

**Sonoran Desert National Monument & Phoenix South
Community Workshops
Final Report, December 2003**

In November and December 2003, the Sonoran Institute facilitated a series of five community workshops in partnership with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) as part of continued public participation for the Sonoran Desert National Monument and Phoenix South planning efforts. The workshops were held in Ajo, Buckeye, Gila Bend, Mobile, and Tonopah. The purpose of the workshops was to discuss values people associate with their community and how they, in partnership with the BLM, can protect these values based on current and predicted trends in population growth. The workshops generally lasted 2-3 hours and the program included:

- a values exercise in which participants wrote down three things they value most about their community and the surrounding landscape (including BLM lands);
- presentations by Karen Kelleher on where BLM is in the planning process, Nina Chambers (from the Sonoran Institute) on social and economic trends in the region, and Hoyt Johnson (from Blueline Consulting/NASA) on the results of population growth modeling out to the year 2030; and
- a discussion of five questions that explore what communities and the BLM can do, independently and together, to manage public lands, accommodate growth, *and* maintain local values.

Participation

In general, participation in the community workshops was good. The three workshops held November 3-6 were better attended than the two held December 3-4. This could be attributed to the December meetings held closer to the holidays, or perhaps the longer time between when the meetings were arranged and when they were held. The best levels of participation were in Ajo, Tonopah, and Mobile. These three communities are more rural than Gila Bend and Buckeye; seem to have more people that live near the border with BLM lands (or, perhaps, have more connection to the BLM lands); and have specific issues or interests related to the BLM lands or the planning process. For example, current issues in Ajo involve access; in Tonopah the protection of Saddle Mountain; and in Mobile the siting of a proposed utility corridor. It is also worth noting that Ajo had the largest number of participants attend the meeting, and had a number of people express distrust for the BLM. All the other community workshops had a more relaxed atmosphere and no such distrust expressed. All the workshops showed people are willing to collaborate with the BLM.

The workshops in December were least well attended. It is a bit of a puzzle why there wasn't more participation in Gila Bend. It seems there are motivated, interested people, there are plans for a visitors center that would serve the multiple federal lands in the area, and they seem very connected to the national monument and the BLM lands to the west of town. Potential reasons for the lack of participation could be: there is an insufficient communication network to get the message out; the message isn't yet reaching the right people; people are apathetic; or people are generally satisfied and don't feel the need to attend and provide their comments. Among the people that do attend public meetings there appears to be a sincere desire to work closely and collaboratively with the BLM. The workshop held in Buckeye was intended to include residents

of nearby Goodyear, but no one from Goodyear attended. The participants in Buckeye were professionals and personally involved in planning the future of the community.

Values

The vision the communities described for themselves was consistent: they all expressed wanting to maintain their current quality of life and general rural character while gaining additional amenities in their communities (such as better jobs, restaurants and movie theatres, and community services).

There were many similarities among the communities in the values they expressed. They all included some values about the natural environment, their communities, and the role of public lands for recreation and open space. Some of the commonly expressed values among all the communities included: wildlife, flora and fauna, rural character, solitude/peacefulness/quiet/remoteness, “small town” character, and open space. Many expressed the values of accessing public lands—for a wide range of uses.

There were also pronounced differences in the communities and the way they expressed what they value. These are interesting because they reflect the character of the communities, and perhaps, the level of growth they have experienced. Below are short descriptions of each community.

Ajo

There were two striking values that distinguished Ajo from the other communities. First, “freedom” was repeated often in the values. This related mostly to access to BLM lands, being able to enjoy a range of activities from walking and solitude to family excursions to the use of OHVs. The second striking difference was the emphasis and specificity of value toward the Sonoran Desert and the emphasis on its “pristine” nature and beauty. Ajo residents also expressed values about their small community, the solitude and quietness. There were many concerns about access and damage to the resources, as well as the value of the BLM maintaining ownership of the lands around the community to help control/limit growth.

Mobile

Mobile was striking in its “leave us alone” sentiment. The most commonly expressed values in Mobile were about privacy, remoteness, peacefulness, and the role of public lands to protect and maintain these qualities.

Tonopah

Tonopah is unique in its rural character. People in Tonopah expressed similar values as other communities, such as privacy, quiet, solitude, and freedom, but had less emphasis and less specific value on the desert environment and more values related to rural ranching communities. These included “open range,” “no close neighbors,” references to scenery and vistas, rural and ranch environment, and equestrian recreation. There was concern here, as in other communities, about damage to the area from inappropriate OHV and other recreation.

Gila Bend

The values expressed in Gila Bend were evenly split between values of the natural Sonoran Desert, small town community, and rural character. Similar to Ajo, people have specific values related to the Sonoran Desert; similar to Ajo and Buckeye, they value their community and neighbors; and similar to Tonopah, they expressed values related to rural character, scenery, and open space.

Buckeye

The values expressed in Buckeye were the most dissimilar to the other communities. This may be a reflection of the difference in the make up of the participants, or could simply be the difference between Buckeye and the other communities. There were values expressed about the natural environment, but they were much less specific. Rather than “pristine Sonoran Desert” or “native flora and fauna,” they expressed “sense of place,” views, and open space. In fact, “open space” and “mountain views” were the most repeated values. There were also many more values about people, jobs, and growth.

Overall, the communities perceived that the Sonoran Desert National Monument and the proximity of other BLM lands to their communities would have a positive impact. The most common perceptions are that the BLM lands would help insulate their communities from growth and would provide open space, and that there would be some modest economic growth due to recreation and tourism. There were a few concerns about negative impacts of recreation and tourism use (expressed by Ajo, Mobile, and Tonopah) such as increased traffic, lack of control of access, and resource damage.

BLM Priorities and Issues

Participants had an opportunity to express what they think should be BLM’s priorities for land management. These were quite similar across all the communities, and included:

- *Maintain and improve resource protection.* People understood BLM’s multiple use mission and while they are concerned about access, they also support the protection of resources and the maintenance of areas in pristine condition. Residents of Tonopah also mentioned specific resource priorities such as providing and protecting wildlife corridors, and taking more opportunity for ecological and cultural research.
- *Provide access.* A wide range of access and use concerns was expressed. Mobile was least interested in additional access provided around their community; Ajo expressed their desire for (nearly unlimited) local access, though more control and limitations on others visiting the area (specifically limiting long-term stays of RVs). There was recognition of the need to accommodate all kinds of uses, and that there are some inappropriate uses occurring that are damaging the resources.
- *Increase public outreach.* There was a common desire expressed by all communities for more information, information that clearly explains policies and the reasons for these policies, a list of acceptable and unacceptable activities, clear access/road markings (maps and signage), and educational materials and/or programs that help inform the public about appropriate behavior.
- *Volunteer programs.* There was interest expressed in all the communities in volunteer programs and continued cooperation and collaboration in planning and management.

- *Safety and law enforcement.* Safety was a concern expressed particularly in connection with illegal traffic from the border (in Ajo, primarily). Law enforcement was also expressed as a way to better control recreation conflicts and prevent resource damage.

Community interests and priorities

Participants were asked what they thought their role could be in support of BLM land management. There seemed to be an easy acceptance of the role local communities can have and their impact on the surrounding lands. Again, there were commonalities and agreement among the communities about what they can do to support the BLM; they included:

- *Local planning and policies.* Particularly after the presentations on growth and regional trends, there was rich discussion about the kinds of planning and policy decisions communities can make that may help them deal with growth. There was also support that these planning and policy decisions are made in collaboration with the BLM and the broader context of neighboring communities and the county. Strong sentiment was expressed in the communities to maintain BLM ownership of the lands to limit growth and provide open space.
- *Public outreach.* To go along with the expressed priority that BLM focus on public outreach, residents also said that they could help get the message out to their neighbors. There was particular interest in education (especially for the youth) in appropriate use of OHVs.
- *Local law enforcement.* Since the BLM cannot provide the law enforcement coverage the community desires with the amount of acreage and number of staff available, there was significant interest among the communities in somehow coordinating with local law enforcement, establishing a hotline to report incidents on BLM land, and other kinds of “neighborhood watch” models to report and monitor disturbances.
- *Volunteerism.* There is interest in all the communities to help with volunteer projects—including clean-up activities, research and stewardship, monitoring, or education and outreach.

Following are the notes from each of the meetings, arranged chronologically. The sign-in sheets with participant names, addresses, and email addresses have been provided to the BLM in addition to all the original comment cards upon which people recorded what they value.

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Community Workshop—Mobile, Arizona

Sonoran Desert National Monument and

Phoenix South BLM Planning Areas

Monday, November 3, 2003

Facilitators

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Participants: 12

Purpose

The purpose of the workshop was to discuss values people associate with their community and how they, and the BLM, can protect these values based on current and predicted trends of growth.

Values

Everyone had the opportunity to write down three things they valued most about their place (Mobile and the surrounding landscape); the values people expressed were:

Undiscovered nature of the area, remoteness

“Things to remain unchanged”

“[The] public at large has not discovered the monument yet, so it is very peaceful”

“Privacy” (this was mentioned twice)

“Remoteness” (this was mentioned three times)

“Quietness”

Lifestyle

“Openness and freedom”

“Desert living”

“Private lifestyle”

“Raise my family in a wholesome lifestyle”

“I live here because I like the rural lifestyle with available space to pursue my hobby (flying)”

Public lands’ contribution to quality of life and the pristine nature of the region

“Public land should be protected to preserve the state’s quality of life”

“Public land is scenic, although parts seem a little desolate”

“Public lands in the area have limited access, which helps maintain the pristine environment”

“[The] pristine desert is an important public asset”

Aesthetics and quality of life

- “Enjoy the beautiful desert and non-congestion”
- “Beauty”
- “Wildlife”
- “Clean air”

Management issues

- “Keep the power grids close together”
- “Community input and feedback process”
- “Impacts on and off BLM land concerning agency decisions”
- “Community involvement—the people”
- “Well-managed state, federal, and private property”

At the end of the presentations, the following questions were discussed; responses are listed below:

How do you accommodate growth and keep what you value?

- Be realistic and plan for growth
- Buy up the land around you
- Establish a minimum size on lots for sale to maintain large lots
- Initiate zoning that specifies lot sizes of minimum 5 acres
- Actively seek to resolve social conflicts between residents and absentee landowners (through on-going communication, civil dialogue, etc.)

What kind of economy and quality of life do you want in your community?

- Encourage “low impact” economic sectors, such as services
- Increase community services
- Food services (restaurants, grocery stores, etc.)
- Establish areas for parks and recreation for local children and families to enjoy
- Establish an open space plan for the community, maybe a green belt
- Connect local open space to the national monument to create a buffer
- Become a “gateway” for the national monument
- Concentrate growth north of Highway 238
- Search for and encourage economic sectors that relate to the local area and local people’s interests and skills—such as businesses related to air strips: pleasure flying, plane storage, plane repair, and other businesses based recreation opportunities

What influence do you think the Sonoran Desert National Monument or other BLM lands have on your community and local economy?

- Increased traffic
- Increased number of visitors will result in increased visitor-resident interactions (residents now have visitors to the area asking for assistance, such as when they are lost or in trouble)

- Increased garbage
- Security issues will increase on private lands (there was a concern about crime and vandalism)
- Recreation and recreation impacts spill over on adjacent private (open) lands
- There will be more opportunity for economic growth and new businesses, especially along the Highway 238 corridor
- Because they are so close to the BLM lands, management decisions the BLM makes for this region will impact local residents

What should be BLM priorities for land management?

- Don't encourage the increased use of the monument
- Don't develop it, keep it like it is, and don't tell anyone about it
- BLM should anticipate regional growth and its impacts on the monument and other BLM lands and plan for it
- Increase law enforcement and patrol to reduce the impacts on the community; help maintain local security and safety
- Build flexibility into the plan to respond to unanticipated changes as they arise
- Place the entrance or access points to the monument away from residential areas to minimize the possibility of people crossing private lands to enter the monument

How can you help protect public lands?

- Be involved in the planning process
- Learn how to help in the implementation of the management plan
- Get rid of grazing in residential areas (there is a concern about cattle grazing on private lands crossing over onto the monument, and the reverse, cattle grazing on the monument crossing over onto private lands)
- Maintain respect for local BLM lands within the community
- Maintain communication with the BLM to work together on issues as they arise
- Help keep the BLM plan and management flexible to respond to unanticipated issues

Community Workshop—Ajo, Arizona
Sonoran Desert National Monument and
Phoenix South BLM Planning Areas
Wednesday, November 5, 2003

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Participants: 41

Purpose

The purpose of the workshop was to discuss values people associate with their community and how they, and the BLM, can protect these values based on current and predicted trends of growth.

Values

Everyone had the opportunity to write down three things they valued most about their place (Ajo and the surrounding landscape); the values people expressed were:

Quality of life values

- “Peace and quiet”
- “The quietness, serenity, and emptiness of the desert”
- “I value being able to use the Sonoran Desert for quiet reflection—a quiet, clean, peaceful place”
- “The beauty and peace of the Sonoran Desert (we spend a lot of time out there!)”
- “Sonoran Desert and its ambience is very unique”
- “Isolation and beauty of Ajo’s surroundings”
- “Physical beauty”
- “Lush desert vegetation (Sonoran Desert)”
- “I value the integrity (conservation) of the Sonoran landscape”
- “The extraordinary beauty of this area of the Sonoran Desert”
- “The wildness of this area allows people from all economic walks of life to live here.”
- “I value the wildness of the area and want to see it preserved.”
- “Cherishing the beauty of what we see, what we hear”
- “I value open vistas that appear untouched despite use by both people and animals—a result of thoughtful management”
- “Preserve the ambience of the area—the reason we came in the first place—solitude, quiet, clean air, and a gentle lifestyle”

Natural desert values

- “Desert animals”
- “Desert plants”
- “Conservation of the already protected wildlife refuges and national park”
- “Preservation of wildlife and habitat”
- “Habitat integrity”
- “Protection of desert flora and fauna”
- “Protecting the flora and fauna”
- “Preservation of the pristine desert environment”
- “Beautiful pristine desert”
- “I value the desert for its pristine environment and that it is available to us to use and not exploit”

Values for the community of Ajo

- “I value the unique people that live in this town. I have lived in a lot of places, but have never found such good friends before. I think the desert draws them.”
- “Small town”
- “Small town living—where you know people by name”
- “A small community where people care and take the time to work out differences”
- “I value small towns with an open, affirming, and accepting populace.”
- “Laid-back town of Ajo and its people”
- “Just a great place to live—quiet, laidback, and the animals (wildlife).”
- “Above all, I value community.”

Cultural and historic values

- “When I think of the Sonoran Desert, I think of the footprints left by my ancestors, and their struggles to survive. This makes me humble.”

Freedom

- “Freedom”
- “Preserve freedom to explore surrounding desert”
- “Freedom to enjoy wide open spaces”
- “Freedom of the desert”
- “Freedom to use the desert to see different things”
- “Freedom to use the desert as a tax payer”
- “Free to travel the trails of the desert”
- “Allow all to enjoy and respect the desert”
- “Freedom to enjoy the desert, keeping beautiful space beautiful”
- “Freedom for everyone to walk or drive in the desert”
- “Freedom to explore and hike and drive in the desert”
- “Freedom to enjoy the desert without driving a great distance. Ajo is already land-locked by the Cabeza Prieta, Organ Pipe Monument, the T.O. Reservation, and Barry Goldwater Range. We need the BLM area open to be able to enjoy our freedoms of being a citizen of the U.S. I enjoy camping, hiking, and exploring this area.”

Values of public lands

- “Protection of BLM lands with reasonable multiple use”
- “Public land that is available to the public and not to special interests”
- “Rights to use public lands”
- “Access to public lands”

Values of access to the desert

- “My concern is the continuing closing of the desert to public use. I would like to see the restrictions of the desert south of Ajo lifted.”
- “Not to close roads. No more parks. Our government has too much land as is”
- “How does the BLM justify restraining my movements on the Sonoran Desert, when they can’t stop the illegal immigration and drug running that goes on?”
- “Keep the BLM’s public land around Ajo *safe* from future residential development, but continue the policies of allowing free access for camping and just “being in the desert” (not *developed* facilities, however)”
- “Will not be deprived of the right to hunt gem stones and minerals in the desert”
- “Open access to all of the desert around Ajo”
- “Open access of BLM land surrounding Ajo for recreational use”
- “Rockhounding, wildflower and cacti study, wildlife sightings (birds, reptiles, butterflies)”
- “Keep lands available for hiking and natural resource observation”
- “Camping in the Sonoran Desert; also day trips to explore new spots, play scrabble, and just be there (we spend a lot of time out there!)”
- “Hiking and camping”
- “Non-destructive (foot) access”
- “Preserve access to surrounding desert”
- “Preserve existing roads and trails in surrounding desert”
- “Keep access open to existing roads and trails for ORV use. Restrict sensitive areas from ORV use.”
- “I have a son who owns 2 four-wheelers, so I can understand the need to allow such vehicles to *carefully* and *properly* use the BLM land. Hopefully, *not* through the streets of Ajo itself.”

Concern about damage to the desert

- “Avoid any degradation of the desert. My personal belief is that nothing that results in the degradation of public lands should be permitted, particularly in such a fragile environment as the Sonoran Desert.”
- “My greatest concern is the destruction of the desert by off-road vehicles. Given another five years of the current use, this desert will truly be a desert: a dust bowl unresponsive of vegetation and wildlife.”
- “I would like to see a restriction placed on ATV use within a 3 mile distance (for example) of residential areas. This would stop the noise and dust disturbance for these residents. I would really like them to be totally outlawed, but that is probably not realistic. The destruction to the desert and wildlife by these noisy, destructive machines must be considered also.”

“Stop the destruction of the desert by ATVs and other vehicles.”

Concerns about trash

“Clean up the desert—trash”

“Clean up the trash in the desert”

“Concerned that everywhere I look, I see new roads, trash, etc.”

Concerns for safety

“Safety is a concern because of the border crossers.”

“Safer access to the national park and the wildlife refuge”

At the end of the presentations, the following questions were discussed; responses are listed below:

How do you accommodate growth and keep what you value?

- Keep it as it is! Growth may not affect us much
- BLM maintains its land ownership to limit growth in the area
- Maintain current private land boundaries
- Get a handle on the current degradation of the desert; there is a need for monitoring and increased management
- Maintain local access for family enjoyment
- The increasing number of recreation (RV and ATV) use is a concern; how do we limit use without limiting local access?
- Limit long-term stays and the impacts they cause

What kind of economy and quality of life do you want in your community?

- Leave us alone, maintain the local character
- Maintain local community diversity
- The community is as it is because people are self-selected—those who love the desert and isolation come here
- Find ways to maintain families and youth
- (eco)tourism focused
- Spread tourism out over the year (rather than current, seasonal cycle)
- Take advantage of short-term, pass-through tourists
- There is a need to evaluate the kinds of visitor services needed and those currently available
- Retirement and services have replaced mining and grazing
- Stabilize and diversify the economy by fostering entrepreneurial activities
- Encourage a strong micro-business, entrepreneurial economy, increase community education level and skills
- Improve local infrastructure to support new businesses (e.g., fiber optics, etc.)
- Improve community services available

What influence do you think the Sonoran Desert National Monument or other BLM lands have on your community and local economy?

- The Sonoran Desert National Monument has little or no impact on Ajo because of the little use the monument gets
- The Sonoran Desert National Monument isn't really an influence here, Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument is much more of an influence
- There is some impact from people visiting the Sonoran Desert National Monument and Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument
- The proximity of Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument and Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge does affect Ajo
- Decisions made on the BLM Ajo lands *will* influence the community and economy of Ajo
- BLM lands protect us; increased protection and designation increases the protection to the community from growth
- BLM protects us from developers
- The potential of a Sonoran Desert National Park would result in profound growth pressure on Ajo
- Ajo is isolated and depends on BLM lands for recreation—we need to take back the desert and return it to pristine
- Conflict resolution is a positive impact for Ajo because of learning to deal with these issues

What should be BLM priorities for land management?

- Priority on increasing personnel to improve management and patrols to improve the enforcement of rules, laws, and designated camping areas
- BLM lands should be kept pristine; uses need to be allowed, but there needs to be appropriate use, compatibility of uses, and/or specially designated areas to allow uses (such as zoning)
- “Appropriate use” needs to be clearly defined; if uses are to be zoned or in designated areas, this needs to be clearly defined and communicated
- Improve management
- Restore “two-mile wash” (also known as “gun sight wash”) and other places that have been impacted
- Clearly communicate policy to the public
- Public outreach that explains rationale behind BLM decisions
- More signage in RV parks about the rules of using BLM lands, and to educate people about the desert and their impacts

How can you help protect public lands?

- Promote individual responsibility
- Promote community ethic
- Support and/or join volunteer efforts to help BLM
- Educate the children on how to responsibly use natural areas, ethics

- Form a local organization or club that is self-governing and structures, controls, and educates people about access and motorized use—involve this club in service projects that help restore and protect the area
- EDUCATION—assist in educating the youth, use the media to educate people in town and visitors, help with public outreach
- Involve local law enforcement to help the BLM
- Attend meetings and stay informed
- Make sure voices are heard

Community Workshop—Tonopah, Arizona

Sonoran Desert National Monument and

Phoenix South BLM Planning Areas

Thursday, November 6, 2003

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Participants: 20

Purpose

The purpose of the workshop was to discuss values people associate with their community and how they, and the BLM, can protect these values based on current and predicted trends of growth.

Values

Everyone had the opportunity to write down three things they valued most about their place (Tonopah and the surrounding landscape); the values people expressed were:

Quality of life

“Personal property”

“Privacy”

“Quiet”

“Solitude”

“Peace and Quiet”

“Open space” (this was mentioned twice)

“Non-developed, natural open space”

“Uninhabited areas—unspoiled landscape”

“Mountain and open areas”

“No close neighbors”

“Freedom from outside harassment”

“Preserve the local beauty to promote protection and betterment of our community”

“Enjoy being away from city congestion, etc.”

“Very little traffic”

“Enjoy small-town lifestyle”

“Rural environment”

“Maintain rural atmosphere”

“Ranch—rural area”

“Open, rural land”
“Open range”
“Open land with grand vistas”
“Vistas/view”
“Scenic view”
“Beautiful scenery”
“Dark skies”

Natural and cultural resources

“Naturalness”
“Flora/fauna”
“Wildlife” (this was mentioned four times)
“Sonoran Desert (renewal, blooming, endurance)”
“Cultural resources” (this was mentioned twice)
“I enjoy the pristine beauty of Saddle Mountain and want to keep it that way by preserving the mountain”

Recreation

“Maintain areas for recreation—horseback riding, hiking, ...”
“Ability to ride my horse without traffic; horse riders need their own areas without ATV use”

Concerns about resource damage

“Limiting overuse of land—destruction of the land”
“ATVs need their own riding areas
“... limit motorized vehicle use of wilderness lands”
“Keeping ATVs out of riverbeds”

Growth issues

“To have options for the future; as the area grows, as to where new roadways may be placed as we need new ways to exit our valley in other directions. Also to provide alternate ways for 500KV power transmission lines to be routed so as not to encroach further on our small amount of private lands.”
“Address incoming growth in a proper manner so that things can be placed in compatible locations”

Economy, local features

“Dog rescue area”

At the end of the presentations, the following questions were discussed; responses are listed below:

How do you accommodate growth and keep what you value?

- Work now to protect values
- Strike a balance—use growth to our benefit
- Ensure cooperation among stakeholders and landowners

- Create a win-win situation so people have a stake in maintaining these values
- Ensure cooperation between commercial interests and private stakeholders
- Identify areas for compatible uses
- Zoning and planning to allow an economy and growth that supports our values and interests (such as businesses related to horses and riding)

What kind of economy and quality of life do you want in your community?

- Just as it is now
- Keep low density (R190, R43)
- Maintain buffers and open space
- Maintain and create wildlife corridors for migration and other wildlife movement
- Encourage businesses based on natural assets, such as wildlife watching or bird watching
- Encourage equestrian-based businesses
- Protect grazing rights (with monitoring) on BLM lands to maintain a ranching, rural lifestyle (there was a related concern about keeping cattle from encroaching on private lands)
- Maintain the natural landscape
- Protect Saddle Mountain from resource damage (from irresponsible recreational shooting, off-road use, etc.)
- Encourage private recreation businesses for shooting ranges, dirt bike tracks/courses, bike repair, retail, etc.
- Encourage clean industry
- Need more businesses that serve the local area
- Need more jobs

What influence do you think the Sonoran Desert National Monument or other BLM lands have on your community and local economy?

- There has been more dirt bikers using this area
- There is a concern about the potential sale or disposal of BLM lands
- Growth will be channeled around BLM lands into the community
- There is an untapped potential for archaeological research and study
- Businesses are tied to Saddle Mountain—for economic benefit and for sense of place

What should be BLM priorities for land management?

- MORE PROTECTION!
- Keep the land and protect it
- Find more funding to better protect the lands
- Keep an interconnected set of wildlands to function as they do now (as wildlife corridors, etc.)
- Maintain riparian corridors for wildlife travel (ensure there are no gaps! Make use of underpasses, etc. when needed)
- Encourage the location and protection of open space that makes sense for wildlife (to fill in corridors, expand habitat, etc.)
- Increase community/public education with kiosks, signs, and other outreach materials (in Spanish, too)

- Use interpretation to educate people about the importance of the natural (and cultural) resources
- Work collaboratively with planning and zoning departments (county, local, etc.)
- Coordinate more volunteer efforts and projects (some equipment may need to be supplied)

How can you help protect public lands?

- Keep doing good deeds—both organized work parties and individual actions that help protect the resources and local area
- Live here, and try to help
- Work with the BLM to increase communication and partnership
- Local collaboration and information exchange with BLM to check out activities, locations, etc. to minimize the impact of use in the area
- Citizens should help bring the BLM and county together to collaborate
- Assist enforcement efforts through reporting, something like a neighborhood watch network, etc. (there was discussion about how to best get the information to BLM, and the role of local law enforcement)

Community Workshop—Gila Bend, Arizona

Sonoran Desert National Monument and

Phoenix South BLM Planning Areas

Wednesday, December 3, 2003

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Participants: 14

Purpose

The purpose of the workshop was to discuss values people associate with their community and how they, and the BLM, can protect these values based on current and predicted trends of growth.

Values

Everyone had the opportunity to write down three things they valued most about their place (Gila Bend and the surrounding landscape); the values people expressed were:

Natural qualities of the desert

“The beautiful desert and wildlife surrounding Gila Bend”

“Sustainment and protection of the Sonoran Desert, flora and fauna”

“I value the pristine desert that surrounds Gila Bend”

“Saguaro cactus preservation”

“Native vegetation”

“Wildlife habitat”

“Wildlife”

Small-town character

“Small town”

“The small town atmosphere of Gila Bend; knowing most everyone in town”

“I value the community in a sense that it is a small town and everyone knows each other”

“Friendliness of the people of Gila Bend, not afraid to talk to neighbors”

“Good neighbors; to the extent possible, mutually supportive”

“Having had the opportunity to make a living and raise a family here”

“I value that Gila Bend is not too isolated (as opposed to Ajo); it is close to Phoenix, Yuma, and Tucson”

Rural character

“Desert, mountain scenery”
“Country atmosphere”
“Agricultural area—green fields”
“Open space”
“Wide-open spaces”
“Tumble weeds”

Access and activities

“Public access consistent with protection of the ecosystems”
“The ability to get out of town for camping, hunting, riding, walking in our desert with family and friends”
“Hunting”
“Gila Monster activities”

Other values

“Main historic sites in area”
“Air quality”

At the end of the presentations, the following questions were discussed; responses are listed below:

How do you accommodate growth and keep what you value?

- We don't know...we're frustrated with developers coming in and with development occurring without any bounds
- Need to limit growth to minimize pressure on nearby military and public lands
- Water should be a limiting factor for growth
- Work with the city council to get ahead of the game by having a plan
- Cooperate, be proactive, get involved
- Coordinate with state and other regional plans (e.g., state trust lands)

What kind of economy and quality of life do you want in your community?

- Keep small, but big enough for some amenities, such as a movie theatre and restaurants
- Maintain night sky
- Maintain agricultural lands and water rights
- (see APS report on public opinions)

What influence do you think the Sonoran Desert National Monument or other BLM lands have on your community and local economy?

- Depends on how the national monument is managed
- Access by trails should be allowed, but controlled; an example is Saguaro NP East, where people can access the park and enjoy it, even though the city goes right up to the limits of the park
- More tourism—it has already started
- Gila Bend can provide information to tourists through the visitor center

What should be BLM priorities for land management?

- Maintain the beauty of the monument; most people support the BLM's mission
- Provide the public with information about what they can and can't do on the national monument
- Better designate routes
- Provide more detailed maps and access routes, signage
- "Protect the land *for* the people, not *from* the people;"—some areas need to be kept pristine, but people should still be allowed access to other areas to enjoy
- Maintain access
- Access should be provided for elderly and handicapped people to enjoy the Sonoran Desert as well
- Help establish an off-road organization
- Educate people about the misuse of the land (e.g., inappropriate OHV use)
- Control the impacts of OHV use and educate people—especially the youth—designate areas for OHV use in order to protect other areas from damage
- Involve youth and volunteers in service projects (e.g., clean up)
- Rangers are important for patrol and enforcement; contact with the public is important

How can you help protect public lands?

- Help educate the youth and citizens, involve the school district
- Help organize and participate in volunteer projects
- Work with the NRCD and their educational program for OHV users
- Foster mutual support and collaboration for BLM land management

Community Workshop—Buckeye, Arizona

Sonoran Desert National Monument and
Phoenix South BLM Planning Areas
Thursday, December 4, 2003

Facilitators

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Participants: 12

Purpose

The purpose of the workshop was to discuss values people associate with their community and how they, and the BLM, can protect these values based on current and predicted trends of growth.

Values

Everyone had the opportunity to write down three things they valued most about their place (Buckeye and the surrounding landscape); the values people expressed were:

Sense of place

- “Sense of place”
- “Open space” (mentioned six times)
- “Appreciation of rural atmosphere of the community”
- “Mountain views” (mentioned four times)
- “Green valleys”

Livability of the community

- “People”
- “People living in the area”
- “Smaller cities”
- “Small town”
- “Means of earning a living”
- “Employment base—jobs that pay well”
- “Opportunity to incorporate the natural amenities into the life/quality of the community”
- “Opportunity/availability to manage and orchestrate the town’s destiny and growth”
- “Good transportation system”
- “Public safety”

Other values

“Water conservation”

At the end of the presentations, the following questions were discussed; responses are listed below:

How do you accommodate growth and keep what you value?

- Plan well; think about the future
- Adopt policies that help us reach our goals
- Provide incentives to attract the kind of growth we want

What kind of economy and quality of life do you want in your community?

- A balanced community where people can live, work, and play
- A self-sustaining community
- Create an edge city so that people don't have to commute

What influence do you think the Sonoran Desert National Monument or other BLM lands have on your community and local economy?

- A positive influence
- BLM lands maintain open space
- Maintaining BLM lands will maintain the valued mountain views
- Depends on how the BLM allows their lands to be used in the future
- Currently it is insignificant, but as access is allowed and available, there will be more positive impacts
- Provides a reason and focus for collaborative planning and development of federal and state lands
- There will continue to be a need for easements on BLM lands to get to private lands

What should be BLM priorities for land management?

- Plan jointly and collaboratively with the state, county, and municipalities
- Plan for public access, not barriers to keep people out
- The BLM should attend meetings that discuss new development
- Provide the communities a sense of certainty
- Establish realistic goals for the public lands that are consistent with adjoining lands managed by other agencies
- Make management meaningful and practical
- Share data and collaborate with communities
- Security/safety issues should be a high priority
- Create a hotline (perhaps at the Chamber of Commerce) for citizens to report concerns

How can you help protect public lands?

- Outreach—communicate with stakeholders and citizens
- Work with the county sheriff to help ensure safety
- Educate residents and interest/user groups about appropriate public land use (e.g., responsible OHV use, to help prevent illegal dumping)

- Involve groups in volunteer projects
- Provide designated space for specific uses (such as OHV)
- Work with BLM to create a hot line (perhaps at the Chamber of Commerce) for citizens to report concerns at the BLM, and where they can pick up information about the monument and other BLM lands
- Educate the public about the allowed/restricted uses of nearby public (federal) and state lands