



Decision Memo
Lochiel Well Water Improvement
U.S. Forest Service
Coronado National Forest
Sierra Vista Ranger District

Background

Rainfall has been historically inconsistent in the San Rafael Valley and throughout the Lochiel and neighboring allotments. After multiple years of drought, the lack of waters throughout the Lochiel allotment have led to a decrease in wildlife dispersal as well as challenges for the permittee with watering livestock. The Lochiel Allotment sits along the United States and Mexico border and relies almost solely on springs along with a well on a neighboring allotment for its water needs. For these reasons, it has been proposed that the Lochiel Well be drilled to provide a more permanent water source within the Lochiel Allotment. This well would fill the need for additional water availability on the allotment and would positively benefit many wildlife species, as well provide for better livestock distribution.

Decision

It is my decision to implement the Lochiel Well Water Improvement. A well would provide a consistent year-round water supply for wildlife and livestock. This project would include the drilling of a well in the southern portion of San Antonio Canyon, the installation of a storage tank, and in the future, the placement of pipe to provide water to troughs in both of the allotments pastures, East and West. The pipe would be laid out following an existing road - Forest Road 4736. The storage tank would supply multiple troughs with water year-round, regardless of whether or not livestock are present within the pasture. This project will be completed collaboratively with funding from the Natural Resources Conservation Service through their Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

Due to lack of rainfall the last two winters, many of the natural springs in the San Antonio Canyon area have dried up before the monsoon rains. This source of water would help the area's struggling mule deer population. The mule deer have retreated into the private lands of the San Rafael Valley which consistently has year round water. This water source would encourage mule deer herds to reestablish and thrive on public lands.

A permanent water source would also promote the expansion Gould's turkey into the drainages west of the Huachuca Mountains. The majority of the Gould's turkey population occurs within a small portion of the suitable habitat, preferring the wetter canyon bottoms. Having a consistent water source may encourage flocks of Gould's turkeys to permanently establish themselves in the drier canyons west of the Canelo Hills, and promote expansion across and into the San Rafael Valley.

This water source would also benefit Mearn's quail populations which have declined in recent years, presumably due to drought. Currently, the Coues whitetail densities represent the highest big game population in the area and would also benefit from this water source.

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or an environmental assessment (EA). The applicable category of actions is identified in agency procedures as 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. This category of action is applicable because the proposed action would improve wildlife habitat by providing additional, year-round water sources in this area of the San Rafael Valley.

I find that there are no extraordinary circumstances that would warrant further analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS. I took into account the following resource conditions identified in agency procedures that should be considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstances might exist:

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

The District Wildlife Biologist has determined that the proposed action would have no effect on the western yellow-billed cuckoo, jaguar and its critical habitat, and ocelot. Yellow-billed cuckoos may occur within the project area but because all actions that might disturb breeding cuckoos would occur outside the breeding season, this project would have no effect to breeding cuckoos. The project area does contain habitat that may be used by jaguars and ocelots; however, because the project activities would only occur during daylight hours, these secretive and primarily nocturnal species would not be affected by the noise or ground disturbance.

The proposed action may impact individuals of the Forest Service Sensitive Species; however, these impacts would not result in a trend toward federal listing or loss of species viability. Implementation of the proposed action would have no impact on Management Indicator Species or species covered under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds – The proposed project area does not fall within a municipal watershed. Portions of the project may fall within floodplains and wetlands, however, effects would be negligible so long as implementation adheres to Forest Service standards using best management practices.

Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, national recreation areas, research natural areas, or inventoried roadless areas – The proposed project is not located in a wilderness, wilderness study area, national recreation area, research natural area, or inventoried roadless areas, therefore there will be no impact to these areas.

American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites – There are no known extraordinary circumstances that may result in adverse effects on American Indian religious and cultural sites. Cultural resources clearance is recommended in Heritage Resources Report No. 2018-05-44.

Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas – No historic properties would be affected by the proposed action and cultural resources clearance is recommended in Heritage Resources Report No. 2018-05-44.

In addition to the above mentioned resources, this proposed action was reviewed by specialists in the fields of Lands/Special Uses, Minerals/Geology, Visual Quality, and the Forest National Environmental Policy Act Coordinator. These specialists contributed to the determination that the project is consistent with the Coronado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, as well as federal, state, and local laws and regulations.

Public Involvement

This action was originally listed as a proposal on the Coronado National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions in February 2019. Cooperators for this project include the United States Forest Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

This action is not subject to legal notice and opportunity to comment per 36 CFR 218.23(a).

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

National Forest Management Act - This decision is consistent with the 2018 Coronado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. The project was designed in conformance with land management plan direction for the Sierra Vista Ranger District, Huachuca Ecosystem Management Area, and forestwide management of Animals and Rare Plants, and Range Management.

Endangered Species Act - The District Wildlife Biologist has determined that the proposed action would have no effect on the western yellow-billed cuckoo, jaguar and its critical habitat, and ocelot. Yellow-billed cuckoos may occur within the project area but because all actions that might disturb breeding cuckoos would occur outside the breeding season, this project would have no effect to breeding cuckoos. The project area does contain habitat that may be used by jaguars and ocelots; however, because the project activities would only occur during daylight hours, these secretive and primarily nocturnal species would not be affected by the noise or ground disturbance.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) - The Forest Archaeologist has determined that no historic properties would be affected by the proposed action and that consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office is not required.

Administrative Review or Objection Opportunities

This decision is not subject to an administrative review or objections pursuant to 36 CFR 218.20.

Implementation Date

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

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Steve Bluemer, District Range and Watershed Staff Officer, Sierra Vista Ranger District, 4070 S. Avenida Saracino, Hereford, AZ 85615; (520) 803-2831.


CELESTE KINSEY
District Ranger


Date

Attachments:

- 1 – Map of project area.
- 2 – Archaeological inventory and clearance.

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Map of Proposed Lochiel Well Project

