

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
NEEDLES FIELD OFFICE

PRELIMINARY FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Camp Ibis Engineering Evaluation/Cost Analysis
CA-690-EA02-05

Proposed Action:

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE) has requested the issuance of a Temporary Use Permit to conduct an Engineering Evaluation/Cost Analysis (EE/CA) of former Camp Ibis, located in eastern Piute Valley and the western Dead Mountains, San Bernardino County, California. Camp Ibis was a divisional camp associated with the Desert Training Center/California-Arizona Maneuver Area activities conducted from 1942 to 1944 under the command of General George S. Patton Jr. The EE/CA would statistically characterize the nature, location and concentration of residual ordnance and explosives, if any, that may be present within the Camp as a result of former military training activities. The EE/CA study would randomly sample 3,000 magnetic anomalies detected in about 100 acres out of the Camp's roughly 13,400 acre total. Up to 50 explosive projectiles would be detonated in place, should any be found during the project. The greatest probable surface disturbance associated with these activities is estimated to be less than 0.1 acres.

Preliminary Finding of No Significant Impact:

The proposed action, as analyzed in the attached Environmental Assessment CA-690-02-05, is not a major federal action, as defined in Title 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1508.18, and will have no significant impacts on the human environment; therefore preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) pursuant to Title 40 CFR 1508.13 is not required.

Rationale for Finding of No Significant Impact:

The primary purpose for conducting an environmental assessment is to determine whether or not a proposed action will have a significant impact on the human environment and therefore will require the preparation of an EIS. As defined in 40 CFR 1508.13, the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is a document that briefly presents the reasons why an action will not have significant effect on the human environment. The regulations further define the term "significantly" in 40 CFR 1508.27 and require that the context and intensity of impacts be considered in analyzing significance. The following provides an analysis of the significance of impacts of the

proposed Camp Ibis EE/CA study in terms of context and intensity as defined in the regulations.

“a) Context. This means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human, national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. For instance, in the case of a site-specific action, significance would usually depend upon the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole. Both short-term and long-term effects are relevant”. (40 CFR 1508.27(a))

Because the Camp Ibis EE/CA project is site-specific, the context for evaluating the significance of the effects is primarily the immediate locale. The project is located in eastern Piute Valley and the western Dead Mountains. The analysis focuses on the effects of the proposed action in the immediate vicinity the former military camp. Effects are also considered in the broader contexts of the threatened desert tortoise and Dead Mountain Wilderness. Based on site-specific, threatened species and wilderness impacts identified in the environmental assessment, it has been determined that, in terms of context, the effects of the proposed actions are not significant either in the immediate vicinity of the proposed action nor in the broader region of desert tortoise habitat or the Dead Mountains Wilderness. There are also no significant impacts to society as a whole or to affected interests as a result of these proposed projects.

“(b) Intensity. This refers to the severity of impact. Responsible officials must bear in mind that more than one agency may make decisions about partial aspects of a major action. The following should be considered in evaluating intensity:” (40 CFR 1508.27(b))

“(1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on balance the effect will be beneficial.” (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(1))

Impacts of the proposed action are anticipated to be beneficial to future management of the project area. The benefit lies in determining if there are potential hazards, identifying and analyzing any possible problems that may be caused by the presence of unexploded ordnance (UXO), and evaluating methods to manage the risks. Based on a review of the impacts identified in the environmental assessment, adverse effects of the proposed action have been found to be non-significant.

“(2) The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.” (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(2))

As indicated in the environmental assessment, there are some health and safety concerns related to public access to the project area during implementation of phase 3's intrusive investigation of possible UXO. The remote location, difficult access, and potential for UXO detonation, both intended as well as unintended, may lead to possible injuries and difficulty in securing prompt medical aid. However, protocols for project

safety are comprehensively addressed in the EE/CA Final Work Plan and the public's safety would be ensured by establishing a limited closure during implementation of phase 3. By incorporating these health and safety measures, it has been determined that the degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety has been minimized and such effects are not significant.

“(3) Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.” (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(3))

The proposed action is located within the Dead Mountains Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), Camp Ibis Divisional Camp and Dead Mountains Wilderness. The environmental assessment identifies the impacts of EE/CA field studies on ACEC, cultural resource and wilderness values. The project would occur within a historic military camp and other historic and prehistoric resources may occur in the project area. However, all cultural resources within the project area, previously recorded and newly identified cultural resources, will be avoided by project design with the exception of World War II related UXO requiring detonation. Detonation of WWII ordnance is an Exempt Undertaking pursuant to the State Protocol Agreement (1988) between the BLM – California and the California State Historic Preservation Officer, Appendix C: General Program Exemption 9 (hazards abatement). The Dead Mountains ACEC is associated with Native American values of cultural and religious importance. However, consultation with the Fort Mojave Indian Tribe, Chemehuevi Indian Tribe and Colorado River Indian Tribes revealed no known Native American sacred or traditional values located within the boundaries of the proposed study area. The project activities will have a minimal short term impact on naturalness and opportunities for solitude in the wilderness area. However, the anticipated results would leave the wilderness such that it “generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable;” (The Wilderness Act of 1964). Based on a review of the environmental assessment, it has been determined that there will be no significant impacts to ecologically critical area, cultural resource or wilderness values as a result of the proposed action. There are no other unique characteristics of the geographic area that are affected by the proposed action.

“(4) The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.” (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(4))

A Notice of Proposed Action was mailed to 75 members of the public and other agencies. The notice generated one response from an environmental group. While the respondent raised public safety concerns with the former military camp, no issues related to the proposed EE/CA project were identified. Three Indian tribes were also consulted. The tribes identified no concerns with the proposed project. Based on a review of the tribal and public comments, it has been determined that the project is not considered highly controversial.

“(5) The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.” (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(5))

The remote location, difficult access, and potential for UXO detonation, both intended as well as unintended, may lead to possible injuries and difficulty in securing prompt medical aid. However, protocols for project safety are comprehensively addressed in the EE/CA Final Work Plan. It has been determined, therefore, that the extent and degree of uncertainty regarding impacts or unique or unknown risks is not sufficient to warrant the preparation of an EIS.

“(6) The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration” (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(6))

and

“(7) Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. Significance exists if it is reasonable to anticipate a cumulatively significant impact on the environment. Significance cannot be avoided by terming an action temporary or by breaking it down into small component parts.” (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(7))

This action will not establish a precedent and does not represent a decision in principle about any future consideration. This study will help characterize the type, location and amount of UXO that may be present within the camp. Results of the study will be used to help determine if there are potential hazards, identify and analyze any possible problems that may be caused by the presence of UXO, and evaluate methods to manage the risks. The extent to which the camp may harbor UXO is currently unknown and therefore methods to manage any risks associated with UXO have not been established.

“(8) The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources” (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(8))

Cultural resources within the project area, previously recorded and newly identified cultural resources, will be avoided by project design. Consultation with the Fort Mojave Indian Tribe, Chemehuevi Indian Tribe and Colorado River Indian Tribes revealed no known Native American sacred or traditional values located within the boundaries of the proposed study area.

“(9) The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973” (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(9))

The proposed undertaking would occur within desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) critical habitat. The species is listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. After reviewing the current status of the desert tortoise, the environmental baseline for the action area, the effects of the proposed project activities, and the cumulative effects, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued its biological opinion that the action, as proposed, is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the desert tortoise or adversely modify designated critical habitat.

“(10) Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment” (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(10))

The proposed action is consistent with all Federal, State and local laws.