

Decision Memo

New Dutchman Well and Soldier Camp Tanks
Pleasant Valley Ranger District
Tonto National Forest
Gila County, Arizona
Township 9 North, Range 13 East, Section 33
(New Dutchman Well)
And
Township 9 North, Range 13 East Section 19
Township 8 North, Range 12 East Sections 3 and 4
Township 9 North, Range 12 East Section 26
(Soldier Camp Tanks)

Background

The New Dutchman Well project on the Pleasant Valley Ranger District is located on the Potato Butte allotment, approximately 4 air miles southwest of Young, Arizona. The existing New Dutchman Well collapsed several years ago and without that source of water in the area, there are no longer good options for livestock and wildlife water sources.

The Soldier Camp Tanks project on the Pleasant Valley Ranger District is located on the Soldier Camp allotment, approximately 13 miles west of Young, Arizona. This is an allotment with large areas that have no developed water that will benefit from additional livestock and wildlife water sources.

(See maps in appendix A)

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the New Dutchman Well project is to provide adequate water for wildlife and permitted livestock in portions of the Potato Butte allotment not currently served by any water sources, due to the failure of the well. We need to provide dependable water sources in these areas in order to maintain adequate grazing distribution as well as for wildlife in the area.

The Soldier Camp tanks project is part of a larger tank maintenance project funded by the Arizona Game and Fish Department, designed to provide more reliable water resources over a large area on the Soldier Camp allotment. The larger project includes tank clean outs of four existing tanks as well.

The Land Management Plan for these areas provides guidance to maintain or improve habitat conditions as a result of better water availability throughout the allotment. In addition we are directed in this plan to provide water for wildlife and livestock. The Tonto NF Plan has the following requirements on page 41:

- Provide a minimum of four waters per section in small game and one water per section in big game key areas.
- Continue close coordination with State and other federal agencies for the benefit of plant and animal species.
- Maximize coordination with the Arizona Game and Fish Department regarding State listed species and their habitats.

Conservation Measures and Best Management Practices

The well will be of sufficient depth to equal the flow previously generated by the old well and will be equipped with a solar pump. The new well will be drilled slightly away from the historic well structures so as to eliminate any possibility of damage. All necessary archeological and biological clearances have been accomplished for these projects. No heavy equipment will be used in violation of Mexican Spotted Owl breeding season restrictions.

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 FSH 1909.15, Chapter 32.2 (6) Timber stand or wildlife habitat improvement

I have determined that there are no extraordinary circumstances associated with this project that would 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, endangered and/or Region 3 sensitive species or designated critical habitat. A site specific Biological Assessment and Evaluation was completed and approved on 4/14/2015. There are no significant effects to listed, proposed or Forest Service Sensitive Species.
- b. Floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds. There are no effects on flood plains, wetlands or municipal watersheds.
- c. Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas. None of the described work will be conducted within such areas.
- d. Inventoried Roadless areas or potential wilderness areas. No such areas exist within the project area.
- e. Research natural areas. No such areas exist within the project area.
- f. American Indian religious or cultural sites; and archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas. A 100% archeological survey was completed and signed by the Forest Supervisor on 4/13/2015.

Public Involvement

On 4/28/2015, a scoping letter was mailed out to 15 individuals and organizations outlining the proposed action. No letters or comments were received.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

This decision is consistent with the Forest Plan, Forest Service Policy, and other management considerations. 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 NF. *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 discloses forestwide standards and guidelines and management area direction.

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

- *Clean Water Act, as amended*
- *Clean Air Act, as amended*
- *Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended*
- *American Antiquities Act of 1906 and Historic Preservation Act of 1966*
- *Executive Order 12898 of 1994, Environmental Justice*

Decision

I am authorizing the current permittee to install a new well within the Potato Butte allotment to replace a failed well. The well location is adjacent to existing water system features which may be associated with AR-03-12-05-527 (a historic homestead) but the age of the existing components is unclear. The project will be located along FR-933. Ground disturbance would include use of a truck-mounted drill rig to dig the well, pipeline, and/or armature to link the new well with an existing windmill and water storage tanks. All existing surface features will be left in place and undisturbed, with the exception of utilizing the windmill and tanks noted above.

In addition, I have decided to authorize the current permittee to construct four new roadside tanks. The locations of these tanks have been identified in the associated map and archeological studies. Tanks will be 50ft. X 100 ft. X 8-10 ft. deep.

This decision includes the following design features for resource protection:

- No heavy equipment will be operated in violation of Mexican Spotted Owl breeding season restrictions.
- No heavy equipment will be operated in violation of fire restrictions in place at the time the work commences.

Implementation Date

This project is not subject to appeal. I anticipate implementing this project during the spring and summer of 2015

Contact

For additional information, contact, North Zone Range Staff, Doug Ruppel

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Debbie Cress, District Ranger

Date

Payson and Pleasant Valley Ranger Districts, Tonto National Forest

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