

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

**Background**

The Huachuca Mountain range lacks dependable water sources and rainfall has been historically inconsistent in this mountain range. The goal of the Lone Mountain Well Water Improvement project will be to provide alternate water sources for livestock in approximately 12 different pastures (17,500 acres), and help alleviate pressure on over 24.5 miles of major drainages and over 30 permanent and ephemeral waterbodies (mostly stockponds). Many of these areas are important habitats for six aquatic or riparian obligate Threatened and Endangered Species and their Critical Habitat.

The Lone Mountain Well project will take place on the Lone Mountain grazing allotment. The Lone Mountain Allotment covers over 50,000 acres on the Sierra Vista Ranger District. This allotment covers an expansive amount of the district across the Huachuca Mountain range and San Rafael Valley which includes habitat for many threatened and endangered species, Species of Greatest Conservation Need, and several Species of Economic and Recreational Importance such as Mearns's quail, Gould's turkey, white-tailed deer and mule deer. All these species would benefit from the additional water sources and any habitat improvements that may result from the Lone Mountain Well project.

Expanding the amount of permanent water on the landscape both improves the distribution of livestock across that landscape and reduces pressure on riparian and aquatic ecosystems, giving the Forest increased flexibility to manage these important habitat types. This project will help the Forest, and our partners, address populations of aquatic invasive species and expand populations of native species, thereby improving the resiliency of these ecosystems. They also strengthen our relationship with our partners (Permittees, Arizona Game and Fish, Fish and Wildlife Service) and the community at large by working collaboratively and coming up with innovative solutions to problems.

This water infrastructure project will help alleviate livestock pressure on riparian communities and aquatic habitat in/near drainages that support populations of Chiricahua leopard frog (and Critical Habitat), Huachuca water umbel (and Critical Habitat), northern Mexican gartersnake (and proposed Critical Habitat), western yellow-billed cuckoo, jaguar (and Critical Habitat), ocelot, lesser long-nosed bat, and the Sonoran tiger salamander. This well will also help reduce the dependency of livestock on stock ponds. This will allow the Forest Service, and their partners, greater flexibility when addressing populations of nonnative aquatic species such as bullfrogs, crayfish, and spiny-rayed fishes.

## Decision

It is my decision to implement the drilling of a well and installation of a water storage tank located off of Forest Road 4755 in the Upper Joaquin Pasture of the Lone Mountain Allotment. The storage tank would supply multiple troughs with water year-round, even when livestock are not present within the affected pastures.

Once the well has been installed and its productivity has been assessed, future plans for the Lone Mountain Well water system include additional water distribution pipelines and troughs in close proximity to ephemeral stockponds to the south of the newly implemented well. Once locations for the additional water sources have been identified, biological and archaeological clearances will be conducted.

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. Consultation was completed in conjunction with the Double Tanks Rx Project 2020-05-13. Cultural resources clearance is recommended in Heritage Resources Report No. 2020-05-043.

*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. 2020-05-043.

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 December 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.

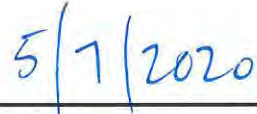
**Contact**

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.



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CELESTE KINSEY  
District Ranger



Date

Attachments:

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



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### Map of Proposed Lone Mountain Well Project

