United States Department of Agriculture | Forest Service | Santa Fe National Forest | Supervisor's Office
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[redacted]

IDENTICAL LETTER SENT TO ALL SFNF PERMITTEES
ON ATTACHED RECIPIENT LIST

[redacted]

The forecast for this winter calls for exceptionally dry conditions to continue for much of New Mexico, triggering a third year of drought conditions. Based on observations from district rangers and range staffs across the forest, and climate information from the New Mexico Drought Task Force, the Western Regional Climate Center, and the Natural Resource Conservation Service, we feel it is imperative for us to continue drought dialogue and coordination with you. The moisture outlook may change by spring, but the current projection is unfortunately a very undesirable one.

I have attached a link (http://www.ose.state.nm.us/DroughtTaskForce/) to the New Mexico Drought Task Force (utilizing data from the National Weather Service) which reports that New Mexico precipitation for the first eleven months of 2012 was 58 percent of average and ranked as the second driest through November of any year on record. Additionally the past 24 months have been the driest 2-year period on record ending in November for New Mexico. Storms brought snow to the northern New Mexico Mountains in December, but the year still finished with precipitation 26 percent of normal.

Currently, the majority of the Santa Fe National Forest is within the severe drought category. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Climate Prediction Center winter outlook for New Mexico from December 2012 through February 2013 indicates equal chances for below normal, near normal, or above normal precipitation throughout the state while temperatures are favored to be generally above normal. The spring outlook (March through May 2013) tilts the odds toward drier than normal conditions with temperatures again favored to be generally above normal.

Other climatic information we monitor includes the Standardized Precipitation Index (SPI) and snowpack levels:

- The Standardized Precipitation Index (SPI) is a way of measuring drought. The index is negative for drought, and positive for wet conditions. As the dry or wet conditions become more severe, the index becomes more negative or positive (the scale ranges from +3 to -3, with 0 being near normal). The SPI is computed for several time scales, ranging from one month to 24 months, to capture the various scales of both short-term and long-term drought. The 6-month SPI indicates trends in precipitation and can be effective in showing the precipitation over distinct seasons. The current 6-month SPI (July to December 2012) for the Santa Fe National Forest are -2.99 to -2.00 which represents the extremely dry category (http://www.wrcc.dri.edu/cgi-bin/spiFmap.pl?spi06).

- Data from the Natural Resource Conservation Service for the river basins in the Santa Fe National Forest indicate that current snow pack conditions range from 62% of average for the Jemez River Basin and 68% of average for the Sangre de Cristo Mountain Range Basins in terms of snow water equivalent (http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/cgibin/snowup-graph.pl?state=NM). Additionally, in an unusual turn of events, the El Niño weather pattern that was developing this summer has weakened and is now not expected to be a factor this winter in bringing above-average precipitation to the Southwest.

My concern is that this winter's storms by every indication will result in below average snowpack conditions by spring.

Inherent in cooperating with you in grazing management of National Forest grazing allotments is the duty to apply sound management practices that will sustain the long-term productivity and health of the rangelands. District Rangers will evaluate drought factors on an allotment-by-allotment basis in partnership with grazing permittees considering factors such as forage production, plant vigor, multiple-use values being managed for, water availability, conditions of fences, and the permittees ability to stock the allotment. Equally important to me is the responsibility the Forest Service has as neighbors to local communities and continuing our relationship with you as National Forest grazing permittees.

It is time to begin considering specific allotment and Forest-wide grazing strategies or management actions for the upcoming grazing season. Due to drought conditions experienced the last two years and the potential for a third consecutive year of drought conditions on the Forest, management during and after a drought should be devoted to overall health and as needed, recovery of rangeland vegetation. Please give some thought to strategies and specific actions that you could adopt should there be late turnouts or shortened grazing seasons on your allotment. Contingency planning may involve such practices as:

1. Acquiring more feed for cattle or additional private pasture.
2. Deferring grazing on a pasture or allotment until key forage species have produced mature seed.
3. Resting allotment pastures for at least one grazing season or more following severe droughts.
4. Monitoring livestock prices for possible opportunities to reduce herds at an advantageous time.
5. Liberal application of Memorandums of Understanding (MOU's) for resource protection non-use in order to protect the interests of grazing permittees.

Should drought conditions prevail through this winter and upcoming spring, communication between you, the District Ranger, and my staff will become increasingly important. The Santa Fe National Forest is committed to working with you in this joint effort to properly manage the land and minimize adverse impacts to your operations.

I encourage you to read the paper entitled "Rangeland Management Before, During, and After Drought" by Larry Howery, University of Arizona Cooperative Extension Service. The paper has many helpful, universal concepts regarding forage recovery and livestock husbandry practices pertaining to drought management and may provide us all with important information to consider and act on. This paper is available on both the Carson and Santa Fe National Forest websites, located at: http://www.fs.usda.gov/carson/ or http://www.fs.usda.gov/santafe/ . A hard copy of this paper can be made available upon request from any of our Forest offices.

We are hopeful the weather predictions will prove to be wrong and that we will see average or above average precipitation between now and spring. I anticipate continued correspondence with you to share and update information as the winter develops. I welcome your feedback and thoughts on this matter. If you have questions or would just like to talk, please call me at 505-438-5312 or call Jon T. Williams, Ecosystems Staff Officer, at 505-438-5430.

Sincerely,

Joseph H Monell Deputy FS

for **MARIA T. GARCIA**
Forest Supervisor

cc:
Dave Stewart, RO
District Rangers
Honorable Ben Lujan, Jr., US Congressman
Honorable Jeff Bingaman, US Senator
Honorable Tom Udall, US Senator
Rio Arriba County Board of Commissioners
Sandoval County Board of Commissioners
Santa Fe County Board of Commissioners
Mora County Board of Commissioners
San Miguel County Board of Commissioners
Los Alamos County Board of Commissioners
Farm Service Agency - Santa Fe County Farm Service Agency
Natural Resources Conservation Service – Santa Fe Service Center
Rangeland Improvement Task Force – New Mexico State University
Bureau of Land Management – New Mexico State Office
Northern New Mexico Stockman's Association
New Mexico Cattle Grower's Association