U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
PALM SPRINGS-SOUTH COAST FIELD OFFICE

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
EA Number CA-660-05-45

DATE: April 5, 2005

TITLE / PROJECT TYPE: OHV Route Restoration, Lanning Lane Area, Big Morongo Canyon ACEC

CASE FILE / PROJECT NO: N/A

FUNDING CODE: 1772 **PROGRAM ELEMENT:** JA

BLM OFFICE: Palm Springs- South Coast Field Office
690 W. Garnet Avenue, P.O. Box 581260
North Palm Springs, CA 92258-1260

APPLICANT / PROPONENT: BLM

LOCATION OF PROPOSED ACTION:
Big Morongo Canyon Area of Critical Environmental Concern
San Bernardino County (SBBM)
Township 1S, Range 4E: Sections 23 S ½, 26 all, 27 all, 35 NW ¼

PROJECT ACREAGE: 2.5 acres direct impact**,**
32 acres diffuse impacts (all BLM land)

USGS TOPOGRAPHIC MAP: Morongo Valley

LAND USE PLAN CONFORMANCE and Other Regulatory Compliance:

In accordance with Title 43 Code of Federal Regulations 1610.5-3, the proposed action and alternatives are in conformance with the following approved land use plan: California Desert Conservation Area Plan (1980), as amended.

The USFWS was consulted informally during this process for Environmental Assessment CA-660-02-36 in regards to previous work in the same project area. A determination of "beneficial affect" was made by the BLM and the USFWS. Formal consultation was not required.

NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

A 1998 California Desert Conservation Area Plan Amendment expanded Big Morongo Canyon Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) to its present size and closed the ACEC to public motorized vehicle use, except for access to the Preserve parking lot and use of Kickapoo Trail, which runs from the Devers substation near Desert Hot Springs through lower Little Morongo Canyon and an unnamed canyon to the Town of Yucca Valley. Big Morongo ACEC contains numerous unauthorized trails, including a dense network on a mountain plateau to the northeast of Covington Park and southwest of Lanning Lane in Morongo Valley. These unauthorized trails are the sites for the proposed rehabilitation efforts in order to minimize soil erosion and loss of native vegetation. Rehabilitating non-designated routes encourages (Off-Highway Vehicles)OHVs to stay out of areas that are closed to their use. Increased OHV compliance together with increased plant cover and diversity of shrubs, forbs, and grasses is expected to improve wildlife habitat, increase wildlife populations, and restore ecosystem processes.

A timely response by BLM for soil protection and vegetation restoration in the ACEC will afford greater protection to species of special concern and outstanding scenic landscapes, thereby meeting public expectations for environmental protection and enhancement of settings for recreational activities.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION and ALTERNATIVES

Background

The proposed rehabilitation sites are part of a network of over 14 miles of unauthorized trails localized in a two-square-mile area (approximate) on a plateau above the valley floor. Currently, the trail network is only accessible by motorized vehicle via six unauthorized routes that ascend to the plateau from Morongo Valley. Because of the topography of the area, access to the plateau can be controlled at these six points.

The unauthorized trails appear to have been used for many years. Local sources indicate that some of them have been present for over 20 years, and are used primarily by local residents. Some of the trails are wide enough for 4-wheel vehicles, while others are only accessible by motorcycles. These trails are also used by hikers and equestrians.

1. Proposed Action

The Bureau of Land Management proposes to restore the majority of the unauthorized trails in the Lanning Lane area, leaving one vehicular route for administrative use and one loop trail for non-motorized use (e.g., hiking and horseback riding). Presence of the loop trail would help protect natural resource values by passively channeling recreational activities to the already disturbed path.

There would be two ways to access the loop trail for hiking and horseback riding: (1) from the southwest via the Yucca Ridge Trail that originates in Big Morongo Canyon Preserve, and (2) from the northeast via Lanning Lane. The loop trail would not be promoted as an “official” trail without further planning and improvements, but the proposed restoration would be the first step towards its establishment.

Unauthorized routes on the perimeter of the planning area near private residences would be restored in their entirety to discourage the creation of additional unauthorized OHV entry points. Generally, routes would be restored where visible from the highway, authorized entry point, or loop trail, otherwise known as “line-of-sight” restoration. Where the loop trail utilizing an existing unauthorized vehicle route

continues from the administrative road or a road at an entry point, line-of-sight restoration of the unauthorized route would reduce the route's width to that of a narrow footpath. Beyond the line-of-sight restoration point, loop trail routes would not be restored. Figure 1 depicts the trail network, along with the proposed restoration prescription for each segment.
{ SHAPE * MERGEFORMAT **}**
Figure 1. MAP

In order to discourage use of restored routes, barriers would be placed at all six access points. Access points 1-4 occur in fairly open, flat areas, and post-and-cable fencing would be used to barricade them (see Figure 1). Access point 5 is on a ridge and would provide administrative access by motorized vehicle, so a heavy-duty gate would be installed with fencing along the ridge. This gate would also allow access by horses and hikers, as would the barricade at access point 1. Access points 1 and 5 would be entry points for non-motorized recreational use of the loop trail. Access point 6 occurs in a narrow canyon—it would be blocked by a metal bar or fence.

Approximately 5,050 meters of unauthorized routes would be restored, with an average width of 2 meters, for a total of 10,100 square meters (2.5 acres). A list of all restoration sites is found in **Table 1**. Below is a summary of the restoration techniques which would be employed for the project. The Student Conservation Association (SCA) restoration technicians would decide which treatments to employ at each site unless given specific instructions by the Environmental Careers Organization (ECO) restoration ecologist. In almost all instances only hand tools would be used. Overall, the restoration aims to restore the soil and topography to a more natural state which will enhance natural regeneration of vegetation.

Restoration Techniques:

Decompaction

Unauthorized vehicle routes exhibiting evidence of repeated vehicle traffic may require soil decompaction to increase water infiltration. Improving water infiltration allows plants to establish and burrowing animals such as ants, rodents, and foxes to inhabit the soil again. Workers would use hand tools such as soil spades, spading forks, and shovels to loosen the top two to six inches of soil.

Soil Pitting

Soil pitting contours the soil to direct water flow and draw wind-blown seeds to focal points on the ground. Pitting first creates bowls approximately one to two feet wide and six inches deep. This practice creates microsites in the bowls to increase seed germination and small plant growth.

Soil Imprinting

Soil imprinting entails raking small trenches to roughen the texture on surface soil and to collect wind-blown seed. Hand tools such as shovels and rakes would be used.

Raking

Treatment of unauthorized trails formed after a single vehicle pass, as well as trails with little or no vegetation trampling or soil compaction resulting from vehicular passages, would entail raking or sweeping the top one inch of soil with a broom to hide the evidence of tracks. Soils may also be contoured to match surrounding land. Only hand tools would be used.

Barricading with Rice Straw Bales

Certified weed-free bales of rice straw would be placed to obstruct OHV travel in areas once used for hill climbs and on unauthorized OHV trails. The bales reduce soil erosion by slowing and diffusing water

flow down slopes. Over time, rice straw bales break down and provide mulch for plants grown from seeds trapped on the upslope side of the decomposing bale. A truck to transport bales would be the only mechanical equipment required.

Terracing with Berms
Berms or terraces slow and disperse water flow. Work crews would use hand tools to disturb the top one to six inches of soil.

Vertical Mulching
Dead plant material placed at the beginning of unauthorized trails where they intersect with the administrative vehicle route or the loop trail can disguise these trails and deter further use. Large desert shrubs on the soil surface act as barricades. Similarly, dead shrubs or branches planted upright in the soil make the trail blend in with surrounding vegetation. Vertical mulch also benefits restoration by trapping wind-blown seeds and lessening wind erosion just above the ground surface. This work would be primarily accomplished with hand tools. Little soil disturbance would be needed except where mulch is "planted," thus requiring a small hole to anchor the material.

Planting Vegetation
Re-vegetatation involves directly planting native species to the line-of-sight point from a trail that is available for use. This accelerates improvements to soil stability, vegetation cover and diversity, and wildlife habitat. Eventually re-vegetation disguises trails. Planting would make use of hand tools (shovels) and some mechanized equipment (augers) to dig holes up to two feet deep and one foot wide for the largest transplants. In extraordinary cases, transplantation of larger plants would require somewhat larger holes potentially up to three feet deep and three feet wide. During FY 2005, available stock of that size will not be available. After planting, soil may be contoured to direct the flow of rainwater or irrigation water to plant roots.

Planting vegetation requires considerable advance work. First, restoration ecologists would gather local provenances of seeds for native shrub, forb, and grass species. In dry years, it may be necessary to irrigate specimens of plant species desired for propagation by seed. To propagate plants from seed and to hold young plants before outplanting, BLM could enter into a contract with Joshua Tree National Park Nursery for such services, or construct portable lath houses to undertake these activities on its own.

Seeding
Seeding requires rakes to collect seed from seed banks in the soil or from dried seedpods still attached on plants. Hand sowing would spread seeds across the soil surface. Raking would disturb at most the top one-inch of soil. Hand seeding may also be accomplished concurrent with soil pitting (see above) to improve seed germination rates.

Signing
Insufficient or ambiguous signs may cause responsible OHV riders to accidentally ride on unauthorized routes or in closed areas. To help riders, the restoration ecology team shall work closely with the ECO trail maintenance team to maintain existing signs and place new signs wherever necessary. Various signs may be appropriate to site needs; recreational, directional, special designation, or informational signs may be needed. Special designation signing would indicate areas of re-vegetation to prevent unintended trampling. Signing work may include use of a Carsonite signpost driver that can disturb soil to a one-foot depth but with a minimal surface disturbance due to the small sign profile.

Removing Manufactured Materials
The restoration team would remove litter and other unsightly or potentially dangerous manufactured materials less than 50 years old. If the restoration team discovers previously undocumented materials that appear to be more than fifty years old, they would consult with the cultural resources specialist at the Palm Springs Field Office (FO). The cultural resources specialist would assess whether removing materials older than 50 years is appropriate and what documentation or mitigation is appropriate.

Eradicating Noxious Weeds
The restoration crew would remove noxious non-native plants and perennial shrubs growing in unauthorized routes and trails by hand or with hand tools. If the infestation of noxious weeds appears to require applications of herbicides (as with *Tamarix* sp), restoration ecologists would consult with the BLM Palm Springs FO the noxious weed program coordinator to arrange for herbicide treatments. In the case of *Tamarix* sp., chainsaws may be used by certified personnel under the supervision of a natural resource specialist.

Maintaining Site Integrity
Vandalism of barriers and trampling of plantings may occur. To minimize costly irreversible damage, rehabilitated sites may require on-going maintenance as they are undergoing natural restoration. Restoration ecologists may undertake additional restoration efforts and install new barriers on a case-by-case basis.

Summary of work: Work would be done between April 11 and May 25, 2005, or until all sites are restored as described. Work would be conducted between the hours of 0700 and 2000. Summary information on the unauthorized routes to be restored can be found in **Table 1**.

Table 1. UTM location, site number, azimuth, trail type, and length to the line-of-sight of the unauthorized routes to be restored under the proposed action. NAD 1983 datum used for UTMS.

Site Identifier		**UTME**	**UTM N**	**Line of sight**
(route number)	*(incursion number)*	*(NAD 83)*	*(NAD 83)*	*(m)*
ENTRY	1	540307	3768249	653
ENTRY	2	541070	3768468	20
ENTRY	3	541068	3768559	50
ENTRY	4	541573	3769268	260
ENTRY	5	542246	3769467	Gate-no restoration
ENTRY	6	542751	3769449	22
ENTRY 2	1	541207	3768538	60
PURPLE 1	1	541868	3768883	35
PURPLE 1	2	541868	3768883	850
PURPLE 1	3	541771	3766607	50
PURPLE 1	4	541814	3768561	50
PURPLE 1	5	541811	3768489	25
PURPLE 1	6	541811	3768489	320
PURPLE 1	7	542010	3768587	30
PURPLE 1	8	542010	3768587	120
PURPLE 1	9	542068	3768622	40

PURPLE 1	10	542081	3768621	40
PURPLE 1	11	542081	3768621	25
PURPLE 1	12	542161	3768637	30
PURPLE 1	13	542161	3768637	90
PURPLE 2	1	542756	3767789	20
PURPLE 2	2	542626	3767598	10
PURPLE 2	3	542962	3767639	310

Table 1 (continued)

Site Identifier		UTME	UTM N	Line of sight
(route number)	*(incursion number)*	*(NAD 83)*	*(NAD 83)*	*(m)*
PURPLE 2	4	542351	3767640	5
PURPLE 2	5	542136	3767687	13
PURPLE 2	6	542103	3767677	10
PURPLE 2	7	542011	3767656	18
PURPLE 3	1	542120	3768155	12
PURPLE 3	2	542130	3768135	10
PURPLE 3	3	542130	3768147	30
GREEN 1	1	542369	3769357	211
GREEN 1	2	542589	3769280	100
GREEN 1	3	542622	3769203	115
GREEN 1	4	542533	3769031	73
GREEN 1	5	542429	3768997	62
GREEN 1	6	542419	3768965	1,109
GREEN 2	1	542192	3769040	50
GREEN 2	2	542058	3769033	40
GREEN 3	1	542263	3768912	50
GREEN 3	2	542363	3768620	40
GREEN 3	3	542393	3768563	15
GREEN 3	4	542407	3768518	80
GREEN 3	5	542453	3768378	30
GREEN 3	6	542426	3768332	35
GREEN 3	7	542283	3768264	15
GREEN 3	8	542214	3768253	50
GREEN 3	9	542197	3768235	15
GREEN 3	10	542197	3768235	20

2. No Action Alternative

The Proposed Action would not be undertaken. Existing management and use of the site would continue subject to applicable statutes, regulations, policy and land use plans. Any revegetation would occur naturally.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

1. Area Description

Restoration activities would take place in creosote (Larrea tridentata-Ambrosia dumosa) scrub, microphyll woodland vegetation communities and Pinyon-juniper woodland. A further description of the affected environment can be found in the California Desert Conservation Area Plan EIS (1980, with amendments 1982-2002) and is incorporated by reference. The Lanning Lanes area to be restored is included in the Big Morongo Canyon ACEC and contains several significant resources that contribute to the area's relevance and importance.

Wildlife

Sensitive Wildlife Species. The wildlife species of special management concern shown in Table 2 may potentially be found within the portions of the Big Morongo Canyon ACEC to be rehabilitated under this action.

Table 2: Wildlife Species of Special Management Concern

SPECIES	STATUS
Desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii)*	Federal/State Threatened
Desert bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis nelsoni*)	State Protected
Peninsular bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis nelsoni dps*)	Federal Endangered/State Threatened
Mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*)	Game Animal
Gambel□s quail (*Lophortyx gambelii*)	Game Bird
Burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*)	State Species of Concern
Least bell's vireo (*Vireo bellii pusilus*)	Federal/State Endangered
Cooper's hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*)	State Species of Concern
Le Conte's thrasher (*Toxostoma lecontei*)	State Species of Concern

Reptiles. The desert tortoise is a Federal- and California-threatened species that is found in the arid sandy or gravelly locales of the Mojave Desert. The sandy flat areas within the Lanning Lane area are potential desert tortoise habitat.

Mammals. Desert bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis ssp. nelsoni*) are known from the upper portions of Little Morongo Canyon owing to the presence of permanent water sources east of the specific restoration sites. These two canyons serve as a major corridor for the Little San Bernardino Mountain herd, estimated to be approximately 50 sheep, as it moves between the Little Morongo Canyon water sources and suitable habitat in Joshua Tree National Park to the east.

Other mammals that can be found in the area where habitat rehabilitation is proposed are mountain lion (*Felis concolor*), mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), bobcat (*Lynx rufus*), raccoon (*Procyon lotor*), ring-tailed cat (*Bassaricus astutus*), coyote (*Canus latrans*), and other small mammal species.

Birds. Though bird diversity is a trademark of the Big Morongo Canyon "—›—, most bird life is seen in the permanent riparian habitats at the northern end of Big Morongo Canyon near the town of Morongo Valley and adjacent to the Lanning Lanes area. Within the limits where habitat rehabilitation is proposed, there exists potential habitat for those avian species of special management concern shown in Table 2. However, no sign or sightings of these species were found during pre-restoration surveys, and due to the already disturbed nature (soil compaction, minimal vegetation cover) of the sites to be restored, no impact on these species is anticipated.

Sensitive Plant Species

Several plant species that are federally or state endangered or threatened or are identified as sensitive by the California Native Plants Society (CNPS) could potentially be found within the portions of the Big Morongo Canyon ACEC (i.e., appropriate elevation/habitat) to be rehabilitated under this action. Table 3 shows these species. No sightings of these species have ever been recorded at the rehabilitation site locales and none of these species were found during pre-restoration surveys.

Table 3: Sensitive Plant Species

SPECIES	STATUS
Chaparral sand-verbena (*Abronia villosa var. aurita*)	CNPS 1B
Pinyon rock cress (*Arabis dispar*)	CNPS 2
Parish's rock cress (*Arabis parishii*)	CNPS 1B
Darwin rock cress (*Arabis pulchra var. munciensis*)	CNPS 2
Shockley's rock cress (*Arabis shockleyi*)	CNPS 2
Triple-ribbed milk-vetch (*Astragalus tricarinatus*)	Federal endangered, CNPS 1B
Palmer's mariposa lily (*Calochortus palmeri var. palmeri*)	CNPS 1B
Parry's spineflower (*Chorizanthe parryi var. parryi*)	CNPS 3
White-bracted spineflower (*Chorizanthe xanti var. leucotheca*)	CNPS 1B
Parish's daisy (*Erigeron parishii*)	Federal threatened, CNPS 1B
Little San Bernardino Mtns. linanthus (*Linanthus maculatus*)	CNPS 1B
Orcutt's linanthus (*Linanthus orcuttii*)	CNPS 1B
Robison's monardella (*Monardella robisonii*)	CNPS 1B

Cultural Resources

Little Morongo and Big Morongo Canyons would have served, and still do, as travel routes between the Coachella and Morongo Valleys. Members of the Serrano Tribe occupied Big and Little Morongo Canyons during the ethnographic period (Bean and Smith 1978; Daly, Davis, and Lerch 1981; Kroeber 1925). The Serrano followed a life way similar to their southern neighbors, the Cahuilla. Evidence exists that economic, ceremonial and social relationships existed between the Serrano and the Cahuilla. Both groups occupied villages situated to take advantage of ecotones and water supplies. The majority of necessary plant foods and materials were available within a short distance of the village site.

The nearest recorded prehistoric site is SBr-148 is located approximately 1 mile northwest of the project area. SBr-148 (also apparently referenced as SBr-349) is a site containing midden soils, features, and artifacts that suggest either long-term or repeated occupation. King (1971) noted that the site was a “quite large midden site” with a suggested temporal range from 2000 BP through the historic period.

Covington Park and Big Morongo Preserve are the location of another previously recorded prehistoric archaeological site (SBr-561). In 1971 P. Wilke recorded the presence of a "large camp of some permanence". The available water and diverse plant resources would have made the location attractive for occupation. Wilke reported that even at that time, the site had been damaged by artifact collecting and much of it had been plowed over.

During the 1900's a large ranch was established in the Covington Park area. The old barn and other features at Big Morongo Preserve are remnants of this period of use. Until the establishment of Highway 62 in the 1930's, Big Morongo Canyon was the location of a road that connected Desert Hot Springs and the Morongo Valley.
In August of 2002, Jay Sanders and the Chambers group identified site CA-RIV-6945H (33-12125) while surveying south of the Canyon House Road outside of the city of Morongo. The site is recorded in the *"Cultural Resources Inventory for the Coachella Valley Management Plan, Riverside County, California."* The site consisted of a historic-period concentration of cans.

In 2002 Wanda Raschkow, BLM Palm Springs-South Coast Cultural Resource Specialist, performed a Class III cultural resource inventory for T1S, R5E Section 30 for placement of earthen barrier berms. Raschkow surveyed transects less than 10 meters apart along the road and the surrounding terraces. No cultural resources were observed.

In August of 2002, Jay Sanders and the Chambers group identified site CA-RIV-6945H (33-12125) while surveying south of the Canyon House Road outside of the city of Morongo. The site is recorded in the *"Cultural Resources Inventory for the Coachella Valley Management Plan, Riverside County, California."* The site consisted of a historic-period concentration of cans.

In 2005 Wanda Raschkow, BLM Palm Springs-South Coast Cultural Resource Specialist, and Aaron S. Kind, BLM-PSSC Archaeological Technician, performed a Class III cultural resource inventory for T1S, R5E Section 30 for the removal of earthen berms. The area of the berms was surveyed and no cultural resources were observed.

Aaron Kind, PSSCFO Archaeological Technician conducted a Class III cultural resources inventory of the current project area during March 22-29, 2005. No historic properties or cultural resources were identified as a result of this survey. The project area has a low potential to contain significant cultural resources: known sites occur on the flatter lands in the valley and cluster near water. The project area itself is accessed via steep hillsides and contains few resources important to the Serrano- other than an abundant crop of chia. The restoration project will have no effect to properties listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places.

If previously unidentified cultural resources are encountered during project activities, all work will cease in the immediate area and the PSSC Cultural Resources Specialist will be notified. The restoration team shall consult with the Cultural Resources Specialist before removal of litter or other manufactured materials or structures that appear to be 50 or more years in age.

Recreation
Recreational use in the proposed area of restoration is generally limited to vehicular activities (motorcycle and all-terrain vehicle trail riding and hill climbing), horseback riding, and hiking. Such uses at present are primarily from the local residents of Morongo Valley. Of these uses, vehicular travel on existing routes is not authorized in accordance with the California Desert Conservation Area Plan, as amended.

Levels of use are unknown.

Visual Resource Management
In accordance with the California Desert Conservation Area Plan Amendment for the Coachella Valley (2002), public lands affected by the proposed action are designated Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class 2. The objective of this class is to retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape resulting from management activities should be low. Management activities may be seen, but should not attract the attention of the casual observer. Any changes must repeat the basic elements of form, line, color, and texture found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape.

2. Land Status

1. **Land Use Classification:** Area of Critical Environmental Concern, MUC "L" (Limited Use).

2. **Valid Existing Rights:** There are no valid existing rights affected.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Critical Elements

The following table summarizes potential impacts to various elements of the human environment, including the "critical elements" listed in BLM Manual H-1790-1, Appendix 5, as amended. Elements for which there are no impacts will not be discussed further in this document.

Environmental Element	Proposed Action	No Action Alternative
Air Quality	Short-term	No Impact
ACEC's	Improve ACEC	Scars remain
Cultural Resources	No effect	No effect
Native American Concerns	No effect	No effect
Farmlands	No impact	No impact
Floodplains	No impact	No impact
Energy (E.O. 13212)	No impact	No impact
Minerals	No impact	No impact
T&E Animal Species	No Impact	No impact
T&E Plant Species	No impact	No impact
Invasive, Nonnative Species	Beneficial impact	No impact

Wastes (hazardous/solid)	No impact	No impact
Water Quality (surface and ground)	No impact	No impact
Wetlands/Riparian Zones	No impact	No impact

Critical Elements (continued)

Environmental Element	Proposed Action	No Action Alternative
Wild and Scenic Rivers	No impact	No impact
Wilderness	No impact	No impact
Environmental Justice	No impact	No impact
Health and Safety Risks to Children	No impact	No impact
Visual Resource Mgt.	Conforms to VRM Class 2 management objectives	Does not conform to VRM Class 2 management objectives

B. Discussion of Impacts and Proposed Mitigation Measures

AIR QUALITY

A. Discussion of Impacts

1. Proposed Action: An increase in fugitive dust during wind storms could occur due to the soil disturbance as a result of the proposed action. Vehicle use on the access road will generate PM-10 emissions throughout the project. Emissions from the proposed action will be minimal. No significant offsite impacts are anticipated. Control measures are not included and are not necessary to reduce emissions from the proposed project. The proposed project does not exceed the deminimus emission levels and no further conformity determination is necessary.

2. No Action Alternative: Impacts would continue to occur at current levels. Disturbed, exposed surfaces such as roads and trails experience increased wind erosion/fugitive dust.

B. Mitigation Measures

1. Use water as necessary to limit fugitive dust blowing off the site during the work if fugitive emissions exceed state and/or Riverside Co. APCD standards.

2. Curtail activities when wind speeds exceed 25 MPH.

C. Residual Impacts

No long term residual adverse effects on air resources are expected from the proposed action. The impacts are expected to occur during the duration of the proposed action. Once the action is completed the site should return to pre disturbance stability.

WILDLIFE

A. Discussion of Impacts

1. Proposed action:
Restoration of non-designated trails to natural conditions would occur on sites with pre-existing disturbances from OHV traffic. Restoration activities would create new but temporary, small-scale disturbances to set natural soil recovery and re-vegetation processes in accelerated motion for site rehabilitation and improved wildlife habitat.

Restoring soil contours and vegetation would create wildlife habitat, including habitat for desert tortoise and desert bighorn sheep. Restoration work may occur during active periods in the seasonal cycles of desert tortoise and desert bighorn sheep. It is not likely that burrows would be found in the trail or route beds.

Other Wildlife
No wildlife species would be negatively affected, and no additional impacts to wildlife resources are anticipated.

2. No Action Alternative: Some negative impacts to wildlife resources would continue to occur because of continuing vegetation loss and soil erosion occurring on non-designated OHV trails. This results in a reduction in available food resources and impaired water quality, which could cause population decreases for all species, including Threatened and Endangered Species.

B. Mitigation Measures
All personnel and equipment will be brought in through existing routes, which will be restored after they complete work in the area. All work, including hand preparations, transplanting, equipment operation for ripping roads and trails, the moving of dead debris and boulders and maintenance and monitoring activities will be conducted only on the currently impacted areas of unauthorized hill climbs, roads and trails. These areas are presently devoid of vegetation and suffer from moderate to severe compaction.

C. Residual Impacts
No long term residual adverse effects on wildlife are expected from the proposed action.

SOILS
A. Discussion of Impacts

1. Proposed Action: Restoration of non-designated trails and routes would impact soils by modifying texture, particle size distribution, chemical properties, and biological content in affected soils. Pitting of some soils (i.e. desert pavement) may create areas with a different color, drawing attention to the restored area. Positive impacts from a restoration can include a reduction of wind and water erosion in the long-term. Smoothing and scarifying soil can expose soil to wind erosion. In addition, some temporary soil loss from wind blown erosion is likely. However, in the long-term, soil loss would decline because of increased vegetation.

2. No Action Alternative: Under the No Action Alternative, some impacts to soils would continue to occur. This includes compaction by vehicular traffic, and wind and water erosion.

B. Mitigation Measures
Sites with the desert pavement soil type, or those with marked changes in soil color in the top 10 cm of soil, will not be pitted or decompacted. In addition to the other environmental protection measures incorporated in the Proposed Action, BLM resource specialists may select from the list of additional mitigation measures outlined in BLM manuals/handbooks and other documents.

C. Residual Impacts

There would be few residual impacts to soils after mitigation from rehabilitation activities. Generally, these activities will increase infiltration and percolation rates in affected soils, increase available water, breakup soil compaction and loss of organic matter.

VEGETATION

A. Discussion of Impacts

1. Proposed action:

Most of the non-designated trails to be restored are already partially or entirely devoid of vegetation. Restoration under this EA would improve the vegetative cover and create more wildlife habitat with native vegetation. Populations of early-stage shrubs would be the first species to increase while in the long-term late-stage shrubs such as creosote would establish themselves in restored shrublands.

Restoration sites have been surveyed for special status plants, and no such species were found. The crew would reexamine the sites for newly emerged special status plants before they begin work, and cease work and call a BLM Natural Resource Specialist if they suspect any special status plants are present. If the special status plants are not correctly identified, they may be impacted by soil disturbance.

Some non-native plant species may be eradicated locally.

Indirect impacts would be in the form of dust settling on the nearby vegetation stands, which may reduce photosynthetic capabilities.

2. No Action Alternative: Some impacts to vegetation resources would continue, such as trampling of vegetation by continued OHV travel on routes and trails that have not been approved for such use.

B. Mitigation Measures

No soil disturbance would occur within a meter of special-status plants. Restoration sites with known populations of an annual plant species of concern would not be restored while the annual plant species are growing, flowering, or producing seed. In addition to environmental protection measures incorporated in the Proposed Action, BLM resource specialists may select from the list of additional mitigation measures outlined in BLM manuals/handbooks and other documents. Weed treatments with herbicides will require special approval and coordination with the Palm Springs FO Weed Specialist.

C. Residual Impacts

No long term residual adverse effects on vegetation are expected from the proposed action

RECREATION

A. Discussion of Impacts

1. Proposed Action: The requirements for vehicular access, be they recreational, administrative, or for other purposes, were considered during the route designation process for the CDCA Plan Amendment for the Coachella Valley (CV Plan). The approved network of vehicle routes is deemed satisfactory in meeting access needs for recreation while protecting various other resource values, particularly those related to wildlife, wildlife habitats, and cultural resources. The proposed restoration of vehicle routes, trails, and tracks that were not approved for vehicle use through the CV Plan, therefore, would result in no adverse impacts to recreation; use of these

vehicle ways is not necessary for the enjoyment of recreational resources in Big Morongo Canyon Preserve.

2. No Action Alternative: Motorized-vehicle activities on routes, trails, and tracks not approved for such use does not conform to BLM's land use plan. The proposed action is one element of a strategy to implement route designation decisions made through the CV Plan. Absent this or other actions to encourage the use of approved routes, recreationists could be issued citations for traveling where it is inappropriate and illegal to do so, thereby adversely affecting their recreational experience. Further, degradation of resource values (such as soil erosion, crushing of vegetation, and wildlife mortality) from vehicular use of closed or non-approved routes, trails, and tracks would adversely affect opportunities for such recreational endeavors as sightseeing, nature study, and photography.

B. Mitigation Measures

A program to inform the public about the restoration of closed and non-approved vehicle routes, trails, and tracks should be established. The intent of the program would be to encourage the use of approved routes for motorized-vehicle activities, and describe the adverse impacts associated with the use of non-approved vehicle ways.

C. Residual Impacts

No residual adverse impacts to recreation are anticipated.

VISUAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

A. Discussion of Impacts

1. Proposed Action: Restoration of vehicle routes, trails, and tracks not approved for vehicle use generally reduces contrast in the long-term between "management activities" (in this case, evidence of activities that are inconsistent with management prescriptions established by the CV Plan) and the characteristic landscape. As soils are stabilized and native vegetation becomes reestablished, evidence of non-conforming uses diminishes. The proposed action would, in time, result in the assimilation of the basic elements of form, line, color, and texture of the characteristic landscape where vehicular activities have created substantial contrasts. Evidence of such vehicular activities would no longer attract the attention of the casual observer when viewed from key observation points (these being along the loop trail and Highway 62), thereby achieving VRM Class 2 management objectives. In the short-term, contrasts resulting from the proposed action may be evident, but substantially less noticeable than the vehicle routes, trails, and tracks should no restoration occur. Hence, short-term effects would also achieve VRM Class 2 management objectives.

2. No Action Alternative: When viewed from the key observation points, the numerous vehicle routes, trails, and tracks identified for restoration would attract the attention of the casual observer. The form, line, color, and texture of these routes, trails, and tracks are substantially different from those of the characteristic landscape. Contrasts between these vehicular routes, trails, and tracks, and the landscape would not conform to VRM Class 2 management objectives.

B. Mitigation Measures

The proposed action itself is designed to mitigate the impacts of vehicular activities that are not approved by the CV Plan. No additional mitigation measures are necessary.

C. Residual Impacts

No residual impacts to visual resources are anticipated.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

1. Proposed Action: The resource impacts of the restoration efforts would have no long term cumulative impacts to soils, vegetation, wildlife habitat, cultural, or visual resources. Restoration of illegal OHV routes would have a long term positive impact to the soils, vegetation, and wildlife habitat of the Big Morongo Canyon ACEC. By removing existing illegal routes, future use of these routes, and continued resource degradation would be reduced.

2. No Action: Taking no action, and not completing restoration of illegal routes, would result in continued use of routes by OHV's. Route proliferation and impacts to soils, vegetation, wildlife habitat, cultural, and visual resources would increase, leading to continued cumulative impacts to these resources over time.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT CONSIDERATIONS:

Public comments submitted for this environmental assessment, including names and street addresses of respondents, will be available for public review at the Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office during regular business hours (7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.), Monday through Friday, except holidays. Individual respondents may request confidentiality. If you wish to withhold your name or address from public review or from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comments. Such requests will be honored to the extent allowed by law. All submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, will be made available for public inspection in their entirety.

PREPARED BY:

Starry Sprenkle, ECO Restoration Ecologist
Aaron S. Kind, BLM Archaeological Technician
Wanda Raschkow, Archaeologist
Chadette Pfaff, Biological Technician
James Foote, Recreation Specialist

REVIEWED BY: _____ _____
Environmental Coordinator Date

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
PALM SPRINGS-SOUTH COAST FIELD OFFICE

DECISION RECORD
CA-660-05-45

NAME of PROJECT: OHV Route Restoration, Lanning Lane Area, Big Morongo Canyon Preserve ACEC

DECISION: It is my decision to approve the proposed action as described in Environmental Assessment (EA) number CA-660-05-45. Compliance with the mitigation measures identified in the EA is hereby required. These measures are incorporated into this decision record as stipulations by reference. A copy of this Decision Record and attendant conditions of approval (stipulations) shall be in the possession of the on-site operator during all undertakings approved herein.

RATIONALE: To restore native habitat to pre-disturbance condition. To discourage the future use by OHV traffic over unauthorized trails. The approved action is in conformance with applicable land use plans and will not cause unnecessary or undue degradation.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT: Environmental impacts associated with the proposed action have been assessed. Based on the analysis provided in the attached EA, I conclude the approved action is not a major federal action and will result in no significant impacts to the environment under the criteria in Title 40 Code of Federal Regulations 1508.18 and 1508.27. Preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement to further analyze possible impacts is not required pursuant to Section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.

APPEALS: This decision may be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of the Secretary, in accordance with the regulations at Title 43 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 4, and the information provided in Form 1842-1 (enclosed). If an appeal is taken, your notice of appeal must be filed in the Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Department of the Interior, 690 West Garnet Avenue, P.O. Box 581260, North Palm Springs, California 92258, within 30 days from receipt of this decision. The appellant has the burden of showing that the decision appealed from is in error.

If you wish to file a petition for a stay of the effectiveness of this decision during the time that your appeal is being reviewed by the Board, pursuant to Title 43 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 4, Subpart E, the petition for a stay must accompany your notice of appeal. A petition for a stay is required to show sufficient justification based on the standards listed below. Copies of the notice of appeal and petition for a stay must also be submitted to each party named in this decision and to the Interior Board of Land Appeals and to the appropriate Office of the Solicitor (see 43 CFR 4.413) at the same time the original documents are filed with this office. If you request a stay, you have the burden of proof to demonstrate that a stay should be granted.

Standards for Obtaining a Stay

Except as otherwise provided by law or other pertinent regulations, a petition for a stay of a decision pending appeal shall show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

(1) the relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied,
(2) the likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits,
(3) the likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the stay is not granted, and
(4) whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

APPROVED BY: _____ _____

Field Manager Date
Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office
USDI Bureau of Land Management
690 W. Garnet Avenue; P.O. Box 581260
North Palm Springs, CA 92258-1260

Appendix 1: *Desert Tortoise Mitigation*

The following tortoise mitigation measures will apply .

1. Desert tortoise sign and presence pre-restoration surveys will be conducted at all sites. If during these surveys a tortoise or burrow is observed within the route to be restored or the 15 m buffer on each side of the centerline, a qualified biologist monitor must be present during restoration activities at that site and work will only take place during the desert tortoise inactive season, November 1 – March 1. The biologist will thoroughly survey the project site for presence of tortoises each day before and during construction activities. This biologist shall have authority to halt any action that might result in harm to a tortoise. No soil disturbance shall occur within 1 meter of a desert tortoise burrow.

2. An employee education program must be presented to all on-site workers prior to beginning work. The program may consist of a class or video presented by a qualified biologist (BLM or contracted) or a video. Wallet-sized cards with important information for workers to carry are recommended. All on-site workers shall participate in a tortoise education program prior to initiation of restoration activities. The operator is responsible for ensuring that the education program is developed and presented prior to conducting activities. The program shall cover the following topics at a minimum:

   - Distribution of the desert tortoise,
   - General behavior and ecology of the tortoise,
   - Sensitivity to human activities,
   - Legal protection,
   - Penalties for violations of State or Federal laws,
   - reporting requirements, and
   - Project protective mitigation measures.

3. During restoration, if a tortoise is observed within 15 m of the centerline of the route to be restored (area of impact), all activities potentially affecting the individual tortoise will cease and will not continue until the individual has moved out of the area of impact. If a previously undetected tortoise burrow is discovered in the area of impact, work will not continue until a biological monitor is on-site.

4. Desert tortoises will not be handled in order to move them out of the project area. The only case in which they would be handled would be in order to take them to a qualified veterinarian (see Item 7).

5. The area of disturbance shall be confined to the smallest practical area, considering topography, placement of facilities, location of burrows, pubic health and safety, and other limiting factors. Work area boundaries shall be delimited with flagging or other marking to minimize surface disturbance associated with vehicle straying. Special habitat features, such as burrows, identified by the qualified biologist shall be protected by at least a two meter buffer with no soil disturbance.

6. Upon locating a dead or injured tortoise, the operator (restoration crew) is to notify the BLM. The BLM must then notify the appropriate field office (Carlsbad) of USFWS by telephone within three days of the finding. Written notification must be made within fifteen days of the finding. The information provided must include the date and time of the finding or incident (if known), location of the carcass, a photograph, cause of death, if known, and other pertinent information. Tortoise remains shall be collected, delivered to the BLM, and frozen as soon as possible. Injured animals shall be transported to a qualified veterinarian for treatment at the expense of the project proponent. If an injured animal recovers, the USFWS should be contacted for final disposition of the animal.

7. All trash and food items shall be promptly contained within closed, raven-proof containers. These shall be regularly removed from the project site to reduce the attractiveness of the area to ravens and other tortoise predators.