



## WILDERNESS INVENTORY UNIT EVALUATION

NAME & NO. Palmerita Ranch AZ-030-01-01

I. DESCRIPTION: (Include acreage, land ownership, location, topography, vegetation and summary of major human uses/activities)

The Palmerita Ranch WIU is comprised of approximately 360 of private land, owned by David Gelbaum. Mr. Gelbaum desires to donate the land to the American people, to be managed by the Bureau of Land Management as wilderness. The purpose of this evaluation is to ascertain whether the property is suitable as an addition to the National Wilderness Preservation System.

This WIU is located in Township 11 North, Range 11 West, Sections 6 and 7, G&SRM. It straddles the boundary between Mohave and LaPaz Counties in northwest Arizona, and abuts the south boundary of the 130,000-acre Arrastra Mountain Wilderness. The property also encompasses a 1.5-mile stretch of the Santa Maria River. This portion of the Santa Maria River is part of a larger segment that has been found suitable for "Wild" river status, and BLM has recommended to Congress that it be included in the National Wild and Scenic River System. Finally, this property is surrounded by the Three Rivers Riparian Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). This administrative designation was made by BLM through the Kingman Resource Management Plan to protect outstanding riparian resources, threatened and endangered species habitat and recreation values. Should this property be put in public ownership, it would be placed under the prescriptive management for this ACEC.

The majority of the Palmerita Ranch property under consideration is made up of the broad, sandy river bottom of the Santa Maria River. Most of the year this river is naught more than a shallow stream which threads its way from east to west across the ranch. However, as a result of heavy rains on the watershed, the Santa Maria River can become a raging torrent which reaches from bank to bank (a distance of up to one-fourth mile on this property) and may be several feet deep. Growing within this sandy river bottom and adjacent floodplain are Goodings willow, Fremont cottonwood, seepwillow, arrowweed, and salt cedar.

Floodplains and terraces rise 5 to 15 feet above the river channel on both sides of the river; both show evidence of being flooded in the past during high flow events. These floodplains and terraces are made up of very deep and fertile soil that had historically been deposited by the river when it floods. Farming in the recent past likely caused increased sediment deposition which formed the broad floodplains and terraces in this area. Since the cessation of farming, large stands of honey mesquite have become established on the terraces forming "mesquite bosques". The current terrace height and depth to groundwater prevents the establishment of flood-dependent tree species such as cottonwood and willow. Mesquite trees thrive in this environment by putting down deep taproots to the watertable. In addition to the sandy river bottoms and upland terraces, the toe slopes of upland hills contact the terraces on either side of

the river. These lands have shallow soils and have much lower water-holding capacity. They support Sonoran desert vegetation which reflects the lower availability of water, including saguaro cactus staghorn cholla, ocotillo, creosotebush, white bursage and brittlebush.

Palmerita Ranch was established ca. 1885 by Jesus and Angelita Faz and was operated by the Faz family until the 1930s. The ranch produced hay and vegetables for the nearby mining communities of Congress and Signal. During this period, Yavapai Indians occasionally camped on the north side of the Santa Maria River. Jesus Faz and some ten descendants are buried at the ranch. Harold Shaunts bought the property in the 1930s. Livestock ranching has continued to this day. As a result of these human uses of the land, much evidence remains, including historic buildings, fences, machinery, trash, irrigation canals and the remains of diversion dikes on the farmlands.

## II. WILDERNESS CHARACTER ANALYSIS:

Analyze in a concise narrative the following essential wilderness characteristics.

### A. SIZE

Approximate Acres:

Wilderness Inventory Unit 360 acres

Subunit(s) \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL 360 acres

Contiguous WSA (or other lands with wilderness character) Northern and eastern  
boundaries of the WIU are contiguous with Arrastra Mountain Wilderness, designated  
11/28/1990

**Narrative:** The Palmerita Ranch WIU contacts the boundary of the Arrastra Mountain Wilderness for a distance of 1.75 miles, on the northern and eastern sides of the WIU. The WIU also borders private land on its' southeastern and northwestern regions, and borders on BLM-managed public lands on the south.

Summary: 1. Does the area have at least 5,000 acres of contiguous land or is it of sufficient size to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition?

YES X NO\_\_

## B. NATURALNESS

**Narrative:** During the intensive inventory, a variety of human impacts were noted (see “Human Imprints” Map). These included:

- three miles of barbed-wire fencing
- one 6-inch diameter well casing extending 12 inches above ground
- three-fourths of a mile of concrete irrigation ditch
- one and one-quarter miles of dirt irrigation ditch
- one well-head with 20-inch diameter well casing
- about 70 acres of naturally-revegetating agricultural field
- one cemetery with 6 discernible graves
- one acre of hillside cleared with heavy equipment
- nine segments of vehicle ‘ways’ and three ‘road’ segments
- 6 structures, including residences, outhouse, sheds, water tank
- trash and abandoned farm equipment
- picnic table, refrigerator, chairs, other items at a family picnicking area

Referring to the “Wilderness Characteristics Determination” Map, the area labeled as ‘unsuitable’ has lost most of its apparent naturalness because of the number and types of human impacts present. This is the area that includes the ranch headquarters, cemetery, agricultural fields, associated roads and ditches associated with those fields, corrals, farm equipment and trash dumps. This area is generally bounded by concrete ditches and established roads. It is of special note that the “Wilderness Characteristics Determination” Map indicates a planned dedicated Right-of-Way for a neighboring landowner, following an existing route along the base of the hills on the south side of the property, thence proceeding north along the east side of the section line on the west side of the property until it connects with the neighboring property. This route will require regular maintenance for vehicle travel and therefore would be unsuitable for inclusion in wilderness.

The remainder of the WIU, labeled suitable on the map, appears to be in a natural condition, with the imprints of man’s works being substantially unnoticeable. The imprints that are present include eight of the vehicle ways, most of the barbed-wire fencing, the six-inch well casing, some of the historic ‘trash’, about 20 acres of the rehabilitating agricultural field and some associated dirt irrigation ditches around the edge of the field.

Without exception, all nine vehicle ways appear to have been originally constructed using machinery, many years past. Portions of each route have been cut into hillsides. The routes do not appear to have been maintained since construction, nor do they appear to receive regular use. This is evidenced by the many locations where mature vegetation is growing in the roadbed or

overhanging the travel route. No vehicle tracks were observed. In many locations, sheet erosion or gullying have made the routes impassible to most vehicles, yet no effort was made to repair damage.

The portion of the agricultural field included in the 'suitable' area has substantially been reclaimed by mature mesquite trees to a point where it would appear natural to the average visitor. Dirt irrigation ditches on the north and south perimeters of this field have not been maintained in many years and are becoming overgrown with vegetation, particularly with mesquite trees. Likewise, a section of dirt irrigation ditch to the east of the ranch headquarters is not substantially noticeable to the average visitor, due to encroaching vegetation and siltation from river flooding.

The east end of the property on the north side of the river contains the remnants of human occupancy. These remnants include wood scraps from dwellings, small trash dumps, and minor excavations, all apparently historic in nature. These items do not detract from the overall apparent naturalness of this bench area, and the area is being re-vegetated with mesquite trees.

The three miles of barbed wire fencing is an obvious manmade feature of the area, but is substantially unnoticeable and is compatible with naturalness standards for wilderness.

Summary: Does the area generally appear to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of people's work substantially unnoticeable?

YES X (260 acres) NO X (100 acres)

C. OUTSTANDING OPPORTUNITY FOR SOLITUDE OR PRIMITIVE AND UNCONFINED RECREATION

1. SOLITUDE

Narrative: This WIU is located in an area that requires considerable effort to obtain access. Nevertheless, a good road provides access into the ranch headquarters and appears to be well used. Visitors within close proximity to the ranch headquarters could expect to be disturbed by others visiting the area with motor vehicles. Once north of the ranch headquarters and into the river bed, a visitor can expect to find excellent opportunity for solitude, thanks to vegetative screening created by the dense riparian community and dense mesquite bosques. When considered as a part of the adjacent Arrastra Mountain Wilderness, a vast area is created to

get away from other people.

Summary: Does the area have outstanding opportunities for solitude?

YES X (partially) NO\_\_

## 2. PRIMITIVE AND UNCONFINED RECREATION

Narrative: When taken along with the adjacent Arrastra Mountain Wilderness, this WIU offers excellent opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation activities including hiking, horseback riding and backpacking. A person seeking to venture out on a multi-day trip within a primitive, natural area could utilize the lands within the WIU as a part of that experience.

Summary: Does the area have outstanding opportunities for a primitive and unconfined type of recreation?

YES X NO\_\_

## D. SUPPLEMENTAL VALUES

Narrative:

The Santa Maria River, which runs through the center of the WIU, supports an community of lush riparian vegetation, which appears to only be affected by periodic natural flooding of the river (see photos #2-6, 2-7). The riparian vegetation includes gallery overstory trees, mostly cottonwood and willow. This ecological type is rare and very important in desert environments.

Closely related to this vegetation type are the mesquite bosques which are found on the terraces of the river. Mesquite bosques are also relatively rare, and this WIU contains some excellent examples of mature, closed-canopy stands of trees.

Finally, historic artifacts associated with early farming on the floodplain benches of the river are present.

Summary: Does the area contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value?

YES X NO\_\_

II. SUMMARY:

Results of wilderness character analysis:

1. Does the area meet any of the size requirements? X yes \_\_no
2. Does the area appear to be natural? Partially X yes \_\_no
3. Does the area offer outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation? X yes \_\_no
4. Does the area have supplemental values? X yes \_\_no

IV. CONCLUSION:

Check one:

X The area or a portion of the area has wilderness character.

\_\_ The area does not have wilderness character.

PREPARED BY: /s/ Bruce Asbjorn

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VI. APPROVED BY: /s/ John R. Christensen

Title: Field Manager Date: 1/31/2001