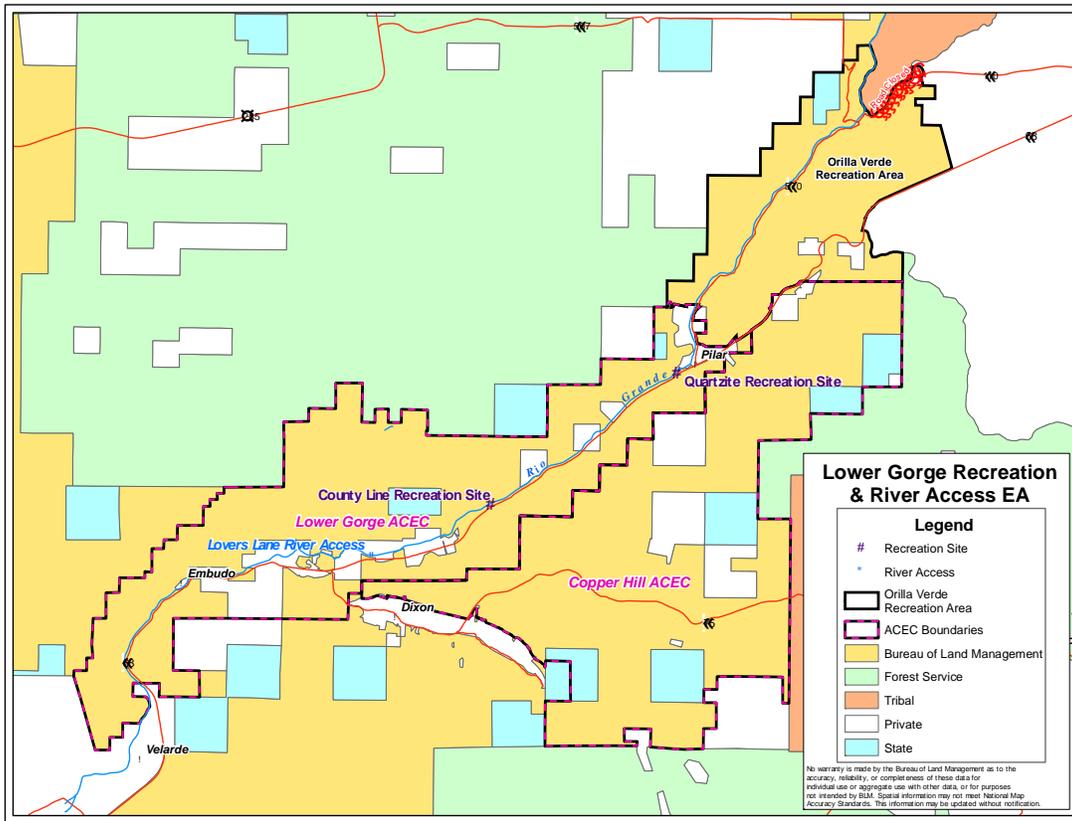


**Lower Gorge Recreation & Riverside Access  
Environmental Assessment  
EA # NM-220-07-005**



**U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
Taos Field Office**





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## CHAPTER ONE - Purpose and Need

### Background

Between 1999 and 2000 an environmental analysis was nearly completed by the Taos Field Office staff and conceptual design drawings of two alternatives for improved traffic flow at County Line were submitted by the National Science and Technology Center (NSTC) in Denver. One alternative included bus parking around an island, while the other featured head in parking for busses facing the slope of NM Highway 68. Unfortunately funding for the project was held back at that time due to other higher ranking priorities. Funding is now scheduled for the fall of 2007 and the Taos BLM Field Office is evaluating the project again in addition to actions that may be taken at Quartzite.

### Relationship to Other Plans

In consulting the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum map from the 1988 Taos Resource Management Plan, it appears that the project area in the Lower Gorge was identified as Rural. The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) is used as a management tool to provide a variety of settings (that include physical, social, and administrative attributes) by which visitors may experience benefits or recreation goals. The BLM aims to provide for a diversity of outdoor recreation opportunities and experiences. See "**Affected Environment**" for more detail.

The Racecourse segment of the Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River is part of a 12 mile stretch designated as scenic. Scenic rivers have the following attributes: they are free flowing, accessible by road, their shorelines are largely primitive, they meet minimum water quality criteria for recreation, and are capable of supporting propagation of aquatic life (RGCFP 2000). Management of scenic river areas should maintain and provide outdoor recreation opportunities in a near-natural setting. In general, a wide range of agricultural, water management, silvicultural, and other practices or structures could be compatible with scenic river values, providing such practices or structures are carried on in such a way that there is no substantial adverse effect on the river and its immediate environment. Larger-scale public use facilities, such as moderate-sized campgrounds, interpretive centers, or administrative headquarters are allowed if such facilities are screened from the river (BLM .51B-.51B2c 1992).

The project area is within the Lower Gorge Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). The ACEC designation was based on the area's value for recreation, wildlife habitat, and riparian vegetation (RGCFP 2000).

The Visual Resource Management objective for this portion of the Lower Gorge is designated as VRM Class II: To retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be low. Management activities may be seen but should not attract the attention of the casual observer. Any changes must

repeat the basic elements of form, line, color, and texture found in the predominant natural feature of the characteristic landscape (BLM 1986).

The Rio Grande Corridor Final Plan outlines actions that may be taken at Quartzite and County Line relative to recreation and public education. For example, the plan calls for development of interpretive signs describing key resources and river characteristics at Quartzite (RGCFP 2-12, 2000). While signing at County Line is to focus on riparian area protection (2-12). Facilities to be provided for picnicking and fishing are: day use facilities at the south end of County Line and, if use warrants, a universally accessible restroom, and universal fishing access at either the Quartzite or County Line Recreation Site and at Lover's Lane (2-12).

In 1998 the US Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with BLM findings that the Corridor Plan "may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect" the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher based on three contingencies: 1. the BLM will be implementing an interim Southwestern Willow Flycatcher Management Plan, 2. the BLM will continue to survey areas for flycatchers within the action area and, 3. removal of native riparian vegetation in all planning units will be prohibited.

## **Purpose of and Need for Action**

### Quartzite

When flow from the Rio Grande is high, part of this **site gets flooded** leaving less available space for parking, boat launching, and fishing. There is **little on site information** about the river and no interpretation of resources at this site. The restroom facility is outdated and beginning to fall apart. Commercial boating outfitters have complained that the permanent **toilet facilities usually smell very bad**. The access **road from the highway is uneven** and full of potholes. It's difficult to get traction when pulling out into highway traffic.

## County Line



Figure 1 County Line Recreation Site

Four portable toilets are provided at the site during the peak use in the summer. During the winter and early spring, when portable toilets are not available at the site, people relieve themselves near the changing rooms and cottonwoods leaving the site in an **unsanitary condition**.

**Traffic flow** is important at this site primarily due to use by both private passenger vehicles and commercial vans and buses pulling trailers. Commercial vehicles pull in, load or off-load boats and passengers, back up to the river bank, and park. Traffic flow and parking has been defined with signs but signs need to be improved and maintained for better control so on-site patrols are not necessary at all times.

During peak use, **parking** can become scarce. The topography and proximity of NM Highway 68 intensifies these issues. The site is a narrow strip constricted by the highway on one side and the river on the other. Also, some parking places could be lost on either side of the driveway if a turn lane and a wall is constructed on the highway at a later date if funding is acquired by BLM and NMDOT.



Figure 2 Taking out at County Line



Figure 3 Parking at County Line

**Runoff along the highway and the recreation site flows into the river is a water quality issue.**

Visitors arriving at this site are often taken unaware of the volume of use they may encounter, the power of the river, and/or what behavior is expected of them. **On-site information is sparse and there is no interpretation of riparian or historic resources.**

The high volume of use during the summer from commercial boating, especially at the launch/landing area, can be in **conflict with other uses** such as; fishing and picnicking. Boating passengers and all other recreation users like to hang out in the shade under the trees.

## **CHAPTER TWO - Description of the Alternatives**

### **Proposed Action**

#### Quartzite

In brief, the proposal here is to raise the beach and site, improve and pave the access road from the highway, and replace the existing restroom facility.

Listed below are individual actions:

#### Access/Signs

- Pave access road only from NM Hwy. 68
- Pave the upper parking area
- Install custom designed kiosk near main downstream boat launch. The kiosk would be two panels measuring approximately 3' to 5' wide by 4' tall. Information on the kiosk would focus on orientation to the site, the Rio Grande, and Taos Field Office.
- Trim vegetation around loading zone signs.
- Install BLM Recreation Site signs on shoulder at ingress/egress and  $\frac{1}{4}$  from site along NM Highway 68 from both directions
- Define pathway upstream to the picnic table under the cottonwoods and behind the toilet

#### Facilities

- Replace existing toilet and changing structure. Provide a separate structure for changing.
- Replace the two existing picnic tables
- Define parking for 3 buses and/or 45 passenger cars. This results in no net change to the existing physical footprint.

#### Launching/Drainage

- Raise site to prevent flooding by cutting and filling. Site will be raised an average of 2.5 feet.

#### Shade

- Plant more cottonwoods and native vegetation such as alder on site

## County Line

In brief the proposal is to replace portable toilets with a permanent toilet structure, to pave the access road from the highway, to add picnic tables, to define parking, traffic flow and launch areas, and to provide highway shoulder signs for the site and a two to three panel kiosk for orientation to the site, the river, and to interpret the Rinconada acequia. Listed below are individual actions:

### Access/Signs

- Pave access road only from NM Hwy. 68
- Install a graded contour (size is  $\frac{1}{2}$  acre) to stabilize access road. This will be armored on the river side with large, stacked boulders.
- Design recreation site to accommodate a potential future 1,855' long highway retaining wall (1,125' on south approach and 730' on north approach) and acceleration and deceleration lanes that may be constructed in the future if funding is acquired. Retaining wall would be constructed of rolled and seeded Geogrid fabric. Recreation site designs would not change the existing footprint but a potential future highway retaining wall might. See Cumulative Impacts.
- Install custom designed kiosk near main downstream boat launch. The kiosk would be two panels measuring approximately 3' to 5' wide by 4' tall. Information on the kiosk would focus on orientation to the site, the Rio Grande, and Taos Field Office, and interpret the Rinconada acequia.
- Trim vegetation around loading zone signs
- Install traffic flow signage to separate commercial and private parking and reduce conflict.
- Install BLM Recreation Site signs on shoulder at ingress/egress and  $\frac{1}{4}$  from site along NM Highway 68 from both directions

### Facilities

- Install two separate and permanent restroom facilities to replace the existing four portable toilets that are provided seasonally.
- Replace changing rooms.
- Install two picnic tables under cottonwoods near the main boat launch. Also install two tables downstream of site at end of riverside trail.
- Provide universal fishing access along the riverside trail that runs downstream of site past cottonwood trees. The existing riverside trail would be widened to 5' and hardened up to and adjacent to the riverbank, approximately 100'. The access would be hardened with material such as gravel and lined parallel along the bank with a curb that may be wooden and held in place with rebar. The access may be fortified with hand placed riprap.

### Parking

- Delineate parking and vehicle areas with a variety of barriers
- Provide head-in parking for 12 buses and/or vans with trailers facing NM Highway 68
- Provide parking for 59 passenger vehicles.
- Launching/Drainage/Rinconada Ditch

- Improve drainage from NM Hwy 68 culvert (runs across site to the river)
- Define and harden both boat launch areas. Larger downstream launch would be concrete.
- Improve/lessen the slope of the upstream boat launch
- Run acequia underground with 24-30" plastic pipe. The location of the acequia and pipe are outside the 100 year floodplain

### **No Action**

Under this alternative, no new actions would be taken at Quartzite, County Line, or Lover's Lane.

## **CHAPTER THREE - Affected Environment**

### **Cultural Resources**

The Rio Grande, one of the southwest's largest rivers has attracted humans over the last 10,000 years or so. Many archaeological sites dating to the Archaic, the Ancestral Puebloan, and historic periods have been located along the Rio Grande in the general vicinity of the project areas. These sites include prehistoric camp sites and petroglyphs and historic structures, roads and acequias.

### **Air**

Air quality in the project area is generally very good and is not designated as non-attainment area by the New Mexico Environment Department. Short term air quality degradation can occur from smoke due to wildfires. Long term air quality impairments include green house gas emissions from automobiles and work trucks.

### **Watershed & Soils**

#### Water Quantity

All sites lie on the Rio Grande between the Rio Pueblo de Taos upstream and the Rio Embudo downstream. Control structures are not present upstream of the sites in NM, but agriculture diversions affect flows from tributaries. Water delivery among CO, NM and TX is regulated by an interstate stream compact, which sets amounts that must be delivered from CO to NM and from NM to TX based on flows at certain gauges on the river. Peak flows for this reach are derived from winter snowmelt runoff resulting in peak flows during late May to early June on average. Summer rainstorms result in sporadic peak flows throughout the summer and into fall. Data since 1997 from the USGS gauge #08276500 (Rio Grande Below Taos Junction Bridge near Taos, NM) show peak flows ranging from a low of 640 cfs in March of 2002 to a high of 6020 cfs in May of 2005, with a median peak flow of 1945 cfs. Average annual flow for the past 10 years is:

**Figure 1: Average Annual Flow**

| Year | Avg Annual Flow (CFS) |
|------|-----------------------|
| 1997 | 912.5                 |
| 1998 | 782.1                 |
| 1999 | 888.8                 |
| 2000 | 437.9                 |
| 2001 | 648.0                 |
| 2002 | 299.3                 |
| 2003 | 304.3                 |
| 2004 | 459.7                 |
| 2005 | 962.4                 |
| 2006 | 428.0                 |

Instream flow rights for the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River have not been quantified.

### Water Quality

The New Mexico Environment Department has assessed the Rio Grande between the Rio Embudo and Rio Pueblo de Taos. They found no impairments to designated uses. Designated uses identified include livestock watering, warmwater aquatic life, primary contact, marginal coldwater fishery, irrigation, wildlife habitat.

### Soils

Soils at both County Line and Quartzite are identified as Orthents-Badland association, very steep (NRCS, <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/>). These soils have been identified as very limited for recreation developments due to slope and gravel component, but are rated good for water movement. Development with very limited rating can be expected to require special design and higher maintenance costs. Overall erodibility for these soils is low, although the fine soil component is moderately erodable, drainage rating is well drained and infiltration rate is classified as moderate.

### **Floodplains**

Floodplains with a probability of 1:100 years have been assessed for County Line and Quartzite (Figures: 3 & 4). Approximately half of the County Line site and 75-90% of the Quartzite site construction zone occurs within the 100 year floodplain. Currently, changing room facilities at County Line and part of the restroom at Quartzite are located below the 100 year floodplain.

## Biological Resources

### Fisheries

Fish surveys in the Rio Grande between Taos Junction Bridge and Rio Embudo have been completed in 2004 and 2006. Survey reaches did not include the reach adjacent to the Quartzite Recreation Area. A total of 12 species were identified in this survey, although distribution was not consistent and appears to relate to habitat availability. Species found in 2004 and 2006 are shown in table #. This area of the Rio Grande is dominated both in number and biomass by non-native species, especially white sucker and carp. Game species occurring in significant numbers and biomass in the reaches near County Line and Quartzite include brown trout and smallmouth bass. Native fish species captured in the project area include river carpsucker, Rio Grande sucker, Rio Grande chub, longnose dace and red shiner. Results for 2006 show that total estimated fish biomass per mile of river is lowest at within the first mile downstream from County Line.

**Table 1: Fish species**

4 letter code, scientific name, common name and determination of native status. X in last column indicates years that the species was collected.

| CODE | SCIENTIFIC NAME               | COMMON NAME       | ORIGIN     | 2004 | 2006 |
|------|-------------------------------|-------------------|------------|------|------|
| CACA | <i>Carpiodes carpio</i>       | river carpsucker  | Native     |      | X    |
| CACO | <i>Catostomus commersoni</i>  | white sucker      | introduced | X    | X    |
| CAPL | <i>Catostomus plebeius</i>    | Rio Grande sucker | Native     | X    |      |
| CYCA | <i>Cyprinus carpio</i>        | common carp       | introduced | X    | X    |
| CYLT | <i>Cyprinella lutrensis</i>   | red shiner        | Native     |      | X    |
| ESLU | <i>Esox lucius</i>            | northern pike     | introduced | X    | X    |
| GIPA | <i>Gila pandora</i>           | Rio Grande chub   | Native     | X    | X    |
| ICME | <i>Ictalurus melas</i>        | black bullhead    | introduced |      | X    |
| LECY | <i>Lepomis cyanellus</i>      | green sunfish     | introduced |      | X    |
| MIDO | <i>Micropterus dolomieu</i>   | smallmouth bass   | introduced | X    | X    |
| ONMY | <i>Oncorhynchus mykiss</i>    | rainbow trout     | introduced | X    | X    |
| PEFL | <i>Percha flavescens</i>      | yellow perch      | introduced | X    |      |
| RHCA | <i>Rhinichthys cataractae</i> | longnose dace     | Native     | X    | X    |
| SATR | <i>Salmo trutta</i>           | brown trout       | introduced | X    | X    |

### Wildlife and Riparian Resources

Habitat within the project areas consists primarily of riparian species, (i.e., willow, alder, cottonwood, tamarisk, grasses, sedges, rushes, and forbs). Sagebrush is present between the existing footprint of the recreation area and the upper slope of the highway.

Many songbirds, raptors, and waterfowl are present year round in this area as well as migratory species in the spring. Bald eagles use the river corridor in the winter. More common species include American robin, rock wren, canyon wren, northern flicker, mountain

bluebirds and kingfishers. Utilizing boulder habitat within the gorge are ringtail, rock squirrel, chipmunk, pack rat and mice and can often be seen between rock crevices. Coyote, gray fox and cottontail rabbit can also be seen in this habitat. Various amphibians include frogs, snakes, and lizards are also present.

The Rio Grande Corridor provides essential habitat for migratory birds during spring and winter migrations, including critical habitat for the Southwestern willow flycatcher (SWWF). The critical habitat designation Final Rule became effective November 18, 2005. Prior to the ruling by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher Management Plan (SWWFMP) was developed in 1998 by the Taos Field Office in response to a Biological Opinion dated April 17, 1997 (Cons #2-22-95-F-410), for the Taos RMP (USDI, BLM, 1988). Within this opinion, the Taos Field Office is to implement non-discretionary Reasonable and Prudent alternatives and measures. The BLM is committed to protecting threatened and endangered species and their habitats.

### Threatened and Endangered Species

There are no known threatened or endangered plant species occurring within the boundaries of the Lower Gorge ACEC. Therefore, the proposed action will have no adverse affects on threatened or endangered plants.

Within Taos County, two endangered (black-footed ferret and Southwestern willow flycatcher) two threatened (bald eagle and Mexican spotted owl), and one candidate (yellow-billed cuckoo) species have the potential to occur within the project areas.

Bald eagles occur from mid-October through February or March. No habitat exists for the Mexican spotted owl within the project areas.

The black-footed ferret is extirpated in this county and there will be no affect to this species by the proposed action. In 1993 the BLM began surveys for the Southwestern willow flycatcher along the Rio Grande in the most likely areas for the species to occur. Surveys within the project areas have not been conducted and are outside the Orilla Verde Recreation area but within the Critical Habitat Designation. Along with implementing reasonable and prudent alternatives and measures from the 1997 Biological Opinion, the BLM is required to protect those physical and biological features that are essential to the conservation of the species that may require special management considerations or protection. Such requirements are termed Primary Constituent Elements (PCE's). These elements are: (1) Space for individual and population growth; (2) food, water, air, light, minerals, or other nutritional or physiological requirements; (3) cover or shelter; (4) sites for breeding, reproduction, rearing of offspring, germination, or seed dispersal; and (5) habitats that are protected from disturbance or are representative of the of the historic geographical and ecological distributions of the species.

## Recreation & Visual Resource Values

To follow is the list of descriptors for settings and an inventory of the current condition of each which illustrates that a Rural experience is more likely for visitors. Rural experiences are possible when there are many opportunities to affiliate with other visitors and when ease and comfort is provided with facilities. Safety, conveniences, and high social interactions are important. In the Lower Gorge visitors may also experience a sense of adventure and group affiliation due to rafting and kayaking the Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River. They may also improve their confidence and skill in boating and angling.

**Table 2: The Lower Gorge along the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum**

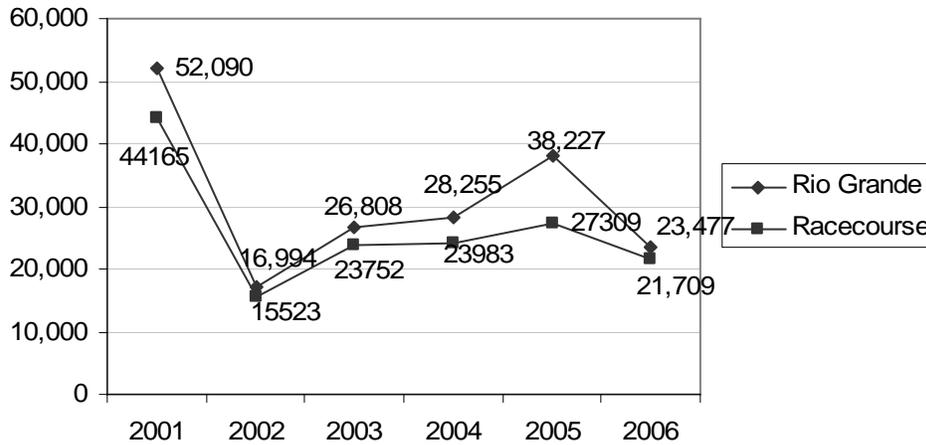
| ROS Descriptor               | Current Condition  |
|------------------------------|--|
| Access                       | Readily accessible from a state highway; NM 68.  |
| Remoteness                   | Little remoteness due to proximity of highway. However boaters can obtain a sense of remoteness along some river reaches where the roadway and structures are not visible. |
| Naturalness                  | The Rio Grande retains much of its naturalness, but has many modifications from roads, residences, and small scale agriculture.  |
| Social Encounters            | Encounters are likely along this stretch of river; especially between Quartzite and County Line.   |
| Visitor Impacts              | Site hardening exists at several sites along the river from vehicle use and informal trails.   |
| Visitor Management           | Seasonally frequent patrols occur and recreation activities are regulated. Although onsite controls are subtle.  |
| Facilities & Site Management | Few facilities designed for comfort, mostly for protection of resources.   |

Quartzite and County Line are a destination for people coming predominantly from California, Arizona, Texas, Colorado, and other parts of New Mexico. Many of these visitors are families that travel with their kids after school is out. Most boating trips on the Rio Grande are half day trips on the Racecourse which extends from Quartzite to County Line. Once school begins at the end of summer the guided use drops dramatically.

Facilities at Quartzite consist of a permanent restroom facility with two women's toilets and one men's urinal, two picnic tables, a dumpster, boat launch, and parking for 41 passenger cars and 3 buses. Facilities at County Line include: four portable toilets seasonally, a changing structure, two boat launches, and parking for 78 cars and 18 buses. This would result in no net change to the existing footprint.

Figure 2:

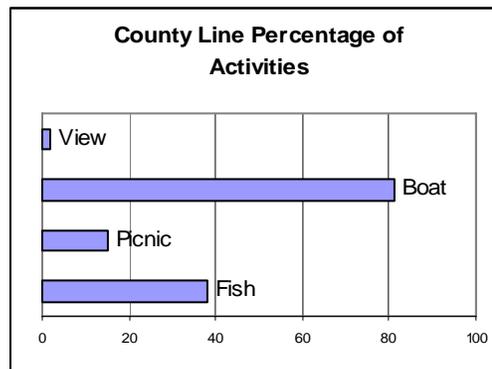
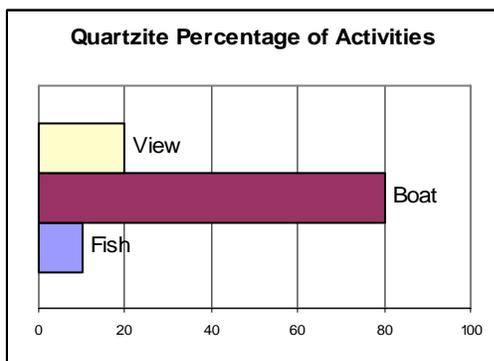
**Guided Rio Grande & Racecourse Passengers**



Non-guided boating use also occurs primarily in the spring/summer or when runoff flows are higher and at their peak. Private boating by kayakers, canoe's, and other rafters typically ranges from 12% to 18% of guided boating.

Other activities include sightseeing of boating and swimming. Fishing also occurs on site and along the river up and down stream of these sites along the bank. Some guided fly fishing trips also occur on site. Picnicking occurs and some people like to walk downstream at County Line and upstream at Quartzite to shady areas under the trees and away from the hub of activity near the launching areas.

Figures 3 & 4: Percentage of activity for Q & CL



In 2005 the visitation in the Lower Gorge was approximately 217,768. This number includes boating on the Orilla Verde, Pilar, and Racecourse river segments, Quartzite, County Line, and the Rio Grande Gorge Visitor Center. This represents virtually 38% of

the total visitation to other developed and dispersed areas on the approximately 600,000 acres in Taos, Rio Arriba, and Santa Fe Counties managed by the Taos Field Office, BLM.

### **Visual Values**

The gorge is a distinctive visual resource that is enjoyed by local residents, visitors to the area, travelers along NM 68 following the meander of the Rio Grande, and river rafters. As one travels the highway, the surrounding terrain draws the eye into a converging view. The expansive views of the gorge, distant mountains, surrounding hills, riparian vegetation, river, and small farms and pastures all contribute to the importance of the gorge as a visual resource. The steep, rugged texture of the pinkish-tan colored escarpments on the east side of NM 68 are an important visual resource. On the west side of the river is hilly terrain and benched mesa covered with grassland/shrubland and piñon/juniper vegetation. Scattered black and grey rock outcrops occur throughout the gorge. Cottonwood trees border the river along the length of the gorge adding a green color to bottomland areas in the spring and summer and gold color in the fall. The river itself is visible from scattered locations along NM 68 and is one of the dominant visual elements for river rafters.

## **CHAPTER FOUR - Analysis of Environmental Impacts**

### **Proposed Action**

#### **Cultural Resources**

This alternative will have no impact on cultural resources at Quartzite or County Line, since all construction activities will occur within the footprint of the existing recreation areas. Archaeological inventories (report # 86-9) were carried out in 1986 for construction projects at those two areas, and no cultural resources were located.

The Rinconada acequia has existed at the County Line site for at least 150 years. It was moved during construction of the highway. Proposed Actions would not impact the original location of the acequia and installation of a pipe across the site would enable owners to re-establish use of it at a later date, if they so chose.

#### **Air**

Activities planned for the project areas are not expected to exceed air quality standards.

#### Cumulative

Project activities are expected to release greenhouse gasses from non-renewable resources, resulting in fractional increases of atmospheric carbon and other climate change gasses. Actual amount released depends on the equipment used, length of time operating and weather during construction. Best management practices to decrease this cumulative impact include:

- ◆ the use of renewable fuels such as ethanol and biodiesel,
- ◆ avoiding idling equipment when not necessary,

- ◆ maintaining equipment performance,
- ◆ using the minimum amount of equipment and personnel necessary to complete the job.

Project contracts should consider these BMPs prior to selection of a contractor.

## **Watershed & Soils**

### *Water Quantity*

The activities described will not measurably impact available water in the Rio Grande or tributaries. Use of river water by construction crews is not authorized without approval from the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer.

### Cumulative

There is no anticipated cumulative impact to water availability from project activities.

### *Water Quality and Soils*

The BLM is required to avoid impacts to water quality by implementing BMP's. Construction activities must also be regulated for storm water events and a storm water plan must be completed before construction activities begin. In addition, permits will need to be obtained from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and New Mexico Environment Department.

There are potential short term impacts to water quality from construction activities. Proximity to the Rio Grande and earth disturbing activities can release sediment into the river. Vehicles and machinery used may leak fluids into soils or water. BMP's to be implemented by the contractor include:

1. Develop a flow barrier between the site and the river during construction.
2. Barriers will be maintained until the site is operable and vegetation recovered, or as considered appropriate by BLM staff.
3. Design runoff from site to flow into catchment basins.
4. Where catchment basins are not possible, grade parking and road to slow runoff from site into river.
5. Work on vehicles involving fluids may not be completed on site.
6. Construction vehicles with fluid leaks will not be used.
7. Access Roads drainage will be designed to reduce sheet flow.
8. Access road will be drained away from the river.
9. Gravel will be used on bare ground to reduce runoff and allow for water percolation.
10. Construction equipment may not be used below water line in the Rio Grande.

Other BMP's may be implemented depending on the contractor's equipment and planned activity to implement this project. The BLM staff will meet on site with the contractor prior to project start to assess the need for further mitigation.

### Cumulative

The current site design results in elevated runoff and soil movement. The redesign outlined in this project should reduce such water quality impacts in the future

### **Floodplains**

Much of the proposed work will occur within the 100 year floodplain. None of the proposed activities will alter the floodplain beyond existing alteration except to improve runoff patterns to reduce sheet flow. Restroom facilities will be located such that the top edge of the waste holding tank is located above the elevation of the 100 year floodplain. Structures located in the floodplain will be anchored to reduce the chance of movement in the event of a flood event. Construction will not be occurring during peak flow months such as May and June, but the BLM require removal of all equipment in the event of flooding during construction.

### Cumulative

No increase in site size is anticipated and there are no plans to increase the number of accessible sites in the 100 year floodplain. Therefore, there are no anticipated cumulative effects.

### **Biological Resources**

#### Fisheries

Impacts to fisheries in this reach would primarily be from water quality impacts, specifically increased turbidity and sedimentation in spawning and feeding areas. Implementation of construction BMP's to reduce impact to water quality should mitigate impacts to aquatic biota.

#### Cumulative

There are no cumulative impacts to fisheries anticipated from construction activities. Development of a fishing platform at County Line may result in increased angling pressure. This increased angling pressure is not expected to be very localized and may be offset by recruitment from other reaches.

#### Wildlife and Riparian Resources

Indirect impacts occurring to wildlife within the project area would result from noise on a short term basis during construction. This displacement is temporary. No impacts to riparian habitat would occur since there will be no removal of riparian vegetation during construction. All activities will occur within the existing disturbed footprint.

#### Cumulative

Same as for fisheries.

### Threatened and Endangered Species

No impacts will occur to threatened and endangered species as a result of the proposed action.

To avoid negative impact to the bald eagle, if an eagle is observed perching or roosting within 0.5 miles of the active project site in the morning before project activity begins, then activity will not commence until the bird leaves on its own; however, if an eagle arrives during construction activities or if an eagle is beyond the 0.5 mile distance, construction need not be interrupted ( USFWS Cons. 02-22-02-I-571). There will be no adverse affects to this species as a result of the proposed action. No habitat exists for the Mexican spotted owl within the project area, therefore, the proposed action will have no affect on this species.

Reconstruction activities will begin outside of the breeding season for the Southwestern willow flycatcher which is April 15 through September 15. None of the PCE's for designated critical habitat for the Southwestern willow flycatcher will be affected as a result of the proposed action.

#### Cumulative

Since the project areas are not adjacent to flycatcher habitat, it is unlikely that impacts will occur.

### **Recreation & Visual Resource Values**

#### Quartzite and County Line

Design and materials of facilities and signs are consistent in a Rural setting. Facilities are rustic; using a mix of native and synthetic materials but provide comfort and convenience for the visitor. Pre-cast concrete toilets are normal in a Rural setting. Roads and trails are hardened with a mix of aggregate and/or paving for site protection.

The site improvements are compatible with the level of use as allocated in the Rio Grande Corridor Final Plan since carrying capacity is the same in terms of number of vehicles that can be accommodated.

Onsite information and regulations are consistent in this setting not only, to improve the visitor experience but to increase the value and appreciation of natural resources. Visitors can benefit from knowledge of wildlife values and local culture and history. Results tabulated by the University of Idaho from a visitor satisfaction survey conducted in 2005 indicated that 74% of visitors surveyed at County Line and Taos Junction Bridge said the BLM should "provide more educational and interpretive material about this area's resources" (USDI 2005).

There would be little impacts to the ability to recreate at these sites since construction will occur outside the boating and peak use season; from May 15 through August 15.

Maintaining the current launching/parking pattern of commercial vehicles at County Line works well for the guides. Maintaining the smaller launch area helps reduce conflict because private boaters like to use it and keep clear of commercial passengers.

The physical carrying capacity of County Line will be reduced slightly by defining parking and traffic flow. Passenger car parking would decrease by 19; from 78 to 59 and reduction of bus parking would be 6; from 18 down to 12. Available parking at Quartzite would increase slightly. Currently there is room for three buses and 41 cars. The Proposed Action would be to provide three bus spaces and 45 car spaces.

There would be short term weak to moderate visual contrasts with the existing structures and a slight impact to Naturalness with improvements to the access roads due to some widening and hardening with asphalt. Moderate contrasts to color occurring from improvements to the access roads are not acceptable under VRM II Objectives. However, moderate impacts from color of asphalt are short term as it is expected to fade from black to grey over time.

Contrasts to existing structures from improving boat launches and replacing toilets and changing stations are expected to be weak to none, so long as a blend of natural and synthetic materials and colors are used, since they already existing on site.

### **Cumulative Impacts for Recreation and Visual Values**

Future projects would include a primitive camp area for boaters downstream from Taos Junction Bridge on river right, redesign of facilities at Petaca, Taos Junction Bridge Campground, Arroyo Hondo, the Pueblo/Grande Confluence area, Prickly Pear Trail and interpretation on rim. These projects and activities occur in two different Special Recreation Area Management zones and will benefit visitors in different ways. Most are within the canyon where use is managed for a Rural setting and visitor use is marketed as a destination.

There exists a proposal to re-establish access to the river slightly downstream of Lover's Lane. Neither formal nor vehicular access is currently available due to land ownership patterns. Vehicular access might be provided in the future by moving a gate, constructing a short access road and small parking area. Pedestrian access might be enhanced with steps from the highway to the river and a defined trail from the gate near the highway shoulder to the river. These recreation actions are called for in the Rio Grande Corridor Final Plan, and are either maintenance related or serve to enhance the current level and type of activity occurring in these locations.

Trail and interpretive projects will be also implemented on the rim on Taos Valley Overlook according to the Taos Valley Overlook Project Plan. The Overlook will be managed for a Middle Country setting and visitor use will be marketed primarily on site and toward the local community. When funding is acquired, BLM will partner with NMDOT, the National Park Service, and local groups to install interpretive signs and an interpretive trail at the Horseshoe curve rest area. There is also an undeveloped zone adjacent to the recreation area on the west side of the gorge to be managed with little use and marketing. These recreation actions are called for in the Taos Valley Overlook Project Plan.

It is anticipated that a highway retaining wall, acceleration and deceleration lanes will be constructed by BLM and NMDOT after recommendations are made from the Corridor Safety Study for Highway 68. Construction of a retaining wall is contingent on the availability of funds from both agencies. Design of the retaining wall needs to include best management practices and ensure no erosion into the river. The potential use of turn lanes, speed reduction, rumble strips, flashing yellow lights, and no passing zones will be evaluated in the Safety Corridor Study currently in progress and if implemented would most likely occur after this project is completed.

This segment of the river was rated and designated in part for its outstanding scenic qualities. In addition it has VRM Class II objectives for management which aim to retain the characteristic landscape and carry out only those activities that will not attract the attention of the casual observer. Moderate to strong contrasts to color and texture of vegetation are expected from the highway retaining wall that would support the acceleration and deceleration lanes. Moderate and strong contrasts are not consistent with VRM II objectives and unfortunately these contrasts could be long term. The highway wall will be viewed primarily by boaters on the Wild and Scenic River and by recreation users of the County Line site. Moderate and strong contrasts from the wall should be mitigated with any design options possible that blend well with the characteristic landscape. The use of soil with seeded geo fabric might facilitate growth of vegetation through the wall making it less visible and more natural looking. It's possible to get patches of grass coming in within a year. However, full recovery of the same mix and color of sage, grasses, and rock could be uncertain.

## **No Action**

### **Cultural Resources**

There would be no effects to cultural resources since no new earth disturbing activities would occur.

### **Air**

Reduced impact to air quality because there would be no equipment emissions.

## **Watershed & Soils**

Short term impacts from construction would not occur, resulting in no impact to water quality or soil condition. Lack of improved drainage would result in chronic long-term water quality reduction and soil loss during precipitation events.

## **Floodplains**

Impacts to floodplains would be the same as the Proposed Action.

## **Biological Resources**

### Fishery

Chronic soil erosion caused by site drainage could reduce feeding and spawning habitat.

### Wildlife and Riparian Resources

Impacts to wetlands would continue without proper site drainage.

### Threatened and Endangered Species

There would be no impacts from the No Action alternative.

## **Recreation & Visual Resource Values**

Maintenance of Quartzite and County Line would not occur. This means that unfavorable conditions would continue: such as unnecessary erosion across both sites into the river and flooding at Quartzite, rough access roads from the highway to the sites, parking that is not delineated between commercially permitted and private passenger vehicles, and a lack of information regarding parking and riparian and cultural resources.

## **Alternatives considered but eliminated from further analysis**

There were two additional alternatives considered for access at Lover's Lane. One option could be to re-establish vehicular access slightly downstream of the bosque. This would involve constructing a small parking area. The other option would be to simply enhance pedestrian access from the highway shoulder and from the river via trails. These alternatives were eliminated from analysis at this time because they are outside of the existing physical footprint of actions in the Rio Grande Final Corridor Plan. These actions are not covered in consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for affects to critical habitat and the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher. However, BLM may propose and analyze these actions and enter into consultation with USFWS at a later date.

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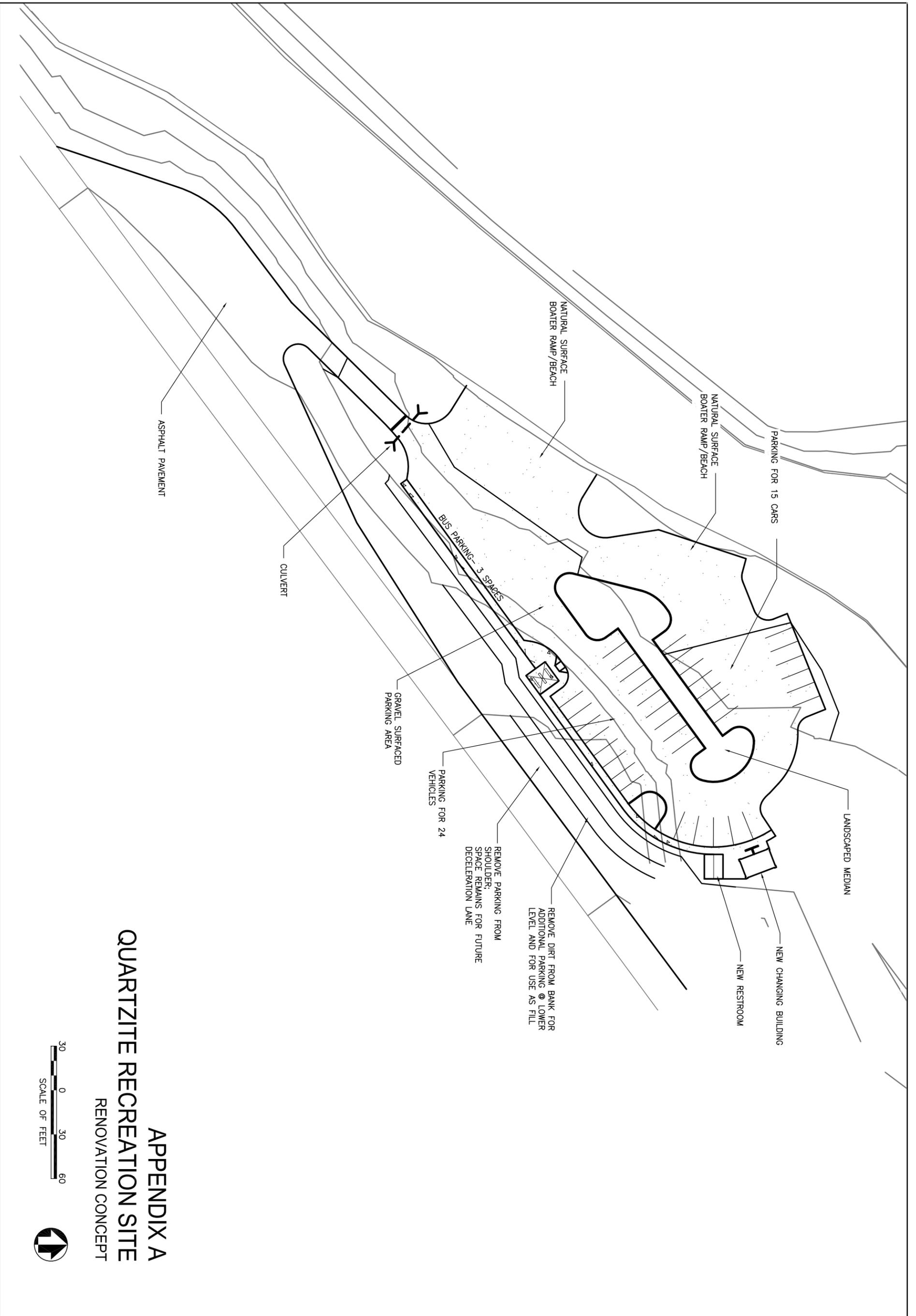
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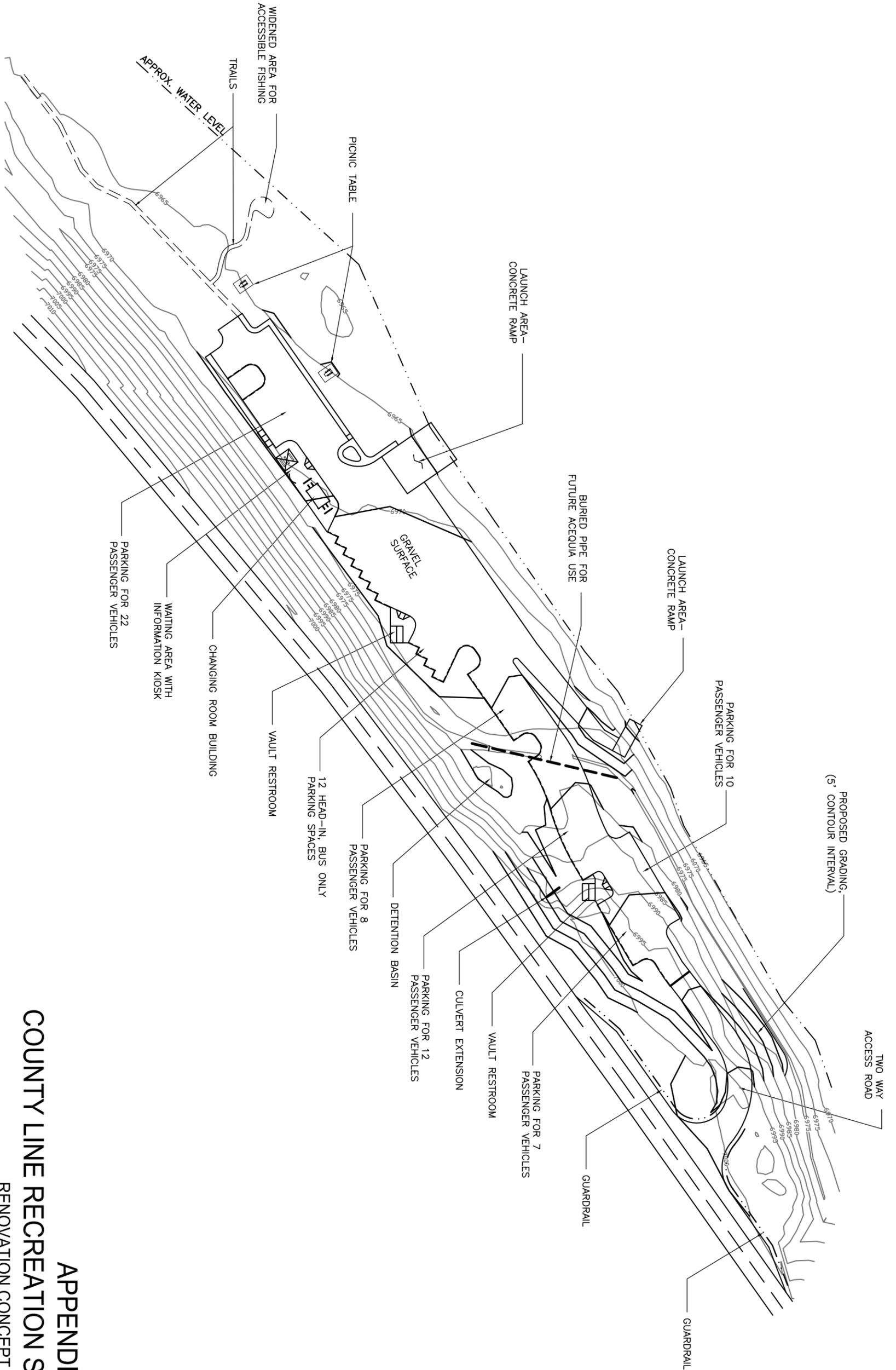
**APPENDIX A**  
**QUARTZITE RECREATION SITE**  
**RENOVATION CONCEPT**



|                        |      |             |      |          |                   |
|------------------------|------|-------------|------|----------|-------------------|
| PROJECT NO: AE-NM-014  |      |             |      |          |                   |
| DESIGN OFFICE: NSTC    |      |             |      |          |                   |
| DESIGNED BY: PRITCHETT |      |             |      |          |                   |
| DRAWN BY: PRITCHETT    |      |             |      |          |                   |
| CHK'D BY:              |      |             |      |          |                   |
| APPROVED BY:           |      |             |      |          |                   |
| DATE: MAY 2007         | MARK | DESCRIPTION | DATE | APPROVED | TAOS FIELD OFFICE |

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
 BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
**CONCEPTUAL SITE PLAN- APPENDIX A**  
 QUARTZITE RECREATION SITE RENOVATION  
 NEW MEXICO





**APPENDIX B**  
**COUNTY LINE RECREATION SITE**  
**RENOVATION CONCEPT TWO**



|                        |      |             |      |          |                   |
|------------------------|------|-------------|------|----------|-------------------|
| PROJECT NO: AE-NM-014  |      |             |      |          |                   |
| DESIGN OFFICE: NSTC    |      |             |      |          |                   |
| DESIGNED BY: PRITCHETT |      |             |      |          |                   |
| DRAWN BY: PRITCHETT    |      |             |      |          |                   |
| CHK'D BY:              |      |             |      |          |                   |
| APPROVED BY:           |      |             |      |          |                   |
| DATE: MAY 2007         | MARK | DESCRIPTION | DATE | APPROVED | TAOS FIELD OFFICE |

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
 BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
**CONCEPTUAL SITE PLAN – APPENDIX B**  
 COUNTY LINE RECREATION SITE RENOVATION



### Appendix C: Comparison of Impacts Table

| Resource                        | Proposed Action   | No Action   |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Wild &amp; Scenic Rivers</b> | No impact   | No impact   |
| <b>Wilderness or WSA</b>        | No impact   | No impact   |
| <b>Visual Resources</b>         | Short term weak to moderate contrasts to color due to access roads and turn outs. Moderate contrasts do not meet objectives. However, color of asphalt is expected to fade in the long term.  | No impact   |
| <b>Recreation</b>               | Consistent with Rural Setting. Carrying capacity mostly unchanged. Slightly increased parking at Quartzite and slightly decreased parking at County Line. Visitors can benefit from increased environmental interpretation. Minor impacts to opportunities during construction. | This means that unfavorable conditions would continue: such as unnecessary erosion across both sites into the river and flooding at Quartzite, rough access roads from the highway to the sites, parking that is not delineated between commercially permitted and private passenger vehicles, and a lack of information regarding parking and riparian and cultural resources. |

**Appendix C: Comparison of Long Term Impacts for Each Resource Area**

| <b>Resource</b>                             | <b>Proposed Action</b>   | <b>No Action</b>   |
|---|--|--|
| <b>Air and Water Quality</b>                | Cumulative impact caused by construction vehicle emissions   | No impact  |
| <b>Soils</b>                                | Short term increases to soil erosion during construction   | Long term increases in soil erosion due to drainage patterns       |
| <b>Environmental Justice/Socio-Economic</b> | No impact  | No impact  |
| <b>Noxious Weeds</b>                        | Disturbed areas need to be planted with native grass seed. Avoid introduction of noxious weeds by inspecting equipment prior to construction.  | No impact  |
| <b>Cultural Resources</b>                   | No impact  | No impact  |
| <b>Wildlife/T&amp;E</b>                     | <p>Indirect impacts occurring to wildlife within the project area would result from noise on a short term basis during construction. This displacement is temporary. No impacts to riparian habitat would occur since there will be no removal of riparian vegetation during reconstruction. All activities will occur within the existing disturbed footprint.</p> <p>No impacts will occur to threatened and endangered species as a result of the proposed action.</p> <p>Possible short term impacts to water quality could impact fish foraging and spawning near sites</p> | Long term impacts from runoff could reduce fish habitat near sites |
| <b>Hazardous or Solid Wastes</b>            | No impact  | No impact  |
| <b>Prime or Unique Farmlands</b>            | No impact  | No impact  |
| <b>Wetlands or Riparian Areas</b>           | See Wildlife/T&E   | See Wildlife/T&E   |
| <b>Native</b>                               | No impact  | No impact  |

|  |           |           |
|--|-----------|-----------|
| <b>American<br/>Religious<br/>Concerns</b> |           |           |
| <b>Grazing<br/>Allotments</b>              | No impact | No impact |