

**FINAL  
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFIGANT IMPACT (FONSI)  
FORT HANCOCK ROAD UPGRADE AND CANAL CROSSING PROJECT, FORT  
HANCOCK, TEXAS**

**U.S. BORDER PATROL, EL PASO SECTOR, TEXAS  
U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION  
DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY  
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

**INTRODUCTION:** U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) plans to upgrade three roads and construct four associated canal crossings in the U.S. Border Patrol (USBP) Fort Hancock Station (FHT) Area of Responsibility (AOR). The Border Patrol Air and Marine Program Management Office (BPAM-PMO) within CBP has prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA). The EA will address the proposed upgrade of the three aforementioned roads and associated canal crossings (Figure 1-1). The BPAM-PMO is preparing this EA on behalf of the USBP Headquarters.

CBP is the law enforcement component of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) responsible for securing the border and facilitating lawful international trade and travel. USBP is the uniformed law enforcement subcomponent of CBP responsible for patrolling and securing the border between the land ports of entry.

**PROJECT LOCATION:** The proposed new tactical infrastructure (TI) is located within the FHT AOR, El Paso Sector, Hudspeth County, Texas (Figure 1-1). The FHT AOR is located approximately 50 miles southeast of El Paso. It covers approximately 2,700 square miles and includes approximately 40 miles along the U.S. – Mexico border paralleling the Rio Grande River. The road corridors are located owned and private lands.

The Start/Stop Coordinates of the three proposed roads to be upgraded are as follows:

Riverside Road - 0.4 mile of road construction, to include construction of two crossovers (Start: N31.36960, W-105.95082; Stop: N 31.365781, W -105.957266) (Figure 1-2).

Rock Bridge Road – 0.8 mile of road construction (Start: N31.086283, W-105.595017; Stop: N31.08195, W-105.601717) (Figure 1-3)

Verduzco’s Road – 0.6 mile of road construction, to include construction of two crossovers (Start: N31.19861, W-105.77193; Stop: N31.19496, W-105.78054) (Figure 1-4).

**PURPOSE AND NEED:** The purpose of the Proposed Action is to improve mobility and accessibility for USBP Agents responding to illegal cross-border traffic.

The FHT currently has mobility and accessibility issues throughout their AOR. Limited ingress/egress points throughout the AOR and poor road conditions are two major factors that affect response times and limit Agent options when responding to traffic. Access points called

“Crossovers” allow the only passage across a drainage canal that parallels the entire Rio Grande levee in FHT’s AOR. Crossovers are scattered along the levee, which creates extended response times and limited access in the border area.

The need is to provide FHT AOR USBP agents with better access to the Rio Grande levee in order to expedite response time to address illegal cross-border traffic. The improved mobility and accessibility for agents will increase and sustain the certainty of arrest and help deter illegal cross-border activities by improving enforcement capabilities, thus preventing terrorists and terrorist weapons from entering the United States, reducing the flow of illegal drugs, and enhancing agents’ response time, while providing a safer work environment for USBP agents.

**ALTERNATIVES:** CBP analyzed two alternatives in the EA. Alternative 1 is the No Action Alternative. Under the No Action Alternative, the proposed road upgrades and canal crossings construction would not take place. In the absence of the proposed road and canal construction, the FHT would continue to experience major capability gaps due to limited mobility and accessibility throughout the AOR. Limited ingress/egress points throughout the AOR and poor road conditions would continue to affect agent response times and ability to respond to illegal cross-border traffic. The No Action Alternative does not meet the purpose and need for this project.

Alternative 2 is the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action would include the upgrade of three existing roads from narrow dirt track roads to Functional Classification (FC)-2, 20 to 30-foot wide roads, and the construction of four new canal crossovers within the FHT AOR. The upgrade of the three roads would be executed utilizing a design-bid-build approach. This project also includes the preparation of a road alignment study to determine the best location for a new proposed east –west border patrol road in Zone 39. Zone 39 is the largest zone in FHT consisting of 23.7 border miles.

**ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES:** The Proposed Action would have permanent, negligible impacts on land use. Approximately 7.89 acres would be permanently converted from undeveloped land to law enforcement road, access, or canal crossing. The total acreages of the different land use types to be converted are as follows:

- 5.17 acres of active agricultural fields
- 1.36 acres of Chihuahuan desert scrub
- 0.47 acre of inactive agricultural fields
- 0.39 acre of saltcedar (*Tamarix* sp.) dominated riparian area
- 0.39 acre Bermuda grass (*Cynodon dactylon*) field
- 0.11 acre of cattail (*Typha* sp.)-saltcedar dominated drainage canal

Additionally, approximately 1.93 acres (1.03 acres of Chihuahuan Desert scrub, and 0.5 acre of Rio Grande riparian vegetation, and 0.40 acre of agricultural land) will be temporarily disturbed for use as staging areas for equipment and material.

Temporary, minor impacts would be expected on surface water quality during construction. The withdrawal of water for construction purposes could have a temporary, minor impact on surface

water resources. Long-term, permanent impacts would occur on approximately 1 acre of potentially jurisdictional wetlands; however, these impacts would be addressed during the permitting process. Best management practices (BMPs) and standard construction procedures will be implemented to minimize the potential for erosion and sedimentation during construction.

Minor impacts on soils and vegetative habitat and negligible impacts on wildlife would occur as a result of disturbing 9.82 acres for the road upgrades construction of canal crossing structures. Areas with highly erodible soils would be given special consideration when designing the Proposed Action to ensure incorporation of various BMPs, such as certified weed-free straw bales, aggregate materials, and wetting compounds to decrease erosion. A Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) would be prepared prior to construction activities and will include pre- and post-construction measures.

Four Federally listed species have the potential to occur within the project area: northern aplomado falcon (*Falco femoralis septentrionalis*), southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*), yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*), and Rio Grande silvery minnow (*Hybognathus amarus*). The Proposed Action may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect, any of the Federally listed species. No designated critical habitat occurs within the construction footprint. Endangered Species Act (ESA), Section 7 consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is ongoing for this project.

No archaeological sites were recorded during surveys of the road corridors and therefore no archaeological sites would be affected by implementation of the Proposed Action. The architectural/aboveground resources survey noted one previously recorded resource within the survey area of the three road corridors, the Madden Lateral Cemetery (Cemetery ID No. HZ-C005, Atlas No. 7229000505), which was located within the 1-mile search area of the Verduzco's Road Corridor. Construction of the road would not have an adverse effect on the cemetery.

Temporary and minor increases in air emissions would occur during construction of the canal crossing structures and road upgrades, maintenance, and repairs. Air emissions would be below the Federal *de minimis* thresholds for construction, operation, maintenance, and repair activities. Noise level increases associated with construction of the canal crossing structures and road upgrades, maintenance, and repairs would result in temporary, negligible impacts on wildlife within the vicinity of the construction areas.

Construction of the canal crossing structures and road upgrade activities would create a temporary, minor impact on roadways and traffic within the region. The increase of vehicular traffic near each road corridor site would occur during transportation of materials and work crews at each for a short period of time. Construction vehicles and equipment would use established roads with proper flagging and safety precautions.

The Proposed Action would have a long-term, moderate impact on aesthetic qualities within 5 miles or less of road upgrade and canal crossover site. The Proposed Action would not result in exposure of the environment or public to any hazardous materials. None of the sites are located near residential areas, and all construction activities would strictly adhere to Occupational Safety

and Health Administration (OSHA) guidelines. Proper fencing would be installed around the construction site to prevent children or others from entering the construction site. By implementing OSHA guidelines and practicing safe construction habits, no adverse effect relative to environmental justice or protection of children issues would occur.

**BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES:** BMPs were identified for each resource category that could be potentially affected. Many of these measures have been incorporated as standard operating procedures by CBP in similar past projects. The BMPs were also identified in the EA in Section 5.0 Best Management Practices.

**FINDING:** On the basis of the findings of the EA, which is incorporated by reference, and which has been conducted in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Council on Environmental Quality regulations, and DHS Management Directive, 023-01, Rev. 01, and Instruction Manual 023-01-001-01, Rev. 01., and after careful review of the potential environmental impacts of implementing the proposal, we find that there would be no significant impact on the quality of the human or natural environments, either individually or cumulatively; therefore, there is no requirement to develop an Environmental Impact Statement. Further, we commit to implement BMPs and environmental design measures identified in the EA and supporting documents.

<i>Ntina Cooper</i>	9/26/2019
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