



DECISION MEMO
WALNUT SPRING DEVELOPMENT PROJECT
U.S. FOREST SERVICE
TONTO NATIONAL FOREST
TONTO BASIN RANGER DISTRICT
GILA COUNTY, ARIZONA

BACKGROUND

The Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) implemented a project from 2003 to 2006 called the Resort Road to Devore Wash project. The ADOT project enhanced the road route from the City of Globe to Devore Wash. ADOT provided mitigation money to the Tonto National Forest for the restoration or enhancement of riparian/wetland resources on the Tonto Basin Ranger District. The District will enhance an area located south and adjacent to Walnut Spring. The purpose of the project is to increase water availability for wildlife and livestock, protect riparian resources, and conserve native fish species. The proposed project is located on the Tonto Basin RD on the Walnut Allotment off of Forest Road 71, approximately 6 miles east of Punkin Center.

DECISION

I have decided to install a pipe collection box (water collection device), two water tanks (one above ground and one buried), a water trough, and 1500 feet of HDPE piping at Walnut Spring (NAD 83 12S 481335, 3749651) on the Tonto Basin Ranger District.

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 "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" [36 CFR 220.6(e) (6)] as described in [FSH 1909.15.32.2]. This category of action(s) is applicable because this project will distribute water to adjacent areas which would otherwise not have surface water, thus improving wildlife habitat for big game species, migratory birds, Forest sensitive species (common Blackhawk, lowland leopard frog, Arizona toad, reticulate Gila monster, and Abert's towhee), and threatened and endangered fish species.

I find that there are no extraordinary circumstances that would warrant further analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS. I took into account 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 – No federally threatened, endangered, or candidate species are currently present.

No designated or proposed critical habitat is currently present within the project area. Sensitive species occupy the area and utilize walnut spring year round. This project will benefit two endangered fish species (future introduction) and several Forest sensitive species like the common Blackhawk, lowland leopard frog, Arizona toad, reticulate Gila monster, and Abert's towhee.

- Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds – A flood plain exists near walnut spring. No significant impacts associated with this project are expected because spring areas and tanks will only be filled when surface runoff provides additional water above base flows. No wetlands are present. No municipal watersheds will be affected by implementation of this project.
- Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas – None are present
- Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas – None are present
- Research natural areas – None are present
- American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites – None are present within immediate project area according to cultural resources survey (archeological survey report and inventory assessment) conducted on 7/23/2012.
- Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas – None are present within immediate project area according to cultural resources survey (archeological survey report and inventory assessment) conducted on 7/23/2012.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

This action was originally listed as a proposal on the Tonto National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions and updated periodically during the analysis. A 30 day legal notice for preparation of a decision memo was published in the *Payson Roundup* classifieds section on 7/31/2012. The Arizona Game and Fish Department have been aware of the project since 2007 and will continue to be an integral part of this project. The current term grazing permittee of the Walnut allotment was also informed and supports the project. No comments were received within the 30 day comment period.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

This decision is consistent with the Tonto National Forest Land Management Plan (Forest Plan). The Walnut Spring Development project is entirely contained within management area 6J. The management emphasis described within the Forest Plan for management area 6J is "Manage for a variety of renewable natural resources with primary emphasis on wildlife habitat improvement, livestock forage production, and dispersed recreation. Watersheds will be managed so as to improve them to a satisfactory or better condition. Improve and manage the included riparian areas (as defined by FSM 2526) to benefit riparian dependent resources" (Tonto Forest Plan, pp 193). The future introduction of two endangered fish, Gila topminnow *Poeciliopsis occidentalis* and desert pupfish *Cyprinodon macularius* was covered under a separate Decision

Memo titled "Restoration activities at Mud Spring, Walnut Spring, and Cottonwood Artesian, and Kiosk at Tonto Basin Visitor Center". The District had completed various analyses for that decision and also complied with the Endangered Species Act of 1973 [See the *Land Management Effects on Gila Topminnow & Desert Pupfish in Two Springs and an Artesian Well on the Tonto Basin Ranger District Biological Assessment and Evaluation and Biological Opinion 22410-2009-F-0462*], the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, The Bald and Golden Eagle Act Final Rule [analysis 2010-06-01] and the Tonto LMP by conducting a Management Indicator Species analysis [analysis 2009-06-11]. See project record for these documents and supporting clearances for this decision.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW (APPEAL) OPPORTUNITIES

This decision is subject to administrative review (appeal) pursuant to 36 CFR part 215. No comments were received during the 30 day comment period for this project so there are no individuals with appeal rights for this project.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

Implementation date for this project is expected in November 2012.

CONTACT

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Kelly Jardine, District Ranger, Tonto Basin Ranger District, 28079 N. AZ Hwy 188 Roosevelt, Arizona 85545, (928) 467-3200

Kelly Jardine

Date

District Ranger, Tonto Basin

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Walnut Spring Development Project Location, Tonto National Forest

