

Pre-decisional Administrative Review (hereinafter referred to as "Objection") Process

Objector: Lead Objector:

John Fowler
Rockin 4 Ranch



In Consultation with:

Van C. Elsbernd
Great Plains Consulting
and Professional forest Management LLC
2712 Willow Creek Drive
Fort Collins, Co 80525

Name of Proposed Project:

Draft Decision Notice for
Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment Grazing Authorization
U.S. Forest Service, Tonto National Forest
Globe Ranger District - Gila County, Arizona

Responsible Official:

Adam Bromley
Globe District Ranger

Connection Statement: A statement that demonstrates the connection between prior specific written comments on the particular proposed project or activity and the content of the objection. 36 C.F.R. §218.8(d)(6).

Statement: Mr. John Fowler provided comments on multiple Draft Environmental Assessments for the Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment Grazing Authorization including the February 2021 version in several meetings and phone calls with the Globe Ranger District and Tonto Forest staff personnel.

Objections, including attachments, must be filed via mail, fax, email, hand delivery, express delivery or messenger service to:

Tom Torres, Acting Forest Supervisor
2324 E. McDowell Rd.
Phoenix, AZ 85006
FAX: 602-225-5295

Description of Specific Issues: A description of those aspects of the proposed project addressed by the objection, including:

1. specific issues related to the proposed project, if applicable,
2. how the objector believes the environmental analysis or draft decision specifically violates law, regulation, or policy;
3. suggested remedies that would resolve the objection;
4. supporting reasons for the reviewing officer to consider.

Objections

1. Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessment

P. 48 – 51: Range Improvements

P. 48 – 51: Under Range Improvements - Proposed Structural Improvements - Additional Infrastructure - Sideboards for Additional Infrastructure - Improvements may be authorized as necessary to achieve desired conditions without additional environmental analysis within the following specifications:

- All new range improvements within one quarter mile of the Upper Salt River will be constructed out of view from the Upper Salt River and verified at the physical site of construction (Figure 9). No improvements will be built within 100 feet of the Upper Salt River.
- In areas with a visual quality objective (VQO) of preservation, or retention, new pipelines will be buried or placed out of sight of a casual forest observer where practicable.

Proposed Improvements:

Table 15: Proposed Structural Range Improvements anticipated to be installed within the First Two Years

Identifier	Description	Pasture
W2	An above ground water line running from existing Lower Mud Spring with approximately 1.5 miles of above ground water line with 1 trough, 1 storage tank and a corral.	West Ortega

F2 Install a drift fence near the Salt River to provide a barrier to keep cattle from accessing the river. West Ortega

Background:

On Page 51 it states:

- "All new range improvements constructed within one quarter mile of the Upper Salt River will be constructed beyond the **Foreground**, the nearest visible area from the Upper Salt River, up to one quarter mile. (Figure 9) and verified at the physical site of the construction. No improvements will be built within 100 feet of the Upper Salt River."

On Page 99, second Paragraph, it states:

- (Figure 9). (which was created by with a computer viewshed model using points in the middle of the river every 1/16 of a mile with a viewer height of 5 feet), proposed range improvement 2F will place 1,998 feet of newly constructed fence in the foreground view of recreational users on the river. This visual effect is somewhat mitigated by its proximity to Forest Road 219, and range improvements on the private land, which are also visible in the area.
- Any additional proposed range improvements would be constructed according to the sideboards listed in the Proposed Action. **This means they will be constructed beyond the viewshed of the Upper Salt River and constructed with non-reflective materials.** While they may affect the wilderness character of the Salt River Canyon Wilderness, they will largely go unperceived by the majority of Wilderness users and consequently should only have a small effect on their opportunity for a primitive and unconfined type of recreation, or the high quality of their whitewater river-running experience.

Objection:

The above two background statements are conflicting - one refers to "**Foreground**" and one refers to "**Viewshed**". The definitions provided for foreground and viewshed differ and both restrictions are not in concurrence with an agreement reached with the Rocking 4 Ranch, the Globe Ranger District Ranger and Supervisors Office staff on December 10, 2019. The agreement was to allow fencing in the foreground and viewshed and no other structures such as windmills or tanks. This agreement was to be incorporated into the EA and was not.

On p. 129 - Finding of No Significant Impact; Intensity; #3 - Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as the proximity to historical or cultural resources, parklands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.it states the following:

- The majority of the proposed range improvements were analyzed as being constructed according to sideboards established to minimize or eliminate potential effects to these and other resources.
- These sideboards include being built of non-reflective materials and being built outside of the foreground viewshed if within one quarter mile of the Salt River. **Most forest users experience the Upper Salt River by boat, so the planned infrastructure should go largely unnoticed and has been determined to not significantly impact the Wilderness character or the Wild and Scenic Outstandingly Remarkable Values for this river segment.** Consequently, the Proposed Action will not significantly affect the Wild and Scenic River eligibility or the potential of such a designation for this river segment.

There are two remedies available to resolve this:

- 1 - Allow fencing per the agreement reached Dec 10, 2019 as relied on by the permittee.
- 2 - Eliminate the fence along the Salt River and winter graze the pastures as allowed in the SWWF Recovery Plan.

As it states in p. 99 –

- (Figure 9). (which was created by with a computer viewshed model using points in the middle of the river every 1/16 of a mile with a viewer height of 5 feet), **proposed range improvement 2F will place 1,998 feet of newly constructed fence in the foreground view of recreational users on the river. This visual effect is somewhat mitigated by its proximity to Forest Road 219, and range improvements on the private land, which are also visible in the area.**

Fences have been a very accepted range structure in restricted viewsheds. The Wild and Scenic river designations were put to Congress in 1982 and never have been approved, however the FS is managing the Salt River as if they had been approved.

Rockin 4 Ranch requests the FS live up to its agreement made on December 10, 2019 and to what the FS stated in the EA on p. 99 above and on p. 102 - Direct and Indirect Effects of the Proposed Action. Without the fence the livestock would be allowed to access to the Salt River and Rockin 4 Ranch cattle to other allotments.

2. Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessment

Page 8 - Current Grazing Management – 2nd paragraph and Page 34 - Ortega Pasture

p. 8 - Lower Shute and West Ortega pastures are not part of the current grazing management rotation.

p. 34 - Ortega Pasture This pasture is watered by seven springs, two stock tanks, and one well. However, this pasture has not been used for grazing for more than ten years.

Objection: Rockin 4 Ranch requests the FS make a correction – Ortega pasture is now being used.

3. Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessment

Page 21, last paragraph - Soils:

“Slope ranges are those assigned to the Terrestrial Ecosystem Unit Inventory map units. Slopes of up to 40 percent are considered suitable for livestock grazing.

Objection: Percent slope has been found to be one of the greatest single effect on utilization of forage. Cattle walk up the slopes (20-30% slope) in the canyon bottom. They then feed along contour trails on both sides of the canyon. The animals utilize heavily the canyon bottoms and the ridgetops.

Cattle utilize slopes between 20% and 60% quite heavily with the greatest impact on slopes less than 40%. The 60% slope seems to be the maximum used by cattle. Limited cattle grazing takes place on the 61% to 80% slopes.

In the Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment Grazing Authorization EA it states:

- Although cattle can climb steep slopes, and will, to chase their favorite plants, we measure use and production on less steep ground since we expect lighter and not representative use on areas above **60 percent slope**. According to Holechek (1988), grazing areas with slopes greater than **60 percent** receive little to no use by cattle.

Rockin 4 Ranch requests the FS change their statement concerning slopes to the following:

- Slopes of up to **60 percent** are considered suitable for livestock grazing.

Page 22 Table 3:

- Defines slopes percentages in categories using 40- 80 percent as a parameter. These should be corrected to be broken at 60 percent.

According to Holechek (1988), grazing areas with slopes greater than 60 percent receive little to no use by cattle.

Rockin 4 Ranch requests the FS change their statement concerning slopes to the following:

- Defines slopes percentages in categories using **40 - 60** percent as a parameter. These should be corrected to be broken at 60 percent.
- A new category of 40-60% be added to Table 3 by breaking the 40%-80% into two categories: 40%-60% and 61%-80%.

Page 23:

Table for soil condition uses satisfactory, impaired, and unsatisfactory.

Objection: It was evident from reading the EA and the DN that most of the Soil condition was evaluated by using information from the Terrestrial Ecosystem Unit Inventory, survey digital elevation models, aerial photo interpretation, and topographic maps. Very little of it came from field inspection. The Terrestrial Ecosystem Unit Inventory (TEUI) does not use current or available information for soils in their analysis. NCRS is a much more sophisticated and robust model to use when analyzing soils.

Rockin 4 Ranch requests the FS discontinue their use of the TEUI definitions and use the NRCS's web soils survey and conduct their analysis from this information and the appropriate Ecological Sites.

4. Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessment

Page 24, table 5- Soils:

Page 24, table 5: "Much of the unsatisfactory soil condition appears to have been caused by historical grazing impacts, however, current management practices could also be slowing or preventing recovery."

Objection:

Again, it was evident from reading the EA and the DN that most of the Soil condition was evaluated by using information from the Terrestrial Ecosystem Unit Inventory, survey digital elevation models, aerial photo interpretation, and topographic maps. Very little of it came from field inspection. The Terrestrial Ecosystem Unit Inventory (TEUI) does not use current or available information for soils in their analysis. NCRS is a much more sophisticated and robust model to use when analyzing soils.

For the soils specialist to look at the sites either on the ground or on maps and make the characterization the ““Much of the unsatisfactory soil condition appears to have been caused by historical grazing impacts” means it is a guess or an assumption that has very little relevance to the dialog. Approximately 1/3 of the listed unsatisfactory pastures have been rested for the past 20 years and therefore the sentence makes the assumption that these areas are in current use. They are not.

Without monitoring on the ground, it would be very difficult to state – “current management practices could also be slowing or preventing recovery”. It is obvious this is an unknown.

Rockin 4 Ranch requests the FS rewrite this section to state: “Further on the ground monitoring is needed to know exactly what is occurring on the ground with soils”.

5. Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessment

Page 26

Soils in all pastures on the Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment had the following results within the watershed condition frameworks

- Soil productivity and soil erosion were found to be poor (3) – impaired functioning.
 - o Soil nutrient and hydrologic cycling processes are impaired and the ability of the soil to maintain resource values and sustain outputs is compromised in more than 25 percent of the watershed.

Objection:

How does the FS account for the fact the Shute Pasture has been rested for over 20 years and yet is still poor (3) – impaired functioning? Rockin 4 Ranch requests the FS include the study or data to support their statements.

6. Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessment

Page 28 – Historic Conditions

A 1944 Forest Service range inspection includes a lengthy report that contains information about several of the channels on the neighboring Radium Allotment to the south.

Objection: Rockin 4 Ranch requests the FS remove any reference to Radium Allotment as it should not be in an EA about the Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment.

7. Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessment

Page 30 – paragraph 2 – last sentence

When large flood events with high water velocities occur, the channels experience severe erosion and/or aggradation causing heavy loss of riparian vegetation.

Objection: The FS makes a generic categorization in saying “causing heavy loss of riparian vegetation”. The FS does not provide any way to measure this statement. Rockin 4 Ranch requests the FS drop this sentence.

8. Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessment

Page 36 - 37 – Water Quality

- Pinal Creek from lower Pinal Creek WTP discharge to Salt River. Designated uses for this section include aquatic and wildlife-warm water fisheries, partial body contact recreation and fish consumption.

The Salt River from Pinal Creek to Roosevelt Lake, just downstream of the allotment boundary, was rated as impaired in the 2012/ 2014 Assessment Report (ADEQ, 2015) due to exceedances of the suspended sediment, nitrogen, and phosphorus criterion for aquatic and wildlife-warm water fisheries and the E. coli criterion for full body contact recreation.

Lower Pinal Creek was first listed as Impaired by ADEQ in 1988 for copper, manganese, zinc, and low pH (ADEQ 2011a). Subsequently, a water treatment plant was constructed on Pinal Creek at State Route 188, groundwater is pumped from the creek to intercept a plume of polluted groundwater (resulting from historic mining activities) migrating through the alluvium beneath the creek, the water is then treated and a portion of it is returned to the creek. Pinal Creek was delisted in 2002 (ADEQ 2011a). Designated uses of the creek were changed from aquatic and wildlife warm water to an aquatic and wildlife effluent-dominated stream between the 2012 and 2014 assessments to the most recent draft 2016 assessment¹³. The reach of the creek from the treatment plant to the Salt River was assessed as Attaining Some Uses in the 2012 and 2014 assessment but is assessed as inconclusive in the Draft 2016 assessment due to an exceedance of the copper standard that violates the partial body contact and the aquatic and wildlife effluent dominated stream standard.

Objection:

Pinal Creek is not a part of the Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment. Rockin 4 Ranch requests the FS remove all references to Pinal Creek from the EA.

9. Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessment

p. 42 - Examples of How Desired Condition May Be Measured

Change (improvement or decline) in watershed condition class will be reassessed following significant natural events (i.e., fire or flood) or after completion of projects identified in a watershed restoration action plan that were designed to improve or maintain watershed condition.

Objection: Rockin 4 Ranch would like to know if there is a watershed restoration action plan that has identified projects for completion and are designed to improve or maintain watershed condition. If so, then Rockin 4 Ranch requests the FS show those projects in an appendix.

10. Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessment

Page 47

The description of the three grazing units have an upper limit of cattle in the Ortega and Windmill units.

Ortega Unit: One adult cattle herd would graze in North Horseshoe Bend, East Horseshoe Bend, Hope, East Ortega, and West Ortega pastures. West Ortega pasture would not be grazed until a drift fence is constructed to prevent livestock from accessing the Salt River (see proposed structural range improvement F2). **Pastures may be grazed with up to 300 head of livestock.**

Windmill Unit: One adult cattle herd would graze in North Windmill, South Windmill, South Horseshoe Bend, West Horseshoe Bend, Upper Shute, East Lower Shute, West Lower Shute, and Redmond pastures. Both Lower Shute pastures would not be grazed until a drift fence is constructed to prevent livestock from accessing the Salt River (see proposed structural range improvement AF4). **Pastures may be grazed with up to 250 head of livestock.**

Objection:

Rockin 4 Ranch requests the Ortega Unit and the Windmill Unit limit numbers be removed or shown as estimates that may be adjusted based on production and utilization monitoring.

11. Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessment

Page 48 – Table 14

Riparian herbaceous Limited to 50 percent of plant species biomass and maintain 6 to 8 inches of stubble height of species like deergrass

Objection: Rockin 4 Ranch requests the FS remove the 6-8” stubble height. These stubble heights are not feasible. Stubble heights are so variable and dependent on moisture. The FS should use a different use threshold here.

12. Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessment

Page 52, table 16:

Table 16 through Table 18 and Figure 8 identify additional infrastructure that may be installed in the future, beyond the two years following a decision for this project. These projects, as depicted in Figure 8, are not the exact locations and only identify a general location for additional infrastructure. These additional projects, as well as others, would be designed following the sideboards above.

Objection: This paragraph describes improvements which are to be built beyond 2 years following this decision. Some of these will be constructed before that timeline. Rockin 4 Ranch requests the FS comment “beyond 2 years” needs to be removed. Rockin 4 Ranch asked for this to be removed in the 3 - hour phone call on January 4, 2021 and it was not. Representing the FS on the 3 – hour phone call on January 4, 2021 were:

- Adam Bromley, Globe District Ranger – 7680 South Sixshooter Canyon road; Globe, AZ 85501 (928) 402-6200
- A. Jamie Wages, Globe Rangeland Staff - 7680 South Sixshooter Canyon road; Globe, AZ 85501 (928) 402-6200
- Tyna Yost – NEPA Coordinator, Tonto National Forest, Supervisors Office, 2324 E. McDowell Rd., Phoenix, Arizona 85006 (602) 225-5200

13. Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessment

p. 56 - Troughs and Storage tanks

All existing or future water developments that have open tops (i.e. troughs, open top storage tanks) must have escape and access ramps. All escape ramps will be built of expanded metal or similar materials and extend to bottom of trough and sides (1985 Tonto Forest Plan). Ramp will be firmly secured to trough rim so it will not be knocked loose by animals. Access ramps will be constructed of durable material such as concrete or metal. Slope will not exceed 45 degrees. Further design specifications may be required from "Water for Wildlife" by Taylor and Tuttle 2007.

Objection: Rockin 4 Ranch requests access ramps be removed from the permittees responsibility and placed on to FS wildlife staff to install since it is a wildlife standard for Troughs and Storage tanks. The standard is not a regulation, FS policy. It is a FS procedure that is required of FS personnel.

14. Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessment

Page 62: Table 20 - Riparian utilization standards are exceeded in key reaches, or insufficient riparian vegetation is present to allow for meaningful (statistically valid) riparian monitoring; Then - Livestock should be removed from the pasture. Areas with insufficient riparian vegetation to allow meaningful monitoring should be rested until sufficient riparian vegetation is established.

Objection: This "Then" consequence should be removed. Rockin 4 Ranch requests that if Riparian utilization standards are exceeded in key reaches, or insufficient riparian vegetation is present to allow for meaningful (statistically valid) riparian monitoring because of livestock, then fence the riparian area. It is not acceptable for the Fs to require removal of cattle to achieve riparian monitoring on a very small area.

15. Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessment

Page 65: Table 23

If - Livestock are not on authorized allotment, due to insufficient fencing or gates left open.
Follow up - Conduct a pasture inspection.

Objection: Rockin 4 Ranch requests following be added – The permittee(s) will not be billed for unauthorized use due to fencing issues or open gates.

16. Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessment

Page 67 - Livestock Management: For grazing throughout Tonto National Forest General Management Areas and the Salt River Wilderness Management Area, practices to minimize impacts to other resources include:

- Forest Service and/or Permittee will monitor livestock utilization and move cattle when triggers are met.

Objection: Rockin 4 Ranch requests “triggers” to be defined.

17. Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessment

Page 69 - Heritage Resources Management - All construction, reconstruction, removal, maintenance and repair of improvements will comply with current Forest direction to protect heritage resources. Archeological clearance must be approved with all necessary consultation with SHPO and the potentially interested Tribes prior to issuing any decision regarding the construction, of all improvements, reconstruction of improvements outside of the existing footprint, **or repair and maintenance of improvements away from existing roads or pre-established access.**

Objection: Rockin 4 Ranch requests removing the last part of the above sentence ~~“or repair and maintenance of improvements away from existing roads or pre-established access.”~~

18. Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessment

Page 75 - Affected Environment – Last sentence: Overall, native perennial plant composition has shifted to shrubs. A chronic constant impact (i.e. continuous grazing) of livestock on plant leaves reduces the plant’s ability to grow and reproduce (D. D. Briske and Gillen 2008).

Objection: Continuous grazing is not currently used. Rockin 4 Ranch requests the FS remove the last sentence outlined above.

19. Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessment

Page 78 – Range Improvements: Ortega pasture division fences would increase flexibility in grazing pastures. Each new pasture will have new water developments, offering slightly more distribution

Objection: Rockin 4 Ranch requests the word “slightly” be removed from the above statement. The FS is offering a very negative opinion and pre-judging the effects of putting in new water developments.

20. Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessment

Page 86 – 87, table 26:

Proposed Action

p. 86-87: Troughs proposed within or near a riparian area would have a detrimental effect on the riparian area by drawing cattle to the riparian vegetation (Table 26). Wells located in or near stream channels have the potential to pump surface water, reducing the amount of water for riparian vegetation.

Table 26: Proposed troughs and wells located in or near riparian areas

Pasture	Stream Name	Comments
Kenny	Devore Wash	trough in channel
Rip	Hicks Wash	trough near channel
Murphy	Devore Wash	well near Murphy Spring

Supplying water in new areas may cause heavy use in those areas.

Objection:

This comment illudes to the permittee installing a trough in the Devore Wash channel and near the Hicks wash channel. Prior to this publication of the final EA the permittee agreed to move these, however, this document was not changed to reflect this action. Under comments **Rockin 4 Ranch** requests replacing – “trough in channel” with “Troughs will not be in stream or channel”.

Under the table 26 a comment is written “Supplying water in new areas may cause heavy use in those areas.” This statement is negative. **Rockin 4 Ranch** requests the FS replace the above statement with a statement that “additional water troughs will

distribute the livestock and graze underutilized areas. Same amount of water being used.

21. Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessment

Page 90 – Proposed Action, second paragraph:

With continued drought and higher temperatures, in combination with piping water away from riparian areas for use by cattle, it is possible that some of the smaller springs may dry up. There may be mortality of riparian vegetation even on some larger springs.

Objection:

Rockin 4 Ranch requests the removal of this paragraph because it is a negative conjuncture made without proof of this happening. **Rockin 4 Ranch** requests the following to be added:

- The proposed water distribution is to move the cattle away from springs and does not increase the amount of water used. Livestock will still drink the same amount of water.

22. Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessment

Page 92 - Soil Condition – 1st paragraph: The soil conditions that are currently less than satisfactory are largely attributable to the combined effects of **historic grazing and current management. Soil condition is expected to improve on the allotment under current management.** However, measurable soil improvement happens slowly, and will likely take more than the ten-year time frame of this project under either alternative.

Objection: The FS has two sentences above that contradict each other.

- **In the first sentence soils are less than satisfactory attributable to the combined effects of historic grazing and current management.**
- **In the next sentence the FS states under current management soil condition is expected to improve on the allotment**

Rockin 4 Ranch requests the FS remove “and current management” from the 1st sentence.

23. Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessment

Page 93 – Slope - Slope is one factor which can predict where cattle may congregate. Holechek reports that cattle tend to use ten to 30 percent slopes thirty percent less often than zero to ten percent slopes and 30 to 60 percent slopes sixty percent less often than flats. Slopes over 60 percent are seldom used (Holechek, 1992)

Objection: Rockin 4 Ranch requests the FS remove the above quote from Holechek since the study is over 30 years old and based on continuous grazing.

24. Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessment

Page 93 – Slope – 2nd paragraph: The remaining 31 percent of the allotment, (68,497 acres) is mapped as 40 percent slope or greater.

Objection: Rockin 4 Ranch requests the use the correct percentage in what is mapped as 40 percent slope or greater. 31% of the allotment is **20,719 acres**.

25. Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessment

Page 94 – Cumulative Effects, second to last sentence:

- Past grazing actions have resulted in soil erosion and compaction while current management has, in some cases, prevented or slowed recovery.

Objection:

It is obvious whoever wrote this section does not like grazing. The following sentence was included twice in the same paragraph – 2nd and 8th sentence.

- Past grazing actions have resulted in soil erosion and compaction while current management has, in some cases, prevented or slowed recovery.

The FS specialist finishes up the paragraph with the following sentence:

- Even with no grazing, it is very unlikely that any measurable or unfavorable foreseeable changes (regarding soils) would occur over the period of time allowed for grazing.

Rockin 4 Ranch requests the FS remove the entire paragraph. The paragraph is extremely negative with no explanation.

26. Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessment

Page 102 - Cumulative Effects to Recreation: From March 1 to May 15 the Forest Service requires a permit for private boaters (people with their own boats who wish to organize their own trips) to boat through the Salt River Canyon Wilderness.

Objection: When the FS permits boaters to boat through the Salt River Canyon Wilderness from March 1 to May 15 they are violating ESA. The FS is required to adhere to ESA and not violate ESA. Rockin 4 Ranch requests the FS **stop permitting boaters to boat through the Salt River Canyon Wilderness from March 1 to May 15.**

27. Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessment

Page 126 - Direct and Indirect Effects of the Proposed Action

The proposed action would allow a maximum stocking level greater than what is currently permitted. However, this only reflects the maximum stocking level under optimum conditions of active management. Necessary annual adjustments to grazing management on the allotment will be implemented through the annual operating instructions (AOI), which will adjust use to be consistent with current vegetation productivity and resource conditions. Modifications to the AOI may be implemented at any time throughout the grazing season in response to unforeseen environmental concerns such as drought, fire, flood, etc., or management and livestock operation concerns.

Objection: The FS wording at the start of this section is misleading. Rockin 4 Ranch requests the FS to reword this section as follows:

- Necessary annual adjustments to grazing management on the allotment will be implemented through the annual operating instructions (AOI), which will adjust use to be consistent with current vegetation productivity and resource conditions. Modifications to the AOI may be implemented at any time throughout the grazing season in response to unforeseen environmental concerns such as drought, fire, flood, etc., or management and livestock operation concerns. Under optimum

conditions of active management, the proposed action would allow a maximum stocking level greater than what is currently permitted.

28. Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment Grazing Authorization Environmental Assessment

Page 145 - Water Sources - Sycamore well - Windmill is inactive; sycamore, walnut, cottonwood in wash.

Objection: Rockin 4 Ranch requests the FS update its improvement record on Sycamore well. The well is on a solar system

29. Decision Notice

Authorization (p. 1)

P. 1 - The Globe Ranger District of the Tonto National Forest proposes to **authorize** livestock grazing on the Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment under the following terms:

Objection: The FS uses the term "authorization" or "authorize" when it should use the term "re-authorization" since the Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment has livestock grazing authorized on it under the existing term grazing permit issued to the current permittee - Rockin Four Ranch, LLC.

The FS uses the term "authorization" or "authorize" on many of its documents. However, an example where the FS recognizes they should be "re-authorizing" or "re-authorization" was the Salt and Griffin Fire - Hicks-Pikes Peak Grazing Allotment; Draft Post Fire Assessment and Restocking Memorandum of Understanding; Globe Ranger District, Tonto NF, Gila County Arizona.

In this document it states the following:

- Assess range readiness of the forage to **re-authorize** livestock grazing.
- Range readiness uses visual cues and monitoring data to identify if desired conditions are met to consider **re-authorization** of livestock in burned areas.
- Areas not impacted by the Salt and Griffin Fire, and continue to offer availability may be considered for **re-authorization** of cattle.
- Strategies for **re-authorizing** livestock grazing onto burned areas.

Livestock grazing is already "authorized" under the existing grazing permit. The Decision Notice for Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment Grazing Authorization should be restated to "Decision Notice for Hicks-Pikes Peak Allotment Grazing Re-Authorization".

30. Decision Notice

Administrative Actions to Adjust Grazing Management (p. 18)

In the Forest Plan achievement of meeting objectives is measured in either “meeting or moving towards”. The FS would evaluate whether the resource monitoring objectives are met. Adaptive management would also to be used in meeting objectives. If the resource condition is not meeting the desired condition, a determination must be made if the resource is moving toward the desired condition, or not moving toward the desired condition. If adaptive management changes are warranted, the Forest Service and the permittee would evaluate an adaptive option. Evaluating current condition versus meeting or moving toward desired conditions is to be made through the use of long-term monitoring data.

In the Draft Decision Notice, it states the Proposed Action will: continue to move the project area toward the desired conditions as site specifically interpreted for this area from the 1985 Tonto National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan)10.

Both the EA and the DN are lacking in establishing whether objectives are either are being met or are moving towards meeting the objectives. The DN needs to show whether the resource management objectives are meeting or moving toward desired conditions. Simply stating objectives are satisfactory or unsatisfactory will not help in letting everyone know whether the resource objective is meeting or moving toward desired conditions.

The FS needs to include an adaptive management decision process to evaluate whether the resource objective is meeting or moving toward desired conditions.

31. Decision Notice

Decision Rationale (p. 3 of 33)

Under “**Decision Rationale**”, 2nd bulleted point it states:

- I have also determined it is consistent with the standards and guidelines in the draft revised forest plan published in November 2019, the most current version available at the time of this decision.

Objection: The FS cannot use the draft revised forest plan published in November 2019 as a reference for stating the Decision Notice is consistent with the standards and guidelines in the Draft. The draft revised forest plan is still a draft and cannot be referenced.

