

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



March 2004

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument · Border Enforcement Activities · Pima County, Arizona

Introduction

The National Park Service (NPS) is reviewing actions proposed by the Border Patrol to protect the United States/Mexico border along Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument (NM). Organ Pipe Cactus NM was established to protect the life and landscape of the Sonoran Desert in southwestern Arizona. About 94% of the monument is federally designated wilderness and its unique setting is home to threatened and endangered species such as the Cactus ferruginous pygmy-owl, the Lesser long-nosed bat, and the Sonoran pronghorn. The monument shares 30 miles of international border with Mexico. The Office of Border Patrol, Bureau of Customs and Border Protection (CBP) (under the Directorate of Border and Transportation Security, Department of Homeland Security) operational goal is to gain greater control of the Arizona border and support of the priority mission of anti-terrorism, detection, arrest and deterrence of all cross-border illicit trafficking. Since the late 1990s, the monument has become an increasingly popular border crossing for drug smugglers and undocumented aliens. The Border Patrol estimated that 500 people per day (180,000 per year) and 700,000 pounds of drugs entered the US illegally through the monument in the year 2000. To help counter such activities, various protection/apprehension methods have been implemented, including remote cameras and sensors, increased patrols, and a vehicle barrier fence along the U.S./Mexican border throughout the entire length of the monument (under construction).

Proposal

In order to meet their operational goal, the CBP Office of Border Patrol would like increased access to the monument's backcountry and to conduct activities that have not been permitted in the past. The CBP Office of Border Patrol would like access to designated wilderness to control illegal activities such as drug smuggling and illegal entry by undocumented aliens. The Border Patrol would like to accomplish this goal through

- the establishment of 4 new east-west roads across the monument to control north-south illegal activity
- unlimited backcountry patrol by horseback
- the establishment of two backcountry camps
- the installation of remote surveillance equipment in key areas
- authorized use of off road vehicles on illegally established roads and trails
- authorized cross-country use of off-road motorcycles throughout the monument

Proposed activities outside of designated wilderness include

- the establishment of an all-weather road along the length of the border on NPS lands
- establishment of a dirt road adjacent to the all weather road to identify fresh tracks and track illegal entry into the monument
- the use of a night vision scope on and an improved road to the top of Monument Hill

The National Park Service would like to explore the impacts associated with these proposed actions collectively in a Border Strategy Analysis/Environmental Assessment. As part of the process to evaluate impacts to designated wilderness lands, the NPS will also be determining a minimum requirements or "minimum tool" process that will identify what tool/action/method would minimize negative impacts to wilderness lands, character and values while meeting the mission of both the Border Patrol and the NPS.

An important element of this process is public participation. Therefore, your input on issues and concerns about the proposal is needed. This notice describes the proposal and provides an opportunity for you to comment. As the superintendent of Organ Pipe Cactus NM, I invite you to participate in this scoping process.

Sincerely,

Lisa Eckert, Acting Superintendent

Overview of the Process

Project milestones include:

- Public scoping period **closes April 20, 2004**
- Preparation of environmental assessment
- Public review of environmental assessment
- Analysis of public comment
- Preparation of decision document

Resources and Concerns

Initial internal project scoping identified the following resources and other concerns for consideration in the environmental assessment (EA).

<i>Air quality</i>	<i>Cultural resources</i>
<i>Geology and soils</i>	<i>Lightscaapes</i>
<i>Water resources</i>	<i>Visitor use</i>
<i>Wilderness</i>	<i>Natural soundscapes</i>
<i>Fish and wildlife</i>	<i>Vegetation</i>
<i>Species of special concern</i>	<i>Park Operations</i>
<i>Viewscapes</i>	

What does the scoping period mean? Scoping is done in the initial phase of a project to seek input from a variety of sources. The input is used to identify issues, areas requiring additional study, and topics that will be analyzed in the EA process. This is an opportunity for you to provide us with your suggestions, comments, and concerns regarding this project at Organ Pipe Cactus.

Is this scoping period my only opportunity to comment on the project? No, once the EA is developed, the document will be made available for public review for a 30-day period. Any additional public involvement, such as public meetings, will be announced at a later date as such information becomes available.

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**Superintendent
Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument
10 Organ Pipe Drive
Ajo, Arizona 85321-9626**