

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
PALM SPRINGS-SOUTH COAST FIELD OFFICE**

Desert ATV Tours Special Recreation Permit (SRP)

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
EA Number DOI-BLM-CA-060-0011-0004 EA**

DATE: 4/11/2011

TITLE / PROJECT TYPE: Desert ATV Tours Special Recreation Permit
CASE FILE / PROJECT NO:

BLM OFFICE:
Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office
1201 Bird Center Drive
Palm Springs, CA 92262

APPLICANT / PROPONENT: Mr. Randy Simpson, Desert ATV Tours

LOCATION OF PROPOSED ACTION:

Riverside County: T6S, R10E, Sec 25, 35
T7S, R10E, Sec 1, 7, 12, 18, 24, 26
T6S, R11E, Sec 14
T6S, R12E, Sec 25, 26, 27
T6S, R13E, Sec 8, 10, 11, 12, 30, 32, 34, 36
T7S, R13E, Sec 3, 4, 9, 10, 14
T6S, R14E, Sec 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 15, 16, 21, 22, 23, 24,
25, 27, 28, 33, 34
T7S, R14E, Sec 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 14, 23, 26

USGS TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS: Mortmar, Cottonwood Spring, Hayfield, Red Canyon,
Hayfield Spring, East of Red Canyon, Red Cloud
Canyon

LAND USE PLAN CONFORMANCE and Other Regulatory Compliance:

In accordance with Title 43 CFR 1610.5-3, the proposed action and alternatives are in conformance with the following approved land use plan: California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan (1980), as amended, including the Northern and Eastern Colorado Desert (NECO) Coordinated Management Plan (2002). The proposed activity would

occur on public lands designated as Multiple Use Class “L” (Limited Use) and “M” (Moderate Use). Motorized vehicle use is allowed on routes designated as “open” unless the authorized officer determines the need for immediate closure pursuant to 43 CFR 8341.2.

Class “L” lands are managed to provide for generally lower-intensity, carefully controlled multiple use of resources, while ensuring that sensitive values are not significantly diminished. These lands are suitable for recreation that generally involves low to moderate user densities. Class “M” is based upon a controlled balance between higher intensity use and protection of public lands. Lands in this category are suitable for a wide range of recreation activities that may involve moderate to high user densities.

The proposed activity in the Meccacopia SRMA would traverse the Chuckwalla Desert Wildlife Management Area (DWMA), established through the NECO Plan (2002). The DWMA was designated to protect desert tortoise and significant natural resources, including special status plant and animal species and natural communities. Any motorized vehicle use associated with the proposed activity would be restricted to routes designated “open” or “limited”.

RELATIONSHIP TO STATUTES, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PLANS

Cultural Resources Review

Under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), the BLM is charged with managing public lands in a manner that will “protect the quality of scientific, scenic, historical, ecological, environmental, air and atmospheric, water resource, and archaeological values”. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, as implemented at 36 CFR Part 800, requires Federal agencies to take into account the effects of their undertakings on historic properties. The Revised State Protocol Agreement (2007) between the California State Director of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the California and Nevada State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPOs) defines the roles and relationships between the SHPOs’ offices and the BLM under the National Programmatic Agreement. The State protocol is intended to insure that the California BLM operates “efficiently and effectively in accordance with the intent and requirements of the NHPA.” The protocol streamlines the 106 process by not requiring case by case consultation with the SHPO on most individual undertakings.

Threatened and Endangered Species Consultation

In the DWMA, the proposed activity would, in part, occur within designated critical habitat for the desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*). The desert tortoise was listed as a threatened species in 1990 under the federal Endangered Species Act. In 1994, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) designated critical habitat. The proposed activity is subject to the terms and conditions of *Biological Opinion for Small Projects*

Affecting Desert Tortoise Habitat in Imperial, Inyo, Kern, Los Angeles, Riverside, and San Bernardino Counties, California (1-8-97-F-17) issued by USFWS to the Bureau of Land Management in 1997 (see Appendix A).

Chapter 1. Purpose and Need

PURPOSE AND NEED

In accordance with 43 CFR 2932.11, Special Recreation Permits are required for commercial use of public lands. Mr. Randy Simpson, president of Desert ATV Tours, has submitted an application to the Bureau of Land Management for a Special Recreation Permit to conduct commercial driving tours on existing routes designated “open” in the Mecca Hills-Orocopia Mountains-Chuckwalla Mountains region, otherwise referred to as the Meccacopia Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA).

Chapter 2. Proposed Action and Alternatives

ALTERNATIVE 1: PROPOSED ACTION

Desert ATV Tours (DAT) proposes to conduct commercial ATV driving tours on public lands for the period of October 1, 2010 through June 1, 2011. This schedule would repeat on a yearly basis for as long as the permit allows. These tours would occur as described below. The general locations of these tours are depicted on SRP-11-02 Map 1. Stipulations identified in Appendix A are incorporated as a part of the proposed action. In accordance with 43 CFR 2932.41, BLM may impose stipulations and conditions to meet management goals and objectives, and to protect lands and resources and the public interest. The permittee would be required to follow all stipulations of the approved Special Recreation Permit.

Tours would take place on the following routes between October 1st and May 30th each year:

- Red Canyon Jeep Trail
- Amy’s Wash Loop
- Summit Road
- Powerline Road
- Meccacopia Trail - Seasonal closure in effect until Nov 1st. No tours offered in October.
- Little Box Canyon Trail
- Godwin Trail
- Red Cloud Road
- Gasline Road

Tours would begin by parking at the north end of Box Canyon Road in the pullout near the BLM kiosk located there. For shorter tours, or better access to the Meccacopia Trail, DAT proposes to park on BLM land at the south end of Box Canyon road near the Godwin Trail turnoff.

A maximum of two tours per day, seven days a week, would be conducted. A maximum of five quads would be used for each tour, including DAT drivers/tour guides, for a maximum grand total of 10 quads per day. Tours will take place during the daylight hours of 9 a.m. to roughly 4 p.m.

Prior to engaging in any activities, riders will be given safety training on the operation of the quad, an overview of the trail and a map, helmet, safety glasses, gloves and emergency instructions. They will also receive a briefing on respecting the trails and the desert ecosystem, with emphasis on threatened and endangered species such as the desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*). Guides will be trained in Basic First Aid, CPR, Wilderness Survival, and other general desert safety measures. Guides will carry water, flares, first aid kit, and other safety supplies.

One route per tour will be used, with the possibility of another route being added. For example, customers would choose one route as their tour and would be given the option to continue onto a connecting route if time permits. Tours would consist of travelling out and back on the chosen routes.

DAT will confine all ATV use to designated "open" routes. No off-trail riding will be allowed. Riders will adhere to a 25 mile/hour speed limit and will travel in a single file line to minimize conflicts with other users. Breaks and photo stops will be completed on the trail or at appropriate pullouts no more than 30 feet off of the route and riders will take care not to disturb existing vegetation. Prior to resuming the tour, DAT will check under vehicles for desert tortoise and any other wildlife species. All trash will be packed out to avoid attracting ravens and other wildlife.

ALTERNATIVE 2: LIMITED ROUTE OPTION

This alternative would have the same components as the proposed action with the exception of the number of routes available to DAT. Tours would be limited to the following routes:

- Amy's Wash Loop
- Summit Road
- Powerline Road
- Godwin Trail
- Red Cloud Road
- Gasline Road

ALTERNATIVE 3: NO ACTION

The proposed action would not be undertaken. Existing management and use of motorized routes would continue subject to applicable statutes, regulations, and land use plans.

Chapter 3. Affected Environment

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs)

The proposed project lies within the Chuckwalla Desert Wildlife Management Area (DWMA), formerly known as the Chuckwalla Bench ACEC. This area was established in 2002 through the Northern and Eastern Colorado Desert (NECO) Coordinated Management Plan. The DWMA was designated to protect desert tortoise and significant natural resources, including other special status plant and animal species. The area coincides with designated critical habitat for the tortoise.

Cultural Resources

Native American tribal groups were the first inhabitants of the California Desert region and continue to hold lands in the desert today. Archaeological sites, plant collection areas, ritual and ceremonial areas, and sacred areas are significantly connected to specific desert resources and regions. Potential threats and impacts to these resources are of concern to these tribes. These resources are often difficult to identify as they may not have associated physical or archaeological components, and locations may be held as closely guarded secrets by various tribes.

The Mecca Hills are in the traditional use areas of the Cabazon Band of Mission Indians and the Torres-Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians. Primary uses of the Mecca Hills included quarrying of clay for pottery, hunting bighorn sheep and other game, and gathering plant foods. The historic period village site of Maswut Helaanut is reported to have been located at the mouth of Painted Canyon. This village was one of several under the leadership of Chief Cabezon. The village is believed to have been destroyed during a flood in the early 1900's.

Between 900 A.D. and 1600 A.D., Ancient Lake Cahuilla intermittently filled the Salton Basin. Several prehistoric camps and occupation sites are associated with the freshwater shoreline of Lake Cahuilla. There is the potential for these types of sites to occur at the base of the Mecca Hills. Prehistoric cultural resources located in the Mecca Hills include rock rings, trail segments, lithic scatters, and pottery scatters.

The Meccacopia Trail tour passes through an area which may have been the location of a branch between two important Indian trails. In the 1950's Francis and Patricia Johnston recorded segments of an east-west trail which parallels today's Interstate 10

(north of the Orocopia Mountains). This trail has been referred to as the Cocomaricopa Trail. This name has also been applied to a trail which ran east to west but was located south of the Orocopia Mountains. An alternate name for this southern trail is the Maricopa-Cahuilla Trail. The route of the Meccacopia Trail follows a natural corridor which would have provided a link between these two trails. North-south trail segments have been identified in the foothills of the Mecca Hills. Other archaeological resources in the area include lithic scatters and General Patton's Desert Training Center (DTC) maneuver areas from the 1940's.

The Red Canyon Jeep Trail also passes through an area which may contain DTC related sites. Very little cultural resources inventory has been done within the Orocopia Mountains. Sites recorded as a result of sample inventories performed in support of the 1980 California Desert Conservation Plan include lithic reduction and quarry locations. Other sites in the area include rock art sites and temporary camps with lithics, pottery, and plant processing artifacts and features. Prehistoric trails have been identified, but not formally recorded.

The primary historic sites in the project area include the Bradshaw Trail and stage stops associated with it. William Bradshaw developed the route in 1862, reportedly with the help of Indians from Chief Cabezon's village. He also followed portions of a route surveyed earlier by Isaac Smith, H.M. Frink, and Hank Brown. Bradshaw's route served the mines at La Paz, AZ and remained the primary route of east-west travel until the Southern Pacific Railroad was constructed in 1875 and 1876.

The Orocopia Mountains also include several historic mining sites. Gold, fluorite, and manganese were among the minerals sought in these mountains. Mining in the Orocopias began in the 1880's.

Plants and Wildlife

Plants:

The project area is comprised of two dominant plant communities: Sonoran Desert Scrub and Desert Dry Wash Woodland. Sonoran Desert, or Creosote Scrub, is characterized by widely spaced shrubs, 0.5 to 3 meters tall growing on well-drained secondary soils of slopes, fans, and valleys. Sonoran Desert Mixed Scrub, another type of Sonoran Desert Scrub, includes members of the cactus and agave families and is generally found above 1000-foot elevations on rocky, well-drained slopes and baguets. Common plants in the Sonoran Desert Scrub communities include creosote (*Larrea tridentata*), brittlebush (*Encelia farinosa*), white bursage (*Ambrosia dumosa*), and cheesebush (*Hymenoclea salsola*).

Desert Dry Wash Woodland, also called microphyll woodland, consists of drought-deciduous, small-leaved (microphyllous), mostly leguminous trees of riparian or wash areas. Trees can reach 30 feet or more in height, but typically do not exceed 15 feet.

This community is typically found in sandy or gravelly washes or adjacent baguets under 2500-foot elevation throughout the Mojave and Colorado Deserts. This plant community is considered sensitive by the California Resource Agency. Common species include palo verde (*Cercidium* spp), ironwood (*Olneya testota*), honey mesquite (*Prosopis glandulosa*), and smoke tree (*Psoralea argemone*).

Several special status plant species (those that are federally or state designated as endangered, threatened, candidate or sensitive) may occur in the area. These species include the following:

Los Anima colubrine or snakebush (*Colubrina californica*)
California ditaxis (*Ditaxis serrata* var. *californica*)
Spearleaf (*Matelea parvifolia*)
Giant Spanish needle (*Palafoxia arica* var. *gigantea*)
Orocopia sage (*Savia greatea*)
Mecca aster (*Xylorhiza cognata*)

Animals:

Special status animal species that may occur in the project area include the following:

Desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*)
Desert bighorn sheep (*Ovis Canadensis nelsoni*)
Pallid bat (*Antrozous pallidus*)
Western mastiff bat (*Eumops perotis*)
California leaf-nosed bat (*Macrotus californicus*)
Townsend's big-eared bat (*Plecotus townsendii*)
Prairie falcon (*Falco mexicanus*)
LeConte's thrasher (*Toxostoma lecontei*)
Crissal thrasher (*Toxostoma crissale*)
Colorado Valley woodrat (*Neotoma albigula venustra*)
Mountain lion (*Puma concolor*)

Common wildlife include badgers (*Taxus taxidea*), coyotes (*Canis latrans*), bobcats (*Felix rufus*), kit foxes (*Vulpes fulva*), antelope ground squirrels (*Ammospermophilus* sp.), side-blotched lizards (*Uta stansburiana*), and a wide variety of beetles and other insects. Crows, ravens, red-tailed hawks, rock wrens, and black-tailed gnatcatchers all occur in the area. Wildlife is particularly abundant in heavily-vegetated washes and much less common on barren hilltops.

Threatened and endangered:

Desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*)

Desert tortoises are widely distributed in the desert: from as far north as Olancho south to Mexican border and from the Colorado River west to near Lancaster. The Desert Tortoise (Mojave Population) Recovery Plan shows two major populations or recovery units. These are the Northern Colorado Desert and Eastern Colorado Desert Recovery Units. The desert tortoise is a Federal Threatened Species (Mojave Population only) and State-listed Threatened Species.

Recreation:

Numerous opportunities for motorized backcountry touring exist on routes along the outskirts of the Mecca Hills, Orocopia Mountains, and Chuckwalla Mountains Wilderness areas (casual motorized-vehicle use is prohibited within designated wilderness). Immediately to the south of these wilderness areas is the Bradshaw Trail National Back Country Byway. The route can be followed today from Dos Palmas near the Salton Sea to Highway 78 south of Blythe, CA.

The Meccacopia Trail is a popular OHV route that separates the Mecca Hills and Orocopia Mountains Wildernesses. It provides the only opportunity to travel from the "Drop 31" area to access routes north of the Mecca Hills and Orocopia Mountains without utilizing the paved Box Canyon Road or first driving for some distance in an easterly or westerly direction to avoid the two wilderness areas. The central portion of the Meccacopia Trail (the section separating the Mecca Hills and Orocopia Mountains wildernesses) was designated "limited" in 2002; motorized vehicle use of this segment is prohibited from June 1 through September 30 and is allowed the remainder of the year. The northern and southern segments of the route are open year-round.

On the eastern edge of the Orocopia Mountains Wilderness is the Red Canyon Jeep Trail, a four-wheel drive route that provides visitors with a challenging drive through scenic canyon country. A segment of the route separates the main body of the Orocopia Mountains Wilderness from a much smaller disjunctive portion to the northeast.

There are several other secondary routes which traverse the area including Amy's Wash Road, Gasline Road, Summit Road, and Powerline Road. In addition, Red Cloud road borders the Chuckwalla Mountains Wilderness. These 4x4 roads also provide a challenging way to explore this region of the field office.

Recognizing that significant public recreation issues and management concerns occur in the Mecca Hills-Orocopia Mountains region, the BLM established the roughly 126,000 acre Meccacopia Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) in 2002. It is anticipated that a Recreation Area Management Plan (RAMP) to address these issues

and concerns will be drafted within the next 5 years. Part of the overall Meccacopia SRMA management strategy to be addressed through the RAMP includes the following:

- (1) protect wilderness values to include eliminating motorized vehicle and mechanized equipment incursions into the two wilderness areas;
- (2) enhance the quality of motorized recreation on public lands surrounding the two wilderness areas and wildlife watering zones by providing adequate facilities and management to direct use and protect environmental values;
- (3) enhance the quality of non-motorized recreation on public lands by minimizing the potential for conflicts with motorized vehicles; and,
- (4) construct and maintain additional water sources with limited vehicle access to discourage bighorn sheep from using the Coachella Canal and to minimize conflicts with off-highway vehicle users.

Currently, three commercial recreation operators conduct tours in the Meccacopia area. These companies offer both bicycle and jeep/hummer tours through the Painted Canyon Rd, Box Canyon Rd, and Red Canyon Jeep Trail.

Data regarding levels of casual use (i.e. Activities for which no permit or other specific authorization is required) in the Meccacopia-Chuckwalla Mountains regions are limited. There are traffic counters placed strategically along several of the secondary routes in the SRMA including Amy's Loop Road, Red Canyon Jeep Trail, Meccacopia Trail, Little Box Canyon Rd, Red Cloud Road, and Summit Road. Currently, there is no visitor data available for Godwin Trail or Powerline Road; however, the level of visitor use is expected to be much lower on these routes due to their location. After averaging the data for the known routes, it was determined the overall vehicle use of the routes remains relatively low, with the maximum number of vehicles travelling on a route on any given day being less than 34, and several days of having no traffic.

Wilderness:

The Mecca Hills Wilderness encompasses 26, 243 acres of arid badlands. Of the twelve wilderness areas administered by the Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office, this wilderness by far receives the most visitation by the public. It is relatively close to populated areas of the Coachella Valley and is very easy to access from I-10 via Box Canyon Rd and Painted Canyon Rd. The wilderness is deeply incised with numerous slot canyons whose colorful rock formations and unusual geologic forms make this an ideal spot for hikers. Despite high use, the Mecca Hills Wilderness is relatively pristine with outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. Non-conforming uses and activities do occur at some boundaries, but do not detract from the overall wilderness character.

The Orocopia Mountains Wilderness encompasses 55,614 acres of folded, faulted, and eroded valleys, canyons, and washes. The northern portion is dominated by open valley and dissected ridges, whereas the southern portion boasts colorful eroded canyons. The Red Canyon Jeep Trail, a four-wheel drive route that connects the I-10 frontage road near Chiriaco Summit, CA with the Bradshaw Trail National Back Country Byway, passes through a corridor that separates the main body of the wilderness from a much smaller portion to the northeast.

The Chuckwalla Mountains Wilderness encompasses 112,326 acres of a characteristic Sonoran desert landscape. These mountains rise like an island from a vast sea of sand and rock. Included within the walls of this rock fortress are a seemingly endless variety of landforms, textures, and colors. Steep-walled canyons, inland valleys, large and small washes, isolated rock outcrops, and vast desert expanses interact to form a constantly changing panorama. Red Cloud Road runs along the edge of the wilderness, eventually forming a cherry-stemmed route (i.e.-excluded from wilderness).

Chapter 4. Environmental Impacts

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Elements of the Human Environment

The following table summarizes various elements of the human environment subject to requirements specified in statute, regulation, or executive order. Elements for which there are no impacts will not be discussed further in this document.

Environmental Element	Proposed Action	No Action Alternative
Air Quality	Minimal to no impact	No impacts
ACEC's	Minimal to no impact	No impacts
Cultural Resources	Not likely to impact	No impacts
Native American Concerns	Not likely to impact	No impacts
Farmlands	NA	No impacts
Floodplains	No impact	No impacts
Energy (E.O. 13212)	No Impact	No impacts
Minerals	No impact	No impacts
T&E Animal Species	Not likely to adversely impact	No impacts
T&E Plant Species	Not likely to adversely impact	No impacts

Invasive, Nonnative Species	Minimal impact. See stipulation B.(6)	No impacts
Wastes (hazardous/solid)	Minimal impact	No impacts
Water Quality (surface and ground)	No impact	No impacts
Wetlands/Riparian Zones	NA	No impacts
Wild and Scenic Rivers	NA	No impacts
Wilderness	Possible negative impact	No impacts
Environmental Justice	NA	No impacts
Health and Safety Risks to Children	NA	No impacts
Visual Resource Mgmt.	No impacts	No impacts

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)

The proposed action has the potential to affect the Chuckwalla Desert Wildlife Management Area/ACEC, specifically the biological resources it was principally established to protect. These effects are herein described under the applicable element.

Cultural resources

The majority of the proposed areas have not been inventoried for cultural resources and unrecorded cultural resources may be present. Because all vehicle traffic will occur on previously established routes, little to no new surface disturbance would result, and the potential for impacts to cultural resources is minimal.

The visitors themselves are the most likely source for impacts to cultural resources. Impacts could include artifact collections, excavation attempts, trampling or scattering of artifacts, and touching or alteration of rock art. However, the focus of the proposed tours is travel by off-road vehicle, not on foot; hence, “opportunities” for visitors to impact cultural resources would be minimal, occurring only when clients are allowed to stop at scenic overlooks or to take photos.

Damaging, altering, or defacing archaeological resources is prohibited under the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) as well as other federal laws and regulations. Violations of ARPA may result in civil or criminal penalties.

Cultural resources are protected by Standard Conditions and Stipulations 15 and 16 and by Special Stipulation B.11 (Appendix B). These stipulations instruct the operator to ensure its clients do not disturb or damage cultural resources. In addition, the commercial operator, Desert ATV Tours, will be encouraged to educate customers about cultural resource values and deliver a stewardship and conservation message.

With the above protections in place, the proposed project will have no effect to cultural resources listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places.

Plants and Wildlife

Plants:

It is possible for vehicles/quads to transport non-native seeds into the area, including salt cedar (*Tamarix ramosissima*). This exotic plant could potentially displace native plants within washes thereby degrading the natural habitat and lowering plant biodiversity. See stipulation B.6.

Desert Tortoise (and general wildlife):

Since motorized vehicles would be used on existing routes only, few direct impacts to plant and wildlife habitat would occur. However, wildlife may be disturbed by motorized vehicles and might temporarily leave habitats adjacent to these routes. In addition, a small amount of wildlife mortality, including desert tortoise, might occur from vehicles running over animals. Juvenile tortoises, lizards, snakes, and beetles are particularly vulnerable to such mortality. Due to the potential for these impacts, the proposed activity “may affect” desert tortoises, in accordance with the regulations at 50 CFR Part 402. Although the proposed action “may affect” desert tortoises, incorporation of pertinent terms and conditions from *Biological Opinion for Small Projects Affecting Desert Tortoise Habitat in Imperial, Inyo, Kern, Los Angeles, Riverside, and San Bernardino Counties, California* (1-8-97-F-17, USFWS 1997) (see Appendix A) results in a determination of “not likely to adversely affect” the population.

Prohibiting tours from June 1 through October 30th on the segment of the Meccacopia Trail dividing the Mecca Hills and the Orocopia Mountains Wildernesses would allow bighorn sheep to freely access critical water sources during the summer months.

Recreation

The main focus of Desert ATV Tours is touring on existing routes designated as “open”. The level of use on these roads averages less than 34 vehicles a day at the maximum, with several routes having little to no traffic several days a week. The addition of five quads, with a maximum of no more than ten quads per day on any one route is not

expected to substantially affect others' use and enjoyment of these routes. Opportunities for casual use would be generally unimpeded by the permitted commercial activity.

Wilderness

Section 4(d)(6) of the 1964 Wilderness Act (P.L. 88-577) states that "commercial services may be performed within the wilderness areas...to the extent necessary for activities which are proper for realizing the recreational or other purposes of the area." Although the entire proposed activity takes place outside of wilderness, commercial services provided by Desert ATV tours and others serve an important role in management of this area as wilderness by providing the opportunity to introduce these special areas to segments of the public that might not otherwise visit the wilderness. Such services can widen wilderness consciousness within the public mind and further the goals of wilderness management and protection. However, if such use occurs at levels that either adversely impacts the natural landscape or causes deterioration in the solitude that wilderness protects, all possible benefits of such use are erased.

All the proposed activity would take place on designated routes either adjacent to or "cherry-stemmed" through wilderness. While it is possible that too many people using the trails simultaneously have the potential to diminish the quality of the wilderness experience of those along the wilderness boundary due to excessive noise, the likelihood of this occurring is rather low due to the few numbers of visitors these areas actually receive. In addition, the type of ATVs used by DAT (Suzuki King Quad) does not exceed the standard 94 decibel noise limit, especially while travelling at the low speeds required for safely traveling on the rugged, uneven designated routes which circumnavigate the wilderness areas.

With respect to activities taking place adjacent to wilderness boundaries, Section 103(d) of the California Desert Protection Act of 1994 (P.L. 103-433), the law designating the Mecca Hills, Orocopia Mountains, and Chuckwalla Mountains Wildernesses, states that there will be no buffer zones or protective perimeters around each wilderness area and "the fact that non-wilderness activities or uses can be seen or heard from areas within the wilderness shall not, of itself, preclude such activities or uses up to the boundary of the wilderness area". In addition, BLM Manual 8560.19 addresses buffer zones and adjacent lands by stating "no buffer zones are created around wilderness to protect them from the influence of activities on adjacent land" and that "mitigation of impacts from outside wilderness must not be so restrictive as to preclude or seriously impede such activities."

It is anticipated that tours conducted by DAT adjacent to the three wilderness areas mentioned above would not substantially preclude or adversely affect opportunities for solitude and/or primitive types of recreation.

Wastes (Hazardous/Solid)

There are no developed sanitary facilities within the Chuckwalla DWMA. It is anticipated that some human waste would occasionally be deposited on site. As these areas are regularly frequented by casual users of public lands, an accumulation of additional wastes consequent to DAT activities in these locations may degrade the visual appeal of the scenery, especially if toilet paper and other wastes become scattered by wind or wildlife. If DAT customers are advised about the lack of sanitary facilities in these backcountry areas and are informed about the availability of such facilities at Chiriaco Summit, it is anticipated that deposition of fecal matter would be infrequent.

In addition, Desert ATV Tours will not do any maintenance on BLM lands with respect to oil or other fluid changes on the vehicles. In the unlikely event of a spill of hazardous material from one of the machines, a crew will respond by gathering up all the material possible into a container and removing it from BLM land for proper disposal.

Overall, threats to human health are not expected from contact with human waste or other hazardous mechanical fluids.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation measures to protect desert tortoise and cultural resources and to maintain opportunities for solitude in wilderness have been included in the proposed stipulations, which are incorporated as part of the proposed action by reference (Appendices A and B).

Residual Impacts

After mitigation, the probability of tortoise mortality would be reduced. Disturbances to wildlife and the possibility of exotic plant invasion would remain. Positive impacts to wilderness would be realized through enhanced opportunity for the public to experience wilderness, increasing awareness of the wilderness resource. Additionally, the increased presence afforded by individuals experiencing the wilderness in a legal manner would likely deter unauthorized entry or other illegal activities through peer pressure.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

The addition of Desert ATV Tours adds to the growing number of users on public land. Additional tour operators may apply for permits in the future as tourism grows in the Coachella Valley, thus adding to the potential for disturbances to wildlife and other resources. Disturbances to wildlife also occurs from noncommercial activities such as

hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, camping, off-highway vehicle use, shooting, hunting, and commercial filming. All of these human impacts have likely resulted in some loss of vegetative cover and increased soil compaction. Generally, the level of human impacts would be expected to increase in the region as the growing human population seeks places to recreate in and near the Coachella Valley.

Chapter 5. Consultation and Public Involvement

PERSONS, GROUPS, AND AGENCIES CONSULTED

List of groups, Tribes, individuals, agencies contacted:

ID Team Member	Title	Organization
Christopher Dalu	Archaeologist	BLM
Beth Wood	Wildlife Biologist	BLM
Jennifer Taylor	ORP/Wilderness	BLM
Greg Hill	Planning/Environmental Coordinator	BLM
Prepared by:		
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