



Decision Memo

83 Pit Exclosure Fence Project

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

Background

This project is within the Schoolhouse Grazing Allotment on the Tonto Basin Ranger District of the Tonto National Forest. It is located South of Roosevelt Lake and Highway 188, at the end of Forest Service road #75 just West of Forest Service Road 83. 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 barbed wire fence around the Forest Service Road 83 green waste pit. This area is a large material pit that, at times, collects water and is used as by the public to dump their green waste that the Forest then burns. While the dumping of toxic plants is not authorized, it has been known to happen and can lead to the death of the allotment's cattle. To address this, installation of the fence and a cattle guard across this road at the swing gate location will be authorized.

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



Per forest Service policy, the four strand barbed wire fence will have three strands barbed and the bottom wire smooth. Posts will be placed every 16 feet and the wire spaced to create a fence height of 42 inches.

This decision includes the following design features for resource protection:

- Installation of cattle guards must follow the following range programmatic contract action.
- This area will need future safety signs, including ~~“bicycle cross with caution”~~ and “cattle guard” installed.
- Flag and avoid all heritage sites.
- If soil disruption is present during the installation of fence posts do the following:
 - Mulch the soil of the disturbed area to prevent further degradation; and
 - Monitor soil disturbance sites after precipitation events to protect soils.

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. There is a population of Hohokam agave in the area, approximately a half a mile from proposed range improvements, but will not be effected if mitigations are followed.
- b. **Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds-** According to the Tonto National Forest Hydrologist, this project will not affect perennial streams, springs, 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 Archeologist, there are known sites in the area. Following mitigations, there will be no effect to historic properties.



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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