

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

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
EA Number CA-660-06-05**

DATE: October 11, 2005

TITLE / PROJECT TYPE: Hauser Mountain Wilderness Study Area
Route Improvement Project - Supplement

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

APPLICANT / PROPONENT: U.S. Border Patrol (USBP),
El Cajon Field Station

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.

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.*" BLM believes that the extreme fire danger, the lack of ingress and egress in the event of a situation requiring fire or medical personnel, and safety concerns for USBP agents and the public due to the increasing criminal element among illegal border crossers contribute to this being a minimum necessary action for health and safety. (USBP, 2004). It is therefore determined that this authorization is exempt from the non-impairment criteria in the IMP.

C. 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.

D. 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). The initial EA contained a letter from the BLM archeologist documenting compliance with this protocol. A field visit was also made where he determined that the amendment to the proposed action would have no impacts on cultural resources.

PURPOSE AND NEED

This document is a supplement to EA-660-06-01. In that EA, BLM analyzed the impacts of allowing route maintenance to be conducted for approximately 2 miles within the Hauser Mountain Wilderness Study Area (WSA). The proposed action stated “Installation of culverts, concrete ditches, or any other erosion control structures would not be authorized at this time”. The project proponents have requested authorization to build several trenches along the route to keep water draining off of the route. The trenches would divert water off the existing routes to minimize erosion. Vehicular access for USBP agents would be maintained, allowing them to accomplish their mission of securing United States borders. The remote nature of the area requires vehicular access to detect and apprehend suspects in a timely manner. The trenches would also serve to insure continued access for fire fighting or medical emergency personnel, and allow adequate response time for USBP in apprehending illegal border crossers. Large, wind driven fires appear to be the norm for the mixed chaparral ecosystem present on Hauser Mountain. Fire history data indicates that the area has not seen a typical fire in over 50 years. These two factors contribute to an urgent need to provide continual access. This continued access will reduce the need for more damaging suppression techniques in the event of wildfire, and will allow for the continued safety of USBP agents and the public. Fire detection capabilities will be enhanced, further reducing resource threats from fire and associated suppression. The proposed action is to enter into a cooperative agreement with USBP authorizing the additional work on the trenches. The cooperative agreement would allow for one-time construction of the trenches, will give terms and conditions for USBP’s use of the routes, and will require that construction work be completed within thirty days of authorization.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION and ALTERNATIVES

Background

Initial improvement of the routes proposed for additional work was authorized in a letter to USBP on September 27, 2005. Backfilling of erosion channels and the grading of existing surface took place in early October 2005. Vegetation was also trimmed back no more than six feet from the edge of the existing route. The intent was for the initial work to be done only once, not on a recurring basis. This was not explicitly stated in the letter of authorization, and would be included as a term or condition in the cooperative agreement.

1. **Proposed Action**

The proposed action is to enter into a cooperative agreement with USBP. Cooperative agreements with other federal agencies are allowed under Sections 302(b) and 307(b) of The Federal Land Policy and Management Act, as amended, 1976. The agreement would authorize digging of trenches along the route to allow water to drain through the berm and off of the route. This would be accomplished with a combination of hand tools and a Bobcat tractor. The work would include a two to three foot wide, one foot deep trench extending five to twenty feet past the edge of the route. Equipment operators from the USBP have identified nine sites where the trenches would be constructed. Two of the nine would require use of the Bobcat tractor, the

remaining seven would require shorter and shallower trenches and be constructed with hand tools. Maximum surface disturbance would be 540 square feet (.01 acres). Equipment would be washed before arriving at the project site to minimize spread of invasive plants and noxious weeds. The work would take place on the same routes analyzed in EA-660-06-01, within the Hauser Mountain WSA. Work would be completed within thirty days of authorization.

Trenches would be located so as to avoid the uprooting of trees and large boulders. Operations would immediately cease and BLM would be notified of any cultural or paleontological resources discovered during the trenching. BLM would, as appropriate, evaluate the significance of the site and determine the need for mitigation. The operator could not proceed with the work until authorized to do so by the BLM.

An on-site BLM project inspector would be on hand to evaluate cultural, riparian, or any other sensitive resources.

2. No Action Alternative

The Proposed Action would not be undertaken. Existing management and use of the site would continue subject to applicable statutes, regulations, policy and land use plans. The USBP would continue to be unable to carry out their mission of securing our nation's borders due to inadequate access. The potential would remain high for wildfire suppression techniques to do significant resource damage.

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" (1990). Naturalness has been lessened by a variety of grazing improvements such as fences, diversion dikes, reservoirs, and primitive routes of travel. Opportunities for solitude exist due to remoteness and lack of usable vehicle routes, and are enhanced by rolling terrain, huge rock outcrops, and tall, dense vegetation. Unconfined types of recreation include upland game hunting, hiking, backpacking, and equestrian use. These are all limited by lack of public access across surrounding private lands, dense, impenetrable vegetation, and livestock fences. Special features present include the rare plant species Hemizonia floribunda, and a portion of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail. The primitive ways within the Hauser Mountain WSA under consideration in this EA were identified in the 1979 Wilderness Inventory report.

B. Wildland Fire Hazards

The South Coast management area is characterized by highly combustible mixed chaparral vegetation, heavy fuel loading from over fifty years without a major fire, and copious rains

followed by drought conditions. Large, wind driven fires are the norm for this ecosystem (Mensing et al., 1999; CDF, 2005). 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 traverse 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, there is currently 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.

A review of the literature and records for this area indicated that there have been no prior surveys for historic properties covering the area of potential effect (APE) and that there are no known or recorded cultural properties.

D. Visual Resources Management (VRM)

The *South Coast RMP* designates all lands outside of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC's) as VRM Class III. Class III guidelines allow for moderate change to landscape character. Management actions may attract attention but should not attract the view of the casual observer.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Critical Elements

The following table summarizes potential 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
Air Quality	See discussion below	See discussion below
ACEC's	No Impact	No Impact
Cultural Resources	No Effect	No Effect
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	See Regulatory Compliance Section	See Regulatory Compliance Section
T&E Plant Species	See Regulatory Compliance Section	See Regulatory Compliance Section
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.	See discussion below	See discussion below

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

1. **Proposed Action**

Air Quality. Digging of trenches would release a marginal amount of dirt and debris into the air.

Exhaust from equipment would also be released into the air in marginal amounts. Dirt, debris, and exhaust would settle back onto the project site except on windy days. On windy days particles would likely dissipate very quickly, traveling no further than 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.

Cultural Resources. A BLM staff archaeologist conducted a field survey of the APE for the nine proposed trench locations on December 12, 2005. No cultural properties were noted within the APE. The results of survey are described in a report entitled *Project Evaluation Report, Road Improvements, Hauser Mountain Wilderness Study Area (CA-669-06-PR01)*, prepared by Rolla Queen, Archaeologist, Palm Springs and South Coast Field Office, North Palm Springs, CA, 2005. However, both historic period and prehistoric archaeological sites were observed in the general area and the area is considered to be sensitive for cultural resources. BLM has recommended that a cultural resources monitor or authorized representative be present during trenching activities. In the event of an inadvertent discovery of archaeological resources or features, work will cease in the area until a BLM archaeologist is able to investigate. Pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act as implemented in the BLM *State Protocol* with the State Historic Preservation Officer, BLM has found that this undertaking will have no effect on historic properties included or eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places.

Invasive/Non-native Species. Spread of invasive or non-native species could occur in the small areas where the trenches are dug. As part of the proposed action, all equipment would be washed before entering the work site in order to minimize the spread of invasive/non-native species.

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. The additional authorization of trenches as part of the improvements to the two existing ways would not appreciably change the naturalness of the WSA.

2) *Solitude:* Digging of trenches along the ways within the WSA would increase USBP's presence within the Hauser Mountain WSA. It is hoped that this would result in a decrease in illegal immigrant traffic through this same area. The trenches would also eliminate the need for future work on the route, which could increase opportunities for solitude in the long term.

3) *Primitive and unconfined recreation:* This WSA currently supports light hunting,

hiking, backpacking, and equestrian use. This use has been and is expected to remain low due to restricted access across surrounding private land. Opportunities for unconfined types of recreation are limited only by dense vegetation and some fences supporting the grazing allotment. Digging of trenches would not further diminish the opportunities for primitive or unconfined recreation.

4) *Special Features*: A portion of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail passes through the WSA in close proximity to where some of the trenches would be dug. Impacts to the wilderness experience of hikers on the PCT would be minimized by requiring work to be completed within thirty days. 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. A BLM on-site project inspector would be responsible for ensuring that trench digging activities do not disturb this rare plant species.

Visual Resources. No new structures with high degree of visual contrast would be placed. Trenches would be constructed from natural materials already present. Because public use of the route would be restricted if necessary (see mitigation measures below) little impact on visual resources is expected. The VRM objectives of only moderate change to the landscape would be met.

2. No Action Alternative:

Air Quality. The potential for any additional deterioration of air quality from the authorization of trenches would not occur.

Cultural Resources. This alternative would have no effect on historic properties.

Invasive/Non-native Species. No invasive or non-native species would be spread other than what was discussed in the original authorization EA. Their spread from the additional authorization of trenches would not occur.

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

- 1) *Naturalness*: Currently, man-made intrusions include fences, routes of travel, and water developments in support of grazing within the WSA. The improvements are inconspicuous and do not significantly impact the naturalness of the WSA. Naturalness would increase under this alternative as natural processes continue to reclaim the route.
- 2) *Solitude*: Public access to the site is limited due to fences and locked gates on the surrounding private lands, giving visitors high degrees of solitude. 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, negatively impacting solitude.

3) *Primitive and unconfined recreation*: This WSA currently supports light hunting, hiking, backpacking, and equestrian use. Opportunities for unconfined types of recreation are limited only by dense vegetation and some fences supporting the grazing allotment. No change to these opportunities would occur under this alternative.

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. Under this alternative, none of these special features would be impacted.

Visual Resources. No impact to visual resources would occur. Landscape would remain unchanged.

C. Mitigation Measures

Mitigation in the initial authorization has been changed to allow erosion control structures, and to allow surface disturbance outside the existing route for the digging of erosion control trenches. The agreement authorizing the work will specify that both the initial grading and the subsequent trenching were intended to be one-time actions. All other mitigation measures included in the original proposed action are still required.

BLM staff would monitor the area as necessary and communicate with USBP to determine if public use of the ways is occurring. If motorized vehicle use has the potential to or is degrading wilderness character or other resources, BLM in conjunction with adjacent private landowners would limit access. This measure may include an interim vehicle closure until route designation is complete.

D. Residual Impacts

Although the proposed action requires washing of equipment, some invasive or non-native plants may be spread by personnel working on the project. The time to complete the project is limited to minimize impacts to wilderness values, but some visitors still may be negatively impacted by the sights and sounds of heavy equipment in what is otherwise a primitive area.

E. Cumulative Impacts

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. Cumulatively, air quality is expected to remain good and well below standards.

The completion of the trenches would perpetuate the route, allowing continued use by USBP, who has access across the private lands. This may negatively impact wilderness values in the short term. Once the presence of USBP agents is established, the number of illegal border crossers should go down, and the overall wilderness impacts will decrease.

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 impacting techniques such as engines and hand crews could be used to effectively fight wildfires. The presence of USBP personnel would also increase fire detection capabilities, further limiting threats to life, property, and resources from wildfire.

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.

CONSULTATION/COORDINATION

A. Persons/ Agencies Consulted

U.S. Border Patrol – El Cajon Field Station
California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
Joyce Schlachter, BLM Wildlife Biologist-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 final decision associated with this EA. 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, Wilderness Specialist - PSSCFO
Janaye Byergo, San Diego Project Manager – PSSCFO
Rolla Queen, BLM Archaeologist – PSSCFO

REVIEWED BY: _____
Environmental Coordinator Date

**BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
PALM SPRINGS-SOUTH COAST FIELD OFFICE**

**DECISION RECORD
CA-660-06-05**

NAME of PROJECT: Hauser Mountain Wilderness Study Area Route Improvement

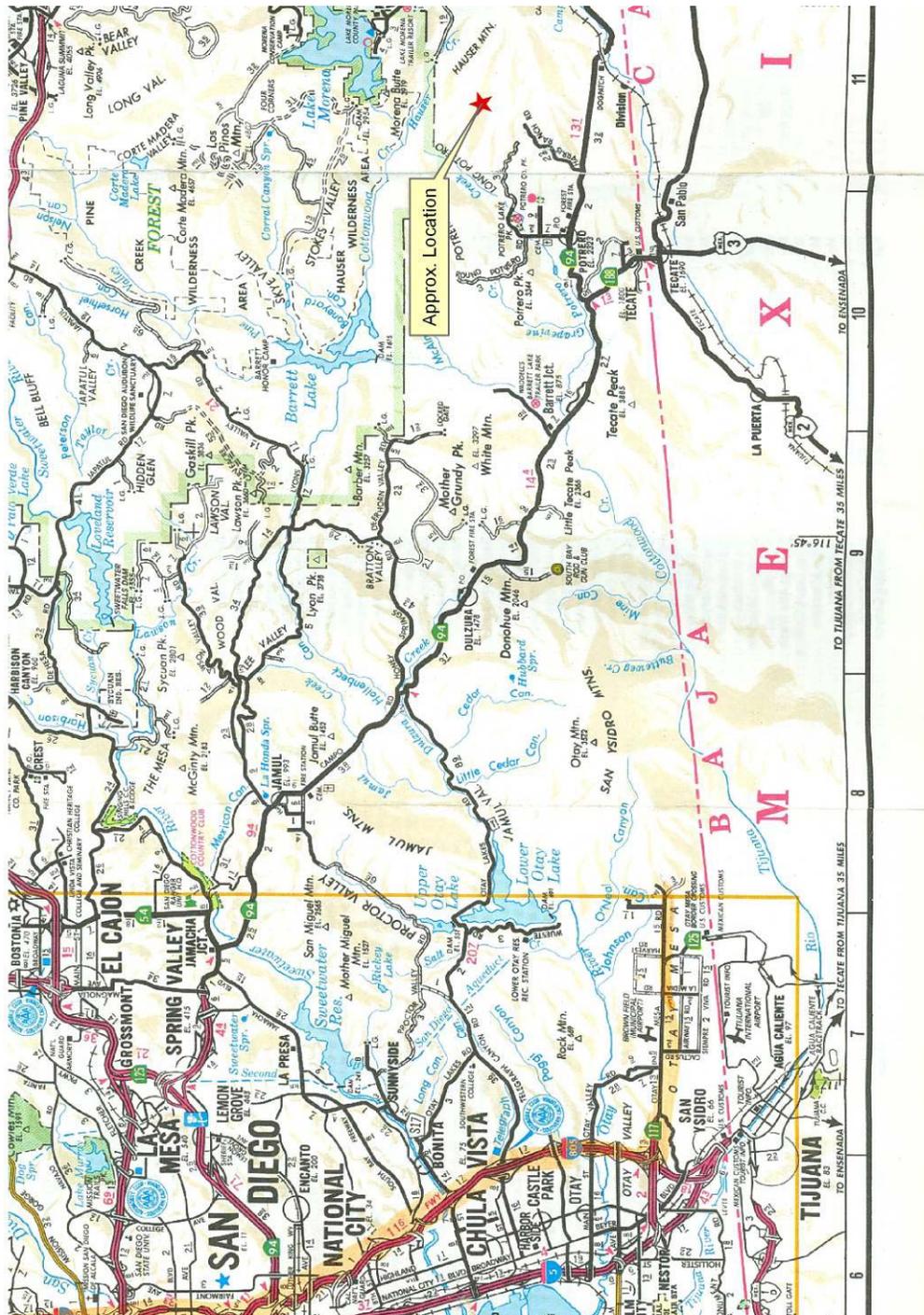
DECISION: It is my decision to approve the proposed action as described in Environmental Assessment (EA) number CA-660-06-05. Compliance with the mitigation measures identified in the EA is hereby required. These measures are incorporated into this decision record as stipulations by reference. A copy of this Decision Record and attendant conditions of approval as written in the cooperative agreement shall be in the possession of the on-site operator during all undertakings approved herein.

RATIONALE: The approved action is in conformance with applicable land use plans and will not cause unnecessary or undue degradation. Environmental impacts have been mitigated through terms and conditions in the cooperative agreement. The project will allow USBP to accomplish their mission while reducing threats to health, human safety, and resources from illegal activity and wildfires.

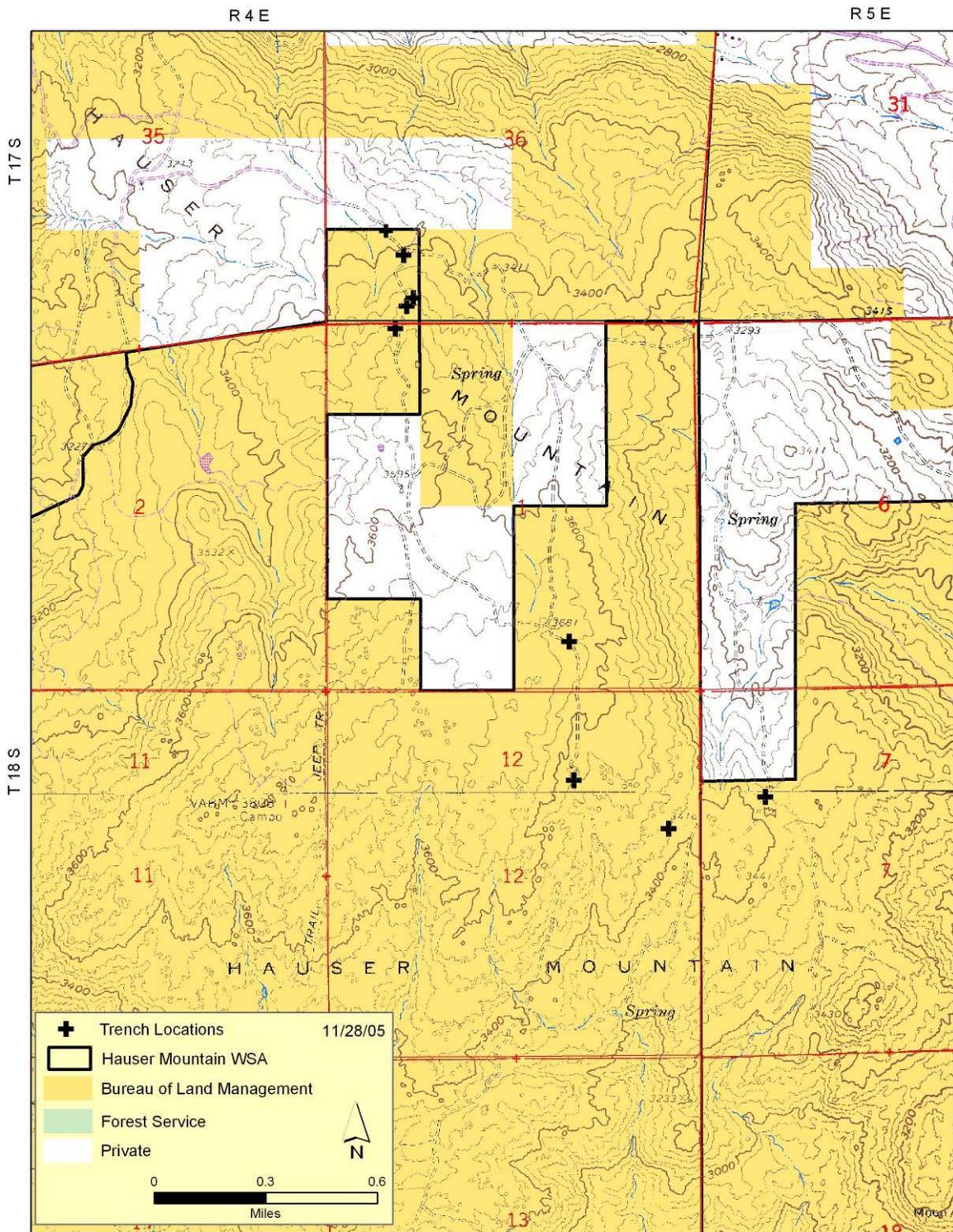
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT: Environmental impacts associated with the proposed action have been assessed. Based on the analysis provided in the attached EA, I conclude the approved action is not a major federal action and will result in no significant impacts to the environment under the criteria 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.

APPEALS: This decision may be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of the Secretary, in accordance with the regulations at Title 43 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 4, and the information provided in Form 1842-1 (enclosed). If an appeal is taken, your notice of appeal must be filed in the Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Department of the Interior, 690 West Garnet Avenue, P.O. Box 581260, North Palm Springs, California 92258, within 30 days from receipt of this decision. The appellant has the burden of showing that the decision appealed from is in error.

If you wish to file a petition for a stay of the effectiveness of this decision during the time that your appeal is being reviewed by the Board, pursuant to Title 43 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 4, Subpart E, the petition for a stay must accompany your notice of appeal. A petition for a stay is required to show sufficient justification based on the standards listed below. Copies of the notice of appeal and petition for a stay must also be submitted to each party named in this decision and to the Interior Board of Land Appeals and to the appropriate Office of the Solicitor (see 43 CFR 4.413) at the same time the original documents are filed with this office. If you request a stay, you have the burden of proof to demonstrate that a stay should be granted.



APPENDIX B – SPECIFIC LOCATION OF TRENCHES
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Bureau of Land Management. 1979. Final Intensive Inventory for Public Lands Administered by BLM California outside the California Desert Conservation Area. 187-189.

Bureau of Land Management. 1990. California Statewide Wilderness Study Report. Part 4, Volume 3.

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, Fire and Resource Assessment Program. 2005. State of California Fire Perimeters Map 1950-2004. { HYPERLINK "http://frap.cdf.ca.gov/webdata/maps/statewide/firep_map.pdf" }

Mensing, S. A., J. Michaelsen, and R. Byrne. 1999. A 560-year record of Santa Ana fires reconstructed from charcoal deposited in the Santa Barbara Basin, California. Quaternary Research 51:295-305.

Scully, P. Personal Communication. 2005. California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, San Diego Unit. Dulzura, CA.

U. S. Customs and Border Protection. 2004. Performance and Annual Report.