

7-11-05

DECISION NOTICE
AND
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
ALADDIN ALLOTMENT COMPLEX

U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service
Colville National Forest
Three Rivers Ranger District
Kettle Falls, WA
Stevens and Pend Oreille Counties, Washington

This Decision Notice documents my decision regarding actions proposed in the Aladdin Allotment Complex Environmental Assessment (Aladdin EA), February 2005. The Aladdin EA is available by request from the Three Rivers Ranger District, 255 West 11th Avenue, Kettle Falls, Washington, 99141. It is also available on the Colville National Forest Web site <http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/colville/forest/projects/index.html>. The EA documents the site-specific analysis conducted by an interdisciplinary team to determine the potential environmental effects connected to the proposed actions and alternatives to the proposed actions.

PROJECT LOCATION

The Aladdin Allotment Complex includes three grazing allotments: Aladdin, Meadow Creek, and Smackout Creek (see Figure 1-1 in Chapter 1 of the EA). The Aladdin Complex is located approximately ten miles northeast of Colville, Washington, primarily within Stevens County, with some of the eastern portions of Smackout and Meadow Creek Allotments in Pend Oreille County. The Forest Service ownership within the project planning area is approximately 38,055 acres in size. These acres are administered by the Three Rivers Ranger District of the Colville National Forest.

Table 1. Ownership of Aladdin Allotment Complex Acres (October 2001)

Owner	Aladdin	Meadow Creek	Smackout Creek	Total Acres
Forest Service	14,295	10,085	13,675	38,055
Private	3,313	654	993	4,960
State	640	940	54	1,634
Total	18,248	11,679	14,722	44,649

DECISION AND RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION

It is my decision to adopt Alternative 3 (Continued grazing with modifications) and the accompanying mitigation and monitoring measures referenced in Sections 2.2.3 and 2.6 of Chapter 2 of the EA. This will allow grazing in the Aladdin, Meadow Creek, and Smackout Creek allotments with modifications to address resource concerns.

SELECTED ALTERNATIVE

The selected alternative is the Proposed Action, Alternative 3 in the EA. This alternative will continue grazing of livestock in the Aladdin, Meadow Creek, and Smackout Creek allotments and address riparian habitat and water quality problems by redistributing livestock presence, armoring stream crossings, constructing a temporary fence, and encouraging alternative water sources for cattle.

Table 2. Proposed Action: Allotment Numbers and Use

Allotment	Livestock Numbers	Extent of Season of Use
Aladdin	33 cow/calf pairs	Between ¹ June 1 and October 15
Meadow Creek	61 cow/calf pairs	Between June 1 and October 15
Smackout	156 cow/calf pairs	Between June 1 and October 15

The allotments will be managed under new allotment management plans (AMPs) that include new management practices and standards based on the EA, current laws, regulations, and policies of the Forest Service. Practices and standards include best management practices (BMPs) from the Pacific Northwest Region (Region 6) and those developed specifically for the Aladdin Complex EA.

To address water quality and riparian condition issues, stream crossings will be armored in the Aladdin allotment; off-stream watering will be provided in all three allotments, and a livestock crossing will be constructed on Smackout Creek. A temporary seasonal electric fence will be constructed in the Smackout allotment to exclude cattle from Smackout Creek. The fence will be removed when the riparian areas are sufficiently recovered.

RATIONALE

I have selected the alternative that I believe best meets the project objectives. The No

¹ "Between" means that grazing starts no earlier than June 1 and stops no later than October 15. Actual start and stop dates are determined through adaptive management as described later in this section.

Action alternative was not selected because it does not meet the purpose and need of the project or the project objectives. The environmental analysis did not identify environmental effects of such a magnitude that lead me to believe that grazing needs to be eliminated (Alternative 2—No grazing) from any of the three allotments. Current management (Alternative 1—No change) does not address the riparian condition or water quality issues as well as the proposed action does. Also, current management does not adequately meet Forest Plan forest-wide standards and guidelines for range (see USDA FS 1988 pages 4-44 – 4-47).

The proposed action meets Forest Plan standards and guidelines, addresses riparian condition, sensitive plant, and water quality issues.

MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

The guiding management direction for the analysis area is provided by the Land and Resource Management Plan, Colville National Forest², as amended by the Inland Native Fish Strategy³ (INFISH). Surveys of riparian areas, stream reaches and monitoring indicate that current grazing management activities may be contributing in some locations to less than satisfactory resource conditions or may be retarding the attainment of Forest Plan standards and guidelines, INFISH riparian management objectives (RMOs), state water quality standards, and the Clean Water Act.

Direction also comes from the need to meet the Rescission Bill schedule. Section 504(a) of the 1995 Rescission Act, Public Law 104-19, pertains to grazing on National Forest System lands, specifically allotment analysis, grazing permit issuance, and compliance with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The Rescission Act requires environmental analysis and decisions on allotments with the National Forest System for which NEPA is needed between 1996 and 2010.

SCOPING

Notice of the Aladdin Complex Allotment Management Plan project was first listed in the Colville National Forest's Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) in the spring of 2000 (Volume Eight, Number Three). It has continued to appear, with updated information, in each quarterly SOPA since that time.

The Aladdin EA was formally initiated in November 2003. On November 19, 2003, the Three Rivers Ranger District sent a letter requesting comments on the Proposed Action to individuals and groups on the District mailing list. A project scoping notice, including a description of the Proposed Action, was mailed to 36 individuals, organizations, and agencies. Seven letters were received in response to the scoping effort.

² U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. 1988. Land and resource management plan: Colville National Forest. Colville, WA: Colville National Forest.

³ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. 1995. [INFISH] Decision notice and finding of no significant impact for the inland native fish strategy environmental assessment. Missoula, MT; Ogden, UT; Portland, OR.

OBJECTIVES AND MAJOR CONCERNS

The objectives and major concerns identified through the scoping process are described in Section 1.1.2 of the EA. Objectives are:

1. Water quality of streams
2. Riparian condition
3. Effects on sensitive plant communities

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The following section briefly describes the alternatives that were analyzed in the Aladdin EA.

No Action (Alternative 2: No Grazing)

All grazing permits would be cancelled. No permits would be issued for any grazing on the three allotments, which would be put into vacant status. All existing improvements would be abandoned; existing fencing would be removed. Current AMPs would be discarded.

Current Management (Alternative 1: No Change)

Grazing would continue under the current AMPs; existing range improvements would be maintained. Existing permits would not be modified.

The Aladdin allotment would be managed in a deferred rotation system grazed by 33 cow/calf pairs, with a normal grazing season from June 1 until October 15.

The Meadow Creek allotment would be managed in a “deferred rotation in general forest areas” system, with controlled use of Paradise Meadow, grazed by sixty-one cow/calf pairs. Normal grazing season would be from June 1 until October 15.

The Smackout Creek allotment would be managed in a rest-rotation system, with Smackout Meadow pastures #1 through #4 followed by deferred rotation in general Forest areas. 156 cow/calf pairs would graze from June 1 until October 15.

Proposed Action (Alternative 3: Continued Grazing with Modifications)

The proposed action continues livestock grazing on the three allotments, but includes activities that address problems with water quality and riparian condition. For a more detailed description, see page 2 in this Decision Notice and Chapter 2 of the environmental assessment.

COMMENT PERIOD

The Three Rivers Ranger District consulted on the project with the U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service. They concurred with the Proposed Action by letter on September 7, 2004.

The Aladdin Allotment Complex EA was available for public comment from April 13, 2005 to May 13, 2005. A Legal Notice announcing the comment period for the Aladdin Allotment Complex EA was published in the Colville Statesman-Examiner, the newspaper of record, on April 13, 2005. In addition, a notice announcing the availability of the Environmental Assessment was mailed to three local Indian tribes, agencies, the permittees and other groups and individuals who had previously commented or who had requested they be notified when the analysis document was available.

Five letters commenting on the Environmental Assessment were postmarked or received by the close of the comment period. All of the comments were in support of continued grazing. Some of the comments supported Alternative 1: No Change, and others supported Alternative 3, Proposed Action which included modifications to the existing grazing activities. The comments were considered in my final decision. Forest Service responses to the comments are filed in the project file.

CONSISTENCY WITH THE FOREST PLAN, LAWS, REGULATIONS, POLICIES

The selected actions described above comply with the Colville National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, including amendments. Rationale is:

The selected actions meet all standards and guidelines prescribed in Chapter for of the Forest Plan for the following management areas (MAs).

Table 3. Forest Plan Management Areas and Corresponding Page Numbers

Forest Plan Management Area	Pages in Forest Plan
MA 1, Old growth dependent species habitat	4-69 – 4-72
MA 3A, Recreation	4-77 – 4-79
MA 5 Scenic and timber	4-93 – 4-96
MA 6, Scenic and winter range	4-97 – 4-100
MA 7, Wood and forage	4-101 – 4-104
MA 8, Winter range	4-105 – 4-108
MA 11, Semi-primitive, non-motorized recreation	4-119 – 4-122

The actions are consistent with:

- Forest-wide standards and guidelines (Forest Plan pages 4-35 – 4-60).
- Direction in the INFISH direction (Section 2.2.3 of the EA).

The actions are consistent with the Forest Plan because mitigation measures (Section 2.2.3 of the EA) have been fully included in the selected alternative. The project is feasible and reasonable; it results in applying management practices that meet the Forest

Plan overall direction of protecting the environment while producing goods and services.

These actions have been examined and found to be in compliance with the Clean Water Act (Section 3.8 of the EA), the National Historic Preservation Act (Heritage Resource Specialist Report in the analysis file), the Endangered Species Act (Section 3.10 of the EA and USDI FWS letter of concurrence, dated September 7, 2004, in the analysis file), the National Environmental Policy Act, the National Forest Management Act, and the Washington State Clean Air Act (Section 3.11.1 of the EA).

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

I have determined, through the Aladdin Allotment Complex Environmental Assessment (EA), that this is not a major federal action, individually or cumulatively, that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment; therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary. This determination is based on analysis of the context and intensity of the environmental effects anticipated from the selected alternative (Alternative 3 in the EA), including the following factors:

1. Analysis of the beneficial and adverse effects of the proposed action.

(See Chapter 3 of the EA for more discussion of beneficial and adverse effects.)

Beneficial Effects	Adverse Effects
<p><u>Culture and heritage</u> Improvements identified in Alternative C may affect historic properties, and will be handled on a case-by-case basis before each action is implemented.</p>	
<p><u>Fire and fuels</u> Grazing may make ignition more difficult in meadows, and reduce fire spread and intensity. Larger meadows, like Smackout Meadow, may be used as fuelbreaks during fire suppression.</p>	
<p><u>Fisheries</u> Temperature: Decreases slightly in Smackout Creek, moves toward meeting INFISH RMO. Large woody debris: In-stream wood will increase; moves toward meeting INFISH RMO. Pools frequency: Sediment accumulation levels will decrease. Pool numbers may increase; moves toward meeting INFISH RMO. Width-to-depth ratio: Bank integrity will improve, sediment loading will decrease, so high width-depth ratio will decrease, moving toward meeting INFISH RMO. Embeddedness: Levels will decrease; substrate condition will improve; levels of in-stream sediment will decrease. Riparian vegetation: Reduced cattle pressure will allow riparian revegetation along Smackout Creek. Moves toward potential natural vegetation.</p>	

<p>Fish population: Decreased sediment input and degradation of spawning and rearing habitat in planning area. Reduced cattle pressure in Smackout valley will have beneficial impact on westslope cutthroat trout and habitat and improve degraded channel and riparian habitat.</p>	
<p><u>Forest trees</u></p>	<p>In the case of fire, drought, or an event that creates more transitory range, additional mitigation may be needed to protect conifer regeneration.</p>
<p><u>Noxious weeds</u></p>	<p>Cattle presence and movement will continue to spread noxious weeds.</p>
<p><u>Range and grazing</u></p>	<p>The temporary fence will require maintenance.</p>
<p><u>Sensitive plant species</u> Controlling noxious weeds benefits sensitive plant habitats</p>	<p>Some trampling of individual sensitive plants may occur.</p>
<p><u>Soils and Water</u> Soil compaction and displacement will decrease mostly along streams and wetlands. Relocating the ford between pastures 1 and 4 will improve soil compaction. Armoring stream crossings in Aladdin allotment will have small positive effect on erosion and sedimentation.</p> <p>Fecal levels in Smackout Creek will improve from the installation of a fence, most likely will meet state water quality standards; width-depth ratios and streambank stability will improve.</p> <p>Off-site watering will keep cattle in drier areas of pastures, away from riparian areas.</p>	
<p><u>Visuals and recreation</u> Placing water troughs away from streams will reduce cattle's use of streams.</p>	<p>Cattle and evidence of their presence will continue to be seen.</p>
<p><u>Wildlife, MIS, and neotropical migratory birds</u></p> <p>Canada lynx:</p>	<p>May have localized insignificant negative effects on regenerating lodgepole pine, winter browse of snowshoe hare.</p>

<p>Beaver: Seasonal fence of riparian meadow will improve habitat by allow re-establishment of woody vegetation.</p> <p>Primary cavity nesters: Excluding cattle from riparian meadow will have a localized positive effect by allowing more re-establishment of hardwoods.</p> <p>Neotropical migratory birds: Managing riparian areas to allow woody vegetation to re-establish would improve habitat for some species of concern.</p>	
<p>Economic and social The Dawson family ranch will continue to operate.</p>	

2. To what degree does the proposed action affects public health and safety?

There is limited health and safety hazards to Forest Service employees, permittees, and the general public, but none are unusual or unique to this project. The hazard is related to the treatment of noxious weeds, and is limited to an acceptable level by following the Colville Integrated Weed Treatment EA and pesticide label restrictions. Areas treated with chemicals will be posted as such to notify the public when the area was treated and which chemical was used.

3. What are the effects on unique characteristics of the geographic area?

Because the Aladdin Allotment Complex does not include any inventoried roadless areas, they were not considered in this decision.

4. To what degree are the effects on the quality of the human environment likely to be highly controversial?

No scientifically-backed information has been presented that indicates substantial controversy about the effects disclosed in the Aladdin Allotment Complex EA.

5. To what degree might the possible effects on the human environment be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks?

No highly uncertain, unique, or unknown risks have been identified for the Aladdin Allotment Complex EA.

6. To what degree might the action establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects?

Continuing livestock grazing on the Aladdin, Meadow Creek, and Smackout Creek allotments, with modifications, does not set any precedent. The Three Rivers Ranger District has been authorizing and permitting livestock grazing for a number of years; many of these cases are similar in scope and nature to the Aladdin Complex allotments.

7. Is the action related to other actions with individually insignificant, but cumulatively significant, effects?

Each effects analysis in the EA discusses cumulative effects; none were found to be significant. Chapter 3 of the EA includes summaries of the specialists' reports on the environmental effects on each resource.

8. To what degree may the action adversely affect scientific, cultural, or historic resources?

There are no scientific resources in the Aladdin Allotment Complex planning area. The effects on cultural or historical resources are discussed in Section 3.1 of the EA. Individual project construction sites (fences, water developments, etc.) will be reviewed and approved by an archeologist before ground-disturbing activities.

9. To what degree may the action adversely affect endangered or threatened species or habitats?

Effects on endangered or threatened species are discussed in the Biological Assessment in the project analysis file; results are summarized in Section 3.10 of the EA. Endangered or threatened species that may inhabit the area but will not be significantly affected by this project are:

- Bald eagle (threatened)
- Gray wolf (threatened)
- Grizzly bear (threatened)
- North American lynx (threatened)

The U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with the findings in the Biological Assessment in a letter dated Sept. 7, 2004.

10. Does the action result in a violation of environmental laws or requirements?

There are no known significant irreversible resource commitments or irretrievable losses of timber production, wildlife habitats, soil productivity, or water quality.

Prime farmlands, prime rangelands, wetlands, and floodplains within the project area will not be significantly affected (see Sections 3.3 and 3.8 of the EA for wetlands and floodplains, and Section 3.11 for rangelands).

Consumers, civil rights, minority groups, and women will not be significantly affected (see Section 3.11 of the EA).

Project Appeal

This project is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215. Any written notice of appeal of the decision must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 215.4, "Content of an Appeal," including the reason for appeal and how the decision fails to consider comments previously provided. Those who are legal instrument holders such as permittees can also appeal under 36 CFR 251. Legal instrument holders must stipulate which appeal regulation they are appealing under. They cannot appeal under both. The notice of appeal must be filed with the Regional Forester, Attention: 1570 Appeals, P.O. Box 3623,

Portland, Oregon, 97208-3623 within 45 days of the date that legal notice of this decision appears in the Colville Statesman Examiner newspaper.

Project Implementation

This project will not be implemented for at least 50 days from the date that the legal notice of this decision appears in the newspaper of record, the Colville Statesman Examiner.

For more information, contact Dennis Gordon, NEPA Coordinator, Three Rivers Ranger District, Colville National Forest, 255 W 11th, Kettle Falls, WA 99141; 509-738-7700.

/s/ Sherri Schwenke

Sherri Schwenke
District Ranger

July 11, 2005
Date

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