

**Vermilion Cliffs National Monument**  
**Arizona Strip District**  
**Bureau of Land Management**  
345 East Riverside Drive  
St. George, Utah 84790

**Environmental Assessment**  
**EA-AZ-120-2006-0046**  
**California Condor Viewing Site Construction**



California Condor photo courtesy of  
Chris Parish and the Peregrine Fund

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## **1.0 Purpose and Need**

### **1.1 Introduction**

An unofficial California Condor Viewing Site on House Rock Valley Road (BLM 1065) has been in use since 1996. The site offers direct line-of-sight views to the area atop the Vermilion Cliffs where condors have been released on numerous occasions over the past 10 years. The cliff area is heavily used by condors, making the viewing site an excellent location for observing condor activity.

The existing site consists of a 10'x10' wooden shade shelter constructed of natural materials and a parking area that is delineated by four large boulders and sparse surrounding vegetation. It is used by the staff of the Peregrine Fund, who use the site to monitor the birds, and by the general public for condor watching.

Interpretive panels for the site that describe the biology and natural history of California Condors have been developed with matching funds (both cash and in-kind services) from the Peregrine Fund and the State of Arizona, Game and Fish Department.

This environmental assessment will analyze potential impacts from the construction of new site amenities, including a shade shelter, interpretive signing, post and rail fencing, parking lot and pathway surfacing, and a vault toilet.

### **1.2 Location**

The Condor Viewing Site is located within the Vermilion Cliffs National Monument in Coconino County, Arizona. It is in the NE ¼ of the NE ¼ of Section 22, T39N, R3E, directly adjacent to BLM Road 1065, and 2.8 miles from the intersection of Highway 89A and House Rock Valley Road (see Page 1, Attachment 1 for map). The site is on the east side of BLM 1065 and is comprised of an existing disturbed, bare dirt area of less than one-half acre.

### **1.3 Need for the Proposed Action**

The site currently receives moderate use by the general public, condor enthusiasts, and Peregrine Fund staff. Traffic counter data collected on BLM 1065 shows annual numbers of vehicles averaging between 2,000 and 2,500, with this number reflecting a gradual increase since the designation of the Vermilion Cliffs National Monument in November of 2000. In addition, the location has been named as a Watchable Wildlife Site in the latest publication being produced by the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD). It is expected that this designation, a gradually increasing condor population, and growing publicity for the Vermilion Cliffs National Monument will all contribute to an increase in public use at the site over the next ten years.

The site is open and exposed to both sun and wind, and while it is an ideal place to view California Condors, a lack of site amenities can make it an unpleasant place to spend an afternoon. Since condor viewing is an activity that often requires patience, the addition of site amenities is considered an important aspect of making the site more hospitable to longer visits.

#### **1.4 Purpose of the Proposed Action**

The Vermilion Cliffs National Monument will use this environmental analysis to determine whether the environmental impacts from the proposed action are acceptable for the project to proceed.

#### **1.5 Conformance with BLM Land Use Plans**

Alternative A (proposed action), Alternative B, and Alternative C (no action) are in compliance with the Arizona Strip District Resource Management Plan (ASDO RMP, December 1990) and the Vermilion Resource Area Implementation Plan (VRAIP, July 1992).

Even though new interpretive panels would be installed under Alternative C, it would still result in no action as the three panels would only replace the three panels that were there previously, but were removed after they were damaged.

Applicable ASDO RMP Decisions (from VRAIP):

RR03: Provide recreation settings where traditional, backcountry, and extensive recreation activities such as camping, hunting, and sightseeing are possible and the experience opportunities for such activities, as defined by the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum, are high.

RR10: Update, upgrade, and maintain signs within the resource area.

RR32: Provide visitors to the Canyons and Plateaus of the Paria Resource Conservation Area with accurate information regarding recreation opportunities, interpretation of natural and human history, and specific rules and regulations pertaining to their use of public lands.

RR35: Provide signs in the Canyons and Plateaus of the Paria Resource Conservation Area that ensures public safety and informs visitors of BLM programs, geographic locations, and interprets resource values.

TE10: BLM will support and assist with releases of special status species consistent with recovery needs, and the Endangered Species Act.

#### **1.6 Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, other Plans, and BLM Guidance**

This proposed project is in conformance with “The BLM’s Priorities for Recreation and Visitor Services, 2003 – 2007.” This document provides the national blueprint for the delivery of recreation benefits to the American people, and it sets goals and objectives for all BLM recreation and visitor services projects.

Goal 2: Ensure a quality experience and enjoyment of natural and cultural resources on DOI managed or partnered lands and waters.

Goal 2, Objective 2: Enhance and expand visitor services, including interpretation, information, and education.

### 1.7 Identification of Issues

For the purposes of this Environmental Assessment, Table 1 below summarizes the Critical Elements of the Human Environment that were carefully considered but not carried forward for detailed analysis. The reasons for these exclusions are described in the rationale column.

Other elements, resources, issues and concerns that were carried forward for detailed analysis are shown in Table 2 on the following page. It was determined that these elements could be affected by either Alternative A (proposed action) or by Alternative B. The reason for each inclusion is also described in the rationale column.

**Table 1. Critical Elements of the Human Environment Not Carried Forward**

<b>Element</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)	No impact. There are no Areas of Critical Environmental Concern are within or near the proposed project.
Cultural Resources	No impact. The site has already received cultural clearance
Environmental Justice	No impact. This proposal would not result in any adverse health or environmental effects on low income or minority populations.
Flood Plains	No impact. Project area is not located within a flood plain.
Hazardous or Solid Waste	No impact. No hazardous or solid wastes are within or adjacent to the proposed project site.
Lands and Realty	No impact. There are no land ownership or right-of-way issues with this project.
Native American Religious Concerns	No impact. No sites of identified Native American Religious Concern are within the proposed project site.
Prime or Unique Farmlands	No impact. There are no prime or unique farmlands that are within or adjacent to the proposed project site.
Wetlands / Riparian Zones	No impact. No riparian areas are within or near the proposed project.
Wild and Scenic Rivers	No impact. No areas eligible and suitable for Wild and Scenic River designation would be affected.
Wilderness	No impact. Wilderness is visible from the project site, but is not affected.

**Table 2. Elements Carried Forward for Analysis**

<b>Element</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
Air Quality	Air quality may be disturbed during construction activities.
Range Resources	Seasonal grazing occurs within the project area.
Recreation Resources	Recreation settings would be affected by the project.
Soil Resources	Soil disturbance would occur during construction.
Threatened / Endangered Species	Condors may be affected during construction, and after construction as the site draws an increasing number of visitors.
Vegetation Resources	Some vegetation disturbance will occur within the project footprint.
Vegetation Resources Threatened / Endangered	A small amount of Siler Fishhook exists in two areas 1 ½ miles north of the project site.
Visual Resources	Structures may introduce vertical and horizontal elements that contrast with the existing setting.
Wildlife Resources	A number of native species are found within or near the project site.

## **2.0 Description of Alternatives**

### **2.1 Alternative A – Proposed Action**

The proposed action would consist of the following:

1. Existing wood shelter would be dismantled and removed (Page 2, Attachment 1).
2. Existing boulders would be removed and stacked along the fence line of the opposite side of BLM Road 1065 (Page 2, Attachment 1).
3. Installing 360 lineal feet of post and rail fencing (Pages 3, 4, and 6, Attachment 1).
4. Installing approximately 16,500 square feet (0.38 acres) of untreated road base for parking lot and walkways as shown on construction drawings (Pages 3, 5, and 6, Attachment 1). This material would comprise the parking lot surface and the walkway between the parking lot, shade shelter; interpretive panels, and the vault toilet.
5. Installing 12'x18' steel shade shelter (Pages 3 and 4, Attachment 1, and Attachment 2).
6. Installing vault toilet, which will be provided by BLM (see Page 5, Attachment 1 and Attachment 3).
7. Installing three interpretive panel kiosks, which will be supplied by BLM (see Pages 5 and 6, Attachment 1).

## **2.2 Alternative B – Reduced Footprint**

The reduced footprint option installs only the steel shade shelter and interpretive panels as described in the proposed action. Under this alternative, the new steel shelter would be installed in the same location as the existing wood shelter, which would be removed. The three interpretive panels would be installed next to the shelter in a configuration similar to the proposed action. All other site amenities listed (Items 3,4,6 above) in the proposed action would not be installed.

## **2.3 Alternative C – No Action**

Under the No Action alternative, the site would remain in its current condition. The existing shade shelter and rock barricade would remain. Under this alternative, the interpretive panels would be installed under a categorical exclusion. Three interpretive panels, which would replace the three panels that were previously installed at the site. These panels were removed after they were damaged.

## **3.0 Affected Environment**

Only those elements described in Section 1.7, Table 2 are described in this section.

### **3.1 General Setting**

The project area is located in the southwestern corner of the Vermilion Cliffs National Monument. It is 65 road miles WSW of Page, Arizona, and access from Page is via Highways 89 and 89A. The project area is 46 road miles ESE of Fredonia, Arizona, and access from Fredonia is via Highway 89A, through the Kaibab National Forest.

From the proposed project site, the steep and dramatic sandstone of the Vermilion Cliffs is visible less than a mile to the east. The base of these cliffs mark the boundary of the Paria Canyon – Vermilion Cliffs Wilderness. To the east lie the lower slopes of Buckskin Mountain as it rises steadily from the surrounding lowlands to the higher elevations of the Kaibab Plateau. House Rock Valley slopes gently away to the south, with wide open semi-arid topography.

The project site sits at 5,500 feet in elevation and precipitation averages 11 to 12 inches annually. A general description of the environment can be found in the Arizona Strip District Resource Management Plan (ASDO RMP, December 1990).

### **3.2 Resources/Issues Brought Forward for Analysis**

#### Air Quality

Air quality within the general area is good, though wind blown dust from exposed soils and road surfacing is considered a minor source of pollution. The Arizona Strip District is managed under Class II Ambient Air Quality Standards (prevent substantial decreases in air quality).

#### Range

The project site is within the Signature Allotment, which is a mix of public (BLM) and private

land. Approximately 19% (893 acres) of the 4,827 acre allotment is privately owned. The allotment has 52 private and 382 public AUM's. It contains eight separate pastures.

### Recreation

The project area lies within the Canyon and Plateaus of the Paria, Special Recreation Management Area. The recreation opportunities, settings and experiences available are generally characterized by the roaded natural recreation opportunity class that exists within the ½ mile buffer created by the lightly trafficked BLM Road 1065. Areas away from, but adjacent to BLM 1065 are characterized by the semi-primitive motorized recreation opportunity class, with this area being defined by a number of rough two-tracks used by ranchers and motorized recreational users. Primitive recreation opportunities exist nearby on the steep slopes of the Vermilion Cliffs within the designated Paria Canyon – Vermilion Cliffs Wilderness.

The project area is two miles down a good, gravel surface road from Arizona State Highway 89A, and is accessible to all types of vehicles. The landscape setting is primarily natural, with primitive roads, pasture fences, and scattered range developments being the only features interrupting the natural landscape.

The project area receives a light amount of visitation, with most recreational use occurring in the spring and fall when temperatures are mild and pleasant. Traffic counter records show use on BLM 1065 averaging between 2,000 and 2,500 vehicles per year.

Primary activities that occur in the vicinity of the project area are typical of undeveloped roaded natural and semi-primitive motorized recreation settings, and include driving for pleasure, sightseeing, hunting, day hiking, and car camping. Off-highway vehicle travel in the area is considered very light and is limited to existing roads and trails.

Experiences that visitors are exposed to in the project area include enjoying the sights and sounds of the natural landscape; learning about the natural environment; and experiencing self-directed exploration. The benefits derived from these experiences include, but are not limited to: a greater awareness of and sensitivity to the outdoor environment; an increased understanding and appreciation of nature; and improved outdoor knowledge and self-confidence.

### Soil

Soils in the project area are of the Monue-Seeg Complex, which is typical of the one to six percent slopes in the project area. The parent material of this soil type is a mixture of sandstone from the Vermilion Cliffs to the east, which is primarily from the Mesozoic age, and Kaibab Limestone to the west, which is mainly from the Paleozoic age.

### Threatened or Endangered Species

An experimental population of the endangered California Condors was reintroduced on the Arizona Strip in December of 1996. The primary release site is located atop the Vermilion Cliffs on the Paria Plateau, adjacent to and above the proposed project site. California Condors are among the largest flying birds in the world, with adults weighing approximately 10 kg (22lb) and having a wingspan of up to 2.9 meters (9.5 ft). They can live up to 60 years in the wild. Telemetry data indicates they may travel hundreds of miles in search of carrion, their primary

source of food. Condors released on the Vermilion Cliffs have been known to fly to parts of Arizona, Utah, Wyoming, Colorado, and California, however, they typically return after short periods. Currently, there are 55 condors in Arizona.

The Bald Eagle, a threatened species may occasionally fly over this area during the winter. The species is not known to nest in this area and typically migrates northward in the Spring. The nearest winter roost is to the northwest near Fredonia, Arizona.

### Vegetation

Vegetative composition in the project area is a sagebrush-grass community. Wyoming big sagebrush is the main constituent of the shrub component--with snakeweed, fourwing saltbush, Mormon tea, and cliffrose as lesser constituents. Perennial grasses include blue grama, galleta, Indian ricegrass, needlegrasses and squirreltail. The forb component is rather limited, composed mainly of desert globemallow.

### Vegetation – Threatened and Endangered

Sclerocactus Sileri (Siler Fishhook) is known to exist in two small populations near the project site. The first is approximately 1 ½ miles due north and the second is one mile to the east. Both areas are found at the base of the Vermilion Cliffs.

### Visual Resources

Visual Resource Management (VRM) classes were established on the Arizona Strip District in 1990, with the approval of the Arizona Strip Resource Management Plan (RMP). Visual values were identified through an inventory conducted by Resource Area personnel. The VRM system identifies visual values; establishes objectives in the RMP for managing those values; and provides a means to evaluate proposed projects to ensure that visual resource management objectives are being met.

The Visual Resource Management Class established for the project area is Class II. The objective for Class II areas is as follows:

The objective of this class is to retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be low. Management activities may be seen, but should not attract the attention of the casual observer. Any changes must repeat the basic elements of form, line, color, and texture found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape. (Areas that have a high scenic quality, and where people are highly sensitive to changes in the scenery, typically rate as Class II.)

The immediate project area consists of flat terrain with minimal elevation change. There is little visual variety within or adjacent to the project site. Directly to the east, and within the foreground/midground distance zone, the Vermilion Cliffs rise dramatically from the valley floor. The elevation gain is 2,000 feet in just over ¼ mile. This abrupt elevation change creates strong horizontal and vertical lines in the landscape. In addition to these natural lines, strong horizontal lines are formed by manmade features present in the project area. BLM Road 1065 forms a north-south corridor that cleanly bisects the valley. Directly adjacent to the project area, a pasture fence runs east/west, perpendicular to BLM Road 1065 and directly towards the

## Vermilion Cliffs.

To the east, the limestone formation of Buckskin Mountain also rises 2,000 feet. These slopes rise more gently than the Vermilion Cliffs, with the elevation gain taking place over a 1 ½ mile distance. The formation is gently rounded and rolling, with its lower slopes deeply incised by gullies and washes.

All east/west views in the project area are constrained by the Vermilion Cliffs and Buckskin Mountain, and are in the foreground/midground distance zone only. Background views exist to the north/south along BLM Road 1065, with the landforms to the south being flat to the horizon in House Rock Valley, to moderately uplifted and rolling to the north as the flat terrain tapers to a minimum between the Vermilion Cliffs and Buckskin Mountain.

Vegetation is primarily a mix of grasses and desert shrubs with a scattering of pinyon-juniper on the lower slopes of the Vermilion Cliffs and Buckskin Mountain. Textures range from smooth on the flats adjacent to the project site to moderately coarse on the slopes of Buckskin Mountain, to coarse on the steep, angular terrain of the Vermilion Cliffs.

Colors on the flats and on Buckskin Mountain vary from greens and grays in the winter/spring to yellows and browns in the summer/fall. These colors contrast sharply with the deep red hues of the Vermilion Cliffs. There is exposed soil in the proposed construction site and on the surface of BLM Road 1065, with the soil color being a neutral yellow/tan.

The landscape is classic southwest, with open, lonely horizons enframed by dramatic sandstone cliffs and steep, rolling, scrub-covered hills.

### Wildlife

Mule deer can be found in the area, although their habitat in the immediate vicinity of the project site is classified as limited. On the nearby Paria Plateau, the terrain is more conducive and habitat is classified as year-round.

Pronghorn antelope inhabit the House Rock Valley area just south of Highway 89A, approximately three miles south of the project site. Two limited pronghorn releases were conducted by Arizona Game and Fish in December 2004 and December 2005, and these animals can often be seen south of the highway. They may occasionally stray into the project area, although the area north of Highway 89A is considered to be less desirable habitat.

The nearby Vermilion Cliffs has a small population of bighorn sheep, and their habitat follows the cliff line, which includes almost the entire circumference of the Vermilion Cliffs National Monument.

Coyote, jackrabbit, ground squirrel, and various rodents also exist, or routinely pass through the project area. Common birds include crows, ravens, and red-tailed hawks. Reptiles are mostly various species of small lizards (refer to the Paria - Kanab Creek Habitat Management Plan for a comprehensive list of wildlife species).

## 4.0 Environmental Impacts

### 4.1 Introduction

Only impacts that may result from implementing Alternative A or Alternative B are described in this section. Critical elements of the human environment that were not brought forward for analysis are detailed in Table 1. Those elements / issues brought forward for analysis in this section are listed in Table 2.

Impacts are quantified where possible. In the absence of quantifiable data, professional judgment was used. Impacts may be described using ranges of potential impacts or in qualitative terms, if appropriate. The intensities of impacts to each resource are described using the following guidance:

- Negligible: The impact is at the lower level of detection; there would be no measurable change.
- Minor: The impact is slight but detectable; there would be a small change.
- Moderate: The impact is readily apparent; there would be a measurable change that would result in an observable, permanent change.
- Major: The impact is severe; there would be a highly noticeable, long-term, permanent measurable change.

### 4.2 Direct/Indirect Impacts

#### Air Quality

##### *Alternative A*

Soil disturbance is the only action at the project site that could degrade air quality, and it would be limited to what is necessary to complete the following: grade the area; install the 312 lineal feet of post and rail fencing; and excavate and install the vault toilet and shade shelter. Impacts to air quality are expected to be minor as the total disturbed area is approximately 16,500 square feet (0.38 acre). The existing disturbed (bare dirt) area totals approximately 7,800 square feet (0.18 acres), so the total new disturbance would be 8,700 square feet (0.20 acres). Using this information, it is likely that the total amount of new soil particles that could be released into the air is not measurable. After construction is complete and the untreated road base has been installed, the total amount of exposed soil would be reduced, resulting in a minor increase in the overall air quality at the project site.

##### *Alternative B*

Under this alternative, the project would fit within the existing disturbed area. Impacts to air quality during construction are expected to be negligible. Impacts from an increased number of recreational users are expected to be greater than Alternative A as no road base is proposed for

the parking area under this alternative and additional vehicles can be expected to stir up dust. Impacts are expected to be negligible to minor.

#### *Alternative C*

Under this alternative, the site would remain in its present condition. There would be no impacts from construction, but impacts from recreational users would be the same as Alternative B.

### Range

#### *Alternative A*

Construction traffic and activities at the site are expected to have minor impacts on livestock grazing operations as cattle may be disturbed by the increased traffic and construction noise. It is expected that grazing operations may be impacted to a greater degree once the project is complete and the site's Watchable Wildlife designation is published in the latest AGFD site guide. Increased noise and traffic on BLM 1065 from recreational visitors may disturb cattle in three of the eight pastures in the Signature Rock Allotment, although without quantifiable numbers the degree of impact is difficult to determine.

#### *Alternative B*

Impacts under this alternative would be similar to those described for Alternative A. Impacts from construction would be reduced. Impacts from an increased number of recreational users would be similar to Alternative A, although with reduced site amenities, the area will be less attractive for stays of longer duration.

#### *Alternative C*

Under this alternative, the site would remain in its present condition. Construction impacts would not occur, but impacts from an increased number of recreational users would be similar to Alternative B.

### Recreation

#### *Alternative A*

The addition of site amenities proposed under this alternative would enhance the experience of recreational visitors, resulting in moderate positive impacts. The shade shelter would provide a more comfortable environment in which to observe condor activity; a restroom would eliminate the current problem of long hikes to the nearest spot where privacy can be obtained, as well as providing a sanitary repository for human waste; and interpretive panels would increase visitor knowledge of condor history and biology.

#### *Alternative B*

The addition of site amenities proposed under this alternative would enhance the experience of recreational visitors, resulting in minor positive impacts. The shade shelter and interpretive panels would provide benefits identical to those in Alternative A. The lack of a vault toilet in this alternative would force visitors to continue the practice of hiking long distances in order to

obtain privacy, and with the anticipated increased use, human waste may become a minor problem. The lack of a toilet would also make the site less desirable to stays of longer duration. By not installing the post-and-rail fencing in this alternative, parking will not be delineated. Currently, this is not a problem, but it may become a problem as use increases due to the designation of the site as a Watchable Wildlife area. Overall, impacts are expected to be minor.

#### *Alternative C*

The lack of a new shade shelter proposed under this alternative would diminish the experience of recreational visitors, resulting in minor impacts. The lack of a vault toilet and fencing would be the same as Alternative B.

#### Soil

##### *Alternative A / Alternative B*

Impacts to soil would be the same as those described under Air Quality for each alternative.

#### Threatened or Endangered Species

##### *Alternative A*

The addition of site amenities proposed under this alternative could have minor to moderate impacts on the Vermilion Cliffs California Condor population. The birds are known to be curious and increased activity, noise, and dust at the viewing site during construction may prove to be an attraction. Additionally, as the site becomes more popular with visitors, the increased activity may pique their curiosity, drawing them to the viewing site and reducing their fear of humans.

The inclusion of site amenities, including interpretation and a Watchable Wildlife designation are also expected to have a positive impact, as an increased number of visitors learn about condor history and biology, giving them a greater understanding and appreciation of this endangered species. This may prove to be beneficial to the species over time. These impacts are expected to be minor.

##### *Alternative B*

The addition of site amenities under this alternative could have minor impacts on California Condors. With reduced construction activity, the area would be less likely to attract the attention of the birds. The same can be said for visitor activity. With less site amenities, the viewing site will be less attractive to visits of longer duration, which would presumably reduce visitor time at the site.

While site amenities under this alternative are less than Alternative A, the interpretation being proposed is the same and the positive impacts would be similar to those listed under Alternative A.

##### *Alternative C*

Impacts would be similar to Alternative B, except that there would be no impacts from construction activities.

## Vegetation

### *Alternative A*

The entire project site is approximately 0.38 acres. Of this total, 0.20 acres would be newly disturbed, which would impact vegetation resources. In the area of new disturbance, vegetation is sparse with some of the area already containing bare exposed soil. This scarcity of vegetation is most likely due to visitor use in the area. Impacts to vegetation are expected to be negligible.

### *Alternative B*

Under this alternative, the project would be confined to the existing disturbed area only, and there would be no impacts to vegetation resources.

### *Alternative C*

Same as Alternative B.

## Vegetation – Threatened and Endangered

### *Alternative A / Alternative B / Alternative C*

The nearest population of *Sclerocactus Sileri* is one mile to the east, up against the Vermilion Cliffs. Because of this distance, no impacts are expected during construction. If however, the site becomes more popular with visitors (as expected), it is possible that some of them may decide to hike to the base of the cliffs, which could impact the small population located there. This is possible, as the terrain is open, but trying to predict an impact at this time is not possible.

## Visual Resources

### *Alternative A*

A field trip was made to the proposed project site on July 13, 2006. Skies were clear, wind speed was slight, and temperatures were in the mid-nineties. A contrast rating was completed in accordance with BLM Manual Section 8431. Key observation points (KOPs) were selected along the main access road (BLM 1065) in places where visitors would normally first spot the proposed project site.

The finding is that the proposed project would create only weak contrast (read: insignificant visual impacts) between the project features and the existing landscape. Of the four landscape character elements (form, line, color, texture), none received a contrast rating that would be detrimental to the VRM Class II classification. This is due to several factors: the similarity of existing structures within and adjacent to the project site; the small project footprint; and harmonious colors chosen for the structures (neutral browns and tans). Impacts to visual resources under this alternative would range from negligible to minor.

### *Alternative B*

Under this alternative, the post-and-rail fencing and the restroom would not be included in the project. This would reduce the number of structures to what already exists, although the new shade shelter is slightly larger than the existing shelter. Impacts would be negligible.

### *Alternative C*

There would be no impacts to Visual Resources under this alternative.

### Wildlife

#### *Alternative A*

It is anticipated that wildlife in the vicinity of the project site would be affected by construction noise and activity. However, the project is expected to last less than one month, and as the project area is less than one-half acre, impacts are expected to be minor. The increased activity that site amenities and a Watchable Wildlife designation are expected to bring would also have minor impacts on local wildlife populations, with the disturbance from increased vehicle traffic to and from the site expected to cause the majority of impacts.

#### *Alternative B*

Impacts from this alternative would be similar to those described for Alternative A. With the reduced construction activity and a decrease in the amount of time recreational users are expected to spend at the site, impacts are expected to be negligible to minor.

#### *Alternative C*

Impacts from this alternative would be similar to those described for Alternative B, although there would be no impacts from construction activities.

## **4.3 Cumulative Impacts**

Historically, BLM Road 1065 and the condor site in particular have received low visitor use, mainly because they are off the beaten path and many potential visitors are not willing to venture off the highway onto on a dirt road.. Traffic counter data shows an average of 2,000 to 2,500 vehicles per year traveling on BLM 1065. A small number of visitors use BLM 1065 to access trailheads in Utah, although most prefer to access those trailheads from Highway 89, through Page, AZ or Kanab, UT. The majority of visitors use 1065 to access the Paria Plateau, and traffic counter numbers on the main access road to the Paria Plateau mirror the numbers collected on BLM 1065.

All vehicles using BLM 1065 travel past the condor site, but it is unknown how many vehicles actually stop. The 1065 traffic counter is located north of the condor site so vehicles that stop there and then return to the highway are not captured in these counts. While the exact number of visitors to the condor site is unknown, use has been determined to be low based on an absence of impacts such as soil disturbance, evidence of human waste, and trash/litter.

Once the project was constructed, it is anticipated that most vehicles traveling on BLM 1065 would stop. A shade shelter with picnic tables, a parking lot, a restroom, and interpretive panels could prove to be powerful draw to any visitor in a remote location such as this. When this is added to the Watchable Wildlife designation, which will put the site on maps and in guidebooks, the increase in traffic could be substantial, although trying to predict an exact number is not possible at this time.

Even with substantial increases in traffic, the overall volume of visitors will likely remain low compared to similar sites, and impacts to most resources over time are expected to be negligible. With new amenities, the condor site itself could easily handle any increase in recreational use over the next ten years.

The unknown quantity are the long-term impacts to the condors themselves. It is already known that they are attracted to human activity as evidenced by their penchant for hanging around the Navajo Bridge Interpretive Center. It is unknown if increased traffic at the site would negatively impact the birds, and if it did, to what degree.

#### **4.4 Mitigation and Monitoring**

##### Cultural

The following standard archaeological stipulations have been included:

1. Any surface or sub-surface archaeological, historical, or paleontological remains discovered and not covered in the CRPR during construction, maintenance, or use shall be left intact; all work in the area shall stop immediately and the Vermilion Cliffs National Monument Manager (435-688-3241) shall be notified immediately. Commencement of work shall be allowed upon clearance by the BLM Office Field Manager in consultation with the Archaeologist.
2. An additional archaeological survey shall be required in the event the proposed project location is changed, or additional surface disturbing activities are added to the project after the initial survey. Any such survey would have to be completed prior to commencement of the project.
3. If in connection with operations any human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects or objects of cultural patrimony as defined in the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (P.L. 101601; 104 Stat. 3048; 25 U.S.C. 3001) are discovered, the proponent shall stop operations in the immediate area of the discovery, protect the remains and objects, and immediately notify the Monument Manager. The proponent shall continue to protect the immediate area of the discovery until notified by the Authorized Officer that operations may resume.

##### Invasive Species

The following standard invasive species stipulations have been included:

1. There is potential for the spread of noxious and invasive weeds from equipment contaminated with weed seed and/or biomass. To reduce this potential, the contractor will thoroughly power wash and remove all vegetative material and soil before transporting equipment to the work site to help minimize the threat of spreading noxious and invasive weeds. This includes trucks, trailers, and all other machinery. The contractor shall be

responsible for the eradication of noxious weeds on disturbed areas within the limits of the work site during the contract period.

The contractor is responsible for consultation with the authorized officer and local authorities for implementing acceptable weed treatment methods. Any use of chemical treatments will be made using only chemicals approved in BLM's EIS, by a state certified applicator who will abide by all safety and application guidelines as listed on the product label and Material Data Safety Sheet (MSDS). Any reclamation efforts requiring seeding will be done with certified, weed-free native seed.

2. Use of herbicides shall comply with the applicable Federal and state laws. Herbicides shall be used only in accordance with their registered uses and within limitations imposed by the Secretary of the Interior. Prior to the use of herbicides, the holder shall obtain from the authorized officer written approval of a plan showing the type and quantity of material to be used, weed(s) to be controlled, method of application, location of storage and mixing areas, method of cleansing and disposing of containers, and any other information deemed necessary by the authorized officer. Emergency use of herbicides shall be approved in writing by the authorized officer prior to such use.

### Recreation

A new traffic counter has been planned for BLM 1065. The location is approximately one-mile south of the condor site. By comparing these counts with the numbers from the northern 1065 counter, an accurate number of visitors to the condor site can be calculated. These numbers can then be used to monitor use levels and gauge future impacts.

### Threatened and Endangered Species

The Peregrine Fund uses the site on a regular basis to monitor the condors. Any adverse impacts to the birds from the installation and use of site amenities will be determined by their staff and the AGFD Condor Biologist, and any proposed mitigation measures would receive immediate consideration.



- Never shoot or harm a condor, it is a felony offense.
- Report anyone harassing a condor by contacting the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Arizona Game & Fish Department, The Bureau of Land Management, Grand Canyon National Park or The Peregrine Fund.

Other concerns raised in the letter were: minimizing visual degradation to the landscape; avoiding the introduction of non-native plant species; protecting Siler Pincushion cactus in the vicinity; guarding against an increase in trash and litter; and monitoring future use patterns.

Each of these concerns was adequately addressed in the analysis, and the letter confirmed this by finishing with the statement that “this project does not appear to compromise the condors or their habitat.”

## **6.0 Attachments**

Attachment 1: Project Map and Construction Plans

Attachment 2: Shade Shelter Specifications and Photograph

Attachment 3: Restroom Specifications and Photograph

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS AND DECISION RECORD  
CALIFORNIA CONDOR VIEWING SITE CONSTRUCTION EA-AZ-120-2006-0046**

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS:** Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the attached environmental assessment, I have determined that impacts to the human environment are not expected to be significant and an environmental impact statement is not required.

**DECISION:** The California Condor Viewing Site Construction project is authorized and is subject to the terms and conditions in the attached Environmental Assessment (EA). The proposed construction is considered important to enhancing public education about this endangered species.

It is my decision to allow construction of the Condor Viewing Site during the time period of Fall 2006 to Spring 2007, as described in the EA. The project will consist of the following:

3. Existing wood shelter to be dismantled and removed.
4. Existing boulders to be removed and stacked along the fence line of the opposite side of BLM Road 1065.
8. Install 360 lineal feet of post and rail fencing to delineate public parking area.
9. Install approximately 16,500 square feet (0.38 acres) of untreated road base for parking lot and walkways as shown on construction drawings. This material will comprise the parking lot surface and the walkway between the parking lot, shade shelter; interpretive panels, and the vault toilet.
10. Install 12'x18' steel shade shelter.
11. Install vault toilet.
12. Install three interpretive panels.

**Stipulations**

**Cultural**

The following standard archaeological stipulations have been included:

4. Any surface or sub-surface archaeological, historical, or paleontological remains discovered and not covered in the CRPR during construction, maintenance, or use shall be left intact; all work in the area shall stop immediately and the Vermilion Cliffs National Monument Manager (435-688-3241) shall be notified immediately. Commencement of work shall be allowed upon clearance by the Monument Manager in consultation with the Archaeologist.
5. An additional archaeological survey shall be required in the event the proposed project location is changed, or additional surface disturbing activities are added to the project after the initial survey. Any such survey would have to be completed prior to commencement of the project.
6. If in connection with operations any human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects or objects of cultural patrimony as defined in the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (P.L. 101601; 104 Stat. 3048; 25 U.S.C. 3001) are discovered, the proponent shall stop operations in the

immediate area of the discovery, protect the remains and objects, and immediately notify the Monument Manager. The proponent shall continue to protect the immediate area of the discovery until notified by the Authorized Officer that operations may resume.

### Invasive Species

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2. There is potential for the spread of noxious and invasive weeds from equipment contaminated with weed seed and/or biomass. To reduce this potential, the contractor will thoroughly power wash and remove all vegetative material and soil before transporting equipment to the work site to help minimize the threat of spreading noxious and invasive weeds. This includes trucks, trailers, and all other machinery. The contractor shall be responsible for the eradication of noxious weeds on disturbed areas within the limits of the work site during the contract period.

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### **Monitoring**

#### Recreation

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#### Threatened and Endangered Species

The Peregrine Fund uses the site on a regular basis to monitor the condors.

Any adverse impacts to the birds from the installation and use of site amenities will be determined by their staff and the AGFD Condor Biologist, and any proposed mitigation measures would receive immediate consideration.

### **RATIONALE**

The decision to allow the proposed action does not result in any undue or unnecessary environmental degradation and is in conformance with the Arizona Strip District Resource Management Plan, as

amended. In addition, the decision provides for educational and recreational opportunities for the visiting public as well as condor enthusiasts and researchers.

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Becky Hammond  
Arizona Strip Field Office Manager

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Date