

ARIZONA Planning Bulletin



Phoenix South Resource Management Plan
Sonoran Desert National Monument Resource Management Plan

Bureau of Land Management • Phoenix Field Office

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Thanks for Your Input!

We would like to thank everyone who participated in the public meetings or submitted comments during the public scoping process. Your input is already helping us shape the direction of how the public lands should be managed. We received more than 6,000 comment letters during the scoping period (which ended on March 30, 2003) for the Phoenix South and Sonoran Desert National Monument (SDNM) Resource Management Plans (RMPs) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). These comments will help us focus on the issues that concern the people who use or are otherwise interested in these public lands.

The comments were compiled, reviewed, and analyzed to identify the preliminary issues that will be addressed in the RMPs and EIS. The results are available in a Scoping Report, which documents the scoping process, planning criteria, and issues identified. **The Scoping Report is available on the BLM planning web site at www.az.blm.gov.** The document is also available through an exciting new pilot program called e-Planning, which provides an interactive web site where project-related documents will be available for viewing or downloading. You are encouraged to provide comments using e-Planning, which is available through the BLM web site. If you don't have access to the Internet, copies of the Scoping Report also are available in the Phoenix Field Office's public room, located at 21605 N. 7th Avenue (south of Deer Valley Road) in Phoenix, Arizona, from 7:30 a.m. to 4:15 p.m. Monday through Friday.



The 11 public scoping meetings held in February and March 2003 were a success with 367 individuals attending.

Preliminary Issues Identified

The comments received during scoping generally fit into 18 resource categories. Most issues were similar for the Phoenix South and SDNM planning areas, but comments for SDNM tended to be more focused on environmental conservation and resource protection. The majority of the comments regarded the six resource categories listed below.

Special Area Designations – Public comments proposed new wilderness study areas (WSAs) for 16 areas to protect natural and cultural resources, and to prevent urban sprawl. Some support establishment of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) to protect specific areas. Others expressed that there is an abundance of wilderness areas, national monuments, and other restricted access areas and were opposed to any additional designations. Based on a settlement in a recent court case and BLM policy, BLM does not have the authority to propose or establish WSAs. However, BLM can evaluate the wilderness character of lands and consider other types of special designations including ACECs, national trails, national conservation areas, and backcountry byways, as consistent with federal law as well as policies and procedures.

Recreation – There was support for continuing existing recreational uses, such as hiking, hunting, sight-seeing, camping, and observing wildlife. Some people prefer dispersed recreation only and others prefer developed recreational facilities such as campgrounds, restrooms, recreational vehicle areas, etc. There also were mixed comments on recreational (target) shooting; some desire this opportunity and others oppose it because of the noise, debris left behind, and public safety concerns.

Lands and Realty – Comments supported retaining public land holdings and using land exchanges, land acquisitions, or conservation easements to protect the public lands and resources from encroachment. Preventing encroachment and incompatible land uses were the greatest concerns for SDNM. Utility companies,

in particular, urged support for existing and new utility corridors. Others were opposed to new utility corridors, particularly within SDNM, and some encouraged elimination of the Interstate 8 utility corridor.

Transportation and Access – Many expressed concern that there be no new restrictions to public lands access, but some indicated that access restrictions are needed to protect resources, particularly within SDNM. Comments were mixed with both support for and opposition to off-highway vehicle and all-terrain vehicle use, driving in washes, closing roads, and designating off-road use areas. Concerns regarding off-highway vehicles included soil erosion, impacts to vegetation and wildlife, noise, and dust.

Grazing Management – In the Phoenix South planning area, comments both supported and opposed livestock grazing. Some supported grazing but objected to overgrazing. Comments pertaining to SDNM were similar, but more heavily weighted toward the elimination of grazing within the monument.

Biological Resources – Comments supported the protection of vegetation—particularly riparian areas, floodplains, and wetlands—for their contribution to wildlife habitat and the watershed. There was support for biodiversity and ecosystem management, eradicating non-native and invasive species, protecting threatened and endangered species and their habitats, working in close partnership with the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD), protecting existing wildlife corridors, and rehabilitating fragmented habitat. Some comments supported the development of waters to support wildlife populations and a similar number of comments opposed the development of waters because of their potential to increase predation, competition, and disease transmission.

Other Categories – Other categories included air quality, airspace, cultural resources, fire management, law enforcement, mining and energy resources, Native American issues, public health and safety, public participation and education, socioeconomics, soil, visual resources, water, and wild horses and burros.

BLM Seeks Public Input on the Planning Criteria

We have developed draft planning criteria and would appreciate your comments, which may be submitted in several ways as noted in the section “How to Stay Involved.”

The planning criteria provide direction for the plan, and determine how the planning team approaches the development of alternatives and ultimately the selection of a preferred alternative. They ensure that plans are tailored to the identified issues and that unnecessary data collection and analyses are avoided.



Planning criteria focus on the decisions to be made in the plan and achieve the following:

- Provide an early basis for inventory and data collection needs
- Enable the manager and staff to develop a preliminary planning base map delineating geographic analysis units
- Provide sideboards for the decisions and alternatives that will be considered in the plan, taking into account law, regulations, and policy

CRITERIA APPLICABLE TO BOTH PLANNING AREAS

- The SDNM RMP will establish the guidance upon which the BLM will manage the SDNM. The Phoenix South RMP will establish management guidance for the remaining public lands. The Phoenix South and SDNM RMPs will replace and supercede all other BLM RMPs for the lands covered by them. The planning process will include an EIS that will comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) standards. Two Records of Decision will be issued, one for the SDNM and one for the Phoenix South area.
- The plans will be completed in compliance with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, Endangered Species Act, NEPA, the Archaeological Resources Protection Act, and all other relevant federal law and executive orders, as well as the management policies of the BLM.
- Where planning decisions have previously been made that still apply, those decisions will be carried forward into the RMPs. They also will use information developed and management alternatives proposed in previous studies of the planning area, including the proposed Amendment and Environmental Assessment to the Lower Gila North Management Framework Plan and the Lower Gila South RMP (2000).
- Planning decisions will be made in the context of the best-available data, including information specific to the BLM managed lands and regional contextual information. Regional contextual data may be used to identify the regional importance of the public lands for resource use and protection.
- The planning team will work collaboratively with the State of Arizona; Maricopa, Pinal, Pima, Gila, and Yuma counties; tribal governments; municipal governments; other federal agencies; the Resource Advisory Council; and all other interested groups, agencies, and individuals. Decisions in the plan will strive to be compatible with existing plans and policies of adjacent local, State, Tribal,

and Federal agencies, consistent with Federal law and regulations. Opportunities to coordinate management with adjoining landowners for resource protection and public uses will be considered.

- The RMPs will be developed in such a way that they will be flexible and adaptable to new and emerging issues and opportunities. During implementation of the RMPs, the BLM will continue to work in partnership with the public and local, State, and Tribal governments and agencies to identify priority implementation projects and to identify and resolve emerging issues.
- Native American Tribal consultations will be conducted in accordance with policy, and tribal concerns will be given due consideration. The planning process will include the consideration of any impacts on Indian trust assets.
- Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will take place throughout the planning process in accordance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act and the National Memorandum of Agreement to identify conservation actions and measures for inclusion in the plan.
- Coordination with the Arizona State Historic Preservation Office will be conducted throughout the planning process.
- The plans will recognize the State's authority to manage wildlife populations, including hunting and fishing, within the planning area. Coordination with AGFD will occur in accordance with the statewide Memorandum of Understanding.
- The plans will set forth a framework for managing recreational and commercial activities in order to maintain existing natural landscapes and to provide for the enjoyment and safety of the visiting public.
- The lifestyles of area residents, including the wide variety of uses of the public lands, will be considered in the RMPs.
- Any lands, or interests therein, located within the planning area boundary, which are acquired by BLM, will be managed consistently with these RMPs, subject to any constraints associated with the acquisition.
- The RMPs will address transportation and access for the public lands; areas will be identified as open to vehicles, closed to vehicles, or vehicles limited to designated roads. Within the monument and in other areas identified in the RMPs, motorized and mechanized routes will be designated.

- The RMPs will recognize valid existing rights.
- Federal Geographic Data Committee standards and other applicable BLM standards will be followed in the development and management of data.
- Management of existing wilderness will continue. The RMPs will not address reduction or elimination of existing wilderness, changes in boundaries of existing wilderness, or opening of roads or mechanized or motorized access into existing wilderness.



CRITERIA APPLICABLE TO SDNM PLANNING AREA

- The SDNM RMP will meet the requirements of the SDNM Proclamation of January 17, 2001 (#7397), to protect the objects of geological, archaeological, historical, and biological value within the monument.
- In accordance with the Proclamation, acquired lands and interests within the monument boundary will be added to the monument, and will be managed consistently with the SDNM RMP.
- Due to the desire to maintain the existing natural and cultural landscapes of the SDNM, to the maximum extent possible, facilities will be located outside the monument boundary or in neighboring communities. Facilities that must be located within the monument boundaries will be placed in such a way that they are unobtrusive.
- The SDNM RMP will not address monument boundary adjustments or proposals to change the Proclamation.

RESOURCE-SPECIFIC PLANNING CRITERIA

In addition to the general planning criteria listed above, resource-specific planning criteria have been developed for each planning area and are available for public review in the Scoping Report. Included below are several examples of resource-specific planning criteria. In some cases, the planning criteria are the same for both planning areas. In other cases, the criteria differ between planning areas.

Special Designations – The BLM will review, through this planning process, lands within the planning area that may possess remote or primitive characteristics. Consistent with BLM policy, BLM has the authority to discuss and incorporate wilderness values into the land use plan, in accordance with the public process incorporated in all land use planning efforts. Thus, BLM is committed to listening to public input through the land use planning process and, where appropriate, managing specified areas of land for wilderness values. However, BLM has no authority to establish new WSAs or to report such areas to Congress. BLM can protect areas in their natural state using a wide range of land use tools other than the WSA designation process.



Grazing Management –

Proposed decisions will determine if allotments are open or closed to grazing in accordance with the Taylor Grazing Act and, if open, in what manner. BLM will manage grazing through existing laws, regulations, and policies including the Arizona Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Grazing Administration. BLM will provide for livestock management in an environmentally sensitive manner consistent with resource management objectives, including achieving desired plant communities and land use conditions. Decisions will include a strategy for ensuring that proper grazing practices are followed while preserving habitats for sensitive plant and wildlife species. Appropriate best management practices will be followed to protect rangeland resources, and where necessary, mitigate any conflicts with other uses and values. Administrative actions to assure compliance with existing permit/lease requirements, modify permits and leases, monitor and supervise grazing use, and remedy unauthorized grazing use will continue. Consistent with the monument proclamation, grazing permits on Federal lands within the monument south of Interstate 8 shall not be renewed at the end of their current term and grazing on Federal lands north of Interstate 8 shall be allowed to continue only to the extent that the BLM determines that grazing is compatible with the paramount purpose of protecting the objects identified in the proclamation. A priority will be placed on protecting the monument resources, including the diversity of plant communities identified in the Presidential Proclamation.



Vegetation and Habitat Management – Proposed decisions will be measured against the Arizona Standard for Rangeland Health for desired plant communities that provide for biodiversity and protection and restoration of native species. Vegetation will be managed to achieve desired plant communities (considering the ecological site potential) that provide for biodiversity as well as protection and restoration of native species. The plant communities will be managed to protect, improve, and restore communities to provide wildlife habitat and non-consumptive uses including plant protection, visual quality, watershed protection and stability, and water quality. Provisions may be made for hazardous fuels reduction and habitat restoration. For the monument, desired plant community descriptions will be developed that emphasize the protection of the diversity of natural communities specified in the proclamation. Monument plan decisions will prioritize achieving or maintaining these desired plant communities.

Draft Purpose and Significance Statements are Prepared for the Monument

Purpose, significance, and mission statements have been developed to clarify the intent of the monument proclamation. Pur-

pose statements clarify why the monument was set aside as a unit for special management. Significance statements address what makes the areas unique. Mission statements reflect the conditions managers should strive to attain. **The statements are currently in draft form and your input is needed before they are finalized. See “How to Stay Involved” for information on where to send your comments.**

Purpose – The purpose of the SDNM is to protect and manage the natural, geologic, and cultural resources for long-term conservation and to further our knowledge and understanding of those resources through scientific research and interpretation. The SDNM was designated to protect resources, specifically:

- A large Sonoran Desert landscape, that connects to other large natural areas.
- The ecological diversity of the Sonoran Desert, including a diversity of flora and fauna associated with rare woodlands assemblages, palo verde-mixed cacti, creosote-bursage, desert washes, and rare desert grasslands.
- A cultural landscape that appears largely unchanged, with a rich history that spans at least 10,000 years, from the Archaic to modern day.

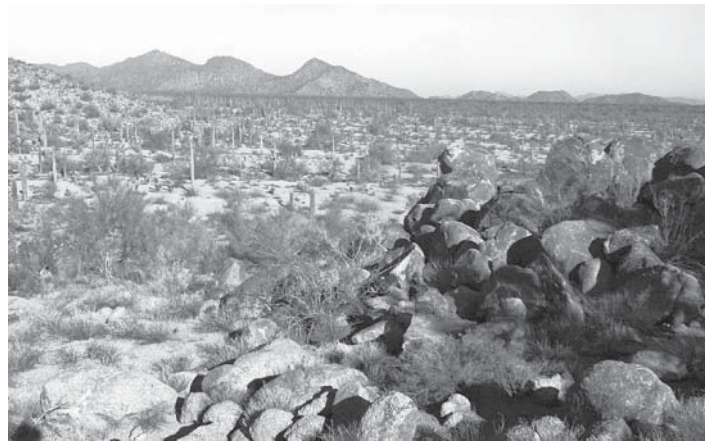
Significance – The monument includes natural resources that represent the amazing biological diversity of the Sonoran Desert, including ecological communities found in both the Arizona uplands subdivision and the Lower Colorado River subdivision of the Sonoran Desert biome. The ecological communities include large, high-quality examples of common Sonoran Desert communities such as creosote-bursage and palo verde-mixed cacti, which contain expansive saguaro cactus forests and provide habitat for a wide variety of wildlife, including cactus ferruginous pygmy-owls, Sonoran desert tortoise, lesser long-nosed bat, and desert bighorn sheep. Less common communities include rare woodland assemblages, typically found in wetter climates, and desert grasslands and other habitats, that provide important habitat for foraging and nesting birds and amphibians. Cutting through these communities are desert washes that provide important cover, movement corridors, and forage, especially in hot summer months. This ecological diversity provides habitat for completing life cycles and surviving drought, and provides excellent opportunities for scientific research on many aspects of the Sonoran Desert.

The monument encompasses a diverse cultural landscape that appears little changed from prehistoric to modern times. The monument provides a rare opportunity to protect, in one area, a wide diversity of sites, both in time and place. It contains sites representative of the time periods from the Archaic through the modern day, including villages, camps, ak-chin farming



sites, rock art, lithic scatters, homesteads, and historic ranches, as well as economically important trade and travel routes. These and other sites are an important connection for contemporary tribal peoples and descendants of those who have traveled through and settled here. The monument provides significant opportunities to expand our knowledge and understanding of aboriginal peoples, Spanish explorers, and Euro-Americans within a landscape that encompassed all aspects of their daily lives.

The monument is a large area of Sonoran Desert that supports large-scale ecological processes. This largely undeveloped area provides important open space, wilderness opportunities, and a valuable visual landscape in the midst of a rapidly urbanizing area.



Mission Statements

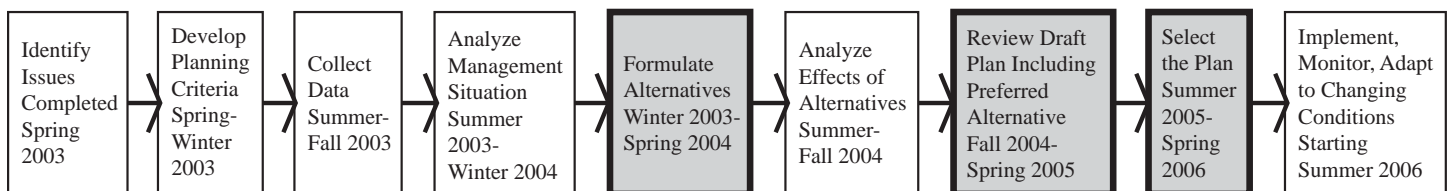
- The protection of the cultural, biological, physical, and scientific resources for which the SDNM was created receives the highest priority in planning and management.
- The biological diversity and associated values of the monument are protected, restored, maintained, and managed within their broader ecosystem context. Particular attention is paid to retaining connectivity with other natural areas and conserving habitats for viable populations of a full range of native species.
- The cultural resources of SDNM are protected and managed. Particular attention is paid to the cultural landscape and the relationship of individual sites to the larger landscape.
- Scientific research that aims to expand understanding and improve management of Sonoran Desert resources is encouraged.
- Outreach programs are developed that build constituencies, and expand understanding and appreciation of the SDNM and its resources. The public receives the information they need to have a safe and enjoyable experience.
- Natural and social settings are managed to protect the undeveloped and natural character of the monument, while providing opportunities for compatible, sustainable uses. The monument provides an opportunity for the visitor to explore and discover the Sonoran Desert.

What’s Next? - Project Schedule and Process

The process for developing the RMPs/EIS is well underway. BLM's planning process employs nine basic steps. Issues have been identified through the public scoping process that is now completed. The Scoping Report and this Planning Bulletin (in summary) represent the outcome of the first step and also introduce planning criteria to guide and direct the plan. We are in the process of collecting data and starting to analyze the management situation. There will be formal public meetings, workshops, or hearings in the steps with bold box outlines and we especially encourage your participation in these steps.

The planning team will integrate and use the issues identified, inventory of resource data, and existing management direction (including compliance) with federal, state and local policies and procedures in the development of the draft management alternatives. A range of reasonable alternatives, including an alternative considering no action, as required by NEPA, will be developed and analyzed in the EIS.

We plan to host workshops, beginning in January, so that you may participate in the development of the alternatives and we will notify you when specific dates and locations are confirmed. Once the alternatives are developed, they will be analyzed for their impact on the environment.



Phoenix South/SDNM Planning Process
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Phoenix South and Sonoran Desert National Monument Planning

How to Stay Involved in the Planning Process

At this point, your thoughts and ideas on the planning criteria and SDNM purpose and significance statements (rather than commenting on the issues identified or the scoping process) will be most relevant to the planning process. Please submit your comments by November 28, 2003 via the e-Planning web page at www.az.blm.gov, by email to az_sdnm_phx_south@blm.gov, or by mailing them to Phoenix South/SDNM Planning Process, Bureau of Land Management, Phoenix Field Office, 21605 North 7th Avenue, Phoenix, AZ 85027.

Over the next three years, there will be many opportunities to stay involved in the Phoenix South/SDNM planning process. There will be several workshops and other meetings, periodic planning bulletins, and opportunities to comment on planning documents particularly through the interactive e-Planning site.

If you would like to ask a question, make a comment, be added to the mailing list, or request a presentation with your organization, please call our toll-free telephone information line at 1-866-627-7850. Just leave us a message, and we will return your call within one business day.