BACKGROUND
In 1987 the Pagosa Ranger District installed two wildlife guzzlers on Dry Mesa. A guzzler is a permanent, self-filling watering structure designed to capture and store precipitation and make it available to wildlife. Guzzlers are placed in certain locations to provide adequate drinking water during critical periods of the year, to create or expand suitable habitat for wildlife, and/or improve water quality and accessibility where natural water sources are insufficient.

The two guzzlers placed on Dry Mesa were intended to provide water sources for elk, mule deer, Merriam’s turkey, and other wildlife. A 2,000 gallon guzzler was placed on the west end of the mesa, and another 2,000 gallon guzzler was placed on the east end of the mesa. Since installation, periodic monitoring of both guzzlers has shown extensive use by wildlife, particularly elk, mule deer, Merriam’s turkey, and black bear. Field reconnaissance of the area in 2011 revealed damage to the eastern guzzler, rendering the structure nonfunctional and unrepairable (see attached photo). A portion of the guzzler was subsequently removed, with plans for complete removal during installation of the new guzzlers.

A project proposal was submitted to the Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), San Juan Basin Habitat Partnership Program (HPP) Committee requesting funding to replace the damaged guzzler. The local CPW District Wildlife Manger and HPP Committee recognized the importance of the project and habitat value for wildlife. HPP has approved funding and will be purchasing two guzzlers. Project implementation combined with recent (fall 2011) prescribed burning in the area will enhance wildlife habitat and species distribution in the Burns Canyon area.

PROJECT LOCATION
The project area is located on Dry Mesa (see attached map). Dry Mesa is located approximately eight miles southwest of Pagosa Springs, Colorado in the Burns Canyon area. The legal location is Township 34 North, Range 2 West, Section 28, Southwest ¼ of the NE ¼, New Mexico Principle Meridian (N.M.P.M.).

PURPOSE AND NEED
The purpose of the project is to provide an additional water source for wildlife on Dry Mesa. Dry Mesa is a relatively large mesa, approximately 500 acres in size. The primary vegetation type on the mesa is mature ponderosa pine and Gambel oak, with Rocky Mountain juniper and mountain shrublands intermixed. There are no perennial water sources, wetlands, springs, or seeps on the mesa.

The area provides year-round habitat for elk, mule deer, Merriam's turkey, and other wildlife but currently lacks seasonal and year-round water sources for wildlife. The nearest permanent water source is the San Juan River located approximately 1.5 miles east of the project area. Additional water sources (small stock ponds) are located on adjacent private lands and provide seasonal water sources for domestic livestock (cattle and horses) and wildlife. Wildlife present on Dry Mesa consume water from a 2,000 gallon guzzler located on the west end of the mesa (approximately 0.6 miles from the project area) and the small stock ponds located on adjacent private lands.
PROPOSED ACTION
The proposed action is to install two 500 gallon wildlife guzzlers on Dry Mesa. Installation of the new guzzlers will replace a 2,000 gallon guzzler that is no longer functional. The new guzzlers are approximately 96” x 64” x 29” in size, constructed of UV and freeze tolerant polyethylene, and are granite green in color (see attached specifications for Rainmaker Guzzlers). Each guzzler contains a 35 degree built-in ramp. The ramp provides easy access to water for birds and small mammals, and minimizes mortality due to drowning. The two guzzlers will be placed side-by-side, buried approximately 2.5 feet in the same footprint as the 2,000 gallon guzzler, and provide a combined storage of 1000 gallons of water from spring through early fall. The guzzlers will be transported to the site by vehicle, via an existing Forest Service road that is closed to public motorized use. Installation will be conducted by Forest Service and CPW personnel using a small Kubota tractor and other hand tools.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE
Project implementation will occur in June 2012.

DESIGN CRITERIA
To be determined by District Interdisciplinary Team.

MONITORING
Wildlife detection cameras will be placed near the guzzlers to monitor wildlife use. Use will also be monitored by documenting wildlife sign (tracks and scat) around the guzzler.