

EL CAMINO REAL DE TIERRA ADENTRO NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL

Record of Decision, Comprehensive Management Plan, and Resource Management Plan Amendment for Mimbres, White Sands, and Taos Resource Management Plans



SEPTEMBER 2004

**National Park Service
Bureau of Land Management
U.S. Department of the Interior**



United States Department of the Interior

EL CAMINO REAL DE TIERRA ADENTRO NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL

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Dear Reader:

Included here are the two documents from the Camino Real de Tierra Adentro National Historic Trail comprehensive management planning effort: the Record of Decision (ROD), and the Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP) and Resource Management Plan Amendment (RMPA). The Record of Decision approves the Comprehensive Management Plan, El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro National Historic Trail (NHT), and Resource Management Plan Amendment for the Mimbres, White Sands, and Taos Resource Management Plans (RMP). The proposed plan was described in El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro National Historic Trail CMP and Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).

The plan provides guidance for administering El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro NHT, a 404-mile trail connecting El Paso, Texas, with Santa Fe and San Juan Pueblo, New Mexico. This historic trail was designated a national historic trail by Congress in 2000. The overall planning area follows the historic routes of the trail, which follows the Río Grande River valley, and includes a trail corridor of approximately 5 miles on each side of the historic trail route. The trail crosses lands managed by federal agencies, including the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) (57 miles), the Fish and Wildlife Service (28 miles), the Army Corps of Engineers (4.6 miles of duplicate route only), and the Forest Service (11 miles), as well as lands held as North American Indian reservations (62 miles), New Mexico state lands (24 miles), and private lands (222 miles).

This plan was prepared implementing the BLM land use planning requirements established in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 and the regulations in 43 CFR 1600. An environmental impact statement was prepared for this plan in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969.

The ROD approves new decisions concerning Visual Resource Management (VRM) classifications in the Mimbres and White Sands Resource Management Plans (RMPs) administered by the Las Cruces Field Office of the BLM, and the Taos Resource Management Plan administered by the Taos Field Office of the BLM. These decisions amend and replace VRM classifications assigned in the Mimbres RMP, the White Sands RMP, and the Taos RMP.

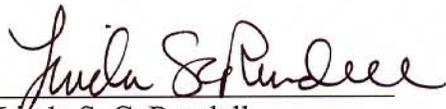
The draft plan and EIS was made available for public comment and review from October 18, 2002 to January 30, 2003. The proposed plan and FEIS was released on April 30, 2004.

The proposed plan and RMPA was subject to a 30-day protest period that ended June 2, 2004. There were no protests to the proposed plan, and, consequently, no significant changes were made to the proposed plan.

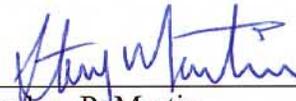
The regulations in 43 CFR 1610.5-2 do not provide for any additional administrative review of this decision. However, actions taken to implement this plan, such as providing recreational opportunities, including trails, wayside exhibits, and other developments on public lands or as part of a federal undertaking, may be administratively reviewed in accordance with applicable regulations at that time such action is taken.

Thank you for your interest and participation in the development of the plan. If you have any questions about the ROD or CMP/RMPA, please contact Sarah Schlanger, BLM Lead, El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro NHT, at 505 438-7454, or Harry Myers, NPS Lead, El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro NHT, at 505 988-6717.

Sincerely,



Linda S. C. Rundell
BLM State Director
New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas



Stephen P. Martin
Director, Intermountain Region
National Park Service

RECORD OF DECISION

Comprehensive Management Plan

El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro National Historic Trail

Prepared By
National Trails System Group- Santa Fe
National Park Service

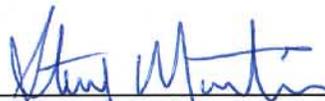
New Mexico State Office
Bureau of Land Management

SEPTEMBER 2004

Approved:



Linda S. C. Rundell
BLM State Director
New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas



Stephen P. Martin
Director, Intermountain Region
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Introduction

This document records the decisions reached by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the National Park Service (NPS) for administering El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro National Historic Trail (NHT), a historic route that connected Mexico City, Mexico, to the historic capitols in northern New Mexico at San Gabriel, San Juan Pueblo, and Santa Fe, New Mexico. The route, designated a national historic trail and added to the National Trails System in 2000, includes 404 miles along the Río Grande valley in New Mexico, and the historic crossing of that river in the vicinity of what is now El Paso, Texas. An additional 1,200 miles of trail stretch from El Paso south to Mexico City. The decisions, which are summarized below, are more fully described in the Approved Management Plan in Chapter 2 of this document.

The Record of Decision (ROD) approves for immediate adoption El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro NHT Comprehensive Management Plan. The approved plan consists of the Preferred Alternative in its entirety and establishes a joint BLM/NPS administrative entity to administer the trail, Camino Real Administration. The CMP provides guidance for administering and managing the NHT and its resources along the 404-mile length of the trail in New Mexico and Texas. The CMP also provides guidance for coordination of management and administrative responsibilities for the full, 1,600-mile length of the trail which extends to Mexico City, Mexico. At present, nearly 200 high-potential trail sites and segments have been recognized along El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro NHT. While some of these resources are on public lands, and are afforded protection as federal components of the trail, many trail resources are under state, county, or municipal management, the stewardship of Native American tribes and pueblos, or are held in private ownership. The plan describes providing additional protection for some federal components through the adoption of new visual resource management guidelines, and describes how non-federally-managed, potential components of the NHT can gain protection and can become part of the trail program through the establishment of site and segment certification agreements between Camino Real Administration and the property owners and managers.

The BLM and NPS initiated the planning process in May, 2001 with interviews, community meetings, and public meetings to determine the scope of the issues and concerns that should be incorporated into the action alternatives and impact analysis. A core team of BLM and NPS staff formed the interdisciplinary team that guided the identification of the issues and development of the project description and alternatives.

Of particular interest in this planning effort was the development of a statement of desired “visitor experiences” related to the national historic trail. Visitors in this sense must be understood as including both those people coming to the trail from afar (including people experiencing the trail remotely via the internet, classroom settings, books, photographs, etc) and people experiencing the trail as members of

local communities of place and interest. These “visitor experiences” contain the core of the desired outcomes for the planning effort and will guide implementation of the CMP.

Briefly, the desired visitor experiences include:

- feeling welcome on the trail;
- having access to trail resources, interpretive facilities, and educational materials;
- being able to participate in trail-related celebrations and activities;
- understanding and gaining an appreciation for the trail’s legacy;
- and respecting and appreciating the rights of landowners.

The desired visitor experiences and the resulting management goals and objectives are more fully outlined in Chapter 2 of the CMP. The formal scoping process identified four major issue themes:

- How will the historic, scenic, and natural resources of the trail be preserved?
- How do people’s activities and uses affect the trail?
- How will trail management be integrated with tribal and other government agency and community plans?
- How do we incorporate international interest in the trail?

A draft CMP/EIS was written and made available for public review and comment on October 18, 2002. Public comments focused on several issues, including: the definition of the trail used in the plan as well as particulars of the trail route and associated historic properties; the impact of national historic trail designation on lands and properties not under federal management; the impact of increased visitation along trail routes and proposed auto tour routes; and the impact of re-classifying federally-managed acreage along approximately 10 miles of the 404-mile trail route to preserve visual resources in the vicinity of well-preserved and interpretable trail resources and trail segments. These comments were addressed in the proposed CMP/FEIS through the inclusion of clarifying language in the text where appropriate; responses to all comments were published as part of the proposed CMP/FEIS in April 2004. A Notice of Availability was published in the Federal Register on April 30, 2004; no protests to the proposed Plan were received from the public during the 30-day protest period that ended on June 2, 2004.

Decision

The decision approves the attached plan as the Comprehensive Management Plan for El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro National Historic Trail. This plan was prepared under the regulations implementing the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (43 CFR 1600). An environmental impact statement was prepared for this plan

in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969. The plan is nearly identical to the one set forth in the proposed Comprehensive Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement published April, 2004.

The major management emphases in the Approved Plan include:

- A BLM and NPS commitment to joint management through the creation and support of Camino Real Administration, a jointly staffed and funded entity established to administer the national trail.
- A commitment by the Camino Real Administration and its partners to enhance and balance resource preservation and visitor use.
- A commitment to partnered efforts, including continued research and fieldwork, in support of the identification and protection of archaeological and historic sites and visible trail route segments.
- A commitment to proactive, coordinated management of high-potential historic sites and segments by federal, state, local, and private land managers and owners, including the development of a certification program for sites and segments in private ownership and/or not under federal management. High-potential sites are those historic sites related to the route, or sites in close proximity thereto, which provide opportunity to interpret the historic significance of the trail during the period of its major use. High-potential trail segments are those segments of a trail which would afford a high-quality recreation experience in a portion of the route having greater than average scenic values or affording an opportunity to vicariously share the experience of the original users of a historic route.
- A commitment to increasing public and community access to the Camino Real NHT and its resources through the development of interpretive, educational, recreational, and outreach programs and opportunities for visitors from distant communities as well as those located along the trail.
- A commitment to work with local and State governments, Native American Indian tribes, organizations, and Federal agencies to manage lands or programs for mutual benefit consistent with other Plan decisions and objectives.

Specific management decisions for public lands under the jurisdiction of the Taos and Las Cruces Field Offices, Bureau of Land Management include:

- Amending the Mimbres and White Sands Resource Management Plans (RMPs) for 97,873 acres of existing Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class IV public land in the vicinity of the trail in the Jornada del Muerto to VRM Class II;
- amending 903 acres of VRM Class III public lands in the vicinity of trail resources in the Jornada del Muerto to VRM Class II;
- and amending the Taos Resource Management Plan to assign VRM Class II to 998 acres of previously unassigned public lands in the vicinity of trail resources in the Santa Fe river canyon.

Alternatives Considered

Three alternatives for management of the NHT, including Alternative A, a “no action” alternative, were described in the draft Comprehensive Management Plan/ Environmental Impact Statement (released October 2002) and the Proposed Comprehensive Management Plan/FEIS published April 2004.

Alternative A, the “no action” alternative had the effect of continuing current management practices on public (federally-managed) lands. Alternative B emphasized resource protection for high-potential sites and segments, but provided only limited opportunities for additional, coordinated interpretive and educational programs. The Preferred Alternative, originally labeled Alternative C, but published as the Preferred Alternative in the draft and Proposed Comprehensive Management Plan/FEIS, outlined a broad range of proactive management initiatives aimed at maximizing resource protection, enhancing visitor experiences, and facilitating understanding of the trail’s role in national and international historical processes and events.

The Preferred Alternative is considered the environmentally preferable alternative because of its focus on preservation and protection of trail resources, and because of its emphasis on providing opportunities for public enjoyment of the trail and its associated resources. Neither the “no action” alternative, Alternative A, nor the limited protections and visitation opportunities provided for in Alternative B will be as effective in meeting the goals of the National Trails System Act under which El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro was designated as a national historic trail.

Management Considerations

The alternatives described in the draft Comprehensive Management Plan/EIS, public comment on the alternatives, and input provided throughout the planning process were considered in preparing the proposed Plan. The Preferred Alternative was brought forward as the proposed Comprehensive Management Plan, and is adopted here as the Approved Plan.

This approach to administering El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro was adopted because it most clearly expresses the intent of the National Trails System Act regarding protection and preservation of trail resources and facilitating public access to trail resources; it provides a framework for the joint administration of the trail by BLM and the NPS, as directed by the Secretary of the Interior; it addresses the partnership roles of NPS, BLM, Native American Indian tribes, state, local, municipal, and non-governmental groups in managing trail resources; and it best meets the visitor experience goals described by communities along the trail during the planning process. This approach also recognizes that not all trail resources have been definitively located or adequately assessed and identified at this time,

and recognizes the need for additional archival and field research. The plan adopted here identifies the role of the Camino Real Administration as a facilitator in trail resource identification, protection, preservation, and public access enhancement.

Mitigation Measures

The approved CMP outlines a general strategy for administering El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro National Historic Trail. An implementation plan, which will identify priorities and strategies for implementing on-the-ground actions, will be developed next by NPS, BLM, and trail partners working through the joint Camino Real Administration. Impacts of proposed actions will be evaluated and mitigation measures proposed through site-specific environmental analyses as implementation proceeds.

Plan Monitoring

BLM and NPS will monitor compliance with the CMP through annual reports prepared by Camino Real Administration and submitted to the State Director, New Mexico Bureau of Land Management, and the National Trails System Group—Santa Fe.

Public Involvement

Public involvement was encouraged and developed through 21 public meetings (eight Scoping Meetings, three Community Design Sessions, four Appreciative Inquiry Sessions, and six “open houses” for discussion of the draft CMP/EIS; the creation and distribution of a project newsletter; and the development of a web-based resource that tracked the planning process and eventually included the full text of the plan, educational resources, background information, and a comment tool (www.elcaminoreal.org). Fifty Indian communities were contacted by letter and/or telephone several times during plan development, resulting in six face-to-face meetings with individual tribes or Pueblos; three public meetings also were attended by American Indian representatives.

Scoping

The public has been involved formally and informally in identifying issues and concerns regarding the administration and management of El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro NHT since the planning process was initiated via the Federal Register notice of May 18, 2001. Members of the public were contacted by telephone, letter, newspaper announcements, and the project website, elcaminoreal.org. Formal public scoping meetings were held in Las Cruces, Truth or Consequences, Socorro,

Albuquerque, Alcalde, and Santa Fe, New Mexico, and El Paso, Texas. In addition, a series of community design meetings and appreciative inquiry sessions, developed and implemented to elicit further community interest and concerns regarding the trail program, were held in Albuquerque, Española, Sunland, Socorro, New Mexico, and El Paso, Texas. Summaries of the scoping meetings were mailed to all individuals and organizations on the mailing list in October 2001 and a newsletter update was printed and mailed to the same individuals and organizations in January 2002.

Review of the Draft CMP/EIS

The Federal Register Notice announcing the availability of the draft CMP/EIS was published on October 18, 2002. The public was afforded a 90-day comment period. Seven public comment meetings were held during this period, in Albuquerque, Socorro, Santa Fe, Las Cruces, Truth or Consequences, and Alcalde, New Mexico, and in El Paso, Texas. The draft CMP/EIS was mailed to individuals who had requested copies and was also made available electronically on the project website at elcaminoreal.org.

A total of 56 individuals, representing a number of public agencies and private interests, submitted comments on the draft plan.

The public comments focused on: 1) The definition of the trail used in the plan as well as particulars of the trail route and associated historic properties; 2) The impact of National Historic Trail designation on lands and properties not under federal management; 3) The impact of increased visitation along trail routes and proposed auto tour routes; and 4) The impact of re-classifying federally-managed acreage along approximately 10 miles of the 404-mile trail route to preserve visual resources in the vicinity of well-preserved and interpretable trail resources and trail segments.

Proposed CMP/FEIS

The draft CMP was modified in the proposed CMP to address the comments received from the public as follows.

- **Trail definition:** The definition of the trail used in the draft document stemmed from the definition applied in the feasibility/suitability study completed for the trail in 1996, and from the establishing legislation for the trail enacted in October, 2000. Although two communities—Sunland Park, and Taos, New Mexico, which are located at the northern and southern ends of the route in that state, urged the adoption of a different trail definition, the proposed plan keeps the “Spanish [colonial] capital to Spanish [colonial] capital” language first introduced in the feasibility/suitability study. Comments regarding the location of various trail routes and alternative routes, and the significance of individual trail properties have been incorporated into the proposed plan where appropriate.
- **Impacts to non-federal lands and resources:** The impact of National Historic Trail designation on non-federally-managed properties has been addressed in the proposed plan. Where appropriate, plan language was modified to clarify that

the management prescriptions described in the plan will be applied to federally-managed properties, that participation in the management program is entirely voluntary for private land owners and non-federal land managers, and that participation will be facilitated by Camino Real Administration (a joint NPS/BLM program) on a case-by-case basis through the certification process.

- Location of the auto tour route: A portion of the auto tour route was relocated to accommodate community concerns in the vicinity of La Cieneguilla, New Mexico, a traditional community that expressed fears regarding the poor condition of routes proposed for the auto tour and adverse impacts on the quality of life in this rural area. The auto tour route is located entirely on all-weather roads to reduce environmental impacts along the trail route on roads not engineered for increased traffic loads.
- Restrictions on uses of public lands: The Visual Resource Management (VRM) re-classification issue was raised by sand, gravel, and aggregate operators concerned that re-classification would adversely impact their access to mineral materials on public and private lands. As outlined in the draft and clarified in the proposed plan, re-classification affects slightly fewer than 10 miles of the trail corridor on public lands (less than 2.5% of the length of the trail in the U.S.), and does not preclude the development of any economic interests. The proposed plan amends the White Sands, Mimbres, and Taos Resource Management Plans. New, ground-disturbing projects proposed for the re-classified areas will need to meet the VRM objectives; impacts may be mitigated through a variety of measures to reduce visual impacts. No lands were withdrawn as a result of this plan.
- Finally, a number of comments of an editorial nature were received (mismatches between text and figures or tables, wording suggestions, suggestions for future plan implementation, and statements of opinion or fact), and changes to the text were made in the document where appropriate. None of these comments resulted in substantial changes to the plan language.
- Comments and responses are presented in full in the proposed CMP/FEIS, Appendix J, "Comments and Responses."

Protest Period

The final CMP/FEIS was released in April 2004 and announced in the Federal Register on April 30, 2004. No protests were received during the 30-day protest period ending on June 2, 2004.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Consultation

The BLM and NPS conducted a biological evaluation for this plan that made a "no effect" determination for listed threatened and endangered species. Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 is required before the BLM or NPS undertake an action that may affect, and is likely to adversely affect, any federal special-status wildlife or plant species or its designated habitat. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has agreed to enter into consultation again in pre-construction Environmental Assessments for

specific projects that may be developed through plan implementation. A copy of the FWS correspondence is included in the proposed Comprehensive Management Plan/FEIS in the section titled "Agency Letters."

Agency Coordination

Coordination with State and Federal agencies took place frequently during the development of the CMP. The list of agencies and organizations contacted during the planning effort is included in Table 13 of the proposed CMP/FEIS. Agency letters received as comments on the plan are reproduced in the section of the proposed CMP/FEIS titled "Agency Letters."

Consistency with Applicable Policies, Plans, and Programs

The Governors of New Mexico and Texas were provided an opportunity to review the document for 60 days (January 5, 2004 through March 8, 2004); no inconsistencies were noted with state plans.