

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

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**Environmental Assessment  
DOI-BLM-AZ-P010-2016-0020-EA  
February 2016**

**Trailhead adjacent to the  
Hassayampa River Canyon Wilderness**

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[Staging Area outside of the Hassayampa River Canyon Wilderness Area]

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# **1. INTRODUCTION**

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## **1.1 Background**

The Hassayampa River Canyon Wilderness is located approximately 16 miles northeast of Wickenburg, Arizona via Constellation Road (see Figure 1). Visitors to the Hassayampa River Canyon Wilderness Area have been using an informal trailhead area outside of the wilderness as a staging area, causing the area to increase in size. This trailhead borders private lands and some wilderness users have been trespassing onto the adjacent private property. To limit the footprint of the trailhead and the amount of trespass, the BLM proposes to provide up to five picnic tables with optional ramadas; install fencing and signs to limit the footprint and prevent trespass; level the parking area to increase safety for visitors; and use mechanical or manual means to control vegetation at the trailhead. In addition, a restroom may be installed to contain human waste and provide for visitor health and safety.

## **1.2 Purpose and Need for Action**

The purpose of the proposed project is to control the unmanaged expansion of the trailhead located outside of the Hassayampa River Canyon Wilderness. The need for the proposed project is to maintain healthy vegetation and wildlife habitat in the surrounding area while still allowing users access to the wilderness area. An additional need would be to limit user access to public land only to prevent further unintentional trespass onto the adjacent private property.

## **1.3 Decision to be Made**

The decision to be made for the action is whether or not to approve the further development of this area by installing fencing and posting signs, providing for amenities that accompany the type of use occurring in the area by wilderness visitors, and to manage for vegetative growth.

## **1.4 Land Use Plan Conformance**

The proposed project is in conformance with the Bradshaw Harquahala Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan (April 2010), including the following management action:

RR-21. Recreation management facilities will be planned, installed, and maintained where needed for: protecting resources, providing for visitor safety, resolving social conflicts, improving the quality of recreation experiences, and/or increasing recreation opportunities.

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
HASSAYAMPA FIELD OFFICE

### Trailhead Adjacent to Hassayampa River Canyon Wilderness Area

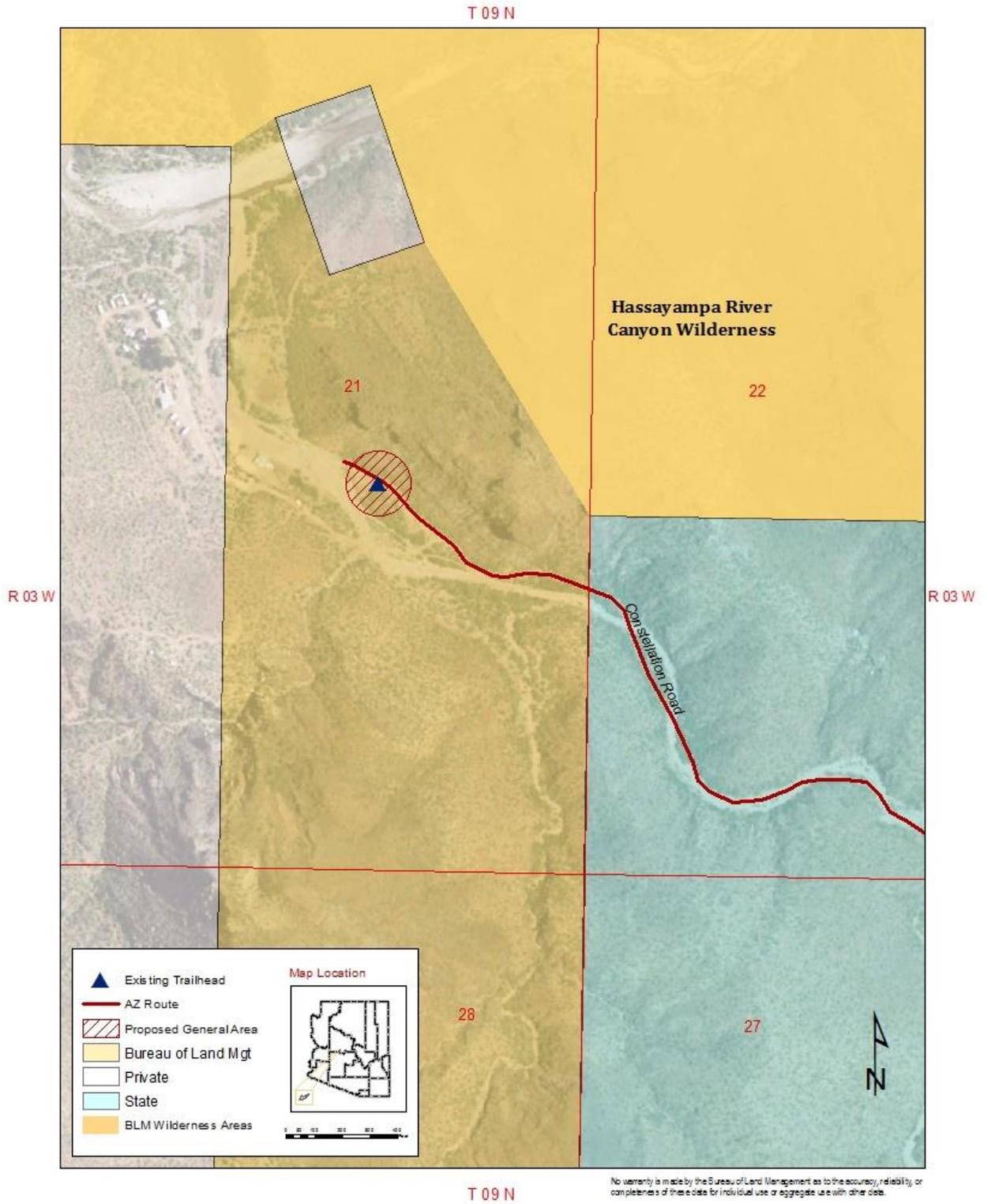


Figure 1. Location map of project area

### **1.5 Scoping & Public Participation**

A site visit was held with the adjacent landowner and a representative from the Arizona Game and Fish Department during 2013 to discuss concerns. The proposal was also presented to the BLM Phoenix District interdisciplinary team of specialists for internal scoping on April 14, 2014.

### **1.6 Issues Identified**

The issues identified are listed below:

- Contain the footprint of the parking/staging area that serves the adjacent wilderness area
- Discourage use of private property by recreation users
- Provide for amenities for recreation users at the trailhead which reflect the types of needs they have to enhance their recreation experience while providing for health and safety
- Provide a means to clear vegetative growth of the parking/staging area

## 2. ALTERNATIVES

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This section describes the alternatives considered to address the purpose and need, including the 'no action' alternative.

### 2.1 Alternative 1 - Proposed Action

The BLM proposes to limit the growing footprint of the Hassayampa River Canyon Wilderness to approximately 0.5 acres for a parking/staging area and up to 1 acre if use increases to a level that warrants expansion by installing barriers around the perimeter of the area and installing minimal signs, if needed. The materials of the barriers can range from pipe rail to smooth wire, the aesthetic placement of boulders, or other similar materials. Installation of the barriers may involve the use of heavy equipment to excavate holes or place boulders in appropriate locations. Other types of barriers, such as pipe rail or smooth wire fencing, may be installed with the use of a pneumatic hammer or drill or hand tools.

Up to five picnic tables with possible ramadas will be placed at this site away from the parking area to offer the visitor a place to eat, load/unload their equipment, and rest. Installation of the picnic tables and ramadas would require the use of heavy equipment. Vegetative management by blading the area, weed whacking, or other methods would be used to maintain the site, not to exceed 1 acre, and provide for a safer environment. If need be, a restroom would be added to the site to provide for a safe and healthy environment. All amenities would be designed to blend into the environment to meet the visual resource management Class II standards.

Since the project area is located in category III Sonoran desert tortoise habitat, construction crews would look for and avoid tortoises. Prior to operating equipment or vehicles, the operator/driver would check underneath and around the equipment/vehicle for desert tortoises. If a tortoise must be moved to avoid harming it, it would be moved in accordance with Arizona Game and Fish Department's "Guidelines for Handling Sonoran Desert Tortoises Encountered on Development Projects."

### 2.2 Alternative 2 - No Action

The BLM will not alter the area, which will likely result in continued growth of the footprint of the parking/staging area, possible social conflicts among users, and vegetative growth that may look as if the area is abandoned. Safety and health issues would not be addressed through any new construction of facilities without additional NEPA analysis and unintentional trespassing on the bordering private property would likely continue.

### 3. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT & ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This section describes the existing condition of the potentially impacted resources and how they would or might be affected by the proposed action and alternatives.

#### 3.1 Definition of Terms

Common terms used to describe potential environmental impacts are defined as follows:

**Adverse:** An effect that is negative or detrimental to one or more resources (e.g. degrades its quality or integrity). In this document, the term “impact” is assumed to be adverse unless otherwise stated.

**Beneficial:** An effect that is positive or beneficial to one or more resources (.e.g enhances its quality or integrity)

**Cumulative:** Direct and indirect effects of the action combined with the incremental, additive effects of other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, on a given resource.

**Short-Term:** An effect that occurs only for a short time relative to the temporal scope of the action.

**Long-Term:** An effect that occurs for a long time relative to the temporal scope of the action.

#### 3.2 Analysis of Resources

**Table 1.** Resources and rationale for detailed analysis

Resource	Not Present	Present, Not Affected	Present, May Be Affected	Rationale
Air Quality		x		The minimal fugitive dust associated with construction of the proposed facilities would be localized to the project area and would not have a measurable impact on the overall air quality of surrounding area.
Areas of Critical Environmental Concern	x			Not present
Cultural Resources	x			A Class III survey of the project area revealed no sites.
Environmental Justice	x			None of the alternatives would disproportionately impact any low income or minority populations as described in

<b>Resource</b>	<b>Not Present</b>	<b>Present, Not Affected</b>	<b>Present, May Be Affected</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
				Executive Order 12898.
Farmlands (Prime and Unique)	x			Not present
Floodplains	x			No floodplains have been mapped in the vicinity of the proposed action and the proposed facilities would have no impact on any unmapped floodplain function for the Hassayampa River.
Native American Religious Concerns	x			No concerns have been expressed.
Non-native Invasive and Noxious Species	x			No non-native invasive or noxious species have been observed at the site.
Vegetation			x	See Section 3.3
Visual Resources		x		All proposed facilities will be designed to comply with the standards set forth for Visual Resource Management Class II.
Wastes (Hazardous and Solid)	x			Not present
Water Quality (Surface and Ground)	x			Not present
Wetlands and Riparian Zones	x			Not present
Wild and Scenic Rivers	x			Not present
Wilderness		x		This trailhead accesses the wilderness area, but is located completely outside of the wilderness boundary.

Resource	Not Present	Present, Not Affected	Present, May Be Affected	Rationale
Wildlife and Fish, including Threatened and Endangered Species, Special Status Species, and Migratory Birds			x	See Section 3.4

### 3.3 Vegetation

#### 3.3.1 Affected Environment

The project area consists of approximately a 0.5 acre parking/staging area which has already been cleared for parking and wilderness use information dissemination.

#### 3.3.2 Proposed Action

Impacts to vegetation under the proposed action would be minimal since the area proposed for development has already been cleared of almost all existing vegetation. The BLM would continue to maintain the area within the perimeter barriers as generally free of any vegetation to provide a clear space for visitor use. The construction of the barriers would prevent further unmanaged damage and removal of vegetation since the boundaries of the parking area would be more clearly defined.

#### 3.3.3 No Action Alternative

The impacts to vegetation may increase over time as the footprint continues to grow larger. Impacts would include trampling and crushing of vegetation if vehicles are parked outside of the currently disturbed area. If vegetation is damaged beyond survival, it will cause the area of bare ground to further increase.

### 3.4 Wildlife

#### 3.4.1 Affected Environment

The project area is currently used as a trailhead and is heavily disturbed; therefore it has little value as wildlife habitat. However, the project area is located in category III Sonoran desert tortoise habitat, and tortoises may be present in the vicinity of the project area.

#### 3.4.2 Proposed Action

Installation of the proposed facilities would cause short term adverse impacts for wildlife in the surrounding area due to the noise and activity associated with construction. However, long term impacts are expected to be beneficial by avoiding further unmanaged expansion of the disturbed

area. Design features related to protection of Sonoran desert tortoise should minimize any direct impacts from construction activities.

*3.4.3 No Action Alternative*

The parking area would continue to expand beyond 1.0 acre, which would result in further loss of vegetation that may function as habitat and food for wildlife.

## **4. CUMULATIVE EFFECTS**

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The CEQ defines cumulative effects (also known as cumulative impacts) as “the impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what (federal or non-federal) agency or person undertakes such actions” (40 CFR 1508.7). In other words, it is the sum total of the direct and indirect effects of the action and the direct and indirect effects of other actions on the same affected resource or resources (i.e. the overlap of the actions’ impacts). It is factored into the overall assessment of the significance of the proposed action’s/alternative’s impacts.

### **4.1 Cumulative Effects Study Area**

The cumulative effects study area includes the 0.5 acre project area and the immediate vicinity up to 1 acre.

### **4.2 Cumulatively Connected Actions**

#### *4.2.1 Past and Present Actions*

During major precipitation events, the Hassayampa River swells and has removed the wilderness portal sign and the visitor register box. Depending upon the volume of water rushing down the river, the potential to take out much more may occur, including parked vehicles. To date, no vehicles have been in the parking area during these events.

#### *4.2.2 Reasonably Foreseeable Future Actions*

The impacts from major precipitation events are expected to continue. The BLM is not aware of any proposed developments within the immediate vicinity of the project area.

### **4.3 Cumulative Effects**

The addition of the proposed facilities under the Proposed Action or the continuation of the current situation under the No Action Alternative will have no impacts on the severity or timing of precipitation events in the area. No cumulative effects are expected.

## **5. PARTIES CONSULTED**

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Arizona Game and Fish Department  
Williams Ranch

## **6. LIST OF PREPARERS**

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Mary Skordinsky- Wilderness and Recreation Specialist  
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Codey Carter – Wildlife Biologist  
Rem Hawes –Field Manager  
Gloria Tibbetts – Planning and Environmental Coordinator