

SPRNCA – Public Strategic Planning Meeting
Windemere Hotel, Sierra Vista, AZ
May 15, 2013 * 6:00-8:30pm

MEETING SUMMARY

Meeting Goals

- *Discuss public engagement plans for the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area (SPRNCA) Resource Management Plan (RMP) process*
- *Identify goals for SPRNCA RMP public engagement*
- *Discuss and identify specific recommendations for effective communication and engagement methods*

Meeting Format: A brief presentation on the RMP process was shared, followed by Q/A and group discussion.

Resource Management Plan – Overview (highlights from presentation)

The Tucson Field Office is beginning work on a Resource Management Plan (RMP)/ Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) focused on the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area (SPRNCA). The RMP will establish goals and objectives for resource management in the SPRNCA (i.e., desired outcomes) and measures needed to achieve the goals and objectives. It will also identify lands that are open or available for certain uses (i.e. livestock grazing), including any restrictions, and lands that are closed to certain uses. The RMP will guide BLM staff as they manage the natural, cultural, and historical resources at SPRNCA. All activities in an area must be consistent with the guiding RMP.

The EIS will analyze and disclose the impacts of achieving the goals, objectives, allowable uses, and management actions outlined in each alternative on the human environment and natural and cultural resources. Each fully-developed alternative represents a different land use plan that addresses and/or resolves the identified planning issues in different ways. The process of assessing environmental impacts for the EIS will help the BLM manager make an informed decision.

A Notice of Intent for the RMP/EIS was published in the *Federal Register* on April 30, 2013, announcing the beginning of the scoping process that will solicit public comments and identify issues. The public is invited to participate throughout the planning process to share their ideas and concerns. The planning effort encompasses all public lands within the SPRNCA and possibly additional lands within the watershed identified through scoping.

The planning process follows requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and includes the following major steps: scoping, draft RMP/EIS, proposed

RMP/Final EIS, and a Record of Decision for the Approved RMP/EIS. Each step includes opportunities for public involvement.

Group Feedback & Discussion

There was considerable discussion about the **public engagement process and timeline**. Overall the timeline was felt to be too crammed. Participants voiced interest in holding **educational forums** on relevant topics to inform public comment in the scoping period. Participants were broadly supportive of the suggestion that there be three educational meetings in Sierra Vista all on different topics, and that these meetings be spread out further, as many people leave for the summer.

Participants suggested that in order to support science-based decision-making, these forums should include presentations by topic-based experts (e.g. universities, agencies, research institutes), opportunities to drill down deeply into issues, talk to people with different views, and support group dialogue. The presentations should include the key restrictions or “givens” of this planning process, assumptions, and scientific baseline. Many felt that field visits to the management area would be beneficial, but that summer is a bad time of year to get outside; therefore, the suggestion was that meetings should be inside for the summer months with opportunities for on-the-ground engagement later.

Many comments also focused on the need for a good **website** with clear communication and up-to-date information about the RMP process. Specific suggestions for this website included:

- Post background documents:
 - Similar RMPs (e.g. Las Cienegas National Conservation Area RMP)
 - Enabling legislation for SPRNCA
 - Record of Decision for San Pedro River Riparian Management Plan
 - Briefing packet from BLM that was distributed at this meeting
- Look at the Sierra Vista’s Dream Your City website as an example
- Inventory of resources and socio-economics

Additional suggestions and concerns:

Decision-Making:

- There were several questions about how input gathered during scoping is recorded and integrated into decision-making. BLM staff clarified that all scoping comments are recorded and considered in the BLM’s decision-making process. Comments are sorted into different types: those that can be resolved in the plan, those that will be resolved through policy or administrative action, and those that are beyond the scope of the plan. Issues that fall within the scope of the

plan will be addressed in the alternatives that are developed as part of the RMP/EIS process. The BLM staff also shared their intention that the planning process be transparent. More clarity is desired on the specific decision-making process.

- It is difficult for people to understand how website comments are incorporated into the official record - participants need clarity about when comments “count” or not.

Outreach:

- Concern about lack of young people at the meeting. It was suggested that further outreach be done to engage young people in this process. In addition to the website presence, participants suggested the process include a presence on Facebook and other social media.
- Must engage public and other land users outside of the SPRNCA – things outside SPRNCA boundaries have an influence.
- Non-Governmental Organizations need to be able to coordinate and participate in this planning process. BLM staff clarified that while cooperating agency status is limited to governmental and tribal organizations, NGOs and the general public are encouraged to participate
- A participant applauded the BLM’s effort to get people to the meeting, but suggested the need to expand the outreach further.
- The Sierra Vista library was suggested as a local repository for the information related to the RMP development.

Other/General Comments:

- There was interest in articulating the importance of the resource to the community in clear language.
- BLM staff shared their experience that the BLM has not historically engaged in socio-economic analysis, but that it will be component of this planning process.
- BLM should highlight the circumstances that have changed since the last management plan was created.
- The process must be open, transparent, and pass the “common sense” test
- Need to separate emotional “unsolvable” issues from other important but less “exciting” issues in this process.
- The draft public engagement process diagram shared during the meeting was very difficult to read and understand. Needs to be simplified. The more simplified planning diagram that was shared was too simplistic. A middle-level diagram highlighting key points for public input needs to be developed.
- Benson sub-watershed issues are different from Sierra Vista’s- educational forums and topics of interest there would be different.