**United States Department of Agriculture** **Forest Service** **Norwood Ranger District**

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**File Code:** 1950-1
**Date:** February 16, 2007

Greetings:

The Norwood Ranger District is seeking comments on a proposal to continue livestock grazing. This proposal will utilize adaptive management strategies to make management adjustments to improve rangeland health, sustain multiple uses, and improve riparian conditions. Your comments on the information provided below will help us to: 1) Fine-tune our proposal; 2) Identify issues and concerns related to the proposal; and 3) Develop alternatives to the Proposed Action. For these reasons, I encourage you to take the time to consider the proposal and to submit your comments to the Norwood Ranger District by **March 19, 2007.** If you find that more information is needed to make comment, a detailed existing condition analysis is available upon request.

In addition to the opportunity to comment, the Norwood District will also be hosting an **Open House** for the Naturita Division analysis. The Open House will be held in Norwood Colorado, at the USFS/BLM building located at 1150 Forest Street, off state highway 145, on **March 5, 2005**. The meeting will begin at 3:00 p.m. and last until 7:00 p.m. Interdisciplinary Team members will be available to discuss and answer any questions the public may have about the proposal described below.

## BACKGROUND

A project-level analysis evaluating the site-specific impacts of livestock grazing activity, in conformance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), is required in order to authorize livestock grazing on specific allotments. Site-specific analysis will provide appropriate prescriptions for livestock management and rangeland resources, and ensure that these prescriptions will move toward or meet desired rangeland resource objectives.

Prior to 1995, controversy existed over whether there was any need to consider a grazing permit as a Federal action requiring review under the NEPA as well as the adequacy of the progress toward getting allotment NEPA decisions completed. To resolve the issue, Congress included language in the Rescission Act of Fiscal Year 2005 (Public Law 104-19, Section 504), which requires the Forest Service to identify all allotments, on which NEPA analysis is needed, and to prepare and adhere to a schedule for conducting an assessment of grazing actions under NEPA.

Allotment Management Plans direct livestock grazing management practices. They are updated by conducting an environmental analysis of the impacts of grazing and associated activities. Section 504(b) and (c) allows the Forest Service to issue expired and waived permits on allotments listed on the schedule, but have not gone through a NEPA analysis, as long as the terms and conditions of the permit are not changed. In a reply to Congress, the Forest Service established a fifteen-year schedule for completion of this work by 2010.

Grazing actions on public land must be viewed as an on-going action. To understand the context of grazing activity today, one must have an appreciation of the history of grazing in the West. Prior to the 1930's, grazing on public land was unregulated until Congress enacted laws, which required grazers to own a local home ranch to qualify for a permit to graze. The Granger-Thye Act of 1950: P.L. 81-478 (April 24, 1950) established the direction for National Forest System allotment management, including the authorization to issue grazing permits for terms up to 10 years; authorization to use grazing fee receipts for rangeland improvement; and the establishment of grazing advisory boards. Requirements, including base property and commensurability, were also designated by statute to ensure economic stability to local communities, and to foster stewardship toward the public land resources and to mange the rangelands for sustainability. This period of unregulated grazing resulted in adverse environmental consequences such as soil loss, plant community change, and watershed modifications that appear in many of the rangelands throughout the west and can be seen today in parts of the project area. Some of these impacts, such as the incapacity of sites to naturally restore native vegetation communities, must be clearly recognized and understood to ensure that unrealistic expectations for management are not part of the action alternatives.

This assessment of vegetation and watershed conditions takes into account the historic level of use that occurred on these allotments prior to the establishment of management and control of livestock numbers with the enactment of the Granger-Thye Act of 1950. The purpose of both the Granger-Thye Act for the Forest Service and Taylor Grazing Act for the Bureau of Land Management was to establish controls and stewardship creating a linkage of the use of public land to an established private landowner who would bring stability to the community and bring these lands into a sustainable level of production for both forage and wildlife habitat.

## ANALYSIS AREA DESCRIPTION

The Naturita Division Range Allotment Analysis Area is located on the Norwood Ranger District, on the Uncompahgre National Forest, in San Miguel County, Colorado. The Analysis Area is all contained within an isolated tract containing about 26,145 total acres of National Forest System land. This area is situated just south of the Town of Norwood, Colorado and north of Miramonte Reservoir, between the San Juan River and Uncompahgre Plateau to the North and the San Juan Mountain Range to the South.

Extensive private land development is occurring along the North and East boundaries of the Naturita Division. Many private parcels have been broken and subdivided. It is expected this trend will continue and may possibly extend along the southern boundary of the National Forest.

The Analysis Area currently consists of four active cow/calf allotments – East Naturita, West Naturita, Cy Orr, and Portis. See Vicinity Map (Figure 1-1) in exhibit 1-A for the Analysis Area. Currently, 470 cow/calf pair (1612 Head Months or 2127 Animal Unit Months) are authorized to graze in the Analysis Area. All are authorized under Term Grazing Permits, which include only public National Forest System Lands.

Within this Analysis Area, 19,826 acres of "Suitable" rangeland exist (i.e., encompassing both suitable and capable rangeland). "Capable" rangeland is accessible to livestock, produces forage or has inherent forage-producing capabilities, and can be grazed on a sustained basis under reasonable management practices. Suitable rangeland is land determined to be appropriate for use by livestock – that is, there are no decisions (including specifically the Forest Plan) that preclude use by livestock. There are many areas that currently provide forage, that absent disturbances, will eventually succeed to closed-canopy forest limited foraging opportunities in the future. These areas are associated with timber harvest and stand replacing fire.

## PROPOSED ACTION

**The Forest Service proposes:**

- To authorize livestock grazing;
- To utilize livestock adaptive-management strategies to improve or maintain rangeland health;
- To allow for adequate vegetative resource conditions to sustain multiple uses;
- To manage authorized livestock to improve riparian condition.

A range of grazing systems and management strategies would be applied on 19,826 acres of capable and suitable rangelands within the Uncompahgre National Forest on the Naturita Division of the Norwood Ranger District (suitability/capability map in exhibit 1-B). Implementation would occur through incorporation of this proposed action into an allotment management plan (AMP) specific to each allotment. All grazing systems and management adjustments would be designed to meet all Forest Plan guidance and desired future conditions and would be consistent with the Environmental Management System (ISO 14001 Compliant).

This alternative focuses on desired resource conditions and outlines specific management objectives. Adaptive-management principles would be applied by describing sideboards, which are flexible enough to ensure that progress is made in achieving the desired resource conditions and objectives. Each sideboard would have the ability to adjust for annually changing conditions or disturbances such as drought, fire, flood, disease, plague, and planned management activities.

Adaptive management is a process that uses monitoring information to determine if management changes are needed and, if so, what changes, and to what degree. It is a process that allows the Forest Service to cope with uncertainty and changing conditions over time. It gives the authorized officer the flexibility to adapt to ever-changing environments, which exist in this project area. The goal of adaptive management is to resolve the disparity between the Forest Plan Desired Conditions and the existing conditions in the analysis area as they relate to livestock management.

The proposed action is further broken down into four segments; (1) *Key Features*, which are those critical strategic elements of the proposed action; (2) *Management Objectives*, which are achievable parameters that livestock management is striving for; (3) *Design Criteria*, which are implementation components; (4) *Measures of Success*, which are mechanisms to show improvement or needed management adjustments.

Each specific *Management Objective* is designed to incorporate *Key Features* identified through consultations with various resource specialists. The *Design Criteria* illustrate how each *Management Objective* would be achieved and is essentially a "roadmap" to achieve the desired future condition. Finally, monitoring using specified protocols would demonstrate a *Measure of Success*. The purpose is to create a feedback-loop, which would allow for adjustments in grazing strategies. This in the end would document and affirm that resource management is moving in the planned direction. Any new science or management techniques would be incorporated as needed, or when they are developed which would assist in achieving the stated objectives.

**Adaptive Management Strategies:**

- For the Key Feature of Gunnison Sage Grouse

*Management Objectives* for this resource include:

- ✓ Improve Gunnison Sage Grouse Habitat at selected sites.
- ✓ Maintain Gunnison Sage Grouse Habitat at selected sites.

*Design Criteria* for this resource include:

- ✓ Improve or maintain structural diversity, and species diversity/richness of identified sage grouse habitats (see map exhibit 1-C), by moving toward or meeting the desired conditions of the Gunnison Sage Grouse Range Wide Conservation Plan, Appendix H (Structural Habitat Guidelines).
- ✓ Utilize the Gunnison Sage Grouse Range Wide Conservation Plan to assist in annual decision-making.
- ✓ Adjust the timing, intensity, frequency, and duration of permitted livestock grazing to assist in achieving the desired resource condition.
- ✓ Utilize prevention, control and eradication measures to limit the establishment and spread of undesirable invasive plant species, which may limit the ability to improve or maintain habitat.

*Measures of Success* for this resource include:

- ✓ Evaluate the quality and quantity of invasive species control being utilized on an annual basis. This should reveal whether or not increases of undesirable target species are increasing or decreasing.

- ✓ Every fifth year, re-read rangeland health transects located within sagebrush ecosystem community types. Establish new transects if needed or desired. This will establish if species diversity and species richness is moving in the desired direction.

- ✓ Utilize the Grazing Response Index (GRI), (see exhibit 2-A) to assess the effects of annual livestock management with a positive GRI score average every three years in areas where Gunnison Sage Grouse habitat requires improvement. Intensity: light use as defined in the GRI. If the GRI score is not achieved, adjust grazing practices so these criteria are met.

- ✓ Utilize the GRI to assess the effect of annual livestock management with at least a neutral GRI score average every three years in areas where Gunnison Sage Grouse habitat is currently at acceptable levels. Intensity: light to moderate use as defined in the GRI. If the GRI score is not achieved, adjust grazing practices so these criteria are met.

- ✓ Conduct periodic interdisciplinary reviews to evaluate the rate and effectiveness of livestock grazing strategies, in achieving the desired habitat conditions outlined in the Gunnison Sage Grouse Range Wide Conservation Plan.

- For the Key Feature of Big Game and Livestock Interaction

*Management Objectives* for this resource include:

- ✓ Provide high quality big game habitat to encourage utilization of National Forest System lands.

*Design Criteria* for this resource include:

- ✓ The total amount of vegetation utilized by both wildlife and livestock should allow for sustained health of the ecosystem and desired vegetation in the identified winter range areas, (see exhibit 1-D).

- ✓ Adjust the timing, intensity, frequency, and duration of livestock grazing to provide high quality palatable forage and browse to wild ungulates.

*Measures of Success* for this resource include:

- ✓ Utilize the GRI score to assess the effects of annual, livestock management with a positive or neutral GRI score average over every 3-year period. Intensity: light to

moderate use as defined in the GRI. Make adjustments as necessary if the GRI score averages below neutral.

- ✓ Periodically review the Colorado Division of Wildlife's population and distribution data and GRI scores to determine the effectiveness of livestock grazing strategies.

- ✓ Every fifth year, re-read rangeland health transects located within the identified winter range area. Establish new transects if needed or desired. Analyze to establish if desired habitat components are moving towards or staying in the desired condition.

- For the Key Feature of Riparian and Aquatic Health

*Management Objectives* for this resource include:

- ✓ For the upper mile of West Naturita Creek; move the stream channel from a Rosgen type "F" and/or "C", towards a Rosgen type "E" stream channel with inclusions of Rosgen type "C" (see map exhibit 1-E).

- ✓ For the upper mile of Callan Draw; move the stream channel from a Rosgen type "F" and/or "C", towards a Rosgen type "E" stream channel with inclusions of Rosgen type "C" (see map exhibit 1-E).

- ✓ For the upper one and a half miles of East Naturita Creek; move the stream channel from a Rosgen type "F" and or "C" towards a Rosgen type "E" stream channel with inclusions of Rosgen type "C" (see map exhibit 1-E).

- ✓ Maintain all other reaches of stream in present condition and classification (see map exhibit 1-E).

*Design Criteria* for this resource include:

- ✓ Determine appropriate riparian indicators to allow for adjustments in livestock grazing strategies.

- ✓ Until more precise riparian indicators can be established, adjust the timing, intensity, frequency, and duration of livestock use in the riparian areas of East Naturita Creek, West Naturita Creek, and Callan Draw as to allow for no greater than 30% bank alteration of stream banks.

- ✓ Create a new management unit called Wheeler Ridge, to allow for more precise management of Naturita Creek. This management unit will be included into the East Naturita Cattle and Horse grazing allotment.

*Measures of Success* for this resource include:

- ✓ Conduct Proper Functioning Condition Assessments in the project area on East Naturita, West Naturita, and Callan Draw. Establish desired riparian monitoring locations.

- ✓ Establish two riparian monitoring sites (using the Boise Aquatic Science Team and Rosgen protocols) each for the upper reaches of West Naturita Creek, East Naturita Creek, and establish one monitoring site along the upper reach of Callan Draw, (see map exhibit 1-E).

- For the Key Feature of Reforestation:

*Management Objectives* for this resource include:

- ✓ Limit tree seedling mortality caused by livestock management strategies in current and future plantations within the project area, up to 5 years after establishment. The target is to achieve survival of at least 150 seedlings per acre. (see map exhibit 1-F)

*Design Criteria* for this resource include:

- ✓ Do not salt and/or supplement within plantations or within 200 yards of plantation boundaries.

- ✓ Utilize deferred rotation grazing systems.

- ✓ Adjust the timing, intensity, frequency, and duration of permitted livestock grazing to assist in achieving the desired seedling survival rates.

- ✓ Utilize livestock and wildlife as a tool to increase the available resources needed to allow for tree seedling establishment by removing competitive vegetation. Balance the risk of direct trampling verses the benefit of removing competitive vegetation to achieve the desired survival rates of tree seedlings.

*Measures of Success* for this resource include:

- ✓ Utilize plantation survival surveys to determine first if survival is less than 150 seedlings per acre, and second likely average cause of mortality. If mortality is greater than desired, analyze both the Colorado Division of Wildlife's population/distribution data for big game, and livestock concentration areas.

- ✓ If mortality is greater than desired conduct interdisciplinary reviews to evaluate the effectiveness of livestock grazing strategies.

- For the Key Feature of Rangeland Health

*Management Objectives* for this resource include:

- ✓ Rangelands in good condition are maintained in good condition. No areas of good condition are in downward trend. While specifics vary by cover type, good condition rangelands include sites dominated by native species with densities, species composition, and diversity in age, size and structural classes which provide natural vegetation patterns or a mosaic of successional stages appropriate for the given cover type. Desired non-native species may be present. Invasive species populations are kept small due to early detection and rapid response. Effective control efforts reduce or eliminate populations over time. Where populations of invasive species persist, they are a component of the plant community but do not dominate ecosystem functions. Timing and intensity of grazing systems are designed considering invasive plant phenology. Good condition rangelands are resilient following natural or management disturbances and are sustainable over time. (see map exhibit 1-B).

- ✓ The trend in fair condition rangelands is shifted so that the majority is in an upward trend moving towards good condition. No fair condition rangeland is in a downward trend. These changes would be evident through species mixes with increased amounts of native or desired non-native species, increased (where possible) or sustainable level of production, increased diversity in ages and size of desired plants (especially in pinyon-juniper woodland and shrubland communities which have become very dense or have encroached into grasslands due to interruption of fire disturbances and/or historic grazing pressure), and reduction or elimination of invasive species. These changes may be the result of allowing previously interrupted natural disturbances (e.g., wildland fire, insects, disease) to alter rangeland ecosystems. Livestock grazing management may be the dominant method used to change conditions in these areas (see map exhibit 1-B).

- ✓ Currently no areas of poor condition rangeland have been identified within this project area. No areas of poor condition rangeland will occur.

*Design Criteria* for this resource include:

- ✓ Utilize deferred rotation grazing systems.

- ✓ Salt and/or supplement at least ¼ mile away from water and riparian areas. Do not place salt and/or supplement in the same location every year.

- ✓ Improve distribution of livestock through; completion of construction of two new pastures boundary fences within the West Naturita Allotment, Create an additional pasture (Wheeler Ridge) in the East Naturita Allotment. This will increase the total acreage in the East Naturita Allotment by approximately 333 acres and decrease the West Naturita Allotment by approximately the same.

Repair and make functional Sawmill Spring, and Cogan Spring (see map exhibit 1-E).

- ✓ Utilize herding for dispersing animal concentrations and movement into underutilized and new areas.

- ✓ Where possible utilize low-pressure livestock handling techniques.

- ✓ Conduct prevention, control, and eradication strategies for targeted invasive plant species, utilizing integrated weed management techniques through implementation of the GMUG weed action plan.

- ✓ Analyze local annual precipitation data in conjunction with the "Soil Survey of San Miguel Area, Colorado" to determine if the years outlook is "favorable", "unfavorable", or "neutral". Favorable years equate to when the month-by-month precipitation average is greater than the 2-out-of-10 year average. Unfavorable years equate to when month-by-month precipitation average is less than the 2-out-of-10 year average. Neutral years equate to when month-by-month precipitation average falls in the 6 year middle range of the 10 year average.

- ✓ Stock all pastures to no greater than 100 AUM's less than the estimated carrying capacity (based on 40% utilization of available forage) for "favorable", "unfavorable", and "neutral" years to allow for variability of onsite conditions and disturbance regimes.

- ✓ Remove 28 pair of permitted livestock from the Portis allotment and add 28 pair of permitted livestock to the West Naturita allotment.

*Measures of Success* for this resource include:

- ✓ Every fifth year, re-read rangeland health transects located in the project area. Establish new transects if needed or desired. This will verify condition and trend of the range.

- ✓ Utilize the GRI to assess the effect of annual livestock management with at least a neutral GRI score average every three years in areas where the rangeland condition and trend is rated as "good/stable" and "fair/upward" Intensity: light to moderate use as defined in the GRI. If the GRI score is not achieved, adjust grazing practices so these criteria are met.

- ✓ Utilize the Grazing Response Index (GRI) to assess the effect of annual livestock management with a positive GRI score average every three years in areas where the rangeland condition and trend is rated as "fair/stable" Intensity: light use as defined in the GRI. If the GRI score is not achieved, adjust grazing practices so these criteria are met.

## PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROJECT

### Purpose

The purpose of the Environmental Assessment is to determine whether to allow livestock grazing to continue to be permitted on all, on parts, or on none of the project area. Furthermore, if the decision is to continue, the analysis will determine what management will be applied so as to meet or progress toward achieving desired rangeland resource conditions as outlined in the analysis. Moreover, this analysis will define the timeframes to achieve the desired resource conditions to the extent that livestock grazing is the key-limiting factor.

### Need

The site-specific need for the proposed action is based on knowing that a change in management needs to occur. This need for a change in management is identified by comparing what currently exists on the landscape in the project area to specific descriptions of what should exist across the project area. Essentially, this is comparing what is present to what is wanted. Some specific items within the project area have been identified to not be meeting or moving towards desired future conditions within acceptable timeframes. Desired future conditions and their timeframes for implementation are criteria established by regulation such as the Forest Plan, law such as the National Forest Management Act, and policy such as Memorandums of Understanding (MOU's) as in the Gunnison Sage Grouse Range Wide Conservation Plan. These documents and others were used in conjunction with site inventories to determine if management goals were being achieved.

Allotment-specific disparities that we have identified are:

*West Naturita Allotment*

Burn Canyon Wildfire Areas:

- There is apparent mortality to planted tree seedlings caused by livestock trampling.
- Current grazing management has not created widespread distribution. This has resulted in both localized use areas and limited use areas.
- Current grazing strategies do not allow for control of livestock in relation to the timing, frequency, intensity, and duration of use of vegetative resources.
- Rangeland structural improvements currently lack the ability to adequately assist in control of livestock.
- Invasive plant species are widespread and concentrated in high livestock use areas such as ponds and springs. Livestock have the ability to transport noxious weeds

to new locations and may create situations advantageous for new infestations to occur. Reducing the risks associated with new infestation establishment is needed for long-term weed treatments and eradication to be successful.

- A statistically significant difference exists on shrub cover, total vegetation, % cover of litter, % cover of bare soil, % cover of wood, and species richness related to both time since the burn, and the silvicultural treatments within the burned area. Current livestock grazing strategies have the potential to further influence these differences and negatively effect the restoration of the burned area. There is a need to more precisely control the timing, intensity, frequency, and duration of livestock grazing within this burned area to achieve the desired future conditions.

Sagebrush Landscapes:

- Some sagebrush parks lack structural and species diversity sufficient to successfully rear Gunnison Sage Grouse broods (see exhibit 1-C). Current livestock grazing timing, intensity, and duration are likely a key factor.

Naturita Creek:

- Upper reaches of Mainstem Naturita Creek have been determined to be "functioning at risk". Moreover, these reaches have a static apparent trend. Current livestock grazing strategies appear to be contributing to this static trend.
- The upper 2 miles of Naturita Creek show species composition lacks sufficient stabilizing vegetation in some locations.

- Streambank stability is low in many locations on the upper 2 miles of Naturita Creek. Livestock hoof shear is a contributing factor.

Callan Draw:

- The upper 1 mile of Callan Draw appears to be "non-functional" with a static trend. Livestock grazing strategies appear to be contributing to this static trend.

- Streambank stability is low in the upper 1 mile and appears to be contributing to erosion.

- Desired riparian streambank vegetation appears to be lacking in the upper 1 mile of Callen Draw.

West Naturita Allotment Landscape:

- The majority of rangelands in "fair" condition are currently not in an upward trend moving towards "good" condition. Moreover, only about 21% of all suitable and capable rangelands within this allotment in "fair" condition are in an upward trend (see exhibit 1-B).

- All rangelands in "good" condition should remain in "good" condition with no areas in a downward trend. There is a need to assure no downward trends occur in the future.

  The table below breaks the condition/trend classes and acreages down by management pasture or unit.

| PASTURE/UNIT | CONDITION/TREND CLASS | APPROXIMATE ACREAGE | PERCENT OF FAIR CONDITION RANGELANDS IN UPWARD TREND |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sawmill Springs | Fair/Stable | 219 | 68% |
| | Fair/Upward | 483 | |
| | Good/Stable | 458 | |
| | | | |
| Callan | Fair/Stable | 831 | 6% |
| | Fair/Upward | 55 | |
| | Good/Stable | 2308 | |
| | | | |
| Wheeler | Fair/Upward | 49 | 100% |
| | Good/Stable | 998 | |
| | | | |
| Mckee Draw | Fair/Stable | 1954 | 9% |
| | Fair/Upward | 189 | |
| | Good/Stable | 3572 | |

- Currently, a defined livestock management strategy does not exist to balance big-game and livestock interactions. Manipulating the timing, frequency, intensity, and duration of use on the range by both livestock and wild ungulates, is needed to increase the quality and quantity of forage resources. These adjustments to management are needed to meet the multiple management objectives related to big-game management, while still meeting the needs of the grazing permittee.

*East Naturita Allotment*

Sagebrush Landscapes:

- Some sagebrush parks lack structural and species diversity sufficient to successfully rear Gunnison Sage Grouse broods (see map exhibit 1-C). Current livestock grazing timing, intensity, frequency and duration are likely a key factor.

Naturita Creek:

- Upper reaches of West Naturita Creek have been determined to be "functioning at risk". Moreover, these reaches have a static apparent trend. Current livestock grazing strategies appear to be contributing to this static trend.

- The upper 1 mile of West Naturita Creek show species composition lacks sufficient stabilizing vegetation in some locations.
- Streambank stability is low in many locations on the upper 1 mile of Naturita Creek. Livestock hoof shear is a contributing factor.

East Naturita Allotment Landscape:

- The majority of rangelands in "fair" condition are currently not in an upward trend moving towards "good" condition. All of the rangelands in "fair" condition are considered to be stable (see map exhibit 1-B).

- All rangelands in good condition should remain in good condition with no areas in a downward trend. There is a need to assure no downward trends occur in the future.

  The table below breaks the condition/trend classes and acreages down by management pasture or unit.

| PASTURE/UNIT | CONDITION/TREND CLASS | APPROXIMATE ACREAGE | PERCENT OF FAIR CONDITION RANGELANDS IN UPWARD TREND |
|---|---|---|---|
| Unit 1 | Good/Stable | 154 | NA |
| | | | |
| Unit 2 | Fair/Stable | 140 | NA |
| | Good/Stable | 833 | |
| | | | |
| Unit 3 | Good/Stable | 631 | NA |
| | | | |
| Unit 4 | Good/Stable | 454 | NA |
| | | | |
| Unit 5 | Good/Stable | 388 | NA |
| | | | |
| Wheeler Ridge | Good/Stable | 154 | NA |

*Portis Allotment*

Portis Allotment Landscape:

- The majority of rangelands in "fair" condition are currently not in an upward trend moving towards "good" condition. All of the rangelands in "fair" condition are considered to be stable (see map exhibit 1-B).

- All rangelands in good condition should remain in good condition with no areas in a downward trend. There is a need to assure no downward trends occur in the future.

- Vegetation in areas showing fair rangeland condition would benefit from less frequent defoliation.

- Additional livestock management techniques are needed to relieve pressure on heavily used areas.

  The table below breaks the condition/trend classes and acreages down by management pasture or unit.

| PASTURE/UNIT | CONDITION/TREND CLASS | APPROXIMATE ACREAGE | PERCENT OF FAIR CONDITION RANGELANDS IN UPWARD TREND |
|---|---|---|---|
| Unit 1 | Fair/Stable | 100 | 0% |
| | Good/Stable | 644 | |
| | | | |
| Unit 2 | Fair/Stable | 128 | 0% |
| | Good/Stable | 781 | |
| | | | |
| Unit 3 | Good/Stable | 1436 | NA |

*Cy Orr Allotment*

Cy Orr Allotment Landscape:

- The majority of rangelands in "fair" condition are currently not in an upward trend moving towards "good" condition. All of the rangelands in "fair" condition have a trend rating of stable (see map exhibit 1-B).

- All rangelands in good condition should remain in good condition with no areas in a downward trend. There is a need to assure no downward trends occur in the future.

  The table below breaks the condition/trend classes and acreages down by management pasture or unit.

| PASTURE/UNIT | CONDITION/TREND CLASS | APPROXIMATE ACREAGE | PERCENT OF FAIR CONDITION RANGELANDS IN UPWARD TREND |
|---|---|---|---|
| Cy Orr | Good/Stable | 639 | NA |
| | | | |
| Homestead | Fair/Stable | 943 | 100% |
| | Good/Stable | 32 | |

## FOREST PLAN CONFORMANCE

The Land and Resource Management Plan provides guidance for management on the Uncompahgre National Forest. Livestock grazing has been determined in the Forest Plan to be an appropriate use of the project area, based in part on the Forest Plan Suitability determination.

This environmental assessment will be prepared and will be consistent under the current Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). In addition, to prepare for the new Forest Plan revision that is considered to be in the final stages of completion, this document conforms to the new plan's strategic and aspirational emphasis. Both the current and new Forest Plans are managed for a particular emphasis area such as a theme in the current plan or management area in the new revision. Each management area in both Forest Plans have a description of the physical setting for the areas, a description of the desired conditions for the area, and in the current plan only, a list of standards and guidelines that apply to the area. The new Forest Plan instead, puts extra emphasis on the desired future condition of the forest.

On June 1st, 2006, the Environmental Management System (EMS) was implemented. EMS established a process of review and correction to assure all applicable law, regulation, and policy are adhered to. An interdisciplinary review of the "legal and other requirements" was conducted, as required by EMS, and documentation can be found in the project file. To view the full compliment of laws, regulation, and policy guiding land management of the Forest Service, or to find out more about EMS, see the GMUG National Forest website (www.fs.fed.us/r2/gmug).

## DECISIONS TO BE MADE

The District Ranger of the Norwood Ranger District is the responsible official who will decide whether or not to continue to authorize livestock grazing on all or portions of the 4 grazing allotments and if so, under what terms and conditions so as to meet or move toward the desired conditions outlined in the Environmental Assessment and the Forest Plan.

Management on each allotment is implemented through an allotment-specific Allotment Management Plan based on the alternative selected in the NEPA Decision. The Allotment Management Plan is the implementation document by which the Forest Service communicates to the permittee and others the management objectives and planned actions to accomplish those objectives. If the Decision is to continue to graze, then the Allotment Management Plan will amend the existing or future livestock grazing permits for the areas considered in the Environmental Assessment.

## SCOPING AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

This scoping statement represents an early stage in the analysis process. This 30-day opportunity to comment is required at 36 CFR 215.3. The opportunity to comment on the Proposed Action ends 30 days following the date of publication of the legal notice (of opportunity to comment) in the Telluride Daily Planet. After receiving your comments, we will identify and analyze the issues raised, finalize a Proposed Action, and if necessary, develop alternatives to the Proposed Action. Plans are to complete the NEPA analysis and make a decision whether or not to implement the proposed action or another alternative during the spring of 2007 and implement the decision during the 2007 field season.

Please respond with comments specific to this proposal by **March 19, 2007**. Written comments should be submitted to the Norwood Ranger District, Attn: Brian Hoefling, P.O. Box 388, Norwood, Colorado, 81423. You may also send comment via email at **comments-rocky-mountain-gmug-norwood@fs.fed.us.** Those people responding to this scoping letter will be included on the mailing list for future information related to this project.

This Decision is subject to appeal. An appeal may be filed by any person who, or any non-Federal organization or entity that has provided comment or otherwise expressed an interest in the proposed action by the close of the comment period. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR Parts 215 or 217. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR, Subpart B, Section 1.27(d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under the FOIA,

confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request of confidentiality, and where the request is denied; the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within 10 days.

For more information concerning the Proposed Action or analysis, please contact Brian Hoefling, Rangeland Management Specialist, at (970) 327-4261.

Thank you for caring about your National Forest!

Sincerely,

JUDY SCHUTZA
District Ranger