

Decision Memo

Barnhardt Troughs and Storage
Payson Ranger District
Tonto National Forest
Gila County, Arizona
Township 9 North, Range 9 East, Sections 24, 26

Background

The Barnhardt Troughs project on Payson Ranger District is located on the Rye Creek allotment, approximately 20 air miles south from Payson, Arizona. (See map in appendix A) This is an allotment that will benefit from additional livestock and wildlife sources in order to achieve better distribution throughout the pasture.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of this project is to provide adequate water for wildlife and permitted livestock in portions of the Rye Creek allotment not currently served by any water sources. The Forest Service in coordination with the permittee needs to take this action in order to provide adequate distribution of grazing impacts. Improved grazing distribution will reduce the dependence of livestock on riparian areas for water and will reduce forage utilization in riparian areas.

Development of these additional troughs will enhance grazing distribution and will lessen grazing impacts around all water sources. Additional water sources will provide better habitat for wildlife in the area as well as more hunting opportunities for the public.

Page 41 of the Tonto NF plan calls for:

- 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.
- Using Desired Future Condition as a guide, optimize wildlife outputs in all management units by coordination of other resource activities and direct habitat improvement projects.

Conservation Measures and Best Management Practices

All necessary archeological and biological clearances have been obtained for this project to proceed. All drinkers will be equipped with wildlife escape ramps and will be left charged with water throughout the year.

Reasons for Categorically Excluding the Proposed Actions

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 & Evaluation was completed and signed on 4/14/15.
- b. There are no effects to floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds.
- c. There are no congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas within the project area.
- d. There are no inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas within the project area.
- e. There are no research natural areas within the project area.
- f. American Indian religious or cultural sites; and archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas. A 100% archaeological survey was completed and signed by the Forest Supervisor on 3/25/15.

Public Involvement

On 4/25/2015, a scoping letter was mailed out to 15 individuals and organizations outlining the proposed action. One response letter was received. This letter expressed several concerns:

- The purpose and need for this project is not adequate to explain how it will benefit wildlife. It also does not address cumulative impacts from other projects in the Payson District.
- NEPA sufficiency

This project was analyzed by specialists to ensure compliance with law, regulation, and policy—including the Forest Plan—for the following program areas: soils, hydrology, wildlife, heritage, lands, recreation, rangeland management, and NEPA. As part of the analysis, cumulative impacts from other similar projects were considered and none were found that would preclude use of the categorical exclusion.

The presence of the proposed improvement and its use within established grazing management protocols will result in reduced livestock grazing impacts for all wildlife species and especially those in riparian areas within the allotment. Reducing the dependence of livestock on a limited number of water resources and improving our ability to manage the use of forage species within desired limits throughout the allotment.

This project falls within the categories of actions listed in the Forest Service National Environmental Policy Handbook (FSH) that are excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement. This category is found in FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30. 36 CFR 220.6(e)(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.*

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 of 1977, as amended*
- *Clean Air Act of 1963, as amended*
- *Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended*
- *American Antiquities Act of 1906 and National Historic Preservation Act of 1966*
- *Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 and Executive Order 13186*
- *Executive Order 12898 of 1994 (Environmental Justice)*

Decision

I have decided to allow the current permittee to install a new 2,500 gallon storage tank and two new troughs along the route of an existing surface polypipe. The project will be located along FR-419. Minimal ground disturbance would be expected from surface placement of troughs near the existing pipeline and linking the pipeline to the troughs; installing a new storage tank and linking it to the pipeline. Materials would be transported to the site by pickup truck.

This decision includes the following design features for resource protection:

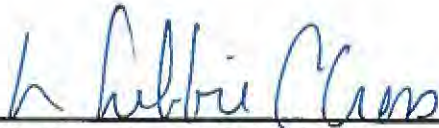
- All drinkers will be equipped with escape ramps for wildlife
- This system will be maintained in a useable condition a charged with water year round for the benefit of wildlife in the area.

Implementation Date

This project is not subject to appeal. I anticipate implementing this project late 2015.

Contact

For additional information contact North Zone Range Staff, Doug Ruppel at
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11/23/15

Debbie Cress, Payson District Ranger
North Zone, Tonto National Forest

Date

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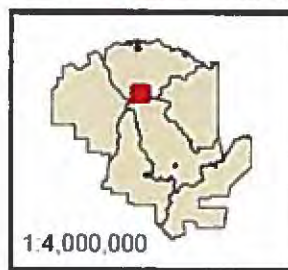
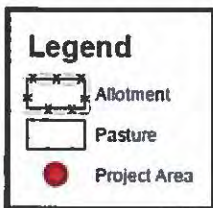
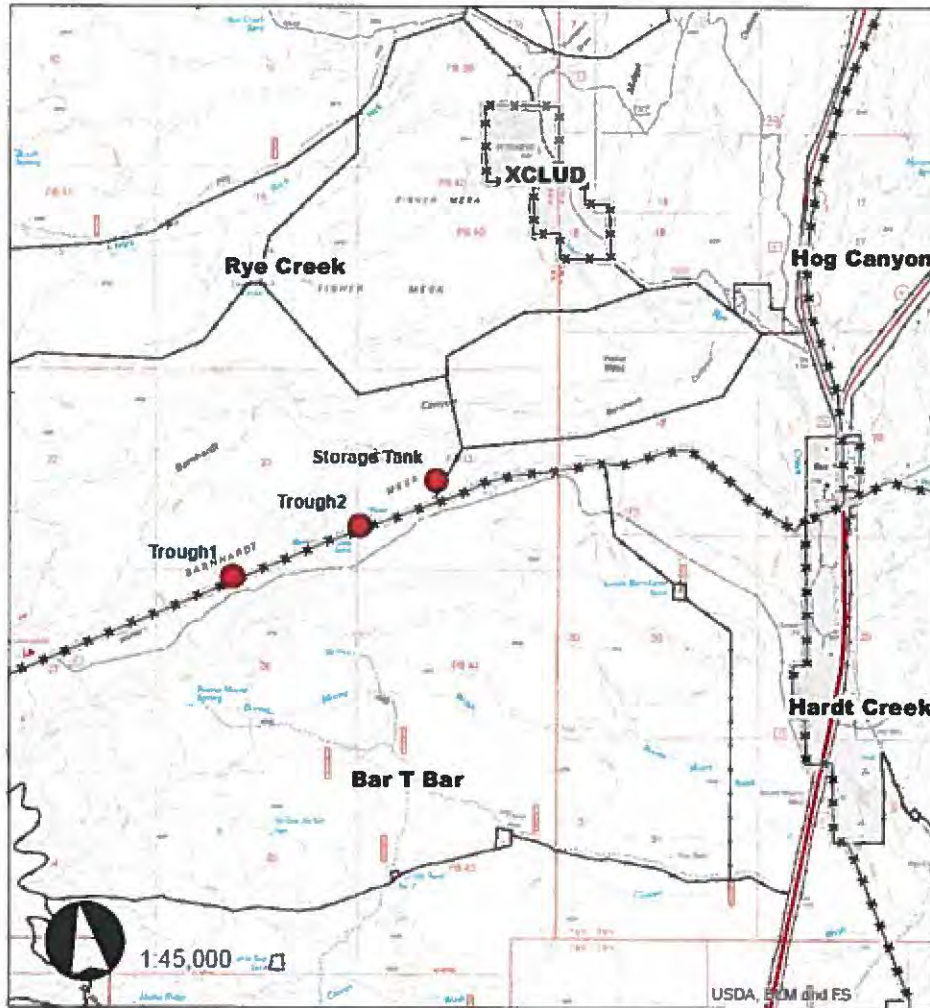
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Appendix A

Figure 1: Barnhardt Troughs & Storage Project



Map created by Kelly Bedson, Range Management Specialist, May 2015
Tonto National Forest, Payson Ranger District, Arizona.