Estabishment of the Ironwood Forest National Monument

The landscape of the Ironwood Forest National Monument is swathed with the rich, drought-adapted vegetation of the Sonoran Desert. The monument contains objects of scientific interest throughout its desert environment. Stands of ironwood, palo verde, and saguaro blanket the monument floor beneath the rugged mountain ranges, including the Silver Bell Mountains. Ragged Top Mountain is a biological and geological crown jewel amid the depositional plains in the monument.

The monument presents a quintessential view of the Sonoran Desert with ancient legume and cactus forests. The geologic and topographic variability of the monument contributes to the area's high biological diversity. Ironwoods, which can live in excess of 800 years, generate a chain of influences on associated understory plants, affecting their dispersal, germination, establishment, and rates of growth. Ironwood is the dominant nurse plant in this region, and the Silver Bell Mountains support the highest density of ironwood trees recorded in the Sonoran Desert. Ironwood trees provide, among other things, roosting sites for hawks and owls, forage for desert bighorn sheep, protection for saguaro against freezing, burrows for tortoises, flowers for native bees, dense canopy for nesting of white-winged doves and other birds, and protection against sunburn for night blooming cereus.

The ironwood-bursage habitat in the Silver Bell Mountains is associated with more than 674 species, including 64 mammalian and 57 bird species. Within the Sonoran Desert, Ragged Top Mountain contains the greatest richness of species. The monument is home to species federally listed as threatened or endangered, including the Nichols turk's head cactus and the lesser long-nosed bat, and contains historic and potential habitat for the cactus ferruginous pygmy-owl. The desert bighorn sheep in the monument may be the last viable population indigenous to the Tucson basin.

In addition to the biological and geological resources, the area holds abundant rock art sites and other archeological objects of scientific interest. Humans have inhabited the area for more than 5,000 years. More than 200 sites from the prehistoric Hohokam period (600 A.D. to 1450 A.D.) have been recorded in the area. Two areas within the monument have been listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Los Robles Archeological District and the Cocoraque Butte Archeological District. The archeological artifacts include rhyolite and brown chert chipped stone, plain and decorated ceramics, and worked shell from the Gulf of California. The area also contains the remnants of the Mission Santa Ana, the last mission constructed in Pimeria Alta.

Section 2 of the Act of June 8, 1906 (34 Stat. 225, 16 U.S.C. 431), authorizes the President, in his discretion, to declare by public proclamation historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest that are situated upon the lands owned or controlled by the Government of the United States to be national monuments, and to reserve as a part thereof parcels of land, the limits of which in all cases shall be confined to the smallest area compatible with the proper care and management of the objects to be protected.
WHEREAS it appears that it would be in the public interest to reserve such lands as a national monument to be known as the Ironwood Forest National Monument:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, WILLIAM J. CLINTON, President of the United States of America, by the authority vested in me by section 2 of the Act of June 8, 1906 (34 Stat. 225, 16 U.S.C. 431), do proclaim that there are hereby set apart and reserved as the Ironwood Forest National Monument, for the purpose of protecting the objects identified above, all lands and interests in lands owned or controlled by the United States within the boundaries of the area described on the map entitled "Ironwood Forest National Monument" attached to and forming a part of this proclamation. The Federal land and interests in land reserved consist of approximately 128,917 acres, which is the smallest area compatible with the proper care and management of the objects to be protected.

All Federal lands and interests in lands within the boundaries of this monument are hereby appropriated and withdrawn from all forms of entry, location, selection, sale, or leasing or other disposition under the public land laws, including but not limited to withdrawal from location, entry, and patent under the mining laws, and from disposition under all laws relating to mineral and geothermal leasing, other than by exchange that furthers the protective purposes of the monument.

For the purpose of protecting the objects identified above, the Secretary of the Interior shall prohibit all motorized and mechanized vehicle use off road, except for emergency or authorized administrative purposes.

Lands and interests in lands within the proposed monument not owned by the United States shall be reserved as a part of the monument upon acquisition of title thereto by the United States.

The Secretary of the Interior shall manage the monument through the Bureau of Land Management, pursuant to applicable legal authorities, to implement the purposes of this proclamation.

The Secretary of the Interior shall prepare a transportation plan that addresses the actions, including road closures or travel restrictions, necessary to protect the objects identified in this proclamation.

The establishment of this monument is subject to valid existing rights.

Nothing in this proclamation shall be deemed to enlarge or diminish the jurisdiction of the State of Arizona with respect to fish and wildlife management.

This proclamation does not reserve water as a matter of Federal law. Nothing in this reservation shall be construed as a relinquishment or reduction of any water use or rights reserved or appropriated by the United States on or before the date of this proclamation. The Bureau of Land Management shall work with appropriate State authorities to ensure that any water resources needed for monument purposes are available.

Nothing in this proclamation shall be deemed to enlarge or diminish the rights of any Indian tribe.
Laws, regulations, and policies followed by the Bureau of Land Management in issuing and administering grazing permits or leases on all lands under its jurisdiction shall continue to apply with regard to the lands in the monument.

Nothing in this proclamation shall be deemed to revoke any existing withdrawal, reservation, or appropriation; however, the national monument shall be the dominant reservation.

Warning is hereby given to all unauthorized persons not to appropriate, injure, destroy, or remove any feature of this monument and not to locate or settle upon any of the lands thereof.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this ninth day of June, in the year of our Lord two thousand, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-fourth.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

Ironwood Forest National Monument


ACTION: Notice of Intent to (1) prepare a Resource Management Plan (RMP) for the Ironwood Forest National Monument, designated on June 9, 2000, and (2) amend the 1989 Phoenix RMP to consider land tenure adjustments in support of the Pima County Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan. These two actions will require a single Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). These lands are located northwest of Tucson in Pima and Pinal Counties, Arizona.

SUMMARY: This document provides notice that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) intends to prepare a RMP for the Ironwood Forest National Monument and an amendment to the Phoenix RMP to consider land tenure adjustments with one EIS prepared for both plans. The plan development will continue and expand the planning approach in the Tucson Field Office, which means working closely with interested parties to identify the management decisions that are best suited to the needs of the public. This collaborative process will take into account local, regional, and national needs and concerns. The planning effort will include the Ironwood Forest National Monument and other lands managed by the Tucson Field Office. The planning effort will fulfill the needs and obligations set forth by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), the National Monument proclamation, and BLM management policies. This notice also initiates the public scoping process to examine issues and develop planning criteria to guide the planning process. Formal scoping will last a minimum of 60 days. The scoping process will include an evaluation of the existing RMP in the context of the needs and interests of the public and protection of the objects of scientific and historic interest in the National Monument.

ADDRESSES: For further information and/or to have your name added to our mailing list, contact Tony Herrell, Telephone 520-258-7203, Bureau of Land Management, Tucson Field Office, 12661 East Broadway, Tucson, Arizona 85748; Fax 520-258-7238. Comments, including names and street addresses of respondents, will be available for public review at the above address during regular business hours 7:45 a.m. to 4:15 p.m., Monday through Friday, except holidays, and may be published as part of the EIS. Individual respondents may request confidentiality. If you wish to withhold your name or street address from public review or from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your written comment. Such requests will be honored to the extent allowed by law.
All submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, will be made available for public inspection in their entirety.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The designation of the Ironwood Forest National Monument and the changing needs and interests of the public necessitate the development of a RMP for the Ironwood Forest National Monument. In addition, the Phoenix RMP will be amended to address land tenure adjustments in support of the Pima County Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan. These two actions require a single EIS. Public meetings will be held throughout the scoping and preparation period. In order to ensure local community participation and input, meeting locations will occur in local communities in the Tucson area, including Marana, Eloy, Casa Grande, and Picture Rocks, as well as in the Phoenix area. At least 15 days public notice will be given for activities where the public is invited to attend. The minutes and list of attendees for each meeting will be available to the public and open for 30 days to any participants who wish to clarify the views they expressed. Written comments will also be accepted throughout the planning process at the address shown above. Meetings and comment deadlines will be announced through the local news media, newsletters and the BLM web site (www.az.blm.gov). Additional opportunities for public participation will be provided through comment on the alternatives and upon publishing the draft RMP/Draft EIS. Documents pertinent to this proposal may be examined at the Tucson Field Office located in Tucson, Arizona. Early participation by all those interested is encouraged and will help determine the future management of the Ironwood Forest National Monument.

Preliminary issues and management concerns have been identified by BLM personnel and other agencies and in meetings with individuals and user groups. They represent BLM's knowledge to date on the existing issues and concerns with current management. The major issue themes that will be addressed in the plan effort are: Management and protection of Monument resources; appropriate scientific research activities; visitor use and safety; identification of protection measures for cultural resources, sensitive plant and animal species and other special resources; public access and transportation within the Monument; commercial and industrial uses; integrating Monument management with tribal, other agency and community needs; and addressing urban interface and land tenure issues. Other issues may be identified by interested parties during the public scoping phase of the planning. After gathering public comments on what issues the plan should address, the suggested issues will be placed in one of three categories:

1. Issues to be resolved in the plan.
2. Issues resolved through policy or administrative action.
3. Issues beyond the scope of this plan.

Rationale will be provided for each issue placed in category 2 or 3. In addition to the preceding major issues, management questions and concerns to be addressed in the plan effort include, but are not limited to: Native American consultation; rangeland management; watershed management; wildlife management; soil, water, and vegetation management; air quality; and hazardous materials. Disciplines corresponding to these issue areas will be represented and used during the planning process. Where necessary, outside expertise may be used.

Background Information: The Ironwood Forest National Monument was created to protect the resources of the Sonoran Desert. The Ironwood Forest National Monument Presidential Proclamation of June 9, 2000, designated about 129,068 acres of land in Pima and Pinal Counties, Arizona, managed by the BLM as the Ironwood Forest National Monument.
Before designation, management of the area was guided by the Phoenix RMP, completed in 1989. Previously completed wildlife habitat plans, such as the Silverbell Habitat Management Plan, allotment management plans, as well as other activity level plans provide specific management direction and actions on lands within and immediately adjacent to the Ironwood Forest National Monument. As these plans address many significant issues, those decisions that are still valid will be incorporated into the new plan. Pima County, in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and with the unanimous endorsement of the Board of Supervisors, spearheaded the planning effort that addressed growth issues in the county, largely related to construction delays because of the identification of threatened and endangered species. This local, collaborative effort involved all interested parties in developing the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan. This collaborative approach will continue to be used in the planning for the Ironwood Forest National Monument. Among the management prescriptions included in the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan are the identification of lands critical to threatened and endangered species throughout Pima County, including the recommendation to designate the Ironwood Forest National Monument.

Elaine Marquis-Brong,
Director, National Landscape Conservation System, Bureau of Land Management.
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