

APPENDIX G. SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS AND BLM RESPONSES

Archaeology Southwest (ArchSW)	Comment Text	Responses
ArchSW.6	<p>Two Overarching Flaws in the EA Relating to Cultural Resources</p> <p>The ASW mission dictates the focus of the remainder of these comments on two primary, overarching, and related issues. First, and as explained to BLM in prior communications with affected Tribes (especially the 17 September 2024 letter from San Carlos Apache Tribe Chairman Rambler), BLM has failed and is failing to meet its fiduciary and regulatory requirements, especially pursuant to Department of the Interior, Departmental Manual, Part 512, Chapter 5, Procedures for Consultation with Indian Tribes § 5.4 (Nov. 30, 2022). Chairman Rambler’s letter affirms that the in-progress drilling is affecting lands the Tribe regards as “sensitive and fragile” and that “the drilling may be affecting the Tribe’s cultural and ancestral resources, water rights, and downstream interests.” Because a Tribe has requested in-depth consultation and BLM has not completed meaningful consultations, the EA is incomplete and premature, especially as regards cultural and water resource identification and harm assessment.</p>	<p>The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with the San Carlos Apache Tribe to address concerns. The BLM has made several attempts to consult and discuss the project throughout its duration with the San Carlos Apache Tribe Leadership and Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.</p>
ArchSW.8	<p>Instead of using this definition and seeking to place the lands and resources affected by the ongoing and proposed exploratory drilling into geographical, historical, and cultural contexts, the EA relies exclusively on cultural resource surveys conducted by archaeologists and limited to the identification of archaeological resources and historic properties within and adjacent to drilling and road impact areas. Instead of heeding advice from San Carlos Apache Tribe and lessons learned from the nearby SunZia powerline installation, BLM has ignored its obligations to identify and analyze the full spectrum of cultural resources. The EA fails to analyze the high probability that the ongoing drilling has adversely impacted and is continuing to impact cultural resources associated with land, water, and plant and animal communities. The proposed continuation and expansion of the drilling will exacerbate these significant and adverse impacts.</p>	<p>The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with the San Carlos Apache Tribe to address concerns. The BLM has made several attempts to consult and discuss the project throughout its duration with the San Carlos Apache Tribe Leadership and Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.</p>

ArchSW.10	<p>Ten Substantive Comments and Associated Recommendations</p> <p>1. Additional cultural resource surveys, analyses, and Tribal consultations are needed to understand Copper Creek cultural landscapes. The EA confirms that the Class III cultural resource surveys conducted in Copper Creek in 2007 and 2011 inspected only limited areas targeted for proposed drilling operations. These surveys improved knowledge of large and complexly interrelated cultural resources, including the town of Copper Creek, Copper Creek Road, and Copper Creek Railroad. The prior surveys indicate the presence of one or more districts eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places, yet the EA claims without further evidence, analysis that “the Proposed Action would have no adverse effect on any historic properties” (EA, pg 16).</p> <p>This dubious conclusion is offered without any holistic or synthetic evaluation of the greater Copper Creek area or of indirect or cumulative drilling impacts on these sensitive and significant cultural resources (see Figures 2-5). The conclusion is offered despite the clear statement from the San Carlos Apache Tribe as to the presence of cultural resources unlikely to be detected by archaeologists. The EA ignores BLM obligations to consider impacts on cultural resources beyond the confines of road and drillpad disturbance. Those direct impacts have the clear potential to be significant and to promise indirect and cumulative impacts through time.</p>	<p>Additional explanation of the APE and Class III survey area has been added to Appendix A of the EA. BLM appropriately narrowed its review of potential impacts from road and drilling activity (totaling 18 acres of surface disturbance) on cultural resources in the area. Concurrence of no adverse effects was requested from SHPO on October 25, 2024 via certified letter and a response was received on November 14, 2024.</p>
ArchSW.13	<p>Of particular concern is the expansion of roads without consideration of the effects on historic features, such as hand-built rock retaining walls (Figure 3). The EA claim that historic sites are “not affected to a degree that detailed analysis is required” (EA Appendix A, pg 2) is unsupported. At a minimum, an archaeologist should be present during road expansion operations to ensure that historic features are not affected.</p>	<p>Additional explanation of the APE and Class III survey area has been added to Appendix A of the EA. BLM appropriately narrowed its review of potential impacts from road and drilling activity (totaling 18 acres of surface disturbance) on cultural resources in the area. Concurrence of no adverse effects was requested from SHPO on October 25, 2024 via certified letter and a response was received on November 14, 2024.</p>

ArchSW.16	<p>All reasonably foreseeable impacts to cultural resources require analysis and planning to avoid and reduce impacts to resource significance and integrity. Further consideration of the Copper Creek mining district's historic significance is required to assess drilling impacts and to facilitate the district's management treatments, including interpretation and protection, in relation to the proposed drilling, roadwork, etc. BLM is advised to more holistically evaluate direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to the Copper Creek town site and Copper Creek Road and Railroad. Expanded cultural resource identification surveys and synthetic investigations are needed to improve understanding of the Indigenous and Non-Indigenous history and archaeology of the Copper Creek watershed and vicinity. Consultations are required to incorporate Apache and O'odham understandings of the area's cultural resources, history, integrity and significance</p>	<p>Additional explanation of the APE and Class III survey area has been added to Appendix A of the EA. BLM appropriately narrowed its review of potential impacts from road and drilling activity (totaling 18 acres of surface disturbance) on cultural resources in the area. Concurrence of no adverse effects was requested from SHPO on October 25, 2024 via certified letter and a response was received on November 14, 2024.</p>
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ArchSW.21

It is likely that Indigenous cultural resources have been obscured, destroyed, or removed. Additional cultural resource identification fieldwork—this time conducted in meaningful consultation with affected Tribes—is required to better understand the Indigenous cultural landscape and significance of the project area. Class III surveys should be expanded to address areas less directly impacted by mining, places where there is a higher probability of identifying Indigenous cultural resources, including traditional cultural properties (TCPs).

The EA states that letters were sent to Tribes in early 2023 and that no TCPs were identified in the project area (EA Appendix A, pg 2). However, this statement apparently discounts requirements for government-to-government consultation regarding the ongoing and proposed drilling. This statement and the EA also ignore relevant findings from ongoing consultations with Tribes regarding the SunZia Southwest Transmission Project in the San Pedro Valley. In numerous letters and meetings, the Tohono O’odham Nation, San Carlos Apache Tribe, and other Tribes have advised BLM to conduct a cultural landscape study of the San Pedro Valley. The Tribes have declared the San Pedro Valley to be a TCP, of which Copper Creek may be a part. A landscape-scale assessment, completed in consultation with affected Tribes, is necessary to assess the landscape-scale impacts of the proposed action on cultural resources, including TCPs.

Westland (on behalf of the BLM) completed the class III survey within the appropriately determined APE. SHPO Concurrence of no adverse effects was received.

Appendix A of the EA has been updated in response to public comment to acknowledge the importance of the San Pedro Valley to Tribes.

ArchSW.22	<p>2. Saguaros and agaves within and adjacent to impact areas should be understood as cultural resources and respectfully removed from harm's way. Saguaros and agaves hold significant cultural value for Tribes associated with Copper Creek and are important to local residents alike. The EA ignores these facts and fails to discuss or analyze the impacts of the proposed action on these species.</p> <p>Has:an (saguaro) are sacred to O'odham peoples and are present in the vicinity of the proposed drilling and road construction (Figure 6). In 2021, The Tohono O'odham Nation (TON) Legislative Council passed Resolution 21-137, which declares that "the Tohono O'odham and sister O'odham tribes, hold the Ha:san in the highest regard and consider the Ha:san as an O'odham person." The Resolution "calls on all entities, state, and federal agencies to reverse the destruction of sacred plants associated with O'odham traditions" and to "Enter into proper government-to-government consultation with the Tohono O'odham Nation whenever ... federal or state projects may potentially affect saguaros on the Tohono O'odham Nation or on or around the O'odham aboriginal lands" (Tohono O'odham Legislative Council, 2021). Unless the TO Nation has been notified of impacts to saguaros BLM must conduct additional Tribal outreach with TON to determine their values and preferences regarding this species.</p>	<p>Appendix A of the EA has been updated to clarify that Saguaros and Agaves have not been found to be present in the areas of proposed surface disturbance related to this project. Section 2.2.10 of the EA has been updated on the Best Management Practice if a Saguaro or Agave is found in the surface disturbing area</p>
ArchSW.24	<p>Figure 6. Saguaro cacti along the slopes of Copper Creek. Coordinates: 32.748375, -110.500678</p>	<p>Appendix A of the EA has been updated to clarify that Saguaros and Agaves have not been found to be present in the areas of proposed surface disturbance related to this project. Section 2.2.10 of the EA has been updated on the Best Management Practice if a Saguaro or Agave is found in the surface disturbing area</p>
ArchSW.25	<p>Agaves similarly warrant respectful considerations, assessments, and treatments to protect individual plants, groupings, and possible field areas from unplanned and unnecessary impacts (Figure 7). Representatives of the Hohokam archaeological culture (A.D. 300-1450) managed extensive dryland agricultural fields to grow agaves. These fields are typically located on slopes above river floodplains, on bajadas close to mountains, and on alluvial fans (Clark and Lyons, 2012; Fish et al., 1985; Gumerman 1991). The San Pedro Valley contains numerous and extensive Hohokam dryland agricultural fields.</p>	<p>Appendix A of the EA has been updated to clarify that Saguaros and Agaves have not been found to be present in the areas of proposed surface disturbance related to this project. Section 2.2.10 of the EA has been updated on the Best Management Practice if a Saguaro or Agave is found in the surface disturbing area</p>

ArchSW.27	Figure 7. Agave in Copper Creek. Coordinates: 32.750867, -110.4813.	Appendix A of the EA has been updated to clarify that Saguaros and Agaves have not been found to be present in the areas of proposed surface disturbance related to this project. Section 2.2.10 of the EA has been updated on the Best Management Practice if a Saguaro or Agave is found in the surface disturbing area
ArchSW.28	<p>Through ongoing work that began in the early 1990s, botanists at the Desert Botanical Garden have identified six pre-contact agave domesticates (PCADs) that have persisted on cultural sites for many centuries. PCADs that may occur in or adjacent to areas proposed for drilling include <i>Agave murpheyi</i>, <i>Agave phillipsiana</i>, and <i>Agave sanpedroensis</i> (Hodgson et al. 2023). <i>Agave sanpedroensis</i> is one of the rarest agave species, with less than one hundred known individuals living near where their forebears were cultivated. Although unmistakably endangered, PCADs are domesticated and are not considered under the Endangered Species Act.</p> <p>In addition to associations with Hohokam culture, agaves are culturally, historically, and economically important to O’odham and Apache peoples. Agave hearts are harvested, roasted, and dried for stable storage and exchange. Agave roasting areas are common features across upland Arizona and New Mexico. Saguaros and agaves embody the cultural heritage of the Sonoran uplands. Preservation-oriented treatment of these genera aligns with Arizona State law, which designates them as “Highly safeguarded native plants” and requires permits for removal or translocation (3 A.A.C. 3, Supp. 16 1, 2016). Safeguarding saguaros and agaves honors and respects the natural environment and the cultural landscapes of the Indigenous landowners.</p> <p>The next NEPA document should identify all cultural resources and assess the impacts of the proposed action on botanical cultural resources, notably including saguaros and agaves.</p>	Appendix A of the EA has been updated to clarify that Saguaros and Agaves have not been found to be present in the areas of proposed surface disturbance related to this project. Section 2.2.10 of the EA has been updated on the Best Management Practice if a Saguaro or Agave is found in the surface disturbing area
ArchSW.29	<p>3. Unnecessary roads should be reclaimed to restore wildlife habitat and connectivity without limiting recreation.</p> <p>The Copper Creek area has many miles of redundant roads (Figures 8 and 9), one harmful byproduct of a century of mining. High road densities diminish scenic and recreation values, increase habitat fragmentation, enable soil erosion, introduce invasive plants, and impact most types of cultural resources.</p>	The project includes a reclamation plan see EA Section 2.2.11. Reclamation would be completed to the standards described in 43 CFR 3809.420(b)(3) and the reclamation objectives outlined in BLM Handbooks H-3042-1 and H-3809-1.

ArchSW.35	<p>The next NEPA document should study road histories and future road uses to build knowledge for use in treatment plans. Such studies should gather and analyze data pertaining to the historical development and future demands on the road network, erosion concerns, invasive species types and distributions, impacts on wildlife, etc. Transportation Management Manual (BLM Manual 1626, pg 4-4) provides guidance for decommissioning surplus routes. In alignment with BLM's mandates to enable mineral exploration without disabling recreational and scenic values, the next NEPA document should evaluate additional roads for reclamation. By doing this, the natural and ecological values of Copper Creek can be enhanced without limiting public access or recreational values.</p>	<p>The BLM Aravaipa Ecosystem Management Plan (2012) designated the Copper Creek Road as an open route; however, additional development of a travel management plan is outside the scope of this project. While the project would not result in any new access routes, some existing routes would be widened and maintained in the area as described in Table 2-5 in the EA.</p>
ArchSW.36	<p>4. One or more rights-of-way are required to ensure public access to Copper Creek.</p> <p>Braces for gates have recently been installed on roads formerly used for public recreation, including a gate on Copper Creek Road at 32.750858, -110.517831 (Figure 10). Because all roads into Copper Creek traverse land now owned by Redhawk Copper, these braces indicate the threats of road closures and loss of public vehicular access into Copper Creek. Copper Creek is well-loved for camping, hiking, hunting, ORV use, and historical explorations (Figure 11). The next NEPA document should analyze options to guarantee public access into Copper Creek.</p>	<p>See 2.2.11 for monitoring and fulfillment of revegetation</p>
ArchSW.41	<p>5. A project-specific timeline is required to provide the public with certainty about the project's duration.</p> <p>The EA describes the Copper Creek Exploration Project drilling operations as occurring "24 hours per day, 365 days per year, as weather permits, for 2 to 3 years," although drilling would realistically occur for nine months out of the year (EA, pg 10). This drilling is intrusive, dusty, water-consumptive, and off-putting to recreationists and wildlife. The sounds of heavy machinery echoing through the canyon and the smell of diesel fumes are out of place and impactful to both the cultural and recreational landscapes. This amount and intensity of drilling constitutes a significant and adverse impact to the area. The next NEPA document should specify an end date for the drilling operations.</p>	<p>This is addressed in Section 2.2.3 of the EA.</p>

ArchSW.42	<p>That document should also include more and more meaningful avoidance and mitigation measures for the drilling. For transparency and to enable assessment of impacts, some of which depend on duration, the public needs to know the approximate start date, duration, and end date of the proposed action. A draft environmental impact statement (EIS) is needed to analyze, avoid, and reduce these significant impacts.</p>	<p>The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS.</p>
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ArchSW.43	<p>6. Stockpiled topsoil needs signage to ensure proper identification when implementing the Reclamation Plan.</p> <p>The EA describes how “topsoil would be salvaged and stockpiled as part of the sidecast to form berms on the edge of the disturbance areas in advance of any construction, for use in reclamation at the conclusion of drilling activities, per BLM guidance H3809-1 Section 5.3.3.2.1 (BLM 2012b)” (EA, pg 7). Native topsoils—and the native seed banks, nutrients, and microbiota therein—are critical for successful revegetation. However, neither BLM guidance H3809-1 nor the EA specify procedures needed to effectively manage stockpiled topsoil for reclamation (Figure 12). Although identification may be possible if the same employees that removed the topsoil also implement reclamation efforts, this is supposition. At a minimum, we recommend durable signage or high-precision mapping of topsoil stockpiles to facilitate reclamation work.</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment.</p>
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ArchSW.46	<p>7. Water bars and other measures for erosion control should be maintained after road grading.</p> <p>Visits by Archaeology Southwest staff and associates have observed berms in water bars caused by road grading which would prevent proper drainage during rainfall events. The EA states that “bladed roads would have water bars constructed, as needed, at BLM-recommended spacing” in accordance with BLM’s Primitive Road Design Handbook H-9115-1 (EA, pg 11). However, it appears that constructed water bars are not being maintained after road maintenance activities. Although the Primitive Road Design Handbook does not specifically address maintenance, it is necessary to ensure proper drainage. The next NEPA document should specify maintenance of water bars whenever roads are re-graded.</p>	<p>The inspection and maintenance of sediment controls is required under the MSGP issued for the SWPPP by ADEQ, as outlined in section 2.2.10.</p>
ArchSW.47	<p>8. The baseline groundcover data is insufficient as a basis for revegetation monitoring.</p> <p>For revegetation monitoring in the Reclamation Plan, the EA describes how “Redhawk would conduct line-point intercept transects on 10 percent of the proposed pads prior to project disturbance of the pads, to provide a measure of baseline cover. Redhawk would also conduct a line-point intercept transect on a reference pad; a pad previously disturbed that will not be used by Redhawk for the project” (EA, pg 20). No single reference pad or transect can provide adequate baseline data. BLM needs more than a single reference pad to assess impacts and direct revegetation efforts. BLM needs to account for annual and seasonal variation in groundcover. The next NEPA document needs to explain and justify how the methods used to assess groundcover and guide revegetation are based on knowledge of temporal factors and elevation-slope-aspect variation of specific sites within the canyon. At least three reference pads should be selected to understand variation across microbiomes.</p>	<p>The BLM has used the best available science with the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Web Soil Survey (WSS), which provides electronic access to soil and related information for making land-use and management decisions. The Ecosystem Dynamics Interpretive Tool (EDIT) is an information system for the development and sharing of Ecological Site Descriptions (ESDs). Soil types and ESDs are gleaned from these internet sources, and the seed mix is designed based on grasses and forbs which are suitable for and typically present in the specific location of the project area. Species will be also be informed by the baseline data, which will collect line-point intercept data from 10% of the 67 pad sites, thus no less than 6 pads. Additionally, the BLM has Terrestrial AIM vegetative data collected for undisturbed areas near the Copper Creek project site, which could provide meaningful information regarding species present in the vicinity. The species ultimately selected for the seed mix are chosen for reasons including quick establishment, ability to grow in disturbed areas, facilitation of erosion control, pollinator-friendliness, and lack of additional scarification of seeds necessary for germination (i.e. many shrub species). A seed mix design will be prepared by the BLM specialist for the applicant to complete the revegetation work. The final mix of species used in reclamation is dependent on which species' seeds are available from reputable distributors. The BLM will also provide this information to the applicant. Additionally, if shrubs and/or trees are removed due to project activities, the BLM may additionally require seedlings or saplings to be planted in addition to broadcast seeding, as stated in the Reclamation Plan, Section 2.2.11.</p>

ArchSW.48	<p>9. Bighorn sheep movement data should be evaluated to determine if the project area serves as a corridor between the Aravaipa Canyon and Redfield Canyon populations.</p> <p>The Draft EA lists bighorn sheep as a priority species and notes their presence in the area (EA pg 28, Appendix C pg 10, Appendix D pg 24). Beyond that important recognition, there is no discussion or evaluation of project impacts to this species. Copper Creek is part of a corridor that links bighorn sheep populations in the Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness and Redfield Canyon Wilderness areas. Because it is inarguable that long-term industrial drilling in shrinking habitat is beneficial to bighorn sheep, additional research and analysis is required to assess the levels and types of drilling impacts on this species.</p> <p>Specific analysis is required to assess drilling impacts on connectivity among bighorn sheep populations. At a minimum, the AZGFD bighorn sheep GPS data should be queried to determine when the project area and nearby habitat was most recently used by bighorn sheep and how the drilling will impact the Aravaipa and Redfield populations and the connections between them. The next NEPA document should provide specific measures for avoiding and mitigating impacts to bighorn sheep. These measures might include limits on project-related vehicle traffic and other operations when bighorn sheep are most active on daily or seasonal bases, limits on impacts to ridgelines that are known crossing points, and other ways to protect and sustain bighorn sheep.</p>	<p>Collar data through this wildlife movement corridor is limited, but nearby movement patterns and the landscape suggest it is likely being used by bighorn sheep and is important for connectivity. The project area lies within the broader range of multiple bighorn sheep populations and serves as a potential link between distinct habitat areas. Issue statement #3 of the EA addresses impacts to wildlife movement corridors from the proposed action and cumulative impacts. Several big game species - including bighorn sheep - are implied users of the wildlife movement corridor analyzed.</p>
ArchSW.49	<p>10. A wildlife camera study should be implemented to monitor impacts to mammal populations and diversity.</p> <p>The EA provides minimal information on wildlife populations and diversity and little analysis of the types and levels of impacts on nonhuman animals. Given the lack of locally relevant and reliable baseline information and the likelihood that the proposed drilling will enable additional and more impactful mining operations, more and better data on species presence and diversity is needed.</p>	<p>This has been added to section 2.2.10 Design Features for Wildlife in response to public comment.</p>

ArchSW.52	<p>The next NEPA document should include the results of one or more wildlife camera studies. Cameras could improve knowledge about animal uses of travel routes and corridors, roads, water sources (Figure 13), and nearby roadless areas. Such studies would inform BLM and others about which species are present, how they interact with landscapes, and how their behaviors reflect environmental conditions, including changes relating to drilling and variations in temperature and precipitation. Such knowledge would establish baselines, improve understanding of project impacts, and facilitate specification of alternatives for effective impact avoidance and mitigation efforts.</p>	<p>This has been added to section 2.2.10 Design Features for Wildlife in response to public comment.</p>
ArchSW.53	<p>Conclusions</p> <p>We appreciate BLM's EA for the Copper Creek Exploration Project and its incorporation of an Adaptive Management Plan to address potential hydrologic impacts. In light of the two fundamental flaws and the 10 related concerns with the EA described above, BLM is advised to prepare a draft environmental impact statement (EIS). Only an EIS can address the full spectra of resources and resource values affected by the proposed drilling and assess and require all pertinent measures for impact avoidance and mitigation.</p> <p>If BLM elects to discount the highly controversial, significant, and consequential impacts of the proposed drilling operations and proceeds with a final EA, that document should either select the No Action Alternative or should address our concerns and incorporate our recommendations in the Preferred Action Alternative. Regardless of how BLM decides to proceed, the Copper Creek area and its cultural heritage and natural environment needs and deserves respectful treatment to uphold public interests in these public lands. BLM is uniquely positioned to balance mineral exploration with the long-term stewardship of this special place.</p> <p>Please contact us for further discussion, information, or clarification. Sincerely,</p>	<p>The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS.</p>

Center for Biological Diversity (CBD)	Comment Text	Commenter Name	Responses
CBD.14	Upon review, it is clear that the proposed project has the potential to result in significant environmental effects within the meaning of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), triggering the need for a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) under 43 CFR 46.415(a).	Russ McSpadden	<p>The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS.</p> <p>The proposal that is before the BLM at this time is for consideration and analysis of exploratory drilling. The BLM does not have an application for a future copper mine that is associated with the exploratory drilling. Therefore it would be speculative at this time for the BLM to consider and analyze a future copper mine associated with the exploratory drilling - even as a reasonably foreseeable future action in the cumulative effects analysis. When and if applications and permits are filed for a future copper mine, the BLM would initiate a new NEPA process for the future copper mine and would consider impacts to resources and associated mitigation at that time.</p>
CBD.15	Moreover, BLM's review and proposed approval of the Project must be evaluated in the context of BLM's ongoing unlawful management of this project, including its premature and unlawful approval of Notice-Level drilling on May 1, 2024, for Faraday Copper. That Notice-Level approval—which authorized drilling on the very same pads, in the very same project area, for the very same project proponent currently under review in this EA—was both procedurally and substantively unlawful. This premature approval and the ongoing, authorized Notice-Level drilling, which is permitted to continue through 2026, undermines the integrity of the current environmental review and raises serious concerns about segmentation, prejudgment of alternatives, and compliance with mandatory Tribal consultation requirements that BLM blatantly ignored. BLM's failure to address or correct these violations within the Draft EA exacerbates its deficiencies and demonstrates a continuing pattern of NEPA noncompliance.	Russ McSpadden	<p>The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS.</p> <p>The BLM acknowledged the notice level operations under 43 CFR 3809.300 which does not require NEPA for notice level operations that are under 5 acres. The BLM accepted the Notice as complete under 43 CFR 3809.301 and qualified as notice-level activity per 3809.11. The BLM adequately incorporated notice-level activities across all alternatives considered in the EA, further precluding the need for an EIS.</p>
CBD.16	As detailed below, BLM's review and proposed approval of the Project violates several federal laws, including the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Clean Air Act (CAA), the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and other federal laws and regulations. At a minimum, due to the likely potential for significant impacts, BLM must prepare a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for this Project.	Russ McSpadden	<p>The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS.</p> <p>43 CFR 3809.21 defines segmentation as a "series of Notices for the purpose of avoiding filing a Plan of Operations". To date, the BLM has acknowledged one notice level operation. The BLM describes the notice level operations that are currently taking place in the Copper Creek project area in the EA Chapter 2. The BLM describes and includes the notice level operations in the impact analysis sections as part of the affected environment.</p>
CBD.17	1.BLM's Unlawful Notice-Level Approval Compounds the Draft EA's Violations and Demonstrates a Pattern of Procedural and Substantive NEPA Failures The EA for the Copper Creek Exploration Project must be evaluated in the context of BLM's ongoing unlawful management of this project, including its premature and illegal approval of Notice-Level drilling on May 1, 2024, for Faraday Copper. Faraday Copper understood BLM's intent clearly as an approval of drilling for the Copper Creek Project and published a press release online titled "Faraday Copper Receives Approval From the Bureau of Land Management for Its Notice of Intent To Conduct Drilling at Its Copper Creek Project in Arizona." ¹ ¹ "Faraday Copper Receives Approval from the Bureau of Land Management for Drilling at the Copper Creek Project," Faraday Copper, March 13, 2024, https://faradaycopper.com/news-releases/faraday-copper-receives-approval-from-the-bureau-o-8863/ .	Russ McSpadden	43 CFR 3809.21 defines segmentation as a "series of Notices for the purpose of avoiding filing a Plan of Operations". To date, the BLM has acknowledged one notice level operation. The BLM describes the notice level operations that are currently taking place in the Copper Creek project area in the EA Chapter 2. The BLM describes and includes the notice level operations in the impact analysis sections as part of the affected environment.
CBD.18	That Notice-Level approval—which authorized drilling on the very same pads, in the very same project area, for the very same project proponent currently under review in this EA— was both procedurally and substantively unlawful. BLM's failure to address or correct this violation within the EA exacerbates the deficiencies of the EA itself, compounding the violations and demonstrating a continuing pattern of NEPA noncompliance.	Russ McSpadden	43 CFR 3809.21 defines segmentation as a "series of Notices for the purpose of avoiding filing a Plan of Operations". To date, the BLM has acknowledged one notice level operation. The BLM describes the notice level operations that are currently taking place in the Copper Creek project area in the EA Chapter 2. The BLM describes and includes the notice level operations in the impact analysis sections as part of the affected environment.
CBD.20	• EA § 1.1 (Background, p. 1) – Mentions the applicant's prior notice-level activities but does not assess their environmental impact.	Russ McSpadden	<p>In response to your comment BLM has added additional information regarding the notice-level activities in Chapter 2 and 3 of the EA.</p> <p>The BLM has included the notice level operations in the cumulative effects analysis as a present and ongoing action throughout the EA in chapter 3, thus, the notice level operations are considered as part of the full scope of related actions and included in the impact analysis sections, including cumulative impacts.</p>
CBD.21	• EA § 2.2 (Proposed Action Alternative, p. 5-6) – Describes expansion of existing Notice-level operations but does not analyze their prior impact on site conditions.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM has included the notice level operations in the cumulative effects analysis as a present and ongoing action throughout the EA in chapter 3, thus, the notice level operations are considered as part of the full scope of related actions and included in the impact analysis sections, including cumulative impacts.

CBD.22	<p>• EA § 3.4 (Issues Analyzed in Detail, p. 37-67) – Includes analyses of wildlife and water issues but does not incorporate Notice-Level activities.</p>	Russ McSpadden	<p>The BLM has included the notice level operations in the cumulative effects analysis as a present and ongoing action throughout the EA in chapter 3, thus, the notice level operations are considered as part of the full scope of related actions and included in the impact analysis sections, including cumulative impacts.</p>
CBD.24	<p>By authorizing drilling under a separate Notice-Level approval while simultaneously preparing this Draft EA, BLM unlawfully segmented the project into disconnected pieces, directly undermining NEPA's requirement to consider connected, cumulative, and similar actions in a single, unified environmental review. See 43 CFR 46.115.1.2 The Draft EA fails to:</p> <p>2 The Draft EA, at 2-3, relies on CEQ's NEPA regulations at 40 CFR 1500 et seq. Because recent federal court decisions, Executive Orders, and actions by the Council on Environmental Quality arguably vacate or rescind those regulations, see, e.g., K. Scarlett, CEQ, Memo on Implementation of the National Environmental Policy Act (Feb. 19, 2025), available at https://ceq.doe.gov/docs/ceq-regulations-and-guidance/CEQ-Memo-Implementation-of-NEPA-02.19.2025.pdf, we request that BLM clarify what NEPA guidance and direction it is relying on to prepare any subsequent NEPA document.</p>	Russ McSpadden	<p>43 CFR 3809.21 defines segmentation as a "series of Notices for the purpose of avoiding filing a Plan of Operations". To date, the BLM has acknowledged one notice level operation. The BLM describes the notice level operations that are currently taking place in the Copper Creek project area in the EA Chapter 2. The BLM describes and includes the notice level operations in the impact analysis sections as part of the affected environment. The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in EA sections 3.3, 3.4.1.4, 3.4.1.6, 3.4.2.4, 3.4.2.6, 2.4.3.4, 2.4.3.6, 2.4.4.4, and 2.4.4.6. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA Section 3.3. If BLM were to receive future applications from the applicant that would require subsequent NEPA documentation, the BLM would follow the most recent NEPA guidance and direction available at that time.</p> <p>The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 7B ranch.</p> <p>43 CFR 3809.21 defines segmentation as a "series of Notices for the purpose of avoiding filing a Plan of Operations". To date, the BLM has acknowledged one notice level operation. The BLM describes the notice level operations that are currently taking place in the Copper Creek project area in the EA Chapter 2. The BLM describes and includes the notice level operations in the impact analysis sections as part of the affected environment.</p>
CBD.26	<p>• Analyze how the already-approved Notice drilling irreversibly impacts the baseline conditions for the EA's analysis.</p>	Russ McSpadden	<p>The notice level drilling impacts are analyzed in the No Action Alternative and in the Affected Environment for each of the resources analyzed in detail thereby analyzing how the notice level drilling impacts the baseline conditions. Additional analysis has been added to Chapter 3 of the EA.</p>
CBD.27	<p>• Assess how past and ongoing disturbance at those pads affects future cumulative impacts, particularly to species, water, and cultural sites.</p>	Russ McSpadden	<p>See response to CBD.24</p> <p>The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 7B ranch.</p>
CBD.28	<p>This segmentation fractures the environmental review into artificially narrow slices, evading comprehensive analysis of the whole action, which NEPA prohibits. BLM's refusal to confront this in the EA—despite having been directly informed of the violation through formal Tribal and organizational letters—renders the Draft EA legally deficient on its face.</p>	Russ McSpadden	<p>See response to CBD.24</p> <p>43 CFR 3809.21 defines segmentation as a "series of Notices for the purpose of avoiding filing a Plan of Operations". To date, the BLM has acknowledged one notice level operation. The BLM describes the notice level operations that are currently taking place in the Copper Creek project area in the EA Chapter 2. The BLM describes and includes the notice level operations in the impact analysis sections as part of the affected environment.</p>
CBD.30	<p>The BLM's regulations limit notice operations to those causing surface disturbance of 5 acres or less, and all other mineral exploration projects that exceed 5 acres require a PoO. 43 C.F.R. § 3809.21. BLM regulations prohibit segmentation of notice level operations to avoid filing of a Plan of Operations ("PoO"). 43 C.F.R. § 3809.21(b). Here, BLM approved notice operations for exploration despite the very same exploration operations being included within an existing PoO from the same project proponent, for the same purposes, the same drill pads, the same mineral deposit, and the same BLM managed lands. Such an end-run around is unlawful.</p>	Russ McSpadden	<p>See response to CBD.24</p> <p>43 CFR 3809.21 defines segmentation as a "series of Notices for the purpose of avoiding filing a Plan of Operations". To date, the BLM has acknowledged one notice level operation. The BLM describes the notice level operations that are currently taking place in the Copper Creek project area in the EA Chapter 2. The BLM describes and includes the notice level operations in the impact analysis sections as part of the affected environment.</p>
CBD.31	<p>NEPA also prohibits agencies from segmenting a larger project into smaller pieces to avoid a more rigorous environmental review. On May 2, 2024, Faraday Copper published a press release announcing approval from BLM for its notice level operations to conduct drilling on 11 drill pads at its Copper Creek Project in Arizona. Because they involve the same company, the same "project area," the same drill pads, the same mineral deposits, and would not occur but for the same potential mining development, Faraday's exploratory drilling sites and its Plan of Operations are connected and cumulative actions under NEPA. 3 Center for Biological Diversity, Letter to BLM: Notice of Intent on Drill Sites, May 21, 2024, https://www.coppercreekmine.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Center_Letter_BLM_11_NOI_Drill_Sites_May_21_2024.pdf.</p>	Russ McSpadden	<p>See response to CBD.24</p> <p>43 CFR 3809.21 defines segmentation as a "series of Notices for the purpose of avoiding filing a Plan of Operations". To date, the BLM has acknowledged one notice level operation. The BLM describes the notice level operations that are currently taking place in the Copper Creek project area in the EA Chapter 2. The BLM describes and includes the notice level operations in the impact analysis sections as part of the affected environment.</p>
CBD.33	<p>The BLM's approval of these 11 exploratory drill wells via notice level approval is also of great environmental concern. Activities are allowed inside the February 1 through September 30 breeding/fledgling season for migratory birds and drilling within a wildlife connectivity area identified by the Arizona Game and Fish Department ("AGFD") that will impact wildlife connectivity and movements. The AGFD HDMS online review tool predicts that ranges of 81 nongame wildlife species of greatest conservation need intersect the areas within and near the 11 drill pad locations.</p>	Russ McSpadden	<p>Thank you for your comment. BLM must accept mining notices that meet the requirements of 43 CFR 3809.300. There is no federal action in responding to the submittal of a mining notice under the cited regulation.</p> <p>The BLM acknowledged the notice level operations under 43 CFR 3809.300 which does not require NEPA for notice level operations that are under 5 acres. The BLM accepted the Notice as complete under 43 CFR 3809.301 and qualified as notice-level activity per 3809.11. The BLM adequately incorporated notice-level activities across all alternatives considered in the EA, further precluding the need for an EIS.</p>

CBD.34	Furthermore, May 3, 2023 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) provided BLM with a list of threatened and endangered species that may occur in the Copper Creek Project Area, and thus the same area covered by the May 1, 2024 approval, that identified nine federally listed species with habitat that intersects the Project Area: ocelot, Mexican spotted owl, yellow-billed cuckoo, Chiricahua leopard frog, Gila chub, loach minnow, spike dace, monarch butterfly, and Huachuca water umbel. Mexican spotted owls forage at night and ocelots hunt at night and both federally protected species can become disorientated from loud noises or bright lights from these drilling projects. We are not, however, aware of any completed Section 7 ESA consultation for the May 1, 2024 Approval.4 4 Ibid.	Russ McSpadden	BLM must accept mining notices that meet the requirements of 43 CFR 3809.300. There is no federal action in responding to the submittal of a mining notice under the cited regulation.
CBD.35	For a NOI to conduct exploratory drilling, 43 CFR Part 46 requires BLM to determine whether the proposed action prevents unnecessary or undue degradation under FLPMA (UUD) and may affect threatened or endangered species and, if so, to initiate consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under the ESA Section 7. The regulations require early consultation and ESA compliance. Under 43 CFR § 46.105 & § 46.205, BLM must consult with USFWS as early as possible if the drilling project may affect listed species or their critical habitat. If the project is likely to adversely affect a listed species, formal consultation with USFWS is required, leading to a Biological Opinion.	Russ McSpadden	43 CFR 3809.11 states, in part: "(c) You must submit a plan of operations for any operations causing surface disturbance greater than casual use in the following special status areas where § 3809.21 does not apply: [...] (6) Any lands or waters known to contain Federally proposed or listed threatened or endangered species or their proposed or designated critical habitat, unless BLM allows for other action under a formal land-use plan or threatened or endangered species recovery plan;" The lands covered under the mining notice are not known to contain Federally proposed or listed threatened or endangered species or their proposed or critical habitat. Therefore, a mining notice is allowed under 43 CFR 3809.300. No consultation is required as accepting a mining notice is not a federal action.
CBD.36	Per 43 CFR § 46.215(h), BLM cannot use a CE if the action may affect listed species or designated critical habitat. In such cases, an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is required, incorporating ESA consultation. Yet BLM failed to consult and failed to even consider the NOI drilling in the current EA.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM has included the notice level operations in the cumulative effects analysis as a present and ongoing action throughout the EA in chapter 3, thus, the notice level operations are considered as part of the full scope of related actions and included in the impact analysis sections, including cumulative impacts.
CBD.37	It's important to note that even if an NOI is small in acreage, ESA still applies regardless of project size if, as here, listed species may be affected (50 CFR § 402.14).	Russ McSpadden	See response to CBD.35.
CBD.39	ocelot (<i>Leopardus (=Fe/ls) pardalis</i>), cactus ferruginous pygmy-owl (<i>Glaucidium brasilianum cactorum</i>), Mexican spotted owl (<i>Strix occidentalis lucida</i>), yellow-billed cuckoo (<i>Coccyzus americanus</i>), Chiricahua leopard frog (<i>Rana chiricahuensis</i>), Gila chub (<i>Gila intermedia</i>), Gila topminnow (incl. Yaqui) (<i>Poeciliopsis occidentalis</i>), loach minnow (<i>Tiaroga cobitis</i>), spikedace (<i>Medafafigida</i>), monarch butterfly (<i>Danaus Plexippus</i>), and Huachuca water- umbel (<i>Lilaeopsis schaffneriana</i> var. <i>recurva</i>)5 5 Bureau of Land Management (BLM), "Resource Clearance for Redhawk Copper Inc. Exploration Notice," memorandum from a BLM employee to Case File AZAZ106362501, April 1, 2024, in Faraday/Redhawk Notice of Intent (NOI) Drilling Documents, p. 239. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1l_3lga6L8Ly4y2KuGHKymXD9MVKiu9/view?usp=sharing	Russ McSpadden	See response to CBD.35.
CBD.40	Mexican spotted owls forage at night and ocelots hunt at night and both federally protected species can become disorientated from loud noises or bright lights from these drilling projects. A Mexican spotted owl has been documented in the area,6 and an ocelot 7 and jaguar8 have been detected on the eastern slopes of the Whetstone Mountains in recent years, in the watershed of the San Pedro Valley and at elevations matching the Project area. In a letter to BLM and Redhawk, a BLM employee acknowledged that "yellow-billed cuckoo has the potential to be present just outside of the project boundary, in suitable habitat of the riparian corridor. Noise and activity from the project have the potential to disturb this species, if present, in the project area."9 We are not, however, aware of any completed Section 7 ESA consultation for the May 1, 2024 Approval. 6 "Wildlife of the Lower San Pedro Watershed," The Arizona Republic, March 24, 2025, https://www.azcentral.com/picture-gallery/news/local/arizona-environment/2025/03/24/wildlife-lower-san-pedro-watershed/82548847007/ . 7 Center for Biological Diversity. (2024, October 3). Endangered ocelot appears on trail camera in new Arizona location. Retrieved from https://biologicaldiversity.org/w/news/press-releases/endangered-ocelot-appears-on-trail-camera-in-new-arizona-location-2024-10-03/ 8 The Guardian, "Photographs Show Wild Jaguars Returning to the US," February 6, 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/feb/06/photographs-wild-jaguars-return-us-aoe . 9 Ibid.	Russ McSpadden	See response to CBD.35.
CBD.41	For NOI operations, BLM must consult with USFWS if there is any potential impact on threatened or endangered species. If the project may affect listed species, it cannot be categorically excluded from further environmental review, requiring an EA or EIS with formal consultation. Failure to do this at the Notice level, and failure to do this in the current EA violate NEPA, FLPMA, and the ESA. BLM should conduct an EIS to rectify these issues to address the project's potentially significant impacts.	Russ McSpadden	See response to CBD.35.

CBD.43	The fundamental purpose of an EA or EIS is to fairly evaluate all reasonable alternatives before action is taken. By approving exploratory drilling at Notice-Level before the EA was completed, BLM foreclosed meaningful consideration of alternatives that could have excluded or restricted these pads based on their impacts to sensitive species, cultural resources, or water quality. NEPA's requirement that agencies maintain objectivity and avoid actions that limit the choice of reasonable alternatives (43 CFR 46.420(d)) was directly violated. The Draft EA fails to account for this prejudgment or disclose how the agency's premature approval of drilling compromises the objectivity of its alternatives analysis.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM acknowledged the notice level operations under 43 CFR 3809.300 regulations. The BLM analyzes three alternatives in detail and considers several alternatives that are eliminated from detailed analysis presented in EA Chapter 3. The notice level operations do not prevent the BLM from analyzing a range of alternatives and are part of the baseline affected environment in the analysis for each alternative.
CBD.45	The unlawful Notice-Level approval not only violated NEPA's mandate that agencies consider the impacts of connected actions in a single NEPA document, but it also bypassed mandatory Tribal consultation requirements that were in effect at the time of the NOI approval, ignoring multiple formal consultation requests from the San Carlos Apache Tribe. This procedural violation continues within the Draft EA process, which also fails to reflect meaningful, documented, government-to-government consultation. BLM's failure to correct the omission of Tribal perspectives in its analysis compounds the harm caused by the unconsulted Notice-Level approval, demonstrating that the Draft EA process itself perpetuates a continuing violation of NEPA's procedural and substantive consultation obligations under 43 CFR 46.305.	Russ McSpadden	<p>The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with the San Carlos Apache Tribe to address concerns. The BLM has made several attempts to consult and discuss the project throughout its duration with the San Carlos Apache Tribe Leadership and Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.</p> <p>On September 9, 2024, the BLM issued a new policy to improve transparency and encourage early engagement on mining notice-level exploration activities. Under the new policy, IM 2024-048, BLM field offices were required to notify each interested Tribe when an operator submits a notice of exploration activities. Prior to this new policy, the BLM did not notify Tribes about notice-level mining exploration activities before a mining plan of operations was submitted. In March 2024, the operator submitted a notice for exploration drilling on less than five acres on nine pads using existing roads. Since this exploration notice-level activity pre-dated the new policy for Tribal notification, the BLM did not notify any Tribes. IM 2024-048 was rescinded in March 2025.</p>
CBD.47	EA § 4.0 (Consultation and Coordination, p. 74-75, Appendix p.2) – Lists consulted entities but does not indicate whether government-to-government consultation was substantive. San Carlos Apache Tribe is not listed despite sending letters to BLM requesting consultation.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with tribes to address concerns. Pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800, the regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA 54 U.S.C. 306108); Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments; and the Bureau of Land Management policies as found in Handbook 1780-1, Improving and Sustaining BLM-Tribal Relations; the Safford Field Office sent letters to initiate consultation with potentially affected tribes. Of the 12 tribes invited to consult, the BLM only received responses from three, none of whom had serious concerns that needed to be addressed. The BLM continues to notify the tribes as the process advances and is open to discussion of any concerns that may come up. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.
CBD.48	EA § 2.2.10 (Design Features for Cultural Resources, p. 16-17) – Discusses previous surveys but does not address concerns raised by the Tribe.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with tribes to address concerns. Pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800, the regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA 54 U.S.C. 306108); Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments; and the Bureau of Land Management policies as found in Handbook 1780-1, Improving and Sustaining BLM-Tribal Relations; the Safford Field Office sent letters to initiate consultation with potentially affected tribes. Of the 12 tribes invited to consult, the BLM only received responses from three, none of whom had serious concerns that needed to be addressed. The BLM continues to notify the tribes as the process advances and is open to discussion of any concerns that may come up. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.
CBD.49	BLM received two letters from the San Carlos Apache Tribe (Tribe) dated July 2, 2024 and September 17, 2024 concerning the May 1, 2024 NOI drilling approval for the Copper Creek Project. ¹⁰ The Tribe has repeatedly sought consultation with BLM regarding the Copper Creek Exploration Project and NOI drilling due to the area's deep cultural and historical significance to the Tribe. The Tribe has long maintained ancestral ties to the San Pedro Valley, which it identifies as a "Traditional Cultural Place and cultural landscape with numerous archeological and cultural sites." ¹¹ Despite this, BLM failed to consult with the Tribe before issuing Notice-Level approval for exploratory drilling on May 1, 2024, allowing work to proceed on public lands without considering the project's impact on cultural resources, water rights, and downstream ecosystems. BLM has continued to fail to consult with the Tribe concerning NOI drilling and has compounded the issue by failing to include analysis of the cumulative impacts of the NOI drilling concerning the current EA. 10 San Carlos Apache Tribe, Letters to Bureau of Land Management, Department of Interior and Faraday Concerning Consultation for NOI Drilling at Copper Creek Project, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1mBGU11pAntm5JNXlvbuzsYtybVYca2/view?usp=sharing	Russ McSpadden	<p>The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with tribes to address concerns. Pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800, the regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA 54 U.S.C. 306108); Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments; and the Bureau of Land Management policies as found in Handbook 1780-1, Improving and Sustaining BLM-Tribal Relations; the Safford Field Office sent letters to initiate consultation with potentially affected tribes. Of the 12 tribes invited to consult, the BLM only received responses from three, none of whom had serious concerns that needed to be addressed. The BLM continues to notify the tribes as the process advances and is open to discussion of any concerns that may come up. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.</p> <p>The BLM acknowledged the notice level operations under 43 CFR 3809.300 which does not require NEPA for notice level operations that are under 5 acres. The BLM accepted the Notice as complete under 43 CFR 3809.301 and qualified as notice-level activity per 3809.11. The BLM adequately incorporated notice-level activities across all alternatives considered in the EA, further precluding the need for an EIS.</p>
CBD.50	The Tribe first requested consultation in a letter dated July 9, 2024, highlighting BLM's legal obligation under Department of the Interior policies and 43 CFR Part 46 to engage in meaningful, pre-decisional consultation. A follow-up letter on September 17, 2024, reiterated the Tribe's concerns and noted that, while Faraday Copper had reached out to the Tribe, BLM had entirely ignored these requests. The Tribe has emphasized that the Notice-Level approval unlawfully segmented the project and that BLM's failure to consult represents an ongoing violation of federal law and policy. The Tribe has urged BLM to revoke or suspend the approval and engage in formal consultation before any further exploratory operations are considered.	Russ McSpadden	<p>The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with the San Carlos Apache Tribe to address concerns. The BLM has made several attempts to consult and discuss the project throughout its duration with the San Carlos Apache Tribe Leadership and Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.</p> <p>The BLM acknowledged the notice level operations under 43 CFR 3809.300 which does not require NEPA for notice level operations that are under 5 acres. The BLM accepted the Notice as complete under 43 CFR 3809.301 and qualified as notice-level activity per 3809.11. The BLM adequately incorporated notice-level activities across all alternatives considered in the EA, further precluding the need for an EIS.</p>
CBD.52	The EA is procedurally flawed due to the BLM's failure to engage in meaningful government-to-government consultation with the San Carlos Apache Tribe, a federally recognized Tribe with documented cultural, historical, and spiritual ties to the project area. This failure violates 43 CFR 46.305(a), NEPA, the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), and the Department of the Interior's own Tribal Consultation Policy set forth in 512 DM 5:	Russ McSpadden	The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with the San Carlos Apache Tribe to address concerns. The BLM has made several attempts to consult and discuss the project throughout its duration with the San Carlos Apache Tribe Leadership and Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.
CBD.55	It is important to emphasize that according to DOI Tribal Consultation policy requires consultation with Tribes when considering "a Departmental action with tribal implications" and this does not preclude NOI drilling.	Russ McSpadden	<p>The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with tribes to address concerns. Pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800, the regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA 54 U.S.C. 306108); Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments; and the Bureau of Land Management policies as found in Handbook 1780-1, Improving and Sustaining BLM-Tribal Relations; the Safford Field Office sent letters to initiate consultation with potentially affected tribes. Of the 12 tribes invited to consult, the BLM only received responses from three, none of whom had serious concerns that needed to be addressed. The BLM continues to notify the tribes as the process advances and is open to discussion of any concerns that may come up. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.</p> <p>The BLM acknowledged the notice level operations under 43 CFR 3809.300 which does not require NEPA for notice level operations that are under 5 acres. The BLM accepted the Notice as complete under 43 CFR 3809.301 and qualified as notice-level activity per 3809.11. The BLM adequately incorporated notice-level activities across all alternatives considered in the EA, further precluding the need for an EIS.</p>

CBD.58	<p>July 2, 2024 Letter from Chairman Terry Rambler to BLM Arizona State Director Suazo — This letter recounts the Tribe's concerns over cultural resource impacts, water rights, and downstream interests. It formally requests consultation, invoking BLM's obligations under 512 DM 5 (DOI Tribal Consultation Policy) and the December 1, 2022 joint DOI-USDA policy regarding mineral exploration proposals. The letter explicitly requests suspension of drilling until proper consultation occurs.</p>	Russ McSpadden	<p>The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with the San Carlos Apache Tribe to address concerns. The BLM has made several attempts to consult and discuss the project throughout its duration with the San Carlos Apache Tribe Leadership and Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.</p>
CBD.59	<p>September 17, 2024 Letter from Chairman Terry Rambler to Secretary Deb Haaland and BLM Director Tracy Stone-Manning — This letter documents the complete absence of response from BLM Arizona despite multiple requests for consultation, including letters sent both by the Tribe and the Center for Biological Diversity. The Tribe's concerns regarding cultural resources, water, and cumulative impacts were summarily ignored. The letter calls on the BLM to revoke the Notice-Level approval and conduct meaningful consultation before allowing any further activity.</p>	Russ McSpadden	<p>The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with the San Carlos Apache Tribe to address concerns. The BLM has made several attempts to consult and discuss the project throughout its duration with the San Carlos Apache Tribe Leadership and Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.</p> <p>The BLM has included the notice level operations in the cumulative effects analysis as a present and ongoing action throughout the EA in chapter 3, thus, the notice level operations are considered as part of the full scope of related actions and included in the impact analysis sections, including cumulative impacts.</p>
CBD.61	<p>April 30, 2024 Letter from Chairman Terry Rambler to Paul Harbridge, President and CEO of Faraday, as well as Angela Johnson VP — Corporate Development & Sustainability — This letter raises multiple concerns highly relevant to the National Historic Preservation Act particularly Section 106. The Tribe asserts that the San Pedro Valley—where the Copper Creek Project is located—qualifies as a Traditional Cultural Property and cultural landscape, with documented ancestral ties, sacred sites, archaeological materials, and ongoing ceremonial and subsistence use. The letter emphasizes that the area contains historic properties of religious and cultural significance and expresses concern about adverse landscape-scale impacts already occurring during the exploration phase. In the letter the Tribe requests transparency and voluntary mitigation, and highlights that any federal involvement (e.g., permits under the Clean Water Act) would trigger mandatory consultation obligations. The Tribe's request for engagement with its Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO) and a site visit further reinforces the need to evaluate cumulative effects and preserve the cultural integrity of the region under federal historic preservation law. 13 San Carlos Apache Tribe, Letter to Faraday Copper Regarding the Copper Creek Project in Mammoth, Arizona (Apr. 30, 2024), https://acrobot.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:US:bb1f16d6-c2c5-4687-8d73-50c9866fe202.</p>	Russ McSpadden	<p>The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with the San Carlos Apache Tribe to address concerns. The BLM has made several attempts to consult and discuss the project throughout its duration with the San Carlos Apache Tribe Leadership and Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.</p>
CBD.63	<p>BLM must comply with the NHPA and requirements regarding Native American interests and resources. Due to the potential that cultural and religious sites and resources will be adversely affected, it would be a violation of the NHPA and other laws (such as NEPA and FLPMA) to approve the project without the required review of, and protection of, cultural/historical resources, including but not limited to the Copper Creek watershed, the Galiuro Mountains and the San Pedro River Valley.</p>	Russ McSpadden	<p>The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with tribes to address concerns. Pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800, the regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA 54 U.S.C. 306108); Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments; and the Bureau of Land Management policies as found in Handbook 1780-1, Improving and Sustaining BLM-Tribal Relations; the Safford Field Office sent letters to initiate consultation with potentially affected tribes. Of the 12 tribes invited to consult, the BLM only received responses from three, none of whom had serious concerns that needed to be addressed. The BLM continues to notify the tribes as the process advances and is open to discussion of any concerns that may come up. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.</p>
CBD.73	<p>Under the NHPA, NEPA, and the other laws, policies and requirements noted herein, the BLM cannot approve the Project until full government-to-government consultation with all potentially affected Tribes has been completed. It is our understanding that there has been inadequate outreach and consultation to date with affected Tribes, including but not limited to the San Carlos Apache Tribe.</p>	Russ McSpadden	<p>The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with the San Carlos Apache Tribe to address concerns. The BLM has made several attempts to consult and discuss the project throughout its duration with the San Carlos Apache Tribe Leadership and Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.</p> <p>The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with tribes to address concerns. Pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800, the regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA 54 U.S.C. 306108); Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments; and the Bureau of Land Management policies as found in Handbook 1780-1, Improving and Sustaining BLM-Tribal Relations; the Safford Field Office sent letters to initiate consultation with potentially affected tribes. Of the 12 tribes invited to consult, the BLM only received responses from three, none of whom had serious concerns that needed to be addressed. The BLM continues to notify the tribes as the process advances and is open to discussion of any concerns that may come up. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.</p>
CBD.74	<p>Furthermore, any approved exploration activities must include the requirement of tribal monitors to be on site during drilling activities, at the expense of the project proponent. The tribal monitors should also be present during the archeological survey. The Project site is within an area that is known to have archeological resources and deep, longstanding cultural significance to the San Carlos Apache Tribe. The area should be surveyed as part of this project before drilling begins. Given the areas significance to the San Carlos Apache Tribe, the Project should be cancelled absent consent of the Tribe.</p>	Russ McSpadden	<p>The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with the San Carlos Apache Tribe to address concerns. The BLM has made several attempts to consult and discuss the project throughout its duration with the San Carlos Apache Tribe Leadership and Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.</p>
CBD.77	<p>36 CFR 46.305(a) — Requires BLM to consult with Tribes when a proposed action may affect tribal interests, including cultural resources and sacred landscapes.</p>	Russ McSpadden	<p>The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with tribes to address concerns. Pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800, the regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA 54 U.S.C. 306108); Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments; and the Bureau of Land Management policies as found in Handbook 1780-1, Improving and Sustaining BLM-Tribal Relations; the Safford Field Office sent letters to initiate consultation with potentially affected tribes. Of the 12 tribes invited to consult, the BLM only received responses from three, none of whom had serious concerns that needed to be addressed. The BLM continues to notify the tribes as the process advances and is open to discussion of any concerns that may come up. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.</p>
CBD.78	<p>FLPMA (43 U.S.C. § 1701 et seq.) — Imposes a duty on BLM to protect cultural and historic resources and to engage Tribes in land use decision-making.</p>	Russ McSpadden	<p>The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with tribes to address concerns. Pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800, the regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA 54 U.S.C. 306108); Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments; and the Bureau of Land Management policies as found in Handbook 1780-1, Improving and Sustaining BLM-Tribal Relations; the Safford Field Office sent letters to initiate consultation with potentially affected tribes. Of the 12 tribes invited to consult, the BLM only received responses from three, none of whom had serious concerns that needed to be addressed. The BLM continues to notify the tribes as the process advances and is open to discussion of any concerns that may come up. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.</p>

CBD.79	· NHPA Section 106 (54 U.S.C. § 306108) — Requires consultation with affected Tribes when federal undertakings could affect historic properties or traditional cultural places.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with tribes to address concerns. Pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800, the regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA 54 U.S.C. 306108); Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments; and the Bureau of Land Management policies as found in Handbook 1780-1, Improving and Sustaining BLM-Tribal Relations; the Safford Field Office sent letters to initiate consultation with potentially affected tribes. Of the 12 tribes invited to consult, the BLM only received responses from three, none of whom had serious concerns that needed to be addressed. The BLM continues to notify the tribes as the process advances and is open to discussion of any concerns that may come up. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.
CBD.80	· 512 DM 5 — The Department of the Interior's own Tribal Consultation Policy, which explicitly requires agencies to make good-faith efforts to consult early in the planning process and throughout the decision-making process, especially for mineral development activities with potential tribal impacts.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with tribes to address concerns. Pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800, the regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA 54 U.S.C. 306108); Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments; and the Bureau of Land Management policies as found in Handbook 1780-1, Improving and Sustaining BLM-Tribal Relations; the Safford Field Office sent letters to initiate consultation with potentially affected tribes. Of the 12 tribes invited to consult, the BLM only received responses from three, none of whom had serious concerns that needed to be addressed. The BLM continues to notify the tribes as the process advances and is open to discussion of any concerns that may come up. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.
CBD.82	The Draft EA's cumulative impacts analysis is fatally flawed because it treats the Notice- Level drilling as if it were a separate and independent event, rather than part of the same exploration project. This artificially suppresses the project's true cumulative footprint, violating NEPA's requirement to evaluate cumulative effects across the full scope of related actions. See 43 CFR 46.115. The EA fails to disclose or analyze how drilling and surface disturbance from the Notice-Level approval alters the landscape for future phases of exploration and development.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM has included the notice level operations in the no action alternative, and cumulative effects analysis across all alternatives as a present and ongoing action. Thus the notice level operations are considered as part of the full scope of related actions. 43 CFR 3809.21 defines segmentation as a "series of Notices for the purpose of avoiding filing a Plan of Operations". To date, the BLM has acknowledged one notice level operation. The BLM describes the notice level operations that are currently taking place in the Copper Creek project area in the EA Chapter 2. The BLM describes and includes the notice level operations in the impact analysis sections as part of the affected environment. The BLM has included the notice level operations in the cumulative effects analysis as a present and ongoing action throughout the EA in chapter 3, thus, the notice level operations are considered as part of the full scope of related actions and included in the impact analysis sections, including cumulative impacts.
CBD.83	We note that BLM's duty to disclose cumulative effects is inherent in the statute itself, and not reliant on CEQ's regulations or BLM's manual. See Swain v. Brinegar, 517 F.2d 766, 775 (7th Cir. 1975) (holding, years before CEQ's 40 CFR 1500 regulations were promulgated, that an agency must prepare an EIS if an individual action is an integral part of a larger action because NEPA "recognizes that each 'limited' federal project is part of a large mosaic of thousands of similar projects and that cumulative effects can and must be considered on an ongoing basis."). In 1976, the U.S. Supreme Court acknowledged the importance of cumulative impacts. While ruling that in the particular situation at issue an EIS was not required, the Court stated that, "when several proposals for coal-related actions that will have cumulative or synergistic environmental impact upon a region are pending concurrently before an agency, their environmental consequence must be considered together. Kleppe v. Sierra Club, 427 U.S. 390, 410 (1976). The Court reasoned that "[o]nly through comprehensive consideration of pending proposals can the agency evaluate different courses of action." Id.	Russ McSpadden	43 CFR 3809.21 defines segmentation as a "series of Notices for the purpose of avoiding filing a Plan of Operations". To date, the BLM has acknowledged one notice level operation. The BLM describes the notice level operations that are currently taking place in the Copper Creek project area in the EA Chapter 2. The BLM describes and includes the notice level operations in the impact analysis sections as part of the affected environment. The BLM has included the notice level operations in the cumulative effects analysis as a present and ongoing action throughout the EA in chapter 3, thus, the notice level operations are considered as part of the full scope of related actions and included in the impact analysis sections, including cumulative impacts.
CBD.85	BLM must commit to preparing an EIS to correct the unlawful segmentation, prejudgment, and consultation failures embedded in the Notice-Level approval. The Draft EA is inadequate and cannot lawfully proceed unless it acknowledges, analyzes, and corrects the segmentation, prejudgment, and consultation failures embedded in the unlawful Notice-Level approval. This requires:	Russ McSpadden	The BLM acknowledged notice level operations under 43 CFR 3809.300. No segmentation occurred as the notice met all the requirements of 43 CFR 3809.300. The subject MPO addresses additional proposed drilling.
CBD.86	A. Explicitly acknowledging the Notice-Level approval within the Draft EA and analyzing its impacts within the cumulative effects analysis.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM reviewed the Notice-level operations for completeness under 43 CFR 3809.301 as required by 43 CFR 3809.311, and determined the Notice is complete and proposed activities are adequate to prevent unnecessary or undue degradation as defined by 43 CFR 3809.5. The BLM has explicitly acknowledged the Notice-Level acceptance within the administrative EA and analyzed its impacts within the cumulative effects analysis in chapters 2 and 3.
CBD.87	B. Explaining how the Notice-Level approval biased the range of alternatives considered, and how to correct for that procedural flaw.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM acknowledged the notice level operations under 43 CFR 3809.300 regulations. The BLM analyzes three alternatives in detail and considers several alternatives that are eliminated from detailed analysis presented in EA Chapter 3. The notice level operations do not prevent the BLM from analyzing a range of alternatives and are part of the baseline affected environment in the analysis for each alternative.
CBD.88	C. Engaging in full, good-faith government-to-government consultation with the San Carlos Apache Tribe and other Tribes about both the Notice-Level and Plan-Level activities.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with the San Carlos Apache Tribe to address concerns. The BLM has made several attempts to consult and discuss the project throughout its duration with the San Carlos Apache Tribe Leadership and Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA. The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with tribes to address concerns. Pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800, the regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA 54 U.S.C. 306108); Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments; and the Bureau of Land Management policies as found in Handbook 1780-1, Improving and Sustaining BLM-Tribal Relations; the Safford Field Office sent letters to initiate consultation with potentially affected tribes. Of the 12 tribes invited to consult, the BLM only received responses from three, none of whom had serious concerns that needed to be addressed. The BLM continues to notify the tribes as the process advances and is open to discussion of any concerns that may come up. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.

CBD.89	D. At a minimum, given the scope and significance of the impacts, a full EIS is the only legally and scientifically defensible path forward.	Russ McSpadden	<p>The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS.</p> <p>The BLM acknowledged the notice level operations under 43 CFR 3809.300 which does not require NEPA for notice level operations that are under 5 acres. The BLM accepted the Notice as complete under 43 CFR 3809.301 and qualified as notice-level activity per 3809.11. The BLM adequately incorporated notice-level activities across all alternatives considered in the EA, further precluding the need for an EIS.</p>
CBD.93	The project occurs in or near ecologically critical areas (e.g., riparian habitats, wildlife corridors, critical habitats for endangered species).	Russ McSpadden	<p>Impacts to endangered species are analyzed in Section 3.4.2. Design features in Section 2.2.10 would also reduce impacts to listed species, as well as implementation of the adaptive management plan (AMP) in the Preferred Action alternative.</p> <p>Impacts to wildlife connectivity have been expanded upon and are analyzed and disclosed in EA Section 3.4.3.</p>
CBD.94	The project contributes to cumulative environmental impacts, including other major industrial, mining, and infrastructure projects in the region.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 7B ranch.
CBD.95	The project's impacts involve high levels of scientific uncertainty or controversy.	Russ McSpadden	Thank you for your comment.
CBD.96	The project will adversely affect species listed under the ESA.	Russ McSpadden	Thank you for your comment.
CBD.97	The project's potential effects on cultural resources trigger concerns under the National Historic Preservation Act, especially given documented Tribal objections.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with tribes to address concerns. Pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800, the regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA 54 U.S.C. 306108); Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments; and the Bureau of Land Management policies as found in Handbook 1780-1, Improving and Sustaining BLM-Tribal Relations; the Safford Field Office sent letters to initiate consultation with potentially affected tribes. Of the 12 tribes invited to consult, the BLM only received responses from three, none of whom had serious concerns that needed to be addressed. The BLM continues to notify the tribes as the process advances and is open to discussion of any concerns that may come up. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.
CBD.98	Each of these triggers applies to the Copper Creek Exploration Project, requiring BLM to elevate this process to an EIS.	Russ McSpadden	Thank you for your comment.

CBD.126	The context and intensity of the proposed action individually and in combination with its direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts, including reasonably foreseeable mining as discussed below, previous and ongoing NOI drilling and other mine infrastructure and activity which BLM fails to analyze in the current EA, is significant because it would industrialize and decimate a landscape considered a Traditional Cultural Place of the San Carlos Apache. Industrialization and decimation of Copper Creek and the San Pedro River and the surrounding area as a result of the proposed action and its direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts, is significant in its intensity, because it would cause irretrievable and unmitigable impacts to the Tribe. The context of the proposed action and its cumulative impacts, indirect and direct impacts, is further significant because it may impact critically rare riparian areas and springs and associated biological resources. Spring and their associated habitat are extremely rare in the southern Arizona desert. Damage to the spring and groundwater systems that feed it would effectively eliminate the very rare springs and its very rare associated biological diversity from the landscape. Such damage would be irretrievable, unmitigable, and significant under NEPA because it would eliminate unique characteristics of the geographic area such as wetlands or ecologically critical areas, cause loss or destruction of significant scientific resources, and, because a full biological inventory of the springs, streams and riparian areas and its associated ecosystem has not yet been conducted, would be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks such as loss of federally-listed species. The context and intensity of the proposed action individually and in combination with other past, present and reasonably foreseeable activities and projects is significant because it would industrialize, decimate, dewater or otherwise adversely modify occupied and designated critical habitat for endangered species within and near (but not limited to) Copper Creek and the San Pedro River.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM has included the notice level operations in the cumulative effects analysis as a present and ongoing action throughout the EA in chapter 3, thus, the notice level operations are considered as part of the full scope of related actions and included in the impact analysis sections, including cumulative impacts.
CBD.127	BLM fails to consider the NOI drilling and other direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts, and the baseline conditions of all potentially affected resources, rendering the EA, and any FONSI, inadequate.	Russ McSpadden	<p>43 CFR 3809.21 defines segmentation as a "series of Notices for the purpose of avoiding filing a Plan of Operations". To date, the BLM has acknowledged one notice level operation. The BLM describes the notice level operations that are currently taking place in the Copper Creek project area in the EA Chapter 2. The BLM describes and includes the notice level operations in the impact analysis sections as part of the affected environment.</p> <p>The BLM has included the notice level operations in the cumulative effects analysis as a present and ongoing action throughout the EA in chapter 3, thus, the notice level operations are considered as part of the full scope of related actions and included in the impact analysis sections, including cumulative impacts.</p> <p>The notice level drilling impacts are analyzed in the No Action Alternative and in the Affected Environment for each of the resources analyzed in detail thereby analyzing how the notice level drilling impacts the baseline conditions. Additional analysis has been added to Chapter 3 of the EA.</p>
CBD.129	· EA § 3.3 (Cumulative Effects Study Area, p. 36) – The EA's approach to cumulative effects and inappropriately small Cumulative Effects Study Area is flawed.	Russ McSpadden	The Cumulative Effects Study Area (CESA) for issue statements 1 and 2 was delineated to assess cumulative impacts such as habitat loss, surface water depletion, noise pollution, and the spread of invasive species. The CESA for issue statement 3, focuses on evaluating the effects on wildlife movement and connectivity in relation to the Santa Catalina/Rincon-Galiuro Linkage. The CESA includes a portion of the San Pedro River watershed, including areas that function as wildlife corridors that link the San Pedro River, Aravaipa Canyon, and the Galiuro Mountains. These natural corridors support species movement and gene flow across highly fragmented landscapes. The watershed boundary includes downstream water, and habitat impacts along with connectivity for both resident and migratory wildlife. The CESA for issue statement 4 evaluates potential impacts on hydrologic resources and their associated resources within the Copper Creek watershed that may result from groundwater withdrawals. This includes groundwater and surface water interactions, aquifer drawdown, and potential impacts to riparian vegetation and aquatic habitats, especially in areas with seasonal or perennial surface flows. The 7B Ranch has been included as a portion of it falls within this CESA.
CBD.130	· EA § 1.6 (Identification of Issues, p. 3) – This section discusses issues analyzed in detail but does not address segmentation concerns.	Russ McSpadden	43 CFR 3809.21 defines segmentation as a "series of Notices for the purpose of avoiding filing a Plan of Operations". To date, the BLM has acknowledged one notice level operation. The BLM describes the notice level operations that are currently taking place in the Copper Creek project area in the EA Chapter 2. The BLM describes and includes the notice level operations in the impact analysis sections as part of the affected environment.
CBD.131	· EA § 2.1 (No Action Alternative, p. 4) – This section does not acknowledge the impact of prior Notice-Level drilling on baseline conditions.	Russ McSpadden	Notice level operations are explained in detail in EA Section 2.1. Additional analysis has been added to chapter 3 in the EA.
CBD.132	· EA § 3.4 (Issues Analyzed in Detail, p. 37) – Focuses on specific issues but does not fully consider cumulative past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions.	Russ McSpadden	<p>The Cumulative Effects Study Area (CESA) for issue statements 1 and 2 was delineated to assess cumulative impacts such as habitat loss, surface water depletion, noise pollution, and the spread of invasive species. The CESA for issue statement 3, focuses on evaluating the effects on wildlife movement and connectivity in relation to the Santa Catalina/Rincon-Galiuro Linkage. The CESA includes a portion of the San Pedro River watershed, including areas that function as wildlife corridors that link the San Pedro River, Aravaipa Canyon, and the Galiuro Mountains. These natural corridors support species movement and gene flow across highly fragmented landscapes. The watershed boundary includes downstream water, and habitat impacts along with connectivity for both resident and migratory wildlife. The CESA for issue statement 4 evaluates potential impacts on hydrologic resources and their associated resources within the Copper Creek watershed that may result from groundwater withdrawals. This includes groundwater and surface water interactions, aquifer drawdown, and potential impacts to riparian vegetation and aquatic habitats, especially in areas with seasonal or perennial surface flows. The 7B Ranch has been included as a portion of it falls within this CESA.</p> <p>The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 7B ranch.</p>
CBD.134	The EA for the Copper Creek Exploration Project fails to fully assess the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of exploratory drilling and related operations on federally listed, BLM sensitive, and other wildlife species. The EA acknowledges some potential habitat disturbances but lacks a comprehensive analysis of species connectivity, indirect effects, and cumulative stressors at a larger ecological scale.	Russ McSpadden	<p>Impacts to wildlife connectivity have been expanded upon and are analyzed and disclosed in EA Section 3.4.3.</p> <p>Impacts to wildlife and to special status species are analyzed in Sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2. Design features in Section 2.2.10 would also reduce impacts to listed species, as well as implementation of the adaptive management plan (AMP) in the Preferred Action alternative. Changes to the EA include an expansion of the 500 foot buffer from the centerline of Copper Creek riparian area, to a 0.25 mile buffer where no vegetation clearing, drilling, or reclamation activities would occur during the yellow-billed cuckoo breeding season (May 25-September 30).</p>

CBD.135	<p>1. Incomplete Assessment of Threatened and Endangered Species</p> <p>The EA lists species such as the yellow-billed cuckoo, Mexican spotted owl, lesser long-nosed bat, and ocelot, yet it does not provide a meaningful analysis of how habitat disturbance, noise, and groundwater withdrawals could affect movement corridors, foraging habitat, or breeding success. Specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The yellow-billed cuckoo is a riparian-dependent species, yet the EA does not analyze how groundwater depletion could reduce riparian vegetation over time. · The ocelot relies on the connectivity of the Galiuro Mountains-San Pedro River corridor for dispersal, yet the EA fails to assess whether increased drilling activity and habitat fragmentation could impair this movement. · The lesser long-nosed bat depends on agave and columnar cacti, which could be indirectly affected by road expansion and dust accumulation from drilling activities. 	Russ McSpadden	<p>Impacts to wildlife connectivity have been expanded upon and are analyzed and disclosed in EA Section 3.4.3.</p> <p>Impacts to wildlife and to special status species are analyzed in Sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2. Design features in Section 2.2.10 would also reduce impacts to listed species, as well as implementation of the adaptive management plan (AMP) in the Preferred Action alternative. Changes to the EA include an expansion of the 500 foot buffer from the centerline of Copper Creek riparian area, to a 0.25 mile buffer where no vegetation clearing, drilling, or reclamation activities would occur during the yellow-billed cuckoo breeding season (May 25-September 30).</p>
CBD.136	<p>The EA lists species such as the yellow-billed cuckoo, Mexican spotted owl, lesser long-nosed bat, and ocelot, yet it does not provide a meaningful analysis of how habitat disturbance, noise, and groundwater withdrawals could affect movement corridors, foraging habitat, or breeding success. Specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The yellow-billed cuckoo is a riparian-dependent species, yet the EA does not analyze how groundwater depletion could reduce riparian vegetation over time. · The ocelot relies on the connectivity of the Galiuro Mountains-San Pedro River corridor for dispersal, yet the EA fails to assess whether increased drilling activity and habitat fragmentation could impair this movement. · The lesser long-nosed bat depends on agave and columnar cacti, which could be indirectly affected by road expansion and dust accumulation from drilling activities. 	Russ McSpadden	<p>The EA analyzed impacts to the yellow-billed cuckoo and the lesser long-nosed bat in chapter 3 of the EA. Appendix F has been created in response to your comment to explain how the Preferred Action alternative would be carried out over time. Refer to Section 2.3 which has also been updated to clarify implementation of the Preferred Action Alternative. Refer to Appendix D of the EA for species that BLM determined have no potential to occur within the project area.</p> <p>The comment letter does not provide a specific location provided for the ocelot trail camera photo, and the text only states that the photo was taken July 24, 2024, within the San Pedro River watershed. The SPR watershed encompasses approximately 4720 square miles in both Sonora, Mexico and Arizona. There is not enough information here to suggest where this photo was taken, as it could theoretically have been in the Huachucas. The press release from CBD https://biologicaldiversity.org/w/news/press-releases/endangered-ocelot-appears-on-trail-camera-in-new-arizona-location-2024-10-03/?_gl=1*1pu3cOb*_gcl_au*MTI1MzgNDQ5My4xNzQ5MDU2ODM0 mentions the ocelot had been spotted near Nogales and then crossed the Santa Cruz River to an AZ sky island range. Therefore, there is still no evidence that ocelot has potential to occur within the project area or CESA, and thus this species would not be affected by project actions.</p> <p>Project design features in Section 2.2.10 are in place to mitigate the effects of dust on biological resources, including flowering plants. The BLM has analyzed BLM-recognized Special Status Species in Appendix D. Murphey (Hohokam) Agave (<i>Agave murpheyi</i>) is not expected to occur within the project area, and thus no impacts are expected. Saguaro Cactus (<i>Carnegiea gigantea</i>) does occur within the project vicinity but is not a BLM Sensitive Species. This species is protected by the Native Plant Protection Act, and a permit is required by the applicant prior to displacing, damaging, or destroying any saguaro plants.</p> <p>The BLM has consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on this project, and received a concurrence on our effects determinations. Refer to Chapter 4 for a summary of ESA Section 7 consultation conducted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service as part of this project.</p>
CBD.138	<p>The San Pedro River watershed and its tributaries, including Copper Creek, serve as critically important habitat for migratory birds, large mammals, and aquatic species. The EA fails to analyze the broader ecosystem-scale impacts, including:</p>	Russ McSpadden	<p>Project design features in Section 2.2.10 are in place to mitigate the effects of dust on biological resources, including flowering plants. The BLM has analyzed BLM-recognized Special Status Species in Appendix (D). Murphey (Hohokam) Agave (<i>Agave murpheyi</i>) is not expected to occur within the project area, and thus no impacts are expected. Saguaro Cactus (<i>Carnegiea gigantea</i>) may occur within the project area but is not a BLM Sensitive Species. This species is protected by the Native Plant Protection Act, and a permit is required by the applicant prior to displacing, damaging, or destroying any saguaro plants.</p>
CBD.139	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Wildlife corridor fragmentation – The project area lies within a designated wildlife connectivity zone, but the EA does not address how increased traffic, noise, and human presence could create barriers to species movement. 	Russ McSpadden	<p>Impacts to wildlife movement are disclosed in EA Section 3.4.3.2. Refer to the design features in chapter 2 for additional information.</p>
CBD.140	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Compounded habitat stress – Other land and water uses, including grazing, mining, and urban expansion, already contribute to habitat degradation in the region. The EA does not assess how exploratory drilling operations contribute to a larger pattern of cumulative habitat loss. See section IV for more thorough list of past, present and foreseeable future projects that should be analyzed for cumulative and connected impacts. 	Russ McSpadden	<p>Refer to Table 3-2 for acreage of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions within the project area and the cumulative effects study area (CESA) that adequately quantifies regional land use patterns.</p> <p>The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 7B ranch.</p>
CBD.141	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The draft Environmental Assessment (EA) fails to address the potential impacts of exploratory mining on riparian restoration projects along the San Pedro River, including, but not limited to, Arizona Game and Fish's Beaver Dam Analog Project. Water drawdown from the Copper Creek tributary could negatively affect initiatives designed to enhance the health and resilience of Arizona's river ecosystems, which serve as off-site mitigation for ecological impacts occurring in urban-dominated watersheds. The Beaver Dam Analog Project mimics natural beaver activity by constructing structures that capture water and improve river health. · Additionally, the perennial stretches of the lower San Pedro River play a crucial role as wildlife corridors, connecting beaver populations and other species between the Gila River and upper San Pedro, including tributaries such as Aravaipa, Muleshoe, and Babocomari Creeks. The beaver complex between Redington and Mammoth is particularly significant, as it may be one of the only permanent beaver populations in southern Arizona and northern Mexico. This complex includes an extensive beaver dam measuring 3 to 6 feet in height, over 1,000 feet in length, with a wetland area exceeding 4.5 acres and an intricate network of interconnecting beaver channels. 	Russ McSpadden	<p>Refer to the EA Section 3.4.4.2 for anticipated impacts to the San Pedro River. Refer to the adaptive management plan (AMP) which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F. Redington is upstream from the confluence of Copper Creek and the San Pedro River, such that Copper Creek would have minor, if any, influence to surface flows into that reach between Redington and Mammoth and so no effects to the beaver complex mentioned in the comment would be anticipated.</p>
CBD.143	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The draft EA acknowledges groundwater withdrawals for drilling operations (70,000 gallons per month per drill rig), yet it does not evaluate the long-term consequences for streamflow in Copper Creek or downstream effects on the Lower San Pedro River. 	Russ McSpadden	<p>The BLM has updated EA Section 3.4.4.2 in response to your comment to provide additional discussion on streamflow in Copper Creek as well as the San Pedro River. Due to the relatively low volume (5.2 acre-feet-annually) of total annual anticipated water used for the proposed project for up to three years, the BLM anticipates negligible long-term consequences for streamflow in Copper Creek as a result of the proposed Project. The BLM would still carry out the Adaptive Management Plan (AMP) as described in Section 2.3 and Appendix F in the Preferred Action alternative to monitor impacts to Copper Creek.</p>

CBD.144	· The EA lacks a detailed discussion of native fish and aquatic species including downstream in the San Pedro River—such as the Gila chub and desert sucker— which depend on sustained water levels.	Russ McSpadden	Refer to Appendix D of the EA for species that BLM determined are not present within the project area that includes the Gila chub and Desert sucker. The San Pedro River at the confluence with Copper Creek does not support perennial flow. This reach is typically intermittent and lacks sustained surface water to support populations of native fish species. The closest known population of federally endangered Gila chub (<i>Gila intermedia</i>) is located approximately 28 miles upstream from Copper Creek, whereas the nearest population of Roundtail Chub is approximately 17 miles downstream from Copper Creek. This spatial separation, along with the absence of continuous surface flow, reduces the likelihood of direct impacts to Gila chub or other native fish species from exploratory activities at the project site.
CBD.145	· The EA fails to include hydrological modeling to assess whether groundwater pumping could lead to flow reductions that degrade aquatic habitat.	Russ McSpadden	Should the Preferred Action Alternative be selected, the adaptive management plan (AMP) would produce an array of relevant hydrological information useful in assessment of trends and may be used to produce a hydrologic model of Copper Creek. As described in Section 2.3.1, which has been updated in the administrative EA, the AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project to monitor and mitigate adverse impacts on the water and water-dependent resources. The AMP has been also been described further in Appendix F.
CBD.146	4. Lack of Mitigation Enforcement and Monitoring Commitments	Russ McSpadden	Direct impacts to Gila chub, desert sucker, and other native fish species are unlikely due to hydrologic separation and the presence of nonnative fish species in the San Pedro River. Any future phases of project development would require additional surveys and environmental analysis, including a more detailed evaluation of potential downstream effects.
CBD.147	While the EA outlines some mitigation measures (e.g., seasonal restrictions, noise limitations, and revegetation), it lacks clear enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance.	Russ McSpadden	If the Preferred Action Alternative in the EA was selected and the proposed mining exploration activities were to proceed, implementation of the project and implementation of associated design features and mitigation will be enforced by the BLM per the standards in 43 CFR 3809 and the required design features and mitigation as described in the EA.
CBD.148	· How will BLM verify that mitigation measures, such as light and noise restrictions, are properly implemented? During a recent site visit on March 24, 2025, that included a tour of an active drill site, it was observed that Redhawk was not operating under conditions proposed in the EA. Lights were not hooded and drill equipment, did not appear to have secondary mufflers.	Russ McSpadden	If the Preferred Action Alternative in the EA was selected and the proposed mining exploration activities were to proceed, implementation of the project and implementation of associated design features and mitigation will be enforced by the BLM per the standards in 43 CFR 3809 and the required design features and mitigation as described in the EA.
CBD.149	· Will there be post-project monitoring to assess species impacts, particularly for groundwater-dependent wildlife?	Russ McSpadden	<p>In response to public comments, the adaptive management plan (AMP) has been described further in Section 2.3.1 of the EA and in Appendix F. As described in Section 2.3.1 in the EA, the AMP would produce an array of information about the water and water-related resources and would also ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the Proposed Project to mitigate impacts on the water and water-dependent resources including wildlife habitat.</p> <p>In response to public comments, and in consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service for this proposed project, additional design features and information that would reduce impacts to special status species are analyzed in Sections 2.2.10 and 3.4.2 of the EA. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has also been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek. The AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project through monitoring, and subsequently would mitigate adverse impacts on the water, riparian, and wild and water-dependent resources.</p>
CBD.151	· Conduct a more detailed analysis of species connectivity and corridor impacts, particularly for ocelots, and migratory birds.	Russ McSpadden	<p>Refer to Appendix D of the EA for species that BLM determined are not present within the project area that includes the ocelot. Direct impacts to migratory birds have been analyzed in Chapter 3 of the EA. Design features in Section 2.2.10 would reduce potential project related impacts to migratory birds.</p> <p>Impacts to wildlife connectivity have been expanded upon and are analyzed and disclosed in EA Section 3.4.3.</p>
CBD.152	· Expand its cumulative effects analysis to include regional stressors on the Lower San Pedro River watershed and its wildlife.	Russ McSpadden	As described in Section 3.3 of the EA, the selection of the eastern portion of the Tucson Wash Subwatershed (the cumulative effects study area [CESA]) is sufficient to identify the cumulative impacts that could be associated with the proposed Project. This is because it provides an adequate geographic context for impacts to hydrologic and hydrologic-dependent resources within the Copper Creek watershed that may be affected by groundwater withdrawals related to the proposed Project. In addition, the CESA provides adequate geographic context to assess cumulative impacts from habitat loss, surface water depletion, noise pollution, and the spread of invasive species as well as the effects to wildlife movement and connectivity. Refer to Section 3.4.4.2 for anticipated impacts to the San Pedro River.
CBD.153	· Provide hydrological modeling to evaluate the potential effects of groundwater withdrawals on riparian and aquatic ecosystems.	Russ McSpadden	Should the Preferred Action Alternative be selected, the adaptive management plan (AMP) would produce an array of relevant hydrological information useful in assessment of trends and may be used to produce a hydrologic model of Copper Creek. As described in Section 2.3.1, which has been updated in the administrative EA, the AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project to monitor and mitigate adverse impacts on the water and water-dependent resources. The AMP has been also been described further in Appendix F.

CBD.154	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen enforcement mechanisms for mitigation measures... 	Russ McSpadden	If the Preferred Action Alternative in the EA was selected and the proposed mining exploration activities were to proceed, implementation of the project and implementation of associated design features and mitigation will be enforced by the BLM per the standards in 43 CFR 3809 and the required design features and mitigation as described in the EA.
CBD.155	...and commit to long-term wildlife monitoring.	Russ McSpadden	Wildlife trail camera monitoring has been added to the EA in section 2.2.10 in response to public comment.
CBD.157	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desert Purple Martins: The draft EA minimizes the significant risk of traffic and habitat disturbance to Arizona's largest known breeding site for desert purple martins. 	Russ McSpadden	The BLM determined that Desert purple martins may possibly be present in the project area, refer to Section 3.4.2.1 in the EA or Appendix D for further information regarding occurrences in the project area. Implementation of the design features in Section 2.2.10 of the EA would adequately reduce potential impacts to migratory birds including this species.
CBD.158	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desert Tortoises: The EA fails to account for documented sightings within the project area and along Bunker Hill Road, contradicting its "possible" classification. 	Russ McSpadden	Section 3.4.2.2 in the EA and Appendix D adequately analyzes potential impacts to the Sonoran desert tortoise. The BLM considers the species to have the potential to be present in the project area because there is potential suitable habitat within the project area even though there are no formal records or documented sightings within the project area currently available. The Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGFD) considers the area to be occupied based on expert knowledge and habitat characteristics.
CBD.159	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bat Species: The lack of thorough bat studies disregards the national significance of Copper Creek for NABat program studies. Evidence of Mexican long-nosed bats, a federally endangered species, should necessitate further consideration. 	Russ McSpadden	As part of the environmental review process, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) tool was used to identify federally listed species that may occur in or be affected by the proposed project. The Mexican long-nosed bat was not included on the IPaC species list for the project area. The USFWS species profile for Mexican long-nosed bat shows the area of current range for this species in the USA to be in New Mexico surrounding Playas Lake. Because of these reasons the BLM determined the Mexican long-nosed bat is not present in the project area. Impacts to other bat species have been adequately analyzed in Sections 3.4.1.2 and 3.4.2.2, bat species potential occurrences within the project area has been discussed in Appendix D.
CBD.160	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lowland Leopard Frogs: Sedimentation from traffic in Copper Creek has the potential to disrupt crucial breeding sites, yet this risk is inadequately addressed. 	Russ McSpadden	In response to your comment, the impacts of sedimentation on the Lowland Leopard Frog are discussed in further detail in Section 3.4.2.2 Proposed Action Alternative Environmental Consequences—Riparian-Dependent.
CBD.161	BLM should conduct thorough, targeted wildlife surveys and update the analysis to reflect accurate species presence and baseline conditions. Enforce stricter mitigation measures for species protection, with specific attention to tortoises, frogs, and rare bats.	Russ McSpadden	If the Preferred Action Alternative in the EA was selected and the proposed mining exploration activities were to proceed, implementation of the project and implementation of associated design features and mitigation will be enforced by the BLM per the standards in 43 CFR 3809 and the required design features and mitigation as described in the EA.
CBD.163	The Draft EA fails to recognize that the San Pedro River Watershed, including the Copper Creek area, is part of a globally recognized migratory bird corridor and is designated as an Important Bird Area (IBA) by the National Audubon Society. The San Pedro IBA supports one of the most significant migratory flyways in the southwestern United States, serving as a critical passage for neotropical migratory birds traveling between breeding grounds in North America and wintering grounds in Central and South America.	Russ McSpadden	In response to your comment, BLM has updated EA Sections 3.4.1.3, 3.4.2.3, and 3.4.3.3 to address the relevance of the Lower San Pedro Important Bird Area that falls within the Cumulative Effects Study Area (CESA). The project area (proposed drill pads and access roads) are located approximately eight miles from the San Pedro River and lie outside the San Pedro Important Bird Area. The wildlife analysis in the EA considered the potential for indirect impacts to avian species, including habitat alteration, noise, and human activity in Section 2.2.10 and throughout chapter 3 of the EA.
CBD.164	By failing to identify the Project Area's position within this critical corridor, the EA omits a key environmental consequence — the potential for habitat fragmentation, light pollution, and noise disturbance to disrupt essential stopover habitat for species already facing climate and habitat stress.	Russ McSpadden	See response to CBD.163.
CBD.165	<p>Additionally, the EA incorrectly states that the Mexican spotted owl (<i>Strix occidentalis lucida</i>) is not present in the Project Area. However, Mexican spotted owls have been observed on citizen scientist wildlife camera traps within the Copper Creek Mine project footprint. They have been documented on three separate occasions during the years 2023 and 2024. 14 This species is listed as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act, requiring formal Section 7 consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Failure to disclose current species presence data is a violation of NEPA's requirement to use the best available science.</p> <p>14 Personal correspondence by phone and email exchange of images. See also "Wildlife of the Lower San Pedro Watershed," The Arizona Republic, March 24, 2025, https://www.azcentral.com/picture-gallery/news/local/arizona-environment/2025/03/24/wildlife-lower-san-pedro-watershed/82548847007/.</p>	Russ McSpadden	<p>Refer to Appendix D of the EA for species that BLM determined are not present within the project area that includes the Mexican spotted owl.</p> <p>The BLM has consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on this project, and received a concurrence on our effects determinations. Refer to Chapter 4 for a summary of ESA Section 7 consultation conducted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service as part of this project.</p>

CBD.166	BLM should update the wildlife analysis to recognize the Project Area's position within the San Pedro IBA and major migratory bird flyway, as well as conduct a revised biological assessment that evaluates project impacts on migratory bird habitat quality, light/noise interference with nocturnal migration, and indirect habitat loss through road dust and vegetation fragmentation.	Russ McSpadden	See response to CBD.163.
CBD.167	The San Pedro River and its surrounding habitats at places like Copper Creek are critical for migratory and resident bird species, many of which rely on dark skies for navigation and foraging. Research from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and others highlights that artificial nighttime lighting poses a significant threat to birds, leading to increased collisions, disorientation, and habitat disruption. Introducing bright lights and noise into this sensitive ecosystem—especially near a recognized migratory corridor—could have detrimental effects on bird populations. 15 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "Threats to Birds from Collisions & Nighttime Lighting." FWS.gov, https://www.fws.gov/story/threats-birds-collisions-nighttime-lighting . See also: Adams, C.A., Fernández- Juricic, E., Bayne, E.M. et al. Effects of artificial light on bird movement and distribution: a systematic map. Environ Evid 10, 37 (2021). https://doi.org/10.1186/s13750-021-00246-8 ; See also: Horton, K.G., Buler, J.J., Anderson, S.J. et al. Artificial light at night is a top predictor of bird migration stopover density. Nat Commun 14, 7446 (2023). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-023-43046-z ; See also: Natalie E. van Dis, Kamil Spoelstra, Marcel E. Visser, & Davide M. Addenari. The noise pollution generated by nighttime drilling could disrupt the natural behaviors of nocturnal wildlife, including owls and other predators that depend on undisturbed conditions for hunting. The combination of artificial light and industrial noise has the potential to fragment habitat, increase stress on wildlife, and contribute to long- term ecological degradation in an area already facing multiple environmental pressures. 16 16 Senzaki M, Kadoya T, Francis CD. Direct and indirect effects of noise pollution alter biological communities in and near noise-exposed environments. Proc Biol Sci. 2020 Mar 25;287(1923):20200176. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7126038/ ; See also: Mathiaraman, K. J., Mulder, R. A., & Hale, R. (2024). "Anthropogenic double jeopardy: Urban noise and artificial light at night interact synergistically to influence abundance." Environmental Pollution, 363(1), 125078. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envpol.2024.125078 .	Russ McSpadden	Impacts to endangered species are analyzed in Section 3.4.2. Design features in Section 2.2.10 would also reduce impacts to listed species, as well as implementation of the adaptive management plan (AMP) in the Preferred Action alternative. Impacts to noise and light pollutions are adequately incorporated as design features in Section 2.2.10 of the EA. In response to public comments, sections 3.4.1, 3.4.2, and 3.4.3 in the EA have been updated to expand upon continuous drilling effects on wildlife.
CBD.168	Additionally, the noise pollution generated by nighttime drilling could disrupt the natural behaviors of nocturnal wildlife, including owls and other predators that depend on undisturbed conditions for hunting. The combination of artificial light and industrial noise has the potential to fragment habitat, increase stress on wildlife, and contribute to long- term ecological degradation in an area already facing multiple environmental pressures. 16 16 Senzaki M, Kadoya T, Francis CD. Direct and indirect effects of noise pollution alter biological communities in and near noise-exposed environments. Proc Biol Sci. 2020 Mar 25;287(1923):20200176. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7126038/ ; See also: Mathiaraman, K. J., Mulder, R. A., & Hale, R. (2024). "Anthropogenic double jeopardy: Urban noise and artificial light at night interact synergistically to influence abundance." Environmental Pollution, 363(1), 125078. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envpol.2024.125078 .	Russ McSpadden	Impacts to endangered species are analyzed in Section 3.4.2. Design features in Section 2.2.10 would also reduce impacts to listed species, as well as implementation of the adaptive management plan (AMP) in the Preferred Action alternative. Impacts to noise and light pollutions are adequately incorporated as design features in Section 2.2.10 of the EA. In response to public comments, sections 3.4.1, 3.4.2, and 3.4.3 in the EA have been updated to expand upon continuous drilling effects on wildlife.
CBD.170	EA § 2.2.2 (Drilling and Support Activities, p. 8-10) – States that drilling will occur 24/7 but lacks a detailed analysis of nighttime impacts.	Russ McSpadden	Impacts to endangered species are analyzed in Section 3.4.2. Design features in Section 2.2.10 would also reduce impacts to listed species, as well as implementation of the adaptive management plan (AMP) in the Preferred Action alternative. Impacts to wildlife and to special status species are analyzed in Sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2. Design features in Section 2.2.10 would also reduce impacts to listed species, as well as implementation of the adaptive management plan (AMP) in the Preferred Action alternative. Changes to the EA include an expansion of the 500 foot buffer from the centerline of Copper Creek riparian area, to a 0.25 mile buffer where no vegetation clearing, drilling, or reclamation activities would occur during the yellow-billed cuckoo breeding season (May 25-September 30).
CBD.171	EA § 3.4.1 (Issue Statement 1: Impacts on Wildlife, p. 37-50) – Mentions noise but does not fully evaluate its impact on owls, ocelots, and other species.	Russ McSpadden	Impacts to endangered species are analyzed in Section 3.4.2. Design features in Section 2.2.10 would also reduce impacts to listed species, as well as implementation of the adaptive management plan (AMP) in the Preferred Action alternative. Impacts to wildlife and to special status species are analyzed in Sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2. Design features in Section 2.2.10 would also reduce impacts to listed species, as well as implementation of the adaptive management plan (AMP) in the Preferred Action alternative. Changes to the EA include an expansion of the 500 foot buffer from the centerline of Copper Creek riparian area, to a 0.25 mile buffer where no vegetation clearing, drilling, or reclamation activities would occur during the yellow-billed cuckoo breeding season (May 25-September 30).
CBD.172	Given these concerns, a more comprehensive assessment of the impacts of nighttime operations on bird populations should be considered, as well as mitigation measures such as restricting drilling to daylight hours, implementing better light shielding techniques, and establishing better noise reduction protocols. Protecting the ecological integrity of the San Pedro region should be a priority in any proposed industrial activities.	Russ McSpadden	Refer to Section 3.4.4.2 for anticipated impacts to the San Pedro River. Impacts to noise and light pollutions are adequately incorporated as design features in Section 2.2.10 of the EA. In response to public comments, sections 3.4.1, 3.4.2, and 3.4.3 in the EA have been updated to expand upon continuous drilling effects on wildlife.
CBD.174	Copper Creek is a tributary of the San Pedro River, which is home to critical habitat for the endangered Southwest willow flycatcher. This species depends on riparian areas with dense vegetation for breeding, nesting, and foraging. Any project that affects Copper Creek, whether through water quality degradation, hydrological alterations, or habitat disruption, could significantly harm the flycatcher's ability to survive and reproduce. Given that the SWFL's habitat is already highly fragmented, any further loss or degradation of habitat could exacerbate its decline and push the species closer to extinction.	Russ McSpadden	In response to public comments, and in consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service for this proposed project, additional design features and information that would reduce impacts to special status species are analyzed in Sections 2.2.10 and 3.4.2 of the EA. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has also been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek. The AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project through monitoring, and subsequently would mitigate adverse impacts on the water, riparian, and wild and water-dependent resources. Impacts to endangered species are analyzed in Section 3.4.2. Design features in Section 2.2.10 would also reduce impacts to listed species, as well as implementation of the adaptive management plan (AMP) in the Preferred Action alternative.
CBD.175	Mining operations, including exploration projects like Copper Creek, can have significant impacts on water resources. This can include changes in water quality through the release of contaminants such as metals, acids, and sediments, or reductions in water flow due to extraction or diversion activities. Such changes could degrade the health of Copper Creek and, by extension, the San Pedro River ecosystem. The downstream impacts could lead to a reduction in the quantity and quality of water available to riparian habitats that the SWFL relies on. This could result in diminished habitat suitability, reduced insect populations, and increased mortality among flycatchers.	Russ McSpadden	Potential degradation of water quality through sedimentation of surface waters, contamination of surface or groundwater is addressed in sections 2.2.6 and 2.2.10 of the EA. The BLM has not received an application for a full mine plan of operation at this time. From the BLM NEPA Handbook H-1790-1, "You cannot limit reasonably foreseeable future actions to those that are approved or funded. On the other hand, you are not required to speculate about future actions. Reasonably foreseeable future actions are those for which there are existing decisions, funding, formal proposals, or which are highly probable, based on known opportunities or trends." The discussion of the potential environmental impacts should be commensurate with the size, stage, and history of the operations. For this Project being at the stage and size of exploration drilling for site characterization, analysis of a future mine of the Project would be speculative.

CBD.176	Under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), BLM is required to ensure that federal actions do not jeopardize the continued existence of endangered species or adversely modify their critical habitat. Given that Copper Creek flows through critical habitat for the SWFL, BLM is legally obligated to analyze how the exploration project could affect this habitat. Failing to do so undermines the ESA's goal of recovering endangered species and protecting their habitats. A proper analysis of the potential impacts is necessary to ensure that any mitigation measures or alternatives are identified and implemented to prevent harm to the SWFL and its habitat.	Russ McSpadden	Critical habitat for the Southwestern willow flycatcher is found at the confluence of Copper Creek and the Gila River, 7 miles outside of the project area. See response to CBD.180. The BLM has consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on this project, and received a concurrence on our effects determinations. Refer to Chapter 4 for a summary of ESA Section 7 consultation conducted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service as part of this project.
CBD.177	Even if the Copper Creek Exploration Project itself does not result in immediate and direct harm to the SWFL or its critical habitat, the BLM must consider the cumulative impacts of the project in combination with other existing and foreseeable future actions. This includes other mining activities, urban development, agriculture, or water management strategies that could further degrade the SWFL's habitat. Without this consideration, BLM risks underestimating the overall threat to the species and failing to implement the necessary safeguards to protect its habitat.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM has consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on this project, and received a concurrence on our effects determinations. Refer to Chapter 4 for a summary of ESA Section 7 consultation conducted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service as part of this project. The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 7B ranch. See response to CBD.180.
CBD.178	NEPA requires that all significant environmental impacts of federal actions be thoroughly assessed, including indirect and cumulative effects. An adequate environmental impact statement or environmental assessment should include a robust analysis of potential impacts to the Southwest willow flycatcher and its critical habitat. By failing to include such an analysis, the BLM risks violating NEPA's transparency requirements and denying the public, including stakeholders and conservation organizations, an opportunity to weigh in on the potential	Russ McSpadden	The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 7B ranch. The BLM has consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on this project, and received a concurrence on our effects determinations. Refer to Chapter 4 for a summary of ESA Section 7 consultation conducted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service as part of this project. See response to CBD.180.
CBD.179	Scientific research consistently emphasizes the importance of riparian zones for maintaining biodiversity, especially in arid environments like those found in Arizona. Riparian ecosystems provide vital ecological functions, including water filtration, habitat for wildlife, and flood control. Disturbing these delicate ecosystems, particularly in areas already impacted by climate change and drought, could have far-reaching consequences not just for the Southwest willow flycatcher, but for the entire ecosystem that depends on the health of the San Pedro River and its tributaries.	Russ McSpadden	In response to public comments, and in consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service for this proposed project, additional design features and information that would reduce impacts to special status species are analyzed in Sections 2.2.10 and 3.4.2 of the EA. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has also been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek. The AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project through monitoring, and subsequently would mitigate adverse impacts on the water, riparian, and wild and water-dependent resources. See response to CBD.180.
CBD.180	The BLM must fulfill its legal and moral obligations to assess the potential impacts of the Copper Creek Exploration Project on the Southwest willow flycatcher and its critical habitat. This assessment is crucial to ensuring the long-term survival of the species and the integrity of its habitat. The failure to conduct such an analysis not only violates NEPA and ESA requirements but also puts the future of this endangered species at further risk. It is imperative that the BLM thoroughly evaluate these downstream impacts to prevent irreparable harm to the Southwest willow flycatcher and the delicate ecosystems it inhabits.	Russ McSpadden	Refer to Appendix D of the EA for species that BLM determined are not present within the project area (18 acres of surface disturbance) that includes the Southwest willow flycatcher. In response to your comment regarding potential downstream impacts, BLM has updated Section 3.4.2.3 in the EA.
CBD.183	The Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Copper Creek Exploration Project reveals a serious legal deficiency — the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) failed to conduct formal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) as required under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) (16 U.S.C. § 1536) despite clear evidence that the proposed action may affect federally listed species and their habitat.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM has consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on this project, and received a concurrence on our effects determinations. Refer to Chapter 4 for a summary of ESA Section 7 consultation conducted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service as part of this project.
CBD.184	Relevant EA Sections: · EA § 3.4.2 (Issue Statement 2: Threatened & Endangered Species, p. 50-61) – Provides an analysis of species but lacks sufficient consideration of cumulative and Notice-Level impacts. · EA Appendix D (Federally Listed and BLM Sensitive Species) – Lists species but does not indicate formal ESA consultation outcomes. · EA § 2.2.10 (Design Features for Biological Resources, p. 12-15) – Discusses mitigation measures, including seasonal restrictions, but does not provide ESA Section 7 consultation details.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM acknowledged the notice level operations under 43 CFR 3809.300 regulations that included compliance with performance standards outlined in 43 CFR 3809.420 to ensure the Notice activities would not cause unnecessary or undue degradation. The BLM has included the notice level operations in the cumulative effects analysis as a present and ongoing action throughout the EA in chapter 3, thus, the notice level operations are considered as part of the full scope of related actions and included in the impact analysis sections, including cumulative impacts. Notice level operations are explained in detail in EA Section 2.1. Additional analysis has been added to chapter 3 in the EA. The BLM has consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on this project, and received a concurrence on our effects determinations. Refer to Chapter 4 for a summary of ESA Section 7 consultation conducted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service as part of this project.
CBD.190	Further, recent trail camera data has documented the presence of the Mexican spotted owl (<i>Strix occidentalis lucida</i>) within the vicinity of the Copper Creek Project, despite the EA's assertion that no such species are present. 17 This is particularly egregious given that the Mexican spotted owl is listed as Threatened and is the subject of designated critical habitat and an existing USFWS Recovery Plan. This directly contradicts BLM's finding that the species is absent and requires immediate correction. 17 "Wildlife of the Lower San Pedro Watershed," <i>The Arizona Republic</i> , March 24, 2025, https://www.azcentral.com/picture-gallery/news/local/arizona-environment/2025/03/24/wildlife-lower-san-pedro-watershed/82548847007/ .	Russ McSpadden	Currently, the best available data - Arizona Game and Fish Department's Environmental Review Tool (ERT), does not show any recorded occurrences of this species within a three-mile radius of the proposed project area. See Appendix D for more discussion.

CBD.193	BLM should incorporate the recent Mexican spotted owl detection into the analysis, triggering formal ESA Section 7 consultation and incorporating owl-specific disturbance buffers and seasonal protections.	Russ McSpadden	See response to CBD.165.
CBD.194	<p>iii. Improper Reliance on IPaC and Internal Checklists</p> <p>Rather than fulfilling its duty to consult under Section 7, BLM relied solely on:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. An automatically generated IPaC report (Appendix E), which is a preliminary screening tool but not a substitute for formal consultation; and 2. The Interdisciplinary Team Checklist (Appendix A), which reflects internal agency opinion, not external consultation with the wildlife agency legally responsible for administering the ESA. <p>This does not meet the mandatory requirement for inter-agency consultation under 50 CFR § 402.14. Courts have consistently held that informal internal assessments do not substitute for legally required consultation with USFWS. This failure leaves the EA legally vulnerable to challenge and violates BLM's duty under Section 7(a)(2) to ensure no action jeopardizes protected species or critical habitat.</p>	Russ McSpadden	The BLM has consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on this project, and received a concurrence on our effects determinations. Refer to Chapter 4 for a summary of ESA Section 7 consultation conducted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service as part of this project.
CBD.196	The Project Area is part of a key wildlife connectivity corridor between the Galluro Mountains, the San Pedro River, the Sky Island Mountain ranges of southern Arizona and the northern Sierra Madre Occidental in Mexico, which could play a critical role in supporting species like the jaguar and ocelot. Maintaining connectivity in this region is essential for their long-term survival and recovery. Failing to evaluate these landscape- level connectivity impacts would undermine the efforts to protect these species and their critical habitats.	Russ McSpadden	<p>Refer to Appendix D of the EA for species that BLM determined are not present within the project area that includes the Ocelot and Jaguar.</p> <p>Impacts to wildlife connectivity have been expanded upon and are analyzed and disclosed in EA Section 3.4.3.</p>
CBD.197	<p>The EA's species impact analysis for jaguar and ocelot is incomplete and outdated. Both species have been detected in the San Pedro River watershed since 2023, a crucial part of the San Pedro River wildlife corridor. In November of 2023, Sky Island Alliance detected a jaguar in the watershed of the San Pedro River.18 The Center for Biological Diversity captured an image of an ocelot in the watershed in July 2024. 19 The EA fails to consider how habitat fragmentation, increased noise, and expanded vehicle access degrade this critical linkage.</p> <p>18 The Guardian, "Photographs Show Wild Jaguars Returning to the US," February 6, 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/feb/06/photographs-wild-jaguars-return-us-aoe.</p> <p>19 Center for Biological Diversity. (2024, October 3). Endangered ocelot appears on trail camera in new Arizona location. Retrieved from https://biologicaldiversity.org/w/news/press-releases/endangered-ocelot-appears-on-trail-camera-in-new-arizona-location-2024-10-03/</p>	Russ McSpadden	The BLM reviewed the two references provided in CBD.197 and determined that the two locations of sightings from the are not in the immediate vicinity of the project area. The EA evaluated the best available occurrence data from federal and state sources. Based on current records, the project area lies outside of the documented range of both species, and there is no known use of the site by jaguar or ocelot. As a result, no direct impacts to these species are expected.
CBD.201	<p>BLM must undergo an EIS to include a species-specific connectivity analysis for jaguar and ocelot, accounting for noise, habitat fragmentation, and increased human presence.</p> <p>BLM must also immediately initiate formal consultation with USFWS and prepare a Biological Assessment (BA) addressing all potential direct, indirect, and cumulative effects on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Western yellow-billed cuckoo · Mexican spotted owl (including addressing new photographic evidence) · Ocelot · Other species listed in the IPaC report for the Project Area <p>Further, BLM must prepare an EIS to include the findings of the formal consultation process, including the issuance of a Biological Opinion (BO) from USFWS. The BO must evaluate the full lifecycle of the project, including construction, operations, noise, vehicle traffic, habitat fragmentation, groundwater withdrawals, and cumulative impacts from other regional actions such as SunZia transmission line construction and military overflights.</p>	Russ McSpadden	<p>The BLM has consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on this project, and received a concurrence on our effects determinations. Refer to Chapter 4 for a summary of ESA Section 7 consultation conducted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service as part of this project.</p> <p>The Sunzia Project lies outside the established Cumulative Effects Study Area for this Project and the effects of the SunZia project have already been disclosed in an EIS.</p> <p>See response to CBD.196, CBD.197.</p>
CBD.202	Given the significant deficiencies in species impact analysis, as well as the real risk of impacts to federally listed species and their habitat, an EIS is warranted rather than relying on an EA.	Russ McSpadden	The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS.
CBD.203	<p>7. Violations Under NEPA & 43 CFR 46.415(a)</p> <p>Under 43 CFR 46.415(a), an Environmental Assessment (EA) must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Analyze the context and intensity of environmental impacts, including effects on wildlife populations and habitat. · Consider cumulative impacts from connected and reasonably foreseeable projects. · Ensure scientific integrity and professional expertise in evaluating species impacts. 	Russ McSpadden	<p>Impacts to wildlife connectivity have been expanded upon and are analyzed and disclosed in EA Section 3.4.3.</p> <p>Impacts to wildlife and to special status species are analyzed in Sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2. Design features in Section 2.2.10 would also reduce impacts to listed species, as well as implementation of the adaptive management plan (AMP) in the Preferred Action alternative. Changes to the EA include an expansion of the 500 foot buffer from the centerline of Copper Creek riparian area, to a 0.25 mile buffer where no vegetation clearing, drilling, or reclamation activities would occur during the yellow-billed cuckoo breeding season (May 25-September 30).</p> <p>The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 7B ranch.</p>

CBD.204	<p>EA Deficiencies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Failure to analyze cumulative impacts on species connectivity and habitat degradation (e.g., impacts from groundwater withdrawals, habitat fragmentation, and industrial activities such as SunZia, mining, and military flights). 	Russ McSpadden	<p>The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 7B ranch.</p> <p>The BLM assessed the Department of Defense (DoD)'s Arizona Regional Airspace project to determine if the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project would affect the resources that the Copper Creek exploration project may affect. The Copper Creek exploration project is located within the Outlaw area of the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project. The sound from the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project would not exceed 65 DNL (day-night average sound level) and the species that may be affected by DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project might be affected but are not likely to be adversely affected under Section 7 of the ESA. There are no anticipated effects to cultural resources from the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project. DoD would be responsible for consultation with tribes regarding military actions and drills. In addition, as the DoD's Regional Airspace project relates to fire risk, the minimum release elevation is 2,000 feet and the flares usually burn out by 1,600 feet about ground level so are unlikely to have an impact. Given the large geographic area that the DoD will have for the Arizona Regional Airspace project, the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project is unlikely to contribute meaningful effects to the same resources that are affected by the Copper Creek exploration project. Additionally, the applicant would have a Fire Prevention Plan in place that may mitigate potential impacts associated with future military overflight proposals.</p>
CBD.205	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Piecemealing impacts of exploratory drilling rather than considering the foreseeable impacts of an operational mine. 	Russ McSpadden	<p>The proposal that is before the BLM at this time is for consideration and analysis of exploratory drilling. The BLM does not have an application for a future copper mine that is associated with the exploratory drilling. Therefore it would be speculative at this time for the BLM to consider and analyze a future copper mine associated with the exploratory drilling - even as a reasonably foreseeable future action in the cumulative effects analysis. When and if applications and permits are filed for a future copper mine, the BLM would initiate a new NEPA process for the future copper mine and would consider impacts to resources and associated mitigation at that time.</p>
CBD.206	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of data-driven assessment of species movements and riparian dependencies, violating the requirement for scientific integrity in decision-making. 	Russ McSpadden	<p>Impacts to species connectivity are analyzed in the EA Section 3.4.3. The BLM used the best available science as well as resource specialists' expertise to assess species movement and riparian dependencies as described in Sections 3.4.1, 3.4.2, and 3.4.3 of the EA.</p>
CBD.207	<p>9. ESA Violations</p> <p>The ESA (16 U.S.C. §§ 1531-1544) mandates that federal agencies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) if a project may affect a federally listed species or its critical habitat (Section 7). Use the best available science to evaluate risks to protected species (Section 4). Prohibit "take" of endangered species, including harm through habitat destruction (Section 9). 	Russ McSpadden	<p>The BLM has consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on this project, and received a concurrence on our effects determinations. Refer to Chapter 4 for a summary of ESA Section 7 consultation conducted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service as part of this project.</p>
CBD.209	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The EA does not adequately assess habitat degradation for ESA-listed species such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yellow-billed cuckoo (<i>Coccyzus americanus</i>), a riparian-dependent species potentially affected by water withdrawals. Jaguar (<i>Panthera onca</i>) and ocelot (<i>Leopardus pardalis</i>), which rely on habitat connectivity in the Galiuro Mountains-San Pedro corridor. Mexican spotted owl (<i>Strix occidentalis lucida</i>), which may be affected by noise pollution from drilling and increased human activity. 	Russ McSpadden	<p>Impacts to wildlife and to special status species are sufficiently analyzed in Sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2 of the EA. In response to public comments, and in consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service for this proposed project, additional design features and information that would reduce impacts to endangered species are analyzed in Sections 2.2.10 and 3.4.2 of the EA.</p> <p>Jaguar and Mexican spotted owl have been determined to not be present within the project area (Appendix D).</p>
CBD.210	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The lack of hydrological impact analysis for Copper Creek ignores potential effects on riparian-dependent species, a direct violation of ESA Section 7 consultation requirements. 	Russ McSpadden	<p>The BLM has consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on this project, and received a concurrence on our effects determinations. Refer to Chapter 4 for a summary of ESA Section 7 consultation conducted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service as part of this project.</p>
CBD.214	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ARS § 17-102 (Wildlife Policy) – Mandates that wildlife be managed as a public trust resource. The EA's failure to assess cumulative effects on game species and habitat connectivity undermines this principle. 	Russ McSpadden	<p>The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 7B ranch.</p>
CBD.215	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ARS § 17-452 (Arizona Native Plants and Wildlife Protection Act) – Requires habitat protection for species of concern, including Sonoran desert tortoise, Gila monster, and native fish species. 	Russ McSpadden	<p>(The commission has not determined that the operation of motor vehicles is or may be damaging to wildlife reproduction, wildlife management or wildlife habitat of such area, so the roads within the project area remain open.)</p> <p>Impacts to wildlife and to special status species are analyzed in Sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2. Design features in Section 2.2.10 would also reduce impacts to listed species, as well as implementation of the adaptive management plan (AMP) in the Preferred Action alternative. Changes to the EA include an expansion of the 500 foot buffer from the centerline of Copper Creek riparian area, to a 0.25 mile buffer where no vegetation clearing, drilling, or reclamation activities would occur during the yellow-billed cuckoo breeding season (May 25-September 30).</p> <p>In response to public comments, and in consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service for this proposed project, additional design features and information that would reduce impacts to special status species are analyzed in Sections 2.2.10 and 3.4.2 of the EA. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has also been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek. The AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project through monitoring, and subsequently would mitigate adverse impacts on the water, riparian, and wild and water-dependent resources.</p>

CBD.216	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arizona Administrative Code R12-4-401 (Threatened and Endangered Species Management) – Requires impact mitigation for sensitive species. The EA lacks enforceable mitigation measures and fails to demonstrate how protective actions will be monitored. 	Russ McSpadden	<p>The BLM will ensure all mitigation measures, design features, and BMPs are being implemented through inspection and enforcement procedures required per 43 CFR 3809.600 through 3809.605. Per BLM policy, Plans of Operations without leachate are to be inspected twice annually, at a minimum, to ensure compliance with the performance standards at 43 CFR 3809.420 and the operation is in conformance with the approved Plan of Operations. Mitigation measures developed through the NEPA process are included in the Decision and enforceable.</p>
CBD.218	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No clear enforcement of seasonal restrictions for species like the yellow-billed cuckoo. 	Russ McSpadden	<p>Impacts to wildlife and to special status species are analyzed in Sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2. Design features in Section 2.2.10 would also reduce impacts to listed species, as well as implementation of the adaptive management plan (AMP) in the Preferred Action alternative. Changes to the EA include an expansion of the 500 foot buffer from the centerline of Copper Creek riparian area, to a 0.25 mile buffer where no vegetation clearing, drilling, or reclamation activities would occur during the yellow-billed cuckoo breeding season (May 25-September 30).</p>
CBD.219	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No commitment to habitat restoration beyond minimal reclamation requirements. 	Russ McSpadden	<p>The project includes a reclamation plan see EA Section 2.2.11. Reclamation would be completed to the standards described in 43 CFR 3809.420(b)(3) and the reclamation objectives outlined in BLM Handbooks H-3042-1 and H-3809-1.</p> <p>See 2.2.11 for monitoring and fulfillment of revegetation</p>
CBD.220	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No analysis of indirect effects (e.g., increased noise, light pollution, habitat fragmentation). 	Russ McSpadden	<p>Design features intended to reduce impacts of noise and light pollutions have been updated and are discussed in Section 2.2.10 of the EA.</p>
CBD.221	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community members in the Dudleyville and Aravaipa areas depend on a healthy ecosystem and the continued vitality of the San Pedro River for farming and recreation, including cattle and sheep farming, pecan and citrus growing, and greenhouse operations. Local businesses such as Aravaipa Creekside Growers—a small-scale diversified farm producing a variety of crops, cut flowers, and mushrooms, along with a bagel baking and food delivery operation—and Aravaipa Farms Orchard and Inn, which supports hikers visiting the Aravaipa Wilderness, rely on these natural resources. Mining proposals currently under consideration in the Copper Creek area pose significant risks to the Aravaipa region, including increased heavy equipment traffic, large-scale ecological fragmentation, and disruptions to local watersheds. 	Russ McSpadden	<p>The AMP is designed to provide the best available information to BLM Management as it becomes available in order to facilitate rational, adaptive decision making regarding Project related water use.</p> <p>The AMP is intended to monitor and mitigate impacts to sensitive resources thus preventing long-term impacts to the Copper Creek ecosystem. The proposed Project would be complete within 3 years of issuance of a decision, ensuring groundwater withdrawals related to the proposed Project will terminate at that time.</p> <p>The Cumulative Effects Study Area (CESA) for issue statements 1 and 2 was delineated to assess cumulative impacts such as habitat loss, surface water depletion, noise pollution, and the spread of invasive species. The CESA for issue statement 3, focuses on evaluating the effects on wildlife movement and connectivity in relation to the Santa Catalina/Rincon–Galiuro Linkage. The CESA includes a portion of the San Pedro River watershed, including areas that function as wildlife corridors that link the San Pedro River, Aravaipa Canyon, and the Galiuro Mountains. These natural corridors support species movement and gene flow across highly fragmented landscapes. The watershed boundary includes downstream water, and habitat impacts along with connectivity for both resident and migratory wildlife. The CESA for issue statement 4 evaluates potential impacts on hydrologic resources and their associated resources within the Copper Creek watershed that may result from groundwater withdrawals. This includes groundwater and surface water interactions, aquifer drawdown, and potential impacts to riparian vegetation and aquatic habitats, especially in areas with seasonal or perennial surface flows. The 7B Ranch has been included as a portion of it falls within this CESA.</p>
CBD.225	<p>The Draft EA's cumulative and connected impacts analysis is wholly deficient. It does not adequately evaluate the impacts of this project together with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The nearby Hot Breccia Copper Project. The approved SunZia Transmission Line, which disrupts contiguous wildlife corridors near the project area. The Air Force's proposed expansion of supersonic flight testing and increased use of flares and chaff, contributing to fire risk. Existing Mining Operations such as ASARCO's Ray Mine located near Kearny, Ariz and the nearby Hayden Smelter. Existing agricultural and municipal water use impacts on the San Pedro River. Past and present exploration activities, including drilling, by Redhawk over the last 18 years in the region. <p>Failure to account for these projects violates 43 CFR 46.115, which requires meaningful cumulative impacts analysis across the Cumulative Effects Study Area</p>	Russ McSpadden	<p>The Cumulative Effects Study Area (CESA) for issue statements 1 and 2 was delineated to assess cumulative impacts such as habitat loss, surface water depletion, noise pollution, and the spread of invasive species. The CESA for issue statement 3, focuses on evaluating the effects on wildlife movement and connectivity in relation to the Santa Catalina/Rincon–Galiuro Linkage. The CESA includes a portion of the San Pedro River watershed, including areas that function as wildlife corridors that link the San Pedro River, Aravaipa Canyon, and the Galiuro Mountains. These natural corridors support species movement and gene flow across highly fragmented landscapes. The watershed boundary includes downstream water, and habitat impacts along with connectivity for both resident and migratory wildlife. The CESA for issue statement 4 evaluates potential impacts on hydrologic resources and their associated resources within the Copper Creek watershed that may result from groundwater withdrawals. This includes groundwater and surface water interactions, aquifer drawdown, and potential impacts to riparian vegetation and aquatic habitats, especially in areas with seasonal or perennial surface flows. The 7B Ranch has been included as a portion of it falls within this CESA.</p> <p>The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 7B ranch.</p>
CBD.227	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The exploratory drilling project is part of Faraday's larger mining project and must be considered together <p>BLM is reviewing the proposed exploration drilling as a stand-alone project not related in any way to Faraday's planned large scale mine in the area. Yet under NEPA the agency cannot piecemeal or segment its review of connected or cumulative actions, nor ignore that the mine is a "reasonably foreseeable activity" under NEPA.</p>	Russ McSpadden	<p>The proposal that is before the BLM at this time is for consideration and analysis of exploratory drilling. The BLM does not have an application for a future copper mine that is associated with the exploratory drilling. Therefore it would be speculative at this time for the BLM to consider and analyze a future copper mine associated with the exploratory drilling - even as a reasonably foreseeable future action in the cumulative effects analysis. When and if applications and permits are filed for a future copper mine, the BLM would initiate a new NEPA process for the future copper mine and would consider impacts to resources and associated mitigation at that time.</p>

CBD.228	NEPA prevents a project from being implemented as smaller separate projects to avoid an environmental review of the cumulative impacts. NOI drilling projects by Faraday are concurrent and ongoing consisting of drilling at 11 pads.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM has included the notice level operations in the cumulative effects analysis as a present and ongoing action throughout the EA in chapter 3, thus, the notice level operations are considered as part of the full scope of related actions and included in the impact analysis sections, including cumulative impacts.
CBD.229	This project should be considered together among past and subsequent connected actions. Faraday describes the proposed action, past exploration, and future actions in the context of its broader mining project, the "Copper Creek Mine." Faraday Copper's plans for the Copper Creek Project, according to the company, encompasses approximately 73 square kilometers. The project area includes a three-kilometer-long resource zone of breccia and porphyry copper deposits.	Russ McSpadden	The proposal that is before the BLM at this time is for consideration and analysis of exploratory drilling. The BLM does not have an application for a future copper mine that is associated with the exploratory drilling. Therefore it would be speculative at this time for the BLM to consider and analyze a future copper mine associated with the exploratory drilling - even as a reasonably foreseeable future action in the cumulative effects analysis. When and if applications and permits are filed for a future copper mine, the BLM would initiate a new NEPA process for the future copper mine and would consider impacts to resources and associated mitigation at that time.
CBD.230	The 2023 Preliminary Economic Assessment (PEA) outlines a mining operation that processes approximately 345 million tons of mill feed material through a combination of open-pit and underground block-cave mining methods. The plan includes a 30,000 tons per day conventional flotation process plant designed to produce copper and molybdenum concentrates, with silver as a by-product. Faraday also outlines plans for processing facilities, waste sites and tailings piles. Faraday estimates mining for 30 years or more. 20 20 Faraday Copper, "Faraday Copper Announces PEA for Copper Creek with \$542M After-Tax NPV," news release, May 4, 2023, https://faradaycopper.com/news-releases/faraday-copper-announces-pea-for-copper-creek-with-5420/	Russ McSpadden	The BLM has not received an application for a full mine plan of operation at this time. Analysis of a future mine and effects would be speculative.
CBD.231	Given the scale and scope of the proposed operations, it is imperative that BLM includes the Copper Creek Project in a comprehensive cumulative impacts analysis. Such large-scale mining activities have the potential to cause significant environmental disturbances, including habitat destruction, water resource depletion, and pollution from mining waste. Additionally, the influx of industrial activity can adversely affect nearby communities through increased traffic, noise, and potential health risks associated with mining operations. A thorough cumulative impacts analysis is essential to assess and mitigate these potential adverse effects on the environment and local populations.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM has not received an application for a full mine plan of operation at this time. Analysis of a future mine and effects would be speculative.
CBD.234	The fact that Faraday has yet to formally submit the mine proposal to the BLM does not mean that it is not a "reasonably foreseeable activity" or connected action that must be fully considered under NEPA. The Bureau of Land Management must prepare an EIS now to analyze the cumulative impacts of connected exploratory drilling projects.	Russ McSpadden	The proposal that is before the BLM at this time is for consideration and analysis of exploratory drilling. The BLM does not have an application for a future copper mine that is associated with the exploratory drilling. Therefore it would be speculative at this time for the BLM to consider and analyze a future copper mine associated with the exploratory drilling - even as a reasonably foreseeable future action in the cumulative effects analysis. When and if applications and permits are filed for a future copper mine, the BLM would initiate a new NEPA process for the future copper mine and would consider impacts to resources and associated mitigation at that time.
CBD.235	Projects need not be finalized before they are reasonably foreseeable. "NEPA requires that an EIS engage in reasonable forecasting. Because speculation is ... implicit in NEPA, [] we must reject any attempt by agencies to shirk their responsibilities under NEPA by labeling any and all discussion of future environmental effects as crystal ball inquiry." <i>Selkirk</i> , 336 F.3d at 962 (internal quotation marks and citation omitted). As the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) also has noted, "reasonably foreseeable future actions need to be considered even if they are not specific proposals." EPA, <i>Consideration of Cumulative Impact Analysis in EPA Review of NEPA Documents</i> , Office of Federal Activities, 12-13 (May 1999) 22, <i>Northern Plains Resource Council, Inc. v. Surface Transp. Bd.</i> , 668 F.3d 1067, 1078-79 (9th Cir. 2011). 22 Available at https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2014-08/documents/cumulative.pdf .	Russ McSpadden	The BLM has not received an application for a full mine plan of operation at this time. Analysis of a future mine and effects would be speculative.
CBD.238	In the hardrock mining context, the federal courts have held that mineral examinations conducted as part of an anticipated larger mine cannot be piecemealed and segregated from review of the larger project. <i>Ksanka Kupaqa Xa'icín v. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service</i> , 2021 WL 1415255, *8, 2021 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 72235 (D. Mont. 2021) (since the mining company "planned for the construction of a mine following a proposed mineral exploration project" it must be considered at the time of the agency's review of the exploration). As that Court noted, when mineral investigations such as the drilling project proposed here are part of an anticipated mine, it is very different from the situation where there has been no previous mineral examinations and no plans by the company for a mine. <i>Id.</i>	Russ McSpadden	The proposal that is before the BLM at this time is for consideration and analysis of exploratory drilling. The BLM does not have an application for a future copper mine that is associated with the exploratory drilling. Therefore it would be speculative at this time for the BLM to consider and analyze a future copper mine associated with the exploratory drilling - even as a reasonably foreseeable future action in the cumulative effects analysis. When and if applications and permits are filed for a future copper mine, the BLM would initiate a new NEPA process for the future copper mine and would consider impacts to resources and associated mitigation at that time.
CBD.239	All of these conditions requiring review of the mine are present here – as acknowledged by Faraday's own presentations and materials. Faraday's mining project and its impacts must be fully reviewed as a connected action under NEPA, and/or at a minimum, for its cumulative impacts, along with the other reasonably foreseeable future activities in the area. Faraday Copper proposes a 32-year, multi-pit mine near Mammoth, involving federal, state, and private lands in the Copper Creek area. This project could significantly affect water resources and ecosystems in the region. 23 23 Arizona Communities Grapple with the Cost of a Green Energy Future: More Mining, KJZZ, February 9, 2024, https://www.kjzz.org/2024-02-09/content-1870825-arizona-communities-grapple-cost-green-energy-future-more-mining .	Russ McSpadden	The BLM has not received an application for a full mine plan of operation at this time. From the BLM NEPA Handbook H-1790-1, "You cannot limit reasonably foreseeable future actions to those that are approved or funded. On the other hand, you are not required to speculate about future actions. Reasonably foreseeable future actions are those for which there are existing decisions, funding, formal proposals, or which are highly probable, based on known opportunities or trends." The discussion of the potential environmental impacts should be commensurate with the size, stage, and history of the operations. For this Project being at the stage and size of exploration drilling for site characterization, analysis of a future mine of the Project would be speculative.

CBD.240	BLM is improperly treating Faraday's exploratory drilling as an isolated project, rather than as part of the broader Copper Creek Mine. NEPA requires agencies to consider connected actions and reasonably foreseeable future projects together to prevent segmentation that could obscure cumulative environmental impacts. Multiple legal precedents confirm that mineral exploration undertaken with the intent to develop a larger mine cannot be piecemealed from the broader mining proposal. The draft EA acknowledges cumulative effects in a general sense but fails to properly analyze the relationship between ongoing exploration and Faraday's anticipated large-scale mining project. Given the significant and foreseeable environmental effects, including impacts to sensitive wildlife, riparian areas, and groundwater, BLM must prepare a full EIS rather than relying on an EA.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM has not received an application for a full mine plan of operation at this time. From the BLM NEPA Handbook H-1790-1, "You cannot limit reasonably foreseeable future actions to those that are approved or funded. On the other hand, you are not required to speculate about future actions. Reasonably foreseeable future actions are those for which there are existing decisions, funding, formal proposals, or which are highly probable, based on known opportunities or trends." The discussion of the potential environmental impacts should be commensurate with the size, stage, and history of the operations. For this Project being at the stage and size of exploration drilling for site characterization, analysis of a future mine of the Project would be speculative.
CBD.241	ii. Failure to Consider the Hot Breccia Project	Russ McSpadden	The Cumulative Effects Study Area boundary for the EA is the portion of the Tucson Wash subwatershed (HUC 1505020308) east of the San Pedro River. The Hot Breccia Project is located outside the CESA and was not considered as part of the cumulative impact analysis and is approximately 25 miles northwest of the proposed project. The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 7B ranch.
CBD.242	The EA for the Copper Creek Exploration Project inadequately assesses cumulative impacts by failing to consider the Hot Breccia Project, managed by Prismo Metals, as a reasonably foreseeable future action). This omission results in a deficient cumulative impacts analysis that does not comply with NEPA and BLM regulations.	Russ McSpadden	See response to comment CBD.241.
CBD.243	The Hot Breccia Project is located in the Bunker Hill Mining District along the Gila River. Given the shared geological and environmental context, it is likely that the Hot Breccia Project will have cumulative impacts that should be analyzed alongside the Copper Creek Project. 24 In a February 2025 video, Prismo CEO. Alain Lambert explains that major mining companies like Rio Tinto, BHP, ASARCO and Freeport McMoRan, what he calls "the majors" are interested in the results of the exploratory drilling. Mr. Lambert explains that Prismo will be "partnering up" with a major mining company "sooner rather than later." 25 This proximity suggests a high potential for overlapping impacts, particularly regarding: 24 Infinitum Copper, "Hot Breccia Project," accessed March 20, 2025, https://infinitumcopper.com/projects/hot-breccia-project . 25 Prismo Metals Inc. "Hot Breccia: Prime Location, Major Potential!" YouTube, 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AS5xVgnN9zE .	Russ McSpadden	See response to comment CBD.241.
CBD.244	· Groundwater Resources: Both projects could lead to cumulative groundwater depletion, potentially affecting riparian habitats and hydrologic-dependent species within the Copper Creek watershed.	Russ McSpadden	See response to comment CBD.241.
CBD.245	· Wildlife and Habitat Connectivity: Increased surface disturbance, road construction, and expanded exploration activities from both projects may degrade habitats, increase noise pollution, and hinder wildlife connectivity, including impacts to BLM-sensitive species and federally listed species.	Russ McSpadden	See response to comment CBD.241.
CBD.246	· Air and Water Quality: Dust, noise, and potential water contamination from drilling and transportation could collectively degrade air and water quality beyond what has been assessed individually for each project.	Russ McSpadden	See response to comment CBD.241.
CBD.248	· BLM NEPA Handbook H-1790-1 at 6.8.3.: Defines cumulative impacts as the result of "the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions." The Hot Breccia Project is a reasonably foreseeable project given its active exploration status in the same mining district.	Russ McSpadden	See response to comment CBD.241.

CBD.249	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BLM NEPA Handbook H-1790-1: Mandates the evaluation of all RFFAs within the Cumulative Effects Study Area that could contribute to cumulative impacts. By omitting the Hot Breccia Project, the EA does not meet this requirement. 	Russ McSpadden	
CBD.250	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 43 CFR § 46.30: Requires consideration of non-federal projects likely to occur and contribute to cumulative impacts, further supporting the need to assess the Hot Breccia Project. 	Russ McSpadden	See response to comment CBD.241.
CBD.251	Neglecting to analyze the cumulative impacts of the Hot Breccia Project risks rendering the EA legally insufficient. Courts have consistently held that agencies must make a reasonable and good faith effort to evaluate cumulative impacts fully (Muckleshoot Indian Tribe v. U.S. Forest Service, 177 F.3d 800, 810-811 (9th Cir. 1999)). The failure to do so could lead to legal vulnerabilities for the BLM, necessitating a revision or supplementation of the EA.	Russ McSpadden	See response to comment CBD.241.
CBD.252	<p>On July 12, 2024, Prismo Metals announced in a press release that the company “is pleased to announce that it has received permit approval from the Bureau of Land Management (“BLM”) for ten drill pads, at the Hot Breccia copper project in Southern Arizona.” 26 Maps provided by Prismo Metals on the Hot Breccia Copper Project website show that this exploratory project exists on the boundary of the San Carlos Apache Reservation. 27 But BLM failed to analyze potential cumulative impacts to cultural resources or consult the Tribe on this issue, despite their letters asking for consultation. In fact, in the EA, BLM fails to list any consultation with the Tribe. Under NEPA, BLM must assess the cumulative effects of a proposed project on all aspects of the human environment, which includes cultural, historic, and archaeological resources. BLM’s NEPA Handbook specifically requires cumulative impact analyses to consider the incremental impacts of a proposed action when combined with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. This includes evaluating potential effects on cultural resources that hold significance for Native American Tribes.</p> <p>26 Prismo Metals Secures Permit Approval for Deep Drilling Program at Hot Breccia Copper Project in Arizona, Junior Mining Network, March 14, 2024, https://www.juniorminingnetwork.com/junior-miner-news/press-releases/2893-cse/priz/164084-prismo-metals-secures-permit-approval-for-deep-drilling-program-at-hot-breccia-copper-project-in-arizona.html.</p> <p>27 The Hot Breccia Property, Prismo Metals, accessed March 17, 2025, https://prismometals.com/project/the-hot-breccia-property.</p>	Russ McSpadden	See response to comment CBD.241.
CBD.253		Russ McSpadden	The MPO will be revised with the FEA.
CBD.254	The NHPA requires agencies to identify and assess impacts on historic properties, which include cultural resources that are significant to Native American Tribes. If a project has the potential to affect properties that possess cultural or religious significance to Tribes, these impacts must be considered and the relevant Tribes consulted. Specifically:	Russ McSpadden	The MPO will be revised with the FEA.
CBD.255	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 36 CFR § 800.2(c)(2)(ii)(A): Federal agencies must consult with Tribes regarding properties of traditional religious and cultural significance. 	Russ McSpadden	<p>NEPA requires BLM to analyze the action and alternatives as proposed. Speculation on the effects of actions not proposed is not within the scope of a NEPA analysis.</p> <p>The BLM has not received an application for a full mine plan of operation at this time. Analysis of a future mine and effects would be speculative.</p>

CBD.258	To rectify this oversight, the BLM should revisit the cumulative impacts analysis within an EIS to explicitly consider the Hot Breccia Project. This analysis should include a thorough examination of overlapping resource impacts and mitigation measures. Without such a revision, the EA fails to meet the fundamental NEPA requirement of informed decision- making and public transparency.	Russ McSpadden	
CBD.259	iii. Failure to Consider the SunZia Southwest Transmission Project, which disrupts contiguous wildlife corridors near the project area	Russ McSpadden	See response to comment CBD.241.
CBD.260	The SunZia Southwest Transmission Project is a large-scale infrastructure project aimed at transporting energy from New Mexico to Arizona, crossing through the San Pedro River Valley near Mammoth, Arizona. The San Pedro River is a critical riparian corridor that supports diverse wildlife and has significant cultural value to nearby Tribal communities, including the San Carlos Apache Tribe. Given its scale and proximity to the Copper Creek Exploration Project, the SunZia project is a past, present and foreseeable, impactful action that should have been included in the cumulative impacts analysis.	Russ McSpadden	The SunZia Project lies outside the established Cumulative Effects Study Area for this Project and the effects of the SunZia project have already been disclosed in an EIS.
CBD.268	Despite these concerns, the BLM's analysis did not adequately address the cumulative impacts of the SunZia project on these cultural resources.	Russ McSpadden	The SunZia Project lies outside the established Cumulative Effects Study Area for this Project and the effects of the SunZia project have already been disclosed in an EIS.
CBD.269	According to the Draft EA, the Cumulative Effects Study Area encompasses a portion of the Tucson Wash subwatershed east of the San Pedro River, yet the analysis fails to consider the SunZia Project, which directly crosses this area. There are several overlapping impacts that should be considered:	Russ McSpadden	The SunZia Project lies outside the established Cumulative Effects Study Area for this Project and the effects of the SunZia project have already been disclosed in an EIS.
CBD.270	1. Water Resources and Groundwater Depletion: The Draft EA recognizes potential impacts on riparian and aquatic resources from groundwater withdrawal associated with Copper Creek. However, it fails to assess how combined withdrawals from SunZia construction could exacerbate regional groundwater declines, threatening riparian habitats and surface water flow.	Russ McSpadden	The SunZia Project is outside of the Cumulative Effects Study Area (CESA) for this proposed project. The SunZia line crosses the San Pedro River approximately 42 miles south of the Copper Creek project area. In addition, according to the SunZia Southwest Transmission Project Final Environmental Impact Statement, Chapter 4, 4.5.1.2, "impacts to groundwater would be highly unlikely, due to appropriate avoidance and mitigation measures." Because there are no anticipated impacts to groundwater by the SunZia project, there would be no combined impacts from these projects.
CBD.271	2. Wildlife Habitat and Connectivity: The SunZia Project, with its construction and maintenance activities, disrupts habitats essential for game species, BLM-sensitive species, and federally listed species. The failure to analyze combined impacts on wildlife corridors essential for migration and dispersal represents a significant analytical gap.	Russ McSpadden	The SunZia Project is not a connected action to the proposed Copper Creek Exploration Project. Further, the SunZia line is outside of the Cumulative Effects Study Area for this proposed project. The SunZia line crosses the San Pedro River approximately 42 miles south of the Copper Creek project area, and the closest intersection of the SunZia Project footprint and the Santa Catalina Wildlife Connectivity Corridor is west of the San Pedro River approximately 16 miles to the southwest. This distance is great enough such that any effects of the SunZia Project on wildlife can not be attributed to, and thus were not analyzed as, cumulative impacts for this proposed exploration project. Impacts to wildlife connectivity have been expanded upon and are analyzed and disclosed in EA Section 3.4.3.
CBD.272	3. Cultural Resources: The San Pedro River Valley holds cultural significance to the San Carlos Apache Tribe and other Indigenous communities. BLM is required under 36 CFR § 800.2(c)(2)(ii)(A) and 36 CFR § 800.5(a) to consult with Tribes and assess cumulative impacts on cultural resources, which is absent in the analysis. The SunZia project's potential effects on cultural landscapes and archaeological sites further heighten the need for a comprehensive cumulative impacts assessment.	Russ McSpadden	The SunZia Project lies outside the established Cumulative Effects Study Area for this Project and the effects of the SunZia project have already been disclosed in an EIS.
CBD.275	To ensure compliance with NEPA, NHPA, and BLM regulations, including 43 CFR § 46.415(a), BLM NEPA Handbook H-1790-1, and NHPA Section 106, BLM must prepare an EIS that: 1. Includes the SunZia Southwest Transmission Project in its cumulative impacts analysis. 2. Assesses the combined impacts of both projects on groundwater resources, wildlife habitat connectivity, and cultural resources. 3. Engages in meaningful consultation with the San Carlos Apache Tribe and other impacted Tribal Nations regarding the cumulative effects on culturally significant resources. By omitting analysis of the SunZia Project, the BLM has failed to provide a legally adequate and scientifically sound assessment of cumulative impacts.	Russ McSpadden	The SunZia Project lies outside the established Cumulative Effects Study Area for this Project and the effects of the SunZia project have already been disclosed in an EIS.

CBD.277	BLM inadequately assesses cumulative impacts by omitting the U.S. Air Force's proposal to expand and modify special use airspace in Arizona as a reasonably foreseeable future action (RFFA). This omission results in a deficient cumulative impacts analysis that does not comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and BLM regulations.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM assessed the Department of Defense (DoD)'s Arizona Regional Airspace project to determine if the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project would affect the resources that the Copper Creek exploration project may affect. The Copper Creek exploration project is located within the Outlaw area of the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project. The sound from the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project would not exceed 65 DNL (day-night average sound level) and the species that may be affected by DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project might be affected but are not likely to be adversely affected under Section 7 of the ESA. There are no anticipated effects to cultural resources from the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project. DoD would be responsible for consultation with tribes regarding military actions and drills. In addition, as the DoD's Regional Airspace project relates to fire risk, the minimum release elevation is 2,000 feet and the flares usually burn out by 1,600 feet about ground level so are unlikely to have an impact. Given the large geographic area that the DoD will have for the Arizona Regional Airspace project, the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project is unlikely to contribute meaningful effects to the same resources that are affected by the Copper Creek exploration project. Additionally, the applicant would have a Fire Prevention Plan in place that may mitigate potential impacts associated with future military overflight proposals.
CBD.284	Flares and chaff deployed during training exercises introduce a significant fire hazard, particularly in the arid landscapes of the San Pedro River Valley.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM assessed the Department of Defense (DoD)'s Arizona Regional Airspace project to determine if the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project would affect the resources that the Copper Creek exploration project may affect. The Copper Creek exploration project is located within the Outlaw area of the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project. The sound from the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project would not exceed 65 DNL (day-night average sound level) and the species that may be affected by DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project might be affected but are not likely to be adversely affected under Section 7 of the ESA. There are no anticipated effects to cultural resources from the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project. DoD would be responsible for consultation with tribes regarding military actions and drills. In addition, as the DoD's Regional Airspace project relates to fire risk, the minimum release elevation is 2,000 feet and the flares usually burn out by 1,600 feet about ground level so are unlikely to have an impact. Given the large geographic area that the DoD will have for the Arizona Regional Airspace project, the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project is unlikely to contribute meaningful effects to the same resources that are affected by the Copper Creek exploration project. Additionally, the applicant would have a Fire Prevention Plan in place that may mitigate potential impacts associated with future military overflight proposals.
CBD.285	Supersonic flights produce shock waves and sonic booms, which can create sparks and ignition sources, increasing the likelihood of wildfires in dry vegetation zones.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM assessed the Department of Defense (DoD)'s Arizona Regional Airspace project to determine if the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project would affect the resources that the Copper Creek exploration project may affect. The Copper Creek exploration project is located within the Outlaw area of the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project. The sound from the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project would not exceed 65 DNL (day-night average sound level) and the species that may be affected by DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project might be affected but are not likely to be adversely affected under Section 7 of the ESA. There are no anticipated effects to cultural resources from the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project. DoD would be responsible for consultation with tribes regarding military actions and drills. In addition, as the DoD's Regional Airspace project relates to fire risk, the minimum release elevation is 2,000 feet and the flares usually burn out by 1,600 feet about ground level so are unlikely to have an impact. Given the large geographic area that the DoD will have for the Arizona Regional Airspace project, the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project is unlikely to contribute meaningful effects to the same resources that are affected by the Copper Creek exploration project. Additionally, the applicant would have a Fire Prevention Plan in place that may mitigate potential impacts associated with future military overflight proposals.
CBD.286	Past military exercises in Arizona have resulted in wildfires, demonstrating that this is not merely a theoretical risk. The EA fails to analyze how increased military activity in the area could exacerbate regional fire hazards, especially when combined with other industrial and mining activities.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM assessed the Department of Defense (DoD)'s Arizona Regional Airspace project to determine if the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project would affect the resources that the Copper Creek exploration project may affect. The Copper Creek exploration project is located within the Outlaw area of the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project. The sound from the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project would not exceed 65 DNL (day-night average sound level) and the species that may be affected by DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project might be affected but are not likely to be adversely affected under Section 7 of the ESA. There are no anticipated effects to cultural resources from the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project. DoD would be responsible for consultation with tribes regarding military actions and drills. In addition, as the DoD's Regional Airspace project relates to fire risk, the minimum release elevation is 2,000 feet and the flares usually burn out by 1,600 feet about ground level so are unlikely to have an impact. Given the large geographic area that the DoD will have for the Arizona Regional Airspace project, the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project is unlikely to contribute meaningful effects to the same resources that are affected by the Copper Creek exploration project. Additionally, the applicant would have a Fire Prevention Plan in place that may mitigate potential impacts associated with future military overflight proposals.
CBD.288	Increased low-altitude and supersonic flights may result in chronic noise exposure for wildlife and human communities.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM assessed the Department of Defense (DoD)'s Arizona Regional Airspace project to determine if the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project would affect the resources that the Copper Creek exploration project may affect. The Copper Creek exploration project is located within the Outlaw area of the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project. The sound from the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project would not exceed 65 DNL (day-night average sound level) and the species that may be affected by DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project might be affected but are not likely to be adversely affected under Section 7 of the ESA. There are no anticipated effects to cultural resources from the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project. DoD would be responsible for consultation with tribes regarding military actions and drills. In addition, as the DoD's Regional Airspace project relates to fire risk, the minimum release elevation is 2,000 feet and the flares usually burn out by 1,600 feet about ground level so are unlikely to have an impact. Given the large geographic area that the DoD will have for the Arizona Regional Airspace project, the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project is unlikely to contribute meaningful effects to the same resources that are affected by the Copper Creek exploration project. Additionally, the applicant would have a Fire Prevention Plan in place that may mitigate potential impacts associated with future military overflight proposals.
CBD.289	Wildlife impacts include stress-related behavioral changes, nesting disruption for threatened and endangered species, and increased habitat abandonment by noise-sensitive species such as the Mexican spotted owl, jaguar, and yellow-billed cuckoo.	Russ McSpadden	Impacts to wildlife and to special status species are analyzed in Sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2. Design features in Section 2.2.10 would also reduce impacts to listed species, as well as implementation of the adaptive management plan (AMP) in the Preferred Action alternative. Changes to the EA include an expansion of the 500 foot buffer from the centerline of Copper Creek riparian area, to a 0.25 mile buffer where no vegetation clearing, drilling, or reclamation activities would occur during the yellow-billed cuckoo breeding season (May 25-September 30).
CBD.290	Noise pollution is particularly harmful in riparian corridors like the San Pedro River, which serves as a migratory flyway for hundreds of bird species.	Russ McSpadden	Design features intended to reduce impacts of noise and light pollutions have been updated and are discussed in Section 2.2.10 of the EA.
CBD.292	The affected airspace overlaps tribal lands, historic sites, and rural communities, yet no formal consultation with impacted Indigenous nations is reflected in the draft EA.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM assessed the Department of Defense (DoD)'s Arizona Regional Airspace project to determine if the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project would affect the resources that the Copper Creek exploration project may affect. The Copper Creek exploration project is located within the Outlaw area of the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project. The sound from the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project would not exceed 65 DNL (day-night average sound level) and the species that may be affected by DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project might be affected but are not likely to be adversely affected under Section 7 of the ESA. There are no anticipated effects to cultural resources from the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project. DoD would be responsible for consultation with tribes regarding military actions and drills. In addition, as the DoD's Regional Airspace project relates to fire risk, the minimum release elevation is 2,000 feet and the flares usually burn out by 1,600 feet about ground level so are unlikely to have an impact. Given the large geographic area that the DoD will have for the Arizona Regional Airspace project, the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project is unlikely to contribute meaningful effects to the same resources that are affected by the Copper Creek exploration project. Additionally, the applicant would have a Fire Prevention Plan in place that may mitigate potential impacts associated with future military overflight proposals.

CBD.293	· Noise and air pollution from increased training operations could affect public health, leading to increased stress, sleep disturbances, and other health effects on local populations.	Russ McSpadden	Thank you for your comment.
CBD.295	· The combined effects of expanded mining, the SunZia transmission project, and increased military overflights would create a fragmented landscape that decreases habitat connectivity and increases displacement of wildlife species already stressed by human activities.	Russ McSpadden	Thank you for your comment. The Sunzia Project lies outside the established Cumulative Effects Study Area for this Project and the effects of the SunZia project have already been disclosed in an EIS.
CBD.299	· BLM NEPA Handbook H-1790-1 – Mandates the evaluation of all RFFAs within the Cumulative Effects Study Area. By omitting the Air Force's proposal, the EA fails to meet this requirement.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM assessed the Department of Defense (DoD)'s Arizona Regional Airspace project to determine if the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project would affect the resources that the Copper Creek exploration project may affect. The Copper Creek exploration project is located within the Outlaw area of the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project. The sound from the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project would not exceed 65 DNL (day-night average sound level) and the species that may be affected by DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project might be affected but are not likely to be adversely affected under Section 7 of the ESA. There are no anticipated effects to cultural resources from the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project. DoD would be responsible for consultation with tribes regarding military actions and drills. In addition, as the DoD's Regional Airspace project relates to fire risk, the minimum release elevation is 2,000 feet and the flares usually burn out by 1,600 feet about ground level so are unlikely to have an impact. Given the large geographic area that the DoD will have for the Arizona Regional Airspace project, the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project is unlikely to contribute meaningful effects to the same resources that are affected by the Copper Creek exploration project. Additionally, the applicant would have a Fire Prevention Plan in place that may mitigate potential impacts associated with future military overflight proposals.
CBD.300	· 36 CFR § 800.2(c)(2)(i)(A) – Requires federal agencies to consult with Tribes regarding impacts to culturally significant lands and resources—which has not occurred.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with tribes to address concerns. Pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800, the regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA 54 U.S.C. 306108); Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments; and the Bureau of Land Management policies as found in Handbook 1780-1, Improving and Sustaining BLM-Tribal Relations; the Safford Field Office sent letters to initiate consultation with potentially affected tribes. Of the 12 tribes invited to consult, the BLM only received responses from three, none of whom had serious concerns that needed to be addressed. The BLM continues to notify the tribes as the process advances and is open to discussion of any concerns that may come up. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.
CBD.301	By neglecting to analyze the cumulative impacts of the Air Force's training expansion, the BLM's EA violates NEPA's requirement for a complete and informed decision-making process. The failure to assess wildfire risks, noise pollution, habitat fragmentation, and cultural impacts exposes the agency to legal vulnerabilities, as courts have ruled that agencies must make a reasonable and good faith effort to evaluate cumulative impacts (Muckleshoot Indian Tribe v. U.S. Forest Service, 177 F.3d 800, 810-811 (9th Cir. 1999)).	Russ McSpadden	The BLM assessed the Department of Defense (DoD)'s Arizona Regional Airspace project to determine if the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project would affect the resources that the Copper Creek exploration project may affect. The Copper Creek exploration project is located within the Outlaw area of the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project. The sound from the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project would not exceed 65 DNL (day-night average sound level) and the species that may be affected by DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project might be affected but are not likely to be adversely affected under Section 7 of the ESA. There are no anticipated effects to cultural resources from the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project. DoD would be responsible for consultation with tribes regarding military actions and drills. In addition, as the DoD's Regional Airspace project relates to fire risk, the minimum release elevation is 2,000 feet and the flares usually burn out by 1,600 feet about ground level so are unlikely to have an impact. Given the large geographic area that the DoD will have for the Arizona Regional Airspace project, the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project is unlikely to contribute meaningful effects to the same resources that are affected by the Copper Creek exploration project. Additionally, the applicant would have a Fire Prevention Plan in place that may mitigate potential impacts associated with future military overflight proposals.
CBD.304	2. Analyze overlapping wildfire risks from increased flare deployment and supersonic activity, particularly in fire-prone areas of the San Pedro River Valley.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM assessed the Department of Defense (DoD)'s Arizona Regional Airspace project to determine if the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project would affect the resources that the Copper Creek exploration project may affect. The Copper Creek exploration project is located within the Outlaw area of the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project. The sound from the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project would not exceed 65 DNL (day-night average sound level) and the species that may be affected by DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project might be affected but are not likely to be adversely affected under Section 7 of the ESA. There are no anticipated effects to cultural resources from the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project. DoD would be responsible for consultation with tribes regarding military actions and drills. In addition, as the DoD's Regional Airspace project relates to fire risk, the minimum release elevation is 2,000 feet and the flares usually burn out by 1,600 feet about ground level so are unlikely to have an impact. Given the large geographic area that the DoD will have for the Arizona Regional Airspace project, the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project is unlikely to contribute meaningful effects to the same resources that are affected by the Copper Creek exploration project. Additionally, the applicant would have a Fire Prevention Plan in place that may mitigate potential impacts associated with future military overflight proposals.
CBD.305	3. Assess combined noise and air pollution effects on wildlife, public health, and cultural sites when military training, mining, and infrastructure projects are considered together.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 7B ranch.
CBD.306	4. Engage in formal consultation with Indigenous tribes and rural communities affected by military overflights and associated disturbances.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM assessed the Department of Defense (DoD)'s Arizona Regional Airspace project to determine if the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project would affect the resources that the Copper Creek exploration project may affect. The Copper Creek exploration project is located within the Outlaw area of the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project. The sound from the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project would not exceed 65 DNL (day-night average sound level) and the species that may be affected by DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project might be affected but are not likely to be adversely affected under Section 7 of the ESA. There are no anticipated effects to cultural resources from the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project. DoD would be responsible for consultation with tribes regarding military actions and drills. In addition, as the DoD's Regional Airspace project relates to fire risk, the minimum release elevation is 2,000 feet and the flares usually burn out by 1,600 feet about ground level so are unlikely to have an impact. Given the large geographic area that the DoD will have for the Arizona Regional Airspace project, the DoD's Arizona Regional Airspace project is unlikely to contribute meaningful effects to the same resources that are affected by the Copper Creek exploration project. Additionally, the applicant would have a Fire Prevention Plan in place that may mitigate potential impacts associated with future military overflight proposals.
CBD.308	The EA fails to fully assess the cumulative impacts to groundwater resources and riparian ecosystems in the Lower San Pedro River watershed, a critically important downstream reach that depends directly on inflows from tributaries like Copper Creek. This omission violates the requirements of NEPA.	Russ McSpadden	The selection of the eastern portion of the Tucson Wash HUC 10 Subwatershed is sufficient to identify the cumulative impacts that could be associated with the proposed Project. This is because it provides an adequate geographic context for impacts to hydrologic and hydrologic-dependent resources within the Copper Creek watershed that may be affected by groundwater withdrawals. The AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project through monitoring, and subsequently would mitigate adverse impacts on the water, riparian, and water and water-dependent resources during the proposed 2-3 year operating period of exploration activities. Due to the relatively low pumping rate and relatively low annual volume proposed for pumping, no project attributable discernible impacts to inflows, either surface or groundwater, to the San Pedro River are anticipated.

CBD.309	The Lower San Pedro River, including its contributing tributaries like Copper Creek, functions as a single, hydrologically interconnected system. BLM's EA, however, artificially narrows its analysis to focus only on the immediate project footprint, ignoring the well-documented cumulative water stress affecting the entire Lower San Pedro Basin. This failure to analyze cumulative withdrawals underrepresents the downstream impacts that the project could contribute to.	Russ McSpadden	According to weather-station data at the nearest RAWs site, Horse Camp, the average annual precipitation during the period of 2021 through 2024 was 16.07 inches. According to OSU PRISM modeling, the average modeled precipitation in the Project area during the past 10 years was 15.2 inches. According to USGS StreamStats modeling, the mean annual precipitation calculated for the Copper Creek watershed was 18.9 inches. Using the lowest modeled volumes from either the USGS model or the OSU PRISM model (6.83 to 13.9 inches annually, much lower than the median or averages recorded or modeled), and the total Copper Creek contributing watershed area calculated at the Hendrickson Well as 12.9 square miles, and anticipating losses to evapotranspiration of 90%, the lowest modeled range of precipitation available as streamflow and/or aquifer recharge is 469 to 956 acre-feet annually. The total annual use for Project purposes is 1.1% or less.
CBD.311	EA § 3.4.4 (Issue Statement 4: Hydrology, p. 67-73) – Discusses groundwater but does not fully evaluate long-term effects of withdrawals.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM is committed to elevated levels of monitoring, per the AMP, to ensure biological communities and environmental processes are maintained and no long-term impacts to riparian ecosystems are incurred.
CBD.312	EA § 2.2.6 (Water Management Plan, p. 11-12) – Describes water use but does not quantify potential depletion impacts on riparian ecosystems.	Russ McSpadden	The nearest ADWR GWSI well (ID 324418110350001) is located west of the proposed project area and east of the San Pedro River shows an overall increase in groundwater levels since the late 1990s. The groundwater levels associated with the project, including at this well, will be included in quarterly data analyzed by the BLM in accordance with the AMP in order to balance uses and preserve resources if the Preferred Action is selected.
CBD.313	EA Appendix E (USFWS Consultation Report on Aquatic Resources) – If present, this should be referenced directly for species affected by water use.	Russ McSpadden	Thank you for your comment.
CBD.315	<p>1. Regional Groundwater Overdraft in the Lower San Pedro Basin</p> <p>Copper Creek contributes flow to the Lower San Pedro River, an area already subject to severe groundwater overdraft from a combination of agricultural pumping, private wells, residential development, and mining activities. BLM has clear data available from the Arizona Department of Water Resources (ADWR), which has repeatedly identified parts of this basin as at risk of groundwater mining, meaning withdrawals exceed natural recharge. There are several authoritative sources that document the issue of groundwater overdraft in the Lower San Pedro Basin, exacerbated by activities such as mining, agriculture, and residential development. These sources provide comprehensive data and analyses on groundwater usage and its implications for the region.</p> <p>1. Arizona Department of Water Resources (ADWR) – Overdraft Data Dashboard: ADWR maintains an Overdraft Data Dashboard that supplements the Safe-Yield report. This interactive tool allows stakeholders to explore data related to groundwater overdraft across Arizona, including the Lower San Pedro Basin. It supports data transparency efforts and aids in understanding the balance between groundwater withdrawals and natural recharge. 34</p> <p>34 Arizona Department of Water Resources, Overdraft Data Dashboard, https://www.azwater.gov/adwr-data-dashboards.</p> <p>2. Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) – Ambient Groundwater Quality of the Lower San Pedro Basin: ADEQ conducted a comprehensive study in 2000 on the ambient groundwater quality of the Lower San Pedro Basin. The findings highlight that mining is the single largest water use in the basin, significantly impacting groundwater levels and quality. The study also notes that the floodplain aquifer, the most productive in the region, supplies water for mining, irrigation, and municipal uses, making it vulnerable to overdraft. 35</p> <p>35 Arizona Department of Environmental Quality, Ambient Groundwater Quality of the Lower San Pedro Basin, https://static.azdeq.gov/wqd/gw/fs/02-09_1sp_fs.pdf.</p> <p>3. Arizona Department of Water Resources – Groundwater Site Inventory (GWSI) Database Handbook: The GWSI database serves as ADWR's primary repository for statewide groundwater data, including the Lower San Pedro Basin. It contains field-verified data on wells and springs, collected by ADWR and cooperating agencies. This resource is essential for analyzing groundwater levels, usage patterns, and identifying areas at risk of overdraft. 36</p> <p>36 Arizona Department of Water Resources, Groundwater Site Inventory (GWSI) Database Handbook (2021), https://www.azwater.gov/sites/default/files/2022-12/GWSI_DatabaseHandbook2021.pdf.</p> <p>4. Arizona Department of Water Resources – San Pedro Model: ADWR has developed groundwater models, including the San Pedro Model, to support water management decisions. These models assist in understanding groundwater flow and the impacts of various water uses in the basin, providing valuable data for assessing overdraft risks. 37</p>	Russ McSpadden	The nearest ADWR GWSI well (ID 324418110350001) is located west of the proposed project area and east of the San Pedro River shows an overall increase in groundwater levels since the late 1990s. The groundwater levels associated with the project, including at this well, will be included in quarterly data analyzed by the BLM in accordance with the AMP in order to balance uses and preserve resources if the Preferred Action is selected
CBD.316	<p>2. Climate Change and Reduced Recharge in the Lower Basin</p> <p>Scientific research confirms that climate change is reducing groundwater recharge across southeastern Arizona, including the Lower San Pedro watershed (Seager et al., 2007; Garfin et al., 2013). 39</p> <p>39 Richard Seager et al. Model Projections of an Imminent Transition to a More Arid Climate in Southwestern North America. <i>Science</i> 316, 1181–1184 (2007). https://acrobatis.adobe.com/id/urn:aa:sc:US:14652a8e-094c-4d7c-bbfb-1d9904ec2ac9; and Merideth, M. Black, and S. LeRoy, eds. 2013. Assessment of Climate Change in the Southwest United States: A Report Prepared for the National Climate. https://acrobatis.adobe.com/id/urn:aa:sc:US:451820a1-6b56-418e-b7b2-6379c587cb47</p> <p>Warmer temperatures, more intense drought, and declining winter precipitation all reduce the natural recharge processes that sustain both Copper Creek baseflows and downstream riparian health.</p>	Russ McSpadden	BLM is aware of the effects of climate on water and related resources and intends to monitor those susceptible resources in the project area. Climate factors including recent drought and precipitation, daily temperatures, and relative humidities will be considered in quarterly assessments of resource conditions in Copper Creek, as outlined in the AMP in Chapter 2 of the EA, should the Preferred Alternative be selected.
CBD.317	<p>3. Groundwater-Dependent Riparian Ecosystems</p> <p>The Lower San Pedro River is home to some of the last remaining intact riparian forests in the desert Southwest, supporting species like Western yellow-billed cuckoo, Southwestern willow flycatcher, and lowland leopard frog. These riparian forests are critically dependent on sustained shallow groundwater levels fed by tributary inflows from creeks like Copper Creek. The loss or reduction of Copper Creek's contributions would directly impair riparian health downstream.</p>	Russ McSpadden	<p>In response to public comments, and in consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service for this proposed project, additional design features and information that would reduce impacts to special status species are analyzed in Sections 2.2.10 and 3.4.2 of the EA. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has also been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek. The AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project through monitoring, and subsequently would mitigate adverse impacts on the water, riparian, and wild and water-dependent resources.</p> <p>The AMP is designed to provide the best available information to BLM Management as it becomes available in order to facilitate rational, adaptive decision making regarding Project related water use.</p> <p>The AMP is intended to monitor and mitigate impacts to sensitive resources thus preventing long-term impacts to the Copper Creek ecosystem. The proposed Project would be complete within 3 years of issuance of a decision, ensuring groundwater withdrawals related to the proposed Project will terminate at that time.</p> <p>Due to the relatively low pumping rate and relatively low annual volume proposed for pumping, there would be no discernible impacts to inflows from this project, either surface or groundwater, is anticipated to the San Pedro River.</p>
CBD.318	4. Wildlife Connectivity and Habitat	Russ McSpadden	Impacts to wildlife connectivity have been expanded upon and are analyzed and disclosed in EA Section 3.4.3.
CBD.324	A reduction in surface flow or loss of riparian vegetation due to cumulative groundwater stress would directly harm these species, triggering BLM's obligations under ESA Section 7.	Russ McSpadden	<p>In response to public comments, and in consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service for this proposed project, additional design features and information that would reduce impacts to special status species are analyzed in Sections 2.2.10 and 3.4.2 of the EA. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has also been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek. The AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project through monitoring, and subsequently would mitigate adverse impacts on the water, riparian, and wild and water-dependent resources.</p> <p>The BLM has consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on this project, and received a concurrence on our effects determinations. Refer to Chapter 4 for a summary of ESA Section 7 consultation conducted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service as part of this project.</p>

CBD.329	By omitting these well-documented scientific linkages, BLM fails to meet NEPA's requirement to use the best available science and ignores the full hydrologic context within which this project would operate.	Russ McSpadden	Should the Preferred Action Alternative be selected, the adaptive management plan (AMP) would produce an array of relevant hydrological information useful in assessment of trends and may be used to produce a hydrologic model of Copper Creek. As described in Section 2.3.1, which has been updated in the administrative EA, the AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project to monitor and mitigate adverse impacts on the water and water-dependent resources. The AMP has been also been described further in Appendix F.
CBD.330	Courts have consistently held that NEPA requires a watershed-scale analysis when projects involve groundwater withdrawals that could cumulatively affect surface flows downstream. In Great Basin Mine Watch v. Hankins, 456 F.3d 955 (9th Cir. 2006), the court found BLM's failure to account for regional groundwater drawdown violated NEPA — the same omission occurs here.	Russ McSpadden	The selection of the eastern portion of the Tucson Wash HUC 10 Subwatershed is sufficient to identify the cumulative impacts that could be associated with the proposed Project. This is because it provides an adequate geographic context for impacts to hydrologic and hydrologic-dependent resources within the Copper Creek watershed that may be affected by groundwater withdrawals. The AMP has been developed to include project driven, local, and national data to ensure that potential long-term, or cumulative impacts to water and water-related resources would be mitigated during the proposed 2-3 year operating period of exploration activities. Due to the relatively low pumping rate and relatively low annual volume proposed for pumping, no project attributable discernible impacts to inflows, either surface or groundwater, to the San Pedro River are anticipated.
CBD.332	1. Maps all past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions (RFFAs) affecting groundwater and surface water within the Lower San Pedro Basin, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private and municipal wells. Agricultural withdrawals. Existing and proposed mining and exploration projects. Infrastructure projects like the SunZia Transmission Line. 	Russ McSpadden	A discussion on neighboring private wells and mining projects can be found in section 3.3 of the EA. The Sunzia Transmission line is several miles to the south of the Cumulative Effects Study Area.
CBD.333	2. Incorporates current climate projections showing declining recharge and increasing drought.	Russ McSpadden	BLM is aware of the effects of climate on water and related resources and intends to monitor those susceptible resources in the project area. Climate factors including recent drought and precipitation, daily temperatures, and relative humidities will be considered in quarterly assessments of resource conditions in Copper Creek, as outlined in the AMP in Chapter 2 of the EA, should the Preferred Alternative be selected.
CBD.334	3. Analyzes cumulative impacts to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baseflows in Copper Creek. Surface water contributions to the Lower San Pedro River. 	Russ McSpadden	Due to the relatively low pumping rate and relatively low annual volume proposed for pumping, there would be no discernible impacts to inflows from this project, either surface or groundwater, is anticipated to the San Pedro River.
CBD.335	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Riparian forest health along both Copper Creek and the Lower San Pedro. 	Russ McSpadden	The Lotic AIM methods, described in AIM National Aquatic Monitoring Framework: Field Protocol for Wadeable Lotic Systems: Technical Reference 1735-2, Version 2, are the culmination of years of development and revision in effort to standardize field data collection methods, implement electronic data capture, and create a consistent, quantitative approach for determination of land health. Those method are deployed bureau wide.
CBD.336	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Habitat connectivity and wildlife movement corridors. ESA-listed species dependent on these habitat s. 	Russ McSpadden	The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 7B ranch.
CBD.337	4. Uses a regional groundwater model that accounts for cumulative pumping across the basin, rather than focusing only on localized project withdrawals.	Russ McSpadden	Cumulative impact pumping is addressed in section 3.3.4 of the EA.
CBD.338	5. Develops enforceable thresholds and adaptive management triggers tied to ecological indicators such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Streamflow persistence. Riparian vegetation cover. Groundwater level monitoring at established wells. 	Russ McSpadden	In response to public comments, and in consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service for this proposed project, additional design features and information that would reduce impacts to special status species are analyzed in Sections 2.2.10 and 3.4.2 of the EA. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has also been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek. The AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project through monitoring, and subsequently would mitigate adverse impacts on the water, riparian, and wild and water-dependent resources.
CBD.339	Without this broader cumulative analysis, BLM cannot lawfully issue a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) because the agency has failed to account for reasonably foreseeable cumulative harm to one of the most ecologically valuable and vulnerable watersheds in the desert Southwest.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM is ultimately responsible for ensuring that there are not detrimental impacts to water and water-related resources. Thus the BLM would implement an AMP that outlines an array of project specific, local, and national data collection and quarterly data interpretation that would be used to determine if water use reductions are needed to prevent effects to sensitive resources. For more information on this process, see sections 2.2.1.6. The EA has been updated to clarify the timing of the AMP and the role of various data sources in the decision making process.

CBD.340	vi. Omission of Population Growth and Development Pressure in Cumulative Analysis The Draft EA does not account for the region's rapid population growth and the resulting land use changes (urban sprawl), increased groundwater pumping, road expansion) affecting wildlife corridors, air quality, and groundwater supplies. Pinal County's population has nearly doubled in recent decades, and BLM-managed lands are increasingly impacted by recreation, residential development, and groundwater withdrawals. 43 43 Arizona Game and Fish Department. Pinal County Riparian Area Guidelines. Accessed March 20, 2025. https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/azgfd-portal-wordpress-pantheon/wp-content/uploads/archive/PinalCounty_RiparianGuides_FINAL.pdf . See also: Pinal County Board of Supervisors. We Create Our Future: Pinal County Comprehensive Plan. February 9, 2009. Accessed March 20, 2025. https://downloads.regulations.gov/FWS-R2-ES-2021-0153-0006/attachment_104.pdf . BLM should update the cumulative impacts analysis to include current and projected population growth and its associated impacts on	Russ McSpadden	The nearest cities are outside of the Cumulative Impacts Study Area.
CBD.341	vii. Exclusion of Significant Areas in Cumulative Effects Study Area Analysis	Russ McSpadden	The BLM is ultimately responsible for ensuring that there are not detrimental impacts to water and water-related resources. Thus the BLM would implement an AMP that outlines an array of project specific, local, and national data collection and quarterly data interpretation that would be used to determine if water use reductions are needed to prevent effects to sensitive resources. For more information on this process, see sections 2.2.1.6. The EA has been updated to clarify the timing of the AMP and the role of various data sources in the decision making process.
CBD.342	BLM's exclusion of significant areas from the Cumulative Effects Study Area appears to downplay the true scope of cumulative impacts. These exclusions include: · Copper Creek Project Area: Despite its extensive exploration history, it's largely excluded, minimizing the assessment of past, present, and RFFAs. The exclusion reduces the accuracy of the impacts associated with current and expanded exploratory drilling. · Tributaries to the San Pedro River: Critical waterways such as Copper Creek, Smelter Wash, Tucson Wash, and others are excluded. Given that these are essential to the hydrology and ecosystem health of the San Pedro, their omission is a significant oversight. · Wildlife Corridors: The Cumulative Effects Study Area 's exclusion of areas along River Road, known to support endangered and migratory bird species, neglects the potential fatal impacts of increased heavy truck traffic. The lack of consideration for critical foraging and nesting habitats of species like the purple martin and yellow-billed cuckoo raises concerns. · 7B Ranch and Other Conservation Areas: The failure to include these areas in the Cumulative Effects Study Area ignores their role in regional wildlife connectivity and their status as mitigation for other mining projects, making the assessment incomplete.	Russ McSpadden	In response to comments, the Cumulative effects study area (CESA) has been reviewed and updated based on the information provided from public comments, such that the gypsum mine project is also now included in the analysis. Wildlife corridors were considered in the development of the CESA, which focuses within the Santa Catalina/Rincon-Galluro Linkage. It includes parts of the San Pedro River watershed and surrounding areas that serve as wildlife corridors linking the San Pedro River, Aravaipa Canyon, and the Galiuro Mountains. These linkages support movement and gene flow for both resident and migratory species across an increasingly fragmented landscape. The CESA also encompasses potential downstream water, and habitat impacts relevant to connectivity. The CESA evaluates cumulative impacts to hydrologic and hydrologic-dependent resources within the Copper Creek watershed that may be affected by groundwater withdrawals. Key concerns include groundwater-surface water interactions, aquifer drawdown, and impacts to riparian vegetation and aquatic habitat, especially in areas with seasonal or perennial surface flows. The 7B Ranch falls within this CESA and was included in the analysis.
CBD.343	· For example, the 7B Ranch is a 3,073-acre property located along the eastern side of the lower San Pedro River, directly east of Mammoth, Arizona. This expansive parcel encompasses approximately 6.8 miles of the river corridor and boasts one of the largest, unfragmented mesquite bosques in the American Southwest. The quality and size of this bosque have led to its proposal as both a state Natural Area and a National Natural Landmark, underscoring its significant conservation value. The 7B Ranch was designated by an Act of Congress to mitigate ecological impacts of the Resolution Copper Mine expansion near Superior. The current plan is to put the parcel under the management of the BLM's San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area (SPRNCA). See: 7B Management Plan by The Nature Conservancy; Ecological Overview – San Pedro River Parcel by WestLand Resources. The 7B Ranch is a crucial component of the lower San Pedro River ecosystem, which serves as a vital movement corridor for both seasonal and annual migrations of birds and mammals. The property is contiguous with other conservation lands, including a 7-mile stretch owned by BHP-Billiton at San Manuel, together representing the largest intact mesquite bosque in Arizona. Notably, this area has documented the highest numbers of nesting Southwestern Willow Flycatchers on the San Pedro River, highlighting its importance for avian conservation.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 7B ranch. The BLM is ultimately responsible for ensuring that there are not detrimental impacts to water and water-related resources. Thus the BLM would implement an AMP that outlines an array of project specific, local, and national data collection and quarterly data interpretation that would be used to determine if water use reductions are needed to prevent effects to sensitive resources. For more information on this process, see sections 2.2.1.6. The EA has been updated to clarify the timing of the AMP and the role of various data sources in the decision making process.
CBD.345	Because Copper Creek feeds into the San Pedro River at the 7B Ranch, any pollution, sedimentation, or hydrological disruption from mining exploration and operations could have direct downstream impacts on the ranch's sensitive riparian habitat. If the Copper Creek mining exploration or future mine causes increased sedimentation, heavy metal contamination, or acid drainage, those pollutants would flow directly into the San Pedro River, potentially degrading the water quality at 7B Ranch. Mining often requires extensive groundwater pumping, which could lower the water table in Copper Creek and the San Pedro River, reducing the availability of water for the riparian forests, wetlands, and wildlife habitats at 7B. Changes to the flow of Copper Creek could lead to altered sediment transport, affecting the stability of wetland and mesquite bosque ecosystems that are crucial for migratory birds and other wildlife. The 7B Ranch is part of a critical wildlife corridor along the lower San Pedro. If Copper Creek's flow is reduced or polluted, it could deter wildlife movement, especially for species dependent on riparian areas. 44 44 See: The Nature Conservancy, 7B Ranch Management Plan (2016), available at https://www.resolutionmineeis.us/sites/default/files/references/nature-conservancy-7b-ranch-2016.pdf ; see also: Arizona Important Bird Areas, Lower San Pedro River, available at https://aziba.org/?page_id=461 ; see also: Arizona Game & Fish Department, Lower San Pedro River Conservation Opportunity Area, available at https://awcs.azgfd.com/conservation-opportunity-areas/terrestrial/lower-san-pedro-river ; see also: Faraday Copper Corp., Copper Creek Project Preliminary Economic Assessment (May 3, 2023), available at https://minedocs.com/24/Copper_Creek_PEA_05032023.pdf .	Russ McSpadden	Should the Preferred Action Alternative be selected, the adaptive management plan (AMP) would produce an array of relevant hydrological information useful in assessment of trends and may be used to produce a hydrologic model of Copper Creek. As described in Section 2.3.1, which has been updated in the administrative EA, the AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project to monitor and mitigate adverse impacts on the water and water-dependent resources. The AMP has been also been described further in Appendix F. The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 7B ranch.
CBD.347	The assessment should integrate data from the excluded regions, reflecting a comprehensive analysis of cumulative impacts.	Russ McSpadden	The Cumulative effects study area (CESA) has been reviewed and the gypsum mine project is also now included in the analysis. Wildlife corridors were considered in the development of the CESA, which focuses within the Santa Catalina/Rincon-Galluro Linkage. It includes parts of the San Pedro River watershed and surrounding areas that serve as wildlife corridors linking the San Pedro River, Aravaipa Canyon, and the Galiuro Mountains. These linkages support movement and gene flow for both resident and migratory species across an increasingly fragmented landscape. The CESA also encompasses potential downstream water, and habitat impacts relevant to connectivity. The CESA evaluates cumulative impacts to hydrologic and hydrologic-dependent resources within the Copper Creek watershed that may be affected by groundwater withdrawals. Key concerns include groundwater-surface water interactions, aquifer drawdown, and impacts to riparian vegetation and aquatic habitat, especially in areas with seasonal or perennial surface flows. A portion of the 7B Ranch falls within this CESA and was included in the analysis.

CBD.348	viii. Exclusion of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) The exclusion of the Desert Grasslands Research National Area ACEC and Table Mountain Research National Area ACEC from the assessment overlooks areas with rare vegetation and critical wildlife habitat. The analysis should assess the direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of exploratory drilling and associated traffic on these ACECs, including impacts to biodiversity. Given their research and conservation value, the potential for long-term damage should be considered.	Russ McSpadden	The Cumulative effects study area (CESA) has been reviewed and the gypsum mine project is also now included in the analysis. Wildlife corridors were considered in the development of the CESA, which focuses within the Santa Catalina/Rincon-Galiuro Linkage. It includes parts of the San Pedro River watershed and surrounding areas that serve as wildlife corridors linking the San Pedro River, Aravaipa Canyon, and the Galiuro Mountains. These linkages support movement and gene flow for both resident and migratory species across an increasingly fragmented landscape. The CESA also encompasses potential downstream water, and habitat impacts relevant to connectivity. The CESA evaluates cumulative impacts to hydrologic and hydrologic-dependent resources within the Copper Creek watershed that may be affected by groundwater withdrawals. Key concerns include groundwater-surface water interactions, aquifer drawdown, and impacts to riparian vegetation and aquatic habitat, especially in areas with seasonal or perennial surface flows. A portion of the 7B Ranch falls within this CESA and was included in the analysis.
CBD.349	V. BLM Must Consider Cumulative Impacts, Including Cumulative Impacts on Climate Change BLM cannot abandon cumulative impacts analysis, based on CEQ's 2025 Guidance or its suggestion to follow the 2020 CEQ regulations, which eliminated the requirement for cumulative impacts analysis. Cumulative impacts necessarily fall within NEPA's mandate for agencies to consider the reasonably foreseeable effects of its action, "to the fullest extent possible." 42 U.S.C. § 4332, tracing back to NEPA's original understanding, as interpreted by CEQ, the courts, and BLM and the Department of Interior.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 7B ranch.
CBD.365	BLM should continue to follow current Interior and BLM policies and procedures requiring cumulative impacts analysis and the failure to do so would be arbitrary and capricious. See Office of the Secretary, Implementation of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, 73 Fed. Reg. 61292, 61310 (Oct. 15, 2008) (recognizing that Interior's 43 CFR 46.415(a)(3)'s requirement for an EIS to "disclose 'the environmental impact of the proposed action' necessarily includes 'cumulative impacts'"); 43 CFR § 46.215(f) (categorical exclusion exception applies if the responsible official determines the proposed action has "a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects"). See also id. §§ 46.30, 46.115 (recognizing cumulative impacts analysis must consider reasonably foreseeable future actions and past actions, respectively); BLM, 516 Department Manual 11, at 6 § 11.8 (Jan. 16, 2025) 50 (BLM Manual providing that an EIS is required "[i]n circumstances where a proposed action is directly related to another action(s), and cumulatively the effects of the actions taken together would be significant, even if the effects of the actions taken separately would not be significant"); BLM, NEPA Handbook 1790-1 (2008) 51 at Ch. 6.8.3 ("the purpose of cumulative effects analysis is to ensure that Federal decision-makers consider the full range of consequences of actions (the proposed action and alternatives, including the No Action alternative)"). 50 Available at https://www.doi.gov/document-library/departmental-manual/516-dm-11-managing-nepa-process-bureau-land-management-2 . 51 Available at https://www.blm.gov/sites/blm.gov/files/uploads/0Media-Library-BLM-Policy-Handbook-1790-1 .	Russ McSpadden	The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 7B ranch.
CBD.372	E.O. 14148 revoked E.O. 14096 E.O. 14173 revoked E.O. 12898. Therefore, NEPA documents should not include an environmental justice analysis, to the extent that this approach is consistent with other applicable law. CEQ.2025 Guidance at 5. To the contrary, environmental justice impacts fall squarely within NEPA's purview.	Russ McSpadden	The President has revoked Executive Order 12898.
CBD.383	Failing to conduct environmental justice analysis would also run contrary to CEQ's consistent understanding that NEPA requires consideration of economic and social effects that are interrelated with physical environmental impacts. CEQ has long recognized, "effects" under NEPA include not just "ecological" effects, but also "aesthetic, historic, cultural, economic, social, or health" effects. 40 CFR § 1508.8 (1978); 1508.1(g)(1) (2020); id. § 1508.1(j)(4) (2024); see also 1970 Guidelines, 35 Fed. Reg. at 7391 ("alternative actions that will minimize adverse impact should be explored and both the long- and short-range implications to man, his physical and social surroundings, and to nature"); 1971 Guidelines, 36 Fed. Reg. at 7725, § 2 (same), § 5(c) ("Significant adverse effects on the quality of the human environment include both those that directly affect human beings and those that indirectly affect human beings through adverse effects on the environment"); 1973 Guidelines, 38 Fed. Reg. at 20550, § 1500.2(b) ("agencies should use the environmental impact statement process to explore alternative actions that will avoid or minimize adverse impacts and to evaluate both the long- and short-range implications of proposed action to man, his physical and social surroundings, and to nature").	Russ McSpadden	The President has revoked Executive Order 12898.
CBD.386	The Draft EA fails to rigorously explore and objectively evaluate all reasonable alternatives, particularly those that could significantly reduce environmental impacts. NEPA requires agencies to evaluate a reasonable range of alternatives to ensure informed decision-making and meaningful public participation. The BLM's failure to consider key alternatives violates 43 CFR 46.415(b) and undermines the integrity of the NEPA process.	Russ McSpadden	The alternatives that are considered and eliminated from detailed analysis were eliminated because they did not reduce impacts or would not meet the purpose and need for action as described in Section 2.4.1 of the EA. There are three alternatives analyzed in detail in this EA including the Preferred alternative with the AMP, which would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project through monitoring, and subsequently would mitigate adverse impacts on the water, riparian, and wild and water-dependent resources.

CBD.387	<p>Reasonable Alternatives Not Adequately Considered</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Seasonal or Spatial Restrictions to Avoid Sensitive Habitats The EA acknowledges the presence of sensitive riparian and wildlife habitat within the project area, yet it does not rigorously evaluate an alternative that imposes seasonal or spatial restrictions on drilling operations to minimize disturbance during critical breeding, migration, or other ecologically sensitive periods. 2. A Reduced-Drilling Alternative to Limit Surface Disturbance The Draft EA does not assess an alternative that significantly reduces the number of drill pads or road expansions, despite the well-documented impacts of surface disturbance on wildlife habitat, riparian corridors, and connectivity. A reduced- footprint alternative could focus on areas of known mineralization to lessen environmental impacts. 3. Offsite Water Sourcing Alternative (Unjustifiably Dismissed) The Draft EA briefly considers an offsite water sourcing alternative but dismisses it, citing potential traffic and dust impacts from water trucking. However, this reasoning lacks rigorous analysis of water conservation measures, alternative trucking routes, or offsite water treatment options. Given the acknowledged risks of groundwater depletion and riparian degradation, this alternative warrants a more thorough evaluation. 4. Riparian Area Exclusion Alternative (Unjustifiably Dismissed) The Draft EA eliminates a Riparian Area Exclusion Alternative, which would have restricted project activities near Copper Creek to protect sensitive aquatic and riparian habitats. While BLM argues this would prevent access to drill sites, it does not explore buffer zones or alternative access routes that could allow mineral exploration while preserving crucial riparian ecosystems. 5. A Conservation Alternative (Completely Ignored) The EA entirely fails to consider a Conservation Alternative, which could: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Prohibit all surface disturbance within designated sensitive areas, including riparian zones, wildlife corridors, and known breeding habitats. · Require the use of directional drilling to minimize habitat destruction and reduce surface impact. · Enhance groundwater conservation measures, such as requiring zero- discharge drilling techniques and prioritizing recycled or non-potable water sources. · Commit to habitat restoration by implementing active replanting and erosion control in disturbed areas. 	Russ McSpadden	<p>Impacts to wildlife and to special status species are sufficiently analyzed in Sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2 of the EA. In response to public comments, and in consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service for this proposed project, additional design features and information that would reduce impacts to endangered species are analyzed in Sections 2.2.10 and 3.4.2 of the EA. The adaptive management plan (AMP), which would also reduce impacts to endangered species, has been described in further detail in Section 2.3.1 of the EA and in Appendix F. Changes to the EA include an expansion of the 500 foot buffer from the centerline of Copper Creek riparian area, to a 0.25 mile buffer where no vegetation clearing, drilling, or reclamation activities would occur during the yellow-billed cuckoo breeding season (May 25-September 30).</p> <p>The alternatives that are considered and eliminated from detailed analysis were eliminated because they did not reduce impacts or would not meet the purpose and need for action as described in Section 2.4.1 of the EA. There are three alternatives analyzed in detail in this EA including the Preferred alternative with the AMP, which would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project through monitoring, and subsequently would mitigate adverse impacts on the water, riparian, and wild and water-dependent resources.</p>
CBD.388	Given the lack of consideration of a range of reasonable alternatives, an EIS is warranted. An EIS would require BLM to conduct a far more rigorous evaluation of alternatives, ensuring that conservation measures are properly analyzed alongside project proposals.	Russ McSpadden	The alternatives that are considered and eliminated from detailed analysis were eliminated because they did not reduce impacts or would not meet the purpose and need for action as described in Section 2.4.1 of the EA. There are three alternatives analyzed in detail in this EA including the Preferred alternative with the AMP, which would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project through monitoring, and subsequently would mitigate adverse impacts on the water, riparian, and wild and water-dependent resources.
CBD.389	By failing to rigorously explore these reasonable alternatives, the Draft EA does not meet NEPA's legal and procedural requirements. BLM must either revise the EA to include these alternatives or elevate the review to an EIS to comply with federal law.	Russ McSpadden	The alternatives that are considered and eliminated from detailed analysis were eliminated because they did not reduce impacts or would not meet the purpose and need for action as described in Section 2.4.1 of the EA. There are three alternatives analyzed in detail in this EA including the Preferred alternative with the AMP, which would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project through monitoring, and subsequently would mitigate adverse impacts on the water, riparian, and wild and water-dependent resources.
CBD.390	<p>VIII. Clean Water Act (CWA) Violations – ADEQ MSGP</p> <p>The EA assumes but does not demonstrate compliance with the ADEQ Multi-Sector General Permit (MSGP). Critical issues include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · No clear stormwater modeling or sediment transport analysis. · No demonstration that the Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) effectively accounts for steep terrain and intense monsoon events. <p>These failures violate 33 U.S.C. § 1342 and 43 CFR 46.115 (cumulative water impacts), requiring a more robust EIS analysis.</p> <p>The Draft EA's proposed vehicle crossings through Copper Creek do not adequately account for potential sedimentation, erosion, or habitat fragmentation. Further, the best management practices (BMPs) listed are vague and unenforceable. Under the Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. § 1344) and Executive Order 11988 (Floodplain Management), BLM must ensure that activities in riparian zones avoid and minimize impacts.</p> <p>The draft EA acknowledges road widening but downplays erosion impacts. Recent field observations document significant erosion resulting from improperly managed water bars, which have caused sediment deposition in critical drainage areas.</p> <p>An EIS should include a more detailed erosion control and road management plan. Mitigation measures should be enhanced with enforceable standards for road maintenance, sediment control, and prompt reclamation of eroded areas.</p> <p>BLM must require site-specific Riparian Habitat Protection Plans with enforceable water quality standards, erosion controls, and invasive species prevention tailored to Copper Creek's ecological conditions.</p>	Russ McSpadden	ADEQ has reviewed the SWPPP and has issued the proper permitting to the proponent. The BLM has reviewed the BMPs and erosion mitigation measures found in section 2.2.10 of the EA and finds those sufficient to avoid or mitigate potential impacts due to erosion. No FEMA floodplain has been designated in the project area.
CBD.391	<p>IX. Clean Air Act (CAA) Violations – Dust and PM Analysis</p> <p>The Draft EA inadequately addresses fugitive dust, particulate matter (PM), and other emissions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The EA's analysis does not quantify PM10 or PM2.5 emissions, despite significant road grading, vehicle traffic, and drilling activity in arid, dusty terrain. · No dispersion modeling was conducted, even though sensitive riparian areas and nearby residential areas could be affected. <p>This violates 42 U.S.C. § 7401 et seq. and BLM's duty under FLPMA to prevent unnecessary or undue degradation (UUD).</p> <p>An EIS should include a comprehensive air quality analysis, including modeling, to meet Clean Air Act requirements.</p>	Russ McSpadden	This is addressed in Section 2.2.10 - Design Features and Best Management Practices of the EA and Appendix A.
CBD.392	<p>X. FLPMA and BLM Manual Violations – Wildlife and Habitat Protections</p> <p>The EA does not adequately protect wildlife connectivity and fails to adhere to BLM Manual 6500 for Wildlife and Fisheries Management:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The project's location within a key wildlife corridor is acknowledged but no meaningful mitigation is applied. · No seasonal restrictions are proposed for migratory bird nesting. · No adaptive management plan for cumulative wildlife impacts exists. <p>These failures violate 43 U.S.C. § 1701 et seq. (FLPMA) and BLM MS 6500, requiring the stronger analytical and protective framework of an EIS.</p>	Russ McSpadden	<p>Impacts to wildlife connectivity are analyzed and disclosed in EA Section 3.4.3. Threatened and endangered species that the BLM identified as present within the project area are analyzed in detail in Section 3.4.2 of the EA.</p> <p>Impacts to wildlife and to special status species are sufficiently analyzed in Sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2 of the EA. In response to public comments, and in consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service for this proposed project, additional design features and information that would reduce impacts to endangered species are analyzed in Sections 2.2.10 and 3.4.2 of the EA. The adaptive management plan (AMP), which would also reduce impacts to endangered species, has been described in further detail in Section 2.3.1 of the EA and in Appendix F. Changes to the EA include an expansion of the 500 foot buffer from the centerline of Copper Creek riparian area, to a 0.25 mile buffer where no vegetation clearing, drilling, or reclamation activities would occur during the yellow-billed cuckoo breeding season (May 25-September 30).</p>

CBD.395	The MPO indicates that water will be sourced from an offsite private well and transported via hoses or trucks. However, the environmental and hydrological impacts of this withdrawal have not been sufficiently analyzed.	Russ McSpadden	In response to public comments, and in consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service for this proposed project, additional design features and information that would reduce impacts to special status species are analyzed in Sections 2.2.10 and 3.4.2 of the EA. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has also been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek. The AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project through monitoring, and subsequently would mitigate adverse impacts on the water, riparian, and wild and water-dependent resources.
CBD.396	There should be a clearer assessment of potential groundwater depletion impacts, especially considering regional water stress.	Russ McSpadden	Should the Preferred Action Alternative be selected, the adaptive management plan (AMP) would produce an array of relevant hydrological information useful in assessment of trends and may be used to produce a hydrologic model of Copper Creek. As described in Section 2.3.1, which has been updated in the administrative EA, the AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project to monitor and mitigate adverse impacts on the water and water-dependent resources. The AMP has been also been described further in Appendix F.
CBD.398	The reclamation plan states that Redhawk will recontour and reseed drill sites, sumps, and access roads. However, it lacks specifics on long-term monitoring and success criteria for revegetation and ecosystem recovery.	Russ McSpadden	<p>The project includes a reclamation plan see EA Section 2.2.11. Reclamation would be completed to the standards described in 43 CFR 3809.420(b)(3) and the reclamation objectives outlined in BLM Handbooks H-3042-1 and H-3809-1.</p> <p>See 2.2.11 for monitoring and fulfillment of revegetation</p>
CBD.399	Given the sensitive ecological landscape, there should be a more robust and enforceable post-mining monitoring plan to ensure successful habitat restoration.	Russ McSpadden	<p>The project includes a reclamation plan see EA Section 2.2.11. Reclamation would be completed to the standards described in 43 CFR 3809.420(b)(3) and the reclamation objectives outlined in BLM Handbooks H-3042-1 and H-3809-1.</p> <p>See 2.2.11 for monitoring and fulfillment of revegetation</p>
CBD.400	3. Toxic and Hazardous Waste Handling	Russ McSpadden	This is addressed in 2.2.10 of the EA.
CBD.401	The MPO states that all hazardous waste will be removed daily, but there is little discussion on emergency spill response beyond basic containment.	Russ McSpadden	This is addressed in 2.2.10 of the EA.
CBD.402	A more detailed risk assessment should be included, particularly regarding potential spills of drilling fluids and hydrocarbons, and their mitigation measures.	Russ McSpadden	This is addressed in 2.2.10 of the EA.
CBD.403	4. Alternatives to Reduce Impact	Russ McSpadden	The alternatives that are considered and eliminated from detailed analysis were eliminated because they did not reduce impacts or would not meet the purpose and need for action. There are three alternatives analyzed in detail in this EA including the AMP alternative which allows for the BLM to make adjustments to the project before the effects are significant.

CBD.404	The MPO does not sufficiently explore a conservation alternative that could minimize surface disturbance and mitigate environmental risks.	Russ McSpadden	The alternatives that are considered and eliminated from detailed analysis were eliminated because they did not reduce impacts or would not meet the purpose and need for action. There are three alternatives analyzed in detail in this EA including the AMP alternative which allows for the BLM to make adjustments to the project before the effects are significant.
CBD.405	BLM should require a "reduced disturbance" alternative that significantly limits the footprint of exploration activities while still allowing for meaningful resource evaluation.	Russ McSpadden	The alternatives that are considered and eliminated from detailed analysis were eliminated because they did not reduce impacts or would not meet the purpose and need for action. There are three alternatives analyzed in detail in this EA including the AMP alternative which allows for the BLM to make adjustments to the project before the effects are significant.
CBD.407	The MPO acknowledges that roads will be used for exploration and then reclaimed, but the plan should specify how road closures will impact recreational users and local wildlife corridors.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM is committed to managing public lands in a manner that balances multiple uses and minimizes conflicts by adhering to established land use planning processes, engaging with relevant stakeholders, and implementing adaptive management strategies that promote sustainable resource use while protecting the environment and public access. The proposed action would not result in the temporary or permanent closure of primary access roads (ex. Copper Creek Rd, Bunker Hill Rd, Rug Rd). The project would not impede public access to drill pads via non-motorized means, into and through the area via Copper Creek Road, and the other access roads identified for improvement with no reclamation. Impacts to wildlife connectivity have been expanded upon and are analyzed and disclosed in EA Section 3.4.3.
CBD.408	Clearer mitigation strategies should be outlined for maintaining public access while ensuring safety.	Russ McSpadden	The proposed action would not result in the closure of public land to the public as the BLM would not be authorizing exclusive use of the area. While about 5.2 miles of spur routes would be reclaimed post-project, that would not restrict public access to those areas by non-motorized means. The EA addresses safety best management practices in section 2.2.10 in the EA.
CBD.414	1. Lack of Baseline Data Analysis	Russ McSpadden	Should the Preferred Action Alternative be selected, the adaptive management plan (AMP) would produce an array of relevant hydrological information useful in assessment of trends and may be used to produce a hydrologic model of Copper Creek. As described in Section 2.3.1, which has been updated in the administrative EA, the AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project to monitor and mitigate adverse impacts on the water and water-dependent resources. The AMP has been also been described further in Appendix F. Baseline ranges of Project specific hydrologic and environmental data have been collected for 2-3 years as of the publishing of the draft EA. Baseline ranges for parameters such as precipitation and temperature are available from a large resource pool of local and national weather data. New monitoring data will be analyzed against those baseline ranges. The EA has been updated to clarify data sources and their use in decision making. The AMP is designed to provide the best available information to BLM Management as it becomes available in order to facilitate rational, adaptive decision making regarding Project related water use.
CBD.416	"...present the environmental impacts of the proposed action and alternatives in comparative form, thus sharply defining the issues..." — 43 CFR § 46.415(a)	Russ McSpadden	The BLM is ultimately responsible for ensuring that there are not detrimental impacts to water and water-related resources. Thus the BLM would implement an AMP that outlines an array of project specific, local, and national data collection and quarterly data interpretation that would be used to determine if water use reductions are needed to prevent effects to sensitive resources. For more information on this process, see sections 2.2.1.6. The EA has been updated to clarify the timing of the AMP and the role of various data sources in the decision making process.
CBD.417	The EA discusses future monitoring but doesn't appear to evaluate existing Lotic AIM data—if any exist—for Copper Creek. The EA does not state if past Lotic AIM data is available or analyze other forms of aquatic monitoring data that could be analyzed in its place. That omission raises questions about how the BLM intends to distinguish between natural variability, climate-related changes, and project-induced impacts.	Russ McSpadden	Baseline ranges of Project specific hydrologic and environmental data have been collected for 2-3 years as of the publishing of the draft EA. Baseline ranges for parameters such as precipitation and temperature are available from a large resource pool of local and national weather data. New monitoring data will be analyzed against those baseline ranges. The EA has been updated to clarify data sources and their use in decision making.
CBD.418	The EA does not appear to analyze or even reference several other possible sources of aquatic or riparian condition data, which could be useful under NEPA to establish environmental baseline or support impact assessment:	Russ McSpadden	Baseline ranges of Project specific hydrologic and environmental data have been collected for 2-3 years as of the publishing of the draft EA. Baseline ranges for parameters such as precipitation and temperature are available from a large resource pool of local and national weather data. New monitoring data will be analyzed against those baseline ranges. The EA has been updated to clarify data sources and their use in decision making.
CBD.422	But this impairment listing is only discussed briefly in the context of cumulative impacts and not analyzed in depth. It could provide evidence of past or ongoing stream stressors relevant to project effects.	Russ McSpadden	Water quality was not an issue analyzed in full detail. More information as to why can be found in Appendix A.
CBD.424	PFC is listed as a potential future protocol to help assess impacts in the AMP, but the EA does not include any existing PFC assessments. If previous BLM PFC evaluations exist, they could help describe historic riparian health.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM is ultimately responsible for ensuring that there are not detrimental impacts to water and water-related resources. Thus the BLM would implement an AMP that outlines an array of project specific, local, and national data collection and quarterly data interpretation that would be used to determine if water use reductions are needed to prevent effects to sensitive resources. For more information on this process, see sections 2.2.1.6. The EA has been updated to clarify the timing of the AMP and the role of various data sources in the decision making process.
CBD.425	C. Hydrologic or biological monitoring data from previous mine activity	Russ McSpadden	Thank you for your comment.

CBD.426	Given that mining activity in Copper Creek dates back to the early 1900s and is acknowledged as a source of water quality degradation, BLM may have earlier monitoring data (e.g., for surface water metals or stream flow). The EA doesn't mention looking for or using such data.	Russ McSpadden	Water quality was not an issue analyzed in full detail. More information as to why can be found in Appendix A.
CBD.428	The EA notes that BLM may compare new Copper Creek data to "appropriate time intervals at similar sites within the Gila District". However, no such comparisons are made in this draft EA, even though they could help establish whether current Copper Creek conditions are anomalous or within expected ranges.	Russ McSpadden	Baseline ranges of Project specific hydrologic and environmental data have been collected for 2-3 years as of the publishing of the draft EA. Baseline ranges for parameters such as precipitation and temperature are available from a large resource pool of local and national weather data. New monitoring data will be analyzed against those baseline ranges. The EA has been updated to clarify data sources and their use in decision making.
CBD.429	Under 43 C.F.R. § 46.130 and § 46.415, BLM must describe the "environmental baseline" and analyze "reasonably foreseeable impacts." The EA:	Russ McSpadden	This has been addressed in Chapter 3 of the EA.
CBD.430	· Relies only on 2023–2024 Lotic AIM data for baseline conditions;	Russ McSpadden	Baseline ranges of Project specific hydrologic and environmental data have been collected for 2-3 years as of the publishing of the draft EA. Baseline ranges for parameters such as precipitation and temperature are available from a large resource pool of local and national weather data. New monitoring data will be analyzed against those baseline ranges. The EA has been updated to clarify data sources and their use in decision making.
CBD.431	· Fails to discuss whether prior relevant datasets exist, or why they were excluded;	Russ McSpadden	The BLM is ultimately responsible for ensuring that there are not detrimental impacts to water and water-related resources. Thus the BLM would implement an AMP that outlines an array of project specific, local, and national data collection and quarterly data interpretation that would be used to determine if water use reductions are needed to prevent effects to sensitive resources. For more information on this process, see sections 2.2.1.6. The EA has been updated to clarify the timing of the AMP and the role of various data sources in the decision making process.
CBD.432	· Mentions but does not analyze existing impairment designations or legacy data from previous mining;	Russ McSpadden	While describing the affected environment in which a proposed action would occur is a requirement of NEPA, analyzing the affected environment is beyond the scope of analysis.
CBD.433	· Postpones meaningful trend analysis until future adaptive management cycles, leaving impacts largely hypothetical and not fully evaluated in the current EA.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM is ultimately responsible for ensuring that there are not detrimental impacts to water and water-related resources. Thus the BLM would implement an AMP that outlines an array of project specific, local, and national data collection and quarterly data interpretation that would be used to determine if water use reductions are needed to prevent effects to sensitive resources. For more information on this process, see sections 2.2.1.6. The EA has been updated to clarify the timing of the AMP and the role of various data sources in the decision making process.
CBD.437	This reactive approach may not satisfy NEPA's requirement to take a "hard look" at environmental consequences before action is taken, rather than depending on adaptive management to fix issues after impacts occur.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM takes a "hard look" at the environmental consequences of the Proposed Action and alternatives in Sections 3.4.1, 3.4.2, 3.4.3, and 3.4.4 of the EA. The AMP, as described in Section 2.3.1 of the EA, would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project through monitoring, and subsequently would mitigate adverse impacts on the water, riparian, and water and water-dependent resources.
CBD.439	While the EA claims thresholds for "wetted width, thalweg depth, and hydric vegetation composition" will be used to trigger mitigation, it does not identify specific numeric thresholds or explain the scientific basis for them. NEPA and BLM policy require that any mitigation or monitoring plan be: "...enforceable and based on scientific data"— BLM NEPA Handbook H- 1790-1, §6.6.3	Russ McSpadden	The Lotic AIM methods, described in AIM National Aquatic Monitoring Framework: Field Protocol for Wadeable Lotic Systems: Technical Reference 1735-2, Version 2, are the culmination of years of development and revision in effort to standardize field data collection methods, implement electronic data capture, and create a consistent, quantitative approach for determination of land health. Those method are deployed bureau wide.
CBD.440	Without specific metrics and defined baselines, the thresholds risk being subjective or unenforceable.	Russ McSpadden	Baseline ranges of Project specific hydrologic and environmental data have been collected for 2-3 years as of the publishing of the draft EA. Baseline ranges for parameters such as precipitation and temperature are available from a large resource pool of local and national weather data. New monitoring data will be analyzed against those baseline ranges. The EA has been updated to clarify data sources and their use in decision making. The AMP is designed to provide the best available information to BLM Management as it becomes available in order to facilitate rational, adaptive decision making regarding Project related water use.
CBD.442	· Incorporate and analyze historical Lotic AIM or other aquatic data for Copper Creek if it exists, or explicitly state that no such data are available.	Russ McSpadden	The AMP is designed to provide the best available information to BLM Management as it becomes available in order to facilitate rational, adaptive decision making regarding Project related water use.
CBD.443	· Quantify thresholds for key indicators such as wetted width or percent cover of hydric vegetation and justify them scientifically.	Russ McSpadden	The Lotic AIM methods, described in AIM National Aquatic Monitoring Framework: Field Protocol for Wadeable Lotic Systems: Technical Reference 1735-2, Version 2, are the culmination of years of development and revision in effort to standardize field data collection methods, implement electronic data capture, and create a consistent, quantitative approach for determination of land health. Those method are deployed bureau wide. Baseline ranges of Project specific hydrologic and environmental data have been collected for 2-3 years as of the publishing of the draft EA. Baseline ranges for parameters such as precipitation and temperature are available from a large resource pool of local and national weather data. New monitoring data will be analyzed against those baseline ranges. The EA has been updated to clarify data sources and their use in decision making.
CBD.444	· Explain how baseline conditions will be established, and how confounding factors (e.g., drought, upstream land use) will be	Russ McSpadden	Additional information has been added to Section 2.3.1 of the EA in response to public comment.
CBD.447	1. Reject the current Draft EA as insufficient.	Russ McSpadden	The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS.
CBD.448	2. Prepare a full Environmental Impact Statement to analyze and disclose the project's full range of impacts.	Russ McSpadden	The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS.

CBD.449	3. Fully engage with the San Carlos Apache Tribe and other interested Tribes in a transparent, meaningful consultation process.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with the San Carlos Apache Tribe to address concerns. The BLM has made several attempts to consult and discuss the project throughout its duration with the San Carlos Apache Tribe Leadership and Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.
CBD.450	4. Conduct required consultation under the ESA.	Russ McSpadden	The BLM has consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on this project, and received a concurrence on our effects determinations. Refer to Chapter 4 for a summary of ESA Section 7 consultation conducted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service as part of this project.

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	Comment Text	Responses
EPA.1	<p>EPA'S DETAILED COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR THE COPPER CREEK EXPLORATION PROJECT, PINAL COUNTY, ARIZONA – APRIL 14, 2025</p> <p>Water Resources Geochemistry</p> <p>We understand from the public meeting on March 6, 2025, that potentially acid generating rock would be present, but the Draft EA does not include any analysis of acid rock drainage (ARD) or the potential for acid generation from exploration activities. This is especially important to disclose and evaluate since the Copper Creek Mining District is known to host sulfide-bearing minerals as part of its porphyry copper system, and drilling could expose reactive mineral to oxygen and water, creating conditions for acid rock drainage. In addition, historical mining in the area has already resulted in water quality degradation (p. 64). For example, Upper Copper Creek is listed as impaired for copper, iron, selenium, cadmium, and zinc, and ongoing remediation measures, including evaporation ponds and monitoring wells, are in place to address historic contamination (p. 64).</p> <p>The Draft EA does not include any geochemical characterization of the rock that would be disturbed. While the project proposes to contain drill cuttings in lined sumps and backfill them after drilling (p. 9, 11, 14), it is not clear whether the cuttings could generate acidity or mobilize heavy metals. We also note that pH or acid neutralization potential in the project area soils/rocks is not included in the analysis, nor any measures designed specifically to address ARD risks (e.g., lime addition, off-site disposal, or targeted water quality monitoring).</p> <p>During the March 27, 2025, meeting between the BLM and EPA staff, the BLM shared that oxidation, and therefore sulfuric acid creation, would be minimal because the holes would be capped immediately after drilling. The Draft EA says that once an exploration drill hole is completed, the drill hole will be abandoned with the Arizona Department of Water Resources abandonment requirements and pads could remain open for further exploration (p. 4). While prompt capping can help limit oxygen and water infiltration into boreholes, it does not prevent oxidation of drill cuttings stored at the surface, subsurface oxidation through fractures, or incomplete or failed borehole sealing over time. The EPA agrees that capping, when done properly and quickly, can reduce risk, but it is not a comprehensive risk reduction measure. Given the known geologic context and impaired condition of Copper Creek, the EPA believes analysis of ARD potential and associated mitigation is warranted in the Final EA.</p>	<p>Geochemical testing of drillholes and cuttings are generally performed during exploration activities (such as the proposed action) to characterize ARD potential and aid in the development of mitigation measures to permit the mine development/operation phase of a project. Due to the relatively short duration in which any given drillhole would be open, the adherence to ADWR abandonment requirements when drilling at each location is complete, the construction of sediment traps to contain cuttings/fluids, and all sumps being lined to prevent any migration and/or interaction from cuttings, acid generation and heavy metal mobilization potential for the proposed activity is mitigated.</p> <p>The operator is responsible for meeting the requirements of 43 CFR 3809.401 and 43 CFR 3809.420.</p> <p>43 CFR 3809.401(c)(1) states, in part:</p> <p>"Operational and baseline environmental information for BLM to analyze potential environmental impacts ... as well as information that may require you to conduct static and kinetic testing to characterize the potential for your operations to produce acid drainage or other leachate. ..."</p> <p>43 CFR 3809.420, in part, requires: "(11)</p> <p>Acid-forming, toxic, or other deleterious materials. You must incorporate identification, handling, and placement of potentially acid-forming, toxic or other deleterious materials into your operations, facility design, reclamation, and environmental monitoring programs to minimize the formation and impacts of acidic, alkaline, metal-bearing, or other deleterious leachate, including the following:</p> <p>(i)</p> <p>You must handle, place, or treat potentially acid-forming, toxic, or other deleterious materials in a manner that minimizes the likelihood of acid formation and toxic and other deleterious leachate generation (source control);</p> <p>(ii)</p> <p>If you cannot prevent the formation of acid, toxic, or other deleterious drainage, you must minimize uncontrolled migration of leachate; and</p> <p>(iii) You must capture and treat acid drainage, or other undesirable effluent, to the applicable standard if source controls and migration controls do not prove effective. You are responsible for any costs associated with water treatment or facility maintenance after project closure. Long-term, or post-mining, effluent capture and treatment are not acceptable substitutes for source and migration control, and you may rely on them only after all reasonable source and migration control methods have been employed."</p>
EPA.2	<p>• Disclose the potential for ARD and metal leaching from disturbed rock. For example, if pyrite or other sulfide-bearing minerals are present, discuss the potential for oxidation and cuttings to produce ARD and mobile metals such as copper, selenium, or cadmium into surface water or groundwater.</p>	<p>Geochemical testing of drillholes and cuttings are generally performed during exploration activities (such as the proposed action) to characterize ARD potential and aid in the development of mitigation measures to permit the mine development/operation phase of a project. Due to the relatively short duration in which any given drillhole would be open, the adherence to ADWR abandonment requirements when drilling at each location is complete, the construction of sediment traps to contain cuttings/fluids, and all sumps being lined to prevent any migration and/or interaction from cuttings, acid generation and heavy metal mobilization potential for the proposed activity is mitigated.</p> <p>The operator is responsible for meeting the requirements of 43 CFR 3809.401 and 43 CFR 3809.420.</p> <p>43 CFR 3809.401(c)(1) states, in part:</p> <p>"Operational and baseline environmental information for BLM to analyze potential environmental impacts ... as well as information that may require you to conduct static and kinetic testing to characterize the potential for your operations to produce acid drainage or other leachate. ..."</p> <p>43 CFR 3809.420, in part, requires: "(11)</p> <p>Acid-forming, toxic, or other deleterious materials. You must incorporate identification, handling, and placement of potentially acid-forming, toxic or other deleterious materials into your operations, facility design, reclamation, and environmental monitoring programs to minimize the formation and impacts of acidic, alkaline, metal-bearing, or other deleterious leachate, including the following:</p> <p>(i)</p> <p>You must handle, place, or treat potentially acid-forming, toxic, or other deleterious materials in a manner that minimizes the likelihood of acid formation and toxic and other deleterious leachate generation (source control);</p> <p>(ii)</p> <p>If you cannot prevent the formation of acid, toxic, or other deleterious drainage, you must minimize uncontrolled migration of leachate; and</p> <p>(iii) You must capture and treat acid drainage, or other undesirable effluent, to the applicable standard if source controls and migration controls do not prove effective. You are responsible for any costs associated with water treatment or facility maintenance after project closure. Long-term, or post-mining, effluent capture and treatment are not acceptable substitutes for source and migration control, and you may rely on them only after all reasonable source and migration control methods have been employed."</p>

EPA.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Summarize any geochemical testing conducted to date. If no testing has been performed, commit to sampling representative drill core or cuttings from mineralized zones for Acid-Base Accounting and humidity cell testing.	<p>Geochemical testing of drillholes and cuttings are generally performed during exploration activities (such as the proposed action) to characterize ARD potential and aid in the development of mitigation measures to permit the mine development/operation phase of a project. Due to the relatively short duration in which any given drillhole would be open, the adherence to ADWR abandonment requirements when drilling at each location is complete, the construction of sediment traps to contain cuttings/fluids, and all sumps being lined to prevent any migration and/or interaction from cuttings, acid generation and heavy metal mobilization potential for the proposed activity is mitigated.</p>
EPA.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If tests indicate acid-generating potential, disclose and commit to specific mitigation, such as:<ul style="list-style-type: none">o Neutralizing acidic cuttings (e.g., mixing with lime).o Off-site disposal of reactive material in a controlled facility.o Covering sumps during precipitation events and ensuring cuttings are buried above the water table.	<p>Geochemical testing of drillholes and cuttings are generally performed during exploration activities (such as the proposed action) to characterize ARD potential and aid in the development of mitigation measures to permit the mine development/operation phase of a project. Due to the relatively short duration in which any given drillhole would be open, the adherence to ADWR abandonment requirements when drilling at each location is complete, the construction of sediment traps to contain cuttings/fluids, and all sumps being lined to prevent any migration and/or interaction from cuttings, acid generation and heavy metal mobilization potential for the proposed activity is mitigated.</p> <p>The operator is responsible for meeting the requirements of 43 CFR 3809.401 and 43 CFR 3809.420.</p> <p>43 CFR 3809.401(c)(1) states, in part: "Operational and baseline environmental information for BLM to analyze potential environmental impacts ... as well as information that may require you to conduct static and kinetic testing to characterize the potential for your operations to produce acid drainage or other leachate. ..."</p> <p>43 CFR 3809.420, in part, requires: "(11) Acid-forming, toxic, or other deleterious materials. You must incorporate identification, handling, and placement of potentially acid-forming, toxic or other deleterious materials into your operations, facility design, reclamation, and environmental monitoring programs to minimize the formation and impacts of acidic, alkaline, metal-bearing, or other deleterious leachate, including the following: (i) You must handle, place, or treat potentially acid-forming, toxic, or other deleterious materials in a manner that minimizes the likelihood of acid formation and toxic and other deleterious leachate generation (source control); (ii) If you cannot prevent the formation of acid, toxic, or other deleterious drainage, you must minimize uncontrolled migration of leachate; and (iii) You must capture and treat acid drainage, or other undesirable effluent, to the applicable standard if source controls and migration controls do not prove effective. You are responsible for any costs associated with water treatment or facility maintenance after project closure. Long-term, or post-mining, effluent capture and treatment are not acceptable substitutes for source and migration control, and you may rely on them only after all reasonable source and migration control methods have been employed."</p>

EPA.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Include water quality monitoring for pH and dissolved metals in nearby drainages or springs (e.g., Copper Creek, Bootlegger Spring) during and after drilling, and detect any changes in water chemistry that may signal ARD development.	<p>As discussed in the EA Appendix A under the Groundwater Quality section of the Interdisciplinary Team Checklist Table Appendix A-1, Copper Creek is listed by ADEQ as impaired for five elements including copper, cadmium, zinc, selenium, and iron. These elements are primarily waste products of historical mining activities within the Copper Creek Mining District. The potential impacts to water quality from exploration activities associated with this project are mitigated by minimizing drilling fluids, lining sumps with impermeable materials, and using BMPs to minimize risk of impacts from hazardous products such as fuel and other petroleum products. In addition, water quality monitoring is being conducted in Copper Creek annually as part of the AIM monitoring for this project. Water quality parameters such as pH, temperature, and conductivity are being collected.</p>
EPA.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coordinate with agencies involved in Copper Creek remediation to ensure exploration activities do not exacerbate legacy issues. Consider data sharing and avoid drilling in areas with potential hydrologic connectivity to contaminated mine workings, waste rock, or tailings.	<p>Thank you for your comment.</p>

EPA.7	<p>Groundwater Quantity</p> <p>The Draft EA acknowledges that groundwater withdrawal is one of the most critical environmental issues for this project as pumping water for drilling could potentially impact nearby springs and riparian habitat in the Copper Creek watershed. Additional qualitative discussion of aquifer characteristics in the Final EA would improve public understanding of potential hydrologic impacts. For example, it is unclear whether the project wells are located within a fractured bedrock aquifer with limited yield or a more transmissive alluvial aquifer along Copper Creek. It is also unclear how far the wells are from Bootlegger Spring and Copper Creek, which is essential for evaluating drawdown risk to these sensitive resources.</p> <p>The Draft EA states that during the driest parts of the year, pools in Upper Copper Creek can be unconnected and about two to four feet deep (p. 69). The Draft EA states that the Proposed Action has the potential to lower groundwater during these dry times, resulting in reduction or cessation of flows or elimination of pools in Upper Copper Creek. While the Adaptive Management Plan (AMP) aims to respond project-induced drawdown, it is unclear whether baseline shifts due to drought are accounted for in the AMP's response triggers. To strengthen the AMP, the EPA recommends incorporating explicit drought-related provisions, such as suspending or reducing pumping during declared drought conditions, regardless of drawdown thresholds alone. Alternatively, a predictive model could be used to assess how combined effects of drought and pumping could affect spring discharge or riparian function.</p> <p>The Draft EA estimates that 70,000 gallons of water would be pumped per month per drill rig (p. 11, 68), with one or two drill rigs operating at any given time (p. 8). To support this estimate due to sensitive nature of the riparian habitat in the project area, the EPA recommends clarifying that this usage rate is based on a 230 track-mounted core drill rig (p. 10), as confirmed in the March 27, 2025, meeting with the BLM. The EPA also recommends discussing impacts of the proposed action's groundwater usage on water needed by local ranches, and how the project's pumping could be balanced with periods of high use by ranchers.</p>	<p>Maps included in the EA have been revised to show proximity between the wells and nearby springs and riparian habitat.</p> <p>The BLM is ultimately responsible for ensuring that there are not detrimental impacts to water and water-related resources. Thus the BLM would implement an AMP that outlines an array of project specific, local, and national data collection and quarterly data interpretation that would be used to determine if water use reductions are needed to prevent effects to sensitive resources. For more information on this process, see sections 2.2.1.6. The EA has been updated to clarify the timing of the AMP and the role of various data sources in the decision making process.</p> <p>The nearest non-exploration or monitoring well is for stock uses and is approx. 1.4 miles away from the Hendrickson Well and 3.1 miles from the Solar Well. Due to the low pumping rates and non-continuous pumping, that and other wells much further away would not be affected.</p>
EPA.8	<p>Recommendations for the Final EA:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide additional qualitative detail on the aquifer type, transmissivity, and proximity to surface water features, including Bootlegger Spring and Copper Creek. 	<p>Should the Preferred Action Alternative be selected, the adaptive management plan (AMP) would produce an array of relevant hydrological information useful in assessment of trends and may be used to produce a hydrologic model of Copper Creek. As described in Section 2.3.1, which has been updated in the administrative EA, the AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project to monitor and mitigate adverse impacts on the water and water-dependent resources. The AMP has been also been described further in Appendix F.</p>

EPA.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Incorporate AMP provisions to reduce or suspend pumping during drought conditions or develop a predictive model that considers cumulative drought and pumping effects on spring discharge thresholds.	Should the Preferred Action Alternative be selected, the adaptive management plan (AMP) would produce an array of relevant hydrological information useful in assessment of trends and may be used to produce a hydrologic model of Copper Creek. As described in Section 2.3.1, which has been updated in the administrative EA, the AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project to monitor and mitigate adverse impacts on the water and water-dependent resources. The AMP has been also been described further in Appendix F.
EPA.10	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Disclose how the 70,000 gallons per month per drill rig groundwater usage rate was estimated, specifically if a 230 track-mounted core drill rig.	Thank you for your comment. This has been addressed in section 2.2.6 of the EA in response to public comment.

EPA.11	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Disclose whether any nearby wells or water users could be impacted.	<p>This is addressed in section 3.4.4.2 of the EA in response to public comment. The nearest non-exploration or monitoring well is for stock uses and is approx. 1.4 miles away from the Hendrickson Well and 3.1 miles from the Solar Well. Due to the low pumping rates and non-continuous pumping, that and other wells much further away would not be affected.</p>
EPA.12	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Download and evaluate groundwater monitoring data more frequently than once a month to enable timely response.	<p>As detailed in the AMP, the BLM would commit to enhanced monitoring, exceeding typical monitoring efforts. Frequency of evaluation is based on expectations of seasonal variances and the BLM considers the reporting and evaluation period frequency as being sufficient to identify potential impacts before long-term or significant adverse impacts to water and water related resources occur.</p>

EPA.13	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Update the groundwater level maps more frequently than quarterly, especially during active pumping or drought.	Monitoring data would be updated quarterly at a minimum.
EPA.14	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clarify whether the seven monitoring wells on BLM-managed land are currently active, maintained, and equipped for continuous measurement. Include a map or showing their proximity to Copper Creek and Bootlegger Spring.	3 shallow wells are equipped and maintained, see the AMP in 2.3.1 of the EA. 4 mid-depth wells have been operated since 2019 by Redhawk and they have offered that information. A map showing the locations of all 7 wells is found in the EA.

EPA.15	<p>Surface Water Monitoring</p> <p>The Draft EA recognizes the likely hydrologic connection between shallow groundwater and surface flow in Copper Creek and Bootlegger Spring (p. 47) but proposes annual surface water monitoring using the BLM's Assessment, Inventory, and Monitoring protocol. Given the sensitivity of these riparian habitats and their potential to experience short-term changes, annual frequency may be insufficient to capture early signs of ecological stress. To more effectively assess potential impacts from groundwater pumping on surface water features and riparian health, the EPA recommends increasing surface water monitoring frequency and coordinating it with groundwater data collection.</p>	<p>The BLM is ultimately responsible for ensuring that there are not detrimental impacts to water and water-related resources. Thus the BLM would implement an AMP that outlines an array of project specific, local, and national data collection and quarterly data interpretation that would be used to determine if water use reductions are needed to prevent effects to sensitive resources. For more information on this process, see sections 2.2.1.6. The EA has been updated to clarify the timing of the AMP and the role of various data sources in the decision making process.</p>
EPA.16	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Implement a seasonal or event-based surface water monitoring schedule, including assessment: at spring runoff, during summer low-flow conditions, and after major pumping periods or storm events.	<p>The BLM is ultimately responsible for ensuring that there are not detrimental impacts to water and water-related resources. Thus the BLM would implement an AMP that outlines an array of project specific, local, and national data collection and quarterly data interpretation that would be used to determine if water use reductions are needed to prevent effects to sensitive resources. For more information on this process, see sections 2.2.1.6. The EA has been updated to clarify the timing of the AMP and the role of various data sources in the decision making process.</p>

EPA.17	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use fixed monitoring points along Copper Creek and at key spring discharge areas (e.g., Bootlegger Spring) to record: wetted stream length, surface flow presence/absence, stream depth or pool persistence, and riparian vegetation condition.	There is a low-likelihood of affects to Bootlegger Spring from pumping due to the springs distance from pumping wells. However, Bootlegger has and would continue to be evaluated for presence of water, water quality, and riparian vegetation condition.
EPA.18	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Integrate surface water and groundwater data in reporting to evaluate whether flow changes are natural or pumping related.	Data would be integrated, this has been updated in the Final EA.

EPA.19	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consider installing simple flow indicators or staff gauges to improve consistency and detect trends over time.	This has been addressed in section 2.3.1.1 of the EA in response to public comment.
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EPA.20	<p>Adaptive Management Objectives</p> <p>The AMP established four environmental indicators for triggering changes in groundwater pumping: depth to groundwater (DTG), thalweg depth, wetted channel width, and percent of hydric vegetation cover. The EPA highlights that the Draft EA does not explain how threshold values were derived, nor why the same percent-change ranges (25%-50%, >50%) are applied across biologically distinct indicators.</p> <p>It is unclear whether the AMP is sufficiently responsive to protect riparian systems from short-term or cumulative drawdown impacts. Additional information about implementation would help clarify the effectiveness of the AMP, including how long a threshold must be exceeded before corrective action is triggered for there to be a change in groundwater pumping, how quickly the applicant would implement a change in pumping once a threshold has been met, and how frequently the surface-based indicators would be monitored during the project. The monitoring frequency for each measurement is also important, because some of these measurements may fluctuate more than others. For example, a 25–50% loss in wetted width may have vastly different ecological consequences than a similar reduction in hydric vegetation cover, yet the AMP currently treats them identically in terms of response.</p>	<p>The response to any parameter is variable, within a specified range outlined in the AMP, and is influenced by data from the myriad of project driven, local, and national sources available to make that decision from an informed perspective. Thresholds were developed in accordance with rooting depths of vegetation classes (forbs, grasses, shrubs, trees), habitat availability and composition and spatial distribution of vegetation.</p>
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EPA.21	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explain how the thresholds were decided for all the four adaptive management objectives, and why similar categories are applied to ecologically distinct metrics.	This has been addressed in section 2.3.1.1 of the EA in response to public comment.
EPA.22	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide a clear timeline and response protocol, including how long a trigger must be exceeded and the timeframe for modifying groundwater pumping.	This has been addressed in section 2.3.1.1 of the EA in response to public comment.

EPA.23	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Specify the monitoring frequency for thalweg depth, wetted channel width, and hydric vegetation cover.	The AMP, including parameter monitoring frequency, is detailed in section 2.3.1 of the EA.
EPA.24	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discuss the expected lag time and response of hydric vegetation cover to groundwater depth changes (e.g., from one to three feet), and whether the AMP is responsive enough to detect and address ecological degradation.	The response of hydric vegetation to changes in groundwater depth depends on factors such as species composition, soil characteristics, and seasonal climate variability. A drop in groundwater levels from one to three feet may not produce immediate visible effects but can lead to vegetation stress, dieback, or changes in plant community composition over a period of months to years. Obligate wetland species are sensitive and may exhibit stress or mortality with even moderate, sustained declines in water table levels. Facultative species are generally more tolerant of fluctuations but may gradually be displaced if drier conditions persist. The AMP is responsive enough such that if continuous data resulting in questionable occurrences of sufficient water availability for vegetation and for habitat maintenance would prompt immediate additional monitoring to assess impacts. Based on the assessment, the BLM could require changes in management to prevent impacts to riparian resources.

EPA.25	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure the 10-mph speed limit is explicitly included in the ACEPMs.	This has been addressed in section 2.2.10 of the EA in response to public comment.
EPA.26	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work with the applicant to include the following measures in the ACEPMs.<ul style="list-style-type: none">o Regularly maintain and clean drill pads and access roads to minimize dust generation and include this under the ACEPMs.o Minimize use, trips, and unnecessary idling of heavy equipment.o Prohibit any tampering with engines and require continuing adherence to manufacturer's recommendations.o Employ periodic, unscheduled inspections to limit unnecessary idling and to ensure that construction equipment is properly maintained, tuned, and modified consistent with established specifications.	Under 43 CFR 3809.420, the operator is responsible for maintaining all structures, equipment, and other facilities in a safe and orderly manner (43 CFR 420(b)(13)) and compliance with other pertinent federal and state laws (43 CFR 3809.420(a)(6)). All site facilities and visitors must comply with safety requirements of the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) and corresponding state safety regulations. The EA addresses dust abatement, adherence with applicable federal health and safety requirements, and safety coordinator at drill sites.

EPA.27

- Include Valley Fever in the air quality training for workers and supervisors on the potential presence of Valley Fever spores, methods to minimize exposure, and how to recognize symptoms.

Thank you for your comment.

EPA.28

- Consider mitigation measures such as limiting workers' exposure to disease-endemic areas by directing them to remove dusty clothing after fieldwork and store in closed plastic bags until washed. When exposure to dust is unavoidable, provide approved respiratory protection to filter particles.

Thank you for your comment.

EPA.29	<p>Tribal Consultation</p> <p>The Draft EA provides limited information about the BLM's engagement with Tribes. While the document includes that Tribes were notified of the project by letter on February 17, 2023, and the BLM received responses from the Ak-Chin Indian Community, Pascua Yaqui Tribe, and White Mountain Apache Tribe (Appendix A p. 2), it does not disclose a full list of Tribes contacted, the methods of all outreach used, or if any of the Tribals responses had concerns about the project (Table 4-1, p. 74). The EPA appreciates that BLM provided the full list of Tribes contacted on March 28, 2025. Due to Tribal concerns with the project and related notice level drilling, it is important to include this full list as well as additional and comprehensive information about Tribal consultation in the Final EA. The EPA also encourages offering consultation to the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation due to its proximity to the project area.</p>	<p>The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with tribes to address concerns. Pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800, the regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA 54 U.S.C. 306108); Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments; and the Bureau of Land Management policies as found in Handbook 1780-1, Improving and Sustaining BLM-Tribal Relations; the Safford Field Office sent letters to initiate consultation with potentially affected tribes. Of the 12 tribes invited to consult, the BLM only received responses from three, none of whom had serious concerns that needed to be addressed. The BLM continues to notify the tribes as the process advances and is open to discussion of any concerns that may come up. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.</p>
EPA.30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly disclose all Tribes that the BLM consulted, the methods of all outreach used, if any of the Tribes had concerns about the project, and how those concerns were addressed. 	<p>The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with tribes to address concerns. Pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800, the regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA 54 U.S.C. 306108); Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments; and the Bureau of Land Management policies as found in Handbook 1780-1, Improving and Sustaining BLM-Tribal Relations; the Safford Field Office sent letters to initiate consultation with potentially affected tribes. Of the 12 tribes invited to consult, the BLM only received responses from three, none of whom had serious concerns that needed to be addressed. The BLM continues to notify the tribes as the process advances and is open to discussion of any concerns that may come up. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.</p>

EPA.31	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify how consultation influenced the decision-making process, including the selected alternative and mitigation to avoid, minimize, or compensate for impacts to Tribes.	<p>The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with tribes to address concerns. Pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800, the regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA 54 U.S.C. 306108); Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments; and the Bureau of Land Management policies as found in Handbook 1780-1, Improving and Sustaining BLM-Tribal Relations; the Safford Field Office sent letters to initiate consultation with potentially affected tribes. Of the 12 tribes invited to consult, the BLM only received responses from three, none of whom had serious concerns that needed to be addressed. The BLM continues to notify the tribes as the process advances and is open to discussion of any concerns that may come up. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.</p>
EPA.32	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Re-engage with Tribes prior to issuing a Finding of No Significant Impact and consider face-to-face meetings.	<p>The policy of the BLM in relation to Tribal Consultation is to maintain transparency and to communicate early and often throughout the process of each project. The tribes that were invited to consult will be notified at each continuing step of this project and are always encouraged to reach out with any comments and concerns that they may have.</p>

EPA.33	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Offer formal consultation to any Tribes not originally included, such as the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation, who may be in the project vicinity or have historical or cultural ties to the area.	BLM followed the Government-to-Government Toolkit, a database developed and maintained by the State Historic Preservation Office and Arizona's Tribes, to compile the list of tribes for consultation. Any tribes not included in this consultation process were left off the list because this project's APE does not appear to be in their ancestral territory.
EPA.34	<p>Cultural Resources</p> <p>The Draft EA includes cultural resources information in the ACEPMs; however, this content is not limited to specific design features or best management practices, and instead addresses broader compliance obligations under the National Historic Preservation Act. To improve the clarity and structure of the EA, we recommend including the cultural resources be treated as a standalone resource issue within the affected environment and environmental consequences section rather than embedded in the ACEPM list. In addition, the ACEPMs in the Draft EA differ than those listed in the Mine Plan of Operations. We recommend updating the MPO with the measures listed in the Draft EA.</p> <p>The EPA also recommends that BLM enhance its approach to cultural resource protection by incorporating Tribal input and Tribal-approved monitoring, particularly during new surface-disturbing activities and reclamation. While the Draft EA includes basic inadvertent discovery protocols, it does not propose proactive strategies for Tribal monitoring or cultural specialist involvement during field activities that could affect previously undocumented resources or areas of cultural significance.</p>	<p>The current proposed action being analyzed in this environmental assessment is not expected to cause any significant impacts to known, eligible cultural resources, because the proposed exploration activities would not include more than minor expansion past previously disturbed areas as described in the Cultural: Archaeological Resources section of the Appendix A-1 Interdisciplinary Team Checklist table. Therefore, impacts to cultural resources can be eliminated from detailed analysis. The BLM has invited tribes to participate in consultation and to provide input on the project. Of the 12 tribes invited to consult, the BLM only received responses from the Ak-Chin Indian Community, Pascua Yaqui Tribe, and White Mountain Apache Tribe. The current project APE primarily encompasses areas that have been previously disturbed and where there are no known eligible cultural resources that would be affected by this undertaking. Thus, basic inadvertent discovery protocols are sufficient.</p> <p>Given that the current project APE encompasses areas that have been previously disturbed and that there are no known eligible cultural resources that will be impacted by this undertaking, Tribal-approved monitoring is most likely not necessary. Furthermore, basic inadvertent discovery protocols are sufficient for this undertaking.</p>

EPA.35

- Remove the cultural resources information from the ACEPMS section and instead present as an environmental issue with associated analysis and impact determination.

Thank you for your comment.

EPA.36

- Update the MPO to include cultural resource ACEPMS currently outlined in the Draft EA to ensure consistency and enforceability across project documents.

Thank you for your comment.

EPA.37

- Work with interested Tribes to develop a Tribal-approved list of formally trained cultural specialists.

Thank you for your comment.

EPA.38

- Require hiring cultural specialists to be on-site during new surface disturbance to provide information and/or recommendations to the BLM. Consider requiring Tribal-approved cultural specialists on-site during reclamation activities and audits of water quality testing.

Thank you for your comment.

EPA.39	<p>• If a Tribal-approved cultural resource specialist is not available within five days' notice, contact consulting Tribes to request an interim Tribal observer and proceed with a qualified non-tribal cultural specialist, if necessary, to maintain project timelines while honoring consultation commitments.</p> <p>Thank you for your comment.</p>
EPA.40	<div> <div> <p>Indigenous Knowledge</p> <p>The Draft EA does not disclose if Indigenous Knowledge was considered in decision-making. While the EPA understands that it is important to Tribes that sensitive information be withheld, a summary of Indigenous Knowledge, if used in the decision-making process, remains important to disclose if it is not protected under the Freedom of Information Act exemptions or other federal statutes. Without this disclosure, it is unclear if or how the BLM incorporated this information in the Copper Creek decision-making process. As such, the EPA recommend the identification, inclusion, and integration of Indigenous Knowledge into the Final EA.</p> </div> <div> <p>The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with tribes to address concerns. Pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800, the regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA 54 U.S.C. 306108); Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments; and the Bureau of Land Management policies as found in Handbook 1780-1, Improving and Sustaining BLM-Tribal Relations; the Safford Field Office sent letters to initiate consultation with potentially affected tribes. Of the 12 tribes invited to consult, the BLM only received responses from three, none of whom had serious concerns that needed to be addressed. The BLM continues to notify the tribes as the process advances and is open to discussion of any concerns that may come up. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.</p> </div> </div>

EPA.41	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Disclose the Indigenous Knowledge provided by the Tribes, if applicable.	Appendix A of the EA was updated to reflect Indigenous Knowledge of the San Pedro Valley for Native American Religious Concerns.
EPA.42	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Describe how Indigenous Knowledge was collected and used in the NEPA decision-making process. If Indigenous Knowledge was not used, describe why it was not.	The Safford Field Office sent letters to initiate consultation with the Ak Chin Indian Community, the Gila River Indian Community, the Hopi Tribe, the Mescalero Apache Tribe, the Pascua Yaqui Tribe, the Pueblo of Zuni, the Salt River Pima- Maricopa Indian Community, the San Carlos Apache Tribe, the Tohono O'odham Nation, the Tonto Apache Tribe, the White Mountain Apache Tribe, and the Yavapai Apache Nation. Of the 12 tribes invited to consult, the BLM only received responses from the Ak-Chin Indian Community, Pascua Yaqui Tribe, and White Mountain Apache Tribe, none of which expressed concern with the project. Tribes were contacted via registered letters to insure receipt as well as follow-up via email.

EPA.43	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Identify all BLM Sensitive Plant Species with potential to occur at the project area.	BLM Sensitive Plant Species have been added to the Environmental Assessment. Please see the Special Status Species in Appendix D for analysis of these species.
EPA.44	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Disclose any site-specific survey results for sensitive plants, including survey methods and timing.	The site-specific survey for Aravaipa Sage (<i>Salvia arbuscula</i>) and Giant Sedge (<i>Carex spissa</i>) was performed on October 27, 2022. No BLM Sensitive Plant Species were observed.

EPA.45	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discuss any potential adverse impacts to BLM Sensitive Plant Species and outline avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures, such as pre-disturbance surveys, protective buffers, and post-activity monitoring during reclamation.	<p>The BLM used the AZGFD ERT as described in Section 3.4.2.1 of the EA, to determine which BLM sensitive species are present or have the potential to be present in the project area.</p> <p>None of the BLM Sensitive plant species listed in the Appendix are expected to occur in the project area. Therefore, no adverse impacts due to project actions are anticipated.</p>
EPA.46	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clarify the presence of the lowland leopard frog at the site and reconcile the conflicting statements in Appendix D and Section 3.4.1 of the Draft EA.	<p>The federally endangered Chiricahua leopard frog is not known to occur within the Copper Creek project area. However, the lowland leopard frog, a BLM-sensitive species, has been documented in the area.</p>

EPA.47	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evaluate the long-term impacts of groundwater drawdown and surface flow cessation on riparian and aquatic species, especially for the Sonoran mud turtle and lowland leopard frog.	The lowland leopard frog and sonoran mud turtle are discussed in section 3.4.1.1 of the EA.
EPA.48	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Commit to pre-disturbance surveys for riparian-dependent species and incorporate mitigation measures, including: seasonal activity restrictions, protective buffers, and adaptive management or monitoring if species are encountered during operations.	The EA includes several of the measures suggested by EPA in Section 2.2.10 - Design Features and Best Management Practices. These include the implementation of pre-disturbance surveys to identify riparian-dependent species prior to any ground-disturbing activities, as well as the incorporation of protective buffers around riparian and aquatic habitats. The project also includes an environmental awareness plan to ensure that personnel are informed of species and sensitive areas that may be encountered, and an adaptive management hydrological plan designed to monitor and respond to hydrologic changes that may affect surface flows and aquatic and riparian systems. In addition, noise reduction measures are incorporated to minimize disturbance to wildlife.

EPA.49	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Describe the specific public roads and routes that would be used to access the project site and assess potential impacts on nearby communities or recreational users.	<p>The Draft EA includes Table 2-5 and Figure 3 that quantify and identify which of the various roads would require minor maintenance, need re-establishment, or would do not require any modifications. The EA also specifies that about 6.7 miles of access roads would remain open post-project, and about 5.2 miles of spur roads would be reclaimed. Connectivity through the area would be maintained even after the reclamation of spur routes that access drill pads are reclaimed.</p> <p>As described in the Travel Management section of the Appendix A-1 Interdisciplinary Team Checklist table, the project is limited in scope regarding both area and time, and thus would be unlikely to have more than a negligible effect on nearby communities and recreational users.</p>
EPA.50	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consider implementing signage (e.g., warning signs, speed limits, active drilling notices) as part of the ACEPMs to inform the public users during periods of increased activity.	<p>This has been addressed in section 2.2.10 of the EA in response to public comment.</p>

Faraday	Comment Text	Commenter Name	Responses
Faraday 1	<p>The conclusions in the Plateau Report are supported by site specific data, documented public records, geologic information, field verification and supplemental monitoring wells drilled by Redhawk. In fact, the Plateau Report projected (based on a scientifically accepted modeling approach) that pumping of the Solar Well would result in drawdown of less than 0.1 feet and that said drawdown would actually be less than anticipated due to local aquifer recharge and barriers to groundwater flow between the well and drainages. Translating those results to flow depletion, an estimation of a reduction of 0.07 gpm (0.00002 cfs) and 0.5 gpm (0.0001 cfs) were contemplated. Further, because both Copper Creek and Scanlon Wash naturally are dry from late spring through the fall to early winter (with only small persistent pools in Copper Creek), there is zero flow loss from well pumping during that period.</p> <p>For the Hendrickson Well, the conclusions were similar in that pumping impacts were estimated to be approximately 0.1 feet along Lower Copper Creek and less than 0.1 feet along Upper Copper Creek and no measurable drawdown was estimated along Scanlon Wash from pumping this well. Translating that to estimated flow depletion, the Plateau Report indicates that pumping of this well could reduce flows in Lower Copper Creek by a rate of 1.2 gpm within one year, however that was a conservative estimate based on the assumption that no natural recharge would occur in the drainage.</p>	Paul Harbidge	The BLM received and evaluated the Plateau Report. The Plateau Report is addressed in the EA in Section 3.4.4.1.

Faraday 2 In the event the estimated drawdown does occur, the draft EA does not adequately explain how the anticipated effects of drawdown on aquatic and riparian vegetation would be mitigated through the implementation of the Adaptive Management Plan (AMP) in the Preferred Alternative scenario. The sole purpose of the AMP is to establish thresholds for monitoring Copper Creek (i.e., depth to groundwater, wetted width, thalweg depth and hydric vegetation compositions) and then to implement reduced pumping regimes if specified thresholds are met and causation is determined. These AMP measures will prevent the degradation of aquatic and riparian habitat, however that is not adequately discussed in the draft EA. This requires addressing in the final EA. For example, in the Issue #2 (Preferred Action) environmental consequences discussion, the draft EA concludes as to species impact that there is a “risk of riparian an aquatic resource loss that could affect the suitability of habitat for federally threatened yellow-billed cuckoo (YBC) and BLM Sensitive species” and “lead to degradation and loss of available breeding habitat, drinking water, forage, cover and mortality or abandonment of the area for these species.” That conclusion is not supported by any scientific evidence or site-specific data and fails to consider the remedial effect of the AMP measures. Such conclusions with respect to YBC are also inconsistent with the fact that AGFD ERT screening report data evidencing no yellow-billed cuckoo records within 3 miles of the Project Area, and Redhawk survey data evidencing no-detections and only small habitat patches being present in the Project Area making it unlikely that “individuals would occur within the Project Area on more than a transient basis, while passing through.

Paul
Harbidge

The effects of implementing the AMP and the associated reduction in the potential effects on aquatic and riparian vegetation is described in Sections 3.4.1.4, 3.4.2.4, and 3.4.4.4. The BLM uses the best available science as well as resource specialist expertise to consider the effect of the AMP. In addition, the BLM is using lotic AIM methods which have been thoroughly vetted and reviewed to create a consistent, quantitative approach for determination of land health.

Faraday 3	<p>In the context of NEPA, BLM has the responsibility to ensure the scientific integrity of the analysis in its environmental document and is required to make use of reliable existing data and resources. Similarly, the Endangered Species Act requires the agencies to use the “best scientific and commercial data available” in the Section 7 consultation process. 16 U.S.C. § 1536(a)(2), (c). Redhawk has provided (via the Plateau Report) reliable data that is supported by scientific integrity and requests that BLM utilize this data in conjunction with balanced revisions to the effects analysis, particularly in the Issue #2 and Issue #4 sections evaluating the Proposed Action and Preferred Action Alternative. As an example, in the Issue #4 (Proposed Action) analysis the draft EA states the impacts to surface water and groundwater levels resulting from groundwater pumping are “unknown.” In fact, they may be uncertain, but there have been efforts undertaken to determine the anticipated extent of drawdown (which is nominal) and that should be discussed in the final EA. Further, the identified risks to riparian species, habitat and ecosystem services discussed in the draft EA (e.g., page 69 and 70) are risks associated with substantial groundwater drawdown, not the nominal drawdown predicted by the available scientific data and minimized by the mitigation measures to be implemented.</p>	Paul Harbidge	<p>The BLM uses the best available science as well as resource specialist expertise to assess the impacts to resources from the proposal. The BLM received and evaluated the Plateau Report. The Plateau Report is addressed in the EA in Section 3.4.4.1.</p>
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Paul
Harbidge

On behalf of Redhawk Copper Inc. ("Redhawk"), we submit the following comments on the draft environmental assessment ("EA"). As discussed in the draft EA, two existing private land wells will provide the source water for the proposed exploration drilling (i.e., known as the Solar Well and the Hendrickson Well). Redhawk provided BLM an assessment of the potential effects from pumping the two wells in 2023 (Plateau Resources, 2023) (hereafter the "Plateau Report"). Unfortunately, BLM has not given due consideration to the provided information in the draft EA when discussing the potential effects of groundwater pumping. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that due consideration was also not given to implementation of the Adaptive Management Program. Coupled together, there is an extremely low likelihood of effects to riparian vegetation and on special status species who might utilize that riparian and aquatic resource. These data and analyses, however, are not analyzed in the draft EA

The nearest non-exploration or monitoring well is for stock uses and is approx 1.4 miles away from the Hendrickson Well and 3.1 miles from the Solar Well. Due to the low pumping rates and non-continuous pumping, that and other wells much further away would not be affected.

The BLM received and evaluated the Plateau Report. The Plateau Report is addressed in the EA in Section 3.4.4.1.

**San Carlos
Apache Tribe
(SC)**

Comment Text

Responses

The Bureau of Land Management Owes the Tribe a Trust Obligation. The Tribe is a federally recognized Indian Tribe organized under the provisions of Section 16 of the Indian Reorganization Act of June 18, 1934 (48 Stat. 984). In 1852, the Tribe entered the Treaty of Santa Fe, which ended the conflict between the United States and the Tribe. By virtue of this Act, treaty, and other actions of Congress and the Executive Branch, the United States voluntarily and expressly entered a trust relationship for the benefit of the Tribe, its members, and the San Carlos Reservation. These trust obligations are carried out in large part by, among others, the United States Department of the Interior and the Bureau of Land Management ("BLM") is responsible to fulfill them. The Copper Creek project directly impacts many of the United States' trust obligations to the Tribe, its members, and Apache allottees. See 25 U.S.C. § 331 et seq. Pursuant to these obligations, the United States negotiated the 1935 Globe Equity Decree No. 59 and December 21, 199 Water Rights Settlement, which granted certain water rights to the San Carlos Apache Tribe in the flows of the Gila River from its headwaters in New Mexico to its confluence with the Salt River, as well as the San Pedro River.

The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with the San Carlos Apache Tribe to address concerns. The BLM has made several attempts to consult and discuss the project throughout its duration with the San Carlos Apache Tribe Leadership and Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.

SC.2

In addition to the Tribe, the Gila River Indian Community, and non-Indian irrigators who are served by the San Carlos Irrigation District and San Carlos Irrigation Project, the latter of which are operated by the Department of the Interior, also have certain adjudicated rights in the Gila River. Surprisingly, the Environmental Assessment fails to consider the impacts Faraday's exploration on these water rights.

This is addressed in section 3.4.4.2 of the EA. 5.2 acre feet per year for three years is the anticipated volume of water use - which would be negligible and have no effect on the flow of the San Pedro or Gila Rivers, and no discernible effects on downstream user's water rights. Further, the water comes from a well and groundwater is not regulated in the project area.

SC.3

As BLM is aware, copper creek flows into the San Pedro River, which, in turn, flows into the Gila River. Faraday's exploration and associated pumping will diminish the flow of Copper Creek into the San Pedro and reduce the flow of both the San Pedro and Gila Rivers, impairing the Tribe's fully adjudicated water rights. Reduced flows in these two rivers will also affect allottees whose lands are along the northern reaches of the San Pedro River and Aravaipa Creek, as well as other right-holders downstream. As BLM is surely aware, all water rights in San Pedro River are currently being litigated in state adjudication court. This litigation, now in its 6th decade, involves tens of thousands of claimants in the San Pedro Subbasin and will not finally determine those rights for many more decades. This includes water that flows from Copper Creek to the San Pedro River. Because the Tribe's water rights are held in trust by the United States, BLM must consider the impacts of the Faraday's Exploration Project on the Tribe's water rights.

This is addressed in section 3.4.4.2 of the EA. 5.2 acre feet per year for three years is the anticipated volume of water use - which would be negligible and have no effect on the flow of the San Pedro or Gila Rivers, and no discernible effects on downstream user's water rights. Further, the water comes from a well and groundwater is not regulated in the project area.

SC.4

BLM Must Also Consider the Cultural Impacts on the Tribe Not only will pumping associated with Faraday's Exploration Project impair the Tribe's water rights, but the pumping also threatens the Tribe's cultural, traditional, and religious practices and resources. Copper Creek and the surrounding area are part of the ancestral territory of the Western Apache. Indeed, native people have occupied this area and used its springs for at least to 12,000 years and many cultural sites are located nearby. These include both prehistoric and historic burial sites, and remnants of pit houses and stone houses, where traditional pottery and personal objects may still be found. As such, this landscape and the many springs close to Copper Creek are sacred to members of the Tribe. Apache people hold springs sacred—they make offerings to springs before approaching them and often make another upon leaving them. Apache people use spring water for personal use in sacred ceremonies, including both coming of age ceremonies and also cultural and religious cleansing ceremonies, such as sweat baths. The EA fails to consider the presence of natural springs in the Copper Creek area or how Faraday's substantial pumping will deplete these springs, cause them to dry up, possibly forever. These losses would be devastating to tribal members who depend on these springs.

This has been addressed in section 3.4.4.4 of the EA in response to public comments.

SC.5

Other cultural resources at risk in the area are the deposits of malachite and cuprite, turquoise, azurite, and copper oxides that members use in their traditional body painting and artwork. Faraday's exploration will reduce our member's access to these resources as they are converted to drill sites. Indeed, the extraordinary number of drill sites and additional traffic for road expansion, brings a substantial risk that sacred areas will become subject to looting and desecration.

Thank you for your comment.

SC.6

Finally, the EA does not adequately address the impacts of the proposed action on culturally important plants and animals. This includes species protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 for species traveling from Canada to Mexico, such as bald eagles, Mexican black mallard, willow flycatcher, Mexican white wing dove, and Mexican Inca dove. Other species the EA should fully consider include the monarch butterfly and queen Butterfly, which drink from natural springs in Copper Creek, riparian water plants, and even jaguarundi (endangered feline species similar to a jaguar) that have been seen in the area. As part of its trust obligation to the Tribe, BLM must give due consideration to these important legal and cultural issues that are threatened by Faraday's Exploration Project. As we say in our Apache language, Ahi'yi'e (thank you) in advance for your review and consideration of these comments and requests.

Comment Text	Responses
<p>The Nature Conservancy (TNC)</p>	
<p>Water Impacts</p> <p>Additional analysis is needed to understand impacts to hydrologic and hydrologic-dependent resources due to groundwater withdrawals. As stated in the EA hydraulic conditions in this area are largely unknown. TNC appreciates BLM's inclusion of the Adaptive Management Plan (AMP) to monitor groundwater levels along Copper Creek, and to provide baseline data that could be used as data input for hydrologic modeling of the system. Given these uncertainties, the ecological importance of this landscape, and the proximity to TNC landholdings a groundwater model is needed to make better informed decisions about groundwater impacts of this action, what the current uses are, and the availability of groundwater to support this action. TNC is also concerned about the availability of water to support future mining actions that could result from this exploration for the reasons stated above.</p> <p>The EA states groundwater pumping will cause loss of surface water availability and loss of riparian vegetation, understanding that the degree to which could vary with and without the application of the AMP. However, it was unclear when impacts are anticipated to occur. TNC requests additional analysis be added to the EA for the reviewer to properly assess the degree, scale, duration and long-term impacts to groundwater and hydrologically dependent resources. In addition, to trigger the AMP the source of the draw down needs to groundwater demands have not been analyzed in the EA. The EA should provide how the source will be determined. Current depth to groundwater also needs to be included to evaluate impacts of proposed hole depth that will range from 600 ft to 4,900 ft. The EA states ~70,000 to 140,000/gallons (gal) of groundwater will be pumped per month up to 3 years. TNC requests annual and total groundwater pumping be presented in the EA. This information is needed for the review and comparison of groundwater pumping to determine impacts with or without AMP.</p>	<p>Should the Preferred Action Alternative be selected, the adaptive management plan (AMP) would produce an array of relevant hydrological information useful in assessment of trends and may be used to produce a hydrologic model of Copper Creek. As described in Section 2.3.1, which has been updated in the administrative EA, the AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project to monitor and mitigate adverse impacts on the water and water-dependent resources. The AMP has been also been described further in Appendix F.</p> <p>The nearest non-exploration or monitoring well is for stock uses and is approx. 1.4 miles away from the Hendrickson Well and 3.1 miles from the Solar Well. Due to the low pumping rates and non-continuous pumping, that and other wells much further away would not be affected.</p> <p>The BLM has not received an application for a full mine plan of operation at this time. Analysis of a future mine and effects would be speculative.</p>
TNC.5	<p>In response to your comment, additional information has been provided in Section 3.4.4.2 of the EA. Namely, nearest Groundwater Site Inventory(GWSI) well measured annually by ADWR is located east of the proposed project area and west of the confluence of Copper Creek with the San Pedro River. This well (ID 324418110350001) has shown a relatively steady increase in the water level elevation since the late 1990s. The water use of the Lower San Pedro basin was analyzed by ADWR in 2008 and found to have a 1% inadequacy in water supply (the Upper San Pedro was 27% and Safford was 85%, for comparison). The inadequacy determination was due to lack of information supplied or lack of sufficient information. The average annual municipal demand of the Lower San Pedro basin is 2,745 acre-feet including 2,300 acre-feet from groundwater, 300 acre-feet from surface water, and 145 acre-feet from effluent. The total annual use for the project is expected to be 5.16 acre-feet. The project use would be 0.2% of the total current annual municipal demand for the Lower San Pedro basin. Municipal, agricultural, and industrial demands in the LSP basin have all declined since the early 1990's. Natural recharge is estimated to be 24,000 to 29,000 acre-feet per year. Storage estimates in the LSP are estimated to be 11 million to 27 million acre-feet.</p>
TNC.6	<p>This has been addressed in 3.4.4.2 of the EA in response to public comment.</p> <p>The BLM has not received an application for a full mine plan of operation at this time. Analysis of a future mine and effects would be speculative.</p>
TNC.7	

Riparian and Wildlife Impacts

As stated on page 47, groundwater pumping for the project will likely reduce the availability of surface water, crucial for aquatic species and other wildlife as a drinking source. Additionally, it may deplete shallow groundwater levels, adversely affecting riparian vegetation and leading to habitat degradation. TNC recommends the EA provide a standalone section that outlines all actions within the riparian area and buffer (EA -Figure 5) and potential impacts within the riparian area/buffer to facilitate review. The EA also needs to discuss ways to minimize/avoid further degradation and permanent loss of fish and wildlife habitat. It should be noted that Copper Creek supports wildlife (amphibians and reptiles etc.) and should provide habitat for native fish if it were not impaired by historic mining and insufficient reclamation of public lands managed by BLM.

TNC appreciates the inclusion of wildlife conservation measures and BMPs. Of particular note are noise and light abatement and Sonoran Desert Tortoise (*Gopherus morafkai*) procedures. TNC offers additional recommendations to minimize impacts to wildlife and wildlife habitat. Per page 49, potential impacts due to reduced water resource availability for game species and nongame species may include loss of available drinking water, forage, cover, and game and nongame species of wildlife mortality or abandonment of the Upper Copper Creek area. TNC requests the EA include analysis of alternate sources of wildlife water (year-round and intermittent) for wildlife given the proposed project will reduce or eliminate surface water availability in the Creek. Analysis should include distance to water as this will vary by species. 2. Year-round water sources and alternate aquatic habitat needs to be relatively available to displaced wildlife such as Sonoran mud turtles (*Kinosternon sonoriense sonoriense*) and other reptiles and amphibians. Consideration should be given to installing additional wildlife water sources that can support a range of species to account for loss of surface water availability as a result of this action, combined with long-term drought conditions in Arizona, and climate change. This should also include mitigation of the existing concrete holding pond within the Copper Creek channel that is currently a hazard to wildlife, that will attract more wildlife as surface water availability decreases.

2 TNC recommends exact location of game water sources should be excluded from the EA.

The Adaptive Management Plan (AMP) was developed to monitor groundwater pumping relations to surface water availability in Copper Creek and the connection to riparian-dependent species, which would require the applicant to share groundwater withdrawal data and supports continuous monitoring. The BLM would also conduct annual Lotic AIM monitoring to assess wetted width, thalweg depth, and hydric vegetation. The BLM specialists would evaluate groundwater and climate data alongside monitoring results to determine if pumping is negatively affecting Copper Creek. If so, groundwater use would be reduced as outlined in the AMP.

Refer to Appendix D of the EA for species that BLM determined are not present within the project area that includes the Gila chub and Desert sucker. We consulted the Lower Colorado Basin Fish Database, which provides the most comprehensive coverage of fish occurrence in the southwestern USA and northwestern Mexico. The data sources include museum specimens, primary and gray literature, and the Arizona Game and Fish Non-Game Fish Branch (AZGFNGFB) database. No occurrences of fish were found for Copper Creek. This does not mean fish were never present, however, if they were they were never documented.

TNC.8

TNC appreciates the proactive inclusion of noise abatement (drill mufflers) and analysis. However, 'frequency' was missing from the analysis, which is required to assess impacts to wildlife, particularly bats and other wildlife that can be impacted by audible and ultrasonic noise. TNC request consideration of noise abatement measures for the 4 to 8 generators required to run 24-hour exploration (e.g., noise blankets, generator mufflers). Continuous long-term noise can create an annoyance response causing wildlife and humans to avoid the area. This could impact wildlife-related recreation including hunting (hunter success) and birding as well as worker safety.

Design features intended to reduce impacts of noise and light pollutions have been updated and are discussed in Section 2.2.10 of the EA.

TNC.9

Erosion and sedimentation are a primary threat to freshwater systems in Arizona. TNC appreciates the inclusion of erosion and sedimentation control measures and recommends design features be prioritized in riparian areas and adjacent. TNC also recommends consideration of temporary mats to minimize impacts to road crossings that are within the waterway. Wildlife friendly erosion and sedimentation control measures should be employed. Small animals (reptiles, mammals, insects) can get entangled in plastic netting that can cause injury or mortality. Natural materials should be used to the extent practicable to minimize entanglement and introduction of microplastics. Roadways are typically a significant source of sedimentation and erosion.

Thank you for your input regarding erosion and sedimentation impacts on freshwater systems, particularly in riparian zones and near waterways. We recognize the importance of minimizing these impacts and agree that roads and road crossings are critical areas for implementing effective erosion and sedimentation control. Design features to control erosion are in Sections 2.2.10 and 2.2.6 of the EA.

TNC.10

TNC highlights the need for BLM to develop a travel management plan for this area to provide safe recreational access and minimize impacts to wildlife and water resources in the area.

The BLM Aravaipa Ecosystem Management Plan (2012) designated the Copper Creek Road as an open route; however, additional development of a travel management plan is outside the scope of this project. While the project would not result in any new access routes, some existing routes would be widened and maintained in the area as described in Table 2-5 in the EA.

TNC.11

Connectivity
TNC is concerned about maintaining wildlife connectivity at TNC landholdings, in the Copper Creek area, and the greater North-South Corridor between the Galiuro Wilderness and the Aravaipa Wilderness. The project area is just adjacent to the North-South Corridor between the Galiuro Wilderness and the Aravaipa Wilderness, a known wildlife corridor in the State of Arizona. TNC encourages the priority protection of this area. Mexican Desert Bighorn Sheep (*Ovis canadensis mexicana*) connectivity between the Redfield herd and the Aravaipa herd is of paramount importance as a flagship species but impacts to other species should also be considered. It is known Bighorn sheep utilize the Copper Creek area not just for movement but for foraging and other behaviors. Preserving connectivity during exploration and following is of importance to maintain functional wildlife habitat.

In response to your comment, an additional best management practice has been incorporated to Section 2.2.10 of the EA. In collaboration with the BLM, the applicant would develop a wildlife trail camera monitoring program to monitor wildlife activity in and around the Project Area, including Desert bighorn sheep. All data would be shared with the BLM, AZGFD, and USFWS, if appropriate.

Impacts to wildlife connectivity have been expanded upon and are analyzed and disclosed in EA Section 3.4.3.

TNC.12

TNC.13	<p>TNC requests that data from monitoring wells and the groundwater level map be shared publicly on an annual basis during the duration of project related activities. TNC also requests that a summary of groundwater withdraw be shared publicly as they are used to inform the adaptive management thresholds.</p> <p>Cumulative Impacts and Reclamation TNC suggests additional analysis be considered for foreseeable mining activities as a result of this exploration. TNC would like to see future reclamation include actual restoration, not just to baseline conditions, but with the goal of a functional lift of ecosystem health. Per 43 CFR § 3809.420 Reclamation includes rehabilitation of fish and wildlife habitat, and the BLM Conservation and Landscape Health 2024 Rule includes protection of intact landscapes, restoration of degraded habitat, to be balanced with the BLM's multiple use and sustained yield mission. TNC recommends Redhawk work with restoration practitioners with local knowledge to ensure success. TNC requests that restoration with the goal of a functional lift of ecosystem health particularly of the Copper Creek riparian area to recoup the degradation from pass mining action not just of the current project, such as improvements to water quality and quantity, reclamation of the existing concrete holding pond, and other hazards to wildlife.</p>	<p>The adaptive management plan (AMP) data and baselines, including data sharing, has been described in further detail in Section 2.3.1.1 of the EA. Redhawk has agreed to provide all data associated with groundwater levels and pumping to the BLM. Data described in association with the AMP would be publicly available.</p> <p>The proposal that is before the BLM at this time is for consideration and analysis of exploratory drilling. The BLM does not have an application for a future copper mine that is associated with the exploratory drilling. Therefore it would be speculative at this time for the BLM to consider and analyze a future copper mine associated with the exploratory drilling - even as a reasonably foreseeable future action in the cumulative effects analysis. When and if applications and permits are filed for a future copper mine, the BLM would initiate a new NEPA process for the future copper mine and would consider impacts to resources and associated mitigation at that time.</p> <p>While outside of the scope of the proposed Project at this time, the BLM remains open to collaborating with the TNC for future landscape restoration initiatives throughout BLM-managed public lands in the SFO.</p>
TNC.14	<p>The EA should be revised to include cumulative impacts associated with a built-out mine. In addition, effects on the 7B mesquite bosque, located immediately downslope of the project area, which is proposed mitigation for the Resolution Copper Mine outside of Superior should be included. Finally, impacts to the San Pedro River, a nationally recognized migratory bird route and one of the last undammed rivers in Arizona should be included in the cumulative impacts section.</p>	<p>The 7B Ranch was included as a portion of it falls within the cumulative effects study area (CESA) and as such, the EA has been updated in Sections 3.4.1.3, 3.4.2.3, and 3.4.3.3 to address potential cumulative impacts to the 7B ranch.</p> <p>The Cumulative Effects Study Area (CESA) for issue statements 1 and 2 was delineated to assess cumulative impacts such as habitat loss, surface water depletion, noise pollution, and the spread of invasive species. The CESA for issue statement 3, focuses on evaluating the effects on wildlife movement and connectivity in relation to the Santa Catalina/Rincon-Galiuro Linkage. The CESA includes a portion of the San Pedro River watershed, including areas that function as wildlife corridors that link the San Pedro River, Aravaipa Canyon, and the Galiuro Mountains. These natural corridors support species movement and gene flow across highly fragmented landscapes. The watershed boundary includes downstream water, and habitat impacts along with connectivity for both resident and migratory wildlife. The CESA for issue statement 4 evaluates potential impacts on hydrologic resources and their associated resources within the Copper Creek watershed that may result from groundwater withdrawals. This includes groundwater and surface water interactions, aquifer drawdown, and potential impacts to riparian vegetation and aquatic habitats, especially in areas with seasonal or perennial surface flows. The 7B Ranch has been included as a portion of it falls within this CESA.</p>
TNC.19	<p>Monitoring. Many of the actions were considered Not Present (NP) or Present but not affected (NI) but were based on the occurrence of specific activities. TNC requests that BLM provide public assurances that operational adherence will be monitored and enforced throughout the course of the operations and violations be shared publicly. Examples of this include but are not limited to 10 mph travel limits and the cleaning of incoming vehicles to prevent the spread of invasive noxious weeds.</p>	<p>Monitoring and enforcement of the project will occur per the requirements in the 43 CFR 3809.600 - 3809.605 regulations.</p>
TNC.20		

Form Letters, Group F	Comment Text	Commenter Name	Responses
F.0	The EA fails to adequately analyze the environmental impacts of the proposed project, and I urge BLM to prepare a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) before proceeding with any approvals. Given these significant flaws, I request that BLM: 1. Prepare a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that thoroughly analyzes all potential impacts. BLM must comply with NEPA, the Endangered Species Act, and the National Historic Preservation Act before proceeding with any approvals. The EA has several major deficiencies...Given these significant flaws, I request that BLM: Prepare a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that thoroughly analyzes all potential impacts. BLM must comply with NEPA, the Endangered Species Act, and the National Historic Preservation Act before proceeding with any approvals.	Roger Featherstone	The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS.
F.1	· Failure to Conduct ESA Consultation: The project threatens endangered species such as the jaguar, ocelot, yellow-billed cuckoo, and Mexican spotted owl. BLM has not conducted the required ESA Section 7 consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, violating 16 U.S.C. § 1536(a)(2). Given these significant flaws, I request that BLM: Given these significant flaws, I request that BLM: Conduct formal ESA Section 7 consultation to assess harm to listed species.	Roger Featherstone	The BLM has consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on this project, and received a concurrence on our effects determinations. Refer to Chapter 4 for a summary of ESA Section 7 consultation conducted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service as part of this project.
F.2	· Groundwater Withdrawals & Riparian Impacts: The project could negatively impact Copper Creek's riparian ecosystem, yet the EA fails to analyze the effects of groundwater depletion on water-dependent species. Given these significant flaws, I request that BLM: Analyze the long-term hydrological impacts of groundwater withdrawals on riparian ecosystems.	Roger Featherstone	Impacts to groundwater and to water-dependent species are analyzed in the EA in Sections 3.4.1, 3.4.2, and 3.4.4. In response to public comments, and in consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service for this proposed project, additional design features and information that would reduce impacts to special status species are analyzed in Sections 2.2.10 and 3.4.2 of the EA. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has also been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek. The AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project through monitoring, and subsequently would mitigate adverse impacts on the water, riparian, and wild and water-dependent resources.

F.4	<p>· Lack of Tribal Consultation: The San Carlos Apache Tribe has requested government-to-government consultation, yet BLM has failed to engage in meaningful dialogue, violating the National Historic Preservation Act (36 CFR 800.2(c)(2)(ii)). Given these significant flaws, I request that BLM: Engage in meaningful consultation with Tribes before issuing any approvals</p>	Roger Featherstone	<p>The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with the San Carlos Apache Tribe to address concerns. The BLM has made several attempts to consult and discuss the project throughout its duration with the San Carlos Apache Tribe Leadership and Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.</p>
F.5	<p>· Cumulative Impacts Ignored: The EA does not fully analyze how past and ongoing mining activities compound the environmental damage, violating NEPA's cumulative impact assessment requirements (40 CFR 1508.7). Given these significant flaws, I request that BLM: Implement stronger mitigation measures to reduce noise and light pollution from drilling operations.</p>	Roger Featherstone	<p>The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 7B ranch.</p> <p>Design features intended to reduce impacts of noise and light pollutions have been updated and are discussed in Section 2.2.10 of the EA.</p>
F.6	<p>· 24/7 Drilling's Effect on Wildlife: Continuous drilling will create noise and light pollution, harming nocturnal species such as the Mexican spotted owl and jaguar. Given these significant flaws, I request that BLM: Conduct formal ESA Section 7 consultation to assess harm to listed species.</p>	Roger Featherstone	<p>Design features intended to reduce impacts of noise and light pollutions have been updated and are discussed in Section 2.2.10 of the EA.</p> <p>The BLM has consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on this project, and received a concurrence on our effects determinations. Refer to Chapter 4 for a summary of ESA Section 7 consultation conducted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service as part of this project.</p>
F.3	<p>The EA lacks analysis of impacts to the Lower San Pedro River. The river is already experiencing severe groundwater overdraft, and Copper Creek contributes vital flow to this system. The project's potential impacts on groundwater could have cascading effects on the river's ecological health and on species that rely on the Lower San Pedro for survival, including endangered southwestern willow flycatchers.</p>	John Benschoter	<p>The proposed Copper Creek exploration project would have a negligible effect on the Lower San Pedro River as the proposal is 5.2-acre feet per year of water use which is unlikely to affect the Lower San Pedro River which is located approximately 8 miles away.</p>

Form Letters, Group H	Comment Text	Commenter Name	Responses
H.1	Dear BLM Safford Field Office, As a former BLM and FWS employee, now retired, I believe moving forward on the Copper Creek mining exploration project, ignores the required NEPA process for such a potentially impactful action. The BLM needs to prepare a draft environmental impact statement for the proposed project. The project could cause significant adverse environmental impacts to local wildlife, water, and even local agricultural economic endeavors. I believe my concerns described above are significant enough that I want to appeal to the BLM to prepare a full environmental impact statement before considering any project approvals. An EIS should thoroughly analyze all potential risks and long-term impacts on the Lower San Pedro River wildlife corridors, riparian habitats, and area water sources (which are also crucial to the local agricultural economy), as well as examine all issues cited above.	Rebecca Leas	<p>The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS.</p> <p>The proposed Copper Creek exploration project would have a negligible effect on the Lower San Pedro River as the proposal is 5.2-acre feet per year of water use which is unlikely to affect the Lower San Pedro River which is located approximately 8 miles away.</p> <p>Impacts to wildlife and to special status species are analyzed in Sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2. Design features in Section 2.2.10 would also reduce impacts to listed species, as well as implementation of the adaptive management plan (AMP) in the Preferred Action alternative. Changes to the EA include an expansion of the 500 foot buffer from the centerline of Copper Creek riparian area, to a 0.25 mile buffer where no vegetation clearing, drilling, or reclamation activities would occur during the yellow-billed cuckoo breeding season (May 25-September 30).</p> <p>Should the Preferred Action Alternative be selected, the adaptive management plan (AMP) would produce an array of relevant hydrological information useful in assessment of trends and may be used to produce a hydrologic model of Copper Creek. As described in Section 2.3.1, which has been updated in the administrative EA, the AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project to monitor and mitigate adverse impacts on the water and water-dependent resources. The AMP has been also been described further in Appendix F.</p>
H.3	The Copper Creek watershed, a tributary to the Lower San Pedro River, could also suffer groundwater depletion and contamination from the project's hydrological impacts. The assessment fails to analyze the project's groundwater withdrawals and riparian impacts. The project could negatively affect Copper Creek's riparian ecosystem, but the BLM has failed to analyze the effects of groundwater depletion on water-dependent species, such as southwestern willow flycatchers. The Copper Creek watershed already faces hydrological stress from agricultural water withdrawal, mining, and development. An environmental impact statement would correctly address the possibility of the project worsening this stress and should address the long-term effects the project could have on riparian habitat.	Rebecca Leas	<p>The proposed Copper Creek exploration project would have a negligible effect on the Lower San Pedro River as the proposal is 5.2-acre feet per year of water use which is unlikely to affect the Lower San Pedro River which is located approximately 8 miles away.</p> <p>Should the Preferred Action Alternative be selected, the adaptive management plan (AMP) would produce an array of relevant hydrological information useful in assessment of trends and may be used to produce a hydrologic model of Copper Creek. As described in Section 2.3.1, which has been updated in the administrative EA, the AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project to monitor and mitigate adverse impacts on the water and water-dependent resources. The AMP has been also been described further in Appendix F.</p> <p>Impacts to endangered species are analyzed in Section 3.4.2. Design features in Section 2.2.10 would also reduce impacts to listed species, as well as implementation of the adaptive management plan (AMP) in the Preferred Action alternative.</p> <p>The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS.</p>
H.4	It is imperative that tribal consultation occur with the San Carlos Apache Tribe, who has requested such consultation. This looks like a violation of the National Historic Preservation Act (36 CFR 800.2(c)(2)(ii)).	Rebecca Leas	<p>The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with the San Carlos Apache Tribe to address concerns. The BLM has made several attempts to consult and discuss the project throughout its duration with the San Carlos Apache Tribe Leadership and Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.</p>

H.5	Cumulative impacts of mining in the tributary and river watershed should be analyzed to acknowledge how past, current, and projected mining activities could compound adverse environmental impacts. A mere draft assessment violates the cumulative impact assessment requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (40 CFR 1508.7).	Rebecca Leas	The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 7B ranch.
H.6	The draft assessment doesn't adequately address how 24/7 drilling will affect wildlife. Constant drilling will create noise and light pollution, particularly harming nocturnal species such as Mexican spotted owls, ocelots, bats, and migratory bird species. These impacts need to be addressed, and potential mitigation actions analyzed.	Rebecca Leas	Design features intended to reduce impacts of noise and light pollutions have been updated and are discussed in Section 2.2.10 of the EA.
H.2	Endangered species, including ocelots and yellow-billed cuckoos, could be harmed by the proposed mining activities. The draft assessment fails to include an Endangered Species Act consultation. The project threatens federally protected species, from ocelots and yellow-billed cuckoos to Mexican spotted owls, but the Bureau of Land Management hasn't conducted the required Section 7 consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, violating 16 U.S.C. § 1536(a)(2).	Rebecca Leas	The BLM has consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on this project, and received a concurrence on our effects determinations. Refer to Chapter 4 for a summary of ESA Section 7 consultation conducted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service as part of this project.

Public comments	Comment Text	Comment er Name	Responses
	<p>2)Page 23 states: "Research has shown that rates of groundwater decline, as opposed to climate factors, is the primary driver of declines of riparian species (Patten 1998, Williams et al. 2022)." Is it BLM's intent to disregard the effect of climate on vegetation and hydrologic changes in the project area? Although climate might not be the primary driver of groundwater decline it certainly affects the groundwater.</p> <p>BLM should revise the EA to include an analysis of climate effects on groundwater and vegetation as related to the proposed project.</p>	Diane M. Laush	<p>It is BLM's intent to implement the multiple use mission as directed. It is SFO's intent to balance uses through elevated monitoring of environmental resources and site conditions.</p> <p>BLM is aware of the effects of climate on water and related resources and intends to monitor those susceptible resources in the project area. Climate factors including recent drought and precipitation, daily temperatures, and relative humidities will be considered in quarterly assessments of resource conditions in Copper Creek, as outlined in the AMP in Chapter 2 of the EA, should the Preferred Alternative be selected.</p>
	<p>7)Resource Objectives and Associated Adaptive Management Actions. Page 29-33. The same mitigation strategy is used for all 4 objectives (depth to groundwater, wetted channel width, water depth, and greenline. If a reduction is noted in the affected monitoring objective, no mitigation will be implemented until an additional quarterly monitoring session is completed. This delays effective mitigation by a minimum of 3 months. That assumes the monitoring is carried out on time and BLM has the staff to review the monitoring.</p> <p>The AMP should be revised to discontinue groundwater withdrawals after a decline has been observed in any of the resource objectives. Groundwater withdrawals should only be continued after the next quarterly monitoring determines groundwater levels have increased to previous levels.</p>	Diane M. Laush	<p>Thank you for your comment. The AMP states that any resource parameter (objective) can induce groundwater use reductions if found to be out of its expected range. Groundwater is dynamic, a decline may be climate driven or action driven and may be short or long-term. Multiple lines of evidence are needed to make an informed decision. BLM is mandated to support a multiple use mission. The AMP is designed to accommodate legal uses while preserving our resources.</p>
	<p>4)Section 2.2.11 discusses revegetation. There is no discussion of the seed mix proposed or the length of monitoring after the revegetation process is completed. Broadcast seeding is proposed during winter or monsoon rains. Monitoring compliance is completed when BLM makes the determination. No criteria are given for acceptance of the revegetation. Due to chronic BLM staff shortages, this is unacceptable.</p> <p>BLM should revise the EA to specify the criteria for acceptance of the revegetation and specific timelines should be stated.</p>	Diane M. Laush	<p>See 2.2.11 for monitoring and fulfillment of revegetation:</p> <p>"Post-reclamation line-point intercept transects would be conducted annually during reclamation in the same locations at the same time of year as the baseline survey was conducted. Line-point intercept surveys would continue until 70 percent of baseline cover was met. Annual reports outlining reclamation progress would be submitted to the BLM with recontouring, reseeding, and planting dates by area and line-point intercept data. Redhawk would further collect photos of all pads prior to project disturbance, using standard operating procedures for photo collection provided by the BLM. These photos would be used as a supplement to the line-point intercept data and to further provide a visual aid. Reclamation is intended to return disturbed land to a level of productivity comparable to the level of productivity of any specific area as it was prior to activities associated with the Proposed Action Alternative."</p> <p>Reclamation would be completed to the standards described in 43 CFR 3809.420(b)(3) and the reclamation objectives outlined in BLM Handbooks H-3042-1 and H-3809-1.</p>
	<p>3)BLM should re-evaluate the effect of 24 hour/day, year-round drilling noise and lights effects on wildlife. I believe BLM has minimized these impacts to wildlife.</p>	Diane M. Laush	<p>Please refer to 3.4.1.3. Proposed Action Environmental Consequences - Noise and lighting as this section has been updated.</p> <p>Impacts to noise and light pollutions are adequately incorporated as design features in Section 2.2.10 of the EA. In response to public comments, sections 3.4.1, 3.4.2, and 3.4.3 in the EA have been updated to expand upon continuous drilling effects on wildlife.</p>
	<p>5)Section 2.3.1 Adaptive Management Plan (AMP) (page 24): "These systems are recharged from natural meteoric precipitation. The amount of water currently recharging many of these aquifers is insufficient to meet current and future demands (Hoffman et al. 2007)."</p> <p>If the current natural recharge mechanisms are insufficient to meet current and future needs, then any removal of water for this project will affect riparian and xeriparian resources.</p>	Diane M. Laush	<p>In response to public comments, and in consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service for this proposed project, additional design features and information that would reduce impacts to special status species are analyzed in Sections 2.2.10 and 3.4.2 of the EA. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has also been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek. The AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project through monitoring, and subsequently would mitigate adverse impacts on the water, riparian, and wild and water-dependent resources.</p>
	<p>6)The AMP section continues to state: "Thoughtful consideration of all factors and available information will be made prior to triggering the adaptive management measures described herein. The primary objective is balanced use to meet the BLM's multiple use mandate."</p> <p>The above statement in the EA is apparently included to provide BLM with an excuse to delay implementing the AMP. This is further reinforced by the next comment.</p>	Diane M. Laush	<p>The AMP would be implemented effective immediately upon decision if the Preferred Alternative is selected.</p>

	8)Cumulative Effects. Table 3.2 on page 47. One of the most egregious omissions in this EA is that BLM did not consider the impacts associated with implementation of a large-scale mine under cumulative effects. The entire purpose of this exploratory drilling is to determine if mining is feasible.	Diane M. Laush	The BLM has not received an application for a full mine plan of operation at this time. Analysis of a future mine and effects would be speculative.
BRC.1	<p>Roads and Trails</p> <p>BRC supports responsible mineral exploration and development consistent with the BLM's multiple-use mandate. The Copper Creek area includes a network of existing roads that are used not only for administrative purposes but also for public recreation. We appreciate that the proposal does recognize the need for public use on these current roads and will continue to maintain them. We support this approach as long as public access remains open throughout the exploration phase and following reclamation.</p> <p>We request that any road upgrades or temporary closures be clearly signed and that the BLM coordinate with recreation stakeholders to minimize disruption to access. Roads leading into the Copper Creek drainage and surrounding hills are valued by local residents and visitors alike for OHV touring, hunting, sightseeing, and accessing dispersed camping areas.</p> <p>We also emphasize that in many cases, mining activities have contributed to road networks that recreationists now depend on. This project provides an opportunity to improve road conditions that can benefit all users—both during and after the exploration phase.</p>	Ben Burr	The BLM is committed to managing public lands in a manner that balances multiple uses and minimizes conflicts by adhering to established land use planning processes, engaging with relevant stakeholders, and implementing adaptive management strategies that promote sustainable resource use while protecting the environment and public access. The BLM would maintain access on primary, existing BLM-managed roads during and after the exploration phase and would ensure that Redhawk utilizes appropriate traffic control signage for any road improvement work. Redhawk would be leaving about 6.7 miles of improved access roads open to the public post-project, which would maintain access for various recreation activities.
BRC.6	<p>Explore Act</p> <p>The BLM must comply with the EXPLORE Act's mandate to expand and enhance outdoor recreation opportunities, including motorized use, rather than restricting access through road and area closures. The Act emphasizes increasing recreational access across federally managed lands, streamlining permitting processes, and improving infrastructure to support diverse recreational uses, including off-highway vehicle (OHV) recreation. Any effort by the BLM to close existing motorized routes or restrict access contradicts the spirit of the EXPLORE Act, which directs federal agencies to facilitate and expand motorized recreation opportunities. Instead, the BLM should focus on maintaining and designating sustainable routes that align with the Act's goals, ensuring public lands remain open and accessible for multiple-use recreation.</p>	Ben Burr	The BLM is committed to managing public lands in a manner that balances multiple uses and minimizes conflicts by adhering to established land use planning processes, engaging with relevant stakeholders, and implementing adaptive management strategies that promote sustainable resource use while protecting the environment and public access. The proposed action would not result in the temporary or permanent closure of primary access roads (ex. Copper Creek Rd, Bunker Hill Rd, Rug Rd). The project would not impede public access to drill pads via non-motorized means, into and through the area via Copper Creek Road, and the other access roads identified for improvement with no reclamation.
SRP.1	Second, pumping operations are noted as likely to cause streamflow "depletion." Streamflow depletion is likely to impact existing and vested surface water rights in Copper Creek. The Draft EA notes on Page 8 of Appendix A that water rights impacts are "present with potential for relevant impact that need to be analyzed in detail in the EA." The Draft EA does not include a significantly robust analysis of surface water rights impacts. The EA should include ample analysis of these operations on the likely impacts to rights to appropriable surface waters. Underground water withdrawals from production wells associated with this exploration project can affect stream flows and depths to water adjacent to streams and can result in impacts to riparian ecosystems and resident species. Withdrawals from these wells are estimated to be 5.2 AF/Yr for three years. The Draft EA indicates that "impacts to surface water and groundwater levels resulting from groundwater pumping are unknown." These impacts must be studied for the Project Area and the lower San Pedro River. Additionally, the impacts of depletion to streams, riparian ecosystems, and vested water rights must be sufficiently evaluated, monitored, and mitigated.	Charles Paradzick	<p>"Depletion" is described in the AMP as a brief explanation of how groundwater withdrawals can affect a stream. It does not state that depletion is likely. The IDT checklist was not updated following the inclusion of the Preferred Action. Though present, water rights are not likely to be affected by this action (NI). Impacts to natural resources will be monitored, evaluated and mitigated per the AMP.</p> <p>The AMP is intended to monitor and mitigate impacts to sensitive resources thus preventing long-term impacts to the Copper Creek ecosystem. The proposed Project would be complete within 3 years of issuance of a decision, ensuring groundwater withdrawals related to the proposed Project will terminate at that time.</p>

SRP.2	<p>Other SRP Comments</p> <p>SRP notes that for each of the stated Adaptive Management Objectives, the Bureau of Land Management ("BLM") appears to be responsible for evaluating Assessment, Inventory and Monitoring. SRP questions why the responsibility for evaluating the hydrological monitoring data and determining corrective actions falls on the BLM, rather than on Redhawk staff or consultants, who might be more directly responsible for the project or directly involved in daily operations.¹³</p> <p>13 Section 2.3.1: Adaptive Management Plan, Page 24: "The BLM management objective is to use adaptive management strategies to prevent loss of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek due to water withdrawal for project purposes."</p>	Charles Paradzick	<p>The BLM is ultimately responsible for ensuring that there are not detrimental impacts to water and water-related resources. Thus the BLM would implement an AMP that outlines an array of project specific, local, and national data collection and quarterly data interpretation that would be used to determine if water use reductions are needed to prevent effects to sensitive resources. For more information on this process, see sections 2.2.1.6. The EA has been updated to clarify the timing of the AMP and the role of various data sources in the decision making process.</p>
SRP.8	<p>SRP's obligations under the ITP, and associated Roosevelt HCP, for the lower San Pedro River properties are to "provide ecological and conservation benefits to species covered by the RHCP" and "[t]he primary management goal within the active channel and floodplain is to protect and enhance a naturally functioning system to protect and maintain a dynamic mosaic of riparian vegetation communities by maintaining and enhancing surface and ground water conditions and removing major stressors of livestock grazing and motorized vehicular use of the floodplain".⁹ As a result of these obligations, SRP has concerns regarding the potential near- and long-term impacts of water use by the proposed project that could cause flow reductions in the San Pedro River affecting the riparian habitat on SRP's conservation properties used by federally endangered species.</p> <p>⁹ Id.</p>	Charles Paradzick	<p>Impacts to wildlife and to special status species are analyzed in Sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2. Design features in Section 2.2.10 would also reduce impacts to listed species, as well as implementation of the adaptive management plan (AMP) in the Preferred Action alternative. Changes to the EA include an expansion of the 500 foot buffer from the centerline of Copper Creek riparian area, to a 0.25 mile buffer where no vegetation clearing, drilling, or reclamation activities would occur during the yellow-billed cuckoo breeding season (May 25-September 30).</p> <p>The BLM has consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on this project, and received a concurrence on our effects determinations. Refer to Chapter 4 for a summary of ESA Section 7 consultation conducted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service as part of this project.</p>
SRP.10	<p>Conclusion</p> <p>SRP is interested in ensuring that potential impacts to water resources and associated impacts to the habitats acquired and maintained by SRP for sensitive and endangered species in the Project Area and the lower San Pedro River caused by Redhawk's exploration activities are adequately studied and that any impacts are sufficiently monitored and appropriately mitigated. SRP appreciates your consideration of these comments</p> <p>Sincerely, Charles Paradzick Senior Manager, Biological & Cultural Resource Services</p>	Charles Paradzick	<p>Design features and best management practices are in EA Section 2.2.10.</p> <p>Impacts to hydrological resources are in EA Section 3.4.4.</p> <p>Impacts to wildlife and to special status species are analyzed in Sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2. Design features in Section 2.2.10 would also reduce impacts to listed species, as well as implementation of the adaptive management plan (AMP) in the Preferred Action alternative. Changes to the EA include an expansion of the 500 foot buffer from the centerline of Copper Creek riparian area, to a 0.25 mile buffer where no vegetation clearing, drilling, or reclamation activities would occur during the yellow-billed cuckoo breeding season (May 25-September 30).</p>
Abrell.1	<p>Minimizing effects to wildlife at night by directing lights down toward the interior of the drill pads. All proposed lighting will be located to avoid light pollution onto any adjacent lands as viewed from a distance. All lighting fixtures will be hooded and shielded, face downward and directed on to the pertinent site only.</p> <p>What is the viewing distance? This should be quantified.</p>	Leif Abrell	<p>Thank you for your comment.</p>

	<p>After reviewing the Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for Copper Creek Exploration, I believe the EA is inadequate in several areas, and it fails to comply with applicable Federal laws, including the national Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the Clean Water Act (CWA), and the Endangered Species Act (ESA)</p> <p>With that said, I would like to focus on water resources. It is documented that this project and similar project negatively impact aquifers, personal and public wells, and overall watershed health. The EA has not done a sufficient analysis in this area.</p> <p>*Ground water contamination from drilling</p> <p>*Reduction of available water in an area with limited water already</p> <p>*Water quality downstream and damage to aquatic habitats</p>	Deborah Gaines	<p>Redhawk is in compliance with ADWR and ADEQ regulations for drilling. Those regulations are sufficient to avoid impacts to groundwater quality. Redhawk is pumping from private wells and ADWR does not regulate groundwater uses in this area. The pumping capacity qualifies these wells as exempt from reporting to ADWR. BLM can only regulate actions on BLM lands. BLM lands end at the western edge of the Proposed Project Area. Further, with BMPs in place and the AMP to assess impacts to BLM resources, no new impacts to downstream users are likely to occur.</p> <p>Potential degradation of water quality through sedimentation of surface waters, contamination of surface or groundwater is addressed in sections 2.2.6 and 2.2.10 of the EA.</p>
	I have many other concerns including a lack of adequate analysis as to the cumulative effects of more drilling,	Deborah Gaines	The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 7B ranch.
	...harm to endangered species such as, Mexican spotted owl or ocelots to mention only a few species impacted. Lack of water in the San Pedro River is already challenging for wildlife as a whole.	Deborah Gaines	Impacts to endangered species are analyzed in Section 3.4.2. Design features in Section 2.2.10 would also reduce impacts to listed species, as well as implementation of the adaptive management plan (AMP) in the Preferred Action alternative.
	<p>Air quality and noise negatively effect all living things in the area and must be taken into consideration. It is well know that increased dust and drought are leading to more cases of asthma and respiratory problems for humans.</p> <p>In my opinion, the EA fails to provide a robust analysis of alternatives. Based on the deficiencies I stated and those of concerned citizens and experts, I ask BLM to withdraw the current Draft EA, and prepare a full Environmental Impact Statement that addresses the communities concerns and the those of experts.</p>	Deborah Gaines	This project is not located within any National Ambient Air Quality Standard PM2.5 or PM10 Non-Attainment Areas. Incorporation of best available operating practices from the proponent into the proposed Project design would make the impacts to air quality negligible.

	<p>I am writing to emphatically express my deep objections to the Copper Creek Project. I oppose this project primarily because of the highly damaging and irrevocable effects this project will have on wildlife in the Lower San Pedro River area. This mining project will destroy the habitats not only of federally protected species including Mexican Spotted Owls and Yellow-Billed Cuckoos but also of numerous types of wildlife in the area. Notable portions of the Lower San Pedro offer the last remaining true wilderness areas in southern Arizona, and Copper Creek supplies essential water to this critical watershed. This project, which will lead to a reasonably foreseeable future action of full-scale mining, would destroy the water source for both protected and unprotected species - neither of which has an alternative habitat in such a rugged landscape. BLM has not scientifically analyzed the project's impact on hydrology and must do so before considering approval. Further, BLM has not properly applied Endangered Species Act considerations, when it is clear that several endangered species (including ocelot, Mexican spotted owl and yellow-billed cuckoo) exist in or adjacent to the area of the Project. I cannot imagine the terrible effect that the noise of drilling (which will be 24/7) and related lights will have on nocturnal animals in the Project area. Mexican spotted owls and ocelots are nocturnal species and are protected under ESA. But they are not the only nocturnal wildlife that will be affected. Every animal that accesses water at Copper Creek for survival will be deeply affected by the noise and light, and their continued health will be threatened.</p>	Ann Jacobs	Design features intended to reduce impacts of noise and light pollutions have been updated and are discussed in Section 2.2.10 of the EA.
	<p>In addition, BLM has chosen to conduct an Environmental Assessment, when an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) would be more appropriate for a project of such impact to such a sensitive riparian area. An EIS must be provided before BLM considers approval of this exploratory project.</p>	Ann Jacobs	<p>The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS.</p>
	<p>This Project and its many side effects will also destroy the natural beauty that we humans crave as an escape from our urban lives. If the Project proceeds, activities such as hiking, bird watching, and camping will no longer be viable. BLM must better evaluate the impacts of the Project on recreation and protect access to this special public land for non-industrial uses. Already, gates are being constructed that will keep US citizens from entering their public lands.</p>	Ann Jacobs	<p>The BLM is committed to managing public lands in a manner that balances multiple uses and minimizes conflicts by adhering to established land use planning processes, engaging with relevant stakeholders, and implementing adaptive management strategies that promote sustainable resource use while protecting the environment and public access. The proposed action would not result in the temporary or permanent closure of primary access roads (ex. Copper Creek Rd, Bunker Hill Rd, Rug Rd). The project would not impede public access to drill pads via non-motorized means, into and through the area via Copper Creek Road, and the other access roads identified for improvement with no reclamation.</p>
	<p>As required by NEPA, BLM must evaluate alternative actions, which are dismissed in the Environmental Assessment (riparian exclusion alternative, limited operating hours alternative) to avoid the many harms I have described in this letter. These alternatives were summarily dismissed with only the mining company's interests considered. Why is this so when, under the Public Lands Rule, "conservation" is also considered a 'best use' of public land? In addition, BLM and everyone associated with the Project must remember that if the Project is approved, after all the irrevocable destruction it will cause, the copper extracted from this special, unique place will be sent overseas for processing, since we no longer have the ability to process copper in the United States.</p>	Ann Jacobs	<p>The alternatives that are considered and eliminated from detailed analysis were eliminated because they did not reduce impacts or would not meet the purpose and need for action. There are three alternatives analyzed in detail in this EA including the AMP alternative which allows for the BLM to make adjustments to the project before the effects are significant.</p>
	<p>But lack of access to water is just part of the destruction the Project would cause. The Project area is one of the state's most robust wildlife corridors for multiple species. Drilling, new roads, the introduction of large equipment, surface destruction, increased road use near the Lower San Pedro River area, human activity, trash, porta potties and incessant noise will destroy the habitats of wildlife that are unique to the area and roam in this corridor.</p>	Ann Jacobs	<p>Impacts to noise and light pollutions are adequately incorporated as design features in Section 2.2.10 of the EA. In response to public comments, sections 3.4.1, 3.4.2, and 3.4.3 in the EA have been updated to expand upon continuous drilling effects on wildlife.</p>

	<p>This letter is to state my belief that BLM should NOT approve the Copper Creek Exploration Project. I am an elderly citizen, and one of my greatest pleasures has been watching videos of wildlife in the Copper Creek and Lower San Pedro area. The breadth of wildlife diversity is unparalleled, and certainly not what I see in Texas. This area will be directly and tenibly affected not only by exploratory drilling, but also by the very real potential of a full-scale copper mine, as proposed by Redhawk (a reasonably foreseeable future action).</p> <p>As noted, the videos I watch show abundant wildlife and bird activity in the area. Some species live there and some use it as a "corridor". It is also my understanding that some of the species that live in the area of the Project are protected under the Endangered Species Act. It seems there are only about 1500 Mexican Spotted Owls in the world - and they've been documented in this project area. BLM must conduct the proper consultations and assessments before approving this exploration project. BLM cannot destroy the habitat of endangered species.</p> <p>The environmental impact to be caused by the Project will be horrible. The water supply of the animals I see in the affected area will be changed, reduced or eliminated. How are the animals I watch going to stay alive if their water supply is destroyed or negatively affected? BLM must conduct a full Environmental Impact Statement and a full water study of Copper Creek, including the impacts of mining to the downslope San Pedro River, before even considering approval of this Project.</p> <p>I realize that I am only an older person who has come to deeply love and care about the wildlife in the Copper Creek Project area; however, my voice counts, too. I strongly ask that BLM not only conduct the studies I have suggested, but that BLM decide at this point to terminate consideration of this massive exploration Project and look for an alternate, less ecologically sensitive location for copper mining.</p>	Tommy Lee Ladewig	<p>Impacts to noise and light pollutions are adequately incorporated as design features in Section 2.2.10 of the EA. In response to public comments, sections 3.4.1, 3.4.2, and 3.4.3 in the EA have been updated to expand upon continuous drilling effects on wildlife.</p>
	<p>I am writing in print because your intake instructions were unclear regarding submissions sent under the same name -as a resident, but also a representative of an organization. I did not want to disqualify either submission by inputting them both online, but I wanted a personal opportunity to voice concerns as well. I request that, with this mailed letter, I also receive receipt acknowledgement and a response.</p> <p>More than 20 years ago, I moved from Phoenix to the remote desert- near the proposed project area addressed in the Environmental Assessment-specifically for the area's tranquility and access to vast, open public spaces.</p> <p>What began as simple joy at exposure to the desert Southwest's unique insects, diverse wildlife, incredible range of bird species, and resilient plants, grew into a passion that is fully a part of who I am as a person. There is no other place in the United States that rivals the Sonoran Desert's biodiversity.</p> <p>Every day has been a day of new discovery and awe - rainbow-colored grasshoppers, desert tortoises of every size emerging each year, bobcat kittens and raven babies, fascinating observations among javelina squadrons, mule deer families, and coyote packs. That love and interest continues even today as - on my own property- I journal, photograph and record these interactions. But, as your biologists and hydrologists know, those experiences are intensified in the Sky Island region of the Galiuros at Copper Creek, where forests of mature saguaros greet visitors, cottonwoods whisper on the breeze, and redtailed hawks nest in saguaro arms every year. It's the same place where an even greater array of wildlife lives - mammals, specifically- and where Gila Monsters scuttle by, frogs splash in rare desert water basins, and dragonflies skim across water.</p> <p>Copper Creek-this place of mostly public and state land is the go-to when our family and friends come to visit. We settle next to Copper Creek and camp under the cottonwoods, a known hangout of locals for 100+ years. We've seen truckloads of families, Jeeps and sightseers marveling at the splendor that is our backyard. The locals call Copper Creek "theirs" - it is "their" mountains. We made a choice to move to this place for these wonders. And it is all threatened by the forward movement of this EA.</p> <p>Because, let's be clear: while BLM says that they can only comment on the action before them - exploration - we are all intelligent enough to know that mining exploration leads to full-blown mining. Allowing additional exploration creates more opportunities for</p>	Melissa Fry	<p>The proposal that is before the BLM at this time is for consideration and analysis of exploratory drilling. The BLM does not have an application for a future copper mine that is associated with the exploratory drilling. Therefore it would be speculative at this time for the BLM to consider and analyze a future copper mine associated with the exploratory drilling - even as a reasonably foreseeable future action in the cumulative effects analysis. When and if applications and permits are filed for a future copper mine, the BLM would initiate a new NEPA process for the future copper mine and would consider impacts to resources and associated mitigation at that time.</p>

	<p>Where are the studies that share existing air contamination and the projections for the increase in air toxicity to communities? These details, too, must be included. There are no mentions of the mining Superfund sites to our north. NEPA is supposed to promote sound and environmentally-informed decision-making by federal agencies, and is the primary way for the public to learn about and provide input regarding the impacts of federal actions on their lives.</p>	Melissa Fry	<p>This project is not located within any National Ambient Air Quality Standard PM2.5 or PM10 Non-Attainment Areas. Incorporation of best available operating practices from the proponent into the proposed Project design would make the impacts to air quality negligible.</p>
	<p>Please listen to the public and address the EA's deficiencies. There is no mention of protected plant and animal species: why are saguaros - a protected plant - exempt from protection, allowing mines to mow down thousands of them without repercussion? Include those details, please. What happens when mining personnel kill wildlife unfamiliar to them? How will BLM enforce all the rules and regulations proposed in the EA when, during the Zoom call, BLM indicated they only come out a handful of times a year -that a single visit per year is all that is required by law?</p> <p>I would greatly appreciate more than a cut/paste response, which I realize is likely to be sent to the thousands and thousands of us who don't want this. I deserve that much, as a resident who loves the unique desert southwest and has found solace in an area, that sadly- because of BLM's continued approvals to foreign exploratory mining companies-will be killed off once and for all. BLM's actions on this EA will determine the go or no-go of an impending full-scale mining operation. Under current law, the BLM has the chance to deem this area's best public use as a conservation area. There are places for copper mining, but an area upslope of the San Pedro River and a Global Important Bird Area is not one of them. Your EA ignores impacts to this important waterway. Why? This is the last un-industrialized river in southern Arizona, and BLM's decisions could dry up this unique biodiversity hotspot foreverleaving nothing for future generations.</p>	Melissa Fry	<p>Impacts to BLM sensitive plant and wildlife species are addressed in Section 3.4.2. Impacts to hydrologic and hydrologic-dependent resources are analyzed in Section 3.4.4. The BLM will monitor and enforce the measures of the proposed action as required by the 3809 regulations.</p>
	<p>The BLM must go back to the drawing board: re-do the incomplete work in the EA and replace it with a full Environmental Impact Statement. Tell Red hawk to halt their activities on federal land until the EIS is complete. Don't steal the joy from all of us. Don't steal this water from the arid desert and its inhabitants. We get only one life, and citizens' concerns should trump the interests of foreign mining companies that use our resources for free and pay nary a royalty in the process.</p>	Melissa Fry	<p>The proposal that is before the BLM at this time is for consideration and analysis of exploratory drilling. The BLM does not have an application for a future copper mine that is associated with the exploratory drilling. Therefore it would be speculative at this time for the BLM to consider and analyze a future copper mine associated with the exploratory drilling - even as a reasonably foreseeable future action in the cumulative effects analysis. When and if applications and permits are filed for a future copper mine, the BLM would initiate a new NEPA process for the future copper mine and would consider impacts to resources and associated mitigation at that time.</p>
	<p>As a 27-year resident of Arizona, I am writing to express my strong opposition to the Copper Creek Exploration Project. I made Arizona my home because I love the desert for all its beauty and incredible diversity of wildlife and landscapes. Over the years, I have hiked, camped, and birdwatched in the San Pedro River Valley and the surrounding mountain ranges. These are irreplaceable places, and I am deeply concerned about the long-term damage that could result from this project.</p> <p>Mining is one of the most damaging industries to the environment. Let us not forget, the Navajo Nation continues to suffer from generations of uranium mining, which left a legacy of contaminated land, poisoned water, and deep cultural harm. These impacts persist decades later. It is a painful reminder that mining projects often promise short-term gains but leave behind long-term devastation - especially for Indigenous communities and fragile ecosystems.</p> <p>After reviewing the Draft Environmental Assessment (EA), I do not believe it adequately accounts for the full range of environmental and cultural impacts this project will render. The proposed Copper Creek project would include 67 drill sites, 24/7 operations, and significant infrastructure. The draft Environmental Assessment (EA) simply does not go far enough. An Environmental Assessment is not sufficient for a project of this magnitude. BLM must prepare a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to accurately assess the risks to water, wildlife, air quality, cultural resources, and nearby communities.</p>	Peggy Baker	<p>The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS.</p>

	<p>Water is one of Arizona's most precious and limited resources, especially now. Our state is in long-term drought, and yet this project would withdraw groundwater without fully evaluating how it will affect Copper Creek, the surrounding riparian ecosystems, and the people who rely on this water- including residents of Mammoth and nearby communities. The EA does not answer key questions: How will this affect local wells? How will water use be monitored? What protections will be in place for those downstream?</p>	Peggy Baker	<p>The nearest non-exploration or monitoring well is for stock uses and is approx. 1.4 miles away from the Hendrickson Well and 3.1 miles from the Solar Well. Due to the low pumping rates and non-continuous pumping, that and other wells much further away would not be affected.</p>
	<p>I am especially concerned that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The EA fails to address endangered species such as the yellow-billed cuckoo, Mexican spotted owl, and ocelot. Why weren't these species, which rely on intact riparian and nocturnal habitats, included in the analysis? • There is no evidence of Section 7 consultation under the Endangered Species Act. This is a legal requirement. 	Peggy Baker	<p>Yellow billed cuckoo is addressed in section 3.4.2. Ocelot and Mexican spotted owl were determined to not occur in the project area (see EA Section 3.4.2.1). The BLM is consulting with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act on this project.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The San Carlos Apache Tribe has not received proper consultation, despite repeated requests to address potential impacts on sacred sites and cultural resources. Why is this being overlooked? 	Peggy Baker	<p>The BLM Safford Field Office is open and eager to hear the concerns that the San Carlos Apache Tribe has and is more than willing to work with them to try and find a satisfactory path ahead. To this end, the BLM has made several good faith attempts to consult and discuss the project with the San Carlos Apache Tribe Leadership and Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, including certified letters sent on February 17, 2023, August 1, 2024, October 10, 2024, November 7, 2024, and February 14, 2025; emails on November 11, 2024, February 18, 2025 and February 27, 2025. Additionally, the Safford Field Office hosted a public meeting specifically for the various consulting tribes on March 6, 2025 and the Safford Office Field Manager made several attempts to contact Tribal Leadership to schedule a meeting to discuss the project. Unfortunately, the San Carlos Apache Tribe has yet to respond to any of these attempts, nor did they attend the scheduled public meeting. Furthermore, The Safford Field Office has yet to directly receive any requests originating from the San Carlos Apache Tribe for consultation and attempts to open dialogue in response to the letter from Tribal Leadership to the BLM Arizona State Director continue to go unanswered.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Light and noise pollution from 24-hour drilling will disrupt nocturnal species. What mitigation measures are being proposed? How will these impacts be monitored or reduced? 	Peggy Baker	<p>Design features intended to reduce impacts of noise and light pollutions have been updated and are discussed in Section 2.2.10 of the EA.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The EA does not evaluate cumulative impacts from past, current, and future mining in the area. This is a critical omission. 	Peggy Baker	The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 7B ranch.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Air quality concerns are not thoroughly addressed. There is no data on baseline conditions or expected increases in diesel emissions and particulate matter. Why is this missing? 	Peggy Baker	This project is not located within any National Ambient Air Quality Standard PM2.5 or PM10 Non-Attainment Areas. Incorporation of best available operating practices from the proponent into the proposed Project design would make the impacts to air quality negligible.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public land access and recreational use are not adequately considered. This area supports hiking, birding, and outdoor exploration. How will these be protected? 	Peggy Baker	The BLM is committed to managing public lands in a manner that balances multiple uses and minimizes conflicts by adhering to established land use planning processes, engaging with relevant stakeholders, and implementing adaptive management strategies that promote sustainable resource use while protecting the environment and public access. The proposed action would not result in the temporary or permanent closure of primary access roads (ex. Copper Creek Rd, Bunker Hill Rd, Rug Rd). The project would not impede public access to drill pads via non-motorized means, into and through the area via Copper Creek Road, and the other access roads identified for improvement with no reclamation.
	<p>This area's ecological and cultural value demands thorough analysis before any industrial development. I strongly urge BLM to strengthen the reclamation plan, establish long-term habitat monitoring, and fully evaluate alternatives to minimize harm.</p> <p>Please delay the approval of this project until a full EIS is completed, meaningful tribal consultation occurs, and science-based, enforceable protections are in place.</p>	Peggy Baker	The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS.

<p>Dear Sharisse and BLM Officers- Your commitment and actions to protect our treasured lands are deeply valued! Please consider my plea to help protect all that is sacred to people, wildlife and their habitat from both your professional capacity and empathetic conscience.</p> <p>I urge the following immediate, imperative actions related the Copper Creek Exploration Project:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prepare a comprehensive Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) vs. short-cutting based solely on an inadequate Environmental Assessment that fails to assess the full scape of impact, particularly to endangered species and water resources. Furthermore, the EA does not appear to reflect best-in-class, evidence-based science. The EIS should include, but not be limited to: far-reaching impacts to this fragile ecosystem, the cascade of effect of each potentially deleterious act including noise and light pollution from 24/7 drilling, impact to wildlife corridors from human activity disruption and reduced air quality. The aforementioned list names only the top few and goes on extensively 2. Conduct a deep-reaching Endangered Species Act Consultation with appropriate agencies as well as independent, non-biased, non-governmental experts BEFORE green-lighting a project of this nature, which likely will have an irreversibly-devastating impact on many levels to all endangered species 3. Perform a critical assessment on Copper Creek's Hydrology with a sharp focus on its riparian ecosystem and the species dependent on it. This should include, but not be limited to, water pollution and sediment discharge risk 4. Base ALL decisions on the broader context and compounding effect of both past and existing mining projects. The magnitude of effect is likely profound and should be given the weight of consideration it deserves in your decision-making process Should you deem it appropriate to approve this project, I implore you to put in place a rigorous, post-surveillance monitoring program that quantitatively assesses effectiveness based on key metrics, agreed policies and protective measures. Included in this plan should be immediate, mandatory (enforceable) course corrections at the first sign of any short-falls. <p>I'm confident you will reflect on the great responsibilities entrusted to you as "a maker of the crucial decisions. Please remember, YOU HAVE THE POWER to shape the survival of an ecosystem that once lost will be forever gone\</p>	<p>Donna Vetter</p>	<p>The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS.</p>
<p>Dear Ms. Platt:</p> <p>There are grave concerns regarding the Environmental Impact Statement and it's analysis involving more test wells to operate in the Lower San Pedro River area. As a resident of Mammoth, we are deeply dismayed by the lack of due diligence in your investigations.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The USFWS department was not contacted by those doing an ecological evaluation regarding the request to begin drilling test holes. The law was broken under the Endangered Species act. 2. The EA provided by the BLM is incomplete and violates BLM's obligations per 43 CFR46.415(a). 3. Hydrological impacts on Copper Creek have been ignored. The BLM has not done a proper analysis regarding the water table. 4. BLM's own regulations and NHPA require Tribal consultations. You have failed to properly consult with the Tribe regarding the EA. • • • • • 5. Nocturnal wildlife rely on undisturbed habitats. The proposed 24-hour drilling is extremely loud and even though the dome lights will be pointed directly down over the machines, there will still be too much light. It would be more beneficial if operations were conducted only during the day. Please provide strong mitigation to protect the wildlife. 6. NEPA's cumulative impact assessment requirements, (40CFR 1508. 7), is not addressed by the EA. A full impact study needs to occur. 7. It would be beneficial if the BLM would evaluate alternative locations and restrictions to minimize environmental harm. 8. A thorough air quality impact study must be performed by the BLM and enforce mitigation measures. The EA did not do this and has violated the Clean Air Act. 9. The BLM needs to protect Copper Creek from erosion from fluid runoff and sediment discharge. It was not adequately assessed and may violate the Clean Water Act. 10. It is also in the best interests of the BLM to evaluate the impacts that will affect the wildlife corridors and prevent habitat fragmentation. The EA did not do this. 11. Mining operations will affect Recreation and Public Land use. 12. The Reclamation Plan is so weak that there may not be a return for the habitat. Will monitoring the habitat restoration actually be implemented? <p>This area that Faraday Copper wants to drill, is one of the most biologically rich landscapes left in the American southwest. The San</p>	<p>Susan Strahl</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The BLM has consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on this project, and received a concurrence on our effects determinations. Refer to Chapter 4 for a summary of ESA Section 7 consultation conducted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service as part of this project. 2. The proposal that is before the BLM at this time is for consideration and analysis of exploratory drilling. The BLM does not have an application for a future copper mine that is associated with the exploratory drilling. Therefore it would be speculative at this time for the BLM to consider and analyze a future copper mine associated with the exploratory drilling - even as a reasonably foreseeable future action in the cumulative effects analysis. When and if applications and permits are filed for a future copper mine, the BLM would initiate a new NEPA process for the future copper mine and would consider impacts to resources and associated mitigation at that time. 3. The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS. 4. The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with tribes to address concerns. Pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800, the regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA 54 U.S.C. 306108); Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments; and the Bureau of Land Management policies as found in Handbook 1780-1, Improving and Sustaining BLM-Tribal Relations; the Safford Field Office sent letters to initiate consultation with potentially affected tribes. Of the 12 tribes invited to consult, the BLM only received responses from three, none of whom had serious concerns that needed to be addressed. The BLM continues to notify the tribes as the process advances and is open to discussion of any concerns that may come up. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA. 5. Design features intended to reduce impacts of noise and light pollution have been updated and are discussed in Section 2.2.10 of the EA. 6. The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 78 ranch. 7. Under the General Mining Law of 1872, as amended, a claimant has a possessory right to the valuable minerals found on their claim and the right to develop and extract those valuable minerals, 30 U.S.C. Chapter 2. The purpose and need for the analysis is to support BLM's decision whether to authorize the MPO submitted by the proponent. 8. This project is not located within any National Ambient Air Quality Standard PM2.5 or PM10 Non-Attainment Areas. Incorporation of best available operating practices from the proponent into the proposed Project design would make the impacts to air quality negligible. 9. Potential degradation of water quality through sedimentation of surface waters, contamination of surface or groundwater is addressed in sections 2.2.6 and 2.2.10 of the EA. 10. Impacts to wildlife connectivity have been expanded upon and are analyzed and disclosed in EA Section 3.4.3. 11. The BLM is committed to managing public lands in a manner that balances multiple uses and minimizes conflicts by adhering to established land use planning processes, engaging with relevant stakeholders, and implementing adaptive management strategies that promote sustainable resource use while protecting the environment and public access. The proposed action would not result in the temporary or permanent closure of primary access roads (ex. Copper Creek Rd, Bunker Hill Rd, Rug Rd). The project would not impede public access to drill pads via non-motorized means, into and through the area via Copper Creek Road, and the other access roads identified for improvement with no reclamation. 12. Monitoring and enforcement of the project will occur per the requirements in the 43 CFR 3809.600 - 3809.605 regulations.

	<p>Dear Bureau of Land Management,</p> <p>I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed Cooper Creek Exploration Project. This project poses a serious threat to the land, water, and cultural heritage of the San Carlos Apache Tribe. The area under consideration holds deep spiritual and cultural significance for the San Carlos Apache people. Disturbing this land for mineral exploration risks not only harming the environment, but also further marginalizing the voices and rights of Indigenous communities who have already endured centuries of displacement and disregard.</p> <p>Additionally, the potential environmental impacts-such as groundwater contamination, habitat destruction, and landscape degradation-would have long-lasting consequences for both tribal and non-tribal communities that rely on the health of this region.</p> <p>I respectfully urge the BLM to deny approval for the Cooper Creek Exploration Project and to instead uphold its responsibility to protect public lands and honor tribal sovereignty and cultural resources.</p> <p>Thank you for your time and consideration.</p>	Bonnie Keiper	<p>The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with the San Carlos Apache Tribe to address concerns. The BLM has made several attempts to consult and discuss the project throughout its duration with the San Carlos Apache Tribe Leadership and Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.</p>
	<p>Dear Bureau of Land Management,</p> <p>I am writing to formally object to the Cooper Creek Exploration Project due to the Bureau's failure to conduct a proper cumulative impact analysis, as required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).</p> <p>Frankly, it is unacceptable that the Environmental Assessment for this project neglects to fully examine the combined and long-term impacts of multiple mining proposals already burdening this region. The document reads more like a box-checking exercise than a serious attempt at environmental review.</p> <p>Given the ecological sensitivity of the area and its cultural importance to the San Carlos Apache Tribe, the lack of thorough cumulative impact analysis is not just an oversight - it is a dereliction of duty. NEPA requires a comprehensive review of connected and similar actions, not a piecemeal justification for industrial intrusion.</p> <p>BLM's role is to manage public lands responsibly - not rubber-stamp destructive exploration projects while ignoring the broader consequences. Approving this project without addressing its cumulative impacts would be both procedurally flawed and ethically indefensible.</p> <p>I urge the BLM to pause this process and conduct a legitimate, legally compliant cumulative impact analysis before moving forward. Anything less would represent a breach of public trust and a violation of environmental law.</p>	Robert Keiper	<p>The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 7B ranch.</p>
	<p>Dear Mrs. Flatt,</p> <p>I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed mining project in the Sonoran Desert. As a concerned citizen and advocate for the protection of our natural resources, I urge the Bureau of Land Management to reconsider the approval of this project due to the numerous environmental, cultural, and community risks it poses.</p> <p>Mining in this region could lead to significant harm to the land, water, and wildlife. The extraction process, especially in ecologically sensitive areas such as Cooper Creek, could cause long-term damage to soil quality, air and water contamination, and the destruction of critical habitats. The long-term effects of such a project could extend beyond the operational phase, impacting the health of local ecosystems for generations to come.</p> <p>Given these substantial concerns, I respectfully request that the BLM halt the approval process for this mining project and conduct a thorough, independent Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that fully evaluates the risks to the environment, wildlife, water sources, and local communities. In addition, I urge you to engage in a meaningful consultation with local stakeholders,</p>	Tricia Fry	<p>The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS.</p>

	<p>...including Indigenous peoples, before moving forward with any decisions.</p> <p>Thank you for your attention to this matter. I trust that the Bureau of Land Management will act in the best interests of the public, the environment, and the future generations who will inherit the consequences of today's actions. I look forward to hearing from you regarding your next steps.</p>	Tricia Fry	<p>The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with tribes to address concerns. Pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800, the regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA 54 U.S.C. 306108); Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments; and the Bureau of Land Management policies as found in Handbook 1780-1, Improving and Sustaining BLM-Tribal Relations; the Safford Field Office sent letters to initiate consultation with potentially affected tribes. Of the 12 tribes invited to consult, the BLM only received responses from three, none of whom had serious concerns that needed to be addressed. The BLM continues to notify the tribes as the process advances and is open to discussion of any concerns that may come up. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.</p>
	<p>I am writing concerning the BLM's draft EA of Faraday/Redhawk's Copper Creek Exploration Project.</p> <p>I am concerned about the water impacts. The effects of using so much groundwater for drilling are not fully explained, as is required by NEPA and the Clean Water Act. The groundwater withdrawal may lower the water table. This modeling has not been done and thus the impact on the riparian ecosystem is unclear.</p>	Amy	<p>In response to public comments, and in consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service for this proposed project, additional design features and information that would reduce impacts to special status species are analyzed in Sections 2.2.10 and 3.4.2 of the EA. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has also been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek. The AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project through monitoring, and subsequently would mitigate adverse impacts on the water, riparian, and wild and water-dependent resources.</p>
	<p>I also believe the San Carlos Apache Tribe has not had an appropriate seat at the table, with requests for government to government consultation ignored.</p>	Amy	<p>The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with the San Carlos Apache Tribe to address concerns. The BLM has made several attempts to consult and discuss the project throughout its duration with the San Carlos Apache Tribe Leadership and Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.</p>
	<p>Broadly I believe the EA has some important shortcomings. I want to better understand the big picture, meaning the impact with respect to past mining in the area. Research continues to strengthen the negative impact of noise and light pollution on wildlife, and the EA does not fully address these concerns or mitigation measures.</p>	Amy	<p>The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 7B ranch.</p>
	<p>We also know mining causes increased sediment and air pollution; these factors have not been adequately included with their proposed mitigation.</p>	Amy	<p>This project is not located within any National Ambient Air Quality Standard PM2.5 or PM10 Non-Attainment Areas. Incorporation of best available operating practices from the proponent into the proposed Project design would make the impacts to air quality negligible.</p>
	<p>In a similar vein, the EA needs a reclamation plan. Living in PA, I see first hand how the negative impacts of abandoned mines. We know better now and past mining must be part of the initial assessment.</p>	Amy	<p>The project includes a reclamation plan see EA Section 2.2.11. Reclamation would be completed to the standards described in 43 CFR 3809.420(b)(3) and the reclamation objectives outlined in BLM Handbooks H-3042-1 and H-3809-1.</p> <p>See 2.2.11 for monitoring and fulfillment of revegetation</p>

	<p>I cannot imagine the terrible effect that the noise of drilling (which will be 24/7) and related lights will have on nocturnal animals in the Project area. Mexican spotted owls and ocelots are nocturnal species and are protected under ESA. But they are not the only nocturnal wildlife that will be affected. Every animal that accesses water at Copper Creek for survival will be deeply affected by the noise and light, and their continued health will be threatened.</p> <p>But lack of access to water is just part of the destruction the Project would cause. The Project area is one of the state's most robust wildlife corridors for multiple species. Drilling, new roads, the introduction of large equipment, surface destruction, increased road use near the Lower San Pedro River area, human activity, trash, porta potties and incessant noise will destroy the habitats of wildlife that are unique to the area and roam in this corridor. That said, animals are not the only victims. This Project and its many side effects will also destroy the natural beauty that we humans crave as an escape from our urban lives. If the Project proceeds, activities such as hiking, bird watching, and camping will no longer be viable. BLM must better evaluate the impacts of the Project on recreation and protect access to this special public land for non-industrial uses. Already, gates are being constructed that will keep US citizens from entering their public lands.</p>	Ann Jacobs	<p>This project is not located within any National Ambient Air Quality Standard PM2.5 or PM10 Non-Attainment Areas. Incorporation of best available operating practices from the proponent into the proposed Project design would make the impacts to air quality negligible.</p> <p>The BLM is committed to managing public lands in a manner that balances multiple uses and minimizes conflicts by adhering to established land use planning processes, engaging with relevant stakeholders, and implementing adaptive management strategies that promote sustainable resource use while protecting the environment and public access. The proposed action would not result in the temporary or permanent closure of primary access roads (ex. Copper Creek Rd, Bunker Hill Rd, Rug Rd). The project would not impede public access to drill pads via non-motorized means, into and through the area via Copper Creek Road, and the other access roads identified for improvement with no reclamation.</p>
	<p>As required by NEPA, BLM must evaluate alternative actions, which are dismissed in the Environmental Assessment (riparian exclusion alternative, limited operating hours alternative) to avoid the many harms I have described in this letter. These alternatives were summarily dismissed with only the mining company's interests considered. Why is this so when, under the Public Lands Rule, "conservation" is also considered a 'best use' of public land? In addition, BLM and everyone associated with the Project must remember that if the Project is approved, after all the irrevocable destruction it will cause, the copper extracted from this special, unique place will be sent overseas for processing, since we no longer have the ability to process copper in the United States.</p> <p>In the name of many species of animals (a number of which are protected) as well as humans who believe in the sanctity of nature, DO NOT approve the Copper Creek mine exploratory project.</p>	Ann Jacobs	<p>The alternatives that are considered and eliminated from detailed analysis were eliminated because they did not reduce impacts or would not meet the purpose and need for action. There are three alternatives analyzed in detail in this EA including the AMP alternative which allows for the BLM to make adjustments to the project before the effects are significant.</p>
	<p>I am writing to express my concerns about the Copper Creek mining project near Mammoth, Arizona. I live about 1.5 miles from the Copper Creek road corridor. During the BLM meeting on the 6th, it was stated that the drill rigs would run 24 hours a day, seven days a week and that hoods would be used to protect light pollution into the air. I have noticed that we have already begun to see lights from our home. These lights are very bright and remain static, they are not from vehicles. My questions include: Can the BLM confirm that the light shields are currently in use? Are the drill rigs operating at all hours thus far in the process? I am aware that there "dark sky" areas in Pinal County and the tri-community. Dark Sky International, headquartered in Tucson, references that light pollution has scientifically established economic and environmental consequences, which result in significant impacts to the ecology and human health of all communities. I find that this assessment fails to mention how the wildlife, ecosystems and health of the communities will be protected. If we are beginning to see drill rig light pollution, noise pollution must be occurring as well. I have concerns if we will hear the noise. It was not covered in this assessment as to have far the drill rig noise will travel and be heard? Will this noise be heard when we recreate in the area? Will that gates that the mining group is installing, prevent us from getting around the Copper creek area? There are many unanswered questions and I implore the BLM to research the information that was not covered in this assessment. Thank you, Brent Walden</p>	Brent Walden	<p>Design features intended to reduce impacts of noise and light pollutions have been updated and are discussed in Section 2.2.10 of the EA.</p> <p>The BLM is committed to managing public lands in a manner that balances multiple uses and minimizes conflicts by adhering to established land use planning processes, engaging with relevant stakeholders, and implementing adaptive management strategies that promote sustainable resource use while protecting the environment and public access. The proposed action would not result in the temporary or permanent closure of primary access roads (ex. Copper Creek Rd, Bunker Hill Rd, Rug Rd). The project would not impede public access to drill pads via non-motorized means, into and through the area via Copper Creek Road, and the other access roads identified for improvement with no reclamation.</p>

	<p>I am a resident of the Mammoth area, and also a hunter, with grave concerns about the quality of life for my community, should exploration by Faraday/Redhawk expand to 67 drill sites (We all know that exploration leads to full-scale mines). Approving this additional exploration puts us one step closer to the reality of a giant open-pit mine, 24/7 lighting and noise - and it favors a foreign mining company's interests over community health. First: like many residents, I have serious concerns about my groundwater and the potential of wells running dry - even during these exploratory phases, which will consume such inordinate amounts of water during a 25-year period of prolonged drought. What will the mine or BLM do when we have to drill deeper wells? Who will pay for those expenses? We've heard plenty of local hydrologists talk about their studies of receding groundwater levels in the San Pedro, and how taking water from the Galiuros is the same as "robbing the middle of the San Pedro aquifer." But your analysis shares none of that data. Why?</p>	Roxanne Garcia	<p>The nearest non-exploration or monitoring well is for stock uses and is approx. 1.4 miles away from the Hendrickson Well and 3.1 miles from the Solar Well. Due to the low pumping rates and non-continuous pumping, that and other wells much further away would not be affected.</p> <p>Should the Preferred Action Alternative be selected, the adaptive management plan (AMP) would produce an array of relevant hydrological information useful in assessment of trends and may be used to produce a hydrologic model of Copper Creek. As described in Section 2.3.1, which has been updated in the administrative EA, the AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project to monitor and mitigate adverse impacts on the water and water-dependent resources. The AMP has been also been described further in Appendix F.</p>
	<p>On behalf of Honor the Earth, I am writing to express our organizations strong opposition to the Copper Creek Exploration Project and the current Draft Environmental Assessment (EA). The EA is insufficient and fails to meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and the Clean Water Act. The proposed project poses significant risks to sensitive species, including the yellow-billed cuckoo, Mexican spotted owl, and ocelot, and threatens the hydrological integrity of Copper Creek. The EA does not adequately analyze cumulative impacts, segmentations of review, or the full scope of potential environmental consequences. Additionally, the allowance of 24/7 drilling without meaningful mitigation measures for noise and light pollution is unacceptable. The Bureau of Land Management (ELM) is required under NEPA to prepare a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), and we urge the agency to do so before taking any further action on this project.</p>	Conor Varela Handley	<p>Impacts to wildlife and to special status species are analyzed in Sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2. Design features in Section 2.2.10 would also reduce impacts to listed species, as well as implementation of the adaptive management plan (AMP) in the Preferred Action alternative. Changes to the EA include an expansion of the 500 foot buffer from the centerline of Copper Creek riparian area, to a 0.25 mile buffer where no vegetation clearing, drilling, or reclamation activities would occur during the yellow-billed cuckoo breeding season (May 25-September 30).</p> <p>The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 7B ranch.</p> <p>43 CFR 3809.21 defines segmentation as a "series of Notices for the purpose of avoiding filing a Plan of Operations". To date, the BLM has acknowledged one notice level operation. The BLM describes the notice level operations that are currently taking place in the Copper Creek project area in the EA Chapter 2. The BLM describes and includes the notice level operations in the impact analysis sections as part of the affected environment.</p> <p>Design features intended to reduce impacts of noise and light pollutions have been updated and are discussed in Section 2.2.10 of the EA.</p> <p>The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS.</p>
	<p>We are especially concerned by BLM's failure to conduct proper government-to-government consultation with Tribes, particularly the San Carlos Apache Tribe, whose sacred sites, cultural resources, and water rights are directly threatened by this project. This lack of consultation is a clear violation of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and BLM's own regulatory obligations. It is imperative that ELM pause this project until comprehensive and respectful consultation has been conducted with all Tribes in the region including the Tohono O'odham Nation, Pascua Yaqui Tribe, and White Mountain Apache Tribe. Tribal nations must have a meaningful role in determining the future of projects that affect their ancestral lands and resources. Anything less undermines federal trust responsibilities and perpetuates a legacy of exclusion. We respectfully request that ELM honor its legal and ethical responsibilities by conducting a full EIS and engaging in thorough Tribal consultation.</p>	Conor Varela Handley	<p>The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with the San Carlos Apache Tribe to address concerns. The BLM has made several attempts to consult and discuss the project throughout its duration with the San Carlos Apache Tribe Leadership and Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.</p> <p>The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with tribes to address concerns. Pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800, the regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA 54 U.S.C. 306108); Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments; and the Bureau of Land Management policies as found in Handbook 1780-1, Improving and Sustaining BLM-Tribal Relations; the Safford Field Office sent letters to initiate consultation with potentially affected tribes. Of the 12 tribes invited to consult, the BLM only received responses from three, none of whom had serious concerns that needed to be addressed. The BLM continues to notify the tribes as the process advances and is open to discussion of any concerns that may come up. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.</p>

	I am a resident of Mammoth AZ and wish to add my comments about the current and proposed Red Hawk/Faraday mining operation in the Copper Creek area. Since this area is a set aside area from other mining areas how is this project even possible. What has changed to allow this set aside to be ignored. This set aside has been a huge asset to our community in rebuilding from a mining town to a rural community that values the recreational benefits of the set aside. I doubt that there has been a new home built or and existing home sold in this area that was not been influenced positively by the proximity of the set aside.	Robert George	Thank you for your comment.
	The continued exploration in Cooper Creek can only lead to damage of this environment. The proposed damage to free flowing water in this exceedingly dry environment will be catastrophic to the wildlife that depends on it. The vast number and diversity of birds alone that use this area as residents or migrants justifies retaining its undisturbed status. Faced with the current stress of HPAI the struggling avian communities certainly will react negatively to this intrusion on the environment. The irreparable damage of this operation will impact dozens of species of owls and hawks alone.	Robert George	Impacts to wildlife, special status species, and wildlife connectivity are analyzed in EA Sections 3.4.1, 3.4.2, and 3.4.3.
	The issue of our continued supply of water has not been fully explored. This is an extremely arid area. Will our ground water be sustained? Will it be useable for our households? Mining has used excessive water and destroyed ground water resources regularly. What safeguards are there for our community and wildlife.	Robert George	Impacts to wildlife and to special status species are analyzed in Sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2. Design features in Section 2.2.10 would also reduce impacts to listed species, as well as implementation of the adaptive management plan (AMP) in the Preferred Action alternative. Changes to the EA include an expansion of the 500 foot buffer from the centerline of Copper Creek riparian area, to a 0.25 mile buffer where no vegetation clearing, drilling, or reclamation activities would occur during the yellow-billed cuckoo breeding season (May 25-September 30). Impacts to hydrologic resources are discussed in EA Section 3.4.4.
	This area is also a historical cultural asset to our area. There are many known ancient cultural sites like the walled town that sits overlooking Mammoth on Cooper Creek road. There are many undocumented sites that have not been surveyed that exist about every mile along the San Pedro and undoubtedly along Cooper Creek. A valuable riparian area would not have been ignored by ancient people using the San Pedro highway migrating north and south. We know that past mining operations have totally destroyed these types of culturally significant features. One only needs to refer to the burying of the village and ball court at San Manuel. In short we do not need a mine to sustain Mammoth and the destruction caused by such an operation will destroy the sustainability of our community. Our personal investments in the community will be destroyed. The future of the community, environment and cultural heritage will be damaged beyond repair. Please reconsider any and all permits for this ill advised project. Thank You Robert George	Robert George	Thank you for your comment.
	1. Hydrologic data of the area are not well characterized. As stated in the EA, "The flow regime of Copper Creek is complex and not fully understood..."(p71). We do know that pulling water out of the Creek will deplete the aquifer in the middle of the San Pedro River Basin. Additionally, the amount of recharge to the aquifer is unknown, and the future of precipitation in the watershed is unknown and likely to be declining over time as we continue through a 25-year megadrought. Already, the recharge to the Lower San Pedro is not keeping up, even without full-scale mining. A full ecohydrological model should be included in order to evaluate the indirect ecological consequences of exploratory activities. It should include the entire San Pedro watershed, not simply the smaller-scale tributaries listed as separate watersheds in the EA.	Linda Leigh	Should the Preferred Action Alternative be selected, the adaptive management plan (AMP) would produce an array of relevant hydrological information useful in assessment of trends and may be used to produce a hydrologic model of Copper Creek. As described in Section 2.3.1, which has been updated in the administrative EA, the AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project to monitor and mitigate adverse impacts on the water and water-dependent resources. The AMP has been also been described further in Appendix F.
	2. Reclamation of the impacted ecosystems must meet clearly-stated results, set forth before any activity commences. This could take longer than the few years listed in the EA for monitoring. The intended results of the post-project restoration plan must be measurable and enforceable and must establish long-term monitoring requirements.	Linda Leigh	The project includes a reclamation plan see EA Section 2.2.11. Reclamation would be completed to the standards described in 43 CFR 3809.420(b)(3) and the reclamation objectives outlined in BLM Handbooks H-3042-1 and H-3809-1. See 2.2.11 for monitoring and fulfillment of revegetation
	3. Impact to existing mitigation area, in particular the 7B Ranch which supports a mature mesquite bosque set aside for conservation in a land swap with another copper mine company. Activities of this exploration project could have a significant negative impact on the site. In addition, Table 4.1 of the EA, p.78, does not list Findings and Conclusions. The EA does not sufficiently acknowledge the ecological complexity, interconnectedness, or long-term vulnerabilities of the Sonoran Desert system. The science of systems ecology—and its relevance to public land management—demands a more comprehensive assessment that accounts for thresholds, feedbacks, and cumulative impacts. The BLM must prepare a full EIS if it intends to move forward with this project; there is too much at stake not to do so.	Linda Leigh	Should the Preferred Action Alternative be selected, the adaptive management plan (AMP) would produce an array of relevant hydrological information useful in assessment of trends and may be used to produce a hydrologic model of Copper Creek. As described in Section 2.3.1, which has been updated in the administrative EA, the AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project to monitor and mitigate adverse impacts on the water and water-dependent resources. The AMP has been also been described further in Appendix F.

	I would like to add my personal comments on BLM's Draft Environmental Assessment of the Copper Creek exploratory mining project, for your consideration. I believe this EA to be woefully inadequate for making any decision on this exploratory mining project. Throughout most of the state Arizona's public lands have been severely degraded, so much so that we have lost a great deal of habitat needed to sustain our wild native populations of both plants and animals. This degradation has been especially severe for natural aquatic resources and the biota that depend on them for survival. This area has some of the last remaining aquatic resources and it is critical that they be preserved and, wherever possible, we should be restoring them to a more fully healthy condition. This proposal needs a full EIS that looks carefully to fully evaluate the resources and the risks to those resources, in full detail.	Saelon Renkes	The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS.
	As a landowner who relies on a well, I am greatly concerned with the impact on the aquifers. In November of 2024, I read a report about Wells completely being run dry by along the Upper San Pedro River near Willcox, Arizona related to a large-scale project in the area. It was about this time that I began to see social media posts by Faraday/Redhawk promoting their Copper Creek project. In one of these posts, it stated "One drill rig uses less than the equivalent of 4 households worth of water". I asked on that social media post if there was a quantifiable amount in gallons. I was then blocked from asking anymore questions on that platform. That same month on the 21st of November, I attended an Open house style meeting presented by Redhawk exploration held in San Manuel, Arizona. At that meeting I spoke with Faraday staff about the water usage and if they could explain to me how much 4 household's would use. They were unable to answer my questions at this meeting and whether the aquifer would be able to sustain the planned mining project. Faraday/Redhawk could not confirm that our wells would not run dry.	Jennifer Walden	Should the Preferred Action Alternative be selected, the adaptive management plan (AMP) would produce an array of relevant hydrological information useful in assessment of trends and may be used to produce a hydrologic model of Copper Creek. As described in Section 2.3.1, which has been updated in the administrative EA, the AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project to monitor and mitigate adverse impacts on the water and water-dependent resources. The AMP has been also been described further in Appendix F. The nearest non-exploration or monitoring well is for stock uses and is approx. 1.4 miles away from the Hendrickson Well and 3.1 miles from the Solar Well. Due to the low pumping rates and non-continuous pumping, that and other wells much further away would not be affected. The BLM has not received an application for a full mine plan of operation at this time. Analysis of a future mine and effects would be speculative.
	Finally, after much research and combing through their literature, I found that according to Faraday/Redhawk mining, they expect to use around 175,000 gallons per drill rig. This is a tremendous amount of water and can affect the health of our water table. In January of 2025, I attended a meeting regarding the Copper Creek mining Project with a group of concerned citizens in Mammoth, Arizona. I listened to a professor of Geoscience from the University of Arizona discuss the mega-drought in the San Pedro River and the effects on the Aquifer. Mr. Eastoe stated that research has shown that water recharge is not sufficient to maintain water levels. One well near Gamez road has collapsed and several active springs in the area have dried up. The USGS has shown that sufficient recharge is not occurring in the San Pedro water shed. My water concerns heightened, as I know that most of the households and properties in this corridor rely on Wells for their water. I am also the well manager of 5 properties, and it is my fiduciary interest to keep our neighborhood well healthy. Furthermore, the environmental assessment fails to address the amount of water that will be used and only briefly touches on water quality. I am writing to urge the Bureau of Land Management to complete a full Environmental Impact Statement. Please protect our community	Jennifer Walden	Should the Preferred Action Alternative be selected, the adaptive management plan (AMP) would produce an array of relevant hydrological information useful in assessment of trends and may be used to produce a hydrologic model of Copper Creek. As described in Section 2.3.1, which has been updated in the administrative EA, the AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project to monitor and mitigate adverse impacts on the water and water-dependent resources. The AMP has been also been described further in Appendix F. The nearest non-exploration or monitoring well is for stock uses and is approx. 1.4 miles away from the Hendrickson Well and 3.1 miles from the Solar Well. Due to the low pumping rates and non-continuous pumping, that and other wells much further away would not be affected. The BLM has not received an application for a full mine plan of operation at this time. Analysis of a future mine and effects would be speculative.
	During the March 6, 2025 public Zoom meeting, BLM geologist Dan Moore stated: "[When considering] directional drilling vs. straight vertical drilling, you're looking at overall length of drill necessary - directional drilling is longer. So you have more resource use there. This is very hilly, steep terrain and directional drilling is not necessarily possible to go in the direction you want from a common pad when you're looking at the slopes near the surface." That response is contrary to what has been documented at Faraday/Redhawk's drilling sites to date. The mining company has exclusively employed the directional drilling method from their private lands since 2022 to gain access to mineral samples beneath the ground on Public BLM land. Please explain the "not necessarily possible" comment when it is not only possible, but is an action that has been routinely conducted, as seen in Faraday's press releases and technical documents.	Steven Fry	LO-The performance standard at 43 CFR 3809.420(a)(1) requires the operator to use equipment and methods that meet the performance standards, prevent UUD, and are technically feasible and standard industry practices. Vertical drilling is a standard practice and technically feasible based on the terrain and distance between drillholes. Directional drilling is not always feasible in steep, hilly terrain. Where the slope aspect aligns with the desired direction of drilling, attempting to drill through the surficial zone of weathered rock can lead to hole collapse before reaching competent rock.
	The EA should also explain the limit of drill holes per pad. During Notice-Level-approved drilling operations that have already taken place, Faraday has drilled three to four times per pad on Public land. The EA states that the project includes "67 drill pad sites." This is a potentially misleading statement to the public. Is it more accurate to share with the public that the likelihood is that 268 drill holes might occur vs. the implied 67? If this is true, it is a vast misrepresentation to the public of the amount of water that will actually be used.	Steven Fry	This is described in the EA in Ch. 2.

	Specific mining details seem to be lacking in the EA and must be addressed to transparently inform the public. Additionally, Mr. Moore's response that directional drilling requires more resource use seems to be in opposition to the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), which includes a provision to ensure sustainable use of the land. Even the BLM SFO's own Resource Management Plan presented in the EA suggests 'special management attention' to this riparian area to ensure 'these fragile areas are protected and improved.' Please investigate further, share this insight with the public, and include your comments in a revised Environment Impact Statement, in lieu of the deficient EA.	Steven Fry	Directional drilling uses more water to reach the target depth than a vertical boring to the same target depth. The commenter is correct that drilling multiple borings from a common drill pad would reduce land use.
	The project plans to withdraw groundwater for drilling but it doesn't analyze how this will affect Copper Creek's riparian ecosystem, the species dependent on it, or the river downstream. And it especially doesn't address how it will impact residents closest to the activity. BLM must analyze the project's impact on Copper Creek's hydrology and the health of the Lower San Pedro before approval.	Roxanne Garcia	In response to public comments, and in consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service for this proposed project, additional design features and information that would reduce impacts to special status species are analyzed in Sections 2.2.10 and 3.4.2 of the EA. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has also been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek. The AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project through monitoring, and subsequently would mitigate adverse impacts on the water, riparian, and wild and water-dependent resources.
	As a longtime hunter and avid outdoorswoman, I chose to move from Phoenix to this place, expressly to live in this geographic area for access to nature and hunting opportunities. With such aggressive exploratory drilling, I - and hunters like me - will lose hunting opportunities because game species will be less likely to be in the area due to lighting, road expansion, and noise from operating equipment and vehicle disturbances.[...] . The EA does not address hunters and gaming, and, under NEPA, it should. It fails even to list the game animals in the area. Overall, the Environmental Assessment does not take into consideration recreational impacts, yet it must consider protecting public land access for non-industrial use. Residents in this area deserve a full response with supporting evidence. BLM must prepare a full Environmental Impact Statement instead of relying on an inadequate EA.	Roxanne Garcia	The BLM is committed to managing public lands in a manner that balances multiple uses and minimizes conflicts by adhering to established land use planning processes, engaging with relevant stakeholders, and implementing adaptive management strategies that promote sustainable resource use while protecting the environment and public access. The proposed action would not result in the temporary or permanent closure of primary access roads (ex. Copper Creek Rd, Bunker Hill Rd, Rug Rd). The project would not impede public access to drill pads via non-motorized means, into and through the area via Copper Creek Road, and the other access roads identified for improvement with no reclamation.
	I've already seen that Faraday has installed gate posts (no gate yet) in anticipation of moving forward, likely preventing me and other US citizens in the near future from accessing our own public lands in and around Copper Creek. This is our land, not a Canadian exploration company's. My family has enjoyed visits to the Copper Creek area for two decades, taking family visitors and friends there multiple times per year, camping there, and respectfully taking side-by-side rides to enjoy the natural, rugged beauty of such a unique desert area. We have traditions in these spaces, traditions that honor lost loved ones, who loved the area every bit as much as us. With BLM's proposal to expand exploration which - again - will lead to mining, my enjoyment of these areas will be stripped, during a period when I anticipate retiring and enjoying them even more. That will all be stolen from me	Roxanne Garcia	The BLM is committed to managing public lands in a manner that balances multiple uses and minimizes conflicts by adhering to established land use planning processes, engaging with relevant stakeholders, and implementing adaptive management strategies that promote sustainable resource use while protecting the environment and public access. The proposed action would not result in the temporary or permanent closure of primary access roads (ex. Copper Creek Rd, Bunker Hill Rd, Rug Rd). The project would not impede public access to drill pads via non-motorized means, into and through the area via Copper Creek Road, and the other access roads identified for improvement with no reclamation.

	BLM indicated they had added an AMP (Adaptive Management Plan) to Faraday's application. What actions would BLM take if the impacts of Faraday pulling water from private wells has negative impacts on Copper Creek? Would drilling be suspended? For how long? Does BLM provide any of the AMP monitoring data to the public? If not, why? If yes, where can we find it?	Cathy Gorman	The BLM has no authoritative standing to restrict a private company (or citizen) from withdrawing water from their private well on their private land. Our capability to mitigate potential impacts to resources is founded in that the water withdrawn is for project purposes and is a connected action. If BLM determines that the withdrawal of water used for project purposes is causing deleterious effects on components of the riparian and/or aquatic ecosystems of Copper Creek within the portion of Copper Creek that is managed by the BLM, then the BLM is reserving the capability of the Authorized Officer at Safford Field Office to require the operator (Redhawk) to reduce the water used for project purposes. Assessment takes the form of annual Lotic AIM data collection, bi-annual compliance inspections, period site visits and Proper Functioning Condition assessments, and quarterly review of data gathered from several sources including mid-depth wells, shallow-depth wells, surface flow gages, pumping records, and environmental data including precipitation and temperature. All data is collected on site and continuously sampled. There is a possibility of suspending drilling on public lands via reducing water resources used for the exploration project on public lands until resource conditions on public lands improve. That said, the BLM has created the Adaptive Management Plan in order to facilitate a scaled response to variable conditions while also meeting our Congressionally mandated obligation for Multiple Use management of our public lands. BLM understands just how important areas such as Copper Creek are for all user communities and the conservation of the ecological functions and services of those areas is a significant piece of our obligation for Sustainable Yield. As noted in the Preferred Action Alternative, the BLM is committing to continuously evaluate resources for potential impacts and mitigate those impacts as appropriate for the life of the proposed project. The BLM does make Lotic AIM data available to the public (as well as Terrestrial AIM and Riparian & Wetland AIM). You can find that lotic data at BLM Natl AIM Lotic Indicators Hub BLM GBP Hub. Data from wells and surface flow gages is provided from devices owned and operated by Redhawk which were authorized through a separate NEPA action. Data is shared quarterly with the BLM but is technically owned by Redhawk. We are working with Redhawk to potentially make that data available through a third party, perhaps through the University of Arizona.
	Hello, I just want to share several strong concerns I have relating to the exploratory mining & possible mining in the Galiuros north of San Manuel. I was born in San Manuel & still live in the Tri-community that I've called home for 67 years now. During this time I have seen considerable negative change in the San Pedro River. I understand Blackhawk is currently drawing 35 gallons per minute which will be much worse should actual mining begin. NEPA & the Clean Water Act require full disclosure of the hydrological impact yet the EA does not model how the water withdrawal will impact the lower water table. I have rancher friends who depend on this water yet I see no plan to assist with the water level dropping below their well depths.	Michael Blomquist	35 gallons per minute is a threshold per ADWR that governs a well user's requirement to report pumping volumes. It is not the rate at which the wells associated with this project are proposed to be pumped. The actual value is closer to 1.5 gallons per minute, but that is not a continuous rate. BLM is not analyzing a full-scale mining operation as one has not been proposed. The nearest ranch well to the wells proposed a the source for project water is more than a mile away and in another watershed, so no effects are likely. The nearest well that is continually monitored, outside of those monitored in accordance with the AMP, is more than four miles to the west toward the San Pedro River and has shown an overall increase in groundwater levels since the late 1990s. Per the AMP, the BLM would require enhanced monitoring of groundwater resources if the Preferred Action were to be selected.
	Nor does the EA properly assess impacts on endangered species in the area. The Mexican Spotted Owl, ocelot, yellow billed cuckoo, the impact appears will also have a negative affect on Gila Chub & Jaguars in the area. I urge the BLM to prepare a full EIS instead of relying on an inadequate EA. It appears to violate the Endangered Species Act. Water pollution & sediment discharge risks that could violate the Clean Water Act, Insufficient analysis of wildlife corridors, Failure to evaluate impacts on public land use, hiking, photography & hunting just to name a few. The BLM must evaluate recreational impacts & protect public land. There are many other concerns such as drilling noise & light pollution and its affect on nocturnal wildlife, lack of cumulative impact analysis, Air Quality & the deficient air quality analysis, erosion control measures to protect Copper Creek, neglecting of NEPA requirement to address alternate locations or restrictions, weak reclamation plan & long term monitoring for disturbed land, water sources & habitat recovery. Please consider & respond to all my concerns & the concerns of many & the effects on our home.	Michael Blomquist	Impacts to endangered species are analyzed in Section 3.4.2. Design features in Section 2.2.10 would also reduce impacts to listed species, as well as implementation of the adaptive management plan (AMP) in the Preferred Action alternative. The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS. Impacts to wildlife connectivity have been expanded upon and are analyzed and disclosed in EA Section 3.4.3. The BLM is committed to managing public lands in a manner that balances multiple uses and minimizes conflicts by adhering to established land use planning processes, engaging with relevant stakeholders, and implementing adaptive management strategies that promote sustainable resource use while protecting the environment and public access. The proposed action would not result in the temporary or permanent closure of primary access roads (ex. Copper Creek Rd, Bunker Hill Rd, Rug Rd). The project would not impede public access to drill pads via non-motorized means, into and through the area via Copper Creek Road, and the other access roads identified for improvement with no reclamation. The notice level drilling impacts are analyzed in the No Action Alternative and in the Affected Environment for each of the resources analyzed in detail thereby analyzing how the notice level drilling impacts the baseline conditions. Additional analysis has been added to Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 7B ranch. This project is not located within any National Ambient Air Quality Standard PM2.5 or PM10 Non-Attainment Areas. Incorporation of best available operating practices from the proponent into the proposed Project design would make the impacts to air quality negligible. The alternatives that are considered and eliminated from detailed analysis were eliminated because they did not reduce impacts or would not meet the purpose and need for action. There are three alternatives analyzed in detail in this EA including the AMP alternative which allows for the BLM to make adjustments to the project before the effects are significant. The project includes a reclamation plan see EA Section 2.2.11. Reclamation would be completed to the standards described in 43 CFR 3809.420(b)(3) and the reclamation objectives outlined in BLM Handbooks H-3042-1 and H-3809-1. See 2.2.11 for monitoring and fulfillment of revegetation The BLM would be monitoring area resources and conditions using multiple data sources including continuous groundwater monitoring in at least 3 wells, surface flow from three gages, annual lotic AIM data collection, periodic data collection using any of several protocols including PFC and wet/dry mapping, local weather station data, national data sets and modeling including WRCC RAWs data, OSU PRISM model, and US Drought Monitor. Data evaluation would occur quarterly for the length of the proposed project and data gaps or exceeded triggers would induce additional monitoring in accordance with the AMP.
	There are many other areas of concern in this area such as sacred San Carlos Apache sites. The NHPA & BLM's own regulation require meaningful tribal consultation, however the BLM failed to properly consult the tribe before issuing the EA. The BLM must pause any and all activity until proper tribal consultation is completed.	Michael Blomquist	The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with the San Carlos Apache Tribe to address concerns. The BLM has made several attempts to consult and discuss the project throughout its duration with the San Carlos Apache Tribe Leadership and Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.

	<p>The EA lack's enforceable post-project restoration. I would strongly expect the BLM to provide a strengthened reclamation plan with long term monitoring.</p>	<p>Michael Blomquist</p>	<p>The project includes a reclamation plan see EA Section 2.2.11. Reclamation would be completed to the standards described in 43 CFR 3809.420(b)(3) and the reclamation objectives outlined in BLM Handbooks H-3042-1 and H-3809-1.</p> <p>See 2.2.11 for monitoring and fulfillment of revegetation</p>
	<p>I am requesting that an environmental impact statement be done for the proposed mining exploration in Copper Creek area I the San Pedro. I am concerned about the unlimited water pumping that will occur in the San Pedro aquifer and the damage it will do to one of the last water sources in south east Arizona. Aravaipa canyon, one of the most diverse areas in the nation will be impacted negatively if this is allowed to proceed. I have spent most of my 84 years in the Oracle area. Towards the end of my life I am extremely disappointed at how we are leaving the planet in such dire straights. We must control the urban sprawl and protect what we have left. I am including one of my late husbands many paintings of the Lower San Pedro. Thank you, E. Joy McGrew</p>	<p>Joy McGrew</p>	<p>The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS.</p> <p>In response to public comments, and in consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service for this proposed project, additional design features and information that would reduce impacts to special status species are analyzed in Sections 2.2.10 and 3.4.2 of the EA. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has also been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek. The AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project through monitoring, and subsequently would mitigate adverse impacts on the water, riparian, and wild and water-dependent resources.</p> <p>The proposed Copper Creek exploration project would have a negligible effect on Aravaipa Canyon as the proposal is 5.2-acre feet per year of water use which is unlikely to affect Aravaipa Canyon which is located approximately 12 miles away.</p>
	<p>A second concern I wish to address is the cumulative effect of ongoing and past mining activities on the entire watershed and life in southeastern Arizona. It is my understanding that part of the area that will be affected by drilling is an area that was preserved to offset environmental damage due to mining elsewhere, in particular Oak Flat. The Oak Flat area was authorized for mining in exchange for setting aside land in the San Pedro area to mitigate the negative effects of mining in Oak Flat. Now, they propose to cause environmental damage to the area that was set aside to mitigate damage from another mine site? This is robbing Peter to pay Paul as they say. Is there no end to this trickle-down effect? How can we allow drilling on land that was set aside to mitigate mining elsewhere? I believe that the negative costs of drilling and ultimately mining in this last area of wilderness far outweighs any possible benefit. At some point we need to accept that the earth has finite resources and we need to learn to live within those boundaries. I am asking for a complete environmental impact statement that considers all of the issues referenced, identifies the cumulative effects of drilling and mining in the area, but also throughout the state, and carefully weighs the limited benefits of mining against the environmental impacts that cannot be reversed and may result in permanent loss of quality of life for Arizonans. Thank you. Linda Paul</p>	<p>linda paul</p>	<p>The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 7B ranch.</p> <p>The Cumulative Effects Study Area (CESA) for issue statements 1 and 2 was delineated to assess cumulative impacts such as habitat loss, surface water depletion, noise pollution, and the spread of invasive species.</p> <p>The CESA for issue statement 3, focuses on evaluating the effects on wildlife movement and connectivity in relation to the Santa Catalina/Rincon-Galiuro Linkage. The CESA includes a portion of the San Pedro River watershed, including areas that function as wildlife corridors that link the San Pedro River, Aravaipa Canyon, and the Galiuro Mountains. These natural corridors support species movement and gene flow across highly fragmented landscapes. The watershed boundary includes downstream water, and habitat impacts along with connectivity for both resident and migratory wildlife.</p> <p>The CESA for issue statement 4 evaluates potential impacts on hydrologic resources and their associated resources within the Copper Creek watershed that may result from groundwater withdrawals. This includes groundwater and surface water interactions, aquifer drawdown, and potential impacts to riparian vegetation and aquatic habitats, especially in areas with seasonal or perennial surface flows.</p> <p>The 7B Ranch was included as a portion of it falls within this CESA and as such, the EA has been updated in Sections 3.4.1.3, 3.4.2.3, and 3.4.3.3 to address potential cumulative impacts to the 7B ranch.</p> <p>The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS.</p>

	<p>I am writing to express my concern about the Copper Creek Exploration Project. Under the National Environmental Policy Act an Environmental Impact Statement is required. The Draft Environmental Assessment from the Bureau of Land Management appears to be inadequate and does not fully address the multiple areas of concern. I request the BLM prepare a full Environmental Impact Statement addressing all of the environmental issues that will be impacted by drilling exploration. While the current request is for drilling only, there is no reason to drill unless the ultimate plan is to mine. Therefore, the impact of subsequent mining must be taken into account. There are many potential impacts from drilling in this area that have not been completely addressed - air quality, water quality, national historic preservation, endangered species, tribal involvement, climate change, diversity. In the interest of time and space I want to comment on just two issues: water and the cumulative effect of the assault on wilderness. No one will deny that Arizona is in a water crisis, exacerbated by climate change, decrease in Colorado River diversions, drought, overuse of ground water. If we do not seriously address the water issue the state will soon have to limit consumer use. Meanwhile, we are allowing (encouraging) unsustainable pumping of ground water that is depleting our aquifers and affecting our watersheds. While the project claims to recycle water needed for drilling, it admits there will be some water loss. This loss will affect the entire watershed, resulting in insufficient water for ranchers, industry, consumers, etc. In addition, the rivers and riparian areas that support wildlife and migrating birds will be impacted and possibly never recover. Utilizing limited ground water for drilling seems to be indefensible.</p>	linda paul	<p>The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS.</p> <p>The proposal that is before the BLM at this time is for consideration and analysis of exploratory drilling. The BLM does not have an application for a future copper mine that is associated with the exploratory drilling. Therefore it would be speculative at this time for the BLM to consider and analyze a future copper mine associated with the exploratory drilling - even as a reasonably foreseeable future action in the cumulative effects analysis. When and if applications and permits are filed for a future copper mine, the BLM would initiate a new NEPA process for the future copper mine and would consider impacts to resources and associated mitigation at that time.</p> <p>In response to public comments, and in consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service for this proposed project, additional design features and information that would reduce impacts to special status species are analyzed in Sections 2.2.10 and 3.4.2 of the EA. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has also been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek. The AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project through monitoring, and subsequently would mitigate adverse impacts on the water, riparian, and wild and water-dependent resources.</p> <p>The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 7B ranch.</p>
	<p>As a U.S. citizen who cares deeply about all of our public lands, in every state, I am writing in response to the Bureau of Land Management's Draft Environmental Assessment of the proposed industrial mining operation at Copper Creek in the Lower San Pedro River watershed. (DOI-BLM-AZ-G010-2023-0003-EA) Not only is the Environmental Assessment inadequate to the circumstances, but the Bureau violated NEPA by allowing exploratory drilling before a completed environmental review. I urge the Bureau to conduct a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) before proceeding, as is appropriate for the many significance factors of this project. One of the most concerning aspects of the proposed project is the cumulative depletion of groundwater that it would cause, and the effects this would have on local residents and on wildlife—including several species, such as ocelot and yellow-billed cuckoo, that should have received Endangered Species Act (ESA) consultations as required by law, but didn't. The EA also fails to show that riparian habitats would effectively be protected from erosion, sedimentation, and loss of habitat. The Lower San Pedro River valley is an important flyway for migratory birds and a vital wildlife corridor. Wetlands and springs that depend on groundwater are essential elements of habitat for many species, and the EA fails to evaluate the effect on them of industrial-scale mining at Copper Creek. The San Pedro Valley has already seen extraction of considerable groundwater in the service of other mining operations. In an era of rising temperatures and increasing water shortages, we owe it to the residents and wildlife of the area to preserve the resources of this watershed—or at least to follow the appropriate and mandated processes of carrying out a full EIS before any further drilling is allowed. Thank you for your time and attention.</p>	Rebecca Stefoff	<p>The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS.</p> <p>43 CFR 3809.21 defines segmentation as a "series of Notices for the purpose of avoiding filing a Plan of Operations". To date, the BLM has acknowledged one notice level operation. The BLM describes the notice level operations that are currently taking place in the Copper Creek project area in the EA Chapter 2. The BLM describes and includes the notice level operations in the impact analysis sections as part of the affected environment.</p>
	<p>Dear Ms. Flatt, I am writing out of concern regarding the plan for exploring the possibility of locating several mines in the area of the lower San Pedro River known as the Faraday Copper/Redhawk Mining Exploration Project. Since the area under consideration is located on public lands, the probability of land, water and air degradation is huge as a review of mining history has shown. The riparian area along the San Pedro River supports site-specific biodiversity. To my knowledge, adequate studies that include guidelines and/or restrictions on land and water usage, as evidenced in the Clean Air Act & Water Acts, the Endangered Species Act, among other, have not been conducted. This landscape provides recreational activities like hiking, hunting, birding and camping which would no longer be available to the public on these public lands. The climate crisis has exacerbated drought conditions in Arizona and the state cannot afford to have its limited water resources used and polluted by mining, creating a negative effect the area's watershed. I'm also concerned about the destruction of wildlife habitat including migratory and aquatic species in this area of extremely rich biodiversity. I urge the BLM to conduct an environmental impact study as soon as possible and produce a statement that will be available to the public for review. On a personal note, our family has hiked in the area over the years and would be heartbroken if this pristine beautiful landscape was subjected to an exploratory plan to mine it and much more if actual mines are approved.</p>	Deb Hilbert	<p>Should the Preferred Action Alternative be selected, the adaptive management plan (AMP) would produce an array of relevant hydrological information useful in assessment of trends and may be used to produce a hydrologic model of Copper Creek. As described in Section 2.3.1, which has been updated in the administrative EA, the AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project to monitor and mitigate adverse impacts on the water and water-dependent resources. The AMP has been also been described further in Appendix F.</p> <p>The BLM is committed to managing public lands in a manner that balances multiple uses and minimizes conflicts by adhering to established land use planning processes, engaging with relevant stakeholders, and implementing adaptive management strategies that promote sustainable resource use while protecting the environment and public access. The proposed action would not result in the temporary or permanent closure of primary access roads (ex. Copper Creek Rd, Bunker Hill Rd, Rug Rd). The project would not impede public access to drill pads via non-motorized means, into and through the area via Copper Creek Road, and the other access roads identified for improvement with no reclamation.</p> <p>Potential degradation of water quality through sedimentation of surface waters, contamination of surface or groundwater is addressed in sections 2.2.6 and 2.2.10 of the EA.</p> <p>Impacts to wildlife and to special status species are analyzed in Sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2. Design features in Section 2.2.10 would also reduce impacts to listed species, as well as implementation of the adaptive management plan (AMP) in the Preferred Action alternative. Changes to the EA include an expansion of the 500 foot buffer from the centerline of Copper Creek riparian area, to a 0.25 mile buffer where no vegetation clearing, drilling, or reclamation activities would occur during the yellow-billed cuckoo breeding season (May 25-September 30).</p>

WD.1	BLM Must Prepare an EIS for the Copper Creek Exploration Project. There is a strong likelihood of significant, and irreparable, environmental impacts, and UUD occurring. Under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is required when a project may significantly affect the environment (42 U.S.C. § 4332). The EA fails to adequately analyze cumulative effects, segmentation of environmental review (the lands get torn up wit the drilling so that by the time a full blown mine NEPA analysis takes place, the miners will say - Well this is already an degraded area). The full scope of impacts on endangered species, ground and surface water sustainability, additional and cumulative threats to waters in the region and cultural sites and uses. The current shallow, incomplete review violates BLM's obligations under 43 CFR 46.415(a).	Katie Fite	The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS.
WD.2	Violation of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) - and a Lack of Section 7 Consultation The EA does not properly assess impacts on federally protected species such as the Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Ocelot, and Mexican Spotted Owl, which rely on the project's riparian and connectivity corridors. The Endangered Species Act (ESA) requires federal agencies to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) before approving projects that may impact listed species (16 U.S.C. § 1536(a)(2)). However, there is no evidence that BLM conducted the required Section 7 consultation. BLM must conduct formal ESA consultation before approving this project. After the drill roads get bulldozed and the large-scale drilling that may puncture, drain, deplete and destroy shallow surface water areas starts, it will be too late. This area is critical to both terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity. Plus, the miner may end up destroying (additively) more land areas - due to the way BLM deals with so-called "reclamation".	Katie Fite	The BLM has consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on this project, and received a concurrence on our effects determinations. Refer to Chapter 4 for a summary of ESA Section 7 consultation conducted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service as part of this project.
WD.3	Hydrological impacts on Copper Creek must be fully analyzed and a solid environmental baseline established, the connectivity between ground and surface waters, and the foreseeable impacts of punching boreholes down and into these fragile aquifer areas. The project plans to withdraw groundwater for drilling but the documents fail to analyze how this will affect Copper Creek's riparian ecosystem and the species dependent on it, and the sustainability of ground and surface waters that supports habitat for so many sensitive and imperiled species, as well as a beautiful wild landscape. BLM must provide full disclosure of potential hydrological impacts before approval, yet the EA does not model how water withdrawals may lower the water table. Riparian-dependent species, such as the yellow-billed cuckoo and Gila chub, could be significantly affected. How much foreseeable reduction in riparian habitat and water flow will result? How many boreholes at each site? How far are drill sites located from riparian areas, and how are these areas defined? Will horizontal drilling take place? If so, will horizontal drilling further encroach on riparian zones?	Katie Fite	Due to the unpredictable nature of precipitation, it is impossible to foretell the exact impacts to the aquifers associated with pumping for this project. However, if we look at the total area of watershed up to the point where BLM SFO managed lands end, and take into account a 90% loss of that precipitation for evapotranspiration, and we use a range of precipitation values from several sources including the nearest RAWs, then as a total percentage of the remainder of water that is typically captured in the watershed each year the project proposes to use less than 1% of those annual water resources. While this figure is relatively small, BLM remains committed to enhanced resource monitoring per the AMP if the Preferred Action is accepted.
WD.4	Tribal Consultation Failures - Violate of Federal Law The San Carlos Apache Tribe has repeatedly requested government-to-government consultation regarding the project's impact on cultural resources, sacred sites, and water rights. The National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and BLM's own regulations require meaningful Tribal consultation (36 CFR 800.2(c)(2)(iii)). However, BLM has failed to properly consult the Tribe before issuing its EA. We request that BLM pause the project until proper Tribal consultation occurs.	Katie Fite	The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with the San Carlos Apache Tribe to address concerns. The BLM has made several attempts to consult and discuss the project throughout its duration with the San Carlos Apache Tribe Leadership and Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.
WD.5	Drilling Noise and Light Pollution Will Harm Nocturnal Wildlife The EA allows continuous, 24-hour drilling, which will create significant noise and light pollution affecting Mexican spotted owls, yellow-billed cuckoos, southwest willow flycatchers, and ocelots, as well as migrating birds and insects and other biota in significant decline. Nocturnal species that rely on undisturbed habitats. The EA does not include mitigation alternatives, nor adequate mitigation and minimization measures to reduce these impacts, violating NEPA's requirement to fully analyze environmental consequences. Drill crews will run over wildlife driving roads at night and all hours of the day, as well as displace animals into sub-optimal habitats threatening their survival. BLM must consider a range of more protective alternative actions, restrict drilling hours, and implement much stronger mitigation measures to protect wildlife.	Katie Fite	Impacts to noise and light pollutions are adequately incorporated as design features in Section 2.2.10 of the EA. In response to public comments, sections 3.4.1, 3.4.2, and 3.4.3 in the EA have been updated to expand upon continuous drilling effects on wildlife.

WD.6	Lack of Proper Cumulative and Foreseeable Impacts Analysis. The EA does not fully assess how ongoing and past mining activities compound the environmental effects of the current project, violating NEPA's cumulative impact assessment requirements (40 CFR 1508.7). BLM also does not assess the existing and ever-growing threats to sensitive and endangered species, and to ground and surface waters in the region. BLM must conduct a full cumulative impact analysis before approving the project.	Katie Fite	The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 7B ranch.
WD.7	Deficient Air Quality Analysis The EA does not analyze increased particulate matter, diesel emissions, or fugitive dust from expanded drilling activities, violating the Clean Air Act. Are there PFAS (Forever chemicals in any materials used in drilling? Will dust suppressants be used, and if so, what do they contain? Is there a fire danger from drilling activities, and if so, what drought or other conditions will trigger shut down? BLM must conduct a thorough air quality impact assessment and enforce mitigation measures.	Katie Fite	The fire prevention plan is described in Section 2.2.10 of the EA. This project is not located within any National Ambient Air Quality Standard PM2.5 or PM10 Non-Attainment Areas. Incorporation of best available operating practices from the proponent into the proposed Project design would make the impacts to air quality negligible.
WD.8	Water Pollution & Sediment Discharge Risks Increased sediment and potential drilling fluid runoff into Copper Creek are not adequately assessed, which could violate the Clean Water Act. BLM Use require all drilling waste water be hauled to a disposal site. BLM should analyze sedimentation risks and implement strong erosion control measures to protect Copper Creek. What happens in the event of a 10-year rain event downpour? A 50 year event? How much soil could be eroded away? What are soil formation events here?	Katie Fite	Section 2.2.10 discusses design features and BMPs in place to mitigate potential impacts to water quality. The SWPPP, accepted and permitted by ADEQ, provides sufficient detail to conclude that no significant impacts would occur due to Project related actions. Drilling fluids are managed on-site, in small quantities and no wastewater is hauled.
WD.9	BLM Fails to Address Alternative Locations, Restrictions and Triggers to Change or Shut Down Project Activity NEPA requires agencies to consider a full range of alternatives (40 CFR 1502.14) for drill sites, routes, etc. The EA dismisses important alternatives such as restricting drilling near sensitive habitats. BLM must evaluate alternative locations and restrictions, including reduced drill site and disturbance areas, to minimize environmental harm.	Katie Fite	Under the General Mining Law of 1872, as amended, a claimant has a possessory right to the valuable minerals found on their claim and the right to develop and extract those valuable minerals, 30 U.S.C. Chapter 2. The purpose and need for the analysis is to support BLM's decision whether to authorize the MPO submitted by the proponent. The alternatives that are considered and eliminated from detailed analysis were eliminated because they did not reduce impacts or would not meet the purpose and need for action. There are three alternatives analyzed in detail in this EA including the AMP alternative which allows for the BLM to make adjustments to the project before the effects are significant.
WD.10	No Hard Look Analysis of Important and Critical Wildlife Corridors The unique Galiuro-San Pedro corridor is an important corridor for greatly imperiled wide-ranging species like jaguars and ocelots but does not evaluate fragmentation effects on both these species as well as host of other sensitive and important species from increased human activity, road expansion, vegetation clearing including potential long-term ew habitat fragmentation if veg recovery is hindered by drought, weeds, etc. BLM must assess impacts on wildlife corridors and disruption to wildlife of all types, and implement much more certain and mandatory protections to prevent habitat fragmentation.	Katie Fite	Impacts to wildlife connectivity have been expanded upon and are analyzed and disclosed in EA Section 3.4.3.
WD.11	Failure to Evaluate Impacts on Recreation & Public Land Use The EA does not consider how expanded drilling and road use will negatively impact hiking, birdwatching, and other recreational activities in the area - including public health and safety while engaging in these activities. Please conduct detailed noise monitoring for all types of drilling and other equipment that may be used on site. This is also critical to protect sensitive and endangered species, migratory birds and other wildlife. BLM must evaluate recreational impacts and protect public land access for non-industrial use.	Katie Fite	The BLM is committed to managing public lands in a manner that balances multiple uses and minimizes conflicts by adhering to established land use planning processes, engaging with relevant stakeholders, and implementing adaptive management strategies that promote sustainable resource use while protecting the environment and public access. The proposed action would not result in the temporary or permanent closure of primary access roads (ex. Copper Creek Rd, Bunker Hill Rd, Rug Rd). The project would not impede public access to drill pads via non-motorized means, into and through the area via Copper Creek Road, and the other access roads identified for improvement with no reclamation.
WD.12	Reclamation Plan Is Weak, Uncertain & Lack of Long-Term Monitoring The EA lacks mandatory enforceable post-project restoration measures to ensure that disturbed lands, water sources, and habitats recover. BLM must strengthen the reclamation plan and establish long-term monitoring requirements for habitat restoration. How will BLM ensure that drilling is carried out the way the NEPA document says it will be, and that bore holes are properly capped and plugged off? How will BLM ensure that this drilling is carried out the way the EA claims? Will cameras be installed at each drill site so driller actions can be properly monitored? Has past drilling occurred here? If so, what were the depths of the drill holes? Were the depths to ground water encountered during any earlier drilling recorded in well logs, and if so, what did it show? Please keep us fully informed of all steps in this process.	Katie Fite	The project includes a reclamation plan see EA Section 2.2.11. Reclamation would be completed to the standards described in 43 CFR 3809.420(b)(3) and the reclamation objectives outlined in BLM Handbooks H-3042-1 and H-3809-1. See 2.2.11 for monitoring and fulfillment of revegetation

	<p>The mining company Faraday Copper (Redhawk), through its request for this additional exploration of 67 sites, aims to create an enormous open-pit and block cave mine that threaten everything that makes this area a treasure. The project would usher in heavy industrialization, with all the accompanying lights, noise, widened roads, endless flow of large vehicles, and bottomless thirst for water. Open pit mining eradicates food and water needed by wildlife. The same is achieved by drilling, which ultimately invites subsidence. Your Environmental Assessment doesn't take any of these reasonably foreseeable actions into account. They absolutely need to be addressed. So much that makes the area a paradise for my loved ones will be gone. The bounty of life will sicken and struggle. Species in large numbers will slide toward endangered. Those close to extinction will vanish. And my loved ones will find themselves with such a significant reduction in their quality of life that they'll forever after divide their existence into a Before and an After. My loved ones tell me that an Environmental Assessment is underway but I am deeply worried that it fails to take a great deal into consideration. For instance, how will this project - including currently ongoing drilling - affect the aquifers and other sources of water on which my loved ones rely? What are the plans to prevent toxins from entering streams and wells? How will the shredding of the topography affect the migratory birds who for millennia have rested on this land? Why were the Mexican spotted owl and ocelots - recently found in the area - left out of the Environmental Assessment? What plans are in place to provide shields from lights, reduce noise, enforce speed limits? How can my loved ones have confidence about their future ability to fill their lungs with fresh air, given that no information has been presented regarding baseline air quality from existing mining projects? How can they have confidence that their hiking won't be irreparably degraded? How can they ensure they will even have access to these public lands? Your Environmental Assessment speaks of this area being of unique and rare riparian status. BLM's Safford Field Office even discusses the need to protect it. Yet it has permitted Faraday/Redhawk to drill - right now, as I write this - on close to a dozen sites, and all without environmental review. And your Adaptive Management Plan only glancingly addresses how you will handle the draw-down of water by this mining company. This moment simply cries out for a far higher standard of science. It is impossible to trust that the project is being handled in good faith, given the lack of attention to these and other serious concerns. Therefore, it is crucial that the Bureau of Land Management not proceed with just an Environmental Assessment. A full Environmental Impact Statement is essential.</p>	Rachel Simon	<p>The BLM has not received an application for a full mine plan of operation at this time. From the BLM NEPA Handbook H-1790-1, "You cannot limit reasonably foreseeable future actions to those that are approved or funded. On the other hand, you are not required to speculate about future actions. Reasonably foreseeable future actions are those for which there are existing decisions, funding, formal proposals, or which are highly probable, based on known opportunities or trends." The discussion of the potential environmental impacts should be commensurate with the size, stage, and history of the operations. For this Project being at the stage and size of exploration drilling for site characterization, analysis of a future mine of the Project would be speculative.</p> <p>The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS.</p>
	<p>Charisse Flatt, Safford Field Manager BLM - Safford Field Office 711 S. 14th Ave. Safford, AZ 85546 April 10, 2025 I am a resident of Oracle, Arizona. I care deeply about preserving our irreplaceable and unique public lands for recreational use and protected wildlife habitat. I am concerned about the numerous possible environmental impacts caused by the Copper Creek Exploration Project. These impacts could negatively affect water resources, wildlife survival, and recreation throughout the lower San Pedro River area. The San Pedro River and its tributaries constitute the last major, intact riparian ecosystem in southern Arizona. This pristine area is a critical wildlife habitat. It is also a major migratory route for millions of birds. Endangered and threatened species have been documented within the San Pedro River watershed area. The Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) issued by the BLM for the Copper Creek Exploration Project does not address the impacts on federally protected species such as the yellow-billed cuckoo, ocelot, the Mexican spotted owl, and others. The EA does not show that the BLM has consulted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) about the protected species. The Endangered Species Act (ESA) requires BLM to consult with FWS if a project may impact endangered or threatened species. The ESA also requires BLM to assess if the proposed mining project could affect critical habitats designated for endangered species, this has not been done for the Copper Creek project.</p>	Marlena Day	<p>The BLM has consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on this project, and received a concurrence on our effects determinations. Refer to Chapter 4 for a summary of ESA Section 7 consultation conducted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service as part of this project.</p>

	<p>The ongoing drought and climate warming has already shown significant effects on everyday life in the southwest. Water conservation and reclamation are ongoing topics for ensuring a livable future in the southwest. The water usage for the Copper Creek project includes withdrawing groundwater needed for drilling, but there is not an analysis on how this will impact the water table or the riparian ecosystem and the plants and animals dependent on it. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Clean Water Act require analysis and disclosure of hydrological impacts, but the Copper Creek EA does not include modeling to show how the water table may be affected.</p>	<p>Marlena Day</p>	<p>Should the Preferred Action Alternative be selected, the adaptive management plan (AMP) would produce an array of relevant hydrological information useful in assessment of trends and may be used to produce a hydrologic model of Copper Creek. As described in Section 2.3.1, which has been updated in the administrative EA, the AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project to monitor and mitigate adverse impacts on the water and water-dependent resources. The AMP has been also been described further in Appendix F.</p> <p>In response to public comments, and in consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service for this proposed project, additional design features and information that would reduce impacts to special status species are analyzed in Sections 2.2.10 and 3.4.2 of the EA. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has also been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek. The AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project through monitoring, and subsequently would mitigate adverse impacts on the water, riparian, and wild and water-dependent resources.</p>
	<p>The recreational uses within the San Pedro River watershed region is an important component in the local economy, and provides opportunities for hiking, birding, artistic pursuits, and other enriching activities that are important to many of the local residents as well as tourists who come to enjoy this special natural area. The EA does not evaluate the impact of expanded drilling, increased road usage, degraded air quality, and noise pollution on the recreational activities within the public lands. The Environmental Assessment issued by BLM is inadequate for the Copper Creek Exploration project. It does not properly analyze the impacts for water resources, protection of federally protected species, and recreational land use. BLM is obligated, under NEPA, to prepare a full Environmental Impact Statement if a project may significantly affect the environment, with analysis on all significant environmental impacts.</p>	<p>Marlena Day</p>	<p>The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS.</p> <p>The BLM is committed to managing public lands in a manner that balances multiple uses and minimizes conflicts by adhering to established land use planning processes, engaging with relevant stakeholders, and implementing adaptive management strategies that promote sustainable resource use while protecting the environment and public access. The proposed action would not result in the temporary or permanent closure of primary access roads (ex. Copper Creek Rd, Bunker Hill Rd, Rug Rd). The project would not impede public access to drill pads via non-motorized means, into and through the area via Copper Creek Road, and the other access roads identified for improvement with no reclamation.</p>
	<p>On behalf of Redhawk Copper Inc. ("Redhawk"), we submit the following comments on the draft environmental assessment ("EA"). As discussed in the draft EA, two existing private land wells will provide the source water for the proposed exploration drilling (i.e., known as the Solar Well and the Hendrickson Well). Redhawk provided BLM an assessment of the potential effects from pumping the two wells in 2023 (Plateau Resources, 2023) (hereafter the "Plateau Report"). Unfortunately, BLM has not given due consideration to the provided information in the draft EA when discussing the potential effects of groundwater pumping. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that due consideration was also not given to implementation of the Adaptive Management Program. Coupled together, there is an extremely low likelihood of effects to riparian vegetation and on special status species who might utilize that riparian and aquatic resource. These data and analyses, however, are not analyzed in the draft EA</p>	<p>Paul Harbidge</p>	<p>The nearest non-exploration or monitoring well is for stock uses and is approx. 1.4 miles away from the Hendrickson Well and 3.1 miles from the Solar Well. Due to the low pumping rates and non-continuous pumping, that and other wells much further away would not be affected.</p> <p>The BLM received and evaluated the Plateau Report. The Plateau Report is addressed in the EA in Section 3.4.4.1.</p>

	<p>The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has issued a Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Copper Creek Exploration Project despite the likelihood of significant environmental impacts. Under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is required when a project may significantly affect the environment (42 U.S.C. § 4332). The EA fails to adequately analyze cumulative effects, segmentation of environmental review, and the full scope of impacts on endangered species, water resources, and cultural sites. This incomplete review violates BLM's obligations under 43 CFR 46.415(a). I demand that BLM prepare a full EIS instead of relying on an inadequate EA.</p>	<p>R- Laurraine Tutihasi</p>	<p>The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS.</p>
	<p>The EA does not properly assess impacts on federally protected species such as the yellow-billed cuckoo, ocelot, and Mexican spotted owl, which rely on the project's riparian and connectivity corridors. The Endangered Species Act (ESA) requires federal agencies to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) before approving projects that may impact listed species (16 U.S.C. § 1536(a)(2)). However, there is no evidence that BLM conducted the required Section 7 consultation. I urge BLM to conduct formal ESA consultation before approving this project.</p>	<p>R- Laurraine Tutihasi</p>	<p>The BLM has consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on this project, and received a concurrence on our effects determinations. Refer to Chapter 4 for a summary of ESA Section 7 consultation conducted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service as part of this project.</p>
	<p>The project plans to withdraw groundwater for drilling but fails to analyze how this will affect Copper Creek's riparian ecosystem and the species dependent on it. NEPA and the Clean Water water withdrawals may lower the water table. Riparian-dependent species, such as the yellow-billed cuckoo and Gila chub, could be significantly affected. The BLM must analyze the project's impact on Copper Creek's hydrology before approval.</p>	<p>R- Laurraine Tutihasi</p>	<p>Should the Preferred Action Alternative be selected, the adaptive management plan (AMP) would produce an array of relevant hydrological information useful in assessment of trends and may be used to produce a hydrologic model of Copper Creek. As described in Section 2.3.1, which has been updated in the administrative EA, the AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project to monitor and mitigate adverse impacts on the water and water-dependent resources. The AMP has been also been described further in Appendix F.</p> <p>In response to public comments, and in consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service for this proposed project, additional design features and information that would reduce impacts to special status species are analyzed in Sections 2.2.10 and 3.4.2 of the EA. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has also been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek. The AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project through monitoring, and subsequently would mitigate adverse impacts on the water, riparian, and wild and water-dependent resources.</p> <p>Baseline ranges of Project specific hydrologic and environmental data have been collected for 2-3 years as of the publishing of the draft EA. Baseline ranges for parameters such as precipitation and temperature are available from a large resource pool of local and national weather data. New monitoring data will be analyzed against those baseline ranges. The EA has been updated to clarify data sources and their use in decision making.</p> <p>The AMP is intended to monitor and mitigate impacts to sensitive resources thus preventing long-term impacts to the Copper Creek ecosystem. The proposed Project would be complete within 3 years of issuance of a decision, ensuring groundwater withdrawals related to the proposed Project will terminate at that time.</p>
	<p>The San Carlos Apache Tribe has repeatedly requested government-to-government consultation regarding the project's impact on cultural resources, sacred sites, and water rights. The National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and BLM's own regulations require meaningful Tribal consultation (36 CFR 800.2(c)(2)(ii)). However, BLM has failed to properly consult the Tribe before issuing its EA. I demand that BLM pause the project until proper Tribal consultation occurs.</p>	<p>R- Laurraine Tutihasi</p>	<p>The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with tribes to address concerns. Pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800, the regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA 54 U.S.C. 306108); Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments; and the Bureau of Land Management policies as found in Handbook 1780-1, Improving and Sustaining BLM-Tribal Relations; the Safford Field Office sent letters to initiate consultation with potentially affected tribes. Of the 12 tribes invited to consult, the BLM only received responses from three, none of whom had serious concerns that needed to be addressed. The BLM continues to notify the tribes as the process advances and is open to discussion of any concerns that may come up. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.</p>
	<p>The EA allows continuous, 24-hour drilling, which will create significant noise and light pollution affecting Mexican spotted owls, yellow-billed cuckoos, southwest willow flycatchers, and ocelots, all of which are nocturnal species that rely on undisturbed habitats. The EA does not include mitigation measures to reduce these impacts, violating NEPA's requirement to fully analyze environmental consequences. The BLM should restrict drilling hours and implement stronger mitigation measures to protect wildlife.</p>	<p>R- Laurraine Tutihasi</p>	<p>Impacts to noise and light pollutions are adequately incorporated as design features in Section 2.2.10 of the EA. In response to public comments, sections 3.4.1, 3.4.2, and 3.4.3 in the EA have been updated to expand upon continuous drilling effects on wildlife.</p>

	The EA does not fully assess how ongoing and past mining activities compound the environmental effects of the current project, violating NEPA's cumulative impact assessment requirements (40 CFR 1508.7). The BLM must conduct a full cumulative impact analysis before approving the project. NEPA requires agencies to consider a full range of alternatives (40 CFR 1502.14), yet the EA dismisses important alternatives such as restricting drilling near sensitive habitats. I demand that BLM evaluate alternative locations and restrictions to minimize environmental harm.	R- Laurraine Tutihasi	<p>The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 7B ranch.</p> <p>The alternatives that are considered and eliminated from detailed analysis were eliminated because they did not reduce impacts or would not meet the purpose and need for action. There are three alternatives analyzed in detail in this EA including the AMP alternative which allows for the BLM to make adjustments to the project before the effects are significant.</p> <p>Under the General Mining Law of 1872, as amended, a claimant has a possessory right to the valuable minerals found on their claim and the right to develop and extract those valuable minerals, 30 U.S.C. Chapter 2. The purpose and need for the analysis is to support BLM's decision whether to authorize the MPO submitted by the proponent.</p>
	The EA does not analyze increased particulate matter, diesel emissions, or fugitive dust from expanded drilling activities, violating the Clean Air Act. The BLM must conduct a thorough air quality impact assessment and enforce mitigation measures.	R- Laurraine Tutihasi	This project is not located within any National Ambient Air Quality Standard PM2.5 or PM10 Non-Attainment Areas. Incorporation of best available operating practices from the proponent into the proposed Project design would make the impacts to air quality negligible.
	Increased sediment and potential drilling fluid runoff into Copper Creek are not adequately assessed, which could violate the Clean Water Act. The BLM should analyze sedimentation risks and implement strong erosion control measures to protect Copper Creek.	R- Laurraine Tutihasi	Potential degradation of water quality through sedimentation of surface waters, contamination of surface or groundwater is addressed in sections 2.2.6 and 2.2.10 of the EA.
	The EA identifies the Galiuro-San Pedro corridor as important for wide-ranging species like jaguars and ocelots but does not evaluate fragmentation effects from increased human activity and road expansion. I urge BLM to assess impacts on wildlife corridors and implement protections to prevent habitat fragmentation.	R- Laurraine Tutihasi	Impacts to wildlife connectivity have been expanded upon and are analyzed and disclosed in EA Section 3.4.3.
	The EA does not consider how expanded drilling and road use will negatively impact hiking, birdwatching, and other recreational activities in the area. The BLM must evaluate recreational impacts and protect public land access for non-industrial use.	R- Laurraine Tutihasi	The BLM is committed to managing public lands in a manner that balances multiple uses and minimizes conflicts by adhering to established land use planning processes, engaging with relevant stakeholders, and implementing adaptive management strategies that promote sustainable resource use while protecting the environment and public access. The proposed action would not result in the temporary or permanent closure of primary access roads (ex. Copper Creek Rd, Bunker Hill Rd, Rug Rd). The project would not impede public access to drill pads via non-motorized means, into and through the area via Copper Creek Road, and the other access roads identified for improvement with no reclamation.
	The EA lacks enforceable post-project restoration measures to ensure that disturbed lands, water sources, and habitats recover. I demand that BLM strengthen the reclamation plan and establish long-term monitoring requirements for habitat restoration. -- R- Laurraine Tutihasi laurraine@mac.com http://www.weasner.com/ Be nice to Earth. It's the only planet that lets us live on it! - Lauren Birch	R- Laurraine Tutihasi	<p>The project includes a reclamation plan see EA Section 2.2.11. Reclamation would be completed to the standards described in 43 CFR 3809.420(b)(3) and the reclamation objectives outlined in BLM Handbooks H-3042-1 and H-3809-1.</p> <p>See 2.2.11 for monitoring and fulfillment of revegetation</p>

	<p>we are writing to express our concerns and to call for the fuller analysis provided by an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the following reasons: 1.The EA fails to adequately address Reasonable Future Foreseeable Actions as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the most obvious of which is the development of actual open pit mining which is the whole purpose of the exploration. This would also include the impacts of on-site processing, tailings, transportation of products, and water use. 2. The EA fails to adequately address Cumulative Impacts, also required by NEPA, such as past mining activity, the state Superfund site on the east side of the Aravaipa Wilderness, additional mining activity and other developments already impacting the area. In addition, the Cumulative Effects Study Area is defined too narrowly. The potential devaluation of the 7B in particular, as well as of other local mitigation properties, and the dewatering of the lower San Pedro River, including water quantity and quality impacts for wildlife and local communities are not addressed. 3. There has been no consultation with the Fish & Wildlife Service as required by the Endangered Species Act despite the project area occurring in an important wildlife corridor and the actual and potential presence of endangered, threatened and sensitive species. Nor has there been consultation with the San Carlos Tribe as required by the National Historic Preservation Act.Although we could list additional concerns, in the interest of brevity, we simply ask that you consider these comments in making your decision and thank you for the opportunity to comment.</p>	Cathy Gorman	<p>The BLM has not received an application for a full mine plan of operation at this time. From the BLM NEPA Handbook H-1790-1, "You cannot limit reasonably foreseeable future actions to those that are approved or funded. On the other hand, you are not required to speculate about future actions. Reasonably foreseeable future actions are those for which there are existing decisions, funding, formal proposals, or which are highly probable, based on known opportunities or trends." The discussion of the potential environmental impacts should be commensurate with the size, stage, and history of the operations. For this Project being at the stage and size of exploration drilling for site characterization, analysis of a future mine of the Project would be speculative.</p> <p>The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 7B ranch.</p> <p>The Cumulative Effects Study Area (CESA) for issue statements 1 and 2 was delineated to assess cumulative impacts such as habitat loss, surface water depletion, noise pollution, and the spread of invasive species.</p> <p>The CESA for issue statement 3, focuses on evaluating the effects on wildlife movement and connectivity in relation to the Santa Catalina/Rincon-Galiuro Linkage. The CESA includes a portion of the San Pedro River watershed, including areas that function as wildlife corridors that link the San Pedro River, Aravaipa Canyon, and the Galiuro Mountains. These natural corridors support species movement and gene flow across highly fragmented landscapes. The watershed boundary includes downstream water, and habitat impacts along with connectivity for both resident and migratory wildlife.</p> <p>The CESA for issue statement 4 evaluates potential impacts on hydrologic resources and their associated resources within the Copper Creek watershed that may result from groundwater withdrawals. This includes groundwater and surface water interactions, aquifer drawdown, and potential impacts to riparian vegetation and aquatic habitats, especially in areas with seasonal or perennial surface flows.</p> <p>The 7B Ranch was included as a portion of it falls within this CESA and as such, the EA has been updated in Sections 3.4.1.3, 3.4.2.3, and 3.4.3.3 to address potential cumulative impacts to the 7B ranch.</p> <p>The BLM has consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on this project, and received a concurrence on our effects determinations. Refer to Chapter 4 for a summary of ESA Section 7 consultation conducted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service as part of this project. The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with the San Carlos Apache Tribe to address concerns. The BLM has made several attempts to consult and discuss the project throughout its duration with the San Carlos Apache Tribe Leadership and Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.</p>
	<p>As the Pinal County Supervisor of the Tri-Community Area in Eastern Pinal County, I support Redhawk Copper's proposed drilling program to proceed following your review of its plan of operations. One constant issue has been the lack of economic opportunity in Eastern Pinal County. Jobs are not available and residents are moving elsewhere for better opportunities; it has been challenging to bring new job creators to this part of the county. Redhawk Exploration's project represents a tremendous opportunity to bring a sustainable, high-paying job creator to this area. The project team is strongly supported by Redhawk's executive leadership and will continue to be. The project anticipates creating more than 500 direct jobs and supporting another 600 or so more jobs for supportive industries. Mining wages in Arizona are well above the median income for Pinal County, and Redhawk could provide more than \$89 million in personal income for its employees. This would be a life-changing opportunity for Pinal County families. The project will also greatly benefit state and local public services. Over the course of a projected three-decade mine life, Redhawk would generate \$1.6 billion in tax revenue. With this money, Pinal County and the Town of Mammoth can improve roads and support other long-neglected community needs. In addition to creating revenue, Redhawk's team is doing the necessary work to build strong, long-term relationships with individuals, organizations, and businesses in the Tri-Community area. They support the local Little League and the high school agriculture club, provide medical equipment to local emergency personnel, help send kids to summer camp, and lend their voice to help us promote infrastructure needs with state officials. Ultimately, Redhawk maintains a visible presence in the local communities their project will employ, and clearly cares about the people in the community it has chosen to call home. I support moving their project forward.</p>	Jeffrey McClure, Pinal County Board of Supervisors	<p>Thank you for your comment.</p>
	<p>I am a resident of Mammoth AZ and wish to add my comments about the current and proposed Red Hawk/Faraday mining operation in the Copper Creek area. Since this area is a set aside area from other mining areas how is this project even possible. What has changed to allow this set aside to be ignored. This set aside has been a huge asset to our community in rebuilding from a mining town to a rural community that values the recreational benefits of the set aside. I doubt that there has been a new home built or and existing home sold in this area that was not been influenced positively by the proximity of the set aside.</p>	Robert George	<p>The Cumulative Effects Study Area (CESA) for issue statements 1 and 2 was delineated to assess cumulative impacts such as habitat loss, surface water depletion, noise pollution, and the spread of invasive species.</p> <p>The CESA for issue statement 3, focuses on evaluating the effects on wildlife movement and connectivity in relation to the Santa Catalina/Rincon-Galiuro Linkage. The CESA includes a portion of the San Pedro River watershed, including areas that function as wildlife corridors that link the San Pedro River, Aravaipa Canyon, and the Galiuro Mountains. These natural corridors support species movement and gene flow across highly fragmented landscapes. The watershed boundary includes downstream water, and habitat impacts along with connectivity for both resident and migratory wildlife.</p> <p>The CESA for issue statement 4 evaluates potential impacts on hydrologic resources and their associated resources within the Copper Creek watershed that may result from groundwater withdrawals. This includes groundwater and surface water interactions, aquifer drawdown, and potential impacts to riparian vegetation and aquatic habitats, especially in areas with seasonal or perennial surface flows.</p> <p>The 7B Ranch was included as a portion of it falls within this CESA and as such, the EA has been updated in Sections 3.4.1.3, 3.4.2.3, and 3.4.3.3 to address potential cumulative impacts to the 7B ranch.</p>
	<p>The continued exploration in Cooper Creek can only lead to damage of this environment. The proposed damage to free flowing water in this exceedingly dry environment will be catastrophic to the wildlife that depends on it. The vast number and diversity of birds alone that use this area as residents or migrants justifies retaining its undisturbed status. Faced with the current stress of HPAl the struggling avian communities certainly will react negatively to this intrusion on the environment. The irreparable damage of this operation will impact dozens of species of owls and hawks alone.</p>	Robert George	<p>In response to public comments, and in consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service for this proposed project, additional design features and information that would reduce impacts to special status species are analyzed in Sections 2.2.10 and 3.4.2 of the EA. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has also been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek. The AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project through monitoring, and subsequently would mitigate adverse impacts on the water, riparian, and wild and water-dependent resources.</p>

	I am very troubled by the proposed Copper Creek Exploration Project. The project will cause significant and lasting harm to ecology that extends well beyond the Project's footprint. The current Bureau of Land Management's draft environmental assessment fails to assess this harm. There are many areas in which the assessment falls short. You will learn about many of these in submissions by knowledgeable experts and concerned citizens. You won't hear directly from those whose rights are being violated: The Natural Nocturnal Environment and wildlife. So I will speak for them. The continuous drilling will create noise and light pollution, harming nocturnal species such as Mexican spotted owls, ocelots, bats, and migratory bird species. These impacts MUST be addressed and mitigated. I urge the agency to prepare a full environmental impact statement that addresses ALL impacts of this project before moving issuing any approvals. All possible risks and long-term impacts on the region's wildlife corridors, riparian ecosystems, water sources, and the Natural Environment (day and night) must be considered.	mweasner@everyactioncusto m.com on behalf of Mike Weasner	Design features intended to reduce impacts of noise and light pollutions have been updated and are discussed in Section 2.2.10 of the EA. The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS.
	I want to know: How will you enforce speed limits, light shields, noise reduction?	Kathryn Keever	If the Preferred Action Alternative in the EA was selected and the proposed mining exploration activities were to proceed, implementation of the project and implementation of associated design features and mitigation will be enforced by the BLM per the standards in 43 CFR 3809 and the required design features and mitigation as described in the EA.
	How will you monitor water use and impacts on our communities?	Kathryn Keever	Monitoring and enforcement of the project will occur per the requirements in the 43 CFR 3809.600 - 3809.605 regulations.
	Why wasn't data presented regarding baseline air quality from existing mining projects and possible future impact?	Kathryn Keever	This project is not located within any National Ambient Air Quality Standard PM2.5 or PM10 Non-Attainment Areas. Incorporation of best available operating practices from the proponent into the proposed Project design would make the impacts to air quality negligible.
	I urge the BLM to conduct an environmental impact statement as soon as possible. In doing so, I hope that the BLM will take to account fully, the impact that a mine of this size would have on the ground water, the environment and it's people.	James Hilbert	The proposal that is before the BLM at this time is for consideration and analysis of exploratory drilling. The BLM does not have an application for a future copper mine that is associated with the exploratory drilling. Therefore it would be speculative at this time for the BLM to consider and analyze a future copper mine associated with the exploratory drilling - even as a reasonably foreseeable future action in the cumulative effects analysis. When and if applications and permits are filed for a future copper mine, the BLM would initiate a new NEPA process for the future copper mine and would consider impacts to resources and associated mitigation at that time.
	I urge the following immediate, imperative actions related the Copper Creek Exploration Project: Prepare a comprehensive Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) vs. short-cutting based solely on an inadequate Environmental Assessment that fails to assess the full scope of impact, particularly to endangered species and water resources. Furthermore, the EA does not appear to reflect best-in-class, evidence-based science. The EIS should include, but not be limited to: far-reaching impacts to this fragile ecosystem, the cascade of effect of each potentially deleterious act including noise and light pollution from 24/7 drilling, impact to wildlife corridors from human activity disruption and reduced air quality. The aforementioned list names only the top few and goes on extensively	dairyqueen@everyactioncusto m.com on behalf of Catherine Williams	The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS. Design features intended to reduce impacts of noise and light pollutions have been updated and are discussed in Section 2.2.10 of the EA. Impacts to wildlife connectivity have been expanded upon and are analyzed and disclosed in EA Section 3.4.3.

	Dear BLM Safford Field Office, I'm deeply concerned about the Bureau of Land Management's draft environmental assessment for the proposed Copper Creek Exploration Project. The project could cause significant and lasting harm to wildlife, water, and local ecosystems, and the environmental assessment fails to adequately assess these impacts. I urge the agency to prepare a full environmental impact statement "before" moving forward with any approvals. It must thoroughly analyze all possible risks and long-term impacts on the region's wildlife corridors, riparian ecosystems, and water sources, as well as address all points listed above. I am a high school environmental science teacher and this issue is important to me and my students. This email has been received from outside of DOI - Use caution before clicking on links, opening attachments, or responding.	sschimp p@everya ctioncusto m.com on behalf of Sarah Schimp	The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS.
	Dear BLM Safford Field Office, I urge the Bureau of Land Management's to conduct a comprehensive Environmental Impact Statement before approving any mining-exploration project in Copper Creek, a tributary of the San Pedro River. The project's location within a vital wildlife corridor, home to endangered species like jaguars and ocelots, demands a thorough evaluation of potential impacts. The agency's draft environmental assessment for the Copper Creek Exploration Project fails to adequately address the project's profound risks to the Madrean Sky Islands' sensitive ecosystems. The assessment's shortcomings, including the absence of required Endangered Species Act Section 7 consultation, insufficient analysis of groundwater depletion and riparian impacts, and the failure to consider cumulative mining effects, represent significant legal and procedural deficiencies. Furthermore, the lack of meaningful Tribal consultation and the omission of 24/7 drilling impacts on nocturnal wildlife are deeply troubling. This email has been received from outside of DOI - Use caution before clicking on links, opening attachments, or responding.	Donald Sanger	The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS. Impacts to wildlife connectivity have been expanded upon and are analyzed and disclosed in EA Section 3.4.3. The BLM has consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on this project, and received a concurrence on our effects determinations. Refer to Chapter 4 for a summary of ESA Section 7 consultation conducted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service as part of this project. In response to public comments, and in consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service for this proposed project, additional design features and information that would reduce impacts to special status species are analyzed in Sections 2.2.10 and 3.4.2 of the EA. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has also been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek. The AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project through monitoring, and subsequently would mitigate adverse impacts on the water, riparian, and wild and water-dependent resources. The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 78 ranch. The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with tribes to address concerns. Pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800, the regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA 54 U.S.C. 306108); Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments; and the Bureau of Land Management policies as found in Handbook 1780-1, Improving and Sustaining BLM-Tribal Relations; the Safford Field Office sent letters to initiate consultation with potentially affected tribes. Of the 12 tribes invited to consult, the BLM only received responses from three, none of whom had serious concerns that needed to be addressed. The BLM continues to notify the tribes as the process advances and is open to discussion of any concerns that may come up. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA. Design features intended to reduce impacts of noise and light pollutions have been updated and are discussed in Section 2.2.10 of the EA.
	2. Conduct a deep-reaching Endangered Species Act Consultation with appropriate agencies as well as independent, non-biased, non-governmental experts BEFORE green-lighting a project of this nature, which likely will have an irreversibly-devastating impact on many levels to all endangered species	dairiquee n@everya ctioncusto m.com on behalf of Catherine Williams	The BLM has consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on this project, and received a concurrence on our effects determinations. Refer to Chapter 4 for a summary of ESA Section 7 consultation conducted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service as part of this project.
	3. Perform a critical assessment on Copper Creek's Hydrology with a sharp focus on its riparian ecosystem and the species dependent on it. This should include, but not be limited to, water pollution and sediment discharge risk	dairiquee n@everya ctioncusto m.com on behalf of Catherine Williams	In response to public comments, and in consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service for this proposed project, additional design features and information that would reduce impacts to special status species are analyzed in Sections 2.2.10 and 3.4.2 of the EA. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has also been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek. The AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project through monitoring, and subsequently would mitigate adverse impacts on the water, riparian, and wild and water-dependent resources.
	4. Base ALL decisions on the broader context and compounding effect of both past and existing mining projects. The magnitude of effect is likely profound and should be given the weight of consideration it deserves in your decision-making process. Should you deem it appropriate to approve this project, I implore you to put in place all I'm confident you will reflect on the great responsibilities entrusted to you as you make these crucial decisions. Please remember, YOU HAVE THE POWER to shape the survival of an ecosystem that once lost will be forever gone!	dairiquee n@everya ctioncusto m.com on behalf of Catherine Williams	In response to public comments, and in consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service for this proposed project, additional design features and information that would reduce impacts to special status species are analyzed in Sections 2.2.10 and 3.4.2 of the EA. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has also been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek. The AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project through monitoring, and subsequently would mitigate adverse impacts on the water, riparian, and wild and water-dependent resources.

	<p>A Draft EA should not have been issued. A full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) should have been prepared, given the myriad of problems the proposed mining project impacts - groundwater depletion, wildlife harm, loss of wildlife habitat, loss of wildlife egress, destroyed water quality, degraded air quality, soil quality, toxic industrial pollution. The presence of such threatened and endangered species as species the yellow-billed cuckoo, ocelot, southwest willow flycatcher, and Mexican spotted owl obviously requires an Endangered Species Act (ESA) consultation. BLM has failed to do this, bypassing it with a rushed EA that violates the law.</p>	<p>Sandra Henderson</p>	<p>The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS.</p> <p>The BLM has consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on this project, and received a concurrence on our effects determinations. Refer to Chapter 4 for a summary of ESA Section 7 consultation conducted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service as part of this project.</p>
	<p>It is shocking that BLM is set to approve unlimited groundwater depletion by a Canadian company, allowing it to exploit the severely limited hydrologic basin of the Lower San Pedro River in the euphemistic dewatering process of industrial mining that could leave local residents, wildlife, and the river itself without sources of water. Copper mining is water intensive; writing a blank check to a foreign corporation to pump as much water as they can out of a fragile Sonoran Desert ecosystem is beyond unsupported and irrational ... It is madness to give away, for free, fossil water to a foreign corporation, for their private profit from public lands, where resources are owned by all Americans. I recall from studying Arizona geology as an undergraduate that recharging desert aquifers, where rainfall is measured in a few centimeters per year, takes centuries if not millennia. Given the trend over the past several decades of declining precipitation in the region, this is a grave threat - one the EA did not address. A full EIS is required.</p>	<p>Sandra Henderson</p>	<p>The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS.</p>
	<p>There is also the problem of water quality, industrial mining effluent, sedimentation, numerous forms of pollution to the air, water, and soil, along with noise pollution, light pollution, the disturbances of heavy equipment operation, the destructive effects of road building, and increased traffic to the area. The rushed EA lacks enforceable protections for riparian habitat, and fails to require that Faraday prevent erosion, sedimentation, noise pollution, air pollution, soil contamination, and habitat fragmentation and destruction. BLM has accepted Canadian corporate PR assurances rather than conducting independent EIS studies by American scientists. The EA simply assumes compliance by Faraday with the Clean Water Act, without showing that required permits or hydrological studies are in place. For example, will the BLM monitor water use and impacts on local communities? Will BLM monitor and enforce air quality standards? Will BLM monitor and protect impacted wildlife, especially threatened and endangered species?</p>	<p>Sandra Henderson</p>	<p>Potential degradation of water quality through sedimentation of surface waters, contamination of surface or groundwater is addressed in sections 2.2.6 and 2.2.10 of the EA.</p> <p>This project is not located within any National Ambient Air Quality Standard PM2.5 or PM10 Non-Attainment Areas. Incorporation of best available operating practices from the proponent into the proposed Project design would make the impacts to air quality negligible.</p> <p>Design features intended to reduce impacts of noise and light pollutions have been updated and are discussed in Section 2.2.10 of the EA.</p> <p>Should the Preferred Action Alternative be selected, the adaptive management plan (AMP) would produce an array of relevant hydrological information useful in assessment of trends and may be used to produce a hydrologic model of Copper Creek. As described in Section 2.3.1, which has been updated in the administrative EA, the AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project to monitor and mitigate adverse impacts on the water and water-dependent resources. The AMP has been also been described further in Appendix F.</p>

	<p>Wetlands are among the most valuable, most fragile, and most threatened ecosystems in the United States. The vestigial ones that we still have, as Americans, deserve our protection. Signing off on the degradation and likely the destruction of the Lower San Pedro River is shocking malfeasance. The San Pedro River is one of the last large, undammed rivers in the Southwest. As a proper EIS would show, it is a significant and ecologically important river due to its undammed status and the rich biodiversity it supports. The San Pedro River corridor provides critical stopover habitat for millions of migrating birds each year. This is what first drew me to the Sky Islands zone, the rare birds there, and the natural beauty of the place.</p>	Sandra Henderson	<p>The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS.</p> <p>The proposed Copper Creek exploration project would have a negligible effect on the Lower San Pedro River as the proposal is 5.2-acre feet per year of water use which is unlikely to affect the Lower San Pedro River which is located approximately 8 miles away.</p> <p>Due to the relatively low pumping rate and relatively low annual volume proposed for pumping, there would be no discernible impacts to inflows from this project, either surface or groundwater, is anticipated to the San Pedro River.</p>
	<p>Dear BLM Safford Field Office, I urge the Bureau of Land Management's to conduct a comprehensive Environmental Impact Statement before approving any mining-exploration project in Copper Creek, a tributary of the San Pedro River. The project's location within a vital wildlife corridor, home to endangered species like jaguars and ocelots, demands a thorough evaluation of potential impacts. The agency's draft environmental assessment for the Copper Creek Exploration Project fails to adequately address the project's profound risks to the Madrean Sky Islands' sensitive ecosystems. The assessment's shortcomings, including the absence of required Endangered Species Act Section 7 consultation, insufficient analysis of groundwater depletion and riparian impacts, and the failure to consider cumulative mining effects, represent significant legal and procedural deficiencies. Furthermore, the lack of meaningful Tribal consultation and the omission of 24/7 drilling impacts on nocturnal wildlife are deeply troubling. This email has been received from outside of DOI - Use caution before clicking on links, opening attachments, or responding.</p>	Donald Sanger	<p>The purpose and need for this project is to analyze 18 acres of surface disturbance (67 drill pads and access road widening) for exploratory drilling from Faraday's Mine Plan of Operation for exploration drilling for up to three years. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek by providing continuous hydrologic data gathering and identifying impacts to the water resources and riparian-dependent species. Additional design features have also been incorporated in Section 2.2.10 of the EA which would further reduce potential impacts to water resources and riparian-dependent wildlife species. Because of the scope and scale of the proposed Project, and in combination with incorporated design features and BMPs including the AMP, the BLM has adequately analyzed potential impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities thereby preventing the need for an EIS.</p> <p>The BLM has consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on this project, and received a concurrence on our effects determinations. Refer to Chapter 4 for a summary of ESA Section 7 consultation conducted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service as part of this project.</p> <p>Should the Preferred Action Alternative be selected, the adaptive management plan (AMP) would produce an array of relevant hydrological information useful in assessment of trends and may be used to produce a hydrologic model of Copper Creek. As described in Section 2.3.1, which has been updated in the administrative EA, the AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project to monitor and mitigate adverse impacts on the water and water-dependent resources. The AMP has been also been described further in Appendix F.</p> <p>The BLM analyzed the cumulative impacts of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to the affected resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The BLM has updated the cumulative impact study area definition, why it was selected, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the EA - including a discussion on potential impacts to the 7B ranch.</p> <p>The BLM has not received an application for a full mine plan of operation at this time. From the BLM NEPA Handbook H-1790-1, "You cannot limit reasonably foreseeable future actions to those that are approved or funded. On the other hand, you are not required to speculate about future actions. Reasonably foreseeable future actions are those for which there are existing decisions, funding, formal proposals, or which are highly probable, based on known opportunities or trends." The discussion of the potential environmental impacts should be commensurate with the size, stage, and history of the operations. For this Project being at the stage and size of exploration drilling for site characterization, analysis of a future mine of the Project would be speculative.</p> <p>Design features intended to reduce impacts of noise and light pollutions have been updated and are discussed in Section 2.2.10 of the EA.</p>
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LSPWA.6	<p>LSPWA submitted a letter via email to the oversight agency during this EA process on May 20, 2024. This letter noted the absence of BLM public meetings and other avenues for meaningful public participation in the oversight agency's decision to allow a significant portion of 67 drilling site operations to proceed before completing the EA that Redhawk was seeking. We requested acknowledgement of receipt of this letter but received none. [See Comment Appendix 1A]</p> <p>LSPWA later submitted a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request in July of 2024 concerning a report of potential illegal drilling by Redhawk and how the BLM resolved the issue. LSPWA has received no substantive response to this FOIA request from the Safford Office of the BLM [See Comment Appendix 1B]. Many of our comments in this letter reflect the lack of meaningful outreach by the BLM to public concerns.</p> <p>LSPWA also has formal standing in the EIS process for the expansion of the Resolution Mine near Superior, Arizona. As will be referenced later in this comment letter, the Resolution expansion proposal involves a federal land swap that includes the 3000-acre "7B Ranch" parcel, which is planned to become part of a National Conservation Area. This NCA would be managed by the same federal agency overseeing the EA for the Redhawk Project and is located in the same wildlife connectivity corridor and Copper Creek hydrological sub-basin of the lower San Pedro watershed. In addition to commenting on this land swap in our 2018 EIS comments during the Resolution EIS process, LSPWA wrote a letter in 2023 to the U.S. Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture regarding the negative impacts of the Redhawk Project on the value of the 7B parcel for off-site mitigation purposes. Receipt of this letter was acknowledged by Secretary of Agriculture Vilsack.</p>	Melissa Crytzer Fry	<p>Thank you for your comment. The Cumulative Effects Study Area (CESA) for issue statements 1 and 2 was delineated to assess cumulative impacts such as habitat loss, surface water depletion, noise pollution, and the spread of invasive species.</p> <p>The CESA for issue statement 3, focuses on evaluating the effects on wildlife movement and connectivity in relation to the Santa Catalina/Rincon-Galiuro Linkage. The CESA includes a portion of the San Pedro River watershed, including areas that function as wildlife corridors that link the San Pedro River, Aravaipa Canyon, and the Galiuro Mountains. These natural corridors support species movement and gene flow across highly fragmented landscapes. The watershed boundary includes downstream water, and habitat impacts along with connectivity for both resident and migratory wildlife.</p> <p>The CESA for issue statement 4 evaluates potential impacts on hydrologic resources and their associated resources within the Copper Creek watershed that may result from groundwater withdrawals. This includes groundwater and surface water interactions, aquifer drawdown, and potential impacts to riparian vegetation and aquatic habitats, especially in areas with seasonal or perennial surface flows.</p> <p>The 7B Ranch was included as a portion of it falls within this CESA and as such, the EA has been updated in Sections 3.4.1.3, 3.4.2.3, and 3.4.3.3 to address potential cumulative impacts to the 7B ranch.</p>

LSPWA.8	<p>Section III. NEPA requirement to accurately and fully acknowledge the Applicant's (Redhawk's) purpose in seeking a permit from the oversight agency.</p> <p>In the draft EA, the BLM describes Redhawk's application solely as a "request to explore, locate, and delineate copper deposits on public land mining claims." [EA section 1.2]. The new Canadian-based owners of Redhawk have gone well beyond that stated level of purpose. They have now extended their use of this NEPA process to be part of a major marketing campaign to demonstrate to potential investors and mining corporations that Redhawk is "de-risking" (their language) a plan for a large-scale copper mining operation. De-risking is solely concerned about protecting the financial interests of a mine's investors and has nothing to do with reducing risks to cultural, hydrological, and biological resources. For Redhawk, this de-risking process involves receiving a large number of past approvals from the BLM with no documentation of environmental review referenced in the draft EA, as well as promoting to investors the imminent approval for a large number of new drilling actions with an untimely environmental review. Such agency action has allowed the Applicant to promote the narrative that the Copper Creek basin has already been degraded significantly by its long history of mining activity, and therefore no longer presents serious challenges to conducting a future Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process.</p> <p>Redhawk itself has been doing most of the degradation during the past 18 years. "De-risking" a mining operations plan is made possible by lax oversight; it allows continual degradation to the region over a long period of time prior to conducting an EIS for a mining plan of operations. It allows a future major-mining corporation to justify the large-scale open-pit and block-cave mining operation that Redhawk has been promoting. Redhawk's Technical Report (marketed by Faraday Copper as its Preliminary Economic Assessment [PEA]), released May 2, 2023, illustrates plans for large-scale mining operations in a 28-square mile footprint that includes proposed locations for explosives storage facilities, waste disposal sites, overland conveyors, underground portals, crushers, a tailings pile adjacent to Copper Creek's downstream location, (expected to reach 4,000 feet above sea level), open-pit activity, and block-caving activity.</p>	Melissa Crytzer Fry	<p>The proposal that is before the BLM at this time is for consideration and analysis of exploratory drilling. The BLM does not have an application for a future copper mine that is associated with the exploratory drilling. Therefore it would be speculative at this time for the BLM to consider and analyze a future copper mine associated with the exploratory drilling - even as a reasonably foreseeable future action in the cumulative effects analysis. When and if applications and permits are filed for a future copper mine, the BLM would initiate a new NEPA process for the future copper mine and would consider impacts to resources and associated mitigation at that time.</p>
LSPWA.10	<p>During BLM and SFO's first and only public meeting March 6, 2025 (scheduled after public release of the Environmental Assessment), a BLM staff member indicated, in response to public concerns regarding why future open-pit mine operations were not discussed as 'reasonably foreseeable impacts,' that doing so would be pre-decisional.</p> <p>The pre-decisional action, however, has already occurred through BLM's delayed and untimely EA, following 18 years of prior drilling by the Applicant. An EA is no longer the appropriate NEPA action for the Redhawk Project, which now involves a major marketing pitch to mining corporations and the local public for full-scale mining. An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process is necessary at this point because of the public statements and marketing outreach being conducted by Redhawk to find a corporation willing to purchase a mining plan that they claim is being de-risked through decades of Notice-Level permit approvals. Based on the information we have provided, a major mining operation is certainly a reasonably foreseeable future action, and must be considered in the BLM's analyses in an EIS, not an EA.</p>	Melissa Crytzer Fry	<p>The proposal that is before the BLM at this time is for consideration and analysis of exploratory drilling. The BLM does not have an application for a future copper mine that is associated with the exploratory drilling. Therefore it would be speculative at this time for the BLM to consider and analyze a future copper mine associated with the exploratory drilling - even as a reasonably foreseeable future action in the cumulative effects analysis. When and if applications and permits are filed for a future copper mine, the BLM would initiate a new NEPA process for the future copper mine and would consider impacts to resources and associated mitigation at that time.</p>
LSPWA.14	<p>Section V: NEPA requirement for consultation and coordination [Section 4.0 of the draft EA, page 74]</p> <p>Tribal Consultation. No nation-to-nation consultation was conducted with the San Carlos Apache Tribe. Furthermore, despite the Department of the Interior's and the Department of Agriculture's Dec. 1, 2022 regulatory and policy requirements specifically related to mineral exploration proposals, the BLM failed to inform the San Carlos Apache Tribal government of its Notice-Level approval for Redhawk to conduct drilling on public land in Copper Creek. A letter from Chairman of the San Carlos Apache Tribe, Terry Rambler, on July 2, 2024 to Arizona's state director of the US BLM, Raymond Suazo, documents this infraction. When the state director of BLM failed to respond, Chairman Rambler sent a second letter on Sept. 17, 2024, to then-Secretary of the US Department of the Interior Deb Haaland and then-BLM Director Tracy Stone-Manning. No responses were received.</p> <p>Public Meetings and Community Response. The Environmental Assessment includes no documentation of any public meetings held by the BLM for any Redhawk exploration activities for the past 18 years, prior to the release of this untimely draft EA. The BLM must review its approval history of NOI exploratory drilling with the Applicant over the past 18 years and provide permitting evidence to the public.</p>	Melissa Crytzer Fry	<p>The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with the San Carlos Apache Tribe to address concerns. The BLM has made several attempts to consult and discuss the project throughout its duration with the San Carlos Apache Tribe Leadership and Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.</p> <p>The BLM acknowledged the notice level operations under 43 CFR 3809.300 which does not require NEPA for notice level operations that are under 5 acres. The BLM accepted the Notice as complete under 43 CFR 3809.301 and qualified as notice-level activity per 3809.11. The BLM adequately incorporated notice-level activities across all alternatives considered in the EA, further precluding the need for an EIS.</p>
LSPWA.17	<p>The Interdisciplinary Team Check List [EA Appendix A] failed to recognize the following:</p> <p>A Complete Cumulative Effects Study Area (CESA): The NEPA process is designed to analyze the significant environmental impacts of a proposed action, yet the CESA map identified in draft EA, Appendix A, Figure 6 (and EA 3.3) excludes several areas of significant cumulative impact, which greatly decrease the estimated past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions (RFFAs) pertaining to mineral activities in EA Table 3-2.</p>	Melissa Crytzer Fry	<p>The Cumulative Effects Study Area (CESA) for issue statements 1 and 2 was delineated to assess cumulative impacts such as habitat loss, surface water depletion, noise pollution, and the spread of invasive species. The CESA for issue statement 3, focuses on evaluating the effects on wildlife movement and connectivity in relation to the Santa Catalina/Rincon-Galiuro Linkage. The CESA includes a portion of the San Pedro River watershed, including areas that function as wildlife corridors that link the San Pedro River, Aravaipa Canyon, and the Galiuro Mountains. These natural corridors support species movement and gene flow across highly fragmented landscapes. The watershed boundary includes downstream water, and habitat impacts along with connectivity for both resident and migratory wildlife. The CESA for issue statement 4 evaluates potential impacts on hydrologic resources and their associated resources within the Copper Creek watershed that may result from groundwater withdrawals. This includes groundwater and surface water interactions, aquifer drawdown, and potential impacts to riparian vegetation and aquatic habitats, especially in areas with seasonal or perennial surface flows. The 7B Ranch has been included as a portion of it falls within this CESA.</p>

LSPWA.20	<p>Excluded from the CESA:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most of the Copper Creek project area (blue in above map) – the site of current Redhawk drilling activity, past extensive exploratory drilling [Comment Appendix 28] and RFFA Redhawk drilling activity • The remainder of Copper Creek itself, as a tributary leading to the San Pedro River and the ecologically sensitive 7B federal land exchange parcel • A portion of Mulberry Wash, which the EA indicates may already be suffering from pumping at Redhawk's Solar Well (current and RFFA impact). • The majority of River Road, upon which Redhawk's heavy equipment and pickups currently travel to gain entry to the primary access route, and Bunker Hill Road (also an excluded area of the CESA, representing present and RFFA impact). This most sensitive length of River Road with its riparian area has nearly no barrier between it and the mesquite bosque to the west, where endangered yellow-billed cuckoos are present as well as hundreds of migratory nesting and breeding bird species, and where wildlife cross River Road to several bubbling artesian wells for water access. Redhawk's heavy equipment currently runs from San Manuel and traverses directly beneath the evening foraging grounds of the largest breeding colony of rare desert purple martins in the state of Arizona, as they access the BHP pond on the west side of the road. (These unique birds rest on power lines directly to the edge of the road every evening during monsoon season). 	Melissa Crytzer Fry	<p>The Cumulative Effects Study Area (CESA) for issue statements 1 and 2 was delineated to assess cumulative impacts such as habitat loss, surface water depletion, noise pollution, and the spread of invasive species. The CESA for issue statement 3, focuses on evaluating the effects on wildlife movement and connectivity in relation to the Santa Catalina/Rincon–Galiuro Linkage. The CESA includes a portion of the San Pedro River watershed, including areas that function as wildlife corridors that link the San Pedro River, Aravaipa Canyon, and the Galiuro Mountains. These natural corridors support species movement and gene flow across highly fragmented landscapes. The watershed boundary includes downstream water, and habitat impacts along with connectivity for both resident and migratory wildlife. The CESA for issue statement 4 evaluates potential impacts on hydrologic resources and their associated resources within the Copper Creek watershed that may result from groundwater withdrawals. This includes groundwater and surface water interactions, aquifer drawdown, and potential impacts to riparian vegetation and aquatic habitats, especially in areas with seasonal or perennial surface flows. The 7B Ranch has been included as a portion of it falls within this CESA.</p>
LSPWA.21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The remainder of the former Mercer Ranch, purchased by Redhawk/Faraday, which increases traffic in a highly sensitive wildlife connectivity corridor as workers travel with their trucks to the Redhawk core-sample storage warehouse. RFFA can be expected from the proposed solar farm [Comment Appendix 28]. • The 7B Ranch, a 3000-acre mitigation property owned by Resolution Copper in exchange for planned mining impacts at Oak Flat in Superior, Arizona. • The community 7B hiking trail and the paved section of Copper Creek Road adjacent to the hiking trail cutting through the mesquite bosque. An increase in traffic from heavy equipment during expanded exploration would lead to wildlife mortality documented in this area of robust species including ornate box turtles, numerous reptiles and amphibians, as well as mammals ranging from bobcats and black bears to mountain lions and gray foxes. 	Melissa Crytzer Fry	<p>Impacts to 7B ranch from this project have been added to Chapter 3 of the EA in response to public comment.</p> <p>The Cumulative Effects Study Area (CESA) for issue statements 1 and 2 was delineated to assess cumulative impacts such as habitat loss, surface water depletion, noise pollution, and the spread of invasive species.</p> <p>The CESA for issue statement 3, focuses on evaluating the effects on wildlife movement and connectivity in relation to the Santa Catalina/Rincon–Galiuro Linkage. The CESA includes a portion of the San Pedro River watershed, including areas that function as wildlife corridors that link the San Pedro River, Aravaipa Canyon, and the Galiuro Mountains. These natural corridors support species movement and gene flow across highly fragmented landscapes. The watershed boundary includes downstream water, and habitat impacts along with connectivity for both resident and migratory wildlife.</p> <p>The CESA for issue statement 4 evaluates potential impacts on hydrologic resources and their associated resources within the Copper Creek watershed that may result from groundwater withdrawals. This includes groundwater and surface water interactions, aquifer drawdown, and potential impacts to riparian vegetation and aquatic habitats, especially in areas with seasonal or perennial surface flows.</p> <p>The 7B Ranch was included as a portion of it falls within this CESA and as such, the EA has been updated in Sections 3.4.1.3, 3.4.2.3, and 3.4.3.3 to address potential cumulative impacts to the 7B ranch.</p>
LSPWA.22	<p>Because Redhawk has published a Technical Report for a mining operation and is actively promoting this mining operation to the public and to investors, an EIS is required. With this much marketing and with 18 years of Redhawk exploration drilling, mining is a reasonably foreseeable connected action. See Appendix 7 for a description of other areas that must be included in the CESA for this necessary EIS process.</p> <p>Tribal Cultural/Ecological Concerns. The BLM has classified "Cultural: Archaeological Resources" and "Cultural: Native American Religious Concerns," [EA Table Appendix A-1] as NI = present, but not affected; and NP = not present in the area. Yet the draft EA never addresses the 7B Ranch's 3,000 riparian acres along the San Pedro proposed as mitigation property in 'exchange' for the desecration of religious Tribal lands at Oak Flat due to Resolution Copper's planned mining operations. The San Carlos Apache Tribe, in fact, is not mentioned in any substantive manner in the draft EA. Nor is BLM's own role in the future management of the 7B mitigation property, slated to become part of the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area (SPRNCA), that will continue to be adversely impacted by the Applicant's proposed exploration (wildlife mortality along River Road and sub-basin water withdrawals impacting the mitigation property's ecological vitality). The reasonably foreseeable future action of full-scale mining will have irreversible effects on the 7B property.</p> <p>Areas of Critical Environmental Concern: The BLM has classified Areas of Critical Environmental Concern [EA Table Appendix A-1] as NP = not present in the area impacted by the proposed or alternative actions. However, as established in Section III of this response – that a full-scale mining operation is a reasonably foreseeable future action – two significant ACECs adjacent to the Galiuro Mountains, near Copper Creek, must be considered: the Desert Grasslands Research National Area ACEC – 90 acres at Sombrero Butte (desert grasslands); and Table Mountain Research National Area ACEC – 1220 acres (rare vegetation). Exploration and aggressive marketing to investors leads to mining, and mining leads to expanded mining footprints, endangering these two unique ACEC landscapes.</p>	Melissa Crytzer Fry	<p>Impacts to 7B ranch from this project have been added to Chapter 3 of the EA in response to public comment.</p> <p>The proposal that is before the BLM at this time is for consideration and analysis of exploratory drilling. The BLM does not have an application for a future copper mine that is associated with the exploratory drilling. 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This includes groundwater and surface water interactions, aquifer drawdown, and potential impacts to riparian vegetation and aquatic habitats, especially in areas with seasonal or perennial surface flows.</p> <p>The 7B Ranch was included as a portion of it falls within this CESA and as such, the EA has been updated in Sections 3.4.1.3, 3.4.2.3, and 3.4.3.3 to address potential cumulative impacts to the 7B ranch.</p> <p>The BLM is engaging in government-to-government consultation as part of this project and is working with the San Carlos Apache Tribe to address concerns. The BLM has made several attempts to consult and discuss the project throughout its duration with the San Carlos Apache Tribe Leadership and Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. Further details on the consultation process have been updated in Chapter 4.0 of the EA.</p> <p>The Cumulative Effects Study Area (CESA) for issue statements 1 and 2 was delineated to assess cumulative impacts such as habitat loss, surface water depletion, noise pollution, and the spread of invasive species. The CESA for issue statement 3, focuses on evaluating the effects on wildlife movement and connectivity in relation to the Santa Catalina/Rincon–Galiuro Linkage. The CESA includes a portion of the San Pedro River watershed, including areas that function as wildlife corridors that link the San Pedro River, Aravaipa Canyon, and the Galiuro Mountains. These natural corridors support species movement and gene flow across highly fragmented landscapes. The watershed boundary includes downstream water, and habitat impacts along with connectivity for both resident and migratory wildlife. The CESA for issue statement 4 evaluates potential impacts on hydrologic resources and their associated resources within the Copper Creek watershed that may result from groundwater withdrawals. This includes groundwater and surface water interactions, aquifer drawdown, and potential impacts to riparian vegetation and aquatic habitats, especially in areas with seasonal or perennial surface flows. The 7B Ranch has been included as a portion of it falls within this CESA.</p>

LSPWA.23	<p>Soils: Physical/Biological Issues: While acknowledging that soils are moderately susceptible to erosion caused by expansion of roads and developing drill sites, the BLM has classified this resource concern as NI = present, but not affected to a degree that detailed analysis is required. This designation ignores the fact that the 3000-acre 7B proposed addition to a National Conservation Area (SPRNCA) is directly downstream along Copper Creek at the confluence with the San Pedro River. Erosion prevention measures on pages 18- 22 of the draft EA are identical to the demonstrably inadequate measures that were implemented in the recent construction of SunZia's powerline access roads and tower pads in the San Pedro River Valley.</p> <p>Despite Appendix A, p. 6 of the EA stating the prioritization of "the prevention of erosion" and "maintenance and monitoring ... to prevent further degradation of soil resources caused by vehicle traffic associated with this operation and the effects of storm water runoff," current evidence suggests no such monitoring and erosion-prevention is occurring. [See VII in this comment letter for more details and Comment Appendix 4G for photographic evidence].</p>	Melissa Crytzer Fry	<p>Potential degradation of water quality through sedimentation of surface waters, contamination of surface or groundwater is addressed in sections 2.2.6 and 2.2.10 of the EA.</p> <p>The Cumulative Effects Study Area (CESA) for issue statements 1 and 2 was delineated to assess cumulative impacts such as habitat loss, surface water depletion, noise pollution, and the spread of invasive species.</p> <p>The CESA for issue statement 3, focuses on evaluating the effects on wildlife movement and connectivity in relation to the Santa Catalina/Rincon-Galiuro Linkage. The CESA includes a portion of the San Pedro River watershed, including areas that function as wildlife corridors that link the San Pedro River, Aravaipa Canyon, and the Galiuro Mountains. These natural corridors support species movement and gene flow across highly fragmented landscapes. The watershed boundary includes downstream water, and habitat impacts along with connectivity for both resident and migratory wildlife.</p> <p>The CESA for issue statement 4 evaluates potential impacts on hydrologic resources and their associated resources within the Copper Creek watershed that may result from groundwater withdrawals. This includes groundwater and surface water interactions, aquifer drawdown, and potential impacts to riparian vegetation and aquatic habitats, especially in areas with seasonal or perennial surface flows.</p> <p>The 7B Ranch was included as a portion of it falls within this CESA and as such, the EA has been updated in Sections 3.4.1.3, 3.4.2.3, and 3.4.3.3 to address potential cumulative impacts to the 7B ranch.</p> <p>The BLM has revised the EA to include part of 7B Ranch in EA section 3.2, the Cumulative Effects Study Area (CESA). How to address monitoring and erosion prevention Design features to control erosion are in Sections 2.2.10 and 2.2.6 of the EA.</p>
LSPWA.25	Clean Water Act. Because a major conservation designation was proposed in an Act of Congress to allegedly compensate for the impacts of destroying Oak Flat for the expansion of the Resolution Mine near Superior, Arizona, and because of the hydrological connectivity within the Copper Creek sub-basin, it is not valid to classify Clean Water Act issues as NI = present, but not affected to a degree that detailed analysis is required.	Melissa Crytzer Fry	Potential degradation of water quality through sedimentation of surface waters, contamination of surface or groundwater is addressed in sections 2.2.6 and 2.2.10 of the EA.
LSPWA.29	Multiple Wildlife Deficiencies: The draft EA includes multiple wildlife deficiencies, including the absence of accepted scientific tools for wildlife study: most notably, camera traps. Remote trail cameras are relatively inexpensive and allow researchers to study wildlife ecology, conservation, and management by capturing images and videos of animals in remote, natural habitats. They are used to monitor species presence and population size, and yet they are not part of the scientific study employed within the EA. Existing Sky Islands citizen-scientist cameratrap studies exist but were not consulted. In fact, no detailed analysis of Copper Creek's species' presence and diversity exists in the draft EA, though LSPWA supplies eight years of its own studies [See Comment Appendix 5A, 5B]. Arizona Game and Fish's Heritage Data Management System is another publicly accessible tool for wildlife reporting and geographical analysis – data which is not presented in the draft EA.	Melissa Crytzer Fry	Impacts to wildlife and to special status species are analyzed in Sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2. Design features in Section 2.2.10 would also reduce impacts to listed species, as well as implementation of the adaptive management plan (AMP) in the Preferred Action alternative. Changes to the EA include an expansion of the 500 foot buffer from the centerline of Copper Creek riparian area, to a 0.25 mile buffer where no vegetation clearing, drilling, or reclamation activities would occur during the yellow-billed cuckoo breeding season (May 25-September 30).
LSPWA.30	• Mexican Spotted Owl: While EA section 3.4.2.1 and Appendix A, p. 11 summarily dismiss the species potential to occur as "None," Mexican spotted owls have been observed on LSPWA citizen scientist cameratrap on three separate occasions during the years 2023 and 2024, in close proximity to current exploratory drilling.	Melissa Crytzer Fry	Impacts to endangered species are analyzed in Section 3.4.2. Design features in Section 2.2.10 would also reduce impacts to listed species, as well as implementation of the adaptive management plan (AMP) in the Preferred Action alternative.
LSPWA.32	<p>• Desert Purple Martins: Listed only as "possible," [EA p. 52, Appendix A] these rare saguaro-nesting birds are fully present in the largest and most ancient breeding grounds in the state in an area excluded by the proposed CESA (See VI Incomplete Cumulative Effects Study Area (CESA). The area is already being impacted by the Applicant's exploratory activity.</p> <p>• Sonoran Desert Tortoise: Listed only as "possible," [EA p. 56] and as having only been observed 5 to 6 miles from the project area [EA p. 57], this species has been documented by LSPWA members directly in areas that are now active exploratory drilling sites.</p>	Melissa Crytzer Fry	Impacts to endangered species are analyzed in Section 3.4.2. Design features in Section 2.2.10 would also reduce impacts to listed species, as well as implementation of the adaptive management plan (AMP) in the Preferred Action alternative.

LSPWA.33	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bat species: The BLM cannot make determinations on bat presence or absence if robust studies have never been conducted. Lack of species knowledge in the area is evidenced by the Copper Creek area's inclusion as a site for the NABat program, a nationally listed critical area for study. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Lesser Long-Nosed Bats: Page 52 of the EA lists this species as 'possible,' though AZ Game and Fish's Backyard Bats citizen-scientist project has documented them in the town of Mammoth for more than 20 years. These bats travel to hummingbird feeders sometimes up to 13 miles, suggesting they might be roosting in mining adits in the Copper Creek area. o Mexican Long-Tongued Bats: Page 52 of the EA lists this species as 'unlikely,' though AZ Game and Fish's Backyard Bats citizen-scientist project has documented them in the town of Mammoth for more than 20 years. These bats travel to hummingbird feeders sometimes up to 13 miles, suggesting they might be roosting in mining adits in the Copper Creek area. o Mexican Long-Nosed Bats: These bats, listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act, are excluded entirely from the draft EA, but in January 2025, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) confirmed the presence of this species in Arizona, using eDNA study. The Mexican Long-Nosed bat is easily misidentified visually as the commonly seen lesser long-nosed bat and must be considered as a possible inhabitant in the project area, without further eDNA study. 	Melissa Crytzer Fry	Impacts to wildlife and to special status species are analyzed in Sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2. Design features in Section 2.2.10 would also reduce impacts to listed species, as well as implementation of the adaptive management plan (AMP) in the Preferred Action alternative. Changes to the EA include an expansion of the 500 foot buffer from the centerline of Copper Creek riparian area, to a 0.25 mile buffer where no vegetation clearing, drilling, or reclamation activities would occur during the yellow-billed cuckoo breeding season (May 25-September 30).
LSPWA.34	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protected Arizona wildlife not considered in the EA, but present in the project area and Lower San Pedro watershed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Gila monster o Ornate box turtle • Lowland Leopard Frog: While the draft EA acknowledges the presence of this species and reveals that, "Seven project pads would potentially be accessed by using the crossing below the dam," and that "sedimentation from trucks passing through could kill tadpoles," [EA p. 57], the BLM still advocates for the use of this path, favoring the interests of the Applicant. • Game species: In land managed by BLM, which offers hunting permits, the EA admits "specific game species surveys have not been conducted at Copper Creek" [EA p. 39], another indication of an incomplete environmental assessment. It lists only "deer," and does not delineate between Coues and Mule Deer. 	Melissa Crytzer Fry	<p>Impacts to endangered species are analyzed in Section 3.4.2. Design features in Section 2.2.10 would also reduce impacts to listed species, as well as implementation of the adaptive management plan (AMP) in the Preferred Action alternative.</p> <p>Impacts to wildlife and to special status species are analyzed in Sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2. Design features in Section 2.2.10 would also reduce impacts to listed species, as well as implementation of the adaptive management plan (AMP) in the Preferred Action alternative. Changes to the EA include an expansion of the 500 foot buffer from the centerline of Copper Creek riparian area, to a 0.25 mile buffer where no vegetation clearing, drilling, or reclamation activities would occur during the yellow-billed cuckoo breeding season (May 25-September 30).</p> <p>The BLM has consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on this project, and received a concurrence on our effects determinations. Refer to Chapter 4 for a summary of ESA Section 7 consultation conducted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service as part of this project.</p>
LSPWA.35	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yellow-billed Cuckoo: This ESA-listed bird is deemed 'possible' on page 52 of the draft EA, though the species is fully documented at 7B ranch, which was excluded from the CESA. [Comment Appendix 6] Furthermore, the EA fails to consider the US Geological Survey's 2024 discovery of new breeding habitat for the rare Yellow-billed Cuckoo of southeast Arizona in xeroriparian habitat during the nesting season. Continued access by the Applicant through the Bunker Hill Road xeroriparian habitat must be studied for impact to this bird species that is federally listed as a threatened distinct population segment. • Monarchs and Milkweed: Despite being listed as a Proposed Threatened Species, "Neither species-specific monarch nor milkweed surveys were conducted within the Project Area," according to the draft EA on page 56. These studies must be conducted in the project area and affected areas downslope of the proposed exploration. 	Melissa Crytzer Fry	The BLM has consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on this project, and received a concurrence on our effects determinations. Refer to Chapter 4 for a summary of ESA Section 7 consultation conducted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service as part of this project.

LSPWA.37	<p>Unsubstantiated water-usage figures by Applicant: The draft EA includes no documentation of methodology used for Redhawk to allege water use of 70,000 gallons per month per drill site. BLM's own hydrologist, in a FOIA-obtained email on 6/9/2023, predicted monthly water-use rates to be at least 175,000 gallons a month under the 67-site exploration proposal. [See Comment Appendix 3C].</p>	Melissa Crytzer Fry	<p>Refer to Section 2.2.6 for more information for water usage estimates related to the proposed project. Refer to Section 3.4.4.2 has been updated to reflect water usage impacts from the proposed project.</p>
LSPWA.38	<p>Nonexistent hydrological data and studies: The draft EA includes no hydrology studies or reports on sub-basin(s) of the lower San Pedro watershed likely to be affected by exploratory drilling and reasonably foreseeable future mining operations. Recent wet-dry mapping data, and indicators of local watershed health exist through the research of several organizations – including but not limited to The Nature Conservancy, Arizona Game & Fish, the US Geological Survey, the University of Arizona, and even through EPA-conducted site visits to study past mining effects on the San Pedro aquifer – though none have been cited or acknowledged. The draft EA further includes no reference to ongoing adjudication proceedings to determine and establish water rights for local residents within the San Pedro River watershed, which may pose additional future water conflicts. Despite the EA's Appendix A, page 8, listing Water and Water Rights as PI = Present with potential for relevant impact that need to be analyzed in detail in the EA, they are not analyzed in any way and include no supporting documentation. The draft EA states only that “many private, state and federal water rights associated with Copper Creek and the San Pedro River could potentially be affected by water withdrawals with this project” and that “changes in groundwater levels may affect the expression, availability, and/or duration of surface and/or near-surface water resources.”</p>	Melissa Crytzer Fry	<p>The proposed Copper Creek exploration project would have a negligible effect on the Lower San Pedro River as the proposal is 5.2-acre feet per year of water use which is unlikely to affect the Lower San Pedro River which is located approximately 8 miles away.</p> <p>Should the Preferred Action Alternative be selected, the adaptive management plan (AMP) would produce an array of relevant hydrological information useful in assessment of trends and may be used to produce a hydrologic model of Copper Creek. As described in Section 2.3.1, which has been updated in the administrative EA, the AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project to monitor and mitigate adverse impacts on the water and water-dependent resources. The AMP has been also been described further in Appendix F.</p> <p>The AMP is intended to monitor and mitigate impacts to sensitive resources thus preventing long-term impacts to the Copper Creek ecosystem. The proposed Project would be complete within 3 years of issuance of a decision, ensuring groundwater withdrawals related to the proposed Project will terminate at that time.</p>
LSPWA.39	<p>The same lack of scientific documentation exists for the Streams, Riparian, Wetlands, Floodplains, Surface Water Quality, Fish listing on the EA's Appendix A, page 8, deeming this resource, also, as PI = Present with potential for relevant impact that need to be analyzed in detail in the EA.</p> <p>Lack of Historic Water Data: Static Levels. Despite various agencies, mitigation-property landholders, and nonprofits conducting multi-year studies, the draft EA presents no historic data regarding static water levels in monitoring wells located on or downslope from the Redhawk exploration sites within the likely sub-basin(s).</p> <p>BLM should specifically evaluate combined surface and groundwater hydrology on downstream sub-basins for impacts of exploratory drilling on wildlife and neighboring Community Water Systems like the Town of Mammoth and Arizona Water Company. This evaluation should address both water supply and water quality impacts from exploratory mining operations. Threats to river/riparian restoration projects. The draft EA fails to address exploratory mining's potential impacts to riparian restoration projects along the San Pedro River, including but not limited to, Arizona Game and Fish's Beaver Dam Analog Project. Water draw-down from the Copper Creek tributary may have negative impacts to projects aimed at increasing the health and vitality of Arizona's default river ecosystem for off-site mitigation of ecological impacts taking place in urban-dominated watersheds.</p>	Melissa Crytzer Fry	<p>In response to public comments, and in consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service for this proposed project, additional design features and information that would reduce impacts to special status species are analyzed in Sections 2.2.10 and 3.4.2 of the EA. As described in the Preferred Action Alternative (which has also been updated in Section 2.3 and in Appendix F of the administrative EA), the AMP would create a framework to monitor and mitigate degradation of aquatic and riparian habitats and the biological communities that are supported by the ecosystem of Copper Creek. The AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project through monitoring, and subsequently would mitigate adverse impacts on the water, riparian, and wild and water-dependent resources.</p> <p>The proposed Copper Creek exploration project would have a negligible effect on the Lower San Pedro River as the proposal is 5.2-acre feet per year of water use which is unlikely to affect the Lower San Pedro River which is located approximately 8 miles away.</p>

LSPWA.41	<p>Rejection of Project Alternatives Without Documentation and Scientific Justification. Without providing explanation or scientific justification, BLM entirely rejects the Riparian Exclusion Alternative [EA 2.4.2], despite acknowledging “the primary impact from the proposed project is aquatic and riparian habitat degradation within Copper Creek from low water road crossings and from road traffic in the uplands.” BLM completely disregards environmental considerations in favor of the Applicant’s purpose, but should reconsider the proposed buffered polygon option around the Copper Creek channel.</p> <p>The EA further rejects the Limited Operating Hours Alternative [EA 2.4.3], which would reduce noise and lighting impacts by establishing operating hours between sunrise and sunset, eliminating the need for use of artificial lighting, significant human presence, and operational noise at night. Again, no scientific justification is provided for the decision, and the Applicant’s preference for operational efficiency receives precedence over environmental impacts. During a March 24, 2025 site visit to the exploration area at Copper Creek, hosted by the Applicant for members of the Lower San Pedro Collaborative, LSPWA members who also serve on the Collaborative observed lights pointing skyward, illustrating the need for limited operating hours since the Oversight Agency is not able to enforce shielded night lighting. This lack of oversight begs the question of whether BLM even has the capacity to monitor the Applicant’s noise-and-light-reduction mandates from their distant office in Safford, which – as already illustrated in Section IV of this response letter – have been breached.</p>	Melissa Crytzer Fry	<p>The alternatives that are considered and eliminated from detailed analysis were eliminated because they did not reduce impacts or would not meet the purpose and need for action. There are three alternatives analyzed in detail in this EA including the AMP alternative which allows for the BLM to make adjustments to the project before the effects are significant.</p> <p>If the Preferred Action Alternative in the EA was selected and the proposed mining exploration activities were to proceed, implementation of the project and implementation of associated design features and mitigation will be enforced by the BLM per the standards in 43 CFR 3809 and the required design features and mitigation as described in the EA.</p>
LSPWA.43	<p>Remedial Projects - Copper Creek. On page 48 of the EA, BLM indicates it is conducting remedial projects, including evaporation ponds and monitoring wells within the Project Area. No documentation on current remediation is included: no updates regarding upgrades to the evaporation ponds installed decades ago or whether they are operational, no water-study results, no figures on actual current use and application to the Redhawk project. Additionally, no scientific documentation is referenced regarding the monitoring wells and their findings.</p>	Melissa Crytzer Fry	<p>Should the Preferred Action Alternative be selected, the adaptive management plan (AMP) would produce an array of relevant hydrological information useful in assessment of trends and may be used to produce a hydrologic model of Copper Creek. As described in Section 2.3.1, which has been updated in the administrative EA, the AMP would ensure that the BLM has the ability to implement changes to the proposed Project to monitor and mitigate adverse impacts on the water and water-dependent resources. The AMP has been also been described further in Appendix F.</p>
LSPWA.47	<p>Light-Pollution Data – The draft EA fails to cite readily available light-pollution data (from mapping applications) and visual satellite imagery comparing the difference in nighttime light pollution pre-Redhawk drilling vs. 2022 when the mining company began 24/7 exploratory operations, to the present. Statistical models should be consulted to predict increased light pollution with multiple rigs in the area, and scientific research should be accessed to determine increased light-pollution impact on sensitive species. Continual assessment of this data should be part of BLM’s light-pollution impact assessment protocol, which is absent from the EA’s lighting discussion on page 44.</p>	Melissa Crytzer Fry	<p>Impacts to noise and light pollutions are adequately incorporated as design features in Section 2.2.10 of the EA. In response to public comments, sections 3.4.1, 3.4.2, and 3.4.3 in the EA have been updated to expand upon continuous drilling effects on wildlife.</p> <p>Design features intended to reduce impacts of noise and light pollutions have been updated and are discussed in Section 2.2.10 of the EA.</p>

LSPWA.48	<p>Section VIII: Conclusion</p> <p>Process errors in this draft EA are numerous and significant.</p> <p>The Applicant has been conducting exploratory drilling in the project area for 18 years without undergoing NEPA review, significantly degrading the validity of baseline studies contained within the draft EA.</p> <p>The BLM provides no clear timeline for Redhawk's exploration project, mentioning only brief reference of two to three years. Such lax timelines leave room for additional ecological degradation. With well over 18 years of degradation taking place for exploration activities alone, it is invalid to conclude that, at the end of this long period, there has been and will be no significant impact.</p> <p>The BLM has prioritized 'best use' of the land in favor of the Applicant – i.e. mining exploration – when, by the Public Lands Rule, an additional use of land includes conservation. Unique, biodiverse riparian areas are the best candidates for conservation-use consideration, especially in light of the 7B designation as mitigation for impacts of yet another mining proposal.</p> <p>There are unacceptable impacts to the 7B federal land swap property and to the ecological and Indigenous cultural integrity of the lower San Pedro conservation landscape.</p>	Melissa Crytzer Fry	<p>The notice level drilling impacts are analyzed in the No Action Alternative and in the Affected Environment for each of the resources analyzed in detail thereby analyzing how the notice level drilling impacts the baseline conditions. Additional analysis has been added to Chapter 3 of the EA.</p> <p>The Cumulative Effects Study Area (CESA) for issue statements 1 and 2 was delineated to assess cumulative impacts such as habitat loss, surface water depletion, noise pollution, and the spread of invasive species.</p> <p>The CESA for issue statement 3, focuses on evaluating the effects on wildlife movement and connectivity in relation to the Santa Catalina/Rincon–Galiuro Linkage. The CESA includes a portion of the San Pedro River watershed, including areas that function as wildlife corridors that link the San Pedro River, Aravaipa Canyon, and the Galiuro Mountains. These natural corridors support species movement and gene flow across highly fragmented landscapes. The watershed boundary includes downstream water, and habitat impacts along with connectivity for both resident and migratory wildlife.</p> <p>The CESA for issue statement 4 evaluates potential impacts on hydrologic resources and their associated resources within the Copper Creek watershed that may result from groundwater withdrawals. This includes groundwater and surface water interactions, aquifer drawdown, and potential impacts to riparian vegetation and aquatic habitats, especially in areas with seasonal or perennial surface flows.</p> <p>The 7B Ranch was included as a portion of it falls within this CESA and as such, the EA has been updated in Sections 3.4.1.3, 3.4.2.3, and 3.4.3.3 to address potential cumulative impacts to the 7B ranch.</p>
LSPWA.49	<p>Redhawk is actively promoting a mining plan, not simply an exploration plan. At this point, actual mining is a reasonably foreseeable future action. An EIS must be developed by the BLM because the scope of past and future impacts is much greater than what can be covered in an EA. Dismissing the extensive impacts described in this comment letter by issuing a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) decision under an EA process would not be scientifically and legally supported. Exploration by Redhawk must be suspended until the impacts of their past 18 years of drilling and the reasonably foreseeable future action of copper mining have been analyzed in an Environmental Impact Statement.</p>	Melissa Crytzer Fry	<p>The proposal that is before the BLM at this time is for consideration and analysis of exploratory drilling. The BLM does not have an application for a future copper mine that is associated with the exploratory drilling. Therefore it would be speculative at this time for the BLM to consider and analyze a future copper mine associated with the exploratory drilling - even as a reasonably foreseeable future action in the cumulative effects analysis. When and if applications and permits are filed for a future copper mine, the BLM would initiate a new NEPA process for the future copper mine and would consider impacts to resources and associated mitigation at that time.</p>
LSPWA.143	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other tributary creeks/washes that feed the San Pedro from both the east and west, including but not limited to: • The Tucson Wash, whose exclusion bypasses impact reporting for the Metallica/Golden Mile Resources Mining company, recently approved by BLM for Notice-level drilling (present impact and RFFA impact). This exploratory area is only three miles west of the town of Mammoth and within close proximity to the Old Tiger Mine and San Manuel Mine's open pit – both significantly disturbed past impact areas. • Nine additional washes that feed into the San Pedro and support the state's oldest mesquite bosque (2003 Ecological Overview prepared by WestLand Resources, Inc. for Resolution Copper). • Areas west of the San Pedro, including miles of BHP tailings dumped adjacent to the San Pedro River near San Manuel – visible in their enormity even in the above map (between S. River Road and 76). • Hot Breccia exploratory copper drilling at the confluence of the San Pedro and Gila River, which received Notice-Level exploratory drilling approval by BLM. • The Aravaipa Watershed, Aravaipa Creek (a tributary to the San Pedro), and the Aravaipa Wilderness area may be impacted by the reasonably foreseeable future action of a full-scale mine. Despite the draft EA [3.4.4.1 Affected Environment] indicating "Due to the distance of the Project Area to Aravaipa Creek, no effects would be anticipated, and no further evaluation is warranted," this concern was addressed by local hydrologists and, also, BLM staff in bi-weekly meeting notes obtained through FOIA request (see below). 	Melissa Crytzer Fry	<p>The Cumulative Effects Study Area (CESA) for issue statements 1 and 2 was delineated to assess cumulative impacts such as habitat loss, surface water depletion, noise pollution, and the spread of invasive species. The CESA for issue statement 3, focuses on evaluating the effects on wildlife movement and connectivity in relation to the Santa Catalina/Rincon–Galiuro Linkage. The CESA includes a portion of the San Pedro River watershed, including areas that function as wildlife corridors that link the San Pedro River, Aravaipa Canyon, and the Galiuro Mountains. These natural corridors support species movement and gene flow across highly fragmented landscapes. The watershed boundary includes downstream water, and habitat impacts along with connectivity for both resident and migratory wildlife. The CESA for issue statement 4 evaluates potential impacts on hydrologic resources and their associated resources within the Copper Creek watershed that may result from groundwater withdrawals. This includes groundwater and surface water interactions, aquifer drawdown, and potential impacts to riparian vegetation and aquatic habitats, especially in areas with seasonal or perennial surface flows. The 7B Ranch has been included as a portion of it falls within this CESA.</p> <p>The proposed Copper Creek exploration project would have a negligible effect on Aravaipa Canyon as the proposal is 5.2-acre feet per year of water use which is unlikely to affect Aravaipa Canyon which is located approximately 12 miles away.</p>