

**United States
Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Tucson Field Office**

Finding of No Significant Impact

Las Cienegas National Conservation Area Road Improvements and Low-water Crossings Environmental Assessment NEPA # DOI-BLM-AZ-G02000-2014-0031-EA

Background

The Bureau of Land Management prepared an Environmental Assessment (DOI-BLM-AZ-G02000-2014-0031-EA) which analyzed the effects of constructing roadway safety improvements and drainage improvements within the 49,000 acres of the Las Cienegas National Conservation Area (LCNCA). The EA considered the Proposed Action, which would be to construct the roadway safety improvements and drainage improvements, and the No Action alternative which would be to not construct these improvements.

Context

The Proposed Action would occur in the LCNCA, seven miles northeast of Sonoita, Arizona. The project area would consist of 3.0 miles of LC6900 (Las Cienegas Main Road North), .2 miles of LC6900E, 1.7 miles of LC6901 (Airstrip Road), and 8.1 miles of LC6900 (Las Cienegas Main Road South).

Under the Proposed Action, placement of riprap, grading and resurfacing of the roads, and construction of low-water crossings would occur on approximately 32 acres in a 49,000 acre National Conservation Area (NCA).

Intensity

I have considered the potential intensity/severity of the impacts anticipated from the Las Cienegas Road Improvement Project decision relative to each of the ten areas suggested for consideration by the CEQ. With regard to each:

1. *Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.*

The EA considered both potential beneficial and adverse effects of the Proposed Action. None of the effects are beyond the range of effects analyzed in the Proposed Las Cienegas Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement (June 2002). Temporary disturbance to wildlife and recreation would occur over a 4-8 week period during road construction. This project could potentially improve the recreation experience for users who prefer a smoother road. The improved road would require less maintenance which would reduce disturbance to wildlife and reduce the costs associated with maintenance. Some road drainage issues may be improved through installation of low-water crossings and riprap aprons.

2. *The degree to which the proposed action affects public health and safety.*

The improved road would benefit public health and safety.

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

No cultural resources were found within the 32 acres where road improvements are proposed. As a result, the Proposed Action should have negligible direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts to cultural resources.

The road improvements will not be conducted within or around the Historic Empire Ranch Headquarters.

Wetlands are located within the project area. Proposed road improvements located adjacent to wetland areas would be completed within the roadway prism and the Proposed Action should have negligible direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts to wetlands.

The Proposed Action would occur within the Empire-Cienega ACEC but the proposed road improvements would not affect the unique resources in the ACEC.

There are no park lands, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas in the 32 acres where road improvements are proposed.

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

The effects of the proposed road improvements planned under the Proposed Action are similar to other road maintenance and improvement projects implemented within the scope of the Las Cienegas RMP and ROD. Possible effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be controversial.

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

The analysis in the EA has not shown that the effects of the proposed road improvement would involve unique or unknown risks to the human environment. Road resurfacing, drainage improvements, and riprap installation have been performed frequently on public lands including in National Landscape Conservation System units.

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.*

This project neither establishes a precedent nor represents a decision in principle about future actions.

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

This action is not related to other actions that would cumulatively cause significant negative actions.

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

The project was surveyed for cultural resources and there were no cultural resources found in the project area. If cultural resources are discovered during construction activities, construction will be halted and BLM Archaeology staff will be contacted so that construction personnel can receive instructions on how to avoid, minimize, or mitigate impacts.

The road improvements will not be conducted within or around the Historic Empire Ranch Headquarters.

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 Endangered Species Act of 1973.*

There are 11 Federally listed and 1 proposed species (4 with designated critical habitat and 2 with proposed critical habitat) with a potential to occur within or in proximity to the project area. The Chiricahua leopard frog with Designated Critical Habitat, Gila topminnow, Gila Chub with Designated Critical Habitat, Desert pupfish, Huachuca water-umbel, Lesser long-nosed bat, Jaguar with Designated Critical Habitat, Northern Mexican gartersnake with Proposed Critical Habitat, Ocelot, Southwestern willow flycatcher with Designated Critical Habitat, and Yellow-billed cuckoo with Designated Critical Habitat are known to occur in the project area. The Proposed Action has been determined to have a *No Effect* on these 11 federally listed species and 1 proposed species including the Designated Critical Habitat.

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

The Proposed Action does not threaten to violate any law. All necessary permits will be obtained before implementation of the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action is in compliance with the Las Cienegas RMP which allows for altering or upgrading existing roads where needed to protect natural resources on public lands in the Sonoita Valley.

Finding of No Significant Impact

On the basis of the information contained in the EA, and all other information available to me, it is my determination that the proposed action would not significantly affect the quality of the human environment and that preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required.

/S/ Viola E. Hillman

9/10/14

Viola E. Hillman
Field Manager

Date