

**Lands Update**  
For the Arizona Game and Fish Commission  
June 7, 2013  
Phoenix, Arizona

**U.S. FOREST SERVICE LAND AND TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PLANNING**

**General Planning Status** – Please see attached worksheet.

**Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest**

The Department has reviewed and provided comments on the Proposed Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Plan) on May 15, 2013. The Department was generally supported of the proposed alternative but disagreed on a number of issues including but not limited to: some wilderness designations, attributing lack of aspen regeneration to browsing by elk, and the representation of elk as a non-native species. Neither travel management nor dispersed camping is addressed in the Plan.

**Coconino National Forest**

The Forest continues internal development of its Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP). Release of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is expected mid-summer 2013.

The Forest is in the implementation phase of its Travel Management Rule (TMR) and have produced the Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM), which is provided free to the public.

**Coronado National Forest**

The Draft Travel Management Plans are being developed for each District and will be released successively for public comment beginning in 2013.

The Draft Land and Resource Management Plan and EIS are currently in internal review and are expected to be available for public input in late fall of 2013.

**Kaibab National Forest**

The North Kaibab Ranger District (NKRDR) released its Record of Decision for their Travel Management Plan, and the Department subsequently appealed the Forest's Decision. The appeal addressed two main issues: 1) the omission of Motorized Big Game Retrieval (MBGR) for deer, and 2) the inadequate provision of dispersed camping in the pinyon-juniper habitats.

The Department received a 'final administrative determination' from the Deputy Regional Forester denying the Department's appeal on the TMP. As it stands, MBGR will be allowed for bison and elk, 1 mile from designated system roads (except where prohibited). Motorized dispersed camping will be allowed 300 feet from either side of 99 miles of specified roads and

100 feet from either side of 104 miles. The Department filed a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request and received the Project Record from the North Kaibab Ranger District on March 1. The Department's additional FOIA request for all communications, including emails generated and received by Forest and the Dept. of Agriculture in connection with the development of the NKRD travel management decision has been forwarded to the Southwestern FOIA Service Center for review and final determination.

### **Prescott National Forest**

Department personnel continue to analyze the effects of implementation of the Travel Management rule, and changes in dispersed camping to constituents that recreate upon the public lands of the Prescott National Forest.

### **Tonto National Forest**

The Interdisciplinary team has kicked off with the first couple of meetings. The Department is working to provide data and input into that process for the development of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The individual Ranger District coordination meetings have been completed with Department participation and input.

The Department met for a mini coordination meeting to discuss potential for cost share position, travel management, SR6 and general coordination

## **U.S. FOREST SERVICE – GENERAL UPDATES**

### **Four Forest Restoration Initiative- 4FRI**

The Department submitted positive comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Four Forests Restoration Initiative (4FRI), which includes 587,923 acres of mechanical thinning and 593,211 acres to be treated with prescribed fire, primarily on the Coconino and Kaibab National Forests. The 4FRI stakeholder group also submitted comments on the DEIS, the bulk of which are consensus recommendations to improve the DEIS. However, areas of stakeholder disagreement remain (e.g., protection of large, non-old-growth trees and how open the forest will be post-treatment), which may be the basis for future administrative challenges or litigation by advocacy groups.

### **Apache Sitgreaves National Forest (A-S)**

#### Rim Lakes Forest Restoration Project

The A-S announced the availability of the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Rim Lakes Forest Restoration Project. This project is an authorized fuel reduction project as defined by the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003. As such, it is subject to a 30-day Predecisional Administrative Review Process. The proposed action (alternative B) would selectively cut trees on approximately 23,615 acres and then broadcast burn on those acres. On approximately 9,340 acres, broadcast burning would occur without mechanical treatment. The proposed action includes an amendment to the "Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests Land and Resource Management Plan" (forest plan). Alternative C is the other action alternative considered in detail.

It would implement the same proposal, except limit mechanical treatment to trees less than 16 inches in diameter, moving many treated stands toward even-aged conditions. This alternative also proposes an amendment to the forest plan in order to allow for this even-aged condition. Because no changes to the DEIS were made as a result of comments, a new cover, two appendices, and the DEIS comprise the FEIS.

## **Coconino National Forest**

### Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project (FWPP)

The Department has reviewed and made comments on the FWPP project Proposed Action and will continue to serve as a formal member on the Interdisciplinary Team. As a reminder, FWPP is a voter-approved, \$10 million bond to reduce fire risk on the steep slopes of Mt. Elden and the Dry Lake Hills above Flagstaff as well as the Mormon Mountain area. Helicopter and cable logging will be used, although the forest is investigating newer technology for ground based operations that would/may eliminate some acreage to be treated by non-conventional logging based operations. Given the need to protect the community, and the political backing to this project, the Department will make this a priority project.

## **Coronado National Forest**

### Galiuro Mountain Leopard Frog Salvage

The Department salvaged Chiricahua leopard frogs from a private pond in the Galiuro Mountains and translocated the frogs to a recent reintroduced site on the Coronado Forest. The private pond was losing water due to increasing drought conditions.

### Rosemont Copper Project

The Department is coordinating with the Coronado Forest (Forest) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife (USFWS) on issues relative to the Biological Opinion. The Department also continues to work with the Forest, Rosemont, USFWS, Army Corps of Engineers, and other stakeholders to discuss mitigation to state and federal trust resource impacts.

## **Kaibab National Forest**

### North Kaibab Ranger District (NKRD) Westside Project

The Department recently met with the USFS and the Grand Canyon Trust (GCT) to discuss planning and implementation for controlling cheatgrass on the westside of the NKRD. In order to create larger fuels breaks for this fire season, the FS has incorporated strategic herbicide spraying on both sides of many FS roads running east/west across the westside. These “brownstrips” will give fire crews more defensible space and hopefully be wide enough to drop flame lengths should a fire occur in the cheatgrass areas. The Department and GCT are supportive of these efforts and a second spraying this fall when cheatgrass germinates from monsoon rain. The firescape analysis, which will define where larger scale more permanent green strips will be incorporated, will begin in August 2013 with a projection of a 6-month turn around.

## **Tonto National Forest**

### SR6

The Forest continues to develop an EIS to analyze management strategies that maintain and improve ecological conditions on six grazing allotments along the Salt River corridor, between Roosevelt Lake and the Fort Apache Indian Reservation. Draft Specialist Reports were released to permittees this fall. The Habitat Optimization Alt. 4 has been drafted. The DEIS is nearly complete and anticipated release is in January for 45 day review period. The Department has requested copies of the Specialists Reports. The Department reviewed the DEIS in April and provided comments this month.

### Resolution Mine

The Department met with legal representation and project leads for the proposed operations due to the bill being proposed regarding the land swap. Five pieces of land currently managed by private organizations (ie, TNC, etc.) are up for the swap. The final determination on the lands would depend on the appraisals.

## **BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT (BLM)**

### **Restoration Design Energy Project (RDEP)**

BLM is developing policies and strategies for the implementation of RDEP. The objective is to streamline the permitting/compliance process for utility scale solar projects on lands identified as having minimal natural and cultural resource conflicts. Department staff attended training on and provided input for the draft strategies.

## **Arizona Strip Field Office**

### Pine Hollow Chaining Project

Approximately 940 acres were chained in the Buckskin Mountain area of the Arizona Strip by the Bureau of Land Management in early May. The initial chaining will be followed by burning, seeding and chaining in the opposite direction, all planned for completion later this fall.

### Uinkaret Restoration Project

In the past couple of weeks Region II has met with BLM management and discussed joint objectives related to a 130,000 acre planning effort on the AZ Strip District. This project encompasses a significant portion of 13A in the Mt. Trumbull/Mt. Logan area and will aim at reducing fuels, watershed health, and restoration of ponderosa pine and pinyon- juniper woodlands. Recently, we formalized our commitment to being a member of the interdisciplinary planning team and have committed to developing an EIS as a cooperating agency (pending a formal letter) to help facilitate wildlife decisions in this planning effort.

## **Kingman Field Office**

### Heritage Planning Committee (HPC) - Iron Basin Mule Deer Habitat Improvement Project

Final clearances are being completed for implementation of the Iron Basin mule deer habitat improvement project that was funded in the 2011 HPC cycle. The project will utilize mechanical treatments to augment previous and upcoming fire fuels treatments in the decadent chaparral

community found at the northern terminus of the Music Mountains in GMU 15A. Currently the Department is cooperating with BLM in the development of a native seed mixture that will be used to reseed the area following mechanized and fire treatments. The objective of the reseeding effort is to improve the forage component of habitat for mule deer in the project area.

#### NEPA Meeting

Regional personnel attended a NEPA planning meeting with BLM Kingman on 4/2/13. At the meeting, a topic of discussion was a proposed action to dismantle the horse and burro holding and shipping facility on Shinarump Road in Golden Valley. The corrals at the site are able to accommodate 400-600 horses or burros. Since then, BLM has issued a finding of no significant impact (FONSI) and has initiated deconstruction of the Shinarump corrals.

#### **Tucson Field Office**

##### Madrean Archipelago Rapid Ecoregional Assessment (MAREA)

The Department participated on the Assessment Management Team to finalize Conservation Elements for the MAREA on April 30 and May 1.

##### San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area (SPRNCA) Resource Management Plan (RMP)

The Department will be a cooperating agency for development of a Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the SPRNCA. The Department is reviewing the recently received draft memorandum of understanding (MOU). BLM has modified the scoping plan to include public engagement meetings in Sierra Vista, Benson, and Tucson, and Saturday education and scoping forums in Sierra Vista for Water and Riparian, Watershed and Range, Wildlife and T&E, and Cultural and Recreation topics. Meetings are scheduled in June, July, and August.

#### **WILDLIFE AREAS**

##### **Bear Springs**

On May 18, Department personnel worked with a Phoenix Rotary Club to repair perimeter fence breaks and install a dozen wildlife crossings.

##### **Vincent Ranch**

Personnel did some maintenance at Vincent Ranch, including annual spring cabins clean-up and maintenance.

##### **Other AGFD Property Information**

Regional personnel are conducting fence evaluations for all properties in Region 1.

##### **Horseshoe Coordinated Resource Management Plan (CRMP)**

The Department continues to coordinate and participate on the CRMP for the Horseshoe and Copper Creek Allotments. Information is provided to the public via an updated web-site and the agencies are utilizing the services of a facilitation group. Progress continues as the group is finalizing shared goals and objectives while working into strategies. The CRMP is currently being drafted in sections. The desire to ensure the federal agencies can utilize the CRMP process

as their NEPA for formal decision and implementation has affected the timelines somewhat, but will greatly enhance the ability to conduct management actions under one NEPA umbrella at process completion. The anticipated plan document completion will be in 2013

- **Interagency/Planning Team Activities-** Upcoming plans include June Planning Team meetings with CRMP stakeholders. The principal goal of the meeting is to update stakeholders on the past years accomplishments and to continue working on the Situation Analyses and Results Chains. The stakeholders will have a chance to review and comment on what has been accomplished so far for uplands and riparian; and then there will be breakout groups to work on Cultural and Wildlife Situation Analyses and development of a few results chains. The goal will be to develop Results Chains for the threats the stakeholders perceive as most important to address. Interagency Team plans to meet in June as well to continue coordination and activities to progress the CRMP and NEPA processes.
- **Riparian monitoring-** This past month AGFD helped BLM identify monitoring reaches and conduct multiple indicator monitoring on Silver Creek. The two monitoring reaches are located where riparian vegetation is well established along the Creek. The purpose of the monitoring is to track long-term trends and changes in vegetation canopy cover and composition, channel widths, water depth, streambank stability and woody species regeneration. There are also indicators measured that allow assessment of whether current years grazing meets allowable use criteria. The BLM plans to also conduct riparian Proper Functioning Condition assessments this month and has invited the Department to help.
- **Upland monitoring-** BLM plans to accomplish rangeland health assessments required for NEPA analysis on Horseshoe Allotment using the agency standard method- "*Interpreting and Measuring 17 Indicators of Rangeland Health*" during late summer/fall of 2013. Plans are underway to explore how CRMP stakeholders can help facilitate and participate. BLM is struggling with staff and budget constraints to accomplish the work. There is a possibility the TNC can use some BLM funding to help contract the work.
- **Assessment, Inventory and Monitoring (AIM) data analysis-** The Lead Administrative Trustee is working with BLM and experts from the USDA-ARS Jornada Experimental Range Station to analyze the AIM data collected summer 2012 on the Horseshoe. Collaboration on data analysis was put on hold this Spring due to BLM staff constraints and the need to conduct some QA/QC on the database. We are waiting for BLM to share the DIMA database.

## RENEWABLE ENERGY DEVELOPMENT

### WIND

#### Boquillas Wind Energy Project

The Coconino County Board of Supervisors heard an appeal from the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority (NTAU) and partner EDF Renewable Energy to reverse the decision of County Planning and Zoning which denied installation of a 263-foot lighted meteorological testing tower. The Department submitted written comment for, and presented testimony in support of,

Coconino County Planning and Zoning Commission review of a permit request by the developers for 5 new meteorological testing towers. The developers received approval for 4 towers at a P&Z public hearing on March 26, 2013, and the County required that the fifth tower be replaced due to its greater height and FAA-required warning lights. NTUA appealed this decision and the Department provided testimony in response to Supervisors' questions, stating we had no objections to the tower and appreciated the applicant's intention to perform regular carcass searches to monitor for any avian fatalities. The appeal was denied and on May 14, 2013 the Coconino County Board of Supervisors upheld the Planning and Zoning Commission's decision to remove the larger tower.

The Department continues to participate in ongoing review of an Eagle Conservation Plan (ECP) for the Boquillas wind energy project being developed by the NTAU and project partner EDF Renewable Energy. A revised turbine layout and additional survey data has been submitted, and the Department is currently completing fatality estimates for golden eagles at the project. The FWS Strike Team and Eagle Technical Assessment Team will review these fatality estimates and make recommendations for the project. USFWS will evaluate the final ECP and associated biological data to help determine whether a federal eagle take permit for the project is warranted.

#### **Invenergy Wind Project GMU 37B Pinal County**

The Department became aware of a wind project potentially covering 7000 acres of State Trust Land from state grazing permittees. Part of the project, if built, will occupy the Department's grazing lease for the Triangle Bar Ranch associated with the Department's Lower San Pedro property.

The current Special Land Use Permit is for two sites, one 6000 acres and another 10,000 acres on which meteorological towers will be placed for two years to assess wind speeds. Invenergy states that the project will require a minimum of 20 mph long-term yearly average speeds to be feasible. The project will consist of 80 foot tall wind turbines, a substation, and a 115-135MW transmission line interconnect. The turbines will be connected by a network of 16' wide roads within a 20-foot wide right of way. Each turbine will be approximately 10' in diameter with a 16' road around it. Project staff will be onsite and conduct daily inspections of each turbine. The turbines are expected to be constructed in a density of 6 turbines per section or 1 per 100 acres. The minimum power generation required would equal about 50MW or 30 turbines and the maximum expected would be 100MW or 60 turbines.

The project will be funded by equity investors and through power purchase agreements regulated under the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC).

#### **Mohave County Wind Farm**

The final environmental impact statement (FEIS) for the Mohave County Wind Farm Project was received by the EPA on May 5, 2013. The Notice of Availability was published in the Federal Register on May 17. To inform the public of the FEIS a news release will be submitted by the BLM. There will be a 30 day availability period for comments, with the ROD projected to be signed and published on June 18, 2013.

### **Perrin Ranch Wind**

The Region recently attended the spring Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) for the Perrin Ranch Wind Facility. The wind farm has been operating since January 2013. So far, no thresholds for wildlife have been reached and overall fatality at the site for both birds and bats is relatively low.

### **Redhorse Wind Project**

The Redhorse Wind Project is proposed for an area that includes the Allen Flat pronghorn population in Game Management Unit 32. Torch Renewable Energy, LLC (TRE), is proposing to build a wind-energy facility approximately 15 miles west of the city of Willcox, in Cochise County. The proposed project is called the Red Horse Wind Energy Facility. The project area encompasses approximately 5,798 acres of land, a small percentage of which would be occupied by permanent and temporary project infrastructure, including meteorological (MET) towers, approximately 21 2.4-megawatt (MW) or 28 1.6- to 1.8-MW wind turbines and foundations, buried electrical collection lines, access roads, laydown areas, a small operations and maintenance building, a switchyard at the point of interconnection, and an overhead generation tie transmission line. The route of the generation tie transmission line will be southeast of an existing 345-kilovolt (kV) transmission line, and run parallel to the existing 345-kilovolt (kV) transmission line, and run parallel to the existing 345 kV line to the point of interconnection at the existing Winchester Substation. The entire project area is located on private and State lands, whereas the generation tie line would likely cross State lands to reach the point of interconnection.

The Department is concerned about the impacts of this project will have on bats, golden eagles, and other raptors in this area. Additionally the project is being proposed in area where the pronghorn population is already declining. The project site is on the best remaining grassland within the Allen Flat and Steele Hills area and also has the potential to impact mule deer habitat. The Department is also concerned with hunter opportunity and access. The pronghorn habitat on State Land in this area has degraded in the last several decades. Mesquite has overtaken the grasslands in the Allen Flat and Steele Hills which are rapidly becoming a disclimax mesquite scrubland; the site chosen for the Special Use Permit is considered by the Wildlife Manager to be the best open grassland left for pronghorn in the area.

The Department is also concerned with our ability to conduct aerial big game surveys in the area if wind turbines pose a significant flight hazard.

On April 10, 2013, the Cochise County Planning and Zoning Committee approved the project 8-0 with one member abstaining. However, on April 24, 2013, Audubon Arizona appealed this decision. The Cochise County Board of Supervisors will hold a meeting on June 11, 2013 to discuss the appeal. The Department will be sending another letter asking the county to put some conditions on the permit. The conditions reflect recommendations from the Department's wind guidelines.

## **TRANSMISSION LINES**

### **SunZia Transmission Line Project**

The Preliminary Final Environmental Impact Statement was released to the cooperating agencies for a two week review period. The Department asked for, and was denied, an extension on this review period due to previously calendared workload. The Department notified BLM that we would be unable to provide comments on the Preliminary Final EIS given the short, two week, review period allotted for cooperating agencies. The Department continues to work toward developing mitigation strategy for project impacts in cooperation with the Arizona State Land Department.

## **NON-RENEWABLE ENERGY DEVELOPMENT**

### **Sierrita Pipeline Project (formerly the Sasabe Lateral Natural Gas Pipeline)**

The Department is reviewing several resource reports being updated by EP/KM to respond to numerous comments from FERC and its cooperating agencies. The Department will meet with EP/KM May 26 for further discussions on the restoration and long-term monitoring plans.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

### **Camelback Parkway**

The Department participates on the technical committee. This parkway will run east/west from the White Tanks west across the Hassayampa River. The primary wildlife concerns will be impacts to Desert tortoise habitat, kit fox and important washes that provide connectivity opportunities between White Tanks and Hassayampa River. The Department has reviewed and provided input on Draft Tech Memos 1, 2 and 3. Tech Memo 4- Candidate Alignment was sent for review in April and a meeting was held in May to discuss the Preferred Alignment. A decision on the final alignment is anticipated in July 2013.

### **Dove Valley Parkway**

MCDOT has initiated a Corridor Feasibility Study for a west valley parkway that will run east-west south of SR74, across US60 and west across the Hassayampa River. MCDOT has held 2 Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meetings to date and a 3<sup>rd</sup> is scheduled for later this month. Three final reports have been completed and submitted to the TAC for final review: Existing & Future Conditions, Environmental Overview and the Drainage Overview. The Department provided review and comments on the draft reports prior to completion. The Department's main concerns are accurate descriptions of the wildlife resources in the planning area and potential impacts to special status species; wildlife habitat loss; fragmentation; and impacts to linkages, wildlife and outdoor recreation; and access to public lands. Next steps include TAC review and input on 3 parkway alignment alternatives and development of the Preferred Alignment- Final Report. MCDOT has completed three of the Technical memos to date: Existing & Future Conditions, Environmental Overview, and Drainage Overview. Recently the Candidate Alignments Evaluation was completed and the next step will be finalizing the Preferred Alignment. The Department provided review and comments on the draft reports and candidate alignments. We have no preference for which alignment should be preferred as all have similar impacts and will have similar design mitigations, including wildlife friendly bridge/culvert crossings at the Hassayampa and other drainages.

### **Greenway Parkway**

MCDOT has initiated a parkway feasibility study for an east/west corridor between the White Tank Mountains and the Belmont Mountains, transecting the Hassayampa River corridor. Once again wildlife issues are going to include habitat loss and fragmentation, indirect effects to adjacent habitats and potential impacts to special status species. The Department is currently developing scoping comments for both parkways.

### **Hidden Waters North Parkway**

MCDOT has completed the corridor feasibility study for the proposed parkway and released the preferred alignment. This future parkway will provide a north/south link between I-10 and US 60 to the north, west of the Hassayampa River corridor. The Department does not support the preferred alignment as drawn. We had made recommendations on the alignment that would minimize impacts to wildlife and wildlife habitat connectivity goals that were not incorporated into the recommended alignment as a result of various urban development constraints that took priority. The Department also raised concerns with portions of the Final Report and Environmental Overview regarding omissions, accuracy of maps and information presented on wildlife linkages that was provided by the Department. In short, linkage designs provided to consultants were not represented in their entirety, but rather truncated at the project area. The Department raised concerns to the MCDOT project manager and MCDOT has agreed to develop an amendment/attachment to the final report with corrections. We are currently waiting for response from MCDOT on whether an amendment/attachment has been completed to address AGFD concerns with accurate representation of information provided to TAC Final Report by AGFD. The project consultant was EPG and was tasked to do the amendment.

### **North/South SR 24 Corridor Study**

The purpose of this project is to provide a connection between US 60 and I-10 through identifying and evaluating various proposed routes. The study also has now included the reinitiation of the SR24 study area that crosses the North/South study area (from east to west). The studies will be combining efforts to determine the alternatives to be carried forward for the tier 1 EIS analysis. We have reviewed and provided comments on the draft alternatives selection report that will help to inform those alternatives being carried forward into the Draft Design Concept Report and DEIS. The Department remains consistent in support of those alternative routes west of the CAP canal, along existing infrastructure and minimizing potential impacts to environmental resources. We continue to provide information to assist in the development of analysis process as it moves forward. The study team has completed the Alternative Section Report and it is being reviewed by the consultants and ADOT. The toll feasibility study consultant is preparing a draft scope of work to submit to ADOT. The next phase of public involvement is being coordinated and anticipated for summer. The Department shared preliminary Pinal County wildlife linkages data with the project leads to ensure consideration through the process. The draft final alternatives selection report is currently out for review and we are working to provide comments.

### **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 (EIS). This parkway will be aligned north/south through Rainbow Valley, between the Sierra Estrella Mountains and the

Sonoran Desert National Monument in southwest Maricopa County. The BLM released the DEIS to the Cooperating Agencies for review and comment. The Department provided technical review and recommendations for revisions. BLM included Department wildlife mitigation strategies as an appendix in the DEIS, resulting from interagency meetings with the project proponent, Goodyear, to identify appropriate solutions to mitigate parkway impacts to the Sierra Estrella to Sonoran Desert National Monument linkage. The Cooperating Agency Comment Matrix for the DEIS was released to cooperators this past month. BLM anticipates release of the DEIS in May or June to the public and is hoping for release of the Final EIS later this summer and a Record of Decision in the fall.

### **South Mountain Freeway**

The proposed South Mountain Freeway has been a critical part of the Maricopa Association of Governments' Regional Freeway Program since it was first included in funding through Proposition 300 approved by Maricopa County voters in 1985. The freeway was also part of the Regional Transportation Plan funding passed by Maricopa County voters in 2004 through Proposition 400. The South Mountain Freeway is the last piece to complete the Loop 202 and Loop 101 freeway system necessary for high-quality regional mobility. The study team, led by the Arizona Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration, has released the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Loop 202 South Mountain Freeway Study. The April 26, 2013 release begins a 90-day public comment period that will conclude on July 24, 2013. A full-day public hearing on the Draft EIS will be held on May 21, 2013. The Department participated in the hearing and is currently reviewing the DEIS.

### **I-11 Phoenix to Las Vegas Project**

U.S. Congress in the 2012 Surface Transportation Act designated Interstate 11. The first phase of the project is from Phoenix to Las Vegas. ADOT and Nevada Department of Transportation are partnering to conduct a two year study of potential corridors for the proposed Interstate. The Department participated in a stakeholder's meeting and expressed that the study should include impacts to wildlife, hunting opportunities and stressed the economic importance of hunting and wildlife-dependent recreation for the region. It should be noted that one of the ideas "being kicked around" is using Carefree Highway as part of the corridor. This proposal would impact Department headquarters and Ben Avery Shooting Range. The Department met with I-11 ADOT project managers at their request to discuss data sharing and early coordination on project planning. The Department expressed concerns with consultant use of HabiMap data and requested collaboration on data analysis and interpretation.

### **US 60, Silver King and Superior**

The project is to widen the existing US60 to a four lane rural and urban fringe cross section. The Department is currently 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 30% designs for the bridges. The recently submitted comments reflect the specifications denoted in the AGFD Guidelines for Wildlife Friendly Fencing, the USFWS's 2005 Recommended Specifications for Desert Tortoise Exclusion Fencing, and the 2010 ATRC report (SPR-650) that reported on the effectiveness of desert tortoise mitigation measures relative to highways. The Department

continues to coordinate and provide information for the biological evaluation and NEPA process. This project includes several drainage, bridge structures and lighting that will provide opportunity for wildlife friendly retrofitting. In addition, several wildlife linkages/corridor will need to be considered. The project looks good overall, and with the right structure specifications (they appear to be there for the most part) and the inclusion of some funnel fencing this could be a very wildlife friendly road that would promote both driver safety and wildlife connectivity. Because of the structures already included and the prime location relative to species distributions and habitat, this could be a shining example of permeability with relatively little added effort. The May meeting was cancelled but the Department submitted comments on the 60% to final design.

#### **Juan Sanchez Blvd.**

ADOT and the City of San Luis are planning to widen Juan Sanchez Blvd. from US 95 to SR 195. Department staff met with ADOT planners to discuss wildlife impacts that could result from this project. The widening will result in loss of Flat-tailed Horned Lizard habitat.

### **GENERAL UPDATES**

#### **Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) RGP 62 Permit**

ACOE has issued RGP 62 to the Bureau of Reclamation for a list of approved maintenance activities on the Colorado River. Under the authority of the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, the permit stipulates that BOR consult with and obtain concurrence from the Department prior to conducting permitted maintenance activities. BOR consulted with and obtained concurrence from the Department for the removal of seven wash fans from the River.

#### **Army Corps of Engineers 404 Permitting**

The construction of new or the replacement of old boat docks on the Colorado River requires a 404 permit from ACOE. Depending on the number, location, size and type of dock, boat docks can result in the loss of local fishing opportunities. Department personnel recently reviewed the proposed construction of boat docks at various locations along the lower Colorado River. Region IV personnel plan on meeting with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to discuss current boat dock guidelines intended to limit/control development in relatively undisturbed areas and limit the proliferation of docks and ramps.

#### **Central Arizona Grasslands- Unit 21, Sycamore Mesa**

Collaborated with AGFD/PNF/BLM on a volunteer workday to modify fences within and adjacent to juniper thinning treatment areas to wildlife friendly standards. Project was hosted by Mule Deer Foundation. About 1.5 miles of fence and a fence around a stock tank were successfully improved to wildlife standards. There were approximately 30 volunteers.

#### **Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)**

The Department is in the process of hiring for the Region IV/VI and Region V Landowner Relations Specialists.

### **Potash Mining**

Department personnel met with owner of the Spurlock Ranch that has an agreement with Prospect Global/American West Potash (predominantly east of the Petrified Forest NP (PFNP)). A tour to view the potential mine facilities site was provided along with a narrative of locations of evaporation ponds and tailings site locations. American West has several financial goals to meet throughout the summer in order to ensure forward movement of the project.

On May 30, 2013, Passport Potash (predominantly west of the PFNP) announced that they have garnered nine new exploration permits and increased their ASLD land holdings by 4,703.66 acres. The permits are on ASLD sections that had been closed to development related to the proposed expansion of the PFNP and are “strategic” to the mine’s development.

### **Pinal Partnership Open Space and Trails Committee**

The Department remains in the discussions for implementation of the master plan and participates on the subcommittee for drainage protection. The subcommittee met recently with the County planner and Flood Control coordinator for further discussion on data needs and process to move forward with the County to identify important drainage features (for wildlife and flood control interest) through development of criteria, compilation of data and modeling exercise to produce the results. The results could then be used as another layer with wildlife linkages and open spaces to help inform where protection/acquisition could be focused, along with potential for guiding future development and development of ordinances. The open space committee is working to provide presentation of the annual report to the county manager and board of supervisors for implementation of the recommendations put forth in the report. The committee is also working toward building partnership with the Central Arizona Association of Governments. The committee remains committed to producing outreach materials and getting the products to stakeholders. The drainage sub-committee continues to work with the county flood control and public works department to share information, form partnerships and continue to research the important drainage features within the county. The county is interested in utilizing a green infrastructure layer over the regional transportation layer to further inform decisions. This green infrastructure layer would include the open space plan and county wildlife linkages. The county has made a commitment to adopt the wildlife linkages into their county comprehensive plan during the next major amendment cycle (spring). Committee provided overview and summary of flights the board took earlier in the month that highlighted the open spaces, watersheds/drainages and wildlife connectivity within the county. We gave a briefing on the Pinal stakeholder’s assessment report for connectivity with the final maps. The county let us know they would not be considering the maps for the current amendment cycle and would need to meet with us further to determine the direction for future amendment potentials. The Committee requested the county revisit the recommendations provided in the annual report that includes the connectivity be included in the open space plan as an amendment and to the comprehensive plan as an amendment. We are working with the county to schedule a meeting for further discussion on amendments to the comprehensive plan and process.

### **City of Apache Junction-Parks Department**

The Department is coordinating with Apache Junction for the upcoming amendment cycle for their General Land Use Plan to include wildlife linkages and potential next steps in open space and trails planning efforts.

### **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 its 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 Preservation Program will be designed to work in concert with these tools. The City provided a presentation on their program to the Department and key governmental/agency partners to introduce the plan, discuss the modeling process behind the plan, goals and objectives, and to initiate lines of communication and collaboration on the vision and implementation of the plan. In the near future the Department will be meeting with Peoria to take a closer look at the wildlife linkage priorities within their planning boundary. The City wants to focus on the areas within 2 entitled developments, Vistancia and Saddleback, as well as the New River corridor. These areas are either State land or a mix of State and private; and are the areas facing most imminent development pressure. The City would like to look closely at special status species needs and refine the linkage recommendations to an implementable design. The City potentially has resources to help with modeling or other wildlife data needs.

### **City of Surprise General Land Use Plan**

The Department will be attending a coordination meeting on upcoming General Land Use Plan amendments with City staff. Purpose will be to also continue linkage planning discussions and identification of next steps. The main purpose will be to also continue linkage planning discussions and identification of next steps.

### **Town of Buckeye**

The Department is working with Town of Buckeye Planning Department (Town) to develop a workshop presentation to the Town Council in January 2013 on Wildlife Habitat Linkages: Planning and Conservation. The goal is to increase Town awareness and develop collaboration to incorporate wildlife habitat management goals for linkages and wildlife in general, into the Town's land use planning. The Town is interested in information on linkage planning and design, wildlife movement research associated with the White Tank Mountains, and ideas on what development guidelines or ordinances other communities in Arizona are using to achieve conservation of linkages. The Department recently presented to the council and was well received. The Town Planning Department staff have taken the White Tanks- Belmont- Heiroglyphic Mountatins Linkage design and completed a series of overlays to look at community master plans and existing entitlements against the proposed linkage; as a follow-up to the Town Council workshop and Council guidance to continue working with AGFD on wildlife linkage implementation/conservation strategies. Constraints identified include the entitled communities of Douglas Ranch, Trillium, Festival Ranch and Sun Valley. The Douglas Ranch community is the only one not meeting performance thresholds for water and sewer development which could "reopen" a window to renegotiate the community development plans in such a way as to facilitate conservation of a linkage. Opportunities identified are conservation of wash corridors, which does not meet linkage goals in their entirety. Planning staff met with the Town Manager to discuss the results of their preliminary fact finding research and as a result the Town Manager supported a budget recommendation to fund further study to benchmark what other communities have done to codify or otherwise incorporate linkages into development plans, as well as explore best management options. The budget has not yet been approved. The Town is also looking at other linkage needs in the Buckeye planning area including those near

Buckeye Hills. The Department will meet in June with Planning staff to look at their preliminary research, discuss options, discuss best practices from a regulatory perspective and discuss “lesson’s learned” from others implementing linkages in Arizona.

### **Maricopa County Flood Control District (MCFCD)-Watson Drainage System**

The preliminary concept for an outlet for the Watson Drainage system to the Gila River accommodates a future lake built to within a 25-ft setback of the north property line, provides an energy-dissipating riprap area to protect the channel from erosive head-cutting if a lake were created, minimizes interim construction impacts to the AGFD parcels and existing vegetation, show proposed relocation of the existing BWCDD Watson Drain incorporating it into the low flow of the channel. This allows for construction of a portion of the channel, while maintaining the function of the existing drain preserves a corridor for a potential Watson Road near the typical section line alignment connects the low flow to the existing Arlington Canal. Department staff have met with MCFCD staff to discuss the flood control project that intersects/drains onto AGFD Gila River lands. The affected lands are currently identified for disposal and there is a prospective buyer. Regional and Lands Program staff are coordinating with the prospective buyer, MCFCD and Town of Buckeye to ensure project designs and potential impacts are addressed and do not impact potential sale of subject property.

### **Food and Drug Administration Food Safety**

Department personnel recently reviewed and provided comments on the Food and Drug Administration’s science-based minimum stands for food safety and the Arizona and California Leafy Green Food Safety Committee’s Good Agricultural Practices (GAP’s). Both documents will help refine and set forth procedures, processes, and practices that minimize risk of serious adverse health consequences and death. It is hoped both revised documents will help reduce foodborne illness associated with the consumption of contaminated produce.

### **Heritage Planning Committee (HPC)-Iron Basin Mule Deer Habitat Improvement Project**

In cooperation with the BLM, the Department has initiated implementation of large-scale HPC-funded habitat improvement project for mule deer on the Northern end of the music Mountains. The project will expand the scope of previous prescribed fire treatments in decadent chaparral habitat, in an effort to return habitat to an early seral stage - restoring vigor to approximately 5,200 acres of important mule deer habitat.

The treatment area encompasses roughly 11,204 acres of public and private land, and seeks to create a mosaic of uneven aged stands of interior chaparral across the project area - enhancing wildlife habitat and minimizing the potential for large unplanned summer wildfires. (*See project diagram below*)

<b>Forest</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Next Step</b>	<b>Projected Next Step Completion</b>
<b>Apache Sitgreaves</b>	The Proposed LRMP and Draft EIS public review period ended 5/16/2013.	Review Public comments and produce final LRMP and EIS.	Final EIS (LRMP) End of 2013 TMP start after LRMP complete, draft out early 2014. (separate
Issues:	MBGR in preferred Alt B of previous TMP draft allows 1mile from road for elk, mule deer & bear. 658 miles of corridors for dispersed camping 300 ft off established roads.		
<b>Coconino</b>	TMP signed Sept 2011, MBGR appeal denied; Draft EIS(LRMP) ready. Motor Vehicle Use Maps (MVUM's) available	Draft EIS (LRMP) Scheduled Out for review	Decision anticipated 10/2013
Issues:	Dispersed camping 300 ft from designated roads, else 30 ft. MBGR for elk only, 1 mile from roads except GMUs 5A & 5B.		
<b>Coronado</b>	Internal review of LRMP ongoing	Public Comment	Late Fall 2013
	TMP in Process in all Districts.	TMP Working Draft	Final TMP end of 2013, early 2014 Decisions by district
Issues:	Motor Vehicle Use maps show access through roads that have locked gates. Maps not enforceable.		

<b>Forest</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Next Step</b>	<b>Projected Next Step Completion</b>
<b>Kaibab</b>	AGFD appeal on North Kaibab TMP declined.	Consultation with FWS.	LRMP Decision July 2013
	Tusayan & Williams TMP in implementation. MVUM's available. North Kaibab TMP completed 9/17/12	Monitoring for Tusayan & Williams, Implementation for North Kaibab.	Ongoing Monitoring for Tusayan and Williams. <i>(Based on history, North Kaibab implementation complete mid 2013)</i>
Issues:	Tusayan & Williams TMP: MBGR 1 mile from road for elk in designated areas. Dispersed camping in camping corridors, or 30 feet from road. North Kaibab MBGR 1 mile off designated roads for elk and bison, dispersed camping 300 feet off 99 miles of designated roads and 100 feet off 104 miles of		
<b>Prescott</b>	Draft EIS LRMP in Federal Register 8/24/2012. Public input ended Nov 28, 2012.	Review and Development of final EIS (LRMP). AGFD personnel invited to participate in Strategic planning . Wilderness under consideration reduced from 44,000 acres to 23,000	Final EIS (LRMP) anticipated fall 2013. Will not do new TMP. Rely on 2009 updated/amended TMP
Issues:	Current draft advocates MBGR: Elk within 1 mile of designated open road. May be changed by amendment. Dispersed camping 300' from centerline of designated roads.		

4/23/2013

<b>Forest</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Next Step</b>	<b>Projected Next Step Completion</b>
<b>Tonto</b>	LRMP began 2006. Negotiating to reinstate due to rule change. TMP elevated to EIS from EA. Notice of intent to prepare TMP EIS has been released for review and comment. Department comments submitted 3/4/2013. request to be Cooperating Agency has been accepted. IDT teams have met and individual Ranger District meeting have been held.	LRMP public scoping in 2014. TMP draft anticipated late 2013	3-4 years to completion of LRMP.
<i>Issues:</i>	Department response to NOI: request to be cooperating agency and member of IDT. Consistency across forests, enforceability, MBGR, road closures, and Dispersed Camping all addressed in response to NOI.		