

Central Basin and Range & Mojave Basin and Range REA Update: February 2011

Background

Widespread environmental influences—fire, nonnative species, urban growth, climate change, and others—are affecting the western landscapes that are managed, in part, by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The BLM is undertaking two connected initiatives to understand, anticipate, and respond to the effects of these agents of change upon the public lands. These initiatives are Rapid Ecoregional Assessments (REAs), which are currently being prepared, and a proposed landscape approach for managing public lands, which is under development. The REAs examine ecological values, conditions, and trends within ecoregions, which are large, connected areas that have similar environmental characteristics. Ecoregions span administrative boundaries and typically encompass areas much larger than those managed by individual BLM field offices. Assessments of these larger areas will provide land managers additional information and tools to use in subsequent resource planning and decision-making.

The BLM began the Rapid Ecoregional Assessment (REA) program with several prototype assessments, including the Northern Basin and Range - Snake River Plain REA covering part of northern Nevada. The REA report for the Northern/Snake REA was completed in 2010. Because of its prototype nature, the Northern-Snake REA is proposed to be updated to current REA standards beginning FY 2011. In FY 2010, the BLM initiated seven REAs including the Central Basin and Range REA & the Mojave Basin and Range REA, which cover large extents of Nevada. The status of progress to date within these two Nevada ecoregions is highlighted below.

Central Great Basin and Mojave Desert Ecoregions Status

The Central and Mojave REAs have followed similar courses, with both REAs beginning with a series of start-up meetings during late 2009. These meetings were held in Boise, Salt Lake City, Las Vegas, and Ontario and included BLM State Office and Field Office personnel and several federal and state partners. The outcomes of these meetings were an initial set of management questions, conservation elements, and change agents that were incorporated into statements of work that would guide how the REAs would be conducted.

BLM REAs are being conducted by contractors overseen by the BLM's National Operations Center. The Central and Mojave REAs formally began in July 2010 with NatureServe being awarded contracts to undertake these two REAs. REAs consist of two phases, a Pre-Assessment phase (Phase I) with four tasks followed by an Assessment phase (Phase II) with three tasks. The final product of Phase I is the REA Work Plan (REAWP), which fully describes management questions, conservation elements, change agents, all data and methods to be used in Phase II, and the end products to be produced. The REAWP is a detailed description of the work that is to be accomplished during Phase II.

The Phase I effort for both the Central and Mojave REAs began in July 2010. To date, Task 1 and 2 have been completed, and Task 3 is in progress, as detailed below:



- Phase I, Task 1. The objective of this task was to produce finalized lists of ecoregion-specific management questions, develop a base ecoregion model, select core conservation elements and the change agents that influence these elements, and determine the output products that will guide the remainder of the REA effort. Workshops to receive ecoregion manager input were held in Reno and Las Vegas in August 2010. This task was completed for both REAs in August with the findings presented in a Task 1 Final Memo.
- Phase I, Task 2. This task identified, evaluated, and recommended various datasets for assessing the current status of conservation elements, assessing the potential for future change to status, and answering the ecoregion management questions. To gain manager input, workshops were held in Salt Lake City and Ontario in October/November 2010. This task was completed for both REAs in November 2010 with the findings presented in the Phase I, Task 2 Final Memorandum.
- Phase I, Task 3. The goal of this task is to identify, evaluate, and select various conceptual models, methods, and tools for addressing the management questions identified during Phase I Task 1 using the datasets identified in Phase I Task 2. This task is ongoing. A combined Central-Mojave Task 3 draft memo was prepared in January 2011 and provided the basis for discussions at a workshop held in Las Vegas the first week of February. A final memorandum for this task is currently in preparation.

Future Effort

Development of the REA Work Plans for the Central and Mojave REAs will begin upon completion of Phase I, Task 3 and is expected to commence in March 2011. The REAWP, compiled using the results and findings of Task 1 through 3, will take approximately two months to complete. Phase II—the assessment phase—will begin in early summer.

During Phase II, Task 1, NatureServe will generate the basic ecoregional datasets that will be used for all subsequent analyses of the assessment. In Task 2, they will use the datasets generated during Task 1 and the various tools, models, and method identified in the REAWP to conduct the required analyses that geographically identify conservation elements, change agents, and change potential, as identified in the REAWP. Finally, in Task 3, the ecoregional assessment work effort will be summarized in several work product documents, including an Rapid Ecoregional Assessment Report, PowerPoint presentations, and maps. The scheduled project completion is February 2012.

