

**United States Department of the Interior**  
**Bureau of Land Management**

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**Environmental Assessment DOI-BLM-CA-D050-2020-25-EA**

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**Finding of No Significant Impact Determination**

**for the**

**Proposed Comprehensive River Management Plan for the Cottonwood Creek  
Wild and Scenic River**

**Inyo County, California**

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## **Finding of No Significant Impact Ridgecrest Field Office**

### **BACKGROUND:**

The Bureau of Land Management has conducted an environmental assessment (EA) (DOI-BLM-CA-D050-2020-0025-EA) to analyze the potential environmental impacts that would result from the Cottonwood Creek Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive River Management Plan (CRMP).

The purpose of this project is to adopt a CRMP for Cottonwood Creek. This proposed CRMP would cover the designated Wild and Scenic River (WSR), which is in the California Desert District. This plan is administrative in nature. Actions proposed include establishing Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs) and protecting free-flow and water quality; delineating a permanent river management boundary; establishing user capacity levels for the river; and establishing a monitoring strategy. The project identifies BLM management actions needed to protect these values, but no on-the-ground actions are specifically authorized at this time.

### **PLAN CONFORMANCE AND CONSISTENCY:**

The proposed authorization is consistent with the California Desert Conservation Area Management Plan of 1980 (CDCA Plan) and its amendments: specifically, these two amendments: the Northern and Eastern Mojave Desert Management Plan (NEMO 2002); and the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP 2016).

This and other plans are publicly available at the California BLM website for land use planning at [EplanningUi \(blm.gov\)](https://www.blm.gov/eplanningui)

### **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT DETERMINATION:**

Based upon a review of the EA (DOI-BLM-CA-D050-2020-0025-EA), I have determined that the Proposed Action would not significantly impact the quality of the human environment individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. The Proposed Action's environmental effects, identified in the environmental assessment, would not be significant and thus preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not warranted.

Since the Project was initiated prior to the September 2020 and subsequent May 2022 revisions to the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ)'s NEPA implementing regulations, the BLM has utilized the requirements set forth in the 1978 CEQ NEPA implementing regulations. The NEPA regulations referenced in the EA and in this FONSI are those in place at the time of Project initiation, in May 2020.

The BLM's finding is based on the potentially affected environment and the degree of effects of the project as described below:

**Context [40 CFR 1508.27(a)]** refers to the suitable scale for analysis. A total of 21.5 miles of Cottonwood Creek is designated as a wild or recreational river. The segment managed by the Forest Service is 17.4 miles long and is classified as wild to the forest boundary.. The segment managed by BLM is 4.1 miles long, and it is classified as recreational. This segment extends from the Forest boundary to the northern boundary of sec. 5, T. 4 S., R. 36 E. (US Congress 2009). BLM segment of Cottonwood Creek, the boundary has been modified to better reflect protection of the scenic viewshed. Thus, in the BLM section, the width of the final boundary varies in places), but overall complies with the average of no more than 320 acres per river mile that is mandated by the Act. The boundary is shown as Figure 1 on page 9 of the EA.

**Intensity [40 CFR 1508.27(b)]** refers to impact severity. The following ten sections refer to the specific conditions/concerns addressed in §1508.27 and document the BLM's impact severity consideration as assessed in the EA. The following have been considered in evaluating intensity for this project:

**1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse**

The Proposed Action will result in long-term beneficial effects to river hydrology through the establishment of a final boundary and capacity thresholds which will help protect water quality and quantity by ensuring public use of the river does not increase uncontrollably. It will also result in beneficial impacts on the river's scenery through the implementation of actions to maintain and improve riparian vegetation and to prevent erosion at riverbanks. Similarly, the Proposed Action will result in long-term indirect beneficial effects to river wildlife and botany through the additional protections afforded by the CRMP; protections such as a final boundary, capacity thresholds, and additional management guidance could prevent disturbance to wildlife in the river corridor and will benefit the conservation of botanical species. Finally, the Proposed Action will have indirect beneficial impacts on recreation in the river corridor because management actions in the CRMP could counteract the negative impacts of overuse along the WSR.

**2) The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety**

The Proposed Action will not adversely affect public health or safety. The approval of a CRMP for this WSR is consistent with long standing land management objectives and actions in this area, such as ensuring riparian vegetation is healthy. This plan does not conflict with other jurisdictional plans or policies.

**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.** This plan would not have a significant impact on the unique characteristics of the Wild and Scenic River, White Mountains Wilderness, and White Mountain Wilderness Study Area ACEC, historic or cultural properties, park lands, farmlands, wetlands or other ecologically critical areas.

**4) The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.**

The Proposed Plan's possible effects on the human environment are not highly controversial. There is no known scientific controversy over the impacts of this plan and that is not the focus of this criterion; the degree of scientific controversy over the effects of the proposed project.

**5) The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.**

The possible effects from implementing the Proposed Action are not unique or unusual. In analyzing the CRMP, the BLM and Forest Service did not identify any unique or uncertain risks to the human environment with its implementation, nor were any brought forward during internal or external scoping. The proposed plan's impact on the quality of the human environment are not highly uncertain and do not involve unique or unknown risks.

**6) The degree to which the action establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.**

The plan does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, nor does it represent a decision in principle about a further consideration outside of those analyzed in the EA. Any future decisions would be considered in a separate analysis with site-specific information available at that time.

**7) Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts**

The EA analyzed the cumulative effects for each resource and no significant adverse cumulative effects were identified for the CRMP when the impacts of this project were considered with all past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions.

**8) The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.**

The Proposed Action is administrative in nature, with no proposed ground disturbance, and would not cause any adverse effects to Historic Properties or cause loss of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. Subsequent plans would continue to be subject to compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act, and other relevant laws protecting heritage resources, including consultation responsibilities.

**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.**

The Proposed plan is not expected to have significant adverse impacts to federally listed, proposed, or BLM sensitive species, as analyzed in the EA. There is no critical habitat within the BLM portions of this project area, however Wild and Scenic River designations and subsequent Plans would offer wildlife habitat benefits through the additional protection of including the riparian vegetation, stream channel, water quality, and natural free flow. As such, sensitive species and habitats would not be adversely affected from this decision.

**10) Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.**

As detailed in the EA, the Proposed Action is not expected to threaten a violation of any federal, state, local, or tribal laws, regulations, or policies.

**CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings discussed herein, I conclude that the Proposed Action (**DOI-BLM-CA-D050-2020-0025**) will result in no significant impacts to the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively and that preparation of an EIS is not required.

Approved by: Thomas Bickauskas  
Thomas Bickauskas  
Ridgecrest Field Manager

April 6, 2023  
Date