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

**Background**

Rainfall has been historically inconsistent in the Huachuca Mountain range and throughout the Lone Mountain and neighboring allotments. After multiple years of drought, the lack of waters throughout the Lone Mountain allotment, including Dove Canyon, have led to a decrease in wildlife dispersal as well as challenges for the permittee with watering livestock. For these reasons, it has been proposed that the Paloma Well be drilled to supplement natural springs, dirt tanks, and a non-functional United States Forest Service water catchment within the project area. This well would fill the need for additional water availability in the Huachuca Mountain Range near the Lone Mountain allotment and would positively benefit many wildlife species, as well provide for better livestock distribution.

**Decision**

It is my decision to implement the Paloma Well Water Improvement Project. A well would provide a consistent year-round water supply for wildlife and livestock. This project would include the drilling of a well on Jones Mesa and the burial of approximately one mile of high-density polyethylene (HDPE) water pipe to the existing Paloma Trick Tank. The pipe would be buried in an existing road bed of Forest Road 4736. The 10,000 gallon storage tank at Paloma Trick Tank would be repaired and would supply a water trough year-round, regardless of whether or not livestock are present within the pasture.

Due to lack of rainfall the last two winters, many of the dirt tanks and natural springs in the Dove Canyon area have dried up before the monsoon rains. This source of water would help the area's struggling mule deer population. On a recent aerial survey, no mule deer were surveyed in this area, even though the habitat supported mule deer in the past and is suitable mule deer habitat. 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. The well would also be utilized to pipe water into other locations in the area to feed wildlife drinkers making this a multi-phase project.

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)(5). 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 Huachuca Mountains.

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 –***

The proposed action would have no effect on the western yellow-billed cuckoo, jaguar and its critical habitat, ocelot, and lesser long-nosed bat. 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 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 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 is done according to Forest Service standards using best management practices.

***Vegetation resources –*** The proposed action is not anticipated to negatively impact the vegetation resources within the project area. The project consists of oak woodlands and desert grasslands of the Huachuca Mountains. The vegetation consists mainly of emory oak, juniper sp., Mearns' Sumac, and a variety of native perennial grasses. The area is comprised of native grass species and Lehmann Lovegrass is present in small amounts.

***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.

*American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites* – There are no known extraordinary circumstances that may result in adverse effect on American Indian religious and cultural sites. Cultural resources clearance is recommended in Heritage Resources Report No. 2017-05-042.

*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. 2017-05-042.

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 regulations by specialists in the fields of Lands/Special Uses, Minerals/Geology, Visual Quality, 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 2014.

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

Cooperators for this project include the United States Forest Service, Arizona Game and Fish Department, and the National Wild Turkey Federation - Huachuca Gould's Chapter.

### **Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations**

National Forest Management Act - This decision is consistent with the Coronado National Forest Land Management Plan. As required by the National Forest Management Act, the proposed action was reviewed for consistency with the Coronado's Forest Plan (1986, as amended). Management direction for the project area (Management Area 4) is to maintain and improve current habitat for federally listed plant and animal species and work toward delisting (p. 62; U.S. Forest Service 1986).

Endangered Species Act - The District Biologist has determined that the proposed action would have no effect on the western yellow-billed cuckoo, jaguar and its critical habitat, ocelot, and lesser long-nosed bat. 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 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 Officer and Native American Tribes is not required.

### Administrative Review or Objection Opportunities

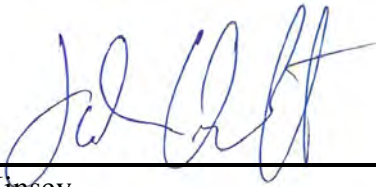
This decision is not subject to objections pursuant to 36 CFR 218.20.

### 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, Sierra Vista Ranger District, 4070 S. Avenida Saracino, Hereford, AZ 85615; (520) 803-2831.



09/08/2017

Acting for: Celeste Kinsey  
Sierra Vista District Ranger

Date

### Attachments:

- 1 – Map of project area.
- 2 – Archaeological inventory and clearance.
- 3 – Biological assessment and evaluation.

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# Map of Proposed Paloma Well and Pipeline Project

