



Decision Memo

Duncan Well and 80 Tank Dip Site Creation

USDA Forest Service

Coronado National Forest, Sierra Vista Ranger District

Cochise County, Arizona

Background

The Huachuca Mountain range lacks dependable water sources to aid fire-suppression activities, specifically, relatively large bodies of open water that can be utilized by a wider variety of helicopter sizes for water delivery during fire suppression activities. While there are some water sources in the vicinity of the mountain range, they are not dispersed evenly so that aircraft can cover the entire range efficiently.

While increasing our capacity to respond to wildfires, this project will also aid in recovery efforts to Threatened and Endangered species and dozens of other wildlife species. Suppression response can be managed to accommodate both uses of this precious resource by including water storage tanks next to the pond. That way, if a wildfire does occur and these sites are utilized during suppression activities, the water removed can be quickly replaced so that both the dip site and the wildlife habitat will not be compromised. Of course, this will not eliminate the potential negative effects to wildlife and Threatened and Endangered species, but it will reduce the negative effects to tolerable levels. Because this project will have such broad and potentially profound effects, this is a unique opportunity to create a truly integrated restoration project that will benefit the entire mountain range, the surrounding community, important wildlife habitat, and multiple program areas.

Decision

I have decided to renovate Duncan Well and 80 Tank to create a permanent water source to aid in fire suppression and benefit wildlife species. The renovation of both stockponds requires the installation of a liner and geo-textile fabric. Installation techniques will be identical at both locations and will follow guidelines produced by the Center for Wetlands and Stream Restoration (Biebighauser 2011). Installation is scheduled to occur in February 2021.

The installation of the liner will be completely within the existing footprint of the existing stockpond (Figure 1). To install the liner, a trackhoe (200-series) will shape the basin and prepare the bed for the new liner. During the shaping, some vegetation may be removed. Some of the woody vegetation, including small trees (< 3 in dbh), limbs, and shrubs may be removed to allow for the heavy equipment access and operation.

After the basin is prepared, the liner will be installed in three layers. First, a protective layer of eight ounce geo-textile fabric will be laid in the re-contoured basin. Next, a 30 millimeter fish-safe polyvinyl chloride (PVC) liner will be placed on top of the geo-textile fabric. Finally, another protective layer of geo-textile fabric will be placed on the top of the PVC liner. All layers will be positioned by hand and all objects that may penetrate the liner (rocks, sticks, etc.) will be

removed prior to placement. The three layers will then be pinned to the ground by 12 inch galvanized stakes, 18 inches apart, so that the liner does not rise or bubble up to the surface over time. Once the layers are pinned, the excavator will spread six to eight inches of soil and gravel over the layers for added protection and to provide a substrate for aquatic life that will return to the pond. After installation, a livestock exclusion fence will be installed (Figure 1).

Water storage tanks will be installed within the project area and near both finished ponds. The water storage tanks at 80 Tank will be connected to a pipeline from 80 Well or from D'albini Well, depending on their status. The storage tanks at Duncan Well will be connected by a pipeline from D'albini Well. At both sites, troughs will be installed outside the exclusion fence to provide alternate water to livestock.

The total acreage of surface disturbance for the installation of the pond liner, storage tanks, exclusion fence, and troughs at both sites will be less than 2 cumulative acres. All disturbed areas within the project area may be planted with native plants, if needed.

Not including some minor prep work of both sites, the renovation should take approximately one week.

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 "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," specified in 36 CFR 220.6(e)(6). This category of action(s) is applicable because it will improve the quality and overall integrity of the Threatened and Endangered species habitat in the area.

I find that there are no extraordinary circumstances that would warrant further analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS. I took into account 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:
 - Because there are no federally listed species that currently occur at the site, the District Biologist has determined that the project will have No Effect to listed species or designated critical habitat. No negative impacts to Forest Service Sensitive Species, Management Indicator Species, or species included within the Migratory Bird Treaty Act are expected.
- Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds:
 - The proposed pond renovation is not predicted to have adverse impacts on municipal water supplies, floodplains or wetlands, because none of these occur within the project area.
- Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, national recreation areas, inventoried roadless areas, potential wilderness areas, or research natural areas:

- The proposed project area is not located in a wilderness, wilderness study area, national recreation area, research natural area, or inventoried roadless area; therefore, the proposed pond renovation would have no effect on these resources.
- American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites; and,
- Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas:
 - The area of potential effects associated with the Duncan and 80 Wells Renovation project is reviewed in Heritage Resources Report No. 2020-05-078. No archaeological or historical sites have been identified in the area. The entire area was surveyed in May 2020 and supported the determination that no historic properties would be affected by the proposed action. Much of the area has been previously disturbed, and there appears to be minimal potential for encountering buried deposits. Given these continued negative findings and provided that project activities are limited to the surveyed areas, no historic properties would be affected by the proposed renovations of the Duncan and 80 Wells. Furthermore, there are no extraordinary circumstances that may result in adverse effects on American Indian religious and cultural sites. Therefore, no additional National Historic Preservation Act review and consultation is required for this project. In the event that any cultural resources are discovered during the course of project implementation, all activities shall cease in the immediate area and the Forest Archaeologist or another appropriate cultural resources specialist shall promptly evaluate the discovery and consult, as necessary, prior to resuming project activities.
- In addition to the above-mentioned resources, this proposed action was reviewed and determined that it is consistent with the Forest Plan and Federal, state and local laws and the Forest NEPA Coordinator.

Public Involvement

This action was originally listed as a proposal on the Coronado National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions in December 2020 and updated periodically during the analysis.

Throughout the development of the proposed action, this project has been shared with a variety of affected agencies, organizations, and the public, including the Appleton-Whittell Research Ranch of the Audubon Society, Fort Huachuca Department of Natural Resources, Arizona Game and Fish Department, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

This decision is consistent with the 2018 Coronado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. The project was designed in conformance with the forest wide management direction for Animals and Rare Plants, and the Huachuca Ecosystem Management Area.



Endangered Species Act

The District Biologist has determined that the project will have no effect to any federally listed species and their designated critical habitat.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

The Forest Archaeologist has determined that no historic properties will be affected by the proposed action and that consultation with Native American tribes is not required (Heritage Resources Report No. 2020-05-078).

Administrative Review Opportunities

This decision is not subject to the pre-decisional administrative review process per **36 CFR § 218.23 - Proposed projects and activities not subject to legal notice and opportunity to comment.** *The legal notice and opportunity to comment procedures of this subpart do not apply to: (a) Any project or activity categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement.*

Implementation Date

Implementation of this project may take place immediately upon issuance of this decision. Installation is scheduled to occur in February 2021.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: John Kraft, District Biologist, at the Sierra Vista Ranger District Office, 4070 S. Avendia Saracino, Hereford, AZ 85615; (520)803-2827; and jpkraft@usda.gov.

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KINSEY**

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CELESTE KINSEY
Sierra Vista District Ranger

Date



Attachments:

1. Map of the project area.

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Attachments

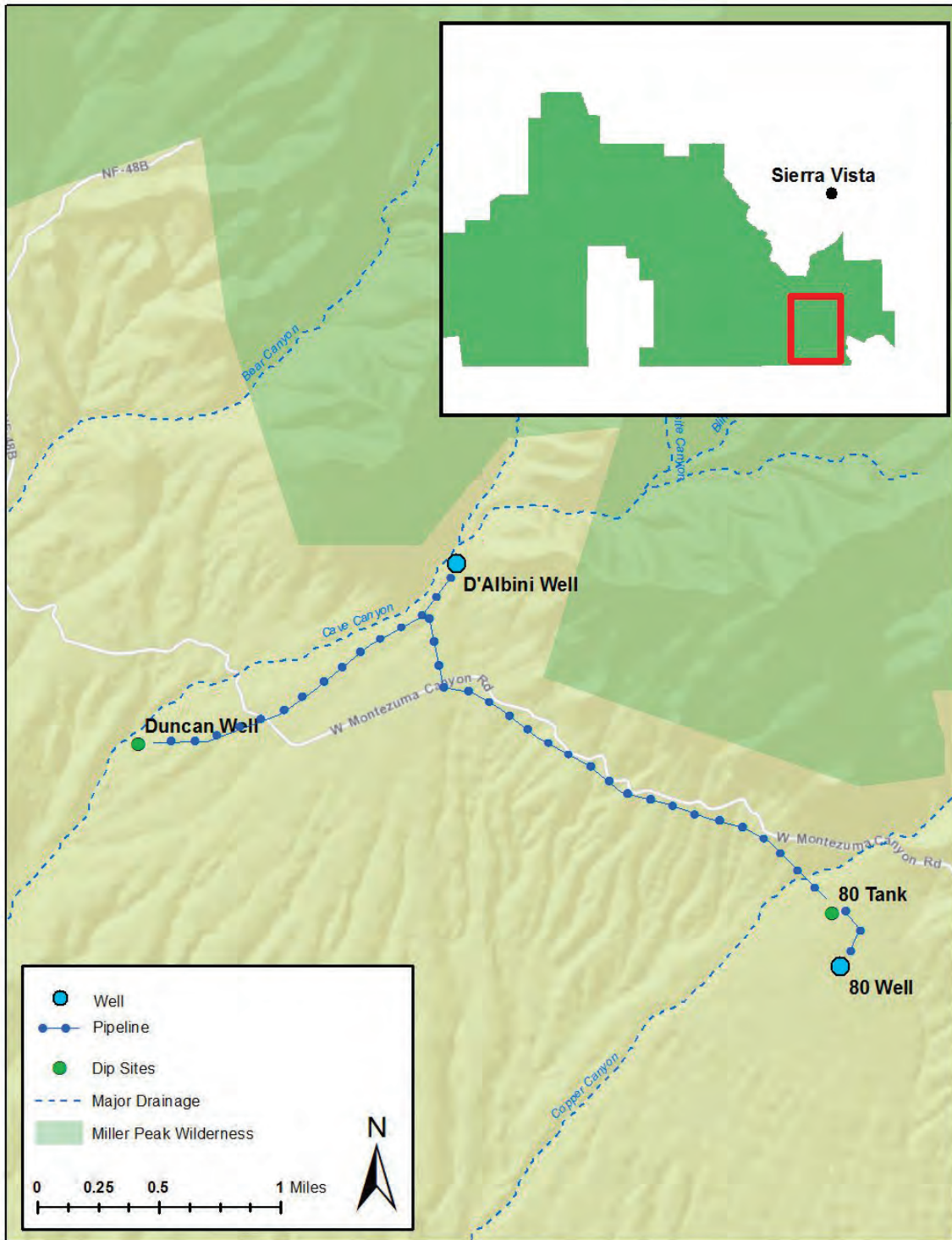


Figure 1. Location of the proposed Duncan Well and 80 Tank renovation. The installation of the liner will be completely within the existing footprint of the existing stockponds. Total surface disturbance within the project area will be less than 2 acres.