

**Annual Operating Instructions**  
South Fork Allotment  
Black Range Ranger District, Gila National Forest  
**2004 grazing season**

**1. PASTURE USE SCHEDULE**

We have approved your application to graze 212 head of cattle on the South Fork Allotment. Total cattle numbers for the South Fork Allotment are not to exceed 212 head for the 2004 grazing season. At our January 15, 2004 annual validation meeting we developed the following grazing rotation schedule:

<i>PASTURE</i>	<i>ON DATE</i>	<i>OFF DATE</i>	<i>NUMBER</i>
Hagin's	03/01/2004	06/30/2004	212
Monument	07/01/2004	11/30/2004	212
Lodge	12/01/2004	02/28/2005	212

The schedule above is an estimate, and may be modified at any time during the grazing season if the utilization levels, identified below, are met, if water availability is inadequate, or for other resource management reason. If allowable use levels are met early in the scheduled pasture, cattle will be rotated into the next pasture or off the Forest. Cattle are to be completely removed from a pasture by the off date. Due to the rugged terrain of the South Fork Allotment, I will allow you two weeks prior to the off date to begin moving cattle into the next pasture. If two weeks is not adequate, you must request additional time from this office. Please notify this office when you begin to move cattle and when a pasture rotation is complete.

**2. UTILIZATION STANDARDS**

The following utilization standards will be applied on the South Fork Allotment:

- Riparian areas are not to exceed 25% of current year's growth on woody riparian species.
- Upland sites grazed during the growing season are not to exceed 35% of current year's growth of perennial grasses.
- Upland sites grazed during the dormant season are not to exceed 40% of current year's growth 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 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>
Monument	Cluster C-1	Upland grasses
Hagin's	Cluster C-2	Upland grasses
Hagin's	Cluster C-3	Upland grasses
Lodge	Cluster C-4	Upland grasses
Lodge	NW1/4 SEC 21,T11S,R9W	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 obtain the majority of their required forage resources. 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 as well as riparian herbaceous species.
- 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 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, and may also include FS Regional stubble-height standards, as well as other techniques generally accepted in the field of range management.

#### **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.

We are aware that the new fence in Turkey Run is complete. District personnel will make arrangements to inspect the fence. The permit modification will be closed out as soon as the abandoned section of fence #2077 is rolled up and removed from the Forest. Please inform this office of a schedule for the fence removal. We will make arrangements to provide you with the paint you requested as well as the cross-cut saws to maintain the section of fence #2077A within the Aldo Leopold Wilderness. This #2077A fence must be in such a condition as to be effective in keeping cattle out of the Diamond Pasture before cattle will be allowed into the Lodge Pasture.

We should have funding to install a cattle guard across FDR #226 at JHW well and will try and implement that project this year.

We did not receive funding for the trick-tank you proposed in the Hagin's Pasture. We will try for funding again for FY 2005 and keep you informed on our success in acquiring funding for these projects.

You have informed us that the storage tank at JHW well is becoming beyond repair and that water is leaking out of the bottom of the tank. We may or may not have an extra storage tank, depending on other planned projects for this year. We will keep you informed on the status of our storage tanks.

You have expressed a concern that pine trees are blocking the windmill at Turkey Run well. You proposed to either cut down the trees or put a solar pump in the well. It is unlikely that funding is available for a solar pump this year; however we will keep it in mind for next year. The District Ranger and others from the district will have to get together and discuss the possibility of cutting down any trees around the windmill. We will keep you informed of any discussion or decisions regarding this project.

#### **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.
- The Diamond Pasture is closed to livestock grazing. Fences must be maintained to a standard which prevents cattle passage into the Diamond Pasture.
- At our AOI meeting we discussed the listing of the Chiricahua leopard frog as a threatened species. Because of the listing of the Chiricahua leopard frog as a threatened species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, an analysis was completed for all Gila allotments. We have determined that livestock grazing on the South Fork Allotment has the potential to adversely affect the Chiricahua leopard frog. As a result of this determination, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will prepare a draft Biological Opinion, which may modify grazing management practiced to minimize the level of affect an action will have on a listed species.

However, this determination has not yet resulted in any changes to your grazing permit. As the permittee of the South Fork Allotment, you have applicant status which allows you the opportunity to provide comments to the draft Biological Opinion. This office will keep you informed on the process.

The Endangered Species Act requires that actions funded or carried out by the federal government go through the consultation process to insure these actions do not jeopardize the continued existence of a listed species. Please notify this office of any planned earth disturbing activities involving riparian areas, dirt tanks, or other sources of open water.

## **6. OTHER INSTRUCTIONS**

The permittee must obtain permission from the District Ranger 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, with the exception of bulls. 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 replacements.

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.

The permittee must prevent cattle drift from the South Fork Allotment onto neighboring Forest System Lands.

The Annual Operating Instructions are a part of the Term Grazing Permit as provided for in Part 1, Section 3. 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 and the Biological Assessment for the South Fork 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 South Fork Allotment. If you have any questions regarding these instructions, please contact Ron Mortensen, Rangeland Management Specialist, or myself at (505)894-6677. Thank you.

Sincerely,

TAMMY RANDALL PARKER  
District Ranger