



DECISION MEMO
POTATO BUTTE 2011 JUNIPER TREATMENT
U.S. FOREST SERVICE
TONTO NATIONAL FOREST
PLEASANT VALLEY RANGER DISTRICT
GILA COUNTY, ARIZONA

BACKGROUND

Project location #1: North Pasture

T 9 N, R 13 E, Corner of Sections 21, 22, 27 & 28
(5400 ft. – 5800 ft. elevation)

Project area encompasses about 575 acres east of Diamond Butte, north of Potato Butte and west of Walnut Creek. Project area is in the headwaters of a tributary Walnut Creek. The area is on a very gentle easterly slope in Semi Desert Grasslands, invaded by alligator juniper seedlings.

Project location #2: South Pasture

T 9 N, R 13 E, Corner of Sections 33 & 34
(5100 ft. – 5230 ft. elevation)

Project area encompasses about 355 acres west of Potato Butte, south of Little Walnut Tank and north of Bryant Canyon Tank. Project area is in the headwaters of a tributary Walnut Creek. The area is on a very gentle westerly slope in Semi Desert Grasslands, invaded by alligator juniper seedlings.

The project areas are within Management Area 5G identified in the Tonto Forest Plan (USDA, 1985, as amended). Management emphasis for this area is to manage for a variety of renewable natural resources with primary emphasis on wildlife habitat, livestock forage and dispersed recreation. Watersheds are managed to meet satisfactory condition.

Pleasant Valley Ranger District proposes to shear off juniper seedlings using a skid steer with rubber tires or tracks and a hydraulic shear attachment. The juniper seedlings are encroaching into approximately 930 acres of semi-desert grasslands on the Potato Butte Allotment.

There would be no ground disturbing activities outside of the above-described project area. A 100 percent archeology survey would be completed prior to any equipment operations approaching or within the project area.

The Potato Butte Juniper Treatment would reduce juniper encroachment into semi-desert grasslands and bring the project areas into compliance with Forest Plan direction of forty juniper trees per forty acre parcel. Reducing juniper would result in an increase in native grass species diversity as well as forage production. Reducing juniper would result in a decrease in percent bare ground. Reducing the encroaching juniper would create a mosaic of grasslands within the

surrounding Ponderosa pine and Madrean evergreen oak woodlands, enhancing structural wildlife habitat diversity. Increasing ground cover will result in a decrease in sediment loading into Walnut Creek watershed.

DECISION

I have decided to implement sheering of juniper trees which are encroaching into approximately 355 acres of semi-desert grasslands on the Potato Butte Allotment. A minimum of forty trees for every forty acres will be retained as per Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines and no greater than 8" DBH in size.

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 Section 339 of the 2005 Consolidated Appropriations Act. This category of action(s) is applicable because 1) The project is within Category 1909.15.31.2 (9) that includes "Implementation or modification of minor management practices to improve allotment condition or animal distribution when an Allotment Management Plan is not yet in place". The current Allotment Management Plan for the Marsh Creek allotment was approved on 06/11/1984. This AMP is no longer valid, and the revision process is underway to update the AMP so that it is compliant with current laws, regulations, and policies. The project is also within Category 1909.15.31.2(6) that includes "Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction (Service Level D, FSH 7709.56)."

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 – A site specific Biological Assessment and Evaluation was completed and approved on 6/8/2011. There are no significant effects to listed, proposed, or Forest Service sensitive species.
- Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds – There are no effects on flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds.
- Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas – None of the described juniper treatment occurs within such designated areas
- Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas – The proposed juniper treatment does not occur within an inventoried roadless area.
- Research natural areas – The proposed juniper treatment does not occur within a research natural area.
- American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites – See "Archaeological

sites, or historic properties or areas" below.

Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas – A 100% archaeological survey will be completed prior to implementation. Treatment of juniper will not occur within any documented archaeological or historic sites.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

This action was originally listed as a proposal on the Tonto National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions and updated periodically during the analysis. Internal coordination for the projects occurred with the following Forest Service personnel: Denise Ryan, Zone Archeologist; Julia Camp, District Wildlife Biologist; Jeremy Human, District Fuels Specialist, Norm Ambros, Forest Soil Scientist; Lynette Mason, Forest Hydrologist, and David Frew, District Recreation Specialist. Term Grazing Permit Holders on neighboring allotments were advised verbally and via e-mail on 03/26/2011.

No significant issues were raised as a result of the scoping.

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 forest plan objectives and complies with all applicable laws and regulations, some of which are summarized below:

- Forest Plan Consistency (National Forest Management Act) – This project is consistent with the management direction of the Tonto National Forest Land Management Plan, as amended, for Management Area 5G.
- Management Indicator Species – Management Indicator Species (MIS) Analyses were completed for this project and approved on 6/8/2011. No significant impacts to these species are anticipated.
- Migratory Bird Treaty Act – In compliance with this Act, the Wildlife Biologist has considered effects to migratory bird species, and has determined that project actions will have no adverse effects on these species. The District Wildlife Biologist completed the Migratory Bird Analyses on 6/8/2011.
- Clean Water Act – Best Management Practices will be followed during project implementation to ensure protection of soil and water resources, in compliance with this Act.
- National Environmental Policy Act – This Act requires public involvement and consideration of potential environmental effects. The entirety of documentation for this decision supports compliance with this Act.
- Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960; Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974; Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, particularly authorization of livestock grazing permits for a ten-year period required Sec. 402 (a)&(b)



(3) and 36 CFR 222.3; and National Forest Management Act of 1976; all exhibiting congressional intent to allow grazing on suitable lands.

- Forest Service policy on rangeland management (FSM 2202.1, FSM 2203.1).
- Federal Regulation [36 CFR 222.2 (c)], which states that National Forest System lands will be allocated for livestock grazing and these allotment management plans will be prepared consistent with land management plans, and the Clean Water Act of 1948, Clean Air Act of 1955, Endangered Species Act of 1973, and 13186 (Conservation of Migratory Birds), and National Historic Preservation Act 1966, as amended.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW (APPEAL) OPPORTUNITIES

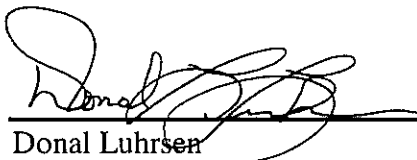
This decision is not subject to administrative appeal under 36 CFR 215.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

This project can be implemented immediately upon approval and completion of 100% archeological survey.

CONTACT

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Sean Brown, Range Specialist, of the Pleasant Valley Ranger District, PO Box 49, Young , AZ, 85554; (928) 462-4320



Donal Luhrsen
District Ranger

8/11/11
Date

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