

**DECISION NOTICE
AND
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

Manastash Allotment Complex
(Naches, Nile, Rattlesnake and Manastash Sheep Allotments)

USDA FOREST SERVICE
OKANOGAN AND WENATCHEE NATIONAL FORESTS
NACHES AND CLE ELUM RANGER DISTRICTS
YAKIMA AND KITTITAS COUNTIES, WASHINGTON

This Decision Notice documents my decision regarding actions proposed in the Manastash Complex Allotment Management Planning Environmental Assessment, September 2004. This decision notice also describes the rationale for my selection of an alternative for implementation of the Manastash Complex Allotment Management Plan. The Manastash Complex Allotment Management Planning Environmental Assessment is available on request from the Naches Ranger District, 10237 Hwy 12, Naches, WA 98937.

PROJECT LOCATION

The Naches, Nile and Rattlesnake Sheep Allotments are located on the Naches Ranger District, Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forests, in all or portions of the Mainstem Naches, Wenas, Little Naches and Rattlesnake watersheds. These three allotments are bounded on the north by the Naches/Cle Elum District boundary, on the east by the Naches District boundary, on the south by the Little Rattlesnake Creek and on the west by ridgelines east of Rattlesnake Creek, east of North Fork Rattlesnake Creek, south of Bumping River, east of Little Naches River, and north of Crow Creek to Cougar Valley. In legal terms, the allotments include all or parts of: Sections 1-2, 12, and 24-25, T15N, R13E; Sections 4-30 and 31-16, T15N, R14E; Sections 1-5, 8-16, and 22-25, T16N, R13E; Sections 1-36, T16N, R14E; Sections 1-5, 10-15, 18-19, 23-26, 30-31, and 35-36; T16N, R15E; Sections 12-14, 24-27 and 32-36, T17N, R13E, Sections 1-5 and 7-36, T17N, R14E, Sections 1-36, T17N, R15E, Sections 24-25, T18N, R11E, Sections 21-27, T18N, R12E, Sections 16-30, T18N, R13E; Sections 18-21, 25-30, and 32-36, T18N, R14E; and Sections 31-33, T18N, R15E. The Naches, Nile and Rattlesnake allotments encompass 58,030 acres, 53,857 acres and 16,837 acres, respectively.

The Manastash Sheep Allotment is located on the Cle Elum Ranger District, Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forests, in portions of the Taneum and Manastash watersheds. The allotment is bounded on the north and east by the Cle Elum District boundary, on the south by the Naches/Cle Elum District Boundary, and on the west by landmarks such as Shoestring Lake, Frost Meadows, Frost Mountain, the ridgeline east of Frost Creek, and lands east of the mouth of Lodgepole Creek. The legal description includes all or parts of Sections 1-4 and 12, T17N, R15E, Sections 1-3, 7-30, and 32-36, T18N, R15E, and Sections 13-16, 21-28, and 34-36, T19N R15E. The Manastash Allotment encompasses 27,356 acres.

THE DECISION

Based on the analysis documented in the Manastash Complex Allotment Management Plan Environmental Assessment (EA), the desired condition identified in the Wenatchee National

Forest Late Successional Reserve and Managed Late Successional Area Assessment (1997), the Naches Mainstem and Wenas Watershed Assessment (1995), the Rattlesnake Watershed Assessment (1997), the Little Naches Watershed Assessment (1994), the Taneum/Manastash Watershed Assessment (1994), the Clemens Bighorn Sheep Herd Plan (1995), and the management guidance provided in the biological assessments described on page I-15 and I-16 of the EA, it is my decision to select Alternative 3, the Adaptive Management Alternative, as analyzed in the EA, and described in this Decision Notice.

Under this decision, three bands of ewes with lambs will graze on four allotments as follows:

Allotment	Season of Use	Authorized Ewe/Lamb Pair
Naches	June 16 – August 31	872
Nile	June 16 – August 31	1050
Rattlesnake	June 20 – August 31	1000
Manastash	June 16 – September 16	822

The Naches, Nile and Rattlesnake Allotments will be managed under a rest-rotation grazing system that allows for grazing each allotment two of every three seasons, with each allotment resting the third season. This graze-rest system will provide for grazing two allotments and resting one annually. The Manastash Allotment will be managed independently of the other allotments and will be grazed annually. Certain trigger points have also been built into these alternatives that provide for changes (adaptive management) when the trigger points are reached, as described further below. Refer to the attached map for specific locations described below.

Manastash Allotment- Major Rerouting and Relocation of Bedgrounds

On the Manastash Allotment, I have decided to, implement major rerouting and relocation of bedgrounds to minimize or eliminate known adverse impacts to vegetation, soil, riparian and aquatic resources, and cultural properties. Rather than alternating the location of livestock turn out between the Taneum area (T19N, R15E, Section 25) and Buck Meadows (T18N, R15E, Section 23) as is done currently, turn out will be confined each year to the Taneum area. This alternative will reroute a majority of the previously established key route and eliminate and relocate associated bedgrounds, as necessary. Specifically, portions of the key grazing route in the vicinity of Cedar Creek, Larkin Spring, Taneum Junction, Grasshopper Flat, South Fork Manastash Creek, Buck Meadows, Frost Meadows, lower Willow Gulch, Tamarack Springs and Walter Springs will be rerouted to eliminate further adverse impacts.

In addition to the general design criteria and mitigation measures described on pages II-6 to II-9 of the EA, the following design criteria and mitigation measures will be applied to the Manastash Allotment (see pages II-10 to II-11 of the EA):

1. Grazing will be designed to not retard vegetative recovery in Buck Meadows and at Taneum Junction.
2. The Taneum Creek crossing will be on the bridge along the Taneum Road (Forest Road 3300). If this crossing is not adequate, the Range Administrator will work with the permittee to identify an alternate location.

3. A designated route will be established through the Buck Meadows area. The objective of this route will be to provide for livestock travel while avoiding on-going meadow restoration efforts.
4. Grazing will be designed to minimize conflicts with recreation uses as follows:

No bedding or trailing will occur at any time at the developed campgrounds/day-use sites/ special use sites identified below:

- Manastash (T18N, R15E, Sec 22 NW1/4)
- Icewater (T19N, R15E, Sec 25 NE1/4)
- Taneum Junction (T19N, R15E, Sec 26 NW1/4)
- Tamarack Springs (T18N, R15E, Sec 12 NE1/4)
- Riders Camp (T18N, R15E, Sec 23 SW1/4)

No bedding or trailing will occur through the following NW Forest Pass Trailheads and semi-developed heavily used dispersed sites on summer weekends (Friday through Sunday) or holidays.

- Manastash Trailhead (T18N, R15E, Sec 22 NW1/4)
- Riders Trailhead (T18N, R15E, Sec 23 SW1/4)
- Manastash Lake Trailhead (T18N, R15E, Sec 27 NE1/4)
- Shoestring Meadows Trailhead (T18N, R15E, Sec 16 NW1/4)

Naches, Nile and Rattlesnake Allotments

On the Naches, Nile and Rattlesnake Allotments, I have decided to implement management strategies that minimize or eliminate known adverse impacts to vegetation, soil and riparian and aquatic resources through minor modifications to the existing management scenario. In addition to minor modifications in the management of these allotments, this decision also provides options for each allotment to address issues associated with bighorn sheep. Refer to attached map for specific locations described below.

Naches Allotment

My decision implements minor modifications to the existing routing in the eastern-most portion of the Naches Allotment in the vicinity of Canteen Flats, Rocky Prairie and Two-Point Spring. Additionally, I have decided to implement monitoring of specific bedgrounds and portions of the route to ensure that activities are consistent with standards and guidelines and are moving toward desired objectives. Specific areas identified for monitoring include the area south of Canteen Flats (T17N, R15E, Section 26), the area adjacent to and surrounding Two-Point Springs (T17N, R15E, Section 14) and specific sensitive locations in the north-central portion of the allotment (EA, page II-11).

My decision also provides for an adaptive management approach to address issues associated with bighorn sheep. If domestic sheep encounters with bighorn sheep become a problem, as determined by the District Range Specialist in consultation with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, one of two scenarios will be implemented based on collaborative discussions between the Forest Service, the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the permittee.

Scenario A

Bighorn Sheep Scenario A will eliminate the routing of domestic sheep from “primary” bighorn sheep habitat as identified by the *Clemen Bighorn Sheep Herd Plan* (1995) prepared by the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife. This scenario will require that the domestic sheep route originate in the area north of Canteen Flat (T17N, R15E, Section 26) rather than on private land adjacent to the forest boundary to the south (T16N, R15E, Section 26). The key travel route will remain the same subsequent to leaving the new “load-out” location. Scenario A will also require that the domestic sheep be trucked onto the allotment rather than trailed from the adjacent private land.

Scenario B

Bighorn Sheep Scenario B will implement the concept of management by “emphasis area”. This scenario requires that the domestic sheep route originate in the area north of Canteen Flat (T17N, R15E, Section 26) rather than on private land adjacent to the forest boundary to the south (T16N, R15E, Section 21) and that the domestic sheep be trucked onto the allotment rather than trailed. However, under Scenario B the route will continue in a north-westerly direction staying well north of the present route. This scenario will require that new bedgrounds be identified along the relocated route. Location of bedgrounds will be consistent with the design criteria and mitigation measures identifies on pages II-6-9 of the EA.

Grazing will be designed to minimize conflicts with recreation uses as follows:

No bedding or trailing will occur at any time at the developed campgrounds/day-use sites/ special use sites identified below:

- Kaner Flat Campground (T18N, R14E, Sec 32 NW1/4)
- Crow Creek Campground (T18N, R14 E, Sec 30 SE)

No bedding or trailing will occur through the following NW Forest Pass Trailheads and semi-developed heavily used dispersed sites on summer weekends (Friday through Sunday) or holidays.

- Milk Pond (T17N, R14E, Sec 2 SW1/4)
- Long Meadow (T18N, R14E, Sec 30 SE1/4)
- Longmire Meadow (T18N, R13E, Sec 24 SE1/4)
- Ponderosa Camp (T18N, R14E, Sec 29 W1/2)

Nile Allotment

I am authorizing minor modifications at various locations along the existing route to minimize adverse impacts to riparian areas and spring locations. Portions of the route in Dry Creek (T16N, R14E, Section 36) and specific areas in the most northwesterly portion of the allotment (T17N, R14E, Section 20) include areas where slight modifications in routing will avoid areas of concern such as riparian and culturally sensitive sites. Specific areas identified for monitoring include Orr Creek (T16N, R14E, Section 28), Devil Creek (T17N, R14E, Sections 19, 20 and 30) and associated unnamed tributaries (T17N, R14E, Sections 26, 27 and 28).

My decision also provides an option to address issues associated with bighorn sheep by restricting the southern extent of the key travel route. Relocating the route north several miles to Dry Ridge (T16N, R14E, Section 36) will provide a narrow buffer (1-1½ miles) between the key route and suitable bighorn sheep habitat.

I am including a mitigation measure that requires, concurrent with the implementation of a site specific watershed restoration effort in the forested portion of the Nile Mill Site, that any bedgrounds determined to prevent attainment of restoration objectives will be eliminated and relocated to a suitable location elsewhere (EA page II-13).

Grazing will be designed to minimize conflicts with recreation uses as follows:

No bedding or trailing will occur at any time at the developed campgrounds/day-use sites/ special use sites identified below:

- Halfway Flats Campground (T17N, R14E, Sec 9 NE 1/4)
- Boulder Cave Day Use Site (T17N, R14E, Sec 15 SW 1/4)
- Outfitter Guide Base Camp (T17N, R14E, Sec 21 NW 1/4)
- Camp Roganunda Horse Staging Area (T17N, R14E, Sec 21 NE1/4)

No bedding will occur at the following trailheads or dispersed sites:

- Halfway Flats South (T17N, R14E, Sec 15 SE1/4)

Rattlesnake Allotment

On the Rattlesnake Allotment, I have decided to implement minor modifications to the existing routing in the vicinity of Three Creeks. My decision will eliminate grazing from the Three Creeks meadow complex until streambank recovery is evident. Indicators of watershed recovery will include, but not be limited to, vegetative condition, ground cover, extent of streambank revegetation and streambank stability. Additionally, this decision requires the monitoring of specific bedgrounds and portions of the route to ensure that activities are consistent with standards and guidelines and are moving toward desired objectives. Specific areas identified for monitoring include Devil's Table (T15N, R14E, Section 13), the area along the Little Rattlesnake Creek (T15N, R14E, Section 25) and specific sensitive locations in the central portion of the allotment (T15N, R14E, Section 15 and 22).

I have also decided to follow an adaptive management approach with respect to bighorn sheep encounters on the Rattlesnake Allotment. Under this strategy, one of two options will be implemented when triggered by encounters to address issues associated with bighorn sheep. The choice of scenarios will be based on collaborative discussions between the Forest Service, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the permittee.

Scenario A

Bighorn Sheep Scenario A eliminates the existing key travel route from Devil's Table (T15N, R14E, Section 13). Under this scenario the key travel route will initiate in the vicinity of the junction of Forest Roads 1500 and 1503 rather than at Forest Road 1500-114.

Scenario B

Bighorn Sheep Scenario B will modify the timing of domestic sheep grazing by reversing the direction of travel along the existing route. Under this scenario the location of the key travel route will remain the same as under the No Action alternative (current management scenario); however, movement along the route will be in reverse of what it is at the present time.

Grazing will be designed to minimize conflicts with recreation uses as follows:

No bedding or trailing will occur at any time at the developed campgrounds/day-use sites/ special use sites identified below:

- McDaniel Lake (T15 N, R14E, Sec 8, NW1/4)

No bedding will occur at the following trailheads or dispersed sites:

- Mt. Aix Trailhead (T15N R13E, Sec 1 SE1/4)
- Rattlesnake Springs (T11N, Range 14E, Sec 11 NE1/4)
- Rattlesnake Trailhead (T15N, R13E, Sec17 NE1/4)
- Soda Springs/Coral Meadows Complex (T14N, R14E, Sec33 S1/2)

Mitigation and Design Features

Design Criteria/Mitigation Measures for the selected Alternative 3 include those described on pages II-6 to II-9. These design criteria/mitigation measures were developed to protect soil, water, riparian and aquatic resources, vegetation, bighorn sheep, heritage resources, PETS species, recreation, and concerns related to noxious weed spread. In addition, based on the findings in the analysis, and the issues raised in the public comments on the EA, I have decided to add the following measures:

1. Management of the Manastash Allotment Complex will include implementation of the Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests Noxious Weed Prevention Strategy.
2. Although no road management decisions (including road closures) are being made as part of this decision, existing closed roads may be assessed and utilized for bedground locations. Focusing use in these areas will minimize new disturbance in previously undisturbed locations.
3. In the event indicators for bighorn sheep are triggered (known domestic-bighorn sheep encounters, Page C-4 of the EA), discussions between the Forest Service, the permittee and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife will be initiated to collaboratively identify the most appropriate management scenario to proceed with. (i.e., Scenario A, Scenario B or No Action at this time).
4. In the event it is necessary to make significant adjustments to bedground locations, a soil scientist will be utilized as part of an Interdisciplinary Team prior to closure or relocation of bedgrounds.
5. Closures of bedgrounds, rerouting of sheep, and other management strategies will be coordinated with the permittee prior to implementation to ensure decisions are workable and economically feasible.

Monitoring Framework

Monitoring and assessment is a primary component of Alternative 3 (Adaptive Management). Under Alternative 3, the adaptive management strategy is intended to provide for selection of one, or a combination of proposed options, as necessary over time. Monitoring will track a suite of “indicators”. These indicators, in combination with the standards and guidelines identified on, pages I-8 to I-14 of the EA, will be used to determine when ranges of tolerance or trigger points have been met or exceeded. This information will provide the foundation on which decisions regarding changes in management and implementation of alternative scenarios will be based (e.g., establishment of new bedgrounds under the criteria established in this analysis). The Monitoring Framework is included in its’ entirety in Appendix C of the EA.

RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION

I have selected Alternative 3 because I feel it best meets the purpose and need and will contribute to the desired future condition identified in the EA. The purpose and need for this action is two-

fold: 1) to provide for an appropriate level of domestic livestock grazing, as set forth in the Wenatchee National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1990); and 2) to ensure that authorized grazing complies with applicable federal environmental laws, regulation and Forest Service policies and procedures, specifically in relation to the amended Wenatchee Forest Plan standards and guidelines. Because the Wenatchee Forest Plan recognizes the continuing need for forage production from the Forest and previously determined that these allotments were suitable for livestock grazing, this decision continues this allocated use. Under this decision, grazing of the number of ewe/lamb pairs and the season of use will be as described above. However, because it is also recognized that there is a need to maintain or improve resource conditions in specific areas, this decision also addresses multiple resource objectives associated with 1) soil, water and fisheries; 2) plant and animal species of special concern; 3) special and unique habitats; 4) noxious weeds; and 5) cultural properties.

To address the need for improved resource conditions related to soil erosion and streambank stability, specific portions of the existing routing and previously established bed-grounds will be modified to avoid susceptible areas and streamside access points will be hardened to minimize adverse impacts. Routing and bedding areas may, if necessary, be restricted to avoid encounters between domestic sheep and bighorn sheep, special and unique habitats and plant species of concern. Grazing and associated actions will also avoid known cultural properties. Criteria have been developed for establishment of new bedding areas and grazing routes. Routes and bed areas that require relocation or elimination from future use will be rehabilitated as needed. Structural rangeland developments will be maintained or developed to facilitate the improvement of resource conditions and management of domestic livestock.

As well as the above advantages, I believe that Alternative 3 provides for flexibility during implementation of the action to respond to changing conditions and unexpected results over time. The selected strategy emphasizes short and long-term resource objectives and provides an array of management options that meet or move toward the objectives identified in the EA. Furthermore, monitoring and subsequent evaluation of results will occur over time to determine if adjustments in management are necessary to ensure continued progress toward the defined objectives.

In addition, based on the analysis documented in the EA, I believe the selected alternative best responds to the significant issues as follows:

1. Riparian and Aquatic Health -

With implementation of the design criteria the project will not be likely to impact aquatic and riparian habitat, will meet the Riparian Reserve standards and guidelines and will contribute to restoration of the affected watersheds over the long-term. Heavy grazing will be moved away from riparian restoration areas and away from riparian reserves, routes and crossings on fish bearing streams have been adjusted, and restrictions have been added to the locations of bedgrounds. Further, this alternative is expected to maintain current habitat conditions in all watersheds and contribute to maintaining or restoring the fifth-field watersheds over the long-term, therefore not adversely affecting Essential Fish Habitat (Pages III-26 to III-34 of the EA).

Manastash Allotment. Alternative 3 affords more protection to Cedar Creek, Larkin Spring, Grasshopper Flat, South Fork Manastash Creek, Frost Meadows, Willow Gulch, Tamarack Springs, Three Creeks Meadow, Buck Meadows, and Taneum Junction. Bedground criteria

required in Alternative 3 will prevent accelerated erosion to stream channels, prevent a reduction in riparian plant cover that helps anchor streambanks, and will provide shade and organic matter to streams. The pre-approved designated routes will avoid riparian habitat and is not expected to result in adverse impacts to aquatic and riparian habitat such as accelerated erosion, loss of bank stability, shade or organic input due to grazing, other than in those areas discussed above to be avoided or mitigated. By avoiding streams, the potential for adverse effects due to administrative error such as insufficient compliance monitoring is minimized.

Naches and Nile Allotments. With implementation of the design criteria there will be no impacts to habitat elements. Avoiding Clemans Mountain will protect cryptogammic crusts and thus protect soil productivity. Alternative 3 will provide less potential risk due to administrative error by staying high in the drainages on predominately dry slopes and above the fish-bearing portions of the streams. Bull trout, steelhead and spring Chinook potential spawning and rearing areas will be avoided except where the route crosses the Little Naches River. By crossing on road 1902, no individuals of any species will likely be harmed by trampling (pages III-31 to III-32 of the EA).

Rattlesnake Allotment. No grazing impacts would be expected in any scenarios under Alternative 3. All scenarios avoid Three Creeks Meadow, so grazing will not further contribute to the degraded conditions and should help stream banks and vegetation recover (Page III-32 of the EA).

2. Upland and Terrestrial Health

Soil Productivity

Alternative 3 makes adjustments in many of the grazing practices which have been recognized as contributing to cumulative watershed effects. Under Alternative 3 (adaptive), bedgrounds have been relocated, will be used differently than in the past (i.e., one night versus multiple nights), or will be avoided entirely and routing will be changed to avoid the most sensitive upland areas. Provisions for monitoring and subsequent adjustments in grazing practices are included in this alternative to ensure that practices are compatible with achieving upland ecosystem health. (Pages III-47 to III-49 of the EA).

Manastash Allotment. Under this alternative, a number of adjustments to locations of bedgrounds and routing of sheep will address identified soil productivity issues. Bedgrounds identified as contributing to adverse soil impacts are relocated or eliminated under this alternative (Pages B-2 to B-4 of the EA). In addition to bedground changes, adjustments in routing will avoid approximately 100 acres of moist to wet soil types, which should reduce the risk of soil compaction. While the new route will increase the number of acres of shallow/rocky soils within the routed area, the areas of severe soil erosion risk and severe soil compaction will both be reduced under this alternative. Changes in the alignment of the route along the South Fork Manastash Creek, South Fork Taneum Creek, and South Cle Elum Ridge should result in avoidance of soils that are susceptible to compaction and erosion. In these areas the impacts associated with repeated passes over the same ground and bedgrounds used multiple nights on sensitive soil sites are expected to be eliminated. Watershed restoration projects are expected to experience increased shrub and hardwood growth along riparian areas; increasing ground cover, increasing rooting strength and reducing soil erosion (Pages III-47 to III-48 of the EA).

Naches, Nile and Rattlesnake Allotments. Under Alternative 3, emphasis on protection of soil, water and riparian resources will continue. Areas that have been identified as higher risk for potential future adverse effects are proposed for more intensive monitoring. Under this alternative, the Forest Plan standards for soil resource protection are expected to be met. The adaptive management strategy will allow for future changes in grazing management if necessary to meet soil standards (Pages III-48 to III-49 of the EA).

Vegetation

Implementation of Alternative 3 will address the need to maintain and improve upland vegetation conditions related to domestic sheep grazing. This strategy will provide for the management of known livestock-related issues relative to plant community composition, structure and productivity through the modification, elimination and/or reestablishment of grazing routes and associated bedgrounds away from presently degraded areas and areas susceptible to adverse impacts. Rerouting the grazing routes and relocating beds and other activities away from sensitive locations (including cryptogammic crusts) will likely result in an improvement in plant species composition and structure in identified areas of concern over time by reducing the overall intensity, duration and frequency of grazing at these individual locations. A site that supports a more desirable species composition is also more likely to resist the establishment and spread of noxious weeds and other undesirable vegetation.

This alternative also provides for the restoration of previously disturbed plant communities along grazing routes and at bedding areas. I believe the management flexibility provided by this alternative will enhance the likelihood that past and on-going restoration efforts will be successful. Alternative 3, presents the opportunity to capture potentially available forage by providing for both key travel routes and secondary routes. Most importantly, the selected alternative will allow for the modification of management strategies needed to respond to changing conditions and unexpected outcomes across a relatively large landscape area over time. For example, although no PETS plants were located, the selection of this alternative affords protection to those that may be located in the future. The monitoring framework provided by this alternative further ensures the opportunity for administrators to effectively respond to changing conditions or ineffective management strategies (Pages III-61 to III-65 of the EA).

Although I recognize the potential for conflict between wild ungulates and domestic livestock, the selected alternative provides the opportunity to route domestic livestock away from areas heavily utilized by wild grazing ungulates, thus lessening the impacts of overlapping use by the two species. We will continue to work closely with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and the USDA Wenatchee Forest Sciences Lab to determine the relationship of forage utilization to forage production within these allotments, and to the use patterns of wild ungulates in this area.

3. Wildlife-Bighorn Sheep

Although the findings of the EA indicate that the effects of Alternative 3 without immediate implementation of a bighorn sheep scenario are similar to the effects of the No Action Alternative (current management scenario) (Pages III-92 to III-100), I do not feel that the past and present situation on the ground dictates the implementation of additional restrictions at this time. My decision is based on the fact that, as of the present time, there have been no documented cases of pasturella in any of the allotments under analysis. Further, there is no evidence to suggest that the previous decisions to graze domestic sheep on these allotments for

the last 40+ years has had an adverse impact on the health of the existing bighorn sheep herds. Additionally, there is not currently a herd plan in place for two of the allotments under consideration (Nile and Rattlesnake). I believe that implementing restrictions to domestic livestock based on adverse impacts to bighorn sheep may be premature. In addition, the selected adaptive management strategy provides a process to address encounters as they become a problem by establishing indicators as triggers to implement more restrictive management measures. I feel this strategy allows for continuation of the current use of these allotments while providing for a rapid response in the event encounters are documented.

4. Rangeland Resources – Loss of Social and Economic Value

The selection of Alternative 3 addresses the two-fold purpose and need of this proposal; 1) to provide for an appropriate level of domestic livestock grazing as set forth in the Wenatchee National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1990) and 2) to ensure that authorized grazing complies with applicable federal environmental laws, regulation and Forest Service policies and procedures, specifically in relation to Wenatchee Forest Plan and the Northwest Forest Plan amendment standards and guidelines. The adaptive strategy provided under this alternative recognizes the continuing need for forage production from the Forest and continues this use. This alternative provides the flexibility necessary during implementation of the grazing operation to respond to changing conditions and unexpected results over time. This is particularly important because of the scale of the area under consideration, changing environmental conditions and the associated uncertainties regarding the effects of the proposal.

The selection of this strategy will not result in adverse economic impacts to the local permittee or result in a reduction in value to the local, regional and national livestock economy, nor will it adversely affect the local tax base since the permittee will continue to provide employment and patronize businesses in town for feed, equipment, gasoline, and supplies. My decision will also maintain traditional land use practices and long-standing relationships between local individuals and the landscapes from which they have derived their livelihood and sense of place for decades, which I believe to be important (Pages III-28 to III-30 of the EA).

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

No Action (Current Management Scenario)

The No Action Alternative would result in the Forest continuing to administer the Manastash, Naches, Nile and Rattlesnake Sheep Allotments under the current management scenario. Under this alternative, resource issues relative to soil, water and fisheries; plant and animal species of concern; special and unique habitats; noxious weeds; and cultural properties which are associated with domestic sheep grazing would continue to occur. The No Action alternative does not provide an opportunity to address the identified need to maintain or improve upland ecosystem health as related to domestic livestock grazing. Further, this alternative does not ensure that authorized grazing complies with applicable federal environmental laws, regulations and Service policies and procedures, specifically in relation to forest plan standards and guidelines.

No Grazing

Under this alternative, no forage would be made available to livestock and all grazing permits would be canceled upon implementation of the decision and resolution of the appeals process. No permits would be issued for any of the allotments. All existing improvements would be abandoned. Exterior fences would be assigned to adjacent permittees for continued maintenance.

The No Action alternative was not selected because it does not meet the purpose of and need for the project. Specifically, it does not provide for an appropriate level of domestic livestock grazing as set forth in the Wenatchee National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1990). This alternative would result in a small reduction in the local tax base; as the permittee would no longer continue to provide employment or patronize businesses in town for feed, equipment, gasoline, and supplies to the degree they are currently. Selection of the No Grazing alternative would adversely affect traditional land use practices and long-standing relationships between local individuals and the landscapes from which they have derived their livelihood for decades. The environmental analysis did not identify environmental effects of a magnitude that would lead me to believe that grazing needs to be eliminated from any of the allotments.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Formal public involvement for the project was initiated on September 21, 2001, when a description of the proposed action was mailed to individuals, organizations and Federal, State and County agencies thought to have an interest in the project. An interdisciplinary team (IDT) approach was utilized to identify significant issues and consider alternatives presented by resource specialists, public response and management. The public comment period was on-going throughout the environmental analysis process. Three written comment letters and two verbal (via telephone conversation) comments were received. By utilizing information gleaned throughout the scoping process, the IDT was able to identify significant issues and formulate alternatives to the proposed action. Alternatives developed to date were presented at a Trails and Wilderness Interest Group meeting at Naches Ranger Station on June 3, 2003 to receive additional input and address questions and concerns relative to the proposal. The project was also identified in the Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) for the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forests beginning the 4th quarter (October-December) of 1999. The SOPA was mailed to a variety of individuals, groups and government agencies, and was also available for public viewing on the Forest website. Significant controversy relative to this project was not evident at any time during the scoping process.

The completed Environmental Assessment was sent by the Naches Ranger District to anyone who had indicated an interest in the project on August 9, 2004 for a 30 day review period. Three letters containing comments on the Environmental Assessment were submitted during the comment period. The comments received formed four broad categories: effects on water quality and aquatic species, effects on soil productivity and vegetation, the effects on the rangeland resource, and concerns with the bighorn sheep scenarios. In addition, one response indicated a concern relative to the level of magnitude associated with the effects described for the current management scenario. The commenter felt that the scale of the effects described on at least a portion of the allotments, while possibly valid at a localized site, were overstated when assessed at the larger scale. All comments received during the comment period were considered in my final decision.

CONSISTENCY WITH THE FOREST PLAN, LAWS, REGULATIONS, AND POLICIES

The guiding management direction for the analysis area is provided by the 1990 Wenatchee National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan (1994). The analysis supporting my decision relied on completed watershed assessments

(Naches Mainstem Watershed Assessment (1995), Rattlesnake Watershed Assessment (1997), Little Naches Watershed Assessment (1994), Taneum/Manastash Watershed Assessment (1999)) and Late-Successional Reserve Assessments (Wenatchee National Forest, Late-Successional Reserve and Managed Late-Successional Area Assessment (1997)) to inform the analysis, and fully describe the effects of the selected alternative on the watershed conditions (Chapter III, pages III-1 to III-142). In general, these documents describe the watersheds that are affected by my decision as meeting Forest Plan standards and guidelines with respect to watershed health, riparian habitat and aquatic species. They did, however, identify some isolated site-specific locations of concern relative to soil compaction and water quality. These concerns have been addressed by the design criteria and mitigation measures identified in my decision.

All required surveys for special status species (PETS) have been conducted as part of the environmental analysis. No plant species included on the current special status species lists were located. Currently, listed proposed, threatened and endangered species found in the project area include the bald eagle, Canada lynx, gray wolf, grizzly bear, marbled murrelet, and northern spotted owl. Critical Habitat has also been designated for the northern spotted owl. This project would not affect current habitat for the bald eagle, marbled murrelet, and northern spotted owl. It would also have no affect on Designated Critical Habitat for the northern spotted owl. The habitat elements required by the bald eagle, marbled murrelet, northern spotted owl, and Designated Critical Habitat for the northern spotted owl will not be altered by any of the actions proposed under this analysis. With respect to Canada lynx, gray wolf and grizzly bear, the findings of the EA indicate that these species are not likely to be adversely affected by this decision.

Sensitive species found on the Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests include the California Mountain kingsnake, California wolverine, common loon, sharptail grouse, eared grebe, ferruginous hawk, gray flycatcher, great gray owl, Larch Mountain salamander, Van Dyke's salamander, northwestern pond turtle, Pacific fisher, peregrine falcon, western sage grouse, sandhill crane, sharptail snake, striped whipsnake, Townsend's big-eared bat, upland sandpiper, western gray squirrel, and fringed myotis (Forest Service Regional Forester's Sensitive Species list, 2000). Of these, there is no habitat in the project area for the Van Dyke's salamander, California Mountain kingsnake, common loon, sharptail grouse, eared grebe, ferruginous hawk, northwestern pond turtle, western sage grouse, sandhill crane, striped whipsnake, upland sandpiper, and western gray squirrel. Habitat for the California Wolverine, Larch Mountain salamander, Pacific Fisher, peregrine falcon, Townsend's big-eared bat, sharptail snake, and fringed myotis would not be affected by activities associated with this project as the habitat elements used by these species will not be altered by the actions proposed under this analysis.

Grazing is likely to occur in habitats used by the gray flycatcher due to the availability of forage. Reduction of herbaceous and shrub ground cover could reduce the habitat of insect prey species of the gray flycatcher but is not expected to result in an adverse effect (EA pages III-108 and III-111). The great gray owl uses meadows and other open areas to hunt for prey. Grazing by ungulates, both wild and domestic has the potential to reduce habitat quality and quantity of prey species by reducing cover and/or forage from meadows and other openings. The EA findings indicate that this project would not affect current habitat for the northern spotted owl, nor will it have an affect on Designated Critical Habitat for the northern spotted (EA, page III-67).

Habitat for the MIS species: Primary Cavity Excavators, Pileated Woodpeckers, and Marten and Northern Three-toed Woodpeckers should not be affected by activities associated with sheep grazing. The habitat elements required by these species will not be altered by actions proposed under this analysis. As discussed in the EA, the potential for a conflict for forage between domestic livestock and Rocky Mountain Elk, Mule Deer and Mountain Goats has been recognized (EA, pages III-70 to III-75, III-57 to III-62, III-100 to III-101). The impacts to riparian dependent species, including beaver/ruffed grouse and many Neotropical migrants, include the removal of cover and food sources. However, selection of this alternative will result in an overall improvement from the current habitat conditions for these species (EA, pages III-83, III-120 to III-121).

Although localized areas of soil disturbance will result from this decision, these impacts do not exceed the Forest Plan standards as applied to the activity area (allotment) (EA, pages III-39 to III-49).

This decision is consistent with Forest Plan management direction for range management for this area, which has as its objectives the management of the range resource to maintain and improve vegetative conditions and the provision of opportunities to enhance other resource values through the use of livestock (Wenatchee Forest Plan, page IV-3). Under the Northwest Forest Plan, the changes to the trailing and bedding of sheep will help to ensure that Riparian Reserves are given adequate protection and that Aquatic Conservation Strategy Objectives are met, consistent with the grazing management standards and guidelines (EA, pages III-26 to 34).

A thorough discussion of the forest plan direction, laws, regulations and policies specific to the lands within the analysis area is provided on pages I-5 to I-16 of the EA.

Additional direction comes from the need to meet the Rescission Bill schedule. Section 504(a) of the 1995 Rescission Act, Public Law 104-19, pertains to grazing on National Forest System Lands, specifically allotment analysis, grazing permit issuance, and compliance with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The Rescission Act requires environmental analysis and decisions on allotments within the National Forest system for which NEPA is needed to be completed by 2010. The allotment analyses that are the subject of this decision were scheduled for completion in 2004.

The laws, regulations and Forest Service policies that apply to the allotment management planning are described on pages I-5 to I-16 of the EA. The selected alternative has been examined and found to be in compliance with the legislative requirements. In particular, the approved activities are consistent with the Clean Water Act (EA, pages III-1 to III-34), the National Historic Preservation Act (EA, pages III-130 to III-139; Heritage Resources Specialist Report in the Analysis File), the Endangered Species Act (EA pages III-65 to III-123, pages III-63 and III-65 and USFWS and National Marine Fisheries Service Letters of Concurrence, dated May 3, 2004 and April 7, 2004 respectively, in the Analysis File), the National Environmental Policy Act, and the National Forest Management Act.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

After considering the environmental effects described in the *Manastash Complex Allotment Management Plan Environmental Assessment* and in this Decision Notice, I have determined that

the actions associated with Alternative 3 are not a major federal action that individually or cumulatively will significantly affect the quality of the human environment, thus, an Environmental Impact Statement is not needed. This determination is based on analysis of the context and intensity of the environmental effects, including the following factors:

1. The selected alternative will have a limited overall positive effect on public health and safety by limiting the occurrence of livestock on Forest Service roadways. In addition, the public will be informed through signing and public notices that livestock are present (EA, page III-140).
2. The selected alternative will not affect any unique characteristics, such as prime farmlands, parklands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas. Wet meadows are present, however, restrictions have been applied to reduce potential impacts. (EA, pages II-6 to II-9).
3. There will be no apparent significant impacts to soil, water, fisheries, or wildlife resources or other components of the environment. This analysis considered cumulative effects of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions within the National Forest lands in the potentially affected area (EA, pages III-1 to III-142).
4. The environmental analysis included in the EA and incorporated by reference into this Decision Notice, indicates that the selected alternative will have no significant adverse impacts on heritage resources, given the mitigation measures associated with the alternatives. The Washington State Historic Preservation Office has been consulted and has concurred with the finding of no effect on heritage properties (EA, pages III-130 to III-139).
5. Evaluations for Proposed, Endangered, Threatened, and Sensitive Plants found there were no Proposed, Endangered, Threatened or Sensitive (PETS) plant populations known to occur within the Manastash Allotment Complex Project Area therefore, no direct or indirect effects to PETS plant populations are anticipated as a result of any of the proposed alternatives. (EA, page III-63 to III-65).
6. A Biological Evaluation has been completed for Proposed, Endangered, Threatened, and Sensitive wildlife species. Habitat is present for a number of these species within or adjacent to the project area. Informal consultation has been completed with the USDI - Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service for Alternative 3 of Adaptive Management Strategy for the Manastash Complex Allotment Planning Project. Consultation for the Manastash Complex Allotment Planning Project was completed on January 27, 2004 with the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service. The USDA Forest Service analysis concluded: “may affect, not likely to adversely affect” the Canada lynx, gray wolf, grizzly bear and bull trout, and will not adversely modify or destroy proposed critical habitat for bull trout in the Columbia River DPS; “no affect” on the marbled murrelet, northern bald eagle, northern spotted owl, and Designated Critical Habitat for the northern spotted owl. (EA pages III-67, III-107 to III-108, III-111, and the *Manastash Complex Allotment Management Plan, Biological Evaluation for PETS Species*, March 3, 2004, located in the analysis file). The USDI

Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with the above determination (Concurrence letter dated May 3, 2004, located in analysis file).

A Biological Assessment has been completed for Middle Columbia River steelhead and Chinook and coho salmon (Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act). The USDA Forest Service analysis concluded: may affect, not likely to adversely affect the Middle Columbia River steelhead; and will not adversely affect Essential Fish Habitat. With respect to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (EA, pages III-27 to III-34, and the *Nile, Naches, Rattlesnake and Manastash Grazing Allotment Management Plan Update, Aquatic Biological Assessment*, 2004). The National Marine Fisheries Service concurred with the above determination (Concurrence letter dated April 7, 2004, located in analysis file).

7. The proposed action is in compliance with relevant Federal, State, and local laws, regulations, and requirements designed for protection of the environment as described above.
8. These alternatives do not set a precedent for other projects that may be implemented to meet the goals and objectives of the Wenatchee Forest Plan (WFP). Any future decisions will need to consider all relevant scientific and site-specific information available at that time.
9. The effects on the quality of the human environment of implementing the alternative is not likely to be highly controversial. A considerable body of scientific literature is available on the effects of livestock grazing on biological and physical resources (EA pages III-1 to III-2, III-35 to III-39, III-51 to III-52, III-65 to III-81, and VI-1 to VI-18).
10. Due to the long history of livestock grazing in the eastern Cascades and on the Naches and Cle Elum Ranger Districts, as well as, the body of science developed relating to ungulate grazing and range management, there are no known effects on the human environment that are uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks (EA pages III-1 to III-142).
11. Both beneficial and adverse effects have been taken into consideration when making this determination of significance. Beneficial effect have not, however, been used to offset or compensate for potential adverse effects (EA pages III-1 to III-142).

PROJECT APPEAL

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215. Any written notice of appeal of the decision must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 215.14, "Appeal Content." The notice of appeal must be postmarked, hand delivered, or faxed to the Regional Forester, ATTN: 1570 APPEALS, P.O. Box 3623, Portland, Oregon, 97208-3623, fax (509) 808-2255, or sent electronically to appeals-pacificnorthwest-regional-office@fs.fed.us within 45 days of the date the legal notice of this decision appears in the *Wenatchee World*. Hand deliveries must be made between 7:45AM and 4:30 PM Monday through Friday, except legal holidays. Electronic appeals must be submitted only to the e-mail address shown above as part of the actual e-mail message, or as an

attachment in Microsoft Word, rich text format or Adobe portable document format only. E-mails in other formats or containing viruses will be rejected.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

This project will not be implemented for 50 days from the date the legal notice of this decision appears in the *Wenatchee World* newspaper (Wenatchee, Washington). If no appeal is received, the project can be implemented immediately. If an appeal is received, implementation will not occur until 15 days after the appeal decision.

For further information, contact Jodi Leingang, Range Administrator, Naches Ranger District, ADDRESS, Naches, WA 98937, or at (509) 653-1450.

JAMES L. BOYNTON
Forest Supervisor

Date