



APPENDIX D
WILD AND SCENIC RIVER ELIGIBILITY
ASSESSMENT

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D. WILD AND SCENIC RIVER ELIGIBILITY ASSESSMENT

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APPENDIX D

WILD AND SCENIC RIVER ELIGIBILITY

ASSESSMENT

D.1 WILD AND SCENIC RIVER ELIGIBILITY ASSESSMENT

D.1.1 REASON FOR CONSIDERATION

Public comments submitted on Scoping Process for the Lower Sonoran Field Office and the Sonoran Desert National Monument Resource Management Plan.

D.1.2 SEGMENT DESCRIPTION

Table D-1
Observations on Gila River Segments Assessed for WSR Eligibility

Segment Description	Within BLM Jurisdiction		Comments
	Segment Length (miles)	Segment Acreage	
Segment A: 19.3 miles from Hayden Dam to the Gila River Indian Community Reservation (east boundary)	0.31	50	Urban area, trash, salt cedar, effluent from sewage plants, roads, bridges, transient camps, occupation, stone and gravel extraction.
Segment B: 67.7 miles within the Gila River Indian Community Reservation	0	0	Gila River Community Reservation and Interstate 10.
Segment C: 37.6 miles from the Gila River Indian Community Reservation (north boundary) to Gillespie Dam.	13	2,080	Phoenix, Goodyear, and Buckeye metro area with farming, residential development, trash, salt cedar trees, effluent from sewage plants, transient camps, OHV use areas, farm runoff and DDT contamination, non-native fishes, roads, bridges, golf courses, and race tracks. Dirt roads cross bed of river when dry. Fred J. Weiler Green Belt and AGFD and USFWS wildlife conservation areas.
Segment D: 40.8 miles from Gillespie Dam to Painted Rock Dam	23.6	3,776	Contaminated fish, DDT contamination, salt cedar infestations, trash, dump debris, roads, and farming run-off. Dirt roads cross bed of river when dry. Fred J. Weiler Green Belt. AGFD has relinquished wildlife management area in flood reservoir of Painted Rocks Dam. Fred J. Weiler impoundment area.

**Table D-1
Observations on Gila River Segments Assessed for WSR Eligibility**

Segment Description	Within BLM Jurisdiction		Comments
	Segment Length (miles)	Segment Acreage	
Segment E: 127.1 miles from Painted Rock Dam to the Colorado River	54.4	8,704	Contaminated fish, DDT, salt cedar infestations, trash, and farming run-off. Dirt and paved roads cross bed of river when dry
TOTAL	91.31	14,610	River length from Hayden Dam to the Colorado River: 292.5 miles.

D.1.3 FREE-FLOWING REQUIREMENT ANALYSIS

For a river or river-segment to be eligible for inclusion in the NWSRS, it must be free-flowing. The Wild and Scenic River Act (WSRA) defines a “free-flowing” river as having:

- Existence in a natural condition,
- Flow in a natural condition,
- Few impoundments,
- Few diversions,
- No straightening,
- No rip-rapping.

In-stream impoundments or structures will not automatically preclude a river segment from being considered for inclusion in the NWSRS. The intent of Congress and Federal regulations is that rivers must be generally free flowing, but not completely without human modification.

D.1.4 SECTION C: OUTSTANDINGLY REMARKABLE VALUES (ORV) ANALYSIS

A river must have one or more Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs) to be eligible for inclusion in the NWSRS. Each value must be directly river-related (defined as occurring within a quarter-mile of the river’s high-water mark), exhibit rare or exemplary values within the geographic region, and be determined to be regionally or nationally significant. BLM IM 2004-196 indicates that judgment should be used to determine whether the ORV meets the criteria: Each ORV “should be located in the river or on its immediate shore lands, contribute substantially to the functioning of the river ecosystem, and/or owe [its] location or existence to the presence of the river”.

Table D-2
Flow of Gila River Segments Considered for WSR Eligibility

Segment	Flow regime	Free-flowing Status	Comments
Segment A: Hayden Dam to Gila River Indian Community Reservation (east boundary)	Ephemeral or underground.	No. Existence and Flow not in a Natural Condition. Impoundments. Water flow diverted by Hayden Dam diversion and Coolidge Dam.	Impoundments and upstream dams essentially de-water river below Hayden Dam and Salt River confluence. Salt cedar infestations.
Segment B: Gila River Indian Community Reservation	Ephemeral or underground.	No. Existence and Flow not in a Natural Condition. Impoundments. Water diverted by Hayden Dam diversion and Coolidge Dam.	Impoundments and upstream dams essentially de-water river below Hayden Dam and Salt River confluence. Salt cedar infestations.
Segment C: Gila River Indian Community Reservation (north boundary) to Gillespie Dam	Ephemeral – effluent from 91st sewage treatment plan creates permanent flow in areas. Seasonal or permanent ponding and marsh in some areas. Underground flow in some areas.	No. Water flow Existence and Flow is not considered a natural regime. Water flows are a product of farm water run-off, treated sewage effluent from the 91st Avenue Sewage Treatment Plant, and occasional surfacing of subterranean flows. Significant effect from upstream impoundments and diversions of the Salt, Verde and Gila Rivers. Straightening and bank Rip-Rapping near urban communities.	Salt River contributes little water due to dams, impoundments and diversions. Hassayampa River and Salt River flows are ephemeral and contribute to some subterranean flow. Some marsh and wetland areas intermixed with salt cedar infestations and cottonwood trees.
Segment D: Gillespie Dam to Painted Rock Dam	Ephemeral – little surface flow. There is underground and surface flow in some areas due to farm water recharge and sewage effluent.	No. Water flow considered only marginal and not natural per its existence and flow regime. Flows are a product of farm run off, and treated sewage effluent from the 91 st Avenue Sewage Treatment Plant. The lower ten-miles east of Painted Rock Dam are an impoundment area full of dead and living salt cedar trees and subject to fires.	Upper half of segment is surrounded by farms, and crossed by roads and utilities. Lower part of segment is a toxic (DDT and other materials) and dead salt cedar forest clogged with dead trees, deposited with refuse and contamination from the 1993 and 2005 Painted Rock Dam flood impoundments, and fire scars. Gillespie Dam breached in 1993 and no longer impounds water or silt.

Table D-2
Flow of Gila River Segments Considered for WSR Eligibility

Segment	Flow regime	Free-flowing Status	Comments
Segment E: Painted Rock Dam to Colorado River	Ephemeral, surface flow occasionally in some areas, underground flows, seasonal ponding in some areas below Painted Rock Dam. Marshy areas near ponding areas.	No. Painted Rocks Dam is a major impediment to all natural flow events and impounds all surface water flowing down the Verde, Gila and Salt systems. Surface water below Painted Rock Dam flows and surfaces to some extent due to lack of additional impoundments. However, the current Existence and Flow regimes are not considered natural. Occasional surfacing water flows do not resemble or mimic an unencumbered river's natural ebb and flow existence nor the desert river's natural water flow. River flows are mainly a product of farm run-off, release of flood waters from Painted Rock Dam, and occasional surfacing of some re-charged subterranean flows. This segment does offer more connected riparian habitat and cover than the other four segments.	Most natural appearing segment along lower Gila River due to remoteness and less human infrastructure. There are some marsh areas, cottonwood trees, along with salt cedar infestations.

Potential ORVs are:

- Scenic: diversity of view, special features, seasonal variations, cultural modifications;
- Fish: habitat quality, diversity of species, value of species, abundance of fish, natural reproduction, size and vigor of fish, cultural and historic importance, recreational importance, and access;
- Recreation, water-oriented and general: length of season, flow, diversity of use, experience quality, scenery and naturalness, access, level of use, associated opportunities, attraction, sites and facilities;
- Wildlife: habitat quality, diversity of species, abundance of species, natural reproduction, size and vigor of species, cultural and historic importance recreational importance, and access;
- Geologic: feature abundance, diversity of features, educational and scientific;
- Historic: significance, education and interpretation, listing and eligibility, site integrity;
- Cultural: significance, current uses, number of cultures, site integrity, education and interpretation, listing and eligibility;
- Ecological: species diversity, ecological function, rare communities, educational and scientific.

The size of a river is not a criterion of eligibility. To be eligible, rivers do not have to have outstanding white-water or even boatable segments. Flow must be sufficient to sustain the ORV that makes a river or river segment eligible for consideration. The ORVs present on the segments of the Gila River assessed for WSR eligibility are shown in **Table D-3**, Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs) Present on the Segments of the Gila River below.

Pesticide contamination affects most of the lower Gila River, especially between its confluences with the Salt and the Colorado rivers. DDT was used to control cotton pests in Avondale and Buckeye. Reports in the late 1970s considered the Salt River confluence to the Painted Rock stretch of the Gila River the most DDT-laden stream sampled in the West. Anglers are warned not to eat fish caught in the Gila River, near Painted Rock Dam, or from the dam's various impoundments and borrow areas. Due to the 1993 and 2005 floods, contaminants have flushed downstream to the Colorado River. These two floods impounded high levels of water behind the dam, which eventually were released, taking DDT compounds and pollution with them. No clean-up plans are in the works due to high costs and a low threat to human activities.

The Gila River flows continually and consistently near Goodyear, Arizona. The water comes from the 91st Avenue Sewage Treatment Plant. This permanent water source has allowed riparian areas to self-restore and re-establish habitat for birds, aquatic species, and water-dependent plants like cottonwood, salt cedar and willows, along with cottontails and sedges. However, these riverbed riparian areas are not natural and will not return to a natural functioning condition. Larger animal species will never be able to re-populate the riparian areas as these animals are permanently displaced or cut off by urban and agricultural development. Native fish survival also is problematic due to intense competition with non-native fishes that eat the natives or usurp their nesting and feeding habitat.

Table D-3
Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs) Present on the Segments of the Gila River

Segment	Scenic	Recreational	Geological	Fish and Wildlife	Historical	Cultural	Other Similar Values
Segment A: Hayden Dam to Gila River Indian Community Reservation	Not Present.	Not Present.	Not Present. – Flat desert plain below Hayden Dam	None identified except pygmy owl (currently in the process of potential delisting by the USFWS).	Not Present.	Not Present.	None identified.
Segment B: Gila River Indian Community Reservation	Not Present.	Not Present.	Not Present. – Flat desert plain below Hayden Dam	Not Present, except where Tribe has artificially restored riparian habitat.	Long history of uses and importance to the Gila River Indian Community.	Cultural and spiritual importance to Gila River Indian Community	None identified.
Segment C: Gila River Indian Community Reservation to Gillespie Dam	Views of the Gila River. Some areas are scenic and form a “greenbelt” through parts of this segment.	Bird hunting, bird watching.	None identified.	Base and Meridian Wildlife Area Robbins Butte Wildlife Area Fred J. Weiler Green Belt. Federally endangered Yuma clapper rail, and the Western yellow-billed cuckoo, a Federally listed candidate species. Potential habitat for the Southwestern willow flycatcher.	Long history of use and importance to the Gila River Indian Community.	Long association of use and cultural importance to the Gila River Indian Community	None identified.
Segment D: Gillespie Dam to Painted Rock Dam	In areas where the river flows by the Gila Bend Mountains and Painted Rock Dam area due to mountain views to east and north. These views are outside of river corridor. Class C Scenery per VRM.	Not Present. Little public land and limited public access. Dense salt cedar thickets in Painted Rocks impoundment impede public access.	None identified.	Fred J. Weiler Green Belt. AGFD has relinquished control of the Painted Rock Dam wildlife Federally endangered Yuma clapper rail, and the western yellow-billed cuckoo, a Federally listed candidate species in area. Appropriate habitat exists for the endangered Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, although	Anza National Historic Trail Butterfield Stage Trail Gila Overland Trail Mormon Battalion	None identified, but probably cultural affiliation and importance to Gila River Indian Community and Tohono O’odham	None identified.

Table D-3
Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs) Present on the Segments of the Gila River

Segment	Scenic	Recreational	Geological	Fish and Wildlife	Historical	Cultural	Other Similar Values
	River corridor itself is disturbed and impacted by farms, roads, pipelines, impoundments (Painted Rock) and bridges.			nesting not documented.		Nation.	
Segment E: Painted Rock Dam to Colorado River	Middle areas - Wellton to Aqua Caliente - is not noted for scenic views, but some areas where the river cuts through the Sentinel Plain lava flows and Muggins Mountains have scenic character due to rugged volcanic geology. These views. The best views are greater than ¼ mile away. Roads and farms along river banks in many areas.	Bird watching and bird hunting good at Painted Rocks Lake below dam and, to a lesser extent along the Gila River to the Colorado River.	River cuts deeply through Sentinel Plain Lava Flow, one of the youngest and thickest shield volcano lava flows in Arizona.	Fred J. Weiler Green Belt. River corridor has good habitat and cover for large mammals, aquatic life, birds and raptors, and stretches of riparian habitat. Federally endangered Yuma clapper rail and the western yellow-billed cuckoo, a Federally listed candidate species in area. Appropriate habitat exists for the endangered Southwestern Willow Flycatcher.	Anza NHT. Butterfield Stage Overland Trail, Gila Overland Trail Sears Point Cultural ACEC Concentration of pre-historic cultural sites on both sides of river, especially petroglyphs and pathways Historic site of Oatman family "massacre"	Long association of uses and importance to lower Colorado River Indian Tribes and communities, and the Tohono O'odham Nation. Concentration of pre-historic cultural sites on both sides of river, especially petroglyphs and pathways.	None identified.

D.1.5 CURRENT MANAGEMENT AREAS – LOWER GILA RIVER CORRIDOR

The lower Gila River's best riparian and wildlife habitats and most noted cultural resources are managed through a series of special management areas. These areas encompass and effectively manage the best remaining fragments of natural and cultural resource values associated with this beleaguered and over-used river. Segments A and B have no notable special management areas associated with conservation of riparian and river-related values, but Segments C, D and E have several special management areas. These areas include the Baseline Meridian, Robbins Butte, Powers Butte, Arlington and Quigley Wildlife Management Areas, the Fred J. Weiler Green Belt, the Sears Point ACEC and the Gila Trail Special Recreation Management Area. These areas are described in greater detail in Attachment I – Resource Values of the Lower Gila River.

Urban communities along Segment C of the Gila River have proposed plans for “river greenbelts” and recreation sites along the river. These include the Tres Rios Master Plan and the El Rio Master Plan (along a portion of the Gila River). These areas would be intensely managed recreation sites with trails, ponds, lakes, sports areas and other urban recreation uses. All the plans are under consideration at this time.

D.2 ATTACHMENT I: RESOURCE VALUES OF THE LOWER GILA RIVER

D.2.1 FRED J. WEILER GREEN BELT SPECIAL MANAGEMENT AREA

Segments C, D and part of E of the lower Gila River contain BLM-administered public lands encompassed within the Fred J. Weiler Green Belt Management Area. Virtually all riparian habitat along the lower Gila River channel is salt-cedar and mesquite thickets and salt-bush flats. Cottonwoods and willows are limited. The Fred J. Weiler Green Belt, managed by the BLM and the Arizona Game & Fish Department (AGFD), consists of approximately 63,000 acres in the southwest region of Maricopa County. The green belt extends along the Gila River from the Sierra Estrella Regional Park to a point 12 miles west of Dateland, Arizona. The US Department of the Interior determined in 1968 that the green belt would be retained under the Classification for Multiple Use Act of 1964, then designated the area the Fred J. Weiler Green Belt Special Recreation Area in 1970. Both classifications were established to enable management of wildlife habitat, flood and erosion control, and recreation opportunities. The green belt contains habitat for the Federally endangered Yuma clapper rail and the Western yellow-billed cuckoo, a Federally listed candidate species.

D.2.2 SEGMENT A - HAYDEN DAM TO THE GILA RIVER INDIAN COMMUNITY RESERVATION (EAST BOUNDARY)

No resource values identified.

D.2.3 SEGMENT B – GILA RIVER INDIAN COMMUNITY RESERVATION

No resource values identified.

D.2.4 SEGMENT C - GILA RIVER INDIAN COMMUNITY RESERVATION (NORTH BOUNDARY) TO GILLESPIE DAM.

Base and Meridian Wildlife Area (B&M)): The AGFD manage 200 acres of river and adjacent riparian habitat at the confluence of the Salt River and Gila River just west of the Phoenix metropolitan area. B&M contains riparian vegetation assemblages of cottonwood, willow, salt cedar, seep willow and desert broom and mesquite.

The goal for management of the B&M area is to optimize the habitat for wildlife and wildlife-oriented recreation. The area is fully devoted to waterfowl and riparian management.

Wetland and riparian habitats within B&M area provide critical nesting, cover and food resources for many avian species, including sensitive species. The riparian habitat common to the Gila River is recognized as the highest quality nesting habitat for white-winged dove in Arizona. The property is equally valuable for mourning dove nesting. Other species of significant value are Gambel's quail, coots and other shorebirds. A host of bird, mammal, and reptile species use the area because of its proximity to the river. Wildlife may include: Common yellowthroat, great blue heron, belted kingfisher, and Western screech-owl.

Special Status Species occurring on the B&M includes the Federally endangered Yuma clapper rail and the Western yellow-billed cuckoo, a Federally listed candidate species. Potential habitat for the following special status species may also occur near the area: Lowland leopard frog, Ferruginous hawk, Great egret, Loggerhead shrike, Osprey, American peregrine falcon, Southwestern willow flycatcher, California leaf-nosed bat, Greater Western mastiff bat, and Sonoran desert tortoise.

Robbins Butte Wildlife Area: The Robbins Butte Wildlife Area (RBWA) is located approximately seven miles southwest of Buckeye, Arizona, comprising approximately 1,681 acres. RBWA is one of two areas along the Gila River with the greatest potential for waterfowl habitat enhancement. Vegetative cover is a diverse mixture including dense salt cedar thickets, willows and cattail in the river bottom; mature mesquite on the river terrace; saltbush and shrub-sized mesquite upland areas.

The primary management emphasis at RBWA is to provide food crops and nesting habitat for upland game birds. Secondary management emphasis includes enhancing riparian habitat and the riparian-desert upland ecotone. A combination of wildlife food crops, natural foods and nesting habitat attracts many breeding white-winged and mourning doves. Amphibians and reptiles also are common; a minimum of 19 reptile species reside at RBWA.

RBWA is the center of the annual Gila River Christmas Bird Count, and over 115 species of winter-resident birds have been observed in the vicinity. In addition, many raptors winter in and near RBWA, including the White-tailed Kite. The summer avian community has not been counted, but species numbers probably exceed those of winter.

Special Status Species occurring on or near the Robbins Butte Wildlife Area includes the Federally endangered Yuma clapper rail, and the Western yellow-billed cuckoo, a Federally listed candidate species. Those special status species that potentially occur on the RBWA include Great egret, Snowy egret, and Western yellow bat.

Powers Butte Wildlife Area: The Powers Butte Wildlife Area (PBWA) encompasses 1,120 acres. The area is managed for the enhancement of its riparian and aquatic habitats.

Mourning doves, white-winged doves, Gambel's quail, and cottontail rabbits inhabit the area. Particularly abundant during migration and in the winter, various birds, including a wide assortment of hawks and other birds of prey, find food and shelter within the bounds of this wildlife area as well.

The 91st Avenue Wastewater Treatment Plant, local agriculture, intermittent tributary flows, and groundwater all feed the Gila River through the wildlife area, creating dense stands of salt cedar, and marsh and wetland habitats. Powers Butte, a steep knoll formed by volcanic boulder, provides an overlook to the surrounding valley and river.

Riparian habitats are the most noticeable plant life on the area. The most common plants are salt cedar and mesquite. Salt cedar was introduced to Arizona many years ago and does not naturally occur here. Most of the original cottonwood and willow trees have been replaced with salt cedar.

The upper flood plain, which once was a mesquite forest, also contains a lot of salt cedar. This area is highly valued for its protection of sensitive species and habitats in Arizona. With appropriate enhancement, the amount and quality of riparian and wetland habitats can be increased, and diversified to support more species that depend on such areas. The salt cedar, which has replaced most of the native riparian trees in the area, provides good nesting places for doves.

Arlington Wildlife Area: The Arlington Wildlife Area (AWA) is located along the west bank of the Gila River and is approximately 1,500 acres. The AWA is managed to optimize the habitat potential of the property for wildlife and for present and future generations of the public to enjoy wildlife-oriented recreation

The wildlife area has an extensive stand of salt cedar and about 4 miles of river channel, including running water, cattails and other emergent vegetation, sand and gravel bars, and riparian trees such as cottonwood, willow and salt cedar. The AWA is particularly favorable as a location for limited-mobility hunters to gain access for duck hunting. This area also has a very high value for its dove-nesting habitat. The Federally endangered Yuma clapper rail also is a regular nesting species in the ponds and along the river.

The water ponds attract numerous waterfowl and shorebirds. The Yuma clapper rails nest on site. The salt-cedar *bosque* provides nesting habitat for red-winged blackbirds, doves, and other riparian bird species. The salt-cedar *bosque* also provides cover for various mammals, amphibians and reptiles. Special-status species occurring on or near the AWA include the Federally endangered Yuma clapper rail and the western yellow-billed cuckoo, a Federally listed candidate species.

Urban communities on Segment C, including Buckeye and Goodyear, have proposed master plans for "river greenbelts" and recreation sites along the river. Plans include the Tres Rios Master Plan and the El Rio Master Plan along a portion of the Gila River. These areas would be intensely managed recreation sites with trails, ponds, lakes, sports areas, and other urban recreation uses. All the plans are under consideration at this time.

D.2.5 SEGMENT D - GILLESPIE DAM TO PAINTED ROCK DAM

Public land ownership within the river bed is quite limited within Segment D. Public lands within the river bed channel are part of the Fred. J. Weiler Green Belt and managed for riparian and wildlife values. The area above Painted Rocks Dam has limited value for wildlife.

Anza National Historic Trail (NHT): The NHT enters this segment north of Gila Bend and extends down the river corridor to the Colorado River and Yuma, Arizona. The BLM is mandated to maintain and protect the historic and cultural resources within the NHT corridor as defined by Federal law.

Gila Trail Special Recreation Management Area: This management area enters Segment D north of Gila Bend and extends down the river corridor to the Maricopa County/Yuma County line. The area includes lands surrounding the Gila Trail, the Butterfield Overland Stage Route, the Anza National Historic Trail, the Southern Overland Trail, the Mormon Battalion Trail, the Oatman Massacre Site, and the Painted Rock Mountains and associated cultural and recreational features.

D.2.6 SEGMENT E - PAINTED ROCK DAM TO THE COLORADO RIVER

This river segment has the most BLM-administered public land. Many of the public lands are encompassed by the Fred J. Weiler Green Belt. The segment's most noted cultural and riparian values are enclosed within the following areas:

Quigley Wildlife Management Area (QWMA): The QWMA contains approximately 622 acres consisting of two major open-water areas, idle farmland, large stands of salt cedar and open-water areas characterized by emergent vegetation such as cattail. The area is managed to restore, enhance, and manage wetland habitat, including open water and marsh, riparian and associated upland wildlife habitats; and to provide public opportunities for wildlife viewing, education, research, hunting and fishing.

Wetland and riparian habitats within the QWMA provide critical nesting, cover and food resources for many avian species. The low water depths and emergent vegetation such as cattail and bulrush make excellent nesting substrate for a large number of waterfowl species. Other wildlife species supported by the wetlands at QWMA include shorebirds, game and nongame fish, game and nongame birds, and amphibians. The marsh habitat at QWMA has in the past supported four to six pairs of the endangered Yuma clapper rail, and appropriate habitat exists for the endangered southwestern willow flycatcher, although nesting has not been documented.

The upland habitats currently provides significant nesting habitat for white-winged and mourning doves.

Special-status species occurring on or near the QWMA include the American bittern, great egret, loggerhead shrike, osprey, snowy egret, southwestern willow flycatcher, western least bittern, and white-faced ibis.

Sear's Point Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC): The BLM manages all cultural resources in the river channel under the Antiquities Act of 1906. The Painted Rocks area and Sears Point Cultural ACEC protect significant rock art and cultural areas of importance to local and regional Indian nations and tribes.

Gila Trail Special Recreation Management Area: This management area includes lands surrounding the Gila Trail, the Butterfield Overland Stage Route, the Anza National Historic Trail, the Southern Overland Trail, the Mormon Battalion Trail, the Oatman Massacre Site, and the Painted Rock Mountains and associated cultural and recreational features.

Anza National Historic Trail (NHT): The NHT enters this segment north of Gila Bend and extends down the river corridor to the Colorado River and Yuma, Arizona. The BLM is mandated to maintain and protect the historic and cultural resources within the NHT corridor as defined by Federal law.