



Decision Memo

Highway and Tower Pipelines Project

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

Background

The Highway and Tower Pipelines project on Globe Ranger District is located on the Chrysotile Grazing Allotment. Location information for all range improvements referenced can be found in the Project Geodatabase in the project record at the Tonto National 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 Chrysotile Allotment. These improvements will consist of two separate water haul locations, each with pipeline, storage tanks, and troughs.

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

The first project, Highway Pipeline, will consist of one 5000 gallon storage tank and four water troughs. Originating from a haul storage tank and trough on Old Hwy 60 (at 12S E540877 N3758320), the water line will travel two directions. One pipeline route will travel south along the Old Hwy 60 to a trough near Timber Camp well (at 12S E539854 N3727639). The second pipeline route will travel north along Forest Service Road 355 to an existing trough at Carol Corrals that has become unreliable due to poor spring flows. From the corrals, the northern pipeline route will continue along Forest Service Road 355 to a proposed trough (at 12S E543063 N3726993). It will continue on and end at another proposed trough (at 12S E542896 N3725962). All troughs are located adjacent to Forest Service Roads with clear access less than 200 feet.

The second project, Tower Pipeline, will consist of one 5000 gallon storage tank, two water troughs, and connecting pipeline. The storage tank will be placed off of Forest Road 215, with equipment. Originating from this haul storage tank off Forest Service Road 215, the pipeline will travel east toward Forest Road 2332 on an existing user-created route. Heading north toward Forest Service Road 2332, a new trough will be placed (at 12S E539807 N3725277). This pipeline will continue on and end at another new trough (at 12S E539863 N3725799). All pipeline will be placed above ground and strung across the ground using an ATV where Forest Roads exist. Where pipeline will be strung heading toward Forest Road 2332, ATV or horseback will be used.

This decision includes the following design features for resource protection:

- The troughs will be required to have a usable wildlife escape ramp and a functioning float.
- 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 (or subsoiled). 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, There is a single georeferenced occurrence of arid throne fleabane (*Erigeron arisolius*) mapped in close proximity to

proposed range improvements, but this occurrence is questionable (species identification) because it is located far from the main distribution (SE Arizona). If it is correct, the locality description should place the occurrence further north near Rock Point Arizona. As such, no impacts from this project are anticipated for this species. According to the District Wildlife Biologist, no listed wildlife species or their habitat occurs in the project area and will not be affected. The project may have negative effects on individual sensitive species but would not trend the population toward federal listing. Wildlife species may benefit from the range improvements. These projects are in the headwaters of Ash Creek, which is a wildlife corridor from nearby Tribal lands extending to the Upper Salt River. Water stressed animals are observed in this area during hot summer months prior to monsoon rains, and these developments may reduce water stress until animals reach the mines on Ash Creek or the river.

- b. Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds** – According to the Tonto National Forest Hydrologist, the water source is a water haul source. Two springs near the project, Carol Spring and Bee Spring, would not be affected. Perennial streams, mapped floodplains and riparian areas do not occur within the proposed project area. Minimal surface disturbance would occur. Water resource related permits would 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.
- 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.
- e. Research natural areas** – According to the District Recreation Staff, this project is not within any of these areas, thus there are no effects.
- 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.

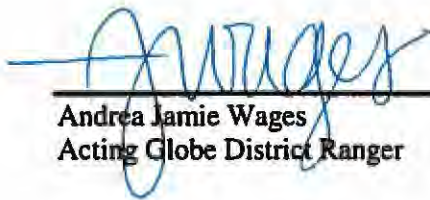


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This project is not subject to appeal. I anticipate implementing this project immediately or as soon as feasible.

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.



Andrea Jamie Wages
Acting Globe District Ranger

6/8/2018

Date

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