Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness and
Special Recreation Management Area

Draft Business Plan

United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

BLM

Safford Field Office

November 2015

United States Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Safford Field Office
711 14th Avenue
Safford, AZ 85546
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In Reply Refer To:
8366 (AZ04)

Dear Reader:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Safford Field Office (SFO) is responsible for stewardship of Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness, a stunning example of a desert canyon and riparian ecosystem that is enjoyed by thousands of visitors each year. The BLM limits entry into the canyon bottom through a recreational permit system in order in order to protect ecological conditions and maintain established opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation.

In order to guide management of the fee revenues derived from permits, the BLM has prepared the *Draft Aravaipa Canyon Business Plan*. The plan describes the current permit fee system, how these fees are collected and how BLM uses them to enhance the visitor experience. We invite you to review and comment on the Draft Business Plan. Highlights of the plan include:

- No increase or change to the permit fee, although a transaction fee is proposed
- No increase or decrease in the allowable number of visitors to the canyon bottom
- No change to the timing of when permits can be reserved
- A proposal to move the online permitting process from outdated BLM servers to Recreation.gov, a standardized government-wide website operated by third party provider

The *Draft Aravaipa Canyon Business Plan* provides the public the opportunity to examine how the permit system operates by providing a variety of supporting information. It demonstrates how SFO has spent the fees in the past and how it proposes to use these fees in the future.

This Business Plan is being prepared in compliance with changes in the Federal authorities that authorize the BLM to collect recreation fees. In this case, the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) of 2004 authorizes the BLM to retain, and then expend, special recreation permit fees as local recreation revenues managed by this office.

The Safford Field Office will be accepting comments on this draft plan until December 3, 2015.

You may submit your comments in writing in either of the following ways:

- Mail or hand-deliver comments to the Safford Field Office at the above address

- Submit comments via email to BLM_AZ_AravaipaBP_commnents@blm.gov

Thank you for taking the time to assist the BLM with recreation planning. If you have any questions regarding management of the Aravaipa Canyon recreation permits program, please contact Todd Murdock, Outdoor Recreation Planner, at the above address or by telephone at (928) 348-4453.

Sincerely,

Timothy R. Shannon
Gila District Manager

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ARAVAIPA CANYON
SPECIAL RECREATION PERMIT PROGRAM
BUSINESS PLAN

A strategy for fee collection and expenditure in compliance with the
Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act P.L. 108-447, enacted December 8, 2004.

Summary

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Safford Field Office is responsible for stewardship of nearly 1.4 million acres in southeastern Arizona, including the Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness. The wilderness is well known for outstanding backcountry recreation opportunities in a pristine canyon environment. A visitation limit of 50 persons per day was established for a special area within the Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness. This limit is managed through a recreation permit system that dates back to 1979. This system has been successful in minimizing impacts to wilderness characteristics of outstanding opportunities for solitude, outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation, and naturalness, thereby ensuring positive visitor experiences.

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

- Improve access to appropriate recreation opportunities;
- Ensure a quality experience and enjoyment of natural and cultural resources; and
- Provide for and receive fair value in recreation.
- Coordinate with local communities and recreation service providers to facilitate greater well-being and economic benefits to residents and gateway communities.

This *Draft Aravaipa Canyon Business Plan* has been prepared to meet the criteria defined in the "Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act, 2004" (FLREA). The BLM originally began issuing permits for the recreation use of public lands under the authority of the Federal Lands Policy and Management Act (1976) – known as the "organic act". The FLREA authorizes the Bureau of Land Management to collect Special Recreation Permit (SRP) fees for the recreational use of certain areas. FLREA allows collected SRP fees to be retained locally and furthermore outlines how revenues are to be used for such things as repair, maintenance, facility enhancement related directly to visitor enjoyment, visitor access, and health and safety, interpretation, visitor information, visitor service, visitor needs assessments, signs, habitat restoration directly related to wildlife-dependent recreation

that is limited to hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, or photography, law enforcement related to public use and recreation, and direct operating or capital costs associated with the Recreation and Visitor Services program, and a fee management agreement established under section 6805(a) of FLREA or a visitor reservation service. The recreational use of a special area within the larger Aravaipa Canyon Special Recreation Management Area is managed under the authority of the FLREA's SRP program.

This Draft Business Plan proposes no fee increases, modifications to the allowable visitor limits or changes to the timing of when permits can be reserved. The plan proposes one substantive change. It calls for the online permitting system, currently operated by BLM and accessed on blm.gov, to move to the nationally standardized Recreation.gov, a nationwide website operated by third party provider.

The primary purpose of the business plans is to serve as public notification of the objectives for use of recreation fee revenues and to provide the public an opportunity to comment on these proposed objectives. The *Draft Aravaipa Canyon Business Plan* is subject to public review and is the Safford Field Office's official documentation to explain the recreation fee determination and use of the resulting recreation fee revenues.

This business plan will assist the Safford Field Office in meeting these recreation and visitor service goals for commercial and/or competitive activities, individual SRP's and organized group events as managed through the BLM's SRP program.

Background and Authorities

The following authorities and regulations for this business plan are as follows:

- The **Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA)**, [Public Law 94-579], contains BLM's general land use management authority over the public lands, and establishes outdoor recreation as one of the principal uses of those lands. Section 302 (b) of FLPMA directs the Secretary of the Interior to regulate through permits or other instruments the use of the public lands. Section 303 of FLPMA contains BLM's authority to enforce the regulations and impose penalties.

- The **Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA)**, repealed applicable portions of the LWCFA and replaced BLM's authority to collect fees in 2004. This current law authorizes BLM to collect amenity recreation fees at sites that meet certain requirements, issue special recreation

permits, and allows BLM to keep the fees revenues and directs how BLM will manage and utilize these revenues. FLREA also established the America the Beautiful – The National Parks and Federal Recreational Pass Program.

- **Title 43 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 2930,** contains the regulations governing BLM's recreation permitting programs as required to implement FLPMA and FLREA.

- **BLM's H-2930-1 Recreation Permit Administration Handbook,** contains guidance concerning the management of the recreation permit and fee program.

- The BLM's FLREA implementation policy requires that each fee account have a business plan which thoroughly discusses fees and explains how fees are consistent with the criteria set forth in the Act. Business plans assist management in determining the appropriateness and level of fees, cost of administering fee programs, provide for a fee revenue account auditing standard, and provide a structured communication and marketing plan.

1. Area Description

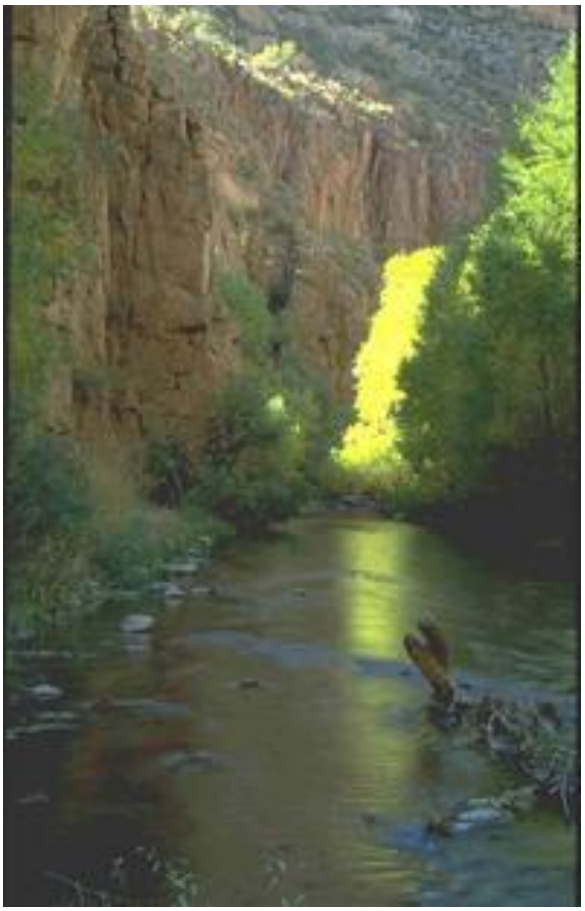
Overview
The Safford District Resource Management Plan (RMP) designated approximately 75,000 acres as the Aravaipa Canyon Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA); an area that BLM has identified requires focused or intensive management.

Located 50 miles west of Safford in southeastern Arizona, the SRMA contains the 19,410-acre Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness and many acres of dispersed areas around the wilderness. The area lies within the 5th and 6th Congressional Districts, encompassing both Graham and Pinal counties, and in addition to the Wilderness encompasses three areas of critical environmental concern.

Through the RMP, management determined it was necessary to issue permits for recreational activities within a special area of the canyon as a means to manage visitor use and mitigate resource impacts to this sensitive area. This special area consists of 2,867 acres (see map page 9). The information in this business plan is specifically relevant to this Special Area and to the fees and the method that they are collected and processed. An Individual Special Recreation Permit (ISRP) or associated fee is not required for the visiting the portions of the SRMA that are outside of the special area, and the Aravaipa Canyon special area comprises less than 4% of public lands in the larger SRMA.

Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness
The Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness area is found at the center of the Aravaipa Canyon SRMA. The Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness was first designated by the Arizona Wilderness Act of 1984 and the wilderness was expanded to its current size - 19,410 acres - by the Arizona Desert Wilderness Act of

1990.



The Wilderness is now part of the National Landscape Conservation System that was created in June 2000, and officially designated by Congress in March 2009, a nationwide system that contains the crown jewels of the public lands managed by the BLM. The wilderness area includes the 11-mile long Aravaipa Canyon, as well as, the surrounding tablelands and nine side canyons. The region is highly regarded for its biological diversity. Above the canyon, mesquite bosques line higher terraces above the floodplain. Low-elevation upland areas are dominated by Sonoran desert scrub with creosote, palo verde, a variety of shrubs, and saguaro. Mid-elevation slopes have semi-desert grassland/scrub with native perennial grasses and the steeper slopes at middle and upper elevations support evergreen woodlands of oak and juniper and mixed chaparral.

Within the colorful 1,000-foot canyon walls, outstanding scenery, wildlife, and rich history are all protected. Saguaro cacti dot the inside of the canyon walls, which are up to 1,000 feet deep in some places. The canyon's mixed-broadleaf riparian forest lines the canyon where it meets the lifeblood of the region – Aravaipa Creek. The perennial Aravaipa Creek is home to various reptiles, mammals, and insects, and over 200 species of birds which live among the cottonwoods, sycamores, willows, ash, and other riparian species present in the canyon. The creek also supports the last remaining assemblages of desert fishes in Arizona, including two species - spikedace and loach minnow - federally listed as threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. The canyon is home to desert bighorn sheep, javelina, coatimundi, ringtail cats, Mexican owl, and many other wildlife species

Aravaipa Canyon Special Area

A 2,867-acre area inside the Aravaipa Canyon walls was established as a Special Area through a publically involved planning effort during 1979. The purpose is to sustain the naturalness and solitude opportunities within a confined canyon by controlling the amount of use in the most popular portion of the Wilderness, where it is subject to the highest visitation.

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Figure 1. Map of Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness

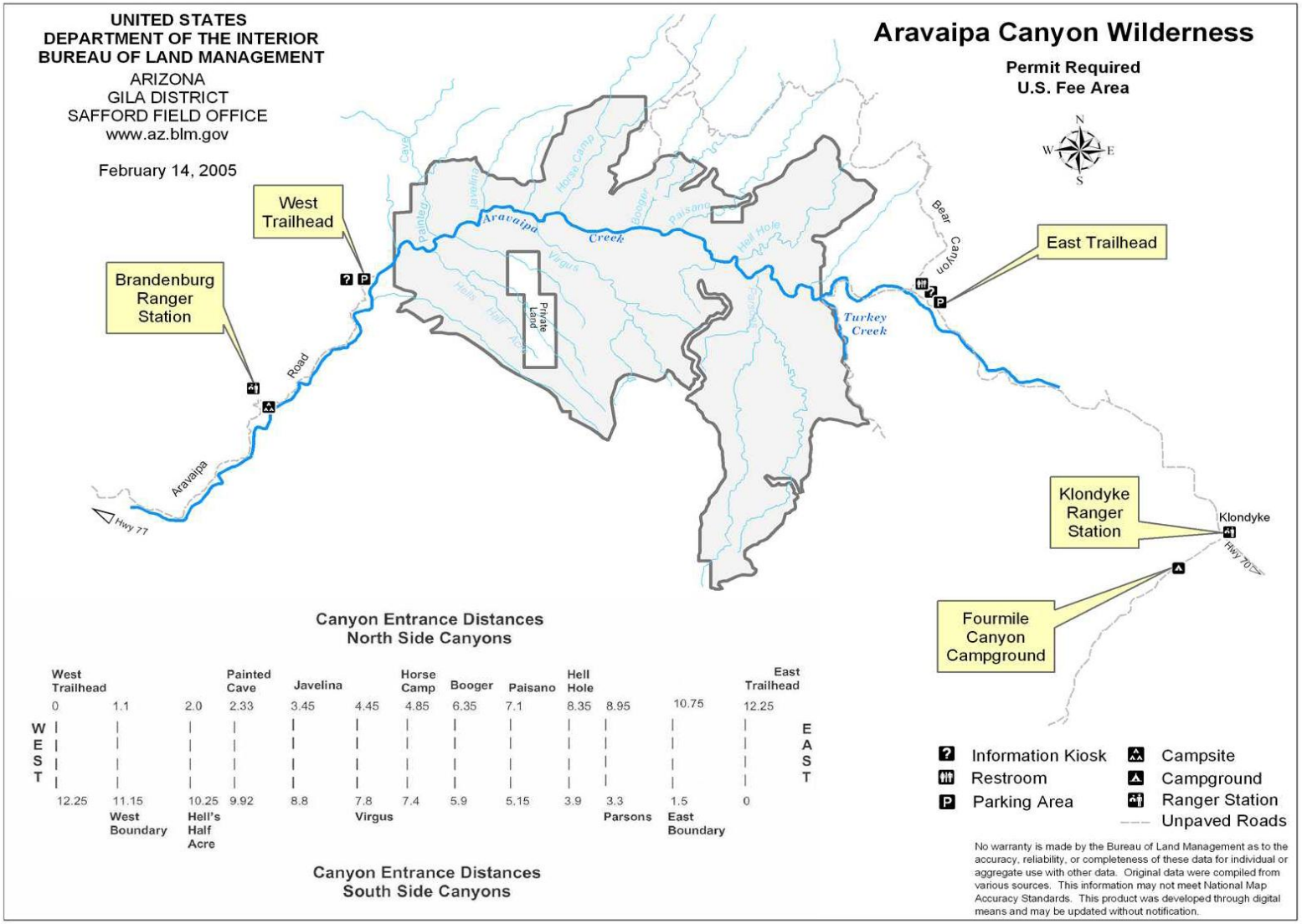
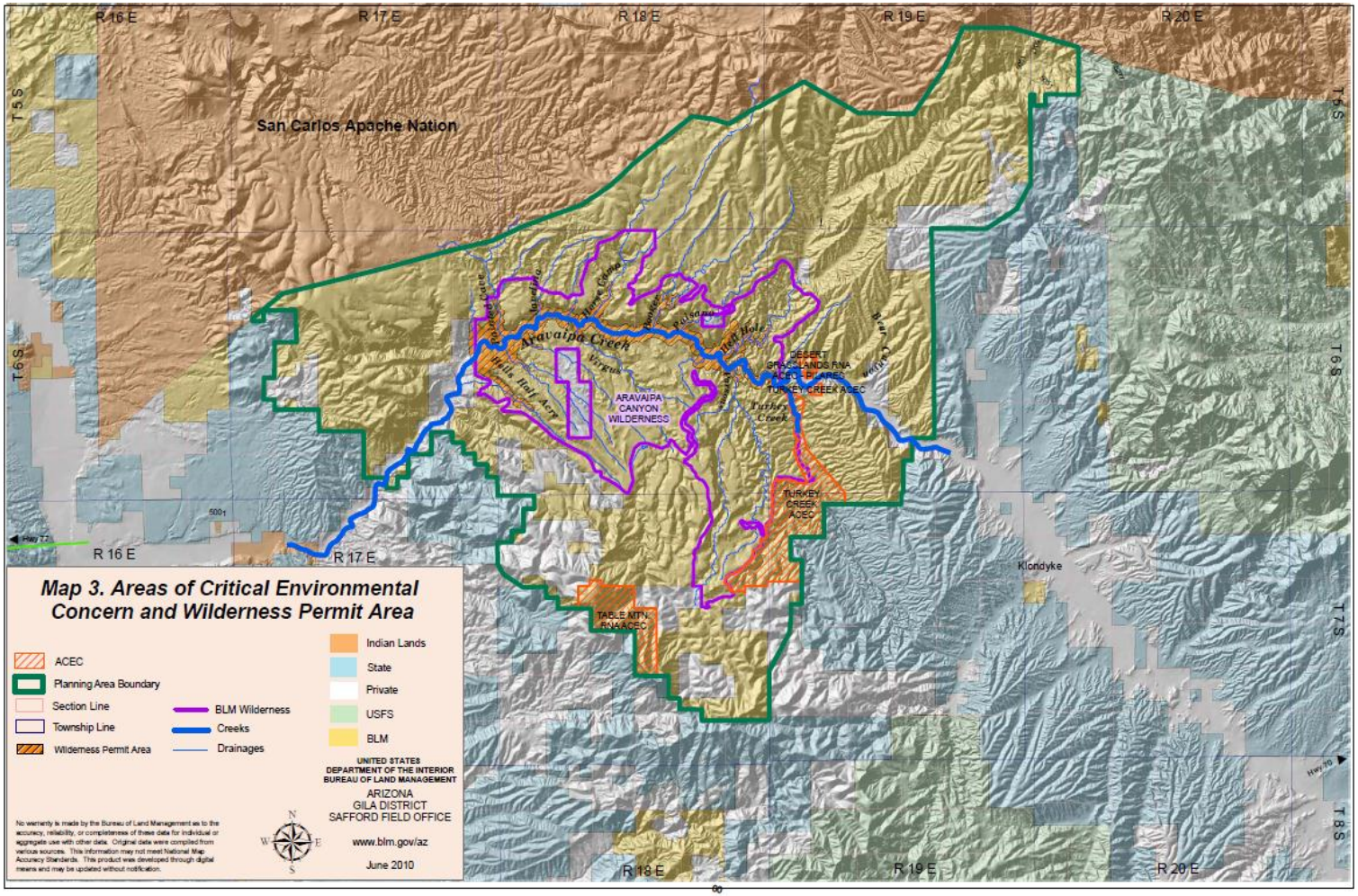


Figure 2. Map of Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness and Special Area Boundaries



Administrative Facilities
A BLM ranger station is located in Klondyke on the east side and serves as an important visitor contact point. It is staffed for four to six months a year with volunteers.

BLM's Brandenburg Ranger Station is located at the west end of the wilderness. It is staffed by a full-time park ranger. This facility includes a visitor center, parking area, restroom, and a fee free overnight camping area for canyon visitors.

2. Visitor Use and Description

Visitors to the Aravaipa Canyon SRMA primarily come to the general area for hiking, back country and four-wheel driving, wildlife viewing, camping, and picnicking. The Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness, especially the Special Area is extremely popular for hiking, horseback-riding, backpacking, and wildlife viewing. Other attractions to the area include Turkey Creek Canyon and cliff dwelling. Turkey Creek offers outstanding opportunities for viewing a prehistoric interpretive site, wildlife viewing, hiking, and back country driving (4WD). A four-wheel drive road leads up the canyon. Turkey Creek is also very popular for day use and camping, though no developed facilities are provided. Visitors to the ranger stations stop to acquire information about hiking in Aravaipa Canyon and to inquire about recreation opportunities on public lands in the SRMA. Visitors within the canyon hike, backpack, and view the wildlife as well as enjoy sightseeing, nature study, research, and photography. Often Special Area visitors also explore those portions of the Wilderness outside the Special Area.

Aravaipa Canyon has been written about in many national and international newspapers, magazines, books, and other publications. Most visitors come from within Arizona and other locations less than 10 hours away. To a lesser extent, the area draws both out-of-state and international visitors. However, Arizona's Department of Tourism research (Longwoods, Tourism Economics, 2004) has shown that visitors to this region of Arizona are 64% nonresidents and 36% residents of the State, and their average party size is 2.6 persons. Their average household income is $67,060, and average age is 47.1 years. A recent survey conducted by BLM indicated that 83% of the Wilderness visitors were adults 18 years and older. It also indicated that 62% of users were male.

The majority of use in Aravaipa Canyon takes place the spring and fall. With its more moderate weather, the spring and fall are much more popular and permit allocations are typically full. The summer and winter are low use seasons with extreme heat and monsoons in the summer and cold temperatures and short days in the winter, so permits are easily acquired. About 60% of use within the canyon is day use and about 40% of the use is overnight backpacking.

Over the past five years, issued permits have increased approximately 8% primarily as a result from increased visitor use filling the allocation during the shoulder seasons. Based on these trends, BLM estimates permit utilization will peak around 65% of total allocated permits within the next five to ten years. Visitation will remain limited by the unfavorable conditions (temperature, flooding potential and other factors) found within the canyon in the summer and winter months.

Figure 3 below indicates visitation numbers to the Aravaipa Canyon SRMA and to Aravaipa Wilderness

Figure 3. (Data from RMIS): Total annual visits to Aravaipa SRMA and Special Area and total permits issued for the Special Area (these permits are group permits ranging from 1 to 10 people per permit)

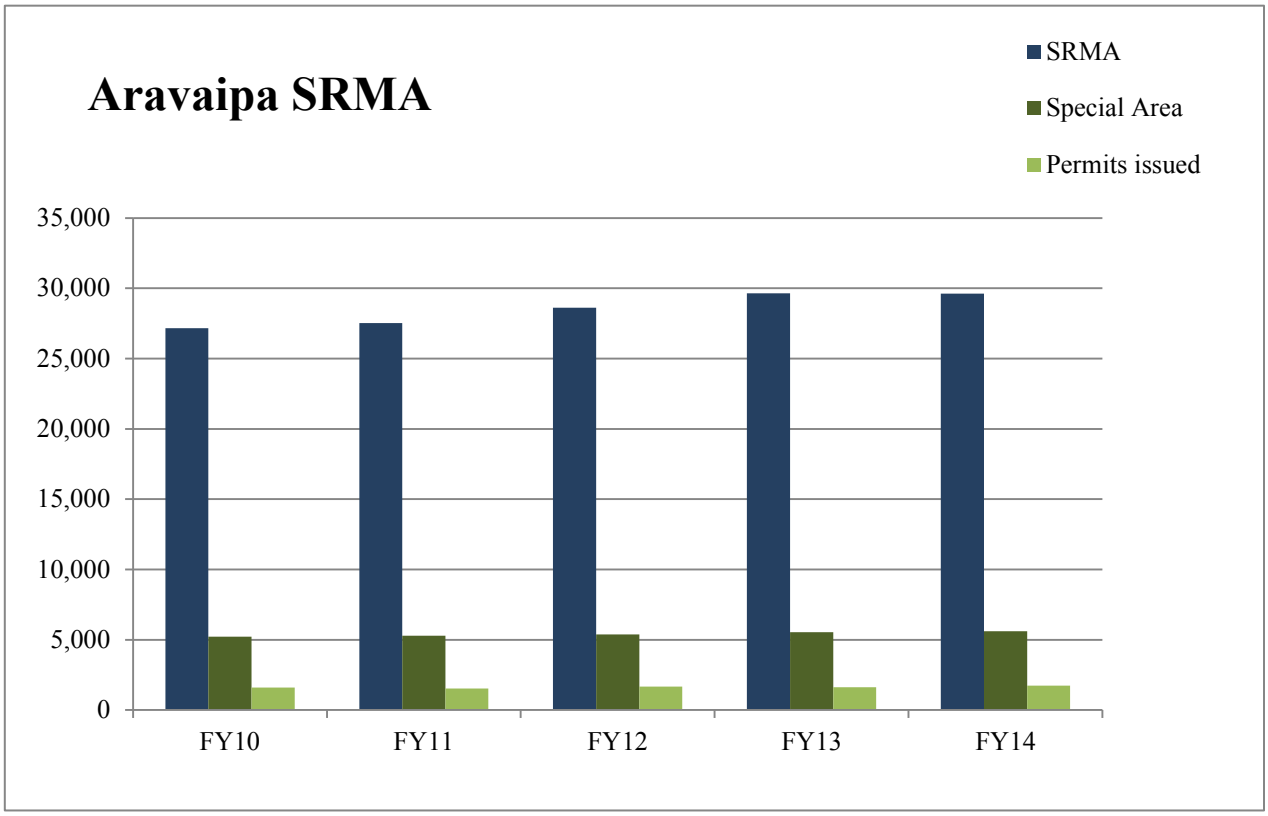


Figure 4. (Data from RMIS) Number of issued group permits at Aravaipa Canyon Special Area. A group permit is valid for 1 to 10 people (not an ISRP).

Total permits issued for Aravaipa Canyon Special Area	
Year	**Total**
FY10	1599
FY11	1536
FY12	1659
FY13	1622
FY 14	1732

3. Objectives for Use of Recreation Fees

The primary purpose of this business plan is to ensure public accountability for the collection and expenditure of SRP fee revenues. This is accomplished by sharing the Safford Field Office's objectives for the processing and expenditure of these revenues as allowed under current law. There are three objectives for use of the fees collected at this recreation area.

1. Maintain existing developed recreation facilities in a safe, operable, and efficient condition for the life of the plan.

2. Maintain the BLM's presence in the region to provide effective resource management and customer service, and to continue our good working relationship with our neighbors for the life of the plan.

3. Provide future facilities as needed and warranted for the life of the plan.

Monies collected annually will be used to accomplish the objectives identified above. The BLM is authorized to expend up to 15% of the fee revenues for general administration, overhead, and indirect costs, (including labor) of a SRP program. Currently, the BLM Safford does not foresee any large capital expenditures in the future. Specifically, fee dollars will be used as follows, in order of priority:

- To pay for the administrative site leases. Both the Klondyke ranger station and the west side trailhead are located on private property. The BLM pays an annual lease fee for each of the two sites.
- Administrative site operations and maintenance and supplies
- Vehicle operational costs for the west end ranger vehicle and east end volunteers vehicle
- Printed material such as brochures and maps
- To maintain existing signs and purchase new and replacement signs
- Supplies and materials for servicing vault toilets, cleaning, toilet paper, and paper towels, etc,
- Salary for Park/Wilderness Ranger positions (partial) and campground hosts (volunteer stipend)
- Youth Crews for assistance with campsite location and condition inventories

Past Recreation Fee Revenue Accomplishments

Recreation permit fees have been used to provide recreation visitor services, monitor social conditions, and enforce the permit system.

Funds have also been utilized to cover the annual operating costs of keeping both administrative facilities (Brandenburg Ranger Station, Klondyke Ranger Station) maintained and operable. Funds were spent on a partnership with Northern Arizona University to conduct wilderness monitoring (Limits of Acceptable Change) and then rehabilitation of damaged areas based on the results of the monitoring program.

From 2010 to 2014, recreation fee revenues were spent on an agreement with the Graham County Chamber of Commerce for the purpose of maintaining and operating a Tourist Information Center in the Chamber of Commerce building. The purpose of the Center is to provide outdoor recreation information to visitors to Graham County and to educate visitors about the land, its resources and opportunities, proper land use ethic, and the agencies that manage the land.

Funds have been used to provide supplies to the volunteer site hosts at the east end for the operation of the ranger station. The site hosts provide valuable assistance to visitors, monitor fee compliance, provide maintenance as needed and are available as a point of contact for emergency assistance for law enforcement and medical needs. In addition, they help to provide a good working relationship with our neighbors in the area. Funds also have paid for a portion of the Park Ranger's salary that assists with patrols on the east side of Aravaipa Canyon. Patrols consist of monitoring wilderness boundary signs and intrusions, checking permits, making public contacts and recreation facility maintenance.

The Safford BLM will provide the public with annual reports on revenue collected, expenditures and projects completed for the previous fiscal year. Reports will take the form of an accountability statement posted at the recreation sites where the revenue was collected (trailheads and ranger

stations). Reporting may also include use of the Internet, brochures, newspaper articles, radio, and oral presentations.

4. Current Special Recreation Permit (SRP) Fee Program

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976, authorized the BLM to regulate use of the public lands through the administration of permits. SRPs are issued for specified recreational uses of public lands, typically organized group events and commercial activities such as guided trips. Activities are permitted when the proposed use falls within allowable use levels, causes no significant adverse environmental impacts, and provides the public with a safe and quality experience.

SRPs can also be issued on an individual basis for use of certain special areas like the one within Aravaipa Canyon. Special areas are officially designated by statute, Secretarial order, or the BLM's land use planning process. In general, special areas require additional management in order to protect their natural, historical and/or cultural resources. The requirements for special areas can be found in 43 CFR 2932.5. The Aravaipa Canyon hosts one such designated Special Area.

Individual SRP Permittee Requirements

Individuals (who may also join together in limited size groups) must obtain SRPs to hike all canyons within the Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness. Canyon use is limited to 50 people per day, 30 from the west end, and 20 from the east end. This system helps to reduce the potential impacts to the environment caused by human use and helps assure visitors can enjoy the canyon's naturalness, solitude and recreation wilderness values.

The existing fee system was implemented in April 1984 at the cost of $1.50 per visitor (at that time, the fees were established under authority of the Land and Water Conservation Act (LWCFA), as amended, [Public Law 33-578]). In 1999 fees were raised to the current fee of $5.00 per visitor per day. Permits are on a "first-come, first-serve" basis and can be obtained 13 weeks in advance from one of three ways: (1) an online system located at: www.blm.gov/az/st/en/arolrsmain.html; (2) by calling the Safford Field Office; or (3) by visiting in person the Safford Field Office during regular business hours (8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.).

There is currently no administrative fee for acquiring a permit, but there is a $30 administrative fee for all refunds on cancelled permits.

Commercial and Organized Group SRP Permittee Requirements

The Safford Field Office issues a small number of SRPs for commercial and organized group activities within the Aravaipa Canyon. In the past, these SRPs have been for hunting guide services and sightseeing operations. Clients who purchase the services of these companies are still required to obtain an individual SRP if they wish to participate in activities within the Special Area. These fees are in addition to the fees paid to the operator. Operators are also required to obtain an individual SRP for their entry into the Special Area. These fees are separate from the commercial SRP fee, which is also required. A commercial operator who is providing services in this area may be required to obtain individual SRPs for his clientele prior to operations and remit the individual SRP fees to the BLM at the end of their season.

For further information on the issuance of Special Recreation Permits and frequently asked questions the following BLM Arizona webpage is available: http://www.blm.gov/az/st/en/prog/recreation/rec-fee.html

5. Expenditures and Operating Costs of the SRP Fee Program

The recreational revenues derived from the Aravaipa Canyon SRPs are deposited and expended within the agency's fiscal management system by using "LVRDAZ04" as a reference code. In the tables below you will see "AZ04" to mark columns pertaining to the fee revenues. The column that uses the words "Appropriated Funds" is referring to funding appropriated by Congress to the BLM as part of the agency's annual budget. The cost of labor is also shown separately from all other costs, collectively referred to as "Operations".

The data provided in these figures is expected to remain relatively stable over the next five years. No major capitol projects such as parking lot construction, restroom replacement or visitor information overhaul is expected during that period that will have a major impact on use of recreation fee revenue.

Figure 5. Actual Expenditures of Aravaipa Canyon Fees, by Year (LVRD AZ04)

Federal Fiscal Year	Staff Labor	Operations Costs	Total Annual Expen-ditures	Revenues	Net Gain/Loss	Fund Balance
2010	$9,954	$30,614	$40,568	$43,730	$3,162	$57,510
2011	$18,228	$59,316	$77,544	$45,900	$-31,644	$40,551
2012	$1,049	$33,996	$35,045	$46,015	$10,970	$67,336
2013	$3,031	$30,866	$33,897	$47,135	$13,238	$100,097

Federal Fiscal Year	Staff Labor	Operations Costs	Total Annual Expen-ditures	Revenues	Net Gain/Loss	Fund Balance
2014	$6,307	$53,062	$59,369	$46,116	$-11,284	$96,860
5-Year Average	**$7,713**	**$41,570**	**$49,284**	**$45,779**	**$-3,111**	**$72,470**

Figure 6. Costs of Operating the Aravaipa Canyon Special Area Permit System.

Federal Fiscal Year	AZ04 Staff Labor/Volunteers	Estimated Appropriate d Funds Staff Labor	AZ04 Operations Costs (miscellaneous)	AZ04 Operations costs (Leases for ranger station and trailheads)	Estimated Appropriated Funds Operations
2010	$9,954	$79,140	$26,054	$4,560	$10,000
2011	$18,228	$79,140	$54,756	$4,560	$10,000
2012	$1,049	$79,140	$29,436	$4,560	$10,000
2013	$3,031	$79,140	$26,306	$4,560	$7,500
2014	$6,307	$79,140	$48,502	$4,560	$7,500
5-Year Average	**$7,713**	**$79,140**	**$37,010**	**$4,560**	**$9,000**

Continued from above

Federal Fiscal Year	AZ04 Total Annual Expenditures	Total expenditures of Appropriated funds	Total expenditures
2010	$40,568	$89,140	$129,708
2011	$77,544	$89,140	$166,684
2012	$35,045	$89,140	$124,185
2013	$33,897	$86,640	$120,537
2014	$59,369	$86,640	$146,009
5-Year Average	**$49,284**	**$88,140**	**$137,424**

6. ISRP Fee Revenue

The following figure indicates the total annual recreation fee revenue in past fiscal years from the sale of individual SRPs at Aravaipa Canyon Special Area.

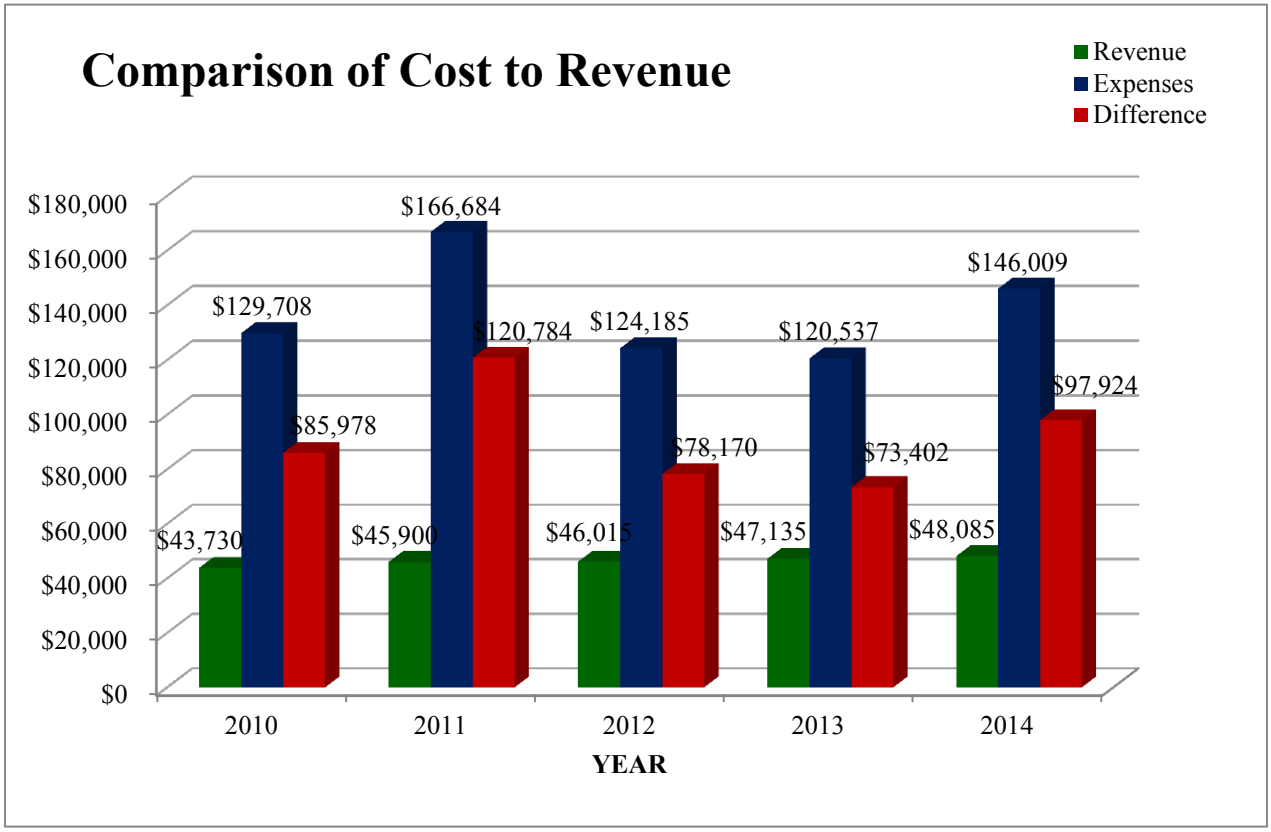
Figure 7. (Data from the BLM's Recreation Management Information System) Annual total of fees collected from ISRPs at Aravaipa Canyon Special Area.

ISRP Fees Collected	Permits Issued for Aravaipa Canyon Special Area

ISRP Fees Collected		Permits Issued for Aravaipa Canyon Special Area
Fiscal Year	**TOTAL**	**TOTAL**
FY10	$43,730	1599
FY11	$45,900	1536
FY12	$46,015	1659
FY13	$47,135	1622
FY 14	$46,116	1732

7. Analyses of Recreation Fee Rates

Figure 8. Comparison graph of Cost to Revenue, showing the expenses, revenue, and net difference per year



The above figures serve to illustrate the revenues that would be required for the Safford Field Office's SRP program to be self-sufficient. Currently, much of the costs to administer the program

are covered by annual appropriations (salaries for: outdoor recreation planner, park rangers, law enforcement, and administrative staff positions). Although the actual cost to administer the program is greater than revenue collected from the program, the recreation fees generated by the program provide meaningful support for the program. Along with annual appropriations, user fees are used for operations and maintenance, improvements, and enhancements to the areas where they have been collected.

The maximum number of permits allocated for each year is 18,250. At $5 per permit/person, maximum utilization would result in annual fee revenue of $91,250. Currently, the permit system is seeing a utilization rate of nearly 50% of available permits, primarily during the six months of highest visitor use (fall and spring). At the highest predicted utilization rate (65%), the permit system would generate annual fee revenue of $59,310.

The SFO, as well as other BLM offices, is working continuously to make managerial changes that improve business practices to make the processing and monitoring of SRPs more efficient and thus less costly. For example, volunteers have been utilized to assist with public contacts and permit compliance.

8. Proposed Modifications to Recreation Fee Management of Aravaipa Canyon Recreation Permits Program

The proposed action is to transfer the issuing of permits from Arizona Recreation Online Permit System (AROLPS) and the Safford Field Office to www.recreation.gov. Recreation.gov offers 24/7 access to the online permitting system as well as a call center that is open 12 hours a day from November 1st to February 28th and 14 hours a day from March 1st to October 31st. They will also offer more flexibility in terms of cancellations and refunds for the permits. All permit fees will be fully refundable as long as the permit is cancelled at least two weeks prior to the permitted entry date. The Recreation.gov website will have a different look but the current allocation of permits and fee structure will remain the same. Permits will continue to be available 13 weeks in advance and the current allocation of 50 people a day, 30 people from the west side, 20 from the east side and $5.00 per person per day fee will continue. However, Recreation.gov will charge a one-time transaction fee of $6.00 in addition to the permit fee. The transaction fee pays the contract for the maintenance and operation of the online services.

9. Fee Collection Process and Permit Delivery System

The following describes the current method for issuing permits/collecting fees, and how the processes would function under the proposed transition to Recreation.gov.

Currently, the fee collection process and permit delivery system is handled by the BLM. Permits become available for reservation 13 weeks in advance via a BLM website, in person at the Safford

BLM office or by phone with Safford BLM staff. Fees are collected either via a BLM website, in person at the Safford BLM Office or over the phone with Safford BLM staff. Permit reservation fees can currently be paid with cash, check or credit card. Permits are then delivered in person at the Safford BLM office, email, mail or via the BLM website.

With the proposed transition to Recreation.gov, the permit process will remain relatively the same as it currently stands. Permits will become available 13 weeks in advance of desired entry date. All permits will be acquired via the Recreation.gov website or the Recreation.gov call center. A credit card will be mandatory to purchase a permit. Hard copy permits will be available for print two weeks in advance of the permitted date. Changes to the current process include: Recreation.gov website will have a different look and feel from the current BLM managed site, cash and check will no longer be accepted as a form of payment, use of an email account and a credit card are mandatory, Recreation.gov will charge an additional non-refundable $6.00 transaction fee. In this proposal, the BLM will not handle any parts of the issuing permit/collecting fees process. In return, this will assist the SFO to more efficiently use time and resources with staff to better serve the public with more time and energy on field work for public contacts and less time in administrative accounting.

The 2002 President's "Recreation One Stop Initiative" focuses on creating simple and accessible web-based resources for the public that offers a single point of access to information and reservations for federal recreational opportunities. The proposed transition helps implement this initiative.

Recreation.gov is a federal government web service and a one-stop visitor resource for recreation facilities and activities offered by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, NPS, BLM, Bureau of Reclamation and U.S. Forest Service. As described below, Recreation.gov would help the BLM serve the public better. In addition, it hosts a contracted national recreation reservation service function that is better equipped to keep up with changing technology, increased internet traffic, and safeguard private individual information than the BLM's internal systems, which are being phased out.

Recreation.gov charges a $6.00 transaction fee each time a permit is purchased. This fee pays for the cost of Recreation.gov hosting the software and online visitor and call center support. The permit fee would stay the same rate of $5.00 per person per day.

<u>Benefits of hosting permit system with Recreation.gov</u>

The transition to Recreation.gov would streamline the permit application process for the public, which would result in improved customer service because of the following:

- ***Increased Flexibility:*** The public would be able to cancel their permit and receive a refund for the permit fee, before their scheduled trip date. Currently, cancellations and refunds are processed with a $30 fee.

- ***Website Reliability:*** Recreation.gov is capable of handling a high volume of internet traffic.

Website performance has caused significant issues at times with AROLPS, including mix-ups with permit dates and the system freezing up and locking users out, making the ability to obtain a permit difficult. These issues will only continue to worsen over time because the BLM, as a separate agency, is no longer supporting its own server upgrades and technology services capable of supporting the needs of permittees.

- ***Increased Phone Service:*** The public would have the flexibility and convenience to acquire permits via the internet as well as through the Recreation.gov call center which will offer more hours of operation than the BLM staff can provide.

- ***Automated notifications***: Automated e-mail notificaitons in the event of road closures, extreme weather events and or other emergencies will be sent to individuals with a permit.

National Consistency: The move to Recreation.gov complies with Presidential direction by providing enhanced on-line recreation services. Recreation.gov's contractors use the latest technology to reduce paper handling, increase accuracy and improve privacy information protection.

10. Consequences of Not Adopting the Proposal

Currently the online permit system website for Aravaipa Canyon is hosted by AROLPS. This website also supports the permit system for the Paria Canyon/Coyote Buttes permit system. With the departure of the Paria Canyon/Coyote Buttes permit system from AROLPS, AROLPS is no longer a financially viable option as a website host/support for the Aravaipa Canyon permit system. Recreation.gov would take the place of AROLPS as the website host/support and much more. If the proposal to move to recreation.gov does not go forward, the Safford BLM would be left to manage the Aravaipa Canyon permit system on its own. This would require hiring of new staff to handle the high volume of permit reservations and questions and or development of a new website and database to manage the permits and permitting process. The Safford BLM would have a difficult time managing the permit system independently because of a lack of expertise with website/database design, support and funding for extra staffing needed.

11. Fee Calculation Process

This plan does not propose a change to the Aravaipa Canyon SRP fees as a result of the fee calculation and comparison described below. It has been determined that the Aravaipa Canyon individual SRP fee of $5 is comparable to fees for similar recreation opportunities elsewhere in the region.

State Directors of jurisdiction are given the authority to establish the fees associated with individual SRPs, and the BLM is periodically reviews its fee schedules to assure they are aligned with current fair market values. Proposed fees are published in the Federal Register six months before the fee is established. These fees may be adjusted periodically to reflect changes in costs and to ensure a fair return for the use of public lands. One method of review was selected as applicable to use, and the results are described below:

Fair Market Value Calculation Method

The fair market value method was used in the fee calculation process, making comparisons to back-country/wilderness areas with similar facilities and back country settings. For a comparison of back-country or wilderness use fees, the area of comparison was quite broad, since there are not a large number of comparable areas. Currently, the Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness permit fee schedule is $5.00 per person, per day.

A. Grand Gulch Primitive Area (Utah)	
Overnight use (Mar 1-Jun 15 & Sep 1-Oct 31)	$8.00/person/trip
Overnight use (Jun 16-Aug31 & Nov1-Feb28)	$5.00/person/trip
1-day use permit	$2.00/person
7-day use permit (no overnight)	$5.00/person
B. Saguaro National Park	
Backcountry Camping Fee	$6.00/campsite (inside the wilderness)
C. Paria Canyon Overnight	$5.00/person (current) $10.00/person (proposed)
Paria Canyon, Wire Pass, Buckskin Gulch	$ 6.00/person/day (current) $ 5.00/person/day (proposed)
Coyote Buttes North/South	$ 7.00/$5.00 person/day (current) $12.00/person/day (proposed)
D. Grand Canyon National Park	
Backcountry Camping Fee	$10.00 per permit, plus $8.00/ person
E. San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area	
Backcountry Camping Fee	$2.00/person/night

12. Public Outreach and Communications

BLM policy and the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) require BLM to complete public outreach when proposing new recreation fees or changes to existing fees. While the development of a business plan is not technically required in this circumstance due to the lack of a change in the underlying recreation fee, the Safford Field Office has developed the draft plan to ensure visitors and stakeholders are appropriately engaged.

Communications Objectives

- Clearly describe the scope and nature of the proposed changes to the permitting system.
- Provide the opportunity for users and affected stakeholders to comment on the proposal.
- Meet BLM policy requirements for informing the public about changes to fees charged under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act

Communication Actions

• A 30-day comment period to solicit feedback from the public.
• Press release announcing the availability of the Draft Business Plan.
• Strategically posting an electronic copy of the Draft Business Plan on pertinent BLM webpages and social media outlets (e.g. tumblr, Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
• Mail and email copies of the Draft Business Plan to members of the public who have expressed interested in the plan.
• Create awareness of the availability of the plan through face-to-face contact with the public when visiting the Special Area.

Key Public Messages

- Aravaipa Canyon is a special place to many Arizonans, where a year-round flow of water supports a rare and important riparian ecosystem.
- Aravaipa Canyon offers a world-class recreation experience within a short drive of Phoenix and Tucson.
- BLM limits entry into the canyon bottom through a recreational permit to protect ecological conditions and maintain opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation.
- BLM is proposing to move the online permitting process from outdated BLM servers to Recreation.gov, a standardized government-wide website operated by third party provider.
- The proposed change will only affect *how* the permits are issued. The cost of the BLM permit, the number of visitors allowed and the timing of when permits can be reserved are not among the proposed changes.
- The move to recreation.gov offers numerous benefits including improve phone service, newly available refunds, automated users notifications and national consistency.
- While the BLM permit fee will remain unchanged, a new transaction fee will be charged by

the third party provider.

- The Draft Aravaipa Canyon Business Plan was prepared to inform the public about how BLM is using the recreation fees. All fees are used to enhance the visitor experience and protect the canyon environment. The plan will not be finalized until public input has been received and considered.

How BLM will Utilize Public Input

Public comments received during the comment period will be evaluated by the Safford Field Office outdoor recreation staff and management team. Substantive comments will be considered and modifications, if necessary, will be made before a Final Aravaipa Canyon Business Plan is released and the changes are implemented.

In conjunction with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), BLM staff will continue to conduct visitor satisfaction surveys for Aravaipa Canyon to ensure the public has an ongoing chance to comment on current situations and management practices.

13. Results of Public Outreach

ARAVAIPA CANYON BUSINESS PLAN

RECOMMENDATIONS, REVIEWS and APPROVALS

Recommended by:

_____ _____

Todd Murdock Date
Outdoor Recreation Planner

Reviewed by:

_____ _____

Thomas Schnell Date
Assistant Field Manager

Approved By:

_____ _____

Scott Cooke Date
Field Manager

Approval

This business plan was prepared pursuant to the "Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act, 2004" (P.L. 108-447) and BLM recreation fee program policy. It establishes future management goals and priorities for Special Recreation Permits.

Prior to approval and implementation of the plan, public and stakeholder input will be solicited and considered. The Plan will be distributed and made available consistent with the description of public outreach and communication described above. These comments will be analyzed for viewing at the Safford Field Office or mailed upon request for a 30-day period.

- The plan will not be finalized under public input has been received and considered.

Public input in the form of letters, comments on fee envelopes, and advice from volunteer campground hosts have been collected in the past and will continue to be collected and compiled for use in management of the fee program, including updates of this business plan. These comments provide a variety of useful information relating to public desires and expectations for managing Special Recreation Permits.

The Special Recreation Permit Fee Schedule is as follows:

Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness	$ 5.00/person/day