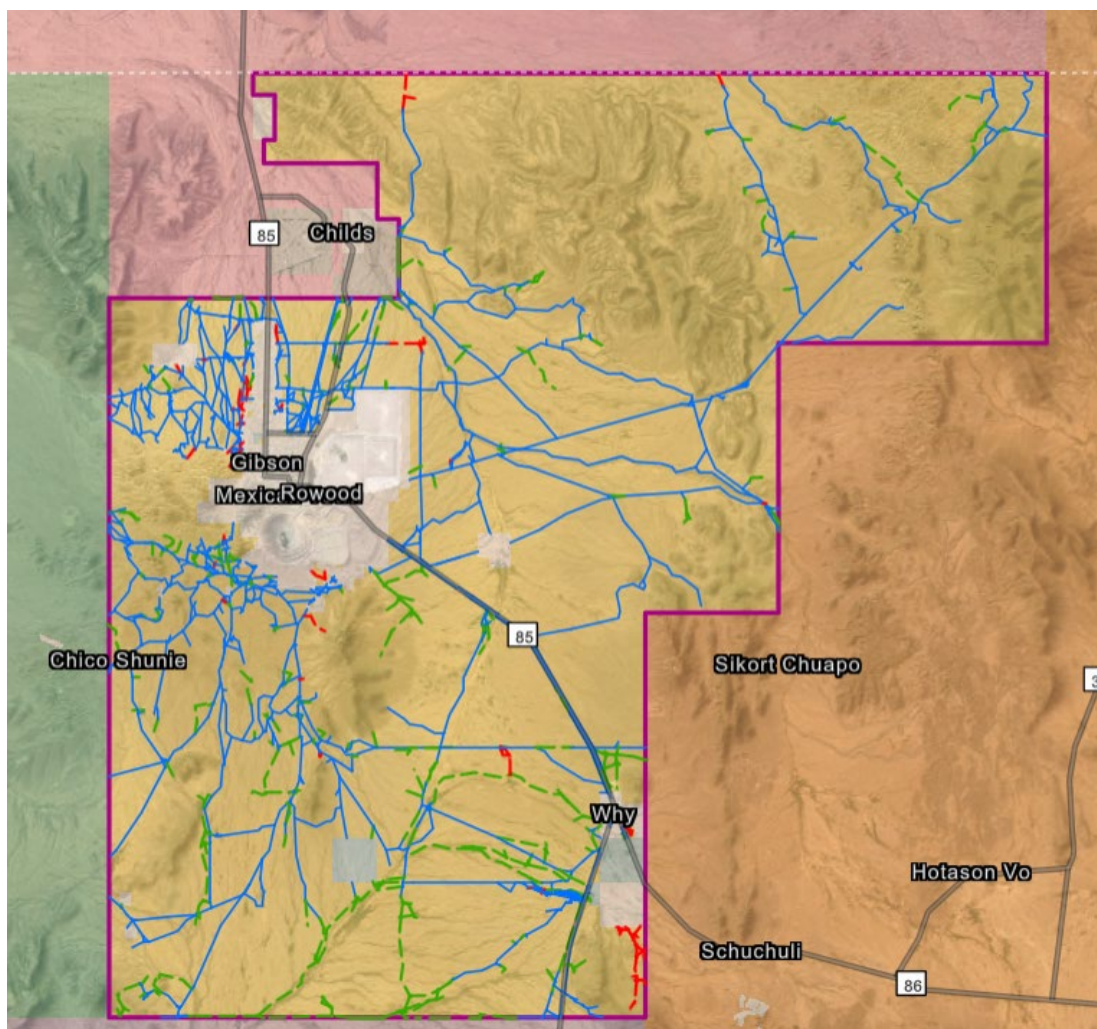


October 24

Ajo Travel Management Plan Public Information Period Summary

DOI-BLM-AZ-P020-2023-0005-EA



BLM Arizona – Phoenix District

Lower Sonoran Field Office
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It is the mission of the Bureau of Land Management to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

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ACRONYMS

| Acronym | Full Terminology |
|----------------|-----------------------------------|
| AZGFD | Arizona Game and Fish Department |
| BLM | Bureau of Land Management |
| EA | Environmental Assessment |
| LSFO | Lower Sonoran Field Office |
| NEPA | National Environmental Policy Act |
| OHV | Off-Highway Vehicle |
| TMA | Travel Management Area |
| TMP | Travel Management Plan |

1 INTRODUCTION

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Lower Sonoran Field Office (LSFO) proposed to designate a comprehensive network of motorized routes and trails for managing travel within the Ajo Travel Management Area (TMA). See Map 1, below. The Ajo TMA covers approximately 177,112 acres of BLM-managed public land in western Pima County, Arizona. The Ajo TMA is bounded by the Tohono O’odham Nation Reservation on the east, the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument on the south, the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge on the west, and the Barry M. Goldwater Air Force Range on the north. Travel management planning is necessary for designating and providing appropriate access to and across public lands for a variety of uses including recreation, hunting, grazing, mineral exploration and energy development. There was a need for the BLM’s LSFO to develop a plan for managing travel and transportation within the Ajo TMA because the TMA’s existing routes have not previously been subjected to evaluation by LSFO resource specialists to determine their long-term purpose and need, and their potential impacts on the TMA’s natural and human environment to bring travel and transportation management in the TMA into conformance with 43 CFR 8342.1 (i.e., the Designation Criteria). The 2012 Lower Sonoran Approved Resource Management Plan (2012 RMP) designated OHV Management Areas, established a preliminary LSFO transportation plan which limited OHV travel to existing roads and trails, provided guidance for finalizing transportation and travel in the LSFO, and delineated TMAs based on area-specific desired future conditions for resource protection, recreation user opportunities, and reducing user conflicts.

Travel management planning consists of three phases: route inventory, route evaluation, and the development of a Travel Management Plan (TMP). On-the-ground inventory within the Ajo TMA identified approximately 385 miles of routes. These are routes the BLM identified through an initial inventory that were being considered for designation to form the travel network within the TMA. National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance for this project has not yet started.

2 PUBLIC INFORMATION PERIOD

The BLM shared the existing route inventory and requested feedback on any routes that are missing from the data set, as well as comments and concerns on activities, resources, and access needs in the TMA. The comment period for the route inventory was open from May 22, 2023, to July 6, 2023.

2.1 Outreach methods:

A news release was provided to local media outlets, and informational postcards were sent to the LSFO’s list of interested parties. Two virtual public meetings provided information about the project and how to participate and submit comments. The first meeting was held on May 23, 2023, and the second meeting was held on May 24, 2023. The comment period was posted on the BLM’s ePlanning website on May 22, 2023.

2.2 Comments Received

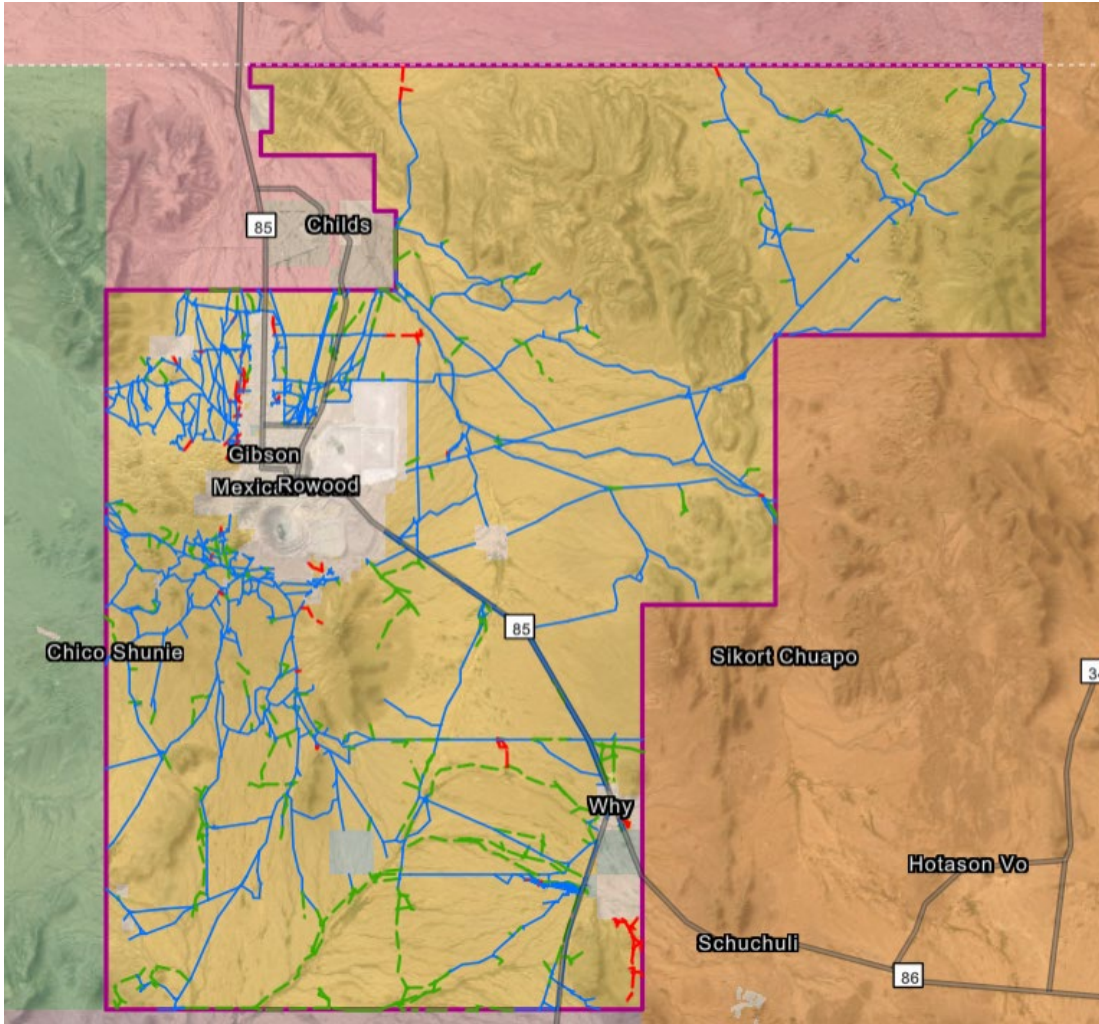
The BLM received a total of 51 comments during the route inventory comment period, of which all but four were deemed as substantive comments (i.e., comments that are clear, concise, and constructive, and that provide new information or data that would have a bearing on the analysis), and appropriate responses from the BLM were provided. The comments are summarized as follows:

- One comment was received from the Arizona State Association 4 Wheel Drive Club requesting an extension of the inventory comment period.
- One commenter considered the request for comments about the route inventory to be commensurate with the “scoping” phase of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.
- Eight comments were route-specific, noting the character of the specified route and/or other issues associated with the route such as redundancy (another route nearby that serves the same purpose), or routes extending onto or across private land.
- One comment from the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGFD) requested that access be maintained on a route not included in the inventory that extends through Lands Managed for Wilderness Characteristics to an existing water catchment.
- Thirty-five comments provided suggestions or recommendations for the environmental assessment and designation of the proposed travel network such as, but not limited to, the following:
 - Ensuring protection for the desert tortoise and its habitat, including complying with the Sonoran Desert Tortoise Candidate Conservation Agreement as well as other interagency guidelines and measures for projects in tortoise habitat.
 - Suggesting that existing routes that dead-end at National Park Service or National Wildlife Refuge lands be closed to avoid unauthorized extension onto these lands.
 - Recommending that the TMP include measures for effective law enforcement.
 - Incorporating effective signing measures for crossing private land.
 - Eliminating redundant routes and reducing route density.
 - Ensuring thorough analysis of route effects on resources and habitats, including cumulative effects.
 - Keeping as many routes open as possible to recreation users to mitigate impacts from concentrated use.
 - Addressing growth in outdoor recreation and economic opportunities.
- Seven comments were received from the AZGFD suggesting and/or requesting that the TMP incorporate such measures or allowances as the following:
 - Conserving existing access for hunting, fishing, trapping, shooting, wildlife watching, and other forms of outdoor recreation.
 - Providing clear and uniform route signing.
 - Allowing for motorized game retrieval, including a specified distance for off-route retrieval for holders of AZGFD-issued Challenged Hunter Access/Mobility Permits.
 - Allowing for a 300-foot width dispersed camping corridor along open travel routes and maintaining access to and use of existing dispersed campsites.
 - Designating “Closed to OHV” (off-highway vehicle) routes for non-motorized hiking, biking, and horseback riding use.
 - Allowing administrative access on “Closed to OHV” use to AZGFD for wildlife management purposes (e.g., maintaining water catchments, wildlife surveys, etc.)

3 FUTURE STEPS

Currently, the BLM is evaluating workloads and the future schedule for this project is not yet determined. The BLM’s ePlanning website would be updated when the BLM initiates NEPA and preparation of the TMP.

Map 1: Ajo Travel Management Area



APPENDIX A. PUBLIC INPUT NEWS RELEASE



News Release

BLM Arizona Phoenix District – Lower Sonoran Field Office

Media Contact: Dolores Garcia, dagarcia@blm.gov, 602-417-9241

May 4, 2023

BLM hosts open house seeking public input on Ajo Travel Management Plan

PHOENIX – The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Lower Sonoran Field Office is seeking public input to inform the Ajo Travel Management Area Travel Management Plan (Ajo TMP) and associated environmental assessment. The Ajo Travel Management Area covers approximately 177,112 acres of BLM-managed public land in Pima County.

Travel management planning is necessary for designating and providing appropriate access to and across public lands for a variety of uses including recreation, hunting, grazing, mineral exploration and energy development. Travel management planning consists of three phases: route inventory, route evaluation, and the development of the travel management plan. On-the-ground inventory within the Ajo Travel Management Area identified approximately 385 miles of routes.

To provide information and receive public input on this route inventory within the Ajo Travel Management Area, the BLM will host virtual public meetings. During the virtual public meetings, the BLM will present an overview of its travel planning process and the Ajo Travel Management Plan specifically. Maps of the inventoried routes will be available for review on the project's National NEPA Register / ePlanning page: https://bit.ly/BLM_AZ_AjoTMP. The public is encouraged to review the inventoried routes and make comments during a 15-day period starting May 22 and ending June 6.

The BLM will conduct two virtual Zoom meetings to provide information about the project and how to participate:

Meeting 1: Tuesday, May 23 from 5 to 6:30 p.m.,

(<https://blm.zoomgov.com/meeting/register/vJItcOitqDkuEk-Wm2o2xfMXBcm7raG6r4I>)

Meeting 2: Wednesday, May 24 from 5 to 6:30 p.m.,

(<https://blm.zoomgov.com/meeting/register/vJIIsdeGurjkoEsGVt1kbjqR5snzQsruIDm0>)

Comments may be submitted in the following ways:

- Online via the “participate now” feature on the [National NEPA Register](https://bit.ly/BLM_AZ_AjoTMP).
https://bit.ly/BLM_AZ_AjoTMP

- Email to: **BLM_AZ_LS_AjoTravelMgmtPlan@blm.gov**
- US Mail to: BLM Arizona State Office, ATTN: Ajo TMP, One North Central Avenue, Suite 800, Phoenix, AZ 85004

The BLM plans to release the proposed travel management plan and environmental assessment for public review and comment in August 2023 and expects to issue the Decision Record in fall 2023.

-BLM-

The BLM manages more than 245 million acres of public land located primarily in 12 western states, including Alaska, on behalf of the American people. The BLM also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. Our mission is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of America's public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

APPENDIX B. REFERENCES

BLM (Bureau of Land Management). 2012. Lower Sonoran Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan. Bureau of Land Management, Lower Sonoran Field Office, Phoenix, AZ. September 2012. https://eplanning.blm.gov/public_projects/lup/11856/40127/42156/01-LSDA_ROD-ARMP_FINAL_2012-09-19_web-with-Links_sans-map-pages.pdf.