

Palo Verde Regional Park

Draft Finding of No Significant Impact

DOI-BLM-AZ-P020-2021-0001-EA

November 2021



Background

In December 2020, Pinal County submitted an application to the BLM, under Title V of the Federal Land Management and Policy Act for a right-of-way (ROW) for a 26.5-mile non-motorized trail system. In June 2021, Pinal County submitted an application under the Recreation & Public Purposes Act (R&PP) to lease approximately 493 acres for recreation facilities. The three recreational developments would be the McDavid Road Trailhead and Staging Area, Farrell Road Trailhead and Campground, and Table Top Road Off-Highway Vehicle Area. This infrastructure would be components of the Palo Verde Regional Park, operated by Pinal County Open Space and Trails. This new regional park is a component of the Pinal County Open Space and Trails Master Plan completed in 2007. The BLM would issue a 25-year lease for the three R&PP parcels and a 30-year grant for the non-motorized trail system within a 30-foot wide ROW.

Determination

This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is prepared in reference to the Pinal County Proposed Action, considered in the *Palo Verde Regional Park Draft Environmental Assessment* (EA) (DOI-BLM-AZ-P020-2021-0001-EA). A full list of project design features is included in Pinal County's Plan of Development (POD) and the associated EA. Based on the information contained in the application, POD, and EA I have *preliminarily* determined that the Proposed Action does not constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement (EIS) will not be required.

This finding is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1501.3 [2020]), both with regard to the *affected environment* and *degree of effects* described in the final EA, which is hereby incorporated by reference.

Affected Environment

The Analysis Area for Recreation and BLM Sensitive Species is the three R&PP parcels, and a 500-foot radius surrounding these parcels, for approximately 1,032 acres. The Analysis Area for the 26.5-mile non-motorized trail system that would connect these parcels including the area within a 100-foot radius, is approximately 408 acres. The predominant vegetation community in the Analysis Area is the Sonoran desertscrub. Approximately 48 percent of the Analysis Area is within Sonoran desert tortoise Category II habitat, which has potential to support presence of the species. The proposed park facilities would introduce approximately 41 acres of ground disturbance to an existing dispersed recreation and natural area, and approximately 14 acres of new trails.

Degree of Effects

1) Short- and long-term effects of the proposed action.

Short-term impacts are defined as those that would cease after project construction; long-term impacts are those associated with operation or would otherwise extend beyond the short-term time period. Short term impacts associated with the proposed action would occur during the construction of the recreation facilities and non-motorized trail system. Long-term impacts would occur during the operation and maintenance of the recreational facilities and non-motorized trail system. There would be short- and long-term impacts to the Sonoran desertscrub

vegetation community and associated wildlife habitat. There would be long-term impacts to the visual character of the Analysis Area.

2) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

During construction, there would be localized noise associated with equipment and workers. Construction activities would displace wildlife into available adjacent habitat. These impacts would be negligible and adverse. Long-term operation and maintenance of the facilities would result in the loss of approximately 55 acres of Sonoran desertscrub vegetation community and associated wildlife habitat, including Sonoran desert tortoise Category II habitat. Pinal County will survey Category II habitat for Sonoran desert tortoise and follow Arizona Game and Fish Recommendations to reduce impacts to tortoise burrows and individual animals to the greatest extent practicable. While some species may be permanently displaced into other available habitat, other species may continue to occupy the areas within the recreation facilities. These impacts would be minor and adverse.

During construction and operation of the facilities, there would be increases in fugitive dust and emissions from equipment and motor vehicles. These impacts would be negligible and adverse.

The operation of the recreation facilities would support Pinal County's need to provide new formal recreation areas for a growing population. These impacts would be minor and beneficial. Those members of the public seeking recreational uses on undeveloped public lands would be displaced to other available areas. These impacts would be negligible and adverse. The construction of new access roads and recreation facilities would introduce new features on the landscape that would affect the visual quality of the area. Recreation facilities would be predominately of color similar to the natural landscape, various shades of brown, green and gray. While the degree of change would be weak to moderate, the proposed action would be in conformance with Visual Resource Management Class IV, which allows for major changes to the visual character of the Analysis Area. These impacts would be negligible to minor, and adverse.

3) The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

During construction, measures would be implemented to ensure public and worker safety in construction zones, such as temporary road closures, and warning signs. There would be no impact to public health and safety during operation of these recreation facilities.

4) Whether the action would violate federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

As described in the EA, Section 1.5 *Relationships to Statutes, Regulations, Manuals, and Other Plans*, the Proposed Action is consistent with relevant laws, regulations, policies, program guidance, and local permitting requirements; and the project would not violate a federal, State, Tribal, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment. Federal, State, and local interests were consulted and given the opportunity to participate in the environmental analysis process. Notification letters of the proposed action were sent to Tribal Nations with interest in the project area. No concerns were identified.

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