



U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management

# BLM Arizona Strip Field Office Virgin River Canyon Recreation Area Business Plan



**May 2024**

## Recommendations, Reviews, and Approvals

Recommended by:

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Lorraine Christian, Field Manager, Arizona Strip Field Office

Date

Reviewed by:

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Wayne Monger, District Manager, Arizona Strip District Office

Date

Approved by:

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Raymond Suazo, Arizona State Director

Date

This business plan was prepared by the Bureau of Land Management's Arizona Strip Field Office pursuant to the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act of 2004 (16 U.S.C. 6801-6814) and BLM recreation fee program policies. It establishes future management goals and priorities for the Virgin River Canyon Recreation Area (VRCRA) within the Arizona Strip Field Office.



# United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
Arizona Strip Field Office  
345 E. Riverside Dr.  
St. George, UT 84790

In Reply Refer to:  
2932 AZA01000

Dear Reader,

I would like to present for your review and comment the draft *Virgin River Canyon Recreation Area (VRCRA) Business Plan*, managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Arizona Strip Field Office. This recreation site includes a campground and day-use area providing outstanding recreation opportunities for an average of 14,760 visitors annually.

Current fee revenue only partially covers operation and maintenance costs most years and will not cover future infrastructure replacement needs. The current fee structure has remained unchanged since 1998 while costs and visitation have both increased. Actual expenditures and average annual operating costs for the last 5 years including expenditures on replacement, repair, or renovation of aging facilities using both fee revenue and appropriated funds from fiscal years (FY) 2019-2023 are shown in the table below.

### Average Annual Operating Cost—Virgin River Campground FY19-23

Staff Labor	Operations	Total Annual Expenditures	Average Annual Revenue
\$77,503	\$135,229	\$212,732	\$48,191

This draft plan proposes the following fee increases (see table below) based on comparative market research within the region. The proposed fee increases are needed to meet growing operational and maintenance expenses.

Type of Recreation Fees at Cove Recreation Site	Current Fees	Proposed Fees
Day Use – Standard Amenity	\$2	\$6
Overnight Camping (Tent, RV) – Expanded Amenity	\$8	\$22
Group Overnight Camping – Expanded Amenity	n/a	\$42

In addition to the fee increase proposal described above, the Arizona Strip Field Office (ASFO) seeks input to implement routine adjustments to fees to offset inflation and cover future operating expenses, based on the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U). ASFO proposes to increase each fee by 20% and rounded to the nearest dollar whenever the CPI-U rises by 20%.

The purpose of this draft plan is to describe the site's fee program objectives and how the BLM intends to achieve them and to provide opportunities for public participation in the development of the proposed fee change proposal. The draft plan is available for public comment from May 13 to June 12, 2024. Written comments will be accepted through the following means and are due by June 12:

- Email: [lmchrist@blm.gov](mailto:lmchrist@blm.gov) with subject line: "Virgin River Canyon Business Plan"
- Mail: BLM Arizona Strip Field Office, Attn: Virgin River Canyon Business Plan, 345 East Riverside Drive, St. George, UT 84790

Thank you for your interest in your public lands.

Sincerely,

Lorraine M. Christian  
Field Manager

Draft

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# 1 Executive Summary

This business plan was prepared pursuant to the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) of 2004 (16 United States Code (U.S.C.) 6801-6814), and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) recreation fee program policy. It establishes future management goals and priorities for the Virgin River Canyon Recreation Area's recreation fee program. This plan covers all existing and proposed recreation fees within the Virgin River Canyon Recreation Area (VRCRA) fee site. The plan seeks fee modifications for existing day use areas and overnight use campsites, as well as introduces a group-site fee for overnight camping. Fees at the VRCRA have not been modified since 1998, or approximately half of the campground's 48-year-old "lifetime". The BLM Facility Asset Management System (FAMS) database shows that the campground was constructed in 1976 and that fees were increased with the 1998 plan.

After careful consideration of the current fee rates and the anticipated revenues and expenditures as outlined in this document, as well as a comparative review of fees charged elsewhere by other public agencies and private sector providers for similar sites, services, and facilities within the region, the following fee changes are recommended:

- Increase the current \$2.00 day use area fee to *\$6.00 per carload per day*.
- Increase the current \$8.00 individual site overnight camping fee (includes access to the day use area) to *\$22.00 per night per site* with a maximum of two vehicles per site and up to four people per vehicle.
- Establish a group-site fee of *\$42.00* for overnight camping (includes access to the day use area) with a maximum of 10 vehicles at designated group sites.

Fee increases are needed to meet the business needs required to maintain and operate the site, to prevent resource damage, and to provide visitor services including information about the campground. The BLM has been maintaining and making minor improvements to the campground facilities since construction was completed in 1978. However, in 2019 it was determined that renovations of the bathroom facilities and other infrastructure in the campground were necessary to ensure the health and safety of public land users. The area was therefore closed from April 2019 until April 2022 to allow for these renovations and to update and improve restrooms and other facilities. Work completed included a thorough remodeling of the restrooms, upgrades to water and electrical systems, resurfacing of the roads in the campground, improving site accessibility, and replacing or retreating picnic tables as needed. Repair of the epoxy floors in the bathrooms and replacement of septic tank/leach fields at each of the three restrooms has yet to be completed. This work is scheduled to be done in phases so that only a few sites or a single restroom will be temporarily unavailable while work is being done rather than the entire campground being closed.

The data used to analyze and prepare this business plan was obtained through internal BLM tracking and accounting mechanisms such as the Recreation Management Information System (RMIS), Collections and Billings System (CBS), Federal Business Management System (FBMS),

and locally generated recreation and visitor use tracking spreadsheets. For more detailed information, please contact the BLM Arizona Strip Field Office. Some data may be subject to Privacy Act or other legal requirements.

## 2 Background and Authorities

This business plan has been prepared to meet the criteria defined in the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act of 2004 (Public Law 108-447; Title VIII, Section 801; 16 U.S.C. 6801–6814). The authorities and regulations for this business plan are:

- **The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976** (Public Law 94-579; 43 U.S.C. 1701–1787), contains BLM’s general land use management authority over the public lands, and establishes outdoor recreation as one of the principal uses of those lands. Section 302 (b) of FLPMA directs the Secretary of the Interior to regulate through permits or other instruments the use of the public lands. Section 303 of FLPMA contains BLM’s authority to enforce the regulations and impose penalties.
- **The Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) of 2004** repealed applicable portions of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act and replaced BLM’s authority to collect recreation fees. This current law authorizes BLM to collect recreation fees at sites that meet certain requirements, allows BLM to keep the fee revenues at the local offices where they were collected, and directs how BLM will manage and utilize these revenues. FLREA also established the America the Beautiful – The National Parks and Federal Recreational Pass Program.
- **Title 43 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 2930 (43 CFR 2930) Permits for Recreation on Public Lands** contains the regulations governing BLM’s recreation permitting program.

This business plan has also been prepared pursuant to all applicable BLM recreation fee program policies and guidance, including:

- BLM Manual 2930, *Recreation Permits and Fees*, Rel. 2-296 dated October 22, 2007
- BLM Handbook 2930-1, *Recreation Permit and Fee Administration Handbook*, Rel. 2-300 dated November 17, 2014

The BLM strives to manage recreation and visitor services to serve the diverse visitor outdoor recreation demands while helping to maintain sustainable setting conditions needed to conserve the public lands, so the visitors’ desired recreation choices remain available. The BLM’s goals for delivering recreation benefits from BLM-administered lands and waters to the American people and their communities are to:

- Improve access to appropriate recreation opportunities,
- Ensure a quality experience and enjoyment of natural and cultural resources, and
- Provide for and receive fair value in recreation.

### **3 Introduction to the Arizona Strip Field Office (ASFO) Recreation Program**

The BLM ASFO is part of the BLM Arizona Strip District and lies within Arizona's Second and Ninth Congressional Districts in northern Coconino and Mohave counties in northwestern Arizona. The Grand Canyon isolates the Arizona Strip from the rest of Arizona, making it among the most remote and rugged public land in the lower 48 states. The ASFO administers approximately 1.15 million acres of public lands on the Arizona Strip. The rugged environment with countless mesas, canyons, mountains, and plateaus offers visitors a wide array of dispersed and structured recreation opportunities. The BLM estimates 225,000 recreation visits annually to public lands managed by the ASFO, according to the BLM's RMIS database.

There are five Special Recreation Management Areas (SRMA) in the ASFO which are the focus of management and monitoring for the recreation and visitor services program. The ASFO also manages three wilderness areas, portions of the Old Spanish National Historic Trail, a section of the Arizona National Scenic Trail, 9 Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, and segments of the Virgin River suitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

Recreation opportunities within the ASFO are diverse and unique with activities ranging from sightseeing, hiking, rock climbing, backpacking, whitewater boating, camping, and hunting to off-highway vehicle travel. While there are several developed recreation sites such as trailheads with vault toilets, delineated parking areas, maintained trails, and interpretive signs or informational kiosks scattered across the field office, most of the public lands within the ASFO offer an undeveloped setting for recreationists. The only fee site administered by the ASFO is VRCRA, which is described in more detail in Section 2 of this document.

## 4 Description of Existing Fee Site/Area

The 135-acre VRCRA is located adjacent to the southeastern side of the Cedar Pocket Road interchange of Interstate 15 (I-15) near milepost 18 in Arizona, approximately 20 miles southwest of St. George, Utah and 20 miles northeast of Mesquite, Nevada. This location, adjacent to a remote section of I-15 without services, makes VRCRA a very attractive stop over spot for travellers passing through the area. The rugged terrain of the wilderness areas adjacent to the Virgin River, which is the main attraction in the area, are within walking distance of the 109-site campground and day use areas.

Table 1: Estimated Number of Visitors to the VRCRA, Fiscal Years 2014-2023\*

Fiscal Year	VRCRA Estimated Number of Visitors
FY2014	11,435
FY2015	14,408
FY2016	15,600
FY2017	15,781
FY2018	16,573
FY2023	20,578

\* 2019 and 2022 were partial years; 2020 and 2021 the area was closed for renovations.

VRCRA sits at approximately 2,264 feet in elevation, in the middle of the geological wonder of the Virgin River Gorge and between two wilderness areas: the Paiute Wilderness south of I-15 and the Beaver Dam Mountains Wilderness north of I-15 (Figures 1, 2, and 3). This relatively low elevation setting makes the VRCRA very attractive during the colder times of the year to visitors from colder regions looking for warmer temperatures to recreate and camp in. VRCRA is managed by the ASFO, located in St. George, Utah.

The current fee for day use at VRCRA is \$2 per day per vehicle. The overnight camping fee is \$8 per night, per site. Each campsite is limited to two vehicles (Table 1). Fees are collected year-round.

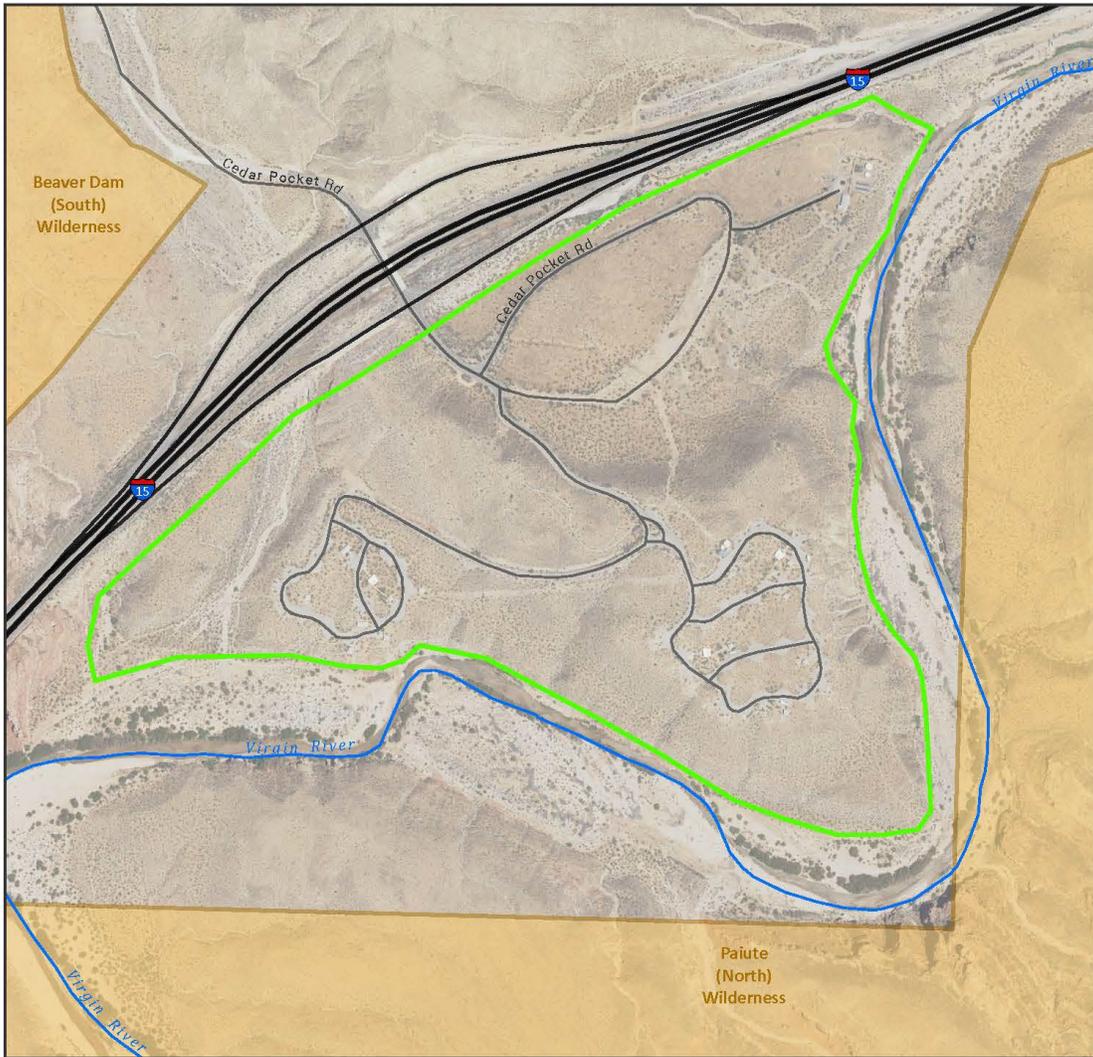
Table 2 Current Recreation Fee Type and Category

Fee Type and Category	Current Fees
Day Use – Standard Amenity	\$2/day/vehicle
Overnight Camping – Expanded Amenity	\$8/night/site



# Virgin River Canyon Recreation Area

Bureau of Land Management - Arizona State Office



Recreation Area Boundary

### Transportation

Interstate Highway

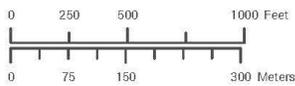
Highway Ramp

Road

### BLM Wilderness Area

Wilderness Area Boundary

Federal Land within Wilderness Area



★ Map Location

Map Produced by BLM Arizona State Office  
Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 12N  
Scale: 1:7,500 at 8.5x11 page output  
Date: 8/23/2022

*No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual use or aggregate use with other data. Map location extent depicts BLM managed land.*

Figure 1 Virgin River Canyon Recreation Area Map

## 4.1 Environmental Setting

VRCRA lies in the transition zone between the Basin and Range Physiographic Province and the Colorado Plateau Physiographic Province. Vegetation in the region varies greatly, due to substantial elevation changes. Several plant communities range from the hot Mojave Desert with sparse vegetation such as saltbush, brittlebush, and Joshua trees to mountains with pinyon pine, Ponderosa pine and Douglas fir. The lower slopes of the mountains are home to a variety of desert dwelling wildlife, notably the Gila monster, North America’s only poisonous lizard, and the threatened Mojave Desert tortoise. Moving upslope, into the rocky, sparsely vegetated canyons, desert bighorn sheep can be found.



Figure 2 Beaver Dam Mountains Wilderness

The massive Virgin River Gorge provides a stunning, colorful, and rugged landscape and forms the scenic backdrop to VRCRA. Extreme faulting, folding, and natural erosion has resulted in a complex mixture of steep craggy cliffs, sandstone buttes, and alluvial fans. The Virgin River Gorge mimics, on a smaller scale, the colorful layers and striking depth of the Grand Canyon and many of the very same geological formations are found in both places.

## 4.2 Amenities and Compliance with FLREA

VRCRA has numerous amenities, including facilities and services. The BLM completed construction of the original VRCRA facilities in 1978. VRCRA was closed from April 8, 2019 to April 8, 2022 to complete major renovations to ensure the health and safety of public land users, and to update restrooms and other facilities. Work completed included thorough renovation of the restrooms, upgrades to water and electrical systems, resurfacing the roads in the campground, improving accessibility, replacing or retreating picnic tables as needed, removal of the residence associated with the former highway rest area, and installation of a new fee kiosk.

The day use areas meet the criteria in FLREA to charge a standard amenity fee because the following amenities are provided:

Day Use	Amenities
X	Designated developed parking
X	A permanent toilet facility
X	A permanent trash receptacle
X	Interpretive sign, exhibit, or kiosk
X	Picnic tables
X	Security services

In addition, potable water, fire pits, barbeque grills, and educational interpretive signs are available in the day use area. The day use area also has pull-through parking spaces, and seven of the day use sites have shade structures (two double sized for larger groups and five single-party sized). Four of the day use sites are fully compliant with the Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) accessibility standards. Federal government facilities are subject only to the ABA standards which are very similar to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards.

The campground meets the criteria in FLREA to charge the expanded amenity fee because the following amenities are provided:

<b>Campground</b>	
<b>X</b>	Tent or trailer spaces
<b>X</b>	Picnic tables
<b>X</b>	Drinking water
<b>X</b>	Access roads
<b>X</b>	The collection of the fee by an employee or agent of the Federal land management agency
<b>X</b>	Reasonable visitor protection
<b>X</b>	Refuse containers
<b>X</b>	Toilet facilities
<b>X</b>	Simple devices for containing a campfire

In addition, the campground offers barbeque grills and pull-through parking spaces. Four campsites are fully compliant with the ABA accessibility standards and five campsites have shade structures.

Short footpaths facilitate movements within VRCRA between the parking lot and individual sites, restrooms, and hiking trails. There is an interpretive trail that features excellent views and provides educational resource information via an interpretative panel. There is a scenic trail leading to the Virgin River from both the campground and the day use area. Access roads and parking spaces are paved.

Three restroom facilities have three toilets each and are in centralized locations with convenient access for both day use and campground visitors. The day use area and campground restrooms provide flush toilets and comply with ABA accessibility standards. The BLM provides trash receptacles and garbage dumpsters along with trash removal service. The campground has no electrical or waste dump hook ups, except for the camp host site. Figures 5, 6, and 7 illustrate examples of some of the provided amenities.



Figure 3 Campsite Area



Figure 4 Day Use Area



Figure 5 Typical Restroom

### 4.3 Visitation and Visitor Demographics

Visitation trends are highly variable and primarily influenced by factors such as economic conditions, fuel prices, weather, temporary closures, and river levels. Overall visitation to VRCRA consistently increased year-over-year in the five-year period prior to the April 2019 to April 2022 temporary closure and has continued this trend from reopening to present. Visitation at VRCRA is derived primarily through tabulation of recreation use permits (BLM Form 1370-036; commonly known as fee envelopes). Calculation methods also include traffic counters, trail counters, and/or BLM staff estimates. The BLM documents annual visitation by fiscal year (FY) which starts October 1 and ends on September 30.

Table 3 Estimated Number of Visitors to VRCRA by Fiscal Year\*

Fiscal Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2023	Average
Day Use Visitors	6,990	7,899	7,720	8,007	8,608	8,261	7,914
Overnight Visitors	4,445	6,509	7,880	7,774	7,965	12,317	7,815
<b>Total</b>	11,435	14,408	15,600	15,781	16,573	20,578	15,729
Year-Over-Year % Increase	8%	26%	8%	1%	5%	24%	12%

\* 2019 and 2022 were partial years; 2020 and 2021 the area was closed for renovations.

There are two types of recreation use permits (RUP) issued to VRCRA visitors: day use and overnight use (purchase of the overnight use permit includes access to the day use area). In general, day users are the predominant user group at VRCRA, based on the number of day use RUPs issued (Table 4). The BLM does not collect or maintain comprehensive visitor demographic information for recreational users across the public lands that it administers. For relevant demographic data please refer to Section 10 in this document.

Table 4 Number of Recreation Use Permits (RUPs) Issued by Fiscal Year and by Type of Use for VRCRA\*

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>Average</b>
Day Use RUPs	2,757	3,341	3,472	3,460	4,013	2,804	3,307
Overnight RUPs	1,935	2,714	3,206	3,749	3,765	5,250	3,437
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,692</b>	<b>6,055</b>	<b>6,678</b>	<b>7,209</b>	<b>7,778</b>	<b>8,054</b>	<b>6,744</b>
Year-over-Year % Increase	0%	29%	10%	8%	8%	4%	10%

\* 2019 and 2022 were partial years; 2020 and 2021 the area was closed for renovations.

#### 4.4 Season of Use

Visitation to the region is typically higher in spring and fall because of the favorable weather conditions. The main recreational activities visitors enjoy in VRCRA are: camping, picnicking, photography, and river play. In the winter, visitation to VRCRA is primarily for camping. For spring and summer visitors, hiking and river play are important recreational activities. Water level is a significant attractant for visitors who come to VRCRA in the spring and early summer, when the streamflow is generally highest, to enjoy the Virgin River. Table 5 shows the total (day use and overnight visitors) estimated monthly visitation for Fiscal Years 2017, 2018 and 2023, illustrating seasonal visitor fluctuations over the two-year period before the temporary closure in 2019 for renovations and then in 2023 after the VRCRA was reopened.

Table 5 Seasonal Visitation

<b>Visitors</b>	<b>Oct</b>	<b>Nov</b>	<b>Dec</b>	<b>Jan</b>	<b>Feb</b>	<b>Mar</b>	<b>Apr</b>	<b>May</b>	<b>Jun</b>	<b>Jul</b>	<b>Aug</b>	<b>Sep</b>
FY2017 Visitors	1556	1655	486	558	816	2087	2381	2087	1000	862	1253	1040
FY2018 Visitors	1841	1401	355	1040	1161	1920	2329	2272	769	1150	1180	1155
FY2023 Visitors	2036	830	483	828	1919	828	3954	1414	2553	2701	no data	1258



Figures 6, 7, 8 Examples of common visitor activities at VRCRA, from left to right, include hiking, gathered around a campfire while camping, and camping and/or picnicking.

## 5 Proposed Modifications to Recreation Fee Rates

After careful consideration of the fee calculation process (as described in Section 9), the proposed changes to fees are as follows:

Table 6 Proposed Fee Change

Description	FLREA Fee Category	Current Fee	Proposed Fee
Day Use Area Fee per Vehicle	Standard	\$2.00	\$6.00
Individual Site, Overnight Camping Use Fee per 2 Vehicles, per night (includes access to the day use area)	Expanded	\$8.00	\$22.00
Group Site Fee, Overnight Camping use, per night with a maximum of 10 vehicles (includes access to the day use area)	Expanded	N/A	\$42.00

The interagency America the Beautiful – the National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass is accepted at all BLM fee sites that charge a standard amenity fee but does not cover expanded amenity fees. These passes will continue to be accepted at VRCRA to cover the day use fee (standard amenity fee). Interagency Senior Pass or Interagency Access Pass holders receive a 50% discount on the overnight camping fee (expanded amenity fee). The discount only applies to the fee for the campsite physically occupied by the Senior Pass or Access Pass holder, not to any additional campsite(s) occupied by members of the pass holder’s party.

The Arizona Strip Field Office will use various e-commerce technologies as directed in BLM Instruction Memorandum 2022-010, to provide recreation visitors opportunities to find, reserve

and pay for campsites and day use within the field office. Most of these options are provided through the interagency reservation service Recreation.gov.

An expanded amenity fee for reservation services is charged at VRCRA in addition to any other standard or expanded amenity fees in accordance with 16 U.S.C. 6802(g)(2)(G). Reservation services fees could range from \$.50 to \$10.00 depending on the type of service provided. The reservation service is subject to contracting requirements and will be adjusted with contract changes or with future updates to the business plan. Other payment options may also be considered in the future as technology and software develops, such as onsite credit card payment systems.

## **5.1 Model for Establishing Future Fee Changes**

BLM's permit and fee policy recommends the use of an index for routine fee adjustments rather than reviewing each individual adjustment through a comprehensive business plan effort that requires tremendous investment of effort and time. VRCRA fees have been at their current levels since 1998. In 1998 the average annual Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U) was at 163.0; by 2023 it had climbed to 304.702. According to the [CPI Inflation Calculator](#), \$10 in January 1998 has the same buying power as \$19.20 in February 2024. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, "the CPI -U is a measure of the average change over time in the price paid by urban consumers for a market basket of consumer goods and services" (bls.gov/cpi). The BLM is seeking approval to exercise the option to increase overnight camping and day use fees by \$5 a night for camping and \$1.50 a day for day use fees when there is a 20% increase in the CPI from the date this business plan is approved. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as of January 2024 the CPI is 302.201. This option to further increase fees could occur when the CPI reaches 362.641.

The ASFO seeks approval to adopt a model to increase fees by 20% (then rounded) whenever the CPI-U, US City Average, All Items, 1982-84=100, not seasonally adjusted, rises by 20%. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Consumer Price Index or CPI is "a measure of the average change over time in the price paid by urban consumers for a market basket of consumer goods and services" (bls.gov/cpi). The CPI-U is the broadest and most comprehensive CPI. The all urban consumer group included in the CPI-U represents over 90 percent of the total U.S. population (<https://www.bls.gov/cpi/questions-and-answers.htm>).

The BLM is seeking approval to exercise the option to increase each fee by 20%, rounded up to the nearest dollar for the overnight camping use fees and rounded up to the nearest half dollar for the day use fee, when there is a 20% increase in the CPI-U from the date this business plan is approved. The first adjustment would result in an increase to: the day use fee of \$1.50, the individual site overnight camping fee of \$5, and the group site overnight camping fee of \$9. For example, if the current CPI-U at the time the final plan is approved is 312.332 then the CPI-U would need to reach 374.80 before the ASFO could increase fees by 20%.

This model would ensure the VRCRA fees evolve in tandem with the ever-changing environment of the future and increasing costs.

## 6 Operating Costs

The total actual and average operating costs, as shown below in Tables 7 and 8, includes staff labor, contractual services and equipment, materials, and supplies. The amounts associated with these costs are shown in the following breakdowns for each category.

**Table 7 Actual Expenditures by Year - VRCRA**

Federal Fiscal Year	Staff Labor	Operations Costs	Total Annual Expenditures	Revenues	Net Gain/Loss
2023	\$63,663	\$26,074	\$89,737	\$89,980	\$243
2022	\$101,080	\$82,690	\$183,770	\$51,334	(\$132,436)
2021	\$39,545	\$211	\$39,756	\$20,800	(\$18,956)
2020	\$126,864	\$91,128	\$217,992	\$10,904	(\$207,088)
2019	\$56,362	\$476,042	\$532,404	\$67,937	(\$464,467)

**Table 8 Average Annual Operating Cost - VRCRA FY19-23**

Staff Labor	Operations	Total Annual Expenditures	Average Annual Revenue
\$77,503	\$135,229	\$212,732	\$48,191

Currently, fee revenue is used to fund labor, operations, contractual services and equipment, materials, and supplies as much as possible – as shown in the table, current revenues do not cover all these expenses. Table 7 illustrates the annual difference between revenue and needed expenditures and shows a net loss of for all fiscal years except 2023. When there is a net loss, fee revenue must be supplemented by significant amounts of annual appropriation funding to cover expenditures required to maintain and operate the campground. Table 8 demonstrates the shortfall (or lack thereof) in fee revenue in the Net Gain/Loss column.

### 6.1 Staff Labor

Salaries for BLM staff engaged in the operation of VRCRA are funded through Congressionally appropriated funds to BLM and through fee revenues. Table 9 lists the estimated total staffing costs needed to operate VRCRA using Congressionally appropriated funds and fee revenues.

### 6.2 Contractual Services

Table 9 also estimates contracted services that are used for waste removal (dumpster service) and for other specialized services such as for electrical work or plumbing.

### 6.3 Equipment, Materials, Supplies

Table 9 lists the costs of the equipment, materials, and supplies needed to maintain, improve, and manage VRCRA. The costs shown in Table 9 are estimates based averages from the FYs 2019-2023. In 2019, several Deferred Maintenance/Capital Improvement projects (a combination of deferred maintenance and new construction) have been completed: replacement of all traffic, regulatory, guidance and directional signs; installation of Pay/Interpretive Stations; trail markers; installation of barrier fencing; new paving; updated restrooms and pumphouses, and demo of an

existing unused administrative site and building. Most of the equipment, materials, and supplies associated with these Deferred Maintenance/Capital Improvement (DM/CI) projects were funded by Congressionally appropriated funds to BLM, though many of the improvements were paid for with 1232 (Recreation Fee Collections) fee funding.

Table 9 Total Estimated Annual Staffing, Contracted Services, and Materials Cost Breakdown

<b>Position/Contract/Materials</b>	<b>Workdays Per Year</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Outdoor Recreation Planner (1)	100	\$58,580
Administrative Assistant Public Land Information Center 1)	1	\$10,000
Maintenance Staff (1)	20	\$9,000
Law Enforcement Ranger (2)	30	\$24,100
Park Ranger (1)	100	\$30,160
Community Water System Testing (1)	3	\$20,000
Campground hosts (1)	1	\$1,000
Fire personnel Labor (2-6)	30	\$11,060
Contracted Bathroom Cleaning and Maintenance (proposed but not implemented currently)	116 days for 16 toilets.	\$68,788
Trash Dumpster (weekly) and plumbing and electrical maintenance services (as needed)	As needed	\$5,000
Equipment/Materials/Supplies & DM/CI projects	As needed	\$22,500
<b>Total</b>	N/A	<b>\$260,188</b>

## 6.4 Other Services

Other costs of administering the Recreation Area that are not quantified here include overhead: office space; information services; fleet operations; and managerial, engineering, administrative, and budget support.

## 6.5 Deferred Maintenance and Capital Improvements

Major projects within VRCRA have been funded by Congressionally appropriated funds. For example, through the BLM's 5-Year Deferred Maintenance and Capital Improvement Program, the major projects previously mentioned were completed or have been initiated to increase safety, improve accessibility, and repair or replace deteriorating structures. However, additional health and safety, as well as functional projects may be needed outside the Deferred Maintenance and Capital Improvement Plan as they have in the past. Such projects could include:

- Deferred maintenance to facilities over and above what has been estimated for annual operating costs for equipment, materials, and supplies; and
- Construction of new trails to improve non-motorized access throughout the Recreation Area.

## 6.6 Other Projects

Information outreach is a critical component of visitor satisfaction. Current outreach materials include an informational brochure, website, on-site informational kiosks (including fee information, rules and regulations, and activity ideas), wayside interpretation panels. Additional interpretative outreach will continue as funding is available to produce new interpretive materials.

## 7 Revenues

100% of fee revenues are managed and maintained within the Arizona Strip Field Office. Fee revenue partially pays for labor associated with the operation and maintenance of VRCRA, and facility improvements.

### Estimated Annual Review After Fee Increase—Virgin River Campground FY24-28<sup>1</sup>

Federal Fiscal Year	Projected Fee Revenue Without Fee Increase	Projected Fee Revenue With Fee Increase	Projected Fee Revenue Lost Without Fee Increase
FY 24	\$97,737	\$271,491	\$173,754
FY25	\$105,737	\$293,713	\$187,976
FY26	\$113,737	\$315,936	\$202,199
FY27	\$121,737	\$338,158	\$216,421
FY28	\$129,737	\$360,380	\$230,643

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<sup>1</sup> Based on fee trends from FY2019-23 and the current fee being approximately 36% of proposed fee.

Revenues are deposited in a separate fee account, specific to VRCRA. Any balance remaining in this fee account at the end of the fiscal year (October 1 - September 30) remains in the account and becomes the beginning balance for the next fiscal year.

BLM recreation staff and law enforcement rangers conduct patrols to verify visitor compliance with permit and fee payment requirements. Recreation Area fees revenues are deposited into the site's fee account.

## 8 Priorities for Future Expenditures

Table 10 provides an estimate of the total average annual operating costs for the next six years. The costs shown for 2024-2029 include staff labor costs and equipment, materials, and supplies costs and have a 2 percent annual inflation rate adjustment added for each year. 2 percent represents the Federal Reserve's target for inflation over the long term.

Table 10 Future Total Average Annual Operating Costs

FY	Staff Labor	Operations, Equipment, Materials, and Supplies	Total Cost
2024	\$120,000	\$135,000	\$255,000
2025	\$122,400	\$137,700	\$260,100
2026	\$124,848	\$140,454	\$265,302
2027	\$127,345	\$143,263	\$270,608
2028	\$129,892	\$146,128	\$276,020
2029	\$132,490	\$149,051	<b>\$281,541</b>

## 9 Analysis of Recreation Fee Rates

### 9.1 Analysis of Current Fees

BLM policy authorizes the use of either a cost-recovery calculation or the fair market value<sup>2</sup> method to analyze proposed fee rates. The fair market value method was chosen to support the need to modify fees at VRCRA and to analyze the fees charged in the area for use of similar

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<sup>2</sup> Fair Market Value is the price for a good, resource, or service that is based on competition in open markets that creates neither a shortage nor a surplus of the good, resource, or service.

services and facilities, though the Cost Recovery Method is also discussed at the end of this section.

## 9.2 Fair Market Value

When the current fee schedule was established up for VRCRA in 1997, fees in the market area for sites with similar facilities and services were examined to determine the fair market value for day use and overnight camping. Those same recreation sites, as well as new additions to the area, were examined as part of this Business Plan. Table 11 displays the recreation sites assessed and the fees charged; sites are a mix of state and federal government sites. No private facilities are shown because the amenities and services were not comparable: they offered far more amenities such as RV hookups, boating, pools, sport courts, and laundromats. An assessment of the fees charged elsewhere at similar facilities was made to determine what level of fee increase would be appropriate for VRCRA. The purpose of this assessment was to determine a fair market value for VRCRA, without creating unfair federal competition or over charging visitors.

The other recreation areas most similar to VRCRA being discussed (marked with an \* in Table 11) charge camping fees ranging from \$12 to \$35 with the average site fee being \$22.67. At VRCRA, the services and facilities for camping are the same and consequently should be charged an equivalent fee. This range of fees also shows that VRCRA, at \$8, is well below the market rate for camping. When comparing camping fees at the other recreation areas that have more amenities than VRCRA (such as the availability of showers, etc.), fees range from \$20 to \$40. This indicates that VRCRA should stay at the lower end of the market, since these amenities are not available.

The same criteria from above applies for the group-site fees. The recreation sites with a \* show similarities in amenities that are available. These similar recreation sites have fees ranging from \$42-\$108 for group campsites, with the average site fee coming out as \$41.78. However, Quail Creek State Park has a noticeably higher fee due to the site being a shaded pavilion, lakefront, being ADA accessible, and having RV hookups. While these qualities do set the site apart from VRCRA, it is still comparable due to the amenities, facilities, and services offered. The enhanced qualities are what causes the group fee to be at the high end of the market, meaning that since VRCRA's group sites do not offer the same qualities, the offered fee will be at the lower end. The fair market value produces an equivalent and fair fee.

Of those recreation sites that have day-use fees, all are comparable in terms of offering recreational activities and basic amenities to support day use (restrooms, trails, picnic area, etc.). Fees range from \$5 to \$20 with the average being \$6.25. This indicates that VRCRA, at \$2, is vastly below the going market rate for day use. The average day use fee is well over triple the cost of the current day-use fee at VRCRA.

**Table 11 Comparison of Developed Recreation Sites and Fees in Washington County, Utah**

Recreation Site	Agency	RV Hookups	Day Use Fee	Individual Site - Campsite Fee	Group Site - Campsite Fee	Notes
<b>VRCRA CG</b>	BLM-ASFO	No	\$2	\$8	N/A currently	No group sites currently. 3 group sites proposed in business plan. These sites will have accessible flush toilets, RV or vehicle parking, campfire grills and picnic tables. Will provide visual, hiking, and birding opportunities.
Baker Dam*	BLM	No	\$5	\$12	\$24	18 sites with accessible vault toilets, RV or vehicle parking and a tent pad, fire rings, grills, picnic tables. Provides fishing, hiking, and birding opportunities.
Red Cliffs*	BLM	No	\$5	\$15	N/A	11 sites with shade shelters, picnic tables, potable water, accessible vault toilets, trash collection, and grills. Also provides historic and paleontological sites, hiking trails, mountain biking, and horseback riding.
Gunlock State Park*	State	No	Out of state senior: \$10 Out of state: \$15 Resident senior: \$5 Resident: \$10	\$35 + \$20/extra vehicle	N/A	30 sites with boat ramps, restrooms, opportunities for fishing, day-use parking areas, water and electricity, picnic tables, and grills. Also includes RV, tent, and trailer sites.
Snow Canyon State Park *	State	Yes	Out of state senior: \$10 Out of state: \$15 Resident senior: \$5 Resident: \$10 Commercial: \$4/person Group: \$100 for 3 hours; \$30/extra hour	Non-hookup \$40 + \$20/extra vehicle Hookup \$45 + \$20/extra vehicle	\$175 (35 people) \$200 (50 people)	32 sites with 3 group sites holding a maximum of 8 vehicles, ADA compliant and modern restrooms, comfort station, drinking water, dump station, electricity, fire pit, grill & table, hiking trail, hookups, horseback riding, hot showers, interpretive/ nature programs, motor home/trailers, ranger station, rock climbing, sewage disposal station, tent pad, visitor center, water hookups. Also includes RV, tent, and trailer sites.

Sand Hollow State Park *	State	Yes	Out of state week: \$20 Out of state weekend: \$25 Resident senior: \$10 Resident weekday: \$15 Resident weekend: \$20 Walk in: \$5/person	Hookup: \$50 Non-hookup: \$35	\$75-\$125	97 sites with 5 group sites holding a maximum of 16 vehicles, boating, comfort station, dump station, fishing, full hookups, hot showers, modern restrooms, off highway vehicle area, parking, ranger station, sewage disposal station, showers, trailer, and water sports. Also includes RV, tent, and trailer sites.
Quail Creek State Park*	State	Yes	Out of state: \$20 Resident senior: \$10 Resident: \$15	Hookup: \$40 Non-hookup: \$28 + \$20/extra vehicle	\$108	24 sites with 1 shaded group site holding a maximum of 4 vehicles, beach access, boating, canoeing/kayaking, comfort station, drinking water, fish cleaning station, fishing, modern restrooms, pets allowed, picnic shelter, picnicking, ranger station, scenic views, shelters, sports activities, and swimming. Also includes RV, tent, and trailer sites.
Dixie National Forest (NF) Ebenezer Bryce*	USFS	No	N/A	\$21 + \$9/extra vehicle	\$42	11 sites with 3 double sites holding a maximum of 16 people, picnic tables, fire pits, tent pads, drinking water (Memorial Day-Labor Day), vault toilet, great views of the Pine Valley Mountains. Recreation opportunities include horseback riding, hiking, fishing, sight-seeing, and wildlife viewing. Also has RV sites.
Dixie NF Crackfoot*	USFS	No	Day Use Large Group: \$48-\$190 Day Use Standard Site Fee: \$23	\$23	\$46	15 sites with 3 double sites holding a maximum of 16 people, picnic tables, fire pits, tent pads, 5 walk in sites, drinking water, vault toilet and opportunities for horse riding, fishing, cycling, and hiking. Also has RV sites.

Dixie NF Yellow Pine*	USFS	No	Day Use Large Group: \$48-\$190  Day Use Standard Site Fee: \$23	\$23	\$46	5 sites with 1 double site holding a maximum of 16 people with picnic tables, fire pits, tent pads, and drinking water (Memorial Day-Labor Day). Also has RV sites.
Dixie NF Dean Gardner*	USFS	No	Day Use Large Group: \$48-\$190  Day Use Standard Site Fee: \$23	\$23	\$46	21 sites with 3 double sites holding a maximum of 16 people, picnic tables, fire pits, and tent pads, drinking water (Memorial Day-Labor Day), vault toilet, and opportunities for horse riding, fishing, cycling, and hiking. Also has RV sites.
Dixie NF Pine Valley Recreation Area - Picnic Area*	USFS	No	Picnic Area Fee (Day Use Only): \$8	N/A	N/A	Numerous Day Use Picnic Areas are scattered throughout the Pine Valley Recreation Area.
Zion National Park (NP) South*	NPS	No	N/A	Tent only \$20 Electric: \$30	\$50	117 sites with 4 group sites holding a maximum of 15 people, trash/recycling collection, staff on site, potable water, dump station, flush toilets, a picnic table, and a fire ring. Also has tent and dry RV sites.
Zion NP Watchman*	NPS	No	N/A	Tent only \$20 Electric: \$30	\$50	176 sites with 7 group sites holding a maximum of 12 people for \$50 (max of 25 for \$90 and 40 for \$130), electric hookups, trash/recycling collection, staff on site, potable water, dump station, flush toilets, a picnic table, a fire ring, an amphitheater, and boat access. Also has tent and RV sites.
<b>Average*</b>	---	---	\$11.40	\$22.67	\$61.60	

\*Average numbers for Camping Fee and Group Camping Fee calculated only using areas which represents similar amenities, services, and facilities.

### Cost recovery Fee Calculation Method

The goal of a fee increase would be to cover 100% of the average annual operating costs of contractual services, equipment, materials, and supplies, and maintain fee revenue reserves to cover one year of average annual operating costs. These costs are estimated to be approximately \$260,000 for FY 2024. An additional goal would be to provide revenue for some Deferred Maintenance and Capital Improvement and other projects that would benefit visitors which have been averaging approximately \$80,000 a year for since 2019 projected out to FY28. Added together, these costs equal \$340,000 for FY24. Projected estimated revenue for FY24 is approximately \$100,000 resulting in a projected shortfall of \$240,000 so projected revenue will only cover 29% of total costs. In order to cover 100% of the total costs, camping fees would need to be raised to \$27.50 and day use fees raised to \$7, an increase of 345% which is the reciprocal of 29%.

## **10 Impacts from Changing and Non-Changing Recreation Fee Rates**

### **10.1 Geographic Context**

VRCRA is located in close proximity to the borders of three counties, including Mohave County in Arizona, Clark County in Nevada, and Washington County in Utah (refer to Map 1 below). There are eight population centers in close proximity (within a radius of 20 miles) to VRCRA, including Beaver Dam CDP (Census Designated Place), Littlefield CDP, and Scenic CDP in Mohave County; Bunkerville CDP and Mesquite City in Clark County; and Ivins City, St. George City and Santa Clara City in Washington County (refer to Map 1). VRCRA is surrounded by two BLM wilderness areas (refer to Map 1).

### **10.2 Socioeconomic Context**

Based on the latest American Community Surveys published by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2020, these eight population centers cover a wide range of population sizes, including four small-size communities in Arizona and Nevada with populations of less than 2,000 people, three mid-size communities in Nevada and Utah with populations of around 10,000 people, and a large-size community in Utah, namely, St. George City, with a population of around 113,000 people (refer to Table 12).

In terms of the primary economic status, the three small-size population centers in Mohave County (due to census data availability, represented by census tract 9501.01 as shown in Map 1) have the lowest income levels compared with the other five population centers, as does Mohave County compared with the other two counties, and Arizona compared with Nevada, Utah, and the nation (refer to Figure 1a). This similar pattern is reflected in the higher poverty rates within the three population centers in Mohave County, Mohave County as a whole, as well as the State of Arizona (refer to Table 12).

### **10.3 Potential Ecosystem Impacts**

Based on the revenue collected and the fees charged during 2018 in VRCRA with a 38-site day-use area and the 74-site campground, on average there were 24 day-use visitors and 22 overnight

campers daily. There is some capacity for VRCRA to be more fully utilized. The proposed increased recreation fees for both day-use and camping overnight can contribute to a higher standard of maintenance and protection of VRCRA which in turn can improve the cleanliness and amenity value of the area. These improvements can, on the one hand, attract more visitors, and on the other, enhance the recovery of the functions and services generated by the surrounding ecosystems.

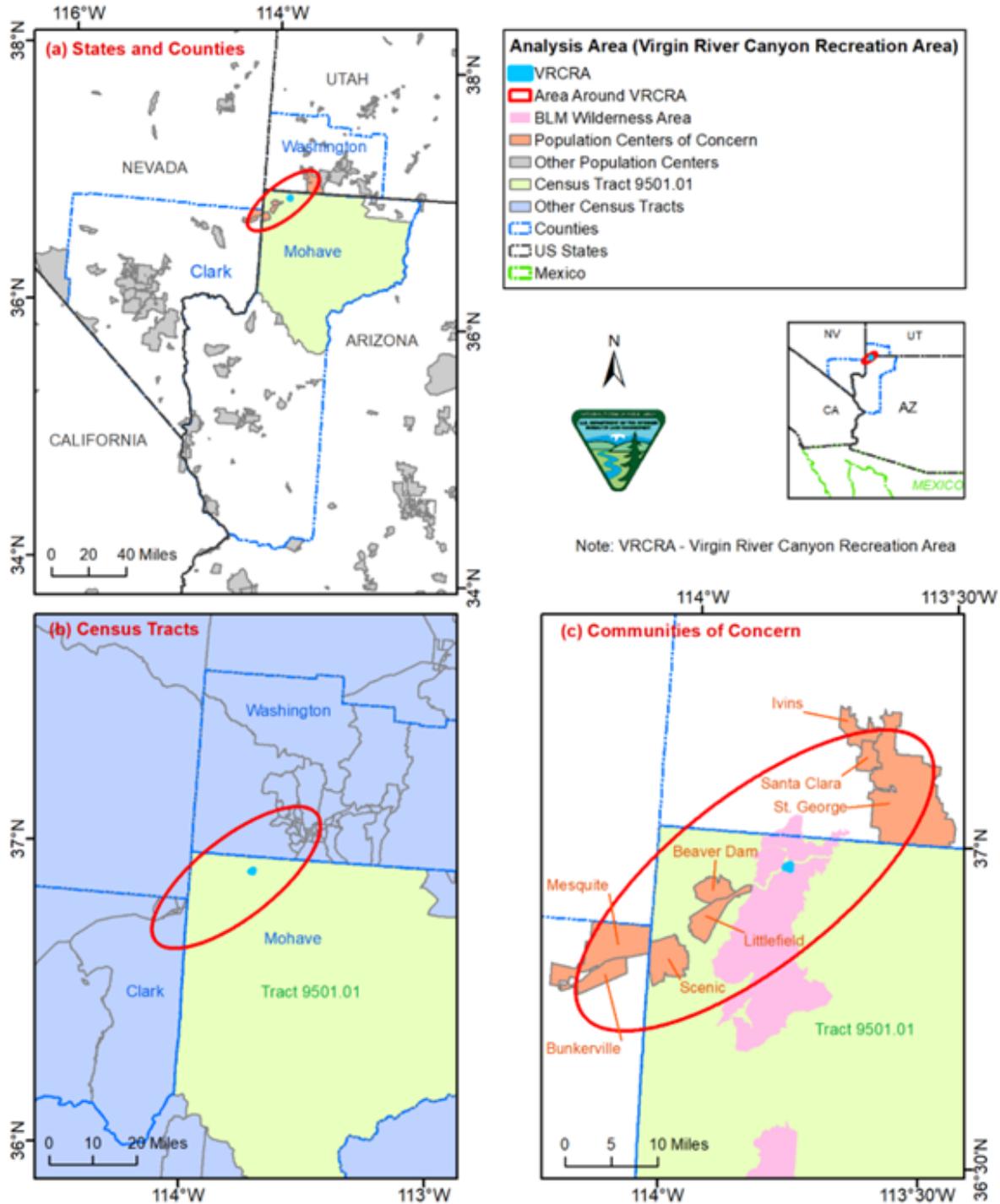
## **10.4 Potential Economic Impacts**

The expected increased number of visitors to VRCRA will potentially contribute to more employment opportunities for relevant economic sectors such as (A) arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services, (B) educational services, health care and social assistance, and (C) wholesale trade and retail trade. In 2020, these three sectors were the top 2, top 1 and top 3 industries respectively, in terms of employment by population in Mohave County in Arizona, Clark County in Nevada and Washington County in Utah, respectively (refer to Table 12). Given this established foundation, the expected increased visitation to the Recreation Area has the potential to further enhance employment and economic outputs in these sectors.

## **10.5 Potential Social Impacts**

Based on the definition for minority population or Environmental Justice population as provided by the Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ, 1997), none of the eight population centers with close proximity to VRCRA has an Environmental Justice population higher than 50% of their respective populations. However, census tract 9501.01 which represents the three small communities – Beaver Dam CDP, Littlefield CDP and Scenic CDP in Mohave County – has a meaningfully higher Environmental Justice population than that of Mohave County; that is, 42% compared with 23%, as well as a lower income levels and higher poverty rates. The increase of recreation fees is likely to reduce the affordable frequency for the three small communities to enjoy VRCRA.

# Map 1: Analysis Area: Communities



This map was compiled in July 2022. No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual use or aggregate use with other data, or for purposes not intended by BLM. Spatial information may not meet National Map Accuracy Standards. This information may be updated without notification.

Table 12 Analysis Area: Population in 2020

County	Mohave County, Arizona			Clark County, Nevada		Washington County, Utah		
<b>Population Center</b>	Beaver Dam CDP	Littlefield CDP	Scenic CDP	Bunkerville CDP	Mesquite City	Ivins City	St. George City	Santa Clara City
<b>Population</b>	1,552	256	1,850	1,667	22,928	11,108	113,096	8,924

<b>Population Area</b>	Mohave County	Clark County	Washington County	Arizona	Nevada	Utah	United States
<b>Population</b>	218,499	2,391,137	197,143	7.46 million	2,890,845	3.42 million	336,673,595

Data source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2016-2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

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Table 13 Analysis Area: Employment by Sector in 2020

Sector *	Census Tract and Population Centers						Counties			State			Nation
	Census Tract 9501.01	Bunkerville CDP	Mesquite	Ivins	St. George	Santa Clara	Mohave County	Clark County	Washington County	Arizona	Nevada	Utah	United States
ADM	0%	8%	3%	4%	3%	3%	6%	4%	4%	5%	4%	5%	5%
ART	34%	33%	32%	8%	12%	12%	18%	26%	12%	10%	23%	9%	9%
CON	26%	6%	9%	16%	9%	6%	8%	7%	10%	7%	7%	7%	7%
EDU	10%	6%	16%	20%	25%	24%	21%	16%	24%	22%	16%	22%	23%
FIN	0%	5%	5%	9%	6%	4%	6%	6%	6%	9%	6%	7%	7%
INFO	0%	5%	1%	2%	2%	1%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%
MANU	0%	8%	4%	2%	7%	3%	6%	4%	6%	7%	5%	10%	10%
NAT	0%	11%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	2%	2%
OTHER	0%	9%	4%	2%	4%	5%	6%	5%	4%	5%	5%	5%	5%
SCI	10%	9%	7%	12%	12%	14%	7%	12%	10%	13%	12%	13%	12%
TRADE	20%	0%	13%	21%	15%	22%	14%	13%	16%	14%	14%	14%	14%
TRANS	0%	2%	4%	4%	5%	6%	6%	6%	6%	6%	6%	5%	6%
(Total)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Data source: developed based on data from U.S. Census Bureau, 2022. 2016-2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Orange	Top 1 employment by population
Blue	Top 2 employment by population
Green	Top 3 employment by population

Abbreviation	Sector
ADM	Public administration and government
ART	Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services
CON	Construction
EDU	Educational services, health care and social assistance
FIN	Finance, insurance, real estate, rental and leasing
INFO	Information
MANU	Manufacturing
NAT	Natural resources, agriculture and mining
OTHER	Other services, except public administration
SCI	Professional, scientific, technical and managerial services
TRADE	Wholesale trade and retail trade
TRANS	Transportation and warehousing and utilities

Consistent with the Department of the Interior and BLM priorities, the BLM Arizona Strip Field Office seeks to achieve environmental justice, equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility and make a difference in five communities through expanding recreational access and opportunities and providing for natural resource interpretation. This includes to:

- encourage, facilitate, and improve partnership with and access for youth, tribes, and underserved communities to public lands through recreation partnerships and collaborations;
- improve public health and safety at developed recreation sites and areas by updating and modernizing infrastructure—including meeting accessibility standards for people with disabilities;
- invite education, interpretation, and recreational access for all Americans, especially for diverse populations and those near urban areas to encourage enjoyment of BLM-managed public lands and waters;
- collaborate with community members, government organizations, nonprofit organizations, academic institutions, and other stakeholders to address environmental and health-related challenges for recreation management;
- enhance understanding of environmental and health-related issues at the community level;
- improve methods for identifying, addressing, tracking, and measuring progress toward achieving environmental justice;
- and develop and support youth education and outreach programs.

## 11 Public Outreach

Our plan for outreach and notice about fees includes these steps:

- Public notice of proposed fee changes will be posted on site along with information on how to provide comments.
- Annual report on use of fees will be posted on site and on the BLM's website at: <https://www.blm.gov/programs/recreation/permits-and-fees/flrea-revenue>.
- News releases announcing the public comment period for proposed fee changes will include information on how to provide comments.
- Information on proposed and/or approved fee changes will be posted on BLM's website at <https://www.blm.gov/programs/recreation/permits-and-fees/business-plans>
- Any approved fee changes would be updated on the fee signs to clearly reflect the fee changes when new fee schedule implemented.
- Notices will be posted on site for projects, programs and services funded through fee revenue.
- BLM will post information about the proposed fee changes on the Recreation.gov page for this site and request public input on the draft business plan.

Once the public comment period is completed and any changes are made to the fee proposal as a result of analysis of the public participation, the ASFO will present the draft business plan proposal to the Arizona Recreation Resource Advisory Committee (RRAC) in 2024.

Fee expenditure information is collected on an annual basis and presented in the Public Land Statistics available online at [https://www.blm.gov/public\\_land\\_statistics/](https://www.blm.gov/public_land_statistics/). More specifically, the BLM will post VRCRA fee expenditure information on site and online to inform the public where and on what services, maintenance, and operations their fees are spent.

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