Scoping Summary

Farrell, Harshaw, Lewis, McFarland and Weiland Allotment Management Plans
Sierra Vista Ranger District
Coronado National Forest
Santa Cruz County, Arizona

Introduction

This report summarizes a Forest Service proposal to authorize grazing and develop allotment management plans (AMPs) for the Farrell, Harshaw, Lewis, McFarland and Weiland Allotments in the Sierra Vista Ranger District, Coronado National Forest. Where consistent with the goals, objectives, standards and guidelines of LRMPs, it is Forest Service policy to make forage from lands suitable for grazing available to qualified livestock operators (*FSM 2202.1, FSM 2203.1, 36 CFR 22.2 (c), Multiple Use and Sustained Yield act of 1960, Wilderness Act of 1964, Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974*). Federal actions such as the authorization of grazing and approval of allotment management plans must be analyzed to determine potential environmental consequences (*National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, NEPA; Rescission Act of 1995 (P.L. 104-19)*).

The purpose of this report is to inform interested and affected parties of the proposal and to solicit comments to assist in the NEPA review of the proposal. Analysis of the proposal is ongoing and will be documented in an Environmental Assessment (EA) expected in late 2004. Comments received in response to this solicitation will be used to identify potential issues related to the proposed action and to identify alternatives to the proposed action that meet the purpose of and need for the project.

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose and need of the proposed action is to manage grazing resources Farrell, Harshaw, Lewis, McFarland and Weiland Allotments in a manner consistent with Forest Service policy and the Coronado National Forest LRMP, and to provide long-term management direction on grazing through allotment management plans (AMPs).

- The Farrell, Harshaw, Lewis, McFarland and Weiland Allotments include land identified as suitable for grazing in the Coronado National Forest LRMP.
- The allotments currently lack sufficient environmental analysis necessary to comply with the Rescission Act (P.L. 104, 1995).
- Allotment management plans for all six allotments need to be updated.
- Recent sustainable use on some of the allotments has been less than permitted; indicating that permitted use may need to be adjusted.
- Cattle distribution on the allotments could be improved by additional infrastructure such as water sources and fences.

The EA will describe the existing and desired conditions for the allotments and will analyze proposed management practices to resolve discrepancies between the two. Management practices that are approved will be incorporated into AMPs for each allotment. Current knowledge regarding existing and desired conditions, and potential management practices, is described in the following sections.

Existing Condition

The five allotments are located in the Patagonia Mountains in the Huachuca Ecosystem Management Area (EMA). Elevations range from 4,200 feet to over 6,300 feet near Red Mountain. Topography ranges from steep inaccessible peaks to broad alluvial valleys. The majority of capable rangelands are found on gentler hills and valleys at elevations under 5,500 feet. Broadleaf evergreen woodland is the dominant vegetation type in the project area. Stands of chaparral vegetation occur on ridges in the eastern portion of the analysis area and at upper elevations on Red Mountain. Open valleys in the eastern portion of the Farrell allotment support plains grassland communities. At lower elevations near Patagonia, the woodlands grade into desert grassland. Harshaw Creek runs from south to north generally through the center of the project area. The creek runs seasonally in response to precipitation events, but water persists year round in only a few locations. Vegetation associated with the stream course is a mixture of evergreen riparian and deciduous riparian trees, primarily sycamore. Information on recent livestock use is summarized below.

		Farrell	Harshaw	Lewis	McFarland	Weiland
Total Acres		6,429	9,302	2,282	1,042	2,089
Capable Acres[1]		6,303	6,024	1,422	756	1,630
Current Permitted Use (CYL)[2]		60 CYL	262 yearlings year long	22 CYL	20 CYL Forest 2CYL Private	32 CYL Forest 5 CYL Private
Recent Actual Use	2000	60 CYL	100 CYL	17 Oct.-June	22 CYL	12 CYL
	2001	60 CYL	77 CYL	18 Oct.-June	22 CYL	13 CYL
	2002	60 (9 mo.)*	102 CYL	19 CYL***	22 CYL	18 CYL
	2003	60 CYL	102 (3 mo.)**	19 CYL	8 CYL****	20 CYL
	2004		25 CYL			

* Cattle removed in June 2002 due to overuse. Rested through growing season (July-September).
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*** Red Mountain Allotment pastures (approx. 2000 acres) added to Lewis allotment in 2002.
****Numbers reduced in June 2002 due to lack of forage and water.

Farrell Allotment: In 1994 the permit was reduced from 128 CYL to the current 60 CYL (950 AUM[3]) in response to poor resource conditions. Resource conditions have improved since 1994, primarily because of reduced stocking, but overuse occurs on some pastures because livestock distribution remains poor, largely because the rotation schedule is not always successfully implemented. As currently designed, a single 60-head herd is rotated through seven primary pastures in a deferred-rest rotation. The herd typically winters in a single large pasture on the southwest side of the allotment and rotates through the remaining six pastures during the warmer months.

Harshaw Allotment: The allotment is currently permitted for 262 yearlings yearlong (2,358 AUM), but the allotment has not been stocked at this level for several years. Since 1998 the permittee has been permitted to run cow-calf pairs, with numbers ranging from 25-100 CYL (396-1584 AUM). The allotment contains three primary pastures. In most years, cattle are scattered throughout the three

[1] Capable acres are defined as areas under 40% slope and capable of producing 100 pounds of dry forage per acre. Areas considered "not capable" are not used to calculate grazing capacity.
[2] CYL: cattle year long
[3] AUM=animal unit month. The amount of forage required by one animal unit for one month. A cow and a calf equal 1.32 AUM

pastures from November through June. During the summer growing season, cattle are placed in two of the pastures and the third is rested. Because of broken topography and unreliable or insufficient water sources, optimum livestock distribution is difficult to achieve. Range monitoring data indicate fair or better ecological condition on the allotment; however, several of the transects are in areas that have received relatively little use in recent years. Because of poor distribution, there are areas on the allotment dominated by annuals and showing signs of poor condition.

Lewis Allotment: The Lewis allotment is permitted for 22 CYL (348 AUM) on 1422 capable acres. In 2001, the then vacant Red Mountain allotment was merged into the Lewis allotment, roughly doubling the size of the allotment and adding two additional pastures. No additional cattle were authorized as a result of the merger. Currently a single herd is grazed under a four pasture deferred rotation. Data from permanent range transects indicate the allotment is in fair condition with a stable trend. Portions of the allotment have been invaded by catclaw and Lehman lovegrass.

McFarland Allotment: The McFarland Allotment is permitted for 20 CYL (317 AUM) term and a private land permit for 2 CYL and one horse. The allotment contains three pastures. A single herd is rotated through the three pastures on a deferred rotation with periodic growing season rest for each pasture. Water availability is a problem at higher elevations, which has led to heavy use of lower elevation sites in the past, especially along Harshaw Creek. Some fences are unserviceable due to age. Range transects indicate the allotment is in fair condition with a stable trend.

Weiland Allotment: The allotment is permitted for 32 CYL term and 5 CYL on a private land permit, for a total of 37 CYL (586 AUM). The most recent allotment management plan was written in 1987. The allotment contains six pastures. A single herd is rotated through the allotment in a deferred rotation. In 2003, range transects indicated good range condition on two upland sites. Resource conditions are improving in upland sites, primarily as a result of light stocking over the past few years. Lower gradient slopes and riparian areas are in less than desirable condition. The riparian area associated with Harshaw Creek shows signs of long-term heavy use. Livestock distribution has been less than optimal because of limited water availability.

Range condition data were collected for all allotments in 2001 and 2003. Soil condition will be updated as part of the analysis in progress.

Desired Condition

The Coronado LRMP identifies the following goals for the range and wildlife programs on the Forest.

Range

- To restore rangeland to at least moderately high ecological condition (70% to 75% of potential production, fair range condition) with stable soil and a static to upward trend.
- Produce livestock products consistent with other resources and uses.
- Eliminate grazing from areas not capable of supporting livestock without significant detriment to range or other resources.
- Balance permitted grazing use with grazing capacity.

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Wildlife

- Provide habitat for wildlife populations consistent with the goals outlined in the Arizona and new Mexico Department of Game and Fish Comprehensive Plans and consistent with other resource values.
- Provide for ecosystem diversity by at least maintaining viable populations of all native and desirable nonnative wildlife, fish and plant species through improved habitat management.
- Improve the habitat of and the protection for local populations of Threatened and Endangered species to meet the goals of the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

Grazing management strategies have been proposed that support these goals and contribute to the following specific objectives, which constitute the desired condition in the analysis area:

- Improvement in ecological condition as expressed by the number of acres in fair or better condition.
- Increase in range production and movement toward site potential for each soil/vegetation site.
- Improvement in riparian condition.

Proposed Action

The Sierra Vista Ranger District proposes to authorize grazing on and develop allotment management plans for the Farrell, Harshaw, Lewis, McFarland and Weiland allotments. Grazing on the allotments will be authorized under the following terms and conditions:

- Forage utilization on all five allotments will be limited to 45% of current year's growth of key species in key areas.
- Management on each allotment will be designed to insure that pastures receive periodic growing season rest.
- Range improvements would be constructed to the degree necessary to achieve management objectives and move the project area toward desired condition.
- Provisions for the protection and recovery of threatened and endangered species will be incorporated in accordance with the LRMP and recovery plan objectives.

The proposed actions recognize the need to be adaptive in order to respond to changing resource conditions. Therefore, in most cases a maximum authorized use, expressed as animal unit months (AUM), is identified. Annual permitted livestock numbers will be specified in annual operating instructions. Stocking may be less than, but will not exceed the AUMs authorized. On all five allotments, herd movements would be determined by utilization levels, forage conditions and water availability and will be specified in annual operating instructions.

Farrell Allotment. Under the proposed action, the Forest Service would authorize the use of 950 AUM annually, equivalent to 60 cow/calf yearlong. The current management system consisting of a deferred rest rotation will remain in place. The herd will winter in the American Peak pasture and will rotate through the remaining six pastures during the warmer months.

Improvements proposed to improve livestock distribution include:

- One mile of pipeline, one 10,000-gallon storage tank and two troughs in the Best Pasture.
- One mile of fencing to divide the Best pasture into two units.
- Develop upland waters in the south end of the Best and Corral Canyon Pastures.

Harshaw Allotment. Under the proposed action the Forest Service would authorize the use of 792-1188 AUM, equivalent to 50-75 cow/calf yearlong on a term permit. An additional 29 AUM for 2 horses would be authorized for the permittee's private lands managed in combination with Forest Service lands. Management will consist of a one herd, three pasture deferred rotation grazing system. Actual stocking levels would be set based on resource conditions and management objectives. Range improvements needed to improve livestock distribution include two wells, approximately 5 miles of pipeline, storage and drinkers.

Lewis Allotment. Under the proposed action, the Forest Service would authorize the use of 348 AUM of forage annually, equivalent to 22 cow/calf yearlong. Management would consist of a four pasture, one herd deferred rotation grazing system. Annual permitted stocking levels would be set based on resource conditions and management objectives. Range improvements needed to improve livestock distribution include two new water developments and replacement of one half mile of fence.

McFarland Allotment. Under the proposed action, the Forest Service would authorize the use of 240 AUM of forage annually (equivalent to 15 cow/calf yearlong). An additional 30 AUM (1 cow/calf and 1 horse) would be authorized for the permittee's private lands managed in combination with Forest Service lands. Cattle would be rotated through three pastures on a deferred rotation management system that provides periodic growing season rest for each pasture. Annual permitted stocking levels would be set based on resource conditions and management objectives.
Range improvements needed to help achieve desired condition include:

- Approximately 1.5 miles of pipeline, one storage tank and three new troughs. The storage tank would service both the McFarland and Weiland Allotments.
- Construction of a riparian exclosure on Harshaw Creek in the south end of the allotment.

Weiland Allotment. Under the proposed action, the Forest Service would authorize the use of 240 AUM of forage annually (equivalent to 15 cow/calf yearlong). An additional 48 AUM (3 cow/calf yearlong) would be authorized for the permittee's private lands managed in combination with Forest Service lands. Cattle would be rotated through six pastures on a deferred rotation system that provides periodic growing season rest for each pasture. Annual permitted stocking levels would be set based on resource conditions and management objectives. Range improvements needed to improve livestock distribution include:

- 1 mile of pipeline and two troughs to provide water in upper portions of the allotment.
- Construction of a riparian exclosure in Harshaw Creek

Preliminary Alternative Development.

The Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) for the project has identified the following alternatives to the proposed action. Further alternatives may be identified or alternatives may be revised if scoping results in the identification of issues not already identified, or if additional management practices are identified that achieve the desired condition.

Alternative 1 – No Action/No Grazing

Forest Service Policy (Forest Service Handbook 2209.13) requires the Forest Service to identify no grazing as the No Action alternative. Under this alternative, grazing would not be authorized and use of the allotments by domestic livestock would be discontinued. Existing structural improvements would remain in place but would not be maintained. Improvements contributing to resource protection or

enhancement, such as water developments important for wildlife, would be maintained where feasible using other program funds. Periodic inspection of structural improvements would be used to determine whether maintenance or removal is needed. Removal or maintenance of improvements would be authorized by a separate decision. Where necessary, maintenance of allotment boundary fences would be reassigned to adjacent permittees with the understanding that livestock are to be kept off of the allotments.

Alternative 2 – Continue Current Management
Livestock grazing would continue on all allotments as currently permitted. New permits would be issued for the classes and numbers of livestock currently allowed. New allotment management plans would be developed and authorized use would continue to be controlled through annual operating instructions. Existing fences, water developments and other range improvements would be maintained, but no new infrastructure would be proposed or developed.

Alternative 3 – The Proposed Action
The proposed action is described above.

Under Alternatives 2 and 3, mitigation measures and Best Management Practices will be identified and implemented to avoid or minimize effects to wildlife, soil and water quality. Allotment management plans will be developed for all five allotments. Monitoring will be used to determine whether management is being properly implemented and whether the actions are effective at achieving or moving toward desired conditions.

Preliminary Issues
To date, the Forest has identified the following issues for analysis during the NEPA review. The issues will be refined or expanded as a result of comments received from the public and other interested parties.

1. **Grazing effects on wildlife:** Special status species in the project area include Mexican spotted owl, lesser long-nosed bat, and Chiricahua leopard frog. The timing and intensity of grazing in the project area could result in adverse effects on wildlife, including threatened, endangered, proposed, sensitive (TEPS) species, management-indicator species, and their respective habitats. Utilization in canyon bottoms could impair the achievement of Forest Plan standards for Mearns' quail cover. Issues will be evaluated through narratives and tables describing effects, by alternative, as identified through a Wildlife Specialist's Reports, Biological Assessment and Evaluation and consultation with appropriate wildlife resource agencies.
2. **Soil and watershed condition:** Topographic and vegetative features on the allotments encourage cattle to concentrate in areas with impaired soils and moderately low range condition. Effects will be evaluated through narrative and tabular descriptions, by alternative, as identified through a range and soil condition and trend analysis.
3. **Upland vegetation condition.** Stocking rates and utilization levels may impair achievement of Forest Plan standards for restoring rangelands. Condition will be described and compared in narrative and tabular form, by alternative, as identified by range condition and trend analysis data.

Additional environmental components include effect to air quality, water quality, riparian, heritage (cultural) resources and economics. Effects on these resources will be evaluated through specialist's

reports and consultation with appropriate tribes and regulatory agencies. Effects will be disclosed in narrative and tabular form

Decision Framework

The Sierra Vista District Ranger is the official responsible for decisions regarding management of the Farrell, Harshaw, Lewis, McFarland and Weiland Allotments. Based on the results of the NEPA analysis, the Ranger would decide whether the proposed action would proceed as proposed, as modified by an alternative, or not at all. If it proceeds, the Ranger would determine which mitigation measures and monitoring requirements would be prescribed in each AMP, including permitted number of animals and season of use, range facilities to be constructed, allowable utilization standards and the term of the permits. Separate decisions may be made for each allotment or for all three allotments, combined.

Public Input Needed

Comments are specifically requested on the proposed action, preliminary issues, evaluation methodology, and alternatives. Suggestions for additional actions that may be undertaken to facilitate achievement of desired conditions are encouraged. Comments made on this proposal would be most helpful if they are received early and are directly relevant to the proposal and project area. Issues that are outside of the scope of the proposal will not be addressed at this level of planning. In accordance with 36 CFR 215.5, additional opportunities for public and agency review of the project will occur as the NEPA review progresses. The expected date of completion of the analysis is November 2004.

The primary contact for questions and comments on this NEPA review is Richard Gerhart, Analysis Team Leader, Coronado National Forest, 300 West Congress Street, Tucson, Arizona 85701, telephone (520) 670-4503, rgerhart@fs.fed.us. To obtain details about the proposal, please contact Tom Lorenz (Harshaw, Lewis, McFarland, Weiland Allotments) or Bill Edwards (Farrell Allotment), Range Management Staff, Sierra Vista Ranger District, telephone (520) 378-3011.

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1. **Grazing effects on wildlife:** Special status species in the project area include Mexican spotted owl, lesser long-nosed bat, and Chiricahua leopard frog. The timing and intensity of grazing in the project area could result in adverse effects on wildlife, including threatened, endangered, proposed, sensitive (TEPS) species, management-indicator species, and their respective habitats. Utilization in canyon bottoms could impair the achievement of Forest Plan standards for Mearns' quail cover. Issues will be evaluated through narratives and tables describing effects, by alternative, as identified through a Wildlife Specialist's Reports, Biological Assessment and Evaluation and consultation with appropriate wildlife resource agencies.
2. **Soil and watershed condition:** Topographic and vegetative features on the allotments encourage cattle to concentrate in areas with impaired soils and moderately low range condition. Effects will be evaluated through narrative and tabular descriptions, by alternative, as identified through a range and soil condition and trend analysis.
3. **Upland vegetation condition.** Stocking rates and utilization levels may impair achievement of Forest Plan standards for restoring rangelands. Condition will be described and compared in narrative and tabular form, by alternative, as identified by range condition and trend analysis data.

Additional environmental components include effect to air quality, water quality, riparian, heritage (cultural) resources and economics. Effects on these resources will be evaluated through specialist's

reports and consultation with appropriate tribes and regulatory agencies. Effects will be disclosed in narrative and tabular form

Decision Framework

The Sierra Vista District Ranger is the official responsible for decisions regarding management of the Farrell, Harshaw, Lewis, McFarland and Weiland Allotments. Based on the results of the NEPA analysis, the Ranger would decide whether the proposed action would proceed as proposed, as modified by an alternative, or not at all. If it proceeds, the Ranger would determine which mitigation measures and monitoring requirements would be prescribed in each AMP, including permitted number of animals and season of use, range facilities to be constructed, allowable utilization standards and the term of the permits. Separate decisions may be made for each allotment or for all three allotments, combined.

Public Input Needed

Comments are specifically requested on the proposed action, preliminary issues, evaluation methodology, and alternatives. Suggestions for additional actions that may be undertaken to facilitate achievement of desired conditions are encouraged. Comments made on this proposal would be most helpful if they are received early and are directly relevant to the proposal and project area. Issues that are outside of the scope of the proposal will not be addressed at this level of planning. In accordance with 36 CFR 215.5, additional opportunities for public and agency review of the project will occur as the NEPA review progresses. The expected date of completion of the analysis is November 2004.

The primary contact for questions and comments on this NEPA review is Richard Gerhart, Analysis Team Leader, Coronado National Forest, 300 West Congress Street, Tucson, Arizona 85701, telephone (520) 670-4503, rgerhart@fs.fed.us. To obtain details about the proposal, please contact Tom Lorenz (Harshaw, Lewis, McFarland, Weiland Allotments) or Bill Edwards (Farrell Allotment), Range Management Staff, Sierra Vista Ranger District, telephone (520) 378-3011.