

Carrizo Plain National Monument Draft Resource Management Plan And Draft Environmental Impact Statement

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DECEMBER 2008

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

Bakersfield Field Office



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**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT**



**DRAFT
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN
AND
DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT
STATEMENT
CARRIZO PLAIN NATIONAL MONUMENT
BAKERSFIELD, CALIFORNIA**

Prepared by the
Bakersfield Field Office
December 2008

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Pool", written over a horizontal line.

Mike Pool
State Director, California

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United States Department of the Interior



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Dear Reader:

Enclosed for your review and comment is the Draft Resource Management Plan (DRMP) and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM's) Carrizo Plain National Monument. This document was prepared by BLM in concert with one cooperating agency, two managing partners, and the Monument Advisory Committee, as well as from public comments received during the scoping phase of this planning effort. The document contains both land use planning decisions and implementation decisions to provide planning structure to facilitate management of the Carrizo Plain National Monument.

The geographic planning area includes all lands managed by BLM within the boundary of the Carrizo Plain National Monument, which is located in the eastern portion of San Luis Obispo County and also includes small portions of western Kern County. The overall intent of this DRMP is to develop a comprehensive management strategy that will guide the management of the Carrizo Plain National Monument into the future. When finalized, this RMP will replace the Carrizo Plain Natural Area Plan of 1996.

This DRMP and DEIS has been developed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976. This document contains the no action alternative, BLM's preferred alternative, and two additional action alternatives. A Reader's Guide is included to help you navigate through the chapters of this document, and is located directly after the Abstract.

The DRMP/DEIS is available for a 90-day public comment period beginning on the date the Environmental Protection Agency publishes the Notice of Availability of the DEIS in the *Federal Register*. During this period, comments may be submitted using several methods:

Written comments should be sent to:

Carrizo Plain National Monument RMP Comments
Attention: Planning Coordinator
Bureau of Land Management
Bakersfield Field Office
3801 Pegasus Drive
Bakersfield, CA 93308

E-mail comments to:

cacarrizormp@ca.blm.gov

BLM's practice is to make comments, including names and home addresses of respondents, available for public review and disclosure at the above address Monday through Friday, except holidays, during regular business hours (8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.). Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, be advised that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold from public review your personal identifying information, we cannot

guarantee that we will be able to do so. All submissions from organizations and businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations and businesses, will be available for public inspection in their entirety.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION: For further information or to have your name added to the project mailing list, contact Judith Sackett, CPNM Outreach Technician, Bureau of Land Management, 3801 Pegasus Drive, Bakersfield, CA 93308, or email your request to Judith_Sackett@ca.blm.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Copies of the DRMP/DEIS documents for the BLM Carrizo Plain National Monument have been sent to affected federal, state, and local government agencies and to interested parties. Copies of the DRMP/DEIS documents are available for public inspection at the BLM Bakersfield Field Office, 3801 Pegasus Drive, Bakersfield, CA. Interested persons may also review the DRMP/DEIS on the Internet at <http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/bakersfield/Programs/carrizo.html>.

BLM would like to thank the California Department of Fish and Game (our cooperating agency partner and a managing partner), The Nature Conservancy (our other managing partner), and the Monument Advisory Committee members that have worked so hard to help us complete this document. They have provided support and expertise to facilitate focusing the issues and developing alternatives to help resolve the many compelling resource concerns that face the Carrizo Plain National Monument. Their experience and dedication has made this a better process and BLM looks forward to continuing to work with them to complete this planning effort. We also extend thanks to those individuals and organizations that have provided extensive information and many excellent ideas that have been considered during this process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Timothy Z. Smith". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'T' and 'S'.

Timothy Z. Smith
Field Manager
Bakersfield Field Office

**CARRIZO PLAIN NATIONAL MONUMENT
DRAFT RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN / DRAFT
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

[X] Draft Environmental Impact Statement [] Final Environmental Impact Statement

Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management

Type of Action: [X] Administrative [] Legislative

Abstract:

This Draft Resource Management Plan / Draft Environmental Impact Statement describes and analyzes the Preferred Alternative, the no action alternative, and two action alternatives for managing the Carrizo Plain National Monument in California. The Preferred Alternative provides management recommendations to guide the multiple use management of all resources.

Comments:

Comments on this document are requested from all interested and / or affected agencies, organizations, and individuals. Comments must be received within 90 days of the Federal Register notice of availability. Comments being mailed must be postmarked by close of business on the 90th day.

For further information contact:

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Readers' Guide

Introduction

The Carrizo Plain National Monument Draft Resource Management Plan (DRMP) / Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) is divided into six chapters, and includes maps (of the planning area and the alternatives), an Executive Summary, Appendices, a Glossary, and an Acronyms List.

Executive Summary

The Executive Summary addresses the entire document and highlights the key issues brought forth in the planning process.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 identifies the purpose and need for the plan, defines the planning area, and explains public participation in the planning process. This chapter identifies the planning criteria used as guidelines influencing all aspects of the process. These guidelines are based on law, regulation, and policy. Also included in this chapter is a description of the involvement of state, local, and federal governments and tribal agencies. The issues developed through public participation and the planning processes are described therein.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 presents the various management strategies for achieving the desired range of conditions. The DRMP includes a detailed description of the goals, objectives, and management actions for each resource or program that are included in the no action alternative, the preferred alternative, and two action alternatives. The actions in this DRMP / DEIS are designed to provide general management guidance in most cases. Specific projects for a given area or resource will be detailed in future activity plans or site-specific proposals developed as part of interdisciplinary project planning or other means. These plans and processes address more precisely how a particular area or resource is to be managed and additional National Environmental Policy Act analysis and documentation would be conducted as needed.

An *Alternatives Summary Table* is included in this chapter. This table provides the reader a general summary of the key management actions for each of the four alternatives developed for the DRMP.

An *Impacts Summary Table* is also included at the end of Chapter 2. This table provides the reader a comparison summary of the main adverse and beneficial impacts that would result from implementing each of four alternatives that were developed for the DRMP.

Maps are also supplied to assist the reader in comprehending proposed management actions as described in Chapter 2.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 (Affected Environment) provides an overview of the planning area and describes the existing situation for each of the resource programs. It describes both the biological and physical components that may be affected by the alternatives. Other components of the environment that will not be affected by the

proposed actions are also described, such as hazardous materials and solid waste, wild and scenic rivers, and public safety.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 (Environmental Consequences) analyzes the beneficial and adverse effects of each alternative. Assumptions used in the analysis are specified at the beginning of each resource discussion to help guide the reader through the assessment process. At the end of the analysis of each resource, a discussion of the cumulative effects is provided.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 summarizes key events in the consultation and coordination process prior to and during preparation of the DRMP / DEIS. It also lists those agencies, organizations, and individuals who were contacted or provided input into the planning process. Also listed are the document team members who prepared this plan.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 lists the references cited throughout Chapters 1 through 5.

Appendices

The appendices include supplemental material referenced in the DRMP / DEIS.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has prepared this Draft Resource Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS) to provide direction for managing the Carrizo Plain National Monument (CPNM) and to analyze the environmental effects resulting from implementing the preferred alternative, the no action alternative, and two action alternatives.

The CPNM includes approximately 246,852 BLM-managed surface acres in California. The CPNM is located in the Coast Range of central California, approximately 90 miles west of Bakersfield and 60 miles east of San Luis Obispo. Most of the area is in the eastern portion of San Luis Obispo County but it also includes small portions of western Kern County. The planning area for the RMP includes all lands managed by BLM within the boundary of the CPNM. BLM's mission is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands it manages for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

The Draft RMP was prepared using BLM's planning regulations and guidance issued under the authority of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976. A Draft EIS is also included in this document to meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), Council on Environmental Quality regulations for implementing NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations 1500-1508), and requirements of BLM's NEPA Handbook, H-1790-1.

Purpose and Need

The CPNM was established on January 17, 2001, by President William J. Clinton, using authority under Section 2 of the Antiquities Act. The Monument Proclamation identifies the exceptional objects of scientific and historic interest that the Monument is intended to protect. The Monument Proclamation directed the Secretary of the Interior to "... prepare a management plan that addresses the actions, including road closures or travel restrictions, necessary to protect the objects identified in this proclamation." The Secretary in turn instructed the Director of BLM to "... review relevant management plans for the Monument to ensure consistency with the proclamation." Furthermore, the Secretary acknowledged that the Bakersfield BLM office had already prepared a management plan for the area, and directed that it be amended to ensure its consistency with the Proclamation.

The public has helped to develop the two previous plans that guide activities in the Carrizo Plain. The Caliente RMP was approved in May 1997 and provides general guidance on a landscape level. The Carrizo Plain also has an interagency activity plan (this is the plan identified in the Monument Proclamation). Following many years of work with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), this plan was signed by BLM and TNC in November 1996 and by CDFG in November 1999. In addition, in 2003, BLM completed public scoping for an RMP with an environmental assessment (EA) level of analysis, but a draft document was never issued. This current RMP was initiated as a new start to that effort, with an EIS level of analysis.

BLM has established a bureau-wide policy that all National Monuments have stand-alone RMPs because of their significance and specific management direction associated with the proclamations/legislation. The purpose of this planning effort is to complete a separate, stand-alone RMP to provide overall guidance for CPNM management and land uses.

Planning and Public Comment Process

There has been a long history of public involvement and support in the acquisition of lands and management of the CPNM before it was formally designated as a National Monument. As stated above, the Monument Proclamation recognizes this existing planning history. The initial Notice of Intent for the current planning process was published in the Federal Register on April 24, 2002. A revised Notice of Intent was published in the Federal Register on March 2, 2007, when the planning effort was changed from an EA to an EIS level of analysis.

The scoping process for an RMP / EIS is intended to identify issues and concerns from the public, other agencies, and organizations to frame the scope of the RMP and environmental analysis. A formal scoping period for the CPNM RMP was held from April 12 to June 12, 2007. Based on the scoping comments and public outreach process, the themes and priorities listed below were identified to be addressed in and to help guide the planning process.

- Undeveloped Character
- Resource Conservation and Management
- Wilderness Values
- Access and Travel Management
- Recreation Development and Facilities
- Vegetation Management and Grazing Use
- Cultural and Historic Resources
- Oil and Gas Development Impacts

Collaboration

BLM approaches planning with community-based collaboration, in which interested groups and people—often with varied or opposing interests—work together to devise solutions with broad public support for managing BLM-administered lands. Cooperating local, state, tribal, and federal agencies have been part of the planning team for the RMP/EIS to the fullest extent possible. During plan implementation, BLM will continue partnerships with these public and local, state, and tribal governments and agencies to select high priority projects and to resolve emerging issues.

The Council on Environmental Quality defines a cooperating agency as any agency that has jurisdiction by law or special expertise for proposals covered by NEPA (40 CFR 1501.6). Any federal, state, or local government jurisdiction with such qualifications may become a cooperating agency by agreement with the lead agency. CDFG is a formal cooperating agency for this RMP/EIS.

BLM's managing partners for the CPNM are CDFG and TNC. The Secretary of the Interior recognized that the managing partnership was key to the successful acquisition and restoration of much of the land that now encompasses the Monument. After the President signed the Monument Proclamation, the Secretary provided direction that BLM continue working with the managing partners in administering the area and update the Memorandum of Understanding guiding this collaborative relationship. The partners will continue to collaborate on management and planning for the Monument. Final decisions regarding management actions on each of the partner's lands still rest with the respective agency / organization.

The Secretary of the Interior directed BLM to establish a formal advisory committee, whose purpose is to advise BLM on management of the Monument. The Monument Advisory Committee has been an integral

part of the RMP process, serving as a conduit for additional public input and advising BLM during preparation of the document.

BLM has also collaborated with Native American groups with regional cultural ties to the land in the Monument, and has consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the State Historic Preservation Office.

Management Alternatives

BLM developed management alternatives for the CPNM RMP/EIS using input and comments from public scoping meetings, written comments, as well as from staffs of BLM and other collaborating and consulting partners. NEPA regulations and BLM resource management planning regulations require the formulation of a reasonable range of alternatives that seek to address identified planning issues and management concerns. Each alternative must be evaluated to ensure that it would be consistent with resource goals and objectives, and current laws, regulations, and policy.

Alternatives are developed to establish a framework to evaluate the potential impacts on the planning area that might occur as a result of implemented management decisions. The four management alternatives developed for the CPNM RMP are summarized as follows:

No Action Alternative (required by NEPA): Retains current management through guidance and direction from current policies and existing management plans.

Alternative 1 represents a more “hands off” approach to resource management, and provides for more limited public uses of the Monument. For example, natural processes would be allowed to take their course with minimal interventions to stabilize fluctuations of wildlife and vegetation, except in instances where the populations are in jeopardy. No grazing would be authorized. The largest acreage would be allocated to the “primitive” recreation zone and managed for wilderness character. A smaller road network would be open for public vehicle use. Access to rock art sites would not be permitted, and minimal interventions would be taken to stabilize or restore historic and prehistoric sites from natural decay.

Alternative 2 (Preferred Alternative) represents an approach that incorporates elements of the other alternatives as well as some unique elements to provide for protection of the Monument’s resources while allowing for compatible public uses. For example, this alternative identifies moderate acreage for wilderness character management and a mix of active biological restoration and hands-off approaches in different areas of the Monument. Recreation use and rustic improvements would be focused along the Soda Lake Road corridor, with the remainder of the area providing for dispersed opportunities. This alternative provides for a transition to grazing for vegetation management only. Access to Painted Rock would be allowed by permit and guided tour, and priority historic sites would be stabilized or restored.

Alternative 3 represents the most active approach to management and provides for a broader array and higher levels of public use and access while still retaining the overall rustic, undeveloped character of the Monument. For example, the managers would implement more intensive resource management and restoration actions for lands that have been impacted by past use. Only the existing Caliente Mountain Wilderness Study Area (WSA) would be managed for wilderness characteristics. Cultural sites would be actively restored, and a higher emphasis would be placed on environmental education programs and facilities linked to significant cultural and natural resources. Grazing would continue to be managed for forage production while meeting the Monument’s biological and cultural resource objectives.

The Preferred Alternative would enhance the ability of BLM to achieve the purpose and need of this document, as outlined in Chapter 1, as well as meet goals and objectives for specific resources, as outlined in Chapter 2. Alternative 2, the preferred alternative, provides the most effective balance of protection and restoration while allowing for a variety of compatible public use. Alternative 2 was developed based on planning criteria, the Monument proclamation, and scoping comments to maximize these goals and minimize impacts to resources.

Each alternative has a somewhat different concept and emphasis on how natural resources and resource uses would be managed. Chapter 2 of this RMP /EIS describes in detail the management actions that are proposed to achieve the objectives of each alternative. For the three action alternatives, all objectives and management actions support the goals listed in the following table.

RMP Goals for Action Alternatives
<p><i>Biological Resources</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage the landscape to enhance the CPNM as a significant unique and undeveloped portion of the once vast San Joaquin Valley ecosystem (which is of crucial importance and provides the context for management). • Restore and maintain a mosaic of natural communities and successional stages to benefit the biodiversity inherent in the ecosystem, including ecological processes that sustain them. Manage resources to emphasize an increase of native and indigenous species. • Manage the CPNM in a manner that emphasizes its critical importance for threatened and endangered species conservation and recovery, rare natural communities, and conservation of the regional landscape. • Identify core geographic areas for endangered species population management and recovery. Within these core areas, endangered species habitat will be a primary management priority relative to other resources and uses.
<p><i>Fire and Fuels Management</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that protection of human life is the single, overriding priority in all fire management activities. • Manage fuels and wildfire suppression actions to avoid resource damage from catastrophic fire. • Restore natural role of fire in the ecosystem.
<p><i>Air Quality</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage uses to maintain and improve air quality to meet federal and state ambient air quality standards.
<p><i>Soils</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieve desired outcomes for soil resources, such as meeting or exceeding rangeland health standards for Central California. • Conserve sensitive soils such as the clay dunes and those supporting biological crusts.

RMP Goals for Action Alternatives

Water Resources

- Maintain and enhance surface and groundwater quality throughout the Monument.
- Protect Soda Lake and other water resources (such as springs).
- Maintain hydrologic processes and function of Soda Lake and other monument watersheds.
- Protect a quantity of water sufficient to fulfill the purposes for which the Monument was established.
- Maintain groundwater quantity and quality throughout the portion of the Carrizo Plain Groundwater Basin located within the National Monument.

Wild and Scenic Rivers

- Meet the requirements of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to study stream segments for potential inclusion in the Wild and Scenic Rivers system.

Geology and Paleontology

- Identify, protect, and preserve paleontological values and unique geologic features and examples of geologic processes pursuant to the Monument Proclamation.
- Enhance scientific, educational, and recreational opportunities pertinent to paleontological and geological resources.

Cultural Resources

- Identify, protect, and preserve significant prehistoric and historic resources.
- Provide opportunities for Native American traditional cultural practice and access.
- Enhance opportunities for research, public education, and awareness of the fragile nature of heritage resources.

Visual Resources

- Protect and restore the unique scenic quality of the CPNM landscape.

Wilderness Study Areas and Other Lands with Wilderness Characteristics

- Manage the Caliente Mountain WSA to preserve its wilderness qualities.

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

- The Carrizo ACEC designation would be dropped for all lands within the National Monument boundary.

Livestock Grazing

- Manage all livestock grazing (either as an allowable use, such as a Section 15 grazing lease, which utilizes livestock forage, or as a vegetation management tool, such as a free use grazing permit, which meets objectives other than the production of livestock forage) in a manner that protects the objects of the Proclamation.

RMP Goals for Action Alternatives

Recreation and Interpretation

- Provide recreation opportunities and interpretive programs that enhance the public’s appreciation of the objects of the Monument Proclamation and other Monument resources.
- Manage Monument lands to provide quality recreation while protecting natural and cultural resources, promoting safety, and minimizing conflicts between users and wildlife.
- Identify specific management zones that will each offer distinct types of recreation settings and opportunities to Monument visitors.

Administrative Facilities

- Provide facilities that are consistent with the mission of the Monument and support the management goals identified in this RMP.

Travel Management

- Identify and manage an effective travel network that supports management activities and appropriate public uses while protecting the objects of the Monument Proclamation.

Minerals

- Manage the exploration and development of oil and gas on existing federal leases in a manner that protects the objects of the Monument Proclamation.
- Work with state, county, and local agencies to ensure that the mission and purpose of the CPNM are furthered and only reasonable uses of public lands are made to access and develop private mineral estate.
- Manage the development of mineral material borrow sites on federal mineral estate for emergency and / or administrative use in a manner compatible with the mission of the CPNM.

Lands and Realty

- Land tenure adjustments such as acquisition within the Monument would be managed to further the overall purposes of the Monument Proclamation, which are protection of the natural features present, including endangered, threatened, and rare animal and plant species; the San Andreas fault zone; Soda Lake; fossil resources; and cultural resources.
- All realty actions such as rights-of-way, land use permits, and others within the Monument would be managed in keeping with the overall purposes of the Monument Proclamation.
- Eliminate unauthorized use of public lands.

Research Management

- Conduct research within the Monument to improve understanding, management, and protection of Monument resources and to further scientific knowledge of those resources.

Environmental Consequences

The potential environmental consequences (or impacts) of the four alternatives were analyzed for each natural resource, resource use, and social and economic conditions in the RMP/EIS. Detailed descriptions of the direct and indirect impacts of resource management under the alternatives are provided in Chapter 4, along with a discussion of the possible cumulative impacts that could result from actions taken in this RMP/EIS. A comparative summary of these impacts (for all alternatives) is provided in the Impacts Summary Table in Chapter 2.

Alternative 2, the preferred alternative, would result in overall negligible to minor adverse impacts to resources and, through the use of standard operating procedures, stipulations in contracts, and best management practices, would further mitigate these impacts. Management actions under the preferred alternative would result in beneficial impacts to the following resources and management issues:

- 1) **Biological Resources** - moderate benefits on habitat structure from prescribed fire and livestock grazing as a vegetation management tool by expanding the amount of suitable habitat, and enlarging the effective size of the core areas when such management might be critical to maintaining viable populations on the Monument. Although restoration activities to reintroduce native plants would have minimal impact, there would be a benefit from long-term improvement in native plant species composition.
- 2) **Air and Soil Quality** - the preferred alternative would reduce fugitive dust and particulate matter emissions on and off roads throughout the Monument and takes an aggressive approach to help soils achieve proper functioning condition while educating users about soil resources and sensitivity.
- 3) **Cultural Resources** - would be protected and preserved while allowing for group and individual visitor access. Emphasis would be placed on preserving historic ranching and farming buildings and structures in the Monument.
- 4) **Visual Resources, Wilderness, and Recreation** - minor to moderate beneficial impacts from restoring campgrounds, removing or upgrading dilapidated fences, restoring wilderness qualities on approximately 55,000 acres, and closing approximately 45 miles of roads with rehabilitation or natural revegetation of these routes.
- 5) **Social and Economic Conditions** - the preferred alternative would provide the most support for preserving non-market values.

The preferred alternative, Alternative 2 best meets the goals and objectives of the RMP as well as the goals of the Monument Proclamation.

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