

Vulture Mountains Recreation & Public Purposes Act Lease Area Project

Finding of No Significant Impact

DOI-BLM-AZ-P010-2017-0016-EA

January 2019



Background

On April 26, 2012, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Hassayampa Field Office received a Recreation & Public Purposes (R&PP) Act Lease application from Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department (MCPRD) for a recreation facility on approximately 1,046 acres of BLM-administered lands located in Maricopa County, Arizona. The R&PP Act as amended (43 U.S.C. 869 et seq.) allows for State and local governments and nonprofits to apply for the leasing of public lands for the construction and maintenance of facilities such as, but not limited to, schools, fire stations, and parks.

On December 5, 2017, the Maricopa County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) submitted a road right-of-way (ROW) grant application to the BLM, in accordance with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA). The road ROW grant application is for the realignment and widening of Vulture Mine Road in association with the proposed VMR Project. Two road segments of Vulture Mine Road, totaling approximately 0.9 miles, would be realigned and widened as part of the proposed recreation development and would include the construction of all-weather wash crossings and access points.

Determination

On the basis of the information contained in the *Vulture Mountains Recreation & Public Purposes Act Lease Project Final Environmental Assessment* (EA) (DOI-BLM-AZ-P010-2017-0016-EA), I have preliminarily determined that the Proposed Action does not constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore an environmental impact statement (EIS) would not be required.

This finding is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), both with regard to the *context* and *intensity* of the impacts described in the final EA, which is hereby incorporated by reference.

Context

The Project Area is located in the Vulture Mountains approximately seven miles southwest of Wickenburg in a gently sloping upper bajada zone. Elevations range from 2,080 to 2,500 feet above mean sea level. The Vulture Mountains are surrounded by the Hassayampa Plain to the south, the Aguila Valley to the north and northwest, and the Hassayampa River to the east. The Hassayampa River is the primary drainage in the area, and it is located approximately 9 miles east of the Project Area.

The north lease area to the west of the Vulture Mine Road is largely undeveloped with a minimal amount of travel routes. To the east of the Vulture Mine Road, there is an existing use area where dry camping, vault-style restrooms, and unpaved parking areas which provide access for motorized and non-motorized recreation, including hiking on the Vulture Peak Trail. In the south lease area there is dry camping, unpaved parking areas (which includes an unauthorized airstrip), and multiple travel routes which provide access for motorized and non-motorized recreation. As the south lease area is adjacent to the existing Vulture Mine, there are a number of active unpatented mining claims. Both lease areas are under a Special Recreation Permit for the Vulture Mine Off-Road Challenge, a BLM-permitted race event.

Intensity

1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

In the short-term, there would be negligible increases in emissions and particulates associated with the construction of recreation facilities and road modifications. Permit requirements would reduce potential short-term air quality impacts. During construction activities, any wildlife present would likely be displaced into adjacent available habitat. In the long-term, there would be the permanent loss of approximately 100 acres of wildlife habitat (approximately 10 percent of the Project Area). The new nature center would include an environmental outreach/education program.

A number of existing/designated travel routes would be affected by the Project, and cause both short- and long-term impacts. In the north lease area, to the west of the Vulture Mine Road, a route would be constructed in order to allow for continued west-east/east-west bound travel access (Figure 3-1). Several routes to the east of the Vulture Mine Road would become a part of the recreation developments. Access to parking for the Vulture Peak Trail would now occur through a controlled entrance point (Figure 3-1). In the south lease area, one existing travel route would be closed in order to protect sensitive resources (Figure 3-2). Other routes adjacent to the unauthorized airstrip would remain open, however use would likely move onto the newly improved road system. Recreational uses would change in the long-term, as the Project Area currently has only dry camping and no fees are charged. The new recreational facilities with hook-ups for recreational vehicles, County-based fees, and fencing would likely in the long-term, cause displacement of recreational users that do not want those types of amenities, fees, or access controls etc.

2) The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

During construction activities, measures would be taken such as traffic controls, in order to minimize potential safety hazards. As appropriate, additional warning signage along the Vulture Mine Road may be installed where off-highway vehicle crossings occur between BLM-administered lands to the west and east.

3) Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

There are no park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers or other ecologically critical areas in the Project Area. As described below, the BLM completed a cultural resources survey of the 1,046 acre Project Area and road modifications for the Vulture Mine Road.

4) The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

The Project is not highly controversial, the direct, indirect and cumulative effects are well understood.

5) The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

The Project involves the construction and maintenance of recreation facilities and modifications to the Vulture Mine Road. The impacts associated with these actions is well understood.

6) *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.*

The BLM would approve an R&PP lease and right-of-way. Any future activity not considered in the EA would be subject to new environmental analysis.

7) *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.*

The EA analyzes the direct, indirect and cumulative effects from the issuance of an R&PP lease of two parcels and right-of-way for the Vulture Mine Road. No significant impacts have been preliminarily identified by the BLM.

8) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the NRHP or may cause loss of destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.*

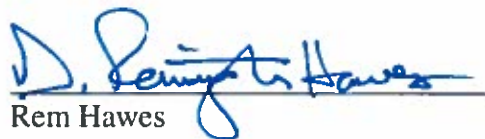
The BLM completed a cultural resources inventory of the 1,046-acre "Area of Potential Effect" under the National Historic Preservation Act. Seven cultural resource sites were identified, with two determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). On August 15, 2018 the BLM received concurrence from the State Historic Preservation Office that the Project would have "no adverse effect" to these two sites.

9) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the ESA or 1973.*

There is no proposed or designated critical habitat, or threatened or endangered species within the Project Area.

10) *Whether the action threatens a violation of federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.*

The Project would not threaten to violate federal, State or local law or requirements for the protection of the environment.



Rem Hawes
Field Manager
Hassayampa Field Office

1/31/2019
Date