



Decision Memo

Powerline Pipeline Extension Project

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

Background

This project is within the Roosevelt Grazing Allotment on the Tonto Basin Ranger District of the Tonto National Forest. It is located south Lake Roosevelt and south of State Route 88. 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 installation of a 0.92 Mile long, one and a quarter inch diameter, high density polyethylene pipe that will begin at an existing pipeline near Coyote Tank, run above ground following the powerline corridor to a 3,000 gallon storage tank placed at the end of Forest Service Road 3408. From this tank, the pipeline will be installed to a trough located in a clearing created by Salt River

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



Project just north of Forest Service Road 49. From this new trough, the pipeline will run to Forest Service Road 49, continuing along the side of the road until it intersects and is tied into an existing pipeline and trough. Only hand equipment and tools will be used in the installations and no new roads will be created for the movement of materials.

This decision includes the following design features for resource protection:

- To protect spring integrity, water should remain at the spring's source to support the water dependent resources at both Two Prong and Lion Spring.
- All troughs will be equipped with escape ramps and functioning floats to provide protection to wildlife.
- Pipeline will be laid above ground and just off of the old roadway to conceal it from casual observation.
- The trough and storage tank locations will be leveled before placement.
- Pipeline alongside roads must be outside road prism from Toe of Fill or Top of Cut on either side of the road.
- Any potential pipeline crossing the roads must not pass through existing culverts.
- Impacts from soil excavation should follow these mitigations:
 - Document new improvements for unforeseeable circumstances;
 - If moisture conditions are high, activity should be avoided in the area; and
 - Restoration of the soil surface should be to improve contour.

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, the range improvements are not within known listed plant species habitat. According to the District Wildlife Biologist, the actions are not anticipated to have any significant effects on any of these species.
- b. **Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds-** According to the Tonto National Forest Hydrologist, this project will not affect perennial streams, mapped floodplains, or mapped riparian areas. Water resources related permits will not be required.
- 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: Eric Hoskins, Range Specialist, Tonto Basin Ranger District, 28079 N Hwy 188, Roosevelt, AZ 85545, 602-225-5332


Kelly L. Jardine
Tonto Basin District Ranger


Date



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