



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

Draft El Malpais National Conservation Area Business Plan

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

Rio Puerco Field Office
August 2021



RECOMMENDATIONS, REVIEWS, and APPROVALS

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This business plan was prepared by the Bureau of Land Management's Rio Puerco Field Office pursuant to the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act of 2004 ([16 U.S.C. 6801-6814](#)) and BLM recreation fee program policies. It establishes future management goals and priorities for the El Malpais National Conservation Area in the Rio Puerco Field Office.

Table of Contents

Letter to the Reader	5
1. Executive Summary	6
2. Background	7
3. Authorities	9
Land Use Plan Guidance.....	9
4. Description of the Rio Puerco Field Office Recreation Program	10
Administrative Unit.....	10
Overview of the Rio Puerco Field Office Recreation Program.....	10
Annual Rio Puerco Field Office Visitation	11
5. Description of the El Malpais NCA and Recreation Program	12
Administrative Unit.....	12
Overview of the El Malpais NCA	12
Annual El Malpais NCA Visitation.....	15
Recreation Site Visitation Data	15
Detailed Description of El Malpais NCA Recreation Sites	18
El Malpais Ranger Station Recreation Site	18
Joe Skeen Campground.....	21
La Ventana Natural Arch Recreation Area	24
South Narrows Picnic Area.....	26
Special Recreation Permit Program for the El Malpais NCA.....	28
Partnerships	28
Volunteers.....	28
6. Financial Analysis (Costs and Revenues)	30
Current Overall Costs	30
7. Fee Revenue Analysis	32
8. Priorities for Future Expenditures	34
El Malpais NCA and Joe Skeen Campground Projected Expenditures/Budget.....	35
Deferred Maintenance.....	36
Other Priority Expenditures	37
9. Impacts from Changing and Not Changing Recreation Site Fees	39
Impacts from Charging Recreation Fees	39
Impacts from Not Charging Recreation Fees	40
10. Public Outreach	41

11. Appendices	42
Appendix 1: El Malpais RMP Conformance	42
Appendix 2: El Malpais National Conservation Area Site Map	46
Appendix 3: Joe Skeen Campground Site Map	47
Appendix 4: El Malpais NCA Fair Market Value Analysis 2021	48
12. References	51



United States Department of the Interior



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06/09/2021

Dear Reader,

I would like to present for your review and comment the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Rio Puerco Field Office's (RPFO) *El Malpais National Conservation Area Draft Business Plan*. Under the authority of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA), the BLM RPFO manages one campground in Cibola County, New Mexico. The draft business plan covers management topics such as operating costs, fee rate changes, annual revenues, and future expenditures.

The RPFO proposes to establish Joe Skeen Campground as a fee site at \$5 per night per campsite for up to two cars and \$5 per night for additional vehicles. The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 authorizes the BLM to regulate the use of public lands and the FLREA authorizes the BLM to collect recreational fees when sites and areas meet specific criteria and this proposal will help us to offset operating costs, incorporate standard amenities, and to reduce dependency on appropriated funding sources.

The objective of the *El Malpais National Conservation Area Draft Business Plan* is to provide the public with information on the current state of the recreation program, ensure consistency with required statutes and laws, establishes future management goals and priorities of the program and invites the public to submit comments on the proposed fee structure. Comments can be submitted through July 9, 2021, by email to Marshall Farris at mfarris@blm.gov and by mail to BLM Rio Puerco Field Office, 100 Sun Ave., Suite 330, Albuquerque, NM, 87109. Please indicate which business plan you are making comment on in the subject line with "RPFO El Malpais NCA Business Plan."

Thank you for your interest and input in managing your public lands.

Sincerely,

Kymm Gresset
Field Manager

INTERIOR REGION 7 · UPPER COLORADO BASIN
Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, Wyoming

1. Executive Summary

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Rio Puerco Field Office (RPFO) prepared the Draft El Malpais National Conservation Area (NCA) Business Plan (Plan) to meet the criteria defined in the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) of 2004 ([16 U.S.C. 6801-6814](#)). This business plan outlines the current state of the El Malpais NCA recreation program, ensures consistency with required statutes and laws, and establishes future management goals and priorities of the program. This business plan describes information used to determine appropriate fee rates, outlines the cost of administering El Malpais NCA, considers impacts to local communities and the local economy, and identifies priorities for future expenditures within the El Malpais NCA. Most importantly, the business plan process facilitates transparency to the public regarding the agency's intended use of collected recreation fees and serves as a vehicle to provide the public an opportunity to comment on these objectives. The draft Business Plan for El Malpais NCA is subject to public review and comments will be considered prior to making any changes to the campground fee program.

Through fair market value analysis, assessment of current and future visitor trends, operating expenditures, and policy review, the RPFO determined that there is a need to:

- Implement an expanded amenity fee at Joe Skeen Campground for a fee of \$5.00 per night per campsite for up to two vehicles and \$5.00 per night for additional vehicles.

El Malpais Ranger Station Recreation Site, La Ventana Natural Arch Recreation Area, and South Narrows Picnic Area will remain fee-free sites at this time with the Ranger Station accepting donations upon reopening. The RPFO currently finds that leaving these three sites free allows a balanced and affordable means for all members of the public to visit El Malpais NCA, while simultaneously remaining able to protect natural resources, provide for public health and safety, and facilitate access to public lands and waters. Further, these findings support that a portion of public lands should be available free of charge to all members of the public. There are 10 developed recreation sites within the NCA, and with Joe Skeen Campground being set as a fee site, 90% of the developed recreation sites would remain fee free. The Special Recreation Permit (SRP) fees will also remain the same as those are set by the BLM Director and are unable to be changed by this plan.

The RPFO will periodically review this business plan to determine if the plan continues to fulfill management goals and is consistent with laws, including the FLREA. The RPFO will seek input from the Recreation Resource Advisory Council and the public.

2. Background

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) originally began collecting recreation fees for the use of public lands under the authority of the [Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976](#). When the [Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act \(FLREA\)](#) was enacted in 2004, it provided the BLM the authority to collect an expanded and/or standard amenity recreation site fee for use of certain areas, as well as Special Recreation Permit (SRP) fees. The FLREA allows revenue from recreation fees and SRP fees to be retained locally and outlines uses of revenue, such as facility repair, maintenance, enhancement, interpretation, visitor information, visitor services, visitor needs assessments, signs, habitat restoration, law enforcement related to public use and recreation, and direct operating or capital costs associated with operations. The FLREA, as well as [BLM Manual 2930](#) and [BLM Handbook 2930-1](#), requires each recreation fee program to have a business plan that thoroughly discusses the purpose and rationale of recreation fees and explains how fees are consistent with the criteria set forth in the FLREA.

Currently, the RPFO does not collect fees at any recreation sites within the Field Office apart from Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument. BLM must determine if any other sites within the RPFO meet FLREA requirements for amenity fees. The focus of this business plan is to analyze and recommend recreation sites within the El Malpais NCA that meet the FLREA requirements and are appropriate. Within the El Malpais NCA, El Malpais Ranger Station Recreation Site, La Ventana Natural Arch Recreation Area, and South Narrows Picnic Area meet the FLREA requirements to be a standard amenity fee site (Table 1) and Joe Skeen Campground meets the requirements to be an expanded amenity fee site (Table 2).

In addition to an analysis and recommendation of the recreation sites for El Malpais, this business plan will consider SRP fees associated with the El Malpais NCA. The El Malpais NCA deposits SRP minimum or other fees (e.g., competitive, commercial, group) into the L1232 subactivity account with the work breakdown structures. Any additional fee sites would have a new structure created. This business plan incorporates data from internal BLM tracking and accounting mechanisms, such as the Recreation Management Information System, Collections and Billings System, Financial and Business Management System, and locally generated recreation and visitor use tracking spreadsheets. The RPFO El Malpais NCA SRP program generates minimal revenue from commercial uses, much of those being an average of four SRPs for commercial large game hunting outfitting and guiding. For more detailed information, contact the RPFO. Some data may be subject to Privacy Act requirements.

Table 1. Available Amenities Based on FLREA Site Requirements for Standard Amenity Fee

All Amenities are Required for Standard Amenity Fee ^{1a}	El Malpais Ranger Station Recreation Site	La Ventana Natural Arch Recreation Area	South Narrows Picnic Area
Designated developed parking	Yes	Yes	Yes
A permanent toilet facility	Yes	Yes	Yes
A permanent trash receptacle	Yes	Yes	Yes
Interpretive sign, exhibit, or kiosk	Yes	Yes	Yes
Picnic tables	Yes	Yes	Yes
Security services	Yes	Yes	Yes

1a. For a standard amenity fee sites must meet all the amenity requirements of Section 3(f)(4)(D) of FLERA and be within a National Conservation Area, National Volcanic Monument, and/or be a destination visitor or interpretive center that provides a broad range of interpretive services, programs, and media.

Table 2. Available Amenities Based on FLREA Site Requirements for Expanded Amenity Fee

Required <u>Minimum 5 of 9 Amenities</u> for Expanded Amenity Fee ^{2a}	Joe Skeen Campground
Tent or Trailer Spaces	Yes
Picnic Tables	Yes
Drinking Water	No
Access Roads	Yes
Fee Collection by Employee or Agent	No
Reasonable Visitor Protection	Yes
Refuse Containers	Yes
Toilet Facilities	Yes
Simple Devices for Containing Campfires	Yes
Total Amenities	7

2a. Section 3(g)(2)(A) of FLREA lists requirements for an expanded amenity fee. Recreation sites must offer at least 5 of 9 specific amenities at those sites to charge an expanded amenity fee.

3. Authorities

The authorities and regulations for this business plan, including fee collection at federal recreation lands, are:

- Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (Public Law 94-579) ¹
- Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act of 2004 (16 U.S.C. 6801-6814) ²
- [43 Code of Federal Regulations 2931.2](#) ³
- [43 Code of Federal Regulations 2932](#) ⁴

This business plan also follows applicable BLM recreation fee program policies and guidance, including:

- BLM Manual 2930, Recreation Permits and Fees 2007
- BLM Handbook 2930-1, Recreation Permit and Fee Administration, 2014
- BLM Manual 1105 – Donations, Solicitation, and Fundraising, 2019

In addition to specific authorities and regulations, this business plan assists in fulfilling the following strategies:

- [Connecting with Communities: BLM Recreation Strategy](#), by making the benefits of recreation more accessible to communities while supporting local social, economic, and environmental goals.

Land Use Plan Guidance

The El Malpais NCA recreation program is guided by the 2001 [Record of Decision and Approved El Malpais Resource Management Plan](#) (RMP). The RMP provides a framework that includes goals and decisions for the overall recreation program and this business plan is consistent with RMP decisions, which are presented in Appendix 1.

¹ This act contains the BLM's general land use management authority over public lands.

² This law authorizes the BLM to collect recreation fees at sites that meet certain requirements and special recreation permit fees. It allows the BLM to keep the fee revenues at the local offices where they are collected and directs how the BLM will manage and utilize these revenues. It also established the America the Beautiful – National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass. FLREA was enacted in October 2004 with a ten-year sunset provision. Starting with the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014, Congress has provided extensions, most recently the “Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021,” which extends FLREA through October 1, 2022.

³ Establishes a permit and fee system for recreation use permits for use of fee areas such as campgrounds and day use areas.

⁴ Establishes a permit and fee system for special recreation permits.

4. Description of the Rio Puerco Field Office Recreation Program

Administrative Unit

The RPF0 is part of the BLM Albuquerque District Office within New Mexico. The RPF0 planning area encompasses 986,202 federal surface acres and 3.6 million federal subsurface (mineral) acres in Bernalillo, Cibola, Torraine, Valencia, Sandoval, and McKinley counties of central New Mexico. The RPF0 stretches into all three of New Mexico's congressional districts. The RPF0 surrounds the Albuquerque metropolitan area, and the population density of this area strongly affects the demands placed on the nearby public lands.

Overview of the Rio Puerco Field Office Recreation Program

The [Rio Puerco Resource Management Plan](#) (RMP) was written in 1986. The RMP and Record of Decision was updated in October 1992 by the Albuquerque District. The recreation programs in the RPF0 are managed according to multiple use principles, unless specified otherwise by law. The RPF0's primary goal is to ensure the continued availability of outdoor recreation opportunities which are not readily available from other sources. Recreation use is managed to protect the health and safety of users, to protect the natural and cultural resource values, and to promote public use and enjoyment of public lands.

The RPF0 offers many recreation opportunities and activities at both designated and dispersed recreation areas. Visitors often utilize the public lands in the RPF0 for hiking, camping, backpacking, scenic driving, target shooting, hunting, horseback riding, picnicking, riding/driving off-highway vehicles, birdwatching/wildlife viewing, and exploring cultural resources. Within the RPF0 purview are the El Malpais National Conservation Area and the Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument. Currently within the RPF0, standard amenity fees are charged only at Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument. Each of these special management areas has their own resource management plan.

Other major attractions within the RPF0 and outside of the NCA and National Monument include congressionally designated Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, Bluewater Canyon, White Ridge Bike Trails, Perea Nature Trail, San Ysidro Trials Area, Guadalupe Ruins, and Richard W. Becker Nature Area & Ted Mace Trail. The Ojito designated Wilderness and eight Wilderness Study Areas (Cabezon, Chamisa, Empedrado, Ignacio Chavez, La Lena, Manzano, Ojito, and Petaca Pinta WSAs) draw many visitors for primitive recreation and solitude.

The BLM strives to manage recreation and visitor services to serve the diversity of public outdoor recreation demands while helping the agency maintain healthy and sustainable resource conditions to allow desired recreation opportunities and experiences to remain available. The BLM's goals for delivering recreation benefits from BLM-administered lands to the American people and their communities are to: Improve access to appropriate recreation opportunities; Ensure a quality experience and enjoyment of natural and cultural resources; Provide for and receive fair value in recreation.

Annual Rio Puerco Field Office Visitation

The RPFO maintains estimated visitor use data in the national Recreation Management Information System database. Historically, visitor use numbers recorded in the database are collected through a variety of methods, including TRAFx vehicle counters, estimates made by recreation staff, and recreation use permits. In fiscal year (FY) 2019, RPFO recreation staff installed TRAFx vehicle counters at the primary entrances of developed recreation sites outside of the NCA and National Monument to count recreational traffic within the RPFO. Annual recreational visitation to BLM-administered lands managed by the RPFO averages 673,698 visits for the last 5 fiscal years (Table 3). RPFO intends to deploy more TRAFx counters throughout the FO including the NCA and dispersed RPFO areas.

Table 3. Annual Rio Puerco Field Office visitation from FY 2016 through FY 2020.

Fiscal Year	Total Visits	Average Visits/Year
2016	767,689	673,698
2017	541,434	
2018	624,131	
2019	958,082	
2020	477,152	

Source: Estimated RMIS visitor count data



A mountain biker on White Ridge Bike Trails

5. Description of the El Malpais NCA and Recreation Program

Administrative Unit

The El Malpais NCA is part of the RPF0 and the BLM Albuquerque District Office. The El Malpais NCA planning area lies south of the city of Grants, New Mexico, primarily in Cibola County which is in New Mexico Congressional District 2. The planning area encompasses approximately 249,200 acres of Federal land, 34,600 acres of private land, and 2,500 acres of Tribal land. It is bordered on the east by the Acoma Indian Reservation, on the south by Catron and Socorro counties, on the west by Ramah Navajo land, and on the north by the Zuni Mountain portion of the Cibola National Forest. See Appendix 2 for El Malpais NCA Site Area map.

Overview of the El Malpais NCA

On December 31, 1987, Congress designated the El Malpais NCA. Until that date, the “El Malpais Special Management Area” was administered under the land-use decisions of the Rio Puerco RMP. On that date, Congress passed the El Malpais Act ([Public Law 100-225](#)) which, in addition to designating El Malpais National Monument to be managed by the National Park Service (NPS) and El Malpais NCA to be managed by the BLM, required the BLM to develop a general management plan for management of the NCA. The Act also required an implementation plan for a continuing program of interpretive and public education, a proposal for public facilities development, natural and cultural resources management plans, a wildlife resources management plans, and a wilderness suitability recommendation for the Chain of Craters Wilderness Study Area (WSA). In 2000, the NCA became a part of BLM’s new National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS). [The El Malpais Plan, 2001](#), was prepared to meet all these planning requirements in a single document and includes all decisions and management guidance currently applicable to the El Malpais Plan Area.

The Approved El Malpais Plan amended the Rio Puerco Resource Management Plan (RMP), the land management plan for the entire Albuquerque Field Office (now known as RPF0). The Approved Plan also includes activity-level decisions for management of the resources of the Plan Area. The El Malpais Plan is a “stand-alone plan” meant to consolidate all twenty-one separate management plans for the various resources managed by the RPF0 in the El Malpais Plan Area.

Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas

The NCA has two designated Wilderness areas the Cebolla and West Malpais Wildernesses and three WSAs the El Malpais, Chain of Craters, and Canyons. In the 61,600-acre Cebolla Wilderness, you will find sandstone mesas stacked with ponderosa pines, deep eroding canyons, and grassy valleys which, in spring host colorful wildflowers. Vertical escarpments provide excellent nesting habitat for golden eagles, prairie falcons, red-tail hawks, and great horned owls. The Cebolla Wilderness is rich in prehistoric archaeological sites, petroglyphs, and historic homesteads. Within the Cebolla Wilderness visitors can explore La Ventana

Natural Arch, Dittert archeological site, the Narrows Rim trail, Lobo Canyon Petroglyph trail, Homestead Canyon trail, and Armijo Canyon trail.



Lobo Canyon Petroglyphs

The West Malpais Wilderness landscape hosts piñon-juniper woodlands and volcanic fields that are 18,000 years old. The most distinctive landform within the West Malpais Wilderness is a 6,700-acre kīpuka (a Hawaiian term meaning island of fertile ground) in the north part of the wilderness called

Hole-in-the-Wall. Hole-in-the-Wall is encircled by jagged basalt flows. The Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDNST) cuts through the southwestern edge of the Wilderness.

Canyons WSA is made up of sagebrush flats and piñon covered sandstone hills. Chain of Craters WSA is named for the line of more than 25 cinder cones found within its bounds. A portion of the CDNST winds along the base of some of these cinder cones. El Malpais WSA consists of several independent tracts of land. One tract includes a small kipuka called Little Hole-in-the-Wall.

Overview of the El Malpais NCA Recreation Program

Although the BLM manages public lands for many different uses, most the public's interaction with the lands is through recreational pursuits. The NCA is comprised of primarily designated Wilderness and WSAs, though there are non-wilderness areas within the NCA boundaries. Most recreation activities that occur within the NCA include camping, sightseeing, hiking/walking, big game hunting, horseback riding, picnicking, scenic driving, exploring and learning about historic and archeological sites, and birdwatching/wildlife viewing. Local tribes also continue their ancestral uses in the NCA.

The RPF0's goal for the El Malpais NCA recreation program is to ensure the continued availability of quality outdoor recreational opportunities and experiences that are not readily available from other sources. Recreational use and capital investment in facilities are managed to protect the health and safety of visitors; protect natural, cultural, and other

resource values; stimulate public enjoyment of public land; provide for universal access; and, to the extent possible, resolve user conflicts.⁵

The NCA offers recreational opportunities at both developed recreation sites and in undeveloped areas. Visitation is steady throughout the year, lessening slightly in winter and summer months likely due to weather conditions. The NCA offers four developed recreational sites that will be described in further detail for the purposes of this plan: Joe Skeen Campground, La Ventana Natural Arch Recreation Area, El Malpais Ranger Station Recreation Site, and South Narrows Picnic Area.



La Ventana Natural Arch

There are designated trails available that offer visitors the opportunity to hike to cultural sites and scenic landscapes through designated Wilderness areas and WSAs. Armijo Canyon Trail is a 4.5 miles round trip and is a designated, primitive trail that leads to the Dittert Site and other prehistoric and historic cultural sites. Homestead Canyon Trail is 3.75 miles long and is a primitive, closed road trail that connects to Sand Canyon Road. Lobo Canyon Petroglyph Trail is a short 0.75-mile, primitive trail that leads to a panel of petroglyphs. Armijo Canyon, Homestead Canyon, and Lobo Canyon Petroglyph trails are in the Cebolla Wilderness. Hole-in-the-Wall trail system leads to a 6700-acre kipuka that consists of ponderosa pine parklands and open rangeland surrounded by lava. This trail system is in the West Malpais Wilderness and access requires hiking several miles across open plains and lava flows. Part of the congressionally designated Continental Divide National Scenic Trail is clearly marked and winds among the Chain of Craters, through West Malpais Wilderness, and through El Malpais WSA. The Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDNST or CDT) is a long-distance hiking trail that follows the spine of the Rocky Mountains for 3,100 miles from Canada to Mexico. The trail traverses the Great Continental Divide, which separates the watersheds that drain into the Pacific, Atlantic, and Arctic Oceans. The CDNST is the most challenging and remote of America's eleven National Scenic Trails. Through-hikers and day hikers alike can enjoy the well-marked El Malpais NCA section of the CDNST.

⁵ El Malpais Plan, 2001.

There are also lots of opportunities for recreation outside of hiking designated trails. The designated Wilderness areas and WSAs are the destination for a majority of the NCA invite visitors to hike, backpack, view wildlife, sightsee, and explore in a wilder more primitive way.

Annual El Malpais NCA Visitation

Estimated visitor use data for the NCA is maintained in the national Recreation Management Information System database. Visitor use for FY 2016 through FY 2020 is shown in Table 4. Average annual visitation from FY 2016 through FY 2020 is 264,764 visitors. Historically, visitor use numbers recorded in the database are collected through a variety of methods including estimates made by recreation staff based on data from the nearby NPS El Malpais Visitor Center and El Malpais NCA SRPs. The El Malpais NCA recreation program plans to deploy TRAFx trail and vehicle counters during the last quarter of fiscal year 2021. In the Recreation Management Information System, the current estimated annual visitation is reported less accurately than data that TRAFx counters will provide in the future. Visitation in the NCA is steady throughout the year with the highest overall use from spring to summer. Elk and pronghorn hunting are popular in the NCA with open seasons from August through December 15 as well. We expect that visitation to El Malpais NCA will increase over the years due to population increase and increased interest in outdoor activities.

Table 4. Annual El Malpais NCA visitation from FY 2016 through FY 2020.

Fiscal Year	Total Visits	Average Visits/Year
2016	215,618	264,764
2017	206,114	
2018	314,370	
2019	302,095	
2020	285,621	

Source: Estimated RMIS visitor count data

Recreation Site Visitation Data

Visitation has been accurately tracked at El Malpais Ranger Station from FY 2018 to FY 2020 (Table 5). During FY 2018, the Ranger Station was open for only four months from May 24, 2017, through September 30, 2018. During that time, the Ranger Station saw 2,274 visits, averaging approximately 570 visitors a month or 19 visitors a day. The Ranger Station was open 11 months during FY 2019, closed from December 24, 2018, through January 24, 2019. During these 11 months, the Ranger Station saw 4,419 visitors, averaging approximately 400 visitors a month or 13 visitors a day. During FY 2020, the Ranger Station was open about 5 months, closed March 22, 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During those 5 months the Ranger Station saw 1,780 visitors, averaging approximately 360 visitors a month or 12 visitors a day. The Ranger Station remains closed currently for installation of a new interpretive exhibit. Summer months in the El Malpais NCA tend to see more visitors, so FYs numbers are lower when the Ranger Station is closed during those summer months.

Although FY2018 is likely the most representative of actual visitation seen at the El Malpais Ranger Station, we expect visitation to increase FY2022 when the Ranger Station reopens. We will be publicizing the new exhibit, interpretation, and resources we have developed during the closure.

*Did you know?
Visitors come to El Malpais
NCA from all over the
United States! A short 2-
month survey showed
visitors from 29 states!*

Table 5. El Malpais Ranger Station Visitation Data

Fiscal Year	Total Visits
2018 ^{5a}	2,274
2019 ^{5b}	4,919
2020 ^{5c}	1,780

5a Open May 24th, 2018, through September 30, 2018.

5b Closed December 24, 2018, through January 24, 2019, due to a federal shutdown.

5c Closed March 22, 2020, and for the remainder of FY20 due to COVID-19 and renovations.

In 2019, from July 7 through September 6, El Malpais NCA staff performed a Visitor Satisfaction Survey at La Ventana Natural Arch Recreation Area, Joe Skeen Campground, and the El Malpais Ranger Station Recreation Site. Most respondents were between the ages of 50 to 70 and were in small groups (1-2 people) of adults. There was a nearly equal number of male and female respondents. Most visitors were from New Mexico (39.1%) and neighboring states, but out of 335 respondents, visitors came from 29 other states across the country. The following recreational opportunities were identified by respondents, in order of popularity; Hiking/Walking, Sightseeing, Camping, Driving for Pleasure, Picnicking, Education and interpretation, Birdwatching/Wildlife viewing, Rock climbing, Bicycling, Riding/Driving OHVs, and Target Shooting. While this data is useful, it must be noted that the surveys were taken during summer months at developed recreation sites within the NCA and not at areas offering the primitive recreational opportunities. During large game hunting season, most visitors are likely found dispersed throughout the Cebolla Wilderness and West Malpais Wilderness.

When Joe Skeen Campground becomes a fee site, we will also be able to track more specific data through Recreation Use Permits regarding group size, user nights, and reasons for visiting the site. Campground usage is steady throughout the year, with observations from the park rangers showing that there is a slight decrease in use during the coldest winter months of January and February. In addition to camping, day use recreation is available at both the NCA and NPS National Monument.



A group of 7th graders hikes the El Malpais Ranger Station Nature Trail

Detailed Description of El Malpais NCA Recreation Sites

The El Malpais NCA Recreation Program strives to provide high-quality recreational experiences and increase recreational opportunities for all visitors. Currently none of the recreation areas within the NCA are fee sites, though three of the sites meets the FLREA required amenities for a standard amenity fee (Table 1) and Joe Skeen Campground meets the minimum number of FLREA required amenities to charge an expanded amenity fee (Table 2).

El Malpais Ranger Station Recreation Site

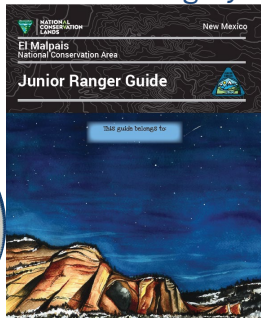
El Malpais Ranger station is located off NM Highway 117 approximately 17 miles from Grants, NM. It is the first BLM designated recreation area that visitors reach on Highway 117 from Interstate -40 exit 89. The Ranger Station is a hub for visitor information and staff interpretation. Visitors can connect with Park Rangers, learn information about available



El Malpais Ranger Station and Parking Area

Join the Adventure!

El Malpais NCA has a Junior Ranger booklet! Thanks to the hard work of Maria Gigliotti, a Conservation Corps New Mexico intern, and a partnership with Public Lands Interpretive Association, this beautiful Junior Ranger booklet was created in December 2020! Much of the artwork was contributed by Samantha Simmons, a NM State Office Conservation Legacy intern!




recreation opportunities and interpretation programs, pick up brochures and maps, view an exhibit on the resources found in the NCA, utilize a 1-mile nature trail loop east of the parking area as well as picnic. The site has a maintenance shed for tools, a water well shed, and an interpretation material shed. It also has a small yard for El Malpais staff to store supplies.

In 2017, RPF0 began the process of revitalizing the interpretation exhibit to be interactive and 3D within the main atrium. A remodel of the Ranger Station was also completed in April of 2021 which included repairing exterior mortar and stucco;

restoring exterior wood features (vigas, latillas, log columns and lintel, canopy, and fence); repainting interior and exterior; refurbish restroom flooring, plumbing fixtures, and counters; new kitchenette cabinets and sink; new flooring; mechanical room plumbing; update HVAC; and new track lighting in atrium.

New interpretation materials have recently been produced and brochures have been recently updated. A Junior Ranger booklet for the El Malpais NCA was finalized and printed in December 2020. An El Malpais Newspaper was created in collaboration with the Public Lands Interpretive Association and will be printed in FY2021. These projects were primarily funded through the BLM New Mexico State Office with National Conservation Lands funds.

Table 6. El Malpais Ranger Station at a Glance.

	
Location:	Approximately 9.25 miles along NM Highway 117 south of Interstate 40 exit 89.
Acreege:	Approximately 3 acres not including the Nature Trail
Amenities Offered:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 picnic tables, 2 with shelters • Flush toilets in Ranger Station • Drinking water available inside and outside of Ranger Station • Interpretive exhibit and signs • Trailhead to El Malpais Nature Trail • ADA accessible
Daily Fees:	\$0/day use, donations will be accepted
Season of Use:	Open year-round Thursday through Monday from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm;
Amenities for Fee Site	Meets FLREA requirements as a standard amenity recreation fee site and service as a visitor center.
Popular Activities:	Picnicking, interpretation and education, visitor information, sightseeing, hiking, restroom stop.



El Malpais Ranger Station Newly Renovated Atrium



Ranger Station Newly Renovated ADA Accessible Shower



Ranger Station Newly Renovated Kitchenette

Joe Skeen Campground

This high desert campground is set back from NM Highway 117 approximately 19 miles from Grants, NM and is the only designated campground within the RPF0. It is located about 2 miles south of the El Malpais Ranger Station Recreation Site. The campground was constructed in 2006 and is also the only designated campground outlined in the El Malpais Plan. Currently, the campground has 10 sites and a camp host site near the entrance (Appendix 3). Each site can hold a varying amount of cars and five of the sites have pull through parking ideal for camper and trailer lengths of up to 50 feet (Table 7). Sites also include shade shelter with concrete pad, ADA fire pit, grill, and picnic table. The road leading to and through the campground is graveled and passable in most conditions.

What's in a name?

The campground was named after Joseph Richard Skeen (June 30, 1927 – December 7, 2003) a congressman from southern New Mexico who secured the initial funding for the site improvements.



Campground use is steady throughout the year, with observation from park rangers showing that there is a slight decrease in use during the coldest winter months of January and February. In addition to camping, day use recreation is available at both the NCA and NPS National Monument.

Though RPF0 does not have concrete visitor data, through Google and other campground review sites, we can infer that visitors are drawn to camp at Joe Skeen because it is in a relatively undeveloped area and offers more privacy per site than is typical of a designated

campground. We know that visitors are also just passing through the area and stopping for a night or two or are camping in the area to recreate on the surrounding public lands.



Joe Skeen Campground Site #4

Stay is limited to 7 days per month in the campground and total stay in the NCA is limited to 14 days per month. The site is set-up for a campground host and RPF0 would like to have one during the busier months of June through mid-December. During these busy months, the campground is typically at

capacity and visitors begin to try to find areas to camp that are outside of designated camping sites, which leads to resources damage. A camp host presence would mitigate resource damage by educating visitors and stopping visitors from camping in or near the

campground in undesignated sites.


Table 7. Joe Skeen Campground Site Amenities and Vehicle Capacity

Camp Site	Grill	Fire Pit	Picnic Table with Shelter	Pull-through parking	Possible Vehicle Accommodations
1	Single	Yes	1	No	2
2	Single	Yes	1	No	4
3	Single	Yes	1	No	3
4	Single	Yes	1	Yes	3
5	Single	Yes	1	Yes	3
6	Single	Yes	1	No	2
7	Single	Yes	1	No	2
8	Single	Yes	1	No	4
9	Single	Yes	1	Yes	2
10	Single	Yes	1	Yes	3
Camp Host	Group	Yes	1	Yes	4



Joe Skeen Campground ADA Accessible Vault Toilet

Table 8. Joe Skeen Campground at a Glance

	
Location:	Approximately 11 miles south along NM Highway 117 from Interstate 40 exit 89.
Acreage:	Approximately 4.25 acres
Amenities Offered:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 campsites with picnic tables, picnic shelters, grills, and fire rings • 2 vault toilets • Refuse containers • Ample parking for vehicles pulling trailers up to 50 ft. • ADA accessible
Daily Fees:	Currently \$0/night for a site, proposed \$5/night per site up to 2 vehicles and \$5/night for extra vehicle.
Season of Use:	Open year round; busiest June through mid-December
Amenities for Fee Site:	Meets FLREA requirements as an expanded amenity recreation fee site and service as a developed campground.
Popular Activities:	Camping, hiking, hunting, sightseeing.



Joe Skeen Campground Camp Host Site with Group Grill

La Ventana Natural Arch Recreation Area

This recreation area is approximately 25 miles from Grants, NM and has one of El Malpais NCA's most iconic scenic views. It is located about 6.5 miles south of Joe Skeen Campground. There is a relatively easy ¼-mile trail to the base of New Mexico's second largest natural arch, La Ventana. The trail transitions from paved to primitive as you enter the Federally designated Cebolla Wilderness surrounded by dramatic sandstone cliff formations, piñon and juniper trees, and a variety of shrubs and grasses. There are 2 picnic tables with shelters, 2 vault toilet facilities, trash and recycle bins, and interpretive signs. Overnight camping and rock climbing are strictly prohibited. This is one of the most popular sites for both visitors to the NCA and those just passing through.

*Did you know?
La Ventana arch is the second largest natural arch in New Mexico and has been preserved in its natural condition by the BLM since 1974!*



La Ventana Natural Arch ADA Accessible Viewpoint

In FY20, a deferred maintenance project was completed for relocation and replacement of two vault toilets to a location near the parking area. Sidewalks, picnic tables with shelters and recycling bins were also installed. In FY21 a pipe fence replaced the wooden fence at the parking lot and in some areas along the trail.



La Ventana Picnic Tables with Shelters



La Ventana ADA Accessible Vault Toilets

Table 9. La Ventana Natural Arch Recreation Area at a Glance

Location:	Approximately 18.5 miles along NM Highway 117 from Interstate 40 exit 89.
Acreage:	Approximately 2.5 acres
Amenities Offered:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 picnic tables with shelters • Refuse and recycling containers • 2 vault toilets • Paved and graveled paths • Interpretive panels • Day use area • ADA accessible
Daily Fees:	\$0/day use
Season of Use:	Open year-round; Busiest March through October.
Amenities for Fee Site:	Meets FLREA requirements as a standard amenity recreation fee site and day-use service.
Popular Activities:	Picnicking, sightseeing, hiking, education and interpretation, restroom stop

South Narrows Picnic Area

This is a day-use area approximately 29 miles from Grants, NM. Set just off NM Highway 117, about 4 miles south of La Ventana Natural Arch Recreation area, the picnic area is tucked against the sandstone cliffs among piñon and juniper trees. Each of the 6 sheltered picnic tables has fire grills available. The area also has 2 vault toilets.



South Narrows Picnic Area Group Picnic Site

The Narrows Rim Trail is located near the entrance at the south end of the picnic area. The trail takes you to the top of a 500-foot sandstone mesa with scenic views of the lava beds and surrounding country. At the end of the trail, there is a great view of La Ventana Natural Arch. The trail is 8 miles roundtrip and is in the Cebolla Wilderness.

Table 10. South Narrows Picnic Area at a Glance

Location:	22.6 miles south along NM Highway 117 from Interstate 40 exit 89.
Acreage:	Approximately 2.25 acres
Amenities Offered:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 picnic sites with tables, shelters, and fire grills (1 is a group picnic shelter with 2 tables) • 2 vault toilets • Trailhead to Narrows Rim Trail • Day use area • ADA accessible
Daily Fees:	\$0/day use
Season of Use:	Open year round
Amenities for Fee Site	Meets FLREA requirements as a standard amenity recreation fee site and day-use service.
Popular Activities:	Picnicking, sightseeing, hiking



South Narrows Picnic Area ADA Accessible Vault Toilet



South Narrows Picnic Area Table with Shelter

Special Recreation Permit Program for the El Malpais NCA

SRPs are required for commercial, competitive, and organized groups and are issued with stipulations deemed necessary by the BLM to manage visitor use, protect natural and cultural resources, and achieve the goals and objectives of the El Malpais NCA plan and recreation program. By charging fees for permitted activities, SRPs also ensure that the public receives a fair-value return for certain recreational uses of public lands and provide economic development in surrounding communities through sustainable recreation uses.

An average of four one-year SRPs are issued yearly for commercial hunting and guiding groups and some years there are additional SRPs issued for organized groups, such as Sandia Preparatory School Outdoor Leadership Program. The RPF0 administers commercial outfitter SRPs in conjunction with the New Mexico Department of Game & Fish (NMDGF). The fees obtained from the El Malpais NCA SRP program from FY2016 through FY2020 average about \$2,200 a year and are shown in Table 11.

Table 11. El Malpais NCA Special Recreation Permit Fees FY2016 through FY2020

FY	Fees Collected	Permits Issued
2016	\$3,300.00	5
2017	\$2,586.00	2
2018	\$2,694.30	5
2019	\$330.00	3
2020	\$2,104.80	5
5-year Average	\$2,203.02	4

Source: OBIEE and RMIS data systems

Partnerships

As a part of the [Connecting with Communities: BLM Recreation Strategy](#), the BLM recognizes the need for collaborative relationships with community service providers as communities expand and as demands increase for open space recreation along with other authorized uses of public lands. Service providers, including lodging, restaurants, nature and youth centers, sporting goods and retail stores, and other nongovernmental organizations. The BLM intends to increase and improve collaboration with community service providers by fostering current partnerships and identifying and developing new ones. Partnership in community networks will enable the BLM to manage recreation resources on public lands to deliver social, economic, and environmental goals.

Partnerships are critical to the success of operations of the El Malpais NCA. For several years, there were many vacant positions at the El Malpais NCA and some well-established partnerships were lost. Recently, with staff additions, the El Malpais NCA recreation program has worked to establish good working relationships with its local governments, federal agencies, individuals, and organizations. Some of these groups and organizations include the National Park Service, Ancestral Lands Conservation Corps, Public Lands Interpretive Association (PLIA), Southwest Conservation Corps, Conservation Corps of New Mexico, Conservation Legacy, and Continental Divide Trail Coalition.

Volunteers

The RPF0 has an active volunteer program, with some of those volunteers focusing their

efforts in the El Malpais NCA. According to [Independent Sector](#), the current estimated value of volunteer time is \$28.54 per hour. The Rock Art volunteers under the archeology division assist with monitoring of the archeological sites within the NCA. The Wilderness division patrol group regularly scouts for incursions in designated Wildernesses and WSAs within the NCA. For several years, there has been no volunteer campground host at Joe Skeen Campground and the face-to-face visitor contact provided by a campground host improves regulation and fee compliance and helps reduce and prevent negative impacts, including vandalism (e.g., breaking into fee tubes, destroying signs), since they are present to convey rules and regulations to the public. RPF0 would like to consider a volunteer campground host who contributes to a six-month operation and would save the agency and the public about \$20,700 per year. Estimated cost is based on volunteer campground host cost and BLM staff cost savings for a 6-month period. In the past, volunteers have staffed the El Malpais Ranger Station, freeing the Park Rangers to perform other tasks, such as patrols, site maintenance, and interpretive programs. RPF0 intends to rebuild its volunteer base for the El Malpais NCA in the future to leverage work force and funding.



Volunteer aids in soil research in Cebolla Wilderness

6. Financial Analysis (Costs and Revenues)

The BLM invests substantial amounts of money toward the development, staffing, and operation of the El Malpais NCA. Data from the BLM Facility Asset Management System cite the current replacement value of the Joe Skeen Campground, La Ventana Natural Arch Recreation Area, South Narrows Picnic Area, and the Ranger Station Recreation Site at more than \$8.2 million dollars. An in-depth analysis of facility assets, current and future costs, and revenues was performed to assess the fiscal health of the El Malpais NCA and to determine if it is leveraging available funding while meeting all requirements for continued operation of high-quality recreation services. The El Malpais NCA has administrative costs paid by congressionally appropriated funds, including those from the RPFO's recreation resources management (L1220), Wilderness management (L1210), and the National Conservation Lands management (L1711) accounts. Appropriated funds cover most of the permanent labor and operational costs to run the recreation sites and the SRP program. In FY20 the NCA received approximately \$664,000. Other appropriated funds, such as those for deferred maintenance (L1653), are utilized for larger projects typically greater than \$25,000. El Malpais NCA does not currently have non-appropriated funds (L1232) for fees or donations, but with the addition of Joe Skeen Campground and future donations at the Ranger Station, this analysis included projected receipts.

Current Overall Costs

On average, the El Malpais NCA has an annual cost of \$398,602, expending an average \$220,431 a year in labor costs and \$178,171 a year in operating costs (Table 12). As shown in Figure 1, the operations to labor ratio is 45% to 55%, respectively, which shows that a larger portion of costs associated with the program involve labor with ample funds still available for operations. Deferred maintenance⁶ from L1653 projects are submitted as a field office for similar work to gain contracting efficiencies are not included in the costs shown in Table 12.

Labor costs are predominantly attributed to a GS-12 monument manager whose time is split between Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument and El Malpais NCA, two GS-9 park rangers, one GS-7 park ranger, and project work accomplished by the Force Account crew⁷. The highest operating expenses are maintenance of recreation facilities and monitoring and patrols of the NCA. The El Malpais NCA recreation staff visit each site at least twice a week year-round for resource and visitor use monitoring, cleaning, general maintenance as well as wilderness and WSA monitoring. Other operating costs include vault toilet pumping and illegal dump site clean-up which may fluctuate from year to year.

⁶ Deferred maintenance refers to large-scale projects (\$25,000 and more) that replace major recreation site infrastructure, such as buildings, flushable and vault toilets, boat ramps, and road repairs. This is typically funded under the L1653 subactivity.

⁷ The Force Account crew are Operations Staff at the District level and assist in completion of construction projects.

Table 12. Annual labor and operating costs of the EI Malpais NCA from FY 2016 through FY 2020.

Fiscal Year	Labor Costs ^{12a}	Operating Costs ^{12b}	Total Annual Expenditures
2016	\$259,641.41	\$211,581.94	\$471,223.35
2017	\$114,883.82	\$121,142.56	\$236,026.38
2018	\$168,066.20	\$138,676.85	\$306,743.05
2019	\$274,971.20	\$110,795.44	\$385,766.64
2020	\$284,592.66	\$308,660.35	\$593,253.01
Total	\$1,102,155.29	\$890,857.14	\$1,993,012.43
Average	\$220,431.06	\$178,171.43	\$398,602.49

^{12a} Labor costs include recreational staff, law enforcement, and operations staff.

^{12b} Operating costs include supplies, services, utilities, equipment, vehicles, uniforms, sign replacement, building maintenance and repairs, training, and travel. Deferred maintenance and cooperative agreement costs are not included in these figures. RPFO utilizes cooperative agreements to fulfill maintenance and project needs. For example, in FY2020, RPFO obligated a \$70,000 agreement with Rocky Mountain Youth Corp to complete trail maintenance throughout the FO, including in the NCA.

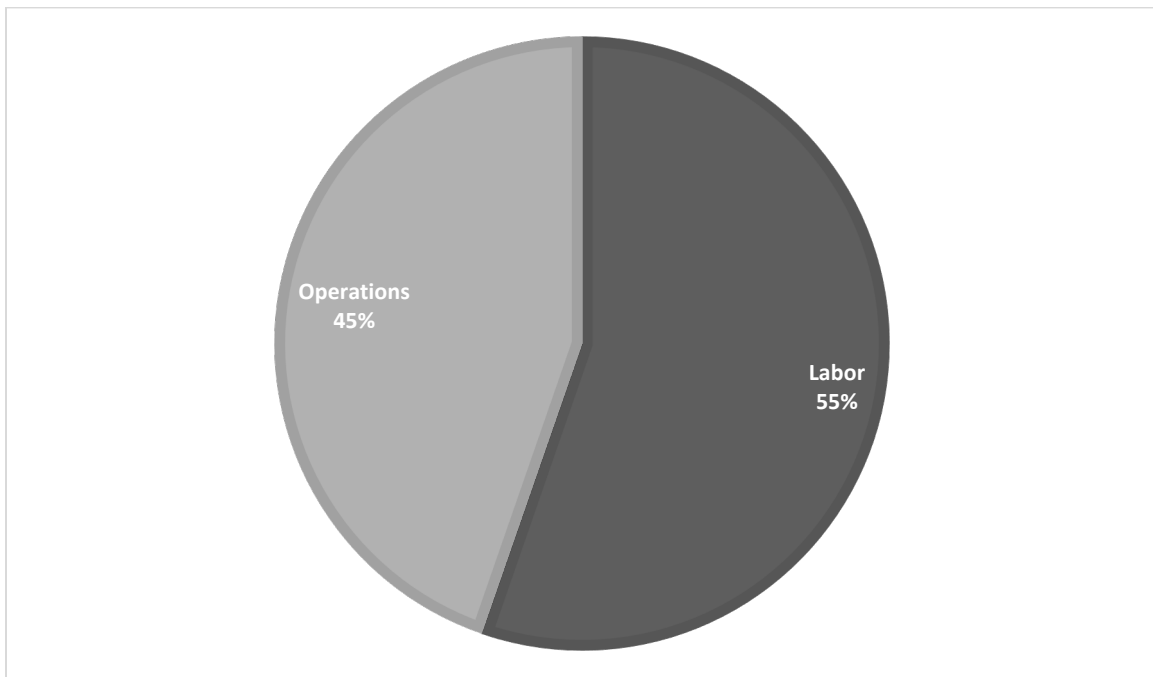


Figure 1. Cost ratios of the 5-year average expenditure (\$398,602.49) of the EI Malpais NCA.

7. Fee Revenue Analysis

None of the El Malpais NCA recreation sites have been evaluated for fee collection, therefore a comprehensive fair market value fee calculation was completed to analyze recreation site fees of similar state, federal, and park facilities in the local and regional area. Fair market analysis was focused on campground areas in the local and regional area (Appendix 4). The public sites most comparable to the Joe Skeen Campground, in terms of amenities provided and costs, are local BLM and USFS campgrounds, which have camping fees of \$5 per night for a campsite. The private sites most comparable, in terms of amenities provided and costs, are the Red Rock Park West and Main Campgrounds, located near Gallup, NM, and have fees of \$10 per night for primitive sites and \$20 per night for developed sites.

Through this analysis, assessment of current and future visitor trends, fee collection levels, operating expenditures, policy review, and input from interested parties, the RPFO determined that the lack of fees are not adequate to meet needs of the El Malpais NCA recreation sites, and a new fee site at Joe Skeen Campground needs to be introduced at this time. RPFO intends to change the fee from \$0 per night for a campsite at Joe Skeen Campground to \$5 per night for a campsite up to two cars and \$5 per night for additional vehicles. To mitigate resource damage, RPFO considered and decided that \$5 per site per night for additional vehicles was a reasonable charge at this time.

Table 13 provides an estimated projection of revenues (assuming fee increase) is based on a range of 50% - 70% capacity at the campground throughout the year, meaning 5 – 7 sites would be filled every day of the year⁸.

Table 13. Estimated projection of 1232 revenues of Joe Skeen Campground

Fiscal Year	Estimated Group Size	Projected User Nights	Estimated Revenue Range (assuming fee increase)	Estimated Revenues (with no fee increase, ex. donation only)	Total Annual Revenue
2022	4 - 8 people	2 nights	\$9,125 - \$12,775. ⁹	\$1,560	\$10,685 - \$14,335

Fees of \$10 night were considered, which would increase revenues by a range of \$18,250 to \$25,550 a year based on a range of 50% - 70% capacity at the campground throughout the year, meaning 5 – 7 sites would be filled every day of the year. Through fair market analysis, this was not brought forward as a recommendation at this time.

Joe Skeen Campground will currently remain a first come, first served area. RPFO has chosen to keep El Malpais Ranger Station Recreation Site a fee free site and will accept

⁸ Based on observation, we conservatively assume that half of the campsites are utilized throughout all seasons.

⁹ This value is based on assumptions of projected visitation for recreation fee sites and analysis of fee increases. Implementing Joe Skeen as a fee site would

unsolicited donations when it is reopened. La Ventana Natural Arch Recreation Area and the South Narrows Picnic Area will remain as fee-free sites. RPFO considered the offerings of the Ranger Station and determined that it operates more as a visitor center than an interpretive center and that collecting fees would outweigh the benefit.

SRP fees are usually collected at the conclusion of the calendar year. As of 2021, commercial use fees are 3% of gross; organized group and competitive event fees are \$6 per person per day. Permittees are billed for their use on public lands after they submit their post-use report for the calendar year. The SRP commercial and group fees are determined by the BLM Director and the RPFO cannot adjust any SRP fees with this business plan.¹⁰ SRP fees are collected in accordance with BLM Handbook H-2930-1, Recreation Permits and Fees.¹¹ Because there are so few SRPs in the El Malpais NCA, they do not account for a large amount of revenue but are a part of the overall funding of the El Malpais NCA. Revenue analysis for the SRP program is projected to remain around the 5-year average shown in Table 11.

¹⁰ Commercial fees, in addition to the minimum fee, are 3 percent of adjusted gross receipts, plus any applicable assigned site fee and/or exclusive use fee, any applicable special area fee, and cost recovery, including application fees.

8. Priorities for Future Expenditures

If approved, the expanded amenity fees for Joe Skeen campground would go into a L1232 account and RPFO would utilize those funds according to FLREA requirements. Appropriate uses of L1232 funds include:

- Repair, maintenance, and facility enhancement related directly to visitor enjoyment, visitor access, and health and safety.
- Interpretation, visitor information, visitor services, visitor needs assessments, and signs.
- Habitat restoration directly related to wildlife-dependent recreation that is limited to hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, or photography.
- Law enforcement related to public use and recreation.
- Direct operating or capital costs associated with the recreation fee program.
- A fee management agreement established under Section 6805(a) of the FLREA or a visitor reservation service.

To provide an adequate estimate of future expenditures, the RPFO first considered what should be budgeted for the El Malpais NCA. Additionally, the RPFO considered priority short-term expenditures and projected deferred maintenance projects.



Joe Skeen Campground Portal Sign and Entrance

El Malpais NCA and Joe Skeen Campground Projected Expenditures/Budget

Table 14 illustrates the projected annual expenditures for the entire El Malpais NCA with a minimum¹² and maximum range for FY 2021 through FY 2025. Table 15 illustrates the projected annual expenditures specifically for Joe Skeen Campground. These two tables include a 2% increase in labor and larger operational costs¹³ for each fiscal year, accounting for the general effects of inflation.

Table 14. Annual expenditures of the El Malpais NCA projected for FY 2021 through FY 2025.

Labor	Minimum	Maximum
GS-12 monument manager, permanent full-time (1/2 time)	\$61,270.44	\$66,321.09
GS-9 park ranger, permanent full-time	\$83,600.00	\$90,491.33
GS-9 park ranger, permanent full-time	\$80,573.68	\$87,215.54
GS-7 park ranger, permanent full-time	\$65,425.36	\$70,818.51
GS-11 Law Enforcement Officer, Permanent full-time (1 work month)	\$12,968.03	\$14,037.01
Force Account Work	\$20,000.00	\$32,472.96
TOTAL	\$323,837.51	\$329,388.44
Operating Expenses	Minimum	Maximum
Volunteer campground host reimbursement (6 months, \$38/day)	\$6,916.00	\$6,916.00
Volunteer El Malpais Ranger Station (6 months, \$19/day)	\$3,458.00	\$3,458.00
Supplies (e.g., toilet paper, garbage bags, cleaning supplies)	\$6,922.40	\$10,824.32
Vault toilet pumping services	\$10,500.00	\$14,206.92
Operating costs for vehicles (3)	\$39,805.00	\$45,462.15
Communication costs (i.e., Ranger Station Cell Phone costs, Garmin service)	\$1,205.00	\$1,623.65
Uniform Annual Cost (4 employees)	\$1,200.00	\$1,731.89
Ranger Station building maintenance and repair	\$2,500.00	\$5,412.16
Staff and volunteer training	\$1,000.00	\$1,623.65
Ranger Station security system costs	\$2,280.00	\$3,247.30
Unexpected expenses (e.g., rec site repairs, waterlines, wells, sign purchase)	\$5,000.00	\$10,824.32
TOTAL	\$82,786.40	\$110,806.87
GRAND TOTAL	\$406,623.91	\$440,195.35

¹² The minimum range was set using FY 2021 projected costs.

¹³ Camp host reimbursement is a fixed cost and is not adjusted for inflation.

Projected annual expenditures for the El Malpais NCA are expected to range from about \$406,623.91 to \$440,195.35 a year. Projected annual direct expenditures for Joe Skeen Campground are expected to range from about \$21,004.04 to \$28,448.05.46 a year. The direct operations costs for Joe Skeen Campground are at a deficit of around \$8,229.04 to 19,323.05 after accounting for application of estimated 1232 funds.

Table 15. Annual direct expenditures of Joe Skeen Campground projected for FY 2021 through FY 2025.

Operating Expenses	Minimum	Maximum
Volunteer campground host reimbursement (6 months, \$38/day)	\$6,916.00	\$6,916.00
Supplies (e.g., toilet paper, garbage bags, cleaning supplies)	\$2,307.47	\$2,814.32
Vault toilet pumping services	\$3,500.00	\$5,412.16
Unexpected expenses (e.g., rec site repairs, waterlines, wells, sign purchase)	\$1,000.00	\$2,500.65
TOTAL	\$21,004.04	\$28,448.05

Deferred Maintenance

An important topic for consideration with recreation sites and public lands is the deferred maintenance backlog and facility asset replacement. Some of the most recent projects funded with deferred maintenance funds (L1653) are listed below:

- FY 2020 La Ventana Natural Arch Recreation Area (\$77,683) – Contract costs to remove old vault toilets and their site rehabilitation; new vault toilet purchase and contract costs for installation; Force Account crew labor for installation of new sidewalks to two new picnic areas; Force Account crew labor for installation of new picnic tables, shelters, recycle bins, and traffic bollards; Force Account crew labor for new sidewalk to enlarge the ADA accessible viewpoint.
- FY 2020 Ranger Station Remodel (\$533,718) – Remodel included contract costs for: repairing exterior mortar and stucco; restoring exterior wood features (vigas, latillas, log columns and lintel, canopy, and fence); repainting interior and exterior; refurbish restroom flooring, plumbing fixtures, and counters; new kitchenette cabinets and sink; new flooring; mechanical room plumbing; update HVAC; and new track lighting in atrium.

Several future deferred maintenance projects for the El Malpais NCA include:

- New potable waterline system and new electrical system for Joe Skeen Campground (\$447,000)
- Repaving, Striping, with repair of curb and gutter at Ranger Station and La Ventana Natural Arch Recreation Site parking areas (\$526,000)

These projects have been submitted for the five-year maintenance plan for a total cost of \$973,000.

Other Priority Expenditures

Some of the El Malpais NCA priority expenditures include short-term, long-term, and ongoing/annual expenses. Expansion of the Recreation Program is driven by the El Malpais Plan. Even without any changes, the costs of operations will continue to increase due to inflation and increased use.

Previously Completed Projects (L1711 – National Conservation Lands funding)

- FY 2021 Interpretation overhaul (\$40,000) New kiosk construction and panels for Joe Skeen Campground, La Ventana Natural Arch Recreation Area, South Narrows Picnic Area, CR42 Pullout, North and South Continental Divide National Scenic Trail trailheads. New interpretive waysides and trail signs for Ranger Station courtyard and Ranger Station Nature Trail,
- FY2021 Ranger Station Exhibit Fabrication and Installation (\$182,370) – Contract costs for fabrication and design of Ranger Station Interpretive Exhibit
- FY 2021 La Ventana Fence Project (\$25,000) – Costs for force account crew to replace wooden fence with metal pipe fence.
- FY 2020 Ranger Station Sidewalks and Picnic Tables (\$22,000) – Force Account crew cleared a median in the Ranger Station parking area and installed new picnic tables with shelters and poured sidewalks to them.
- FY 2019 Ranger Station Exhibit Design (\$58,190) – Contract costs for redesign of Ranger Station interpretive exhibit.

El Malpais NCA Short- and Long-Term Future Expenditures

- Repaint picnic shelters and vault toilet flooring at South Narrows Picnic Area (\$5,000)
- Purchase tool racks and maintenance equipment for each NCA vehicle (\$1,500)
- Stabilize erosion along La Ventana Natural Arch Recreation Area trail (\$15,000)
- Add additional concrete sidewalks at South Narrows Picnic Area to improve ADA accessibility (\$10,000)
- Resurface La Ventana and Ranger Station Parking lots and replace concrete sidewalks. (\$526,000)

Joe Skeen Campground Short- and Long-Term Future Expenditures

- Barricades (boulders) at Joe Skeen Campground to prevent user-created routes/camping areas (\$7,500)
- Stabilize general site erosion at Joe Skeen Campground (\$5,000)
- Repaint picnic shelters and vault toilet flooring at Joe Skeen Campground (\$5,000)
- Replace fire rings at Joe Skeen with maintenance-friendly versions (\$8,000)
- Add additional concrete sidewalks at Joe Skeen Campground to improve ADA accessibility (\$25,000)
- Revamp campground host area and reclaim user-created turn-around (\$75,000)

Ranger Station Short-Term Future Expenditures

-
- Install gate at Ranger Station to block visitors from ware yard (\$5,000)
 - Local Art Installation intern through PLIA and partnership with PLIA (\$199,700)
 - Interpretative signs for both the courtyard area and the Ranger Station Nature Trail (\$10,000).

9. Impacts from Changing and Not Changing Recreation Site Fees

To meet requirements of the FLREA, the RPFO considered charging fees at four different sites within the El Malpais NCA plan area. The RPFO intends to begin to collect an expanded amenity fee at Joe Skeen Campground, which meets the definition for expanded amenity fees of the FLREA (Table 2). RPFO does not currently intend to collect standard amenity fees at these La Ventana Natural Arch Recreation Area, South Narrows Picnic Area, and El Malpais Ranger Station Recreation Site to keep the NCA affordable and accessible. The intent of the BLM recreation fee program is not to maximize revenue but to help protect natural resources, provide for public health and safety, and facilitate access to public lands and related waters. BLM Manual 2930 outlines that fees should be balanced and affordable for all members of the public, rather than an impediment. The manual also states, “Fees are a way of ensuring that those who actively use recreation opportunities make a greater, but reasonable, contribution towards protecting and enhancing these opportunities than those who do not.”

Impacts from Charging Recreation Fees

Due to the desire to increase the quality of services and amenities provided, current efficiencies in the operation of the El Malpais NCA recreation program, and analysis of future expected costs, the RPFO has a compelling case to add Joe Skeen Campground as a fee site. During analysis, the RPFO considered how the fee charges would affect public land users. The RPFO determined the implementation of a fee would be beneficial to the El Malpais NCA’s expenditures and would not have negative impacts on the local community.

Joe Skeen Campground sees a high capacity of visitors throughout the year and with those visitors the area sees resource damage issues, such as vandalism, theft, user-created campsites, and fire rings. The current allocated funding for the area would be greatly augmented with the addition of L1232 funds generated by implementing a fee for the campground. The potential benefits from a fee at Joe Skeen Campground would include:

- Generation of revenue to be used for labor and operational needs
- Increase staff or camp host presence to halt resource damage in and around the campground.
- Ability to improve campground facilities and recreational opportunities.
- Improve recreational opportunities and the quality of the experience and public satisfaction for visitors.
- Ability to sustain and direct management of the recreation fee site.
- Ability to continue operations despite potential increase of costs of goods, labor, and/or services.
- Return visitors may find it off putting that they are now required to pay a fee.
- Socio-economic impacts to low-income or minority populations are unknown at this time. Some impacts could be expected with any fee. Collection of RUPs at Joe Skeen Campground will be used to understand what populations are visiting the area.

A potential negative impact from implementing a fee at the Joe Skeen Campground would be that there are fewer public lands available free of charge to members of the public and local community.

Impacts from Not Charging Recreation Fees

Through fair market value analysis, assessment of current and future visitor trends, operating expenditures, policy review, and input from interested parties, the RPFO determined that the lack of fees are not adequate to meet short-term or long-term needs of the Joe Skeen Campground.

Not designating the Joe Skeen Campground as an expanded amenity fee site could lead to a low-quality recreational experience for visitors. Without additional funds, the Joe Skeen Campground may not realize the short-term or long-term projects meant to improve the campground and lead to lower quality of services, amenities, and efficiencies in the operation at Joe Skeen Campground. Without L1232 funds from an expanded amenity fee RPFO may not be able to successfully protect natural resources in the area or provide for public health and safety appropriately. To meet requirements of the FLREA and other recreation goals, impacts from not changing fees include:

- Loss of potential revenue in L1232 funds to augment funds for labor and operational costs.
- Potential environmental degradation of resources in and around the campground.
- Potential degradation of recreation experience and public satisfaction for current and new visitors.
- Costs of goods, labor, and services increase at a faster rate than fee revenue projections.
- Socio-economic impacts to low-income or minority populations would be favorable because no fee would be required.

10. Public Outreach

The RPFO will initiate public notification and outreach for the fee proposal per PL 108-447 Sec. 804 (d)(4) and the BLM Recreation Permit and Fee Administration Handbook H-2930-1.

This includes:

- Soliciting public comments for at least 30 days on the draft business plan by:
 - Posted it on the BLM Recreation Site Business Plans website on June 9, 2021. <https://www.blm.gov/programs/recreation/permits-and-fees/business-plans>
 - Issued news releases and posted on social media platforms June 9, 2021.
 - Future, publishing of a notice of the proposed new fee in the Federal Register at least 6 months before the establishment of a new fee area or recreation site. Federal Register Notices are not required for fee changes.
- The FO reviews and considers public comments and revises the draft business plan as warranted and finalizes the business plan for Resource Advisory Council approval.

11. Appendices

Appendix 1: El Malpais RMP Conformance

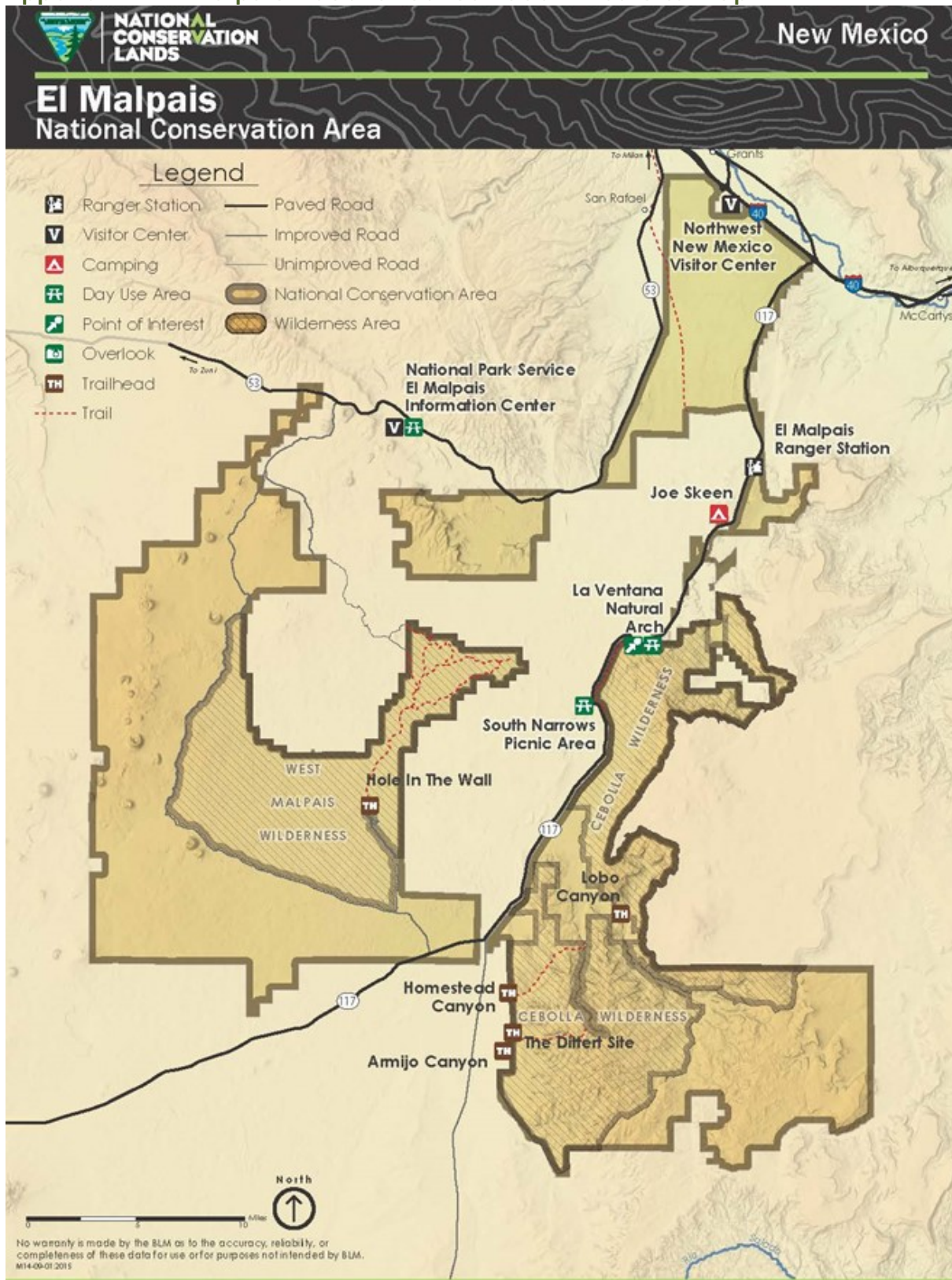
Resource or Use	Citation El Malpais RMP
<p>Recreation</p>	<p>Goal – To ensure the continued availability of quality outdoor recreational opportunities and experiences that are not readily available from other sources. Recreational use and capital investment in facilities are managed to protect the health and safety of visitors; protect natural, cultural, and other resource values; stimulate public enjoyment of public land; provide for universal access; and, to the extent possible, resolve user conflicts.</p> <p>Objective – Continue to issue special recreation permits to qualified outfitters and guides when requested, following the permitting process, which includes compliance with NEPA. Permits issued will be consistent with resource protection objectives and management decisions for the area in which the proposed use is planned and set up to reduce user conflicts. Examples of activities sometimes covered under these permits are guided and/or outfitted hunting, mountain biking events, pack-animal trekking, commercial photography, and other commercial outfitting. Commercial, competitive, and organized uses of public lands may be permitted. However, no motorcycle race or other off-highway vehicle competitive event will be allowed, as this would not be compatible with the intent of the El Malpais Act.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Action 1</u>—Operate SRP program consistent with RMP and El Malpais Act. • <u>Action 1.1</u>—Coordinate issuance of commercial outfitting and guide permits with New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. • <u>Action 1.2</u>— Establish parameters for Organized Group recreation permits with appropriate NEPA documents. • <u>Action 1.3</u>—Issue no competitive motorcycle or off-highway vehicle permits.
<p>Interpretation/Public Education Program</p>	<p>Goal – To educate the public about the RPFO’s objectives, goals, and mission at El Malpais NCA. The RPFO offers public programs for users to attend and learn about the natural and cultural resources of El Malpais, as well as being good stewards of the public lands. In addition, this program provides written interpretation of the resources of the NCA in brochures and at facilities throughout the area. This program provides support to all the resource programs for which the RPFO has responsibility.</p>

	<p>Objective – The RPFO will continue to produce its own interpretive materials and will maintain its partnership with the Public Lands Interpretive Association (formerly the Southwest Natural and Cultural Heritage Association) or another natural history organization to provide maps and other publications for visitors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Action 1</u> –Develop appropriate interpretation signs and materials for recreation sites identified in the El Malpais RMP. • <u>Action 2</u> - Interpretation will occur through one-on-one contacts with visitors (public programs, guided hikes, and Ranger Station contacts); printed brochures, exhibits, interpretive media, and publications at the Ranger Station; and wayside exhibit panels, self-guided trails with interpretive signs, kiosks, and informational signs. • <u>Action 3</u> - Visitor facilities at trailheads and other entry points to wilderness will be upgraded to improve access opportunities, services, and information. Additional on-site information will be provided to better inform and educate the public. Signs will identify the wilderness boundary, wilderness name, and some regulations governing use. • <u>Action 4</u> - Up to three wayside exhibits will be located at the Narrows Rim Trailhead or near the picnic area. • <u>Action 5</u> - To assist with its goals of public outreach, interpretation, and environmental education, the AFO will develop and maintain cooperative agreements and contacts with teaching institutes, research institutes, and non-profit organizations.
<p>Recreation Facilities Development</p>	<p>Goal – To ensure the continued availability of quality outdoor recreational opportunities and experiences that are not readily available from other sources. Recreational use and capital investment in facilities are managed to protect the health and safety of visitors; protect natural, cultural, and other resource values; stimulate public enjoyment of public land; provide for universal access; and to the extent possible, resolve user conflicts. Management priority is given to undeveloped areas experiencing resource damage, user conflicts, or threatening visitor safety; areas where use exceeds current capacity; unique and/or scenic attractions adjoining heavily traveled highways; and preservation and protection of natural and cultural resources.</p> <p>Objective – The RPFO will inspect recreation-related facilities and conduct a program of preventive and rehabilitative maintenance of recreation-related facilities, to the extent resources permit, to provide a safe, sanitary, and aesthetically</p>

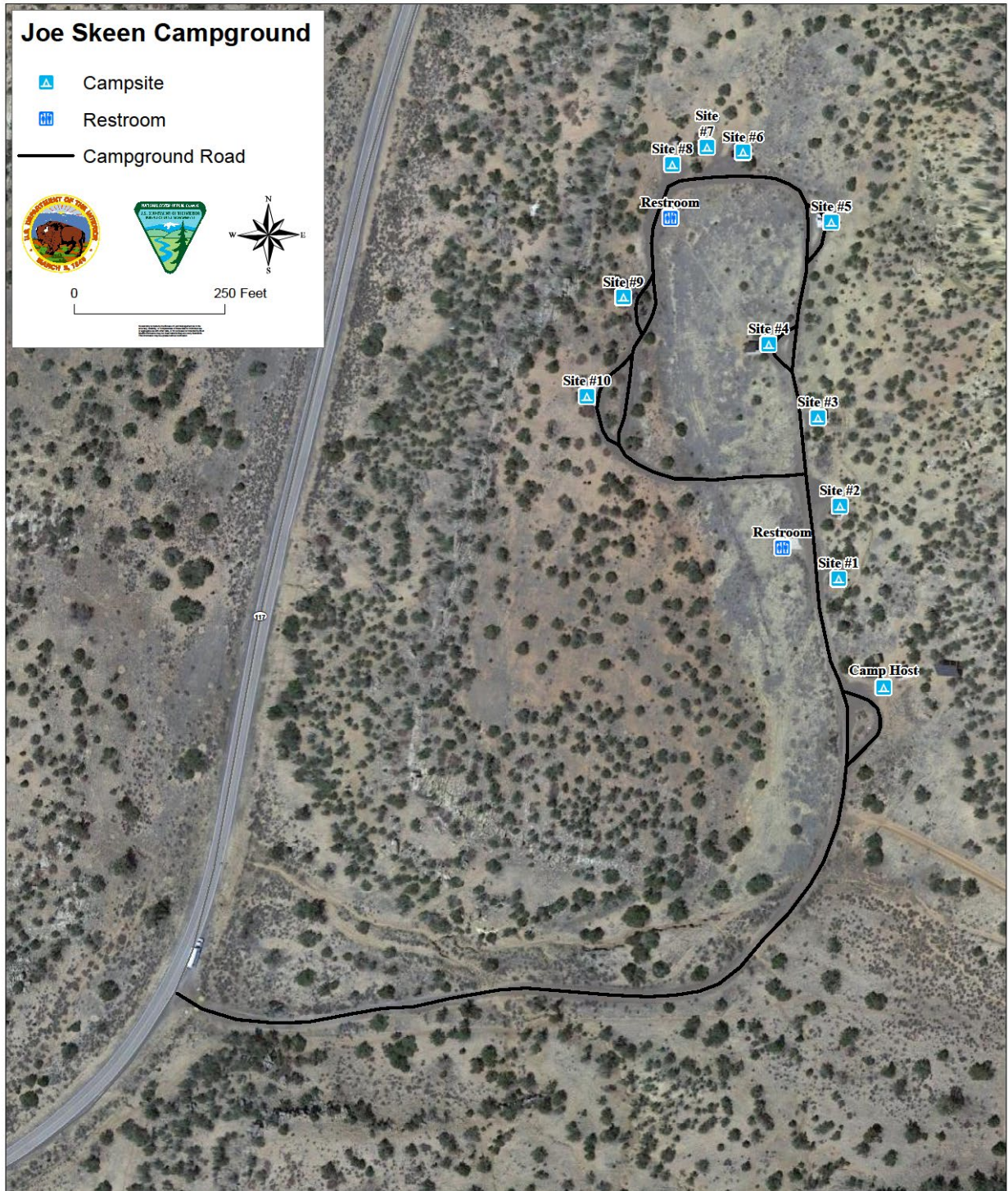
	<p>pleasing environment for visitors and employees. Through inspection the RPFO will identify and remove hazards or give warning of their presence. RPFO personnel, volunteers, cooperative management agreements, contracts with the private sector, and other means as necessary will be utilized to maintain BLM facilities. The AFO will continually evaluate its recreation-related facilities through inspection to determine if they should be reconstructed, expanded, transferred, closed, or removed based on costs, resource protection, health and safety, and their capability of meeting current and future uses and demands.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Action 1</u>—Continue to monitor and maintain recreation-related facilities. <p>Objective - Camping will be offered at one developed campground and at dispersed sites throughout the Plan Area. No camping will be allowed at The Narrows or at La Ventana Natural Arch.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Action 1</u>— The campground will provide up to 20 single-family units with leveled parking spurs large enough to handle small self-contained recreational vehicles, vehicle campers, or tent camping. One unit will be built for multi-family or group camping with appropriate parking. Two vault toilets, tables, and cooking facilities will be constructed within the campground and, if possible, drinking water will be provided. Vehicle access to the campground from NM 117 will be improved by upgrading the existing dirt road and surfacing it for all-weather use. • <u>Action 2</u>— An amphitheater designed to hold about 50 people will be built at a location within a five-minute walk of the campground. • <u>Action 3</u>- Picnicking facilities will be provided only at the south end of The Narrows and will include a picnic area with up to 10 units, parking, drinking water (if possible), graveled access, and vault toilets. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <u>Action 3.1</u>- Up to three wayside exhibits will be located near the picnic area or at the nearby trailhead for the Narrows Rim Trail. ○ <u>Action 4</u> - The Narrows will be designated as a day-use-only site for parking and hiking in the Cebolla Wilderness
<p>Visual Resources</p>	<p>Goal— Manage public lands to protect or enhance the quality of visual (scenic) values.</p> <p>Objective— Visual resources will continue to be evaluated as a part of activity and project planning for all surface-disturbing projects regardless of size or potential impact.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Action 1</u>—Manage the following acreage of BLM land according to VRM class designations:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Class I—100,900 acres;• Class II—148,240 acres;• Class III—60 acres; and• Class IV—0 acres.
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Appendix 2: El Malpais National Conservation Area Site Map



Appendix 3: Joe Skeen Campground Site Map



Appendix 4: El Malpais NCA Fair Market Value Analysis 2021

Recreation Site	Ownership	Site Fees*	Full-Service RV	Tent Spaces	Drinking Water	Toilet Facilities	Fire Rings/BBQ Stand	Picnic Tables	Onsite Host/Visitor Assistance	Showers	Pavilion	Cable/Wi-Fi	Laundry	River/Lake Access	Key Points to Consider
El Morro National Monument Campground	NPS	\$0		x	x	x	x	x							No reservations; First-come, first-served basis only
Coal Mine Campground	USFS	\$5/site		x		x		x							Mount Taylor RD, Reservations required, discount for American the Beautiful Senior Pass
McGaffey Campground	USFS	Single party: \$10.00/vehicle per night Group sites: \$50 - \$100.00 per night		x	x	x		x							Mount Taylor RD, No reservations required, discount for American the Beautiful Senior Pass
Ojo Redondo Campground	USFS	\$0		x		x		x							No reservations; First-come, first-served basis only

Recreation Site	Ownership	Site Fees*	Full-Service RV	Tent Spaces	Drinking Water	Toilet Facilities	Fire Rings/BBQ Stand	Picnic Tables	Onsite Host/Visitor Assistance	Showers	Pavilion	Cable/Wi-Fi	Laundry	River/Lake Access	Key Points to Consider
Quaking Aspen Campground	USFS	\$5/vehicle		x		x	x	x							No reservations; First-come, first-served basis only, discount for American the Beautiful Senior Pass
Red Rock Park West Campground	City of Gallup	\$10/night primitive camping \$20/night water and electric available	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x			Reservations required
Red Rock Park Main Campground	City of Gallup	\$10/night primitive camping \$20/night water and electric available	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x			Reservations required

Recreation Site	Ownership	Site Fees*	Full-Service RV	Tent Spaces	Drinking Water	Toilet Facilities	Fire Rings/BBQ Stand	Picnic Tables	Onsite Host/Visitor Assistance	Showers	Pavilion	Cable/Wi-Fi	Laundry	River/Lake Access	Key Points to Consider
Gallo Campground	NPS	\$20.00 /site per night Group sites: \$60/site per night		x	x	x	x	x							Reservations required, Chaco Culture National Historical Park, Interagency Senior and Access pass holders pay \$10.00 per site, per night
Angel Peak Scenic Area	BLM	\$0		x		x	x	x							No reservations, Farmington FO BLM
Datil Well Campground	BLM	\$5/night		x	x	x	x	x							No reservations, Socorro FO BLM
Pilar Campground	BLM	\$0	x	x	x	x	x	x							No reservations, Taos FO BLM
El Malpais Visitor Center	NPS	\$0			x	x		x	x						

*Prices reflect the lowest published prices and do not include taxes or reservation fees or other factors that could increase fees, such as state of residency, length of vehicle, trailer slide outs, number of people and/or pets, days of the week, and months of the year.

12. References

BLM (Bureau of Land Management). 2001. The El Malpais Plan. U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Albuquerque Field Office*, Albuquerque, NM.

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*Albuquerque Field Office (AFO) is now known as the Rio Puerco Field Office (RPFO).