United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

LAKE MEAD NATIONAL RECREATION AREA
601 NEVADA WAY
BOULDER CITY, NEVADA 89005

IN REPLY REFER TO:
D18 (LAKE-Supt)

February 26, 2015

Dear Friends of Lake Mead National Recreation Area and the Southern Nevada District Office of the Bureau of Land Management,

We are pleased to present the final Wilderness Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement for eight wilderness areas within and adjacent to Lake Mead National Recreation Area. The plan was jointly prepared by the National Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management as three of the eight wilderness areas include public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management. The plan is the culmination of several years of effort involving the thoughtful input and participation of hundreds of individuals, many public agencies and numerous outside organizations and stakeholder groups.

The new plan / environmental impact statement presents and analyzes three alternatives for future direction of the management and use of eight wilderness areas in the Park and on adjacent Bureau of Land Management lands. The three alternatives vary primarily in the level of public access and degree of management. Alternative B, the agencies' preferred alternative, focuses on protecting the character of the wilderness areas while providing a few more opportunities for access into several areas.

In the preferred alternative, climbing and bouldering would continue to be permitted in all wilderness areas. Temporary or removable equipment would be encouraged. The placement of new fixed anchors and equipment in all NPS wilderness would require authorization from the superintendent and be in compliance with Director's Order 41(Wilderness Stewardship). The placement of new fixed equipment would be prohibited in the Spirit Mountain Wilderness and existing equipment would be removed in partnership with the local climbing community where removal does not damage the rock face. In the Bridge Canyon Wilderness, the number of intensively bolted face climbs would be reduced and the replacement of existing anchors and equipment would require authorization from the superintendent. The park staff will work with the local tribes and climbing community in the pursuit of reducing the number of intensively bolted face climbs.

Lake Mead National Recreation Area and its adjacent public lands have become a recreational destination for over six million visitors per year due primarily to the spectacular setting and variety of recreational opportunities available. We sincerely thank those who have helped shape the Wilderness Management Plan and we invite all friends of Lake Mead National Recreation Area and the adjoining public lands to join us in bringing the vision of the plan to fruition.

Sincerely,

Patrick Gubbins
Acting Superintendent
Lake Mead National Recreation Area

Erick A. Kurkowski
(Acting) District Manager
Bureau of Land Management
Southern Nevada District Office

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

RECORD OF DECISION

WILDERNESS MANAGEMENT PLAN

JIMBILNAN, PINTO VALLEY, BLACK CANYON, ELDORADO, IRETEBA PEAKS, NELLIS WASH, SPIRIT MOUNTAIN, AND BRIDGE CANYON WILDERNESS AREAS

Southern Nevada District Office

The Bureau of Land Management Nevada State Office has prepared this Record of Decision for the *Final Wilderness Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement for Jimbilnan, Pinto Valley, Black Canyon, Eldorado, Ireteba Peaks, Nellis Wash, Spirit Mountain, and Bridge Canyon Wilderness Areas.* This record of decision includes a brief description of the project background and objectives, a statement of the decision and discussion of the basis for the decision, a summary of the other alternatives considered, a description of the environmentally preferred alternative, a listing of the measures that will be implemented to minimize or avoid environmental harm, and an overview of public involvement and agency consultation.

Note: Although the wilderness management plan/final environmental impact statement covered lands jointly managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and National Park Service (NPS), this record of decision only covers the wilderness lands managed by the BLM.

The NPS has prepared a separate Record of Decision for those portions of the wilderness areas that it manages.

BACKGROUND

In 2002, The Clark County Conservation of Public Land and Natural Resources Act (P.L107-282) was signed into law. This act designated 18 wilderness areas in Clark County, Nevada, as part of the national wilderness preservation system. Nine of these designated wilderness areas are fully or partially within Lake Mead National Recreation Area with four of the areas jointly managed by the BLM. This plan covers eight of the nine wilderness areas, of which three are jointly managed by the BLM. One area, the Muddy Mountains Wilderness, is covered under a separate plan that was jointly developed by the BLM and NPS in 2007.

During 2006 the BLM and NPS began collaborating on the wilderness management plan for these eight Nevada wilderness areas. Public scoping meetings were held in October 2006. A draft wilderness management plan /environmental assessment was released for public review in April 2010. During the public comment period, information was provided concerning the existence of an extensive climbing area in the Bridge Canyon Wilderness and the presence of fixed climbing anchors within the Spirit Mountain Traditional Cultural Property and Spirit Mountain Wilderness. This information, along with revisions to NPS wilderness management policies and tribal and climbers' concerns, prompted the decision to complete additional analysis and prepare an environmental impact statement.

A notice of availability of the draft wilderness management plan / environmental impact statement was filed on January 17, 2014, and published in the *Federal Register* (79 FR 14363) on January 21, 2014. The public was invited to submit comments on the draft document from January 21, 2014, through March 23, 2014. The

draft plan presented and analyzed three alternatives for future direction of the management and use of eight wilderness areas in Lake Mead NRA and adjacent BLM lands.

Purpose and Need for the Plan

The purpose of this wilderness management plan is to outline steps for preserving the wilderness character, natural resources, and cultural resources in eight designated wilderness areas, including three jointly managed by the BLM, while also providing for the use and enjoyment of the wilderness areas. It is intended to provide accountability, consistency, and continuity for managing the wilderness areas in the BLM wilderness management program. This plan provides guidelines to BLM wilderness area managers in maintaining desirable conditions in the wilderness areas and to respond effectively to future changes.

A plan is needed for the wilderness areas for several reasons. The population in Clark County is expected to continue to grow, resulting in changes in visitation patterns that have the potential to affect opportunities for solitude and other characteristics of the wilderness areas. Several wilderness-specific issues and topics have not been previously fully addressed by the BLM, including: determining appropriate access to the areas; identifying appropriate types and levels of resource management; setting user capacities for the areas; instituting wilderness character monitoring; providing guidance on the management of climbing in the wilderness areas; and determining the type and amount of visitor use that should be permitted versus the level of cultural resource protection that should be provided. Because three of the wilderness areas are jointly managed by the Bureau of Land Management and National Park Service, a plan is needed to ensure consistent management and tor solve potential conflicts. BLM Manual 8561 – Wilderness Management Plans (section .06A) requires wilderness management plans be prepared for all wilderness areas on public lands.

The draft plan proposed some changes in how the eight wilderness areas are managed. Three alternatives were developed that varied primarily in the level of public access and degree of management. All of the alternatives were crafted with the intention of ensuring cohesive management of the wilderness areas across jurisdictional boundaries. The proposed changes that will be most obvious to the public are those that address access and visitor distribution, visitor information services, management of climbers, and resource conditions.

DECISION (SELECTED ACTION)

Upon consideration of the concerns and issues raised during the planning and environmental impact analysis process, with due consideration for all public comments received during scoping as well as review of the Draft EIS, and in light of applicable laws, regulations, and BLM guidance, the BLM has selected Alternative B, which focuses on protecting the character of the wilderness areas while providing more opportunities for access into some of the wilderness areas. Alternative B was identified as the agencies' preferred alternative (selected action) in the January 2014 *Draft Wilderness Management Plan for Jimbilnan, Pinto Valley, Black Canyon, Eldorado, Ireteba Peaks, Nellis Wash, Spirit Mountain, and Bridge Canyon Environmental Impact Statement (WMP/DEIS)*. The selected action is the same as described for Alternative B in the Final EIS. The selected action includes the following primary components, which will be implemented as staffing and funding allow and may be accomplished in phases.

General Components

- Access points will be established at various locations to improve access to some of the wilderness areas compared to alternative A.

- Additional opportunities will be provided for both day and overnight use.
- Approximately 23 miles of routes will be designated in the wilderness areas. Some of these routes will follow old road beds, while others will be designated on maps and involve no on-the-ground work. They are all intended to provide access to the areas while avoiding/minimizing resource impacts.

- Resource management will primarily focus on restoration of disturbed areas, long-term inventory and monitoring, and mitigation of disturbances by people where appropriate.

- Additional efforts will be made to inform and educate visitors about opportunities to experience each wilderness area.

Eldorado Wilderness

- An access point with an information kiosk will be developed off Nevada State Route 165 to provide information on a designated route that follows Oak Creek Canyon and Lonesome Wash.

Ireteba Peaks Wilderness

- No actions will be taken to improve visitor access into this area.

- Restoration work will occur in Tule Spring to restore its wilderness character.

Spirit Mountain Wilderness

- An information kiosk will be installed in the vicinity of Spirit Mountain that will mention the importance of the area to the local tribes.

- All existing fixed anchors and equipment from rock climbing activities will be removed if it can be done without damaging rock faces, and no new fixed anchors or equipment will be authorized.

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Alternative A, No Action

Alternative A, the "no-action" alternative, reflects current management of the wilderness areas and serves as a baseline for comparison with the other alternatives. No major change would occur in the management of the wilderness areas under this alternative.

Alternative C

Compared to Alternative B (the Selected Action), Alternative C would provide a higher level of access and visitor use management while still protecting the overall character of the wilderness areas. In alternative C, additional efforts would be made to inform and educate both visitors and the public about the presence of the wilderness areas and opportunities that are available. Dispersed use would continue to be encouraged, while the establishment and maintenance of designated routes would concentrate use in some areas. Although slightly more access opportunities would be provided in most of the wilderness areas, slightly fewer opportunities would be provided in the Black Canyon area. More proactive management would be given to the Black Canyon, Pinto Valley, Spirit Mountain, and Bridge Canyon wilderness areas to ensure their values are protected and unacceptable impacts do not occur. Access to the wilderness areas would be improved primarily through the establishment of trail heads at various points.

BASIS FOR DECISION

After careful consideration of each alternative and its foreseeable environmental impacts, the expressed purpose and need for federal action, and all public and agency comments, including comments on the wilderness management plan/draft EIS, Alternative B has been selected for implementation. This alternative best complies with BLM management policies, and best meets the management objectives to preserve the

wilderness character, natural resources, and cultural resources in the three designated wilderness areas managed by BLM while also providing for the use and enjoyment of these areas.

The BLM has determined that the selected action will:

- Provide for the long-term protection and preservation of the areas' wilderness character.
- Repair, where possible, degradation from past nonconforming uses that have diminished wilderness character.
- Manage the wilderness areas for the use and enjoyment of visitors in a manner that will leave the areas unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness.
- Manage cultural resources in the wilderness areas so they will be preserved and appreciated through appropriate protection, research, education, monitoring, and treatment methods and techniques.
- Promote and perpetuate public and managers' awareness of, and appreciation for, wilderness character, resources, and ethics through interpretation and education.
- Manage the wilderness areas using the minimum tools and equipment necessary to successfully, safely, and economically preserve wilderness resources.
- Manage nonconforming but accepted uses permitted by the Wilderness Act and subsequent laws in a manner that will prevent unnecessary or undue degradation of the areas' wilderness character.
- Manage the NPS and BLM portions of the three jointly managed wilderness areas to provide a maximum amount of management consistency across administrative boundaries.

As documented in the final EIS, the following key factors support implementation of the selected action:

- The environmental analyses demonstrate that the Selected Action will have beneficial effects on wilderness character and only short- and long-term negligible to moderate adverse impacts to natural resources and negligible to minor adverse impacts to cultural resources; no major adverse impacts will occur.
- The selected action has a high likelihood of achieving the expressed purpose and objectives as articulated in the draft and final EIS.
- The selected action is fully compliant with BLM's mission and policies, and other pertinent laws and regulations.
- The selected action specifies all feasible and prudent measures to minimize environmental harm.
- The selected action was crafted through several years of public involvement and agency coordination.

ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERABLE ALTERNATIVE

According to Council on Environmental Quality regulations implementing the National Environmental Policy Act, the environmentally preferable alternative is the alternative "that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment and best protects, preserves, and enhances historical, cultural, and natural

resources. The environmentally preferable alternative is identified upon consideration and weighing by the responsible official of long-term environmental impacts against short-term impacts in evaluating what is the best protection of these resources. In some situations, such as when different alternatives impact different resources to different degrees, there may be more than one environmentally preferable alternative."

The environmentally preferable alternative is alternative B. This course of action would result in fewer adverse impacts, and more beneficial impacts, than alternatives A and C. Alternative C would provide for more visitor use opportunities and increased information to visitors, compared to alternative B, but there also would be a higher potential for more impacts on wilderness resources and values in comparison with the Selected Action.

MEASURES TO MINIMIZE ENVIRONMENTAL HARM

Mitigation measures are the practicable and appropriate methods that will be used under the Selected Action to avoid or minimize harm to wilderness character, natural and cultural resources, visitors, and the visitor experience. The mitigation measures have been developed by using existing laws and regulations, best management practices, conservation measures, and other known techniques. Most of the mitigation measures below relate to construction of facilities, all of which will occur outside the wilderness areas (e.g., development of access points).

General - Natural Resources

- Previously disturbed areas will be used whenever possible and new disturbance will be confined to carefully selected sites with as small a construction footprint as possible.

- Natural and cultural resource staff will identify sensitive areas during design and planning stages and will be on-site during periods of construction, if necessary, to ensure that all mitigation and conservation measures are followed.

- Best management practices will be implemented to reduce impacts on air and water quality and natural soundscapes.

Soils and Vegetation

- Erosion control measures will be incorporated into development projects. Areas of disturbance will be rehabilitated through raking and, as appropriate, replacement of topsoil and revegetation.

- Best management practices will be used to avoid the introduction of nonnative plant species. These will include prohibiting the use of imported fill, soil, or hay bales; ensuring all equipment is clean and free of foreign soil or seeds; minimizing new ground disturbance and initiating restoration of disturbed sites immediately· and monitoring disturbed areas for growth of nonnative species. All cacti and yuccas will be avoided or salvaged and replanted.

Wildlife

- Visitor impacts on wildlife will be addressed through such techniques as visitor education programs, restrictions on visitor activities, and ranger patrols.

- During any construction of facilities necessary to support wilderness management, noise abatement measures will be implemented. These measures may include: a schedule to minimize impacts in noise-sensitive areas, use of the best available noise control techniques wherever feasible, use of

hydraulically or electrically powered impact tools when feasible, and the location of stationary noise sources as far from sensitive uses as possible.

- For occupied raptor nests, rock climbing will be prohibited up to 0.5 mile from the nest site.

Threatened, Endangered, and Rare Species

Surveys will be conducted for special status species, including rare, threatened, and endangered species, before taking any action that might cause harm. In consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Nevada Department of Wildlife, appropriate measures will be taken to protect any sensitive species, whether identified through surveys or presumed to occur.

Prior to any surface disturbing activities associated with the implementation of this wilderness management plan, the following conservation measures will be implemented to ensure that the federally threatened Mojave desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) and its habitat are protected:

- Project areas will be surveyed for tortoises within 24 hours of the start of ground disturbance. If a tortoise is present, it will be allowed to move out of harm's way of its own volition.
- All project personnel will receive desert tortoise education, which will include information on the species' life history and legal status as well as all stipulations associated with project implementation.
- Litter control will be strictly enforced.
- Pets will be required to be under leash control at all times.
- Sites where vegetation is disturbed will be rehabilitated as soon as possible to restore habitat.

Cultural Resources

- As appropriate, archeological surveys and/or monitoring will precede any ground disturbance.

- National register-eligible or national register-listed archeological resources will be avoided to the greatest extent possible. If such resources could not be avoided, an appropriate mitigation strategy will be developed in consultation with the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office and associated American Indian tribes.

- If during construction previously unknown archeological resources were discovered, all work in the immediate vicinity of the discovery will be halted until the resources could be identified and documented and evaluated for National Register eligibility; if the resources cannot be preserved *in situ*, an appropriate mitigation strategy will be developed in consultation with the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office and associated American Indian tribes.

- Sensitive traditional use areas will be protected to the extent feasible by avoiding or mitigating impacts on ethnographic resources and continuing to provide access to traditional use and spiritual areas.

- Use of climbing equipment (including climbing chalk) within a minimum of 50 feet of rock art will be prohibited.

- Visitors will be educated on the importance of protecting the wilderness areas' cultural resources and leaving these undisturbed for the enjoyment of future visitors.

Although comments from unaffiliated individuals were by far the largest source of comments, a variety of federal and state agencies, county government, recreational groups, businesses, conservation groups, nonprofit groups, and other organizations commented on the plan.

The BLM and NPS responded to all substantive comments raised by the public and agencies as part of developing the final wilderness management plan / environmental impact statement. In some cases, the content of the document was modified in response to public comments.

On February 27, 2015, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency published its notice of filing of the final EIS in the *Federal Register* (80 FR 10683), initiating the minimum 30 days "no action" waiting period through April 3, 2015. The notice of availability for the final EIS was published in the *Federal Register* (80 FR 11685) on March 4, 2015.

CONSULTATION WITH AGENCIES AND TRIBAL GOVERNMENTS

Section 7 Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, requires in section 7 (a) (2) that each federal agency, in consultation with the secretary of the interior, ensure that any action the agency authorizes, funds, or carries out is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of a listed species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of designated critical habitat. This section of the act sets out the consultation process, which is further implemented by regulation (50 CFR 93 402).

The planning team initiated informal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the desert tortoise, the only federally listed species known to occur in the wilderness areas. This informal consultation occurred during the development of the 2010 draft wilderness management plan / environmental assessment. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred on September 12, 2008, with the agencies' determination that the proposed action is not likely to adversely affect the desert tortoise. Because the 2013 wilderness management plan / environmental impact statement is not proposing new actions that will affect the tortoise or its habitat, the earlier consultation covers this plan.

Tribal Governments

The BLM recognizes that indigenous peoples have traditional and contemporary interests and ongoing rights in lands now under BLM management, as well as concerns and contributions to make for the future for this wilderness management plan. Related to tribal sovereignty, the need for government-to-government American Indian consultations stems from the historic power of Congress to make treaties with American Indian tribes as sovereign nations. Consultations with American Indian tribes are required by various federal laws, executive orders, regulations, and policies. For example, such consultations are needed to comply with section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended. Implementing regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality for the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended, also call for American Indian consultations.

Formal consultation with tribes associated with Lake Mead National Recreation Area and neighboring BLM managed lands was initiated in September 2008. A formal request to consult was sent to the Kaibab Paiute Tribe, the Las Vegas Paiute Tribe, the Moapa Paiute Tribe, the Shivwits Band of Paiute, the Paiute Indian Tribes of Utah, the Pahrump Paiute Tribe, the Chemehuevi Tribe, the Colorado River Indian Tribes, the Ft. Mojave Tribe, the Ft. Yuma Quechan Tribe, the Gila River Indian Community, the Havasupai Tribe, the Hopi Tribe, the Hualapai Tribe, the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, the Yavapai-Prescott Indian Tribe, the Ak-Chin Indian Community, and the Zuni Tribe.

Visitor Use and Experiences

- Visitor safety concerns will be integrated into interpretive and educational programs.
- Guidance consistent with Leave No Trace principles will be developed to educate visitors on minimizing impacts on wilderness areas.

PUBUC INVOLVEMENT

Project Scoping

Scoping on this project began with the publication of a newsletter in 2006, which described the planning effort and requested the public to identify issues and concerns the plan should address. Scoping meetings were held at Henderson and Laughlin, Nevada, in October of 2006.

Work began on the environmental impact statement in 2011 with meetings being held with Lake Mead National Recreation Area and BLM Southern Nevada District staff to identify potential issues and concerns for the plan. Formal public scoping began with a notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement, which was published in the *Federal Register* on February 15, 2012. A newsletter, issued in March 2012 described the planning effort and requested the public to identify issues and concerns the plan should address. The public was asked to send their comments via the internet or mail. The public was requested to send their comments by April 20, 2012. Only a few comments were received, with no common themes or issues. Topics that were raised included overflights; protection of wilderness character; use of fixed anchors for climbing in wilderness and ensuring opportunities continue to be provided for climbing; and access into the areas.

In February 2013 a preliminary alternatives newsletter was distributed to the public. The newsletter requested comments on the preliminary alternatives by April 2, 2013. Public open houses were also held in Bullhead City, Arizona, and Boulder City and Henderson, Nevada, on March 18-21, 2013. At these meetings, representatives of both the BLM and the NPS participated.

Draft Wilderness Management Plan I Environmental Impact Statement

A notice of availability of the draft wilderness management plan / environmental impact statement was filed on January 17, 2014, and published in the *Federal Register* (79 FR 14363) on January 21, 2014. The public was invited to submit comments on the draft document from January 21, 2014, through March 23, 2014.

Three public meetings were held on the draft plan in the region: Henderson, Nevada (February 11, 2014); Boulder City, Nevada (February 12, 2014); and Bullhead City, Arizona (February 13, 2014). A total of approximately 30 individuals attended the three meetings. The meetings were primarily informational in nature, intended to provide opportunities for the public to meet members of the planning team, learn about the plan, and have questions answered. Attendees were encouraged to provide comments in writing to the planning team.

A total of approximately 269 written comments were received during the comment period. Most comments were received as e-mails, with the remainder being letters (which were scanned into the NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) web site). Several of the comments sent via e-mail included portions of a form letter. Comments were received from 32 states, and one correspondence from the District of Columbia. The majority of comments were from California, Nevada, and Arizona.

Representatives from the Chemehuevi Tribe, the Ft. Mojave Indian Tribe, the Hualapai Tribe, and the Southern Paiute Pahrump Paiute Tribe attended meetings with NPS staff on the tribes' issues and concerns regarding the management of the wilderness areas.

Several tribes expressed concerns about visitor use and specifically the use of fixed anchors in the Spirit Mountain Wilderness (which is considered sacred by several tribes and is a designated traditional cultural property) and Bridge Canyon Wilderness. Tribal consultations indicate the use of fixed anchors within the traditional cultural property is not compatible with the cultural values of the tribes and conflicts with their heritage and self-identity as a community.

Section 106 Consultation with the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office

The National Park Service was the lead agency for the Section 106 consultation. The National Park Service initiated consultation with the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) with a letter dated August 12, 2008. The National Park Service informed the state historic preservation office about the undertaking to develop a wilderness management plan for the eight wilderness areas in Lake Mead National Recreation Area and on adjacent BLM lands. The state historic preservation office was invited to participate in the planning process and to comment on the draft plan as it progressed. The National Park Service continued consultation with the state historic preservation office throughout the development of the wilderness management plan.

CONCLUSION

The selected action (alternative B) provides the most comprehensive, long-term, effective strategy among alternatives considered in the *Wilderness Management Plan for Jimbilnan, Pinto Valley, Black Canyon, Eldorado, Ireteba Peaks, Nellis Wash, Spirit Mountain, and Bridge Canyon Wilderness Areas FEIS* for meeting the project's purpose and wilderness management objectives. The selected action is fully compliant with BLM policies and other pertinent laws and regulations, and allows the BLM to balance protection of the wilderness areas' natural and cultural resources and wilderness character while providing more opportunities for access into some of the areas.

APPROVED:

John F. Ruhs
Acting Nevada State Director

15 June 2015
Dated

ERRATA SHEET

Corrections to the *Final Wilderness Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement for Jimbilnan, Pinto Valley, Black Canyon, Eldorado, Ireteba Peaks, Nellis Wash, Spirit Mountain, and Bridge Canyon Wilderness Areas* are listed in this section. These revisions have not resulted in substantial modification of the selected action and do not require additional environmental analysis. The page numbers referenced are from the final plan.

Page v: The text should be corrected to: "NPS and BLM managers, with further input from the climbing community and tribes, will consider would reduce anchors in the Bridge Canyon Wilderness that have unacceptable impacts on Wilderness resources and wilderness character."

Page 142, right column, 2nd full paragraph: The text should read: "Sticky buckwheat. … occurs in ~~Pinto Valley and possibly~~ the Jimbilnan wilderness area.