

**United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management**

**Finding of No Significant Impact
Decision Record**

**Environmental Assessment DOI-BLM-UT-2015-0227-EA
March 2016**

**Permanent Restriction of
Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges to Roped Activities**

Location: Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges, Grand County, Utah

Applicant/Address: Bureau of Land Management, 82 East Dogwood, Moab, UT 84532

Moab Field Office
82 East Dogwood
Moab, UT 84532
435-259-2100
435-259-2106



FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Environmental Assessment

DOI-BLM-UT-Y010-2015-0227-EA

Permanent Restriction of Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges to Roped Activities

INTRODUCTION:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has conducted an environmental analysis (DOI-BLM-UT-Y010-2015-0227) for a proposed action to restrict roped activities at Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges. The underlying need for the proposal would be met while accomplishing the following objectives:

1. Restricting roped activities at the two locations would allow the majority of users (hikers) to enjoy the experience of viewing the arches unfettered by dangling apparatus and people. The noise often associated with roped activities would also be eliminated, further enhancing the experience of the majority users.
2. Restricting roped activities at the two locations would prevent further scarring and bolting of the natural features, which are the most visited arches on BLM-administered public in the Moab area.

The project area is within the Labyrinth Rims/Gemini Bridges Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA); Corona Arch is within the Goldar Hiking Focus Area subdivision of this SRMA. EA #DOI BLM-UT-Y010-2015-0227 is incorporated by reference for this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). A no action alternative and the proposed action alternative were analyzed in the EA.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Based upon a review of the EA and the supporting documents, I have determined that the project is not a major federal action and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects meet the definition of significance in context or intensity as defined in 40 CFR 1508.27 and do not exceed those effects described in the 2008 Moab RMP/FEIS. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not needed.

This finding is based on the context and intensity of the project as described:

Context: The project is a site-specific action restricting one type of recreation use (roped activities) on approximately 31 acres around Corona Arch and on 6.3 acres around Gemini Bridges on BLM administered land.

Intensity: The following discussion is organized around the Ten Significance Criteria described in 40 CFR 1508.27 and incorporated into resources and issues considered (includes supplemental authorities Appendix 1 H-1790-1) and supplemental Instruction Memorandum, Acts, regulations and Executive Orders.

The following have been considered in evaluating intensity for this proposal:

1. **Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse.** The Proposed Action would impact visitors and resources as described in the EA. None of the environmental effects discussed in detail in the EA are considered significant, nor do the effects exceed those described in the 2008 Moab RMP/FEIS.
2. **The degree to which the selected alternative will affect public health or safety.** The Proposed Action removes visitors using ropes on top of the arches. These visitors would not be able to impact the safety of the hiking public recreating below, thus enhancing public safety.

3. **Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farm lands, wetlands, wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.** The historic and cultural resources of the area would not be impacted. The following components of the Human Environment and Resource Issues are not affected because they are not present in the project area: Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, BLM Natural Areas, Threatened and Endangered or Candidate Plant Species Waste, Wetlands, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and Wilderness/Wilderness Study Area.

In addition, the following components of the Human Environment and Resource Issues, although present, would not be affected by this proposed action for the reasons listed in Appendix A of the EA: Air Quality, Cultural Resources, Floodplains, Environmental Justice, Fuels/Fire Management, Geology, Invasive Species, Lands/Access, Livestock Grazing, Migratory Birds, Native American Religious Concerns, Paleontology, Soils, Water Resources Wildlife, Threatened, Endangered or Candidate Plant or Animal Species, Vegetation, Lands with Wilderness Characteristics, Rangeland Health Standards, Socioeconomics, Utah BLM Sensitive Species, and Woodlands.

The following components of the Human Environment and Resources Issues were analyzed in detail in Chapter 4: Recreation and Visual Resources. Neither of these would be significantly impacted because:

- a) Recreation: the experience of the majority of the visitors would be enhanced by restricting a subset of visitors that are impacting this experience.
 - b) Visual Resources: restricting roped activities would prevent further degradation of the arches from the “sawing” of swinging ropes and the bolting of the natural features. In addition, hikers would not have their view of the arches diminished by the presence of roped people in the viewshed.
4. **The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.** There is no scientific controversy over the nature of the impacts.
 5. **The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.** The project is not unique or unusual. The BLM has experience implementing similar actions in similar areas. The environmental effects to the human environment are fully analyzed in the EA. There are no predicted effects on the human environment that are considered to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.
 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.** The actions considered in the selected alternative were considered by the interdisciplinary team within the context of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. Significant cumulative effects are not predicted. A complete analysis of the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the selected alternative and all other alternatives is described in Chapter 4 of the EA.
 7. **Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts – which include connected actions regardless of land ownership.** The interdisciplinary team evaluated the possible actions in context of past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions. Significant cumulative effects are not predicted. A complete disclosure of the effects of the project is contained in Chapter 4 of the EA.
 8. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other 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 historical resources.** The project will not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in or

eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, nor will it cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

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, or the degree to which the action may adversely affect: 1) a proposed to be listed endangered or threatened species or its habitat, or 2) a species on BLM's sensitive species list.** There would be a "minor, positive impact" for Mexican spotted owl by instituting the proposed action.
10. **Whether the action threatens a violation of a federal, state, local, or tribal law, regulation or policy imposed for the protection of the environment, where non-federal requirements are consistent with federal requirements.** The project does not violate any known federal, state, local or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.


Authorized Officer


Date

DECISION RECORD

DOI-BLM-UT-Y010-2015-0227-EA

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has conducted an environmental analysis (EA # DOI- BLM-UT-Y010-2015-0227) for a proposed action to restrict roped activities at Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges. Two alternatives were analyzed for their environmental impacts (Proposed Action and No Action).

It is my decision to approve the Proposed Action, which authorizes the restriction of roped activities on 31 acres surrounding Corona Arch and on 6.3 acres around Gemini Bridges. This permanent restriction would not be instituted until its publication in the Federal Register, although the temporary restriction on the activities is still in effect. See the Maps in the above referenced EA for the exact areas of the restriction.

Authorities: The authority for this decision is in CFR 43 8364.1 – Closure and restriction orders.

PLAN CONFORMANCE AND CONSISTENCY:

The Proposed Action has been reviewed and found to be in conformance with the 2008 Moab BLM Resource Management Plan. The Corona Arch area is within the Goldbar Hiking Focus Area, which is specifically managed to enhance hiking opportunities. Decision REC-39 (page 90) states: “Manage the Corona Arch Trail for hiking only.” Gemini Bridges is within the Gemini Bridges/Poison Spider Mesa Focus area. Decision REC-39 (page 91) states: “close the spur route to Gemini Bridges to facilitate public use and help restore damaged lands along the spur route.” The RMP further authorized closing the spur route to Gemini Bridges and reconfiguring it as a hiking trail to facilitate public use.

Rationale for Decision: the Proposed Action meets the purpose and need for the project by eliminating user conflict between hikers and roped activity participants at Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges.

The public was notified of the proposed action by posting on the ePlanning website on November 1, 2015. A formal scoping period was held on the proposal; three comments were received during the scoping period, all supporting the permanent restriction of Roped Activities on the two arches. The EA was made available for public comment on January 29, 2016; 22 letters were received during that period. Of these, 15 comments fully supported the restriction; 7 comments were opposed to the restriction.

Protest/Appeal Language:

The decision may be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of the Secretary, in accordance with the regulations contained in 43 CFR Part 4. Within 30 days of this decision, a notice of appeal must be filed in the office of the Authorized Officer at Moab Field Office, Bureau of Land Management, 82 East Dogwood, Moab, Utah 84532. If a statement of reasons for the appeal is not included with the notice, it must be filed with the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of Hearings and Appeals, U.S. Department of the Interior, 801 North Quincy St., Suite 300, Arlington, VA 22203 within 30 days after the notice of appeal is filed with the Authorized Officer.

If you wish to file a petition for stay pursuant to 43 CFR Part 4.21(b)), the petition for stay should accompany your notice of appeal and shall show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

1. The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied,
2. The likelihood of the appellant’s success on the merits,
3. The likelihood of irreparable harm to the appellant or resources if the stay is not granted, and
4. Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

If a petition for stay is submitted with the notice of appeal, a copy of the notice of appeal and petition for stay must be served on each party named in the decision from which the appeal is taken, and with the IBLA at the same time it is filed with the Authorized Officer.

A copy of the notice of appeal, any statement of reasons and all pertinent documents must be served on each adverse party named in the decision from which the appeal is taken and on the Office of the Regional Solicitor, U.S. Department of the Interior, 6201 Federal Building, 125 South State Street, Salt Lake City, Utah 84138-1180, not later than 15 days after filing the document with the Authorized Officer and/or IBLA.


Authorized Officer


Date

Attachments: EA # DOI-BLM-UT-Y010-2015-0227, which includes maps of the restricted areas.

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management**

Environmental Assessment DOI-BLM-UT-2015-0227-EA

March 2016

**Permanent Restriction of Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges to
Roped Activities**

Location: Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges, Grand County, Utah

Applicant/Address: Bureau of Land Management, 82 East Dogwood, Moab, UT 8453

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Moab Field Office
82 East Dogwood
Moab, UT 84532
Phone: 435-259-2100



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

INTRODUCTION

The Moab Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposes to enact a permanent restriction (in accordance with regulations found at 43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) §8364) at Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges to ban activities involving ropes, cables, vectran, climbing aids, webbing or anchors; hereafter these activities will be referred to as “roped activities”. Activities affected by this restriction include, but are not limited to: ziplining, high-lining, slacklining, climbing, rappelling, and rope swinging. The two locations are heavily visited by the general hiking public.

Over the past several years, the BLM had received comments from the public that the aforementioned activities pose a conflict with their use and enjoyment at Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges. On January 6, 2015, the BLM concluded a very public environmental assessment process resulting in a Decision Record closing the two arches to roped activities for a period of two years. The temporary restriction was enacted by a publication in the *Federal Register* on May 14, 2015. The decision was appealed to Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA); IBLA upheld the BLM’s decision on July 22, 2015. Since the imposition of the temporary restriction on roped activities, the BLM has received one report of a violation. Furthermore, the BLM has received letters of thanks from those who wish to view and photograph these iconic arches free from swinging people. Since the temporary restriction has resolved the user conflicts and has been accepted by the public, the BLM is now considering making the restriction permanent.

This Environmental Assessment is being prepared to analyze the impacts of permanently restricting the uses listed above at Corona Arch (on approximately 31 acres) and Gemini Bridges (on approximately 6.3 acres). Comments received during the public comment period for the temporary restriction were considered concerning the longer-term restriction, as stated during the temporary restriction process.

Both Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges are located within the Labyrinth Rims/Gemini Bridges Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA). Corona Arch is furthermore located within the Goldbar Hiking Focus Area (a sub-management unit of the SRMA). These attractions are heavily visited and require hiking to access; the hike to Corona Arch is approximately 1.5 miles in length, and the hike to Gemini Bridges is about 0.25 miles in length. These geological features are two of the most popular such features on BLM-administered public lands in the Moab Field Office.

See Appendix B for maps of the specific areas around the two arches where roped activities are proposed to be permanently restricted.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

Both Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges are outstanding geologic formations in spectacularly scenic settings at the end of hiking trails. Both features have been very popular destinations for

hikers, sightseers and photographers for many years. It is estimated that 40,000 people visit Corona Arch and 50,000 people visit Gemini Bridges each year. Both geological features, but especially Corona Arch, are among the most often photographed sites on BLM lands. In recent years (prior to the temporary restriction), Gemini Bridges and Corona Arch and their vicinities have been utilized by a small number of visitors engaging in roped activities. This had led to a number of complaints from the general public about the roped activities diminishing the experience of hikers, photographers and sightseers.

The need for this action is for the BLM to develop a permanent management stratagem to address user conflicts in the vicinities of Gemini Bridges and Corona Arch.

The purpose for the action is to extend the temporary two year restriction on roped activities and make this restriction permanent.

CONFORMANCE WITH BLM LAND USE PLAN

The proposed action described below is in conformance with the 2008 Moab Resource Management Plan (RMP). The Corona Arch area is within the Goldbar Hiking Focus Area, which is specifically managed to enhance hiking opportunities. Decision REC-39 (page 90) states: "Manage the Corona Arch Trail for hiking only".

Gemini Bridges is within the Gemini Bridges/Poison Spider Mesa Focus area. Decision REC-39 states: "close the spur route to Gemini Bridges to facilitate public use and help restore damaged lands along the spur route." The RMP further authorized the creation of a hiking route to Gemini Bridges to facilitate public use.

Ziplining, highlining, slacklining and rope swinging were not specifically addressed in the 2008 Moab RMP.

RELATIONSHIPS TO STATUTES, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PLANS

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act mandates multiple use of Public Lands, including recreation use. An objective of BLM's recreation policy is to satisfy recreation demand within allowable use levels in an equitable, safe and enjoyable manner, while minimizing user conflicts.

CHAPTER 2 DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES

INTRODUCTION

There are two alternatives: (a) the Proposed Action, which would make permanent the restriction of roped activities at Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges areas; and (b) No Action, which is to not approve the permanent restriction of roped activities.

PROPOSED ACTION

The BLM proposes to restrict the areas around Corona Arch (totaling 31 acres) and Gemini Bridges (totaling 6.3 acres) to activities involving ropes, cables, vectran, climbing aids, webbing or anchors; hereafter these activities will be referred to as “roped activities”. Roped activities include, but is not limited to: ziplining, high-lining, slacklining, climbing, rappelling and rope swinging. The restriction would make permanent the temporary, two-year ban on such activities. The restricted area does not include the fin behind Corona Arch that is used to access the top of the mesa (see detailed map of the Corona Arch restricted area in Appendix B). In addition, the restricted area does not include the eastern wall across from Gemini Bridges (see detailed map of the Gemini Bridges restricted area in Appendix B).

NO ACTION

The BLM would not approve a permanent restriction to roped activities at Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges. Activities involving ropes, cables, vectran, climbing aids, webbing or anchors, including (but not limited to) ziplining, high-lining, slacklining, climbing, rappelling and rope swinging would be allowed at Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges at the conclusion of the two-year temporary restriction (May, 2017).

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT ELIMINATED FROM FURTHER ANALYSIS

During analysis of the temporary restriction, the BLM considered three alternatives, but eliminated them from further analysis. These three alternatives were:

- 1) An alternative that would restrict roped activities to those holding a commercial or organized event Special Recreation Permit from the Moab BLM;
- 2) An alternative that would require a permit to engage in roped activities in the affected areas, whether the activity be commercial or private;
- 3) An alternative that would establish certain times and/or days when roped activities could occur in the restricted areas (temporal zoning).

These variations on additional action alternatives were eliminated because they did not meet the purpose and need for the proposed action, which is to eliminate user conflict at the two locations. Visitors hiking to these locations are equally conflicted by roped activities whether the use is private or commercial. While requiring a permit could lessen the number of people engaged in roped activities, the user conflict would still persist.

Temporal zoning (separating uses by time slots) was eliminated because while it might mitigate the user conflict, it would not eliminate it. This is primarily due to the nature of the visitation to these two arches. Unlike destinations that are local in nature (such as Mill Creek Canyon near Salt Lake City), visitors to Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges come from all over the United States and the world. These visitors might be able to visit Corona Arch or Gemini Bridges on only one day in their entire lives. Temporal zoning would do little to eliminate the user conflict when the hiking clientele is almost entirely from outside the local area and would most probably be unaware of the temporal zoning.

The same rationale is applied to the present consideration of a permanent restriction, and thus the three alternatives are eliminated from further analysis for the same reasons as stated above.

CHAPTER 3 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL SETTING

The affected environment of the Proposed Action and No Action alternatives was considered and analyzed by an interdisciplinary team as documented in Appendix A, the Interdisciplinary Team Analysis Record Checklist. The checklist indicates which resources of concern are either not present in the project area, or would not be impacted to a degree that requires detailed analysis. Critical Elements of the Human Environment are those elements that are subject to the requirements specified in statute, regulation, or executive order, and must be considered in all EAs (BLM H-1790-1, Appendix 5). Critical Elements of the Human Environment are included in Appendix A. Resources, including Critical Elements, which would be impacted to a level requiring further analysis are described in Chapter 3 and impacts on these resources are analyzed in Chapter 4 below.

The following Critical Element of the human environment, Recreation, is present in the project area, and would be impacted by the proposed action, because the recreation experience of the majority of recreationists would be enhanced; conversely, the recreation experience of a small number of recreationists would be restricted at the two locations in question. Since Visual Resources are an important part of the experience enjoyed by visitors to these areas, Visual Resources will be considered as a component of Recreation; the two resources are analyzed together.

The following Critical Elements of the human environment would not be negatively impacted to a degree that requires detailed analysis by the proposed action: Air Quality, Floodplains, Soils, Water Resources, Cultural Resources, Native American Religious Concerns, Socioeconomics, Environmental Justice, , Lands with Wilderness Characteristics, Threatened Endangered or Candidate Animal Species, Migratory Birds, Utah BLM Sensitive Species, Fish and Wildlife, Invasive Species, Livestock Grazing, Rangeland Health Standards, Vegetation, Woodland/Forestry, Fuels, Geology, Lands and Paleontology.

The following critical elements are Not Present: Wetlands, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Wastes, Threatened, Endangered or Candidate Plant Species, Wild and Scenic Rivers, BLM Natural Areas, and Wilderness.

Recreation/Visual Resources

Corona Arch

Corona Arch was owned by the State of Utah until May 8, 2014. On that date, the Utah Recreational Land Exchange (Public Law 111-53) was signed, which deeded 25,034 acres to the U.S. Government (to be managed by the BLM) in 58 separate parcels. One of the parcels deeded

to the BLM was the section containing Corona Arch. Corona Arch is one of the most heavily visited backcountry geologic sites on public lands managed by the BLM Moab Field Office; the trail register shows that over 40,000 people per year make the hike to the arch. The towering geological feature measures 140 by 105 feet and is located within a rock bowl that also contains nearby Bowtie Arch. (Bowtie Arch is one of only five portal photos on the Utah BLM website). Visitors approach the two arches via a foot trail that is approximately 1.5 miles long. As hikers round the last corner on the trail, Corona and Bowtie arches suddenly appear in a spectacular setting. There is often an atmosphere of quiet reverence on the part of visitors as they grasp the enormity of the view.

Very few reports of roped activities on the arch were received prior to the posting (February 15, 2012) of a YouTube video entitled "World's Largest Rope Swing". In January of 2013, the State of Utah forbade commercial outfitters from rope swinging on Corona Arch, although private use of the arch for rope swinging was not disallowed. Roped activities in the rock bowl containing the two arches occurred with some regularity, although the number of visitors engaging in these activities was estimated to be small. It was not uncommon that shouting and screaming accompanied engagement in roped activities.

There had been reported conflicts between hikers and people engaging in roped activities from 2012 to January 6, 2015 (the date of the temporary restriction). The most notable of these conflicts involved a permitted group that was authorized to have Passover under the arch, but was impeded by the presence of a group of people utilizing the arch for rope swinging. This incident was investigated by the Grand County Sheriff's Department. In public comment on the temporary restriction, many hikers and photographers described in detail the conflicts that they had had with rope swingers on Corona Arch. On March 24, 2013, a man was killed while swinging on Corona Arch in view of 70 people, including many children. Another man was severely injured while swinging on Corona Arch in May of 2014, again in view of many visitors.

The Corona Arch bowl is also used by at least one commercial permittee to access the mesa above. This access point is not within the restricted area. Clients cross the mesa and descend from it at a location that is not within the Corona Arch bowl. The commercial permittee places a hand line up the back-most fin so that clients can walk up the fin more safely.

Corona Arch is also a frequently utilized location for commercial hiking trips. There are about 30 permittees that are authorized to guide visitors along the hiking trail to Corona Arch.

There are bolts present on the arch and its vicinity as well as noticeable scarring of the arch that has been caused by roped activities. The scarring of the rock at Corona Arch is particularly visible because the movement of the swinging ropes "saws" into the arch and leaves a mark on the arch itself. The rope "burn" removes the desert varnish from the rock and the burn appears as a lighter, pinkish line on the arch. It is unknown whether or not these scars diminish the integrity of the arch. Visitors have expressed concerns about the effects on visual resources due to the presence of bolts, scars in the rock on the arch, and the presence of people on and hanging from the arch, as well as the noise made by these recreationists. Commenters on the EA analyzing the temporary closure offered firsthand accounts of this noise, including setting off of fireworks from the top of the arch as the swing was commenced.

Commenters on the EA analyzing temporary closure expressed concerns about the dangers to hikers below from objects falling from the arch above as those engaged in roped activities set up their gear; several commenters offered first-hand accounts of objects falling from the top of the arch. One commenter stated that he and a nearby teen-aged boy were nearly struck by the person swinging through the arch. Other commenters pointed out that there has been trauma caused by witnessing death and injury, especially on the part of children.

Commenters on the EA analyzing temporary closure stated that they (as hikers and photographers) have been displaced from a prime public land location by the activities of a few individuals. One family stated that they travelled from Salt Lake City to obtain their family Christmas photo at Corona Arch and the presence of rope swingers made it impossible to complete the mission.

Since the temporary restriction was imposed, there have been no reports of user conflicts as roped activities seem to have ceased. Compliance with the restriction has been exemplary and the arch has been “returned” to the hikers and photographers.

The arch is featured in many guidebooks, on many websites and in numerous brochures. The visitor register shows that visitors come from all over the world to hike to Corona Arch; it is an internationally recognized destination.

Gemini Bridges

Gemini Bridges has long been a popular destination for visitors to the Moab area. While there is no trail register at the location, the BLM estimates that at least 50,000 people per year visit the Gemini Bridges. The arch is featured in guidebooks and brochures.

The Gemini Bridges are two twin spans that are about 5 feet apart; each of these natural bridges measures about 20 by 80 feet. The Gemini Bridges are situated at the head of a side canyon. Prior to 2008, the Gemini Bridges could be accessed by motorized vehicle. The 2008 Travel Plan accompanying the Moab RMP closed this 0.25 mile of route to motorized vehicles. In 2009, Grand County and the BLM constructed a parking area and converted the motorized route into a hiking trail. Visitors now approach the Gemini Bridges on foot to enjoy the view through the Bridges.

Prior to the temporary restriction of January, 2015, highlining between the two rims of the canyon containing the Gemini Bridges was the primary roped activity occurring in this location. Also occurring in this location was rappelling through the bridges as well as ziplining from the canyon edge to the bridges. It is estimated that a very small number of people engaged in these activities. These types of activities are fully visible from the bridges and from the hiking approach to the bridges. Visitors have also expressed concerns about the impacts to the rock from bolts and hardware as well as the scars made by the rope on the rock surface. The rappel on the east wall of the Gemini Bridges bowl is not included in the restricted area.

CHAPTER 4

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

DIRECT AND INDIRECT IMPACTS

PROPOSED ACTION

This section analyzes the impacts of the proposed action to those resources described in the Affected Environment, Chapter 3, above.

Recreation/Visual Resource

A permanent restriction of roped activities at Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges would be expected to enhance the experience for the majority of the visitors to the features. Comments received from the public during the temporary restriction process were heavily in favor of the restriction. Many of these commenters explained how their personal experience was negatively impacted by roped activities, especially swinging at Corona Arch and its associated noise. Conversely, the permanent restriction would deny what is estimated to be a small number of people the opportunity to engage in roped activities at the two locations. The estimated small number of visitors wishing to engage in roped activities would be unable to do so at Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges. Therefore, the permanent restriction would impact the enjoyment of roped users at Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges.

The future impacts to Corona Arch and to Gemini Bridges and their vicinities resulting from rope scarring, and the addition of hardware (including bolts) would be lessened because Roped Activities would not be allowed at these two locations.

The estimated small number of visitors who participate in roped activities and would likely choose to engage in roped activities in other areas within the Moab Area (such as the Fruit Bowl) where these activities have not been restricted. Those who wish to engage in Roped Activities would be able to do so at many other locations within the Moab Field Office.

Corona Arch

The general visitor to Corona Arch would have the opportunity to enjoy the view of and photograph the arch without people engaging in roped activities on it. Since noise often accompanies these types of roped activities, the restriction would be expected to lessen noise levels in the vicinity of the arch. Based on public complaints about noise, the lessening of noise would be expected to enhance the visitor experience for the majority of visitors in the Corona Arch bowl. The fact that visitors to Corona Arch have undertaken a 1.5 mile walk to get there means that the arch experience is a hard-won backcountry goal; many of these visitors wish to quietly enjoy the arch and its setting once they arrive. An example of this is that visitors usually view the arch from afar, take photos, walk underneath the arch, and then vacate the space so that the next set of visitors can partake in the same routine. When visitors are engaging in roped activities, it generally occupies the Corona Arch "space" for an extended period of time, which means that for many visitors the viewing as well as photographic opportunities are lost. As visitors come from all over the world to see Corona Arch, many of these visitors will have only a single opportunity to enjoy the view, setting, and to photograph Corona Arch. It is expected that the proposed permanent restriction of roped activities would manage for the experience being sought by the majority of visitors.

Restricting roped activities permanently would mean that there would be no danger posed to hikers below from objects falling from the top of the arch, or from swingers inadvertently hitting a hiker below. Restriction of roped activities would also mean that the noise associated with roped activities would be curtailed. There would be less chance of an indirect effect of the trauma associated with witnessing death and injury if roped activities were permanently disallowed. The scarring of the arch by "rope burns" would cease, and the bolts formerly used to support ropes could be removed.

Gemini Bridges

The general visitor to Gemini Bridges would have the opportunity to enjoy the view of and photograph the bridges without people engaging in roped activities on them. For many visitors who walk down to the Gemini Bridges, there will be one lifetime opportunity to visit it. To view and photograph the bridges in their natural state requires the absence of those engaged in roped activities. Conversely, those who enjoy roped activities on the six acres of rock in the Gemini Bridges area would be forced to seek their activity at other locations.

NO ACTION

The No Action alternative would mean that roped activities would continue at both Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges after the cessation of the temporary restriction. There would be no permanent restriction of the two areas to such activities.

Recreation/Visual Resources

Based on input received from the public, many of the 40,000 visitors per year that visit Corona Arch would continue to risk having their experience diminished or possibly ruined by the presence of those engaged in roped activities. These visitors would not have the guarantee of an "unoccupied" arch awaiting them at the end of their 1.5 mile walk; in addition, they would not be able to obtain a photograph of the arch in its natural state when it was occupied by those engaged in roped activities. The noise that usually accompanies such roped activities would continue, diminishing the sense of reverence that many visitors have come to Corona Arch to experience. The recreation experience of the majority of visitors would be lessened; some would be displaced altogether from enjoying Corona Arch. Visual impacts would increase as additional hardware is installed (including bolts) and as scars caused by ropes increase and deepen from use.

Some of the 50,000 visitors per year that visit Gemini Bridges would continue to risk having their experience diminished or ruined by other visitors engaging in roped activities. People visiting when roped activities are taking place at Gemini Bridges would not be able to experience the bridges in their natural state. The noise that usually accompanies such roped activities would continue, which is expected to continue diminishing the experience for some visitors at Gemini Bridges. Visual impacts would increase as additional hardware is installed (including bolts) and as scars caused by ropes increase and deepen from use.

Those visitors who come to the Moab area to engage in roped activities would continue to use these two venues for their sport.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Cumulative impacts are those impacts resulting from the incremental impact of an action when added to other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable actions regardless of what agency or person undertakes such other actions.

At Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges, hiking and sightseeing are the major uses. Overall hiking use is expected to increase at moderate levels as Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges continue to grow in popularity as destination locations. In addition, the demand for the use of Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges for roped activities is also expected to increase. Increases in the interest by the different recreation uses is expected to result in an increasing conflict and impacts to the visitor experiences for visitors engaging in both types of activities.

CHAPTER 5 PERSONS, GROUPS, AND AGENCIES CONSULTED

During preparation of this EA, the public was notified of the proposed action by posting on the BLM's ePlanning website on November 1, 2015. A formal scoping period was announced on the BLM Moab and Utah State Office websites; the press release announcing the scoping period was published in the Moab *Times Independent* on November 5, 2015 and in the Salt Lake City *Deseret News* on November 16, 2015. The scoping period concluded on December 2, 2015.

Three comments were received as a result of the scoping period. All three were in favor of the permanent restriction of roped activities on the two arches. Two people raised the issue of user conflict, and one person brought up the impact of roped activities on the beauty and integrity of the arches.

The BLM announced a comment period, inviting the public to comment on the EA by posting the document on the ePlanning website on January 29, 2016, and a comment period was held till February 19, 2016. A press release announcing the availability of EA was issued and was posted on the Moab BLM webpage as well as the BLM Utah State Office webpage. The Press Release was published in the Moab *Times Independent* on February 4, 2016, in the Moab *Sun News* on February 4, 2016 and in the Salt Lake City *Deseret News* on February 10, 2016.

Twenty-two comments were received during the comment period on the EA. Fifteen fully supported the ban on roped activities for a variety of reasons. Seven commenters did not support the ban on roped activities.

The chart below summarizes the comments and provides BLM responses to them.

Comment Summary/Number of times mentioned	BLM Response
<i>Comments Supporting the Ban of Roped Activities</i>	
Swinging and other roped activities detract	The impacts to hikers are detailed in the EA,

Comment Summary/Number of times mentioned	BLM Response
from the scenery that the majority of people come to see. Roped activity ruins the experience of other people (15).	including the time it takes to set up for roped activities. This means that hikers cannot “wait their turn” as the roped activities take up the majority of the day.
Roped activities, especially swinging, cause defacement of the rock (8)	The impact to the rock itself, including the visual impacts are noted in the EA.
The noise that accompanies these activities impacts or ruins the experience of others (10). I come to places like Corona Arch for a quiet, serene and “sacred” experience.	The impacts of noise associated with roped activities to the hikers coming to Corona Arch is detailed in the EA.
<i>Comments Opposing the Ban of Roped Activities</i>	
People complain too much and are too easily offended by such activities. Hikers diminish my experience, too. (1)	The BLM does not side with one activity versus another; however, the number of people who enjoy Corona Arch by hiking far exceeds those who enjoy Corona Arch by swinging.
There should be no restrictions on activities on BLM lands (3)	Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges are within Special Recreation Management Areas. BLM can restrict activities to foster proper management of recreation within SRMAs.
The arch should not be closed because of safety concerns – where will it stop?(2)	The arch is not being closed for safety concerns, but rather for user conflicts. Every other area of BLM lands in the Moab Field Office remains open to roped activities (although new bolts are prohibited in WSAs). Those interested in rope swinging are free to do so at any other BLM venues.
Employ a designated swinging day. Set up one day of the week (or month) during which roped activities can occur (1)	Discussion of such an alternative is found in Chapter 2 of the EA, “Alternatives Considered, but Eliminated from Further Analysis”.

BLM Preparers

Name	Title	Responsible for the Following Section(s) of this Document
Ann Marie Aubry	Hydrologist	Soil, Air Quality, Floodplains, Water Resources
Mark Grover	Ecologist	Wetlands
Bill Stevens	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Socioeconomics, BLM Natural Areas, Wilderness/WSA, Lands with Wilderness Characteristics, Environmental Justice
Pamela Riddle	Wildlife Biologist	T&E Animals, Wildlife, Migratory Birds, Utah BLM Sensitive Species
Jared Lundell	Archeologist	Cultural, Native American
Katie Stevens	Outdoor Recreation	Team Leader, Recreation, VRM, ACECs, Wild and

	Planner	Scenic Rivers
David Williams	Rangeland Management Specialist	Threatened, Endangered or Candidate Plant Species
Jordan Davis	Rangeland Management Specialist	Invasive Species, Livestock Grazing, RHS, Vegetation, Woodlands
Jason Kirks	Fuels	Fuels
David Pals	Geologist	Wastes, Geology
Jan Denney	Realty Specialist	Lands
ReBecca Hunt Foster	Paleontology	Paleontology

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interdisciplinary Team Analysis Record Checklist

Appendix B: Maps:

- 1) Map of proposed restriction around Corona Arch
- 2) Map of proposed restriction around Gemini Bridges

Appendix A: INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM CHECKLIST

Project Title: Permanent Restriction of Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges to Roped Activities

NEPA Log Number: DOI BLM UT Y010-2015-0227 EA

Project Leader: Katie Stevens

DETERMINATION OF STAFF: (Choose one of the following abbreviated options for the left column)

NP = not present in the area impacted by the proposed or alternative actions

NI = present, but not affected to a degree that detailed analysis is required

PI = present with potential for relevant impact that need to be analyzed in detail in the EA

NC = (DNAs only) actions and impacts not changed from those disclosed in the existing NEPA documents cited in Section D of the DNA form. The Rationale column may include NI and NP discussions.

The following elements are not present in the Moab Field Office and have been removed from the checklist:
Farmlands (Prime or Unique), Wild Horses and Burros.

Determination	Resource	Rationale for Determination*	Signature	Date
RESOURCES AND ISSUES CONSIDERED (INCLUDES SUPPLEMENTAL AUTHORITIES APPENDIX 1 H-1790-1)				
NI	Air Quality Greenhouse Gas Emissions		A.M. Aubry	12/16/15
NI	Floodplains		A.M. Aubry	12/16/15
NI	Soils		A.M. Aubry	12/16/15
NI	Water Resources/Quality (drinking/surface/ground)		A.M. Aubry	12/16/15
NP	Wetlands/Riparian Zones	None Found	Mark Grover	12/15/15
NP	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern	See 2008 Moab RMP	Katie Stevens	12/15/15
PI	Recreation	Would affect recreationists	Katie Stevens	12/15/15
NP	Wild and Scenic Rivers	See 2008 Moab RMP	Katie Stevens	12/15/15
PI	Visual Resources	Activity affects the feature that the public comes to view	Katie Stevens	12/15/15
NP	BLM Natural Areas	See 2008 Moab RMP	Bill Stevens	12/15/15
NI	Socio-Economics		Bill Stevens	12/15/15
NP	Wilderness/WSA	See 2008 Moab RMP	Bill Stevens	12/15/15
NI	Lands with Wilderness Characteristics	The Proposed Action would increase the availability of outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation, necessary attributes for wilderness characteristics.	Bill Stevens	12/16/15
NI	Cultural Resources		Jared Lundell	12/15/15
NI	Native American Religious Concerns		Jared Lundell	12/15/15

Determination	Resource	Rationale for Determination*	Signature	Date
NI	Environmental Justice		Bill Stevens	12/15/15
NP	Wastes (hazardous or solid)		David Pals	12/15/15
NI	Threatened, Endangered or Candidate Animal Species	Minor, positive impacts to Mexican Spotted Owl habitat	Pam Riddle	12/15/15
NI	Migratory Birds	Minor, positive impacts to habitat	Pam Riddle	12/15/15
NI	Utah BLM Sensitive Species	Minor, positive impacts to habitat	Pam Riddle	12/15/15
NI	Fish and Wildlife Excluding USFW Designated Species	Minor, positive impacts to habitat	Pam Riddle	12/15/15
NI	Invasive Species/Noxious Weeds		Jordan Davis	12/15/15
NP	Threatened, Endangered or Candidate Plant Species		Dave Williams	12/15/15
NI	Livestock Grazing		Jordan Davis	12/15/15
NI	Rangeland Health Standards		Jordan Davis	12/15/15
NI	Vegetation Excluding USFW Designated Species		Jordan Davis	12/15/15
NI	Woodland / Forestry		Jordan Davis	12/15/15
NI	Fuels/Fire Management		Jason Kirks	12/15/15
NI	Geology / Mineral Resources/Energy Production		David Pals	12/15/15
NI	Lands/Access	No conflict with land use authorization	Jan Denney	12/15/15
NI	Paleontology		R. Hunt-Foster	12/15/15

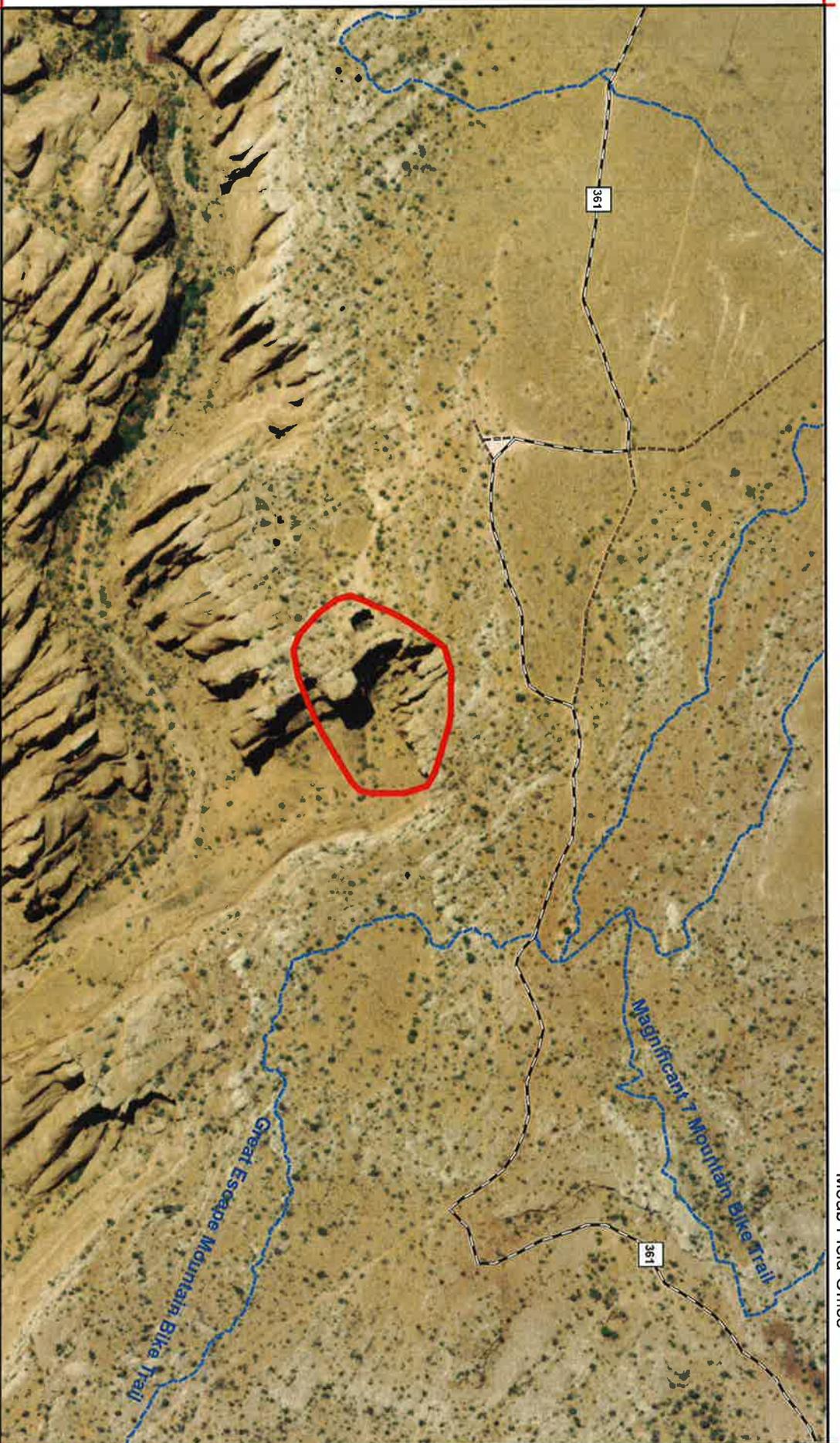
FINAL REVIEW:

Reviewer Title	Signature	Date	Comments
Environmental Coordinator	Katie Stevens <i>KS</i>	3/21/16	
Authorized Officer	Beth Ransel <i>R. Ransel. My acty for</i>	5/5/2016	

Gemini Bridges Restricted Area

R 20E

DOI-BLM-UT-V010-2015-0227 EA
Bureau of Land Management
Moab Field Office



T 25S

T 25S

R 20E

Location Map
Utah BLM Field Office Boundaries



12/10/2015

- Gemini Bridges Restricted Area
- B Roads (Maintained)
- D Roads (Unmaintained)
- Mountain Bike Trails

Scale = 1:6,000



No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual use or aggregate use with other data.

Corona Arch Restricted Area

R 21E

DOI-BLM-UT-Y010-2015-0227 EA
Bureau of Land Management
Moab Field Office



T 26S

T 25S

T 26S

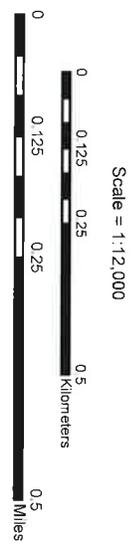
T 25S

Location Map
Utah BLM Field Office Boundaries



12/10/2015

-  Corona Arch Restricted Area
-  State and Federal Highways
-  D Roads (Unmaintained)
-  Corona Arch Hiking Trail
-  Corona Arch Trailhead



No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual use or aggregate use with other data.