

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

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

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

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1. INTRODUCTION

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

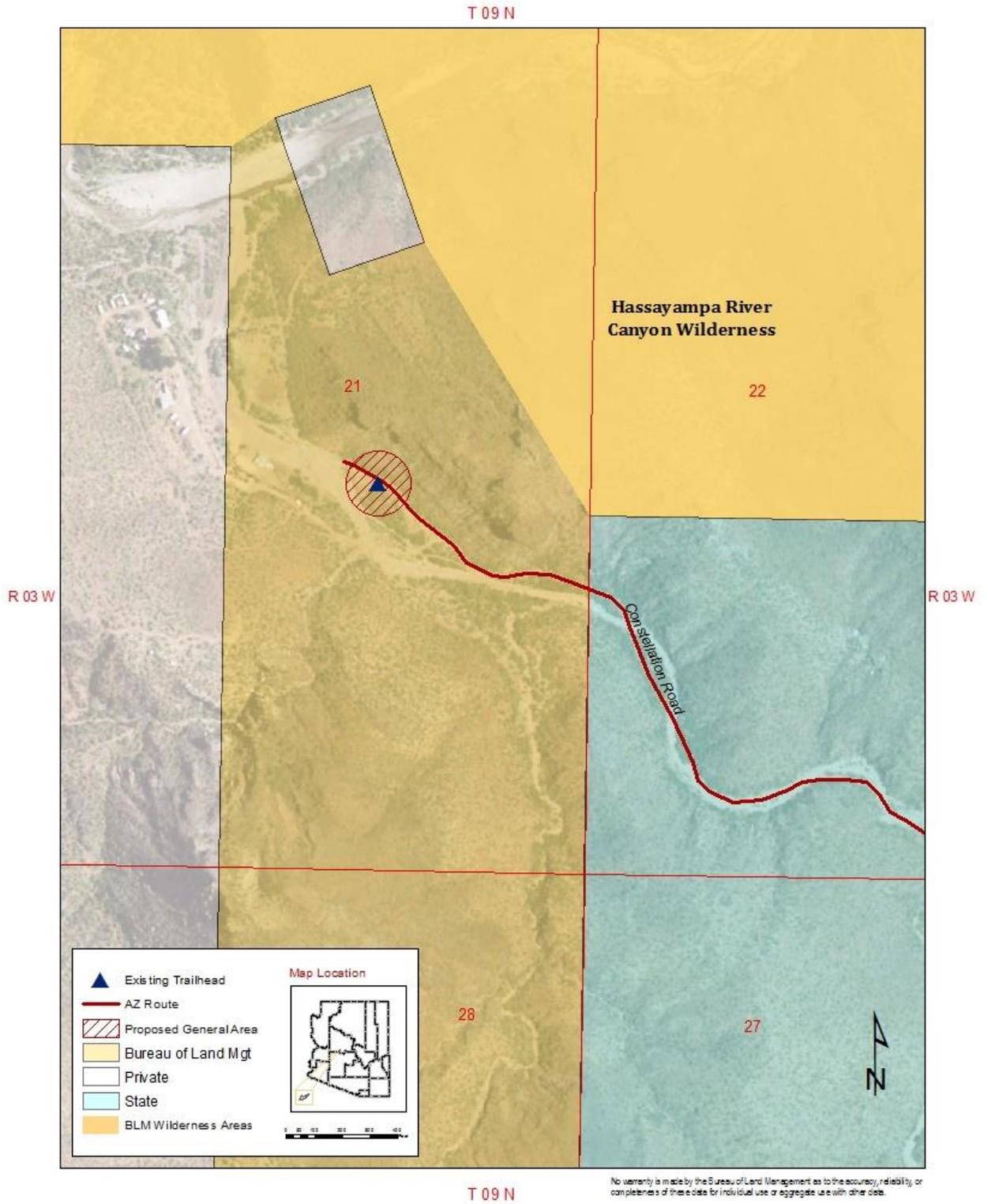


Figure 1. Location map of project area

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.

The environmental assessment was made available for public comment between February 10-26, 2016. Three responses were received and each of the comments is listed with an individual response from the BLM in Appendix A.

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

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

Resource	Not Present	Present, Not Affected	Present, May Be Affected	Rationale
				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

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

Arizona Game and Fish Department
Williams Ranch

6. LIST OF PREPARERS

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

APPENDIX A: RESPONSE TO PUBLIC COMMENTS

Comment Number	Commenter	Comment	Response
1	Joe Stevens	I believe we have the cart before the horse. There is no easement to the Wilderness area. Isn't that needed first?	The proposed trailhead is located on BLM land that is contiguous with the wilderness area. Information will be provided at the trailhead to inform the public of proper access routes on BLM land to minimize or eliminate trespass on adjacent private parcels.
2	Joe Stevens	Also, this parking area remains in Amazon wash. Ten plus years ago the parking area and sign in kiosk was on the south side of the river. The river took all that away so now the parking is on the north side. When will the river again do what rivers do and take out the current area. Why spend money on picnic tables, etc. when they can go away so easily. Parking is needed and the spot currently, without easement exists. I would leave it alone.	The BLM will further consider the design and placement of any planned improvements to minimize impacts from future storm events.

Comment Number	Commenter	Comment	Response
3	Barbara Hawke, Arizona Wilderness Coalition	Arizona Wilderness Coalition represents some 2,000 members, volunteers and supporters across the state who enjoy wilderness and backcountry areas on public lands for hiking, hunting, fishing, bird watching, equestrianism, nature study and much more. We have been involved in a very gratifying partnership project with the Bureau of Land Management to restore portions of the Hassayampa River Canyon Wilderness and greatly value the scenic, recreational and ecological benefits of this resource. We support improvement of the parking area described in the aforementioned document to increase sustainability, reduce resource damage, limit trespass on private property, and manage access to better preserve surrounding areas. The project as described should increase visitor amenities while discouraging inappropriate use.	Comment noted.
4	Barbara Hawke, Arizona Wilderness Coalition	We strongly support provision of educational and interpretative materials, including the use of kiosks and maps, to promote responsible use of public lands and protection of natural resources.	Materials made available at the kiosks would be consistent with this recommendation.
5	Barbara Hawke, Arizona Wilderness Coalition	We would not want to see any developments that might encourage motorized vehicles to intrude on the wilderness area, thus the use of fencing, barriers and signage is important. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.	The proposed improvements will be designed to discourage motorized vehicle use within the wilderness in compliance with the conditions of the Congressional designation.
6	Roy and Carrol and Doby Williams	We are very excited that you all are considering this access. We feel there is a real need for it.	Comment noted.

Comment Number	Commenter	Comment	Response
7	Roy and Carrol and Doby Williams	Our experience with the parking area, that possibly that 3 or 4 picnic tables and Ramada might be about right.	The proposed action is consistent with this recommendation, as stated in Section 2.1 of the EA, where up to five picnic tables are proposed.
8	Roy and Carrol and Doby Williams	An outhouse would be a really good addition.	The proposed action allows for the installation of a restroom if needed to ensure a safe and healthy environment.
9	Roy and Carrol and Doby Williams	We have no problems with hikers crossing our land. We gave verbal easement for hikers and the Desert Caballeros horseback riders year ago. William's Family Ranch can authorize for access south down river, Gold Bar mine owns private property upstream. We have leased from them grazing on that part.	Comment noted. The trailhead is intended to minimize or eliminate unintended trespass on adjacent private land.
10	Roy and Carrol and Doby Williams	Cindy Barrett has looked at the access and can probably help with the plan.	The BLM will continue to involve Law Enforcement Ranger Cindy Barrett during implementation.
11	Roy and Carrol and Doby Williams	Do you want to fence out the livestock from the parking area, what type? It's not a problem except for gate? or access.	Fencing materials have not yet been selected. A pipe rail or smooth wire fence may have the effect of limiting livestock access, but the other vehicle barriers outlined in Section 2.1 may not since the primary intent of this action is to limit human encroachment outside of the designated trailhead area.
12	Roy and Carrol and Doby Williams	A good sign at the fork of the road so people do not drive up to our road by mistake, sign at the moment is and old one we provided.	Comment noted, additional signs will be considered as part of implementation.

Comment Number	Commenter	Comment	Response
13	Roy and Carrol and Doby Williams	If you have any other Idea or questions, let us know. We can help if you need.	Comment noted, the BLM appreciates continued coordination on this effort.