VERDE ALLLOTMENT

MANAGEMENT PLAN

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INTRODUCTION

The Verde allotment is located between State Route 279 and the Verde Rim. The south end of the allotment is Interstate 17 and the north end borders the Jerome allotment in the vicinity of Wilbur Wash. One hundred and eighty eight cattle are permitted on the Verde allotment. The allotment is 21,829 acres in size with 19,740 acres of full capacity range.

Elevations range from 3200 to 5000 feet. Topography includes alluvial flats at the lower elevations near 279. Steep hillsides in the middle of the allotment, grade into the Verde Rim, which is a steep escarpment. The Cherry Creek basin is located near the center of the allotment and is formed by Cherry and Boulder Creeks.

Management Areas 2, 3 and 5, Prescott National Forest Plan, are represented on the Verde. Utah juniper occurs at mid and upper elevations and in some areas there are moderate to heavy stands (this is in Management Area 2). In Management Area 3, chaparral dominates the slopes and the drainages including the Cherry Creek basin. The flat areas are desert shrub vegetation, (Management Area 5) and include dense thickets of catclaw mimosa. Riparian plants grow in Cherry Creek and near various springs, but because surface flows are intermittent, there are no large areas of riparian vegetation. Production of perennial grasses is greatest at the upper ends of the alluvial flats and on the slopes where brush density does not inhibit growth.

Shallow, basalt origin soils are found in the Black Hills south of Cherry Creek. The alluvial flats are clay loams and are characteristically deep. The northern hills, including the Smoke Area, reflect granitic parent materials as does the north side of the Cherry Creek basin. Wide, sandy washes disect this area.

The Verde Valley is among the fastest growing areas in Arizona. The closeness of the allotment to Camp Verde (the southeast portion is in the city limits) and Cottonwood means that recreational use of the allotment is high. Human impacts are becoming the most important influence on the Verde allotment. The land between 279 and the Verde River will no longer be grazed because of the conflicts with development and the futility of maintaining fences to control grazing of the river's riparian vegetation. The lower part of the Smoke Area has been added to the Verde allotment to offset the loss of grazing capacity along the river.

Mule deer are common in the chaparral and woodland, but the impacts of human activity will limit antelope use of the desert shrub vegetation. Quail hunting is popular on the allotment, with the area between Cherry Road and I-17 having the largest populations of these birds. The growth of the Valley will reduce the area available for hunting, but will also increase the demand for non-hunting wildlife experiences.

Another recreational impact is the use of off-road vehicles (ORV's). The sandy washes, eroded areas and mining roads are attractive to these recreationists and the location of the allotment is convenient to Verde Valley ORV users.

HISTORY OF GRAZING

There is little specific information on grazing the Verde allotment prior to 1912, but it is known that the Verde Valley was grazed intensively during the 1800'S. Both cattle and sheep were documented as grazing the present Verde allotment. The historic levels of livestock grazing in the Verde Valley resulted in converting the Valley from a grassland (as noted in journals from 1860's) to the current eroded desert shrub dominated landscape. The shortage of forage in the Valley, and a drought in the 1890's, led to greatly reduced grazing by 1900.

In 1912, the Verde Community grazing allotment was established and was operative until 1939 when the Verde allotment was assigned to a single permittee. The present Verde allotment was formed in 1981 with the combination of the Hull Hill and Verde allotments.

Stocking on the Verde allotment has fluctuated, starting at 200 cattle year long in 1912, to 91 cattle in 1962. Trespass livestock play a significant role on the Verde allotment with the allotment boundary fences not being completed until 1950 and numerous incidences of trespass appearing in the allotment history.

PRESENT MANAGEMENT

The current grazing permit is for 188 cattle year long on the allotment. Cattle graze the entire allotment yearlong. A fence was constructed across the middle of the allotment in the early 1980's, but lack of adequate water has limited opportunities for grazing deferrment. The areas adjacent to Highway 279 produce an abundance of cool season annual grasses and forbs. These areas are grazed heavily every spring and as a result, perennial forage grasses are depleted and ground cover is sparse. Livestock move to higher, cooler areas with the onset of summer. In winter, the cattle distribute throughout the allotment. Riparian areas are used every year which reducescottonwood and willow reproduction.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Verde Allotment Management Plan reflect the emphasis of the Prescott National Forest Plan. Management areas are noted in parenthesis.

1. Increase grazing distribution for more efficient forage harvesting. (All)
2. Provide periodic growing season rest for forage and riparian plants. (3, 5)

3. Increase the percent vegetative composition of desirable forage grasses (5)

4. Increase the amount of ground cover for:

   a. Shelter for small game and ground nesting birds and

   b. Reduced runoff and improved rainfall infiltration.

5. Increase livestock access in the catclaw mimosa thicket on the north end. (5)

6. Reduce conflicts between livestock management and recreational use. (All)

PROPOSED MANAGEMENT

Control of livestock grazing is necessary to meet the plan objectives. The proposal is to construct the improvements needed for, and to implement, a three pasture rotation grazing system. The Forest Service has obtained a well on the Copper Canyon allotment, which has the potential for providing water to the south end of the Verde allotment. A pipeline under I-17 would serve the part of the Verde that now lacks any source of water. Resolution of water problems will allow the entire cattle herd to be grazed south of the division fence in a rotation grazing program.

A fence from the Smoke Area to the Hayfield Draw exclosure fence and another fence from the 279 right-of-way to the exclosure will create a north pasture.

A watershed condition survey is being conducted on the Verde Allotment. This survey will identify opportunities for soil stabilization and gully control. The Verde District Juniper Inventory and Analysis with Management Guidelines identifies opportunities for increasing vegetative diversity and ground cover on Hull Hill. Prescribed burning to enhance forage and riparian conditions will be considered in the Cherry Creek basin. Periodic burning of the catclaw,

combined with spring grazing (to reduce regrowth) will increase livestock access in this area. Any burning must be sensitive to air quality and public concerns in the Verde Valley; a quick efficient burn and an extensive public information program will be necessary.

The Hayfield Draw Off Road Vehicle Management Plan was implemented to address concerns identified during allotment planning. A cattleguard in the fence near Pfau Spring and an ORV cattleguard in the trail near 279 will significantly reduce problems resulting from open gates.

STRUCTURAL RANGE IMPROVEMENTS

1. JRB well pipeline, 2.5 miles
2. Water storage, 35 - 50 gallons
3. North division fence, 2 miles
4. Pfau cattleguard
5. Grapevine cattle guard.
6. Reconstruct Hull Hill pipeline, 0.25 mile
7. ORV cattleguard in the North fence near 279
8. New Pfau spring pipeline
9. Springs will be fenced wherever possible, collector pipelines and troughs will provide livestock water while allowing protection of the spring. Fencing will be three wire with a 22" bottom wire.
10. 5000 gallon water storage tanks will be installed at:
    a. Divide trough
    b. Cottonwood Spring (with feeder lines from Grapevine and Willow Springs).
    c. Goat Camp Spring
    d. Wilbur Well

NON-STRUCTURAL RANGE IMPROVEMENT

Prescribed burning of catclaw to improve access will be considered. Burning would be done in blocks to create stand diversity and improve access. Hull Hill is in the Verde Juniper Inventory and may be hand thinned to create vegetative diversity.

Grazing Schedule

A three pasture rest rotation grazing program will be implemented. South pasture is the unit south of the existing division fence. Central pasture is north of the existing division fence and south of the proposed cross fence. North/Hull pasture is composed of three units, Hull Hill, Smoke Area, and North (which is the area north of the proposed division fence). The cattle may be placed in one unit of the North/Hull pasture (at a time) and rotated through the three units, or they may be divided between the units, depending on the availability of water.

Pasture changes will be made in the Spring and Fall when cattle are gathered for branding or shipping. When forage or water is insufficient to support the cattle in one or more pastures, the rotation will be accelerated.

FOLLOW UP

Inspections will be conducted to monitor the effects of the plan. A grazing capacity study will be started when the management plan has been in effect through several complete grazing cycles.

GRAZE. ■ ROTATION—DEFERRED GRAZING WORK SHEET