



UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
ECOLOGICAL SERVICES
3616 W. Thomas, Suite 6
Phoenix, Arizona 85019

2-21-89-F-069

September 14, 1989

MEMORANDUM

TO: Area Manager, Kingman Resource Area, Bureau of Land
Management, Kingman, Arizona

FROM: Field Supervisor

SUBJECT: ^{ACTING} Biological Opinion on the Proposed Cliffrose Exclosure at Burro
Creek, Mohave County, Arizona

This biological opinion is our response to your March 21, 1989 request to initiate formal consultation pursuant to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (as amended) (Act) and supercedes the biological opinion issued on April 27, 1989. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is proposing to construct a fence to exclude cattle and burros from the Arizona cliffrose (Purshia subintegra) population at Burro Creek, Mohave County. The consultation period began on March 22, 1989, the date your request was received in our Phoenix Ecological Services Field Office.

BIOLOGICAL OPINION

It is my biological opinion that constructing the exclosure as proposed in the BLM's March 21, 1989 Environmental Assessment (EA AZ-020-88-65) of the BLM is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of Arizona cliffrose. We believe that the project will increase the protection afforded Arizona cliffrose and promote its conservation.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Arizona cliffrose was added to the endangered species list on May 29, 1984. The species is known from four widely scattered localities on the northern edge of the Sonoran Desert in basins of the Transition Zone geologic province. All known populations occur on limy-tuff soils derived from Tertiary freshwater lakebed deposits on low, arid hillsides between 2050 to 3400 feet elevation. The BLM has estimated that the Burro Creek (Mohave County, Arizona) population contains several thousand plants. Arizona cliffrose, a palatable and preferred browse species, is threatened by browsing by wildlife and domestic and feral livestock. Other threats include mining activities, powerlines, natural gas pipelines, off-road vehicle use, and construction and maintenance of roads.

To assess the effects of browsing on Arizona cliffrose, the BLM established a monitoring program at Burro Creek in 1984. A number of cliffrose plants were caged to prevent browsing and the productivity of caged plants compared with the productivity of uncaged plants. The data (unpublished) that has been collected annually since 1984 has indicated that a combination of cattle, mule deer, and burros are browsing the plants and that this browsing was affecting the form class of plants. The environmental assessment states that in 1987, 48.5% of the plants monitored in one plot were in the severe form class and 38.5% were in the moderate form class. The monitoring data and other observations indicated that by excluding cattle and burros from the population, overall utilization could be significantly reduced.

The current proposed fencing project would achieve the goal of excluding cattle and burros from occupied habitat of Arizona cliffrose near Burro Creek and reducing browsing there. The proposed fence will be located in Township 14N, Range 11W, Sections 1, 2, 11, and 12. The majority of land contained within the fence (approximately 1 square mile) is occupied by or is potential habitat for Arizona cliffrose.

The biological evaluation states that the fence will meet the following specifications. The fence posts will be at least 6 feet high. The four strands of wire will be placed (from the ground up) at 16, 24, 30, and 42 inches. The bottom strand of wire will be smooth to allow for the safe passage through the fence by mule deer. If the fence does not adequately exclude burros, a taller fence may be constructed. Gates on each side of the enclosure will be constructed to allow access by horseback to remove burros or livestock that may get inside the enclosure and also to allow access to the powerline and gas pipeline road. No new roads will be constructed during the construction of the fence.

IMPACTS OF THE ACTION

We believe that excluding burros and cattle will beneficially affect the species by reducing/eliminating utilization by non-native animals (cattle and burros). Reducing browsing is likely to increase plant productivity and allow plants to return to their natural form. Recruitment may increase due to increased plant vigor, increased number of flowers reaching maturity, increased seed set, and less habitat disturbance.

The BLM has surveyed and flagged the fence line and has determined that the construction of the fence will not destroy or damage any cliffrose plants. The BLM plans to have a biologist accompany the field crew to ensure that the crew follows the flagged line and does not drive vehicles through the habitat or otherwise damage plants while constructing the fence.

CONSERVATION RECOMMENDATIONS

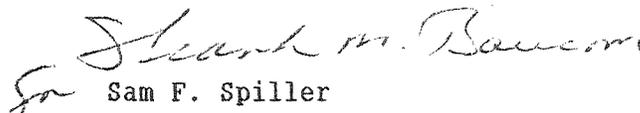
Section 7(a)(1) of the Act directs Federal agencies to use their authorities to further the purposes of the Act by carrying out conservation programs for the benefit of endangered and threatened species. The term "conservation recommendations" has been defined as suggestions of the Service regarding discretionary measures to minimize or avoid adverse effects of a proposed action on listed species or critical habitat or regarding the development of information.

We recommend that the BLM remove cattle and burros from inside the enclosure when the fence is completed. Although the environmental assessment does not state whether this action will occur, we believe that the assessment implies that it will. If not removed, the cattle and burros inside the enclosure will reduce the beneficial effect of this project.

We recommend that the current monitoring project continue for at least another two years to assess the effects of the enclosure.

This biological opinion concludes formal consultation on this action. Reinitiation of formal consultation is required if new information reveals effects of the action that may affect listed species or critical habitat in a manner or extent not considered in this opinion, if the action is subsequently modified in a manner that causes an effect to the listed species or critical habitat that was not considered in this opinion, and/or if a new species is listed or critical habitat designated that may be affected by the action.

The Fish and Wildlife Service appreciates the active interest and dedication of the BLM in conserving this species and its habitat. If we may be of further assistance, please contact Sue Rutman or me (Telephone: 602/261-4720 or FTS 261-4720).


 for Sam F. Spiller

cc: Regional Director, Fish and Wildlife Service, Albuquerque, New Mexico
 (FWE/HC)
 District Manager, Phoenix District Office, Bureau of Land Management,
 Phoenix, Arizona
 State Director, Arizona State Office, Bureau of Land Management,
 Phoenix, Arizona
 Director, Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C. (EHC)