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Gila Lower Box Recreation Area Management Plan

Draft Environmental Assessment

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Signature and Title of Project Lead — Date

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACEC – area of critical environmental concern
ARPA – Archaeological Resources Protection Act

BLM – United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management
BMP – best management practice

EA – environmental assessment
EO – Executive Order
ESA – Endangered Species Act of 1973

GIS – geographic information systems

IDT – interdisciplinary team

LCDO – Las Cruces District Office

NAAQS – National Ambient Air Quality Standards
NEPA – National Environmental Policy Act of 1969
NHPA – National Historic Preservation Act of 1966
NRHP – National Register of Historic Places

OHV – off-highway vehicle
ORV – outstandingly remarkable value

PM – particulate matter

RAMP – recreation area management plan, EA
RMP – resource management plan

SRMA – special recreation management area

TWI – topographic wetness index

US – United States

VRM – visual resource management

WSA – wilderness study area
WSR – wild and scenic river

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The United States (US) Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Las Cruces District Office (LCDO) is preparing this recreation area management plan (RAMP) concurrently with an environmental assessment (EA) for the Gila Lower Box area, a popular recreation area in southwestern New Mexico. The RAMP is meant to provide implementation-level recreation management decisions based on management directives for the area in the Mimbres Resource Management Plan (RMP) and the Gila River Coordinated RMP (BLM 1993, 1985). In addition, this RAMP-EA provides guidance for potential future recreation management actions to address changes in future conditions and recreation uses. These future actions may include increasing signage and building recreation infrastructure to protect the area's valuable and unique resources while continuing to allow for recreation uses. The BLM is preparing this EA to analyze the environmental consequences of the RAMP, in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA).

This EA includes the following chapters:

- **Chapter 1** describes the purpose of and need for the BLM's action and identifies the project's background, context, early planning, and issues for consideration.
- **Chapter 2** describes the management alternatives for the RAMP. Alternative B is the preferred alternative for the RAMP. The proposed RAMP itself is included as **Appendix A**.
- **Chapter 3** frames the issues identified for detailed consideration in this EA and describes the affected environment and environmental consequences of implementing the various RAMP alternatives.
- **Chapter 4** documents the BLM's consultation and coordination for the RAMP and the associated EA.
- **Chapter 5** includes a list of individuals involved in the development of the RAMP and EA.
- **Chapter 6** provides references for the EA.

1.1. Background and RAMP Planning Area

The 11,200 acre Gila Lower Box RAMP planning area is located in Hidalgo and Grant Counties, New Mexico, approximately 20 miles northwest of the town of Lordsburg (see **Figure 1-1**). The planning area includes the Gila Lower Box Wilderness Study Area (WSA), the Gila Lower Box Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), and the Gila Lower Box Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA). The planning area boundary largely follows the boundary of the Gila Lower Box SRMA but extends across a wider area to the southeast to include the locations of all proposed recreation features in the RAMP alternatives.

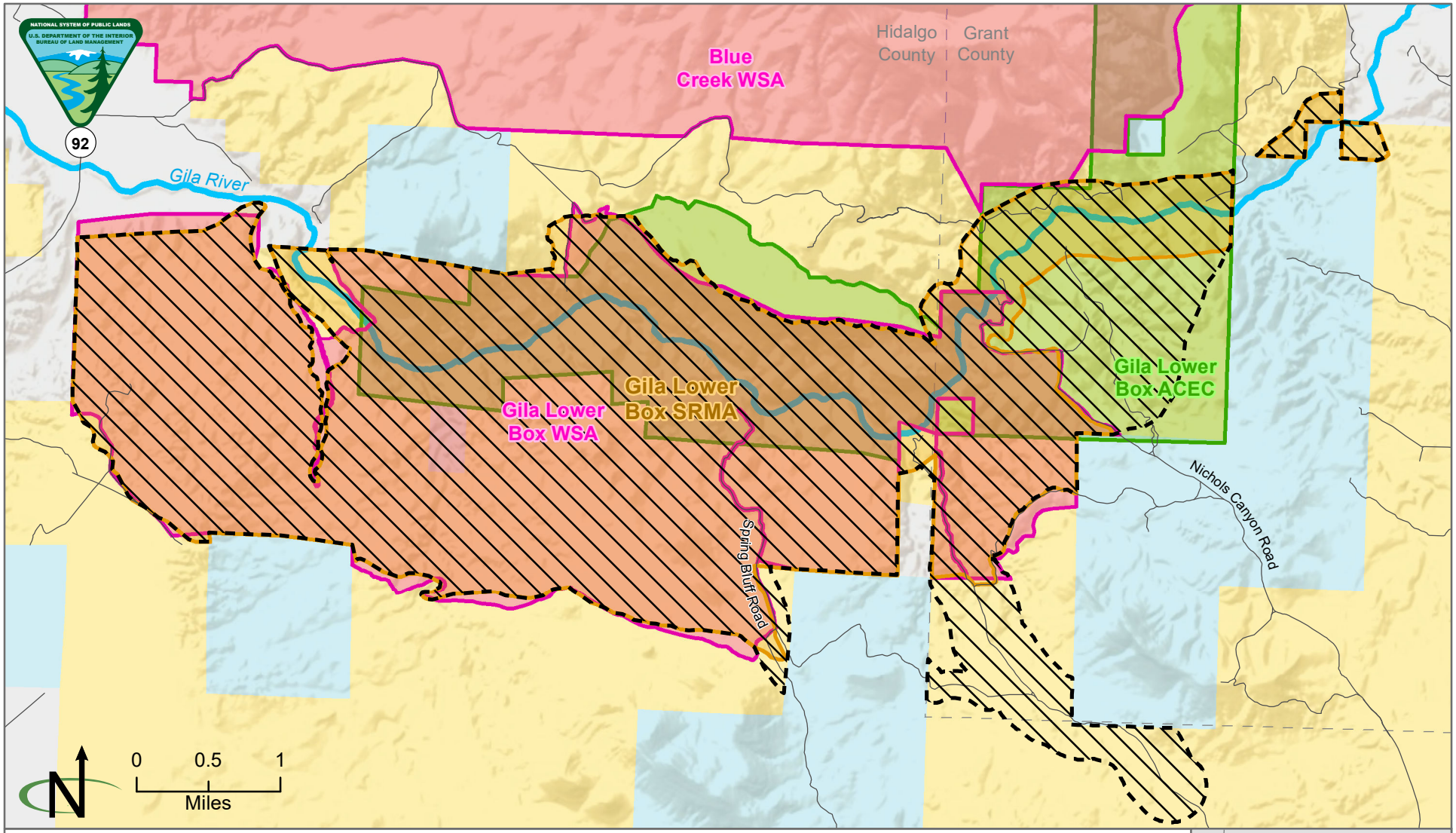

Figure 1-1
Gila Lower Box Recreation Area Management Plan (RAMP) Planning Area

- RAMP planning area
- Special Recreation Management Area
- Wilderness Study Area
- Area of Critical Environmental Concern
- Bureau of Land Management
- State
- Private

Source: BLM GIS 2021
October 10, 2023
GilaRAMP_Intro.mxd
No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual or aggregate use with other data. Original data were compiled from various sources. This information may not meet National Map Accuracy Standards. This product was developed through digital means and may be updated without notification.

The Gila Lower Box SRMA (9,630 acres; 86 percent of the planning area) was designated in the 1985 Gila River Coordinated RMP. The Gila Lower Box ACEC (6,280 acres; 56 percent) was designated in the Mimbres RMP in 1993. The Gila Lower Box WSA (8,800 acres; 78 percent) was established in 1980. A small portion of the Blue Creek WSA (less than 5 acres) also extends into the northeastern portion of the planning area.

The Gila Lower Box RAMP planning area represents one of the most biologically diverse river corridors in southwestern New Mexico. An oasis in the desert, it is known as one of the best bird-watching areas in New Mexico and contains very high biological diversity—265 bird species, 67 mammal species, 17 fish species, 12 amphibian species, and 54 reptile species have been recorded. The planning area also contains numerous archaeological resources. In addition, the Gila Lower Box stretch of the Gila River was identified as eligible for potential inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River System in the Mimbres RMP (BLM 1993). A bill proposing it for designation is currently being considered by Congress.

1.2. Purpose and Need

While recreation is an important use of the planning area, unmanaged recreation use has resulted in disturbance and damage to sensitive resources. There is a need to implement primitive and sustainable recreation actions to protect the Gila Lower Box area while being consistent with the management goal of protecting riparian values outlined in the 1993 Mimbres RMP. A RAMP specific to the Gila Lower Box area is needed to provide a long-term vision and commitment for improved primitive recreation while protecting sensitive cultural and biological resources. Better infrastructure has the potential to cut down on erosion and habitat degradation by making recreation use more sustainable while improving the recreation experience.

The purpose of the RAMP is to implement the land use planning decision made in the 1993 Mimbres RMP that calls for the continued management of the Gila Lower Box SRMA, in accordance with the 1985 Gila River Coordinated Management Plan (BLM 1993, page S-6). The 1985 plan called for a "recreation activity plan" to be developed for the Gila Lower Box (BLM 1985).

The goals of the proposed action are to balance natural resource preservation with recreation use and to protect the Gila Lower Box's unique and special resources through the proper management of public recreation in the RAMP planning area. This includes managing and improving current recreation opportunities in the planning area and meeting the management requirements of special designations in and around the planning area. Management directives may evolve in the planning area to meet the demands of increased visitation.

1.2.1. Balance Recreation and Special Resources

The purpose of the action includes balancing recreation and the protection of special resources. The planning area contains special biological and archaeological resources. There are several threatened and endangered species and five species with designated critical habitat that overlaps with the planning area: loach minnow, narrow-headed gartersnake, southwestern willow flycatcher, yellow-billed cuckoo, and spikedace. Invasive annual and perennial weeds are becoming an increasing issue in the planning area's southern portion. The BLM is planning

removal of an identified population of saltcedar (*Tamarix* spp.), but with increased recreation and climate change, the potential for more invasive plant species is growing.

The planning area experiences mostly seasonal and local traffic. Current recreational uses include off-highway vehicle (OHV) use, bird-watching, some float boating (when adequate flows exist in the Gila River), camping, hunting, and fishing. Specific areas where motorized vehicles travel off designated routes and are currently a concern include the western portion of the Gila Lower Box RAMP planning area near Sunset Dam and trespass driving in the WSA. In addition, due to the Nichols Canyon Road wash out, there has been an increase in trespass driving over the floodplain and, in the Gila River, extending into the upper box.

Dispersed camping is also a concern due to the camping occurring in a concentrated area along the Gila River. The concentrated dispersed camping results in trash and debris left behind in this area and causes degradation of the riverbanks, which in turn is increasing concerns for soil sedimentation into the Gila River. There is no infrastructure for fire within the Gila Lower Box. Fire danger is increasing as recreationists build fire rings in and around dispersed camping areas.

The RAMP is also being developed to protect cultural and paleontological resources from damage by recreation users. The planning area has a high density of cultural sites, but many are unrecorded. It is important to protect these areas without drawing attention to their existence. Finally, while paleontological resource inventory has been limited within the planning area, the area does contain geologic formations with High and Unknown potential to yield fossils (PFYC 4 and U, respectively). Scientifically important fossils have been recorded outside but relatively near the planning area in the same geologic units.

1.2.2. Improving Recreation Opportunities

Another purpose of the action is to facilitate recreation in a way that it will not degrade the land. The action will address the lack of signage and recreation infrastructure in the hope that increasing information and providing infrastructure, such as campgrounds and trails, will improve the recreation experience while decreasing recreation's impacts on both natural and special resources. Some trails within the planning area are not well maintained and may need to be reconstructed or restored. There is an electric fence across the river near the Nichols Canyon area that sustains damage during high-flow events and presents dangers to recreationists. Improving recreation opportunities in areas outside Nichols Canyon may reduce the concentrated recreational use in that area, diminishing degradation of sensitive resources in Nichols Canyon itself.

1.2.3. Meeting the Requirements of Special Designations

The purpose of the action includes meeting the management requirements and standards for protection of special designation areas. Most of the Gila Lower Box WSA and a small portion of the Blue Creek WSA (less than 5 acres) overlaps the planning area. BLM Manual 6330, Management of Wilderness Study Areas (BLM 2012a), provides management guidance to preserve the wilderness characteristics in WSAs and prevent impairing the suitability of such areas for designation as wilderness. This is known as the non-impairment standard, and the BLM manages WSAs according to this standard until Congress either designates the areas as wilderness or releases them for other purposes.

The Gila Lower Box ACEC also overlaps with the planning area. In accordance with BLM Manual 1613 (BLM 1988), ACECs must be managed to protect the relevant and important values for which they were designated. The Mimbres RMP identifies the relevant and important values in the Gila Lower Box ACEC as habitat for several state-listed and federal candidate species; also, the ACEC comprises the largest and most significant riparian area in the Mimbres RMP planning area (BLM 1993). The Mimbres RMP identifies management actions to be applied in the ACEC to protect its relevant and important values, which include habitat for state-listed and federal candidate species and its status as the largest and most significant riparian area in the Mimbres RMP planning area (BLM 1993). The management actions from the Mimbres RMP include developing a primitive recreation management area and parking areas, closing it to motorized vehicle use (except for Nichols Canyon Road), and managing it for primitive and semi-primitive nonmotorized classes.

Additionally, the Gila Lower Box stretch of the Gila River was identified as eligible for potential inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers (WSR) System in the Mimbres RMP (BLM 1993, Appendix J). The river is therefore subject to management under BLM Manual 6400 (BLM 2012b), Wild and Scenic Rivers – Policy and Program Direction for Identification, Evaluation, Planning, and Management. A bill has also been introduced in Congress to designate the Gila River, including the stretch within the planning area, as a WSR under the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968.

Recreational use in the planning area has affected features associated with the special designation areas. For example, motorized vehicle use along Nichols Canyon Road, which overlaps the ACEC, has spread beyond the washed-out road into other parts of the ACEC, causing damage to the floodplain. The floodplain is a key relevant and important value of the ACEC in need of protection. The 1993 Mimbres RMP calls for the closure of motorized recreation within the ACEC besides existing routes (page 5-25). The proposed action would close unauthorized routes along the washed-out Nichols Canyon Road.

1.3. Decision to Be Made

The BLM LCDO Manager will decide whether to adopt a RAMP alternative or to modify the proposed RAMP based on the environmental analysis and any other factors identified during public review of this RAMP/EA. The LCDO Manager will make the decision based on the analysis of the issues and how well the alternatives respond to the project's purpose and need.

1.3.1. Decision Factors

When considering an alternative, the LCDO Manager will consider how the alternatives meet the project's purpose and need. Additionally, the decision-maker will:

- Consider how the alternatives contribute to the economics of the regional area and the BLM LCDO
- Decide whether the analysis reveals a likelihood of significant adverse effects from the selected alternative that cannot be mitigated, and whether an environmental impact statement would be needed

1.4. Land Use Plan Conformance

The proposed RAMP conforms to the Mimbres RMP (BLM 1993) and the Gila River Coordinated RMP (BLM 1985) and is consistent with the following program objectives:

- "The objective of the soil, air and water program is to protect, maintain and enhance these resources on the public land as well as provide support to other resource programs" (BLM 1993, page 2-33).
- "The objective of the wildlife program is to improve, enhance and expand wildlife habitat on public land for both consumptive and non-consumptive uses as well as biological diversity" (BLM 1993, page 2-39).
- "The objective of the Mimbres Cultural Resource Program is to manage cultural resources on public land in a manner that protects and provides for their proper use. Cultural resources include archaeological, historic, and sociocultural properties. Paleontology and natural history are also managed under the cultural resource program" (BLM 1993, page 2-43).
- "The objective of the recreation program is to enhance opportunities for developed and undeveloped recreation on public land" (BLM 1993, page 2-47).
- "The objective of the wilderness program is to identify areas that are suitable for wilderness designation, and to manage those areas in a manner that will preserve the natural values of those ecosystems" (BLM 1993, page 2-53).
- "The objective of the riparian program is based on the BLM's formal riparian policy (adopted in 1987) which is directed at achieving a healthy and productive ecological condition for public land riparian areas" (BLM 1993, page 2-61).
- "The objective of the Special Status Species program (BLM Manual 6840.86) is to give priority to the protection and management of habitat for known populations of Federal or State listed species, to prevent the listing of Federal candidates, and to assist in recovery of listed species" (BLM 1993, page 2-63).
- "Manage [the Gila Lower Box ACEC] to protect riparian values" (BLM 1993, page 5-25).
- "To eliminate all mineral activity within the ACEC and limit mechanized use to the roads to Fisherman's Point, Spring on the Bluff, Sunshine Diversion Dam, and Nichols Canyon" (BLM 1985, page 13).
- "To provide for recreation use as follows:
    - 2,000 visitor days[1] of boating
    - 1,000 visitor days of motorized camping
    - 1,000 visitor days of bird-watching

[1] A unit of measure equal to 12 visitor hours

- 1,000 visitor days of primitive camping
- 2,000 visitor days of picnicking
- 1,000 visitor days of fishing

ORV use is considered incompatible with wildlife objectives" (BLM 1985, page 14).

The proposed RAMP is also consistent with the following decisions in the Mimbres RMP (BLM 1993) and the Gila River Coordinated RMP (BLM 1985):

- "Designate the Gila Lower Box (6,490 acres) and the Gila Middle Box (840 acres) as ACECs to protect special status species and riparian habitat" (BLM 1993, page 2-42).
- "Management of the two existing SRMAs will continue…the Gila Lower Box SRMA will continue to be managed in accordance with the Gila River Coordinated Resource Management Plan" (BLM 1993, page 2-50).
- "The 14 WSAs in the Mimbres Resource Area will be managed under the Interim Management Policy and Guidelines for Lands Under Wilderness Review (BLM 1995), until the area is either added to the National Wilderness Preservation System or removed from further wilderness consideration" (BLM 1993, page 2-54).
- "Throughout the Mimbres Resource Area, riparian and arroyo habitat management will continue to be coordinated with other programs and activities as needed. Specific programs include Range, Wildlife, Watershed, Recreation, and Lands. Riparian and arroyo habitat values will be addressed in all surface and vegetation disturbing actions. Riparian areas will have a higher priority for funding, management, and protection than arroyo habitats" (BLM 1993, page 2-62).
- "Present management for Federal or State species consists of protecting and enhancing habitat and all proposed actions are evaluated for their potential impact on known populations of, or potential habitat for, listed or candidate species and to develop and implement recovery plans with objectives for listed species on public land" (BLM 1993, page 2-64).
- The following management decisions apply to the Gila Lower Box ACEC (BLM 1993, page 5-25):
    - Close to vehicle use.
    - Develop primitive recreation management area and parking areas (5 acres).
    - Sign main entrances and provide maps and brochures.
    - Manage for Recreation Opportunity Spectrum primitive and semi-primitive nonmotorized classes.
- "Process a limited off-road vehicle designation in accordance with the requirements of BLM Manual 8342. This designation will limit vehicles to designated roads with the exception of the roads to Fisherman's Point, Spring on the Bluff, Sunshine Diversion Dam, and Nichols Canyon. The public land in the ACEC will be closed to vehicle use" (BLM 1985, page 14).

- "A 10-unit picnic and camping facility will be developed in Nichols Canyon. Each unit will have a table and fire circle. Parking will be provided near each unit. A 2-unit vault toilet will also be constructed. A 10-car parking lot will be developed for overflow parking. This facility will be designed to take advantage of existing topography and vegetation screening to provide privacy and protect the development from periodic flooding. This may require the purchase of additional easements or acquisition of the private land in Section 18.

  Visitor safety, education, and resource protection will be accomplished through interpretive brochures, posters, and signing within the area and on a central bulletin board" (BLM 1985, page 15).

1.5. Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, and Other National Environmental Policy Act Documents

1.5.1. Other Laws, Regulations, Policies, and Plans

The BLM considered various laws, regulations, policies, and plans (described below) and how they could potentially apply to the proposed RAMP. As appropriate and if relevant to the proposed RAMP, further consideration of these laws, regulations, policies, and plans is provided in **Chapter 3**, Affected Environment and Environmental Impacts.

1.5.1.1. Laws and Regulations

American Religious Freedom Act—This act protects the rights of Native Americans to exercise their traditional religions by ensuring access to sites, use and possession of sacred objects, and the freedom to worship through ceremonial and traditional rites.

Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) of 1979—This act protects archaeological resources and sites on federally administered lands. It imposes criminal and civil penalties for removing archaeological items from federal lands without a permit.

Clean Air Act of 1970, as amended—This act provides the framework for national, state, and local efforts to protect air quality.

Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973, as amended—This act directs federal agencies to ensure their actions do not jeopardize threatened and endangered species.

Executive Order (EO) 13175—This EO establishes regular and meaningful consultation and collaboration with Tribal officials in the development of federal policies that have Tribal implications. The EO also strengthens the US government-to-government relationships with Indian Tribes.

Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976—This act provides the basic policy guidance for the BLM's management of public lands.

Federal Noxious Weed Act (Public Law 93-629, November 28, 1990)—This act provides for the management of undesirable plants on federal lands.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969—This act requires the preparation of EAs or environmental impact statements for federal actions. These documents describe the environmental effects of federal actions and determine whether the actions have a significant effect on the human environment.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, as amended—This act provides for the management, protection, and enhancement of historic properties. It also provides for consultation procedures with the local State Historic Preservation Officer or Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, Tribes, consulting parties, and the public.

Paleontological Resource Preservation Act (PRPA) of 2009—This act provides guidance regarding the collection of paleontological resources under provisions of the PRPA of 2009.

Taylor Grazing Act of 1934—This act provides for the regulation of grazing on federal lands.

Wilderness Act of 1964—This act preserves and protects certain lands "in their natural condition" to "secure for present and future generations the benefits of wilderness." It recognizes the value of preserving "an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain."

1.5.1.2. Policies

BLM Handbook H-2930-1 (Recreation Permit and Fee Administration)—This handbook provides policy and guidance for administering key elements of the BLM Recreation Fee Program, including special recreation permits and recreation-use permits and passes.

BLM Manual 8320 (Planning for Recreation and Visitor Services)—This manual provides policy, direction, and guidance for planning for recreation resources as part of the land use planning process required under BLM Manual 1601 (Land Use Planning). The BLM's recreation planning process is an outcomes-focused management approach that stresses the management of recreation settings to provide opportunities that allow visitors and local communities to achieve a desired set of individual, social, economic, and environmental benefits.

BLM Handbook H-8320-1 (Planning for Recreation and Visitor Services)—This handbook aids in the planning and management of recreation and visitor services on public lands and adjacent waters. This handbook provides planning guidance at the land use plan and implementation level and also supports the policies in BLM Manual 8320 (Planning for Recreation and Visitor Services).

BLM Manual 4180-1 (Rangeland Health Standards)—The purpose of this manual is to provide the authorities, objectives, and policies that guide the implementation of the Healthy Rangeland Initiative.

BLM Manual 6330 (Management of Wilderness Study Areas)—This manual's purpose is to provide policy on the non-impairment standard when managing WSAs, which are part of the BLM's National Landscape Conservation System. This policy is intended to guide BLM personnel in the specific decisions that arise every day in the management of these areas.

BLM Manual 6400 (Wild and Scenic Rivers)—This manual contains policy and program

direction for the identification, evaluation, and management of eligible and suitable wild and scenic rivers and the management of designated components of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

BLM Manual 1613 (Areas of Critical Environmental Concern)—This manual provides policy and procedural guidance on the identification, evaluation and designation of ACECs in the development, revision and amendment of RMPs and amendments of management framework plans not yet replaced by RMPs.

BLM Manual 6840 (Special Status Species)—The purpose of this manual is to provide policy and guidance for the conservation of BLM special status species and the ecosystems upon which they depend on BLM-administered lands. BLM special status species are: (1) species listed or proposed for listing under the ESA, and (2) species requiring special management consideration to promote their conservation and reduce the likelihood and need for future listing under the ESA, which are designated as Bureau sensitive by the State Director.

1.6. Scoping and Issues

1.6.1. Internal Scoping

The BLM interdisciplinary team (IDT) conducted internal meetings to develop the proposed action and identify issues. Issues are concerns over how a resource may be affected by the proposed action. Issues were further defined in an internal IDT workshop. The IDT conducted a site visit to assess resource issues on the ground and to adjust the proposed action accordingly.

1.6.2. External Scoping

The BLM solicited input from the public on the proposed action to assist in identifying key issues and defining the RAMP's scope and environmental analysis. The BLM conducted a 30-day scoping period, during which comments could be submitted via the BLM's e-Planning website and through the US mail. The BLM sent project information via mail to individuals, agencies, nongovernmental organizations, Tribes, and elected officials that have expressed an interest in the subject area or project vicinity. A press release was published in local and regional newspapers, broadcast over the radio, and distributed on social media. The BLM also created a website with project information and information about the virtual public scoping meeting conducted by the BLM.

On February 3, 2022, the BLM met with local stakeholders and allotment permittees and hosted a site visit to discuss the project and their involvement. The Natural Resource Conservation Service, Hidalgo Soil and Water Conservation District, and local ranchers were in attendance.

The BLM held a virtual public scoping meeting on Tuesday, April 26, 2022. Agency staff presented information about the project to the assembled public and provided opportunities for questions and answers and verbal public comments. Six members of the public attended the virtual public scoping meeting.

The BLM received 10 comment letters during the public scoping period. Individual comments within each letter were identified, and each comment was analyzed per the BLM's criteria for

determining key issues for consideration in the EA. See **Appendix B** for a summary of the scoping comments received.

1.6.3. Issues

Using the comments submitted during public scoping and internal input from the BLM IDT, the BLM developed a list of issues to analyze in detail in this EA, in accordance with guidelines set forth in the BLM NEPA handbook (BLM 2008). The key issues identified during internal and external scoping are summarized in **Table 1-1**. An issue warrants detailed analysis in an EA if it is related to how the proposed action or alternatives respond to the purpose and need or if analysis is necessary to determine the significance of impacts. The issues identified below warrant analysis for these reasons. The BLM selected the impact indicators in **Table 1-1** to describe the difference between the baseline condition of the affected environment and the condition of the environment after implementation of the RAMP.

The following potential issues were evaluated and are not discussed in further detail in this EA, either because the issue does not relate to how the proposed action or alternatives respond to the purpose and need or because there is not a question of significance. The rationale for dismissing these issues is described in **Table 1-2**. For these issues, the impacts of the proposed action were considered to either not be significant or to be sufficiently mitigated. In contrast to **Table 1-1**, these are "non-issue" statements.

The alternatives would not affect the following because they are not present in the planning area: caves and karst resources, environmental justice populations or social and economic values, solid or hazardous wastes, wild horses and burros, forestry efforts, global climate change and noise impacts on human sensitive receptors.

Table 1-1. Issues Identified for Detailed Analysis in this EA

ISSUE #	ISSUE STATEMENT	IMPACT INDICATORS
Issue 1	How would the alternatives impact natural and cultural resources within the planning area?	• Riparian area health • Water turbidity and soil erosion • Potential for and extent of ground disturbance • Vectors for the spread of noxious and invasive weeds, as measured by disturbance • Opportunities for dust emissions, as measured by vehicular travel
Issue 2	How would the alternatives impact recreation opportunities, including parking and access for current and future users?	• Number of users • User-created trails

ISSUE #	ISSUE STATEMENT	IMPACT INDICATORS
Issue 3	How would the alternatives impact special designations, including ACECs, WSAs, and WSRs?	• Size • Naturalness • Outstanding opportunities • Supplemental values • Unauthorized user-created roads • Relevant and important values • Outstandingly remarkable values
Issue 4	How would the alternatives impact livestock grazing?	• Cattle and human interactions • Forage availability

Table 1-2. Issues Not Carried Forward for Detailed Analysis

ISSUE	RATIONALE*
How would the alternatives impact visual resources?	Most of the project is in VRM Class II areas, with one fence and one parking area proposed in VRM Class I areas. Design features would be incorporated to bring the project into conformance with guidelines for VRM Classes I and II (see **Section 2.2.1**, Design Features). The proposed action also would not affect the viewshed from overlooks and viewpoints (see **Appendix H** for Contrast rating sheet.
How would the alternatives impact geology and minerals?	The proposed action would not affect unique geologic features. There is no mineral development in the planning area.
How would the alternatives impact water resources, floodplains, wetlands, and riparian areas?	The proposed action would help improve native riparian vegetation and watershed function by reducing unauthorized impacts.
How would the alternatives impact vegetation?	The proposed action would improve native vegetation by reducing unauthorized impacts. New or restored trails would be small enough to minimize effects on vegetation communities.
How would the alternatives affect land-use authorizations and land tenure?	The proposed action would not affect access for maintenance of existing land-use authorizations or the ability to issue new authorizations, as permitted by the Mimbres RMP or other governing RMP. Administrative access would be allowed on portions of roads that would be otherwise closed to motorized travel. No land tenure changes are proposed. The proposed action would not affect future land tenure changes, in accordance with the governing RMP.
How would the alternatives affect paleontological resources?	Geologic formations with a high potential for paleontological resource preservation are present in the planning area. The LCDO Paleontologist visited most areas of the proposed action and the paleontologist did not observe scientifically important paleontological resources (Appendix C). As long as the design features are followed, paleontological resources would be protected (see **Section 2.2.1**, Design Features).

* Supporting documentation for these statements is included in the project record.

CHAPTER 2. ALTERNATIVES

The BLM developed three alternatives, including the no action alternative, for consideration in this EA. Some actions would be common among all three alternatives (see **Table 2-2**). For example, motorized recreation in the Gila Lower Box ACEC is limited to the existing road (Nichols Canyon Road) and the two WSAs would remain closed to motorized travel. Using a combination of active and passive restoration, the BLM would restore burned areas and degraded habitats with native plant materials. On-site education, interpretation, and visitor-use monitoring would be included in all alternatives. Based on past trends, it is likely that visitation will increase slightly. With increased use, the BLM would evaluate the need for a site host to monitor the area and collect fees.

There are five existing or proposed recreation management areas where specific recreation actions would be implemented under the action alternatives (Alternatives B and C). These include Nichols Canyon (existing), Gauge Dispersed Camping Area (proposed), Fisherman's Point (existing), Spring on the Bluff (existing), and Caprock Campground (proposed). Under all action alternatives, management at each recreation management area would involve travel and trail management, such as maintaining or closing to motorized access, and recreation infrastructure and facilities, such as parking areas, trailheads, or camping areas.

Under the action alternatives, this management would result in surface disturbance, such as clearing vegetation to create parking areas. The action alternatives would also involve installation of new post-and-cable boundary in certain areas. Surface disturbance and post-and-cable boundary installation under each alternative are shown in **Table 2-1**. Each alternative is briefly summarized below. For maps of alternatives see **Figure 2-1.**

Table 2-1. Estimated Acres of Surface Disturbance (Including Existing Disturbance) and Miles of Post-and-Cable Boundary by Alternative

ALTERNATIVE	ACRES OF DISTURBANCE[1]	MILES OF POST-AND-CABLE BOUNDARY
Alternative A – No Action Alternative	0.24	0.0
Alternative B – Proposed RAMP	6.43	0.42
Alternative C – Minimal Disturbance	3.40	0.29

Source: BLM GIS 2022

[1]Includes existing surface disturbance from Spring on the Bluff parking area. Does not include disturbance from existing roads.

2.1. Alternative A—No Action Alternative

Under Alternative A, the BLM would continue current management in the RAMP planning area without constructing any new facilities or repairing existing roads and trails. Motorized recreation would continue on existing roads, and unauthorized user-created routes would continue to be created off of existing roads such as Nichols Canyon Road, Gauge Station Road, and Spring Bluff Road. This alternative would not result in any new surface disturbance or post-and-cable boundary installation. The 0.24-acre Spring on the Bluff parking area would remain as existing surface disturbance.

2.1.1. Design Features

The design features proposed under Alternative B—Proposed RAMP (**Section 2.2.1**) for vegetation, cultural resources, paleontological resources, wildlife, and trails and recreation would be applied under Alternative A—No Action Alternative.

2.2. Alternative B—Proposed RAMP

Under Alternative B, the proposed action, the BLM would complete a RAMP for the five recreation sites: Nichols Canyon, Gauge Dispersed Camping Area, Fisherman's Point, Spring on the Bluff, and Caprock Campground. The RAMP would involve the construction of additional recreational facilities, such as parking areas, trailheads, and dispersed camping areas; the reestablishment of the Spring on the Bluff pedestrian trail; and changes to the types of travel allowed on certain roads.

New surface disturbance from these features would cover approximately 2.7 acres for the new nonmotorized trail from Gauge Station Road to Nichols Canyon Road. Another 0.65 acres would be newly disturbed for the construction of a new trailhead, parking area, and boating takeout in Nichols Canyon. Slight amounts of surface disturbance would occur in other areas to add fire rings for primitive campgrounds, to add posts and cable, and to formalize parking areas. Once visitor monitoring data demonstrate a demand, the BLM would construct a developed campground (Caprock Campground) to accommodate additional users. This would result in an additional 1.55 acres of disturbance, if the developed campground were constructed.

The proposed RAMP is included as **Appendix A**.

2.2.1. Design Features

2.2.1.1. Vegetation

1. Retain existing vegetation. Consider:
    a. using retaining walls on fill slopes
    b. reducing surface disturbance
    c. protecting roots from damage during excavations
2. Enhance revegetation. Consider:
    a. mulching cleared areas to reduce erosion
    b. controlling planting times
    c. furrowing slopes
    d. planting holes on cut/fill slopes
    e. choosing native plant species
    f. stockpiling and reusing topsoil
    g. fertilizing, mulching, and watering vegetation
3. Minimize impact on existing vegetation. Consider:
    a. partial cut instead of clear cut
    b. using irregular clearing shapes
    c. feathering/thinning edges
    d. disposing of all slash
    e. controlling construction access

f. utilizing existing roads
g. limiting work within construction area
h. selecting type of equipment to be used
i. minimizing clearing size (i.e., strip only where necessary)
j. grass seeding of cleared areas

4. Maintain the integrity of vegetation units. Consider:
    a. utilizing the edge effect for structure placement along natural vegetation breaks

2.2.1.2. Cultural Resources

1. All state and federal laws relating to prehistoric or historic archaeological sites or artifacts (historical properties) shall be complied with. The collection of artifacts or disturbance of historical properties on federal lands is prohibited and is prosecutable under the ARPA. Disturbance of human graves is also prohibited. Actions, other than those explicitly approved by the BLM, that result in impacts upon archaeological resources shall be subject to the ARPA, as amended, and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976. Damaging historical properties more than 100 years of age is a punishable act under ARPA. Criminal and/or civil penalties may result if damage to historical properties is documented, as provided under ARPA and its implementing regulations at 43 CFR 7.
2. In accordance with 43 CFR § 10.4 (g), the holder shall notify the BLM Authorized Officer immediately upon the discovery of human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony pursuant to 43 CFR §10.4 (b). All work will be suspended within 100 feet of the discovery until written authorization to proceed is issued by the Authorized Officer. In addition, the area of discovery will be covered, stabilized, or otherwise protected from damage. An evaluation of the discovery will be made by the Authorized Officer to determine appropriate actions to prevent the loss of significant cultural or scientific values.

2.2.1.3. Paleontological Resources

1. The operator shall immediately notify the BLM Authorized Officer of any paleontological resources discovered as a result of operations under this authorization. The operator shall suspend all activities in the vicinity of such discovery until notified to proceed by the Authorized Officer and shall protect the discovery from damage or looting. The operator may not be required to suspend all operations if activities can be adjusted to avoid further impacts to a discovered locality or be continued elsewhere. The Authorized Officer will evaluate, or will have evaluated, such discoveries as soon as possible, but not later than 10 working days after being notified. Appropriate measures to mitigate adverse effects to significant paleontological resources will be determined by the Authorized Officer after consulting with the operator. Within 10 days, the operator will be allowed to continue construction through the site, or will be given the choice of either (1) following the Authorized Officer's instructions for stabilizing the fossil resource in place and avoiding further disturbance to the fossil resource, or (2) following the Authorized Officer's instructions for mitigating impacts to the fossil resource prior to continuing construction through the project area.

2. The operator shall develop a Worker's Environmental Awareness Program training that communicates requirements and procedures for the inadvertent discovery of paleontological resources during construction, to be delivered by a qualified paleontologist to the construction crew prior to the onset of ground disturbance.

2.2.1.4. Wildlife

1. Protect migratory bird nests by working outside the nesting season or surveying for nests prior to activities and protecting any active nests.
2. Move visitor areas away from high-quality wildlife habitat. Consider:
    a. moving camping areas away from riparian areas or water sources
    b. limiting or prohibiting off-trail travel in sensitive areas
    c. concentrating trails to lower-quality habitat areas
3. Use sediment fences, erosion control waddles, and other erosion control methods during construction activities.
4. Consult with Wildlife biologists before any on the ground activity.

2.2.1.5. Travel Management

1. Follow The Gold Book standards for road design (BLM 2007).

2.2.1.6. Visual Resources

1. Reduce the size of cut-and-fill slopes. Consider:
    a. relocating to an area with less slope
    b. changing road width, grade, etc.
    c. changing alignment to follow existing grades
    d. prohibiting dumping of excess material on downhill slopes
2. Reduce earthwork contrasts. Consider:
    a. rounding and/or warping slopes
    b. retaining rocks, trees, drainage, etc.
    c. toning down freshly broken rock faces with asphalt emulsion spray or with gray paint
    d. adding mulch, hydromulch, or topsoil
    e. shaping cuts and fills to appear as natural forms
    f. cutting rock areas so forms are irregular
    g. designing to take advantage of natural screens (i.e., vegetation, landforms)
    h. grass seeding of cuts and fills
3. Maintain the integrity of topographic units. Consider:
    a. locating projects away from prominent topographic features
    b. designing projects to blend with topographic forms in shape and placement
4. Minimize the number of visible structures.
5. Minimize structure contrast. Consider:
    a. using earth-tone paints and stains
    b. using self-weathering steel
    c. treating wood for self-weathering
    d. using natural stone surfaces
    e. burying all or part of the structure

f. selecting paint finishes with low levels of reflectivity (i.e., flat or semi-gloss)

6. Redesign structures that do not blend/fit. Consider:
    a. using rustic designs and native building materials
    b. using natural appearing forms to complement landscape character (use special designs only as a last resort)
    c. relocating structure
7. Recognize the value and limitations of color. Consider:
    a. that color (hue) is most effective within 1,000 feet; beyond that point, color becomes more difficult to distinguish, and tone or value determines visibility and resulting visual contrast
    b. that using color has limited effectiveness (in the background distance zone) in reducing visual impacts on structures that are silhouetted against the sky
    c. painting structures somewhat darker than the adjacent landscape to compensate for the effects of shade and shadow
    d. selecting color to blend with the land and not the sky

2.2.1.7. Trails and Recreation

1. Improve communication with visitors. Consider:
    a. adding signs at trailheads
    b. employing a trail steward to aid in educating the public
    c. add interpretation on invasive species
2. Improve trail markings. Consider:
    a. adding obvious trail markers and/or paint blazes
    b. adding markers for areas of concern such as muddy sections
3. Consider formalizing some informal trails (Hockett et al, 2010).
4. Modify the amount, density, and type of use. Consider:
    a. redistributing, discouraging, or limiting use
    b. redistributing or reducing peak use
    c. long-term monitoring
5. Modify location of use. Consider:
    a. dispersing levels or use to prevent lasting impacts
    b. concentrating use on established trails and recreation areas
6. Modify visitor behavior. Consider:
    a. using persuasive language and education
    b. using enforcement or regulation
    c. promoting high-quality social conditions
7. Modify site management. Consider:
    a. maintaining or relocating trails and campsites to more sustainable locations
    b. closing or rehabilitating less sustainable locations
    c. limiting campsite numbers
    d. marking campsites either with markers or established infrastructure such as fire circles or visitor-created log-and-rock seating circles
    e. charging a fee
    f. warning visitors of known hazards (Marion et al. 2020)

2.2.1.8. Soils

1. Use erosion control methods including but not limited to water bars and turn outs, as well as other design features mentioned above.

2.3. Alternative C—Minimal Disturbance

Alternative C is similar to Alternative B, but management would focus on less intensive recreational use to minimize the effects on resources. This alternative would involve fewer recreational facilities, such as trailheads and informational kiosks, and would close more roads to motorized travel, compared with Alternative B. This alternative would result in 3.40 acres of new surface disturbance. Construction of the Gauge Dispersed Camping Area primitive campground would result in 1.52 acres of new surface disturbance. Slight or negligible amounts of surface disturbance would occur in other areas to add fire rings or posts for post-and-cable boundaries. Like Alternative B, the 1.55-acre Caprock Campground would be developed only if recreation use reached an average of 100 visitors per day in the planning area. Additionally, 0.29 miles of post-and-cable boundary would be installed under this alternative.

2.3.1. Design Features

All design features proposed under Alternative B—Proposed RAMP (**Section 2.2.1**) would apply to Alternative C—Minimal Disturbance.

Detailed management and actions under each alternative are described in **Table 2-2**.

Table 2-2. Gila Lower Box RAMP Comparison of Alternatives

ALTERNATIVE A (NO ACTION)	ALTERNATIVE B (PROPOSED PLAN)	ALTERNATIVE C (MINIMAL DISTURBANCE)
Common to All Alternatives		
Area setting and opportunities		
Within the planning area, there are dispersed water-based and water-dependent recreation opportunities, such as fishing, boating, camping, hiking, and nature-viewing. Activities occur mainly in a primitive setting with minimal site controls and few interactions with other users. Along the primary access corridors and in camping areas, management controls promote visitor safety.		
Travel and Trails Management		
- Manage the Gila Lower Box ACEC with motorized recreation limited to the existing road (Nichols Canyon Road) and WSA as closed to motorized recreation (see **Figure 1-1**). - Prohibit motorized use in the riverbed channel[2] during times when the river is not flowing. - Consider seasonal or temporary closures following weather events to reduce trail impacts from visitor use. - Install barriers to prevent off-road motorized access to the ACEC and WSA. - Install information signs identifying the boundaries of the ACEC and WSA.		
Recreation Infrastructure and Facilities		
- Upgrade and maintain gates and gap fences across the river to restrict livestock, while enabling boater access. - Allow recreational mining and rock hounding pursuant to the RMP and BLM Manual 6330 in the WSAs.		
Education, Interpretation, and Partnerships		
- Provide on-site and offsite education and interpretation opportunities that inform the public of the area's natural and cultural resources, describe the allowed recreational uses, and identify open routes for motorized use and those available for nonmotorized use only. - Add signs to educate visitors about the spread of chytrid fungus.[3] - Develop language on interpretive materials to combat invasive weeds and prevent their spread.		
Special Recreation Permits		
- Evaluate special recreation permit applications pursuant to BLM Handbook H-2930-1.		

[2]The riverbed channel is defined as a type of landform consisting of the outline of a path of relatively shallow and narrow body of water, that most commonly confines a river, the waterway between two land masses that lie close to each other.
[3]Chytrid fungus is an infectious fungal disease that affects amphibians worldwide and has caused extinctions.

ALTERNATIVE A (NO ACTION)	ALTERNATIVE B (PROPOSED PLAN)	ALTERNATIVE C (MINIMAL DISTURBANCE)
Monitoring and Adaptive Management		
- Implement an annual visitor-use monitoring program to document visitation at critical locations in the planning area. As part of this, add pedestrian and vehicle counters to monitor visitor use in the planning area. - Establish natural resource monitoring parameters and implement annual monitoring of resource conditions. - Work with local volunteer organizations to obtain citizen scientists to assist with monitoring. - Establish adaptive management indicators and thresholds for critical resources. Apply adaptive management strategies where natural resources monitoring indicates threshold exceedance.		
Resource Protection		
- Restore areas with native plant materials appropriate for use within the planning area. - Restore burned areas or degraded habitats to improve wildlife habitat and visitor enjoyment of the planning area. - With trail designation or creation, prioritize avoidance of sensitive resources. - Implement a combination of active and passive restoration and revegetate unauthorized user-created routes in the ACEC and WSA.		
Land Acquisition		
- Acquire properties and easements from willing parties to improve public river access for fishing, boating, safe portage access, trails, and other types of recreation. - Acquire properties and conservation easements from willing parties to improve the protection of sensitive habitats and scenic viewsheds.		
Visitor Health and Safety		
- Encourage courteous and safe river behavior by boaters and anglers. Develop educational materials to advise boaters to avoid floating through water where anglers are fishing. - Where feasible, post warnings of imminent flash flood danger in the floodplain. - Cooperatively develop safe passage and portage and scouting opportunities. - Strive to protect human life and provide for injury-free visits. Some visitors' recreational activities may pose a personal risk to participants, which the BLM cannot control. Visitors to the planning area assume a substantial degree of responsibility for their safety when visiting areas managed and maintained as natural, cultural, or recreational environments. - Prioritize saving human life over all other management actions. - Ensure public safety, protect federal land resources, and continue to create an environment to promote the health and safety of visitors, staff, and nearby residents by working with local, state, and federal agencies. These are the BLM's primary responsibilities.		
Enforcement		
- Enforce rules and regulations using BLM law enforcement. - Coordinate with local volunteer organizations to encourage self-enforcement practices. - With increased use, evaluate the need for a site host to monitor the area and collect fees.		
Fees		
- With increased use, evaluate the potential of establishing a fee area for all or portions of the planning area.		

ALTERNATIVE A (NO ACTION)	ALTERNATIVE B (PROPOSED PLAN)	ALTERNATIVE C (MINIMAL DISTURBANCE)
Alternatives Specific to Recreation Management Areas (see **Appendix D, Figure 2-1** for site locations)		
Nichols Canyon		
Area setting and opportunities		
There is dispersed water-based and water-dependent recreation, primarily fishing, boating, camping, and nature viewing, accessed via Nichols Canyon Road. Activities occur in a primitive or semi-primitive setting with moderate site controls and few interactions with other users. In addition to the recreation values already described, the area has outstanding scenic values, geological values, and habitat for native fish and wildlife species.		
Travel and Trails Management		
Maintain OHV access into the ACEC/Nichols Canyon wash via the current alignment of Nichols Canyon Road. Implement road maintenance as funding and other management priorities allow (**Appendix D, Figures 2-2 and 2-3**).	Manage Nichols Canyon Road as open to motorized access to a new proposed parking area approximately 0.15 miles past the existing cattle guard across the road within the wash (**Appendix D, Figure 2-8**).	Manage Nichols Canyon Road as limited to nonmotorized travel and administrative access. Install a locked gate or other removable barrier on the Nichols Canyon road before entering Nichols Canyon wash (**Appendix D, Figures 2-14 and 2-15**).
No similar action.	Restore, revegetate, and barricade access to unauthorized routes in Nichols Canyon.	Same as Alternative B.
Allow for access to the Nichols Canyon floodplain via existing nonmotorized trails from the end of Nichols Canyon Road (**Appendix D, Figure 2-2**).	Designate and extend the existing nonmotorized trails for access to the river and primitive campsites from a new designated parking area located approximately 0.15 miles past the existing cattle guard across the road within the wash (**Appendix D, Figure 2-7**).	Manage Nichols Canyon Road for administrative access and nonmotorized access for the public to hike into the floodplain. (**Appendix D, Figure 2-14**).
Recreation Infrastructure and Facilities		
No similar action.	Construct three to five primitive walk-in campsites with fire rings above the Nichols Canyon floodplain. Limit campfires to fire rings (**Appendix D, Figure 2-7**).	Manage Nichols Canyon as dispersed walk-in camping only with no formal campsites. (**Appendix D, Figure 2-14**).
No similar action.	Establish a primitive walk-in non-motorized boat pullout and launch location at the riverside terminus of the non-motorized trail on Nichols Canyon Road (**Appendix D, Figure 2-7**). Boats must be carried or rolled out to trailhead (approximately .65 miles away)	Same as Alternative B (**Appendix D, Figure 2-14**).

ALTERNATIVE A (NO ACTION)	ALTERNATIVE B (PROPOSED PLAN)	ALTERNATIVE C (MINIMAL DISTURBANCE)
No similar action.	Construct a parking lot, kiosk, and trailhead approximately 0.15 miles past the existing cattle guard across Nichols Canyon Road within the wash. Install posts and cable surrounding the parking area and fence across the wash to keep out motorized access (**Appendix D, Figure 2-7 and 2-8**).	Construct a turnaround and kiosk at the locked gate before entering Nichols Canyon wash (**Appendix D, Figure 2-14 and 2-15**).
No similar action.	Install signage alerting visitors of the electric range fencing crossing the river. (**Appendix D, Figure 2-7**).	Same as Alternative B (**Appendix D, Figure 2-14**).
Gauge Dispersed Camping Area		
Area setting and opportunities		
There are dispersed camping and nature-viewing opportunities accessible by OHVs via an existing road. Camping occurs in a primitive or semi-primitive setting with minimal site controls and few interactions with other users.		
Travel and Trail Management		
Maintain motorized access via a roadway that is a valid existing right (**Appendix D, Figure 2-4**).	Same as Alternative A.	Same as Alternative A.
Manage Gauge Station Road for motorized access.	Designate the existing route from the new primitive campground to the Nichols Canyon floodplain for nonmotorized and administrative access. Install a locked gate to limit unauthorized motorized access past the campground (**Appendix D, Figure 2-9**).	Same as Alternative B (**Appendix D, Figure 2-16**).
No similar action.	Establish a new nonmotorized trail from the Gauge Station Road to the Nichols Canyon floodplain (**Appendix D, Figure 2-9**).	No similar action.
No similar action.	Manage the old mining road heading east from the Gauge Station Road for nonmotorized and administrative access. Install a locked fence at the intersection of the Gauge Station Road and the old mining road to prevent unauthorized motorized access (**Appendix D, Figure 2-9**).	Same as Alternative B (**Appendix D, Figure 2-16**).

ALTERNATIVE A (NO ACTION)	ALTERNATIVE B (PROPOSED PLAN)	ALTERNATIVE C (MINIMAL DISTURBANCE)
Recreation Infrastructure and Facilities		
No similar action.	Establish a post-and-cable boundary of Gila Lower Box WSA along the Gauge Station Road from the intersection with the old mining road to the locked gate (**Appendix D, Figure 2-9**).	Same as Alternative B (**Appendix D, Figure 2-16**).
No similar action.	Establish a primitive (dispersed) campground by clearing existing scrub vegetation, adding post and cable fence within cleared area, replacing surface, and installing signage off the Gauge Station Road after it turns west (**Appendix D, Figure 2-9**).	Same as Alternative B (**Appendix D, Figure 2-16**).
No similar action.	Install a kiosk with a map indicating access to the Gila River from the camping area.	Same as Alternative B.
Fisherman's Point		
Area setting and opportunities		
There are bird-watching, other nature-viewing, and dispersed camping opportunities accessible via an existing county road and spur route. There is pedestrian access from the bluff to the river via an existing trail. Activities occur in a primitive or semi-primitive setting with minimal site controls and few interactions with other users.		
Travel and Trail Management		
Maintain motorized access to Fisherman's Point via the current route (**Appendix C, Figure 2-5**).	Manage the spur route from the junction with the county road to where the route heads downhill for motorized travel. Decommission and restore a portion of the spur route where it heads downhill. Manage the remainder of the spur route heading downhill to its terminus at Fisherman's Point for nonmotorized travel only (**Appendix D, Figure 2-10**).	Manage the spur route from the junction with the county road to its terminus at Fisherman's Point for nonmotorized travel only (**Appendix D, Figure 2-17**).
Manage the existing trail from the terminus of the existing motorized route to the river for pedestrian access only.	Reestablish and repair the existing pedestrian trail to provide safe pedestrian-only access from the new trailhead to the river (**Appendix D, Figure 2-10**).	Reestablish and repair the existing pedestrian trail to provide safe pedestrian-only access from the nonmotorized access route terminus to the river (**Appendix D, Figure 2-17**).
Recreation Infrastructure and Facilities		
No similar action.	Install informational signage as needed, dependent on use.	Same as Alternative B.

ALTERNATIVE A (NO ACTION)	ALTERNATIVE B (PROPOSED PLAN)	ALTERNATIVE C (MINIMAL DISTURBANCE)
No similar action.	Establish a trailhead and parking area at the end of the county road leading to the WSA (**Appendix D, Figure 2-10**).	No similar action.
No similar action.	Establish a small parking area on the spur route before the nonmotorized trail heads downhill to the primitive (dispersed) camping area (**Appendix D, Figure 2-10**).	No similar action.
No similar action.	Establish a primitive (dispersed) camping area near the beginning of the pedestrian trail (**Appendix D, Figure 2-10**).	No similar action.
Spring on the Bluff		
Area setting and opportunities		
There are trail-based recreation opportunities with river access. The area is accessible via an existing county road. There is pedestrian access from the bluff to the river via the Spring on the Bluff Trail. Activities occur in a primitive setting with minimal site controls and few interactions with other users.		
Travel and Trail Management		
Maintain river access via the existing Spring on the Bluff pedestrian trail (**Appendix D, Figure 2-6**).	Reestablish the Spring on the Bluff Trail for pedestrian access only (**Appendix D, Figure 2-11**).	Same as Alternative B (**Appendix D, Figure 2-18**).
Recreation Infrastructure and Facilities		
Keep the parking to access the existing Spring on the Bluff pedestrian trail at the intersection of the county road and the existing pedestrian trail (**Appendix D, Figure 2-6**).	Establish a new trailhead and formalize the existing parking area at the intersection of the county road and the existing pedestrian trail (**Appendix D, Figure 2-11**). Install posts and cabling to designate a pull-out parking area. Install signage as needed, dependent on use.	Install signage as needed, dependent on use. Keep the parking to access the existing Spring on the Bluff pedestrian trail at the intersection of the county road and the existing pedestrian trail (**Appendix D, Figure 2-18**).
Caprock Campground		
Area setting and opportunities		
There are developed camping opportunities that are accessible by motor vehicle via an existing county road. Camping occurs in a semi-primitive setting with extensive site controls and a high potential for interactions with other users.		

ALTERNATIVE A (NO ACTION)	ALTERNATIVE B (PROPOSED PLAN)	ALTERNATIVE C (MINIMAL DISTURBANCE)
Recreation Infrastructure and Facilities		
Manage the area for dispersed camping.	At a location south of Caprock Mountain accessed via White Rock Canyon Road, establish a 1.55-acre campground, including developed sites, a kiosk, pit toilets, fire rings, water, and a site host location (**Appendix D, Figures 2-12 and 2-13**). Establish the campground once visitor monitoring data collected by pedestrian and vehicle counters indicate an average visitation of 100 visitors per day in the planning area.	Same as Alternative B (**Appendix D, Figures 2-19 and 2-20**).
No similar action.	Establish an informational kiosk to serve as an entry portal to the Gila Lower Box area.	No similar action.

2.4. Alternatives Considered but Dismissed from Detailed Analysis

Table 2-3 provides the rationale for certain alternatives that were considered but not carried forward for analysis in this EA.

Table 2-3. Alternatives Considered but Dismissed from Detailed Analysis

ELIMINATED ALTERNATIVE	RATIONALE*
Close Nichols Canyon to all motorized use	Closing this area would impact the grazing permittee's ability to maintain range improvements and would greatly limit the public's access to Nichols Canyon.
Expand developed recreation (such as paved walking areas) and OHV use	This alternative is not consistent with the Mimbres RMP direction to manage the Gila Lower Box area as a primitive recreation area and a SRMA. It contradicts the Mimbres RMP decision to close the Gila Lower Box ACEC to motorized recreation. This alternative is also not compatible with preserving the cultural and wildlife ORVs for the eligible WSR stretch.
Develop a trailhead and boating takeout at Sunset Dam	The BLM does not have legal public access to the dam, which would be required before these facilities could be developed.

*Supporting documentation for these statements is included in the project record.

CHAPTER 3. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

3.1. Introduction

This chapter describes the existing conditions relevant to the issues presented in **Table 1-1**. It also discloses the potential direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of the proposed action and the alternatives on those issues.

3.2. Cumulative Actions

This section describes other actions that overlap geographically and temporally with the proposed RAMP. Actions cause cumulative effects on the environment when the proposed action's incremental impacts combine with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, regardless of what agency (federal or nonfederal) or person undertakes such actions. These effects can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions taking place over time (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1508.7).

3.2.1. Past and Present Actions

Past and present actions are encompassed in the description of the affected environment for each resource below. In general, past and present actions include construction and maintenance of facilities, such as the bathrooms and associated parking/staging areas as well as installation of barriers for resource protection, and the development of user-created routes. Other ongoing actions that may relate to the proposed action are detailed below.

Existing features in the planning area receive periodic maintenance as needed. The cattle exclosure fences are maintained weekly throughout the year. Maintenance activities involve

driving a pickup truck or similar vehicle to the upper and lower gap fences and performing repair or rebuild activities. These activities include walking along the fence, using hand tools, and replacing materials, as needed.

The Duncan Electric distribution line right-of-way crosses the planning area at Nichols Canyon and Gauge Station Road and is maintained roughly once or twice per year. Maintenance activities involve driving a truck along the right-of-way to cut vegetation away from lines using hand tools and chainsaws. When needed to repair a downed power line, workers drive a bucket truck to locations along the right-of-way and complete the repairs. If a pole needs to be replaced, a large truck with trailer is required. The diversion canal at Sunset Dam also receives regular maintenance.

3.2.2. Reasonably Foreseeable Future Actions

3.2.2.1. Gila Lower Box Saltcedar Removal Project

The LCDO is in the process of producing an EA that will analyze the impacts of a full inventory and removal of all saltcedar trees currently in the Gila Lower Box river segment. The BLM would complete an inventory of saltcedar trees in the Gila Lower Box and adjacent New Mexico State lands upstream to locate all trees in the river segment. Then, the BLM or licensed applicators, or both, would use the global positioning system inventory of saltcedar trees to treat the saltcedar trees in the Gila Lower Box and the adjacent State lands upstream. A number of different application methods would be used, and the appropriate method would be used for each tree. All trees would be accessed on foot; no off-road travel would occur.

Methods would include herbicide injection directly into trees with a basal stem diameter of approximately 2 inches or larger. Trees with smaller stems and perhaps some large, multi-stemmed trees would be cut down to the stump, and the stumps would be treated with an herbicide that is approved for use in riparian and aquatic sites when applied above the waterline.

Inventory and location recording would occur during spring to early fall. Herbicide treatment would be completed within a September to early October time frame when trees are drawing resources from the leaves back into the stems and root system and are therefore most susceptible to herbicides. The herbicide would be mixed and applied according to label instructions. Treated areas would be monitored semiannually following application and re-treated as necessary to ensure full mortality. As new trees and seedlings are opportunistically discovered during ancillary monitoring and survey activities, they would be extracted by hand. If they are too large, they would be recorded for herbicide treatment at the next available opportunity.

3.3. Issue 1: How would the alternatives impact natural and cultural resources within the planning area?

Impacts on the natural and cultural resources of the RAMP planning area occur from recreation and ground disturbance. The number of recreationists visiting the planning area has increased in recent years, resulting in ground disturbance from user-created trails and OHV use in riparian areas and streams.

3.3.1. Affected Environment

3.3.1.1. Wildlife (Including Threatened and Endangered Species)

As discussed in **Chapter 1**, the planning area is biologically diverse with numerous special status species associated with the Gila Lower Box area. Special status species include those recognized under the ESA and BLM sensitive species. In the RAMP planning area, there are 20 federally recognized species identified by the USFWS ECOS IPaC tool, including four birds, three mammals, three snakes, one amphibian, eight fish, and one candidate insect (see **Appendix E**, Federally Listed Species). In addition, five final designated critical habitats (see **Table 3-1** and **Figure 3-1**) occur in the river and riparian habitats associated with the Gila River (see **Appendix F**, BLM Las Cruces District Sensitive Species Lists; USFWS 2022). The riparian area within the Gila Lower Box is one of the few places in New Mexico with documented southwestern willow flycatcher and yellow-billed cuckoo territories. Additionally, the area is home to two federally threatened fish species, the loach minnow and the spikedace (BLM 2000).

Table 3-1. Critical Habitat in the Planning Area

FINAL DESIGNATED CRITICAL HABITAT	ACRES OR MILES IN THE PLANNING AREA
Narrow-headed garter snake (*Thamnophis rufipunctatus*)	440 acres
Southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*)	660 acres
Yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*)	860 acres
Loach minnow (*Tiaroga cobitis*)	10 miles
Spikedace (*Meda fulgida*)	10 miles

Source: BLM GIS 2022
Note: Critical habitat units cannot be totaled because they overlap for multiple species in the canyon.

The New Mexico BLM maintains sensitive animal and plant lists for special status species management. BLM sensitive species verified or with the potential to occur in the Las Cruces District could occur in the planning area (**Appendix F**, BLM Las Cruces District Sensitive Species Lists; BLM 2018).

The planning area is known for bird-watching with over 260 species documented. Migratory birds are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Wildlife and their habitats are threatened by invasive species, habitat modification, disturbance, and climate change effects, especially reduced water availability to support vegetation and aquatic and terrestrial wildlife.

3.3.1.2. Soil Resources

Soils are formed from the interactions between parent materials, climate, organisms, and topography over time. The physical, chemical, and biological properties of soils differ with changes in soil characteristics (for example, texture, structure, porosity, and others) define the physical, chemical, and biological properties of soils, which alter the ecosystem services,

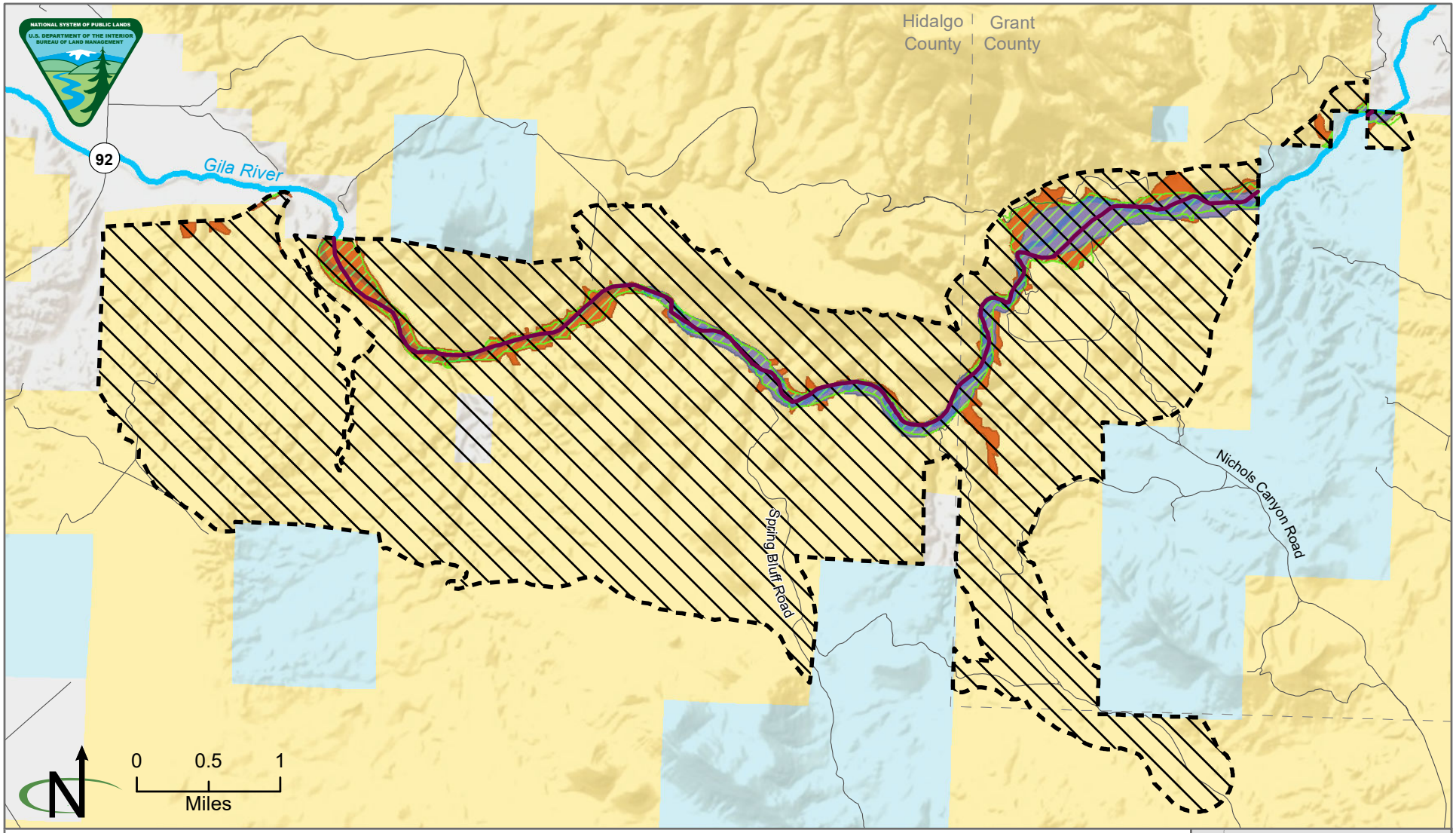

Figure 3-1
Critical Habitat

- Loach minnow/Spikedace
- Southwestern willow flycatcher
- Narrow-headed gartersnake
- Yellow-billed cuckoo
- RAMP planning area
- Bureau of Land Management
- State
- Private

Source: BLM GIS 2021
January 05, 2023
GilaRAMP_AE_Bio_CritHab.mxd
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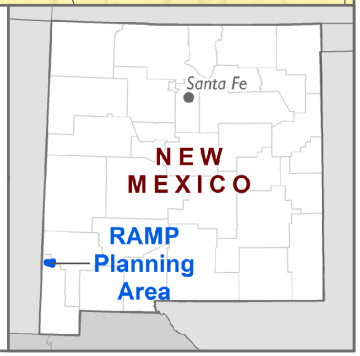

including storing and cycling nutrients, providing long-term carbon storage, purifying the air and water, storing and regulating water flow, and providing support for plants and human structures (Weil and Brady 2019).

Soil map units provide interpretations of soils for physical, chemical, and biological properties and land suitability characteristics (NRCS 2022). Soil map units generally consist of one or more major soil series. A soil series consists of those soils that have similar horizons from the surface down, developing from related parent materials, under common climate and similar vegetation. Some areas, such as rock outcrops and riverwashes, have little or no soil development; therefore, they do not have soil interpretations. **Table 3-2** lists the soil map units that occur in the planning area. Most of the soils in the planning area have a high gravel and rock content and loamy texture, indicating they have relatively equal parts of sand[4], silt[5], and clay[6]. However, they either have more sand or more clay than silt.

Table 3-2. Soil Map Units

UNIT NAME	MAJOR SOIL SERIES	ACRES
Anthony fine sandy loam, 1 to 3 percent slopes	Anthony	70
Berino sandy loam	Berino	60
Bucklebar-Sonoita-Continental association, 1 to 8 percent slopes	Bucklebar, Sonoita, Continental	40
Continental-Nickel association, 0 to 15 percent slopes	Continental, Nickel	50
Forrest gravelly loam	Forrest	1,190
Gila variant fine sandy loam, 1 to 3 percent slopes	Gila	20
Graham extremely rocky clay loam, 10 to 45 percent slopes	Graham	250
Graham rocky clay loam, 1 to 9 percent slopes	Graham	210
Lehmans extremely rocky loam, 10 to 25 percent slopes	Lehmans	1,790
Mimbres-Arizo-Riverwash association, 0 to 5 percent slopes	Mimbres, Arizo	260
Nickel gravelly sandy loam, 3 to 9 percent slopes	Nickel	60
Orthents, 25 to 60 percent slopes	Orthents	90
Rock outcrop-Graham association, 5 to 25 percent slopes	Graham	60
Tres Hermanos gravelly clay loam	Tres Hermanos	1,090
Tres Hermanos-Lehmans association, 1 to 15 percent slopes	Tres Hermanos, Lehmans	2,270
Other[1]	N/A	3,710
Total	**N/A**	**11,220**

Source: BLM GIS 2022
[1]Includes riverwash, which is unconsolidated soil material that is frequently transported and deposited by streams, and rough broken land.

[4]A term used to categorize large soil particles (0.05 mm to 2.0 mm in diameter).
[5]A term used to categorize soil particles larger than clay and smaller than sand (0.002 mm to 0.05 mm in diameter).
[6]A term used to categorize small soil particles (smaller than 0.002 mm in size).

Soil orders are frequently defined by a single dominant characteristic affecting soils. In the planning area, the low amount of precipitation is the single dominant characteristic; thus, most of the soils are classified in the Aridisols soil order. Aridisols are associated with alluvium[7] materials. They can be shallow or deep soils, and they are all well drained. This means water infiltrates and drains from the soil with ease. In addition to Aridisols, there are three Entisols (Anthony, Gila, and Arizo soil series). Entisols are the youngest of any soil order; they have little soil profile development. In the planning area, these soils are dry and well drained. They are found on alluvial deposits and floodplains.

NRCS provides soil interpretations for each soil map unit, which are models that predict soil behavior under a specific use based on the soil's physical and chemical attributes (Soil Science Division Staff 2017). **Table 3-3** shows ratings for the soil map units in the planning area for the camp area and picnic area soil interpretations from Web Soil Survey (NRCS 2022).

Table 3-3. Soil Map Unit Interpretation for Camp and Picnic Areas

Soil Map Unit	Soil Series	Camp areas	Picnic Area	Major Limiting Features
Anthony fine sandy loam, 1 to 3 percent slopes	Anthony	Very limited	Somewhat limited	Flooding
Berino sandy loam	Berino	Somewhat limited	Somewhat limited	Too Sandy
Bucklebar-Sonoita-Continental association, 1 to 8 percent slopes	Bucklebar	Somewhat limited	Somewhat limited	Dusty
	Sonoita	Somewhat limited	Somewhat limited	Too sandy
	Continental	Somewhat limited	Somewhat limited	Slow water movement, dusty
Continental-Nickel association, 0 to 15 percent slopes	Continental	Somewhat limited	Somewhat limited	Slow water movement, dusty
	Nickel	Somewhat limited	Somewhat limited	Slow water movement, gravel content
Forrest gravelly loam	Forrest	Somewhat limited	Somewhat limited	Slow water movement, dusty, gravel content
Gila variant fine sandy loam, 1 to 3 percent slopes	Gila variant	Very limited	Somewhat limited	Flooding, dusty
Graham extremely rocky clay loam, 10 to 45 percent slopes	Graham	Very limited	Very limited	Depth to bedrock, slow water movement, slope
Graham rocky clay loam, 1 to 9 percent slopes	Graham	Very limited	Very limited	Depth to bedrock, slow water movement, slope

[7]Sediments transported and deposited by rivers and streams.

SOIL MAP UNIT	SOIL SERIES	CAMP AREAS	PICNIC AREA	MAJOR LIMITING FEATURES
Lehmans extremely rocky loam, 10 to 25 percent slopes	Lehmans	Very limited	Very limited	Depth to bedrock, slow water movement, slope, dusty, gravel content
Mimbres-Arizo-Riverwash association, 0 to 5 percent slopes	Mimbres	Very limited	Somewhat limited	Flooding, dusty, slow water movement
	Arizo	Very limited	Somewhat limited	Flooding, too sandy
	Riverwash	Not rated	Not rated	N/A
Orthents, 25 to 60 percent slopes	Orthents	Very limited	Very limited	Slope, gravel content, dusty, slow water movement
Rock outcrop-Graham association, 5 to 25 percent slopes	Rock outcrop	Not rated	Not rated	N/A
Tres Hermanos gravelly clay loam	Tres Hermanos	Somewhat limited	Somewhat limited	Slow water movement, dusty, gravel content
Tres Hermanos-Lehmans association, 1 to 15 percent slopes	Tres Hermanos	Somewhat limited	Somewhat limited	Slow water movement, dusty, gravel content
	Lehmans	Very limited	Very limited	Depth to bedrock, slow water movement, slope, dusty, gravel content

Source: Soil Survey Staff, UC Davis California Soil Resource Lab

The ratings for these soil interpretations are given as very limited, somewhat limited, and very limited, based on numerical ratings that identify the severity of the limitation of soil properties and features. A rating of "not limited" indicates the soil has features that are favorable for recreation; "somewhat limited" indicates the soil has some features that could be unfavorable for the specified use; and "very limited" indicates the soil has one or more features that are unfavorable for the specified use (Soil Survey Staff, no date). Limiting features include high flooding potential, dusty conditions, slow water movement, soils that are high in sand content, steep slopes, high gravel content, and shallow depth to bedrock.

Soils in the planning area have been naturally eroded by recreation uses, especially from motorized vehicles and camping. Soil disturbance from motorized vehicle uses generally exceeds that of nonmotorized uses, as well as wind and water. Motorized vehicles can travel great distances, allowing visitors to access more areas in a short amount of time, and they apply higher pressure from weight to the soil (Monz et al. 2010). Campfires, which sterilize soils and reduce their water-holding capacity, increase soil susceptibility to erosion (Reid and Marion 2005). In addition, trampling and compaction of soils occurs near campfires. These impacts worsen when multiple campfire sites are used or campfire sites expand in size (Reid and Marion 2005).

Wind erodibility is greatest for sandy soils and for soils with minimal rock fragments. There are soils within the planning area that correspond with wind erodibility groups 1 through 5, which have high to moderate susceptibility to wind erosion (NRCS 2019). Most soils in the planning area are in wind erodibility groups 6 and 8, which have low susceptibility to wind erosion (BLM GIS 2022). Of the map units listed in **Table 3-2**, the Mimbres-Arizo-Riverwash association, 0 to 5 percent slopes, Orthents, 25 to 60 percent slopes, and Tres Hermanos-Lehmans association 1 to 15 percent slopes are classified as wind erodibility group 6; Graham rocky clay loam, 1 to 9 percent slopes is classified as wind erodibility group 7; and Graham extremely rocky clay loam, 10 to 25 percent slopes is classified as wind erodibility group 8 (BLM GIS 2022).

Water erosion is the detachment and removal of soil particles by running water (NRCS 2001). Deposition of the detached soil particles (sediment) occurs where water slows and accumulates on the land surface (NRCS 2001). While some erosion is natural, human activities can accelerate erosion. Soils exposed to recurrent forces such as motorized vehicles and foot traffic can undergo compaction. Soil compaction increases in proportion to the number of a vehicle's passes and can become evident after only a few passes (Ouren et al. 2007). Soil compaction reduces water infiltration by reducing porosity and root growth, and it increases the potential for erosion (Pouyat et al. 2020). Loamy soils are the most vulnerable to compaction; this is due to the potential for finer particles to be forced between larger particles when the pore space is reduced. Most soils in the planning area have high gravel contents that make them more resistant to compaction.

The analysis of impacts to soils from the proposed alternatives is based on slope, the runoff potential of a soil unit, and a topographic wetness index (TWI)[8] as indicators for water erosion susceptibility and a TWI raster (grid cells) map as indicators for water erosion susceptibility. The methodology for analyzing impacts is to use these indicators as a baseline for areas where soils would be the most susceptible to erosion and determine whether actions under the alternatives would increase or decrease the potential susceptibility.

3.3.1.2.1. Slopes

Slope is used to determine areas that are more vulnerable to erosion. Slope influences the lateral movement of water in soil, which can result in runoff and soil erosion. In general, runoff generation and soil erosion typically increase as the percent slope increases. South-facing slopes are more vulnerable to high evaporation rates and generally have more shallow soils than north-facing slopes (Pellant et al. 2020). When disturbed, erosion from steeper slopes can lead to an increase in sedimentation, a loss of soil nutrients, and a decrease in soil productivity. Soil productivity is the capacity of a soil for producing plants (Weil and Brady 2019). **Table 3-4** shows the acres of percent slope intervals in the planning area. The slope intervals are also shown in **Figure 3-2**. In the planning area, there are 430 acres of soils within 0.25 miles of existing trails. Of these, 320 acres (74 percent) have slopes greater than 20 percent.

[8] An index that models where water may flow or accumulate on the landscape. See the Soil Resources Section under Section 3.3.1 for more details.

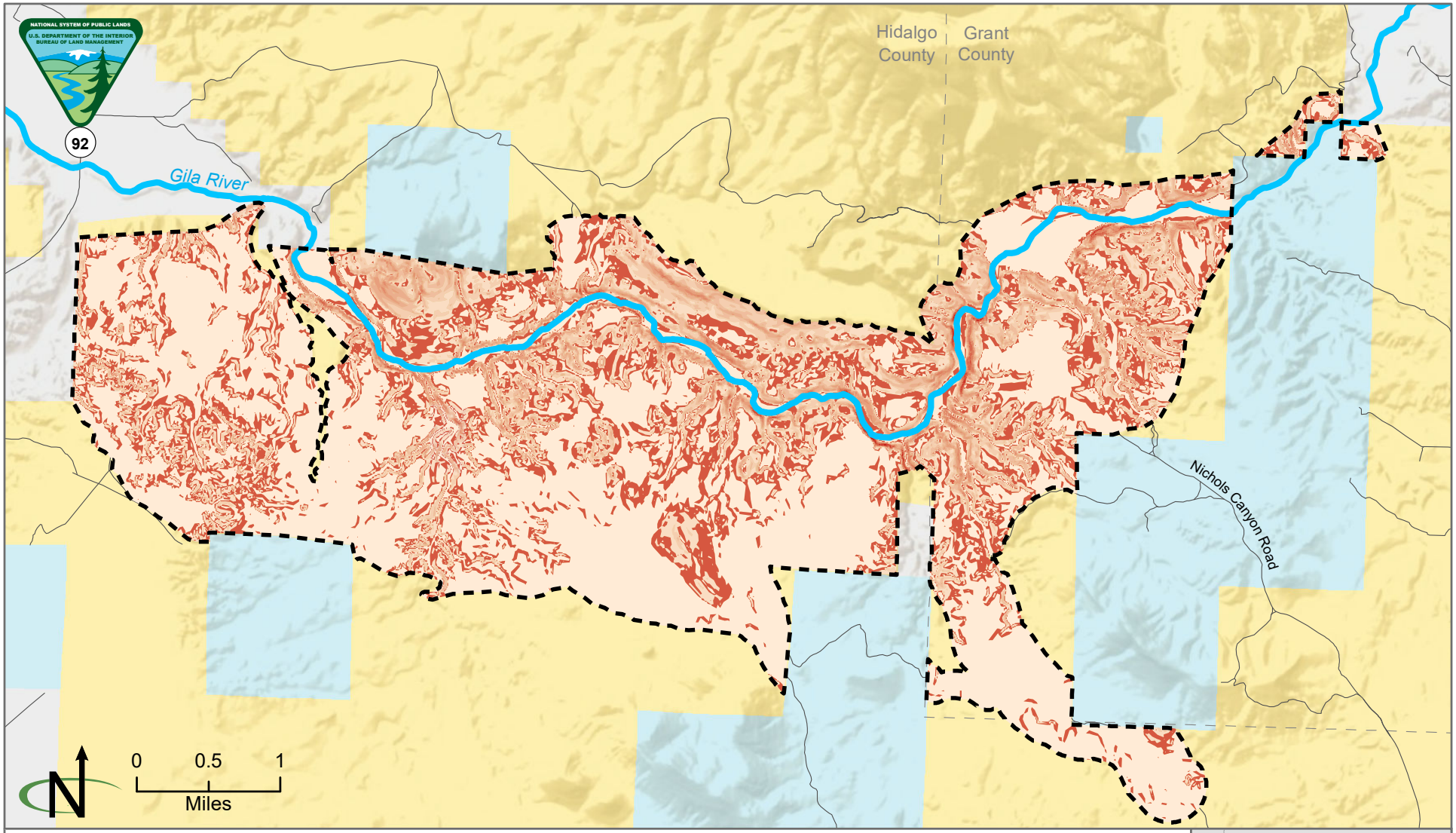

Figure 3-2
Slope

- 0 - 5%
- 10 - 15%
- 15 - 20%
- 20 - 25%
- 25 - 30%
- 30 - 35%
- 35 - 40%
- 40 - 45%
- 45 - 50%
- 5 - 10%
- 50 - 55%
- 55 - 60%
- 60 - 65%
- 65 - 70%
- RAMP planning area
- Bureau of Land Management
- State
- Private

Source: BLM GIS 2021
January 05, 2023
GilaRAMP_AE_Soil_Slope.mxd

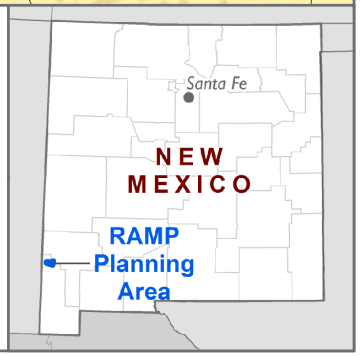

Table 3-4. Acres of Percent Slope Intervals

Slope Interval	Acres
0%–10%	8,100
11%–20%	2,040
Greater than 20%	1,060
Total	**11,200**

Source: BLM GIS 2022

3.3.1.2.2. Runoff Potential

The NRCS rates the runoff potential of soils using rankings between very low and very high. Soils rated as high or very high for runoff potential would be the most susceptible to erosion and subsequent sedimentation. **Table 3-5** lists acres of runoff potential ratings in the planning area and within 0.25 miles of existing trails. There are approximately 5,440 acres (49 percent of the planning area) of soils with high or very high runoff potential in the planning area, and 370 acres are within 0.25 miles of existing trails.

Table 3-5. Acres of Runoff Potential Ratings

Rating	Acres of Planning Area	Acres within 0.25 miles of Trails
Very low	10	0
Low	3,040	0
Medium	2,170	60
High	2,320	160
Very high	3,120	210
Total	**11,200**	**430**

Source: BLM GIS 2022

3.3.1.2.3. Topographic Wetness Index

A topographic wetness index (TWI) is a map calculation derived from an elevation model. It predicts where the accumulation of water flow occurs, which is generally in topologically low areas (Cornell University 2013). Sedimentation occurs when eroded material that is being transported by water, settles out of the water column onto the surface, as the water flow slows. Therefore, the model can be used to predict areas where sedimentation is likely to occur. The index does not account for conditions in areas where there are other more dominant processes controlling the water flow (Cornell University 2013).

A TWI of the planning area is shown in **Figure 3-3**. A high index value represents an area where flow accumulates (ponds) in topographically low areas. A low index value represents an area where flow does not accumulate (no ponding) and is generally the topographic high areas on the landscape. Existing features in Nichols Canyon, Spring on the Bluff, and Gauge Dispersed Camping Area are in lower topographic areas, where surface water accumulates and ponds (BLM GIS 2022). Fisherman's Point is in a topographic high area where no ponding occurs on the landscape (BLM GIS 2022).

3.3.1.3. Noxious Weeds and Nonnative Species

As discussed in **Chapter 1**, noxious weeds and nonnative species are an increasing problem in the RAMP planning area and are anticipated to increase with climate change. There are several noxious weeds and nonnative species, such as common Mediterranean grass (*Schismus barbatus*), poison hemlock (*Conium maculatum*), and saltcedar (*Tamarix* spp.) in the planning area. There are several projects to control noxious weeds and nonnative species, including federal, state, and private projects, that focus efforts along the Gila River.

Noxious weeds and nonnative species tend to be better adapted to disturbance and stressors, such as drought and fire, and they can outcompete native vegetation in these situations. The loss of native vegetation reduces wildlife habitat quality and can increase the risk of wildfires by increasing fuel loading and vegetation density.

3.3.1.4. Air Quality

Regulation exists to prevent significant deterioration of air quality in areas in attainment for the national ambient air quality standards (NAAQS) from being polluted up to the level of the NAAQS. Air quality control regions are classified either as Class I, II, or III to indicate the degree of air quality deterioration that the state or federal government will allow, while not exceeding the NAAQS. Class I areas are defined in the Clean Air Act as national parks larger than 6,000 acres, and wilderness areas and memorial parks larger than 5,000 acres, which existed in 1977. Class I areas are considered special areas of natural wonder and scenic beauty, where air quality should be given the most stringent protection. Actions located farther than 62 miles (100 kilometers) from Class I areas are generally presumed to not impact air quality-related values of the Class I area. There are three Class I areas that are within a 62-mile buffer of the planning area. These are the Gila Wilderness, Chiricahua National Monument, and Chiricahua Wilderness. Air quality in the planning area is generally good and does not exceed the state or federal air quality standards because the planning area is surrounded by, or includes, three Class I areas.

Particulate matter (PM) is a mixture of solid particles and liquid droplets found in the air. It is broken down into two categories, PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$. Some particles less than 10 micrometers in diameter (PM_{10}) can penetrate deep into the lungs, and some may even enter the bloodstream. Further, particles less than 2.5 micrometers in diameter ($PM_{2.5}$), also known as fine particles, pose the greatest risk to health (EPA 2022). Dust emissions can fall into either category, depending on the particle size of dust that is suspended. In dry conditions, OHV and motorized vehicle use can lead to short-term fugitive dust impacts that can negatively impact other recreation users' experiences.

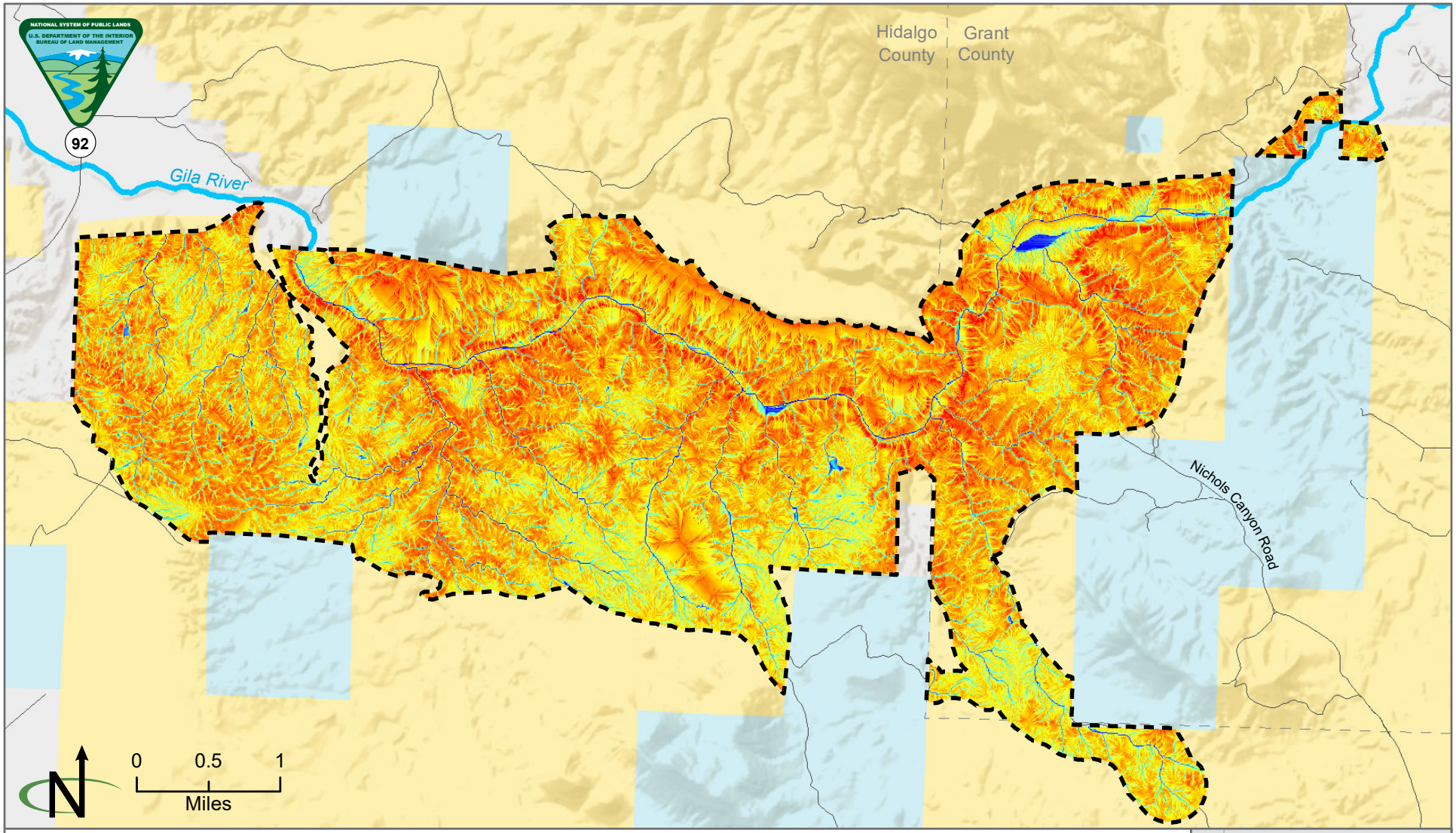

Figure 3-3
Topographic Wetness Index Model

High index value (ponding)
Low index value (no ponding)
RAMP planning area
Bureau of Land Management
State
Private

Source: BLM GIS 2021
January 05, 2023
GilaRAMP_AE_Soil_TopoInd.mxd
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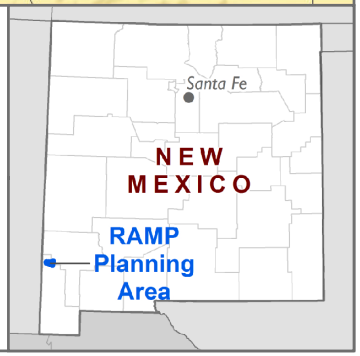


3.3.1.5. Cultural Resources and Native American Concerns

This RAMP's entire area of potential effect (APE)[9] has been recently professionally surveyed, with all cultural resources recorded and evaluated. The archaeological survey identified one site within the APE that has been recommended as eligible for listing on the NRHP. The BLM would avoid this site during all project activities.

Despite the remote location, looting and vandalism are still potential threats to the condition and historic integrity of cultural resources. Higher levels of visitation are likely to increase this further and should be monitored for impacts. Sites can be susceptible to natural wind and water erosion, neglect, and disturbance from vehicle use and recreation. There is very little development in the planning area. Most federal undertakings that are reviewed by the BLM are resolved through mitigation or avoiding recorded sites.

The BLM has reached out to eight federally recognized Tribes in the region: the Acoma Pueblo, Fort Sill Apache Tribe, Hopi Tribe, Isleta Pueblo, Mescalero Apache Tribe, Navajo Nation, White Mountain Apache Tribe, and Zuni Pueblo. As part of Section 106 of the NHPA and pursuant to regulations under NEPA and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, the BLM will maintain ongoing coordination or consultation with these Tribes regarding the Lower Gila Box RAMP/EA.

3.3.2. Environmental Impacts

3.3.2.1. Wildlife (Including Threatened and Endangered Species)

Construction of proposed infrastructure (campgrounds, parking lots, road gates, barricades, signage, and kiosks), construction of the new trails and roads, repair of existing routes, and restoration of areas that include surface disturbance could cause modification to wildlife, including special status species, and their habitats. Construction noise and the presence of project personnel could cause disturbance to general wildlife and special status species, especially during sensitive periods, such as nesting. These impacts would be mostly short-term, to occur during construction activities, and localized to small areas. Construction of developed campgrounds and parking lots would be outside critical habitat and riparian areas; this would avoid significant habitat modification to sensitive wildlife areas.

Application of design features would protect aquatic and riparian habitat for fish and aquatics, including special status species. Additionally, under all alternatives, signage would be added to educate the public about how to prevent the spread of chytrid fungus. All alternatives include protecting migratory bird nests by working outside the nesting season, or surveying for nests prior to activities and protecting any active nests.

Unauthorized recreation use could disturb or harm general wildlife and special status species, including their habitats, especially in riparian and aquatic habitats. Unauthorized OHV use in riverbeds could increase sedimentation and pollutants in aquatic habitats and adversely impact special status fish and aquatic species. In general, the potential for ecological impact with motorized use generally exceeds that of other analogous nonmotorized activities, primarily due

[9] The areas where ground disturbance may occur under the action alternatives.

to (1) the ability of vehicles to travel great distances, allowing visitors to access more terrain in a shorter time, including remote locations, and (2) the higher ground pressures and greater torque applied to soil/vegetation surfaces (Buckley 2004; Liddle 1997 in Monz et al. 2010). Numerous ecological consequences have been investigated, including soil displacement (Anders and Leatherman 1987 in Monz et al. 2010), vegetation damage (Liddle 1997 in Monz et al. 2010), seed and pathogen spread, and effects on animal populations (Buckley 2004 in Monz et al. 2010). RAMP actions under all alternatives to prevent unauthorized user-created routes, especially in riparian and aquatic habitats, would benefit the associated wildlife, such as ESA-listed fish, the southwestern willow flycatcher, and the western yellow-billed cuckoo, as well as their habitats.

Increases in recreation use could increase the potential for recreation-related disturbances to general wildlife and special status species, especially during breeding periods. Higher recreation use in spring and summer tends to correlate with sensitive wildlife periods. Camping and recreation use in or near riparian or aquatic habitats could increase adverse impacts, including disturbance, injury, and mortality on wildlife and wildlife habitat from trash, human waste, trampling, campfires, and degradation of habitat. Campsite proliferation problems are common when managers permit largely unconfined or unregulated "dispersed" camping that allows visitors the freedom to find and select a campsite of their choice, with minimal regulatory interference. Recreation ecologists who study the impacts of visitor use in protected areas have consistently documented some substantial avoidable and unacceptable natural resource and experiential impacts associated with unconfined camping policies (Cole 1982a, 1982b, 2013a, 2013b; Leung and Marion 2000, 2004 in Marion et al. 2020). Three common/chronic problems include: 1) visitors frequently create unsustainable campsites in flat terrain close to popular attraction features or destination locations, water, and formal trails; 2) visitors create high-density clusters of large campsites with high levels of resource and social impact in the most popular areas; and 3) site proliferation over time leads to exceptionally large numbers of unnecessary campsites (Marion et al. 2020).

Although short term, localized adverse impacts on wildlife could occur during construction. The BLM would implement measures to avoid or reduce these impacts under all alternatives. Overall, all alternatives would be beneficial to wildlife, including special status species, and their habitats by addressing unauthorized recreation use outside designated areas and informing the public about natural resources.

3.3.2.1.1. Impacts of Alternative A—No Action Alternative

Alternative A has the least management direction to address unauthorized recreation use. It also maintains motorized access closer to the canyon. Under Alternative A, recreation impacts on wildlife would be high. Motorized access routes closer to riparian and river areas would likely increase with recreation levels. The associated disturbance to the riparian and aquatic habitats associated with wildlife, including critical habitat and species listed as threatened or endangered under the ESA, would increase proportionally with the increase in motor vehicle use.

Alternative A would not establish a primitive campground with designated fire rings at Nichols Canyon in designated critical habitat. Therefore, there would be no short-term construction-related impacts on critical habitat. However, primitive campers would be free to camp along the

river where they choose and would likely create multiple fire rings and campsites that could degrade critical habitat and disturb special status species, if not properly managed.

There would be no cumulative impacts on wildlife and wildlife habitat as a result of Alternative A. The proposed saltcedar removal project would cause a short-term, local disturbance to wildlife due to human presence during herbicide application and saltcedar removal. However, the project would improve habitat along the riverbank in the long term. However, Alternative A would reduce the effect of these riparian area improvements due to continued unauthorized motorized vehicle use in the riparian area and resulting habitat disturbance, potentially negating the beneficial impacts from saltcedar removal.

3.3.2.1.2. Impacts of Alternative B—Proposed RAMP

Alternative B has the most potential for short-term impacts related to construction and disturbance of wildlife and their habitats. However, campgrounds, parking lots, and other proposed, larger surface-disturbing actions are outside the riparian zone. Also, the BLM would implement design features to reduce or avoid construction disturbances to wildlife. While primitive campground construction would occur within southwestern willow flycatcher and yellow-billed cuckoo critical habitats, it would occur outside the floodplain and riparian corridor of cottonwood and willow canopy, where nesting predominantly occurs. Actual surface disturbance activities to create fire rings, electric fence work, and to establish primitive campsites would require minimal change to the natural environment and would have a minimal footprint. Construction impacts would be short term, localized, and in areas of existing recreation use.

Although there would be an increase in recreation activities, RAMP actions under all action alternatives would prevent unauthorized user-created routes and confine dispersed camping, especially in riparian and aquatic habitats and benefit critical habitat. When camping is unconfined (unregulated), visitors frequently create large numbers of campsites that receive mostly moderate levels of use (Cole 1993, 2013a, 2013b, cited in Marion et al 2020). Recreation ecology studies support a containment (concentration) strategy as the most effective option, particularly in moderate- to high-use settings, with visitors encouraged to use a limited number of carefully selected, established sites that meet agency guidance, or with visitors required to use only designated sites (Cole 2013a, 2013b, Marion 2016, Reid and Marion 2004 cited in Marion et al. 2020). The core objective of a containment strategy is to limit camping impact to the smallest number of sites needed, and to spatially concentrate camping activity on each site to minimize the aggregate area of camping disturbance (Cole 1992; Leung and Marion 1999, 2004; Hammitt et al. 2015 cited in Marion et al. 2020).

Under Alternative B, camping would be confined to three to five established sites and the public informed to stay within established sites, potentially reducing recreation-related disturbances to ESA-listed species in the RAMP planning area, compared with Alternative A. This is because established campsites would reduce creation of dispersed sites along the stream banks and reduce the spatial extent of resource damage impacts (Marion et al 2020).

Compared with Alternative A, Alternative B would better address recreation-related impacts, including unauthorized OHV use in floodplains and streams. Overall, habitat modification would

be lower under Alternative B than under Alternative A because the concentration of recreation uses to managed areas and increased interpretation would minimize surface disturbance, spread of invasive species, and sedimentation. Reducing disturbance of riparian habitat under Alternative B coupled with the proposed saltcedar removal project would result in cumulative impacts on wildlife by improving habitat quality within the planning area.

3.3.2.1.3. Impacts of Alternative C—Minimal Disturbance

Alternative C would have the least adverse impacts on wildlife, including special status species, and their habitats. Compared with Alternatives A and B, it would further reduce the motorized and unauthorized recreation access to sensitive riparian and river habitats, thereby limiting the potential for recreation-related habitat modification and disturbance to wildlife. Under this alternative, the BLM would propose less temporary and permanent surface disturbance for new infrastructure; therefore, less habitat modification and disturbance to wildlife would occur.

Alternative C would not establish a primitive campground with designated fire rings and campsites at Nichols Canyon near the Gila River. Similar to Alternative A, impacts on special status species and critical habitat would have no short-term construction disturbance, but potentially more recreation impacts from unmanaged dispersed campers. However, since access to Nichols Canyon wash would be restricted to administrative use and nonmotorized trail use, there would be less recreation use and impacts compared with Alternative A and Alternative B. Those alternatives would maintain Nichols Canyon Road for motorized access allowing campers closer access and use of primitive camping near Gila River, which would increase recreation impacts on wildlife compared with Alternative C.

Under Alternative C, more areas would be restored, such as redesignated nonmotorized routes, which would maintain and increase wildlife habitat. Alternative C would be more beneficial to wildlife, including special status species, than Alternative A. As under Alternative B, reducing disturbance of riparian habitat under Alternative C would result in cumulative improvements in habitat quality in combination with the proposed saltcedar removal project compared with Alternative A.

3.3.2.2. Soil Resources

3.3.2.2.1. Impacts of Alternative A—No Action Alternative

The lack of designated parking areas, campgrounds, and post-and-cable boundaries in the planning area has resulted in dispersed recreation conditions. Dispersed recreation often leads to the creation of multiple routes to a common destination, which results in unnecessary soil compaction, erosion, and sedimentation from multiple sources (Hockett et al. 2010). Dispersed camping results in similar impacts due to selection of campsites close to streams, creation of high-density clusters of campsites, and site proliferation over time that leads to many unneeded campsites (Marion et al. 2020). Dispersed camping at multiple sites with moderate use has similar impacts to a singular site with heavy use, except the aggregate impact of multiple sites is greater than the singular site (Marion et al. 2020).

Under Alternative A, the Mimbres-Arizo-Riverwash association, 0 to 5 percent slopes; Gila variant fine sandy loam, 1 to 3 percent slopes; and the Anthony fine sandy loam, 1 to 3 percent

slopes soil map units overlap most of the Nichols Canyon features (2 miles total). These are all rated as very limited for camp areas and somewhat limited for picnic areas due to flooding, slow water movement, and dust limiting features. The Tres Hermanos-Lehmans association, 1 to 15 percent slopes map unit overlaps the Gauge Dispersed Camping Area motorized road (2 miles) and the Nichols Canyon motorized road (1 mile). The Lehmans extremely rocky loam, 10 to 25 percent slopes map unit overlaps the Spring on the Bluff parking area and pedestrian trail (0.2 acres and 1 mile, respectively). The Tres Hermanos soil series is rated as somewhat limited for camp and picnic areas due to slow water movement, dust, and gravel content limiting features. The Lehmans soil series is rated as very limited for camp and picnic areas due to its depth to bedrock (top of bedrock is shallow, 10-20 inches below the soil surface), slow water movement, slope, dust, and gravel content limiting features (see **Table 3-6**). The Forrest gravelly loam map unit overlaps the Fisherman's Point motorized trail (0.1 miles) has a somewhat limited rating for camp sites and picnic areas due to the slow water movement, dusty and gravel content.

Table 3-6. Landscape Positions for Existing Areas Under Alternative A

AREA	ELEVATION RANGE (METERS)	ELEVATION RANGE (FEET)	PERCENT SLOPE RANGE[1]	DRAINAGES (MILES)
Nichols Canyon	1,172–1,491	3,845–4,892	0–50%	13.2
Gauge Dispersed Camping Area	1,172–1,461	3,845–4,892	0–50%	12.6
Spring on the Bluff	1,160–1,408	3,086–4,620	0–40%	7.8
Fisherman's Point	1,164–1,370	3,819–4,495	0–45%	11.1
Total	**--**	**--**	**--**	**44.7**

Source: BLM GIS 2022
[1]For areas greater than 10 acres

Due to the limiting features associated with the Mimbres, Arizo, Gila, and Lehmans soil series, project features on these soils would be at the most risk for soil erosion.

Using geographic information systems (GIS) analysis, a digital elevation model was clipped to a 1-mile buffer of the project areas under Alternative A for Nichols Canyon, Gauge Dispersed Camping Area, Spring on the Bluff, and Fisherman's Point (12,880 acres total). The digital elevation model was used to determine the elevation ranges and percent slope for each of the areas. The TWI model described in the affected environment was also clipped to the 1-mile buffer to calculate the drainage for each area.

Alternative A has approximately 44.7 miles of drainages that flow to the Gila River. Motorized uses occur in Nichols Canyon, Gauge Dispersed Camping Area, and Fisherman's Point, which likely contribute the most sedimentation to the river. In the Nichols Canyon area, if road maintenance is delayed due to funding and timing priorities, the potential for runoff and sedimentation would increase.

The following areas under Alternative A are in areas with a high TWI (topographically low, where water flow accumulates and ponds): Nichols Canyon Road and the existing nonmotorized trail, the existing features at Gauge Dispersed Camping Area, and the trailhead and parking area

at Spring on the Bluff (BLM GIS 2022). Fisherman's Point is in area with a low TWI, so water flow does not accumulate in this area.

Impacts from dispersed recreation would continue under Alternative A. Since motorized uses occur in most areas, soil compaction, erosion, and excessive sedimentation would continue, especially on slopes greater than 20 percent, in areas with high TWI, for soils rated as very limited for camp and picnic areas, and for soils with high or very high runoff potential.

The saltcedar removal project would reduce the saline content in the localized removal areas and would induce more favorable soil conditions for native vegetation. Though invasive, the removal of saltcedar would reduce the overall vegetation cover until native vegetation reestablished, which could increase the potential for soil erosion and sedimentation during the project. Therefore, when considered with the potential impacts on soil under Alternative A, there is the potential for cumulative impacts resulting in increased erosion and sedimentation.

3.3.2.2.2. Impacts of Alternative B—Proposed RAMP

Compared with Alternative A, the acreage of soils rated as somewhat limited or very limited for camp and picnic areas would increase under Alternative B. The Mimbres-Arizo-Riverwash association, 0 to 5 percent slopes and the Anthony fine sandy loam, 1 to 3 percent slopes soil map units overlap some of the Nichols Canyon features (0.3 miles). The Tres Hermanos-Lehmans association, 1 to 15 percent slopes map unit overlaps most of the Gauge Dispersed Camping Area features (4.3 acres and 1.6 miles) and the motorized road in Nichols Canyon (0.8 miles). The Lehmans extremely rocky loam, 10 to 25 percent slopes map unit overlaps the Spring on the Bluff features (0.9 acres). The Graham rocky clay loam, 1 to 9 percent slopes map unit overlaps the Caprock Campground (0.2 acres) and is rated as very limited for camp and picnic areas. The Forrest gravelly loam map unit overlaps the Fisherman's Point features (0.3 acres and 0.3 miles).

Using the same GIS analysis, as described under Alternative A, the following landscape position data was calculated for Alternative B and is shown in **Table 3-7**. The 1-mile buffer around the project areas proposed under Alternative B (including Caprock Campground) totals 15,270 acres.

Table 3-7. Landscape Positions for the Proposed Areas Under Alternative B

AREA	ELEVATION RANGE (METERS)	ELEVATION RANGE (FEET)	PERCENT SLOPE RANGE[1]	DRAINAGES (MILES)
Nichols Canyon	1,172–1,491	3,845–4,892	0–50%	13.5
Gauge Dispersed Camping Area	1,172–1,461	3,845–4,892	0–50%	13.3
Spring on the Bluff	1,160–1,408	3,086–4,620	0–45%	7.8
Fisherman's Point	1,164–1,370	3,819–4,495	0–45%	11.1
Caprock Campground	1,254–1,435	4,114–4,708	0–25%	7.4
Total	**--**	**--**	**--**	**53.1**

Source: BLM GIS 2022
[1]For areas greater than 10 acres

The landscape positions for the areas under Alternative B are very similar to those under Alternative A (with the exception of Caprock Campground). In total, Alternative B would have 53.3 miles of drainages that flow to the Gila River. Compared with Alternative A, the miles of drainages would increase slightly under Alternative B for Nichols Canyon and Gauge Dispersed Camping Area, and Caprock Campground would add 7.4 more miles. The range of slopes at Caprock Campground would be less steep than other areas, which would minimize runoff and sedimentation. Compared with Alternative A, sedimentation would be reduced where motorized use is limited in Fisherman's Point and the Gauge Dispersed Camping Area.

The following areas under Alternative B would be located in areas with a high TWI (ponding areas): the Nichols Canyon parking area, portions of the nonmotorized trail and motorized trail near the primitive campground at the Gauge Dispersed Camping Area, the trailhead and parking area at Spring on the Bluff, and Caprock Campground (BLM GIS 2022). Soil displaced by motorized uses in these areas would be more susceptible to erosion and sedimentation.

Similar to Alternative A, impacts from motorized uses would continue to increase soil compaction, erosion, and successive sedimentation, especially on slopes greater than 20 percent, in areas with high TWI, for soils rated as very limited for camp and picnic areas, and for soils with high or very high runoff potential.

Compared with Alternative A, soil erosion and sedimentation under Alternative B would be reduced with the establishment of more designated recreation areas and delineation of these areas with post and cable boundaries and sign interpretation. As demonstrated by Hockett et al. 2010 and Marion et al. 2020, sources of sedimentation (such as trails and campsites) can be minimized by discouraging dispersed uses and concentrating uses to designated areas. Even if the intensity of use increases in a designated area, the aggregated impact is less severe than for dispersed areas (Marian et al. 2020). At Nichols Canyon, BLM would place a barrier across the wash to prevent motorized use in the floodplain. This would also reduce soil erosion and sedimentation, compared with Alternative A. Revegetation of unauthorized routes under Alternative B would increase soil stability and further reduce impacts from undesignated areas, compared with Alternative A. In addition, public education, maintenance of designated areas, and revegetation of undesignated areas, as proposed under Alternative B, are all effective ways to reduce soil compaction and erosion (Hockett et al. 2010).

Cumulative impacts to soils from the combination of Alternative B and the saltcedar removal project would be the same as described under Alternative A; however, the cumulative effect would be less, given the lessened intensity of recreation impacts under Alternative B.

3.3.2.2.3. Impacts of Alternative C—Minimal Disturbance

Compared with Alternative A, the acreage of soils rated as somewhat limited or very limited for camp and picnic areas would increase under Alternative C. The overlapping soil map units described under Alternative B would be the same for Alternative C, except the acreage of the Tres Hermanos-Lehmans association, 1 to 15 percent slopes map unit would be 2.4 fewer acres for the Gauge Dispersed Camping area. There would be no acres of disturbance for the Fisherman's Point area; miles of disturbance would be the same as under Alternative B (0.3

miles). Similarly, there would be no acres of disturbance for Nichols Canyon; miles of disturbance would be the same as under Alternative B.

Using the same GIS analysis as described under Alternative A, landscape positions for the areas under Alternative C are very similar to those calculated for Alternative B. The 1-mile buffer around the project areas proposed under Alternative C totals 15,100 acres. There are 0.4 fewer miles of drainages for the Gauge Dispersed Camping area and 3 fewer miles of drainages for Nichols Canyon compared with Alternative B (BLM GIS 2022). Areas with high TWI would be the same as those described under Alternative B, except there would be no areas in Nichols Canyon with a high TWI.

The potential gate location on Gauge Station Road is the only recreation infrastructure that is outside of the 1-mile buffer. Using the same GIS analysis for the 27.38-acre proposed gate location, the elevation range is 1,249–1,284 feet (4,098–4,213 meters) and the slope range is 0–30 percent. Based on the TWI model, the proposed gate location has approximately 0.6 miles of drainages and varying low to high topography. The center of the area is where ponding is most likely to occur (BLM GIS 2022).

In total, Alternative C would have 49.4 miles of drainages that flow to the Gila River (BLM GIS 2022). Impacts are anticipated to be the same as those described under Alternative B for most project features, except for Nichols Canyon. The miles of drainages from Nichols Canyon would decrease under Alternative C, with 2.7 fewer miles than under Alternative A and 3 fewer miles than under Alternative B.

Under Alternative C Nichols Canyon would be managed as a dispersed camping area and would not include formal campsites. Impacts from dispersed camping in this area are anticipated to be the same as those described under Alternative A.

Cumulative impacts from the proposed areas and the saltcedar removal project would be similar to those described under Alternative B. However, the intensity of soil compaction and erosion would be reduced, compared with Alternatives A and B, wherever motorized access is limited. Limiting motorized use in Nichols Canyon and Fisherman's Point would decrease sedimentation substantially compared with Alternatives A and B.

3.3.2.3. Noxious Weeds and Invasive, Nonnative Species

Noxious weeds and invasive, nonnative plant species can be established and spread by project equipment and personnel when constructing roads, reestablishing trails, creating campgrounds, and installing gates, kiosks, signage, and other infrastructure. Recreation use, including OHV travel, camping, hiking, and boating, can spread weed and invasive species seeds transported on vehicles, recreationists, and pets. Project equipment and recreationists can bring invasive seeds from other locations if vehicles and personal equipment are not properly cleaned. These impacts are typically greater in riparian and aquatic habitats where seed transportation is higher and in areas of disturbance near existing noxious weeds and invasive species populations.

Under all alternatives, the design features in Chapter 2 and management guidance under the Federal Noxious Weed Act to address weeds and invasive species would avoid or reduce impacts caused by ground-disturbing activities.

All alternatives include resource monitoring and adaptive management. Monitoring would inform noxious weed and invasive species occurrences. Adaptive management could address management actions to control weeds and invasive species when invasive species' thresholds are reached or exceeded. All alternatives would restore burned areas and degraded habitats, including unauthorized user-created routes in the ACEC and WSA, through a combination of active and passive restoration. Active restoration would use native plant material free from noxious weed and invasive, nonnative material.

These management actions under all alternatives would reduce adverse impacts from noxious weeds and invasive, nonnative species, thereby benefiting the natural resources in the planning area. In combination with the saltcedar inventory and removal project in the Gila Lower Box, all RAMP alternatives would have cumulative beneficial impacts for the management and control of weeds and invasive species in the planning area.

3.3.2.3.1. Impacts of Alternative A—No Action Alternative

Without barricades, road gates, post-and-cable boundaries, and reestablished designated routes, unauthorized user-created routes would be the most prevalent under Alternative A. This could result in the establishment and spread of noxious weeds and invasive species by recreationists in unauthorized areas, such as OHV use in riverbeds and floodplains in Nichols Canyon.

3.3.2.3.2. Impacts of Alternative B—Proposed RAMP

The construction of proposed parking lots, campgrounds, gates, new trails, and other infrastructure would cause surface disturbance that could establish or spread noxious weeds and invasive species, if brought in by project equipment or personnel. However, as discussed above, this would be reduced or avoided by design features relevant to noxious weeds.

Compared with Alternative A, Alternative B would reduce the potential weed and invasive species spread from recreational motorized vehicles by redesignating motorized routes for nonmotorized travel only (such as Gauge Station Road) and through motorized access barricades. This is especially true in riparian and floodplain areas that would be protected from unauthorized OHV use. Information signs could inform the public about sensitive habitats and about how the public can help protect natural resources, including being aware of weed spread.

With the creation of campgrounds and the improvement of access, the BLM anticipates that recreation use would increase. An increase in the level of recreation use could increase the potential for noxious weed and invasive species establishment and spread, especially if recreationists bring new weed material from outside areas. Resource monitoring and adaptive management would address noxious weed and invasive, nonnative species management.

3.3.2.3.3. Impacts of Alternative C—Minimal Disturbance

Alternative C would have similar impacts as Alternative B. However, there would be less potential for weed and invasive species spread from proposed surface-disturbing activities due to less proposed infrastructure such as parking lots and established fire rings. Recreation access to the riverside areas, that are more susceptible to weed and invasive species, would be more limited (for example, restricting motorized recreation use into Nichols Canyon wash). This

would thereby limit potential increases in weed spread from recreation use in these sensitive areas.

Like Alternative B, the spread of weeds and invasive species from unauthorized user-created routes and motorized use of access routes would be reduced, compared with Alternative A, with the installation of barricades and the redesignation of motorized routes to nonmotorized.

3.3.2.4. Air Quality

3.3.2.4.1. Impacts of Alternative A—No Action Alternative

The continuation of current management of existing recreational amenities in the planning area would not result in measurable changes to the planning area's air quality. Therefore, there would be no effects on air quality resources under Alternative A. However, under Alternative A, the potential for fugitive dust emissions would continue because there would be more routes open to motorized use and the additional routes are a potential source of dust.

The No Action Alternative would not contribute substantially to cumulative effects on air quality resources in the planning area because there are no significant changes expected from ongoing management actions.

3.3.2.4.2. Impacts of Alternative B—Proposed RAMP

The proposed RAMP would not result in measurable changes to the planning area's air quality. Allowing additional motorized vehicle use on certain routes with improved recreation facilities would not result in measurable long-term air quality impacts. Potential short-term impacts, such as fugitive dust emissions, could be present; however, the concentration of $PM_{2.5}$ and PM_{10} would be negligible. Closing certain areas to motorized access could improve short-term air quality from fugitive dust emissions, but long-term trends are not expected to change.

Reasonably foreseeable future actions include the inventory and removal of all saltcedar trees currently in the Gila Lower Box river segment. This action would involve the removal of nonnative species from the landscape. The discrete and localized actions proposed under the RAMP would not contribute substantially to cumulative effects on air quality resources in the planning area. Therefore, no cumulative impacts are anticipated when this alternative is coupled with reasonably foreseeable future projects.

3.3.2.4.3. Impacts of Alternative C—Minimal Disturbance

Impacts on air quality resources would be similar to those described under Alternative B; however, they would be slightly reduced given the focus on less intensive recreational use under this alternative. Under Alternative C, the cumulative effects would be the same as those described under Alternative B. Of all alternatives, Alternative C would provide for the most limited access since it closes the greatest mileage of inventoried roads and trails. This could decrease short-term fugitive dust emissions when compared with the other alternatives. Cumulative impacts are anticipated to be the same as Alternative B.

3.3.2.5. Cultural Resources and Native American Concerns

3.3.2.5.1. Impacts of Alternative A—No Action Alternative

Continuing current management of the planning area would not result in changes in the potential for adverse effects on cultural resources from ground disturbance resulting from vehicle use, recreation, and vandalism. The Spring on the Bluff pedestrian trail currently abuts or goes through an archaeological site that is recommended as eligible for listing on the NRHP. The repeated use could affect this site. Unauthorized motorized access and recreation could also affect unknown sites in the planning area. Although specific Tribal resources have not been identified, impacts from continuing current management are possible and could be revealed in ongoing coordination and consultation. Section 106 would be completed for the saltcedar removal project and ensure that historic properties would be avoided and any adverse effects resolved. With increased recreational use and the lack of the proposed RAMP protection measures, there would be potential for more ground disturbing impacts on known and unrecorded cultural resources but these are not anticipated to contribute substantially to cumulative impacts.

3.3.2.5.2. Impacts of Alternative B—Proposed RAMP

The proposed RAMP includes recreational improvements and new amenities, such as establishing camping areas, trailheads, and parking areas; adjusting travel management; and installing barriers to define areas where vehicles are permitted. In general, these amenities would reduce the potential for erosion and ground-disturbing impacts on cultural resources as use increases since their locations do not overlap with cultural resources. The construction of these amenities (covering up to 6.43 acres total) could have the potential to disturb cultural or Tribal resources; however, an archaeological survey has been conducted and known sites would be avoided. Effects on cultural resources are not anticipated to be adverse and would be avoided through design features and compliance with Section 106 of the NHPA.

The planned removal of all saltcedar trees along the river in the Lower Gila Box is a cumulative activity that would include the potential for ground disturbance. All trees would be accessed on foot, and no off-road travel would occur. This would reduce the potential for disturbing cultural resources. As a federal undertaking, the BLM would review the planned removal project, complete the Section 106 process, and ensure historic properties would be avoided. If unrecorded sites are discovered during the removal project, work would cease in the immediate area of the discovery until the sites can be assessed. The recreational improvements and new amenities, in combination with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, are not anticipated to contribute substantially to cumulative impacts.

3.3.2.5.3. Impacts of Alternative C—Minimal Disturbance

Potential impacts on cultural resources would be similar to those described for Alternative B. There would be no primitive campground with designated fire rings and campsites at Nichols Canyon, and the Nichols Canyon Road would be closed to motorized use. These additional measures to limit motorized travel and minimize disturbance would reduce the potential for ground-disturbing activities (covering a total of up to 3.40 acres) and for impacts on cultural resources. Like under Alternative B, the recreational improvements and new amenities, in

combination with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, are not anticipated to contribute substantially to cumulative impacts on cultural resources.

3.3.3. Mitigation, Monitoring, and Adaptive Management

3.3.3.1. Wildlife (Including Threatened and Endangered Species)

All alternatives include resource monitoring and adaptive management that would help inform and address impacts from recreation on wildlife and their habitats. Such adaptive management could include seasonal restrictions to avoid sensitive periods, campground rules to reduce noise disturbance, excluding recreation in sensitive resource areas, and implementation of a permit system if wildlife resource thresholds were exceeded.

Design features (see **Chapter 2**) would protect aquatic and riparian habitat for fish and other aquatic species, including special status species. All alternatives include protecting migratory bird nests by working outside the nesting season, or surveying for nests prior to activities and protecting any active nests.

3.3.3.2. Soil Resources

The BLM LCDO would require design features (see **Chapter 2**), including implementing and designing small-scale erosion control measures to lessen the potential impacts to the soil resources.

3.3.3.3. Noxious Weeds and Invasive, Nonnative Species

Under all alternatives, following design features (see **Chapter 2**) and management guidance under the Federal Noxious Weed Act to address weeds and invasive species would avoid or reduce impacts caused by ground-disturbing activities.

All alternatives include resource monitoring and adaptive management. Monitoring would inform noxious weed and invasive species occurrences. Adaptive management could address management actions to control weed and invasive species when invasive species thresholds are reached or exceeded.

3.3.4. Residual Impacts

3.3.4.1. Wildlife (Including Threatened and Endangered Species)

In spite of mitigation measures, wildlife would still be disturbed from an increase in recreation noise, human presence, and trampling. However, that disturbance would not significantly affect reproductive success or species populations due to the small spatial scale and proposed activities being in existing disturbed areas.

3.3.4.2. Soil Resources

There would be permanent impacts on the soil resource from constructing proposed parking lots, campgrounds, gates, new trails, and other infrastructure. The installation of water bars, turn outs, and other erosion-control measures, as well as the design features (see **Section 2.2.1**), would minimize soil-erosion sedimentation to streams.

3.3.4.3. Noxious Weeds and Invasive, Nonnative Species

In spite of mitigation measures, weeds and invasive species would continue to spread as a result of construction and recreation use. However, this would occur to a lesser extent due to implementation of design features. Monitoring and adaptive management would improve the response to address the continued spread of these species.

3.4. Issue 2: How would the alternatives impact recreation opportunities, including parking and access for current and future users?

Impacts on recreation opportunities in the planning area could occur from the proposed construction of infrastructure and the closure of certain areas to OHV use under the alternatives. The number of recreationists visiting the planning area has increased in recent years, and the area is an important source of water-based and land-based recreation opportunities.

3.4.1. Affected Environment

3.4.1.1. Recreation

Approximately 100 miles west of Las Cruces, New Mexico, the Gila Lower Box area is a popular recreation site for local communities. The BLM manages recreation in the planning area according to multiple-use principles to protect natural, cultural, and other resource values. The BLM LCDO's objective is to ensure the continued availability of outdoor recreation opportunities and experiences while limiting impacts on other resources.

The BLM manages the Gila Lower Box SRMA (9,630 acres; **Figure 3-4**), which overlaps much of the planning area, for a variety of recreation opportunities, primarily centered around dispersed water-based and water-dependent recreation, such as fishing, boating, camping, hiking, and nature viewing. The boating is limited to nonmotorized, shallow-draft boats, such as canoes, rafts, and kayaks. In recent decades, there has been a marked increase in motorized recreation along and in the riparian corridors on the Gila River, resulting in increased recreation-based impacts on other resources values. Recreation occurs in a primitive setting with minimal site controls or established infrastructure, such as informative signage or established camping areas.

Currently, there are few developed recreation opportunities within the planning area, aside from existing roads and trails. Most recreation use is dispersed and semi-primitive.

3.4.1.2. Travel Management

On BLM-administered lands, OHV use is limited to existing roads, trails, and dry washes. In the Gila Lower Box ACEC, which overlaps 4,190 acres of the planning area, OHV use is limited to designated roads and trails. There are approximately 2.6 miles of motorized roads and 0.70 miles of nonmotorized trails in the planning area. All WSAs, such as the Gila Lower Box WSA, are closed to motorized and wheeled vehicles. The 1993 Mimbres RMP proposed several areas that would be eligible for nonmotorized designation; these are included in the current planning area (BLM 1993).

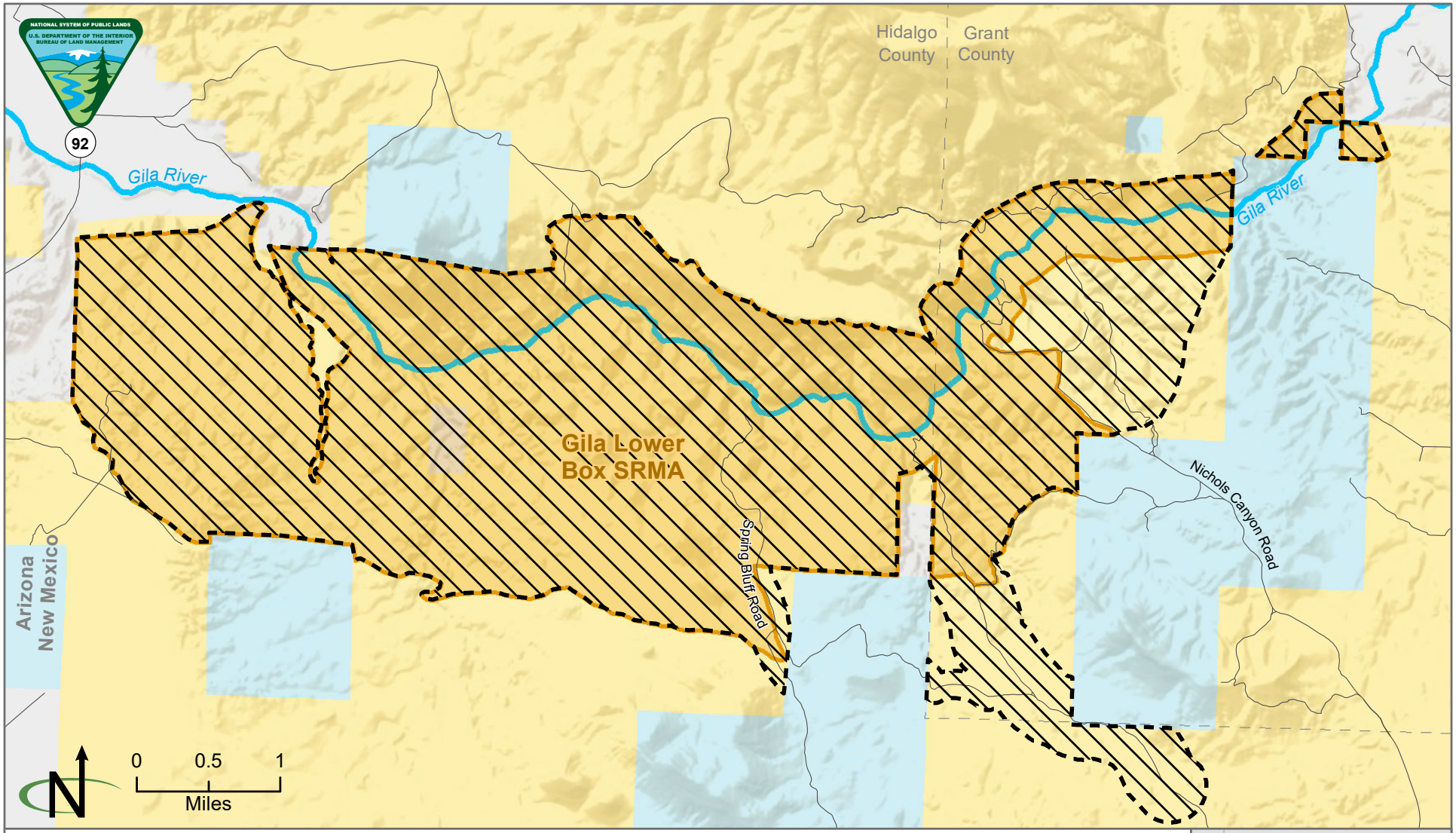
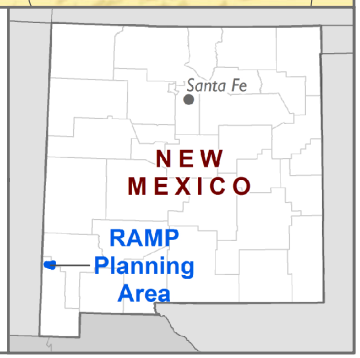


Figure 3-4
Special Designated Areas - Special Recreation Management Area

RAMP planning area
Special Recreation Management Area
Bureau of Land Management
State
Private



Changes are being considered to three existing recreation areas and two new areas that have under this RAMP, each of which are summarized below:

3.4.1.2.1. Nichols Canyon

Nichols Canyon is one of the primary access points to the RAMP planning area and has experienced considerable resource degradation due to various unauthorized OHV trails that spread out in the canyon from the washed-out Nichols Canyon Road. This is the only road in the Gila Lower Box ACEC where OHV use is allowed. Visitors also enjoy dispersed camping in the riparian area.

3.4.1.2.2. Gauge Dispersed Camping Area

The Gauge Dispersed Camping Area would be a new recreation management area located in the far northeastern portion of the planning area. The area surrounding it has seen resource degradation due to unauthorized motorized and camping access, including in the Gila Lower Box WSA.

3.4.1.2.3. Fisherman's Point

Located in the eastern-central portion of the planning area, Fisherman's Point provides users with opportunities for hiking activities. Some use has encroached into the Gila Lower Box WSA. An existing hiking trail leads to the river from the end of a spur road heading off the county road. The public also uses this trailhead for dispersed camping.

3.4.1.2.4. Spring on the Bluff

Located in the central portion of the planning area, Spring Bluff Road leads to a undesignated parking area and a pedestrian trail heading down to the river in the Gila Lower Box ACEC. The area has seen a considerable increase in usage, with BLM staff reporting overflow parking out of the existing parking area and associated disturbance.

3.4.1.2.5. Caprock Campground

The proposed Caprock Campground is located in the southeastern portion of the planning area. There are currently no existing roads, trails or facilities associated with this area.

3.4.1.3. Human Health and Safety

Public safety issues can arise from a variety of circumstances, ranging from natural to human-made hazards. In remote areas, natural environmental circumstances pose safety issues, including extreme temperature variations, storms and inclement weather, flashfloods and debris flows, and the presence of aggressive or venomous animals. Wildfires also have the potential to endanger persons or property. The density and types of vegetation and the consequent likelihoods of natural or human-caused fires vary greatly due to differences in elevation, climate, soils, and topography in the planning area. Increased fire activity can result in the potential increase of flooding events, which also have the potential to endanger persons, property, and infrastructure.

In the project area, peak flooding events in the Gila River are known to occur as high as 58,700 cubic feet per second (cfs; USGS Gila River below Blue Creek Gauge 1978). However, flooding impacts could occur with flows as low as 2,500 cfs.[10] **Table 3-8** lists peak flows at the Gila River below Blue Creek USGS gauge since 2000. In the project area, Gila River flows typically reach 2,500 cfs on an annual basis.

Table 3-8. Peak flow measurements on the Gila River, NM at the Blue Creek Gauge 2000–2021

DATE	FLOW (CFS)
November 2000	4,380
October 2002	7,920
September 2004	15,000
February 2005	32,700
August 2006	8,280
January 2008	12,500
September 2009	2,270
January 2010	3,170
August 2012	1,290
September 2013	11,200
September 2014	4,440
July 2015	3,770
December 2016	4,960
July 2018	10,200
December 2019	3,050
July 2021	2,830

Source: USGS Gauge 9432000, July 2022.
Note: Only available data is shown.

Almost any recreational activity may be hazardous to the participants and, in some circumstances, to nonparticipants. Exercising appropriate caution, using appropriate gear, and wearing the correct clothing help to reduce the risk of injury.

OHV use occurs throughout the planning area for transportation and recreation. OHVs are used to transport recreational visitors to recreation sites and for a recreational activity (for motorcycle races and hill climbing). These recreational activities have safety implications due to the nature of the vehicles, rough terrain, and potential risky behavior (BLM 2006). The risk of a single- or multiple-vehicle accident, or a collision between a vehicle and a pedestrian or bicyclist, is potentially associated with any location where motor vehicles operate.

[10]Corey Durr, BLM Las Cruces District hydrologist, internal communications on August 15, 2022

Public health and safety management is intended to protect the public on BLM-administered lands, to comply with applicable federal and state laws, to prevent waste contamination, and to minimize physical hazards due to any BLM-authorized actions, recreation, or illegal activities on public lands. BLM management decisions are informed by the degree to which inherent risks associated with outdoor recreation can result in the potential for personal injury. The BLM prioritizes human life over all other management actions. Maintaining a safe environment encompasses various resources that are discussed in detail under the relevant sections in this RAMP/EA, such as recreation and visitor services.

3.4.2. Environmental Impacts

3.4.2.1. Recreation

Under all alternatives, the BLM would implement a visitor monitoring program as visitation increases. Traffic and pedestrian counters would be added to monitor the visitation within the planning area, and once visitation reached an average of 100 visitors per day, the BLM would construct the Caprock Campground. With increased use, the BLM would also evaluate the potential need for a site host to monitor the area and to collect fees from users. Over the long term, a site host would improve the visitor experience by maintaining site controls to prevent impacts from heavy recreation use. In addition, the BLM would upgrade and maintain the water gates across the Gila River to improve boater access and to restrict livestock, which would prevent human-livestock interactions and improve the recreational experience.

Under all alternatives, the BLM would consider the potential for seasonal closures to reduce impacts from visitors, which would limit recreation opportunities during certain times of the year, if implemented. Motorized use would be prohibited within the river channel, and barriers would be installed to prevent motorized access to the ACEC and WSA. However, nonmotorized access to the ACEC and WSA would remain. Recreation such as rock hounding and casual use mining would continue, pursuant to the RMP. This would improve the overall recreation experience for nonmotorized users.

Ongoing maintenance activities and the saltcedar removal project may have localized, short-term effects on recreation by temporarily restricting recreation access where maintenance/removal activities occur. In the long term, these activities would benefit recreation by improving riparian habitat and ensuring the adequacy of infrastructure. Therefore, there would be no cumulative effects on recreation from the saltcedar project in combination with others across all alternatives.

3.4.2.1.1. Impacts of Alternative A—No Action Alternative

Under Alternative A, recreation opportunities and the recreation experience would continue without any additional infrastructure, and no new nonmotorized trails or motorized routes would be created. Continuing current management of the planning area would not result in changes in the potential for adverse effects on recreation. There would be no additional signage or informational kiosks, which could limit the recreation experience. OHV use in Nichols Canyon would continue via unauthorized routes off the washed-out Nichols Canyon Road. No new primitive or developed campsites would be constructed; thus, dispersed camping would continue along the Gila River corridor and in existing primitive campsites that were not established by the BLM.

Continued and increasing visitor use, particularly OHV use, on unauthorized trails would prevent site recovery, and continued resource damage would diminish the recreation setting. Recreation would continue in mainly a semi-primitive setting, with minimal site controls. Over the long term, a lack of additional site controls would lead to a diminished recreation experience, particularly if recreation use increased over time.

3.4.2.1.2. Impacts of Alternative B—Proposed RAMP

Under Alternative B, the BLM would manage Nichols Canyon road as open to OHV use up to a locked gate, beyond which only nonmotorized use and motorized administrative use would be allowed. This would decrease opportunities for motorized recreation compared with Alternative A. Route, trail, and trailhead creation would increase connectivity for users and improve the recreation setting. The motorized administrative use would only be for official use for maintaining infrastructure. New development would also include a primitive non-motorized walk-in boat pullout, which would increase opportunities for water-based recreation through the planning area. Primitive campgrounds established in Fisherman's Point, the Gauge Dispersed Camping Area, and Nichols Canyon would limit camping opportunities to these areas designated for dispersed camping, but the camping experience would be improved due to reduced resource degradation. Signage would be added where appropriate to delineate where these areas are. The option to construct a developed campground south of the Caprock Mountain site, which would include developed campsites with fire rings, water, pit toilets, and a site host, would allow additional recreation opportunities as visitation increases. These opportunities currently do not exist.

Construction of informational kiosks would enhance the recreation experience by providing on-site educational and interpretation opportunities for visitors. Kiosks would outline and describe the allowed recreation uses, and identify routes open for motorized and nonmotorized use. Development of parking lots, additional trails, and primitive and developed camping would support intended visitor uses in the planning area. Over the long term, Alternative B would have the greatest beneficial impact on recreation, by increasing the breadth of established recreation opportunities.

3.4.2.1.3. Impacts of Alternative C—Minimal Disturbance

Alternative C would have similar impacts on recreation as Alternative B, though there would be decreased opportunities for motorized recreation. Redesignating motorized routes for nonmotorized use only would increase recreation opportunities and improve the recreation experience for nonmotorized users, by improving connectivity and potentially dispersing use. This would limit the concentration of impacts.

3.4.2.2. Travel Management

Table 3-9 shows the travel designations and features under each alternative.

Table 3-9. Miles of Linear Project Features by Alternative

FEATURE	ALTERNATIVE A	ALTERNATIVE B	ALTERNATIVE C
Motorized road	3.57	1.25	0.19
Nonmotorized trail	0.34	2.66	3.72
Pedestrian-only trail	0.72	0.72	0.72
Total	**4.63**	**4.63**	**4.63**

Source: BLM GIS 2022

3.4.2.2.1. Impacts of Alternative A—No Action Alternative

The continuation of current management of existing recreational amenities in the planning area would not result in measurable changes to travel management. Unauthorized use of user-created roads would continue, which would be inconsistent with the proposed road closures and management direction of the ACEC and 1993 Mimbres RMP. Current roads would not receive any new designations or improvements, which could further put stressors on existing infrastructure. Alternative A would provide the greatest access for current and future visitors, since it would not close and restore any existing authorized or user-created roads and trails.

The proposed saltcedar project would likely have minimal impacts on travel and access within the planning area. While there may potentially be short-term interruptions in access due to crews and vehicles working in the area, these are not anticipated to be an noticeable increase from regular use of the planning area. The saltcedar project is not anticipated to have impacts on travel management and access, therefore, Alternative A would not contribute to cumulative effects in combination with the proposed saltcedar removal project or other regular maintenance activities.

3.4.2.2.2. Impacts of Alternative B—Proposed RAMP

Alternative B would result in the designation of 1.25 miles of motorized routes and 2.66 miles of nonmotorized routes, as shown in **Table 3-9**. Implementing the RAMP, including the monitoring and adaptive management strategies in Section 1.7 of the RAMP, would ensure the travel network is maintained and supports the intended visitor uses in the planning area. The redesignation of 2.32 miles of motorized routes for nonmotorized use under Alternative B would reduce motorized access, compared with Alternative A. These routes cover 65 percent of the motorized routes in the RAMP planning area. Administrative motorized access would still be allowed in otherwise nonmotorized areas for official access only for infrastructure upkeep.

The specific changes in travel and trail management and their impacts are summarized below:

Nichols Canyon

Redesignating Nichols Canyon Road for nonmotorized use only beyond the gate and installing a barrier across the wash to stop OHV use in the floodplain would reduce transportation access in the Nichols Canyon Area compared with Alternative A. Closing unauthorized user-created motorized routes in the floodplain along Nichols Canyon Road would eliminate motorized access on those routes. Formal designation of the existing nonmotorized trails under Alternative B from

the end of the motorized road to the river would improve access by providing clear routes rather than users needing to rely on other unauthorized user-created trails.

Gauge Dispersed Camping Area

Under Alternative B, 1.55 miles of the Gauge Station Road and the old mining road would be designated for nonmotorized use only. This would reduce motorized access to the area compared with Alternative A. Motorized travel would be allowed up to a new parking area and dispersed campground. Nonmotorized access would be improved by the redesignation of the motorized road and by construction of a new nonmotorized trail leading to Nichols Canyon Road.

Fisherman's Point

Under Alternative B, the BLM would redesignate the last 0.26 miles of the road for nonmotorized travel only. This would reduce motorized access to the area compared with Alternative A. Motorized travel would be allowed up to a new parking area. The nonmotorized road, in combination with the rehabilitation of the existing pedestrian trail, would continue to provide access to the river.

Spring on the Bluff

Under Alternative B, the establishment of a new trailhead and parking area at the currently existing parking area would result in improved motorized access. Traffic could increase due to the newly maintained parking lot and trailhead, but impacts are expected to be minimal.

Caprock Campground

There are no proposed travel and trail management changes, and transportation and access would not be affected. Traffic would increase on White Rock Canyon Road if the developed campground were constructed.

In summary, under Alternative B, the construction, maintenance, and redesign of trails and roads would overall enhance travel and access in the planning area. Opportunities for motorized travel would decrease in Nichols Canyon (particularly on user-created, unauthorized routes) and the Gauge Dispersed Camping Area, and they would slightly decrease in Fisherman's Point. However, motorized access on Nichols Canyon Road would be restored, and new nonmotorized trails would improve nonmotorized access in Nichols Canyon and the Gauge Dispersed Camping Area.

The cumulative impacts under Alternative B are anticipated to be the same as Alternative A since the proposed saltcedar project would have limited to no impacts on travel management and access within the planning area.

3.4.2.2.3. Impacts of Alternative C—Minimal Disturbance

Alternative C would result in the designation of 0.19 miles of motorized routes and 3.72 miles of nonmotorized routes, as shown in **Table 3-9**. Motorized access would be more limited under Alternative C, when compared with Alternative A. Alternative C would provide for the least motorized access; this is because it would close or redesignate the greatest mileage of roads and

trails. The redesignation of 3.38 miles of motorized routes for nonmotorized use under Alternative B would reduce motorized access, compared with Alternative A. These routes cover 95 percent of the motorized routes in the RAMP planning area.

Specific changes in travel and trail management and their impacts are summarized below:

Nichols Canyon

Under Alternative C, all 1.34 miles of Nichols Canyon Road within the wash would be redesignated for nonmotorized use only, which would decrease overall transportation access in Nichols Canyon compared with Alternative A. However, there would be fewer opportunities for conflicts between nonmotorized and motorized vehicle use in the redesignated area. Also, formal designation of the existing nonmotorized trails from the end of the road to the river would also improve access by providing clear routes rather than users needing to rely on other unauthorized user-created trails.

Gauge Dispersed Camping Area

Impacts under Alternative C would be similar to those described under Alternative B; however, nonmotorized access would be improved to a lesser extent. This is because no new nonmotorized road would be constructed from Gauge Station Road to Nichols Canyon Road.

Fisherman's Point

Impacts under Alternative C would be the same as those described under Alternative B.

Spring on the Bluff

Impacts under Alternative C would be similar to those described under Alternative B, except parking would continue to occur on an informal basis without a formal parking area. This would mean motorized access would not be improved, compared with Alternative A.

Caprock Campground

Impacts would be the same as those described under Alternative B.

In summary, under Alternative C, nonmotorized access would improve due to redesignations and construction of new trails in Nichols Canyon; however, overall access to the planning area would be reduced due to the redesignation of 3.38 miles of road for nonmotorized travel only on Nichols Canyon Road and Gauge Station Road. Primary motorized access points for the Gila River in the planning area would shift to Spring Bluff Road and the county road in the Fisherman's Point area.

The cumulative impacts under Alternative C are anticipated to be the same as Alternative A since the proposed saltcedar project would have limited to no impacts on travel management and access within the planning area.

3.4.2.3. Human Health and Safety

3.4.2.3.1. Impacts of Alternative A—No Action Alternative

The continuation of current management in the planning area without construction of any new facilities or repair of existing roads and trails would present some degree of potential risk to public health and safety from the ongoing degradation of infrastructure. As conditions on roads and trails continued to deteriorate, the potential for personal injury and vehicle-related hazards would increase. Moreover, the continued potential for the wash out of electric fencing located at the river near the Nichols Canyon area would present an ongoing public health and safety issue. Flooding would continue to have the potential to harm persons, property, and existing infrastructure. Furthermore, any future fire activity would result in the potential increase of flooding events, which would exacerbate this issue.

Reasonably foreseeable future actions include the inventory and removal of all saltcedar trees currently in the Gila Lower Box river segment. This action, which would involve controlling a nonnative species on the landscape, would also enable the free movement of visitors to the area by removing a dense vegetation barrier that occurs along riparian areas. Such removal could help to promote safer access to river segments by public users. When taken in the context of reasonably foreseeable future actions, however, the resulting benefit to health and safety under Alternative A would not present a measurable change within the context of ongoing and foreseeable future actions.

3.4.2.3.2. Impacts of Alternative B—Proposed RAMP

The completion of a RAMP under Alternative B for the five recreation management areas, as well as proposed improvements at specific locations in the planning area, would enhance public safety and result in beneficial effects on public health and safety. Implementation of primitive and sustainable recreation to protect the planning area from increased use and resource damage would have the secondary effect of promoting safe visitor access to recreational areas. The proposed action would also address the lack of signage and recreation infrastructure, including by installing signage alerting visitors of the electric range fencing crossing the river near the Nichols Canyon area. Additionally, trails within the planning area that are not well maintained would be reconstructed or restored, resulting in a decreased risk of personal injury. As a result of these measures, Alternative B would result in overall beneficial impacts on public health and safety.

These measures would not eliminate the risk of future flooding events, which could result in negative impacts on recreation infrastructure or human health and safety. However, creation of the primitive camping area above the floodplain would divert overnight camping out of the floodplain and reduce risks of flooding affecting most recreational users and infrastructure in the Nichols Canyon area compared with Alternative A.

Cumulative impacts are anticipated to be the same as those described under Alternative A.

3.4.2.3.3. Impacts of Alternative C—Minimal Disturbance

The impacts on human health and safety would be the same as those described under Alternative B. The focus on less intensive recreational use under this alternative would not result in measurable differences from those changes in the protection of human health and the provision of public safety measures described above.

Cumulative effects would also be the same as those described under Alternative A.

3.4.3. Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are relevant to this issue.

3.5. Issue 3: How would the alternatives impact special designations, including ACECs, WSAs, and WSRs?

The alternatives' impacts on special designations could occur from the proposed construction of infrastructure and the closure of certain areas to OHV use.

3.5.1. Affected Environment

3.5.1.1. Areas of Critical Environmental Concern and Wild and Scenic Rivers

The Gila Lower Box ACEC (see **Figure 3-5**) overlaps 4,190 acres within the planning area. The stretch of the Gila River that flows through the planning area (the Gila Lower Box stretch) was determined to be eligible for potential inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River System in the Mimbres RMP (BLM 1993). This reach has also been proposed for designation in the M.H. Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic River Act, introduced in the US Senate in November 2021 (see **Figure 3-6**).

ACECs are areas where special management attention is needed to protect relevant and important values. The relevant and important values in the Gila Lower Box ACEC include habitat for several state-listed and federally listed species; also, the ACEC comprises the largest and most significant riparian area in the Mimbres RMP planning area. The Mimbres RMP (BLM 1993) identifies management actions to be applied in the ACEC, including developing a primitive recreation site and parking areas, closing it to motorized vehicle use (except for Nichols Canyon Road), and managing it for primitive and semi-primitive nonmotorized classes.

WSRs are streams or segments of streams designated by Congress under the authority of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 (WSR Act) (Public Law 90-542, as amended; 16 USC 1271-1287) to preserve the stream or stream section in its free-flowing condition, preserving water quality and protecting its ORVs. ORVs are identified on a segment-specific basis and may include scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, or other similar values (BLM 2012d). Section 5(d)(1) of the WSR Act directs federal agencies to consider potential WSRs in their land- and water-planning process. The Mimbres RMP (Appendix J) determined

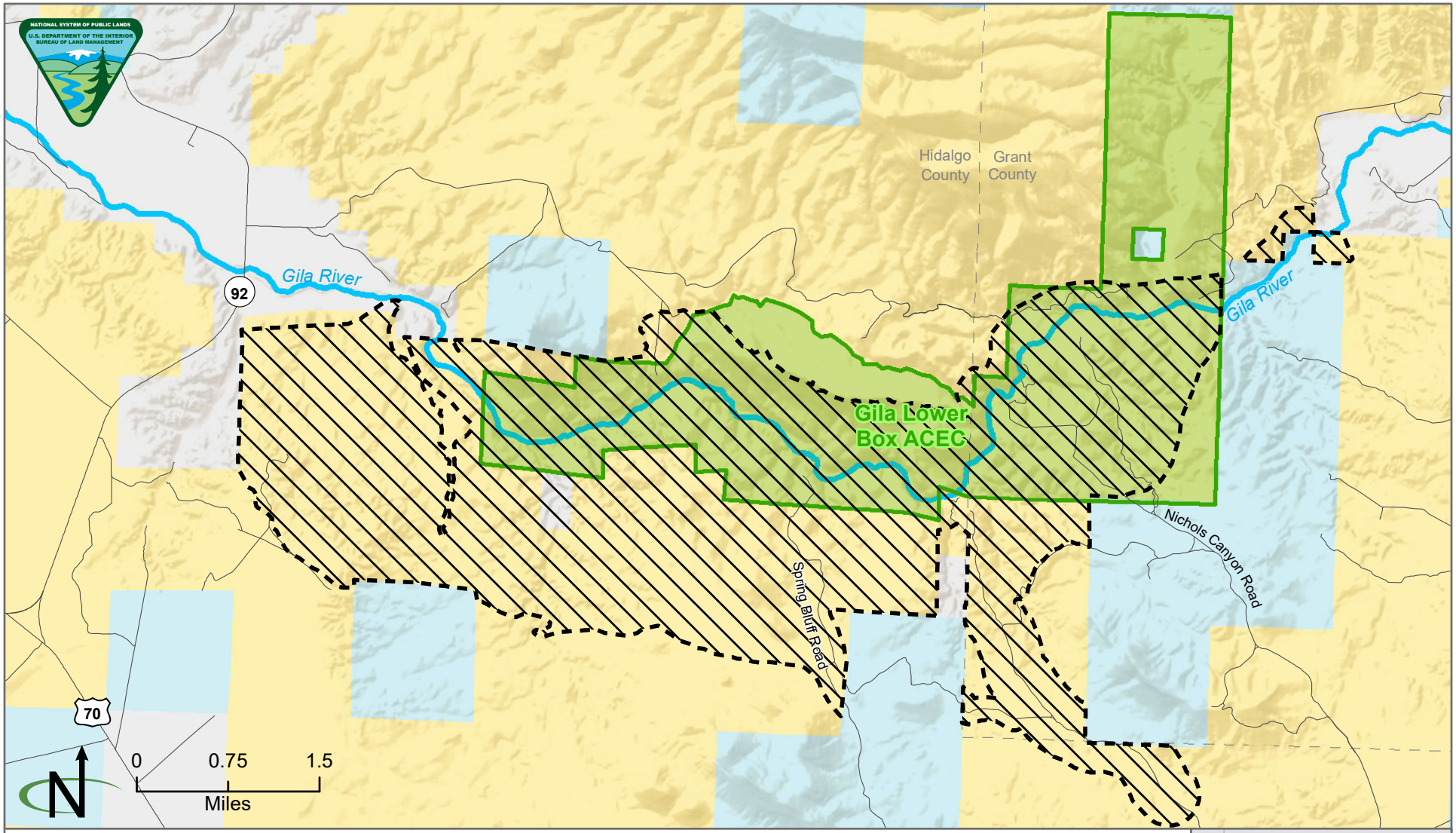
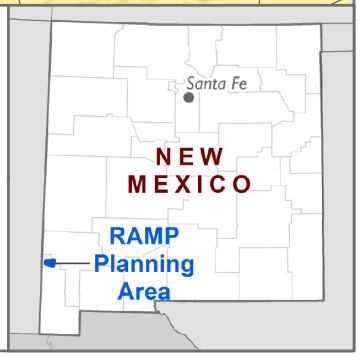


Figure 3-5
Special Designated Areas - Area of Critical Environmental Concern

RAMP planning area
Area of Critical Environmental Concern
Bureau of Land Management
State
Private

Source: BLM GIS 2021
January 05, 2023
GilaRAMP_AE_SDA_ACEC.mxd
No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual or aggregate use with other data. Original data were compiled from various sources. This information may not meet National Map Accuracy Standards. This product was developed through digital means and may be updated without notification.



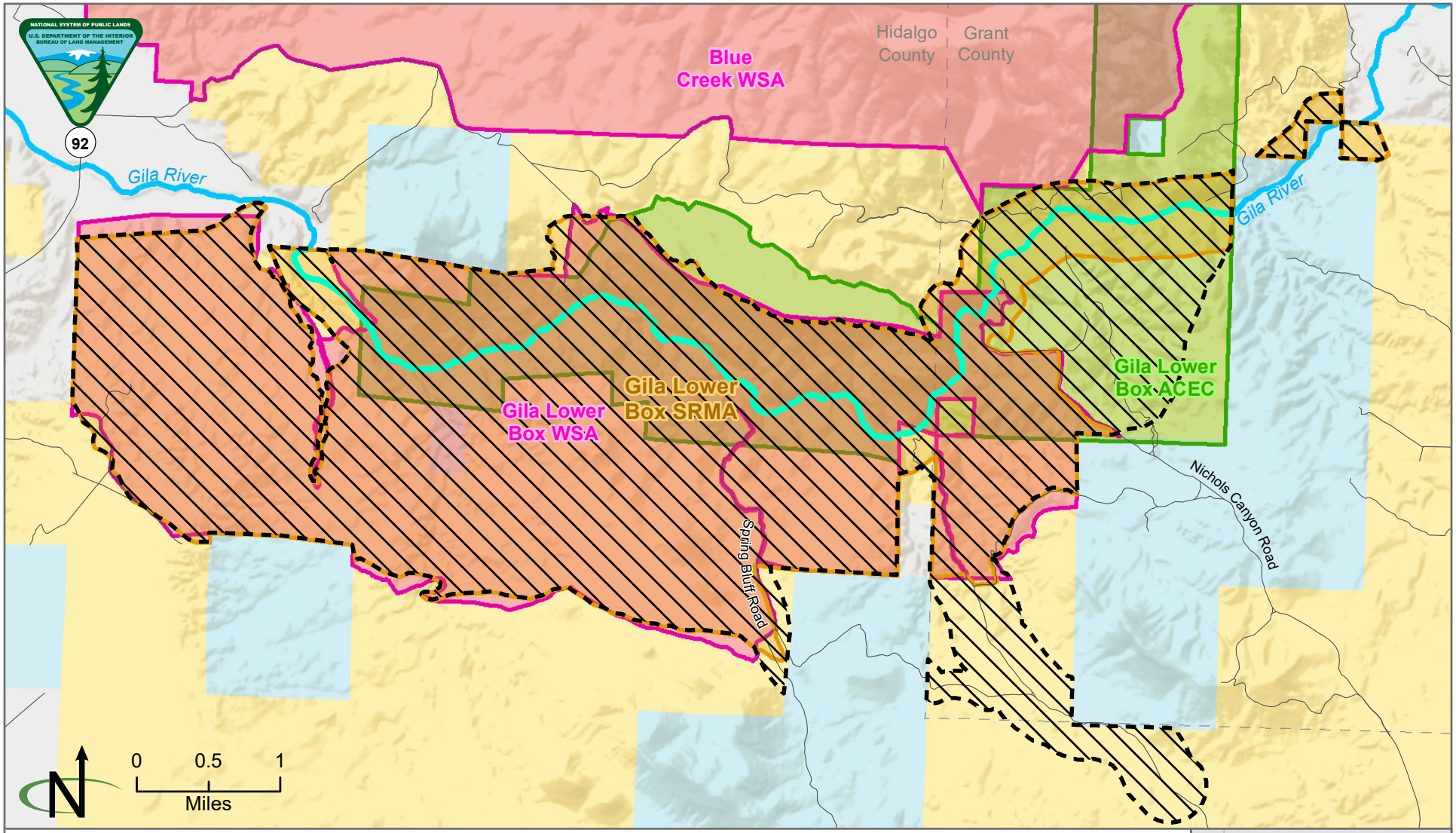


Figure 3-6
Special Designated Areas - Wild and Scenic River Study Reach

- Eligible - Wild
- RAMP planning area
- Special Recreation Management Area
- Wilderness Study Area
- Area of Critical Environmental Concern
- Bureau of Land Management
- State
- Private

Source: BLM GIS 2021
January 05, 2023
GilaRAMP_AE_Visual_WSR.mxd
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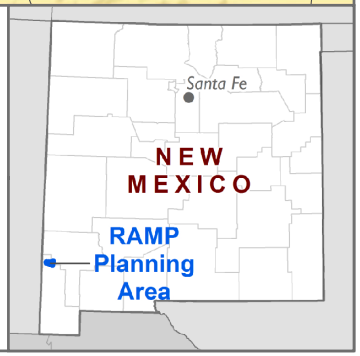

that the Gila Lower Box stretch of the Gila River was eligible for potential inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System (BLM 1993). ORVs present in the stretch include scenic, geologic, fish, wildlife, and cultural values. The current condition of the ORVs present on the river remains stable. In November 2021, Congress proposed that the river corridor within the Gila Lower Box WSA be included as a component of the National Wild and Scenic River System (Heinrich & Luján 2022).

The riparian area located within the Gila Lower Box is the largest and most significant on BLM land within LCDO jurisdiction (BLM 2000). This riparian area includes many of the scenic, fish, and wildlife ORVs found within the eligible WSR as it contains a fair number of large trees and habitat to most of the special status species found in the area (see **Section 3.3.1.1**, Wildlife [including Threatened and Endangered Species]).

3.5.1.2. Wilderness Study Areas

The BLM manages WSAs to ensure they are unimpaired for preservation as wilderness until Congress either designates them as wilderness or releases them from WSA status. This non-impairment standard guides all management decisions within the WSA. In accordance with BLM Manual 6330—Management of BLM Wilderness Study Areas, all uses and facilities in a WSA must be temporary and must not create surface disturbance. There are exceptions to the non-impairment standard, including one for actions that clearly benefit a WSA by protecting or enhancing wilderness characteristics. For this exception to be used, the actions must still be carried out in the manner that is least disturbing to the site.

There are two WSAs that overlap with the planning area (see **Figure 3-7**). The Gila Lower Box WSA overlaps 8,470 acres of the planning area and is the focus of this analysis. Only a small portion (less than 5 acres) of the Blue Creek WSA overlaps with the northeastern portion of the planning area. None of the proposed project features overlap or are adjacent to the Blue Creek WSA, so it is not analyzed in this EA.

3.5.1.2.1. Naturalness

The Gila Lower Box WSA is located in southwestern New Mexico. The Gila River flows through the northern portion of the WSA, and that area is generally characterized by narrow, steep-walled canyons. This pristine canyon system is over 600 feet deep in some places and is almost completely void of signs of human intrusion. The steepness of the terrain has made development of any kind difficult. The rest of the WSA, the southern portion, consists of more rolling hills and drainages into the Gila River. There is a vehicle right-of-way leading to private holdings and the USGS gauging station; however, the gauging station is substantially unnoticeable, as it was painted to match the surrounding area.

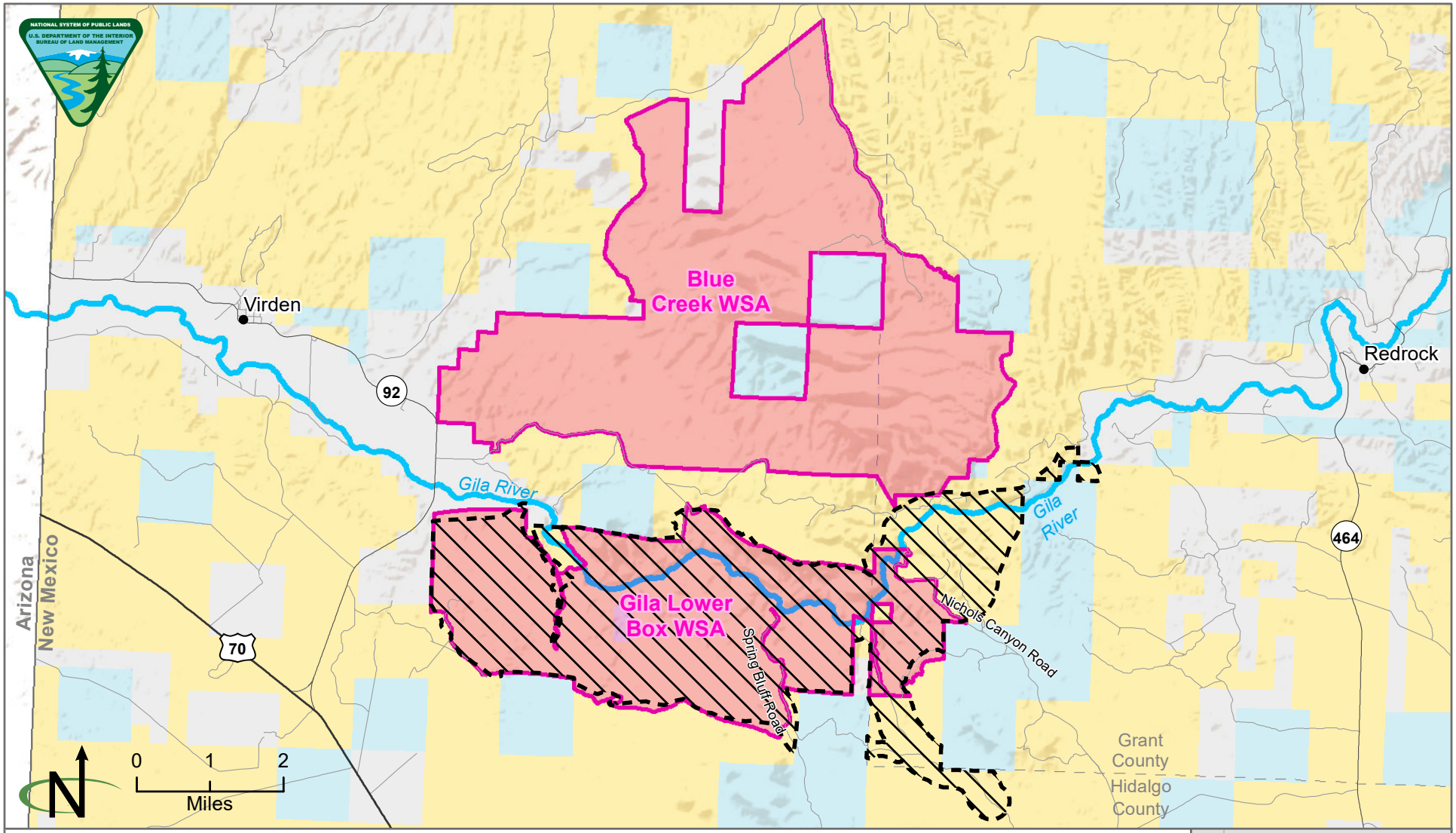

Figure 3-7
Special Designated Areas - Wilderness Study Area

RAMP planning area
Wilderness Study Area
Bureau of Land Management
State
Private

Source: BLM GIS 2021
January 05, 2023
GilaRAMP_AE_SDA_WSA.mxd

3.5.1.2.2. Solitude

Outstanding opportunities for solitude exist throughout the Gila Lower Box WSA in the canyons around the Gila River. The canyon walls provide many secluded locations where visitors can be surrounded by nature without seeing other humans. Due to the steep terrain, the USGS gauging stations and fences are out of view after rounding the first bend.

The rolling hills in the south provide a different type of solitude from that found in the canyon. As the area is wide open, visitors have more opportunities to fan out and find space away from one another.

3.5.1.2.3. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

The numerous resources available in the Gila Lower Box WSA greatly enhance the quality of primitive recreation. The topography, desert scenery, riparian areas, and wildlife and cultural resources provide unique opportunities. Common recreational opportunities include hiking; camping; nature study; sightseeing; photography; bird watching; bird hunting; swimming; and nonmotorized, shallow-draft boating, such as rafting, canoeing, or kayaking.

3.5.1.2.4. Special Features (Supplemental Values)

The Gila Lower Box WSA contains 587 acres of vital riparian habitat that supports a diverse selection of wildlife. The Gila River also provides a natural pathway for wildlife as it extends from the Mogollon Plateau, through the Chihuahuan Desert, to the Sonoran Desert. Approximately 265 species of birds have been recorded along the Gila River, most of which can also be found within the WSA. Half the vertebrate species found in the State of New Mexico can be found within the WSA. The WSA also contains habitat for several threatened and endangered species, both federally and state-listed. There are 19 special status species found in the Gila Lower Box WSA. The WSA also contains critical habitat for five species: the narrow-headed garter snake, southwestern willow flycatcher, yellow-billed cuckoo, loach minnow, and spikedace (see **Section 3.3**, Wildlife [including Threatened and Endangered Species] for more information).

The WSA also contains several Mogollon-style petroglyph panels, rock shelters and rock structures, and evidence of at least one granary. Remains like the rock structures are rare throughout the Southwest (see **Section 3.3**, Cultural Resources and Native American Concerns for more information).

Additionally, the WSA possesses outstanding scenic qualities due to its varied topography. As a river system in an arid environment, it is a unique setting.

3.5.1.3. WSA Site-Specific Information

The proposed action would affect wilderness characteristics in the WSA at the Gauge Dispersed Camping Area, Fisherman's Point, and Spring on the Bluff sites.

3.5.1.3.1. Wilderness Characteristics Common To All Affected Sites

Solitude – These sites are all located in the canyon areas that provide ample opportunities for solitude through visually blocking the surrounding areas from view. However, in the immediate vicinity of the Gauge Dispersed Camping Area, Fisherman's Point, and Spring on the Bluff sites, opportunities for solitude are limited by the use of these areas as recreational access points. Vehicle traffic and parked cars in the WSA along Gauge Station Road, the county road leading to Fisherman's Point, and Spring Bluff Road, create sights, sounds, and evidence of other people.

Primitive and Unconfined Recreation – All three affected sites present outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation due to their scenic viewpoints from high bluffs and access down to the riparian area and river via existing roads and trails. Both the county road leading to the Fisherman's Point site and Spring Bluff Road leading to the Spring on the Bluff site are key access points for recreationists visiting the WSA, and they were recognized as such in the original WSA inventory (BLM 1990).

Special Features (Supplemental Values) – Special features in the WSA are not affected by the proposed features in the Gauge Dispersed Camping Area, Fisherman's Point, or Spring on the Bluff sites.

3.5.1.3.2. Gauge Dispersed Camping Area

Naturalness – Naturalness is affected locally because this portion of the WSA is near the WSA boundary and there is traffic on the road along the WSA boundary. Gauge Station Road makes up the boundary in this area. Motorized vehicle users have created unauthorized routes from the road into the WSA, resulting in vegetation trampling and disturbance.

3.5.1.3.3. Fisherman's Point

Naturalness – Naturalness is affected locally because this portion of the WSA is near the WSA boundary along either side of the county road. The county road leading to the WSA in this area has a gravel surface and is used as a primary recreation access point for the WSA. Since designation of the WSA, Hidalgo County has widened the road by approximately 8 feet on either side and added a turnaround at the end of the road. Naturalness is affected by cars parking along the road that have created disturbance by trampling the grass and shrub vegetation, as well as traffic along that cherry stemmed county road. An unmaintained dirt spur road cuts off from the county road through approximately 160 feet of flat dirt surface in the WSA before continuing outside the WSA downhill toward the riparian area along the Gila River

3.5.1.3.4. Spring on the Bluff

Naturalness – Naturalness is affected at the Spring on the Bluff site because this portion of the WSA is near the WSA boundary on either side of Spring Bluff Road. Spring Bluff Road has a gravel surface and is used as a primary recreation access point for the WSA. Visitors park in a dirt area off to the left side of the road in the WSA across from a pedestrian trail leading downhill toward the Gila River. Motorized vehicles have created additional disturbance in the WSA extending out from the parking area. Traffic along the cherry stemmed county road also affects naturalness.

3.5.1.3.5. Relevant Exceptions to the Non-Impairment Standard

The following exception called out in BLM Manual 6330 applies to the Fisherman's Point, Spring on the Bluff, and Gauge Dispersed Camping Area recreation management areas:

> 1.6.C.2.f Protect or enhance wilderness characteristics or values. As described in section 1.6.A.2 of this manual [Manual 6330], Section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act of 1964 outlines the characteristics required of every wilderness. Actions that clearly benefit a WSA by protecting or enhancing these characteristics are allowable, even if they are impairing, though they must still be carried out in the manner that is least disturbing to the site (BLM 2012a).

3.5.2. Environmental Impacts

3.5.2.1. Areas of Critical Environmental Concern and Wild and Scenic Rivers

3.5.2.1.1. Impacts of Alternative A—No Action Alternative

Under Alternative A, unauthorized motorized travel in the ACEC would continue to occur. This would violate the ACEC management laid out in the 1993 Mimbres RMP. Further, not implementing special management could cause a decline in the biological ORVs along the eligible WSR stretch. The proposed saltcedar removal project would contribute to maintaining or improving the riparian relevant and important values of the ACEC and the biological ORVs along the eligible WSR stretch. Alternative A would reduce the effect of these riparian area improvements due to continued unauthorized motorized vehicle use in the riparian area.

3.5.2.1.2. Impacts of Alternative B—Proposed RAMP

Under Alternative B, the impacts of unauthorized motorized travel in the ACEC would be reduced or eliminated by closing unauthorized motorized routes in Nichols Canyon. The establishment of a new nonmotorized pedestrian trail through the Gila Lower Box ACEC would be consistent with the ACEC management laid out in the Mimbres RMP. The proposed management changes under Alternative B are not expected to significantly hinder any of the eligible WSR stretch's ORVs and instead could enhance some of them. For example, closing unauthorized user-created routes in Nichols Canyon would improve biological ORVs. Improvements to the riparian relevant and important values for the ACEC and the biological ORVs of the eligible WSR stretch from Alternative B would result in cumulative improvements in these riparian and biological values in combination with the proposed saltcedar removal project.

3.5.2.1.3. Impacts of Alternative C—Minimal Disturbance

The proposed management changes under Alternative C are not expected to significantly hinder any of the eligible WSR stretch's ORVs and instead could further enhance some of them. Effects on biological ORVs would be similar to those described in Alternative B. Like Alternative B, improvements to the riparian relevant and important values for the ACEC and the biological ORVs of the eligible WSR stretch from Alternative C would result in cumulative improvements in these riparian and biological values in combination with the proposed saltcedar removal project.

3.5.2.2. Wilderness Study Areas

3.5.2.2.1. Impacts of Alternative A—No Action Alternative

Naturalness

Under Alternative A, unauthorized motorized recreation and access would continue within the WSA, violating the non-impairment standard. Visitors would continue to park their vehicles inside the WSA along the junction of the county road and the spur road at Fisherman's Point, creating disturbance along the road and widening the roadway itself. Unauthorized roads from Gauge Station Road would continue to occur and impair naturalness in the WSA. Vehicle use extending out from the parking area at Spring on the Bluff would also continue to create disturbance in the WSA and impair naturalness.

Special Features (Supplemental Values)

Effects on wildlife and cultural special features are described in **Section 3.3.2**.

3.5.2.2.2. Impacts of Alternative B—Proposed RAMP

Naturalness

Gauge Dispersed Camping Area – The new post-and-cable boundary would run along Gauge Station Road on the boundary of the WSA but would not be within the WSA. Therefore, it would not impair naturalness in the WSA. It would, however, improve naturalness by reducing additional disturbance in the WSA from unauthorized user-created routes stemming off from Gauge Station Road and allowing revegetation of existing unauthorized routes.

Fisherman's Point – The proposed parking area at Fisherman's Point would be built at the end of the existing county road. While the county road is not within the WSA, the parking area would be within it. Construction of this parking lot would impair naturalness by removing vegetation and creating 0.01 acres of new disturbance. The parking area would have a gravel surface that would not appear natural among the surrounding scrub vegetation. However, cars currently park in the WSA at the junction between the county road and the spur road. Construction of the new parking area would confine disturbance in the WSA to a single area and reduce instances of visitors parking on and trampling vegetation in other areas of the WSA along the county road. The lot would be surrounded by steep drop-offs that would prevent vehicles from expanding the disturbance area beyond the constructed footprint.

Spring on the Bluff – Construction of post-and-cable boundaries around the existing dirt parking area in the WSA at Spring on the Bluff would reduce naturalness by making the parking area more noticeable from a short distance. However, the post-and-cable boundaries would improve naturalness in a larger area of the WSA beyond the parking area by reducing additional disturbance in the WSA from unauthorized user-created routes extending from the parking area and allowing revegetation of existing unauthorized routes.

Special Features (Supplemental Values)

Effects on wildlife and cultural special features are described in **Section 3.3.2**.

3.5.2.2.3. Impacts of Alternative C—Minimal Disturbance

Naturalness

Impacts on the WSA under Alternative C would be similar to those under Alternative A, except that construction of a post-and-cable boundary would reduce additional disturbance in the WSA from unauthorized user-created routes stemming off from Gauge Station Road and allowing revegetation of existing unauthorized routes. While there would be no new surface disturbance in the WSA, cars would continue to park in the WSA along the county road, which would continue to violate the non-impairment standard in the WSA. In addition, the risk of unauthorized motorized vehicle use in the WSA at the Spring on the Bluff parking area would continue because no posts and cable would be installed around the existing parking area.

Special Features (Supplemental Values)

Effects on wildlife and cultural special features are described in **Section 3.3.2**.

3.5.2.2.4. Non-Impairment Standard Analysis

All Alternatives

Size – None of the alternatives would affect the size of the WSA.

Alternative A—No Action

Naturalness – Naturalness would continue to be impaired through the unauthorized disturbance and vehicle routes in the WSA from Gauge Station Road and the parking area off of Spring Bluff Road. Vehicles parking in the WSA would continue to trample the vegetation along the county road leading to Fisherman's Point.

Alternative B—Proposed RAMP

Naturalness – Naturalness would be improved in the WSA along Gauge Station Road, where installation of the post-and-cable boundary would prevent additional unauthorized disturbance and allow revegetation of past unauthorized disturbance from user-created routes.

Naturalness would be impaired under Alternative B through construction of the Fisherman's Point gravel parking lot and the post-and-cable boundaries around the Spring on the Bluff parking area. The gravel parking area would be noticeable from a short distance because it would stand out from the surrounding vegetation. However, due to the steep and varied topography in this portion of the WSA, it would be substantially unnoticeable in the WSA as a whole. Additionally, creation of the parking area at Fisherman's Point would reduce trampling of vegetation in the WSA along the county road that has affected naturalness.

Similarly, the post-and-cable boundaries would make the existing dirt parking area at Spring on the Bluff more noticeable from a short distance. However, the post-and-cable boundaries would be substantially unnoticeable in the WSA as a whole. It would also prevent unauthorized disturbance in the WSA extending from the parking area.

Outstanding Opportunities – Outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation would not be affected by Alternative B.

Outstanding opportunities for solitude would be temporarily affected by noise during construction of the Fisherman's Point parking area and the post-and-cable boundaries around the Spring on the Bluff parking area.

Supplemental Values – Supplemental values in the WSA would improve from the lack of unauthorized trails and disturbance (see **Section 3.3.2**).

Alternative C—Minimal Disturbance

Naturalness – The effects of Alternative C would be the similar to those under Alternative A, except that naturalness would be improved along Gauge Station Road, where installation of the post-and-cable boundary would prevent additional unauthorized disturbance and allow revegetation of past unauthorized disturbance from user-created routes.

Outstanding Opportunities – Outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation and for solitude would not be affected by Alternative C.

Supplemental Values – Supplemental values in the WSA would improve from the lack of unauthorized trails and disturbance (see **Section 3.3.2**).

3.5.2.2.5. Conclusions

Alternative A—No Action

Alternative A would not conform to the non-impairment standard for the following reasons:

a) The use or facility is not temporary. Unauthorized user-created routes from Gauge Station Road and Spring Bluff Road result in ongoing surface disturbance and trampling of vegetation. Parking along the county road leading to Fisherman's Point results in similar ongoing surface disturbance and vegetation trampling.

b) The use or facility would create new surface disturbance. Surface disturbance would continue to result from parking vehicles and driving on unauthorized user-created routes in the WSA.

Alternative B—Proposed RAMP

Implementation of Alternative B would not conform to the non-impairment standard for the following reasons:

a) The use or facility is not temporary. The gravel parking area at Fisherman's Point and post-and-cable boundaries at the Spring on the Bluff parking area would remain long after construction and would continue to be used for recreation access.

b) The use or facility would create new surface disturbance. Construction of the new parking area at Fisherman's Point would create 0.01 acres of new surface disturbance from vegetation removal and resurfacing the area with gravel. The post-and-cable boundaries around the parking area at Spring on the Bluff would create minimal new surface disturbance.

Exception – The proposed action would be an exception to the non-impairment standard because is falls under exception f: Protect or enhance wilderness characteristics or values. As described in section 1.6.A.2 of the BLM WSA manual, Section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act of 1964 outlines

the characteristics required of every wilderness. Actions that clearly benefit a WSA by protecting or enhancing these characteristics are allowable even if they are impairing, though they must still be carried out in the manner that is least disturbing to the site (BLM 2012a).

Construction of the post-and-cable boundaries and the new parking area would prevent additional disturbance in the WSA from unauthorized parking and user-created routes and allow revegetation of previously disturbed areas. These small local disturbances would enhance naturalness in a broader area of the WSA where unauthorized disturbance has occurred.

Alternative C—Minimal Disturbance

The conclusions for this alternative would be the same as those for Alternative A. The only difference would be that naturalness would be improved in the WSA along Gauge Station Road, where the new post-and-cable boundaries along the WSA boundary would prevent creation of unauthorized user-created routes and allow revegetation of existing user-created routes.

3.5.2.2.6. Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are relevant to this issue.

3.6. Issue 4: How would the alternatives impact livestock grazing?

Impacts on livestock grazing in the planning area could occur from human and livestock interactions and ground disturbance. The number of recreationists visiting the planning area has increased in recent years; this has created the need for this RAMP to address the ground disturbance that is affecting forage quality and availability. Specific indicators and methods are discussed in the individual resource sections below.

3.6.1. Affected Environment

3.6.1.1. Livestock Grazing

The BLM administers livestock grazing on eight allotments within the planning area, totaling approximately 8,940 acres of public lands. Livestock grazing on rangeland in the planning area offers several benefits to the local communities, including sustaining multigenerational ranching operations and providing the basis for the local culture and lifestyle. Rangeland grazing of domestic cattle is an economic driver for local communities, and the rangelands themselves provide large swaths of forage and habitat for wildlife.

Interactions among recreationists and livestock are present at access points, particularly where forage and water developments are present. Several allotments are fenced off completely from the Gila River corridor, particularly in the Nichols Canyon area, and interactions among recreationists and livestock in those areas are minimal. However, other allotments, including the Canador Peak, Redrock Canyon, and Sunset Dam allotments, overlap with the Gila River, and the opportunity for livestock and human interactions exists.

3.6.2. Environmental Impacts

3.6.2.1. Livestock Grazing

Where recreation opportunities, such as motorized and nonmotorized trails and routes, overlap with allotments, there exists the potential for impacts on livestock grazing from human-livestock encounters. Motorized recreation in the planning area may affect forage conditions. Erosion and soil compaction from motorized vehicles may reduce forage quality and availability. Motorized recreation is also known to increase the spread of invasive plants, thus further reducing the forage quality (Wolf et al. 2017). Increases in motorized recreation and visitors to the area cause a higher likelihood of collision with livestock, usually at night or in areas where livestock gather (for example, by water). However, these uses, when conducted in compliance with BLM rules and regulations, would not have a measurable impact on animal unit months.

While generally considered low impact, primitive and nonmotorized recreation could affect livestock by reducing forage quality in a manner similar to motorized recreation; however, these impacts would likely be of lower intensity, when compared with motorized recreation. They also would be concentrated along trails and dispersed campsites, where livestock and visitors are most likely to be in proximity.

Under all alternatives, the BLM would upgrade and maintain gated access across the river, which would restrict livestock and decrease the potential for livestock-human interactions within the river corridor. Under all alternatives, OHV use by permittees to access and supplement cattle and maintain range infrastructure would not be restricted.

3.6.2.1.1. Impacts of Alternative A—No Action Alternative

Motorized and nonmotorized recreation that results in erosion and forage trampling would continue under Alternative A. Since motorized uses are allowed in most of the planning area, erosion and forage removal would continue to occur and would impact livestock.

Where allotments with authorized grazing overlap with planned vegetation treatments, such as saltcedar removal, there could be a short-term loss or modification to forage. However, over the long term, vegetation treatments are likely to improve forage conditions, resulting in an increase in acres capable of grazing over time. During vegetation treatments, livestock could be temporarily moved from treatment areas, and there would be close coordination between the BLM and permittees to discuss the need for rest or deferment, or to potentially move livestock until recovery objectives are met.

Alternative A, in combination with the planned saltcedar removal, is not expected to result in cumulative decreases in forage. Overall, forage is expected to improve in the long term as a result of the saltcedar removal.

3.6.2.1.2. Impacts of Alternative B—Proposed RAMP

Under Alternative B, there would be increased limitations on the use of motorized recreational vehicles within the planning area. Restricting access within rangelands used by livestock would

decrease the impacts from motorized recreational vehicles on forage conditions, by decreasing the intensity of soil erosion and the potential for crushed vegetation.

The identified site for the development of Caprock Campground is located within 0.6 miles of an existing livestock water well and watering facilities. This is likely to increase the potential for livestock and visitor interactions during the time of year that livestock are present.

Revegetation of unauthorized roads could increase the overall availability of forage for livestock over the long term. Interpretive signage would increase the public's awareness of the presence of livestock and would help to minimize the impacts of recreation on livestock and ranching operations. Concentrating recreation use and access to designated areas would limit dispersed recreation and decrease the opportunity for human-livestock interactions.

Cumulatively, expected long-term forage increases from the proposed action would further improve forage, when combined with forage increases resulting from the planned saltcedar removal.

3.6.2.1.3. Impacts of Alternative C—Minimal Disturbance

Impacts on livestock grazing under Alternative C would be similar to those described under Alternative B, including the development of Caprock Campground. However, there would be an additional reduction in motorized access by designating more nonmotorized routes. This would decrease the potential for impacts from motorized vehicles on livestock and ranching operations.

3.6.3. Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are relevant to this issue.

CHAPTER 4. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

4.1. Tribes, Individuals, Organizations, and Agencies Consulted

During the NEPA process for this RAMP/EA, the BLM formally and informally consulted and coordinated with other federal agencies, state and local governments, Native American Tribes, and the interested public. The BLM did this to ensure its compliance, in both the spirit and intent, with 40 CFR 1501.7, 1502.19, and 1503. In addition to the public scoping process, the BLM implemented collaborative outreach and consultation in accordance with applicable laws.

4.1.1. Government-to-Government Consultation

The federal government works on a government-to-government basis with Native American tribes because they are recognized as separate governments. This relationship was formally recognized on November 6, 2000, with EO 13175 (65 *Federal Register* 67249). As a matter of practice, the BLM coordinates with all Tribal governments, associated Native communities, Native organizations, and Tribal individuals whose interests might be directly and substantially affected by activities on public lands.

In addition, Section 106 of the NHPA requires federal agencies to consult with Native American tribes for undertakings on tribal lands and for historic properties of significance to the Tribes that

may be affected by an undertaking (36 CFR 800.2(c)(2)). BLM Manual 1780, Tribal Relations, and BLM Handbook H-1780-1, Improving and Sustaining BLM-Tribal Relations, provide guidance for Native American consultations. EO 13175 stipulates that during the NEPA process, federal agencies must consult Tribes identified as being directly and substantially affected.

The BLM notified several Tribes of the proposed action on April 6, 2022, with a physical scoping letter and map of the area. The BLM sent initial scoping letters to the Fort Sill Apache Tribe, Hopi Tribe, Mescalero Apache Tribe, White Mountain Apache Tribe, Acoma Pueblo, Isleta Pueblo Navajo Nation, and Zuni Pueblo. The White Mountain Apache Tribe responded and did not wish to pursue further consultation. The remaining Tribes have not provided responses to date. The BLM continues to follow up with those Tribes that did not initially respond.

The BLM has completed a pedestrian cultural survey of the proposed project footprints (Dalpra 2023). The survey, NMCRIS No. 153432 (BLM Cultural Project Number 030-23-043), was completed in July 2023 and received SHPO concurrence on November 8, 2023, that there would be "No Adverse Effect to Historic Properties" (HPD Log #121052).

4.1.2. New Mexico State Historic Preservation Officer

In accordance with the requirements of Section 106 of the NHPA, the BLM is consulting with the New Mexico State Historic Preservation Officer. As described above, the BLM has completed a pedestrian cultural survey and prepared a report on the survey results.

4.1.3. Cooperating Agencies

Cooperating agencies are any federal, state, or local government agency or Native American tribe that enters into a formal agreement with the lead federal agency to help develop an environmental analysis. Cooperating agencies and Tribes work with the BLM, sharing knowledge and resources, to achieve desired outcomes for public lands and communities within statutory and regulatory frameworks. The BLM is consulting with the US Fish and Wildlife Service for this NEPA process.

4.1.3.1. Other Stakeholders

On April 6, 2022, the BLM sent letters via US mail to stakeholders (39 different organizations and individuals). In response to the letter, a meeting was held with the Hidalgo County Public Land Advisory Committee to discuss the RAMP and EA. **Appendix B** contains the results of the scoping period.

The BLM held a public meeting with members of the public in Hidalgo County on November 09, 2024, to present the final alternatives. A further 30-day comment period was held, and 23 comments were received. One substantive comment was received on invasive species and is incorporated with added design features on additional education and interpretation to inform the public of ways to mitigate invasive species while recreating in the area. **(see Appendix G).**

CHAPTER 5. LIST OF PREPARERS

Table 5-1. List of BLM Preparers

NAME	TITLE	RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FOLLOWING SECTIONS
Alexandra Bettinger	Project Manager	Recreation, Special Designation Areas, Recreation and Visitor Services, Travel and Transportation Management, Visual Resources
Kendrah Madrid	Las Cruces District Office Branch Chief, Recreation & Cultural Programs	—
Bill Wight	Public Affairs Officer	—
Trinity Miller	Archaeologist	Cultural/Native American Concerns
Cody Howard	Wildlife Biologist	Wildlife
Colin Dunn	Las Cruces District Office Paleontologist	Paleontological Resources
Corey Durr	Branch Chief, Recreation and Cultural Programs (acting)	Hydrology
Dominick Chavez	Engineering Equipment Operator	Health and Human Safety
Gordon Michaud	Soil Scientist/Air Resource Specialist	Soil, Air
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Table 5-2. List of Other Preparers

NAME	TITLE	RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FOLLOWING SECTIONS
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Noelle Crowley	Deputy Project Manager/Environmental Planner/NEPA Specialist	—
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Appendix A

Gila Lower Box Recreation Area Management Plan

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACEC – area of critical environmental concern

BLM – United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management

CFR – Code of Federal Regulations

EA – environmental assessment

NEPA – National Environmental Policy Act

OHV – off-highway vehicle

RAMP – recreation area management plan
RMP – resource management plan

SRMA – special recreation management area

US – United States

WSA – wilderness study area

APPENDIX A. GILA LOWER BOX RECREATION AREA MANAGEMENT PLAN

A.1. Introduction

The United States (US) Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Las Cruces District Office has developed this recreation area management plan (RAMP) to guide the agency's overall management of the Gila Lower Box Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA), a popular recreation area in southwestern New Mexico. The RAMP is meant to provide implementation-level recreation management decisions based on management directives for the area in the Mimbres Resource Management Plan (RMP) and the 1985 Gila River Coordinated RMP (BLM 1993, 1985). In addition, this RAMP provides guidance for potential future recreation management actions as conditions and recreation uses change. These future actions may include increasing signage and building recreation infrastructure to protect the area's valuable and unique resources while continuing to allow for recreation uses. The Gila Lower Box RAMP identifies the goals, strategies, and decisions for the BLM's management of recreation in the planning area, and identifies processes for monitoring, enforcement, and adaptive management.

A.2. Area Overview

The 11,200 acre Gila Lower Box Canyon RAMP planning area is in Hidalgo and Grant Counties, New Mexico. It is approximately 20 miles northwest of the town of Lordsburg (see EA Figure 1-1). The planning area includes the Gila Lower Box Wilderness Study Area (WSA), the Gila Lower Box Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), and the Gila Lower Box Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA). The planning area boundary largely follows the boundary of the Gila Lower Box SRMA; however, it extends across a wider area to the southeast to include the locations of all proposed recreation features in the RAMP.

The Gila Lower Box SRMA (9,630 acres) was designated in the 1985 Gila River Coordinated RMP. The Gila Lower Box ACEC (6,490 acres) was designated in the Mimbres RMP in 1993. The Gila Lower Box WSA (8,555 acres) was established in 1980. A small portion of the Blue Creek WSA (less than 5 acres) also extends into the northeastern portion of the planning area.

The Gila Lower Box RAMP planning area represents one of the most biologically diverse river corridors in southwestern New Mexico. An oasis in the desert, it is known as one of the best bird-watching areas in New Mexico and contains very high biological diversity; 265 bird species, 67 mammal species, 17 fish species, 12 amphibian species, and 54 reptile species have been recorded. The planning area also contains numerous archaeological resources. In addition, the Mimbres RMP (BLM 1993) identified the Gila Lower Box stretch of the Gila River as eligible for potential inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River System. A bill proposing it for designation is currently being considered by Congress.

A.3. Purpose and Need of the Recreation Area Management Plan

The need for the BLM's action is to implement primitive and sustainable recreation to protect the Gila Lower Box area from increased use and resource damage of sensitive values, while being consistent with the management goal outlined in the 1993 Mimbres RMP of protecting riparian values.

The purpose of the proposed recreation management actions is to implement the land use planning decision made in the 1993 Mimbres RMP that calls for the continued management of the Gila Lower Box SRMA in accordance with the 1985 Gila River Coordinated RMP (BLM 1985, page S-6). The 1985 plan called for a "recreation activity plan" to be developed for the Gila Lower Box (BLM 1985).

The goals of the RAMP are to balance natural resource preservation with recreation use and to protect the Gila Lower Box's unique and special resources through the proper management of public recreation in the RAMP planning area. This includes managing and improving current recreation opportunities in the planning area and meeting the management requirements of special designations in and around the planning area. Management directives may evolve in the planning area to meet the demands of increased visitation.

The BLM Recreation and Visitor Services Handbook (H-8320-1) recommends the local BLM officer develop a RAMP that addresses implementation-level management, administration, information, and monitoring actions. A RAMP specific to the Gila Lower Box is needed to provide a long-term vision and commitment for improved primitive recreation while protecting sensitive cultural and biological resources. While recreation is an important use of the planning area, recreation use has resulted in disturbance and damage to these sensitive resources in the past. Better infrastructure has the potential to decrease erosion and habitat degradation by making recreation more sustainable while improving the recreational experience.

The RAMP's purpose includes balancing recreation and the protection of special resources. The planning area contains special biological and archaeological resources. There are several threatened and endangered species and one species proposed for listing whose habitats overlap the planning area. Invasive annual and perennial weeds are becoming an increasing issue in the planning area's southern portion. The BLM is planning to remove an identified population of saltcedar (*Tamarix* spp.), but with increased recreation and climate change, the potential for more invasive plant species is growing.

The planning area experiences mostly seasonal and local traffic. Current recreation uses include off-highway vehicle (OHV) use, bird-watching, some float boating (when adequate flows exist in the Gila River), camping, hunting, and fishing. Motorized travel off designated routes, particularly in the streambed, is causing disturbance to biological resources. This has occurred at Sunset Dam in the planning area's western portion, where there is illegal driving into the WSA and on the riverbed, and Nichols Canyon. Since Nichols Canyon Road washed out, Nichols Canyon has experienced an increase in illegal driving over the floodplain and in the river itself down into the upper box. Dispersed camping is also concentrated along the river, which results in trash left in the area. The increase in recreation along the river is also causing degradation of riverbanks and increased concerns for soil sedimentation.

The RAMP is also being developed to protect cultural and paleontological resources from damage by recreation users. The planning area has numerous, dense cultural sites, but many are unrecorded. It is important to protect these areas without drawing attention to their existence. Finally, though no fossil resources have been recorded, the planning area is within the Gila Group/formation, which has a high potential for fossil resources.

Another part of the RAMP's purpose is to facilitate recreation in a way that it will not degrade the land. The RAMP will address the lack of signage and recreation infrastructure in the hope that increasing information and providing infrastructure, such as campgrounds and trails, will improve the recreation experience while decreasing recreation's impacts on special resources. Some trails within the planning area are not well maintained and may need to be reconstructed or restored. There is an electric fence across the river near the Nichols Canyon area that sustains damage during high-flow events. Improving recreation opportunities in areas outside Nichols Canyon may reduce the concentrated recreation use in that area, thereby reducing degradation of sensitive resources in Nichols Canyon.

The RAMP's purpose includes meeting the management requirements and standards for protection of special designation areas. Most of the Gila Lower Box WSA overlaps the planning area, and a small portion of the Blue Creek WSA (less than 5 acres) overlaps the northeastern portion of the planning area. BLM Manual 6330, Management of Wilderness Study Areas (BLM 2012a), provides management guidance to preserve the wilderness characteristics in WSAs, so as not to impair the suitability of such areas for designation as wilderness. This is known as the non-impairment standard. The BLM manages WSAs according to the non-impairment standard until Congress either designates the areas as wilderness or releases them for other purposes.

The Gila Lower Box ACEC also overlaps the planning area. In accordance with BLM Manual 1613 (BLM 1988), the BLM must manage ACECs to protect the relevant and important values for which they were designated. The Mimbres RMP identified management actions to be applied in the ACEC to protect its relevant and important values, which include habitat for state-listed and federal candidate species and its status as the largest and most significant riparian area in the Mimbres RMP planning area (BLM 1993). The management actions from the Mimbres RMP include developing a primitive recreation management area and parking areas, closing it to motorized vehicle use (except Nichols Canyon Road), and managing it for primitive and semiprimitive motorized classes.

Additionally, the Mimbres RMP identified the Gila Lower Box stretch of the Gila River as eligible for potential inclusion in the National Wildlife and Scenic Rivers System (BLM 1993, Appendix J). The river is therefore subject to management under BLM Manual 6400, Wild and Scenic Rivers – Policy and Program Direction for Identification, Evaluation, Planning, and Management (BLM 2012b). A bill to designate the Gila River, including the stretch within the planning area, as a wild and scenic river under the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 has also been introduced in Congress.

Recreation in the planning area has affected features associated with the special designation areas. For example, motorized vehicle use along Nichols Canyon Road, which overlaps the ACEC, has spread beyond the washed-out road into other parts of the ACEC, causing damage to the floodplain. The floodplain is a key relevant and important value of the ACEC in need of protection. The Mimbres RMP called for the closure of motorized recreation within the ACEC except for existing routes (BLM 1993, page 5-25). The management in this RAMP would close unauthorized routes along the washed-out Nichols Canyon Road and realign the existing road.

The BLM is preparing a separate environmental assessment (EA) to review the potential impacts associated with the implementation of the proposed RAMP. The EA details the existing

conditions within the Gila Lower Box planning area, including natural and cultural resources, recreation uses, and travel management. Information specific to some existing recreation uses is provided in the RAMP. The EA will include additional details on the existing conditions.

A.4. Relationship to Other Plans

A.4.1. Gila River Coordinated RMP and Mimbres RMP

The 1985 Gila River Coordinated RMP currently guides the BLM's management of the Gila Lower Box planning area. The RMP's primary direction for recreation in the ACEC is to a) protect and interpret the petroglyph panels and rock shelters present in the area, b) preserve scenic values, c) preserve primitive recreation opportunities, and d) enhance opportunities for solitude (BLM 1985). The RMP also identifies the need to protect and improve riparian vegetation that provides important wildlife habitat, maintain and improve water quality, maintain and improve channel stability, and allow livestock grazing to the extent that it is compatible with other objectives.

The proposed RAMP also conforms to the Mimbres RMP (BLM 1993). The RAMP is consistent with the following program objectives from the Mimbres RMP and the Gila River Coordinated RMP:

- "The objective of the wildlife program is to improve, enhance and expand wildlife habitat on public land for both consumptive and non-consumptive uses as well as biological diversity" (BLM 1993, page 2-39).
- "The objective of the Mimbres Cultural Resource Program is to manage cultural resources on public land in a manner that protects and provides for their proper use. Cultural resources include archaeological, historic, and sociocultural properties. Paleontology and natural history are also managed under the cultural resource program" (BLM 1993, page 2-43).
- "The objective of the recreation program is to enhance opportunities for developed and undeveloped recreation on public land" (BLM 1993, page 2-47).
- "The objective of the wilderness program is to identify areas that are suitable for wilderness designation, and to manage those areas in a manner that will preserve the natural values of those ecosystems" (BLM 1993, page 2-53).
- "The objective of the riparian program is based on the BLM's formal riparian policy (adopted in 1987) which is directed at achieving a healthy and productive ecological condition for public land riparian areas" (BLM 1993, page 2-61).
- "The objective of the Special Status Species program (BLM Manual 6840. 86) is to give priority to the protection and management of habitat for known populations of Federal or State listed species, to prevent the listing of Federal candidates, and to assist in recovery of listed species" (BLM 1993, page 2-63).
- "Manage [the Gila Lower Box ACEC] to protect riparian values" (BLM 1993, page 5-25).

- "To eliminate all mineral activity within the ACEC and limit mechanized use to the roads to Fisherman's Point, Spring on the Bluff, Sunshine Diversion Dam, and Nichols Canyon" (BLM 1985, page 13).
- "To provide for recreation use as follows:
    - 2,000 visitor days of boating;
    - 1,000 visitor days of motorized camping;
    - 1,000 visitor days of bird watching;
    - 1,000 visitor days of primitive camping;
    - 2,000 visitor days of picnicking;
    - 1,000 visitor days of fishing.

  (ORV use is considered incompatible with wildlife objectives)" (BLM 1985, page 14).

The proposed RAMP is also consistent with the following decisions in the Mimbres RMP (BLM 1993) and the Gila River Coordinated RMP (BLM 1985):

- "Designate the Gila Lower Box (6,490 acres) and the Gila Middle Box (840 acres) as ACECs to protect special status species and riparian habitat" (BLM 1993, page 2-42).
- "Management of the two existing SRMAs will continue…the Gila Lower Box SRMA will continue to be managed in accordance with the Gila River Coordinated Resource Management Plan" (BLM 1993, page 2-50).
- "The 14 WSAs in the Mimbres Resource Area will be managed under the Interim Management Policy and Guidelines for Lands Under Wilderness Review (BLM 1995), until the area is either added to the National Wilderness Preservation System or removed from further wilderness consideration" (BLM 1993, page 2-54).
- "Throughout the Mimbres Resource Area, riparian and arroyo habitat management will continue to be coordinated with other programs and activities as needed. Specific programs include Range, Wildlife, Watershed, Recreation, and Lands. Riparian and arroyo habitat values will be addressed in all surface and vegetation disturbing actions. Riparian areas will have a higher priority for funding, management, and protection than arroyo habitats" (BLM 1993, page 2-62).
- "Present management for Federal or State species consists of protecting and enhancing habitat and all proposed actions are evaluated for their potential impact on known populations of, or potential habitat for, listed or candidate species and to develop and implement recovery plans with objectives for listed species on public land" (BLM 1993, page 2-64).
- The following management decisions apply to the Gila Lower Box ACEC (BLM 1993, page 5-25):
    - "Close to vehicle use.
    - Develop primitive recreation management area and parking areas (5 acres).

    - Sign main entrances and provide maps and brochures.
    - Manage for ROS primitive and semiprimitive nonmotorized classes."

- "Process a limited off-road vehicle (ORV) designation in accordance with the requirements of BLM Manual 8342. This designation will limit vehicles to designated roads with the exception of the roads to Fisherman's Point, Spring on the Bluff, Sunshine Diversion Dam, and Nichols Canyon. The public land in the ACEC will be closed to vehicle use" (BLM 1985, page 14).
- "A 10-unit picnic and camping facility will be developed in Nichols Canyon. Each unit will have a table and fire circle. Parking will be provided near each unit. A 2-unit vault toilet will also be constructed. A 10-car parking lot will be developed for overflow parking. This facility will be designed to take advantage of existing topography and vegetative screening to provide privacy and protect the development from periodic flooding. This may require the purchase of additional easements or acquisition of the private land in Section 18.

  Visitor safety, education, and resource protection will be accomplished through interpretive brochures, posters, and signing within the area and on a central bulletin board" (BLM 1985, page 15).

A.5. BLM Recreation Management Framework

The BLM plans for and manages recreation and visitor services in accordance with BLM Manual 8320, Planning for Recreation and Visitor Services (BLM 2011), and BLM Handbook H-8320-1, Planning for Recreation and Visitor Services (BLM 2014). These policy-level documents direct the BLM to manage for positive recreation experiences and benefits. A person's ability to experience positive recreation outcomes and benefits depends largely on the type of activity and the area's recreation setting characteristics. The physical, social, and operational qualities that constitute the recreation setting characteristics of a recreation area generally align with the traditional continuum of recreation opportunity classes: primitive, backcountry, middle country, front country, rural, and urban.

Physical setting characteristics are the physical components of the natural or built environment. The physical setting can be remote with little or no evidence of human structures or alterations to the landscape. In these areas, natural processes occur largely unmodified by human activity, maintenance, or structural interventions. Developed physical settings are those with facilities and other infrastructure to accommodate human activity.

Social setting characteristics refer to the types and intensity of human interactions. Factors that contribute to the social setting are the number of interactions with other visitors, group sizes, and evidence of human activity. In developed physical settings, visitors generally expect to encounter other people and see physical changes to the landscape that are designed to accommodate human use.

Operational setting characteristics are the result of physical management controls, such as signs, fences, and gates, and governance structures, such as local, state, and federal laws; site management policies; and other agreements that govern how the BLM manages the land. The level of visitor services and allowance for motorized or mechanized forms of travel also

influence the operational setting. In more developed areas, there are typically more physical controls, regulations, and structured visitation. Motorized and mechanized use may occur, but they are likely restricted to designated areas. These controls and services maintain public health and safety, reduce the potential for resource impacts, and allow larger volumes of visitors to achieve their desired recreation experiences and outcomes.

A.6. Management

The purpose of the Gila Lower Box RAMP is to guide how the BLM manages recreation on BLM-administered lands in the Gila Lower Box planning area. The approximately 11,200 acre Gila Lower Box planning area is primarily used for recreational OHV use, birding, camping, fishing, and some boating (when adequate flows exist in the Gila River). The RAMP includes a combination of broad direction and specific strategies to inform the future implementation of BLM recreation facilities, programs, and enforcement consistent with the SRMA, ACEC, and WSA designations and associated management objectives.

The RAMP also reflects issues raised by the public and key stakeholders during public participation opportunities. Proposed plan direction would allow the BLM to meet the needs of present and expected future visitors while maintaining and enhancing the natural resource values that contribute to the area's unique physical setting. The BLM prepared this RAMP based on national and state BLM direction and policy, existing conditions, resource issues, and a thorough consideration of public input received during the early information gathering process. Plan monitoring would inform the need for any future updates and associated adaptive management (see **Section A.7**).

Goals are the management conditions toward which the BLM would like to move; strategies define the methods to be used by the BLM to achieve those goals. In some cases, strategies are specific decisions the BLM intends to make to achieve the goals for the RAMP. The degree to which the BLM carries out the specific management decisions depends on other management priorities, available personnel, funding levels, and the completion of further environmental analyses and decision-making, as appropriate.

A.6.1. Guiding Principles

Guiding principles provide overarching direction for the BLM in implementing the BLM's mission consistent with the values of the SRMA. The BLM will consider the fundamental objectives outlined in the Gila River Coordinated RMP, and summarized in **Section A.4**, in managing visitor use by aligning activities, services, and experiences with the purpose to preserve primitive recreation opportunities (BLM 1985). The following principles will guide the BLM's visitor use management in the Gila Lower Box planning area:

Primitive Recreation Opportunities. Provide safe, sustainable, and accessible primitive recreation opportunities in the Gila Lower Box planning area for locals and visitors, and enhance opportunities for solitude.

Resource Protection. Protect the unique and special natural and cultural resources that contribute to the special designations in and around the planning area.

A.6.2. Management Goals, Strategies, and Decisions

The Gila River Coordination RMP and the guiding principles in **Section A.6.1**, above, provide overarching direction for the BLM in managing the Gila Lower Box planning area and the development of this RAMP. Goals provide high-level direction for managing recreation in the Gila Lower Box planning area. Goals are aspirational in nature and describe the general conditions toward which the BLM intends to allocate resources during implementation.

Strategies are more detailed steps the BLM proposes to implement the goals. Decisions are specific actions the BLM would take to achieve the goals and strategies. Goals, strategies, and decisions align with the guiding principles and achieve the overarching management objectives of the proposed Gila Lower Box RAMP. See Figure 2-1 for alternatives that help guide decisions.

A.6.2.1.1. Goal 1.1 Resource Protection—Emphasize resource protection while improving the quality of outdoor recreation opportunities in the Gila Lower Box SRMA.

There is the potential for visitor use to impact natural resources, such as disturbing vegetation and wildlife through the continued use of user-created routes and unauthorized OHV use. The BLM would balance recreation use in the Gila Lower Box planning area through the following strategies and decisions to protect resources.

A.6.2.1.2. Resource Protection Strategy 1

Restore areas with native plant materials appropriate for use within the Gila Lower Box SRMA.

Resource Protection Strategy 2

Restore burned areas or degraded habitats to improve wildlife habitat and visitor enjoyment of the Gila Lower Box SRMA.

Resource Protection Strategy 3

Implement a combination of active and passive restoration methods and revegetate unauthorized user-created routes in the ACEC and WSA. Some restoration options include:

Passive Restoration Options

- Physical barriers at road heads, such as posts and cables, boulders, and berms
- Signage indicating the route is closed for restoration
- Vertical mulching at road access points (endcaps) to the line of sight
- Using salvaged dead plant material and substrate to disguise road access and encourage plant recolonization
- Allowing routes to restore naturally

Active Restoration Options

- Decompaction and imprinting to include a 1-inch harrow and heavy machinery, imprinting de-compacted surfaces to create seed catches and encourage colonization, and/or manual seeding
- If severe erosion is occurring, recontouring to shed water more effectively

Resource Protection Strategy 4

Acquire properties and conservation easements from willing parties to improve the protection of sensitive habitats and scenic viewsheds.

Resource Protection Decision 1

Ensure rules, regulations, and ethics are clearly posted and enforced, including use restrictions, limitations, and closures.

Resource Protection Decision 2

Prioritize avoidance of sensitive resources when designating or creating trails.

A.6.2.1.3. Goal 1.2. Recreation Uses and Activities—Facilitate visitor participation in uses that are compatible with the Gila Lower Box SRMA, ACEC, and WSA designations. Minimize conflicts between recreational user groups and potential impacts from recreation on natural and cultural resources by minimizing, mitigating, or prohibiting noncompatible recreational activities in certain areas or at certain times.

Currently, recreation use of the Gila Lower Box SRMA is largely focused on primitive activities, including fishing, boating, camping, hiking, and nature viewing. OHV use also occurs on roads open to motorized access and in washes. Activities occur mainly in a primitive setting with minimal site controls and few interactions with other users. The proposed RAMP would emphasize dispersed water-based and water-dependent recreation, primarily fishing, boating, camping, hiking, and nature viewing, as the primary activities within the area, while allowing for OHV use on authorized roads and washes.

Recreation Uses and Activities Strategy 1

Encourage responsible recreation and trail use.

Recreation Uses and Activities Strategy 2

Address visitor health and safety, resource protection and use, and user conflicts by implementing management controls along the primary access corridors and in camping areas.

Recreation Uses and Activities Decision 1

Manage the Gila Lower Box SRMA primarily for dispersed water-based and water-dependent recreation, including fishing, boating, camping, hiking, and nature viewing, while allowing OHV use on authorized roads and washes.

Recreation Uses and Activities Decision 2

Evaluate special recreation permit applications pursuant to BLM Handbook 2930.

Recreation Uses and Activities Decision 3

Manage specific sites for the following area settings and opportunities:

Nichols Canyon

- Allow dispersed water-based and water-dependent recreation, primarily fishing, boating, camping, and nature viewing, accessed via Nichols Canyon Road.
- Preserve wild and scenic river outstandingly remarkable value characteristics with activities that occur in a primitive or semiprimitive setting with moderate site controls and few interactions with other uses.

Gauge Dispersed Camping Area

- Provide for dispersed camping and nature-viewing opportunities accessible by OHVs via an existing road.
- Maintain camping in a primitive or semiprimitive setting with minimal site controls and few interactions with other users.
- Provide pedestrian access from the proposed campground to the river via a proposed trail.

Fisherman's Point

- Allow for bird-watching and other nature-viewing and dispersed camping opportunities accessible via an existing county road and spur route.
- Provide pedestrian access from the bluff to the river via an existing trail.
- Preserve activities that occur in a primitive or semiprimitive setting with minimal site controls and few interactions with other users.

Spring on the Bluff

- Allow for trail-based recreation opportunities with river access.
- Provide access via an existing county road.
- Provide pedestrian access from the bluff to the river via the Spring on the Bluff Trail.
- Continue activities in a primitive setting with minimal site controls and few interactions with other users.

Caprock Campground

- Provide developed camping opportunities that are accessible by motor vehicle via an existing county road.
- Maintain camping in a semiprimitive setting with extensive site controls and a high potential for interactions with other users.

A.6.2.1.4. Goal 1.3 Recreation Infrastructure and Facilities—Prioritize the maintenance of existing facilities and infrastructure. Construct new facilities and infrastructure to improve recreation experiences and protect natural resources.

Recreation Infrastructure and Facilities Strategy 1

Maintain and improve existing facilities as funding and partnerships permit. Consider new facilities on a case-by-case basis.

Recreation Infrastructure and Facilities Strategy 2

Upgrade and maintain water gates across the river to restrict livestock while enabling boater access.

Recreation Infrastructure and Facilities Decision 1

Allow recreational mining and rock hounding pursuant to the Mimbres RMP, ACEC, and WSA.

Recreation Infrastructure and Facilities Decision 2

Acquire properties and easements from willing parties to improve public river access for fishing, boating, safe portage access, trails, and other types of recreation.

Recreation Infrastructure and Facilities Decision 3

Establish the following site-specific recreation infrastructure and facilities:

Nichols Canyon

- Construct three to five primitive walk-in campsites with fire rings above the Nichols Canyon floodplain. Limit campfires to fire rings.
- Establish a primitive walk-in non-motorized boat pullout and launch location at the riverside terminus of the non-motorized trail on Nichols Canyon Road. Boats must be carried or rolled out to trailhead (approximately .65 miles).
- Construct a parking lot, kiosk, and trailhead approximately 0.15 miles past the existing cattleguard across Nichols Canyon Road within the wash (see EA Appendix D, Figure 2-7 and 2-8). Install posts and cable surrounding the parking area and fence across the wash to keep out motorized access.
- Install signage alerting visitors of the electric range fencing crossing the river.

Gauge Dispersed Camping Area

- Establish a post-and-cable boundary of the Gila Lower Box WSA along the Gauge Station Road from the intersection with the old mining road to the locked gate.
- Establish a primitive (dispersed) campground by clearing existing scrub vegetation, adding post and cable fence within cleared area, replacing surface, and installing signage off the Gauge Station Road after it turns west.
- Install a kiosk with a map indicating access to the Gila River from the camping area.

Fisherman's Point

- Install informational signage as needed, dependent on use. Provide pedestrian access from the bluff to the river via an existing trail.
- Establish a trailhead and parking area at the end of the county road leading to the WSA (see EA Appendix D, Figure 2-10).
- Establish a small parking area on the spur route before the nonmotorized trailheads downhill to the primitive (dispersed) camping area (see EA Appendix D, Figure 2-10).
- Establish a primitive (dispersed) camping area near the beginning of the pedestrian trail (see EA Appendix D, Figure 2-10).

Spring on the Bluff

- Establish a new trailhead and formalize the existing parking area at the intersection of the county road and the existing pedestrian trail (see EA Appendix D, Figure 2-11).
- Install posts and cables to designate the pull-out parking area.
- Install signage as needed, dependent on use.

Caprock Campground

- At a location south of Caprock Mountain accessed via White Rock Canyon Road, establish a 1.6-acre campground, including developed sites, a kiosk, pit toilets, fire rings, water, and a site host location.
- Establish the campground once visitor monitoring data demonstrate a demand.
- Establish an informational kiosk to serve as an entry portal to the Gila Lower Box SRMA.

Recreation Infrastructure and Facilities Decision 4

With increased use, evaluate the potential of establishing a fee area for all or portions of the SRMA.

A.6.2.1.5. Goal 1.4 Travel, Access, and Trails Management—Maintain a designated road and trail system that protects natural resources and provides access to recreation opportunities in the Gila Lower Box planning area.

Dirt roads and trails are the primary means of access in the Gila Lower Box planning area. The following strategies and decisions are intended to enhance trail-based recreation opportunities, while protecting and enhancing the area's natural resources through strategies that keep visitors on designated trails.

Travel, Access, and Trails Management Strategy 1

Prevent new user-created trails using signs, barriers, other infrastructure, and enforcement.

Travel, Access, and Trails Management Strategy 2

Consider seasonal or temporary closures following weather events to reduce trail impacts from visitor use.

Travel, Access, and Trails Management Strategy 3

Install barriers to prevent motorized access to the ACEC and WSA.

Travel, Access, and Trails Management Strategy 4

Install information signs identifying the boundaries of the ACEC and WSA.

Travel, Access, and Trails Management Decision 1

Manage the Gila Lower Box ACEC and WSA as closed to cross-country OHV use, and limit OHV travel to existing county roads (see EA Figure 1-1).

Travel, Access, and Trails Management Decision 2

Prohibit motorized use in the river channel.

Travel, Access, and Trails Management Decision 3

Implement the following site-specific travel, access, and trails management decisions:

Nichols Canyon

- Manage Nichols Canyon Road as open to motorized access to a new proposed parking area approximately 0.15 miles past the existing cattle guard across the road within the wash. See EA Appendix D, Figure 2-8 for the road alignment.
- Restore, revegetate, and barricade access to unauthorized routes in Nichols Canyon.
- Construct new primitive campsites above the Nichols Canyon floodplain (see EA Appendix D, Figure 2-7).
- Install signage alerting visitors of the electric range fencing crossing the river and replace the existing livestock fence on the river's south bank with a U- or V-shaped pass-through gate (see EA Appendix D, Figure 2-7).

Gauge Dispersed Camping Area

- Maintain motorized access via a roadway that is a valid existing right.
- Designate the existing route from the new primitive campground to the Nichols Canyon floodplain for nonmotorized and administrative access (see EA Appendix C, Figure 2-9). Install a locked gate to limit unauthorized motorized access past the campground.
- Establish a new nonmotorized trail from the Gauge Station Road to the Nichols Canyon floodplain (see EA Appendix D, Figure 2-9).

- Manage the old mining road heading east from the Gauge Station Road for nonmotorized and administrative access. Install a locked fence at the intersection of the Gauge Station Road and the old mining road to prevent unauthorized motorized access.

Fisherman's Point

- Manage the spur route from the junction with the county road to where the route heads downhill as open to motorized travel. Decommission and restore a portion of the spur route where it heads downhill (see EA Appendix D, Figure 2-10). Manage the remainder of the spur route heading downhill to its terminus at Fisherman's Point for nonmotorized travel only.
- Reestablish and repair the existing pedestrian trail to provide safe pedestrian-only access from the new trailhead to the river.

Spring on the Bluff

- Reestablish the Spring on the Bluff Trail for pedestrian access only.

A.6.2.1.6. Goal 1.5 Education, Interpretation, and Partnerships—Expand visitor understanding of the Gila Lower Box planning area by providing diverse educational and interpretive opportunities.

Education, Interpretation, and Partnerships Strategy 1

Provide on-site and offsite education and interpretation opportunities that inform the public of the area's natural and cultural resources, describe the allowed recreation uses, and identify open routes for motorized use and those available for nonmotorized use only.

Education, Interpretation, and Partnerships Decision 1

Install interpretive materials at existing and new kiosks and/or trailhead locations.

Education, Interpretation, and Partnerships Decision 2

Develop educational materials to advise visitors of resource considerations in the Gila Lower Box planning area.

Education, Interpretation, and Partnerships Decision 3

Develop educational materials to advise boaters to avoid floating through water that anglers are fishing.

A.6.2.1.7. Goal 1.6 Visitor Health and Safety—Provide enjoyable and safe experiences for visitors while recognizing there are limitations on the capability of the BLM and its staff, volunteers, partners, and contractors to eliminate all hazards.

Visitor Health and Safety Strategy 1

Strive to protect human life and provide for injury-free visits. The recreational activities of some visitors may pose a personal risk to participants, which the BLM cannot totally control. Gila

Lower Box visitors must assume a substantial degree of responsibility for their own safety when visiting areas that are managed and maintained as natural, cultural, or recreational environments.

Visitor Health and Safety Strategy 2

Prioritize saving human life over all other management actions.

Visitor Health and Safety Strategy 3

Ensure public safety, protect federal land resources, and continue to create an environment to promote the health and safety of visitors, staff, and nearby residents by working with local, state, and federal agencies. These are the BLM's primary responsibilities.

Visitor Health and Safety Strategy 4

Encourage courteous and safe behavior by all users.

Visitor Health and Safety Strategy 5

Enforce rules and regulations using BLM law enforcement.

Visitor Health and Safety Strategy 6

Coordinate with local volunteer organizations to encourage self-enforcement practices.

Visitor Health and Safety Decision 1

Develop educational materials to advise recreationists of resource considerations in the Gila Lower Box SRMA.

Visitor Health and Safety Decision 2

Where feasible, post warnings of imminent flash flood danger in the floodplain.

Visitor Health and Safety Decision 3

Cooperatively develop safe passage and portage and scouting opportunities.

A.7. Monitoring, Enforcement, and Adaptive Management

A.7.1. Monitoring

The monitoring requirements discussed below generally apply to all the action alternatives in the Gila River Coordinated RMP. The RMP monitoring requirements discussed in **Section A.7.2**, however, would also apply to the no-action alternative for this RAMP.

A.7.2. Gila River Coordinated RMP Monitoring Requirements

The Gila River Coordinated RMP identifies several actions and programs that include monitoring, such as vegetation, wildlife, water quality, visitor use, cultural resources, and grazing. The BLM also regularly monitors wilderness areas for wilderness character. Monitoring is integral to all actions and programs in the RMP to measure the effectiveness of actions

implemented or to record the impacts on the natural resources. While specific details are not provided, the RMP considers the key resources for the Gila Lower Box (wildlife, vegetation, recreation, and cultural resources) as appropriate for monitoring to record impacts and to seek to reverse or mitigate those impacts.

Whenever monitoring shows impacts that are considered significant or that surpass the limits of acceptable change, the RMP suggests that the BLM implement mitigation to reverse the situation. This could include a reduction in or elimination of the action or situation causing the impact. The RMP provides flexibility in how the monitoring is implemented; however, some monitoring details are provided, as shown below:

- Analyze vegetation changes by conducting riparian stand analysis transects before and after fencing projects.
- Take trend photos of plantings and fencing projects.
- Conduct summer and winter avian transects before and after fencing projects. Participate in the midwinter bald eagle survey coordinated by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish.
- Write an annual report summarizing the progress of the planned actions and the results of monitoring. During the preliminary annual work plan, assign one resource specialist to edit the inputs of all involved resource specialists.
- Obtain and compile water quality and peak flow data from stream gauging stations on the river system.
- Obtain and analyze water quality samples during periods of peak flow (spring) and minimal flow (fall). Take samples from points above and below the Gila Lower Box.
- Using volunteers, install signs for petroglyphs and OHV and woodcutting restrictions. Ensure volunteer patrols check the Gila Lower Box for stolen or vandalized signs and to keep camping areas in good condition by destroying fire circles and picking up litter. Arrange for volunteers to also report cattle in fenced areas.
- Conduct condition and trend studies to determine changes over time on the allotments.
- Collect precipitation data and make periodic livestock counts on the allotments.
- Evaluate changes in site condition annually to see if stronger protective measures are needed. If stronger protection is needed, evaluate other measures, and identify and implement options for meeting these needs.
- Inspect all posted signs annually to see if replacement or maintenance is needed. Replace or maintain signs during inspection.
- Monitor the impact of other planned actions on significant sites annually to see if further mitigation is necessary. Perform mitigation.

The programs listed above have monitoring systems in place; others would need to have monitoring techniques developed and tested to determine how to best evaluate conditions and implementation results.

The BLM will develop monitoring practices by selecting indicators that are used to track trends in resource and experiential conditions. Established thresholds will be used to clearly define when conditions are becoming unacceptable for the selected indicators, thus alerting managers that a change in management action(s) is required. Management action in response to monitoring will be implemented as necessary (see **Section A.7.7**, Implementation, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Adjustment).

A.7.3. Additional Proposed Monitoring

In addition to the monitoring requirements in the Gila River Coordinated RMP, the BLM proposes the following additional monitoring measures to understand progress toward meeting the goals and strategies in the RAMP and to inform subsequent adaptive management (see **Section A.7.5**, below). The BLM will implement these monitoring measures through an increased volunteer and resource staff presence in the Gila Lower Box planning area:

- Implement an annual visitor use monitoring program to document visitation at critical locations in the planning area.
- Establish natural resource monitoring parameters and implement annual monitoring of resource conditions.
- Work with local volunteer organizations to obtain citizen scientists to assist with monitoring.
- Establish adaptive management indicators and thresholds for critical resources. Apply adaptive management strategies where monitoring of natural resources indicates threshold exceedance.

As described above, additional monitoring efforts should not be limited to BLM staff and managers. The BLM should implement strategies to work with partners and the public to also monitor certain activities. For example, the BLM should provide an easy process for visitors to report unauthorized trail use or a way to educate partner organizations, so they can recognize poor trail conditions and report these issues to BLM staff. With this information, Gila Lower Box managers will work to set standards that define the conditions sought for the wide range of recreation opportunities, identify management actions desired to achieve these conditions, and adjust management accordingly. The BLM should also consider using a variety of technological approaches, such as game cameras and drones.

A.7.4. Design Features

The BLM is proposing to implement the following design features, as needed, to avoid excessive impacts on vegetation, cultural resources, paleontological resources, wildlife, and trails and recreation.

A.7.4.1.1. Vegetation

1. Retain existing vegetation. Consider:
    a. Using retaining walls on fill slopes
    b. Reducing surface disturbance
    c. Protecting roots from damage during excavations

2. Enhance revegetation. Consider:
    a. Mulching cleared areas
    b. Controlling planting times
    c. Furrowing slopes
    d. Planting holes on cut and fill slopes
    e. Choosing native plant species
    f. Stockpiling and reusing topsoil
    g. Fertilizing, mulching, and watering vegetation
3. Minimize impacts on existing vegetation. Consider:
    a. Using partial cut instead of clear cut
    b. Using irregular clearing shapes
    c. Feathering and thinning edges
    d. Disposing of all slash
    e. Controlling construction access
    f. Using existing roads
    g. Limiting work within construction area
    h. Selecting the type of equipment to be used
    i. Minimizing the clearing size (that is, strip only where necessary)
    j. Using grass seeding of cleared areas
4. Maintain the integrity of vegetation units. Consider:
    a. Using the edge effect for structure placement along natural vegetation breaks

A.7.4.1.2. Cultural Resources

1. Comply with all state and federal laws relating to prehistoric or historic archaeological sites or artifacts (historic properties). Collecting artifacts or disturbing historic properties on federal lands is prohibited and is prosecutable under the ARPA. Disturbance of human graves is also prohibited. Actions other than those explicitly approved by the BLM that result in impacts on archaeological resources are subject to the ARPA, as amended, and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976. Damaging historic properties more than 100 years of age is a punishable act under ARPA. Criminal or civil penalties, or both, may result if damage to historic properties is documented, as provided under ARPA and its implementing regulations at 43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 7.
2. In accordance with 43 CFR 10.4 (g), ensure the BLM Authorized Officer is notified immediately upon the discovery of human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony, pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4 (b). Suspend all work within 100 feet of the discovery until the BLM Authorized Officer issues written authorization to proceed. In addition, cover, stabilize, or otherwise protect the area of discovery from damage. Ensure the Authorized Officer evaluates the discovery to determine appropriate actions to prevent the loss of significant cultural or scientific values.

A.7.4.1.3. Paleontological Resources

1. Report any unanticipated paleontological resource discoveries.
2. Suspend all activities in the vicinity of such discovery until notified to proceed by the Authorized Officer, and protect the discovery from damage or looting. Do not require suspension of activities if activities can be adjusted to avoid further impacts on a

discovered locality or be continued elsewhere. Ensure the Authorized Officer evaluates or will have evaluated such discoveries as soon as possible, but not later than 10 working days after being notified.

3. Determine appropriate measures to mitigate adverse effects on significant paleontological resources.
4. Where necessary, either stabilize the fossil resource in place and avoid further disturbance to the fossil resource or mitigate impacts on the fossil resource prior to continuing construction.

A.7.4.1.4. Wildlife

1. Protect migratory bird nests by working outside the nesting season or by surveying for nests prior to activities. Protect any active nests.
2. Consult with Wildlife biologists before any on the ground activity
3. Move visitor areas away from high-quality wildlife habitat. Consider:
    a. Moving camping areas away from riparian areas or water sources
    b. Limiting or prohibiting off-trail travel in sensitive areas
    c. Concentrating trails to lower-quality habitat areas

A.7.4.1.5. Travel Management

1. Follow the Gold Book standards for road design (BLM 2007)

A.7.4.1.6. Visual Resources

1. Reduce the size of cut and fill slopes. Consider:
    a. Relocating to an area with less slope
    b. Changing the road width, grade, etc.
    c. Changing the alignment to follow existing grades
    d. Prohibiting dumping of excess material on downhill slopes
2. Reduce earthwork contrasts. Consider:
    a. Rounding or warping slopes, or both
    b. Retaining rocks, trees, drainage, etc.
    c. Toning down freshly broken rock faces with asphalt emulsion spray or with gray paint
    d. Adding mulch, hydromulch, or topsoil
    e. Shaping cuts and fills to appear as natural forms
    f. Cutting rock areas so forms are irregular
    g. Designing to take advantage of natural screens (that is, vegetation and landforms)
    h. Using grass seeding of cuts and fills
3. Maintain the integrity of topographic units. Consider:
    a. Locating projects away from prominent topographic features
    b. Designing projects to blend with topographic forms in shape and placement
4. Minimize the number of visible structures.
5. Minimize the structure contrast. Consider:
    a. Using earth-tone paints and stains
    b. Using corten steel (self-weathering)
    c. Treating wood for self-weathering
    d. Using natural stone surfaces

e. Burying all or part of the structure
f. Selecting paint finishes with low levels of reflectivity (that is, flat or semigloss)

6. Redesign structures that do not blend or fit. Consider:
    a. Using rustic designs and native building materials
    b. Using natural-appearing forms to complement the landscape character (use special designs only as a last resort)
    c. Relocating the structure
7. Recognize the value and limitations of color. Consider:
    a. that the color (hue) is most effective within 1,000 feet. Beyond that, paint color becomes more difficult to distinguish, and tone or value determines visibility and the resulting visual contrast;
    b. that using color has limited effectiveness (in the background distance zone) in reducing visual impacts on structures that are silhouetted against the sky;
    c. painting structures somewhat darker than the adjacent landscape to compensate for the effects of shade and shadow;
    d. selecting the color to blend with the land and not the sky.

A.7.4.1.7. Trails and Recreation

8. Improve communication with visitors. Consider:
    a. Adding signs at trail heads
    b. Create interpretive materials (brochures, maps, update website, etc.)
    c. Employing a trail steward to aid in educating the public
9. Improve trail markings. Consider:
    a. Adding obvious trail markers or paint blazes, or both
    b. Adding markers for areas of concern, such as muddy sections
10. Consider formalizing some informal trails (Hockett et al. 2010).
11. Modify the amount, density, and type of use. Consider:
    a. Redistributing, discouraging, or limiting use
    b. Redistributing or reducing peak use
    c. Long-term monitoring
12. Modify location of use. Consider:
    a. Dispersing levels or use to prevent lasting impacts
    b. Concentrating use on established trails and recreation areas
13. Modify visitor behavior. Consider:
    a. Using persuasive language and education
    b. Using enforcement or regulation
    c. Promoting high-quality social conditions
14. Modify site management. Consider:
    a. Maintaining or relocating trails and campsites to more sustainable locations
    b. Closing or rehabilitating less sustainable locations
    c. Limiting campsite numbers
    d. Marking campsites either with markers or established infrastructure, such as fire circles or visitor-created log and rock seating circles
    e. Charging a fee
    f. Warning visitors of known hazards (Marion et al. 2020)

A.7.5. Adaptive Management

The adaptive management proposed in this RAMP framework is divided into four major elements (**Figure A-1**):

- Build the foundation with the broad management in the RMP.
- Define specific visitor use management direction for the Gila Lower Box planning area in this RAMP.
- Identify adaptive monitoring and management strategies.
- Implement, monitor, evaluate, and adjust.

These elements provide increasingly detailed management direction from the RMP to the in-field monitoring and mitigation to move resources toward the desired characteristics detailed in the proposed RAMP (see **Figure A-2**). Further, this process of adaptive management is intended to be flexible, iterative, and adaptable while including the application of relevant laws and regulations, BLM guidance, and public involvement. This process is modeled on the Interagency Visitor Use Management Council's Visitor Use Management Framework. This council consists of six federal agencies: the BLM, National Park Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Forest Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and US Army Corps of Engineers (IVUMC 2016).

Figure A-1. Adaptive Management Framework

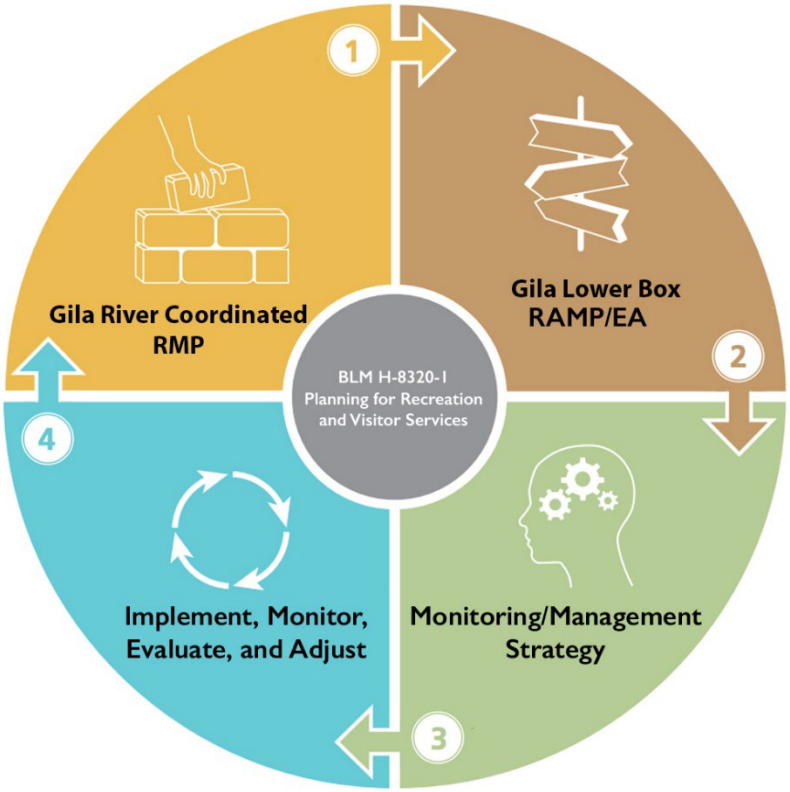
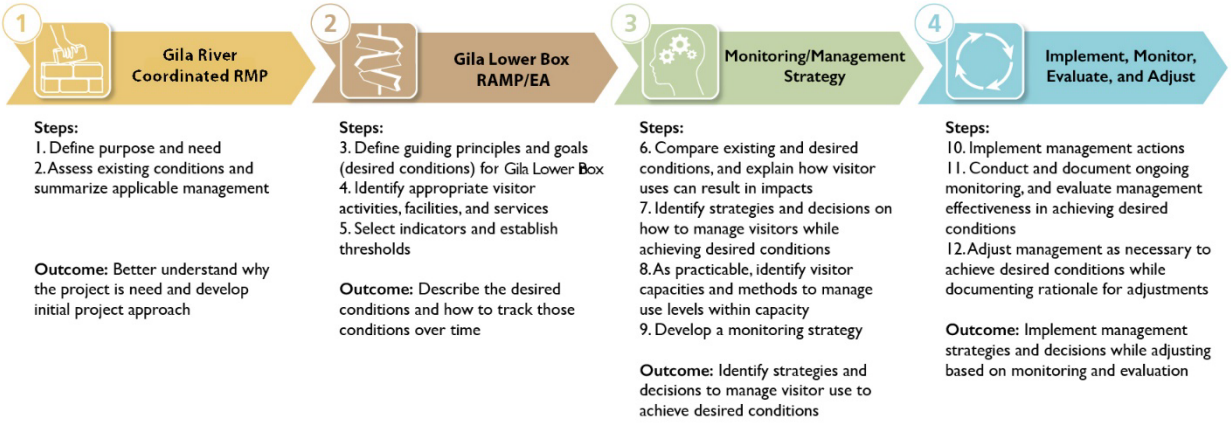


Figure A-2. Components of Adaptive Management



Each step described in **Figure A-2** is considered in this RAMP as follows:

1. The project background and need for the RAMP are defined, respectively, in **Section A.1**, Introduction and **Section A.3**, Purpose of the Recreation Area Management Plan.
2. Existing conditions are described in Chapter 3, Affected Environment, in the EA associated with this RAMP**.** Applicable laws, regulations, guidance, and management are also provided in Section 1.5 of the EA, Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, and Other National Environmental Policy Act Documents.
3. Guiding principles and goals are described in **Section A.6.1**, Guiding Principles, and **Section A.6.2** under Management Goals, Strategies, and Decisions.
4. Appropriate uses and facilities are included in **Section A.6.2** under Management Goals, Strategies, and Decisions.
5. Indicators are described in detail below in **Section A.7.6**, Management Indicators.
6. Existing and desired conditions are compared in **Section A.7.7**, Implementation, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Adjustment.
7. Strategies for managing visitors while achieving desired conditions are compared in **Section A.7.7**, Implementation, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Adjustment.
8. Methods to manage use levels are described in **Section A.7.7**, Implementation, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Adjustment.
9. Ongoing and proposed monitoring efforts are summarized above in **Sections A.7.2**, Gila River Coordinated RMP Monitoring Requirements, and **A.7.3**, Additional Proposed Monitoring. The plan for monitoring and mitigation is considered in **Section A.7.7**, Implementation, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Adjustment.
10. Implementing management actions is discussed below in **Section A.7.7**, Implementation, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Adjustment.
11. Step 11 is discussed below in **Section A.7.7**, Implementation, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Adjustment.
12. Adjusting management, as necessary, is discussed below in **Section A.7.7**, Implementation, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Adjustment.

A.7.6. Management Indicators

Management indicators serve as measurements and data sources that may signal a need to adjust management of recreation or resources. Changes in these indicators, such as increases in the evidence of resource damage or number of emergency responses, may indicate a need for change. Each management indicator below corresponds to the issues and topics discussed in **Section A.6.2** under Management Goals, Strategies, and Decisions.

- Resource Protection and Restoration
    - Indicator: Evidence of resource disturbance
    - Indicator: The presence or absence of wildlife and desired vegetation
    - Indicator: Distribution or increase of noxious and invasive weeds
    - Indicator: Funding for staff to monitor and manage resources
    - Indicator: Evidence of successful restoration actions
- Recreation Uses and Activities
    - Indicator: Change in the primary recreation use of the area
    - Indicator: Increasing conflicts between recreation uses
- Recreation infrastructure
    - Indicator: Number and types of facilities and infrastructure in the Gila Lower Box planning area
    - Indicator: Incidents of vandalism
- Trail Uses and Access
    - Indicator: Inappropriate trail use in the Gila Lower Box planning area (for example, motorized use in an area where motorized use is not allowed), including any citations by law enforcement of these inappropriate uses
    - Indicator: Widening, erosion, and braiding of trails
    - Indicator: Development of user-created access points
    - Indicator: Incidence of user-created, unauthorized trails, including any citations by law enforcement of creation of unauthorized trails
    - Indicator: Evidence of unauthorized motor vehicle use on closed routes
    - Indicator: Trail conditions with the potential for secondary erosion, such as those that would follow high-intensity rain
    - Indicator: Incidence/prevalence of trash disposal or illegal dumping, including any citations by law enforcement for these activities

- Education, Interpretation, and Partnerships
    - Indicator: Incidence of coordination with partners, such as cooperative projects and periodic meetings
    - Indicator: Amount of new or updated interpretive materials and signage at key locations for education and impact reduction
- Visitor Health and Safety
    - Indicator: Frequency of emergency service responses
- Indicator: Reports of crime or criminal activity

A.7.7. Implementation, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Adjustment

Adaptive management will allow the BLM to consider how its management actions are implemented and how to adjust management based on the results of monitoring. The management proposed for implementation under this RAMP is described in the decisions discussed in **Section A.6.2** under Management Goals, Strategies, and Decisions. Some of these decisions would be in effect immediately following the issuance of the RAMP, such as route decisions and restoration proposals and signage. Other decisions could require additional NEPA and other analyses, such as future recreation improvements and amenities.

While some implementation-phase projects would require additional NEPA and other analyses, once those efforts had been completed, the BLM managers using this RAMP would follow the same adaptive management process for their decisions. This adaptive management process includes steps 10–12 of Element 4, described above in **Figure A-2**, Components of Adaptive Management. The final element and steps of adaptive management are as follows:

- Implement management actions
    - Prepare to implement a decision by ensuring BLM staff is equipped to make this change and that the required resources are available.
    - Implement the management and inform BLM staff, relevant partners, and members of the public of the new management.
    - Ensure adequate staff is available on-site to gauge the reactions from visitors and to respond to any questions or concerns.
- Conduct and document ongoing monitoring and evaluate the effectiveness of management actions in achieving desired conditions.
    - Conduct monitoring (per **Section A.7.1**, Monitoring) with BLM staff using consistent indicators, such as those described in **Section A.7.6**, Management Indicators.
    - Ensure consistency and the ability to track changes over time by documenting the monitoring and the impact indicators.
    - When appropriate, empower partners and the public to also monitor the same indicators and create a process to document their results.

- Following an adequate period to observe and monitor changes resulting from management actions, evaluate the effectiveness of the changes and determine whether the management is moving that resource or setting toward the goals for the Gila Lower Box (see **Section A.6.2**, Management Goals, Strategies, and Decisions) and the appropriate SRMA characteristics.

- Adjust management to achieve desired conditions and document why management is being changed.
    - If indicators show there are impacts and there is movement away from desired conditions, analyze the potential cause(s).
    - Consider how to adjust management and work with BLM staff to ensure the change(s) for a particular resource would not affect another resource.
    - Change the management strategy with the following documentation to demonstrate the rationale for the modification:
        - A summary of the original action and its implementation (step 10)
        - A summary of monitoring data and analyses suggesting the need for an adjustment (step 11)
        - Reasoning for the selection of the new actions, including the supporting analysis and evidence
        - Demonstrations of what will change, how it will change, and the resources needed to make the change
        - Explanations of how the changed management will move this resource toward improved, desired conditions.
- Change the management, including any required NEPA documentation or analysis. Return to step 10 and repeat as necessary.

A.8. References

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Appendix B

Public Scoping Comment Summary

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Attachment

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BLM – Bureau of Land Management
NEPA – National Environmental Policy Act
RAMP – recreation area management plan

APPENDIX B. PUBLIC SCOPING COMMENT SUMMARY

B.1. Introduction

This report documents the results of the public scoping period for the Gila Lower Box Recreation Area Management Plan (RAMP) and Environmental Assessment. The period ran from April 5 to May 5, 2022. Public involvement is a vital part of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) conducted this public comment period to identify issues to be addressed and to help determine the appropriate scope of the forthcoming NEPA analysis.

B.1.1. Description of the Public Involvement Process

In accordance with 40 Code of Federal Regulations 1501.9, the BLM must document public involvement and determine the scope of issues related to a proposed action. The BLM solicits comments from relevant agencies and the public; it then organizes and analyzes all comments received. The agency evaluates the substance of each comment and extracts the overarching issues that will be addressed during the NEPA process. These issues help define the scope of the NEPA analysis and are used to develop the project alternatives.

B.1.2. Nature of Comments Received and the Comment Analysis Process

Comment analysis is used to compile and combine similar public comments into a format that decision-makers can use to identify alternative management actions in a NEPA document. It assists the team in organizing, clarifying, and addressing technical information, in accordance with NEPA regulations. It also aids in identifying the topics and issues to be evaluated and considered throughout the NEPA process.

The process includes five main components, as follows:

- Developing a comment coding structure
- Using a comment database for comment management
- Reading and coding public comments
- Interpreting and analyzing the comments to identify issues and themes
- Preparing issue statements

The BLM developed a comment coding structure to help sort comments into logical groups by topics and issues. The coding structure was designed to capture all comment content, rather than to restrict or exclude any ideas.

The BLM used the comment analysis and response application database to manage all public comments. The database stores the full text of all correspondence and allows each comment to be coded by topic and issue. Some outputs from the database include tallies of the total number of correspondence and comments received, sorting and reporting comments by a topic or issue, and demographic information regarding the comment sources.

B.1.3. Methodology

From the 10 comment submissions received, the BLM identified a total of 70 parsed individual comments (see **Attachment A**). Each comment was assigned a code to identify its general content and to group similar comments.

The BLM considered all comments; however, only those comments determined to be substantive were analyzed. Substantive comments received during public comment periods do one or more of the following:

- Raise issues the BLM has not considered, or reinforce issues the BLM has already identified
- Present information that can be used when the BLM considers the impacts of alternatives
- Raise concerns, with reasoning, regarding public land resources in the planning area
- Recommend specific changes to the proposed action or alternatives
- Question, with reasonable basis, the accuracy of information in an existing report

Substantive comments raise, debate, or question a point of fact or policy. Comments that merely support or oppose a proposal or that only agree or disagree with BLM policy are not considered substantive. Under each code, the BLM grouped all comments by similar topics; those that raised issues, concerns, or alternatives were summarized with issue statements.

B.2. Public Comment Summary

The BLM received comments submitted through the e-Planning website throughout the public scoping period. The comments concerned recreation uses, cultural and paleontological resources, biological resources, socioeconomics, the range of alternatives, best available information, Native American religious concerns, public safety and enforcement, lands and realty, and grazing. These comments were used to identify the issue statements outlined in **Section 2.1**.

B.2.1. Issue Statements

Identifying resource categories and capturing issues is one of the primary benefits of scoping. Defining significant issues early in the scoping process allows for more effective communication between the public and the decision-makers. An issue is a concern, disagreement, or debate over potential project impacts on the environment. Such issues tend to be associated with areas near a project location, although impact areas may vary depending on the specific resource and nature of the project. The purpose of preparing issue statements is to highlight comment themes identified through the comment analysis process. The BLM will use the issue statements to develop potential alternatives and identify issues to be analyzed in the environmental assessment.

B.2.1.1. *Recreation Area Management Plan Issue Statements*

B.2.1.1.1. Biological Resources

- How would changes in recreation management affect biological resources?

B.2.1.1.2. Cultural Resources

- How would changes in recreation management affect cultural resources, particularly in the Fisherman's Point area?

B.2.1.1.3. Recreation Uses

- How would the RAMP manage routes?
- How would changes to recreation management affect camping?
- How would changes to recreation management affect access in the Gila Lower Box planning area?
- How would changes to recreation management affect off-highway vehicle use?
- How would the BLM provide for a diversity of recreation opportunities that exist in harmony with ecosystem needs?
- How would the BLM provide effective interpretive signage that would not detract from a primitive recreation experience?
- How would changes to recreation management affect boating access?

B.2.1.1.4. Designated Areas

- How would the RAMP ensure the protection of the area of critical environmental concern and wilderness study areas?

B.2.1.1.5. Grazing

- How would changes to recreation management affect grazing?

B.2.1.1.6. Lands and Realty

- How would changes to recreation management affect lands and realty?

B.2.1.1.7. Socioeconomics

- How would limiting motorized use in the area affect the local economy?

B.2.1.1.8. Range of Alternatives

- Would the BLM analyze an alternative that would expand recreation opportunities in the Gila Lower Box planning area?

B.2.1.1.9. Soils

- How would changes to recreation management affect soils and erosion?

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Attachment A

Public Comments

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Last Name	First Name	Organization	Letter Number	Comment Number	Comment Code Name	Comment Text
Gorman	Peter	N/A	1	1	Cultural and Paleontological Resources	[comment:1-1; 205]Fisherman's Point- Alternative C. This is a fragile area. There are archeological sites in the area both in the canyon and on nearby bluffs. This area should be kept undeveloped and no campground developed near the river.[comment end]
Not Provided	Stan	N/A	2	2	Recreation Administration	In order to prevent and avoid adverse resource impacts and user conflict, the BLM should be actively managing the area and routes. Through different management strategies and proper education, negative impacts can be properly mitigated without closures. As popularity for outdoor recreation grows, the BLM should be looking at ways to provide reasonable access that will sustain the growing numbers of visitation. Restricting use and concentrating use will only increase impact. The BLM should not just consider, but absolutely add "additional loops and routes for motorized activities" to accommodate the increase of use to mitigate negative impact.
Not Provided	Stan	N/A	2	3	Socioeconomics	The Gila Lower Box area is also crucial for the local economy. The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis showed that in 2019 the outdoor recreation industry brought in $459.8 billion nationwide. Motorized recreation contributes a large portion of that income, and these areas in New Mexico need to be reaping the economic benefits. By limiting access, decommissioning trails, or restricting recreation opportunities the BLM could be harming the local economy and robbing them of potential income.
Not Provided	Stan	N/A	2	1	Range of Alternatives	I believe the BLM needs to create and analyze a broad range of alternatives including increasing recreation opportunities. Through NEPA, Bureau of Land Management typically creates a conservation alternative but rarely creates an alternative that looks at creating more open areas for recreation including increasing trails and roads as well as dispersed camping areas.
Not Provided	Stan	N/A	2	4	Recreation	Dispersed camping is a popular recreational activity that also needs to be protected through these plans. Restricting use to designated sites or a specific number of sites is arbitrary. The BLM should be able to add in additional resources as needs increase. Any user conflicts or possible resource damage can be solved through management solutions other than closure and the BLM needs to implement these practices first. These management solutions must start from the position that addressing user conflict should be limited to managing incidents of conflict and not be interpreted to restrict access to public land for some users based on the subjective and arbitrary complaints of other users.
Not Provided	Stan	N/A	2	5	Recreation	In order to advance equity of access on public land for those with mobility impairment disabilities, it is important to recognize that discrimination towards Americans with disabilities within federal land management agencies is deeply rooted and hidden in plain sight. It is common for motorized recreation to take a backseat to conservation and protection. Motorized recreation is often times the only way those with mobility impairment disabilities are able to enjoy high value recreation experiences on public lands. Current policies actively discriminate against this group of underserved Americans and I would like to see this plan help connect all users with public lands.
Spotts	Richard	N/A	4	1	Designated Areas	As an ACEC and WSA, BLM must not allow any recreational uses or excessive recreational levels that would threaten or harm the resources intended for protection in the ACEC and the wilderness characteristics that should be maintained in the WSA. This may require a delicate balance of management, but BLM should always err on the side of resource protection.
Spotts	Richard	N/A	4	2	Direct/Indirect Impacts	Some obvious scoping issues and resources are potential effects on soils, vegetation, wildlife, habitat connectivity, any special status species, noise, VRM, night sky, and invasive weeds. Other possible scoping issues include human access points, visitor education and interpretation, visitor infrastructure (toilets, trash cans, parking areas), law enforcement presence and capacity, emergency search and rescue, and landscape ecology (how would increased human uses affect natural landscapes and necessary wildlife movement patterns over a larger area).
Spotts	Richard	N/A	4	3	Best Available Information – Baseline Data	Please carefully review the two related attachments [SEE ATTACHMENTS FOR BLM Necessary Reforms Spotts August 2021 and Recreation Report_Sept 2021]. The Recreation Report likely contains helpful information and recommendations. The BLM reform information likely contains some helpful insights.
Davis	Hara	N/A	5	1	Recreation Administration	ORV access needs to be severely restricted to an improved roadway to allow accesssibity for disabled/ elderly to the least environmentally fragile area.This area would be maintained with trash and toilet service.Other sections of the river need to remain sanctuaries for people and wildlife without vehicle access to the river.ORV partial trails to lookouts or mines are possible in my plan, but primary river access is by foot or float.All fencing would be removed from across the river and recreational floating would be facilitated.

Last Name	First Name	Organization	Letter Number	Comment Number	Comment Code Name	Comment Text
Davis	Hara	N/A	5	2	Cultural and Paleontological Resources	Indigenous rock art and sacred sites need to be cherished and protected and resanctified, then shared for historic perspectives when appropriate.
Davis	Hara	N/A	5	3	Public Safety and Enforcement	The last time I was at lower box the trash was ankle deep.Site stewards are needed as long as people don't respect the area.
McSpadden	Eric	N/A	6	1	Recreation Administration	- The area be more restrictive to the public's ability to access the area with motorized vehicles.
McSpadden	Eric	N/A	6	2	Recreation Administration	- Provide certain locations that would allow the public to access the Gila Lower Box that can be managed with minimal effort by the BLM. Examples would be Fishermans Point, Spring Bluff, and a trail that would lead toward the Nichols Canyon area.
McSpadden	Eric	N/A	6	3	Recreation Administration	- Establish designated areas for both camping and fires. Restricting fires to designated areas only.
McSpadden	Eric	N/A	6	4	Recreation Administration	- Possibly, eliminate the access, other than administrative, in Nichols Canyon.
McSpadden	Eric	N/A	6	5	Lands and Realty	- Keep available, access to any and all utilities within the area. There should not be any restrictions beyond what is currently in place, to allow the company(ies) to maintain, add or replace services and further manage vegetation and roads that allows them access.
McSpadden	Eric	N/A	6	6	Lands and Realty	- Also, we noticed that a portion of two sections NM State Trust land, Sections 9 and 16, Township 19 S, Range 19 W are included on the map of the Recreation Plan. The map boundary should be changed as the BLM has no jurisdiction over NM State Trust lands. This land is not part of the existing ACEC, or WSA.
Phillips	Tom	N/A	7	1	Recreation	I have visited this area for many years and the draft plans providing for establishment of actual camping areas, especially in the Nichols Canyon area are desirable and appropriate.
Phillips	Tom	N/A	7	2	Recreation Administration	Of all the things being proposed, the clarification of parking areas, and defining the boundaries for those parking areas are critical. This will not only allow for the public to access as close as possible, but also better protect the floodplain. Where the parking areas are not nearby the river, please construct good pedestrian trails that are properly designed, but also ensure they are regularly maintained.
Phillips	Tom	N/A	7	3	Range of Alternatives	Overall, Alternative B (the Preferred Alternative), does the most to improve the public use in the Gila Lower Box Recreation Area and is also my preferred option.
McSpadden	Eric	Hidalgo Soil and Water Conservation District	8	1	Recreation Administration	The area be more restrictive to the public's ability to access the area with motorized vehicles.
McSpadden	Eric	Hidalgo Soil and Water Conservation District	8	2	Recreation Administration	Provide certain locations that would allow the public to access the Gila Lower Box that can be managed with minimal effort by the BLM. Examples would be -Fisherman's Point, Spring Bluff, and a trail that would lead toward the Nichols Canyon area.
McSpadden	Eric	Hidalgo Soil and Water Conservation District	8	3	Recreation	Establish designated areas for both camping and fires. Restricting fires to designated areas only. Also, limiting spots to mitigate human waste problems.
McSpadden	Eric	Hidalgo Soil and Water Conservation District	8	4	Recreation Administration	Possibly, eliminate the access, other than administrative, in Nichols Canyon.
McSpadden	Eric	Hidalgo Soil and Water Conservation District	8	5	Lands and Realty	Keep available, access to any and all utilities within the area. There should not be any restrictions beyond what is currently in place, to allow the company(ies) to maintain, add or replace services and further manage vegetation and roads that allows them access.
McSpadden	Eric	Hidalgo Soil and Water Conservation District	8	6	Lands and Realty	Also, we noticed that a portion of two sections NM State Trust land, Sections 9 and 16, Township 19 S, Range 19 Ware included on the map of the Recreation Plan. The map boundary should be changed as the BLM has no jurisdiction over NM State Trust lands. This land is not part of the existing ACEC, or WSA.

Last Name	First Name	Organization	Letter Number	Comment Number	Comment Code Name	Comment Text
Burr	Ben	BlueRibbon Coalition	9	1	Recreation Administration	No routes or areas should be decommissioned or closed. In fact the BLM should strongly consider keeping as much area as possible open to recreation users so they are not concentrated in smaller areas to mitigate impacts that come from concentrated use. This land should benefit as many users as possible.
Burr	Ben	BlueRibbon Coalition	9	2	Designated Areas	Where this area already encompasses a Wilderness Study Area and an ACEC, the BLM should look to maximize recreation opportunities elsewhere.
Burr	Ben	BlueRibbon Coalition	9	3	Recreation Administration	BRC does not support the restoration of routes as all routes have been created for a significant reason and serve a purpose and need. If there is a possibility that the route could cause harm to resources the route should be re-routed or the BLM should find adequate ways to manage the impact rather than closure. Land agencies are required to manage the land through proactive management and education and not hardwire closure as the correct first response to mitigate impact.
Burr	Ben	BlueRibbon Coalition	9	4	Recreation	This plan should ultimately identify reasonable standards for allowing dispersed camping as well as added campgrounds. Keeping open roads will allow use for dispersed camping and help mitigate impact as campers won't be concentrated into small areas. Management strategies should be exhausted before restrictions and closures of areas to any type of recreational use. BRC supports all recreational activities if done responsibly.
Burr	Ben	BlueRibbon Coalition	9	5	Recreation	Many of our members hold organized events that include organized rides in this area. A significant portion of the education mission of organizations like ours and the fundraising that supports organizations like ours comes from these organized events, and we see the continuation of these events as an integral expression of protected rights including freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. We believe these events are protected by the First Amendment and believe they are crucial to clubs and organizations.
Burr	Ben	BlueRibbon Coalition	9	6	Socioeconomics	Local communities rely on motorized recreation for economic opportunities. There has been a surge of use throughout the nation on public lands as well as in New Mexico. Local groups have worked hard to put the area on the map so that they could reap the economic benefits. Closing roads would greatly hinder economic opportunity. Many local organizations and businesses recognize the influx of traffic and believe that any user conflict can be mitigated through better signage and education.
Burr	Ben	BlueRibbon Coalition	9	7	Range of Alternatives	The Bureau of Land Management is required to show a broad range of alternatives through the NEPA process. In order to adequately comply with NEPA the BLM must have alternatives that increase dispersed camping and motorized recreation. An alternative needs to be considered that increases the amount of motorized trails as well as dispersed campsites. This inequitable privilege of one stakeholder's interest over the interests of other stakeholders taints the integrity of the NEPA process. Otherwise, the agency is treading down a dangerous path of pursuing a planning action that isn't compliant with the basic requirements NEPA.
Burr	Ben	BlueRibbon Coalition	9	8	Purpose and Need	The purpose and need of this plan is to create better management strategies, not to simply close and restrict use which is what the alternatives given propose. Closure is not management. These areas provide a purpose and need for outdoor access that improves physical and mental health for public land users.
Burr	Ben	BlueRibbon Coalition	9	9	Other Laws	We recommend that the BLM use this planning process to finally begin to reverse its decades-long systematic discrimination against those with mobility impairment-related disabilities. On his first day in office, President Joe Biden issued an "Executive Order On Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government." This executive order established "an ambitious whole-of-government equity agenda" which focuses on addressing "entrenched disparities in our laws and public policies," and mandates a "comprehensive approach to advancing equity for all, including people of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality." Under this executive order, "The term 'equity' means the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as ... persons with disabilities " Historically, there has been no group more greatly marginalized and excluded by public land management policies, and motorized travel management policies in particular, than people with disabilities. Outdoor enthusiasts with ambulatory disabilities frequently rely on motorized travel as their sole means to enjoy recreating on public lands. Not everyone has the ability to hike into a remote wilderness area, but many such people are still able to drive Jeeps, side-by-sides, and ATVs, which are restricted to the designated motorized route network.

Last Name	First Name	Organization	Letter Number	Comment Number	Comment Code Name	Comment Text
Burr	Ben	BlueRibbon Coalition	9	10	Recreation Administration	Travel management policies focused on "minimizing" the environmental impacts of motorized recreation have resulted in a dramatic decrease in motorized recreation opportunities on public lands over the last 20 years which has disproportionately impacted people with disabilities. Wilderness focused environmental groups with extreme ableist biases have pushed for more and more areas to be closed to motorized recreation and reserved exclusively for hikers, mountain bikers, and other "human powered" and "quiet use" forms of recreation in which many people with disabilities are unable to participate. Every time motorized routes or areas are closed, people with disabilities that require the use of motorized means to access public lands are barred from those areas forever. There has been little recourse for such people in the past because the Americans With Disabilities Act does not require public land management agencies to consider disproportionate effects on the disabled community, but only requires that they be given access to public lands on equal terms with everyone else. As a result, the BLM has historically failed to give any real consideration to the impacts of motorized route closures on the disabled community when developing travel management plans. The Biden Administration's focus on equity, however, changes the equation. While the ADA focuses only on equality of opportunity, equity inherently focuses on equality of outcome. Any policy that is facially neutral but disproportionately harms a disadvantaged or marginalized group is considered inequitable. The BLM is therefore required by this executive order and others mandating that federal agencies consider "environmental justice" in NEPA proceedings to consider whether any route closures in the Gila Lower Box plan would disproportionately harm disabled users' ability to access public lands. Any approach to travel management that presumes the superiority of non-motorized forms of recreation like hiking over motorized recreation, or that justifies closing motorized access on the basis that people can still hike on those routes, is inherently discriminatory toward people with disabilities. Any large-scale closures of existing routes would unfairly and inequitably deprive people with disabilities of the ability to recreate in the area using the only means available to them. It is imperative that the BLM consider the access needs of disabled users in drafting the alternatives for this travel plan and ensure that people with disabilities who depend on motorized means do not lose access.
Burr	Ben	BlueRibbon Coalition	9	11	Recreation Administration	We would like to close by saying we support "shared use". As long as overall visitation numbers are appropriate for the affected resources, motorized and non-motorized users can be compatible with one another so long as individual users understand designations and plan their activities accordingly. Indeed, motorized and nonmotorized recreation use often overlap as OHV's often increase accessibility to non-motorized recreational activities such as hiking, camping, equestrian use, etc. We also hold that responsible recreational use of public lands can exist in harmony with ecosystem needs.
Burr	Ben	BlueRibbon Coalition	9	12	Public Outreach	BRC would like to be considered an interested public for this project. Information can be sent to the following address and email address: Ben Burr BlueRibbon Coalition P.O. Box 5449 Pocatello, ID 83202 brmedia@sharetrails.org
Allison	Mark	Gila Conservation Coalition et al.	10	3	Requests for Information	We attended the virtual public meeting on April 26. At that meeting, it was mentioned that a recording of the virtual public meeting would be made available on the project website. As of today, the recording is not available. The public meeting was very helpful in adding context to the information available on the BLM virtual public meeting website. We are disappointed that the recording was not provided to the public as promised.
Allison	Mark	Gila Conservation Coalition et al.	10	5	Designated Areas	Recreation area improvements in the Gila Lower Box are proposed in both the Wilderness Study Area (WSA) and the Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). We suggest that BLM keep signage in or adjacent to the WSA and the ACEC to a minimum in order to not detract from the primitive recreation experience, while at the same time highlighting the boundary of the WSA, reminding visitors to stay on designated trails and roads, and to follow Leave No Trace principles to help prevent littering.
Allison	Mark	Gila Conservation Coalition et al.	10	6	Recreation Administration	Is BLM considering adding interpretive signage? If so, what are the issues to be covered? Again, we would recommend keeping signage to a minimum in order not to detract from the primitive recreation experience. Existing BLM signage needs to be repaired or replaced. If signage looks like it is being maintained, then visitors have a more positive impression about taking care of a place i.e., not littering, etc.
Allison	Mark	Gila Conservation Coalition et al.	10	12	Range of Alternatives	We recommend that BLM consider alternatives for improving the Nichols Canyon Road. The maps provide no detail for where the road realignment will go or what maintenance level the road will be designed for and what kinds of vehicles would be appropriate. We understand the tradeoffs for keeping Nichols Canyon as a primitive recreation area, but currently the severely degraded road limits access to those people with high clearance trucks or off-road vehicles.

Last Name	First Name	Organization	Letter Number	Comment Number	Comment Code Name	Comment Text
Allison	Mark	Gila Conservation Coalition et al.	10	13	Range of Alternatives	We agree with BLM's proposed plan (Alternative B) for a parking area with post and cable fence. Will the road heading northwest, ending in a cul-de-sac be closed beyond the proposed/existing parking lot? Is this portion of the road in the WSA? Will the road beyond the proposed/existing parking lot be closed to prevent motorized vehicle travel in the WSA? This extension of the road beyond the proposed parking does not show up on the maps. Additionally, we support BLM's plan for restoration of the trail to the river, as well as adding minimal signage to mark the trailhead. A well-designed and maintained trail will prevent hikers from creating multiple trails.
Allison	Mark	Gila Conservation Coalition et al.	10	16	Recreation	It is impossible to evaluate the proposed Caprock Canyon Campground because of the lack of map detail. Our field exploration didn't help because the boundaries of the state lands aren't clear. It's worth noting that New Mexico Wild proposed a dispersed campground on nearby New Mexico State lands at the junction of the Nichols Canyon Road and the Gauging Station Road.
Barrett	Sherry	Gila Conservation Coalition et al.	10	4	GIS Data and Analysis	We are very disappointed in the quality of the maps and the lack of a clear narrative for the proposed action produced for project scoping. The lack of landmarks and boundaries of the Wilderness Study Area and Area of Critical Environmental Concern make it difficult to understand the details and potential effects of the proposed alternatives. Although we visited the locations of each alternative, we are still unsure of locations of the parking area in Nichols Canyon, the realignment of the Nichols Canyon road, parking area at Spring on the Bluff, and the potential Caprock Campground. Since management requirements differ by designation, understanding locations in relation to management designations would allow for better scoping input. We recommend that more detailed maps are produced for the EA so that the public can better understand the proposed alternatives.
Barrett	Sherry	Gila Conservation Coalition et al.	10	7	Grazing	We appreciate BLM's commitment to hiring a contractor to maintain the electric fence above the ACEC. However, we have noticed that the fence along the private land in Box Canyon doesn't appear to have the same level of maintenance. On a recent trip to Box Canyon on January 16, 2022, we noticed that the fence along the private property was down allowing cattle to access the Gila River. We put the fence back up again, but it seems like it will need more routine maintenance to ensure that the cows are kept out of the riparian area.
Barrett	Sherry	Gila Conservation Coalition et al.	10	8	Vegetation	The Nichols Canyon floodplain is severely damaged by OHV use. We are supportive of alternatives to close roads in this area to limit harm to riparian vegetation and to encourage restoration of the floodplain vegetation.
Barrett	Sherry	Gila Conservation Coalition et al.	10	9	Recreation Administration	Boat Put-in/Take Out - this location is approximately a quarter mile away from the parking area and limits the viability of the location for river access. While we support the overall goal of limiting motor vehicle access to the river, we suggest that BLM explore alternatives to provide boater access to the put-in/take-out. We recommend installation of a locked gate that would allow vehicles to transport boats and gear closer to the put- in/take-out. The lock could have a combination that could be changed periodically to limit abuse of the access. The combination could be obtained by legitimate boaters through communication with the BLM office in Las Cruces.
Barrett	Sherry	Gila Conservation Coalition et al.	10	10	Recreation Administration	The Gila Conservation Coalition and New Mexico Wild have explored additional boat put-ins and take-outs for canoes, kayaks, and rafts up and downstream of the WSA and ACEC. There are 3 put-in alternative options upstream at: the Redrock State Wildlife Experimental Area, the Highway 464 Redrock Bridge on NM State Land, and on BLM land at the end of Patton Road on the north side of the river, west of Redrock. There is also a good take-out at the Sunset Canal diversion dam on BLM land adjacent to the WSA. This location has been behind a locked gate so some provision for a combination lock may also be necessary for access. We would recommend analysis of these access points for boaters as appropriate. Please see New Mexico Wild's report "Gila Lower Box - Wilderness Study Area Assessment of Recreation, Education & Enforcement Opportunities" attached to these comments for additional information on some of these options.
Barrett	Sherry	Gila Conservation Coalition et al.	10	11	Grazing	We also recommend analyzing boater-friendly alternatives for the fenceline between Blue Creek and Nichols Canyon. Often electric fences are not boater-friendly. Hanging cable/swinging PVC pipe fences have proven to be an effective cattle deterrent that is both boater-friendly but also resistant to damage from high flows.
Barrett	Sherry	Gila Conservation Coalition et al.	10	12	Range of Alternatives	We recommend that BLM consider alternatives for improving the Nichols Canyon Road. The maps provide no detail for where the road realignment will go or what maintenance level the road will be designed for and what kinds of vehicles would be appropriate. We understand the tradeoffs for keeping Nichols Canyon as a primitive recreation area, but currently the severely degraded road limits access to those people with high clearance trucks or off-road vehicles.

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Barrett	Sherry	Gila Conservation Coalition et al.	10	17	Recreation	We support establishing a dispersed camping area along the Gauging Station Road providing that sufficient controls are installed that prohibit vehicular access to the WSA. We also support closing the road past this point and extension of the non-motorized trail down to Nichols Canyon. This trail offers non-motorized access for campers to Nichols Canyon.
Barrett	Sherry	Gila Conservation Coalition et al.	10	18	Recreation Administration	We strongly support robust visitor monitoring of the Gila Lower Box to get an accurate picture of visitation rates and types of recreation that can be used to inform the Recreation Area Management Plan.
Carpenter	Scott	Gila Conservation Coalition et al.	10	1	Best Available Information – Baseline Data	Please see the attached files containing our comments [SEE ATTACHMENT FOR Gila Lower Box Assessment_April2021-compressed].
Carpenter	Scott	Gila Conservation Coalition et al.	10	5	Designated Areas	Recreation area improvements in the Gila Lower Box are proposed in both the Wilderness Study Area (WSA) and the Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). We suggest that BLM keep signage in or adjacent to the WSA and the ACEC to a minimum in order to not detract from the primitive recreation experience, while at the same time highlighting the boundary of the WSA, reminding visitors to stay on designated trails and roads, and to follow Leave No Trace principles to help prevent littering.
Carpenter	Scott	Gila Conservation Coalition et al.	10	6	Recreation Administration	Is BLM considering adding interpretive signage? If so, what are the issues to be covered? Again, we would recommend keeping signage to a minimum in order not to detract from the primitive recreation experience. Existing BLM signage needs to be repaired or replaced. If signage looks like it is being maintained, then visitors have a more positive impression about taking care of a place i.e., not littering, etc.
Carpenter	Scott	Gila Conservation Coalition et al.	10	10	Recreation Administration	The Gila Conservation Coalition and New Mexico Wild have explored additional boat put-ins and take-outs for canoes, kayaks, and rafts up and downstream of the WSA and ACEC. There are 3 put-in alternative options upstream at: the Redrock State Wildlife Experimental Area, the Highway 464 Redrock Bridge on NM State Land, and on BLM land at the end of Patton Road on the north side of the river, west of Redrock. There is also a good take-out at the Sunset Canal diversion dam on BLM land adjacent to the WSA. This location has been behind a locked gate so some provision for a combination lock may also be necessary for access. We would recommend analysis of these access points for boaters as appropriate. Please see New Mexico Wild's report "Gila Lower Box - Wilderness Study Area Assessment of Recreation, Education & Enforcement Opportunities" attached to these comments for additional information on some of these options.
Carpenter	Scott	Gila Conservation Coalition et al.	10	13	Range of Alternatives	We agree with BLM's proposed plan (Alternative B) for a parking area with post and cable fence. Will the road heading northwest, ending in a cul-de-sac be closed beyond the proposed/existing parking lot? Is this portion of the road in the WSA? Will the road beyond the proposed/existing parking lot be closed to prevent motorized vehicle travel in the WSA? This extension of the road beyond the proposed parking does not show up on the maps. Additionally, we support BLM's plan for restoration of the trail to the river, as well as adding minimal signage to mark the trailhead. A well-designed and maintained trail will prevent hikers from creating multiple trails.
Carpenter	Scott	Gila Conservation Coalition et al.	10	16	Recreation	It is impossible to evaluate the proposed Caprock Canyon Campground because of the lack of map detail. Our field exploration didn't help because the boundaries of the state lands aren't clear. It's worth noting that New Mexico Wild proposed a dispersed campground on nearby New Mexico State lands at the junction of the Nichols Canyon Road and the Gauging Station Road.
Johnson	Hattie	Gila Conservation Coalition et al.	10	15	Soils and Geologic Resources	In order to prevent additional erosion, BLM should look at installation of erosion control measures that might be needed given the existing damage to the current motorized trail to the proposed primitive camping area.
Martin	Susan	Gila Conservation Coalition et al.	10	19	Public Safety and Enforcement	We encourage the BLM to increase funding levels for enforcement at the Gila Lower Box. We recognize that the area is far from the Las Cruces District Office, but increased visitation and associated negative impacts as was described in the virtual public meeting warrant more frequent patrolling by BLM law enforcement.

Last Name	First Name	Organization	Letter Number	Comment Number	Comment Code Name	Comment Text
Siwik	Allyson	Gila Conservation Coalition et al.	10	14	Range of Alternatives	8. Fisherman's Point We recommend a hybrid between Alternatives B and C with an additional element. We agree that there should be a designated parking area at Fisherman's Point but it shouldn't be called a trailhead. The area below the existing cul-de-sac is very steep and erodible. Calling this spot a trailhead will encourage potentially damaging foot traffic down the steep erodible hill. We recommend establishing the non-motorized trail as suggested in Alternative C and also establishing a parking area and trailhead at the junction of this non-motorized trail and the road out to Fisherman's point. There is already a flat area at that site that is currently used for parking.
Siwik	Allyson	Gila Conservation Coalition et al.	10	2	Recreation Administration	1. Protect the Gila Lower Box from Motorized Vehicle Impacts The most important part of this proposed action is limiting vehicular travel in the riparian/floodplain areas and closing roads on steep erodible hillsides, particularly roads that lead to the river. If the BLM does nothing else in this area, these actions should receive priority.
Gaume	Norm	N/A	11	1	Recreation Administration	I understand the BLM proposes to block vehicular access to the river at Nichols Canyon to halt the abuse of this primitive area by ATVs. The parking lot is a quarter mile from the river. Please provide for vehicular access to the river for put-in for the Lower Gila Box and take-outs from the Middle Gila Box and bird area. Please consider a locked gate that legit river runners get through by prior arrangement with the BLM. Your objectives are worthy but please find a way to not penalize the wild river paddling community. I'm now a senior citizen and am unable to shlep my boat and gear for an overnight trip over a rough quarter mile.
Gaume	Norm	N/A	11	2	Public Outreach	Please add me to your mailing list for the EA.

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Appendix C
Paleontology Report

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT—LAS CRUCES DISTRICT

Paleontology Assessment

General Information

Paleo Case #	BLM-NM-L000-2022-PALEO-009	**IT4RM Number**	IT4RM-L000-2021-0143-EA
Serial Number	-	**NEPA Number**	DOI-BLM-NM-L000-2021-0143-EA
Project Name	**Gila Lower Box Recreation Area Management Plan (RAMP)**		
Project Lead	Allie Bettinger	**Applicant**	BLM Internal
Description	Alternative B—Proposed RAMP Under Alternative B, the proposed action, the BLM would complete a RAMP for the five recreation sites: Nichols Canyon, Gauge Dispersed Camping Area, Fisherman's Point, Spring on the Bluff, and Caprock Campground. The RAMP would involve the construction of additional recreational facilities, such as parking areas, trailheads, and dispersed camping areas; the reestablishment of the Spring on the Bluff pedestrian trail; and changes to the types of travel allowed on certain roads. New surface disturbance from these features would cover approximately 2.7 acres for the new nonmotorized trail from Gauge Station Road to Nichols Canyon Road. Another 0.65 acres would be newly disturbed for the construction of a new trailhead, parking area, and boating takeout in Nichols Canyon. Slight amounts of surface disturbance would occur in other areas to add fire rings for primitive campgrounds, to add posts and cable, and to formalize parking areas. Once visitor monitoring data demonstrate a demand, the BLM would construct a developed campground (Caprock Campground) to accommodate additional users. This would result in an additional 1.55 acres of disturbance, if the developed campground were constructed.		
Paleontology Analyst	Colin R. Dunn, BLM LCDO Paleontologist	**Assessment Date**	3/28/2024

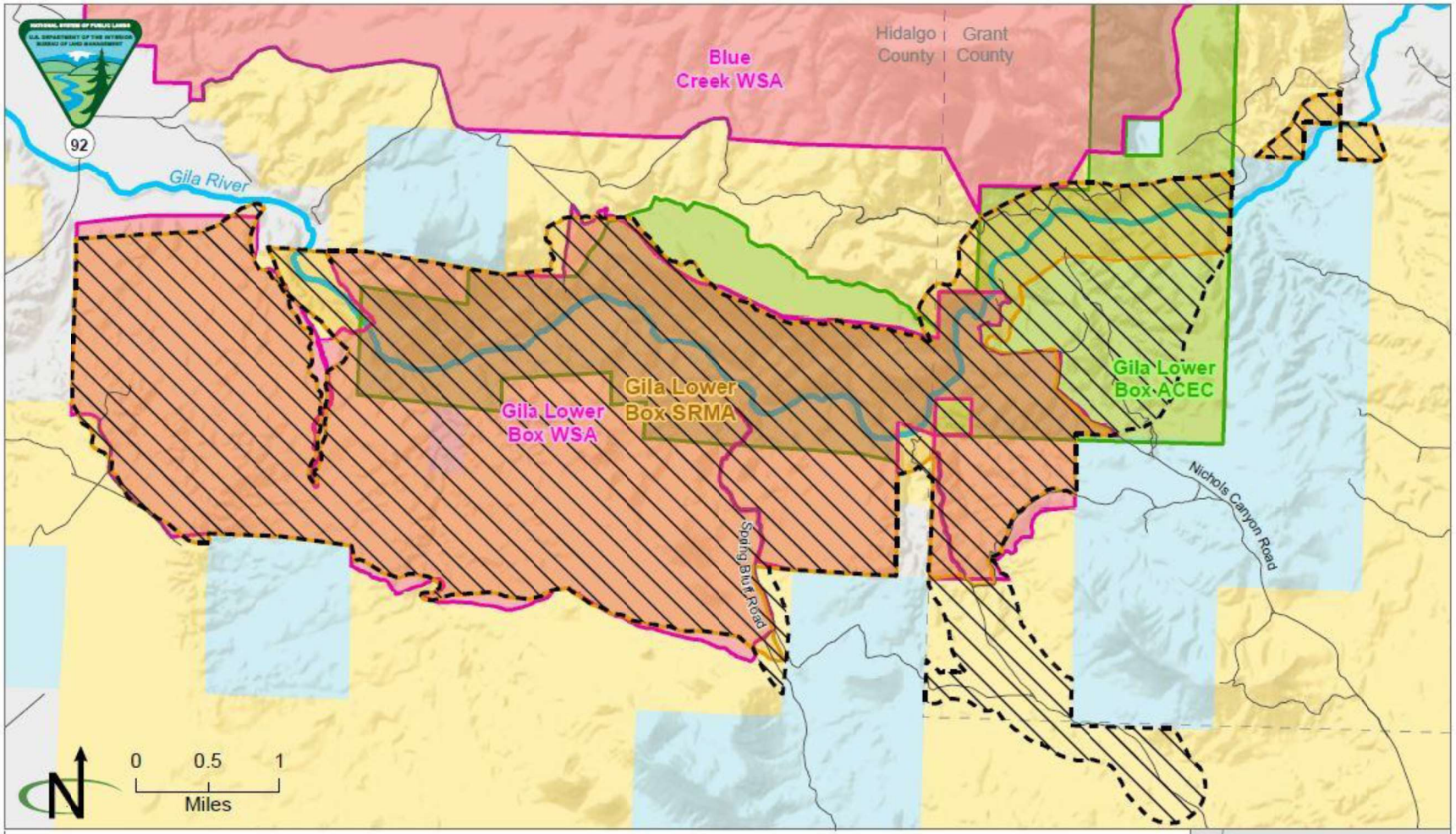


Figure 1-1
Gila Lower Box Recreation Area Management Plan (RAMP) Planning Area

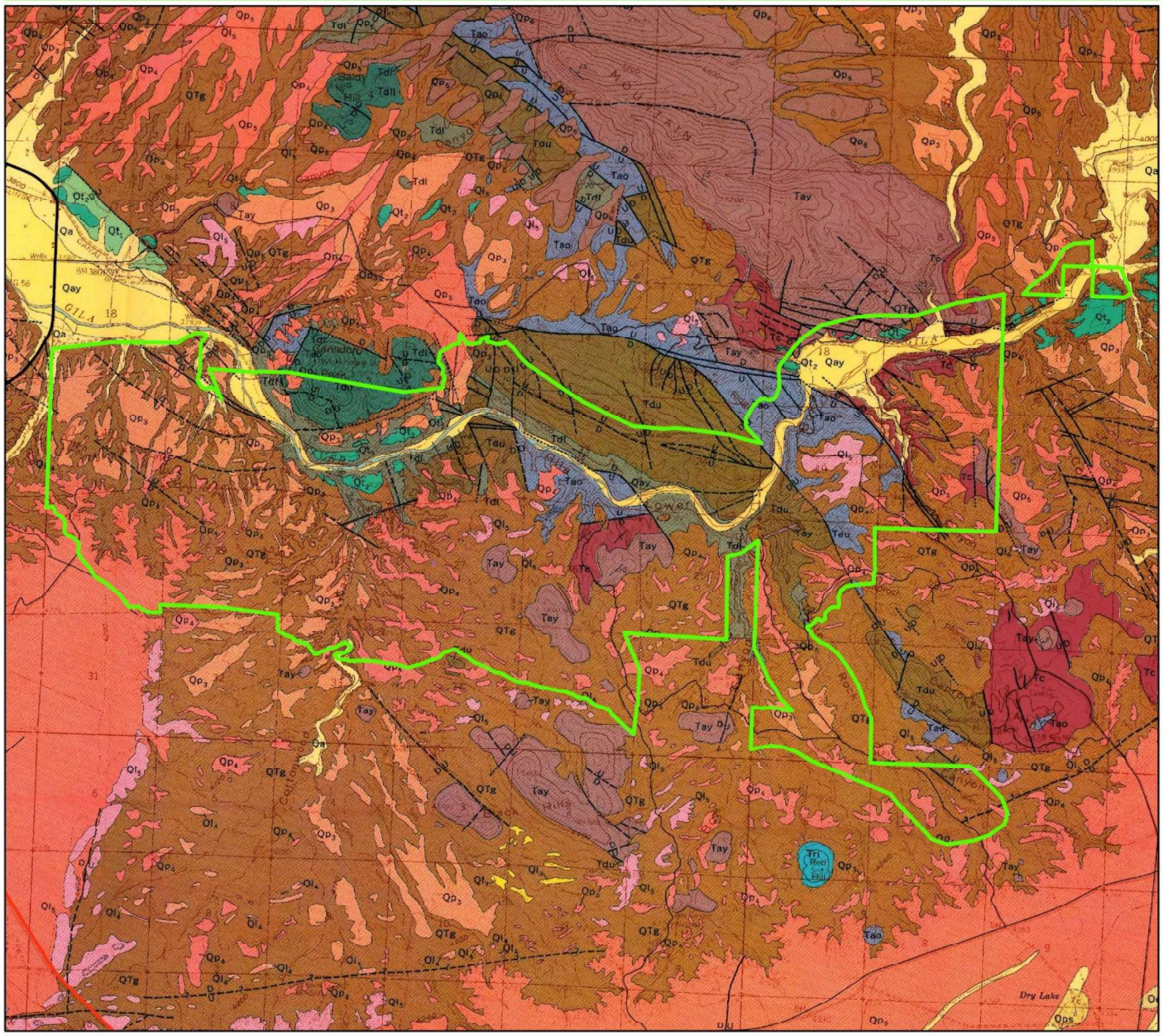
- RAMP planning area
- Special Recreation Management Area
- Wilderness Study Area
- Area of Critical Environmental Concern
- Bureau of Land Management
- State
- Private

Source: BLM GIS 2021
January 05, 2023
GilaRAMP_Intro.mxd

No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual or aggregate use with other data. Original data were compiled from various sources. This information may not meet National Map Accuracy Standards. This product was developed through digital means and may be updated without notification.

Geology of the Planning Area

Bureau of Land Management- Las Cruces District Office



Transportation

- US Highway
- State Highway
- Other
- Approx Gila Lower Box Planning Area

0 1 2 Miles

Map Produced by: BLM Las Cruces District Office
Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 13N
File: L000-2022-PALEO-009
Scale: 1:75,000
Scale: 1:0
Date: 3/28/2024

N

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, or for purposes not intended by the BLM. Spatial information may not meet National Map Accuracy Standards. This information is subject to change without notification.

Potential Fossil Yield Classification:

[1:48,000]: Morrison (1965) *Geologic descriptions from cited source

- PFYC 1 (Very Low)

[Tay] Younger basaltic andesite—*Pliocene*—The younger basaltic andesite consists of basaltic flows that are scoriaceous to massive, and locally platy. Cinder beds occur locally, particularly in the lower part of the section at the southeast end of Black Mountain; basaltic alluvial gravel occurs locally in the Duncan quadrangle. The andesite is mainly dark gray to black, but locally various shades of brown. purple, and red. It commonly appears to be olivine basalt, but probably is mostly or entirely basaltic andesite (Halva, 1961). Small plagioclase phenocrysts are common in some flows. The flows are horizontal or dip gently (rarely more than 10°), generally eastward. The andesite's maximum exposed thickness is nearly 2,000 feet west of Whitlock Peak on the western scarp of the Peloncillo Mountains. The andesite overlies or is interbedded with volcanic conglomerate, older basin fill, and tuff [Tc] at the southeastern end of Black Mountain, where its maximum exposed thickness is about 700 feet, and in several areas within 3 miles to the south and southeast—**Justification**: Units consists of lava flows and other igneous deposits.

[Tdll] Datil Formation, lower unit—*Oligocene to Early Miocene*—The lower unit in the vicinity of Gila Lower Box consists of, from top to bottom: 200ft Lithic tuff [pale-yellow to nearly white, weathers to darker yellow and tan, massive to very thick bedded, well-indurated, prominent cliff former; locally at top is a 20 to 25-foot zone of hard (welded?) rhyolitic lithic tuff, red brown at top, grading downward through pinkish gray to light gray], 150ft Lithic tuff [red in upper part, grading downward through orange and yellow to pale yellow in lower two-thirds], 25ft Andesite or latite flow, 150ft Lithic tuff [greenish-gray; massive in upper part, well-bedded in lower part], 10–30ft Lithic tuff [pale-yellow, well-indurated, strongly columnar-jointed; cliff former], 10–100ft Lithic tuff [light greenish-gray, locally light-tan; thick-bedded], 0–50ft Basaltic andesite flow and flow breccia [dark-gray to black, very lenticular], and 100ft Lithic tuff [light greenish-gray to light-gray]. Total thickness 645–805 feet—**Justification:** Units consists of lava flows and tuffs.

[Tdl] Datil Formation, latite-andesite unit—*Oligocene to Early Miocene*—The latite-andesite unit consists of thick latite and andesitic flows and some local tuff. Bedding and flow structures are discernible locally. The flows typically are highly lenticular, and they crop out only in a few localities where they underlie hills that have resisted erosion, as at Canador Peak and Baldy Hill. Each locality is so bounded by faults and(or) overlapped by the Gila Formation and younger sediments that the exact stratigraphic relation of the latite-andesite unit to the Datil Formation generally cannot be determined; the limited evidence available suggests that this unit is approximately coeval with the upper part of the lower unit—**Justification**: Units consists of lava flows and other igneous deposits.

[Tao] Older Andesite—*Pliocene to Eocene(?)*—The older andesite is mainly andesite flows and flow breccias, with local andesitic tuff and other intermediate lavas. It is dark gray to black, brown, maroon, and purple. Spotted greenish-gray andesite which has strong platy structure is common. The andesite is commonly vesicular, amygdaloidal, and(or) porphyritic, and contains small phenocrysts of plagioclase and mafic minerals. It is commonly closely sheared and somewhat hydrothermally altered or propylitized. Its total thickness is difficult to estimate because of poor exposures and faulting but it probably is more than I .000 feet—**Justification**: Units consists of lava flows and tuff.

- PFYC 2 (Low)

  [Qay] Youngest Floodplain deposits—*Historic*—The flood plain of the Gila River is mainly silt with some sand and local gravel stringers within a few feet of the surface: it is commonly more gravelly at depth. The present river bed is cobble gravel to sand. The thickness of alluvial deposits in the inner valley of the Gila River ranges from several feet locally near edges of the flood plain to about 75 feet in the wide flood-plain sectors to perhaps locally more than 100 feet in the gorge sectors. The youngest flood-plain deposits (Qay) are differentiated only alone the Gila River: they represent that part of the Gila River flood plain which has been inundated by major floods in the last century.
  Justification: The unit is too young (less than 10,000 years) to produce fossils.

- PFYC 3 (Moderate)

  No units present with this classification at this scale.

- PFYC 4 (High)

  [QTg] Gila Conglomerate—*Pliocene to Pleistocene*—The Gila Formation in the mapped area consists of alluvium, playa, and shallow-lake sediments, deposited while the intermontane basin between the Peloncillo Mountains and the mountains to the east-here called the Duncan basin-had closed drainage, prior to the development of through drainage by the Gila River. The Gila probably is equivalent to the upper part of the Quiburis Formation and possibly the lower part of the Sacaton Formation of the Gila Group as defined by Heindl (1963).

  The deeply dissected region north of Pearson and Lordsburg Mesas exposes two major zones in the Gila Formation: a lower zone of fanglomerate, and an upper zone of mostly unconsolidated or poorly consolidated silt and sand, with some gravel. A sharp litholgic break commonly marked by a small angular unconformity generally separates them. The two zones cannot be differentiated at the scale of the map.

  The lower fanglomerate zone consists of subangular to subrounded coarse- to medium-sized fan gravel, generally poorly sorted, locally derived, and generally tightly cemented by calcium carbonate. At Nichols Canyon and the canyon of Blue Creek the unit dips east and northeast, generally about 3° and locally more than 5°. Near the mouth of Blue Creek it unconformably overlies flows of younger basaltic andesite that are interbedded with volcanic conglomerate, older basin fill, and tuff. In the lower parts of Picnic and Corral Canyons this zone is especially strongly jointed and locally is displaced by small faults. South of the Gila River in the middle of sec. 11, a maximum thickness of at least 750 feet is exposed.

  The upper zone in the western half of the Canador Peak quadrangle is mainly sand which is commonly silty and locally pebbly in its lower part, and mainly silt with some beds of clay, sand, marl, and diatomaceous silt in its upper part. South of the Gila River gravelly zones commonly are interbedded with sandy, silty, and clayey zones. Some of the gravel zones near the western edge of the Canador Peak quadrangle may be lacustrine. South of Pearson Mesa only the upper zone is exposed; it is silt, sand, and a little clay, except bordering the Summit Hills where a gravelly facies extends 200-800 feet from the hardrock contact.

  In the northwest corner of the Canador Peak quadrangle the upper zone attains a maximum exposed thickness of about 250 feet. In the area southwest of Black Mountain and Riley Peaks the boundary between the upper and lower zones dips very gently southwestward, and as a result the upper zone thins out toward the mountains. North of

Canador Peak and in the vicinity of Gila Lower Box the upper zone is commonly 30 and rarely as much as 100 feet thick. In the northeast corner of the quadrangle this zone consists of alternating silty and sandy beds with sparse to abundant gravelly layers. The lower contact dips generally southeastward, so the upper zone attains a maximum thickness of about 300 feet near the eastern edge of the mapped area—**Justification:** The Axial-fluvial facies of the Gila Conglomerate is well known for producing scientifically important vertebrate fossils only a couple miles to the west of the planning area. A few localities are known from the east, but most of the Gila Conglomerate in the planning area has not received full inventory Field visits appears to indicate a lower abundance of fossil preservation in the planning area.

- PFYC 5 (Very High)

  No units present with this classification at this scale.

- PFYC U (Unknown)

  [Qa] Alluvial Deposits—*Latest Pleistocene to Holocene*—The alluvial deposits consist of unconsolidated alluvial gravel, sand, and silt that underlie the youngest flood plains and stream beds and the lowermost stream terrace. The youngest flood-plain deposits are mapped along the Gila River. Along all streams other than the Gila River these deposits range in thickness from 1 to rarely 20 feet. Boulder-to-pebble gravel in and near mountain areas grades basinward to pebble gravel, sand, and silt several miles from the mountains. Alluvial deposits on the western part of Lordsburg Mesa are mainly silt and locally clay. Wide flood plains along the lower parts of main washes, such as Rainville, Burro, and Railroad Washes and Hunter Flat, are underlain mainly by silt with local. sand and gravel interbeds. Deposits on these wide portions are on a comparatively recent pediment which is developed on poorly consolidated sediments, mainly silt and clay, of the Gila Formation and which commonly extends some distance beyond the mapped limits of the alluvium—**Justification:** The literature of the above units does not discuss the presence/absence of fossils, but the units are old enough to produce fossils. Note: This unit is only old enough at its base; the upper portions and surface are likely too young for fossil production.

  [Qt1] and [Qt2] Stream-Terrace gravels—*Pleistocene*—consists of unconsolidated cobble-and-pebble gravel and, locally, gravelly sand. The total thickness is 3–25 feet. Stream-terrace gravel 1 veneers a lower younger terrace along the Gila River than does stream-terrace gravel 2. Gravel I bears a moderately to locally strongly developed Pedocal and gravel 2 bears a strongly developed Pedocal—**Justification**: The literature of the above units does not discuss the presence/absence of fossils, but the units are old enough to produce fossils. Additionally, this unit contains some degree of pedogenic carbonate cementation at the surface, which can preclude fossil preservation. However, fossils could be preserved at depth in these units (where the subsurface is exposed in arroyos).

  [Qp3] Pediment-and-terrace gravel, youngest—*Pleistocene*—Pediment-and-terrace gravel 3 forms a mantle that is locally discontinuous on a major pediment-terrace surface that is lower than the pediment-gravel 4 surface. This unit is generally somewhat finer than pediment-and-terrace gravel 5 in the same general area. Along the eastern side of the Peloncillo Mountains unit 3 commonly has foreign rock types reworked from lake gravel 5. At altitudes of 4,100± 100 feet unit 3 locally intertongues with, and(or) underlies approximately coeval lake sediments (lake gravel 3): pediment-and-terrace gravel 3 also includes local areas of this lake gravel that are not differentiated.

Areas downstream from Gila Lower Box within 1.5 miles south of the river that are mapped as pediment-and-terrace gravel 3 are not pediment gravel but are somewhat younger strath-terrace gravel deposited by the ancient Gila River after downcutting by the river had drained the lake in which lake gravel 3 was deposited. This strath-terrace gravel is generally somewhat coarser and commonly thicker than the pediment-and-terrace gravel 3 of adjoining areas. The southern margin of the ancient river flood plain appears to have been partly defined by faults.

AII areas of pediment-and-terrace gravel 3 bear a very strongly developed Pedocal where this soil is not eroded, which is similar to. though somewhat less well developed than, the soil on pediment-and-terrace gravel 5—**Justification:** The literature of the above units does not discuss the presence/absence of fossils, but the units are old enough to produce fossils. Additionally, this unit contains some degree of pedogenic carbonate cementation at the surface, which can preclude fossil preservation. However, fossils could be preserved at depth in these units (where the subsurface is exposed in arroyos).

[Qp4] Pediment-and-terrace gravel, older—*Pleistocene*—Pediment-and-terrace gravel4 mantles a minor. intermediate pediment-terrace surface. It commonly is preserved only in local remnants on ridge crests, many of which are too small to be mappable. Unit 4 resembles the gravel of unit 5 in the same area, and it locally intertongues with coeval lake gravel 4, as at the headwaters of Cottonwood Canyon. Unit 4 bears a very strongly developed Pedocal like that on pediment-and-terrace gravel 5—**Justification:** The literature does not discuss the presence/absence of fossils, but the unit was deposited in an environment that can preserve fossils and is old enough to produce fossils. This unit contains some degree of pedogenic carbonate cementation at the surface, which can preclude fossil preservation. However, fossils could be preserved at depth in these units (where the subsurface is exposed in arroyos).

[Qp5] Pediment-and-terrace gravel, old—*Pleistocene*—This unit is the coarsest and most extensive pediment-and-terrace gravel: it mantles the second highest post-Gila surface generally with slight disconformity. Along the east side of the Peloncillo Mountains and in the west half of the Canador Peak quadrangle unit 5 locally intertongues with and(or) underlies high-shore gravel (lake gravel 5) of an approximately contemporaneous deep lake. Locally below the 4,250-foot altitude it includes undifferentiated occurrences of this lake gravel.

Unit 5 in areas south of the Gila River from Pearson Mesa eastward contrasts with the unit in other areas by its different lithology and a better rounding of the pebbles. The unit here consists mainly of pebble gravel with some cobble gravel and interbedded sand and rarely silt, 15 to more than 50 feet thick; here some undifferentiated lacustrine beds are locally present. The gravel in these eastern areas was deposited on a low-gradient alluvial fan delta of the ancestral Gila River that extended over most of Lordsburg and Pearson Mesas. The gravel of the ancestral Gila River consists of rocks of many types, including Tertiary volcanic rocks and igneous and metamorphic rocks from the Big Burro Mountains and Little Burro Mountains region. Along the east edge of the mapped area, -south of the Grant-Hildalgo County line, however, unit 5 is mainly reddish arkosic sand and gravel derived from Precambrian granitic rocks in the Knight Peak area about 14 miles to the east.

In all areas pediment-and-terrace gravel 5 bears a very strongly developed Pedocal where this soil has been protected from erosion. The soil has a deep reddish-brown, clayey, strongly structured B horizon as much as 4 feet thick, over a white, very

strongly calcium-carbonate-cemented Cca (caliche) horizon 5–8 feet thick. This soil is tentatively correlated with the Yarmouth Interglaciation.

On Pearson and Lordsburg Mesas locally overlying this soil is one to several feet of younger eolian and alluvial sand and silt not differentiated on the map—**Justification:** The literature of the above units does not discuss the presence/absence of fossils, but the units are old enough to produce fossils. This unit contains some degree of pedogenic carbonate cementation at the surface, which can preclude fossil preservation. However, fossils could be preserved at depth in these units (where the subsurface is exposed in arroyos).

[Ql5] Lake gravels, oldest—*Pleistocene*—Lake gravel 5 is high-shore gravel of the first deep Quaternary lake in the Duncan basin. It is mainly pebble gravel with local cobble gravel and rarely some small boulders: locally it contains some sand and silt. The gravel is well rounded and generally well bedded: locally it shows small-scale crossbedding. The unit is generally unconsolidated but locally it is cemented with calcium carbonate. Algal and thinolite (a euhedral crystalline variety pseudomorphic after aragonite) tufas occur· rarely, as in the SE ¼ sec. 11. T09S R31E. Much-eroded remnants of lake morphologic forms, such as bars (shown on map by special symbol) and shore terraces, are preserved locally, especially in the southeast corner of the Duncan quadrangle.

This unit is 3–60 feet thick, and is thickest between Woods Canyon and the Day Ranch headquarters. The thicker exposures commonly show a zone of sand and silt between lower and upper gravel zones. The unit locally intertongues with and(or) overlies the approximately coeval pediment-and-terrace gravel 5 [Qp5]. Lake gravel 5 bears a very strongly developed Pedocal like that on pediment-and-terrace gravel 5. This soil is correlated with the Yarmouth Interglaciation—**Justification:** The literature does not discuss the presence/absence of fossils (besides algae), but the unit was deposited in an environment that is conducive to fossil preservation, and old enough to produce fossils. However, this unit contains some degree of pedogenic carbonate cementation at the surface, which can preclude fossil preservation. However, fossils could be preserved at depth in these units (where the subsurface is exposed in arroyos).

[Tc] Volcanic conglomerate, older basin-fill, and tuff—*Pliocene(?)*—This sequence is mostly water-laid volcanic detritus-conglomerate, sandstone, clay, and tuff. It underlies the Gila Formation with pronounced angular unconformity and commonly conformably underlies and is locally intercalated with the younger basaltic andesite. The unit is well indurated. The gravel facies are generally crudely bedded and poorly sorted and consist of subangular to subrounded pebbles. The unit lacks megascopic fossils and its principal areas of exposure are widely separated; this, together with the widespread faulting and. marked sedimentary facies gradations, makes exact correlation impossible between the outcrop areas, although the unit probably is approximately the same age everywhere.

In seven separate areas, seven main facies are recognized:

(1) The principal facies, which occurs within 4 miles of the south edge of the Duncan quadrangle,
(2) IIn the northern part of the Duncan quadrangle, about 70 feet of basaltic tuff breccia and basaltic and felsitic conglomerate is intercalated with the younger basaltic andesite unit.
(3) From Mexican Canyon to Moore Box, in the northwestern part of the Canador Peak quadrangle, this unit is a volcanic conglomerate

(4) Along the lower part of Riley Canyon this unit consists of red-tan to red-brown clay and silty clay, with a few interbeds of light-tan to pale-gray calcareous sandstone and one 2- to 3-inch bed of white diatomite.
(5) Near the southeastern end of Black Mountain this unit locally underlies or is intercalated with the younger basaltic andesite. It is mostly sandy pebble-conglomerate, and composed almost entirely of basaltic andesite
(6) The unit in the areas south and southeast of Gila Lower Box is mostly silty to sandy poorly sorted pebble-conglomerate that is locally cobbly. It is light tan-gray, well indurated, and rudely bedded to locally well bedded. This pebble conglomerate is composed of subangular to subrounded pebbles of dark-gray, black, and red andesite and hard pink, gray, and 'white lithic rhyolite tuff and rhyolite in a tuffaceous sand matrix. Some fault zones in these areas contain manganese minerals, as at the Consolation, Constellation, Cliff-Roy, .and Poe Mines.
(7) White pumiceous tuff and tuffaceous sandstone, generally water-laid and well bedded and as much as 100 feet in exposed thickness, underlie the younger basaltic andesite on the west side of the Summit Hills.

Justification: The subunits include sedimentary deposits and are old enough to produce fossils. However, while the literature mentions the absence of fossils, enough time has passed (60 years) from the last study, and our understanding of geology and paleontology has increased such that another look may be warranted.

[Tdu] Datil formation, upper unit—*Oligocene to Early Miocene*—The upper unit near Gila Lower Box consists of the following zones, from top to bottom: 30ft Felsite (latite?) flow [dark-red, strongly flow banded], 70ft Andesite [dark-gray to black, vesicular to platy], 75ft Tuffaceous (andesitic to felsitic) sandstone and conglomerate [pink to dark-red, well-bedded, water-laid; moderately well indurated in upper part, generally poorly indurated in lower part], 40ft Lithic felsitic tuff [pale-gray to white, locally pink, massive, indurated (darker and more indurated in lower part); cliff former], 60ft Welded felsitic tuff [medium-gray, weathers to dark reddish gray, massive, very well indurated; strongly jointed; major cliff former], 0–200ft Lithic tuff and tuffaceous conglomerate [light-gray and pink to red, poorly to well-indurated], and 100–300ft Tuffaceous sandstone with some tuffaceous conglomerate and lithic tuff [mostly light greenish-gray and light grayish-green, locally tan, red, pink, gray, to nearly white; well-bedded to almost laminated, water-laid; graded bedding common]. Total thickness 375–775 feet—**Justification:** Units contains sedimentary subunits that were deposited by water, and are old enough to preserve fossils.

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Date: 2024.03.28 15:16:48 -06'00'

Colin R. Dunn Date
BLM LCDO Paleontologist

References:

Morrison, R.B., 1965, Geologic map of the Duncan and Canador Peak quadrangles, Arizona and New Mexico, U.S. Geological Survey, Miscellaneous Geologic Investigations Map I-442, 1:48,000

Field Visit Observations:

Figure 1: facing southeast. Butte of unit Tc (Volcanic conglomerate, older basin-fill, and tuff) at mouth of Nicols Canyon.

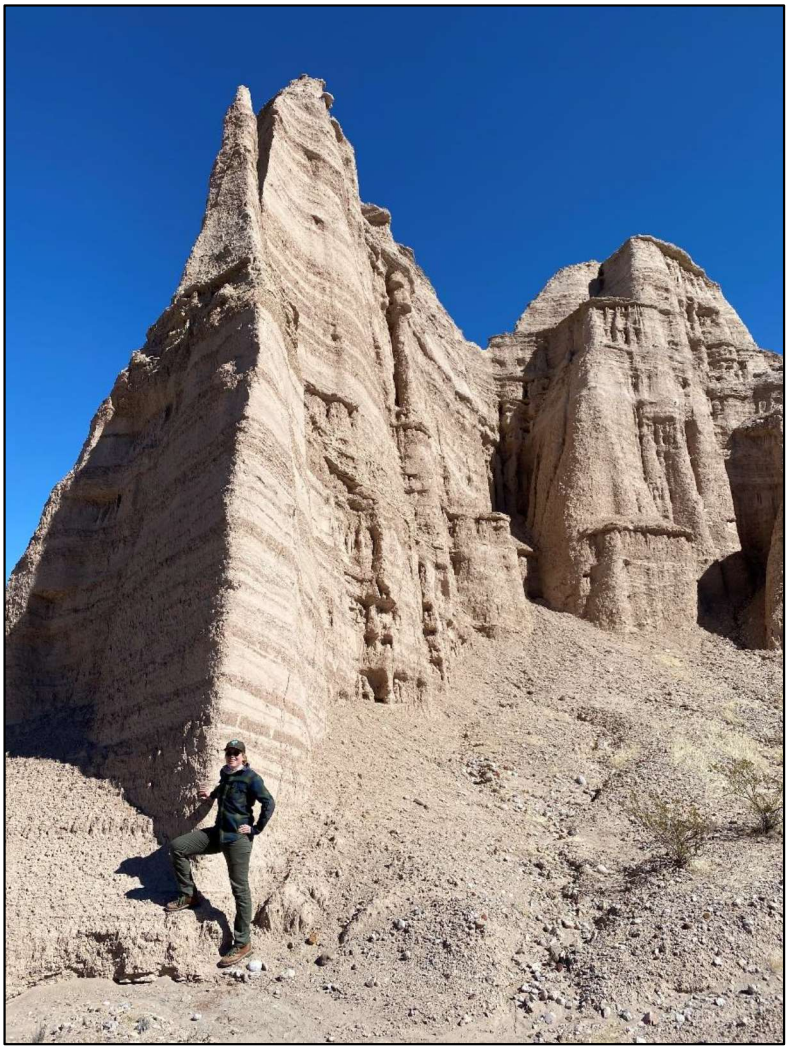

Figure 2: Unit Tc with human for scale.

Figure 3: Facing Southeast from Fisherman's Point parking area showing Qp4 over Gila Conglomerate. Person for scale. Caprock Mountain on horizon.

Figure 4: Close up of contact between Qp4 (top) and Gila Conglomerate. Trimble unit is approximately 10 inches long.

Figure 5: Facing west from trail to proposed Spring on the Bluff parking lot. Unit Tao (Older Andesite) in foreground with limited exposures of Gila Conglomerate at top. Note person on horizon for scale.

Figure 6: Facing northwest. Reworked Gila Conglomerate at the proposed Caprock Campground.

Figure 7: Facing northeast, overview of proposed Guage Dispersed Camping Area showing unit Ql5 (Lake gravels, oldest)

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Appendix D
Alternatives Figures

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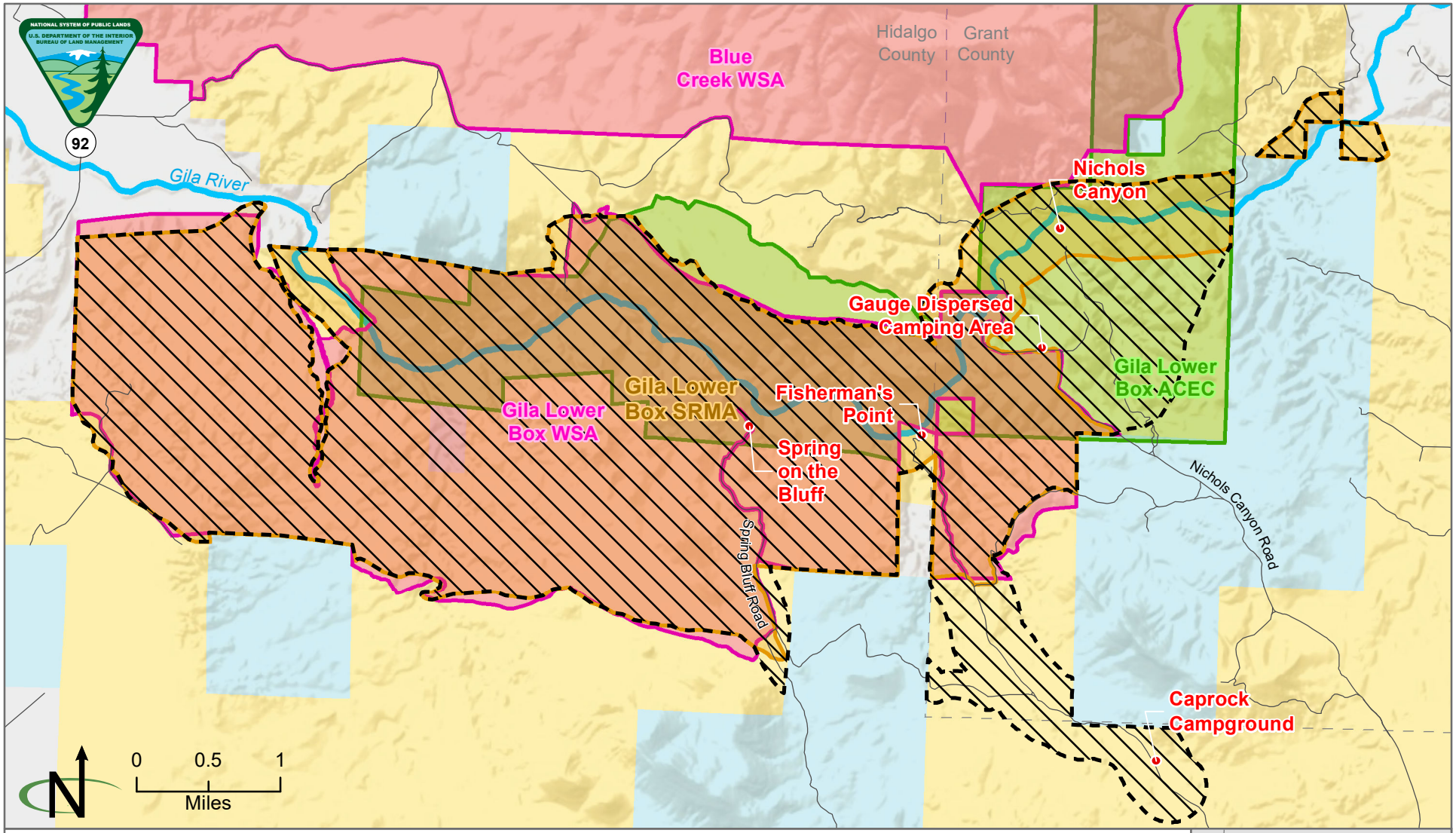


Figure 2-1
RAMP Site Locations

- Project area
- RAMP planning area
- Special Recreation Management Area
- Wilderness Study Area
- Area of Critical Environmental Concern
- Bureau of Land Management
- State
- Private

Source: BLM GIS 2021
October 10, 2023
GilaRAMP_Alts_Overview.mxd
No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual or aggregate use with other data. Original data were compiled from various sources. This information may not meet National Map Accuracy Standards. This product was developed through digital means and may be updated without notification.

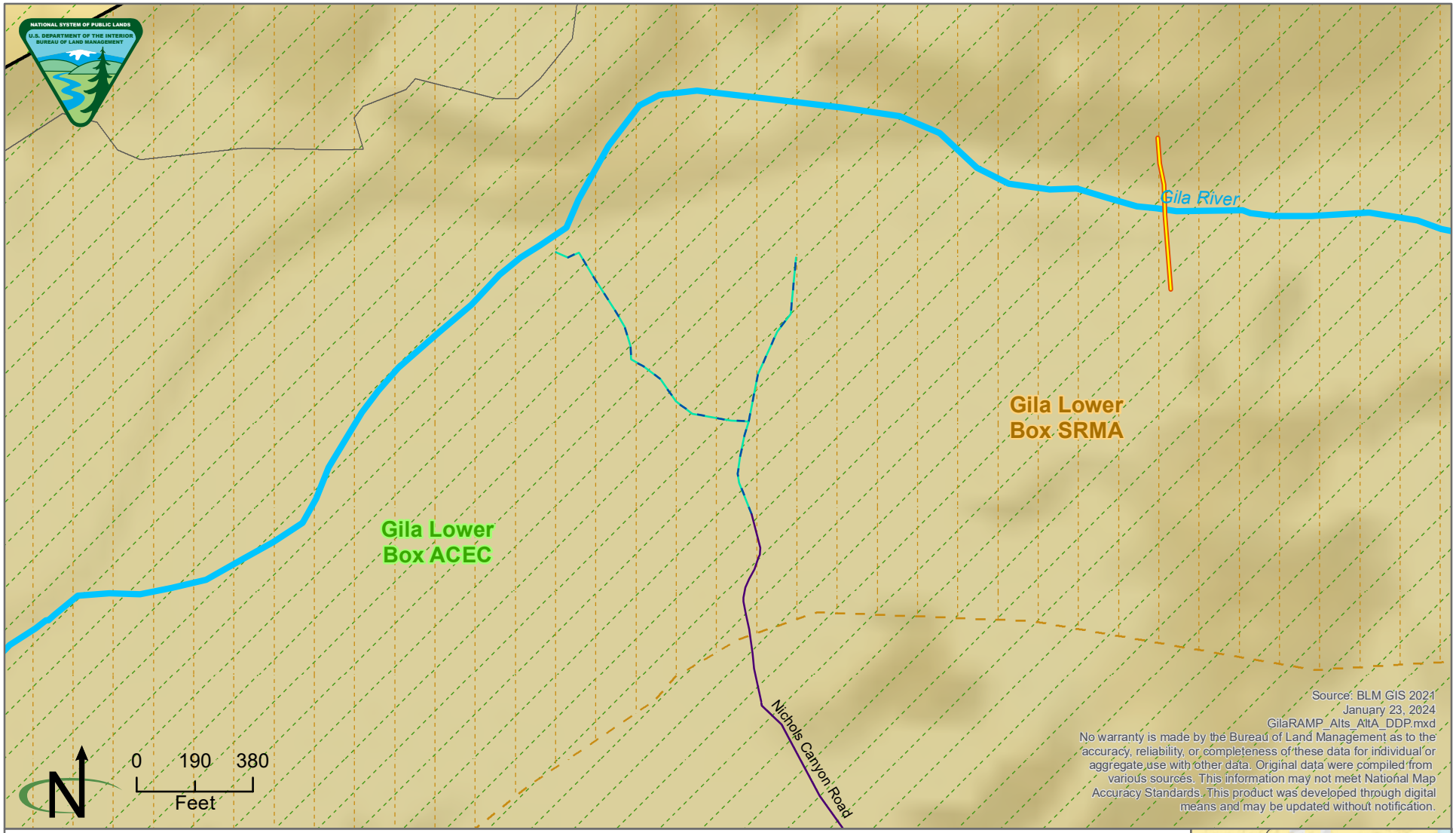
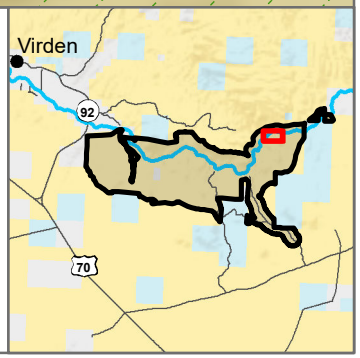


Figure 2-2
Alternative A (No Action): Nichols Canyon

- Non-motorized trail (existing)
- Motorized road (existing)
- Electric fence (existing)
- RAMP planning area
- Special Recreation Management Area
- Area of Critical Environmental Concern
- Bureau of Land Management



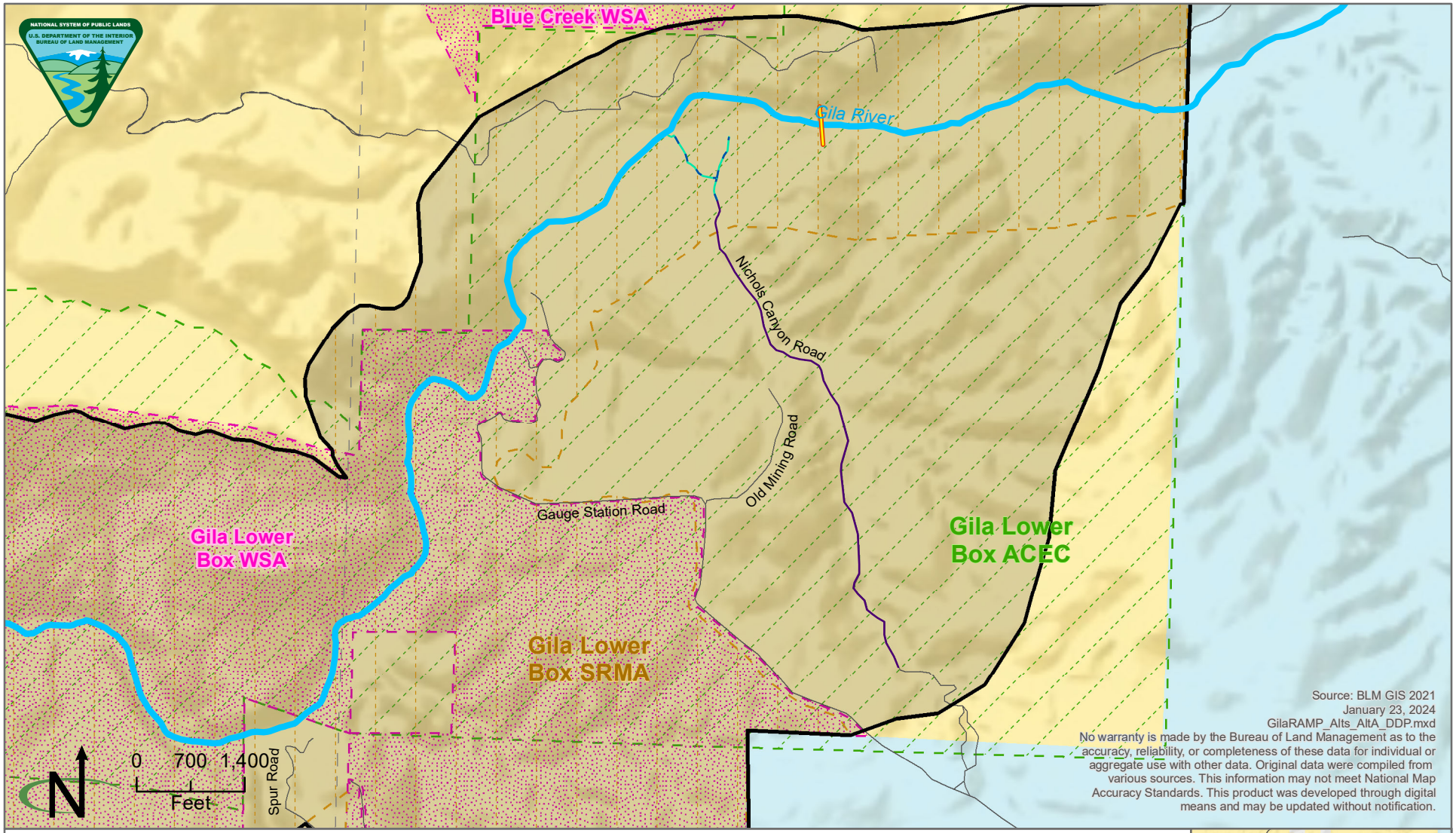
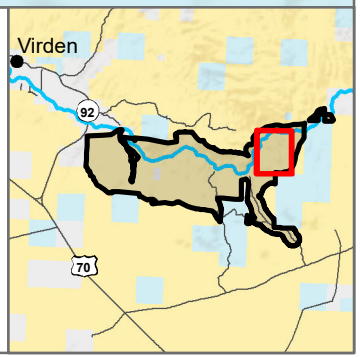


Figure 2-3
Alternative A (No Action): Nichols Canyon

- Non-motorized trail (existing)
- Motorized road (existing)
- Electric fence (existing)
- RAMP planning area
- Special Recreation Management Area
- Wilderness Study Area
- Area of Critical Environmental Concern
- Bureau of Land Management
- State



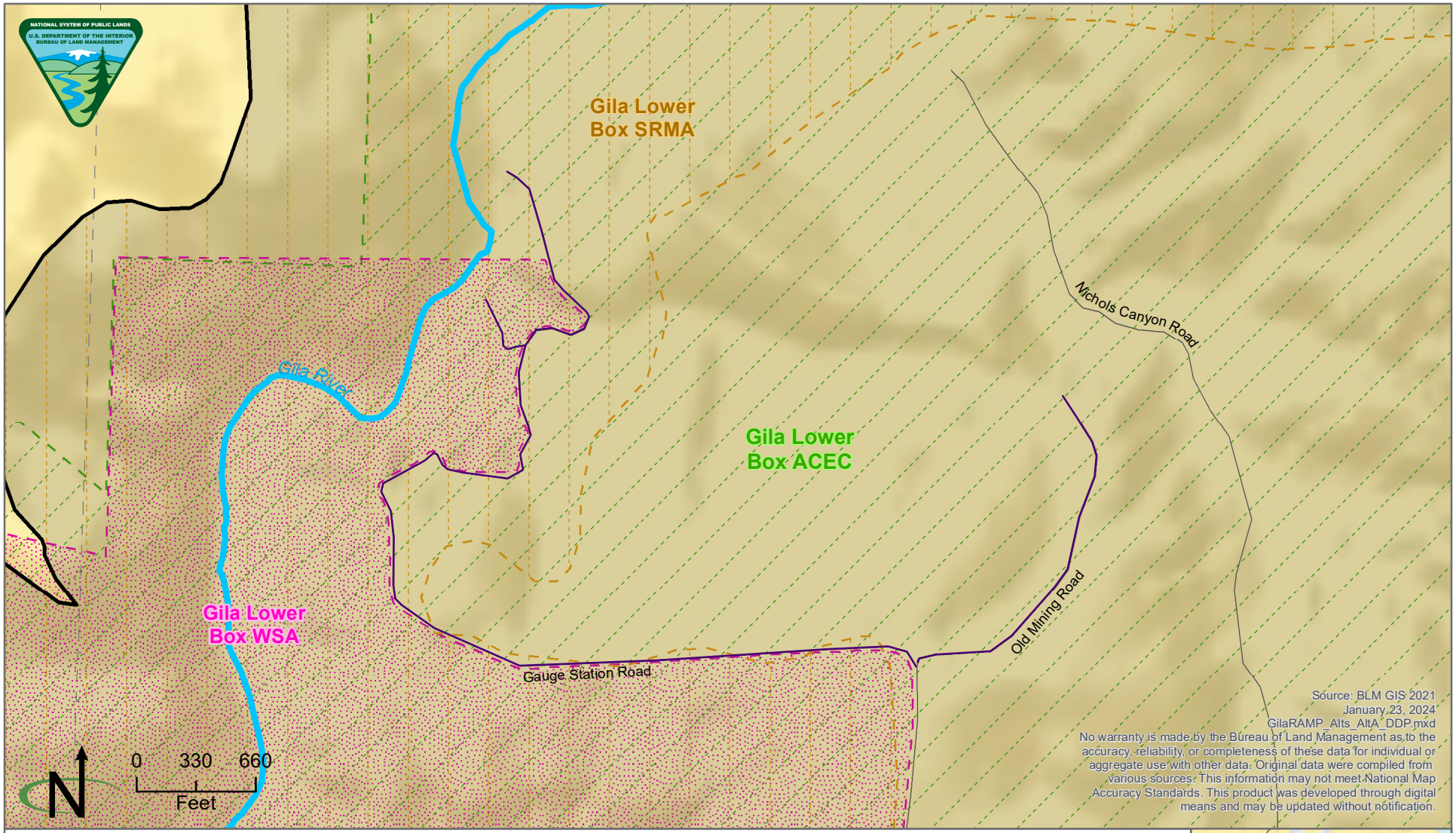
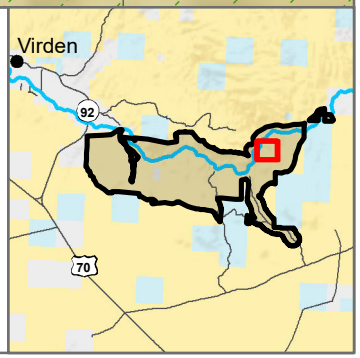


Figure 2-4
Alternative A (No Action): Gauge Dispersed Camping Area

- Motorized road (existing)
- RAMP planning area
- Special Recreation Management Area
- Wilderness Study Area
- Area of Critical Environmental Concern
- Bureau of Land Management



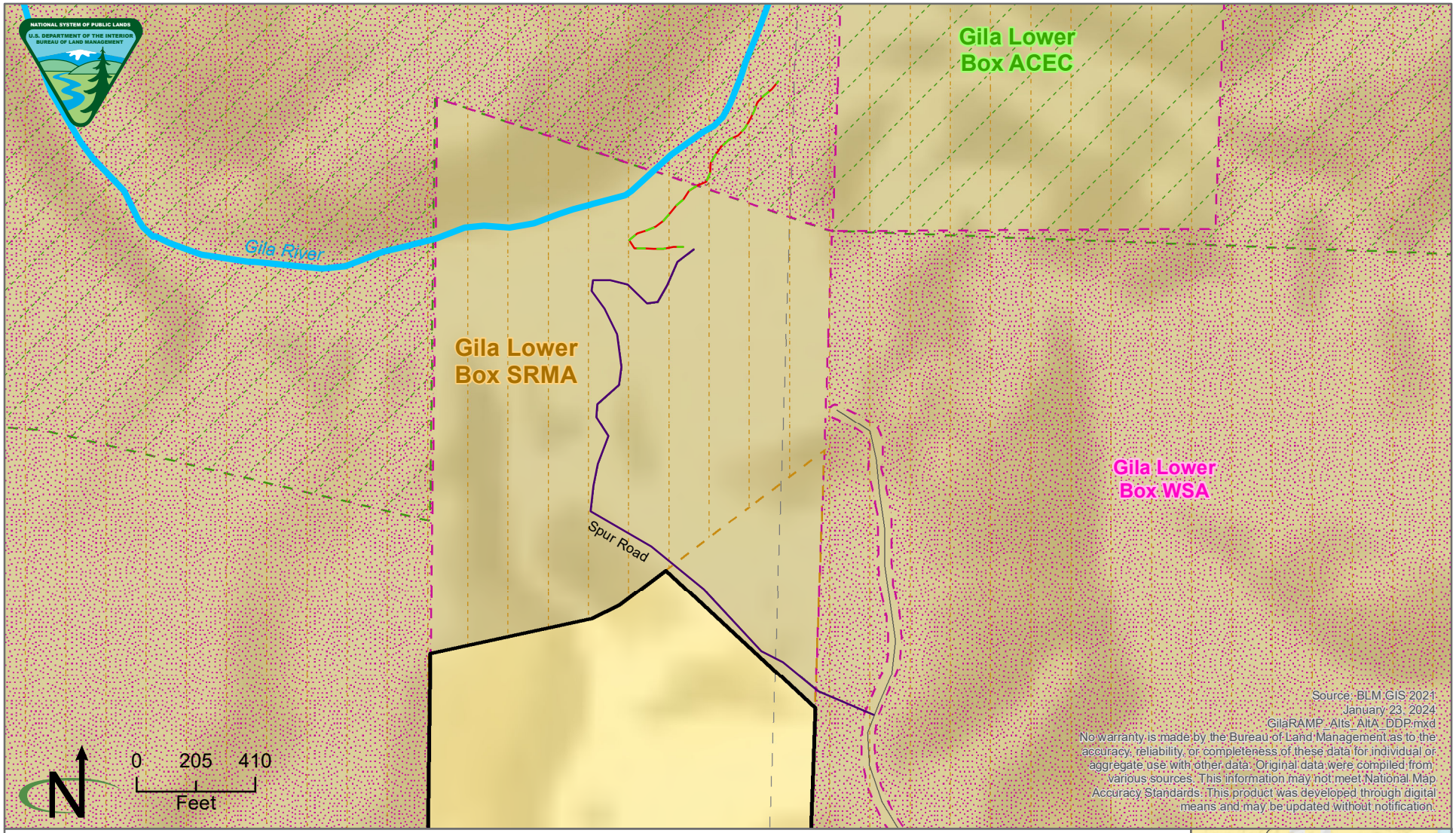
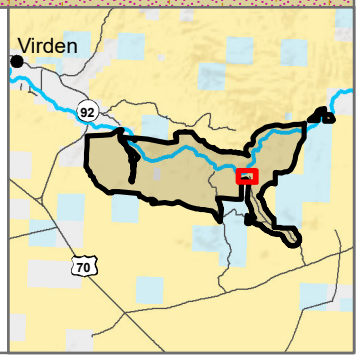


Figure 2-5
Alternative A (No Action): Fisherman's Point

- Motorized road (existing)
- Pedestrian only trail (existing)
- RAMP planning area
- Special Recreation Management Area
- Wilderness Study Area
- Area of Critical Environmental Concern
- Bureau of Land Management



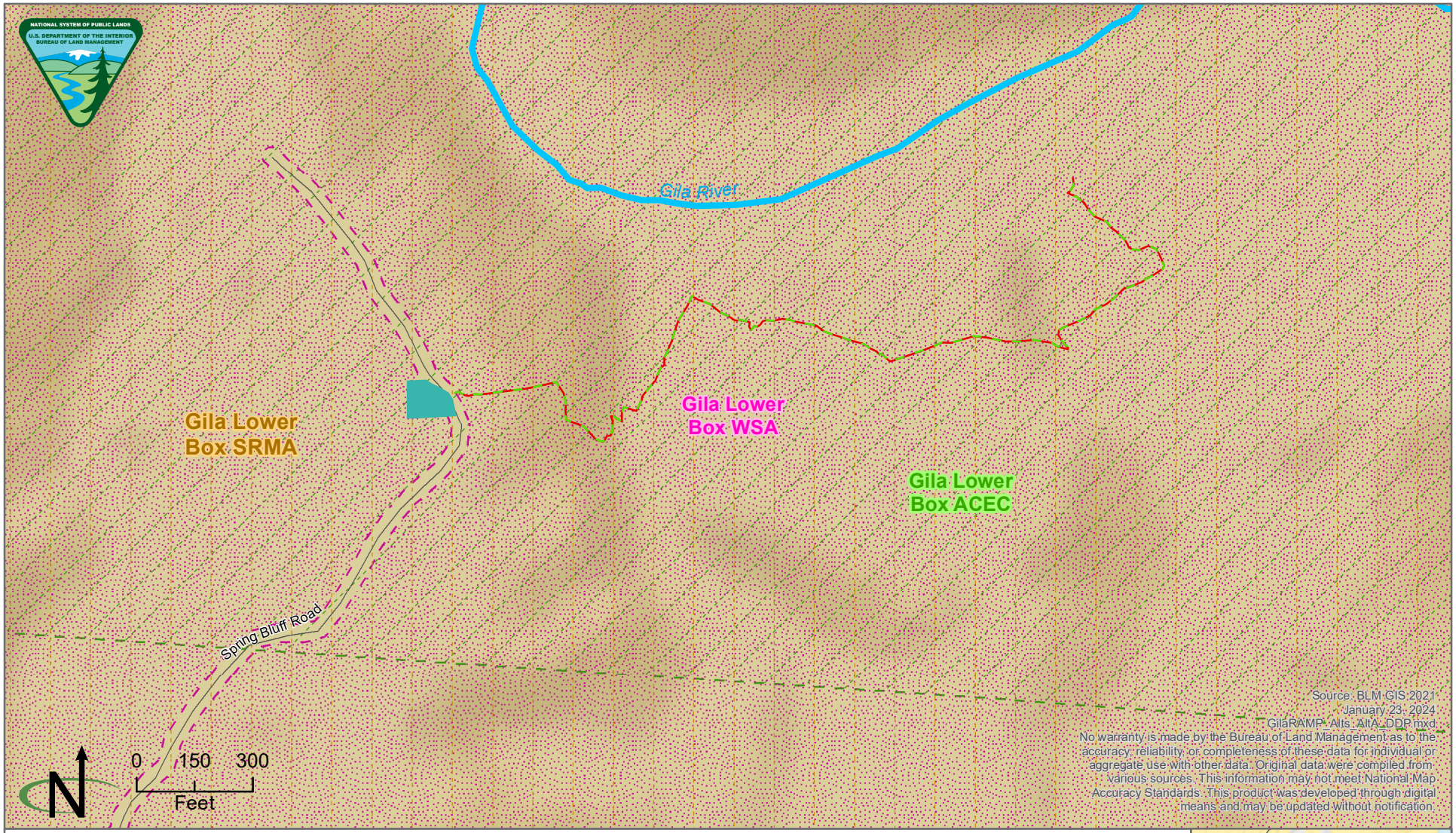
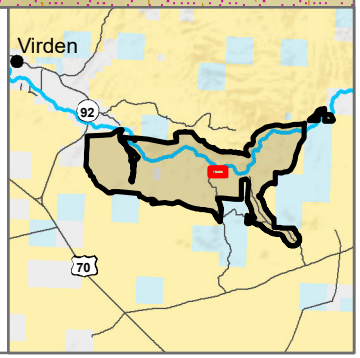


Figure 2-6
Alternative A (No Action): Spring on the Bluff

- Pedestrian only trail (existing)
- Parking area (existing)
- RAMP planning area
- Special Recreation Management Area
- Wilderness Study Area
- Area of Critical Environmental Concern
- Bureau of Land Management



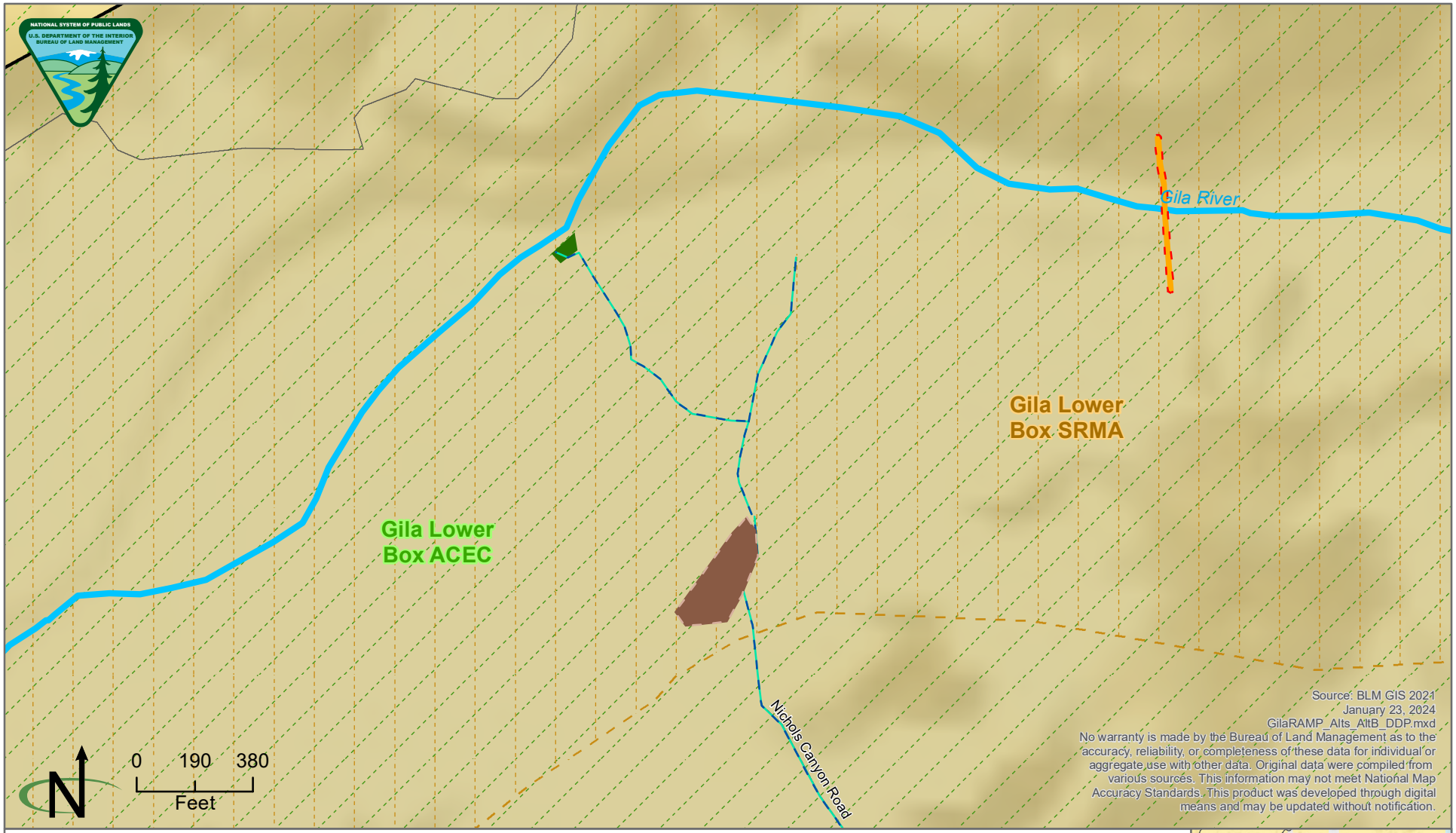
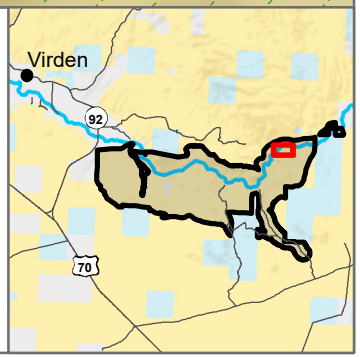


Figure 2-7
Alternative B (Proposed Plan): Nichols Canyon

- Non-motorized trail
- Boating take out
- Primitive campground
- Existing electric fence (add signage and pass-through gate)
- RAMP planning area
- Special Recreation Management Area
- Area of Critical Environmental Concern
- Bureau of Land Management



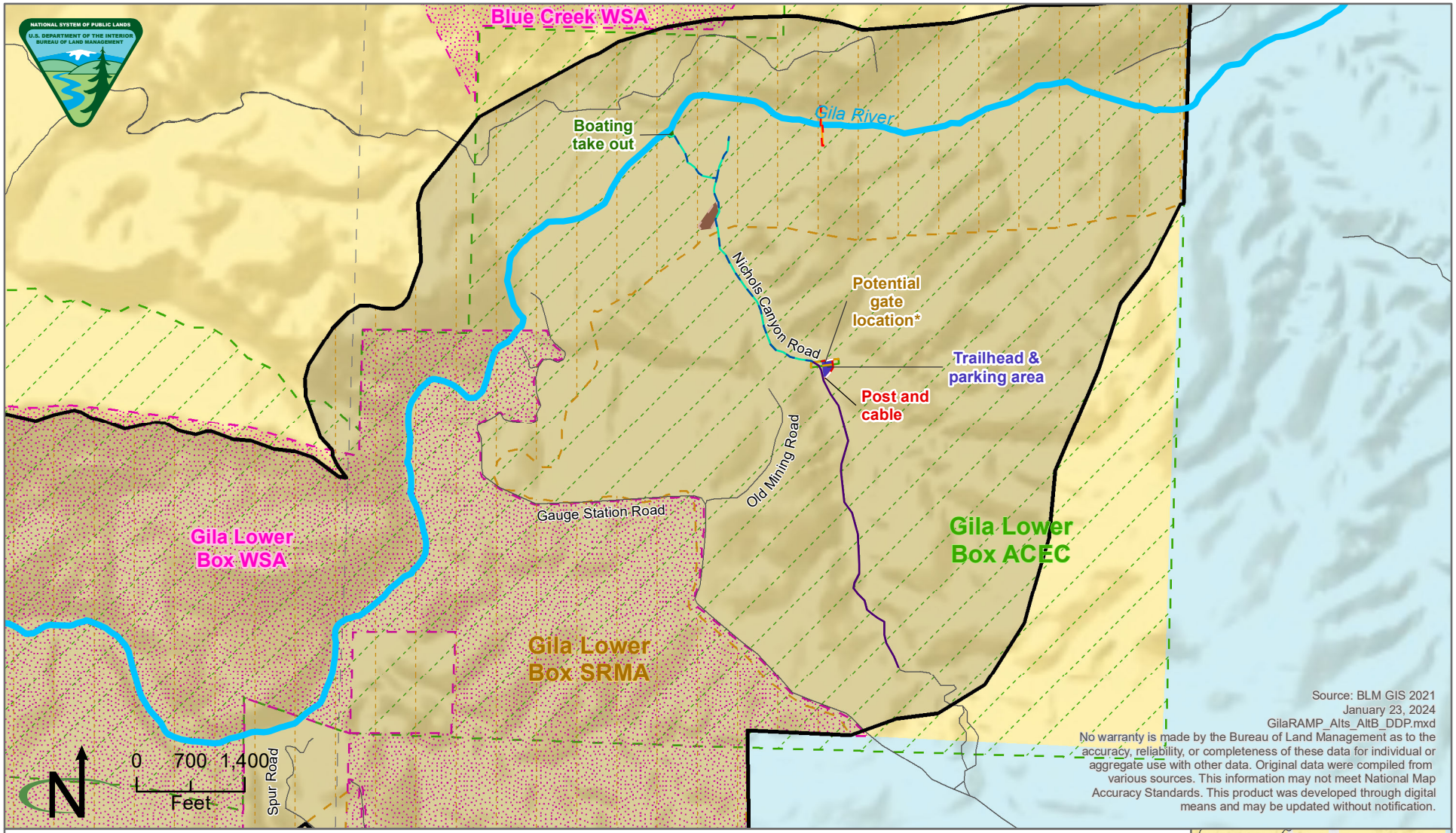
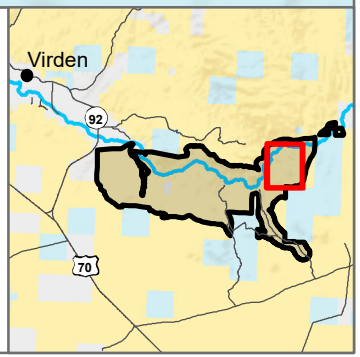


Figure 2-8
Alternative B (Proposed Plan): Nichols Canyon

- Motorized road
- Non-motorized trail
- Post and cable
- Potential gate location (fence across the wash)
- Boating take out
- Primitive campground
- Existing electric fence (add signage and pass-through gate)
- Trailhead & parking area
- RAMP planning area
- Special Recreation Management Area
- Wilderness Study Area
- Area of Critical Environmental Concern
- Bureau of Land Management
- State



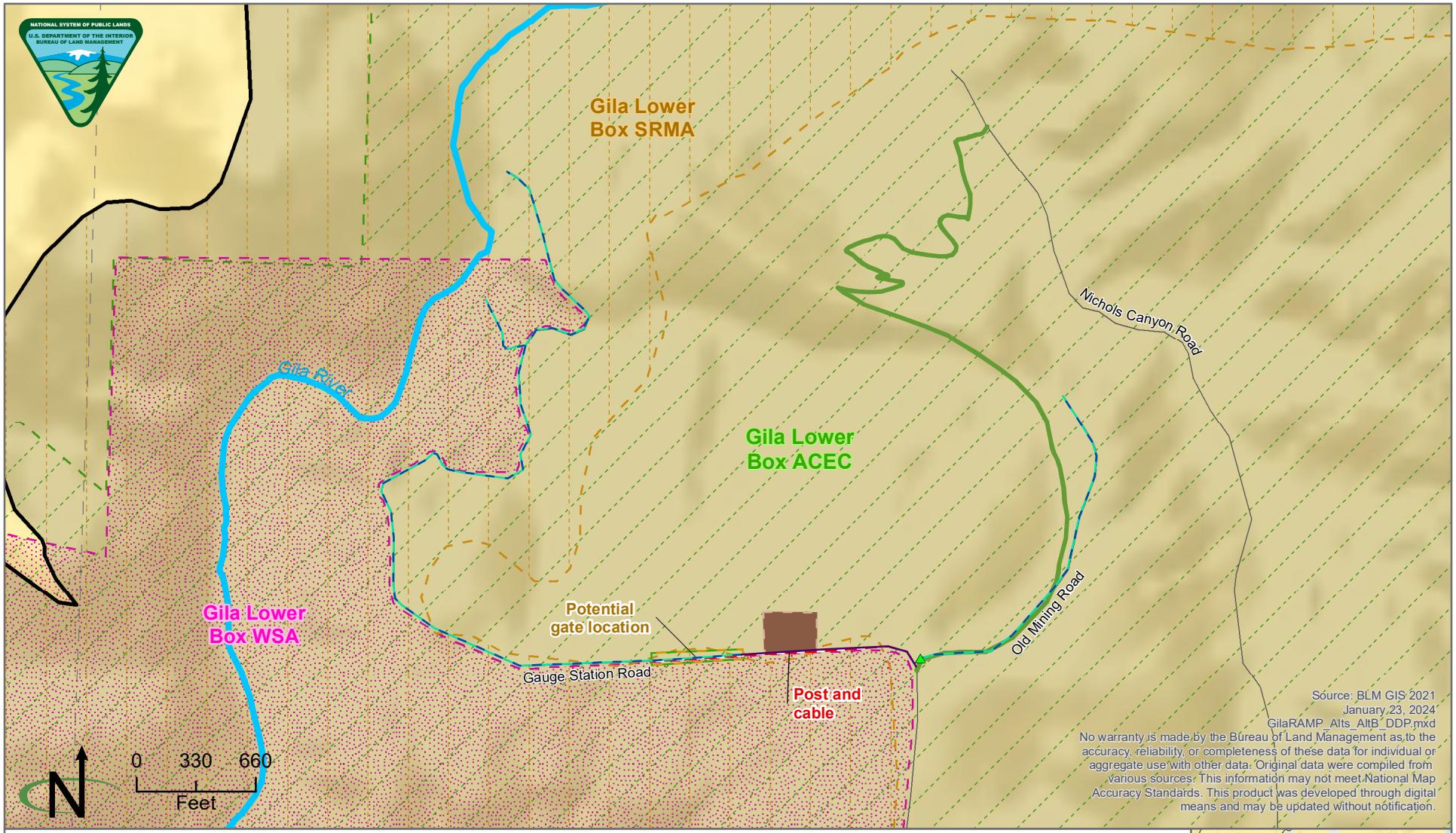
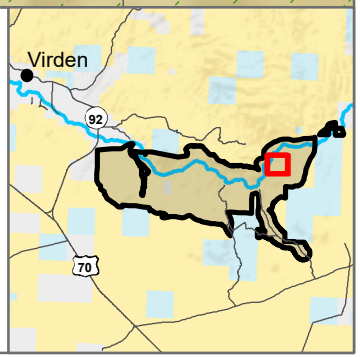


Figure 2-9
Alternative B (Proposed Plan): Gauge Dispersed Camping Area

- Locked gate
- Motorized road
- Non-motorized trail
- Post and cable
- Potential gate location
- Non-motorized trail possible range
- Primitive campground
- RAMP planning area
- Special Recreation Management Area
- Wilderness Study Area
- Area of Critical Environmental Concern
- Bureau of Land Management



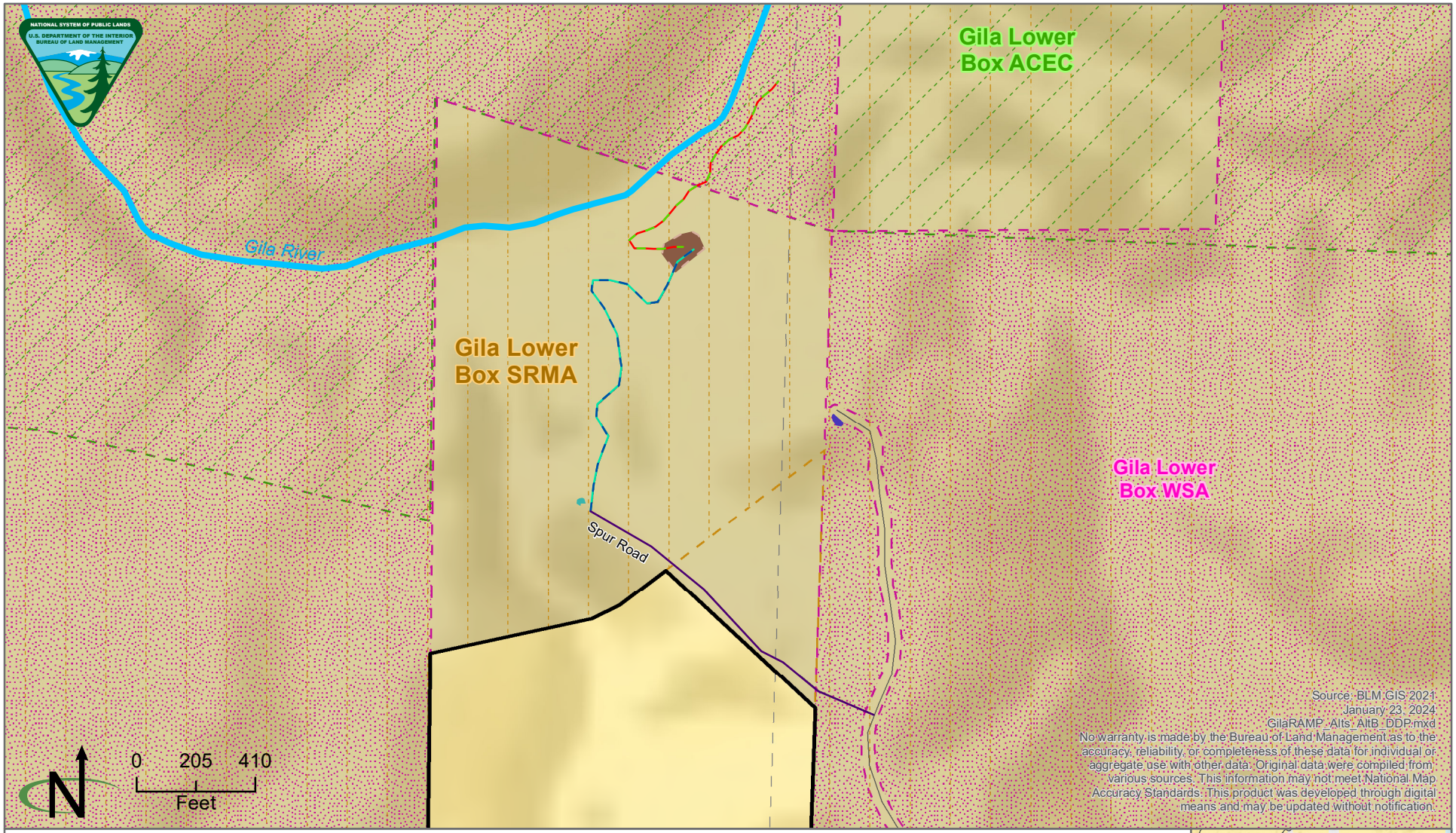
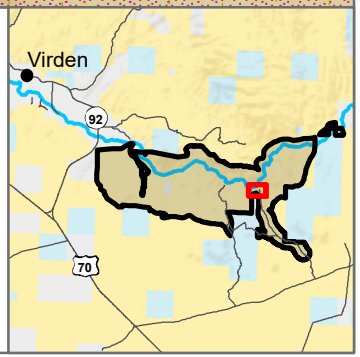


Figure 2-10
Alternative B (Proposed Plan): Fisherman's Point

- Motorized road
- Non-motorized trail
- Pedestrian only trail
- Primitive campground
- Trailhead & parking area
- Parking area
- RAMP planning area
- Special Recreation Management Area
- Wilderness Study Area
- Area of Critical Environmental Concern
- Bureau of Land Management



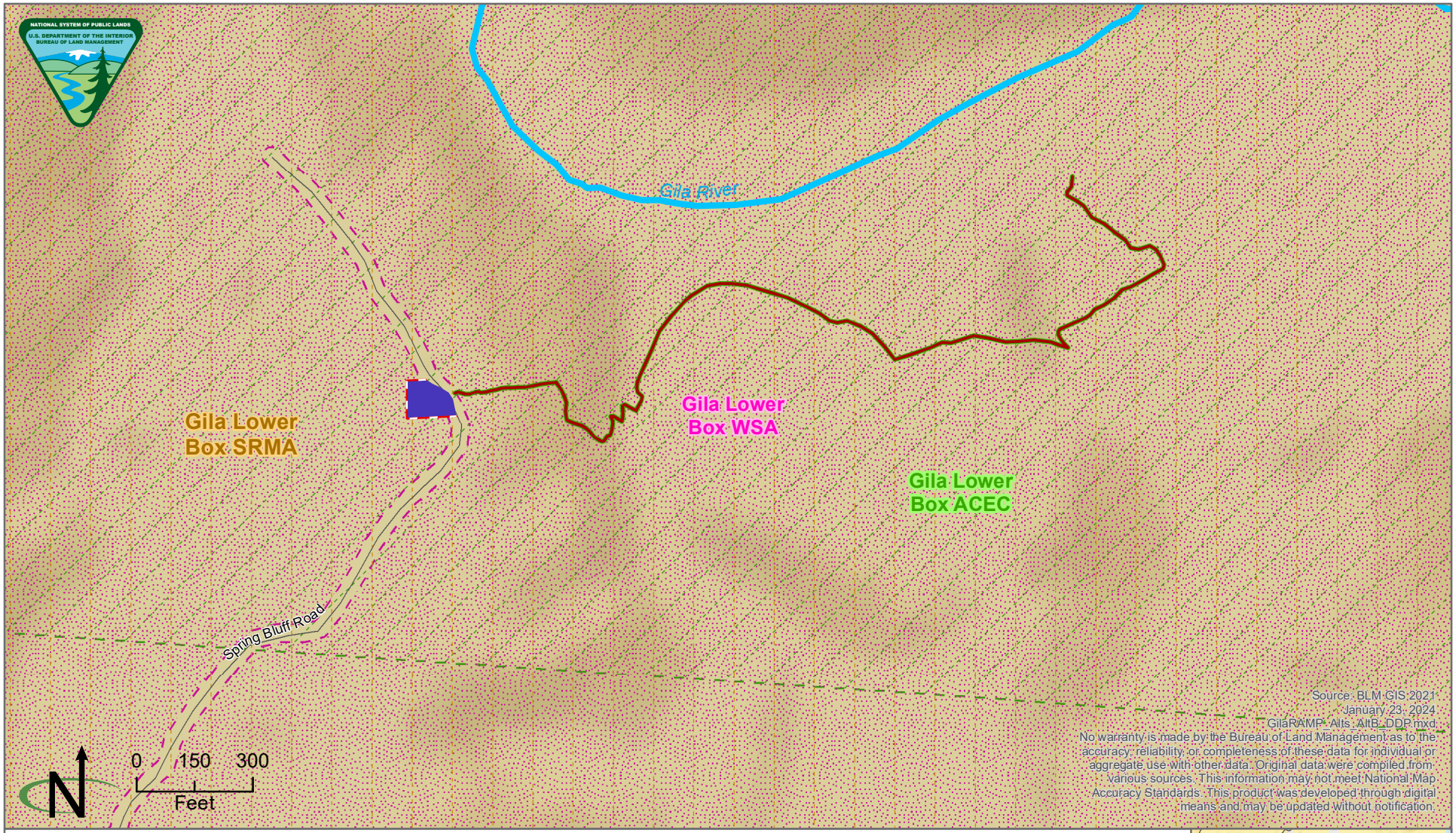
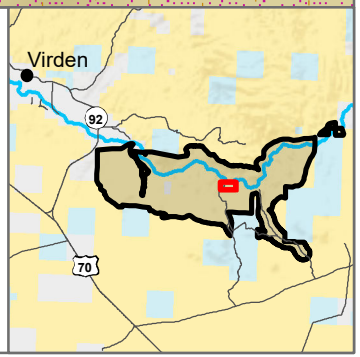


Figure 2-11
Alternative B (Proposed Plan): Spring on the Bluff

- Post and cable
- Pedestrian only trail possible range
- Trailhead & parking area
- RAMP planning area
- Special Recreation Management Area
- Wilderness Study Area
- Area of Critical Environmental Concern
- Bureau of Land Management



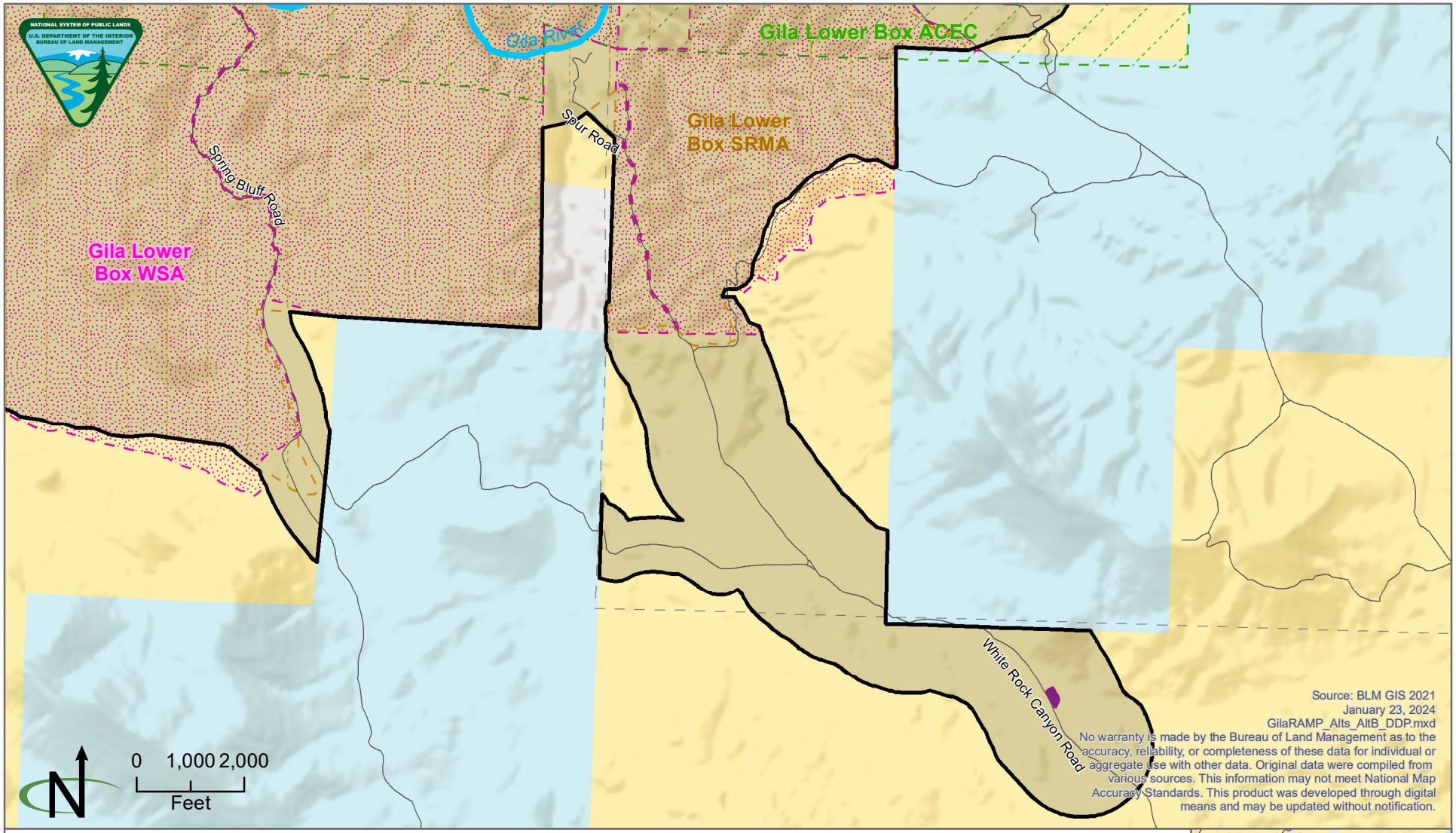
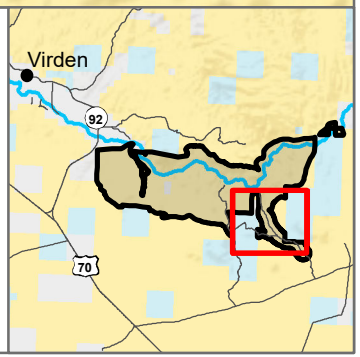


Figure 2-12
Alternative B (Proposed Plan): Caprock Campground

- Developed campground
- RAMP planning area
- Special Recreation Management Area
- Wilderness Study Area
- Area of Critical Environmental Concern
- Bureau of Land Management
- State
- Private



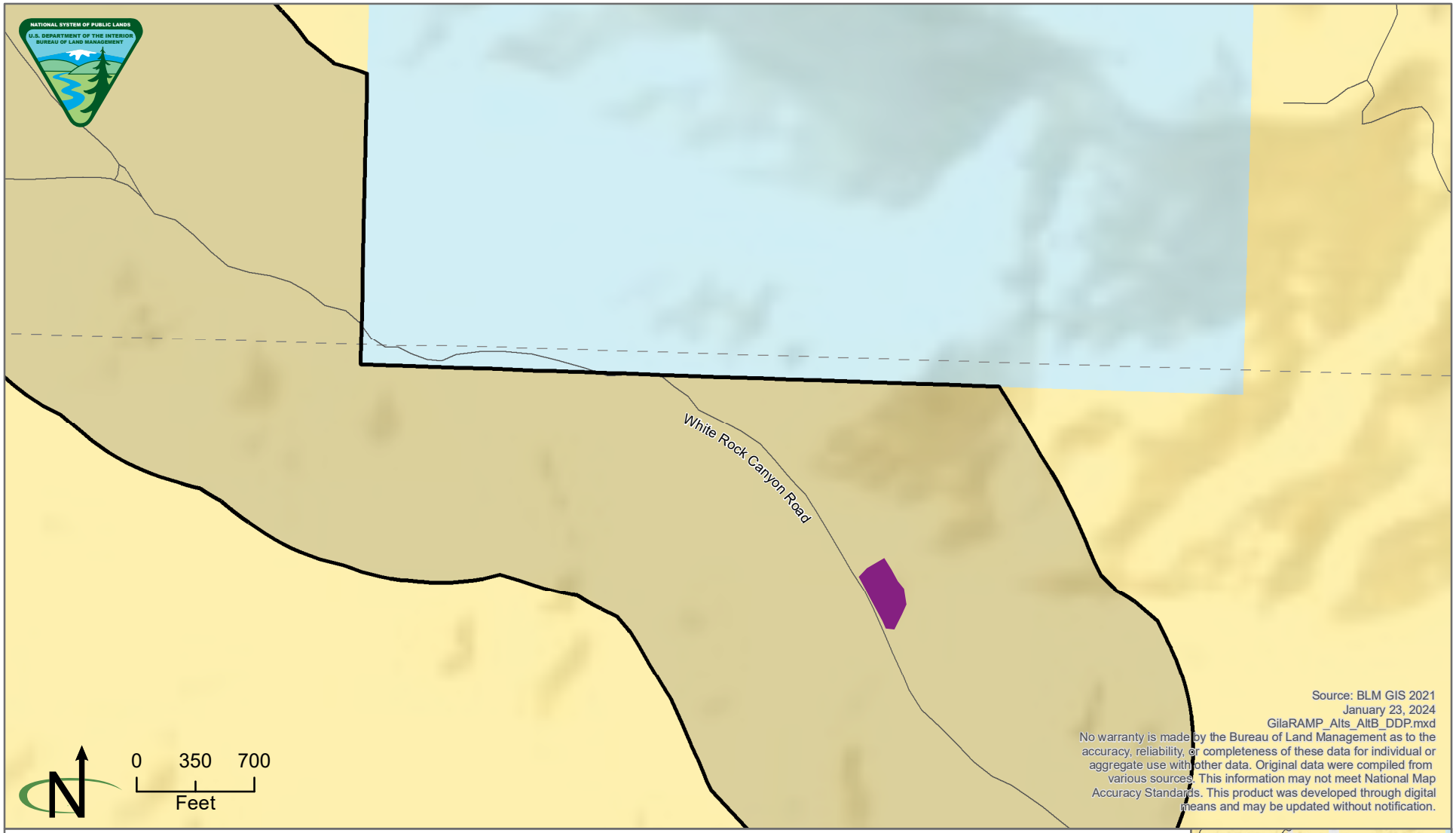
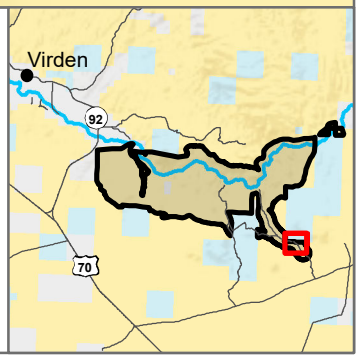


Figure 2-13
Alternative B (Proposed Plan): Caprock Campground

- Developed campground
- RAMP planning area
- Bureau of Land Management
- State



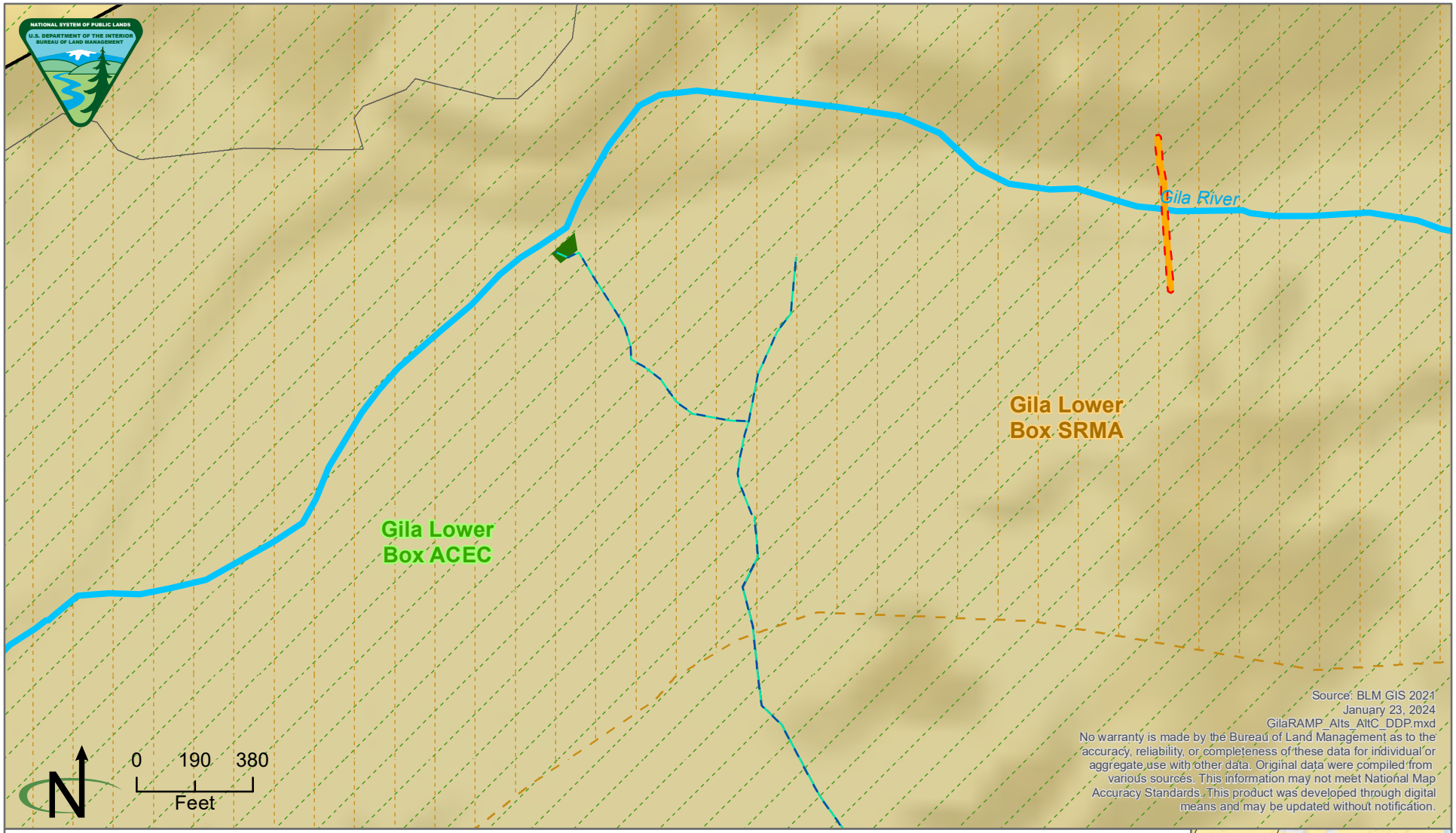
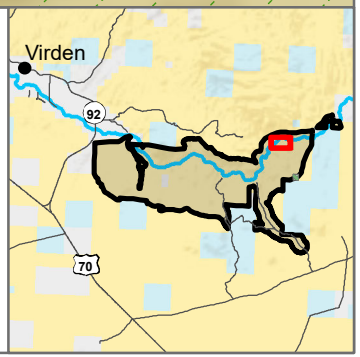


Figure 2-14
Alternative C (Minimal Disturbance): Nichols Canyon

- Non-motorized trail
- Boating take out
- Existing electric fence (add signage and pass-through gate)
- RAMP planning area
- Special Recreation Management Area
- Area of Critical Environmental Concern
- Bureau of Land Management



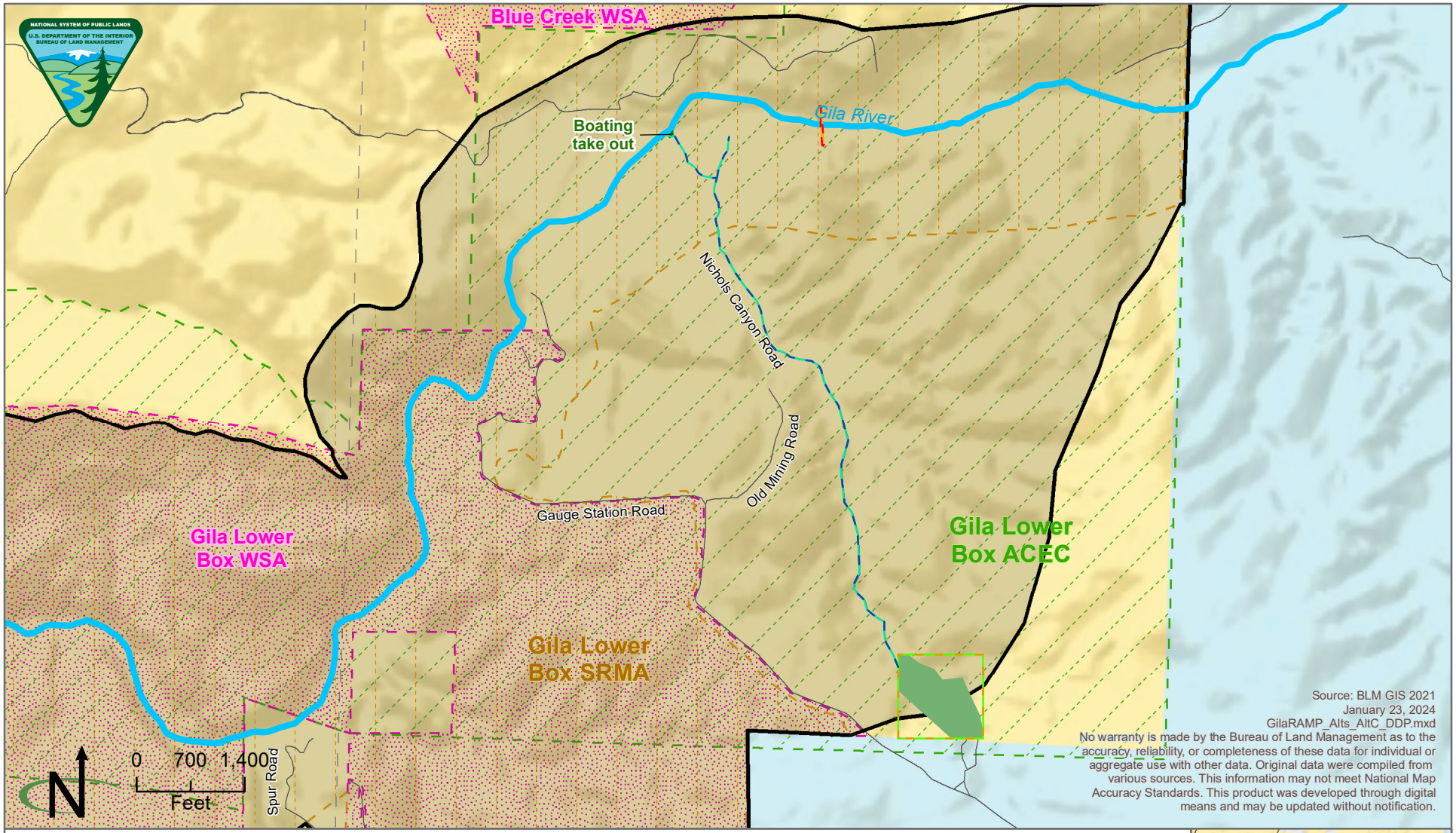
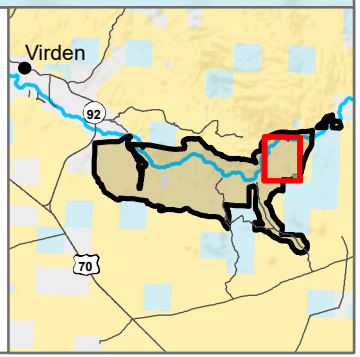


Figure 2-15
Alternative C (Minimal Disturbance): Nichols Canyon

- Non-motorized trail
- Turn around and kiosk
- Boating take out
- Existing electric fence (add signage and pass-through gate)
- Potential gate location
- RAMP planning area
- Special Recreation Management Area
- Wilderness Study Area
- Area of Critical Environmental Concern
- Bureau of Land Management
- State



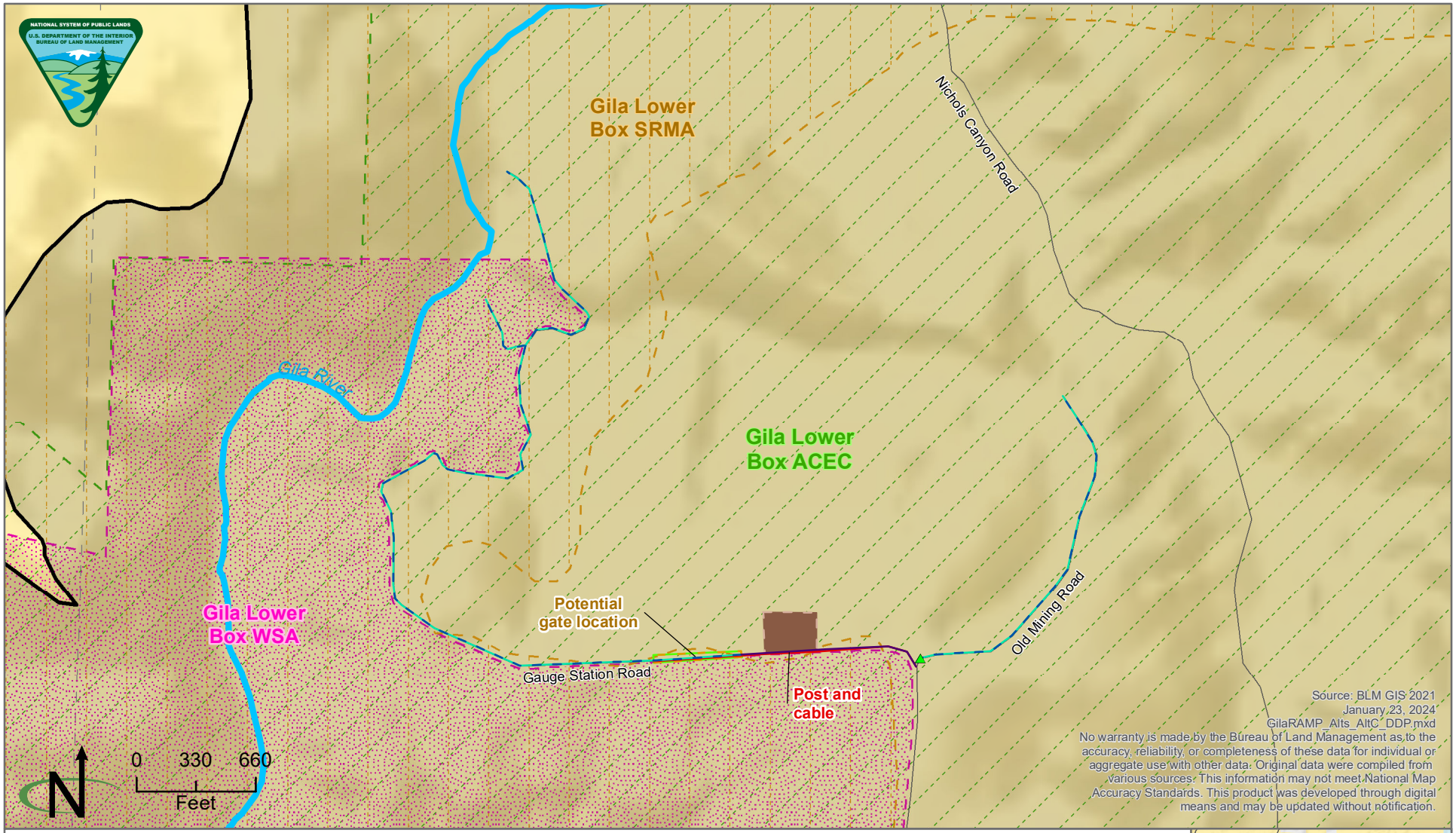
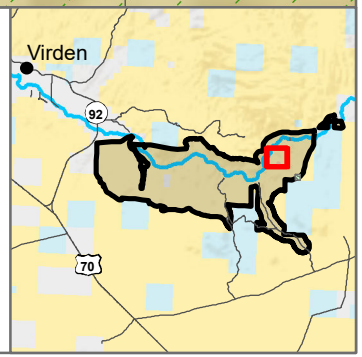


Figure 2-16
Alternative C (Minimal Disturbance): Gauge Dispersed Camping Area

- Locked gate
- Motorized road
- Non-motorized trail
- Post and cable
- Primitive campground
- Potential gate location
- RAMP planning area
- Special Recreation Management Area
- Wilderness Study Area
- Area of Critical Environmental Concern
- Bureau of Land Management



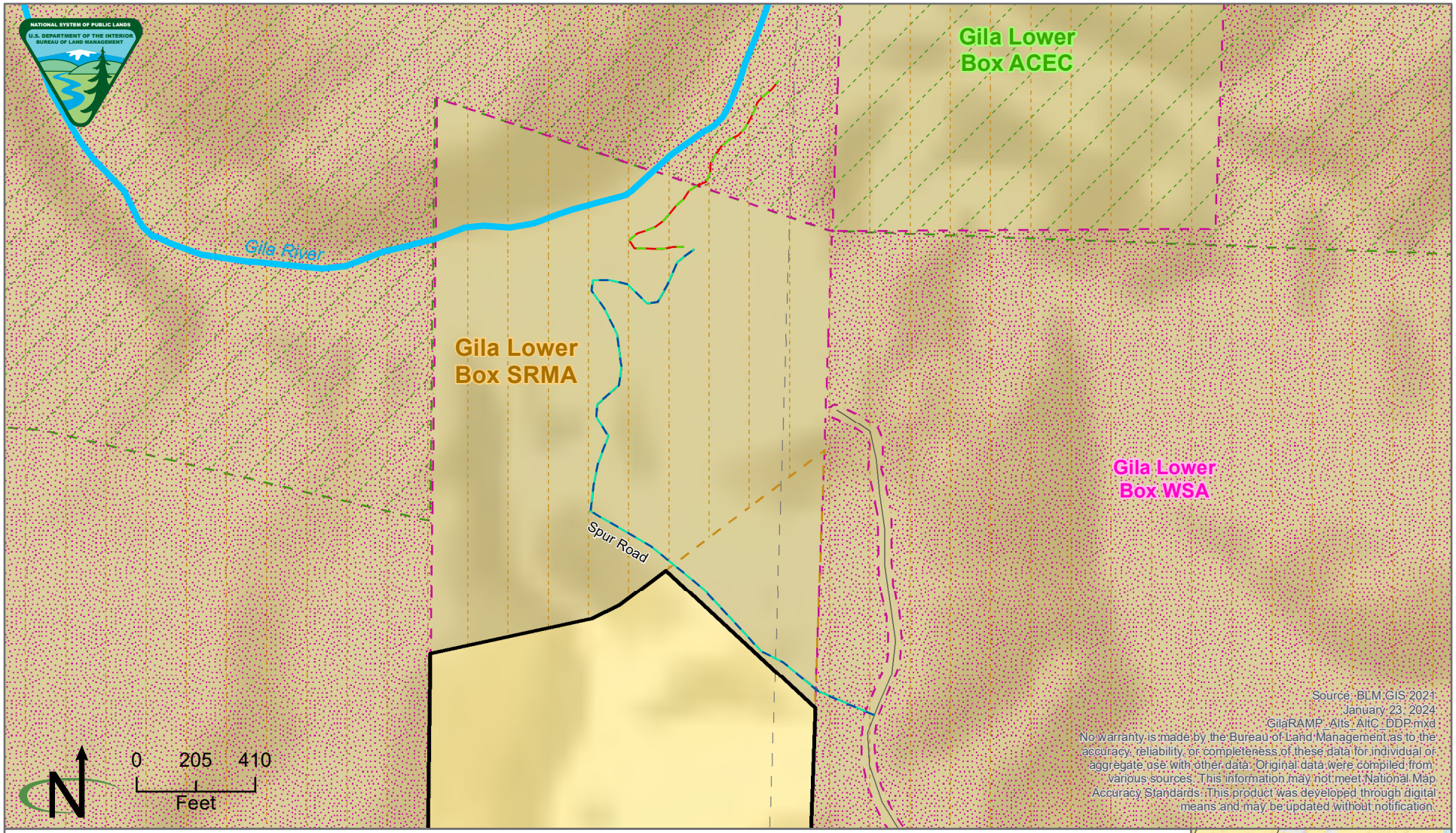
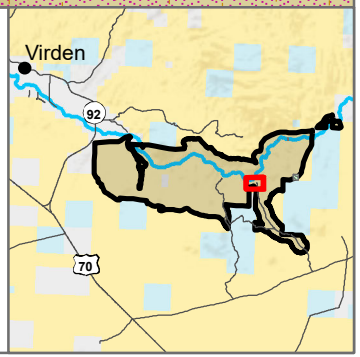


Figure 2-17
Alternative C (Minimal Disturbance): Fisherman's Point

- Non-motorized trail
- Pedestrian only trail
- RAMP planning area
- Special Recreation Management Area
- Wilderness Study Area
- Area of Critical Environmental Concern
- Bureau of Land Management



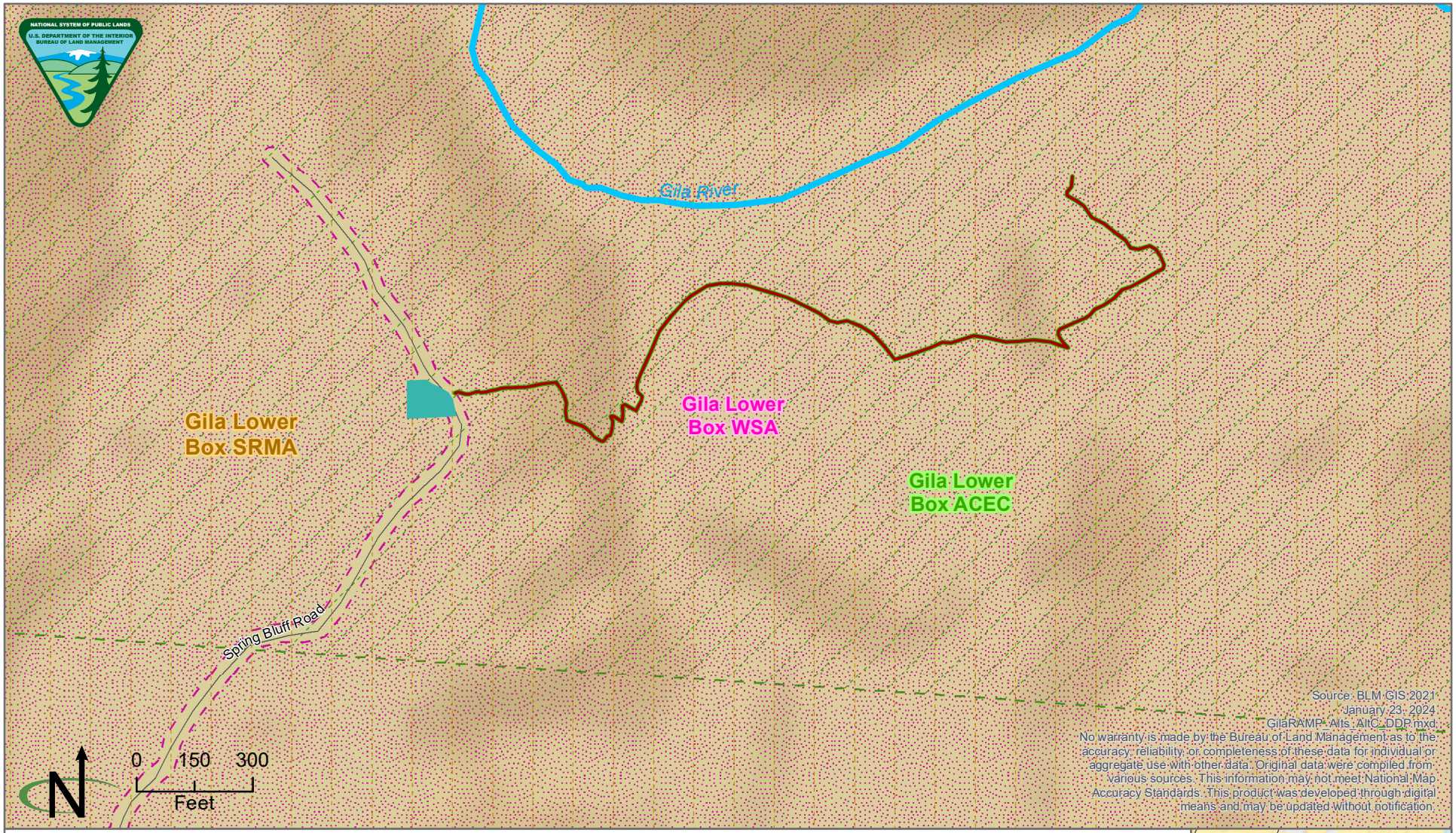
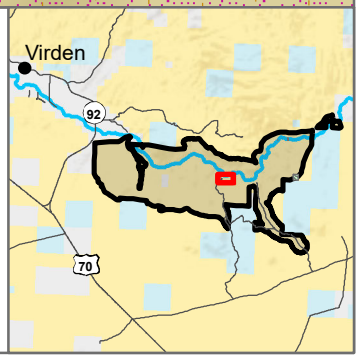


Figure 2-18
Alternative C (Minimal Disturbance): Spring on the Bluff

- Pedestrian only trail possible range
- Parking area (existing)
- RAMP planning area
- Special Recreation Management Area
- Wilderness Study Area
- Area of Critical Environmental Concern
- Bureau of Land Management



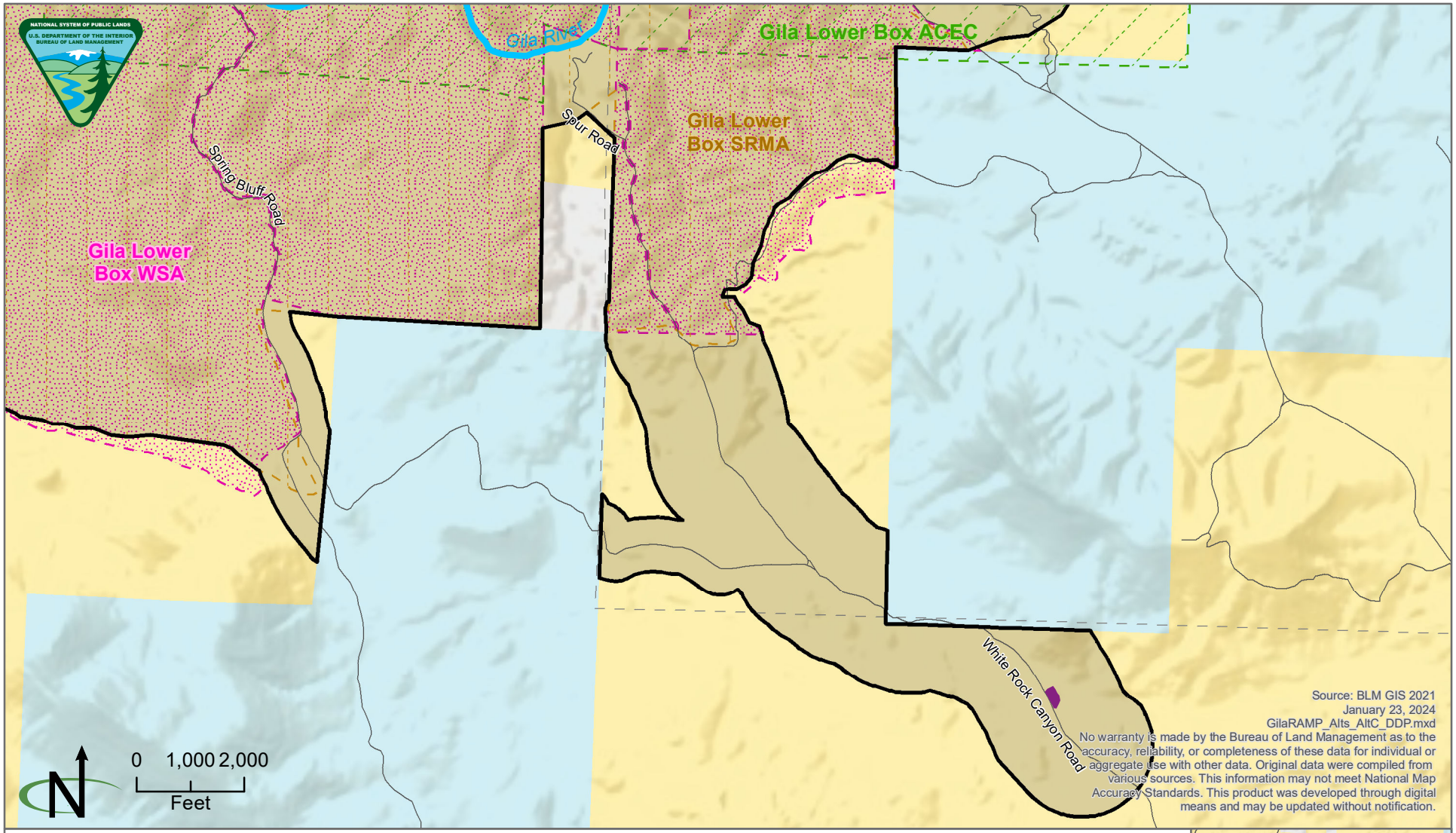
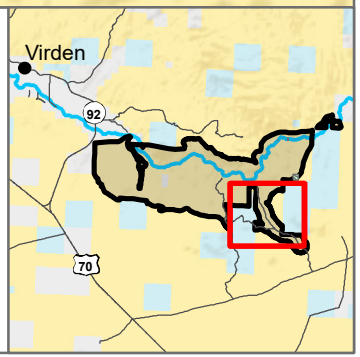


Figure 2-19
Alternative C (Minimal Disturbance): Caprock Campground

- Developed campground
- RAMP planning area
- Special Recreation Management Area
- Wilderness Study Area
- Area of Critical Environmental Concern
- Bureau of Land Management
- State
- Private



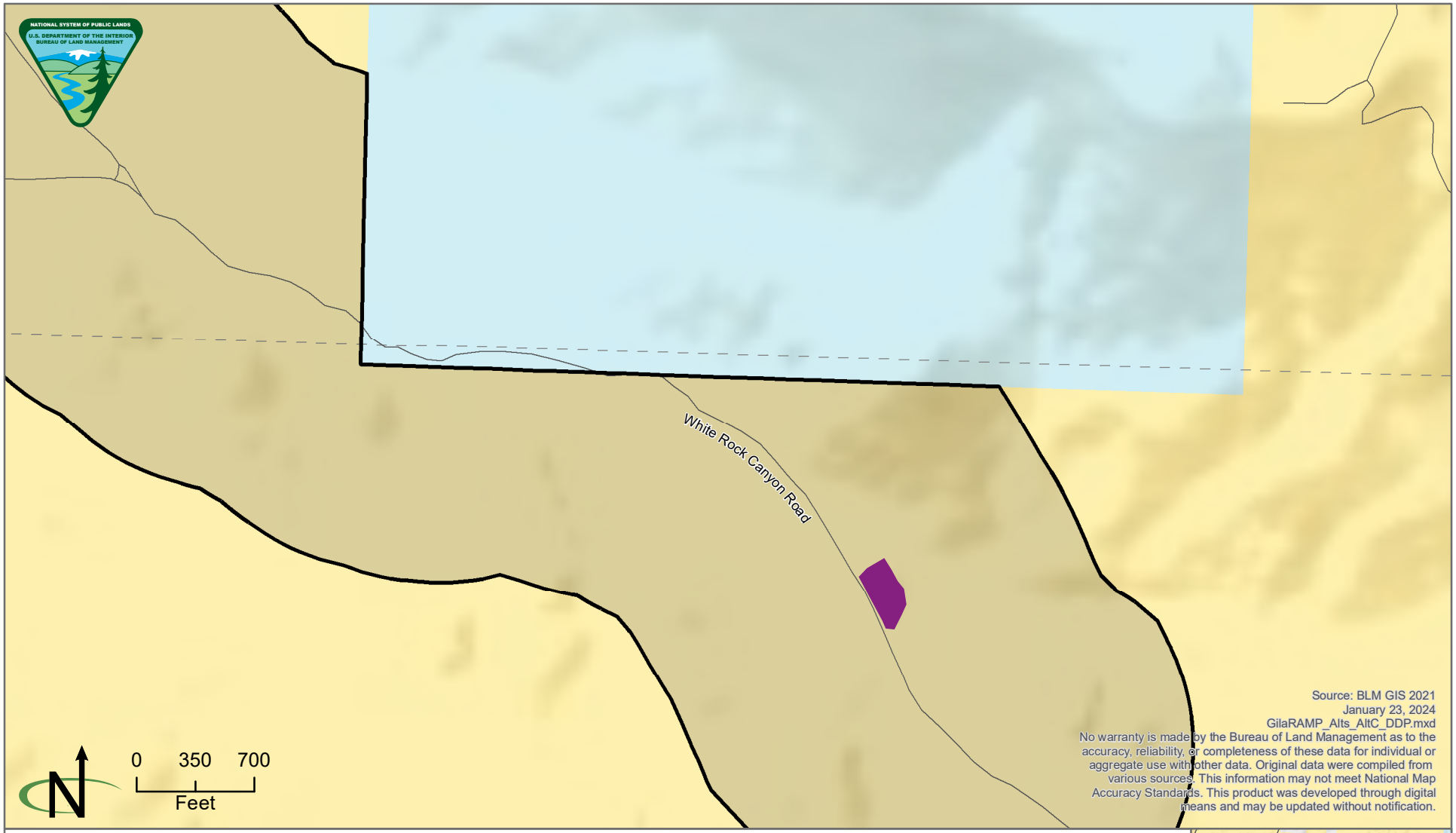
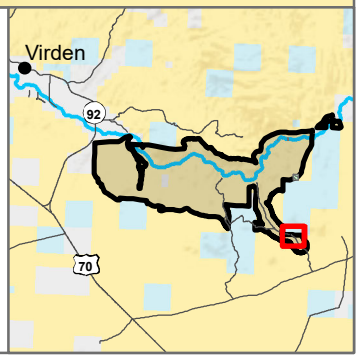


Figure 2-20
Alternative C (Minimal Disturbance): Caprock Campground

- Developed campground
- RAMP planning area
- Bureau of Land Management
- State



Appendix E

IPaC List

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United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
New Mexico Ecological Services Field Office
2105 Osuna Road Ne
Albuquerque, NM 87113-1001
Phone: (505) 346-2525 Fax: (505) 346-2542

In Reply Refer To: July 08, 2022
Project Code: 2022-0061927
Project Name: Gila Lower Box Recreation Area Management Plan

Subject: List of threatened and endangered species that may occur in your proposed project location or may be affected by your proposed project

To Whom It May Concern:

Thank you for your recent request for information on federally listed species and important wildlife habitats that may occur in your project area. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has responsibility for certain species of New Mexico wildlife under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973 as amended (16 USC 1531 et seq.), the Migratory Bird Treaty Act as amended (16 USC 701-715), and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act as amended (16 USC 668-668(c)). We are providing the following guidance to assist you in determining which federally imperiled species may or may not occur within your project area, and to recommend some conservation measures that can be included in your project design.

The enclosed species list identifies threatened, endangered, proposed and candidate species, as well as proposed and final designated critical habitat, that may occur within the boundary of your proposed project and/or may be affected by your proposed project. The species list fulfills the requirements of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) under section 7(c) of the ESA of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*).

New information based on updated surveys, changes in the abundance and distribution of species, changed habitat conditions, or other factors could change this list. Please feel free to contact us if you need more current information or assistance regarding the potential impacts to federally proposed, listed, and candidate species and federally designated and proposed critical habitat. Please note that under 50 CFR 402.12(e) of the regulations implementing section 7 of the ESA, the accuracy of this species list should be verified after 90 days. The Service recommends that verification be completed by visiting the ECOS-IPaC website at regular intervals during project planning and implementation for updates to species lists and information. An updated list may be requested through the ECOS-IPaC system by completing the same process used to receive the enclosed list.

The purpose of the ESA is to provide a means whereby threatened and endangered species and

the ecosystems upon which they depend may be conserved. Under sections 7(a)(1) and 7(a)(2) of the ESA and its implementing regulations (50 CFR 402 *et seq.*), Federal agencies are required to utilize their authorities to carry out programs for the conservation of threatened and endangered species and to determine whether projects may affect threatened and endangered species and/or designated critical habitat.

A Biological Assessment is required for construction projects (or other undertakings having similar physical impacts) that are major Federal actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment as defined in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA; 42 USC 4332(2) (c)). For projects other than major construction activities, the Service suggests that a biological evaluation similar to a Biological Assessment be prepared to determine whether the project may affect listed or proposed species and/or designated or proposed critical habitat. Recommended contents of a Biological Assessment are described at 50 CFR 402.12.

If a Federal agency determines, based on the Biological Assessment or biological evaluation, that listed species and/or designated critical habitat may be affected by the proposed project, the agency is required to consult with the Service pursuant to 50 CFR 402. In addition, the Service recommends that candidate species, proposed species and proposed critical habitat be addressed within the consultation. More information on the regulations and procedures for section 7 consultation, including the role of permit or license applicants, can be found in the "Endangered Species Consultation Handbook" at http://www.fws.gov/endangered/esa-library/pdf/TOC-GLOS.PDF.

Candidate Species and Other Sensitive Species

A list of candidate and other sensitive species in your area is also attached. Candidate species and other sensitive species are species that have no legal protection under the ESA, although we recommend that candidate and other sensitive species be included in your surveys and considered for planning purposes. The Service monitors the status of these species. If significant declines occur, these species could potentially be listed. Therefore, actions that may contribute to their decline should be avoided.

Lists of sensitive species including State-listed endangered and threatened species are compiled by New Mexico State agencies. These lists, along with species information, can be found at the following websites.

Biota Information System of New Mexico (BISON-M): www.bison-m.org

New Mexico State Forestry. The New Mexico Endangered Plant Program: https://www.emnrd.nm.gov/sfd/rare-plants/

New Mexico Rare Plant Technical Council, New Mexico Rare Plants: nmrareplants.unm.edu

Natural Heritage New Mexico, online species database: nhnm.unm.edu

WETLANDS AND FLOODPLAINS

Under Executive Orders 11988 and 11990, Federal agencies are required to minimize the destruction, loss, or degradation of wetlands and floodplains, and preserve and enhance their natural and beneficial values. These habitats should be conserved through avoidance, or mitigated to ensure that there would be no net loss of wetlands function and value.

We encourage you to use the National Wetland Inventory (NWI) maps in conjunction with ground-truthing to identify wetlands occurring in your project area. The Service's NWI program website, www.fws.gov/wetlands/Data/Mapper.html, integrates digital map data with other resource information. We also recommend you contact the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for permitting requirements under section 404 of the Clean Water Act if your proposed action could impact floodplains or wetlands.

MIGRATORY BIRDS

In addition to responsibilities to protect threatened and endangered species under the ESA, there are additional responsibilities under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (BGEPA) to protect native birds from project-related impacts. Any activity, intentional or unintentional, resulting in take of migratory birds, including eagles, is prohibited unless otherwise permitted by the Service (50 CFR 10.12 and 16 USC 668(a)). For more information regarding these Acts see https://www.fenws.gov/birds/policies-and-regulations.php.

The MBTA has no provision for allowing take of migratory birds that may be unintentionally killed or injured by otherwise lawful activities. It is the responsibility of the project proponent to comply with these Acts by identifying potential impacts to migratory birds and eagles within applicable NEPA documents (when there is a Federal nexus) or a Bird/Eagle Conservation Plan (when there is no Federal nexus). Proponents should implement conservation measures to avoid or minimize the production of project-related stressors or minimize the exposure of birds and their resources to the project-related stressors. For more information on avian stressors and recommended conservation measures see https://www.fws.gov/birds/bird-enthusiasts/threats-to-birds.php. We also recommend review of the Birds of Conservation Concern list (https://www.fws.gov/birds/management/managed-species/birds-of-conservation-concern.php) to fully evaluate the effects to the birds at your site. This list identifies migratory and non-migratory bird species (beyond those already designated as federally threatened or endangered) that represent top conservation priorities for the Service, and are potentially threatened by disturbance, habitat impacts, or other project development activities.

In addition to MBTA and BGEPA, Executive Order 13186: *Responsibilities of Federal Agencies to Protect Migratory Birds*, obligates all Federal agencies that engage in or authorize activities that might affect migratory birds, to minimize those effects and encourage conservation measures that will improve bird populations. Executive Order 13186 thereby provides additional protection for both migratory birds and migratory bird habitat. Please visit https://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/pdf/management/executiveordertoprotectmigratorybirds.pdf for information

regarding the implementation of Executive Order 13186.

We suggest you contact the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, and the New Mexico Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department, Forestry Division for information regarding State protected and at-risk species fish, wildlife, and plants.

For further consultation with the Service we recommend submitting inquiries or assessments electronically to our incoming email box at nmesfo@fws.gov, where it will be more promptly routed to the appropriate biologist for review.

We appreciate your concern for threatened and endangered species. The Service encourages Federal agencies to include conservation of threatened and endangered species into their project planning to further the purposes of the Act. Please include the Consultation Code in the header of this letter with any request for consultation or correspondence about your project that you submit to our office.

Attachment(s):

- Official Species List
- Migratory Birds

Official Species List

This list is provided pursuant to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, and fulfills the requirement for Federal agencies to "request of the Secretary of the Interior information whether any species which is listed or proposed to be listed may be present in the area of a proposed action".

This species list is provided by:

New Mexico Ecological Services Field Office
2105 Osuna Road Ne
Albuquerque, NM 87113-1001
(505) 346-2525

Project Summary

Project Code: 2022-0061927
Event Code: None
Project Name: Gila Lower Box Recreation Area Management Plan
Project Type: Management Plans Land Management/Restoration
Project Description: The BLM proposes to complete a RAMP for the five recreation sites: Nichols Canyon, Gauge Dispersed Camping Area, Fisherman's Point, Spring on the Bluff, and Caprock Campground. The RAMP would involve the construction of additional recreational facilities, such as parking areas, trailheads, and dispersed camping areas; the repair and realignment of certain roads and trails; and changes to the types of travel allowed on certain roads.

New surface 1 disturbance from these features would cover approximately 2.7 acres for the new nonmotorized trail from Gauge Station Road to Nichols Canyon Road. Another 0.9 acres would be newly disturbed for the realignment of Nichols Canyon Road and construction of a new trailhead, parking area, and boating takeout. Slight amounts of surface disturbance would occur in other areas to add fire rings for primitive campgrounds, to add posts and cable, and to formalize parking areas. Once visitor monitoring data demonstrate a demand, the BLM would construct a developed campground (Caprock Campground) to accommodate additional users. This would result in an additional 1.6 acres of disturbance, if the developed campground were constructed.

Project Location:

Approximate location of the project can be viewed in Google Maps: https://www.google.com/maps/@32.646595149999996,-108.88905640819038,14z

Counties: Grant and Hidalgo counties, New Mexico

Endangered Species Act Species

There is a total of 19 threatened, endangered, or candidate species on this species list.

Species on this list should be considered in an effects analysis for your project and could include species that exist in another geographic area. For example, certain fish may appear on the species list because a project could affect downstream species.

IPaC does not display listed species or critical habitats under the sole jurisdiction of NOAA Fisheries[1], as USFWS does not have the authority to speak on behalf of NOAA and the Department of Commerce.

See the "Critical habitats" section below for those critical habitats that lie wholly or partially within your project area under this office's jurisdiction. Please contact the designated FWS office if you have questions.

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1. NOAA Fisheries, also known as the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), is an office of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration within the Department of Commerce.

Mammals

NAME	STATUS
Gray Wolf *Canis lupus* Population: Southwestern Distinct Population Segment No critical habitat has been designated for this species.	Proposed Endangered
Mexican Long-nosed Bat *Leptonycteris nivalis* No critical habitat has been designated for this species. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/8203	Endangered
Mexican Wolf *Canis lupus baileyi* Population: U.S.A. (portions of AZ and NM)see 17.84(k) No critical habitat has been designated for this species. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/3916	Experimental Population, Non-Essential

Birds

NAME	STATUS
Mexican Spotted Owl *Strix occidentalis lucida* There is **final** critical habitat for this species. The location of the critical habitat is not available. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/8196	Threatened
Northern Aplomado Falcon *Falco femoralis septentrionalis* Population: U.S.A (AZ, NM) No critical habitat has been designated for this species. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/1923	Experimental Population, Non-Essential
Southwestern Willow Flycatcher *Empidonax traillii extimus* There is **final** critical habitat for this species. Your location overlaps the critical habitat. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/6749	Endangered
Yellow-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus americanus* Population: Western U.S. DPS There is **final** critical habitat for this species. Your location overlaps the critical habitat. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/3911	Threatened

Reptiles

NAME	STATUS
Narrow-headed Gartersnake *Thamnophis rufipunctatus* There is **final** critical habitat for this species. Your location overlaps the critical habitat. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/2204	Threatened
New Mexican Ridge-nosed Rattlesnake *Crotalus willardi obscurus* There is **final** critical habitat for this species. The location of the critical habitat is not available. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/3657	Threatened
Northern Mexican Gartersnake *Thamnophis eques megalops* There is **final** critical habitat for this species. The location of the critical habitat is not available. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/7655	Threatened

Amphibians

NAME	STATUS
Chiricahua Leopard Frog *Rana chiricahuensis* There is **final** critical habitat for this species. The location of the critical habitat is not available. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/1516	Threatened

Fishes

NAME	STATUS
Beautiful Shiner *Cyprinella formosa* There is **final** critical habitat for this species. The location of the critical habitat is not available. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/7874	Threatened
Chihuahua Chub *Gila nigrescens* There is **proposed** critical habitat for this species. The location of the critical habitat is not available. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/7156	Threatened
Gila Chub *Gila intermedia* There is **final** critical habitat for this species. The location of the critical habitat is not available. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/51	Endangered
Gila Topminnow (incl. Yaqui) *Poeciliopsis occidentalis* No critical habitat has been designated for this species. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/1116	Endangered
Gila Trout *Oncorhynchus gilae* No critical habitat has been designated for this species. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/781	Threatened
Loach Minnow *Tiaroga cobitis* There is **final** critical habitat for this species. Your location overlaps the critical habitat. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/6922	Endangered
Spikedace *Meda fulgida* There is **final** critical habitat for this species. Your location overlaps the critical habitat. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/6493	Endangered

Insects

NAME	STATUS
Monarch Butterfly *Danaus plexippus* No critical habitat has been designated for this species. Species profile: https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/9743	Candidate

Critical habitats

There are 5 critical habitats wholly or partially within your project area under this office's jurisdiction.

NAME	STATUS
Loach Minnow *Tiaroga cobitis* https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/6922#crithab	Final
Narrow-headed Gartersnake *Thamnophis rufipunctatus* https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/2204#crithab	Final
Southwestern Willow Flycatcher *Empidonax traillii extimus*	Final

NAME	STATUS
https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/6749#crithab	
Spikedace *Meda fulgida* https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/6493#crithab	Final
Yellow-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus americanus* https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/3911#crithab	Final

Migratory Birds

Certain birds are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act[1] and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act[2].

Any person or organization who plans or conducts activities that may result in impacts to migratory birds, eagles, and their habitats should follow appropriate regulations and consider implementing appropriate conservation measures, as described below.

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1. The Migratory Birds Treaty Act of 1918.
2. The Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act of 1940.
3. 50 C.F.R. Sec. 10.12 and 16 U.S.C. Sec. 668(a)

The birds listed below are birds of particular concern either because they occur on the USFWS Birds of Conservation Concern (BCC) list or warrant special attention in your project location. To learn more about the levels of concern for birds on your list and how this list is generated, see the FAQ below. This is not a list of every bird you may find in this location, nor a guarantee that every bird on this list will be found in your project area. To see exact locations of where birders and the general public have sighted birds in and around your project area, visit the E-bird data mapping tool (Tip: enter your location, desired date range and a species on your list). For projects that occur off the Atlantic Coast, additional maps and models detailing the relative occurrence and abundance of bird species on your list are available. Links to additional information about Atlantic Coast birds, and other important information about your migratory bird list, including how to properly interpret and use your migratory bird report, can be found below.

For guidance on when to schedule activities or implement avoidance and minimization measures to reduce impacts to migratory birds on your list, click on the PROBABILITY OF PRESENCE SUMMARY at the top of your list to see when these birds are most likely to be present and breeding in your project area.

NAME	BREEDING SEASON
Bald Eagle *Haliaeetus leucocephalus* This is not a Bird of Conservation Concern (BCC) in this area, but warrants attention because of the Eagle Act or for potential susceptibilities in offshore areas from certain types of development or activities. https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/1626	Breeds Oct 15 to Jul 31
Black-chinned Sparrow *Spizella atrogularis* This is a Bird of Conservation Concern (BCC) throughout its range in the continental USA and Alaska. https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/9447	Breeds Apr 15 to Jul 31

NAME	BREEDING SEASON
Chestnut-collared Longspur *Calcarius ornatus* This is a Bird of Conservation Concern (BCC) throughout its range in the continental USA and Alaska.	Breeds elsewhere
Ferruginous Hawk *Buteo regalis* This is a Bird of Conservation Concern (BCC) only in particular Bird Conservation Regions (BCRs) in the continental USA https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/6038	Breeds Mar 15 to Aug 15
Varied Bunting *Passerina versicolor* This is a Bird of Conservation Concern (BCC) throughout its range in the continental USA and Alaska.	Breeds Apr 25 to Sep 30
Virginia's Warbler *Vermivora virginiae* This is a Bird of Conservation Concern (BCC) throughout its range in the continental USA and Alaska. https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/9441	Breeds May 1 to Jul 31

Probability Of Presence Summary

The graphs below provide our best understanding of when birds of concern are most likely to be present in your project area. This information can be used to tailor and schedule your project activities to avoid or minimize impacts to birds. Please make sure you read and understand the FAQ "Proper Interpretation and Use of Your Migratory Bird Report" before using or attempting to interpret this report.

Probability of Presence (■)

Each green bar represents the bird's relative probability of presence in the 10km grid cell(s) your project overlaps during a particular week of the year. (A year is represented as 12 4-week months.) A taller bar indicates a higher probability of species presence. The survey effort (see below) can be used to establish a level of confidence in the presence score. One can have higher confidence in the presence score if the corresponding survey effort is also high.

How is the probability of presence score calculated? The calculation is done in three steps:

1. The probability of presence for each week is calculated as the number of survey events in the week where the species was detected divided by the total number of survey events for that week. For example, if in week 12 there were 20 survey events and the Spotted Towhee was found in 5 of them, the probability of presence of the Spotted Towhee in week 12 is 0.25.
2. To properly present the pattern of presence across the year, the relative probability of presence is calculated. This is the probability of presence divided by the maximum probability of presence across all weeks. For example, imagine the probability of presence in week 20 for the Spotted Towhee is 0.05, and that the probability of presence at week 12 (0.25) is the maximum of any week of the year. The relative probability of presence on week 12 is 0.25/0.25 = 1; at week 20 it is 0.05/0.25 = 0.2.

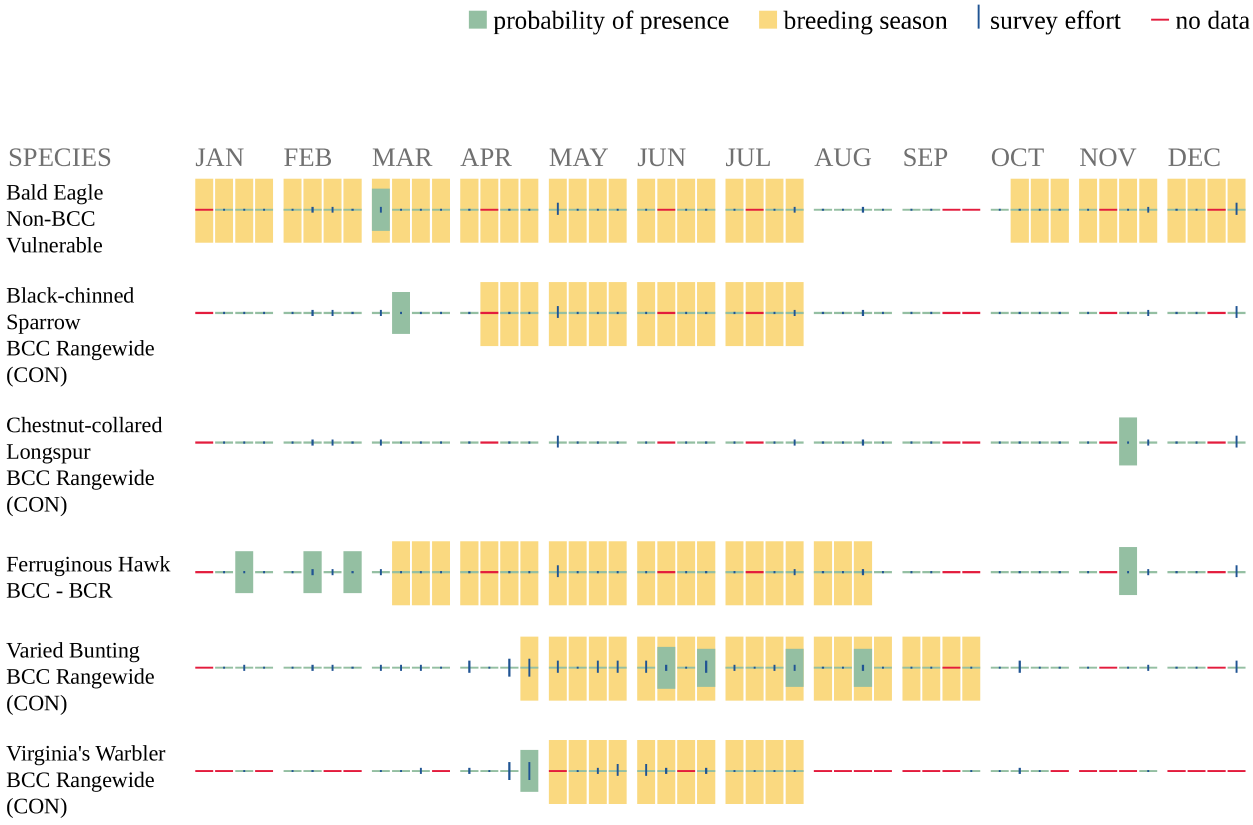
3. The relative probability of presence calculated in the previous step undergoes a statistical conversion so that all possible values fall between 0 and 10, inclusive. This is the probability of presence score.

Breeding Season (■)
Yellow bars denote a very liberal estimate of the time-frame inside which the bird breeds across its entire range. If there are no yellow bars shown for a bird, it does not breed in your project area.

Survey Effort (|)
Vertical black lines superimposed on probability of presence bars indicate the number of surveys performed for that species in the 10km grid cell(s) your project area overlaps. The number of surveys is expressed as a range, for example, 33 to 64 surveys.

No Data (–)
A week is marked as having no data if there were no survey events for that week.

Survey Timeframe
Surveys from only the last 10 years are used in order to ensure delivery of currently relevant information. The exception to this is areas off the Atlantic coast, where bird returns are based on all years of available data, since data in these areas is currently much more sparse.



Additional information can be found using the following links:

- Birds of Conservation Concern https://www.fws.gov/program/migratory-birds/species
- Measures for avoiding and minimizing impacts to birds https://www.fws.gov/library/collections/avoiding-and-minimizing-incidental-take-migratory-birds
- Nationwide conservation measures for birds https://www.fws.gov/sites/default/files/documents/nationwide-standard-conservation-measures.pdf

Migratory Birds FAQ

Tell me more about conservation measures I can implement to avoid or minimize impacts to migratory birds.

Nationwide Conservation Measures describes measures that can help avoid and minimize impacts to all birds at any location year round. Implementation of these measures is particularly important when birds are most likely to occur in the project area. When birds may be breeding in the area, identifying the locations of any active nests and avoiding their destruction is a very helpful impact minimization measure. To see when birds are most likely to occur and be breeding in your project area, view the Probability of Presence Summary. Additional measures or permits may be advisable depending on the type of activity you are conducting and the type of infrastructure or bird species present on your project site.

What does IPaC use to generate the migratory birds potentially occurring in my specified location?

The Migratory Bird Resource List is comprised of USFWS Birds of Conservation Concern (BCC) and other species that may warrant special attention in your project location.

The migratory bird list generated for your project is derived from data provided by the Avian Knowledge Network (AKN). The AKN data is based on a growing collection of survey, banding, and citizen science datasets and is queried and filtered to return a list of those birds reported as occurring in the 10km grid cell(s) which your project intersects, and that have been identified as warranting special attention because they are a BCC species in that area, an eagle (Eagle Act requirements may apply), or a species that has a particular vulnerability to offshore activities or development.

Again, the Migratory Bird Resource list includes only a subset of birds that may occur in your project area. It is not representative of all birds that may occur in your project area. To get a list of all birds potentially present in your project area, please visit the AKN Phenology Tool.

What does IPaC use to generate the probability of presence graphs for the migratory birds potentially occurring in my specified location?

The probability of presence graphs associated with your migratory bird list are based on data provided by the Avian Knowledge Network (AKN). This data is derived from a growing collection of survey, banding, and citizen science datasets .

Probability of presence data is continuously being updated as new and better information becomes available. To learn more about how the probability of presence graphs are produced and

how to interpret them, go the Probability of Presence Summary and then click on the "Tell me about these graphs" link.

How do I know if a bird is breeding, wintering, migrating or present year-round in my project area?
To see what part of a particular bird's range your project area falls within (i.e. breeding, wintering, migrating or year-round), you may refer to the following resources: The Cornell Lab of Ornithology All About Birds Bird Guide, or (if you are unsuccessful in locating the bird of interest there), the Cornell Lab of Ornithology Neotropical Birds guide. If a bird on your migratory bird species list has a breeding season associated with it, if that bird does occur in your project area, there may be nests present at some point within the timeframe specified. If "Breeds elsewhere" is indicated, then the bird likely does not breed in your project area.

What are the levels of concern for migratory birds?
Migratory birds delivered through IPaC fall into the following distinct categories of concern:

1. "BCC Rangewide" birds are Birds of Conservation Concern (BCC) that are of concern throughout their range anywhere within the USA (including Hawaii, the Pacific Islands, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands);
2. "BCC - BCR" birds are BCCs that are of concern only in particular Bird Conservation Regions (BCRs) in the continental USA; and
3. "Non-BCC - Vulnerable" birds are not BCC species in your project area, but appear on your list either because of the Eagle Act requirements (for eagles) or (for non-eagles) potential susceptibilities in offshore areas from certain types of development or activities (e.g. offshore energy development or longline fishing).

Although it is important to try to avoid and minimize impacts to all birds, efforts should be made, in particular, to avoid and minimize impacts to the birds on this list, especially eagles and BCC species of rangewide concern. For more information on conservation measures you can implement to help avoid and minimize migratory bird impacts and requirements for eagles, please see the FAQs for these topics.

Details about birds that are potentially affected by offshore projects
For additional details about the relative occurrence and abundance of both individual bird species and groups of bird species within your project area off the Atlantic Coast, please visit the Northeast Ocean Data Portal. The Portal also offers data and information about other taxa besides birds that may be helpful to you in your project review. Alternately, you may download the bird model results files underlying the portal maps through the NOAA NCCOS Integrative Statistical Modeling and Predictive Mapping of Marine Bird Distributions and Abundance on the Atlantic Outer Continental Shelf project webpage.

Bird tracking data can also provide additional details about occurrence and habitat use throughout the year, including migration. Models relying on survey data may not include this information. For additional information on marine bird tracking data, see the Diving Bird Study and the nanotag studies or contact Caleb Spiegel or Pam Loring.

What if I have eagles on my list?

If your project has the potential to disturb or kill eagles, you may need to obtain a permit to avoid violating the Eagle Act should such impacts occur.

Proper Interpretation and Use of Your Migratory Bird Report

The migratory bird list generated is not a list of all birds in your project area, only a subset of birds of priority concern. To learn more about how your list is generated, and see options for identifying what other birds may be in your project area, please see the FAQ "What does IPaC use to generate the migratory birds potentially occurring in my specified location". Please be aware this report provides the "probability of presence" of birds within the 10 km grid cell(s) that overlap your project; not your exact project footprint. On the graphs provided, please also look carefully at the survey effort (indicated by the black vertical bar) and for the existence of the "no data" indicator (a red horizontal bar). A high survey effort is the key component. If the survey effort is high, then the probability of presence score can be viewed as more dependable. In contrast, a low survey effort bar or no data bar means a lack of data and, therefore, a lack of certainty about presence of the species. This list is not perfect; it is simply a starting point for identifying what birds of concern have the potential to be in your project area, when they might be there, and if they might be breeding (which means nests might be present). The list helps you know what to look for to confirm presence, and helps guide you in knowing when to implement conservation measures to avoid or minimize potential impacts from your project activities, should presence be confirmed. To learn more about conservation measures, visit the FAQ "Tell me about conservation measures I can implement to avoid or minimize impacts to migratory birds" at the bottom of your migratory bird trust resources page.

IPaC User Contact Information

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Appendix F

New Mexico BLM Sensitive Species List

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BLM Sensitive Species List
Las Cruces District Office
Revised 10/2018

Mammals	
Choeronycteris mexicana	Mexican long-tongued bat
Leptonycteris yerbabuenae	Lesser Long-nosed Bat
Euderma maculatum	Spotted bat
Corynorhinus townsendii	Townsend's big-eared bat
Sorex arizonae	Arizona shrew
Lepus callotis	White-sided jack rabbit
Cynomys ludovicianus	Black-tailed prairie dog

Birds	
Vermivora virginiae	Virginia's Warbler
Calcarius mccownii	McCown's Longspur
Antrostomus arizonae	Mexican Whip-poor-will
Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus	Piñon Jay
Toxostoma bendirei	Bendire's Thrasher
Aimophila boterii	Botteri's Sparrow
Anthus spragueii	Sprague's Pipit
Ammodramus savannarum ammolegus	Arizona Grasshopper Sparrow
Ammodramus bairdii	Baird's Sparrow
Passerina ciris	Painted Bunting

Arthropods	
Danaus plexippus plexippus	Monarch Butterfly

Amphibians	
Anaxyrus (Bufo) microscaphus	Southwestern toad

Reptiles	
Trachemys gaigeae gaigeae	Big Bend Slider

Molluscs & Crustaceans	
Streptocephalus moorei	Moore's Fairy Shrimp
Phallocryptus (Branchinella) sublettei	Sublette's fairy shrimp
Lytta mirifica	Anthony Blister Beetle
Gastrocopta dalliana dalliana	Shortneck Snaggletooth Snail
Holospira crossei	Cross Holospira Snail
Ashmunella hebardi	Hacheta Grande Woodlandsnail
Ashmunella macromphala	Cooke's Peak Woodlandsnail
Sonorella todseni	Dona Ana Talussnail
Sonorella hachitana	New Mexico Talussnail
Sonorella hachitana flora	New Mexico Talussnail (Florida Mountains)
Holospira metcalfi	Metcalf Holospira Snail
Radiocentrum ferrissi	Fringed Mountainsnail

BLM Sensitive Species List
Las Cruces District Office
Revised 6/2020

Apiaceae	
Spermolepis organensis	Organ Mountains scaleseed

Asteraceae	
Cirsium vinaceum	Sacramento Mountains thistle
Cirsium wrightii	Wright's marsh thistle
Hymenoxys ambigens var. neomexicana	New Mexico bitterweed
Lepidospartum burgessii	gypsum scalebroom
Perityle cernua	nodding cliff daisy

Brassicaceae	
Boechera zephyra	Wind Mountain rockcress
Nerisyrenia hypercorax	crow flat greggia,
Sibara grisea	gray sibara; Texas thelypody

Cactaceae	
Coryphantha robustispina ssp. scheeri	Scheer's beehive cactus
Echinocereus fendleri var. kuenzleri	Kuenzler's hedgehog cactus
Escobaria duncanii	Duncan's pincushion cactus
Escobaria sneedii var. sneedii	Sneed's pincushion cactus
Escobaria villardii	Villard's pincushion cactus
Opuntia arenaria	sand pricklypear
Peniocereus greggii var greggii	night-blooming cereus

Caryophyllaceae	
Paronychia wilkinsonii	Wilkinson's nailwort

Fabaceae	
Astragalus cobrensis var. maguirei	coppermine milkvetch
Dermatophyllum guadalupense	Guadalupe mescalbean
Pediomelum pentaphyllum	Chihuahua scurfpea

Lamiaceae	
Agastache pringlei var. verticillata	Organ Mountains giant hyssop
Hedeoma todsenii	Todson's pennyroyal

Loasaceae	
Mentzelia humilis var. guadalupensis	Guadalupe stickleaf

Nyctaginaceae	
Anulocaulis leiosolenus var. howardii	Howard's gyp ringstem

Orobanchaceae	
Castilleja organorum	Organ Mountains paintbrush

Papaveraceae	
Argemone pinnatisecta	Sacramento prickly-poppy

Plantaginaceae	
Penstemon alamosensis	Alamo beardtongue

Poaceae	
Puccinellia parishii	Parish's alkaligrass

Ranunculaceae	
Aquilegia chrysantha var. chaplinei	Chapline's columbine

Scrophulariaceae	
Scrophularia laevis	Organ Mountain figwort
Scrophularia macrantha	Mimbres figwort

Appendix G

Public Comment and Response Summary

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APPENDIX G. PUBLIC COMMENT AND RESPONSE SUMMARY

The below table provides BLM responses to public comments on the draft Gila Lower Box Recreation Area Management Plan/Environmental Assessment. The BLM released the draft Gila Lower Box RAMP/EA, Chapter 1, Introduction and Chapter 2, Alternatives for public comment from November 1, 2023, to December 1, 2023. Copies of the draft Gila Lower Box RAMP/EA Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 were made available on eplanning.blm.gov. The BLM accepted public comments through the BLM's ePlanning website, email, and mail. The BLM received 23 individual comment letter submissions and statements. All comments were reviewed by the BLM.

The below table presents the comments received by the BLM during the public review period, including the issue area, full comment text, and BLM's response to the comment.

Table G-1. Public Comment and Response Summary Matrix

COMMENT #	COMMENTOR	COMMENT	RESPONSE
001	LaFrance	I understand that this is an extremely sensitive area and that portions of the Gila River within it have been proposed for Wild and Scenic designation. BLM should have a duty to carefully balance the value of public recreation opportunities against the environmental values of this very precious, very important resource, the Gila River. Although I can no longer hike and camp (age) it would mean a lot to leave a "wild" legacy for my grandchildren and their children. Do not expand any public access in this area--rather, close as many unauthorized trails and roads as possible.	The purpose of the action includes balancing recreation and the protection of special resources. In Chapter 2 of the RAMP, alternatives B and C restrict access in Nichols Canyon and Fisherman's point to help manage for unauthorized trails and roads in those areas.

COMMENT #	COMMENTOR	COMMENT	RESPONSE
002	Manlowe	BLM is proposing recreation improvements and resource protection measures in the Gila Lower Box Wilderness Study Area, Gila Lower Box Area of Critical Environmental Concern, and on surrounding lands. The segment of the Gila River that flows through the project area is also proposed for Wild and Scenic River designation. I cannot attend the public meeting but want to say that the sensitive lands and waters within the project area have suffered from unmanaged recreation uses, including offroad vehicle use in the Wilderness Study Area, Area of Critical Environmental Concern, and the Gila River floodplain, and the development of informal social trails on unstable, steep, and erosive slopes, among other issues. I strongly feel that the BLM should: • Prohibit motor vehicle use on routes that exist within the Wilderness Study Area; • Prohibit all off-road (cross-country) motor vehicle use; • Develop formal and appropriately aligned trails coupled with the restoration of user-developed social trails within the project area to eliminate erosion issues and other resource impacts. The damage of motor vehicle use would permanently change and degrade the area through erosion, pollution, species destruction, denuding, among other harmful effects. There are plenty of other options for motorized vehicles and they should not be allowed to destroy the remaining precious natural areas. Also, Scenic River designation is clearly warranted.	Per the Mimbres RMP, cross country vehicle use is already prohibited in both the Gila Lower Box WSA and ACEC In Chapter 2 of the RAMP for the preferred alternative, manage Nichols Canyon Road as open to motorized access to a new proposed parking area; Designate the existing route from the new primitive campground to the Nichols Canyon floodplain for nonmotorized and administrative access. In Chapter 2 of the RAMP for the preferred alternative, manage the spur route from the junction with the county road to where the route heads downhill for motorized travel. Decommission and restore a portion of the spur route where it heads downhill. Manage the remainder of the spur route heading downhill to its terminus at Fisherman's Point for nonmotorized travel only. • Manage the Gila Lower Box ACEC with motorized recreation limited to the existing road (Nichols Canyon Road) and WSA as closed to motorized recreation • Prohibit motorized use in the riverbed channel during times when the river is not flowing. • Consider seasonal or temporary closures following weather events to reduce trail impacts from visitor use. • Install barriers to prevent off-road motorized access to the ACEC and WSA. • Install information signs identifying the boundaries of the ACEC and WSA. • Wild and Scenic River Designation is an act of Congress and not a part of this plan.

COMMENT #	COMMENTOR	COMMENT	RESPONSE
003	McCreary	• Prohibit motor vehicle use on routes that exist within the Wilderness Study Area • Prohibit all off-road (cross-country) motor vehicle use. • Develop formal and appropriately aligned trails coupled with the restoration of user-developed social trails within the project area to eliminate erosion issues and other resource impacts	Per the Mimbres RMP,cross country vehicle use is already prohibited in both the Gila Lower Box WSA and ACEC In Chapter 2 of the RAMP for the preferred alternative, manage Nichols Canyon Road as open to motorized access to a new proposed parking area; Designate the existing route from the new primitive campground to the Nichols Canyon floodplain for nonmotorized and administrative access. In Chapter 2 of the RAMP for the preferred alternative, manage the spur route from the junction with the county road to where the route heads downhill for motorized travel. Decommission and restore a portion of the spur route where it heads downhill. Manage the remainder of the spur route heading downhill to its terminus at Fisherman's Point for nonmotorized travel only. • Manage the Gila Lower Box ACEC with motorized recreation limited to the existing road (Nichols Canyon Road) and WSA as closed to motorized recreation • Prohibit motorized use in the riverbed channel during times when the river is not flowing. • Consider seasonal or temporary closures following weather events to reduce trail impacts from visitor use. • Install barriers to prevent off-road motorized access to the ACEC and WSA. • Install information signs identifying the boundaries of the ACEC and WSA. • Wild and Scenic River Designation is an act of Congress and not a part of this plan.

COMMENT #	COMMENTOR	COMMENT	RESPONSE
004	Pafford	We all know the value of the Upper Gila, but the question is always about how to let the most people have access to it. In the past those who value their own motorized recreation above the protection of that fragile environment. The 3 factors seem well thought out as attempts to restrict those vehicles and watercraft while still allowing access to some restricted locations. Certainly, it is obvious that there needs to be some enforceable regulations and this may be an acceptable start.	Per the Mimbres RMP,cross country vehicle use is already prohibited in both the Gila Lower Box WSA and ACEC In Chapter 2 of the RAMP for the preferred alternative, manage Nichols Canyon Road as open to motorized access to a new proposed parking area; Designate the existing route from the new primitive campground to the Nichols Canyon floodplain for nonmotorized and administrative access. In Chapter 2 of the RAMP for the preferred alternative, manage the spur route from the junction with the county road to where the route heads downhill for motorized travel. Decommission and restore a portion of the spur route where it heads downhill. Manage the remainder of the spur route heading downhill to its terminus at Fisherman's Point for nonmotorized travel only. • Manage the Gila Lower Box ACEC with motorized recreation limited to the existing road (Nichols Canyon Road) and WSA as closed to motorized recreation • Prohibit motorized use in the riverbed channel during times when the river is not flowing. • Consider seasonal or temporary closures following weather events to reduce trail impacts from visitor use. • Install barriers to prevent off-road motorized access to the ACEC and WSA. • Install information signs identifying the boundaries of the ACEC and WSA. • Wild and Scenic River Designation is an act of Congress and not a part of this plan.

COMMENT #	COMMENTOR	COMMENT	RESPONSE
005	Stephens	I understand the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is proposing a variety of recreation improvements and resource protection measures in the Gila Lower Box Wilderness Study Area, Gila Lower Box Area of Critical Environmental Concern, and on surrounding lands. The segment of the Gila River that flows through the project area is also proposed for Wild and Scenic River designation. The sensitive lands and waters within the project area have suffered from unmanaged recreation uses, including off-road vehicle use in the Wilderness Study Area, Area of Critical Environmental Concern, and the Gila River floodplain, and the development of informal social trails on unstable, steep, and erosive slopes, among other issues. BLM must balance recreation access with the protection of these areas. Please: • Prohibit motor vehicle use on routes that exist within the Wilderness Study Area • Prohibit all off-road (cross-country) motor vehicle use • Develop formal and appropriately aligned trails coupled with the restoration of user-developed social trails within the project area to eliminate erosion issues and other resource impacts	Per the Mimbres RMP,cross country vehicle use is already prohibited in both the Gila Lower Box WSA and ACEC In Chapter 2 of the RAMP for the preferred alternative, manage Nichols Canyon Road as open to motorized access to a new proposed parking area; Designate the existing route from the new primitive campground to the Nichols Canyon floodplain for nonmotorized and administrative access. In Chapter 2 of the RAMP for the preferred alternative, manage the spur route from the junction with the county road to where the route heads downhill for motorized travel. Decommission and restore a portion of the spur route where it heads downhill. Manage the remainder of the spur route heading downhill to its terminus at Fisherman's Point for nonmotorized travel only. • Manage the Gila Lower Box ACEC with motorized recreation limited to the existing road (Nichols Canyon Road) and WSA as closed to motorized recreation • Prohibit motorized use in the riverbed channel during times when the river is not flowing. • Consider seasonal or temporary closures following weather events to reduce trail impacts from visitor use. • Install barriers to prevent off-road motorized access to the ACEC and WSA. • Install information signs identifying the boundaries of the ACEC and WSA. • Wild and Scenic River Designation is an act of Congress and not a part of this plan.

COMMENT #	COMMENTOR	COMMENT	RESPONSE
006	Vendig	I support the recommendations of New Mexico Wild, ESPECIALLY THE PROHIBITION OF OFF ROAD VEHICLES.	Thank you for your comment.
007	Hallmark	The Lower Box of the Gila in NM is a precious resource by any measure. BLM's planning for the area should ensure that motor vehicles are kept out of existing roads in wilderness study area, and that all vehicles are prohibited off road. Social trails in the area that are erosion-prone should be redesigned or moved altogether. Recreation should not endanger the wonderful wilderness characteristics of the box, the wildlife, and especially the indigenous culture sites in the area	In Chapter 2 of the RAMP for the preferred alternative, manage the Gila Lower Box ACEC with motorized recreation limited to the existing road (Nichols Canyon Road) and WSA as closed to motorized recreation • Prohibit motorized use in the riverbed channel during times when the river is not flowing. There are no social trails and to prevent the creation of social trails BLM LCDO is proposing to construct one new trail, and maintain the two existing trails • BLM LCDO will Consider seasonal or temporary closures following weather events to reduce trail impacts from visitor use

COMMENT #	COMMENTOR	COMMENT	RESPONSE
008	Martinez, C	I will make very brief comments. I am a hunter, angler, and conservationist. I visit the Gila Lower Box several times a year when I am questing for solitude and a wilderness experience. • First, I would like to express my disappointment with the maps. Although I know the place well, I simply cannot figure out where the locations for several proposed structures (parking lots, campgrounds, and so on) are. • I am pleased with the effects of excluding cows from the riparian areas. I have even found effects on the number of turkeys! Keep this up. • Please keep signages at the lowest levels possible.-I am particularly worried about OHVs in this area. My desire is to keep them out completely out of the box and closing as many roads as possible. • I am also a bit worried about road improvements. I drive a hardy 4 wheel drive, but understand that you might want to improve them a bit. I would prefer that you keep Nichols canyon a primitive area "protected" by a rough road. This might sound like a weird recommendation, but keep improvements to a minimum. We can walk! Thanks for having this scoping about this magnificent place.	Maps are in draft form and there will be overview maps in the finalized EA that will provide better context and orientation. Cows will continue to be kept out of the Gila Lower Box as apart of conformance with the Mimbres RMP In Chapter 2 of the RAMP for the preferred alternative, signs will be kept minimal and will only be added to developed recreation areas and Wilderness study area boundaries. We must comply with Visual Resource Management Class I values and cannot add obtrusive signage that will degrade the landscape. Under Alternative A - no road maintenance to very minimal road maintenance would occur on Nichols Canyon Road.

COMMENT #	COMMENTOR	COMMENT	RESPONSE
009	Martinez, M	The Lower Gila Box along the Gila River in New Mexico is a gem. I urge the BLM to take all measures to preserve this stretch of the River and its surrounding landscape. Specifically these following actions would be vital conservation strategies: • Prohibit motor vehicle use on routes that exist within the Wilderness Study Area • Prohibit all off-road (cross-country) motor vehicle use. • Develop formal and appropriately aligned trails coupled with the restoration of user-developed social trails within the project area to eliminate erosion issues and other resource impacts. Thank you for considering these ideas as management proposals are being developed.	Per the Mimbres RMP,cross country vehicle use is already prohibited in both the Gila Lower Box WSA and ACEC In Chapter 2 of the RAMP for the preferred alternative, manage Nichols Canyon Road as open to motorized access to a new proposed parking area; Designate the existing route from the new primitive campground to the Nichols Canyon floodplain for nonmotorized and administrative access. In Chapter 2 of the RAMP for the preferred alternative, manage the spur route from the junction with the county road to where the route heads downhill for motorized travel. Decommission and restore a portion of the spur route where it heads downhill. Manage the remainder of the spur route heading downhill to its terminus at Fisherman's Point for nonmotorized travel only. • Manage the Gila Lower Box ACEC with motorized recreation limited to the existing road (Nichols Canyon Road) and WSA as closed to motorized recreation • Prohibit motorized use in the riverbed channel during times when the river is not flowing. • Consider seasonal or temporary closures following weather events to reduce trail impacts from visitor use. • Install barriers to prevent off-road motorized access to the ACEC and WSA. • Install information signs identifying the boundaries of the ACEC and WSA. • Wild and Scenic River Designation is an act of Congress and not a part of this plan.

COMMENT #	COMMENTOR	COMMENT	RESPONSE
010	Koenig	The BLM should balance protection with recreational access. One of the best ways to do that is to honor existing WSA boundaries. Even though it may be a convenient option, formalizing even relatively small vehicle intrusions into WSAs sets a dangerous precedent. Specifically, the BLM should consider connecting the existing pedestrian trail at spring on the bluff to the turnaround at the end of the Cherry Stem to avoid formalizing the existing parking and to avoid encouraging parking there. The same concept could be applied to the Fisherman's point trail connecting it to the turnaround at the end of the Cherry Stem to avoid formalizing the small road intrusion there. Balancing this, vehicular access ought to be preserved to the boating takeout at Nicholas Canyon and that road should be maintained to discourage cross country off roading around impediments. Thank you so much for your time.	There is already disturbance on the ground in the WSA near the Spring on the Bluff. The only way to keep the public from parking in the current disturbed area would be to build a long fence along the boundary of the WSA which would be much more visually intrusive than a small flat parking area. The road into Fisherman's point is a primitive road and would be kept that way and not developed further. New trails that would have to be built to connect to the turn around would also have to be built in the WSA and would add more disturbance. There is no way to manage vehicular access on the Nichols canyon flood plain. Infrastructure in line with fencing and a parking area to guide the public cannot be built on the flood plain in Nichols Canyon in line with human health and safety.
011	Swoboda	Just finished my 2nd hike in the study area. Nichols Canyon today. I strongly support any plan that keeps motorized vehicles out of the bosque/riparian areas. The traffic/trails alongside the river results in trash/erosion. The beavers would also appreciate no traffic.	In Chapter 2 of the RAMP common to all alternatives are to prohibit motorized use in the riverbed channel during times when the river is not flowing. BLM LCDO is considering under all alternatives, reestablishing and repairing the existing pedestrian trail (s)
012	Malott	Please let me know percentage of BLM Land in Hidalgo Co.- or number of sections/sq miles. Hidalgo Co. has 2446 sq miles.	Thank you for your comment. This is outside of the scope of the EA.

COMMENT #	COMMENTOR	COMMENT	RESPONSE
013	Blurton	For years many have been accessing the BLM land at the confluence of Box Canyon and the Gila River for the unique riparian species found there. This route starts on State land and crosses holdings of the McSpadden Land and Cattle Co. Please consider adding this small portion of BLM land to the RAMP. A trail from the Fisherman's Point Road to Box Canyon avoiding the McSpadden holdings would be nice.	There is currently a trail already available in Box Canyon to access the river. In Chapter 2 of the RAMP, under Alternatives B and C in Fisherman's point Reestablish and repair the existing pedestrian trail to provide safe pedestrian-only access on existing trails and from the new trailhead to the river
014	Smith and Stout 22November Letter	We are writing you on behalf of the Great Old Broads for Wilderness, Aldo's Silver City Broadband, a non-profit, all-volunteer organization focusing on education about, and advocacy for public lands, especially wilderness. We are based in the heart of the Gila/Aldo Wilderness regions, and are an affiliated chapter of a national organization headquartered in Durango, CO, with over forty chapters nationwide. Our grassroots organization, led by women, works to preserve and protect wilderness and wild lands. Aldo Silver City Broad [Band] currently partners with the Gila National Forest to monitor exclosures along the major river systems for trespass cattle. We file survey reports with the Forest Service on our monitoring activities and follow up when action is needed by the Forest Service. We know that Land Management Agencies don't always have the staff and funding to conduct all of the necessary monitoring on the lands that they are responsible for. We would like to meet with you sometime soon to share strategies and ideas based on our experiences with grazing monitoring. We are writing to thank you for the opportunity to provide early input into the creation of a Recreation Area Management Plan (RAMP) to better help manage the recreation resources in the Gila Lower Box area. The draft Environmental Assessment provides a good overview of the recreational and environmental resources in the area, and the three action alternatives you have developed.	Thank you for your comments. In Chapter 2 of the RAMP, the alternatives that are currently being developed for the Gila Recreation Area Management Plan/Environmental Assessment currently have Alternative B as the proposed action and the preferred alternative. BLM Las Cruces District Office would like to meet in the future to discuss monitoring and volunteer opportunities. In Chapter 2 of the RAMP,common to all alternatives include: • Implement an annual visitor-use monitoring program to document visitation at critical locations in the planning area. As part of this, add pedestrian and vehicle counters to monitor visitor use in the planning area. • Establish natural resource monitoring parameters and implement annual monitoring of resource conditions. • Work with local volunteer organizations to obtain citizen scientists to assist with monitoring. • Manage the Gila Lower Box ACEC with motorized recreation limited to the existing road (Nichols Canyon Road) and WSA as closed to motorized recreation

COMMENT #	COMMENTOR	COMMENT	RESPONSE
014 *(cont.)*	*(See above.)*	After reading through the draft EA, we think that Alternative B (Proposed RAMP) provides additional primitive recreation development that could decrease impacts from uncontrolled dispersed camping, and protects natural resources, especially the Gila's immensely important riparian corridors. The EA details all the actions that the BLM could take to implement a successful management plan for the area. What is essential to the success is the commitment of the BLM to carry out the plan, including enforcement of motor vehicle prohibitions, and keeping fences functional to reduce trespass cattle grazing. The management plan should include specific annual tasks to accomplish timely and meaningful management activities and monitoring, tied to the annual budget, so that a year or more does not go by without attention to problems and issues	• Prohibit motorized use in the riverbed channel during times when the river is not flowing.
015	MacDonald	I have hiked and camped extensively in the area affected by the Gila Lower Box EA. I am the author of the desertlavender.com website and a co-organizer of Meetup.com/gila-hikers hiking group. My primary concerns with this plan are the likely environmental impacts if motorized travel is allowed too close to the river. The recent explosion of interest in dispersed camping coupled with increasingly available and capable off-road vehicles has created a great deal of pressure on dispersed camping areas, especially if they are located close to water. Unless the BLM is in a position to provide full-time staffing at the site to prevent careless campers from discarding trash, tearing up vegetation and leaving untended campfires, roads that lead to within one mile of the river should be closed to motorized traffic.	In Chapter 2 of the RAMP for the preferred alternative, manage Nichols Canyon Road as open to motorized access to a new proposed parking area; Designate the existing route from the new primitive campground to the Nichols Canyon floodplain for nonmotorized and administrative access. Manage the spur route from the junction with the county road to where the route heads downhill for motorized travel. Decommission and restore a portion of the spur route where it heads downhill. Manage the remainder of the spur route heading downhill to its terminus at Fisherman's Point for nonmotorized travel only.

COMMENT #	COMMENTOR	COMMENT	RESPONSE
015 *(cont.)*	*(See above.)*	Therefore I opposed Gauge Dispersed Camping Area, alternative A, since it allows vehicular traffic all the way to the river. Options B or C would be my preference. Nichols Canyon option A also allows too much vehicular access to the river. I prefer option B, which offers a nice balance of pedestrian and vehicular access. Option C makes no sense because it is nearly two miles from the so-called "boating access" to the river. Noone is going to carry their boat that far. Regarding the second set of options for Nichols Canyon, alternative A appears to be a duplicate of alternative A, above. I oppose this option because it allows for vehicular access too close to the river. Option B calls for dispersed camping that is neither close to the river nor has an vehicular access, so I don't see the point. Option C, like option C above, calls for a "boating access" that is more than two miles from a drivable road. I don't see the point of spending money building a boating access that no one can drive to. Regarding the two proposals for Caprock Campground, we were just in the area a few days ago, and that seems like a nice, flat area that would be perfect for dispersed camping. The preliminary plan for Fisherman's Point Alternative B shows a primitive campground right on the river, which I oppose for all the reasons stated above.	• Manage the Gila Lower Box ACEC with motorized recreation limited to the existing road (Nichols Canyon Road) and WSA as closed to motorized recreation • Prohibit motorized use in the riverbed channel during times when the river is not flowing. • Consider seasonal or temporary closures following weather events to reduce trail impacts from visitor use. • Install barriers to prevent off-road motorized access to the ACEC and WSA. In Chapter 2 of the RAMP the alternatives that are currently being developed for the Gila Recreation Area Management Plan/Environmental Assessment have Alternative B as the proposed action and the preferred alternative. Reestablish and repair the existing pedestrian trail to provide safe pedestrian-only access on existing trails and from the new trailhead to the river.

COMMENT #	COMMENTOR	COMMENT	RESPONSE
016	RavenHeart	I attended the public information meeting in Lordsburg. These are my comments and preferences for the plans you suggest. Spring on the Bluff: Plan B is the best alternative. A definitive parking area. Trail head sign to make clear the destination. An improved trail would make the route safer for hikers as well as protect the steep slope from erosion. This is all within good wilderness study practices. Fisherman' s Point: Plan B would close the driving road at a critical point to preserve and restore the hill top. From that point the trail should be pedestrian only. The area is in dire need of restoration. The need for a primitive campground is questionable because of the damage that has already been done. However since the ability to camp there already exists it would also be good to keep it open. The road driven in to the area crosses over WSA land, at the point it turns on to spur road, that road should be off limits to motorized travel. Caprock Campground is a good use of the area. I provides for increasing public use of an area. It utilizes a county road and does not disturb the areas in need of protection. It allows people who need more structure than primitive camping, and therefore is more fair and inclusive. Gauge Station Road. Plan B & C. Closure of dispersed camping, Closure of road to motorized travel, Primitive campground area and a gate to prevent further driving. Very Important!! Stepping up and treating the WSA area more closely aligned with Wilderness Area guidelines is imperative here to prevent further degradation and abuse to the area by off road travel. Nichols Canyon: Plan B. Gila Lower Box ACEC indicates it is of concern but not to the point of wilderness.	In Chapter 2 of the RAMP, the alternatives currently being developed for the Gila Recreation Area Management Plan/Environmental Assessment have Alternative B as the proposed action and the preferred alternative. Fisherman's Point Alternative B proposes to manage the spur route from the junction with the county road to where the route heads downhill for motorized travel. Decommission and restore a portion of the spur route where it heads downhill. Manage the remainder of the spur route heading downhill to its terminus at Fisherman's Point for nonmotorized travel only Gauge Station Road – Thank you for your comment. Camping on public lands away from developed recreation facilities is referred to as dispersed camping. Most of the remainder of public lands are open to dispersed camping, as long as it does not conflict with other authorized uses or in areas posted "closed to camping," or in some way adversely affects wildlife species or natural resources. Under all alternatives some level of maintenance would be performed on Nichols Canyon Road.

COMMENT #	COMMENTOR	COMMENT	RESPONSE
016 *(cont.)*	*(See above.)*	The drivable road needs to be graded if further travel is going to be allowed. The planned point of blocking road travel is a good spot as it is severely eroded there. The non motorized portion is essential. Campground is located in a good area to allow diversity of activity. Beavers are doing a great deal of work in the area and they or a flood may make short work of a boat take out.	*(See above.)*
017	Public Land Visitor, plus attachment	I support and applaud BLM for this positive planning and NEPA work. I think that Alternative C, for minimal resource disturbance, would be the best choice. Public recreation is important but it should be carefully managed to avoid or minimize adverse resource impacts. I'm especially concerned about the rapidly worsening climate and biodiversity crises. I believe that BLM should strive to encourage a reduction in use of harmful fossil fuels and work to increase protection for special status species and their habitats. It is necessary that this and all other BLM planning take these crises and potential solutions into consideration. The attached recreation report may provide helpful information. Thanks for this great work and for considering my input	Thank you for your comment.

COMMENT #	COMMENTOR	COMMENT	RESPONSE
018	Mittelstadt, B	I favor development only to improve the Wilderness Quality of the area. Keeping cattle and motorized vehicles out. Fencing, gates, signs and more patrolling No boater access at Nichols Canyon. There is no reason to put in or take there. Boaters that ~~who~~ want to make the trip do. Also there are so few days a year that have enough water to make the trip. Above all Preserve the Wilderness.	Cows will continue to be kept out of the Gila Lower Box as a part of conformance with the Mimbres RMP. Thank you for your comment. The Environmental Assessment and RAMP is written to maintain and protect wilderness values of the Gila Lower Box Wilderness Study Area.
019	Mittlestadt, S.	I favor a continuation of minimal development of the area with an improvement in fencing, gates, and signs to protect the river corrido and ~~wilder~~ proposed wilderness. The proposed campground (future) is an inhospitable place and would require a dramatic increase in infrastructure maintenance. It seems to me resources are better spent protecting the wilderness values.	The Environmental Assessment and RAMP is written to maintain and protect wilderness values of the Gila Lower Box Wilderness Study Area.
020	Delgado et all.	Access to the Gila Lower Box Road at Caprock to Nichl[o]s Canyon Road Need to [Maintain] road [because] is in poor condition to allow public to the river and cotton wood area for fishing and [picnicking] grounds families and generations have use the lower Box Area's 1. Need to look at how to d[i]vert water at flooding 2. Need to have public facilities 3. A way to contain trash 4. Have signage for ATV & 4 wheel drives use 5. Work with Hidalgo County and Grant County on Road Maintenance improvements 6. Have a system to collect garbage 7. ADA compliant	There will still be access to the Nichols Canyon flood plain. The Mimbres Resource Management Plan provides BLM the framework to provide a primitive recreation experience and we have created a plan that is in line with these experiences. Building infrastructure in the Nichols Canyon flood plain is not in line with a primitive recreation experience. Hidalgo county currently maintains many of the roads into the Gila Lower Box including the Fisherman's point road, Spring on the Bluff road, and Fuller road, and White rock road are already Hidalgo County maintained roads.

COMMENT #	COMMENTOR	COMMENT	RESPONSE
021	Mora	Improved and easier access to Lower Box would be a great addition for area locals. Current conditions make access difficult, if not impossible for certain vehicles.	Thank you for your comment.
022	Lopez	A win for all, if we could just keep the road maintained, Make people aware of the impact we have on the area and respect that. We know no off the trail riding (The Rules). We all know about the petroglyphs just south of the box and how nice it would be to take the young people to see this. (Maybe get them away from the television). Nice day hike. I hope we can make this happen. That's just the start, there are several Native American sites I would like the people to see and know about (several on state & BLM Land) but close off [to] the public. (Ranchers illegally moving gate to private land and so on. A stor[y] for another time ?)	Thank you for your comment.
023	Anderson	When you put the boat ramp in you need it to be monitored 24 hours a day. Boats should be checked for Zebra and Quagga mussels. They could severely damage the water system. • How are you going to define the water's edge? • Are you doing e-coli monitoring? Who will do it? • Have you done a business plan or model as you are required to do? The proposed campground (if numbers exceed a certain point) is too close to the permittee's water and corral. It will cause conflict. The number to initiate the campground is too low and too subjective to BLM interpretation. The campground location is too far from the river. People aren't coming to camp in the desert, they are coming to see the lower box area. If a campground is put in, it should be staffed 24 hours a day, with water and sewage provided. Who is going to police all of the garbage?	Thank you for taking the time to provide us detailed comments and attending our public meeting for the Gila Lower Box Recreation Area Management Plan. Your comment on invasive species was especially useful and was taken into consideration. Edits were made to the alternatives in the Environmental Assessment (EA). We will be adding interpretation and signs to inform the public about invasive species and how to mitigate the impacts. Furthermore, for your other comments, defining the water's edge and monitoring for E. coli are outside of the scope of this EA. Traditionally the Surface Water Quality Bureau of the New Mexico Environmental Division completes testing yearly for surface water quality and identifies waters that are impaired including those that have high amounts of E. Coli specifically. The Surface Water

COMMENT #	COMMENTOR	COMMENT	RESPONSE
023 *(cont.)*	*(See above.)*	The Gila Lower Box WSA was carved out of one ranch to "protect and enhance the area for hunting, fishing, camping and sightseeing." The ACEC on the north end was largely private property. This where any campground should be located, rather than grabbing more ground used for grazing. Two pieces of land on the east end (upriver) are shown as being part of the RAMP. They do not join the downriver RAMP. Are these areas new? I have asked BLM this question and to this date received no response This is not acceptable… Who is going to maintain the roads, have them engineered to bring them back into some sort of useable road? Grant nor Hidalgo Counties have this kind of money? You want no opinions, but you are getting mine. This is a poorly done plan and should be thrown in the garbage where it belongs.	Quality Bureau administers these tests for the Environmental Protection Agency under the Clean Water Act. In Chapter 2 of the RAMP for the preferred alternative, the proposed Caprock Campground is .75 miles away from the nearest range infrastructure. The range infrastructure is also not visible from the proposed campground. The BLM has installed Trafx counters to accurately monitor the amount of use in and around the Gila Lower Box and will only use hard data in management decisions. We take the building of this campground very seriously and will not do so unless the data reflects a large trend upward. The Caprock Campground is proposed to provide access to more of the public who do not have four-wheel drive to get near the river corridor and will include more amenities like toilets to help offset human impacts. Under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act a business plan is only completed after a certain number of amenities are present. Currently there are not enough amenities in the area to warrant completing a business plan to charge fees. The BLM has sent Mr. Anderson an email on 12/06/2023 explaining the Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) boundary. If he would like further information on this subject, we are happy to provide it. Lastly regarding maintenance of roads in the area, the Fisherman's Point Road, Spring on the Bluff Road, Fuller Road, and White Rock Road are already Hidalgo County maintained roads and are kept up to standards.

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Appendix H

Contrast Rating Sheet

Form 8400-4

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
VISUAL CONTRAST RATING WORKSHEET

Date: April 11, 2024

District/ Field Office: Las Cruces District Office

Resource Area: Mimbres RMP

Activity (program): Recreation

SECTION A. PROJECT INFORMATION

1. Project Name	4. Location	5. Location Sketch
Gila Lower Box RAMP	Township_019S0_____	
2. Key Observation Point KOP 1 – Spring on the Bluff	Range_020W_____	
3. VRM Class VRM Class 1	Section_026_____	

SECTION B. CHARACTERISTIC LANDSCAPE DESCRIPTION

	1. LAND/WATER	2. VEGETATION	3. STRUCTURES
FORM	Flat to rolling terrain	Simple forms created by vegetative patterns	N/A
LINE	Undulating and simple	Irregular	N/A
COLOR	Light tans, browns	Brown, green, pale yellow yellow	N/A
TEX-TURE	Course with smooth patches	Uneven and irregular with medium spacing	N/A

SECTION C. PROPOSED ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

	1. LAND/WATER	2. VEGETATION	3. STRUCTURES
FORM	Flat	N/A	Linear
LINE	Horizontal (cable) Vertical (post)	N/A	Horizontal (cable) Vertical (post)
COLOR	Light tan, browns	N/A	Brown
TEX-TURE	Smooth	N/A	Uniform and continuous

SECTION D. CONTRAST RATING __SHORT TERM _X_LONG TERM

1. DEGREE OF CONTRAST		FEATURES: LAND/WATER BODY (1)				VEGETATION (2)				STRUCTURES (3)			
		STRONG	MODERATE	WEAK	NONE	STRONG	MODERATE	WEAK	NONE	STRONG	MODERATE	WEAK	NONE
ELEMENTS	FORM			X					X			X	
	LINE			X					X			X	
	COLOR				X				X				X
	TEXTURE				X				X				X

2. Does project design meet visual resource management objectives? _X_Yes ___No (Explain on reverses side)

3. Additional mitigating measures recommended _X_Yes ___No (Explain on reverses side)

Evaluator's Names: A. Bettinger

Date: 04/11/2024

SECTION D. (Continued)

Comments from item 2.

Additional Mitigating Measures (See item 3)

1.Reduce the size of cut-and-fill slopes. Consider:a.relocating to an area with less slope
b.changing road width, grade, etc.
c.changing alignment to follow existing grades
d.prohibiting dumping of excess material on downhill slopes
2.Reduce earthwork contrasts. Consider:a.rounding and/or warping slopes
b.retaining rocks, trees, drainage, etc.
c.toning down freshly broken rock faces with asphalt emulsion spray or with graypaint
d.adding mulch, hydromulch, or topsoil
e.shaping cuts and fills to appear as natural forms
f.cutting rock areas so forms are irregular
g.designing to take advantage of natural screens (i.e., vegetation, landforms)
h.grass seeding of cuts and fills
3.Maintain the integrity of topographic units. Consider:a.locating projects away from prominent topographic features
b.designing projects to blend with topographic forms in shape and placement
4.Minimize the number of visible structures.
5.Minimize structure contrast. Consider:a.using earth-tone paints and stains
b.using self-weathering steel
c.treating wood for self-weathering
d.using natural stone surfaces
e.burying all or part of the structure
f.selecting paint finishes with low levels of reflectivity (i.e., flat or semi-gloss)
6.Redesign structures that do not blend/fit. Consider:
a.using rustic designs and native building materials
b.using natural appearing forms to complement landscape character (use specialdesigns only as a last resort)
c.relocating structure
7.Recognize the value and limitations of color. Consider:
a.that color (hue) is most effective within 1,000 feet; beyond that point, colorbecomes more difficult to distinguish, and tone or value determines visibility andresulting visual contrast
b.that using color has limited effectiveness (in the background distance zone) inreducing visual impacts on structures that are silhouetted against the sky
c.painting structures somewhat darker than the adjacent landscape to compensatefor the effects of shade and shadow
d.selecting color to blend with the land and not the sky