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**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE DISTRICT OF ARIZONA**

Western Watersheds Project, et al.,  
Plaintiffs,  
v.  
United States Bureau of Land Management,  
Defendant.

No. CV-21-01126-PHX-SRB  
**ORDER**

The Court now considers Plaintiffs Western Watersheds Project and Grand Canyon Chapter of the Sierra Club (collectively, “Plaintiffs”) and Defendant United States Bureau of Land Management’s (“BLM”) Motions for Summary Judgment (“Motions”). (Doc. 38, WWP Mot.; Doc. 39, BLM Mot.) For the following reasons, the Court grants Plaintiffs’ Motion in part and denies it in part, and grants BLM’s Motion in part and denies it in part.

**I. BACKGROUND**

**A. Sonoran Desert National Monument & BLM’s Role**

This case arises out of BLM’s 2020 decision to allow livestock grazing on portions of the Sonoran Desert National Monument (“SDNM” or “Monument”).

“The Antiquities Act grants the President broad authority to create, by presidential proclamation, national monuments from federal lands to protect sites of historic and scientific interest.” *Murphy Co. v. Biden*, 65 F.4th 1122, 1124 (9th Cir. 2023) (citing 54 U.S.C. § 320301(a)–(b)). In 2001, President Clinton issued a Proclamation creating the SDNM, which covers roughly 486,000 acres in southwest Arizona. AR-0009264–68. The

1 Proclamation tasked the Secretary of Interior with protecting the biological and cultural  
2 resources within the Monument, directing the Secretary to make a management plan for  
3 the SDNM “that addresses the actions . . . necessary to protect the objects identified in this  
4 Proclamation.” AR-0009267. In addition to restricting vehicle use and land development,  
5 the Proclamation restricted livestock grazing on the Monument, mandating that:

6       Grazing permits on Federal lands within the monument south of Interstate  
7 Highway 8 shall not be renewed at the end of their current term; and . . .  
8 grazing on Federal lands north of Interstate 8 shall be allowed to continue  
9 only to the extent that [BLM] determines that grazing is compatible with the  
10 paramount purpose of protecting the objects identified in this proclamation.

11 *Id.* Under the Federal Land Policy Management Act (“FLPMA”), “BLM must manage the  
12 [SDNM] in compliance with the terms of the Proclamation.” *W. Watersheds Project v.*  
13 *Abbey*, 719 F.3d 1035, 1042 (9th Cir. 2013).

14       In September 2012, BLM issued its Record of Decision and Approved Resource  
15 Management Plan (“2012 RMP”), the grazing compatibility determination for the land  
16 north of I-8. This northern Monument land is broken down into six allotments: Arnold,  
17 Beloat, Big Horn, Conley, Hazen, and Lower Vekol. *See* AR-0005332. Portions of each  
18 allotment extend outside of the SDNM. AR-0031516–0031518; *see* AR-0031552–  
19 0031553. The Big Horn allotment has not been grazed since 2009,<sup>1</sup> nor has the Hazen since  
20 approximately 2010. AR-0031540, 0031542. The Arnold allotment has been designated  
21 for exclusively ephemeral grazing.<sup>2</sup> AR-0031321. BLM and contracted third parties  
22 collected data on the SDNM to conduct a Land Health Evaluation (“LHE”) for the 2012  
23 RMP, meaning to determine whether “livestock grazing was compatible with protecting  
24 the objects of the Monument.” *See W. Watersheds Project v. Bureau of Land Mgmt.*, No.  
25 CV–13–01028–PHX–PGR, 2015 WL 846548, at \*2–5 (D. Ariz. Feb. 25, 2015) (“*WWP*  
26 *I*”); AR-0031514. BLM “gauged whether ‘Standard One’ and ‘Standard Three’<sup>3</sup> of the

25 <sup>1</sup> BLM created a “use pattern map” in 2009 to reflect areas within the Monument where  
26 livestock frequently gathered in 2008 (“2009 Pattern Map”). *See* AR-0031552.

27 <sup>2</sup> “Ephemeral grazing” is only authorized if annual plants reach a certain density due to  
28 adequate rainfall, whereas “perennial grazing” authorizes a set amount of Animal Unit  
Months (“AUMs”) per allotment every year. *See* AR-0031315. An AUM is the amount of  
forage a cow eats in one month. AR-0031536.

<sup>3</sup> Standard 1 is used to measure soil health. AR-0031546–0031549. A plot achieves  
Standard 3 when “the majority, greater than 50 percent, of the plots representing the

1 Arizona Standards for Rangeland Health were being met on the grazing allotments located  
2 on Monument lands north of I-8 and, if not, whether livestock grazing was the causal  
3 factor.” *WWP I*, 2015 WL 846548, at \*2. As part of this “causality determination,” BLM  
4 created the 2009 Pattern Map to “assess livestock use of key perennial forage species.” *Id.*  
5 at \*2–3. “The LHE results were analyzed in a compatibility study to determine if livestock  
6 grazing was compatible with the paramount purpose of protecting the objects of the  
7 SDNM. The LHE and the compatibility findings were used to inform the 2012 [RMP]/Final  
8 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).” AR-0031514.

9 In the 2012 RMP, BLM concluded that livestock grazing could continue or restart  
10 on over 157,170 acres of SDNM land north of I-8 at various intensity levels but restricted  
11 grazing on the remaining 95,290 acres. AR-0005332; (*see* Doc. 1, Compl. ¶ 72.) This  
12 included a complete prohibition on grazing on the Conley allotment and partial prohibitions  
13 on the Big Horn and Lower Vekol allotments. AR-0005332.

#### 14 **B. Prior Litigation**

15 Plaintiffs challenged the 2012 RMP in this District in April 2013, arguing that the  
16 LHE and compatibility determination underlying the decision were arbitrary and capricious  
17 under NEPA. *See WWP I*, 2015 WL 846548, at \*1–2. Judge Rosenblatt granted summary  
18 judgment to Plaintiffs, finding that “BLM did not provide an adequate explanation in the  
19 record to support its setting of, and/or adjustments to, the objectives for the limy fan, sandy  
20 wash, limy upland deep, and granitic hills ecological sites [within the Monument].” *WWP*  
21 *I*, 2015 WL 846548, at \*6, 12. “BLM’s setting of these plant community objectives was  
22 therefore arbitrary and capricious.” *Id.* at \*6. Judge Rosenblatt also found that BLM  
23 arbitrarily excluded certain data from its analysis, particularly where BLM relied on only  
24 one year of data to support its “key area analysis” yet rejected competing data because it  
25 was “only from a single year.” *Id.* at \*8, \*11.

26 Although Judge Rosenblatt gave BLM an opportunity to further explain its decision,  
27 \_\_\_\_\_  
28 ecological site are achieving” desired plant community objectives. AR-0031547. Achieving Standard 3 “ensures . . . that the ecosystem is in functioning condition . . . consistent with . . . providing forage and cover for both wildlife, general and sensitive species, and livestock.” *Id.*

1 he ultimately upheld his ruling, remanded the 2012 RMP to BLM, and ordered BLM to  
2 complete a new LHE and grazing compatibility determination regarding the effects of  
3 livestock grazing on Monument land north of I-8. *Id.*; *W. Watersheds Project v. U.S.*  
4 *Bureau of Land Mgmt.*, 181 F. Supp. 3d 673, 691–92 (D. Ariz. 2016). The 2012 grazing  
5 decisions—including complete prohibitions on grazing certain allotments north of I-8—  
6 remain in effect after Judge Rosenblatt’s remand. *See* AR-0031514. The Court set a  
7 deadline of September 30, 2020 for BLM to complete the new LHE and compatibility  
8 determination and incorporate them into an SDNM Livestock Grazing Resource  
9 Management Plan Amendment (“Amended RMP”). (Compl. ¶ 84.)

### 10 **C. Amended RMP**

11 BLM finalized the updated LHE and compatibility determination in accordance  
12 with its September 2020 deadline. AR-0031510–0031582, 0032331–0032361. It released  
13 an updated LHE, Grazing Compatibility Analysis, and Environmental Assessment (“EA”)  
14 to support the Amended RMP, all of which BLM used to conclude that grazing up to 4,232  
15 AUMs within the northern Monument was compatible with the Proclamation.

#### 16 **1. Land Health Evaluation & Compatibility Analysis**

17 The purpose of BLM’s updated LHE was “to re-evaluate the Arizona Standards for  
18 Rangeland Health (Standards) on the BLM-administered public lands available for  
19 livestock use as provided for under the 2012 . . . RMP.” AR-0031514. The updated LHE  
20 “contain[ed] preliminary conclusions on achievement or non-achievement of Standards  
21 and causal factors for non-achievement of Standard 1 or 3 or both.” *Id.* The LHE also  
22 proposed remediation measures, or “management recommendations,” for any plots within  
23 the SDNM north of I-8 which were not meeting Standards. *Id.*

24 By 2015, four of the six grazing allotment permits (Big Horn, Conley, Hazen, and  
25 Lower Vekol) had expired and no grazing has since occurred on the SDNM portions of the  
26 remaining two allotments. *See* AR-0031321. BLM only authorized ephemeral grazing on  
27 the Arnold allotment in 2014 and 2015. *Id.* Due to an absence of usable data regarding  
28 actual grazing in the Monument, BLM created a livestock use probability map (“use

1 probability map” or “probability map”) to conduct the updated LHE. AR-0031602–  
2 0031603. The probability map illustrated which areas in the Monument were most to least  
3 likely to be grazed by any livestock reintroduced to the northern SDNM. *See* AR-0031553.  
4 Class 1 indicated a “high probability” of use for grazing, Class 3 indicated “moderate  
5 probability,” and Class 5 indicated “low probability.” *Id.*, AR-0031551. To create the  
6 probability map, BLM assumed that “livestock [generally] do not travel more than 2 miles  
7 from water on flat terrain and no more than 1 mile in rough terrain,” which meant that  
8 portions of the Monument more than two miles from a water source were coded as Class  
9 5. AR-0031625. BLM primarily relied on a single citation—Smith et al. (1986) (the “Smith  
10 Publication”)—to support its two-mile benchmark.<sup>4</sup> AR-0031331, 0031625, 0032303. The  
11 portion of the Smith Publication reflected in the Administrative Record indicates:

12       The distance between water points depends to some extent on topography  
13       and climate. Various range management textbooks state that water points  
14       should be no farther than 2 miles in flat country and 1 mile in rough.  
15       Obviously this is seldom practiced. I am not sure how these numbers were  
16       arrived at, but most desert operations I know of have water points at about  
17       twice these distances or greater.

18 AR-0000780.

19       BLM also developed desired plant community objectives to perform the LHE and  
20       complete its Grazing Compatibility Analysis. AR-0031514; *see also* AR-0032340,  
21       0032349–51 (Grazing Compatibility Analysis reviewing plant community conclusions  
22       from LHE). The data BLM evaluated to set these community objectives came “from  
23       randomly stratified monitoring plots on each of the most prevalent ecological sites without  
24       expected livestock use or unnatural disturbances. Areas without expected livestock use was  
25       defined as areas greater than 2 miles of livestock waters.” AR-0031547. BLM set the  
26       threshold for passing plant standards one standard deviation below—or, in the case of the  
27       bare ground objective, above—the mean for a healthy plant community. *See id.* The LHE  
28       confirms the definition of a plant community in its “natural condition” came from “data

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<sup>4</sup> BLM cited two additional sources when discussing its two-mile benchmark in the context of setting objectives for plant community health on the SDNM. (*See* WWP Mot. at 16 n.7 (citing AR-0031547).) These sources do not address whether cattle are less likely to specifically move more than two miles from a water source. *See* AR-0000781 (Martin and Severson 1988), 0003124 (Blanco et al. 2009).

1 collected on plots located greater than two miles distance from livestock water, current or  
2 historic, and without additional unnatural disturbances.” *Id.*

3 After setting objectives and studying plant communities within the six allotments,  
4 BLM specifically evaluated communities that were failing plant community objectives.  
5 Once BLM determined that a plant community was not meeting its objective, BLM made  
6 a causality determination as to why the community was failing standards. *See* AR-0031557.  
7 The use probability map “and field observations [were] used to determine if livestock  
8 grazing is the causal factor for non-achievement of either Standard 1 or 3.” *Id.*; AR-  
9 0031549. Specifically, BLM monitored 124 “stratified random plots” across the northern  
10 Monument between 2017 and 2018, which helped “determine the variability of ecological  
11 site and vegetation community attributes.” AR-0031549–0031550. But again, “[p]lots with  
12 known disturbances, from sources other than livestock or livestock management  
13 infrastructure such as mining operations and right-of-ways, and areas inaccessible by  
14 livestock were excluded from the sample design. Mining operations, roads (300 foot buffer  
15 from the centerline), and steep slopes (>30 percent) were excluded from the sampling  
16 polygons.” *Id.*

17 All this study led BLM to conclude that “there are areas that are not achieving  
18 standards as a result of historical livestock grazing.” AR-0031330 (EA discussing results  
19 of Grazing Compatibility Analysis). BLM’s Grazing Compatibility Analysis, published  
20 along with the Amended RMP, specifically found that “the majority of areas near livestock  
21 waters on the Beloat, Big Horn, Conley, and Lower Vekol allotments are failing to achieve  
22 Standard 1 or 3 or both because of current or historical perennial livestock grazing.” AR-  
23 0032352. Though BLM predicted grazing patterns throughout the Monument assuming  
24 only a low probability that livestock would travel more than two miles from water, BLM  
25 also noted that there were signs of livestock use in several Class 5 sites failing objectives  
26 and, where BLM observed such signs, BLM concluded that grazing caused the site to fail.  
27 AR-0031557–0031578 (discussing, *inter alia*, signs of livestock use on Class 5 plots failing  
28 standards); *see also* AR-0032349 (Grazing Compatibility Analysis detailing that “it is

1 possible that historical livestock grazing may have impacted the saguaro cactus forest,  
2 diversity of plant and animal species, vegetation communities, and wildlife monument  
3 objects within close proximity to livestock waters but it is unlikely to have impacted  
4 biological objects far, greater than 2 miles, from livestock waters.”)

## 5 **2. Environmental Assessment & Impact**

6 BLM also conducted an EA to substantiate the Amended RMP. After evaluating  
7 several alternatives to the action proposed in the Amended RMP, including not allowing  
8 any grazing on the SDNM, taking no action, and further reducing grazing allowance, the  
9 agency settled on the instant plan. AR-0031313–031318. The agency concluded that a  
10 maximum of 4,232 AUMs<sup>5</sup> was compatible with protecting Monument objects, so long as  
11 BLM could manage grazing to protect objects at the implementation level. AR-0031313  
12 (EA describing that implementation-level adjustments in authorized AUMs would be  
13 “required” for grazing to be compatible with protecting the Monument), 0031314 (“[N]o  
14 livestock grazing will be permitted on four of the six allotments (Big Horn, Conley, Hazen,  
15 and Lower Vekol) until the BLM first completes implementation-level NEPA analysis, on  
16 an allotment-by-allotment, or group of allotments, basis . . . [and] permits could be issued  
17 [on Arnold and Beloat only] pursuant to and authorized under [the] FLPMA.”).

18 The EA also concluded that introducing up to 4,232 AUMs to the SDNM would  
19 have no significant environmental impact on the Monument, so BLM completed a Finding  
20 of No Significant Impact (“FONSI”) to accompany the EA. AR-0032324; *see* 40 C.F.R.  
21 § 1508.13 (agency may issue FONSI where EA concludes agency action will have no  
22 significant effect on environment and where agency will not prepare EIS). The FONSI  
23 explained that the proposed 4,232 annual AUM allowance “represents a reduction of 5,385  
24 AUMs or 39 percent from the historically (1985) authorized AUMs, but an increase of 914  
25 AUMs or 21 percent above the 2012 authorization.” AR-0032325. BLM acknowledged  
26 that grazing would cause adverse impacts to “wildlife, vegetation, and soils” in the

27 <sup>5</sup> BLM reached 4,232 AUMs by “by averaging the perennially, non-ephemeral, authorized  
28 AUMs for each allotment between 2007 and 2018 and calculating the amount of AUMs  
within the SDNM portion of each allotment by the percentage of BLM land in the SDNM.”  
AR-0031580 (LHE explaining evaluation process).

1 Monument, but “[t]he degree of impacts to these resources would depend on grazing  
2 management determined at the implementation-level.” *Id.* BLM proposed installing  
3 fencing around “sensitive areas,” moving water sources to less sensitive areas, and  
4 authorizing fewer AUMs on the Monument to mitigate grazing impacts. AR-0032326. And  
5 “the degree of impacts from . . . implementation-level actions would depend on the extent  
6 of the development and would be evaluated under separate environmental review.” *Id.*

7 BLM also consulted with the State Historic Preservation Office (“SHPO”) regarding  
8 protection of cultural objects under the Amended RMP, as required under Section 106 of  
9 the National Historic Preservation Act (“NHPA”), 54 U.S.C. § 300101, *et seq.* AR-  
10 0032329. Multiple historic trails, including at least one with significance to indigenous  
11 communities in Arizona, cross through the SDNM, and the Monument “contains many  
12 significant archaeological and historic sites, including rock art sites, lithic quarries, and  
13 scattered artifacts.” AR-0031340 (EA discussing cultural sites), 0032328 (FONSI  
14 discussing same). According to BLM, “[r]oughly 80 percent of the cultural sites found on  
15 public lands in the entire SDNM reflect aboriginal occupation,” but added that “an  
16 unknown number of sites have not been identified or documented.” AR-0031340. Multiple  
17 Native American tribes expressed concerns about allowing grazing on the SDNM, and the  
18 Tohono O’odham Nation actively opposed “livestock grazing on the SDNM due to the  
19 potential damage to fragile-pattern archaeological sites.” AR-0031343. The Gila River  
20 Indian Community shared similar concerns.<sup>6</sup> AR-0032329. Consultation with tribes is  
21 “ongoing.” AR-0031341; *see also* AR-0031051, AR-0031083–84.

22 BLM assessed cultural impacts of its Amended RMP by conducting a “thorough  
23 review of project records and cultural site information,” or “Class I” inventory, regarding  
24 cultural objects found on the Monument, though much of this information was collected  
25 more than two decades prior. AR-0032329 (FONSI discussing that records study revealed

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26  
27 <sup>6</sup> BLM gave the public an opportunity to comment on its proposed Amended RMP, but the  
28 ensuing feedback did not significantly alter BLM’s plan. AR-0032327. According to BLM,  
“commenters expressed their opposition to livestock grazing, [but] none of the commenters  
indicated any substantial dispute in the scientific community over the nature of the effects  
from the Proposed Action.” *Id.*



1 74 cultural sites within the northern SDNM, including 27 sites recommended as eligible  
2 for the National Register); *see* AR-0031055–0031063, 0031341; *Montana Wilderness*  
3 *Ass’n v. Connell*, 725 F.3d 988, 1005–06 (9th Cir. 2013) (explaining inventory classes).  
4 BLM clarified to the SHPO “that allotment specific implementation-level projects would  
5 be proposed in the future . . . and would be treated as separate undertakings.” AR-0031051.  
6 On June 29, 2020, the SHPO agreed with BLM that the Amended RMP would have “no  
7 adverse effects to cultural sites” within the Monument. AR-0032329.

### 8 **3. Terms of Amended RMP**

9 Based on these new analyses, BLM issued the Amended RMP on September 29,  
10 2020. AR-0032609–0032618. BLM decided that “all allotments, including formerly  
11 unavailable portions of the Big Horn, Conley, and Lower Vekol allotments, would be  
12 available for grazing with a level of use ranging from ephemeral only to a maximum 4,232  
13 perennially authorized A[nimal] U[nit] M[onths] across all six allotments in the SDNM  
14 north of I-8.” AR-0032610. BLM underscored that the number of AUMs authorized may  
15 be far lower than the number of AUMs allowed. *E.g., id.*

### 16 **D. Instant Litigation**

17 Plaintiffs filed their Complaint in this Court on June 29, 2021, challenging BLM’s  
18 updated decision regarding grazing on the SDNM north of I-8. (Doc. 1, Compl.) Plaintiffs  
19 specifically claimed that the preparation and substance of the Amended RMP violated (1)  
20 the FLPMA and National Landscape Conservation System Act by issuing an RMP that  
21 failed to comply with the Proclamation; (2) the NHPA by failing to follow several  
22 procedural requirements in the statute; and (3) NEPA by issuing a FONSI that  
23 “unreasonably dismissed” criteria that should have led BLM to produce an EIS, failing to  
24 consider an adequate range of alternative actions in the EA,<sup>7</sup> and failing to take a “hard  
25 look” at the environmental effects of “allowing grazing across all lands on the Monument  
26 north of Highway 8.” (Compl. ¶¶ 130–66.)

27 After litigating to designate the administrative record, Plaintiffs and BLM both

28 <sup>7</sup> Plaintiffs have since waived their argument regarding alternatives. (*See* Doc. 42, WWP  
Resp. at 10 n.2.)

1 moved for summary judgment on March 22, 2023. (Doc. 27, 07/26/2022 Order; WWP  
2 Mot.; BLM Mot.) Plaintiffs and BLM then filed their Responses to each other’s Motions  
3 on May 3, 2023. (Doc. 41, BLM Resp.; Doc. 42, WWP Resp.) The Court held oral  
4 argument on the Motions on June 1, 2023. (Doc. 43, Min. Entry.)

## 5 **II. LEGAL STANDARDS & ANALYSIS**

6 BLM argues that Plaintiffs lack standing to pursue their FLPMA claim and contends  
7 that the Amended RMP complies with all relevant statutory requirements. (BLM Mot. at  
8 13–35.) The Court addresses each argument in turn.

### 9 **A. Standing**

10 Article III of the U.S. Constitution specifies that the judicial branch’s power only  
11 extends to “Cases” and “Controversies.” U.S. Const. art. III, § 2, cl. 1. Standing “is a  
12 doctrine rooted in the traditional understanding of a case or controversy” that “limits the  
13 category of litigants empowered to maintain a lawsuit in federal court to seek redress for a  
14 legal wrong.” *Spokeo, Inc. v. Robins*, 578 U.S. 330, 338 (2016) (citation omitted). There  
15 are three elements required for standing. *Lujan v. Defs. of Wildlife*, 504 U.S. 555, 560  
16 (1992). First, the plaintiff must have suffered an injury-in-fact that is “concrete and  
17 particularized” and “actual or imminent.” *Id.* Second, the injury must be “fairly traceable”  
18 to the violation of law by the defendant. *Id.* at 560; *Mecinas v. Hobbs*, 30 F.4th 890, 899  
19 (9th Cir. 2022). Lastly, it must be “likely, as opposed to merely speculative” that the  
20 requested relief will redress the injury. *Lujan*, 504 U.S. at 561 (internal quotation marks  
21 omitted). Plaintiffs “invoking federal jurisdiction bear[] the burden of establishing these  
22 elements” and they must demonstrate standing “for each claim . . . and for each form of  
23 relief that they seek.” *Id.*; *TransUnion LLC v. Ramirez*, 141 S. Ct. 2190, 2208 (2021).

24 Plaintiffs assert that BLM violated the FLPMA because “BLM’s proxy analysis did  
25 not ensure its decision would protect all of the plants and animals identified in the  
26 proclamation,” “BLM’s decision that all lands on the SDNM north of Highway 8 should  
27 be available for grazing was not supported by the evidence and a rational explanation,” and  
28 “[t]he record here shows that grazing all lands on the SDNM north of Highway 8 is not

1 compatible with protecting all biological and cultural objects of the SDNM, and it was  
2 unreasonable to side-step that conclusion by deferring decisions to later analyses.” (WWP  
3 Mot. at 30–31.) BLM argues that because the Amended RMP is only “a planning decision  
4 that serves as a precursor to BLM’s authorization of grazing,” Plaintiffs’ FLPMA claim is  
5 unripe and they lack standing to sue. (BLM Mot. at 14–17.) Courts consider three factors  
6 to determine whether a challenge to an administrative action is ripe: “(1) whether delayed  
7 review would cause hardship to the plaintiffs; (2) whether judicial intervention would  
8 inappropriately interfere with further administrative action; and (3) whether the courts  
9 would benefit from further factual development of the issues presented.” *Citizens for Better*  
10 *Forestry v. U.S. Dep’t of Agric.*, 341 F.3d 961, 977 (9th Cir. 2003) (quoting *Ohio Forestry*  
11 *Ass’n, Inc. v. Sierra Club*, 523 U.S. 726, 733 (1998)). Plaintiffs counter in their Response  
12 that their FLPMA claim is ripe because the Amended RMP failed at the programmatic level  
13 to protect Monument objects, in that the RMP is an erroneous decision based on a flawed  
14 decision-making process. (WWP Resp. at 2–9.)

15 Despite Plaintiffs’ arguments to the contrary, their FLPMA claim<sup>8</sup> is unripe.  
16 Regarding delayed review, Plaintiffs have not shown that withholding review of their  
17 FLPMA claim will harm their interests. *Citizens for Better Forestry*, 841 F.3d at 977  
18 (explaining that if injury is substantive, no hardship to plaintiffs in withholding review

19 <sup>8</sup> Plaintiffs argue that their FLPMA claim is essentially procedural, not substantive. (See  
20 WWP Resp. at 2–4.) Unlike an injury from an agency’s substantive conclusion, “a person  
21 injured by ‘a failure to comply with [a statutory] procedure may complain of that failure at  
22 the time the failure takes place, for the claim can never get riper.’” *Env’t Def. Ctr. v. Bureau*  
23 *of Ocean Mgmt.*, 36 F.4th 850, 871 (9th Cir. 2022) (citation omitted). Yet Plaintiffs’  
24 FLPMA claim attacks the substantive conclusions contained in the Amended RMP,  
25 alleging *inter alia* that BLM’s “management plan failed to include actions necessary to  
26 protect objects identified in the proclamation because the RMP amendment did not identify  
27 any lands as unavailable for grazing.” (See Compl. ¶¶ 133–34.) Plaintiffs also alleged that  
28 the Amended RMP “relied on a compatibility analysis that did not adequately assess  
impacts of grazing on all Monument objects to be protected,” but this attack on BLM’s  
procedure is fundamentally an allegation that BLM did not adequately protect the  
Monument. (*Id.* ¶ 134; see also WWP Mot. at 30 (“The RMP amendment is inconsistent  
with the SDNM proclamation and [the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act] because  
it does not protect all biological and cultural objects identified in the proclamation.”);  
WWP Resp. at 5 (analogizing instant case to one where agency failed to comply with  
“substantive standards in FLPMA.”).) Moreover, to the extent the Court can distinguish  
the purportedly procedural arguments in Plaintiffs’ Moton from Plaintiffs’ substantive  
FLPMA challenge, these attacks on BLM’s decision-making process underlying the  
Amended RMP are addressed below with Plaintiffs’ NEPA and NHPA claims.

1 “because the plans had not yet been implemented at the site-specific level[.]” (citation  
2 omitted); *c.f. Cottonwood Env’t Law Ctr. v. U.S. Forest Serv.*, 789 F.3d 1075, 1083–84  
3 (9th Cir. 2015) (finding claim procedural where plaintiff did “not argue for a particular  
4 substantive result”). Plaintiffs argue that BLM’s decision to “punt grazing management to  
5 future allotment-level decisions” will obscure larger-scale impacts of grazing across  
6 allotments, but the record does not reflect that BLM would make implementation-level  
7 decisions without considering each decision’s impact on the Monument as a whole. (*See*  
8 *WWP Mot.* at 31); AR-0031051 (“It is anticipated that allotment specific implementation-  
9 level projects would be proposed in the future and would be evaluated through the . . .  
10 NEPA process, and would be treated as separate undertakings.”), 0032359 (“[G]razing  
11 could be allowed if managed conservatively. . . . Livestock grazing management, including  
12 stocking rates and grazing schemes . . . will be analyzed in accordance with [NEPA] on an  
13 implementation-level basis in the future.”).

14 The Court must also avoid interfering with further administrative action, meaning  
15 BLM’s implementation-level decision-making. “[H]ere, the possibility that further  
16 consideration will actually occur before the Plan is implemented is not theoretical, but  
17 real.” *Ohio Forestry*, 523 U.S. at 735 (finding challenge to logging plan that had yet to  
18 authorize site-specific logging was unripe as, *inter alia*, “immediate judicial review  
19 directed at the lawfulness of the [agency decision] could hinder agency efforts to refine its  
20 policies”). Plaintiffs suggest that the Amended RMP is at an “administrative resting place,”  
21 which means the Court would not interfere with agency action by taking up Plaintiff’s  
22 FLPMA claim. (*See WWP Resp.* at 4); *Cottonwood Env’t Law Ctr.*, 789 F.3d at 1083–84.  
23 But because Plaintiffs fail to address that BLM has not enabled any grazing to occur on the  
24 Monument, may decline to authorize any grazing or authorize far fewer AUMs than the  
25 Amended RMP allows, and is continuing consultation with Native American tribes and the  
26 SHPO regarding grazing decisions, Plaintiffs do not persuade the Court that the finality of  
27 the programmatic plan makes their substantive challenge ripe. (*See WWP Mot.* at 23, 35.)  
28 The Court will give BLM the opportunity to abide by the Proclamation in its

1 implementation-level decisions rather than “interfere with the system that Congress  
2 specified for the agency to reach” such decisions. *Ohio Forestry*, 523 U.S. at 736.

3 Lastly, the Court would benefit from further factual development of Plaintiffs’  
4 FLPMA claim before adjudicating the substantive claim that BLM has “failed to protect  
5 all of the plants and animals identified in the proclamation.” (WWP Mot. at 30.) There is  
6 no grazing occurring on the Monument, nor does the Amended RMP change the status quo.  
7 Plaintiffs cite *Western Watersheds Project v. Salazar*, 4:08-cv-516-BLW, 2011 WL  
8 4526746 (D. Idaho Sept. 28, 2011) for support that an RMP only allowing, rather than  
9 authorizing, grazing still confers standing to sue under the FLPMA. (WWP Resp. at 5.)  
10 But the plaintiff’s standing in *Salazar* hinged on the “key fact present [t]here—and absent  
11 in *Ohio Forestry*—[which] is that the RMPs at issue have immediate and continuing  
12 effects.” 2011 WL 4526746, at \*18; *see also Nat’l Trust for Historic Preservation v. Suazo*,  
13 No. CV–13–01973–PHX–DGC, 2015 WL 1432632, at \*2, \*5–8 (D. Ariz. Mar. 27, 2015)  
14 (reaching merits of FLPMA claim where programmatic plan allowed *ongoing* target  
15 shooting on SDNM). The Amended RMP has no “immediate and continuing effect” upon  
16 grazing in the SDNM, nor have Plaintiffs explained why they cannot once again sue should  
17 BLM issue an implementation-level decision with which Plaintiffs disagree.<sup>9</sup> Plaintiffs’  
18 FLPMA claim is unripe.<sup>10</sup> *See Ohio Forestry*, 523 U.S. at 736 (“[D]epending upon the  
19 agency’s future actions to revise the Plan or modify the expected methods of  
20 implementation, review now may turn out to have been unnecessary.”).

### 21 **B. Statutory Challenges Under APA Review**

22 NEPA challenges are reviewed under the Administrative Procedure Act (“APA”)  
23 framework. The APA mandates that a reviewing court “shall . . . hold unlawful and set

24  
25 <sup>9</sup> Plaintiffs raise that BLM will not issue a landscape-scale LHE upon making  
implementation-level decisions. (WWP Resp. at 1.) The Court anticipates that the below  
NEPA analysis will address at least some underlying concerns about the LHE.

26 <sup>10</sup> *Western Watersheds v. Abbey*, 719 F.3d 1035, 1042–44 (9th Cir. 2013) reached the  
27 merits of the plaintiff’s FLPMA claim regarding an RMP regulating grazing. (*See* WWP  
28 Resp. at 4.) But *Abbey* addressed, *inter alia*, site-specific permit renewal, not just the  
interpretation of the Proclamation at the programmatic level, and found that BLM’s  
decision to “exclud[e] from consideration programmatic changes to grazing management”  
did not violate the FLPMA. *See* 719 F.3d at 1039, 1041–45.

1 aside agency action, findings, and conclusions found to be arbitrary [or] capricious.” 5  
2 U.S.C. § 706(2)(A). “Under . . . this ‘narrow’ standard of review, [courts] insist that an  
3 agency ‘examine the relevant data and articulate a satisfactory explanation for its action.’”  
4 *F.C.C. v. Fox Telev. Stations, Inc.*, 556 U.S. 502, 513 (2009) (citation omitted). “[A] court  
5 is not to substitute its judgment for that of the agency and should uphold a decision of less  
6 than ideal clarity if the agency’s path may reasonably be discerned.” *Id.* at 513–14  
7 (citations and internal quotations omitted). This means that a reviewing court cannot  
8 “second-guess” the agency’s “weighing of risks and benefits [or] penalize[] [the agency]  
9 for departing from [a different authority’s] inferences and assumptions,” nor may the court  
10 “ask whether [an agency] decision was ‘the best one possible’ or even whether it was  
11 ‘better than the alternatives.’” *Dep’t of Commerce v. New York*, 139 S. Ct. 2551, 2571  
12 (2019) (citation omitted). But agency action can be set aside “if the agency has relied on  
13 factors which Congress has not intended it to consider, entirely failed to consider an  
14 important aspect of the problem, offered an explanation for its decision that runs counter  
15 to the evidence before the agency, or is so implausible that it could not be ascribed to a  
16 difference in view or the product of agency expertise.” *Motor Vehicle Mfrs. Ass’n of United*  
17 *States, Inc. v. State Farm Mut. Auto. Ins. Co.*, 463 U.S. 29, 43 (1983); *NW Coal. for Alts.*  
18 *to Pesticides v. U.S. E.P.A.*, 544 F.3d 1043, 1052 n.7 (9th Cir. 2008) (“[W]here the  
19 agency’s reasoning is irrational, unclear, or not supported by the data it purports to  
20 interpret, we must disapprove the agency’s action.”) (citation omitted). And courts “may  
21 not supply a reasoned basis for the agency’s action that the agency itself has not given.”  
22 *Fox Telev. Stations*, 556 U.S. at 515 (citation omitted).

### 23 1. NEPA

24 NEPA “ensure[s] a fully informed and well considered decision.” *Vermont Yankee*  
25 *Nuclear Power Corp. v. NRDC*, 435 U.S. 519, 558 (1978). Specifically, “NEPA imposes  
26 procedural requirements designed to force agencies to take a ‘hard look’ at environmental  
27 consequences of their proposed actions.” *Bark v. United States Forest Serv.*, 958 F.3d 865,  
28 871 (9th Cir. 2020) (citation omitted). “NEPA itself does not mandate particular results,

1 but simply prescribes the necessary process.” *Robertson v. Methow Valley Citizens*  
2 *Council*, 490 U.S. 332, 350 (1989). Courts are to “strictly interpret the procedural  
3 requirements in NEPA to the fullest extent possible consistent with the policies embodied  
4 in NEPA. Grudging, pro forma compliance will not do.” *WildEarth Guardians v.*  
5 *Provencio*, 923 F.3d 655, 668 (9th Cir. 2019) (cleaned up).

6 Plaintiffs argue that the Amended RMP violated NEPA in multiple respects. The  
7 Court agrees at least that BLM’s unsupported assumptions and unaddressed effects  
8 underlying the EA warrant remand to the agency. *See WWP I*, 2015 WL 846548, at \*12  
9 (remanding rather than vacating 2012 RMP “to provide [BLM] with the opportunity to  
10 either articulate reasoned explanations and responses, or adopt different decisions with  
11 reasoned explanations that support them”).

#### 12 **i. Unsupported Assumptions & Analysis**

13 An agency decision undergoing NEPA review must demonstrate a “a rational  
14 connection between the facts found and the conclusions made” in order to survive under  
15 the APA. *WildEarth Guardians*, 923 F.3d at 672 (quoting *Or. Nat. Res. Council v. Lowe*,  
16 109 F.3d 521, 526 (9th Cir. 1997)). While an agency has “substantial discretion” to choose  
17 its scientific methodology, it still must explain its choice of scientific modeling. *San Luis*  
18 *& Delta-Mendota Water Auth. v. Locke*, 776 F.3d 971, 997 (9th Cir. 2014).

19 Plaintiffs take issue with BLM’s assumptions underlying the land use probability  
20 map, arguing that “BLM’s failure to use its own information to verify its probability use  
21 model undermined its analysis and violated NEPA.” (WWP Resp. at 13.) Specifically,  
22 Plaintiffs argue that BLM repeatedly assumed, without any substantiation, that cattle would  
23 not travel more than two miles from water sources and would have no ecological impact  
24 on Monument land fitting that criterion. (WWP Mot. at 15.) Plaintiffs detail that BLM  
25 primarily cites the Smith Publication for the two-mile benchmark, but this document does  
26 not support the proposition that cattle move no more than two miles from water sources,  
27 nor do any other documents cited to support that specific assumption. (*Id.* at 16, 16 n.7.)  
28 BLM then used this unsupported two-mile mark to set desired plant community objectives

1 and to analyze in the LHE whether cattle grazing caused degraded ecological conditions  
2 on the SDNM. (*Id.* (citing AR-0031547, 0031625).)

3 The Court agrees with Plaintiffs that BLM arbitrarily relied on the two-mile  
4 benchmark to design its use probability map, which was integral to the conclusions in the  
5 LHE, EA, and Grazing Compatibility Analysis. *See, e.g.*, AR-0032303 (explaining to  
6 public that two-mile benchmark from LHE “applies to all sections of the Proposed  
7 RMPA/EA”); *Great Basin Res. Watch v. Bureau of Land Mgmt.*, 844 F.3d 1095, 1103 (9th  
8 Cir. 2016) (agency cannot reasonably rely on a source without “supporting reasoning” to  
9 create baseline estimates for environmental health, particularly where agency did not  
10 “independently scrutinize th[e] estimate and decide[] it was reasonable”). BLM repeatedly  
11 cited the Smith Publication without ever qualifying its conclusions or independently  
12 explaining why the two-mile benchmark should be persuasive. AR-0032303; *see* AR-  
13 0031547 (“Areas without expected livestock use was defined as areas greater than 2 miles  
14 of livestock waters (Martin and Severson 1988; Blanco et al. 2009).”); AR-0031625 (“In  
15 general, livestock do not travel more than 2 miles from water on flat terrain and no more  
16 than 1 mile in rough terrain (Smith et al. 1986).”); AR-0031331 (citing Smith Publication  
17 to conclude that fencing not required to protect saguaro forest area more than 2 miles from  
18 water source). All parties agree that grazing impacts are most severe near water sources,  
19 but BLM provides no true substantiation or independent reasoning to justify its serial use  
20 of the two-mile benchmark. (*See* WWP Mot. at 22.)

21 Further, there is evidence in the record that contradicts BLM’s two-mile benchmark,  
22 but BLM makes no attempt to distinguish these sources. *See Bark*, 958 F.3d at 871 (finding  
23 EA inadequate because “NEPA requires agencies to consider all important aspects of a  
24 problem” and the agency merely “reiterated its conclusions . . . but did not engage with the  
25 substantial body of research cited by Appellants”). Plaintiffs correctly raise that there is a  
26 “published study in the record that BLM failed to cite [which] states that most grazing in  
27 arid rangelands of Australia occurred within . . . 6.2 miles of water.” (WWP Mot. at 16  
28 (citing AR-0001352).) Plaintiffs also invoke the 2009 Pattern Map, which they argue



1 “shows that numerous areas mapped as class 5 in the 2020 [livestock use probability] map  
2 had livestock use in 2008, ranging from slight use all the way to heavy use.”<sup>11</sup> (*Id.* at 16–  
3 17); AR-0031552, 0031553. BLM counters that “Plaintiffs mistakenly suggest that the  
4 2020 probability map is contradicted by the 2009 actual use map. [But] [t]hese maps are  
5 based on entirely different methods and measure different variables – probability of any  
6 grazing versus intensity of use.” (BLM Resp. at 7.) The Court agrees with Plaintiffs that  
7 there are disconnects between the 2020 projections and 2009 recordings that warranted  
8 further consideration. There are areas in the southeastern, central, and southwestern  
9 portions of the Monument north of I-8 where BLM recorded “heavy” livestock use in 2008,  
10 yet BLM projected low to moderate probability of livestock use in these areas. *Compare*  
11 AR-0031552 with AR-0031553. While such discrepancies appear to reflect no more than  
12 five square miles of underestimation between actual use in 2008 and projected use in 2020,  
13 the discrepancy underscores that BLM’s two-mile benchmark lacks support in the record.

14 BLM counters that it “did not assume there would be no grazing impacts beyond a  
15 two mile range, but used the two mile rule of thumb as a way of analyzing past impacts  
16 and predicting future impacts.” (BLM Resp. at 6.) But the record does not reflect that the  
17 two-mile benchmark was merely a “rule of thumb.” While BLM noted when it observed  
18 livestock sign on sites categorized as Class 5, it still assumed throughout its analyses that  
19 SDNM areas specifically more than two miles from a water source had a low probability  
20 of livestock use. *See* AR-0031565 (noting livestock use as causal factor in Class 5 plot  
21 failing standards where there was “recent livestock sign, trails and scat” at the plot); AR-

22 <sup>11</sup> Plaintiffs make similar arguments about BLM’s assumption that slopes greater than 30%  
23 will cause diminished livestock use. (*See* WWP Mot. at 17.) BLM counters that “[t]his  
24 choice represents BLM specialists’ view that in the Monument 30% or steeper slopes are  
25 likely to be impassable by cattle.” (BLM Resp. at 7–8 (citing AR-0031621).) BLM did not  
26 direct the Court to any authority for its assumption that terrain with more than 30% slope  
27 would be impassable by cattle. (AR-0031621; *see also* AR-0031522, 0031549 (areas with  
28 slope greater than 30% were excluded from BLM’s stratified random plot monitoring).) Plaintiffs also raise that BLM assumed terrain with greater than 60% slope was impassable in the 2009 Pattern Map and point to a study in the record finding that “cattle did access high elevation rocky slopes during two years of the study, causing impacts to vegetation in those areas.” (WWP Mot. at 17–18 (citing AR-0005246, 0011545).) Though BLM’s assumption about 30% slope does not pervade the LHE to the same degree as its two-mile benchmark, it is similarly a product of BLM’s failure to grapple with the record and explain its decision-making process.

1 0031546–47 (using two-mile benchmark to define where historical grazing probably  
2 affected plant community), AR-0031551 (two-mile benchmark used in generating  
3 livestock use probability map, which was used to determine whether livestock caused  
4 below-average rangeland health standards); (BLM Resp. at 6.) BLM further argues that it  
5 declined to include its previously collected or studied data because Plaintiffs’ “successful  
6 challenge to the 2012 [RMP] . . . caused BLM to recognize the flaws in relying upon those  
7 past data and studies.” (BLM Mot. at 28.) BLM then “revised its methodology . . . to  
8 address particular flaws . . . that the Court found in the 2012 [RMP]” when preparing the  
9 Amended RMP. (*Id.* at 29.)

10         Though BLM attempted to correct the flaws underlying its previous RMP, BLM  
11 still failed to “adequately explain[] its methodology and rationally tie[] its conclusions to  
12 the” administrative record. (*See* BLM Resp. at 3.); *Northwest Coal. for Alts. to Pesticides*,  
13 544 F.3d at 1052 n.7 (“[W]here the agency’s reasoning is irrational, unclear, or not  
14 supported by the data it purports to interpret, we must disapprove the agency’s action”).  
15 Plaintiffs correctly raise several points in the record where even BLM’s data reflect  
16 livestock use of Class 5 plots, further contradicting BLM’s two-mile benchmark. (*See*  
17 WWP Mot. at 17.) For example, the 2020 LHE recorded that two of the three plots in the  
18 Limy Fan ecological site within the Big Horn Allotment were failing to achieve Standard  
19 1. AR-0031565. Of those two failing plots, one was Class 5 “with recent livestock sign,  
20 trails and scat, and absent of palatable species.” *Id.*; *see also* AR-0031578 (same on Limy  
21 Upland plot within Lower Vekol Allotment). BLM surmised that “current unauthorized  
22 livestock grazing and historical . . . livestock grazing is the causal factor for non-  
23 achievement of Standard 1 on the Limy Fan ecological site.” AR-0031565. And on the  
24 Sandy Loam Deep ecological site within the Beloat Allotment, one of the four failing plots  
25 was Class 5 “with recent livestock trails, substantial use of key species, and loitering areas,  
26 and [the second] one is in livestock use probability Class 5 with livestock trails and scat.”  
27 AR-0031561. These two Class 5 plots failed “likely due to prolonged stocking of the  
28 pasture and the relatively high forage quality of these areas causing livestock to travel

1 further in search of forage.” *Id.* Yet BLM still relied on its use probability map and  
2 underlying two-mile benchmark to make conclusions about grazing compatibility. BLM’s  
3 “failure to explain” its two-mile benchmark “assumption frustrated the BLM’s ability to  
4 take a ‘hard look’ at [grazing] impacts.” *Great Basin Res. Watch*, 844 F.3d at 1104.

5 Indeed, BLM’s unsupported reasoning pervades its conclusions about grazing  
6 compatibility.<sup>12</sup> (WWP Resp. at 6–7.) BLM’s analysis of plant communities again falters  
7 because it was based on BLM’s two-mile benchmark. (*See* BLM Resp. at 6); AR-0031547.  
8 When it is possible that the mean condition for a plant community in its “natural” state  
9 actually reflects areas negatively impacted by livestock, BLM cannot adequately analyze  
10 plant community health. *See* AR-0031547. And beyond the two-mile benchmark, Plaintiffs  
11 raise that by setting the plant community objectives one standard deviation below the mean,  
12 BLM is lowering the standard of community health. (*See* WWP Mot. at 9, 9 n.5, 18.) BLM  
13 counters that “BLM did this because it ‘represents the average spread, natural variability,  
14 of the normally distributed data from the mean of each vegetation community attribute  
15 absent of unnatural disturbances,’ [which] . . . reduces the possibility that natural variability  
16 would be the cause of a site failing to meet Standards.” (BLM Resp. at 8 (citing AR-  
17 0031547).) Yet BLM’s explanation that this below-average plant health standard will  
18 promote accuracy does not appear in the portion of the administrative record where the  
19 plant community objectives were explained, nor does BLM offer any independent cite for  
20 this assertion. *See id.*; *Env’t Def. Ctr.*, 36 F.4th at 878 (“[A]n agency’s action must be  
21 upheld, if at all, on the basis articulated by the agency itself’ rather than ‘. . . counsel’s  
22

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23 <sup>12</sup> The parties also dispute the significance of BLM’s reliance on a single year of data. BLM  
24 argues that *WWP I* “did not say that using a single year’s data is a per se violation of the  
25 APA – the Court instead found it was ‘the inconsistent treatment of data’ that was arbitrary  
26 and capricious.” (BLM Resp. at 8); 2015 WL 846548, at \*8 (noting that BLM “use[d] just  
27 a single year’s data for its determination of whether the objectives were being met, but then  
28 reject[ed] the PBI data in part because a single year’s data is not enough to support sound  
conclusions”). Plaintiffs contend that particularly given the additional data at BLM’s  
disposal, notably the 2009 Pattern Map, BLM could not reasonably rely on a single year’s  
data collected after the SDNM had not been grazed for years. (*See* WWP Mot. at 18–20.)  
Plaintiffs cite no categorical rule, nor does the Court know of any, that an agency must rely  
on more than one year of data to support an LHE. However, as detailed in the surrounding  
analysis, the Court agrees with Plaintiffs that BLM inadequately analyzed the record data  
at its disposal, including the 2009 Pattern Map.

1 post hoc rationalizations.” (quoting *Or. Nat’l Desert Ass’n v. Bureau of Land Mgmt.*, 625  
2 F.3d 1092, 1120 (9th Cir. 2010)). Lowering the threshold for plant community health,  
3 without rational explanation in the EA itself, is arbitrary and capricious.

4 BLM argues that this Court should defer to BLM’s expertise in quantifying the  
5 impacts of grazing on the SDNM, including through its land use probability map, in the  
6 absence of recent data regarding grazing on the SDNM. (BLM Resp. at 5 (citing *Safari  
7 Club Int’l v. Haaland*, 31 F.4th 1157, 1174–75 (9th Cir. 2022)). But the record is not  
8 “devoid of pre-existing studies to clarify the impact of policies on threatened animal  
9 species.” *See Safari Club*, 31 F.4th at 1174 (upholding agency action under “default rule .  
10 . . . to rely on a specialized federal agency’s presumptive expertise in the subject” where  
11 plaintiff “identifie[d] no studies on how” challenged action would impact threatened  
12 species). In sum, unlike other agency decisions and underlying predictive modeling upheld  
13 by the Ninth Circuit, the land use probability map and its two-mile benchmark does not  
14 “make[] entire sense.” *Id.* at 1175 (citing *Fox Television Stations*, 556 U.S. at 521); *c.f.*  
15 *Native Ecosystems Council v. Marten*, 883 F.3d 783, 795 (9th Cir. 2018).

## 16 **ii. Failure to Examine Effects**

17 Plaintiffs relatedly argue that BLM “failed to adequately assess and explain all of  
18 the direct and indirect<sup>13</sup> effects of its proposed grazing plan in the EA, as NEPA requires.”  
19 (WWP Mot. at 21.) “The NEPA regulation requires agencies to assess the direct and  
20 indirect effects, as well as the cumulative impact, of their actions on the environment.” *See*  
21 *Kettle Range Conservation Grp. v. U.S. Forest Serv.*, No. 2:21-CV-00161-SAB, 2023 WL  
22 4112930, at \*8 (E.D. Wash. June 21, 2023) (citing 40 C.F.R. §§ 1502.16, 1508.25(c)); *Ctr.*  
23 *for Biological Diversity v. Bernhardt*, 982 F.3d 723, 737 (9th Cir. 2020). “Indirect and  
24 direct effects are both ‘caused by the action,’ but direct effects occur ‘at the same time and  
25 place’ as the proposed project, while indirect effects occur ‘later in time or [are] farther  
26 removed in distance.’” *Bernhardt*, 982 F.3d at 737 (citing 40 C.F.R. § 1508.8(a), (b)).  
27 Courts may not perform their own review of the scientific evidence before the agency, but

28 <sup>13</sup> Plaintiffs previously argued that BLM also failed to consider the cumulative effects of  
the Amended RMP but has since waived this argument. (*See* BLM Resp. at 2 n.1.)

1 instead must only “ensure that the agency has adequately considered and disclosed the  
2 environmental impact of its actions.” *Abbey*, 719 F.3d at 1048 (citation omitted). Plaintiffs  
3 assert that BLM tries to “punt” the requisite hard look to implementation-level analyses in  
4 the future, but BLM must still perform an analysis consistent with NEPA following its duties  
5 under the Proclamation. (WWP Mot. at 23.) The Court agrees in part.

6 On a general note, BLM’s repeated reliance on the superficiality of the Amended  
7 RMP raises concerns under NEPA.<sup>14</sup> BLM asserts that “there is no more than a theoretical  
8 possibility, but near-zero likelihood, that any grazing whatsoever will actually occur within  
9 the Monument prior to follow-on implementation decisions to grant grazing permits,” and  
10 asserted at oral argument that it is uncertain whether any grazing will be authorized on the  
11 SDNM. (BLM Mot. at 16; *see also* Min. Entry.) If BLM’s position is that even ephemeral  
12 grazing has been and will be incompatible with protecting Monument objects, this  
13 reasoning should have been reflected in the analysis it was required to perform under  
14 NEPA. *See Kettle Range*, 2023 WL 4112930, at \*6 (“The statute’s hard look obligation  
15 must involve a discussion of adverse impacts that does not improperly minimize negative  
16 side effects.”). While an agency is not “obligated fully to evaluate the impacts of a proposed  
17 action” at the programmatic level, an agency must still “provide sufficient detail to foster  
18 informed decision-making.” *See Abbey*, 719 F.3d at 1049–50 (discussing relative agency  
19 burdens at programmatic versus implementation level EIS) (citation omitted). And BLM’s  
20 decision to delay further NEPA analysis until the implementation stage does not insulate  
21 the decision from remand. *C.f. Suazo*, 2015 WL 1432632, at \*12 (The agency’s “proposed  
22 wait-and-see approach undermines the purpose of NEPA”).

23 Plaintiffs also argue that “it is undisputed that the greatest impacts from grazing  
24 occur near water sources,” but BLM still failed to adequately consider the impacts of the  
25 Amended RMP on areas near present or proposed water sources. (WWP Mot. at 22–23.)

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26 <sup>14</sup> BLM repeatedly cites implementation-level management as an extra mitigation measure  
27 ensuring that BLM’s grazing decisions comply with NEPA. (*E.g.*, BLM Mot. at 21, 26,  
28 32.) But “[m]itigation measures . . . while relevant to the adequacy of an environmental  
analysis . . . are not a panacea for inadequate data collection and analysis.” *Oregon Natural  
Desert Ass’n v. Jewell*, 840 F.3d 562, 570–71 (9th Cir. 2016) (citing *City of Sausalito v.  
O’Neill*, 386 F.3d 1186, 1212–13 (9th Cir. 2004)).

1 BLM intends to “exclud[e] . . . sensitive areas and/or areas failing to achieve Standards in  
2 proximity to livestock waters . . .” from grazing, but Plaintiffs contend that BLM never  
3 defined the meaning of “sensitive” or “why areas around new [water] sources would be  
4 ‘less sensitive’ than around existing sources.”<sup>15</sup> (*Id.* at 23.) To further illustrate the  
5 arbitrariness of BLM’s assessment, Plaintiffs raise that BLM quickly dismissed an  
6 alternative plan where it would have closed portions of allotments failing standards to  
7 grazing, largely through fencing and removal of troughs, only because “the additional  
8 ground disturbance involved in subdividing allotments” would not meet the purpose of  
9 protecting the SDNM. (*Id.* at 22); AR-0031316–0031317. BLM provided no additional  
10 explanation for how fencing to facilitate grazing is less impactful on the Monument than  
11 fencing to prevent grazing in areas failing standards. BLM now argues that it “considered  
12 the approach suggested by Plaintiffs, to not allow for grazing in areas that are not meeting  
13 standards, and provided a *rational* explanation for not considering such an alternative in  
14 detail.” (BLM Mot. at 25 (emphasis added).) In light of the action chosen in the Amended  
15 RMP, BLM’s failure to more thoroughly consider the impacts of fencing off certain areas  
16 was, without more explanation, irrational. *See Neighbors of the Mogollon Rim, Inc. v.*  
17 *United States Forest Serv.*, No. 22-15259, 2023 WL 3267846, at \*2 (9th Cir. May 5, 2023)  
18 (“Studying an alternative that excludes [a certain site] from grazing would not require the  
19 Forest Service to adopt that plan. Instead, it would allow the agency and the public to  
20 consider fully the effects of the different alternatives and express informed opinions.”  
21 (citing *Abbey*, 719 F.3d at 1053–54)).

22 Plaintiffs’ remaining arguments invite the Court to review the agency’s scientific  
23 findings or ask more of BLM than is required from a programmatic decision in an EA.  
24 Plaintiffs argue that BLM’s “failure to connect the dots between the facts and its  
25 conclusions” is exemplified by its analysis of the creosote-bursage plant community on the  
26 SDNM. (WWP Mot. at 23.) And because the historical level of grazing on the Monument

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27  
28 <sup>15</sup> The Court finds that BLM made a reasonable effort to clarify the meaning of “sensitive”  
in the EA, discussing “Sensitive Areas such as Cultural Sites and Saguaro Forests  
Unavailable to Livestock Grazing.” *See* AR-0031317.

1 was lower than previously authorized, Plaintiffs assert that “the record does not support  
2 BLM’s conclusion that 4,232 AUMs will reduce the level of grazing on the SDNM and  
3 thus conditions will improve, nor does the record explain how fencing current water  
4 sources and building new water sources will reduce impacts to an insignificant level; and  
5 the FONSI offers no further explanations” regarding both the creosote-bursage community  
6 specifically and general conditions on the SDNM. (*Id.* at 23, 27); *see* AR-0032325 (FONSI  
7 explaining historical and contemporary grazing authorizations).<sup>16</sup> But BLM correctly raises  
8 that its duty under NEPA is not to “improve” conditions of Monument objects, but rather  
9 follow the procedure NEPA prescribes. (BLM Resp. at 10.)

10 Similarly, Plaintiffs argue that BLM failed to adequately address impacts of the  
11 Amended RMP on the Sonoran desert tortoise, but the EA explained that the tortoise  
12 “potentially occur[s]” within the SDNM, admitted that livestock grazing threatens tortoise  
13 communities, and detailed that “there is little overlap in the habitat shared by livestock and  
14 [the tortoise] in most areas in Arizona, and because livestock grazing in Arizona is actively  
15 managed by land management agencies, livestock grazing is not currently thought to affect  
16 populations in Arizona.” AR-0031328–0031329. Contrary to Plaintiffs’ claims, even the  
17 2009 Pattern Map reflects that there is not significant overlap on the SDNM between areas  
18 with a history of moderate to heavy grazing and tortoise habitat. (*Compare* AR-0031552  
19 *with* AR-0032322; *see* WWP Mot. at 24.) Plaintiffs also fault BLM for failing to monitor  
20 annual plants, which certain commenters asserted were an important food source for the  
21 tortoise, but BLM explained that “[a]nnual forage production and utilization could not be  
22 measured due to the lack [of] significant precipitation and lack of livestock grazing on the  
23 SDNM since 2015.” AR-0032307; (*see* WWP Mot. at 24); *Audubon Soc’y of Portland v.*  
24 *Haaland*, 40 F.4th 967, 987 (9th Cir. 2022) (an agency may legitimately acknowledge that  
25 “a lack of data made certain detailed assessments difficult, [and that] does not render the

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26 <sup>16</sup> Plaintiffs argue that BLM failed to adequately analyze how climate change would  
27 exacerbate grazing impacts on the Monument. (WWP Mot. at 24–26.) Plaintiffs cite no  
28 authority for their argument that BLM must make specific findings and disclosures about  
how drought could affect the SDNM’s biological resources. (*See id.*) Moreover, the EA  
acknowledged that climate change and drought could negatively impact Monument  
resources. AR-0031889. No more is required of BLM at the programmatic level.

1 agency’s NEPA analysis inadequate.”).<sup>17</sup> And BLM must more thoroughly evaluate the  
 2 effects of grazing upon the Sonoran desert tortoise at the implementation stage. *See Abbey*,  
 3 719 F.3d at 1049–50. The same is true for BLM’s analysis of impacts of grazing upon  
 4 bighorn sheep, which BLM addressed in comments and acknowledged may be affected by  
 5 livestock grazing. (*See WWP Mot.* at 25); AR-0031330 (bighorn sheep depend on forbs  
 6 and shrubs for “forage and concealment”), 0032309 (BLM explaining that “[a]s described  
 7 in Section 3.5.2 of the Draft RMPA/EA livestock can displace wildlife; desert bighorn  
 8 sheep are typically found in rugged and steep terrain, which livestock tend to avoid.”).

### 9 **iii. Failure to Complete an EIS**

10 Like other challenges under NEPA, “[a]n agency’s decision not to prepare an EIS  
 11 once that agency has prepared an EA is reviewed for abuse of discretion, and will be set  
 12 aside only if it is arbitrary and capricious.” *W. Land Exchange Project v. U.S. Bureau of*  
 13 *Land Mgmt.*, 315 F. Supp. 2d 1068, 1086 (D. Nev. 2004) (quotations omitted) (citing *Kern*  
 14 *v. U.S. Bureau of Land Mgmt.*, 284 F.3d 1062, 1070 (9th Cir. 2002). “NEPA requires  
 15 agencies to prepare an EIS for ‘major Federal actions significantly affecting the quality of  
 16 the human environment.’” *Am. Wild Horse Campaign v. Bernhardt*, 963 F.3d 1001, 1007  
 17 (9th Cir. 2020) (quoting 42 U.S.C. § 4332(c)). Agencies evaluate the need for an EIS  
 18 through an EA. *Id.* (agencies can prepare an EA that “[b]riefly provide[s] sufficient  
 19 evidence and analysis for determining whether to prepare an [EIS].” (quoting 40 C.F.R.  
 20 § 1508.9(a)(1)); *see Bark*, 958 F.3d at 871. Plaintiffs assert that BLM also violated NEPA  
 21 by preparing a FONSI and an EA instead of an EIS. (*WWP Mot.* at 27.)

22 Given the multiple flaws in the EA and BLM’s assertion that environmental effects  
 23 will only be fully evaluated in implementation-level decisions, the Court will not reach  
 24 whether an EIS is necessary. *See Ctr. for Biological Diversity v. Nat’l Highway Traffic*  
 25 *Safety Admin.*, 538 F.3d 1172, 1126–27 (9th Cir. 2008) (concluding that the record was  
 26 “insufficiently complete . . . to order the immediate preparation of an EIS”); *Neighbors of*

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 28 <sup>17</sup> Given the lack of recent grazing on the Monument, the Court similarly cannot conclude  
 that the “EA should have revealed violations of the 20% utilization standard used for  
 wilderness.” (*See WWP Mot.* at 25.)



1 *the Mogollon Rim*, 2023 WL 3267846, at \*3 (“The significant flaws in the EA undermine  
2 the [agency’s] conclusion that the proposed action would have no significant effect on the  
3 environment. Because the seriously inadequate EA creates significant uncertainty, we  
4 cannot ‘categorically decide’ that the agency could not support its conclusions in a revised  
5 EA.” (citation omitted)). If BLM again declines to prepare an EIS and Plaintiffs assert that  
6 this violates NEPA, nothing in this opinion determines the outcome of that claim.  
7 *Neighbors of the Mogollon Rim*, 2023 WL 3267846, at \*3 (“NEPA is not a paper exercise,  
8 and new analyses may point in new directions.” (quoting *Or. Nat. Desert Ass’n*, 625 F.3d  
9 at 1124)); *c.f. Env’t Def. Ctr.*, 36 F.4th at 870 (“Programmatic environmental review  
10 ‘generally obviates the need’ for subsequent review at the application level ‘unless new  
11 and significant environmental impacts arise.’”)

12 The Court concludes that the EA is inadequate because BLM unreasonably relied  
13 on its two-mile benchmark and failed to consider certain environmental impacts, but the  
14 Court will not reach whether Plaintiffs have raised a substantial question that the planning-  
15 level decision may have significant environmental effect. *C.f. Env’t Def. Ctr.*, 36 F.4th at  
16 881–82 (finding agency should have issued EIS for planning-level decision where plaintiff  
17 had shown unknown risks posed by agency action and agency acknowledged “significant  
18 data gaps”).

## 19 2. NHPA

20 Section 106 of the NHPA mandates that “prior to any federal undertaking, the  
21 relevant federal agency ‘take into account the effect of the undertaking on any . . . site . . .  
22 or object that is included in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register [of Historic  
23 Places]’ and ‘afford the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation . . . a reasonable  
24 opportunity to comment’” on the undertaking. *Muckleshoot Indian Tribe v. U.S. Forest*  
25 *Serv.*, 177 F.3d 800, 805 (9th Cir. 1999) (per curiam) (quoting 16 U.S.C. § 470f).  
26 Specifically, “[u]nder NHPA, a federal agency must make a reasonable and good faith  
27 effort to identify historic properties, 36 C.F.R. § 800.4(b); determine whether identified  
28 properties are eligible for listing on the National Register based on criteria in 36 C.F.R.

1 § 60.4; assess the effects of the undertaking on any eligible historic properties found, 36  
 2 C.F.R. §§ 800.4(c), 800.5, 800.9(a); determine whether the effect will be adverse, 36  
 3 C.F.R. §§ 800.5(c), 800.9(b); and avoid or mitigate any adverse effects, 36 C.F.R.  
 4 §§ 800.8(e), 800.9(c).” *Id.*; *Te-Moak Tribe of W. Shoshone of Nevada v. U.S. Dep’t of*  
 5 *Interior*, 608 F.3d 592, 607 (9th Cir. 2010). “The NHPA implementing regulations require  
 6 the BLM, at all stages of the section 106 process, to consult with tribes that ‘attach[]  
 7 religious and cultural significance to historic properties that may be affected by an  
 8 undertaking.” *Te-Moak Tribe*, 608 F.3d at 607 (citing 36 C.F.R. § 800.2(c)(2)(ii)).

9 **i. Identification of Cultural Resources & Tribal**  
 10 **Consultation**

11 Plaintiffs contend that BLM failed to make the requisite good faith effort to identify  
 12 cultural resources.<sup>18</sup> Specifically, Plaintiffs argue that “BLM claimed that the northern  
 13 portion of the SDNM just has light-density [cultural] sites, and it can design future grazing  
 14 decisions so that livestock congregation areas do not conflict with cultural resource sites. .  
 15 . . Yet BLM had only surveyed 4% of the area, and most of those surveys were not targeting  
 16 livestock use.” (WWP Resp. at 24 (citing AR-0031051–0031052).) And the organization  
 17 Archaeology Southwest informed BLM that it conducted a survey of the northern SDNM  
 18 between 2017 and 2018 where it identified 40 previously undocumented cultural sites. (*Id.*;  
 19 WWP Mot. at 33; AR-0029372, 0031051.)

20 BLM counters that it fulfilled its obligations under the NHPA by conducting a  
 21 “Class I” inventory and consulting with the SHPO, which then concurred that BLM had  
 22 made adequate efforts “to identify cultural resources and determin[e] eligibility and finding  
 23 of effect.” (BLM Mot. at 34; BLM Resp. at 19–21); AR-0031257–0031258. At this stage

24 <sup>18</sup> BLM raises in its Response that “it is not clear that Plaintiffs even have standing to bring  
 25 NHPA claims.” (BLM Resp. at 20 n.4, 23.) This argument is untimely. (*See id.*); *Eberle v.*  
 26 *City of Anaheim*, 901 F.2d 814, 818 (9th Cir. 1990). In any event, the Court finds that  
 27 Plaintiff Sierra Club’s interests, particularly as outlined in the declaration accompanying  
 28 Plaintiffs’ Motion, are “at the least, *arguably* within the zone of interests that the [NHPA]  
 protects.” *See Bank of Am. Corp. v. City of Miami*, 581 U.S. 189, 197 (2017) (describing  
 requirement for prudential standing) (citation omitted); *Leonard v. Clark*, 12 F.3d 885, 888  
 (9th Cir. 1993) (“[O]nce the court determines that one of the plaintiffs has standing, it need  
 not decide the standing of the others.”); (*see* Doc. 38-2, S. Bahr Decl. ¶ 3 (Sierra Club’s  
 mission is “[t]o educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural  
 and human environment”).).

1 of agency decision-making, the Court agrees with BLM. Class II or III inventories may be  
2 necessary even at planning rather than implementation-level stages of agency decision-  
3 making, but such rigorous inventories are necessary where “*existing* authorized uses” pose  
4 a threat to the protection of cultural objects. *See Connell*, 725 F.3d at 1009 (emphasis  
5 original). BLM underscored in its letter to the SHPO that implementation-level decisions  
6 would follow the 2020 Amended RMP. AR-0031051; *see also* AR-0031257 (SHPO  
7 deeming BLM identification efforts appropriate “based on the understanding that any  
8 future use of any allotment would require separate environmental review and Section 106  
9 consultation to address affects to historic properties.”). The same is true for BLM’s  
10 understanding with Native American tribes. *E.g.*, AR-0031083. BLM followed the  
11 procedure required for resource identification and tribal consultation in a planning-level  
12 decision under the NHPA.<sup>19</sup> *C.f. Connell*, 725 F.3d at 1106–09 (distinguishing between  
13 “less intensive identification efforts,” appropriate where agency actions merely preserve  
14 the status quo, and “Class III inventory,” required where agency action will “concentrate[]  
15 travel into areas in which historic sites will be adversely affected.”); *Te-Moak Tribe*, 608  
16 F.3d at 610 (finding BLM complied with NHPA where it had “consulted with the Tribe  
17 regarding [significant sites] within the project area for many years” and “the Tribe [made]  
18 no showing that it would have provided new information had it been consulted earlier in  
19 the . . . approval process.”)

20 **ii. “No Adverse Effect” Determination**

21 BLM similarly complied with the NHPA in determining that the Amended RMP  
22 would have no adverse effect on cultural objects. Plaintiffs argue that SHPO’s concurrence  
23 in BLM’s no adverse effects determination should not be persuasive as “SHPO did not  
24 spend much time considering BLM’s letter” and SHPO relied on “the assumption that  
25 future implementation-level decisions could address any effects.” (WWP Resp. at 25  
26 (citing AR-0031257).) But not only do Plaintiffs invite the Court to substitute its opinion

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28 <sup>19</sup> Plaintiffs’ argument that BLM failed to evaluate sites within the SDNM for National Register eligibility is similarly unavailing at this stage of agency decision-making. (*See* WWP Mot. at 34.)

1 for that of the SHPO and BLM’s experts, but Plaintiffs incorrectly assume that  
2 implementation-level decisions would not undergo good faith NHPA analysis. (*See id.*);  
3 *Earth Island Inst. v. U.S. Forest Serv.*, 351 F.3d 1291, 1301 (9th Cir. 2003) (“When  
4 specialists express conflicting views, an agency must have discretion to rely on the  
5 reasonable opinions of its own experts, even if a court may find contrary views more  
6 persuasive.”); AR-0031083 (discussing additional measures BLM would take to identify  
7 and document Komatke trail if grazing permit were issued); AR-0031051. Unlike BLM’s  
8 NEPA analysis, which contained unsupported assumptions underlying the agency’s  
9 analysis of environmental impacts at the planning stage, Plaintiffs have not shown that  
10 BLM’s analysis of cultural resources and tribal interests impermissibly rests on  
11 unsupported or erroneous assumptions. *C.f. United States v. 0.95 Acres of Land*, 994 F.2d  
12 696, 698 (9th Cir. 1993) (“NHPA is similar to NEPA except that it requires consideration  
13 of historic sites, rather than the environment.”). On the contrary, BLM explained its  
14 conclusions, committed to perform NHPA analysis upon implementation, and ensured that  
15 the Amended RMP had no immediate effect upon cultural objects. *See Te-Moak Tribe*, 608  
16 F.3d at 611 (clarifying that NHPA “does not mandate protection of all parts of an eligible”  
17 area of cultural or religious importance; NHPA requires agency to consider any “alteration  
18 to the characteristics of a historic property” eligible for the National Register).

### 19 **III. CONCLUSION**


20 The Court finds that BLM failed to take the “hard look” required by NEPA and will  
21 remand the Amended RMP to the agency to address the procedural flaws described above.  
22 The Court “will deny summary judgment, without prejudice to renewal, to the extent WWP  
23 seeks to vacate BLM’s decision.” *WWP I*, 2015 WL 846548, at \*12. Given the inadequate  
24 analysis in the EA, the Court declines to reach whether BLM should have prepared an EIS.  
25 As the Amended RMP is a planning-level decision with no imminent impact on Monument  
26 objects, the Court concludes that Plaintiffs’ FLPMA claim is unripe. Similarly, given the  
27 stage of agency decision-making and BLM’s ongoing tribal consultation, the Court  
28 concludes that BLM abided by the NHPA.

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**IT IS ORDERED** granting in part and denying in part Plaintiffs Western Watersheds Project and Sierra Club’s Motion for Summary Judgment (Doc. 38) and granting in part and denying in part Defendant Bureau of Land Management’s Motion for Summary Judgment (Doc. 39).

**IT IS FURTHER ORDERED** directing the parties to meet and confer and notify the Court within thirty (30) days regarding what the next steps should be for this case.

Dated this 9th day of August, 2023.

  
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Susan R. Bolton  
United States District Judge