

BLM Northern New Mexico Resource Advisory Council

Field Offices' Reports

August 2021

Rio Puerco Field Office

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1. SUBJECT: Rio Puerco Field Office (RPFO) Oil and Gas development in Sandoval County

SUMMARY: BLM-RPFO was included in the Oil and Gas Lease Sales starting in December 2018. The following bullets include the status of recent Oil and Gas Lease sales.

- December 2018 Lease Sale was issued November 1, 2019, to include 30 parcels totaling 40,802.37 acres. This lease sale is currently under litigation (Dine Care v. BLM, Case No. 1:20-cv-00673). A stay of activities was requested and denied.
 - The Ford Development EA, FONSI and DR were signed on December 17, 2020. One hundred twenty-five APD's have been issued to date with one of the pads constructed, the well has been spud and facilities are in place. The drilling of this well is tentatively scheduled for late fall. Six road ROW's have been issued.
 - RPFO is currently working on a ROW application from EOG Resources that will provide access from NM 550 to the December 2018 Lease Sale parcels.
- March & June 2019 Lease Sale- Parcels removed from sale to allow for further Tribal consultation
- November 2019 Lease Sale occurred November 7, 2019, 4 Parcels totaling 2,838.34 acres. Lease issuance is pending.
- February 2020 Lease Sale occurred February 6, 2020, 7 Parcels totaling 1,250.08 acres. Lease issuance is pending.

2. SUBJECT: North Sandoval County Forest Product Harvest Project

SUMMARY: BLM-RPFO is developing a long-term project for commercial and non-commercial harvesting of forest products (fuelwood, Christmas trees, transplants, etc.) on BLM land in Sandoval County to reasonably accommodate public demand (600-1200 cords per year) for these products in accordance with FLPMA and the Rio Puerco RMP. All reasonable options are being considered but the preferred alternative focuses on establishing harvest limits (300-360 cords per year) for long term sustained-yield along with seasonal harvesting restrictions during certain times of year across ~25,000 acres of forest and woodlands west of Cuba, NM. An Environmental Assessment is underway to analyze the impacts of all alternatives. A 30-day public scoping period began on July 21, 2021.

3. SUBJECT: RPFO Resource Management Plan

SUMMARY: The BLM RPFO administrative area is located in central New Mexico and includes approximately 731,599 acres of BLM-managed public surface land in Bernalillo, Cibola, Torrance, Valencia and Sandoval counties. Within those counties, the RPFO administers approximately 3,600,047 acres of federal mineral estate. The RPFO began drafting its revised Resource Management Plan (RMP) in 2008 and released the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in 2012. The BLM was under contract to finalize the EIS, draft the Proposed RMP, and complete the Record of Decision (ROD) by October 20, 2020 and the formal DOI Review Team briefing was cancelled on July 31, 2020. RPFO briefed Department of the Interior on the status of the RMP in February 2021 and is awaiting guidance on what alternative to proceed with in the PRMP/FEIS.

4. SUBJECT: Public recreation access during pandemic

SUMMARY: The Rio Puerco Field Office (RPFO) provides highly sought recreational access to public lands during pandemic. The field office closed only one recreation site, Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument (KKTR). BLM is continuing to work in close cooperation with the Pueblo de Cochiti to develop a reopening plan to address long standing issues including over-visitation, long wait times, staffing needs, and ability to provide resource protection. It is BLM's hope that through these efforts, the Monument will re-open in a way that reduces impacts on the land and resources, as well as to the Cochiti people, and will provide an improved experience for all visitors.

5. SUBJECT: RPFO National Public Lands Day Events

SUMMARY: The BLM RPFO is hosting two events for National Public Lands Day on Friday, September 24 at Ted Mace Trail for general cleanup and at La Ventana Natural Arch to assist with graffiti removal.

Taos Field Office

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1. SUBJECT: Status of Sabinoso Wilderness Cañon Ciruela acquisitions and public access

SUMMARY: The Taos Field Office (TFO), completed the Cañon Ciruela acquisition of a portion of the Hobo Ranch. The donation is the largest under the Wilderness Act, at 9,617 acres. The Sabinoso Wilderness is now 29,242 acres--an increase of nearly 33 percent! The Sabinoso Wilderness is located about an hour east of Las Vegas, NM. The BLM continues to work with the Trust for Public Lands to now acquire an easement so visitors can, in the near future, access the northern part of the wilderness through a new staging area.

2. SUBJECT: Río Grande del Norte National Monument Plan – Status of the Taos Resource Management Plan Amendment environmental impact statement

SUMMARY: The Río Grande del Norte National Monument was designated on March 25, 2013. The Monument consists of approximately 245,290 acres of public lands in Taos and Rio Arriba Counties in north-central New Mexico, managed by the TFO. In accordance with the Presidential Proclamation which established the Monument, a new stand-alone management plan is being prepared for the Monument. The Monument Plan was initiated in 2014 and suspended in April 2017 following the issuance of Executive Order 13792 (Review of Designations Under the Antiquities Act). Executive Order 13792 was rescinded in March 2021, and the NEPA process was reinitiated in July 2021. The TFO has prepared a Statement of Work to hire a contractor to aid in preparing an environmental impact statement that will analyze the Monument Plan as an amendment to the 2012 Taos Resource Management Plan. The TFO aims to initiate the EIS for the Monument Plan in January 2022 and complete the process by the end of 2023.

3. SUBJECT: Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River Scenic Easement / Manby Hot Springs

SUMMARY: The Taos Field Office works in concert with the Taos County Commission and Sheriff's office, two homeowner associations and the public to address the needs of the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River Scenic Easement. A scenic easement was purchased in 1984, using Land and Water Conservation Funding, to protect the viewshed. The scenic easement is on private property and sits above the Manby Hot Springs. It is not open to the public, and it is landlocked with no public roads leading to the private property. The BLM educated the public about non-use on the easement followed by installation of informational signs. A gate and some fencing is being installed to alleviate trespass. The public has access to Manby Hot Springs by floating the Rio Grande and through the remnants of the old John Dunn Trail from John Dunn Bridge.

4. SUBJECT: Public recreation during COVID 19 pandemic

SUMMARY: The TFO provides highly sought recreational access to water-based recreation on public lands. Daily visitation of recreation sites on public lands managed by the field office, including the Río Grande del Norte National Monument, continues to be high and mimics what one would expect on holiday weekends. Visitation is exceeding parking and trash collection capacity at trailheads, Santa Cruz Lake, and John Dunn Bridge.

Unprecedented high visitation at campgrounds is additionally taxing BLM Taos staff and resources and increasing incidents of vandalism and misuse.

5. SUBJECT: Rangeland drought conditions and status of grazing permit renewals

SUMMARY: The TFO manages 334 grazing allotments. Of those, 281 are active and 53 are inactive. In the Río Grande del Norte National Monument, there are 72 allotments, in which 57 are active and 15 are inactive. Severe drought conditions during 2020 to early 2021 resulted in most permittees whose allotments were in poor condition taking voluntary non-use and/or decreasing their amount of cattle on BLM lands. However, there is an alternative allotment within the Río Grande del Norte National Monument that features

19,334 acres due ongoing drought, vegetation treatments, or wildfire. (The Reserve Common Allotment (RCA) EA was signed October 9, 2020)

6. SUBJECT: Status of Habitat Stamp Program, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grants, and ongoing habitat improvements

SUMMARY: The area between San Antonio Mountain and the Taos Plateau within the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument contains critical winter use areas and big game migration corridors (mule deer, elk, and pronghorn). Utilizing grant funds from the Habitat Stamp Program and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the TFO has been working on replacing existing fences with wildlife friendly fences in critical winter use areas and migration corridors (~17 miles total). A recent project included replacing 13 miles of fencing with the Taos Soil and Water Conservation District, the Mule Deer Foundation, the New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts, and several volunteers from across the state.

7. SUBJECT: Status of ongoing community outreach and science programs

SUMMARY: The TFO believes that engaging the public and involving our community in a meaningful way is paramount to public land management. The TFO has is working with the Taos Archaeological Society on a multi-year site project to teach volunteers about archaeological fieldwork methods for cultural recording. Fieldwork begins in August 2021. Additionally, TFO is developing a Community Science Program (CSP) that will encompass many diverse projects, from weeds monitoring, rare plant monitoring, monarch butterfly and milkweed monitoring, with a rollout in the spring of 2022.

Farmington Field Office

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1. SUBJECT: Farmington Mancos-Gallup Resource Management Plan Amendment (RMPA) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

SUMMARY: The RMPA/EIS is currently in “Draft Proposed Final” stage, awaiting completion of the Section 106 Programmatic Agreement (PA) before final reviews and publication. As a reminder, the PA will line out the process for undertakings authorized by the Amendment. Although the PA has been in development since 2019, much of the progress slowed over 2020 as focus shifted to the higher priority of caring for communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. This past February, the Assistant Secretary of Lands and Minerals approved a “pause” on the RMPA/EIS to allow work on the PA to catch up. We are aiming to resume meetings by this fall, and are currently conducting outreach with consulting parties to develop a collaborative plan.

After the 106 process is complete, the Draft Proposed RMPA/Final EIS will be presented to the DOI Review Team for approval to proceed with the New Mexico Governor’s consistency review and Navajo Nation President’s review, and eventually final publishing.

2. SUBJECT: Renewable Energy Projects

SUMMARY: Shiprock Solar, a subsidiary of Photosol US, is proposing to construct, operate, maintain and decommission the Shiprock Solar Facility Project, a utility-scale photovoltaic solar and battery storage facility and gen-tie on Bureau of Land Management land in northwest San Juan County. The proposed project would encompass 1,980 acres of BLM-administered public lands and 555 acres of private lands that are located approximately 4 miles north of Waterflow, N.M., near the Public Service Company of New Mexico operated San Juan Generating Station.

The proposed project would produce approximately 360 megawatts of electricity. It would connect to the existing Western Area Power Administration Substation via an approximately 1,400-foot 345kV new transmission line (using a constructed Main Collector Substation Location near the WAPA substation) or approximately 2,600 feet to PNM’s San Juan 345kV station as the second option (using an alternative location for the Main Collector Substation). Both substations connect the solar facility to regional electrical system grids.

San Juan Solar Project, LLC, a subsidiary of Photosol US, is proposing to construct, operate, maintain, and decommission a 345kV (110.675 acres) single circuit Gen-Tie and communication line, 34.5kV (24.55 acres) collector power line and communication line, and existing access roads within a 30’ width in 17-30N-15W and 50’ width on the existing Barker Dome road to the first phase of a 598-megawatt (MW) solar facility and energy storage on private land. The proposed project would be located on 135.23 acres of public land, and proposed implementation date of February 2022.

3. SUBJECT: Minerals

SUMMARY: In fluid minerals, drilling season has begun with two active rigs operating in the San Juan Basin. All lease sales are currently being deferred until further notice from HQ.

In solids, Westmoreland will cease mining coal in August at the San Juan Underground mine in anticipation of the San Juan Generating Station shut-down in December 2022. The mine intends to bury the longwall mining equipment in place as it has no salvage value. Final abandonment is dependent on Enchant’s

proposal for carbon capture in the area. If the carbon capture proposal is approved, Enchant will take over the mining operations selling both coal and carbon dioxide.

4. SUBJECT: National Public Lands Day

SUMMARY: The BLM Farmington Field Office is working with partners, including San Juan County and the City of Farmington, to host a large-scale public lands day event on September 25. There will be various events throughout San Juan County for the public to participate in, including trail maintenance and trash clean-up. For more information about these events, contact BLM Outdoor Recreation Planner Doug McKim.