



This is the fourth in a series of newsletters to provide an update on the current status of the TriCounty Resource Management Plans (RMPs). The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Las Cruces District Office (LCDO) is preparing a revision of its 1986 White Sands RMP, an amendment to its 1993 Mimbres RMP, and a supporting environmental impact statement (EIS). This planning effort, referred to as the TriCounty RMPs/EIS, is needed to respond to changing policies, land use conditions, and emerging issues through updated management of public land in Sierra, Otero, and Doña Ana Counties in south-central New Mexico (collectively these three counties are called the Planning Area).

The planning process for the TriCounty RMPs began in January 2005 with public scoping; the public was asked to help identify issues and natural resources to be addressed in the plans. Management alternatives representing a range of resource protection and use options were developed and presented to the public for review and comment in December 2006. The Preliminary Draft RMPs/EIS was produced in late 2008 and reviewed internally by the BLM and our cooperating agencies.

Due to a series of unexpected delays, however, the process has taken longer than originally scheduled. The BLM is again moving forward with the planning process. This newsletter provides an update on recent changes to the RMPs/EIS and the anticipated schedule for this year.

Cooperating Agencies

Seven cooperating agencies are participating in the preparation of the TriCounty RMPs/EIS: the City of Las Cruces; Doña Ana, Otero, and Sierra counties; State of New Mexico departments including Agriculture and Game and Fish; and White Sands Missile Range. Federal and state agencies or local and tribal governments may serve as cooperating agencies based on two criteria defined by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations. A cooperating agency has jurisdiction by law, that is authority to approve, deny or finance all or part of a proposal; or special expertise—the relevant capabilities or knowledge that an agency can contribute to the planning process or EIS. Roles and responsibilities of cooperating agencies

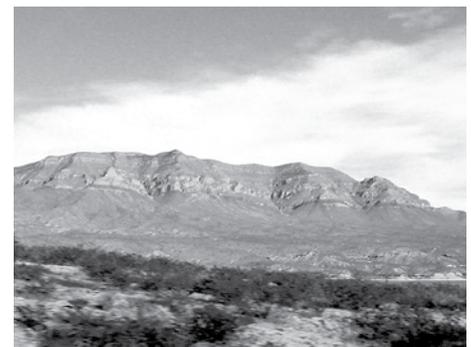
are described in a Memorandum of Understanding signed by representatives of both BLM and the cooperating agency.

Changes to the TriCounty RMPs/EIS

Recent changes have been made to the RMPs/EIS because of a court decision, policy emphasis, and internal document review comments. These changes are summarized below.

Decision on Fluid Minerals RMP Amendment

When preparation of the TriCounty RMPs began in 2005, it was determined that the decisions contained in the RMP Amendment for Fluid Minerals Leasing and Development in Sierra and Otero counties (BLM 2005) would be carried forward unchanged into the TriCounty RMPs. However, when the Record of Decision (ROD) for the Fluid Minerals RMP Amendment was issued, the State of New Mexico, the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance, and several other environmental organizations filed suit against the BLM challenging those decisions dealing with oil and gas development, primarily around Otero Mesa. In April 2009, the Tenth Circuit Court of appeals issued a decision



which voided the management decisions made in the Fluid Minerals RMP Amendment. Consequently, those decisions could not be carried into the TriCounty RMP/EIS and the schedule for the TriCounty RMPs/EIS had to be extended.

To avoid further delay in preparing the TriCounty RMPs, and to comply with the court's decision, the BLM is removing all proposed management actions and environmental analysis for oil and gas leasing and development in the TriCounty RMPs. Unless otherwise indicated, decisions in the existing 1986 White Sands RMP and 1993 Mimbres RMP pertaining to oil and gas development will remain in effect throughout the TriCounty Planning Area for existing oil and gas operations.

The fluid minerals program for oil and gas will be addressed later in a programmatic RMP Amendment for the entire District after completion of the TriCounty RMPs. The BLM may also defer any new, proposed oil and gas actions in the Planning Area until completion of the programmatic RMP Amendment. Existing leases will continue until the lease expires or is relinquished by the lease holder. In most cases, previous RMP decisions have closed existing Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) and other designations to mineral development, including fluid minerals. Protection from surface disturbing activities in both existing and proposed ACECs will be considered and analyzed in the TriCounty RMPs/EIS.

The proposed decisions for geothermal leasing will be addressed in the TriCounty RMPs/EIS and will be managed according to the Programmatic EIS and RMP Amendments for Geothermal Leasing in the Western United States (2008) and by management direction and stipulations developed through the TriCounty planning process.

Renewable Energy

Under the administration of President Obama, a national policy and priority has emerged to promote development of renewable energy projects on public land



managed by the BLM. Proposals from the renewable energy industry for development of solar, wind, and geothermal generating facilities, and supporting utility corridors have increased dramatically on BLM-managed land in the Southwest, including New Mexico.

The TriCounty RMPs/EIS does not currently address renewable energy to the extent that is needed. Although right-of-way avoidance or exclusion areas are identified, the environmental implications of renewable energy projects need to be considered on certain resources and resource uses, and will be addressed in this revision of the TriCounty RMPs/EIS.

Livestock Grazing

Although livestock grazing was not raised as an issue during scoping in 2005, it was brought up in several comments during the cooperator agency review last spring. Consequently, we are re-analyzing livestock grazing use and the impacts of grazing management.



Prehistoric Trackways National Monument

In March 2009, the Prehistoric Trackways National Monument was designated as part of the 2009 Omnibus Public Lands Act. The National Monument consists of 5,280 acres in the south end of the Robledo Mountains, and encompasses the Paleozoic Trackways Research Natural Area (RNA) which BLM designated in the Mimbres RMP in 1993. The 2009 legislation requires that a stand-alone management plan be prepared for the Monument within 3 years of designation. Consequently, management of the Monument is not addressed in the TriCounty RMPs/EIS but will be addressed in a separate RMP currently under way.



What's Next

The BLM is revising the Preliminary Draft RMPs/EIS to incorporate the proposed changes regarding fluid minerals leasing, renewable energy projects and livestock grazing. Upon completion, the BLM and its cooperating agencies will review the document again. Comments will be incorporated into the document, where appropriate, and it will be released for a 90-day public comment period. Page 3 includes an approximate schedule for the process through the end of 2010.

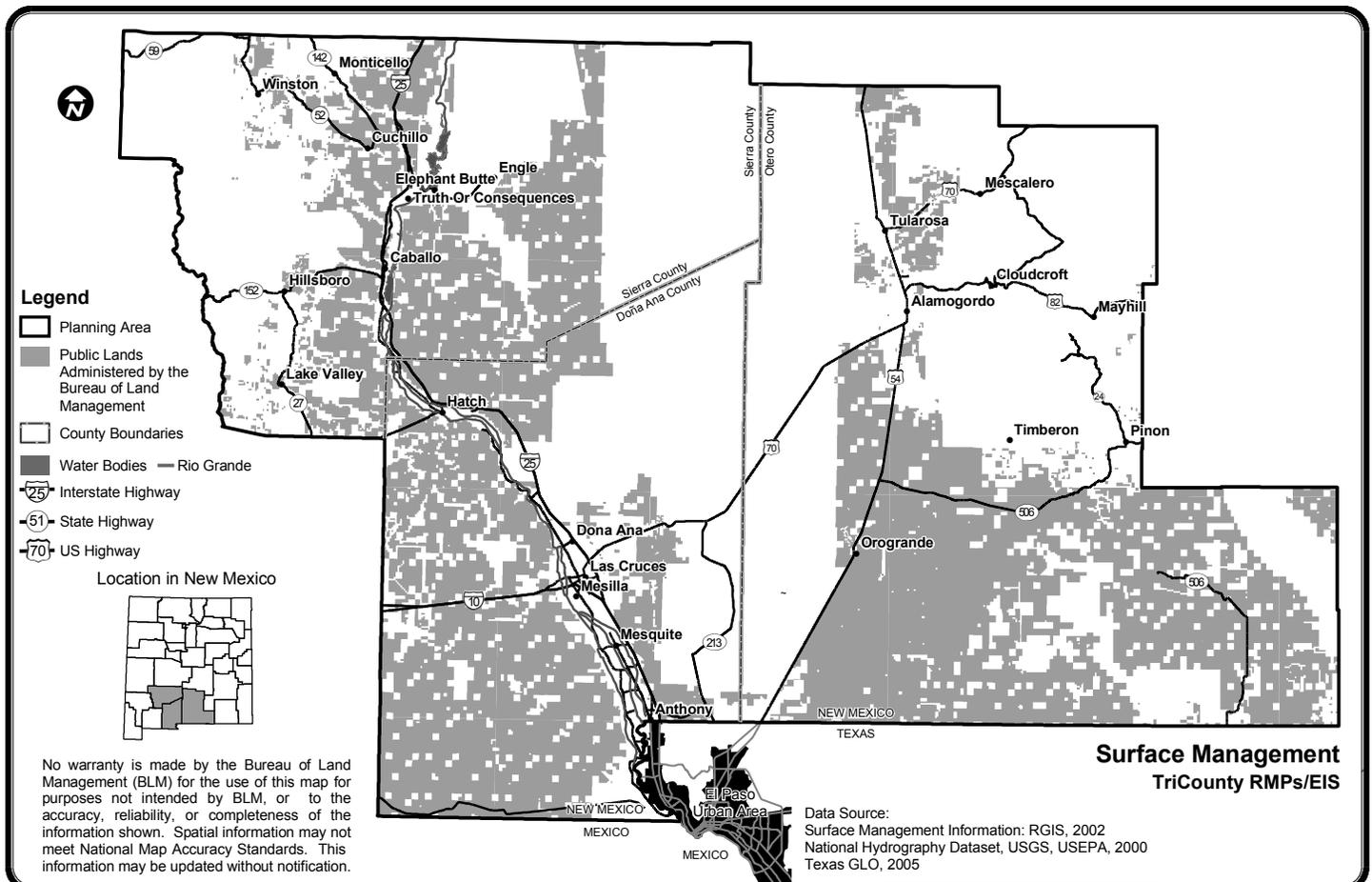
Revised RMP Schedule

- Revise RMPs:
February – June 2010
- Internal and cooperating agency review: **July 2010**
- Publish Draft RMP/EIS and begin 90-day public comment period:
October 2010
- 90 day public comment period and public meetings: **October – December 2010**
- Review and analyze public comments: **January 2011**

Current Comment Period

Due to the changes in the TriCounty RMPs/EIS regarding fluid minerals, renewable energy development, and livestock grazing management, BLM is requesting and accepting public comments on these three issues. Only comments regarding these three programs and related issues will be considered during this comment period. Please record your comments on the attached addressed mailer and return it to the Las Cruces District Office. You may also provide comments by email at nmlcdo_comments@blm.gov. Please indicate that your comments are for the TriCounty RMPs/EIS and direct them to the attention of Dwayne Sykes. The deadline for submitting public comment is June 1, 2010.

Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.





Bureau of Land Management Las Cruces District Office

TriCounty RMPs/EIS



BLM WANTS TO HEAR FROM YOU! COMMENT FORM

The following form was designed to help us better understand public views and values relevant to fluid minerals, renewable energy development, and livestock grazing management. Only comments regarding these three programs and related issues will be considered during this comment period.

Please return this form by June 1, 2010. Additional sheets may be attached if more space is needed. Fold the form so the BLM address is showing and tape or staple the edges together to mail it. No postage is required.

I AM INTERESTED IN RECEIVING THE DRAFT TRICOUNTY RMPS/EIS

YES — Method: CD PAPER ON WEBSITE

NO THANKS!

Name and Address: (PLEASE PRINT OR PLACE ADDRESS LABEL BELOW)

PLEASE READ CAREFULLY

Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. All submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, are available for public inspection in their entirety.
