

**2007 ANNUAL OPERATING INSTRUCTIONS
SPRING CREEK ALLOTMENT 631
CARSON NATIONAL FOREST
TRES PIEDRAS RANGER DISTRICT**

I. INTRODUCTION/OBJECTIVES

The Spring Creek Annual Operating Instruction meeting was held on February 16, 2007 at Conejos Peak Ranger District from 10:00-12:00. Attending Spring Creek permittees were Clint Huffaker, Tyler Huffaker, Aaron Valentine, Pat Abeyta, Jasper Casias, Mark Bechaver, Brock Canty, Edwin Gurule, and Phyllis Gurule. Forest Service representatives were Wayne Yonemoto and Anna Dominguez.

The Annual Operating Instructions are hereby made part of the Term Grazing Permit. Carson Forest Annual Operating Instructions are posted on the Carson Forest Web site. <http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/carson>, Natural resources, Range, District, Allotment. Annual Operating Instructions contain items that are guidance criteria addressing proper use of the Spring Creek allotment. Permittees were advised to review terms and conditions stated on their permits that were completed after NEPA decision in 2004.

II. ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

A. Weather Report

2003 Rangeland Management Action Plan for the Santa Fe and Carson National Forest will be referred to during 2007 grazing season. The plan stresses communication, permittee involvement, monitoring, range administration, and reference to the Standard Precipitation Index addressing adaptive management during near normal, drought and drought recovery conditions. Permittees are recommended to have a drought contingency plan.

Standard Precipitation Index (SPI) will be used to define drought conditions following the 2003 Rangeland Management Action Plan for the Santa Fe and Carson National Forests. SPI values are available from the Western Regional Climate Center at www.wrcc.dri.edu. The 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. Example: SPI values of -0.70 or less for the past month signal drought conditions. SPI values of positive 1.0 or more for the past 12 months signal the end of drought. The following are the 1 and 12 month SPI through the end of January 2007.

1-month SPI through the end of January 2007 is -0.74 to 0.74 (near normal conditions)

12-month SPI through the end of January 2007 is -0.74 to 0.74 (near normal conditions)

Tres Piedras precipitation records are referenced in recommendation for Annual Authorized Use. Allotment stocking should adjust with effective precipitation patterns. 2006 spring production was stunted due to spring drought conditions, summer rains allowed for cool season green up and good warm season production. 2007 spring effective precipitation is unknown at this time. 2007 spring and summer precipitation patterns will determine adaptive management actions with the objective to maintain/improve forage resources (proper use).

Weather conditions influence Forest fire occurrence and it is recommended that permittees have a fire contingency plan for livestock management. 2007 Fire season is forecasted to be normal.

Report wildfires to: Tres Piedras Ranger Station at (505) 758-8678 or Carson Dispatch at (505) 758-6208 or (505) 758-6209.

B. Review of 2006 spreadsheet, inspection reports and End of Season Report

Due to the dynamic influences on resource condition, an annual spreadsheet (adaptive management tool) compiling /summarizing chronological allotment management and resource conditions is completed. The spreadsheet helps identify/document management objectives for each pasture so that livestock can be used as a grazing tool to maintain-enhance range conditions. The spreadsheet:

- Documents permitted, authorized, and actual livestock management data
- Documents current and prior year's objective per pasture so that it can be easily referenced
- Documents qualitative Grazing Response Index, to consider early elk utilization prior to livestock entry and permittee involvement and growing season conditions
- Refers to allotment inspections reports and monitoring studies
- Considers climate data to describe end of season forage condition
- Estimates production/vigor
- Documentation of end of season utilization standards for USFS administrative requirements
- Spreadsheet information is then summarized in an End of Season Report that is considered in following year adaptive management

On March 16, 2006 Spring Creek permittees agreed to a 25% reduction in authorized numbers, addressing resource protection in the 2006 spring drought conditions. On 5-10-06 after range readiness inspection permittees voluntarily took a larger reduction of 30% with a staggered delayed on date and split herd addressing intensity of livestock during spring drought conditions. Adaptable management head month calculation was used to calibrate timing in the Spring Creek allotment with split herd and staggered entry at the end of the year because days were no longer an accurate reference. Head months will be used in the future to calibrate and estimate proper use of Spring Creek allotment.

2006 low precipitation during spring critical growing season and early elk utilization had an effect on 2006 grass production. Monsoon season in July and August allowed green up on cool seasons and production on warm season forage. Precipitation was sporadic, reflective in the water levels in dirt tanks at the end of growing season. Estimated production/vigor of forage was low for cool seasons and moderate-high for warm seasons due to the pattern of precipitation received. Overall estimated production/vigor of forage was low (moderate).

Spring Creek took a 34% reduction in HM in 2006. It is estimated that 4/4 pastures did not meet the 20-40% standard of utilization at the end of the year. Spring drought, elk utilization and livestock utilization and distribution contributed to this estimate.

The following are summarized objectives for 2007 grazing season reviewed with permittees at AOI.

- **Spring Creek allotment** has few pastures minimizing flexibility in pasture rotation. Percent authorization will influence flexibility of livestock management. Recommended 2007 authorized numbers is similar to voluntary 2006 reduction of 34% to address resource recovery from near normal conditions since 2003. Recommended 2007 rotation to be followed with one herd addressing deferred rotation. Evaluation of elk use prior to livestock entry in all pastures if

possible to calibrate rotation and document wild ungulate use which will be considered in utilization standard at the end of the year. Following targeted HM per pasture as documented in Table 2 2007 Spring Creek rotation and shortening clean out time of pastures. Grazing Permittee Instructions for Cattle Operators on Tres Piedras Ranger District is an appendix to 2007 AOI and should be followed by Spring Creek livestock management.

- **Wheatgrass pasture**, this pasture usually has adequate water in the spring but limited in cool season grasses due to wildlife use before livestock entry. USFS needs to calibrate (by clipping) cool season production with tentative rotation. There is a possibility of fewer days in the spring and more days in the fall due to species composition of forage and precipitation patterns.
- **Palmer pasture**, Range readiness is critical since it will be second pasture and will have the majority of the days in spring rotation. Conduct evaluation of watering points to calibrate rotation schedule.
- **Cow creek pasture**, completing quantitative monitoring so that ocular methods of utilization can be calibrated with species composition and grazable acres (full and partial potential capacity). Document observations of wild horses and antelope. Additional quantitative monitoring by USFS is needed to compare species composition to calibrate grazable acres for Cow Creek pasture and review prior to livestock entry.
- **Coyote pasture**, allowing for seed production on Arizona Fescue.

C. 2007 Range Readiness

Inspection of 2007 range readiness meeting attendance is strongly recommended to review range conditions on 5/10/06 at 9:00 A.M. at Wheatgrass corral. Evaluation of range readiness conditions will determine what adaptive management adjustments is needed addressing proper use.

D. 2007 Grazing Fee and Annual Authorized Use Request

The livestock grazing fee for grazing year 2007 is \$1.35 c/c and \$.27 e/l on National Forests. The reduction in grazing fees is due to increase in the cost of production attributed to higher fuel prices, high loan rate, and equipment expenses, which offsets slight increases in prices received, and forage values attributed to private grazing land leasing rates. 2007 Unauthorized use of National Forests is \$4.10 for livestock and \$.82 for sheep and goats.

Spring Creek permittees discussed voluntary reduction and requested to finalize decision at a later date. Credit applications from 2006 grazing year were completed and will be turned in when 2007 Annual Authorized forms are finalized. On 3-9-07 it was decided by District Ranger to authorize 18% of livestock numbers with an on date of 5/15, with no filling in on non-use permits. Letters documenting this decision will be mailed out separate from the AOI. Range readiness will determine actual entry date and authorized numbers depending on resource condition.

The 2007 authorized livestock and grazing season are no guarantee that grazing can occur for the tentative rotation. Low resource conditions may require alterations in rotations or possible early off date.

Table 1-Spring Creek 2007 permitted/authorized data/Actual data

Permitted season 5/15-10/14, 153 days	2007 Authorized season 5/15-10/14, 153 days, with 442 c/c (2,224 HM/ 2,936 AUM)	2007Actual season days, with c/c (HM/ AUM)
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Patricio Abeyta 35c/c, 176 HM, 232 AUM	29 c/c, 146 HM, 193 AUM	
Mark and Brian Bechaver 35 c/c, 176 HM, 232 AUM	29 c/c, 146 HM, 193 AUM	
Jasper Casias 25c/c, 126 HM, 166 AUM	20 c/c, 101 HM, 133 AUM	
Broch Canty 51 c/c, 257 HM, 339 AUM	42 c/c, 211 HM, 279 AUM	
Edwin Gurule 41 c/c, 206 HM, 272 AUM	34 c/c, 171 HM, 226 AUM	
Bradley, Clinton & Tyler Huffaker 80 c/c, 402 HM, 531 AUM	66 c/c, 332 HM, 438 AUM	
Clinton and Tyler Huffaker 72 c/c, 362 HM, 478 AUM	59 c/c, 297 HM, 392 AUM	
James Sowards 157 c/c, 790 HM, 1043 AUM	129 c/c, 649 HM, 856 AUM	
W. & K. Reed & Company 41 c/c, 206 HM, 272 AUM	34 c/c, 171 HM, 225 AUM	
Total permitted 537 c/c, 2,701 HM, 3565 AUM	442 c/c, 2224 HM, 2935 AUM	

E. Tentative Rotation Schedule

All allotment rotation plans are subject to change due to unforeseen circumstances such as lack of water or low forage production. Range Readiness inspection will confirm availability of water and adjust 2007 tentative rotation schedule if needed. The pastures currently have minimum-**goal**-maximum days, HM and AUM. It is the responsibility of the permittee to ensure proper distribution of livestock addressing utilization standard of 40% of annual production.

Table 2-2007 Spring Creek Pasture rotation

Pastures	Permitted Minimum- goal -maximum days HM AUM	2007 18% reduction by permit Authorized, 5/15- 10/14, 153 days, Minimum- goal -maximum days HM AUM	2007 Actual	2007 Carson Forest standard of utilization at end of season
Wheatgrass	2-----7----25 days 35-123-441 HM 46-163-582 AUM	2-----7----25 days 29---102---363 HM 38--135---479 AUM		
Palmer	28--40 days 494--706 HM 652--931 AUM	28--40--45 days 407---581---654 HM 537---767---863 AUM		
Cow Creek	20---50---60 days 353-883-1059 HM 466-1166-1398 AUM	20--43--50---60 days 290--625--726--872 HM 383--825--958--1,151 AUM		
Coyote	26----50----52 days 459-883-918 HM 606-1166-1212 AUM	26----50----52 55 days 378--726--756--799 HM 499--958--997--1055 AUM		

Wheatgrass	trailing	2--3---7----25 days 29--44--102---363 HM 38--58--135---479 AUM		
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F. Monitoring references and Utilization standards

The following list describes priority monitoring data of the Spring Creek allotment addressing proper use.

1. Spring Creek spreadsheet
2. Elk utilization prior to livestock entry date-Inspection reports, documented on spreadsheet
3. Fence conditions-Deferred maintenance list
4. SPI , weather forecast and water availability- weather record, Deferred maintenance list
5. Soil moisture depth and temperature-Inspection reports
6. Production cages, Parker, and permittee key areas, reviewed with methods listed on the Tres Piedras Monitoring Plan
7. Key forage list per pasture-AOI obtained from 1970 blue line map
8. key areas reviewed if accessible-Inspection reports
9. Existing stubble heights on key species--Production/Vigor of key species per pasture at range readiness and end of season

Below is a table of key species with stubble heights requirements for pasture entry. It is stressed that stubble heights of key species and utilization are two different ecological concepts. Stubble height is related to:

- The effect of grazing on the physiological response of individual plant-vigor
- The effect of residual vegetation in protecting the soil from wind or water erosion.

Utilization will be estimated with the USFS Ocular estimate method by class.

Table 3-Spring Creek key species stubble heights reference

Key areas	Pasture Key Species requirements for entering pastures	Range readiness 5/10/07	End of season 10/X/07	Estimated production/vigor
	Wheatgrass			
Cage	Blue gramma 1.5" Western wheatgrass 6-8" Crested wheatgrass 6+''			
Parker	Western wheatgrass 6-8" Arizona fescue 8+'' Crested Wheatgrass 6+'' Blue gramma 1.5''			
Permittee	Western wheatgrass 6-8" Arizona fescue 8+'' Crested Wheatgrass 6+'' Blue gramma 1.5''			
	Coyote			
Cage	Arizona fescue 8+'' Western wheatgrass 6-8" Blue gramma 1.5'' Kentucky blue grass fully open panicle			

Parker	Arizona fescue 8+” Western wheatgrass 6-8” Blue gramma 1.5” Kentucky blue grass fully open panicle			
Permittee	Arizona fescue 8+” Western wheatgrass 6-8” Blue gramma 1.5” Kentucky blue grass fully open panicle			
	Cow Creek			
Cage	Arizona fescue 8+” Western wheatgrass 6-8” Blue gramma 1.5” Kentucky blue grass fully open panicle			
Parker	Arizona fescue 8+” Western wheatgrass 6-8” Blue gramma 1.5” Kentucky blue grass fully open panicle			
Permittee	Arizona fescue 8+” Western wheatgrass 6-8” Blue gramma 1.5” Kentucky blue grass fully open panicle			
	Palmer			
Cage	Arizona fescue 8+” Western wheatgrass 6-8” Blue gramma 1.5” Kentucky blue grass fully open panicle			
Parker	Arizona fescue 8+” Western wheatgrass 6-8” Blue gramma 1.5” Kentucky blue grass fully open panicle			
Permittee	Arizona fescue 8+” Western wheatgrass 6-8” Blue gramma 1.5” Kentucky blue grass fully open panicle			

Early elk utilization and drought conditions can stunt forage production effecting permitted grazing time and contribute to % utilization at the end of the season. Permittees are recommended to have a contingency plan due to early elk utilization. If elk have utilized the pasture prior to livestock entry and the remaining forage availability is low, other pastures' entry and exits dates may be affected. Allotment spreadsheet has been organized to document these dynamic factors influencing production and vigor of forage. Analysis of quantitative/qualitative spreadsheet data is a reference for estimating if standard of utilization at the end of the growing season was met. Utilization is not to exceed 40 % of annual forage production at the end of the year. Riparian utilization standard is 4” stubble height of the annual available forage. The few riparian areas identified in Spring Creek have been intermittent in the past near normal

precipitation years influencing the 4” standard stubble height. Updated maps are necessary to clearly identify riparian areas referencing soil type and existing species composition.

III. DEFERRED MAINTENANCE

Deferred maintenance assigned in your Term Grazing Permit requires annual maintenance that is to be completed prior to placing livestock in the pasture. Allotment boundary fences must be maintained before the entry date and interior fences must be maintained before cattle enter the pasture.

The cost of maintenance is the responsibility of the permittee. Maintenance means returning the improvement to its original functioning working order and using the equivalent material. Additional technical maintenance information and specification guides can be found on the Natural Resource Conservation Service web site at:

<http://www.nm.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/fotg/intro3.html>.

When allotments are in non-use, permittees are responsible for maintenance of allotment improvements referred to in deferred maintenance list. Construction of new improvements or reconstruction of existing projects must have the approval of the District Ranger.

A working deferred maintenance list has been completed as a management tool addressing the following management objectives:

- Update/correct corporate data to produce accurate new maps
- Update/correct I-web data base reference numbers for future merge with Arc-GIS, NEPA process.
- Organize data by pasture addressing communication with permittees and managers
- Pasture attributes are organized according to type, condition, and maintenance needs
- Document maintenance responsibility
- Reference to watering point condition
- Planning of maintenance with technical assistance from NRCS following an AMP
- Develop maintenance strategies with seasonal conditions

The deferred maintenance list is referenced to prioritize annual maintenance which are listed on the AOI in project status section below.

A. 2006 Deferred Maintenance Priorities

- Permittees Clean out American Spring and any other natural spring to encourage water flow.
- Permittees repair of Esquibel tank in Palmer if water level allows. Berm needs to be re-enforced.
- Continued monitoring of Wheatgrass Pasture for proposed vegetation project with NMGF in the migratory elk range.

B. 2007 Deferred Maintenance Priorities

- American Spring is an on going priority in 2005, 2006, and 2007. If conditions allow, permittees need to clean out or repair American Spring to increase functional watering points addressing livestock distribution.
- USFS monitor of 2006 maintenance of Esquibel tank in Palmer. If conditions allow additional permittee maintenance/repairs are priority for this critical watering point. NRCS technical assistance is recommended for maintenance specifications on berm.

- Continued monitoring of Wheatgrass Pasture for proposed vegetation project with NMGF in the migratory elk range.

C. Travel Management Rule

USFS Travel Management Plan was discussed. The travel management rule requires each Forest Service administrative unit or Ranger District to designate those, roads trails, and areas open to motor vehicle use. On November 2, 2005, the Forest Service announced final management regulations governing OHV's and other motor vehicle use on national forests and grasslands. On June 8, 2006, Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth approved the agency's schedule for implementation of the travel management rule. The schedule will guide local efforts over the next four years to designate those roads, trails and areas open to motor vehicle use. Range permittee guidelines will be developed and will be part of allotment planning in the future. More information is available on the Carson NF web page at:

http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/carson/recreation/travel_mgmt/index.shtml. A Travel Management meeting will held in Tres Piedras March 21, 3007 from 6:00P.M. to 9:00 P.M. for an additional opportunity to provide comments to USFS regarding:

- Roads or motorized trail that you would like to see remain open as part of the designated system
- Roads or motorized trail that you would like to see closed
- Access routes you believe are necessary to access range improvements and description of how you have been accessing these improvements
- Roads or motorized trails you would like to see closed to the public but where you could retain adequate access for range operations and maintenance of you range-related facilities.

VIII. APPEAL RIGHTS

Range managers were informed in January 07 that if an allotment has current NEPA, then appeal language is not needed on the AOI. Allotments with current NEPA operate within the guidelines of the NEPA decision therefore; appeal language has been omitted from Spring Creek 2007 AOI. The opportunity to appeal management was when the NEPA decision was made. If the allotment has a new permittee appeal rights still follow the NEPA decision.

BENJAMIN ROMERO
District Ranger

Date

Attachment: Appendix

Appendix

Grazing Permittee Instructions for Cattle 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. Obtaining the best distribution of cattle on mountain ranges is made difficult because of their natural tendency to gather in openings, watering sites, drainages, riparian areas and meadows. 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. Frequent movement of salt within slight to light use areas is required to improve the pattern of use. Cattle 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. All cattle on the allotment would be handled as one herd. Moves between pastures may be handled as drifting moves where gates to the next successive pasture may be opened 2 days before the agreed scheduled move date. The exit pasture that the cattle are leaving must be cleaned-out within 3 days after the scheduled date for moving.

Salting

1. Salt must be placed in each pasture prior to cattle entering the pasture. Salt shall be located at least 0.5 miles to 1.0 miles away from streams, spring, 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 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 material. 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 you 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 unreadable stock will be allowed.
4. Ear tags ill 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 (505 758-8678 or Carson Dispatch at (505) 758-6208 or (505) 758 6209.

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