



DECISION MEMO
13 RANCH STOCK TANKS PROJECT
U.S. FOREST SERVICE
PAYSON RANGER DISTRICT
TONTO NATIONAL FOREST
GILA COUNTY, ARIZONA

The 13 Ranch Stock Tanks project is located within the 13 Ranch grazing allotment, about 15 miles east of Payson Arizona, on the Payson Ranger District, Tonto National Forest (map attached).

Project Background

The 13 Ranch allotment is a summer use (May 1-October 13) grazing allotment using a deferred, rest-rotation grazing system. Limited water sources are available across the allotment but do not provide for adequate livestock distribution. The permittee proposed to develop three earthen stock tanks which will provide additional water for wildlife and livestock, while improving livestock distribution and management to meet allotment management objectives. The Forest Service, in conjunction with the permittee, and Arizona Game and Fish Department, have confidence in the resource benefit by the addition of these stock tanks.

Project Purpose

The addition of the stock tanks will play a key role in achieving management objectives set forth in the Forest Plan. Development of these roadside tanks will provide additional distribution opportunities for livestock and wildlife across the allotment, promoting fewer overall disturbances to watershed and soil resources. In addition, the additional water sources may likely help distribute utilization across the allotment by further spreading livestock out across the pastures. Utilization around current improvements and other water sources such as riparian areas may also decrease because of the improved distribution, contributing to better wildlife habitat. In addition to direction in the Forest Plan, the Arizona Game and Fish Department has determined additional water sources in this area are desirable for grazing ungulates, as well as small game animals; subsequently the Arizona Game and Fish Department have expressed interest in funding this project.

In addition to wildlife benefits, this project may enhance soil stability via improved livestock distribution. The Proposed Action calls for the construction of "roadside" earthen tanks of limited size. The proposed stock tanks will be designed and constructed in a way that reduces harmful effects of existing run-off generated and directed by roads in the project area. Rather than simply allowing run-off to produce additional erosion and sedimentation, this type of earthen tank will capture these roadside flows, dissipating flow energy and allowing water to pool up, rather than allowing flows to be discharged into



stream channels, therefore providing small water quality benefits. Due to the fact that almost all of the proposed tanks are not located in stream channels, the amount of the watershed area intercepted by these tanks will be minimal and overall effects of the tanks on watershed processes will be negligible.

Decision

It is my decision to authorize the implementation of the 13 Ranch Stock Tanks Project as presented in the Project's Proposed Action. Project development will employ construction standards, conservation measures and design features that are consistent with the Forest Service Handbook.

This decision includes the following design features for resource protection: Tanks will be adjacent to existing system roads or undeveloped two-tracks and will collect run-off from the roadways, avoiding placement within drainage channels. Ground disturbance will include using a bulldozer to dig the tanks, build a berm around the tank, and construct bar ditches to collect water. Incidental tree and shrub removal may take place within the project area. Tanks will be approximately 50' x 100' in size and approximately 8-10' deep.

Reasons for Categorically Excluding the Proposed Actions

My assessment is that this proposal falls within the categories of actions listed in the Forest Service National Environmental Policy Act Handbook (FSH) that are excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement. This category is found in 36 CFR 220.6 (E,6 "*TIMBER STAND OR WILDLIFE HABITAT IMPROVEMENT*"). This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or an environmental assessment (EA).

The applicable category of actions is identified in agency procedures as a timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activity that does not include the use of herbicides or does not require more than 1 mile of low standard road construction, as found in Chapter 30, 36 CFR 220.6(e)(6) and as described in FSH 1909.15 Sec. 31.2. I have determined that there are no extraordinary circumstances associated with this project that will preclude the use of this category. This determination is based on the absence or the negligible level of adverse effects on the following resource conditions:

- a. Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species – project activities do not involve impacts
- b. Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds – none are present
- c. Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas – none are present
- d. Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas – none are present
- e. Research natural areas – none are present



- f. Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas –No archaeological sites or historic properties were observed during surveys of the project areas (*Tonto cultural clearance project # 2022-12-073*).

Public Involvement

On July 13th, 2022 a scoping letter was sent to 28 individuals and organizations outlining the proposed action. The project was scoped through July 29th. During this time, no scoping comment letters were received. In addition to scoping letters, the project was posted on the Tonto Nation Forest's *Schedule of Proposed Actions* website.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

This decision is consistent with the Tonto National Forest Land Management Plan. The project was designed in conformance with the Forest Plan and other federal and state law, policy, and direction applicable to the resources present in the Tonto National Forest. *The National Forest Management Act of 1976 (Public Law 104-33, as amended)* requires the U.S. Forest Service to provide for biological diversity on National Forest Service lands consistent with overall multiple-use objectives and to maintain viable wildlife populations in the planning area. The Forest Plan provides planning components that this decision complies with, including standards and guidelines.

Implementation of this decision will not violate any Federal, State, or local laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

Implementation Date

This project is not subject to administrative review and can be implemented immediately as detailed in this decision.

Contact

For additional information contact:
North Zone Range Staff, Jeff Sturla
Payson Ranger District
1009 E. Hwy 260
Payson, AZ 85542
928-474-7900



FREDDIE DUNCAN
Deputy District Ranger

Date August 04, 2022



In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.



Appendix A

13 Ranch Stock Tank Project Map

The Forest Service makes no expressed or implied warranty with respect to the character, function, or capabilities of the data or their appropriateness for any user's purposes; represented features may not be in an accurate geographic location. The Forest Service reserves the right to correct, update, modify, or replace this geospatial information without notification.

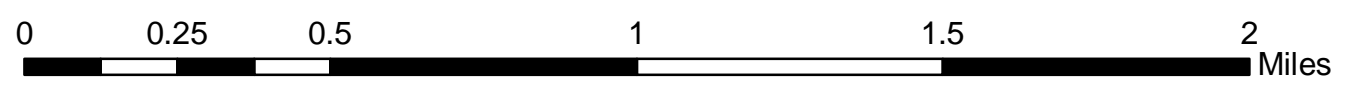
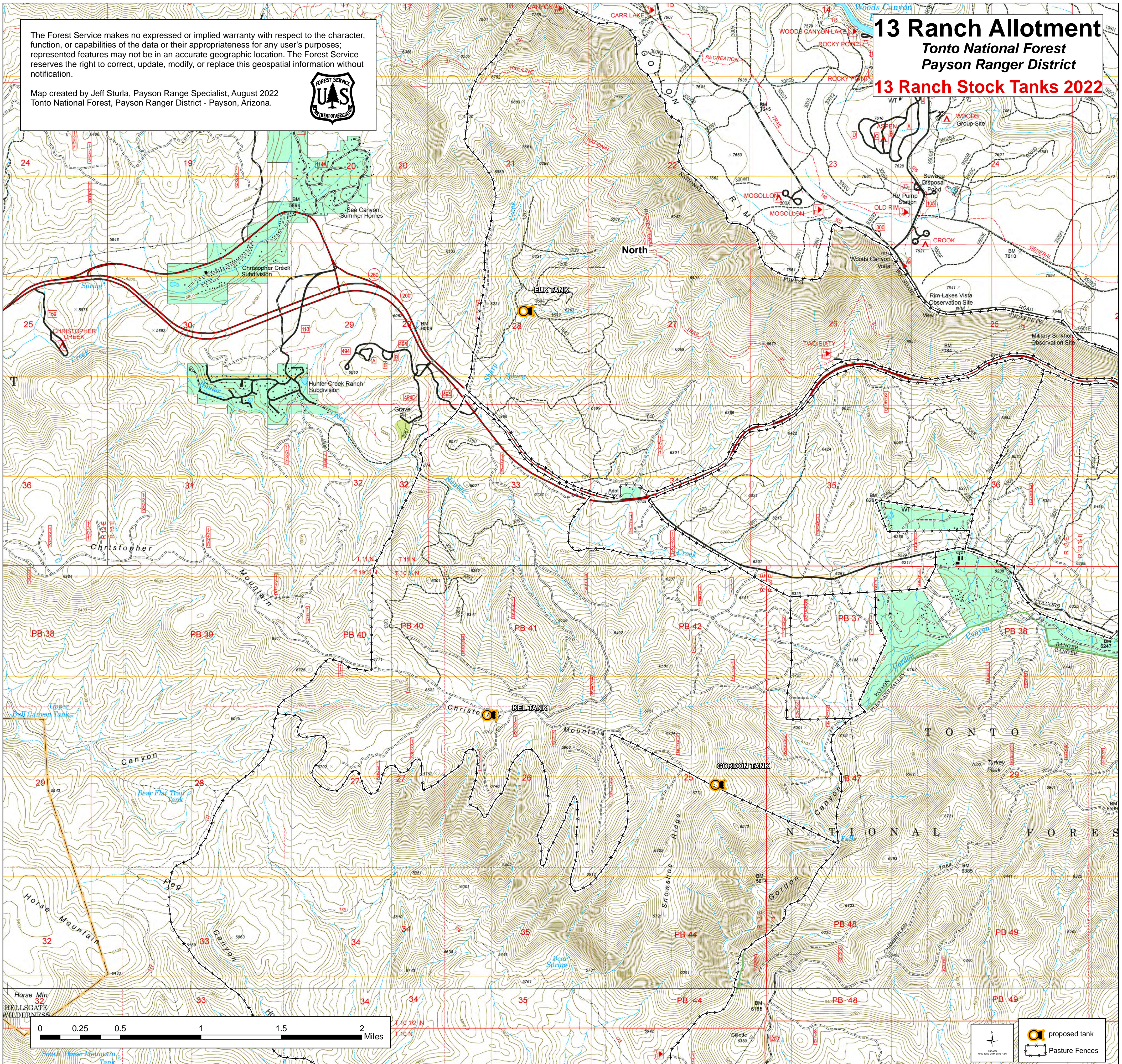
Map created by Jeff Sturla, Payson Range Specialist, August 2022
Tonto National Forest, Payson Ranger District - Payson, Arizona.



13 Ranch Allotment

Tonto National Forest
Payson Ranger District

13 Ranch Stock Tanks 2022



Legend:

- proposed tank
- Pasture Fences