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

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
EA Number EA-660-03-08

DATE:	December 31, 2002
TITLE / PROJECT TYPE:	Homme-Adams and Visitor Center Trail Loops
BLM OFFICE:	Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office 690 W. Garnet Avenue, P.O. Box 581260 North Palm Springs, CA 92258-1260
APPLICANT / PROPONENT:	City of Palm Desert 73-510 Fred Waring Drive Palm Desert, CA 92260-2578 (760) 346-0611
LOCATION OF PROPOSED ACTION:	Riverside County; Homme-Adams Park and Cahuilla Hills Park trails: Township 5 South, Range 6 East - Sections 30 and 19, San Bernardino Meridian; Visitor Center Trail: Township 6 South, Range 6 East – Section 7, San Bernardino Meridian
USGS TOPOGRAPHIC MAP:	Rancho Mirage 7.5-minute quad (both trails)

LAND USE PLAN CONFORMANCE and OTHER REGULATORY COMPLIANCE:

The City of Palm Desert is proposing to improve existing informal trails and construct new trails in two areas. Portions of both of the proposed trails would occur on BLM-managed land. In accordance with Title 43 Code of Federal Regulations 1610.5-3, the proposed action and alternatives are in conformance with the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan (1980, as amended). The proposed project sites are located within Multiple-Use Class L (Limited Use) areas. Class L lands are managed to provide for generally lower-intensity, carefully controlled multiple use of resources, while ensuing that sensitive values are not significantly diminished. Hiking is an allowable use of public lands in Class L designations.

A meeting was held with the BLM, City of Palm Desert, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) on December 6, 2002 to discuss project issues related to the bighorn sheep. The BLM has determined that the proposed action is likely to adversely affect Peninsular Ranges bighorn sheep and, thus, will initiate formal consultation with the USFWS pending completion of this draft Environmental Assessment.

Proposed new trail construction near Homme-Adams Park would cross a drainage marked as a blue-line stream on the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) topographic map (northwest 1/4 of the northwest 1/4 of Section 30). This drainage would likely fall under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps). This portion of the new trail construction is on BLM-managed land.

New trail construction would also cross washes at the Visitor Center Loop Trail, although the wash is not a blue-line stream at the crossing location. Prior to new construction in these areas, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), CDFG, and Regional Water Quality Control Board

(RWQCB) will be consulted regarding their jurisdiction over these resources. All required permits will be obtained prior to new trail construction and all permit provisions will be adhered to in order to reduce potential impacts to these resources.

Under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), the BLM is charged with managing public lands in a manner that would "protect the quality of scientific, scenic, historical, ecological, environmental, air and atmospheric, water resource, and archaeological values". Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, as implemented at 36 CFR Part 800, requires Federal agencies to take into account the effects of their undertakings on historic properties that are eligible for or listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

1.0 NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

The Peninsular Ranges bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis nelsoni*) is a distinct vertebrate population segment listed as endangered under the Federal Endangered Species Act (1973) and a state-listed threatened species located in the project area. Hiking with dogs is a popular pastime in the Coachella Valley. Because bighorn sheep evolved with canine predators (Geist 1971) they are particularly sensitive to the presence of dogs and exhibit elevated heart rates (MacArthur *et al.* 1979, MacArthur *et al.* 1982, Purdy and Shaw 1981) and increased nervousness and flight response. In addition, chronic stress may result in physiological changes (Martucci *et al.* 1992). This has created a conflict between bighorn sheep conservation management and recreational use of public lands. In 2000, BLM issued a temporary closure of public lands east of Palm Canyon, prohibiting dogs in designated critical bighorn habitat, except in a few designated areas. In response to public need for dog use areas, the City of Palm Desert allows dog walking on city land south of the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Visitor Center on Highway 74, using an informal hiking trail established in an existing wash and on an old dirt road. This action caused a conflict with the Bighorn Institute, a captive bighorn sheep breeding facility located north of the Visitor Center. The director of the Bighorn Institute has expressed concern over the nearness of the dogs south of the Visitor Center and has requested that they be moved to a different location. The City of Palm Desert has proposed to formally construct a loop trail south of the Visitor Center that would be off-limits to dogs, and to construct an additional trail on the west side of Highway 74 that would connect the Homme Adams Park with the Cahuilla Hills Park. Dogs would be allowed on the Homme-Adams Park and Cahuilla Hills Park trails. Figure 1 shows the relative location of each of the trails.

2.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

2.1 Proposed Action

The BLM proposes to authorize the City of Palm Desert to construct/improve one mile of trail on BLM-administered lands. This trail segment is part of a larger project in which the City proposes to improve/construct four miles of trail on City land. For the purposes of this EA, the entire trail alignment (both City and BLM land) is described and analyzed; however the BLM has no jurisdiction over non-Federal land. The City of Palm Desert is conducting its own analysis in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and will go through their own decision-making process for activity on City lands.

Homme-Adams/ Cahuilla Hills Trail. This two-mile trail would be created by improving existing trails on land owned by the City (about one mile) at Homme-Adams and Cahuilla Hills Parks (Figure 2), and establishing a connector trail (about one mile) between the two City parks on BLM-managed land. The connector trail on BLM land (T5S R6E Section 30 SBM) entails improving half (0.5) mile of existing trail, and half mile (0.5) of new trail construction using switchbacks on steep terrain, immediately west of the Palm Valley Stormwater Channel.

Hiking with dogs is currently allowed on the existing trails in Homme-Adams Park and Cahuilla Hills Park on City land, and such use would continue to be allowed. The BLM portion would also be designated for dog use. Parking would be provided at the trailhead at both Homme-Adams Park and Cahuilla Hills Park. Dog owners would be required to keep their dogs under voice control at all times. Additionally, dog owners would be required to pick up and remove dog feces from the area. Plastic bags would be provided at the trailhead for this purpose.

All construction equipment would be limited to a maximum overall wheel or track width of 74 inches. Construction would be conducted with a small skid-steer loader (i.e., Bobcat). In general, the existing vegetation would be cleared 3 feet from the centerline of the trail (6 feet total). However, where the trail crosses steep slopes or in other areas where a 6-foot-trail width is not feasible, a narrower trail would be constructed. At no time would the trail width be less than 1 foot. On slopes of 10 percent or less, grading would be kept to a minimum. For the majority of the trail, plant material and litter would be removed from the trail surface to expose, but not remove, the soil. Grading would only occur where it is necessary to create a smooth trail tread. On slopes over 10 percent, cut and fill techniques and rock retaining walls would be used to maintain a fairly level trail on slopes. Blasting may be used during construction to clear rocks. If needed, blasting is expected to occur only on portions of the 0.5-mile switchback portion of the trail.

Construction would take approximately 150 days for the connector portion of the trail and 30 days to improve the existing trails. Dog use may be eliminated on the Visitor Center Loop Trail (see below) prior to the completion of improvements and new trail construction on the Homme-Adams Trail. Dog use would continue to be allowed on the City-owned portions of the unimproved trails in both Homme-Adams and Cahuilla Hills parks until construction and improvement activities started. During the construction and trail improvement period, the public would not be allowed on the trail. To minimize the amount of time that the hiking trail for dogs is unavailable, the Cahuilla Hills Park portion of the trail may be opened as soon as it is improved, prior to the completion of the connector. After construction of the connector trail, dogs would be allowed on the entire trail.

Visitor Center Loop Trail. The Visitor Center Loop Trail is an informal trail in an existing wash and along a dirt road. The existing trail is an approximately three-mile loop beginning at the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Visitor Center parking lot, which is located east of State Route (SR) 74 at an elevation of approximately 1,000 feet above mean sea level (MSL) (Figure 3). There would be a spur trail off the main loop trail leading to a viewpoint located at about 1,750 feet MSL. Part of the easternmost spur trail would use an existing dirt road, and no construction or improvement is anticipated on this part of the trail. The majority of the trail (approximately 2.8 miles) is on land owned by the City of Palm Desert.

Construction techniques would be similar to those described for the Homme-Adams Trail. Construction improvements on the Visitor Center Loop Trail would take approximately 75 days.

Informational signs informing the public about the prohibition of dogs on the trail would be posted at the trailhead. Educational materials regarding the effect of domestic dogs on the bighorn sheep may be placed on existing indoor and outdoor displays at the Visitor Center. Parking for the trail would be at the existing Visitor Center parking lot.

2.2 No Action Alternative

With the No Action Alternative, the proposed trail improvements and expansions would not occur. Existing management and use of the trails would continue subject to applicable statutes, regulations, policy and land use plans.

Click here for Figure 1 Homme-Adams Trail and Visitor Center Loop Trail

Note: Fig. 1 is a color map -- it is a large file: 3.23 megabytes.

Click here for Figure 2 Homme-Adams Trail with Land Ownership

Note: Fig. 2 is a color map -- it is a large file: 3.64 megabytes.

Figure 3 – Visitor Center Loop Trail with Land Ownership

3.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Homme-Adams and Cahuilla Hills Park Trail. Land uses north, south, and west of the project area include open space and residential land uses. The Palm Valley Stormwater Channel and residential land uses are east of the project area. The new switchback construction would occur on BLM-managed land.

Visitor Center Loop Trail. The Visitor Center Loop Trail is located mostly on City-owned land within the boundaries of the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument. SR 74 is west and south of the project area. The Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Visitor Center, associated parking, and driveway are located northwest of the project area. The Bighorn Institute facility is located north of the Visitor Center. The Boyd Deep Canyon Desert Research Center, operated by UC Riverside, is located on approximately 16,800 acres approximately 2 miles east of the project area. The remainder of the land uses immediately south, west, and north of the project area are open space.

4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

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	Potential impact	No impact
Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs)	No impact	No impact
Cultural Resources	No impact	No impact
Native American Concerns	No impact	No impact
Farmlands	Not Applicable (N/A)	No impact
Floodplains	No impact	No impact
Minerals	N/A	N/A
Noise	Potential impact	No impact
Threatened and/or Endangered Animal Species	May affect, likely to adversely affect species; Potential impact to sensitive habitats (washes)	Impacts to Peninsular Ranges bighorn sheep from domestic dogs would continue.
Threatened and/or Endangered Plant Species	No impact	No impact
Invasive, Nonnative Species	Potential impact	No impact
Wastes (hazardous/solid)	Potential impact	No impact

Environmental Element	Proposed Action	No Action Alternative
Water Quality (surface and ground)	No impact	No impact
Wetlands/Riparian Zones	Potential impact to sensitive habitats (washes)	No impact
Wild and Scenic Rivers	N/A	N/A
Wilderness	N/A	N/A
Environmental Justice	No impact	No impact
Visual Resource Management (VRM)	Conforms to VRM objectives	No impact
Energy (E.O. 13212)	No impact	No impact
Health, safety, risks to children	No impact	No impact

Discussion of Impacts

4.1 Proposed Action

Air Quality

The project is not projected to produce any operational emissions in excess of the threshold values established by the SCAQMD or exceed ambient air quality standards. As such, the project would not conflict with or obstruct implementation of the 2002 Coachella Valley PM_{10} State Implementation Plan. During construction and improvement activities, there will be emissions from the operation of the skid-steer loader ("Bobcat"), the use of explosives, and trips by the construction worker. These impacts would be temporary and would not exceed SCAQMD daily threshold values. Additional information is included as part of Appendix A, Air Quality.

Cultural Resources

A cultural resources record search was conducted for the proposed project area by the Eastern Information Center on November 22, 2002. The search identified all previous investigations, archaeological sites, and properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) located within a 0.5-mile (800-meter) radius of the project area. Results of the cultural resources record search indicate that there have been three prior cultural resources surveys performed within the project area. Roughly half of the Homme-Adams Trail was surveyed in 1990 and all of the area encompassing the Visitor Center Loop Trail was inventoried during two separate surveys conducted in 1981 and 1995. Because these surveys are all more than 5 years old, they are considered out-of-date according to standards established by the California Office of Historic Preservation. The record search also indicated that 13 cultural resources surveys have been conducted within a half-mile radius of the project areas. No archaeological sites, isolated finds, historic structures or features, or historic properties listed on, or determined eligible for listing on, the NRHP have been recorded within a half-mile radius of the project area as a result of any of these previous investigations.

The project area falls within the traditional use area of the Cahuilla Indians. Cultural resources in the area can be expected to include archaeological sites associated with Cahuilla occupation and use of the area. There is also the potential for prehistoric sites associated with occupations pre-dating the Cahuilla and for sites associated with historic period settlement of the Coachella Valley.

A search of information on file at the Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office of the BLM indicates that numerous archaeological sites are located within a one-mile radius of the Homme-Adams portion of the project area. These sites include small clusters of ceramic sherds, lithic debitage, rock cairns, milling features, and trail segments. Several of the sites appear to represent short-term occupation or plant-processing sites. The terrain where these sites are found is very similar to the terrain adjacent to the project area; therefore, there is a moderate potential for prehistoric cultural resources to occur in or around the project area.

Previously-recorded cultural resources within the vicinity of the Visitor Center Loop Trail include small ceramic sherd clusters and individual lithic or ground stone artifacts. Sites within a one-mile radius include plant-processing sites with milling features and sites containing ceramics, lithic debitage and evidence of occupation. The majority of these sites are located east of the project area in Deep Canyon and are separated from the project by rugged topography. There is a low potential for cultural resources to occur in the area of the Visitor Center Loop Trail.

The California Native American Heritage Commission conducted a search of the Sacred Lands File on November 26, 2002. No Native American cultural resources are reported in the vicinity of either of the trails.

Archaeologists from Chambers Group conducted a Class III, intensive, pedestrian cultural resources inventory on December 10, 2002 (Sander and Chandler 2002). No archaeological sites or isolated artifacts were identified within the project area as a result of this inventory. A Government Land Office (GLO) survey marker from 1942 was identified and recorded adjacent to the Homme-Adams Trail. This survey marker is one of thousands placed in southern California in the first half of the 20th Century. Trail construction activities will avoid this historic feature. It is unlawful to disturb survey markers.

Completion of the proposed Homme-Adams trail system would involve switchbacks and surface disturbance from cut and fill construction activities. To avoid inadvertent impacts to unidentified subsurface cultural resources, a qualified archaeologist must monitor construction in areas that require blasting, cut and fill, or other substantial surface disturbing activities. The majority of the Visitor Center Loop Trail will require only minimal enhancement of an existing trail system. Archaeological monitoring is not recommended for this portion of the project.

If previously unidentified cultural resources are encountered during construction, all activity in the immediate area must cease and the BLM archaeologist must be consulted.

Biological Resources

This section describes the potential impacts of the Proposed Action on vegetation communities, general wildlife, sensitive habitats and jurisdictional waters, and sensitive plants and wildlife at the study area.

All phases of the Proposed Action were evaluated, including:

Visitors Center Loop Trail

1. The removal of domestic dogs,
2. Improvements to existing trails, and
3. New trail construction.

Homme-Adams /Cahuilla Hills ParkTrails

1. Increase in numbers of domestic dogs,
2. Improvements to existing trails, and
3. New trail construction.

General Vegetation and Wildlife. The project area is dominated by Sonoran creosote bush scrub (Holland 1986). Both the visitors' center loop trail and Homme-Adams trail areas support mostly

Sonoran creosote bush scrub communities with varying degrees of disturbance from human use. Species characteristic of this community include creosote bush (*Larrea tridentata*), desert lavender, chuparosa, burrobush (*Ambrosia dumosa*), and brittlebush (*Encelia farinosa*). Wildlife expected to occur in the project area includes reptiles such as the side blotched lizard (*Uta stansburiana*), speckled rattlesnake (*Crotalus mitchelli*), red diamond rattlesnake (*Crotalus rubus*), and desert iguana (*Dipsosauus dorsalis*); bird species common to the area such as mourning doves (*Zenaida marcoura*), hummingbirds, mockingbirds, verdin, and common raven (*Corvus corax*); and mammal species such as desert cottontail (*Sylvilagus audubonii*) and coyote (*Canis latrans*).

Impacts to these resources may occur during trail construction and improvement activities. Plant removal may result in displacement of small mammals, reptiles, and birds; destruction of habitat; and reduction of cover used to escape from predators and for thermal cover. Animals may be crushed during removal of vegetation and movement of machinery. Beneficial impacts to wildlife species are expected to occur near the Visitor Center Loop Trail because the removal of domestic dogs from the area should result in reduced mortality and disturbance to wildlife species.

Sensitive Species. Sensitive species include those that are listed as endangered and threatened by the USFWS and CDFG. Other sensitive species are also considered in this document, including those listed by CDFG as California species of special concern, species listed by the California Native Plant Society, BLM State Sensitive Species, and species covered by the Coachella Valley MSHCP. Table 1 lists sensitive species recorded within three miles of the project area, and sensitive species that have been identified in the region and may inhabit the habitats present at the projects sites. Each of these species is further discussed following the table.

Table 1
Sensitive Species Recorded Near the Project Sites

Common Name ***Scientific Name***	**Status**	**PFO**	**Habitat Requirements and Comments**
PLANTS			
Deep Canyon snapdragon *Antirrhinum cyathiferum*	Federal: None State: None CNPS: 2 MSHCP: not covered BLM: None	M	Inhabits rocky Sonoran desert scrub habitats below approximately 1,500 feet mean sea level in elevation.
Glandular ditaxis *Ditaxis clariana*	Federal: None State: None CNPS: 2 MSHCP: not covered BLM: None	M	Inhabits Sonoran desert scrub habitats in sandy washes and rocky hillsides.
California ditaxis *Ditaxis serrata* var. *californica*	Federal: None State: None CNPS: 3 MSHCP: not covered BLM: None	M	Inhabits Sonoran desert scrub habitats in sandy washes and alluvial fans.
WILDLIFE			
Desert tortoise *Gopherus agassizii*	Federal: T State: T MSHCP: covered BLM: sensitive	L	Inhabits most desert habitats in low densities.
Flat-tailed horned lizard *Phrynosoma mcalli*	Federal: PT State: CSC MSHCP: covered BLM: sensitive	L	Inhabits desert washes and flats with fine sand only in central Riverside, Eastern San Diego, and Imperial Counties.
LeConte's thrasher *Toxostoma lecontei*	Federal: None State: CSC	L	Inhabits open desert wash and scrub habitats. Nests in dense spiny shrubs or cactus.

Common Name *Scientific Name*	Status	PFO	Habitat Requirements and Comments
	MSHCP: covered BLM: sensitive		
Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard *Uma inornata*	Federal: T State: E MSHCP: covered	L	Inhabits windblown sand habitats in the Coachella Valley.
Peninsular bighorn sheep *Ovis canadensis nelsoni* DPS	Federal: E State: T MSHCP: covered BLM: sensitive	H	Inhabits open desert slopes below 4,000 MSL in elevation with steep-walled canyons and ridges bisected by washes. Forages on alluvial fans near escape cover

Status

Federal
E = Endangered
T = Threatened
PT = Proposed threatened

State
E = Endangered
T = Threatened
CSC = California Species of Special Concern

California Native Plant Society (CNPS)
2 = Plants rare, threatened, or endangered in California but more common elsewhere
3 = Plants about which we need more information

Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP)
Covered = species proposed to be covered under the MSHCP
Not covered = species not proposed to be covered

Potential for Occurrence (PFO)

L = Low
No present or historical records cite the species' occurrence in or near the project area, and the habitats strongly associated with the species do not occur in or near the vicinity.

M = Moderate
Either a historical record exists of the species in or near the project area, or the habitats associated with the species occur in or near the project vicinity.

H = High
Both a recent record exists of the species in or near the project area, and the habitats associated with the species occur in or near the project vicinity.

Three sensitive plant species, the Deep Canyon snapdragon, glandular ditaxis, and California ditaxis, have been found within three miles of the project sites, and these sites do support the habitats preferred by these plant species. New trail construction may adversely affect these species by directly removing individual plants or small populations of these plants, if they are present the areas where new construction will occur. Because none of these species is listed by the federal or state agencies as endangered or threatened, these impacts are not expected to be substantial and no mitigation is required.

One individual desert tortoise was recently observed in the area of the Visitor Center Loop Trail. This sighting may have been a released captive tortoise since no other sightings of this species have been made in the project area. In addition to this observation, tortoises have been observed directly north of the Visitor Center at the Bighorn Golf Club. Habitat for the desert tortoise is located on both sites.

LeConte's thrasher may be present throughout the Sonoran creosote scrub habitats on both project sites. The proposed project is unlikely to adversely affect this species because little habitat will be removed, and the area already supports a high degree of human and domestic dog disturbance. Impacts are not expected to be substantial and no mitigation is required.

Bighorn sheep are most sensitive to disturbance during the lambing and rearing season (Geist 1971, Light and Weaver 1973, King and Workman 1986, Wagner and Peek 1999, Wehausen 1980) and in lambing areas that are close to dependable water sources (Leslie and Douglas 1980, McCarty and Bailey 1994, BLM 1980, Blong and Pollard 1968). Ewes exhibit a heightened response to disturbance about a month prior to having their lambs (Geist 1871, Hansen and Deming 1980, Wagner and Peek 1999). The onset of lambing is correlated with seasonal

precipitation and forage availability (Goodson 1999, Wagner and Peek 1999, Rubin et al. 2000). In the deserts of the southwestern United States, bighorn ewes may have their lambs during any month of the year (Guy Wagner, personal communication), but in general, ewes in the Peninsular Ranges have their lambs January through June (DeForge and Scott 1982, Rubin et al. 2000, Bighorn Institute unpublished data) with the peak March 1 - April 30 (Figure 1). Lambing habitat is characterized by rugged canyons and steep, open slopes which provide escape cover from predators (Geist 1971, Wakelyn 1987, Risenhoover and Bailey 1985) and reduces impact from human disturbance as well (Risenhoover et al. 1988). DeForge and Scott (1982) observed ewes in the northern Santa Rosa Mountains giving birth in rugged canyons adjacent to the urban interface. Another critical constituent of lambing habitat is water and nutritious forage. Ewes with lambs are typically found within 2 miles of water and will go to water every day if it is available (Monson and Sumner 1980).

The proposed action is likely to adversely effect Peninsular Ranges bighorn sheep. Construction is likely to occur during the lambing season, a time when bighorn sheep are much more vulnerable to disturbance (Geist 1971). Ewes with lambs that are disturbed during this critical period may abandon safe habitat for areas less rugged with poorer escape options. In addition, construction activity has been shown to alter behavior and movement of bighorn sheep (Leslie and Douglas 1980); thus it is likely that the proposed activities will impact bighorn sheep. Noise associated with construction activity including blasting, machinery and rolling rock is likely to displace bighorn sheep from habitat adjacent to the project sites, especially at the Homme-Adams site. This displacement, although likely to be temporary, will impact bighorn sheep during the critical lambing period.

The Bighorn Institute, a non-profit research organization, lies north of the Visitor Center. Currently, if dogs and their owners hike the old road to the north, they may be able to overlook the sheep pens at the Institute. This may cause stress to captive bighorn. However, there is no risk of adult sheep or lambs being killed by dogs because the sheep are contained. Moving the dog use area from south of the Visitor Center to Homme-Adams Park would decrease the risk of sheep seeing dogs, thus, reducing stress to the captive sheep. In addition, there are lambing and watering areas within one mile of this site on the west side of Hwy 74 in Carrizo and Dead Indian Canyons. However, Hwy 74 presents a physical barrier that helps to contain dogs in the area south of the Visitor Center and keeps them out of habitat occupied by wild sheep.

Creating a dog use area at the Homme-Adams Park would increase the potential for interaction between domestic dogs and wild bighorn sheep. The proposed dog use area is within one mile of occupied critical bighorn sheep habitat, known lambing areas, and known watering areas. Bradley Canyon and Magnesia Canyon are both critical lambing sites and watering sites. The proposed action would require that dogs be under voice control and assumes that all dogs respond to voice control. Domestic dogs are known to chase and potentially kill bighorn sheep. Bighorn sheep use their keen eyesight to detect predators, alert conspecifics visually, and seek escape through rugged terrain. Unlike the Visitor Center site, there is no highway to act as a physical barrier between occupied bighorn habitat and the dog use area. Without mitigation, there would be nothing to prevent dogs from continuing upslope from the trail switchbacks and into sheep habitat. Bighorn sheep evolved with canine predators (Geist 1971) and thus react very strongly to domestic dogs. Disturbance of bighorn sheep by dogs causes heart rate increases and flight response (MacArthur et al. 1979, MacArthur et al. 1982, Purdy and Shaw 1981), with nervousness and alertness persisting for up to 30 minutes following an encounter and exhibiting response to subtle stimuli which otherwise evoked no response (MacArthur et al. 1982).

Sensitive Habitats. Sensitive habitats include those listed by CDFG, wildlife movement corridors, and jurisdictional wetlands and waters of the United States. Two CDFG sensitive habitats are found in the project region, windblown sands and desert fan palm oasis woodland. No windblown sands (which provide habitat for the flat-tailed horned lizard and Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard) have been identified in the project area. An area of desert fan palm oasis woodland is found near the project area in Deep Canyon, south of the Visitors Center Loop Trail. In addition,

there is a fan palm oasis in Dead Indian Canyon, to the west of the Visitor Center. Neither area would be affected by the proposed project and no impacts are expected and no mitigation required.

Canyons in the project area are likely significant wildlife movement corridors. The proposed project would likely create beneficial impacts for these areas along and near the visitors center loop trail by removing domestic dogs from the area. The increase in domestic dog activity along the Homme-Adams Trail is likely to adversely affect wildlife movement corridors. Even though there is currently human and domestic dog activity in the area, the establishment of a formal trail would increase the impacts to wildlife moving through the canyons adjacent to the area. Mitigation requirements are discussed in Section 5.0.

Washes present at the project sites do not support wetland vegetation but would likely fall under the jurisdiction of Section 404 of the Clean Water Act and 1600-1603 of the California Fish and Game Code. The Visitors Center Loop Trail extends through a portion of an area of blue-line stream on U.S. Geological Society (USGS) maps. New construction in this trail area may cross a higher area of the same wash, but is not a blue-line stream on the map. At the Homme-Adams Trail, a blue-line stream is present that will be crossed by the area of new construction on BLM-managed land. All of these drainages originate in the Santa Rosa Mountains and flow to the Whitewater River, north of the project area. Jurisdictional determination will be conducted with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) prior to construction.

New trail construction would cross washes in both trail locations. Prior to new construction in these areas, the Corps, CDFG, and Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) will be consulted regarding their jurisdiction over these resources. All required permits will be obtained prior to new trail construction and all permit provisions will be adhered to in order to reduce potential impacts to these resources.

Hazardous Waste

Construction equipment on the site would use materials such as fuel and oil. These materials would be used on the site during construction, and would be removed on completion of the project. With the implementation of spill-control measures from the project's Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP), required by the Regional Water Quality Control Board, impacts would be minor. In addition, dog owners would be required to pick up and remove dog waste from the trail. This would reduce the amount of fecal material on the ground at the dog use area.

Visual Resources

The Visual Resource Management (VRM) system is an analytical process that identifies, sets, and meets objectives for maintaining scenic values and visual quality. It functions in two ways. First, an inventory is conducted that evaluates visual resources (Inventory/Evaluation). Once inventoried and analyzed, lands are assigned management classifications. Management classes describe the different degrees of modification allowed to the basic elements of the landscape. Second, when development is proposed, the degree of contrast between the proposed activity and the existing landscape is measured (Contrast Rating).

An inventory/evaluation of visual resources was conducted for each of the project areas. For both areas, scenic quality is rated as "Class B" (there is a combination of some outstanding features and some that are fairly common to the physiographic region); sensitivity level is rated as "High," and the distance zone is determined as "Foreground / Middleground," resulting in a VRM Class of "2." The management objective of Class 2 areas is to ensure that that changes in any of the basic elements (form, line, color, texture) caused by a management activity should not be evident in the characteristic landscape; contrasts can be seen, but must not attract attention.

Contrast ratings for the proposed Visitor Center Loop Trail and Homme-Adams Park Trail reveal the degree of contrast for each as "none" to "weak," consistent with VRM objectives for Class 2 areas.

The complete VRM analysis is available for review at the City of Palm Desert Planning Department and BLM's Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office.

Noise
The trail construction would take place using a small Bobcat, which is not expected to generate sufficient noise to disturb sensitive receptors in the area. However, blasting may be required to level the trail in some locations. This impact would be temporary, and would not occur once construction was completed. With the mitigation measure listed in Section 5.0, impacts would be reduced to less than significant.

4.2 No Action Alternative

Under this alternative, the trails would continue to be used in the same manner as current conditions. Most persons who use the trail loop south of the Visitor Center to walk their dogs stay within the wash, which has no impact on bighorn sheep in the wild nor in pens. Some visitors with dogs hike the old road up the ridge to the north, allowing them to overlook the sheep pens at the Bighorn Institute. This may cause stress to captive bighorn.

5.0 MITIGATION MEASURES

Cultural Resources
1. To avoid inadvertent impacts to unidentified subsurface cultural resources, a qualified archaeologist must monitor construction in areas that require blasting, cut and fill, or other substantial surface disturbing activities. The majority of the Visitor Center Loop Trail will require only minimal enhancement of an existing trail system. Archaeological monitoring is not recommended for this portion of the project. If previously unidentified cultural resources are encountered during construction, all activity in the immediate area will cease and the BLM archaeologist will be consulted.

Biological Resources
1. To mitigate the impacts of dogs on bighorn sheep, a fence will be constructed along the western edge of the connecting trail between Homme-Adams Park and Cahuilla Hills Park on BLM land to reduce the likelihood of loose dogs in bighorn sheep habitat.

2. Blasting will occur from October 1 through January 1 to protect bighorn sheep during the lambing and hot season.

Noise
1. All blasting shall conform with all City of Palm Desert regulations including construction hours, and special permits. All construction, including blasting, shall be limited to between 7 a.m. and 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday, and in accordance with Biological Resources Mitigation Measure 2, above, addressing blasting in bighorn sheep habitat.

6.0 RESIDUAL IMPACTS

Residual impacts would not be substantial. Impacts to air quality would occur during construction and improvement activities. As discussed in Section 4.1, these impacts would be minor, and would not occur at all after the construction and improvements are completed. After the implementation of mitigation measures described in Section 5.0, residual impacts to biological resources include disturbances to LeConte's thrasher, and destruction of vegetation, resulting in reduced cover and habitat for ground-nesting birds such as the mourning dove, small mammals, and reptiles. Unknown cultural resources could be affected during construction, particularly where large amounts of ground disturbance would be required (i.e., blasting or grading new

portions of the trail). As discussed in Section 5.0, a cultural resources monitor will be present on the site during these types of activities, reducing the potential level of impact to unknown cultural resources. Also as discussed in Section 5.0, blasting activities will be limited to specific hours to avoid noise impacts during noise-sensitive times.

7.0 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

In addition to the direct and indirect impacts associated with implementation of the Proposed Action, NEPA requires that cumulative impacts be analyzed and disclosed. A cumulative impact is an impact on the environment that results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (federal or nonfederal) or person undertakes such other actions. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively substantial actions taking place over a period of time.

Habitat for bighorn sheep has been reduced incrementally over the past several decades by housing developments, golf courses, and increased demand for recreation opportunities. Dogs have been allowed in sheep habitat during this time, except for the past 2 years when the BLM issued a temporary order closing the public lands east of Palm Canyon to dogs, except for designated areas. The proposed action would create a legal dog use area and would concentrate dogs in the Homme-Adams/Cahuilla Hills Park area. As the bighorn population in the northern Santa Rosa Mountains increases, the potential impact to sheep may increase. The areas immediately surrounding the Homme-Adams/Cahuilla Hills Park area are currently used for open space, recreation, and very low density land uses. The City of Palm Desert General Plan states that these uses will continue. However, residential construction in the City of Palm Desert and the region will likely increase, resulting in the increase in the use of the Homme-Adams Park Trail.

8.0 PERSONS / AGENCIES CONSULTED

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

DECISION RECORD
CA-_____

NAME of PROJECT: Palm Desert Trails Improvement Project

DECISION: It is my decision to approve the proposed action as described in Environmental Assessment (EA) number CA-_____. 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: The applicant is proposing trail improvement that would eliminate hiking with domestic dogs in the Santa Rosa/San Jacinto Mountains National Monument, while providing an opportunity for hiking with dogs on another trail in a less-sensitive area in the region. This action would reduce impacts to bighorn sheep 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 1260, 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.

During the appeal to the State Director, all decisions from which the appeal is taken shall be effective during the pendency of the appeal.

If no appeal is taken, this decision constitutes final administrative action of this Department as it affects the mining claim(s). No appeal, protest or petition for reconsideration will be entertained from this decision after the appeal period has expired.

APPROVED BY: _____ _____

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

APPENDIX A
AIR QUALITY