



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

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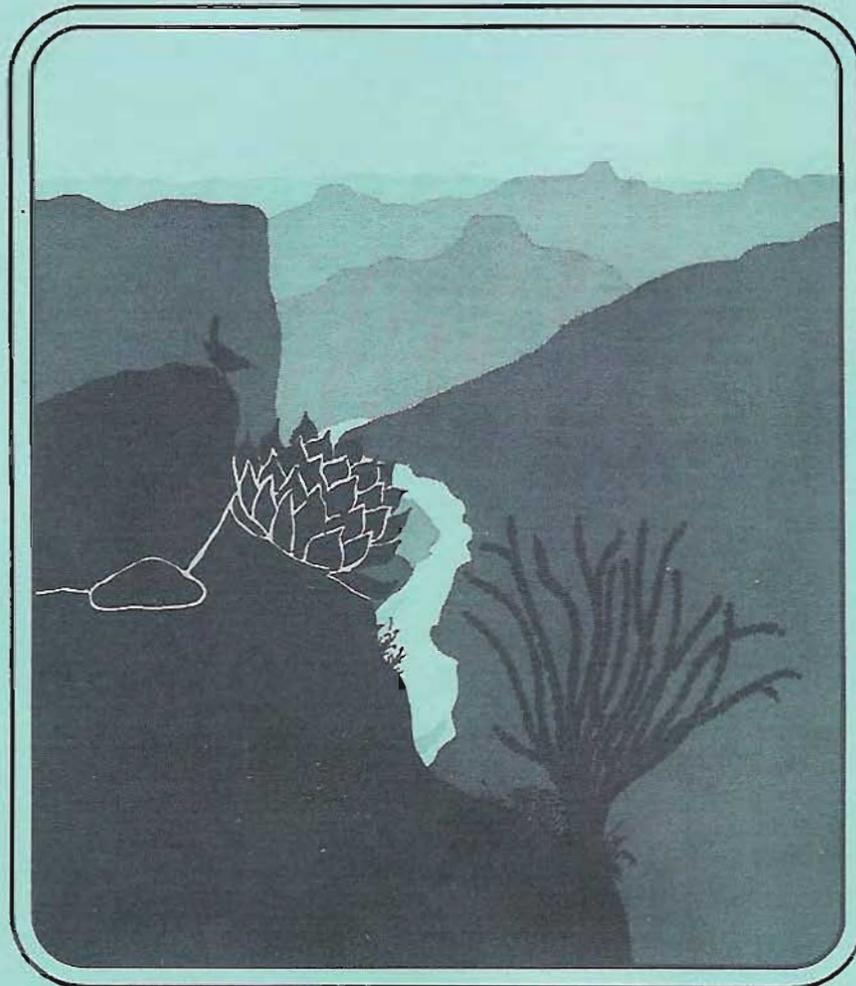
Safford District Office
425 East 4th Street
Safford, Arizona 85546

August 1991



Safford District Resource Management Plan

Environmental Impact Statement



Final Safford District Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement

Prepared by

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Safford District
Arizona


Arizona State Director

This Final Environmental Impact Statement describes and analyzes four alternatives for management of approximately 1,400,000 acres of public land in southeastern Arizona. The alternatives analyzed include Alternative A (the Preferred Alternative), Alternative B (a protection oriented alternative), Alternative C (a production oriented alternative) and Alternative D (the No Action Alternative).

For further information contact Cindy Alvarez, Planning and Environmental Coordinator, Safford District Office, Bureau of Land Management, 425 East 4th Street, Safford, Arizona 85546 or call (602) 428-4040.



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
SAFFORD DISTRICT OFFICE
425 E. 4TH STREET
SAFFORD, ARIZONA 85546
(602) 428-4040

IN REPLY REFER TO:
1615
(040)

Dear Public Land User:

Enclosed is the Final Safford District Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement for your information. The draft document was published and released for public comment January 5, 1990. After an extension was provided to accommodate comments on Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, the comment period concluded June 5, 1990.

Passage of the Arizona Desert Wilderness Bill of 1990 on November 28, 1990 required revisions of the final plan and environmental impact statement to reflect the changes created by the passage of the wilderness legislation. These revisions include boundary changes for some of the Areas of Critical Environmental Concern and the deletion of some areas from designation recommendations.

The resource management planning process includes an opportunity for administrative review via a plan protest to the BLM's Director if you believe the approval of a proposed Resource Management Plan would be in error (see 43 CFR 1610.5-2). Careful adherence to these guidelines will assist in preparing a protest that will assure the greatest consideration to your point of view.

Only those persons or organizations who participated in our planning process may protest. If our records do not indicate that you had any involvement in any stage in the preparation of the proposed Resource Management Plan, your protest will be denied without further review.

A protesting party may raise only those issues which were submitted for the record during the planning process. New issues raised in the protest period should be directed to the Safford District, the San Simon Area Manager or the Gila Area Manager for consideration in plan implementation, as potential plan amendments or as otherwise appropriate.

The period for filing protests begins when the Environmental Protection Agency publishes in the Federal Register its notice of Receipt of the final environmental impact statement containing the proposed Resource Management Plan or amendment. The protest period extends for 30 days. There is no provision for any extension of time. To be considered "timely", your protest must be post-marked no later than the last day of the protest period. Also, although not a requirement, we suggest that you send your protest by certified mail, return receipt requested.

Protests must be filed to: Director (760)
Bureau of Land Management
1849 "C" Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

In order to be considered complete, your protests must contain, at a minimum, the following information:

1. The name, mailing address, telephone number, and interest of the person filing the protest.
2. A statement of the issue or issues being protested.
3. A statement of the part or parts of the plan being protested. To the extent possible, this should be done by reference to specific pages, paragraphs, sections, tables, maps, etc., included in the proposed Resource Management Plan.
4. A copy of all documents addressing the issue or issues that you submitted during the planning process or a reference to the date the issue or issues were discussed by you for the record.
5. A concise statement explaining why the BLM State Director's **proposed** decision is believed to be incorrect. This is a critical part of your protest. Take care to document all relevant facts. As much as possible, reference or cite the planning documents, environmental analysis documents, available planning records (i.e. meeting minutes or summaries, correspondence, etc.). A protest which merely expresses disagreement with the Arizona State Director's proposed decision, without any data will not **provide** us with the benefit of your information and insight. In this case, the Director's review will be based on the existing analysis and supporting data.

Sincerely,



Ray A. Brady
District Manager

Summary

Purpose and Need

This final Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement contains several changes from the draft version. During the preparation of the Final Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement, the Arizona Desert Wilderness bill was passed by Congress and on November 28, 1990 was signed into law by President George Bush. The Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement has been modified to reflect the changes created by the passage of the Wilderness bill. In addition, the Gila Box Riparian National Conservation Area was so designated by Congress. Other significant changes to alternatives are:

1. Wild and Scenic River eligibility and classification determinations have been made for five additional rivers; Aravaipa Creek, Turkey Creek, Swamp Springs-Hot Springs Canyon, Bonita Creek and San Pedro River. Suitability determinations have been deferred.
2. Identification of specific tracts of lands deemed suitable for acquisition. See Map 27 for locations.
3. Deletion of mountain bikes from Off -Highway Vehicle definition.
4. During the development of this Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement Congressional action created six additional wilderness areas in the Safford District (See Map 25). The new wilderness areas are: Needles Eye, North Santa Teresa, Fishhooks, Redfield Canyon, Dos Cabezas Mountains and Peloncillo Mountains. In addition, the existing Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness has been expanded. Some of the Areas of Critical Environmental Concern described in the draft Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement are entirely within the boundaries of a wilderness area. Area of Critical Environmental Concern prescriptions will be carried forward into the wilderness management plan where appropriate. In other cases, some of the Area of Critical Environmental Concern lands are outside the wilderness boundaries. These lands will be carried forward as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern but with adjusted acreages.
5. The same Wilderness legislation created the Gila Box Riparian National Conservation Area which includes the Bonita Creek Area of Critical Environmental Concern and a large portion of the Gila Box Area of Critical Environmental Concern. Area of Critical Environmental Concern prescriptions will be carried forward into the National Conservation Area manage-

ment plan where appropriate. As with the wilderness areas, the remaining Area of Critical Environmental Concern lands outside the National Conservation Area will be carried forward.

This Resource Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement has been prepared to guide management of 1,400,000 acres of public land in the Safford District (southeastern Arizona) for approximately the next 15 years. The decisions in the approved Resource Management Plan/Record of Decision will determine which use or combination of uses will be emphasized in the District. The Resource Management Plan will also decide which uses are not appropriate.

The Resource Management Plan will replace four existing Management Framework Plans Winkelman, Geronimo, Black Hills and San Simon. These plans have guided BLM's management since the early 1970s. Much of the information used in preparing the Management Framework Plans and the decisions of those plans that are still valid have been incorporated into this Resource Management Plan. Management Framework Plans were not prepared for scattered parcels of public land in Cochise and southwestern Graham Counties. The decisions of the approved Resource Management Plan will guide management of these areas.

In 1989, BLM completed a land management plan for 47,668 acres of public lands along the upper San Pedro River. The San Pedro River Riparian Management *Plan* (BLM 1989) provides direction for management of the natural and cultural resources of that property. During the preparation of the plan, Congress designated these lands and adjacent public lands as the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area. This Resource Management Plan incorporates the decisions of the *San Pedro River Riparian Management Plan* and sets management direction for lands in the National Conservation Area not covered by that plan.

Planning Issues and Management Concerns

Decisions in the approved Resource Management Plan will resolve significant issues and management concerns about specific land management opportunities and problems. Four issues and 10 management concerns were identified for analysis in this planning process. The issues and concerns were identified by BLM managers and specialists and the public. The following issues and concerns were analyzed in this Resource Management Plan.

Issue 1 Access

Land ownership in southeastern Arizona varies from large blocks of public, national forest and Indian reservation lands to small scattered tracts of public, state and private lands. The land pattern restricts physical and legal access to some public lands. In this Resource Management Plan, BLM identifies areas where physical and legal access is needed to or across public lands for vehicle and foot or horse travel. The Resource Management Plan will also identify areas where current access should be restricted.

Issue 2 Areas of Critical Environmental Concern and Other Special Management Types

Public lands in the Safford District have a variety of important historic, cultural, scenic and natural values. Areas of Critical Environmental Concern and wild and scenic rivers are special management types that can be used to preserve unique and important resource values. In this Resource Management Plan, BLM will analyze 30 Area of Critical Environmental Concern nominations and several river segments including the Gila River (Gila Box and lower river below Coolidge Dam), the Lower San Francisco, Bonita Creek, Aravaipa Creek, San Pedro River, Hot Springs Creek, Swamp Springs Creek and Turkey Creek for eligibility and classification under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

Issue 3 Off-highway Vehicles

Recreational off-highway vehicle use has increased over the years and continues to grow. Off-highway vehicles can cause significant damage to the environment if not used in the proper manner and in the proper location. BLM manages the public lands for use by off-highway vehicles, but their use must be carefully managed to prevent adverse impacts to the land and its resources. Through this Resource Management Plan, BLM will identify lands that will be opened, limited or closed to off-highway vehicle use.

Issue 4 Riparian Areas

Riparian areas are valuable because of their importance to watershed protection, water quality, wildlife, recreation opportunities and livestock management. Special management attention is needed to ensure these fragile areas are protected and improved while providing for their use. In this Resource Management

Plan, BLM determines the objectives for management of riparian areas and the actions to be taken to implement the objectives.

Ten management concerns are also addressed in this Resource Management Plan:

Management Concern 1	Wildlife Habitat including Threatened and Endangered Species
Management Concern 2	Lands and Realty
Management Concern 3	Outdoor Recreation and Visual Resource Management, including socio-economic
Management Concern 4	Energy and Minerals, including socio-economic
Management Concern 5	Cultural Resources
Management Concern 6	Soil Erosion, especially San Simon
Management Concern 7	Vegetation
Management Concern 8	Water Resources
Management Concern 9	Air Quality
Management Concern 10	Paleontological Resources

This Resource Management Plan determines management objectives for each of these concerns and identify actions that will be taken to implement the objectives. Specific planning questions for each issue and concern are identified in Chapter 1 Purpose and Need. Evaluation criteria are also found in Chapter 1.

Issues considered but not addressed include livestock grazing, wilderness and herbicides and pesticides. Livestock grazing was not addressed because it is considered adequately in the Upper Gila-San Simon and the Eastern Arizona Grazing Environmental Impact Statements. Implementation of the decisions of these documents is still in the implementation and monitoring phases. Present management has the flexibility to modify grazing levels and seasons where necessary. Wilderness was not addressed because of pending legislation which addressed wilderness areas in Arizona. The legislation has since been passed by Congress and signed into law by President George Bush. An Environmental Impact Statement is presently being prepared to provide Bureauwide guidance on the use of pesticides and herbicides. If chemicals are approved for use, site-specific environmental documents will be prepared for each proposal for the use of these chemicals.

Description of the Alternatives

Four alternative plans (including the Preferred Alternative) have been developed to respond to the issues and concerns. Each alternative presents the land-use objectives that will guide management of the public lands for the next 15 years, and the actions BLM will carry out to accomplish those objectives. The following alternatives are analyzed in this Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement.

Alternative A (Preferred Alternative)

This alternative is BLM's preferred Resource Management Plan. It is designed to respond to the issues and management concerns in a manner that provides a balanced approach to multiple use management. It provides protection to sensitive resources that cannot tolerate disturbance from other activities. It also provides for the consumptive use and development of other resources.

Alternative B (Protection Oriented)

This alternative emphasizes management and protection of natural and cultural resources while still providing for use and development of the public lands. More restrictions are applied to protect natural and cultural resources. This alternative designates the largest areas as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern with more protective management prescriptions. Priority wildlife species include Threatened and Endangered species and their habitat, but not game species. Actions are proposed to protect water quality and quantity and additional management emphasis is given to protection and enhancement of riparian areas. The protection of cultural resources will be emphasized before any area is used.

Alternative C (Production Oriented)

This alternative provides more emphasis than Alternative A or B to use and develop public lands. Fewer areas are managed to protect natural and cultural resources and specific prescriptions are less restrictive to use and development activities. While Areas of Critical Environmental Concern are still designated, they are generally smaller and less restrictive on other uses. Protection and enhancement of riparian areas and Threatened and Endangered wildlife species are emphasized as are scientific use and recreational/interpretive development of cultural resources. Most of the planning area is open to off-highway vehicles.

Alternative D (No Action or Current Management)

This alternative continues implementation of the current land use plans. The allocation of lands and resources would remain unchanged. The analysis of the impacts of implementing Alternative D provides a basis for comparing the effects of the other three alternatives.

Environmental Consequences

The environmental consequences of implementing each alternative are analyzed in this Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement. The level of detail of the analysis for each element of the environment varies with the degree of anticipated impact or benefit. The term impact refers to an adverse effect whereas the term benefit refers to a beneficial effect. The planning team concluded that no significant impacts or benefits would occur to topography, air or climate with the implementation of any alternative.

Alternative A (Preferred Alternative)

The selection of this alternative would give moderate to high benefits to paleontological and cultural resources through the protection measures provided by Area of Critical Environmental Concern management. Elsewhere, the construction of Timber Draw detention dam would cause high impacts to archaeological sites within portions of the project area, and would require intensive mitigation prior to construction.

Area of Critical Environmental Concern management would provide moderate benefits to wildlife habitat and high benefits to riparian vegetation through implementation of management prescriptions. Restrictions on off-highway vehicle use and mining and mineral leasing activities would also have increased benefits for wildlife habitat by minimizing disturbance of wildlife and their habitat.

Restrictions on mining, mineral leasing activities and off-highway vehicle use would provide some benefits to soil and water quality by reducing surface disturbing activities. Construction or repair of detention dams would have a moderate benefit to soil retention in the San Simon River channel and the Bear Springs Flat area. Upland vegetation would receive some benefits from land treatments and restrictions on off-highway vehicle use.

Mineral entry withdrawals, no surface occupancy stipulations and restrictions on mineral material sales would have a minor adverse impact on segments of the local economy dealing with minerals extraction and exploration.

Alternative B (Protection Oriented)

Because the theme of this alternative stresses management and protection of resources, its implementation would provide high benefits to paleontological resources by protecting known fossil deposits. Moderate benefits would be gained for wildlife habitat, riparian vegetation, cultural resources and soils because of the protective measures described for the various actions. Upland vegetation would receive some benefits. The construction of Timber Draw detention dam would cause high impacts to archaeological sites in part of the project area. Low socio-economic impacts would result from mineral restrictions.

Alternative C (Production Oriented)

Management of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern would provide moderate benefits to riparian vegetation and cultural and paleontological resources. Off-highway vehicle use, however, would cause moderate impacts to riparian areas, wildlife habitat and cultural and paleontological resources due to disturbance caused by vehicles. The construction of Timber Draw detention dam would result in high impacts to archaeological sites but moderate benefits to soils by regrading a highly eroded area.

Mineral entry withdrawals, no surface occupancy stipulations for mineral leasing and restrictions on mineral material sales would provide low benefits to riparian vegetation, wildlife and their habitat and cultural and paleontological resources through reductions of surface disturbing activities.

That portion of the local economy providing goods and services for off-highway vehicle users would receive some increased benefits from the implementation of this alternative through increased opportunities created by an expanded use area. The mineral industry and that part of the local economy providing goods and services to primitive recreation users would suffer a low impact due to decreased opportunities.

Alternative D (No Action/Current Management)

Continuation of current management practices would provide some benefits to water resources by controlling Off-Highway Vehicle activity that causes soil erosion and sedimentation of streams and rivers. This alternative would also provide moderate benefits to soil, wildlife habitat, riparian vegetation and cultural and paleontological resources by designation of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern. The construction of Timber Draw detention dam would result in high impacts to archaeological sites in the project area.

Mining and mineral leasing restrictions would cause some impacts to the economy. Designation of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern would provide some benefits to the economy of local tourism industries.

Mitigating Measures

No specific mitigating measures have been identified in this Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement that would reduce the anticipated impacts of implementing the Preferred Alternative. Mitigation will be incorporated when BLM begins implementing the specific actions identified in the Resource Management Plan. At that time, an environmental assessment will be prepared to analyze the specific impacts of each project and identify any needed mitigating measures to deal with those impacts.

Abbreviations

Abbreviations have been limited to a few which are found in some of the tables and in the headings on some of the maps. Those are defined below.

ACEC Area of Critical Environmental Concern

NNL National Natural Landmark

NSO No Surface Occupancy

OHV Off-Highway Vehicle

ONA Outstanding Natural Area

RNA Research Natural Area

RW Right-of-Way

T&E Threatened and Endangered

VRM Visual Resource Management