



File Code: 1950/2210

Date: February 16, 2016

Dear Interested Party,

The San Juan National Forest is seeking public comments on a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) that has been prepared for the **Weminuche Landscape Grazing Analysis** project. Comments will be accepted for 45 days.

The DEIS and some other supporting documents are available for download from the San Juan National Forest (SJNF) website at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=37578>

The Columbine Ranger District will host a public meeting at 1:00 pm on Saturday, March 12, 2016 at the San Juan Public Lands Center, 15 Burnett Court, Durango, CO, for those who want more information or have questions or comments on the Draft EIS.

BACKGROUND

The purpose of this action is to administer term livestock grazing on all or portions of the Weminuche Landscape in such a manner that will meet or move existing resource conditions toward desired conditions, and be consistent with the Forest Plan direction, including standards and guidelines.

The Weminuche Landscape is located northeast of Durango and is within T36-40N, R4-9W, N.M.P.M. on the Columbine Ranger District, San Juan National Forest (SJNF), Hinsdale, La Plata, and San Juan Counties, Colorado. The analysis area is approximately 166,700 acres in size. The Weminuche Wilderness covers 85% of the analysis area. The allotments included in this analysis are six active allotments (Burnt Timber, Canyon Creek, Endlich Mesa, Spring Gulch, Tank Creek, and Virginia Gulch) and seven vacant allotments (Cave Basin, Fall Creek, Flint Creek, Johnson Creek, Leviathan, Pine River, and Rock Creek).

Livestock grazing is just one of many activities that occur on this landscape. Livestock grazing has been occurring on many of these allotments since before 1900, and was a traditional use of the area prior to establishment of the San Juan National Forest. Livestock grazing has been determined by the San Juan National Forest Amended Land and Resource Management Plan (1992), to be an appropriate use of the project area. Livestock grazing also falls under the multiple-use mandate of the Forest Service (Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act, 1960).



Public involvement has been on-going since scoping began in 2011. Scoping has revealed five key issue topics relating to livestock grazing on the landscape:

- Soil/Water Impacts
- Vegetation Impacts
- Recreational Experience Impacts
- Wildlife Impacts
- Socio-Economic Impacts

These issues led the agency to develop four alternatives:

- Alt. 1: No Livestock Grazing
- Alt. 2: Current Management
- Alt. 3: Adaptive Management / Forage Reserves
- Alt. 4: Preferred Alternative - Adaptive Management / Vacant Allotments with Restocking Requirements

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE/ PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed action is to continue to permit term livestock grazing on the Weminuche Landscape by incorporating adaptive management strategies that would allow the lands within the landscape to meet or move towards meeting Forest Plan desired conditions. The proposed action includes adaptive management options for the six active grazing allotments, and also incorporates monitoring and a long list of both landscape-wide and site-specific Design Criteria, which are designed to reduce or prevent negative impacts. The proposal also includes some minor boundary adjustments to the active allotments to eliminate all overlap between active allotments and bighorn core herd home range and to match topographic features on the ground. Some portions of some allotments would also be authorized for potential future conversion from sheep to cattle. The seven vacant sheep allotments would remain vacant, but with a specific list of requirements to be met before restocking could occur, including an additional environmental analysis and decision. No forage reserve allotments would be authorized.

The responsible official will decide whether term livestock grazing will proceed as proposed, modified, not at all, on all or part of the Weminuche Landscape; and if so, with what associated activities, monitoring, and design criteria. The official may choose any of the alternatives in part or whole, or may choose elements from different alternatives and combine them into a modified alternative to be chosen in the decision.

HOW TO COMMENT AND TIMEFRAME

A Notice of Availability (NOA) for the DEIS is scheduled to be published in the Federal Register on February 19, 2016. Written comments concerning this action will be accepted for 45 days following that date; they can be submitted via electronic means, postal service, hand-delivered, or facsimile. The publication date of the NOA in the Federal Register is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for a proposed action documented in a DEIS. Those wishing to comment should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

Comments must be written and must be submitted by April 4, 2016, assuming publication occurs as scheduled.

Comments may be emailed to: comments-rocky-mountain-san-juan-columbine@fs.fed.us.

Acceptable formats for electronic comments are text or html e-mail, Adobe portable document format (.pdf), and formats viewable in Microsoft Office applications. For electronically mailed comments the sender should normally receive an automated acknowledgement from the agency as a confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive an automated acknowledgement receipt of comments, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means (36 CFR 215.6 (4) (iii)).

Comments can be sent via U.S. Postal Service to: **District Ranger Matt Janowiak, P.O. Box 439, Bayfield, CO 81122.**

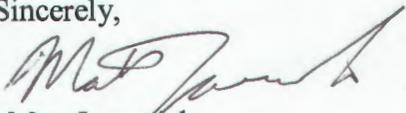
Comments may also be hand-delivered to the Columbine Ranger District Office at 367 South Pearl Street in Bayfield, Colorado between 8:00 am and 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays, or faxed to 970-884-2428.

Comments received, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered a part of the public record and available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered, but those who submit anonymously will not be put on the project mailing list to receive future information.

Only individuals or entities (as defined by 36 CFR 218.2) who submit timely and specific written comments during a public comment period will be eligible to file an objection under the 218 objection process for project level decisions. Other eligibility requirements are defined by 36 CFR 218.25 (a)(3) and include name, postal address, title of the project and signature or other verification of identity upon request and the identity of the individual or entity who authored the comments. Individual members of an entity must submit their own individual comments in order to have eligibility to object as an individual. A timely submission will be determined as outlined in 36 CFR 218.25 (a)(4). It is the responsibility of the sender to ensure timely receipt of any comments submitted.

For more information about the proposed action or analysis, or to request a hard copy of the DEIS, please contact the project leader, Jared Whitmer, Rangeland Management Specialist, (970) 884-1416, jwhitmer@fs.fed.us .

Sincerely,



Matt Janowiak
District Ranger