



DECISION MEMO

WILDLIFE WATER IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS – GALIURO MOUNTAINS

USDA Forest Service
Safford Ranger District, Coronado National Forest
Graham County, Arizona
Section 14, Township 9 South, Range 20 East
Sections 29 and 32, Township 10 South, Range 21 East
Section 16, Township 11 South, Range 21 East

BACKGROUND

The Forest Service and partners have proposed a series of habitat projects to improve the availability of water to wildlife in the Galiuro Mountains. These projects include installation of a well, drinkers, and troughs, as well as partially fencing an area to protect and improve habitat for Chiricahua leopard frogs (*Lithobates chiricahuensis*).

The proposed activities meet the intent of guidance provided by the Coronado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan by attempting to provide one water source per section that is available to wildlife all year long, and by maintaining or improving habitat occupied by listed threatened and endangered species.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of the Wildlife Water Improvement Projects - Galiuros is to provide improved wildlife access to existing water sources, to increase the reliability of existing water sources for wildlife, and to protect and improve habitat for the Chiricahua leopard frog.

This decision authorizes the following series of wildlife habitat improvements:

- 1) Installation of a well and approximately 1,000 feet of pipeline near Home Ranch Tank on the Deer Creek Allotment Section 14, Township 9 South, Range 20 East. Drilling depth is estimated to be 150 to 350 feet deep. Equipment would use established roads (primarily NFSR 253) to access the site, with less than 50 feet of off-road travel necessary to access the drilling point. Contracted drilling specialists would provide all labor. This extra water source would improve the stability of water levels at Home Ranch Tank, which would allow for consistency of habitat for Chiricahua leopard frog (*Lithobates chiricahuensis*).



- 2) Partial fencing of Bull Tank on the Bull Tank Allotment, Section 32, Township 10 South, Range 21 East. Seventy-five foot segments of standard pipe rail fencing would be constructed from the existing dam on Bull Tank to corner posts. Seventy-five foot fence wings would then be installed, extending from the corner posts into the water of the tank. The center area between these wings would remain open to allow cattle access should water levels become extremely low. All fencing would occur within the footprint of the existing tank, and fence height would be level with the spillway of the tank, to allow water to flow over and through the fencing in case of floods. Partial fencing allows for continued water access for cattle and wildlife species, while also providing vegetation protection along the edges of the tank. Bank vegetation serves as one of the physical and biological features important to the survival and reproduction of Chiricahua leopard frogs (USFWS 2012).
- 3) Installation of an in-ground trough/turkey drinker (no greater than 5 feet x 5 feet x 5 feet) surrounded by a 30-foot by 30-foot wildlife-passable fenced enclosure, and 40 feet of buried pipeline to an existing water storage on the Bull Tank Allotment, Section 29, Township 10 South, Range 21 East. Fencing this small portion of the allotment would allow for maintenance of cover around a water source specifically designed for wildlife, which is intended to increase the range of Gould's turkeys (*Meleagris gallopavo mexicana*) within the Galiuro Mountains.
- 4) Installation of a storage tank within a cracked existing rock/masonry storage trough, and a ground-level wildlife drinker would be connected to the Walnut Spring waterline at Jackson Cabin, in Section 16, Township 11 South, Range 21 East on the Safford Ranger District. Ground-disturbance for this project would be limited to the installation of the in-ground drinker (no greater than 5 feet x 5 feet x 5 feet) and less than 50 feet of buried pipeline. Installation of the storage and drinker would increase the dependability of the water source near Jackson Cabin and increase its availability to wildlife by providing ground-level access.

DECISION

It is my decision to approve the proposed action described in this Decision Memorandum (DM).

The proposed action may be categorically excluded from further review and documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment because it meets the criteria for categorical exclusion specified in 36 CFR 220.6(e)(5): *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.*

The project record for the project is on file and available for review at the Safford Ranger District Office.

CONSIDERATION OF EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES

Using the best available scientific and commercial information, Forest resource specialists confirmed for me that there are no extraordinary circumstances associated with the proposed uses that would result in individual and/or cumulative adverse effects on resources identified in 36 CFR 220.6(b)(1)(i through vii). Their findings reported below support the validity of the CE and my decision to authorize the permit.

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

Determination: The Endangered Species Act requires that federal activities do not jeopardize the continued existence of any species federally listed or proposed as threatened or endangered, or result in adverse modification to such species' designated critical habitat. In accordance with Section 7(c) of this Act, potential effects of this decision on listed species have been analyzed and documented by a qualified Forest Service biologist.

The Safford Ranger District Biologist determined that the proposed action would have no effect on federally listed threatened or endangered species, proposed species, or designated or proposed critical habitat. No negative impacts to species on the Region 3 Regional Forester's Sensitive Species List, management indicator species, or species included within the Migratory Bird Treaty Act are expected.

- ii. Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds.

Determination: Floodplains are recognized as streamside areas inundated by flows ranging from the annual flood up to approximately a 100-year recurrence interval event. The proposed activity will take place in a floodplain. There will be no adverse effects to floodplains. This project is an improvement project for the natural environment.

Field review and review of topographical maps indicate that the proposed activity will not take place in a wetland. There will be no adverse effects to wetlands.

A municipal watershed is defined as a community water system "that serves at least 15 service connections used by year-round residents of the area served by the system; or regularly serves at least 25 year-round residents" (Safe Drinking Water Act,

Section 1401, 42 U.S.C.A. 300f.(15)). The proposed activity will not take place in a designated municipal watershed.

- iii. Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas.

Determination: No activities are planned to occur within wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas. There will be no impacts to designated wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas.

- iv. Inventoried roadless area or potential wilderness areas.

Determination: No activities are planned to occur within inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas. There will be no impacts to inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas.

- v. Research natural areas.

Determination: No activities are planned to occur within research natural areas. There will be no impacts to research natural areas.

- vi. American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites.

Determination: Surveys were conducted for Native American religious or cultural sites. None were found. Approximately 2 acres were completely surveyed in the project site. No historic properties would be affected by the proposed habitat improvement project. Cultural resource clearance was recommended by the Forest Archeologist and approved by the Forest Supervisor on November 7, 2014.

- vii. Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas.

Determination: Surveys were conducted for archaeological sites and historic properties or areas that may be affected by this decision. Consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office was not required per programmatic agreement. A 'no properties affected – properties present' determination was made.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

For categorically excluded projects, the Forest Service offers public involvement opportunities for categorically excluded projects as provided for in its NEPA procedures found in 36 CFR 220.4(d) (SOPA) and 36 CFR 220.4(e) and 200.6(c) (scoping).

This proposed action was listed on a schedule of proposed actions (SOPA) on the Forest's public website in March 2014. A scoping letter was sent on May 7, 2014, initiating a 30-day scoping period. The DM will be posted on the SOPA after I have signed it.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA):

The process for this environmental analysis followed the regulations and direction outlined in 40 CFR Parts 1500-1508, Forest Service manual 1950, and Forest Service Handbook 1909.15. There was opportunity for public involvement during the course of the analysis, and the public comments received helped inform my decision. Therefore, I find this decision fully complies with NEPA.

National Forest Management Act (NFMA):

The proposed action was reviewed for consistency with the Coronado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan, 1986, as amended), as required by the National Forest Management Act. The project complies with Forest-wide standards and guidelines in the Forest Plan that recommend the provision of year-long wildlife waters in every section of Forest lands (Plan, page 35).

Endangered Species Act (ESA):

The Safford Ranger District Biologist determined that the project would have no effect on threatened or endangered species, designated critical habitat, or species or habitat proposed for Federal listing.

National Historic Preservation Act:

A Forest Archeologist prepared a Heritage Resource report for the Wildlife Water Improvements Projects – Galiuro Mountains to address the potential for the project to impact archaeological, historic and cultural resources, including Native American heritage resources in the area of potential effect. A determination of “no historical properties affected – properties present” was made.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW (APPEAL) OPPORTUNITIES

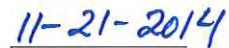
This decision is not appealable per 36 CFR 215.12(f).

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

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

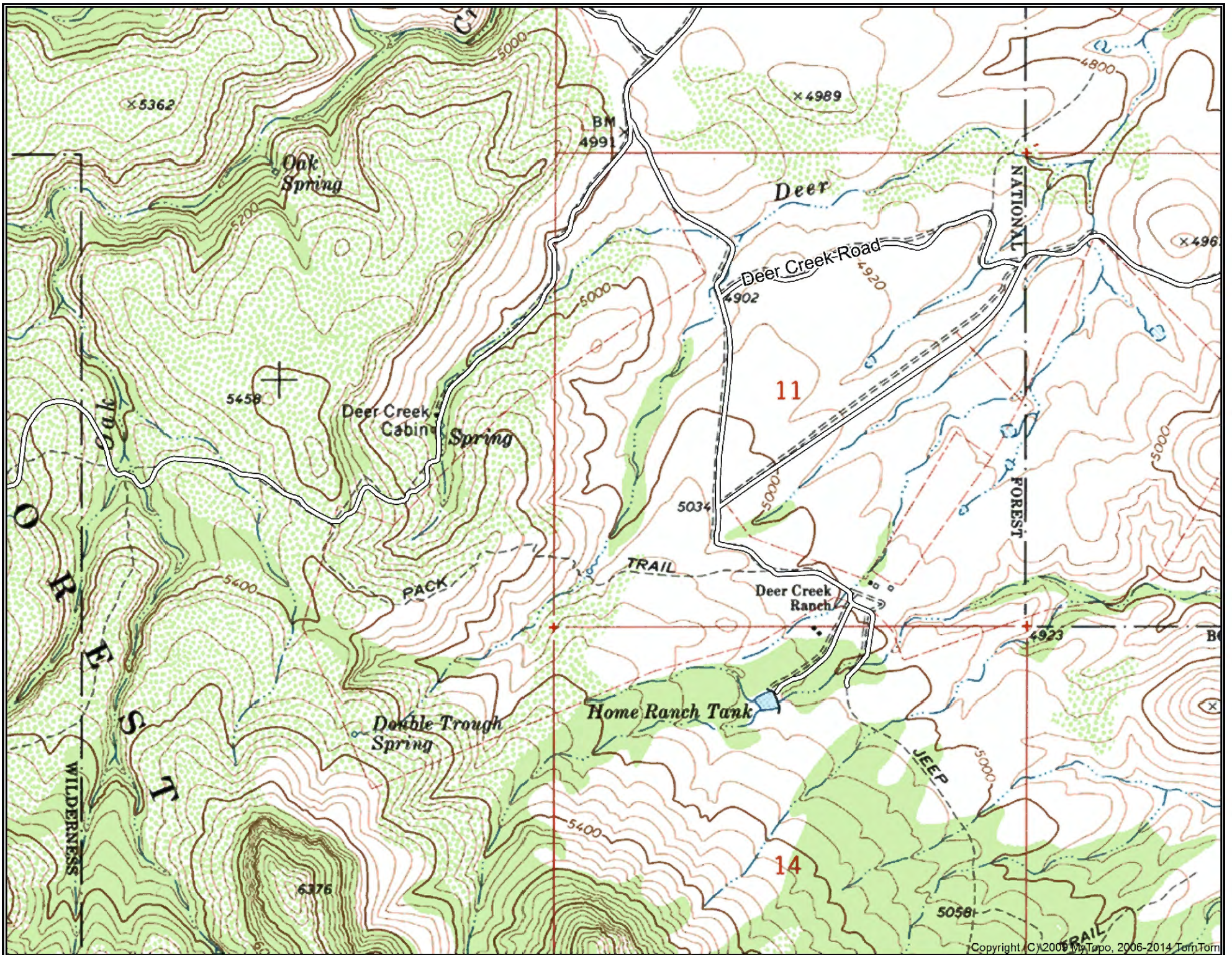
POINT OF CONTACT

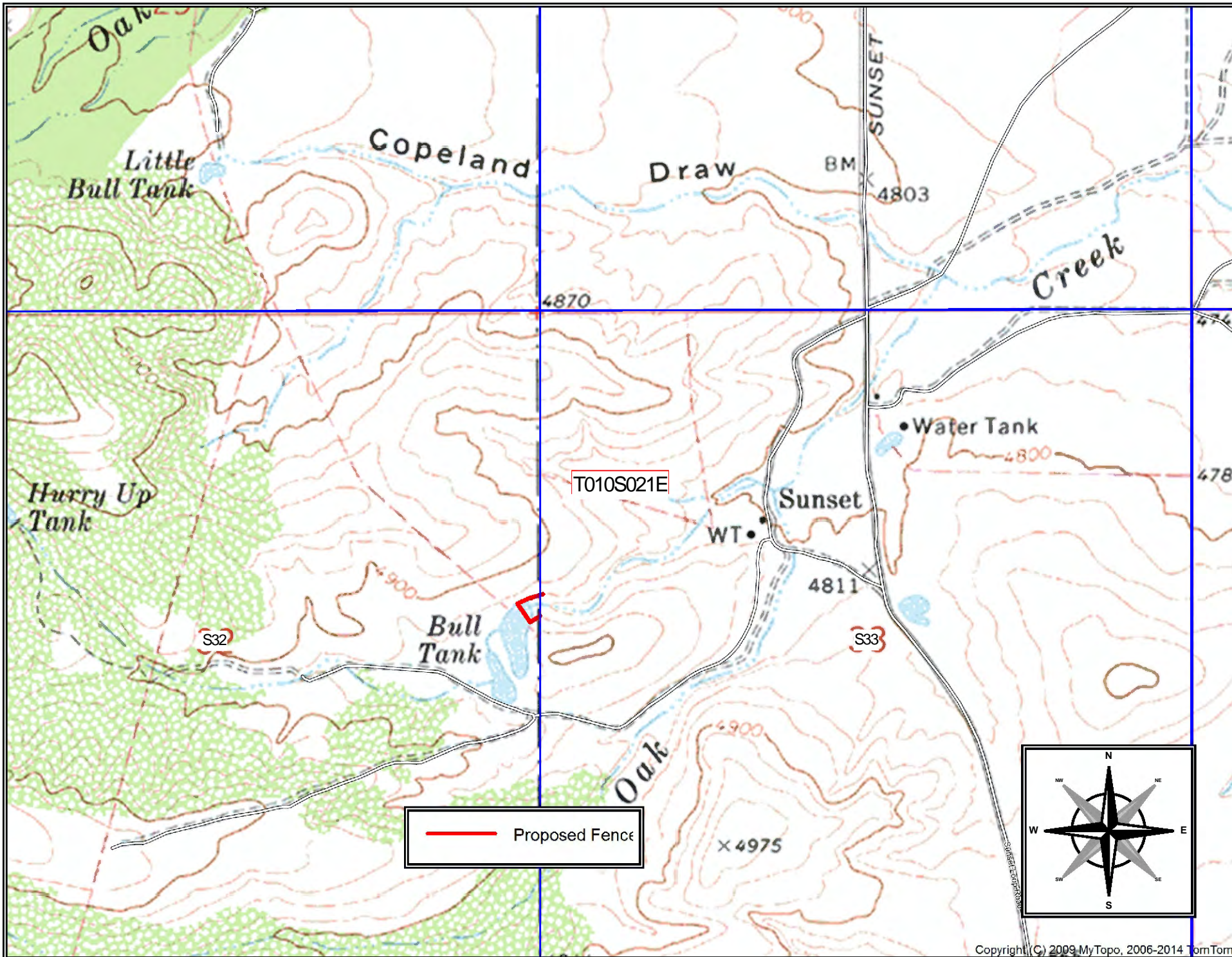
For additional information concerning this proposed action and decision, please contact Ms. Anne Casey, District Biologist, at the Safford Ranger District Office, 711 14th Ave., Suite D, Safford, Arizona; (928) 428-4150; and acasey@fs.fed.us.

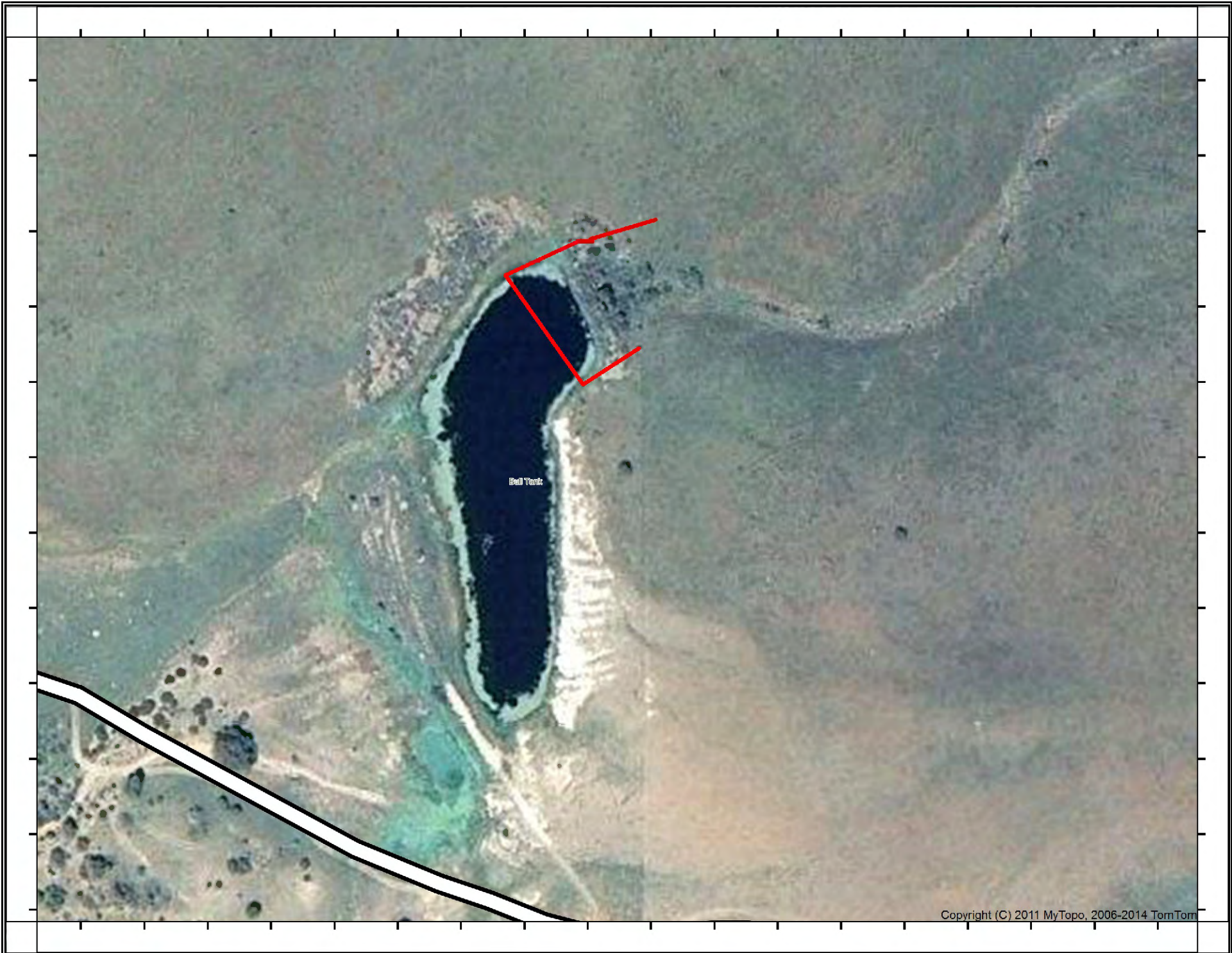


Kent C. Ellett
Safford District Ranger
Coronado National Forest

Date







Ball Tank