



United States
Department of
Agriculture

**Forest
Service**

Pacific
Southwest
Region

R5-MB-062
September 2005



Environmental Assessment

COASTAL RANGELANDS ANALYSIS

MONTEREY RANGER DISTRICT
LOS PADRES NATIONAL FOREST
MONTEREY COUNTY, CALIFORNIA



The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, family status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (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 to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 – Introduction.....	1
Background	1
Acquired Properties	2
Suitability	2
Silver Peak Wilderness.....	3
Big Sur Wilderness and Conservation Act of 2002.....	3
Purpose & Need for Action	4
Proposed Action	8
Decision Framework	8
Public Involvement.....	8
Chapter 2 - Comparison of Alternatives.....	10
A. Alternatives to be Studied in Detail.....	10
B. Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study.....	14
C. Comparison of Alternatives	16
Chapter 3 – Environmental Consequences.....	38
A. Socio-Economic Impacts.....	39
B. Soils	43
C. Plant Diversity	53
D. Watershed	61
E. Threatened and Endangered Species.....	81
F. Heritage Resources.....	87
G. Recreation and Wilderness	88
Other Physical and Biological Components of the Environment.....	98
Chapter 4 – Federal, State, Local Agencies and Tribes Contacted	100
Appendices	101
References Used In This EA	101
Standard Management Requirements Common to All Action Alternatives	107
Forest Plan Consistency	111
Range Management Best Management Practices.....	126
Summary of animal unit months (AUMs) available for grazing at the Moderate Level, and AUMs proposed on Primary and Secondary Range.....	130
Summary of Historical Management for Coastal Rangelands	131
Summary of Stream Access – By Steelhead and by Livestock.....	132
Allotment Maps	134

Chapter 1 – Introduction

The Los Padres National Forest (LPNF) proposes to authorize livestock grazing on National Forest System lands that encompass approximately 24,380 acres and not authorize grazing on approximately 8,780 acres of National Forest System lands within the coastal rangelands of the Monterey Ranger District. Authorization of livestock grazing 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 incorporate those portions of Sur Sur, Sea Vista, and Kozy Kove Ranches outside of wilderness designation into adjacent management area 42 and those portions designated as wilderness by congress into management area 64 through a non-significant LRMP (Forest Plan) amendment. (See Appendix B for Mgt. Area direction)

The Proposed Action is also consistent in meeting the goals, desired conditions, objectives, land use zoning and standards and guidance in the 2005 Revised Land Management Plan [LMP] (see Appendix C for a summary of the revised LMP relating to livestock grazing). When the revised 2005 LMP becomes effective, all new management direction and monitoring requirements will be incorporated into the permits issued under these decisions.

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 the capability and suitability of grazing as well as the capacity of the subject allotments utilizing Forest Service criteria consistent with national direction (Howell et al. 1999). The capacity analysis determined acres of primary and secondary range and capacity at the moderate¹ utilization 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 livestock grazing through the issuance of term livestock grazing permits. It is Forest Service policy (FSM 2203.1) to make forage available to qualified livestock operators consistent with agency policy; issue term grazing permits, generally for ten-year periods, with appropriate terms and conditions to allow use of range vegetation and promote stability for livestock enterprises consistent with the LRMP. The management of the range program is also consistent with the Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960, the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 and the Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978.

¹ Moderate utilization level is defined as leaving an average of at least 1000 lbs./acre of residual dry matter at the onset of the rainy season.

The Monterey Ranger District has administered seven livestock grazing allotments within the coastal rangelands: Torre Canyon, Twitchell, Gorda, Alder Creek, Buckeye, Salmon Creek, and San Carpoforo for the last 17 years under the 1988 LRMP. The current grazing allotment permittees have expressed strong interest in continuing the use of their active allotments.

In 1999, the Forest Service completed a Watershed Analysis Report for the Oceanfront Watershed on the Monterey Ranger District, which covers all the grazing allotments analyzed in this assessment. 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 in effect under the 1988 LRMP 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 site specific needs identified in the Purpose and Need for the proposed action. The Rescissions 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 new decisions covering all allotments. The current proposed action covers all the grazing allotments within the coastal rangelands of the Monterey Ranger District.

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. Since 1995, the Forest Service has acquired three historically grazed ranch properties adjacent to Forest Service administered lands: Sur Sur Ranch in 1995; Kozy Kove Ranch in 1997; and Sea Vista Ranch in 1999. These three ranches are included in the proposal to authorize grazing. Livestock use was established on these properties prior to acquisition, with range structures and facilities currently in place.

The three acquired ranches were once under single private ownership and part of a livestock grazing operation extending from the Buckeye allotment south to, and including, the Sur Sur Ranch (see Appendix H-1). Prior to sub-dividing and fencing, the natural landscape features divided grazing units. These properties were being grazed when the Forest Service acquired them. The Sur Sur Ranch was in fact grazed in conjunction with the adjoining San Carpoforo Allotment, when the Forest Service acquired the property. Forest Service Policy (FSM 2203.1) consistent with Local Coastal Program Policies (developed under the guidelines of the California Coastal Act of 1976), call for the Forest to provide available forage to qualified applicants and continue traditional agricultural practices when suitable grazing lands pass from private to public ownership. 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.

Suitability

The Interdisciplinary (ID) Team verified through their individual analyses of the coastal rangelands (Appendix A) that the lands within existing Forest Service allotments and the three newly acquired ranches, analyzed in this environmental assessment, are suitable for

grazing. Areas are considered suitable because they meet availability factors and can be grazed while maintaining water quality, riparian area protection, soil protection, cultural resources, threatened and endangered species, recreational opportunities, and plant diversity.

In addition, range structures and facilities are already in place; management is such that the timing and amount of grazing is controlled to minimize grazing impacts; natural features and facilities help facilitate proper distribution; and proposed management provides for desired plant conditions.

It is important to note that only approximately 45% of any given existing allotment, and approximately 68% of the acquired ranches, consists of primary and secondary rangelands, which is where most grazing occurs. Other parts of the allotments receive little if any grazing use due to steep terrain, thick brush, distance from water, and active livestock herding. Determining these lands suitable would not significantly alter the long-term relationship between projected levels of multiple use goods and services in the LRMP.

Silver Peak Wilderness

In 1992, 14,500 acres on the Monterey Ranger District were added to the wilderness preservation system and entitled additions to the Silver Peak Wilderness. This wilderness borders and/or encompasses portions of the coastal rangelands (see Appendix H, allotment maps). For acreage of wilderness per allotment see Table 2 in Chapter 3.

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 additional wilderness, as components of the National Wilderness Preservation System. This new designation encompassed the following approximate portions of the coastal rangelands: (see 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)

Forest Service Manual 2320 permits adjustments of permitted livestock in wilderness when there is no adverse impact on wilderness values such as plant communities, primitive recreation, and wildlife populations or habitat.

To clarify congressional intent relative to livestock grazing within these new 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

Underlying Situation: 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 Los Padres Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP 1988).

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. Current grazing allotment permittees have requested continued use of forage produced within the coastal rangelands.

Under the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960 (amended 1996) the national forests shall be administered for outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, and wildlife and fish purposes. The Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978 establishes a grazing fee formula and directs 25% of grazing fees collected returned to the County to be used for County roads, schools, and rangeland improvements.

Under the Monterey County Local Coastal Program, Section 3.6 Agriculture, 3.6.2 General Policies #8 directs that "The U.S. Forest Service and the State Department of Parks and Recreation should lease grazing land to private individuals in order that such areas may continue in traditional agricultural use."

Underlying Need: To provide available forage through continued livestock grazing under updated Allotment Management Plans on the Gorda, Alder Creek, Salmon Creek, and San Carpoforo allotments.

Additional site-specific Situations and 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 or land use zones 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 comply with the National Forest Management Act, incorporate the wilderness and non-wilderness portions of the Kozy Kove, Sea Vista and Sur Sur Ranches into specific management areas/land use zones with LRMP direction and management emphasis. (PA#1)

2. Situation: Field inspections show that the Prewitt Unit of the Gorda allotment and Alder Creek Allotment has supplementary forage production indicating that the stocking rate could be increased and still meet our moderate use guidelines. The current grazing allotment permittees have requested use of the additional available forage and a return to stocking rates similar to pre 1998. (see Appendix F)

Need: To provide supplemental forage produced on the Prewitt Unit of the Gorda allotment and Alder Creek Allotment consistent with agency policy. (P&N#2b,4)

3. Situation: Since acquisition, grazing on the historic Kozy Kove, Sea Vista and Sur Sur ranches has been suspended pending environmental analysis and LRMP consistency determination. This traditional agricultural use by local livestock enterprises has been ongoing since circa 1880s up to the date of acquisition. The Sur Sur ranch has been used in conjunction with the San Carpoforo allotment for the last 25 years. All three ranches provide the natural landscape and existing range improvements for moderate well-distributed grazing that the Forest Service prescribes. Since acquisition, the livestock operators who were using the Kozy Kove and Sur Sur ranches have scaled back their operations but continue to request use of forage produced on these historic ranches to help sustain the economic viability of their livestock operations. In addition, we have received applications from other local livestock operations requesting use on one or more of the acquired ranches.

Need: To authorize continued livestock grazing on the Kozy Kove, Sea Vista and Sur Sur ranches consistent with agency policy with appropriate terms and conditions to allow use of rangeland vegetation and promote stability of local livestock enterprises consistent with the 1988 LRMP and 2005 Revised LMP. (PA#5,6)

4. Situation: The old Forest boundary (prior to acquisition) between Kozy Kove ranch and the adjacent 1992 designated Silver Peak Wilderness is not fenced. Livestock, grazing on this ranch, could drift into land where grazing had not been authorized prior to wilderness designation.

Need: To provide measures to prevent unauthorized grazing on the 1992 designated Silver Peak Wilderness. (PA#5)

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

livestock. Long term concentrated grazing could lead to over-utilizing the primary forage species resulting in eventual dying out and replacement by less desirable plants adversely affecting biodiversity.

Need: To adjust season of use to correspond with the maximum available water and green forage promoting uniform distribution and plant use across the Mill Creek unit as natural features and facilities will allow, maintaining vigor and abundance of desirable plant species. (PA#2a)

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 desirable plant species thereby adversely affecting biodiversity. Current utilization guidelines may not leave adequate residual dry matter to impede the spread of French broom into the key grassland areas used by livestock on the Unit.

Need: To maintain sufficient soil cover and desirable plant vigor to impede the spread of French broom into the grasslands of the Mill Creek unit. (PA#2a)

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 there, while Alms Ridge has received little to no use. Long term concentrated grazing could lead to over-utilizing the primary forage species resulting in eventual dying out and replacement by less desirable plants adversely affecting biodiversity.

Need: To obtain uniform distribution and plant use across the Prewitt unit as natural features and facilities will allow, maintaining vigor and abundance of desirable plant species. (PA#2b)

8. Situation: On the Gorda Allotment, Plaskett Unit, some ephemeral and intermittent creeks are dry, or at minimum flows, by the end of the current grazing season resulting in congregated use at the few remaining water sources and improper distribution of livestock. Long term concentrated grazing could lead to over-utilizing the primary forage species resulting in eventual dying out and replacement by less desirable plants adversely affecting biodiversity.

Need: To adjust season of use to correspond with the maximum available water and green forage promoting uniform distribution and plant use across the Plaskett unit as natural features and facilities will allow, maintaining vigor and abundance of desirable plant species. (PA#2c)

9. Situation: On the Gorda Allotment, Pacific Valley Unit, historical use prior to Forest Service acquisition in 1957 included annual cultivation and farming. During the 1960s accepted range improvement programs promoted the planting of introduced perennial grasses (in this case Harding grass and reed fescue) for sustained livestock forage. After these grazing resilient grasses were established on the Pacific Valley unit grazing seasons were able to sustain grazing January through October annually. The long-term effects have favored the spread of

Italian thistle and other non-native invasive weeds, while maintaining Harding grass and reed fescue, all of which is affecting biodiversity.

Need: To maintain sufficient soil cover and plant vigor to impede the spread of Italian thistle; to encourage consumption by livestock of Harding grass and reed fescue; and to reduce the duration desirable forage is exposed to grazing, thus promoting vigor and abundance of desirable plant species within the Pacific Valley unit. (PA#2d)

10. Situation: On the South Pasture and North Pasture of the Pacific Valley unit, cattle have season long access to Plaskett Creek and cross Prewitt Creek when changing pastures. Both creeks contain suitable habitat for resident and anadromous fisheries. When eggs or fry are present in these creeks, cattle could trample eggs or disturb fry. Both eggs and fry are noted as being most susceptible from February through April.

Need: To maintain and protect resident and anadromous fisheries and the associated habitat in Plaskett and Prewitt creeks within the Pacific Valley unit. (PA#2d)

11. Situation: On the North Pasture of the Pacific Valley unit, cattle may impact a sensitive resource site adjacent to Prewitt Creek by trampling or exposing items to looting by removing the vegetative cover.

Need: To protect and preserve sensitive resources along Prewitt Creek. (PA#2d)

12. Situation: On the San Carpoforo Allotment, at Dutra Camp a small-developed wilderness campsite that predates Forest Service ownership is enclosed by barbed wire to keep livestock out during the grazing season. Public comments during scoping for this analysis stated the camp created 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 all activities authorized in the Wilderness Act of 1964 and other enabling legislation within the San Carpoforo allotment. (PA#6)

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 construction of range improvements (i.e. water developments, fences) to promote proper livestock distribution. As a result cattle are congregating at selected meadows. Long term concentrated grazing could lead to over-utilizing the primary forage species resulting in eventual dying out and replacement by less desirable plants adversely affecting biodiversity. In addition, the LRMP (MA 66) emphasis is to manage for non-manipulative research and study. This emphasis and the Establishment Record, prevent the Forest from promoting proper distribution through installation of added range improvements.

Need: To comply with direction in the Cone Peak Gradient Research Natural Area Establishment Record and LRMP and maintain plant diversity within the Twitchell allotment. (PA#8)

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 to combine with are key limiting factors preventing a logical livestock operation.

Need: To comply with the Rescission Act and decide the proper status of vacant allotments within the coastal rangelands not providing viable livestock operations. (PA#7)

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 comply with the Rescission Act and decide the proper status of vacant allotments within the coastal rangelands. (PA#9)

Proposed Action

The LPNF proposes to authorize livestock grazing on the Gorda, Alder Creek, Salmon Creek, Kozy Kove Ranch, and San Carpofofo grazing allotments; incorporate the non-wilderness portions of the Kozy Kove, Sur Sur and Sea Vista ranch acquisitions into Management Area 42 and corresponding land use zones under the 2005 LMP, and the congressionally designated wilderness portions of the acquisitions into Management Area 64 of the LRMP of 1988 and Wilderness land use zone under the 2005 LMP, through a non-significant Forest Plan amendment; modify the San Carpofofo Allotment to include the recently acquired Sur Sur and Sea Vista Ranches; close the Buckeye, Twitchell, and Torre Canyon allotments. (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 authorize 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 authorized 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 and resource protection. In addition, ensure resource conditions are consistent with the Forest Plan and will continue to meet or move towards Forest Plan desired conditions, and implement all pertinent Forest Plan standards and guidance.

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 grazing permit

holders, local Federal and State agencies, interest groups and individuals, 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.

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

A second scoping letter describing the analysis area and proposed action was sent out to grazing permit holders, appropriate local Federal and State agencies, interest groups and individuals, and Native American representatives on March 15, 2004. The decisions made in December of 2004 were withdrawn.

This revised proposal and environmental assessment documents the Forest Service's reconsideration based on review of previously received public comments and new information. The proposed action has not substantively changed but has been refined for clarification. A draft of this environmental assessment was sent out for public comment on July 28, 2005.

Comments were previously received from the public, other agencies, and Native Americans. Review of scoping comments received on previous documents identified 136 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. A summary of all scoping comments and responses has been updated in 2005 and is available in the project file. Public comments received on this new document pursuant to Section 215 appeal regulations have been reviewed and responses documented (see Appendix I).

Issues

Based on reviews of similar actions and previous comments received by the Forest, several preliminary issues were identified as significant and have been used to help focus the proposed action and the range of alternatives developed for analysis. These preliminary significant issues, referred to as resource elements in the consequences chapter include: Socio-Economic Impacts; Soils; Plant Diversity; Watershed; Threatened and Endangered Species; Heritage (Cultural) Resources; and Recreation and Wilderness Values. (see Table 2 and Chapter 3 for comparison of effects on these issues). The issue of the effects of the enclosure at Dutra Camp on Recreation/Wilderness Values, identified in the first round of public scoping, has been incorporated into the current proposed action.