

Draft Decision Notice

Revised Duchesne Roosevelt District Wide Range Improvement Project

**USDA Forest Service
Duchesne/Roosevelt Ranger District, Ashley National Forest
Duchesne County, Utah**

Background

The intent of this project is to Revise part of the Duchesne Roosevelt District Wide Range Improvement Project decision and EA to better meet the purpose and need for the project to improve livestock distribution and grazing management in Sower's canyon. The revisions of Sowers canyon range improvements will help intensify management efforts to improve resource conditions while sustaining current livestock operations. In addition to improving range management practices, several resources, including soil and water, recreation, and wildlife habitat, are expected to benefit from implementing the proposed project.

Decision

As the Responsible Official, I have considered several factors during my evaluation of this project. I have reviewed the project file documentation, including the purpose and need for action (EA, pp. 4); input from the public, other levels of governmental, and tribes (EA, p. 4, 5); and the direction outlined in the Forest Plan (EA p. 6, 7). I have determined that preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not necessary based upon the analyses presented in the EA, as well as the entirety of the project file. No amendments to the Forest Plan are necessary. Based upon my review of the EA, I have decided to implement the Proposed Action, which will allow for the following actions:

The revisions include 1.2 miles of additional water line down Sowers Canyon, and 2.8 miles of additional water line up the side canyons and hollows using 1.5-inch pipe, that would be buried with the use of large excavating equipment. In addition, 6 new water troughs would be connected to the water system, along the pipeline route as well as two new water storage tanks in Trapper Canyon. The proposed pipeline would carry water down Sowers Canyon and into nine side canyons where water is limited. Four of these side canyons were not in the original EA. Table 1 below presents the differences between the original design and the proposed new design.

Table 1 – Sowers Canyon Range Improvements: Proposed Revision, Approved Original Design and Total Improvements.

Range Improvement Location	Proposed Revision	Approved Original Design	New Project Design Totals (Proposed Revisions + Originally Authorized Amount)
Main Sowers Canyon	1.2 miles of pipeline	3.8 miles of pipeline, one storage tank	5 miles of pipeline
Broad Hollow	0.2 miles of pipeline	0.5 miles of pipeline, 1 new trough	0.7 miles of pipeline, 1 new trough
Spring Hollow	0.2 miles of pipeline, 1 new trough	0 miles of pipeline, 0 troughs	0.2 miles of pipeline, 1 new trough
Corral Hollow	0.5 miles of pipeline, 1 new trough	0.2 miles of pipeline, 1 existing trough	0.7 miles of pipeline, 2 troughs (1 new and 1 existing)
Trapper Canyon	0.1 miles of pipeline, two storage tanks	0.2 miles of pipeline, 1 existing trough	0.3 miles of pipeline, 1 existing trough, two storage tanks
Lance Canyon	0.1 miles of pipeline	0.6 miles of pipeline, 1 existing trough	0.7 miles of pipeline, 1 existing trough
Road Hollow	0.7 miles of pipeline, 1 new trough	0 miles of pipeline, 0 troughs	0.7 miles of pipeline, 1 new trough
Jolie Hollow	0.4 miles of pipeline, 1 existing trough	0 miles of pipeline, 0 troughs	0.4 miles of pipeline, 1 existing trough
South Twin Hollow	0.6 miles of pipeline, 1 new trough	0 miles of pipeline, 0 troughs	0.6 miles of pipeline, 1 new trough
North Twin Hollow	0 miles of pipeline, 0 troughs	0.5 miles of pipeline, 1 new trough	0.5 miles of pipeline, 1 new trough
<i>Totals</i>	<i>4.0 miles of pipeline 5 troughs two storage tanks.</i>	<i>5.8 miles of pipeline 5 troughs one storage tank.</i>	<i>9.8 miles of pipeline 10 troughs Two storage tanks.</i>

Project Design Elements

In response to public comments and specialist analysis of the proposal, project design elements were developed to mitigate some of the potential impacts from the proposed action. These measures, in addition to all other applicable Forest Plan standards and guidelines and other relevant direction will apply.

1. Construct troughs, fences and pipelines according to U.S. Forest Service (USFS) protocol which includes:
 - Place wildlife ramps in troughs
 - Place floats in troughs
 - Place valves on water lines that allow water to be turned off when not in use
 - Place pipelines underground where possible and restore contours
2. Limit vegetation removal.
3. Where possible, implement project activities when sites and access are dry.
4. Remove all construction trash and excess debris from the public lands and disposed of at a site approved by the USFS
5. If cultural resources are discovered in the project area during project activities, cease ground disturbing activities within 100 feet of the discovery, contact the Forest Heritage Staff.
6. Flag the route for pipelines based on the project GPS data prior to construction. The route should not deviate from the surveyed route.
7. If there are any changes to the pipeline route or trough placement, contact the heritage staff.
8. Avoid noxious weed infestations to the extent possible. Where noxious weeds cannot be avoided, chemically treat populations prior to driving, walking, and/or riding through noxious weed infestation in accordance with the approved 1994 Ashley Noxious Weeds Environmental Assessment and the 2013 Ashley National Forest Noxious Weeds Management Supplemental Environmental Assessment.
9. Thoroughly clean all vehicles and construction equipment at a location off the Ashley National Forest prior to transporting them into the Project Area.
10. If used for rehabilitation purposes, only use certified noxious weed free hay, straw, and mulch within the Project Area.
11. Monitor noxious weeds before and after implementation and treat, according to the district monitoring plan, if they become established.
12. Where feasible, place troughs, tanks, and solar panels in low areas or areas where they can be screened by vegetation and topography from roads and trails.
13. Locate water troughs and tanks on sites that will not adversely affect wet meadows, spring or streams and are outside of erosive areas and debris fans in order to protect water quality and soils.

14. No mechanized equipment within 100 feet of wetlands, floodplains, and riparian areas.
15. Refuel and service equipment only in designated staging areas or off the forest. These areas shall be located to prevent contamination of streams and wetlands by fuels and other chemicals.
16. Store fuels and other petroleum products in safe locations as far from water sources as possible or off of NFS lands
17. Do not drain used oil, fuel, antifreeze or other materials into the soil or bury any chemicals on site. Excess fuels and other supplies must be removed from the area.
18. Sower's Canyon Creek will not be disturbed. Where crossings are needed over-spanning or boring will be used.

Decision Rationale

While I realize that I signed a decision in 2018 authorizing range improvements in Sowers Canyon, it came to my attention afterwards that additional changes were needed because the previously approved actions in Sowers Creek would not fully address all the livestock management concerns in the bottom of the canyon. Some modifications to those improvements were needed to better disperse livestock by providing water sources further up the side canyons. As the Responsible Official, I have considered several factors during my evaluation of this project. I have reviewed the project file documentation, including the purpose and need for action (Environmental Assessment (EA), pp. 4); input from the public, other levels of governmental, and tribes (EA, p. 8); and the direction outlined in the Forest Plan (EA p. 5). I have determined that preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not necessary based upon the analyses presented in the EA, as well as the entirety of the project file. No additional impacts are expected over what was already analyzed and decided by the original EA. No amendments to the Forest Plan are necessary.

Based upon my review of the EA, I propose to implement the Proposed Action Alternative as shown on pages 4-5 of the EA.

Other Alternatives Considered

No additional alternative were received during scoping or considered.

Public Involvement

The public involvement effort was initiated on July 16, 2019. A legal notice was published in the *Uinta Basin Standard* on July 16, 2019 briefly describing the project and announcing the start of the 30 day official comment period. The scoping package was mailed to several individuals with the Northern Ute tribe as well as 22 interested parties, affected permittees, organizations, and other agencies whose names are maintained on the Forest's mailing list. In addition, the scoping package was emailed to 384 parties on the Forest's electronic address list through *Gov Delivery*. In response to scoping efforts, 3 interested parties provided comments. The project record contains all written comments received and discloses how the ID Team addressed those concerns within supporting resource analyses. The proposed project was placed on the Forest's Schedule of Proposed Actions as well as the Forest's web page on July 16, 2019.

The Forest Service received three responses to scoping from: Duchesne County, Uintah County and the State of Utah. Duchesne County stated the project appears to be consistent with the policies in the Duchesne county Resource Management Plan and affirmed support for this project. Uintah County had no concerns with the project since is not located in Uintah County, but appreciated our efforts to maintain transparency with local governments. The State of Utah supports the proposed improvements and provided details on how the project should help wildlife species, improve livestock distribution, and have positive impacts on rangeland vegetation.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

This decision may be implemented on or after the signature date.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Todd Irish, Rangeland Management Specialist. Call (435-781-5205) or email todd.irish@usda.gov.

Kristy Groves
Duchesne/Roosevelt District Ranger

Date

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