



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

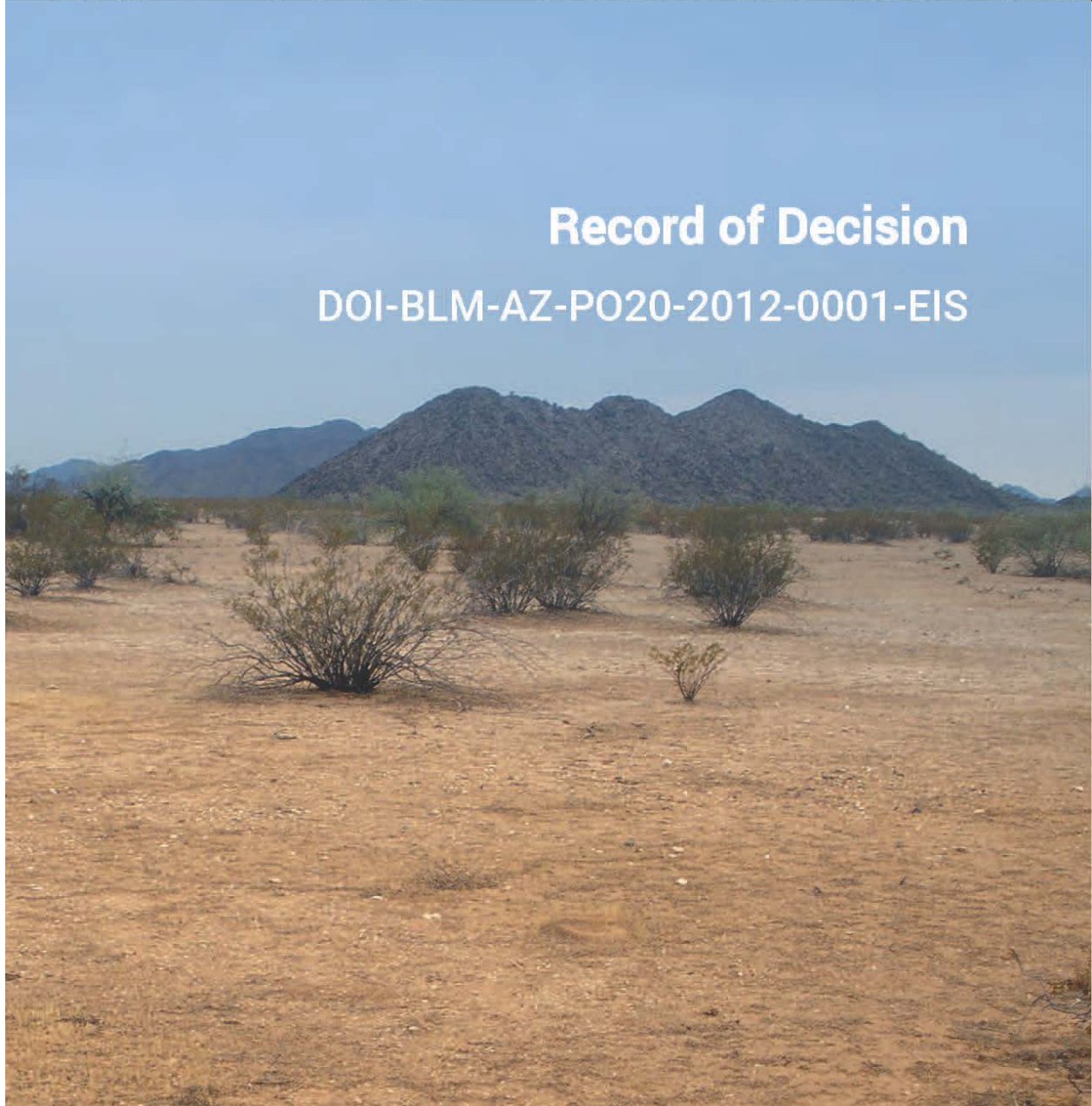
Sonoran Valley Parkway Project

Arizona State Office, Lower Sonoran Field Office

April 29, 2019

Record of Decision

DOI-BLM-AZ-PO20-2012-0001-EIS



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SUMMARY

The U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Lower Sonoran Field Office (LSFO) received a proposal from the City of Goodyear (City) in February 2008 for a right-of-way for the construction and operation of a two- to six-lane, 250-foot-wide, approximately 15- to 18-mile-long Sonoran Valley Parkway (Parkway). This document constitutes the DOI's and BLM's Record of Decision (ROD) for the Sonoran Valley Parkway Project.

Chapters 1 and 2 of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) include a detailed discussion of the project components and alternatives. The BLM identified a portion of Alternative A in combination with Sub-Alternative G as the BLM Selected Alternative (Figure A-1). Other alternatives considered include the No Action Alternative, Alternative A the proponent proposed action, Alternative C, Alternative H and Sub-alternatives F, and G, (Figure A-2). The project can be found on BLM's ePlanning website: <https://go.usa.gov/xP9zF>

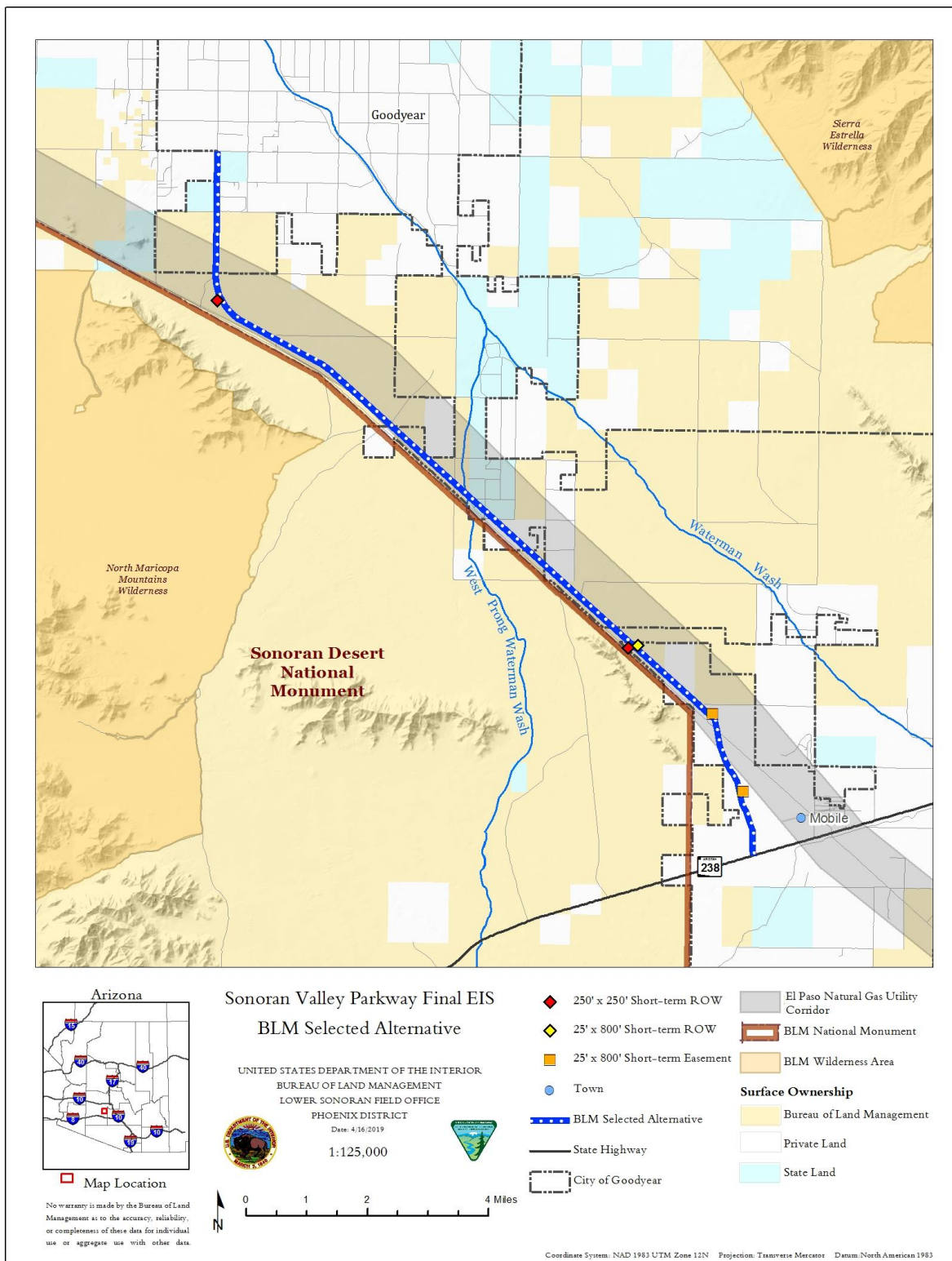


Figure A-1. BLM Selected Alternative.

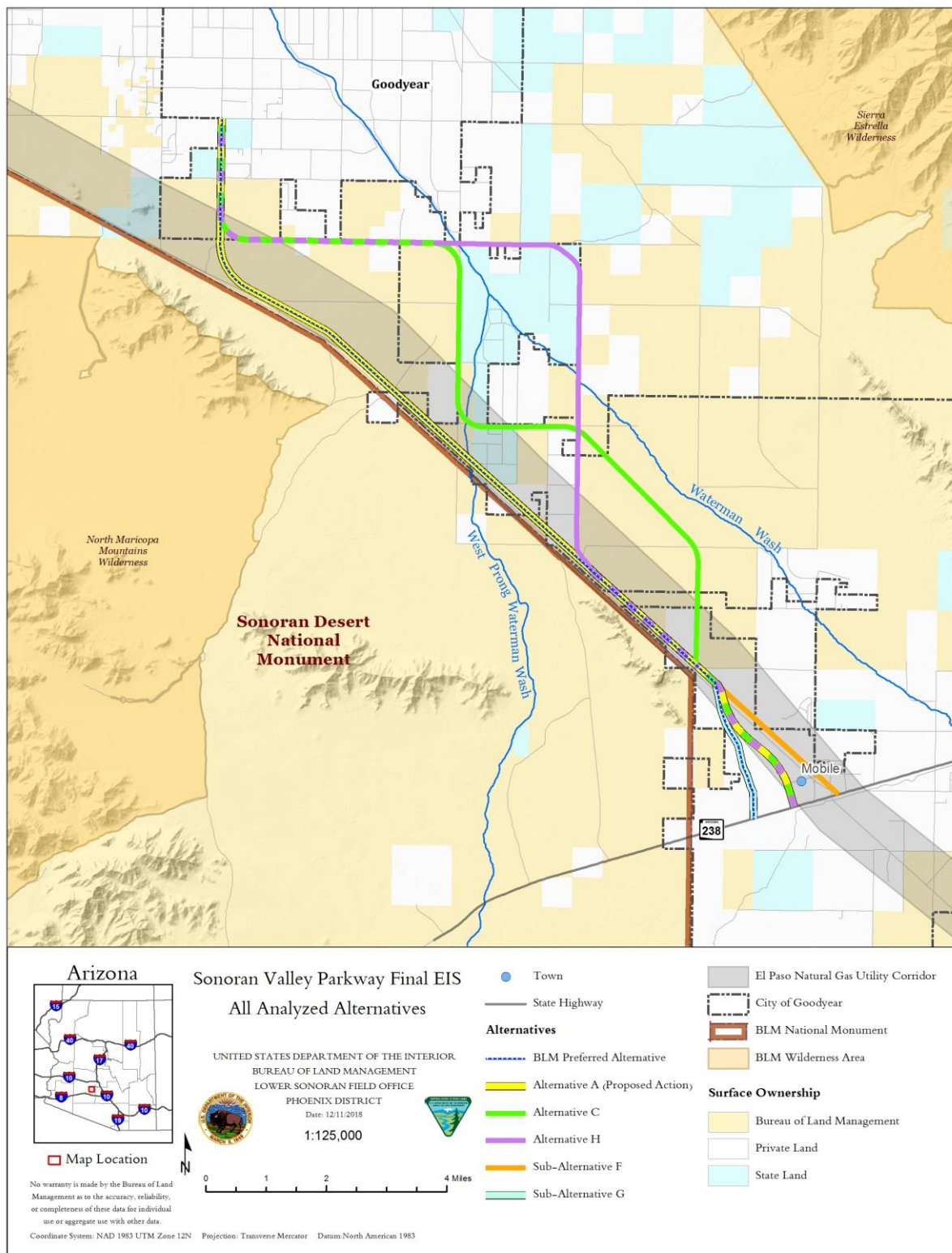


Figure A-2. All Analyzed Alternatives.

1 DECISION

This ROD has one decision: the decision is hereby made to approve the BLM Selected Alternative (a portion of Alternative A combined with Sub-alternative G as identified in Figure A-1.), which authorizes a perpetual right-of-way (ROW) grant under Title V of the Federal Land and Policy Management Act (FLPMA) (43 United States Code [USC] 1761 *et seq.*) as amended. The ROW will be granted to the City to construct, operate, and maintain a 2-lane Parkway on BLM-administered lands in Arizona with terms and conditions as explained herein. Design features, best management practices (BMPs), and standard operating procedures (SOPs) are included in Appendices D and E of this ROD, which include specific means, measures, or practices that would reduce or eliminate effects of the BLM Selected Alternative. The design features apply to the project as a whole. Chapter 4 of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS) describes the potential direct, indirect and cumulative effects from the BLM Selected Alternative and other action alternatives considered.

The BLM Selected Alternative lies predominately within the existing multi-use utility corridor, previously analyzed for this type of use in the Lower Sonoran Resource Management Plan (LSFO RMP). This minimizes land disturbance where the Parkway and temporary ROWs will be constructed.

This ROD applies only to the BLM-administered lands, and to the BLM's decision on the Parkway. Other agencies are responsible for issuing their own permits and applicable authorizations for the project. This ROD reflects careful consideration of the information generated from the environmental review process, and it further reflects resolution of the issues by the BLM and the DOI through such process.

All practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental impacts have been considered and adopted. The voluntary City-committed design features and BMPs noted in Appendices D and E of this ROD are intended to avoid and/or minimize adverse impacts to environmental resources.

This decision authorizes the issuance of a 250-foot ROW grant to accommodate a two-lane Parkway (Phase I). Later phases would address potential future expansion to a four- to six-lane Parkway. The time frame for the phased construction is unknown and is dependent on demands within the Sonoran Valley Planning Area. Potential expansion beyond Phase 1 would require further authorizations from the BLM and would be subject to additional environmental review.

The ROW grant does not authorize the City to commence construction of any of the facilities or proceed with any ground disturbing activities associated with the Parkway on BLM-administered lands. The City must provide an updated Plan of Development (POD) for the BLM Selected Alternative. The City must comply with all pre-construction requirements, ROW grant, POD (Construction, Operation, and Maintenance Plan), and design features included in Appendices A through E of this ROD.

1.1 BLM Selected Alternative

The BLM Selected Alternative (Figure A-1) in this ROD, and described in the 2019 Final EIS as the BLM Preferred Alternative, incorporates the design features, BMPs, SOPs, and other measures detailed in Appendices A through E. The BLM Selected Alternative grants the City a ROW across BLM-administered lands to meet the City's transportation needs.

The BLM Selected Alternative offers the shortest, most efficient and direct route, avoids known historic and cultural resources, and will allow for better management opportunities for vehicle entry into the public lands. It would be approximately 15 miles; and include approximately 10 miles of BLM-administered land, 1 mile of Arizona State Land Department (ASLD) land, and 4 miles of private land.

Alternative A follows the alignment identified within the Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG) and Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) long-range transportation plans and would be compatible with the Maricopa County Department of Transportation recommendations. Characteristics of the Alternative A alignment include the following:

- Located in an existing El Paso Natural Gas (EPNG) multi-use utility corridor, previously analyzed in the LSFO RMP.
- Represents the shortest and most direct route to connect southern Goodyear to Mobile.
- Splits multiple grazing allotments; may require development of additional water sources for continued grazing.

Sub-Alternative G is described in Section 2.1.2 below.

Public input generated from the scoping and Draft EIS comments indicated support for the Selected Alternative, which provides the most direct and efficient connection from Rainbow Valley Road to State Route 238 through Rainbow Valley for emergency services, while providing the greatest distance from Waterman Wash, a sensitive resource area.

The Selected Alternative will reasonably accomplish the purpose and need for the Federal action while fulfilling the BLM's statutory mission and responsibilities, giving consideration to economic, environmental, and technical factors. In particular, this alternative best addresses public and agency concerns. See Section 2, Alternatives, for detailed descriptions of all Alternatives.

2 ALTERNATIVES

2.1 Overview of Alternatives Considered in the Final EIS

All action alternatives (Figure A-2) would provide for a 250-foot-wide ROW that would accommodate a two- to six-lane parkway connecting to Rainbow Valley Road in the north and SR 238 in the south. Grading, drainage, traffic speeds of 55 miles per hour (mph) and periodic interchanges will provide improved access to public and private lands in the project area. Additionally, at-grade intersections will support future transportation connections. All action alternatives would provide opportunities for improved access to the BLM-administered lands. Under all action alternatives, the two-lane Parkway would accommodate approximately 24,000 vehicles per day. All action alternatives would provide access to the Butterfield Overland Stage Route and Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail (Anza NHT).

2.1.1 Alternative A Proposed Action Alternative

Alternative A (Figure A-2) was developed by the City and represents the Proposed Action, providing a direct and efficient connection from Rainbow Valley Road to State Route 238 through Rainbow Valley for emergency services. It would cross approximately 16 miles: 10 miles of BLM-administered land, 1 mile of ASLD land, and 5 miles of private land. Compared to the BLM Selected Alternative, Alternative A is 1 mile longer, crosses more private land, and impacts the Mobile Elementary School and cultural resource sites. Public input generated from scoping meetings indicated support for Alternative A.

2.1.2 Sub-Alternative G

Sub-Alternative G, approximately 2 miles long (Figure A-2), was developed by the BLM to avoid known historic and cultural resources and move the Parkway away from the Mobile school. It would provide a

different alignment and replace approximately 3 miles of Alternative A, C, or H on the southern portion of the Parkway.

2.1.3 No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, the City's ROW application to develop the Parkway would not be approved. Without the project, the projected increase in traffic volumes would occur on area roadways such as State Route (SR) 85 and SR 238 and access for emergency services, residents, and commuters would remain unchanged, limited, and unimproved. The No Action Alternative conflicts with the regional transportation recommendations stated in the MAG 2040 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) (2017b), which provides for a parkway corridor to meet travel demand from Goodyear to SR 238.

2.1.4 Alternative C

Alternative C, approximately 18 miles long (Figure A-2), was developed to distance the Parkway from the SDNM. It crosses approximately 12 miles of BLM-administered land, 1 mile of ASLD land, and 5 miles of private land. It follows the existing Patterson Road and Bullard Avenue to eliminate the need for new construction on ASLD lands and private inholdings. It would parallel Waterman Wash within a half mile, which would require design features to minimize impact from the wash flooding during monsoons. This alternative contains multiple sharp turns and curves and does not align within the EPNG multi-use utility corridor.

Characteristics of the Alternative C alignment include the following:

- Redirects noise and visual impacts away from the SDNM.
- Splits multiple pastures and would result in areas without water sources; additional water sources (subject to separate environmental analysis) may be required for continued grazing.
- Longer than Alternative A and the BLM Selected Alternative.

2.1.5 Alternative H

Alternative H (Figure A-2), approximately 18 miles long: crosses approximately 8 miles of BLM-administered land, 4 miles of ASLD land, and 6 miles of private land. It provides access to the private lands and 26 acres of BLM-administered lands that have been identified for disposal or exchange. It would not parallel Waterman Wash, but cross the wash in numerous locations with culverts to avoid impacts. This alternative contains multiple sharp turns and curves and does not align within the EPNG multi-use utility corridor.

Characteristics of the Alternative H:

- Redirects noise and visual impacts away from the SDNM.
- Provides access to BLM-administered lands identified for disposal.
- Avoids paralleling the biological and hydrologic resources of Waterman Wash and its tributaries.
- Longer than Alternative A and the BLM Selected Alternative.

2.1.6 Sub-Alternative F

Sub-Alternative F (Figure A-2), approximately 3 miles, was developed to avoid known historic and cultural resources, and the (EPNG) Pipeline Road, while maintaining access to the Butterfield Overland Stage Route and Anza NHT. It would provide a different alignment and replace approximately 3 miles of Alternative A, C, or H on the southern portion of the Parkway. This alternative would pass directly through the

Butterfield Station Landfill, an active municipal solid waste landfill, and would require relocation of approximately 5 acres of the landfill.

2.2 Environmentally Preferred Alternative(s)

As required by 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1505.2(b), an agency preparing an EIS must state in its ROD the environmentally preferable alternative. This is the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment and that best protects, preserves, and enhances historic, cultural, and natural resources. The No Action Alternative is the environmentally preferable alternative. Under the No Action Alternative, the BLM would not issue the City a ROW grant to construct a Parkway on Federal land, therefore, there would not be environmental impacts to historic, cultural, and natural resources on Federal land. Although the No Action Alternative would have the least effect on the environment, it would not allow for development of the project.

2.3 Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Further Analysis

The BLM considered nine other alternatives, but eliminated them from detailed analysis. Appendix J and Figure 2-6 in the Map Volume of the Final EIS discusses each of the alternatives and the rationale for why they were eliminated from detailed analysis.

- Rainbow Valley Road Connection
- State Route 303L Connection
- Combining the Parkway with Future Planned Roads
- Gas Line Road
- Alternative B
- Alternative D
- Alternative E
- Sub-Alternative H1
- Sub-Alternative H2

3 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The BLM has taken numerous steps to inform the public, special interest groups, tribes, and local, state, and Federal agencies about the Parkway, and to solicit feedback from these interested parties to help shape the scope and alternatives of this project.

3.1 Scoping

The BLM published a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare the proposed SVPP EIS in the *Federal Register* on April 2, 2008. Publication of the NOI initiated a 60-day formal scoping period, to solicit comments regarding the project and its potential impacts.

The BLM advertised the initiation of the EIS process using a variety of methods and held public scoping meetings in Goodyear on May 28, 2008, and in Maricopa and Mobile on May 29, 2008. At each meeting, BLM and City staff members were available to provide information on project planning activities to date and to answer questions. Meeting attendees were encouraged to provide comments on the issues and alternatives to be analyzed in the Draft EIS.

3.2 Draft EIS Availability and Comments Received

A Notice of Availability (NOA) for the Draft EIS was published in the *Federal Register* on July 19, 2013, initiating a 45-day comment period ending September 3, 2013. At the public's request the comment period was extended to September 20, 2013. The BLM hosted two public meetings in August 20 and 22, 2013 in Goodyear and Maricopa, to allow the public an opportunity to ask questions and provide comments on the Draft EIS.

The BLM held 16 public and agency meetings from February 27, 2009 to September 10, 2014.

The BLM received approximately 46 comment emails or letters to consider. The Final EIS includes all comments received by the BLM in response to publication of the Draft EIS, and the BLM's responses to substantive comments are included in Appendix Q of the Final EIS. In response to the comments, the Final EIS includes more background information on regional transportation needs and the relationship of other projects to the Parkway; a better explanation of the separate phases of constructing the fully-built Parkway (Section 2.5 of the Final EIS); an updated development scenario (Appendix C of the ROD); and an updated environmental analysis that better reflects the anticipated phasing of the Parkway's construction.

3.3 Final EIS Availability and Comments Received

An NOA for the Final EIS was published in the *Federal Register* on March 22, 2019. Copies were made available at various libraries, BLM offices, and on the Internet. To date, the BLM has received three comments after publication of the Final EIS, one non-substantive, the second concerning an existing utility within the proposed ROW. The BLM contacted the utility company, and provided them feedback regarding the location of the Parkway within the utility corridor and committed to coordination during project implementation. The BLM also received a letter from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requesting clarification on several points. The BLM reached out to the EPA and provided responses to their comments.

3.4 Cooperating Agency Involvement

Beginning in April 2012, BLM initiated Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) invitations to local municipalities and agencies, whose purpose would be to establish a formal cooperating agency relationship. Seven agencies (Federal, state, county, and local) with jurisdictional authority and/or applicable special expertise cooperated in the development of the EIS. The cooperating agencies in the Final EIS process were the City, ADOT, Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD), ASLD, MAG, National Park Service, Flood Control District of Maricopa County, and the City of Maricopa.

The cooperating agencies assisted with preparation in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, including providing up-to-date and relevant studies and inventories, reviewing public involvement documents, identifying issues, assisting with the formulation of alternatives, and reviewing Draft and Final EIS text and other EIS materials.

3.5 Additional Coordination

3.5.1 Native American Tribes

The BLM consulted with tribes throughout the EIS process on a government-to-government basis pursuant to NEPA; Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA); Executive Order 13175; and

other laws and policies in accordance with BLM Manual 1780, *Tribal Relations*, and BLM Manual 1780-1, *Improving and Sustaining BLM-Tribal Relations*. In addition to compliance with Section 106 of the NHPA, tribes are also invited to comment on other issues of concern to their governments and communities. The Gila River Indian Community, Salt River Pima–Maricopa Indian Community, Tohono O’odham Nation, Ak-Chin Indian Community, and Hopi Tribe were included in this consultation effort. The BLM consulted and coordinated with Native American Tribes through letters, face to face meetings, and field trips starting in 2008 through 2015 (see Section 5.4 of the Final EIS).

3.5.2 Arizona State Historic Preservation Office

The BLM is the lead Federal agency for compliance with the NHPA. Section 106 of the NHPA, as amended (54 USC 306108 et seq.) and as defined in 36 CFR 800. In consultation with the Arizona SHPO, the BLM made an “adverse effect” determination for the proposed project. In September 2013, BLM and SHPO determined that preparation of a Programmatic Agreement (PA) was appropriate because the effects of the proposed project could not be fully determined prior to the approval of the project (36 CFR 800.14(b) (1) (ii)) since the project could be approved in phases (Appendix A of this ROD). The PA stipulates the process necessary to comply with Section 106 obligations for construction, operation, maintenance, and decommissioning of the proposed project.

4 ERRATA

4.1 Errata to the Final Environmental Impact Statement

No errata have been identified to date.

5 APPROVAL

It is my decision to approve the BLM Selected Alternative, which allows for the authorization of a 250-foot ROW to the City of Goodyear for the construction and operation of a two-lane Parkway subject to the terms, conditions, stipulations, and voluntary design features incorporated in this ROD. This decision is effective on the date this ROD is signed.

Should you wish to appeal the decision, all instructions listed in Form 1842-1 (Appendix E of this ROD) must be followed.

Approved By:



Edward J. Kender
Field Manager
Lower Sonoran Field Office



Date