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Closing of Selected Grazing Allotments

Santa Clara/Mojave Rivers District

Angeles National Forest

Los Angeles County, California

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Summary

The Angeles National Forest proposes to remove six livestock grazing allotments from areas considered suitable for permitted livestock grazing on the Santa Clara/Mojave Rivers Ranger District of the Angeles National Forest. The purpose of this proposal is to make adjustments to the range management land base where lack of use and interest in term grazing permits indicates that there is no need to manage these areas as grazing allotments. The proposed action would also result in a non-significant Forest Plan amendment that removes the implication that permitted livestock grazing occurs on the Angeles National Forest.

In addition to the proposed action, the Forest Service also evaluated the alternative of maintaining the livestock grazing allotments as vacant allotments.

Based upon the effects of the alternatives, the responsible official will make a decision whether to remove these allotments from the range land base and amend the Forest Plan.

Chapter 1 Introduction

Background

The Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Angeles National Forest (ANF) Land Management Plan (Forest Plan FEIS) (USDA 2005a) includes a total of 50,862 acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands as designated livestock grazing areas on the Angeles National Forest (Table 107, Page 291) within six allotments and one livestock area (Table 180, Page 290). Acreages of these livestock grazing areas are listed in Table 1 as analyzed in the Forest Plan EIS. The last year permitted or contracted livestock grazing occurred is also displayed. The allotments are located in the northwestern portion of the Santa Clara/Mojave Rivers Ranger District; about 7-12 miles northeast of Santa Clarita (see Figure 1).

This proposal is focused on the six grazing allotments. The Chantry Flats Livestock Area is part of the Adams Pack Station and is not included as part of the Proposed Action.

Allotment Name	Total Acres	NFS Acres	NFS Capable Acres*	Last Year Grazed
Castaic	3,845	3,721	1,606	1996
Charlie	7,820	7,558	4,819	1993
Del Sur	10,582	10,410	4,463	2001
Drinkwater	7,650	6,989	2,992	2001
Sierra Pelona	17,653	17,472	6,363	2001
Texas-Vasquez	4,740	4,704	3,040	2002
Chantry Flats Livestock Area	8	8	8	Ongoing
TOTAL	52,298	50,862	23,291	

***Capable Acres:** areas where livestock can be controlled or sustained within a designated area and management in the Forest Plan EIS.

The six grazing allotments under consideration overlap four Land Use Zones as described and mapped in the Angeles National Forest Land Management Plan (Forest Plan). The overlapping Land Use Zones are 1) Back Country, 2) Back Country, Non-Motorized, 3) Back Country Motorized Use Restricted, and 4) Developed Area Interface. Each of these Land Use Zones is considered suitable for livestock grazing in designated areas (Table 2.1.3 in Part 2 of the Forest Plan).

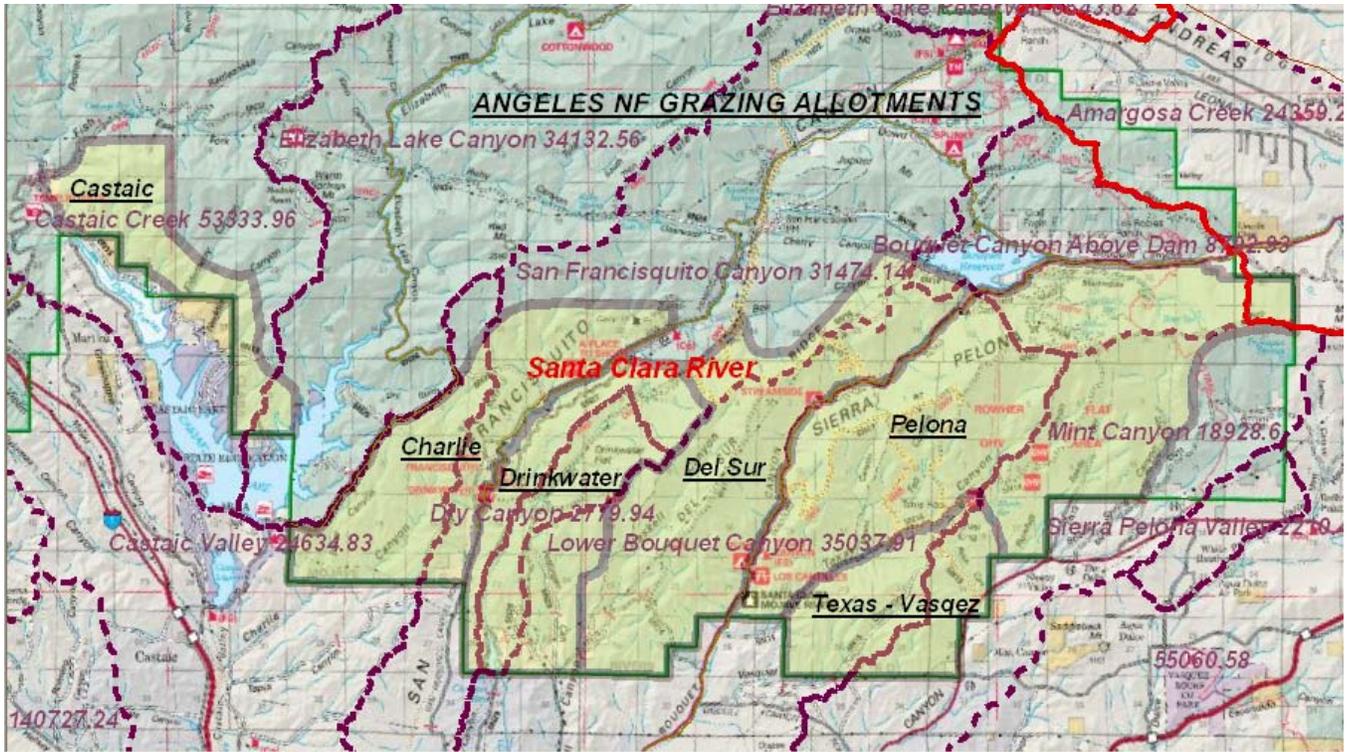
Appendix J, contained in Part 3 of the Forest Plan, describes other factors to consider in suitability analysis for range allotments. According to Appendix J, determining rangeland suitability is a two-step process. The first step is determining those lands that are capable or have the potential of being grazed. This has been determined in the Forest Plan FEIS and capable acres are listed in Table 1. The second step is determining those capable lands that are suitable for livestock grazing based on site-specific information or analysis. Capable lands may not be suitable for many reasons, one of which is “areas where livestock grazing is impractical due to economic considerations”.

There has been no grazing in two of the allotments, Castaic and Charlie, since the 1990s. There has been little demand for commercial livestock grazing in the other four allotments (Del Sur, Drinkwater, Sierra Pelona and Texas-Vasquez) due to the lack of available water. Costs associated with trucking in water and hiring herders make it cost prohibitive even with a free-use permit. These four allotments

have been most recently grazed under contract by the Diamond Sheep Company to maintain fuelbreaks in the allotments. The same company continues to be interested in grazing these areas under a fuelbreak treatment contract. Under this contract, the ANF would pay for the service of fuel reduction accomplished through grazing. This has been the only way grazing has been economically feasible in the units.

Since the allotments are not financially viable for permitted livestock grazing, they are no longer considered suitable due to economic considerations.

Figure 1 Grazing Allotments and Watersheds on the Angeles National Forest



Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of this proposal is to reduce administrative costs by removing vacant range allotments from future consideration. Also, vacant range allotments may interfere with contract grazing for fuel reduction in areas overlapping the range allotment boundaries.

Proposed Action

To meet the purpose and need the Angeles National Forest is proposing to cease authorizing commercial livestock grazing and remove the following areas from consideration for suitable for permitted livestock grazing on the Castaic, Charlie, Del Sur, Drinkwater, Sierra Pelona, and Texas-Vasquez grazing allotments. With this proposal, these six allotments would no longer be available for grazing under term grazing permits. Grazing may be used in the future for vegetation management (fuelbreak maintenance) under fuel treatment contracts. Any future grazing under a service contract would be subject to subsequent compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act.

Decision Framework

The deciding official will review the proposed action and the no action alternative in order to decide whether or not to remove the Castaic, Charlie, Del Sur, Drinkwater, Sierra Pelona, and Texas-Vasquez grazing allotments from suitable grazing designation status. Deciding to remove the allotments would not preclude future contract grazing for purposes of fuel treatment over the same areas, but would remove the allotments for future consideration as permitted livestock grazing areas.

In general, Forest Plan amendments are not required for projects. The Forest Plan describes strategic management direction, while site-specific or project level environmental analyses implement Forest Plan direction. However, a Forest Plan amendment is necessary for this decision. Forest Plan amendments are required if there is a change in direction as specified in the Forest Plan. While the Angeles Forest Plan does not specify outputs for livestock grazing, it does imply that some permitted livestock grazing will occur on the Forest. Implementing the proposed action would eliminate all of the permitted livestock grazing allotments across the Forest.

Table 2.1.3 in Part 2 of the Forest Plan lists the suitability of the Land Use Zones for commodity and commercial uses, including livestock grazing (see Background section for more on Land Use Zones). Several Land Use Zones, including all that overlap the allotments (such as Wilderness), are listed as suitable for livestock grazing in “Designated Areas”. Implementing the proposed action does not change the suitability of livestock grazing for the Land Use Zones, but it does change the amount of “Designated Area” for each Land Use Zone to 0 acres. A statement specifying that there are no livestock grazing areas, and therefore no “Designated Areas”, would be added to the Forest Plan with the proposed action.

Also, Table 2.1.8 includes an estimated 200 acres for monitoring to manage grazing allotments. This would drop to 0 acres of grazing monitoring with implementation of the proposed action and removal of the allotments.

The amendment would be a non-significant amendment according to the criteria in Forest Service Manual 1926.51, because it does not constitute a significant change in the long-term goods, outputs, and services projected for the Forest. The Forest Plan does not quantify livestock grazing opportunities as a long-term output, so there are no outputs to modify. Also, there would be no change in multiple-use goals and objectives that result from the decision, only some additional wording and a change in monitoring expectations.

Public Involvement

The proposal was listed in the quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) for the Angeles National Forest for the April 1 to June 30, 2008 period. It was provided to the public and other agencies for scoping comments starting April 30, 2008. Scoping letters were sent to 378 groups and individuals. No written responses or other comments were received during scoping.

Issues

No comments or concerns were received during the scoping comment period. There has been a lack of interest in grazing these allotments for the last several years, so it follows that the same lack of interest exists over whether the allotments are removed.

Chapter 2 Alternatives

Alternative 1 -No Action

Under the No Action alternative, although no grazing would be authorized for the six allotments they would continue to be considered available for grazing. These allotments would be considered areas capable and suitable for permitted livestock grazing. As vacant allotments, a potential permittee could apply for a term grazing permit to graze livestock.

Alternative 2 -The Proposed Action

The Angeles National Forest is proposing to no longer authorize commercial livestock grazing on the Castaic, Charlie, Del Sur, Drinkwater, Sierra Pelona, and Texas-Vasquez grazing allotments and to remove them from areas considered suitable for permitted livestock grazing. With this proposal, these six allotments would be closed to grazing under term grazing permits. Grazing may be used in the future for vegetation management (fuelbreak maintenance) under a service contract. Any future grazing under service contracts would be subject to subsequent compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act.

Chapter 3 Environmental Consequences

Since there would be no grazing authorized in the project area under either alternative, there would be no environmental consequences resulting from this project. Effects are administrative and social. The Proposed Action Alternative would close the allotments, allowing them to be removed from further consideration and discontinuing permitted livestock grazing in the allotments. The No Action Alternative would leave them as open but vacant allotments, allowing potential future permitted livestock grazing. The allotments are shown to not be economical (see Chapter 1, Background), so it is highly unlikely that any potential Permittee would request these as permitted allotments in the future.

Chapter 4 List of Preparers

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