



Decision Memo

Cottonwood to Mesquite Pipeline Extension Project

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

Background

This project is within the Armer Mountain Grazing Allotment on the Tonto Basin Ranger District of the Tonto National Forest. It is located near Forest Service Road 97A and south of Forest Service Road 60, which is also known as the A Cross Road. 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 one inch diameter, high density polyethylene pipeline from an existing water well located in the Schell pasture near Cottonwood Wash to a new storage tank and livestock trough in an existing livestock holding pen. The current condition of the well is unknown;

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



therefore, if water amounts are not sufficient to support the addition of new troughs, a storage tank will be installed off of Forest Service Road 97A and water will be hauled by truck to the tank. In this situation, water from this tank will be gravity fed to the proposed trough site as well as an existing trough near the well site. Additionally, if necessary, the pipeline will be connected to an existing water system that feeds a livestock trough less than half a mile from Schell Well.

This decision includes the following design features for resource protection:

- All troughs will be equipped with escape ramps and functioning floats to provide protection to wildlife.
- Pipeline will be laid above ground and just off of the old roadway to conceal it from casual observation.
- The pipeline will be installed above ground and trough sites will be hand leveled to decrease impacts from erosion.
- When pipeline crosses the road, it will be buried to 18 inches below the road surface and utility tape will be used to mark it.
- If water is removed from the Cottonwood artesian well, enough water should remain on site to support water dependent resources developed around the well.
- Impacts from soil excavation should follow these mitigations:
 - Document new improvements for unforeseeable circumstances;
 - If moisture conditions are high, activity should be avoided in the area; and
 - Restoration of the soil surface should be to improve contour.
- Flag and avoid all heritage sites.
- Flag and avoid Hohokam agave where range improvements are to be installed.

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. There is a population of Hohokam agave in the area, approximately a half a mile from proposed range improvements, but will not be effected if mitigations are followed. According to the District Wildlife Biologist, the actions are 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, this project will not affect perennial streams, springs, mapped floodplains, or

mapped riparian areas. If this option is selected then some water should remain on site to support water dependent resources developed around the well. The area of surface disturbance at the Cottonwood artesian well will be minimal. Connection of a new pipeline to the existing Cottonwood water system should not result in increased removal of water from the water source based on the capacity of the one inch pipeline. Water resources related permits 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 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 implementing this project immediately or as soon as feasible.

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



Date



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