

**UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
HASSAYAMPA FIELD OFFICE**

**Harquahala Mountain Sampling Project
DOI-BLM-AZ-P010-2013-0013-EA**

Finding of No Significant Impact

I, the undersigned authorized officer, considering the criteria provided by 40 CFR 1508.27 and the information contained in the Harquahala Mountain Sampling Project Environmental Assessment DOI-BLM-AZ-P010-2013-0013-EA, and as explained further below, find that the proposed action and alternatives will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement does not need to be prepared.

Context

The Proposed Action would occur in washes and lands in W½, section 27, T.5 N., R.11 W., Gila & Salt River Meridian, La Paz County, Arizona, about 12.5 miles east of Salome, La Paz County, Arizona as shown in the 43 CFR 3809 Hyduke Harquahala Sampling Project Plan of Operations (AZA-36148), received November 19, 2012. The project location is within the BLM Harquahala Mountains Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC).

The ACEC designation protects unique biological resources and significant cultural resources, including intact prehistoric and historic sites. This area also is of cultural importance to the Yavapai Tribe, as it was a major area of settlement for the Western Yavapai groups.

The biological richness of the Harquahala Mountains is unique within southwest Arizona. The Harquahala Mountains and surrounding bajadas provide important wildlife habitat to a diverse array of species. The area is an ecoregional conservation site with important biodiversity values.

Intensity

Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse

Potential adverse impacts to the scenic quality and landscape appearance, the Sonoran Desert Scrub vegetative community, the local wildlife habitat, air quality, would either be mitigated by management controls listed in Appendices I & II of the above referenced Environmental Assessment, or be so small as to be insignificant to the resource in question.

All Land Use Plan Management Actions, Land Use Allocations, and Desired Future Conditions for the ACEC listed in the Bradshaw Harquahala Resource Management Plan (BH RMP) can be achieved while implementing this plan. The No Action Alternative does not achieve Land Use Allocation MI-3.

Degree of effect on public health and safety:

Although there would be minor impacts to air quality and local traffic patterns by increasing motor vehicle traffic to the project area, the increase would be statistically insignificant (less than 1% on four or fewer days per month).

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:

Although the general area is designated an ACEC for its cultural resources and biodiversity, no cultural resources, NHPA eligible sites, threatened or endangered listed species or their critical habitats, wetlands, farmlands, parks, or wild and scenic rivers exist within or in proximity to the project area. Since the proposed action has taken in to account potential visual and noise impacts by limiting activity time periods and not requesting occupancy under 43CFR3715 et seq., there are no significant or permanent effects to the environment from this action.

Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial:

The area surrounding the project does not have high usage and is not used for regular or organized recreation or commercial events. The EA was made available for a 30-day public comment period and no comments were received. Native American tribes were notified of the action and further consultation efforts were conducted to address the few issues that were raised. In particular, the Culture Research Compliance Department Officer of the Yavapai Prescott Indian Tribe concurred with no concerns to the proposed action. Therefore, there are no foreseen controversial effects from the operation.

Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risk.

The proposed action is simple, constrained, and manageable by an operator with significant expertise and experience with operations at this scale. By implementing the mitigation measures and controls in Appendices I and II to the Harquahala Mountain Sampling Project Environmental Assessment DOI-BLM-AZ-P010-2013-0013-EA, there are no unique risks associated with this action.

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:

Although the authorization of mining within an ACEC is a matter requiring detailed analysis of the effects, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process and the management actions contained within the BH RMP listed in section B. 7. of the Harquahala Mountain Sampling Project Environmental Assessment DOI-BLM-AZ-P010-2013-0013-EA adequately remove or mitigate any significant effects.

Mining operations are consistent with the multiple use philosophy of section 302 of the Federal Land Policy Management Act (FLPMA), and the designation of ACEC in the area of the action. Each proposed change to this action will require a new analysis under NEPA and consultation with Native Americans under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, as well as a new evaluation for conformance to the Land Use Plan.

Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts:

The Proposed Action would not change the existing impact of inactive mining in the general area. The long-term visual quality of the area would remain the same. Recreational opportunities, such as OHV and camping, would remain the same except during the actual exploration (two consecutive days, twice per month), but impacts would not be significant.

Degree to which the action may adversely affect district, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed on the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources:

The Proposed Action occurs entirely within the Harquahala Mountains ACEC, and partially within the Harquahala Mountains Special Cultural Resource Management Area (SCRMA), both of which were designated in the Bradshaw Harquahala Resource Management Plan approved in April, 2010, and outlined in Map 24 of that document.

A cultural resources inventory, consisting of a Class I (records search and literature review) and a Class III Intensive survey was completed by BLM Archaeologist Bryan M. Lausten in January, 2014. No cultural resources were identified during the Class III Intensive archaeological survey of the proposed project. Based upon the findings of the Class I literature review and the intensive survey of the proposed project area, the action will have no effect on cultural resources.

The action would not permanently add any prominent visual intrusions to the viewsheds of known cultural sites in this mountain range nor will it affect other known Native American religious concerns.

Degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat:

No threatened or endangered species occur in the project area. Sonoran desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*), a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act, occupies the area. Direct impacts to desert tortoise habitat from the Proposed Action would be the disturbance of approximately 0.4 acres of habitat at the sampling pit sites; however, there are no tortoise shelter sites within the expected disturbance area around the test pits (20 x 40 foot area). Tortoises often use washes for movement and foraging, making them vulnerable to direct mortality due to driving and operating equipment in wash habitat. Existing roads occur near the test pits, however, paralleling the washes that will be sampled. Due to the sparse vegetative cover and short off-road travel distances little long-term habitat disturbance is expected.

Whether the action threatens a violation of federal, state, or local environmental protection law:

Conformance to Appendix I, Performance Measures, and Appendix II, Guidelines for Handling Sonoran Desert Tortoises Encountered on Development Projects, of the Harquahala Mountain Sampling Project Environmental Assessment DOI-BLM-AZ-P010-2013-0013-EA would ensure the action would comply with federal, state, and local environmental protection laws.

D. Remington Hawes

Rem Hawes
Field Manager
Hassayampa Field Office

11/21/2014
Date