

Lands Update
For the Arizona Game and Fish Commission
July 27, 2012
Phoenix, Arizona

FOREST SERVICE LAND AND TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PLANNING

Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest

The Forest recently provided an update on the timeline for their forest plan revision. Following the Wallow Fire of 2011, the Forest planning team has been assessing the changed condition resulting from the fire. The Final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision are now expected to be published in the summer of 2013.

Coronado National Forest

Catalina Unit Travel Management

The Department continues to review proposed changes to motorized travel system on the Catalina District of the Forest. Several roads have been identified for closure that the Department expects to recommend for retention in the travel system. At least one road, which used to provide access to the former Laquachi Archery Range, permitted as a special use, was not recognized as an existing road. The Department has previously expressed the importance of this portal to the forest from the Tucson metro area as an access point for hunters and as a potential access point for youth educational activities. Former attempts to retain the use of the area as an archery range were unsuccessful.

Kaibab National Forest

The Notice of Availability for the draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Forest was published in the Federal Register on April 20, 2012, which initiated the 90 day comment period. The Department is currently reviewing the document and will submit comments by July 18, 2012. The Department attended a workshop on June 28th to improve the monitoring chapter in the Land Management Plan (LMP). The revised LMP guides the Forest in fulfilling its stewardship responsibilities and provides direction in the form of desired conditions, objectives, standards, guidelines, and suitability. The planning rule also directs the Forest to use the best available science, and provides a framework for adaptive management. This draft plan is much more strategic in nature than the previous plan; therefore the Department will be reviewing the document and asking for assurances that the level of detail is sufficient to translate into how management will be implemented on the landscape. Key variables the Department will be looking for are consistency with the restoration framework set forth by the Four Forest Restoration Initiative (4FRI); clear and detailed desired conditions; and how Standards and Guidelines may be implemented. The Department has had a very productive relationship with the Kaibab throughout plan revision and their process has been very transparent. The Department will continue to meet individually with Forest planners to clarify language in the Plan and bolster its emphasis on wildlife habitat.

Tonto National Forest

The Forest updated the Department during a recent coordination meeting regarding the timeline for the Land Management Plan draft revision (by 2014), with anticipation of 4-6 years for the final Plan and EIS.

U.S. FOREST SERVICE

Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests (A-S)

Wallow West Fuel Reduction and Forest Recovery Project

On June 7, the Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact was signed for the Wallow West Fuel Reduction and Forest Recovery Project, allowing for salvage of dead and dying trees and pile burning of slash on up to 15,402 acres in moderate to high burn severity areas. Reforestation would also occur on up to 400 acres in treated salvage units annually over a 10-year period. Up to 141 miles of existing open roads would be used for salvage activities and up to 136 miles of maintenance level 1 closed roads would be opened and then closed after use. Two miles of new temporary roads would be required. They will be closed and rehabilitated after use.

Burro Creek Allotment Work Project Weekend

The Arizona Elk Society (AES) sponsored the 6th annual Burro Creek Allotment work project weekend. Eighty-two volunteers from AES, Southeastern Arizona Sportman's Alliance, Phoenix Varmint Callers, AZGFD, and the USFS participated. Over the two workdays four more miles of old and/or burnt fence were removed from the landscape. Much of the fence removal included fence damaged in the Wallow fire. Also fences around several upper elevation wetlands were rebuilt or repaired. Many of these wetlands are important for nesting waterfowl, as well as elk and antelope populations. The work was done in conjunction with the Department's Adopt-a-Ranch program in cooperation with the 26 Bar Ranch. Approximately 10 miles of wetland protection fencing was repaired.

Coconino National Forest

Fossil Creek Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive River Management Planning (CRMP)

The Forest is working on an Environmental Assessment for the Fossil Creek CRMP, which is a requirement of its Wild and Scenic River designation. The Fossil Creek CRMP is expected to address protection of the Wild and Scenic 'outstandingly remarkable values' which have been determined to be recreation, geology, fish and aquatic resources, wildlife, history and traditional cultural uses, and water. On May 10, the Forest granted the Department Cooperating Agency status for the CRMP planning process. As part of this relationship, the Forest will provide the Department with a seat on the interdisciplinary planning team to provide input into their process. In exchange, the Department will provide our Fisheries Program staff capacity and expertise and other areas of expertise, as needed. A Proposed Action for the CRMP has been released, and the Forest is in the process of developing their Environmental Assessment.

Coronado National Forest

Conservation and Mitigation Program (CAMP)

The Department, the Forest, and volunteers seined Bull Tank on the Bull Grazing Allotment in the Ash Creek Area of the Galiuro Mountains in efforts to remove non native tiger salamanders in preparation for reintroducing Chiricahua leopard frogs. On June 4-15 the Department collected 155 Chiricahua leopard frogs from Home Ranch Tank and released them in Bull Tank. This action is a step towards establishing a second metapopulation in the Galiuro Mountains Management Area, and could potentially meet recovery criteria established in the species

recovery plan. This action may also fulfill a conservation and mitigation measure identified under the Department's CAMP Program for sportfish stocking.

Reddington Pass AGFD Kiosk

The Forest finished a special use permit for the Department to erect an informational kiosk in Reddington Pass. The kiosk will be filled with information regarding dispersed recreational shooting, off-highway vehicle laws, fire restrictions, cleanup information, Friends of Reddington Pass Adopt-a-Road info, and any other info related to the area. The Department has a target install date of September so that information will be available for fall hunting season.

Four Forests Restoration Initiative (4FRI)

4FRI is a federally-funded, US Forest Service Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration (CFLR) Project to restore ponderosa pine forests across 2.4 million acres of the Apache-Sitgreaves, Coconino, Kaibab, and Tonto National Forests over the next 20 years. Collaboration and planning have been ongoing since 2009, and the Department is a founding member of the 4FRI Stakeholder Group which includes a diverse list of over 35 organizations. The Department is also a Cooperating Agency on the USFS 4FRI Coconino-Kaibab Project, which is an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) proposing mechanical thinning and burning over 580,000 acres on those two forests. Planning on the Coconino-Kaibab Project is ongoing, and the expected release of the Draft EIS is some time in August.

Recognizing the immediate need for landscape-scale restoration work to begin, the Department is supportive of a stewardship contract going forward. The 4FRI stewardship contract recipient, Pioneer Forest Products (Pioneer), met with the 4FRI Steering Committee and Stakeholder Group on June 26-27 at their monthly meeting in Pinetop. At this meeting, Pioneer shared a portion of their business plan with the stakeholders and stated their willingness to engage in relevant working groups. Pioneer intends to construct a wood mill in Winslow, creating jobs for plant construction and operation, as well as logging and trucking. Small diameter, ponderosa pine timber will be converted into non-commodity, high value lumber, laminate wood panels used for doors, windows, furniture, cabinetry, and specialty components. A portion of the wood slash will be used for the mill's kiln-firing. Pioneer proposes to also use slash in the production of biodiesel fuel. Pioneer will begin harvesting 5,000 acres this year and proposes full capacity at 30,000+ acres per year by 2014.

The Department continues to be actively engaged in the 4FRI Stakeholders' Landscape Assessment and Monitoring Working Group, where we are actively collaborating on the 4FRI Monitoring Plan. During recent NEPA update meetings for the DEIS, the USFS shared their draft implementation plan which increases the Department's confidence that there will be a system of checks and balances that ties directly into adaptive management. Collaboration in this regard is ongoing and productive.

Prescott National Forest

Gold Button Mine Reclamation Plan

The Department reviewed and provided supportive project evaluation comments on a reclamation plan the Forest recently issued for the Gold Button Mine in GMU 20A, located Southeast of Crown King. The plan calls for offsite disposal of construction materials from abandoned mine structures and disposal of mine tailings in abandoned, on-site evaporative

ponds, which will be capped with soil and revegetated after internment. The only concerns associated with the reclamation plan were associated with the proposed backfilling of an abandoned mine adit at the site. Those concerns were alleviated by the Forest's commitment to have the adit surveyed for bats and other wildlife prior to closure. Bat gates will be considered if survey data warrants their construction.

Tonto National Forest

Salt River Allotments Vegetation Management Project

The Department continues to work with the Forest on providing wildlife related information to support development of the Environmental Impact Statement. No further actions have occurred since the June 2012 Lands update.

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT (BLM)

Pakoon Basin and Tweeds Points Area Brome Management EA

The Department submitted comments to Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument regarding the Environmental Assessment for the Pakoon Basin and Tweeds Points Area Brome Management plan, an effort of the Mohave Desert Initiative of which the Department is a partner. The goal of this proposed action is to reduce fire threat to native vegetation posed by fuel loads created by exotic grasses and to protect desert tortoise habitat, through the preferred alternative of application of the herbicide Plateau. The Department has offered its general support for the preferred alternative while recommending changes including greater buffer distances around water sources; avoiding intact areas of oak and other key forage species; and expanding the proposed monitoring plan to include additional native plant species.

Kingman BLM Field Office

Iron Basin Mule Deer Habitat Improvement Project

The Department met with Kingman BLM to discuss progress on the environmental clearance necessary to move forward with the Iron Basin Mule Deer Habitat Improvement Project funded in the 2011 HPC cycle. It was confirmed that all clearances for moving forward with this brush management/native re-seeding project would be complete by August with implementation to begin soon thereafter.

Travel Management Planning (Route Evaluation)

The Department participated in BLM Kingman's Route Evaluation carried out during the week of June 25. This Route Evaluation is in support of the Colorado River District's ongoing Travel Management Planning effort, with this week's focus on the Bagdad and Francis Creek Allotments of GMU 18B.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Grand Canyon National Park – Comprehensive Fisheries Management Plan

In cooperation with Glen Canyon National Recreation Area (NRA), Grand Canyon National Park released its Scoping Packet for the Comprehensive Fisheries Management Plan for both Glen and Grand Canyons. The Department is a Cooperating Agency on this project, and recently

submitted comments on the Scoping Packet. In those comments, the Department reiterated its authority to manage fisheries resources in Grand and Glen Canyons and its interest in maintaining the Lees Ferry rainbow trout fishery while also maintaining and enhancing native fishes in the Park and the NRA. We recommended including Lake Mead in this management plan because of the emerging impact of striped bass. We also called out several of the NPS-NRA proposed actions that we felt had not been fully evaluated for their impact to the sport fishery or native fish populations and requested thorough development of a robust monitoring and adaptive management program.

GENERAL UPDATES

Access Agreements

Dunton Ranch

On May 22, the Department executed a seven-year Access Agreement with Dunton Ranch for lands north of I-40. The Department continues to engage in discussions with the Landowner Relations Program, Ranch Ownership, and neighboring landowners to resolve concerns associated with the sign-in kiosk, map, and signage associated with the agreement.

Francis Creek, Greenwood Community, and Byner Allotments

The Department met with Ranch Management of the Francis Creek, Greenwood Community, and Byner Allotments to discuss a comprehensive access agreement that would ensure extensive access in GMU's 16A and 18B. If awarded, Access funding will be utilized to implement a suite of rangeland improvements including fence construction and water development, to provide for better livestock distribution and implementation of a rotational grazing system that would provide the rest necessary to protect rangeland resources, while at the same time providing better habitat quality and perennial water sources for wildlife. To move forward with this agreement, the Permittee needs to acquire a letter of approval from the Lessee, the Bagdad Mine's Ownership - Freeport McMoran.

Upper Music Mountain Allotment

The Department continues to await Ranch Management's decision between a three or five year Access Agreement for the Music Mountain Ranch located in GMU 15A. Funding from the selected Agreement will be utilized by the rancher to renovate waters, clean and restore dirt tanks, and address other resource and management concerns on the Ranch.

Kane/Two Mile Ranches

The Department met with NRCS and BLM staff to kick off a remapping effort of soils and ecological sites on the Kane/Two Mile ranches to allow for a forthcoming collaborative grazing management research project. The Department is also currently reviewing the U.S. Forest Service EA for the Kane Ranch allotments. Comments will be submitted by August 7th.

Woody Ridge Restoration

The Arizona Wildlife Federation and the Department are implementing a National Forest Foundation grant to improve wildlife habitat and permeability within the Woody Ridge Wildlife Corridor located in GMU 6B and GMU 7 in Region 2. The corridor links habitat in the San Francisco Peaks area south to the Mogollon Rim. Volunteer work days are being held throughout

the summer to repair livestock fencing to wildlife friendly standards, obliterate user-created roads and trails, and remove invasive weeds within the corridor. Project sites are on or adjacent to the Coconino National Forest and include forest grazing allotments, Coconino County's Rogers Lake Natural Area, Centennial Forest State Land parcels, and City of Flagstaff utility properties. Community stewardship is building among these stakeholders and volunteer groups like Friends of Northern Arizona Forests, Grand Canyon Trust, Northern Arizona University, and sportsmen's groups to restore this crucial landscape feature. To date, we have repaired over 1 mile of fence, built nearly 1 mile of new fence, and removed ¼ mile of downed fence material. We have scheduled four additional work days for fence and weed projects.

Habitat Partnership Committee (HPC) Applications

Mountain Shadow Allotment

The Department participated in a field visit to the Mountain Shadow Allotment in GMU 16A to investigate the opportunity for a Habitat Partnership Committee (HPC) Grant Application. In exchange for HPC funds, the Permittee would re-drill a well and install a 5,000 gallon storage tank and wildlife friendly drinker to provide perennial water for wildlife and livestock operations.

Music Mountain #1, #2, and Powerline Wildlife Water Catchments

The Department carried out site visits to the Music Mountain #1, #2, and Powerline wildlife water catchments in GMU 15A, for which HPC applications will be resubmitted in the upcoming HPC cycle. In the previous cycle, funding was not awarded for Music Mountain #1, #2, and Powerline Catchments, which were submitted collectively, as *Phase 2* of a previously funded, large-scale water improvement project for the Music Mountains. Feedback from the HPC Program Coordinator indicated that the previous proposal did not receive funding due to its size, cost, and limited funds availability – and that the likelihood of funding would be increased if the catchment renovation proposals were submitted individually.

Sugarloaf Wildlife Water Catchment

The Department carried out a site visit to the Sugarloaf wildlife water catchment in Eastern GMU 15A. The existing catchment, located on State Trust Land on the Eastern edge of the X-One Ranch, has been defunct since 2006. This water was, and can again become an important perennial source of water for pronghorn, mule deer, elk, and assorted small game and non-game species.

Wildlife Areas

Arivaca Lake Wildlife Area

The Department met with the Coronado Forest regarding a scoping notice on the Arivaca Lake grazing allotment which surrounds Arivaca Lake Wildlife Area – a Commission-owned property managed as a trophy bass fishery. The Department owns the lake and immediate area around the lake as well as an easement along the road accessing the lake. The Forest administers a grazing lease for 31 Cows Year Long on the allotment but issues annual operating instructions which allow 100 cows to graze for one month during the winter non-growing season. The lake is the only water on the allotment and the cattle depend on the lake for water. The Department is looking into the need for a memorandum of agreement to allow the use of the water for purposes other than fish and wildlife use.

Horseshoe

The pond has recently been renovated to remove the excess organic matter and vegetation, along with bullfrogs, for contribution to the CAMP Program under the sportfish stocking consultation. The pond was lined and fish habitat was installed.

Lamar Haines Wildlife Area

The Department has been evaluating Veit Springs on Lamar Haines Wildlife Area for the potential to move it from a non-functioning to a functioning spring. Veit is a group of three springs for which the Department holds the water rights. Currently two of the three springs lack surface flow likely due to historic plumbing developments in place prior to Department ownership. As the Department works on perfecting those water rights with ADWR, we are also exploring restoration options to restore surface flows and create wetland pond habitat for native aquatic wildlife such as the northern leopard frog.

Coordinated Resource Management Plans (CRMP)

The Department continues to inventory resource baseline data on The Willow Springs Ranch in Unit 37B. The Willow Springs Ranch consists of 186,000 acres of State leased lands and 30 sections of private lands and is immediately west of the Triangle Bar Ranch. The Willow Springs Ranch is an important small game, mule deer, and javelina hunting destination. The CRMP was initiated when the ranch contacted the Department about access concerns. The Department recommended that all issues, including access, be addressed in a CRMP. Since that time the State Land Department has expressed concern over using the CRMP process to address access concerns. The Department is now addressing the access separately from the CRMP and continues to address other resource concerns concurrently but not in the same document as the CRMP or under the same framework.

Battle Axe

The Department recently provided review and comment on the Battle Axe CRMP located in GMU 37B.

Horseshoe

The Department continues to coordinate and participate on the CRMP for the Horseshoe and Copper Creek Allotments. The Landscape Assessment Team continues to make progress on various field sessions and beginning the required assessment inventory monitoring for BLM. This team is made up of agency experts and stakeholders. The next Agency-Stakeholder Planning Team meeting is anticipated for September. There are several active subgroups and topical working groups planning meetings for August and September.

Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)

Field Offices (Avondale, Chandler, Casa Grande)

The Department made visits to each office for introductions and communications about coordinating efforts and technical assistance for projects.

Rogers Lake County Natural Area

The Department in collaboration with NRCS is providing a rangeland health assessment for Coconino County at their Rogers Lake County Natural Area (RLCNA), which will serve as a baseline for forthcoming monitoring program, which the Department is also helping the County develop. Grazing leases were transferred from the Arizona State Land Department to the County as a condition of purchase of Rogers Lake parcels and the County will be assessing rangeland conditions as part of its overall management plan for RLCNA.

Freeport McMoran, ASLD Water Lease Application

The Department reviewed a water lease application submitted by Freeport McMoran to the Arizona State Lands Department to extract water from State Trust Lands in GMU 18B near the Bagdad Mine, and proximate to Boulder Creek. The water lease application was submitted to replace water ensured by previous 10-year leases, but scheduled to expire in December of 2012. The Department provided project guidance recommending that new water extractions not exceed previous withdrawals; thereby ensuring that source water for Boulder Creek's riparian habitat would not be reduced.

Pinal Partnership Parks, Trails, Open Space and Public Lands Committee

The Pinal partnership, parks, trails, open space and public lands committee's purpose is to move forward with regional efforts to initiate localized citizen participation in discussions and projects across the county. This committee is part of the larger Pinal Partnership. The committee is charged with planning outreach, vision statements and recommendations about parks, trails and open space for the county comprehensive plan and open space and trails master plan. The goal of the committee is to protect regional landscapes and private rights while providing natural and multi-use recreational connectivity for parks, trails and open space and the education of Pinal County residents and visitors. The Department has re-initiated the commitment to the committee and we are currently engaging and providing wildlife linkages, recreation, drainage and OHV planning information into the discussions. The Department continues to participate with the committee and is currently assisting in providing information and recommendations in the development of the committees reporting.

PM-10

Pinal County Air Quality Update

As of May 22, EPA is redesignating a portion of Pinal County to nonattainment for the 1987 24-hour PM10 national ambient air quality standard (NAAQS). It appears that the EPA has taken stakeholder input and reduced the size of the nonattainment area by approximately 36% when compared to the draft nonattainment area boundary proposed in 2010. The areas that were excluded from this final designation were large areas of Tonto National Forest, BLM, and Arizona State Trust Lands that are not developed and did not make sense to include in the nonattainment area. This reduction in size is a positive outcome for the Department in regards to future restrictions to motorized outdoor-related recreation. Many heavily used OHV areas in Pinal County and hunting areas were originally included in the original nonattainment boundary but are now excluded. The areas include populous segments of Pinal County, including the San Tan Valley area, Maricopa, Casa Grande, and portions of Coolidge, Florence and Eloy. The ADEQ and Pinal County Air-Quality Dept will be required to identify sources of PM-10 (e.g. dirt roads, construction, agriculture, livestock ops, etc.) and outline what measures (e.g. State Implementation Plan (SIP)) will be implemented to ensure levels are in compliance with the

described federal standards. Pinal County will have approximately 18 months to draft a SIP and associated rules and regulations on PM-10 sources outlined in the SIP. It has been determined that Pinal County has some of the highest PM-10 levels in the country, by EPA estimates. For the past 10 years, air-quality monitors throughout the county have shown persistent violations of the PM-10 standard. The EPA sets air-quality standards based on health-related data, and its threshold for acceptable PM-10 emissions is 150 micrograms per cubic meter over a 24-hour period. To remain in compliance, communities cannot exceed the threshold more than three times in three years.

Proposed Rosemont Copper Project

The Coronado National Forest is currently reviewing public input received during the comment period for the Rosemont Copper Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The Forest received over 25,000 comments during this period. All substantive comments have been identified, coded, and organized and responses are being developed for them. The Forest's response to these comments will be incorporated into future public disclosures for the project as required under NEPA.

The Forest is now working more closely with the Department to identify mitigation measures and monitoring plans for impacts to wildlife, habitat, and recreation. The Department had one meeting with the Forest and other cooperators in June to identify mitigation measures. A date has not been set for publication of the Final EIS. The Forest has indicated a target date of the end of the calendar year.

RENEWABLE ENERGY DEVELOPMENT

Energy Element

The Coconino County Board of Supervisors on July 10 approved the new Energy Element as an amendment to the County Comprehensive Plan. The Element is designed to promote energy conservation and to guide the siting and design of renewable energy facilities in the County. The Department is actively involved in the development of goals and policies to promote avoidance, minimization and mitigation of impacts to wildlife and habitat associated with utility-scale renewable facilities. The Element is highly reflective of the Department's approach to renewable energy as embodied in our Wind and Solar Guidelines.

Proposed Sasabe Natural Gas Pipeline

The Project would consist of an approximately 60-mile pipeline extending from El Paso Natural Gas' (EPNG) existing South Mainline System near Tucson to the US/Mexico border near Sasabe. The Project is designed to provide additional export capability to Mexico with an initial capacity of 195 million cubic feet per day. The Department is a cooperating agency for the NEPA process. The Federal action agency is the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). The Department is participating in bi-weekly conference calls with the cooperating agencies. The project is in the FERC pre-filing review process. Environmental reports (water, T&E species, vegetation, cultural, etc.) are anticipated to be complete this fall. EPNG expects to file the formal application for the project in January 2013.

WIND

Mohave County Wind Project

The Eagle Conservation Plan (ECP) will be combined with the Avian Conservation Strategy (ACS) into one document. The second draft of the ECP/ACS is currently under review with comments due by July 31.

The BLM and BP Wind Energy are currently coordinating on responses to public comments received from the open forum on the draft Environmental Impact statement. Specific technical issues are being discussed with resource leads and conference calls are scheduled with core participants to respond to each question.

The noxious weed and native plant management plan are being combined into a single Vegetation Management Plan. This vegetation plan will be facilitated with the Bureau of Land Management's Kingman Field Office. The National Park Service has offered to contribute to the reclamation portion of the vegetation plan, as they have expertise in appropriate seed mixture for the project site.

Boquillas Wind Energy Project

In June the Department with input from Regional and Phoenix staff submitted extensive comments on a series of biological reports prepared by WEST, Inc. The project was formerly being developed jointly by the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority (NTUA) and Edison Mission Energy of California, but Edison has since withdrawn as partner. NTUA sent the Department a letter upon receipt of our comments acknowledging Department concerns, and pledging to continue working with the Department and the USFWS to "economically mitigate environmental impacts that may result from such project." The Bureau of Indian Affairs has agreed to oversee the NEPA process for this project and has requested Department participation at an initial meeting with NTUA and USFWS later in July.

TRANSMISSION LINES

APS Dugas to Morgan

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Agua Fria National Monument (AFNM) is currently soliciting input on a proposed Arizona Public Service (APS) project within the AFNM. The proposal consists of fiber optic installation on the existing Navajo to West Wing 500 kV overhead transmission line. APS has submitted an application to amend two existing BLM right-of-way (ROW) grants to accommodate the installation and maintenance of the fiber optic cable between the APS Dugas and Morgan substations. The BLM is conducting an Environmental Assessment (EA) to analyze potential impacts of the proposed project on the AFNM and the human environment. The Department participates on the project team to ensure minor routes identified do not conflict with the management of Horseshoe Ranch, along with providing input on the biological evaluation and potential impacts to wildlife resources and recreation in the area. The Department provided comments on the draft EA before it was made public and will continue to provide information to the project team until the document becomes final.

SunZia Transmission Line Project

Although tentatively scheduled for mid June, the SunZia cooperator meeting was not held until July 17. The original intent of this meeting was to discuss the project, comments, and any unresolved issues; however the meeting was not structured adequately to allow time for discussion of issues. The Department has taken the lead in scheduling another meeting between BLM and only those cooperators responsible for wildlife and land management in Arizona.

The BLM’s preferred route (4C2c) for the transmission line would travel through the San Pedro River Valley, on the west side of the river. There is strong support from the project proponent (SunZia, L.L.C.) and Fort Huachuca for route 4B, which goes through the Sulphur Springs Valley and between the Aravaipa and Galiuro Wilderness Areas. The Department supports route 4C3 which avoids the sensitive Sulphur Springs Valley, Aravaipa and Galiuro Wilderness Areas, and the San Pedro River Valley, traveling instead through the Tucson metropolitan area to the project terminus near Picacho Reservoir. The Department’s main concerns continue to be the proposed routes through these sensitive areas, and adequate mitigation to offset project impacts to wildlife and habitat.

Timeline for the DEIS:

May 25, 2012	Release of the DEIS
Mid June	Cooperator Meeting – Discuss comments that have not been resolved/incorporated & discuss upcoming public meetings
Late June/July	Public Meetings
Mid-August	Conference Call with Cooperators – Opportunity for additional conversation & discussion with Cooperators
August 22, 2012	End of 90 day comment period

Southline

The Department submitted scoping comments for the Southline Transmission Project on July 5, recommending the BLM eliminate from further consideration the portion of the proposed route on the east side of the Willcox Playa, as this alternative is routed through the Willcox Playa Wildlife Area and would pose a considerable impact hazard to sandhill cranes and other waterfowl.

TRANSPORTATION

Deer Valley Parkway (formerly Beardsley Parkway)

The Department continues to participate in Technical Advisory Committee meetings and provide input on wildlife and wildlife habitat issues/opportunities/constraints. Most recently Maricopa County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) has released Tech Report 4- Candidate Alignment and Evaluation. The evaluation criteria for the preferred alignment included a measure of the impact each alternative is anticipated to have on existing wildlife habitat and movement corridors for wildlife species of concern. MCDOT has narrowed the potential alignment to two alternatives. The Department does not believe there are significant advantages

or disadvantages to wildlife for either alternative. Both alternatives will result in a new roadway that will cross several washes that the Department has identified as important linkage for the White Tank Mountains and which the City of Surprise adopted as Wildlife Linkage Corridors. The locations of the drainage control structures required for the new roadway will generally coincide with the wildlife movement corridors, so there may be opportunities to incorporate wildlife crossing treatments into the drainage control structures. The Environmental Overview recommends future studies to verify that there will be no impacts to Threatened and Endangered species including Sonoran desert tortoise and Tucson shovel-nosed snake, and that impacts to other Species of Special Concern and wildlife linkages are mitigated to the extent feasible during the design and implementation phases of the project.

North South Corridor Study

This study is evaluating routes for a connection between US 60 and I-10 in the east valley. The Department participates on the stakeholder team. The Department has provided draft wildlife linkages information, and currently we are working with the project managers to address our concerns for removal of an alignment on the west of the CAP in the northern area of the study. A small meeting was scheduled May 2 for specific discussion on the Department's concerns. These discussions included the Environmental Protection Agency, Army Corp of Engineers and Pinal County. This discussion provided sufficient rationale for retaining an alternative west of the CAP, along with two other additional alternatives west of the CAP. The alternatives selection report is being compiled for internal review by ADOT in late June. Planning is also commencing for the environmental fieldwork. The Department is working across Regions and work units to provide participation and input on this project.

Sonoran Valley Parkway (SVPP)

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) invited the Department to become a formal Cooperating Agency for the project's Environmental Impact Statement. The Department is finalizing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to facilitate our involvement. The Department was involved with planning for this parkway with BLM and the City of Goodyear several years ago and provided input on alignments and wildlife related issues/opportunities/constraints, as well as recommendations on types and locations of wildlife crossing structures to mitigate impacts to wildlife movement within the Sierra Estrella – Sonoran Desert National Monument linkage area on BLM lands. The City of Goodyear is the project proponent and needs the parkway to provide access to annexed lands near Mobile. The BLM hosted a webinar kickoff meeting with the Cooperating Agencies for the development of the Environmental Impact Statement in July 2012. The BLM plans to have Draft EIS out to the public in December of 2012; a Final EIS in July 2013; and Record of Decision in September 2013. The BLM is interested in Department input on wildlife issues/concerns and input on ways to mitigate negative impacts to wildlife, such as design features for ROW fencing, wash crossings and general recommendations for the linkage area.

SR 95 Climbing Lane and Fencing Project

The Department performed a field review of the SR 95 Climbing Lane/Fencing Project in the Mohave Mountains North of Lake Havasu City, to identify the locations for, and type of interim fencing mitigation necessary to maintain connectivity for wildlife throughout the project footprint. The proposed work will include construction of game fencing along both sides of the

SR 95 highway, with cattle guards at permitted access points along the right of way. The Department provided ADOT with our recommendations to maintain connectivity.

State Route 303L

ADOT continues planning for an expansion of SR303L to create a north/south link between I-10 and the future proposed Hassayampa Freeway. SR 303 is proposed to run through Rainbow Valley just west of the Sierra Estrella Mountains in western Maricopa County, through the City of Goodyear. The Department has provided input on the Environmental Feasibility Study and Proposed Alternatives for the expansion project and is attending monthly project planning meetings. The Department has identified 'Alternative 3' along existing Rainbow Valley Road as having the least potential for impacts to wildlife and habitats. In addition, concerns to special status species, riparian habitat, xeroriparian habitat, wildlife connectivity, recreation and access have been identified. The project will require a crossing on the Gila River. Discussions have included where the best location would be and what hard structural improvements should be utilized to bridge the crossing. The City of Goodyear is interested in channelizing the river at the bridge location to minimize the bridge size and costs. The Department is concerned with loss of riparian habitat, impacts to special status species and downstream affects to stream channel morphology and riparian habitat that a channelized solution might create. The Draft Feasibility Report/Environmental Overview is expected to be released in September 2012.

US 60, Silver King/Superior

The project is to widen the existing US 60 to a four-lane rural and urban fringe cross section. The project begins around Boyce Thompson Arboretum and ends in Superior. The Department participates on the project team for incorporation of wildlife and recreational access concerns. The project began in the early 2000's and NEPA documentation was completed at that time. Because it has been re-initiated, revisions to earlier documentation are necessary. The project is in the permitting/clearances phase for the geotech investigations for the project. The Department is working with the team to incorporate wildlife friendly specifications into the culvert and bridge designs, along with updating the environmental documentation. This project includes several drainage, bridge structures and lighting that will provide opportunity for wildlife friendly retrofitting. In addition, several wildlife linkages will need to be considered and Wildlife Contracts is also involved in the current discussions and reviews of the 20% designs for the bridges. The Department continues to coordinate and provide information for the biological evaluation and NEPA process. Recently, the Department reviewed and commented on the designs and provided information on movement of sheep in the Mineral Mountains, habitat suitability from the US60 Superior to Globe Linkages design, and information on placement and specifications related to culverts and bridges.

Wild Rose Parkway Feasibility Study

Maricopa County Dept. of Transportation (MCDOT) corridor feasibility study for the 6-8 lane parkway is ongoing and the Department continues to participate on the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). The proposed parkway will provide a north/south link between Sun Valley Parkway and US 60, generally along the 243rd Ave alignment north of the White Tank Mountains. Similar to all parkways proposed in western Maricopa County, the purpose and need for action is based on the projected "build-out" transportation demands analyzed around the MAG Hassayampa Framework Study. Most recently MCDOT released the Technical Memorandums 1 (Existing Features), 2 (Environment) & 3 (Drainage) presented the conceptual

alignments to the TAC for feedback, and discussed the candidate alignment evaluation criteria. TAC meeting 5 will be held in August to discuss the preferred alignment. Department concerns in the analysis area are: maintenance of wildlife habitat connectivity between the White Tank Mountains and surrounding undeveloped lands; preservation of outdoor recreation and hunting opportunities associated with the White Tank Mountains; and potential impacts to Special Status Species. There is no alignment under consideration that would avoid the need for mitigation of losses to habitat connectivity.

City of Peoria – Open Space Preservation Program

The City Planning and Community Development Department has initiated the development of a comprehensive open space program within the City and Planning Area (General Plan). Previously, the City implemented regulatory tools including Hillside Development Overlay (HDO) and Desert Lands Conservation Overlay (DLCO) as a means to guide development in these sensitive areas. The Open Space Prioritization, Preservation & Acquisition Program will be designed to work in concert with these tools. The City is currently holding public meetings to solicit stakeholder input on the Program and the modeled priorities. In conjunction, they are working on a 2012 Amendment to the Peoria Open Space Master Plan. The City has received a significant amount of feedback from the OHV community relating to continued access to public lands that fall within the planning area boundary. The City has responded by underscoring the fact that travel management on public lands is controlled by the land owners (in this case BLM and State Land Department) with emphasis that the City has no intention of conducting travel management outside their jurisdiction. However, the City agrees some aspects of “active recreation” (OHV) should be incorporated into their planning as part of the key element for high quality recreational opportunities. Currently the plan has 4 key elements to the vision for the program: identify ecologically and historically significant lands; provide abundant, high quality recreational opportunities; create an extensive open space network for future generations to enjoy; and prioritize desirable open space properties for acquisition. The Department will be providing input on wildlife resources as well working with Peoria to develop outdoor recreation goals and objectives to incorporate into the plan and prioritization model that include hunting and OHV recreation in addition to those identified for passive recreation.