

San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area Resource Management Plan
Public Meeting – Alternatives Development
Meeting Notes

Meeting Objectives

1. Provide an overview of draft range of alternatives and discuss how input has been incorporated.
2. Provide an opportunity for feedback on draft range of alternatives and whether these represent a *reasonable range*.
3. Discuss opportunities for additional engagement and follow-up.

Agenda

- Welcome and introductions
- Progress update and overview of draft alternatives
- Public feedback
- Next Steps

Participants: *See list on page 9.*

Meeting Summary

TO SUBMIT INPUT ON THE SPRNCA RMP DRAFT ALTERNATIVES, send an email or letter before **June 10** to David McIntyre, BLM Tucson Field Office Planning Lead:
dcmcintyre@blm.gov or
3201 E Universal Way, Tucson, AZ 85756

FOR ALTERNATIVES PRESENTATION AND HANDOUT, see BLM’s SPRNCA E-Planning website:
<https://www.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/planAndProjectSite.do?methodName=dispatchToPatternPage¤tPageId=48115>.

BLM staff presented a progress update and overview of draft alternatives. Following is a summary of the Question and Answer session. The presentation and informational handout are available on the [BLM e-planning site](#).

Question: Are these alternatives now fixed in stone, and BLM will choose from these?

Answer: No, the alternatives are still in draft form. They will not be final until the Record of Decision has been written. The purpose of this meeting is to get input on the draft alternatives. The BLM has already received comments from multiple groups that will be incorporated into the alternatives.

Question: How can we get our own opinions heard [about the alternatives and the RMP]?

Answer: You can email or mail comments to David McIntyre, or request a presentation from BLM for your organization. (*See p. 1 of notes for David’s email and address*)

Question: Does BLM coordinate at all with the Mexican government about what happens to the San Pedro River?

Answer: We have not coordinated with the Mexican government about the RMP. The BLM is a US federal agency, and we partner with many local agencies. Although many outside factors affect the conditions on the SPRNCA, there are only certain areas the BLM can manage or affect.

Question: *Resource Management Planning seems like a big process. How is it decided that a new RMP is needed?*

Answer: Conditions on the land change over time, and new plans are needed periodically. Legislation requires BLM to write a new comprehensive plan every 15-20 years for every area of land it manages. The SPRNCA is currently managed under the overall plan for the Safford Field Office, as well as the plan accompanying its designation as a National Riparian Conservation Area. These plans are not sufficient. An updated, stand alone plan for the SPRNCA is needed.

Question: One of the alternatives states that OHV use would be limited to designated roads, and that this is how the SPRNCA is currently managed. I'm not aware of any OHVs currently allowed besides BLM vehicles. Will that change?

Answer: "OHV" does not mean "off-road vehicle;" it means "off-highway vehicle." The BLM is required to make an allocation for off-highway vehicles in the RMP. Allocation options include completely closing the area to OHVs, completely opening the area to OHVs (in which you can drive off-road anywhere), or having a limited designation (limited to existing roads or designated roads). The decision made for the SPRNCA in the Safford RMP was to limit OHV use to designated roads. Therefore, the No Action alternative would also limit OHVs to designated roads. This would mean that people would not be able to drive off of the few existing roads, unless they are BLM or a permit holder (such as a utility company).

Question: All four alternatives touch on the term "enhanced recharge" of water. A 2006 Stantec report talks about detention basins on non-BLM lands. Does BLM have plans under any alternative to consider detention basins?

Answer: Yes, detention basins would be "tools in the toolbox" to be considered for use under alternatives A, B and C. Detention basins would not fit in Alternative D because active interventions would not be allowed. Under the No Action alternative (alternative A), we could analyze the possibility of a detention basin or recharge facility on a case-by-case basis. The No Action alternative would make creating water recharge facilities more difficult to implement.

Question: The alternatives would be clearer to the public if BLM brought maps of different proposed uses and activities, such as when the Forest Service does timber harvesting and they present a map of the planned harvest areas to the public.

Answer: BLM has not yet created maps of all the proposed uses, because the site-specific implementation part of planning usually goes through additional environmental assessment after the RMP is written. However, we will have an idea of the general areas where activities could occur based on the analysis and information about potential management strategies. For example, our hydrologist is currently looking at the whole NCA to analyze the most successful strategies for water management. This effort may result in a map that illustrates the general areas for activities such as recharge basins, but not exact locations.

Question: Many of the alternatives are polarized, and seem to be taken to extremes to cover the full range of possibilities. Also, many alternatives seem to include conflicts that may cause advocates of different uses to be pitted against each other. What can we do as participants so that the preferred alternative draws from multiple alternatives?

Answer: When looking at the range of alternatives, we must consider the activities that would be reasonable under BLM’s legislative guidance. Since the SPRNCA is already a designated Conservation Area, alternatives that increase resource use would necessarily not allow mining, building shooting ranges, or other more intensive uses. The alternatives are not as polarizing when seen in the context of reasonable possibilities. The alternatives are designed for both the BLM and the public to get an idea of the breadth of possibilities that will be scientifically analyzed.

When we create the preferred alternative required for the Draft RMP, some components of the alternatives will be adjusted based on the input we receive. Between the Draft RMP and the Final RMP, the components will be adjusted even further. For instance, if everyone supported a certain alternative EXCEPT for one component, the BLM could consider the public input and remove that component from the preferred alternative.

There will probably be opposing input on the Preferred Alternative. The EIS (Environmental Impact Statement) process, and the alternative themes in particular, can have the unfortunate side effect of pitting people against each other. Therefore, as an individual or organization weighing in, it would be most effective to look at different components within the range of alternatives, instead of “voting” on certain alternatives. The BLM will use all the information we get to make the best possible decision.

Question: I’m a very visual person, and maps would be very helpful. The maps would not need to be set in stone or very detailed, but rough illustrations of what we’re dealing with would be helpful.

Answer: The maps haven’t been created yet, but we will have a set of maps for each alternative at the Draft RMP meetings. There *may* be maps available before the meetings but we aren’t yet sure; let the BLM know what kind of maps you’re interested in.

Question: There seems to be a contradiction or compromise in Alternatives B and C in terms of conservation. The concepts of “increased use” and “increased restoration” seem to conflict with each other. The two alternatives kind of push you to choose Alternative D.

Answer: None of the proposed increases in use would be very substantial. We already have a narrow range of what we’re permitted to do on the SPRNCA. Examples of increased use include opening a few roads, installing more interpretational signage, and designating more backcountry campsites. The components advocating increased resource use are included in the range of alternatives because they were suggested during Scoping.

Question: Is monitoring incorporated as part of adaptive management across all action alternatives? What kind of monitoring are you proposing? Quantitative analysis of implementation is important.

Answer: Yes, monitoring is one of the most important components of adaptive management. Adaptive management is used when the outcomes of a management action (such as installing a detention basin) are uncertain. You monitor the outcomes, so that you can learn from your decisions and adjust your management actions. The BLM has limited resources [for monitoring], so collaborative monitoring could be a good tool to use in this watershed.

Question: What exactly constitutes restoration - what are the restorative components? How much emphasis would there be on those components?

Answer: At the RMP level, baseline inventory data and assessments determine that something in the natural system is not working quite right. As an example, riparian areas on the SPRNCA were recently assessed by the National Riparian Service Team. The team looked at reaches of the river they thought may be impaired, and analyzed what the causes of those impairments could be. Restoration will be the actions used to address the causes of those impairments.

“Restoration” is a broad term for changing something into a desired condition. This does not necessarily aim to change the conditions back to what they were 100 years ago, but to a desired condition (such as more water in the river). At the RMP level, you identify a toolbox of possible restoration strategies (fire, mechanical, biological, etc). For low-impact tools, you could plant trees, re-seed areas, etc. The BLM will identify a full range of options within the Alternatives, so that additional analysis can be done at the site-specific level (in more detail than in the RMP).

Question: This range of alternatives looks like an egalitarian, democratic buffet. The decision could be a function of the political will of the group at hand. Qualitatively, it would be helpful to get a figure on how many people support which alternative. Also, it would be nice to know who the other people are in the room.

Answer: The Preferred Alternative will not be decided through a vote. As we discussed earlier, we can move around different elements from different alternatives, and the decision on alternatives does not involve counting people’s votes.

We usually ask all participants at SPRNCA RMP meetings to introduce themselves, but this group is too large to make that a timely option. Notes with participant lists are posted on the SPRNCA RMP website, and a participant list from this meeting will be added

Question: I'm an allotment holder, and very proud of what we've done on our allotment. There is still water in the Babocomari river, and it's not because we've gotten more rain – it's because of the rangeland restoration we've done. With increased water pumping, sometimes the only savior [for land health] could be conserving the uplands. Which alternatives call for tebuthiuron chemical treatments for rangeland restoration?

Answer: Alternatives B and C would allow for tebuthiuron treatments to be considered. This doesn't mean that they would certainly be used, but they would be considered as potential tools.

Question: Alternative B mentions that half the SPRNCA would be available for broad restoration tools, and the remainder would be a forage reserve allotment. I don't have a map, and don't know where the current grazing areas are, or where the restoration could occur. How are we supposed to choose an alternative when we don't know where these activities would occur?

Answer: The BLM has not identified exactly where those activities would occur. At this stage, the restoration sites have not been chosen. BLM wants to get more input before we spatially depict and illustrate the details. The Draft RMP will have more details on geographic areas. The public will have 90 days to comment on the details of the draft RMP.

The idea of the forage reserve allotment is to have an allotment available for use to help the watershed as a whole with restoration. For example, it could be used if ranchers or other landowners in the watershed need a place for their cattle to go while they do treatments on their land, or if we want to use cattle as a tool for restoration [on the SPRNCA]. Sometimes it is a good option to have contingency plans, or multiple options, for restoration.

Regarding the treatments in Alternatives B vs C: Alternative B would emphasize restoration in upland areas (brush lands and grasslands outside of the river bottom). Alternative C would emphasize bottomlands and uplands as geographic areas for treatments. No matter which alternative is chosen, every acre of the SPRNCA will never be treated – some areas are not suitable for treatment. Having all possible treatments identified gives the opportunity and flexibility to deal with unforeseen events.

Question: What will be the level of detail in the Draft RMP?

Answer: The Draft RMP will not show location points for activities, but it will show proposed *areas* where activities could be considered. It will contain maps that specifically show proposed areas for Lands with Wilderness Characteristics, Visual Resource Management classifications, and Wild and Scenic River characteristics. A Wild and Scenic River can only be identified by Congress; currently, the whole San Pedro River is recommended to Congress as a WSR under a Recreational designation.

Question: The Alternatives presentation mentioned that one management strategy remaining unchanged for all alternatives is applying the 17 Rangeland Health Indicators. This seems like a cattle-centric strategy, focused with a grazing lens. Would BLM consider creating different guidelines for land health?

Answer: BLM has developed Rangeland Health Standards in each state. Rangeland Health standards are really standards for *land* health – erosion, plant cover, water in streams, habitat for wildlife, etc. They are focused on environmental processes that occur regardless of whether or not grazing is present. Because the “rangeland” term carries the connotation of grazing, the BLM is beginning to call the standards “land health standards” instead. In fact, rangelands have some of the best guidelines of any resource for land health; BLM does not have guidelines or best management practices for other uses like recreation.

In addition, BLM has worked hard to develop specific resource objectives for each resource on the SPRNCA. For instance, standards have been made for riparian resources that are adapted from the Range Health Standards.

Question: How restrictive is Alternative D? For example, if the Rails to Trails project or check dams were proposed, would they be allowed?

Answer: Alternative D allows for low-impact, minimal-tool activities. It places restrictions on where some of those activities could occur, because it recognizes sensitive resources. Alternative D does not propose to close foot trails, so Rails to Trails would be considered an addition to the existing walking trails. Check dams would be allowed.

Question: Some Scoping comments were submitted that could be better addressed in the Alternatives. These include what trails would be open to public use; what, if any, new trails will be developed; any new campgrounds; and what camping areas would be designated?

Answer: Which routes will be open and closed is an *implementation* decision, and not decided in the RMP. The RMP alternatives will stress different *types* of access, not the locations of that access.

The route-specific issues are covered in separate process from the RMP – Travel Management Planning (TMP). TMP is being done at the same time as the RMP. It will determine specifically what roads and trails would be open and closed. The Draft TMP will be released at the same time as the Draft RMP, so that you can comment on both at the same time. Some of you have been contacted about user needs and open/closed routes. If you haven’t, there will be a public meeting soon about the route inventory that was taken.

Regarding campgrounds: Alternative B would keep the current campgrounds (including backcountry camping), while alternative C would designate new backcountry campgrounds. New campgrounds would be designated partly for safety, as it is difficult to find people in trouble if they are not at a designated area. Feedback on camping is welcome.

Question: Over the years, I've seen lots of changes on the SPRNCA – from wide open use to a conservation area. However, roads are not widely available, and handicap-accessible areas are few. I appreciate all the different comments because they focus on better use of public lands. My personal feeling is that land should be opened up a little more, and that handicap use should be available.

Answer: Thank you for pointing that out. Handicap access is an important issue, and it will be incorporated into the alternatives.

Question: What is the Backcountry Byway?

Answer: A Backcountry Byway is a type of road in the BLM road system. The BLM road system has numbered roads and signs listing the uses available. Backcountry Byways are slightly less-traveled routes that BLM encourages people to use to see an area. They can be paved, gravel, or other surfaces, and usually have interpretive signage - kind of an interpretive trail for motor vehicles.

Question: Could you give background on the rationale for the decision to make fire suppression the same across all alternatives?

Answer: A significant amount of the SPRNCA is determined to be a Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) area. In a WUI, wildfires that occur can pose safety problems for life and property. The exterior portion of the SPRNCA is in the WUI, so the BLM fire employees designated it as an area where all fires except for prescribed burns will be immediately suppressed. If there is a lightning-caused wildfire, or a campfire caused fire, they will be suppressed because of the risk to people and their belongings. Since the fire designations have already occurred, the designations are the same across all alternatives.

Question: Each alternative looks like a unified plan for the entire SPRNCA. It seems like you want to apply one set of rules to every section. Aren't there areas within the SPRNCA that need more or less intervention than others – are you limiting yourselves with strict alternatives?

Answer: Alternatives are a *range of tools* that could be used in different areas. Different tools from the chosen alternative could be applied to different geographic areas on the SPRNCA. This came up last week at the Friends of the San Pedro meeting – there are different levels of use, development, and solitude at different areas, and regardless of which alternative is chosen, certain tools will be used in some areas and not others. The geographic-specific plans will be developed later, and feedback will be welcome.

Question: Are increases in cottonwood restoration considered in some alternatives and not others?

Answer: Active restoration and planting (perhaps post-fire) is a potential in all alternatives. A riparian system is very dynamic. As fires, floods, beavers, and other disturbances occur, the number of cottonwoods will differ. The number of cottonwoods along the San Pedro River is already generally at a maximum. This is why a low number of young cottonwoods are seen. Describing the dynamic riparian process in an objective is difficult, and BLM is attempting to describe the fact that the variability of the process should be allowed to continue.

Question: What are the economic criteria considered in planning process?

Answer: Economic criteria are discussed and evaluated when creating the preferred alternatives. There is a socioeconomic section in the Environmental Impact Statement, in which socioeconomic elements are analyzed for the expected impacts of the potential management actions. There was a SPRNCA RMP education forum on socioeconomics, with presentations and notes available on the website.

Question: Who is the final decision-maker [for the RMP], after the BLM Tucson team adopts the draft RMP?

Answer: The BLM Tucson field manager will sign the decision, but there will be coordination with state and national offices before it is signed.

Question: We have been talking about zones for recreation, but they have not been defined. The actual locations of the zones are not identified in the alternatives overview.

Answer: There are zones already defined for recreation called Recreation Management Zones (RMZs). The San Pedro House is in the Natural History RMZ, and other sites are in Human History RMZ. The alternatives do define the boundaries of these zones.

Question: Regarding water resources, the Alternatives handout mentions BLM protecting their federal reserve water right by pursuing the legislation. What about the Tribute legislation, which is more specific?

Answer: BLM never comments on its active litigation. In general, the BLM's federal reserved water right will be defended.

Question: I just got done working with another government agency on a plan, and then the agency ran out of money to implement the plan. How do you match the resources you have with implementing the plan? How do you prioritize plan implementation?

Answer: After the RMP is created, an Implementation Strategy is written every 5 years or so. The Implementation Strategy identifies where BLM can leverage resources with active partners (and it always involving stakeholders in the process). The Implementation Strategy is not set in stone; if money happens to come around early in the 5-year period for an action that had been prioritized for implementation later, that action will be done. In addition to the Implementation Strategy, a Plan Evaluation is conducted to identify what we have and have not implemented, to remember what we have to do.

Question: I've always believed that BLM's hands are tied to outside the boundaries of BLM land. However, BLM's alternatives are affected by what happens outside of the boundaries. I'd like to know that partners are serious about having a stake in managing the SPRNCA. Fort Huachuca has done a lot to help the tributaries, but there is a lot of land between the Fort and the San Pedro River.

Answer: BLM is actively cooperating with County, City, Hereford NRCD, and the Upper San Pedro Partnership on the RMP. BLM has been able to channel Healthy Lands funding through the NRCD. Once the RMP is in place, there will be even more opportunities to work together.

From Mary Darling at Cochise County: Cochise County is doing a tremendous amount with water recharge; it is conducting studies and three projects, restricting water use and putting standards on new houses. It is also working with Fort Huachuca on a daily basis.

Question: I support the notion that there needs to be consideration of handicapped access.

Answer: Thank you- we will make sure access is added to the alternatives.

BLM closing comments: Thanks to everyone who took the time to meet tonight. The more public input we get for the RMP, the better the plan we be. Tonight, we received positive input from creative and passionate people – please continue to give us your input.

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- Melissa Warren, Acting Field Manager
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- Marcia Radke, Wildlife Biologist
- Jim Mahoney, Recreation Specialist
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