

# Annual Operating Instructions

North Palomas Allotment

Black Range Ranger District, Gila National Forest

## 2003 grazing season

### 1. PASTURE USE SCHEDULE

You have applied for 100 head yearlong on the North Palomas Allotment for the 2003 grazing season. Our inspections of last year's post-growing season conditions of the allotment, as well as current inspections, indicate that the allotment cannot currently sustain 100 head yearlong. You are authorized to graze **100 head, in the Upper Pasture from 03/01/03 – 05/15/03**. Prior to the May 15 date, we will conduct inspections of the Upper Pasture to determine use levels. If utilization levels are below allowable we will then adjust the OFF date based on our estimate of remaining forage. Once the allowable use levels have been met in the Upper Pasture, cattle will have to be removed from the Forest. The East and Creek Pastures have not yet recovered from past use, compounded by drought conditions, and will need at least one season rest with two seasons rest more probable. We will assess the range recovery after the upcoming growing season, to determine the need for rest during the 2004 grazing season.

### 2. UTILIZATION STANDARDS

The following utilization standards will be applied on the North Palomas Allotment:

- Riparian areas are not to exceed 25% of current year's growth on woody riparian species, by leader.
- Upland sites grazed during the growing season are not to exceed 35% of current year's growth, by weight, of perennial grasses.
- Upland sites grazed during the dormant season are not to exceed 40% of current year's growth, by weight, of perennial grasses.

### 3. KEY AREA MONITORING

At our annual validation meeting, key areas for monitoring were identified as riparian areas and transect cluster locations. In addition to the cluster sites, we have identified other upland sites for monitoring, which are listed below. Mexican spotted owl protected and restricted habitat will be monitored for compliance with the MSO recovery plan and consultation guidance criteria.

<i><b>PASTURE</b></i>	<i><b>LOCATION</b></i>	<i><b>SPECIES MONITORED</b></i>
East	Cluster C-3	Upland grasses
East	Mesa top in SEC 29	Upland grasses
Creek	Cluster C-2	Upland grasses
Upper	Cluster C-1	Upland grasses
Upper	SW ¼ SEC 26	Upland grasses
Allotment-wide	Riparian areas	All riparian species
Allotment-wide	MSO PAC's & habitat	Residual forage on grasses

The idea of a key area is to find a site that is representative of a larger area in which cattle spend the majority of their time. Key area monitoring will avoid areas directly adjacent to permanent water sources, cattle trails, roads, and fence lines.

- Riparian areas will be monitored for use on riparian woody species' current year's leaders.
- Upland areas will be monitored for use on perennial grass species.
- Mexican spotted owl protected and restricted habitat will be monitored to ensure that current management is providing for cover for rodent prey species, the residual biomass that will support prescribed natural and ignited fires that would reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire in the Forest, and regeneration of riparian trees.

District personnel will contact the permittees to coordinate site visits to monitor key areas. Permittee participation is encouraged. Forage utilization estimates will be consistent with the Forest Service Range Analysis Handbook methodology.

#### **4. RANGE IMPROVEMENTS**

**Range improvements must be maintained to standard before cattle are allowed into a pasture.** It is the permittee's responsibility to ensure that range improvements remain functional. This includes boundary fences in pastures not currently being grazed. Routine maintenance of existing improvements does not require written clearance, however, construction/reconstruction of new improvements must be authorized in writing from this office, prior to the work starting.

You have requested pipe in order to get several spring developments functional, on the North Palomas Allotment. Please provide us a prioritized list of these springs, and an estimate of the amount of pipe you will need. Once we have this list, we will initiate permit modifications and purchase material as our budget allows.

#### **5. SPECIAL MANAGEMENT INSTRUCTIONS**

The following restrictions will be implemented so that management remains in compliance with the Endangered Species Act and the Clean Water Act. The instructions below relate to threatened, endangered, and proposed to be listed species as well as range/watershed conditions.

- No salt or mineral block may be placed in protected and restricted Mexican spotted owl habitat from February 1 to August 31, and no concentrations of livestock (i.e., corral use, traps, or large gatherings of livestock).
- Stock tanks and springs must be surveyed for possible aquatic habitat before earth-disturbing maintenance is authorized.
- Livestock grazing and livestock management activities within protected and restricted owl habitats will be managed for levels that provide the woody and

herbaceous vegetation necessary for cover for rodent prey species, the residual biomass that will support prescribed natural and ignited fires that would reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire in the Forest, and regeneration of riparian trees.

- Livestock grazing within the North Palomas riparian enclosure is not authorized. Enclosure fences must be maintained to a standard, which prevents cattle passage into the enclosure.

#### **6. OTHER INSTRUCTIONS**

The permittee must obtain permission from the District Ranger, in writing, before conducting earth-disturbing activities on the National Forest. The Forest Service will arrange inspections of project areas and will prepare appropriate environmental and cultural documents before earth-disturbing activities proceed. These activities include road/earthen tank maintenance, as well as construction/reconstruction of trails, roads, earthen tanks, etc. **Do not conduct any earth-disturbing activities on the Forest without written clearance from this office.**

Salt must be located at least ¼ mile from water, and preferably on ridges and/or areas of low use. Do not place salt blocks in the same location as the previous year, and locate blocks on hard ground not susceptible to erosion. Supplemental feeding, other than mineral or supplement block, is not authorized on the National Forest.

Accurate records of your operation will aid in planning and determining the effectiveness of the grazing system. You are required to have all counters tagged. Please maintain reasonably accurate records of cattle numbers and class, throughout the grazing season. This includes accurate lists of tagged cattle numbers. Please inform this office of your additional ear-tag needs. It is important that you remove ear-tags from any cattle you sell to re-tag replacement cattle.

On yearlong ranges, calves under six months of age on January 1<sup>st</sup> are not counted against the authorized numbers until March 31<sup>st</sup>. By April 1<sup>st</sup>, these calves must be removed from the Forest or counted against the authorized numbers.

We have provided you with a copy of the registered easement along Forest Development Road #727, through the Dines property. The gate at the Dines property must remain open to the public at all times.

The Annual Operating Instructions are a part of the Term Grazing Permit as provided for in Part 3, Section 8. These instructions comply with the standards and guidelines found in the Forest Plan, including the 1996 Forest Plan Amendment. They also comply with the Endangered Species Act found in the Biological Assessment for the North Palomas Allotment. Any additional information collected during the year may be incorporated into the Annual Operating Instructions.

**This decision is subject to administrative review, pursuant to 36 CFR 251; and any appeal of this decision must be fully consistent**

**with 36 CFR 251.90 (see enclosed copy of 36 CFR 251 regulations). In accordance with 36 CFR 251.84, if you file an appeal, I am willing to meet with you to discuss any concerns you may have with my decision. If you file an appeal, you may request an oral presentation in the appeal or at any time prior to closing of the appeal record (36 CFR 251.97). Additionally, if you file an appeal, you may request a stay of my decision in the appeal or at any time prior to closing of the appeal record (36 CFR 251.91).**

**A notice of appeal must be filed with Marcia Andre, Forest Supervisor, Gila National Forest, at 3005 E. Camino Del Bosque, Silver City, NM 88061, within 45 days of the date of this decision. A copy of the notice of appeal must be filed simultaneously with Maria T. Garcia, District Ranger, Black Range Ranger District at 1804 Date Street, Truth or consequences, NM 89701.**

We appreciate your cooperation in the management of the North Palomas Allotment. If you have any questions regarding these instructions, please contact Jeff Rivera, Rangeland Management Specialist (505)894-6677. Thank you.

Sincerely,

MARIA T. GARCIA  
District Ranger