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**File Code:** 1950  
**Date:** April 14, 2020

Dear Interested Party;

On April 10<sup>th</sup> of last week I sent you a letter regarding the Santa Rosa Rangeland Management Project located on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, Santa Rosa Ranger District.

This letter provided an incorrect link to the project's website. The correct link is provided here:

[http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa\\_project\\_exp.php?project=52282](http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa_project_exp.php?project=52282)

If you would prefer a CD or hard copy of the complete NOPA, please contact Boyd Hatch, Project Manager, Santa Rosa Ranger District, by phone at 775-623-5025 ext. 4, or email at [boyd.hatch@usda.gov](mailto:boyd.hatch@usda.gov). This NOPA was developed to provide the public and other interested parties an opportunity to review and comment on the proposed action.

The Proposed Action is to continue to authorize grazing on all twelve of the active allotment on the Santa Rosa Ranger District. The Forest Service also proposes to modify the terms and conditions in these grazing permits. These modifications include design features to protect resources and adjustments to the number of livestock to be grazed based on annual and within-season assessments of the current ecological conditions of the allotments. These modifications are designed to maintain areas in satisfactory ecological condition and improve areas that are in less than satisfactory ecological condition.

**HOW TO COMMENT AND TIMEFRAME:**

Following the release of the Notice of Proposed Action the Forest Service will be publishing the Legal Notice of Opportunity to Comment on the Project. Publication of this legal notice will start a formal 30-day public comment period (36 CFR 218.24). Complete details on how to comment are provided in the Notice of Proposed Action.

The Forest Service encourages your comments on this proposed action, along with supporting reasons that the responsible official should consider in issuing a decision. Your comments will help us to complete the environmental assessment on the proposed action.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Boyd Hatch, Project Manager at (775) 623-5025 ext. 4 or [boyd.hatch@usda.gov](mailto:boyd.hatch@usda.gov)

Sincerely,

JOSEPH GARROTTO  
District Ranger



# NOTICE OF PROPOSED ACTION

## Santa Rosa Rangeland Management Project

SANTA ROSA RANGER DISTRICT

HUMBOLDT-TOIYABE NATIONAL FOREST

Humboldt County, Nevada



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest Service  
Intermountain Region

April 2020

Cover Photo: Rebel Creek watershed looking towards Santa Rosa – Paradise Peak Wilderness

## Equal Opportunity Statement

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To file a program complaint of discrimination, complete the [USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form](#), (AD-3027) found online at: [How to File a Complaint](#), and at any USDA office, or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov)

## OPPORTUNITY TO COMMENT ON THE PROPOSED ACTION

The Santa Rosa Ranger District of the US Forest Service, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest welcomes your comments on a proposal to continue authorizing grazing on 12 active livestock grazing allotments on the Santa Rosa Ranger District. The allotments are in Humboldt County, Nevada. This project is subject to comment pursuant to 36 CFR 218, Subparts A and B. Please see the "Comment Process" section on pg. 28 for information on how to provide comments.

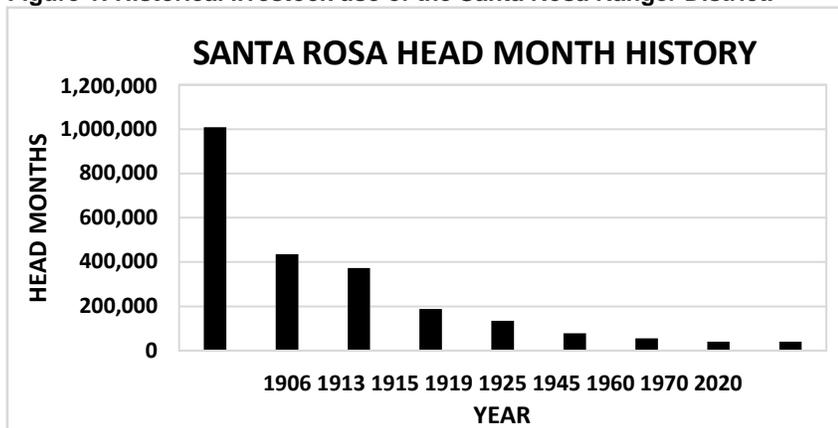
## BACKGROUND

Rangelands in the Santa Rosa Ranger District have supported livestock grazing since the late 1800's, prior to the District's establishment as part of the National Forest System (NFS). Since the establishment of the Forest Reserve in 1911, the Forest Service has been delegated the management responsibility for NFS land and livestock grazing has been allowed on most of the lands under a permit system.

In 1906, prior to establishment of the National Forest in 1911, sheep and cattle use was estimated at 1 million head months annually due to large herds and unmanaged livestock. This led to “very bad conditions” (USDA Forest Service 1915; USDA Forest Service, 1926). Due to these concerns and “To protect their means of livelihood, the local ranchers petitioned for the setting aside of the Santa Rosa’s as a Forest Reserve, (USDA Forest Service, undated).” By 1913, after the Forest was established and grazing use was regulated through issuance of permits, annual use dropped by almost 60% to approximately 400,000 head months. This reduction was directed towards improving conditions of the rangelands and watersheds.

The period between 1913 and 1925 saw a 70% reduction in head months as permits were reduced to meet studies that determined carrying capacity of the forest and to improve watershed conditions (USDA Forest Service, 1945). In this time many sheep permits were not re-issued when they expired. During this time period, the Forest purchased and/or exchanged lands for many private inholdings and phased out the private land permits associated with those properties. During the 1920s to 1940s many of the permits were converted from sheep to cattle, with the last sheep grazing ending in the early 1960s. This was done to further meet carrying capacity studies and to restore degraded rangelands to protect watershed resources. Since the 1970s permitted head months have decreased by 1% as stocking rates were adjusted based on forage production data.

Figure 1: Historical livestock use of the Santa Rosa Ranger District.



The Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960 authorizes and directs the Secretary of Agriculture to develop and administer the renewable resources of timber, range, water, recreation and wildlife on the National Forests for multiple use and sustained yield of products and services. Livestock grazing is identified as one of the multiple uses under the 1986 Humboldt National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan), as amended.

A grazing allotment is a designated area of land available for domestic livestock (cattle, horses, goats, and/or sheep) grazing. The authorizing document for permitting livestock on an allotment is the Term Grazing Permit (Permit). An Allotment Management Plan (AMP) is the implementation document developed, with the livestock permittees, after a project level analysis and associated decision is completed in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The AMP describes how livestock would be managed and includes information on pasture rotation, timing of grazing, water developments, fence installation and maintenance, forage use indicators, and monitoring requirements to achieve desired conditions<sup>1</sup>. Permits are modified to include AMPs as they are completed.

The Santa Rosa Ranger District is approximately 280,000 acres, with 13 livestock grazing allotments. One of these, Eight Mile Grazing Allotment, was closed to livestock grazing in the mid 1970's. All other allotments on the District permit cattle and horse grazing. There are no sheep or goat grazing allotments on the District. Figure 2 (pg. 6) displays the allotments under consideration in this environmental document and the project area. The project area begins approximately 40 miles north of Winnemucca, Nevada in Humboldt County and extends north to the state boundary with Oregon. The allotments are all east of Highway 95, south of the Oregon border, north of State Highway 290, and west of the Greely Crossing road. The project area is surrounded by Tribal land, private land, and land administered by the Bureau of Land Management. Table 1 provides a summary of current grazing management for the 12 active allotments in the project area.

**Table 1. Summary of the current management for the twelve active grazing allotments in the project area.**

ALLOTMENT NAME	SIZE (ACRES)	HEAD MONTHS	PERMITTED LIVESTOCK <sup>1</sup>	# OF PERMITTEES	CURRENT PERMITTED SEASON	ROTATION (SEE TABLES 2-4).	NUMBER OF PASTURES
Buffalo	21,395	651	255	3	June to August	Deferred & Rest	6
Buttermilk	36,653	7,208	1,661	2	May to August	Deferred Rest	4
Granite Peak	41,686	4,591	1,050	3	May to September	Deferred Rest	7
Indian	19,715	1,411	401	1	June to September	Rest	2
Lamance	6,376	996	294	2	May to August	Deferred	3

<sup>1</sup>Desired Condition - Rangelands. The specific condition of rangeland resources that meets management objectives as identified in the Forest Plan and Rangeland Project Decision. Desired condition of rangelands may be expressed in terms of: species composition, diversity of habitats, or age classes of species; desired soil protection. .( FSH 2209.21 Zero Code)

**Table 1 continued**

ALLOTMENT NAME	SIZE (ACRES)	HEAD MONTHS	PERMITTED LIVESTOCK <sup>1</sup>	# OF PERMITTEES	CURRENT PERMITTED SEASON	ROTATION (SEE TABLES 2-4).	NUMBER OF PASTURES
North Fork	5,871	971	360	1	June to September	Deferred Rest	4
Paradise	15,156	1,693	500	1	May to August	Deferred Rest	7
Quinn River	56,389	10,520	2,800	1	April to September	Deferred Rest	6
Rebel Creek	16,591	764	250	1	June to September	Deferred Rest	4
West Side Flat Creek	21, 221	1,303	461	1	June to August	Rest	2
Wild Bill	12,035	2,393	650	1	June to September	Deferred Rest	6
Martin Basin	34,740	7,346	1,960		June to September	Deferred	7
Martin Basin	34,740	7,346	1,960		June to September	Deferred	7

<sup>1</sup>Permitted livestock includes yearlings, cow/calf pairs, saddle horses, and bulls.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE ALLOTMENTS

The 12 active allotments on the Santa Rosa Ranger District are currently managed under deferred-rotation grazing systems, rest-rotation grazing systems or a combination of the two systems.

Deferred rotation is any grazing system which incorporates a delay of grazing aimed at providing time for plant reproduction, establishment of new plants or restoration of plant vigor. A deferred-rotation system provides for a systematic rotation of the deferment among pastures. The example in the following table delays grazing use each year so that no pasture is grazed at the same time each year.

**Table 2. Example of a deferred-rotation grazing system**

PASTURES	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3
Pasture A	June 1-30	Aug 1-30	July 1-31
Pasture B	July 1-31	June 1-30	Aug 1-30
Pasture C	Aug 1-30	July 1-31	June 1-30

Rest-rotation is a grazing system in which rest periods for individual pastures, for the full grazing season, are incorporated into a grazing rotation. The following table shows an example of a rest-rotation system for an allotment with three pastures.

**Table 3. Example of a rest-rotation grazing system**

PASTURES	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3
Pasture A	June 1-30	Rest	July 1-31
Pasture B	July 1-31	June 1-30	Rest
Pasture C	Rest	July 1-31	June 1-30

Some allotments in the project area use a combination of deferred-rotation and rest-rotation grazing systems. Using a combination allows for some units to be rested for a full season while grazing use of the other units is structured so that no pasture is grazed at the same time each year.

**Table 4. Example of a combination of deferred-rest and rest-rotation grazing systems**

PASTURES	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3
Pasture A	June 1-30	Rest	Sept 1-30
Pasture B	July 1-31	June 1-30	Rest
Pasture C	Aug 1-30	July 1-31	June 1-30
Pasture D	Sept 1-30	Aug 1-30	July 1-31
Pasture E	Rest	Sept 1-30	Aug 1-30

## **Buffalo Grazing Allotment**

### *Setting*

This livestock grazing allotment is on the southwest side of the district. The allotment is approximately 21,395 acres in size (this includes some BLM acres), it ranges from approximately 5,000 feet to 8,500 feet in elevation. The allotment has six canyons that bisect the area. These canyons have perennial streams Chimney Creek, Porcupine Creek, Andorno Creek, Buffalo Creek, Falls Canyon Creek, and Horse Creek, with some seasonal streams. The riparian vegetation consists of willows, aspen and some cottonwoods, with a mix of herbaceous vegetation. The uplands consist of a mix of low and mountain big sagebrush, mountain brush, mahogany and large stands of aspen, with a few scattered limber pines scattered around. Upper portions of the Andorno, Buffalo, Falls and Horse Creek Canyons are within the Santa Rosa - Paradise Peak Wilderness Area.

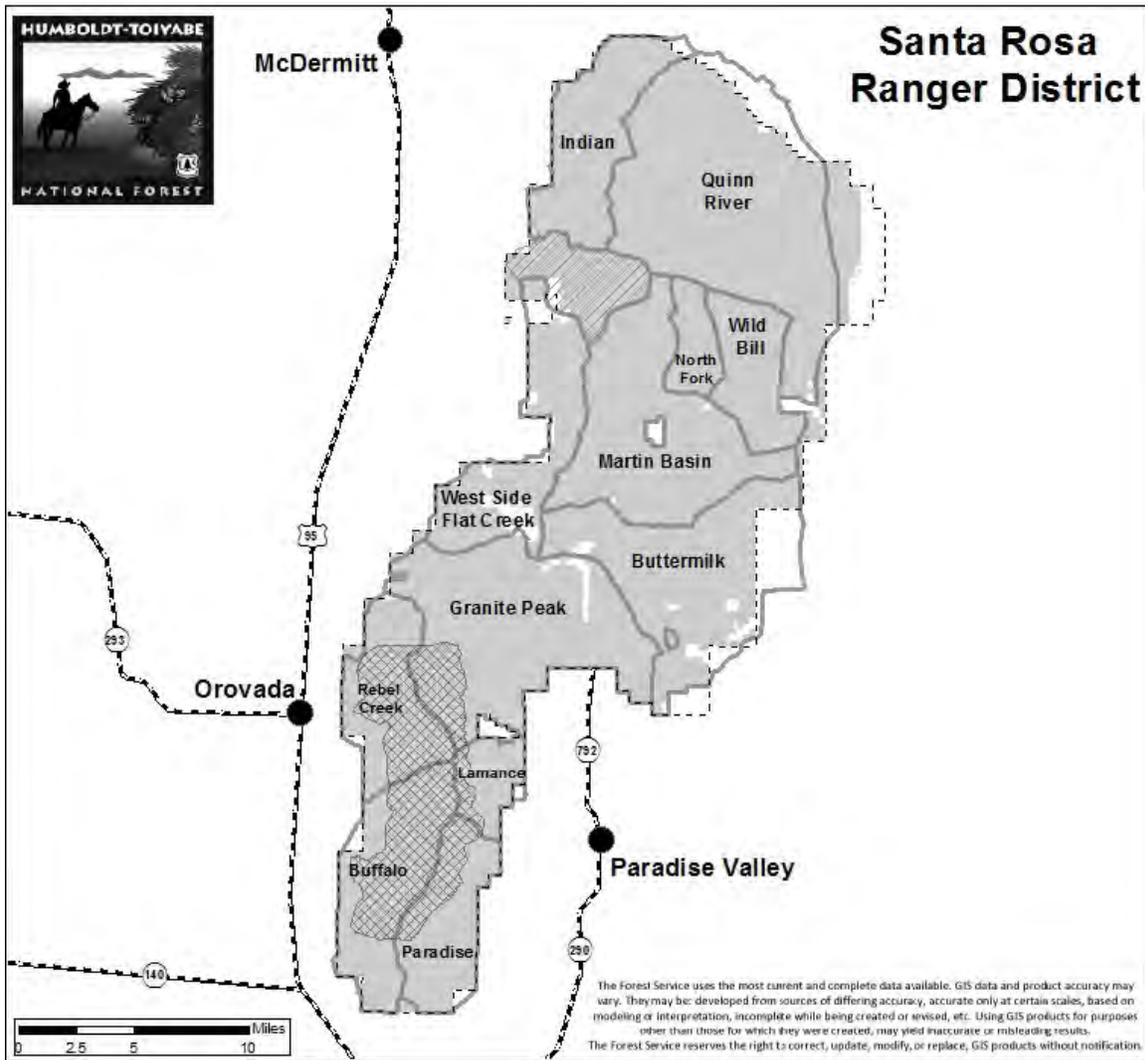
### *Current Management*

Buffalo Allotment is divided into six pastures, Horse Canyon, Falls Canyon, Buffalo Canyon, Andorno Canyon, Porcupine Canyon and Chimney Canyon. It is managed under a rest rotation system and a deferred rotation system. Currently it is grazed by three livestock grazing permittees that have cow/calf pairs, bulls, and replacement heifers, totaling 255 livestock. These stock can currently enter the allotment between June 16 and 25, and exit the allotment between August 4, and 31.

Porcupine Canyon and Chimney Canyon are managed under a deferred rotation system, where 105 head of livestock start in one of the canyons and rotate about mid-season to the other. The following year the rotation is reversed allowing for the vegetation to get grazed at different times of year every other year.

Andorno, Falls, Horse and Buffalo canyons are a rest rotation system, resting two pastures one year and grazing the other two. Falls and Horse are grazed one year with about 75 head season long in each canyon. The following year Buffalo, and Andorno are grazed with 100 head in Buffalo and 50 in Andorno. Having this rotation allows for the plants to have a full growing season to recover from the previous year.

Figure 1. Map showing the location of the 12 active allotments on the Santa Rosa Ranger District



**Santa Rosa Range Management Project**

-  USDA Forest Service
  -  Allotment Boundary
  -  City
  -  Humboldt Toiyabe NF
  -  Closed Allotment
  -  US Highway
  -  Wilderness
  -  Santa Rosa Ranger District
  -  State Boundary
- 



## **Buttermilk Grazing Allotment**

### ***Setting***

This livestock grazing allotment is on the south west side of the district. The allotment is approximately 36,653 acres in size (this includes some private and BLM acres), it ranges from approximately 5,000 to 9,400 feet in elevation. This allotment has seven perennial streams as well as some seasonal ones. The perennial streams are Dutch John Creek, Road Creek, Lye Creek, Alkali Creek, Deep Creek, Round Corral Creek and Martin Creek. These riparian habitats have willows, cottonwoods and aspen, the upper elevations are primarily a mix of low and big sage brush, mountain brush, meadows, mountain mahogany, aspen and scattered limber pine in the upper elevations.

### ***Current Management***

The Buttermilk Allotment is divided into four pastures, Spring City, Black Ridge, Buttermilk and Lye Creek. It has been on a deferred rest rotation system grazing three pastures and resting one. Currently it is permitted for 1,661 head of livestock primarily cow calf pairs, bulls and replacement heifers. This permit has had two permittees, but currently only one is operating. This permittee is currently permitted to graze 1,098 head from May 22 to September 22 and 563 head from May 22 to September 30.

Grazing on this allotment typically rests one pasture while grazing the other three pastures on a deferred rotation. The next year one of the other pastures would be rested while grazing the other three. The intent is to not graze the same pasture or unit at the same time it was grazed the previous year. Grazing this way allows for each pasture to be rested for an entire season once in a 3-year period.

## **Granite Peak Grazing Allotment**

### ***Setting***

This livestock grazing allotment is one of the larger allotments. It is located on the southern end of the district and stretches over the top of the mountain. The allotment is approximately 41,686 acres (this includes some private and BLM acres), it ranges from approximately 5,000 to 9,600 feet in elevation. This allotment contains perennial streams as well as some seasonal ones. The perennial streams present are Willow Creek, Rebel Creek, Cottonwood Creek, Mullinix Creek, Solid Silver Creek, Indian and South Fork Indian Creek. All of them have riparian habitat with willows, cottonwoods, meadow and aspen with an herbaceous understory. The upper elevations are primarily a mix of low and big sage brush, mountain brush, meadow, mountain mahogany, aspen and a few limber pine in the upper elevations, with a mix of herbaceous vegetation. Rebel Creek pasture and the upper portions of the Solid Silver/Mullinix and Upper Willow Pastures are within the Santa Rosa Paradise Peak Wilderness.

### ***Current Management***

Granite Peak Allotment is divided up into seven pastures Tom Basin, Lower Indian Creek, Upper Indian Creek, Solid Silver/Mullinix, Rebel Creek, Lower Willow Cr. and Upper Willow Cr. This allotment is managed under a deferred and rest rotation system. Currently it is grazed by three livestock permittees in common that primarily graze cow calf pairs, bulls and some replacement heifers totaling 1,050 head of livestock. The permittees graze the livestock on the allotment between May 21 and September 30.

Under this deferred and rest rotation system, they typically divide the herd up and one third goes into Tom Basin pasture and the remaining two-thirds start in the Lower Indian Creek pasture. They combine into the Upper Indian Creek unit/pasture and rotate through the other pastures ending in the Solid Silver and Mullinix unit. In this rotation the Lower Willow Creek pasture is rested. The next year the herd is split up and two thirds start in Lower Willow Creek and a third in Solid Silver/Mullinix. The cattle in lower Willow Creek move up into upper Willow Creek and the cattle in Solid Silver move up into Rebel Creek. They combine in to upper Willow Creek and finish by grazing into Lower Indian Creek, resting Tom Basin Pasture. Other pastures or sections of pastures have been rested as they have needed it.

## **Indian Grazing Allotment**

### ***Setting***

This livestock grazing allotment is on the north-west side of the district, is divided into two pastures, the North and South Pasture. This allotment is approximately 19,715 acres (this includes some BLM acres), and ranges in elevations from approximately 4,500 feet to 7,500 feet. These canyons are gradual and have large rolling hills and gradual slopes in the southern end that get steeper as it goes south. These canyons have three perennial streams Jakes Creek, Quinn River, and South Fork of the Quinn River, with some seasonal streams. These riparian habitats have willows, aspen, meadows and some cottonwoods with an herbaceous understory. The uplands are primarily sage brush, mountain brush, mahogany and aspen communities with an herbaceous understory.

### ***Current Management***

The Indian Allotment is divided into two pastures under a rest rotation system, but on certain years it has been authorized to use a deferred system to alleviate excess use on the pastures. Livestock on this allotment are typically cow calf pairs, bulls and replacement heifers, totaling 401 livestock. The permittee can currently graze the allotment between June 16 and September 30. With this rest rotation system, the livestock graze in one of the pastures for the grazing season and rest the other. The following year the rested unit is then grazed, and the other unit is rested.

## **Lamance Grazing Allotment**

### ***Setting***

This livestock grazing allotment is on the southern end of the district on the East side of the mountain. The allotment is approximately 6,376 acres. It ranges from approximately 5,000 to 9,000 feet in elevation. The allotment has three perennial streams, Hanson Creek, Lamance Creek and Cottonwood Creek, and some seasonal streams. These streams have gentle slopes around the foothills and increased in steepness on the upper portions of the allotment. The riparian habitat consists of willows, cottonwoods, and aspen with a variety of herbaceous vegetation. The uplands are comprised of sagebrush, mountain brush, mahogany, aspen and a few limber pines at the higher elevations. The upper portions of the Lamance and Cottonwood pastures are within the Santa Rosa Paradise Peak Wilderness.

### ***Current Management***

The Lamance Allotment has three pastures Lamance, Cottonwood, and Dry Creek. It is managed under a deferred rotation system. Currently it is permitted to two livestock grazing permittees that graze cow calf pairs, bulls and some replacement heifers, totaling 294 livestock. They are permitted to enter the allotment on May 21 and exit on August 31. A deferred rotation system has been used on this allotment starting in a different unit each year and grazing each pasture at different times each year. The following year the livestock will graze in a different unit from the previous year, rotating each pasture so that each is grazed at a different time each year over three years.

### **Martin Basin Grazing Allotment**

#### ***Setting***

This allotment is in the center of the district. It is approximately 34,740 acres in size (this includes some private acres). It ranges from approximately 5,800 to 8,700 feet in elevation. The allotment has ten perennial streams, Martin Creek, Siard Creek, Long Canyon Creek, North Fork of the Little Humboldt Creek, Cabin and North Fork of Cabin Creek, Bradshaw Creek, Dutch John Creek, Road Creek and Alkali Creek, and some seasonal streams. This allotment has several different vegetation communities with large acreage of low and big sagebrush, mountain brush, aspen, mahogany, meadows, and a few limber pine in higher elevations. It has an extensive riparian system with willows, meadows, aspen and cottonwood and a mix of herbaceous vegetation.

#### ***Current Management***

This allotment has seven pastures, Black Ridge, Long Canyon, Cold Spring, North Fork, Siard, Cabin Cr. and Cabin Cr. Riparian. Martin Basin is under deferred rotation system. This allotment is permitted for 1,935 head of cow calf pairs, bulls, some replacement heifers, and 25 head of horses totaling 1,960 head of livestock. The allotment has two permittees that currently graze 1,960 head of livestock on the allotment from June 6 till September 27.

This deferred rotation system is grazed in a clockwise direction one year and counter clockwise direction the next year, starting in the Black Ridge Pasture ending in the Cabin Creek Unit. The following year starts in Black Ridge Unit/Cabin Creek Pasture and ends in Cold Spring Pasture. This rotation grazes each pasture at a different time of year every other year.

### **North Fork Grazing Allotment**

#### ***Setting***

This allotment is nestled in the north central part of the district. It is approximately 5,871 acres in size, and it ranges from approximately 6,200 to 7,500 feet in elevation. It has two perennial streams Long Canyon Creek and North Fork of the Little Humboldt Creek, and some seasonal ones. Riparian areas in this allotment include meadows, willows, cottonwoods, and aspen with a mix of herbaceous vegetation. The uplands are meadow, sagebrush, mountain brush, mahogany, aspen, and a mix of herbaceous vegetation.

#### ***Current Management***

The North Fork Allotment has four pastures, Holloway Meadows, Table Mountain, North Fork and Long Canyon. It has been managed under a deferred and rest rotation systems.

Currently the North Fork allotment is grazed by one livestock grazing permittee. They run cow calf pairs, bulls and a few replacement heifers totaling 360 head of livestock. These 360 head of livestock graze on the allotment between June 16 and September 5. Under this deferred rest rotation, they mother up in the Holloway Meadow pasture right before they move onto the rest of the allotment. One of the pastures is usually rested and the other two are managed in deferred rotation. The following year the rested pasture is then used and one of the other pastures is rested.

## **Paradise Grazing Allotment**

### *Setting*

The Paradise Allotment is on the south eastside of the District and is approximately 15,156 acres (this includes some BLM acres). It ranges from approximately 5,500 to 9,500 feet in elevation. It has six canyons that are steep and narrow and open at the top ends into bowls. The allotment also has some rolling hills, gradual slopes and open areas. The allotment contains Singas Creek, Morrey Creek, Able Creek, Stone House Creek, Wash O' Neal Creek and Provo Creek, which are all perennial streams. The riparian areas contain willows, meadows, aspen and cottonwoods, the uplands have large sagebrush and mountain brush complexes with large aspen stands and mahogany in the upper bowl portions of the pastures. There are a few limber pine in the upper elevations. The upper elevations of the Wash O' Neil, Able Creek, Able Seeding, and Singas pastures are within the Santa Rosa Paradise Peak Wilderness.

### *Current Management*

The Paradise Allotment is divided up into seven pastures Provo, Wash O'Neil, Stone House, Able, Able Riparian, Able Seeding and Singas. It is managed under a deferred rest rotation system. Currently it is grazed by one livestock grazing permittee that has cow calf pairs, bulls and replacement heifers totaling 500 head of livestock. They are permitted to enter the allotment on May 21 and exit it on August 31.

This allotment is managed under a deferred rest rotation system. One or more units are rested and the other units are grazed. During the first-year grazing starts in the south end by splitting the herd into the Provo, Wash O'Neil and Stonehouse pastures. When utilization is met in those pastures the entire herd is moved into the Able Pasture. In some years a few head may be allowed to graze the Able riparian pasture. The herd then ends the season in the Seeding Pasture. During that year the Singas Pasture is rested. The next year Singas is grazed then the seeding, followed by the Able pasture. The remaining pastures are rested. Resting the units can vary from year to year based on the need for a unit. Several pastures in this allotment have been seeded with non-native seeds that have a higher tolerance to grazing.

## **Quinn River Grazing Allotment**

### *Setting*

This is the largest allotment on the Santa Rosa Ranger District. It is on the northeast side of the district. The allotment is approximately 56,389 acres in size (this includes some private and BLM acres), and ranges from approximately 5,000 to 8,000 feet in elevation. The allotment has four perennial streams, Quinn River, Klondike Creek, Laca Creek, and South Fork of the Quinn River, and several seasonal ones. These rivers and streams are vegetated with meadows, willows, aspen and cottonwoods with a mix of herbaceous vegetation.

The uplands are sagebrush, mountain brush, meadows, aspen stands and mountain mahogany stands, with a mix of herbaceous vegetation.

### ***Current Management***

This allotment contains six pastures Quinn River, Long Canyon, Laca, Laca Riparian, Goosey Lake and South Fork. The pastures are grazed in a deferred rest rotation system. The allotment is currently grazed by one permittee that runs cow calf pairs, bull, and replacement yearlings, totaling 2,800 head of livestock. They are permitted to enter the allotment on April 15 with 400 head and the remaining 2,400 entering on May 15. All livestock must exit the allotment on September 1.

If conditions allow, about 400 head of yearling and cow-calf pairs are turned into the Quinn Riparian early in the spring, then in mid-May the remaining 2,400 head of cow calf pairs are split, some entering the Quinn Riparian and Long Canyon units, and the other half starting in the Goosey Lake Unit. After they use those pastures the livestock move into the South Fork, Laca, and Laca Riparian pastures. The South Fork pasture is treated like two pastures with an east and west side. Each year one or more units is designated to be rested and the other pastures are selected for livestock use.

## **Rebel Creek Grazing Allotment**

### ***Setting***

This allotment is located on the west side and about in the center of the District near the town of Orovada. The allotment is approximately 16,591 acres in size (this includes some private and BLM acres), and it ranges from approximately 4,800 to 9,500 feet in elevation. There are five steep, narrow canyons that open at the tops into large bowls. There are five perennial streams in the allotment with willows, aspen, and cottonwoods with an herbaceous understory. They include: Rebel Creek, Wood Canyon Creek, Rock Creek, Antelope Creek, McConnell Creek. The uplands have a mix of low and big sagebrush, mountain brush, mahogany and aspen stands with herbaceous understory. Wood Canyon and the upper portions of McConnell Creek, and Rebel Creek are within the Santa Rosa Paradise Peak Wilderness.

### ***Current Management***

The allotment contains four pastures, Rebel Creek, Eagle Cr., McConnell Cr. and Wood Canyon. It is a deferred rest rotation system. Currently the allotment has one permittee that runs cow calf pairs, bull and some replacement heifers, totaling 250 head of livestock. They are permitted to enter the allotment on June 1 and exit it on September 1. Under the deferred rest rotation system, the permittee's livestock graze two pastures one year and defer the other two pastures until the following year. The next year livestock would graze the pastures that were rested the previous year.

## **West Side Flat Creek Grazing Allotment**

### ***Setting***

This allotment is on the west side and central to the district. It is approximately 21,221 acres in size (this includes some private and BLM acres), and ranges from approximately 5,200 to 9,200 feet in elevation. The allotment has 5 perennial streams: Three-mile Creek, Canyon Creek, Pole Creek, Skull Creek and Flat Creek, and some seasonal streams.

The riparian areas have willows, aspen, and cottonwoods with an herbaceous understory. The uplands consist of a mix of low and big sage brush, mountain brush, aspen, and a few limber pines in the upper elevations, with an herbaceous understory.

### ***Current Management***

West Side Flat Creek Allotment is divided up into two pastures, North and South units. It is currently managed under a rest rotation system. The allotment has one permittee who runs cow calf pairs, bulls and some replacement heifers totaling 461 head of livestock. The livestock may enter the allotment on June 1 and must exit on August 25.

The allotment is currently on a rest rotation system, grazing one pasture all season long one year and then resting the other. The following year the grazed pasture from the previous year is rested and the other unit is grazed. It has been managed some years under a deferred rotation system.

## **Wild Bill Grazing Allotment**

### ***Setting***

This allotment is on the north east side of the district. It is approximately 12,035 acres in size, and ranges from about approximately 5,900 to 7,100 feet in elevation. It has four perennial streams and several seasonal streams. The riparian areas have willows, meadows, aspen, and cottonwoods with an herbaceous understory. The uplands have aspen stands, mahogany, meadows, a mix of low and big sage brush and mountain brush with an herbaceous understory.

### ***Current Management***

Wild Bill Allotment has six pastures, Ground Hog, Goosey Riparian, Duck Cr., South River, North River and Reseed. It is managed as a rest and deferred rotation system. It currently has one permittee that has cow calf pairs, bulls and a few replacement heifers, totaling 650 head of livestock. They enter the allotment on June 11 and exit on September 30.

It is grazed on a rest and deferred rotation system. One or more pastures are rested, and the remainder are grazed under a deferred system. The following year other units/pastures are rested, while deferring different pastures from the previous year. This allows the grasses enough time to complete their life cycle.

## **NEED FOR THE PROPOSAL**

Livestock grazing across the Santa Rosa Ranger District is currently authorized under the Humboldt National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Plan) (1986 as Amended). Rangeland condition monitoring conducted across the District indicates that there is a general overall trend towards the desired condition for most of the pastures/allotments. There are areas that are not at desired condition and may be static or even trending downward away from the desired condition (USDA Forest Service, 2020). In order to address these problem areas and to continue the upward trend towards the desired condition, there is a need to determine how best to manage livestock grazing activities in order to achieve healthy, sustainable rangelands.

National Forest System land is an important source of livestock forage. Congress has made it clear through the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act and the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) that domestic livestock grazing is one of many activities that should be considered when balancing the multiple uses on National Forest System lands.

The purpose of this action is to continue to authorize livestock grazing on the 12 active allotments on the Santa Rosa Ranger District.

## **MANAGEMENT DIRECTION**

Projects that take place on NFS land are guided by the desired conditions, goals, objectives, management direction, and standards and guidelines set out in the Forest Plan specific to each national forest. The 1986 Forest Plan for the Humboldt National Forest, as amended, provides direction that applies to livestock grazing management. Key elements of this direction are shown below.

### **Forest-Wide Goals (pages IV-5 to IV-6)**

**Goal #16** Manage allotments to maintain suitable range in satisfactory ecological condition and improve range in less than satisfactory condition by developing management plans on all allotments.<sup>2</sup>

**Goal #17** Provide a sustained yield of forage on all lands available and suitable for livestock grazing while maintaining or enhancing the productivity of the land.

**Goal #18** Manage livestock to recognize the special needs relating to wet meadows and riparian habitats, and fisheries habitats.

**Goal #19** Reduce conflicts between livestock and wildlife for forage on key winter ranges.

### **Amendment II of the Humboldt Plan**

Amendment II to the Humboldt National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan sets upland utilization standards based on management systems (Season Long, Deferred Rotation, Rest Rotation, High Intensity Short Duration). Upland utilization standards in Amendment II are based on these management system types (grazing management system).

Amendment II also establishes a variable set of utilization rates for five defined riparian area management categories. Under the Amendment II utilization near categorized streams varies from 35 to 70 percent depending on the riparian area management category.

During review of the Desired Conditions and the development of the Proposed Action it was determined that there was a need to develop a project specific Forest Plan Amendment. The need for the proposed plan amendment is to ensure consistency between the Forest Plan and the proposed Santa Rosa Range Management Project.

The substantive requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule (36 CFR part 219) likely to be directly related and, therefore, applicable to the Forest Plan amendment for the Santa Rosa Range Management Project are in 36 CFR 219.8 (a)(3) regarding the ecological integrity of riparian areas, 36 CFR 219.9(b) regarding threatened and endangered species and 36 CFR 219.10(a)(1), regarding integrated resource management for multiple use.

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<sup>2</sup> “Satisfactory ecological condition” is equivalent to the proposed desired conditions. Range that is in “less than satisfactory condition” is not meeting the desired conditions.

The scope of the amendment would be the activities that would be approved by the Santa Rosa Rangeland Management Project decision. The amendment would not apply to any other projects or activities. The scale of the amendment would be limited to the project area.

## **Management Area Direction**

The Forest Plan divides NFS land into sub-units called management areas. Each management area has resource or activity goals and management standards for managing areas in particular ways under management area prescriptions. Specific standards and guidelines for management areas apply in addition to any relevant forest-wide direction. This project is located within the Santa Rosa Management Area. Direction specific to this management area includes the following:

- Range improvements will be maintained, constructed and reconstructed, as provided for in the individual allotment management plans.
- Livestock grazing will continue on the 12<sup>3</sup> allotments currently under management.
- Noxious weed control will continue. (IV-199).

## **Capability/Suitability**

A rangeland capability and suitability analysis is required for this effort as indicated in Goal #17 above to define what lands are suitable and capable for livestock grazing under this action. The definition of rangeland capability and suitability is as follows:

***Inherent capability of the plan area:*** The ecological capacity or ecological potential of an area characterized by the interrelationship of its physical elements, its climate regime, and natural disturbances. (36 CFR 219.9 & 36 CFR 219.19) In terms of livestock management, capability depends upon current resource conditions and site conditions such as slope, soils, distance to water, and potential forage production (pounds of forage per/acre).

***Suitability of lands:*** Specific lands within a plan area will be identified as suitable for various multiple uses or activities based on the desired conditions applicable to those lands (36 CFR 219.7).

Capable and suitable acres for livestock grazing are determined first on the very broad scale at the Forest Plan level and are reevaluated on a more site-specific basis through project level assessments. Using US Forest Service Region Four procedures for determining capability (slope, distance to water, vegetative production and soil characteristics), a GIS exercise was completed to identify capable acres. Areas determined to be unsuitable in the Forest Plan, such as Lye Creek Campground, were not included. Specific information and maps for these twelve (12) allotments are included in the Project Record.

## **PROPOSED ACTION**

The Forest Service is proposing to authorize continued livestock grazing within the 12 active allotments on the Santa Rosa Ranger District. The Proposed Action specifies the required livestock management practices to move rangeland communities toward desired conditions.

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<sup>3</sup> The Eight Mile allotment is a closed allotment and not being opened or reauthorized to grazing.

Key elements of the proposed action include:

- Extend the season of use from a fixed summer season to a flexible grazing season; consistent with seasonal variations in range readiness and forage production;
- Provide flexibility in the rotational grazing management systems (e.g., rest rotation, deferred rest rotation; and/or deferred rotation) used to manage livestock distribution within an allotment from year to year;
- Set annual average utilization for herbaceous species in native uplands across the 12 allotments at 50 percent;
- Set annual average utilization for herbaceous species in non-native “seeded” uplands at 65 percent;
- Set annual average residual stubble height for all meadows, wetlands, and riparian areas at 4 inches;
- Set annual use levels for riparian browse (i.e., shrub and tree species) at 35 percent utilization of current years leader growth;
- Set annual utilization levels for upland browse (i.e., shrub and tree species) at 50 percent of current years leader growth;
- Set annual average residual stubble height for Great Basin and creeping wildrye (*Leymus cinereus* and *Leymus triticoides*) at 10 inches;
- Authorize selected new water improvements and alteration of existing water improvements across the project area; and
- Amend the Forest Plan with the elements above that pertain to grazing management in wetlands, riparian areas, and meadows as well as utilization in uplands and of wildrye species.

The Proposed Action makes these changes within the existing permit framework that specifies the number, kind, or class of livestock already authorized for each allotment (Table 5). The Proposed Action is implemented through the issuance of term grazing permits, allotment management plans, and annual operating instructions.

### **Season of Use**

Grazing would be authorized using a flexible schedule. The typical grazing season for the allotments would generally last between three and five months and occur between March and November. The grazing occupancy would be managed consistent with current grazing use as displayed in the Head Months column in table 5. During years when excess forage is available on an allotment, the District Ranger may allow for additional grazing up to the maximum head months displayed in Table 5. This additional grazing will only be authorized on an allotment if the permittee(s) is in compliance with the terms and conditions of the permit, allotment management plan, and annual operating instructions; and they will not exceed annual use criteria. Additionally, grazing use must be consistent with other direction in the Forest Plan, ESA consultation agreements, and other direction in this decision. Annual changes to the grazing season and authorized use would be identified in writing by the District Ranger in the Annual Operating Instructions or other appropriate documents.

## **Grazing Management Systems**

In all 12 allotments, rotational grazing management systems (e.g., rest rotation, deferred rest rotation, and/or deferred rotation) would be used to manage livestock distribution in the pastures within the allotments.

The application of these grazing management systems provides for periodic rest and plant recovery during the growing season. Providing for periodic rest and plant recovery typically allows plants to go through their entire active growth stages at least once in three years. Pasture rotations are planned in cooperation with the permittee input each year through the development of the Annual Operating Instructions. The timing of grazing may also vary, or grazing may not occur in each grazing season to provide enough rest for plant communities in a pasture, particularly following drought or fire events. The Annual Operating Instructions may be modified throughout the year to address changing conditions.

## **Utilization**

Under the Proposed Action, allowable forage utilization by domestic livestock would be set at 50 percent across all 12 allotments in the native upland plant communities regardless of grazing management system or season of use (Table 5). In non-native “seeded” upland plant communities, allowable utilization would be set at 65 percent regardless of grazing management system or season. Utilization will be measured at representative sites regardless of the grazing system employed in an allotment. In upland areas, utilization on browse will be 50 percent. Utilization on riparian browse will be 35 percent.

## **Average Stubble Height**

For the herbaceous forage, an average residual four-inch stubble height standard will represent an end of the grazing season for the pastures and allotments. These herbaceous dominated wetland, riparian, and meadow areas include all the riparian area management categories identified in Amendment II of the Forest Plan and all springs and seeps across the 12 allotments. Average stubble height will be used at the end of the authorized grazing season as the assessment metric for herbaceous forage in meadows and riparian areas.

In drought years, when there is minimal plant growth expected, alternative and additional management may be undertaken in consultation with the permittee, including but not limited to: full time range riders with each herd or group of cattle to help distribute grazing use, temporary fences around areas not currently meeting the four inch minimum stubble height, supplemental water troughs, a shorted grazing period, grazing during plant dormancy, and reduced livestock numbers would be utilized to allow for the potential of turn out without causing degradation of the allotments and sensitive areas within them. If a reasonable expectation of being able to meet the seasonal monitoring triggers with the drought mitigation actions is not met, then turnout and grazing would be curtailed for that grazing season

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**Table 5. Allotment Information with the proposed livestock kind and class for each allotment and pasture:**

Allotment	Pasture	Acres	Kind	Class	Authorized Head Months <sup>4</sup>	Max Head Months <sup>5</sup>
Buffalo	Andorno	3,623	Cattle	Cow-Calf, Bulls, Yearlings	651	884
	Buffalo	4,951				
	Chimney	2,040				
	Falls	4,456				
	Horse	4,419				
	Porcupine	1,907				
<b>Total</b>		21,395				
Buttermilk	Black Ridge	13,912	Cattle	Cow-Calf, Bulls, Yearlings	7,208	8,847
	Buttermilk	12,068				
	Lye Creek	4,924				
	Spring City	5,749				
<b>Total</b>		36,653				
Granite Peak	Lower Indian	4,949	Cattle	Cow-Calf, Bulls, Yearlings	4,591	5,627
	Lower Willow	2,906				
	Rebel Cr	3,343				
	Solid Silver/ Colman	8,934				
	Tom Basin	3,339				
	Upper Indian	9,240				
Upper Willow	8,973					
<b>Total</b>		41,686				
Indian	North	11,475	Cattle	Cow-Calf, Bulls, Yearlings	1411	1806
	South	8,240				
<b>Total</b>		19,715				
Lamance	Cottonwood	2,695	Cattle	Cow-Calf, Bulls, Yearlings	996	1,286
	Dry Creek	1,228				
	Lamance	2,453				
<b>Total</b>		6,376				
Martin Basin	Black Ridge	1,417	Cattle and Horse	Horses, Cow-Calf, Bulls, Yearlings	7,346	9,279
	Cabin Creek	6,358				
	Cabin Creek Riparian	4,687				
	Cold Spring	5,001				
	Long Valley	3,991				
	North Fork	7,283				
	Siard	6,003				
<b>Total</b>		34,740				
North Fork	Holloway	266	Cattle	Cow-Calf, Bulls, Yearlings	971	1,326
	Long Canyon	1,735				
	North Fork	1,996				
	Table Mountain	1,875				
<b>Total</b>		5,871				
Paradise	Able	2,710	Cattle		1,693	2,203

<sup>4</sup> Authorized head months are the actual head months that will be permitted on the term grazing permit.

<sup>5</sup> Max Head Months are the Maximum authorized use that may be allowed by the District Ranger if excess forage is available and if the permittee has been compliant with permit terms and conditions.

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Allotment	Pasture	Acres	Kind	Class	Authorized Head Months <sup>4</sup>	Max Head Months <sup>5</sup>
	Able Riparian	774		Cow-Calf, Bulls, Yearlings		
	Able Seeding	707				
	Provo	1,947				
	Singas	3,991				
	Stone House	1,544				
	Wash O' Neil	3,484				
<b>Total</b>		15,156				
<b>Quinn River</b>	Goosey	3,298	Cattle	Cow-Calf, Bulls, Yearlings	10,520	13,286
	Laca	9,670				
	Laca Riparian	5,331				
	Long Canyon	15,477				
	Quinn Riparian	4,908				
	South Fork	17,705				
<b>Total</b>		56,389				
<b>Rebel Creek</b>	Eagle Canyon	2,735	Cattle	Cow-Calf, Bulls, Yearlings	764	1,011
	McConnell Creek	4,727				
	Wood Canyon	4,207				
	Rebel Creek	4,922				
<b>Total</b>		16,591				
<b>West Side Flat Creek</b>	North	10,368	Cattle	Cow-Calf, Bulls, Yearlings	1,303	1,773
	South	10,853				
<b>Total</b>		21,221				
<b>Wild Bill</b>	Duck Creek	2,538	Cattle	Cow-Calf, Bulls, Yearlings	2,393	3,035
	Goosey	886				
	Ground Hog	3,337				
	North River	2,119				
	Reseed	1,893				
	South River	1,261				
<b>Total</b>		12,035				
<b>Grand total</b>					<b>39,847</b>	<b>50,363</b>

**Forage Utilization Standards and Stubble Heights**

The proposed action would incorporate the use of stubble height in riparian areas in addition to utilization levels for upland areas. Table 6 displays current and proposed utilization levels and stubble heights. Utilization levels vary under current management based on stream categories and grazing systems. The proposed action sets one utilization level or stubble height for each plant community instead of having multiple rates based on grazing system.

Great Basin wildrye and creeping wildrye were identified as needing a distinct stubble height, as it is an outlier from other grasses and plants in the Santa Rosa Rangeland Project area due to the way it grows (i.e., growth nodes that occur several inches above ground level). It is recommended that the average stubble height following grazing is at not less than 10 inches (Ogle, et al. 2012).

**Table 6. Current and proposed utilization and average stubble height**

Plant Community	Current Management	Proposed Action
Wetlands, Riparian Areas, and Meadows	35 to 70 percent depending on category and grazing management system	Minimum 4-inch average residual stubble height for herbaceous plant species, except Great basin and creeping wildrye, at the end of the grazing season.
Riparian Browse	35 percent	Not to exceed 35 percent.
Native Uplands	55, 60, and 65 percent depending on grazing management system	Not to exceed 50 percent.
Seeded Uplands	Allows exceeding the upland rates by 5 to 10 percent	Not to exceed 65 percent.
Upland Browse	50 percent	Not to exceed 50 percent.
Great Basin wildrye ( <i>Leymus cinereus</i> ) and creeping wildrye ( <i>Leymus triticoides</i> )	35 to 70% depending on whether it occurs in an upland or riparian setting.	Minimum 10-inch average residual stubble height at the end of the grazing period.

## **Water Developments**

New water developments and improvement of existing water developments (e.g., improving mechanical function or water use management, improving the development’s ability to facilitate distribution of livestock use, decreasing concentrated use on sensitive habitats due to placement, etc.) is proposed to improve livestock management and for effective management of the resources (Table 7). All improvements would require heritage, rare plant, and wildlife clearances prior to construction. Any activities related to the construction or reconstruction of water developments authorized by this decision would not commence until appropriate permission to divert and place water to beneficial use was obtained from the state, pursuant to applicable state water laws.

**Table 7. Proposed infrastructure projects**

Name	INFRA #	Allotment	Pasture	Easting	Northing	Comment
Long Canyon Water System	50510	Quinn River	Long Canyon	461783	4641552	Need to replace line and extend it.
Side Drill Water Line	50584	Indian	South	458823	4646408	Extend split into two lines, fix head box.
Cabin Creek Pond	506004	Martin Basin	Cabin Creek Riparian	458590	4620649	Extend into sage fence meadow and spring. Two or three troughs.
Carex Spring Trough	50065	Paradise	Able Seeding	445594	4589514	Fix spring box extend and add troughs, make enclosures bigger around springs.

Name	INFRA #	Allotment	Pasture	Easting	Northing	Comment
Wallow WS	50074	Wild Bill	Duck Creek	466637	4621227	Fix spring box and water line, move trough out of meadow, extend a 3 <sup>rd</sup> trough
Groundhog Pipeline	599031 599052	Wild Bill	Ground Hog	466317	4631187	Move out of meadow extend it.
Wings Spring	599033	Wild Bill	Ground Hog	464267	4630040	Fence spring source/headbox, extend water line out of meadow.
Stocks Trough	50207	Martin Basin	Cold Springs	460328	4624320	Fence spring, move trough out of meadow
Bad Trough	50314	North Fork	Long Canyon	460502	4631461	Extend from MB into NF. Possibly two troughs Fence spring box.
Unit Spring	599606	Buttermilk	Buttermilk	460086	4607442	Need to move trough.
Horse Spring Trough	50291	Granite Peak	Upper Willow	448412	4610729	Fence spring and meadow and move trough
Henry Spring Trough	503001	Granite Peak	Upper Willow	448506	4610505	Fence spring and meadow move trough
Summer Trough	599050	Quinn	Laca	467190	4631696	Move out of meadow, possibly construct two lines and troughs, fence headbox/spring.

### **Forest Plan Amendment**

The need for this project specific forest plan amendment stems from differences between the management direction found in Amendment II of the Humboldt National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan and the Proposed Action.

Amendment II to the Forest Plan sets upland utilization standards based on management systems (Season Long, Deferred Rotation, Rest Rotation, High Intensity Short Duration). The Proposed Action requires a plan amendment because the proposed changes to the utilization standards would not be set based on management (grazing) system. Annual utilization for native herbaceous upland plant communities in the Proposed Action is set at 50 percent rather than a variable 50 to 65 percent as in the current plan.

Amendment II also establishes a variable set of utilization rates for five defined riparian area management categories. Under the Amendment II utilization near categorized streams varies from 36 to 70 percent depending on the riparian area management category.

of applying the riparian utilization standards in Amendment II, the Proposed Action applies an annual average residual stubble height of four inches at the end of grazing period<sup>6</sup> indicator for all meadow and riparian areas across the project area, except for Great Basin and creeping wildrye which have an average minimum residual stubble height of 10 inches. The Proposed Action and proposed changes to the plan are displayed in (Table 8).

The project specific amendment would:

- Adopt a 50 percent average annual utilization in native upland plant communities instead of the variable utilization rates depending on the management (grazing) system dictated by Amendment II.
- Adopt a 65 percent average annual utilization rate in non-native “seeded” upland plant communities instead of the variable utilization rates depending on the management (grazing) system dictated by Amendment II.
- Adopt a general average four-inch annual residual stubble height for herbaceous species in all wetlands, riparian areas, and meadows, including springs and seeps as an end of grazing period measure instead of the variable utilization rates tied to grazing management systems and the five riparian area management categories defined in Amendment II.
- Adopt an average 10-inch annual residual stubble height for Great Basin and creeping wildrye as an end of grazing period measure instead of the variable utilization rates based on the management (grazing) system or riparian area category as defined in Amendment II.

**Table 8. Forest Plan Amendment – Existing forest plan direction verses Proposed Action**

Plant Community	Current Management	Proposed Action	Proposed Amendment
Wetlands, Riparian Areas, and Meadows	36 to 70 percent depending on category and grazing management system	Minimum average 4-inch residual stubble height for herbaceous plant species, except Great basin and creeping wildrye, at the end of the grazing season.	Apply an average 4-inch stubble height instead of the utilization standard for all riparian area management categories defined in Amendment II
Native Uplands	55, 60, and 65 percent depending on grazing management system	Not to exceed an average 50 percent.	Apply single upland average utilization instead of the sliding utilization based on management (grazing) systems.

<sup>6</sup> Grazing Period: The length of time that grazing livestock or wildlife occupy a specific land area. cf. grazing event (SRM Glossary of Terms)

Plant Community	Current Management	Proposed Action	Proposed Amendment
Seeded Uplands	Allows exceeding the upland rates by 5 to 10 percent	Not to exceed an average 65 percent.	Sets specific average utilization for these altered systems instead of utilization standard based on management (grazing) systems.
Great Basin wildrye ( <i>Leymus cinereus</i> ) and creeping wildrye ( <i>Leymus triticoides</i> )	35 to 70% depending on whether it occurs in an upland or riparian setting.	Minimum 10-inch average residual stubble height at the end of the grazing period.	Apply an average 10-inch stubble height standard instead of the utilization for riparian area management categories or uplands defined in Amendment II

## **Design Elements**

Design elements are incorporated into the proposed action to ensure reduce undesirable effects and ensure the action complies with laws, regulations, and policies.

### ***Wildlife***

Avoid concentrated use (e.g. loading /unloading livestock, placement of supplements, placement of water troughs, or other permanent or temporary infrastructure) within the following distances from sensitive wildlife habitat components:

- Sage-grouse: 0.5 miles of active lek between March 1 and May 15;
- Pygmy Rabbit: 100 feet of an active borrow;
- Raptors: 650 feet of active nest with a limited operating period of March 1- August 31;
- Bats: 300 feet from active hibernacula or maternity roost;
  - Maternity roost limited operating period May 1-August 1,
  - Hibernacula limited operating period October 31- March 1.

## **Allotment Management Plans and Annual Operating Instructions**

As part of the permitting process, an Allotment Management Plan and Annual operating Instructions will be developed for each allotment. These documents incorporate and implement Forest Plan management direction and other applicable laws, policies and programs (such as consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), and direction from the project-level National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) decision to provide specific management prescriptions for areas where grazing use is authorized. Each Allotment Management Plan will include goals and objectives for livestock management, appropriate stocking levels, livestock distribution strategies, range improvement needs, and any pertinent travel management guidelines or restrictions (FSH 2209.13 Chapter 90). Each Plan will also include a monitoring plan to help assure the grazing strategy is meeting the desired condition of the allotment.

Annual operating Instructions will be developed with input from the permittees and the district ranger will issue it to the permittee at the beginning of each grazing season. These instructions will clearly state the permittee's and agency's responsibilities for the coming year.

## **Monitoring**

Resource conditions and trend, relative to desired conditions within the allotment would be determined consistent with the monitoring and evaluation direction of the Forest Plan. Effectiveness monitoring is used to determine whether grazing management is effective in meeting the stated goals and objectives. This includes condition/trend monitoring of uplands, streambank conditions and riparian vegetation communities. Designated monitoring areas (representative sites) are used to determine progress towards or maintenance of resource goals and objectives. They are located where conditions and grazing use is representative for the pasture being monitored.

Additional designated monitoring areas may be established as needed to monitor resource conditions potentially impacted by livestock grazing. Ideally, these areas would be monitored every three to five years. Frequency of effectiveness monitoring will depend on the condition of the site. If the designated management area is not meeting objectives a higher frequency of monitoring will occur (i.e. two to four years). If a site is meeting objectives and/or trending upwards towards desired conditions, less frequent monitoring will occur (i.e. four to five years). Data gathered during monitoring will be used to determine whether management practices should be modified.

Annual use monitoring will be done on representative sites, these sites will be identified in the AMPs. This monitoring will help ensure that we are meeting the annual goals to keep areas moving towards or meeting desired conditions.

## **SUMMARY OF POTENTIAL EFFECTS**

This summary of potential effects highlights what may occur through implementation of the Proposed Action. The statements below are based on preliminary review and analysis from the ID team and provide information on potential effects of the Proposed Action. These effects of the Proposed Action will be fully displayed and analyzed in detail in the Environmental Assessment.

### **Soils/Watershed**

The allotments support a variety of plant communities including aspen, mountain brush, sagebrush, and riparian. Each has an influence on watershed function, providing protection and organic matter to the soil, increasing infiltration, stabilizing soil with root systems, and filtering runoff. Appropriate management of the timing and duration of use within a grazing season and across grazing seasons, allowing for occasional years of complete growing season rest, along with application of utilization levels (indicated by browse in woody plants, percent utilization in upland herbaceous plants,

and average residual stubble height in wetland and riparian herbaceous plants as well as wild rye species) could improve watershed health by maintaining or increasing soil and site stability, hydrologic function, nutrient cycling, fertility, cover, and composition.

## **Cultural Resources**

The forest will analyze the potential effects of the Proposed Action on cultural resources following direction in 36 CFR 800.5. The CFR defines an adverse effect as an undertaking that may alter, directly or indirectly, any of the characteristics of a historic property that may qualify it for inclusion in the National Register in a manner that would diminish the integrity of a property's location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, or association.

Proposed changes extending the season of use from a summer season to a flexible grazing season and providing flexibility in grazing management systems do not represent changes to stocking levels and intensity in terms of how livestock are managed across the project area and so are not anticipated to result in significant effects to cultural resources. Changes to reduce utilization levels are proposed for upland and riparian environments. Lower utilization levels are expected to reduce the potential for erosion and surface disturbance from livestock grazing over time as a result of leaving more healthy vegetation on the landscape after each grazing season. Decreased potential for erosion and exposure should reduce potential effects to cultural resource sites. The timing and duration of grazing allotments would vary based on when appropriate weather, soil, and vegetation conditions are met according to Annual Operating Instructions. These provisions would avoid negative effects to soil and mitigate potential effects to cultural resources.

Water developments may involve the construction or maintenance of fence line, pipeline, spring developments, and troughs or ponds. Each of these activities has the potential to adversely affect cultural resources through direct ground disturbance, as well as indirectly through the potential for increased livestock congregation in the area of a new development. Each proposed water development location will need to be surveyed and analyzed for effects to cultural resources in the EA; however, all eligible or unevaluated cultural resource sites will be avoided by infrastructure projects and so this action should resolve potential for adverse effects to cultural resources from this project element.

## **Wildlife**

The Proposed Action reduces utilization in both native and seeded uplands. It is anticipated that ongoing effects to upland habitats and associated wildlife populations will decline as a result of the reduced levels of utilization. In riparian areas the Proposed Action will apply a consistent four-inch average stubble height in all riparian areas instead of the variable utilization applied in these areas under amendment II of the Forest Plan. The requirement to meet the end of grazing period four-inch average stubble height will provide vegetative cover across the riparian areas reducing the transport sediment into waterways and potentially improving the condition of sage-grouse brood-rearing meadows.

The Proposed Action also includes the application of a flexible grazing season rather than the fixed season of use defined for each allotment in Table 1. The permitted livestock numbers and the head months for each allotment remain the same. The design element to avoid the concentration of livestock within 0.5 miles of an active lek between March 1 and May 15 would reduce the potential for direct effects to the grouse during the leking season.

In some cases the flexible grazing season could allow livestock grazing to occur during sage-grouse lekking, nesting, and early brood-rearing season (March 1-June 30). Livestock grazing during the early brood rearing period could result in increased predation on sage-grouse if the early livestock grazing results in a loss of hiding cover.

## **Aquatic**

The project area includes the Quinn River and Humboldt River systems which were historically and currently occupied by Lahontan cutthroat trout (LCT), which are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The analysis in the EA will disclose potential effects to LCT and their associated habitat specifically looking at the potential for habitat alteration resulting from a potential reduction or change in vegetative cover, species composition, change in rates of erosion and deposition of stream banks, and reductions in water quality.

The Proposed Action includes the application of a flexible grazing season of use instead of the fixed season described in Table 1. Under the flexible season of use the number of animals or the duration in the allotment does not change. For LCT, this timing shift may result in livestock being present during LCT spawning periods. It may also allow livestock on the allotments at a time when the riparian areas are more prone to erosion and stream bank degradation. This change will also allow pastures and allotments to be grazed on a rest/deferred rest rotation schedule that would prevent pastures from being grazed at the same time year after year. The potential effect of employing the rest/deferred rest rotation system would be that they allow rest at different times of year on a rotational basis, specifically allowing rest of riparian areas during hot season once every other or every third year.

The Proposed Action also includes the change from utilization levels depending on management objective defined in amendment II of the Forest plan to the application of a four-inch average stubble height for all riparian areas across the project area. Coupled with the rest/deferred rest rotation requirements the Proposed Action this change to four-inch average stubble height across the project area will aid in improvement of overall riparian condition across the project area.

## **Vegetation**

The proposed action was developed to allow livestock grazing on the 12 allotments to occur in such a way as to maintain or move the vegetation communities toward the desired conditions. When current grazing practices are not the cause of the current undesired vegetation composition and/or structure, changing grazing systems is unlikely to achieve the desired condition. This proposed action will use managed grazing systems so that no grazed areas (pastures in allotments) are subject to grazing their entire growing season, every year. The grazing systems should allow grazed plants to remain completely ungrazed during the growing season (leaf emergence to seed set) at least one year in three. In most other years, grazing could occur during part but seldom across the entire growing season. The rotation systems along with the proposed reduction in upland utilization in the proposed action will help maintain vegetation communities and allow ample residual vegetation. The shift from utilization standards in riparian areas, meadows, and at springs and seeps to a standard four-inch average stubble height will, coupled with the change in management systems, help increase vegetative cover, increase rooting depth, stabilize stream banks, and provide important habitat for wildlife species. The placement of new water developments in locations will increase the distribution of livestock in the allotments and draw use away from the riparian areas to areas that are more resistant to the impacts of livestock concentrated activity.

## **Rare Plants**

There are no known occurrences of Obscure scorpion plant (*Phacelia inconspicua*) but there are approximately 65,500 acres of potential habitat. Livestock grazing under the Proposed Action would continue to occur in this potential habitat.

Since there are no known occurrences of this FS sensitive plant species within the project area it is not anticipated that Proposed Action would have measurable impacts on the plant. As upland utilization will be reduced from a 65 percent to a 50 percent in native uplands there is a potential for habitat for the Obscure scorpion plant to improve overtime. There are no other known or proposed Threatened Endangered and Sensitive plant species within the project area.

### **Recreation**

The recreation experience on the Santa Rosa Ranger District should not change a great deal as a result of the Proposed Action. The implementation of a flexible grazing season may put fewer or more livestock in areas during periods of time when forest visitors are on the Forest. The rest/deferred rest rotation requirements will present an inconsistent pattern for the occurrence of livestock during the year. Some year's livestock may graze the allotments and pastures in the fall other times they may only be in the allotments in the late spring and early summer. The changes included in the Proposed Action would not result in quantifiable or qualitative differences in the experience of the recreation visitor to the district because neither the number of animals or head months authorized will change.

### **Inventoried Roadless**

The project area includes all or portions of 12 Inventoried Roadless Areas. The Proposed Action does not include any prohibited actions (E.g. Road construction or the removal of large diameter trees). For that reason, it is not anticipated that the Proposed Action would result in a change to the characteristics of the inventoried roadless area within the project area.

### **Wilderness**

The project area includes all of the Santa Rosa-Paradise Peak Wilderness. Livestock grazing in this wilderness has occurred long before and continuously since wilderness designation, as authorized in the Nevada Wilderness Act. In the EA the forest will analyze the potential effects of the Proposed Action on Wilderness character as defined by four qualities – 1) untrammelled quality, 2) natural quality, 3) undeveloped, and 4) solitude or primitive and unconfined quality. The Proposed Action includes a few changes to how or where livestock are managed in the Wilderness. However, no noticeable changes to wilderness character are anticipated.

One change between the current management direction and the Proposed Action is the shift in a defined season of use to a flexible season of use. In this element of the Proposed Action the number of animals or the duration in the allotment does not change (Table 5). For wilderness character this timing shift may result in livestock being present in the Wilderness during periods they have not been present in the past. The proposed management actions are not expected to result in any detectable adverse changes.

### **Water Rights**

Most components of the Proposed Action related to livestock water developments would not require any changes to valid existing water rights. Some components of the Proposed Action related to livestock water developments may require the holder of an existing valid water right to notify the State of any changes to the diversion works related to an existing livestock water development.

In the case that an existing livestock water development is found to be lacking appropriate permission from the State to divert water, no new or modified works which would facilitate the diversion of water would be permitted by the US Forest Service until appropriate permissions from the State are obtained.

### **Wildfire**

The Proposed Action authorizes livestock grazing across the 12 allotments in the project area. The proposed flexibility in seasonal use may allow reduction of fine fuel loads through early or late season grazing. The proposed action will have neither positive nor negative effect on the management of wildfires that may occur within the project area.

### **Socioeconomics**

This project is not anticipated to have a noticeable effect on the local economy of Humboldt County because it does not change the number of permitted livestock or the duration of time the permitted numbers are allowed on the range.

### **Climate Change**

The analysis will not address in detail the potential effects of the Proposed Action on climate change. The potential impacts of the Proposed Action on carbon cycling (i.e., the release or sequestration of carbon-based greenhouse gasses to or from the atmosphere) are expected to be negligible relative to the total estimated carbon stock of the HTNF, about 121,000,000 tons (USDA2015). Because greenhouse gases mix readily into the global pool, it is not currently possible to ascertain the indirect effects of emissions from the Proposed Action. In general, it is assumed that maintenance or recovery of healthy, productive rangelands and associated soils could help moderate the rates of change in carbon cycling within the project area (e.g., no rapid losses of carbon from organic matter or soil organic carbon to the atmosphere relative to the existing carbon stocks). Insofar as changes in climate may lead to impacts on other resources, it may be considered as appropriate in assessing cumulative impacts on other resources addressed in the analysis.

## **COMMENT PROCESS**

The Forest Service encourages your comments on this Proposed Action, along with supporting reasons that the responsible official should consider in reaching a decision. Your comments will help us prepare an environmental assessment on the Proposed Action. The assessment will be used to determine whether to prepare an environmental impact statement or a finding of no significant impact. If there is no potential for significant impacts, that finding along with the environmental assessment and a proposed decision will be sent to those who commented. If the environmental assessment concludes that there is the potential for significant impacts, then an environmental impact statement will be prepared.

In addition to the Proposed Action, a No Action (which is No-Grazing) alternative will also be analyzed in the environmental assessment. Additional alternatives may be generated from public scoping comments and would also be included in the analysis. (USDA HB CH90).

Written, facsimile, and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of the legal notice in the Elko Daily Free Press.

The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for the Proposed Action. You should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

Written comments should be submitted to: District Ranger, Santa Rosa Ranger District, 3275 Fountain Way, Winnemucca, Nevada 89445. FAX number is (775) 623-9134.

Electronic comments are preferred and can be submitted to the following link at:

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=52282>

Electronic comments should be submitted using plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), and/or Word (.doc). Comments must have an identifiable name attached or verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature may serve as verification on electronic comments.

Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to object must meet the information requirements of a 36 CFR 218 Subpart A and B. 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 regarding the proposed project during a public comment period established by the responsible official are eligible to file an objection under §218.

The District Office is currently closed due to the pandemic situation and the District is unable to accept hand delivered comments at this time. Those who need to make alternative arrangements for comment submittal should contact Boyd Hatch at (775) 623-5025 or [boyd.hatch@usda.gov](mailto:boyd.hatch@usda.gov) to make alternative arrangements.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record for this project and will be available for public inspection and will be released if requested under the Freedom of Information Act.

For further information contact Joseph Garrotto, District Ranger at (775) 623-5025.

## References

- Ogle, D.G., Tilley, D., and L. St. John. 2012. Plant Guide for basin wildrye (*Leymus cinereus*). USDA-Natural Resource Conservation Service, Aberdeen Plant Materials Center, Aberdeen Idaho 83210.
- USDA Forest Service. Undated. History and Resources of the Santa Rosa Ranger District
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- USDA Forest Service, 1926. Stewart, James O, 1926, Feb. 11, Carrying Capacity Humboldt (Santa Rosa)
- USDA Forest Service. 1946. Santa Rosa Rangeland Management Plans
- USDA Forest Service. 2005. FSH 2209.13 Chapter 90: Rangeland Management Decision Making
- USDA Forest Service. 2015. Baseline Estimates of Carbon Stocks in Forests and Harvested Wood Products for National Forest System Units, Intermountain Region.
- USDA Forest Service. 2020. Santa Rosa Rangeland Management Project NFMA Assessment