

DECISION NOTICE and FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

SAN JUAN RANGELAND LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

**Ouray Ranger District
Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests
Ouray, Gunnison, Hinsdale Counties, Colorado**

I. INTRODUCTION

An Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared that analyzes the effects of three alternatives related to livestock grazing on twenty-three range allotments on the Ouray and Gunnison Ranger Districts on the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests. The three alternatives analyzed include No Permitted Livestock Grazing, Existing Condition (“No Action”) and the Proposed Action which includes combining and closing some individual allotments to better allow adaptive management to meet forest and national goals. The analysis area is located on lands administered by the Ouray and Gunnison Ranger Districts, on the Uncompahgre National Forest, in Ouray, Gunnison, and Hinsdale Counties, Colorado. The analysis area is contained within 2 tracts of land encompassing about 200,000 total acres of National Forest System (NFS) land. The Dallas portion of the analysis area is located south of Highway 145 and Dallas Divide, and west of the town of Ridgway, and north of the Ouray and San Miguel County line near the Sneffels Range. The Cimarron and Uncompahgre portions of the analysis area are located north and east of Ouray Colorado; west of Highway 149, and south of Highway 50. The analysis area includes 2 federally designated wilderness areas - Uncompahgre and Mt. Sneffels. The analysis area is located in portions of Ouray, Gunnison and Hinsdale Counties, Colorado.

II. SCOPE OF DECISION AND AUTHORITY

Scope of Decision

With respect to the National Forest System (NFS) lands, I have decided to approve that portion of the proposed action alternative specific to permitted livestock grazing on the following cattle allotments: Baldy, Big Blue, Big Park, Boiler, Box Factory, Coal Creek, Cobbs Gulch, Cocan Flats, Corbett Creek, Green Mountain, Lou Creek, Section 25, West Dallas; and the following sheep allotments: Crystal Peak-Lower Elk, Hero-Idarado, Bear Creek, Miner-Poughkeepsie, Uncompahgre Peak-North Henson, Big Blue-Fall Creek-Little Cimarron, and the continued trailing use of the Ridge and Cimarron Stock Driveways. My decision does not affect recreational stock use, or stock use by authorized outfitter-guide permit holders.

Authorities

The decision complies with authorities delegated in FSM 2204.

III. DECISION

The location of the NFS land for which my decision encompasses is shown in Appendix A of this document and as described in the Proposed Action (Adaptive Management) Alternative in the EA, (EA, Section 2.13). My decision is to implement the Adaptive Management alternative as described in the table below.

Allotment	Decisions
Bear Creek S&G	Maintain current permitted AUMs; incorporate appropriate design criteria to: minimize conflicts with Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep and protect habitat occupied by Federally listed T, E, or S species; minimize impacts to identified archaeology sites; maintain or improve upland and riparian vegetation condition, with an emphasis on frequency, timing, and intensity of grazing. 878 ewes w/lambs 7/11-8/5
Big Blue-Fall Creek-Little Cimarron S&G	Maintain current permitted AUMs; incorporate appropriate design criteria to: minimize conflicts with Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep; and protect habitat occupied by Federally listed T, E, or S species; minimize impacts to identified archaeology sites; maintain or improve upland and riparian vegetation condition, with an emphasis on frequency, timing, and intensity of grazing. 850 ewes w/lambs 7/6-9/15
Crystal-Lower S&G	Elk Maintain current permitted AUMs; incorporate appropriate design criteria to: minimize conflicts with Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep; minimize impacts to habitat occupied by Federally listed T, E, or S species; minimize impacts to identified archaeology sites; improve upland and riparian vegetation condition, with an emphasis on frequency, timing, and intensity of grazing. 600 ewes w/lambs 7/6-9/10
Hero-Idarado S&G	Maintain current permitted AUMs; incorporate appropriate design criteria to minimize improve upland and riparian vegetation condition, with an emphasis on frequency, timing, and intensity of grazing. 1000 ewes w/lambs 7/22-7/28 1000 ewes w/lambs 8/20-8/26
Miner-Poughkeepsie S&G	Retain as vacant all but that portion currently being used with Bear Creek allotment to mitigate possible future changes on the Bear Creek allotment due to potential conflicts between Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep and domestic sheep.

Allotment	Decisions
Uncompahgre Peak-North Henson	<p>Maintain current permitted AUMs; incorporate appropriate design criteria to: minimize conflicts with Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep and habitat occupied by Federally listed T, E, or S species; minimize impacts to identified archaeology sites; improve upland and riparian vegetation condition with an emphasis on frequency, timing, and intensity of grazing.</p> <p>900 ewes w/lambs 7/11-9/20</p>
Ridge Stock Driveway	<p>Continue as permitted and authorized. Implement appropriate design criteria to minimize conflicts between Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep and habitat occupied by Uncompahgre Fritillary butterfly; minimize impacts to identified archaeology sites.</p>
Middle Fork Stock Driveway	<p>Continue as permitted and authorized. Implement appropriate design criteria to minimize conflicts between Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep and habitat occupied by Uncompahgre Fritillary butterfly; minimize impacts to identified archaeology sites.</p>
East Fork Stock Driveway	<p>Continue as permitted and authorized. Implement appropriate design criteria to minimize conflicts between Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep and habitat occupied by Uncompahgre Fritillary butterfly; minimize impacts to identified archaeology sites.</p>
Baldy & Section 25 C&H	<p>Maintain current permitted AUMs; Incorporate BLM standards for BLM unit included in this allotment, and appropriate design criteria to improve upland and riparian vegetation condition with an emphasis on frequency, timing, and intensity of grazing; formally combine the two allotments to create one allotment.</p> <p>80 cow/calf pair; 2 bulls; 35 yearling cattle 6/14-7/6 80 cow/calf pair; 35 yearling cattle 7/27-9/6 20 cow/calf pair 9/7-9/30</p>
Big Blue C&H	<p>Upper 2 pastures (South and Falls units) remain vacant for emergency forage or temporary grazing on an as needed basis. Incorporate appropriate design criteria to improve upland and riparian vegetation condition. Maintain or improve fisheries habitat in Big Blue Creek.</p>
Big Park C&H	<p>Retain existing term grazing permit, grazing rotation, and management practices. Incorporate appropriate design criteria to improve upland and riparian vegetation condition with an emphasis on frequency, timing, and intensity of grazing.</p> <p>200 cow/calf pairs 6/15-8/30</p>
Box Factory C&H	<p>Retain as vacant. Evaluate further to determine whether to combine with Cocan Flats and West Dallas allotments or to retain for temporary grazing on an as needed basis. Permitted livestock number will be based upon grazing capacity as determined by a forage production study.</p>

Allotment	Decisions
Coal Creek C&H	<p>Maintain current permitted AUMs and season-long grazing system. Incorporate appropriate design criteria to improve upland and riparian vegetation condition with an emphasis on frequency, timing, and intensity of grazing.</p> <p>17 cow/calf pairs 7/1-9/20</p>
Cocan Flats C&H	<p>Retain as vacant. Evaluate further to determine whether to combine with Box Factory and West Dallas allotments or to retain for temporary grazing on an as needed basis. Permitted livestock number will be based upon grazing capacity as determined by a forage production study.</p>
Cobbs Gulch C&H	<p>Retain as a vacant allotment unless restocked by a qualified applicant under the following conditions: Adjacent landowner with qualifying base property and livestock; On date will be no earlier than July 1. Off date will be no later than 8/31. Incorporate appropriate design criteria to improve upland and riparian vegetation condition with an emphasis on frequency, timing, and intensity of grazing. Permitted livestock number will be based upon grazing capacity as determined by a forage production study.</p>
Corbett/Boiler C&H	<p>Permitted livestock number will not exceed 80 cow/calf pair July 1 to September 20; Incorporate appropriate design criteria to improve upland and riparian vegetation condition with an emphasis on frequency, timing, and intensity of grazing. Single allotment.</p>
Green Mountain C&H	<p>Maintain current permitted AUMs; incorporate appropriate design criteria to improve upland and riparian vegetation condition and Federally listed T, E, or S species with an emphasis on frequency, timing, and intensity of grazing.</p> <p>578 cow/calf pairs 7/1-10/15</p>
Lou Creek C&H	<p>Maintain current permitted AUM's; Incorporate appropriate design criteria to improve upland and riparian vegetation condition with an emphasis on frequency, timing, and intensity of grazing.</p> <p>125 cow/calf pairs 6/21-8/31 55 cow/calf pairs 7/16-10/5 350 cow/calf pairs 8/25-10/10</p>

Allotment	Decisions
West Dallas C&H	Maintain current permitted AUM's, season of use, and grazing rotation. Incorporate appropriate design criteria to improve upland and riparian vegetation condition with an emphasis on frequency, timing, and intensity of grazing. Reconstruct existing fences between West Dallas and Box Factory allotments. Develop additional water sources as needed. 121 cow/calf pair 7/14-8/15 (odd years-on portion) 121 cow/calf pair 8/15-9/15 (even years-on portion)

This decision will be implemented through issuance of this Decision Notice (DN). Separate decisions for the Alpine Plateau C&H; Big Blue C&H (Guard Station and North pastures) will be issued by the Gunnison District Ranger; a decision to close the Middle Fork-Wetterhorn; Little Cimarron; and Bighorn allotments has been made by the Forest Supervisor for the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests.

In the event of any contradiction or conflict between descriptions or depictions of authorized actions, my decision is to be taken from the project documents in the following order of precedence: first the description in this DN, second the representations on the Appendix A- Decision Map, and finally descriptions in the EA.

IV. REASONS FOR THE DECISION

Applicable Laws, Regulations, and Policy

This decision is consistent with applicable laws, regulations, and policies (refer to Section VIII of this document and EA, Section 1.4) and is consistent with Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) direction (EA, Section 1.6 and Chapter 3).

How Issues Were Considered

Key issues addressed throughout the analysis area are: upland and riparian vegetation; threatened, endangered, or sensitive species, including (R2 sensitive) Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep (Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep); management flexibility, cost efficiency. Vegetation data collected for this analysis may be found in Appendix E of the EA, and in the allotment files stored at the Ouray Ranger district office. A Biological Evaluation (BE); Biological Assessment (BA) and a management indicator species (MIS) report are all found in the project file and are summarized in chapters 3.6, 3.7, and 3.8 of the EA. Cost efficiency, measured as PNV for each alternative is discussed in chapter 3.13 of the EA. Management flexibility is addressed in this analysis through the development of design criteria, and implementation of adaptive management practices as shown in Appendix B of this document.

The primary issue on the Bear Creek S&G, Uncompahgre Peak-North Henson S&G, Big Blue-Fall Creek-Little Cimarron S&G, and Crystal-Lower Elk S&G allotments is the potential for interaction between domestic sheep and Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep. On these 4 active sheep allotments, domestic sheep grazing was proposed to continue as currently authorized. A qualitative risk assessment evaluating the potential risk of contact between domestic sheep and Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep for 4 of the 5 active sheep allotments and the Middle Fork Stock Driveway is found in Appendix A of

the EA. The risk assessment excluded the Hero-Idarado sheep allotment and any active sheep allotments where no overlap with Rocky Mountain bighorn range exists. The risk assessment was completed as part of this environmental analysis with extensive involvement from the Forest Service, Colorado Division of Wildlife, and the sheep permittees, as well as other agency personnel from the San Juan National Forest, the Gunnison Field Office of the BLM, Gunnison Ranger District and Gunnison District Office of CDOW. Potential impacts of continued grazing and trailing activities by permitted livestock will be mitigated or reduced to a very low level by the application of Design Criteria (EA, Sections 2.1.4 and Chapter 3; and Appendix B of this document). As a result of the risk assessment, the potential risk of contact between domestic sheep and Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep was determined to be low on the Middle Fork Stock Driveway, Uncompahgre Peak-North Henson S&G, Big Blue-Fall Creek-Little Cimarron S&G, and Crystal-Lower Elk S&G allotments; and low-moderate on the Bear Creek allotment. The risk assessment will be re-evaluated annually to coordinate on-going activities; adjust management practices as needed; and share information.

As a result of this decision, I anticipate that implementation of design criteria and adaptive management practices on the allotments covered by this decision will promote healthy rangeland ecosystems through continued improvement in vegetation conditions; and will continue to provide fish and wildlife habitat and protect occupied habitat for threatened, endangered, and sensitive species. Recreation opportunities within the decision area will not be changed as a result of my decision. The potential financial impact to local permittees is anticipated to be an increase in some operating costs due to implementing design criteria and a corresponding benefit to rangeland vegetation and wildlife and riparian habitat.

Factors Other Than Environmental Effects Considered In Making the Decision

The purpose and need of this project is to consider whether and where to allow livestock grazing to be permitted within the analysis area, and what management actions will be applied in order to meet or progress toward achieving desired rangeland resource conditions as outlined in the analysis. The need for this action is tied to any important resource, social, or economic disparity that was found when comparing the existing condition in the analysis area to the Forest Plan desired conditions as determined by the interdisciplinary team (IDT) and authorized officer on a site-specific basis. My decision supports the Purpose and Need for this project.

My decision complies with the Rescissions Act, the Federal Land and Management Policy Act (FLPMA), and GMUG Forest Plan direction.

I did not choose alternative 1 or alternative 2 because they would not fully support the purpose and need for the project area.

Alternative 1 (no grazing) was not chosen because there would be financial impacts to permittees and to local communities through the cancellation of term grazing permits if Alternative 1 was selected.

Alternative 2 (existing condition) was not chosen because it does not lend itself to adapting to annual biological, physical or social changes by adjusting management practices, season of use, or permitted livestock numbers, and would not include all of the design criteria specified in the EA in section 2.1.4.

I did not consider closing all vacant allotments covered under this decision (Boiler C&H, Cocan Flats C&H, Box Factory C&H, Cobbs Gulch C&H, Miner-Poughkeepsie S&G) specifically because all or a portion of these allotments could be incorporated into existing, adjacent grazing allotments. As described in the proposed action, the Boiler C&H and Corbett C&H allotments will be combined; and a portion of the Miner-Poughkeepsie S&G allotment will be combined with the Bear Creek S&G allotment. I have decided to retain the remaining portion of the Miner-Poughkeepsie S&G allotment as vacant pending additional future analysis for temporary grazing on an as needed basis, and to mitigate possible future changes on the Bear Creek S&G allotment. The Miner-Poughkeepsie S&G allotment is not within the mapped range for Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep except for approximately 640 acres of overall and summer range that adjoins the northernmost boundary, as documented in project file.

The LRMP would continue to guide management of the project area if either Alternative 1 or Alternative 2, had been selected.

Identification of the Environmental Documents Considered in Making the Decision

This decision was made after carefully considering the contents of the EA, public comments, agency response to comments, and the supporting project file. The GMUG Forest Plan was reviewed and this decision is consistent with it.

Relationship to Public Involvement

Public and agency comments were sought throughout this project (refer to Section VI of this document and EA, Chapter 4). The Forest Service addressed comments received during scoping on the project, which are included as part of the body of the EA (EA, Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, and risk assessment located in the project file and in Appendix A of the EA). Of the 9 responses received, 1 addressed concern about noxious weed management within the analysis area; 1 addressed concerns about domestic livestock grazing and potential impacts to trail systems; and the remaining 7 addressed issues including vegetation/landscape health, economics; Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep and domestic sheep interactions.

I recognize that some members of the public generally do not support grazing activities on NFS lands. Grazing is a recognized and beneficial use of National Forest System lands that maintains critical open space on private lands and provides economic benefits to local communities. Approving and administering grazing activities is part of the Forest Service mission and the legal framework under which the agency operates.

I also recognize the concern over the potential risk of contact between Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep and domestic sheep. A qualitative risk assessment was completed as part of this environmental analysis with extensive involvement from the Forest Service, Colorado Division of Wildlife (Montrose Office), and the sheep permittees. Other agency personnel from the San Juan National Forest, the Gunnison Field Office of the BLM, Gunnison Ranger District, and Gunnison District Office of CDOW were also involved in the risk assessment process.

V. SUMMARY OF ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Seven alternatives were considered in the EA (Sections 2.1, 2.2) with three carried forward for detailed analysis. The selected action is the Proposed Action, conditioned with design criteria. A summary of the action alternatives considered in the EA follows:

No Grazing (Alternative 1)

Under the no grazing alternative, all permitted livestock grazing would be eliminated through cancellation of 5 active sheep permits and 10 active cattle permits. Livestock trailing authorized under these permits would also be cancelled. Livestock trailing authorized under grazing permits issued by other agencies, including the BLM, would not be affected under this alternative. Range improvements would be removed over time, as funding allowed. Monitoring of vegetation conditions would be unlikely to occur.

Existing Condition (Alternative 2)

Under the existing condition alternative, permitted livestock grazing would continue as currently authorized through term grazing permits and annual operating instructions. The ability to modify grazing systems, season of use, or livestock numbers based on annual changes in biological, physical, and social environments would be limited or non-existent. Annual changes made in the Annual Operating Instructions (AOI) to permittees would generally be done by exception. Possible management adjustments needed in the future could require a new NEPA analysis. Rangeland management activities would be guided by Forest Plan standards and guidelines.

Proposed Action (Alternative 3)

Under the proposed action, permitted livestock grazing would continue within the analysis area under an adaptive management strategy. Allotments would move toward or meet Forest Plan desired conditions. Specific design criteria, monitoring, and adaptive management practices would be implemented within the decision area.

VI. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Project scoping comments were solicited from appropriate agencies, specific interested parties, and the general public. This project appeared in the GMUG Schedule of Proposed Actions in April 2008. In addition, as part of the public involvement process, Forest Service met several times with grazing permittees and the Colorado Division of Wildlife and sent scoping letters to approximately 75 groups, individuals and agencies. Ten comment letters were received by the May 5, 2008 deadline. Using comments from the public, other agencies, and the interdisciplinary team, all the issues brought up were addressed in section 1 and Chapter 3 of the EA.

I addressed this project during the scoping period at public meetings including Public Lands Partnership meeting, and also at a Tri-County meeting (Ouray, San Miguel, Montrose County commissioners). The District Wildlife Biologist also addressed the project at a Habitat Partnership Program meeting and led a site visit with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in August 2008. The State Historic Preservation Office also had a site visit with staff in September 2007.

VII. FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Based on my review of the EA, public scoping comments on the EA, the agency responses to comments (EA, Chapter 2 and Chapter 3), the supporting project record, and upon my analysis immediately below, I find that actions resulting from my decision do not constitute major Federal actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment, as defined in the Code of Federal Regulations Title 40 Part 1508, section 27 (40 CFR 1508.27) in terms of either context or intensity, and that an environmental impact statement need not be prepared.

Context

Locality- This decision would directly affect about 143,250 acres of NFS lands on the Ouray Ranger District. This number represents the NFS acreage of the allotments in this decision area and is approximately 72 percent of the analysis area.

Potential impacts as a result of continued livestock grazing and trailing in the decision area are monitored or are mitigated by implementation of the design criteria shown in Appendix B of this document. The effects on public land and users over both the short-term and long-term would remain consistent with that which is presently occurring. Permitted livestock use has declined in the analysis area over time resulting in reduced impacts and improved vegetation conditions currently versus those occurring 20 years or more ago. No short term or long term significant impacts are expected as a result of this decision in the local context (EA, Chapter 3).

Affected Interests and Affected Region- Affected interests for this project are grazing permittees in the analysis area, people who use the analysis area for recreation, people using public and Forest roads, residents of Ouray, Hinsdale, and Gunnison Counties. This decision allows continued use of this portion of the analysis area by livestock permit holders with term grazing permits, and also allows continued use of the Ridge and Cimarron Stock Driveways. Prescribed monitoring and mitigation measures are specified in allotment management plans and carried forward as terms and conditions of the term grazing permit in order to protect and preserve other forest uses. No short or long term significant impacts on affected interests are expected as a result of this decision in the regional context (EA, Chapter 3).

Society as a Whole - This decision provides the opportunity to continue grazing livestock in specified areas of the analysis area while providing for other biological, environmental, or social needs. There would be no impacts to society as a whole that are different than impacts that are currently occurring related to livestock grazing activities.

Intensity

Consideration of Beneficial and Adverse Impacts- A comparison of the effects of each alternative may be found in the EA in section 2.3 followed by a discussion of beneficial and adverse impacts Chapter 3 and considered in Section III of this Decision Notice. The effects of this decision would remain consistent with that which is presently occurring. A benefit of this project will be to maintain current levels of permitted livestock use to support existing active grazing allotments and resulting benefits to rangeland vegetation and economic benefits to local communities; combining allotments to improve overall management and flexibility, while retaining some vacant allotments to support temporary use of forage. Although both beneficial and adverse effects are disclosed, none are severe enough to be considered significant. None of the expected beneficial or

adverse impacts have a significant amount of intensity that would require documentation in an EIS.

Consideration of Public Health and Safety- I considered public health and safety issues in this decision. There are no changes to current levels of livestock use within the area of my decision, resulting in negligible risk to public health and safety. There are no changes to the transportation system in this area related to permitted livestock grazing activities.

Consideration of Unique Characteristics such as Proximity to Historic or Cultural Resources, Park Lands, Prime Farmlands, Wetlands, Wild and Scenic Rivers, or Ecologically Critical Areas - Historic and cultural resources are addressed in section 3.12 of the EA. There are no prime farmlands, rangeland, or forest land as defined in the Secretary of Agriculture's Memorandum Number 1827, Supplement 1, identified on the Grand Mesa Uncompahgre, or Gunnison National Forests. There are 1295 acres of wetlands occurring within the analysis area. Design criteria and application of management measures from the Watershed Conservation Practices handbook (FSH 2509.25) will assure that wetlands are not affected by this decision. There are no identified parklands or Wild and Scenic rivers in proximity to the project. The area of my decision has not been identified by any source as an ecologically critical area.

Consideration of the Degree to Which the Effects on the Quality of the Human Environment Are Likely to be Highly Controversial- This decision and its effects are not unique. The effects of this decision would remain consistent with that which is presently occurring. The effects of applying the design criteria in Appendix B of this document will reduce the potential for contact between Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep and domestic sheep where overlap of Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep range occurs; will result in long-term beneficial effects to vegetation, benefits to local economies; and will improve management flexibility to adjust to ever-changing conditions. The quality and use of the human environment in the project area is understood, has been analyzed, and is not highly controversial from a scientific standpoint. Information or data that would demonstrate that the effects described in the EA are highly controversial have not been brought forward. Given the localized impacts due to the implementation of design criteria and adaptive management practices, the intensity of this factor does not require documentation in an EIS.

Consideration of the Degree to Which the Possible Effects on the Human Environment are Highly Uncertain or Involve Unique or Unknown Risks - This decision is not unique to this area. Decisions to continue grazing, or to leave grazing allotments vacant have been made within and adjacent to the analysis area in the past. The Forest Service has experience in implementing and monitoring similar projects, and the effects have been found to be reasonably predictable. The effects of this decision would remain consistent with that which is presently occurring. The risks associated with this decision are understood, and can be evaluated and reasonably predicted. No effects from this decision would be classified as highly uncertain or involving unique or unknown risks. The intensity of this factor does not require documentation in an EIS.

Consideration of the Degree to Which the Action May Establish a Precedent for Future Actions with Significant Effects or Represents a Decision in Principle about a Future Consideration- The continuation of grazing on Baldy C&H; Big Park C&H; Boiler C&H; Coal Creek C&H; Corbett Creek C&H; Green Mountain C&H; Lou Creek C&H; Section

25 C&H; West Dallas C&H; Crystal-Lower Elk S&G; Hero-Idarado S&G; Bear Creek S&G; Uncompahgre Peak-North Henson S&G; Big Blue-Fall Creek-Little Cimarron S&G; and portions of Miner-Poughkeepsie allotments will not create a precedent to either graze or vacate other allotments. Retention of all or a portion of the Box Factory, Cocan Flats, Cobbs Gulch, Miner-Poughkeepsie, or Big Blue allotments in a vacant status will not create a precedent to either close or retain other vacant allotments. Other proposals, including future proposals to restock or close the vacant allotments or to close active stock driveways would be evaluated on their own merits, based on the issues and effects of those proposed actions. My decision does not set a precedent or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration therefore documentation in an EIS is not required.

Consideration of the Action in Relation to Other Actions with Individually Insignificant but Cumulatively Significant Impacts - Permitted livestock grazing and its associated activities have occurred within and adjacent to the analysis area since at least the early 1900's. No reasonably foreseeable future projects have been identified that would, in connection with this decision, produce cumulative effects beyond those currently occurring. Grazing activities associated with the area of this decision are limited in scope and scale, and would create minimal individual or cumulative effects in a few isolated locations. Implementation of this decision will not affect other uses.

Consideration of the Degree to Which the Action May Adversely Affect Areas or Objects Listed in or Eligible for Listing in the National Register Of Historic Places or May Cause Loss or Destruction of Significant Scientific, Cultural, or Historical Resources. Heritage resources include artifacts, structures, landscapes, or settings for prehistoric or historical events. A literature search of existing information pertinent to the Analysis Area and a review of the National Register of Historic Places for listed cultural resources were completed. The heritage resource analysis and assessment was done according to the Standard Inventory Strategy, an a priori agreement with the State Historic Preservation Officer based on regulations in 36 CFR part 800.13, implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Specific design criteria based on an adaptive management strategy are identified in section 2.1.4 of the EA, and are intended to eliminate or mitigate the effects of the proposed action on cultural resources, in consultation with the SHPO. No significant impacts to cultural resources are anticipated following implementation of the design criteria. Ongoing tribal consultation has not identified any concerns within the analysis area. Additional information regarding cultural resources may be found in the EA in section 3.12 and in the project record.

Consideration of the Degree to Which the Action May Adversely Affect an Endangered or Threatened Species or Its Habitat Has Been Determined Not to be Critical Under The Endangered Species Act. A Biological Assessment has been prepared for this decision (EA, Section 3.6 and Project File). US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) concurred with the determination of "may affect, not likely to adversely affect" for Canada lynx and the Uncompahgre fritillary butterfly. Due to a "no effect" determination for the greenback cutthroat trout and the proposed Gunnison's prairie dog, consultation and concurrence with USFWS is not required. If additional findings regarding threatened or endangered, proposed or sensitive species are discovered, a new biological assessment or evaluation will be written, and any mitigation incorporated into allotment management plans.

Consideration of Whether the Action Threatens a Violation of Law or Requirement Imposed for the Protection of the Environment. To the best of my knowledge, this decision does not threaten violation of any laws and regulations imposed for the protection of the environment (refer to Section VIII of this document).

VIII. FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

To the best of my knowledge, this decision complies with all applicable laws and regulations. In the following, I have summarized the association of my decision to some pertinent legal requirements.

Rescission Act of Fiscal Year 1995 (P.L. 104-19, Section 504) The Rescission Act of 1995 Section 504(a) requires each National Forest System unit to identify all allotments for which NEPA analysis is needed. These allotments must be included in a schedule that sets a due date for the completion of the requisite NEPA analysis. Section 504(a) requires adherence to these established schedules. Sections 504(b) and (c) state that if a grazing permit expires or is waived and the permit authorizes grazing in one or more listed allotments for which the scheduled NEPA analysis has yet to be completed, the Forest Service must issue a new term grazing permit upon the same terms and conditions, including the length of term, as the one which expired or was waived, unless there are reasons other than the lack of the necessary NEPA analysis which justify not issuing a new permit. These provisions do not alter the line officer's authority to make a decision not to issue a new permit for reasons other than not having completed the analysis required by NEPA and other applicable laws. In addition, several Omnibus Appropriations Acts have amended the Rescissions Act to allow the authorized officer to continue to issue term grazing permits under certain circumstances, and to revise the schedule to meet changing priorities.

Granger-Thye Act of 1950 (P.L. 81-478) Granger-Thye Act established 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 establishment of grazing advisory boards. In addition, requirements, such as base property and commensurability, were designated by statute to insure economic stability to local communities, as well as to foster stewardship of the public land resources, and to manage the rangelands in a sustainable manner. The purpose of this law was to establish controls and stewardship of the public land grazing resource.

Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978 (U.S.C. Title 43 Chapter 37 § 1901(b)) The Congress established a national policy and commitment to: (1) inventory and identify current public rangelands conditions and trends as a part of the inventory process required by section 1711 (a) of this title; (2) manage, maintain and improve the condition of the public rangelands so that they become as productive as feasible for all rangeland values in accordance with management objectives and the land use planning process established pursuant to section 1712 of this title; (3) charge a fee for public grazing use which is equitable and reflects the concerns addressed in paragraph (a)(5)..."

Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976: This Act allows the granting of land use permits on National Forest System lands. The regulations at Code of Federal Regulations Title 36 Part 251 (36 CFR 251) guide the issuance of permits under this Act. Land use permits are granted on National Forest System lands when the need for such is consistent with planned uses.

National Forest Management Act of 1976: The Forest Plan was approved in 1983 and amended in 1991, as required by this Act. This long-range land and resource management plan provides guidance for all resource management activities in the Forest. The National Forest Management Act requires all projects and activities to be consistent with the Forest Plan. The Forest Plan has been reviewed in consideration of this project (EA, Sections 1.6 and Chapter 3). This decision is consistent with the Forest Plan.

Clean Air Act of 1955, as amended 1977: This Act required States to develop plans to implement, maintain, and enforce primary and secondary ambient air quality standards for any criteria air pollutants, and called federal agencies to prevent deterioration of air quality. Effects on air quality as a result of this project were analyzed and showed that this project will have negligible effects on air quality. This decision is consistent with this Act.

Clean Water Amendments of 1972: This Act requires State and Federal agencies to control and abate water pollution. This project was designed to comply with this Act (EA, Section 2.1.3a-c and Appendix B of this document). This decision is consistent with this Act.

Executive Order 11990 and 11988: The management of wetlands and floodplains are subject to Executive Orders 11990 and 11988, respectively. The purpose of the EOs are to avoid to the extent possible the long and short term adverse impacts associated with the destruction or modification of wetlands and floodplains and to avoid direct or indirect support of new construction in wetlands wherever there is a practical alternative. This order requires the Forest Service to take action to minimize destruction, loss or degradation of wetlands, and to preserve and enhance the natural and beneficial values of wetlands. In compliance with this order, Forest Service direction requires that an analysis be completed to determine whether adverse impacts would result (EA, Section 2.1.2 and 3.10-3.13). The project was designed to avoid impacts to wetlands and floodplains. This decision is consistent with this Order.

National Historic Preservation Act: Heritage and tribal interests are regulated by Federal laws that direct and guide the Forest Service in identifying, evaluating, and protecting heritage resources. Heritage resources within the analysis area were considered during project development. The heritage resource analysis and assessment were carried out using the Rocky Mountain Region's 1996 Memorandum of Understanding between the Colorado State Historic Preservation Officer and the Forest Service regarding range management activities. Specific design criteria based on an adaptive management strategy are identified in section 2.1.4 of the EA, and are intended to eliminate or mitigate the effects of the proposed action on cultural resources, in consultation with the SHPO. No significant impacts to cultural resources are anticipated following implementation of the design criteria. Ongoing tribal consultation has not identified any concerns within the analysis area.

Endangered Species Act: Compliance with this Act is addressed in Section VII, of this document. Under provisions of the ESA, Federal agencies are directed to seek to conserve threatened and endangered species and to ensure that their actions are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any of these species. I have complied with all applicable Federal laws and regulations and consulted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, where it was appropriate to do so. I have considered the effects of this project and complied with relevant Forest Service regulations and policies. Effects of the selected Alternative on all listed threatened and endangered species, relevant to this Analysis Area, were analyzed in a Biological Assessment (BA) and summarized in the EA in section 3.6. Sensitive species were analyzed in a Biological Evaluation summarized in the EA in section 3.7. Management Indicator Species (MIS) were analyzed in an MIS report summarized in the EA in section 3.8. These documents are all found in the project record.

National Environmental Policy Act: The documentation for this project supports compliance with this Act. The process of environmental analysis and decision making for this proposed action, and the associated documentation, have been conducted to fully comply with the requirements of NEPA. These include requirements of the Act itself, CEQ regulations at 40 CFR 1500, Forest Service policies at Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, the requirements that evolved through the practice of NEPA, and from case law.

IX. IMPLEMENTATION DATE AND ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW AND APPEAL OPPORTUNITY

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

This decision is subject to administrative review pursuant to Federal Regulations at 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 215. This decision is also subject to administrative review under 36 CFR Part 251 Subpart C by term grazing permit holders or applicants (§251.86). However, term grazing permit holders or applicants must choose to appeal under either 36 CFR 251 or 215, but not both (§251.85).

Pursuant to 36 CFR 215.13 (b), only those individuals or organizations who submitted comments during the comment period may file an appeal. Any appeal of my Decision must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 215. It is an appellant's responsibility to provide sufficient activity-specific evidence and rationale, focusing on the decision, to show why the Responsible Official's decision should be reversed. Appeals (including attachments) must be in writing.

Appeals filed under 36 CFR Part 215

Appeals (including attachments) must be in writing and filed (regular mail, fax, e-mail, hand-delivery, express delivery, or messenger service) with the Appeal Deciding Officer

(§ 215.8) within 45 days following the date of publication of a legal notice of this decision in the Montrose Daily Press. Attachments received after the 45-day appeal period will not be considered. The publication date of the legal notice in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal (§ 215.15 (a)). Those wishing to appeal should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

Appeals filed under 36 CFR Part 251 Subpart C

Appeals filed under 36 CFR Part 251 Subpart C (including attachments) must be in writing and filed with the Reviewing Officer within 45 days following the date on the notice of the written decision (§251.88). Attachments received after the 45 day appeal period will not be considered.

It is an appellant's responsibility to provide sufficient activity-specific evidence and rationale, focusing on the decision, to show why the Deciding Officer's decision should be reversed (§251.90). The Deciding Officer is willing to meet with applicants and holders to hear and discuss any concerns or issues related to the decision (§251.93).

Appeals filed under 36 CFR 251 Subpart C must have a copy of the appeal simultaneously sent to the Deciding Officer (§251.88).

An appellant may also include in the notice of appeal a request for oral presentation (§251.97) or a request for stay of implementation of the decision pending decision on the appeal (§251.91).

All appeals must be filed (regular mail, fax, email, hand-delivery, or express delivery) with the Appeal Deciding Officer at:

Appeals Deciding Officer
U.S.D.A. Forest Service
Rocky Mountain Region
740 Simms Street
Golden, CO 80401

Office hours are 8:00 to 4:30.

For Fax delivery: 303-275-5134 to the attention of Appeals

Email: appeals-rocky-mountain-regional-office@fs.fed.us.

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

The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered appeals are 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM Monday through Friday, excluding federal holidays. Electronic appeals must be submitted in a format such as an e-mail message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or MSWord (.doc) to appeals-rocky-mountain-regional-office@fs.fed.us. In cases where no identifiable name is attached to an electronic message, a verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature is one way to provide verification.

Individuals or organizations who expressed interest during the comment period specified at 36 CFR 215.6 may appeal this decision. Notices of appeal must meet the appeal

content requirements at 36 CFR 215.14 or 36 C.F.R. 251.90 as appropriate or they will be dismissed.

Contact Person

For more information about this project, contact Kelley Liston, 2505 S. Townsend, Montrose, CO 81401, phone 970-240-5408, or at kliston@fs.fed.us.

XI. SIGNATURE AND DATE

 /s/ Tammy Randall-Parker

3/20/2009

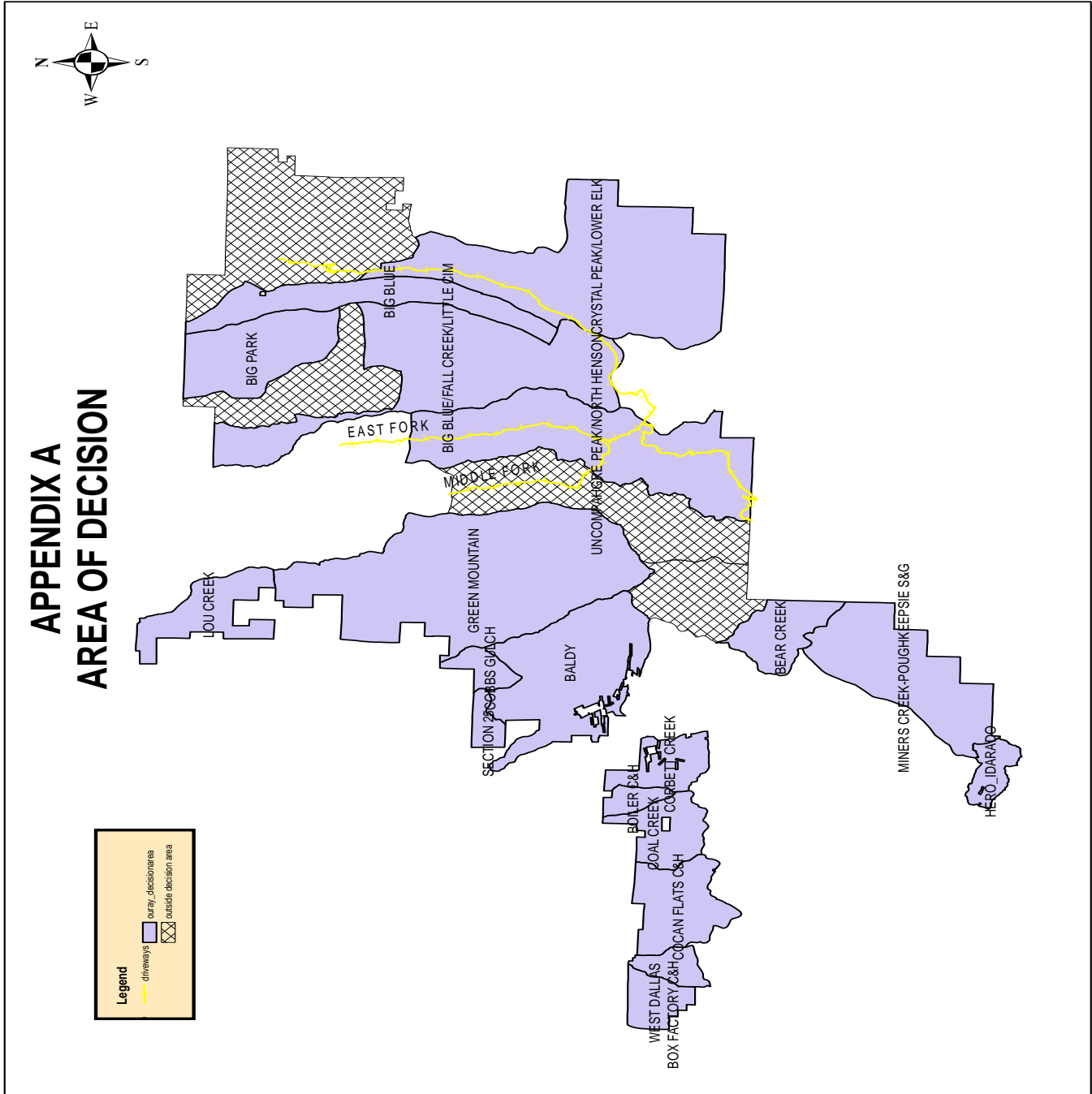
TAMMY RANDALL-PARKER
District Ranger
Ouray Ranger District

DATE

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination on all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Appendix A- Decision Map



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Appendix B- Conditions of Approval

Design Criteria shown in Table 2.1.4 of the EA will be incorporated as appropriate to each allotment in allotment management plans.

	• Design Criteria
•	• Authorized livestock may include cow/calf pairs; other mature cattle including bulls; yearling cattle; ewes with lambs; other mature sheep including rams. Domestic sheep will not be introduced into bighorn sheep range without additional risk assessment.
	• Pastures will be clean of livestock by the prescribed off-date or by the time that allowable use criteria are met on the key species/key areas, whichever occurs first, and livestock will remain out of the cleaned pastures.
	• Annual fluctuations in timing and amounts of precipitation and/or changes in vegetative condition (such as by fire, flood, or hail) may result in an annual change of authorized numbers and/or seasons of use and could result in changes in rotation schedules or management practices. .
	• Range improvements will be maintained yearly by the assigned permit holder; new construction and/or removal of improvements will occur as needed. Most new or reconstruction will be completed under a cost-share arrangement with the permit holder.
	• All livestock carcasses are to be moved at least one hundred feet from the high water line of lakes and streams and out of sight of roads, trails, and recreation sites. Carcasses of animals that have died as a result of contagious or infectious diseases will be burned within 24 hours of discovery. In such event, a burning permit will be obtained from the District Ranger prior to burning.
	• Permittees will spend as much time as needed to move livestock away from areas of concern (meadows, riparian areas, key areas, and so forth)

- **Design Criteria**

and into areas of normally light use.

- Salt or supplement will be placed at least 1/4 mile away from all water sources, including live streams, stock ponds, seeps, springs, and other developed and undeveloped water sources; and 1/4 mile away from roads, skid trails, timber regeneration areas, high-use recreation areas, and other known concentration areas. Salt or supplement should be placed and moved to less utilized areas. Permanent salt or supplement grounds will not be established. Salt or supplement pastures prior to placing livestock in them.
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- Salt or supplement will be placed on rocky knolls, well-drained sites or in timber where excessive trampling will not destroy plant growth. As utilization patterns develop, salt or supplement will be moved to areas where forage has not been grazed, or where it has been grazed lightly. Salt or supplement will be removed from area after allowable use criteria has been achieved. No salt or supplement will be allowed to remain in any location that could attract bighorn sheep into areas used by domestic sheep.
-

- Annual Operating Instructions (AOIs) will be developed annually and will include management practices to be implemented, season of use, authorized livestock number, range improvements planned for the year, authorized trailing routes on and off NFS lands(domestic sheep only). Permittees will be responsible for ensuring that their herders/riders understand and comply with Forest Service requirements.
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- Livestock will be removed from an allotment or pasture if resource monitoring or new information suggests this course of action after all management options have been exhausted.
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- Livestock will be in apparent good health when placed on NFS lands.
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• **Design Criteria**

- Permittees are encouraged to contact the Forest Service on a regular basis (at least weekly during the grazing season) to update on conditions, request changes, or report problems.

- - Sheep will be bedded on new ground every night and moved to fresh feed daily.
 - Camps will be placed at least 200 feet from live water.
 - Camps will be kept clean and garbage packed out.
 - Sheep herders will not be allowed to cut krummholz (dwarf spruce trees at timberline) for firewood.
 - Camps will be placed at least 200 feet from system trails and stock driveways where practical, and ¼ mile from any lake.
 - Use an appropriate number of herders to control and move bands of sheep to desired grazing areas. The main flock will never be left unattended for any reason.
 - The Forest Service and permit holder will jointly notify the public through trailhead signage of the presence of sheep that are protected by guard dogs in the area.
 - Domestic sheep will not graze or trail across NFS lands while in estrous. Generally, ewes will come into estrous in the fall after the lambs are weaned and after the ewes are removed from NFS lands; breeding occurs in November-December.
 - Domestic sheep will be in apparent good health when moved onto NFS lands.
 - Stray domestic sheep will be gathered or disposed of by the permittee within 72 hours of notification. Herders will keep close count on sheep and will

• **Design Criteria**

take timely action to recover any strays.

- The permittee and/or the FS will notify CDOW as soon as possible if individual or small groups of bighorn sheep come into contact with domestic sheep. Notification procedures will be included in the AOI.

- The CDOW is responsible for promptly responding to notifications of contact between wild and domestic sheep and for any subsequent management actions related to wild sheep.

- Permittees may use hazing techniques and guard dogs to ensure separation of wild and domestic sheep.

- Move sheep to a new grazing area every 5-7 days.

- Bedding grounds need to be relocated every 3 days (open bedding) or 1 day (closed bedding). Sheep will not be bedded within 200' of any perennial stream or water source.

- The permittees and their herders will follow the annual operating instructions for the grazing allotment.

- Transplants of wild sheep into the analysis area should be designed to minimize the likelihood of contact between wild and domestic sheep.

- Domestic sheep will not be bedded or salted within 500' of snow survey and vegetation monitoring equipment in Senator Beck Basin.

- Trailing time along the Ridge Stock Driveway is limited to 4 days up and 3 days down from the

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• **Design Criteria**

National Forest boundary between Alpine Plateau and the respective allotment boundary. On the Cimarron Stock Driveways (East and Middle Fork Driveways) trailing time is limited to 2 days each way between the Forest boundary and the Cimarron trailheads unless mutually agreed upon otherwise at the annual allotment meeting or during the grazing season.

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- Trailing activities will comply with direction in the 2210 Management of Sheep Driveways letter dated January 25, 1989 unless otherwise agreed upon at the annual allotment meeting or during the grazing season, or if resource needs arise.

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- Bands of sheep using the Ridge Stock Driveway will bed in the Soldier Creek corral.

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- Bands of sheep using the Cimarron driveways will not overnight on the Big Cimarron C&H allotment except at the Big Cimarron corral near the Forest boundary.

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- Bands of sheep using the Middle Fork driveway will overnight either on the East Fork side of the Middle Fork drainage, or further down (north) the Middle Fork of the Cimarron. (map on file and provided to the permittee in the AOI.) Permittee will patrol the driveway immediately after trailing to check for and remove all strays.

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- A coordination meeting with permittees, CDOW, BLM, San Juan NF, and GMUG NF will occur annually.

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- Bands of sheep using the Ridge stock driveway in the vicinity of Uncompahgre Peak will restrict trailing to the existing route. As specified above, trailing time is limited to 4 days up and 3 days down from the National Forest boundary between Alpine Plateau and the respective allotment boundary. Incidental grazing use occurring during trailing activities is anticipated and should be minimized. Sheep will not be allowed to loiter in
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- **Design Criteria**

the area of the occupied colony.

- - Any hay, straw or other feeds used on the allotment will be either certified or tagged as being free of noxious plants, or will consist of heat-treated pelletized feeds, as directed by Regional order number 02-97-01 and 02-97-02.
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- Permittees will make every effort to ensure that livestock do not contribute to the transport of noxious plants onto the allotment(s). Permittees will be given identification information on State of Colorado “noxious weeds” during annual meetings with the Forest Service.
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- Conduct prevention, control, and eradication strategies for targeted invasive plant species, utilizing integrated weed management techniques through implementation of the GMUG weed action plan.
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- In addition to Project Design Criteria, the following are recommended practices that will be discussed with permittees at the time of the Annual Operating Instructions meeting with the Forest Service:
 - Permittees should report noxious weed sites on the actual use report at the end of the grazing season, or should report them directly to the Forest Officer during the grazing season. Permittees willing to assist in treating noxious plants should discuss with the Forest Officer before taking any action.
 - Livestock coming onto the Forest from lands known to contain noxious plants should be held on clean forage or fed weed-free hay for several days to allow the majority of seeds to pass through the GI tract before turn on.
 - Any equipment used in the transport of livestock, including horse trailers and stock trucks, should be washed before coming onto the allotment if they have been used in areas where noxious plants
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- **Design Criteria**

were present.

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- Animal damage management activities will be conducted in accordance with Federal regulations, State law, and Forest Service policy. Authorization for animal damage management would continue to be authorized on an annual basis by the Forest Service under the existing programmatic environmental analysis and cooperative agreement with USDI Wildlife Services.

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- - Do not establish or maintain bedgrounds, graze, or place salt or supplement on known occupied habitat of the Uncompahgre Fritillary Butterfly. Incidental grazing use occurring during trailing activities is anticipated but should be minimized. The Forest Service will annually provide the permittee with a map of known or suspected locations to avoid.

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- Livestock grazing will be managed in riparian areas and willow carrs to maintain or achieve mid seral or higher condition to provide cover and forage for prey species within Canada lynx habitat.

- Livestock grazing will be managed so that browsing of aspen regeneration within the analysis area does not inhibit successful regeneration to
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- **Design Criteria**

provide or maintain habitat for prey species within Canada lynx habitat as specified under Design Criteria specific to Upland Vegetation.

- Livestock utilization levels in Nate Creek are currently estimated to be less than 10%, due to topography, lack of forage, and limited access. Monitoring conducted jointly between the range and fisheries programs will be used to determine whether management changes are needed and the type of changes needed.

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- Adjust timing, duration, intensity of livestock grazing based on monitoring of Nokomis fritillary butterfly populations. Manage livestock grazing to minimize negative impacts on the abundance of larval food plants or adult nectar sources for Nokomis fritillary butterfly. Maps and instructions to the permit holder will be provided as information becomes available.
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- Adjust grazing management as needed based on impacts to known populations of stonecrop gilia and tundra buttercup. This may include changes to timing, duration, or intensity of grazing use;
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• **Design Criteria**

avoidance of known populations to limit access; or other practices as yet undetermined. Maps and instructions to the permit holder will be provided as information becomes available.

- Adjust grazing management practices implemented to minimize domestic and bighorn sheep interaction as needed based on monitoring information as specified under Design Criteria specific to sheep allotments and driveways.

- Manage livestock grazing in Big Blue Creek to Forest Plan riparian standards to maintain existing condition for the conservation population of Colorado Cutthroat Trout. (CRCT) Manage livestock grazing on other stream reaches within the analysis area to maintain existing CRCT populations as specified in Design Criteria for Riparian Vegetation.

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- Manage livestock grazing so that regeneration of aspen clones is not significantly inhibited where suitable habitat exists for aspen dependent R2 sensitive species as specified under Design Criteria specific to R2 Sensitive Species.

- Limit livestock use of browse and herbaceous plant production to that not needed by big game on winter range areas, and no more than 10-15% of current years growth on other areas. Individual allotment management plans, which have the winter range management area prescription designated within the allotment, will reflect livestock use levels to assure adequate quantity and quality of browse and herbaceous vegetation is available for big game during the winter months. Coordination with adjacent landowners and/or agencies should be evaluated as a way to accomplish this standard (5A & 5B Management Area direction).

- Protect regeneration from livestock damage.

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- **Design Criteria**

Maximum grazing use on transitory ranges resulting from clearcuts is: 20% of current growth on key shrubs, 40-50% of current growth on key grasses, and 20% of total production on key forbs.

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- - Livestock grazing systems will be designed to maximize the opportunity for plant regrowth and recovery, by focusing on the frequency of defoliation, the intensity of defoliation, and the timing and duration of livestock use.

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- Entry and exit dates onto NFS lands will be based on current permitted on-dates; historic range readiness indicators; the availability of water; estimated carrying capacity; and resource conditions. Entry and exit dates are not firm, and will be adjusted based on meeting allowable use standards and resource or environmental conditions, such as drought or range readiness.

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- Grazing schedules will be developed in the annual operating instructions based on the prior year Grazing Response Index (GRI) and/or an evaluation of grazing from the previous season and the resource conditions of the current season. A negative GRI will be corrected the following year by changing any or all of the following: the season of use, allowable use standard, residual stubble height, stocking rate, timing of livestock use, or through the use of temporary range improvements. The management goal would be to have a positive or neutral GRI score as an average over every three-year period

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- On allotments with rotational grazing systems, create sub-units within the allotment without construction of permanent fencing resulting in a neutral or positive GRI. The maximum allowable use on key areas is 50% by weight of current year's growth. On allotments with season-long grazing systems, the maximum allowable use on key areas is 35% by weight of current year's
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- **Design Criteria**

growth. Livestock will be removed from the pasture or the allotment when the allowable use standard is reached.

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- - In key riparian areas, a 4" residual stubble height on tall sedges is an indicator that the site is moving towards desired condition. Residual stubble height of less than 4" would result in either additional monitoring the following year, or a change in management practices, using tools in the grazing toolbox. Allowable use will be no more than 50% by weight of the current year's growth on key forage species on allotments with rotational grazing systems, and will not exceed 35% by weight on allotments with season-long grazing systems. On browse species, livestock use will not exceed 10-15% of current year's growth.

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- - Restore and maintain organic ground cover on benchmark sites of at least 50% canopy cover or greater as determined by long-term monitoring such as cover-frequency transects. The amount of organic ground cover needed will vary by different ecological types and should be commensurate with the potential of the site. (NOTE: Such ground cover allows for prescribed fire and site preparation without increasing surface runoff from a 10-year storm (WRENSS II.60; USFS 1966))

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- - Manage land treatments to limit the sum of detrimentally compacted, eroded, and displaced soil to no more than 15% of any activity area by restricting concentrated-use sites, and similar soil disturbances.

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- - Moving towards desired conditions for soils and vegetation as specified above should also help
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- **Design Criteria**

protect buried or partially sites.

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- - Manage permitted livestock grazing in wilderness areas to meet upland and riparian allowable use standards. Identify and monitor benchmark sites using long-term methodology in RAMTG, such as cover-frequency.

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- - Permittees will comply with the Uncompahgre Travel Management Plan decision approved 3/1/2002. If permittees need administrative access on closed roads, they are to contact the District office for approval. Administrative access will be approved through the annual operating instructions on a case by case basis.
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- **Design Criteria**

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- - Permittees are responsible for monitoring the following: livestock numbers; pasture entry and exit dates; allotment entry and exit dates; and maintenance activities for assigned improvements. The permittee will also complete a Grazing Response Index (GRI) annually. This information is requested at the end of each grazing season, and will be made part of the permanent allotment files. The Forest Officer will provide a reporting form for the permittees use.
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