

PARTIAL RECORD OF DECISION  
FOR THE APPROVAL  
OF THE  
SAFFORD DISTRICT  
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN  
I

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

  
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PARTIAL RECORD OF DECISION  
FOR THE SAFFORD DISTRICT

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN  
AND  
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

## INTRODUCTION

This Record of Decision (ROD) documents approval of portions of the Safford District Resource Management Plan (RMP). The approved portions of the plan will replace four Management Framework Plans (Geronimo, 1973; Black Hills, 1975; Winkelman, 1981; and San Simon, 1973) for the District and provide the basis for managing public lands and resources in the Bureau of Land Management's Safford District over the next 15 years. Much of the information used in preparing the Management Framework Plans and the decisions of those plans that are still valid have been incorporated into this Resource Management Plan. Management Framework Plans were not prepared for scattered parcels of public land in Cochise and southwestern Graham Counties. The decisions of the approved Resource Management Plan includes management direction for these areas. In addition, this Plan incorporates the decisions of the San Pedro River Riparian Management Plan (1989), the Upper Gila-San Simon Grazing Environmental Impact Statement (1978) and Eastern Arizona Grazing Environmental Impact Statement (1986).

The Record of Decision describes the selected alternative (except unresolved protest areas), other alternatives considered and rationale for adopting the selected alternative. The environmentally-preferred alternative is also identified. Seven protests were received on the final Resource Management Plan during the 30-day protest period. The protests centered on very specific issues. Resolution was reached on one of the protests with the conditions of resolution identified in this document. Administrative decisions have been made on two other protests. All decisions relating to the four unresolved protests will be deferred. The selected plan and this Record of Decision include all decisions not under protest. The selected plan is nearly identical to the one set forth in the proposed plan and associated Final Environmental Impact Statement released in September 1991. All practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm have been incorporated into the approved plan.

References cited below are to the Proposed Resource Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement.

## DECISION

It is my decision to adopt the management prescriptions defined in the Safford District Final Resource Management Plan under the sections titled: Management Guidance Common to All Alternatives (pp. 18-26), Alternative A (Preferred Alternative) (pp. 26-47) and the Appendices and maps referenced in these sections with the following exceptions:

1. Designation of the Gila Box Area of Critical Environmental Concern will be deferred pending resolution of the protests objecting to the proposed designation.
2. Designation of the Desert Grasslands Area of Critical Environmental Concern will be deferred pending resolution of the protests objecting to the management prescription for exclusion of livestock.
3. Designation of the Coronado Mountain Area of Critical Environmental Concern will be deferred pending resolution of the protests objecting to the proposed designation.
4. Designation of the Eagle Creek Bat Cave Area of Critical Environmental Concern will be deferred pending resolution of the protests objecting to the management prescription for mineral withdrawal.
5. Designation of the Hot Springs-Swamp Springs Area of Critical Environmental Concern will be deferred pending resolution of the protests objecting to this designation.
6. The decision concerning the grazing prescription for the South Rim Allotment will be deferred pending resolution of the protest objecting to the proposed prescription.
7. The decision to study the Gila Box Segment of the San Francisco and Gila rivers for "suitability" for inclusion in the Wild and Scenic Rivers System will be deferred pending resolution of the protests objecting to this study.
8. The decision to acquire land on the San Pedro River watershed, other than wilderness in-holdings, lands within the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation area and the twelve parcels already in the acquisition process, will be deferred pending progress in the newly initiated Coordinated Resource Management Planning effort.

The following descriptions of issues and management concerns are a summary of the major decisions contained in Alternative A (Preferred alternative) of the Safford District Resource Management Plan.

## Issue 1 ACCESS

The District's goal is to provide the necessary vehicular, horse and foot access routes to meet the needs and responsibilities of the private parties and public entities present in the District.

A District Transportation Plan will be prepared that will define the road, trail, public and administrative access needs on the District. Road construction, reconstruction, closures, maintenance, numbering and signing, as well as access acquisition and retention will be addressed in this Plan.

## Issue 2 AREA OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS and OTHER TYPES OF SPECIAL MANAGEMENT AREAS

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) will be designated where values are determined to be of the appropriate level of significance and special management prescriptions are required for their protection.

Eight ACECs, in addition to three areas within the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area, will be designated to protect important natural and cultural resources. The eight ACECs are:

1. Turkey Creek (2,326 acres)
2. Table Mountain (1,220 acres)
3. Bear Springs Badlands (2,297 acres)
4. Guadalupe Canyon (2,159 acres)
5. Bowie Mountain (4,190 acres)
6. Dos Cabezas Peaks (25 acres)
7. Wilcox Playa (2,475 acres)
8. 111 Ranch (2,688 acres)

The three areas within the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area are:

1. St. David Cienega (350 acres)
2. San Pedro River (1,340 acres)
3. San Rafael (370 acres)

The decision to designate five additional ACECs is deferred. These are listed under the exceptions on pages 2 and 3 of this document.

Coordinated Resource Management Plans will be developed for the following Special Management areas:

1. Aravaipa Creek Watershed
2. Muleshoe Ranch
3. Bear Springs Flat

Portions of seven rivers in the District will be studied for suitability for inclusion in the Wild and Scenic Rivers system. These rivers are:

1. Gila River
2. Aravaipa Creek
3. Turkey Creek
4. Swamp Springs Canyon
5. Hot Springs Canyon
6. Bonita Creek
7. San Pedro River

### Issue 3 OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLES

All public lands within the District will be designated as open, closed or limited with respect to off-highway vehicle use.

Designate Hot Well Dunes (1,708 acres) as open to off-highway vehicle use.

Designate the following areas as closed to off-highway vehicles:

- All designated Wilderness Areas (84,632 acres)
- Turkey Creek above Oak Grove Canyon Corral (102 acres)
- Wilcox Playa ACEC (2,475 acres)
- Hot Springs Canyon Riparian Area (140 acres)

Designate 1,310,713 acres of the public lands within the District as limited off-highway vehicle use. "Limited" off-highway vehicle use is restricted to existing roads and trails occurring at the time of designation and any new roads approved for construction during the life of this RMP.

Designate off-highway vehicle use in the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area (54,189 acres) and the Gila Box Riparian National Conservation Area (20,900 acres) as limited and restricted to designated roads.

### Issue 4 RIPARIAN AREAS

In accordance with National and State BLM directives, Safford District will manage riparian areas, located on public land within the District, to achieve good to excellent condition on 75 percent of the riparian zone acreage by 1997. (See Map 26.)

To achieve these results, the District will cooperate with individuals, private, State and other Federal agencies to develop and implement management practices to meet these goals.

## Management Concern 1 WILDLIFE HABITAT

Safford District will coordinate and cooperate with all appropriate Federal, State and local agencies to achieve RMP wildlife management goals.

District management will focus on priority species and their associated habitats to maintain or enhance population levels. Threatened and endangered, proposed, candidate, State-listed and other special status species will be managed to enhance or maintain District population levels or in accordance with established inter/intra-agency management plans. District management efforts will be directed towards the enhancement of biological diversity.

## Management Concern 2 LANDS AND REALTY

Safford District will adjust land tenure through sale, exchange or purchase to meet Resource management Plan objectives.

One hundred five thousand, five hundred twenty-three (105,523) acres of public lands are identified for disposal, described in Appendix 5, to improve resource management efficiency and service to the public.

Lands with high public values that will improve management efficiency, complement existing management programs or improve service to the public are identified for acquisition. (See RMP Map 27)

Five major utility corridors will be designated along existing lines. These corridors are:

1. Arizona Electric Power Company
2. Tucson Electric Power Company
3. All-American Pipeline
4. San Pedro
5. Hayden/Christmas

Six areas are established as right-of-way exclusion areas. These areas are as follows:

1. Dos Cabezas Peaks ACEC
2. Bear Springs Badlands ACEC
3. Wilcox Playa ACEC
4. Wilderness study areas
5. Designated wilderness areas
6. Oliver Knoll Atmospheric Deposition Monitoring Station

The decision to establish two other areas is deferred.

1. Gila Box ACEC
2. Coronado Mountain ACEC

Two areas are established as right-of-way avoidance zones.

1. Muleshoe Ranch
2. Bowie Mountain ACEC

Three communications sites will be designated.

1. Guthrie Peak
2. Juniper Flat in the Mule Mountains
3. West end of the Dos Cabezas Mountains.

Withdrawals from the public land laws and the mining laws will be processed in the following areas.

1. Table Mountain ACEC (1,200 acres)
2. Bear Springs Badlands ACEC (2,927 acres)
3. Bowie Mountain ACEC (2,230 acres)
4. Fourmile Canyon Campground (159 acres)
5. Oliver Knoll Atmospheric Deposition Monitoring Station  
(10 acres)
6. Proposed District Office site (12 acres)
7. Yuma Wash Archaeological Site (120 acres)
8. Tres Alamos Archaeological Site (160 acres)
9. Midway Cave Archaeological Site (40 acres)

Withdrawals in four sites are deferred.

1. Gila Box ACEC (2,411 acres)
2. Desert Grasslands ACEC (380 acres)
3. Coronado Mountain ACEC (120 acres)
4. Eagle Creek Bat Cave ACEC (40 acres)

### **Management Concern 3 OUTDOOR RECREATION and VISUAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

The Safford District will endeavor to provide a variety of recreational opportunities that meets public demand and are compatible with the Bureau's stewardship responsibilities.

Designate six areas as Special Recreation Management Areas to manage current recreation use. Recreation Area Management Plans will be prepared for these areas as needed.

1. Aravaipa Canyon/Turkey Creek
2. Gila Box/Bonita Creek
3. Christmas (Gila River below Coolidge Dam)
4. Red Knolls/Bear Springs Badlands/Watson Wash
5. Hot Well Dunes
6. Additional lands in San Pedro RNCA

Project plans will be prepared for nine additional areas in the District.

1. Gila Mountain Crest Trail
2. Galiuro/Aravaipa/Santa Teresa Trail
3. Watson Wash Hot Well
4. Safford-Morenci Trail
5. Red Knolls
6. Guadalupe Canyon
7. Black Hills Rockhound Area
8. Round Mountain Rockhound Area
9. Fort Bowie/Helen's Dome

The Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness will be managed under the existing wilderness plan.

The Black Hills Backcountry Byway will be designated as an interpretive vehicle route. An interpretive plan will be written to manage the developments and activities of the area.

District recreation road and sign needs will be developed. A District sign plan will be developed.

Designate all areas in the District as Visual Resource Management Class I, II, III, or IV. (See pages 38 - 40 and Table 2-4.)

#### Management Concern 4 ENERGY AND MINERALS

Safford District will encourage and foster the development of energy and mineral resources located on public land without undue and unnecessary degradation to the other resources found on these or nearby lands.

Entry, sale and lease of mineral and energy resources will be managed through the use of appropriate regulations, withdrawals, no surface occupancy, prohibitions and standard stipulations to protect areas of high and sensitive resource values.

Withdrawal of areas from mineral entry to preserve sensitive resource values will be recommended.

1. Table Mountain ACEC (1,220 acres)
2. Bear Springs Badlands ACEC (2,927 acres)
3. Bowie Mountain ACEC (2,230 acres)
4. Fourmile Campground (159 acres)
5. Oliver Knoll Atmospheric Deposition Monitoring Sta. (10 acres)
6. Proposed District Office site (12 acres)
7. Yuma Wash Archaeological Site (120 acres)
8. Tres Alamos Archaeological Site (160 acres)
9. Midway Cave Archaeological Site (40 acres)



Withdrawals in four areas are deferred.

1. Gila Box ACEC (2,411 acres)
2. Desert Grasslands ACEC (380 acres)
3. Coronado Mountain ACEC (120 acres)
4. Eagle Creek Bat Cave ACEC (40 acres)

Sale of mineral materials on 9,920 acres to preserve sensitive resource values will be prohibited.

1. Bear Springs Badlands ACEC (2,927 acres)
2. Bowie Mountain ACEC (2,230 acres)
3. Dos Cabezas ACEC (25 acres)
4. Riparian areas other than those located in ACECs (4,458 acres)
5. Tres Alamos Archaeological Site (160 acres)
6. Yuma Wash Archaeological Site (120 acres)

The decision is deferred on two areas.

1. Gila Box ACEC (2,411 acres)
2. Eagle Creek Batcave ACEC (40 acres)

Issue mineral and energy leases with "No Surface Occupancy" on 11,601 acres to preserve sensitive resource values.

1. Bear Springs Badlands ACEC (2,927 acres)
2. Bowie mountain ACEC (2,230 acres)
3. Dos Cabezas Peaks ACEC (25 acres)
4. Riparian areas other than those located in ACECs (4,458 acres)
5. Desert Bighorn Sheep Lambing Areas (90 acres)
6. Fourmile Canyon Campground (159 acres)
7. Proposed District Office site (12 acres)
8. Oliver Knoll Atmospheric Deposition Sta. (10 acres)
9. Yuma Wash Archaeological Site (120 acres)

This decision is deferred in two additional areas.

1. Gila Box ACEC (2,411 acres)
2. Eagle Creek Batcave ACEC (40 acres)

## Management Concern 5 CULTURAL RESOURCES

Cultural resources located on public land within the Safford District will be managed for the broad objectives of information potential, public values and conservation. (See Table 2-7 and Appendix 12.)

## Management Concern 6 SOIL EROSION

The Safford District goal, for all public land within the District, is to minimize soil erosion and rehabilitate eroded areas to maintain or enhance watershed condition and reduce nonpoint source pollution that may originate on public lands. Specific objectives include restoration of the eroding flood plains of the San Simon River and the Bear Springs flat area and the reduction of salts entering the Gila River.

## Management Concern 7 VEGETATION

Upland vegetation on public lands within the Safford District will be managed for livestock use, watershed protection, reduction of nonpoint source pollution, Threatened and Endangered species protection, priority wildlife habitat firewood and other incidental human uses. Best management practices and vegetation manipulation will be used to achieve desired plant community management objectives. Treatments may include various mechanical, chemical and prescribed fire methods.

## Management Concern 8 WATER RESOURCES

Sufficient quantities of appropriate quality water will be secured through established State and Federal procedures to accomplish the Bureau's land management objectives. Monitoring programs will be implemented to protect these water sources.

Surface and ground water resources will be managed to conserve and protect them for prudent resource management purposes. This will be accomplished by seeking instream flow water rights, unique waters designations, implementing monitoring programs, initiating appropriate studies, controlling the availability and use of groundwater for District programs, purchasing water rights to protect resource values and adopting best management practices for Bureau managed activities.

## Management Concern 9 AIR QUALITY

The airshed over Safford District public lands will be managed as a Class II area unless designated as nonattainment areas or their classification is changed as the result of appropriate State procedures.

All activities on public lands of the District will comply with the requirements of this management classification. The District goal is to minimize unnecessary surface disturbance, rehabilitate eroding watersheds, coordinate prescribed fire programs with Arizona Department of Environmental Quality and continue operation of the Oliver Knoll atmospheric deposition monitoring station.

## Management Concern 10 PALEONTOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Fossil resources located on public land within the District will be managed for the protection of their scientific and public values.

A Paleontological Resources Management Plan for the District will be prepared. It will include activities aimed at protecting and managing representative Class I sites, prevention of inadvertent damage, and providing opportunities for interpretation, education and scientific research.

Field studies at Bear Springs Badlands, 111 Ranch and Hot Well Dunes will be conducted to inventory and monitor the fossil resources present and evaluate the condition of the resource and the effects of management actions on them.

A detailed overview of the biological and geological history of the District emphasizing the paleontological resources of the area will be prepared.

These decisions will also be further defined and separated by resource area in the forthcoming Gila and San Simon Resource Area Approved Resource Management and Implementation Plans.

## ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Four alternatives for managing the resources of the Safford District were considered in the development of the plan: Alternative A (Preferred Alternative), Alternative B (Protection Oriented), Alternative C (Production Oriented) and Alternative D (No Action). These alternatives were described and analyzed in the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements.

The Preferred Alternative (called the Proposed Plan in the Final Environmental Impact Statement) was designed to respond to the issues and management concerns in a manner that provides a balanced approach to multiple use management. It provides protection to sensitive resources that cannot tolerate disturbance from other activities. It also provides for the consumptive use and development of other resources.

Alternative B (Protection Oriented) emphasized management and protection of natural and cultural resources while still providing for use and development of the public lands. This alternative designated the greatest number and largest Areas of Critical Environmental Concern with more protective management prescriptions. The protection of cultural resources is emphasized before any area is used.

Alternative C (Production Oriented) provided more emphasis than Alternative A or B to use and development of public lands. Fewer areas were managed to protect natural and cultural resources and specific prescriptions are less

restrictive to use and development activities. Protection and enhancement of riparian areas and Threatened and Endangered wildlife species were emphasized as are scientific use and recreational/interpretive development of cultural resources. Most of the planning area is open to off-highway vehicles.

Alternative D (No Action or Current Management) emphasized a level of management similar to the current level. This alternative is required by the National Environmental Policy Act.

## ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED, BUT NOT ANALYZED

No other specific alternatives were considered for analysis in this Environmental Impact Statement. Variations of the four basic themes were considered, but none were carried forward. The four alternatives present a full and reasonable range of alternatives for management of the public lands and comply with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act and BLM regulations and policies.

## ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

Alternative B is the environmentally preferred alternative, providing the greatest protection from surface disturbing activities. Lands administered as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern are larger in this alternative with more protective management prescriptions. Priority wildlife species include Threatened and Endangered species and their habitat but no game species. Actions are proposed to protect water quality by using best management practices to reduce nonpoint pollution from rangeland management activities and uses. Additional management emphasis is given to protection and enhancement of riparian areas. The protection of cultural resource values (scientific, public and conservation) will be emphasized before the use of these values.

## MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

For the approved portions of the Resource Management Plan, BLM considers the Preferred Alternative to be the best option among the alternatives analyzed in the Environmental Impact Statement. The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) requires BLM to manage public lands under the principles of multiple use, maintaining environmental quality and important environmental values while at the same time providing resources and land use opportunities for the public land user.

Implicit in this mandate is the potential for conflicts or trade-offs between environmental and socio-economic values. Accommodating transmission lines, communications facilities, off-highway vehicle use, recreational developments

and use, and mining activities will cause some damage to environmental resources. The following factors were considered in selecting the approved portions of the plan:

Conformance with National Policy as established in laws, regulation, executive orders and Bureau directives.

Conformance with planning criteria established early in the process to guide solutions to the planning issues.

Public comments, suggestions and concerns about the alternatives and solutions to individual issues.

Consistency with the officially approved plans, programs and policies of other Federal agencies, State and local Governments and Indian tribes.

## ISSUE RESOLUTION

### PROTESTS:

Seven protests were received on the Plan during the 30 day protest period in September/October 1991. There was a great deal of overlap in the protest letters with the issues centering around the following areas:

Designation of the Gila Box Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

Study of the Gila (Gila Box Section) and San Francisco Rivers for Wild and Scenic Rivers suitability determination.

Designation of the Coronado Mountain Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

Further withdrawal of any lands in Greenlee County to mineral entry.

Landownership and boundary issues with the San Carlos Apache Tribe.

Several management prescriptions in specific Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (Swamp Springs-Hot Springs, Desert Grassland).

Several grazing issues on the South Rim Allotment (Aravaipa Canyon).

Access across specific private lands.

One protest concerning clarification of the language used to describe grazing lands that are within the boundary of the San Pedro Riparian NCA was resolved and the protest was withdrawn. Administrative decisions on

the protests involving Indian reservation boundaries and the acquisition of access across private land have been rendered by the Director of the Bureau of Land Management. Decisions concerning the remaining protested issues are not included in this partial ROD. Negotiations with affected parties is ongoing and issue resolution is expected within a short time.

The landownership and boundary questions raised by the San Carlos Apache Tribe involved boundary issues not included in the scope of the RMP. (See draft comment letters 123, 14, 152, 47.) While the Director's decision affirmed the State Director's procedures, the Bureau of Land Management acknowledges the concern on the part of the San Carlos Apache Tribe over the landownership in the Bonita Creek and mineral strip areas. The Safford District and all of BLM will continue to work cooperatively with other agencies to assure that the present condition of the lands in question are maintained or enhanced until the legal questions regarding boundaries are resolved.

Wayne Klump protested the access issue stating that the Government did not have the right to acquire access across private lands. The Director issued an administrative decision in which the procedures described by BLM were affirmed.

#### ECONOMIC CONCERNS:

Some concerns were expressed during development of this Resource Management Plan relating to the potentially adverse economic impacts of a Federal acquisition program. The primary issue is that acquisition of privately-held land by the U.S. Government erodes the local real estate tax base, resulting in serious impacts to local tax-funded entities such as county Government and local school districts. The Safford District has prepared a study of this issue in Cochise County for inclusion as reference material for the Resource Management Plan. The Study is titled Economic Impact of Proposed Safford District Land Acquisitions with Emphasis on Specific Impacts in Cochise County, Arizona (March, 1992) and is available in the Safford District. (Central Files; Safford District RMP file 1610.)

#### PUBLIC COMMENT

On September 22, 1987 The Bureau of Land management published a Notice of Intent to prepare a Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in the Federal Register. The draft RMP/EIS was available for public comment from January 5, 1990, to June 12, 1990. The final Safford District Resource Management Plan reflects several changes from the draft

version. During the preparation of the proposed plan, the Arizona Desert Wilderness Act was passed by Congress and on November 28, 1990, was signed into law by President George Bush. The proposed plan has been modified to reflect the changes created by the passage of the Wilderness Act. In addition, the Gila Box Riparian National Conservation Area was also designated by Congress. Other changes include:

Clarification of ACEC management prescriptions based on public comment letters to the draft version.

Wild and Scenic River "eligibility" and "classification" determinations have been made for five additional rivers. "Suitability" determinations have been deferred to provide for additional public review and input.

Identification of specific tracts of land deemed suitable for acquisition. (See Map 27 for locations.)

The Arizona Wilderness Act created six additional wilderness areas that are carried forward into this RMP. Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness area was also expanded. ACEC management prescriptions that fell within the boundaries of the newly designated Wilderness areas will be carried forward into the wilderness management plan where appropriate.

The public was provided opportunities to comment on the Draft and Proposed Plan and associated Environmental Impact Statement in a number of ways. Over 170 people commented in writing on the Draft. In addition, numerous people attended open houses or other meetings to express opinions or ask questions. Local newspapers also published articles about the plan.

## MITIGATION

No specific mitigation measures have been identified in this Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement that would reduce the anticipated impacts of implementing the Preferred Alternative. Mitigation will be incorporated when BLM begins implementing the specific actions of the Plan. At that time, an environmental compliance document will be prepared to analyze the expected impacts of each project and identify needed mitigation measures to deal with those impacts.

## IMPLEMENTATION

An Approved Resource Management Plan and Implementation Plan will be prepared following the issuance of this Record of Decision to establish schedules and budget proposals for administering the plan. The implementation schedule

describes actions to be accomplished in the next 5-year period. The schedule will be reviewed and updated annually to maintain an updated 5-year perspective. Continued public participation will be encouraged during implementation. Additional opportunities for public participation will be provided through National Environmental Policy Act compliance procedures.

The effects of implementing the approved portions of the RMP will be monitored and evaluated on a periodic basis to ensure that the goals and objectives of the Plan are being realized, and to determine how effectively management decisions and guidelines are being applied.

Monitoring will continue throughout the life of the Plan. The initial monitoring review will be conducted 5 years after the adoption of the Approved Plan. Following the first monitoring cycle, evaluations will be completed yearly.