

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

RECORD OF DECISION

WILDERNESS MANAGEMENT PLAN

JIMBILNAN, PINTO VALLEY, BLACK CANYON, ELDORADO, IRETEBA PEAKS,
NELLIS WASH, SPIRIT MOUNTAIN, AND BRIDGE CANYON
WILDERNESS AREAS

LAKE MEAD NATIONAL RECREATION AREA
Arizona and Nevada

The National Park Service at Lake Mead National Recreation Area has prepared this Record of Decision for the *Final Wilderness Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement for Jimbilnan, Pinto Valley, Black Canyon, Eldorado, Ireteba Peaks, Nellis Wash, Spirit Mountain, and Bridge Canyon Wilderness Areas*. This record of decision includes a brief description of the project background and objectives, a statement of the decision and discussion of the basis for the decision, a summary of the other alternatives considered, a description of the environmentally preferred alternative, a listing of the measures that will be implemented to minimize or avoid environmental harm, and an overview of public involvement and agency consultation.

Note: Although the wilderness management plan/final environmental impact statement covered lands jointly managed by the National Park Service (NPS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM), this record of decision only covers the wilderness lands managed by the NPS. In addition, the NPS has prepared a Determination of No Impairment for the selected actions.

The BLM has prepared a separate Record of Decision for those portions of the three wilderness areas that it manages.

BACKGROUND

In 1974, the National Park Service completed an initial wilderness review of all the lands within Lake Mead National Recreation Area. At that time, 409,000 acres were proposed for wilderness. The 1986 general management plan for Lake Mead National Recreation Area identified 558,675 acres as meeting the criteria of the Wilderness Act, and an additional 115,700 acres that potentially meet the criteria. Per NPS policies, these areas were subsequently managed to ensure that no actions were taken that would diminish their wilderness suitability, pending action by Congress.

In 2002, The Clark County Conservation of Public Land and Natural Resources Act (P.L107-282) was signed into law. This act designated 18 wilderness areas in Clark County, Nevada, as part of the national wilderness preservation system. Nine of these designated wilderness areas are fully or partially within Lake Mead National Recreation Area. This plan covers eight of the nine wilderness areas, of which three are jointly managed with the Bureau of Land Management. One area, the Muddy Mountains Wilderness, is covered under a separate plan that was jointly developed by the Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service in 2007.

During 2006 the NPS and BLM began collaborating on the wilderness management plan for these eight Nevada wilderness areas. Public scoping meetings were held in October 2006. A draft wilderness management plan / environmental assessment was released for public review in April 2010. During the public comment period, information was provided concerning the existence of an extensive climbing area in the Bridge Canyon Wilderness and the presence of fixed climbing anchors within the Spirit Mountain Traditional Cultural Property and Spirit Mountain Wilderness. This information, along with revisions to NPS wilderness management policies and tribal and climbers' concerns, prompted the decision to complete additional analysis and prepare an environmental impact statement.

A notice of availability of the draft wilderness management plan / environmental impact statement was filed on January 17, 2014, and published in the *Federal Register* (79 FR 14363) on January 21, 2014. The public was invited to submit comments on the draft document from January 21, 2014, through March 23, 2014. The draft plan presented and analyzed three alternatives for future direction of the management and use of eight wilderness areas in Lake Mead NRA and adjacent BLM lands.

Purpose and Need for the Plan

The purpose of this wilderness management plan is to outline steps for preserving the wilderness character, natural resources, and cultural resources in eight designated wilderness areas within Lake Mead National Recreation Area while also providing for the use and enjoyment of the wilderness areas. It is intended to provide accountability, consistency, and continuity for managing the wilderness areas in the NPS wilderness management program. This plan provides guidelines to NPS wilderness area managers in maintaining desirable conditions in the wilderness areas and to respond effectively to future changes.

A plan is needed for the wilderness areas for several reasons. The population in Clark County is expected to continue to grow, resulting in changes in visitation patterns that have the potential to affect opportunities for solitude and other characteristics of the wilderness areas. Several wilderness-specific issues and topics have not been fully addressed by the National Park Service, including: determining appropriate access to the areas; identifying appropriate types and levels of resource management; setting user capacities for the areas; instituting wilderness character monitoring; providing guidance on the management of climbing in the wilderness areas; and determining the type and amount of visitor use that should be permitted versus the level of cultural resource protection that should be provided. Because three of the wilderness areas are jointly managed by the National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management, a plan is needed to ensure consistent management and to resolve potential conflicts. NPS *Management Policies 2006* (section 6.3.4.2) requires that each park containing wilderness to maintain an up-to-date and approved wilderness management plan, which the eight wilderness areas do not currently have. Finally, the 1986 Lake Mead National Recreation Area called for the preparation of a wilderness management plan.

The draft plan proposed some changes in how the eight wilderness areas are managed. Three alternatives were developed that varied primarily in the level of public access and degree of management. All of the alternatives were crafted with the intention of ensuring cohesive management of the wilderness areas across jurisdictional boundaries. The proposed changes that will be most obvious to the public are those that address access and visitor distribution, visitor information services, management of climbers, and resource conditions.

DECISION (SELECTED ACTION)

Upon consideration of the concerns and issues raised during the planning and environmental impact analysis process, with due consideration for all public comments received during scoping as well as review of the Draft EIS, and in light of applicable laws, regulations, and NPS guidance, the National Park Service has selected Alternative B, which focuses on protecting the character of the wilderness areas while providing more opportunities for access into some of the wilderness areas. Alternative B was identified as the agencies' preferred alternative (selected action) in the January 2014 *Draft Wilderness Management Plan for Jimbilnan, Pinto Valley, Black Canyon, Eldorado, Ireteba Peaks, Nellis Wash, Spirit Mountain, and Bridge Canyon Environmental Impact Statement (WMP/DEIS)*. The selected action is the same as described for Alternative B in the Final EIS. The selected action includes the following primary components, which will be implemented as staffing and funding allow and may be accomplished in phases:

General Components

- Access points will be established at various locations to improve access to some of the wilderness areas compared to alternative A.
- Additional opportunities will be provided for both day and overnight use.
- Approximately 23 miles of routes will be designated in the wilderness areas. Some of these routes will follow old road beds, while others will be designated on maps and involve no on-the-ground work. They are all intended to provide access to the areas while avoiding/minimizing resource impacts.
- Resource management will primarily focus on restoration of disturbed areas, long-term inventory and monitoring, and mitigation of disturbances by people where appropriate.
- Additional efforts will be made to inform and educate visitors about opportunities to experience each wilderness area.

Jimbilnan Wilderness

- No new visitor facilities will be provided in the wilderness area.
- A kiosk and information sign will be installed outside the wilderness area at the intersection of Northshore Road and Boathouse Cove Road (Approved Road 97).

Pinto Valley Wilderness

- Two additional access points will be established off Northshore Road. Information signs about Pinto Valley will be installed at two existing pull-outs along the Northshore Road at milepost 18.2 and milepost 25.5.
- The former Pinto Valley road, from milepost 25.5 to the head of Boulder Wash, and the old road that runs from milepost 18.2 to the head of Boulder Wash will be designated as hiker/stock routes.

- A designated route up Hamblin Peak will be established, while all other unofficial routes will be removed and the landscape restored.

Black Canyon Wilderness

- Information signs will be placed on Boy Scout Canyon Road (Approved Road 59) and all other roads that provide access to the Black Canyon Wilderness.
- A trailhead will be established at the end of North Boy Scout Canyon (Approved Road 75D), which is an alternate route to Boy Scout Canyon via an unnamed wash.
- An informational sign will be placed at the Canyon Point Road overlook, which provides a view into the wilderness area.
- Old signs in Boy Scout Canyon will be removed to restore the wilderness character.

Eldorado Wilderness

- An access point with an information kiosk will be developed off Nevada State Route 165 to provide information on a designated route that follows Oak Creek Canyon and Lonesome Wash.
- An access point with information signs will be established at the end of Yucca Camp Road (Approved Road 51),

Ireteba Peaks Wilderness

- No actions will be taken to improve visitor access into this area.
- Restoration work will occur in Tule Spring to restore its wilderness character.

Nellis Wash Wilderness

- Management actions will focus on restoration work associated with the impacts of off-highway vehicles in this area.

Spirit Mountain Wilderness

- An information kiosk will be installed in the vicinity of Spirit Mountain that will mention the importance of the area to the local tribes.
- All existing fixed anchors and equipment from rock climbing activities will be removed if it can be done without damaging rock faces, and no new fixed anchors or equipment will be authorized.
- An information sign will be placed at the intersection of Nevada State Route 163 and Nevada Telephone Cove Road (Approved Road 9).
- Information signs may be installed as needed at the existing parking area at Sacatone Wash and Christmas Tree Pass Road (Approved Road 20); on the Pipe Spring Road; on the route to Pipe Spring; and in the lower Grapevine Canyon parking area off Approved Road 20.
- The road to White Rock Mine (Approved Road 21) will be closed at the point where the road becomes impassable, or at another point where there is a turnaround.
- The Lower Grapevine Canyon Road (Approved Road 13) will be closed.

Bridge Canyon Wilderness

- The Grapevine Canyon Trail outside the wilderness area will be improved to more clearly direct visitors into the wash and multiple user-created trails will be restored to natural conditions.
- Approved Road 18 will be closed at the point where the road is surrounded by the wilderness.
- The concentration of existing bolt-intensive face climbs will be reduced in certain climbing areas.
- Climbers will be permitted, on a case-by-case basis, to replace old, unsafe anchors on existing routes within the wilderness unit.

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Alternative A, No Action

Alternative A, the “no-action” alternative, reflects current management of the wilderness areas and serves as a baseline for comparison with the other alternatives. No major change would occur in the management of the wilderness areas under this alternative.

Alternative C

Compared to Alternative B (the Selected Action), Alternative C would provide a higher level of access and visitor use management while still protecting the overall character of the wilderness areas. In alternative C, additional efforts would be made to inform and educate both visitors and the public about the presence of the wilderness areas and opportunities that are available. Dispersed use would continue to be encouraged, while the establishment and maintenance of designated routes would concentrate use in some areas. Although slightly more access opportunities would be provided in most of the wilderness areas, slightly fewer opportunities would be provided in the Black Canyon area. More proactive management would be given to the Black Canyon, Pinto Valley, Spirit Mountain, and Bridge Canyon wilderness areas to ensure their values are protected and unacceptable impacts do not occur. Access to the wilderness areas would be improved primarily through the establishment of trailheads at various points.

BASIS FOR DECISION

After careful consideration of each alternative and its foreseeable environmental impacts, the expressed purpose and need for federal action, and all public and agency comments, including comments on the wilderness management plan/draft EIS, Alternative B has been selected for implementation. This alternative best complies with NPS management policies, and best meets the management objectives to preserve the wilderness character, natural resources, and cultural resources in eight designated wilderness areas within Lake Mead National Recreation Area while also providing for the use and enjoyment of these areas.

The National Park Service has determined that the selected action will:

- Provide for the long-term protection and preservation of the areas’ wilderness character.
- Repair, where possible, degradation from past nonconforming uses that have diminished wilderness character.

- Manage the wilderness areas for the use and enjoyment of visitors in a manner that will leave the areas unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness.
- Manage cultural resources in the wilderness areas so they will be preserved and appreciated through appropriate protection, research, education, monitoring, and treatment methods and techniques.
- Promote and perpetuate public and managers' awareness of, and appreciation for, wilderness character, resources, and ethics through interpretation and education.
- Manage the wilderness areas using the minimum tools and equipment necessary to successfully, safely, and economically preserve wilderness resources.
- Manage nonconforming but accepted uses permitted by the Wilderness Act and subsequent laws in a manner that will prevent unnecessary or undue degradation of the areas' wilderness character.
- Manage the NPS and BLM portions of the three jointly managed wilderness areas to provide a maximum amount of management consistency across administrative boundaries.

As documented in the final EIS, the following key factors support implementation of the selected action:

- The environmental analyses demonstrate that the Selected Action will have beneficial effects on wilderness character and only short- and long-term negligible to moderate adverse impacts to natural resources and negligible to minor adverse impacts to cultural resources; no major adverse impacts will occur.
- The selected action has a high likelihood of achieving the expressed purpose and objectives as articulated in the draft and final EIS.
- The selected action is fully compliant with NPS's mission and policies, and other pertinent laws and regulations.
- The selected action specifies all feasible and prudent measures to minimize environmental harm.
- The selected action was crafted through several years of public involvement and agency coordination.

ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERABLE ALTERNATIVE

According to Council on Environmental Quality regulations implementing the National Environmental Policy Act, the environmentally preferable alternative is the alternative "that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment and best protects, preserves, and enhances historical, cultural, and natural resources. The environmentally preferable alternative is identified upon consideration and weighing by the responsible official of long-term environmental impacts against short-term impacts in evaluating what is the best protection of these resources. In some situations, such as when different alternatives impact different resources to different degrees, there may be more than one environmentally preferable alternative."

The environmentally preferable alternative is alternative B. This course of action would result in fewer adverse impacts, and more beneficial impacts, than alternatives A and C. Alternative C would provide for more visitor use opportunities and increased information to visitors, compared to alternative B, but there

also would be a higher potential for more impacts on wilderness resources and values in comparison with the Selected Action.

MEASURES TO MINIMIZE ENVIRONMENTAL HARM

Mitigation measures are the practicable and appropriate methods that will be used under the Selected Action to avoid or minimize harm to wilderness character, natural and cultural resources, visitors, and the visitor experience. The mitigation measures have been developed by using existing laws and regulations, best management practices, conservation measures, and other known techniques. Most of the mitigation measures below relate to construction of facilities, all of which will occur outside the wilderness areas (e.g., development of access points).

General – Natural Resources

- Previously disturbed areas will be used whenever possible and new disturbance will be confined to carefully selected sites with as small a construction footprint as possible.
- Natural and cultural resource staff will identify sensitive areas during design and planning stages and will be on-site during periods of construction, if necessary, to ensure that all mitigation and conservation measures are followed.
- Best management practices will be implemented to reduce impacts on air and water quality and natural soundscapes.

Soils and Vegetation

- Erosion control measures will be incorporated into development projects. Areas of disturbance will be rehabilitated through raking and, as appropriate, replacement of topsoil and revegetation.
- Best management practices will be used to avoid the introduction of nonnative plant species. These will include prohibiting the use of imported fill, soil, or hay bales; ensuring all equipment is clean and free of foreign soil or seeds; minimizing new ground disturbance and initiating restoration of disturbed sites immediately; and monitoring disturbed areas for growth of nonnative species. All cacti and yuccas will be avoided or salvaged and replanted.

Wildlife

- Visitor impacts on wildlife will be addressed through such techniques as visitor education programs, restrictions on visitor activities, and ranger patrols.
- During any construction of facilities necessary to support wilderness management, noise abatement measures will be implemented. These measures may include: a schedule to minimize impacts in noise-sensitive areas, use of the best available noise control techniques wherever feasible, use of hydraulically or electrically powered impact tools when feasible, and the location of stationary noise sources as far from sensitive uses as possible.
- For occupied raptor nests, rock climbing will be prohibited up to 0.5 mile from the nest site.

Threatened, Endangered, and Rare Species

Surveys will be conducted for special status species, including rare, threatened, and endangered species, before taking any action that might cause harm. In consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Nevada Department of Wildlife, appropriate measures will be taken to protect any sensitive species, whether identified through surveys or presumed to occur.

Prior to any surface disturbing activities associated with the implementation of this wilderness management plan, the following conservation measures will be implemented to ensure that the federally threatened Mojave desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) and its habitat are protected:

- Project areas will be surveyed for tortoises within 24 hours of the start of ground disturbance. If a tortoise is present, it will be allowed to move out of harm's way of its own volition.
- All project personnel will receive desert tortoise education, which will include information on the species' life history and legal status as well as all stipulations associated with project implementation.
- Litter control will be strictly enforced.
- Pets will be required to be under leash control at all times.
- Sites where vegetation is disturbed will be rehabilitated as soon as possible to restore habitat.

Cultural Resources

- As appropriate, archeological surveys and/or monitoring will precede any ground disturbance.
- National register-eligible or national register-listed archeological resources will be avoided to the greatest extent possible. If such resources could not be avoided, an appropriate mitigation strategy will be developed in consultation with the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office and associated American Indian tribes.
- If during construction previously unknown archeological resources were discovered, all work in the immediate vicinity of the discovery will be halted until the resources could be identified and documented and evaluated for National Register eligibility; if the resources cannot be preserved *in situ*, an appropriate mitigation strategy will be developed in consultation with the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office and associated American Indian tribes.
- Sensitive traditional use areas will be protected to the extent feasible by avoiding or mitigating impacts on ethnographic resources and continuing to provide access to traditional use and spiritual areas.
- Use of climbing equipment (including climbing chalk) within a minimum of 50 feet of rock art will be prohibited.
- Visitors will be educated on the importance of protecting the wilderness areas' cultural resources and leaving these undisturbed for the enjoyment of future visitors.

Visitor Use and Experiences

- Visitor safety concerns will be integrated into interpretive and educational programs.

- Guidance consistent with Leave No Trace principles will be developed to educate visitors on minimizing impacts on wilderness areas.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Project Scoping

Scoping on this project began with the publication of a newsletter in 2006, which described the planning effort and requested the public to identify issues and concerns the plan should address. Scoping meetings were held at Henderson and Laughlin, Nevada, in October of 2006.

Work began on the environmental impact statement in 2011 with meetings being held with Lake Mead National Recreation Area and BLM Southern Nevada District staff to identify potential issues and concerns for the plan. Formal public scoping began with a notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement, which was published in the *Federal Register* on February 15, 2012. A newsletter, issued in March 2012 described the planning effort and requested the public to identify issues and concerns the plan should address. The public was asked to send their comments via the internet or mail. The public was requested to send their comments by April 20, 2012. Only a few comments were received, with no common themes or issues. Topics that were raised included overflights; protection of wilderness character; use of fixed anchors for climbing in wilderness and ensuring opportunities continue to be provided for climbing; and access into the areas.

In February 2013 a preliminary alternatives newsletter was distributed to the public. The newsletter requested comments on the preliminary alternatives by April 12, 2013. Public open houses were also held in Bullhead City, Arizona, and Boulder City and Henderson, Nevada, on March 18–21, 2013. At these meetings, representatives of both the National Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management participated.

Draft Wilderness Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement

A notice of availability of the draft wilderness management plan / environmental impact statement was filed on January 17, 2014, and published in the *Federal Register* (79 FR 14363) on January 21, 2014. The public was invited to submit comments on the draft document from January 21, 2014, through March 23, 2014.

Three public meetings were held on the draft plan in the region: Henderson, Nevada (February 11, 2014); Boulder City, Nevada (February 12, 2014); and Bullhead City, Arizona (February 13, 2014). A total of approximately 30 individuals attended the three meetings. The meetings were primarily informational in nature, intended to provide opportunities for the public to meet members of the NPS planning team, learn about the plan, and have questions answered. Attendees were encouraged to provide comments in writing to the planning team.

A total of approximately 269 written comments were received during the comment period. Most comments were received as e-mails, with the remainder being letters (which were scanned into the NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) web site). Several of the comments sent via e-mail included portions of a form letter. Comments were received from 32 states, and one correspondence from the District of Columbia. The majority of comments were from California, Nevada, and Arizona.

Although comments from unaffiliated individuals were by far the largest source of comments, a variety of federal and state agencies, county government, recreational groups, businesses, conservation groups, nonprofit groups, and other organizations commented on the plan.

The National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management responded to all substantive comments raised by the public and agencies as part of developing the final wilderness management plan / environmental impact statement. In some cases, the content of the document was modified in response to public comments.

On February 27, 2015, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency published its notice of filing of the final EIS in the *Federal Register* (80 FR 10683), initiating the minimum 30 days “no action” waiting period through April 3, 2015. The NPS notice of availability for the final EIS was published in the *Federal Register* (80 FR 11685) on March 4, 2015.

CONSULTATION WITH AGENCIES AND TRIBAL GOVERNMENTS

Section 7 Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, requires in section 7 (a) (2) that each federal agency, in consultation with the secretary of the interior, ensure that any action the agency authorizes, funds, or carries out is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of a listed species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of designated critical habitat. This section of the act sets out the consultation process, which is further implemented by regulation (50 CFR 93 402).

The planning team initiated informal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the desert tortoise, the only federally listed species known to occur in the wilderness areas. This informal consultation occurred during the development of the 2010 draft wilderness management plan / environmental assessment. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred on September 12, 2008, with the NPS determination that the proposed action is not likely to adversely affect the desert tortoise. Because the 2013 wilderness management plan / environmental impact statement is not proposing new actions that will affect the tortoise or its habitat, the earlier consultation covers this plan.

Tribal Governments

The National Park Service recognizes that indigenous peoples have traditional and contemporary interests and ongoing rights in lands now under NPS management, as well as concerns and contributions to make for the future for this wilderness management plan. Related to tribal sovereignty, the need for government-to-government American Indian consultations stems from the historic power of Congress to make treaties with American Indian tribes as sovereign nations. Consultations with American Indian tribes are required by various federal laws, executive orders, regulations, and policies. For example, such consultations are needed to comply with section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended. Implementing regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality for the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended, also call for American Indian consultations.

Formal consultation with tribes associated with Lake Mead National Recreation Area was initiated in September 2008. A formal request to consult was sent to the Kaibab Paiute Tribe, the Las Vegas Paiute Tribe, the Moapa Paiute Tribe, the Shivwits Band of Paiute, the Paiute Indian Tribes of Utah, the Pahrump Paiute Tribe, the Chemehuevi Tribe, the Colorado River Indian Tribes, the Ft. Mojave Tribe, the Ft. Yuma Quechan Tribe, the Gila River Indian Community, the Havasupai Tribe, the Hopi Tribe, the Hualapai

Tribe, the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, the Yavapai-Prescott Indian Tribe, the Ak-Chin Indian Community, and the Zuni Tribe.

Representatives from the Chemehuevi Tribe, the Ft. Mojave Indian Tribe, the Hualapai Tribe, and the Southern Paiute Pahrump Paiute Tribe attended meetings with NPS staff on the tribes' issues and concerns regarding the management of the wilderness areas.

Several tribes expressed concerns about visitor use and specifically the use of fixed anchors in the Spirit Mountain Wilderness (which is considered sacred by several tribes and is a designated traditional cultural property) and Bridge Canyon Wilderness. Tribal consultations indicate the use of fixed anchors within the traditional cultural property is not compatible with the cultural values of the tribes and conflicts with their heritage and self-identity as a community.

Section 106 Consultation with the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office

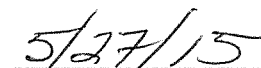
The National Park Service initiated consultation with the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) with a letter dated August 12, 2008. The National Park Service informed the state historic preservation office about the undertaking to develop a wilderness management plan for the eight wilderness areas in Lake Mead National Recreation Area and on adjacent BLM lands. The state historic preservation office was invited to participate in the planning process and to comment on the draft plan as it progressed. The National Park Service continued consultation with the state historic preservation office throughout the development of the wilderness management plan.

CONCLUSION

The selected action (alternative B) provides the most comprehensive, long-term, effective strategy among alternatives considered in the *Wilderness Management Plan for Jimbilnan, Pinto Valley, Black Canyon, Eldorado, Iretaba Peaks, Nellis Wash, Spirit Mountain, and Bridge Canyon Wilderness Areas FEIS* for meeting the project's purpose and wilderness management objectives. The selected action is fully compliant with NPS policies and other pertinent laws and regulations, and allows the National Park Service to balance protection of the wilderness areas' natural and cultural resources and wilderness character while providing more opportunities for access into some of the areas.

APPROVED:


Patricia L. Neubacher
Acting Regional Director


Dated

ERRATA SHEET

Corrections to the *Final Wilderness Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement for Jimbilnan, Pinto Valley, Black Canyon, Eldorado, Ireteba Peaks, Nellis Wash, Spirit Mountain, and Bridge Canyon Wilderness Areas* are listed in this section. These revisions have not resulted in substantial modification of the selected action and do not require additional environmental analysis. The page numbers referenced are from the final plan.

Page v: The text should be corrected to: "NPS and BLM managers, with further input from the climbing community and tribes, ~~will consider~~ would reduce anchors in the Bridge Canyon Wilderness that have unacceptable impacts on wilderness resources and wilderness character."

Page 142, right column, 2nd full paragraph: The text should read: "Sticky buckwheat...occurs in Pinto Valley and possibly the Jimbilnan wilderness area."

DETERMINATION OF NO IMPAIRMENT

Jimbilnan, Pinto Valley, Black Canyon, Eldorado, Ireteba Peaks, Nellis Wash,
Spirit Mountain, and Bridge Canyon Wilderness Management Plan

Lake Mead National Recreation Area
May 2015

IMPAIRMENT PROHIBITION

The National Park Service (NPS) *Management Policies 2006* (§ 1.4) requires analysis of potential effects to determine whether or not proposed actions will impair a park's resources and values. The fundamental purpose of the national park system, established by the Organic Act and reaffirmed by the General Authorities Act, as amended, begins with a mandate to conserve park resources and values. NPS managers must always seek ways to avoid, or to minimize to the greatest degree practicable, adverse impacts on park resources and values. However, the laws do give the National Park Service the management discretion to allow impacts on park resources and values when necessary and appropriate to fulfill the purposes of the park. That discretion is limited by the statutory requirement that the National Park Service must leave resources and values unimpaired unless a particular law directly and specifically provides otherwise.

The prohibited impairment is an impact that, in the professional judgment of the responsible NPS manager, will harm the integrity of park resources or values, including the opportunities that otherwise will be present for the enjoyment of those resources or values (NPS *Management Policies 2006*). Whether an impact meets this definition depends on the particular resources that will be affected; the severity, duration, and timing of the impact; the direct and indirect effects of the impact; and the cumulative effects of the impact in question and other past or planned future impacts.

An impact on any park resource or value may, but does not necessarily, constitute impairment. An impact will be more likely to constitute impairment to the extent that it affects a resource or value whose conservation is:

- Necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation or proclamation of the park.
- Key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or to opportunities for enjoyment of the park.
- Identified in the park's general management plan or other relevant NPS planning documents as being of significance.

An impact will be less likely to constitute impairment if it is an unavoidable result of an action necessary to preserve or restore the integrity of park resources or values and it cannot be further mitigated. An impact that may, but will not necessarily, lead to impairment may result from visitor activities; NPS administrative activities; or activities undertaken by concessioners, contractors, and others operating in the park. Impairment may also result from sources or activities outside the park.

The park resources and values that are subject to the no-impairment standard include:

- The park scenery, natural and historic objects, wildlife, and the processes and conditions that sustain them, including, to the extent present in the park: the ecological, biological, and physical processes that created the park and continue to act upon it; scenic features; natural visibility, both

in daytime and at night; natural landscapes; natural soundscapes and smells; water and air resources; soils; geological resources; paleontological resources; archeological resources; cultural landscapes; ethnographic resources; historic and prehistoric sites, structures, and objects; museum collections; and native plants and animals;

- Appropriate opportunities to experience enjoyment of the above resources, to the extent that can be done without impairing them;
- The park's role in contributing to the national dignity, the high public value and integrity, and the superlative environmental quality of the national park system, and the benefit and inspiration provided to the American people by the national park system; and
- Any additional attributes encompassed by the specific values and purposes for which the park was established.

DESCRIPTION OF PARK PURPOSE

The enabling legislation for Lake Mead National Recreation Area (Public Law [PL] 88-639) established the recreation area “for the general purposes of public recreation, benefit, and use, and in a manner that will preserve, develop and enhance, so far as practicable, the recreation potential, and in a manner that will preserve the scenic, historic, scientific, and other important features of the area, consistent with applicable reservations and limitations relating to such area and with other authorized uses of the lands and properties within such area.”

The 1986 general management plan provided the overall management direction for Lake Mead National Recreation Area. The plan established management zones to accommodate increasing visitor use while protecting park resources. The 2003 “Lake Management Plan” further refined the management of Lakes Mead and Mohave, the associated shoreline, and developed areas around the lakes to ensure the protection of park resources while allowing a range of recreational opportunities to support visitor needs.

IMPAIRMENT DETERMINATIONS FOR THE SELECTED ALTERNATIVE

Impairment determinations are not necessary for visitor use and experience and wilderness character because impairment findings pertain only park resources and values. These impact topics are not generally considered to be park resources or values according to the Organic Act, and cannot be impaired the same way that an action can impair park resources and values. Among the topics addressed in the Final EIS, those which are evaluated for impairment include soils, vegetation, terrestrial wildlife, special status species, natural soundscape, archeological resources, and ethnographic resources.

Soils

Soils are key resources, helping determine where native vegetation communities occur, which in turn affects wildlife populations. The soils affect the wilderness areas' productivity, drainage patterns and erosion. They are thus a key element in maintaining the park's functional desert habitats — a fundamental resource for Lake Mead National Recreation Area. Intact, functional, resilient soils are important for the natural integrity of the wilderness areas.

Previous uses of the wilderness areas, such as cattle grazing and mining, as well as the presence of feral burros, led to the establishment of unofficial trails, increased soil compaction and erodibility, and in some areas decreased cryptogamic soil crust density. Although the selected action will result in some soils being lost or altered in local areas due to the use of designated routes by visitors, the designated routes will occur in areas that have been previously disturbed. Thus these uses will not substantially alter the wilderness area's soils. In addition, establishing a route up Hamblin Peak will help reduce soil erosion in this area. Similarly, establishing and monitoring wilderness character and visitor use management measures should help prevent the development of new user-created trails and resulting soil erosion, compaction or loss; this will have a long-term, beneficial impact.

Overall, some soils will be eroded and some soil properties will be altered over a relatively small area, but the viability and integrity of the wilderness areas' soils will not be substantially affected by the selected action. Therefore the selected action will not result in impairment of soils.

Vegetation

Vegetation is another key element of the eight wilderness areas. Healthy plant populations are important for the natural integrity of the wilderness areas and for maintaining the park's functional desert habitats. The vegetation of the eight wilderness areas contains species representative primarily of the Mojave Desert. Desert vegetation is mainly found on the flats and slopes throughout the wilderness areas up to 6,000 feet. The dominant vegetative communities in this area are creosotebush-bursage and Mojave mixed shrub. Together, these two communities comprise approximately 98% of the wilderness areas.

Vegetation in most portions of the wilderness areas will not be affected by the selected action. Although some vegetation will be lost or substantially altered in localized areas due to visitor use of designated routes (e.g., the Pinto Valley hiker/horse route), the designated routes will occur in previously disturbed areas where native vegetation has already been substantially altered. The Pinto Valley route will follow an old road bed along which compacted soils will be ripped, enabling native plants to revegetate this corridor. Given the previous vegetation disturbance and the application of appropriate mitigation measures (e.g., revegetating disturbed areas and taking steps to avoid the spread of nonnative plants), the long-term, adverse effects on native vegetation from the use of designated routes will not noticeably affect the viability and distribution of plant communities or result in the substantial loss of native plants. Moreover, the removal of user-created unofficial routes in several of the wilderness areas, the restoration of vegetation in disturbed areas, and the removal of nonnative invasive species, such as tamarisk at spring sites, will have long-term, beneficial impacts.

Overall, none of the identified impacts of the selected action will affect the overall integrity, distribution, or presence of native plant communities in the wilderness areas. Therefore, the selected action will not result in impairment of vegetation.

Terrestrial Wildlife

Mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians are an important resource of the wilderness areas. Healthy wildlife populations are important for the natural integrity of the wilderness areas. The eight wilderness areas support a variety of wildlife due to their remote locations, narrow canyons, steep terrain, and general habitat diversity. Reptiles, birds, and amphibian species inhabit the wilderness areas, as do a range of mammals, from bats to desert bighorn sheep.

In the selected action, human use in the wilderness areas will be concentrated on designated routes, in washes, and at particular points of interest such as Boy Scout Canyon. Animals sensitive to human

activities already avoid these areas when people are present. Wildlife that occupy these areas of concentrated use, such as reptiles, birds, and small mammals, are mostly adapted to the presence of people and will not be noticeably affected by the selected action. Some wildlife may be displaced or habitat may be damaged in local areas where disturbance will occur due to the increased use of designated routes. However, the designated routes will occur in areas that have already been disturbed by people. Given the previous wildlife and habitat disturbances, the long-term, adverse effects on wildlife and habitat from the designation and use of routes will be negligible to minor in localized areas. No wildlife populations in the wilderness areas will be adversely affected. In addition, the selected action will result in long-term, beneficial impacts on some wildlife populations due to vegetation restoration efforts and the closure and restoration of roads and unofficial user-created trails. Therefore the selected action will not result in impairment of wildlife resources.

Special Status Species

The only federally listed species known to occur in the wilderness areas is the Mojave desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*). The desert tortoise, which is listed as threatened by both the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the State of Nevada, likely occurs in all eight wilderness areas. In addition, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has designated desert tortoise critical habitat that includes Eldorado, a small part of Ireteba Peaks, Nellis Wash, Spirit Mountain, and Bridge Canyon wilderness areas. Most of the national recreation area, including all of the wilderness areas, supports patchy, very low densities of tortoises, with a few locations of higher densities.

Three BLM special status and state-listed critically endangered plant species are known to occur, or are likely to occur, in the wilderness areas. Las Vegas bearpoppy (*Arctomecon californica*) is an evergreen perennial herb known to occur in the Jimbilnan and Pinto Valley wildernesses. Threecorner milkvetch (*Astragalus geveri* var. *triquetrus*), an annual plant and member of the legume family, occurs in the Jimbilnan and Pinto Valley wildernesses. Sticky buckwheat (*Eriogonum viscidulum*), an annual plant and member of the buckwheat family, occurs in the Jimbilnan wilderness area.

In the selected action, human use in the wilderness areas will be concentrated on designated routes, in washes, and at particular points of interest. A few visitors may occasionally harass tortoises when they see them; however in general, continued dispersed visitor use of the wilderness areas is expected to result in a negligible, long-term, adverse effect on desert tortoises. Likewise, visitation by hikers might result in the trampling of a few state-listed Las Vegas bear poppy, threecorner milkvetch, sticky buckwheat, and the BLM sensitive species, but this use is expected to have a long-term, negligible, adverse effect on the populations in the areas.

Some desert tortoises may be displaced or habitat may be damaged in local areas where disturbance will occur due to the use of designated routes in the selected action. However, the use of designated routes will occur in areas that have already been disturbed by people. This use will have a negligible to minor, long-term, localized, adverse impact on the wilderness area's desert tortoise species and habitat. These impacts will not affect the distribution or abundance of the tortoise populations, or activities necessary for the survival of the species. Moreover, continuing habitat restoration efforts in the wilderness areas will help protect tortoise habitat under the selected action, which will result in a long-term, beneficial impact on desert tortoise and related critical habitat, as well as the state-listed plant species. Therefore, the selected action will not result in impairment to special status species.

Natural Soundscape

The natural soundscape is another important component of the wilderness character of the eight wilderness areas. Natural soundscapes are a key resource, affecting the apparent naturalness and

opportunities for solitude in the wilderness areas. The eight wilderness areas are relatively quiet in comparison to other portions of Lake Mead National Recreation Area and other regional park units.

The natural soundscape in most portions of the wilderness areas will be minimally affected by the selected action. Some natural soundscapes will be degraded due to visitor use in high use localized areas, such as Boy Scout Canyon: long-term negligible to minor adverse impacts will occur due to the establishment of new designated routes, access points, and a developed camping area, which will help confine users and concentrate user noise in these areas. Overall, these adverse effects will be small in scale, and occur only for short times. In the vast majority of the wilderness areas, the natural soundscape will continue to be maintained most of the time. Therefore, the selected action will not result in impairment to the natural soundscape.

Archeological Resources

Although only an estimated 5% of the wilderness areas have been surveyed for cultural resources, a number of archeological sites have been documented in the wilderness areas. There is generally a high probability of finding prehistoric sites located near water sources (primarily tinajas and other seasonally watered areas).

With the creation of designated routes and increased visitor use in the selected action, such as along routes, in washes, and at specific points of interest, there will be the potential for negligible to minor, permanent impacts on archeological resources from trampling or vandalism. However, directing visitor entry to designated locations that have been cleared for use will lessen the potential for visitor impacts on archeological sites accessible from visitor use areas or routes. In addition, establishing and monitoring wilderness character and visitor use management measures should help prevent adverse impacts from visitors on archeological sites. Archeological site monitoring also will continue as in the past with an emphasis on the prevention of deterioration and the maintenance of sites in good condition. Overall, most of the wilderness areas' archeological resources will not be affected by the selected action. Therefore, the selected action will not result in impairment to archeological resources.

Ethnographic Resources

Ethnographic resources are present in the wilderness areas. These resources are an important element of wilderness character. The Spirit Mountain region in particular is sacred to American Indian peoples. Spirit Mountain and the surrounding canyons have been identified as a traditional cultural property and are listed in the National Register of Historic Places because of its significance to the Yuman speaking tribes. This area is still sacred to the members of these tribes and they continue to use the area according to their traditions. Other potential ethnographic resources include components of a traditional trail system that some Yuman tribes continue to travel to places such as Spirit Mountain and Grapevine Canyon for ceremonial purposes.

Ethnographic resources in the wilderness areas may be affected by the removal of some fixed climbing anchors in the selected action. Depending on site-specific characteristics of rock faces, removals may have a minor adverse impact due to scarring that could occur during the removal process. In addition, increased day use visitation within the Spirit Mountain Wilderness in the selected action will cause some negligible to minor adverse impacts. These impacts will not impact the national register listing. Moreover, the placement of informational signs and kiosks in various locations such as at trailheads, access points, and parking areas outside of the wilderness boundaries, will help educate users and help minimize adverse impacts from visitor use, resulting in overall beneficial impacts to ethnographic resources; and the Spirit Mountain traditional cultural property in particular. Therefore, the selected action will not result in impairment to ethnographic resources.