

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT ARIZONA STATE OFFICE EVALUATION REPORT TITLE PAGE		Date: August 30, 2012
Title/Subject: Arizona Strip Field Office/Grand Canyon Parashant NM/Vermilion Cliffs NM RMPs		
Type of Evaluation: Periodic		
Dates Conducted: April 23, 2012 to April 27, 2012		
Conducted By: BLM, Arizona State Office		
TEAM MEMBERS		
NAME	TITLE	
Leah Baker	Acting State Planning and Environmental Coordinator, Arizona State Office	
Michael Hildner	Planning and Environmental Analyst, Washington Office	
Assistance provided by:		
Richard Spotts	Planning and Environmental Coordinator, Arizona Strip District Office	
Jeremy Bradley	Engine Module Leader Arizona Strip District-Fire	
Submitted by:	Signature	Date
Scott Florence Arizona Strip District Manager	/s/	08/07/2012
Approved by:	Signature	Date
Julie Decker Arizona Deputy State Director	/s/	09/07/2012

I. Introduction

In February 2008, the BLM signed Record of Decisions (ROD) for the Arizona Strip Field Office (ASFO), Grand Canyon Parashant National Monument (GCPNM), and Vermilion Cliffs National Monument (VCNM) Resource Management Plans (RMPs). The BLM prepared one Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to support the three RMPs. Together, the three RMPs provide management direction for 2,768,206 acres of BLM-administered land in northwest Arizona. The three RMPs replaced the Arizona Strip District RMP (1992).

GCPNM was established on January 11, 2000 by Presidential Proclamation 7265 under the Antiquities Act of 1906 (34 Stat. 225, 16 U.S.C. 431). On November 9, 2000, Presidential Proclamation 7374 established VCNM. The two monuments were created to protect an array of scientific, biological, geological, hydrological, cultural, and historical objects (“monument objects”).

Purpose

BLM planning regulations require a periodic evaluation of land use plans and environmental review procedures to determine the status of ongoing plan implementation, conformance and monitoring (43 CFR 1610.4-9). The BLM planning handbook (H-1601-1, V. B.) states:

“Evaluation is the process of reviewing the land use plan and the periodic plan monitoring reports to determine *whether the land use plan decisions and NEPA analysis are still valid* and whether the *plan is being implemented*. Land use plans are evaluated to determine if: (1) decisions remain relevant to current issues; (2) decisions are effective in achieving (or making progress toward achieving) desired outcomes; (3) any decisions need to be revised; (4) any decisions need to be dropped from their consideration; and (5) any areas require new decisions...The plan should be periodically evaluated (at a minimum every 5 years) as documented in an evaluation schedule.”

This 2012 report is the first evaluation of the 2008 RMPs and fulfills BLM’s duties under 43 CFR 1610.4-9.

In addition to the objectives above, the Arizona Strip District Office (ASDO) Management Team seeks to use this plan evaluation in three ways: 1) to gain a greater understanding of effectiveness monitoring systems in place; 2) to establish a baseline for the 10 year evaluation; and 3) to develop communications material regarding plan implementation to be shared with stakeholders.

Conduct of Evaluation and Review

The ASDO RMPs evaluation team was comprised of: Leah Baker (Arizona State Office) and Michael Hildner (Washington Office). Richard Spotts and Jeremy Bradley from the ASDO provided assistance to the team. The team met remotely several times during the second quarter of FY2012 and at the ASDO in St. George, UT from April 23-27, 2012. During the ASDO meeting, the team conducted interviews with BLM staff and representatives of key cooperating agencies. BLM staff included the ASFO, GCPNM, VCNM, and ASDO managers, team leads, and resource specialists. Due to time constraints, some resource specialists who could not be interviewed were provided with questions which they answered in writing. Key cooperating agencies with representatives who were interviewed included: Washington

County (Utah), Five County Association of Governments (Utah), Coconino County (Arizona), Kaibab National Forest, Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS).

Survey and Interview Questions

Prior to the evaluation team's visit to the ASDO, to help focus the evaluation, questionnaires were sent to resource specialists, key cooperators, and managers who work with or have knowledge of the RMPs. There were some general questions to recipients and also some customized groups of questions based on the relevant subject matter expertise of some recipients. These questionnaires and subsequent interviews addressed the requirements of the Bureau's H-1601-1 Land Use Planning Handbook, Section V, B, 1.

II. General Findings & Recommendations

Findings of this RMPs evaluation are organized by the five objectives/questions that drive the evaluation process.

Findings

Do decisions remain relevant to current issues?

Overall, plan decisions remain relevant to current issues. The plans are relatively new and the resource and demographic issues that drove their creation and drove the decisions they set forth are relevant today. Despite the current economic downturn, demand for recreation continues to steadily increase and the plans set forth a good foundation for managing recreation needs and potential conflicts. Despite the general direction of plan decisions being on target, there are several areas where minor revision (via amendment or maintenance) would make for more sound decisions and reduce confusion for both BLM staff and the public.

The bulk of staff did mention, however, that due to continued declines in staffing throughout the ASDO, several key plan decisions have not yet been implemented. Some of these areas include: soil, water, and air; lands and realty; livestock grazing; and some wildlife habitat desired future conditions.

The ASDO recently completed an RMP implementation database in Microsoft Access and Excel. The database contains the following information from every NEPA document completed since the plans were approved: NEPA Number, Type of NEPA Document, Responsible Office, Fiscal Year, Project Name, Project Lead, Decision Date, Proposed Action, and Category of Action. The database also contains information on project work completed to date under each completed NEPA and decision document. This database allows managers to quickly capture and describe the implementation work that has been completed each year. Additionally, the database serves as a repository of institutional knowledge that can be shared with new employees.

The database also contains each RMP decision to which the proposed action was linked. Through Microsoft Access, managers are able to generate reports that rank how often an RMP decision was used.

These reports provide managers with information regarding the utility of each RMP decision. It may be worth considering removing decisions that have not been used during a future revision.

See Appendix A for a summary of the RMP implementation database.

Are decisions effective in achieving—or making progress toward achieving— desired outcomes?

In the relatively short amount of time since the plan decisions were approved, a lot of work has gone into implementing actions to meet various goals and objectives. Exemplary areas of effort include completed travel management for the monuments and extensive travel planning for the ASFO; targeted riparian restoration at Pakoon Springs; cultural resource inventory in the GCPNM and VCNM; rangeland health monitoring throughout the ASDO; and implementation-level recreation planning in the monuments.

Both cooperators and some staff expressed concern about unauthorized grazing causing undue impacts to resources including riparian resources and Mojave Desert tortoise habitats. Managers and staff are familiar with the concerns expressed and are working to resolve through separate actions outside of the scope of the RMP and evaluations.

The effectiveness of implementation of some plan decisions is not clear. Some of this lack of clarity revolves around a lack of good baseline data. Specialists, management, and cooperators alike identified several areas in which inventory and monitoring is needed, including additional cultural and paleontological resources; wilderness characteristics; wildlife; and plant and animal T&E critical habitat. The latter area appears to be the most contentious with respect to effectiveness monitoring (particularly with respect to the Mojave Desert tortoise).

Do any decisions need to be revised?

Several decisions were noted for revision by management and specialists alike. For the most part, the changes are not fundamental; rather they are clarifying or correctional in nature. See the next section for specific recommended changes to existing decisions.

One rangeland management decision was mentioned for potential removal/revision or reconsideration, due mainly to workload demands. According to range staff, certain land use allocations may need to be reconsidered. For example, the plans establish forage reserves for which the BLM has maintenance responsibility of range facilities (MA-GM-14/15). Range specialists are currently not able to maintain these facilities. Therefore, it was suggested that it might be better to permit grazing in these reserves so that permittees would be responsible for maintenance of the facilities. It was also suggested that other options (such as contracting) would help maintain the facilities in these reserves.

Some decisions may need to be revised in the future as Rapid Ecoregional Assessment data are incorporated into ASDO data sets. Additionally, the Grand Canyon National Park is working on a new commercial air tours over-flight plan, which could require new decisions/analysis in the GCPNM plan.

Do any decisions need to be dropped from consideration?

As mentioned earlier, overall the decisions remain relevant to planning issues.

Are there any areas that require new decisions?

The ASDO management identified the following two subjects that may affect the plans in the future. The BLM will soon be releasing the Rapid Ecoregional Assessments (REAs). The REAs are a peer-reviewed science product that provides geospatial data on resource condition and trend. ASDO management identified the need to figure out how to address REA data in the planning process.

There is some concern that because of forthcoming implementation of new NLCS policies (such as Wild and Scenic Rivers, National Trails, Lands with Wilderness Characteristics, National Monument / National Conservation Area Manuals), some planning and implementation-level decisions for both the GCPNM and the VCNM RMPs may need revision.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, the evaluation team determined three different types of recommendations:

1. simple clarifying plan maintenance actions
2. plan amendments
3. areas in which plan is sufficient but additional action should be taken

Clarifying plan maintenance

The following section outlines small-scale changes to the plans, recommended by resource staff and the management team that can be accomplished via plan maintenance. In some cases the appropriate method for incorporating changes may be either plan maintenance or amendment, depending on the exact change to be implemented.

Suggested Change	Suggested Method	Applicable RMP
Utilization levels are listed as “management actions” which are defined as planning decisions. However, utilization levels are actually implementation actions that can be adjusted through project-level NEPA.	Maintenance	All
The following maps should have been included in the RMP (rather than having to refer back to the FEIS): Watershed Condition Class IV areas (from Decision No. MA-WS-08) and “Major Vegetation Types” (Map 3-13 in the FEIS).	Maintenance	All
There is a contradiction within Decision No. MA-TE-37 (ASFO) and MA-TE-30 (GCPNM), which first state “To the extent possible ...”, and then go on to state that “The following project activities will only be authorized ...” (emphasis added). The BLM should be able to do limited surface disturbing activities with a monitor during tortoise active season.	Maintenance/Amendment	ASFO and GCPNM

Suggested Change	Suggested Method	Applicable RMP
Decision Nos. MA-AC-16 and MA-AC-17 about vehicle camping in tortoise habitat contradict each other.	Maintenance/Amendment	ASFO
Remove “at key fawning areas” in Decision No. DFC-WF-23 (ASFO) and comparable decision in the other 2 RMPs. No one, including AGFD, knows where “key fawning areas” are or if they exist.	Maintenance	All
Delete MA-WF-20. Guidance from AGFD is that pronghorn will fawn anywhere within their habitat.	Maintenance	All
Remove the term “trapping” from Decisions Nos. AZFO DFC-WF-45, Parashant DFC-WF-46, Vermilion DFC-WF-39 (as trapping is subject to state jurisdiction and was prohibited through passage of an Arizona initiative measure)	Maintenance	All
Modify Decision No. GCPNM MA-TE-23 to accommodate for elimination of categories of tortoise habitat (i.e., the “highest quality” or “lowest quality” habitat referred to in the decision – now there is just designated critical habitat.	Maintenance	GCPNM
Recent land health evaluations led to category changes for some grazing allotments. Allotment categories should be updated in RMPs.	Maintenance	All
Remove the term “and trails” in VC Decision No. MA-TE-43 and the analogous GCPNM decision	Maintenance	VCNM and GCPNM
Clarify dates for peregrine nesting in GCPNM MA-TE-63/64, ASFO MA-TE-78/79, and VC MA-TE-37/38. Currently there are two different dates listed (one for active nesting, the other for reproductive season which includes courtship and other activities for raising young). The two sets of dates can be confusing.	Maintenance	All
The Lands and Realty Administrative Action which states that “Land Ownership adjustments will not be considered on withdrawn land unless or until the withdrawal has been modified or revoked” should be changed. R&PP lease/patents have been completed and a land sale is proposed in a reclamation withdrawal. The current language is not accurate for all withdrawals.	Maintenance	ASFO
Reflect the de-listing of the bald eagle	Maintenance	All
Update the RMP to reflect terminology of latest National Wildland Fire Policy. For example, the plan currently refers to “wildland fire use,” whereas current policy refers to “fire for multiple objectives.”	Maintenance	

Suggested Change	Suggested Method	Applicable RMP
Assess redundancy of decisions pertaining to vegetation and consider removing redundancies.	Amendment/Maintenance	All
Address mineral withdrawal allocations due to 2012 Northern Arizona Withdrawal	Maintenance	ASFO
Update RMP paleontological classifications to bring them up to date with IM-2008-009	Amendment/Maintenance	All
Update RMPs to comply with IM 2011-004. Allocations for recreation follow the outdated two-tier approach, and should be revised	Amendment/Maintenance	All
Identify Kanab Creek as an area where BLM should treat invasive riparian species, which would restore ecological conditions and improve the quality of suitable southwestern willow flycatcher habitat.	Maintenance	ASFO
The AGFD requested that the ASDO formally incorporate the updated Mule Deer and Bighorn Sheep plans in the RMPs. NOTE: The bighorn sheep plan is already specifically referenced in the RMPs – all we would have to do is change the date of the latest plan (from 2001 to 2012).	Maintenance	All
Change MA-TE-23 (GCPNM) and MA-TE-31 (ASFO), which distinguish between highest and lowest quality desert tortoise habitat. This should be changed to reflect that all desert tortoise habitat has been designated critical per the 2008 Recovery Plan.	Maintenance	ASFO and GCPNM

Plan amendments

The following section outlines small-scale plan amendments, recommended by resource staff and the management team. As stated above for suggested plan maintenance actions, the appropriate method for incorporating changes in some cases may be either plan maintenance or amendment, depending on the exact change to be implemented.

Suggested Change	Suggested Method	Applicable RMP
Delete Sun Valley Mine and Paiute Cave as being public use sites	Amendment	VCNM and ASFO
Fuelwood cutting should be allowed field office-wide (with exceptions, such as in ACECs, wilderness, and wilderness characteristics areas).	Amendment	ASFO
There is a contradiction within Decision No. MA-TE-37 (ASFO) and MA-TE-30 (GCPNM), which first states “To the extent possible ...”, and then goes on to state that “The following project activities will only be authorized ...” (emphasis added). The BLM	Maintenance/Amendment	ASFO and GCPNM

Suggested Change	Suggested Method	Applicable RMP
should be able to do limited surface disturbing activities with a monitor during tortoise active season.		
Decision Nos. MA-AC-16 and MA-AC-17 about vehicle camping in tortoise habitat contradict each other. As Decision 16 was specific and 17 required clarification, decision 16 will be implemented which states specifically camping is restricted in Desert Tortoise ACEC's to within 50 feet of <i>designated</i> routes. Before route designation restrictions apply to within 50 feet of <i>existing</i> routes. No camping will be authorized for longer than 14 consecutive days in any one area within the desert tortoise ACEC's.	Maintenance/Amendment	ASFO
Modify Decision No. MA-AC-35(DT) to allow for ROW activities within the Highway 91 ROW in previously-disturbed locations. The protective measure currently provided for Mojave desert tortoise precludes construction/maintenance activities in an active highway corridor.	Amendment	ASFO
The Coyote Buttes Recreation Management Zone boundary should correspond with the Wilderness boundary.	Amendment	VCNM
Assess redundancy of decisions pertaining to vegetation and consider removing redundancies.	Amendment/Maintenance	All
Update RMP paleontological classifications to bring them up to date with IM-2008-009	Amendment/Maintenance	All
Update RMPs to comply with IM 2011-004. Allocations for recreation follow the outdated two-tier approach, and should be revised	Amendment/Maintenance	All
The Arizona National Scenic Trail was designated after the RMPs were completed. Management direction for the Arizona National Scenic Trail should be addressed	Amendment	??
Based on the effectiveness of ACEC allocations in protecting the Holmgren milk-vetch and Siler pincushion, consider amending the RMP to establish an ACEC for Gierisch mallow, which is a candidate species.	Amendment	ASFO

Additional Actions

Data & Effectiveness Monitoring

Specialists, managers, and cooperators all commented on the need to obtain baseline inventories for some resources and continue conducting effectiveness monitoring. Areas for inventory and monitoring should include: cultural and paleontological resources; wilderness characteristics; wildlife (House-Rock Valley chisel tooth kangaroo rat); and plant and animal T&E critical habitat. T&E critical habitat monitoring should continue to be emphasized.

The RMP decisions are relatively new and it is too early to determine if the management actions are sufficient to meet the goals and objectives set forth in the RMPs. For the 10th and 15th year evaluations however, the District has the opportunity to gather more data and draw conclusions on the effectiveness of 2008 RMP decisions. In addition to resource monitoring set forth in the RMPs, tools such as the decision database should continue to be maintained to help meet this effort.

Some of the route inventories have errors. The inventories need to be corrected and will require implementation-level revisions to the travel management plans to “fix” some of the route designation errors.

Implementation Decision Prioritization

Many interviewed expressed interest in prioritizing decisions for implementation. These decisions include the following: treatment of areas where pinyon-juniper encroachment is occurring for wildlife benefit, along with soil stabilization; creating a wilderness management plan for the Kanab Creek Wilderness Area, which is the only ASDO wilderness area without a plan; and applying mechanical treatments of vegetation in the monuments.

Stakeholder Reengagement & Communication

All stakeholders agreed that they were well engaged during the planning process. However, some stakeholders felt that there has been less communication and chances for collaboration during plan implementation. Stakeholders are particularly interested in engaging with the ASDO regarding: route designations, protection of cultural resources, pinyon-juniper treatments, and Mojave desert tortoise protections. One stakeholder suggested the ASDO hold regular (e.g. monthly) briefings for the public to keep them informed regarding plan implementation.

Appendix A

Table 1 - Bureau of Land Management Arizona Strip District Project Accomplishments Summary

Management Area	Program Area	Project Name	Project Accomplishments
Arizona Strip Field Office	Range	Buckskin Stewardship/Vegetation Treatment	Thinned 100 acres of pinyon/juniper vegetation as part of a larger vegetation treatment project intended to enhance wildlife habitat/biodiversity, reduce hazardous fuel loads, and create fire breaks.
Arizona Strip Field Office & Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument	Recreation	Pink Jeep Tours SRP (Motor Tours)	Issue permit to Pink Jeep Tours for travel across the Arizona Strip Bureau of Land Management lands to Toroweap using both the Mt Trumbull (County Road 5) and Antelope Valley Road (County Road 109)
Arizona Strip Field Office	Special Status Species	Tortoise Fencing on the Beaver Dam Slope	Ecological benefit by improving protection under the Endangered Species Act for listed threatened tortoises through installation of tortoise fence along 13.4 miles on either side of Highway 91.
Arizona Strip Field Office	Geology/Minerals	Proposed Right-of-Way Grant and Plan of Operations Black Rock Gypsum Mine	Allows the construction and operation of a water pipeline and expansion of the Western Mining and Minerals Inc. mining operations at the Black Rock Gypsum Mine increasing economic benefit in the area through jobs and ongoing industry.
Arizona Strip Field Office	Lands/Realty	Dixie Escalante Rural Electric Association's Transmission Line Right-of-Way Amendment	Allows Dixie Escalante Rural Electric Association to construct, operate, and maintain a high voltage transmission line.
Arizona Strip Field Office	Range	Water Enhancement Projects Mud and Cane, Pocum Tank, and Wolfhole Canyon Grazing Allotments	Improved or expanded existing water catchments and developed several new water storage sites to improve water availability for wildlife and livestock.
Vermilion Cliffs National Monument	Recreation & NLCS	Stateline Campground Extension	Development of one campsite and vault toilet on the Arizona side as a benefit to the increasing number of recreationists in the area.
Arizona Strip Field Office	Public Health & Safety	Highway 91 Wire Burn Enclosure Fence	Constructed an enclosure fence around 1.607 acres of lead contaminated land to promote public safety and wildlife health.
Arizona Strip Field Office	Special Status Species	Siler Pincushion Habitat Protection Fences	Construct fences enclosures to protect Siler pincushion cactus habitat in the Fort Pearce Wash Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC).

Management Area	Program Area	Project Name	Project Accomplishments
Arizona Strip Field Office	Recreation	Arizona Strip Trail Maintenance	Improvement and maintenance of 49 miles of the Arizona Strip District's existing trails including removal of vegetation, drainage improvements (water bars), grading, and improved alignments. Benefit to recreation and tourism in the area.
Arizona Strip Field Office	Lands/Realty	Rio Virgin Telephone Fiber Optic Line Right-of-Way Project	This Right-of-Way allows improvement of communications for people and businesses.
Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument	Special Status Species	Kelly Dam Vegetation Management	370 acre ecological restoration project with prescribed fire.
Vermilion Cliffs National Monument	Recreation and National Landscape Conservation System	Commercial Motorized Special Recreation Permits on Vermilion Cliffs National Monument and Ferry Swale Area	Establishes commercial motorized recreation permit parameters for predetermined group size, type of appropriate activities, and conditions under which these activities may occur across the project area, while protecting monument objects and recreation
Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument	Wildlife and Range	Bromus Research	Assist the United States Forest Service (USFS) Rocky Mountain Research Station and USGS in brome control research treatments affecting 0.25 acre plots.
Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument	Recreation	Trails Repairs (ARRA Project)	Improved and repaired hiking trails within the Grand-Canyon Parashant National Monument (GCPNM): Mt Trumbull, Nampaweap, Mt Dellenbaugh, Grand Wash Cliffs, and Paiute Wilderness
Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument	Wildlife, Special Status Species, Range	Twin Points-Andrus Rim Fuels Treatment	The 1,098 acre Twin Points and 2,507 acre Andrus Rim vegetation treatments improve forage wildlife and livestock by restoring ecosystem function and condition (biodiversity) and protect nearby private land and structures (Wildland Urban Interface) by reducing hazardous fuel loads.
Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument	Wildlife, Range, Fire	Pakoon Airstrip Renovation	Renovate and upgrade the existing 84.7 acre administration site facility to better accommodate turbo-prop Single Engine Air Tankers, improve facilities for fire crew use, and increase water storage capacity. This project improves the BLM's capacity to reduce fires that destroy Mojave Desert habitats for tortoises and other native species.
Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument	Threatened & Endangered Species	Mojave Desert "Seeds of Success" Seed Collection	Authorize seed collection in Mojave Desert eco-regions outside the GCPNM. This and other Bromus Research projects are crucial to gaining scientific knowledge of the best methods to stop wildfire conversion of Mojave habitats to Brome grassland.

Management Area	Program Area	Project Name	Project Accomplishments
Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument	Wildlife, Range, Threatened & Endangered Species	Seed Bank Analysis in Burned and Unburned Critical Habitat for Mojave Desert Tortoise	Authorize project establishing three research study areas for seed bank sampling carried out under a variety of partnerships.
Arizona Strip Field Office & Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument	Wildlife	Redevelopment of Water Catchments on the Arizona Strip, Mohave County, Arizona	Replaced or upgraded eight existing water catchments by installing fiberglass catchment troughs and storage tanks, metal aprons, and new Arizona Game and Fish Department standard fence to improve water availability for wildlife and livestock.
Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument	Recreation and Range	Esplin Land Acquisition	Purchase 1,920 acres of property inholding within the Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument.
Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument	Threatened & Endangered Species	Pakoon Springs: Control of Non-natives and Management of Public Use	Manage public use of spring, channel stabilization, and eliminate non-native invasive species.
Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument	Wildlife, Range, Threatened & Endangered Species, Fire	Hidden '11 and Jacob '06 Fires Research	Establish 168 treatment plots to test various seed application methods and densities.