

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

EA Number: DOI-BLM-AZ-G010-2014-0020-EA

Serial/Case File No.: 5156

BLM Office: Safford Field Office

The type of impacts to the human environment expected from implementation of the proposed action (now selected alternative) of the Rockhouse Prescribed Fire Environmental Assessment (EA) (DOI-BLM-AZ- G010-2014-0020-EA) were anticipated and declared within the analysis of the Safford Resource Management Plan (RMP, 1991) (ROD:1992, 1994). The site specific impacts described in the EA are no greater than those anticipated in the RMP and EIS. The EA is in accordance with CEQ regulations, Sec. 1502.20 and 1502.21. To the extent there are impacts beyond those described in the RMP and EA they are not significant. The selected alternative allows BLM to manage vegetation conditions on federal land through applicable laws and regulations. Specific resource objectives are identified in the RMP; and where appropriate, these RMP objectives are repeated through the impact analysis section of the EA along with indications of how these objectives would be met.

For the selected alternative, these objectives would be achieved through implementation of prescribed fire, which incorporate project design features, without creating any significant impacts. The EA analyzes the impacts of viable alternatives developed through public and interdisciplinary team scoping and it clearly indicates that the selected alternative, with specific project design features (best management practices and conservation measures) would not significantly affect the human environment. Specific project design features ensure that resource values are protected through avoidance. Project design features are applied to the selected alternative to minimize or avoid impacts, as noted in the EA, even though the action(s), without mitigation, may not rise to the level of "significant" as defined in 40 CFR 1508.

The "intensity" of impacts, beneficial and adverse, is thoroughly described in the Environmental Impacts section of the EA. Intensity is a component of "significance" and is determined by applying ten criteria (CEQ regulations, Sec 1508.27). In review of these criteria, relative to the selected alternative, I have found:

- Beneficial and adverse effects (40 CFR 1508.27 (b)(1))
The EA has analyzed and disclosed both beneficial and adverse impacts of the selected alternative and subsequent connected actions. Implementing the selected alternative is expected to improve ecosystem health and function. Cultural resources and special status species would be afforded additional protection from better management.
- Public Health or Safety (40 CFR 1508.2(b)(2))
There would be no significant effects on public health or safety. The area is remote, so the chance of affecting members of the public in any measureable way

would be minor. Any hazards would be localized and limited to those involved with implementation activities and are within accepted parameters for such work.

- Unique geographic characteristics (cultural or historic resources, park lands, prime and unique farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, wilderness or wilderness study areas or ecologically critical areas (ACECs, RNAs)) (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(3))

There are no wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or prime and unique farmlands in the Rockhouse Prescribed Fire Area. The Swamp Springs-Hot Springs Watershed ACEC and the Redfield Canyon Wilderness Area are located within the Rockhouse Prescribed Fire Area. The natural, historic and cultural resources of the area will be protected through project design features which include archaeologist coordination, identification (survey), and exclusion.

- Highly Controversial Effects (40 CFR 1508.27 (b)(4))

The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial because there are no known controversies over the impacts of the project.

- Unique or Unknown Risks (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(5))

The BLM has experience in planning prescribed fire treatment projects and analyzing impacts from prescribed fire treatments. The nature of these impacts is not highly uncertain, nor does it involve unique or unknown risks. In addition, the RMP and EA analyze the anticipated impacts thoroughly.

- Precedent for future actions (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(6))

The proposed alternative does not represent new, precedent-setting prescribed fire techniques, nor does it establish a precedent for future similar actions with potentially significant effects. The specific actions involved in the selected alternative have been implemented before, separately, and collectively, to manage public lands.

- Cumulative Effects (40 CFR 1508.27 (b)(7))

The impacts of the selected alternative has been analyzed and considered, separately, cumulatively, and at multiple scales of analysis in the Safford Resource Management Plan and in the EA. Impacts would not have significant cumulative effects within the project area, even when added to the effects of other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

- Impacts to significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources (40 CFR 1508.27 (b)(8))

Cultural resources (historic and prehistoric) will be surveyed prior to implementation of the selected alternative. Coordination with an archaeologist during implementation of prescribed fire will occur. No impacts to cultural resource values are anticipated to occur as a result of the selected alternative.

- Federally listed endangered or threatened species (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(9))

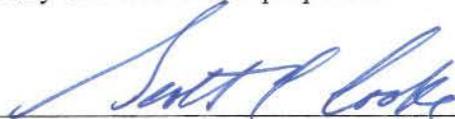
The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service species list for Cochise and Graham Counties was reviewed and determinations made for each species. The Bureau determined that implementation of the Rockhouse prescribed fire treatment will comply with the *Biological and Conference Opinion for the BLM Arizona Statewide Land Use Plan Amendment for Fire, Fuels, and Air Quality Management*, September 2004 (02-21-03-F-0210). The Biological Opinion (BO) was reviewed to insure that

implementation of the prescribed fire treatments is conducted within the scope of the consultation, and all conservation measures stated in the BO are being followed.

The Bureau did determine that the proposed action may affect, and is likely to adversely affect, the desert pupfish (*Cyprinodon macularius*), Gila chub (*Gila intermedia*) and critical habitat, Gila topminnow (*Poeciliopsis occidentalis occidentalis*), loach minnow (*Tiaroga cobitis*) and critical habitat, spikedace (*Meda fulgida*) and critical habitat, Chiricahua leopard frog (*Lithobates chiricahuensis*) and critical habitat, and Mexican spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis lucida*) and critical habitat. The Bureau also determined that the proposed action may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect, ocelot (*Leopardus (=Felis) pardalis*) and lesser long-nosed bat (*Leptonycteris curasoae yerbabuenae*). Following formal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for the Rockhouse Prescribed Fire project, the USFWS concurred with those determinations. Conservation Recommendations as stated in the Biological Opinion issued by the USFWS on August 27, 2014 (AESO/SE 02EAAZ00-2013-F-0093) will be adhered to.

- Compliance with Federal, State or Local Law (40 CFR 1508.27 (b)(10))
The selected alternative is in compliance with federal, state, and local laws, and requirements relative to environmental protection. Further, it is in conformance with the Safford Resource Management Plan and would contribute to the attainment of state water quality standards.

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the Environmental Assessment and all other available information, I have determined that the selected alternative does not constitute a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is unnecessary and will not be prepared.



Scott C. Cooke
Bureau of Land Management
Field Manager



Date