



File Code: 1950

Date: June 28, 2002

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am writing to invite you to comment on proposed adjustments to management and improvements on the Rimel, Allegheny Battlefield and Queens grazing allotments, and on the Clark Tract grazing special use permit area. Details and a map relating to this proposal are attached.

I am the Responsible Official for making a decision about this proposal, and your input and comments are important to me in making the best decision possible.

We will be preparing an environmental analysis (EA) on this proposal. At this time, we are asking for your input on the proposal, including any issues or concerns you may have about it. Comments can be made orally or in writing and should be as specific as possible. In order to ensure that your comments will be considered in the environmental analysis for the proposal, comments are needed by July 31, 2002. Your comments should be sent to the address shown on this letter. Harry Pawelczyk, the leader for this analysis, may be reached at 304-636-1800, extension 257, or e-mail [hpawelczyk@fs.fed.us](mailto:hpawelczyk@fs.fed.us). In your comments, please indicate the name of the project, and include your name, the organization you represent, title (if applicable), address, and telephone number.

If you write or contact us with comments about this proposal, you will receive a copy of the environmental analysis when it is completed. You will then have the opportunity to review the EA and provide comments on it during its 30-day review period. A Decision Notice will be prepared at the completion of the comment period on the EA. The decision notice will document my decision on the proposed project, as well as include information on appeal rights.

I appreciate your interest in the management of the Monongahela National Forest.

Sincerely,

/CT/

CLYDE THOMPSON

Forest Supervisor

Encl.



# ADJUSTMENTS TO MANAGEMENT AND IMPROVEMENTS ON FOUR GRAZING AREAS

## MONONGAHELA NATIONAL FOREST

### WEST VIRGINIA

#### **PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION**

The Monongahela National Forest has determined that opportunities exist to improve management and associated resources and livestock facilities on the Rimel, Allegheny Battlefield and Queens grazing allotments, as well as on the Clark Tract grazing special use permit area.

On all four of these areas, structural improvements, such as fences and livestock watering facilities, and non-structural improvements, such as vegetation types and soil productivity, have deteriorated over years of aging and use. There is a need to make major repairs to, or to reconstruct, some of these structural improvements. Good fences are needed to contain livestock within the allotment, to reduce impacts from grazing to sensitive areas, such as riparian areas and wetlands, and to prevent trespass of livestock to adjacent public and private lands. Water for livestock and wildlife to drink is essential. Ideally livestock water sources will be from developed watering facilities such as water troughs or fenced ponds, as opposed to unfenced creeks or springs. Soils on these areas and their resulting vegetation would benefit from reseeding and from the addition of soil amendments/supplements, such as lime and/or fertilizer. Many species of desirable grasses and legumes die out over time. Just as residential lawns need reseeding at intervals, pasture reseeding helps to maintain important forage species for use by wildlife, as well as by livestock. Liming of soils increases soil pH. This favors the growth of legumes and other beneficial species of vegetation. Increasing soil pH also allows the release of available nutrients for uptake by plants and indirectly acts to increase fertility of the area treated. Plants grow better and are more nutritious. Legumes, such as clovers, are high in protein and are especially nutritious to wildlife and livestock for general health, growth, milk production and healthy offspring. Weeds and woody vegetation have invaded these areas and require selective control. Weeds and brush compete for limited soil moisture and nutrients. They shade out herbaceous vegetation and spread to adjacent areas. Some of these weeds are toxic, are non-native, and/or invasive.

On the Rimel grazing allotment Cockran Creek flows through the allotment. Through a cooperative agreement between the Greenbrier Valley Soil Conservation District, the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Monongahela National Forest, this allotment has been designated as a rangeland demonstration area. Among other techniques, such as rotational grazing and fenced ponds with watering ramps, and to demonstrate good grazing practices to the public, the riparian areas of Cockran Creek have been fenced out from grazing. Since that time these riparian areas have been invaded by large numbers of multi-flora rose bushes. The proliferation of this state listed noxious weed within this riparian area reduces the value and use of this demonstration area for public field trips. Agencies are reluctant to showcase, and private landowners are reluctant to incorporate riparian fencing on their properties, when they observe a noxious weed and seed source taking over this protected area. Demonstrating that a noxious weed invasion within a protected streamside zone can be effectively controlled with the proper

use of a herbicide, approved for use near flowing water, will be instrumental in promoting and exhibiting good land management techniques to private landowners. The numerous, large multi-flora rose clumps are an annual source of seeds that helps spread this aggressive, non-native plant to other portions of the allotment and the surrounding area, both public and private. Some species of birds eat the fruit and associated seed and distribute the seeds over a wide area through their droppings. There is a need to control these multi-flora rose bushes both in the riparian zone and around and inside the allotment.

The Allegheny Battlefield allotment makes up part of a historic Civil War Battlefield. Past and present Forest Archeologists have felt it is very important to continue to use livestock grazing as a tool to slow the rate of tree and brush invasion on this area and to maintain this portion of the battlefield in a pastoral condition so as to maintain the areas character as it likely appeared at the time of the battle.

At the present time the Allegheny Battlefield allotment only has one developed livestock watering facility. The allotment is relatively long and narrow. The addition of a livestock watering facility on the western one third of the allotment and another on the eastern one third of the allotment would improve livestock distribution and forage utilization over the allotment. Development of livestock water on the western one third of the allotment will also allow implementation of a rotational grazing system on the allotment. Rotational grazing is often considered a better grazing method than continuous grazing.

Portions of the roads leading to and within the Allegheny Battlefield allotment are rutted or contain mud holes. Water runs down these ruts causing soil movement, and is further damaging these roads. There is a need to drain mud holes and spot gravel, install water bars, and to grade portions of these roads.

The Queens allotment contains an approximately eight-acre wetland area that prior to Forest Service ownership had been ditched and drained. To avoid possible adverse effects from livestock grazing to this wetland area this allotment has purposely not been grazed since 1993. The West Virginia DNR through mowing every few years has maintained most of the allotment in an herbaceous condition. There is great potential to restore this wetland. Through partnerships or grants with other groups such as the WV DNR, Ducks Unlimited, the Ted Turner Foundation, the North American Wetlands Conservation Council, the National Forest Foundation, and/or the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the two drainage ditches that presently drain the wetland could be plugged. A small water control structure with a cement apron below it could be installed on one of these two drainage ditches to prevent outflow from washing out this plug. The wetland, the associated spring-seep /riparian areas flowing into the wetland, as well as the two channels leading from the wetland to the nearby Shaver's Fork River could be fenced out. The linear earthen (spoil) mound that runs through the length of the wetland from when the wetland was drained could be placed back into the parallel ditch from where it came. This would reestablish lateral movement of water in the wetland and would restore the wetland to its former type.

The original boundary fence of the Queens allotment included, in the southwest corner of the allotment, a small portion of the allotment that was within the riparian zone of the Shavers Fork River. During the flood of 1996 the boundary fence along this part of the allotment was washed out. There is an opportunity to relocate this portion of the boundary fence by constructing a new

fence along the terrace above the riparian zone. This would remove the Shavers Fork riparian zone from the allotment and reduce effects of livestock use to this sensitive area.

Once the wetland and associated drainage ditches and seeps/riparian zones within the Queens allotment would be fenced out, there would be a need for a new livestock watering facility within the allotment. There is an opportunity to use one of the several springs that feeds the wetland as an alternate source of water for livestock. The construction of a spring box, or a headwall below, the northeast spring that feeds the wetland can supply water to a trough located on a nearby upland area.

While the Queens allotment has been vacant the past several years individuals and groups have increasingly begun camping in the allotment. This human activity, along with the associated vehicle use, smells, noise, etc. disturbs wildlife and reduces use of the area by wildlife. Therefore, camping will be restricted from this area. This area has not been designed, nor designated, as a camping area.

The Clark Tract grazing special use permit area contains large clumps of multi-flora rose bushes growing within and adjacent to much of the boundary and interior fence. Due to these plants thorny canes maintaining these portions of the pasture fences is nearly impossible. There is an urgent need to control this nuisance plant from growing amongst the fences so that fence repairs or replacement can be carried out. Due to the nearby seed source the allotment itself also contains multi-flora rose bushes. But due to past mowing, these bushes are usually smaller. They also need control. Because multi-flora rose readily sprouts back and is not killed from hand or mechanical cutting the most effective long-term control of this plant is through the use of approved herbicides.

The existing cement water trough on the Clark Tract is very old and beyond repair. The metal fitting on the bottom of the tank where the overflow pipe screws in is rusted and cannot be replaced. Therefore, the trough does not have a functioning water overflow, the overflow has purposely been plugged so the trough continues to hold water, and water is flowing over the side of the tank. This is causing standing water and mud around the tank. There is a need to replace this old water trough with a new one that operates properly and does not overflow.

A small portion of the boundary fence in the southeast portion of the Clark Tract receives damage by high water when the nearby Anthony Creek flows out of its banks. Vegetation and woody debris catches on the fence wire, and in combination with the rapidly flowing water, breaks fence wires or bends or repositions fence posts. By moving this portion of the fence farther back from the creek the need for reoccurring flood repair will be reduced or eliminated.

The Monongahela National Forest Land Management Plan directs that grazing special use permits be converted to grazing allotments. Allotments can be advertised under competitive bidding and can be permitted to the highest bidder. This provides additional revenue to the Federal Treasury from higher grazing fees. In addition, work on an allotment can be conducted under a fee credit agreement, while fee credit work cannot be carried out on pasture special use permit areas. These are some of the reasons the Clark Tract grazing special use permit should be converted to a grazing allotment.

Table 1. Additional information about these four grazing areas, as of 2001.

	<b>Rimel</b>	<b>Allegheny Battlefield</b>	<b>Queens</b>	<b>Clark Tract</b>
<b>Acres</b>	34	125	40	33
<b>Mngt. Presc.</b>	6.1	6.1	6.1	6.1
<b>Animal Units* Grazed</b>	10	25	0, vacant	10
<b>Grazing Season</b>	May 15-Oct 15	May 15-Oct15	None	May 1-Oct 31
<b>Ranger District</b>	Marlinton-White Sulphur	Greenbrier	Cheat-Potomac	Marlinton- White Sulphur
<b>County</b>	Pocahontas	Pocahontas	Tucker/Randolph	Greenbrier
<b>Grazing System</b>	Rotational, 2 Pasture	Continuous	Continuous	Continuous
<b>Comments</b>	A Demonstration Area – Riparian area is fenced out	Part of a Civil War Battlefield –Needs to be kept open	Potential for wetland restoration	No riparian areas within it, flat

\* An animal unit is one mature cow with or without a nursing calf (less than 6 months old), or, one bull, one yearling, one steer, or one horse/mule/burro/donkey.

All grazing on the Monongahela National Forest is seasonal. Grazing is generally permitted May 15th through October 15<sup>th</sup>. At low elevations grazing may be permitted a few weeks earlier due to earlier vegetation growth.

## THE PROPOSED ACTION

### For All Four Areas

- Continue to use livestock grazing as a vegetation management tool to assist in maintaining these areas in a relatively open, non-forested, herbaceous condition;
  - a. To provide an important habitat type for selected wildlife species
  - b. To support the local farming economy and farmers
  - c. To provide visual/scenic diversity, vistas, and to maintain the character of these rural landscapes on the National Forest
- Maintain/repair and/or reconstruct/replace all structural improvements, such as fences, corrals or watering facilities, as needed.
- Use EPA registered and approved herbicides according to label directions and by certified pesticide applicators to control noxious, non-native, invasive or poisonous brush and weeds, such as multi-flora rose, thistle, autumn olive, St. John's wort, and other undesirable encroaching woody vegetation, within and growing in and over the fence lines of these areas. More than one application may be needed. Only individual stem treatments or spot applications will be made.
- To improve soil productivity and vegetation types, apply lime and/or fertilizer to selected portions of these areas based on soil test results. Reseed grasses and legumes, usually through frost seeding.
- Mow, chainsaw lop or use hand tools as needed to selectively control weed and brush invasion.

### For the Rimel Allotment

- Use an EPA approved herbicide for use near water to control the numerous, large multi-flora rose bushes growing within the fenced out riparian area of Cockran Creek that flows through the allotment. Also treat the multi-flora rose bushes growing within the allotment pastures and within 10 feet of the perimeter of the allotment.

- Initially, permit the grazing of 10 animal units from approximately May 1<sup>st</sup> to Oct 1<sup>st</sup>. Rotate pastures when average forage height decreases to approximately 3 inches. Strive to rest a pasture at least three weeks before grazing again. Alternate which pasture is entered first each year. Adjust livestock numbers as management practices, such as weed and/or brush control, liming, fertilization, and reseeding is completed, and as grazing capacity increases.

#### For the Allegheny Battlefield Allotment

- Repair portions of the road system within the allotment by grading, draining, spot graveling and water barring, as needed.
- Repair portions of the road leading to the allotment by grading, draining, spot graveling and water barring, as needed.
- Develop two new livestock watering facilities.
  - o One would be in the western portion of the allotment. It would be a small pond constructed in a no-channel, ephemeral drain. This pond would be fed by surface runoff. The pond would be fenced and a graveled lane down to the pond would be provided to allow livestock to drink.
  - o The other would be in the eastern portion of the allotment. This would be a spring development with either a spring box or a headwall. Water lines from the spring development to a new trough and from the trough back to the riparian area of the spring would be installed. The area around the trough would be hardened with gravel and the spring would be fenced out.
- After a reliable water source is developed in the western portion of the allotment the allotment will be converted to a two pasture rotational grazing system. A short amount of new interior fence, and a gate, would be constructed where the allotment narrows down, near the main entrance gate/cattle guard.
- After installing the spring development on the east side of the allotment, monitor stream channel and riparian area conditions of the wooded drain in the eastern portion of the allotment. If livestock grazing causes adverse effects to the channel and riparian area, fence this area to prohibit livestock access.

- Initially, permit the grazing of 20 animal units from approximately May 15th to October 1<sup>st</sup>. This is a high elevation allotment. Adjust livestock numbers as management practices, such as rotational grazing, liming, fertilizing, weed and brush control and reseeded are implemented, and as grazing capacity increases.

#### For the Queens Allotment

- Pursue partnerships/grants with other organizations to restore the wetland. Plug the two drainage ditches that presently drain the wetland. On one of the two drainage ditches that drains the wetland, construct a small water control structure/spillway with a cement apron below it to prevent outflow from washing this barrier out. Fence out the wetland, the associated spring-seep/riparian areas flowing into the wetland, as well as the two ditches leading from the wetland to the Shaver's Fork River. The linear earthen/spoil mound that runs through the length of the wetland from when the wetland was drained will be placed back into the adjacent parallel ditch from where it came.
- Exclude from the allotment the small southwest portion that is presently within the flood plain/riparian zone of the Shaver's Fork River. Construct a new section of allotment boundary fence along the terrace above the floodplain/riparian zone.
- Fence out the spring and riparian area in the northern portion of the allotment.
- Develop a new livestock water source by constructing either a spring box over, or a headwall below, the northeast spring that feeds the wetland. Install a water line from the spring development to a new water trough located on an upland area nearby. Install an overflow line from the trough back to the riparian area. Harden the area around the trough with gravel.
- Restrict camping within the allotment.
- Initially, permit the grazing of 8 animal units from approximately May 1<sup>st</sup> to October 1<sup>st</sup>. Adjust livestock numbers as implementation of proposed management practices and improvements increases grazing capacity.

#### For the Clark Tract grazing special use permit area

- Convert this grazing special use permit area to a grazing allotment.

- Reconstruct the existing interior fence presently in disrepair to allow for implementation of a two pasture rotational grazing system. Install one new gate in the interior fence.
- Replace the old, existing cement water trough that straddles the interior fence line with a new water trough. Construct a ditch from the base of the trough out into the pasture to drain water from around the trough area. Remove the old trough. Add fill material to the old trough site to level the area and to reduce standing water. Clear multi-flora rose and other woody vegetation from around the area of the trough. Harden the area around the new trough with gravel.
- Remove the old cattle guard at the end of the road within the allotment near Anthony Creek at the no longer used low water crossing.
- Add fill material to a mud hole where the road within the allotment goes through the allotment's interior fence line.
- Relocate a portion of the perimeter fence in the southeast portion of the pasture that runs along Anthony Creek. Move this section of the fence farther back from the creek so it is less likely to be damaged by future flooding.
- Clean out the cattle guard at the main gate to the allotment. Clean up litter and remove brush from this area.
- Initially, permit the grazing of 10 animal units from approximately May 1<sup>st</sup> to October 1<sup>st</sup>. Adjust livestock numbers as management, such as, conversion from continuous to rotational grazing, liming, top seeding, etc. is completed, and as grazing capacity increases.

Completion of all of the above-proposed work is subject to available funding.

## **HOW THE PROPOSED ACTION MEETS FOREST SERVICE POLICY AND DIRECTION**

The mission of the Forest Service is “to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation’s forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations”.

Some of the primary focus points of the Forest Service Chief and National Leadership Team are:

- A. “Sustainable productivity and use - Restoring rangeland conditions while maintaining public land grazing”.
- B. “Eliminate the maintenance backlog - of facilities” (including range improvements such as fences, livestock watering facilities, etc.).
- C. Benefits to communities
- D. Forest and rangeland health

The Chief's Natural Resource Agenda includes emphasis on "Watershed health and restoration".

This proposal will move these four areas forward in each of these arenas. The proposed action implements Forest Service policy and direction.

### **HOW THE PROPOSED ACTION IS CONSISTENT WITH THE MONONGAHELA FOREST PLAN**

The proposed action is consistent with Monongahela National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan direction, such as:

- A. "Open areas will continue to be managed for grazing, wildlife habitat, and scenery" (pg. 33).
- B. "Maintain open areas of National Forest land for forage, wildlife and visual purposes", (pg. 38).
- C. "Ensure diversity of vegetation types by providing a mix of opportunity areas, openings, regeneration, old growth, mast producers, wetlands, forage, thermal cover and other vegetation types". (Pg.54)
- D. See Forest Plan forest-wide standards/guides, pages 58-60, for direction on how pesticide use, management and coordination should be implemented on the Forest.
- E. See Forest Plan forest-wide standards/guides, pages 60-63, for directions on how range management planning, grazing, and range improvements should be implemented on the Forest.
- F. See Forest Plan standards/guidelines for range/grazing in 6.1 management prescription areas (pg. 169).

### **THE DECISION TO BE MADE**

The Forest Supervisor will decide to:

- a. Implement the proposed adjustments to management and improvements on the Rimel, Allegheny Battlefield and Queens grazing allotments, and on the Clark Tract grazing special use permit area, as outlined above.

Or

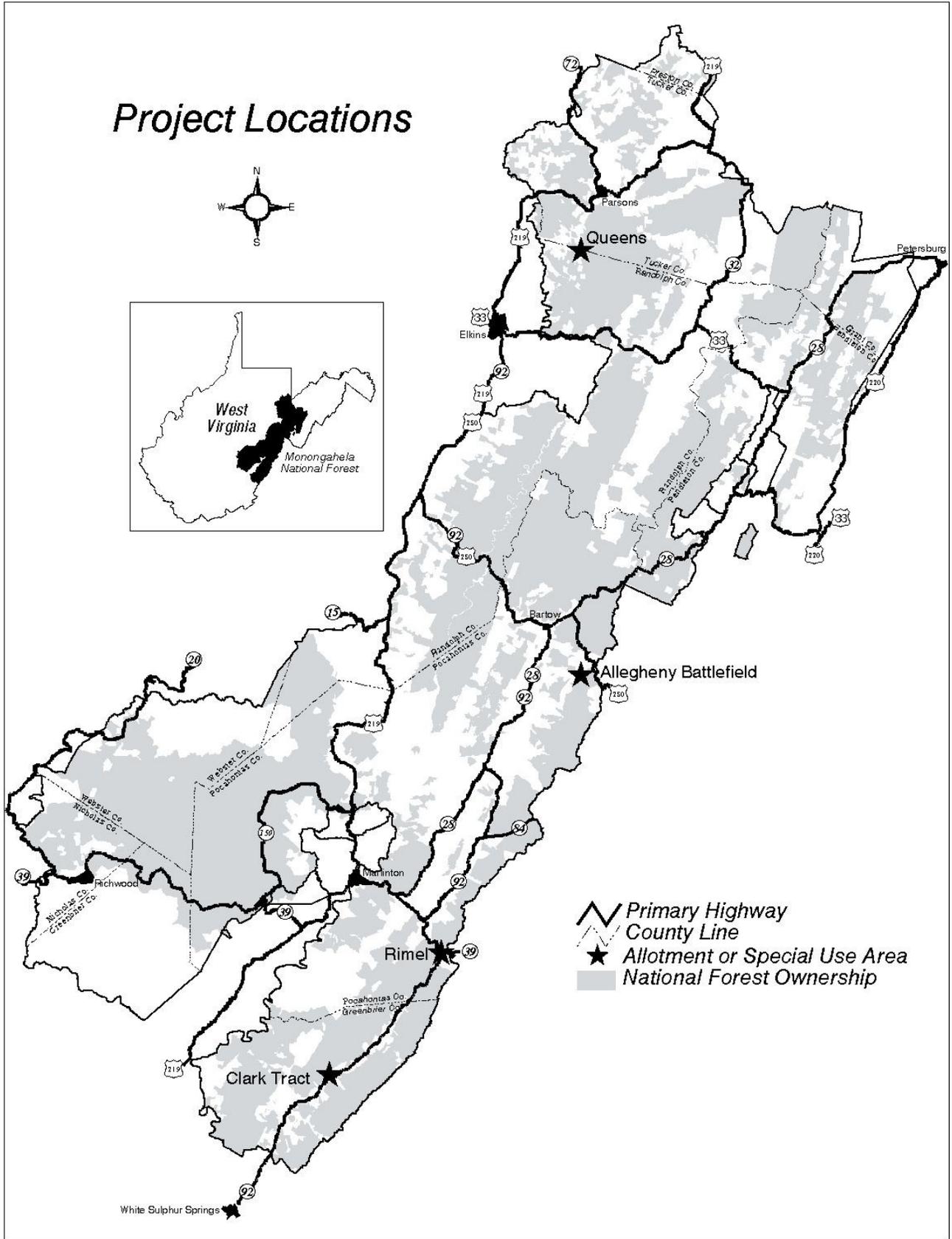
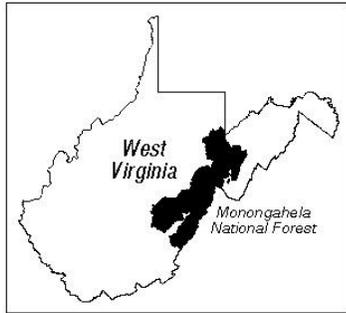
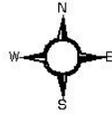
- b. Implement (a) above with modifications to the proposal based on public input and the results of the environmental analysis.

Or

- c. Chose not to implement the proposed action as described here, or with modifications. Continue grazing these areas without any changes to management or improvements.

Encl. Project location map

# Project Locations



- Primary Highway
- County Line
- Allotment or Special Use Area
- National Forest Ownership