



File Code: 1950

Date: June 1, 2005

Dear Friend of the Ashley,

The Flaming Gorge Ranger District proposes to reauthorize livestock grazing on 77,917 acres of Forest Service administered rangelands located within the Flaming Gorge Ranger District of the Ashley National Forest. Livestock grazing would be reauthorized using current Forest Plan direction in addition to the proposed grazing use standards and desired conditions listed below to manage livestock use. It is expected that these standards will maintain these rangelands at current desired conditions or continue to move them towards desired conditions. This proposal recognizes the continuing need for forage production from Forest Service administered lands as identified in the Forest Plan.

These rangelands make up a portion of Cedar Mountain, Rock Springs, Sugarloaf, Spring Creek and Goslin Mountain Allotments (refer to attached maps). The boundary of each allotment extends well beyond Forest Service administered lands to include BLM, State and private lands. The first four allotments listed are located within Sweetwater County, Wyoming while the Goslin Mountain Allotment is located within Daggett County, Utah. Most of these rangelands lie within the Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area (FGNRA) surrounding Flaming Gorge Reservoir. A brief synopsis of each allotment is attached as Appendix A.

An adaptive management strategy would be used to ensure that current Forest Plan direction, as well as the proposed grazing use standards and desired conditions listed below, are met. This strategy would focus on monitoring resource conditions and implementing administrative actions as needed to achieve Forest Plan objectives and specified desired conditions. The proposed additional grazing use standards and desired conditions are as follows:

Grazing Standards

- Utilization of key forage species no greater than 50% of current year's growth except where long-term monitoring demonstrates a different standard is appropriate.
- Limit forage utilization by livestock of key browse species on big game winter range to 20%. Key upland browse on big game winter range is browse in areas where trends in big game numbers indicate livestock use is limiting big game numbers. Key species include sagebrush, bitterbrush, alder-leaf mountain mahogany, curl-leaf mountain mahogany, and serviceberry.
- Leave a 4" or greater stubble height of herbaceous species at the end of the grazing season between greenline and bank full of stream systems.
- Implement grazing management practices that would not cause exceedences in state water quality standards.



Desired Conditions

- Ground cover equal to or greater than 85% of potential.
- Plant communities dominated by native species and selected non-native species of moderate to high value for watershed protection (or erosion control). Dominance indicated by greater cover, frequency and abundance of moderate and high value plants over low value plants. Documentation associated with photography and other notes as well as measurements from studies are sources for determination of dominance. Selected non-native species are those included in plantings in the past based on their erosion control and other desired values.
- Landscape diversity of crown cover of sagebrush that complements a variety of sagebrush associated wildlife species including nesting, brooding, and wintering habitat for sage grouse.
- Noxious weeds not present or where present trending toward control.

All grazing standards and desired conditions would be incorporated within livestock grazing permits and Allotment Management Plans.

I will determine whether or not the decision may be categorically excluded from further analysis following a review of specialist reports, biological evaluations/assessments, public comments, and other pertinent information and analyses. If the allotments qualify for categorical exclusion it is my intention to issue two Decision Memos, one for the Wyoming allotments and one for the Goslin Mountain Allotment under the recently approved authority granted the Forest Service in Section 339 of the FY 2005 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 108-447). This legislation provides that certain decisions to authorize allotment grazing shall be categorical excluded (CE) from documentation in environmental assessments and environmental impact statements under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The full text follows:

SEC. 339. For fiscal years 2005 through 2007, a decision made by the Secretary of Agriculture to authorize grazing on an allotment shall be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.) if: (1) the decision continues current grazing management; (2) monitoring indicates that current grazing management is meeting, or satisfactorily moving toward, objectives in the land and resource management plan, as determined by the Secretary; and (3) the decision is consistent with agency policy concerning extraordinary circumstances. The total number of allotments that may be categorically excluded under this section may not exceed 900.

If these allotments do not qualify for a categorical exclusion then I will proceed with the appropriate level of analysis and decision.

Decisions issued under this authority are not appealable under 36 CFR 215. Permittees may appeal this decision under 36 CFR 251.

The public is invited to offer substantive comment at this time. I am running the scoping and comment period concurrently. Under new regulations effective June 4, 2003, a comment period can be at the Responsible Official's discretion. Only those who submit timely and substantive

comments will be eligible for appeal. The comment period ends 30 days after the publication of the legal notice for this project in the *Vernal Express*. Substantive comments are those within the scope of, are specific to, and have a direct relationship to the proposed actions, and include supporting reasons that the Responsible Official should consider in reaching a decision. Each individual, or representative from each organization submitting substantive comments, must either sign the comments or otherwise verify identity in order to attain appeal eligibility. Comments received in response to this notice, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record for this project.

Comments should include the information required pursuant to 36 CFR 215.6(a)(3), as published in the Federal Register on March 22, 2005. Send your written comments to: Jeff E. Schramm, District Ranger, Flaming Gorge Ranger District, P.O. Box 279, Manila, Utah 84046. Comments may also be hand delivered to the above address during regular business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday-Friday, excluding federal holidays. Hand delivered comments must be on time and date stamped at the District office by close of business on the 30th calendar day following publication of the legal notice for this project. Electronic comments should be sent to comments-intermtn-ashley@fs.fed.us. It would be most useful to receive your electronic comments in MS Word (*.doc) or rich text format (*.rtf). Those using electronic means may submit a scanned signature. Otherwise another means of verifying the identity of the individual or organizational representative may be necessary for electronically submitted comments or comments received by phone. This is pursuant to 36 CFR 215.6(a)(3)(B).

For further information concerning this proposal, please contact D. Ross Catron at the address above or by phone at (435) 781-5268.

Thank you for your continuing interest and participation in the management of the Ashley National Forest.

Sincerely,



JEFF E. SCHRAMM
District Ranger

Attachments: (3)
Maps (2)
Appendix A

Appendix A
Grazing Summary
Flaming Gorge Range Allotments
May 27, 2005

General Information...All of the Wyoming rangelands being considered for continued livestock grazing under this proposal lie within the Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area (FGNRA), which was created by Public Law 90-540 on October 1, 1968. Prior to 1968 these rangelands were BLM managed public lands and private lands. When the reservoir was created, surrounding lands were secured by the United States to be managed as a national recreation area. Some private entities maintained access to Flaming Gorge Reservoir for livestock watering purposes on lands transferred to the United States. This appears to be the case on "checkerboard" lands sold to the United States by Union Pacific Railroad and Rock Springs Grazing Association. These lands are located within the Rock Springs Allotment.

Public Law 90-540, which established the FGNRA, charged the Secretary of Agriculture with administering, protecting, and developing the FGNRA in a manner that "will best provide for (1) public outdoor recreation benefits, (2) conservation of scenic, scientific, historical, and other values contributing to public enjoyment, and (3) such management, utilization, and disposal of natural resources as will promote or are compatible with, and do not extensively impair, the purposes for which the recreation area is established."

Cedar Mountain Allotment (Sweetwater County, Wyoming)...The FGNRA portion of the Cedar Mountain Allotment consists of approximately 18,730 acres or 8.8% of the Cedar Mountain Allotment's 211,000 acres. Prior to 1999 the allotment was known as the Henry's Fork Allotment which consisted of over 315,000 acres. In 1999 the Forest Service and the BLM (Rock Springs Field Office) prepared a joint Environmental Assessment (EA) that analyzed continued livestock grazing on both BLM and FGNRA lands. Based upon this analysis the BLM decided to split the Henry's Fork Allotment into two allotments, the Sage Creek and Cedar Mountain Allotments. Permittee grazing privileges were split into one or the other allotment at that time. Following the allotment split the Wyoming State Department of Transportation fenced Wyoming State Highway 530, allowing mostly FGNRA lands along the reservoir to be managed separately from lands west of the highway.

Prior to the construction of the highway fencing, the FGNRA lands adjacent to the reservoir received a disproportionate amount of sheep and cattle grazing use because the reservoir was essentially the only water source on the eastern end of the allotment. This was especially true in the late 1980s when sheep and cattle use occurred within the FGNRA 365 days a year. This situation gradually changed in the early 1990s when the Forest Service became more active in FGNRA livestock grazing management. However, it wasn't until the highway fence was completed in the early 2000s that the current management system was implemented.

Currently, cattle use within the FGNRA rangelands east of the highway and adjacent to the reservoir occurs one year out of three, with up to 500 cattle from approximately May 15 through June 7. Use is rotated so that each year at least one of the units (FGNRA lands are located in two fenced units) is rested from cattle grazing while the other unit is grazed. One year in three both units are rested (last occurred in 2004).

Sheep use occurs every winter (from approximately Nov 1 through March 31) within FGNRA lands. The amount of sheep use depends upon the amount of cattle grazing earlier in that same year and the amount of precipitation. During the last several years of the drought, both cattle and sheep use has been reduced from twenty to thirty percent.

Rock Springs Allotment (Sweetwater County, Wyoming)...The FGNRA portion of the Rock Springs Allotment consists of approximately 31,550 acres or 1.6% of the RSGA Allotment's estimated 2,000,000 acres. This allotment contains "checkerboard" lands. Checkerboard lands are alternating sections of public and private lands 20 miles north and south of the railroad. A portion of these lands lie within the FGNRA.

Access for livestock watering was maintained on 10,906 acres of the "checkerboard" lands deeded to the United States as part of the purchase of lands for the establishment of the FGNRA in the 1960s. This represents approximately 34.6% of the allotment's FGNRA acreage. A portion of the livestock use within this allotment currently consists of winter sheep and cattle use. This use varies from year to year, and occurs each winter, generally from December 1 through May 1.

Summer use is also allowed by up to 65 cattle on the western portion of the FGNRA. This use generally occurs from May 1 through October 31 each year.

Following the 2000 Wildhorse Basin Fire the Current Creek drainage portion of this allotment was rested from livestock grazing during 2001 and 2002. Winter grazing use within the RSGA Allotment is currently at approximately 50% of permitted use. Other adjustments (complete rest) of the Firehole area is planned for this next year (Dec 1, 2005 through May 1, 2006) to rest adjacent BLM rangelands following prescribed burning.

It is expected that any Forest Service decision concerning the appropriateness of livestock grazing would not affect any legal rights for livestock watering access to the reservoir.

Sugarloaf Allotment (Sweetwater County, Wyoming)...This allotment lies on the east shore of Flaming Gorge Reservoir. The NRA portion of this allotment contains 8,380 acres or 10.5% of the allotment's total 79,820 acres. Cattle use is permitted on this allotment from approximately May 15 through February 28. However, grazing use within the NRA portion is limited from November 1 through February 28. The NRA boundary is not fenced, nor are the boundaries between the RSGA Allotment to the north and the Spring Creek Allotment to the south. Summer use on the allotment is limited to BLM public lands and private lands east of the NRA. Cattle numbers for the two permittees on the allotment are 218 and 256 cattle from May 15 through February 28.

This allotment was rested from grazing in 2001 and 2002 following the 2000 Wildhorse Basin Fire. In 2003 and 2004 reduced numbers were run on the allotment due to the drought.

Spring Creek Allotment (Sweetwater County, Wyoming)...This allotment lies on the east shore of Flaming Gorge Reservoir. The NRA portion of this allotment contains 5,657 acres or 12% of the allotment's total 45,472 acres. This allotment borders the Sugarloaf Allotment to the north and the Wyoming/Utah State line to the south. This allotment is fenced between summer and winter use. The winter use pasture includes both FGNRA lands and BLM public lands. Cattle use is currently authorized on the allotment through two permits, one of which allows 56 cattle from May 16 through October 31 each year. The remaining permit allows 337 cattle to graze the allotment from May 16 through October 15 and for 400 cattle from November 1 through January 30. A BLM portion of this allotment was rested in 2001 and 2002 following the Wildhorse Basin Fire in 2000.

Goslin Mountain Allotment (Daggett County, Utah)...This allotment lies within Daggett County, Utah on the east shore of Flaming Gorge Reservoir and north of, but not adjacent to, the Green River. This allotment consists of 13,600 acres of both FGNRA lands and National Forest lands. These Forest Service administered rangelands comprise 29% of the allotments 46,546 total acres of BLM, private and State lands. The allotment borders the Utah/Wyoming state line to the north and the Littlehole area to the south. The allotment has extensive fencing separating different grazing units and numerous water developments to promote even livestock distribution. Many of these water developments were constructed during the last several years. A single permittee is authorized to graze up to 700 cattle on the entire allotment from May 1 through September 30 each year. FGNRA lands along the reservoir are grazed either early in the grazing season (May) or late in the grazing season (September). Other Forest Service administered lands are grazed each year on a deferred ration basis.

Ashley National Forest, Flaming Gorge Ranger District Proposed Continued Livestock Grazing, Goslin Mountain Allotment

