



Decision Memo

Mazatzal Pipelines Project

USDA Forest Service
Tonto National Forest
Mesa Ranger District
Maricopa County, Arizona

Background

The Mazatzal Pipelines project on Mesa Ranger District is located on the Cross F Allotment. 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 following range improvements on the Cross F Allotment. This project will begin at an existing trough (at 12S E457976 N3753928). A new one inch diameter high density polyethylene pipeline will be installed above ground from this location and travel to a new trough near an existing powerline easement road (at 12S E458550 N3754950). From there the new pipeline will continue to a new 5000 gallon storage tank and trough adjacent to Forest Road 201 (at 12S E458367 N3756520). A

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

400 gallon trough will be installed adjacent to the storage tank. This location will also serve as a water haul location in the event of weak spring flow.

This decision includes the following design features for resource protection:

- Troughs will be required to have a usable wildlife escape ramp and a functioning float.
- The trough and storage tank locations will be leveled before placement.
- Some water should remain at the spring to support water dependent resources (i.e. riparian and wetland vegetation) that rely on water from the spring for survival.
- Installation of improvements should be avoided when soil moisture conditions (soil saturation) are high.
- If installation of improvements results in soil compaction in the immediate area of the improvements, compacted soil will be tilled/aerated. Subsoiling operation should be as deep as compaction depth.
- Pipeline crossing the road will be buried 18 inches below the road and use utility tape to mark it.

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 or sensitive plant species habitat. According to the District Wildlife Biologist, this project is not anticipated to have negative effects on any listed species.
- b. **Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds** – According to the Tonto National Forest Hydrologist, this project will not affect perennial streams, mapped floodplains, or mapped riparian areas. Some water should remain at Summit Spring to support water dependent resources at the spring. One other mapped spring lies within one quarter mile of the project but should not be impacted by it. Water resource related permits are not needed.
- 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 Archaeologist, the project is not within heritage sites nor will it impact any sites within the area.

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: Mike Eytchison, Rangeland Management Specialist, Globe and Mesa Ranger Districts, 7680 S Six-shooter Canyon Rd. Globe AZ, 85501 or email at meytchison@fs.fed.us.


Gary Hanna
Mesa District Ranger


Date



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