

APPENDIX F
MIDDLE GILA CANYONS
TRANSPORTATION AND TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PLAN
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
EA# AZ-420-2007-014

I. INTRODUCTION

The planning area includes approximately 96,320 acres of federal lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), generally located in the following townships: T2S R12E, T3S R11E, T3S R12E, T3S R13E, T4S R10E, T4S R11E, T4S R12E, T4S R13E, T5S R10E, T5S R11E, T5S R12E of the Gila & Salt River Principal Meridian, Pinal County, Arizona.

The project area is shown on Map 1 and Map 2 of the proposed plan. The planning area is covered by the following USGS 7.5' topographic quadrangles: Florence Junction, Picketpost Mountain, Superior, Florence NE, Mineral Mountain, Teapot Mountain, Hot Tamale Peak, Florence, Florence SE, North Butte, Grayback, Kearny, Cactus Forest, Ninety-six Hills NW, and Ninety-six Hills NE.

Purpose and Need: The purpose of the proposed action is to establish the transportation designations and travel management plan for public lands administered by the BLM. This includes defining the travel route network needed to provide access for motorized and non-motorized access and the use restrictions needed to protect resources on the public lands, and to prevent or minimize conflict among uses or users. The proposed action is needed in response to growing demand for public use in the area, particularly for recreational purposes, and to address growing concerns about deteriorating resource conditions on public lands and impacts and conflicts related to public use. Current travel management designations pursuant to 43CFR8342 were established in the 1989 Phoenix Resource Management Plan (RMP). Motorized travel is limited to existing roads and trails on most of the public lands in the planning area, but those routes have not yet been identified. A transportation plan for public lands in the area has not been established since completion of the RMP.

Conformance with Land Use Plan: The proposed action is subject to the Phoenix RMP, approved September 1989, as amended. Notable amendments include the Eastern Arizona Grazing Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and the Ray Land Exchange Amendment of June 1999. This proposed action has been determined to be in conformance with the land use plan terms and conditions as required by 43 CFR 1610.5 and BLM MS 1617.3.

The proposed action consists of implementation level decisions and will not change or modify the existing OHV designations or any other existing resource allocation. The proposed action will define the system of motorized travel routes available for administrative purposes and public use under the existing OHV designations.

The current RMP is planned to be revised within the next five to ten years. Public scoping for the revision was conducted in 2006. Comments received during scoping were considered in developing the proposed action for this plan. The proposed action will guide travel management in the project area until the current RMP is revised or amended.

Relationship to Statutes, Regulations or Other Plans or Policies: The proposed action is authorized under public land regulations at 43 CFR 8300, Recreation Management Programs. Designations and use restrictions are consistent with 42 CFR 8340- Off Road Vehicles, and 43 CFR 8360- Visitor Services.

II. THE PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

1. Proposed Action

The BLM proposes a comprehensive transportation and travel management plan for public lands administered by the BLM in the Middle Gila Canyons Transportation Planning Area. The transportation plan defines the travel route network for motorized and non-motorized access, special use restrictions, closures, and related actions. The travel management designations and other planned actions are described in detail in the Middle Gila Canyons Transportation and Travel Management Plan.

2. No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, a comprehensive travel management plan will not be established for public lands administered by the BLM in the planning area. Current custodial management will continue on a case-by-case basis. It will remain unclear which existing routes encountered on the ground are legally available for motorized travel, and resolution of issues and concerns identified in the project area will be deferred to a later time, or addressed on a case-by case basis under current regulations and policies.

3. Alternatives

The motorized travel route evaluation completed in 2005 by the Middle Gila Canyons Partnership (MGCP) identified three alternatives which were considered in developing the proposed action. These alternatives are discussed below but are not analyzed further. The alternatives represented different strategies for accommodating access with different emphasis on accessibility and resource protection. The evaluation was completed by representatives of land management agencies and recreational and environmental interests for the lands in the project area (OHV organized users, conservation groups, National Guard, Arizona Game and Fish Department, National Forest Service, and BLM). The evaluation was facilitated by a third party contractor (Advanced Resource Solutions, Inc.) using the Route Evaluation Tree methodology adopted by BLM Arizona. Alternative B aimed to minimize the extent of motorized access while accommodating basic access needs for multiple uses. Alternative D aimed to maximize motorized access for multiple uses, and Alternative C aimed at a balanced strategy between alternatives B and D. The alternative route designations are indicated on the route designation table in Appendix A, along with the proposed designations. The proposed plan is primarily based on Alternative C, with changes in specific route designations based on analysis of new information. The alternatives were considered in developing the proposed action, and are not analyzed further. Table 1 compares designations between the three alternatives developed during the route evaluation exercise and the proposed action. The designation figures include routes on BLM land only.

Table 1. Travel route designations for MGCP Alternatives and the proposed action Alternative Closed To Motorized Not

MGCP Alternative	Closed to Motorized Travel (Miles)	Motorized Route (Miles)	No Designation Identified (Miles)
B	203.2	160.9	52.1
C	50.8	313.3	52.1
D	4.5	359.6	52.1
BLM Proposed Action	139.3	263.00	0.0

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

1. Affected Environment

The environmental factors affected by the proposed action are described in Appendix H of the Transportation and Travel Management Plan.

2. Special Management Areas

See Appendix H for a description of the White Canyon Wilderness Area, White Canyon Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), Gila River Riparian Management Area, the Gila River Cultural Resource Management Area (CRMA), and the Reymert Townsite CRMA.

a. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

White Canyon Wilderness Area: Approximately 2.9 miles of existing constructed ‘way’ are identified as non motorized trail to accommodate wilderness hiking and equestrian use. Approximately 2.9 miles of existing way are identified for reclamation. Recreational use will continue to be attracted to the designated wilderness trails, and discouraged from the reclaiming routes identified for reclamation. As recreation demand increases over time, use on the wilderness trails may lead to increased encounters among visitors, affecting opportunities for solitude along the trail corridors. Barriers and signs will be installed and maintained as needed at trail access points to prevent entry by motor vehicles along Battle Axe Road, and will be located outside the wilderness boundary. Public access to wilderness opportunities will be legalized across private lands in Walnut Canyon. A minimum requirements decision worksheet was completed for the designation of wilderness trails, and concluded that wilderness values would be preserved and improved through the proposed action¹.

White Canyon ACEC: The existing Battle Axe Road and a spur road to a primitive camping area and trailhead are identified as primitive roads to accommodate general motorized access to public lands west of the ACEC and mining claim access. Some resource values in the ACEC will continue to be affected by the primitive road disturbance, related maintenance and human activity along the roads and around the camping area. Subject to feasibility, restoring the Battle Axe Road alignment on ground above the channel and floodway will help prevent down-cutting erosion of the streambed and restore some riparian vegetation, though clearing of other vegetation will be required.

Gila River Riparian Management Area: The mileage of inventoried motorized routes within the Gila River Riparian Management Area would be slightly reduced, improving riparian habitat within localized areas. Access would be preserved at several river access points, including Cochran and Whitlow Ranch.

Gila River CRMA and Reymert Townsite CRMA: The mileage of inventoried motorized routes on BLM lands will be slightly reduced in the Gila River CRMA, avoiding motorized traffic in close proximity of known cultural resource sites, and reducing the potential for damage to cultural resource values. An existing driveway and parking area are identified for motor vehicle use within the Reymert Townsite CRMA. Barriers and an interpretive wayside sign will be installed to confine vehicle use and interpret the Townsite’s significance.

Grayback Mountain-Box O Wash Multiple Resource Management Area: The mileage of inventoried motorized routes on BLM land in this SMA will be reduced by approximately 36%, helping protect watershed and wildlife habitat resource values, and cultural resource values. Approximately 68 miles of inventory route will continue providing motorized vehicle access for multiple use activities including Whitlow Ranch and Cochran roads, and ther low volume, low speed unimproved primitive roads. The reduction in mileage and maintenance aimed at

¹ The Minimum Requirements Decision Guide Worksheet for five ways in White Canyon Wilderness Area is available for review at the Tucson Field Office

controlling drainage and stabilizing erosion will reduce watershed impacts from the road network. Approximately 43.0 miles of upland route will remain open to motor vehicle use, and 9.0 miles will be closed. Approximately 9.5 miles of desert wash route will remain open to vehicle use, and 17.0 miles will be closed. Reclamation of closed upland routes will reduce erosion and restore vegetation cover on upland routes. Impacts from vehicle traffic on desert washes will be reduced.

Arizona National Scenic Trail: The Arizona Trail was designated by Congress as a National Scenic Trail under an amendment to the National Trails System Act on March 30, 2009. (P.L. 90-543, as amended through P.L. 111-11, March 30, 2009), making it a special management area. This 800 trail runs from the Coronado National Monument near the international border across Arizona to near the Utah border. Approximately 26 miles of the trail crosses the Planning Area (White Canyon Passage). The trail is under construction, with approximately 7 miles completed and the remainder planned to be completed by 2012. The trail is planned to accommodate non-motorized travel (hiking, equestrian, mountain bicycle), and Trail development is according a project plan and environmental assessment completed in 2006. In 2009 a section of the trail in the vicinity of Red Mountain was analyzed to consider the feasibility of realigning the trail to avoid sensitive lands. The decision and NEPA review for the realignment is being handled separately from the TTMP, but it is addressed to ensure coordination and protection with other travel management designations.

b. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

Motorized vehicle access and use will remain occurring on the motorized inventory routes in all Special Management Areas, leading to increased impacts on resource values related to growing use, and potentially leading to further proliferation of motorized routes in sensitive areas. Impacts to the White Canyon Wilderness Area will be similar to impacts under the proposed action, except that the wilderness trails will not be designated. They will continue to be monitored and wilderness restrictions applied on case-by-case basis.

c. Cumulative impacts to Special Management Areas:

Under the Proposed Action, there will be a reduction in the transportation related impacts and disturbance in all the Special Management Areas, helping further their purposes. The identified motorized routes (roads and primitive roads) will continue to attract vehicle traffic and associated potential impacts from public use and disturbance along the routes and adjacent turnouts in a geographically reduced extent. Approximately three miles of wilderness trail will be designated on two existing constructed 'ways'. Approximately 2.6 miles of existing constructed 'ways' will be allowed to reclaim naturally, with minimal intervention using the minimum tool.

Impacts to wilderness values from recreational trail use will occur on the two designated trail routes, and the natural route along White Canyon. Impacts from recreational use will be dispersed over these three routes, reducing the likelihood of encounters among visitors. Under the No Action Alternative, traffic and disturbance on the entire physical access route system will continue and increase with growing use, affecting resource values in the Special Management Areas.

3. Air Quality

a. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

Impacts to air quality are expected primarily from fugitive dust generated by continued motor vehicle traffic on the area's proposed road and primitive road system, which will remain unpaved. Potential impacts on dust prone soils will be reduced by planned treatment (application of gravel cap or other palliatives).

Emissions from gasoline and diesel combustion engines will be nominal. Impacts will depend mainly on traffic volume, speed and factors related to the travel way surface and soils traversed. Since practically all routes are unpaved, some dust will be generated on all routes depending on the soil types crossed and soil moisture at the time of use. Impacts will be greatest on fine textured soils when dry, particularly during the fall, winter and spring when traffic volume is expected to be greatest. Most of the existing routes on fine grained soils in the study area are on non-federal adjacent lands, with approximately 101 miles primarily on State land, and 11 miles on BLM land. Most of the existing routes in the planning area are naturally paved with gravel, stone/cobble or bedrock. Potential impacts will be reduced by limiting motor vehicle traffic to the designated route network, and taking measures to reduce fugitive dust where needed. The route designations will reduce the mileage of motorized routes located across fine grained soils prone to fugitive dust, and the remaining routes across these soils will be treated to suppress emissions. Currently, the annual average traffic volume on the system is around 20 to 30 vehicles per day on the more heavily traveled routes, with short term peaks around 250 to 370 vehicles per day over weekends, particularly holidays. The higher traffic volumes occur on the public land access routes on non-federal land. Impacts will likely be reduced along Cottonwood Canyon Road and the road to the Mineral Mountain private land once it is paved for proposed development of the Mineral Mountain landfill, and as other roads are maintained by Pinal County or other users (such as quarry operators).

b. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

Current impacts will continue and increase as public demand increases traffic. Dust emissions will be reduced along the public land access routes as roads are paved for developments, such as Cottonwood Canyon Rd. A small amount of fugitive dust generated by traffic will continue along the area's route network.

c. Cumulative impacts to Air Quality:

Under the Proposed Action, the mileage of motor route is reduced from the physical access route inventory, reducing the geographic extent of potential fugitive dust sources on BLM land. Some fugitive dust will continue to be generated by traffic on the designated roads in the planning area depending on traffic volume and soil conditions, but will be minimized by dust control measures applied on the roads. Some dust will continue to be generated, adding to particulate matter emissions from routes on adjacent lands and other sources. Under the No Action alternative, fugitive dust will be generated from all physical access routes depending on traffic, and increase with growing use, particularly on dust prone soil types. Impacts may require case by case action by BLM in response to complaints, or as part of other actions authorizing use of transportation routes related to future land use activities.

4. Water Quality

a. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

Routes across perennial or nearly perennial waters (Walnut Canyon, Martinez Canyon) are avoided or mitigated. Approximately 86 miles motorized route will be designated in washes, and traffic will affect water quality of seasonal water flows and pools in the stream channels. Sediments stirred by traffic and minor amounts of motor vehicle fluids are likely to enter the stream. Risk of contaminants entering intermittent waters will be highest from leaky vehicles brought into the area and accidental spills, particularly in the extreme primitive roads at rock crawling obstacle sites. The risk of accidental spills will be reduced by the special vehicle equipment requirements and through visitor awareness and education efforts, and by enforcing current regulations (43 CFR 8340) which prohibit spilling or draining vehicle fluids. Sediment carried by storm water runoff from eroding roadways and trails will be reduced by erosion control and drainage measures. Mitigation will be accomplished by drainage erosion control work

(waterbars, detention ponds, or stabilization of the tread). Once drainage is corrected, periodic inspection and maintenance will minimize sediment sources from the BLM transportation system, and potential impacts to water quality.

b. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

Current risk of impacts to water quality will continue and will likely increase over time from growing public use of the physical access route system, and from new routes in upland sites and washes which might be created by users without authorization. Visitor education and enforcement efforts will be aimed at preventing new disturbance from new routes created by users, but confusion will remain as to what is an authorized route for use, hampering educational and enforcement efforts.

c. Cumulative impacts to Water Quality:

Under the Proposed Action, sediments entering the area's desert washes, Gila River and impoundments from the transportation system will be reduced by the reduction in motorized route mileage, and by drainage and erosion control measures, and periodic maintenance. Some sediment will continue to enter the area's dry washes and streams, and eventually the Gila River. Under the No Action Alternative, potential sedimentation sources will include all physical access routes, and increase with growing traffic due to wear and tear of travelway surfaces. New sedimentation sources may result from new trespass routes, and/or activity areas created by users.

5. Threatened and Endangered (T&E) and Special Status Species

a. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

The Gila River road crossing at Cochran may adversely affect Critical Habitat for the Spikedace in a small discountable way. Vehicle traffic may introduce small quantities of motor vehicle fluids that contaminate the water when flows are low (e.g. <1 cfs). In addition, young fish and larvae using shallow portions of the river crossing along the edges may be injured or killed by tires or by beaching as water is displaced shoreward.

Impacts related to transportation on the Southwestern Willow flycatcher, Spikedace and Yellow-billed Cuckoo will be minimal, and limited to a few river access points. Impacts will be reduced by closing some inventoried and more recently created motor routes in the Gila River riparian management area. No impact is expected on other species that may be found in the area. Abandoned mine hazard abatement along public use areas will be planned and designed to accommodate passage by bats in suitable habitat.

Formal consultation with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service was conducted pursuant Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973. The biological opinion (BO) on the proposed TTMP concurs with the determination that the proposed action may adversely affect the endangered southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*) and its critical habitat, and the threatened spikedace (*Meda fulgida*) and its critical habitat. Furthermore, the proposed action is not likely to adversely affect the endangered lesser-nosed bat (*Leptonycteris curasoae*), nor the threatened bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*). Conservation measures were identified in the BO to avoid and minimize effects to these species, which are included in Appendix I of the TTMP.

b. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

Current impacts on critical habitats will continue and likely increase in the absence of active management. Visitor education and enforcement under current regulations will aim at minimizing impacts, but will be hampered by the lack of a travel management plan.

c. Cumulative impacts to Threatened and Endangered Species:

Under the Proposed Action, impacts on critical habitats in the planning area will be reduced from current conditions. Under the No Action Alternative, potential impacts will continue and increase primarily related to motor vehicle use in the Gila River and adjacent riparian area. Residual impacts will contribute slightly to degradation of habitat from other causes.

6. Floodplains

a. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

No impacts on floodplain characteristics of the Gila River or side drainages are anticipated. Some inventoried motor routes and some more recently created routes in the river floodplain will be closed to motorized travel. A few routes which provide access to designated river access sites and a river ford crossing at Cochran will remain in the floodplain. No improvements are proposed in the floodplain, but temporary occupancy will be continue with regard to dispersed recreation use (camping, picnicking, fishing, etc.). Routes along the area's washes will tend to speed stream flows by channeling water on the tracks and cutting across gravel bars and terraces. Down-cutting along wash bottoms by travel way erosion may affect normal function of floodplain alluvium terraces in places. Impacts will be reduced by surveys for problem conditions and corrective action on a case-by-case basis.

b. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

No impact on floodplain characteristics is expected. Current conditions and motor route inventory in the floodplain continue, and the level of motorized activity and impacts likely will increase at current river access points. Some routes in the riparian areas prone to flooding may intercept high water and cause erosion that may alter the normal course of water flows, potentially creating new channels and loss of or impairment of riparian area functions.

c. Cumulative impacts to Floodplains:

Under the Proposed Action, no impact on floodplain characteristics is expected. There would be a slight reduction in the number of motorized travel routes in the Gila River floodplain, and potential impacts related to those. Under the No Action Alternative, impacts from vehicle use may cause erosion and alter stream channels and floodplains.

7. Cultural Resources

a. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

Several routes across known cultural sites along the Gila River and in Cottonwood Canyon will be closed to motorized use to protect cultural resource values. Known cultural resource sites along motorized and non-motorized travel routes will be monitored to detect changes in use and condition, and identify corrective action or adaptive management. Implementation of road maintenance, improvements, signing, or other surface disturbing activities will be surveyed and impacts to cultural resources will be avoided. Ongoing surveys will be conducted on designated route system and public use areas, and newly discovered resource values will be protected through adaptive management. Mitigation plans will be prepared for designated routes across or adjacent to cultural sites at risk of damage from use of the routes or maintenance operations. Visitor education and enforcement efforts will foster appreciation for protection of cultural resource values in the planning area.

b. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

Cultural resource sites will remain vulnerable to vandalism or unintentional damage along or adjacent to travel routes, and may be damaged over time. Impacts will be avoided or mitigated during project planning and development on a case-by-case basis.

c. Cumulative impacts to Cultural Resources:

Under the Proposed Action, cultural resource values will be protected by closing vehicle traffic on vulnerable sites being damaged, by controlling access, and by visitor education efforts. Ongoing surveys will identify properties/sites at risk leading to resource protection action on a case by case basis.

8. Native American Religious Concerns:

a. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

The risk of damage to known sites of concern to Native American interests from public use will be reduced by closing specific sections of Cottonwood Canyon to motorized use under the proposed action. New sites discovered by future surveys will be protected through adaptive management as determined by site conditions on a case-by-case basis.

b. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

The risk of potential resource damage incidental to motor vehicle use, or from unintentional acts will continue at known sites of concern until corrective action is undertaken. Important known sites will be protected under current regulations under separate action on a case-by-case basis.

c. Cumulative Impacts to Native American Religious Concerns:

Under the proposed Action, known sites at risk will be protected, and protective action will be undertaken as monitoring or surveys reveal changes in condition and needs. Under the No Action Alternative, sites of concern will not be protected under this plan, and will require separate action to comply with bureau policy or regulations.

9. Wetlands/Riparian Zones:

a. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

No impact on wetlands is expected. As indicated in Table 2 below, approximately 2.6 miles of motorized route in or across riparian areas will be designated to accommodate access and approximately 9.3 miles will be closed to vehicle use to protect resource values. Routes remaining in riparian areas will be managed to minimize or prevent impacts to resource values, which may include traffic controls, relocation or reconstruction. The Cochran river ford crossing will be preserved to connect the travel routes on the south and north side of the river. The mileage of motorized route in xero-riparian areas is reduced.

Table 2: Designations for routes in riparian areas

Route Designation	Total (Miles)
Primitive Road	2.0
Semi-Primitive Road	0.6
TOTAL Motor Routes	2.6
Non Motorized Trail	1.4
NA, Closed to Motor Vehicle Use	9.3

b. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

Impacts on riparian areas will continue at present levels and may increase from largely un-managed public use. Corrective action will be undertaken in problem areas under current regulations on a case-by-case basis.

c. Cumulative impacts to Wetland/Riparian Zones:

Under the Proposed Action, potential impacts from motorized vehicle use and associated recreational activity in areas with riparian resource values will be reduced. Under the No Action Alternative, routes in riparian areas will remain and impacts will continue until corrected by separate future action.

10. Soils

a. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

The designated travel routes will cover approximately 320 acres of ground and loss of normal soil function. The 130 acres of inventoried motorized route that will not be designated for motorized travel will be reclaimed or revegetated. Designated routes in soil types prone to fugitive dust will be treated (capped with aggregate) to reduce the amount of dust generated by traffic. Existing erosion problems will be corrected by spot maintenance and repair projects. Annual inspection and corrective action will ensure erosion is kept to a minimum and that any accelerated erosion and its impacts are quickly abated. Administration, visitor education, regulation of authorized use and identification of unauthorized use by law enforcement and park rangers will improve compliance with rules and help prevent the proliferation of “wildcat” roads.

b. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

Loss of normal soil function and accelerated erosion will continue on approximately 450 acres covered by the inventoried motorized travel routes. Erosion will continue removing roadbed material without drainage and erosion control work, making conditions worse. Proliferation of “wildcat” roads will continue to affect normal soil function to increasing extent. Visual quality of the area will deteriorate as new roads cause barren ground to appear on hillsides. Increase in visible dust will lower air quality as unregulated uses increase with more driving on unmaintained road surfaces. Water quality will decline as soil erosion increases particulates in runoff leading into drainages and streams, eventually entering livestock waters or the Gila River above the Ashurst-Hayden Diversion Dam.

c. Cumulative impacts to Soils:

Under the proposed action, approximately 320 acres of soil would continue to be covered by road or trail way, with associated loss of normal soil function and productivity, and erosion. Soil erosion will be reduced from present levels by drainage and erosion control measures, and from closing some routes to traffic. Soil eroded by runoff will eventually end up in the area’s drainage ways and the Gila River, contributing to sedimentation in impoundments (stock tanks), the river, and the San Carlos Irrigation Project irrigation water systems. Under the No Action Alternative, impacts to soils will continue at present levels and is likely to increase as traffic continues on the physical access route system, as reclaiming and unused routes attract new traffic, and as new routes are created by users.

11. Vegetation

a. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

Vegetation cover will continue to be foregone on roadways covering approximately 320 acres, and an additional 40 acres related to dispersed recreation activity areas or sites. Routes under reclamation objectives would allow restoration of natural vegetation on approximately 130 acres. Impacts on riparian vegetation will be reduced by restricting access in Martinez Canyon, and by relocating the road in Walnut Canyon. Regular inspection and maintenance should ensure erosion is kept to a minimum and that any accelerated erosion and its impacts are quickly abated. Administration and regulation of authorized use and identification of unauthorized use by law enforcement and park rangers should help improve compliance with rules and prevent the proliferation of “wildcat” roads.

b. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

Vegetation cover will be foregone on approximately 450 acres on the motorized route inventory, and will likely increase gradually with increased demand and lack of a management plan. Educational efforts will be undertaken to promote ‘staying on the existing road’ and reduce the increase in impacts on vegetation from user created off-road vehicle tracks. Accelerated erosion will continue or expand as no drainage and erosion control, spot repairs or periodic maintenance will occur.

c. Cumulative impacts to Vegetation:

Under the Proposed Action, vegetation cover will be foregone on approximately 320 acres, and will increase slightly by widening and maintenance activities over time. Impacts to plant cover are likely to occur on the flat ground in the 100’ zone along designated routes as visitors pull off for parking, camping and new turnouts are created. The disturbance will add to loss of vegetation cover due to other existing and potential land uses (mining, utilities and range improvements primarily). Vegetation cover will be restored on closed routes, and revegetation will continue on presently reclaiming routes. Under the No Action Alternative, foregone vegetation cover will continue on approx. 450 acres on the physical access routes, and likely will increase. Vegetation cover on presently reclaiming routes will likely be disturbed anew as visitors are attracted by their remnants and traffic becomes established.

12. Noxious Weeds

a. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

The potential for introduction of weed seed by vehicles driven into the area, or weed seed exporting from the area, will be reduced by visitor education themes on noxious weeds. The potential for dispersal of weed seed from sources within the area by vehicles will continue. Weed surveys will detect presence of weeds, and appropriate treatment plans will be developed on a case-by-case.

b. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

Impacts will be similar to those under the proposed action, except the potential impacts might be more widespread with a greater extent of motorized travel routes receiving public use, and a reduced capability for visitor education, monitoring and treatment.

c. Cumulative impacts to Noxious Weeds:

Under the Proposed Action, the risk of invasive and/or noxious weeds being introduced or spread within the planning area by users will continue. Weed populations discovered will be reduced or eliminated. Under the No Action Alternative, detection and treatment of noxious weeds will not occur, and will be subject to separate action taken under other Bureau programs.

13. Socio-Economics and Environmental Justice

- Socio Economics

The recreational opportunities available in the planning area and adjacent lands produce social and economic benefits related to recreational use and other uses in the area affected by access and transportation. Social benefits are typical of outdoor recreation use in undeveloped settings where visitors engage in sightseeing, exploring, being with friends, developing new skills and taking risks, and developing a greater appreciation and respect for the desert environment and resource values in the area. Economic benefits include revenues to local economy for purchases and travel related expenditures related to trips taken into the area (fuel, supplies, vehicles and equipment), and employment related to same. A substantial number of visitors are from out of state and from international origins, and the recreation opportunities in the area provide a

destination for day trips or multi day trips into the ‘old west’. Recreation demand exists and is gradually increasing for commercial and organized group recreational use operations. Information on demographics of recreational visitors is found in Pinal County’s economic profile and Arizona State Parks’ studies related to the Motorized and Non-Motorized Trails Plan. Economic impact information of hunting and fishing, OHV recreation, and non-consumptive use of wildlife is also available from studies by the Arizona Game and Fish Department².

- ***Environmental Justice***

Low income, minority and disadvantaged populations exist in the towns/communities near the planning area, including the nearest towns/communities of Florence, Superior, Kelvin-Riverside, and Silver Creek, as well as in the major metropolitan areas in Phoenix and Tucson, which are within a one to two hour drive from the planning area. Public land visitors represent a wide socio-economic spectrum, including visitors from low income and minority populations and opportunities in the area will be available to all populations. The communities near the project area historically have depended largely on mining, farming, ranching, prison service, and tourism for their economies. Population growth in metropolitan areas and local communities is causing an increase in demand and recreational use in planning area, including those from low income and minority populations. As growth and development occurs along the Highway 60 corridor east towards Florence Junction, increased demand for visitor services will also increase.

a. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

Opportunities for outdoor recreation will continue to be available resulting in economic benefits related to hunting, OHV recreation, hunting, and non-consumptive use of wildlife, and commercial recreation services. The proposed action will not result in a disproportionate impact on low income and disadvantaged populations.

b. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

Impacts will be similar to those under the proposed action.

c. Cumulative impacts to Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice:

Under the Proposed Action and No Action Alternative, cumulative impacts will be similar to those under the proposed action.

14. Water Resources

a. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

Access will be accommodated to existing water facilities and improvements. Impacts from public use on some facilities will be reduced by use restrictions on or near water sources. The Gila River will be protected from potential impacts of motorized vehicle use when the river is running low or with dry sections. The proposed designations and travel management will clarify the motorized travel route system, and resource damage associated with OHV travel from new “pioneered motor routes” will be reduced through compliance efforts. Designated routes within and adjacent to ephemeral or intermittent stream channels could adversely affect stream-side vegetative communities which may compromise stream channel and bank morphologic stability, elevating erosive potential in the washes. Natural surface runoff and flow paths intercepted and diverted by travel routes will be restored through drainage control projects and spot repairs (installation of water bars, turnout ditches, and other measures). Surface infiltration and permeability of soils on travelway surfaces will be reduced by soil compaction, and may lead to

² http://www.azgfd.gov/w_c/survey_results.shtml. For OHV recreation impact, see also: <http://www.pr.state.az.us/partnerships/ohv/OHVEcon/912pinal.pdf>

elevated surface runoff, accelerated erosion and further sedimentation to downstream water ways, which will be minimized through drainage and stabilization work on the routes.

b. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

Impacts will be similar to those under the proposed action, but conflicts between public use and existing water facilities, and impacts on surface runoff patterns and resulting erosion and sedimentation sources will not be corrected through a comprehensive travel management program. Problems will be addressed on a case-by-case basis.

c. Cumulative impacts to Water Resources:

Under the Proposed Action, conflicts between public use and existing water facilities or improvements will be reduced, particularly those related to temporary occupancy by vehicle parking, driving, camping, and other recreation activities at earthen stock tanks. Impacts on natural surface flow patterns intercepted by designated travel routes will be reduced. Under the No Action Alternative, impacts and conflicts presently occurring at water facilities will continue and are likely to increase with growing use. Impacts on surface flow patterns will not be corrected.

15. Land Status:

a. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

No changes in land status are proposed, except for the possible acquisition of transportation easements across non-federal land and potential granting of transportation rights-of-way on roads across BLM lands to Pinal County or other parties on a case-by case basis. Potential easement acquisitions will resolve trespass conditions where existing physical access routes cross private or state lands without legal authorization.

b. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

Impacts will be similar to those under the proposed action.

c. Cumulative impacts to Land Status:

Under the Proposed Action, acquisition or potential granting of transportation easements or rights-of-way to ensure legal public access to public lands, or provide for maintenance and improvement of designated routes by third parties may occur. Potential easement acquisitions will resolve trespass conditions where existing physical access routes cross private or state lands without legal authorization. Under the No action Alternative, impacts will be similar to those under the Proposed Action, except that easements or rights of ways will be acquired or granted depending on needs identified by other land management programs and needs identified in the future.

16. Recreation Resources and Use

a. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

A travel route system will be available to support recreational opportunities presently occurring in the planning area. The system will access the existing recreational settings, with some exceptions where existing physical access is in sensitive areas requiring use restrictions to protect resource values. The reduction in motor route mileage will reduce the extent of travel routes and potential distribution of visitors, potentially leading to congestion at popular destinations. Opportunities for sport four-wheel driving will be preserved on extreme primitive roads, subject to specific maintenance plans prepared for each extreme route, and subject to special restrictions on vehicles and equipment on these routes. Designated non-motorized trails will provide access to non-motorized settings. The Great Western Trail will be accommodated by the designations. Upper Martinez Canyon will be closed, foregoing motorized access and associated recreation

opportunities, but preserving non-motorized access and administrative access to the Martinez Cabin site. Over time as recreation demand and use increases, social impacts on visitors' experiences related to congestion and crowding at access points and popular destinations may occur. More widespread availability of visitor information about the area resulting from travel management may increase public awareness and attract additional recreational use. Hill climbing opportunities will be reduced by closing climbs on highly visible slopes, such as the route east of the Windy Gap overlook.

b. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

In the absence of an official travel system and route designations, motorized use will continue in sensitive areas and eventually impact areas that are currently naturally reclaiming or that have not been impacted by motorized use in the past. Motorized use will continue on most inventoried routes, with less opportunities for non-motorized users, and increased opportunities for user conflict. The majority of use will continue to be located on main access routes, with additional routes being developed by users. Rock crawling activity will continue in sensitive areas. Motorized use would be more dispersed throughout the area rather than confined to specific, designated routes.

c. Cumulative impacts on Recreation Resources and Use:

Under the Proposed Action, recreation opportunities will continue to be available for visitors to engage in a variety of recreation activities and derived benefits. Impacts associated with traffic and visitor use will continue along the identified transportation system. Encounters among visitors will increase with growing use, particularly at staging areas and along the main access routes and at popular destinations. New turnouts may be created along the main access routes, creating new recreation activity sites (parking lots, camp sites). Under the No Action Alternative, impacts will continue and increase with growing use along the physical access route system, and spread onto new areas, or routes not being used or presently reclaiming.

17. Visual Resources

a. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

Visual impacts from the travel route system will remain in the landscape of the area (cuts, fills, roadway), but largely hidden from off-site views by the terrain. Several highly visible routes on steep slope or hill climbs in the foreground viewing distance zone will be closed and reclaimed to protect visual resources, reducing visual impacts in the local area. Opportunities for sightseeing by various modes of travel will be preserved.

b. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

Visual impacts of the inventoried travel route network will continue. Visual impacts of motor vehicle use may increase from route sprawl/proliferation by ongoing public use and travel in the area, particularly on highly visible slopes.

c. Cumulative Impacts on Visual Resources:

Under the Proposed Action, visual impacts will be reduced by controlling proliferation of vehicle tracks, and from reclamation efforts on closed routes. Localized visual impact will increase from transportation management related actions, including maintenance and spot repairs, signing, barriers, gates, cattleguards and ancillary improvements. Visual impact of closed/reclaimed routes will diminish over time to un-noticeable levels. Under the No Action Alternative, present visual impacts from routes will continue to be noticeable in the landscape, particularly on steep slopes and hill climbs. Visual impacts are likely to increase over time as reclaiming routes attract vehicle use re-disturbed soils and vegetation clearing increase visual contrasts.

18. Grazing and Range Resources

a. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

Vehicle access for use, operation and maintenance of the range and improvements will be accommodated. Exceptions will be granted for vehicle access to range improvements on a case-by-case basis on routes otherwise restricted, provided resource values are preserved. Conflicts between recreation use and grazing operations will be reduced by restrictions on recreation use at or near livestock waters, replacing wire gates that are difficult to operate with cattleguards or frame gates.

b. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

Similar to impacts under the proposed action, except the official transportation system and related use restrictions will not be designated or established.

c. Cumulative impacts on Grazing:

Under the Proposed Action, access needs of grazing operators will be accommodated, and conflicts with recreational use will be reduced, particularly around range improvements such as livestock water sources. Under the No Action Alternative, conflicts between public recreational use and grazing operations will continue, and are likely to increase with growing visitation.

19. Wildlife Habitat

a. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

The designated travel route system will identify motorized routes in different wildlife habitats throughout the planning area. The total mileage of motorized route will be reduced by approximately 25% from inventory levels, and road density will be considerably reduced in sensitive areas. The designated route system could still alter habitat characteristics and the ability to support healthy wildlife populations in localized areas, depending on the intensity, distribution, traffic volume, and type of human activity in the area. Present levels of activity are highest in the northwestern part of the planning area, and over time intensity of use will likely increase throughout the area. Disturbance of wildlife, possible displacement, and potential loss due to mortality of individuals from traffic accidents, poaching, and harassment may also occur with increased traffic and recreational use.

Under the proposed action, travel management designations will tend to reduce the visitor use/human activity in sensitive riparian habitats along the Gila River, Martinez Canyon and Walnut Gulch. Road density overall will be somewhat reduced but remain relatively high in the Mineral Mountain area, potentially affecting wildlife habitat quality. Motorized route density in bighorn sheep habitat will remain low, and will be slightly decreased. Motorized routes in desert wash habitat would be reduced by closing approximately 71 miles of motorized wash route, but impacts will continue on designated motorized trails or primitive roads over approximately 85.6 miles.

Travel route spurs to wildlife waters (and springs and livestock waters) will typically be limited to vehicle use for administrative purposes only, reducing the potential for disturbance of watering wildlife. Camping restrictions will be posted at wildlife waters.

b. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

The motorized travel route inventory will likely continue to receive traffic and recreational activity use at gradually increasing levels based on population projections for Pinal County. Motorized routes in all types of habitats in the planning area will continue to affect habitat quality, occupancy and use by wildlife. The motorized route system will likely grow over time as visitors drive in new places, creating new tracks and causing new impacts and disturbance.

Habitats in sensitive areas (including desert bighorn sheep habitat, desert washes, and riparian areas) may become degraded over time from impacts related to transportation and recreational use. Public recreational use in the area is expected to grow, and without management the travel route network and associated disturbance will continue to spread into areas with little or no disturbance currently present.

c. **Cumulative impacts on Wildlife:**

Under the Proposed Action, continued traffic and human activity along designated travel routes throughout the area will disturb habitat to varying degrees depending on traffic volume and level of activity. Wildlife habitat could change in quality along heavily traveled routes, possibly displacing some animals, and risk of road kill will increase over time. Impacts on desert wash habitat, and wildlife waters will be reduced slightly. Under the No Action Alternative, impacts to wildlife habitat will continue and are likely to increase particularly from public recreational use as visitation increases over time, and as it spreads throughout the area along the physical access route system, and as new routes are put in by users without regard for resource values.

20. Transportation System

a. **Impacts of the Proposed Action:**

The Bureau transportation system for the planning area will be defined with specific objectives for the various types of route. Usability of the designated system will vary according to the route type, with the majority of routes intended to accommodate high clearance, four-wheel drive, and all terrain vehicles, few useable by passenger car and heavy vehicles/motor homes, and some only useable by specialized vehicles.

Approximately 31 miles of road and 247 miles of primitive road will be designated.

Approximately 130 miles of inventoried motorized route will be designated for restoration objectives. Maintenance of the designated route system will be implemented according to route-specific objectives. The Bureau transportation maintenance responsibility will increase, but will be shared through rights-of-way and maintenance agreements with other parties. The BLM will pursue rights-of-way or maintenance agreements with Pinal County to maintain designated public land access routes (Mineral Mountain and Cottonwood Canyon, Price-Box canyon, Sandman Road, Whitlow Ranch, and Battle Axe Rd.) as 'Primitive Roads' in accordance with ARS-28-6706. Transportation-related rights-of-way will be granted for access roads to non-federal land in-holdings and developments on a case-by-case as needed to resolve current trespass conditions. Grade crossings will be improved to proper standards, and conflicts with public use and the Copper Basin Railway will be minimized.

b. **Impacts of the No Action Alternative:**

Transportation maintenance and improvements and trail development and maintenance would continue on a case-by-case basis without a comprehensive plan in place. Transportation assets in the planning area will be added to the Bureau Facility Management System on a case-by-case basis instead of the entire system.

c. **Cumulative impacts on Transportation:**

Under the Proposed Action, the Bureau transportation system will be established and related management and maintenance liability will increase. Use restrictions will be established to protect identified resource values. Impacts of motorized use, traffic and recreational activity will continue on the designated route system. Growth of the route system through proliferation of user created tracks will be controlled. Reclaiming access related disturbances will be reclaimed or revegetated. Under the No Action Alternative, the Bureau transportation system will not be established nor use restrictions to protect resource values.

21. Organizations or Agencies Consulted

The following provided input during the development of the proposed travel management alternatives through the Middle Gila Conservation Partnership evaluation and the stakeholders workshops: the Tonto National Forest, Arizona State Land Department, Arizona National Guard Florence Military Reservation, Arizona Game and Fish Department, San Carlos Irrigation Project, Arizona State Association of Four Wheel Drive Clubs, Arizona OHV Coalition, Arizona Wilderness Coalition, The Sierra Club, The Four Southern Tribes (Tohono O’Odham Nation, the Gila River Indian Community, the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, the Ak-Chin Indian Community, and the Pascua Yaqui Tribe) were consulted about management and protection of petroglyph sites, particularly those in Cottonwood Canyon.

22. List of Preparers

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