

Appendix C: Public Comment Responses

Comment Number	Commenter	Comment	Response
1	Western Watershed Project (WWP)	BLM used the wrong EIS in the EA and S&G	The Upper Gila San-Simon Grazing EIS has been incorporated and is now appropriately referenced throughout the EA and RHE.
2	WWP	There are no specific objectives listed for this allotment in the above plans,” would be inaccurate. The UGEIS lists resource objectives for wildlife populations, plant density, forage availability, and watershed objectives for the Limestone allotment	The specific objectives for the Limestone allotment are now included in both the Limestone RHE and referenced in chapter 2 of the EA.
3	WWP	The S&G obviously doesn’t address how well the allotment is meeting these goals, and the EA would need to be revised in light of this major difference	The RHE and EA now address these specific objectives and explain why these objectives are no longer applicable to the allotment. The RHE sets new objectives as part of Standard 3.
4	WWP	We note that the Upper Gila-San Simon Grazing EIS was finalized in 1978, nearly forty years ago. The analysis of livestock grazing in that document is woefully outdated, and to the extent that the BLM is relying on tiering to it to justify the scant analysis in the EA, that reliance would be highly problematic and in contravention of the law	Decisions in UG-SSEIS were reviewed and incorporated into Safford RMP, also reviewed and Safford RMP amended with implementations of Land Health Standards. The EA steps down from the Upper Gila San-Simon with an analysis of continued livestock grazing on the Limestone allotment.
5	WWP	The Biological Opinion states that this allotment was covered in Consultation #02-21-00-F- 0029, or the Biological Opinion for Livestock Grazing on 18 Allotments along the Middle Gila River Ecosystem, a.k.a. “18 Allotments BO.” FWS 2012 at 2,193, 215. However, the 18 Allotment BO does not include the Limestone Allotment.	The BO for the Gila District Livestock Grazing Program states that the Limestone allotment was previously covered by Amendment No 1 Phoenix District AZ Grazing EIS Upper Gila San Simon (2-21-96-F-422 and 423)
6	WWP	Please explain the consultation history of this allotment in the revised EA.	Biological consultations that apply to the Limestone allotment are consultations that were done on multiple allotments. The Limestone allotment was included in the initial consultation for the Safford and Tucson Field Office’s Livestock Grazing Program including the five amendments: <i>Programmatic Biological Opinion for the Safford/Tucson Field Offices’ Livestock Grazing Program, Southeastern Arizona (#02-21-96-F-0160) with reinitiations (1997 BO)</i> ; The Limestone allotment was also included in the consultation on the UG-EIS which was done in 1996: <i>Biological Opinions for the Phoenix District Portion of the Eastern Arizona Grazing EIS and</i>

			<p><i>the Upper Gila-San Simon Grazing EIS (#02-21-96-F-0422 and #02-21-96-F-0423) with amendment (Phoenix District BOs)</i></p> <p>Finally, the Limestone allotment was also included in the consultation on the Gila District Livestock Grazing Program that was done in 2012: <i>Biological Opinion on the Gila District Livestock Grazing Program</i> #’s 02-21-92-F-0070 02-21-96-F-0160 02-21-96-F-0422 02-21-96-F-0423 02-21-00-F-0029 02-21-03-F-0462 02-21-04-F-0022 02-21-04-F-0454 02-21-05-F-0086 22410-2006-F-0414 22410-2007-F-0119 22410-2007-F-0225 22410-2007-F-0233 22410-2008-F-0103</p>
7	WWP	The Limestone allotment EA includes a Biological Evaluation (BE) that addresses the Sonoran desert tortoise, grey wolf, and ocelot. EA at 29. The EA also contains a list of “Wildlife Resources.” EA at 31. Neither document addresses southwestern willow flycatcher	SWFL added to both documents
8	WWP	The Limestone allotment is certainly within five miles of critical habitat for this species and the failure to even mention the bird in the EA violates NEPA and the Endangered Species Act.	SWFL added to both documents. SWFL covered in Gila District Grazing BO
9	WWP	The EA contains very little information regarding range developments, much less any analysis of cowbird concentration	Sections on cowbird concentrations have been added to the EA, RHE, and BE
10	WWP	This does not indicate whether the spring developments are on public or private land	This has been clarified in the EA and maps have been added to the EA to further clarify where these springs are located.
11	WWP	what the impacts of these diverted springs are on the hydrology of the public lands	Addressed in EA.
12	WWP	or how these provide for livestock concentration areas that could be facilitating cowbird infestation	Cowbird discussion added to the EA.
13	WWP	The map included with the EA does not show water infrastructure either.	New map added
14	WWP	“Tub Spring, Seep Spring, and San Bernardo mine water are known to be present on the allotment.” EA at 13. Are these the four spring developments referenced later in the EA,	Corrected in EA.
15	WWP	are there multiple troughs at each spring,	No. This has been clarified in the EA.

16	WWP	what are the San Bernardo mine waters	Added Mine and Seep waters to the EA and RHE.
17	WWP	The BLM has also not taken a hard look at these resources or evaluated a range of alternatives for livestock grazing in context of what could happen to these seeps and springs if they were restored for wildlife use	See analysis of Issue 2. The EA provides analysis of impacts to wildlife habitat including the impacts of a no grazing alternative.
18	WWP	While the EA states that the proposed action is to renew the grazing lease for a term of ten years for a preference of 557 AUMs (no suspended AUMs) on page 6, the table immediately following (Table 1) shows a fully active AUM level of 596. EA at 6	Corrected to 596.
19	WWP	The No Action/current management alternative describes 596 AUM with an additional 123 AUM suspended. EA at 9	Corrected in EA and RHE.
20	WWP	Elsewhere it says that the permit was reduced to 557 AUM and then raised again to 596 AUM. EA at 4	Corrected in EA.
21	WWP	In the Affected Environmental section of the EA, grazing use is described as 596 AUM. EA at 20	AUM numbers corrected throughout the EA.
22	WWP	The Environmental Impacts of the proposed action state that it would be permitted at 596 AUM. EA at 21	AUM numbers corrected throughout the EA.
23	WWP	There are no actual use data included in the EA.	Section added about actual use
24	WWP	It is also not clear that the BLM has ever based the stocking rate on a reevaluated carrying capacity of the allotment following the 1986 land transfer, since the EIS predated it	Clarified in the introduction.
25	WWP	In addition to lacking actual use data, the EA and the RHE lack any quantitative data.	Quantitative monitoring data is now included in both the EA and RHE.
26	WWP	The inclusion of Alternative 3, an alternative to "Limit Period of Use" to change the period of use to winter only is interesting, but entirely unexplored in the EA	The EA now fully analyzes this alternative.
27	WWP	There is no discussion of whether there would be sufficient vegetation resources to support this change, what the real impacts of concentrated livestock use would be on the plants and animals that inhabit the allotment, or how it could/would work.	The EA now fully analyzes this alternative.
28	WWP	There is not enough information to consider whether this is a reasonable alternative at all, and its inclusion feels more like an exercise in superficial fulfillment of NEPA's mandates to analyze a range of alternatives, but not really to do so.	The EA now fully analyzes this alternative.
29	WWP	Moreover, the description of this	The alternative is now consistent

		alternative is inconsistent. On page 9, BLM describes the alternative as changing the full number of AUM to winter only. On page 13, it says, "Limiting period of use may allow a decrease in livestock utilization and a subsequent change in vegetative cover, structure, and/or species. The current utilization levels would likely be even lower with a reduction in the stocking rate."	throughout the EA.
30	WWP	It isn't clear why BLM believes that the same number of AUM in a shorter time period is a reduced stocking rate, or why the same number of livestock would eat even less in the winter, but as noted above, Alternative B isn't fully or fairly considered. In light of the conflict with desert tortoise later in the spring and summer, this alternative should have been given more attention.	This alternative is fully described and it is explained how many livestock would be on the allotment at a time.
31	WWP	It is unclear whether livestock are authorized on the Desert Grasslands ACEC or not. The EA states that the management prescription for the exclusion of livestock from the ACEC affect only lands not currently accessible to livestock, including the parcel on the Limestone allotment.	The EA describes how the water placement and terrain prevent livestock from accessing the Desert Grasslands ACEC.
32	WWP	The map does not show the ACEC and the EA does not describe why it is inaccessible	Map of the grasslands ACEC is now included as figure 5 in the EA.
33	WWP	The Safford RMP contains very little information about the site-specific management of the Desert Grasslands ACEC on the Limestone allotment, and the present EA doesn't make up for this deficiency.	EA contains best available information.
34	WWP	Is the ACEC fenced? What is the condition of the fence? Do livestock ever access this relict grassland?	Information about the Desert Grasslands ACEC has been edited and clarified.
35	WWP	When was the last time BLM evaluated the ACEC? Are there key areas in the ACEC?	Addressed in RHE and EA.
36	WWP	The analysis of impacts of the proposed action to wildlife states, "Despite common misperceptions, evidence suggests that wildlife-livestock competition does not lead to competitive exclusion and may have a smaller impact on wildlife and livestock populations than factors external to the wildlife-livestock interaction." EA at 13. The EA then cites to a study from the Serengeti that considers wildebeest and land cover. Please provide more information supporting this idea in	Analysis of Issue 2 addresses the resource impacts from continued to livestock grazing and includes appropriate references from the desert southwest.

		the final EA using the best available science	
37	WWP	BLM relies on “inherent partitioning of habitat between Sonoran desert tortoise and livestock” and references but does not provide citations to the “several instances in the literature” that discuss it. EA at 15.	Removed could not find original documentation to back it up.
38	WWP	The FWS 12-month finding described observations of habitat overlap on 12 of 17 long-term monitoring plots in Arizona. 75 FR 78118. The FWS also cites to a study from the Florence Military Reservation (not far from the Limestone allotment) that finds that tortoises most strongly selected for canopy cover, followed by an absence of cattle activity. Id. BLM’s faith in habitat partitioning as a management tool may actually be end result of competitive exclusion instead. WWP urges the agency to take another look at the recent, published, peer-reviewed science.	done Butt and Turner Pastoralism: Research, Policy and Practice 2012, 2:9
39	WWP	The 12-month finding relied on the active management of land management agencies to mitigate the harms of grazing effects to tortoises. 75 FR 78120. That active management would presumably include site-specific, quantitative monitoring and a hard look at the potential effects when renewing grazing permits.	Quantitative pace frequency transect data & utilization data were both collected and incorporated into the analysis in the RHE and EA.
40	WWP	The lack of actual use data makes the information about rangeland health conditions hard to qualify. When the range personnel visited the allotment in 2013, had there been recent grazing?	No recent grazing for at least the past 5 years.
41	WWP	The line pertaining to actual use in the table in the S&G is blank, but the BLM admits that it measured utilization where there was no sign of cattle. It is unclear how this is supposed to provide a measure of livestock use. But BLM conducted utilization monitoring and reported that to was very low. Were there cows on the allotment in the previous year?	Edited in the RHE.
42	WWP	The S&G states that key species selected for utilization monitoring were those listed as preferential forage for livestock in the ecological site description, and that the three species were chosen because others either were not present or had no utilization. There is no discussion as to why some preferred plant species	The reason is under the conclusion for standard one

		weren't present, but it is notable that none of the key species were perennial grasses.	
43	WWP	The analysis of Alternative 2, the No Grazing Alternative, reports that eliminating livestock use on the Limestone allotment could lead to increased utilization and decreased cover on the state and private land of the allotment. EA at 18. There is no information about the current conditions on those lands now, and as far as anyone knows, it's already overgrazed and barren.	RHEs do not look at state or private lands, but it is logical to conclude if cattle are moved off of BLM to state and private, then there would be effects
44	WWP	The state and private land of the allotment total 1160 acres, and comprise only 8 percent of the allotment. Improving conditions on the 92 percent by eliminating livestock grazing may be worth it for the habitats of imperiled species, but BLM's analysis doesn't genuinely contemplate the net benefit of this action.	Revised no grazing alternative to provide an analysis of what would be expected to occur under the no grazing alternative.
45	WWP	BLM reports that there are two large pastures within the allotment that are "intertwined with land status owners." EA at 20. The BLM claims that the public lands could not be managed separately from the other lands without a large amount of new fencing construction. Id. The maps included with the EA (at 38 and 39) show solid boundaries between the state and private outside of the Dripping Springs wash corridor with the exception of one section of State Land. It appears that it would take just over 7 miles of fencing. Based on the lack of information and description in the EA, it doesn't appear that BLM has truly taken a hard look at this option.	EA has been edited.
46	WWP	It is not clear why BLM believes it has to facilitate grazing through public lands livestock permits in order to adhere to the Arizona State Constitution. EA at 21	EA has been edited.
47	WWP	This is the first instance where WWP has heard this rationale for why it must authorize public lands grazing. In order to support this hypothesis, WWP requests that BLM please provide a full economic analysis of the contribution of those 910 acres by comparing the price per AUM on the STL with the loss to federal taxpayers of administering the grazing permit for the federal lands. In this way, the reader could understand the true deprivation the No Grazing alternative might incur.	See above comments.

		<p>Please also provide a legal analysis supporting this idea of necessity, since WWP is unfamiliar with the federal decision-making hinging on state law affecting adjacent parcels. WWP would sincerely appreciate some background on this new-to-us approach.</p>	
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