

Chapter 2. Issue Summary

2.1. Comment Summary

2.1.1. Method of Comment Collection and Analysis

Individuals were encouraged to submit comments in writing unless a special request was made to the RPFO. No such special requests were made. The BLM will continue to accept comments throughout the planning process. A total of 962 submissions were received and considered as part of the scoping process. Comments were collected through various sources including:

- Regular US Mail
- Electronic Comment Forms
- E-mail
- Fax
- Walk-in Comments

Comments were organized by letter and issue. Some individual comment letters included numerous comments, while discrete comments were relevant to numerous resource issues. For these reasons, the 962 submissions included a total of 3,925 discrete comments. The comment forms provided instructions on requesting confidentiality and on requesting that individual names or addresses be withheld from public review or from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act.

The Interdisciplinary Team approach was used to the classify comments in order to represent the various disciplines in the RPFO. Starting with the preliminary seven issues as identified in the Preparation Plan, comments were sorted into five categories and the results of this analysis can be found in attachment F. The categories are:

- A) “Will be addressed in the RMP” (directly related to the identified issues or issues identified by the comments),
- B) “Will be resolved through policy or administrative action” (National and BLM policies),
- C) “Are already being addressed” (WSA’s, existing amendments in the Prep Plan),
- D) “Will be addressed independent of the RMP effort” (PEIS’s amending the 1986 Plan,

proposed amendments, West-wide Energy Corridor, solar, wind, geothermal),

- E) “Determined to be outside the scope of the RMP effort considered but not addressed” (NE loop road, Sandoval County Plan, the “Wild Horse State Park”.

The process was continually defined during the classification sessions in an effort to be sensitive to public sentiment as expressed by the comments. The intent was to give the widest interpretation to the comments as they pertained to issues and to be as inclusive as possible. All comments were considered, however, some of the comments could not be addressed because of conflicts with laws, policies, and jurisdictions. One issue, OHV use, was added to the list of preliminary issues as a result of the comments received normally as a subsidiary issue to Trails and Travel. The number and strength of the comments concerning OHV use compelled us to consider it as a separate but related issue. Additionally, we added Public concerns to our management concerns. Our Preparation Plan identifies management concerns as topics or points of dispute that involve a resource management activity or land use that may overlap the issues and is generally more important to an individual or group, whereas a planning issue has the potential to be a more widespread source of conflict or opportunity. The team was responsive to this definition, however, it was found that many times the public identified a concern, i.e. public safety, that actually had a relationship with most if not all issues.

2.1.2. Summary of Public Comments Received

2.1.2.1. Comments by Affiliation

The following table shows the number and proportion of discrete comments received by each type of affiliation. Some of the comment letters were counted twice because the respondent represented more than one organization with their comment letter. This explains why the total number of letters does not match the total number of comment letter received by affiliation type.

Table 2.1. Number of Submissions per Affiliation

Affiliation	Number of Submission
Individual	925
Organization	33
Business	6
Federal Agency	0
State Agency	0
Local Agency	3
Tribal Government	0
Elected Officials	1
Total	968

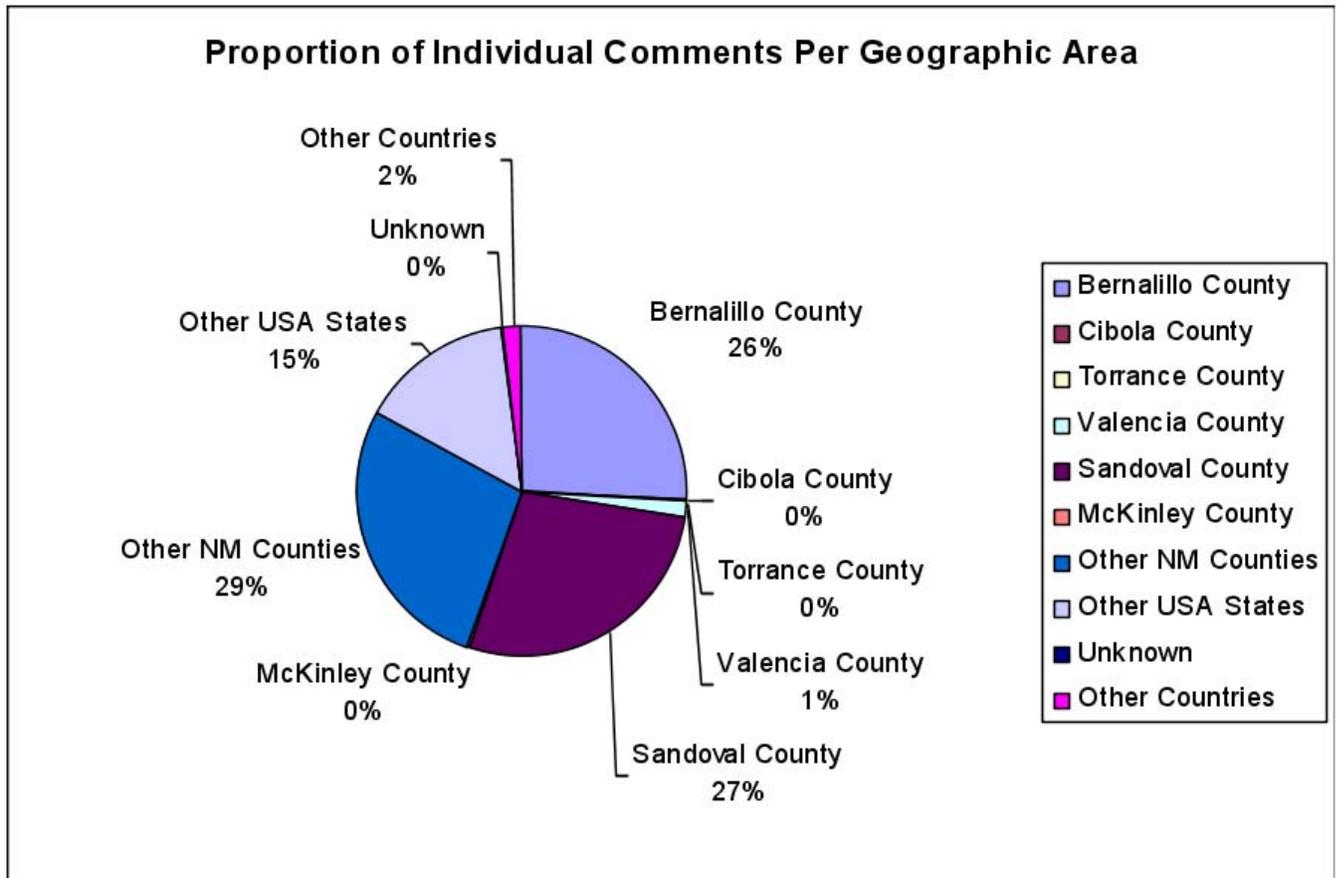


Figure 2.1. Pie Chart - Proportion of Individual Comments Per Geographic Area

2.1.2.2. Comments by Geographical Area

Table 2.2. Number of Individual Comments per Geographical Area

Geographic Source of Comments	Number of Comment Letters	Number of Individual Comments
Bernalillo County	264	1013
Cibola County	2	8
Torrance County	3	6
Valencia	14	56
Sandoval County	238	1071
McKinley County	3	12
Other New Mexico Counties	269	1091
Other USA States	148	596
Other Countries	16	60
Unknown	8	11
Total	965	3924

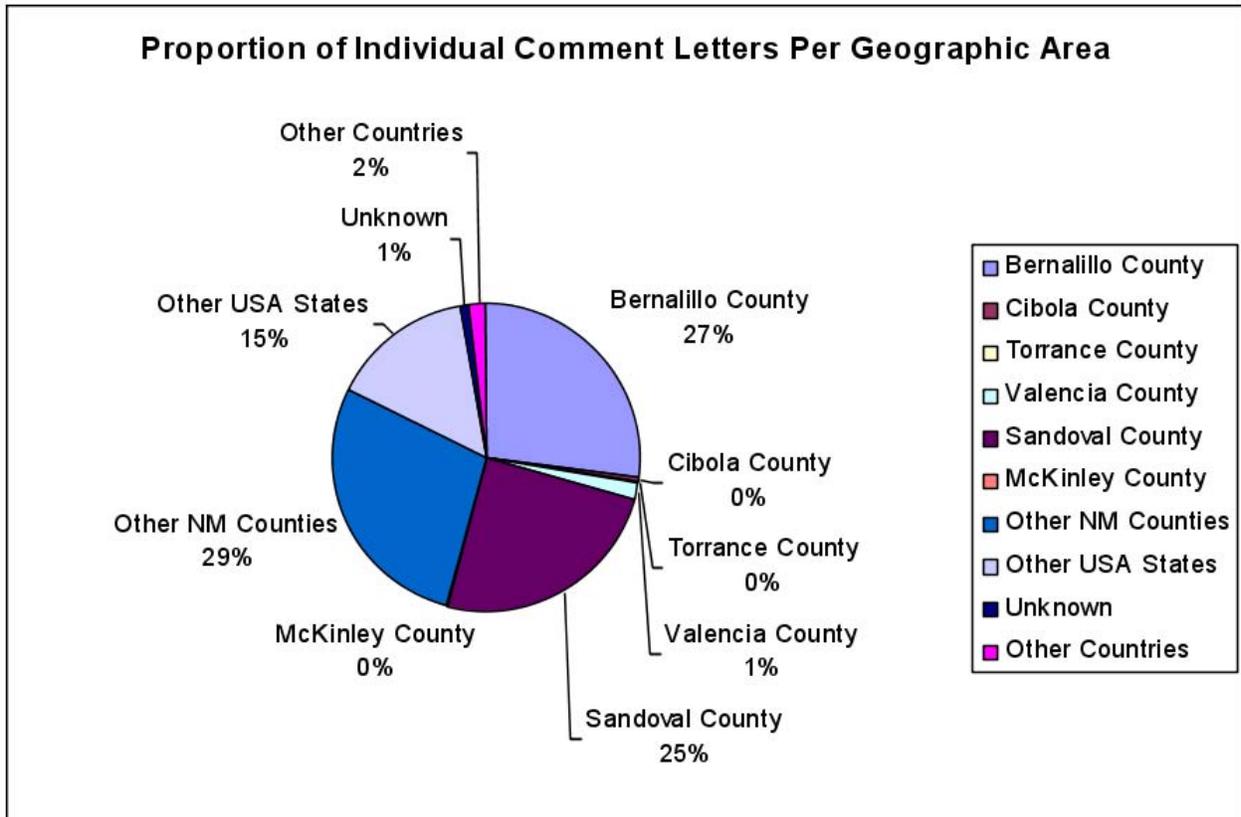


Figure 2.2. Pie Chart - Proportion of Individual Comment Letters Per Geographic Area

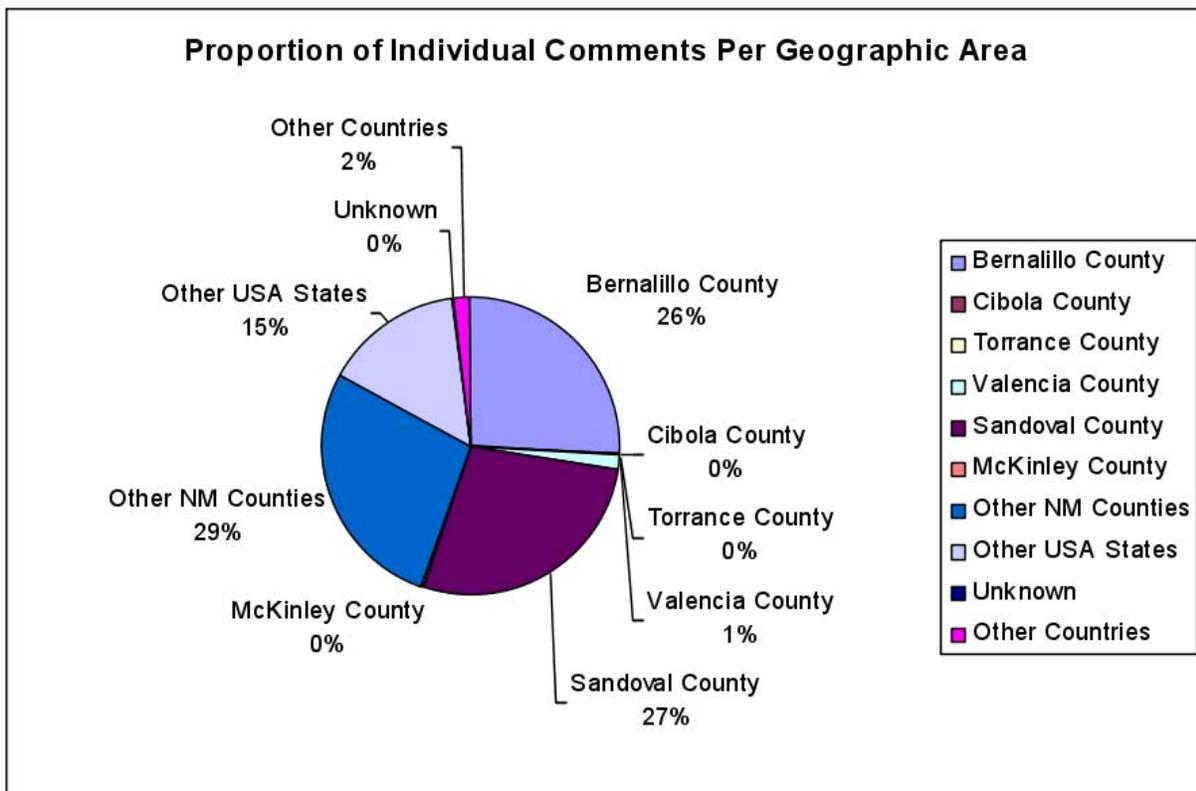


Figure 2.3. Pie Chart - Proportion of Individual Comments Per Geographic Area

2.1.2.3. Comments by Planning Issue Theme

Table 2.3. Number of Individual Comments per Planning Theme

Planning Theme	Number of Individual Comments
Land Tenure Adjustment	55
Mineral and Energy Development	812
Recreation and Visitor Services	800
Visual Resource Management	63
Special Area Designations	841
Travel and Trails Management	62
Public Land-Urban Interface	132
OHV	800
Total	3565

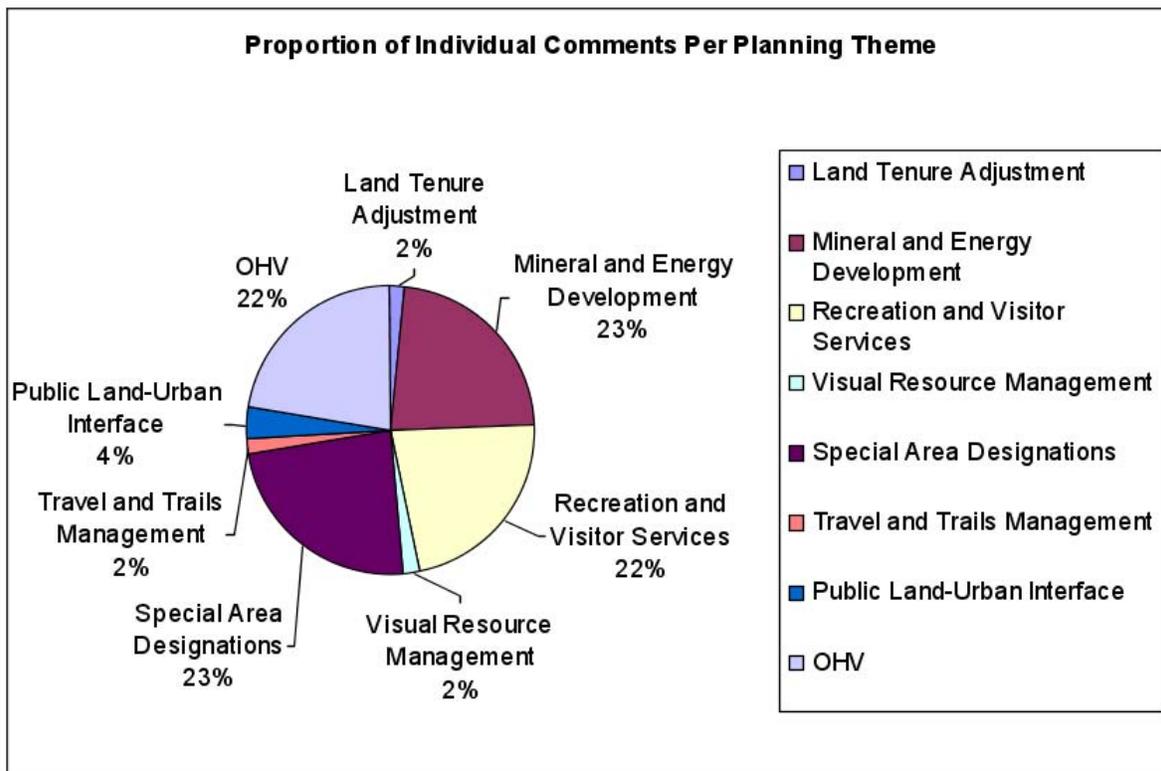


Figure 2.4. Pie Chart - Proportion of Individual Comments Per Planning Theme

2.2. Issues Identified During Scoping

Issue identification is the first step of the nine-step BLM planning process. As defined in the BLM Land Use Planning Handbook (H-1601-1), planning issues are concerns or controversies about existing and potential land and resource allocations, levels of resource use, production, and related management practices. These issues may stem from new information or changed circumstances and from the need to reassess the appropriate mix of allowable uses.

The planning issues will be used to develop alternative management strategies that will be analyzed during the planning process. As discussed in Section 2.1.1, Method of Comment Collection and Analysis, comments were reviewed, categorized, and evaluated. There were 3,565 comments that are going to be addressed in the Rio Puerco RMP revision. Most public comments received during the scoping process fell under these issues and are summarized through these categories in Section 2.2. As a result of the high volume and similarity of many comments, representative comments were selected to be shown in the public comment summary associated with that issue. The table located in Appendix D shows the total comments that were received and how they were categorized. Copies of original comments made will be available within the Rio Puerco Field Office.

While not all comments and concerns can be associated with planning issues, those comments will be addressed by the RMP and will be considered in the effects analysis. Adjustments or additions may be made to the planning issues as the planning process proceeds and BLM continues to review information, meet with the interdisciplinary team, and talk with the public. Comments were categorized into the eight planning issue themes and issue overviews were formulated as follows.

2.2.1. Issue 1—Land Tenure Adjustment

2.2.1.1. Preparation Plan Preliminary Issues/Planning Questions

Conflicts regarding land tenure adjustment drive disposal, acquisition and retention of public lands. The checkerboard ownership patterns of the RPFO Planning Area create conflicts with access and management of resources. Field Office Resource Specialists and Managers will consider the particular resource value of each parcel of public land and the most effective management. In addition, BLM staff will consider the holdings of the New Mexico State Land Office and tribal entities. Questions associated with this issue include the following:

- What lands should be acquired?
- What lands should be retained in federal ownership?
- What lands should be identified for disposal?
- What areas should be considered for right-of-way corridors?
- What easements should be acquired?
- What communication sites are needed, and where should they be placed?
- What areas should be excluded from use for communication sites?
- What areas could be considered for use for Recreation and Public Purposes (R&PP)?
- What areas should be excluded from R&PP uses?

2.2.1.2. Public Comment Summary

Issue Overview

The focal point of these comments was land disposal. Views were split over this issue. Some respondents felt that disposals should only be for conservation uses and not development, while others commented that lands surrounding communities should be made available for disposal, noting that some communities may depend on these lands to accommodate future growth. Some comments expressed concern with the scattered land tracts currently spread across the planning area (checker board)—Other comments expressed support

for a multiple-use approach to public lands management. Respondents requested that the BLM evaluate the criteria it uses to decide which lands will be disposed of; to consider national, state, and county approaches to land management; and to provide clear explanations of any decisions that are made.

Representative Comments

- “Land Tenure Adjustments should be considered to the extent that they promote conservation uses, and discourage development uses.”
- “Some consideration has been given to the transfer of management of Tract C (Crest of Montezuma) from the BLM to the Forest Service.”
- “We recommend planning for eventual extension of the Northwest Route northeast to the Los Pinos Trailhead in a more scenic way by initiating negotiation with several private landowners.”
- “One option is to deed this land to the state, county, land grant, or an established conservation group under the issue Land Tenure Adjustment. The land would be retained for quiet recreational and wildlife habitat and using the Parks and Public Purposes Act or purchase/exchange would allow more involvement of residents of adjoining land.”
- “Possible small Land Tenure Adjustment of 500 plus or minus acres for the local Spanish Land Grant San Antonio de las Huertas but not to include/ allow a connecting road to I-25 or Rt14.”
- “The option of purchasing or leasing the land segments of most concern to the residents living adjacent should be considered if it could be in keeping with the idea of providing a continuous public access and local participation in the management of those land areas. In any case there may be some compromise that preserves the land and the access and guarantees a quality wildlife corridor environment and protection of investment of the residents for the future.”
- “I am against any more land for the so called San Antonio de Las Huertas Land Grant. “
- “We would like the land to be disposed of to the state, county, land grant or an established conservation group under the issue of Land Tenure Adjustment. A change in ownership using the Parks and Public Purposes Act or purchase/exchange would allow more local involvement and management control over the lands’ use, while retaining it for quiet recreational and wildlife habitat, including several herds of wild horses.”
- “I do not want the BLM to have administration over this land, I want it to be NM State or Albuquerque/Santa Fe Open Space lands or private conservancy so that local citizens have more control over what happens in our back yard. I would like Placitans to be able to speak freely of their desires for this area since Placitans have been disallowed to say what they have clearly showed that they want in surveys and public meetings and

BLM comment sheets, therefore an ACEC cannot serve us under these restrictive circumstances.”

- “The previous RMP decisions for Land Tenure Adjustments were comprehensive and inclusive to scattered/isolated lands and their resources and manageable. The prior RMP also made comprehensive acquisitions recommendations. What has changed to warrant reconsideration of this issue? Have you all discovered some new isolated lands, or have you found new significant resources which will change the prior decision? What new land values have you found that warrant new acquisitions? Rights-of-Way are not a land tenure issue. Certainly, once designated they are a commitment of resources, but they still remain in public ownership and annual fees are collected. Issue questions and criteria should highlight what has changed in the decision/planning area to warrant reconsideration of the existing ROW decisions. If warranted than ROW should be a separate issue from Land Tenure.”
- “Consolidation of public lands is an admirable goal but must be limited to lands within the same geographical area. This would ensure that the public has continued access to geographically similar areas. Exchanging lands should be limited to an acre for acre exchange and not utilized land value for a determination. There should be no decrease in acreage. The BLM should aggressively seek to gain access easements to every acre of public land and should not allow for “Land Locked” situations to exist.”
- “The 2011 Resource plan should amend the 1986 plan is such that can allow for land exchange and or sale of land; In areas that are designated as retention lands; Unit 4 planning – township 16 north Range 5 west section 13.”
- “I wish to request 20 acres for our charter school”
- “Please begin to acquire the private lands around Cabezon and its associated other volcanic plugs.”

2.2.2. Issue 2—Mineral and Energy Development

2.2.2.1. Preparation Plan Preliminary Issues/Planning Questions

Special attention is needed to address mineral and renewable and non-renewable energy development conflicts (i.e., oil and gas, saleable and locatable minerals, geothermal resources, wind energy, and related transportation networks) with other land and resource uses and values. Areas must be identified in which energy development is suitable, unsuitable, or should be restricted. Questions to be answered include the following:

- What areas should be considered for travertine development?
- What areas should be considered for sand and gravel development?
- What areas should be considered for development of landscaping materials?
- What known and potential areas for uranium development should be considered?
- What areas have potential for oil and gas exploration?
- What areas have potential for energy resource development?
- What areas are suited to biomass energy development?
- What areas should be considered for wind and/or solar energy development?
- What areas should be considered for geothermal development?
- What areas should be excluded from energy and mineral development?

2.2.2.2. Public Comment Summary

Issue Overview

Those who were opposed to mineral development, particularly sand and gravel mining, felt that the protection of scenic and recreation values outweighed the benefits of mining. Additionally, the increase of residential growth and development in the Placitas area precluded the need for additional aggregate quarries in the area. The concerns raised involving mining ranged from watershed impacts in areas immediately adjacent to mining operations; increased traffic and congestion caused by sand and gravel haul trucks; traffic safety; impacts to the scenic qualities of the area particularly as they affect the Placitas Community; and, the general notion that commercial mining and industrial activities are in conflict with rural residential growth and development.

The comments that supported mining emphasized the economic benefits to the Albuquerque area as they relate to supply and demand in the immediate area and indicated the land ownership barriers that limit the amount of material available for Albuquerque’s growth.

Representative Comments

- “Maintenance and management of the lands for conservation uses necessarily precludes another class of uses, termed “development uses”. These uses include: . . . mineral extraction and subsurface energy resource exploration and extraction.”
- “Protect wilderness quality lands and together sensitive or special places by restricting other, damaging uses such as ORV, oil and gas drilling, and uranium mining, and using protective designations

- such as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern and Special Recreation Management Areas.”
- “I recommend that no further gravel mining occur in Placitas. There are nearly 6,000 people living in Placitas – a residential community. The gravel mines are pouring airborne contaminants in the air we breathe.”
 - “I urge BLM to deny any further applications for such mining due to: 1) severe disruption/elimination of plants and wildlife in the area; 2) disruption of wildlife movement and migration; 3) degradation of the watershed; 4) air pollution from mining dust and diesel truck exhaust, exacerbating respiratory problems for hundreds of residents living adjacent to the site; 5) noise pollution in an otherwise quiet environment, due to the operation of heavy machinery and large diesel trucks; 6) increased light pollution degrading our dark skies; 7) dangerous heavy truck traffic on our rural roads.”
 - “In the Rio Puerco planning area we favor wilderness consideration for the Cabezon Country complex (Ignacio Chavez and Mesa Chivato), Petaca Pinta complex (Sierra Lucero, Cerro Verde, Mesa Cimarron and Mesa Gallina), and Greater Cerro Pomo complex (Santa Rita and Red Flat Wash). These areas include excellent wildlife habitat for elk, pronghorn antelope, mountain lion, bobcat, gray fox, and many others. Several represent highlands rising like sky islands in the landscape. The plan should close these areas to oil and gas leasing and uranium mining, and prohibit off-road vehicles. Elsewhere in the planning area, ORV’s should be restricted to designated routes where BLM is absolutely certain they will not damage wildlife habitat or archeological sites and they will not disturb other visitors.”
 - “Mining and development are not the only viable economic choices for BLM lands.”
 - “Please! No more gravel mines near Placitas. Gravel mines are needed for economic development, but should be reasonably far from populated areas.”
 - “Mining interests are well established, but should not be expanded in close proximity to the Placitas residential community. That balance between residents and mining seems reasonable though closely drawn at present. Further expansion of mining operations in the immediate vicinity would be regarded by most residents as a detriment to the quality of the environment most have sought through their property investment. Many of these residents have spent many long years in government, industry and the military service and see the preservation for the remaining open and natural spaces as a key part of their future peace of mind and investment security.”
 - “If mining is allowed, restrict it to north of the North Side Ridge of the Las Huertas Creek Watershed to keep it out of residential view.”
 - “Public lands remain open to all activities such as oil and gas exploration and development.”
 - “Land uses that destroy wilderness values should be ruled out, including oil and gas leasing, uranium mining, and construction of any new roads or facilities.”
 - “Placitas public lands should; be excluded from energy and mineral development as an Urban Wildlife interface, no travertine development, no sand and gravel development, no development of landscaping materials, no uranium development, no oil and gas exploration, and no associated roads.”
 - “Water usage and water mining is a concern for the Placitas area as well as the East Mt areas and therefore development is a concern as is mining and any other water intensive activity.”
 - “The Las Huertas Watershed is an aquifer recharging system in our area and wildlife habitat that should not be disturbed for gravel mining and its resultant dust, silica, and airborne pollutants we all have to breathe. The New Mexico Environment Department Air Quality Bureau in 2003 recommended that permits for mining that propose locating in areas unsuited for mining be denied. Mines should not be allowed to operate near Native American “sacred sites,” residential neighborhoods, historic rural communities, or in areas where the resulting “scar” will ruin a scenic view shed. The BLM lands in Placitas has sacred sites, is a rural quality residential community with beautiful views from most residences.”
 - “I am requesting that the 5,000 BLM administered acres in Unit 5 of the Rio Puerco District (defined as allotment 00971 and 00972 that are adjacent to my home not be allocated to gravel, mineral, oil or gas mining. We currently have 3 mines in this area that have stripped the land of watershed and left nothing more than acres of dirt which blows through the area constantly. This blowing dust is a cause of health problems for residents with respiratory issues and causes visibility problems. Additionally the truck and mine traffic creates congestion on the local roads and are a hazard to the local wildlife. The Las Huertas Creek Watershed is an important aquifer recharging system for our area and should not be disturbed any further by these types of invasive endeavors.”
 - “With regard to other concerns, ATV’s, mining, target practice, et., these are not what we would like to see, but we will be working with this coalition (Placitas Coalition) to find compromise positions with regard to SAFETY, for human beings and wildlife; our main concern is to keep the Placitas BLM lands as an open space for all to enjoy.”
 - “The proposed update to the Rio Puerco Resource Management Plan must allow for open access to all sand and gravel and aggregate resources, particularly in proximity to the Albuquerque growth area. Albuquerque is unique in that there

are multiple barriers to aggregate extraction in the basin. The Sandia Mountain Wilderness is a barrier to the east. The Isleta Pueblo is a barrier to the south. The Atrisco Land Grant is a barrier to the west and the Sandia, Santa Ana, San Felipe and Santo Domingo Pueblos are a barrier to the north. There are very limited BLM/public lands in the growth corridor and they must remain accessible to aggregate entry to ensure economic stability and growth for the economy of the Albuquerque basin. Aggregate extraction can coincide with other resource uses. Aggregate mining is the best example of multiple uses. Upon completion of mining, the lands can be reclaimed for another use. Also, during mining, other values are protected, such as surface and ground water. Habitats are not permanently removed from the ecosystem and the mining property can co-exist with other uses, such as right-of-way corridors. An analysis of the depletion of aggregate reserves close to the Albuquerque market must be included as reserves are depleting, not increasing and demand is increasing for this valuable public resource. We encourage collaboration with the New Mexico Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resources. This agency could supply much needed information regarding the economic impact of withdrawing aggregates from mineral entry and the locations of rock types conducive to aggregate mining. Access to aggregate resources adjacent to existing aggregate operations should be noted as the least impacting of all aggregate extraction alternatives and be assigned highest priority.”

- “The Draft RMP should point out that BLM can and should protect wilderness and areas by restricting other, damaging uses such as withdrawing areas from leasing and mineral extraction, requiring no surface occupancy for energy development, including timing stipulations designed to protect wildlife during sensitive time periods, and prohibiting or limiting motorized travel and off-road vehicle use.”
- “I live very close to the LaFarge gravel mine just south of Camino Manzano and have witnessed the absolute raving of the beautiful hills, mesas and arroyos that were once beautiful. Opening up this parcel of BLM to mining and/or energy development would not only again scar a once beautiful recreational and wildlife habitat, but significantly impact the Las Huertas Watershed and violate Native American “sacred sites.”
- “Energy development should be limited to areas of existing disturbance. The future permits and rights of ways need to base fees on units of production or throughout to accurately return the fair value of the development to the public.”
- “My other concern is anything that affects the 1872 General Mining law that allows me access

to exploration, prospecting and filing claims for minerals on public lands. I do have claims in other areas of the state and would not want to be denied access to the areas under this RMP. I am a member of several local and national Associations that promote prospecting and mining.”

2.2.3. Issue 3—Recreation and Visitor Services

2.2.3.1. Preparation Plan Preliminary Issues/Planning Questions

As the population in the area continues to increase, the demand for recreational uses of public land and visitor services has also increased. The public has expressed interest in using several RPFO areas for hiking, camping and off-highway vehicle (OHV) use. Additionally, BLM guidelines for specially designated areas have changed, so previously designated areas must be reevaluated to comply with these new requirements. Questions associated with this issue are as follows:

- What types of recreational uses should be allowed in specially designated areas of public land?
- What areas should be designated for special recreation management areas (SRMAs)?
- What would be the specific strategy for managing the SRMAs?
- To what extent, and where (general areas), should the BLM develop facilities and generally improve recreation access opportunities to meet public demand, to provide for public health and safety, and to direct use away from areas of conflict?

2.2.3.2. Public Comment Summary

Issue Overview

Comments generally expressed a profound interest of public land recreation in New Mexico. Most of the comments expressed a concern for impacts of the environment as a result of recreational use. Many of the comments concerning Recreation and Visitor Services came from residents living near Unit 5 of the RPFO Planning Area. Many of these comments stressed the need for open spaces focusing on quiet or minimal impact usage. On other parcels of the RPFO planning area, comments proposed uses such as hiking, geocaching, off-road vehicle use, camping, horseback riding, wildlife viewing, scenic views including night sky views, and shooting. Visitor service comments ranged from those who wanted developed facilities to keeping the areas primitive. (Off-road vehicle use has supporters as well as opponents and is discussed in Issue 8.)

Representative Comments

- “I would like to make a comment regarding the San Ysidro Trials Area. I am a member of NMTA, and have been riding there for years. The area has been designated for about 30 years now and has provided a large number of people with healthy, wholesome recreation. NMTA has been a very good steward of the area, and has worked well with the BLM in taking care of it. As far as the future of the area, I hope that BLM does NOT open it up (as far as gate access) to the wider public. That would make management much more difficult, and I would expect that the various groups might not play well together. Responsibility for the area would be diluted. I also Hope BLM does NOT “improve” the area, with the possible exception of the installation of a pit toilet. The BLM area at Haystack Mt. near Roswell was “improved” and is not nearly as nice of a place as before (besides users having to deal with the paperwork and hassle of paying a fee). Parking is much more crowded, and now there’s a streetlight burning all night. BLM has to deal with hauling trash and other maintenance chores.”
- “For this issue you ask the question, “What types of recreational uses should be allowed in specially designated areas of public land? The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum used in the existing RMP is recreational use based. Why is this information not being used to help define and resolve this issue? One other comment: only slightly over 1% of NM BLM Public Lands are managed for Primitive non-motorized recreation. You should make sure this people’s interests are given fair consideration equal to that of the noise polluting motorized users.”
- “Protect wilderness quality lands and together sensitive or special places by restricting other, damaging uses such as ORV, oil and gas drilling, and uranium mining, and using protective designations such as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern and Special Recreation Management Areas.”
- “The BLM’s analysis of social and economic concerns should consider the changing economics of the West and the revenue brought to counties through non-extractive industries such as recreation. The analysis should consider socio-economic shifts within the planning area, as well as the implicit value of healthy watersheds and quiet recreation areas.”
- “In the Rio Puerco planning area we favor wilderness consideration for the Cabezon Country complex (Ignacio Chavez and Mesa Chivato), Petaca Pinta complex (Sierra Lucero, Cerro Verde, Mesa Cimarron and Mesa Gallina), and Greater Cerro Pomo complex (Santa Rita and Red Flat Wash). These areas include excellent wildlife habitat for elk, pronghorn antelope, mountain lion, bobcat, gray fox, and many others. Several represent highlands rising like sky islands in the landscape. The plan should close these areas to oil and gas leasing and uranium mining, and prohibit off-road vehicles. Elsewhere in the planning area, ORV’s should be restricted to designated routes where BLM is absolutely certain they will not damage wildlife habitat or archeological sites and they will not disturb other visitors.”
- “There is a strong public need for protected recreational areas that afford the opportunity to restore the spirit by encountering wildlife hiking, biking and camping in an intact natural area.”
- “New Mexico depends on tourism and untainted open spaces attract tourists. The Executive Order to Preserve America signed in 2003 was designed to promote and aid projects to encourage Heritage Tourism. This land is a perfect example of an area that tourists enjoy in its original and unspoiled manner in quiet recreation such as camping and hiking.”
- “Recreational activities in this area should be limited to quiet, minimal-impact usage. The land in this area is far too fragile to support high-intensity use. Destruction of the natural terrain will lead to increased erosion, negatively impacting the entire Las Huertas watershed. Hiking trails for different ability levels, and perhaps even some handicap-accessible trails would be very useful. Perimeter parking to keep vehicles out of neighborhoods would help. No expensive maintenance would be necessary with low-impact usage.”
- “If a wild horse preserve is not possible, this space should be maintained as an open space available to the public for hiking, horse riding, and other non-destructive uses.”
- “A major interest of mine is to drive a full sized 4x4 (Jeep Cherokee) on back-country roads and 4x4 trails. I cherish motorized access so that I can enjoy unique scenery, cultural resources such Anasazi remnants and old mines sites, and to visit very remote areas on our public lands. I enjoy challenging trails and have made modifications to my Jeep to enhance the vehicle’s back-country capabilities and safety. While I have traveled extensively throughout the Southwest, I believe that outstanding motorized recreational opportunities could be developed in the Rio Puerco area. As motorized recreational opportunities on public lands disappear, development of managed OHV areas are of great value to the public and to the BLM. The Rio Puerco Resource Management Plan should make provisions for meeting current and future needs of four Wheel Drive (4WD) recreationists.”
- “Recreational shooting, at least we hope it’s recreational shooting, regularly takes place on BLM land in areas designated as “safe” from

- shooting. Local control would allow local authorities to patrol the area. We could call while it's happening when we hike out there.”
- “We would like to see recreation limited to those that produce only conservational noise levels and the sounds of boots or hoofs hitting the desert floor.”
 - “Public lands remain open to all activities such as oil and gas exploration and development, grazing leases, hunting, logging, prospecting for minerals, recreation, wood cutting, etc.”
 - “I am requesting the 5,000 BLM administered acres in Unit 5 of the Rio Puerco District (defined as allotment 00971 and 00972 that are adjacent to my home be allocated to “Quiet Recreational Activities”. ATV’s and motorcycles that use this area do not stay on the trails and cause erosion, damage the plant life (watershed) and disturb the wildlife. These areas should be limited to hiking, horseback riding, bicycle riding, etc. Additionally shooting should be strictly prohibited on any of these lands. The current use of these lands by people hunting and target shooting creates a very dangerous situation for all the other people hiking, etc., not to mention the wildlife.”
 - “We ask that any recreation and visitor centers being considered be planned with minimal impact to the existing neighborhoods.”
 - “With a fifty-year local history, the NM4W’ers have a long record of motorized recreation in the Rio Puerco Management Area (RPMA). The thousands of miles of routes in the RPMA make it impossible to effectively identify routes critical to motorized users. All routes currently allowing motorized use are critical to the broad range of users including the club. As motorized use is restricted on more and more public land, including land managed by other agencies, the remaining open routes become even more critical. It is imperative that the public retains motorized access to all the public lands in the RPMA. This continued access is critical to supporting all historical uses including recreational use.”
 - “If I like to hunt, if I like to hike, if I like to camp, if I like to rock hound, if I like to explore, if I like to prospect, if I like to horseback ride, if I like to photograph, if I like cutting wood, or getting a Christmas tree in the forest (with permits) I should be able to enjoy these activities on our public lands and one group should not be able to dictate what other groups can and can’t do. We should all be able to enjoy our own thing.”
 - “I am a single dad and I spend time with my children on BLM land. I am not a miner; it is a hobby to look for rocks and gold. My kids enjoy going out and being in God’s Creation. Please don’t take this privilege from us.”
 - “I would like to see guidelines in the RMP that set standards and allow active geocaching on BLM.

The sport should be allowed without permits or permission, as long as the cache is hidden within established standards. I also support the use of volunteers that would visit geocaches to assure that they meet BLM standards.”

- “I wish we had a rifle/pistol shooting range available there (Placitas)”
- “My suggestion is to allow geocaching in Ojito Wilderness but that cache web pages should state this is a wilderness and that no mechanized travel is allowed.”
- “I strongly oppose hunting on the BLM land.”
- “All visitors, tourists, and legal U.S. citizens have a right to their outdoor lands. Tourism is an important income source for NM with high fuel prices. We can’t afford to travel but we can enjoy our own lands right here. I love collecting gems, minerals and ore samples out in the great outdoors in God’s country. He really owns it. I will also report any misuses to authorities.”

2.2.4. Issue 4—Visual Resources Management (VRM)

2.2.4.1. Preparation Plan Preliminary Issues/Planning Questions

BLM guidance requires that visual resource values in the Planning Area be managed in accordance with objectives assigned under VRM classes. These classes will be designated in the Planning Area based on an inventory of visual resources and management considerations for other uses. Questions to be considered include the following:

- What level of protection is needed to meet VRM objectives?
- Should some areas be given a special designation for VRM values?
- Are scenic objectives properly established?
- Do scenic objectives need to be modified or established for some areas?
- Has sufficient inventory been done to identify VRM classes for the entire Planning Area?
- Should development be limited or excluded from some areas in order to maintain scenic values?

2.2.4.2. Public Comment Summary

Issue Overview

Almost all comments received pertaining to scenic quality were expressed in terms that placed value on it as a resource. Respondents referred to giving priority to visual resources management, protecting visual resources, valuing visuals as open space, the importance of unfragmented and undeveloped lands, specific places

visuals should be protected, and ways to mitigate development and utilities to protect scenic quality.

There were many general recommendations put forth on how development and utilities or rights of ways could be mitigated to protect scenic quality. Several included zoning in areas of existing disturbance and keeping residential and commercial development out of the backcountry. A few mentioned developing mitigation standards and screening utilities to blend in to the landscape. Quite a few comments named specific types of uses to protect visual resources from such impacts as mining, roads, and OHV use. Some mentioned the influence of visual quality on rural communities (i.e. Placitas) as it relates to their home values. Few mentioned specific VRM management classes that they would like designated.

Representative Comments

- “We recommend planning for eventual extension of the Northwest Route northeast to the Los Pinos Trailhead in a more scenic way by initiating negotiation with several private landowners.”
- “I urge BLM to deny any further applications for such mining due to: 1) severe disruption/elimination of plants and wildlife in the area; 2) disruption of wildlife movement and migration; 3) degradation of the watershed; 4) air pollution from mining dust and diesel truck exhaust, exacerbating respiratory problems for hundreds of residents living adjacent to the site; 5) noise pollution in an otherwise quiet environment, due to the operation of heavy machinery and large diesel trucks; 6) increased light pollution degrading our dark skies; 7) dangerous heavy truck traffic on our rural roads.”
- “The mining operations also ravage the beautiful BLM land.”
- “Generally, speaking, the lands of Tracts A, B and C should be maintained for what are termed “conservation uses”. These uses include: 6) Preservation of scenic visual resources of the land;”
- “It would most likely be impossible for any resident (Placitas) to see additional above ground assets such as utility poles and above ground pumping or transfer apparatus as anything but blight upon the landscape.”
- “Establishment of the land in its near natural state as a recreational and wildlife habitat would preserve the scenic value of the area we have come to expect as homeowners.”
- “As homeowners, our property carries a high premium based on the scenic value of the area. Any diminution in the vistas as they now exist will tend to significantly reduce the intrinsic property value of our investment.”
- “... the abundant visual resources of the Santa Ana Plateaus, the wildlife, the Sandia Mountains, Jemez Mountains, and Placitas ridges and canyons, plant life, big sky, and our night sky should/will be preserved. There should be no residential development in this area.”
- “Highways lined with commercial and residential developments are eyesores. It is hard to promote the “Land of Enchantment” with roads cluttered with developments and billboards. Further away from the road, wooded hillsides and meandering arroyos provide peaceful havens close to home. These areas need to be preserved in the natural state – not developed. Especially in this slow economy, with housing and business spaces going unsold, protecting views and open spaces can greatly enhance the value of surrounding areas. More construction would depress housing values in the surrounding area.”
- “While Class I is the most desirable classification of VRM, there are natural features in the landscape that block views from residents that could serve as natural buffers for inclusion of activities that would disrupt the scenic high plains desert beauty of Unit 5. *If mining is allowed, restrict it to north of the North Side Ridge of the Las Huertas Creek Watershed to keep it out of residential view. The North Side Ridge is visible from more than 1,000 homes in the western region of Placitas. *Assure the pipeline sites are replanted with native plants and trees to restore it to its original condition. * Wildlife viewing is a Visual Resource and one treasured by the residents of the area.”
- “I still get a thrill when I see or hear coyotes, deer, hawks or owls and all other animals and birds trying to survive on diminishing wild lands. Any further development on BLM land will not only decrease the scenic value but also reduce the available land for wildlife.”
- “As residents of Placitas, my husband and I have made Placitas our retirement home because of its serenity and beauty. It is a delight to watch horses roam freely adding to the beauty here.”
- “Mines should not be allowed to operate near Native American “sacred sites”, residential neighborhoods, historic rural communities, or in areas where the resulting “scar” will ruin a scenic view shed. The BLM lands in Placitas has sacred sites, is a rural quality residential community with beautiful views from most residences.”
- “Routes should be of high interest for historical, scenic, or sporting qualities. Again the motorized public enjoys the same attributes of public land that the non-motorized public enjoys, including far vistas, cultural artifacts, and a sense of being immersed in nature.”
- “Residential and/or commercial development should be limited or excluded from some areas in order to maintain scenic value.”
- “BLM has assigned this allotment as a class IV visual Resource Management rating (VRM). It appears that this is based on the vegetation alone

and we feel that the tremendous views should be taken into account for a higher rating.”

- “This Unit 5 BLM land contains cultural sites and is of scenic value to residents and everyone who recreates there. Needless to say, our unscathed vies of this BLM land are reflected in the price I paid for my home.”
- “In a broader sense, the residents of Overlook are concerned about the rapid development of the Placitas area which places pressure on private land owners who value the semi-rural, quiet and visually beautiful aspects of this location. With increasing pressure of urbanization of this area, pressure also will increase on the BLM to consider a variety of uses for the federal lands surrounding Placitas beyond the current open space. As residents of this area, we value greatly the regional visual aesthetics, the unique character of the ecology, freedom of the wildlife to exist with us, and the unique historical and cultural character of this region. In view of the uniqueness of the Placitas area, we believe that retention of open space for recreation and ecological well being throughout this area without further development would be in the best interests of the local population, and the people of the greater of southern New Mexico.”
- “Adopt VRM Class I.”

2.2.5. Issue 5—Special Area Designations

2.2.5.1. Preparation Plan Preliminary Issues/Planning Questions

The BLM’s Land Use Planning Handbook (H-1601-1) requires that application of the following administrative designations be considered when developing RMPs:

- Area of Critical Environmental Concern
- Back Country Byway
- National Recreation Area
- National Trail
- Research Natural Area
- Special Recreation Management Area
- Wild and Scenic River

In the Rio Puerco RMP (1986, maintained and reprinted 1992), the 23 areas were designated as Special Management Areas (SMAs). Under current BLM guidance, SMAs are not recognized as valid area designations. The agency will, through analysis and evaluation determine designation status for each listed SMA and other prospective special areas based on established criteria specific to the above administrative designations. [Note: Some of these special areas have been designated by Congressional legislation, as footnoted in the table below.]

2.2.5.2. Public Comment Summary

Issue Overview

The majority of comments regarding special designations were in favor of protecting natural and cultural resources through special area designations. While most supported SMAs and ACECs designated in the 1986 RMP, some were against special designations all together. Some comments were generally supportive of special designations, while many were tied to a specific areas such as Cabezon ACEC or the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail. Some respondents requested designation of new Wilderness Study Areas or recognition of lands with wilderness characteristics and some advocated expansion of existing ACECs and designation of new ACECs. Others would like Special Recreation Management Areas (SRMAs) designated to enjoy hiking, biking, shooting, rock collecting and Off Highway Vehicles (OHVs) to name a few. Some would like wildlife corridors identified and preserved with special designations.

Representative Comments

- “Specifically recognize the resources and values of the wilderness quality lands identified by the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance and propose protective management to ensure the ongoing health of these lands and the maintenance of their wilderness characteristics.”
- “The BLM’s analysis of cultural and paleontological resources in the planning area should consider the impact of livestock on cultural and historic resources. Cattle should be removed from sensitive archaeological and historical sites, because cattle are known to produce significant physical damage to lithic artifacts.”
- “In the Rio Puerco planning area we favor wilderness consideration for the Cabezon Country complex (Ignacio Chavez and Mesa Chivato), Petaca Pinta complex (Sierra Lucero, Cerro Verde, Mesa Cimarron and Mesa Gallina), and Greater Cerro Pomo complex (Santa Rita and Red Flat Wash). These areas include excellent wildlife habitat for elk, pronghorn antelope, mountain lion, bobcat, gray fox, and many others. Several represent highlands rising like sky islands in the landscape. The plan should close these areas to oil and gas leasing and uranium mining, and prohibit off-road vehicles. Elsewhere in the planning area, ORV’s should be restricted to designated routes where BLM is absolutely certain they will not damage wildlife habitat or archeological sites and they will not disturb other visitors.”
- “Designating this land (Placitas) an Area of Critical Environmental Concern seems its best and highest use. i.e. 1) Destroying this land poses a significant threat to residential property; 2) this land

- is fragile, irreplaceable and unique; 3) It contains cultural sites and is of scenic value to residents and visitors.”
- “. . . the Western Governors’ association has made wildlife corridors one of its initiatives. The WGA’s action items are to (1) make the protection of wildlife corridors and crucial habitat a priority for transportation planning, design, and construction; (2) facilitate inter-jurisdictional coordination, planning, and implementation; (3) manage and coordinate transportation, crucial area, and corridor data and methods; and (4) build long-term fiscal capacity to fund these initiatives.”
 - “Generally, speaking, the lands of Tracts A, B and C should be maintained for what are termed “conservation uses”. These uses include . . . managed public open space.”
 - “Among the many conservation use attributes of Tract C, it is widely known as a area of wildlife migration pathways, and should be excluded from any motorized recreation so as to not disturb or harass wildlife.”
 - “Special designation for Continental Divide National Scenic Trail – We recommend that a spur trail of the CDT be constructed from the mouth of Kinard Arroyo to US Forest Service land at the southwest edge of Cuba Mesa. This narrow corridor should be designated for non-motorized use and managed with the same special considerations of the rest of the CDT.”
 - “Placitas is fragile – it needs special protection status – be careful with this area – thank you.” “In addition, we wish to have some or all of the 5,000 acres set aside for a wildlife corridor.”
 - “Further, the Las Huertas Creek Watershed is an important natural system impacting wildlife migration in the area. Unit 5 needs to be preserved for wildlife habitat and migration.”
 - “The BLM should create a Special Recreation Management Area for 4 WD use at San Ysidro. A trail system suitable for 4WD’s should be established west of the existing single-track trails. It would not conflict with the existing Memorandum of Understanding between the BLM and the New Mexico Trails Association. The BLM should create a Special Recreation Management Area for Four Wheel Drive (4WD) use at Cimarron Mesa southwest of State Highway 6 and west of Los Lunas.”
 - “Pursuant to BLM’s Land Use Planning Handbook (H-1601-1), please give careful consideration to the Placitas Open Space Master Plan in context of the nature of the Placitas community: clearly, Placitas qualifies as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern. *Note that the Placitas Open Space Master Plan recites the fact that the area covered is considered a Major Public Open Space (MPOS) as defined in the Albuquerque/Bernalillo County Comprehensive Plan. * Further, note that the Master Plan delineates numerous sensitive historical, anthropological, cultural and environmental features that should be considered as the RMP is developed. * Please note also that the BLM map covering BLM’s Unit 5 fails to depict the Placitas Open Space. It is assumed that is this is the result of oversight, not intention. Please correct this, in either case.”
 - “Limit areas for wilderness. We already have enough wilderness areas.”
 - “This RMP should identify areas that have wilderness characteristics but are not within wilderness study areas.”
 - “We ask BLM to study all the areas identified by the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance as having wilderness characteristics. If BLM comes to a different conclusion, this should be discussed in the draft RMP, so the public can decide for themselves and submit comments accordingly.”
 - “The Las Huertas Creek Watershed in Unit 5 is a natural system for wildlife migration connecting the Sandias to the Jemez Mountains according to the Dave Foreman of the NM Wilderness Alliance. It is an important link to the wildlife habitat reservation work being done in the Ortiz Mountains and Glorieta mesa and Galesito Basin. This is also of National Significance. It lies in the path of the Continental Mega Linkages called the Spine of the Continent that has been developed over the past 20 years to link areas of wildlife migration together, and utilizes National parks and private lands along the entire stretch of the Rockies linked from Alaska to Mexico.”
 - “I support the Pathways Wildlife Corridor efforts to maintain the wildlife corridors north of and around the Sandia Mt. Area.” “There are currently several organizations using this space for Wildlife and Nature educational purposes and with the official designation of this property as “preserved” we would have even more utilization by local environmental and educational organizations. This area also contains areas of historical and cultural significance which should be preserved and I believe would encourage tourism in this area.”
 - “The NM4W requests that the RPMA seek to identify, develop, and maintain Special Recreation Management Areas (SRMA’s) where appropriate to meet specific needs. One of the fastest growing (and radically under-served) segments of the 4WD public is ‘rock crawling’. The RPMA is in close proximity to the bulk of the state’s population but the nearest SRMA’s that meet the particular need for rock crawling is located outside of Farmington (The Glade) and Las Cruces (Chile Canyons). The Gordy’s Hill area near Socorro may offer other potential opportunities but enthusiasts are still waiting on a Final RMP decision. The NM4W have identified two potential areas for the type fo high challenge, extreme terrain required for quality rock

- crawling recreation. These two areas are near San Ysidro and Cimarron Mesa west of Los Lunas.”
- “Unit 5 could certainly be a candidate for a Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA). I would like to reserve comment on Unit 5 special recreation management area strategies for a future communication.”
 - “In terms of historic and cultural values, it is important to note that the Placitas Open Space immediately to the south of the northern BLM land in Unit 5 has already been designated a New Mexico State Historic District. Can the character of the immediately adjacent BLM tract be significantly different or less deserving of recognition and preservation? An archeological study, beginning with a “walkabout survey,” is urgently needed and should be a part of the RMP process. The riparian character of the Las Huertas Creek watershed is a critical area resource, offering the promise of recharging the aquifer. Unobstructed water flow will support more birds and other wildlife as well. Absent special attention, the direct, indirect and cumulative adverse impacts (per the Environmental Policy Act) on Unit 5 could be severe. The Unit 5 area has demonstrated relevance and importance that would be best managed through creation of an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) as provided by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). The ACEC designation has the added benefit of explicit provision for mineral withdrawal, a longtime community concern, as an appropriate management prescription for protecting ACEC values.”
 - “Wildlife corridors- safe passage, connection between seasonal ranges and latitudinal and elevation changes also need to be identified and management actions proposed to provide connection between wildlife habitats. The affects of global climate change on wildlife habitat and corridors need to be considered.”
 - “Each SRMA, due to increased human use, has potentially a negative impact upon wildlife. Increased motorized vehicle use will raise road densities which disrupt wildlife. Road density standards should be applied to reduce the impact of vehicle use on wildlife.”
 - “In your planning criteria you make reference twice to coordination Native Americans. One regarding their land use plans and another is regarding traditional uses. There are at least 11 tribes and pueblos surrounding the Planning Area. Should not your coordination and consultation consider wildlife as a traditional and cultural (spiritual) use?
- Your wildlife habitat objectives should at least consider their land use plans.”
- “This issue discussion contains incorrect and misleading information. You have incorrectly included ACECs and RNA with those which are only SMAs. The ACEC’s and RNA are valid designations in accordance with the BLM’s Land Use Planning Handbook (H-1601-1). As a consequence, your issue statement, questions and criteria do not establish a basis to reconsider the ACECs and RNA. I assume this is an oversight which can be easily corrected at this time. I have questions regarding how management concerns are to be addressed in the NEPA document. I could not find a definition of “management concerns in the BLM Planning Handbook. The Pre Plan and Newsletter does explain to me how management concerns are to be presented in the planning process. Are management concerns going to be subject to alternative development and impact analysis? You need to clarify your intend.”
 - “This is a request for participation/inclusion of the discussions of the Sandia Grotto of the National Speleological Society for the Rio Puerco management plan being reviewed. Of particular concern are the caves and karst areas being discussed. An existing ACEC is in proximity to the caves and karst.”
 - “Special Management Areas SMA designations should not be utilized in the future. SMAs serve to further fragment management of the land and lead to degradation of multiple use.”
 - “I am a single dad and I spend time with my children on BLM land. I am not a miner, it is a hobby to look for rocks and gold. My kids enjoy going out and being in God’s Creation. Please don’t take this privilege from us.”
 - “As a community member, I support and would hope for the setting up of non-motorized corridors connecting the village of Cuba to the Continental Divide Trail, as special recreation management areas improved with water, information pamphlets, etc. at trail heads. It would be best to have special designation for the CDT as routed across BLM lands close by Cuba, linking current routes with further development of trails, with walking access from the won to public lands. This would benefit both CDT users and the community in areas of economics, recreation and health.”
 - “I believe only non-motorized use of trails for the CDT and its spurs. Trail corridors should be designated for SRMA’s and BLM should work with partners such as CDTA and Step into Cuba.

BLM should develop trail heads with improvements such as lights, bill boards and some facilities.”

2.2.6. Issue 6—Travel and Trails Management

2.2.6.1. Preparation Plan Preliminary Issues/Planning Questions

BLM guidance requires that travel management areas and the designation of off-highway vehicle (OHV) management areas must be included as decisions made at the land use plan level. Travel management decisions significantly interrelate with other resource and use decisions in the RMP Revision, especially because of the area’s growing urban population and increasing demand for off-highway vehicle use. Travel management must be considered consistently with all resource program goals and objectives, primary travelers, objectives for allowing travel, setting characteristics such as VRM classes, and the primary means of travel allowed while still meeting objectives and maintaining setting characteristics. Areas must be classified as open, limited, or closed to motorized travel. Questions associated with this issue are as follows:

- What access needs exist in the RPFO (including those identified by users or interest groups)?
- What easements should be acquired?
- Which roads should be closed?
- What right-of-way exclusion areas are needed?
- What areas will be open, limited, or closed to motorized vehicle travel?
- How will classification of use be determined (e.g., foot, vehicle, horseback)?
- Where should travel management areas be delineated?
- What would be acceptable modes of access and travel for each travel management area?

2.2.6.2. Public Comment Summary

Issue Overview

BLM requires comprehensive travel management address all resource use aspects (such as recreational, traditional, casual, agricultural, commercial, and educational) and accompanying modes and conditions of travel on public lands, not just motorized or off highway vehicle (OHV) activities. Comments received were divided both for and against Off Highway Vehicle/ All Terrain Vehicles (OHV- ATV) use. The management of OHVs was determined to be a separate issue and will be discussed in more detail under that specific issue. Non motorized users asked for more horse, bike and foot trails. Other comments stated that motorized users can be destructive

to public lands; leaving behind trash and visual scars, increasing erosion, fragmenting and destroying wildlife habitat, access and removal of cultural sites, damaging fences, and increasing traffic. Other concerns were identified for specific trails and their management such as the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail. Trespass is an issue where private or tribal land is being crossed to access public lands. Road closure or limited access to RPFO public lands was also a concern. Respondents suggested that Rio Puerco Field Office cooperate with the Forest Service, county and state to assure that route designations and implementation actions are well coordinated.

Representative Comments

- “Foot Bridges over Chihuilla Wash and Rio Puerco – We recommend the BLM construct foot bridges across the Rio Puerco and Chihuilla Wash in order to provide use throughout most of the year of both the Northwest and Southeast Routes. Both watercourses can be impassable many days of the year due to running water and mud flats. Crossing on these days would require a footbridge designed to withstand occasional inundation by high water flows.”
- “Several ranchers have voiced concerns that trail designations may cause undesirable effects such as attraction of motorized vehicles, illegal woodcutters, and persons who would not respect livestock, fences, and nearby private lands. We believe this potential can be minimized by careful choice of routes, signage, and volunteer oversight. BLM, however, must reinforce its intent that these public lands have multiple uses.”
- “We recommend that the BLM consider recreational equestrian use of portions of the Northwest and Southeast loop trails in planning gates, trailheads, and water sources.”
- “Hiking trails for different ability levels, and perhaps even some handicap-accessible trails would be very useful. Perimeter parking to keep vehicles out of neighborhoods would help. No expensive maintenance would be necessary with low-impact usage.”
- “The BLM should create a Special Recreation Management Area for 4 WD use at San Ysidro. A trail system suitable for 4WD’s should be established west of the existing single-track trails. It would not conflict with the existing Memorandum of Understanding between the BLM and the New Mexico Trails Association. The BLM should create a Special Recreation Management Area for Four Wheel Drive (4WD) use at Cimarron Mesa southwest of State Highway 6 and west of Los Lunas.”
- “Limiting Unit 5 to the existing infrastructure access, primitive roads, and trails will maintain the quiet recreation character of the area. Traditional

- universal trail signs should be posted and maintained. Local control would assure the signage is maintained.”
- “The sound of boots or hoofs on trails doesn’t disturb the enjoyment of the open space for local human nor wildlife residents.”
 - “Roads that go out to well and sites become accessible to off-road vehicle users and increase the probability of poaching. Truck traffic from drilling sites and mining sites causes more road kills.”
 - “We are asking that all aspects of travel management –all uses, all user groups, accesses, easements, roads/trails, and rights-of-way-be considered only after each parcel managed by BLM has been assessed for its value pertaining to wildlife linkages and/or habitats.”
 - “Existing roads remain open to vehicle traffic.”
 - “I have possessed a permit from the Albuquerque Office, Rio Puerco area, and Ojito area for approximately one year. Therefore this issue is very important to me. My love for the landscape, history and culture is just as intense as those volunteers and employees of the BLM. I have acted in a steward type role reporting over use, trash and even helped your office recover artifacts in danger of theft or loss. I have been reporting and attempting to be as diligent in paper work, pre-trips post trips etc. Therefore, I would like to request a change in the RMP for guides doing business on the BLM. I would request that trails be opened to guides who have proving themselves, perhaps after a probationary period, for areas that are locked and accessible only by key those areas that are already open to volunteers. I would also expect that back rounds be don’t etc. to ensure that this access is to those guides with as much integrity as possible. This has a dual purpose. First the area is visited in a much more routine type patrol thereby giving law enforcement or archaeologist and idea on how better to manage. Second this benefits our economy by allowing out of state visitors, or locals, such as seniors or students, the ability to study our state.”
 - “My wife and I moved to N.M. to be able to explore the deserts and mountains and to enjoy the dark night skies. We believe in doing this by using multiple tools. One, we use our Jeep, motorcycle, hike camp, telescopes, bicycle, to get into the Rio Puerco area. Two, we have joined the New Mexico 4 wheelers club, the New Mexico Trials Association, The Albuquerque Astronomical Society, and The Rio Rancho Astronomy club. All these organizations have provided us with great resources to enhance our NM experience. Please keep the Rio Puerco area open to multi use. Specifically, please keep the San Ysidro Trials Riding Area open to the NMTA. They have been wonderful caretakers. I use the area for trials motorcycle riding, hiking camping, astronomical observing, thanks to its dark sky viewing. I also ride my bicycle there. This is great multi use area. I believe the area west of the single tracks could be developed for off road rock crawling for the NM4w’ers clubs. Please, also open the Cimarron Mesa area for 4WD use. Develop the land at the end of Southern in Rio Rancho for multi use off roading, marking designated routes. The clubs I am a member of would like to help you mark, maintain, and educate the general public on the correct way to care for these multi use areas. Please take advantage of any grants from government and manufacturers to help develop these areas. The Albuquerque area is growing, and all these people are going to go to this Rio Puerco area to recreate. We must have a multi use plan in place. If these areas are just closed off to all but a few hikers, the Rio Puerco area will become an area of “cops and robbers”. The BLM will spend all it’s time trying to police the area. If this area is developed with a multi use plan, people will know where to go to enjoy this area, and with the help of clubs like the ones I have joined and supported, you would have strong allies to care for the beautiful Rio Puerco.”
 - “My family and friends use the area west of Cuba very often. We like to look at the elk and scenery while riding our dirt bikes and four wheelers. We usually camp about four weekends and make about ten day trips to this area per year. We also participate in the annual “Oh My God 100” desert race which is held in this area. We get gas and groceries in Cuba, and regularly eat lunch at the Cuban Café.”
 - “I am a member of the New Mexico 4 Wheelers, a four wheel drive club that participates in family recreation via my four wheel drive vehicle. I love to explore the back country and really enjoy seeing geological and historic sites throughout the area. Use of four wheel drive trails is highly important to my experience of the back country and I would appreciate you leaving as many miles open as possible.”
 - “As an officer in the club I would like to request that the BLM take full advantage of the willing volunteers within the NM4W organization to identify, develop and maintain 4WD routes.”
 - “Here is the section of the Sandia Ranger District EA on Travel Management with the statement from SHPO. This is page 114 in Chapter 3, Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences. Note this statement “The relative potential for damage depends on the number of miles of trails in each alternative.” This totally fails to recognize that if someone wants to illegally excavate a site, reducing the amount of trail mileage will not make that more likely. One could argue that having more

- eyes on the site is better than having a site off in a remote area where criminal activity is less likely to be observed by the public.”
- “Routes must maintain a wide range of difficulties, and span a broad range of terrain types. “4-Wheelers” do not necessarily require graded, maintained roads.”
 - “All travel and trails management in Unit 5 should be consistent with low-impact conservation uses. Pedestrian and horseback use should be permitted. In general, motorized vehicle travel would not be consistent with low-impact conservation uses. For example, Unit 5 should not support a possible “loop” road. Small motorized recreational vehicles could be permissible where they do not adversely impact archeological, watershed or other critical resources.”
 - “The NM4W club officials note that there are financial resources such as governmental and manufacturer’s grants that have been successfully used at many other locations in other states to develop and maintain 4WD trails. My wife and I would personally support such efforts to continue to build trails for current and future generations of off-road enthusiasts and hobbyists.”
 - “I think existing roads should stay open, though I do agree with limiting OHV to these roads.”
 - “As a community member, I support and would hope for the setting up of non-motorized corridors connecting the village of Cuba to the Continental Divide Trail, as special recreation management areas improved with water, information pamphlets, etc. at trail heads. It would be best to have special designation for the CDT as routed across BLM lands close by Cuba, linking current routes with further development of trails, with walking access from the won to public lands. This would benefit both CDT users and the community in areas of economics, recreation and health.”
 - “I believe only non-motorized use of trails for the CDT and its spurs. Trail corridors should be designated for SRMA’s and BLM should work with partners such as CDTA and Step into Cuba. BLM should develop trail heads with improvements such as lights, bill boards and some facilities.”
 - “We recommend that a spur trail of the CDT be constructed from the mouth of Kinard Arroyo to US Forest Service land at the southwest edge of Cuba Mesa. This narrow corridor should be designated for non-motorized use and managed with the same special considerations of the rest of the CDT.”
 - “We recommend construction of a hiking trail from the mouth of Kinard Arroyo along a BLM corridor to New Mexico Highway 126. This narrow corridor should be designated for non-motorized use and maintained for recreational walking and hiking.”
 - “Recommend the Rio Puerco Field Office, U.S. Bureau of Land Management join a coalition of public and non-profit entities to develop a scenic

loop trail circling Cuba and providing multiple trailheads for access.”

- “I have been enjoying riding trials at the San Ysidro site with my family since I was a kid, and am now privileged to bring my own kids there for the same. It seems to be a model of successful management of public lands, and I commend the BLM for how you have managed the area thus far. I understand that there is pressure to open the main parking area that the New Mexico Trails Association uses to other user groups. I don’t see a problem with the area being open to other groups, but using a separate access site would avoid conflicts between user groups. I would hope you would consider the lack of areas open to the type of recreation the trials club practices, and the long and successful relationship between the NMTA and BLM when making a decision. If hikers and mountain bikers are using the same parking/camping area as the trials club there certainly be members of those groups that work to remove the NMTA from the area. The number of public land available for trials events or practice is dwindling fast and the importance of the Sand Ysidro site increases each year as we find it more difficult to use other public land sites that we used in the past.”
- “Roads should have access for hunters, fisherman and ranchers and access to mining claims.

2.2.7. Issue 7—Public Land-Urban Interface

This issue is defined by the conflicts that occur between the management of public lands and the development of population centers or related infrastructure adjacent to those lands. Frequently referred to as “Wildland Urban Interface” (WUI), the term “public land-urban interface” more correctly identifies its broader context. Public land-urban interface issues are prevalent around the cities of Albuquerque and Rio Rancho and the Village of Placitas. Some of the affected areas in need of further analysis include the Candy Kitchen subdivision (east of Ramah), the Cuba/Torreon area, Placitas, and the Sedora holdings (west of Los Lunas). Associated public land-urban interface concerns include fire management, mineral development, recreation and visual resources management. Questions associated with this issue are similar to those raised for other issues.

- What areas should be considered for right of way corridors?
- What easements should be acquired?
- What areas are suitable for communication sites, and where should they be excluded?
- What areas should be considered for use for Recreation and Public Purposes (R&PP), and where should such uses be excluded?
- What areas have potential for oil and gas exploration?

- What areas have potential for energy resource development?
- What areas should be mined (i.e. for sand, gravel, travertine, uranium)?
- What types of recreational uses should be allowed in specially designated areas of public land?
- Should development be limited or excluded from some areas to protect scenic and other values?

Issue Overview

Many Public Land Urban Interface issue comments received were similar to comments on the VRM issue. Most comments expressed a concern for development of BLM lands adjacent to residential areas. Any development was generally viewed as inappropriate from an ecological, aesthetic and public health point of view by many residential communities, especially those in Unit 5. Open space shielding residential communities from development of private, tribal and other lands had a great deal of support from many of the comments submitted. Noisy, high impact recreational use of public lands adjacent to residential communities was cited in many of the comments as unwanted uses of the land. Preservation of cultural values was emphasized in some of the comments concerning lands located in the public land-urban interface while others focused on wildlife and scenic landscapes.

Representative Comments

- “Maintain a buffer zone between the urbanizing areas of Placitas occurring on private lands and the industrial uses occurring on the western extreme of Tract A and the San Felipe Pueblo lands to the north.”
- “The BLM must consider the long-term predictions about climate change in the planning area. Vegetation conditions are unlikely to improve. Given this, the BLM must consider the extant resources of the planning area as renewable within limits. The context of this plan should be to conserve as much as possible as a buffer against the unknown.”
- “The RMP/EIS should also consider these key findings of a recent report on climate change: weeds grow more rapidly under elevated atmospheric CO₂, invasion by exotic grass species into arid lands will result from climate change, causing an increase fire frequency and rivers and riparian systems in arid lands will be negatively impacted. The BLM must now treat these impacts (and all relevant others identified in the report) as cumulative effects, contextual conditions, and part of the environmental baseline. “
- “I also recommend no further commercial or residential development on BLM land in Placitas.” Water supply here is uncertain at best – some communities are out nearly every summer. Congestion is also a problem in the area already.”
- “No development.”
- “Generally, speaking, the lands of Tracts A, B and C should be maintained for what are termed “conservation uses.” These uses include: maintenance of a buffer zone between the urbanizing areas of Placitas occurring on private lands and the industrial uses occurring on the western extreme of Tract A and the San Felipe Pueblo lands to the north.”
- “Maintenance and management of the lands for conservation uses necessarily precludes another class of uses, termed “development uses.” These uses include: residential and commercial development.”
- “No land tenure adjustment for development, roads, or public energy easements.”
- “I support Cultural and Historical Rural Economic Development efforts associated with the San Antonio de Las Huertas Land Grant.”
- “Having seen two unpleasant confrontations on the BLM land adjacent to my property due to aggressive intrusions by off-road motorcycles and four wheelers, I am convinced that pitting those citizens highly sensitive to high noise and environmental damage against those seeking assertion of their right to pass through that terrain regardless impact is setting the stage for conflict. A big part of the reason people invest in Placitas is for the relative peace and quiet. I doubt that buffer zones would reduce conflict due to the wide range intrusive quality of noise and surface damage usually produced by off-road vehicles in desert terrain. These activities should be restricted to areas well away from residential neighborhoods as the perception of having rights does extend to those who have to listen to the noise generated by these vehicles or feel the need to speak on behalf of the plants and wildlife which area an integral part of the environment. I recognize there are many highly responsible off-road enthusiasts. But in close proximity to residential neighborhoods the outcome is not likely good on two fronts; it creates a perpetual source of irritation for the homeowner and a very limited set of options for the high powered enthusiast.”
- “Development needs to be planned and North East Corridor to either community may play havoc with the water resources for both humans and wild life.” “In the mountain lowland communities east of the Sandia Mountains and Albuquerque, rapid development of largely upper class subdivision (complete with approved planned golf courses) has recently caused water demand to exceed the carrying capacity of local aquifers. Landowners in the adjacent Estancia Basin (a closed basin to the east) are currently pumping large volumes of ground water to these East Mountain communities to meet these increasing demands. In April of 1998, county officials placed a moratorium on

- further subdivision development until groundwater studies of the region can be undertaken. Not unlike Placitas, the East Mountain area is characterized by complex structural and stratigraphic controls on ground-water flow between mountain recharge areas and adjacent basins and these are poorly understood.”
- “It may be good idea to save the water under the Placitas BLM and not allocating it for development or industrial uses to save it for future use by Placitans some of whom are now mining ancient water.”
 - “I support the Placitas Coalition’s efforts for all the animals currently and or recently on BLM lands.” “I do object to any kind of housing development, for it will take away our joy of walking, hiking, bike riding, learning of variety of wild flowers, etc. or enjoying nature itself.” “Additional residential or commercial development is also a highly undesirable use of this land due to the added traffic congestion and pollution, and to the highly questionable availability of sufficient water for even the present development”
 - “Local management/control of the surrounding BLM lands through a joint state or local ownership would offset the lack of BLM manpower to regularly and effectively manage reclamation and unmonitored commercial use to assure safe enjoyment of the land for decades to come. Local control over the surrounding BLM land would allow residents to be creative in its use. Placitans could create a solar powered or other green energy production cooperative modeled after the Rural Electric Cooperatives of the 1950s in response to Global Warming. The area has more than a dozen existing Water cooperatives operating for years and is experienced in working together to cooperatively produce and distribute product.”
 - “There has been dramatic population increases in Placitas, the Albuquerque, Santa Fe, and East Mountain community since the previous RMP was implemented and amended. High density zoning in the cities of Rio Rancho and Bernalillo plus urban infill zoning in the city of Albuquerque brings more and more demand for public recreation away from residential areas. Because Unit 5 is close to urban areas, surrounded by residents and makes up only 1% of the total Rio Puerco District in Sandoval Count it should be considered and urban oasis for recreation in the future and preserved in its natural state. Lands not protected now will be unavailable for protection in 20 years. Because the Albuquerque area is severely limited in its ability to expand, pressure will be exerted on dense use of all available land in the area. Non-tribe held land will be exploited for development, tribe land will be excluded for public use, and residents will lose all access to open space and free non-urban recreational opportunities.”
 - “The 5,000 acre Unit 5 is unique in that is easily accessible to the 500,000 plus Albuquerque area population providing a natural pinion and juniper woodland area for quiet recreation. Sweeping vistas, wide watersheds, grassy plains, and high bluffs offer hikers, photographers and wildlife observers a human connection with the vast biodiversity and cultural experiences of the high desert southwest not afforded anywhere else in the Albuquerque East Side Area. There have been dramatic population increases in Placitas, the Albuquerque, Santa Fe, and East Mountain community since the previous RMP was implemented and amended. Zoning in the cities of Rio Rancho and Bernalillo plus urban infill zoning in the city of Albuquerque brings more and more demand for public recreation away from densely populated residential areas. Because Unit 5 is so close to urban areas it should be considered and urban oasis for recreation in the future and preserved in its natural state.”
 - “WHOA and Placitans have put up over 4.5 miles of fencing in the last 3 years and maintained another 2 miles. This is to say, that Placitans are active, concerned, and responsible in the area of herbivore and other wild life protection and want these BLM lands under more local control than the BLM can provide as a federal agency. In general and in Placitas, the BLM relies on the permittees for fencing; however, Placitans have provided labor, money, and expertise to put up miles of safety fencing over the past few years.”
 - “People have concerns that with a Northeast Corridor and the associated development, traffic, water and wildlife issues, there would be increased crime and noise pollution, etc. If there were a park, traffic could be mitigated by the land tenure adjustments recommended and /or by the use of docents who would drive one car/van from the Coronado Monument or the Bernalillo Train station with multiple tourists in one vehicle by appointment.”
 - “Given that the BLM Unit 5 Planning Area abuts tribal land to the north and the west (Indian flats Mesa) and farther north to the east, an interface that buffers the Placitas community is absolute control over their use. In the exercise of their rights, it is possible that the Tribes might permit (temporary or permanent) uses that would adversely affect the Placitas community. Without an interface, current residents and property owners on private land would be adversely impacted. Or, if BLM were to dispose of all or a portion of Unit 5 for residential development (which I do not recommend), future residents and property owners as well as the community could be harmed. Therefore, I recommend that a public land-urban interface be established on the BLM lands in northern Unit 5 to buffer the community. This is of particular

importance in the area of Indian Flats Mesa where BLM lands to the north are very close to Tribal property. The concept, uses and benefits of buffer zones are well known and clearly articulated in planning literature. The Placitas public land-urban interface could allow low impact conversation uses as previously described. As envisioned, it would be part of the designated ACEC.”

- “This planning process is the time to anticipate the effect of human use and encroachment on wildlife habitat resulting in less acres, decline in habitat quality and isolation of habitats. You have proposed public lands urban interfaces as a planning issue, but none of the questions for this issue consider wildlife habitat.”
- “Finally, must we continually sacrifice the habitats of our state’s precious wildlife? The large subdivisions of the East Mountain area have already had a negative impact on the area’s natural wildlife: cougars, coyotes, wild turkeys, to name a few. The wild horses* area state treasure with, as I understand it, a genetic heritage that dates back to the Spanish conquistadors. Creating a state- or locally owned park* to protect these wonderful animals would provide further evidence that New Mexicans live in a civilized society that protects its vulnerable creatures.”
- “Please move the consumptive uses of resources farther away from existing residential developments. I understand we need these resources, but I also know there are options for obtaining them that will not impact existing developments.”
- “This Unit 5 BLM land contains cultural sites and is of scenic value to residents and everyone who recreate there. Needless to say, our unscathed views of this BLM land are reflected in the price I paid for my home.”
- “Public lands must be managed for multiple uses regardless of their locations. Lands in close proximity to urban areas should not be subject to special management designations catered to the nearest private landowners. If these lands are managed for specific uses a fee mechanism for capturing the deferred multiple use value should be developed and charged to the local community requesting the special designation. This would be no different than any other multiple use of the land in which to those deriving the benefit (grazing, timber, and energy development) pay a fee.”
- “Vehicle access restrictions must apply to all users of public land equally, including permit holders and administrative users. If an area is identified as closed to vehicle use it should be closed to all uses equally. Limited use areas need designated arterial roads open to all users of public land.”
- “In a broader sense, the residents of Overlook are concerned about the rapid development of the

Placitas area which places pressure on private land owners who value the semi-rural, quiet and visually beautiful aspects of this location. With increasing pressure of urbanization of this area, pressure also will increase on the BLM to consider a variety of uses for the federal lands surrounding Placitas beyond the current open space. As residents of this area, we value greatly the regional visual aesthetics, the unique character of the ecology, freedom of the wildlife to exist with us, and the unique historical and cultural character of this region. In view of the uniqueness of the Placitas area, we believe that retention of open space for recreation and ecological well being throughout this area without further development would be in the best interests of the local population, and the people of the greater of southern New Mexico.”

- “I am a single dad and I spend time with my children on BLM land. I am not a miner, it is a hobby to look for rocks and gold. My kids enjoy going out and being in God’s Creation. Please don’t take this privilege from us.” “We are not in favor of any restrictions on the use of BLM land”
- “Let’s face it, this is the desert and water is always a concern. Opening up the tract (Placitas) to real estate development – even residential – could endanger and already fragile water situation. With new development, future water demands could have a devastating effect on the quality of life, the ecosystem and economic viability of the Placitas area. Once developed, there is no turning back. When water becomes scarce, millions of dollars would have to be spent to find and import other sources.”
- “Commercial development should be restricted to a narrow easement along the roadways only.” “Concerned about running a gas/oil pipeline anywhere near the Placitas residents’ housing.”

2.2.8. Off-Highway Vehicles (OHV) Use

2.2.8.1. Preparation Plan Preliminary Issues/Planning Questions

OHV use was added as an issue during the comment analysis period. One issue, OHV use, was added to the list of preliminary issues as a result of the comments received normally as a subsidiary issue to Trails and Travel. The number of the comments concerning OHV use generated a need to consider it as a separate but related issue. Therefore, the issue and planning questions include those that were determined in the Trails and Travel issue. Also, Issue questions from the Special Designation Issue can also be applied to OHV.

2.2.8.2. Public Comment Summary

Issue Overview

The comments concerning OHV use issue varied between those that are opposed to the use and those that enjoy their sport on public land. The comments submitted make it clear that it will be important to keep the public involved in the evolving management and administrative decisions that will come from the Resource Management Plan process. Impacts, both cultural and ecological, will have to be evaluated when designating areas for OHV use. Historically, OHV users have been well organized and active in ensuring the continuation of their sport. Those against the use of OHV on public lands are concerned for preserving the land and desire a lower impact form of recreational use. Also, it is clear that each group will need to be aware of the other's perspectives and positions concerning OHV uses on the public lands.

Representative Comments

- “Protect wilderness quality lands and together sensitive or special places by restricting other, damaging uses such as ORV, oil and gas drilling, and uranium mining, and using protective designations such as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern and Special Recreation Management Areas.”
- “Several ranchers have voiced concerns that trail designations may cause undesirable effects such as attraction of motorized vehicles, illegal woodcutters, and persons who would not respect livestock, fences, and nearby private lands. We believe this potential can be minimized by careful choice of routes, signage, and volunteer oversight. BLM, however, must reinforce its intent that these public lands have multiple uses.”
- “Having seen two unpleasant confrontations on the BLM land adjacent to my property due to aggressive intrusions by off-road motorcycles and four wheelers, I am convinced that pitting those citizens highly sensitive to high noise and environmental damage against those seeking assertion of their right to pass through that terrain regardless impact is setting the stage for conflict. A big part of the reason people invest in Placitas is for the relative peace and quiet. I doubt that buffer zones would reduce conflict due to the wide range intrusive quality of noise and surface damage usually produced by off-road vehicles in desert terrain. These activities should be restricted to areas well away from residential neighborhoods as the perception of having rights does extend to those who have to listen to the noise generated by these vehicles or feel the need to speak on behalf of the plants and wildlife which area an integral part of the environment. I recognize there are many highly responsible off-road enthusiasts. But in close proximity to residential neighborhoods the outcome is not likely good on two fronts; it creates a perpetual source of irritation for the homeowner and a very limited set of options for the high powered enthusiast.”
- “I support setting aside land for open spaces, wildlife and recreation but do not want any options for noisy off highway vehicles such as all terrain vehicles. These types of off-road vehicles should not be allowed as they are frightening to animals and extremely disruptive to humans.”
- “Elsewhere in the planning area, ORVs should be restricted to designated routes where BLM is absolutely certain they will not damage wild life habitat or archeological sites and they will not disturb other visitors.”
- “I support setting aside land for open spaces, wildlife and recreation. What is incongruent with those three items are off highway vehicles such as all terrain vehicles. All recreation on open lands within a minimum of three (3) miles of any residence in Placitas should be quiet recreation (i.e. no motorized vehicles of any kind). Preferable, these type of off-road vehicles would not be allowed as they are extremely disruptive and frightening to animals.”
- “We oppose the presence of ATM(V)'s and motocross type motorcycles on the Unit 5 BLM parcel. These vehicles tear up the terrain and leave an unsightly mess that is prone to erosion. The noise from these vehicles disturbs the tranquility of the Placitas community. (A visit to the Journal Pavilion in the South Valley which is open to the motorcycles and ATV's will demonstrate the terrain destruction caused by the vehicles – it is really ugly out there.)”
- “A major interest of mine is to drive a full sized 4x4 (Jeep Cherokee) on back-country roads and 4x4 trails. I cherish motorized access so that I can enjoy unique scenery, cultural resources such Anasazi remnants and old mines sites, and to visit very remote areas on our public lands. I enjoy challenging trails and have made modifications to my Jeep to enhance the vehicle's back-country capabilities and safety. While I have traveled extensively throughout the Southwest, I believe that outstanding motorized recreational opportunities could be developed in the Rio Puerco area. As motorized recreational opportunities on public lands disappear, development of managed OHV areas are of great value to the public and to the BLM. The Rio Puerco Resource Management Plan should make provisions for meeting current and future needs of four Wheel Drive (4WD) recreationists.”
- “ATVs, of course, are very noisy and would have a very negative impact on anyone hiking on BLM trails. ATVs already have areas where they are welcome and out of earshot of residential areas; areas of Rio Rancho, on land near the airport and

- the track and hill climbs 20 miles west of Placitas.”
 “Existing roads remain open to vehicle traffic for access. This includes ATV’s.”
- “The growth or ORV traffic on BLM public lands has become a west wide problem. This RMP revision should address it squarely by adopting a ban on cross-country ORV travel and requiring ORVs to stay on routes BLM has designated for their use. The route designation process should include clear standards to keep ORV’s out of lands with wilderness characteristics, WSAs and high-value wildlife habitat, and away from places where recreational visitors go seeking a quiet place for hiking, picnicking, camping, hunting, and wildlife-watching.”
 - “OHV to us are the ATVs that are anything but quiet. The BLM land adjoining our Sundance Mesa should be restricted to quiet recreation to at least 2,000 yards within our property lines.”
 - “The BLM should create a Special Recreation Management Area for 4 WD use at San Ysidro. A trail system suitable for 4WD’s should be established west of the existing single-track trails. It would not conflict with the existing Memorandum of Understanding between the BLM and the New Mexico Trails Association. The BLM should create a Special Recreation Management Area for Four Wheel Drive (4WD) use at Cimarron Mesa southwest of State Highway 6 and west of Los Lunas.”
 - “Roads that go out to well and sites become accessible to off-road vehicle users and increase the probability of poaching.” Truck traffic from drilling sites and mining sites causes more road kills.”
 - “I am requesting the 5,000 BLM administered acres in Unit 5 of the Rio Puerco District (defined as allotment 00971 and 00972 that are adjacent to my home be allocated to “Quiet Recreational Activities”. ATV’s and motorcycles that use this area do not stay on the trails and cause erosion, damage the plant life (watershed) and disturb the wildlife. These areas should be limited to hiking, horseback riding, bicycle riding, etc. Additionally shooting should be strictly prohibited on any of these lands. The current use of these lands by people hunting and target shooting creates a very dangerous situation for all the other people hiking, etc., not to mention the wildlife.” “My family enjoys off road motorcycle riding on BLM lands and hope that the BLM doesn’t follow the lead of the forest service in closing access to vehicles that have been on the land and trails for 30+ years.”
 - “I am 33 and the father of two boys, 15 and 4 years old. While my older son plays baseball, football, and enjoys freestyle BMX, dirt biking is the one activity that all three of us can participate together. With no coaches to interfere, it is the one recreational activity that helps me communicate with my children and teach them the valuable life lessons that all children need to learn. We have found that riding brings us closer together and allows us to experience nature and the outdoors in such a way that we could no experience otherwise. Having these lands to ride on plays an essential role with family’s health and happiness. I look forward to insuring that the responsible use of these lands gets passed on to future generations and am very interested in providing my input, opinions, ideas and problem solving skills to reach that goal.”
 - “My wife and I moved to N.M. to be able to explore the deserts and mountains and to enjoy the dark night skies. We believe in doing this by using multiple tools. One, we use our Jeep, motorcycle, hike camp, telescopes, bicycle, to get into the Rio Puerco area. Two, we have joined the New Mexico 4 wheelers club, the New Mexico Trials Association, The Albuquerque Astronomical Society, and The Rio Rancho Astronomy club. All these organizations have provided us with great resources to enhance our NM experience. Please keep the Rio Puerco area open to multi use. Specifically, please keep the San Ysidro Trials Riding Area open to the NMTA. They have been wonderful caretakers. I use the area for trials motorcycle riding, hiking camping, astronomical observing, thanks to its dark sky viewing. I also ride my bicycle there. This is great multi use area. I believe the area west of the single tracks could be developed for off road rock crawling for the NM4w’ers clubs. Please, also open the Cimarron Mesa area for 4WD use. Develop the land at the end of Southern in Rio Rancho for multi use off roading, marking designated routes. The clubs I am a member of would like to help you mark, maintain, and educate the general public on the correct way to care for these multi use areas. Please take advantage of any grants from government and manufacturers to help develop these areas. The Albuquerque area is growing, and all these people are going to go to this Rio Puerco area to recreate. We must have a multi use plan in place. If these areas are just closed off to all but a few hikers, the Rio Puerco area will become an area of “cops and robbers” The BLM will spend all it’s time trying to police the area. If this area is developed with a multi use plan, people will know where to go to enjoy this area, and with the help of clubs like the ones I have joined and supported, you would have strong allies to care for the beautiful Rio Puerco.”
 - “With a fifty-year local history, the NM4W’ers have a long record of motorized recreation in the Rio Puerco Management Area (RPMA). The thousands of miles of routes in the RPMA make it impossible to effectively identify routes critical to motorized users. All routes currently allowing motorized use are critical to the broad range of users including the club. As motorized use is restricted on more and more public land, including land managed by

- other agencies, the remaining open routes become even more critical. It is imperative that the public retains motorized access to all the public lands in the RPMA. This continued access is critical to supporting all historical uses including recreational use. Specifically, recreational use by the 4WD public requires several criteria be met. First, the mileage available must be of sufficient quantity to be meaningful. Daily mileage required by 4WD's in a recreational setting varies dramatically depending on the specific activity. Drivers seeking low challenge backcountry driving for pleasure may cover over one hundred miles in a day. Obviously, many miles of this type of driving are needed to present frequent users enough variety to meet their needs. On the other end of the spectrum, specialists seeking extreme challenge in highly modified vehicles may take eight hours or more to travel a single mile. While the mileage requirements are extremely low to meet this unique need, the type of terrain that provides adequate challenge is very specific and may not be present in large amounts. A high quality route system seeks to maximize the mileage available to users and for all user types. This maximum mileage is desired to keep use within sustainable levels, meet future projected growth, and to provide a sense of solitude and discovery. Believe it or not, the motorized public enjoys the same attributes of public land that the non-motorized public enjoys, including solitude and the thrill of discovery. The second aspect that must be taken into account when inventorying and categorizing potential routes is that a wide variety of types of terrain and challenge levels that users prefer. Motorized recreationists specifically seek out all levels of challenge and terrain types, including both ends of the spectrum described above and everything in between. In order to meet these needs, the route system should include as much variety as possible. The NM4W have identified two potential areas for the type of high challenge, extreme terrain required for quality rock crawling recreation. These two areas are near San Ysidro and Cimarron Mesa west of Los Lunas. The area near San Ysidro has many qualities that position it as a truly world-class rock crawling opportunity. Cimarron Mesa offers an additional opportunity for development trail system oriented toward rock crawling opportunities.”
- “My family and friends use the area west of Cuba very often. We like to look at the elk and scenery while riding our dirt bikes and four wheelers. We usually camp about four weekends and make about ten day trips to this area per year. We also participate in the annual “Oh My God 100” desert race which is held in this area. We get gas and groceries in Cuba, and regularly eat lunch at the Cuban Café.”
 - “I am a member of the New Mexico 4 Wheelers, a four wheel drive club that participates in family recreation via my four wheel drive vehicle. I love to explore the back country and really enjoy seeing geological and historic sites throughout the area. Use of four wheel drive trails is highly important to my experience of the back country and I would appreciate you leaving as many miles open as possible.”
 - “I also hunt and use my vehicle to access distant areas to get away from the populace. Use of the four wheel drive trails for this purpose is important to my solitude when hunting. I like to camp in remote areas and enjoy gazing at the stars when out there in the backcountry. Therefore, maximizing routes that travel through areas and connect with other routes is important. However, one-way routes that branch from these “connecting” routes are always fun to travel, especially when they take you to a historic or geological site.”
 - “We oppose the use of BLM land for ATV use because this permanently destroys the delicate desert landscape, particularly in the Montezuma Peak area of Placitas.”
 - “My request to you is that this area (San Ysidro trials area) continues to be designated as an exclusive off road area for trials motorcycles only, not for any other type of off road vehicle use.”
 - “With regard to other concerns, ATV’s, mining, target practice, et., these are not what we would like to see, but we will be working with this coalition (Placitas Coalition) to find compromise positions with regard to SAFETY, for human beings and wildlife; our main concern is to keep the Placitas BLM lands as an open space for all to enjoy.”
 - “In the Rio Puerco Management Area, there are many, many miles of trails that have existed for many years, open to the public, that off-road enthusiasts use. I believe it is imperative that the public continue to be allowed use of those trails in the RPMA. Simply keeping open a few miles of trails is not sufficient. This is because a significant amount of time is required to maintain vehicles and drive to and from the trailheads. Such an investment in time by the hobbyist, to only drive on a short trail, is detrimental to the sport. A high-quality route system will be a resource to the public for many years in the future.”
 - “The Draft RMP should point out that BLM can and should protect wilderness and areas by restricting other, damaging uses such as withdrawing areas from leasing and mineral extraction, requiring no surface occupancy for energy development, including timing stipulations designed to protect wildlife during sensitive time periods, and prohibiting or limiting motorized travel and off-road vehicle use.”

- “I think existing roads should stay open, though I do agree with limiting OHV to these roads.”

2.3. Anticipated Decisions

Future RMP-level decisions will be made on a broad scale. These decisions will identify management direction and guide future actions for the planning area. The RMP will provide a comprehensive framework for managing the numerous demands on resources managed by the BLM.

The vision for the Rio Puerco Field Office planning area will be described in the RMP in terms of desired outcomes, which represent one of two categories of RMP-level decisions. Desired outcomes will be expressed in terms of specific goals, standards, and objectives. Goals are broad statements of desired outcomes (e.g., ensure sustainable development). Standards are descriptions of conditions or the degree of function required (e.g., land health standards). Objectives are specific, quantifiable, and measurable desired conditions for resources (e.g., manage sagebrush communities to achieve a certain canopy cover by the year 2015). The second category of RMP-level decisions, allowable uses and actions to achieve desired outcomes, will be expressed in the RMP as allowable uses, actions needed, and land tenure decisions. Livestock grazing, administrative designations (e.g., ACECs), and land disposal are examples of some RMP level decisions in this category.

The RMP makes broad-scale decisions that guide future land management actions and subsequent site-specific implementation decisions. Implementation decisions are often referred to as project-level or activity level decisions and represent the BLM’s final approval of on-the-ground actions. Implementation decisions require a more-detailed site-specific environmental analysis that will tie back to the EIS prepared for the RMP. Implementation decisions generally constitute final approval of on-the-ground actions to proceed. (Land Use Planning Handbook H-1601-1 IV(B)). An example of an implementation decision is development and management of a recreation site. In some circumstances, site-specific implementation decisions may be made through the RMP process.

2.4. Issues Raised that Will Not Be Addressed

The following raised issues were determined to be outside the scope of the BLM Resource Management Planning process (see Appendix D for more information of how comments were categorized):

1. BLM included a Travel and Trails Management issue in the Preparation Plan for the Rio Puerco

Resource Management Plan Revision/EIS. During the formal scoping period, many comments addressed this issue as a roads issue on non-BLM administered lands and these comments have been grouped and are being responded to as being outside of the scope of this planning effort. The rationale for this response is that road and transportation routes, other than those on BLM administered lands, are administered by other governmental agencies (Federal, State, County, Tribal, and Local). Therefore, location and development of the roads and routes are outside of the scope of this BLM Resource Management Planning process. Others suggested options to what was understood to be the loop route concept. The loop road relates to a County road concern or proposal. It is not a BLM proposal.

2. The Wild Horse and Burro Act of 1971 provided for an inventory of Wild Horses and Burros and for the establishment of Herd Management Areas. Regulations set forth at Code of Federal Regulations (43 CFR 4700) provides BLM’s guidance for operation and management of the program. As a result of the Act, an inventory conducted by the BLM indicated there were no wild horses in BLM’s Rio Puerco Field Office management area and consequently, no herd management area was established. The feral and unclaimed horses in the planning area, trespassing on BLM administered lands, are not a part of BLM’s inventory or management program as a result of the Act and will not be considered as a part of BLM’s resource management program in this Resource Management Plan process. Frequently in the comments, horses are associated with parks, State parks, wildlife corridors, open space or other resources or resource use. As clarification the BLM does not manage lands for parks and particularly not for state parks. BLM does manage wildlife habitat and this may include wildlife corridors. Processes provided through the Recreation and Public Purposes Act (R&PP) can provide space for other public purposes. These purposes could be considered in relation to Land Tenure Adjustment, Recreation or other land use issues. Habitat management and wild horse parks do not qualify under a R&PP lease.
3. Comments regarding groups with like or opposing views or interests are outside of the scope of this Resource Management Plan process. Expressions of personal opinions about others and their interests, most often, do not contribute data or information on which decisions can be based. Therefore, these types of comments are outside the scope of this planning effort and there is no response to these comments in this scoping report.
4. Some comments refer to implementation decisions made through administrative or resource program guidance and do not require land use planning

decisions in order to be resolved. The BLM land use planning process includes two levels of decisions:

- a. Land Use Plan Decisions establish desired outcomes and actions needed to achieve them. Decisions are reached using the planning processes outlined in 43 CFR 1600. They involve making land use allocations. Land use allocations are the identification, in a land use plan, of the activities and foreseeable development that are allowed, restricted, or excluded for all or part of the planning area, based on the desired future conditions.
 - b. Implementation Decisions are decisions to take action to implement land use plan decisions. Comments are considered to be outside the scope of this Land Use Planning effort when implementation decisions can be used to resolve these specific comment issues.
5. There are separate Programmatic EISs under development for the West-wide Energy Corridor, Solar Energy, and Geothermal Energy. Public comments received during scoping on these National BLM efforts are outside the scope of this planning process. (The public was informed during the scoping meetings that their comments on the Programmatic EISs should be directed to the appropriate project managers and addresses that are available on the BLM's Energy webpage). The decisions that will be made in these Programmatic EISs may amend certain existing BLM RMPs in New Mexico as well as nationwide. The Rio Puerco planning process will consider the decisions in the Programmatic documents for purposes of consistency and in compliance with the Energy Policy Act of 2005.
 6. The following comments were considered, but not addressed, because they are outside the scope of this planning effort and/or are outside of the BLM's decision making authority (Authority is with another agency or entity).
 - Placitas has been overpopulated for the resources available.
 - My static water level in my well is down to 65' from 100'.
 - As a state park, this (minerals and energy development should be off limits.
 - I also oppose the trapping of coyotes with leg clamp traps on public lands.
 - Please, open the Cimarron Mesa area for 4WD use. Develop the land at the end of Southern in Rio Rancho for multi use, off roading, marking designated routes.
 - We would love to assist you with accessing some of these funds to use for trails, kiosks, remote camping areas, and whatever else that may pertain to trails and trail use.
 - As a member of Animal Protection of New Mexico, I also oppose the trapping of coyotes with leg

clamp traps on public lands. These traps are cruel and inhumane and are set so close to public trails as to serve a physical danger to hikers, cyclists, and family pets.

- Develop the land at the end of Southern in Rio Rancho for multi use off roading, marking designated routes.
- Our quality and way of life will be irreparably harmed by this plan.
- Editorial corrections on preparation plan.
- I want to end the possibility of a Connecting Rd through the Placitas BLM from I 25 to RT 14. Land Tenure adjustment of the Al Baca lands or Santa Ana lands or other private lands for easement to the Frontage Rd (not I 25) for the state park.

2.5. Valid Existing Management

BLM-administered public land in the planning area is managed with direction from the Rio Puerco Resource Management Plan (1986). Although the RMP has been amended ten times over the past 20 years, numerous changes have occurred in the area, requiring reconsideration of certain management decisions. Many elements of the existing plan work well and remain valid, and BLM intends to carry many of these management decisions forward. Determining which existing management decisions will be carried forward is part of the planning process. The BLM will review existing resources and resource use conditions and the existing management situation in order to identify which existing management decisions should be carried forward and where there are opportunities to modify existing management direction and/or develop new management guidance. This review will be documented in the Analysis of the Management Situation, the next step in the planning process.

2.6. Special Designations

The BLM's Land Use Planning Handbook (H-1601-1) requires that application of the following administrative designations be considered when developing RMPs.

- Area of Critical Environmental Concern
- Scenic or Back Country Byways
- National Recreation Area
- National Trail
- Research Natural Area
- Special Recreation Management Area
- Wild and Scenic River

The following areas have been designated in the 1986 plan, as amended, and are being managed as special designations as applicable. These special designations will be analyzed and addressed in the Rio Puerco RMP revision. Anticipated decisions that may be discussed in the RP RMP Revision are:

- Changes in the special designation status (Special Management Areas are no longer valid term for designations and the status of these areas will have to be analyzed).
- Changes in special designation boundaries.
- Changes in amount of special designations due to new nominations.

There are three areas that will not be addressed in the Rio Puerco RMP Revision that were previously listed in the 1986 plan. These areas have been designated by acts of the U.S. Congress. Those plans will be incorporated by reference from this time forward.

- El Malpais is recognized as a National Conservation Area (NCA) and a separate resource management plan and associated environmental impact statement (EIS) have been developed for that area in December 2001.
- Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks is recognized as a National Monument and a separate resource management plan and associated environmental impact statement (EIS) has been developed for that area in June 2007.
- Ojito Wilderness has also been designated by the U.S. Congress and a resource management plan for that area will follow.

Nomination forms for specific areas will be filled out during the development of alternatives by the ID team and by participating public. All resource values will be taken into consideration when determining special designation nominations.

2.6.1. Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)

The Rio Puerco Resource Management plan will identify goals, standards, and objectives for each area, as well as general management practices and uses, including necessary constraints and mitigation measures (also see BLM Manual 1613). This direction should be specific enough to minimize the need for subsequent ACEC management plans. ACECs must meet the relevance and importance criteria in 43 CFR 1610.7-2(a) and must require special management (43 CFR 1601.0-5(a)) to:

- Protect the area and prevent irreparable damage to resources or natural systems.
- Protect life and promote safety in areas where natural hazards exist.

Also, the Rio Puerco RMP will consider the designation of research natural areas and outstanding natural areas as types of ACECs using the ACEC designation process.

The following are the current ACECs designated in the Rio Puerco Field Office planning area:

- Ball Ranch
- Bluewater Canyon

- Cabezon Peak
- Canyon Tapia
- Elk Springs
- Jones Canyon
- Ojito
- Pronoun Cave Complex
- San Luis Mesa Raptor Area
- Tent Rocks
- Torrejon Fossil Fauna - East and West Units

2.6.2. Back Country Byways

The Rio Puerco RMP revision will analyze potential for and designate BLM Back Country Byways as appropriate. Currently there are no back country byways designated within the Rio Puerco Field Office planning area. Detailed procedural guidance for nomination and designation of BLM byways, as well as other byway designations occurring on BLM lands (such as All American Roads, National Scenic Byways, State Scenic Byways, Forest Scenic Byways, and similar) can be found in Handbook 8357-1: Byways, 12/17/93.

2.6.3. Special Management Area (SMA)

Under current BLM guidance, SMAs are not recognized as valid area designations. The agency will, through analysis and evaluation determine designation status for each listed SMA and other prospective special areas based on established criteria specific to the above administrative designations.

The following are the current SMAs designated in the Rio Puerco Field Office planning area:

- Azabache Station
- 1870s Wagon Road Trail
- Ball Ranch
- Big Bead Mesa
- Bluewater Canyon
- Cabezon Peak
- Cañon Jarido
- Cañon Tapia
- Continental Divide Trail
- Elk Springs
- El Malpais
- Guadalupe Ruin and Community
- Headcut Prehistoric Community
- Historic Homesteads
- Ignacio Chavez
- Jones Canyon
- Ojito
- Pelon Watershed
- Petaca Pinta
- Pronoun Cave Complex
- San Luis Mesa Raptor Area
- Tent Rocks

- Torrejon Fossil Fauna

2.6.4. National Recreation Areas and Special Recreation Management Areas (SRMAs)

Currently there are three National Recreation Areas designated within the Rio Puerco Field Office planning area. They include:

- National Historic Landmark - Big Bend Mesa,
- National Historic Place - Guadalupe Ruin and Community, and
- Research Natural Area - Elk Springs.

Criteria for National Recreation Areas will be compared and recommendations may be made for specific areas. SRMA is another recreation designation that may be applied by which a public lands unit is identified in the land use plan to direct recreation funding and personnel to fulfill commitments made to provide specific, structured recreation opportunities (i.e., activity, experience, and benefit opportunities). Both land use plan decisions and subsequent implementing actions for recreation in each SRMA are geared to a strategically identified primary market—destination, community, or undeveloped.

2.6.5. National Trails

For designated national scenic and historic trails the Rio Puerco RMP revision will:

1. Identify goals, objectives and measures to achieve them, as well as allowable uses and surface restrictions to avoid potential adverse affects. Land use plans must also reference, incorporate, or be amended with provisions from applicable comprehensive management plans required by the National Trails System Act.
2. Establish VRM designations; identify SRMA, recreation management zones, and off-highway vehicle designations; identify trail-related lands for retention, acquisition, withdrawals, avoidance, and exclusion areas; identify appropriate special leasing conditions, terms, constraints, or stipulations; designate trail segments as ACECs; and identify interpretive measures.
3. Concentrate on high potential sites and segments along national historic trails, national register eligible segments, and the primitive character and connection of national scenic trail segments. Consider the historic context and/or current and future landscape condition along these trails.

Currently the Continental Divide National Scenic trail is the only trail that have been designated by the U.S. Congress within the Rio Puerco planning area.

2.6.6. Wilderness

Currently Rio Puerco has three wilderness areas that have been designated by the U.S. Congress within the resource area. Ojito Wilderness, the one designated wilderness within the Decision Area, is managed under Handbook H 8560, Management of Designated Wilderness Areas dated 7/27/88. Wilderness management provides for the protection of the wilderness by prohibiting activities and occurrences such as motorized vehicles, landing of aircraft, mechanized transport (e.g., bicycles), and structures or installations within the area. The wilderness areas within the RPFO Planning Area include:

- Ojito Wilderness,
- West Malpais Wilderness (El Malpais December 2001), and
- Cebolla Wilderness (El Malpais December 2001).

A stand alone resource management plan for the Ojito Wilderness will be completed in the future. Except as otherwise provided by law (e.g., the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act), congressionally designated wilderness areas are statutorily closed to motorized and mechanized use. These areas will be shown in the land use plan along with the acreage affected.

2.6.7. Wilderness Study Areas (WSA)

The WSAs will be managed under the Interim Management Policy (IMP)(H-8550-1) until they are designated wilderness or released by Congress. The eight Wilderness Study Areas within the Decision Area are currently managed under the IMP. The IMP is temporary and applies only during the time an area is under wilderness review and until Congress acts on WSAs, or where applicable, by final decision by the BLM. BLM manages WSAs to ensure that existing wilderness characteristics of naturalness, solitude, primitive and unconfined recreation opportunities, and special features are not impaired. Currently acceptable uses include hiking, hunting, horseback riding, backpacking, biking, or vehicle use on primitive “ways” established prior to enactment of FLPMA, and other activities that do not result in impairment of the wilderness values.

Areas released from wilderness study will no longer be subject to the IMP, and will be managed under the RMP.

The following are the current WSAs designated in the Rio Puerco Field Office planning area:

- Empedrado
- Cabezón Peak
- Chamisa
- Ignacio Chavez
- La Leña

- Manzano
- Petaca Pinta
- Ojito

the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968, as amended (see BLM Manual 8351). Currently there are no Wild and Scenic Rivers designated within the Rio Puerco Field Office planning area.

2.6.8. Wild and Scenic Rivers

All eligible river segments will be assessed and determine which are suitable or non-suitable per Section 5(d)(1) of