



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Phoenix District

Agua Fria National Monument

21605 North 7th Avenue

Phoenix, Arizona 85027

www.blm.gov/az/

In Reply Refer to:
4130 (AZP030)

MAR 11 2015

Dear Interested Party:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Agua Fria National Monument and the Tonto National Forest (Tonto NF) Cave Creek Ranger District, in collaboration with the Arizona Game and Fish Department, JH Cattle Co., The Nature Conservancy, and various other interested stakeholders and stakeholder groups (collectively known as the Coordinated Resource Management Plan (CRMP) group) proposes to re-authorize livestock grazing within the Horseshoe and Copper Creek Allotments. In response to the proposal to re-authorize livestock grazing within the two allotments, the BLM and Tonto NF are preparing a combined Environmental Assessment (EA) to evaluate livestock grazing within the allotments. As part of the initiation of this process, we are seeking your input and comments regarding the proposal through a public scoping period from March 13 – April 13, 2015.

The Horseshoe Allotment is located within the Agua Fria National Monument and the Copper Creek Allotment is located within the Tonto NF. Both allotments are located in the southeastern portion of Yavapai County, Arizona. Please refer to the enclosed map for more information about the geographic location of the allotments.

This letter provides an overview of the purpose and need and a general description of the Proposed Action. Supporting documents, including the goals and objectives from the CRMP group and maps illustrating proposed range improvements can be found at the following address on the World Wide Web:

<https://sites.google.com/site/horseshoecoppercreekcrmp/>

If you have information that would substantially contribute or help inform a decision regarding this action, please submit any comments you may have in writing. The information you provide may help develop/inform alternatives that will address issues identified for this action. Alternatives, along with analyses and effects, will be documented in the subsequent EA.

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of this action is to consider livestock grazing opportunities on public lands where consistent with management objectives. An additional purpose of this effort is to improve ecological conditions within the project area using tools such as adaptive grazing management and wildlife habitat improvement in order to meet desired future conditions as specified in the

Agua Fria National Monument Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Tonto NF Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) while balancing multiples uses. In addition, per BLM Fundamentals of Range Health (43 CFR 4180) and Forest Service Handbook 2209.13, Chapter 90, section 92.22, the purpose of this action is to authorize livestock grazing in a manner consistent with direction to move ecosystems towards their desired conditions.

The underlying need for authorizing grazing is contained in several levels for BLM regulations and policy:

- Where consistent with other multiple use goals and objectives, there is Congressional intent to allow grazing on suitable lands, (Taylor Grazing Act of 1934, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, Fundamentals of Rangeland Health (43 CFR 4180), and the 2010 AFNM Resource Management Plan.
- The Agua Fria National Monument RMP identifies resource management objectives and management actions that establish guidance for managing a broad spectrum of land uses and allocations for public lands. The RMP allocated public lands within the Horseshoe Allotment as available for domestic livestock grazing. Where consistent with the goals and objectives of the RMP, Land Health Standards, and monument objects and values, the issuance of grazing permits or leases to qualified applicants are provided for by the Taylor Grazing Act and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act.
- BLM Arizona adopted the Arizona Rangeland Health Standards (Land Health Standards) and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management (Arizona S&Gs) in all Land Use Plans in 1997 (Appendix A). The Land Health Standards and Guidelines for Grazing Administration were also incorporated into the RMP. The Land Health Standards for rangelands should be achieving or making significant progress toward achieving the standards. Guidelines direct the selection of grazing management practices and, where appropriate, livestock facilities to promote significant progress toward, or the attainment and maintenance of the standards for land health.

The underlying need for authorizing grazing is contained in several levels for Forest Service (FS) regulations and policy:

- Where consistent with other multiple use goals and objectives, there is Congressional intent to allow grazing on suitable lands, (Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960, Wilderness Act of 1964, Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974, Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, National Forest Management Act of 1976).
- The allotments identified in the EA contain lands identified as suitable for domestic livestock grazing in the Tonto Forest Plan and continued domestic livestock grazing is consistent with its goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines.
- It is Forest Service policy to make forage available to qualified livestock operators from lands suitable for grazing consistent with land management plans (FSM 2203.1; 36 CFR 222.2 (c)).

- It is Forest Service policy to continue contributions to the economic and social well-being of people by providing opportunities for economic diversity and by promoting stability for communities that depend on range resources for their livelihood (FSM 2202.1).

Proposed Action

The Proposed Action is to renew the livestock grazing authorizations for both the Horseshoe and Copper Creek Allotments. Allotments would be intensively managed to achieve short and long-term goals and objectives developed by the CRMP group. Both allotments would be managed in collaboration with one another to provide maximum flexibility in livestock management and to ensure adequate rest in areas after livestock grazing disturbance. Total permitted numbers would include up to 4,572 Animal Unit Months (AUMs) for the Horseshoe Allotment and up to 6,000 AUMs for the Copper Creek Allotment, for up to 12 months annually (March 1 to February 28). The Tonto NF would also authorize up to 3,000 AUMs for natural increase yearlings from January 1 to May 15 annually.

The Proposed Action is to use a deferred/ rest rotational grazing management system to move livestock in single or multiple herds through pastures until scheduled use dates are met or until forage utilization thresholds ("triggers") are met in upland and riparian areas. When use dates or triggers are met, livestock would be moved to other ungrazed pasture(s) or completely removed from the allotments. Annual authorized livestock numbers, stocking rates, and scheduled rotations would be identified through annual operating instructions (annual grazing applications), with consideration from monitoring of the previous season's actual use, production of palatable forage, availability of livestock water, current climatic and resource conditions, and recommendations from the CRMP group.

Ecological conditions are highly variable in both allotments due to dynamic climatic regimes in the desert southwest and globally changing climate conditions. Production of palatable forage and browse for livestock and wildlife varies greatly both seasonally and annually. Through adaptive management strategies, this proposed action strives to respond to climatic variability and change by utilizing a variety of tactics, including flexible stocking rates and grazing strategies to meet resource objectives. Data for determining stocking rates would be gathered throughout each grazing season using a variety of short and long-term monitoring techniques as described in agency manuals and handbooks as well as through scientific literature produced through other agencies, research stations, and universities.

The Proposed Action would also include implementing new infrastructure projects within each of the allotments to promote better livestock distribution and to provide much needed water for wildlife. Some of the infrastructure projects include, but are not limited to, fences to exclude riparian and upland areas from grazing, water wells, spring developments, storage tanks, pipelines, and watering troughs to provide water where it is limited in the allotments. The Proposed Action also includes removing existing improvements that draw in stream water to the upland areas from the Agua Fria River and Silver Creek. All new structures would have cultural and biological clearances prior to implementation and all BLM RMP and Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines for improvement projects would be followed.

The Proposed Action would also call for implementing study plots (≤ 5 acres) on upland areas of the allotment to evaluate vegetation treatments of non-native and invasive species. Treatment methods may include use of herbicide, mechanical, or biological methods to reduce or eradicate unwanted species within the allotments. Successful treatment methods may be implemented on a larger scale to control non-native/invasive plants as needed. Grazing exclosure study plots would also be used as control areas to evaluate future grazing management and ecological conditions within the allotments. The Proposed Action also includes implementing watershed restoration (e.g. seeding, soil stabilization) practices in areas deemed appropriate after major disturbances like wildfire or prolonged drought.

The Proposed Action would also include all of the current terms and conditions for livestock grazing within the Horseshoe and Copper Creek Allotments. New terms and conditions would include a requirement for the livestock operator to submit actual use by livestock to the administrative agencies within 15 days of the end of the grazing season and to follow management practices as outlined in the Final Decision documents.

Decision to be Made

The BLM and Forest Service will evaluate the Proposed Action and alternatives to the Proposed Action. After reviewing the Proposed Action, the alternatives, the environmental analysis, and considering public comments, both the BLM and Tonto NF authorized officers will reach a decision that is in accordance with the purpose and need of this project. The decision would include a description of activities that would be implemented.

Implementation of the Coordinated Resource Management Plan for the Copper Creek and Horseshoe allotments would immediately be developed following a decision and close of the appeal period (if applicable). Re-authorization of livestock grazing for both of the allotments would be for ten years (if selected).

Scoping Input Needed

Written comments on this scoping letter will be accepted during a 30-day comment period, ending on April 13, 2015. Please send all comments to:

Bureau of Land Management
Agua Fria National Monument
ATTN: Casey Addy
21605 North 7th Avenue
Phoenix, Arizona 85027

You may also e-mail comments to: comments-southwestern-tonto-cave-creek@fs.fed.us

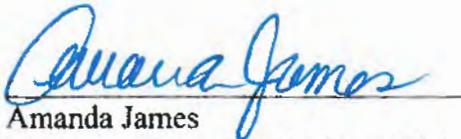
When submitting comments, please keep them specific to this proposal only. Comments which are not specific to the project and project area will be deemed outside the scope of the analysis and will not be considered. If you are including references, citations, or additional information to be considered for this project, please specify exactly how the material relates to the project.

Also indicate exactly what part of the material you would like us to consider (such as page or figure number).

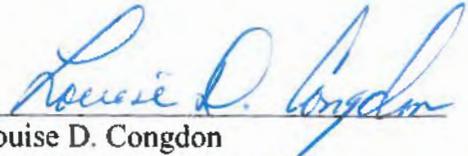
The proposed project is an activity implementing a land management plan and subject to the objection process described in 36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B. The Forest Service is combining scoping with the legal notice and opportunity to comment, as described in 36 CFR 218.24. The regulations prohibit extending the length of the comment period. It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period. Only those who submit timely and specific written comments will have eligibility to file an objection under 36 CFR 218.8. Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to object must meet the information requirements in 36 CFR 218.25(a)(3). Names and contact information submitted with comments will become part of the public record and may be released under the Freedom of Information Act.

If you do not have comments at this time, but would like to be added to the mailing list to be informed of this analysis as it progresses, please let us know. If you have any questions concerning this letter, please contact Casey Addy, Natural Resource Specialist, at (623) 580-5621.

Sincerely,



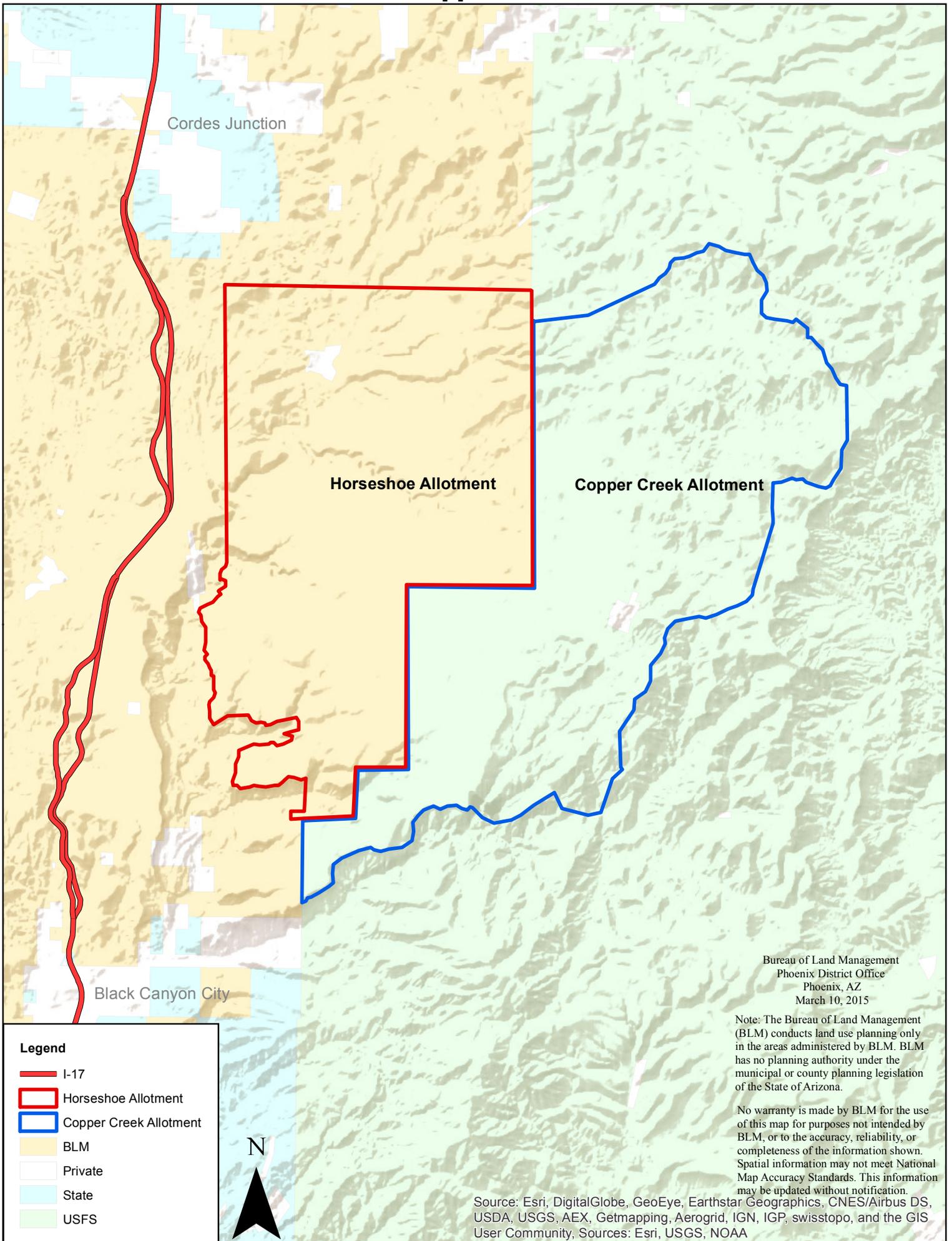
Amanda James
Monument Manager/Assistant Field Manager
Agua Fria National Monument/
Hassayampa Field Office



Louise D. Congdon
Cave Creek District Ranger
Tonto National Forest

Enclosure: Map of Allotments

Horseshoe and Copper Creek Allotments



Cordes Junction

Horseshoe Allotment

Copper Creek Allotment

Black Canyon City

Legend

- I-17
- Horseshoe Allotment
- Copper Creek Allotment
- BLM
- Private
- State
- USFS

Bureau of Land Management
Phoenix District Office
Phoenix, AZ
March 10, 2015

Note: The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) conducts land use planning only in the areas administered by BLM. BLM has no planning authority under the municipal or county planning legislation of the State of Arizona.

No warranty is made by BLM for the use of this map for purposes not intended by BLM, or to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of the information shown. Spatial information may not meet National Map Accuracy Standards. This information may be updated without notification.

Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AEX, Getmapping, Aerogrid, IGN, IGP, swisstopo, and the GIS User Community, Sources: Esri, USGS, NOAA