

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
LAS VEGAS FIELD OFFICE

**ROAD DESIGNATION
FINAL REPORT**
(2003-BLM-347-P)

TO
CLARK COUNTY DESERT CONSERVATION PROGRAM
FOR THE BIENNIUM
JULY 1 2003 TO JUNE 30, 2005

CBE NUMBER 1957-03



Photo: BLM and PIC

November 1, 2007

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Project II: Road Designation (2003-BLM-347-P)

Introduction:

The Bureau of Land Management Las Vegas Field Office (BLM) 1998 Resource Management Plan (BLM, 1998) established over 900,000 acres of listed species habitat and other sensitive resources as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). The plan limits vehicle use within these ACECs to protect the resources for which the ACECs have been established. Vehicle use was limited to designated roads and trails within the desert tortoise ACECs (Coyote Springs, Gold Butte Part A Mormon Mesa, and Piute-Eldorado) and to existing roads, trails and navigatable dry washes as they existed in 1998 (traveled versus not traveled at the signing of the RMP) within other ACECs including Gold Butte Part B and C and Virgin River.

At the time the RMP was signed, the BLM had not identified a complete inventory of existing vehicle routes, so a separate route designation process was required with the exception of Piute-Eldorado ACEC and Rainbow Gardens ACECs where routes were designated previously. A baseline network of roads was inventoried and a route designation process was initiated in 1998 but was never completed due to strong public opposition to BLM's initial approach. For the next three years, the designation process was abandoned. In 2003, the BLM obtained funds through the Clark County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) to reinstate this process and develop a transportation plan for the ACECs within northwest Clark County with full community and resource specialist participation.

The purpose of this transportation plan is to:

- prevent the proliferation of user created routes¹;
- reduce road density;
- improve wildlife habitat (specifically for desert tortoises);
- control the spread of noxious and invasive weeds;
- protect cultural resources;
- mitigate desert tortoise habitat loss and fragmentation by creating a designated route system; and
- provide a reasonable route network to allow public lands users motorized access to remote areas of the Mojave Desert in northeast Clark County.

Vehicle use within these ACECs has increased due to population growth in the Las Vegas Valley and surrounding communities and the growing popularity of off highway vehicles (OHV) and all-terrain vehicles (ATV). As a result, illegal routes have been created, a process called route proliferation. Because of this proliferation, BLM has documented that habitat for sensitive and listed plant and wildlife species is being threatened with fragmentation and destruction, historic and prehistoric cultural resource sites are being threatened by increased use and vandalism, and noxious and invasive weeds are being spread throughout these rural portions of the desert.

¹ The word "route" is used throughout this document to cover all types of motorized paths that will be designated through this project (single track, all-terrain vehicle (ATV) trails, two-track roads and bladed roads.

What measurable goals did you set for this project and what indicators did you use to measure your performance? To what extent has your project achieved these goals and levels of performance?

Methods:

The goal of this project is to develop a network of roads in Coyote Springs, Gold Butte, and Mormon Mesa Desert Wildlife Management Areas (DWMA) and adjacent ACECs. This project involved an inventory of new linear disturbances and re-verification of the baseline inventory from 1998.

In order to accomplish this, BLM hired a Roads Coordinator to oversee the project. The Roads Coordinator's duties included:

- Working on cooperation with Clark County's MSHCP Implementation and Monitoring Committee, rural communities, other interested publics and local government officials to identify and prioritize road designations and alternative management strategies for species conservation, law enforcement, and public information/access;
- Assisting in the development of objective criteria for evaluating impacts of roads on sensitive species and their habitats;
- Developing a process to evaluate and prioritize roads for designation to minimize destruction, degradation and fragmentation of critical habitat and loss of listed species in conjunction with management goals and objectives identified in the Las Vegas RMP;
- Developing a database of roads and trails to document, evaluate and monitor road condition, status and use patterns;
- Assisting with the planning and coordination of recovery actions necessary to reduce or eliminate human-caused impacts related to road use;
- Developing effective public outreach strategies and information/educational materials, such as signs, brochures, and kiosks to support the road designation effort;
- Attending and participating in Town and County Board/City Council meetings, Clark County's Road Working Group, Clark County's MSHCP Public Information and Education Committee, and other venues of information exchange;
- Coordinating internally with BLM's Recreation and Renewable Resource and GIS Divisions and with other federal agencies, such as the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service;
- Preparing proposals, presentations for negotiating appropriate designated road networks in support of species conservation and securing species recovery in the Coyote Springs, Gold Butte, and Mormon Mesa DWMA's as well as the Sunrise Management Areas; and
- Developing environmental documents required by BLM under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

The BLM partnered with a local non-profit conservation group, Partners in Conservation (PIC), to complete much of the inventory and improve communication with and involvement of the rural communities. Over the course of two years, PIC and its volunteers and BLM staff and contractors verified the BLM electronic Global Information System (GIS) road inventory using Global Positioning Units (GPS) documented



Volunteers at work.

and photographs and all new disturbances within the following ACECs: Coyote Springs, Mormon Mesa, Gold Butte (Parts A, B and C), Virgin River, Gold Butte Townsite, Red Rock Spring, Whitney Pocket, and Devils Throat.



Volunteers recording routes with GPS units utilized vehicles the appropriate size and capabilities for the routes.

The following indices of success were established for this project:

1. Route designation should result in better management of critical desert tortoise habitat by reducing road proliferation and duplicate roads, while maintaining a reasonable road network. Reducing road proliferation will reduce habitat fragmentation, tortoise mortality, spread of noxious weeds, and risk of fire.

2. The project should improve effectiveness of law enforcement by having a defined network of roads, which can be communicated to users.

Through the process, BLM determined that route designations would be completed in a two part process. First an interim designation would be put in place. A final designation would follow approximately three years after the interim designation is put into effect. The entire route designation process would follow an adaptive management strategy, where problems could be addressed as they arise. This document addresses the interim designation phase of this project.

The first step in providing protection to the ACECs would be an interim designation of routes within the ACECs as either open, closed, or administrative access. The purpose of an interim designation would be to prevent resource destruction and the proliferation of new routes while data is being collected and analyzed. This data would provide support for the final designation of routes that travel through/in these ACECs. Following the interim designation decision, BLM would be able to sign the routes and enforce compliance, develop interpretive material for the areas, and develop a monitoring strategy. The public would be made fully aware that after an intensive monitoring program and extensive call for data that pertains to the affected areas, there may be modifications to the route designations to improve the transportation plan and protect sensitive habitat or culturally significant areas. Any additional route designations (open, closed, limited) would be preceded by a public process and public review.

Results:

Inventory Summary

Approximately 906 miles of routes were inventoried within the boundaries of Coyote Springs, Mormon Mesa, Gold Butte (Parts A, B and C), Virgin River, Gold Butte Townsite, Red Rock Spring, Whitney Pocket, and Devils Throat ACECs.

- Gold Butte part A – 292.5 miles
- Gold Butte part B – 208.9 miles
- Gold Butte part C – 59.1 miles
- Coyote Springs – 143.7 miles
- Mormon Mesa – 194.5 miles
- Virgin River – 7.3 miles

Through this route designation, routes were identified as open, closed, or administrative access. Motorized recreation will be limited to routes designated as open. Currently motorized recreation is limited to existing roads, trails, and dry washes. In the past ten years there has been a marked increase in routes resulting from motorized vehicles driving off of existing routes. No specific type of recreation will be prohibited in this route designation.

Summary of Recorded features (includes photographs, gates, signs, guzzlers, of-road tracks, dumpsites and campsites)

- Gold Butte – 1182 features
- Coyote Springs – 241 features
- Mormon Mesa – 301 features

The estimated length of roads that will be designated as open under each alternative analyzed in the EA:

- Alternative A - 812
- Alternative B - 754
- No Action Alternative: 906

Public Contacts

A total of 230 public contact opportunities were conducted during the project. These include

GPS Training Sessions	Town Board Meetings	Presentations to Interested Groups	Informational Booths at community events	Roads Working Group Meetings	Field Trips	Public Meetings
66	24	59	18	22	37	4

Discussion:

The following issues and concerns were identified during the inventory by BLM, Partners in Conservation and public participants:

- Proliferation of new roads and trails
- Vandalism of signs
- Vandalism of important archaeological resources.

The following milestones were completed during the project:

- Road inventory and points delivered: June 30, 2006
- Photos, daily field files and daily field notes delivered: June 30, 2006
- Preliminary Environmental Assessment: Completed on December 13, 2006
- Public review end date: March 16, 2007
- Final Environmental Assessment: Completed on
- Public review end date:

Did the project encounter internal or external challenges? How were they addressed? Was there something Clark County could have done to assist you?

Three issues were encountered during the project that warrant discussion.

1. When the project was proposed and initiated, the BLM was uncertain how many miles of roads and trails would be inventoried within the ACECs and what recommendations would result. As the environmental assessment was being prepared, the BLM found that designation and closure of routes would require cultural resource inventories in order to comply with federal and state regulations. The costs and time involved in completing the cultural resource requirements had not been included in the project and the BLM did not have separate funding to conduct the work. The BLM worked closely with the State Historic Preservation Office to find a way to move forward with the interim route designation to reduce resource damage and to maintain compliance with federal and state cultural resource laws. Resolving this issue extended the project timeline.

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2. During the inventory and development of alternatives, stakeholders raised concerns that there was not sufficient information about road age and history of use, species requirements for unfragmented patch sizes, and the economic and social impact of completing a route designation. An alternative was identified to complete the process in two phases, interim and final (as described above). This compromise was discussed with the Desert Conservation Program's Roads Working Group which consisted of representatives from the rural communities, OHV users, environmental organizations, and a science advisor. It was determined that the two phased process would allow for more information to be gathered and while giving the BLM authority to restore newly disturbed habitat (inventoried areas where no routes were documented and especially areas where vehicles use is extending routes). The controversial nature of this project and this two phased approach resulted in the BLM conducting public meetings to inform the public and gather their knowledge of road age and history of use. This public outreach and time required to address the information and issues gathered also extended the project timeline.
 3. The Moapa Town Board sent a letter of protest on the final Environmental Assessment prior to BLM's decision on the alternative to be implemented. If the Moapa Town Board chooses to appeal the decision, once it is made, the BLM may be unable to implement a decision until the appeal is resolved by the Interior Board of Land Appeals.

What lessons did you learn from undertaking this project?

1. Future projects on this scale and this controversial should be closely analyzed to ensure that adequate time is included in the project schedule to allow for additional public input. In retrospect, identification of alternatives and development of the Environmental Assessment should have been a two year process. Inventories and validation of the inventories by local governments should have been completed in one project and the EA process tackled in the next biennium.
2. All regulatory agencies should be consulted prior to funding approval of the project to ensure that all regulatory requirements, like cultural surveys, are included in the project scope and adequately funded.
3. The Roads Working Group provided valuable contributions to this project. Future projects of this complexity would benefit from having similar groups engaged in their project.
4. Value could be added by using a private consultant to inventory routes instead of agencies, environmental groups, or residents This would: increase the quality of data (through standardized data collection methods); save time by having regularly scheduled field staff and minimizing the need to validate the data extensively in the field; and would remove any impressions of bias in the data.

What impact do you think the project has had to date?

1. This project has received a considerable amount of local press coverage. The residents of northeast Clark County are more actively engaged in discussions about land management than they have chosen to be in the past.
2. Funding provided by the Desert Conservation Program has enabled the BLM to complete an extensive route inventory and develop three alternatives for a transportation network in the ACECs in northeast Clark County. This will enable the BLM to complete the designation of roads and trails in accordance with Management Directive AC-aa/2a of the Las Vegas RMP.

Is there additional research or efforts that would complement or add to your project that could be conducted?

1. Completion of the final route designation.
2. Long term monitoring of the approved routes designated for unauthorized use of closed routes and creation of new routes.
3. Restoration of closed routes and new habitat disturbance by unauthorized vehicle use.

Literature Cited

Bureau of Land Management. 1998. *Las Vegas Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement*. Las Vegas, Nevada.