

San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area Resource Management Plan Proposed Alternatives



Bureau of Land Management, Tucson Field Office

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This document contains a set of draft management alternatives for the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area (SPRNCA). The alternatives were developed by the BLM Planning Team, based on input received during the public scoping and alternatives development phases, other comments submitted by Cooperating Agencies and the public, and through internal consultations with BLM staff



and leadership. The document outlines four proposed alternatives: a No Action (or current management) Alternative and three action alternatives.

The No Action Alternative carries forward current management of the affected public lands and resources based on guidance provided by existing applicable land use plans (LUPs) and amendments and the enabling legislation for the SPRNCA, Public Law (PL) 100-696. The action alternatives present a range of public land uses and resource management

practices that address issues identified during the scoping process. Each alternative varies in emphasis and intensity of management, and describes a set of decisions and desired outcomes that would collectively direct future management for the SPRNCA. Additionally, each alternative consists of a set of designations, land use allocations, allowable uses, and management actions necessary to implement the alternative.

Management Strategies That Would be Unchanged (A, B, C, D)

BLM would continue to work in these core areas, regardless of which alternative would be selected to guide management of SPRNCA:

- **Collaboration and Coordination:** opportunities to coordinate with landowners in the watershed to improve river function and water quantity/quality in the SPRNCA.
- **Water Resources:** protect BLM's federal reserved water right on SPRNCA by supporting the Gila River adjudication.
- **Land Health Standards:** application of the *Arizona Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Grazing Administration*.
- **Monitoring:** common administrative actions to monitor resource conditions.

Management Strategies that are the Same for all Action Alternatives (B, C, D)

There are a number of management strategies BLM would implement common to each of the Action Alternatives.

- **Common Natural Resources Objectives:** Establish common natural resource objectives for healthy upland and riparian vegetation, fish and wildlife habitats, water and soil resources. Provides guidance across all alternatives on what goals need to be met to reach the Desired Future Conditions for the San Pedro River.
- **Priority Species and Habitats:** identification of priority species and habitats including fish, amphibians and reptiles, birds, mammals, and plants for targeted protection and management.
- **Fire and Fuels Management:** no portion of the SPRNCA would be suitable for wildland fire use, *i.e. any natural or human fire starts other than a prescribed fire would be immediately suppressed.*
- **Areas of Critical Environmental Concern:** replacement of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) within SPRNCA with priority habitats.
- **Adaptive Management:** A framework would be developed and implemented where applicable to resource treatments/uses.
- **Cultural Resources:** would allocate 3 site types to scientific use, 4 site types to conservation, 11 sites to public use, and 1 site types to traditional use. Would establish related administrative actions and criteria for how future sites would be allocated.
- **Recreation:** Target shooting and plinking would be prohibited throughout SPRNCA.



PROPOSED RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES

Management Strategies	Alternative A – No Action	Alternative B - Resource Use Emphasis	Alternative C - Restoration Emphasis	Alternative D – Natural Processes Emphasis
Strategies That Would be Unchanged				
Apply Land Health Standards	Common to all alternatives.			
Protect federal reserve water right	Common to all alternatives.			
Collaboration and Coordination	Common to all alternatives.			
Monitoring	Common to all alternatives.			

Management Strategies Same for all Action Alternatives

Adaptive Management	Not addressed in current management.	Adaptive management framework common to all action alternatives.		
Set desired future conditions for water quantity and quality; riparian and wetland function; riparian vegetation and upland plant communities.	Not addressed in current management.	Common natural resource objectives for healthy upland and riparian vegetation, fish and wildlife habitats, water and soil resources.		
Management Strategies	Alternative A – No Action	Alternative B - Resource Use Emphasis	Alternative C - Restoration Emphasis	Alternative D – Natural Processes Emphasis
Identify priority fish and wildlife species and set desired habitat conditions for those species.	Yes but updated in Action Alternatives.	Identification of priority species including fish, amphibians and reptiles, birds, mammals, and plants for targeted protection and management.		
Identify ecologically-important areas or scarce, limited habitats for special status species.	Yes but updated in Action Alternatives.	Identification of priority habitats including riparian and upland habitat types.		
Allocate cultural properties to specific uses.	Yes but revised.	Would allocate 3 site types to scientific use, 4 site types to conservation, 11 sites to public use, and 1 site type to traditional use.		
Fire and Fuels Plan Amendment	Yes, both Class I and II.	Class II only, not suitable for wildland fire use.		
Evaluate existing and consider need for designating additional Areas of Critical Environmental Concern and Research Natural Areas.	No.	Replacement of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern within SPRNCA with priority habitats.		

Management Strategies Unique to each Alternative				
Designate Visual Resource Management classes for all BLM land in the SPRNCA	Yes, but updated based on Visual Resource Inventory, vary across action alternatives.	Medium amount of Visual Resource Management Class I (highest level of protection).	No Visual Resource Management Class I.	Maximum amount of Visual Resource Management Class I (highest level of protection).
Designate Special Recreation Management Areas and/or Extensive Recreation Management Areas.	Yes, but vary across action alternatives.	Special Recreation Management Area with three Recreation Management Zones.	Special Recreation Management Area with two Recreation Management Zones.	Special Recreation Management Area with three Recreation Management Zones.
Designate roads in the SPRNCA as open, limited or closed to motorized vehicles.	Yes but revised.	Closed and Limited	Limited	Closed and Limited
Identify right-of-way avoidance and exclusion areas	Yes, vary across alternatives.	Avoidance areas established.	Exclusion areas established.	No new ROW Allowed.
Management Strategies	Alternative A – No Action	Alternative B - Resource Use Emphasis	Alternative C - Restoration Emphasis	Alternative D – Natural Processes Emphasis
Determine which areas are open and closed to grazing	Four existing allotments.	Four existing allotments plus forage reserve area in remainder of SPRNCA.	Four existing allotments.	No grazing.

Alternative Comparison

This is where the alternative themes begin to emerge. While all three action alternatives are trying to reach the same set of desired future conditions, the strategies and tools for getting there vary for each.

Alternative A – No Action Alternative

Alternative A, the No Action Alternative would be the continuation of the existing management under the Safford RMP (1992 and 1994) and the San Pedro River Riparian Management Plan (1989). The No Action Alternative is required to be included in all NEPA documents. This alternative would continue current public use and resource protection/conservation prescriptions without change.

- Species reintroduction, water recharge, and stream restoration done on a case by case basis.
- Limits on recreation.
- Continued grazing on four existing allotments.
- No adaptive management.

Lack of desired future conditions in current management (identified as a shortcoming by National Riparian Service Team).

Due to the substantial changes in circumstances and conditions very few of the existing decisions remain relevant. Very few are being carried forward as common to all alternatives. In many instances they are restated in more clear language as new action alternatives.

Key components of *Alternative A*:

- The entire SPRNCA would be available for a broad use of restoration tools on a case by case basis including chemical, biological, mechanical, and prescribed fire.
- The existing allotments would continue to be available for grazing.
- Stream restoration would take place on a case by case basis.
- Species reintroduction and augmentation would take place on a case by case basis.
- Water recharge enhancements would take place on a case by case basis.
- The eligible San Pedro River and associated tributaries would be managed as recreational, scenic, and wild.
- No portion of SPRNCA would be managed for wilderness characteristics.
- The entire SPRNCA would be managed as a Special Recreation Management Area with no Recreation Management Zones. This means SPRNCA is managed to protect and enhance a targeted set of activities, experiences, benefits, and Recreational Setting Characteristics consistent with the Conservation Values of PL 100-696.
- New Rights-of-Way would be considered on a case by case basis.
- Off Highway Vehicle OHV use would be limited to designated roads throughout SPRNCA.
- Charleston Utility Corridor would be established.
- Hunting would be allowed in designated areas.

Alternative B – Resource Use Emphasis

Alternative B emphasizes a diversity of resource use with some “hands on” landscape restoration. This alternative seeks to answer the question **“What would happen if we emphasized the diversity of allowable resource uses such as recreation and grazing while allowing for some “hands on” restoration?”**

It would maintain the current level of livestock grazing allotments, but would allow for a forage reserve allotment. It would allow for a maximum range of recreational opportunities including vehicular and backcountry access. It focuses landscape restoration on the uplands and the tributaries first and foremost. Restoration in the main stem of the San Pedro River would be on a case by case basis. Protective special designations for Wild and Scenic Rivers, Visual Resource Management Class I, and areas managed for wilderness characteristics would be prescribed at a moderate acreage. It would seek to enhance natural water recharge with a variety of techniques focused on the tributaries and upland areas. Work in the main stem of the San Pedro River would only occur after the tributary work is complete.

This alternative responds to public comment that called for the BLM to analyze enhanced recreation including increased access to sites, increased grazing, restoring upland health conditions to improve riparian and aquatic health, active removal of non-native species, enhanced water quantity through recharge basins and detention structures, and active development of off channel habitat for native fish.

Key components of *Alternative B*:

- Half of the SPRNCA would be available for a broad use of restoration tools including chemical, biological, mechanical, and prescribed fire as appropriate to the vegetation community.
- Forage would be available for livestock grazing on existing allotments.
- Remainder of SPRNCA would be available as a forage reserve allotment (38,740 acres).
- Prioritizes water recharge enhancements to improve water quantity in the uplands and tributaries.
- Structural stream restoration techniques would take place primarily in the tributaries to improve river function.
- Focuses on species augmentation and improving populations of species with balanced resource use.
- The San Pedro River, classified as scenic and recreational with some wild, would be recommended as suitable for Wild and Scenic River designation.
- 19,118 acres would be managed for wilderness characteristics, approximately 70% of the available acreage found to contain wilderness characteristics.
- Establishes the entire SPRNCA as a Special Recreation Management Area with three Recreation Management Zones. The three Recreation Management Zones are focused on specific recreational opportunities (Natural History, Human History, and Back Country).
- The SPRNCA would be an avoidance area for new Rights-of-Way with the exception of the Charleston corridor and corridors along Highways 82, 90, and 92.
- 21,314 acres would be closed to Off Highway Vehicle travel. 34,677 acres would be limited to designated roads.
- Hunting would be allowed in designated areas.
- There would be two proposed backcountry byways.
- There would be a moderate amount of Visual Resource Management Class I (12,962 acres, only “Wild” under Wild and Scenic Rivers).

Alternative C - Restoration Emphasis

Alternative C generally emphasizes the highest level of “hands on” landscape restoration.

This alternative answers the question **“What would occur if BLM lifted the limitations on broad landscape restoration?”**

This alternative would attempt to move the SPRNCA toward achieving the Desired Future Conditions in the shortest amount of time. Outdoor recreation is focused within two Recreation Management Zones around developed recreation sites. Protective special designations for Wild and Scenic Rivers and Visual Resource Management would be prescribed at their lowest acreage under *Alternative C* to

provide flexibility for concerted restoration efforts and there would be no areas managed for wilderness characteristics. It contains the most robust efforts to enhance natural water recharge and increase water quantity, relying on the widest range of techniques including focusing on in-stream modification of the main stem of the San Pedro River.

Alternative C responds to public comment that called for the BLM to analyze the restoration of deteriorated riparian habitat, prioritizing species reintroductions and augmentation, improving water quantity through recharge basins and detention structures, and removal of non-native species.

Key components of *Alternative C*:

- The entire SPRNCA would be available for a diverse range of restoration tools including chemical, biological, mechanical, and prescribed fire as appropriate to the vegetation community.
- Forage would be available for livestock grazing on existing allotments.
- Structural stream restoration techniques would take place in the tributaries and main channel of the San Pedro River to improve river function.
- Prioritizes and emphasizes both species reintroductions and augmentations as habitats are restored.
- Prioritizes water recharge enhancements to improve water quantity.
- The San Pedro River, classified as recreational, would be recommended as suitable for Wild and Scenic River designation.
- No portion of SPRNCA would be managed for wilderness characteristics.
- Would establish a 1,135-acre Special Recreation Management Area with two Recreation Management Zones (Natural and Human History). The focus of recreational use would be within these two Recreation Management Zones.
- All of SPRNCA would be limited to designated roads.
- Hunting would not be allowed.
- There would be one proposed backcountry byway.
- The SPRNCA would be an exclusion area for new Rights-of-Way with the exception of the Charleston Utility Corridor and corridors along Highways 82, 90, and 92.
- There would be no Visual Resource Management Class I.

Alternative D –Natural Processes Emphasis

Alternative D generally emphasizes natural processes to improve landscape health, and minimizes human disturbance within the SPRNCA. This alternative answers the question **“What would happen if BLM allowed natural processes to be the predominant agent of landscape restoration within SPRNCA?”**

This alternative would remove all grazing from SPRNCA. The focus of outdoor recreation management would be primitive backcountry recreation. Protective special designations such as Wild and Scenic Rivers and wilderness characteristics would be prescribed at their highest level under this alternative. There would be an emphasis on natural variation and spread/colonization in species

populations with minimal intervention on a case by case basis. Alternative D would use natural processes to enhance natural water recharge and increase water quantity.

This alternative responds to public comment that called for the BLM to analyze the elimination of grazing on the SPRNCA, the reintroduction of species only as needed, and the preservation of wilderness characteristics including protection of naturalness, opportunities for solitude, and primitive recreation.

Key components of *Alternative D*:

- Natural processes would be emphasized to improve watershed function.
- Species reintroduction and augmentation would occur with minimal intervention.
- No portion of SPRNCA would be available for grazing.
- Would use natural processes to improve water quantity, without the application of specific enhancement techniques.
- The San Pedro River, classified mostly as wild with some scenic and recreational, would be recommended as suitable for Wild and Scenic River designation.
- All 27,529 acres found to contain wilderness characteristics would be managed to protect those characteristics.
- The entire SPRNCA would be a Special Recreation Management Area with three Recreation Management Zones. The three Recreation Management Zones are focused on specific recreational opportunities (Natural History, Human History, and Back Country).
- 32,773 acres would be closed to Off Highway Vehicle travel. 23,219 acres would be limited to designated roads.
- Bow hunting only would be allowed.
- Highest amount of Visual Resource Management Class I (21,912 Acres)
- There would be no backcountry byway.
- The entire SPRNCA would be an exclusion area for new Rights-of-Ways and land use authorizations.

Timeline

We are here

