

U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**  
**EA Number CA-660-06-01**

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**DATE:** September 23, 2005

**TITLE / PROJECT TYPE:** Hauser Mountain Wilderness Study Area Way Improvement Project

**APPLICANT:** U.S. Border Patrol – El Cajon Field Station

**BLM OFFICE:** Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office  
690 W. Garnet Avenue, P.O. Box 581260  
North Palm Springs, CA 92258-1260

**LOCATION of PROPOSED ACTION:** South-central San Diego County, Hauser Mountain Wilderness Study Area:

Route 1: T. 17 S., R. 4 E., Section 36 SW1/4SW1/4; T. 18 S., R. 4 E., Section 1 NW1/4NW1/4, and SW1/4SE1/4; SBBM.

Route 3: T.18 S., R. 4 E., Section 1 W1/2SE1/4; T. 18 S., R. 5 E., Section 7 SW1/4NW1/4; SBBM.

**PURPOSE AND NEED**

On September 16, 2005, the BLM received a written request by facsimile from the U.S. Border Patrol – El Cajon Field Station requesting access to improve two existing ways (identified by the USBP as “Route 1” and “Route 3”) within the Hauser Mountain Wilderness Study Area, located in south-central San Diego County, California. The United States Border Patrol’s primary goal is to prevent the entry into the United States of terrorists and terrorist weapons, smugglers and illegal aliens, and narcotics and other contraband. While every effort is made to interdict and apprehend these targets in the immediate border area, it is not always possible. Of critical importance to the mission of the securing the nations’ borders, is access to both public and private lands in the border area. The El Cajon Station is tasked with patrolling the international border south of the Hauser Mountain Wilderness Study Area (WSA) Potrero/Campo, California.

Currently due to the deteriorated road conditions within the WSA the Border Patrol and other law enforcement entities as well as fire rescue and medical personnel do not have access to a large area of land on Hauser Mountain. In order to work the traffic within the WSA, USBP officers are required to walk two to six hours which minimizes USBP’s effectiveness and poses a potential deadly officer safety risk. The response time required for assistance in a potential life-threatening violent confrontation could be devastating. Due to the exaggerated response times, especially from the south, agents have been apprised not to work traffic from the south because

of the officer safety liabilities. Due to the degraded road conditions, medical personnel do not have access to this land as well. This is an extreme liability issue not only to USBP agents, but illegal migrant traffic and hikers on the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) as well.

Another aspect of gaining access to the WSA, is fire prevention and the ability to contain a fire if one does occur. Illegal campfires by both illegal alien traffic and local traffic is a major concern to the Border Patrol but more so to the California Department of Forestry Fire Prevention (CDF). The Border Patrol's fire concerns focus on the officer safety of our agents as well as the safety of any one in or near the path of the fire. Without the improvement of the road infrastructure in the WSA, there is not a safe egress route for agents or others if a fire occurs. Of paramount concern to the CDF is the road infrastructure in its current degraded condition would not allow direct access to a fire in this area or surrounding areas.

The purpose of this environmental assessment is to analyze potential environmental impacts associated with proposed way improvements within the Hauser Mountain Wilderness Study Area. The BLM, consistent with its authorities and responsibilities under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), 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.... and that will provide for outdoor recreation and human occupancy and use." Under 43 CFR 2809 the BLM is authorized to issue grants to other Federal agencies.

## **LAND USE PLAN CONFORMANCE and REGULATORY COMPLIANCE**

### **A. Land Use Plan Conformance**

In compliance with 43 CFR 1610.5-3, the proposed action described in this environmental assessment has been reviewed and has been found to be in conformance with the approved Land Use Plan: *South Coast Resource Management Plan* (1994). Land Use Decisions for the San Diego County Management Area, Land Use Allocation #12 states "until such time as vehicle route designation takes place, motorized vehicle use will be limited to existing routes of travel." The two ways in questions were identified as part of the wilderness inventory report published in 1979.

### **B. Interim Management Policy for Lands Under Wilderness Review**

The BLM is also responsible for managing wilderness study areas (WSA) so as to not impair their suitability for wilderness designation until such time Congress releases those lands from WSA status or designates those lands as wilderness areas. The BLM identified the Hauser Mountain WSA through its Wilderness Inventory in 1979. Management of WSAs is guided by BLM Handbook 8550-1, "Interim Management Policy for Lands Under Wilderness Review", also known as the IMP. The general guidance found in this policy is that BLM may take no actions in WSA's which would impair their suitability for wilderness designation by Congress. A specific exemption to this policy, Chapter II, B.2 states "The only permitted exceptions to the above rules are: (4) Uses and facilities...that are the minimum necessary for public health and safety in the use and enjoyment of the wilderness values."

B. Threatened and Endangered Species

In accordance with tables and maps provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to BLM's wildlife biologist, there are no known occurrences of threatened and endangered species nor critical habitat within the Hauser Mountain area. In compliance with the Endangered Species Act of 1973 as amended, and 50 CFR 402, formal consultation with the USFWS is not required as a result of this "No Effect" determination.

C. Cultural

Authorities for managing cultural resources and programs of historic preservation exist under the National Environmental Policy Act, Executive Order 11593, the Archaeological Resources Protection Act, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, the Historic Sites Act of 1935, the Antiquities Act, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, Executive Order 13007 ("Sacred Sites"), and the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA). BLM responsibilities for Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act are implemented through an alternative procedure pursuant to the State Protocol Agreement between The California State Director of The Bureau of Land Management and the California State Historic Preservation Officer (1998).

## **DESCRIPTION of ALTERNATIVES**

A. Proposed Action

The BLM proposes to issue authorization to the USBP (43 CFR 2809) to improve portions of two existing ways (identified by the USBP as "Route 1" and "Route 3", for a total of two miles) within the Hauser Mountain Wilderness Study Area as described above. Improvement work will be performed by USBP in conjunction with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF). All work would be completed within 30 days of issuance of authorization.

All improvements would be done with the least possible impact within the WSA. All work would remain within the existing way footprint, with the exception of points along the road where the existing roadbed is insufficient to fill ruts. At these sites, which would be approved by an on-site BLM project inspector, some fill dirt would need to be scraped from the immediate edge of the existing roadbed. BLM and project proponents estimate no more than ten sites would be necessary. The equipment used would consist of a bulldozer operated by CDF to fill in deep ruts created by erosion due to heavy rains, and a USBP road grader to smooth the surface. The equipment may also be used to cut water bars across the way in an effort to control future erosion. Water bars would not extend outside the existing footprint and must be aligned with natural drainages. Installation of culverts, concrete ditches, or any other erosion control structures would not be authorized at this time. Equipment would be washed before arriving at the project site to minimize spread of noxious weeds.

Brush would be trimmed no more than six feet from the edge of the way using only hand tools to minimize impacts to wilderness values. Individual trees and shrubs would not be completely

removed in an effort to maintain a natural appearance. No new construction beyond what is currently in place would be authorized.

B. No Action

Under this alternative, the BLM would deny issuance of any permits to the USBP for way improvements.

## **AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT**

A. Hauser Mountain Wilderness Study Area

The Hauser Mountain Wilderness Study Area (CA-060-027C) encompasses 5,540 acres of BLM administered public lands which were recommended for “non-wilderness” in the BLM’s California Statewide Wilderness Study Report” (1979). The primitive ways within the Hauser Mountain WSA under consideration in this EA were identified in the 1979 report. Congress has not released these lands from WSA status.

B. Wildland Fire Hazards

The South Coast management area is susceptible to large-scale wildfires due to highly combustible vegetation (chaparral), heavy fuel loading (as a result of long-term fire suppression, and copious rains followed by drought conditions), and unwanted ignitions (be it by escaped illegal migrant campfires, lightning or arson). Wildland fires continue to impact urban communities, resulting in catastrophic loss of life and property and increasing the demands on Federal, State and local fire agencies.

Since January of this year, the El Cajon Station has arrested over 6,500 illegal aliens, of which over 1,000 of them traverses through Hauser Mountain WSA lands on a daily basis. Escaped campfires by both illegal immigrant traffic and local traffic, is a major concern to both the Border Patrol and CDF. Due to the degraded conditions of the roads in the Hauser Mountain WSA, currently there is no safe egress route for law enforcement, and no direct access for fire fighters.

C. Cultural Resources

A general discussion of cultural resources located on BLM-administered public lands within the project area may be found in the *Proposed South Coast Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement* (1992). Cultural properties on public lands in the San Diego portion of the project area are predominantly characterized as prehistoric, and primarily include subsistence resource activity areas, which are usually indicated by the presence of bedrock milling features, or lithic quarry and reduction areas. Important quarry areas are found in the vicinity of Otay Mountain. Historical resources consist of sites associated with three major activities: mining, grazing, and transportation. California Indian sites expected to occur in eastern San Diego County include agave roasting pits, trails and seasonal residential sites.

**ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES**

**A. Critical Elements**

The following table summarizes potential direct, indirect, residual and cumulative impacts to various elements of the human environment, including the "critical elements" listed in BLM Manual H-1790-1, Appendix 5, as amended. Elements for which there are no impacts will not be discussed further in this document.

Environmental Element	Proposed Action	No Action Alternative
Air Quality	See discussion below	See discussion below
ACECs	No Impact	No Impact
Cultural Resources	No Impact	No Impact
Native American Concerns	No Impact	No Impact
Farmlands	No Impact	No Impact
Floodplains	No Impact	No Impact
Energy (E.O. 13212)	No Impact	No Impact
Minerals	No Impact	No Impact
T&E Animal Species	No Impact	No Impact
T&E Plant Species	No Impact	No Impact
Invasive, Nonnative Species	See discussion below	See discussion below
Wastes (hazardous/solid)	No Impact	No Impact
Water Quality (surface and ground)	No Impact	No Impact
Wetlands/Riparian Zones	No Impact	No Impact
Wild and Scenic Rivers	No Impact	No Impact
Wilderness	See discussion below	See discussion below
Environmental Justice	No Impact	No Impact
Health and Safety Risks to Children	No Impact	No Impact
Visual Resource Mgmt.	No Impact	No Impact

B. Discussion of Direct, Indirect, Residual and Cumulative Impacts

1. **Proposed Action**

**Air Quality.** Improving two miles of ways and cutting back vegetation (but not to ground) would release a marginal amount of dirt and debris into the air. The dirt and debris would settle back onto the project site except on windy days. Small amounts of dirt and debris released on windy days would most likely dissipate very quickly, traveling no further than onto lands in close proximity to the project site. The dirt and debris would not be released in large enough amounts to reduce visibility or air quality on BLM or adjacent lands.

Currently, there is very little motorized vehicle use of these WSA ways due to the absence of public access to these ways over private land. Use of these WSA ways would increase with USBP interdiction activities and thereby reduce the air quality however minimally. Public use is expected to remain low. In the event of a wildfire, the CDF would likely employ bulldozers to install fuel breaks. It is hoped that by providing improved access into the WSA that less bulldozing would be required in order to effectively fight wildfires. Cumulatively, air quality is expected to remain good and well below standards.

**Invasive/Non-native Species.** The following measures are incorporated into the proposed action in order to minimize the spread of invasive/non-native species: 1) All vehicles would be washed daily before entering the work site, 2) Soil to fill in ruts will be drawn from local sources along the road edge, and 3) No vegetation may be cut to ground.

**Wilderness.** An impairment analysis of wilderness characteristics was conducted which resulted in the following conclusions.

1) *Naturalness:* Currently, man-made intrusions include fences and routes of travel in support of grazing within the WSA. These improvements are inconspicuous and do not significantly impact the naturalness of the WSA. Improvements to the two existing ways would not appreciably change the naturalness of the WSA.

2) *Solitude:* Public access to the site is limited due to fences and locked gates on the surrounding private lands. Opportunities for solitude have been steadily diminishing over the past several years with the institution of “Operation Gatekeeper” in 1994 in the San Diego metropolitan area. This program instituted tighter controls along the international border within the San Diego metropolitan area. As a result, the illegal immigrant traffic has moved to the east into the wildlands of San Diego County, including Hauser Mountain WSA. Improving the ways within the WSA would increase USBP’s presence within the Hauser Mountain WSA. It is hoped that this will result in a decrease in illegal immigrant traffic through this same area.

3) *Primitive and unconfined recreation:* This WSA currently supports light hunting, hiking, backpacking, and equestrian use. The southern end of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail passes through the area. Opportunities for unconfined types of recreation are limited only by dense vegetation and some fences supporting the grazing allotment. Improving the two existing ways would not diminish the opportunities for primitive or unconfined recreation.

4) *Special Features:* A portion of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail passes through the WSA which would be unaffected by any improvements to the two existing ways.

There are no known threatened or endangered species or their critical habitat within Hauser Mountain WSA. The California Native Plant Society identified a “rare” plant that may be found on or near Hauser Mountain, *Hemizonia floribunda*. This species is found on dry slopes and valleys, roadsides and sandy washes in coastal sage scrub, chaparral and grassland. The BLM on-site project inspector would be responsible for ensuring route improvement activities do not disturb this rare plant species.

## 2. No Action

**Air Quality.** Currently, there is very little motorized vehicle use of these WSA ways due to the absence of public access to these ways over private land. Public use is expected to remain low. In the event of a wildfire, the CDF would likely employ bulldozers to install fuel breaks. Cumulatively, air quality is expected to remain good and well below standards.

**Invasive/Non-native Species.** Minimizing surface disturbance is a good tool for minimizing the spread of invasive/non-native species, especially in areas where the native vegetation provides a substantial canopy layer. Cumulatively, however, all of this may be moot in the event of a catastrophic wildfire in which much of the native canopy layer would be lost, and soil is disturbed by bulldozing and cross-country travel by motorized vehicle.

**Wilderness.** An impairment analysis of wilderness characteristics was conducted which resulted in the following conclusions.

- 1) *Naturalness:* Currently, man-made intrusions include fences and routes of travel in support of grazing within the WSA. These improvements are inconspicuous and do not significantly impact the naturalness of the WSA.
- 2) *Solitude:* Public access to the site is limited due to fences and locked gates on the surrounding private lands. Opportunities for solitude have been steadily diminishing over the past several years with the institution of “Operation Gatekeeper” in 1994 in the San Diego metropolitan area. This program instituted tighter controls along the international border within the San Diego metropolitan area. As a result, the illegal immigrant traffic has moved to the east into the wildlands of San Diego County, including Hauser Mountain WSA. Without USBP presence in the area, this illegal immigrant traffic is likely to increase.
- 3) *Primitive and unconfined recreation:* This WSA currently supports light hunting, hiking, backpacking, and equestrian use. The southern end of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail passes through the area. Opportunities for unconfined types of recreation are limited only by dense vegetation and some fences supporting the grazing allotment.
- 4) *Special Features:* A portion of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail passes through the WSA. There are no known threatened or endangered species or their critical habitat within Hauser Mountain WSA. The California Native Plant Society identified a “rare” plant that may be found on or near Hauser Mountain, *Hemizonia floribunda*. This species is found on dry slopes and valleys, roadsides and sandy washes in coastal sage scrub, chaparral and grassland.

C. Mitigation Measures

Mitigation measures were incorporated into the description of the proposed action to ensure way improvements would be carried out in a manner that provides for protection of natural and cultural resources and wilderness values. As a result of the analysis, no additional mitigation measures were identified.

**CONSULTATION and COORDINATION**

A. Persons/ Agencies Consulted

U.S. Border Patrol – El Cajon Field Station  
Rolla Queen, BLM Archaeologist – PSSCFO  
Joyce Schlachter, BLM Wildlife Biologist-PSSCFO  
Tom Gey, BLM Realty Specialist - PSSCFO  
John Kalish, BLM Chief Lands, Minerals & Recreation - PSSCFO  
Christopher Roholt, BLM Wilderness – CDD

A Notice of Proposed Action (NOPA) for activities within wilderness areas was sent out to a mailing list of private and public interest groups which BLM maintains. Any comments received will be taken into consideration in the subsequent EA to be prepared regarding long term maintenance of these ways within wilderness. Please contact the BLM Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office at P.O. Box 581260, North Palm Springs, CA 92258, if you wish to be added to the mailing list.

B. List of Preparers

Justin Seastrand, BLM Wilderness Specialist - PSSCFO  
Janaye Byergo, BLM San Diego Project Manager - PSSCFO  
Elena Misquez, BLM Associate Field Manager - PSSCFO

**FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT CONSIDERATIONS**

Public comments submitted for this environmental assessment, including names and street addresses of respondents, will be available for public review at the Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office during regular business hours (7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.), Monday through Friday, except holidays. Individual respondents may request confidentiality. If you wish to withhold your name or address from public review or from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comments. Such requests will be honored to the extent allowed by law. All submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, will be made available for public inspection in their entirety.

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT STATEMENT**

Environmental impacts associated with the proposed action have been assessed. Based on the analysis provided in the attached EA, I conclude the approved action is not a major federal action and will result in no significant impacts to the environment under the criteria in Title 40 Code of Federal Regulations 1508.18 and 1508.27. 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.

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Gail Acheson  
Field Manager

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Date