



Decision Memo
Sycamore Spring Exclosure
U.S. Forest Service
Coronado National Forest
Sierra Vista Ranger District

Background

Throughout the Huachuca Mountain range, many areas of sensitive aquatic habitat exist, including springs and seeps, which provide habitat for Threatened and Endangered species. Sycamore Spring, within Sycamore Canyon in the Huachuca Mountain Range, is an example of one of these sites. It contains a small population of Chiricahua leopard frogs and a large patch of Huachuca water umbel, both species listed under the Endangered Species Act. Occasionally, livestock congregate at the spring and exert too much pressure on the aquatic habitat causing over utilization of vegetation and localized erosion. This is extremely problematic for management because the site is difficult to access and keep livestock distributed more evenly throughout the pasture. To reduce the pressure on this aquatic habitat and give management more flexibility to manage the pasture to standard, it is recommended that a livestock exclosure fence be built around the Sycamore Spring riparian system.

Decision

It is my decision to construct an exclosure fence around Sycamore Spring for the purposes of reducing impacts from cattle distribution to sensitive aquatic habitat for threatened and endangered species, and to provide for greater flexibility to manage the pasture to standard. The perimeter of the exclosure fence will be approximately 1.5 miles long, constructed using 5.5 foot t-posts, three strands of barbed wire (with 4 inch barb spacing), and a bottom strand of smooth wire. T-posts will be placed 15 feet apart with 3 stays between each t-post set securing the four strands of wire. The top strand of barbed wire will be 42 inches above ground level and the bottom smooth strand of wire will be 16 inches from ground level, allowing big game and wildlife the ability to either safely jump over the four-strand fence or crawl under the smooth wire strand at the bottom.

The northern corner of the proposed exclosure is located within the Miller Peak Wilderness. During construction, no power tools or mechanized equipment will used within the wilderness boundary.

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or an environmental assessment (EA). The applicable category of actions is identified in agency procedures as 36 CFR 220.6(e)(5): Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities that do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than 1 mile of low standard road construction. This category of action is applicable because the proposed action would improve wildlife habitat by providing additional, year-round water sources in this area of the San Rafael Valley.

I find that there are no extraordinary circumstances that would warrant further analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS. I took into account the following resource conditions identified in agency procedures that should be considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstances might exist:

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

Because the fence construction will not occur within the actual wetland, the District Biologist has determined that the proposed action would have no effect on any listed species or their designated critical habitat.

The proposed action may impact individuals of the Forest Service Sensitive Species; however, these impacts would not result in a trend toward federal listing or loss of species viability.

Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds – The proposed project area does not fall within a municipal watershed. Portions of the project may fall within floodplains and wetlands, however, effects would be negligible so long as implementation adheres to Forest Service standards using best management practices.

Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, national recreation areas, research natural areas, or inventoried roadless areas – Part of the proposed project is located within the Miller Peak Wilderness. During construction, no power tools or mechanized equipment will be used within the wilderness boundary.

The project does not occur within a national recreation area, research natural area, or inventoried roadless areas, therefore there will be no impact to these areas.

American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites – There are no known extraordinary circumstances that may result in adverse effects on American Indian religious and cultural sites. Cultural resources clearance is recommended in Heritage Resources Report No. 2019-05-72.

Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas – No historic properties would be affected by the proposed action and cultural resources clearance is recommended in Heritage Resources Report No. 2019-05-72.

Public Involvement

This action was originally listed as a proposal on the Coronado National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions in August 2019.

This action is not subject to legal notice and opportunity to comment per 36 CFR 218.23(a).

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

National Forest Management Act - This decision is consistent with the 2018 Coronado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. The project was designed in conformance with land management plan direction for the Sierra Vista Ranger District, Huachuca Ecosystem Management Area, and forestwide management of Animals and Rare Plants, and Range Management.

Endangered Species Act - Because the fence construction will not occur within the actual wetland, the District Biologist has determined that the proposed action would have no effect on any listed species or their designated critical habitat.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) - The Forest Archaeologist has determined that no historic properties would be affected by the proposed action and that consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office is not required.



Administrative Review or Objection Opportunities

This decision is not subject to an administrative review or objections pursuant to 36 CFR 218.20.

Implementation Date

Implementation of this project may take place immediately upon issuance of this decision.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Steve Bluemer, District Range and Watershed Staff Officer, Sierra Vista Ranger District, 4070 S. Avenida Saracino, Hereford, AZ 85615; (520) 803-2831.

CELESTE KINSEY
District Ranger

Date

Attachments:

1 – Map of project area.

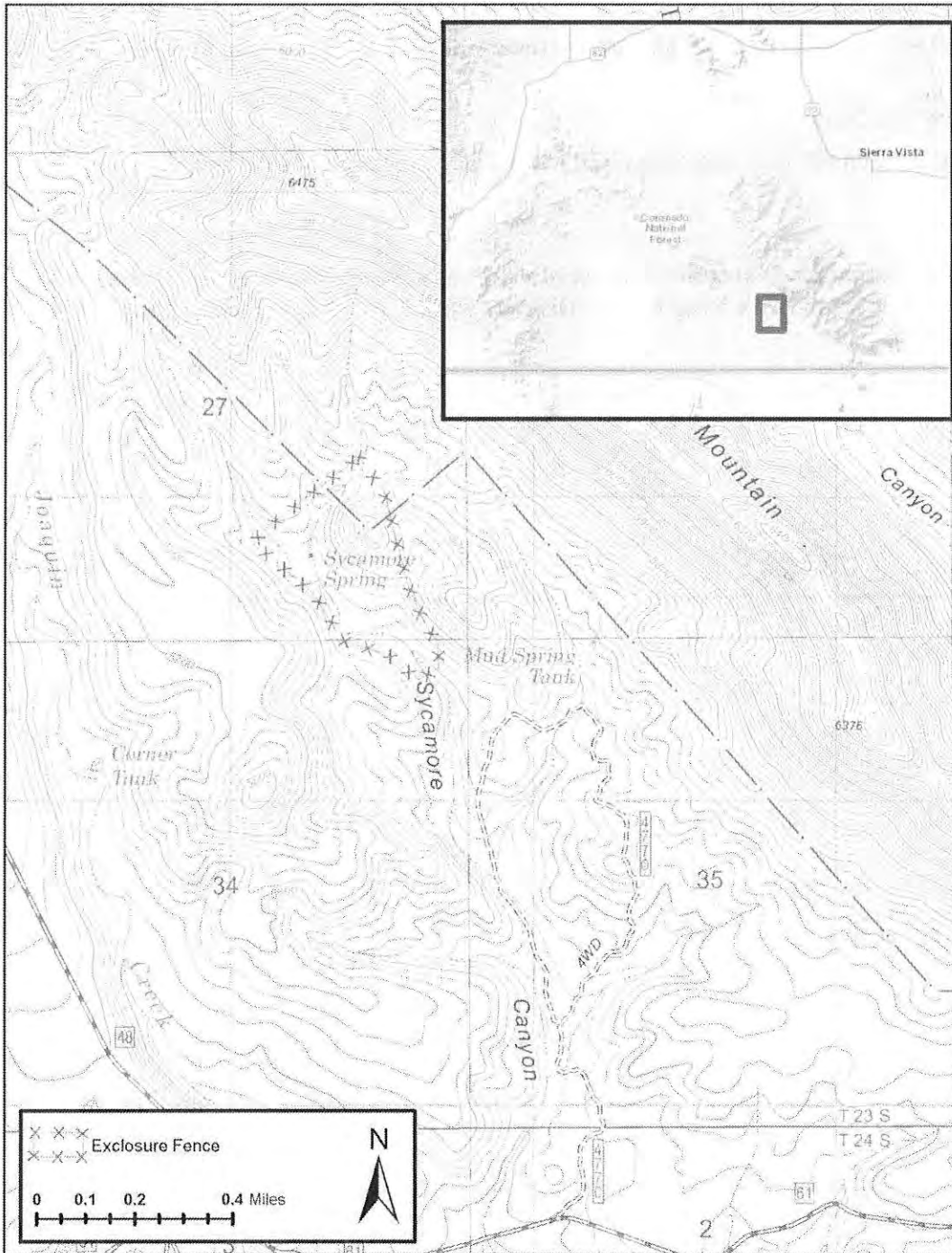


Figure 1. Map of the Sycamore Springs Enclosure fence within the Huachuca Mountain Range, Sierra Vista Ranger District, Coronado National Forest.

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