

Section Four—Open Space Element

4.1 Introduction

There are many ways that open space can be defined, but the following definition of open space is the one used in the *Yuma County 2020 Comprehensive Plan*. Open space is defined as *any publicly owned and publicly accessible space or area characterized by great natural scenic beauty or whose existing openness, natural condition or present state of use, if retained, would maintain or enhance the conservation of natural or scenic resources.*

Arizona Revised Statutes §11-821(D)(1) requires that an open space element contained in a comprehensive plan have the following components: A comprehensive inventory of open space areas, recreational resources and designation of access points to open space areas and resources; an analysis of forecasted needs, policies for managing and protecting open space areas and resources and implementation strategies to acquire open space areas and further establish recreational resources; and policies and implementation strategies designed to promote a regional system of integrated open space and recreational resources and a consideration of any existing regional open space plan.

A rich variety of open spaces exists within Yuma County. Only a very small portion of the County is urbanized and over 91% of the unincorporated Yuma County is publicly owned. Much of the federally owned land and a small portion of state owned land in Yuma County is specifically designated and managed as open space areas. A comprehensive inventory of these designated open space areas as required under ARS §11-821(D)(1)(a) is contained in this element. Maps showing the location of publicly owned land and designated open space can be found on pages four (4) and five (5) of this element. These designated open space areas are managed by a diverse array of federal and state agencies including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Bureau of Reclamation, the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) and the Arizona State Land Department (ASLD).



Open space near the Gila Mountains

Open Space Element

The federal government is the largest land owner in unincorporated Yuma County. Most of the federal lands are administered by four agencies that cover large areas with varying degrees of public access which range from closed to limited access. These four agencies have diverse missions and are: the Yuma Proving Ground (YPG), Barry M. Goldwater Range (BMGR), Kofa National Wildlife Refuge and Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge. Nearly all of the remaining 341,581 acres is managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The portion of federally owned land managed by the BLM is particularly important to Yuma County residents. The BLM administers large portions of the open space near urbanized areas including mountainous and riparian areas that are valued by County residents for multiple uses. The BLM's plan on how this land is to be managed is set forth in the Yuma Field Office Approved Resource Management Plan (RMP) which was completed in January 2010.

The purpose of the RMP is to establish management directions for the balanced uses of land under the management of the BLM including: rangeland, wildlife, wilderness, recreation, cultural resources and other natural, scenic, scientific and historical values. This RMP consolidated previous plans and guides the overall management of activities as well as the use and protection of BLM managed lands. The RMP is the framework for future planning and decision making on BLM managed lands.

The Arizona State Land Department (ASLD) manages a significant amount of land in the form of State Trust Land scattered throughout the County including many parcels close to or in key urban, mountainous or riparian areas. In total, the ASLD manages 317 square miles of unincorporated Yuma County. This total does not include the approximately 305 square miles of State Trust Land that is located within the boundaries of Kofa National Wildlife Refuge, YPG and the BMGR and are managed as part of these entities. State Trust Land is managed in a much different way than nearly all other forms of land owned by the government.

State Trust Lands are managed by the ASLD under mandate from the Arizona Constitution to achieve the highest and best use of the land in order to maximize revenues to the trust's beneficiaries, which include the public schools, prisons and other public entities. Management of State Trust Land differs from lands under the management of the Bureau of Land Management as State Trust Lands are managed solely for the benefit of the trust beneficiaries, as opposed to being managed for the benefit of and use by the public.

All recreational users of State Trust Land, except licensed hunters and fishermen who are actively pursuing game or fish in-season, are required to obtain a recreational use permit from the ASLD. A recreational use permit grants limited privileges to use State Trust Land for some recreation such as hiking, horseback riding, picnics, bicycling, photography, camping, sightseeing and bird watching. Camping is restricted to no more than fourteen days per year. Off-highway vehicular travel on State Trust Land is not permitted without proper licensing. Lands leased for agriculture, mining, commercial or military purposes are not open to recreational use. Other State Trust Lands may be closed to some or all recreational uses due to hazardous conditions or dust abatement in coordination with the Arizona Game and Fish Department or based on certain state, county or local laws or ordinances.

Open Space Element

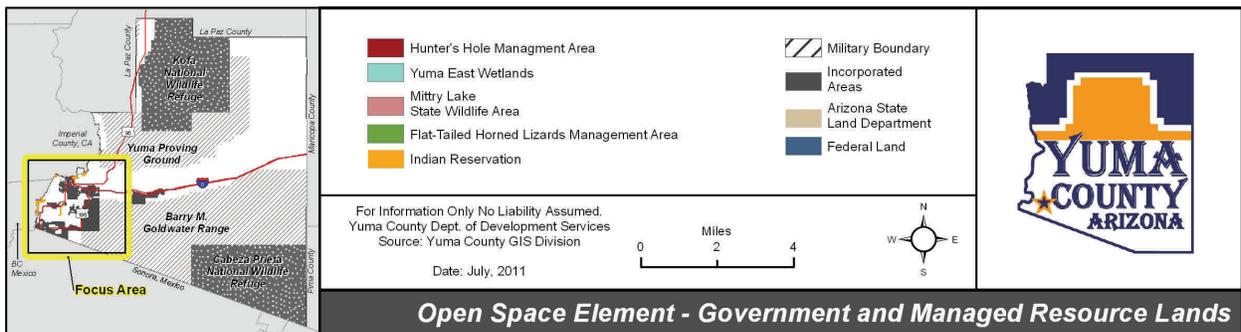
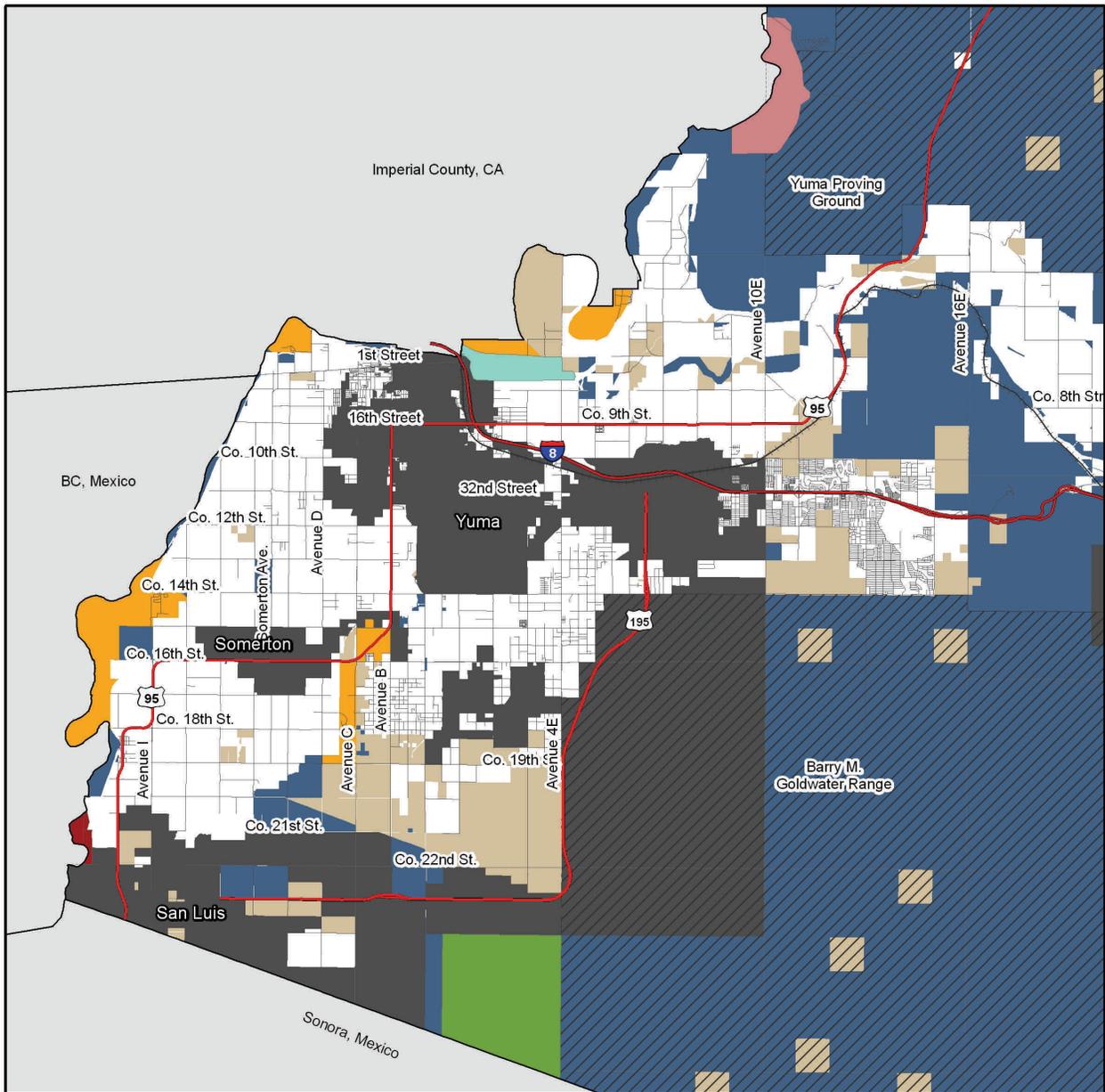
Important economic activities that occur on State Trust Lands and other lands found in Yuma County are hunting and fishing. It is hard overstate the importance of both hunting and fishing to Yuma County's economy. Based data from a 2002 report from the Arizona Game and Fish Department, hunting and fishing expenditures in Yuma County for the year 2001 were 34.2 million dollars. The total multiplier effect of these activities was estimated at 42.0 million dollars.¹

During the public outreach process that led to the development of the *Yuma County 2020 Comprehensive Plan*, Yuma County residents identified several areas of publicly owned open space where current patterns of usage were causing a degradation of the health, safety and welfare of nearby residents and land owners. The Open Space Element identifies these areas of concern and how residents would like to see these issues addressed and are located under Section 4.3 of this Element.

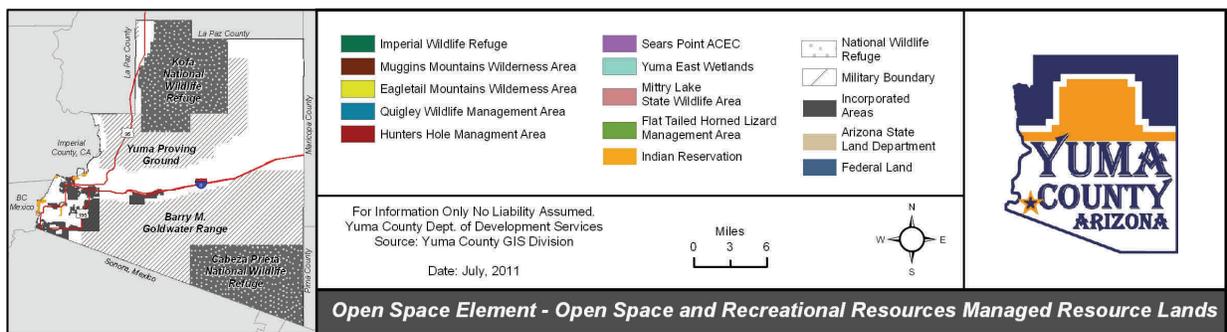
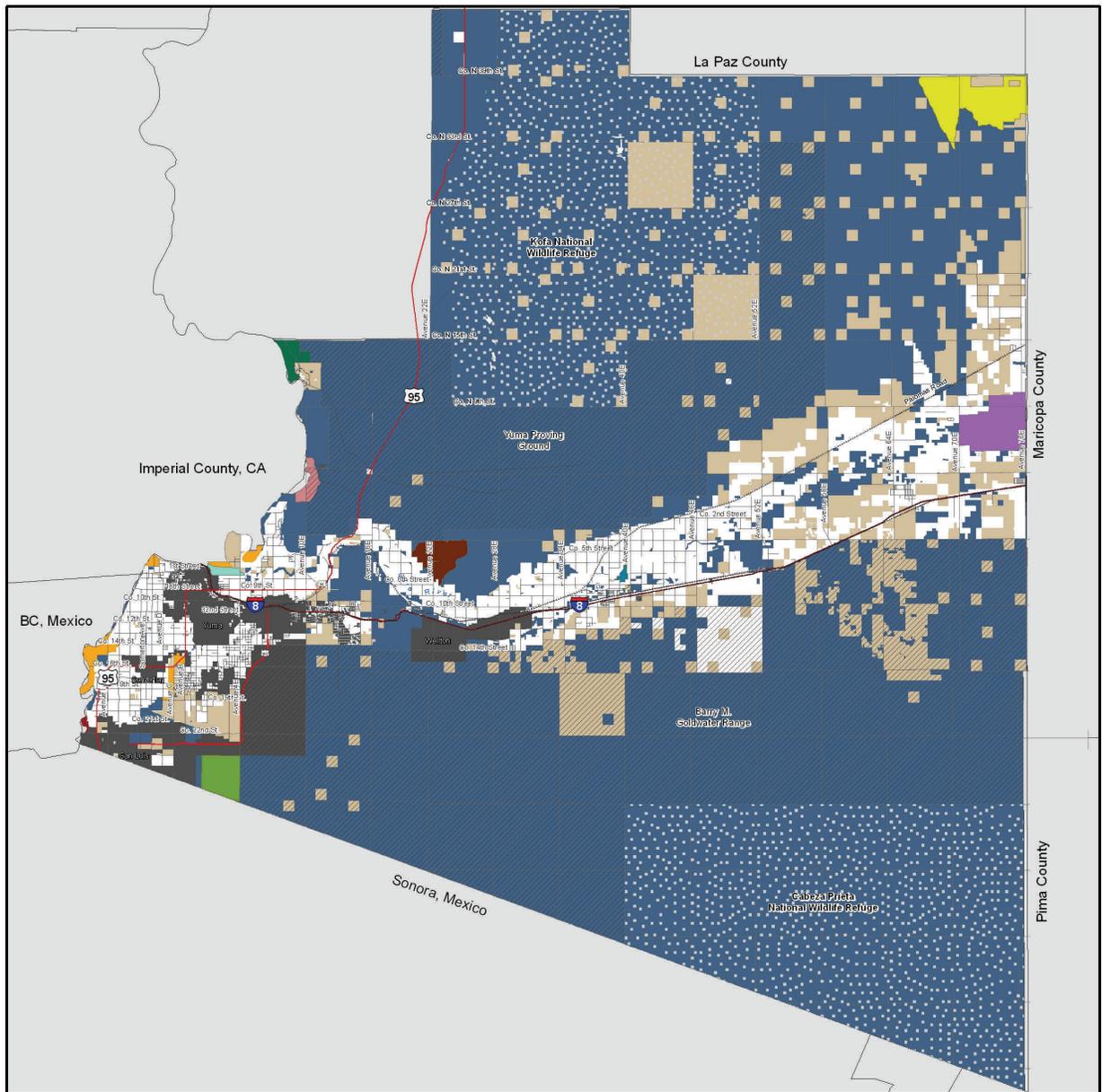
The Open Space Policies and Priorities contained within the *Yuma County 2020 Comprehensive Plan* are derived from comments and feedback from residents across the County. They represent the policy positions and priorities of Yuma County regarding open space within unincorporated Yuma County. All official actions taken by Yuma County regarding open space should be in harmony with these policies and priorities. Furthermore, when other agencies request Yuma County's comment or recommendation on any open space management policy or project, Yuma County's response will reflect as much as possible these policies and priorities.

Open Space Actions are the specific actions that Yuma County will take to advance the adopted Open Space Policies and Priorities.

¹ p. 10, *The Economic Importance of Fishing and Hunting*, a study prepared by Jonathan Silberman, PhD., Arizona State University, 2002 for the Arizona Game and Fish Department.



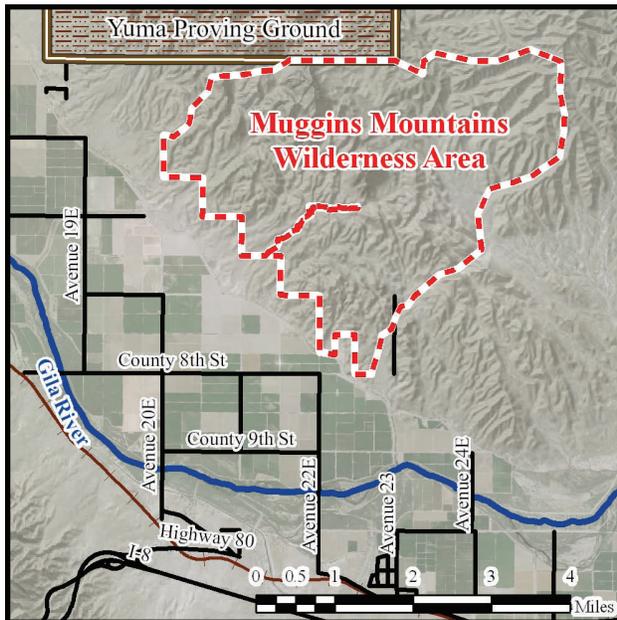
Map 1: Government and Managed Resource Lands (Western Yuma County)



Map 2: Open Space and Recreational Resources Managed Resource Lands

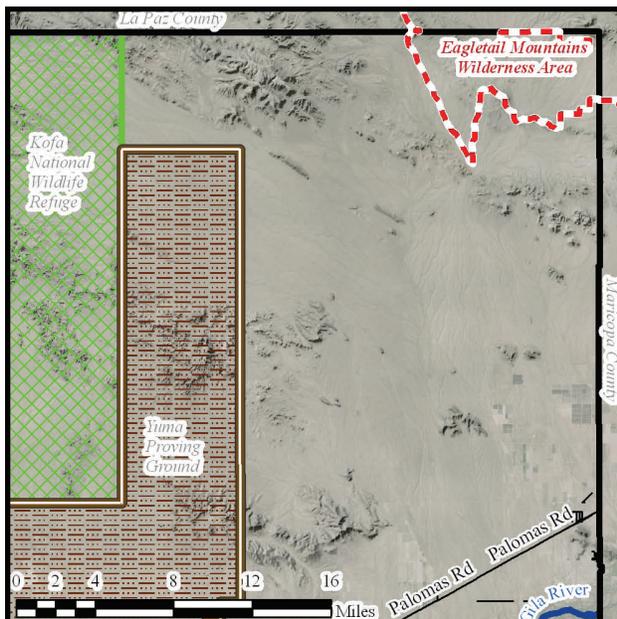
4.2 Open Space Inventory

The Muggins Mountains Wilderness Area and the Eagletail Mountains Wilderness Area, established by an act of Congress, are federal lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management. The Wilderness Act of September 3, 1964, defines wilderness areas as: “... an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined types of recreation....”. Recreation such as backpacking, day hiking, sightseeing, photography and rock climbing are permitted within the wilderness areas.



Muggins Mountains Wilderness Area

Muggins Mountains Wilderness Area

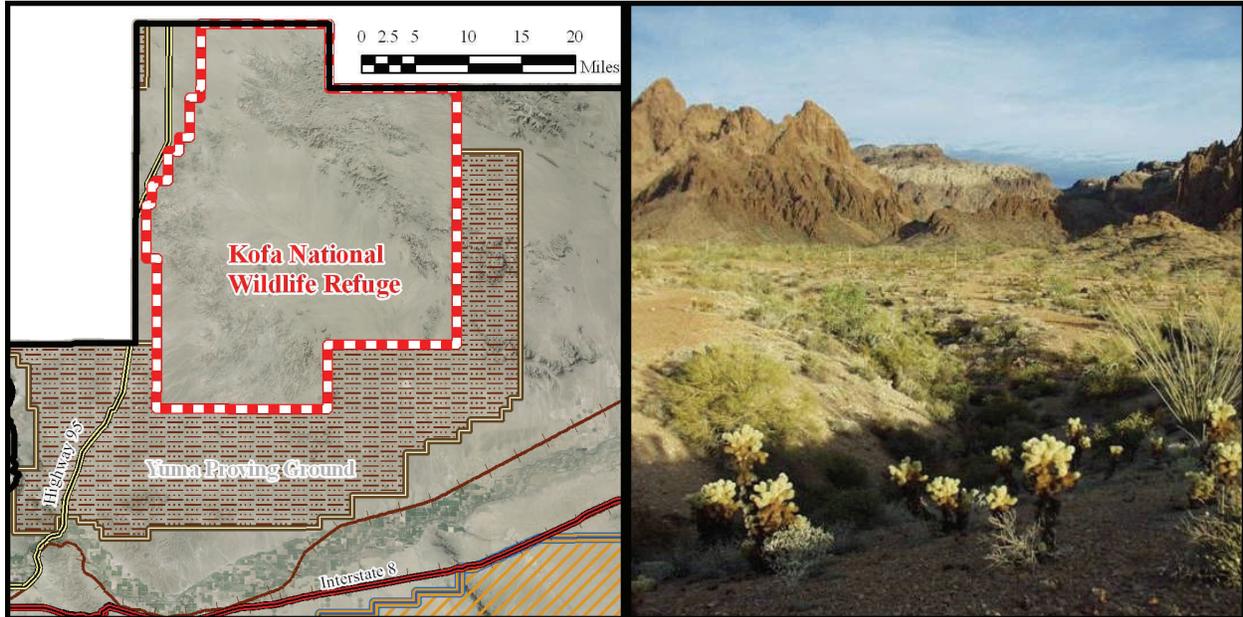


Eagletail Mountains Wilderness Area

Eagletail Mountains Wilderness Area

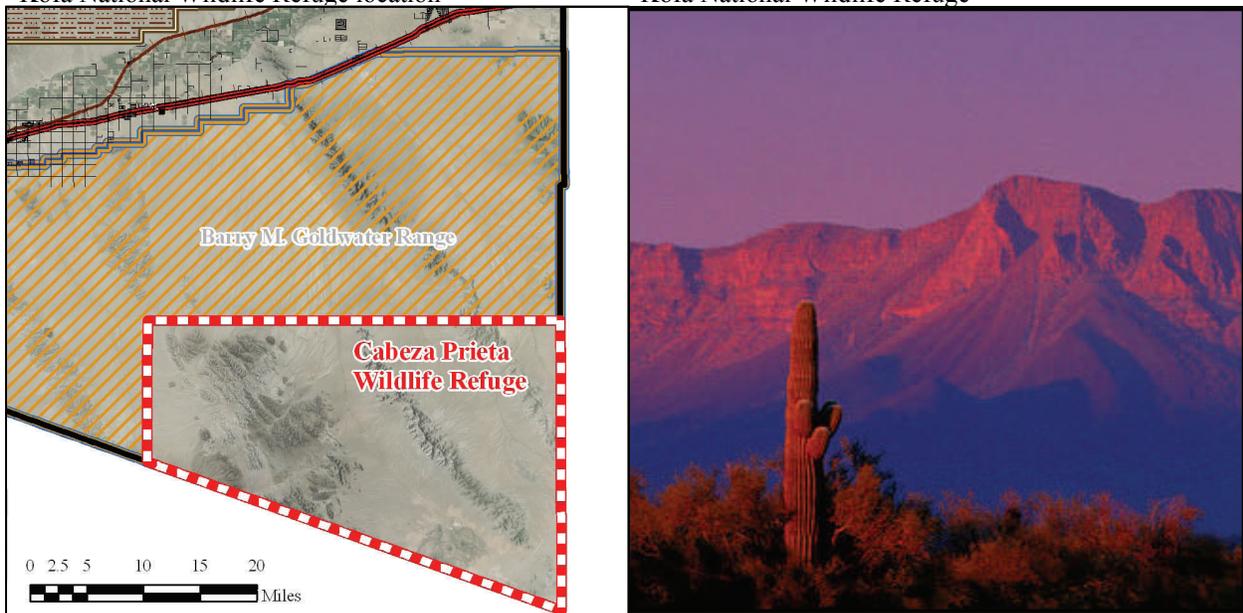
Open Space Element

The Kofa National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1939. The refuge encompasses 665,400 acres of pristine desert that is home to the desert bighorn sheep and the California fan palm, the only native palm trees in Arizona which are tucked away in narrow, rugged canyons on the refuge. Hiking, sightseeing, photography and nature observation are permitted in all areas of the refuge except on patented mining claims and other private in-holdings.



Kofa National Wildlife Refuge location

Kofa National Wildlife Refuge²



Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge Location

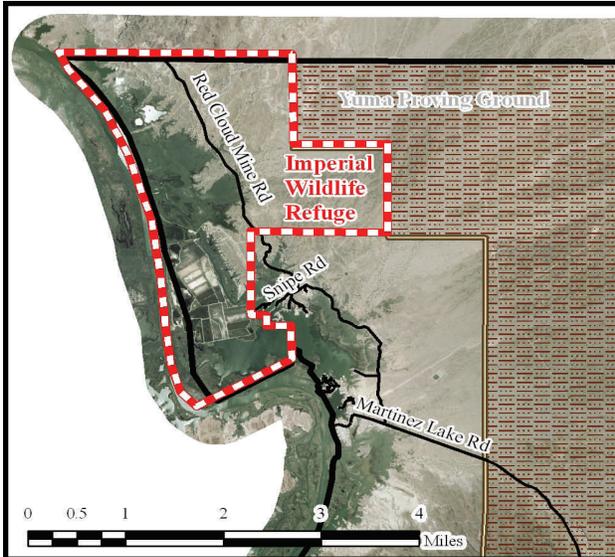
Cabeza Prieta Wildlife Refuge²

The Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge encompasses 860,010 acres across Yuma and Pima Counties. The refuge offers plentiful hiking, photography, wildlife observation and primitive camping. Before entering the refuge a valid Refuge Entry Permit must be obtained and a Military Hold Harmless Agreement signed. El Camino Del Diablo, a historic route linking the northern frontier of Mexico and of California, crosses the refuge.

²Photo courtesy of the United State Fish and Wildlife Service

Open Space Element

The Imperial National Wildlife Refuge protects wildlife habitat along the lower Colorado River in Arizona and California including the last unchannelized section before the river enters Mexico. Meers Point, located within the refuge has shaded tables, toilets and a boat launch. The refuge has a visitors center that is open from November through March.

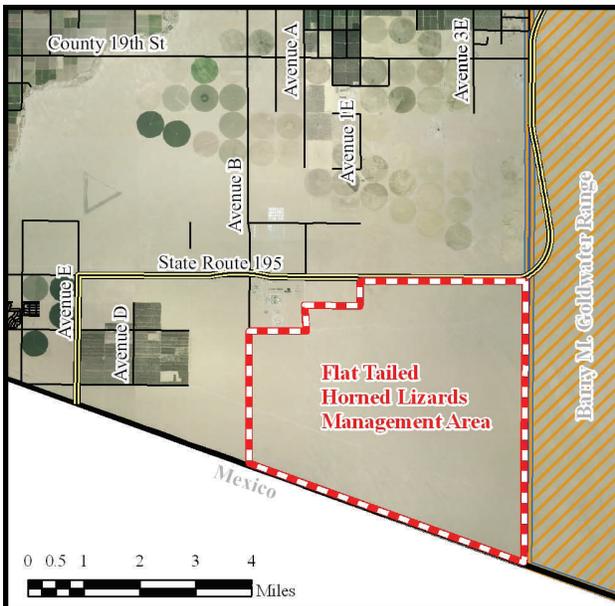


Imperial National Wildlife Refuge Location



Imperial National Wildlife Refuge

The flat-tailed horned lizard was proposed for listing as a threatened species by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1993. In response, the Flat-tailed Horned Lizard Rangewide Management Strategy was prepared. The Rangewide Management Strategy called for the establishment of the Yuma Desert Flat-tailed Horned Lizard Management Area. The Yuma Desert Flat-tailed Horned Lizard Management Area was established on federal land in southwestern Yuma County. The majority of the management area is located on the BMGR; however, 8,875 acres of Bureau of Reclamation land adjacent to the BMGR are included in the management area.



Flat-tailed Horned Lizard Management Area



A Flat-tailed Horned Lizard³

³Photo courtesy of the United State Fish and Wildlife Service

Open Space Element

The most significant aspect of the Yuma Desert Flat-tailed Horned Lizard Management Area is that federal policy requires that land in the management area will remain federally owned and undeveloped.⁴

Most of Mittry Lake Wildlife Area is within the floodplain of the Colorado River. In 1971, the U.S. Department of Interior gave the Arizona Game and Fish Department administrative authority over 3,575 acres of land and water at the lake for the management of fish and wildlife including migratory birds. Management emphasis is to optimize the wildlife habitat potential for present and future generations for public hunting and other wildlife-oriented recreation. The management emphasis is based on the 1971 lease and cooperative agreement which allows for the establishment of a public shooting area, waterfowl resting ground and provisions to improve conditions for the propagation of fish.



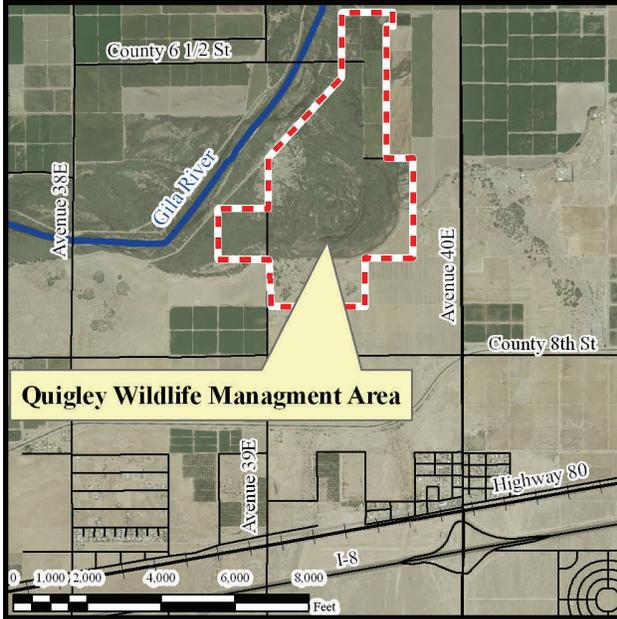
Mittry Lake State Wildlife Area



Mittry Lake State Wildlife Area

The Quigley Wildlife Area is a 612-acre property located within the Gila River floodplain managed by the Arizona Game and Fish Department. The goals for management of the Quigley Wildlife Area are to: restore and manage riparian habitats; maintain and enhance habitat suitability for waterfowl, shorebirds and other riparian associated wildlife; restore, enhance and manage habitats required by sensitive species; encourage compatible consumptive and non-consumptive uses and educational activities including development of "watchable wildlife" opportunities; and maintain and enhance fisheries and fishing opportunities.

⁴Flat-tailed Horned Lizard Interagency Coordinating Committee. "Flat-tailed Horned Lizard Rangewide Management Strategy" May 2003

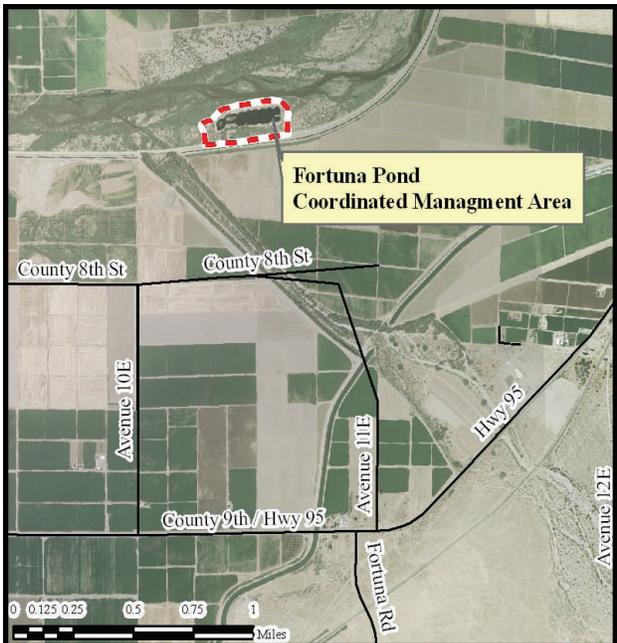


Quigley Wildlife Management Area



Quigley Pond

The Fortuna Pond Coordinated Management Area serves as mitigation for fishing opportunities lost on the lower Colorado River. The 30-acre Fortuna Pond is cooperatively managed by the BLM, AGFD and the Bureau of Reclamation. The BLM monitors visitor use and associated resource damage at Fortuna Pond to determine the need for recreational facilities such as garbage cans, restrooms and/or a volunteer host site. The AGFD stocks Fortuna Pond with rainbow trout and channel catfish.



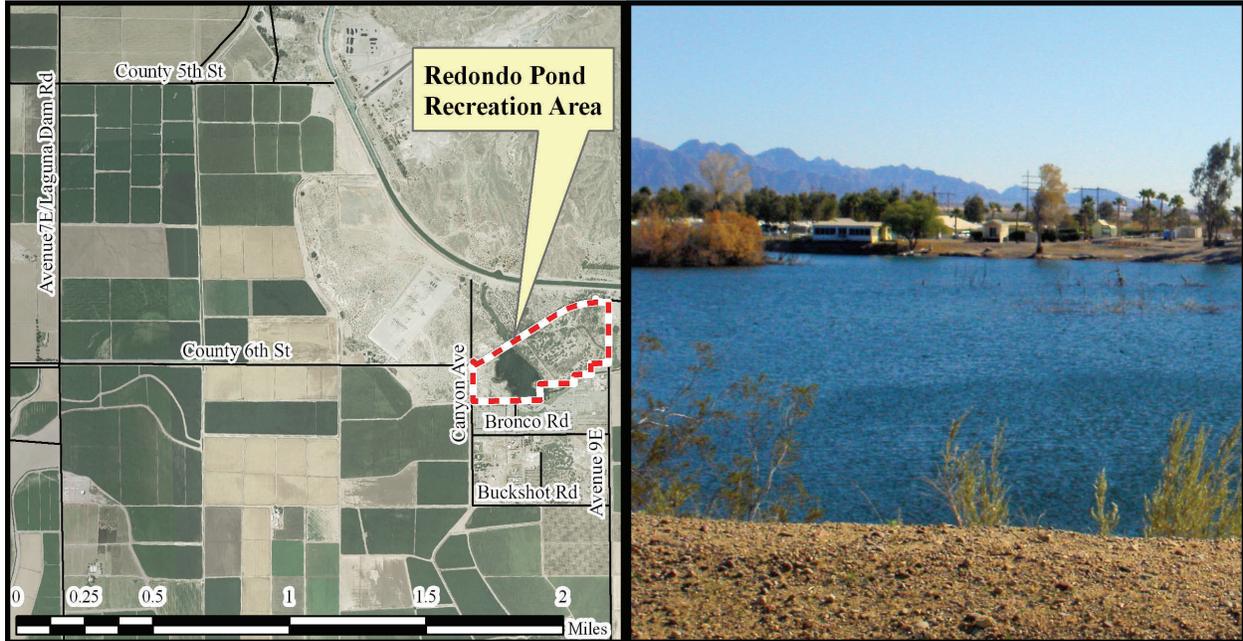
Fortuna Pond Coordinated Management Area



Fortuna Pond

Open Space Element

The Redondo Pond Recreation Area located on federal land is a joint project of Arizona Game and Fish Department's Region IV (Yuma) and the Bureau of Land Management's Yuma Sector. Redondo Pond was formed when groundwater filled an old gravel pit. AGFD and BLM recently completed improvements that included a parking area, providing disability access and construction of the fishing pier. In the summer Redondo Pond is stocked with channel catfish and in the winters it is stocked with rainbow trout.



Redondo Pond Recreation Area

Redondo Pond

Open Space Element

The Hunter's Hole Restoration project along the Colorado River is intended to revitalize the native habitat and reduce the number of illegal crossings and associated crime occurring across the international boundary with Mexico. An international and multi-agency cooperative venture focused on enhancing a 1,000 acre area under the auspices of the Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area (YCNHA) and the Mexican government has been established. The YCNHA is spearheading the effort, and through funding from a private foundation, is proceeding with consensus building, design and preliminary cost estimates.



Hunter's Hole Management Area

Hunter's Hole

Aerial photograph of Hunter's Hole Management Area looking north-northwest. Photo courtesy of the Bureau of Reclamation, cir. 2007.



Gila Mountains

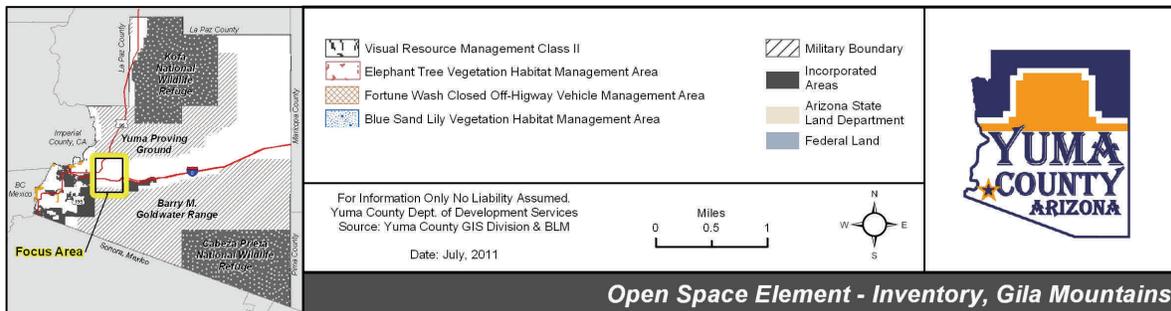
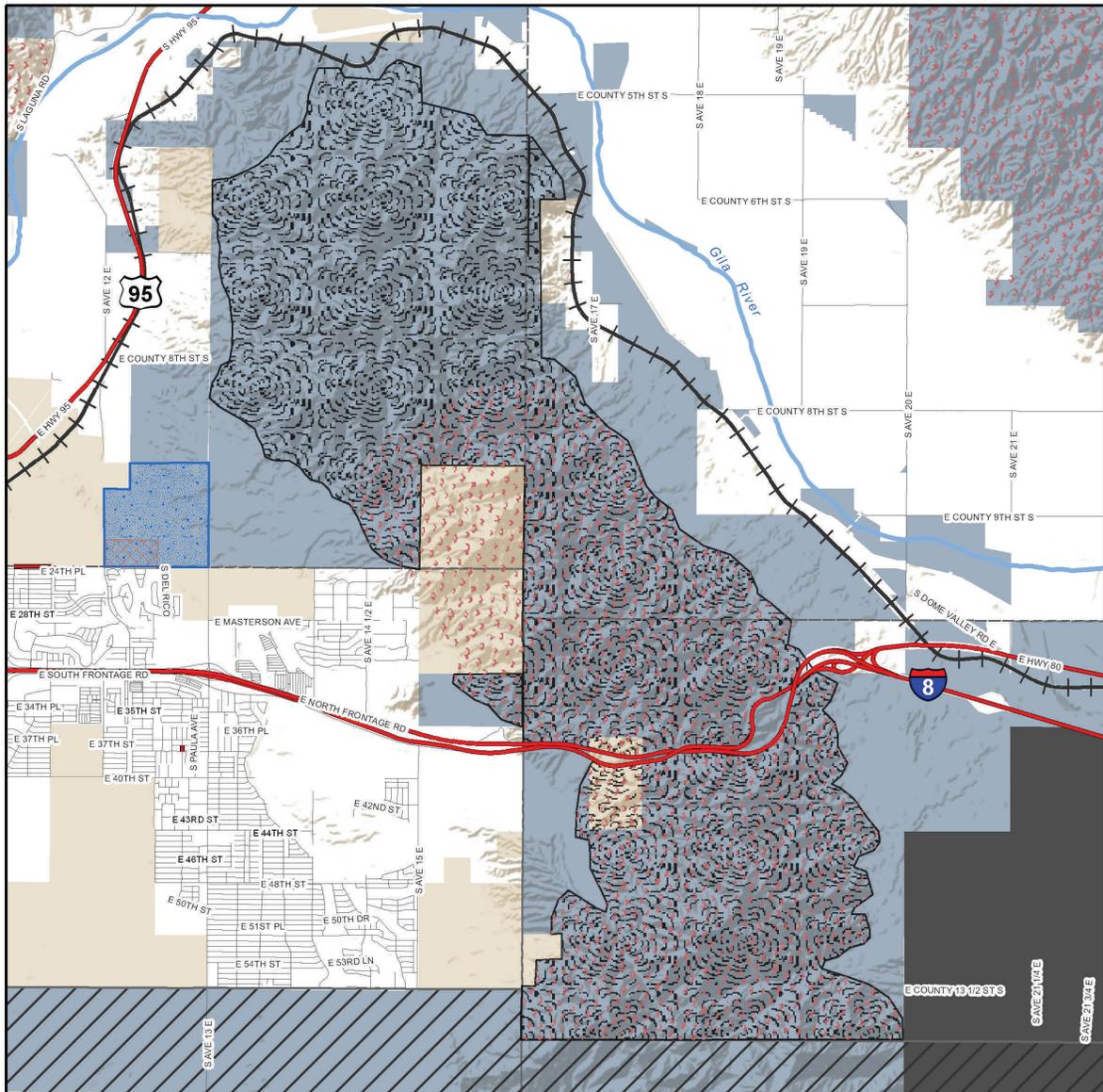
The Gila Mountains have been identified by Yuma County residents as a key open space asset and recreational resource. County residents strongly desire the Gila Mountains to be preserved as open space and for the area to remain open to recreational use. The Arizona State Land Department and private owners own a small portion of the Gila Mountains, but the overwhelming majority of the Gila Mountains is owned by the federal government. The Gila Mountains south of County 14th Street are in the Barry M. Goldwater Range; north of County 14th Street the majority of the Gila Mountains are managed by the Bureau of Land Management. The BLM's plans and policies regarding the land it controls in the Gila Mountains are contained in the Bureau of Land Management's Yuma Field Office Approved Resources Management Plan. The BLM's recreational management goal for the Gila Mountains is to ensure that legal public access, wildlife habitat and cultural resources of the area are not compromised by encroaching urban development and increasing recreational demands. Other specific management policies relating to the Gila Mountains are summarized as follows and are mapped on page 14.

The BLM manages the visual impact of any potential development of land it controls by classifying it into one of four classes that detail what landscape-appropriate mitigation measures are necessary if and when development is permitted to occur. Nearly all of the Gila Mountains under BLM management are classified as visual resource management class II. Class II lands are managed to retain the existing character of the landscape. Any changes must repeat the basic elements of form, line, color and texture found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape. Solar or wind generating facilities are not allowed on land classified as visual resource management class II.

The BLM has designated two areas in and around the Gila Mountains as vegetation habitat management areas (VHA). The 10,000 acre Elephant Tree VHA protects a proposed priority plant species, *bursera microphylla* (elephant tree), a shrub found in the Sonoran Desert on mountains. The population in the Gila Mountains is one of the most well represented stands in the U.S. The 500 acre Blue Sand Lily VHA protects *triteleopsis palmeri*, a flowering plant listed as a sensitive species. This rare plant grows from bulbets and only flowers in wet years. The Blue Sand Lily VHA is located on stabilized sand dunes on the Gila River Mesa and is the northernmost known population in the United States. Within the Blue Sand Lily VHA, the BLM has closed 100 acres to off highway vehicle use. BLM policies for managing VHAs include the following policies: minimization of BLM-authorized ground-disturbing activities in VHAs to protect focal plant species-populations; land use authorizations for activities such as mineral extraction and livestock grazing would generally not be approved; avoiding to the extent possible, new transportation rights-of-way within VHAs; and appropriate mitigation when avoidance is not possible.

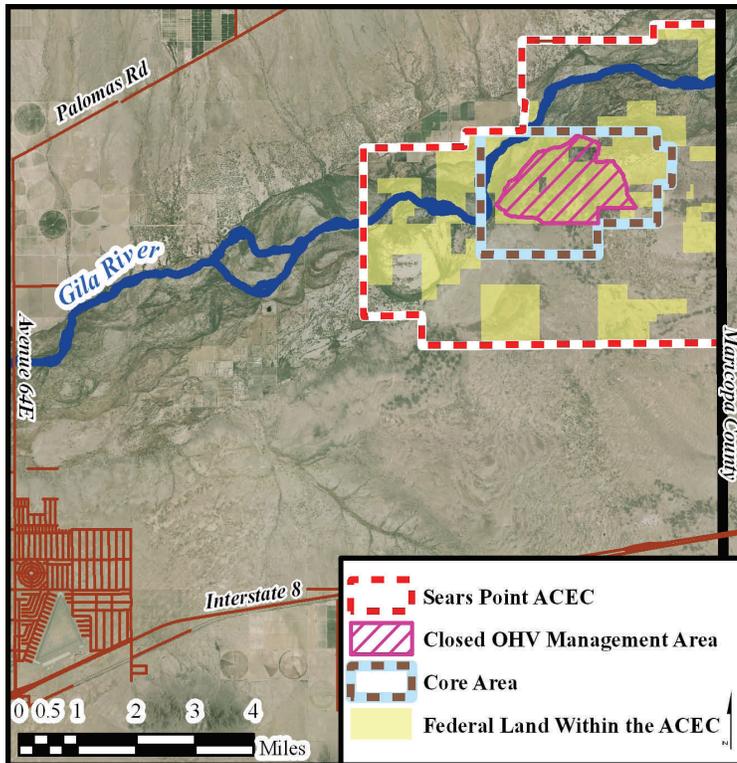


The Gila Mountains



Map 3: Managed or Federally Owned Land in the Gila Mountains

Open Space Element



Sears Point Area of Critical Environmental Concern



A Petroglyph at Sears Point

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) are areas designated by the BLM for special management attention in order to protect the area and prevent irreparable damage to resources or natural systems. Areas qualifying for consideration as ACEC must have substantial significance and value including qualities of more than local significance and special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness or cause for concern. The values for which ACEC are designated are considered the highest and best use for those lands and protection of those values would take precedence over multiple uses.

The Sears Point Area of Critical Environmental Concern, designated in the Bureau of Land Management's Yuma Field Office Approved Resources Management Plan, includes extensive petroglyph displays, prominent basalt mesas, historic trail corridors, and important riparian vegetation including a mesquite bosque. The Sears Point ACEC covers a total of 28,500 acres in Yuma and Maricopa Counties, with 3,700 acres in Yuma County designated as a core area. Within the core area, only day uses are permitted and 1,400 acres are closed to off-road vehicle use. Not all land in the Sears Point ACEC is federally owned. The BLM desires to acquire from willing sellers those non-federal lands within the Sears Point ACEC boundary. BLM policies and regulations for the Sears Point ACEC are only enforceable on federally owned land.

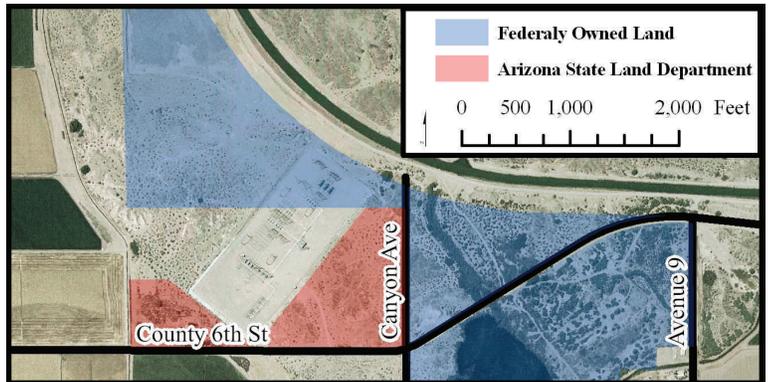
The BLM's long term plans for the Sears Point ACEC include the eventual construction of a visitor host site and interpretive exhibit panels at the central mesas and the main point of access, establishment of a parking area in an appropriate location and safe and legal access from Interstate 8. Additionally, the BLM plans to develop a Sears Point ACEC plan in coordination with interested partners that includes additional management prescriptions for balancing increased public visitation with protection of natural and cultural resources.

4.3 Areas of Concern

During the public outreach process that led to the development of the *Yuma County 2020 Comprehensive Plan*, Yuma County residents identified several areas of publicly owned open space where current patterns of usage were causing a degradation of the health, safety and welfare of nearby residents and land owners. In order to ensure that these specific sites are used by the general public in a manner that does not adversely impact nearby residents and land owners, Yuma County will work with the relevant federal and state agencies to devise a plan/strategy to address the specific areas of concern outlined in this section.

County 6th Street and Avenue 9E

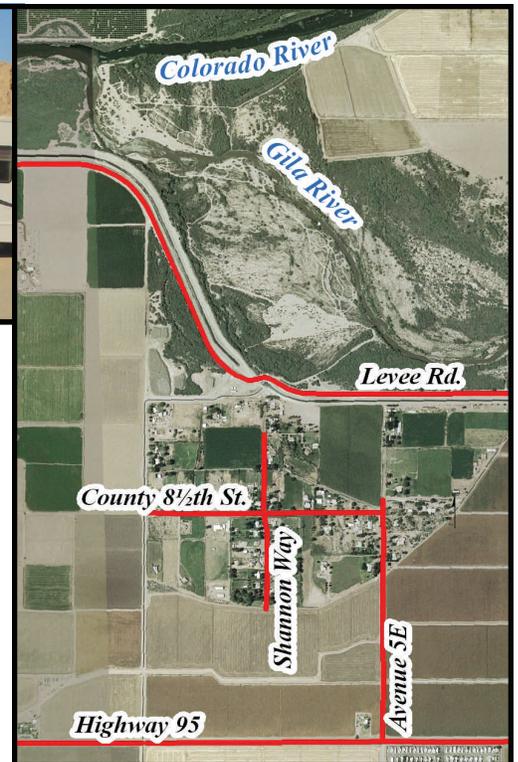
Public lands, both federal and state owned land, in the vicinity of County 6th Street and Avenue 9E have become a popular location for dry land camping. No facilities or specific plans exist to support camping in this area. Large and increasing numbers of campers have created issues with trash, sewage disposal and traffic.



Public lands in the vicinity of County 6th Street and Avenue 9E



Dry land camping along County 6th Street



Public lands in the vicinity of the Colorado and Gila River confluence

4.4 Open Space Policies and Priorities

- OSPP.1:** Land use designation maps contained within the Land Use Element should more accurately reflect actual allowed uses. Land use designations for publicly owned open space shall be the land use designation category with allowed uses that most closely matches the adopted management plan for a particular parcel of publicly owned land.
- OSPP.2:** Yuma County will work to preserve mountainous areas such as the Gila, Mohawk, Laguna and Muggins Mountains and riparian areas along the Colorado and Gila Rivers as the open space areas most valued by Yuma County residents.
- OSPP.3:** Yuma County will work to maintain and when possible enhance access to publicly owned open space in mountainous and riparian areas.
- OSPP.4:** Yuma County supports the eradication of invasive species from and the restoration of riparian areas.
- OSPP.5:** Yuma County supports the further coordination between various management plans that exist for publicly owned open space in Yuma County and the Comprehensive Plan.
- OSPP.6:** Open space should be managed in a manner to ensure that its recreational use does not negatively impact nearby landowners and residents.
- OSPP.7:** The portion of the Mohawk Mountains located outside the Barry M. Goldwater Range should be kept open to recreational use by the general public.
- OSPP.8:** Yuma County supports the Hunter's Hole Restoration project along the Colorado River which is intended to restore native habitat along the river in the Hunter's Hole area and to help reduce the number of illegal crossings and associated crime occurring across the international boundary with Mexico by clearing out heavy undergrowth of invasive species that can provide cover for illegal activity to take place in.
- OSPP.9:** Yuma County supports the continued use by authorized users of authorized recreational trails and areas within the Barry M. Goldwater Range.



Mohawk Mountains

4.5 Open Space Actions

- OSA.1:** Yuma County will continually monitor all land management plans that cover state and federal land within Yuma County to ensure that the *Yuma County 2020 Comprehensive Plan* remains in synchronization with these plans.
- OSA.2:** Yuma County will work with the various governmental agencies that manage open space within Yuma County to ensure that any revision to an open space management plan brings it more into alignment with the desires of County residents.
- OSA.3:** Yuma County will work with relevant agencies and local residents to identify open space where illegal dumping is a problem and then find the most effective way to have those areas cleaned up.
- OSA.4:** Yuma County will work with the relevant federal and state agencies to devise a plan/strategy to address the specific areas of concern in regards to the management of publicly owned open space where current patterns of usage are causing a degradation of the health, safety and welfare of nearby residents and land owners as identified in the *Yuma County 2020 Comprehensive Plan*.
- OSA.5:** Yuma County will work with the relevant federal and state agencies to devise a detailed recreational plan for government land south of County 19th Street that will separate appropriate areas for off-road vehicle recreation, equestrian and hiking uses.
- OSA.6:** Yuma County will encourage and work with all relevant parties to establish a publicly accessible boat washing facility in order to prevent the spread of invasive species, most notably zebra mussels, into the Colorado River.
- OSA.7:** Yuma County will encourage and work with all relevant parties to create and install kiosks displaying information about recreational facilities, areas, opportunities and regulations at the entrances to public lands that have a high recreational use and have experienced problems with improper usage, littering, etc., in the past.
- OSA.8:** Yuma County will work to maintain, and when possible, enhance public hunting access to open space, recreational and sensitive area resource lands.
- OSA.9:** Yuma County will work, when possible, to conserve connections to all parks, trails, open spaces, or sensitive areas as defined in the *Yuma County 2020 Comprehensive Plan*



Fortuna Pond