

United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Interior Region 8: Lower Colorado Basin
Phoenix Area Office

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

CENTRAL ARIZONA PROJECT CANAL TRAIL: PARK LINK DRIVE TO FLORENCE SEGMENT,
PINAL COUNTY, ARIZONA

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Introduction

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA; Public Law 91-90), the Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations implementing NEPA (40 CFR Part 1500-1508), and Department of Interior NEPA regulations (43 CFR part 46), Reclamation has issued a final Environmental Assessment (EA) to disclose the potential environmental impacts that would result from the development, operation, and maintenance of a non-motorized, multi-use recreational trail that spans 39.3 miles within Pinal County from Park Link Drive north to Highway 79. The alignment would be located on land administered by Reclamation, Pinal County, and Arizona State Lands Department (ASLD). Of the overall footprint for the trail, 28.2 miles of the trail (or 85.4 acres) along with the 3 associated trailheads (totaling 2.8 acres) would occur within Reclamation administered land. The final EA considers the impacts of Reclamation's approval of the trail and associated trailheads (Proposed Action) on Reclamation administered lands as well as impacts from potential connected actions on ASLD and Pinal County lands. The final EA is incorporated by reference (Reclamation 2021c).

Background

Pinal County Open Space and Trails (County) entered into a Recreational Land Use Agreement (RLUA) with Reclamation in 2016 to develop, operate, and maintain the portion of the CAP Trail within Pinal County. In accordance with the RLUA, the County's use of Reclamation lands must not interfere with the non-recreational use for which these lands were reserved under Reclamation law and projects constructed and operated thereunder, including project mitigation. The RLUA breaks the Pinal County portion of the CAP Trail into eleven segments, each of which will have a different set of partners that will work with Pinal County over the long-term to construct and/or operate the CAP Trail. These segments correspond with the County's CAP Trail Master Plan (2015). The proposed trail alignment discussed in this EA incorporates three of those segments: the North Picacho Segment, the Coolidge Segment, and the South Florence Segment. The remaining segments will undergo NEPA evaluation as site-specific project details are developed. The construction of the North Picacho, Coolidge, and South Florence Segments would expand the currently developed CAP Trail within Pinal County. The Park Link Segment has already been developed (Reclamation 2018).

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the project is to expand the recreational opportunities within the CAP corridor. The opening up of 39.3 miles of trail and construction of three trailheads would allow Reclamation to continue to meet its obligations under Title 1, Section 102, and Title III, Section 308, of the Colorado River Basin Project Act of 1968, Pub. Law 90-537, 43 U.S.C. Ch. 32, which authorizes the Secretary of Interior, through Reclamation, to provide for, or enhance recreation opportunities connected with, the project works. The Proposed Action would be consistent with the RLUA between Reclamation and the County. In addition, it would implement a segment of Pinal County's Open Space and Trails Master Plan.

Pursuant to the RLUA, Reclamation will need to approve: (1) updates to the CAP Trail Management Plan and Maintenance Manual for this portion of the trail within Pinal County, and (2) third-party agreements for the development, operation, and maintenance of the trail.

Public Involvement

Reclamation solicited input from the public on the proposed project to assist in identifying key issues and defining the scope of the project and environmental analysis (Reclamation 2021a). Scoping for this project began on March 11, 2021. Reclamation conducted scoping via mail (to 115 potentially interested agencies, organizations, tribes, and neighbors to the Proposed Action), newspaper notice, and internet publication. Within the 30-day scoping period, Reclamation received 10 comments.

Reclamation issued a draft EA that presented Pinal County's proposed project, existing conditions in the project area, and the environmental effects that would be reasonably expected from implementing the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative (Reclamation 2021b). The draft EA was released on October 8, 2021, initiating a 15-day public comment period. Reclamation mailed the Notice of Availability (NOA) letters to 120 participating agencies, organizations, tribes, and neighbors to the Proposed Action. The NOA and draft EA were also advertised in local newspapers and on Reclamation's website. Reclamation received one request for an extension to the comment period and granted the extension. Five comment letters or emails were received during the comment period. Substantive comments were addressed in the Final EA.

Major Considerations

The following issues were addressed in the EA and have been taken into consideration in Reclamation's determination of whether a FONSI is appropriate, or an environmental impact statement should be prepared.

1. The Proposed Action would impact resources as described in the EA. Generally, impacts to land use, soil, biological resources, cultural resources, recreation, and air quality (including climate change and greenhouse gases) would be negligible or minor with short or long-term effects. Best management practices and additional applicant proposed mitigation measures would be implemented as part of the Proposed Action to reduce impacts, as described in Section 2.0 and Appendix F of the EA. None of the environmental effects discussed in detail in the EA are considered significant.
2. Trail establishment would occur along existing roadways and would require minimal ground disturbance. The construction of the three associated trailheads would result in a long-term, minor to negligible, adverse effect to land use and soils for the conversion of 2.8 acres of previously disturbed lands for parking and public use. Overall, the development, operation, and maintenance of 39.3 miles of trail and 3 trailheads is not anticipated to impact existing land use, both within, and adjacent to, the project area.
3. The Proposed Action would not have an adverse effect on federally listed threatened or endangered wildlife species or critical habitat.
4. The trail construction, operation, and maintenance effects on candidate species (i.e., Sonoran desert tortoise and Monarch butterfly) and other wildlife in the area include: immediate loss of potentially suitable habitat (2.8 acres), potential disturbance from human noise and activity, and risk for mortality from ground disturbance and vehicle strikes. Wildlife that may use the project area for foraging and breeding would experience long-term adverse effects as a result of disturbance and the loss of habitat. However, the long-term effects to wildlife would be negligible to minor and unlikely to result in population-level effects. To minimize or discourage future contact and effects to wildlife and their habitat in the area, trailway finding signage will be utilized to encourage recreationists to remain on the trail. An additional educational sign will also be placed at the trailheads. Furthermore, in accordance with Reclamation's commitments under the Candidate Conservation Agreement for the Sonoran desert tortoise (USFWS 2015), signage at other strategic locations along the trail within the Ironwood-Picacho Wildlife Corridor will be utilized to discourage trail users from harassing and/or collecting desert tortoises.

Approximately 2 miles of the proposed trail would occur within the Ironwood-Picacho wildlife corridor. The Proposed Action is expected to increase activity along the road that will double as a trail; this activity will have both short and long-term adverse effects on wildlife using the Ironwood-Picacho Wildlife Corridor. Increased human presence along this 2-mile stretch has the potential to degrade the suitability of the Ironwood-Picacho

Wildlife Corridor for wildlife connectivity and reduce wildlife use of the nearby single-purpose wildlife bridges.

5. The Proposed Action would have No Adverse Effect on the six archaeological sites eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. National Historic Preservation Act consultation between Reclamation and tribes has also identified traditional cultural properties in the vicinity of the project.

The use of existing roads for trail-related recreational purposes would not result in new impacts to archaeological sites. To avoid or minimize the potential impacts to an archaeological site found near one trailhead, the trailhead was redesigned. An archaeological monitor would be required during ground disturbing activities at this trailhead to avoid or minimize impacts to AZ U:15:124(ASM). The Proposed Action would likely increase human activity within the project area and may result in impacts to cultural resources, particularly archaeological sites. While not anticipated, it is reasonable to assume that trail users may leave the trail, accessing portions of archaeological sites not previously disturbed. The impacts from such activity are expected to be inadvertent and minor. In order to reduce potential impacts to adjacent cultural sites, the Proposed Action includes the posting of signs along the trail to indicate the prohibition of off-trail use, posting of educational signage at the trailheads, and the implementation of a monitoring program for unauthorized visitation and/or disturbance to the archaeological sites in the immediate vicinity of the Proposed Action. Planned conservation measures intended to minimize or avoid cultural impacts are provided in Appendix F of the Final EA. As a result of these planned conservation measures, Reclamation has concluded compliance with NHPA with a finding of No Adverse Effect to Historic Properties in consultation with the Arizona State Historic Preservation Office and tribes.

6. The establishment of a non-motorized, multi-use recreational trail would have a beneficial effect on local and regional recreation. The trail will add recreational opportunities for local residents and the public, without effecting the function of the CAP canal. Environmental protection measures, including providing the public with information on proper trail etiquette would minimize potential negative impacts of recreation uses. It is important to note that although this EA considers E-bikes as a potential use for the Proposed Action, it would not be implemented until it is authorized by Reclamation's Lower Colorado Basin Regional Director (RD), as per 43 CFR 420.5 (a)(7). Section 3.6.1 provides NEPA analysis for E-bikes that can be used in subsequent NEPA analysis by Reclamation. If authorized by the RD, the RLUA between Reclamation and the County would need to be modified.
7. The Proposed Action would have a negligible impact on public health and safety from fugitive dust emissions during construction and maintenance. The short-term fugitive dust emissions from construction would not substantially increase emissions over background levels or cause an exceedance of National Ambient Air Quality Standards.

8. There are no known incremental effects of the Proposed Action that become significant when added to other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future actions that have affected, or will affect, the project area.
9. The Pinal County CAP Trail Management Plan and associated Maintenance Manual will be updated to include this portion of the CAP trail and will incorporate the mitigation and management measures identified in the EA (Appendix F). The mitigation and management measures identified in the EA will be implemented by Pinal County, Reclamation, and any authorized third-party agreement entities for the trail.
10. The Proposed Action does not violate any known Federal, State, or local law or requirements. Section 4.1 of the EA describes permits, licenses, and easements to be obtained prior to construction or maintenance in areas subject to the regulatory or permitting authority of a public entity.
11. The project area is not unique within its geographical setting and is similar to many other areas of federal and private land in the region. There are no wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, wilderness areas, refuges, or park lands, that will be affected by the Proposed Action.
12. The proposed action does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects and does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.
13. There are no known scientific or environmental controversies over the effects of the Proposed Action on the human environment.
14. There are no known effects on the human environment that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.
15. There will be no disproportionate high and adverse effects on low income or minority populations, as defined in Executive Order 12898. No low income or minority populations were identified through searches within the 2020 U.S. Census data and Environmental Protection Agency's data (EJSCREEN) nor during public outreach for NEPA.
16. The Proposed Action would not have an immediate socioeconomic impact on the local area or the County. However, future recreational use could provide a minimal beneficial effect to the County, City of Coolidge, or the Town of Florence's economy.
17. There are no Indian Trust Assets in the project area or adjacent to the project with the potential to be adversely affected.
18. The Proposed Action will not limit access to, and ceremonial use of, Indian Sacred Sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners, or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (Executive Order 13007 and 512 DM 3).

19. There are no regulated surface waters in the project area, and no potential for groundwater interactions resulting from the project activities.

Finding of No Significant Impact

Based upon the attached Final EA, Reclamation has determined that the development, operation, and maintenance of 39.3 miles of recreational trail and 3 associated trailheads will not have a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not warranted.

Documents Referenced

- U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation). 2018. Final Environmental Assessment and FONSI – CAP Canal Trail: Pinal-Pima County Line to Park Link Road (Park Link Segment). U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation, Lower Colorado Region, Phoenix Area Office.
- _____. 2021a. Notice of Public Scoping for an Environmental Assessment on the Proposed Expansion of the Recreational Trail Along the Central Arizona Project Canal, Pinal County, Arizona.
- _____. 2021b. Draft Environmental Assessment: Central Arizona Project Canal Trail: Park Link Drive to Florence Segment, Pinal County, Arizona. U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation, Interior Region 8: Lower Colorado Basin, Phoenix Area Office.
- _____. 2021c. Final Environmental Assessment: Central Arizona Project Canal Trail: Park Link Drive to Florence Segment, Pinal County, Arizona. U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation, Interior Region 8: Lower Colorado Basin, Phoenix Area Office.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). 2015. Candidate Conservation Agreement for the Sonoran Desert Tortoise (*Gopherus Morafkai*) in Arizona, between U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Cooperating Agencies comprising the Arizona Interagency Desert Tortoise Team.