

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

Environmental Assessment DOI-BLM-UT-2014-0170-EA

August 2014

**Temporary Restriction of Roped Activities at
Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges**

Location: Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges, Grand County, Utah

*Applicant/Address: Bureau of Land Management, 82 East Dogwood, Moab, UT
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

INTRODUCTION

The Moab Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposes to enact a temporary restriction (in accordance with regulations found at 43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) §8364) at Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges to activities involving ropes, cables, vectran, climbing aids, webbing or anchors, hereafter these activities will be referred to as “Roped Activities”. Activities affected by this temporary restriction include, but are not limited to: ziplining, high-lining, slacklining, climbing, rappelling, and rope swinging. The two locations are heavily visited by the general public. The BLM has received comments from the public that the aforementioned activities pose a conflict with their use and enjoyment at Corona Arch and the Gemini Bridges. The temporary restriction is being considered in an effort to address the public concerns.

This Environmental Assessment is being prepared to analyze the impacts of restricting the uses listed above at Corona Arch (approximately 32 acres) and Gemini Bridges (approximately 10 acres). The proposed temporary restriction would be for a period of two years. If the BLM chooses to consider a longer-term restriction, it would be considered through an additional process involving the public.

Both Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges are located within the Labyrinth Rims/Gemini Bridges Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA). Corona Arch is furthermore located within the Goldbar Hiking Focus Area (a sub-management unit of the SRMA). These attractions are heavily visited and require hiking to access; the hike to Corona Arch is approximately 1.5 miles in length, and the hike to Gemini Bridges is about 0.25 miles in length. These two geological features are the most popular such features on public lands in the Moab Field Office.

See Appendix B for maps of the specific areas around the arches where Roped Activities are proposed to be restricted.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

Both Gemini Bridges and Corona Arch are outstanding geologic formations in spectacularly scenic settings at the end of hiking trails. Both features have been very popular destinations for hikers, sightseers and photographers for many years. It is estimated that 40,000 people visit Corona Arch and 50,000 people visit Gemini Bridges each year. Both geological features, but especially Corona Arch, are among the most often photographed sites on BLM lands. In recent years, however, Gemini Bridges and Corona Arch and their vicinities have been utilized by a small number of visitors engaging in Roped Activities. This had led to a number of complaints from the public about the Roped Activities diminishing the experience of hikers, photographers and sightseers.

The need for this action is for the BLM to develop a temporary management stratagem to address user conflicts in the vicinities of Gemini Bridges and Corona Arch.

The purpose for the action is to restrict Roped Activities in these areas for two years while the BLM considers whether a permanent restriction to Roped Activities is appropriate.

CONFORMANCE WITH BLM LAND USE PLAN

The proposed action described below is in conformance with the 2008 Moab Resource Management Plan (RMP). The Corona Arch area is within the Goldbar Hiking Focus Area, which is specifically managed to enhance hiking opportunities. Decision REC-39 (page 90) states: “Manage the Corona Arch Trail for hiking only.”

Gemini Bridges is within the Gemini Bridges/Poison Spider Mesa Focus area. Decision REC-39 states: “close the spur route to Gemini Bridges to facilitate public use and help restore damaged lands along the spur route.” The RMP further authorized the creation of a hiking route to Gemini Bridges to facilitate public use.

Ziplining, highlining, slacklining and rope swinging were not specifically addressed in the 2008 Moab RMP.

RELATIONSHIPS TO STATUTES, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PLANS

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act mandates multiple use of Public Lands, including recreation use. An objective of BLM’s recreation policy is to satisfy recreation demand within allowable use levels in an equitable, safe and enjoyable manner, while minimizing user conflicts.

CHAPTER 2 DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES

INTRODUCTION

There are two alternatives: (a) the Proposed Action, approve a temporary restriction of Roped Activities at Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges areas for a period of two years; and (b) No Action, which is to not approve the temporary restriction of Roped Activities.

PROPOSED ACTION

The BLM proposes to temporarily restrict the areas around Corona Arch (totaling 32 acres) and Gemini Bridges (totaling 10 acres) to activities involving ropes, cables, vectran, climbing aids, webbing or anchors; hereafter these activities will be referred to as “Roped Activities”. Roped Activities includes, but is not limited to: ziplining, highlining, slacklining, climbing, rappelling and rope swinging. The restriction would be for a period of two years. Maps of the areas proposed for temporary restriction to Roped Activities are included in Appendix B.

NO ACTION

The BLM would not approve a temporary restriction to Roped Activities at Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges. Activities involving ropes, cables, vectran, climbing aids, webbing or anchors, including (but not limited to) ziplining, high-lining, slacklining, climbing, rappelling and rope swinging would continue to be allowed at Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges.

CHAPTER 3 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL SETTING

The affected environment of the Proposed Action and No Action alternatives was considered and analyzed by an interdisciplinary team as documented in Appendix A, the Interdisciplinary Team Analysis Record Checklist. The checklist indicates which resources of concern are either not present in the project area, or would not be impacted to a degree that requires detailed analysis. Critical Elements of the Human Environment are those elements that are subject to the requirements specified in statute, regulation, or executive order, and must be considered in all EAs (BLM H-1790-1, Appendix 5). Critical Elements of the Human Environment are included in Appendix A. Resources, including Critical Elements, which would be impacted to a level requiring further analysis are described in Chapter 3 and impacts on these resources are analyzed in Chapter 4 below.

The following Critical Element of the human environment, Recreation, is present in the project area, and would be impacted by the proposed action, because the recreation experience of the majority of recreationists would be enhanced; conversely, the recreation experience of a small number of recreationists would be restricted at the two locations in question. Since Visual Resources are an important part of the experience enjoyed by visitors to these areas, Visual Resources will be considered as a component of Recreation.

The following Critical Elements of the human environment would not be negatively impacted to a degree that requires detailed analysis by the proposed action: Air Quality, Floodplains, Soils, Water Resources, Visual Resources, Cultural Resources, Socioeconomics, Environmental Justice, Wastes, Threatened Endangered or Candidate Animal species, Migratory Birds, Fish and Wildlife, Invasive Species, Livestock Grazing, Rangeland Health Standards, Vegetation, Lands, Paleontology.

The following critical elements are Not Present: Wetlands, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Native American Religious Concerns, Threatened, Endangered or Candidate Plant Species, Wild and Scenic Rivers, BLM Natural Areas, Lands with Wilderness Characteristics and Wilderness.

Recreation/Visual Resources

Corona Arch

Corona Arch was owned by the State of Utah until May 8, 2014 (although nearby Bowtie Arch is on BLM-managed land that has never left federal ownership). On that date, the

Utah Recreational Land Exchange was signed, and the section containing Corona Arch was deeded to the U.S. Government. Corona Arch is one of the most heavily visited backcountry geologic sites on public lands managed by the BLM Moab Field Office; the trail register shows that over 40,000 people per year make the hike to the arch. The towering geological feature measures 140 by 105 feet and is located within a rock bowl that also contains nearby Bowtie Arch. (Bowtie Arch is one of only five portal photos on the Utah BLM website as of June 12, 2014). Visitors approach the two arches by a foot trail that is approximately 1.5 miles long. As hikers round the last corner on the trail, Corona and Bowtie arches suddenly appear in a spectacular setting. There is often an atmosphere of quiet reverence on the part of visitors as they grasp the enormity of the view.

Very few reports of Roped Activities on the arch were received prior to the posting (February 15, 2012) of a YouTube video entitled “World’s Largest Rope Swing”. In January of 2013, the State of Utah forbade commercial outfitters from rope swinging on Corona Arch, although private use of the arch for rope swinging was not disallowed. Roped activities in the rock bowl containing the two arches occur with some regularity, although the number of visitors engaging in these activities is estimated to be small. It is not uncommon that there is shouting or screaming that accompanies engagement in the Roped Activities.

There have been reported conflicts between hikers and people engaging in Roped Activities over the past few years. The most notable of these conflicts involved a permitted group (Adventure Rabbi) that was authorized to have Passover under the arch, but was impeded by the presence of a group of people utilizing the arch for rope swinging. This incident was investigated by the Grand County Sheriff’s Department. On March 24, 2013, a man was killed while swinging on the arch in view of 70 people, including many children. Another man was severely injured while swinging on Corona Arch in May of 2014, again in view of many visitors.

The Corona Arch bowl is also used by at least one commercial permittee to access the mesa above. Clients cross the mesa and descend from it at a location that is not within the Corona Arch bowl. The commercial permittee places a hand line, or via ferrata, up the back-most fin so that clients can walk up the fin more safely.

Corona Arch is also a frequently utilized location for commercial hiking trips. There are about 30 permittees that are authorized to guide visitors along the hiking trail to Corona Arch.

There are bolts present on the arch and in the vicinity and noticeable scarring of the rock on the arch being caused by Roped Activities. Visitors have expressed concerns about the effects on visual resources due to the presence of bolts, scars in the rock on the arch, and the presence of people on and hanging from the arch.

A google search of “Corona Arch” netted 4.2 million hits (searched on June 11, 2014). The arch is featured in many guidebooks, on many websites and in numerous brochures.

Gemini Bridges

Gemini Bridges has long been a popular destination for visitors to the Moab area. While there is no trail register at the location, the BLM estimates that at least 50,000 people per year visit the Gemini Bridges. A google search yielded 1.7 million hits (searched on June 11, 2014); the arch is featured in guidebooks and brochures.

The Gemini Bridges are two twin spans that are about 5 feet apart; each of these natural bridges measures about 20 by 80 feet. The Gemini Bridges are situated at the very head of a side canyon. Prior to 2008, the Gemini Bridges could be accessed by motorized vehicle. The 2008 Travel Plan accompanying the Moab RMP closed this 0.25 mile of route to motorized vehicles. In 2009, Grand County and the BLM constructed a parking area and converted the motorized route into a hiking trail. Visitors now approach the Gemini Bridges on foot to enjoy the view through the Bridges.

Highlining between the two rims of the canyon containing the Gemini Bridges is the primary rope activity that occurs in this location. Also occurring in this location is rappelling through the bridges as well as ziplining from canyon edge to under the bridges. It is estimated that a very small number of people engage in these activities. These types of activities are fully visible from the bridges. Visitors have also expressed concerns about the impacts to the rock from bolts, hardware and the scars made by the rope on the rock surface.

CHAPTER 4 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

DIRECT AND INDIRECT IMPACTS

PROPOSED ACTION

This section analyzes the impacts of the proposed action to those resources described in the Affected Environment, Chapter 3, above.

Recreation/Visual Resource

The temporary restriction of Roped Activities at Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges would be expected to enhance the experience for the majority of the visitors to the features. This assumption is based on comments from the public. Conversely, the temporary restriction would deny what is estimated to be a small number of people the opportunity to engage in Roped Activities at the two locations. It is anticipated that the estimated small number of visitors that wish to engage in Roped Activities that would be unable to do so at Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges would likely choose to engage in Roped Activities in other areas within the Moab Area where these activities have not been restricted.

The future impacts to Corona Arch and to Gemini Bridges and their vicinities resulting from rope scarring, and the addition of hardware (including bolts) would be lessened because Roped Activities would not be allowed at these two locations during the two year temporary restriction.

Those who wish to engage in Roped Activities would be able to do so at many other locations within the Moab Field Office.

Corona Arch

The general visitor to Corona Arch would have the opportunity to enjoy the view of and photograph the arch without people engaging in Roped Activities on it. Since noise often accompanies these types of Roped Activities, the restriction would be expected to lessen noise levels in the vicinity of the arch. Based on public comments complaining about noise, the lessening of noise would be expected to enhance the visitor experience for the majority of visitors in the Corona Arch bowl. The fact that visitors to Corona Arch have undertaken a 1.5 mile walk to get there means that the arch experience is a hard-won backcountry goal; based on public comments many of these visitors wish to quietly enjoy the arch and its setting once they arrive. An example of this is that visitors usually view the arch from afar, take photos, walk underneath the arch, and then vacate the space so that the next set of visitors can partake in the same routine. When visitors are engaging in Roped Activities it generally occupies the Corona Arch “space” for an extended period of time, which means that for many visitors the viewing as well as photographic opportunities are lost. As visitors come from all over the world to see Corona Arch, many of these visitors will have only a single opportunity to enjoy the view, setting, and to photograph Corona Arch. It is expected that the proposed temporary restriction of Roped Activities would be managing for the experience being sought by the majority of visitors.

Gemini Bridges

The general visitor to Gemini Bridges would have the opportunity to enjoy the view of and photograph the bridges without people engaging in Roped Activities on them. For many visitors who walk down to the Gemini Bridges, there will be one lifetime opportunity to visit it. To view and photograph the bridges in their natural state requires the absence of those engaged in Roped Activities.

NO ACTION

The No Action alternative would mean that Roped Activities would continue at both Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges. There would be no temporary restriction of the two areas to such activities.

Recreation/Visual Resources

Based on comments received from the public, many of the 40,000 visitors per year that visit Corona Arch would continue to risk having their experience diminished or possibly ruined by the presence of those engaged in Roped Activities. These visitors would not have an unoccupied arch awaiting them at the end of their 1.5 mile walk; in addition, they would not be able to obtain a photograph of the arch in its natural state. The noise that usually accompanies such roped activities would continue, diminishing the sense of reverence that many visitors have come to Corona Arch to experience. The recreation experience of these visitors could be lessened. Visual impacts would increase as

additional hardware is installed (including bolts) and as scars caused by ropes increase and deepen from use.

Some of the 50,000 visitors per year that visit Gemini Bridges would continue to risk having their experience diminished or ruined by other visitors engaging in Roped Activities. People visiting when Roped Activities are taking place at Gemini Bridges would not be able to experience the bridges in their natural state. The noise that usually accompanies such Roped Activities would continue, which is expected to continue diminishing the experience for some visitors at Gemini Bridges. Visual impacts would increase as additional hardware is installed (including bolts) and as scars caused by ropes increase and deepen from use.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Cumulative impacts are those impacts resulting from the incremental impact of an action when added to other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable actions regardless of what agency or person undertakes such other actions.

At Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges, hiking and sightseeing are the major recreational uses. Overall hiking use is expected to increase at moderate levels as Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges continue to grow in popularity as destination locations. In addition, the demand for the use of Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges for Roped Activities is also expected to increase. Increases in the interest by the different recreation uses is expected to result in an increasing conflict and impacts to the visitor experiences for visitors engaging in both types of activities.

CHAPTER 5 PERSONS, GROUPS, AND AGENCIES CONSULTED

During preparation of this EA, the public was notified of the proposed action by posting on the Utah Internet Electronic Notification Bulletin Board (ENBB) on May 19, 2014.

As early as March of 2013, the Salt Lake *Tribune* noted that the BLM, once it obtained Corona Arch, was considering restrictions on Roped Activities. An article on the proposed restrictions was published in the Salt Lake *Tribune* on June 10, 2014. The proposed restrictions were also covered in many other news media, including the New York *Times* (July 30, 2014). The on-line comments to these newspapers were reviewed by the BLM and will be included in the official BLM record.

Guides and outfitters who use the locations were also notified of the proposal.

BLM Preparers

Name	Title	Responsible for the Following Section(s) of this Document
Ann Marie Aubry	Hydrologist	Soil, Air Quality, Floodplains, Water Resources, Wetlands
Bill Stevens	Outdoor Recreation	Socioeconomics, BLM Natural Areas, Wilderness/WSA,

	Planner	Lands with Wilderness Characteristics, Environmental Justice
Pamela Riddle	Wildlife Biologist	T&E Animals, Wildlife, Migratory Birds, Utah BLM Sensitive Species
Don Montoya	Archeologist	Cultural, Native American
Katie Stevens	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Team Leader, Recreation, VRM, ACECs, Wild and Scenic Rivers
David Williams	Rangeland Management Specialist	Threatened, Endangered or Candidate Plant Species
Jordan Davis	Rangeland Management Specialist	Invasive Species, Livestock Grazing, RHS, Vegetation, Woodlands
Josh Relph	Fuels	Fuels
Joe Manning	Geologist	Wastes, Geology
Jan Denney	Realty Specialist	Lands
ReBecca Hunt Foster	Paleontology	Paleontology

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interdisciplinary Team Analysis Record Checklist

Appendix B: Maps: 1) Map of proposed restriction around Corona Arch
 2) Map of proposed restriction around Gemini Bridges

Appendix A: INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM CHECKLIST

Project Title: Temporary Closure of Corona Arch and Gemini Bridges to Rope Use, including Swinging

NEPA Log Number: DOI BLM UT Y010-2014-0170 EA

Project Leader: Katie Stevens

DETERMINATION OF STAFF: *(Choose one of the following abbreviated options for the left column)*

NP = not present in the area impacted by the proposed or alternative actions

NI = present, but not affected to a degree that detailed analysis is required

PI = present with potential for relevant impact that need to be analyzed in detail in the EA

NC = (DNAs only) actions and impacts not changed from those disclosed in the existing NEPA documents cited in Section D of the DNA form. The Rationale column may include NI and NP discussions.

The following elements are not present in the Moab Field Office and have been removed from the checklist:
Farmlands (Prime or Unique), Wild Horses and Burros.

Determi- nation	Resource	Rationale for Determination*	Signature	Date
RESOURCES AND ISSUES CONSIDERED (INCLUDES SUPPLEMENTAL AUTHORITIES APPENDIX 1 H-1790-1)				
NI	Air Quality Greenhouse Gas Emissions		A.M. Aubry	5.20.14
NP	Floodplains		A.M. Aubry	5.20.14
NI	Soils		A.M. Aubry	5.20.14
NP	Water Resources/Quality (drinking/surface/ground)		A.M. Aubry	5.20.14
NP	Wetlands/Riparian Zones		A.M. Aubry	5.20.14
NP	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern	See 2008 Moab RMP	Katie Stevens	5.20.14
PI	Recreation	Would affect recreationists	Katie Stevens	5.20.14
NP	Wild and Scenic Rivers	See 2008 Moab RMP	Katie Stevens	5.20.14
PI	Visual Resources	Activity affects the feature that the public comes to view	Katie Stevens	5.20.14
NP	BLM Natural Areas	See 2008 Moab RMP	Bill Stevens	5.20.14
NI	Socio-Economics		Bill Stevens	5.20.14
NP	Wilderness/WSA	See 2008 Moab RMP	Bill Stevens	5.20.14
NI	Lands with Wilderness Characteristics	See 2008 Moab RMP	Bill Stevens	5.20.14
NP	Cultural Resources		Don Montoya	5.20.14

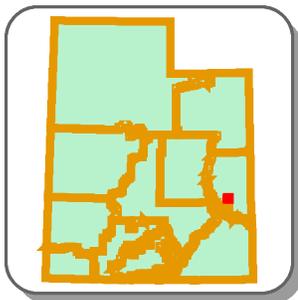
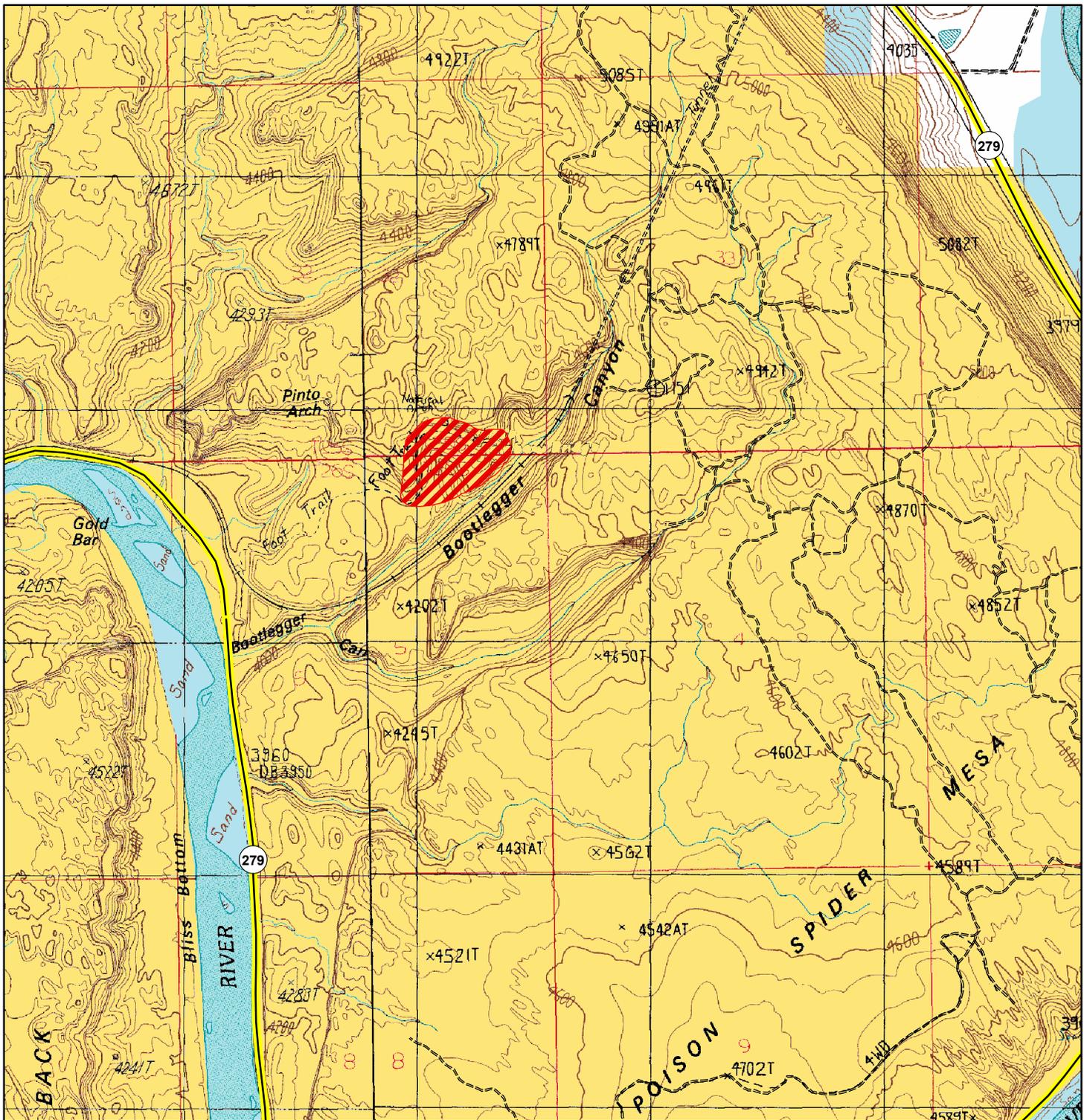
Determination	Resource	Rationale for Determination*	Signature	Date
NP	Native American Religious Concerns		Don Montoya	5.20.14
NI	Environmental Justice		Bill Stevens	5.20.14
NP	Wastes (hazardous or solid)		R. Doolittle	5.20.14
NI	Threatened, Endangered or Candidate Animal Species	Minor, positive impacts to habitat	Pam Riddle	5.20.14
NI	Migratory Birds	Minor, positive impacts to habitat	Pam Riddle	5.20.14
NI	Utah BLM Sensitive Species	Minor, positive impacts to habitat	Pam Riddle	5.20.14
NI	Fish and Wildlife Excluding USFW Designated Species	Minor, positive impacts to habitat	Pam Riddle	5.20.14
NI	Invasive Species/Noxious Weeds		Jordan Davis	5.20.14
NI	Threatened, Endangered or Candidate Plant Species		Dave Williams	5.20.14
NP	Livestock Grazing		Jordan Davis	5.20.14
NI	Rangeland Health Standards		Jordan Davis	5.20.14
NI	Vegetation Excluding USFW Designated Species		Jordan Davis	5.20.14
NI	Woodland / Forestry		Jordan Davis	5.20.14
NI	Fuels/Fire Management		Josh Relph	5.20.14
NI	Geology / Mineral Resources/Energy Production		Joe Manning	5.20.14
NI	Lands/Access	No conflict with land use authorization	Jan Denney	5.20.14
NI	Paleontology		R. Hunt-Foster	5.20.14

FINAL REVIEW:

Reviewer Title	Signature	Date	Comments
Environmental Coordinator	/s/ Katie Stevens	5/20/14	
Authorized Officer	/s/ Beth Ransel	8/24/14	

Corona Arch Restricted Area

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 Bureau of Land Management
 Moab Field Office

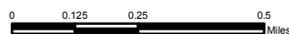


Location Map
 5/28/2014

-  Corona Arch Restricted Area
-  State and Federal Highways
-  D Roads (Unmaintained)

Land Status

-  Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
-  Private
-  State



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