



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Tucson Field Office
3201 East Universal Way
Tucson, Arizona 85756
www.blm.gov/arizona



In Reply Refer To:
1220 (G020)

NOTICE OF 30-DAY PUBLIC SCOPING PERIOD
Middle Gila South Access and Transportation Management Plan
NEPA # DOI-BLM-AZ-G020-2022-0028-EA

Dear Interested Public:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Tucson Field Office will be preparing an environmental assessment (EA) to analyze the potential effects of the Middle Gila South Access and Transportation Management Plan (Plan).

The Plan would establish the access and transportation system for providing entry points to public lands administered by the BLM for multiple land uses and activities, including hunting and other recreational opportunities. The transportation system would include designated roads, primitive roads and trails maintained to provide motorized and non-motorized access to public lands. The EA will analyze the potential direct, indirect, and cumulative effects from the designation and maintenance of the transportation system.

The planning area includes approximately 212,000 acres of BLM-administered public land close to Tucson and Phoenix and near small towns and communities in Pinal, Pima, Cochise, and Gila counties, and includes approximately 700 miles of existing undesignated access routes.

Public comments received during the initial public input in Fall 2022 helped identify land use activities and access needs which were considered in developing the preliminary alternatives for providing access to public lands; see the Preliminary Alternative maps in the 'Documents' folder on the project's website: bit.ly/3kxqix5

Comments received during this public scoping period will help the BLM develop the preferred alternative and the environmental analysis by identifying issues and concerns, alternatives, and other information to consider during the impact analysis. Additional opportunities for public comment will be available before the EA is finalized.

Public Input Opportunity:

Comments are requested on the preliminary route management alternatives, and on any issues or concerns for the BLM to consider in the Plan and EA. Public comments are particularly requested on:

- The type of access the routes would be managed to provide

- Potential effects on the natural and human environment
- Priorities for implementation
- Maintenance and improvement projects
- Signing, gates, cattle guards and wayside facilities, use restrictions
- Trailheads, staging areas for public access, recreation activity sites
- Restoration projects
- Potential partnership opportunities

This 30-day public scoping period is from March 2 to April 3, 2023.

The BLM will conduct two virtual Zoom meetings to provide information about the project and how to participate. The Zoom app is not required to participate; a web browser may be used.

- Meeting 1: March 7, 2023, from 5:00 to 6:30 p.m. - <https://bit.ly/40LoHnz>
- Meeting 2: March 8, 2023, from 5:00 to 6:30 p.m. - <http://bit.ly/3kjlawh>

Comments may be submitted in the following ways:

- Email to: middlegilasouth-tmp@blm.gov,
- US Mail to: BLM Tucson Field Office, ATTN: Middle Gila South Access and Transportation Management Plan, 3201 E. Universal Way, Tucson, AZ 85756
- Electronic comments online on the project's website: bit.ly/3kxqix5. To submit electronic comments, click on the "Participate Now" icon and follow the on-screen prompts.

Please note, by law, the names and addresses of those commenting are available for public review during regular business hours. Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. All comments from organizations or businesses will be available for public inspection in their entirety.

For additional information contact Francisco Mendoza at fmendoza@blm.gov or (520) 258-7226.

Colleen J. Dingman, Field Manager
Tucson Field Office

Attachment

Attachment
Description of Preliminary Alternatives
Middle Gila South Access and Transportation Management Plan
DOI-BLM-AZ-G020-2022-0028-EA

Preliminary Purpose and Need for the Plan

The need for the Access and Transportation Management Plan stems from the over 700 miles of existing vehicle access routes identified in the BLM route inventory which are undesignated, unmaintained, and have deteriorating conditions which affect accessibility of public lands and are potentially causing damage to resources along the routes. In addition, access issues identified during public input associated with the Dingell Act in 2020 and during the initial public outreach for this project included locked gates that block vehicle access to public land areas. Public demand and use have grown since the Safford District Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Phoenix RMP land use allocations were made in 1992 and 1989 respectively and the use of the existing public land access routes has increased in some areas since the inventory was completed.

The purpose of the Access and Transportation Management Plan is to establish a sustainable public land access and transportation system that provides access for multiple land use activities, including hunting and other recreational opportunities, on public lands in the planning area. In addition, the purpose is to identify solutions to the access issues and growing public demand and use.

Preliminary Route Management Designation Alternatives

The existing public land access route inventory was evaluated using available information on multiple land use activities, hunting and other recreational activities. The route evaluation considered the initial public input, input from other government agencies and authorized users, information on biological and cultural resource values, recreation uses and activities, grazing leases and infrastructure, utilities and right of ways, the local county road and public highway access points, and the connectivity of the existing route networks across non-BLM lands.

The route evaluation identified management strategies with different emphasis outlined below. The preliminary alternatives are depicted on the maps in the ‘Maps’ folder on the project’s website: bit.ly/3kxqix5.

Alternative A: No Action

Under Alternative A, existing vehicle access routes would remain undesignated and open to vehicle use without specific type of use designations or maintenance. Roads, primitive roads, or trails could be designated on a case-by-case basis in response to specific maintenance or improvement proposals or applications. Public access issues on public lands blocked by locked gates would be resolved on a case-by-case basis. Recreation visitor services and information would be provided at current custodial levels.

Actions Common to All Action Alternatives

- Existing vehicle access routes would be designated to provide different types of access depending on the land use activities served.
- The most important or functionally significant routes would be maintained depending on their service area and type of use.
- Roads, primitive roads, and trails would be designated and maintained according to guidelines and best practices established in this Plan.
- Recreation visitor services and information would be provided to improve awareness of public land resource values, route management designations and use restrictions, and low impact public use.

Alternative B: Conservation

Under Alternative B, existing routes with limited function and service area would be closed to vehicle use and would be allowed to reclaim. Public access issues on public lands blocked by locked gates would be resolved on a case-by-case basis.

Alternative C: Balanced

Under Alternative C, existing routes with limited function but not in areas with sensitive resource values would be designated open to OHV use but not maintained. Existing routes with limited function in areas with sensitive or fragile resource values and limited-service area would be closed to vehicle use and allowed to reclaim. New access routes would be constructed to bypass locked gates blocking public access to existing route networks.

Alternative D: Access

Under Alternative D, existing routes with limited function would be designated open to OHV use but not maintained. New access routes would be constructed to bypass locked gates blocking public access to existing route networks.