

BIOLOGICAL EVALUATION



Buckskin Sanitary District Phases 5 & 6

PREPARED BY:

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PREPARED FOR:

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January 2014



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Biological Evaluation

for

Buckskin Sanitary District, Phases 5 & 6

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1. Project Location

Buckskin Sanitary District, Phases 5 & 6 will address needed sewer system and treatment improvements to provide adequate service to existing residential customers and State-park users situated along an approximately 3.5-mile service area along State Route 95 (SR 95) in an unincorporated area in far western La Paz County, Arizona, east of the Colorado River (Figure 1). The legal description is Sections 21–22, 27–28, and 32–34 of Township 11 North, Range 18 West, Gila and Salt River Baseline and Meridian. Land in the project area is both privately owned and public land operated by Arizona State Parks.

2. Project Description

The Buckskin Sanitary District (BSD) has been implementing a comprehensive plan to expand its collection and treatment system to serve the unsewered developed portions of BSD's service area. An engineering consultant, Energy and Water Solutions, was retained to provide the technical elements of the planning and preliminary-design documents. The new system will provide sewer service to existing residences, provide necessary treatment for wastewater, and provide for needed improvements for future customer-base growth. Because this project will be federally funded by United States Department of Agriculture Rural Utility Service, a Biological Evaluation has been prepared to comply with the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The Proposed Action includes the addition of a sewer system composed of a new gravity sewer (backbone) within the 3.5-mile project area. In Zone 1, approximately 2,100 linear feet of new 8-inch gravity sewer lines would be constructed, terminating at a lift station located on the north side of Moonridge Marina Unit 1. Additionally, approximately 1,670 linear feet of new 6-inch sewer lines will be installed to serve individual properties along Parker Dam Road, and approximately 600 linear feet of new 8-inch gravity lines would provide service east of SR95 within Zone 1. The new gravity lines will convey wastes to a new lift station which will convey all wastewater flow from Zone 1 through a 6-inch force main along SR95 to an existing manhole in Zone 2.

In Zone 2, a new lift station will be constructed at the south end of Verde West on the east side of SR95. The existing dry gravity sewer and force mains in Zone 2 include 1,574 feet of 12-inch PVC sewer, 1,080 feet of 8-inch sewer, as well as 6-inch and 4-inch sewer lines. Although these lines have never been placed in service, the lines are considered new and in excellent condition. These facilities will be inspected by the District prior to being placed in service (EWS, 2013). All wastewater generated in Zones 1 and 2 will be conveyed through a 6-inch force main and discharge directly into the new WWTP located on the east side of SR95 in Zone 3.

Zone 3 basically consists of three RV Parks located on the west side of SR95: The River Island State Park (RISP), Castle Rock Resort (CRR), and the Buckskin Mountain State Park (BMSP). Since each of these entities will be served by a pumping system, it was determined that a gravity backbone system would not be warranted in Zone 3. A new lift station would be constructed at CRR to convey all wastewater to the proposed WWTP. The proposed lift station at CRR will be sized to accept all existing and future flow generated within the development. The lift station would be constructed at a depth of approximately 12'-15' below grade. A 3-inch force main, approximately 3,610 linear feet, would run out the resort entrance and north along SR95 ROW and discharge to the headworks of the proposed WWTP. The existing lift station at BMSP will be rehabilitated and sized to accept all flow generated within the park. A 4-inch force main, approximately 9,309 linear feet, would run out the park entrance and north along SR95 ROW and discharge to the headworks of the proposed WWTP.

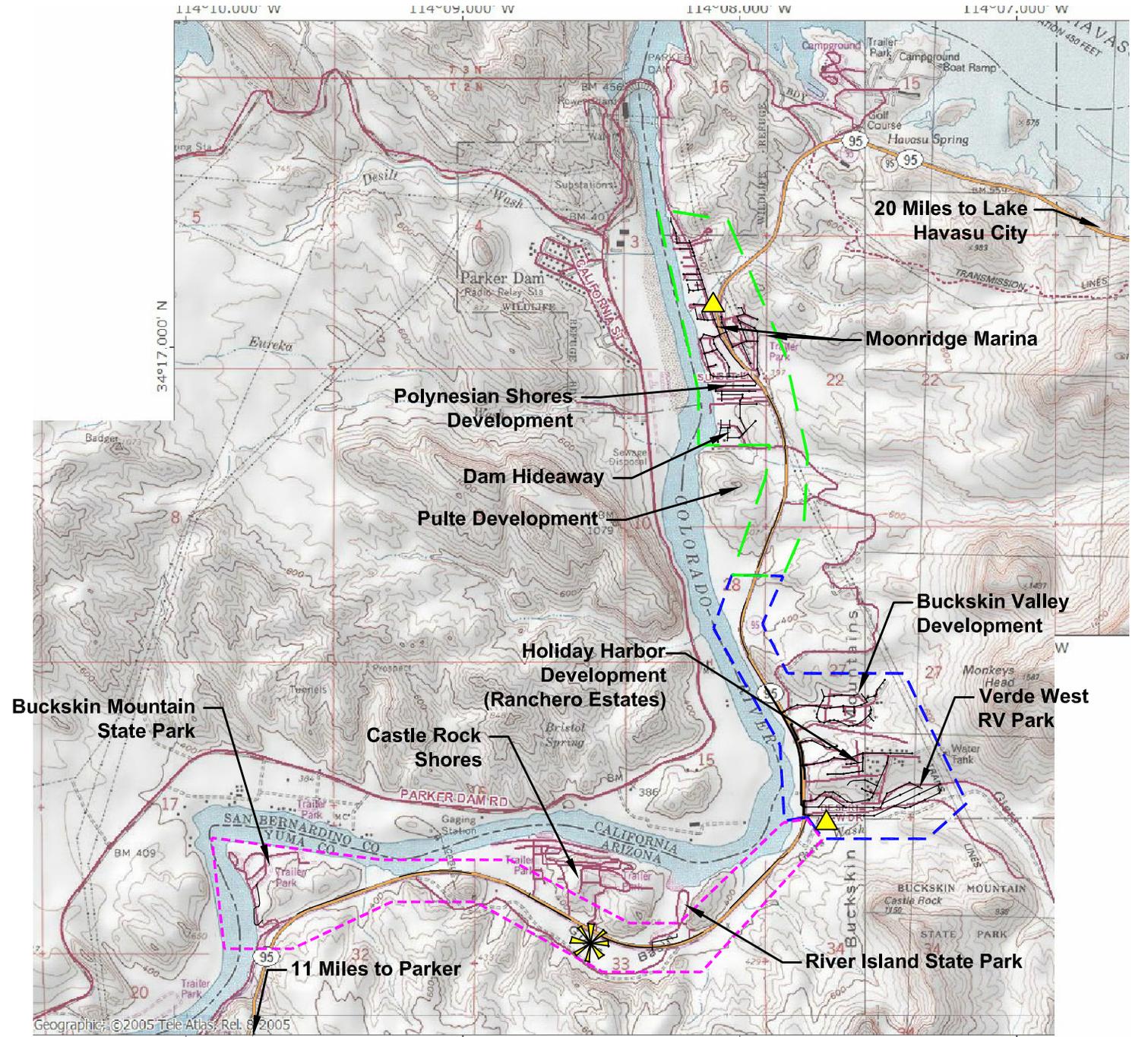
The existing lift station at RISP will be rehabilitated and sized to accept all flow generated within the park. A 1 ¼-inch force main, approximately 400 linear feet, would run in a southerly direction towards SR95 and manifold into the 6-inch force main originating in Zone 2.

3. Vegetation

The project area is located in the Lower Colorado River Valley subdivision of the Sonoran Desertscrub biotic community (Brown 1994). Elevation in the project area ranges from 300 to 1,400 feet above mean sea level. A windshield survey of the project area was completed on September 30, 2013, by a qualified biologist. A thorough pedestrian survey was completed the same day of Giers Basin (Appendix A, Photos 1 and 2). Right-of-way along SR 95 is a mix of rocky road cuts, graded shoulders, residential and business development, and scrubby natural

vegetation. Prominent roadside species include brittlebush, catclaw acacia, creosote, and small velvet mesquites. Small paloverdes are present along the rocky road cuts. Giers Basin is thick with shrubs such as brittlebush, creosote, saltbush, and wolfberry with larger catclaw acacia and velvet mesquite trees. Old, dry saltbushes are especially thick and make traversing parts of the basin difficult. A small drainage swale makes a bend in the basin and is thick with arrowweed, saltbush, and salt cedar (Appendix A, Photo 3). A different plant community grows sparsely on the surrounding cliff faces, including barrel and cholla cacti, foothill paloverde, and ironwood (Appendix A, Photo 4). Trees and cacti protected by Arizona Native Plant Law are present, including barrel and cholla cacti, foothill paloverde, ironwood, and velvet mesquite. Efforts to enumerate and assess protected native plants for salvage in coordination with Arizona Department of Agriculture will be required prior to any ground-disturbing activities.

Figure 1. Project Location Map



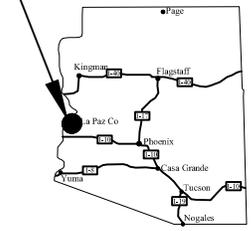
Legend

-  Proposed Wastewater Treatment Plant
-  Proposed Lift Station

Project Zones

-  Zone 1
-  Zone 2
-  Zone 3

PROJECT LOCATION



**BUCKSKIN SANITARY DISTRICT
PHASE 5/6
LA PAZ COUNTY, ARIZONA**

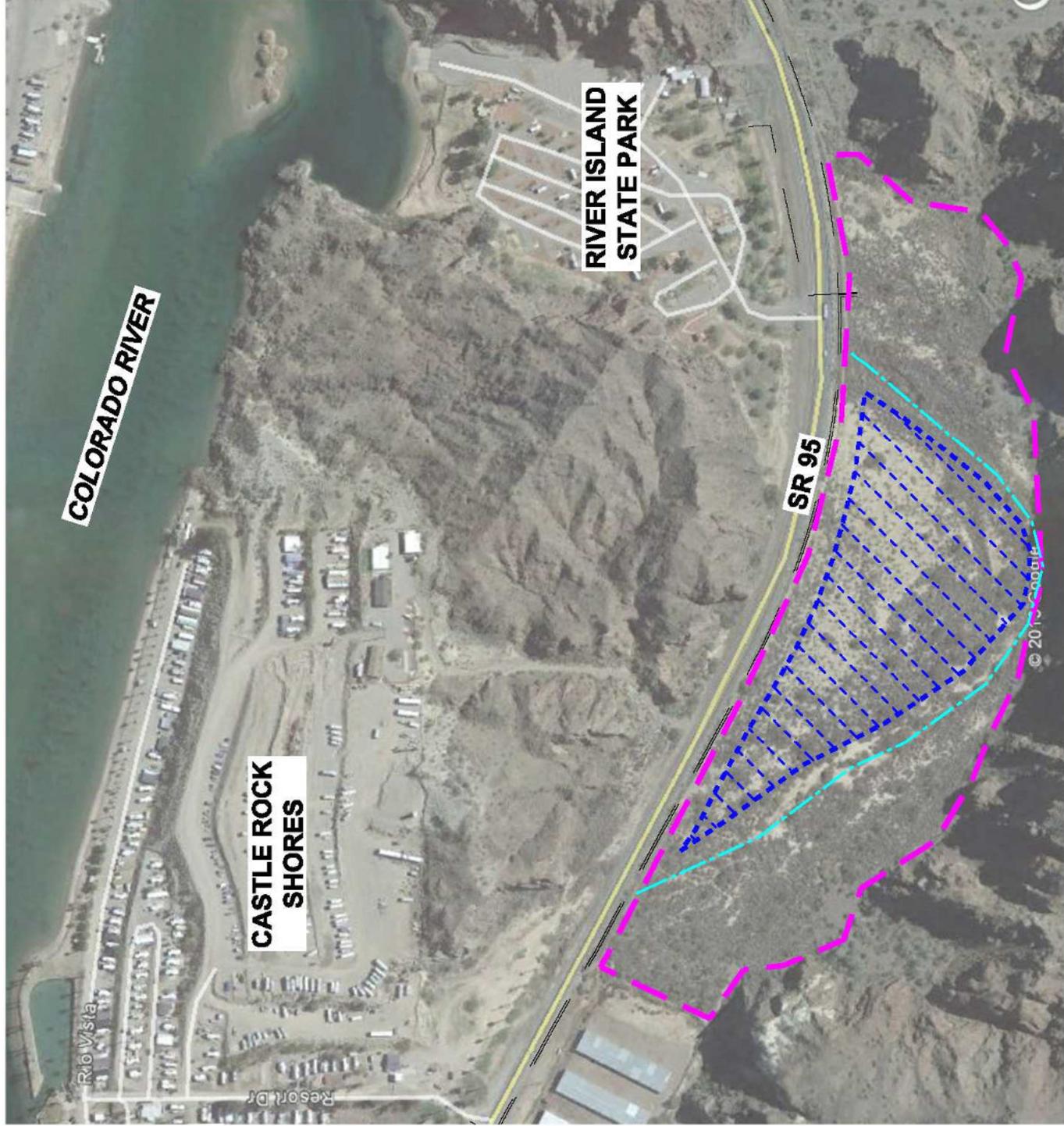
Major Contour Interval: 200'
SCALE 1" = 1/2mi

0 1/4mi 1/2mi 1mi
T11N, R18W, Sections 16, 21, 22, 27, 28, 32, 33, 34
Source: TOPO!map



Figure 1: Project Location Map

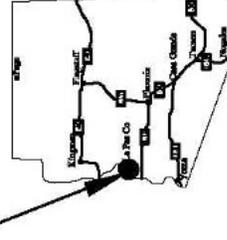
Figure 2. Proposed WWTP Location Map



Legend

-  Waste Water Treatment Plant (WWTP) Study Area
-  Drainage Discharge Area
-  Potential Location for Waste Water Treatment Plant (WWTP)

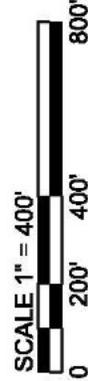
PROJECT LOCATION



**BUCKSKIN SANITARY DISTRICT
PHASE 5/6
LA PAZ COUNTY, ARIZONA**

Figure 2: Proposed WWTP Location Map

Major Contour Interval: 5'



Source: Google Earth 2013



4. Species Identification

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) list of endangered, proposed threatened, candidate, and delisted species (per the ESA) with the potential to occur in La Paz County was reviewed to determine if any of these species has the potential to occur in the project area. Table 1 includes a species that has the potential to occur in the project area and is analyzed further in Section 4. Species included in the USFWS list but excluded from further evaluation are addressed in Table 2. This includes critical-habitat designations for bonytail chub and razorback sucker within 3 miles of the project vicinity (see Section 5 and Appendix B).

Table 1. Candidate species with the potential to occur in the project area

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status ^a
Sonoran desert tortoise	<i>Gopherus morafkai</i>	C

^aStatus Definition: C=Candidate

Source: USFWS list of endangered, proposed threatened, candidate, and delisted species with the potential to occur in La Paz County, <<http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/>>, updated by USFWS on October 30, 2013.

Table 2. Endangered, proposed threatened, candidate, and delisted species excluded from evaluation and justification for their exclusion

Species name	Status ^a	Habitat requirements	Exclusion justification
Fish			
Bonytail chub (<i>Gila elegans</i>)	E	Warm, swift, turbid mainstem rivers of the Colorado River basin and reservoirs in the lower basin below 4,000 feet.	No suitable habitat within project area. No aquatic resources will be impacted. Designated critical habitat will not be impacted.
Gila topminnow (<i>Poeciliopsis occidentalis occidentalis</i>)	E	Small streams, springs, and cienegas-vegetated shallows below 4,500 feet.	No suitable habitat within project area. No aquatic resources will be impacted.
Razorback sucker (<i>Xyrauchen texanus</i>)	E	Riverine and lacustrine areas of the Colorado River and its tributaries below 6,000 feet.	No suitable habitat within project area. No aquatic resources will be impacted. Designated critical habitat will not be impacted.
Roundtail chub (<i>Gila robusta</i>)	C	Cool to warm waters of rivers and streams from 1,000 to 7,500 feet. Often occupies the deepest pools and eddies of large streams.	No suitable habitat within project area. No aquatic resources will be impacted.
Birds			
American peregrine falcon (<i>Falco peregrinus anatum</i>)	D	Rocky, steep cliffs, primarily near water where prey concentrations are high. Nests are found on ledges of cliffs, and sometimes on man-made structures between 3,500 and 9,000 feet.	No suitable habitat within project area. Hilly terrain and surface-mining areas in the project area do not contain rocky or steep cliffs.

Species name	Status ^a	Habitat requirements	Exclusion justification
Bald eagle (<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>)	D	Large trees or cliffs near water (reservoirs, rivers, and streams) with abundant prey at various elevations.	No suitable habitat within project area. No aquatic resources will be impacted.
California brown pelican (<i>Pelecanus occidentalis californicus</i>)	D	Coastal land and islands. Species found occasionally around Arizona's lakes and rivers at various elevations.	No suitable habitat within project area. No aquatic resources or coastal lands/islands/lakes/rivers will be impacted.
Southwestern willow flycatcher (<i>Empidonax traillii extimus</i>)	E	Cottonwood/willow and tamarisk vegetation communities along rivers and streams below 8,500 feet.	No suitable habitat within project area. No riparian resources will be impacted.
Sprague's pipit (<i>Anthus spragueii</i>)	C	Native grasslands with vegetation of intermediate height and lacking woody shrubs below 5,000 feet.	No suitable habitat within project area. No native grasslands in the project area.
Yellow-billed cuckoo (<i>Coccyzus americanus</i>)	PT	Large blocks of riparian woodlands (cottonwood, willow, or tamarisk galleries) below 6,500 feet.	No suitable habitat within project area. No aquatic resources will be impacted.
Yuma clapper rail (<i>Rallus longirostris yumanensis</i>)	E	Fresh water and brackish marshes below 4,500 feet.	No suitable habitat within project area. No aquatic resources will be impacted.
Reptiles			
Northern Mexican gartersnake (<i>Thamnophis eques megalops</i>)	PT	Cienegas, stock tanks, large-river riparian woodlands and forests, and streamside gallery forests between 130 and 8,497 feet.	No suitable habitat within project area. No aquatic resources will be impacted.

^aStatus Definitions: E=Endangered, PT=Proposed Threatened, C=Candidate, D=Delisted

Source: USFWS list of endangered, proposed threatened, candidate, and delisted species with the potential to occur in La Paz County, <<http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/>>, updated by USFWS on October 30, 2013.

5. Species Evaluation

Sonoran Desert Tortoise

Habitat for tortoises consists primarily of rocky (often steep) hillsides and bajadas of Mohave and Sonoran desertscrub, but they may encroach into desert grasslands, juniper woodlands, interior chaparral habitats, and even pine communities at elevations below 7,800 feet. Washes and valley bottoms may be used in dispersal. Suitable habitat is present throughout the project area, especially in the rocky areas bordering Giers Basin, and they have been detected within 3 miles of the project vicinity (see Section 5 and Appendix B).

While no tortoises or signs of tortoises were detected during the site visit, tortoises are a cryptic species and only a small portion of the project area was examined in a non-protocol survey. Tortoises might be present both in the uplands and along wash corridors. Tortoises are currently a candidate species and not afforded formal protection under the ESA; however, they are still protected under State law. Should Sonoran desert tortoises be encountered during ground-disturbing activities *Guidelines for Handling Sonoran Desert Tortoises Encountered on Development Projects* issued by Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) should be used (Appendix C).

6. Other Special-Status Species

AGFD's on-line environmental review tool was accessed on September 9, 2013, to determine special-status species known to occur in the project area and surrounding 3-mile project vicinity (Appendix B). The following species in the query were evaluated previously in Sections 3 and 4: American peregrine falcon, bonytail chub (plus designated critical habitat), razorback sucker (plus designated critical habitat), Sonoran desert tortoise, southwestern willow flycatcher, yellow-billed cuckoo, and Yuma clapper rail.

Arizona toad (USFWS Species of Concern) and Clark's grebe (AGFD Wildlife of Special Concern in Arizona) are both species associated with aquatic habitats of the nearby Colorado River. Because no aquatic resources will be impacted by project activities, these species will not be impacted.

California leaf-nosed bat (AGFD Wildlife of Special Concern in Arizona and USFWS Species of Concern) and Yuma myotis (USFWS Species of Concern) are bat species that may forage in the project area and roost in the rocky uplands in the project vicinity. However, because no rocky uplands will be impacted by project activities, these species and the associated bat colony recorded within 3 miles of the project vicinity will not be impacted.

Like the Sonoran desert tortoise, banded Gila monsters (USFWS Species of Concern) may be present throughout the project area, especially in Giers Basin. While individual banded Gila monsters might be impacted by project activities, this project will not result in a trend toward federal listing or loss of viability for this special-status species.

7. Migratory Birds

Seven bird species native to the project area and protected by the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) were detected during the September 30, 2013, site visit, and many others would be expected to use habitat in the project area throughout the year. The MBTA offers protection to certain adult birds, their nests, and young. If during ground-disturbing activities adult birds are present and nesting, nests should be avoided by ground-disturbing activities until young have fledged. Scheduling ground-disturbing activities outside the bird breeding season (generally late winter, spring, and early summer in the Sonoran Desert) can lessen the chances for MBTA-related impacts. Impacts to MBTA-protected birds require a federal permit.

8. Coordination

Scoping letters were sent to AGFD, Arizona State Parks (including Buckskin Mountain and River Island state parks), and USFWS, among others, to solicit input on environmental effects of the project. Carrie Marr, Environmental Contaminant Specialist with USFWS responded via e-mail asking if the project was going to impact wetlands or jurisdictional waters of the U.S. (as administered by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers). Because no wetlands or jurisdictional waters of the U.S. will be impacted by the project, USFWS has no further concerns. The e-mail string is provided in Appendix D.

9. Finding and Recommendations

Development of Buckskin Sanitary District, Phases 5 & 6 will have no effect to species federally protected under the ESA. The Sonoran desert tortoise is currently a candidate species for ESA protection and is protected by State law. If Sonoran desert tortoises are encountered during ground-disturbing activities, *Guidelines for Handling Sonoran Desert Tortoises Encountered on Development Projects* issued by AGFD should be used (Appendix C). Additionally, the MBTA provides protections to most adult birds, their nests, eggs, and young, and development activities should avoid disturbing nests, which are most active during late winter, spring, and early summer in the Sonoran Desert. Impacts to MBTA-protected birds require a federal permit. Numerous trees and cacti protected by Arizona Native Plant Law are present in the project area, especially in rocky areas. Efforts to enumerate and assess these plants for salvage in coordination with Arizona Department of Agriculture will be required prior to any ground-disturbing activities.

10. Literature Cited

Brown, D. E. 1994. "Sonoran Desertscrub." In Biotic Communities of the Southwestern United States and Northwestern Mexico, edited by D. E. Brown. University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City, pp. 181–221.

Energy and Water Solutions (EWS), 2013. Draft Preliminary Engineering Report.

11. Signature



Prepared By:

Shero Holland, Biologist
Del Sol Group

Date: January 16, 2014

Appendix A. Photographs



Photo 1. View across Giers Basin from its eastern end. Note the thick saltbush in the basin in the foreground and rocky cliffs lining the basin in the background.



Photo 2. View across Giers Basin from its western end. Vegetation in this portion of the basin is more open than Photo 1.



Photo 3. View along a drainage swale that curves through Giers Basin and is lined with thick vegetation.



Photo 4. The rocky uplands surrounding Giers Basin are dotted with barrel and cholla cacti, among other desert plants.

**Appendix B. Arizona Game and Fish Department's
On-Line Environmental Review Tool Receipt**

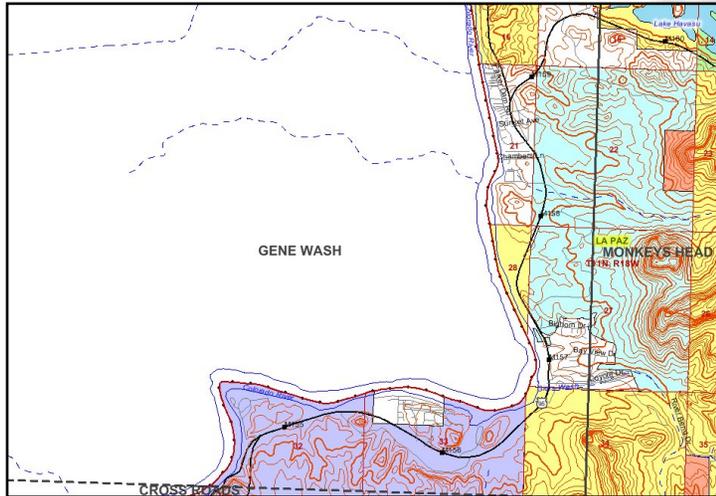
Arizona's On-line Environmental Review Tool

Search ID: 20130909021336

Project Name: Buckskin Sanitary dist

Date: 9/9/2013 12:54:24 PM

Project Location



Project Name: Buckskin Sanitary dist

Submitted By: Noelle Sanders

On behalf of: ACOE

Project Search ID: 20130909021336

Date: 9/9/2013 12:54:19 PM

Project Category: Development Outside Municipalities (Rural Development), Residential single dwelling and associated infrastructure, New construction

Project Coordinates (UTM Zone 12-NAD 83): 211089.992, 3796054.309 meter

Project Area: 1339.898 acres

Project Perimeter: 16762.605 meter

County: LA PAZ

USGS 7.5 Minute Quadrangle ID: 962

Quadrangle Name: GENE WASH

Project locality is currently being scoped

Location Accuracy Disclaimer

Project locations are assumed to be both precise and accurate for the purposes of environmental review. The creator/owner of the Project Review Receipt is solely responsible for the project location and thus the correctness of the Project Review Receipt content.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to provide in-depth comments and project review when additional information or environmental documentation becomes available.

Special Status Species Occurrences/Critical Habitat/Tribal Lands within 3 miles of Project Vicinity:

Name	Common Name	FWS	USFS	BLM	State
Aechmophorus clarkii	Clark's Grebe		S		WSC
Anaxyrus microscaphus	Arizona Toad	SC	S		
Bat Colony					
CH for Gila elegans	Designated Critical Habitat for bonytail				
CH for Xyrauchen texanus	Designated Critical Habitat for razorback sucker				
Coccyzus americanus	Yellow-billed Cuckoo (Western U.S. DPS)	PS:C*	S		WSC
Empidonax traillii extimus	Southwestern Willow Flycatcher	LE			WSC
Falco peregrinus anatum	American Peregrine Falcon	SC	S	S	WSC
Gila elegans	Bonytail	LE			WSC
Gopherus morafkai	Sonoran Desert Tortoise	C*	S		WSC
Heloderma suspectum cinctum	Banded Gila Monster	SC			
Macrotus californicus	California Leaf-nosed Bat	SC	S	S	WSC
Myotis yumanensis	Yuma Myotis	SC			
Rallus longirostris yumanensis	Yuma Clapper Rail	LE			WSC
Xyrauchen texanus	Razorback Sucker	LE			WSC

**Appendix C. Arizona Game and Fish Department's
Tortoise Handling Guidelines**

GUIDELINES FOR HANDLING SONORAN DESERT TORTOISES
ENCOUNTERED ON DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS
Arizona Game and Fish Department
Revised October 23, 2007

The Arizona Game and Fish Department (Department) has developed the following guidelines to reduce potential impacts to desert tortoises, and to promote the continued existence of tortoises throughout the state. These guidelines apply to short-term and/or small-scale projects, depending on the number of affected tortoises and specific type of project.

The Sonoran population of desert tortoises occurs south and east of the Colorado River. Tortoises encountered in the open should be moved out of harm's way to adjacent appropriate habitat. If an occupied burrow is determined to be in jeopardy of destruction, the tortoise should be relocated to the nearest appropriate alternate burrow or other appropriate shelter, as determined by a qualified biologist. Tortoises should be moved less than 48 hours in advance of the habitat disturbance so they do not return to the area in the interim. Tortoises should be moved quickly, kept in an upright position parallel to the ground at all times, and placed in the shade. Separate disposable gloves should be worn for each tortoise handled to avoid potential transfer of disease between tortoises. Tortoises must not be moved if the ambient air temperature exceeds 40° Celsius (105° Fahrenheit) unless an alternate burrow is available or the tortoise is in imminent danger.

A tortoise may be moved up to one-half mile, but no further than necessary from its original location. If a release site, or alternate burrow, is unavailable within this distance, and ambient air temperature exceeds 40° Celsius (105° Fahrenheit), the Department should be contacted to place the tortoise into a Department-regulated desert tortoise adoption program. Tortoises salvaged from projects which result in substantial permanent habitat loss (e.g. housing and highway projects), or those requiring removal during long-term (longer than one week) construction projects, will also be placed in desert tortoise adoption programs. *Managers of projects likely to affect desert tortoises should obtain a scientific collecting permit from the Department to facilitate temporary possession of tortoises.* Likewise, if large numbers of tortoises (>5) are expected to be displaced by a project, the project manager should contact the Department for guidance and/or assistance.

Please keep in mind the following points:

- . These guidelines do not apply to the Mojave population of desert tortoises (north and west of the Colorado River). Mojave desert tortoises are specifically protected under the Endangered Species Act, as administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
- . These guidelines are subject to revision at the discretion of the Department. We recommend that the Department be contacted during the planning stages of any project that may affect desert tortoises.
- . Take, possession, or harassment of wild desert tortoises is prohibited by state law. Unless specifically authorized by the Department, or as noted above, project personnel should avoid disturbing any tortoise.

Appendix D. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Correspondence

noelle sanders

From: Marr, Carrie [carrie_marr@fws.gov]
Sent: Monday, September 09, 2013 12:08 PM
To: noelle sanders
Subject: Re: Buckskin Sanitation District, Phases 5&6

Okay, then we have no further comments or questions.

Carrie

Environmental Contaminant Specialist
Arizona Ecological Services Office
2321 W Royal Palm Road, Suite 103
Phoenix, AZ 85021
602.242.0210, fax 602.242.2513
<http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/contaminants.htm>

On Mon, Sep 9, 2013 at 12:03 PM, noelle sanders <nsanders@groupdelsol.com> wrote:

No wetlands or Waters of the US are expected to be impacted

Thanks.

From: Marr, Carrie [mailto:carrie_marr@fws.gov]
Sent: Monday, September 09, 2013 11:57 AM
To: noelle sanders
Subject: Re: Buckskin Sanitation District, Phases 5&6

Hi Noelle,

Thanks for the updated map! Are any of the construction activities going to occur in wetlands or waters of the US?

All of the threatened and endangered species that occur in the area are fish or marsh birds.

Carrie

Environmental Contaminant Specialist

Arizona Ecological Services Office

2321 W Royal Palm Road, Suite 103

Phoenix, AZ 85021

602.242.0210, fax 602.242.2513

<http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/contaminants.htm>

On Wed, Sep 4, 2013 at 2:17 PM, noelle sanders <nsanders@groupdelsol.com> wrote:

Hi Carrie – Yes, we have a proposed wastewater treatment facility planned and possibly one lift station on undisturbed land.

The WWTP location did not made it on the figure, so I am attaching it along with the lift stations.

The WWTP parcel is ~25-acres and is on land owned by State Parks in the Giers Basin area (Zone 1).

Let me know if you need additional information.

Noelle

From: Marr, Carrie [mailto:carrie_marr@fws.gov]
Sent: Wednesday, September 04, 2013 1:56 PM
To: nsanders@groupdelsol.com
Subject: Buckskin Sanitation District, Phases 5&6

Noelle,

We received your letter notifying us of the Buckskin Sanitary District's application for funding with USDA-Rural Development. Will any of the work in Phases 5&6 (in zones 1-3) be performed in undisturbed sites? Will all of the construction/installation be performed in developed areas? Your answers will help me determine whether we have comments or concerns.

Thanks,

Carrie

Environmental Contaminant Specialist

Arizona Ecological Services Office

2321 W Royal Palm Road, Suite 103

Phoenix, AZ 85021

602.242.0210, fax 602.242.2513

<http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/contaminants.htm>