

APPENDIX H

WATERMAN MOUNTAINS AREA OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN

Section 202 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) requires BLM to give priority to designation and protection of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) during the land use planning process.

DEFINITION OF AN ACEC

BLM regulations (43 CFR part 1610) define an ACEC as:

An area within the public lands where special management attention is required (when such areas are developed or used or where no development is required) to protect and prevent irreparable damage to important historic, cultural, or scenic values, fish and wildlife resources, or other natural systems or processes, or to protect life and safety from natural hazards.

ACECs differ from other special management designations such as wilderness study areas in that the designation, by itself, does not automatically prohibit or restrict other uses in the area. The only regulatory requirement is that a Plan of Operation is necessary for any proposed locatable mineral exploration or development within an ACEC (which would apply only to valid existing mining claims within the Waterman Mountains). Private land and lands administered by other agencies are not included within the boundaries of ACECs. The ACEC designation is an administrative designation and is accomplished through the land use planning process.

THE WATERMAN MOUNTAINS ACEC

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) designated approximately 2,240 acres of BLM-administered land in the Waterman Mountains as an ACEC in the Phoenix Resource Management Plan. The area was designated to protect the federally endangered Nichol Turk's head cactus (*Echinocactus horizonthalonius* var. *nicholii*). As the Nichol Turk's head cactus remains endangered, the values for which this ACEC was designated have not changed. However, based on the establishment of the IFNM, which completely encompasses the ACEC, this area may no longer warrant special management, as the management of the IFNM could provide adequate protection of the resource values within the Waterman Mountains. As a result, BLM can and has considered removal of the ACEC designation from the area under the alternatives presented in the Draft Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement.

