



## Decision Memo

### Grapevine and Sycamore Springs Pipelines Project

USDA Forest Service  
Tonto National Forest  
Payson Ranger District  
Gila County, Arizona

### Background

This project is within the Pine and Hog Canyon Grazing Allotments on the Payson Ranger District of the Tonto National Forest. Pine is located on the northwest of Payson, while Hog Canyon is south of town. 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 Arizona<sup>1</sup>. 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 installation of a spring-box at Sycamore spring and approximately 0.28 miles of high density polyethylene pipe, in a westerly direction, ending at a water trough. Along the

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

pipe's pathway a storage tank, trough, and pump will be installed. All new pipe and other features will be installed above ground by hand and all work on the spring-box will be accomplished with hand tools.

The location of the spring-box at Sycamore spring will be identified by the Tonto National Archeologist on site to ensure the preservation of the heritage sites in the area. In addition, I authorize the cleaning of an existing spring-box at Gilmore Spring. From Gilmore Spring, 1.7 miles of one inch polyethylene pipeline that will be laid above ground by hand, in a southerly direction, ending in a trough. Along this pipeline's pathway storage container, additional trough, and pump will be placed on the surface.

This decision includes the following design features for resource protection:

- To protect spring integrity, water should remain at the spring's source to support the water dependent resources at both Two Grapevine and Sycamore Springs.
- All troughs will be equipped with escape ramps and functioning floats to provide protection to wildlife.
- The trough and storage tank locations will be leveled before placement.
- Flag and avoid all heritage/cultural sites.
- Impacts from soil excavation should follow these mitigations:
  - Document new improvements for unforeseeable circumstances;
  - If moisture conditions are high, activity should be avoided in the area; and
  - Restoration of the soil surface should be to improve contour.

## 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 plant species habitat. According to the District Wildlife Biologist, the actions are not anticipated to have any significant effects on any of these species.
- b. **Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds-** According to the Tonto National Forest Hydrologist, this project will not affect perennial streams, springs, mapped floodplains, or mapped riparian areas. Water resources related permits will not be required.
- 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 Archeologist, known sites are within the area; however, following mitigations there is no effect.

## 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.

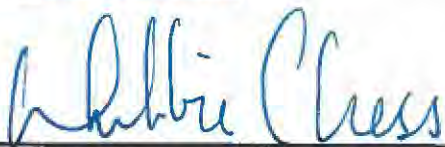
Implementation of this decision will not violate any Federal, State, or local laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

## 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: Kelly Bedson, Rangeland Management Specialist, Payson/Pleasant Valley Ranger Districts, 1009 E. Hwy 260, Payson AZ 85541 or email at [kellypbedson@fs.fed.us](mailto:kellypbedson@fs.fed.us).



6/8/2018

Debbie Cress  
Payson/Pleasant Valley District Ranger

Date

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