

Finding of No Significant Impact For Proposed Arizona Statewide Land Use Plan Amendment Fire, Fuels, and Air Quality Management Environmental Assessment

Introduction

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Arizona State Office has analyzed a proposal to amend its six Resource Management Plans (RMPs) and one Management Framework Plan (MFP). The six RMPs are the Phoenix, Kingman, Arizona Strip, Safford, Yuma and Lower Gila South. The MFP is the Lower Gila North.

The proposed statewide land use plan amendment, including desired future conditions, land use allocations and management actions, along with management common to all alternatives and any potential mitigation measures, are described and analyzed in the attached Environmental Assessment (EA) No. AZ-910-2003-0001.

Related Environmental Documents and Environmental Impact Statements (EISs)

- Proposed Arizona Strip District RMP/Final EIS - December 1990
- Proposed Phoenix RMP/Final EIS - December 1998
- Lower Gila South Proposed RMP/Final EIS - August 1985
- Kingman Resource Area Proposed RMP/Final EIS - September 1993
- Safford District Proposed RMP/Final EIS - August 1991
- Yuma District Proposed RMP/Final EIS - August 1985
- Statewide Plan Amendment of Land Use Plans in Arizona for Implementation of Arizona Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Grazing Administration EA - December 1996
- Vegetation Treatment on BLM Lands in Thirteen Western States Final EIS - May 1991
- Biological Evaluation for the BLM, Statewide LUP Amendment for Fire, Fuels and Air Quality Management, Dynamac Corporation, December 2004.

Reasons for Finding No Significant Impact

- Both beneficial and adverse effects have been considered, (see EA pages 4-1 thru 4-34). The potential adverse effects would be limited to acceptable levels by Standard Operating Procedures and implementation of listed mitigation measures. Therefore, beneficial effects depicted in the analysis far out weight potential adverse effects from implementing the proposed action.
- Overall safety for the general public and potential fire hazard conditions facing fire personnel will be greatly improved on approximately 12 million acres of BLM-administered public lands due to the reduction of hazardous fuels build up over time and overall reduced potential for destructive wildland fire. The actions selected were designed to increase firefighter and public safety and decrease the

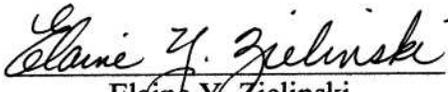
costs of fire suppression efforts, and continued damage from no action that would occur to facilities and structures, water quality on approximately 12 million acres of public lands. Hazardous fuel loads would be reduced thereby allowing direct suppression methods by fire fighters. The implementation of this project would reduce the risk of a wildland fire reaching catastrophic levels and crossing boundaries onto private lands or public lands administered by other agencies.

- The proposed action would not adversely affect any special designation areas, particularly when compared to the No Action Alternative (see EA pages 4-31 thru 4-32). As the Desired Future Conditions are achieved, improvements in species biodiversity, plant composition, structure, and productivity, plant health and vigor, and wildlife habitat would improve ecosystem health throughout special designation areas (National Monuments, National Conservation Areas, National Trails, Wild & Scenic Rivers, Wilderness Areas, Wilderness Study Areas or Areas of Critical Environmental Concern).
- There is no substantial controversy over the effects of this proposal (see EA page 1-3 and Appendix A). No controversy or significant concerns were identified during public comment or agency reviews and therefore none were disclosed in the EA (see pages 1-3 to 1-4 of the EA).
- The BLM has considerable experience with these types of projects and actions, and their effects are not uncertain, therefore a unique or unknown risk is not being taken by implementing the proposed action. Recent projects have exhibited the need for change in vegetation structure by reducing vegetation accumulation and invasive species, thereby reducing catastrophic wildfire risk. These past projects have benefited wildlife, and domestic livestock by creating a mixed age class structure with improved forage production (see EA pages 4-7 to 4-19).
- The LUP Amendments are a response to-- and are consistent with--recent Congressional legislation, current Federal and BLM fire management policies, are therefore are not precedent setting or unique actions.
- Cumulative effects from the proposed action were analyzed in conjunction with anticipated fire management activities by other Federal, state and county agencies on adjacent lands. The EA discloses that over the long-term the proposed action would improve environmental conditions, particularly when compared to continuing current fire management practices under the "no action alternative." The EA discloses that the proposed action would result in a cumulative improvement in air quality; visual resources; soil erosion; vegetation; wildlife habitat; and to social, economic and cultural resources. Adverse cumulative impacts to water quality would be short-term and not significant. Maintaining a mosaic of habitats across the landscape and across administrative boundaries would minimize any cumulative effects to fish and wildlife resources. Based on the effects disclosed in the EA and additional documentation in the supporting project planning record, there are no significant adverse cumulative impacts. (See EA pages 4-1 to 4-34.)
- No or minimal impacts to paleontological, cultural or historic resources would occur from treatment methods or prescribed fire (see EA pages 4-27 to 4-31), and therefore would be less under the proposed action compared to the effects of no action.

- Within the project area, 33 endangered species, 13 threatened species, 2 species proposed for listing, and 4 species that are candidates for listing inhabit either BLM-administered lands in Arizona (or has habitat) or adjacent Federal, state, reservation, or private lands that could be affected by fire suppression or the proposed fire management activities. Although the proposed action has the potential to affect some species, it would however have no significant direct, indirect or cumulative impacts. We anticipate a biological opinion from FWS that the proposed LUP amendment would not jeopardize any of the Federally listed species (see EA pages 4-20 to 4-26). A Biological Evaluation has been prepared and submitted to the FWS, and consultation on schedule is anticipated. Specific Conservation Measures have been developed to reduce or eliminate adverse effects, and would be implemented as described (see EA Appendix C).
- The proposal is consistent with applicable state and federal laws, Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, and BLM Fire Management and Planning Policy (see EA pages 1-1 to 1-4).

Determination

On the basis of the information contained in the attached Environmental Assessment, public involvement throughout the development of the EA level analysis process, and all other information available to me as summarized above, it is my determination that the proposed amendment is not a major Federal Action and will have no significant effect on the quality of the human environment, other than those previously addressed in the aforementioned EISs. Therefore a new EIS or supplement to an existing EIS is unnecessary and will not be prepared.


Elaine Y. Zielinski
State Director, Arizona

March 25, 2004

Date