

In Reply Refer To:

4400 (P010)

CERTIFIED MAIL - RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED

Mr. Dee Johnson

J-P Cattle Co., LLC

381 West Navel Lane

Snowflake, Arizona 85937

***NOTICE OF PROPOSED DECISION***  
***for the***  
***GRAZING PERMIT RENEWAL OF THE***  
***FLORENCE JUNCTION ALLOTMENT (#06053)***  
***FOR***  
***J-P CATTLE CO., LLC/ DEE JOHNSON***

## INTRODUCTION

The *Florence Junction Allotment Rangeland Health Evaluation* was conducted on the Florence Junction Allotment (#06053) in 2010 and 2011. The purpose of this evaluation was to assess whether the allotment is or is not achieving the *Arizona Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Grazing Administration* (1997), along with appropriate Bureau of Land Management (BLM) objectives of the *Lower Sonoran Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision* (Approved 2012). If standards and other multiple use resource objectives are not being met, or if significant progress is not being made toward achieving them, this evaluation identified the causal factors and provided recommendations for management changes to achieve standards.

In addition to the Rangeland Health Evaluation (RHE), an Environmental Assessment (*Lower Sonoran Field Office, DOI-BLM-AZ-P020-2010-23-EA*) was conducted to analyze any effects of the Proposed Action on resources in the Florence Junction Allotment. The EA is enclosed for you and other members of the interested public to review.

## BACKGROUND

In 2007 and 2008, a RHE was conducted for the Florence Junction Allotment and found that the allotment met Standard 1 and Standard 3 (Standard 2 did not apply, as there are no riparian areas on the allotment). On August 19, 2008, the Lower Sonoran Field Office issued a Notice of Proposed Decision with a Determination of NEPA Adequacy (DNA) to renew a 10-year grazing permit for the Florence Junction Allotment (2008-2018). However, on September 4, 2008, BLM received a protest from Western Watersheds Project (WWP) stating that the decision, based on the DNA, “excluded reasonable alternatives, maintains an outdated status quo, and failed to take into account the current setting in which the permit renewal and livestock grazing would be taking place.”

The BLM manages two separate parcels of land on the allotment. The western portion is called the Yost Pasture, and permits 24 AUMs, (or 2 cows) yearlong. The eastern BLM portion is called the “Silver King Pasture.” In 1998, a Range Line Agreement transferred approximately 200 ephemeral-only acres of the Hewitt Road Allotment (#06187) to the Florence Junction Allotment, creating the Silver King Pasture. Despite adding 200 acres to the allotment, the permitted use was not increased, and that part of the allotment was used as another rotational pasture. When this transfer occurred, the Silver King Pasture, (a former ephemeral allotment) did not receive a new

designation. This oversight was discovered during the allotment evaluation in 2010/2011. In order to address this oversight, the EA explored alternatives for appropriate designation of each pasture.

The BLM, Phoenix District Office sent annual notices to the interested public and stakeholders of grazing allotments, including the Florence Junction Allotment, where grazing permits were being considered for renewal and evaluations have been initiated or continued. The notice requested allotment-specific resource data that would assist BLM in analyzing resource conditions on the allotment for permit renewals.

In response to the 2008 WWP Protest, and to address the issue of the grazing designations of each pasture and other issues that were brought up during scoping, the BLM elected to re-evaluate the allotment and conduct an Environmental Assessment. The new RHE indicated that resource conditions are achieving all applicable Standards for Rangeland Health. On August 20, 2012, the revised RHE was sent out for a 30-day comment period. On September 20, 2012, BLM received comments on the RHE from WWP. Substantive comments to the RHE have been addressed in the enclosed EA.

Consultation, coordination and cooperation regarding the RHE and Environmental Assessment (EA) have been ongoing between BLM, Arizona State Land Department, National Resource Conservations System (NRCS), Western Watersheds Project (WWP), and the permittee since 2007. An allotment tour took place on November 12, 2010. Continued consultation between BLM and the Arizona State Land Department has ensured accuracy of information pertaining to State Trust Lands. The RHE and the EA were conducted by an interdisciplinary assessment team of BLM resource specialists. Technical recommendations from the RHE helped develop the alternatives for the EA.

Based on the data compiled and analyzed for the 2012 RHE, it appears that the Florence Junction Allotment is meeting all Standards and Guidelines of the Arizona Standards for Rangeland Health. Across all ecological sites, vegetative current species composition and structure provides cover and forage to support a diverse wildlife community. Utilization was classified as slight to light on browse species at the two key areas where utilization was measured, but was moderate to heavy on invasive grasses. All Desired Plant Community (DPC) objectives are being achieved at all three key areas. Minimizing the invasion of non-native grass species may require future weed treatments, which would be addressed in separate NEPA analysis. Continued monitoring is necessary to ensure the spread of non-natives is minimized.

## FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI, Enclosure)

I have determined that the Proposed Action is in conformance with the following documents, which provide program constraints and general management practices to achieve resource condition objectives and direction for public lands within the Florence Junction Allotment:

- *Lower Sonoran Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision* (Approved 2012).
- Decisions from Strategy for Desert Tortoise Habitat Management on Public Lands in Arizona (TP), 1990.
- Decision Record for the Statewide Plan Amendment of Land Use Plans in Arizona for Implementation of Arizona Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Grazing Administration Environmental Assessment (1997).
- *Code of Federal Regulations* (at 43 CFR Part 4100).
- *Biological and Conference Opinion on Sonoran Desert National Monument and Lower Sonoran Resource Management Plan (02EAAZ00-2012-F-0203)*.
- Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973, as amended.
- Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended.
- Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (25 U.S.C. 3001-3013; 104 Stat. 3048-3058)

I have reviewed the *Environmental Assessment for the Grazing Permit Renewal for the Florence Junction Allotment # 06053* (Lower Sonoran Field Office, DOI-BLM-AZ-P020-2010-23-EA). After consideration of the environmental effects of the BLM's preferred alternative (Proposed Action Alternative – Modify Current Grazing Management) described in the EA and supporting documentation, I have determined that the Proposed Action is not a major federal action and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area.

**PROPOSED DECISION**

Therefore, it is my proposed decision that the following Proposed Actions be implemented for the Florence Junction Allotment:

1. *Issuance of a new 10-year grazing permit for J-P Cattle Co., LLC/ Dee Johnson for 2013-2023.* The permit will be issued consistent with the authorized use, grazing schedule, and terms and conditions specified in the permit. This grazing permit renewal will result in no changes to the current grazing preference, as follows:

**Standard Terms and Conditions for the Grazing Permit Renewal of the Florence Junction Allotment, 2013-2023.**

<b>Allotment</b>	<b>Operator</b>	<b>Pasture</b>	<b>Cattle Number</b>	<b>Grazing Rotation</b>	<b>AUMs</b>	<b>Public Land Billed</b>
Florence Junction #6053	J-P Cattle Co. LLC/ Dee Johnson	Yost	2	3/1 - 2/28 Perennial	24	100%
		Silver King	0*	Ephemeral	0*	100%

\*Pursuant to the Special Ephemeral Rule, when forage becomes available, the lessee must file an application and include the desired number of livestock and period of use. Bureau staff will monitor the rangeland condition and potential for continued soil moisture and forage growth before permitting livestock use for this pasture.

2. *In addition to the standard terms and conditions, the following terms and conditions would be added to the grazing permit, pursuant to 43 CFR 4130.3-2:*

- a) In order to improve livestock distribution on the public lands when BLM authorizes livestock grazing, all salt blocks and/or mineral supplements will be placed a minimum of 1/8 mile upslope from drainages/dry washes, unless stipulated through a written agreement or decision in accordance with 43 CFR 4130.3-2 (c).
- b) “As required by the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act regulations at 43 CFR 10.4(g), if in connection with allotment operations under this authorization, any

human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects or objects of cultural patrimony as defined in the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (P.L. 101-601; 104 Stat. 3048; 25 U.S.C. 3001) are discovered, the permittee shall stop operations in the immediate area of the discovery, protect the remains and objects, and immediately notify the Authorized Officer of the discovery. The permittee shall continue to protect the immediate area of the discovery until notified by the Authorized Officer that operations may resume.”

3. *Terms and Conditions specific to each pasture are as follows:*

**The Yost Pasture (Perennial):**

- a) Data collected and analyzed for the 2012 Florence Junction Allotment Rangeland Health Evaluation supports the previous designation of the Yost Pasture as ‘Perennial.’ Therefore, this pasture will retain its preference of 24 AUMs. The grazing system(s) and/or season of use will be coordinated between the BLM, permittee, Arizona State Land Department, and/or Natural Resources Conservation Service, pursuant to the Lower Sonoran RMP/ROD, GR-1.1.8.
- b) “In accordance with 43 CFR 4130.3-2 (d), Actual Use information must be submitted by the permittee to the BLM by March 15 each year.”

**The Silver King Pasture (Ephemeral):**

- a) The Silver King pasture will not permit year-long grazing. The Silver King pasture, formerly part of the Hewitt Road Allotment, was designated for ephemeral grazing use by agreement dated 05-15-1980. Data collected and analyzed for the 2012 Florence Junction Allotment Rangeland Health Evaluation supports this designation. Therefore, when forage becomes available, you must file an application and include the desired number of livestock and period of use. After BLM staff has monitored the allotment for adequate moisture and forage potential, and when applicable fees are paid, your billing notice becomes your authorization to make a specific amount of grazing use.
- b) If monitoring indicates current livestock grazing practices are causing non-attainment of resource objectives, the BLM could modify the terms and conditions of a grazing permit temporarily or on a more long-term basis.
- c) It is the responsibility of the permittee to prevent livestock from grazing on ephemeral rangelands without authorization. Consultation with the Arizona State Land Department will be necessary to coordinate grazing management of this pasture.

## **RATIONALE**

The purpose for this Proposed Decision is to maintain Arizona Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines and other resource objectives for this grazing allotment over the next 10 years (2013-2023). The *Florence Junction Allotment Rangeland Health Evaluation* and the *Florence Junction Allotment Grazing Permit Renewal Environmental Assessment* present the body of data analysis for the assessment area.

## **AUTHORITY**

The BLM's objectives for rangeland management are to carry out the intent of the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934, as amended and supplemented, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, and the Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978.

Title 43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 4100 govern grazing administration for public rangelands. Among other things, the regulations require the implementation of standards and guidelines to achieve the fundamentals of rangeland health. Specifically, 43 CFR 4130.3-2 (c) provides for the placement of supplemental salt and/or mineral supplements, and 43 CFR 4130.3-2 (d) allows for Actual Use information to be submitted to the BLM for administrative purposes. The *Special Ephemeral Rule*. Published in the *Federal Register*, Vol. 33, No. 238 December 7, 1968, allows for the designation and management of ephemeral rangeland.

## **RIGHT OF PROTEST AND/OR APPEAL**

Any applicant, permittee, lessee, or other affected interest may protest a proposed decision under Sec. 43 CFR 4160.1, in person or in writing to Edward J. Kender, BLM/ LSFO, 21605 North 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Phoenix, Arizona 85027-2929, within 15 days after receipt of such decision. The protest, if filed, should clearly and concisely state the reason(s) as to why the proposed decision is in error.

In absence of a protest, the proposed decision will become the final decision of the authorized officer without further notice, unless otherwise provided in the proposed decision.

Any applicant, permittee, lessee, or other person whose interest is adversely affected by the final decision may file an appeal in accordance with 43 CFR 4.470 and 43 CFR 4160.1-4. The appeal may be accompanied by a petition for stay of the decision in accordance with 43 CFR 4.21, pending final determination on appeal. The appeal and petition for stay must be filed in the office of the authorized officer, as noted above, within 30 days following receipt of the final decision, or within 30 days after the date the proposed decision becomes final.

The appeal shall state the reasons, clearly and concisely, why the appellant thinks the final decision is in error, and otherwise comply with the provisions of 43 CFR 4.470, which is available from the BLM office for your use in a BLM office.

In accordance with 43 CFR 4.21(b)(1), a petition for stay, if filed, must show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

- 1) The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied;
- 2) The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits;
- 3) The likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the stay is not granted; and
- 4) Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

Sincerely,

Edward J. Kender

Acting Field Manager

Enclosures

cc: Arizona Game and Fish Department

Arizona Cattlemen's Association

Arizona State Land Department

Center for Biological Diversity

Ruiz Ranch, Inc.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Western Watersheds Project

Wild Earth Guardians

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

**FOR THE**

**GRAZING PERMIT RENEWAL**

**for the**

**FLORENCE JUNCTION ALLOTMENT # 06053**

**(Lower Sonoran Field Office, DOI-BLM-AZ-P020-2010-23-EA)**

I have reviewed Environmental Assessment (EA) Lower Sonoran Field Office, DOI-BLM-AZ-P020-2010-23-EA, May 31, 2013. After consideration of the environmental effects of the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM's) preferred alternative (Proposed Action Alternative) described in the EA and supporting documentation, I have determined that the Proposed Action identified in the EA is not a major federal action and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects meet the definition of significance in context or intensity as described in 40 CFR 1508.27. Therefore, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required as per section 102 (2) (c) of the National Environmental Policy Act.

I have determined that the Proposed Action Alternative is in conformance and consistent with the plans and policies of the BLM Phoenix District Office, neighboring local, county, state, tribal and federal agencies and governments. This finding and conclusion is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ's) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), both with regard to the context and the intensity of impacts described in the EA.

**Context:**

The Florence Junction Allotment (#06053) is a parcel of rangeland administered by the Bureau of Land Management, Lower Sonoran Field Office, within the Phoenix District Office. The allotment is located in Sonoran shrub mix desert. The terrain consists of gently rolling to steep hills and mountains that are bisected by numerous drainage ways. It encompasses portions of Township 1 S, Range 10 E, of Sections 4, 30, 31, and 33. It covers approximately 14,355 acres, of which the BLM administers approximately 449 acres, or 3% of the total allotment. The remaining 13,900 acres, or 97% of the allotment consists of State Trust Lands. J-P Cattle Company, L.L.C. is the current permittee for this allotment. The permitted Animal Unit Months (AUMs) for the allotment is 24, or 2 cattle yearlong.

The Sonoran Desert Tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) is a Special Status Species that can be found on the allotment. Tortoise habitat is associated with the rocky slopes, and ridges as well as incised washes with caliche caves. No other special status species or threatened or endangered species exist on the allotment.

The Florence Junction Allotment Rangeland Health Evaluation was conducted to determine whether the Arizona Standards and Guidelines and BLM Phoenix District site-specific objectives were met. Detailed analyses are located in the evaluation and the EA (enclosed).

**Intensity:**

The Proposed Action is for BLM to issue a 10-year (2013-2023) livestock grazing permit to allow for the attainment of land health standards on the Florence Junction Allotment. The number of livestock permitted would remain the same as is currently permitted. All current terms and conditions would apply. Additional terms and conditions would be added to the grazing permit, pursuant to 43 CFR 4130.3-2, as described in the Proposed Decision.

**1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.**

The EA considered both beneficial and adverse impacts of the proposed management actions.

Beneficial impacts of the Proposed Action in the Yost Pasture would include: 1) reduced soil compaction from livestock in desert washes and drainages; 2) increased vegetation cover in the washes and drainages; 3) better distribution of livestock across the allotment; 4) more effective monitoring and administration by BLM of livestock numbers and rotation patterns across the allotment. The beneficial impacts of Proposed Action would be negligible because the action involves only 24 AUMs and is focused on maintaining or making significant progress towards the Arizona Standards for Rangeland Health site-specific Desired Plant Community objectives. No adverse impacts from this action are anticipated.

Beneficial impacts of the Proposed Action in the Silver King Pasture would include: 1) reduced soil compaction and increased vegetation cover from limiting livestock use on the pasture to ephemeral use only; 2) improved soil and vegetation condition across the pasture. The adverse impacts of Proposed Action may include less effective distribution of livestock across the allotment and in the pasture with the loss of the Silver King Pasture as a rotational pasture. Furthermore, management of the State land within that pasture may be complicated by the Ephemeral designation of BLM lands. However, both beneficial and adverse impacts are expected to be negligible because the action realizes the loss of only 24 AUMs and is focused on maintaining or making significant progress towards the Arizona Standards for Rangeland Health site-specific Desired Plant Community objectives.

None of the environmental impacts disclosed above and discussed in detail in the Environmental Consequences section of the EA and associated appendices are considered significant.

**2) The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.**

The Proposed Action would not affect public health or safety. There would be no adverse impacts to public health or safety as a result of the Proposed Action.

**3) *Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.***

There are no Wilderness Areas or Wilderness Study Areas in the allotment. There are no prime farmlands, park lands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas in the area of analysis. The EA analyzes possible impacts to Sonoran Desert tortoise. The EA did not identify any significant impacts to any other unique species or their habitats that occur on the allotment or historical or cultural resources.

**4) *The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.***

Public input was requested during scoping for the RHE and the EA, and prior to issuance of a Proposed Decision. Any substantive comments to the RHE were addressed in the EA and considered in the Proposed Decision. The Proposed Action is not expected to be controversial and is implemented to meet resource objectives and the Arizona Standards for Rangeland Health.

The BLM has coordinated with the permittee, interested publics, the Arizona State Land Department, Arizona Game and Fish Department, and the Arizona Cattlemen's Association .

**5) *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.***

There are no known effects of the Proposed Action identified in the EA that are considered uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. The effects analysis demonstrates the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk.

**6) *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.***

The Proposed Action would not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision about future consideration. Completion of the EA does not establish a

precedent for other rangeland health evaluations and Decisions. Any future projects within the area or in surrounding areas will be analyzed on their own merits and implemented or not, independent of the actions currently selected.

**7) *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.***

The past, present and reasonably foreseeable future actions have been considered in the cumulative impacts analysis within the EA. Past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions ongoing in the cumulative impact assessment area would not result in cumulatively significant impacts.

**8) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the NRHP or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.***

Implementation of the Proposed Action would have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places because the large size of the project area relative to the small number of permitted livestock would ensure that grazing is dispersed. The action complies with the National Historic Preservation Act. The action would also not cause loss or destruction of significant cultural, or historical resources.

The BLM is committed to no adverse effects on National Register eligible cultural resources as a result of the Proposed Action.

**9) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), as amended, of 1973.***

No listed threatened or endangered species nor critical habitat for any listed species occur on the Florence Junction Allotment.

**10) *Whether the action threatens a violation of federal, state, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.***

The Proposed Action would not violate or threaten to violate any federal, state, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA.

Continued monitoring of the resources will be ongoing and scheduled on a regular basis to assure conformance with the Arizona Standards for Rangeland Health and Phoenix District land use plans and policies. Future adjustment in the management of the resources will be considered should monitoring determine that the standards and objectives are not be achieved.

**Rationale:**

The Proposed Action, as mitigated with the stipulations described in the EA, will protect the natural resources associated with the public land. The Proposed Action is in conformance with the BLM Phoenix District land use plans and polices and was coordinated with the interested parties.

/S/

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_05/31/2013\_\_\_\_\_

Edward J. Kender

Date

Acting Field Manager

Lower Sonoran Field Office,

Phoenix District Office



**Florence Junction Allotment, Queen Valley, Arizona**

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

**(Lower Sonoran Field Office,**

**DOI-BLM-AZ-P020-2010-23-EA)**

**GRAZING PERMIT RENEWAL**

**for the**

**FLORENCE JUNCTION ALLOTMENT # 06053**

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Florence Junction Allotment (#06053) is a parcel of rangeland administered by the Bureau of Land Management, Lower Sonoran Field Office, within the Phoenix District Office. The Florence Junction Allotment is located about 2 miles northeast of Florence Junction and about 1 mile east of Queen Valley, along El Camino Viejo Road. The allotment is located in Sonoran shrub mix desert. The terrain consists of gently rolling to steep hills and mountains that are bisected by numerous drainage ways. It encompasses portions of Township 1 S, Range 10 E, of Sections 4, 30, 31, and 33. It covers approximately 14,355 acres, of which the BLM administers approximately 449 acres, or 3% of the total allotment. The remaining 13,900 acres, or 97% of the allotment consists of State Trust Lands. J-P Cattle Company, L.L.C. is the current permittee for this allotment. For more details, refer to Map 1 below and the Florence Junction Rangeland Health Evaluation.

### *1.1.1 THE 2008 RANGELAND HEALTH EVALUATION AND DETERMINATION OF NEPA ADEQUACY*

In 2007 and 2008, a Rangeland Health Evaluation was conducted on the Florence Junction Allotment to determine whether the allotment was meeting Standards for Rangeland Health. This assessment and evaluation was necessary to determine whether or not the grazing permit for the allotment should be renewed. Of the three standards of rangeland health, the allotment evaluation found that the allotment was meeting Standard 1 and Standard 3 (Standard 2 did not apply, as there are no riparian areas on the allotment). Because the allotment was meeting standards, on August 19, 2008, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Lower Sonoran Field Office (LSFO) issued a Notice of Proposed Decision to renew a grazing lease for the Florence Junction Allotment to the current permittee for a period of 10 years (2008-2018). A Determination of NEPA Adequacy (DNA) was issued with the proposed decision, based on previous NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) documents that covered the area and the type of decision proposed.

On September 4, 2008, BLM received a protest from Western Watersheds Project (WWP), which protested the proposed decision because it “excluded reasonable alternatives, maintains an outdated status quo, and failed to take into account the current setting in which the permit renewal and livestock grazing would be taking place.”

### *1.1.2 THE 2012 RANGELAND HEALTH EVALUATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT*

In response to the 2008 WWP Protest, BLM elected to re-evaluate the allotment, reassess the technical recommendations, and conduct an Environmental Assessment (EA). The Florence Junction Allotment Rangeland Health Evaluation (RHE) was revised in accordance with direction set forth in the Washington Office Memorandum No. 98-91 for implementation of *Standards of Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Grazing Administration* (1997). The purpose of the evaluation was to determine if the current resource conditions are achieving, making significant progress towards achieving, or not achieving the standards for rangeland health and other land use plan objectives. Several technical recommendations were developed by the interdisciplinary team to identify actions that will allow for continued attainment of the land health standards.

Allotment rangeland health data was gathered from all available credible sources including agency files, monitoring, and other documented field work. Field data were collected in 2009 and 2010. Quantitative methods used to determine rangeland health included utilization, cover, frequency, composition, and dry weight rank. Qualitative methods included apparent trend ratings and Indicators of Rangeland Health assessments.

An interdisciplinary team consisting of resource specialists within the BLM Phoenix District Office was responsible for identifying and addressing current or potential issues in the area, and any direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts. They provided input regarding potential impacts of the proposed action or the alternatives. Data compiled and analyzed by the interdisciplinary team indicated that resource conditions on the Florence Junction Allotment are achieving all applicable Standards for Rangeland Health.

On August 20, 2012, the revised Florence Junction Allotment Rangeland Health Evaluation was sent to the permittee, state and federal agencies and the interested public for comment. On September 20, 2012, BLM received comments on the RHE from WWP. BLM determined that the substantive comments did not question the underlying data or analysis of the RHE, and could instead be addressed in this EA (40 CFR 1530.4). This document constitutes the Environmental Assessment (Lower Sonoran Field Office, DOI-BLM-AZ-P020-2010-23-EA) of the proposed management actions and alternatives for the Florence Junction Allotment. It has been prepared to disclose and analyze the environmental consequences of the proposed grazing permit renewal for the allotment.

### *1.1.3 PROFILE AND LAND STATUS OF THE FLORENCE JUNCTION ALLOTMENT (#06053):*

#### **Profile:**

Permittee: J-P Cattle Co., LLC/ Dee Johnson

Public Land Billed: 100%

BLM Grazing Preference: 24 Animal Unit Months (AUMs) (2 cattle yearlong)

Arizona State Land Trust Grazing Preference: 128.40 cattle yearlong

Rangeland Classification: Perennial

#### **Land Status:**

##### **1. Legal Description of the BLM Yost Pasture:**

Gila & Salt River Meridian, Arizona  
 T. 1. S, R. 10 E,  
 Sec 30 SW ¼ SW ¼  
 Sec 31 N ½ NW ¼  
 Sec 31 NW ¼ NE ¼  
 Sec 31 S ½ S ½  
 Yost Pasture Acres: 248.84

**2. Legal Description of the BLM Silver King Pasture:**

Gila & Salt River Meridian, Arizona  
 T. 1. S, R. 10 E,  
 Sec 33 S ½ S ½  
 Sec 4 NE ¼ NE ¼  
 Silver King Pasture Acres: 200.00

**Total Acres:**

Public (BLM): 448.84 acres  
 State: 13,900.88 acres  
 Private: 5 acres  
**TOTAL: 14,354.72 acres**

**Current Terms and Conditions of the Grazing Permit:**

**Table 1: Grazing Preference for the Florence Junction (#06053) Allotment.**

Allotment	Operator	Cattle Number	Grazing Rotation	AUMs	Public Land Billed
Florence Junction #06053	J-P Cattle Co. LLC/ Dee Johnson	2	Yearlong	24	100%

For Standard Terms and Conditions of the Florence Junction Grazing Permit, see the Florence Junction RHE, pp. 17-18.

**1.1.4 GRAZING HISTORY**

Although there are 10 separate pastures within the boundaries of the Florence Junction Allotment, the BLM administers grazing management in only two pastures, the Yost and the Silver King. (see Figure 1 below). The western portion falls within the “Yost Pasture” which currently permits 24 AUMs, or 2 cows yearlong, as shown above in Table 1.

The eastern BLM portion is called the “Silver King Pasture.” In 1998, a Range Line Agreement transferred approximately 200 ephemeral-only acres of the Hewitt Road Allotment (#06187) to the Florence Junction Allotment, creating the Silver King Pasture. Despite adding 200 acres to the allotment, the permitted use was not increased, and that part of the allotment was used as another rotational pasture. When this transfer occurred, the Silver King Pasture, (a former ephemeral allotment) did not receive a new designation. This oversight was discovered during the allotment evaluation in 2010/2011. In order to address this oversight, this EA will explore alternatives for appropriate designation of each pasture.

Based on rangeland monitoring conducted throughout the evaluation process (2000-2011), it is clear that the Silver King Pasture exhibits characteristics of an ephemeral rangeland, as previously designated. For example, 1) the pasture is characterized by desert type vegetation, some of which is classed as ephemeral only; 2) the pasture does not consistently produce perennial forage, but periodically provides annual vegetation suitable for livestock grazing; 3) the pasture falls below the 3,200-foot contour and below the 8-inch precipitation isoline; and 4) a minor percentage of the total plant composition is made up of desirable perennial forage plants and potential to improve range condition and produce a dependable supply of forage by applying intensive management practices is lacking.

In contrast, the Yost Pasture, including the state-owned portions, exhibits characteristics compatible with limited yearlong grazing, depending on annual rainfall. For example, white ratany is abundant on this pasture, and other perennial forage species, such as ephedra, bush muhly, calliandra, and desert hackberry are readily available for livestock and wildlife. (For details regarding the soils, vegetation, production, and other characteristics that distinguish these pastures as ephemeral or perennial, refer to the RHE). For more details regarding the criteria of ephemeral rangelands, see Section 3.3.1 below and the RHE, pp. 15-16.

## 1.2 PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The purpose of this action is to consider livestock grazing opportunities on public lands where consistent with management objectives, including the Arizona Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management.

The need for this action is established by the Taylor Grazing Act (TGA), the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), and the Lower Sonoran (LSFO) Resource Management Plan (RMP), which require that the BLM respond to applications to fully process permits to graze livestock on public land. In detail, the action is needed because:

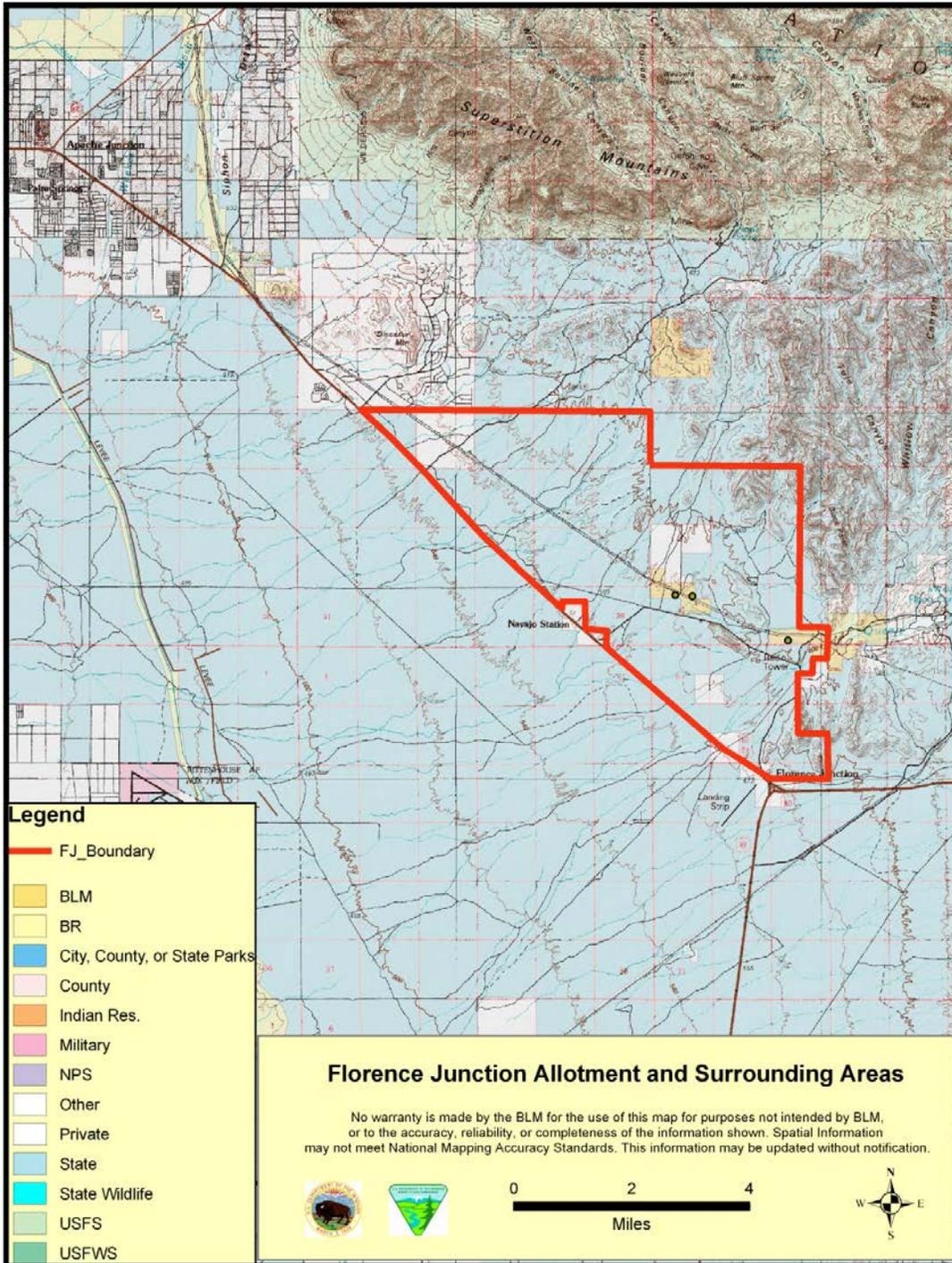
- BLM Arizona adopted the Arizona Standards for Rangeland Health (Land Health Standards) and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management in all Land Use Plans (Arizona S&Gs) in 1997 (Appendix A). Land Health Standards and Guidelines for Grazing Administration were also incorporated into the LSFO RMP (2012). Land Health Standards for Rangelands should be achieving or making significant progress towards achieving the standards and to provide for proper nutrient cycling, hydrologic cycling, and energy flow. Guidelines direct the selection of grazing management practices and, where appropriate, livestock facilities to promote significant progress toward, or the attainment and maintenance of, the standards.

The RHE completed for the Florence Junction allotment determined that Standards 1 and 3 have been fully achieved (Standard 2 does not apply because there are no riparian areas on the BLM portions of the allotment)

- The LSFO RMP identifies resource management objectives and management actions that establish guidance for managing a broad spectrum of land uses and allocations for public lands in the Lower Sonoran Field Office. The LSFO RMP allocated public lands within the Florence Junction Allotment as available for domestic livestock grazing. Where consistent with the goals and objectives of the RMP and Land Health Standards, allocation of forage for livestock use and the issuance of grazing permits to qualified applicants are provided for by the Taylor Grazing Act (TGA) and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA).

***Decision to be made***

The Lower Sonoran Field Manager is the authorized officer responsible for the decisions regarding management of public lands within this allotment. Based on the results of the NEPA analysis, the authorized officer will issue a determination of the significance of the environmental effects and whether an environmental impact statement (EIS) would be required. If the authorized officer determines that it is not necessary to prepare an EIS, the EA will provide information for the authorized officer to make an informed decision whether to renew, renew with modifications, or not renew the permit. If renewed, management actions, mitigation measures, and monitoring requirements will be prescribed for the Florence Junction allotment to ensure management objectives and Arizona Standards for Rangeland Health are achieved.



**Figure 1: The Florence Junction Allotment and Surrounding Areas**



### 1.3 CONFORMANCE TO LAND USE PLAN AND OTHER DECISIONS

The following documents provide program constraints, general management practices, and land use plan objectives to achieve desired resource conditions and provide direction for public lands within the Florence Junction Allotment. Applicable and related Land Use Plan decisions and other decisions that were cited in the RHE (pp. 7-8) have been revised since the *Lower Sonoran Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision (LS RMP/ROD)* was approved in 2012. Those prior decisions were incorporated into the *LS RMP/ROD*.

#### **Lower Sonoran Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision, June, 2012.**

GR-1.1.2: All allotments that are currently available to grazing will remain open to grazing under their current classifications and permitted AUMs

GR-1.1.10: Allotments may be classified as ephemeral, in accordance with the Special Ephemeral Rule published December 7, 1968, through Rangeland Health Assessments during the permit renewal process.

#### **Special Ephemeral Rule. Published in the Federal Register, Vol. 33, No. 238, December 7, 1968.**

Appendix A.

#### **Fundamentals of Rangeland Health and Standards and Guidelines for Grazing Administration**

43 CFR Subpart 4180.

#### **Arizona Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Grazing Administration.**

Appendix B.

### 1.4. RELATIONSHIP TO STATUTES, REGULATIONS, POLICIES AND OBJECTIVES

The Taylor Grazing Act and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) recognize grazing as a valid use of the public lands and require BLM to manage livestock grazing in the context of multiple use. Additionally, livestock grazing on public lands is managed according to grazing regulations found in the *Code of Federal Regulations* (at 43 CFR Part 4100).

The BLM is responsible for establishing the appropriate levels and management strategies for livestock grazing in this allotment. Grazing permits issued must be in compliance with the multiple use and sustained yield concepts of FLPMA and the Fundamentals of Rangeland Health (43 CFR 4180), and be in accordance with the Guidelines for Grazing Administration while continuing to achieve Arizona Standards for Rangeland Health.

Grazing permit renewals are provided for in 43 CFR 4100 where the objectives of the regulations

are “. . . to promote healthy, sustainable rangeland ecosystems; to accelerate restoration and improvement of public rangelands to properly functioning conditions; to promote the orderly use, improvement and development of the public lands”.

The proposed action and alternatives complies with 43 CFR 4100.0-8 which states, in part, “The authorized officer shall manage livestock grazing on public lands under the principle of multiple use and sustained yield, and in accordance with applicable land use plans.” The proposed action also complies with 43 CFR 4130.2(a) which states, in part, “Grazing permits or leases shall be issued to qualified applicants to authorize use on the public lands and other lands under the administration of the Bureau of Land Management that are designated as available for livestock grazing through land use plans.”

The proposed action and the alternatives are consistent with the Fundamentals of Rangeland Health (43 CFR 4180.1) and Arizona’s Standards and Guidelines (S&Gs), which were developed through a collaborative process involving the Arizona Resource Advisory Council and the BLM State Standards and Guidelines team. The Secretary of the Interior approved the Standards and Guidelines in April 1997. These standards and guidelines address watersheds, ecological condition, water quality, and habitat for special status species. These resources are addressed later in this document. Standards and Guidelines were incorporated into Phoenix District land use plans in 1995.

The proposed action and the alternatives comply with the *Biological and Conference Opinion on Sonoran Desert National Monument and Lower Sonoran Resource Management Plan* (02EAAZ00-2012-F-0203).

Additionally, the proposed action complies with the following pertinent laws and/or agency regulations.

- National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969
- Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973, as amended
- Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended
- Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (25 U.S.C. 3001-3013; 104 Stat. 3048-3058)

## 1.5 SCOPING AND ISSUE IDENTIFICATION

Each year, the BLM, Phoenix District Office sends letters to the interested public and stakeholders of grazing allotments. The letters request allotment-specific resource data that would assist BLM in analyzing resource conditions on the allotment for permit renewals. Consultation, coordination and cooperation regarding the Florence Junction Rangeland Health Evaluation and EA have been ongoing between BLM, Arizona State Land Department, National Resource Conservations System (NRCS), Western Watersheds Project (WWP), and the permittee.

As stated above, in 2008, BLM received a protest from Western Watersheds Project (WWP) that included several protest points regarding the 2008 Notice of Proposed Decision to renew a 10-year grazing permit for the Florence Junction Allotment. These protest points were incorporated into

the RHE that went out for public review on August 20, 2012. On September 20, 2012, WWP provided comments to the revised RHE.

The following table provides a list of the potential issues that were identified in internal and external scoping, and how those issues have been addressed.

**Table 2: Issues Identification**

Participant	Issue Identified	How Issue has been Addressed
Permittee	OHV users creating new, unauthorized trails across the allotment	Impacts to and from recreation and OHV use have been analyzed in the Recreation and Transportation sections (3.3.7. 4.7, and 4.8.7) in this EA. Issues concerning target shooting and trash dumping are outside the scope of this grazing permit analysis. These issues are being addressed in a separate context, in coordination with the permittee, State, and BLM.
	Profuse target shooting and associated refuse, particularly on State lands	
	Illegal trash dumping across the allotment	
2008 WWP Protest of Notice of Proposed Decision	The need for BLM to conduct an Environmental Assessment because a Determination of NEPA Adequacy (DNA) was insufficient due to recent changes that have occurred in the Florence Junction area	This issue has been addressed by the development of this EA.
	Recreational and OHV use should be analyzed in the EA	Impacts to these resources has been analyzed in the Recreation and Transportation sections (3.3.7. 4.7, and 4.8.7) in this EA.
	There is a discrepancy in recorded acreages between RAS and the 2008 RHE	The allotment boundary was updated in the 2012 Lower Sonoran Resource Management Plan (RMP). The acreages provided in the RHE reflect the updated boundary. The discrepancy between the RHE acreages and the RAS acreages cannot be updated until a new permit is issued.

	There is a discrepancy between “actual and probable use”	This issue was addressed in the RHE (pg. 27) and in the alternatives for this EA.
	The 2008 proposed decision failed to analyze impacts of livestock grazing on riparian areas and waterways and wildlife impacts of the affected environment.	There are no riparian areas or waterways on the Florence Junction allotment. Wildlife impacts are addressed in this EA.
	The 2008 RHE “failed to provide meaningful management parameters for the administration of this allotment.”	Technical recommendations from the RHE were brought forward to become the Proposed Action for this EA.
	“BLM lacks sufficient data on the allotment’s rangeland health.”	This issue was addressed in detail throughout the revised RHE.
	“The BLM did not adequately consider assigning non-use or closure to this allotment.”	Non-renewal of the allotment is considered as an alternative.
2012 WWP Comments on RHE	“ ‘Desirability’ [of plant composition is] unquantified’ [at Key Area 2]. The forthcoming Environmental Assessment (EA) should consider an alternative that would make this adjustment.”	An EA is not the appropriate document in which to set Desired Plant Community (DPC) objectives; this is accomplished in the RHE. BLM took a hard look at each Key Area when developing DPC objectives. See the RHE, Methodology Section 6.0 for details.
	“High utilization on ephedra and shrubby buckwheat is a concern, because livestock use is cumulative with wildlife use.”	Utilization on all key forage species was “Slight to Moderate” (see Section 7.4.6, Table 26, of the RHE). Adequate perennial and ephemeral forage exists for both livestock and wildlife.
	“The EA should fully explore the issue of desert tortoise habitat needs.”	Desert tortoise habitat is discussed in detail in Sections 3..3.6, 4.6, and 4.8.6 of this EA and in Section 7.5, Wildlife Habitat Assessment, of the RHE.
	Include a range of alternatives, “including ephemeral use and no grazing.”	Both of these alternatives are considered in this EA.

Arizona State Land Department	Target shooting and trash dumping on State lands	The BLM does not have the authority to manage State lands. However, these issues were addressed for BLM lands in the RHE (pg. 14) and in the recreational sections (3.3.7. 4.7, and 4.8.7) of this EA.
	Invasive weeds on state trust lands	The BLM does not have the authority to manage State lands. However, these issues were addressed for BLM lands in the RHE (pg. 14) and in the invasive weeds sections (3.3.5. 4.5, and 4.8.5) of this EA.
BLM Internal scoping	The lack of designation for the Silver King Pasture needs to be addressed and how its designation could impact the permittee.	This issue is explained in Section 1.1.4 of this EA, and was addressed in the development of the alternatives. The new Terms and Conditions of the Proposed Action would remedy the problem with pasture designations.
	Allotment boundary lines need to be formally adjusted in the 2012 Lower Sonoran RMP	This issue was addressed during the development of the Lower Sonoran RMP.
	Examine soils, vegetation, cultural resources, etc. and analyze potential impacts of any alternatives considered.	This EA analyzes potential impacts of the alternatives considered in Section 4.0.
	Invasive weeds found along desert washes.	This issue was recognized during allotment monitoring and was addressed in the RHE in the development of DPC objectives, and in the invasive weeds sections (3.3.5. 4.5, and 4.8.5) of this EA.

## 2.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE ALTERNATIVES

Development of alternatives for this EA was based on the results of a Rangeland Health Evaluation (RHE) conducted by the BLM for Florence Junction Allotment. The RHE indicated that the allotment is currently meeting rangeland health objectives and standards as defined by the S&Gs (BLM 1997).

However, it was necessary to address the designations of each pasture and to improve distribution of livestock. As a result, the proposed action alternative was developed to describe the conditions for authorized use and to address distribution.

## 2.1 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE – CONTINUE CURRENT GRAZING MANAGEMENT

Under the No Action Alternative, current grazing management would continue with the preference shown in Table 3. The current permit for the Florence Junction Allotment was issued to J-P Cattle Co. LLC/ Dee Johnson, and has a term of 03/01/2007 to 02/28/2017 in accordance with the Appropriations Act of 2004 (Public Law 108-108) and renewed under Section 402 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, as amended (7 USC 1010 et seq.). If this alternative is selected, BLM would renew the grazing permit to J-P Cattle Co. LLC/ Dee Johnson for a period of 10 years (2013-2023) with no change to the current terms and conditions of the permit. Salt and mineral supplements would not be restricted in drainages and near water sources. Both the Yost and the Silver King pastures would be grazed in the permittee’s current rotational system.

**Table 3 Terms and Conditions for the No Action Alternative, 2013-2023.**

Allotment	Operator	Percent Public Land Billed	Number and Kind of Livestock	Season of Use	Total AUMs
Florence Junction #6053	J-P Cattle Co. LLC/ Dee Johnson	100%	2 cattle	3/1 – 2/28	24

## 2.2 PROPOSED ACTION ALTERNATIVE – MODIFY CURRENT GRAZING MANAGEMENT

The proposed action is the result of the rangeland health evaluation process and new objectives of the *Lower Sonoran RMP*. The Florence Junction RHE concluded that the objectives contained in the RMP and the *Arizona Standards for Rangeland Health* are being achieved throughout the allotment. The Proposed Action is therefore recommended in order to continue meeting these Standards and objectives. For details that led to these recommendations, refer to the RHE and Section 1 of this document.

Under the Proposed Action Alternative, BLM would issue a new 10-year grazing permit (2013-2023) to J-P Cattle Co. LLC with the preference shown in Table 4 below. The Yost Pasture would retain its original perennial designation with 24 AUMs (2 cattle) because the pasture does not meet some of the criteria for an ephemeral rangeland designation (see Section 3.3.1 for details). The RHE determined that the Silver King pasture does, however, meet the criteria for ephemeral designation. Therefore, under this alternative, the Silver King pasture would be designated as Ephemeral and would be managed pursuant to the Special Ephemeral Rule. The Proposed Terms and Conditions for the Silver King Pasture are zero (0) AUMs. Because ephemeral rangelands do not produce sufficient forage to allocate for livestock grazing on a sustained yield basis, no animal unit months (AUMs) or livestock number are specified in the permit for that pasture. Implementation of

additional terms and conditions, as outlined below, would improve distribution of livestock, preclude unintended impacts to resources, clearly designate each BLM portion for appropriate livestock management, and allow for the continued attainment of land health standards on the allotment.

**Table 4: Terms and Conditions for the Proposed Action Alternative, 2013-2023.**

Allotment	Operator	Pasture	Cattle Number	Grazing Rotation	AUMs	Public Land Billed
Florence Junction #6053	J-P Cattle Co. LLC/ Dee Johnson	Yost	2	3/1 - 2/28 Perennial	24*	100%
		Silver King	0*	Ephemeral	0*	100%

\*Pursuant to the Special Ephemeral Rule, when forage becomes available, the lessee must file an application and include the desired number of livestock and period of use. Bureau staff will monitor the rangeland condition and potential for continued soil moisture and forage growth before permitting livestock use for this pasture.

Also under the Proposed Action Alternative, in addition to the standard terms and conditions, the following terms and conditions would be added to the grazing permit, pursuant to 43 CFR 4130.3-2:

1. In order to improve livestock distribution on the public lands when BLM authorizes livestock grazing, all salt blocks and/or mineral supplements will be placed a minimum of 1/8 mile upslope from drainages/dry washes, unless stipulated through a written agreement or decision in accordance with 43 CFR 4130.3-2 (c).
2. "As required by the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act regulations at 43 CFR 10.4(g), if in connection with allotment operations under this authorization, any human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects or objects of cultural patrimony as defined in the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (P.L. 101-601; 104 Stat. 3048; 25 U.S.C. 3001) are discovered, the permittee shall stop operations in the immediate area of the discovery, protect the remains and objects, and immediately notify the Authorized Officer of the discovery. The permittee shall continue to protect the immediate area of the discovery until notified by the Authorized Officer that operations may resume."

Terms and Conditions specific to each pasture are as follows:

**The Yost Pasture (Perennial):**

1. Data collected and analyzed for the 2012 Florence Junction Allotment Rangeland Health Evaluation supports the previous designation of the Yost Pasture as 'Perennial.' Therefore, this pasture will retain its preference of 24 AUMs. The grazing system(s) and/or season of

use will be coordinated between the BLM, permittee, Arizona State Land Department, and/or Natural Resources Conservation Service, pursuant to the Lower Sonoran RMP/ROD, GR-1.1.8.

2. "In accordance with 43 CFR 4130.3-2 (d), Actual Use information must be submitted by the permittee to the BLM by March 15 each year."

### **The Silver King Pasture (Ephemeral):**

1. The Silver King pasture will not permit year-long grazing. The Silver King pasture, formerly part of the Hewitt Road Allotment, was designated for ephemeral grazing use by agreement dated 05-15-1980. Data collected and analyzed for the 2012 Florence Junction Allotment Rangeland Health Evaluation supports this designation. Therefore, when forage becomes available, you must file an application and include the desired number of livestock and period of use. After BLM staff has monitored the allotment for adequate moisture and forage potential, and when applicable fees are paid, your billing notice becomes your authorization to make a specific amount of grazing use.
2. If monitoring indicates current livestock grazing practices are causing non-attainment of resource objectives, the BLM could modify the terms and conditions of a grazing permit temporarily or on a more long-term basis.
3. It is the responsibility of the permittee to prevent livestock from grazing on ephemeral rangelands without authorization. Consultation with the Arizona State Land Department will be necessary to coordinate grazing management of this pasture.

### **2.3 NO GRAZING ALTERNATIVE: ELIMINATE LIVESTOCK GRAZING ON THE BLM PORTION OF THE ALLOTMENT**

Under this alternative, the BLM grazing permit would be cancelled and livestock grazing would not be authorized for the BLM portions of the Florence Junction Allotment. This alternative would prohibit livestock grazing on BLM lands and would reduce the number of livestock on the BLM-administered portion of the allotment from 2 to 0 (or 24 AUMs to none). This would decrease the total number of livestock across the entire allotment from 130 to 128 (the Arizona State Land Department lease currently permits 128 cattle on the state portion of the lease).

In order to prevent cattle from grazing on public lands, fences would be constructed along the boundaries between State Trust Lands and private lands that border BLM lands. Because a major powerline road bisects both BLM parcels, cattle guards would also be installed at the boundaries along those roads, and gates would be installed for the minor roads and trails. Specifically, the Yost pasture would require approximately 3 ½ miles of fence line, with 2 cattle guards along the power line road and 3 gates. This fence line would also cut off the state portions (approximately 70 acres) between the South Yost boundary fence and the BLM lands. The Silver King Pasture would require about 1 mile of fencing, with 2 cattle guards along the power line road and 1 gate.

## 2.4 ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT ELIMINATED FROM DETAILED ANALYSIS

### *2.4.1 REDUCED GRAZING ALTERNATIVE: DECREASE LIVESTOCK GRAZING ON THE YOST PASTURE OF THE FLORENCE JUNCTION ALLOTMENT.*

The BLM considered a “reduced grazing alternative for the BLM portions of the Florence Junction Allotment, which allows for 24 AUMs, or 2 cows, year-long. A reduced grazing alternative would equal a stocking rate of 1 cow, year-long on the Yost Pasture (see Section 3.3.2 Grazing Management below). The Silver King Pasture would be re-designated as Ephemeral and be administered as described in the Proposed Action Alternative.

When considering the number of cattle permitted on entire allotment (including state lands) this would decrease the number of head from 130 to 129 (the State Trust Lands lease currently permits 128 cattle on the state portion of the lease). The BLM determined that this change could not be definitively measured, and this alternative would be substantially similar in both design and effects to the other alternatives being analyzed.

The above rationale to eliminate this alternative from detailed analysis is supported by the BLM National Environmental Policy Act Handbook, H-1790-1, section 6.6.3.

### *2.4.2 EPHEMERAL-ONLY ALTERNATIVE: DESIGNATE ALL BLM-ADMINISTERED LANDS ON THE FLORENCE JUNCTION ALLOTMENT AS EPHEMERAL.*

The BLM considered designating the entire allotment as ephemeral-only. When considering the number of cattle permitted on entire allotment (including state lands) this would decrease the number of head from 130 to 128 (the State Trust Lands lease currently permits 128 cattle on the state portion of the lease), with some occasional ephemeral use within the BLM portions of the allotment. However, the Yost Pasture does not meet the criteria for ephemeral rangelands, primarily because of the presence of several species of perennial forage which can produce more than 25 pounds of forage per year. This alternative was removed from detailed analysis because it was considered to be substantially similar in both action and impacts to both the proposed action alternative and no grazing alternatives, which are analyzed in detail.

The above rationale to eliminate this alternative from detailed analysis is supported by the BLM National Environmental Policy Act Handbook, H-1790-1, section 6.6.3.

## 3.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Chapter 3 describes the baseline condition of the environmental resources in the allotment that have the potential to be affected by implementation of the alternatives. The affected environment was considered and analyzed by the interdisciplinary team. This EA incorporates by reference the Rangeland Health Evaluation for the Florence Junction Allotment (BLM 2012).

### 3.1 CRITICAL ELEMENTS AND OTHER RESOURCES CONSIDERED IN THE ANALYSIS

The BLM’s 2008 NEPA Handbook, H-1790-1, explains that an issue must have a clear cause and effect relationship with the proposed action or alternatives to be considered a significant issue for

analysis (H-1790-1, p. 40). The BLM is required to consider many elements of the human environment when evaluating a Federal action. Elements that are subject to the requirements specified in statute, regulation, or executive order, and must be considered in all EAs have been considered by BLM resource specialists on the ID Team to determine whether they would be potentially affected by any of the alternatives. Because the intent of a NEPA document is to concentrate on the issues that are *truly significant* to the action in question, rather than amassing needless detail (40 CFR 1500.1(b)), while elements that are not present or would not be affected are not carried forward for analysis in the EA; elements determined to be potentially impacted are carried forward for detailed analysis in this EA.

## 3.2 RESOURCES CONSIDERED BUT NOT CARRIED FORWARD FOR ANALYSIS

### 3.2.1 AIR QUALITY

The Florence Junction Allotment is in the Phoenix air-shed. Air quality in the area is generally good with seasonal inversion periods that result in increased carbon monoxide, ozone and particulates. Moving livestock could produce small amounts of fugitive dust in the short term, but this would cause negligible and localized impacts on air quality. None of the alternatives would measurably impact air quality standards. Because of the minimal impacts anticipated from the grazing of two cattle, the differences between the alternatives with regard to air quality is expected to be negligible.

### 3.2.2 AREA OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN

There are no areas of critical environmental concern within the allotment boundaries.

### 3.2.3 BLM NATURAL AREAS

There are no designated Natural Areas within the allotment boundaries.

### 3.2.4 CLIMATE CHANGE

Some evidence suggests that livestock grazing can “alter vegetation, soils, hydrology, and wildlife species composition and abundances in ways that exacerbate the effects of climate change on these resources” (Beschta, et al. 2012). However, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) has reviewed the latest science on greenhouse gas emissions and concluded that it is currently beyond the scope of existing science to identify a specific source of greenhouse gas emissions or sequestration (storage) and designate it as the cause of specific climate impacts at a specific location (May 14, 2008 Memorandum to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [USFWS]). BLM nevertheless recognizes that climate change as a whole has had, is currently having, and may have in the future, effects on resources that BLM manages.

The effects that these changes may have on livestock grazing in the Florence Junction Allotment, as well as the contribution that such grazing may have to climate change, are currently unknown. Because of the minimal impacts anticipated from the grazing of two cattle, the difference between the alternatives with regard to climate change is expected to be negligible and unquantifiable.

### 3.2.5 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND SOCIAL-ECONOMIC VALUES

In compliance with Executive Order 12898, the Lower Sonoran Field Office has identified no minority or low-income populations that could be disproportionately affected as a result of the proposed action. The Florence area consists of about 47% whites, 35% Hispanic/ Latinos, 4% Native Americans, and the balance comprising other races. There are no low-income or minority populations located within the allotment boundaries. No impacts to environmental justice or socioeconomic values are anticipated from implementation of any of the alternatives.

### *3.2.6 FISH HABITAT*

There are no wetlands or riparian zones in the BLM-administered portion of the allotment that would provide fish habitat.

### *3.2.7 FLOODPLAINS*

There are no floodplains on public lands within the allotment that would be affected by livestock grazing under any of the alternatives.

### *3.2.8 LANDS/ACCESS*

Utility and communications infrastructure are important rights-of-way on this allotment, both on Federal and State lands. A major power line runs the length of the allotment, and a communications tower is accessed from BLM lands. This infrastructure must be maintained and improved to keep up with population increases that are occurring around the Phoenix Metropolitan Area.

No lands issues have been identified in connection with either the No Action or the Proposed Action alternatives. No land use authorizations will be affected by this proposal. Access to the public land parcels would not be altered or impaired by continued livestock grazing under either the No Action or Proposed Action Alternatives. However, the No Grazing Alternative would entail erecting fence lines to prevent trespass of cattle onto BLM lands. Gates and cattle guards would be required to allow continued access by the public, including those responsible for maintaining the rights-of-way and infrastructure.

### *3.2.9 MIGRATORY BIRDS*

All migratory birds are protected under the 1918 Migratory Bird Treaty Act (16 USC 703), which prohibits the taking of any migratory birds, their parts, nests, or eggs. Additional protection is provided by the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 2000 (16 USC 80). Migratory birds are known to occur within the Lower Sonoran Field Office area, some of which are known to use the habitat types present within this allotment. It is expected that the potential for conflicts between two head of livestock grazing and migratory birds under the Alternatives would be minimal and the difference between the two alternatives would be negligible. There is more potential for conflicts with migratory birds under the No Grazing Alternative, due to the installation of fence lines on which they could be injured or killed. However, this effect is expected to be negligible.

### *3.2.10 MINERAL RESOURCES/MINING*

No active mining claims are currently open within the federal lands identified in the project area. Historically, lode mining claims had been previously filed on lands found in N 1/2 of Section 31, and the SW 1/4 SW 1/4 of Section 30, but these claims are currently inactive with no recorded

statutory activity since 1991. Mineral exploration has occurred within a portion of the project area described as the Yost Pasture. Several active claims are found north of the Florence Junction Allotment within the Superstition Mountains Mining District, but these lands are far removed from the lands described in this action. Continuing livestock grazing would not alter geological features or mineral resources.

### *3.2.11 NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS CONCERNS*

The SHPO, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and Indian tribes having historical ties to Arizona public lands were consulted during the preparations of the *Lower Sonoran RMP* (2012). No Native American religious concerns or cultural concerns have been identified in relation to livestock grazing within this allotment. Neither the Proposed Action nor the No Action Alternative are expected to impact cultural or Native American religious resources.

### *3.2.12 PALEONTOLOGICAL RESOURCES*

There are no known paleontological resources located in the allotment and soil compositions present are not the types that tend to support them.

### *3.2.13 PRIME AND UNIQUE FARMLANDS*

There are no prime and unique farmlands on public lands within the allotment.

### *3.2.14 RESOURCE CONSERVATION AREAS*

There are no Resource Conservation Areas on the Florence Junction Allotment. Therefore, neither of the alternatives would affect this resource.

### *3.2.15 VISUAL RESOURCES*

The VRM (Visual resource management) categorization for this allotment is Class III, meaning that actions, projects, facilities can be visible, but should not dominate the landscape. Continuing livestock grazing as described in the Proposed Action or the No Action Alternative would not affect visual resources. There would be no difference in impacts to visual resources between those two alternatives. However, under the No Grazing Alternative, the installation of fence lines and cattle guards to prevent livestock from grazing on BLM lands would cause minor impacts to visual resources.

### *3.2.16 WASTES, HAZARDOUS OR SOLID*

No hazardous wastes would be created by the implementation of any of the alternatives.

### *3.2.17 WATER QUALITY*

There are no Section 303d Water Quality Limited Stream Segments within the allotment.

### *3.2.18 WETLANDS AND RIPARIAN ZONES*

There are no BLM-managed riparian areas or wetlands on the allotment.

### *3.2.19 WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS*

There are no designated wild and scenic rivers within the allotment.

### *3.2.20 WILD HORSES AND BURROS*

There are no wild horse or burro herd areas or herd management areas in the allotment.

### *3.2.21 WILDERNESS AND WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS*

There are no designated Wilderness Areas, Wilderness Study Areas, or lands with wilderness character in the allotment.

### *3.2.22 WILDLAND FIRE MANAGEMENT/FUELS*

No hazardous fuel reduction or fuels management projects are proposed for this allotment. Some fuels management projects are proposed in the Queen Valley area in the near future, but it is unlikely to affect this allotment. Continued livestock use would not affect fire management, other than the continued reduction of some light fuels through livestock grazing, but the difference between the any of the alternatives would be negligible.

## **3.3 RESOURCES BROUGHT FORWARD FOR ANALYSIS**

The following sections contain descriptions of the elements that were determined to be potentially impacted by the alternatives and were therefore carried forward for detailed analysis in this document. The description of the resources identified below provides the baseline for comparison of impacts described in Chapter 4.

### *3.3.1 CULTURAL RESOURCES*

Several cultural resource surveys have been conducted within the assessment area, primarily for mineral exploration, power lines, roads and/or road improvement projects. Approximately 320 acres have been surveyed for cultural resources out of the 449 BLM acres in this allotment. No sites have been recorded in over half of the area. Sites may exist on un-surveyed portions.

### *3.3.2 GRAZING MANAGEMENT*

Grazing history is described in Section 1.0 *Introduction*, and in further detail in the Florence Junction Allotment RHE. Current permit terms and conditions are described above in Section 0 *No Action Alternative*. The Yost Pasture is currently designated as a perennial (year-long grazing) pasture. Allotment monitoring during the evaluation process in 2010/11 determined that the Yost Pasture meets the criteria for limited perennial, yearlong use. In contrast, the Silver King Pasture, previously designated as ephemeral when attached to the Hewitt Road Allotment, meets the criteria for ephemeral rangelands, according to data gathered during the RHE process.

The current permittee typically runs between 50% and 95% of his permitted use for 4 months (Jan-April, or Feb - May) depending on rainfall and available forage. He rotates his cattle through the pastures as needed, based on the size of the pasture and the number of cattle turned out. Because of the location of pasture fencing, BLM land is not separated from State land, and therefore grazing management does not differ between the two agencies' parcels. There are 10 pastures of various size. After the winter "green-up" has dried up, nearly all of the cattle are removed and taken to other ranches for the summer. The permittee tends to leave between 6-40 animals (or 5% to 31% of state and BLM permitted use) on the Florence Junction allotment throughout the summer, which

keeps his local cowboys employed and the waters running (stock tanks and wells) for wildlife and livestock.

There are no range improvement projects on the BLM-administered part of the allotment. All water sources are located within the state lease portions of the allotment (see RHE, pg. 7, for the location of water sources). Although not BLM-administered range improvement projects, there are several fence lines throughout the BLM and State Trust lands that help the permittee to rotate his livestock regularly. However, these fences do not generally mark boundaries between State and Federal lands, but separate pastures and prevent access onto private properties and roads. The existing fence lines are in good condition and function as required.

### *3.3.3 SOILS*

The Florence Junction Allotment is located in the Major Land Resource Area (MLRA) 040—Sonoran Basin and Range. It has an annual average precipitation of 7-10 inches per year. The soil survey that covers the BLM portions of this area is the Eastern Pinal and Southern Gila Counties, Arizona (AZ661). Soils within the Yost Pasture are in the Beardsley-Suncity Complex. Soils within the Silver King Pasture fall primarily into the Beardsley-Suncity Complex and the Tremant-Pinamt Complex. Corresponding ecological sites include predominantly Loamy Uplands, with scattered Limy Fans, a few Shallow Hills sites, and less than 1% Sandy Washes.

Indicators of rangeland health determined that the upland soils at each of the key areas exhibit infiltration, permeability, and erosion rates that are appropriate to the soil type, climate and landform. The data collected during the evaluation has shown that soils are stable within the allotment. The Florence Junction RHE found that all three key areas within the allotment are achieving Standard 1. Furthermore, all key areas meet the DPC objective for adequate vegetative canopy cover. Soil-related indicators such as flow patterns, bare ground, soil and litter movement, presence of biological crusts, and soil compaction, etc. are appropriate for all of the sites. The high percentage of gravel, stone and vegetation helps prevent erosion in most of the areas. Detailed information regarding this resource is provided in detail in the Florence Junction RHE. Potential impacts to soils from any of the alternatives is described in Section 4.3.

### *3.3.4 VEGETATION*

Dominant vegetation across the Florence Junction allotment consists of a creosote/bursage community. White ratany and succulents are common in the uplands, and desert hackberry and catclaw acacia dominate the drainageways. Annual forbs and grasses provide most of the forage that is available in these ecological sites.

The potential plant community on the Loamy Uplands is a mixture of desert shrubs, cacti and annual grasses and forbs. The Limy Fan ecological sites naturally do not produce much palatable perennial forage, and, due to the unpalatable nature of the shrubby species in the potential community, there is little change in species composition even with heavy grazing pressure. However, in wet winters, the production of cool season annuals can be very high and provide for a high carrying capacity of stocker cattle in the March-May grazing season. The potential plant community in a Sandy Wash 7-10" PZ is a diverse mixture of desert trees, shrubs, vines and

perennial and annual grasses and forbs. Total canopy in Sandy Wash sites, including tall shrubs like creosotebush, whitethorn, desert hackberry and wolfberry, ranges from 25% to 40%.

The RHE found that the three key areas within the Florence Junction Allotment are achieving Standard 3 for upland native plant communities. Data collected and analyzed from each study site demonstrated that the areas were productive and diverse. Apparent trend for soils and vegetation across the allotment was assessed as “Stable” overall. Species composition and structure were as expected for each ecological site. Forage utilization allotment-wide ranged from slight to moderate, with evidence of use by both livestock and wildlife. Red brome was located in the uplands, and Bermudagrass, buffelgrass, and red brome were located in the Sandy Wash study site. Most grazing on the Sandy Wash site occurred on these invasive grasses, while most native grasses and shrubs were not utilized. Information regarding vegetation is provided in detail in the Florence Junction RHE.

Site-specific Desired Plant Community (DPC) objectives for the Florence Junction Allotment address the desired resource conditions of Arizona Standard 1 and 3 as land health indicators for each key area’s biological resources (Standard 2 is not included because no riparian areas or wetlands exist on the BLM portions of the allotment). DPC objectives have been established for each study area to identify the desired vegetation attributes, such as composition, structure, and cover for the allotment. These include establishing vegetative characteristics necessary for soil protection (corresponding with Standard 1), and providing forage and habitat for both livestock and wildlife (corresponding with Standard 3). These objectives only apply where the potential exists and are based on near normal year’s precipitation.

All DPC objectives are being achieved on all three key areas. Utilization was classified as slight to moderate at all key areas where utilization was measured. Current forage utilization data does not indicate that current levels of livestock use are a causal factor for the presence of invasive grasses, whose seed base are likely originating from private properties and housing developments farther up the watershed. Potential impacts to vegetation from any of the alternatives is described in Section 4.4.

### *3.3.5 INVASIVE, NONNATIVE SPECIES*

Red brome is an annual grass species that has invaded some of this area. Red brome occupies a niche in the native winter annual forbs and grasses (Arizona Wildlands Invasive Plant Working Group. 2005). Bermuda grass and buffelgrass are invasive non-native perennial grass species that are both a preferred forage for livestock. These two perennial species have invaded some areas along the washes. The likely origin of these invasive grasses is the private properties and golf course in Queen Valley, about a mile upslope in the watershed.

Native grasses (three-awn and bush muhly) made up 5% of the vegetation composition on the Sandy Wash Site (Key Area 2). However, exotic grass species (buffelgrass, Bermuda grass, and red brome) also made up 5% of the composition of the site. Red brome was also present, but not abundant, in the uplands (found under shrubs, but not in the open areas). Utilization of the invasives was not measured; however, estimated use on Bermuda grass is approximately 70%, or

heavy. In comparison, utilization on native species onsite (including the browse species) was 24%, or light (see Appendix A of the RHE for Key Area data).

A heavy livestock carrying capacity can perpetuate the spread of invasive, non-native vegetation. Proper grazing management which maintains the Desired Plant Community should minimize the spread of invasive non-native species. However, in the case of the Florence Junction Allotment, it is likely that the invasion of exotic species originates in the private and state lands north of the BLM-administered parts of the allotment. Therefore, invasives could prove to be difficult to eradicate on public lands regardless of livestock management. Potential impacts to/ from invasive plants from any of the alternatives is described in Section 4.5.

### *3.3.6 WILDLIFE RESOURCES (INCLUDING T&E, SPECIAL STATUS, ETC.)*

The Sonoran desert shrub community present on this allotment provides habitat for big game species including, but not limited to, javelina and mule deer. Other wildlife species present include, coyote, mountain lion, bobcat, gray fox, raccoon, desert cottontail, black-tailed jackrabbits, Gambel's quail, great horned owls, and various reptiles, small mammals and migratory birds.

BLM sensitive species require special management consideration to avoid potential future listing under the ESA. State sensitive species, that is, "species of greatest conservation need" as identified by the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD, 1996), are species that are critically imperiled, imperiled, or vulnerable to rangewide extinction or extirpation. All of the State sensitive species in this report are also BLM sensitive species and thus are discussed together. General wildlife species are also present within the allotment and may be impacted by the action alternatives. In most cases, actions that impact sensitive species may also impact general wildlife species and thus are not discussed separately from BLM sensitive species. The main groups of priority and general wildlife species are discussed below and include birds, reptiles and amphibians, game and other species of interest, bats, and fish.

Monitoring indicates that across all ecological sites, current vegetative species composition and structure provides cover and forage to support a diverse wildlife community (see RHE, Section 7). Trees, shrubs and cacti are available to provide forage, cover and nesting opportunity for many bird species as well as cover and palatable browse for mule deer. Forage species, such as ephedra, white ratany, shrubby buckwheat, and calliandra, as well as annual and perennial grasses and forbs, are available for a variety of wildlife species. The mix of trees/shrubs/cactus and grasses/forbs present on the allotment provides a diversity of habitats suitable for a variety of wildlife species from reptiles and small mammals to various birds, and game species, as well as predators that depend on these species groups.

There are no known or recorded Threatened and Endangered species known to occur on the Florence Junction allotment at this time. There is habitat for the Desert tortoise (Sonoran Population). In December 2010, the Sonoran Population of the Desert tortoise was given status as a candidate species under the Endangered Species Act; the BLM has considered the desert tortoise a sensitive status species for the past two decades and has been actively managing habitat for the tortoise by utilizing USBLM's 1988 *Desert Tortoise Habitat Management on the Public Lands: A Rangewide Plan* (USBLM, 1988a). The allotment contains Category III Desert Tortoise Habitat.

Desert tortoise populations are generally associated with dry washes and rocky hillsides within the Arizona Upland, Sonoran Desert scrub vegetative community.

Desert tortoise populations are generally associated with dry washes and rocky hillsides within the Arizona Upland, Sonoran Desert scrub vegetative community (Van Devender, T. R., et al. 2002.). The allotment contains Category III Desert Tortoise Habitat, which means that BLM must limit population declines to the extent possible by mitigating impacts. However, there appears to be adequate habitat for desert tortoise, which forage on forbs, grasses, subshrubs, and succulents. For example, preferred forage species for desert tortoise include ephedra, white ratany, caliandra, and shrubby buckwheat, all of which are present on the Yost Pasture for their consumption (RHE, pg. 54-55). Additionally, annual forbs and grasses are available on both the Yost and Silver King pastures for desert tortoise and other wildlife species.

### *3.3.7 RECREATION & TRAVEL MANAGEMENT*

Florence Junction, located at the intersection of US 60 and AZ Highway 79, is approximately 16 miles north of Florence, and about 50 miles east-southeast of Phoenix, Arizona. While BLM does not actively manage for recreation in this area, its accessibility and proximity to Apache Junction, Mesa, and Florence make it a popular destination for recreationists. Moreover, about a mile north of Florence Junction is the small community of Queen Valley. With a permanent population of about 300 permanent residents, the small town swells throughout the winter months to nearly 2,500, made up mainly of retirees who relax and recreate near the mountains and on the residential golf course.

Recreational opportunities for both motorized and non-motorized activities are available on the Florence Junction Allotment. The two main roads that provide access to the Florence Junction Allotment are El Camino Viejo Road and San Mateo Castro Road. A power line road provides access across the allotment from either of these two roads. Other smaller tracks heading north/south bisect the allotment as well. Off-highway vehicle (OHV) use tends to originate from Queen Valley to the east or a small housing development to the west. Hunting, camping, target shooting, rock-hounding, hiking, and photography are other recreational opportunities that occur on the allotment.

These recreational opportunities have led to some abuses of state and public lands. Although target shooting is illegal on State Trust Lands, target shooters use the surrounding mountains as the target backdrop, and leave behind their trash and shell casings, littering the area. Potential impacts related to recreation and travel/access are described in Section 4.7.

## **4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS**

The potential direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental consequences or effects of the alternatives are discussed in this chapter. The intent of this analysis is to provide the scientific and analytical basis for the environmental consequences. Only impacts that may result from implementing one of the alternatives are described in this EA. If an ecological component is not discussed, it is because BLM resource specialists have considered effects to the component and

found the Proposed Action would have minimal or no effects (see Section 3.1 *Critical Elements and other Resources Considered in the Analysis*). The No Action Alternative is presented first and serves as a baseline against which to evaluate the environmental consequences of the Proposed Action. Direct and indirect effects are discussed first by resource and cumulative effects are discussed at the conclusion of this chapter.

## 4.1 CULTURAL RESOURCES

### 4.1.1 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under this alternative, current grazing management would continue, resulting in cattle being turned out in both the Yost Pasture and the Silver King Pasture in a high-intensity/ short duration grazing system throughout the year, subject to the current standard terms and conditions. The impacts of the BLM's livestock grazing program on cultural resources has been considered in a series of grazing EIS documents. Part of that effort included compliance with Section 106 of the NHPA. Although no new range improvement projects are proposed as part of the No Action Alternative, any future proposed range improvements actions, including fences, water facilities, and vegetation manipulation, would be subject to a Class III inventory and consultation with the SHPO. The BLM would manage to ensure that livestock grazing would continue to be in compliance with Section 106 (36 CFR 800.3). Livestock grazing has continued as an historic use of the land, and has "no effect" on National Register properties for the purpose of Section 106 compliance.

### 4.1.2 PROPOSED ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under this alternative, the BLM would manage to ensure that livestock grazing would continue to be in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (36 CFR 800.3). Potential impacts from future range improvements would be the same as described for the No Action Alternative. Cultural clearances would not be required for placement of supplemental salt blocks and minerals 1/8 mile from drainages/washes. The Proposed Action, does not constitute a potential adverse effect to cultural resources.

### 4.1.3 NO GRAZING ALTERNATIVE

The alternative to eliminate livestock grazing on BLM pastures would have similar indirect impacts as that of the Proposed Action. However, because fence lines would likely have to be constructed to separate State and BLM lands, the direct impacts of this construction on cultural resources could increase. Range improvement projects (including fence construction) have the potential to impact archaeological resources. New range improvement actions, including fences, water facilities, and vegetation treatments, are subject to a Class III inventory in order to identify any cultural resources located within or near the proposed activity. Any sites located are evaluated for the presence of characteristics that would make them eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Those sites found to have these characteristics would be evaluated for the effects of the project/ activity on them. In the event that significant archaeological resources (sites potentially eligible to the National Register of Historic Places) are found to be adversely impacted by cattle, avoidance, preventative and mitigation measures will be implemented including but not limited to fencing, recordation, data collection, and monitoring as is standard operating procedure under the National Historic Preservation Act.

## 4.2 GRAZING MANAGEMENT

### 4.2.1 *NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE*

Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no changes to grazing management on the Florence Junction Allotment. The No Action Alternative would renew the 10-year grazing permit to J-P Cattle Co. LLC from 2013 to 2023, with the current livestock grazing terms and conditions. Although not specifically designated, the Silver King Pasture, in effect, would become a perennial pasture, and would be grazed in the same rotation as the other pastures. This could cause overutilization of limited resources in this pasture that does not meet the criteria for year-round grazing. Without Actual Use information being provided by the permittee, it would remain difficult for BLM to monitor grazing effects on rangeland health. Furthermore, salt and mineral blocks would continue to be allowed in drainages. Livestock would continue to loiter in washes, and not disperse as needed across the allotment. Grazing pressure on vegetation in these areas would continue.

### 4.2.2 *PROPOSED ACTION ALTERNATIVE*

The proposed action would ensure that the Arizona Standards for Rangeland Health would continue to be achieved. Under the Proposed Action Alternative, BLM would renew the 10-year grazing permit to J-P Cattle Co. LLC from 2013 to 2023, but with additional terms and conditions applied to the grazing permit.

In order to ensure the ephemeral designation is met, in years when ephemeral use is authorized on BLM lands, the operator would either have to run ephemeral use on the entire pasture (including State lands which don't have ephemeral designations), or use some other method of livestock control (e.g. fencing).

Additionally, moving supplemental salts away from washes would encourage livestock to disperse away from these areas. This would decrease the time cattle would loiter in washes where they tend to travel and congregate. It would also enable them to utilize vegetation that they might not otherwise use and could improve livestock productivity and health.

Collecting Actual Use information for the Yost Pasture from the permittee would help BLM with grazing administration and provide season-of-use information. The proposed modifications to the terms and conditions of the permit renewal would further promote rangeland health throughout the allotment and assist BLM in current management and future rangeland health evaluations.

### 4.2.3 *NO GRAZING ALTERNATIVE*

Under this alternative, required boundary fences would prevent the cattle from dispersing freely across the pastures, and would require the livestock operator to herd his cattle around the pastures instead of through them along the power lines when rotating pastures. Moreover, the livestock operator and his employees would have to maintain several more miles of fencing with no mitigating economic return.

This alternative would enable the operator to use the remaining State portion of the Silver King Pasture during regular rotations, rather than waiting for ephemeral years to run it in conjunction with the BLM portion.

## 4.3 SOILS

### 4.3.1 *NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE*

Improper grazing practices can lead to soil compaction, reduced infiltration rates, increased runoff and erosion, and declines in watershed condition. However, properly managed livestock grazing is designed to cause minimal impacts to rangeland resources, including soils. Data collected from the Rangeland Health Evaluation (Section 7) indicate that soils on this allotment are in good condition and Standard 1, Upland Health, was met at all Key Areas. The upland soils were found to exhibit infiltration, permeability, and erosion rates that are appropriate to soil type, climate, and landform (ecological site). The BLM interdisciplinary team evaluated the ratings of the 17 indicators on a site-by-site basis and made a collective rating of none to slight which is the least departure from normal. On both the Yost Pasture and the Silver King Pasture, livestock grazing under this alternative could have a localized, adverse effect on soils when grazing occurs, such as continued compaction in areas in which cattle loiter. However, compaction tends to occur mostly around water sources, and there are not water sources on BLM lands. Overall, this alternative would be expected to continue to meet Standard 1 because only 2 cattle are permitted for these 449 acres.

### 4.3.2 *PROPOSED ACTION ALTERNATIVE*

Under this alternative, potential impacts from livestock grazing on the Yost Pasture would be the same as described in the No Action Alternative. When livestock grazing occurs, localized, adverse effects on soils could result, as described for the No Action Alternative. But it is expected that the additional terms and conditions added to the permit under this alternative would enhance protection of soil resources by reducing compaction and soil disturbance in drainages. However, impacts from grazing on the Silver King Pasture would only occur during years of ephemeral grazing, but could be higher during those years because the permittee could request greater numbers of cattle to be turned out for the short ephemeral season. Soils could then “heal” during years of no ephemeral use.

Under this alternative, livestock distribution on the public lands would be improved by placing salt blocks and/or mineral supplements at least 1/8 mile upslope from drainages/dry washes. Soil compaction would be expected in localized areas, but overall this alternative would be expected to continue to meet Standard 1. Specifically, the proposed terms and conditions would minimize impacts from livestock grazing on both pastures by maintaining plant vigor and increasing litter accumulation, resulting in the maintenance or improvement of organic matter content, soil structure, permeability, and productivity. This would ensure that upland soils would exhibit infiltration, permeability, and erosion rates that are appropriate to soil type, climate, and landform. Currently, the indicators of soil condition are appropriate for their soil type (see RHE for details), and future monitoring would continue to measure these conditions for trend.

Actual use data would provide BLM exact numbers of cattle and season of use that could potentially impact soils throughout the allotment, which in turn would guide future management decisions.

Therefore, the Proposed Action directly and indirectly positively impacts soils by encouraging better livestock distribution throughout the allotment while decreasing soil compaction near washes.

#### *4.3.3 NO GRAZING ALTERNATIVE*

Eliminating livestock from the BLM lands would prevent further compaction of those soils on the Yost Pasture by 2 cow/calf units and on the Silver King Pasture during ephemeral years. However, the direct impacts from fence installation, then the compaction created along the fence lines caused initially by construction, and later by livestock trailing along the fence lines on the State side of the fence, would likely cause more detrimental impacts than 2 cattle dispersed across the allotment, as in the proposed action alternative.

### 4.4 VEGETATION

#### *4.4.1 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE*

Improper livestock grazing practices can directly affect vegetation by reducing plant vigor, decreasing or eliminating desirable forage species, causing loss of, or injury to, individual plants from trampling, particularly near water developments, and increasing soil instability and erosion. As indicated in Section 3.6 *Vegetation*, Standard 3 is currently being met at all of the Key Areas within the allotment indicating that vegetation conditions were appropriate for each ecological site.

Under this alternative, there would be no changes to the current grazing permit, and the Silver King Pasture would continue to be used as a rotational pasture. Impacts to vegetation would likely continue as determined in the RHE, which was nevertheless meeting Standard 3 for Rangeland Health. Salt blocks and mineral tubs would continue to be allowed in drainages. Livestock would continue to loiter in these areas and not disperse as needed across the allotment. Utilization on key forage species would continue in the drainages.

#### *4.4.2 PROPOSED ACTION ALTERNATIVE*

In general, impacts on vegetation under the Proposed Action Alternative would not differ significantly from those described in the No Action Alternative. For instance, on the Yost Pasture where utilization was classified as negligible to light at the two key where utilization was measured, improved management may be difficult to quantify. However, by moving salt blocks from drainages, the Proposed Action would slightly improve livestock distribution across the allotment and therefore put less grazing pressure on those Sandy Wash sites that are experiencing the most use.

On the Silver King Pasture, the Proposed Action would ensure that this pasture would only be in accordance to the Special Ephemeral Rule. This would relieve grazing pressure on the limited perennial forage species in that pasture during years of non-use. However, grazing pressure on annuals would increase during years of authorized ephemeral use. To minimize impacts to vegetative resources, BLM staff would authorize the number of cattle and length of time they would be permitted in the pasture.

#### *4.4.3 NO GRAZING ALTERNATIVE*

Loeser et al. (2007) reported that moderate grazing was superior to both grazing exclusion and high-impact grazing in maintaining plant diversity and in reducing exotic plant recruitment in a semiarid Arizona grassland. Other research has demonstrated that properly managed livestock grazing is designed to cause minimal impacts to rangeland resources. Holecheck (2006) reported that livestock grazing at light to moderate intensities can have positive impacts on rangelands in the Southwest. The BLM portion of the Florence Junction allotment is only 3% of the total land in the lease. It is unlikely that the elimination of 24 AUMs, or 2 cattle across 3% of the entire allotment would impact vegetation either positively or negatively. There would be slightly more grazing pressure on vegetation on State Trust Lands without the ability for the cattle to disperse freely across the entire area.

However, under this alternative, the boundary fences needed to prevent livestock from trespassing on BLM lands would result in vegetation removal and mortality along the fence lines during installation. Heavier grazing pressure and trampling of vegetation tends to occur along fence lines. If BLM areas are fenced out, this pressure and mortality would occur on State Trust Lands, possibly causing morphology and uniformity issues on each side of the fence.

### **4.5 INVASIVE, NON-NATIVE SPECIES**

#### *4.5.1 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE*

Properly managed livestock grazing is designed to cause minimal impacts to rangeland resources and proper range practices can help prevent the spread of undesirable plant species (Sheley 1995). It is possible that seeds could be introduced from cattle coming into the area proposed for cattle grazing. Nevertheless, Loeser et al. (2007) reported that moderate grazing was superior to both grazing exclusion and high-impact grazing in maintaining plant diversity and in reducing exotic plant recruitment in a semiarid Arizona grassland.

The allotment RHE found that utilization on invasive species, such as Bermuda grass and buffelgrass, was much greater than utilization on native grass species. The No Action Alternative would likely not improve the current composition of invasive species on the allotment because livestock grazing may not be the causal factor of the invasive species found there. Furthermore, because there would be no changes to the current grazing permit, salt blocks and mineral tubs would continue to be allowed in drainages. Livestock would continue to loiter in these areas and not disperse as needed across the allotment.

#### *4.5.2 PROPOSED ACTION*

Impacts from the Proposed Action Alternative are similar as those described for the No Action Alternative. However, it is expected that the implementation of the Proposed Action may help decrease the exotic grass component in Sandy Wash sites by encouraging cattle to disperse more evenly across the landscape. However, because the source of the invasives is State land and private properties upslope, a decrease or eradication of exotic grasses may not be possible. Because of this, it is not anticipated that ephemeral use, as proposed, will impact the presence of invasives either positively or negatively in this situation. The Proposed Action would attempt to address the Desired

Plant Community objective to maintain a maximum of 5% invasive species on the Sandy Wash site, an improvement over the No Action Alternative which does not offer a solution to the invasive species problem. The Proposed Action, while limited, is anticipated to slow or reverse the rate at which invasive species are spread throughout the area, especially when combined with weed treatments.

#### *4.5.3 NO GRAZING ALTERNATIVE*

Under this alternative, the BLM grazing permit would be cancelled and the BLM portions of the Yost and Silver King pastures would be fenced off to prevent livestock grazing. However, it is not expected that this alternative affect the presence of invasive weeds on the allotment. Sprinkle et al (2007) found that grazing exclusion does not make vegetation more resistant to invasion by exotic annuals. Reasons for this may include: 1) grazing that results in a more diverse age classification of plants due to seed dispersal and seed implementation by grazing herbivores, and 2) grazing that removes senescent plant material, and if not extreme, helps open up the plant basal area to increase photosynthesis and rainfall harvesting (Holechek 1981). Because the source of the invasive species is likely upslope outside of the allotment, it is unlikely that the elimination of 24 AUMs across 3% of the entire allotment would impact invasive, non-native species either positively or negatively. Moreover, the boundary fences needed to prevent livestock from trespassing on BLM lands could perpetuate the problem by creating disturbed niches along the fence lines in which weeds would invade.

### **4.6 WILDLIFE, THREATENED OR ENDANGERED SPECIES, AND SPECIAL STATUS SPECIES**

#### *4.6.1 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE*

Livestock operations can affect wildlife by changing vegetation composition, function, and structure. Livestock grazing can reduce the amount of forage available to native herbivores (e.g., mule deer), as well as reduce vegetative cover for ground nesting birds, burrowing rodents, and other wildlife species dependent on ground cover for protection, food, and breeding sites. Livestock can affect desert tortoise and their habitat by trampling of individuals above ground or in their burrows, reduction in forage, reduction in cover, soil compaction, damage to soil crusts and introduction of non-native plants.

Based on the data presented in the Rangeland Health Evaluation, current levels of use are not degrading wildlife habitat conditions. Abundant shrubs and subshrubs are available to provide forage, cover and nesting opportunities. The mix of trees, shrubs, cacti, grasses and forbs present on the allotment provides a diversity of habitats suitable for a variety of wildlife species from reptiles and small mammals to various birds, and game species as well as predators that depend on these species groups.

The No Action Alternative would be the continuation of existing conditions. Ecological conditions on both the Yost and the Silver King Pastures have a stable apparent trend. This trend would likely continue and wildlife habitat conditions would reflect this trend.

As stated in Chapter 3.3.6, the allotment does contain Category III desert tortoise habitat. However, current conditions do not indicate any tortoise habitat vulnerability with current grazing

management on either of the pastures (refer to RHE, pp. 12, 54-58), so it is likely that conditions would remain the same under this alternative and continue to meet Standards 1 and 3 of Arizona Standards for Rangeland Health.

#### *4.6.2 PROPOSED ACTION ALTERNATIVE*

This alternative would not differ significantly from the No Action Alternative. However, under the Proposed Action Alternative, improved livestock distribution caused by the wider distribution of salts and minerals would likely initiate a trend toward improved wildlife habitat conditions. Improved conditions would be most noticeable near waters and washes where salt is currently placed. Impacts to wildlife on the Yost Pasture are expected to be the same as described for the No Action Alternative.

The Proposed Action proposes to return the Silver King Pasture to its original ephemeral designation. Because ephemeral grazing is so infrequent and of such short duration on this 200 acres of rangeland, the potential for impacts to wildlife is very small. In years when livestock are not permitted in the pasture, more forage would be available for wildlife, including desert tortoise. In years of above average precipitation when adequate annual forage for grazing exists, cattle are turned out into the allotment for four or more weeks, upon approval of BLM staff. No long-term loss of habitat from grazing is expected, given the ecological sites of this pasture, especially given the infrequent and short duration nature of ephemeral grazing.

No long-term impacts to Sonoran desert tortoise populations are expected. Further, no impacts to reptiles and amphibians, game, or other species of interest would be expected. Overall, impacts to special status species and other general wildlife would not be expected to occur with continued grazing on the Florence Junction Allotment, especially given the very limited percentage of BLM land (3%) and BLM-permitted livestock forage consumption (24 AUMs) allowed on the allotment.

#### *4.6.3 NO GRAZING ALTERNATIVE*

Eliminating 2 cattle from the allotment would make available that forage that would have otherwise been unavailable for the wildlife using it. Likewise, the likelihood of damage to resources, such as cattle trampling desert tortoise, would be slightly lower, with a reduction from 130 total cattle to 128 cattle. Moreover, because BLM lands constitute only 3% of the entire Florence Junction Allotment., this alternative would likely have negligible impact to the forage availability for wildlife species currently using the habitat.

However, the fence that would be needed to prevent cattle from using the BLM lands could have a significant impact on the wildlife using the area. Although fences constructed on public lands must comply with wildlife-friendly specifications, fences nevertheless impact some species of wildlife. The act of fence construction can directly impact wildlife by displacing wildlife or crushing burrows during construction activities. Indirect impacts of additional fencing could inhibit free movement of some ungulate species, many of which exist in this area due to the vicinity of Queen Creek, Fences can also cause fatalities with avian species. If the RHE had determined that the allotment was not meeting Standards for Rangeland Health, this alternative could create a feasible solution. But the rangeland condition was appropriate for the ecological site descriptions, and utilization was light.

Therefore, the No Grazing Alternative would likely cause more adverse impacts to wildlife than the Proposed Action or the No Action Alternative.

## 4.7 RECREATION AND TRAVEL MANAGEMENT

### 4.7.1 *NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE*

The issues regarding recreational use of the allotment that were brought forward by both the permittee and Western Watersheds are outside the scope of this EA. No impacts to recreation or travel management are anticipated to occur with the renewal of a grazing permit for this allotment. Continued grazing by two cattle (in addition to those permitted by the state) is not expected to significantly impact any recreational use on or access to the allotment. Dispersed recreation would continue with the proposed action. Camping, hiking, equestrian activities, recreational prospecting and off highway vehicle usage will continue to increase 3 - 5 % per year (in accordance with population growth of the greater Phoenix Metropolitan Area).

### 4.7.2 *PROPOSED ACTION*

Impacts would be the same for the Proposed Action Alternative as with the No Action Alternative. None of the changes to the terms and conditions of the grazing permit is expected to have any impacts on recreation or travel management.

### 4.7.3 *NO GRAZING ALTERNATIVE*

Recreationists and travelers in this area expect to see cattle on most public and state lands. The presence of 130 cattle (State and BLM permits combined) across the allotment are not considered a significant impact to recreationists, and likely do not impair any responsible recreational activities. The elimination of 2 cattle would have negligible impacts to recreationists using the area.

However, the elimination of BLM's 2 permitted cows would require boundary fences to be built to exclude BLM lands from the rest of the allotment. These fences would cut across the main access road (the powerline road) that links Queen Valley to the small housing community on the west side of the allotment. At least four cattle guards would have to be installed at these junctions to prevent gates from being left open or fences from being cut to enable continued access. Gates that are left open often cause cattle to trespass into excluded areas, creating management problems for the permittee and administrative issues for BLM. Furthermore, additional fence lines would impact the viewshed for recreational users in the Yost Pasture because they would be highly visible from several points along the powerline road. New fence lines in the Silver King Pasture would not create as much of a visual impact from the powerline road as in the Yost Pasture, but gates would have to be installed to allow access from public to state lands on the north/south tracks that run through that pasture.

Furthermore, a potential, though unintended, consequence of this alternative could be that the newly-enclosed livestock-free pastures could provide a "playground" for recreational users, which could lead to increased OHV use and recreational shooting. These public uses cause significantly more damage to rangeland resources than livestock grazing does, and are more difficult to manage.

## 4.8 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Cumulative impacts are those impacts resulting from the incremental effect of an action when added to other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable actions regardless of what agency or person undertakes such other actions (40 CFR 1508.7). Past, present, and foreseeable future actions that could affect the same components of the environment as analyzed above include: grazing management, recreation use, mineral exploration, energy/ utility/ communications infrastructure development, invasive, non-native species control efforts, and wildland fire management.

It is reasonable to expect that most of the past, present, and ongoing actions discussed above are expected to persist and remain steady throughout the time frame considered in this analysis with relatively little change in intensity expected, with the possible exception of recreational use, which is likely to increase with the corresponding 3-5% population increase of the Phoenix Metropolitan Area. Continuation of these activities in the future would result in a continuation of effects similar to those that have resulted from past activities.

The Past, Present, and Reasonably Foreseeable Future Actions applicable to the project area are identified as the following:

### *4.8.1 CULTURAL RESOURCES*

No cumulative effects to cultural resources are expected with any of the alternatives beyond those analyzed for direct and indirect impacts above. Any future proposed actions, including new fences needed for the No Grazing Alternative, or water facilities, vegetation treatments, mining exploration, utility/ communications infrastructure, or proposed rights of ways, would be subject to a Class III inventory in order to identify any cultural resources located within or near the proposed activity.

### *4.8.2 GRAZING MANAGEMENT*

It is unlikely that the No Action nor the Proposed Action Alternatives will create cumulative impacts on other resources beyond those analyzed for direct and indirect impacts. Cumulatively, over time, slight improvements on the Silver King Pasture may be recognized with strictly ephemeral use. However, the apparent trend on the Loamy Upland Ecological Site that classifies most of this pasture appears stable under current management (RHE, pg. 51), so changes to the vegetation and soils on this pasture are unlikely to show much change over time.

Range Improvement Projects (mostly occurring on State lands) have successfully assisted the livestock operator in better distribution of cattle across the allotment. It is possible that additional projects may be proposed in the future, but site-specific NEPA would be accomplished for any future projects located on BLM lands. However, the Proposed Action of moving salt and mineral supplements away from drainages is expected to minimize the need for additional Range Improvement Projects to assist with improved livestock distribution in the future.

The No Grazing Alternative would likely create interconnected cumulative impacts. Eliminating grazing on the small BLM portions of the allotment would entail construction of fences to prevent cattle from using those areas. Cumulative effects of these fences on the livestock operator would include a more difficult pasture rotational system, increased time to maintain additional fencelines,

the potential that recreationists would leave gates open or cut fences, which could lead to the need to retrieve trespass cattle from the closed areas, and possibly the need for further travel and/ or livestock infrastructure.

BLM resource specialists would monitor the Silver King Pasture each time there is an application submitted for ephemeral use on that pasture. Additionally, BLM resource specialists would periodically monitor the entire allotment over the 10-year term of the grazing permit to ensure that the fundamentals or conditions of rangeland health are being met, in accordance with 43 CFR 4180. Monitoring studies will generally include actual use, utilization, trend, and climate. These studies will be analyzed through the evaluation process to determine management actions needed to achieve standards and meet multiple-resource management objectives. If monitoring indicates current livestock grazing practices are causing non-attainment of resource objectives, the BLM could modify the terms and conditions of a grazing permit temporarily or on a more long-term basis, as deemed necessary, after consultation with the livestock permittee. However, if a permittee disagrees with the BLM's assessment of the resource conditions or the necessary modifications, the BLM may nevertheless issue a Full Force and Effect Grazing Decision to protect resources.

#### *4.8.3 SOILS*

No cumulative effects to soil resources are expected with any of the alternatives beyond those analyzed for direct and indirect impacts above.

#### *4.8.4 VEGETATION*

No cumulative effects to vegetation resources are expected with any of the alternatives beyond those analyzed for direct and indirect impacts above.

#### *4.8.5 INVASIVE, NON-NATIVE SPECIES*

Livestock use of invasive grasses may help reduce the reproduction of those species. If invasive grasses increase in the future, more direct management on those areas may be necessary. Upland areas may be susceptible to erosion following wildfire which could lead to proliferation of invasive weeds in these areas. Fire Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation efforts would be undertaken to help prevent the conversion of native range to non-native species. Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation efforts may vary in degrees of success, but when successful should help control the spread of invasive, annual species. Overall, the cumulative effects of reasonably foreseeable future invasive weed monitoring and treatment, and wildfire rehabilitation would be beneficial to upland soils and vegetation in the long term, which would indirectly contribute to attainment of the S&Gs.

The Lower Sonoran Field Office would continue to monitor the allotment for the presence of invasive weeds and current management practices would be employed to attempt to eradicate or contain such infestations. Best management practices would be followed to minimize the potential for herbicide drift or accidental application to desirable species that if damaged could also lead to adverse effects to pollinators within the area.

#### *4.8.6 WILDLIFE, THREATENED OR ENDANGERED SPECIES, AND SPECIAL STATUS SPECIES*

Through proper management of livestock, adequate habitat would be maintained within the allotment to support viable populations of the species discussed in this EA. Therefore, the Proposed

Action Alternative, in combination with the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable activities considered in this analysis, may impact some wildlife and their habitat; however, grazing of two cattle on public lands would not adversely impact the viability of these populations. Furthermore, during years of poor precipitation, any annual forage on the Silver King pasture would be available exclusively for wildlife, including the Sonoran desert tortoise because no grazing would be permitted during those dry years.

Livestock grazing, in combination with the other identified activities, has and will continue to alter upland vegetation composition and densities, which may reduce potentially suitable habitat for wildlife in some cases. Improving grazing distribution as proposed in the Proposed Action Alternative would potentially reduce these impacts. In combination with recreational activities, livestock grazing may contribute to wildlife habitat fragmentation, habitat loss, and other disturbances caused by wildlife/human interactions, particularly as discussed with the No Grazing Alternative which would require additional fencing.

#### *4.8.7 RECREATION AND TRAVEL MANAGEMENT*

Increased OHV use and target shooting may occur as a result of increased population in the region. This use may impact soil and vegetative communities through ground disturbance and may have detrimental effects to natural plant communities, which may lead to more hazardous waste build-up, soil erosion and plant mortality. However, this impact is likely to occur with increased urban sprawl from the Phoenix area, regardless of implementation of any of the alternatives.

Increased OHV use and target shooting may also have an adverse effect on wildlife within the allotment by increasing habitat fragmentation, destroying suitable habitat, and decreasing the ability of the habitat to maintain long-term population numbers. Increased disturbance by OHV users could concentrate wildlife in isolated areas and could result in decreased productivity or habitat impacts. No additional cumulative effects to recreation resources are expected with any of the alternatives beyond those analyzed for direct and indirect impacts above.

## **5.0 CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION**

Consultation, coordination and cooperation for this grazing permit renewal has been occurring among the BLM, the permittee, State agencies, and the interested publics since 2007 (refer to Chapter 1 above, and Section 6.1 below). An allotment tour, including BLM, Arizona State Land Department, and the permittee, took place on November 12, 2010. Continued consultation between BLM and the Arizona State Land Department has occurred to ensure accuracy of information pertaining to State Trust Lands. The Rangeland Health Evaluation and the Environmental Assessment were conducted by an interdisciplinary assessment team of BLM resource specialists. Technical recommendations from the RHE helped develop the alternatives for this EA.

## **Agencies and Individuals Consulted**

Dee Johnson, J-P Cattle Company, L.L.C., permittee  
Arizona Cattleman's Association  
Arizona Game and Fish Department  
Arizona State Land Department  
Center for Biological Diversity  
Ruiz Ranch, Inc. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Western Watersheds Project  
Wild Earth Guardians

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## APPENDIX A: SPECIAL EPHEMERAL RULE

Published in the *Federal Register*, Vol. 33, No. 238, Saturday, December 7, 1968 (Livestock Grazing Ephemeral Range: Arizona, California and Nevada).

In accordance with 43 CFR 4115.2-1 regarding special rules for grazing districts and pursuant to the receipt of recommendations of the State Directors for Arizona, California and Nevada and a factual showing of its necessity, a special rule for range designated as ephemeral is hereby approved.

Ephemeral (annual) ranges lie within the general southwest desert region extending primarily into southern Arizona, southern California and southern Nevada and include portions of the Mohave, Sonoran and Chihuahuan deserts. The region is characterized by desert type vegetation some of which may be classed as ephemeral only. Ephemeral range does not consistently produce forage, but periodically provides annual vegetation suitable for livestock grazing. In years of abundant moisture and other favorable climatic conditions a large amount of forage may be produced. Favorable years are highly unpredictable and the season is usually short lived. Ephemeral areas fall generally below the 3,200-foot contour and below the 8-inch precipitation isoline. A minor percentage of the total plant composition is made up of desirable perennial forage plants and potential to improve range condition and produce a dependable supply of forage by applying intensive management practices is lacking.

Because of the unique characteristics of ephemeral range the following special rule shall apply as follows:

- Applicable allotments or uses shall be formally designated by the District Manager as ephemeral range.
- An annual application by qualified licensees or permittees is not required unless grazing use is desired. On a year-to-year basis whenever forage exists or climatic conditions indicate the probability of an ephemeral forage crop, livestock grazing may be authorized upon application pursuant to any management requirements for the allotment.
- Use of base property (water base) during nonforage years is not feasible or economical and no use of base properties is required except during these periods when ephemeral forage is available and livestock grazing occurs.

## APPENDIX B: ARIZONA STANDARDS FOR RANGELAND HEALTH AND GUIDELINES FOR GRAZING ADMINISTRATION

**Table 1. Arizona Standards for Rangeland Health**

Arizona Standards for Rangeland Health	
<b>Standard 1</b>	<b><i>Upland Sites:</i></b> Upland soils exhibit infiltration, permeability and erosion rates that are appropriate to soil type, climate and landform (ecological site).
<b>Standard 2</b>	<b><i>Riparian-Wetland Sites:</i></b> Riparian-wetland areas are in properly functioning condition.
<b>Standard 3</b>	<b><i>Desired Resource Conditions:</i></b> Productive and diverse upland and riparian-wetland plant communities of native species and are maintained.
Rangeland Health Attributes	
<b>1. Soil/Site Stability</b>	The capacity of the site to limit redistribution and loss of soil resources (including nutrients and organic matter) by wind and water. Indicators are ground cover and signs of erosion.
<b>2. Hydrologic Function</b>	The capacity of the site to capture, store and safely release water from rainfall, runoff and snowmelt, to resist reduction in this capacity and recover from disturbance.
<b>3. Biotic Integrity</b>	The capacity of the site to support characteristic functional and structural vegetation communities and to resist loss due to disturbance and recover following disturbance. Indicators are vegetation composition, structure, and distribution.

The Arizona Guidelines for Grazing Administration (Table 2) are a series of management practices used to ensure that grazing activities meet the Rangeland Health Standards above.

**Table 2. Arizona Guidelines for Grazing Administration**

Arizona Guidelines for Grazing Administration	
<i>Guidelines for Standard 1</i>	1-1. Management activities will maintain or promote ground cover that will provide for infiltration, permeability, soil moisture storage, and soil stability

	<p>appropriate for the ecological sites within management units. The ground cover should maintain soil organisms and plants and animals to support the hydrologic and nutrient cycles, and energy flow. Ground cover and signs of erosion are surrogate measures for hydrologic and nutrient cycles and energy flow.</p>
<p><i>Guidelines for Standard 2</i></p>	<p>1-2. When grazing practices alone are not likely to restore areas of low infiltration or permeability, land management treatments may be designed and implemented to attain improvement.</p>
	<p>2-1. Management practices maintain or promote sufficient vegetation to maintain, improve or restore riparian-wetland functions of energy dissipation, sediment capture, groundwater recharge and stream bank stability, thus promoting stream channel morphology (e.g., gradient, width/depth ratio, channel roughness and sinuosity) and functions appropriate to climate and landform.</p> <p>2-2. New facilities are located away from riparian-wetland areas if they conflict with achieving or maintaining riparian-wetland function. Existing facilities are used in a way that does not conflict with riparian-wetland functions or are relocated or modified when incompatible with riparian-wetland functions.</p>
	<p>2-3. The development of springs and seeps or other projects affecting water and associated resources shall be designed to protect ecological functions and processes.</p>
<p><i>Guidelines for Standard 3</i></p>	<p>3-1. The use and perpetuation of native species will be emphasized. However, when restoring or rehabilitating disturbed or degraded rangelands, non-intrusive, non-native plant species are appropriate for use where native species (a) are not available, (b) are not economically feasible, (c) cannot achieve ecological objectives as well as non-native species, and/or (d) cannot compete with already established non-native species.</p>
	<p>3-2. Conservation of Federal threatened or endangered, proposed, candidate, and other special status species</p>

	<p>is promoted by the maintenance or restoration of their habitats.</p>
	<p>3-3. Management practices maintain, restore, or enhance water quality in conformance with State or Federal standards.</p>
	<p>3-4. Intensity, season and frequency of use, and distribution of grazing use should provide for growth and reproduction of those plant species needed to reach desired plant community objectives.</p>
	<p>3-5. Grazing on designated ephemeral (annual and perennial) rangeland may be authorized if the following conditions are met:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ephemeral vegetation is present in draws, washes, and under shrubs and has grown to useable levels at the time grazing begins;</li> <li>• sufficient surface and subsurface soil moisture exists for continued plant growth;</li> <li>• serviceable waters are capable of providing for proper grazing distribution;</li> <li>• sufficient annual vegetation will remain on site to satisfy other resource concerns, (i.e., watershed, wildlife, wild horses and burros); and</li> <li>• monitoring is conducted during grazing to determine if objectives are being met.</li> </ul>
	<p>3-6. Management practices will target those populations of noxious weeds that can be controlled or eliminated by approved methods.</p>
	<p>3-7. Management practices to achieve desired plant communities will consider protection and conservation of known cultural resources, including historical sites, and prehistoric sites and plants of significance to Native American peoples.</p>