

**Bureau of Land Management, Roswell Field Office
Environmental Assessment Checklist,
DOI-BLM-NM-P010-2010-32-EA, Land Acquisition**

| Resources | Not Present on Site | No Impacts | May Be Impacts | Mitigation Included | BLM Reviewer | Date |
|---|---------------------|------------|----------------|---------------------|---|------------|
| Air Quality | | | X | X | SWA Spec/Hydro. Michael McGee | 1/6/10 |
| Soil | | | X | X | | |
| Watershed Hydrology | | | X | X | | |
| Floodplains | X | | | | | |
| Water Quality - Surface | | | X | X | Geologist John S. Simitz | 1/6/2010 |
| Water Quality - Ground | | | X | X | | |
| Cultural Resources | | X | | | Archaeologist Rebecca L. Hill | 22Dec2009 |
| Native American Religious Concerns | | X | | | | |
| Paleontology | | X | | | | |
| Areas of Critical Environmental Concern | | X | | | J H Parman Plan & Env. Coord. | 12/16/09 |
| Farmlands, Prime or Unique | | | X | X | Realty Specialist Tate Salas | 5/17/2010 |
| Rights-of-Way | | | X | X | | |
| Invasive, Non-native Species | | | X | X | H. Miller Range Mgmt. Spec. | 12/16/2009 |
| Vegetation | | X | | | | |
| Livestock Grazing | | X | | | | |
| Threatened or Endangered Species | X | | | | Randy Howard Biologist | 12/22/2009 |
| Special Status Species | | X | | | | |
| Wildlife | | X | | | | |
| Wetlands/Riparian Zones | X | | | | Outdoor Rec. Plnr. Bill Murry | 1/5/10 |
| Wild and Scenic Rivers | X | | | | | |
| Wilderness | X | | | | | |
| Recreation | | X | | | | |
| Visual Resources | | X | | | | |
| Cave/Karst | | X | | | Glen Garnand Environmental Protection Spec. | 12/16/2009 |
| Wastes, Hazardous or Solid | | X | | | | |
| Environmental Justice | | X | | | | |
| Public Health and Safety | | X | | | Geo/SPS Jerry Dutchover | 01/04/10 |
| Solid Mineral Resources | | x | | | | |
| Fluid Mineral Resources | | X | | | Geologist John S. Simitz | 1/06/2010 |

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Roswell Field Office
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ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
NM- P010-2010-32-EA

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Background

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Roswell Field Office approved the Special Species Resource Management Plan Amendment (RMPA) in April 2008. The plan amendment provides guidance for managing approximately 850,000 acres of public land and 300,000 acres of federal mineral within four counties located in southern New Mexico. The Record of Decision established the “Lesser Prairie-Chicken Habit Preservation Area of Critical Environmental Concern” (ACEC). This purpose of the ACEC is to maintain and enhance habitat for the lesser prairie-chicken and sand dune lizard. While both these species are considered warranted for listing by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the management prescriptions for the ACEC, is to demonstrate a commitment to secure habitat that may prevent the listing of both species.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose is to acquire non-federally owned lands from willing sellers in order to protect habitat for the lesser prairies-chicken (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*) and the sand dune lizard (*Sceloporus arenicolus*). This environmental assessment (EA) will analyze the impacts of these possible acquisitions. These two species are candidates for listing as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. It is BLM policy to conserve special status species and their habitats, and ensure that actions authorized by the BLM do not contribute to the need for the species to become listed as threatened or endangered by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). (For additional information, refer to the BLM Special Status Species Management Manual 6840).

The BLM has placed a high priority on land acquisition in and around the ACEC. The proposed land acquisitions would be to provide opportunities for expansion of lesser prairie-chicken and sand dune lizard habitats within the Planning Area and to reduce the impacts of surface disturbances. The BLM’s objective is to improve management of natural resources through consolidation of BLM, State, and other Federal lands where agencies have compatible land management missions.

The lesser prairie-chicken population size and geographic range have been greatly reduced since the 1800s due to the widespread conversion of native prairie grasslands to agricultural uses. Lesser prairie-chicken populations still contend with habitat loss and fragmentation due to various forms of development and changing land uses. Conversion of rangeland habit to irrigated agriculture continues in some areas of east-central New Mexico. Roads and infrastructure development associated with the oil and gas industry have led to reductions in usable habitat, particularly in the southeast. Such impacts are heightened by the lesser prairie-chicken’s tendency to avoid nesting near areas of human activity or large structures.

Destruction of the sand dune lizard habitat is restricted to sand dune habitat in Lea, Eddy, and south Chaves counties. The sand dune lizard occurs only in large and deep sand dune

“blowouts” (open, low-lying areas between active dunes) in areas dominated by shinnery oak. Sand dune lizard populations may be threatened by activities that remove shinnery oak or otherwise alter the configuration of shrub and grass cover and blowout patches in dune areas. The two main threats faced by the sand dune lizard are the removal of shinnery oak by herbicide application and disturbance of dune areas by roads and infrastructure from activities such as oil and gas development.

CONFORMANCE WITH LAND USE PLAN

This site-specific analysis tiers into and incorporates by reference the information and analysis contained in the 1997 Roswell Resource Area (RMP) and the 2008 Special Species Plan Amendment. This project Environmental Assessment (EA) addresses site-specific resources and/or impacts that are not specifically covered within the 1997 Roswell Resource Area (RMP) and the 2008 Special Species Plan Amendment, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), as amended Public Law 91-90, 43 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.).

The proposed acquisition of non-federal properties in and around the ACEC is consistent with the 1997 Roswell RMP and the Special Status Species Plan Amendment dated April 2008. On page 25 of the 1997 Roswell RMP of the plan it states “...the acquisition of about 75,800 acres of non-federal lands or interests in non-federal lands, will be considered on a case-by-case basis to achieve management objectives”. On page 7 of the 2008 RMPA states “The BLM will consider acquisition of land in the Planning Area for special status species habitat when the opportunity arises from willing sellers.

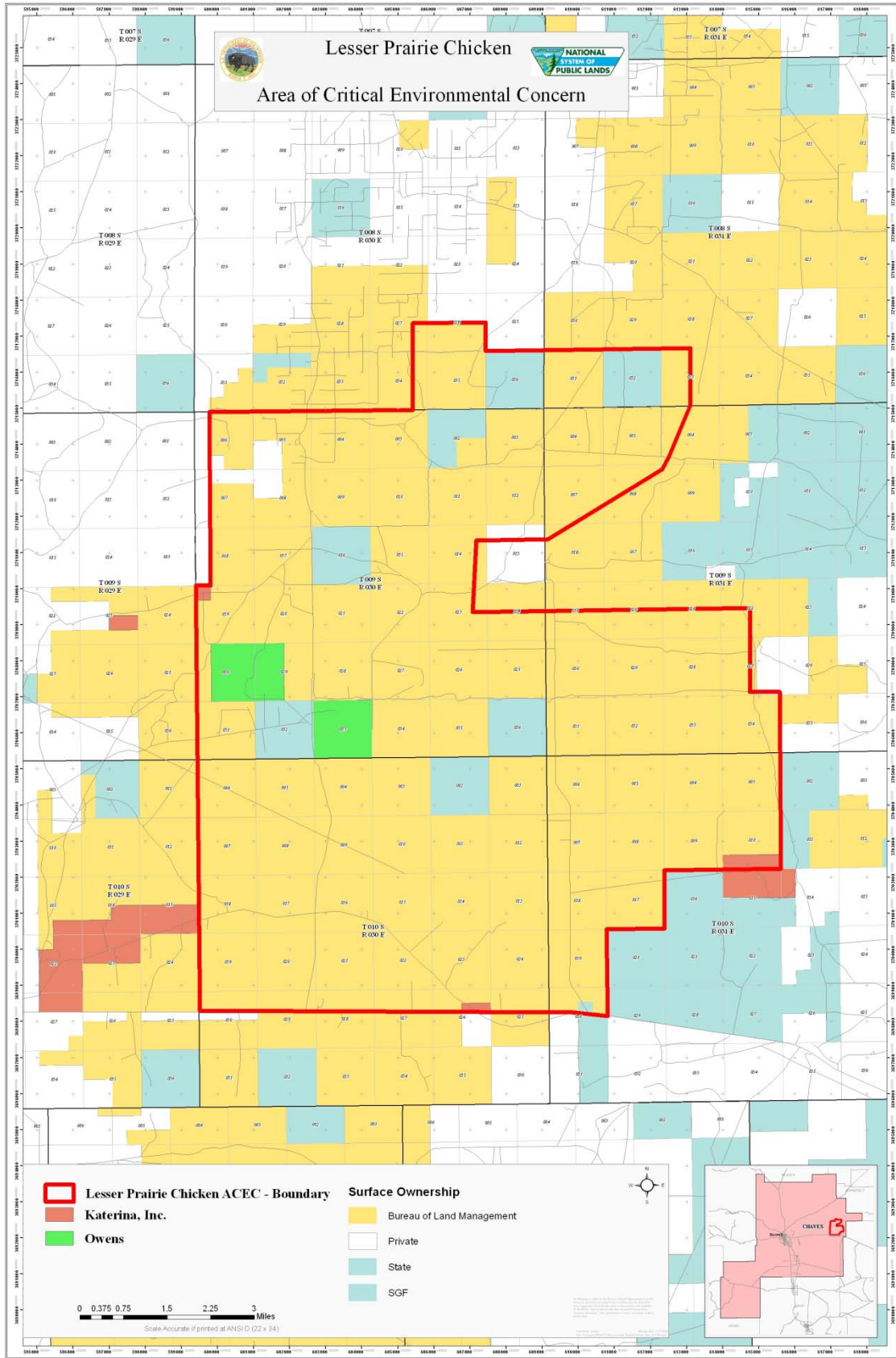
RELATIONSHIP TO STATUTES, REGULATIONS, OR OTHER PLANS

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 as amended, Section 205 provides specific authority for land acquisitions. The emphasis for the land acquisitions program is to acquire non-Federal land in areas that have high resource values or unique characteristics that would enhance management of the Federal lands.

This environmental assessment has been prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and its implementing regulations issued by the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR 1500). It also complies with planning guidance at 43 CFR 1600 and the BLM Planning Manual (1600 Series); The BLM Environmental Handbook (H-1790; Clean Water Act (Sections 402 and 404); and National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA, Section 106); American Indian Religious Freedom Act; Resource Conservation and Recovery Act; Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act; Safe Drinking Water Act; Executive Order 12088 on Federal Compliance with Pollution control Standards, as amended; Wild and Scenic Rivers Act; Wilderness Act; the Endangered Species Act of 1973; as amended (ESA Section 7); Executive Order 13007 on Sacred Sites; Executive Order 11988 on Floodplains; Executive Order 11990 on Wetlands/Riparian Zones; Executive Order 13045 on Protection from Environmental Health Risks and Safety Risks; Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice; Lacey Act as amended, Federal Noxious Weed Act of 1974, as amended; Executive Order 13112 on Invasive Species; and Executive Order 12372 on Intergovernmental

Review of Federal Programs and applicable regulations for this proposal are contained in 43 CFR 2200.

The land acquisition would comply with the appraisal standards set forth in 43 CFR 2201.3-1 and 2201.3-4, and with the Department of Justice Uniform Appraisal Standards for Federal Land Acquisitions when appraising the values of the non-Federal lands involved in this acquisition.



CHAPTER 2 PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

Proposed Action

The proposal involves the acquisition of up to approximately 9,200 surface acres of non-federal lands within and/or adjacent to the ACEC. The proposed land acquisitions would be to provide opportunities for expansion of lesser prairie-chicken and sand dune lizard habitats within the Planning Area and to reduce the impacts of surface disturbances. The acquired properties will be managed in conformance with management objectives to protect the habitat for the lesser prairie-chicken and sand dune lizard in the area.

The BLM has placed a high priority on the following non-federal lands for acquisition:

New Mexico Principal Meridian, Chaves County, New Mexico

T. 8 S., R. 30 E.
Section 36, All.

T. 8 S., R. 31 E.
Section 32, All.

T. 9 S., R. 29 E.
Section 23, N $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$

T. 9 S., R. 30 E.
Section 2, lots 1 to 4 inclusion, S $\frac{1}{2}$ N $\frac{1}{2}$, and SW $\frac{1}{4}$
Section 5, SW $\frac{1}{4}$
Section 6, SE $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$
Section 7, N $\frac{1}{2}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ and NE $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$
Section 8, NW $\frac{1}{4}$
Section 13, All.
Section 16, All;
Section 19, lot 1 ;
Section 29, W $\frac{1}{2}$
Section 30, E $\frac{1}{2}$ and E $\frac{1}{2}$ W $\frac{1}{2}$;
Section 32, All;
Section 33, All
Section 36, All.

T. 10 S., R. 29 E.
Section 13, S $\frac{1}{2}$
Section 14, SE $\frac{1}{4}$ and S $\frac{1}{2}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$
Section 15, S $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$
Section 22, E $\frac{1}{2}$, SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ and E $\frac{1}{2}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$
Section 23, N $\frac{1}{2}$;
Section 27, N $\frac{1}{2}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ and NE $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$

T. 10 S., R. 30 E.
Section 2, lots 1 to 4 inclusive, S $\frac{1}{2}$ N $\frac{1}{2}$ and S $\frac{1}{2}$
Section 26, S $\frac{1}{2}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ Less 12.12 acres lying in the right-of-way of and north of U.S. Highway 380, all lying north of U.S. Highway 380.

T. 10 S., R. 31 E.
Section 10, S $\frac{1}{2}$ S $\frac{1}{2}$
Section 14, W $\frac{1}{2}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$
Section 15, N $\frac{1}{2}$

NO-ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under this alternative, the ACEC acquisitions would not be completed. The non-federal lands would remain in non-federal ownership. This alternative would result in loss of an opportunity for the BLM to acquire lands with important habitat for lesser prairie chicken and sand dune lizard in and around the ACEC.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT NOT ANALYZED

The BLM considered alternatives in which less than 9,200 acres would be acquired. The impacts of these alternatives, however, were essentially the same as the proposed action. Although these alternatives may have met the purpose and need for this document, analyses of alternatives with similar impacts is not required by NEPA.

Chapter 3 Affected Environment:

Affected Resources

The following resource or issues are not addressed since they are not present or not affected: Farmlands, Prime/Unique, Floodplains, Native American Religious Concerns, Wetlands and Riparian Zones, Wild & Scenic rivers, and Wilderness.

Air Quality

The area of the subject properties of the proposed action is considered a Class II air quality area. A Class II area allows moderate amounts air quality degradation. The primary sources of air

pollution are dust from blowing wind on disturbed or exposed soil and exhaust emissions from motorized equipment.

Air quality in the area of the subject properties is generally good and is not located in any of the areas designated by the Environmental Protection Agency as “non-attainment areas” for any listed pollutants regulated by the Clean Air Act.

Under the Clean Air Act, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) established National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for six criteria air pollutants considered harmful to public health and the environment above certain concentrations. The six criteria pollutants are carbon monoxide, lead, nitrogen oxides, and particulate matter, ozone, and sulfur oxides. Air quality is determined by comparing the ambient air levels with the NAAQS for each criteria pollutant.

Chaves County is in attainment (does not exceed State and Federal air quality standards) for all criteria pollutants (NMED AQB 2008). Chaves County covers 6,026 square miles in southeastern New Mexico with a total population of near 61,600 of which approximately 45,000 are in Roswell. Chaves County has low humidity and average annual rainfall of about 12 inches. Prevailing winds come from the south. Late winter and spring are the seasons most closely associated with moderate to strong winds, which can bring blowing dust.

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) – BLM regulations (43 CFR 1610) define an Area of Critical Environmental Concern as an area “within the public lands where special management attention is required (when such areas are developed or used or where not development is required) to protect and prevent irreparable damage to important historic, cultural, or scenic values, fish and wildlife resources, or other natural systems or processes, or to protect life and safety from natural hazards.” An ACEC designation also serves as a reminder that significant values or resources exist which must be accommodated when future management actions and land use proposals are considered near or within an ACEC. An ACEC designation is an administrative designation that is accomplished through the land use planning process. It is unique to the BLM in that no other agency uses this form of designation. The intent of Congress in mandating the designation of ACECs through FLPMA was to give priority to the designation and protection of areas containing unique and significant resource values.

The 2008 Special Status Species RMP Amendment (RMPA) established the Lesser Prairie-Chicken Habitat Preservation ACEC in order to maintain and enhance habitat for the lesser prairie-chicken and sand dune lizard. At its inception the ACEC included 37,000 acres of public land. The RMPA states BLM will consider acquiring non-Federal lands within and adjacent to the ACEC if and when the opportunity arises from willing sellers.

Vegetation and Wildlife - The location of the proposed action is located within the Caprock Wildlife Habitat Area that provides diverse habitat for more than 54 bird species, 33 species of mammals, and 36 species of reptiles and amphibians. The BLM has identified four primary ecological (range) sites within the proposed action area: Deep Sand CP-2, Sand Hills CP-2, Sandy Loam CP-2 and Sandy Plains CP-2. An ecological site is a distinctive kind of land with specific physical characteristics that differs from other kinds of land in its ability to produce a

distinctive kind and amount of vegetation. Ecological site inventory has been used by the BLM as a standard vegetation inventory technique. The potential plant community for the ecological sites identified within the proposed action area include sand bluestem, little bluestem, sand drop seed, plains bristle grass, sand paspalum, black grama, three awn, and blue grama. Shrub species that occur within the proposed action area include shinnery oak, sand sagebrush, and mesquite.

Invasive Non-native Species - Federal agencies are directed by Executive Order 13112, Invasive Species to expand and coordinate efforts to prevent the introduction and spread of invasive plant species (noxious weeds) and to minimize the economic, ecological, and human health impacts that invasive species may cause. Weed management is an integral part of maintaining ecosystem health. A noxious weed is generally destructive and difficult to control or eradicate.

Of the weeds listed on the Noxious Weed List for the State of New Mexico (New Mexico Department of Agriculture 1999), those of immediate concern to the BLM are African rue, Malta star thistle, yellow star thistle, Russian knapweed and salt cedar. These species have invaded public land mainly along oil/gas lease roads, on oil/gas pads, and along pipeline and power line routes.

Special Status Species – There are no known USFWS-listed threatened and endangered species or critical habitat within the proposed action area; however, two candidate species may occupy or utilize the area. These include the lesser prairie-chicken and the sand dune lizard. No special status plants have been identified in the proposed action areas.

Table 1
Special status wildlife species within the Sand Ranch Area

| SPECIES | PRESENT STATUS |
|------------------------|--|
| Lesser Prairie-Chicken | BLM Sensitive, USFWS Candidate |
| Sand Dune Lizard | BLM Sensitive, State Endangered, USFWS Candidate |

In June 1998, the lesser prairie-chicken was added to the USFWS candidate species list. In southeastern New Mexico, lesser prairie-chicken rely upon a variety of habitat types within mixed stands of tall grass land shinnery oak. Seasonal habitat requirements vary from season to season and are often overlapping. Within the subject properties is contained nesting habitat, booming areas (leks), brood habitat, and foraging habitat.

The sand dune lizard only occurs in the southeastern corner of New Mexico and the western region of Texas. Within the range, its habitat is restricted to active sand dunes. Shinnery oak is the dominant plant species that surrounds the top edge of the active sand dune, with a small composition of grasses inside the blowout area. There are scattered shinnery oak dunes blowouts or dune complexes throughout the proposed action area that provides habitat for the sand dune lizard.

Cultural Resources and Native American Religious Concerns - Cultural resources are prehistoric and historic archaeological sites are considered important for scientific, traditional, religious, or other reasons. Federal laws and regulations, including Section 106 of the National

Historic Preservation Act (HNPA) require Federal agencies to consider the effects of their action on properties listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. If the BLM acquires the subject properties they would be managed by the BLM and any cultural resources present on these lands would be managed according to Federal laws.

WATERSHED – HYDROLOGY - The watershed and hydrology in the proposed action area is affected by land and water use practices. The degree to which hydrologic processes are affected by land and water use depends on location, extent, timing and the type of activity. Factors that currently cause short-lived alterations to the hydrologic regime in the area include livestock grazing management, recreational use activities, groundwater pumping and also oil and gas developments such as well pads, permanent and temporary roads, pipelines and power lines.

Water Quality –

Surface: The subject properties in the proposed action area are located on the Mescalero Sands which are bordered to the west by the Pecos River valley with a distance that ranges between 24 and 36 miles from the Pecos River, and also bordered to the east by the Llano Estacado or High Plains. There are no perennial surface waters located on the subject properties. Ephemeral surface water within the area may be located in tributaries, playas, alkali lakes and stock tanks.

Ground: In the proposed action area, usable water for domestic and stock use is obtained in descending order from the Quaternary Alluviums, the Ogallala formation and in the Triassic Age rocks which includes both the Chinle and the Santa Rosa formations. Although most oil and gas wells set casing at 300 ft. this depth barely penetrates the top third (1/3) of the Chinle fm. The depth to water table in the Chinle Formation is 70 to 280 feet below the ground surface (Office of the State Engineer Waters Database 2008).

A domestic water well located in SE $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$, sec. 3, 10 S. R. 29 E., NMPM, identifies the source as the Santa Rosa Fm which underlies the Chinle fm. There are other Santa Rosa water wells cited in the area as well as a few oil and gas wells reporting the occurrence of good water in the formation. The base of the Santa Rosa Formation occurs in the range of 820 ft. to 850 ft.

Below the Santa Rosa lies the Dewey Lake redbeds. Here the section is approximately 100 ft thick but in places it can be less than 50 ft thick. Citations in the historical oil and gas well files suggest that the Dewey Lake redbeds may also provide usable water given the depth to water. However this could not be conclusively verified.

The area is within the administrative boundary of the Roswell Underground Water Basin as designated by the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer. Stock tanks fed by groundwater are present at various locations in the Sand Ranch area for the purpose of watering livestock and wildlife.

Mineral Resources – Mineral resources are classified as locatable, leasable, or salable. Locatable minerals are those that can be located and claimed under the Mining Act of 1872. Mining for these minerals requires staking a claim rather than receiving a lease issuance. Locatable minerals include both metallic (gold, silver, lead, etc.) and non-metallic (gypsum,

fluorspar, etc.) minerals. Leasable minerals include oil, gas, potash, sodium, etc. Salable minerals are those materials such as sand, gravel, and construction material that are sold or permitted for extraction under the Mineral Materials Sale Act of 1947.

Oil and gas production has been established in and around the proposed action area with most of the parcels having moderate to high mineral potential for oil and gas. Caliche has been quarried on small scale on and near the Sand Ranch parcels, and the potential for additional nodular-caliche deposits to occur is moderate to high. However, the demand for this material is very sporadic, usually limited to a few hundred or a few thousand cubic yards, and only for nearby use. The potential for occurrence of other minerals is low to very low.

Soils - The soil units within the proposed action area: Blakeney-Ratliff association (BRB), Chispa-Malstrom association (CMB), Faskin fine sand (FaA), Faskin-Malstrom association (FMA), Faskin-Roswell complex (FRB), Ratliff-Redona association (RBA), Redona-Canez association (RKA), Roswell fine sand (RoD), Roswell-Jalmar fine sands (RPD), Sharvana fine sandy loam (ShA), Stromal-Pyote fine sands (SPA), and Tucumcari clay loam (TvA).

The majority of these soils exhibit moderate permeability. Their available water capacity runs from moderate to high. Runoff characteristics vary from slow to medium. Water erosion hazard for the soils is slight to moderate. For detailed soil information, please refer to the Soil Survey of Chaves County, New Mexico, Northern Part, published by the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). A copy of these publications may be reviewed at the BLM Roswell Field Office or a local NRCS office.

Range Management – The proposed action area is contained within two grazing allotments, 65044 – Twin Windmills and 65043 – Sand Ranch. Currently only one of the allotments is authorized for grazing; Twin Windmills. The authorized use on this allotment is limited to cattle and enough horses to work stock.

Recreation - Recreation opportunities are focused around hunting and watchable wildlife. Mule deer, antelope, and game birds, such as quail and dove are taken during hunting seasons. Portions of the proposed action area are used by birders to observe prairie chickens during their lek courtship displays. Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) designation for public lands within the Sand Ranch area are classified as "Limited" to existing roads and trails.

Visual Resources - The proposed action area is located in a Class IV Visual Management Area. The objective of this class is to provide for management activities which require major modification of the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape can be high. Management activities may dominate the view and be the major focus of viewer attention; however, every attempt should be made to minimize the impact of these activities through careful location, minimal disturbance, and repeating the basic elements.

Wastes, Hazardous or Solid – A Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment (ESA) will be completed as individual properties become available for acquisition. The purpose of a Phase 1 ESA is to evaluate environmental issues that may have a financial or liability impact on the owners of the property. The goal of this process is to identify the presence or likely presence of

any hazardous substances. BLM will not acquire properties that may appear to have hazardous or solid waste concerns.

Socioeconomics – The estimated population in Chaves County is 63,480. Chaves County has experienced moderate population growth with an estimated 3.4 percent increase in population between 2000 and 2007. Roswell is the largest city in Chaves County and is located approximately 35 miles west of the Sand Ranch. As of the 2005 census estimate, the Roswell population was 45,199.

Environmental Justice – Federal agencies must identify and address disproportionately high and adverse effects of Federal projects on the health or environment of minority and low-income populations, as directed by Executive Order 12898 Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations. The purpose of evaluation environmental justice is to determine whether a disproportionate share of adverse impacts would be borne by minority and low-income communities from implementation of a Federal action. The project is located in a sparsely populated area, which does not contain a disproportionately high concentration of minority or low-income populations.

CHAPTER 4 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

PROPOSED ACTION

Air Quality – The acquisition of the subject properties would not have direct impacts on air resources, however subsequent land developments would indirectly affect air resources. The subject properties would be acquired and managed under BLM Federal protection. The primary management objective in this area will be preservation of habitat for the lesser prairie-chicken and the sand dune lizard. Potential indirect impacts would include fugitive dust and exhaust emissions from surface use activities on the subject parcels. The air resources would be managed in accordance with the BLM's RMP objectives for air resource management. The acquisition of the subject properties is not expected to have significant impacts on air resources.

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) – The proposed action would allow the BLM to acquire additional land within and adjacent to the ACEC which would be managed to protect and enhance lesser prairie-chicken and sand dune lizard habitats. The proposed action would support the BLM's management goals for the ACEC.

Wildlife, Including Special Status Species – Acquisition of up to 9,200 acres more or less in Chaves County would consolidate the BLM administered land within and adjacent to the ACEC to enhance management of wildlife resources, particularly for the lesser prairie-chicken and sand dune lizard. BLM management would ensure that the habitats for numerous wildlife species would be managed to provide optimal habitat for migratory birds and other game and non-game species. The acquisition of non-Federal managed habit is expected to create beneficial impacts to wildlife species, populations, and habit.

Cultural Resources – The non-Federal properties acquired by the BLM within and adjacent to the ACEC would be managed under BLM Federal protection. Any cultural resource sites present in these areas would be protected by laws and regulation enforced by the BLM. No adverse impact to cultural resources is anticipated.

Watershed - Hydrology - The acquisition of the subject properties would not have direct impacts on watershed – hydrology water resources, however subsequent land developments would indirectly affect watershed – hydrology resources. Long term direct and indirect impacts to the watershed and hydrology would occur where an increase in impervious surfaces occur with a reduction in infiltration resulting from potential surface use activities on the subject parcels. The watershed – hydrology resources would be managed in accordance with the BLM’s RMP objectives for watershed – hydrology resource management. The acquisition of the subject properties is not expected to have significant impacts on watershed and hydrology.

WATER QUALITY -

Surface: The acquisition of the subject properties would not have direct impacts on surface water resources, however subsequent land developments would indirectly affect surface water resources. The surface water resources would be managed in accordance with the BLM’s RMP objectives for surface water resource management. Any impact would be insignificant because surface waters are not found on the subject parcels. The acquisition of the subject properties is not expected to have significant impacts on surface water resources.

Ground: The acquisition of the subject properties would not have direct impacts on groundwater resources, however subsequent land developments would indirectly affect groundwater resources. The potential development of the subject properties would change existing hydraulic properties by increasing impervious surface and landscaped areas. The change in hydraulic properties would increase surface water runoff and reduce groundwater infiltration in potentially developed areas as compared to predevelopment conditions. However, groundwater recharge would not significantly decrease from changes in hydraulic properties caused by potential land development on the subject parcels. Potential groundwater withdrawals on the subject properties may occur which may be authorized by the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer which may have an effect on groundwater table levels. The groundwater resources would be managed in accordance with the BLM’s RMP objectives for groundwater resource management. The acquisition of the subject properties is not expected to have significant impacts on groundwater resources.

Soils –The non-federal lands offered for acquisition within and adjacent to the ACEC would be managed under BLM federal protection. The soil resources would be managed in accordance with the 1997 RMP objectives for soil resource management. The subject properties would potentially be subjected to increased erosion from surface use activities that create changes in soil conditions that affect vegetation types. Access roads can be a potential source of erosion and dust emissions. The acquisition of the subject properties is not expected to have significant impacts on soils.

Invasive Non-native Species – The non-federal lands acquired within and adjacent to the ACEC would be managed under the BLM Noxious and Invasive Species program. Any populations found would continue to be identified, mapped and a species appropriate treatment implemented.

Range Management – Grazing would continue to be either authorized or utilized as a vegetation management tool, as per the 2008 RMPA. Any changes in the number of stock would be based on on-going vegetation studies.

Recreation and Visual Resources – The non-federal property offered in the proposed acquisition would be managed under BLM federal protection. It is anticipated that recreation activities on all acquired properties would be allowed to occur and they would be similar to those types of activities occurring on the adjacent BLM surface. Acquisition of the subject lands would help consolidate land ownership and improve the BLM's management capability in and around designated areas.

Any acquired lands would be assigned a VRM classification, most likely similar to the existing VRM class on adjacent BLM. Any Federal actions on the acquired land would be subject to compliance with VRM requirements.

No adverse impact to recreation and visual resources is anticipated.

Wastes, Hazardous or Solid – There are no known environmental concerns for properties identified for acquisition adjacent or within the ACEC.

Environmental Justice – No significant impact on minority or low-income populations is expected to occur.

NO-ACTION ALTERNATIVE

The No-Action Alternative for this project would eliminate any environmental impacts to the proposed project site. Under the No-Action Alternative the current landownership patterns would continue.

Cumulative Impacts - In addition to identifying the direct and indirect environmental impacts of the proposed action, the Council on Environmental Quality's NEPA Regulations requires Federal agencies to address cumulative impacts related to their proposal. A cumulative impact is defined in the CEQ Regulations as "the impact on the reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (Federal or non-Federal) or person undertakes such other actions. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time." (40 CFR 1508.7).

In February 2010 the BLM acquired 7,440 acres of private land within the ACEC. This brought the total federal ownership within the ACEC to 50,830 acres.

List of Preparers –

Dan Baggao, Wildlife Biologist
Randy Howard, Wildlife Biologist
Jerry Dutchover, Geologist
Bill Murry, Recreation Planner
Rebecca L. Hill, Archaeologist
Howard Parman, Planning and Environmental Coordinator
Kyle Arnold, Weed Specialist
John Simitz, Geologist
Michael McGee, Hydrologist
Helen Miller, Rangeland Management Specialist
Angel Mayes, Assistant Field Manager Lands & Minerals

Consultation and Coordination

Chaves County