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# Decision Memo

## Oasis Pipeline Project

### USDA Forest Service

### Tonto National Forest

### Tonto Basin Ranger District

### Gila County, Arizona

## Background

This project is within the Hardt Creek Grazing Allotment on the Tonto Basin Ranger District of the Tonto National Forest. The project originates from an existing storage tank located south of Gisela Road and is within the North Ridge and South Ridge Pastures. 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 one and a quarter inch diameter high density polyethylene pipeline from the Long Ridge storage tank to the Holder Storage Tank. The pipeline will follow an existing fence and connecting tanks. From there a final pipeline will connect into a third, unnamed storage

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

tank. The pipeline will be installed above ground, by foot or horseback requiring no new roads or structures and minimizing effects to resources. Ultimately, the additional water features will serve three tanks and their associated troughs.

This decision includes the following design features for resource protection:

- All troughs will be equipped with escape ramps and functioning floats to provide protection to wildlife.
- Flag and avoid all heritage sites.
- Pipeline will be kept out of the channel.
- 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.
- All road crossings requiring any constructed materials or pipeline must be constructed following these guidelines:
  - Outside of road prisms or buried in appropriate measures to prevent damage to pipe(s) for traffic or maintenance
  - Passing thru existing culverts are not acceptable for lines, pipes, or water features
  - New pipelines alongside roads must be outside road prisms, beyond toe of fill or top of cut on both sides of the road, and remain out of ditches.
  - When pipeline crosses the road, it will be buried to 18 inches below the road surface and utility tape will be used 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 plant species habitat. According to the District Wildlife Biologist, the actions are not anticipated to have any significant effects on any 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 Forest Archeologist, there are known sites in the area. Following mitigations, there will be no effect to historic properties.

## 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: Eric Hoskins, Range Specialist, Tonto Basin Ranger District, 28079 N Hwy 188, Roosevelt, AZ 85545, 602-225-5332

  
Kelly L. Jardine  
Tonto Basin District Ranger

  
Date



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