

A project hotline number (602-712-7006) was established so that the public could provide feedback on the study. The hotline was monitored daily. Between 2006 and 2013, more than 500 calls were received.

The public outreach program for the DEIS phase (April 2013 to July 2013) was developed to maximize opportunities for the public to review and provide comments on the DEIS, maintaining compliance with NEPA requirements. The outreach program had four main components:

- ▶ awareness campaign – included a fact sheet, “how to participate” handout and video, events, and briefings of elected officials and key stakeholders
- ▶ public hearing – held on May 21, 2013, at the Phoenix Convention Center from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., with an estimated 500 attendees, including 117 people who spoke before a panel of project team members
- ▶ online public hearing – went live at 10 a.m. on May 21, 2013, at <azdot.gov/southmountainfreeway> and linked to <smfonlinehearing.com>, with 1,864 people visiting the site
- ▶ community forums – held between June 4 and July 11, 2013, at six locations: in the Estrella, Laveen, and Ahwatukee Foothills villages of Phoenix; within the Community; and in Chandler and Avondale

Public involvement during the DEIS 90-day public comment period included participation by 1) attending the public hearing or community forums, 2) viewing the online public hearing, or 3) submitting a comment. Approximately 900 people attended one of the public events held during the comment period. Almost 1,900 unique visitors viewed information from the online hearing. The project team received over 8,000 comments from federal, State, local, and tribal agencies; special interest groups; businesses; and members of the public. When combined, over 10,000 people participated in the DEIS phase through one or more of the public involvement methods available.

To advance project communication and coordination, a voluntary, advisory working group of 25 to 30 representatives was formed to provide a forum for ongoing communication among ADOT, FHWA, and the local and regional community regarding the development of the EIS. The South Mountain Citizens Advisory Team met regularly to review project status, serve as a conduit of information with community organizations, and define neighborhood and regional issues and concerns.

Public opinion regarding a project such as the freeway can change. Several factors can play a role in the ebb and flow of public opinion over the course of time. Seeking input into the process provides awareness of any changes. As an example, during the first half of the EIS process, comments from the public indicated a need for the freeway, but opinions on its location were divided. As action alternatives were identified for further study and their alignments presented to the general public, comments from the participating public revealed a change in the perception of the need for the freeway. Further analysis of the comments revealed many people living adjacent to proposed alignments were the most likely to comment either that there is no purpose or need for the freeway or to simply oppose the freeway entirely. Conversely, the remainder of the comments received from residents throughout the region revealed continued support for the freeway as an effective way to reduce regional traffic congestion (see Volume III of the FEIS).

Public comments strongly suggested the need to clarify how much coordination has occurred with the Community regarding the freeway and also a desire for ADOT and FHWA to exhaust efforts to study alternatives for the freeway on Community land. In addition to written and verbal conversations, over 110 meetings have been held since 2001, at which Community representatives were invited to discuss issues pertaining to the freeway. Efforts to involve the Community in the process were discussed in Chapter 2, *Gila River Indian Community Coordination*, of the FEIS.

The FEIS presents measures to avoid, reduce, or otherwise mitigate environmental impacts of the

freeway. Presentation in the FEIS represents a commitment by ADOT to implement the measures. The commitment by ADOT to the measures was made in cooperation with FHWA and is reinforced in this ROD. Specific mitigation measures and commitments are presented in the *Project Commitments* section.

Measures committed to will be implemented as part of project development, including the final design, R/W acquisition, construction, operation, and maintenance phases of the Selected Alternative, as appropriate.

It is possible that mitigation measures proposed for the benefit of one resource or stakeholder group will also provide benefits to a secondary resource or stakeholder group. Other agencies or groups, such as MAG or the City of Phoenix, may take further actions to augment the project, but such actions would be independent of this project and would not change this NEPA document.

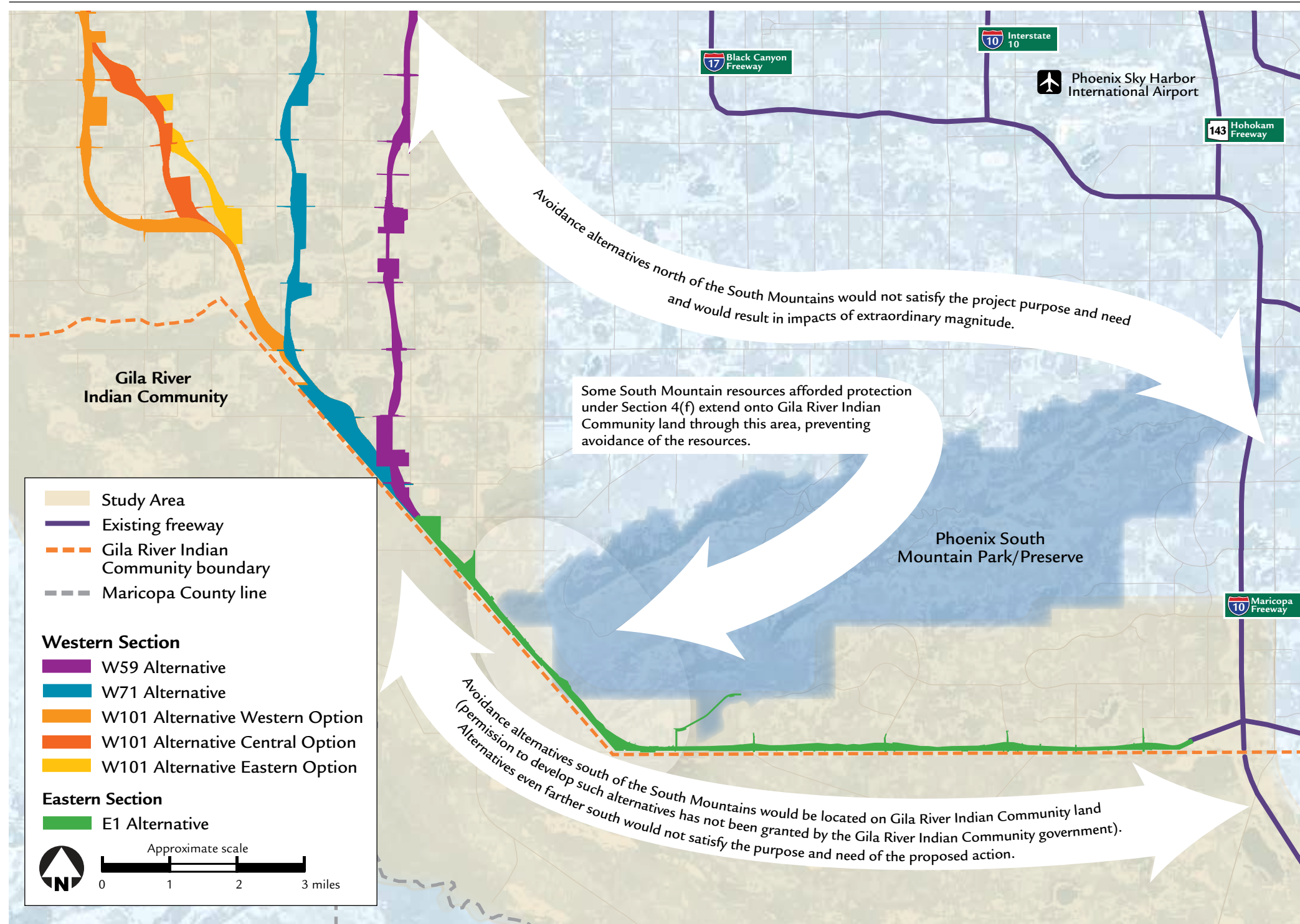
## 5. TREATMENT OF RESOURCES AFFORDED PROTECTION UNDER SECTION 4(f) – AT THE FEIS STAGE

Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966 provides the Secretary of Transportation with a means to protect land that may be affected by construction and operation of a transportation project. The protection extends only to significant publicly owned public parks, recreation areas, and wildlife and waterfowl refuges, as well as significant historic sites, whether they are publicly or privately owned. This protection stipulates that those facilities can be used for transportation projects only if

- ▶ there is no prudent and feasible alternative to using the land
- ▶ the project includes all possible planning to minimize harm to the land [see Chapter 5, *Section 4(f) Evaluation*, in the FEIS]

SMPP, encompassing approximately 16,600 acres (see Figure 20), is afforded protection under Section 4(f) as a publicly owned recreation area and a historic property. Land area within SMPP used for the freeway will be

Figure 20 Sovereign Nation and Section 4(f) Constraints, Action Alternatives



approximately 31.3 acres, which represents less than 0.2 percent of the total parkland.

The South Mountains are a traditional cultural property (TCP) and are afforded protection under Section 4(f). Defining a meaningful boundary for the entire TCP would require detailed study of the traditional uses and cultural significance of the South Mountains beyond that which has been undertaken and is necessary for the EIS process. ADOT, FHWA, and the Community agree that any of the action alternatives would adversely affect the TCP, regardless of its precise boundary.

The South Mountains are highly valued by area residents for various reasons, including the following:

- ▶ SMPP is one of the largest city parks in the United States and is considered a centerpiece of the Phoenix Mountain Preserve system.
- ▶ As a property eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), SMPP’s origins are rooted in President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal programs (see page 5-25 of the FEIS). SMPP is a symbol of Phoenix’s parks program origins.
- ▶ As a TCP and a resource directly associated with other TCPs, the mountains are considered sacred—playing a role in tribal cultures, identities, histories, and oral traditions—and appear in many creation stories. The South Mountains continue to play a role in cultural and community identity.

Avoidance of the South Mountains is not prudent and feasible because:

- ▶ Located south of downtown Phoenix and north of the Community, the mountain range serves as a physical barrier for regional transportation (see Figure 20).
- ▶ Alternatives located north of the mountains to avoid the protected resource will not meet the purpose and need of the freeway and/or will create impacts of extraordinary magnitude (see Table 3-5 on page 3-12 of the FEIS).
- ▶ Alternatives located south of the mountains would pass through Community land. Because the