



Decision Memo

Lake Pasture Drift/Division Fence Project

USDA Forest Service
Tonto National Forest
Tonto Basin Ranger District
Gila County, Arizona

Background

The Lake Pasture Drift/Division Fence Project on the A-Cross Grazing Allotment is on the Tonto Basin Ranger District of the Tonto National Forest. It is located on the northern shore of Roosevelt Lake, west the confluence of the Salt River. The fence will be located on two ridgeline northwest of Forest Service Road 273. Location information for all range improvements referenced can be found in the Project Geodatabase in the project record at the Tonto National Forest Supervisor's Office.

Purpose and Need

The Standardized Precipitation Index (SPI) is a widely used drought index that calculates precipitation anomalies at different timescales and interprets SPI units (standard deviations) in probabilistic (likelihood) terms. This index is the initial measure used in Southwestern Region Drought Policy for rangeland management, which states that any time the index "...falls to a negative one (-1) or less for the preceding 12-month period, grazing allotments should be evaluated for existing drought conditions" (Region 3 Manual Supplement to Forest Service Handbook 2209.13.19.1). In addition, the Tonto National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) directs grazing management when rangeland is in less than satisfactory condition. This can be achieved with the installation of structural and non-structural improvements to better distribute cattle, protect wildlife habitat, and in some instances providing wildlife with additional reliable water sources.

Currently, across the Tonto National Forest, the SPI is negative two (-2), and in some places even lower, according to research conducted by the University of Arizona¹. Because of these conditions, Forest Service regulations, and Forest Plan direction, allotment improvements are being authorized across the forest.

Decision

I have decided to authorize the installation of a pasture division fence to help alleviate potential conflicts between grazing and habitat for wildlife species. The fence will allow the permittee to access the lake on the western portion of the allotment when the lake level is between 40 percent and 80 percent of full.

¹ <https://uaclimateextension.shinyapps.io/SPItool/>

Currently, cattle use is restricted because of fluctuating lake levels at certain times. This is due to the possibility of livestock accessing the floodplain of the lake. The fence will be constructed of 4-strand barbed wire on an existing trail that follows a ridgeline off of Forest Road 273. All fence components will be installed by hand on the east and downhill side of the referenced trail, avoiding all areas of concern and making as few materials hauling trips from the road as possible.

This decision includes the following design features for resource protection:

- To prevent impacts to soils, mulch the disturbed area where posts are implanted. When possible, monitor disturbance sites after rain events, document (via notes and pictures) where unforeseeable soil and weeds impacts may be occurring, and notify district ranger staff.
- Monitor grazing to determine if the fence works and make adjustments so that it's effective at protecting flycatcher habitat (implementation monitoring).
- Flag and avoid all heritage sites.

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 Regulations that are excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement. This category is 36 CFR 220.6(e)(9) "Implementation or modification of minor management practices to improve allotment condition...."

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 or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species** – According to the Tonto National Forest Botanist, the range improvements are not within known listed plant species habitat. According to the District Wildlife Biologist, constructing the fence is not anticipated to have negative effects on any of these species.
- b. **Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds** – According to the Tonto National Forest Hydrologist, the actions as described will have negligible effects on Lake Roosevelt due to the small area of disturbance below the elevation of the conservation pool. Additionally, the area of disturbance on the uplands will be small. Perennial streams, springs, mapped floodplains, and mapped riparian areas will not be affected. Water resource related permits from the state will not be required.
- c. **Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas** – According to the District Recreation Staff, this project is not within any of these areas, thus there are no effects are anticipated.
- d. **Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas** – According to the District Recreation Staff, this project is not within any of these areas, thus there are no effects are anticipated.
- e. **Research natural areas** – According to the District Recreation Staff, this project is not within any of these areas, thus there are no effects are anticipated.



- f. **American Indian religious or cultural sites; and archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas** – According to the Tonto National Forest Archeologist, there are known sites in the area. Following mitigations, there will be no effect to historic properties.

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 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.

Implementation Date

This project is not subject to appeal. I anticipate authorization of this project immediately.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Eric Hoskins, Range Specialist, Tonto Basin Ranger District, 28079 N Hwy 188, Roosevelt, AZ 85545, 602-225-5332

Kelly L. Jardine
Tonto Basin District Ranger

6/8/2018

Date

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