



Decision Memo

Pinto Creek: Registered Pipeline

USDA Forest Service; Tonto National Forest;
Globe Ranger District; Gila, Arizona

Project Background

The Pinto Creek Allotment¹ permittee is authorized to graze in a rotation system, allowing for a growing season of rest in pastures (map in Appendix A). However, water sources are not currently adequate or available where they are needed to fully implement this grazing strategy. In recent years, seasonal springs have dried up, causing uneven grazing patterns. Specifically, in Registered and JK pastures, only seasonal springs are available for livestock. Livestock also push through existing pasture fencing with Pinto Creek Riparian (PCR) pasture to access water in riparian areas including Pinto Creek. This does not allow for livestock to disperse away from available water, across the rest of the pasture where forage is available. This causes high grazing impacts where livestock congregate.

Project Purpose

Pinto Creek Allotment needs to return to a rotational grazing system and utilize areas of the pastures where forage is available and water sources are unreliable to continue to achieve conservative utilization of forage. This project proposes to authorize the addition of water infrastructure (improvements) in Registered and JK pastures to achieve these resource goals.

Decision

I have decided to authorize an above ground poly pipeline (Registered Pipeline) from an existing private land Storage Tank sourced off an existing well on private land. This pipeline would run above ground on the west side of Forest Service Road 287. A storage tank (up to 2,000 gallons) and trough (up to 400 gallons) would be placed in the middle of Registered pasture. Just past the JK pasture fence, a new trough (up to 400 gallons) will be placed. The storage tank and trough location may need to have minimal vegetation cleared with equipment to place the improvements. This improvement is accessible by Forest Service Road 287 and no temporary routes will be necessary. Total proposed water capacity is 2,800 gallons. Once the water development is installed, it will become a maintenance responsibility of the term grazing permit holder.

¹ The project is located off Forest Service Road 287, approximately 13 air miles south from Globe, Arizona. The legal location of the project is Township 2 South, Range 14 East, Section 15.

This project would comply with Best Management Practices and the following design features to minimize or eliminate effects to other resources:

Pipelines

- Diameter of pipe should be large enough to carry the flow of the water development but not less than one inch, preferably one and one quarter inch.
- Inlet and outlet pipe are protected by anchoring to trough with a single post next to the vertical pipe and a brace or pole supporting the horizontal pipe. Inlet and outlet pipeline will be buried as much as possible for their protection.
- All above ground pipeline supported structures will be maintained to keep pipe at gradient and prevent sagging.
- Pipelines with air and drain valves will be covered with fine screen to prevent rodents and dirt from entering pipeline. Screens must be replaced as needed.

Troughs and Storage Tanks

- Troughs will be kept at heights that make them useable to livestock and trough bottom kept clear of ground when possible. Troughs which become elevated or uneven from trampling or erosion is periodically backfilled to maintain a useable height, authorization may be needed.
- All water developments that have open tops (i.e., troughs, open top storage tanks) must have escape and access ramps. All escape ramps will be built of expanded metal or similar materials and extend to bottom of trough and sides. Ramp will be firmly secured to trough rim so it will not be knocked loose by animals. Access ramps will be constructed of durable material such as concrete or metal. Slope will not exceed 45 degrees. Further design specifications may be required from “Water for Wildlife” by Taylor and Tuttle 2007.
- Poles, posts, and trough framing materials used in water development construction will be maintained, repaired, or replaced as needed. Materials must not be taller than the trough and wires should not be placed over trough to allow for watering avian species.

Threatened and Endangered Species

- Prior to installation of Registered Pipeline, the permittee will ensure PCR pasture fence is maintained and functional.

Reasons for Categorically Excluding the Proposed Actions

My assessment is that this proposal falls within the actions listed in 36 CFR 220.6 - *Categorical exclusions* that are excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement. This category is found in 36 CFR 220.6(e)(9). This category of action(s) is applicable because an allotment management plan is not in place and adjustments to the term grazing permit are necessary until further allotment level analysis is completed. 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** – A biological evaluation was completed in March 2021 and updated in August 2022. This evaluation found that if the project is implemented as directed in this decision, there will be no impact to species that would preclude the use of a categorical exclusion.
- b. **Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds** – The trough locations are within 300 feet of a stream. However, if the project is implemented as directed in this decision, there will be no impact to these resources that would preclude the use of a categorical exclusion.
- c. **Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas** – None of these areas occur within or adjacent to the project area. No further discussion of this resource is necessary.
- d. **Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas** – None of these areas occur within or adjacent to the project area. No further discussion of this resource is necessary.
- e. **Research natural areas** – None of these areas occur within or adjacent to the project area. No further discussion of this resource is necessary.
- f. **American Indian religious or cultural sites; and archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas** – A survey for these resources was completed in September 2022, and no sites were observed. If the mitigations and design features are implemented as directed in this decision, there is no impact to cultural resources that would preclude the use of a categorical exclusion.

Public Involvement

On August 12, 2022, a scoping letter was mailed out to 17 individuals and organizations outlining the proposed action. Three letters were received. Commenters were concerned about general allotment management and permitted use of the allotment which is outside of the scope of this project. This project will facilitate the grazing strategy currently authorized in the existing decision. The allotment is managed by conservative grazing standards of 30 to 40 percent utilization throughout a seven-pasture rotation. JK and Registered pastures originally had cattle watering in Pinto Creek, but the construction of PCR pasture fence prevent cattle from reaching the creek. Cattle were not able to adequately graze JK and Registered because they would trail back to the headquarters to water, which was the only water source, or push the PCR pasture fence and try to access Pinto Creek. This decision will make other water available in these pastures which will allow these pastures to be used independently as prescribed in the current grazing authorization.

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* 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 provides planning components that this decision complies with, including standards and guidelines.



Implementation Date

This project is not subject to administrative review and can be implemented immediately as detailed in this decision.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Ryan Summers, Rangeland Management Specialist, Globe Ranger District, 7680 South Sixshooter Canyon Road, 928-242-6125 or ryan.summers@usda.gov.

Adam Bromley

Globe District Ranger

03/30/2023

Date

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Appendix A

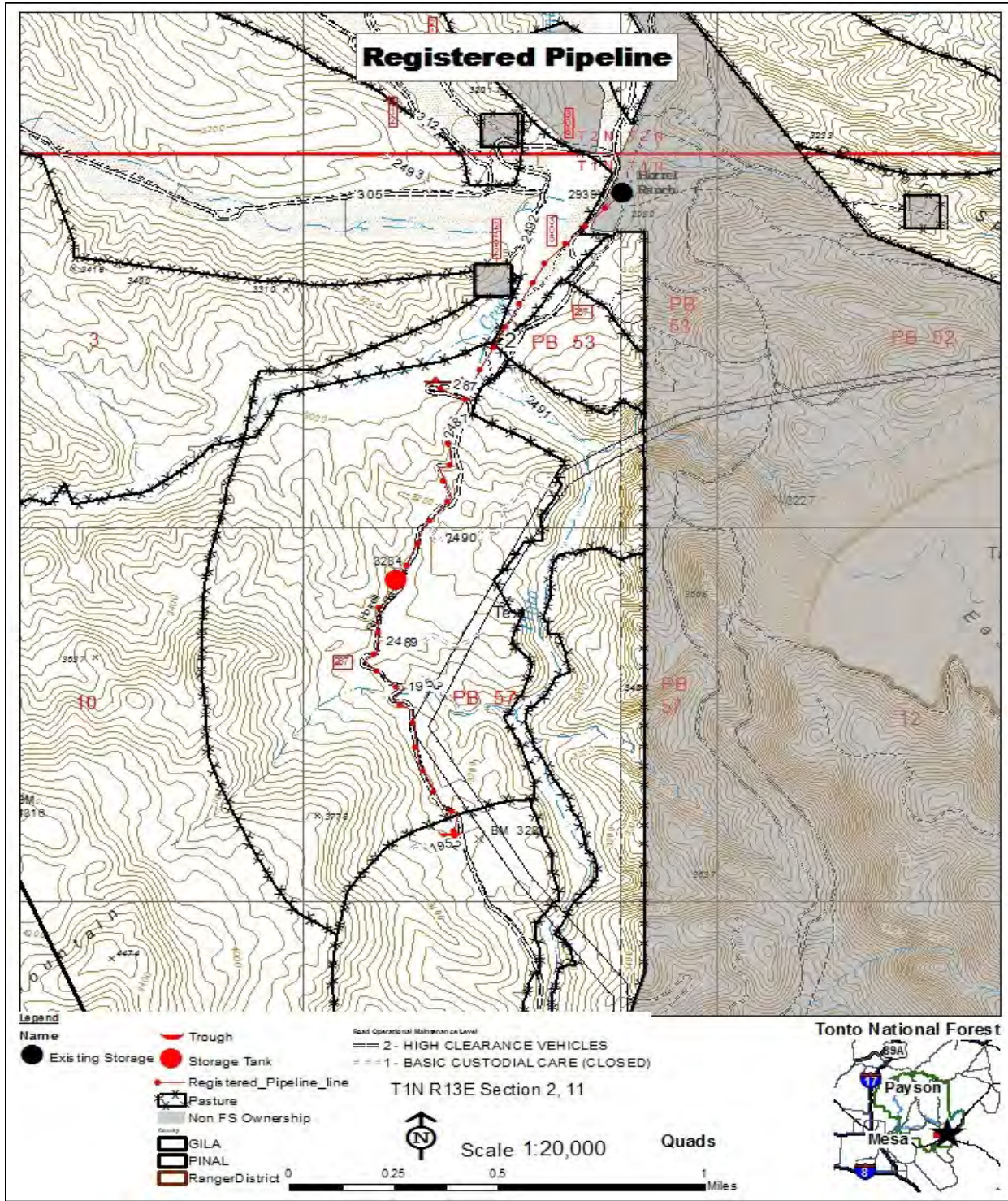


Figure 1: Project Map Showing the Locations of Pipeline and Troughs