

CHAPTER 1.0

INTRODUCTION

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Yuma Field Office (YFO) is revising the *Resource Management Plan* (RMP) for the YFO planning area (hereafter planning area). The revised RMP will direct management of Federal surface and mineral estate managed by the YFO within Yuma, La Paz, and Maricopa counties in Arizona, and portions of Imperial and Riverside counties in California. The planning area encompasses over 1.3 million acres along the lower Colorado River in southwest Arizona and southeast California, and extends eastward into Maricopa County in Arizona (Map 1-1).

In accordance with BLM's planning regulations at 43 *Code of Federal Regulations* [CFR] Part 1600, and in fulfillment of the BLM's obligations under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), the BLM is preparing this *Environmental Impact Statement* (EIS) to analyze the effects of BLM's Proposed Plan and a reasonable range of alternatives. This document has been prepared in accordance with regulations promulgated by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) for implementing procedural provisions of NEPA (40 CFR 1500-1508) and BLM's *NEPA Handbook* (H-1790-1).

The BLM must comply with all Federal requirements and agency policies while developing a reasonable range of alternatives for an analysis of management actions for BLM-administered surface and mineral estate within the planning area. The analysis of resources and values within the planning area would permit the development of recommendations in alternatives for actions that could be taken on BLM-administered lands to enhance management of resources adjacent to and within the planning area.

1.1 PURPOSE AND NEED FOR A RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN REVISION

CEQ regulations (40 CFR 1502.13) require an EIS to "briefly specify the underlying purpose and need to which the agency is responding in proposing alternatives including the Proposed Plan." The Purpose and Need Sections of this EIS provide a context and framework for establishing and evaluating the reasonable range of alternatives described in Chapter 2.

1.1.1 PURPOSE

The purpose of this RMP is to establish management directions for the balanced uses of resources within the planning area, including: rangeland, wildlife, wilderness, recreation, cultural resources, and other natural, scenic, scientific, and historical values. There are three existing RMPs (with amendments) which currently provide for the administration and management of the resources within the planning area. This RMP will consolidate these three plans and will guide the overall management of activities, as well as the use and protection of BLM-administered

resources within the planning area. Subsequent site-specific and more detailed planning will take place for certain geographic areas and resources within the planning area in conformance with this RMP. The RMP will create a framework for future planning and decision making.

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976, as amended (43 *United States Code* [U.S.C.] 1711), requires BLM “to develop, maintain, and, when appropriate, revise land use plans” (43 U.S.C. 1712 [a]). FLPMA directs BLM to manage the public lands and their various resource values for multiple use and sustained yield to ensure that they are utilized in a manner that would best meet the present and future needs of the public. As required by FLPMA and current BLM policy, YFO has prepared this RMP to establish management directions for the balanced uses of such renewable and non-renewable resources as rangeland, wildlife, wilderness, recreation, cultural resources, and other natural, scenic, scientific, and historical values within the planning area.

The FLPMA’s requirement of the RMP is necessarily broad, since the RMP is a general framework document that will guide the overall management of activities within the planning area as well as the use and protection of BLM-administered resources. As is the case of any RMP, subsequent site-specific and more detailed planning will take place for certain geographic areas and resources within the planning area in conformance with this management plan.

In many cases, existing management decisions that are still effective and valid would be carried forward. In other cases, existing management decisions are outdated and inconsistent. The revised RMP would provide the YFO an opportunity to consolidate three RMPs and several plan amendments. The RMP has been developed in compliance with FLPMA and current BLM Policy as set forth in the 2005 BLM H-1601-1 Land Use Planning Handbook.

The objective of the planning effort is to produce a revised RMP that achieves the following:

- Creates a common vision for the planning area;
- Updates existing management decisions for BLM-administered land within the planning area;
- Addresses new uses of public land that have occurred since the 1986 and 1987 Records of Decision (ROD) for the Yuma District RMP, associated amendments, and management/activity plans were implemented;
- Analyzes and incorporates data related to use of public lands that have become available since the 1987 *Yuma District RMP*, associated amendments, and management/activity plans were implemented;
- Addresses land incorporated into the planning area from the Lower Gila South and Lower Gila North planning areas; and
- Provides forward-looking, cohesive, and consistent land management through collaboration with neighboring communities, general public, interested groups, and all levels of government. Collaborators/partners would be involved in RMP implementation as well as RMP development.

1.1.2 NEED

This RMP is needed to respond to the changed conditions and circumstances which have occurred in the planning area and which may not have been previously addressed under current management, as set forth in the *Yuma District RMP*, as amended (United States Department of the Interior [USDOI BLM] 1987a); the *Lower Gila South RMP*, as amended (USDOI BLM 1988a), and the *Lower Gila North Management Framework Plan*, as amended (USDOI BLM 1983). Those portions of existing management which are responsive to changed conditions and circumstances will be carried forward in the present plan.

A *Land Use Plan* (LUP) Evaluation for the planning area was completed in December 2000. The evaluation concluded that a majority of RMP decisions were either being implemented or had been implemented. Resources within the planning area administered by the BLM are currently managed under three LUPs and their nine amendments.

Additional conditions and changing circumstances which relate to the management of BLM resources within the planning area were considered. These include:

- Population growth and changing demographics;
- Increased and conflicting demands on the planning area's resources and resource uses;
- Increased complexity of resource management issues; and
- Increased off-highway vehicle (OHV) use on public lands.

This Proposed RMP/Final EIS (PRMP/FEIS) comprehensively evaluates these issues to balance resource uses in a way that satisfies both public demand and FLPMA's requirements of multiple-use and sustained yield approach for natural resource management.

1.2 PLANNING AREA

The planning area extends northward along the lower Colorado River from the United States of America (U.S.)–United Mexican States (Mexico) border at San Luis, Arizona, to north of Blythe, California, and Ehrenberg, Arizona. The eastern boundary extends past the eastern side of the Eagletail Mountains Wilderness Area in Maricopa County and south to the northern boundary of the Barry M. Goldwater Range (BMGR). The western boundary generally parallels the Colorado River to the west and includes land in California (see Map 1-1).

The YFO manages a diverse combination of land and resources. The lower Colorado River is a destination for visitors seeking camping, year-round water-related recreation, and off-highway travel. On average, 250,000 winter visitors use the La Posa Long-Term Visitor Area (LTVA) and the five surrounding 14-day campgrounds on an annual basis. Within the planning area there are four Wilderness Areas in Arizona and portions of four other Wilderness Areas in California. The YFO maintains an active lands and realty program to oversee rights-of-way (ROWs) for major corridors connecting energy-rich states such as Texas, Wyoming, and New Mexico to California, through Arizona. The planning area encompasses lands within five counties: three in Arizona (La Paz, Maricopa, and Yuma) and two in California (Imperial and Riverside). RMP-related impacts

are most likely to occur in Yuma and La Paz counties, where approximately 95 percent of the planning area lands are located.

Adjacent land jurisdictions that require management coordination in this RMP include Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD), Arizona State Lands, Luke Air Force–BMGR, BLM Field Offices (Lake Havasu, Lower Sonoran, and El Centro), Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), Cibola National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), Cocopah Indian Reservation, Colorado River Indian Tribes, Fort Yuma–Quechan Indian Reservation, Imperial NWR, Kofa NWR, Marine Corps Air Station–Yuma (MCAS–Yuma), U.S. Army Yuma Proving Ground (YPG), and private land including regional irrigation districts.

Where urban interface issues are present, YFO collaborates with cities and towns adjoining public land including the City of Yuma and Town of Quartzsite; Arizona communities of San Luis, Somerton, Dateland, Wellton, Ehrenberg, and Hyder; and California communities of Blythe and Palo Verde, all of which have worked with YFO on various issues.

1.2.1 BUREAU OF RECLAMATION PROJECT LANDS

Several hundred thousand acres of land in the planning area are withdrawn by Reclamation to accommodate Boulder Canyon and related projects from Davis Dam to Mexico. These Reclamation-withdrawn or -acquired lands that constitute a corridor along the lower Colorado River as identified in the Lower Colorado River Land Use Plan of 1964 are jointly managed by Reclamation and BLM for specific purposes as outlined by 613 *Departmental Manual* (DM 613) 1.1 and the joint *Memorandum of Understanding* (MOU) of July 15, 1991.

The Secretary of the Interior has assigned recreation and wildlife management responsibilities on Reclamation-withdrawn lands to the BLM. These activities are conducted in coordination with Reclamation, and the provisions of this arrangement are found in DM 613 1.1. The Secretary of the Interior, acting through Reclamation, retains the role of Watermaster for the lower Colorado River and for operation of the various dams, river works, and irrigation project facilities authorized by Congress.

BLM has the responsibility to maximize opportunities for recreation, wildlife, and other purposes not specified by Reclamation. Reclamation retains the responsibility for operation and maintenance of works and facilities, and environmental mitigation and enhancement associated with its mission of water delivery on the lower Colorado River. Throughout the planning process, YFO has coordinated with Reclamation to ensure that the PRMP/FEIS does not propose planning decisions that would conflict with existing and planned Reclamation project activities. The PRMP/FEIS will take Reclamation projects and plans into account when preparing the ROD for signature.

1.2.2 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF PLANNING AREA

The Lower Colorado River Land Use Office (Land Use Office) was established in Yuma by the USDOJ in 1961 by Secretarial Order 2854. The Lower Colorado River Land Use Plan was published in 1964 by the DOI for 265 river miles between Davis Dam and the International Boundary. This multi-jurisdictional plan addresses trespass and water-based recreation issues to

resolve illegal occupancy including trailer homes, shacks, commercial resorts, and agricultural development.

In December 1968, the Land Use Office was assigned to the BLM to implement the plan. The Yuma District Office was established on August 23, 1972. The district included Reclamation-withdrawn lands of the Land Use Office along the lower Colorado River corridor and large areas of public land to the east in Arizona. Management issues on public lands included recreation, grazing, mining, wildlife, and realty actions.

In October of 1997, through a reorganization of BLM lands within the State of Arizona, the Yuma District was split into the Yuma and Lake Havasu field offices. The YFO planning area expanded to manage 1.3 million acres, including portions of the Lower Gila North and South planning areas. In 2005, Arizona BLM reorganized to form a three-tiered organization composed of field offices, districts, and the Arizona State Office. The Colorado River District was formed, which includes the Yuma, Lake Havasu, and Kingman field offices. Planning area boundaries remained the same for each field office.

A block of BLM-administered land on U.S. Highway 95 (Highway 95) about 10 miles north of the Town of Quartzsite was transferred to the State Land Trust 30 years ago at the request of the Governor of Arizona and under the direction of the Secretary of the Interior to enable the State Land Department to benefit from future growth in the Colorado River area. The block of land was transferred to the State Land Department after a special study by BLM, the State Land Department, and other Federal and State agencies in 1972. The study determined that this, along with several other blocks of BLM-administered lands along the lower Colorado River in Arizona, should be transferred to State Land Trust's ownership.

1.3 PLANNING PROCESS

1.3.1 STEPS IN THE PROCESS

The BLM uses a multi-step process when developing a LUP. Some of the steps may occur concurrently. Some situations may require the manager to supplement previous work as additional information becomes available. These steps have been fully integrated with the NEPA process and the CEQ guidelines, as depicted in Figure 1-1, and described below.

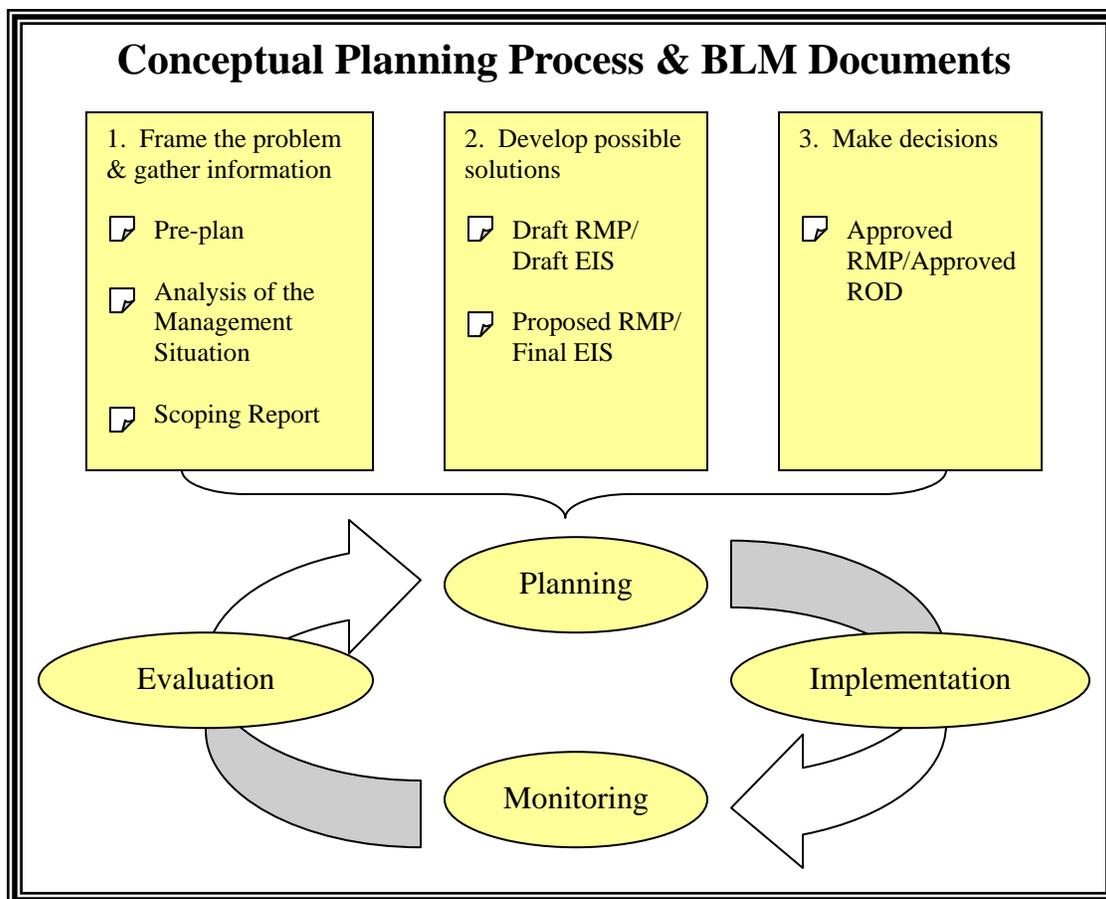


Figure 1-1

A. IDENTIFICATION OF ISSUES

- Issue Notice of Intent (NOI) to begin the scoping process to identify issues and develop planning criteria and to begin public participation.
- Identify issues. This sets the tone and scope for the entire planning process and is done with full public participation.

B. DEVELOP PLANNING CRITERIA

- Establish constraints and guides, and determine what will or will not be done or considered during the planning process.
- Produce a scoping report for public review, including final planning criteria.

C. INVENTORY DATA AND INFORMATION COLLECTION

- Collect an inventory of data and information, which is an ongoing activity and not governed solely by the planning process.

D. ANALYZE THE MANAGEMENT SITUATION

- Gather information on the current management situation. Describe pertinent physical and biological characteristics and evaluate the capability and condition of the resources.

E. FORMULATE ALTERNATIVES

- Alternative formulation is the step where the success of the planning effort hinges on clearly identified reasonable alternatives.

F. ESTIMATE EFFECTS OF ALTERNATIVES

- Estimate the impact or effects of each alternative on the environment and management situation.

G. SELECT PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

- Select the Preferred Alternative, which in the judgment of management best resolves the planning issues and promotes balanced multiple use objectives.
- Issue a Notice of Availability (NOA) of *Draft RMP/Draft EIS* (DRMP/DEIS) for the 90-day public review.

H. SELECT THE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

- Review and analyze public comments, opinions, suggestions, and recommendations and use the important information/data in preparing the PRMP/FEIS.
- Issue a NOA of PRMP/FEIS for the 30-day protest period, concurrent with the 60-day Governor's review.
- Issue a NOA for the *ROD/Approved Plan* after protests are resolved.

I. TIERING TO THE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

- Tiering is the incorporation by reference of the content of previous plans into future implementation level project planning. The YFO will tier project-specific NEPA documents to this RMP after the ROD is signed.
- If a proposed project or site-specific action does not conform to or achieve consistency with the terms, conditions, and decisions in the approved RMP, the YFO may deny the proposal or prepare an RMP amendment in the form of an Environmental Assessment (EA) or EIS.

1.3.2 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The RMP provides numerous opportunities for the public to be involved in the process.

- Public scoping meetings are initially held to assist the BLM in assessing the scope of the RMP proposed actions and alternatives to be considered.

- Public meetings are held once the DRMP/DEIS is released to garner public comments on the draft.
- A public protest period is held after the PRMP/FEIS is finished to allow for public input before the decisions are finalized in the ROD/Approved Plan.

Public participation is essential in making informed decisions. BLM believes that extensive public involvement improves communication, develops enhanced understanding of different perspectives, and identifies solutions to issues and problems.

In addition to the public, there are numerous individuals within BLM and other Federal agencies who take an active role in the planning process. A wide variety of individuals both internal and external to BLM participate in the planning process. While most of the work occurs at the Field Office level, many individuals at higher levels of the organization are involved in the planning process as well.

1.4 PLANNING CRITERIA AND LEGISLATIVE CONSTRAINTS

The BLM planning regulations (43 CFR 1610.4-2) require the development of planning criteria to guide preparation of the RMP. Planning criteria are the constraints or ground rules that guide and direct plan preparation. They ensure that the plan is tailored to the identified issues, and that unnecessary data collection and analyses are avoided. Planning criteria are based on applicable laws and regulations, agency guidance, the result of consultation and coordination with the public, other Federal, State, and local agencies, and Native American tribes.

1.4.1 GENERAL PLANNING CRITERIA

The following criteria were developed and distributed to all interested parties collaborating in the planning process.

- The plan would be completed in compliance with FLPMA, the Endangered Species Act (ESA), NEPA, and all other relevant Federal laws and Executive Orders (EOs) (including wilderness legislation) and management policies of the BLM.
- The plan would result in determinations as required by special program- and resource-specific guidance detailed in Appendix C of the BLM's Land Use Planning Handbook (H-1601-1).
- Planning decisions from the existing RMP that remain valid would be carried forward into the plan. Relevant decisions and alternatives proposed in previous studies of the planning area would be brought forward into the plan for reassessment.
- The planning team would work collaboratively with the State of Arizona, Yuma, La Paz, Imperial, Riverside, and Maricopa counties, Tribal governments, municipal governments, other Federal agencies, the Resource Advisory Council, and all other interested groups, agencies, and individuals. Decisions in the plan would strive to be compatible with existing plans and policies of adjacent local, State, Tribal, and Federal agencies, and consistent with

Federal laws and regulations as long as the decisions are in conformance with legal mandates on management of public lands.

- Native American Tribal consultations would be conducted in accordance with policy. Tribal concerns would be given due consideration.
- Coordination would occur with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) through the Section 7 consultation process to protect and enhance known habitat for threatened and endangered species and assist in the recovery of listed species to maintain biological diversity within the planning area. Special status species would be reviewed, including species proposed for listing under the ESA, throughout the planning area to conserve habitat through inventory, monitoring, and adoption of conservation measures needed to curtail listing.
- Coordination would occur with the Arizona and California State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPOs) throughout the planning process.
- The plan would recognize the States' responsibilities to manage wildlife populations, including uses such as hunting and fishing, within the planning area.
- The plan would establish new guidance and identify existing guidance upon which the YFO would rely in managing public lands within the planning area.
- The PRMP/FEIS would apply the following existing plans, plan amendments, and their decisions: *Standards for Rangeland Health* (USDOI BLM 1997a) as Land Health Standards applicable to all resources and activities, *Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management* (USDOI BLM 1997a), and *Proposed Northern and Eastern Colorado Desert Coordinated Management Plan* (USDOI BLM 2002a).
- The PRMP/FEIS would carry forward existing Wilderness Areas; national trails; Back Country Byways; wild and scenic river suitability recommendations; and, as appropriate, existing Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs).
- Geospatial data would be automated within a Geographic Information System (GIS) to facilitate discussions of the affected environment, alternative formulation, analysis of environmental consequences, and display of results.
- Resource allocations would be reasonable, achievable, supported by technology, and within budgetary constraints. Resource allocations would also be consistent with current BLM policy.
- The lifestyles and concerns of area residents would be recognized in the plan.
- Under the Clean Air Act (CAA), BLM-administered lands were given a Class II air quality classification unless reclassified by the states of California and Arizona. This classification allows moderate deterioration associated with moderate well-controlled industrial and population growth. Actions within the Yuma County PM₁₀ non-attainment area would be assessed for conformance with air quality standards.
- The public would be protected from known safety hazards of abandoned mine lands (AML₁) and hazardous materials sites within the planning area. As identified in the draft Instruction Memorandum titled *Mitigating and Remediating Physical Safety Hazards at Abandoned Mine Land Sites*, the YFO would address closure or signage of all AML₁ sites close to Recreation Information Management System sites. Closures and signage would include temporary and remedial measures.
- YFO would incorporate the Discovery Process®, developed by James Kent and Associates,

to detect emerging issues affecting public land by engaging local citizens in the land use planning process.

1.4.2 PROGRAM-SPECIFIC PLANNING CRITERIA

A. RIPARIAN AREAS, FLOODPLAINS, AND WETLANDS

Riparian areas, floodplains, and wetlands would be managed to protect, improve, and restore their natural functions to benefit water storage, groundwater recharge, water quality, and fish and wildlife values. All management practices would be designed to maintain or improve the integrity of these high priority values, in accordance with the Clean Water Act (CWA), EO 11988 (Floodplain Management), and *Arizona's Standards for Rangeland Health*. Additional criteria are found in the *Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program* (LCR MSCP), priority wildlife habitat designations, existing activity plans, and the current *Lower Colorado River Fire Management Plan*.

B. WATER QUALITY

Section 319 of the CWA obligates Federal agencies to be consistent with *State Nonpoint Source Management Program Plans* and relevant water quality standards. Section 313 requires compliance with State Water Quality Standards. YFO would coordinate with the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) regarding their Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) program and other relevant water quality programs. YFO would incorporate applicable best management practices (BMPs) or other conservation measures for specific programs and activities into the RMP. Water quality would be maintained or improved in accordance with State and Federal standards.

C. SOIL

Soils would be managed to protect long-term productivity. BMPs would be incorporated into other programs to minimize soil erosion and compaction resulting from management actions.

D. VEGETATION

Vegetation would be managed to achieve desired plant communities (considering the ecological site potential) that provide for: biodiversity; protection and restoration of native species; and non-consumptive uses including plant protection (fuel collection), visual quality, and watershed protection. The desired plant communities would provide wildlife habitat, watershed protection and stability, and forage for livestock and wildlife. Water quality would be given priority in all vegetation management decisions.

There are several treatment methods and standard operating procedures that may be used in a vegetation treatment program. BLM policies and guidance for public land treatments would be followed in implementing all treatment methods. Many guidelines are provided in Manual Section (MS) 1740, *BLM Arizona's Standards for Rangeland Health*, programmatic documents such as *BLM's Environmental Impact Statement for Vegetation Treatments, Watersheds and Wildlife Habitats on Public Lands Administered by the BLM in the Western United States*,

Including Alaska (USDOI BLM 1991), and other general and specific program policies, procedures, and standards pertinent to implementation of renewable resource improvements.

E. FISH AND WILDLIFE

Fish and wildlife habitat would be managed to maintain and/or improve the existing habitats including designated priority wildlife habitat. Management actions should minimize the extent of disturbance to fish and wildlife habitat. Vegetation management practices would be considered to achieve desired future conditions.

F. THREATENED, ENDANGERED, AND SPECIAL STATUS SPECIES

Management actions authorized, funded or implemented by BLM would be implemented not to jeopardize the continued existence of federally listed threatened or endangered plant or animal species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat. Candidate species, species proposed for Federal listing, and BLM and State sensitive species would be given equal consideration as listed species. The intent would be to recover listed species and maintain healthy populations of all other species and therefore avoid the need for further Federal listing. As an agency operating within the DOI, the BLM would adhere to the LCR MSCP, approved by Secretary Gale Norton on April 5, 2005.

G. WILDLAND FIRE

Fire management prescriptions would be consistent with the Federal Wildland Fire Policy, the National Fire Plan, and the Lower Colorado River Fire Management Plan. Fire suppression would be accomplished with the least amount of surface disturbance to protect significant cultural or paleontological values. Public lands and resources affected by fire would be rehabilitated in accordance with the multiple use objectives identified for the affected area, subject to BLM policies and available funding.

H. CULTURAL RESOURCES

Management of cultural resources is an integrated system of identifying and evaluating cultural resources, deciding on their appropriate uses, and administering them accordingly, both on public lands and on other lands where BLM decisions could affect cultural resources. All management for cultural resources in this plan would comply with the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, as amended; BLM *Manual* 8100; and other applicable cultural resource laws, regulations, EOs, guidance, and policy. Areas with high cultural resource sensitivity would be evaluated for the new Special Cultural Resource Management Area (SCRMA) allocation. The plan would ensure that management measures are implemented in a manner that protects and provides access to sacred places in accordance with the American Indian Religious Freedom Act and EO 13007.

I. PALEONTOLOGICAL RESOURCES

This plan would develop appropriate management strategies that are based upon the best scientific information available. Management of paleontological resources would emphasize: the non-renewable nature of fossils; their usefulness in deciphering ancient and modern ecosystems; the public benefits and public expectations arising from their scientific, recreational, and educational values; the BLM's interest in the continued advancement of the science of paleontology; and the importance of minimizing resource use conflicts within a multiple use framework.

J. VISUAL RESOURCES

Visual Resource Management (VRM) classification would be conducted to address the public's concerns about open space and natural vistas. Some areas may be subject to special measures to protect resources or reduce conflicts among uses.

K. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

The YFO would review lands to be managed to maintain wilderness characteristics. The YFO has the authority to address lands with wilderness characteristics and describe protective management prescriptions in the RMP. In keeping with the public involvement process that is part of all land use planning efforts, the YFO would be committed to considering public input regarding lands to be managed to maintain wilderness characteristics. As appropriate, the YFO would identify lands to be managed to maintain wilderness characteristics.

L. LIVESTOCK GRAZING

Livestock grazing would be managed through existing laws, regulations, and policies. The plans would incorporate the statewide standards and guidelines established by the Arizona BLM State Director and approved by the Secretary of the Interior. They would include a strategy for ensuring that proper grazing practices are followed, while preserving habitats for sensitive plant and wildlife species. Appropriate BMPs would be followed to protect rangeland resources and, where necessary, to mitigate any conflicts with other uses and values. Administrative actions to assure compliance with existing permit/lease requirements, to modify permits and leases, to monitor and supervise grazing use, and to remedy unauthorized grazing use would continue.

M. MINERALS

Minerals management would be consistent with FLPMA and existing policy and regulation including the Mining and Minerals Policy Act of 1970, Section 102(a)(12) of FLPMA, the National Materials and Minerals Policy, Research and Development Act of 1980, and current BLM Mineral Resources Policy. Lands open to salable, leasable, and locatable minerals would be identified in the plan. Areas within the planning area may also be subject to constraints to surface use. Areas proposed to be closed to mineral entry would continue to be subject to valid existing rights for mining claims, leases, and salable permits that currently exist within these areas.

N. RECREATION

Existing designated recreation sites would be carried forward and evaluated for additional facilities. Other public lands would also be evaluated for their suitability for recreational development.

O. TRANSPORTATION

Motorized and other access on the public lands in the planning area would be managed in accordance with existing law, EOs, proclamation, regulation, and policy. OHV use areas would be designated as open, limited, and closed designations. A network of roads and trails would be designated for all limited areas at least five years after the ROD is signed.

P. LANDS AND REALTY

All public lands would be retained in Federal ownership, unless determined that disposal of a particular parcel(s) would serve the public interest. Lands may be identified for withdrawal, disposal by sale, or exchange. Decisions to acquire private lands from willing sellers would be based on public benefits, management considerations, and public access needs. Specific actions to implement RMP land tenure decisions would include full public participation. There would be no net loss of public ownership along the lower Colorado River.

Q. RIGHT-OF-WAY CORRIDORS

Public lands would generally be available for transportation and utility ROWs subject to NEPA evaluation, except where specifically prohibited by law or regulation or in areas specifically identified for avoidance and exclusion to protect significant resource values. ROW Corridors would avoid areas of designation such as priority wildlife habitat, special status species management areas, ACECs, Wilderness Areas, and cultural areas.

R. AREAS OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN

As required by FLPMA, priority shall be given to the designation and protection of ACECs. The RMP would identify and evaluate new ACEC proposals to determine if special management attention is needed to protect and prevent irreparable damage to important historic, cultural, and scenic values; fish or wildlife resources; or other natural systems or processes; or to protect human life and safety from natural hazards. The plan would also re-evaluate the existing Big Marias and Gila River Cultural Area ACECs, to reassess needs for special management attention and re-determine appropriate acreages. Management prescriptions would be developed in the plan to guide management of ACEC proposals and to protect key relevant and important values. The plan may prescribe future ACEC plans or master interpretive plans for designated ACECs if necessary.

S. WILDERNESS AREAS

Wilderness Areas are designated by Congress and are managed according to the Wilderness Act of 1964, the Arizona Desert Wilderness Act of 1990, the California Desert Protection Act of

1994, regulations for wilderness management at 43 CFR 6300, BLM *Manuals* 8560 and 8561, BLM *Handbook* H-8560-1, and *Wilderness Management Plans*. The RMP would not address reducing or eliminating existing Wilderness Areas, changing existing wilderness boundaries, or allowing motor vehicle or other use of mechanical transportation in any Wilderness Areas not already authorized. Also consistent with policy, the YFO would not establish new Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs), manage any lands not already established as WSAs prior to April 2003 under the FLPMA Section 603 non-impairment standard, or report such areas to Congress.

T. HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

Management actions would consider BMPs which protect the public to the greatest extent through existing policies.

U. SOCIOECONOMICS

Management actions would be evaluated for socioeconomic impacts by using the “Economic Profile System” and other tools such as IMPLAN.

V. ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

The lifestyles of low-income and minority populations, and potential impacts to these residents would be considered in the RMP.

X. COORDINATED PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

YFO would collaborate with adjacent Federal, State, Tribal, city, and county governments.

1.5 PUBLIC SCOPING ISSUES

To allow an early and open process for determining the scope of issues and concerns related to preparation of the DRMP/DEIS (40 CFR 1510.7), a public scoping period was provided by BLM. A NOI to prepare the YFO DRMP/DEIS was published in the *Federal Register* on March 30, 2004 (Volume 69, Number 61, Pages 16608-16609 [AZ 050-04-1610-DO; 1610]). Publication of this notice in the *Federal Register* initiated a 90-day public scoping period for the DRMP/DEIS that ended on June 30, 2004.

YFO contacted Federal, State, county, and local agencies to initiate coordination and collaboration efforts. Agencies received postcards and were invited to comment as part of the initial scoping process and during individual agency meetings with YFO management staff. The YFO mailed informational postcards to approximately 1,200 individuals and organizations announcing its intent to prepare a DRMP/DEIS for BLM-administered public lands in the planning area. Public scoping meetings were held by the YFO in Yuma, Quartzsite, and Roll, Arizona, and Blythe, California on June 1 through 4, 2004. Approximately 150 to 210 persons attended the public scoping meetings. A total of 207 responses identifying 626 issues were received during the comment period. Copies of all project notices and comment forms distributed during the scoping period are contained in the *Final Scoping Report* (USDOI BLM 2004a).

Public comments addressed a variety of issues and concerns regarding resources and resource uses, as well as management considerations. A summary of the most common public comments, issues, and management concerns follows. A listing of the issues, rationale for dismissal, and planning criteria are contained in Appendix 1-A within this document.

1.5.1 ISSUES ADDRESSED IN THIS PRMP/FEIS

The major emphasis and considerations within this PRMP/FEIS which were identified by the public scoping process include:

- Special Designations;
- Fish and Wildlife Management;
- Recreation Management;
- Transportation Management;
- Lands to be Managed to Maintain Wilderness Characteristics; and
- Lands and Realty.

A. SPECIAL DESIGNATIONS

Issues focused on the need to identify and protect new and existing special areas in general and from activities including oil/gas development, mining, OHV, grazing, and road construction in particular. ACEC designation was requested for Sonoran pronghorn and desert tortoise habitat. It was also requested that the river corridor be designated as a natural resource area rather than as a general use area.

Comments were also received in opposition to special designations (specifically Wilderness) stating that these designations benefit only those few who are fit enough to hike into the areas to enjoy them, that there should be no further designations as there is designated Wilderness available in the area, and all currently designated areas should be opened for access.

A considerable number of comments were received concerning Back Country Byway designations. Several commenters stated they would prefer that no Back Country Byways be designated in the planning area, as recreationists would be drawn to these particular areas.

B. FISH AND WILDLIFE

Fish and wildlife issues included habitat fragmentation and impacts from OHV use and development. Impacts to wildlife, specifically ground-nesting birds, and impacts to forage availability and quality from grazing were also mentioned. Several comments were received regarding water catchments, including the desire that these be managed by BLM, concern that there are not enough catchments, and concern that some catchments are sometimes empty and others fenced making them unavailable for use by all wildlife. A few comments emphasized the benefit of agriculture to wildlife for food resources and one commenter expressed concern over policies to control predators and rodents. There were also requests to provide wildlife corridors between this planning area and adjacent areas.

C. RECREATION

Many members of the public used the comment cards to inform the YFO what they felt to be the most important recreation activities on BLM-administered land. These recreation uses included hunting, OHV use, camping, rock hounding, fishing, photography, hiking, wildlife viewing, scientific research, and shooting. Comments received indicated the need to maintain a multiple-use management approach.

Other recreation comments were received regarding the need to maintain camping areas, including the LTVAs. Several comments were received requesting additional equestrian opportunities be provided, expressing a preference both for and against shooting in the area, and requesting trails be designated for specific uses. The need for additional recreational improvements and amenities were specifically mentioned for the Squaw Lake Campground and Day Use Area and the Sandy Cove Campground (Hippy Hole).

Comments also stated there should be no fees for the use of public land.

Education was also mentioned in comments. People felt the resources of the public lands provide important educational opportunities for themselves and future generations. Commenters also emphasized the importance of educating visitors about environmental stewardship of the public lands. Several comments were received about the scientific research and learning opportunities offered by the area, particularly for seed resources and geology.

D. TRAVEL MANAGEMENT

Many public comments were received concerning transportation planning and access. A frequently raised issue was access, with many users commenting that no further restrictions through road closures or Wilderness designation should occur. Another issue was the request for currently closed roads to be reopened. Other issues included: a desire for route designation to manage routes created by the lack of designation and illegal immigrants; the belief that public land should be publicly accessible; and the desire that current access should remain for future generations to enjoy the land. Other comments requested that there be no new roads established.

Issues with OHV use included damage to natural resources, wildlife, cultural resources, and existing roads; lack of designated open, closed, and limited areas; lack of signs and enforcement; and the need to limit OHV to certain or designated areas. Some OHV supporters felt that OHV is the only way to enjoy remote areas, especially for older or disabled users.

E. LANDS TO BE MANAGED TO MAINTAIN WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

The identification of lands to be managed to maintain wilderness characteristics was a frequently mentioned issue. Commenters raised issues concerning the BLM definition of wilderness characteristics and the evaluation process that was used in formulation of the alternatives. Some commenters wanted lands with wilderness characteristics identified, protected, and closed to OHV use and other land disturbing activities. Another public issue was the opposition to

managing for wilderness characteristics and the statement that managing for these resources essentially creates new wilderness in violation of Congressional intent.

F. LANDS AND REALTY

Numerous comments were received regarding land tenure and use authorizations and generally covered one of three categories: (1) general policy regarding disposal or exchange, (2) support for disposal, exchange, or lease of specific areas, and (3) agricultural use. Many commenters expressed concern over future disposals or exchanges. They requested no future disposals or exchanges or only limited ones. Some comments stated that wildlife habitat should be considered during potential land exchanges. Specific areas mentioned for disposal/exchange or leases included Harvey's Fishing Hole, Martinez Lake, area along the Colorado River, and BLM-administered land within the Quartzsite town limits. Several comments were received supporting agricultural use in the area for a variety of reasons and expressing concern over potential termination of agricultural leases.

One response discussed ROW Corridors and expressed a need for future corridors to be identified in the plan, but that there should be no amendments for future corridors. The comment also stated that existing corridors should be used instead of creating new ones.

1.5.2 ISSUES NOT ADDRESSED IN THIS PRMP/FEIS

Throughout the scoping process, issues were raised by the public that were either not within the jurisdiction of BLM or that could be dealt with administratively and would not require a planning decision. A full discussion of these issues is included in the scoping report. Issues not addressed in this PRMP/FEIS are summarized below by topic.

- Airspace—Airspace over public land is managed by other jurisdictions.
- Fish and Wildlife—Wildlife population management is under the authority of AGFD and CDFG.
- Recreation—The use of firearms on developed recreation sites and areas is addressed through 43 CFR 8365.2-5(a). Shooting events would be managed through the Special Recreation Permit (SRP) process. Recreational shooting restrictions would be established as warranted through the development of supplementary rules according to the guidelines set forth in 43 CFR 8365.1-6. Recreation fees are addressed in the YFO Recreation and Visitor Services Business Plan.
- Lands and Realty—Land authorizations in the Martinez Lake area of the lower Colorado River are not within the jurisdiction of BLM.
- Transportation—A travel management plan which would include route designations would be completed within five years of the ROD/Approved Plan.

1.5.3 LAWS AND REGULATIONS

The BLM planning process is governed by FLPMA and the BLM Planning Regulations in 43 CFR Part 1600. LUPs ensure that public land is 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, public land must be managed in a manner that: protects the quality of scientific, scenic, historical, ecological, environmental, air and atmospheric, water resource, and archaeological values; that, where appropriate, would preserve and protect certain public land in their natural condition; that would provide food and habitat for fish, wildlife, and domestic animals; and that would provide for outdoor recreation and human occupancy and use by encouraging collaboration and public participation throughout the planning process. In addition, public land must be managed in a manner that recognizes the nation's need for domestic sources of minerals, food, timber, and fiber from public land. LUPs 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 program-specific guidance.

In addition to FLPMA, NEPA, and their associated regulations, BLM must comply with the mandate and intent of all Federal laws (and any applicable regulations) and EOs that apply to BLM-administered lands and resources in the planning area. The PRMP/FEIS process is intended to develop LUP decisions that resolve such conflicts and meet the multiple use and sustained yield mandate of FLPMA. Appendix 1-B provides a listing of applicable laws, regulations, and EOs that apply to BLM-administered land and resources in the planning area.

1.6 COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

The YFO has utilized a collaborative process to work with all other interested entities and individuals to address common needs and goals within the planning area. The effort involved early identification of the most appropriate, efficient, and productive type of working relationships to achieve meaningful results in land use planning initiatives. The YFO's primary objectives of the proposed collaboration process include providing a comprehensive forum for public involvement to achieve defensible decisions for the RMP. The YFO follows 40 CFR 1501.6 CEQ guidelines on roles of lead and cooperating agencies, as discussed in *A Desk Guide to Cooperating Agency Relationships* (USDO I BLM 2005a). This desk guide identifies BLM's regulations for developing the cooperating agency relationship, where "Cooperating Agencies expect and deserve to be given a significant role in shaping plans and environmental analyses—not merely commenting on them—commensurate with their available time and knowledge" (USDO I BLM 2005a). Several CFR sections are applicable to the BLM/cooperating agency relationship:

- "The Field Manager will prepare criteria to guide development of the resource management plan to ensure...[i]t is tailored to the issues previously identified.... Planning criteria will generally be based upon applicable law, Director and State Director guidance, the results of public participation, and coordination with any cooperating agencies and other Federal agencies, State and local governments, and federally recognized Indian tribes." (43 CFR 1610.4-2);

- “The Field Manager, in collaboration with any cooperating agencies, will arrange for resource, environmental, social, economic, and institutional data and information to be collected, or assembled if already available.” (43 CFR 1610.4-3); and
- “At the direction of the Field Manager, in collaboration with any cooperating agencies, BLM will consider all reasonable alternatives and develop several complete alternatives for detailed study. Nonetheless, the decision to designate alternatives for further development and analysis remains the exclusive responsibility of the BLM.” (43 CFR 1610.4-5).

Public meetings in March 2005 were held to gain public input for Alternative Development (March 7, Quartzsite; March 8, Yuma; March 9, Wellton; and March 10, Blythe). Public meetings in July 2005 were conducted for Preliminary Alternatives (July 25, Wellton; July 26, Quartzsite and Blythe; July 27, Yuma; and July 28, Tucson). Information gathered by the YFO at these public meetings has been incorporated into this PRMP/FEIS.

Additionally, YFO met individually with local offices of several Yuma area agencies to discuss the DRMP/DEIS and to explain the statewide organizational change that BLM-Arizona is undergoing. The YFO staff distributed DRMP/DEIS materials and conducted presentations when requested. The YFO facilitated discussions with the agencies, which generated issues and concerns that are documented in the *Final Scoping Report* (USDO I BLM 2004a) on file at the YFO. Meetings with area agencies were conducted during June, July, and August 2004.

The YFO continues to coordinate and consult with the Arizona and California SHPOs concerning cultural resources within the planning area.

1.6.1 COOPERATING AGENCIES

Numerous Federal, State, and local agencies and Tribal interests were identified by the YFO at the outset of the RMP/EIS effort, and these entities were contacted in writing to determine their interest in serving as cooperators on this PRMP/FEIS. As a part of initiating multiple planning efforts throughout the state, YFO compiled a list of Federal, State, county, and local agencies and Native American tribes that may have a relevant interest in the planning process. Letters were sent to more than 200 agencies to introduce the various RMP/EIS processes within the State of Arizona, identify the upcoming data gathering efforts, and offer an opportunity to become a cooperating agency in the planning effort. An initial cooperating agency meeting was held at the BLM Arizona State Office on October 30, 2002. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss BLM’s planning process, collaborative planning, and the meaning and responsibilities of cooperating agencies. The opportunity for involvement in BLM’s planning process without becoming a cooperating agency was also discussed. BLM emphasized the goal was to encourage involvement by all interested parties using whatever methods the parties preferred.

In January of 2005, the YFO held a cooperating agency invitation/information meeting. Cooperating agency meetings for the YFO RMP/EIS were conducted in Yuma on June 8, July 20, September 14, and December 13–14, 2005, and on January 12 and February 22, 2006. The June 8, 2005 cooperating agency meeting included an overview of the BLM cooperating agency status, a review of MOUs, milestones and schedules, and development of issues/alternatives. The July 20, 2005 cooperating agency meeting included discussion of preliminary alternatives. The September 14, 2005 cooperating agency meeting included discussion of alternatives and the

internal BLM development of a Proposed Plan for the YFO DRMP/DEIS. The December 13 and 14, 2005, cooperating agency meeting included discussions on Special Designations (potential ACECs and potential Back Country Byways) and an overview of Chapter 3 of the DRMP/DEIS. On January 12, 2006 YFO met with Reclamation to discuss issues related to agency jurisdictions and the Colorado River. February 22, 2006 was a review and comment session by cooperating agencies of the draft Chapter 2.

The BLM has a national Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the USFWS to cooperate on Section 7 Consultation for the ESA. AGFD, Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT), and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) have a statewide MOU with BLM and would use this agreement to work collaboratively with the YFO.

To date, the following entities have signed MOUs to serve as cooperating agencies for the YFO PRMP/FEIS.

A. FEDERAL

- Bureau of Reclamation Yuma Area Office & Lower Colorado Regional Office
- Cibola NWR
- Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Customs and Border Patrol
- Imperial NWR
- Kofa NWR
- MCAS–Yuma
- U.S. Army YPG
- U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDOA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
- U.S. Department of Transportation, FHWA

B. STATE

- ADOT–State
- ADOT–Yuma
- AGFD

C. LOCAL

- City of Yuma
- Town of Quartzsite
- Wellton–Mohawk Irrigation and Drainage District (WMIDD)
- Yuma County Department of Public Works

D. TRIBAL

- Cocopah Indian Tribe
- Fort Yuma Quechan Tribe
- Yavapai–Apache Nation

1.6.2 CONSULTATION WITH NATIVE AMERICAN TRIBES

YFO initiated coordination and consultation with 30 Native American tribes and groups within Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Oklahoma with a letter dated June 17, 2004. In the letter, YFO requested the opportunity to make a presentation on the RMP/EIS planning process at a Tribal council meeting or a community meeting. At this early stage in the planning process YFO staff met with representatives from three tribes: the Fort Yuma Quechan Tribe on August 31, 2004; Hualapai Tribe on August 16, 2005; and Tohono O’odham Nation on July 15, 2004.

Twice during the planning process YFO invited all interested tribes to the YFO office to discuss the plan and to share input on the preliminary alternatives. The first meeting on December 9, 2005, was attended by representatives from the Cocopah Indian Tribe, Colorado River Indian Tribes, Fort Mojave Indian Tribe, Pueblo of Zuni, and Tohono O’odham Nation. The second meeting was on December 12, 2006, and was attended by representatives from the Hualapai Tribe, Yavapai–Prescott Tribe, Chemehuevi Tribe, and Cocopah Indian Tribe.

Once the DRMP/DEIS was distributed for public comment on December 15, 2007, YFO staff telephoned each interested tribe to offer to meet at either their Tribal offices or at a central location. The purpose of these meetings was to provide Tribal representatives with an opportunity to ask questions about the DRMP/DEIS and to provide verbal input on the plan. At each meeting, YFO staff also shared a presentation that illustrated the differences between alternatives. During the public comment period, YFO met with representatives from the following tribes:

- Cocopah Indian Tribe on February 27, 2007;
- Colorado River Indian Tribes on February 20, 2007;
- Fort Mojave Tribe on March 1, 2007;
- Fort Yuma Quechan Tribe on February 12 and March 26, 2007;
- Four Southern Tribes (Ak-Chin Indian Community, Gila River Indian Community, Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, and Tohono O’odham Nation) on March 16, 2007;
- Hualapai Tribe on March 15, 2007;
- Yavapai-Apache Nation on March 14, 2007; and
- Yavapai-Prescott Indian Tribe on March 14, 2007.

Because several of these meetings occurred around the end of the public comment period, YFO decided to extend the timeframe for comments from the tribes to April 30, 2007. Notification of this extension was sent to each tribe in a letter dated March 22, 2007.

Documentation of all meetings, written correspondence, and other coordination with the tribes throughout this planning effort can be found in the administrative record. All tribes with an interest in the planning area were invited to join the planning process as a cooperating agency. The Cocopah, Fort Yuma Quechan, and Yavapai–Apache tribes have signed cooperating agency MOUs.

1.7 RELATED PLANS

Title II, Section 202 of FLPMA provides guidance for the BLM land use planning process to coordinate planning efforts with Native American tribes, other Federal departments, and agencies of State and local governments. To accomplish this directive, BLM is instructed to keep informed of State, local, and Tribal plans; assure that consideration is given to such plans; and to assist in resolving inconsistencies between such plans and Federal planning. The section goes on to state in Subsection (c)(9) that “Land use plans of the Secretary [of the Interior] under this section shall be consistent with State and local plans to the maximum extent he finds consistent with Federal law and the purposes of this Act.” The provisions of this section of FLPMA are echoed in Section 1610.3 of BLM Resource Management Planning regulations. In keeping with the provisions of this section, State, local, and Tribal officials were made aware of the planning process through the previously described mailings and meetings. The following is a list of plans reviewed during the YFO PRMP/FEIS planning efforts:

- U.S. Department of the Air Force’s *Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Barry M. Goldwater Range Integrated Natural Resource Plan* (2006),
- U.S. Army’s *YPG Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan* (1995),
- *City of Yuma General Plan* (2002),
- *Imperial County General Plan* (1993),
- *La Paz County Comprehensive Plan* (2005),
- *Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program* (USDOI Reclamation et al. 2004),
- *Maricopa County—Managing for Results Strategic Plan* (2005),
- *Riverside County General Plan* (2003), and
- *Yuma County Plan 2010 Comprehensive Plan* (2006).

1.8 VISION

The vision of the YFO in constructing this PRMP/FEIS is to manage BLM-administered lands comprehensively to accomplish needs for all resource uses, while acting as stewards of the land and its valuable resources. The BLM sustains the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. YFO has considered the public’s needs and stakeholder values in the management programs of resources proposed in this PRMP/FEIS.