

Finding of No Significant Impact

DOI-BLM-AZ-P020-2011-009-EA

Saddle Mountain National Public Lands Day Authorization

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the attached environmental assessment (EA), and considering the significance criteria in 40 CFR 1508.27, described below, I have determined that the proposed action will not have a significant effect on the human environment. An environmental impact statement is therefore not required.

Context

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) LSFO along with the FoSM plan to co-sponsor a National Public Lands Day-Public Lands Appreciation Day on February 26, 2011. The FoSM, a 501 3 ©, has a volunteer agreement and is in an existing partnership with the LSFO. The event will be dedicated to celebrate and educate the public about the National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS). Educational activities, interpretive exhibits, guided hikes, arts and craft booths, and food vendors will be highlighted. Exhibits and activities include the Arizona Game and Fish Department, Audubon Society, AZ Bicycle Club, Back Country Horsemen, Sierra Club, Archaeological Society, Mineralogical and Wilderness Societies. The event will be located approximately twenty miles southwest of Tonopah, AZ, 3 miles west of the Salome Highway and Courthouse Road on approximately 2 acres that has been previously impacted (T1N, R8W, Sec. 3 NWNW). The exhibitor area will be approximately 75 yards from the highway with circular ingress and egress established to simplify staging and parking. Handicap parking will be provided along with dumpsters and porta-johns. Approximately 250 people are expected to visit and participate.

Intensity

The following discussion is organized around the 10 Significance Criteria described at 40 CFR 1508.27. The following have been considered in evaluating intensity for this proposal:

1. The public, in general, and youth in particular, will benefit from learning about and appreciating natural resources in conjunction with the Saddle Mountain area. If the event were not to occur, the public would lose the recreational opportunities to learn more about the natural resources and outdoor recreational experiences.
2. The Saddle Mountain National Public Lands Day event may establish a precedent for continuing it every year in the same location and may need future environmental analysis.

3. From a positive standpoint, the event will enlighten the future public about the BLM and the natural resources, but with the potential for more participants the event may require more intensive management.

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Lower Sonoran Field Manager

February 16, 2011

Environmental Assessment DOI-BLM-AZ-P020-2011-009
For
Saddle Mountain National Public Lands Day Authorization

Prepared by the
Bureau of Land Management
Lower Sonoran Field Office

February 16, 2011

INTRODUCTION

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Lower Sonoran Field Office (LSFO) plans to co-sponsor with the Friends of Saddle Mountain (FoSM) to conduct a National Public Lands Day event on February 26, 2011. The event will be dedicated to educating the general public concerning public land resources and will be held February to allow the public to enjoy cooler weather and escape the summer heat. Besides educating the public concerning public land values and resources, the FoSM wants to make the public more aware of the Saddle Mountain area and all it has to offer.

Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

The purpose of the proposed action is to provide educational and recreational enjoyment opportunities for the public. The need for action stems from BLM's mandate to provide recreational opportunities under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (Public Law 94-579). The FoSM plans to use the event to not only educate the public, but assist in the recruitment of new members for their organization.

Conformance with Land Use Plan

The proposed action is in conformance with the *Final Amendment and Environmental Assessment to the Lower Gila North Management Framework Plan and the Lower Gila South Resource Management Plan; Approved Amendment to the Lower Gila North Management Framework Plan and the Lower Gila South Resource Management Plan and Decision Record* dated July 15, 2005. The plan has been reviewed to determine appropriate compliance with the land use plan terms and conditions set forth in the plan by providing for "resource-base recreational opportunities ranging from facilitated recreation sites... to remote primitive areas with predominately unconfined recreational opportunities and minimal regulation." (Page 24).

Relationship to Statutes, Regulations or Other Plans

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (Public Law 94-579) provided that public lands were to be managed "on the basis of multiple use and sustained yield unless otherwise specified by law," and "outdoor recreation/education" was identified as one of those multiple uses. 43 CFR 2932.12 allows the BLM to waive Special Recreation Permits if "BLM sponsors or co-sponsors the use. This includes any activity or event that BLM is involved in organizing and hosting, or sharing responsibility for, arranged through authorizing letters or written agreements." The use proposed by this action is consistent with federal, state or local plans.

PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

Proposed Action Alternative

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) LSFO along with the FoSM plan to co-sponsor a National Public Lands Day-Public Lands Appreciation Day on February 26, 2011. The FoSM, a 501 3 ©, has a volunteer agreement and is in an existing partnership with the LSFO. The event will be dedicated to celebrate and educate the public about the National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS). Educational activities, interpretive exhibits, guided hikes, arts and craft booths, and food vendors will be highlighted. Exhibits and activities include the Arizona Game and Fish Department, Audubon Society, AZ Bicycle Club, Back Country Horsemen, Sierra Club, Archaeological Society, Mineralogical and Wilderness Societies. The event will be located approximately twenty miles southwest of Tonopah, AZ, 3 miles west of the Salome Highway and Courthouse Road on approximately 2 acres that has been previously impacted (T1N, R8W, Sec. 3 NWNW). The exhibitor area will be approximately 75 yards from the highway with circular ingress and egress established to simplify staging and parking. Handicap parking will be provided along with dumpsters and porta-johns. Approximately 250 people are expected to visit and participate.

No Action Alternative

Under the no action alternative, no special use would be authorized.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT REMOVED FROM DETAILED ANALYSIS

Alternative A

Site A is located approximately twenty miles southwest of Tonopah, AZ, north of the Salome Highway on approximately 2 acres (T2N, R8W, Sec. 31 SESW) in a Maricopa County mineral material site, approximately 3 1/2 miles east of the proposed site. The site is located on a mineral material site. It was not chosen, because the mineral material site could be potentially authorized and the slope of the area made the site unfeasible for the participant and vendor booths.

Alternative B

Site B located in the same vicinity (T1N, R8W, Sec. 1 NWNW), twenty miles southwest of Tonopah, AZ. The site was not deemed an appropriate site because of potential resource impacts, poor staging and parking area, and ingress and egress conflict associated with the site.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

General Setting

The proposed event area is located approximately 65 miles west of downtown Phoenix. The general area is within the Arizona Upland Subdivision of the Sonoran Desert Biome. The Sonoran Desert is a subtropical desert with bi-seasonal (winter and summer) rainfall patterns,

with annual precipitation averaging 10" per year and falls mainly in the form of summer rains which promotes a high diversity of plant and animal species. Vegetation consists primarily of Sonoran desert scrub, including palo verde/saguaro communities. Many wildlife species inhabit the area, including mule deer, javelina, bobcat, coyotes, bats, desert tortoises, rabbits, reptiles, quail and other bird species. The project area is within the Desert Tortoise Habitat Area. The rocky outcrops on some of the hill sides and ridge tops are likely habitat for desert tortoises. The major public activities include 4-wheel driving, hunting, hiking, target shooting and camping. The predominant peak is Saddle Mountain.

Affected Resources

These resources were considered and found to be unaffected by the proposed and no action alternatives, and are therefore not analyzed further in the assessment:

- Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
- Cultural Resources
- Environmental Justice
- Hazardous and Solid Wastes
- Floodplains
- Minerals
- Prime or Unique Farmlands
- Noise Quality
- Water Quality
- Wild and Scenic Rivers
- Native American Religious Concerns
- Visual Resources
- Riparian or Wetland Zones
- Wilderness Areas

Soils: The soils are classified as Cherioni-Rock. The Cherioni-Rock outcrop complex consists of well-drained soils that have a hardpan and are only 6 to 20 inches deep over basalt, andesitic, granite or granite-gneiss bedrock. The soils are classified as mostly gravelly loam. The Cherioni soil is on the lower slopes of mountains and low hills, and rock outcrop is on the upper slopes. Slopes range from 3 to 25 percent. Permeability is moderate above the hardpan. Runoff is medium, and the erosion hazard is slight to moderate (General Soil Map, Maricopa County Arizona, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service, 1977).

Vegetation: The Sonoran Desert consists primarily of palo verde, saguaro, mesquite, ironwood, white and triangle leaf bursage, cactus species, jojoba, and various grasses and shrubs. A more complete description of the area can be found in the Lower Gila South Resource Management Plan (January, 2000).

Wildlife: Wildlife species native to the area are those typical of the vegetative community. Species inhabiting the area include but are not limited to mule deer, javelina, coyote, mountain lion, desert cottontail, black-tailed jackrabbit and various small mammals, reptiles and birds, including Gambel's quail and mourning doves.

Threatened & Endangered Species: Four federally listed species, and two sensitive species may occur in the general area. The listed species are the cactus ferruginous pygmy owl, *Glaucidium brasilianum cactorum*, the lesser long-nosed bat, *Leptonycteris curasoae yerbabuena*, the bald eagle, *Haliaeetus Leucocephalus*, and the Peregrine falcon, *Falco Peregrinus*. The sensitive species are the Hohokam agave, *Agave murpheyi*, the desert tortoise, *Gopherus agassizii*, and the Gilbert's skink, *Eumeces gilberti arizonensis*.

Public Safety: Exhibitors, participants and visitors will take place in the Sonoran Desert floor in the Saddle Mountain area and be exposed to the natural elements.

Recreation: Recreational activities in the area consist primarily of OHV use, hunting, and camping, horseback riding and target shooting. The proposed site is located in the Saddle Mountain Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA). The SRMA was established in the Decision Record for the Approved Amendment to the Lower Gila North Management Framework Plan and the Lower Gila South Resource Management Plan, July 15, 2005 to promote recreational opportunities, emphasize geology, cultural, and wildlife resources, and protect the area's scenic landscapes and vistas. To date the SRMA plan and implementation has not been completed.

Range: The proposed course lies within the Clem Allotment under the administration of the Seven Lakes Co, Inc. The Clem Allotment, a perennial allotment, covers approximately 186,160 acres (78,744 which are federally controlled) and has a preference of 1085 AUMs. The Clem Allotment did not take full use of preference in 2010, running approximately 133 head of cattle.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

These resources were considered and found to be unaffected by the proposed and no action alternatives:

- Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
- Cultural Resources
- Environmental Justice
- Hazardous and Solid Wastes
- Floodplains
- Minerals
- Prime or Unique Farmlands
- Noise Quality

- Water Quality
- Wild and Scenic Rivers
- Native American Religious Concerns
- Visual Resources
- Riparian or Wetland Zones
- Wilderness Areas

Proposed Action Alternative

Soils: The Cherioni soil's permeability and erosion hazard are slight to moderate. The event should not cause any serious impacts to the soil, because the event's visitation and activities will not impact the soil's hardpan crust.

Vegetation: Impacts to vegetation will be slight. Eight to nine creosote bushes will need to be removed to allow for parking; however no major surface disturbing activities would be authorized under the proposed action. Therefore, overall impacts are anticipated to be minor.

Wildlife: No habitat destroying activities are proposed. The six hour event may cause temporary disturbance to individual animals but no more than other incidental human activities. Any impacts will be minimal to resident wildlife populations as a whole.

Threatened or Endangered Species: The project area contains suitable or potential habitat for any listed or proposed threatened or endangered species; however the action, as proposed, will have **no effect** on any listed species.

Public Safety: EMTs and Fire will be on hand to handle any and all safety situations. All extreme accidents will be taken to the Banner Estrella Medical Center Hospital located in west Phoenix.

Recreation: The proposed event activities will offer visitors a variety of organized, educational and fun, family oriented outdoor experiences which will enhance their quality of life, and these services would not be available otherwise. The event and activities will not impact the Special Recreation Management Area values, because of the time spent on public land.

Range: No impacts or disturbance to the grazing operation is expected with the allotment.

No Action Alternative

If the proposed event is not authorized, no impacts to cultural resources, soils, vegetation, wildlife, threatened or endangered species, and range would occur other than those currently experienced with on-going casual use recreation, mining and grazing activities. However, the public would lose the recreational opportunities to learn more about the natural resources and the outdoor recreational experience.

Mitigation Measures

1. BLM reserves the right to cancel the event at any time to protect resource values, inclement weather conditions or if warranted by other unforeseen conditions or factors. Activities are to remain on the approved designated area.
2. The BLM and FoSM will coordinate traffic control and parking with Maricopa County.
3. Any historic or prehistoric cultural site, object, vertebrate fossil, or human remains discovered by the FoSM or anyone working on behalf of the FoSM on public lands, will be reported as soon as possible to the Lower Sonoran Field Office Manager. It is unlawful to disturb, deface, excavate, or remove these cultural and paleontological resources unless authorized by the Bureau of Land Management under a cultural resource use permit or a paleontological permit.
4. The event site will be cleaned and all facilities removed by February 27, 2011. Mitigation of the area such as raking and mulching will be the responsibility of the FoSM to discourage any unauthorized use of the area. Mitigation is to be complete March 10, 2011.
5. The permit does not authorize exclusive use and shall not be construed in any way so as to prevent public use or access on any public lands except as expressly allowed under the authorization.
6. The FoSM will place temporary signs at all major access points and intersections in the area notifying public land visitors of the event and of potential access delays to the public lands during the event.
7. The FoSM and BLM are responsible for ensuring the safety of all participants and support personnel by assuring that all actions in relation to this permitted event are in conformance with local, State and Federal health and safety standards and by providing for appropriate emergency attention if necessary. The parties shall have an emergency response plan in place in case of accident and/or injury requiring first aid or emergency services.
8. The BLM will notify Jim Palen, the grazing permittee, about the event before it occurs. Harassment of livestock or destruction of private and public improvements such as fences and gates is prohibited.
9. Collection, harassment and disturbance of desert tortoises is prohibited by Arizona State Law. If tortoises are encountered along equestrian routes, they will be avoided. If tortoises are encountered on roads they should be avoided. If they cannot be avoided, the tortoise should be carefully moved off of the road (no more than 100 feet) and immediately released unharmed.
10. EMTs from the Harquahala Valley and BLM will be on hand to address any injuries occurring on public land. All injuries requiring emergency hospital care will be reported to the

BLM authorized officer within two days of the occurrence and a Death and Injury Report submitted within 10 days of the occurrence.

Coordination and Consultation

Persons and Agencies Consulted

Bureau of Land Management Lower Sonoran Field Office:

Cheryl Blanchard, Archaeologist
Steve Bird, Wildlife Biologist
Karen Conrath, Geologist
Jack Ragsdale, Outdoor Recreation Planner
Andrea Felton, Range Conservationist
JoAnn Goodlow, Realty Specialist
Leah Baker, Planning and Environmental Coordinator
Ken Shaver, Fire Prevention Officer

Public Involvement:

Maricopa County Department of Transportation
Jim Palen, Clem Allotment Permittee
Maricopa County Flood Control District