

CURRENT TIMELINE FOR THE DRAFT SUPPLEMENT TO THE TRICOUNTY RMP/EIS

- **2014-to mid-2015:** Compile scoping comments, develop alternatives, analyze impacts
- **Mid-2015:** Preliminary Draft Supplemental RMP/EIS issued to cooperating agencies for review
- **Late 2015:** Draft Supplemental RMP/EIS issued for 90-day comment period
- **2016:** Proposed RMP/Final EIS, 30-day protest period, 60-day Governor's review

This timeline is subject to change.



Bureau of Land Management Las Cruces District Office

TriCounty RMP/EIS

Newsletter 5

Doña Ana, Otero, and Sierra Counties

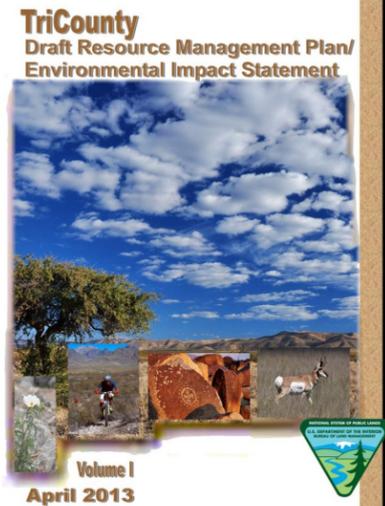
April 2014

This is the fifth in a series of newsletters to provide an update on the current status of the TriCounty Resource Management Plan (RMP). Our last newsletter was issued in April 2010. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Las Cruces District Office has prepared a Draft Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS) to revise its 1986 *White Sands RMP*, and amend its 1993 *Mimbres RMP*. This planning effort, referred to as the TriCounty RMP/EIS, is needed to respond to changing policies, land use conditions, and emerging issues through updated management of public land in Doña Ana, Sierra, and Otero Counties in south-central New Mexico. The planning process began in January 2005 with public scoping. Management alternatives were presented to the public for review and comment in December 2006. The Preliminary Draft RMP/EIS was produced in late 2008 and reviewed internally by the BLM and our cooperating agencies. Due to a series of unexpected delays, the process has taken longer than originally scheduled.

Release of the Draft TriCounty RMP/EIS

On April 12, 2013, the BLM published a Notice of Availability of the Draft TriCounty RMP/EIS in the *Federal Register*. The public had the opportunity to comment until November 4, 2013.

The BLM received over 170 unique comment letters and 600 form letters from individuals, agencies, and tribes. During the comment analysis process, the BLM will examine all letters and emails and will respond to all substantive comments. Responses to substantive comments will be addressed in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS, the next step in the planning process.



Decision to Supplement the TriCounty RMP/EIS

The BLM received substantive comments concerning the need to include oil and gas leasing and development decisions in the current RMP/EIS; and the need to update the inventory and include a more robust review of lands with wilderness characteristics in the current plan. After internal review, the BLM Las Cruces District Office will prepare a Supplement to the RMP/EIS that will address oil and gas leasing and an updated inventory of lands that possess wilderness characteristics.

Cooperating Agencies — NEW AGENCIES



Since the last newsletter, two new cooperating agencies have signed on to participate in the final stages of the TriCounty RMP/EIS. Fort Bliss and the Doña Ana Soil and Water Conservation District, now join the City of Las Cruces; Doña Ana, Otero, and Sierra counties; New Mexico Department of Agriculture and New Mexico Department of 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.

UNITED STATES
 Department of the Interior
 BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
 LAS CRUCES DISTRICT OFFICE
 1800 MARQUESS ST.
 LAS CRUCES, NM 88006-3371
 OFFICIAL BUSINESS
 PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE, \$300

What is a Supplemental EIS?

“Supplementation” has a particular meaning in the NEPA context; supplementation of an EIS is necessary only if there remains major Federal action to occur. The BLM prepares a supplement to a draft or final EIS if, after circulation of a draft or final EIS but prior to signing the Record of Decision, there are significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns and bearing on the proposed action or its effects.

A supplemental EIS must provide a basis for rational decision-making and give the public and other agencies an opportunity to review and comment on the analysis of the new information.

When a supplement is prepared after circulation of a draft EIS, but before preparation of a final EIS, a draft supplemental EIS must be prepared and circulated. A final EIS is then prepared after comment on the supplemental EIS.

Public Scoping . . .

The public scoping period gives the public and other interested agencies and organizations the opportunity to provide comments on issues to be addressed and methods to be used in the Supplemental EIS before the BLM begins drafting it.

Your input may help the BLM identify specific resource concerns; potential alternatives for managing oil and gas resources, and lands with wilderness values; potential mitigation measures for anticipated impacts on resources; or data gaps and information needs.



Supplemental Analysis of Oil and Gas Leasing

When preparation of the TriCounty RMP 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 RMP. However, the Record of Decision (ROD) for the Fluid Minerals RMP Amendment was overturned in April 2009 by the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals. The Las Cruces District Office made the decision to carry on with preparations of the long-delayed TriCounty RMP/EIS (see Newsletter 4 on the Las Cruces District website for a detailed explanation). Comments on the Draft RMP/EIS emphasize the importance of incorporating fluid minerals leasing decisions for oil and gas into the document at this time. The decision to amend the TriCounty RMP at a later date has been reversed. The BLM will now analyze oil and gas decisions in the TriCounty RMP.

To launch the supplemental EIS, the BLM will host three scoping meetings in late April (see **What's Next?**)

Supplemental Analysis of Lands with Wilderness Characteristics

The BLM will also analyze additional wilderness inventories in the supplemental EIS. Internal and external inputs on the inventory process have identified the need for additional review of public lands to ensure our inventory of those lands is complete. For any lands that the BLM determines do have wilderness characteristics, alternatives for managing to protect those resources will be developed.

Scope of Supplemental EIS

Alternatives for oil and gas leasing, and lands with wilderness characteristics, will be developed in the Supplemental EIS. A Reasonable Foreseeable Development (RFD) scenario for oil and gas will be completed. The inventory of lands with wilderness characteristics, along with alternatives for managing those lands, will be presented. Finally, impacts of the new alternatives on resources and resource uses will be analyzed. The Draft Supplement that results will be open for public comment on these two new issues and their impacts.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Scoping the Supplemental EIS

On December 19, 2013, the BLM published a Notice of Intent to prepare a supplement to the TriCounty Draft RMP/EIS. This *Federal Register* Notice initiated scoping for the Supplemental EIS. The BLM also announced this scoping period on its website. The comment period for scoping closes on **May 15, 2014**.



View from Caballo Mountains

How do I Participate in Scoping?

If you would like to participate in scoping, please attend a public meeting, or provide the BLM with written comments. You may submit your comments by mail, fax or email*:

Mail: BLM Las Cruces District Office
Attention: TriCounty Supplement
1800 Marquess Street
Las Cruces, NM 88005

Email: BLM_NM_LCDO_Comments@blm.gov

Fax: 575-525-4412

**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.*

For additional information on the TriCounty Plan, check out the Las Cruces District Website at:

www.blm.gov/nm/tricountyrmf

MARK YOUR CALENDARS — PUBLIC MEETING SCHEDULE

APRIL 24, 2014

TRUTH OF CONSEQUENCES

Civic Center
400 W. 4th Street
(corner of W. 4th & N. Foch St.)
Truth or Consequences, NM 87901

APRIL 29, 2014

ALAMOGORDO

Willie Estrada Civic Center
800 E. 1st Street
(corner of S. Florida and E. 1st St.)
Alamogordo, NM 88310

APRIL 30, 2014

LAS CRUCES

Doña Ana Co Government Center
845 N. Motel Blvd
Las Cruces, NM 88007

Each meeting will run from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. with a brief presentation at 6:00 p.m.