

Middle Gila Canyons Workshop 1

MEETING NOTES

Opening/Welcome from Larry Fisher, including participant introductions

Introduction of the U.S. Institute, Larry Fisher.

Overview of the Travel Management Process, Francisco Mendoza & John Windes

Presentation included an overview of plan elements and requirements, as well as an overview of route designation criteria. The presentation also offered an overview of the three alternatives developed by the MGCP, as well as an explanation of the development of Map 4..

Questions from participants:

Question 1: Back when this map was formed, some may have agreed that a road was to be used for administrative use only. On Map 4, these routes are shown in green, which indicates they are open, which would mean that the public has access to them. How are we differentiating these administrative access roads from public routes?

Answer 1: These instances do need to be indicated in the route designation, as long as it is the most appropriate designation for long-term use. There are not many; we think there are about two routes that may have been given this designation in the MGCP alternatives, but we need to come up with a way to display them.

I am not sure if there is consensus on these routes - whether they are motorized or non-motorized. They could be marked as pending routes on the map for now. We will need to search/sort/query the database to identify these routes. These routes are still open for discussion.

Question 2: Are all the routes shown on Map 4 existing routes in the query?

Answer 2: Yes, there are no new proposed construction routes. The MGCP alternatives indicated several routes for new construction or reopening reclaimed routes, to provide connections or loops

Question 3: In this process are we going to identify public access routes that bring us to the BLM land?

Answer 3: Those are identified, but we will go through these and affirm them.

Question 4: Back in our original planning with the MGCP, we were instructed that we could not leave certain routes open. Now, we don't know what those routes are. What do we do about this?

Also, not all opinions were included in the three alternatives. I'm not sure how we can reach any consensus on this, when these maps were not agreed upon in the first place. Now in this process, people can come in late and make decisions. I just don't know how this can be a fair process.

Answer 4: This is the time for final input on the preferred alternative to go forward with in the planning process. All the routes are open for discussion. The work that MGCP did is foundational to the process, but the credibility was questioned because of certain interests not being represented. A lot of time and energy was put into these maps by the MGCP and now there is an opportunity to move forward. We are going to do the best we can, and get final input from everybody on the recommendation to BLM. We will be using Map 4 as a starting point, and now we will see where the points of agreement and disagreement are on these maps. Until it has been signed off on by the BLM, there is a chance to reinforce opinions, and an opportunity to reach new points of consensus.

The proposed action will be adopted after the preliminary designations for the preferred alternative are finalized, and after the environmental assessment is prepared, it will be available for comments for 30 days. There is an opportunity to comment at that time, and if people are still unhappy with the decision, there are more opportunities to appeal and even litigate the decision.

Question 5: Certain routes in Cottonwood Canyon, Lower Woodpecker, and the petroglyph sites, are shown as closed on the map. What is the status of these routes?

Answer 5: Certain routes, such as Jawbreaker Trail in Martinez Canyon, were identified as closed by the BLM in the preliminary designation on Map 4. In this case, there are a lot of riparian issues and there was no agreement on this route in the MGCP report. These routes are preliminarily set as closed, but we can revisit them.

Question 6: If everyone was not in agreement, why would the BLM just redesignate these behind closed doors? They should be marked as undecided. There are no emergency closures, so there is no reason why the BLM should have done this. What's the point of the process if the BLM is just going to make their own decisions behind closed doors?

Answer 6: BLM will be making the final decision. That specific route (Jawbreaker) was never open. Whatever designations have seemingly been made, are now open for discussion.

Comment 1: Jawbreaker trail WAS open at one time...not true that it was always closed.

Comment 2: It is inevitable that mistakes will be made in this process, and until we get to the final decision no decisions have been made. What we looking for today is to highlight

all the areas/routes you agree with and disagree with. Again, after the report comes out there will be still be opportunities to comment and influence the decision in a positive way.

Comment 2: Lower Woodpecker was shown as closed at the last meeting. We were there last weekend and it looks like its going to be closed. If they are closing it, BLM should just be honest on what they are going to close, and not waste our time.

Question 7: As far as reclaimed routes, were some of those identified in the MGCP?

Answer 7: Yes, they are included in the route inventory.

Question 8: If a road has been washed out, will that now be maintained? There is a difference between looking at the map and being physically out there.

Answer 8: This is true, and we will just have to deal with this as we go along.

Group Discussions of Map 4: Identifying Overarching issues, Areas of Agreement, and Areas of Concern/Disagreement

GROUP 1 (yellow/green)

Overarching issues

- Old mining claims/new claims
- Ranching
- Good area for OHV-close to many different areas
- Playground for PHX
- Cultural-petroglyphs
 - Modern too
- Riparian Areas-different types
- Diverse Recreation
 - Hiking
 - OHV
 - Backpacking
 - Birding/horseback
- Railroad across Gila, maybe recreation in future
- Wilderness areas
 - Prized by backpackers and hikers
 - proposed mine close to wilderness area
 - maybe expand wilderness
 - additional unroaded areas
- Wildlife Values
 - Hunting and other recreation, conflict with OHV, fragmenting the wildlife area
- Development

- Future expansion of use
- Shooting facilities
- Habitat conservation
- Areas open for OHV
- Intensity of OHV use, increasing population
 - Closing areas increases intensity in open areas
- Increased population
 - increased population of off highway
- Working with State Land Department
- Provide recreation for OHV
 - PM10-Dust
 - this is outside PM-10
 - Shutting down areas in PM-10
 - priority for OHV
 - Maricopa Co. not meeting standards
- Enforcement

General areas of agreement

- Designated wilderness
- ASARCO-owned private land
- Cottonwood road is point of entry
- Mineral Mountain road is point of entry
- Price road as point of entry
- Whitlow ranch road as point of entry
- Whole area is beautiful
- Battle Axe access
- Forest Service road 4 access
- There are old mining leftovers in Martinez Canyon
- There is something that appears to be petroglyphs in Martinez Canyon

General areas of disagreement

- Martinez Canyon
 - Don't close
 - Open to 4WD all times of year no limits
 - Want closed, fish, riparian, wildlife, erosion ,birds, water quality, vegetation cutting and trampling
- Petroglyph at Woodpecker
- Whether Jawbreaker is currently closed to motor vehicles
- Roadless areas
- Large yellow areas with lots of roads, duplicate roads
- Box Canyon left open- other roads that need to be addressed in the area
- Roadless areas/ "Quiet area"
- Golden Mine area
- Some areas could be seasonally closed for wildlife

Comment: Interesting that they noted the “quiet area” (Grayback Mountain)

GROUP 2 (blue/silver)

Overarching issues

- Wilderness concerns (White Canyon)
- Growth of ATV use in the Battle Axe area
- Preserve existing opportunities
 - Mineral Mountain township
 - These trails are “difficult” and are highly desired, some mixed difficulty
- Fragmentation of wildlife habitat/Redundancy
- Wildlife Concerns
 - Road densities
 - Species “needs”
 - Use of dry washes as routes
- Camping Opportunities
- Riparian-Walnut canyon, Martinez, Gila river
- South of River, high use of OHV, off trails
- Interface with trails (Non Motorized), (Arizona Trail) and roads (motorized trails)
- Overall growth in the area
 - Avoid conflicting uses with area population growth
 - Area is not remote due to growth
- Air Quality
- Martinez Canyon Area-Riparian, scenery, roads, private property
- Equity for hiking as a % of total area route mileage, and non-motorized bikes. OHV % is much higher
- Access for Hunting
- Segregating types of use
 - ATVs only or none/non motorized
 - Different kinds of impacts
- Need managed ATV play area
- Enforcement
- Lack of hiking, equestrian, bike trails

General areas of agreement

- White Canyon Wilderness area
- Play areas for ATV near CAP in SW corner of planning area
- Main access entrances-Mineral Mountain, Cottonwood, Price, Sandman Rd., Road 4, Whitlow ranch road, Battle Axe rd, Cochran Rd, Tower Rd and Diversion Dam Rd
- Agreement that all green roads should be open as shown on preliminary designations in Map 4, EXCEPT Martinez canyon
 - green roads in Martinez Canyon should have some specifications such as admin access, permitted access, private landowners access (understanding that there are mitigation measures that need to be determined)

- Linear disturbances and reclaiming routes will be designated for restoration w/ specific exceptions, case by case

General areas of concern

- Road density in Mineral Mountain township (high priority)
 - How many?
 - Which ones?
- Whitlow Ranch (on southern area of map) - Road proliferation (medium priority)
 - lot of redundancy
 - opportunities for OHV play areas
- Battle Axe Area – Management, uses, and conflicts (high priority)
 - increasing and conflicting uses
- Box Canyon - Amount and type of use (high priority)
 - cut down on congestion, better management
- Jaw Breaker - NO Agreement (high priority)
- Martinez Canyon - Agreed open through permit (high priority)
 - types of access
- Gila river - ATV/boat limitations (high priority)
 - Motorized uses?
 - Use when it is dry and wet
 - Endangered fish

Comment: As far as the dearth of non-motorized trails, the Arizona trail supports bicycles. Many motorized trails with little traffic could also be used.

Response: The issue here is that the percentage is off. There is a time and place for some of these uses. Some uses are not compatible. We are basically talking about there being no designated hiking (non-motorized) trails.

Comment: It is pretty significant that they agreed on all the green routes. Admin use routes should really be shown as red. This map is for the public, and these roads cannot be shown as open to the public, but truly be restricted.

Comment: We need more colors to show different types of “limited use” routes.

Comment: Air quality is a big issue

GROUP 3 (red/black)

Overarching issues

- Law enforcement
 - Rancher has experience with this - without enforcement the best plan might not work.
- Definition of roads are different between agencies
- Mitigation should always be attempted prior to closure

- Open areas-not limited, play areas. There need to be more.
 - Should not limit everything, people want to go somewhere remote, or go somewhere and play. This would help prevent wildcat trails.
- Liability, landowners
- Protection of cultural/riparian areas
- Sportsman access
- Volunteer groups-wildcat closures
- Restricted access where appropriate, admin access
- Wildlife Concerns

General areas of agreement

- Wilderness Area
- Box Canyon (green routes)
- Red Mountain area –Battle Axe Road, closed route
- SW Corner-agree with all current lines

General areas of concern

- East of Spine (medium priority)
- Martinez Canyon (high priority)
 - Open route is incorrect, riparian issues
 - Bighorn sheep
 - Mitigation
- Cottonwood Canyon (high priority)
 - Closures
 - Cultural-protection vs. access
- Gila River
 - Has not been addressed, not inventoried as a route.
 - Boat traffic and motorized use in a riparian area
 - Access to dry river bed
- White Canyon ACEC
 - Bighorn sheep
 - Riparian
- N.S Butte
 - Bighorn sheep access, gap in between areas
- Cochran (medium priority)
 - Routes open/closed
 - Hunters
 - Scenic view
 - Erosion
- Jawbreaker
 - Did not know how to address this because of unclear designation
 - Open/closed

Comment: Where were bighorn sheep first introduced? Where have they migrated? The point is to say they have migrated within close parameters of OHV users and other users, and that we are compatible with the bighorn sheep.

Comment: We have to be careful not to close too much, because it causes more impacts on the few open trails. Then we would have to worry about mitigation. Also, we have to have enforcement.

Synthesis of Group Discussions

(The responses from each of the three discussion groups were clustered to show points of concurrence among all three groups. Each area of concern was also designated by participants in order of priority – high, medium, or low. This ranking offered a reflection of the participants’ views about the their importance for each issue to be discussed in the collaborative process)

General Areas of Agreement

- White Canyon Wilderness Area
- Access Points
- Green line in Box Canyon

General Areas of Disagreement

- 1) Martinez Canyon-high
- 2) Jawbreaker-high
- 3) Gila River-high
- 4) Box Canyon-high
- 5) Cottonwood Canyon, Woodpecker, Petroglyph-high
- 6) Mineral Mountain Area -high
- 7) Battle Axe-medium
- 8) Whitlow Ranch-medium

These eight highest priority areas of disagreement will be discussed during the next meeting, as time allows.

Question 9: What about “blue” routes that are not in these high priority areas? When can we discuss these?

Answer 9: It is agreed among the group, that we will get to this group of blue routes after addressing the high priority areas, depending on time.

Comment: Some people have only seen these routes on a map, and have not actually seen the area. It is frustrating to work with people who want to make decisions based solely on a map. I encourage everyone to go out to the area and experience it, if possible, sometime before the next meeting.

Information needed for the next meeting, as indicated by the group.

1) BLM will identify routes where the MGCP alternatives suggested they be identified as 'permitted user only' or 'administrative use only'" and provide that info before the next meeting.

2) BLM will provide a list of known issues in Martinez Canyon and other high priority areas. It would be good to have the specific route analysis in these areas and the conclusions.

Recorded and submitted by Kimberly Caringer
March 15, 2007