

**UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
San Luis Valley Field Office**

**DECISION RECORD  
Blanca Wetlands ACEC Plan Amendment  
DOI-BLM-CO-300-2012-001 EA**

DECISION: To authorize the Proposed Action as described in the Blanca Wetlands Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) Resource Management Plan Amendment Environmental Assessment (San Luis Valley Field Office RMPA/EA). The Proposed Action expands the existing Blanca Wetlands ACEC to 122,762 acres in two separate areas as identified in the San Luis Valley Field Office RMPA/EA. The analysis and subsequent land allocation decisions outlined in the Proposed Action (Alternative 1) of the San Luis Valley Field Office RMPA/EA require the San Luis Valley Field Office to amend the San Luis Resource Area RMP. The analysis in the San Luis Valley Field Office RMPA/EA focuses on the environmental consequences of incorporating surrounding current and historic wetland areas that meet the relevance and importance criteria to promote wetland ecological function, restoration, connectivity, and biodiversity. Decisions made in this document will only apply to Bureau of Land Management administered lands.

RATIONALE: The Proposed Action meets the purpose and need identified in the San Luis Valley Field Office RMPA/EA by modifying the boundaries of the Blanca Wetlands ACEC to incorporate current and historic wetland areas. This expansion will assist the BLM in addressing the need for the ACEC to promote ecological function, restoration, connectivity, and biodiversity.

Under the proposed alternative, the San Luis Valley Field Office RMPA/EA applies Land Use Allocation 4-1 from the San Luis Resource Area RMP to an expanded area around the existing Blanca Wetlands ACEC and an additional area near Mishak Lakes that meet relevance and importance criteria for the ACEC. This expansion would address the Resource Condition Objective Decision 1-12 of the SLRA RMP, which states: “provide special management to improve the present acres of wetlands in the Mishak Lakes and Dry Lakes areas to the historical acres of wetlands.” This expansion would also address Resource Condition Objective 4-1 from the San Luis Resource Area RMP by providing special management to maintain and improve wetlands for waterfowl production, maintaining 1600 acres of wetlands, and enhancing an additional 1,175 acres of wetlands.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT: Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the San Luis Valley Field Office RMPA/EA, and considering the significance criteria in 40 CFR 1508.27, the BLM prepared a Finding of No Significant Impact

(FONSI). The Proposed Action implemented by the decision will not have a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, preparation of an environmental impact statement is not necessary. This finding is based on the context and intensity of the proposal as detailed in the FONSI.

AUTHORITIES: The BLM's land use planning requirements are established in Sections 201 and 202 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA, 43 U.S.C. 1711-1712) and the regulations in 43 CFR 1600.

CONFORMANCE AND COMPLIANCE: The Proposed Action meets goals and objectives of the San Luis Resource Area RMP by addressing the Resource Condition Objective Decision 1-12 to "provide special management to improve the present acres of wetlands in the Mishak Lakes and Dry Lakes areas to the historical acres of wetlands" and Resource Condition Objective 4-1 to provide special management to maintain and improve wetlands for waterfowl production, maintaining 1600 acres of wetlands, and enhancing an additional 1,175 acres of wetlands.

BACKGROUND: The San Luis Valley Field Office RMPA/EA that discusses and analyzes the Proposed Action and alternatives is available at the BLM San Luis Valley Field Office, 46525 Highway 114, Saguache, Colorado 81149 and at the following web address:

[http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/fo/slvfo/blanca\\_wetlands.html](http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/fo/slvfo/blanca_wetlands.html)

The San Luis Valley Field Office RMPA/EA describes the purpose and need for the proposed land use plan amendment, three alternatives for the plan amendment, the affected environment in the planning area, and the anticipated impacts (direct, indirect, and cumulative) from each alternative on the affected environment. Please direct questions about the Decision Record, EA or FONSI to Andrew Archuleta, San Luis Valley Field Office Manager, at (719) 655-2547, or by submitting your questions to [BLM\\_CO\\_SLVPLC\\_Comments@blm.gov](mailto:BLM_CO_SLVPLC_Comments@blm.gov).

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT: The scoping process for the proposed amendment and associated National Environmental Policy Act analysis began October 11, 2011, with the publication of the Notice of Intent in the *Federal Register*. The BLM sent out 1,322 letters to landowners in the project area boundary, 39 letters to private and governmental organizations, and 28 letters to tribes. A public meeting was held on February 29, 2012, in Alamosa, Colorado to provide an opportunity to comment on the project. The BLM received a total of 185 comments relating to private property rights, economics, size and scope of the project, Bureau of Reclamation canal operations in the same area, sustaining and connecting wetlands, and water rights.

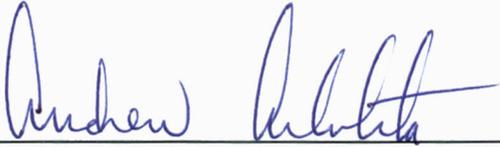
The Draft San Luis Valley Field Office RMPA/EA was available for a 60-day public review and comment period from May 30, 2013, to August 1, 2013. The Notice of Availability was published in the *Federal Register* on November 20, 2013, followed by another 60-day public review and comment period ending January 18, 2014. The BLM distributed the EA to individuals, agencies and organizations via the BLM's website and mailings. The BLM received

a total of 12 letters from individuals, organizations and agencies. Response to comments can be reviewed in the San Luis Valley Field Office RMPA/EA Chapter 1.5.

SUMMARY OF ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED: The EA analyzed three alternatives for expanding the Blanca Wetlands ACEC in the San Luis Valley Field Office. Alternatives included the No Action alternative, the Proposed Action to expand the ACEC to both the Mishak Lakes area and Blanca to San Luis Lake area and additional action alternative that did not include the Mishak Lake area.

PROTEST/APPEALS: The BLM's decision to amend the 1991 San Luis Valley Resource Area RMP is not subject to further administrative appeal. The proposed plan amendment was subject to a 30-day protest period that ended March 28, 2014, and no protests were filed.

SIGNATURE OF RECOMMENDING OFFICIAL:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Andrew Archuleta  
Field Manager  
San Luis Valley Field Office

17 July 2014  
Date

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Ruth Welch  
State Director  
Bureau of Land Management Colorado

July 28, 2014  
Date