

**Resolution Copper Project and Land Exchange
Environmental Impact Statement**

USDA Forest Service
Tonto National Forest
Arizona

April 15, 2025

Process Memorandum to File

Disposition of Information Received Outside of Public Comment Period

This document is deliberative and is prepared by the third-party contractor in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and other laws, regulations, and policies to document ongoing process and analysis steps. This document does not take the place of any Line Officer's decision space related to this project.

**Prepared by:
SWCA Environmental Consultants**

Revision History

Date	Personnel	Revisions Made
4/15/2025	C. Garrett	Process memorandum created.

Purpose of Process Memorandum

The Tonto National Forest received correspondence dated April 11, 2025, purporting to contain “significant new information” regarding the Resolution Copper Project and Land Exchange and associated National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.

Nothing submitted with this correspondence represented new information that had not already been considered during the NEPA process. The purpose of this process memorandum (process memo) is to detail the disposition of the items submitted.

Disposition of Purported New Information

Item #1 – Bureau of Land Management Review of Hydrology Aspects of the Resolution Copper Project

This item was submitted to the U.S. Forest Service (Forest Service) and reviewed in mid-2022. The detailed review is contained in the March 27, 2023, “Process Memorandum to File – Evaluation of Post-January 2021 Comments” (Project Record #0005781). Any appropriate information has already been incorporated into the final environmental impact statement (FEIS).

Items #2 through #17

These items are all related to shortages on the Colorado River, or ongoing drought conditions in Arizona. Both of these topics are addressed directly in the FEIS as part of a holistic discussion of the cumulative effects of the project on water resources. See specifically these subsections in chapter 4 of the FEIS:

- “Drought Contingency Plan and Central Arizona Project Resources”
- “Ramifications of Future Colorado River Shortages on the Resolution Copper Project”

Item #18 – The Arizona Department of Water Resources (ADWR) Review of Pinal Stakeholder Model Revisions

This item regards recent modeling conducted for the Pinal Active Management Area (AMA) that shows a shortfall of over 8 million acre-feet at the end of the 100-year project period. This modeling work has already been reviewed and incorporated into the FEIS. See specifically this subsection in chapter 4 of the FEIS:

- “Pinal Active Management Area Modeling”

Item #19 – Phoenix AMA Groundwater Modeling

This item regards recent updates to the Phoenix AMA model. This modeling work has already been reviewed for appropriateness, compared with the Desert Wellfield model used for analysis in the FEIS. See specifically this subsection in chapter 4 of the FEIS:

- “2023 ADWR Salt River Valley Model Update”

Items #20 through #25

These items are related to the Resolution Copper Mining LLC (Resolution Copper) groundwater permits or rights, and accumulated long-term storage credits. This information has already been reviewed and incorporated as appropriate into the FEIS. See specifically these subsections in chapter 4 of the FEIS:

- “Regulatory Framework and Appropriateness of Resolution Copper’s Water Use”
- “Resolution Copper Groundwater Rights”

Additionally, the long-term storage credits accumulated by Resolution Copper—as well as the long-term storage credits accumulated by other users in the East Salt River valley—were incorporated explicitly into the Desert Wellfield modeling scenarios. See specifically this subsection in chapter 4 of the FEIS:

- “Long-term Storage Credits in East Salt River Valley”
- “Analysis of Cumulative Effects in East Salt River Valley”

Items #26, #29, and #30

These items are related to rural water use, groundwater depletion, and the potential for subsidence. These issues are fully explored in the FEIS. See specifically:

- Chapter 3, Section 3.7.1, Groundwater Quantity and Groundwater-Dependent Ecosystems, subsection “Potential for Land Subsidence due to Groundwater Pumping”

Item #27 – \$10 Million Agricultural Grant

This item is referenced explicitly in the following subsection of chapter 4, as a reference to the FEIS (James 2020):

- “Drought Contingency Plan and Central Arizona Project Resources”

Item #28

This item regards U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) investments and future funding for Tribal communities and acequias in the western United States through water use reductions, reducing water losses and supporting agricultural commodity production. The article identifies the San Carlos Irrigation Project as one of the selected projects for this program. The project will benefit water

resources as it reduces water use by agricultural users and the decrease of water losses during storage and delivery. This USDA program does not involve the Resolution Copper Project or the New Magma Irrigation and Drainage District (NMIDD). One of the compensatory mitigations required under the U.S. Corps of Engineers Clean Water Act 404 mitigation measures (as seen in appendix D of the FEIS) is for Resolution Copper to help with funding of continued water discharges, tamarisk removal, and vegetation treatment at a location south of the Resolution Copper Project area. See the subsection of chapter 4 of the FEIS.

- “Assured Water Supplies, Future Development, and Competing uses for Groundwater”

Items #31 through #38

These items pertain to development in the East Salt River valley, including the Superstition Vistas Planning Area. These topics have been incorporated into the cumulative effects groundwater modeling contained in chapter 4 of the FEIS, subsection “Analysis of Cumulative Effects in East Salt River Valley.”

As noted in this section, the groundwater modeling conducted for the Desert Wellfield incorporates all known present and future water uses in the East Salt River valley, including the following:

- Non-recovery agricultural pumping: 530,000 acre-feet/year
- Non-recovery non-agricultural pumping: 200,000 acre-feet/year
- Recovery of storage credits accrued through 2017 (including Resolution Copper credits): 112,000 acre-feet/year
- Recovery of additional storage credits accrued after 2017: 14,300 acre-feet/year
- Permitted Assured Water Supply groundwater demands: 105,000 acre-feet/year
- Non-recovery Desert Wellfield pumping: 6,700 acre-feet per year

As noted in the submitted items, most recently the first parcel of the Superstition Vistas area was sold and is slated for development. The water supply for this parcel is specifically discussed in the “Sufficiency of Regional Water Supplies” subsection of chapter 4, and importantly the water use associated with this parcel was already incorporated into the Desert Wellfield modeling, as described in the subsection noted.

Future water use in the not-yet-planned area of Superstition Vistas is also already analyzed in the FEIS as well, in subsection “Sufficiency of Regional Water Supplies” of chapter 4.

Item #39 – Arizona Hedgehog Cactus information

A complete review of Arizona hedgehog cactus—and other threatened or endangered species—was completed in 2025 in order to determine the potential need for reconsultation under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (Project Record #0006384). Reconsultation was determined by the Forest Service to not be warranted.

Items #40 through #41

These two items are specific to the mining and use of copper by the project. These have no specific bearing on the analysis and disclosure of impacts in the FEIS, as they do not represent changes in operational details analyzed.

Item #42 – Copper Creek Exploration Project

This article describes the Copper Creek Exploration Project, which is near the Lower San Pedro land exchange parcel, which could be exchanged with the Tonto National Forest. A complete review and screening of reasonably foreseeable future actions is documented within process memo to file “Cumulative Effects Screening and Analysis for Copper Creek Exploration Drilling Program” (Project Record #0006384).

Key Documents and References Cited for Disposition of Information

James, I. 2020. Facing water cutbacks, Arizona farmers 'in limbo' despite \$10 million federal pledge. Published April 24. Available at: <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona-environment/2020/04/24/arizona-pinal-farmers-colorado-river-dcp-funding/3012413001/>. Accessed April 5, 2023.