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COASTAL RANGELANDS ANALYSIS

MONTEREY RANGER DISTRICT
LOS PADRES NATIONAL FOREST
MONTEREY COUNTY, CALIFORNIA



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Chapter 1 – Introduction

The Los Padres National Forest (LPNF) proposes to issue five Term Permits for livestock grazing on National Forest System lands that encompass approximately 24,380 acres, and remove three historic grazing allotments from the Los Padres National Forest grazing program. Issuance of livestock grazing permits is consistent with the Los Padres National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP, 1988) and the policies of the Local Coastal Program of Monterey County. In addition, the LPNF proposes to perform a non-significant amendment of the LRMP to incorporate the non-wilderness portions of three recently acquired ranch properties (Sur Sur Ranch, Kozy Kove Ranch and Sea Vista Ranch) into Management Area 42 of the LRMP; and the portions of those properties designated as Wilderness into Management Area 64 of the LRMP. (See Appendix B for Mgt. Area direction)

The area under analysis is the coastal rangelands located within the oceanfront watershed along the Big Sur coast extending from a few miles south of the Monterey/San Luis Obispo County line north about 40 miles to Grimes Point on the Monterey Ranger District, Los Padres National Forest, California. A capability- suitability analysis was performed by the Interdisciplinary Team (ID) to verify LRMP authorization of grazing and capacity of the subject allotments utilizing standard Forest Service criteria consistent with national direction as found in *Infra* (Howell et al. 1999). The capacity analysis estimated acres of primary and secondary range and capacity at the moderate use level expressed as animal unit months (AUMs). The proposed stocking rates and season-of-use are based on historical use, available water, and estimated carrying capacity. Numbers of animals are expressed in “AUMs not to exceed”. This allows for flexibility in actual numbers based on annual variations in available forage and water. Appendix E provides a summary of the capacity analysis.

Background

The Los Padres National Forest administers the Range program through the issuance of term livestock grazing permits. It is Forest Service policy (FSM 2203.1) to issue term permits, generally for ten-year periods with appropriate terms and conditions, to allow use of range vegetation and promote stability for livestock enterprises. The management of the range program is consistent with the Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960, the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974, the Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978, and the LRMP of 1988.

The Monterey Ranger District administers seven grazing allotments within the coastal rangelands: Torre Canyon, Twitchell, Gorda, Alder Creek, Buckeye, Salmon Creek, and San Carpoforo.

In 1999, the Forest Service completed a Watershed Analysis Report for the Oceanfront Watershed on the Monterey Ranger District. Five key issues for the analysis area were developed by an interdisciplinary watershed analysis team and from public input. Rangeland management was one of those key issues analyzed. The analysis found that current range management practices have eliminated the historic pattern of over-utilization of key areas. Today, range conditions within the oceanfront watershed are in satisfactory condition except where non-native invasive plants have been increasing

along the Highway 1 corridor and for sit specific needs identified in the Purpose and Need for the proposed action. The Rescission Act of 1995 requires the Los Padres National Forest to assess all grazing allotments within the Forest in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and implement decisions on issuing grazing permits. The current proposed action covers all the grazing allotments within the coastal rangelands.

Acquired Properties

Grazing was first introduced into the oceanfront watershed during the Mission Era, specifically in conjunction with the founding and development of Mission San Antonio de Padua in 1771. Circa 1880s, subsistence grazing was centered within the coastal rangelands. The Forest Service has acquired three historically grazed ranch properties adjacent to Forest Service grazing allotments since 1995: Sur Sur Ranch in 1995; Kozy Kove Ranch in 1997; and Sea Vista Ranch in 1999. These three ranches are included in the proposal for permitted grazing.

The three acquired ranches were once under single private ownership and part of a livestock grazing operation extending from the Buckeye allotment south to the San Carpoforo allotment. Prior to sub-dividing and fencing, the natural landscape features divided grazing units. These properties were being grazed, and used in conjunction with Forest Service grazing allotments, when the Forest Service acquired them. It is Forest Service practice to suspend commodity uses on newly acquired properties until the appropriate environmental analysis is completed and LRMP consistency is determined.

Silver Peak Wilderness

In 1992, 14,500 acres on the Monterey Ranger District were added to the wilderness preservation system and entitled the Silver Peak Wilderness. This wilderness borders and/or encompasses portions of the coastal rangelands (see allotment maps). For acreage of wilderness per allotment see Table 1.

Big Sur Wilderness and Conservation Act of 2002

On March 22, 2002, approximately 54,165 acres of National Forest System lands on the Monterey Ranger District were designated wilderness, as components of the National Wilderness Preservation System. This new designation encompassed the following approximate portions of the coastal rangelands: (Appendix H, allotment maps).

- Gorda Allotment, Plaskett Unit: 3,296 acres (Willow Creek Addition)
- San Carpoforo Allotment: 1968 acres (San Carpoforo Addition)
- Kozy Kove Ranch: 185 acres (San Carpoforo Addition)
- Sea Vista Ranch: 14 acres (San Carpoforo Addition)
- Sur Sur Ranch: 117 acres (San Carpoforo Addition)

To clarify congressional intent relative to livestock grazing within these wilderness additions, House Report 4750 on the Big Sur Wilderness and Conservation Act of 2002 incorporated into the Administrative Provisions subsection (b) Grazing- Grazing of livestock in wilderness areas designated by this Act shall be administered in accordance with the provisions of section 4(d)(4) of the Wilderness Act (16 U.S.C. 1133(d)(4)), as further interpreted by section 108 of Public Law 96-560, and, the guidelines set forth in Appendix A of the House Report 101-405 of the 101st Congress. In summary,

- Section 4(d)(4)(2) of the Wilderness Act: Livestock grazing, where established prior to an area's designation as wilderness, shall be permitted to continue subject to reasonable regulations as are deemed necessary by the Secretary of Agriculture.
- Public Law 96-560 and House Report. 101-405: It is anticipated that the numbers of livestock permitted to graze in wilderness would remain at the approximate levels existing at the time an area enters the wilderness system. If land management plans reveal conclusively that increased livestock numbers and/or increases of animal unit months could be made available with no adverse impact on wilderness values such as plant communities, primitive recreation, and wildlife populations or habitat, some increases in AUMs may be permissible. The construction of new improvements or replacement of deteriorating facilities in wilderness is permissible if in accordance with these guidelines and management plans governing the area involved. However, the construction of new improvements should be primarily for the purpose of resource protection.

Purpose & Need for Action

General Need: The Forest Service is required by Section 504 of the Rescission Act of 1995 to develop and implement decisions on issuing term grazing permits in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for all grazing allotments within the Los Padres National Forest. This analysis applies to all allotments within the coastal rangelands on the Monterey Ranger District. All project decisions must also be consistent with the Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP).

Additional site-specific Needs are identified below: (The Proposed Action(s) responding to each Need statement is identified by PA# for tracking purposes)

1. Situation: The recently acquired Kozy Kove, Sea Vista and Sur Sur ranches have not been incorporated into specific management areas with LRMP direction and management emphasis. Under the National Forest Management Act of 1976, project level decisions for National Forest System lands must be consistent with the broad programmatic direction established in the LRMP.

Need: To incorporate the wilderness and non-wilderness portions of the Kozy Kove, Sea Vista and Sur Sur Ranches into specific management areas with LRMP direction and management emphasis. (PA#1)

2. Situation: The recently acquired Kozy Kove, Sea Vista and Sur Sur ranches have not been determined as lands suitable for grazing.

Need: To determine the suitability of grazing on the recently acquired Kozy Kove, Sea Vista and Sur Sur ranchlands. (PA#2)

3. Situation: The old Forest boundary (prior to acquisition) between Kozy Kove ranch and the adjacent 1992 designated Silver Peak Wilderness is not fenced, which may lead to livestock drifting into land where grazing has not been established prior to wilderness designation.

Need: To provide preventive measures if livestock drift from Kozy Kove ranch across the old Forest boundary into the 1992 designated Silver Peak Wilderness. (PA#6)

4. Situation: It is Forest Service policy (FSM 2203.1) and LRMP direction (LRMP 4-3) to make forage available to qualified livestock operators from lands that are suitable for livestock grazing. The Prewitt Unit of the Gorda allotment and Alder Creek Allotment are under- utilized and local demand exists for available forage. Since acquisition, grazing on the historic Kozy Kove, Sea Vista and Sur Sur ranches has been suspended pending environmental analysis and LRMP consistency determination. The Sur Sur ranch has historically been used in conjunction with the San Carpoforo allotment. The adjoining Sea Vista ranch, when combined with the Sur Sur ranch, together provide the natural landscape and existing range improvements for moderate well-distributed grazing. Since acquisition, the permittee (and others) have requested use of forage produced on these historic ranches.

Need: To provide available forage to qualified livestock operators from lands suitable for grazing within the coastal rangelands of the Monterey Ranger District. (PA#3b,4,6&7)

5. Situation: On the Gorda Allotment, Mill Creek Unit, as the ephemeral and intermittent water sources dry up in early summer the cattle tend to congregate around the Diggs Homestead where the only perennial water source exists resulting in improper distribution of livestock.

Need: To obtain more uniform distribution and plant use, and to maintain plant vigor across the Mill Creek unit as natural features and facilities will allow. (PA#3a)

6. Situation: The Mill Creek watershed of the Gorda allotment has areas of moderate (5-23% cover) infestation of French broom, an invasive non-native plant, which tends to out compete and replace native species thereby adversely affecting biodiversity.

Need: To maintain sufficient soil cover and plant vigor to impede the spread of French broom into the grasslands of the Mill Creek unit. (PA#3a)

7. Situation: On the Gorda Allotment, Prewitt Unit, cattle are spending a disproportionate amount of the grazing season congregated on lower Prewitt Ridge resulting in concentrated use, while Alms Ridge has received little to no use.

Need: To obtain more uniform distribution and plant use, and to maintain plant vigor across the Prewitt unit as natural features and facilities will allow. (PA#3b)

8. Situation: On the Gorda Allotment, Plaskett Unit, some water sources are dry, or at minimum flows, by the end of the current grazing season resulting in improper distribution of livestock.

Need: Adjust season of use to obtain more uniform distribution and plant use, and to maintain plant vigor across the Plaskett unit as natural features and facilities will allow. (PA#3c)

9. Situation: On the Gorda Allotment, Pacific Valley Unit, past cultivation and grazing seasons (e.g. January through October) have favored the spread of Italian thistle and other non-native invasive weeds.

Need: To maintain sufficient soil cover and plant vigor to impede the spread of Italian thistle; to encourage consumption by livestock of invasive weeds; and to reduce the duration desirable forage is exposed to grazing, thus maintaining vigor within the Pacific Valley unit. (PA#3d)

10. Situation: On the South Pasture and North Pasture of the Pacific Valley unit, cattle have access to Plaskett Creek and cross Prewitt Creek when changing pastures. Both creeks contain suitable habitat for resident and anadromous fisheries.

Need: To maintain and protect resident and anadromous fisheries habitat in Plaskett and Prewitt creeks within the Pacific Valley unit. (PA#3d)

11. Situation: On the North Pasture of the Pacific Valley unit, cattle may impact a high-risk heritage resource site adjacent to Prewitt Creek.

Need: To protect cultural properties along Prewitt Creek until their value to history, archeology, or culture is determined. (PA#3d)

12. Situation: On the San Carpoforo Allotment, the small permanent campsite enclosure at Dutra Camp creates a 'fenced in' atmosphere, negatively affecting wilderness values.

Need: To modify the enclosure around Dutra camp to preserve Wilderness recreation values and to provide for activities authorized in the Wilderness Act of 1964 and other enabling legislation within the San Carpoforo allotment. (PA#7)

13. Situation: On the Twitchell Allotment, the Cone Peak Gradient Research Natural Area lies almost entirely within the allotment. The Establishment Record (1987) restricts management prescriptions and prevents improvements for proper livestock distribution, which has resulted in concentrated use. The LRMP (MA 66) emphasis is to manage for non-manipulative research and study. This emphasis and the Establishment Record have prevented the Forest from correcting this situation.

Need: To comply with direction in the Cone Peak Gradient Research Natural Area Establishment Record and LRMP and achieve proper livestock distribution within the Twitchell allotment. (PA#9)

14. Situation: On the Buckeye Allotment, there is no demand for available forage by qualified livestock operators from lands suitable for grazing as per FSM 2203.1. There has been no applicant for this area since 1991. The combination of low forage production in key livestock use areas, difficulty in distributing and controlling livestock, and no adjoining private land ranching are key limiting factors preventing a logical livestock operation.

Need: To decide proper status of vacant allotments within the coastal rangelands not providing viable livestock operations. (PA#8)

15. Situation: On the Torre Canyon Allotment, there is no demand for available forage by qualified livestock operators from lands suitable for grazing as per FSM 2203.1. There have been no applicants since 1987.

Need: To decide proper status of vacant allotments within the coastal rangelands not providing viable livestock operations. (PA#10)

Proposed Action

The Los Padres National Forest (LPNF) proposes to determine the suitability of grazing within the recently acquired Kozy Kove, Sea Vista and Sur Sur ranchlands.

The LPNF also proposes to issue ten year Term Permits for livestock grazing on the Gorda, Alder Creek, Salmon Creek, Kozy Kove Ranch, and San Carpoforo grazing allotments; modify the San Carpoforo Allotment to include the recently acquired Sur Sur and Sea Vista Ranches; remove the Buckeye, Twitchell, and Torre Canyon allotments from the Los Padres National Forest grazing program. In addition, the LPNF proposes to implement a non-significant Forest Plan amendment to incorporate the non-wilderness portions of the Kozy Kove, Sur Sur and Sea Vista ranch acquisitions into Management Area 42 and the congressionally designated wilderness portions of the acquisitions into Management Area 64 of the LRMP of 1988. (P&N #1-15)

A complete description of the proposed action (Alternative 1) is detailed in Chapter 2.

Decision Framework

Given the purpose and need, the deciding official will review the proposed action and the other alternatives in order to decide whether or not to permit livestock grazing on all, part, or none of the above listed coastal rangelands identified as suitable for grazing. If livestock grazing activities are to be permitted then decide what management prescriptions will be applied, to appropriately address livestock numbers, season of use, rangeland practices and improvements providing for uniform livestock distribution and utilization. In addition, ensure resource conditions are consistent with the LRMP and will continue to meet or move towards LRMP desired conditions, and implement all pertinent LRMP standards and guidelines.

Public Involvement

The proposal was first listed in the January – March 1999 issue of the Schedule of Proposed Actions. On July 22, 1999, the Forest Service hosted a public meeting at Pacific Valley Station to share information about the NEPA analysis for the coastal grazing permits. Approximately 22 members of the public were in attendance. On August 4, 1999, a scoping letter was sent to 69 addresses, including individuals, agencies, groups, and Native American representatives.

In response to additional inquiries, the Forest Service hosted an information meeting on May 22, 2000, at Alms Ridge for those who reside within or adjacent to the Gorda Allotment. Twelve local residents attended.

Consultation with local Salinan and Esselen tribes has included written notification and request for comments, responses to the comments, personal contacts and site visits.

On February 9, 2001, environmental assessments for this project were sent out for a 30-day comment period to those who responded to the scoping letter, appropriate government agencies, and local Native American representatives. A second scoping letter was sent out on March 15, 2004. The recent decisions made in December of 2004 have been withdrawn. This current revised proposal and analysis documents the Forest Service's reconsideration based on review of previously received public comments, new information and changed circumstances. The basic proposed action has not substantively changed but has been refined for clarification. Public comments received on this new document will be duly reviewed to determine if any new significant issues are identified.

Issues

Comments were previously received from the public, other agencies, and Native Americans. The Forest Interdisciplinary Team divided the comments into three groups: out-of-scope, non-substantive, and substantive.

Out-of-scope comments are identified as those: 1) outside of NFS jurisdiction or the purpose and need of the proposed action; 2) already decided by law, regulation, or national policy; 3) suggest an action not appropriate for the level of planning of the document; 4) propose infeasible restrictions on management or conflict with other actions; 5) do not consider reasonable and foreseeable negative consequences; and 5) are only minor editorial corrections.

Non-substantive comments are conjectural, express personal opinion (in favor or not in favor of), or are not supported by scientific or factual evidence.

Significant issues are based on unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources. Issues are points of debate, dispute or disagreement over the effects of the proposed action. Substantive comments may already be addressed in the proposed action or alternatives. Substantive comments not already addressed in the document may in themselves create a significant issue or be grouped with other substantive comments to create a significant issue that requires modification of the proposed action, the alternatives, or the effects analysis. The Council for Environmental Quality (CEQ) NEPA regulations require this delineation in Sec. 1501.7, "...identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues which are not significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review (Sec. 1506.3)..."

Significant Issues

During our initial scoping in 1999, the public identified the small permanent campsite exclosure at Dutra Camp on the San Carpoforo Allotment as negatively affecting wilderness recreation values. An action to mitigate this issue was incorporated into our Proposed Action at that time.

Other Comments: Review of scoping comments received on previous documents identified 105 out-of-scope comments, 13 non-substantive comments, and 17 substantive comments. These comments have been examined and considered in developing this new document. The substantive comments previously received were found to already be addressed in the proposed action or alternatives and did not lead to identification of any new significant issues.