

Blanca Wetlands ACEC Enlargement and Grazing Plan

Primary Contact:

Jill Lucero, BLM Wildlife Biologist

Phone: (719-274-6327) E-mail: (jlucero@blm.gov)

Blanca Wetlands is an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). This BLM designation is based on an area's unique, rare or sensitive resources. The Blanca Wetlands ACEC is south of the Sand Dunes National Park within the Closed Basin of the San Luis Valley, Colorado. This ACEC is recognized for its recreation and wetland values, including: productive playa and marsh habitats that contain high densities of water birds; amphibians' macroinvertebrates; and habitat for 18 threatened, endangered and sensitive species.

The Blanca Wetlands ACEC is a 9,714 acre parcel of land that contains more than 200 basins and sits in the sump of the San Luis Valley. Historic evidence of the area shows the ACEC sitting on the south end of a large interconnected series of basins that include and connect with Russell Lakes, Mishak Lakes, the Baca National Wildlife Refuge, San Luis Lake and Blanca Wetlands.

The BLM has initiated studies over the last decade that suggest large-scale management efforts across ownership boundaries, could mimic natural ecological processes and provide greater management flexibility to meet the purposes of the ACEC. The BLM has also identified a need to acquire and irrigate key parcels for connectivity from Blanca Wetlands to the north to allow less mobile species the ability to disperse.

To address this need, the BLM has prepared a preliminary Environmental Assessment (EA) to analyze expansion of the ACEC to include

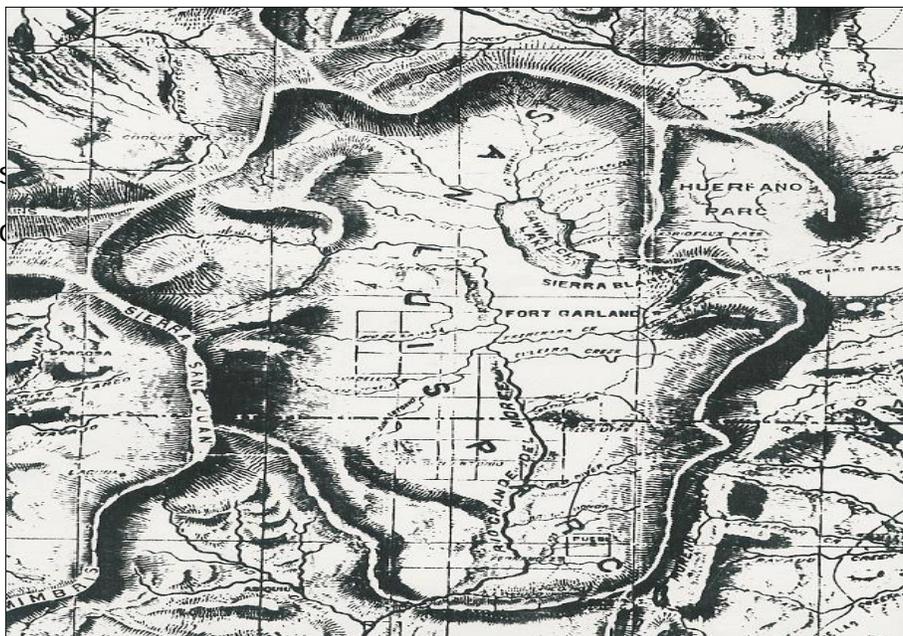


Blanca Wetlands

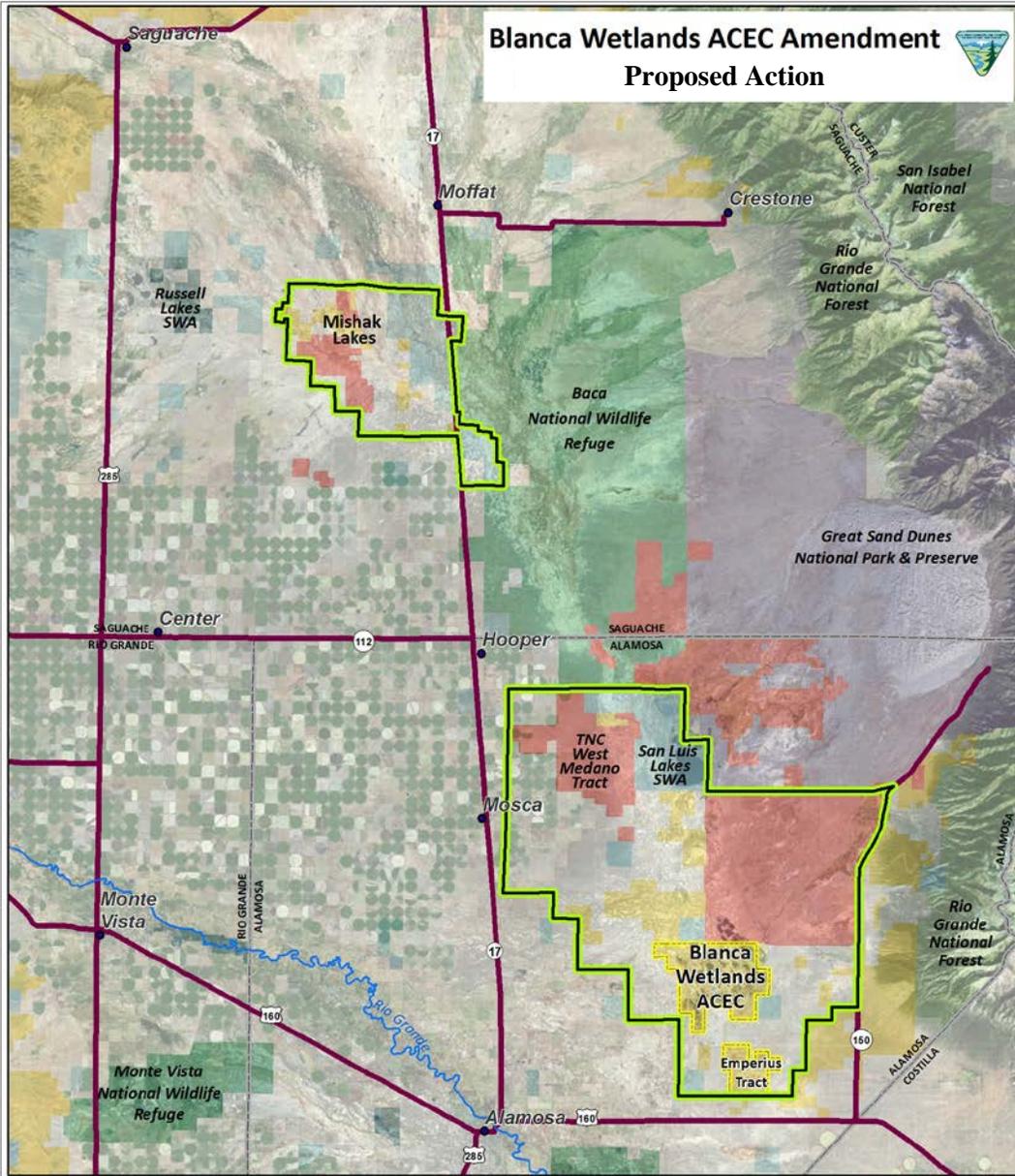
adjacent lands that share the ACEC's values and characteristics. The Draft EA was released for public review in May 2013, and is available on-line: www.blm.gov/co/st/en/fo/slvfo/blanca_wetlands.html The BLM completed its initial scoping through press releases and a public meeting. The BLM received public and internal feedback, and the project was modified to tighten the boundaries based on those comments.

The proposed project would assist the BLM in restoring some of the natural ecosystems that once occurred in the closed basin. This restoration would promote habitat sustainability and connectivity for more than 160 species of birds, 5 species of amphibians, 18 threatened, endangered and sensitive species, and many species of macroinvertebrates. The project would also allow the BLM to compete for Land and Water Conservation Funds to acquire key parcels that would assist efforts toward wetland restoration and/or connectivity. Finally, the project would be a catalyst toward connecting many of the closed basin wetlands and promoting partnerships with other agencies and interested landowners toward a common restoration goal.

Some of the alternatives for enlarging the ACEC boundary may include private land, but the BLM would have no jurisdiction on those lands and would work with willing landowners on conservation efforts. There would also be no expansion of the BLM's existing water rights; any new irrigation needs would be coordinated with the State of Colorado and the Rio Grande Water Conservation District. Finally, any land acquisition would only be pursued with willing sellers.



Blanca Wetlands ACEC Amendment Proposed Action



- Alternative 1 - Proposed Action
- Blanca Wetlands ACEC
- Bureau of Land Management
- Bureau of Reclamation
- National Park Service

- State
- State, County, City; Areas
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- US Forest Service
- The Nature Conservancy



Map Projection: UTM, North American Datum 1983, Zone 13 N
 Background Map: National Agriculture Imagery Program (NAIP)
 Summer 2005

Map Disclaimer - Although the data presented within this map, and the map itself, have been processed successfully on computers of BLM, no warranty, expressed or implied, is made by BLM regarding the use of this map or the data represented, nor does the fact of distribution constitute or imply any such warranty. The Bureau of Land Management reserves the right to correct, update, modify or replace this geospatial information without notification. For more information, contact the San Luis Valley Public Lands Center at (719) 852-6200. Map Created 11/04/2011 by D.Simon