

CHAPTER 1.0

Introduction

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) El Centro Field Office (ECFO) is developing a new Resource Management Plan (RMP) for the Eastern San Diego County (ESDC) Planning Area (Planning Area). The RMP will be developed for federal surface and mineral estate managed by the ECFO within the eastern portion of San Diego County in California. The Planning Area encompasses approximately 102,869 acres of BLM-administered lands (Map 1-1).

The BLM has determined that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will be necessary, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). This document follows the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of The NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500-1508) and BLM's NEPA Handbook (H-1790-1).

The U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) BLM ECFO is the lead agency for the RMP/EIS. The lead agency has approval or disapproval authority over the description of the proposed action and alternatives, the format and analysis of the RMP/EIS, stakeholder collaboration, and public involvement procedures.

The BLM must comply with all applicable federal laws, regulations, and agency policies when addressing a wide variety of issues and analyzing a reasonable range of alternatives for the BLM-administered lands and resources within the Planning Area.

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1.1 Purpose of and Need for Action

The purpose of the Eastern San Diego County RMP is to provide guidance in the management of the lands and resources administered by the El Centro Field Office in eastern San Diego County that will achieve the following: 1) address conflicts between motorized, mechanized, and non-motorized/non-mechanized recreationists; 2) protect sensitive natural and cultural resources from impacts due to recreational use, livestock grazing, and other land uses; 3) provide guidance for renewable energy development; and 4) address other planning issues raised during the scoping process. The Eastern San Diego County RMP will also be comprehensive in nature, providing guidance for management of all uses and resources administered by BLM in the Planning Area.

The need to develop the Eastern San Diego County RMP arises from numerous changes in circumstances since the current land use plan decisions were adopted. The following list of specific factors illustrates the need for preparation of an updated management plan. The existing Management Framework Plan (MFP) for the area was adopted in 1981 (DOI BLM 1981a). Many conditions, both social and resource-based, have changed since their adoption, including:

- Listing and/or additional habitat needs for species protected under the federal 1973 Endangered Species Act (ESA) that the current management plan does not specifically address.

- San Diego County and areas adjacent to the Planning Area, as well as the entire State of California, have undergone changes in social and economic conditions since 1981. These changes have led to increases in demand for use of the public lands for recreation and energy production as well as an increased awareness and social value placed on the cultural and natural resources in the Planning Area. Particularly, recreation on public lands has changed dramatically over the past 25 years, both in levels of use and in the kinds of recreational activities, much of which is not addressed in the existing management plan.

- In recent years, local and regional conservation organizations have become more actively involved in acquiring lands to donate to the BLM for conservation purposes. BLM must provide management of these lands consistent with the purposes for which they were acquired.

1.1 Purpose and Need for Action

- BLM's guidance and policy related to land use planning, energy development, fire management, and other programs have been revised since the current plan was adopted.

1.2 Planning Area

The Eastern San Diego County Planning Area spans a portion of the eastern escarpment of Southern California's Peninsular Ranges. It is a land of remarkable diversity, encompassing a range of environments from pine forests and flowing streams to palm oases overlooking shimmering desert basins. Small bands of Kumeyaay and Mountain Cahuilla Indians resided in this area. Early Spanish, Mexican, and American pioneers and settlers traversed the region on their way to developing coastal population centers. Except for cattlemen who established isolated ranches in order to graze their stock in the grassy valleys and shrub-covered hills, few of the newcomers settled here. Today, much of the region remains wild and uncrowded in spite of the steady growth of the urban society only a short distance to the west.

Scattered in a north-south band along the mountain front are 102,869 acres of public land under the administration of the Bureau of Land Management. Most of the higher land to the west is a part of the Cleveland National Forest, while the low desert country to the east is included in the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. Cuyamaca Rancho State Park and a number of small Indian reservations are interspersed with national forest lands. Riverside County and the Mexican border mark the northern and southern boundaries of the Planning Area, while Imperial County borders it to the east and western San Diego County to the west (see Map 1-1).

1.2 Planning Area

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1.3 Planning Process

Revision of an existing plan is a major federal action for the BLM. NEPA requires federal agencies to prepare an EIS for major federal actions; thus, this EIS accompanies the revision of the existing plan. This EIS analyzes the impacts of five alternative RMPs for the Planning Area, including Alternative A (No Action). Alternative A reflects current management (the current plan). NEPA requires analysis of a No-action Alternative.

The ECFO met individually with several government agencies in the ESDC area to discuss the planning process. The ECFO staff distributed Draft RMP materials and conducted presentations when requested. The ECFO facilitated discussions with the agencies, which generated issues and concerns that are documented in the *Scoping Report: Eastern San Diego County Resources Management Plan* (DOI BLM 2005b) on file at the ECFO.

The BLM coordinates and consults with the California State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) concerning cultural resources within the Planning Area. The BLM has a national Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to cooperate on Section 7 Consultation for the ESA. California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) has a statewide Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with BLM and would use this agreement to work collaboratively with the ECFO. Numerous federal, state, and local agencies and tribal interests were identified by the BLM ECFO at the outset of this RMP effort, and these entities were contacted in writing to determine their interest in serving as cooperators on this RMP. To date no governmental entities have requested cooperating agency status for the ESDC RMP/EIS planning effort.

Public meetings for the ESDC RMP/EIS were conducted during the initial public scoping period on September 8 and 9, 2004 in El Centro and San Diego, respectively. These public meetings were held to gain public input on identifying issues, concerns, and alternatives to be addressed in the RMP. A Social and Economic Workshop was conducted on June 15, 2006 in Julian. Information gathered by the BLM at these meetings has been incorporated into this Proposed Resource Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement (PRMP/FEIS).

This PRMP/FEIS describes five alternative land use plans (including the Preferred Alternative) and environmental consequences of each. Chapter 1 describes the purpose of

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and need for the plan, the role of BLM, and public participation in the PRMP/FEIS process. Chapter 2 provides a description of each alternative land use plan. Chapter 3 describes the affected environment in the Planning Area. Chapter 4 describes potential direct, indirect, and cumulative effects associated with each alternative land use plan and mitigation that would be incorporated.

1.4 Decision Framework

Defining the planning issues and planning criteria represents the first steps in narrowing the scope of the RMP revision. The planning issues and planning criteria provide the framework in which RMP decisions are made and refer to what is established or determined by the final (approved) RMP. The RMP will provide land use plan decisions for the following categories:

- Physical, biological, and heritage resources
- Resource uses and support
- Special designations

In the context of these categories, the planning team develops management strategies aimed at providing viable options for addressing planning issues. The management strategies provide the building blocks from which general management scenarios and, eventually, the more detailed resource management alternatives are developed. The resource management alternatives reflect a reasonable range of management options that fall within limits set by the planning criteria. The planning issues and planning criteria used to revise the existing plan are described in the following sections.

1.4.1 Public Scoping

A Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare a RMP/EIS for the Eastern San Diego County Planning Area was published in the *Federal Register* on July 14, 2004. A press release announcing the time and location of the two initial public scoping meetings was sent out on August 10, 2004. The formal public scoping period began July 14, 2004 and closed October 12, 2004.

Public scoping meetings were held in El Centro and San Diego, California on September 8 and 9, 2004, respectively. The meetings began with the public being able to look at maps depicting an area of interest and discuss their concerns with a subject matter expert from the El Centro Field Office. The public was then given the opportunity to state for the record their preferences for management priorities of public lands under the

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ESDC RMP/EIS. At the end of the meeting, information was passed out on how to submit additional comments.

In addition to the two public scoping meetings, ECFO staff met with Anza Borrego Desert State Park on February 28, 2005 and the County of San Diego, California State Parks, United States Forest Service (USFS), and two water districts on May 3, 2005 to gather information for the RMP/EIS process. In June 2006, a Social and Economic Workshop was also conducted in the Planning Area.

BLM contacted 20 tribal entities to initiate government-to-government consultation or solicit information about issues of concern for the Eastern San Diego County Resource Management Plan. This is discussed in further detail in Section 5.1.3.

During the scoping period, BLM received 17 comment letters. Public comments addressed a variety of issues and concerns regarding resources and resource uses, as well as management considerations. See Appendix A—Results of Scoping for details on the issues and concerns that were raised by the public.

1.4.2 Planning Issues

The BLM's Land Use Planning Handbook defines planning issues as "... disputes or controversies about existing and potential land and resource allocations, levels of resource use, production, and related management practices" (DOI BLM 2005e). Issues identified during scoping for this RMP revision process comprise two categories:

- Issues within the scope of the EIS that are used to develop alternatives or are otherwise addressed in the EIS
- Issues outside the scope of the EIS or that could require policy, regulatory, or administrative actions.

Those planning issues determined to be within the scope of the EIS are used to develop one or more of the alternatives or are addressed in other parts of the EIS. A reasonable

range of alternatives provides various scenarios describing how BLM and cooperating agencies can address key planning issues including the management of resources and resource uses in the Planning Area. In other words, key planning issues serve as the rationale for alternative development. The key planning issues identified in the scoping report were:

Issue #1—How will the natural resources values of eastern San Diego County public lands be managed?

Issue #2—How will human activities and uses (including recreation and off-highway vehicle [OHV] use) be managed?

Issue #3—How will the RMP be integrated with other agency and community plans?

Other key planning issues identified for this EIS include: access and transportation, special designation areas, land health, minerals, livestock grazing, recreation, special status species, air resources, soil resources, water resources, vegetative resources, wildlife resources, cultural resources, paleontological resources, visual resources, public health and safety, social and economic impacts, and environmental justice.

1.4.3 Planning Criteria

Planning criteria are the standards, rules, and guidelines that help guide the RMP process. These criteria influence all aspects of the planning process, including inventory and data collection, development of issues to be addressed, formulation of alternatives, estimation of impacts, and selection of the Preferred Alternative. In conjunction with the planning issues, these criteria ensure that the planning process is focused and incorporates appropriate analyses. Planning criteria are developed from appropriate laws, regulations, and policies. The criteria also help guide the final plan selection and are used as a basis for evaluating the responsiveness of the planning options.

Additional planning criteria can be added at any point in the planning process.

1.4 Decision Framework

The following are the Planning Criteria utilized for this document:

1. The plan will be completed in compliance with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), ESA, NEPA, and all other relevant federal law, executive orders (EOs; including wilderness legislation), and management policies of the BLM.
2. The planning team will work collaboratively with the State of California, San Diego County, tribal governments, municipal governments, other federal agencies, and all other interested groups, agencies, and individuals.
3. Where planning decisions have previously been made that are not at issue but still provide important guidance, those decisions will be included in the PRMP.
4. The planning process will include an EIS that will comply with the NEPA standards.
5. The plan will set forth a framework for managing recreational activities in order to maintain existing natural landscapes and to provide for the enjoyment and safety of the visiting public.
6. Native American tribal consultations conducted in accordance with policy and tribal concerns will be given due consideration. The planning process will include the consideration of any impacts on Indian trust assets.
7. Consultation with the SHPO will be conducted throughout the plan.
8. The plan will identify opportunities for using cultural properties for scientific, educational, recreational, or experimental purposes.
9. The lifestyles and values of area residents will be discussed and considered in the plan.
10. The plan will recognize the state's authority to manage wildlife, including hunting and fishing, within the Planning Area in accordance with the current MOU.
11. The RMP will address transportation and access, and will designate off-road vehicle use areas as open, limited, or closed. Route designation is not a planning level decision, but is rather an implementation level decision. Individual routes will be analyzed in this EIS, however, to accommodate resource users, recreational users, protection of resource values, and administrative needs. Individual routes will be designated as motorized, non-motorized, and unavailable.
12. Lands that will be open to mineral leasing will be identified in the plan. Where the PRMP identifies lands as open to mineral leasing, it will also define any constraints to surface use.

13. Visual Resource Management classification will be conducted to address the public's concerns about open space and natural vistas.
14. Consultations with the USFWS will take place throughout the plan process.
15. Minerals management will be consistent with FLPMA and existing policy and regulation including the Mining and Minerals Policy Act of 1970, Section 102(a)(12) of FLPMA, the National Materials and Minerals Policy, Research and Development Act of 1980, and current BLM Mineral Resources policy.

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1.5 Laws, Regulations, and Executive Orders

The BLM planning process is governed by the FLPMA of 1976 and the BLM Planning Regulations in 43 CFR Part 1600. Land use plans ensure that public land is managed in accordance with the intent of Congress as stated in FLPMA, under the principles of multiple use and sustained yield. As required by FLPMA, public land must be managed in a manner that protects the quality of scientific, scenic, historical, ecological, environmental, air and atmospheric, water resource, and archaeological values; that, where appropriate, would preserve and protect certain public land in their natural condition, provide food and habitat for fish, wildlife, and domestic animals; and that would provide for outdoor recreation and human occupancy and use by encouraging collaboration and public participation throughout the planning process. In addition, public land must be managed in a manner that recognizes the nation's need for domestic sources of minerals, food, timber, and fiber from public land. Land use plans are the primary mechanism for guiding BLM activities to achieve the agency's mission and goals. BLM's Land Use Planning Handbook (H-1601-1) provides guidance for preparing land use plans, including specific guidance for each program and resource (DOI BLM 2005e).

In addition to FLPMA, NEPA, and their associated regulations, BLM must comply with the mandate and intent of all federal laws (and any applicable regulations) and EOs that apply to BLM-administered lands and resources in the Planning Area. While many laws may appear to be in conflict with others, the RMP/EIS process is intended to develop land use plan decisions that resolve such conflicts and meet the multiple use and sustained yield mandate of FLPMA. Appendix B—*Applicable Laws, Regulations, and Executive Orders*—provides a listing of laws, regulations and EOs that apply to BLM-administered land and resources in the Planning Area.

1.5 Laws, Regulations, and Executive Orders

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1.6 Related Plans and Programmatic Records of Decision

The BLM-administered lands in the Planning Area are presently managed in accordance with the *Eastern San Diego County Planning Unit Management Framework Plan* (DOI BLM 1981a). The MFP was amended in 1982, after the California Desert Plan was approved.

The RMP/EIS would incorporate the following BLM programmatic Records of Decisions (RODs) and environmental analyses:

- Record of Decision for the BLM Vegetation Treatments on Bureau of Land Management Lands in 17 Western States Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) would be incorporated upon its approval. In the meantime, the ROD dated November 7, 1988 for the BLM California Vegetation Management EIS would be incorporated.
- Wind Energy Development on BLM-Administered Lands in the Western United States Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (2005)
- National Rangeland Management FEIS (2005)

Other related plans (BLM and non-BLM), which the ESDC RMP will be consistent with to the maximum extent possible, are:

- BLM South Coast RMP (1994, currently under revision)
- BLM California Desert Conservation Area Plan (1980), as amended
- Anza-Borrego State Park General Plan and Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR; 2004)
- Collaboration with the County of San Diego in development of the East San Diego County Multi-Species Conservation Program (MSCP)

1.6 Related Plans and Programmatic Records of Decision

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