Land Adjustment Specialist Report

Kiowa, Rita Blanca, Black Kettle and McClellan Creek National Grasslands Plan Revision

Environmental Impact Statement Analysis

Submitted by:  /s/ ________________________________
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Executive Summary

The Cibola National Forest’s land acquisition program contributes to the consolidation of the ownership pattern of the National Grasslands and improves the Agency’s ability to carry out its mission on the Grasslands.

The 1985 Land Management Resource Plan as amended states that the Forest can acquire land through exchanges, purchases, donations, and service easements. Disposal of land is generally accomplished by exchange, although sale is permitted under certain circumstances.

In order to make adjustments in landownership patterns for administrative purposes, 39,563 acres of Forest or Grasslands have been identified for exchange. Criteria for selection of these lands for exchange includes: 1) isolated tracts; 2) improves management; 3) needed by local community; 4) not suitable for Forest purposes; 5) improves consolidation of public lands; and 6) meets overriding public needs.

Lands desirable for acquisition by the Forest should meet one or more of the following criteria: 1) tracts within wilderness; 2) water related; 3) high recreational potential; 4) contain unique natural or cultural values; 5) needed to stabilize or protect threaten or endangered species; and 6) needed to improve ownership and management pattern or meet research needs; 7) need to provide access or protect public land from fire or trespass or prevent damage to public land resources; 8) needed for rehabilitation or stabilization to restore productivity of public lands; 9) needed to meet programs prescribed by Congress or U.S. Department of Agriculture; and 10) needed to improve management or meet specific administrative needs or benefit other forest programs. The 1985 Plan as amended identified 19,747.85 acres for acquisition, 5,658.60 acres for exchange (disposal), and 1,028.20 acres as undesirable within the Grasslands. The 1985 Plan as amended is in need of review and updating which should occur at a minimum of every five years for identification of base and exchange properties.

The current Plan as it pertains to Alternative A (No Action) provides general goals and direction for land ownership adjustment to consolidate, ensure public access and better management of forest resources, which are pursued as budget and opportunities allow. There is no change with Alternative B (Preferred Alternative) or Alternative C (Canadian River Wilderness Area Recommendation) in relation to these goals and direction. Alternatives B and C also recommend purchase of lands for habitat, cultural or natural resources or special area values, or which improves access. With regard to Alternative C, any acquisition within a Wilderness would take on it characteristic.

All alternatives are designed to guide Kiowa, Rita Blanca, Black Kettle and McClellan National Grasslands in meeting federal laws, regulations and policy.

Overview of the Affected Environment

Each of the Grassland Units is a small, discontinuous parcel of Forest Service managed land that are surrounded by private farms and ranch lands. The Forest Service land ownership consists of less than 24% of the land within the Grassland administrative boundaries. There have been 19,747.85 acres of land identified as desirable for acquisition, 5,658.60 acres for exchange, and 1,028.20 acres as undesirable within the Grasslands per the 1985 Plan.
The location of parcels to be acquired will contribute to the consolidation of the ownership pattern of the National Grasslands. Said lands have qualities that would improve the agency’s ability to carry out its mission on the Grasslands. This includes providing necessary road or trail access, has high quality natural or cultural resources, improves management of designated special areas, contains important plant or animal habitat, contains or influences wetlands, flood plains or riparian areas, or provides opportunities to rehabilitate or stabilize public lands.

**Summary of Environmental Consequences**

Potential environmental consequences are similar in nature for each of the alternatives with none being of sufficient importance.

Land adjustment acquisition will result in **no environmental consequences** as it pertains to management direction by alternative.

**Specialist Report**

**Introduction**

This report discloses and evaluates the potential environmental consequences on the land adjustment resource that may result with the adoption of a revised land management plan. It examines, in detail, three different alternatives for revising the management direction from the 1985 Cibola National Forest Land Management Plan (only that which is relevant to the National Grasslands).

**Relevant Laws, Regulations, and Policy that Apply**

Identify Federal and state law and USFS regulation and policy affecting the land adjustment resource (such as State requirements under the Clean Water Act).


**Methodology and Analysis Process**

The Cibola National Forest’s land acquisition program is based on lands identified that enhance the agency’s ability to carry out its mission on the National Forest and Grasslands. The program relies on professional judgment in compliance with manual direction. Land adjustments are a result of willing parties negotiating to buy, sell, or exchange property.

**Assumptions**

In the analysis for this resource, the following assumptions have been made:

- The land management plan provides a programmatic framework for future site-specific actions.
• Land management plans do not have direct effects. They do not authorize or mandate any site-specific projects or activities (including ground-disturbing actions).
• Land management plans may have implications, or environmental consequences, of managing the forests under a programmatic framework.
• The plan decisions (desired conditions, objectives, standards, guidelines, management areas, monitoring) will be followed when planning or implementing site-specific projects and activities.
• Law, policy, and regulations will be followed when planning or implementing site-specific projects and activities.
• Monitoring will occur and the land management plan will be amended, as needed.
• We will be funded similar to past budget levels (past 5 years).
• The planning timeframe is 15 years; other timeframes may be analyzed depending on the resource (usually a discussion of anticipated trends into the future).

Revision Topics Addressed in this Analysis
Land acquisition is the result of having a willing seller, and the offered lands contribute to the consolidation of the ownership pattern of the National Grasslands. Said lands would have qualities that improve the agency’s ability to carry out the mission of the Grasslands, these could include providing road or trail access, has high quality habitat or cultural resources, improves management of designated special areas, contains important plant or animal habitat, contains an influence for wetlands, flood plains or riparian areas, or provides opportunities to rehabilitate or stabilize public lands.

The acquisition program will continue at the current level in Alternative A (No Action), Alternative B (Preferred Alternative), and Alternative C (Canadian River Wilderness Area Recommendation). The Ecological Sustainability report does not discuss or determine change in current management direction to meet desired condition.

Summary of Alternatives
The 1985 Land and Resource Management Plan as it pertains to Alternative A (No Action) provides general goals and direction for land ownership adjustment to consolidate, ensure public access and better management of forest resources, which are pursued as budget and opportunities allow. There is no change with Alternative B (Preferred Alternative) or Alternative C (Canadian River Wilderness Area Recommendation) in relation to these goals and direction. Alternatives B recommends purchase of land for habitat, cultural or natural resources or special area values, or which improves access. With regard to Alternative C, any acquisition within a Wilderness would take on its characteristic.

Land adjustment acquisition will result in no difference in management direction by alternative for desired condition. Acquisition is based on a willing seller and lands which have been identified that would improve the agency’s ability to carry out its mission on the National Grasslands. Desired lands shall provide for road or trail access, has high quality natural or cultural resources, improves management of designated special areas, contains important plant or
animal habitat, contains or influences wetlands, flood plains or riparian areas, or provides opportunities to rehabilitate or stabilize public lands.

**Description of Affected Environment (Existing Condition)**

The 1985 Plan as amended per the base and exchange map identified 19,747.85 acres of the Grasslands for acquisition, 5,658.60 acres for exchange (disposal), and 1,028.20 acres as none desirable. There have been land acquisitions through purchase of 385.65 acres in 2010, and one being processed for purchase in 2011 of 160 acres within the Kiowa/Rita Blanca National Grasslands. Additionally, there was a land exchange (disposal) in 1992 of 14.04 acres within the Black Kettle National Grasslands.

A new Grassland Plan would not affect the land adjustment program of the Cibola National Forest; agency direction guides the program with criteria for lands which are identified for acquisition or disposal.

Lands acquired from willing sellers have qualities that improve the agency’s ability to carry out its mission on the National Grasslands. The location or condition of the parcel being acquired contributes to the consolidation of the ownership pattern of the National Grasslands, provides necessary road or trail access to National Forest System (NFS) lands, has unique or high quality natural or cultural resources, improves the management or designated special areas, contains important plant or animal habitats, contains or influences wetlands, floodplains, or provides opportunities to rehabilitate or stabilize adjacent NFS lands.

Grasslands units available for exchange or disposal are generally isolated parcels and lack unique natural and cultural resources.

**Environmental Consequences**

The land management plan provides a programmatic framework that guides site-specific actions but does not authorize, fund, or carryout any project or activity. Because the land management plan does not authorize or mandate any site-specific activities or ground-disturbing actions there can be no direct effects. However, there may be implications, or longer term environmental consequences, of managing the forests under this programmatic framework.

Potential environmental consequences are similar in nature for Alternatives A, B and C with none being of sufficient importance.

- Developed Recreation – new campground development will be limited as a result of land acquisition
- Dispersed Recreation – additional recreation opportunities as a result of land acquisition
- Heritage Resources – land acquisition could provide opportunities to meet heritage needs
- Roads and Access – is a means to meet public and administrative access to federal lands through land acquisition
- Land Adjustment – land acquisition to provide for better management of forest resources and land exchanges to dispose of marginal federal lands
- Mineral and Energy Development – land acquisition could result in the mineral estate coming into and out of federal ownership which may result in more or less administration as a result of development.

- Special Uses – land acquisition may result in an increase of applications for occupancy and use requiring additional administration.

- Wind Energy – land acquisition may result in larger areas of federal lands as a result of “blocking up” that previously did not exist that may show addition interest in development resulting in additional administration.

- Livestock Use – land acquisition may provide opportunities for an allotment land base increase.

- Wildland Urban Interface – additional administration and issues may arise as a result of land acquisition.

- General Ecology – land acquisition may assist in achieving diversity of grassland vegetation communities.

- Soil, Water and Air – issues maybe able to be resolved through land acquisition.

- Invasive – may increase on the landscape and require treatment as a result of land acquisition.

- Forest Products – opportunities maybe provided as a result of land acquisition.

- Wildlife Habitat – land acquisition for habitat viability may result.

- Special Areas - as a result of land acquisition areas of interest (i.e. along the Canadian River) may occur.

Land adjustment acquisition or exchange will result in no environmental consequences as it pertains to management direction by alternative.

**Cumulative Environmental Consequences**

There are no know effects by other parties for land acquisition within or adjacent to the Grasslands, however, land purchase and sales may occur at any time. Land adjustment acquisition will result in no cumulative environmental consequences as it pertains to management direction by alternative. There are individuals in the private sector who support land acquisition by the Agency and those who prefer not to see it occur (concerned about large federal in-holdings in the west which result in less of a tax base for counties and states).

**Unavoidable Adverse Impacts**

The land management plan provides a programmatic framework that guides site-specific actions but does not authorize, fund, or carryout any project or activity. Before any ground-disturbing actions take place, they must be authorized in a subsequent environmental analysis. Therefore none of the alternatives cause unavoidable adverse impacts.
Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources

The land management plan provides a programmatic framework that guides site-specific actions but does not authorize, fund, or carryout any project or activity. Because the land management plan does not authorize or mandate any ground-disturbing actions, none of the alternatives cause an irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources.

 Adaptive Management

All alternatives assume the use of adaptive management principles. Forest Service decisions are made as part of an on-going process, including planning, implementing projects, and monitoring and evaluation. The land management plan identifies a monitoring program. Monitoring the results of actions will provide a flow of information that may indicate the need to change a course of action or the land management plan. Scientific findings and the needs of society may also indicate the need to adapt resource management to new information. The Forest Supervisor annually evaluates the monitoring information displayed in the evaluation reports through a management review and determines if any changes are needed in management actions or the plan itself. In general, annual evaluations of the monitoring information consider the following questions:

- What are the effects of resource management activities on the productivity of the land?
- To what degree are resource management activities maintaining or making progress toward the desired conditions and objectives for the plan?
- What changes are needed to account for unanticipated changes in conditions?

In addition to annual monitoring and evaluation, the Forest Supervisor reviews the conditions on the land covered by the plan at least every 5 years to determine whether conditions or demands of the public have changed significantly. The forest plan is ordinarily revised on a 10-year cycle and the Forest Supervisor may amend the plan at any time.

Consistency with Law, Regulation, and Policy

All alternatives are designed to guide the Kiowa, Rita Blanca, Black Kettle and McClellan Creek National Grasslands’ management activities in meeting federal law, regulations, and policy.

Other Planning Efforts

There are no potential conflicts between the proposed action and the objectives of Federal, regional, State, local, or Tribal land use plans, policies, and controls for the area concerned.

List of Preparers

Donald L. Hall, Cibola National Forest, Lands Specialist, Graduated from Utah State University – 1976 with a Bachelor of Science Degree, have been employed by the USDA Forest Service for 30+ years in natural resource management.
References