

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
San Luis Valley Field Office
1313 E. Hwy. 160
Monte Vista, CO 81144**

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION

NUMBER: DOI-BLM-CO-F03-2015-0021 CX

CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER (optional):

PROJECT NAME: National Wind Erosion Research Network (NWERN) Project

PLANNING UNIT:

LEGAL DESCRIPTION:

New Mexico Principal Meridian, Colorado
T. 39 N., R. 12 E.,
sec. 29.

APPLICANT: Jornada Experimental Range

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION

Wind erosion research station, which will be the first national, long-term, intensively instrumented wind erosion research network in the world, is proposed to be installed in San Luis Valley (Figure 1). The proposed station is one of twelve national wind erosion monitoring stations across the western United States. The National Wind Erosion Research Network (NWERN) site will occupy an area of 1 hectare (~2.5 acres). A 33 feet meteorological tower will be located at the center of the site (Figures 2 and 3). The tower will be equipped with instruments to measure wind speed and temperature profiles, relative humidity, rainfall and the transport of soil by the wind. Guywires will be used to support the meteorological tower (Figure 2). Barbed-wire/T-post fence will be installed around the study site to protect instruments. Sediment samplers, which trap soil particles that have been eroded by the wind, will be located randomly within a grid surrounding the tower and samples will be collected on a monthly basis (Figure 3). Measurements of soil properties and vegetation, including the cover, height and spacing, will be made at the site on a seasonal basis. The Bureau of Land Management will conduct data collection activities as required by the NWERN protocol, troubleshoot and assist with maintenance of automated data collection devices as needed, and continue the NWERN station monitoring project if the South San Luis Lakes parcel is acquired by BLM from TNC.

PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW:

Name of Plan: San Luis Resource Management Plan

Date Approved: December 18, 1991

Decision Number: N/A

Decision Language: N/A

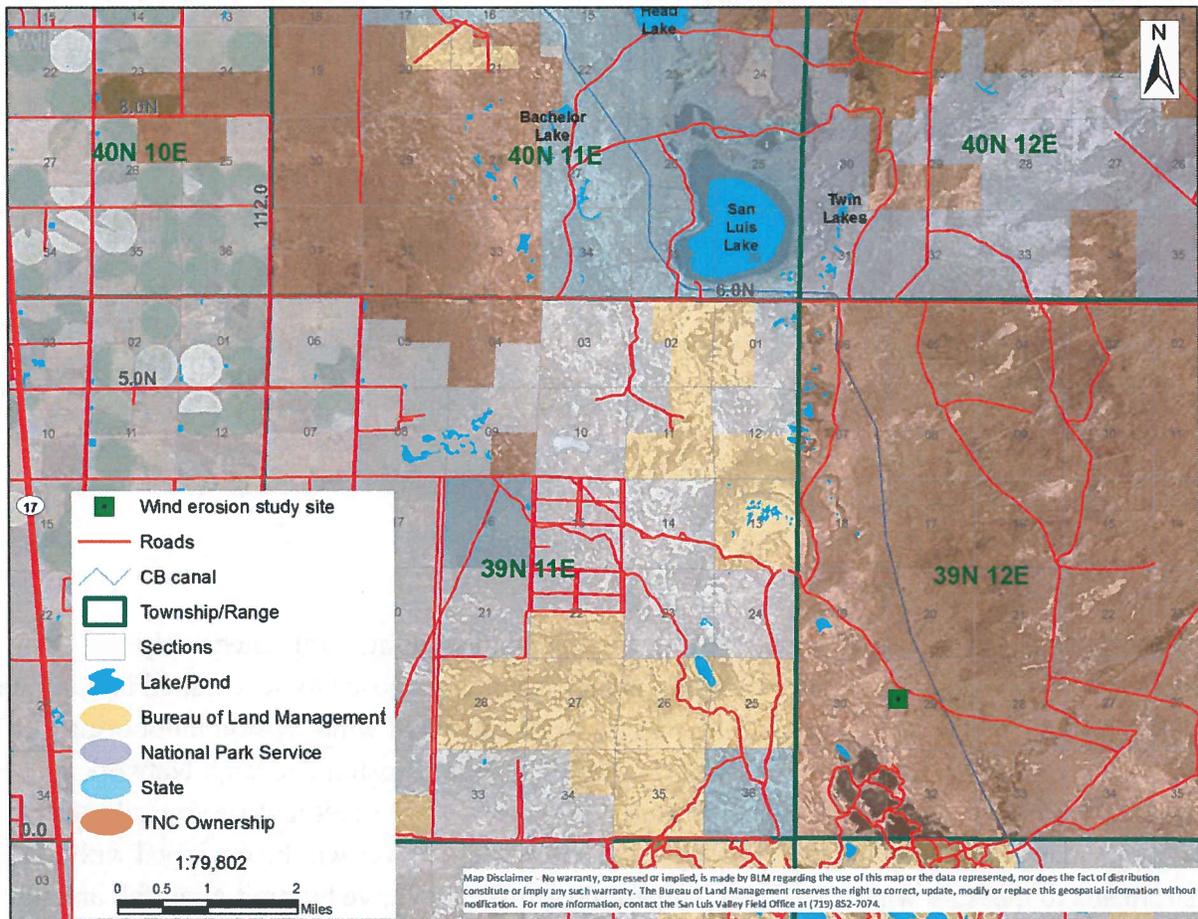


Figure 1 Map of the project site

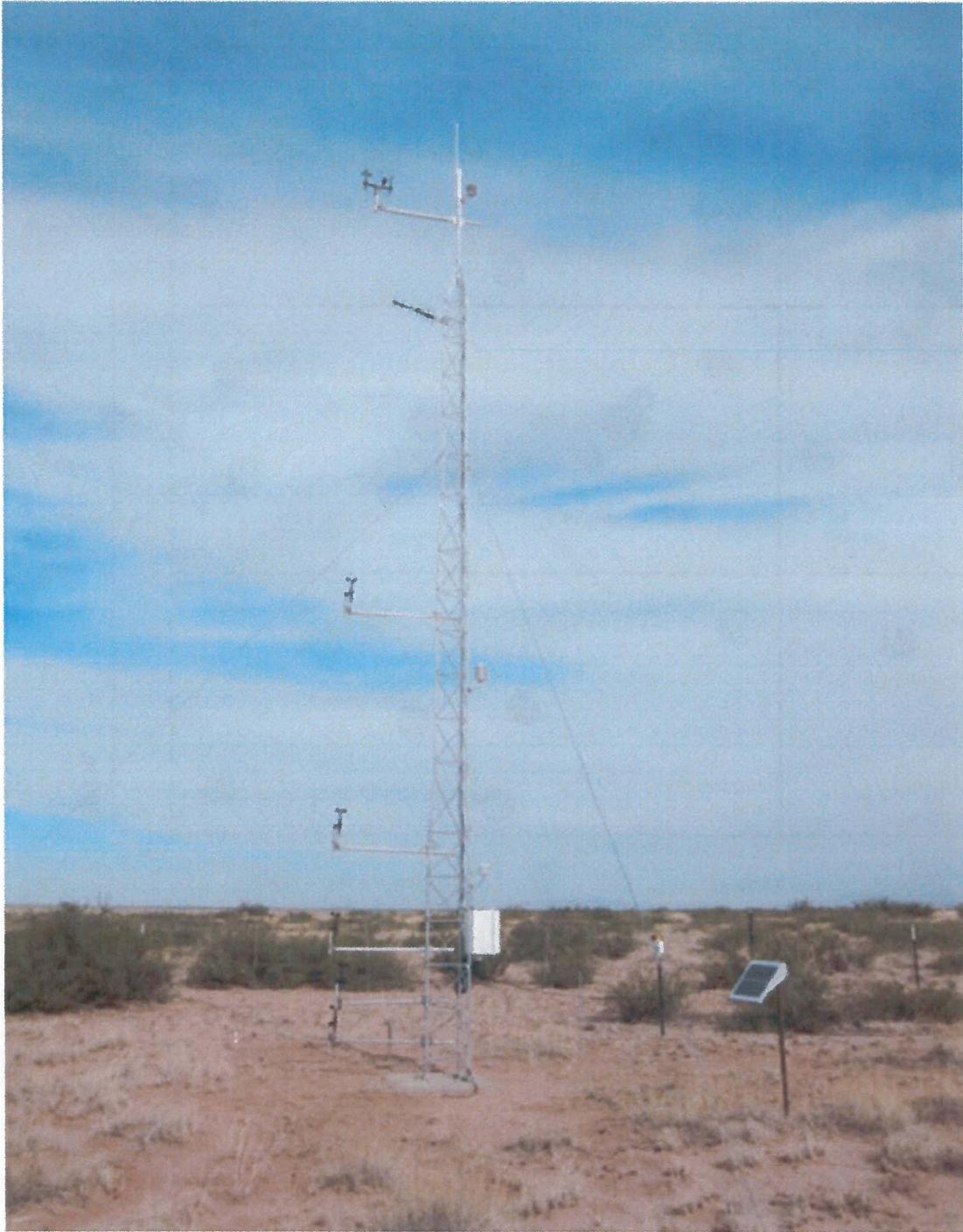


Figure 2 Metrological Tower

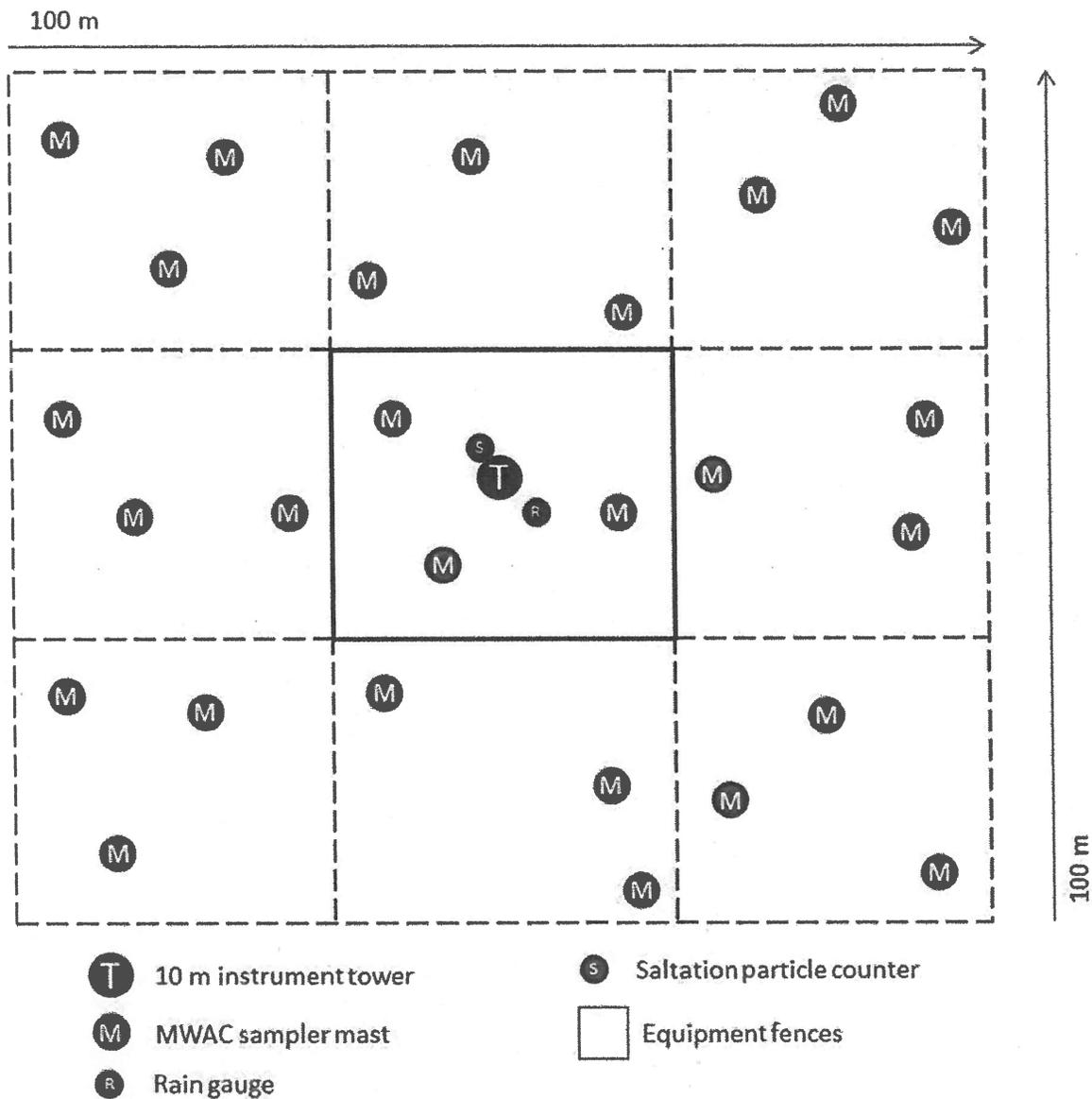


Figure 3 Instrument locations within proposed study site

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION REVIEW: This proposed action is listed as a Categorical Exclusion in DOI Departmental Manual Part 516 Chapter 11.9 (J-3 & J-9). None of the following exceptions in 516 DM 2, Appendix 2, apply.

Exclusion Criteria	YES	NO
1. Have significant impacts on public health or safety.		X
2. Have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation, or refuge lands; wilderness areas; lands with wilderness characteristics; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands; floodplains; national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas.		
3. Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources.		X
4. Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.		X
5. Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.		X
6. Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects.		X
7. Have significant impacts on properties listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places as determined by either the bureau or office.		X
8. Have significant impacts on species listed, or proposed to be listed, on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have significant impacts on designated Critical Habitat for these species.		X
9. Violate a Federal law, or a State, local or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.		X
10. Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations.		X
11. Limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites.		X
12. Contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species.		X

INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM REVIEW			
NAME	TITLE	AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY	Initials/date
Joel Humphries	Wildlife Biologist	Terrestrial Wildlife, T&E, Migratory Birds, Fisheries	JTH 8/14/15
Melissa Shawcroft	Range Management Spec.	Range, Vegetation, Farmland	MJS 8/21/15
Eduardo Duran	NRS, Invasive Plants Coordinator	Riparian, T&E species, and Invasive Plants	END 8/26/15
Rebecca Morris	Physical Scientist	Minerals, Paleontology, Waste Hazardous or Solid	RSM 8/17/15
Negussie Tedela	Hydrologist	Hydrology, Water Quality/Rights, Soils, Air Quality	NHT 08/16/15
Sean Hines/ Leon Montoya	Cadastral Surveyor	Cadastral Survey	SJH 08/17/2015
Sean Noonan	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Recreation, Wilderness, LWCs, Visual, ACEC, W&S Rivers,	STN 08/16/15
Martin Weimer	NEPA Coordinator	Environmental Justice, Noise, SocioEconomics	mw, 8/13/15
Brian Fredericks	Archaeologist	Cultural, Native American	BAF 10-6-15
Leon Montoya	Realty Specialist	Realty	LM 8-13-15
Jill Lucero/Sue Swift-Miller	Wetlands Biologist	Wetlands	JL 8-27-15
Paul Minow	Fire/ Fuels Specialist	Fire/ Fuels	psm, 8/20/15
Brian Garcia	LEO	Law Enforcement	BKG 08/27/15

REMARKS:

Cadastral Comments: The current proposed area is not owned by the BLM and is currently owned by The Nature Conservancy. There has been a dependent resurvey conducted in the area in 1978, and the survey monument evidence should not be disturbed. A list of the survey evidence and coordinates, as well as an estimate to locate this evidence can be provided by Cadastral Survey to the field office, and is available upon request.

Cultural Resources: No historic properties were found in the area of potential effect [see limited results report 15-SLVFO-029. Therefore, the proposed undertaking will have no effect to historic properties.

Native American Religious Concerns: No possible traditional cultural properties were located during the cultural resources inventory (see above). There is no other known evidence that suggests the project area holds special significance for Native Americans.

Threatened and Endangered Species:

Threatened and Endangered Species: This CX was prepared in accordance with the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended. Section 7 consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), in accordance with the Endangered Species Act, was not required. The Proposed Action would have no effect on any threatened, endangered, proposed, or candidate species that is listed under the Endangered Species Act.

Wildlife and Migratory Birds: Meteorological towers pose a collision risk to wildlife species. A wide variety of bird species have been documented to collide with guy wires and power lines. It is generally believed that birds collide with lines because the lines are invisible to the birds or because the lines are not seen until it is too late for birds to avoid it. Large, less maneuverable birds are especially vulnerable to collisions with guy wires, which are relatively thin and difficult to see from a distance. Poor weather conditions, such as fog, rain or snow, as well as darkness, make the lines even more difficult to see.

Each guy wire should be clearly marked with bird diverters for the length of the wire. Starting at the top of the guy wire, the first bird diverter marker must be placed within the first 15 feet of length. The last marker can be no more than 15 feet from the ground at the end of the guy wire. Markers should be of a color that does not blend with the wire. Guy guards should be placed at the base of each guy wire to reduce collision risks to terrestrial mammals.

The area is also adjacent to a proposed wetland restoration area. Should wetland restoration occur within ½ mile of this site, avoid high disturbance maintenance activities during the breeding season for waterbirds from Feb. 15th through July 15th.

COMPLIANCE PLAN (optional):

NAME OF PREPARER: Negussie Tedela

NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR: Martin Weimer

DATE: ~~0x/xx/2015~~ 10/7/2015

DECISION AND RATIONALE: I have reviewed this Categorical Exclusion and have decided to implement the Proposed Action.

This action is listed in the Department Manual as an action that may be categorically excluded. I have evaluated the action relative to the 10 criteria listed above and have determined that it does

not represent an exception and is, therefore, categorically excluded from further environmental analysis.

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Archuleta', written over a horizontal line.

Andrew Archuleta Field Manager

DATE SIGNED:

10/7/15