



Decision Memo
Bellota Well Water Development
Santa Catalina Ranger District
U.S. Forest Service Coronado National Forest

Background

The Bellota Well Project is located in the Redington Pass area of the Santa Catalina Ranger District, Coronado national Forest; Township 13S, Range 17E, Section 10.

Rainfall has been historically inconsistent across the Santa Catalina and Rincon Mountains. After multiple years of drought, the lack of water throughout the District has led to a decrease in wildlife dispersal as well as challenges for the permittee with watering livestock. Chronic shortages of safe, reliable water can impact bat and other wildlife populations, especially in drought years. Water can be a critical factor in determining the abundance, distribution and reproductive success of wildlife, especially in arid western ecosystems, although the impact varies by species, habitat and season. The Redington Pass area supports a diverse assemblage of wildlife species and functions as movement corridor between the Santa Catalina and Rincon Mountains. The distribution of reliable water sources in this corridor is often a limiting factor for wildlife movement and survival. This would include the Bellota Allotment, which is located in the Redington Pass area. For these reasons, it has been proposed that the Bellota Well be drilled to supplement natural springs, and dirt tanks within the project area. This well would fill the need for additional water availability north of Redington Pass and would positively benefit many wildlife species, as well provide for better livestock distribution.

Decision

It is my decision to implement the Bellota Well Water Development Project. This well would provide a consistent year-round water supply for wildlife and livestock. A solar well would be installed with water storage and two troughs to supply water to two pastures within the Bellota Allotment. Pipelines to the storage and troughs would be placed on the ground surface. These water improvements would provide a consistent year-round water supply for wildlife and livestock in Redington Pass.

This project would include the drilling of a well approximately 25-30 feet deep in the Bellota Allotment south of Chimney Rock, and the placement of approximately 725 feet of high-density polyethylene (HDPE) water pipe to the proposed 1500-gallon water storage tank. Water would be gravity fed to a trough in the Bullock pasture and one in the Racetrack pasture. The troughs will be wildlife friendly and will contain wildlife escape ramps.

During construction, the site will be accessed by a pickup truck with a trailer via National Forest System Road (NFSR) 4431. After implementation, the water developments will be maintained by the permittee. Water would be supplied to these troughs year-round, regardless of whether or not livestock are present within the pasture.

This permanent water source would help promote the expansion of the Gould's turkey within the area. The majority of the Gould's turkey population occurs within a small portion of the suitable habitat, preferring the wetter canyon bottoms. Having a consistent water source may encourage flocks of Gould's turkeys to permanently establish themselves in the drier canyons.

The Coues whitetail represent the highest big game population in the area and would also benefit from this water source.

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or an environmental assessment (EA). The applicable category of actions is identified in agency procedures as timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities that do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than 1 mile of low standard road construction, specified in 36 CFR 220.6 (e)(5). This category of action is applicable because the proposed action would improve wildlife habitat by providing additional, year-round water sources in this area of Redington Pass.

I find that there are no extraordinary circumstances that would warrant further analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS. I took into account resource conditions identified in agency procedures that should be considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstances might exist:

Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species –

The proposed action would have no effect on the western yellow-billed cuckoo, jaguar and its critical habitat, ocelot, and lesser long-nosed bat. Yellow-billed cuckoos may occur within the project area but because all actions that might disturb breeding cuckoos would occur outside the breeding season, this project would have no effect to breeding cuckoos. The project area does contain habitat that may be used by jaguars and ocelots; however, because the project would only occur during daylight hours these secretive and primarily nocturnal species would not be affected by the noise or ground disturbance.

The proposed action may impact individuals of the Forest Sensitive species; however, these impacts would not result in a trend toward federal listing or loss of species viability. Implementation of the proposed action would have no impact on Management Indicator Species or species covered under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds – The proposed project area does not fall within a municipal watershed. Portions of the project may fall within floodplains and wetlands, however, effects would be negligible so long as implementation is done according to Forest Service standards using best management practices.

Vegetation resources – The proposed action is not anticipated to negatively impact the vegetation resources within the project area. The project consists of juniper and mesquite woodlands and desert grasslands. The vegetation consists mainly of juniper sp., mesquite, and a variety of annual grasses and forbs which established after the Burro Fire that occurred in July 2017. The adjacent riparian habitat includes velvet ash, coyote willow with an occasional netleaf hackberry above the 100 year floodplain.

Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, national recreation areas, research natural areas, or inventoried roadless areas – The proposed project is not located in a wilderness, wilderness study area, national recreation area, research natural area, or inventoried roadless areas.

American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites – There are no known extraordinary circumstances that may result in adverse effect on American Indian religious and cultural sites. Cultural resources clearance is recommended in Heritage Resources Report No. 2017-05-055.

Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas – No historic properties would be affected by the proposed action and cultural resources clearance is recommended in Heritage Resources Report No. 2017-05-055.

In addition to the above mentioned resources, this proposed action was reviewed and determined that it is consistent with the Forest Plan and federal, state, and local laws and regulations by specialists in the fields of Invasive plants, Recreation, and the Forest NEPA Coordinator.

Public Involvement

This action was originally listed as a proposal on the Coronado National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions in 2017.

This action is not subject to legal notice and opportunity to comment per 36 CFR 218.23(a).

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

National Forest Management Act -This decision is consistent with the Coronado National Forest Land Management Plan. As required by the National Forest Management Act, the proposed action was reviewed for consistency with the Coronado's Forest Plan (1986, as amended). Management direction for the project area (Management Area 4) is to maintain and improve current habitat for federally listed plant and animal species and work toward delisting (p. 62; U.S. Forest Service 1986).

Endangered Species Act - The District Biologist has determined that the proposed action would have no effect on the lesser long-nosed bat. Foraging habitat occurs in the project area, but no food plants will be impacted by the project.



National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) - The Forest Archaeologist has determined that no historic properties would be affected by the proposed action and that consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer and Native American Tribes is not required.

Administrative Review or Objection Opportunities

This decision is not subject to objections pursuant to 36 CFR 218.20.

Implementation Date

Implementation of this project may take place immediately upon issuance of this decision.

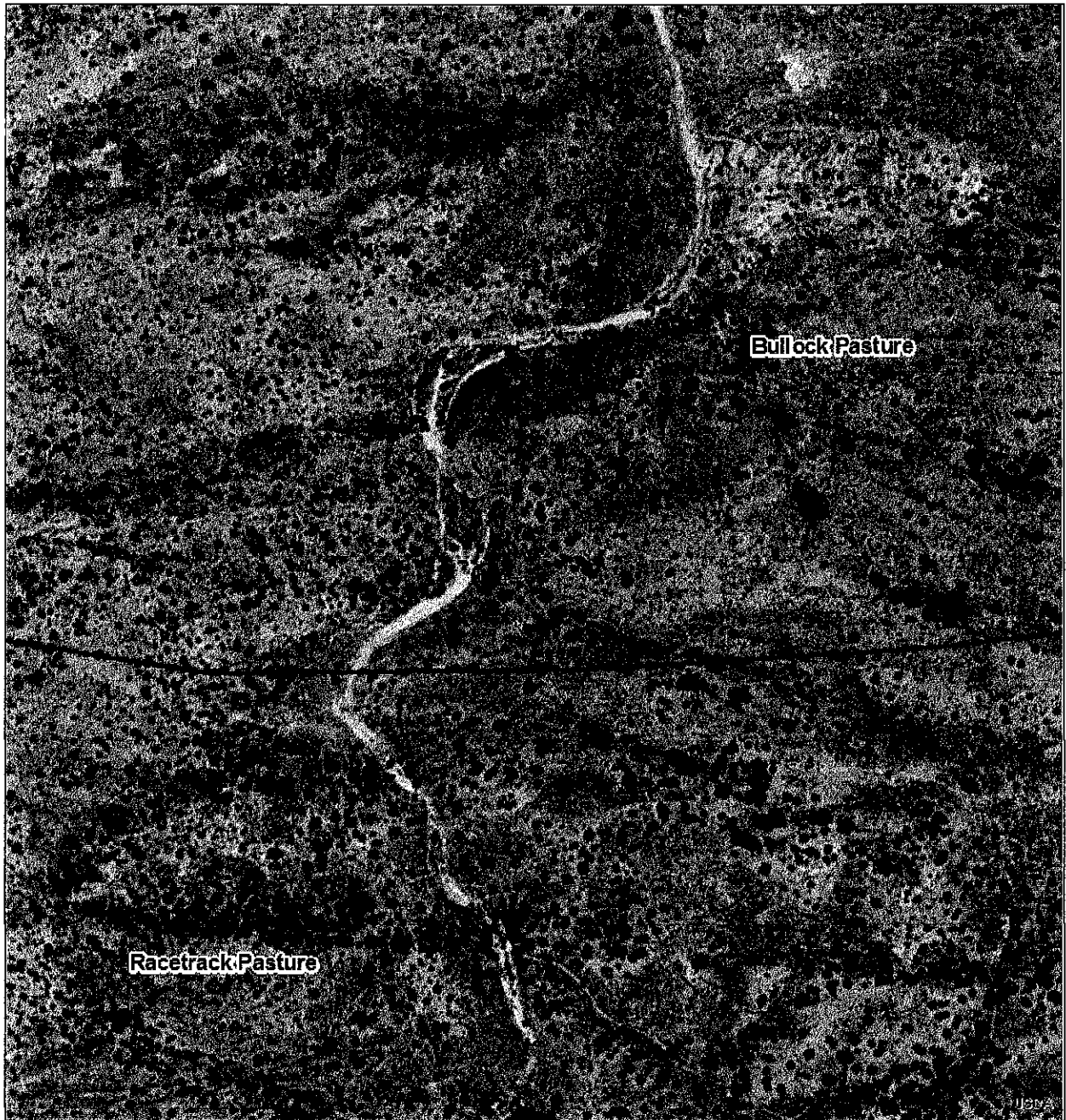
Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Christina Pearson, District Range and Invasives Staff, Santa Catalina Ranger District, 5700 N Sabino Canyon Rd., Tucson, AZ 85710; (520) 749-7706.






Kenneth C. Born
District Ranger

12/11/17
Date

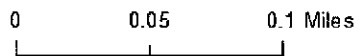
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Legend

-  Trough
-  Well
-  Water Storage
-  Pipeline
-  Pasture Fence

Bellota Well Water Development



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