

Hitching Rock Water System Project

Decision Memo

American Gulch Allotment

USDA Forest Service, Southwestern Region, Tonto National Forest
Payson Ranger District, Gila County, AZ
(T10N, R9E, Sections 10-11, 13-14, 23)

I. Decision:

It is my decision to implement this water development project on the American Gulch cattle grazing allotment that will utilize two existing wells to provide water to a system of storage tanks, pipelines and troughs. Implementation of this project will improve availability of water for livestock and wildlife, which will in turn lead to improved livestock distribution within the allotment.

The water system will include a total of 10 water storage/drinker stations that will be connected by a pipeline that will be installed above ground. The storage tanks will vary in size from 2,500 to 10,000 gallons. Wildlife and livestock drinkers will be placed at the storage tank locations. All drinkers will be equipped with wildlife escape ramps. The drinkers will be approximately 200 to 300 gallons in size and will operate on basic float systems. Total area in distance of the pipelines is approximately four miles.

The current project goals are to provide sufficient amounts of water storage and above-ground watering systems to a historically arid region of the district where earthen reservoirs and springs have proven to provide inadequate water storage for livestock, wildlife, and wildland fire suppression.

Water is to be pumped by submersible pumps placed inside the wells and powered by either solar units, or generators. The wells will be protected by low profile, small-sized buildings (approximately 4'x4'x4') constructed of block or similar material with vandal proof doors and roofing.

II. Reasons for Categorically Excluding this Decision:

I have concluded that this decision may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment. The authority for this decision falls under Forest Service Handbook 1909.15-National Environmental Policy Act Handbook, Chapter 30, Section 31.2(9) and 36 CFR 220.6(e)(9). There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the action. The Project is within category #9 that includes:

(9) Implementation or modification of minor management practices to improve allotment condition or animal distribution when an allotment management plan is not yet in place. Examples include but are not limited to:

(ii) Adding a stock watering facility to an existing water line;

III. Relationship to Extraordinary Circumstances:

I have decided that this program is within context of activity as defined above and concluded that there are no extraordinary circumstances involved with this decision as summarized in the following:

This project has been evaluated for potential effects to threatened, endangered and sensitive (TES) species through the Biological Assessment and Evaluation process. No TES species will be affected by this project. A Biological Assessment and Evaluation, BE # 09-04-RANGE-0004, a Management Indicator Species Analysis, MIS # 09-04-RANGE-0004, and a Migratory Bird Analysis, # 09-04-RANGE-0004 were completed on November 2, 2009.

Implementation of this program will not have any adverse effects on floodplains, wetlands, riparian habitats or municipal watersheds.

This project does not occur within Research Natural Areas, inventoried roadless areas or congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or National Recreation Areas. This decision complies with Interim Directive 1920-2001-1 and Interim Directive 7710-2001-3 policy with regards to inventoried roadless area management.

No new roads are needed to implement this project. Access will be on previously established and presently open forest roads, no new road building or improvements will occur.

Review of this program for compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act has been completed. Appropriate consultation with the tribes was conducted to determine if traditional cultural properties would be affected. Any acreage within the proposed area will be surveyed and receive appropriate archaeological clearances before project work begins. No cultural resource sites will be disturbed by the implementation of this program. Heritage Clearance (#2009-12-124) for this project was approved by the Deputy Forest Supervisor on October 23, 2009.

IV. Public Involvement:

This project was made available to the public in the Schedule of Proposed Actions for the Tonto National Forest in the fourth quarter report of 2009. In addition, a scoping letter was sent out to federal, state, and local agencies, affected tribal entities, and interested individuals and groups. There were a total of 41 scoping letters sent out on September 30, 2009. Two replies were received from tribal governments that did not object to the project as long as cultural sites were avoided. (See list of parties contacted and responses in the Project Record.) Internal scoping was conducted with District resource specialists. There were no issues raised concerning this project as a result of scoping activities.

V. Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations:

In addition to meeting the requirements of NEPA, the following determinations have been made regarding this action:

The Forest Plan has been reviewed and determination made that this decision is consistent with the Forest Plan as required by the National Forest Management Act. This decision is responsive

to guiding direction contained in the Management Area Direction and the Forest-wide standards and guidelines.

To determine compliance with the Endangered Species Act, a Biological Evaluation was approved by a qualified wildlife biologist. It is determined that overall effects on the populations of management indicator species are negligible. With regards to migratory bird species, no important bird areas have been identified for the Tonto National Forest and habitat for migratory birds is not significantly affected.

The proposal does not affect floodplains, wetlands or streams and is therefore in compliance with the Clean Water Act, and Executive Orders protecting floodplains and wetlands.

This decision complies with the National Historic Preservation Act. All archaeological sites will be identified, marked and avoided by machinery driven overland.


VI. Administrative Review and Implementation:

Pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12 (f), this decision is not subject to appeal or a higher level of review. Implementation may begin at any time after the date of this decision.

VII. Contact Information:

For additional information, please contact Christine Thiel, Tonto National Forest, Payson Ranger District, 1009 E. Highway 260, Payson, AZ 85541, (928) 474-7900.

VIII. Signature and Date:



EDWARD E. ARMENTA

District Ranger, Tonto National Forest

5/25/10

DATE

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