



## Decision Memo

### Hutch Springs Wildlife Water Improvement and Fencing Project

USDA Forest Service  
Tonto National Forest  
Cave Creek Ranger District  
Maricopa County, Arizona

### Background

The Hutch Springs Wildlife Water Improvement and Fencing project on the Cave Creek Ranger District, Tonto National Forest is located at Hutch Springs, near the Bloody Basin road, approximately 25 air miles north from Carefree. The legal location of the project is Township 10N, Range 4E, Section. Location information for all range improvements referenced can be found in the Project Geodatabase in the project record at the Supervisor's Office.

Hutch Springs is a series of natural springs and seeps along the east face of the Verde Rim below the Bloody Basin Road switchbacks within an active livestock grazing allotment. The springs provide water for local wildlife and, seasonally, for livestock. The middle springs, (the springs below the roadway), are surrounded by dense blackberry shrubs and riparian trees on the southern, western, and northern sides. There is substantial spring flow from the middle springs. Big game species such as deer, elk, black bear, mountain lions, and javelina, and small game species like quail, doves, rabbits, squirrels, and coyotes use the spring as a water source. Nongame birds, small mammals, amphibians, reptiles, and mollusks also use the spring as a water source and habitat.

There are existing concrete livestock drinkers and a spring water collection box along the ridge to the south of the spring complex. These drinkers have not been in use for many years, but are in good condition. No water is currently being piped to the existing drinkers due to breaks in the old pipe and reduced flows from the upper spring.

### Purpose and Need

The Tonto National Forest seeks to maintain and improve Hutch Springs as a functioning riparian habitat with consistent clean water for wildlife and livestock. There is also a need to prevent heavy trampling of the middle spring.

### Decision

To improve the springs as a wildlife water and protect it from heavy trampling and grazing by livestock, I have decided to authorize the installation of a pipe rail enclosure fence around the middle springs (the springheads and upper spring channels), a pipe rail drift fence as a perimeter barrier along the Bloody Basin Road upslope of the middle springs (from the bend in the road to the north to the bend in the road to the south), a water collection box or trough at the downslope (eastern) end of the spring enclosure fencing, and an above-ground water pipe to divert some of the spring flow to the existing drinkers to the ridge to the south. This configuration is shown in Figure 1. The drinkers will be used by both local

wildlife and livestock, reducing the trampling and grazing impacts to the middle springs habitat. The image below depicts the approximate locations of the fencing and pipeline. The project area covers a total of approximately 15 acres.

Additionally, the following design features will be implemented with this project:

- No heavy equipment will be needed for this work. Portable welding equipment with electrical extension cords will be used from truck-mounted and portable generators.
- Fencing post holes will be hand dug. No post holes will be left open while working on the fence to avoid wildlife injury or entrapment. The top fence rail will be no higher than 42 inches and bottom rail at least 16 inches to allow for wildlife access.
- The Arizona Game and Fish Department will be responsible for maintaining the enclosure fence and pipeline to Forest Service standards.
- The spring will be developed to ensure that water remains at the spring source to maintain current riparian habitat.



**Figure 1: Aerial image of Hutch Springs with approximation of where pipe rail fencing (in red) to be installed, and water pipes (in yellow) to be installed to support the existing drinkers on the ridge to the south.**

## 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 Handbook (FSH) that are excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement. This category is found in FSH 1909.15, section 32.2 (18) Restoring wetlands, streams, riparian areas or other water bodies. This category of action(s) is applicable because this project will both protect the spring and ensure the Forest Service is fully utilizing its water rights in this area.

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** – This project will be wholly beneficial for wildlife. Excluding the spring source from livestock use will benefit the Verde Rim spring snail and lowland leopard frogs. Spring development and piping water to trough(s) located outside of the enclosure will provide a reliable water source for wildlife. The spring will be developed to ensure that water remains at the spring source to maintain current riparian habitat.
- b. Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds** – This resource will not be affected. No further discussion is necessary.
- c. Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas** – This project is outside of any of these areas. No further discussion of this resource is necessary.
- d. Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas** – – This project is outside of any of these areas. No further discussion of this resource is necessary.
- e. Research natural areas** – This project is outside of any of these areas. No further discussion of this resource is necessary.
- f. American Indian religious or cultural sites; and archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas** –The project area was surveyed for cultural resources. Project activities will occur outside of the identified site. The forest archeologist has determined that this project will have no adverse effect on historic properties. (Inventory Standards and Accounting report number 2020-12-046)

## Public Involvement

This project was proposed by the Arizona Game and Fish Department (Department) in furtherance of the Department's Wildlife 20/20 Strategic Plan. Initial project coordination with the grazing allotment permittee and Tonto National Forest range staff was done on October 18, 2019. On November 15, 2019, a follow up site visit to Hutch Springs with the same participants was done and included the Cave Creek district ranger, the Department's Support Services Development Branch Project Coordinator, the Department's Region VI Sector Supervisor, and the Department's Terrestrial Wildlife branch chief. All participants verbally provided their support of this project during the site visit. The project was also reviewed by all relevant Forest Service resource specialists.

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## 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 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 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 including:

- Clean Water Act, as amended
- Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended
- American Antiquities Act of 1906 and Historic Preservation Act of 1966

## Implementation Date

This project is not subject to appeal. I anticipate implementing this project as soon as practicable.



## Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Matt Kilford, Zone Rangeland Management Specialist, (480) 595-3331 or [matthew.kilford@usda.gov](mailto:matthew.kilford@usda.gov).

Micah Grondin  
Cave Creek District Ranger

July 24, 2020

Date

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