

# **2006 ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

## **SOUTH MEADOWS ROAD EXTENSION**

### **IN SANTA FE COUNTY**

#### **Agua Fria Road to NM 599 Frontage Road**

Project No. ST-7549(276)  
CN 7322

Prepared for:  
Santa Fe County  
In cooperation with  
New Mexico Department of Transportation  
And  
Bureau of Land Management

Prepared By:  
Taschek Environmental Consulting

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACEC	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
BLM	U.S. Bureau of Land Management
BMP's	Best Management Practices
CAA	Clean Air Act
CWA	Clean Water Act
EA	Environmental Assessment
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EO	Executive Order
ESA	environmental site assessment
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FHWA	Federal Highways Administration
MPO's	Metropolitan Planning Organization
NAAQS	National Ambient Air Quality Standards
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NMDOT	New Mexico Department of Transportation
NMED	New Mexico Environmental Department
NMEMNRD	New Mexico Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department
NPEDS	National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System
NRCS	Natural Resource Conservation Service
PIP	public involvement plan
RMP	Resource Management Plan
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Officer
SWPPP	storm water pollution prevention plan
USACE	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
USFS	U.S. Forest Service
VRM	Visual Resource Management

## **SOUTH MEADOWS ROAD EXTENSION IN SANTA FE COUNTY AGUA FRIA ROAD TO NM 599 FRONTAGE ROAD**

### **ENVIRONMENTAL REEVALUATION**

#### **1.0 Project Introduction, Purpose, and Need**

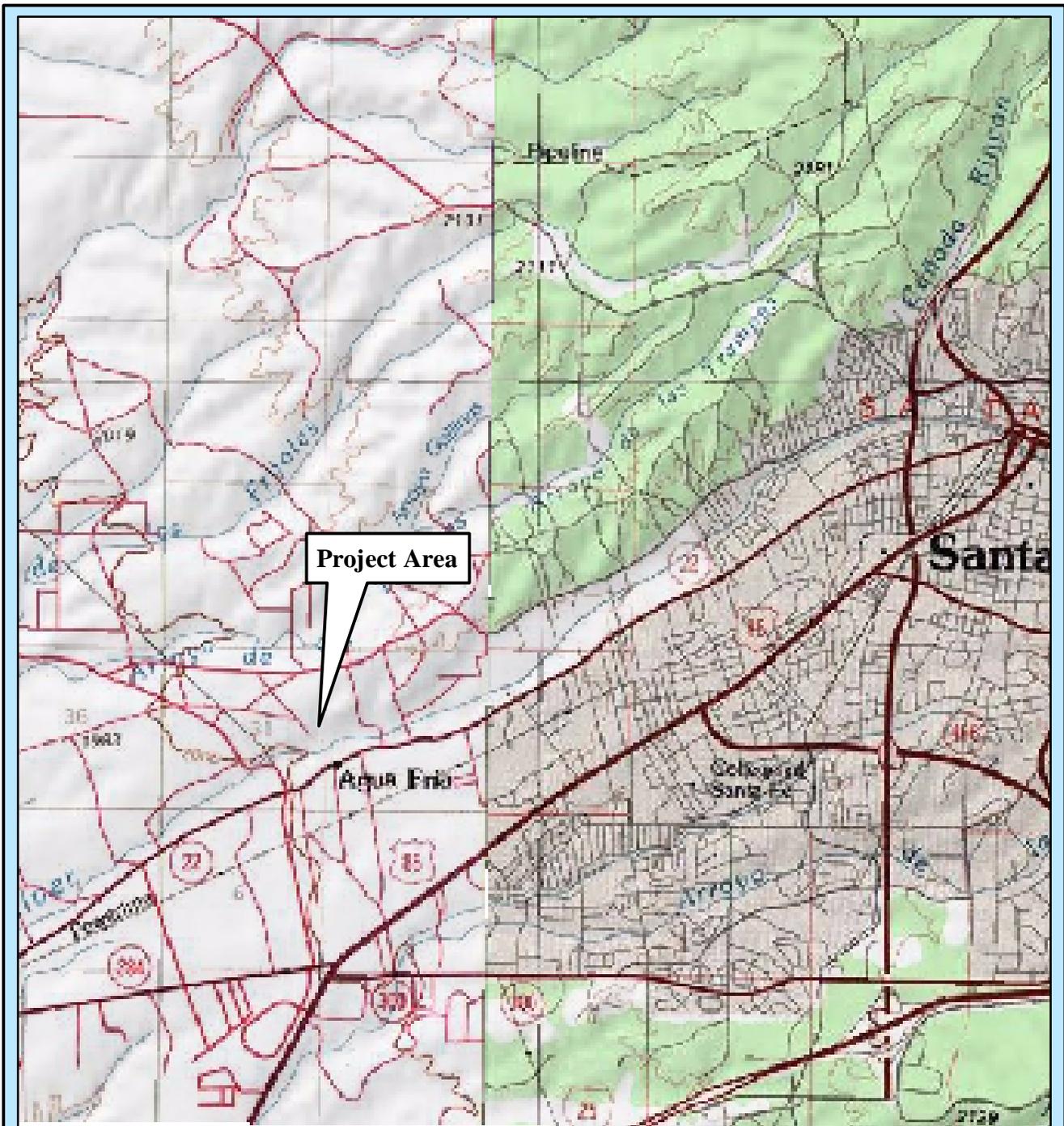
The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) requires a systematic, interdisciplinary approach to planning and project implementation and emphasizes that the environmental impacts of federal actions must be given serious consideration in the decision-making process. Environmental documentation consistent with NEPA and other applicable laws and regulations are required on all proposed federal actions. These documents allow resource managers to make informed decisions on project approvals and stipulations necessary to mitigate adverse impacts.

In 2004, an environmental assessment (EA) was prepared by Santa Fe County in cooperation with the New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT) and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM), for a proposed extension to South Meadows Road. The location of the proposed project is shown on Figures 1 and 2. The NEPA analysis was conducted because the South Meadows Road extension is a new transportation facility that is anticipated to utilize NMDOT funding and because some of the right-of-way includes federally-managed BLM lands. The primary purpose for the South Meadows Road extension is to provide a means of reducing traffic congestion and improving roadway safety in the southwestern part of Santa Fe County.

The EA was prepared in accordance with BLM procedures for environmental documents, including the USBLM Handbook H-1790-1 and Chapter 23, Part 771, Code of Federal Regulations (23 CFR 771). A finding of no significant impact (FONSI) and Decision were approved by the BLM on August 31, 2004. The 2004 EA, FONSI, and Decision authorized a preferred roadway alignment for the South Meadows Road Extension.

Subsequently, Santa Fe County determined that a small modification in the previous alignment, approved in 2004 was desirable to avoid impacts to a development plan on private property. The previously identified right-of-way on the private property, which is east of the BLM property, would severely limit the proposed development plan on the private land. The modification of the route alignment would address this concern by shifting the right-of-way acquisition in a westerly direction onto BLM land, which has been identified for disposal (see Figures 2 and 3).

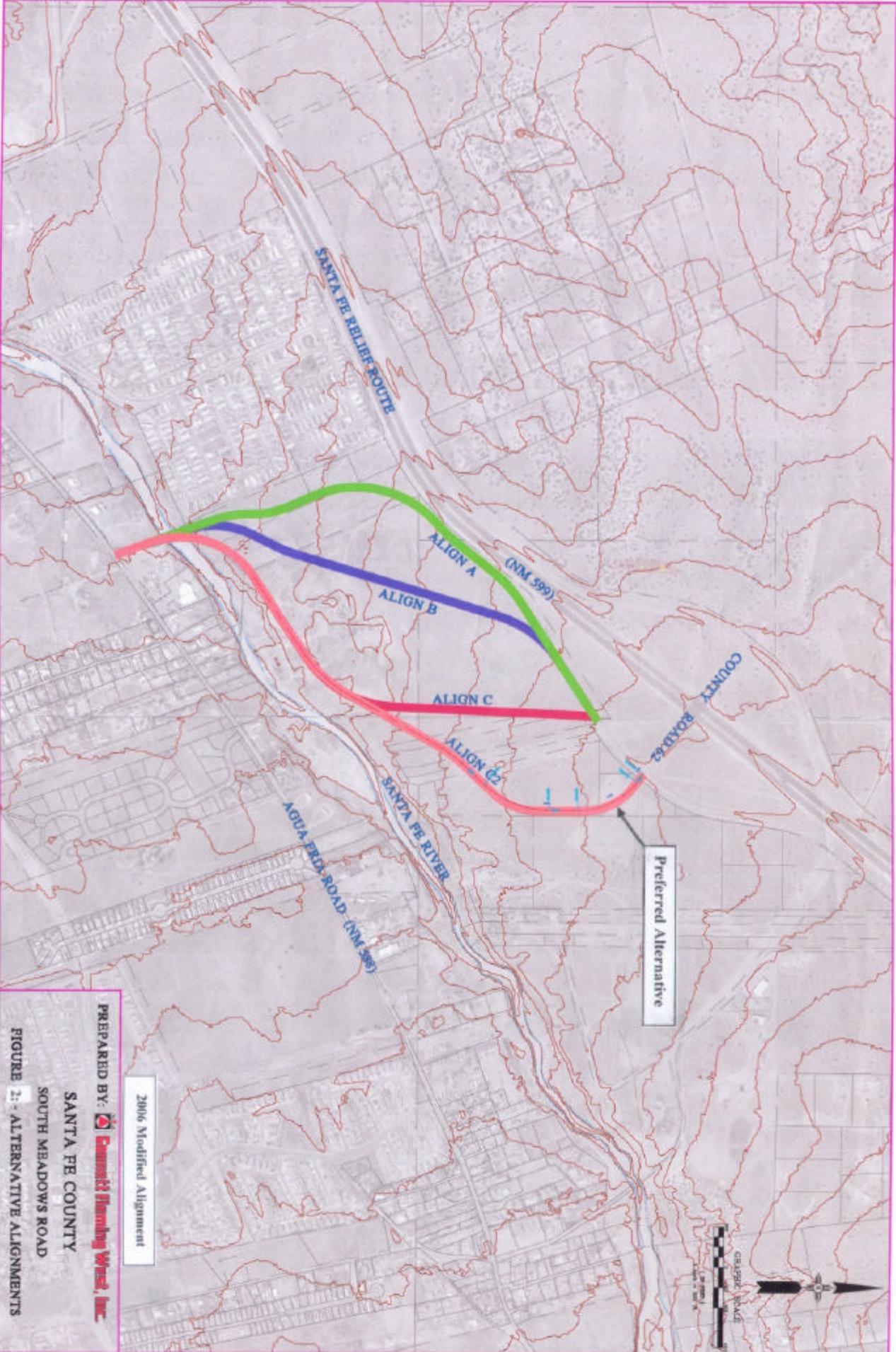
Santa Fe County therefore requested BLM to consider a realignment to avoid the private property. This new proposed route required the following new "2006" EA. The 2004 EA is incorporated into the 2006 EA by reference. The alternatives and effects in the 2006 EA are identical to those analyzed in the 2004 EA except for the new proposed route. The focus of this EA is to describe the new proposed route and analyze and disclose its effects.



Scale 1:60,000

**Figure 1: Study Area Map  
South Meadow Road Environmental Assessment**

**Taschek Environmental Consulting**



PREPARED BY:  **Camnitz Planning West, Inc.**  
SANTA FE COUNTY  
SOUTH MEADOWS ROAD  
FIGURE 2: ALTERNATIVE ALIGNMENTS

2006 Modified Alignment

## 2.0 Project Background

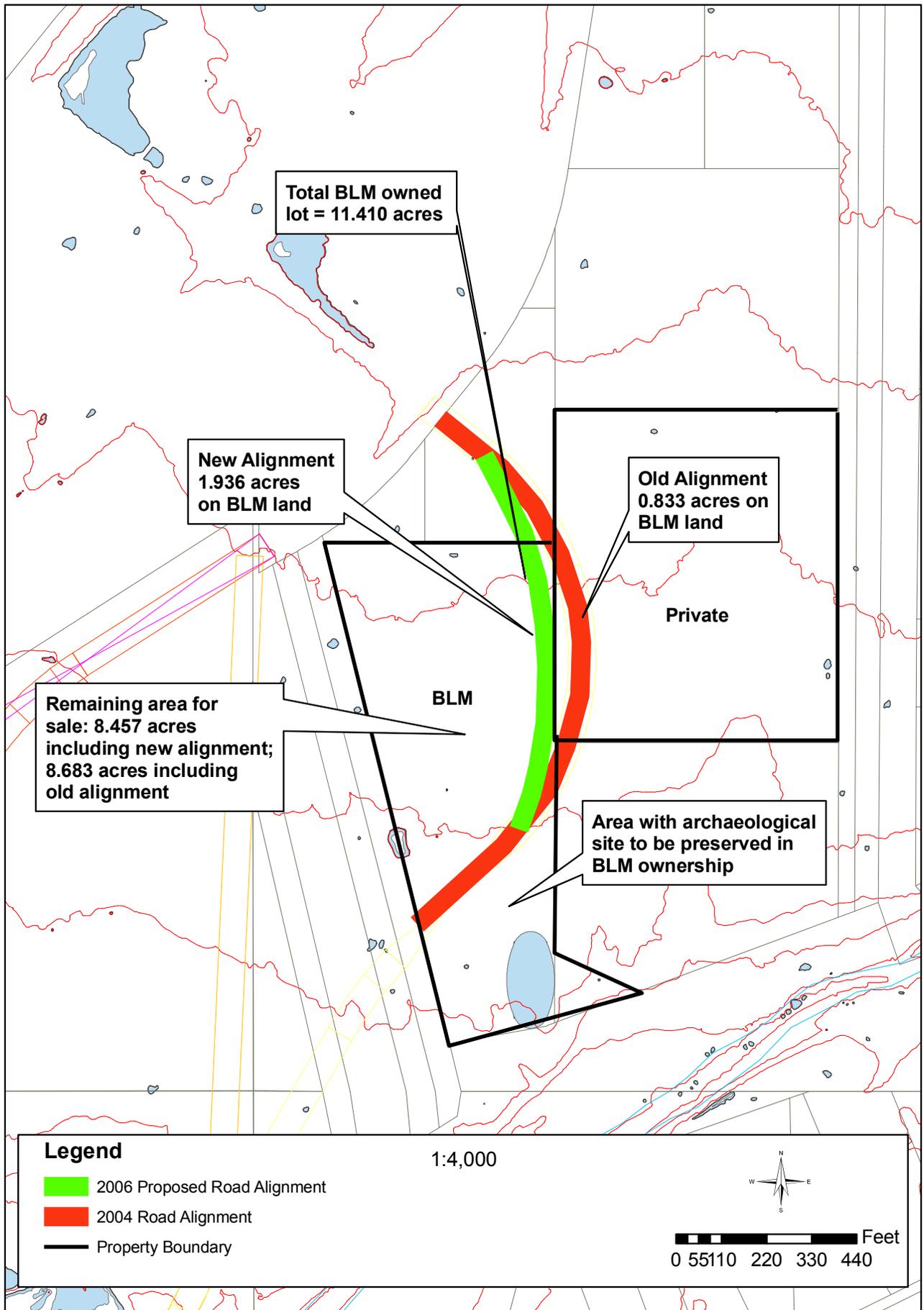
Local officials and planners have discussed the benefits of extending South Meadows Road for a number of years. The Santa Fe Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MPO's) traffic model has shown that this connection would have significant impact in relieving traffic congestion on the arterial streets in this part of the City, primarily on Agua Fria Street. The major arterials serving the southwestern part of the City of Santa Fe and this part of Santa Fe County include Agua Fria Street, Airport Road, NM 599, and County Road 62.

In 2003, Gannett Fleming West Inc. prepared a report for the City of Santa Fe entitled *Location Study Report for South Meadows Road Extension*. This study was undertaken to determine feasible alternatives for the proposed extension. An EA was initiated for the project in 2003 and completed in 2004 by Taschek Environmental Consulting (TEC). Following review, a FONSI and Decision were issued by the BLM on August 31, 2004. The EA evaluated three core alternatives for the proposed undertaking and identified a preferred design concept for implementation. Subsequently, Santa Fe County identified a small modification in the alignment as appropriate and desirable to accommodate private land development plans. This modification triggered the following "2006 EA".

## 3.0 Proposed Action

The current proposal would involve a small shift west in the northern segment of the previously preferred alternative (Alignment C2). This portion of the roadway was originally aligned on private land east of BLM property. However, acquiring the right-of-way proved difficult due to a private development plan to subdivide the land. By shifting the right-of-way onto BLM land, the South Meadows extension would not adversely affect the landowner's planned development. Prior to the proposed alignment shift, the BLM had plans to sell the subject property. Since the proposed shift would affect a small portion of BLM property intended for sale, this alternative would have little impact on BLM plans and would accommodate development in the area.

The proposed modification would move the road alignment approximately 100 feet west (at the most extreme point) onto BLM property (see Figure 3). The total size of the BLM property is 11.410 acres. The modified roadway on BLM land is 80 feet wide and approximately 1,054 feet long, affecting about 1.936 acres. The original alignment was 80 feet wide and approximately 454 feet long on BLM land, requiring about 0.833 acres. (Dawson Surveys File Number 7145). To the south of the road alignment on BLM land (either alternative) is an archeological site with a buffer area that the BLM intends to protect. To the north of this area is the land that BLM intends to sell including the proposed road. With the modified roadway alignment approximately 8.457 acres would remain outside the archeological site and buffer area in BLM ownership for potential sale (this includes the road). With the original alignment, approximately 8.683 acres (including the road) would be available for sale outside the archeological site and buffer area. Thus the proposed modification would reduce the amount of BLM land available for sale by about 0.226 acres. The road right-of-way would be acquired by Santa Fe County in accordance with BLM procedures. Table 1 and Figure 3 illustrate the proposed changes.



**Figure 3: Location of Project Area and New Road Alignment**

**Table 1: Change in BLM Owned Land: 2004 Alignment Versus 2006 Alignment**

	<b>2004 Alignment</b>	<b>2006 Alignment</b>	<b>Change</b>
<b>Road area (acres) on BLM land</b>	<b>0.833</b>	<b>1.936</b>	<b>1.103</b>
<b>BLM land (acres) available for sale</b>	<b>8.683</b>	<b>8.457</b>	<b>0.226</b>

#### **4.0 Public and Agency Involvement**

Public agencies, private organizations, and interest groups were contacted as part of the project development process in 2003 and 2004. Contacts were made with representatives of the following agencies and organizations:

- ? US Fish and Wildlife Service
- ? US Army Corp of Engineers
- ? U.S. Bureau of Land Management
- ? U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- ? NM Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department
- ? NM Department of Game and Fish
- ? NM Environment Department
- ? NM State Historic Preservation Office
- ? NM Commissioner of Public Lands
- ? Santa Fe County
- ? City of Santa Fe

An initial mailing was sent to public agencies to notify them of the then upcoming project and solicit input on potential issues of concern. In general, all of the agencies were in support of the project. All of the issues and concerns raised were included in the original investigation and are available in the EA.

The general public and interested groups were given a chance to provide input as well. Included in this process were two public meetings. Prior to both meetings, display notices were published in the Santa Fe New Mexican, flyers were posted in several locations, and over 500 notices were directly mailed to concerned citizens.

The first public meeting was held on January 15, 2003. Approximately 25 people attended the meeting with a variety of concerns and questions. The second meeting was held on February 26, 2004. Approximately 20 people attended to ask questions and provide input. A complete summary of both of the public meetings is included in Appendix A of the EA. All issues and concerns were addressed to the degree possible through design decisions and/or the EA.

For the currently proposed modification, a public information meeting was not considered to be needed because the alternatives and effects are essentially identical to those analyzed in the 2004 EA. The redesign was made to reduce impacts on private landowner concerns and the reduction in BLM land available for sale only amounts to 0.226 acres.

## **5.0 Environmental Effects**

This section describes changes in the social, economic, and environmental conditions within the modified project area. This discussion is focused on the possible effects of the proposed action and the specific project-related issues. Resources that are unaffected, or not present, within the modified project area are not addressed in this document.

The proposed modified alignment is located in Santa Fe County entirely on property owned by the BLM. The 2004 EA included discussions of direct, indirect, and cumulative effects, and involved public input and coordination with regulatory agencies. Because the modification to the project area is minor, the original investigations for cultural resources, biological resources, and hazardous materials cover the adopted portion of BLM property. Therefore, no supplemental investigations were conducted.

Because the current EA addresses a minor modification to the South Meadows Road Extension project, the analysis does not include an evaluation of other alternatives, such as purchasing a larger right-of-way from the private landowner or funding a redesign of the landowner's development plans.

### **5.1 Hazardous Materials**

An environmental site assessment (ESA), Phase 1A, for hazardous materials was conducted for the expansion project by TEC on February, 19, 2004. No evidence of hazardous materials that would potentially affect the project was discovered during the investigation, including in the additional acre of BLM land discussed in this document. However, if contaminated soils or hazardous materials are discovered they will be removed, tested, and disposed of according to New Mexico Environmental Department (NMED) guidelines and regulations. Specific Best Management Practices (BMP) to be used include: chemical spill prevention and control, the maintenance, onsite, of material safety data sheets for all stored chemicals used in construction, general vehicle maintenance onsite, and general construction site waste management.

### **5.2 Safety**

It is not possible to predict the exact operational characteristics of a road before it is constructed or signalized. The surrounding arterial street network, including Agua Fria Street, Airport Road, and Cerrillos Road, has experienced a significant number of accidents over the past four years. Some of these accidents can be attributed to congestion problems and physical deficiencies on the streets. The South Meadows Road extension would provide traffic relief to these streets and would provide an alternative for highway users wanting to access NM 599, which may reduce accidents on the surrounding arterial street system. The preferred alternative in the original EA was selected because it was anticipated to provide a perpendicular geometric configuration at the intersection of NM 599 and South Meadows Road that would be safer than the other skewed alignments. However, no additional roadway safety is anticipated with the modified project alignment discussed in this reevaluation.

### **5.3 Compliance with local transportation policy**

As proposed, the extension of South Meadows Road is in conformance with Santa Fe County's Land Development Code and meets State and County standards for arterial roads. Development of the South Meadows Road extension will involve a variety of federal, state, and local permits, authorization and approvals, including consultation with federal, state and local agencies and authorities. A summary of the authorizing actions is presented in the 2004 EA.

The extension of South Meadows Road is included in the *City of Santa Fe's General Plan* as a proposed street improvement required to accommodate future land uses envisioned in the Plan. The proposed modification is in compliance with all local and state transportation guidelines.

### **5.4 Off-site design issues**

Traffic projections were provided by the Santa Fe Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to evaluate the effect of the project, assuming that the South Meadows connection would be in place by 2020. These projections show that the construction of the South Meadows extension as proposed would reduce traffic on Agua Fria. County Road 62 traffic volumes also would decrease with the South Meadows connection. Volumes on Airport Road and NM 599 would increase slightly as a result of the project, but these are high capacity major arterial roads.

### **5.5 Environmental Justice and Social-Economic Effects**

In compliance with Executive Order (EO) 12898 on environmental justice, it is Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and NMDOT policy to avoid disproportionately high and adverse impacts on minority and low-income population groups. The project does not adversely affect any property owners or communities. The modification that triggered this reevaluation will benefit surrounding landowners by preserving their development plans. The project will provide improved access to property throughout the area.

The proposed project will require approximately 1.936 acres of BLM property, which will be sold as part of the 8.457 acres that would remain outside the archeological site and buffer area. The proposed road would provide improved access to BLM's land holdings. Although the proposed modified road alignment would reduce the acreage available for sale, the improved road would likely increase the value of the remaining property. The BLM intends to sell this land for appraised, fair-market values. Actual values must be determined through a fair appraisal process at the time of disposal and thus cannot be determined at this time.

### **5.6 Biological Issues**

This project is located at an elevation of about 6440 feet in an area classified as Juniper Savanna. A biological survey was conducted in December 2003, including the area of the proposed alignment modification (Batie Environmental Services). No wetlands or riparian habitat are present in the modified portion of the project area and none of the vegetation is unique or unusual. Within this portion of the project corridor, there were no state listed noxious weeds.

Impacts to habitat on BLM land are not expected to alter animal populations or habitat in the region; however, fragmentation of habitat may occur and foraging and burrowing areas will be slightly reduced. According to Santa Fe ordinance, if prairie dogs are encountered they are to be removed humanely to another site prior to construction.

No suitable habitat for any threatened or endangered species and no critical habitat was located in the project area. No threatened, endangered, or rare species were identified during the survey. Therefore, no impacts to these species are expected as a result of the project.

### ***5.7 Water Quality Issues***

The area of disturbance from this project is over one acre. Under the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit process of the Clean Water Act (CWA), a storm-water pollution prevention plan (SWPPP) will be required for the project. Appropriate erosion control procedures will be used during project construction.

The broader project includes a crossing of the Santa Fe River which is considered waters of the United States, as defined under the CWA. Therefore, a Section 404 permit, as administered by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), is required for this project. However, this modification does not affect the Section 404 permitting process since no additional waters of the United States are present.

Further, the modified area is not expected to affect water quality nor is it within a designated floodplain. No drainage problems have been identified for the project area and the modification will have no affect on surface or ground water.

### ***5.8 Cultural Resources***

A Class III archaeological inventory was completed for the entire project area in March, 2004 (Townsend). This survey included the area of the modified design that triggered this reevaluation. The inventory resulted in 13 isolated occurrences of cultural material and two previously undocumented archaeological sites. However, none of these resources were identified within the proposed modified project area. All findings were submitted to the New Mexico State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) for review. The SHPO concurred with the findings of the survey report (see Appendix B of the EA).

### ***5.9 Visual Impacts***

The Taos BLM Field Office has not classified the South Meadows project area for visual resources through its resource management plan (RMP). Because there were no RMP approved objectives, interim visual resource visual resource management (VRM) classes were developed using the guidelines in Handbook H-8410-1. The inventory was limited to the area affected by the project and the VRM classes reflect the management decision(s) made in the existing RMP (BLM 1988). A visual resources field inventory was conducted on June 7, 2004 (TEC).

Based on the field survey at the South Meadows project, it was concluded that the area would qualify under BLM criteria as Class III. The objective of this class is to partially retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape is expected to be moderate.

The modified alignment plan calls for the proposed road to be shifted approximately 100 feet to the west (at the most extreme point), which reduces the roadway curvature and shortens the length of the right-of-way by about 65 feet. Although the proposed modification places this section of road exclusively onto BLM land, there will be no measurable change to the viewshed and no additional visual impact.

### **5.10 Additional Environmental Effects**

The proposed action will not have discernable adverse impacts in any of the following areas of potential concern: prime and unique farmland, range land, air quality, water quality (surface and ground), floodplains, soils, wilderness areas, vegetation, wildlife, threatened and endangered species, noxious weeds or invasive species, wetlands, riparian zones, cultural resources, hazardous materials, recreation, mineral resources, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs). Following consultation with the resource specialists, it was determined that no supplemental investigations were necessary. Complete records of all investigations can be found in the 2004 EA, FONSI, and Decision, and in the respective discipline-specific reports generated for the proposed undertaking.

## **6.0 Indirect and Cumulative Impacts**

Indirect and cumulative impacts result from a proposed action in combination with other, related projects or occur indirectly as part of a chain of events related to the initial activity. Such impacts may develop simultaneously with construction of the project or incrementally over time.

The modified alignment plan for South Meadows calls for the proposed road to be shifted a maximum of 100 feet to the west, which will reduce the roadway curvature and shortens the length of the right-of-way by about 65 feet, compared to the original alignment. Although the proposed modification places this section of road exclusively on BLM land, little change to indirect or cumulative impacts to vegetation, wildlife habitat, or other natural resources is anticipated, relative to the previous alignment.

The project as a whole, with either of the alignment concepts, may result in more intense land development in the area, resulting in some growth-related indirect or cumulative impacts. However, the roadway project is part of the regional plan and is designed to serve the community by providing better transportation service in the area.

## **7.0 Environmental Commitments**

No additional environmental commitments are required from the 2004 EA, FONSI, and Decision with the modified road alignment discussed in this EA. Following are project commitments.

## **7.1 Environmental Commitment Summary**

*Erosion Control/Water Quality:* Sedimentation control measures will be implemented in the contract and construction plans and a SWPPP will be prepared by the contractor. Disturbed areas will be restored and stabilized as soon as the construction schedule permits. Specifications for temporary erosion, sedimentation, and water pollution controls will be included in the construction contracts. BMP's to be used include dust controls, silt fences, wind and sand fences, vegetative buffers and re-vegetating disturbed land.

*Access:* During construction access to residential properties will be maintained at all times. Emergency departments will be kept informed of the project.

*Utilities:* The contractor will coordinate project activities with utility companies to minimize impacts during construction.

*Hazardous Materials:* During construction, the contractor will be responsible for managing hazardous materials in accordance with state and federal laws.

*Migratory Birds:* If construction activities involving the removal of trees are expected to occur between March and September, a migratory bird survey will be completed. If the survey identifies nesting birds protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, they will be removed or treated in accordance with the requirements of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

*Section 404 Permit:* A Section 404 permit will be obtained from the USACE prior to construction. The requirements of the permit will be followed.

## **8.0 Conclusions**

Investigations conducted by the consulting parties, including the BLM, as documented in the 2004 EA, FONSI, and Decision and this EA, have established that the FONSI remains valid and that no further analyses are necessary. This EA plus the 2004 EA, FONSI, and Decision, which are incorporated by reference, provide the basis for BLM to make a new decision.

## **9.0 References**

Bureau of Land Management, City of Santa Fe, New Mexico Department of Transportation, *Environmental Assessment: South Meadows Road Extension in Santa Fe County, Agua Fria Road to NM 599 Frontage Road*. Project No.ST-7549(276)CN 7322, Santa Fe County, New Mexico, 2004.

Bureau of Land Management, *Environmental Site Assessment (Phase IA), South Meadows Road Extension Alignments, Santa Fe, New Mexico*. April 2004

BLM 1986a. Visual Resource Inventory, BLM Manual Handbook H-8410-1. January 17, 1986.

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Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Department of Interior, “*Taos Resource Management Plan*,” 1988.

City of Santa Fe, “*City of Santa Fe Master Plan*,” May 2002.

Dawson Surveys, File Number 7145, April 21, 2005. Santa Fe, New Mexico

Executive Order 12898, “*Environmental Justice*,” *Federal Register* vol 60, no. 125.

Gannett Fleming West Inc., *Location Study Report for South Meadows Road Extension*, Prepared for the City of Santa Fe, New Mexico, 2003.

New Mexico Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department, *New Mexico Natural Heritage Program* (NMNHP).

U.S. Code of Federal Regulations, Chapter 23 Part 771.

U.S. Code of Federal Regulations, Chapter 23 Part 772.