

United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Environmental Assessment # DOI – BLM – CA – D05000 – 2014 -032 - EA
Case File # none

Decision Record
Red Mountain Closed Route Restoration
Environmental Assessment

San Bernardino County, California

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Ridgecrest Field Office
300 South Richmond Road
Ridgecrest, CA 93555

August 2015



Decision Record
Ridgecrest Field Office
Environmental Assessment # DOI - BLM - CA – D05000 – 2014 - 032
Case File # none

Proposed Action Title/Type: Red Mountain Closed Route Restoration Environmental Assessment

Applicant/Proponent: None. This is an internal project.

Location of Proposed Action

The Red Mountain Sub-Region travel management area is located approximately 20 miles southeast of Ridgecrest and is defined by US Hwy 395 and Kern County line on the west; Spangler Hills OHV Management Area to the north; China Lake Air Weapons Station B Range to the east; and Barstow Field Office Management boundary to the south. Red Mountain is 120,199 acres in size and 82% (98,043 acres) is Federal lands managed by BLM. Private and State lands make up 18% (22,156 acres) of the land. The private land is owned by numerous landowners. There are also two wilderness areas that border the Red Mountain Sub-Region area: Golden Valley Wilderness and Grass Valley Wilderness.

The project area encompasses a majority of the Red Mountain Sub-Region Management area. The specific project area is bounded by Hwy 395 to the west, China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station (NAWS) Mojave Range B property and Grass Valley Wilderness to the east and north, Spangler Open Area to the north, and RM30 and Fremont Peak on the south. There is a southern peninsula included in the Red Mountain Sub-Region that is bounded on the east by Hwy 395, on the south by Hwy 58, and the Kern County/San Bernardino County line to the west. The project area falls within the following township and range locations:

T28.5S, R40E MDM Sections 35, 36
T28S, R41E MDM Sections 32, 33
T29S, R40E MDM Sections 1-3, 10-15, 23- 26, 36
T29S, R41E MDM Sections 3-10, 16-22, 25- 36
T29S, R42E MDM Section 36
T29S, R43E MDM Sections 25-27, 31-36
T29S, R44E MDM Sections 19- 21, 28, 29, 30- 33
T30S, R41E MDM Sections 1-18, 20-36
T30S, R42E MDM Sections 1, 3-36
T30S, R43E MDM Sections 1-9, 12, 18
T30S, R44E MDM Sections 4-9
T31S, R41E MDM Sections 1-18, 20-36
T31S, R42E MDM Sections 1-21, 29-31
T32S, R41E MDM Sections 3-9, 16-21, 27-34
T12N, R7W SBM Sections 33-36

1.0 Introduction and Background

This project would restore upland Mojave Desert scrub and Joshua tree woodland in the Red Mountain Sub-region and Desert Wildlife Management Area (DWMA).

Illegal vehicle use in the Red Mountain area may be causing increased soil erosion, soil compaction, and fragmentation of critical habitat for the desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) and the Mohave ground squirrel (*Spermophilus mohavensis*). There is also a need to educate the public about the area, its wildlife, native plants, and the BLM-designated route network. Rehabilitating illegal routes and camping/parking areas encourage vehicles to stay on BLM designated routes in the limited use area. Increased OHV compliance together with increased plant cover and diversity of shrubs, forbs, and grasses is expected to improve wildlife habitat, increase wildlife populations, and restore ecosystem processes. A timely response by BLM for soil protection and vegetation restoration in the area will afford greater protection to species of special concern to BLM managers, to outstanding scenic landscapes, and recreation uses, thereby meeting public expectations for environmental protection while advancing opportunities for high-quality recreation.

2.0 Decision

It is my decision to approve Alternative 1: Proposed Action Alternative as analyzed in the Red Mountain Closed Route Restoration Environmental Assessment (DOI - BLM - CA – D05000 – 2014 – 032 – EA. This Alternative is in itself a restoration project, therefore no mitigation measures were identified in the EA.

My authority for this decision derives from the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (43 USC 1732). I find that the action conforms to the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan (1980) and its amendments as described in the Environmental Assessment. I have determined the proposed action will not cause unnecessary or undue degradation and find it has no significant impact to public lands or resources. Environmental Assessment DOI - BLM - CA – D05000 – 2014 – 032 - EA, the Finding of No Significant Impact and this Decision constitute the Bureau's compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act. Preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. My decision is based on the analysis and recommendations of Environmental Assessment DOI - BLM - CA – D05000 – 2015 – 032; my Finding of No Significant Impact for this action, and; my consideration that no public comments were received.

2.1 Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1: the Proposed Action Alternative

This alternative would rehabilitate closed routes and associated camping/parking areas within the project area, the Red Mountain Sub-Region. The restoration would begin implementation as early as November 2015 and would be an on-going project dependent upon funding and project need.

Alternative 2, the No Action Alternative:

The no action alternative would continue the existing management of not applying restoration efforts to non-designated (closed) routes and the associated camping/parking areas in the Red Mountain Subregion. These routes would be left to rehabilitate naturally or would not rehabilitate at all, depending upon the continuation of vehicle trespass.

Signs may continue to be replaced as needed, based on the current signing program.

2.2 Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Further Consideration

BLM initially considered a range of restoration activities for alternatives for analysis in this document. After consideration, restoration activities that could conflict with applicable laws and regulations were eliminated from the action alternative. The consideration was limited to dealing with the issue of **how** restoration can be permitted rather than **whether or not it should** be permitted on public lands. The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA 1976) Title II, Section 202 (c) (3) and the California Desert Conservation Plan (CDCA 1980, as amended). Therefore, only the degree by which BLM can permit restoration activities forms the framework from which BLM considers viable restoration activities in the action alternative in this document.

Within these constraints, this EA analyzed only the **No Action Alternative-Alternative 2** and the **Action Alternative-Alternative 1** fully. Other restoration activities not included in the action alternative called for greater use of mechanized equipment: truck-mounted augers for planting deep-rooted desert shrubs and imprinting rollers to create depressions for concentrating water and seeds are eliminated from a detailed review because of potential negative impacts to populations and habitats of Mohave ground squirrels and desert tortoises. Impacts will be addressed only for one action alternative and the no action alternative

3.0 Consultation and Coordination

No tribes consulted because the project area does not occur on or near Tribal lands.

Ray Bransfield, Wildlife Biologist, at the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service in Ventura, CA was consulted. Additionally the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service Biological Opinion for the Ridgecrest Resource Area Results in Ridgecrest Resource Area-Wide Maintenance & Surface Restoration Programmatic EA-065-96-70, 1997 was reviewed for its application to this EA.

4.0 Public Involvement

The Environmental Assessment was posted to the BLM web site for a 30 day public comment period from June,20 to July 20, 2015. The Environmental Assessment and cultural resource finding code was also entered on the National Environmental Policy Act project log on the BLM California webpage for tribal review for two weeks. No comments were received from either review.

5.0 Consistency with Land Use Plans, Regulations and Policies

Based on information in the EA, the project record, and recommendations from BLM specialists, I conclude that this decision is consistent with the following Land Use Plan:

CDCA Plan, as amended

The Proposed Action is consistent with the Endangered Species Act; the Native American Religious Freedom Act; other cultural resource management laws and regulations; and Executive Order 12898 regarding Environmental Justice.

6.0 Administrative Remedies

Administrative remedies may be available to those who believe they will be adversely affected by this decision. Appeals may be made to the Office of Hearings and Appeals, Office of the Secretary, U.S. Department of Interior, Board of Land Appeals (Board) in accordance with the regulations in 43 CFR Part 4, and the enclosed form 1842-1. Notices of appeal must be filed in this office within 30 days after publication of this decision. If a notice of appeal does not include a statement of reasons, such statement must be filed with this office and the Board within 30 days after the notice of appeal is filed. The notice of appeal and any statement of reasons, written arguments, or briefs must also be served upon the Regional Solicitor, Pacific Southwest Region, U.S. Department of Interior, 2800 Cottage Way, E-1712, Sacramento, CA 95825.

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

/s/ Carl Symons
Carl Symons, Field Manager
Ridgecrest Field Office

8/11/2015
Date