

**2009 ANNUAL OPERATING INSTRUCTIONS
SAN ANTONIO MOUNTAIN ALLOTMENT
CARSON NATIONAL FOREST
TRES PIEDRAS RANGER DISTRICT**

I. INTRODUCTION

The Annual Operating Instructions meeting was held on Feb. 12, 2008 at the Conejos Peak Ranger District. The permittee attending the meeting was Charles Thomas. Representing the U. S. Forest Service was Wayne Yonemoto.

The Annual Operating Instructions (AOI) is a document that is made part of the terms and condition of the Term Grazing Permit. The AOI includes guidance criteria described below that addresses annual resource conditions, livestock numbers, period of use, pasture rotations, monitoring and range improvement projects. The 2003 Rangeland Management Action Plan for the Santa Fe and Carson National Forests continues to be program guidance. The objectives of this 2003 strategic plan continues to be a high priority in the range program and emphasizes collaboration, rangeland health, rangeland monitoring and permittee involvement.

The environmental assessment decision for grazing permit issuance was completed in 1996. The livestock grazing fee is \$1.35/HM (Cattle) and \$0.27/HM (Sheep).

II. CLIMATE

The Standardized Precipitation Index (SPI) will be used to define drought conditions. SPI values are available monthly from the Western Regional Climate Center (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, NOAA) at www.wrcc.dri.edu. Following are indicators in determining drought conditions. Conditions will be determined by the size of the negative number, the larger the negative number, the more severe the drought. SPI values of negative 0.70 or less for the past month signal drought conditions. The SPI definition that indicates the end-of-drought is for the SPI values to be positive 1.0 (or higher) for the past 12 months. The SPI for the past 12 months thru January is described as *Near Normal* (-0.74 to +0.74) so the end of drought has not occurred.

The dry weather pattern condition includes the following: Within the Southwest, the NOAA 3-month forecast is for increased chances of below normal precipitation, Mar. through May, 2009, as well as, increased chances of above normal temperatures. The SPI definition that indicates the end-of-drought is for the SPI values to be positive 1.0 (or higher) for the past 12 months. The SPI for the past 12 months thru January is described as *Near Normal* (-0.74 to +0.74) so the end of drought has not occurred. Within the District, during the periods of Oct. to Dec., 2007 and Jan. to Feb., 2008, there were various areas of favorable above normal precipitation and below normal temperatures.

III. 2008 MONITORING REPORT

Review of 2008 Monitoring data

The 2008 monitoring information in the Allotment Study file was reviewed. The allotment was average thru June, but forage production improved after the July, August precipitation.

The dormant period began in mid-August resulting in a limited growing season. Participants discussed areas of below-average to average production and average to above-average production, forage condition and watershed condition. In general, the Top-of-the-Mt. was above average and the Base-of-the-Mt. was average to above average production.

Utilization guidelines of 20% to 40% at the end of the season were met at the mountain base but the mountain top was not inspected by FS employees. The permittee's utilization monitoring indicated the following: Top of Mt. South @ Trick Tank – 15% (9/30); West Mt. Base – 30% (9/30). Permittee's 2008 rain gauge @ Old Fire Cabin measurements: 6/30 – 0.8 in.; 7/31 – 2.5 in.; 8/31 – 3.02 in.; 9/30 – 1.07 in..

Review End of Growing Season Report

End of Season Monitoring was discussed and referenced.

AOI Compliance in 2008

1. Permittee monitoring program continues each year, assessments includes before, during and after livestock grazing and end of season.
2. Communication between FS and Permittees was good and benefited the management adjustments.
3. Permittee moved the herder camp every 7 days except at the Northern Mt. Base.

(In 2007, permittee flagged the location of a proposed pit tank in section 6 (southeast of trick tank) that would improve the distribution by decreasing the trailing impacts to the forage surrounding the current water source and increase access to the forage areas to the north)

IV. MONITORING

AOI Includes Reference To Following Monitoring Information:

4. Weather update (SPI and temperature)
5. Soil moisture depth
6. Water availability
7. Location of paired annual production/utilization cages with supporting photos and documentation
8. Key site map of the Allotment
9. Key forage list showing
 - a. Vegetation type
 - b. Species list
 - c. Stubble height
 1. Range readiness stubble ht./utilization guidelines
 2. Grazing season monitoring stubble ht./utilization guidelines
 3. End of season stubble ht./utilization guidelines
10. Range readiness documentation
11. Watershed health indicators

Utilization Guidelines

Within each pasture, grazing utilization would occur at 20% to 40% (percent dry weight) of the annual available forage (not to exceed 40%) and would be assessed at the end of the growing season.

(Utilization guidelines in the riparian area includes leaving 4 inches of stubble height of the annual available forage when livestock exit the pasture). When proper use levels are reached within the pasture, livestock will be moved to the next scheduled pasture *unless other management considerations require livestock removal before proper use levels are reached.*

Key Forage Species

Stubble Ht – Inches

Parry's oatgrass	4
Junegrass	3
Western wheatgrass	4
Crested wheatgrass	4
Arizona/Thurber fescue	6
Mountain muhly	4
Needleandthread	4
Top-of-Mt. – (Parry's oatgrass, Arizona/Thurber fescue, mountain muhly, western wheatgrass.	
Bottom-of-Mt. - Arizona/Thurber fescue, mountain muhly, western wheatgrass. crested wheatgrass, junegrass.	

Monitoring Methods

Other monitoring methods that may be used on the allotment are: Parker 3-Step, Rapid Assessment Method (RAM), Ocular Estimate Method, Ocular Utilization by Dry Weight, Photo Point, Range Trend Plot and Cover-Frequency.

V. AOI MANAGEMENT

Appendix Reference

The Appendix of the AOI, references the permit. The appendix will contain permitted number, (period of use), authorized number (period of use), actual number (period of use); pasture rotation schedule and amendments to the AOI.

2008 Actual Use:

356 e/l; 396 e/l; (752 e/l total, one band of sheep); 6/4 to 7/5; 50% number reduction.

Mt. Base (North Area) 6/4 to 6/14 (11 days)

Trick Tank (sec 6/7) 6/15 to 6/21 (7 days)

East of Trick Tank/ South (sec 8) 6/22 to 6/26 (5 days)

North of Radio Tower/ East of Main Tank (sec 6) 6/27 to 7/1 (5 days)

Mt. Base (Western Area) 7/2 to 7/5 (4 days)

Mt. Base (Southern Area, Sec., 11, 12) Rest

(Mt. Base - 15 days total; Mt. Top – 17 days total; average to above-average forage production, good available water sources)

Annual Authorized Use Request Form

Credits from previous year, if applicable, would apply to the current bill. The final livestock numbers and entry date would be determined after range readiness inspections. Therefore, additional billing may be required after the first billing (that reflects the Annual Authorized Use Request form for 400 e/l; 400 e/l; (800 e/l total, one band of sheep); 6/4 to 7/3; 47% number reduction. Range readiness would determine livestock number and entry date. Permittee is requesting an entry date of 5/30. Field inspection would determine the exit date. Permittee is requesting an exit date of 7/3.

AOI Objectives

12. Project development of water sources on Mt. top area; salt tank in section 12.
13. Move herder camps every 7 days.
14. Exclude livestock grazing within TEU 141E.

Concerns of the Permittees (Also refer to the Project Section)

15. Develop additional water sources.
16. Provide permittees with Forest Road gate key.
17. Earlier range readiness entry; and later exit date with a 50% livestock number reduction.
18. Allotment objective of improving grazing forage conditions and herbage vigor within 5 to 10 years. Develop range improvement projects.

Range Readiness

The range readiness inspection is tentatively scheduled for May 22, 2008.

VI. RANGE IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS AND MAINTENANCE

The cost of maintenance is the responsibility of the permittee. Term permit projects such as allotment boundary fences, unit boundary fences, cattleguards, stock tanks and other range improvement projects must be maintained prior to the permittee entering the allotment. In addition, when allotments are in non-use, the permittees are responsible for maintenance of the assigned projects.

a. Project Status

2009 new projects – Propose new (section 6) earthen dam stock tank (1400 cubic yds.); site is flagged.

2008 maintenance projects - 1) Section 1 earthen dam stock tank - seal with 2 tons of salt. Completed salt seal in 2008.

2009 maintenance projects – 1) Section 12 earthen dam stock tank - seal with 2 tons of salt.

Future desired projects –

FUTURE DESIRED PROJECTS

Table 1

PROJECT	STATUS
Clearing of down aspen sites at mountain top to develop sites into grazeable areas	The TPRD biologist was consulted and is examining ways to clear the sites.
Propose new (section 7) earthen dam stock tank (1400 cubic yds.);	Locate project site; GPS and flag.
Develop spring location at the northern area of the allotment.	Spring site has been located and contains 2 each 500 gal. concrete drinkers that may last 2 days for the herd. Possibly increase the storage capacity.
Seal (salt) various stock tanks.	Discussed

TRAVEL MANAGEMENT

USFS Travel Management Plan was discussed. The scoping letter was dated Jan. 31, 2009. The travel management rule requires each Ranger District to designate those roads trails and areas open to motor vehicle use. Range permittee guidelines will be developed and will be included in the AOI in the future. A second travel management meeting was held in Tres Piedras on March 21, 2007 (The first travel management meeting was held in Tres Piedras July 11, 2006). Attendees provided comments to the USFS regarding roads or trails that should remain open or closed; and access routes to range improvements that are needed within the allotment. The permittees will provide (in writing) a description of the cross country access routes for supplemental salt placement or routes to the various allotment projects (maintenance, gates, or inspection) and number of times the project would be accessed.

BENJAMIN ROMERO
District Ranger

Date

Attachment: Appendix

2009 San Antonio Mountain Allotment

Table 2

<i>Permittees/Livestock Numbers/Permit – 1502 e/l total; 6/4 – 7/3</i>			
Member	Permit Livestock Number (e/l)	Authorized Number – Tentative 47% reduction	Actual Use
Charles & Rhonda Thomas	711	400	
Brandon & Jamie Thomas	791	400	
Total	1502	800 (Range readiness inspection determines the authorized livestock number)	

Table 3

<i>Tentative Pastures/Period of Use (6/4 – 7/3; 30 days)</i>				
Pasture	Dates - Tentative (From – To) (# of days)	Days - Tentative (Min. to Max)	Actual Use (# of days and dates)	Reason for Adjustment
<i>Southern Mt. Base</i>	6/4 – 6/10	5 to 8 (7)		
<i>East of Trick Tank/South (sec 5/8)</i>	6/11 – 6/17	5 to 7 (7)		
<i>North of Radio Tower (sec 5/6)</i>	6/18 – 6/23	5 to 7 (6)		
<i>Trick Tank (sec 6); (sec 7)</i>	6/24 – 6/28	5 to 7 (5)		
<i>Northern Mt. Base</i>	6/29 to 7/3; (Exit 7/3)	2 to 7 (5)		
<i>Western Mountain Base</i>	REST	7 to 11 (7)		
Total	6/4 to 7/3 (Range readiness would determine livestock number and authorized entry date. Permittee is requesting an entry date of 5/30. Field inspection would determine the exit date.	30 days		

Appendix

Grazing Permittee Instructions for Sheep Operators on Tres Piedras Ranger District

1. Review the term grazing permit and become familiar with the terms and conditions prior to the grazing season.
2. Only livestock branded as shown on your application are permitted to enter the National Forest. The Forest Service (FS) and the permittees will agree to the counting locations, date, and time. Entering the allotment before your authorized entry date is not allowed until livestock are counted.
3. A Crossing Permit is required whenever livestock enter the National Forest. Crossing the District to/from a grazing allotment is only allowed within the authorized season.
4. Livestock found on other unauthorized allotments or in areas without prior authorization will result in the issuance of a Notice of Noncompliance that may impact your term permit.
5. The Annual Operating Instructions (AOI) pasture rotation dates are tentative. Therefore, you must consult with the District Office two weeks before the AOI tentative scheduled rotation dates for discussion and approval of the actual move dates and any AOI adjustments.

Management on the Range

1. The management objective is to obtain proper use throughout the grazeable portions of the range according to the management requirements of the Carson Forest plan.
2. Use the open herding system of handling sheep for better effect on the range and the sheep. The herder should hold the lead sheep instead of pushing the rear, and train the sheep to spread out and graze contentedly, instead of following the natural tendency of certain leaders in the band to move ahead too rapidly. Practice the open herding system of grazing in order to minimize the trailing and driving directly to and from water sources. Trailing and bunching the sheep should be avoided as much as possible. The herder would bed the sheep in a different location each night, except under exceptional circumstances, and never bed the sheep at camp (which is moved every 7 days). Re-using the bed grounds contributes to the spread of disease and parasites. Proper use will be determined by the percent of forage used within key area sites. With proper livestock distribution, a uniform pattern of use would occur. Utilization levels would vary between 20% to 40% (percent dry weight) in pasture key areas, and within the overall pasture's pattern of use.
3. Riding, herding and good salting practices will help. Sheep should be moved to less utilized areas and heavier use should be avoided in the bottoms/meadows/openings that contain more desirable herbage.
4. When proper use levels are reached within each pasture, livestock grazing must end and livestock must exit. An early allotment exit would result in a partial refund/credit of the grazing payment. The grazing of more than one pasture at a time must be approved by the District Ranger.

Camp Operation

1. Move camps at least every 7 days. Locate camps to avoid contaminating water supplies. Remove trash and garbage. Leave the camp site clean and use good sanitation practices. Bury all human waste and locate latrines at least 100 feet from surface water.

The Herder

1. The herder will be expected to deal with unexpected emergencies and make day to day decisions. The herder should report conditions and observations that are vital to the sheep operation. The herder must know the allotment boundary and various property boundaries within the allotment in order to avoid unauthorized use or excess use. When applicable, information on adjoining bands of sheep and their routing/bedding will be shared with permittees and their herders.

Salting

1. Salt shall be located at least 0.5 miles to 1.0 miles away from streams, springs, earthen dam stock tanks and other sources of water in order to improve the livestock distribution within the pasture. Salt must be placed to minimize damage to vegetation and soil, within the tree line instead of in the middle of openings, in drainages/riparian or near roadways. Regular salt ground sites must not be established.

Range Improvement Projects

1. Range Improvement Projects assigned in your Term Grazing Permit require annual maintenance that is to be completed prior to placing livestock in the pasture unit. Allotment boundary fences must be maintained before the entry date and interior fences must be maintained before cattle enter the pasture.
2. Acceptable maintenance means returning the improvement to its original functioning working order and using the equivalent materials. Particular attention, labor and time must be given to gates within the allotment to make certain that they are serviceable and can be opened and closed easily. The FS does not furnish materials or cost-share for maintenance projects.
3. All lay-down fences should be let-down no later than October 20, or as soon as possible after cattle leave the allotment and adjoining allotments.
4. Construction of new improvements or reconstruction of existing projects must have the approval of the District Ranger. During the AOI meeting and throughout the year suggestions for proposed projects are accepted.

Special Attention Items

1. Written authorization from the District Ranger is required for vehicle travel in road closure areas. All cross-country travel where allowed must not cause ruts or down-cutting in the soil surface. Cross-country vehicular travel when the ground is wet is prohibited. This written authorization is only for vehicle travel necessary for your livestock operation on your allotment. Prudent use of this authority is asked when and where general public use is concentrated. All permittees are encouraged to stay off roadways closed to vehicular travel during hunting seasons.

2. All temporary camps and corrals made or used by permittees or their riders will be cleaned up (left in a sanitary condition) and all materials/trash will be removed from the sites. Temporary camp/corral locations should be discussed with the FS prior to setting up the camp.
3. Riders will be permitted 4 horses or mules per rider for work within the allotment. No untrained horses, colts or other unrideable stock will be allowed.
4. Eartags will be provided initially to new permittees on allotments that are tagged. After initial allocation of tags, 10 percent will be provided per grazing season.
5. Please notify the District Ranger with any observations of stray livestock on the National Forest Lands (regardless of the time of year).
6. Move any dead animals to rest no closer than 300 feet from water or roadways.

Report wildfires to: Tres Piedras Ranger Station at (575) 758-8678 or Carson Dispatch at (575) 758-6208 or (575) 758-6209.

If you have any questions, please contact the Tres Piedras Ranger District office.