After reading the GMUG draft forest assessment, I am concerned by how strongly it is influenced by public perception and input. Many of the comments are unsubstantiated and are not based on fact, so, why do they carry any weight? I don’t understand how the Forest Service can buy into what they are saying when it isn’t true. Permittees have photo points that prove that livestock grazing positively impacts the Forest. Look at the photo points that show riparian areas are actually being healed and not being eroded any longer. On the ground studies have shown the best management practices and proven that when they are used, livestock grazing contributes to healthy rangelands and watersheds. To go back to using stubble height as the primary measuring tool takes us back years. The complaints sound like stuff from way back in the day and when the public brings up issues that are based on emotion instead of fact, the Forest Service shouldn’t even consider it. The Forest Service should be taking a holistic approach and looking at the big picture. Look at the time proven facts and what science has proven to work effectively, such as the work of Floyd Reed and Dave Bradford. Use their knowledge to help create a plan that is based on facts. Additionally, permittees already have a working relationship with Forest Service personnel. We need to be able to stay flexible to compensate for environmental factors, such as drought, etc.

As far as grazing fees, most of the Forest Service income comes from livestock grazing. On their own time, permittees also put in water developments which are used by wildlife and livestock. They also spend countless hours maintaining trails and roads which recreationalists use. Without the regular upkeep from permittees, most of these trails would grow over and no longer be available to the public. The Forest Service just doesn’t have the resources to maintain these trails any other way. Livestock grazing boosts the overall economy of the Forest Service. On the other hand, many recreational activities do the reverse. Recreationalists demand new trails to do the activities they enjoy while we have to bend over backwards to provide trails for their activities and gates for their off road travels.

Furthermore, any reduction or elimination of livestock grazing would have negative repercussions to the forest in terms of increased wildfire probability. Look at the news reports of what is going on California. Without current livestock numbers grazing our forests, they would be filled with fuel for wildfires.

Another area of concern to me is the the Ecological Integrity and Species Diversity. The first sentence, “Effects from unmanaged livestock grazing can result in adverse effects on ecological integrity and species diversity as has happened on the GMUG in the late 1800’s” is ancient history, negative and has no place in the current GMUG assessment. This plan should focus on what we are doing now and how it is positively impacting the condition of the GMUG forests. This section is also highly contradictory. “Effects of poor grazing management are well-documented. Fleischerner (1994) identified the ecological cost of livestock grazing as loss of biodiversity: reduced population densities…” 1994. Again, this is bringing up historical information and instead of talking about how we have improved since then, this twists the information. Furthermore, to contradict itself, this plan brings up stubble height as an option of a trend indicator, which is taking us back to that time period. Our management is improving rangeland condition and contributing to a healthy forest. There is no discussion of rotational grazing or rest management. In this assessment, let’s talk about now, about these positive factors and how we have been using photo points to prove they work.

To summarize things, I think that with all the improvements we have made as far as management practices, we are at the proper numbers now. We are currently improving rangeland health. There is no justifiable need to decrease livestock numbers, because livestock grazing on the Forest Service is being properly managed now. We need to continue to be able to have flexibility in our management plans to account for environmental factors and we do not need to go backwards to old practices for trend indicators when we have made so much improvement. Livestock managers want to work with the Forest Service to manage the lands so that they continue to see improvement in the overall rangeland health.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Ron Klaseen