



Decision Memo

Seasonal Water Haul Troughs Project

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

Background

The Ranger Station Seasonal Water Haul Troughs project on Globe Ranger District is located on the Ranger Station Grazing Allotment. Location information for all range improvements referenced can be found in the Project Geodatabase in the project record at the Tonto National Forest Supervisor's Office.

Purpose and Need

The Standardized Precipitation Index (SPI) is a widely used drought index that calculates precipitation anomalies at different timescales and interprets SPI units (standard deviations) in probabilistic (likelihood) terms. This index is the initial measure used in Southwestern Region Drought Policy for rangeland management, which states that any time the index "...falls to a negative one (-1) or less for the preceding 12-month period, grazing allotments should be evaluated for existing drought conditions" (Region 3 Manual Supplement to Forest Service Handbook 2209.13.19.1). In addition, the Tonto National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) directs grazing management when rangeland is in less than satisfactory condition. This can be achieved with the installation of structural and non-structural improvements to better distribute cattle, protect wildlife habitat, and in some instances providing wildlife with additional reliable water sources.

Currently, across the Tonto National Forest, the SPI is negative two (-2), and in some places even lower, according to research conducted by the University of Arizona¹. Because of these conditions, Forest Service regulations, and Forest Plan direction, allotment improvements are being authorized across the forest.

Decision

I have decided to authorize the following range improvements on the Ranger Station Allotment. This project consists of two water haul trough locations. The first is adjacent to Forest Service Road 977 (at 12S E 518274 N3688756). The second is adjacent to Forest Service Road 55 (at 12S E 519254 N3690909). One 400 gallon water trough will be placed at each of these locations and water will be hauled in to fill them by water truck on an as needed basis. Minor vegetation clearing at each site may be

¹ <https://uaclimateextension.shinyapps.io/SPItool/>



needed to ensure level troughs. Access to each site will be on existing Forest Service Roads using ATVs and truck and trailer.

This decision includes the following design features for resource protection:

- Troughs will be required to have a usable wildlife escape ramp and a functioning float.
- Prior to installation of improvements, surveys will be conducted for Hohokam agave, Tonto Basin agave, and Toumey groundsel. If individuals are found, they will be flagged and avoided.
- The southern part of the pasture lies within the area recently burned by the Pinal Fire. Areas of moderate and high burn severity occur within this portion of the burned area. Livestock should be kept out of these areas to allow for continued recovery of the burned area to protect both soil productivity and downstream life and property.
- Installation of improvements should be avoided when soil moisture conditions (soil saturation) are high.
- The proposed action would involve a small amount of soil excavation in order to install pipeline regarding the targeted areas for the project. If installation of improvements results in soil compaction in the immediate area of the improvements, compacted soil will be tilled (or subsoiled). Subsoiling operation should be as deep as compaction depth.
- If weed removal is part of the installation of the troughs, dispose of them off of the forest.

Reasons for Categorically Excluding the Proposed Actions

My assessment is that this proposal falls within the categories of actions listed in the Forest Service *National Environmental Policy Act* Regulations that are excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement. This category is *36 CFR 220.6(e)(9)* “Implementation or modification of minor management practices to improve allotment condition....”

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** – According to the Tonto National Forest Botanist, Toumey groundsel (*Packera neomexicana* var. *toumeyi*), Tonto Basin agave (*Agave delamateri*), and Hohokam agave (*Agave murpheyi*) are located in relatively close proximity (within a mile) to proposed range improvements. Therefore, populations may be present at proposed range improvement sites. However, due to the small footprint of this project within potential habitat, only minimal effects are anticipated. Additionally, surveys will occur to identify individuals within the project footprint. These individuals will be avoided further reducing any effects.

According to the District Wildlife Biologist, no listed wildlife species or their habitat occurs in the project area. Therefore no effects are anticipated. The project may have negative effects on individual sensitive species but would not trend the population toward federal listing. Sensitive bats may use livestock water troughs as foraging areas.

- b. Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds** – According to the Tonto National Forest Hydrologist, water source would be water hauled in from private land. Perennial streams and mapped riparian areas and floodplains do not occur within the pasture. Two springs are located within the pasture but neither is affected by the proposed action. The southern part of the pasture lies within the area recently burned by the Pinal Fire. Areas of moderate and high burn severity occur within this portion of the burned area. Livestock should be kept out of these areas to allow for continued recovery of the burned area to protect both soil productivity and downstream life and property. Water resource related state permits are not required for the proposed action.
- c. Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas** – According to the District Recreation Staff, this project is not within any of these areas, thus there are no effects are anticipated.
- d. Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas** – According to the District Recreation Staff, this project is not within any of these areas, thus there are no effects are anticipated.
- e. Research natural areas** – According to the District Recreation Staff, this project is not within any of these areas, thus there are no effects are anticipated.
- f. American Indian religious or cultural sites; and archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas** – According to the Tonto National Forest Archaeologist, the project is not within heritage sites nor will it impact any sites within the area.

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 (Public Law 104-33, as amended) requires the 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 discloses forestwide standards and guidelines and management area direction.

Implementation of this decision will not violate any Federal, State, or local laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

Implementation Date

This project is not subject to appeal. I anticipate implementing this project immediately or as soon as feasible.



Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Mike Eytchison, Rangeland Management Specialist, Globe and Mesa Ranger Districts, 7680 S Six-shooter Canyon Rd. Globe AZ, 85501, or email at meytchison@fs.fed.us.

Andrea Jamie Wages
Acting Globe District Ranger

6/18/2018

Date

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