

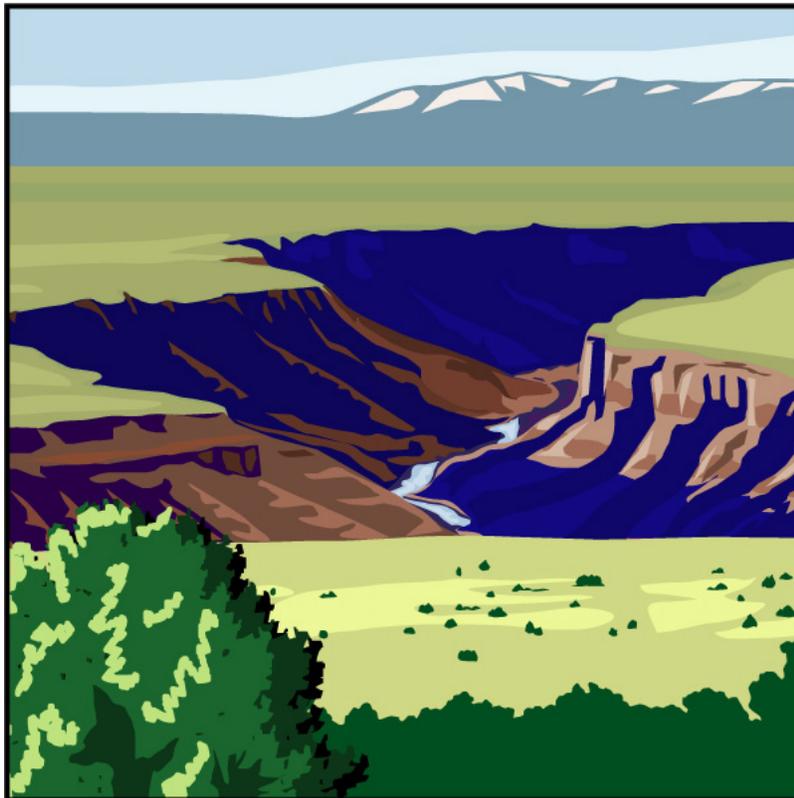
*TAOS  
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT  
PLAN*

**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT  
AND REVISION**

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*SCOPING REPORT*

*September 15, 2006*



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# ***TAOS RMP REVISION SCOPING REPORT***

## **A. INTRODUCTION**

### **OVERVIEW**

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Taos Field Office is preparing a revision to the 1988 Taos Resource Management Plan (RMP), as amended, and associated environmental impact statement (EIS). We understand that a resource management plan for public lands is more effectively implemented if the management decisions made by BLM-Taos reflect the values and sentiment of the public. The first step in our planning process was to identify preliminary issues based on informal discussions with the public, other agencies, and the Taos RMP 15-year Evaluation Report. The next step was to present these preliminary issues to the public through a “scoping” process to validate and refine the issues and to ask the public and other agencies to identify any other major management issues we should address. In late April 2006, we began scoping, which included informal meetings with a number of individuals, groups and agencies. On May 26, 2006 a *Notice of Intent* was published in the Federal Register. This notice indicated Taos Field Office’s intent to prepare a RMP revision and associated EIS and to hold public scoping meetings in conjunction with that process. Four formal scoping meetings and two workshops centering on sharing information about the revision and the planning process were held during the scoping period. The “formal scoping” period closed on August 31, 2006.

Scoping comments for the RMP revision were originally due by July 31, 2006; however, the scoping comment period was extended through August 31, 2006. All scoping comments received by August 31, 2006, have been entered into the record and considered in the planning process. The BLM will accept comments and information on resource management issues throughout the planning process.

This Scoping Report is intended to provide a summary of the comments received, to refine the preliminary issues, and to identify new major issues. The report will help to provide direction to the planning team to clearly identify issues as they begin to develop alternative means of addressing the issues and to analyze the potential impacts of those alternatives.

### **BACKGROUND**

The Taos Resource Management Plan was approved in 1988. Since 1988, the Taos RMP has been amended seven times. Current RMP direction and guidance is comprised of the 1988 Taos RMP, portions of the draft RMP and the EIS prepared in conjunction with it, and the seven amendments described in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Amendments to the Taos RMP		
Amendment	Year	Purpose
Oil and Gas Leasing and Development	1991	Established areas as opened or closed to oil and gas (O&G) leasing, and determined levels of control on opened areas
La Cienega Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)	1992	Expanded the (Special Management Area) SMA and designated it as an ACEC
Orilla Verde Recreation Area	1994	Established a Recreation Area and management prescriptions on land acquired from New Mexico State Parks
Rio Grande Corridor Final Plan	2000	Changed ACECs, Recreation Area boundaries and prescriptions, amended rights-of-way (ROW) Exclusion Areas, established VRM classes for areas not covered in RMP
Standards for Public Land Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management	2001	No RMP decisions were changed; RMP maintenance added a new paragraph to briefly summarize the standards and guidelines; Special Management Area prescriptions were revised as needed.
El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro National Historic Trail	2004	Established a new SMA, with prescriptions for management. Also amended RMP by designating visual resource management (VRM) classes along the trail corridor.
RMPA for Fire and Fuels Management on Public Land in New Mexico and Texas	2004	State-wide amendment provided updated guidance for fire and fuel management practices

These amendments, and periodic Plan maintenance, have kept the RMP fairly current, but the great increase in population and development throughout the Field Office has brought forward new information and an increased sense of urgency to comprehensively review the RMP and revise specific sections. Because of new information and increasing demands on public lands and resources in the Taos Field Office, as well as the need to consolidate direction and guidance into one document, we have decided to prepare a revised RMP.

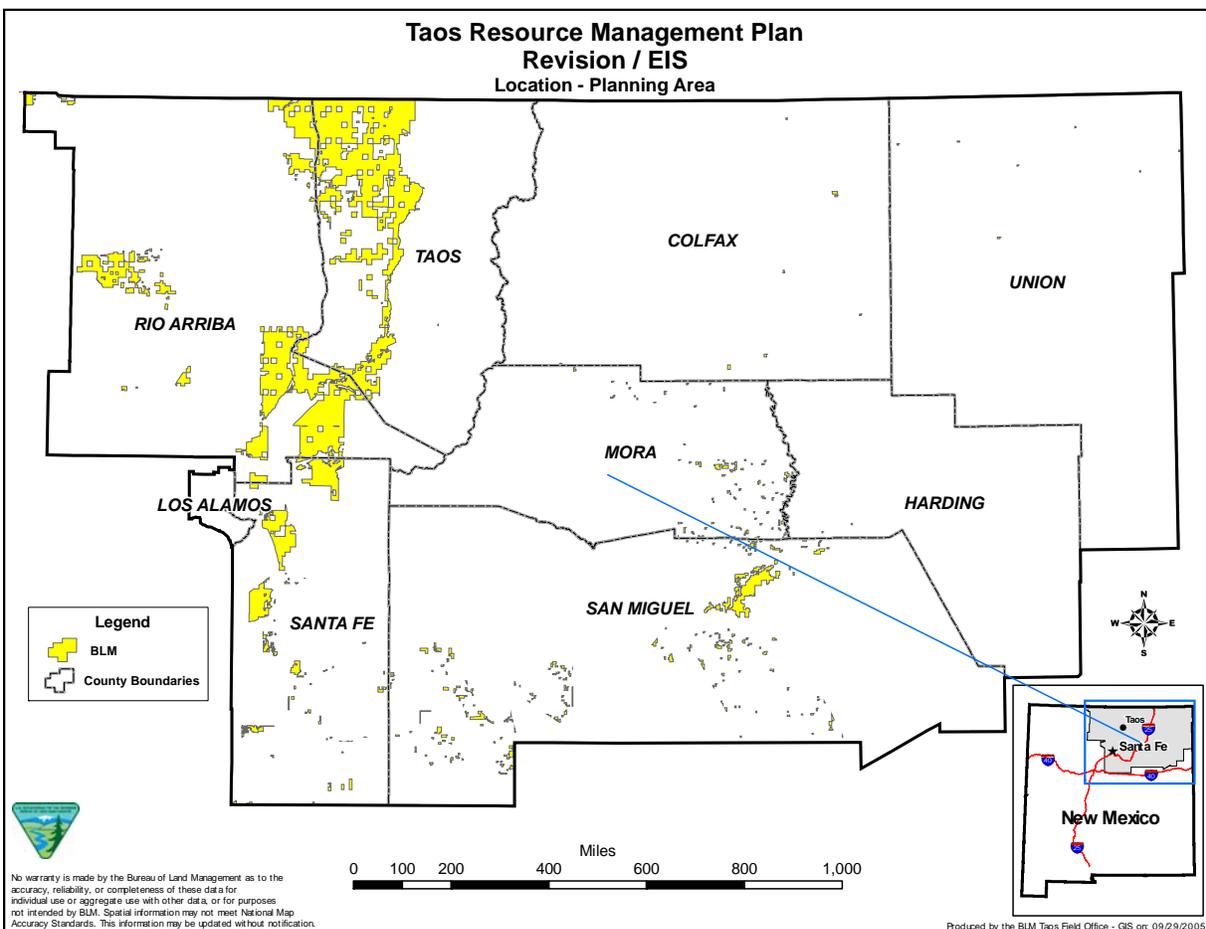
In early 2006, we determined that the Taos RMP would be revised to address the following preliminary issues:

1. Land tenure adjustments
2. Land uses (especially rights-of-way and other authorized land uses)
3. Special area designations
4. Visual resource management
5. Off-highway vehicles (OHV)/travel management/access
6. Minerals

## DESCRIPTION OF PLANNING AREA

The Taos Field Office manages the public lands of the north-central and north-east portions of New Mexico, with the largest portions located in Rio Arriba, Santa Fe, and Taos Counties. Small portions are scattered throughout the remaining area, which includes Colfax, Harding, Los Alamos, Mora, San Miguel, and Union Counties. These nine counties cover about 15.3 million acres. BLM-Taos manages 593,659 surface acres and about 4,000,000 acres of federal mineral estate (surface may be in private ownership or managed by state agencies, the BLM or another federal agencies). See Map 1 for the location of these counties in New Mexico and a general outline of the planning area.

Map 1



## SCOPING PROCESS

The Taos Field Office determined that one of the more effective means of sharing information and collecting ideas about discussing the upcoming RMP revision is through personal one-on-one or small group discussions with interested parties. Therefore, our staff engaged in a number of pre-formal scoping discussions with local groups and individuals (for example, the community of Dixon, the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance

and the Wilderness Society, the Taos and Rio Arriba County Managers, Vecinos del Rio, Santa Fe county commissioners, and others) from late April through early June 2006. Comments were recorded and included in the compilation of scoping comments used to develop this report.

A *Notice of Intent* to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement/RMP revision was published in the **Federal Register** on May 26, 2006 (volume 71, number 102, page 30446). That notice identified the need for the RMP revision; provided information about the planning process, including communities where scoping meetings would be held and the approximate time frame for those meetings; provided contact information; and initiated a 60-day comment period, initially scheduled to close July 30, 2006. Comments received in response to the *Notice of Intent* were also included in the compilation of scoping comments.

Four formal scoping meetings were held in June 2006. The approximately two-hour long meetings began at 6:00 pm with a power-point presentation providing the overview of the need for the RMP revision, the preliminary issues, and the planning process. Following the overview, participants were invited to visit six stations to review display materials presenting information about the preliminary issues and to discuss issues with Taos Field Office staff. The last ½ to 1 hour of the meeting was a question and answer period. Table 2 below identifies the location, date, and number of participants that signed in for each of the four scoping meetings.

Table 2. Formal Scoping Meetings for the Taos RMP revision		
Location	Date	Number of Participants
Taos, NM	June 13, 2006	15
Las Vegas, NM	June 15, 2006	11
Espanola, NM	June 27, 2006	60
Santa Fe, NM	June 29, 2006	132

In addition to scoping meetings, two Economic Profile System (EPS) workshops were held to both inform local citizens and community leaders about the RMP revision and to develop a common basis of understanding about local economics and BLM's role(s) in the economies of the counties discussed. The first EPS workshop was held in Espanola on July 29, 2006 and centered on the economy of Rio Arriba County. The second workshop was held in Santa Fe on July 20, 2006 and centered on Santa Fe County. In Espanola, 23 citizens, county officials, and BLM and other agency planners participated. In Santa Fe, participants numbered 29, and included a number of local organization representatives, county citizens, county planners, a Tribal representative, and BLM and other agency representatives.

In late July 2006, the Field Office received a number of requests asking that the comment period for scoping be extended. An extension was granted and the formal comment period was extended until August 31, 2006. Notification of the extension was posted on the Taos – RMP website and provided through news releases and newspaper articles and other means.

## **COOPERATING AGENCIES**

Potential cooperating agencies were identified very early in the planning process and the list refined prior to scoping. The criteria used to identify potential cooperators were that they be governmental entities which 1) have jurisdiction by law, 2) can contribute expertise and resources to the planning process, or 3) manage adjacent federal lands. The following entities were invited to participate as cooperating agencies and their current status is shown:

- Taos County (status pending)
- Rio Arriba County (status pending)
- Santa Fe County (formal cooperator)
- Town of Taos (declined)
- City of Espanola (formal cooperator)
- City of Santa Fe (declined)
- Carson National Forest (status pending)
- Santa Fe National Forest (status pending)

## **TRIBAL CONSULTATION**

Eleven tribes have lands located within the boundaries of the Taos Field Office. These include the northern Tiwa Pueblos of Taos and Picuris; the Tewa Pueblos of Nambe, Pojoaque, San Ildefonso, Ohkay Owingeh, Santa Clara and Tesuque; the Keresan Pueblos of Cochiti and Santo Domingo; and the Jicarilla Apache Nation. As part of the scoping process, we contacted these tribes to initiate consultations in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act and to extend the opportunity to participate in the planning process. A scoping presentation was made at an Eight Northern Pueblos Council meeting to update the Governors of the eight Pueblos on the RMP revision proposed issues and planning schedule.

Other New Mexico Tribes with lands located outside of the Taos Field Office boundaries were contacted with RMP REVISION scoping information, because of possible interest in the Planning Area. These contacts include the following tribes:

- The Navajo Nation
- Acoma Pueblo
- Isleta Pueblo
- Jemez Pueblo
- Laguna Pueblo
- San Felipe Pueblo
- Sandia Pueblo
- Santa Ana Pueblo
- Zia Pueblo
- Zuni Pueblo
- Hopi Pueblo
- The Southern Ute Tribe

We intend to continue to consult with the Native American tribes on a government to government basis throughout the planning process. Native American tribal governments will be encouraged to raise issues, express concerns, provide information, and identify resources and places they would like the Taos Field Office to consider in its decision-making. The Taos Field Office will look for opportunities to develop cooperative management partnerships with tribes where appropriate.

## **B. ISSUE SUMMARY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

To record and analyze the scoping comments, the planning team developed a spreadsheet database that allows them to track the commenter and their contribution, and to describe individual comments and place them in an “issue category.” The comments were reviewed in their issue category and used to refine and summarize the seven issues in this report (six issues will be addressed in the RMP revision; the seventh will not and is described below).

Approximately 360 scoping letters, e-mails, phone conversations, meeting summaries, and comment forms were reviewed and analyzed, yielding approximately 880 individual comments relating to one of the seven issue categories.

The six issue categories that will be addressed through the RMP revision are:

Land tenure adjustments  
Land uses  
Special area designations  
Visual resource management  
OHV/travel management/access  
Minerals

The seventh issue category relates to Taos Field Office using an adaptive strategy for the planning process. There are no decisions to be made or direction to be formulated through this issue, hence specific questions and concerns will be addressed throughout the planning process. Five representative comments regarding the planning process are:

- “How is public input utilized? Does BLM look for consensus?” (Individual)
- “How will previous studies be incorporated in this work?” (Individual)
- “The analysis of socio-economic impacts of the proposed resource management plan must be thorough and accurate in order to responsibly manage the public lands.” (Group)
- “Each participant in this process needs to be the voice for your community and for your issues of concern.” (Individual)
- “We believe that adaptive management should only be used where it can strengthen BLM’s ability to conserve resources within the multiple use mandate and should not be employed to relieve BLM of specific obligations, restrictions on

development, or use of appropriate management tools such as special designations.” (Group)

Descriptions of the six issue categories that will be addressed in the RMP revision, representative comments from each category and anticipated decisions to be made are provided in the sections below.

## **ISSUES**

### **1. Land Tenure Adjustments**

The land tenure comments were divided into four different topics: Site Specific Disposal, Retention and Criteria for Disposal, Withdrawals, and Acquisition.

#### **A. Land Tenure Adjustments: Site Specific Disposal**

##### **Issue Overview**

There were a number of comments stating the need for public lands, mainly for public purpose uses such as housing, a watershed conservation area for Edgewood and a transfer station in Chimayo. There were an equal number of comments stating that BLM should not dispose of any public lands, specifically in the Arroyo Seco/La Puebla area.

Many comments were received regarding land grants, requesting that public lands be given back to the land grants. This topic will need to be explored in more detail as the plan progresses, because it could affect land ownership decisions.

##### **Representative Comments**

- “Land disposal in the Espanola Valley, concerned that development, loss of open space and vistas, not in favor of county development, preferred to have BLM manage if not land grant.” (Individual)
- “...the (Acequia) Commission requests that special attention be given under this area of the plan for the long-standing need of many traditional communities to open new tracts of land for housing as a way to reduce pressure for conversion of agricultural lands to housing...” (Agency)
- “There is a legal controversy regarding the title of the land involved, which the U.S. Congress is in the process of attempting to resolve. The public lands involved in this RMPR (revision) were expropriated from the Santa Cruz Land Grant, which was established in 1695...Despite these actions the status of the common lands of the Santa Cruz Land Grant are in question and the BLM TFO should not take any actions that would compromise the integrity of any part of this area until such time as Congress reaches their decision concerning whether or not the BLM is legally entitled to be determining its use.” (Individual)

## **Anticipated Actions and Decisions**

- Establish criteria for identifying public lands proposed for disposal.
- Determine how the needs of local communities will factor into the proposal of lands for disposal.

## **B. Land Tenure Adjustments: Retention and Criteria for Disposal**

### **Issue Overview**

Many comments were received identifying specific areas for retention of public lands in specific areas/communities, such as northwest of Santa Fe, Arroyo Seco/La Puebla, Alcalde, and Velarde.

There were several comments stating that we should not dispose of the public lands, and more specifically that the public lands in the La Puebla/Arroyo Seco area should be retained, and that these lands be managed for OHV use, while an equal amount of commenters wanted no OHV use on these lands.

One commenter suggested that land exchanges in the Cerrillos Hills should be undertaken with the State of New Mexico, or that the area should be managed by Santa Fe County.

Several comments indicated the need for a process to identify lands for disposal. Many comments suggested that these disposal areas be small and isolated or that they contain acreage limitations. It was suggested that coordination with land grants and counties be taken prior to disposing of public lands.

The need for additional land for recreation uses was requested, specifically for an OHV park in Santa Fe County.

The land grant issue was also a big concern with commenters; many stated that public lands not being used should be given back to the land grants or to the tribes.

### **Representative Comments**

- “Under a proposal ...the city of Santa Fe would acquire 160 acres of federal land near the Municipal Recreation complex and develop ATV trails and a motocross track.” (Media)
- “Lands transferred out of public domain contain critical energy related infrastructure, protect these resources [sic].” (Business)
- “We support efforts by BLM to do land exchanges with the State of New Mexico and other parties to facilitate management of existing BLM land.” (Group)
- “Disposal areas should be small and isolated. Areas that are urban in nature may be candidates if no resource values.” (Agency)

### **Anticipated Actions and Decisions**

- Determine criteria for disposals.
- Identify lands for disposal.

### **C. Land Tenure Adjustments: Withdrawals**

#### **Issue Overview**

Several comments from the public requested that the Cerrillos Hills/San Pedro areas and the Sombrillo ACEC be withdrawn from mineral entry.

#### **Representative Comments**

- “Can BLM consider designating the public lands in the San Pedro Mountains as low mineral development vs open mining?” (Individual)
- “The area (Cerrillos Hills) should be withdrawn from mineral entry in all unclaimed areas and from future lapsed claims.” (Group)
- “Exclude from mineral exploration, leasing and extraction (Sombrillo SMA).” (Group)

### **Anticipated Actions and Decisions**

- Identify areas within the field office that need to be recommended for withdrawal or segregation from mineral or land laws.
- Determine whether existing withdrawals or segregations be continued, modified or revoked. If withdrawals or segregations are relinquished, establish how the lands will be managed once an opening order is issued.

### **D. Land Tenure Adjustments: Acquisition**

#### **Issue Overview**

There were several comments from the public in favor of acquisition in different areas throughout the field office. Specifically, those areas identified were within existing recreation areas, ACECs, SMAs and the Rio Grande Corridor. Also identified for acquisition was the “North Unit” area and other lands with significant wildlife management potential or proposed for special area designation.

Public comment suggested that exchanges should be considered over the disposal of public lands.

#### **Representative Comments**

- “With the continued population growth in New Mexico, we feel it is important that BLM consider acquiring additional land around existing SMA’s and ACEC’s to protect these sensitive areas.” (Group)
- “Consider acquisition of lands on southern boundary to protect this resource (Ute Mountain).” (Group)

## **Anticipated Actions and Decisions**

- Establish criteria to determine what private or state lands should be acquired.
- Determine whether acquisitions be only within existing recreation areas, ACECs, SMAs, or other areas with unique management guidance.

## **2. Land Uses (commercial uses on BLM land for utility and communication site rights-of-way, etc.)**

### **Issue Overview**

The majority of public comments in this category addressed the issue of cell towers on public land. Most comments were against their construction. One comment stated that cell towers should not be placed on public land in Chimayo, NM. One comment dealt with the issue of establishing wind energy facilities on public land while another addressed the need for energy related corridors across BLM land. Several comments declared that there should be no industrial buildings placed on BLM land.

### **Representative Comments**

- "...Make the cell towers look like windmills..." (Individual)
- "Since FLPMA the need for energy related corridors on public land has only increased. Segregation should be a last resort." (Business)
- "Wind power is being installed on mostly private lands currently and there will be an increase in application for easements across BLM to access these private land wind farms, in addition to application to install wind energy generation on BLM lands. Should manage for that. ..." (Agency)
- "We are in favor of multiple use designation as much as possible. We favor rights-of-way for utilities for power lines, pipelines, etc. where practical and public need is there." (Business)
- "The concern about cell towers is not just about aesthetics, but also about public health from radiation". (Individual)

## **Anticipated Actions and Decisions**

- Determine whether the BLM will authorize the establishment of specific rights-of-ways, including wind energy facilities, cell towers, roads, and utilities on BLM lands, and if so, under what conditions.
- Identify new and review existing right-of-way corridors and right-of-way avoidance or exclusion areas.

## **3. Special Management Areas**

### **Issue Overview**

The majority of comments regarding Special Management Areas and designations were in favor of protecting natural and cultural resources through special area designations. There is support for all SMAs and ACECs designated in the 1988 RMP. Some comments were generally supportive of special designations, while many were tied to a specific area such as Ute Mountain or the Ojo Caliente ACEC. Some commenters

requested designation of new Wilderness Study Areas and Wild and Scenic River designations. Others advocated expansion of existing ACECs and designation of new ACECs.

- “There should be special designations for archaeological, sacred and biologically fragile areas with special protections.” (Individual)
- “We propose an expanded ACEC in the Ojo Caliente area to protect both the numerous cultural sites and the visual aspects of the area.” (Individual)
- “Expand the ACEC in Ojo Caliente, both to the east and west of Highway 285. These lands are of enormous value. The scenic quality of the area is unparalleled in the state of New Mexico. Unimpeded views of 360 degrees, for twenty plus mile exist in these areas. No signs of contemporary human intervention. Currently these areas are used for recreation as well as cattle grazing. Archaeological sites abound..... The cultural heritage preserved in these areas has enormous potential economic value for the citizens of Rio Arriba County. Using these areas for recreation, education and tourism could provide financial windfalls for the County, windfalls to rival any profit to individuals hellbent on exploitation for private gains. Allow locals to continue to picnic, bike ride, hike, and horseback ride in these areas in the relatively pristine conditions in which we now find them, while protecting the historical values. EXPAND THE ACEC in Ojo.” (Individual)
- “We contend that BLM can and should continue to designate the areas identified in the Citizen’s Proposal as new WSAs in the revised Taos RMP. In addition, the BLM can and should manage these lands to protect their wilderness characteristics through applying appropriate management prescriptions.” (Group)
- “Ute Mountain: at a minimum we would like to see this area become an SMA or possibly an ACEC or WSA. We would like to see the Wild & Scenic River stretch enlarged to include Ute Mountain.” (Individual)
- “Buckman needs designation; need to exercise some control over the area.... Raves and shooting should be prohibited. Unique geologic features exist in the canyon, should be protected. Manage for climbing, control OHVs. Peregrine Falcon nesting just downstream from the area, cultural resources are rich in the area.” (Agency)
- “San Pedro: consider a park or special recreation management designation, ok with gold panning or rock hounding.” (Individual)
- “Preservation of old mining town ruins of San Pedro in the San Pedro Mountains as well as the Old Spanish Trail road through the mountains.” (Individual)
- “Set aside wildlife habitats, preserves for animals only, no recreational use or intrusion by people in San Pedros. These mountains are becoming islands in a development.” (Group)

### **Anticipated Actions and Decisions**

- Abolish, retain, or modify existing ACECs and other SMAs.
- Identify new special area designations. (See *Special Designations Including Nominations* later in this report)

## **4. Visual Resources**

### **Issue Overview**

Almost all comments received pertaining to scenic quality were expressed in terms that placed value on it as a resource. Commenters referred to giving visual resources management priority, protecting visual resources, valuing visuals as open space, the importance of un-fragmented and undeveloped lands, specific places visuals should be protected, and ways to mitigate development and utilities to protect scenic quality.

There were many general recommendations put forth on how development and utilities or rights of ways could be mitigated to protect scenic quality. Several included zoning in areas of existing disturbance and keeping development out of the backcountry. A few mentioned developing mitigation standards and screening utilities to blend in to the landscape. Quite a few comments named specific types of uses to protect visual resources from such impacts as cell towers, mining, roads, and OHV use.

Other comments were geared to protecting scenic quality in specific locations. Those named were Fun Valley, La Puebla, Mesa Prieta, Rio Grande, Ute Mountain, and Ojo Caliente. Fun Valley was noted for its beauty many times. One commenter suggested that the North Unit management objectives be VRM Class I. Another commenter recommended that visually impacted areas such as Orilla Verde Recreation Area (OVRA) and Wild Rivers Recreation Area (WRRRA) be managed with higher visual restrictions.

### **Representative Comments**

- “I would like to express my opposition to the proposed Palacio Fun Valley (area) near Chimayo. This is a pristine, beautiful region which belongs to the people of New Mexico. It is a perfect representation of the high desert and badlands that have made our state famous and well loved throughout the world.” (Individual)
- “... (VRM) goals should not preclude the development of future facilities or unduly burden the operation, maintenance, and reconstruction of facilities within existing utility corridors.... the proposed Buckman/Santa Fe Ranch ACEC must not be allowed to affect utilities and other infrastructure outside of those areas.” (Business)
- “... (BLM) should place facilities and/or development in areas that are already disturbed and keep the backcountry free of infrastructure.” (Agency)
- “(BLM) should ... look at future land tenure decisions with an eye toward providing adequate open space for the growing public, maintaining key viewsheds.” (Group)

### **Anticipated Actions and Decisions**

- Update the visual resource management (VRM) class objectives, primarily for Taos, Rio Arriba, and Santa Fe Counties.

## **5. OHV/Travel Management/Access**

## **Issue Overview**

Comprehensive travel management should address all resource use aspects (such as recreational, traditional, casual, agricultural, commercial, and educational) and accompanying modes and conditions of travel on public lands, not just motorized or off-highway vehicle activities. Comments received were divided both for Off Highway Vehicle/ All Terrain Vehicles (OHV- ATV) use and against, however almost all comments advocated more management and control for the protection of soil, water, and cultural resources. Non motorized users asked for more horse, bike and foot trails. Other comments stated that motorized users can be destructive to public lands; leaving behind trash and visual scars, increasing erosion, fragmenting and destroying wildlife habitat, damaging fences, and increasing traffic. Trespass is an issue where private land is being crossed to access public lands. Commenters suggested that Taos Field Office cooperate with the Forest Service, county and state to assure that route designations and implementation actions are well coordinated.

## **Representative Comments**

- “Eliminate El Palacio fun park for off highway vehicle (ATV / OHV) recreation use, these vehicles can not be regulated and have impacts to wildlife, destroy grazing and scenic areas. BLM has no resources to fence, monitor, or enforce regulations. Create a fenced tightly controlled small acreage park for recreational competitive ATV/OHV use and enforce safety regulations. We need one in Chimayo away from the residential area. Consider closing BLM land north of Chimayo to OHV use. Our scenic barrancas are being severely damaged by reckless OHV use as well as our flood control dams.” (Group)
- “I am writing you about the BLM areas known as Alcalde/ Fun Valley and Buckman. These legacy riding areas have served well the recreational lands for OHV since before 1975. With that heritage, I am requesting that the BLM office keep those areas available, and designate them for continued OHV use. With over 65% of the Santa Fe National Forest designated off limits to OHV use it seems that a balance needs to be maintained to provide everyone with a variety of recreational outlets. OHV areas are recreational outlet for over 1000 New Mexico residents, not to mention the out of state riders that frequent these areas. These riders add or bring additional revenue to the State through dealership purchases or overnight accommodations and restraint purchases.” (Individual)
- “I love the peaceful La Puebla area, we can see the beautiful sky and enjoy all the stars at night and the quiet. We could use some of the land for trails for hiking, biking, and grazing. We love the open space, and it is very important to me. My great grandparents, my grandparents, my self, my sibling, aunts and uncles live here, we love this place, please do not destroy the scenic sections.” (Individual)
- “Santa Fe Canyon should be non-motorized, but will need easement from USFS to reach BLM from La Bahada [sic].” (Group)
- “I am very opposed to the ATV recreation park on BLM property surrounding Chimayo...” (Individual)

## **Anticipated Actions and Decisions**

- Examine transportation areas designated in the previous RMP and review their boundaries.

- Designate all areas as either “open” “limited” or “closed”, with the default designation being “limited to designated” roads.
- Use engineering standards to determine road maintenance practices.
- Identify county roads within the transportation area.

## **Mineral Issues**

### **Issue Overview**

Comments regarding mineral issues generally focused on mineral development activities in the San Pedro Mountain area. The comments, for the most part, did not differentiate between locatable mineral actions and mineral material authorizations. The majority of comments were in opposition to the expansion of mineral development throughout the East Mountain area. A number of comments supported mineral development in its existing form and character, particularly in the vicinity of the San Pedro Mountain area.

Those who were opposed to mineral development, particularly sand and gravel mining felt that the protection of scenic and recreation values outweighed the benefits of mining. Additionally, the increase of residential growth and development in the entire East Mountain area precluded the need for additional aggregate quarries in the area. The comments raised concerning mining ranged from: watershed impacts in areas immediately adjacent to mining operations; increased traffic and congestion on Highway 14 caused by sand and gravel haul trucks; traffic safety on State Road 14, especially along neighborhood areas and school zones; impacts to the scenic qualities of the area particularly as they affect the Turquoise Trail Scenic Byway; and, the general notion that commercial mining and industrial activities are in conflict with rural residential growth and development.

The comments that supported mining, both locatable mining and mineral material authorizations, emphasized the economic benefits to the East Mountain area including: enhancing the tax base of the local community; direct support of commercial development; providing construction materials for residential development; and, providing aggregate resources for county and state infrastructure projects. Many comments acknowledged the environmental impacts of mining, but nevertheless, emphasized that compliance with county, state, and, federal mining regulations, minimizes surface impacts caused by mining activities.

A few comments did not specifically oppose or favor mining development, but instead offered suggestions that land adjustments could possibly resolve mining versus non-mining conflicts.

Some comments relating to oil and gas development were general in nature and reflected interests in areas open to fluid mineral leasing and stipulations that would mitigate impacts to other land uses or resources.

## Representative Comments

- "We strongly oppose any expansion of commercial mining operations in these mountains, especially on public land.....Expanding commercial mining in the San Pedro Mountains threatens the quality of rural living." (Individual)
- "New home growth along the Trail has been very dramatic, and will continue to grow at an ever increasing rate.....Large commercial/industrial gravel pits are *not* compatible with upscale residential communities." (Individual)
- "Please ensure that the Highway 14 corridor between Santa Fe and Albuquerque honors the designation "National Scenic Byway" and remains an attractive area for drawing new residents/taxpayers forever." (Individual)
- "My concerns, and the concerns of many if not most of my fellow citizens living in the East Mountains relate to issues surrounding water, soil erosion, truck traffic, degradation of National Scenic Byway (The Turquoise Trail), potential negative impact on tourism and the local businesses that depend heavily on tourism." (Individual)
- "I request the BLM to continue all aspects of the RMP that presently allow mineral material sales, and that allow development of mineral resources and that allow all other manner of mining." (Individual)
- "We feel it is important to keep multiple-use of BLM lands in New Mexico and other areas. The multiple use we refer to includes development of mineral resources, grazing leases, timber and wood cutting, recreational uses such as hiking, biking, and ATV riding.....These multiple uses can co-exist with each other on....BLM land." (Individual)
- "Lands containing marketable natural resources such as minerals, oil, gas....should be kept available for use. There are sound methods for using these resources that minimize ecological, adverse long term damage and anyone using these resources...should be held to the highest standards of...reclamation." (Individual)
- "There is a large and continuously increasing demand for aggregate materials in the San Pedro Mountain vicinity. Need for roads, driveways, and building construction is increasing at a rapid rate in a large area surrounding the San Pedro Mountains, from Edgewood to Cerrillos, and all points between." (Individual)

## Anticipated Actions and Decisions

- Determine areas open or closed to mining, leasing, or mineral material disposal.

## VALID EXISTING MANAGEMENT TO BE CARRIED FORWARD

BLM-administered public land in the planning area is managed with direction from the Taos Resource Management Plan (1988). Although the RMP has been amended seven times over the past 18 years, numerous changes have occurred in the area, requiring reconsideration of certain management decisions. Many elements of the existing plan work well and remain valid, and BLM intends to carry many of these management decisions forward. Determining which existing management decisions will be carried forward is part of the planning process. BLM will review the existing

condition of the environment, review the existing management situation, and identify which existing management decisions should be carried forward and where there are opportunities to modify existing management direction and/or develop new management guidance. This review will be documented in the Analysis of the Management Situation, the next step in the planning process.

Archuleta Mesa and Vigil-Abeyta Mesa are two areas in New Mexico that were managed by the San Juan Resource Area in Colorado. Management of these New Mexico lands was transferred to the Taos Resource Area in 1991. No change in management direction will be proposed - Archuleta Mesa is proposed for disposal, while the Vigil-Abeyta Mesa would be retained.

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Based on comments received during the scoping process, it appears that minimal change will be required to the following programs:

**Air**  
**Soil and Water**  
**Cultural Resources**  
**Paleontology**  
**Coal**  
**Non-energy Leasables**  
**Special Status Species**  
**Forestry**  
**Livestock Grazing**

#### **Wildland Fire Management**

This section of the RMP was amended/updated as part of the 2004 Fire and Fuels Management on Public Land in New Mexico and Texas Plan Amendment and EIS. No change is anticipated as it meets Appendix C guidance.

#### **Wilderness Characteristics**

No change will be proposed in management direction for the three Wilderness Study Areas managed by Taos. Several areas with wilderness characteristics were mentioned by the public during scoping, and will be addressed per Handbook Appendix C guidance.

#### **Fluid Minerals**

Oil and Gas Amendment (1991) is still valid. Revisions may include restrictions on leasing for any new special area designations and new leasing stipulations.

#### **Special Designations**

Designation will be carried forward for the following areas:

- Rio Chama Wild and Scenic River, 1988
- Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River, 1968, 1994
- Sombrillo Area of Critical Environmental Concern, 1988
- Orilla Verde Recreation Area, 1994, 2000
- Wild Rivers Recreation Area, 2000
- Lower Gorge Area of Critical Environmental Concern, 2000

- Copper Hill Area of Critical Environmental Concern, 2000

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Resource programs that have tentatively been identified for revision are:

### **Vegetation**

Vegetation is currently addressed in the RMP under Wildlife, Range, and Fire Management. Guidance in these programs, and knowledge about the locations of sensitive species has changed significantly in the past 18 years.

### **Fish and Wildlife**

We expect to see changes in the lands identified as Habitat Management Areas, and in Special Area Designations that contain significant wildlife habitat.

### **Visual Resources**

About one-third of the Resource Area has established VRM Class objectives, primarily in the Rio Grande Corridor and for a few Special Designation areas. These existing decisions will be carried forward.

### **Recreation and Visitor Services**

No formal designations of Special Recreation Management Areas were made in the original RMP, although four areas are managed primarily for recreation.

### **Trails and Travel Management**

Some area designations will be changed since they no longer address community interests, and do not comply with current BLM policy.

### **Lands and Realty**

The revised RMP will reexamine prior decisions made as to retention and disposal, due to significant increases in population, particularly in Santa Fe County.

### **Mineral Materials**

Numerous comments were received asking for BLM to provide clearer direction on which lands would be open or closed to this activity.

## **SPECIAL DESIGNATIONS, INCLUDING NOMINATIONS**

Numerous areas were referred to by the public during the scoping period, or have been brought forward by staff based on the 15-year evaluation of the RMP, or other internal reviews. These areas are summarized by County, with key values or resources listed, and a brief description of the issue/opportunity raised.

### **Rio Arriba County**

#### **Black Mesa**

*Key values: Cultural resources, scenic quality, recreation*

This ACEC was designated in 1988 to protect populations of “rare and endemic plants.” Since it was designated, these plants have been found in other locations and removed

from protected categories. During scoping, additional resources - particularly cultural and scenic quality - were brought forward. We will consider revising the ACEC boundary as well as the values or resources justifying the designation. Since this ACEC boundary overlaps with, and shares scenic quality and recently recorded cultural resources with the Ojo Caliente ACEC, one alternative might include the expansion of the Ojo Caliente ACEC to include Black Mesa. This enlarged ACEC was referred to in one scoping comment.

### **Ojo Caliente (Rincon del Cuervo – Cerro Colorado)**

*Key values: Cultural resources, recreation, scenic quality, wilderness character, riparian, wildlife*

An existing ACEC designated to protect cultural resources. During scoping, the public proposed expansion of the existing designation and identified additional resources that warranted review. New data from recent archaeological inventories on Black Mesa and near El Rito support scoping statements concerning expansion of the ACEC. Dozens of new sites, including petroglyphs, field houses, agricultural sites and special activity areas, have been recorded in the last few years on Black Mesa. Numerous prehistoric agricultural sites associated with a large prehistoric Pueblo near El Rito, have been recorded lately during volunteer projects. These sites add to the cultural landscape of Tewa origin for which the original Ojo Caliente ACEC was designated.

The Ojo Caliente area is known for its outstanding scenic quality and recreational opportunities. Cerro Colorado is a volcanic formation in the north part of the area, while Rincon del Cuervo describes an eroded mesa cut with colorful badlands formations. The latter was mentioned as a candidate for wilderness consideration.

### **El Palacio Area and Fun Valley**

*Key values: Scenic quality, motorized and non-motorized recreation, paleontological resources, cultural resources, soils.*

Fun Valley was designated as a special management area for motorized recreation. Several comments questioned the wisdom of managing a large area for motorized vehicle play that is also characterized by highly erodable soils and high scenic quality. BLM will look at the broad area surrounding and including Fun Valley, known as El Palacio, for consideration as a Special Recreation Management Area, zoned to include areas for motorized and non-motorized uses; or as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

### **Rio Chama Area**

*Key values: Wilderness characteristics, cultural resources, recreation, riparian, wildlife*

The Chama area contains the Rio Chama Wild and Scenic River, a Wilderness Study Area, and a Special Management Area. Proposals were received to expand the area under consideration for wilderness designation, and to look at a fairly large area of contiguous public land for a “primitive” special recreation management area or Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

### **San Antonio Mountain Area**

*Key values: Wilderness characteristics, scenic quality, vegetation/wildlife, primitive recreation*

The 1988 RMP lists four special designations for this area – a large Special Management Area, two small Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, and a Wilderness Study Area. During scoping, BLM received comments that the Special Management Area should be expanded to include the Rio de los Pinos area, and re-designated as an ACEC. For the existing WSA, BLM was asked to change its recommendation from “nonsuitable” to “suitable” for designation as wilderness.

## **San Miguel County**

### **Sabinoso Area**

*Key values: Wilderness characteristics, recreation, scenic quality, wild and scenic river, cultural/historic resources, wildlife*

Much of this area was designated as a Special Management Area; included within is a Wilderness Study Area. Comments asked that a larger area be considered for designation as an ACEC, with a request that BLM reconsider its earlier recommendation that the area was nonsuitable for wilderness designation.

## **Santa Fe County**

### **Buckman Area, including Diablo Canyon, Rio Grande, and Santa Fe Ranch area**

*Key values: Recreation, cultural resources, visual resources*

This area will be looked at as a potential Area of Critical Environmental Concern or Special Recreation Management Area. A park area has been proposed by a non-profit organization in Santa Fe along the Rio Grande and including BLM and Forest Service land in the Diablo Canyon area. This large, mostly BLM, area has great potential for recreation development. The area includes important archaeological resources, including Archaic campsites, possible portions of the Camino Real de Tierra Adentro, and the Chili Line Railroad. The area also contains interesting geologic features, outstanding visual resources, and wildlife.

### **Cerrillos Hills Area**

*Key values: Recreation, cultural/historic resources*

Cerrillos Hills Historic Park, operated by Santa Fe County, is adjacent to BLM lands that have value for recreation trails and interpretation of historic mining sites. BLM will consider a designation and management of the area as an extension of the Historic Park.

## **La Cienega ACEC**

*Key values: Cultural resources, recreation*

La Cienega ACEC was designated through an RMP amendment in 1992. The amendment expanded the La Cienega Mesa SMA which contained 1493 acres to 3556 acres and designated it as an ACEC. The ACEC is located along the Santa Fe River Canyon and contains nationally significant cultural resources as well as riparian, wildlife, and scenic values. The ACEC will be looked at for possible expansion based on new archaeological data, and additions that could help with the protection of resources and overall management of the area.

## **Pueblos in Galisteo Basin**

*Key values: Cultural resources, scenic quality*

The Galisteo Basin Archaeological Sites Protection Act was signed into law by President George W. Bush in March, 2004. The Act lists 24 protection sites, many including the remains of pueblos containing 500-2000 rooms. These prehistoric and historic ruins span the centuries between the beginnings of settled life in the Southwest, the development of thriving towns, and the reorganization of the Pueblo world following the arrival of the Spanish in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. The BLM manages public lands within nine of the 24 protection sites. An ACEC designation will be analyzed for inclusion of all or only BLM managed sites and will consider actions taken when new sites are added to the Act.

## **Pueblos in Chimayo/Cundiyo Area**

*Key values: Cultural Resources*

In the 1988 RMP the SMAs of Ojo del Zorro Pueblo, Pueblo Quemado, La Caja Pueblo and Pueblo Sarco were designated. The BLM will look into a proposal to join these SMAs into a single ACEC.

## **San Pedro Mountains**

*Key values: Recreation, cultural/historic resources, wildlife*

Comments were presented during scoping concerning special designation of the San Pedro Mountains to protect and interpret the historic mining resources. BLM will consider designation of the area for special management.

## **Santa Cruz Lake Recreation Area**

*Key values: Recreation, scenic quality, wildlife, cultural resources*

The 1989 Recreation Area Management Plan suggested a much larger area should be included in the formal Recreation Area designation. During scoping, comments were received pointing out the value that scenic quality added to surrounding communities, and suggesting that an expanded boundary would better protect visual quality as well as cultural/historic resources in the area.

## Taos County

### **Northern Rio Grande Gorge**

*Key values: Wilderness characteristics, recreation, cultural resources, riparian, wildlife, water*

The Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River cuts through the eastern edge of this extensive area proposed for Area of Critical Environmental Concern, Special Recreation Management Area, or wilderness designation.

### **Taos Plateau**

*Key values: Wildlife, recreation, special status species, cultural resources*

This area was identified as part of a large, 783,000 acre San Antonio/Pot Mountain Habitat Management Area in the 1988 RMP. Comments were received asking BLM to upgrade the designation to ACEC, in part to support land acquisition. See also the summaries for San Antonio Mountain Area, Northern Rio Grande Gorge, and Ute Mountain

### **Ute Mountain**

*Key values: Wilderness characteristics, wildlife*

Ute Mountain, covering about 14,000 acres, was recently acquired with Land and Water Conservation funding. Comments were received asking BLM to consider the area for ACEC or wilderness designation.

### **Cerro de la Olla**

*Key values: Scenic quality, wilderness character, geology, wildlife*

The Cerro de la Olla area on the west side of the Rio Grande was identified in part as a roadless area in New Mexico BLM's wilderness inventory conducted in the 1980s. A scoping comment suggested BLM should review a large part of this area for designation as wilderness or as an ACEC.

## Wild and Scenic Rivers

BLM will inventory all stream segments in the Resource Area to determine which may be eligible for consideration as Wild and Scenic Rivers. During scoping, the following streams were mentioned:

### **Pecos River**

### **Rio Hondo**

### **Rio Pueblo de Taos**

## **C. PLANNING CRITERIA**

Planning criteria are constraints or ground rules that guide and direct the development of the plan. They ensure that plans are tailored to the identified issues and that unnecessary data collection and analyses are avoided. The planning criteria will help Taos Field Office focus on the decisions to be made in the RMP revision.

The planning criteria identified in the *Notice of Intent* published May 26, 2006, are incorporated here by reference.

## **D. DATA and GIS NEEDS**

Preliminary data and GIS needs that are required to address resource and use issues and develop and analyze impacts of revision alternatives were identified in the *Preparation Plan* for the Taos RMP revision ( February 16, 2006). That information is incorporated here by reference. In addition, as a result of the scoping process, the need identified in the *Preparation Plan* to update data for existing OHV routes in El Palacio and Santa Fe County was broadened and the data need currently is described as:

- Prepare a travel route inventory for the Taos Field office, including roads and trails.

## **E. SUMMARY OF FUTURE STEPS IN THE PLANNING PROCESS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Table 3 below provides a list of the future steps in the RMP revision planning process and the associated timelines. Opportunities for public participation are noted in the appropriate steps.

<b>Table 3. Process steps, timeframes, and opportunities for public participation</b>		
<b>Planning Step</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Public Participation</b>
Analyze the Management Situation	Fall 2006	
Data Collection	Fall 2006-spring 2007	Anticipate small focus group discussions and individual and group user contacts to obtain scenic quality, recreation and travel management data.
Formulate Alternatives	Winter 2006 – summer 2007	Most likely will hold informal workshops with the general public, organizations and agencies to discuss alternatives. Will also use newsletters to keep interested parties apprised of progress and to solicit feedback.
Issue the Draft RMP and Draft EIS	Fall 2007-winter 2008	90-day public review and comment period.
Issue the Proposed RMP and Final EIS	Winter 2008-spring 2009	30-day protest period
Implementation of the revised RMP	Summer 2009 forward	Will be opportunities for the public to assist in monitoring and evaluating implementation of the new RMP direction.