

# Section 1 ñ Introduction

## 1.1 Need for the Plan Amendment

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Arizona State Office is amending its six Resource Management Plans (RMP; the Phoenix, Kingman, Arizona Strip, Safford, Yuma, and Lower Gila South RMPs) and one Management Framework Plan (MFP; the Lower Gila North MFP). These document, collectively known as Land Use Plans (LUPs), need to be amended to address todayís wildland fire management concerns and issues, including:

- Improved Public and Firefighter Safety from wildland fires on public lands;
- The use of fire as a management tool for achieving resource management objectives (such as restoring desirable vegetation, improving the health of desirable habitats, reducing competition from invasive species, and restoring/rehabilitating habitats consumed by wildfires), including the return of fire as a process to fire dependent ecosystems;
- The management of hazardous fuel loads inside and outside the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) by the appropriate use of fire, mechanical, biological, and/or chemical treatments to reduce firefighter risk, decrease wildfire severity and intensity, and to restore more natural conditions to forest, rangeland, and woodland vegetative communities;
- Adaptive Fire Suppression Response Strategy. Appropriate Management response, including managing natural fire starts for resource benefit, that will prioritize multiple fires and allow for change in suppression response requirements during these events; and
- Air Quality, and how it will be affected by the reintroduction of fire to the ecosystem as a natural process.

### 1.1.1 National Fire Management Plan

In September 2000 the Secretaries of the Departments of Interior and Agriculture (DOI and DOA) prepared a report, *Managing the Impact of Wildfires on Communities and the Environment: A Report to the President in Response to the Wildfires of 2000*. As a result of the 2000 wildfire season and the report to the President, Congress provided

substantial new appropriations and guidance in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2001 Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. The activities resulting from the Secretariesí report and the Congressional action are generally known as the National Fire Plan.<sup>1</sup> The 2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (2001 Federal Fire Policy)<sup>2</sup> provides a broad philosophical and policy foundation for federal agency fire management programs and activities, including those conducted under the National Fire Plan. The 2001 Federal Fire Policy contained in this report is focused on internal federal agency strategic direction for a broad range of fire management related activities while the National Fire Plan is a more narrowly focused and tactical undertaking involving both federal and non-federal entities. A consistent approach to the incorporation of the National Fire Plan into LUPs is also a requirement for BLM-administered lands. The LUP amendment will be based upon the National Fire Plan and the 2001 Federal Fire Policy.

### 1.1.2 Comprehensive LUP Evaluation Results

In FY 2001, the BLM Arizona State Office evaluated the existing LUPs for its seven Field Offices and found that they have not kept pace with current fire management issues and policy, nor do they provide for interrelationships between fire management and other resources. The Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy has required all agencies to update and include aspects of fire management into their LUPs. The purpose of BLMís LUP amendment is to accomplish the required updates by incorporating adaptive fire management into all planning processes, and to provide a consistent approach to incorporating the National Fire Policy into LUPs. The current LUPs also do not meet BLMís goal of having a consistent approach to incorporating the National Fire Policy in land use plans.

### 1.1.3 Planning Area

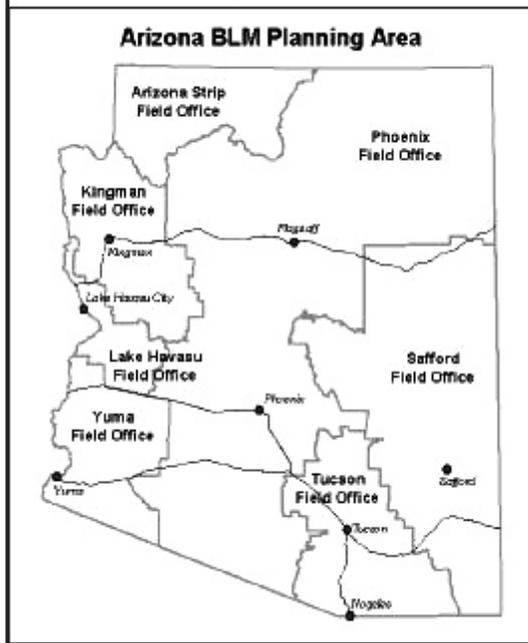
The BLM in Arizona is responsible for fire management on approximately 12 million acres of public lands consisting of 2 million acres of

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<sup>1</sup> See National Fire Plan website at: [www.fireplan.gov](http://www.fireplan.gov)

<sup>2</sup> The Federal Wildland Fire Policy can be found on the NIFC website at: [www.nifc.gov](http://www.nifc.gov)

**Figure 1.1**



Arizona Strip FO located in St. George, Utah. The Arizona Strip FO is comprised of 2.8 million acres of land north of the Grand Canyon and south of the Utah State line, and manages lands within Mohave and Coconino Counties in Arizona. The Safford RMP includes a portion of the Tucson and Safford Field Offices. The Tucson FO manages some 800,000 acres of public lands within Pinal and Santa Cruz Counties. The Safford FO contains 1.6 million acres within Graham, Greenlee, Cochise, Navajo, Apache, and Pinal counties. The Phoenix RMP covers the former Phoenix Resource Area within the Phoenix District (now the Phoenix Field Office) and includes a portion of the Phoenix, Tucson, and Safford Field Offices. The northern region encompasses Apache and Navajo Counties. The southern region includes most of Maricopa County, and all or parts of Gila, Pima, Pinal, Santa Cruz, Yavapai. The major metropolitan areas of Phoenix and Tucson are included within the Phoenix RMP. The Lower Gila South RMP covers a portion of the Yuma and Phoenix Field Offices within La Paz, Maricopa, Pima, Pinal, and Yuma Counties. The Lower Gila North Management Framework Plan spans public lands within Yuma, Yavapai, and Maricopa Counties in the former Lower Gila Resource Area (now the Phoenix Field Office), and a portion of the Havasu Field Office.

Ponderosa Pine, Pinion/Juniper woodlands, 10 million acres of South West desert vegetation, and 43,000 acres of riparian vegetation. The BLM has 7 planning areas in Arizona, covering some 12 million acres of BLM-administered lands. The LUP amendment would amend those seven LUPs (six Resource Management Plans (RMPs) and one Management Framework Plan (MFP).

The Yuma RMP includes the Yuma Field Office (formerly the Yuma District) and a portion of the Havasu Field Office, and encompasses Yuma and La Paz Counties. The Kingman RMP includes the Kingman Field Office and a portion of the Havasu FO, and encompasses some 2.4 million acres of public lands in Mohave and Yavapai Counties. The Arizona Strip RMP encompasses one field office: the

In addition to BLM-administered land, the planning area contains private, State and other land. Indian Trust Assets (ITAs) are lands, natural resources, money, or other tangible assets held by the Federal Government in trust or restricted against alienation for Indian tribes and individual Indians. The Proposed Action is not likely to affect ITAs in the State of Arizona. As with many western states, a significant portion of the lands in Arizona are public lands administered by the Federal government, including the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Forest Service, and National Park Service. Table 1.1 provides the general ownership of lands in Arizona.

**Table 1.1 ñ General Land Ownership in Arizona**

	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Percent of Total</b>
Bureau of Land Management	12,296,000	16.5%
Other Federal Agencies	18,704,000	25.6%
State of Arizona	9,335,000	12.8%
Indian Trust	19,910,000	27.3%
Private	12,982,000	17.8%

## 1.2 Determining the Scope/Issues

A Notice of Intent (NOI) to initiate the planning effort was published in the Federal Register on January 27, 2003. To ensure that the most appropriate measures of managing fire in Arizona are selected from numerous options and alternatives, public input into the LUP Amendment process was essential from the beginning planning stages and throughout the planning process.

A Public Involvement Plan was also prepared to manage and ensure effective, consistent, open communication process between BLM, other federal agencies, state and local government agencies, Native American tribes, universities and research entities, the public, and other stakeholding parties.

In March 2003, BLM conducted eight Open House meetings in Phoenix, Safford, Tucson, Flagstaff, Yuma, Lake Havasu City, Kingman, and St. George, Utah (the location of the BLM field office for the Arizona Strip). These meetings were announced in the first Planning Bulletin, mailed in February 2003 to more than 3,500 individuals and organizations throughout the state. News releases were issued to state and local media, and advertisements were placed in most major newspapers. More than 100 people attended at least one of the meetings.

Issues or concerns on the following topics were expressed by meeting attendees: Coordination with other agencies and/or National Monuments; support for using fire to manage ecosystems, including prescribed fire or allowing naturally-occurring fire cycles with minimal suppression efforts; WUI fires and the cost of fire prevention; hazardous fuel loadings; environmental impacts to air and water quality, and mature trees from logging; invasive species such as tamarisk; fire as a threat to cultural, archeological, and historical resources; impact of fires on livestock forage availability and grazing, as to do so would take a grave toll on the health of public lands and wildlife.

Potential issues not raised by the public include impacts to soil resources, wild horses and burros, or socio-economic impacts of wildland fire. Also, no questions were raised in regards to BLM's LUP amendment process, compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Environmental Assessment (EA) process being followed, or the schedule for the LUP amendment and Environmental Assessment, and no alternatives were raised to the preferred alternative. Additional details on the public involvement meetings is

provided in **Appendix A**, *Determining the Scope Process Summary*

## 1.3 Laws, Regulations, Policies, and Planning Criteria

The BLM planning process is governed by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA, 43 U.S.C. 1711) and the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) contained in 43 CFR Part 1600. Land Use Plans ensure that the public lands are managed in accordance with the intent of Congress as stated in FLPMA, under the principles of multiple use and sustained yield. As required by FLPMA, the public lands must be managed in a manner that protects the quality of scientific, scenic, historical, ecological, environmental, air and atmospheric, water resource, and archeological values; that, where appropriate, will preserve and protect certain public lands in their natural condition, that will provide food and habitat for fish and wildlife and domestic animals; and that will provide for outdoor recreation and human occupancy and use by encouraging collaboration and public participation throughout the planning process. In addition, the public lands must be managed in a manner that recognizes the Nation's need for domestic sources of minerals, food, timber, and fiber from the public lands.

Land use plans are the primary mechanism for guiding BLM activities to achieve the mission and goals outlined in the BLM Strategic Plan. BLM's Land Use Planning Handbook (H-1601-1) contains implementation guidance. BLM's Land Use Planning Handbook, Appendix C (Program-Specific and Resource-Specific Decision Guidance), Part 1 (Natural, Biological and Cultural Resources), Paragraph J (Fire Management), also contains specific guidance on fire management in LUPs.

The President's Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQs) regulations for implementing NEPA (Title 40 CFR Parts 1500-1508) detail the process of preparing Environmental Assessments (EAs). This CEQ guidance and BLM's own internal guidance for conducting an EA-level analysis were followed in the preparation of this document. BLM's National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Handbook (H-1790-1) contains BLM guidance for preparation of an EA-level analysis.

On November 13, 2001, BLM's National Director issued Instruction Memorandum No. 2002-034, providing guidance regarding the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and the treatment of wildland fire management in LUPs. The Instruction

Memorandum directs BLM's LUPs to be amended to meet current fire management policy.

In addition, there are other cross-cutting environmental laws and Executive Orders that may be affected by an agency's action, and they have been considered. These authorities include (but are not limited to) the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the Endangered Species Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, the Archaeological Resource Protection Act, and such Executive Orders as EO 11593, "Protection and Enhancement of the Cultural Environment," and EO 12898, "Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations." Additional information is provided in **Appendix B**, *Applicable Laws, Regulations, Policies and Planning Criteria*.

## 1.4 Collaboration/Partnership Relationship

As part of the processes to determine the project's scope, agency coordination and notification, BLM took actions to inform and obtain input from all other Federal, State, Tribal and local agencies about this LUP amendment project, the schedule, and the steps being taken to complete the project. Agencies were given the opportunity to participate and comment.

In January and February 2003, letters were sent by the BLM, Deputy State Director, to Arizona Federal, State, and County agencies, and to Tribal contacts. These letters provided background information on BLM's statewide fire, fuels and air quality LUP amendment process, and invited them to attend one or more of the public meetings or to contact BLM if they would like a separate meeting. Additionally, tribal representatives were contacted to obtain information on potential issues and concerns they might have. All information obtained was fully considered in the LUP amendment and NEPA processes.

Under a separate but related project, the BLM has arranged for The Nature Conservancy (TNC), a non-profit conservation organization, to review and provide an independent, scientific evaluation of the ecological validity of BLM's existing fire management polygons. TNC's efforts will directly support BLM's update of its Fire Management Plans.

## 1.5 Existing LUP Decisions That Would Be Amended

BLM's seven existing LUPs contain some Desired Future Conditions, Land Use Allocations, and Management Actions pertaining to fire and fuels management, vegetation, and other resources. Some of these decisions are inconsistent with new fire management issues and policies. Table 2.3, "Existing LUP Decisions," lists existing decisions that would be modified by the Proposed Action.