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Mike and team,

Here are the hot topics for Friday's visits with the governors of New Mexico and Nevada. In addition, there are some talking points specific to the revenues from the Pecos (NM) lease sale. Also, I will drop by hard copies of the Incoming letter from Gov. Martinez about SunZia and the current draft replay, which is with WO100. Let me know if you have any questions or concerns.  
Bev

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# 2017 Hot Topics

BLM Nevada

## **Reactivation of Yucca Mountain Nuclear Waste Repository**

### **I. KEY POINTS**

Yucca Mountain is the designated site for a proposed repository for spent nuclear fuel. The area identified as Yucca Mountain consists of approximately 4,255 acres of public land approximately 100 miles northwest of Las Vegas. In 1982, Congress passed an act requiring the establishment of a deep geologic repository for secure nuclear waste storage, and Yucca Mountain was chosen in 1987. The State of Nevada opposes the project.

### **II. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES**

If the project is revived, communication between Department of Energy (DOE) and the BLM would focus on remediating the site or requesting an administrative or Congressional withdrawal of the lands. The DOE would reapply for rights-of-way to authorize the remaining facilities under FLPMA Title V.

### **III. BACKGROUND**

Public Land Orders (PLO) 6802 and PLO 7534 withdrew to the DOE 4,255.50 acres of public lands from the mining and mineral leasing laws to maintain the physical integrity of the subsurface environment for the project tunnel. In February 2008, DOE requested an extension of the PLO 6802; however the withdrawal was never signed by the Secretary of the Interior. In August 2013, the BLM notified DOE that the Yucca Mountain withdrawal had expired and the administrative casefile was closed.

Two rights-of-way to DOE for ancillary facilities included 51,632 acres of BLM land and 18,858 acres of Department of Defense land. These ROWs expired in December 2014 and December 2015, respectively. One ROW was for a railway corridor to move waste to the proposed DOE facility. At present, DOE's expired ROWs have left behind developed roads and numerous other facilities, such as above-ground pipelines, boreholes, wells, signs, and communication sites. In addition, DOE dropped radioactive material down a borehole in 1982, which has never been removed.

## **Dixie Meadows Geothermal Project**

### **I. KEY POINTS**

This project would create 75 short-term construction jobs and 10 long-term operating jobs. The 122-acre geothermal power plant and associated 230-kilovolt generator-tie power line is located on BLM-managed lands about 40 miles northeast of Fallon.

### **II. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES**

The Ormat Dixie Meadows project includes two proposed power line route alternatives, each with unique issues. The preferred northern route would cross public lands with mapped Other Habitat Management Areas (OHMA) for Greater Sage-grouse. The southern route alternative would cross lands segregated for the proposed Naval Air Station (NAS) Fallon Range withdrawal renewal, which would require concurrence from the Navy for the necessary right of way per the segregation notice published in the Federal Register. In addition, the proximity of the Stillwater Range wilderness study area at the project area limits the areas available for siting any proposed infrastructure.

The Project lies within the traditional boundary for the Fallon Paiute-Shoshone Tribe. Consultation with the Tribe has resulted in documentation of the Dixie Hot Springs as a significant traditional, sacred, and religious location. The fact that the hot springs themselves lie upon the Navy-owned surface estate further complicates the BLM's management over these culturally significant features.

### **III. BACKGROUND**

In 2011, Ormat drilled the first well for this project and to date has drilled a total of eight wells, three of which are production-size. The remaining five include two temperature gradient wells, two observation wells, and a monitoring well. Currently there are three approved Geothermal Drilling Permits for two injection wells and one production well yet to be drilled. In October 2014, Ormat submitted a utilization plan proposing development of two 30-megawatt (60 MW total) geothermal generating facilities at Dixie Meadows, which was subsequently accepted as complete, and an analysis was initiated to determine the potential effects of the proposal.

Currently, that environmental assessment (EA) is being finalized based on revisions as a result of public and tribal comment and field office review comments. The Fallon Paiute-Shoshone Tribe had requested a 90-day comment period instead of the normal 30 on the Environmental Assessment (EA) and the district manager declined.

## **Pershing County Lands Bill**

### **I. KEY POINTS**

The Pershing County Economic Development and Conservation Act was reintroduced in the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress as SB414 with companion bill HR1107. It has been read twice and referred to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

This bill directs the Department of the Interior to conduct sales or exchanges of eligible lands in Pershing County, Nevada, identified as the "Checkerboard Lands Resolution Area." The BLM and the county would jointly select which parcels of eligible land to offer for sale or acre-for-acre exchange. If passed, the BLM would identify management priority areas within the Checkerboard Lands Resolution Area, including those considered to be:

- Greater Sage-grouse habitat;
- part of an identified wildlife corridor or designated critical habitat;
- of value for outdoor recreation or public access for hunting, fishing, and other recreational purposes;
- of significant cultural, historic, ecological, or scenic value; or
- of value for improving Federal land management.

## II. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The bill proposes a "sales and exchange" plan for more than 300,000 acres, including "checkerboard" lands in the Interstate 80 corridor, lands around two large mining projects, and the creation of several new wilderness areas.

## III. BACKGROUND

The bill was originally introduced in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress. Many of the lands described in this bill are encumbered by existing multiple uses, including active mining projects, mining claims, grazing allotments, or some combination thereof. The bill would also create the potential for a large amount of new split estate because it doesn't address whether mineral rights are also conveyed. Pershing County's web site for the bill may be found at <http://bit.ly/2pQhww0>.

## **Military Land Withdrawals for Nellis Testing and Training Range (NTTR) and Fallon Naval Air Station (NAS)**

### I. KEY POINTS

The U.S. Navy is planning to extend the lifespan of its current withdrawal of 203,000 acres of public land in Churchill County for the Fallon Naval Air Station Training Range. In addition to extending the lifespan of the existing withdrawal, the Navy is also proposing to expand their withdrawal by an additional 605,000 acres in Churchill, Lyon, Mineral, and Pershing Counties.

Similarly, the U.S. Air Force is also planning to extend the lifespan of its current withdrawal for Nellis of 2.95 million acres in Clark County, 778,681 acres in Lincoln County and 1.8 million acres in Nye County. In addition to extending the lifespan of the existing withdrawal, the Air Force is also proposing to expand their withdrawal by an additional

119,389 acres in Clark County; 154,378 acres in Lincoln County; and 27,740 acres in Nye County.

## **II. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES**

Although timelines for both extensions of existing withdrawals and expansions of those withdrawals include multi-year comment periods for draft and final Environmental Impact Statements (EISs), the BLM is required by law to segregate the lands in question from mining claims while the extensions and expansions are under consideration. Segregation for the Fallon Naval Air Station went into effect in October 2016. The announcement of the segregation went largely unnoticed by the local media and several mining claims were inadvertently filed by claimants after the segregation went into effect, resulting in the BLM's issuing and then immediately voiding the claims. Some of the claimants had already invested in equipment to work their claims and filed appeals with the Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA.)

## **III. BACKGROUND**

The Navy is expected to release a Draft EIS on the Fallon project in the spring of 2018, with a Final EIS to follow a year later. The BLM would then prepare a case file and issue recommendations to the Secretary of the Interior in the fall of 2019.

The Air Force is expected to release a Draft EIS on the Nellis project in the fall of 2017, with a final EIS to follow a year later. The Air Force would then send proposed legislative language to Congress in fall 2019.

Both the Fallon and Nellis expansions are issues of concern to local miners and ranchers, who would rather not see the land removed from multiple use.

## **Resource Management Plans (Southern Nevada, Carson City, Battle Mountain and Elko Districts)**

### **I. KEY POINTS**

The 1998 Resource Management Plan (RMP) covering Southern Nevada provides management direction for approximately 3.1 million acres of public lands located in southern Nevada, which includes all of Clark County and the southern portion of Nye County. This RMP has been under revision and BLM expects to complete it by 2020, following a new public scoping period in 2017. The new public scoping will incorporate emerging issues, such as solar energy, groundwater modeling, lands available for disposal or transfer to local agencies, and the recently designated Gold Butte National Monument. Planning for the Monument will undergo focused public outreach in the Mesquite-area community and have a separate Record of Decision from the remainder of the BLM planning area.

The 2001 RMP covering Carson City District provides management direction for about 4.8 million acres of public lands located in portions of 11 counties in two states (Washoe, Storey,

Carson City, Douglas, Lyon, Churchill, Mineral, and Nye counties within Nevada; and Alpine, Plumas, and Lassen counties within California). Completion is anticipated in 2018.

Battle Mountain and Elko Districts are in the early stages of revising their respective RMPs. These revisions will include updated content for fluid minerals leasing (oil, gas, geothermal) and recreational areas. The 1985 Wells RMP and the 1987 Elko RMP provide management direction for approximately 10 million acres in the Elko District, while the 1984 Shoshone-Eureka RMP and the 1997 Tonopah RMP provides management direction for approximately 10.4 million acres in the Battle Mountain District.

## **II. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES**

The Southern Nevada RMP has been under revision since 2010. The new RMP has been delayed by various contingencies, bookended by the 2014 Bundy cattle gather and the 2017 designation of the Gold Butte National Monument. Public comment has focused on several Areas of Critical Environmental Concern identified in the new plan, as well as implications for economic development and land disposals.

The Carson City RMP has also been under revision since 2012. The size and complexity of the project have been adjusted to complement other large projects in the area, such as the extension and expansion of the Fallon Naval Air Station, to delay its completion.

## **III. BACKGROUND**

In 2015, the Winnemucca District completed its RMP, creating a substantial level of concern among ranchers and Pershing County Commissioners regarding several provisions related to reduction of acreage available for grazing allotments. As BLM Nevada moves forward with RMP revisions in other districts, care is being taken to provide for public involvement and consistent dialogue and collaboration with partners and stakeholders. The specific content of that RMP also is being clarified with plan maintenance updates to be posted later in 2017.

### **Hollister Mine**

#### **I. KEY POINTS**

Located approximately 80 miles northeast of the town of Winnemucca, the Hollister Mine produced more than 115,000 ounces of gold from two open-pit operations as well as more than 450,000 ounces of gold from subsurface operations.

The mine is also located close to a cultural resource site significant to the Te-Moak Band of the Western Shoshone known as Tosawih. Following a dispute between the Tribe and the mine operator in 2014 and 2015 about the programmatic agreement governing how the Tribe and BLM staff monitored and protected cultural resources during mining operations, as well as litigation between the Tribe and the BLM, the previous operator sold the mine to Klondex



Gold, which is the current operator. The BLM is now in the process of cooperatively renegotiating the programmatic agreement with all parties concerned. Klondex has submitted an exploratory drill plan to the Elko District for their proposed 2017 operations.

## **II. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES**

On February 1, 2017, Klondex met with BLM staff, the State Historic Preservation Officer and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to draft a new programmatic agreement. The resulting document is under review by all parties and comments will be incorporated by the end of May.

## **III. BACKGROUND**

In May 2016, the Tribe sued BLM in Federal court to prevent construction of a 29.4-kilovolt power line as part of the company's approved operations. The Tribe's injunction was denied and the power line was built while the Tribe was appealing the decision to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeal. On February 17, 2017, the Ninth Circuit dismissed the appeal.

### **Anaconda Mine**

#### **I. KEY POINTS**

The Anaconda Copper Mine Site covers more than 3,400 acres in the Mason Valley, near the city of Yerington, approximately 65 miles southeast of Reno and about half of the site consists of BLM-managed public lands. Significant contamination created by decades of copper mining resulted in Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) action. The site was proposed for listing on EPA's National Priority List for cleanup under the Superfund Program on September 9, 2016. However, an alternative to Superfund listing is being sought by local landowners and the Atlantic Richfield Corporation (ARC, the responsible party.) The BLM is currently working with EPA, ARC, the state of Nevada, and the Walker River Paiute and Yerington Paiute Tribes to have ARC accomplish the cleanup without using EPA funds.

#### **II. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES**

A draft Record of Decision (ROD) is undergoing headquarters review. BLM Nevada is preparing a ROD concurrence and briefing package for WO. The State has met with both Tribes to prepare for formal consultation. The State and EPA met with ARC on April 26 to discuss engineering design for the cleanup.

#### **III. BACKGROUND**

Since 2005, the EPA as lead agency, and the Nevada Department of Environmental Protection (NDEP) have taken several emergency removal actions at the site to address immediate concerns. They have also required ARC to conduct remedial investigations and feasibility studies to determine the extent of contamination and potential cleanup options.

NDEP has supported remediation efforts since 2001. The BLM currently has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the EPA and NDEP that defines roles and responsibilities for managing the site under Comprehensive Environmental Response Compensation and Liability Act of 1980 (CERCLA) and Nevada State law.

The EPA divided the site into eight operable units (OU) based on similar attributes. OU 8's five heap leach pads and their associated fluid management system are being addressed. The remaining OU-8 cleanup tasks (closure of the former Arimetco Process Areas and addressing groundwater contamination attributed to OU-8) will be addressed in the ROD for OU-8. Contaminants of concern at the site include radionuclides, a uranium plume in groundwater, metals, and hydrocarbons.

Internal Work Document



**Talking Points – Gov. Susana Martinez – For Friday, May 12, Meeting**  
*Internal Working Draft – May 10, 2017*

Governor, I have some good news about the Pecos lease sale from September 2016.

The BLM has issued 35 of the 36 leases sold that day, and now we understand that ONRR will deposit the lease sale proceeds in the state's account on May 30.

ONRR will inform the BLM on May 19 exactly how much it will be depositing into the State's account. Our New Mexico BLM office will notify your office of the amount, but we expect that number to be approximately \$69 million.

The one lease that was sold for approximately \$1.6 million but not yet issued because the successful bidder is required to join a unit prior to the lease being issued. [A unit is an operation of multiple leases that work as a single lease under a single operator] The lessee and the unit operator are working on the unit agreement but it is not yet in place. The State's portion of that revenue is expected to be about \$777,000, but it cannot be issued until that agreement is finalized.

As you know, that was a record lease sale for the BLM, and we're proud to partner with you for the benefit of all citizens of New Mexico.

**BACKGROUND**

The Unit is already in place. The successful bidder is required to join the unit prior to the lease being issued. The lessee and the unit operator are working on the agreement.

A unit is an operation of multiple leases as a single lease under a single operator. Unit Agreements have benefits for the environment, for the oil and gas reservoir and for the lease holders.



# 2017 Hot Topics

BLM New Mexico

## **Farmington Mancos-Gallup RMP Amendment/EIS**

### **I. KEY POINTS**

On October 21, 2016, the BLM published in the Federal Register an Amended Notice of Intent to Amend the Farmington Mancos-Gallup Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Prepare an associated Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The amended notice informed the public that the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) intends to use the EIS to inform decisions where the agency manages mineral leasing and associated activities. The BLM and the BIA will jointly develop the EIS. The notice initiated a 60-day scoping period, which was later extended to 120 days, ending on February 20, 2017. The Farmington Field Office (FFO) held 10 additional public scoping meetings, all of which were conducted in Navajo and English. A final scoping report is expected in May 2017; a draft RMP Amendment will be published in summer 2018.

### **II. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES**

The Farmington RMP Amendment/EIS is controversial due to oil and gas leasing and development (including hydraulic fracturing and air quality), especially around Chaco Culture National Historical Park, World Heritage Sites, and the cultural landscape of the San Juan Basin. Navajo Nation Council Delegates and community members in the area have identified vehicle speeds and effects associated with venting and flaring from active development on public lands in their areas as health and safety concerns.

### **III. BACKGROUND**

Improvements and innovations in horizontal drilling technology and multi-stage hydraulic fracturing have enhanced the economics of development within the Mancos Shale/Gallup Formation. In response, the FFO is preparing the Farmington Mancos Gallup RMPA/EIS to amend the 2003 Farmington RMP to address issues related to oil and gas development, lands and realty, vegetation management, and lands with wilderness characteristics.

## **Transmission Projects**

### **I. KEY POINTS**

A right-of-way (ROW) was granted to SunZia in September 2016. BLM New Mexico and BLM Arizona are now working with the proponents on a Plan of Development. The target timeframe for the Notice to Proceed is December 2017. Construction of the project is scheduled to begin in the first quarter of 2018. In a letter dated March 10, 2017, New Mexico Governor Susana Martinez wrote a letter to Secretary of Defense James Mattis and Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke urging them to reconsider the routing of the Project through the NCUA due to possible negative impacts to the testing capability at WSMR over the next 30 years. A responses is under review.

Three scoping meetings for the Verde Transmission Project were held and in response to requests from the public, the BLM extended the comment period by 30 days. In addition to the extended comment period, the BLM held an additional public scoping meeting on the Verde Project on December 12, 2016 in Pojoaque, New Mexico. The BLM is currently working with cooperating agencies to develop alternative routes to be analyzed in the Draft EIS.

### **II. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES**

For SunZia, issues/concerns raised by White Sands Missile Range (WSMR) were resolved by the Department of the Interior and the Department of Defense. A compromise was reached (5-mile burial of transmission line north of WSMR in northern call-up area).

The proposed route for the Verde Transmission Project traverses three Pueblos (Pojoaque Pueblo, Santa Clara Pueblo, and Okay Owingeh Pueblo). All three Pueblos have been in negotiations with the ROW proponent for several years and routes identified on Pueblo lands have been agreed upon. While the three pueblos support the project, some residents in the project area have expressed concerns regarding the potential visual impacts due to the overhead transmission towers. The BLM will work with cooperating agencies and the proponent in developing alternative routes that minimize visual impacts.

### **III. BACKGROUND**

The SunZia Project is a proposed merchant transmission line originating in east central New Mexico and terminating in Pinal County, Arizona, northwest of the City of Tucson. The SunZia Project will be approximately 460-530 miles in length and requires a ROW width of up to 1,000 feet. The BLM is the lead National Environmental Policy Act agency and BLM New Mexico State Office is the lead office for the SunZia Project. The Record of Decision for the SunZia Transmission Line was signed January 23, 2015.

The BLM is also responding to a ROW application by Verde Transmission, LLC to construct a 33-mile transmission line that would connect the existing Public Service Company of New Mexico (PNM) Ojo Substation, in southern Rio Arriba County, to the existing Norton Substation, in Santa Fe County.

## **Oil & Gas**

### **I. KEY POINTS**

Over the past five years, BLM-New Mexico has led the BLM in the number of applications for permit to drill (APDs) received and approved. During this period, BLM-New Mexico received approximately 30 percent of all new APDs for processing and approved 26 percent of all APDs nationwide.

### **II. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES**

The Carlsbad Field Office (CFO) experiences a high level of oil and gas activity on its Federal leases. The CFO continues to pursue various programs to augment the workforce and help process backlogged work. Over the past two years, the Office has hired contract employees, detailed several BLM employees in from other offices, worked with other offices to allow office work from remote locations, partnered with the New Mexico Oil and Gas Association to employ several term positions, and brought on interns through the Direct-Hire Authority internship program.

In addition, the CFO has been working with companies on Master Development Plans. The plans proactively assess landscape level plans for oilfield development. By considering the environmental impacts during the planning stage, the actual APD can be approved more quickly when they are submitted.

Freedom of Information Act requests, litigation, and public protests have made issuing oil and gas leases more difficult. For example, lease sales for the Carlsbad area are now receiving substantial public protests where traditionally there were none. This increases the complexity of leasing actions and the time it takes to issue legally defensible decisions that meet our required administrative processes. The increased timeframe affects both oil and gas development activities and revenue distribution to the State of New Mexico.

The September 2016 Pecos lease sale set records for both the total money raised per sale and for an individual lease parcel. The BLM issued the leases on May 1, 2017, and we anticipate that the Office of Natural Resources Revenue (ONRR) will disperse the State of New Mexico's portion of the proceeds by the end of May.

### **III. BACKGROUND**

BLM New Mexico manages some of the nation's most productive Federal lands for onshore oil and gas. From 2011-2015, BLM-New Mexico consistently led the BLM in total oil production, accounting for approximately 36 percent of the oil produced from BLM-managed lands nationwide. During the same period, Federal lands managed by BLM-New Mexico were a major contributor to gas production, accounting for approximately 24 percent of the gas produced from BLM-managed lands nationwide.

The State receives 48 percent of the revenue generated from leasing, rentals, and production royalties. For example in 2015, the ONRR disbursed more than \$496 million to the State of New

Mexico. The remaining 52 percent of the revenue generated goes to the Federal treasury. (Revenues from the oil and gas leases, as well as the 12.5 percent royalties collected from any future production on those leases, are shared between the Federal Government and the State of New Mexico.). Over the past decade, the BLM's management of oil and gas on public lands has provided the State of New Mexico almost \$5.4 billion in revenue.

## **Planning**

### **I. KEY POINTS**

BLM-New Mexico is revising or preparing nine Resource Management Plans (RMPs) or major RMP amendments. Six out of eight of BLM-New Mexico's field offices are undergoing full plan revisions or major plan amendments.

### **II. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES**

This is an enormous demand on state resources and staff capacity at the State and Field Office levels.

### **III. BACKGROUND**

Following is an overview of each RMP effort:

*Carlsbad RMP/EIS* (Eddy, Lea, and Chaves counties) – The planning area encompasses approximately 6.2 million acres, of which 2.1 million surface acres and 3 million subsurface acres are BLM-administered. The major issues include fluid and solid mineral extraction and energy development, development of renewable energy, socioeconomics, recreation, special designations (including areas of critical environmental concern), special status species, visual resources, and wildlife habitat. The public Draft RMP/EIS is expected in June 2017.

*Farmington Mancos-Gallup RMP Amendment/EIS* – The Mancos-Gallup RMP Amendment will amend the 2003 Farmington RMP to address issues relating to oil and gas, lands and realty, vegetation, and lands with wilderness characteristics in the Mancos Shale/Gallup formation. The Amended NOI announced the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) as a joint lead agency. The BIA will use the EIS to inform leasing and associated activity decisions on BIA-managed minerals. The major issue associated with the RMP Amendment deals with minerals development on public lands near Chaco Canyon National Historical Park and in the greater Chacoan landscape. The final scoping report is anticipated in May 2017; a Draft RMP Amendment will be published in summer 2018.

*Tri-County RMP/EIS* (Doña Ana, Otero, and Sierra counties) – The BLM published a Draft RMP/EIS on April 12, 2013. Based on public comments received, the BLM initiated a Supplemental Draft EIS on December 19, 2013, to develop allocations and management actions for fluid minerals and to re-evaluate potential lands with wilderness characteristics. (The April 12, 2013, Draft RMP/EIS did not propose decisions relating to fluid minerals.) The planning area includes approximately 9.3 million acres, of which 2.8 million surface acres and 3.98 million subsurface acres are BLM-administered. The major issues include recreation, lands and realty, and special designations. The Supplemental EIS is expected to be released early 2018.

The Supplemental and the 2013 draft RMP/EIS are expected to be combined into the Proposed RMP/FEIS.

*Organ Mountains – Desert Peaks RMP* – The Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument was established in 2014 and contains 496,330 acres managed by the BLM. The national monument had previously been a portion of the lands analyzed in the ongoing Tri-County RMP, and will need to be separated from that planning effort. Public scoping for the Monument Plan will begin in August 2017. The public Draft Monument Plan is anticipated in spring 2019.

*Rio Puerco RMP/EIS* (Bernalillo, Cibola, Tarrant, and Valencia counties and most of Sandoval County and portions of McKinley County) – The BLM published the Rio Puerco Draft RMP/EIS in July 2012. The Planning Area consists of approximately 700,000 acres of BLM-managed public surface land and approximately 3.4 million acres of Federal mineral estate. The major planning issues include energy and mineral development, vegetation and habitat management, land ownership adjustments, motorized access to public lands, grazing, and special designations. The Proposed RMP/Final EIS is expected in summer 2017.

*Río Grande del Norte National Monument RMP Amendment/EA* – The Río Grande del Norte National Monument contains 242,555 acres managed by the BLM. The Río Grande del Norte RMP Amendment will amend the 2012 Taos RMP to provide management direction for the monument. The RMP Amendment is currently in the alternatives development stage; a Draft RMP Amendment/EA will be published in 2017.

*Verde Transmission Project and Taos RMP Amendment* - Verde Transmission, LLC, has applied to the BLM's Taos Field Office for a right-of-way (ROW) on public land to construct a 345-kilovolt transmission line and associated facilities in Rio Arriba and Santa Fe Counties, New Mexico. Approximately one-third of the proposed 33-mile line would cross public lands administered by the BLM. As proposed, the transmission project would not be consistent with the existing visual resource management (VRM) classifications of the area. Therefore, as part of the ROW application evaluation, the Taos Field Office is also evaluating potential amendments to the 2012 Taos RMP VRM classifications. The Draft RMP Amendment/EIS is anticipated to be released in spring 2018.

*Taos RMP Amendment/EA for the Rimrock Rose Ranch Acquisition* - The Taos RMP Amendment/EA evaluates the potential impacts of the BLM's proposal to accept the Rimrock Rose Ranch as a donation to be added to Sabinoso Wilderness, in northeastern New Mexico, under the provisions of Section 6(a) of the Wilderness Act of 1964. Acceptance of the donation would provide first-time public access to Sabinoso Wilderness, a 16,000-acre area currently surrounded by private land. As part of this action, the BLM is proposing to make two livestock grazing allotments for which the ranch served as base property unavailable for grazing to protect important riparian resources, a decision that requires the BLM to amend its Taos RMP. The Proposed RMP Amendment/EA was released for a 30-day protest period in December, 2016; no protests were received.