

San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area Resource Management Plan Implementation Stakeholder Kick-off Meeting

July 29, 2020 | 1-3pm | Virtual

Meeting Summary

Meeting Objectives

- Review the SPRNCA RMP and stakeholder engagement in the RMP development process
- Provide an overview of livestock grazing decisions, implementation, and adaptive management in the RMP
- Introduce SPRNCA RMP implementation process and discuss opportunities for stakeholder engagement in SPRNCA RMP implementation

Participants

(see Appendix)

Organization of this document

A brief summary of each presentation is included here. During the meeting questions were taken after each presentation. For simplicity, however, all questions and comments raised during the meeting are presented after the presentations. Questions that were not addressed during the meeting, due to time, were answered afterwards by BLM and are included here.

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Questions and comments – page 3

Small group discussions – page 9

Acronyms

- AIM – Assessment, Inventory and Monitoring
- LCNCA – Las Cienegas National Conservation Area
- LHE – Land Health Evaluation
- RMP – Resource Management Plan
- SPRNCA – San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area

Presentations

RMP Overview, implementation and adaptive management – *Amy McGowan, BLM*
Presentation upon request. Main points are captured here:

- The SPRNCA was established in 1988
- RMP summary
 - Development from 2013 – 2019
 - Approved in 2019
 - This replaces San Pedro River Riparian Management Plan, and guides all management decisions on the SPRNCA

- The RMP makes resource allocation decisions, but does not authorize on-the-ground actions, this happens in implementation
- Overview of how implementation on the ground relates to decisions in the RMP
- Adaptive Management
 - improves management by monitoring outcomes of projects and iteratively updating as needed
 - Example to illustrating thresholds, triggers and indicators.
 - Has been used successfully with partners in LCNCA for last 20 years

AIM – Theresa Condo, BLM

Presentation upon request. Main points are captured here:

- Before AIM, BLM offices were collecting data at the project level, and needed a standard method.
- It is a multi-resource monitoring protocol, and fits within the monitoring phase of adaptive management
- Key elements of AIM
 - Structured implementation process
 - Standardized set of core quantitative methods and indicators
 - Statistically valid sample designs (where appropriate)
 - Electronic data capture and management
 - Integration with remote sensing
- Three protocols - Terrestrial, lotic (streams, rivers) , lentic (wetlands, floodplains)
- In 2019 AIM data was collected at 23 plots on SPRNCA; at least 5 more plots are being planned for this fall.
- No Lotic data has been collected yet. Will likely collect at 11 sample reaches on San Pedro and 2 sample reaches on Babocomari.

Land Health Evaluations - *Eric Baker, BLM*

Presentation upon request. Main points are captured here:

- RMP grazing decisions: 4 existing grazing allotments remain; acreage is 7,030 and 592 AUMs (Animal Unit Months).
- LHE is a report that determines if Arizona standards for Rangeland Health are being achieved on an allotment. And if not, is livestock grazing a the causal factor?
- Three rangeland health attributes: Soil and site stability, hydrologic function, biotic integrity
- Steps
 - Identify the key area; determine the soil and ecological site
 - Obtain or develop the reference sheet and the corresponding evaluation matrix
 - Collect supplementary information
 - Rate the 17 indicators on the evaluation sheet
 - Determine the functional status of the three rangeland health attributes
- Arizona has three standards
 - 1) Upland Sites (ground cover = AIM data; signs of erosion = indicators of rangeland health)
 - 2) Riparian-Wetland Sites
 - 3) Desired Resource Condition

- Just beginning the lease renewal process – there will be times for public review. Hope to have a complete EA at this time next year.
- Land Health Evaluation reports will result in recommendations, which could include range improvements, vegetation treatments, adaptive management, and changes to grazing lease terms and conditions.

Implementation progress to date – *Amy McGowan, BLM*

Presentation upon request. *Main points are captured here:*

- Implementation to-date:
 - Fairbank Mercantile Stabilization (Oct 2019 – April 2020) to address collapsed wall. Interested in working with partners to ensure that more heavily visited sites are maintained into the future.
 - Areas available/unavailable for hunting with firearms – most is available for hunting with firearms, only about 5,000 acres are designated as “safety zones”
 - On-going resource monitoring: annual wet-dry, streamflow and groundwater monitoring, AIM, MAPS bird banding, annual fish population survey
- Partner engagement in SPRNCA adaptive management process – looking at the LCNCA Bioplanning model as a conceptual first start. Following this meeting a survey will be distributed for partners to share feedback about what/how you’d like to be engaged moving forward.

Questions and Comments

All questions and comments shared during the meeting are presented here. Questions have been organized by theme, with similar questions grouped together. Answers are presented in sub-bullets directly underneath the question.

- Questions in **bold** were addressed during the meeting.
- Responses provided by BLM via the chat box during the meeting are included in *italics*.
- All other questions were answered after the meeting by BLM, and are presented here.
- Comments appear in **blue** text.

Grazing issues (including trespass cattle)

- **Removal of trespassing cattle in the SPRNCA has not been a BLM priority. Cattle have been seen trespassing for years at several riparian locations in the SPRNCA including the extra sensitive Saint David Cienega. How will the BLM ensure that these cattle trespassing issues will get better rather than worse with this new increased grazing?**
 - There is no increased grazing. The allotments/acres in the approved RMP are the same since the BLM acquired property in 1989
 - Trespass grazing is unpermitted. BLM is working towards managing that. It is admittedly a difficult thing to manage. In the past 8-10 years, we’ve tried to focus on being a good neighbor. Trying to identify problem areas and boundary fences. Working with landowners to issue fencing materials

and some youth crew help (there are over 200 water gaps that need constant maintenance)

- **BLM plans on putting cows on SPRNCA as part of the vegetation management plan. That to me is an increase in grazing pressure.**
 - This is in reference to targeted grazing. This is only a method that could be used as a vegetation management tool. It is very different than permitted grazing. This has not been used. Before this would happen, NEPA would occur. If it did occur it would happen in very targeted/specific way (e.g. fire breaks)
- **The BLM's job is to protect the SPRNCA and its resources, not to be a good neighbor.**
 - It's a good thing for BLM to be a good neighbor, to all of our neighbors. This means "no surprises" – we want to work towards all being informed.

Comments

- But you [BLM] haven't apparently implemented any successful dealing with trespass cattle. It's become horrible.
- BLM received reports of cattle trespassing on the SPRNCA at Fairbank on May 8, 10, 23 with photos and the potential danger to an active public site. No action or reply to numerous complaints received via emails
- Protecting the SPRNCA is being a good neighbor to all of us.
- Grazing in SPRNCA, is theft of govt property. Have you tried this approach, rather than focusing so intensively on "being a good neighbor". Trespassing cattle mean the ranchers are not being good neighbors. They are seriously and negatively impacting cultural resources, as well as other resources.
- Visitors to the SPRNCA would probably appreciate not being surprised by encountering cows.
- The bovipobia is interesting, it is too bad the fear and prejudice is so strong with participants, since domestic livestock are probably best tool to manage large landscapes.
- Bovipobia? People told me they were afraid of the bulls because so many cattle were present with young ones. They can be inhibiting. The water was dirty and full of cow poop so I suggested that the adults wash their kids good when they got home after wading and swimming in the cattle murky waters. This is a public area and not in the grazing allotment.
- Yes I think when the Mormon Battalion came through, there were some problems with wild bulls. anything actually happen more recently?
- (The above) comments are pretty off topic.

AIM

- **Are interested parties/interested persons going to be invited on future livestock related field trips? We'd like to be invited to LHE and monitoring field trips (WWP).**
- **Can we be invited to AIM data collection trips? Is the public excluded?**
 - BLM will consider this, but not yet ready to decide. Thanks for the idea.
- **Does AIM training allow for citizen scientist involvement?**
 - We believe so. At this point it is done through contractors (American Conservation Experience), but BLM also does some in-house. Think

anyone can sign up for the training. Would love to figure out how to incorporate more citizen science with AIM. All the data is open to public, once it has gone through QA/QC process.

- **Are the AIM data going to be comparable to data collection methods from the past?**
 - Data from the past doesn't disappear – there are some comparable attributes (e.g. perennial grass cover). While it's not exactly the same, it's arguably a lot more consistent, higher quality, and less biased.
- So few of the thousands of cultural resource sites along the river have been plotted and recorded. How is this dealt with when digging holes and carrying out other AIM tasks?
 - *Response via chat - AIM locations are subject to cultural resources review and approval to avoid cultural sites.*
- Will AIM also be looking at the cienegas?
 - *Yes, there are AIM protocols for wetlands. The protocols are new and will need to be reviewed before implementation. AIM website: <https://aim.landscapetoolbox.org/>*
- How will Lotic sample sites factor in dry reaches?
 - The AIM monitoring protocol does not apply to dry reaches. In general, the priority for monitoring riparian and aquatic sites in the SPRNCA is to use established monitoring protocols (eg. fish sampling protocols and Stromberg sampling transects). AIM lotic will supplement those protocols in applicable perennial or intermittent reaches by monitoring additional indicators that are not in the established monitoring (e.g. Bank Stability, Benthic Macroinvertebrates). In perennial/intermittent sites that do not have established protocols, AIM lotic would be used (e.g. Babocomari River).
- Is Lotic AIM data incorporated into the rangeland analysis?
 - *Response via chat – Yes, lotic data would be used in LHEs. BLM recently published a guide to using AIM in LHEs with a lot more info on the process: <https://www.blm.gov/documents/noc/blm-library/technical-note/guide-using-aim-and-lmf-data-land-health-evaluations-and>*
- Are you coordinating with ADEQ and NGOs on lotic AIM? A lot of this has been gathered for years.
 - Yes, we have shared the monitoring protocol with partners, including ADEQ, and coordinated on past monitoring data. We will continue to coordinate into the future as we develop the plans to implement.
- What criteria will the BLM use to identify priority treatment areas for invasive (or non-native?) species?
 - BLM will prioritize treatment areas based on the potential of high success to move a departed ecological state to a more desired natural state.
- Will Wet-Dry mapping be included in monitoring?
 - Yes, we have conducted wet-dry mapping with our partners on the SPRNCA since 1999 and will continue to do annual wet-dry mapping as part of our monitoring.
- Where on the Babocomari River will those two sample sites be located?
 - We are still developing the monitoring design for Lotic AIM on the SPRNCA. For the Babocomari River, the current thought is to place one

site in the allotment reach and one site outside the allotment boundary, if possible.

Comments

- Lotic should also include springs.
- In my opinion, after visiting the Babocomari River on the BLM's allotment, you need to monitor some different key reaches.
- AIM is still very developmental for riparian-encourage using methodologies for Lotic that have been used for a long time on SPRNCA-use citizen science where possible

Land Health Evaluations

- **Will the results of the allotment EA's result in BLM allotment management plans (AMPs)?**
 - AMPs are older plans that were meant to provide certain criteria of information. LHEs produce all that information plus more. This would be good to discuss further.
- Will the grazing allotment EA's include alternatives besides the existing situation?
 - *Yes, the allotment EAs will include alternatives besides the existing situation*
- Would an Integrated Vegetation Management Plan require an Environmental Assessment?
 - Yes
- So the LHEs are going to have public involvement. Will we in the webinar automatically get those opportunities? Or should we specifically request to be involved?
 - Yes, if you are on the SPRNCA RMP Implementation email list, you will get notification about the availability of the SPRNCA allotment LHEs for comment. All substantive comments made on the SPRNCA allotment LHEs would be addressed in the Environmental Assessment
- Rigorous peer-reviewed historical research clarifies that past models of canopy and ground cover along the region's rivers are incorrect and based on faulty use and interpretation of historical records by people not appropriately trained in their use. How are you incorporating more informed analyses of historical conditions into your management plans and procedures? 2020 "Submerges...Coming Out Again and Then Flowing": What Historical Documents Tell Us About the Character of the Santa Cruz River. Kiva 86(1)
 - BLM will use the best available information and data.
- Water recharge is critical to maintaining the health of the San Pedro River. Mesquite in the Sierra Vista watershed consume approximately 13,000 acre-feet of water each year. Since the BLM wants to be a good neighbor, what is BLM going to do to reduce mesquite in the SPRNCA to reduce the mesquite's consumption of water?
 - The BLM is planning to work on an integrated vegetation management plan and associated environmental assessment as the next implementation priority after the livestock grazing Land Health Evaluations and lease renewal Environmental Assessments. This would allow the BLM to implement vegetation treatments to reduce woody shrubs in appropriate upland locations.

- Historical research shows that mesquite have always been part of the riparian corridor. See reference cited above. These were not vast grasslands at any time in the historical period. The presence of mesquite and other trees are how the river is supposed to look along many segments.

Standards and guidelines

- **Are there not federal standards for rangeland health? You identify using Arizona standards.**
 - Standards are developed on a state by state basis by each BLM state. There is not actually a federal standard. BLM AZ standards were developed in 1997 with input from the AZ Resource Advisory Committee.
- **Weren't the AZ Standards for Rangeland Health developed with livestock grazing in mind. Are they relevant for riparian management?**
 - They are relevant if there is grazing nearby. This would be part of standard 2.
- **The BLM is using "rangeland" indicators. Why would the SPRNCA be considered as rangeland? Would it be better to consider it as grassland and evaluate it from that point of view?**
- **The SPRNCA is not rangeland, it's a riparian NCA. How is the rangeland criteria relevant to the NCA and specifically to the guiding legislation for the SPRNCA of conservation and preservation?**
- **It is really disturbing that the BLM is treating the SPRNCA as rangeland. It is not. You have a higher calling here.**

(Response to all three similar questions):

- The SPRNCA RMP establishes goals and objectives that we need to manage the resources in the SPRNCA for. The goals and objectives outlined in the SPRNCA RMP tie directly to the SPRNCA enabling legislation and are specific to the resources in the SPRNCA and are not "rangeland" indicators.
- AZ standards for rangeland health are overarching standards the BLM needs to meet. We also have to meet the goals and objectives in the RMP. In areas with grazing, the regulations require that BM look at AZ standards for rangeland health in addition to the goals/obj of the SPRNCA RMP.
- BLM's Rangeland Management standard is something that I recall from the RMP process. Is the BLM developing another standards base for NCAs?
 - In addition to ensuring that the BLM is meeting land health standards within the SPRNCA livestock grazing allotments, the BLM will also need to manage the resources in the SPRNCA (including the resources inside the livestock grazing allotments) for the goals and objectives described in the SPRNCA RMP. As described above, the goals and objectives in the SPRNCA RMP tie back to the SPRNCA enabling legislation.

Comments

- I think BLM needs to meet the requirements of the SPRNCA designating legislation, then the RMP, then the AZ Standards for Rangeland Heath. I think the order of priority is important.
- For LHEs, if there hasn't been livestock grazing (at least not "authorized" livestock grazing, the BLM never finds that the standards are not met due to livestock, even when there is clear evidence that livestock are causing damage,

or exacerbating damage. This seems like a system designed to sanction livestock grazing now, and then blame poor ecological conditions on some other cause. This is not rangeland. It is required to be protected to a much higher standard. This is a very disappointing situation.

- By law, the SPRNCA is a riparian preserve, not regular multiple use lands. Your riparian monitoring on the Babocomari River should be used to compare the Babocomari, which is grazed in the winter, with the San Pedro, which isn't grazed, to see if there's a difference. Just meeting the BLM's riparian S&Gs isn't good enough.

Adaptive management

- **In the example given of less than or equal to 5% bare ground, the example of a hard trigger at 10% would be actionable. Why allow so much potentially irreversible, or at least very long-term, damage to occur before taking action?**
 - This was not a real example. We would want to identify hard triggers before there is irreversible damage. Adaptive Management allows a constant feedback loop – looking at data often and consistently and making adjustments; trying to ensure you don't ever get to the hard trigger.
- Will there be an adaptive monitoring plan like on Fossil?
 - The BLM will monitor the resources that are used as indicators to determine whether or not a threshold is being met.

Implementation / general

- **It has been approximately a year since the ROD was signed. What actions have been undertaken?**
 - Refer to presentation on "Implementation progress"
- **My understanding is that BLM proceeded with RMP completion without the benefit of substantive consultation with interested and affected tribes. What is the status and plan for tribal consultations and for integrating tribal values, interests, and preferences into RMP implementation?**
 - BLM hasn't developed a programmatic consultation for SPRNCA. Any action would have consultation for that specific project, however.
- Would any of the management actions need a NEPA?
 - Yes, all of the implementation actions would need NEPA compliance.
- Is BLM trying to do some vegetation management? Will you talk about that, or not until there are actual applications for money?
 - The BLM is planning to work on an integrated vegetation management plan and associated environmental assessment as the next implementation priority after the livestock grazing Land Health Evaluations and lease renewal Environmental Assessments. This would allow the BLM to implement vegetation treatments to reduce woody shrubs in appropriate upland locations.
- How does "The National Landscape Conservation System 15-Year Strategy 2010-2025" come into the RMP implementation process?
 - The National Landscape Conservation System 15-year Strategy 2010-2025 would be considered in implementation but is not a binding document.

- "All NLCS units are designated in keeping with an overarching and explicit commitment: to conserve, protect, and restore natural and cultural resources as the prevailing activities within those areas, shaping all other aspects of management.
To provide for uses that are compatible with landscape and resource values, NLCS managers will: Focus on conservation as the primary consideration in planning for and management of NLCS lands, consistent with designating legislation."

Recreation – hunting

- Should visitors assume that outside the safety zone boundaries it is unsafe and they should wear orange or other bright colors so they don't get accidentally shot?
 - If visitors are concerned outside of the safety zone than they should wear orange or other bright colors
- How can expanded hunting be consistent with the overarching goals of this NCA, which are conservation and preservation?
 - One of the SPRNCA's conservation values is recreation which includes hunting.
- There are large predators in the SPRNCA. How will you know whether hunting is negatively impacting the natural web of life in this NCA?
 - The BLM will continue wildlife habitat monitoring and will rely on Arizona Game and Fish to manage specific wildlife species.
- How can I walk around safely in SPRNCA if people are hunting during the best times of the year?
 - The BLM has established safety zones around the highest use visitor areas where hunting is not allowed in the SPRNCA. In addition, hunters are required to follow all Arizona Game and Fish regulations for hunting.

Engagement process

- Are these topics (riparian, recreation, uplands, cultural) similar to how the Las Cienegas adaptive management has separated out?
 - The BLM will look at feedback that we receive from the SPRNCA stakeholders and use that information to make a decision on which topical groups to form.

Comments:

BLM would be well advised to do some serious thinking about how to respectfully harness and apply the huge amount of technical expertise represented in just this one meeting.

- Specific asks are great
- If possible, would be great to have access to a google doc or something similar that shows real-time notes taken during the meeting.

Small group discussions

Participants were divided into four virtual breakout rooms to discuss partner engagement in adaptive management moving forward. A summary of feedback from all groups is presented here:

Thoughts on proposed adaptive management approach

- Learn from LCNCA, but consider important differences in SPRNCA (location and issues)
- This is a reasonable start. Trial and error, and adaptation will be necessary.
- Are there examples of adaptive management being a successful process? These processes elsewhere have started differently - not sure they can translate well to the way we operate here.
- Cautiously optimistic. Encouraged that BLM is taking this approach. SPRNCA is much closer to a larger population (Sierra Vista) than LCNCA, so there's more community ownership and there will be more challenges. Do it anyway!
- I'm encouraged to see the interest in bringing in all stakeholders and having conversations, trying to find a common ground. Happy to be part of that.
- In favor of open, honest, collaborative efforts.
- Supportive of the adaptive management approach
- Supportive of the adaptive management approach, but concerned about the amount of work involved.
- How will adaptive management work with NEPA?
- Better engage/include sovereign nations
- Specific concerns:
 - There are legitimate concerns regarding the data/types that would be used in this process
 - Concerned about RMP - want to see what BLM has planned
 - Concerned about adaptive management - this is not how the SPRNCA should be managed. The type of monitoring is often not sufficient to meet the needs of protected areas, a management approach that takes the protection of the SPRNCA first should be prioritized.
 - Some concern that looking at how bad something is getting isn't the right approach
 - Concern about jumping into AIM and range assessment without considering the decades of data and citizen science effort
 - Concerned about cattle. Want to maintain river health on the San Pedro.
 - Regularly out recreating on the SPRNCA. Feels less safe because of the hunting.

Recommendations for engagement

- Think about alternative engagement opportunities
- Be mindful of people's time. Develop specific asks of people.
- Personal face-to-face is a better way than email. Willing to participate however we can.
- In-person meetings are better. Email communication is great to keep informed.
- Email is useful, but it's important to meet in person too (when we can again). Recalling the field trips/meetings from the RMP work - those were useful. Online meetings are okay, but not preferred.
- Would like to be involved in an interactive way; activities, stay informed via email. Is there a way to have more interaction during presentations?

- Interested in monitoring /science/implementation of plans to enhance and renew landscapes
- Would like to be a part of working groups to provide input before plans are made
- Keep it streamlined
- Would like to be involved with the review process and field inventory
- Many folks are limited in our capacity to travel, it is difficult to know to what level we can participate in the immediate future
- The SPRNCA belongs to all citizens and the BLM should reach as far as possible to engage with all parties, including indigenous communities.
- Be able to come in and out of the process – not get left behind just because you miss a meeting.

Appendix: Participants

Eric Andersen
Mark Apel
Catie Armstrong
Lynn Ashby
Sandy Bahr
Jeffrey Burgess
Christie Brown
Joy Banks
Mary Darling
Patrick Dome
Robert Evans
Robert Gilbert
Michael Gregory
Tricia Gerrodette

Michael Gregory
Jo Ann Gasper
Nicole Gillett
Kali Holtschlag
Karl Hoerig
David Hodges
Tom Kaye
Ben Lomeli
Diane Laush
Robert Luce
Lizann Michaud
Jennifer Martin
Juliet McKenna
David McIntyre

Shar Porier
Sharon Rock
Audrey Rader
Holly Richter
Sarah Sherman
Deni Seymour
Renell Stewart
Vashti (Tice) Supplee
James Thompson
Cyndi Tuell
Kristin Terpening
Stephen Williams
Robert Weissler
John Welch

BLM

Scott Feldhausen, *Gila District Manager*
Pamela Mathis, *Gila District Associate Manager*
Jayme Lopez, *Field Manager - Tucson Field Office*
Colleen Bergmanis, *Assistant Field Manager – Nonrenewables*
Margarita Guzman, *Assistant Field Manager – Renewable Resources*
Amy McGowan, *Gila District Planning and Environmental Specialist*
June Lowery, *Public Affairs Officer*

Francisco Mendoza, *Outdoor Recreation Planner*
Dave Murray, *Hydrologist*
Eric Baker, *Rangeland Management Specialist*
Kim Ryan, *Cultural Resources Specialist*
Theresa Condo, *Biological Science Technician*
Emilio Corella, *Rangeland Technician*

Facilitation and documentation: Tahnee Robertson & Colleen Whitaker, Southwest Decision Resources