

**Decision Memo**  
**Soldier/Diamond Water Development Project**  
*Pleasant Valley Ranger District*  
*Tonto National Forest*  
*Gila County, Arizona*

**Background**

The Soldier/Diamond Water Development is a project that includes the Soldier Camp and Diamond Butte Allotments on the Pleasant Valley Ranger District and a portion of the Heber-Reno Sheep Driveway, west of Young, Arizona.

Soldier Camp and Diamond Butte are two, year-long active grazing allotments using a deferred, rest- rotation grazing system. While limited livestock water is available in the allotments, the locations of the water does not provide for adequate distribution for existing livestock numbers. The Forest Service in conjunction with the permittee, and the Arizona Game and Fish Department have identified this lack of water as a limitation for livestock or wildlife in this area. The Soldier Camp and Diamond butte allotments are scheduled for a comprehensive analysis in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act in 2019. The legal location of the project is: Township 8 North, Range 13 East, Section 5; Township 9 North, Range 13 East, Sections 21,28,29,31,32,33 and Township 9 North, Range 12 East, Section 23 of the Gila and Salt River Base Meridian.

**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 Arizona . Because of these conditions, Forest Service regulations, and Forest Plan direction, allotment improvements are being authorized to provide additional distribution opportunities for existing livestock numbers and wildlife.

## Decision Memo for Soldier/Diamond Water Development Project

### Proposed Action

In compliance with Forest Service policy and Forest Plan objectives, the Pleasant Valley Ranger District proposes to authorize the permittee to construct six new stocktanks, and place two, 5000 gallon storage tanks with 3.5 miles of polypipe on the Soldier Diamond and Diamond Butte allotments and a portion of the Heber-Reno Sheep Driveway. All of the stocktanks will be adjacent to existing roads or undeveloped two-tracks and will collect runoff from the roadways and will not be developed in drainage channels. Tanks will be approximately 50 to 100 feet long in size and approximately 8 to 10 feet deep. Ground disturbance during tank construction would include using a bulldozer to excavate the tank and construct a berm and bar ditches to collect runoff. Incidental tree and shrub removal may take place in the footprint of the tanks.

The pipelines would be installed above ground, except where they cross two-tracks. The installation would follow existing pasture fence and two-tracks to the storage location. Storage tanks will be transported to the sites by pickup truck and unloaded and placed by hand. The tanks will be placed by hand and the site hand-leveled as necessary.

### Decision

It is my decision to authorize the implementation of the Soldier/Diamond Water Development Project as written in the Proposed Action section of this document. The decision includes the following design features for resource protection:

- Minimizing vegetation disturbance to only tank construction and storage tank sites
- Limiting soil disturbance with use hand placement of pipe and storage tanks
- Use of existing fenceline, roads and two-tracks for ingress and egress and pipe laying

### Reasons for Categorically Excluding the Proposed Actions

I have concluded that this proposed permitted action falls within the categories of actions listed in the Forest Service National Environmental Policy Act Handbook (FSH) that are excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement. This categorical exclusion is found in FSH 1909.15, Chapter 32.2 (9): "*Implementation or modification of minor management practices to improve allotment condition or animal distribution when an allotment management plan is not yet in place.*"

- a. 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:
- b. Federally-listed threatened, endangered and/or Region 3 sensitive species or designated critical habitat. BE (07/24/2017) concluded no effects.
- c. Floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds: The IDT concluded that the project will have no effect on these resource areas, therefore no discussion is warranted.

## Decision Memo for Soldier/Diamond Water Development Project

- d. Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas. The project area is outside any of these areas, and therefore the IDT concluded that no discussion is warranted.
- e. Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas: The project area is outside any of these areas, and therefore the IDT concluded that no discussion is warranted.
- f. Research natural areas. The project area is outside any of these areas, and therefore the IDT concluded that no discussion is warranted.
- g. American Indian religious or cultural sites; and archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas. Heritage Resource clearance date; 07/27/2017. The Forest Archaeologist concluded 'no heritage resources present.'

## Public Involvement

A scoping letter was sent out to 26 local agencies, individuals and organizations describing the proposed action. Nine individuals were scoped internally either through the CE Checklist, scoping letter or both. There were 7 responders providing approximately 22 individual comments. One response was of a neutral, informative nature, 2 were positive and supportive and 4 responders were negative, overall, but focused on a general displeasure with authorizing grazing in National Forest System Lands, and that a Categorical Exclusion was not appropriate for this project both of which are outside the scope of the actions covered in this decision.

## Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

This decision is consistent with the Forest Plan, Forest Service Policy, and other management considerations. 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 NF. The *National Forest Management Act of 1976* (Public Law 104-33, as amended) requires the U.S. 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 forest wide standards and guidelines and management area direction.

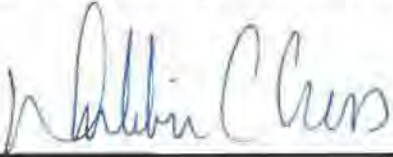
Implementation of this decision will not violate any Federal, State, or local laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment including:

- *Clean Water Act, as amended*
- *Clean Air Act, as amended*
- *Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended*
- *American Antiquities Act of 1906 and Historic Preservation Act of 1966*
- *Executive Order 13186 of 2001, Migratory Bird Treaty Act*
- *Executive Order 12898 of 1994, Environmental Justice*
- *Executive Order 11988 Floodplain Management*
- *Executive Order 11990 Protection of Wetlands*

## Implementation

This project is not subject to appeal. I anticipate implementing this project immediately.

For additional information, contact Kelly Bedson, North Zone Range Specialist, 1009 E Hwy 260, Payson, AZ 85541 or [kellybedson@fs.fed.us](mailto:kellybedson@fs.fed.us)



---

**Debbie Cress**  
District Ranger

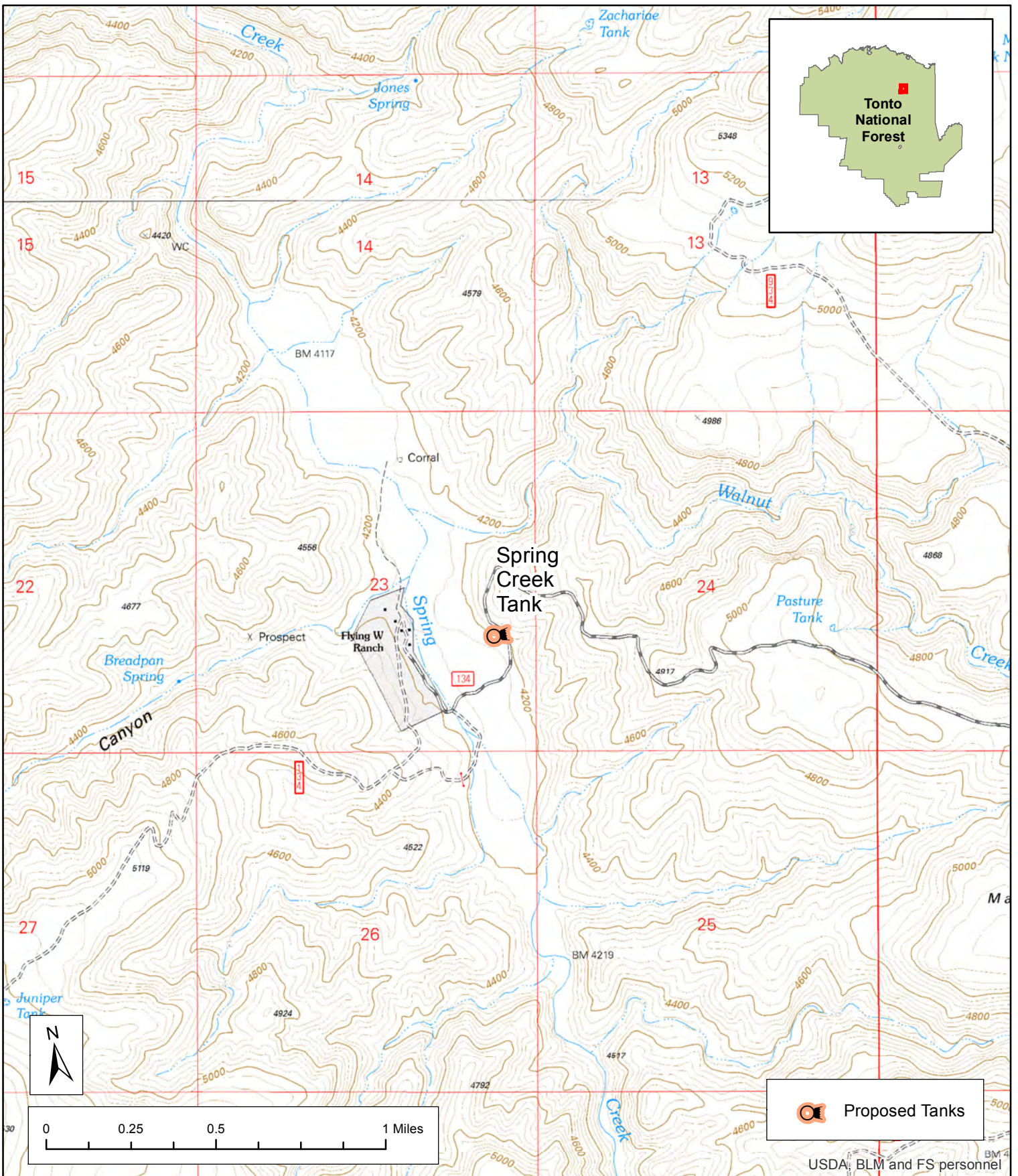
Date

*In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.*

*Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.*

*To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at [http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint\\_filing\\_cust.html](http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).*

*USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender.*



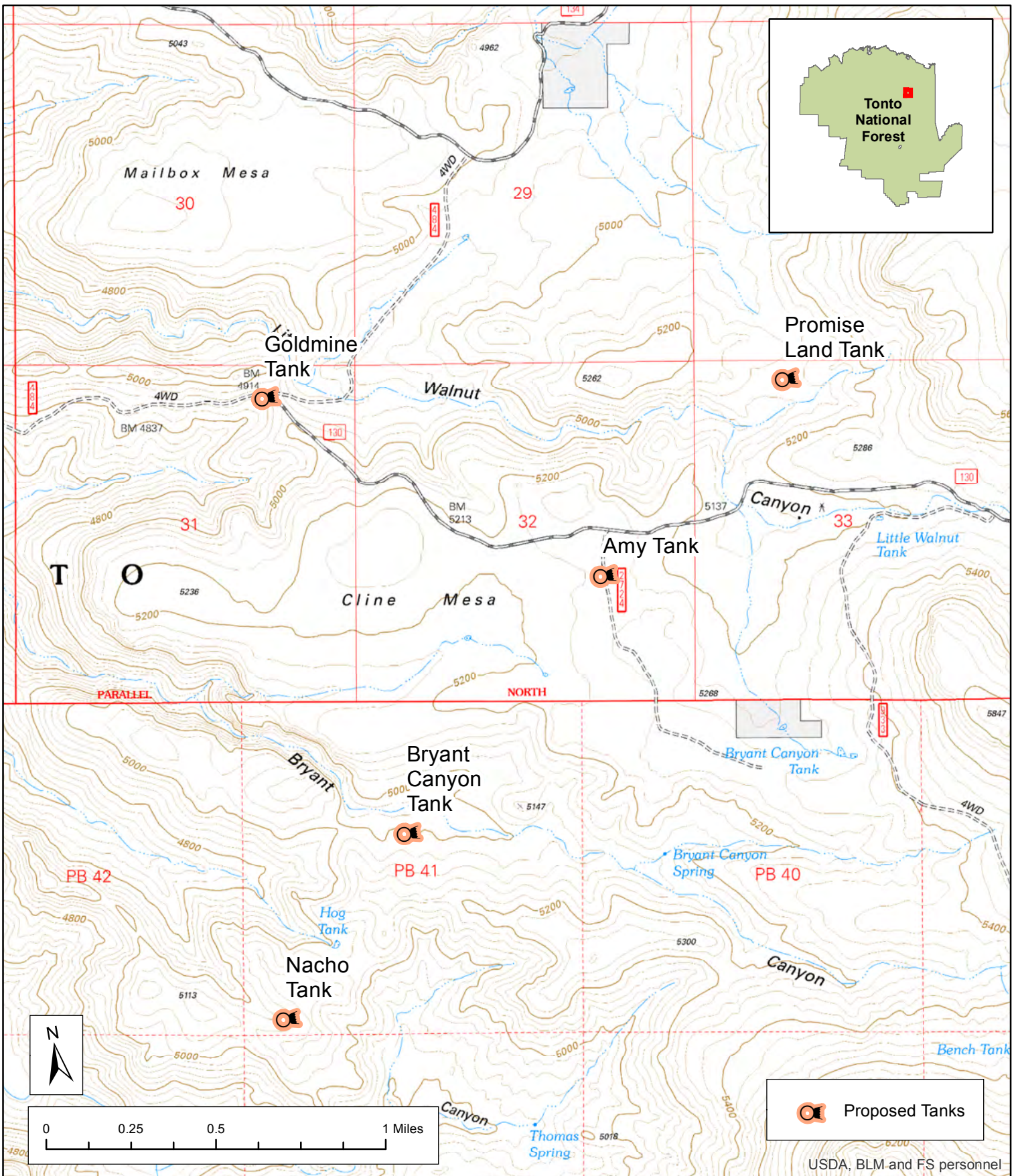
Project Name: Soldier Camp/Diamond Butte: Stocktanks

Scale: 1:24,000 Elevation: 4200 ft.

USGS Quad: Buzzard Roost Mesa Township(s): 9N Range(s): 12E Section(s): 23

Map Created By: Kelly Bedson, 8/15/16

USDA, BLM and FS personnel



Project Name: Soldier Camp/Diamond Butte: Stocktanks

Scale: 1:24,000 Elevation: 4950 - 5100 ft.

USGS Quad: Buzzard Roost Mesa Township(s): 8N Range(s): 13E Section(s): 5

Township(s): 9N Range(s): 13E Section(s): 31, 32, 33

Map Created By: Kelly Bedson, 8/15/16

USDA, BLM and FS personnel