



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Southwestern
Region

333 Broadway Boulevard, SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102-3498
FAX (505) 842-3800
V/TTY (505) 842-3292

Tonto Restocking Process May 18, 2004

Introduction:

The Forest Service recognizes the dependency of the Ranching Industry on rangelands in the Tonto National Forest and the contribution of livestock production to the economy of local counties.

Implementation of the process reaffirms the Forest Service's commitment to multiple use management. This process offers an opportunity to rebuild trust between the Agency and the Ranching Industry and provides a broader perspective for the Agency to administer National Forest lands collaboratively with important forest stakeholders. This broader perspective will result in more effective line officer decisions while incorporating the values and economic needs of the Ranching Industry consistent with sound range administration. The process outlined below could be considered for use by other Forests in the Region.

Process:

1. The Tonto National Forest and the Arizona Cattle Growers Association will jointly issue a letter by June 10, 2004, to all current permittees on the forest describing the restocking process. This process will be communicated to Forest Service personnel and permittees at a joint meeting on June 3, 2004.
2. As per Section 4 (Special Working Groups) in the 1998 Memorandum of Understanding for Coordinated Resource Management in Arizona, a "Coordinated Resource Management Task Force" comprised of qualified range technicians representing the Forest Service, Arizona Association of Conservation Districts, University of Arizona, and Natural Resources Conservation Service, will be established to assist ranchers, in a timely manner, to develop monitoring and planning strategies for each grazing allotment. This "Task Force" will also assemble "Technical Resource Team(s)," and arrange for their support. A "Technical Resource Team" will be assigned to Districts and be used in the field to assist with planning, monitoring and training ranchers. Technical Resource Team members will be selected from the Forest Service, Universities, Natural Resource Conservation Service, and certified governmental or contracted professionals. This team will prepare an annual summary of the allotments for which options were presented and the actions taken. The summary will be presented to the Forest Service and the Arizona Cattle Growers Association. The Forest Service will continue to work with the permittees or their agent(s) on all issues that affect the grazing permit.



3. Utilizing the Tonto National Forest Restocking Guidelines and other pertinent technical information, the Technical Resource Team members will assess resource conditions and provide stocking options for individual grazing allotments. If the team determines that stocking is appropriate, alternatives will be presented addressing stocking levels under various management situations. The team will agree upon monitoring protocols and consider current and anticipated resource conditions, alternative forage options and other resource objectives when developing alternatives. All recommendations will be made by allotment, on a case-by-case basis and conform to all legal requirements and agency policies.
4. The benefits of a "core herd" are recognized in terms of having stock familiar with the range and preserving years of genetic development. Coupled with the difficulties of finding alternative forage in a region with limited private land, we support a "stock and monitor" approach utilizing information provided by the Technical Resource Teams in cooperation with the permittee. Complete removal of livestock from an allotment should be approached cautiously and used as a measure of last resort. Forest Service line officers are encouraged to consider other forage options should livestock reductions or removal become necessary. Swing pastures, combination of allotments, temporary grazing permits, livestock use permits, and other options consistent with Agency policy/regulations should all be considered.
5. Options presented by the Technical Resource Team will be used by Forest Service line officers when making decisions regarding stocking. To be fully considered, recommended options must comply with all applicable laws and agency policies and not exceed Forest Service budgetary limitations. Ranchers will stock allotments in accordance with the line officer's decision. The line officer will use monitoring based on recommendations provided by the team in determining if numbers need to be adjusted. Ranchers will subsequently adjust livestock numbers, either up or down, as directed by the line officer.


We the undersigned concur in the process outlined above.



Harv Forsgren, Regional Forester, Southwestern Region

6/1/04

Date


Karl Siderits, Forest Supervisor, Tonto National Forest


6/3/04

Date


Bob Prosser, President, Arizona Cattle Growers Association

6/3/04

Date


Terry Wheeler, President, Gila County Cattle Growers

6/3/04

Date