

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

El Centro Field Office

EA Number: CA-670-2010-01

Case File No: N/A

Proposed Action Title/Type: Airport Mesa Shooting Closure

Applicant/Proponent: US Border Patrol

Location of Proposed Action: San Diego, CA.

San Bernardino Base and Meridian (SBBM),

Township 18 South, Range 8 East,

Section 3,

S¹/₂S¹/₄SE¹/₄, portion south of Hwy. 80, (20 acres, more or less);

Section 10,

N¹/₂NE¹/₄ (80 acres);

SE¹/₄NE¹/₄ (40 acres);

Lot 9 (17.15 acres);

Section 11,

SW¹/₄NW¹/₄ (40 acres);

Lot 12 (13.05 acres).

Conformance with Applicable Land Use Plan(s):

The proposed action and alternatives are in conformance with the following approved land use plan, as required by 43 CFR 1610.5.

Eastern San Diego County Resource Management Plan

The Eastern San Diego County Resource Management Plan identifies Airport Mesa as the *Airport Mesa Recreation Management Zone* (RMZ). The plan recognized target shooting as a primary activity for this area. In order to provide for the safety of BP agents, the BLM is able to issue a temporary closure under 43 CFR 8364.1 while the BLM goes through the necessary process to amend the Eastern San Diego County RMP.

Summary of Alternatives:

The proposed action, Alternative A, allows for the temporary closure order which would prohibit target shooting along Airport Mesa for 2 years.

Alternative B is the no action alternative. Under this alternative, the BLM administered lands along Airport Mesa would remain open to target shooting, subject to applicable statutes, regulations, policy and land use plans.

Rationale and Management Considerations:

Alternative A is preferred over Alternative B for the following reasons:

- Closing approximately 210 acres of BLM administered lands would reduce hazards from stray and ricocheting bullets landing in and hitting nearby structures or BP personnel.
- The reduction in vehicle traffic, trash dumping and high-impact public use may allow some disturbed land to recover. This would improve potential habitat for plants and wildlife including special status species.
- The reduction in trash dumping and intensive, high impact, public recreation use may have a positive effect on cultural resources.

Consultation and Coordination:

Because this EA analyzes the temporary closure of the shooting area at Airport Mesa, consultation and coordination with agencies and the public will occur when the BLM initiates the environmental assessment for the permanent closure of this shooting area. The BLM has notified local law enforcement agencies, fire departments and planning groups about this temporary closure and will implement signing measures at Airport Mesa to ensure that users of this area are informed of the temporary closure.

A determination of “no affect” to Federally-listed species was made; formal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in accordance with the Endangered Species Act is not required.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

I have reviewed this environmental assessment including the explanation and resolution of any potentially significant environmental impacts. I have determined that the proposed action described above and below will not have any significant impacts on the human environment and that an EIS is not required. I have determined that the proposed project is in conformance with the approved land use plan.

Environmental impacts associated with the proposed action and alternatives have been assessed by an interdisciplinary team and described in Environmental Assessment (EA) CA-670-2010-01. The context of the EA was determined to be at a local and regional scale in San Diego County, California. The effects of the action are not applicable on a national scale since no nationally significant values were involved.

In making this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), the following criteria have been considered, in accordance with the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), 40 CFR. 1508.27:

1. *Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on balance the effect will be beneficial.*

Beneficial Effects: Closing 210 acres of BLM administered lands at Airport Mesa would reduce hazards from stray and ricocheting bullets landing near or hitting BP agents patrolling along the top of the hill. Trash and debris left on the public lands from

shooters would be reduced or eliminated. Noise from the discharge of guns and rifles would also be reduced. The reduction in vehicle traffic, trash dumping and high-impact public use may allow some disturbed land to recover. This would improve potential habitat for plants and wildlife including special status species.

Adverse Effects: Closure of Airport Mesa may displace shooters, causing them to move to other areas to practice this activity. There could be impacts to adjacent lands such as illegal dumping, safety concerns, or conflicts with private land owners.

2. *The degree to which the proposed action affects public health, safety and sanitation.*

The proposed project will have a beneficial effect on public health and safety by reducing hazards from stray and ricocheting bullets landing near or hitting BP agents patrolling along the top of the hill.

3. *Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.*

The temporary closure of Airport Mesa does not affect park lands, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas. The proposed closure may have a beneficial effect on cultural or historic resources.

4. *The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.*

It is not likely that the temporary closure of the Airport Mesa area will result in impacts to the quality of the human environment that will be highly controversial. Closing 210 acres of BLM administered lands at Airport Mesa will reduce hazards from stray and ricocheting bullets landing near or hitting BP agents patrolling along the top of the hill. This will cause an overall increase in the safety of the personnel employed in BP activities.

5. *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risk.*

Effects of the proposed action are well understood and will not involve any unique or unknown risks.

6. *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.*

The proposed action will not establish precedents for future actions or represent a decision in principle about a future action.

7. *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. Significance exists if it is reasonable to anticipate a*

cumulatively significant impact on the environment. Significance cannot be avoided by terming an action temporary or by breaking it down into small component parts.

While closure of Airport Mesa may displace shooters, causing them to move to other areas to practice this activity, the BLM is committed to working with the recreation community to find new solutions. The next best option is to provide for target shooting in designated areas with more intensive management oversight, such as private gun clubs or through public-private management partnerships. Cumulative impacts of the proposed action on the environment will not be significant or related to any other action with significant cumulative impacts.

8. *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.*

No significant scientific, cultural or historical resources will be adversely affected by the proposed action.

9. *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.*

A determination of “no affect” to Federally-listed species was made; formal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in accordance with the Endangered Species Act is not required.

10. *Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.*

The proposed action does not threaten a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

Based on the findings discussed herein, I conclude that the proposed action is not a major Federal action and will result in no significant impacts to the environment. Preparation of an environmental impact statement to further analyze possible impacts is not required pursuant to Section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.

Administrative Remedies

Administrative remedies may be available to those who believe they will be adversely affected by this decision. Appeals may be made to the Office of Hearings and Appeals, Office of the Secretary, U.S. Department of Interior, Board of Land Appeals (Board) in strict compliance with the regulations in 43 CFR Part 4. Notices of appeal must be filed in this office within 30 days after publication of this decision. If a notice of appeal does not include a statement of reasons, such statement must be filed with this office and the Board within 30 days after the notice of appeal is filed. The notice of appeal and any statement of reasons, written arguments, or briefs

must also be served upon the Regional Solicitor, Pacific Southwest Region, U.S. Department of Interior, 2800 Cottage Way, E-1712, Sacramento, CA 95825.

Reviewed By: /s/ Carrie Simmons Date: 10/5/09
Carrie Simmons, Acting Environmental Coordinator

Approved By: /s/ Daniel Steward *acting for* Date: 10/5/09
Vicki L. Wood, Field Manager



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
El Centro Field Office
1661 S. 4th Street
El Centro, CA 92243
www.blm.gov/elcentro

October 2009

Airport Mesa Shooting Closure (CA-670-2010-01) Decision Record

1.0 Introduction and Background

The Airport Mesa area has historically been an important shooting area for residents of San Diego and Imperial Counties. The eastern slope of the mesa is easily accessible and provides a safe back-stop for target shooting. The US Border Patrol (BP) has a new access road that crosses this eastern slope and is within the line-of-fire for recreational target shooters. This has created an unsafe situation, subjecting the BP agents to the dangers of stray bullets or ricochets.

Since construction of the road, the BP has worked to inform shooters of the dangers associated with shooting in this area and have requested that shooters move elsewhere to shoot. On August 18, 2009, the BP issued a letter to the BLM requesting that the BLM formally close Airport Mesa to target shooting in order to protect their agents in the area.

An Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared to disclose and analyze the environmental consequences of the closure of the Airport Mesa shooting area proposed by the BP. The EA is a site-specific analysis of potential impacts that could result with the implementation of a proposed action or alternatives to the proposed action.

2.0 Decision

2.1 Decision and Rationale

Based on information in the EA, the project record, and consultation with my staff, I have decided to implement the project as described in the EA.

Closing approximately 210 acres of BLM administered lands would reduce hazards from stray and ricocheting bullets landing in and hitting nearby structures or personnel. Trash and debris left on the public lands from shooters would be reduced or eliminated. Noise from the discharge of guns and rifles would also be reduced, adding to the comfort level of recreational users in the area. Opportunities for target shooting would still exist on other BLM administered lands in the region.

3.0 Consultation and Coordination

Because this EA analyzes the temporary closure of the shooting area at Airport Mesa, consultation and coordination with agencies and the public will occur when the BLM initiates the environmental assessment for the permanent closure of this shooting area. The BLM has notified local law enforcement agencies, fire departments and planning groups about this temporary closure and will implement signing measures at Airport Mesa to ensure that users of this area are informed of the temporary closure.

A determination of “no affect” to Federally-listed species was made; formal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in accordance with the Endangered Species Act is not required.

4.0 Plan Consistency

Based on information in the EA, the project record, and recommendations from the BLM specialists, I conclude that this decision is consistent with the 2008 Eastern San Diego County Resource Management Plan, the Endangered Species Act, Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and other cultural resource management laws and regulations, Executive Order 12898 regarding Environmental Justice, and Executive Order 13212 regarding potential adverse impacts to energy development, production, supply and/or distribution.

5.0 Administrative Remedies

Administrative remedies may be available to those who believe they will be adversely affected by this decision. Appeals may be made to the Office of Hearings and Appeals, Office of the Secretary, U.S. Department of Interior, Board of Land Appeals (Board) in strict compliance with the regulations in 43 CFR Part 4. Notices of appeal must be filed in this office within 30 days after publication of this decision. If a notice of appeal does not include a statement of reasons, such statement must be filed with this office and the Board within 30 days after the notice of appeal is filed. The notice of appeal and any statement of reasons, written arguments, or briefs must also be served upon the Regional Solicitor, Pacific Southwest Region, U.S. Department of Interior, 2800 Cottage Way, E-1712, Sacramento, CA 95825.

The effective date of this decision (and the date initiating the appeal period) will be the date this notice of decision is posted on the BLM’s (El Centro Field Office) internet website.

/s/ Daniel Steward *acting for*
Vicki L. Wood, Field Manager
El Centro Field Office

10/5/09
Date

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
EL CENTRO FIELD OFFICE**

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
EA Number CA-670-2010-01**

DATE: October 1, 2009

TITLE / PROJECT TYPE: Airport Mesa Shooting Closure

APPLICANT / PROPONENT: US Border Patrol

LOCATION OF PROPOSED ACTION: Airport Mesa is located in Eastern San Diego County, East of the town of Jacumba, south of Old Highway 80. The area described as the Airport Mesa/Carrizo Creek shooting area covers approximately 210 acres along the eastern slope of Airport Mesa.

San Bernardino Base and Meridian (SBBM),
Township 18 South, Range 8 East,
Section 3,
 S½S¼SE¼, portion south of Hwy. 80, (20 acres, more or less);
Section 10,
 N½NE¼ (80 acres);
 SE¼NE¼ (40 acres);
 Lot 9 (17.15 acres);
Section 11,
 SW¼NW¼ (40 acres);
 Lot 12 (13.05 acres).

USGS TOPOGRAPHIC MAP: Jacumba 7.5 minute quad

LAND USE PLAN CONFORMANCE and Other Regulatory Compliance:

Land Use Plan Conformance. The Eastern San Diego County Resource Management Plan identifies Airport Mesa as the *Airport Mesa Recreation Management Zone* (RMZ). The plan recognized target shooting as a primary activity for this area. In order to provide for the safety of BP agents we are able to issue a temporary closure under 43 CFR 8364.1 while we go through the necessary process to amend the Eastern San Diego County RMP.

Endangered Species Act. A determination of “no affect” to Federally-listed species was made; formal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in accordance with the Endangered Species Act is not required.

Cultural Resources and Native American Concerns. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), as implemented (36 CFR Part 800), requires Federal agencies to take into account the effects of their undertakings on historic properties. The State Protocol

Agreement (2007) between the California State Director of the BLM and the California State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) defines the roles and relationships between the SHPO's office and the BLM under the National Programmatic Agreement. The State protocol is intended to ensure that the BLM operates efficiently and effectively in accordance with the intent and requirements of the NHPA. The protocol streamlines the Section 106 process by not requiring case-by-case consultation with the SHPO on most individual undertakings.

Valid existing rights shall not be affected by any proposed action or alternatives outlined in this environmental assessment. The BLM has no authority over private, County, State or other Federal lands. No decisions shall be made by BLM regarding use of firearms on private, County, State or other Federal lands. The San Diego County Sheriff's Office is the appropriate contact for any firearms issues on private, County or State lands.

NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

The Secure Border Initiative (SBI) congressionally authorized and funded the US Border Patrol (BP) to increase their presence along the US/Mexico Border to improve our national security. The Airport Mesa area is critical to the BP's efforts to protect this area because the high elevation of the mesa gives agents the ability to monitor the nearby valleys for illegal activities. As part of this effort to increase the BP's effectiveness in this area, they have constructed pedestrian and vehicle border barriers, as well as roads for access and maintenance. One of these access roads traverses the east slope of Airport Mesa (Figure 1). The BP now uses the top of the mesa as a vantage point to monitor this area.

The Airport Mesa area has historically been an important shooting area for residents of San Diego and Imperial Counties. The eastern slope of the mesa is easily accessible and provides a safe back-stop for target shooting. The BP's new access road crosses this eastern slope and is within the line-of-fire for recreational target shooters. This has created an unsafe situation, subjecting BP agents to the dangers of stray bullets or ricochets.

Since construction of the road, the BP has worked to inform shooters of the dangers associated with shooting in this area and have requested that shooters move elsewhere to shoot. On August 18, 2009, the BP issued a letter to the BLM requesting that the BLM formally close Airport Mesa to target shooting in order to protect their agents in the area.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION and ALTERNATIVES

A. Proposed Action

For reasons of public health and safety the BLM proposes a temporary closure order which would prohibit target shooting along Airport Mesa for 2 years. Approximately 210 acres of BLM administered lands would be affected by the closure. Foot and vehicle access would not be restricted by the proposed action. In order to effectively implement the closure, the BLM proposes to (1) install closure order signs along all access roads and "No Target Shooting" signs at the target shooting sites. The area would remain open to hunting for the legal pursuit of game consistent with California Department of Fish and Game regulations and seasons; and law

enforcement officers while in the performance of their official duties. The closure order would be published in the local media and in the *Federal Register* as a temporary closure order under 43 CFR 8364.1. This temporary closure would remain in effect while the BLM goes through the process of amending the Eastern San Diego County RMP to permanently close this area to shooting.

B. No Action Alternative

The Proposed Action would not be undertaken. The BLM administered lands along Airport Mesa would remain open to target shooting, subject to applicable statutes, regulations, policy and land use plans.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Area Description

Airport Mesa is located in Eastern San Diego County, east of the town of Jacumba and South of Old Highway 80. The mesa is a large hill located along the US/Mexico border east of the Jacumba Airport. The BLM administers 210 acres along the eastern side of Airport Mesa. The BLM administered lands are primarily of disturbed semi-desert chaparral community vegetation type, intermixed with non-native species such as mustard.

Recreation

The Airport Mesa area has historically been an important target shooting area for residents of San Diego and Imperial Counties. The eastern slope of the mesa is easily accessible and provides a safe back-stop for target shooting.

The Eastern San Diego RMP identified this area as the Airport Mesa Recreation Management Zone. The goal of this zone is to manage for rural recreational qualities. The plan recognized this area as a destination point for the public to engage in activities including target shooting, hiking and hunting. The experience and benefits of this recreation area include learning about open spaces, and proper shooting etiquette.

The public receives many benefits from recreation in this area. It offers visitors an opportunity for increased appreciation of open spaces. Partnerships between the BLM and various organizations have provided a chance for local groups and individuals to take part in stewardship of these public lands through clean-ups and education programs. These opportunities have provided for an increased appreciation of open spaces. Use of this shooting area has also contributed to the local economy by attracting shooting enthusiasts.

The development of the BP access road and hilltop staging of BP agents has made the BLM administered lands unsafe and inappropriate for target shooting.

Wildlife including T&E Species

The Airport Mesa area is a transition zone between desert and chaparral vegetation. At only 3000 feet in elevation, the temperature of this region frequently exceeds 100 degrees in summer. The vegetation in this area is very sparse due to the arid conditions of the region.

The project area contains habitat for a variety of wildlife including raptors, migratory birds, bats and other animals such as coyotes and bobcats. The steep rocky crags of airport mesa provide nesting habitat for numerous bird species including Red-Tailed Hawks and Rock Wrens. Much of the vegetation at Airport Mesa is heavily disturbed from staging by recreational shooters, trash dumping, and fires.

There is some potential for the Federally Endangered Quino Checkerspot Butterfly to inhabit the Airport Mesa. While various surveys to date have not detected this species, there is potential habitat particularly for hilltop breeding activity.

Cultural Resources

The occupation of human settlement in southern California began approximately 12,000 years before the present day (BP). Several periods of settlement have existed in southern California from the Paleo-Indian period, through the Spanish occupation, Mexican settlement, and into the present day American period.

The area of Eastern San Diego County in which the Airport Mesa Range is located contains many known cultural resources. It is an important area for the study of the prehistory of the Kumeyaay who lived in the area in prehistoric times, and it is still important to the Kumeyaay tribes living in Eastern San Diego County today. There are many known cultural resources on BLM managed lands within the closure area, and many more in the vicinity. Site types in the vicinity of the proposed closure include historic artifact scatters, and prehistoric lithic scatters, ceramic scatters, flaked stone tools, and rock cairns.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Elements

The following table summarizes potential impacts to various elements of the human environment. Elements for which there are no impacts will not be discussed further in this document.

Environmental Element	Proposed Action	No Action Alternative
Air Quality/Noise	Reduce noise levels	No change
ACECs	No effect	No effect
Cultural Resources	No effect	No change

Native American Concerns	No effect	No effect
Farmlands	No effect	No effect
Floodplains	No effect	No effect
Energy (E.O. 13212)	No effect	No effect
Minerals	No effect	No effect
T&E Animal Species	Potential increase in habitat	No effect
T&E Plant Species	Potential increase in habitat	No effect
Invasive, Nonnative Species	No effect	No effect
Wastes (hazardous/solid)	Reduce target shooting waste	No change
Water Quality (surface and ground)	No effect	No effect
Wetlands/Riparian Zones	No effect	No effect
Wild and Scenic Rivers	No effect	No effect
Wilderness	No effect	No effect
Environmental Justice	No effect	No effect
Health and Safety Risks to Children	Reduce shooting hazards for local residents	No change
Visual Resource Mgmt.	No effect	No effect

Discussion of Impacts

Proposed Action:

Recreation

Closing 210 acres of BLM administered lands at Airport Mesa would reduce hazards from stray and ricocheting bullets landing near or hitting BP agents patrolling along the top of the hill. Trash and debris left on the public lands from shooters would be reduced or eliminated. Noise from the discharge of guns and rifles would also be reduced. Recreational target shooters would have to explore the numerous parcels of BLM administered lands in the region to obtain a location that provides the physical landscape characteristics required for a safe shooting area. Access onto these alternate lands could be somewhat restricted due to lack of roads and proximity to private land.

Wildlife including T&E Species

The reduction in vehicle traffic, trash dumping and high-impact public use may allow some disturbed land to recover. This would improve potential habitat for plants and wildlife including special status species. Reductions in noise levels may have a positive effect on wildlife.

Cultural Resources

Several known cultural resources are located within the Airport Mesa proposed closure. The visitation caused by the area remaining open for shooting creates a potential to affect historic properties. The proposed closure does not have the potential to adversely affect cultural resources or historic properties: the proposed closure is an administrative action. Surface disturbance will be limited to installation of signs which will inform the public that the area is closed to target shooting. The installation of signs along existing roads qualifies as an undertaking exempt from further cultural resources review per the State Protocol Agreement under Exemptions A1 and A20. Furthermore, the closure of the area to shooting may have a beneficial impact to cultural resources by reducing visitation to the area that could lead to surface disturbance or illegal collection.

The reduction in trash dumping and intensive, high impact, public recreation use may have a positive effect on cultural resources.

No Action Alternative

Recreation

Under this alternative, target shooting would continue to be allowed on the public lands administered by the BLM at Airport Mesa. The BP would continue to utilize the access road and patrol the top of the hill. Officer safety would continue to be a major concern for the BP and agents would continue to persuade shooters to move elsewhere to protect their employees.

Wildlife including T&E Species

Trash and debris would continue to accumulate at the sites where target shooting is occurring. These areas would continue to draw residents to dump household trash and goods. The BLM and volunteers would continue to conduct yearly clean-up projects in the area.

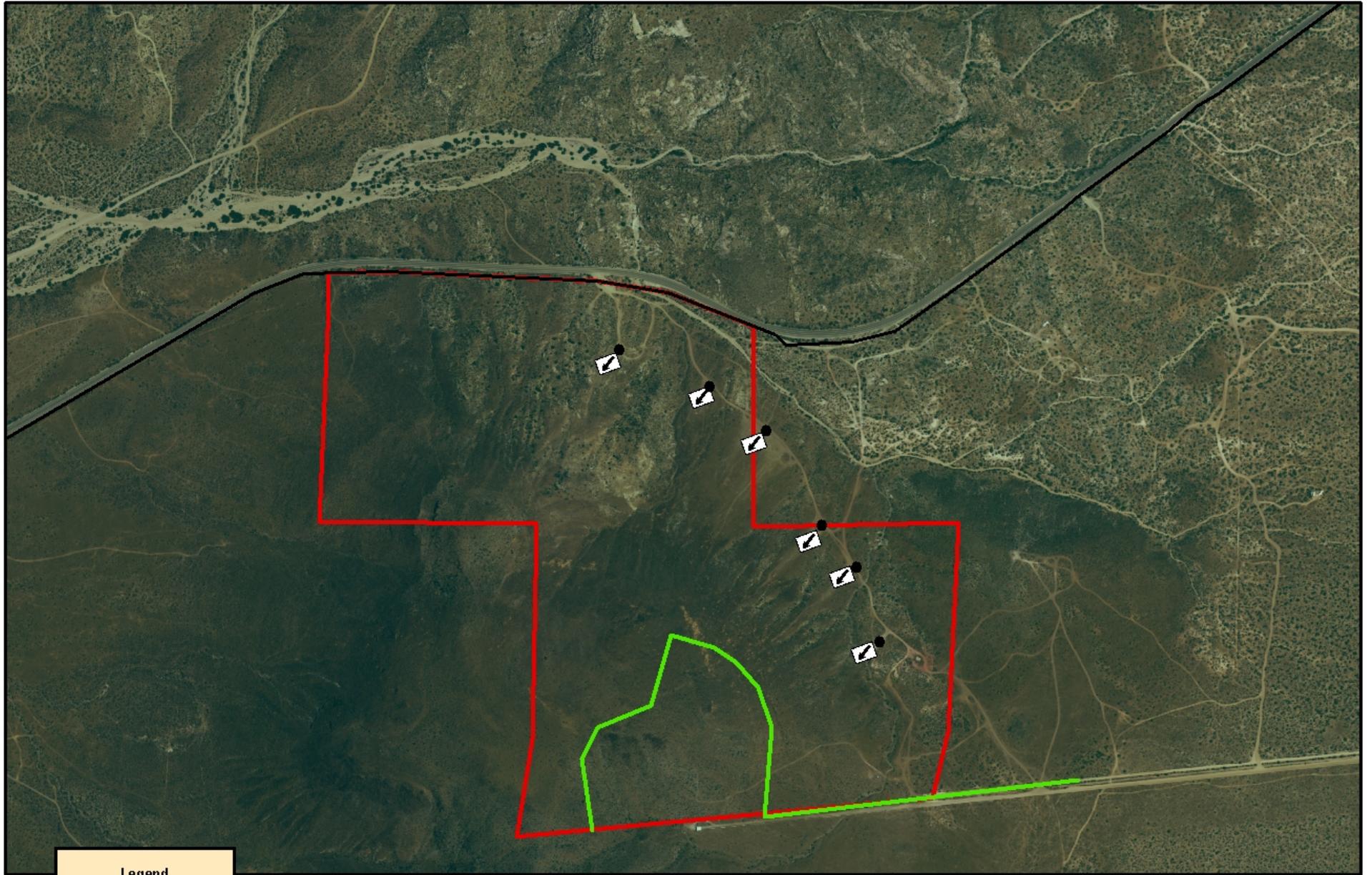
Target shooting areas along Airport Mesa would continue to be denuded of vegetation. Potential habitat for wildlife and special status species would not have the opportunity to develop in the area where target shooting is taking place. These species would be unlikely to inhabit these locales because of lack of vegetation, constant human activity and noise from target shooting.

Cultural Resources

Under the No Action Alternative, visitors would continue to use the Airport Mesa area for target shooting. No surface disturbance is authorized under this alternative, and minimal impacts to cultural resources would continue.

Cumulative Impacts

As urban development continues to spread into the wild lands of southern California, more and more pressure has been placed on the BLM and the Cleveland National Forest to control or



Legend

- Shooting Lanes
- ☑ Shooting Direction
- Major Roads
- AirportMesa a USBP route
- ▭ Shooting Closure

Airport Mesa Target Shooting / USBP Lookout Rd.

