

Proposed Action for the  
**Olla Ranchos Grazing Allotment**  
Camino Real Ranger District  
Carson National Forest  
Taos County, New Mexico

August 2009

### **Proposed Action and Purpose & Need**

The Camino Real Ranger District, Carson National Forest, proposes to continue managing the Olla Ranchos Allotment (see figure 1) as a vacant livestock grazing allotment. This means there would continue to be no currently permitted livestock grazing. This does not preclude future use of the allotment for grazing, however it would mean that future grazing on portions of the allotment or the allotment as a whole would require an additional NEPA analysis and decision for any future such proposal.

The Olla Ranchos Allotment contains land that is considered suitable for grazing in the Carson National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (USDA-FS 1986). When use is consistent with the goals, objectives, standards and guidelines of the forest plan, it is Forest Service policy to make forage available to qualified livestock operators from lands suitable for grazing (Forest Service Manual (FSM) 2203.1.6). However, there has not been a demand for livestock grazing within the Olla Ranchos Allotment project area for 18 years.

The proposed action is needed at this time to meet the requirements of the Rescissions Act of 1995 PL 104-19, Section 504 and 2004 Interior Appropriations Act (PL 108-108), Section 325.

### **Existing Situation**

**Location** – The allotment is located within Townships 22-25 North and Ranges 13-15 East, NMPM, on the Camino Real Ranger District; north of State Highway 518, approximately 4 miles southeast of Taos and approximately 11 miles northeast of the community of Penasco, New Mexico.

The allotment is approximately 68,000 acres in size, ranging in elevation from 7,200 ft to 11,939 ft, with vegetation communities ranging from pinon-juniper in the lower elevations to grass and spruce-fir at the highest.

**Current Grazing Management** – Domestic livestock have not grazed within the majority of the allotment since 1991. Small portions of the allotment have had analysis of the effects of livestock grazing conducted on them in recent years to alleviate grazing pressure on neighboring allotments within the Camino Real Ranger District. These areas have been removed from the Olla Ranchos Allotment and become part of those adjacent allotments. Over the vast majority of the allotment steep topography and lack of infrastructure for herd management limits the grazing management opportunities.

## **Decision Framework**

The Camino Real District Ranger will issue a decision for the Olla Ranchos Allotment that will include a determination of the significance of the environmental effects and whether an environmental impact statement will be prepared. The decision will also include a determination of consistency with the Forest Plan, National Forest Management Act, National Environmental Policy Act, and applicable laws, regulations, and executive orders.

If the Camino Real District Ranger determines it is not necessary to prepare an environmental impact statement, the District Ranger will decide whether to keep the allotment vacant as proposed or to allow cattle grazing as outlined under another alternative. If any alternative other than “no grazing” is selected, the decision will identify the class of livestock, number of livestock permitted, typical grazing season, general type of grazing system, utilization levels (grazing intensity), residual cover thresholds (stubble heights), range facilities, implementation schedules, and what monitoring and evaluation will be done.

## **Public Involvement**

The proposal was provided to 34 individuals and agencies, along with 30 tribal contacts, for comment during a scoping period beginning on August 7, 2009.

## **Issues**

Public involvement is used to identify issues to be addressed in the proposed action. Comments received during the scoping process were examined by the Forest Service specialists for issues to address. The Forest Service separates issues into two groups: significant and non-significant issues. Significant issues are defined as those directly or indirectly caused by implementing the proposed action. Non-significant issues are identified as those: 1) outside the scope of the proposed action; 2) already decided by law, regulation, forest plan, or other higher level decision; 3) irrelevant to the decision to be made; or 4) conjectural and not supported by scientific or factual evidence. The Council for Environmental Quality (CEQ) NEPA regulations require this delineation in 40 CFR 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)...”

No issues were identified during scoping.

## **ALTERNATIVES, INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION**

This section describes the alternatives considered for the Olla Ranchos Allotment.

## **Alternatives Eliminated from Detailed Analysis**

### ***Authorize livestock grazing:***

This alternative would have authorized a currently unspecified level of grazing. Members of the interdisciplinary team discussed whether or not potential future grazing should be analyzed at this time. It was determined that since there is currently no demand for grazing on this allotment due to the steep topography, limited grazing areas, and lack of infrastructure, it would be speculative to analyze any level of grazing at this time. At some point in the future, if a specific demand for grazing this allotment as a whole or a portion within it arises, a thorough analysis of such a proposal could be completed at that time and a new NEPA decision would be needed. The proposed action does not preclude future grazing of the allotment if a demand is put forth.

### ***Use the allotment as a “swing” allotment or “grassbank”:***

This alternative would have proposed to manage the allotment as an area where livestock grazing could be authorized in a manner which would allow livestock from other allotments an opportunity to graze here for a limited period of time to provide the home allotments a period of rest to meet management objectives, or in response to situations such as wildfires or severe drought. However, the topography of the allotment as a whole is not conducive to livestock grazing, since the grazable areas are small and isolated. In addition, infrastructure such as developed waters and fencing to manage livestock grazing is minimal. For this reason, this alternative was removed from detailed analysis.

### ***Close the allotment to grazing:***

This alternative would have closed the allotment to any future permitted livestock grazing. While there is not currently a demand for grazing on the allotment, it contains lands identified as suitable for grazing within the Carson National Forest Plan. There have been no issues identified which compel the IDT to propose closing the allotment to any analysis of grazing in the future.

### ***Analyze portions of the allotment for use with other allotments:***

The interdisciplinary team discussed whether or not it would be appropriate at this time to analyze portions of the Olla Ranchos allotment which could be grazed in conjunction with other adjacent, active allotments. It was determined that it would be more efficient and appropriate to analyze the use of portions of this allotment at the same time an entire active allotment is analyzed in order to analyze connected activities. For this reason it was removed from detailed analysis as a separate alternative.

## **Alternative Considered in Detail**

### ***Alternative A – No Action and Proposed Action***

The Forest Service proposes to continue managing the Olla Ranchos Allotment as a vacant livestock grazing allotment. This means there would continue to be no currently

permitted livestock grazing. This does not preclude future use of the allotment for grazing, but it would mean that future grazing on portions of the allotment or the allotment as a whole would require additional analysis and a NEPA decision for any future such proposal.

**Monitoring**

Since there would be no livestock grazing activity proposed, there would be no implementation or effectiveness monitoring needed. Occasional monitoring for trespass livestock would continue as part of district administrative duties, not related to this proposal.

**Summary of Effects**

This section provides a summary of the effects of implementing the proposed alternative.

**Table 1. Summary of Effects**

<b>Purpose and Need or Resource Area</b>	<b>Effects of Alternative A – No Action and Proposed Action</b>
Purpose & Need	Completing NEPA analysis and issuing a decision to continue managing the Olla Ranchos Allotment as a vacant livestock grazing allotment would meet the requirements of the Rescissions Act of 1995 PL 104-19, Section 504 and 2004 Interior Appropriations Act (PL 108-108), Section 325.
Vegetation Condition and Trend	There would be no effect to vegetation condition and trend by continuing to manage the Olla Ranchos Allotment as a vacant allotment.
Riparian Wetland Areas and Stream Channels	There would be no effect to riparian, wetland areas, and stream channels.
Water Quality	There would be no effect to water quality.
Floodplains	There would be no effect to existing floodplain function.
Air Quality	Attainment status would be maintained.
Federally Listed Species – Mexican spotted owl, Southwest willow flycatcher	No impact to population or prey or habitat quality.
FS Sensitive Species – northern goshawk	No impact to population or prey or habitat quality.
FS Sensitive Animal & Insect Species – riparian or wetland habitat (NM meadow jumping mouse, northern leopard frog, Nokomis fritillary butterfly, masked shrew, water shrew, long-tailed vole, spotted bat & mink)	No impact to population or foraging habitat.

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<b>Purpose and Need or Resource Area</b>	<b>Effects of Alternative A – No Action and Proposed Action</b>
FS Sensitive Animal Species – alpine tundra and high elevation coniferous forest (southern red-backed vole, dwarf shrew, boreal owl, western heather vole, and ermine)	No impact to population or foraging habitat.
FS Sensitive Animal Species – grassland (western burrowing owl, Gunnison’s prairie dog, and white-tailed jackrabbit)	No impact to population or habitat.
FS Sensitive Plant Species – riparian and upland meadow habitat (robust larkspur, lady-slipper, and AZ willow)	No impact to population or habitat.
Management Indicator Species	No change to population trends or habitat.
Migratory Birds	No impact to populations, habitat and prey, or forage availability.
Aquatic Species (Rio Grande cutthroat trout, resident trout, aquatic macro Invertebrates)	No impact to population or habitat.
Cultural Resources	No adverse effect to cultural sites because there would be no ground disturbing activities.
Wilderness	No effect to Wilderness characteristics.
Wild and Scenic Rivers	Eligibility values of Rio Grande del Rancho and Rito de la Olla would be maintained.
Economics	No income would be generated by permittees from livestock business on NFS land within the Olla Ranchos allotment project area. This is not a change from existing conditions.
Social Environment	There would be potential for the historic use of grazing to be authorized in the future if a demand materialized and if analysis and a subsequent authorization ensued. This is not a change from existing conditions.

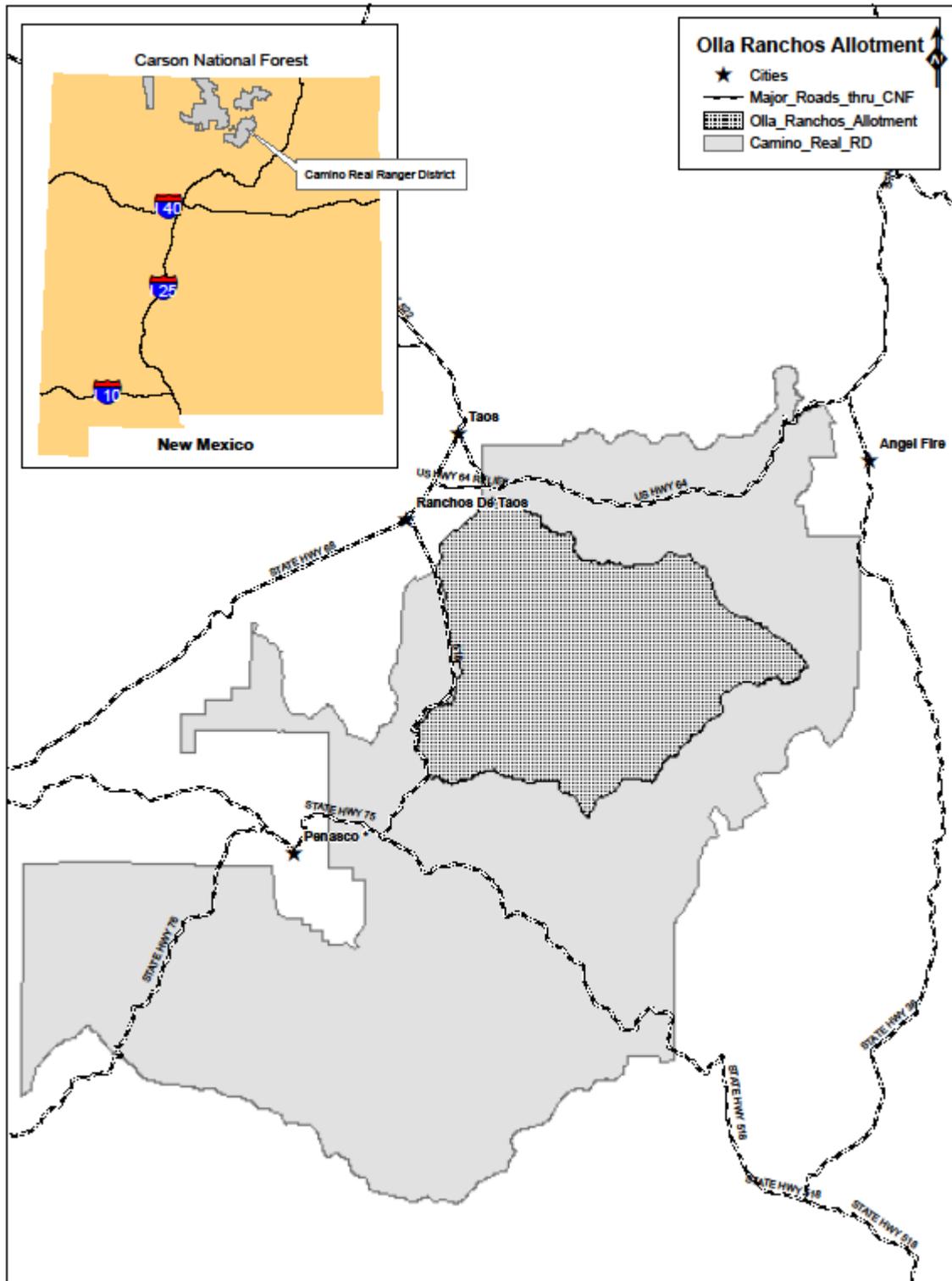


Figure 1. Olla Ranchos Allotment General Location