DECISION NOTICE
and
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

RED CANYON TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PROJECT

USDA Forest Service
Norwood Ranger District
Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, Gunnison National Forests

Montrose County, Colorado

BACKGROUND

The Naturita Rangeland assessment was prepared based on direction in section 504 of the 1995 Rescission Act. (Public Law 104-19) This legislation directed the U.S. Forest Service to conduct an environmental analysis for each grazing allotment for which a grazing permit was issued, and be completed by the year 2010. The environmental analysis discloses the environmental effects of grazing domestic livestock.

An Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared for the proposed Naturita Division Allotment Management Plans. 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 (Exhibit 1-A) in appendix A-1 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.

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.

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. Also, requirements, including base property and commensurability, were also designated by statute to ensure economic stability to local communities, but also 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 Tayor 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.

PURPOSE AND NEED

Purpose

The purpose of this Environmental Analysis 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, this 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, 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 the Forest Plan, regulation such as the National Forest Management Act, and Memorandums of Understanding (MOU's) such as 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 strategies do not allow for widespread distribution.
- 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 sivicultural 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. This area has been mapped; see (Exhibit 1-C) in appendix A-3. 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 also (Exhibit 1-B) in Appendix A-2.

- 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. 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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	

DECISION

I have reviewed the EA and Project Record, including the Response to Comments, the Biological Evaluation, the Biological Assessment, and the Management Indicator Species Assessment. It is my decision, based on consideration of the EA and public comments, to proceed with implementation of Alternative 1, Adaptive Management.

A primary consideration in the design of the proposed action and alternatives were the need to respond more quickly to ever-changing conditions on the landscape. This alternative allows these adaptations in management to occur in a timely manner and will improve resources. Resources, which have been identified, as having disparities between what currently exists and what are desired. Moreover, built-in feedback mechanisms in the project design will assure the success of this proposal.

As a result of this decision Allotment Management Plans for the Portis, Cy Orr, West Naturita, and East Naturita allotments will be developed with the specific management actions being directed at achieving the stated objectives in Alternative 1. Changes to livestock grazing timing, intensity, frequency, and duration will occur as needed to sufficiently meet the objectives.

COMPLIANCE WITH OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

To the best of my knowledge Alternative 4 meets requirements under NFMA, NEPA, ESA, and all other applicable laws and regulations.

PROJECT DESIGN STANDARDS MADE PART OF THIS DECISION

In response to management standards and guidelines of the Forest Plan and the significant issues identified for the proposed action, project design criteria were developed to alleviate potential resource impacts and to facilitate administrative access. The project design criteria and administrative actions are necessary to implement the selected alternative.

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 Figure 2.2), 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) to assess the effect 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 Figure 2.3).

- ✓ 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 Figure 2.4).

- ✓ 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 Figure 2.4).

- ✓ 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 Figure 2.4).

- ✓ Maintain all other reaches of stream in present condition and classification (see Figure 2.4).

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 Figure 2.4).

- 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 Figure 2.5)

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 Figure 2.6).

- ✓ 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 Figure 2.6).

- ✓ 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; 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. Reconstruct and make functional Sawmill Spring, and Cogan Spring (see Figure 2.7).

- ✓ 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 (see Figure 2.9).

- ✓ 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. (see Figure 2.8).

- ✓ 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.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The alternatives considered in detail are described below. The No Action alternative is required under NEPA, and would eliminate all domestic livestock grazing within the project area. The other alternatives were developed by the project Interdisciplinary Team to describe the current condition on the ground, and to meet the purpose and need for the project in response to the significant issues identified.

Alternative 1 – Proposed Action

Alternative 1 is developed to describe the current condition on the ground, and the administrative actions necessary to achieve improvements to resources were improvements are needed.

Alternative 2

The Current Management Alternative provides for continued use of the allotments in the analysis area for livestock grazing but ignores the need to improve various resources. While some areas would nonetheless see improvement with this alternative a few resources would remain at risk to decreases in vigor, abundance, richness, or diversity.

Alternative 3

The No Action Alternative is required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and would eliminate all domestic livestock grazing from the analysis area.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Scoping was conducted to solicit public and agency input to the proposed action, and to help determine issues and concerns associated with the proposed action. To facilitate this, the general public was notified of the proposed action in the Schedule of Proposed Actions for the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests beginning in the fourth quarter of 2006. Also, the Norwood Ranger District published a Legal Notice in the Telluride Daily Planet on February 16, 2007 notifying the public of the Naturita Rangeland Landscape Assessment project and the opportunity to comment on the proposed action. In addition, a personal scoping letter was sent to 69 interested and affected individuals, organizations and agencies on February 16, 2007 to solicit input to the proposed action. Moreover, in addition to the legal notice and scoping letter an open house was held on March 5, 2007 so that members of the public at large were able to ask question or comment on the specific details of the proposed project.

During the 30-day scoping period people were given the opportunity to submit comments through the mail, e-mail, FAX, telephone, verbally at the open house, or to deliver them by hand. During the 30-day scoping period a total of 8 comments were received. Most comments supported the proposed action. Some comments included recommendations to include changes to the proposed action that were deemed outside the scope of the project.

The project Interdisciplinary Team (ID Team) met on April 2, 2007 to review and analyze the comments received from the public. Appendix A contains the Response to Comments. The project ID Team reviewed the proposed action for consistency with direction in the 1991 Amended GMUG National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan and other applicable laws, Forest Service policy, and existing permits. Resource specialists also conducted field reviews and provided the reports necessary to determine potential impacts to heritage and biological resources.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared. I base my finding on the following:

1. My finding of no significant environmental effects is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action.

2. There will be no significant effects on public health and safety.

3. There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area. There are no significant historical or cultural resources, no park lands, no prime farmlands, wetlands, floodplains, and no wild and scenic rivers within or near the project area.

4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not highly controversial.

5. The action will not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects.

6. Cumulative actions considered in the analysis are described in the project EA and evaluated in Chapter 3. The project Interdisciplinary Team has found that the cumulative effects of the proposed action, considered together with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions in the project area are not significant.

7. The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, as none exist in the area. The action will also not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources.

8. The action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. The Forest Service prepared a combined Biological Assessment and Biological Evaluation (BA/BE) and determined there would be "no adverse effect" to any listed species. No effect determinations do not require Section 7 consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

   The BA/BE also determined there would be no impact to the majority of Forest Service sensitive species. There are some impacts to individuals anticipated from the project, but there will be no loss of species viability or trend toward federal listing.

   A Management Indicator Species (MIS) report was also prepared to determine potential effects to MIS within the project area. The project is designed to benefit the Rocky Mountain elk. There would be no impact to any other MIS.

9. The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws and requirements for the protection of the environment.

NFMA FINDINGS AND FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

The selected alternative is consistent with the 1991 Amended Land and Resource Management Plan for the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests, and all other applicable laws, regulations, policies, and other direction. The selected alternative is consistent with the intent of the Forest Plan's long-term goals and objectives listed on pages III-2 through III-5, and with Management Area direction for the Management Areas within which the activities will occur.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

If no appeals are filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of the decision may occur on, but not before, 5 business days from the close of the appeal filing period. When appeals are filed, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th business day following the date of the last appeal disposition.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES

A notice of appeal must be in writing and clearly state that it is a Notice of Appeal being filed in pursuant to 36 CFR 215.7, and must meet all requirements of 36 CFR 215. Appeals must be filed within 45 days of the date of legal notice of this decision in the Telluride Daily Planet. To be eligible to appeal this decision on this project, an individual

or group must have provided a comment or otherwise expressed interest in this project during the formal comment period.

The publication date of the legal notice in the Telluride Daily Planet is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal (36 CFR 215.15 (a). Those wishing to appeal should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

Appeals may be delivered by the following means:

For delivery services or hand delivery to a physical street address
Appeals Deciding Officer
U.S.D.A., Forest Service
Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, Gunnison National Forest
2250 Hwy 50
Delta, CO. 81416-2485

Office hours are 8:00 to 4:30.

For Fax delivery: (970) 874-6698

For email delivery of an appeal: appeals-rocky-mountain-gmug@fs.fed.us.

Electronic appeals must be in Microsoft Word, Word Perfect or plain text file format.

CONTACT

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Craig Grother, Norwood Ranger District, at 970 327-4261.

JUDY SCHUTZA Date
District Ranger
Norwood Ranger District