



Gila Box Riparian National Conservation Area

**National Landscape Conservation System
FY 2010 Annual Manager's Report**

NATIONAL LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION SYSTEM

I. Introduction

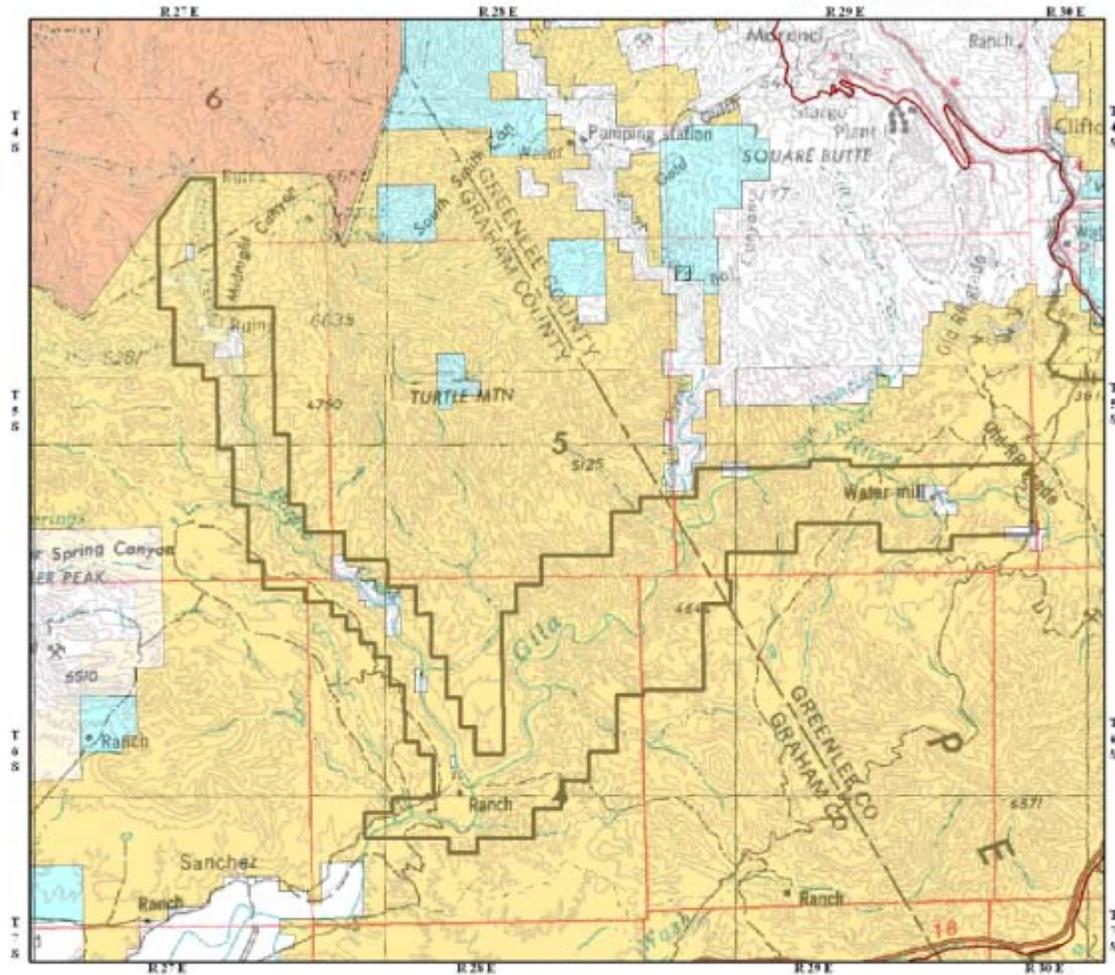
- a. This report covers the period October 1, 2009, through September 30, 2010.
- b. Site Name: Gila Box Riparian National Conservation Area
Address: Safford Field Office, 711 14th Ave, Safford, AZ 85546
Phone: (928) 348-4417
Email: Tom_Schnell@blm.gov
Website: www.blm.gov/az/st/en/fo/safford_field_office.html
- c. Manager: Tom Schnell
- d. Safford Field Office, Gila District, Arizona State Office
- e. The Arizona Desert Wilderness Act of 1990 (Public Law 101-628)
- f. The Gila Box Riparian National Conservation Area was established to conserve, protect, and enhance its riparian areas and associated resources, and the aquatic, wildlife, archaeological, paleontological, scientific, cultural, recreational, educational, scenic, and other resources and values of such areas.
- g. Acreage: Approximately 21,767 acres of public land and 1,720 acres of private land within its designated boundaries.
- h. Estimated Annual Visitation: 50,000



Bonita Creek Fall Colors

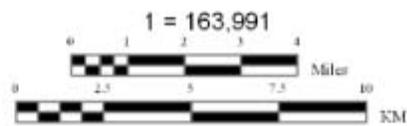
Gila Box Riparian National Conservation Area

State of Arizona



Legend

- | | | | |
|---------------------------|---|--------------------------------|--|
| Private Lands | Bureau of Land Management (BLM) | BLM Wilderness Area | BLM National Monument |
| State Lands | National Forest Lands (USFS) | Forest Service Wilderness Area | National Conservation Area |
| State Wildlife Area | National Park Service (NPS) | NPS Wilderness Area | Military Reservations/Corps of Engineers |
| City, State, County Parks | USFW Service, National Wildlife Refuges | USFW Service Wilderness Area | Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) |
| County Lands | Indian Lands or Reservations | | |




 United States Department of the Interior
 Bureau of Land Management
 Gila District Office
 Map Scale: 1" = 163,991'



CAUTION:
 Land ownership data is derived from less accurate data than the 1:24,000 scale base map. Therefore, land ownership may not be shown for parcels smaller than 40 acres, and land ownership lines may have joggling series due to source data.

No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management for the use of this data for purposes not intended by the BLM.

II. Land Use Planning

- a. Overview
 - Gila Box Management Plan, Environmental Assessment and Decision Record, January 1998.
 - The status of the land use plan's implementation strategy is 80% complete.
- b. Implementation-Level Planning
 - Gila Box Management Plan, January 1998
 - Gila Unit Travel Management Plan, in development

III. Protecting America's Natural Resources

- a. Notable Natural Resources
 - The Gila Box Riparian National Conservation Area (Gila Box RNCA) includes four perennial waterways, the Gila and San Francisco rivers and Bonita and Eagle creeks. This region is a very special riparian ecosystem abounding with plant and animal diversity. Impressive Gila Conglomerate cliffs tower more than 1,000 feet above the Gila River, and bighorn sheep are commonly spotted. Numerous prehistoric and historical structures can be viewed. A network of primitive roads provides hours of backcountry adventure for four-wheel-drive enthusiasts and mountain bike trekkers. The Bonita Creek Watchable Wildlife Viewing Area provides a bird's-eye view of the riparian canyon below, with over 100 species of birds recorded here. Two homestead cabins, rock art and cliff dwellings, show evidence of the occupation of this important perennial stream by earlier inhabitants; several have been interpreted to increase public appreciation.



Bonita Creek Watchable Wildlife Area

- Special status species include:
 - Lowland leopard frog BLM sensitive
 - Arizona toad BLM sensitive
 - Sonora mud turtle BLM sensitive
 - Desert ornate box turtle BLM sensitive
 - Desert pupfish Endangered
 - Desert sucker BLM sensitive
 - Longfin dace BLM sensitive
 - Sonora sucker BLM sensitive
 - Speckled dace BLM sensitive
 - Razorback sucker Endangered
 - Loach minnow Threatened
 - Spikedace Threatened
 - Gila chub Endangered
 - Gila topminnow Endangered
 - California leaf-nosed bat BLM sensitive
 - Cave myotis BLM sensitive
 - Greater western mastiff bat BLM sensitive
 - Golden eagle BLM sensitive
 - Bald eagle BLM sensitive
 - American peregrine falcon BLM sensitive
 - Yellow-billed cuckoo Candidate
 - Southwest willow flycatcher (transient) Endangered
 - Lace-leaf rock daisy BLM sensitive
 - Spring snails (likely Succinidae and Pyrgulopsis) BLM sensitive

- Illegal use of off-highway vehicles (OHV) within the Gila Box is one of the most controversial issues and resource-damaging uses in the conservation area. Impacts include damage to riparian vegetation, stream bed and banks, and disruption to fish and wildlife. Current OHV management limits vehicle use to designated roads. Prior to designation of the Gila Box in 1990, OHV use was virtually uncontrolled and commonly occurred within both the Gila River and Bonita Creek. This historical use pattern has proven difficult to alter. Development of a Transportation Plan for the Safford Field Office will result in the signing of all designated routes with a result in the reduction of impacts caused by illegal OHV use. The Gila Box is part of the Gila Unit Travel Management Plan (TMP). In FY09, the three alternative maps developed during the Evaluation Tree Process for the Gila Unit TMP were distributed for public comment. A preferred travel map will be developed incorporating these comments and will be a part of the Draft TMP.

b. Land Health Assessments

- To date, 21,767 acres (100% of the Gila Box) have been assessed using land health standards. One-hundred percent of the assessed acres met land health standards. A 100% assessment occurs every 10 years.
- 100% of assets were included in the Gila Box RNCA Comprehensive Asset Business Plan.

c. Inventory Efforts

- Gila Box and Safford Field Office staff provided both inventory and monitoring this year for native fish including the threatened and endangered species Gila chub and razorback sucker. Wildlife monitoring was also provided on Bonita Creek and the Gila River primarily focusing on the southwestern willow flycatcher, yellow-billed cuckoo, leopard frog, Mexican garter snake, and raptors. Gila Box staff conducted 12 float-boat patrols on the Gila River for fish, wildlife, riparian, and range monitoring.
- The Gila Box gap fence condition inventory for all livestock river access related gap fencing in the conservation area continues. Several portions of these fences were repaired or replaced.
- Gila Box staff conducted 12 float boat patrols to monitor recreation use impacts and provide visitor contact, information and assistance on the Gila River.



Gila River Monitoring

d. Restoration Efforts

- Overall condition of natural resources within the Gila Box is good. Two resource protection issues are directly related to the annual monsoon. Monsoonal flooding produces wash-outs of roads and gap fencing, leading to excessive erosion and inadvertent livestock trespass. These two issues are being addressed yearly through scheduled and unscheduled monitoring and maintenance.
- Controlling excessive erosion due to monsoonal activity is an ongoing action. The Gila District force account crew reconstructed several miles of flood-damaged access roads and recreation facilities.

- Invasive species: A total of 20 acres of salt cedar were treated.
- A fish barrier was constructed across Bonita Creek by the Bureau of Reclamation in 2008 as part of the Bonita Creek Native Fish Restoration project. Following barrier construction, native fish were salvaged and a 1.7-mile reach of Bonita Creek was chemically renovated to remove nonnative fish species. Following this renovation, native unlisted and federally-listed fish species including salvaged Gila chub and repatriated loach minnow, spikedace, desert pupfish, and Gila topminnow were stocked into the stream. Nonnative mosquitofish, fathead minnow, and green sunfish have since repopulated the stream. Subsequent attempts to remove these nonnative fishes utilizing mechanical methods have not been successful and the agencies (AGFD, BLM, Reclamation, and USFWS) believe at least one additional chemical renovation of the stream will be necessary to protect the native resident and repatriated fish populations. In addition, the BLM and the cooperating agencies determined the success of any additional renovation(s) and associated management actions would be enhanced if a ponded area that formed immediately upstream of the constructed fish barrier was filled with sediment prior to retreatment.



Bonita Creek Fish Barrier

- Water quality testing for E. coli at full-body contact sites on the Gila River and Bonita Creek occurs each year from May through September. These sites are popular swimming holes for Gila Box visitors. This year all samples fell within E. coli standards. Also, macroinvertebrate sampling was conducted at three sites on Bonita Creek and five sites on the Gila River. Macroinvertebrates found at all sites indicate relatively good health for both watersheds.

IV. Protecting America's Heritage Resources

a. Notable Heritage Resources include Old Lady Gay Cabin, Pueblo Devol, and Serna Cabin. Overall condition of cultural resources within the Gila Box Riparian National Conservation Area (Gila Box) is good, however, several historic sites are in poor and failing condition. These sites are "homesteads" found along the Gila River established in the late 1800s to early 1900s. Most of these sites are lean-to or dug-out cabins with remnant corrals and outbuildings. One stone cabin on the Gila is in poor to failing condition. Flood damage producing cut banks are of notable concern.

b. Inventory Efforts: This fiscal year, 14 cultural sites were monitored with nine sites receiving light maintenance.

c. Restoration Efforts: Historic site accomplishments for this year included minor roof repair on the historic Serna Cabin. Prehistoric sites within the Gila Box are in fair to good condition. Vandalism and looting in years past have left some prehistoric sites in less than desirable condition.



Pueblo Devol Cliff Dwelling

V. Providing Recreation and Visitor Experiences

a. Overview

- FY10 visitor estimates for onsite interpretive stations total about 8,000 visitors. Total visitation for the Gila Box in FY10 was 52,052 visits equaling 45,571 visitor days. Primary activities include birding, hiking, hunting, camping, recreational driving, float boating, photography, horseback riding, water play, and picnicking.

b. Facilities, Construction, and Maintenance

- Gila Box portal, directional, informational, and regulatory signs are installed and are up to standard. Sign management is currently provided through a sign plan developed in FY03.
- Developed campsites – Owl Creek Campground and Riverview Campground. Day Use Areas – Flying W Group Day Use Area, Lee Trailhead/Picnic Area, Old Safford Bridge Picnic Area, Spring Canyon Picnic Area, Dry Canyon Picnic Area, Serna Cabin Picnic Area, and Bonita Creek Watchable Wildlife Area.
- The overall condition of recreation facilities is good. Monsoonal flooding caused light to moderate damage in FY10. Primary damage includes washed out OHV barriers, boat ramps, roads, and parking areas close to the Gila River and Bonita Creek. Gila Box recreation facilities are maintained through a maintenance contract (September-June), by volunteers, and by the Gila Box staff. This fiscal

year, Gila Box staff, volunteers, and a recreation maintenance contractor maintained 26 recreation sites within the Box.

- Overall the road system is in fair to good condition. Road maintenance is provided through contract and by the Gila District force account crew. The force account crew maintained approximately 20 miles of road and installed two horse gates on the Cottonwood Trail in FY10. There is still a backlog of roads within the Gila Box that need maintenance.
- The deferred maintenance backlog as reflected in the Five-Year Plan includes the Black Hills Back Country Byway Road Maintenance and Bonita Creek Low Water Crossing.

c. Comprehensive Travel and Transportation Management

- The primary modes of recreational travel are passenger cars and trucks, off-highway vehicles, float boats, hiking, and horseback riding.
- The Gila Box Riparian National Conservation Area is within the Draft Gila Unit Travel Management Plan. This plan is scheduled to go out for public comment in 2011. There are approximately 90 miles of designated roads, 800 miles of primitive roads, and 24 miles of non-motorized trails in the draft plan.
- Route inventory was accomplished through a grant with Arizona State Parks. Marker posts and decals were also purchased through this grant.



Riverview Campground

d. Recreation Fee Program

- Recreation Fee Sites: Riverview Campground, Owl Creek Campground, Flying W Group Day Use Area, and Gila River Float Boating.
- Six commercial special recreation permits for hunting/guiding are Field Office-wide and therefore include the Gila Box.

- Business Plans: Gila Box Riparian National Conservation Area, Special Recreation Permits
- Total revenue generated from fee sites in FY10: \$2,792.45
- Primary priorities for the expenditure of collected recreation fees: facility maintenance, patrols/monitoring, information and education.

VI. Your Recovery Dollars at Work

a. Ongoing Projects

- Gila Box Riparian NCA Vegetation Treatments. This project involves removal of salt cedar from the Gila River and Bonita Creek. It is scheduled to be completed by March 31, 2011. Total funding for the project is \$45,600.

VII. Engaging Youth in America's Great Outdoors

a. Youth Engagement

- Six students from the Gila River Indian Community in Sacaton, Arizona, spent a weekend in the Gila Box completing scientific experiments for a competition sponsored by the Native American Indian Science and Engineering Foundation. Students compete with others for national recognition. BLM funding came from the National Landscape Conservation System Science Grant.
- Clean up of the Gila Box River Trail was the National Public Lands Day project in 2010. It was selected as one of five BLM sites in the nation to be featured through First Lady Michelle Obama's "Let's Move Outside" kids' initiative. In September, Boy Scouts cleaned litter along this three-mile stretch of the Gila River, as well as picnic areas at the boat put-in at Bonita Creek and the take-out site at Dry Canyon.



National Public Lands Day 2010

b. Youth Employment

- From April to October 2010, the Safford Field Office employed a young man who surveyed and monitored native fish, frogs, yellow-billed cuckoo, Sonoran desert tortoise, and plants in a variety of habitats. He was also responsible for data input and developed species accounts that will be used in environmental assessments and Standards and Guidelines for rangeland health evaluations. His stipend was paid by the BLM Washington Office through their agreement with the Chicago Botanic Garden Intern Program.

VIII. Partnership and Volunteer Efforts

a. Overview

- Gila Box Management Plan Objective – “BLM will provide an administrative site and campground host site on the level terrace southwest of the Kearny Camp monument.” Site hosts stay at the administrative site providing information to visitors, area monitoring, trash pick-up, and many other duties as needed.

b. Volunteer Accomplishments

- Two site hosts at Riverview Campground provided 1,760 volunteer hours.
- Eight other volunteers worked for a total of 1,201 hours assisting the site hosts and assisting with Gila River floatboat patrol duties. Work included trash pick-up, patrol logistics, monitoring, and recreation inventory.
- Volunteer Site Stewards assisted with monitoring cultural sites for a total of 232 hours. These volunteer efforts totaled 3,193 hours and \$66,574 in labor dollars.



Site Hosts at Riverview Campground

c. Partnership Accomplishments

**Gila Box Riparian National Conservation Area
Fiscal Year 2010 Partnership Accomplishments**

Partner(s)	Project Name and Description	Accomplishments	Monetary and In-Kind Contributions	
			BLM	Partner
Arizona Department of Transportation and Greenlee County	Intersection at U.S. 191 and Black Hills Back Country Byway. Construction of a new intersection at the junction of the Black Hills Back Country Byway and Highway 191 to increase safety and ease of access.	Completion of this new section provided a much safer access to the northeastern end of the Byway. The Byway provides access to the Gila Box RNCA.	FY10 \$6,000 road rehab on the Byway and planning meetings. (GS-12 .25wm, GS-11 .25wm, 2 WG-10 .25wm)	FY10 Project Completed.
City of Safford	Continue to manage and monitor the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and 10-year pipeline operation and maintenance plan.	Implementation of the MOU initiates mutually approved actions within the Bonita Creek watershed to operate and maintain the municipal water system. The actions focus on continuing to provide high quality drinking water while allowing protection and enhancement of Gila Box natural and cultural resources.	FY10 \$1,600 (GS-11 .25wm)	FY10 \$50,000 road maintenance.
Graham County Chamber of Commerce	Agreement with the Graham County Chamber of Commerce to maintain and operate a Tourist Information Center.	The Center provides outdoor recreation information to visitors to Graham County and educates visitors about the land, its resources and opportunities, proper land use ethics, and the agencies that manage the land.	FY10 \$7,500	FY10 \$7,500

- As of the beginning of FY10, there was no DOI action toward approval of the nominations for the Gila Box Advisory Committee (GBAC) that were submitted by the Safford Field Office through the Arizona State Office in February 2008. Five nominations had been sent forward: two for renewal, two to fill vacancies, and one as an alternate. In the interim, while waiting for these selections by DOI, the Committee Charter expired. The Safford Field Office was notified by the BLM Washington Office that, due to the Charter expiring, a new one would have to be submitted for approval, incorporating nationwide changes to Charter formatting. After approval of the Charter, a “Call for Nominations” for all seven GBAC members would need to be done. This basically would require us to start from the beginning, expending additional funds on a Federal Register publication.

IX. Science

a. Overview

- Six students from the Gila River Indian Community in Sacaton, Arizona, spent a weekend in the Gila Box completing scientific experiments for a competition sponsored by the Native American Indian Science and Engineering Foundation. Students compete with others for national recognition. BLM funding came from the National Landscape Conservation System Science Grant.

b. Science Efforts

- The Arizona Native Fish Conservation and Restoration Partnership continued their monitoring and enhancement efforts, which included along Bonita Creek. Their work was recognized with the Secretary of the Interior’s 2010 Partners in Conservation Award.

X. Outreach, Environmental Education, and Interpretation Efforts

a. Overview

- This objective is met through websites, onsite interpretive stations, signs, kiosks, an agreement with the Graham County of Commerce, national and local volunteer events, and presentations to local schools, organizations, clubs, and civic groups concerning the Gila Box resources, values, and uses.
- The Cottonwood and Gila Box River trails were promoted through media and travel writers to increase tourism.



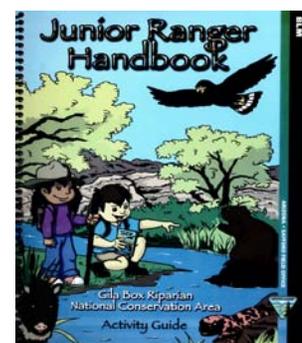
Cottonwood Trail Trailhead

- Twelve new web pages were developed for the Gila Box to provide additional visitor information for the public.
- Work began on five new interpretive panels that can be taken to conferences and community events. These showcase the scenery, wildlife, native fish, heritage resources, and recreation opportunities of the Gila Box. The panels will be completed in FY11.
- Gila Box staff gave two heritage resource presentations. One was to a Gila Valley Leadership class. A second was to community members during celebration of the 10th anniversary of the National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS) and the 20th anniversary of the Gila Box Riparian National Conservation Area.
- Dignitaries, partners, community members, and BLM employees spent April 10 commemorating the 10th anniversary of the National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS) and the 20th anniversary of the Gila Box Riparian National Conservation Area. Following speeches by dignitaries and recognition of our NLCS partners, BLM staff led three tours into the Gila Box. The Recreation/Cultural tour was a walk along the Cottonwood Trail with stops at the General Kearny Historical Monument, historic Serna Cabin, and Bonita Creek Watchable Wildlife Area. The Wildlife Tour provided a guided foray along Bonita Creek focusing on birds, beavers, bighorns, and other wildlife that might be seen in the riparian area. The Fisheries Tour visited Bonita Creek near the nonnative fish barrier to learn about the nine species of native fish that inhabit the creek and BLM's cooperative efforts to protect them.
- The Safford Field Office hosted a Gila Valley Leadership Program tour to the Gila Box to provide community support and teach these future leaders about the complexities of multiple-use management of working landscapes within this NLCS unit.

b. Visitor Centers – The Gila Box RNCA does not have a visitor center. We have an agreement with the Graham County Chamber of Commerce which operates a tourist center in Safford and provides information on the Gila Box to the public, especially on weekends and evenings.

c. Environmental Education

- The educational Gila Box Junior Ranger Handbook for youth was designed and published using supplemental BLM WO Youth Initiative funding.



Gila Box Junior Ranger Handbook

- College students and interns assisted with native fish restoration efforts at Bonita Creek.
- With the assistance of BLM staff, students in grades 6-9 participating in the EAC Discovery Park Campus Summer Science Camp program in June had the opportunity to travel to Bonita Creek to test and record water samples to upload to the internet for comparison next year.

d. Interpretation

- The primary thrust of interpretation within the Gila Box is to educate the public about the resources and values in the Box, teach resource conservation, and promote pride, ownership and value in the conservation area.
- During FY10, the Gila Box river ranger continued to work on production of a Gila River Floatboat Guide.
- Currently, no Friends group exists for the Gila Box. However, local Boy Scout troops provide a dependable source for volunteer projects.



Interpretive Sign on the Black Hills Back Country Byway