



Decision Memo

Shingle Mill Pipeline Extension

USDA Forest Service
Coronado National Forest
Safford Ranger District
Graham County, Arizona

Sections 25, 35-36, Township 7 South, Range 22 East
Sections 28-29, Township 7 South, Range 23 East
Gila and Salt River Meridian

BACKGROUND

The Shingle Mill Pipeline Extension is to address portions of Tripp and Little Righthand Canyon that have limited permanent water for wildlife and livestock. In Tripp Canyon, the current water sources are over two miles apart and current water storage is at an inadequate elevation to provide water to the current drinker near Little Righthand Canyon. Under the current forest plan, our goal is to provide one permanent water source per section of land (every 1 mile) in order to provide wildlife and livestock access to water year round (Coronado National Forest Plan, pg. 35 and 37).

Deer, bear, fowl, and other small species of wildlife are common throughout the project area and as such, these drinkers would be designed to be wildlife friendly and accessible to many different species.

The Shingle Mill Pipeline Extension with additional water storage and drinkers would provide permanent yearlong water to wildlife and livestock and would aid in better livestock distribution for improved wildlife habitat. Water is a part of wildlife habitat and having water within a 1 mile distance would improve that habitat.

PROPOSED ACTION

This project would utilize the existing infrastructure of the Sawmill Pipeline. The project consists of two installations that would include 3.2 miles of pipe (laid above ground), two water storage tanks and two drinkers.

Part 1 of the project would start in Tripp Canyon at the drinker at the end of the existing Sawmill Pipeline and would include approximately 2.4 miles of pipeline. From the drinker, the pipeline would be installed along Forest Service Road (FSR) #286 for approximately 1.6 miles and then head east approximately 100 yards where a new water storage tank and drinker would be installed. The pipeline would then continue north following the ridgeline for approximately 0.5 mile where it would again run along FSR #286 for a total of 0.3 mile and connect with an existing pipeline.

Part 2 of the project involves installing approximately 0.8 mile of pipeline above ground starting at the drinker at the end of Lower Tripp Pipeline near Little Righthand Canyon and continuing east across Mexican Canyon near the forest boundary toward FSR 6611. Just west of FSR 6611 a new storage would be installed and from there continue east, across FSR 6611 to a new drinker in Little Righthand Canyon.

The design of the drinkers would be developed by the Safford Ranger District Range/Watershed Staff and Wildlife Staff and would, at a minimum include a permanent and effective wildlife escape ramp and the top of the drinkers would be low enough to the ground to be easily accessible to small animals (See Map 1).

DECISION AND RATIONALE

It is my decision to approve the proposed pipeline construction as described above. This action may be categorically excluded from further review and documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment because it meets the following criteria for categorical exclusion.

REASONS FOR CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDING

Forest Service Handbook (FSH) reference 1909.15 Chapter 30.3(1) states that “A Proposed Action may be categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or Environmental Assessment (EA) only if the Proposed Action is within a category listed in FSH 1909.15 Chapter 32.1(b) or 32.2; and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the Proposed Action.” These actions do qualify within Section 32.2 category of actions that “may be excluded from documentation in an EIS or EA, however, a project or case file is required and the decision to proceed must be documented in a Decision Memo.”

- Category 32.2 “*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. 36 CFR 220.6(e) (6).*”

No extraordinary circumstances associated with this project exist that would preclude the use of this category, or result in additional impacts. This determination is based on the absence of adverse effects on the following resource areas.

1. *Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species*

The Endangered Species Act requires that federal activities do not jeopardize the continued existence of any species federally listed or proposed as threatened or endangered, or result in adverse modification to such species’ designated critical habitat. As required by this Act, potential effects of this decision have been analyzed and documented in a Biological Evaluation, Management Indicator Species Analysis and Migratory Bird Treaty Act Analysis May 30, 2014. It was determined on February 29, 2016 that this decision will have ‘no effect’ on listed species

or their critical habitats, or on Forest Service sensitive species.

2. *Floodplains, Wetlands, or Municipal Watersheds*

Floodplains: Executive Order 11988 requires federal agencies to avoid to the extent possible the long and short-term adverse impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of flood plains, and to avoid direct and indirect support of floodplain development wherever there is a practicable alternative. Floodplains are defined by this order as, “. . . the lowland and relatively flat areas adjoining inland and coastal waters, including flood prone areas of offshore islands, including at a minimum, that area subject to a one percent [100-year recurrence] or greater chance of flooding in any one year.”

No activity related to this proposal will occur in floodplains; therefore, this decision will not affect floodplains.

Wetlands: Executive Order 11990 requires federal agencies to avoid to the extent possible the long and short-term adverse impacts associated with the destruction or modification of wetlands, and to avoid direct or indirect support of new construction in wetlands wherever there is a practicable alternative. Wetlands are defined by this order as, “. . . areas inundated by surface or ground water with a frequency sufficient to support and under normal circumstances does or would support a prevalence of vegetative or aquatic life that requires saturated or seasonally saturated soil conditions for growth and reproduction. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs, and similar areas such as sloughs, potholes, wet meadows, river overflows, mud flats, and natural ponds.”

No activity related to this proposal will occur in wetlands; therefore, this decision will not affect wetlands.

Municipal Watersheds: The Forest Service identifies a municipal supply watershed as a watershed that serves a public water system as defined in the Safe Drinking Water Act of 1974, as amended (42 U.S.C. § 300f, et seq.); or as defined in state safe drinking water statues or regulations. Municipal watersheds are managed under multiple use prescriptions in Forest Plans.

No activity related to this proposal will occur in or near a municipal watershed; therefore, this decision will not affect municipal watersheds.

3. *Congressionally Designated Areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas*

Wilderness:

This decision, with impacts limited to the immediate area of the activity will not affect any wilderness area.

Wilderness Study Areas:

The Mt. Graham Wilderness Study Area (WSA) occurs on the Pinaleno Ecological Management Area (EMA) and is approximately 5 miles away from the project area. This decision will not affect the Mt. Graham Wilderness Study Area.

National Recreation Areas:

There are no National Recreation Areas on the Coronado National Forest; therefore this decision will not affect National Recreation Areas.

4. Inventoried Roadless Areas or potential wilderness areas

There are several Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA) on Safford Ranger District. The Pinaleno IRA is near the project area. Phase one of the project is 0.34 of a mile at the nearest point from the IRA and phase two is next to but outside of the nearest IRA. As such, this decision will not affect inventoried roadless areas and no new roads will be constructed for this project.

5. Research Natural Areas

The Jesus Goudy Research Natural Area is located approx. 12.52 miles away from the project area and thus will not be affected.

6. Botanical Areas

There are no Botanical Areas within the Pinaleno EMA; therefore this decision will not affect Botanical Areas.

7. American Indian religious or cultural sites

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) requires federal agencies to take into account the effect of a project on any district, site, building, structure, object that is included in, or eligible for inclusion in, the National Register of Historic Places. This Act includes properties that are part of the religious and cultural heritage of American Indians and Alaska Natives. Section 106 of the NHPA also requires federal agencies to afford the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation a reasonable opportunity to comment.

The project occurs within Dzil Nchaa Si'an, a Traditional Cultural Property encompassing all Forest lands on Mt. Graham which is considered a sacred place by Apache peoples. Dzil Nchaa Si'an has been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

A survey was conducted to identify any properties that may be a part of the religious and cultural heritage of American Indians and/or Alaska Natives that could be affected by this decision. No historical sites were identified within the project area but over twenty historical features along FSR #286 in Tripp Canyon that would be associated with our project were identified during the survey. These historic features would be avoided during the project.

The steep terrain of the project area limit the number of places Native American sites would be located. Having found that none of these cultural resources would be affected, this decision complies with the NHPA, and consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office and local Native American tribes is not required per Heritage Report #2016-05-020.

8. *Archeological sites, or historic properties or areas*

Section 106 of the NHPA requires federal agencies to take into account the effect of a project on any district, site, building, structure, object that is included in, or eligible for inclusion in, the NRHP. Section 106 of the NHPA also requires federal agencies to afford the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation a reasonable opportunity to comment. This decision complies with the NHPA. The survey, described above, was conducted to identify any archaeological or historic properties or areas that may be affected by this decision. The completion of this survey did not identify any historic resources that would be affected by the implementation of this proposed action. Any activities resulting from this project will have no effect on cultural resources, therefore there will be no affect to cultural resources from our project (January 23 and 30, Project Record #2).

If previously undetected cultural resources are discovered during project implementation, work will cease and the resources will be evaluated for their eligibility for inclusion on the NRHP. If the newly discovered property is determined to be eligible for the NRHP, impacts to the property will be addressed. Any mitigation or other actions will be developed in consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). Should the decision be made to carry out the project, these mitigation or other measures will be carried out in consultation with the SHPO.

MITIGATION MEASURES

1. To reduce the risk of spread of noxious and invasive weed species, standard equipment inspection and cleaning protocols will be utilized for all work involving off road travel.
2. Sites will be periodically inspected after completion of work to ensure re-vegetation has occurred and that soils and slopes are remaining stable.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Internal scoping was conducted with resource professionals to determine potential impacts to resources from the project. It was determined there were no significant issues with the proposed project. The project was listed on the Coronado National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions on January 01, 2016, and updated periodically during the analysis. Once signed, the Decision Memo will be posted on the SOPA.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS

National Forest Management Act

The proposed action was reviewed for consistency with the Coronado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan, 1986, as amended), as required by the National Forest Management Act.

The project was designed to Forest-wide standards and guidelines in the Forest Plan that require structural and nonstructural habitat improvement projects will be based on guidelines in the Forest-wide prescription. They are intended to meet the following objectives: 1) Improve quality and availability of forage and availability of water for commonly hunted species, 2) Maintain horizontal and vertical plant diversity at current levels Forest Plan page 63. Structural and nonstructural improvements should receive high priority in these areas as needed for the desired level of management Forest Plan page 64.

Endangered Species Act

The Safford District Wildlife Biologist determined that the activities authorized by this decision would have no effect on threatened or endangered species; designated critical habitat; and species or habitat proposed for Federal listing.

National Historic Preservation Act

A Forest Archaeologist has determined that no historic properties would be affected by the proposed actions, and there are no extraordinary circumstances that may result in adverse effects on American Indian religious and cultural sites.

Clean Air Act

Based on the short timeframes for completion of activities, effects to air quality as a result of this decision will be negligible, and will be in compliance with the Clean Air Act.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW AND APPEAL

On January 17, 2014, the President signed into law the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014 (Pub. L. No. 113-76). Section 431 of that Act directs that the 1992 and 2012 legislation establishing the 36 CFR 215 (post-decisional appeals) and 36 CFR 218 (pre-decisional objections) processes “shall not apply to any project or activity implementing a land and resource management plan ... that is categorically excluded ... under the National Environmental Policy Act [NEPA].” On February 7, 2014, the President signed into law the Agricultural Act of 2014 (Farm Bill) (Pub. L. No. 113-79). Section 8006 of the 2014 Farm Bill repealed the Appeals Reform Act (ARA) (Pub. L. No. 102-381). The ARA’s implementing regulation was 36 CFR 215. The 2014 Farm Bill also directs that the pre-decisional objection process established in the Consolidated Appropriation Act of 2012 shall not be applicable to categorically excluded projects or activities.

As a result of these two statutes, the Forest Service will no longer offer notice, comment and appeal opportunities pursuant to 36 CFR 215 for categorically excluded projects and this decision is not subject to objections pursuant to 36 CFR 218.



IMPLEMENTATION DATE

This decision may be implemented immediately upon the date of my signature below.

POINT OF CONTACT

For additional information concerning this proposed action and decision, please contact Gwen Dominguez, Safford District Range Staff at the Safford Ranger District Office, 711 14th Ave, Suite D Safford, AZ, by phone at (928) 965-8545, or via email at gwenrdominguez@fs.fed.us.

Kent C. Ellett

7-1-2016

Kent C. Ellett
District Ranger

Date

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.