

Decision Memo

Salome Mesa and Bull Mountain South Pipelines

Tonto Basin Ranger District
Tonto National Forest
Gila County, Arizona

Background

The Dutchwoman (East) Allotment has an active term grazing permit that authorizes a deferred rest rotation. Throughout the years water developments have been constructed on the allotment to relieve distribution problems. The 1993 Allotment Management Plan for the Dutchwoman Allotment identifies current management direction including the need for Structural range improvements, indicating that "Fencing and extensive water developments are critical to the effectiveness of this management plan."

The Dutchwoman (East) Allotment on the Tonto Basin Ranger District is permitted for 175 Cows and 96 yearlings with an Allotment Management Plan signed in 1993. The basic goal of the management plan is to improve resource conditions on the Dutchwoman Allotment while maintaining a viable livestock operation. Some of the management objectives identified include:

- Accommodate riparian recovery on Salome Creek
- Improve management to increase the area of distribution of livestock from 40% to 80-90% of suitable acres on the allotment using Forest Service Guidelines and Standards.
- Achieve proper use of rangeland to improve vegetation on a greater percentage of allotment acreage to improve rangeland resource objectives.
- Use smaller pastures and more intense grazing for a shorter time period as a tool to accomplish more unified distribution.
- Manage livestock to achieve multiple use resource objectives while maintaining an economical livestock operation.

As livestock are rotated through pastures on the allotment compliance checks and allotment inspections have indicated some areas of distribution could still be improved upon in order to achieve proper distribution and use of the 80-90% of suitable acres. These areas are located in Management area 6J which manages for a variety of renewable natural resources with one of the primary emphasis on livestock forage production.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of this project is to add additional water sources to the Bull Mountain and West Lake pastures on the Dutchwoman (East) Allotment to improve livestock distribution. This would also provide wildlife with additional reliable water sources in dry areas of the pasture where permanent water is lacking. The need is to comply with direction found in the Tonto National Land and Resource Management Plan and to move the allotment towards our desired conditions.

Proposed Action

The Salome and Bull Mountain South Pipeline project is located on Dutchwomen (East) Grazing Allotment on Tonto Basin Ranger District. This project consists of adding approximately 2 miles of HDPE pipe to two new livestock troughs through two separate pipelines. The Bull Mountain South pipeline extension will come off an existing water system originating from the Coffeeberry Artesian Well and the Salome pipeline project will come off of the Lake Artesian Well. The project consists of HDPE pipe being laid above ground using horses and then a trough being moved into place with a ranger from existing two track roads. Ground disturbance is limited to trough placement and livestock congregation at the trough locations. The pipeline will be laid above ground and just off the roadway to conceal it from the casual observer for most of the stretch. The troughs will be leveled before placement. The troughs will also be required to have a usable escape ramp and a functioning float.

Reasons for Categorically Excluding the Proposed Actions

I have concluded that this proposed permitted action falls within the categories of actions listed in the Forest Service National Environmental Policy Act Handbook (FSH) that are excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement. This category is found in FSH 1909.15, Chapter 32.2 (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.”*

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. BE (8/6/2020) concluded no significant effects.
- b. Floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds: The IDT concluded that the project will have no effect on these resource areas, therefore no discussion is warranted.
- c. Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas. The project area is outside any of these areas, and therefore the IDT concluded that no discussion is warranted.
- d. Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas: The project area is outside any of these areas, and therefore the IDT concluded that no discussion is warranted.
- e. Research natural areas. The project area is outside any of these areas, and therefore the IDT concluded that no discussion is warranted.
- f. American Indian religious or cultural sites; and archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas. Heritage Resource clearance date: 11/12/2020. The Forest Archaeologist concluded ‘no potential to cause effects.’

Public Involvement

Design of the project was coordinated with the permittee for the Dutchwoman Allotment and was scoped to Forest Service specialists including Range, Biology, Recreation, and Heritage on April 14th 2020.

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 forest wide 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, as amended*
- *Clean Air Act, as amended*
- *Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended*
- *American Antiquities Act of 1906 and Historic Preservation Act of 1966*
- *Executive Order 13186 of 2001, Migratory Bird Treaty Act*
- *Executive Order 12898 of 1994, Environmental Justice*
- *Executive Order 11988 Floodplain Management*
- *Executive Order 11990 Protection of Wetlands*

Decision

I have decided to authorize the construction of the Salome and Bull Mountain South Pipeline project to increase livestock distribution on the Dutchwoman Allotment.

This decision includes the following design features for resource protection:

- The pipeline must be laid above ground just off of the roadway to conceal it from the casual observer.
- The trough will have a usable escape ramp and a functioning float
- Ground disturbance will be limited to the placement of the trough for leveling

Implementation Date

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

For additional information, contact Eric Hoskins, Tonto Basin Rangeland Management Specialist at 480-435-5563, eric.hoskins@usda.gov or 28079 N. AZ Hwy 188, Roosevelt, AZ 85545.



JEREMY PLAIN
District Ranger TBRD

7/19/21
Date