

**United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Las Cruces Field Office
1800 Marquess
Las Cruces, NM 88005**

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

For

2010 Chile Challenge Trails Tour Event

DOI-BLM-NM-L0000-2009-0188-EA

Location: Public land under BLM jurisdiction in T23S, R1E, S6; T23S, R1W, S1, 2; T22S, R1E, S 19, 20, 29, 30, 31; T22S, R1W, S13, 14, 15, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 35, 36

(USGS Picacho Mountain, Las Cruces, Leasburg and Dona Ana)

And various existing roads in T23S, R1W, T22S, R2W, T22S, R1W, T21S, R1W, T21S, R2W, T21S, R3W, T20S, R3W, T20S, R2W, T19S, R2W, Dona Ana County, NM.

Lease/Serial/Case File Number: NM-030-2009-SRP-0188

Applicant: Las Cruces Four Wheel Drive Club (LCFWDC)

Prepared by:

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Date

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EA Coordinator

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Assistant District Manager

Date

NEPA Log Number: DOI-BLM-NM-L0000-2009-0188-EA

To provide comment to the BLM on this Environmental Assessment, please submit them to the above address or to John_Thacker@nm.blm.gov

1 INTRODUCTION AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

1.1 Applicant

Las Cruces Four Wheel Drive Club (LCFWDC)

1.2 Purpose for Proposed Action

The purpose for the proposed action is to conduct a commercial, motorized vehicle event on public land within the Prehistoric Trackways National Monument and surrounding areas.

1.3 Need for the Proposed Action

The need for the proposed action is to comply with provisions of 43 CFR 2930 (Permits for Recreation on Public Land) and Public Law 111-11 (H.R.146), the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009.

1.4 Conformance with Land Use Plan

Pursuant to 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1508.28 and 1502.21, this site-specific EA tiers to and incorporates by reference the information and analysis contained in the Mimbres Resource Management Plan, April 1993, which was approved as the Final Resource Management Plan for the Las Cruces District Office of the BLM by the Record of Decision (ROD) signed April 30, 1993. The RMP and ROD are available for review at the Las Cruces District Office (LCDO). Although this proposal is not specifically addressed, it is consistent with the scope of Appendix G-1, Recreation Opportunity Spectrum, *Roaded Natural Class*, and conforms to ORV Designations (p. 2-50) – vehicles are limited to a combined total of 2,904,160 acres of existing and designated roads and trails.

This site-specific analysis tiers to and incorporates by reference the information and analysis contained in the Mimbres Resource Management Plan (1993), the *Robledo Mountains Off-Highway Vehicle Implementation Plan* (NM-036-97-83), NM-030-2001-0049 (environmental analysis for fugitive dust in the vicinity of Rocky Acres Trail), NM-030-2008-035, (Emergency Closure for Unpermitted Collection of Fossilized Wood), NM-030-2008-0006 (categorical exclusion for protective buffer in Apache Canyon), and the 2010 Chile Challenge Plan of Operation submitted by the LCFWDC. The project EA addresses site-specific resources and/or impacts that are not specifically covered within the RMP, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA).

On March 19, 2009 the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 (Public Law 111-11[H.R. 146] was signed, creating the Prehistoric Trackways National Monument (PTNM); an area of approximately 5280 acres that encompasses the Robledo Off-Highway Vehicle Trails (NM-036-97-83). The stated purpose for the Monument is found in Section 2103 (a): “*In General – In order to conserve, protect, and enhance the unique and nationally important paleontological, scientific, educational, scenic, and recreational resources and values of the public land described in subsection (b), there is established the ‘Prehistoric Trackways National Monument’*” Further, Section 2104 (f)(2) states that “*Permitted events – The Secretary may issue permits for special recreation events involving motorized vehicles within the boundaries of the Monument , (A) to the extent the events do not harm paleontological resources; and (B) subject to any terms and conditions that the Secretary determines to be necessary.*”

2 DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

2.1 Proposed Action Alternative

The Las Cruces Four Wheel Drive Club (LCFWDC) proposes to conduct a 4 day commercial, organized group event on public land under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the New Mexico State Trust Land Office (NMSLO), the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC), the City of Las Cruces and various private property owners. The proposed activity dates are Wednesday February 24-Saturday February 27, 2010.

The BLM does not authorize or permit access to properties under other federal, state or private surface jurisdictional authority. Notably, this includes a 120 acre portion of the proposed activity area under the administrative authority of the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) in T22S, R1E, Sections 29 and 30. This parcel was withdrawn by Public Land Order (PLO) 1866 (filed in the Federal Register June 2, 1959).

The proposed action is limited to previously disturbed and/or maintained roads and trails. No new surface disturbance is authorized. Exclusive use of public lands does not apply to the proposed action.

The total number of miles for the proposed action is approximately 152.3.
The surface jurisdictions included in the proposal are:

- A. Bureau of Land Management – approximately 105 miles
 - a. Of these, approximately 42 miles of the Robledo Off-Highway Vehicle Trails, lie within the boundaries of the Prehistoric Trackways National Monument.
- B. New Mexico State Land Office – approximately 22.4 miles
- C. Private (various) – approximately 10.6 miles
- D. International Boundary and Water Commission (withdrawn) – approximately 1.6 miles
- E. City of Las Cruces (Las Cruces International Airport – withdrawn) – approximately 2.2 miles,

The proposed activity consists of two components. The first component is an extreme “challenge” aspect designed for the most sophisticated vehicles and experienced drivers. The location of the extreme (rock-crawling) portion of the activity is: T22S, R1E, S19, 30, 31, T22S, R1W, S23, 24, 25, 26, 35, 36 (see Proposed Action Map). Currently, this trail system is open to the public for casual use year-round.

The second component of the event is oriented more toward conventional 4WD vehicles. This portion of the event encompasses the remaining 110 or so miles of maintained roads and accessible trails. Exclusive use of this portion of the activity area is not requested. Any use of these routes would be in conjunction with other public land users, such as recreationists, ranchers or others who might be using the routes at the time. Many of the roads included in this component are County maintained and designed for public use and include portions of Dona Ana County Roads C009, C007, and D012. These roads are located within the following legal descriptions:

- T23S, R1W
- T22S, R2W
- T22S, R1W
- T21S, R1W
- T21S, R2W
- T21S, R3W
- T20S, R3W
- T20S, R2W
- T19S, R2W

These roads are generally west of the Robledo Mountains Off-Highway Vehicle Trails and north of Interstate 10.



Figure 1 Spectators in Patzcuro's Canyon during the 2009 Chile Challenge Event.

2.1.1 Chile Challenge Trails

These trails are part of the Robledo Off-Highway Vehicle Trails and would be used in the proposed action. They are rated according to degree of difficulty and color coded as follows (See attachment 1 – Chile Challenge Trails, Proposed Action Map):

Green: Easy

Conventional four-wheel drive vehicles are allowed on these routes.

Green Trails are: Chile Canyons Loop Trail and Pasado Trail.

Blue: Moderate

Additional clearance (31 inch tires) and limited slip differential required.

Blue Trails are: Amatista Ledges, Hopping Jalapeno, Big Jim.

NOTE: Hopping Jalapeno consists of two one-way routes.

Purple: Difficult

Additional clearance, (33 inch tires) and at least one solid locker required.

Purple Trails are: Cayenne Crawler, Sandia Gulch.

Red: Extreme

Additional clearance (33 inch tires), two solid lockers and winch are required.

Red Trails are: Rocotillo Rapids, Patzcuro's Revenge, Habanero Falls, Tabasco Twister.

NOTE: Habanero Falls consists of two one-way routes.

2.1.2 Robledo Mountains Off-Highway Vehicle Trails

Designated Robledo Mountains Off-Highway Vehicle Trails are single-file vehicle trails. Since the approval of the *Robledo Mountains Off Highway Vehicle Implementation Plan* (NM-036-97-83), “braids” (unauthorized, widened or added segments of trail intended to avoid specific obstacles or inoperative vehicles), have evolved through casual use. These “braids” would not be authorized for use in the 2010 Chile Challenge Trails Tour Event. Participants shall not be allowed to drive around inoperative vehicles unless such a maneuver can be accomplished within the footprint of the designated Trail, or within portions of scoured canyon bottoms. Improperly equipped vehicles will not be allowed to participate on Moderate, Difficult and Extreme trails.

Approximately 2.8 miles of the proposed route is adjacent to the Sierra Las Uvas Wilderness Study Area (WSA). This segment, known as The Rustler Fire Trail, is cherry-stemmed. The width of cherry-stemmed road does not permit a vehicle to execute a turn within its width. The only opportunity for multiple vehicles to negotiate a turn within the cherry-stem is at T20S, R3W, S20 – Chivatos Canyon Tank.

Approximately 1.9 miles of the proposed route follows the western boundary road of the Robledo Mountains WSA.

Approximately 3.1 miles of the proposed route follows the southern boundary road of the Robledo Mountains Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). The designated route will avoid the Robledo Mountains ACEC.

2.2 Event Management

During the permitted portion of the 2010 Chile Challenge Trails Tour Event, registered participants will be escorted through designated trails by members of the LCFWDC.

Approximately 400 registered participants are expected. The Dona Ana County Fair Grounds will serve as the primary staging area for the event. Registered participants will assemble into “Convoys” of 5-25 vehicles. Each “Convoy” will be led by an experienced LCFWDC member “Trail Leader” that is familiar with the designated routes. An experienced LCFWDC member shall also be positioned as a “Tail Gunner” or last in line in each “Convoy” to assure that all vehicles are accounted for, no resource damage has occurred (vehicle fluid leaks or failures, participants detouring off-trail, etc.) and that all range gates are properly secured. Moderate, Difficult and Extreme routes will be limited to properly equipped vehicles. “Convoy” departures will be staggered so as to limit the number of vehicles on any given trail segment at any given time. “Convoys” will generally access the extreme portion of the trails system via Box Canyon, egress will (generally) be via Rocky Acres Trail. The less extreme portions of the trail system will be accessed via Corralitos Ranch Road and will either loop around the Broad Canyon area or exit the trail system north of Las Cruces on NM Highway 185.

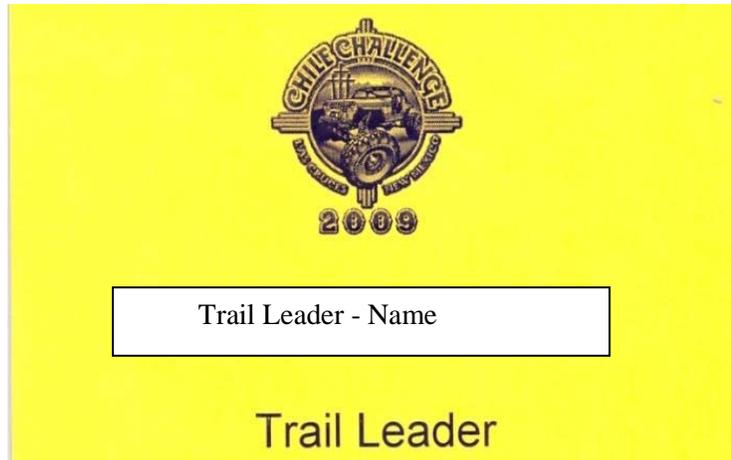
The LCFWDC will provide a vehicle identification sticker for each registered participant. (See example provided by LCFWDC).



Each registered participant will also be issued an identification card and lanyard indicating the vehicle number, participant name and the specific trails that participant has signed up for. (See example provided by LCFWDC)



Each "Trail Leader" will be issued an identification card with the name of the Leader and the Trails they are authorized to lead. (See example provided by LCFWDC).



The LCFWDC is responsible for sanitation, public safety, crowd control, environmental hazards (such as petroleum products spills) and visitor parking during the event. Each “Trail Leader” will be issued a spill mitigation kit to control petroleum spills.

2.3 Alternative B

Under Alternative B, a portion of Patzcuaro’s Revenge (Branson Canyon) and all of Tabasco Twister (Apache Canyon) Trails would not be authorized for use.

Alternative B would not authorize use of approximately .73 miles of Patzcuaro’s Revenge Trail in Branson Canyon beginning at the eastern intersection of Patzcuaro’s Revenge Trail and Rocotillo Rapids Trail and ending at the western intersection of Patzcuaro’s Revenge Trail and Cayenne Crawler Trail.

Alternative B would not authorize use of any of the approximately 2.8 miles of the Tabasco Twister Trail in Apache Canyon.

See attachment 2 – Chile Challenge Trails Tour Event, Alternative B Map

Eliminating use of these two Trails from the Event would effectively avoid all previously documented impacts to paleontological resources by OHV activity while retaining use of approximately 38.5 of the 42 miles of the Robledo Off-Highway Vehicle Trails along with all other roads and trails described in the Proposed Action.

All other actions would be the same as those described for the Proposed Action.

2.4 Alternative C

Under Alternative C, use of Patzcuaro's Revenge Trail (Branson Canyon) would be authorized Wednesday February 24 through Friday February 26. Use of Patzcuaro's Revenge Trail (Branson Canyon) would not be authorized for use on Saturday February 27.

Eliminating use of this Trail during the most popular visitation days of the Event would effectively remove the public attraction to the paleontologically sensitive area of Branson Canyon and also mitigate impacts on the surrounding landscape that would otherwise be created by crowds of spectators.

All other actions would be the same as those described for the Proposed Action.

2.4.1 Alternative D.

Under Alternative D, no Trail within the boundaries of the Prehistoric Trackways National Monument would be authorized for use.

Alternative D would not authorize use of any trail or road within the boundaries of the Prehistoric Trackways National Monument, but would permit use of the remaining system of existing road and trails west and north of the Monument.

These routes would consist of the second component of the event which is oriented more toward conventional 4WD vehicles. This portion of the event encompasses the remaining 110 or so miles of maintained roads and accessible trails. Exclusive use of this portion of the activity area is not requested. Any use of these routes would be in conjunction with other public land users, such as recreationists, ranchers or others who might be using the routes at the time. Many of the roads included in this component are County maintained and designed for public use and include portions of Dona Ana County Roads C009, C007, and D012. These roads are located within the following legal descriptions:

- T23S, R1W
- T22S, R2W
- T22S, R1W
- T21S, R1W
- T21S, R2W
- T21S, R3W
- T20S, R3W
- T20S, R2W
- T19S, R2W

These roads are west of the Prehistoric Trackways National Monument and north of Interstate 10. These routes are generally rated as easy to moderate in term of difficulty.

Under this alternative the number of participants as well as spectators would likely be considerably less since the most difficult and challenging Trails would not be used. All other aspects of this alternative would be the same as the Proposed Action.

2.5 Alternative E

Alternative E is the “no action” alternative. Under this alternative, the SRP application would be denied. No activity would be authorized and current management practices would continue.

The BLM NEPA Handbook (H-1790-1) states that for EAs on externally initiated proposed actions, the No Action Alternative generally means that the proposed activity will not take place. This option is provided in 43 CFR 3162.3-1(h)(2). This alternative would deny the approval of the application, and the current land and resource uses would continue to occur in the proposed project area. The No Action Alternative is presented for baseline analysis of resource impacts. Under the No Action Alternative a Special Recreation Permit would not be issued. Management of the Prehistoric Trackways National Monument would continue to develop through the preparation of a comprehensive management plan in accordance with P.L. 111-1, Subtitle B, Section 2104(b).

3 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Doña Ana County comprises 3,804 square miles in south-central New Mexico, bordering on El Paso County, Texas to the east and the state of Chihuahua, Mexico to the south. The area within the county's boundaries is topographically diverse and includes mountain ranges, hills, valleys, and deserts. The Rio Grande runs the length of the county from the northwest corner to the south-central border where New Mexico, Texas, and Mexico come together. The climate is generally mild and semiarid, with annual precipitation averaging 8.5 inches of rainfall and 3 inches of snowfall.

The Robledo Mountains Off-Highway Vehicle Trails area lies at the southern end of the Robledo Mountains within the Prehistoric Trackways National Monument. The Robledo Mountains are a southern-tilted fault block of Paleozoic and Cenozoic rock. Exposed outcrops of red sandstone frequently contain Permian age ichnofossils (tracks and traces of activity) as well as fossilized plant remains. Additionally, there are concentrations of petrified wood that prove to be associated with Permian age formations. The sedimentary limestone and sandstone are intruded by cinder cones and igneous rhyolite flows. Canyon walls are typically steep and, where the colluvial deposits are exposed, they are easily eroded during monsoonal rains. Elevations vary from approximately 3000 feet above mean sea level (amsl) to over 5000 feet amsl.

The less extreme portions of the proposed activity area (to the west and north of the Robledo Mountains) are characterized by west-trending piedmont slopes transitioning to gently rolling, alluvial flood terraces. Relic lake beds, now recognized as dry playas, encircle Dona Ana County Road C007 north of its intersection with County Road D012. Further north, canyons and terraces become more pronounced as the trails wind back toward the northern end of the Robledo Mountains (See Attached Map).

The Robledo Mountains Off-Highway Vehicle Trails have been authorized for year around casual use (*Robledo Mountains Off-Highway Vehicle Implementation Plan* through NM-036-97-83). Unauthorized casual use of the Robledo Mountains Off-Highway Vehicle Trails area has resulted in additional environmental damage that was not analyzed in NM-036-1997-83. Unauthorized “braids” along various trails allow inexperienced and/or improperly equipped users to circumvent difficult portions of the Trails. This unauthorized use results in increased erosion, habitat damage, damage to range improvements and impacts to paleontological resources.

3.1 Soils

A rock outcrop-Torriorthents association characterizes the southern Robledo Mountains. Developed soils are widely scattered, shallow colluvium gravel. The dominant topography consists of steep sedimentary (sandstone and limestone) rock outcrops punctuated by igneous (cinder cone) or metamorphic intrusions. Canyon walls and slopes are composed of shallow soils and friable sedimentary sandstones and mudstones that are easily eroded and subject to impacts from pedestrian traffic.

The designated Robledo Mountains Off-Highway Vehicle Trails follow canyon bottoms that are, for the most part, either bedrock or scoured by seasonal monsoons.

Dominant soil types in the southern most- portion of the less extreme proposed activity area include the Cacique-Cruces and the Wind-Harrisburg associations. Both of these soils exhibit very high fugitive dust hazards, and both are underlain by a cemented caliche

3.2 Water Quality – Surface/Ground

There are no perennial streams within the area of potential effect for the project as proposed. However, *huecos* in the limestone bedrock may hold rainwater for several days. Cultural Resources

There are at least 54 recorded archaeological sites within 500 meters of some portion of the numerous routes included in the proposed action. It is not anticipated that the proposed action will have any impact on cultural resources. No new surface disturbing activity is authorized.

3.3 Paleontological Resources

The Abo Tongue of the Hueco Formation (labeled Robledo Mountains Member by Lucas et al., 1995) is fossiliferous red sandstone dating from the Early Permian (ca. 300 -250 million years ago.) This sedimentary “redbed” geologic feature locally exhibits a number of ichnofossils (See figure 2) in the form of trackways, i.e., literal impressions of prehistoric animal locomotion. Since at least 1994, with the publication of *The Paleozoic Trackways Scientific Study Report (Lucas et.al. 1994)* by the Smithsonian Institution, the Abo Tongue has been recognized as an important paleontological resource. *The Paleozoic Trackways Scientific Study Report* describes 33 discrete loci of Permian ichnofossils within the Prehistoric Trackways National Monument. During the NEPA analysis for the 2009 Chile Challenge event (NM-030-2008-095) it was determined that fossiliferous material, “... exposed within the designated Chile Challenge Trails...” would be adversely effected. One concentration of such fossils is along the Tabasco Twister Trail in Apache Canyon. According to BLM proprietary data, one location (AF21) in Apache Canyon occurs in the canyon bottom. The BLM authorized (NM-030-2008-0006) the installation of a protective buffer across a section of exposed Abo Formation sandstone in the vicinity of this concentration. Another concentration of ichnofossils is found along the Patzcuaro’s Revenge Trail in Branson Canyon. This site (AF11) has been adversely affected by activity in the canyon. There are no impact scars to suggest the use of hammers or pry bars, but a segment of the exposed Abo shelf approximately 2 feet above nominal canyon floor level has been broken possibly by pressure exerted on the shelf by a tire tracking along the shelf line in a demonstration of “flexing”, a display of the ability of the suspension of an OHV to articulate or travel along parallel or uneven surfaces of different heights. This shelf layer contains exposed ichnofossils. There is no evidence that this damage occurred in direct association with any permitted event.



Figure 2 Ichnofossil salvaged from Branson Canyon

3.4 Visual Resources

The less extreme trail areas to the west and north of the Robledo Mountains fall within a VRM Class III. The Robledo Mountains Off-Highway Vehicle Trails are within a VRM II and III classification. According to BLM Manual 8431-1, Visual Resource Management:

Class II Objective. The objective of this class is to retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be low. Management activities may be seen, but should not attract the attention of the casual observer. Any changes must repeat the basic elements of form, line, color, and texture found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape. New projects can be approved if they blend in with the existing surroundings and don't attract attention (i.e., small-scale picnic area or primitive campground in valley shielded from view that blends with natural appearance).

Class III Objective. The objective of this class is to partially retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be moderate. Management activities may attract attention but should not dominate the view of the casual observer. Changes should repeat the basic elements found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape. New projects can be approved that are not large scale, dominating features (i.e., geothermal powerplant or major mining operation would not be approved).

3.5 Wildlife

The BLM conducted an inventory of wildlife habitats in BLM administered grazing allotments within the proposed project area using the Integrated Habitat Inventory and Classification System (IHICS) in 1980. Standard Habitat Sites (SHS) occurring in the area as of 1981 include:

- Creosote Rolling Upland
- Grass Flat
- Grass Rolling Upland
- Grass Mountain
- Mixed Shrub Rolling Upland
- Mixed Shrub Mountain
- Pinyon-Juniper/Grass Mountain
- Arroyo

Standard Habitat Site descriptions are available from the Las Cruces BLM District Office.

3.6 Special Status Plant Species

Presence of special status plant species and their habitats in Doña Ana County was considered using LCDO species occurrence/habitat records and New Mexico Natural Heritage Program species records. Species descriptions and distributions were derived from LCDO office records and New Mexico Rare Plant Technical Council [NMRPTC. 1999. New Mexico Rare Plants. Albuquerque, NM: New Mexico Rare Plants Home Page. <http://nmrareplants.unm.edu> (Latest update: 18 January 2006)]. Based on evaluation of the above information, 3 species and/or habitats could occur in the proposed action area. Table 1 below identifies special status plant species potentially occurring in the area.

Table 1 Special Status Plant Species in the Proposed Chile Challenge Event Area

| Species | Status |
|----------------------------|---|
| Grayish-white Giant Hyssop | USFWS, NM Species of Concern |
| Standley's Whitlowgrass | BLM Special Status, USFWFS and NM Species of Concern |
| Night-blooming cereus | BLM Special Status, USFWS Species of Concern, New Mexico Endangered |

Grayish-white Giant Hyssop (*Agastache cana*) This semi-woody perennial occurs in crevices and bases of granite cliffs or in canyons with small-leaved oaks at the upper edge of the desert and lower edge of the piñon-juniper zone, at 1,400-1,800 m (4,600-5,900 ft).

Standley's Whitlowgrass (*Draba standleyi*) This short perennial grows in igneous rock faces, bases of overhanging cliffs, and rock clefts between 1,675 and 1,980 meters (5,500 to 6,500 ft.).

Night-blooming cereus (*Peniocereus greggii* variety *greggii*) This slender, twig-like cactus grows mostly in sandy to silty gravelly soils in gently broken to level terrain in desert grassland or Chihuahuan desert scrub. Typically found growing up through and supported by shrubs, especially *Larrea divaricata* and *Prosopis glandulosa*.

None of the Special Status Plant Species are known to grow within the footprint of the Robledo Mountains Off-Highway Vehicle Trails.

3.7 Special Status Animal Species

Special Status animal species lists for Doña Ana County were compiled from: (www.wildlife.state.nm.us/conservation/threatened_endangered_species/index.htm and <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/newmexico/>).

Known geographic distribution and habitat requirements were considered for each species in comparison with habitat types. The results of this analysis are that of 24 species listed by the FWS or NMDGF as species of concern in Doña Ana County, sixteen species are considered to have potential habitat within the proposed action area. Table 2 below identifies special status wildlife species that may occur in the proposed action area.

Table 2 Special Status Animal Species in Proposed Chile Challenge Event Area

| Species | Status |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Varied bunting | NM Threatened |
| Yellow-billed cuckoo | USFWS Proposed |
| Northern aplomado falcon | USFWS Section 10(j): Non-essential Experimental Population, NM Endangered |
| American peregrine falcon | USFWS Species of Concern, NM threatened |
| Southwestern willow flycatcher | USFWS Endangered, NM Endangered |
| Common ground dove | NM Endangered |
| Common black hawk | USFWS Species of Concern, NM threatened |
| Texas horned lizard | USFWS Species of Concern |
| Lucifer hummingbird | NM Threatened |
| Burrowing owl | USFWS Species of Concern |
| Arizona grasshopper sparrow | NM Endangered |
| Baird's sparrow | USFWS Species of Concern, NM threatened |
| Bell's vireo | USFWS Species of Concern, NM threatened |
| Gray vireo | NM Threatened |
| Townsend's big-eared bat | USFWS Species of Concern |
| Western red bat | USFWS Species of Concern, NM |

Habitat descriptions for these special status wildlife species are available from the Bureau of Land Management, Las Cruces District Office.

The Northern aplomado falcon habitat model (available at the BLM LCDO) indicates that portions of the proposed activity area may be low, moderate, and high potential habitat for endangered aplomado falcons, which are listed under Section 10(J) of the Endangered Species Act as a nonessential, experimental population. There have been reports of aplomado falcons from the Corralitos Ranch and adjacent grassland areas. The Northern aplomado falcon in New Mexico is listed as an experimental, nonessential population under Section 10J status of the Endangered Species Act.

Southwestern Willow Flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*) is a small passerine bird placed on the federal Endangered Species list in 1995. The Southwestern Willow Flycatcher breeds in dense riparian habitats along rivers, streams, or other wetlands. The vegetation can be dominated by dense growths of

willows (*Salix* sp.), seepwillow (*Baccharis* sp.), or other shrubs and medium-sized trees. In some areas, the flycatcher will nest in habitats dominated by tamarisk and Russian olive (*Eleagnus angustifolia*). Almost all Southwestern Willow Flycatcher breeding habitats are within close proximity (less than 20 yards) of water or very saturated soil. The closest known pairs to the Proposed Chile Challenge Event breed along the Rio Grande, approximately 1 mile from portions of the event. Breeding usually takes place between early May and early June.

3.8 Air Quality

Prevailing winds are southwesterly. Doña Ana County has experienced numerous exceedances of the Federal PM10 standard (dust) for several years and a Natural Events Action Plan (NEAP) was developed by the New Mexico Environment Department and submitted to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in December of 2000. (<http://www.nmenv.state.nm.us/aqb/NEAP/DonaAna.html>).

Air quality can be affected by dust storms caused by a combination of weather conditions, the natural environment and human activities. High winds can raise large amounts of dust from areas of dry, loose, exposed soil. High winds are most common during the late winter and spring months. Sources of dust can include the following:

- Soil disturbance during construction projects
- Disturbed land areas that are cleared and vacant
- Unpaved roads, parking lots and playgrounds
- Windblown emissions from tilled fields
- Military training exercises
- Unpaved equipment yards
- Undisturbed desert areas during the highest winds

Dust becomes much more common where natural soils have been disturbed by human activities. This tends to be concentrated close to populated areas.

3.9 Climate Change

According to *Potential Effects of Climate Change on New Mexico* (the Agency Technical Workgroup for the State of New Mexico, 2005), the potential impacts of climate change for the Northern Chihuahuan Desert (southern New Mexico lowlands) include: Arid and semiarid lands may be among the first regions in which ecosystem dynamics become altered by global environmental change. In total, the changes would represent (1) reduction in soil fertility, Carbon/Nitrogen ratios, and microbial action; (2) enhanced physical changes, all resulting in soils less conducive to plant production; and (3) reduced resistance to erosive loss. Brown et al. (1997) demonstrated that a substantial ecosystem reorganization at the northwestern extent of the Chihuahuan Desert (i.e., southeastern Arizona, applicable to the bootheel of extreme southwestern New Mexico) appeared to be caused by a shift in regional climate since the late 1970s. Increased precipitation, especially during winter months, appears to have been directly or indirectly responsible for changes in woody shrub density, local extinction of previously common animals, and concomitant increases in numbers of previously rare species.

Encroachment of shrubs into grasslands is likely to continue and move northward. Increasing CO₂ concentrations appear to tip the competitive balance in favor of shrubs over grasses (Polley et al. 1996). This woody encroachment reduces the economic potential of the landscape as rangeland, and increases the likelihood of soil loss during dust storms and extreme rain events, which are expected to

increase in frequency as a result of global warming. As shrubs expand northward, changing habitats will result in changes in the distribution of animal species associated with shrublands and grasslands.

3.10 Vegetation

Canyon bottoms in the upper elevations of the Robledo Mountains include an overstory of juniper. Desert Willow is present in isolated gravelly bottoms where sufficient moisture is retained. The vegetation community at lower elevations consists of various cacti, dropseed grasses, yucca, mesquite, acacia and sotol. The more western segments of the proposed activity area lie with a Chihuahuan Desert Scrub community of grasses, cacti, yucca, etc.

3.11 Grazing

The proposed Chile Challenge event will include trail segments within nine BLM administered grazing allotments (Table 3). The allotments typically contain range improvements such as boundary fences, interior fences, and livestock watering areas (Table 4). These improvements may be found near the trails used for the Chile Challenge and in adjacent allotments that may be crossed in traveling to the event.

Table 3 BLM Livestock Authorizations within the Chile Challenge Proposed Event

| Allotment | | Authorized Grazing Preference | | |
|------------------|--------|-------------------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Name | Number | Cattle Year Long | Livestock Type | Total AUMs |
| Corralitos Ranch | 03013 | 1638 9 | Cattle Horse | 13759 76 |
| Picacho Peak | 03008 | 89 | Cattle | 822 |
| Altamira | 03040 | 54 | Cattle | 635 |
| Indian Spings | 03047 | 154 4 | Cattle Horse | 1700 44 |
| Broad Canyon | 03025 | 45 6 | Cattle Horse | 319 42 |
| Horse Canyon | 03026 | 21 4 | Cattle Horse | 242 46 |
| Rock Canyon | 03007 | 23 | Cattle | 193 |
| Alamo Basin | 03015 | 435 6 | Cattle Horse | 4385 60 |
| Hersey Arroyo | 03014 | 27 | Cattle | 253 |

Table 4 Range Improvements on or near the Proposed Chile Challenge Event

| Allotment | | Range Improvements | | |
|------------------|--------|-----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Name | Number | Name | Number | Authorization |
| Picacho Peak | 03008 | Baker Reservoir | 630159 | RI Permit |
| | | Burke Fence | 630183 632368 632375 | RI Permit |
| | | Burke Tanks | 634235 | RI Permit |
| | | Picacho Pipeline | 634498 | RI Permit |
| | | Robledo Pipeline | 634776 | RI Permit |
| Corralitos Ranch | 03013 | East Hawkins Tank | 630880 | Cooperative Agreement |
| | | East Hawkins Tank II | 631344 | RI Permit |
| | | Headquarters Pipeline | 634190 | RI Permit |
| | | East Hawkins Pipeline | 634204 | Cooperative Agreement |
| Altamira | 03040 | Rasmussen Fence | 631054 | Cooperative Agreement |

4 ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

4.1 Proposed Action-Soils

Colluvial deposits along the Robledo Mountain canyons are easily eroded and will be damaged by impacts from both vehicles and spectators. BLM monitoring of the 2008 and 2009 Chile Challenge Trails Tour Events confirmed that visitor and spectator use of canyon slopes for event viewing resulted in creation of new trails, dislocation and displacement of soils and large cobbles and damage to vegetation. Public safety was endangered by heightened risk of falls from canyon slopes and injury to participants and spectators by landslides and falling rocks.

Canyon bottoms and bedrock are resistant to impacts from vehicles. Alluvial soils to the west of the **Robledo Mountains Off-Highway Vehicle Trails** are not expected to be significantly impacted by the proposed action. Petroleum product spill will contaminate soils in various locations along the routes.

Where “braided” routes, i.e. routes that are used to get around an inoperative vehicle or obstacle, are created, vegetation is crushed and soils are disturbed and/or compressed. These impacts contribute to increased susceptibility to erosion and sediment load during water runoff.

4.2 Proposed Action- Water Quality

Petroleum based product spills (gasoline, brake fluid, power steering fluid, and transmission fluid) and/or engine coolant leaks will occur. Contamination of surface water may occur. Surface water in this context is defined as ephemeral pools or ponds of rain water. Petroleum products such as gasoline, transmission fluid, or brake fluid along with engine coolant may be spilled during the course of the event and could contaminate standing pools of water. The volume of fluid spilled at any given location is typically small

(less than 5 gallons) and is immediately treated by spill mitigation kits that are stipulated for each “Trail Leader”. Residual fluids will be absorbed by the canyon-bottom colluvium.

4.3 Proposed Action- Cultural Resources

No archaeological sites listed on, or eligible for, the National Register of Historic Places will be affected by the action as proposed.

4.4 Proposed Action- Paleontological Resources

The NEPA analysis for the 2009 Chile Challenge event (NM-030-2008-095) determined that fossiliferous material, “... exposed within the designated Chile Challenge Trails...” would be adversely affected.

According to *The Paleozoic Trackways Scientific Study Report*, there is a concentration of paleontological resources located in Branson Canyon along Patzcuaro’s Revenge Trail. AF10 (L02818) is within a Potential Fossil Yield Class (PFYC) 3 area. A PFYC 3 location corresponds to a Condition 2 status as defined in *BLM Guidance for Implementing the Potential Fossil Yield Classification (PFYC) System*. A Condition 2 area is described in BLM Handbook H-8270-1 as: “Areas with exposures of geological units or settings that have high potential to contain vertebrate fossils or noteworthy occurrences of invertebrate or plant fossils.”

L02818 is assigned a Rank of 5 in *The Paleozoic Trackways Scientific Study Report* (p.45), as being, “...most significant”. AF 11 (L02817) is also rated as a PFYC 3, Condition 2 and is described in the Report as having a significance rating of 4 on a scale of 1-5, with 5 as “most significant”.

In Apache Canyon, along the Tabasco Twister Trail, *The Paleozoic Trackways Scientific Study Report* identifies another concentration of paleontological resources. All of the following paleontological sites are rated with a PFYC of 3, which translates to a Condition 2 (described above). AF19 (L02827) is ranked at 3 in significance by *The Paleozoic Trackways Scientific Study Report*, AF18 (L02826) is ranked at a significance level of 4, AF22 (L02830) is ranked at 3, AF20 (L02828) is ranked at 4, and AF21 (L02829) is ranked at 3.

The BLM authorized (NM-030-2008-0006) the installation of a protective buffer across a section of exposed Abo Formation at AF21 as a mitigation measure for the 2009 Chile Challenge.

On March 12-16, 2007 at the behest of BLM Regional Paleontologist Pat Hester, BLM Paleontologist Sherrie Landon examined and evaluated previously recorded trackway localities within the proposed activity area in Apache Canyon and Branson Canyon. She reported her findings in an untitled report. This report is available for review at the Las Cruces District Office of the BLM. In this report, Ms. Landon identified several areas of concern, including:

- A. Installation of a bedrock winch point in Apache Canyon.
- B. Use of hand tools to re-position rocks within the Trail and to backfill holes created by tires experiencing low traction in the canyon gravels.
- C. Impacts from spectators and support crews along canyon walls and benches.
- D. Petroleum based fluid spills.
- E. Collection of fossil specimens by visitors.

Ms. Landon monitored the 2008 Chile Challenge and submitted a report titled: 2008 Chile Challenge, Monitoring of Recorded Paleozoic Trackway Site within the Robledo Canyon OHV Trails during the 2008 Chile Challenge, February 20-23, 2008. This report is available for review at the Las Cruces District Office of the BLM.

Ms. Landon made the following statement on page 21 of the Report: *“It is apparent that the Paleozoic Trackway fossil sites in Branson and Apache Canyons are impacted by natural causes and OHV activities of the Chile Challenge event. During the three days at this event, I observed where natural processes and the Chile Challenge event have resulted in subsequent loss to recorded fossil bearing sites. New mitigation measures were in place in Apache Canyon (installation of a protective buffer across an exposed outcrop of fossil-bearing Abo Formation) and did appear to reduce further impacts to the sites. Implementing some new mitigation measures and combining them with the ones used this year will substantially reduce the potential of future impacts to the fossil resource. These measures however, might not be adequate to prevent impact to the resource from non-sponsored weekend or day OHV use.”* Spectators gather at several locations to watch the participants demonstrate driving skills and vehicle capability. One of the spectator venues is a sensitive paleontological area in Apache Canyon (Tabasco Twister Trail). Small rock slides, often precipitated by spectators climbing the canyon walls, have exposed potential fossil-bearing strata. These strata may then be damaged by weathering, by people walking across them or, once exposed, they may be removed by unauthorized collectors. In addition, casual recreational use has damaged vegetation and contributed to the erosion and instability of the canyon walls (Figure 3).

If this location is included in the selected alternative, it will be monitored by BLM personnel and traffic will be directed to avoid impacts at this site.

While natural degenerative processes (erosion, freeze/thaw cycles) have the greatest impact on the paleontological resources, those impacts occur on a landscape scale. The site specific impacts caused by human activity exacerbate the damage done by natural processes. The BLM is responsible for mitigating those impacts that result from a permitted activity (federal undertaking).

4.5 Proposed Action-Visual Resources

Fugitive dust may temporarily impair scenic views. Scars from existing trails and roads on hillsides or ridges are visible for miles. Use of trails in the canyon bottoms generally has no impact on VRM. Unauthorized (off designated route) OHV activity could create new landscape scars that would detract from the desired VRM objective.



Figure 3 Canyon wall in Branson Canyon that may have been fragmented by pressure impacts.

4.6 Wildlife

Mechanisms through which vehicle activity impacts wildlife and wildlife habitats include:

- Audio disturbance and temporary displacement of wildlife
- Visual disturbance and temporary displacement of wildlife
- Direct impact and mortality to slow-moving wildlife

Vehicle effects on wildlife and wildlife habitats include both beneficial and detrimental impacts, and both short-term and long-term impacts to different species. Short-term effects tend to be relatively direct, whereas long-term effects often involve more complex ecological processes and are often indirect. For example, vehicle presence often causes wildlife to temporarily move to different areas, and while most animals will run away or hide from vehicles, some may be crushed under tires or impact on the vehicle itself. Indirect impacts might include creation of trails, which some species will use when vehicles are not present, but which include the loss of plants that may provide forage and cover for wildlife, and the prevention of reestablishment of those plants. Such effects typically are not recognizable over one or even a few seasons but rather manifest themselves over a period of many years. Vehicle use typically changes habitat from vegetated to non-vegetated, and becomes unsuitable for species that prefer cover but suitable for species that prefer open habitat. Vehicle trails and roads typically are in arroyo bottoms, and may alter the hydrology of a landscape and associated habitats. Animals may be killed or displaced by the proposed activity; or may be inadvertently poisoned by petroleum product spills.

4.7 Special Status Plant Species

Although there are no known occurrences of any Special Status Plant Species within the footprint of the Robledo Mountains Off-Highway Vehicle Trails, implementation of any of the Alternatives may cause direct impacts and potential mortality on all three special status plant species potentially occurring in the area; Grayish-white Giant Hyssop, Standley's whitlowgrass, and night-blooming cereus. The rock-crawling vehicles used in this event, and the fact that large numbers of these vehicles travel in a group, increases the potential for tire impacts to individual plants as compared to casual use by one or two

vehicles at a time, which is the normal use rate. The vehicles do not maintain one tire track, particularly when scaling steep rocky terrain, which is where the Grayish white giant hyssop and Standley's whitlowgrass could occur. Similarly, vehicles will track differently and increase the potential of direct tire impacts to night-blooming cereus while traversing the flatter creosote areas. While it is likely that individual plants would be crushed or damaged, it would not be damaging to the area populations of the three plants on the whole.

4.8 Air Quality

Air quality will be temporarily affected by fugitive dust at the following locations:

- The dry playa along County Road C007 south of Hawkins North Tank (T22S, R1W, S30, 19, 18, 7, and 6).
- Along Box Canyon Road east of the Las Cruces International Airport (T23S, R1W, S26, 23, 14, 11, 12).
- At the "air down" area off Rocky Acres Trail (T22S, R1W, S20).

4.9 Special Status Animal Species

Implementation of the proposed action is not anticipated to have any adverse effect on the habitat of the following special status animal species or their habitats:

- Lucifer hummingbird
- Townsend's big-eared bat
- Western red bat
- Southwestern willow flycatcher
- Common black hawk

Implementation of the proposed action may affect but is not likely to adversely affect the following special status animal species or their habitat as described below:

Varied bunting, yellow-billed cuckoo, and Bell's vireo. These species nest and perch in dense arroyo vegetation. Vehicles driving canyon bottoms may destroy arroyo vegetation in patches where travel corridors enter or exit arroyo bottoms.

Northern aplomado falcon, common ground dove, burrowing owl, Arizona grasshopper sparrow, and Baird's sparrow. These birds are primarily grassland birds, and are expected to be temporarily displaced by columns of vehicles moving through the grassland habitats. Some of this travel would be on hard-surfaced roads, while some would be on smaller dirt roads.

American peregrine falcon. This bird may use the canyons where the majority of the rock-crawling event will occur. Vehicle use would be anticipated to cause temporary displacement of this species.

Gray vireo. This is primarily a pinyon-juniper woodland bird. Vehicle use in pinyon-juniper habitats in the canyons would be anticipated to cause temporary displacement of this species.

Texas horned lizard. Although it is usually cold in February, on certain days it can warm up enough for these lizards to become active. These slow-moving lizards are particularly susceptible to direct mortality from vehicle tires.

4.10 Vegetation

Vegetation within the footprint of the designated trails and along access paths and spectator venues will be crushed, damaged, or destroyed. Vegetation on any existing or newly created go-around routes would also be crushed, damaged, or destroyed. Vegetation overhanging the trail may be cut or destroyed. Invasive/non-native species could be introduced. Spectator use of steep canyon slopes for Event viewing has resulted in resource loss and damage through trampling and uprooting of vegetation.

4.11 Grazing

Range improvements such as drinking tanks, exposed water lines, fences and gates may be damaged due to negligent actions by participants. Livestock may be temporarily displaced or disturbed due to increased vehicle traffic and/or to the improper range gate security.

Some of the impacts could include damage to fences and aboveground pipelines, crushed vegetation, widening of the road, and interference with livestock. Also, there is the potential that noxious weeds could be introduced by vehicles contaminated with weed seeds.

4.12 Wilderness

In accordance with BLM H-8550-1, *Interim Management Policy for Lands Under Wilderness Review*, lands under wilderness review must be managed so as not to impair their suitability for preservation as wilderness. OHV traffic creates surface disturbance, and the BLM shall not authorize surface disturbing activity within a WSA. The BLM shall not authorize use of the Rustler Fire Trail beyond Chivatos Canyon Tank during the proposed event. The designated route will avoid the Sierra Las Uvas WSA.

4.13 Direct and Indirect Impacts of Alternative B

Under Alternative B, a portion of Patzcuaro's Revenge (Branson Canyon) and all of Tabasco Twister (Apache Canyon) Trails would not be authorized for use.

Eliminating use these two Trails from the Event would effectively avoid all previously documented impacts to paleontological resources by OHV activity while retaining use of approximately 38.5 of the 42 miles of the Robledo Off-Highway Vehicle Trails along with all other roads and trails described in the Proposed Action.

All other environmental impacts would be the same as those described for the Proposed Action.

4.14 Direct and Indirect Impacts of Alternative C

Under Alternative C, Patzcuaro's Revenge Trail (Branson Canyon) would be not be authorized for use on Saturday February 27 and on Sunday February 28.

Eliminating use of this Trail during the most popular visitation days of the Event would effectively remove the public attraction to the paleontologically sensitive area of Branson Canyon and also mitigate impacts on the surrounding landscape that would otherwise be created by crowds of spectators.

All other actions would be the same as those described for the Proposed Action.

4.15 Direct and Indirect Impacts of Alternative D

Alternative D would not authorize use of any trail or road within the boundaries of the Prehistoric Trackways National Monument, but would permit use of the remaining system of existing road and trails outside of the Monument.

Alternative D would avoid impacts described in the Alternatives B and Alternative C, above.

All other Direct and Indirect Impacts analyzed for the Proposed Action would be valid for Alternative D.

4.16 Direct and Indirect Impacts of Alternative D

Alternative E is the “no action” alternative. Under this alternative, the SRP application would be denied. Any activity associated with the permit application would not occur; consequently there would be no permitted use impacts to public resources.

5 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Continued permitted (through either a SRP or under casual use provisions) use of the Robledo Mountains Off-Highway Vehicle Trails will have a cumulative adverse impact on exposed paleontological resources. Trail use may also cause these resources to be exposed and subsequently damaged or removed. Such impacts would be incremental, but not necessarily linear; natural erosion may expose or bury fossiliferous layers of sandstone in unpredictable sequences of monsoonal storm events. Damage would be greater at areas exposed through natural erosive processes, but may be lessened at areas where erosion has buried previously exposed specimens. The sheer number of vehicles crossing any given surface is not necessarily a reliable indicator of the degree of damage that may be anticipated. Participants in the permitted Chile Challenge Trails Tour Event tend to move more cautiously across known exposures of paleontological resources. Thus, a smaller group of less responsible users (year around casual use) may inflict greater damage than the numerically more intense use during the Chile Challenge Trails Tour Event.

Monthly monitoring of Apache Canyon and Branson Canyon by the BLM has revealed no clear evidence of wanton damage or unauthorized collection of specimens. Vegetation (juniper and mesquite) has been cut without authorization and it is possible that isolated specimens within the footprint of the Trail have been broken, damaged or looted. Some damage has occurred in Apache Canyon at AF 21 (L02829) and some damage has occurred in Branson Canyon at AF 11 (L02819) and AF 10 (L02818).

Concentrations of spectators damage exposed paleontological resources through direct physical impacts and, potentially through unauthorized “souvenir” collecting.

As BLM Paleontologist Ms. Sherrie Landon noted, the most obvious impact to the paleontological resources is natural erosion. When fossiliferous material erodes from canyon walls, it may fall within the footprint of one of the Chile Challenge Trails and be impacted by vehicle traffic or be subject to opportunistic collection. Degenerative natural processes cannot be reasonably mitigated across a landscape and these impacts would continue to occur over time regardless of trail use by OHVs. However, without vehicle use on the trails, this material could be left *in situ* and interpreted to the visiting public.

Where BLM authorizes an activity, the agency has a responsibility to require mitigation of those impacts that may result from its (BLM's) permitting process, i.e., federal undertakings.

Continued un-restricted spectator access would have a cumulative adverse impact in the vicinity of preferred viewing areas. Soil disturbance along footpaths will tend to make the paths preferentially erode during monsoonal storms. In this example, sheer numbers do suggest greater damage. Spectators tend to track along the same or similar path or contour and thus more individuals exert a concentrated impact to the terrain.

6 DESCRIPTION OF MITIGATION MEASURES

On January 26, 2008 the BLM authorized (NM-030-2008-006) the installation of a protective, rubberized barrier across an exposed section of fossil-bearing sandstone in Apache Canyon. This barrier will be required to remain in place during the proposed 2010 Chile Challenge Trails Tour Event.

Avoidance is the most effective mitigation measure. Paleontological resources in Apache Canyon along Tabasco Twister Trail and in Branson Canyon along Patzcuaro's Revenge Trail would be monitored by BLM personnel during the Chile Challenge Trails Tour Event. Where it appears that damage is occurring, the BLM may immediately close or reroute any trail or road to protect paleontological, archaeological, biological, or scenic values.

Checkpoints or other gathering areas will not be permitted within 300' of livestock watering points.

Gated entry points will be monitored in order to keep gates closed preventing livestock movement.

Noxious weed stipulations will apply to prevent the introduction of weeds to public lands (see attached).

7 MONITORING

The BLM established a systematic monitoring protocol of specific, sensitive paleontological sites in July 2007. Under the direction of BLM paleontologist Sherrie Landon, a series of baseline photo-reference points were established in three locations: 1) AF2, the "discovery site", 2) Branson Canyon, and 3) Apache Canyon at "conifer forest" and "insect hill". With few exceptions, monthly photographic inventories have been collected and the condition of these sites has been monitored and documented. These sites will be monitored again after the 2010 Chile Challenge Trails Tour Event if the permit is granted.

8 INDIVIDUALS, ORGANIZATIONS OR AGENCIES CONSULTED

- Bureau of Land Management, Las Cruces District Office, National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Interdisciplinary analysis Team
- Bureau of Land Management Regional Paleontologist
- International Boundary and Water Commission
- City of Las Cruces, New Mexico
- New Mexico State Land Office
- Las Cruces Four Wheel Drive Club

9 REFERENCES

U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management. Date: April, 1993, *Mimbres Resource Management Plan Record of Decision*. Las Cruces, New Mexico.

The Paleozoic Trackways Scientific Study Report, Spencer G. Lucas, Adrian P. Hunt, Nicholas Hotton, III, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 1994.

Las Cruces Country II, edited by Greg H. Mack, George S. Austin, James M. Barker, New Mexico Geological Society, 1998.

NM-036-87-93 – Environmental Analysis for the *Robledo Mountains Off-Highway Vehicle Implementation Plan*, BLM, Las Cruces District Office, 1993.

NM-030-2001-0049 – Environmental Analysis for fugitive dust in the area of Rocky Acres Trail, BLM, Las Cruces District Office, 2001

Potential Effects of Climate Change on New Mexico – The Agency Workgroup, State of New Mexico, 2005

NM-030-2008-0006 – Categorical Exclusion for mitigation to paleontological resources in Apache Canyon, BLM, Las Cruces District Office, 2008.

NM-030-2008-035 – Environmental Analysis for the emergency closure of the southern Robledo Mountains to the collection of fossilized wood and plant specimens, BLM, Las Cruces District Office, 2008.

BLM Handbook H-8550-1, *Interim management Policy for Lands Under Wilderness Review*, U. S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, 1995.

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
and
DECISION RECORD**

DOI-BLM-NM-L0000-2009-0188-EA Chile Challenge Trails Tour

Finding of No Significant Impact:

Based on the analysis of the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the attached EA, I have determined that impacts on the human environment are not expected to be significant and an environmental impact statement is not required.

Decision:

It is my decision to implement Alternative C in the attached Environmental Assessment (EA) which is to authorize the 2010 Chile Challenge Trails Tour, located at: T21S, R1E, S6, 19, 20, 29, 30, 31; T22S, 1W, S1, 2, 23, 24, 25, 26, 35, 36 (USGS Picacho Mountain, Las Cruces, Leasburg). And various existing roads in T23S, R1W, T22S, R2W, T22S, R1W, T21S, R1W, T21S, R2W, T21S, R3W, T20S, R3W, T20S, R2W, T19S, R2W, Dona Ana County, NM.

Use of the Patzcuaro's Revenge Trail (Branson Canyon) shall not be authorized for Saturday February 27.

Mitigation measures identified for the proposed action in the environmental impacts section of the EA have been formulated into stipulations. This decision incorporates by reference the attached stipulations.

Rationale for Decision:

The proposed action will not result in any undue or unnecessary environmental degradation and conforms with the Mimbres RMP, approved April 30, 1993. In addition, based on the analysis in the attached EA, there will be no significant impacts to the human environment.

If this decision is adverse to you and you believe it is incorrect, you may appeal the decision to the Interior Board of Land Appeals as prescribed in 43 CFR 4.4 and in the attached form.

Compliance and Monitoring:

The attached compliance and monitoring plan has been developed for this project and is incorporated by reference into this decision.

Assistant District Manager

Date

3 Attachments:

- 1 - EA
- 2 - Stipulations
- 3 - Compliance and Monitoring Plan
- 4 - Form 1842-1, Information on Taking Appeals to the Interior Board of Land Appeals