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BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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Resource Management Plan Evaluation Report
El Malpais National Conservation Area
July 2013

APPROVED	DATE
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A. Introduction

Located south of the City of Grants, primarily in Cibola County, New Mexico, the El Malpais National Conservation Area (NCA) Planning Area encompasses approximately 249,200 acres of Federal land, 34,600 acres of private land and 2,500 acres of Indian land. It is generally bordered on the east by the Acoma Indian Reservation, on the south by Catron and Socorro Counties, on the west by the Ramah Chapter of the Navajo Reservation, and on the north by the Mount Taylor District of the Cibola National Forest. The planning area does not include the lands of the El Malpais National Monument, administered by the National Park Service, located in the center of the NCA.

On December 31, 1987, land previously managed by the Rio Puerco Resource Area of the Albuquerque District of the BLM was designated by Congress as the El Malpais NCA and the El Malpais National Monument. The NCA was established "[i]n order to protect for the benefit and enjoyment of future generations that area in western New Mexico containing the La Ventana Natural Arch and the other unique and nationally important geological, archeological, ecological, cultural, scenic, scientific, and wilderness resources of the public lands surrounding the Grants Lava Flows" (Public Law 100-225, December 31, 1987).

In the establishing legislation, Congress required the BLM to develop a general management plan for management of the NCA. In 2000, when the NCA became part of the BLM's new National Landscape Conservation System, a stand-alone management plan for the NCA was required to be developed.

The management plan that was developed and is being evaluated in this evaluation is the 2001 El Malpais Resource Management Plan (RMP). That plan amended the Rio Puerco RMP (1986), the land management plan which was the applicable RMP for the entire Albuquerque Field Office. A General Management Plan for the NCA was developed in 1991, but was overturned in a lawsuit. Decisions from the 1986 Rio Puerco RMP continue to be valid except as they were amended by the approved 2001 El Malpais RMP. The El Malpais RMP is a stand-alone document that consolidates the RMP amendment decisions and activity decisions of the Approved El Malpais Plan with the still applicable Rio Puerco RMP decisions.

The NCA is the primary area addressed in the RMP. It contains six administrative units with additional special designations: the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, Cebolla Wilderness, West Malpais Wilderness, the Chain of Craters Wilderness Study Area (WSA), the El Malpais WSA, and the Canyons WSA. The RMP recommended five areas adjoining the NCA for incorporation into the NCA: the Brazo non-NCA Unit, the Breaks, non-NCA Unit, the Continental Divide Unit, the Techado Mesa Unit, and the Tank Canyon Unit. The RMP also made a number of wilderness suitability recommendations. However, Congressional action would be required before any of these adjoining units could become part of the NCA or designated wilderness, and Congress has, to this point, not acted upon these recommendations.

B. Purpose

The BLM land use planning process is cyclical and includes the following steps: 1) plan development/completion of new decisions; 2) plan implementation; 3) on-going mitigation/monitoring; 4) plan maintenance; 5) plan evaluation; and when required, 6) plan amendment or revision. This evaluation examines steps 1-3 of this process. The evaluation results determine whether an RMP needs to be amended or revised based on changing conditions, new information or policies, or if the decisions are not meeting the desired outcomes. If an amendment or revision is not required, then plan implementation, monitoring, and maintenance continues with no proposed changes to the existing plan decisions until new circumstances or another plan evaluation dictates otherwise.

The BLM Land Use Planning Handbook (H-1601-1) requires that an RMP should be evaluated every five years at a minimum. The purpose of the evaluation is to determine 1) if the land use plan decisions and supporting NEPA analysis are still valid and effective; 2) how well the plan is being implemented; and 3) the effectiveness of mitigation and monitoring activities. For the purposes of this report, if an RMP's decisions are relevant to current issues and there are no changed circumstances or land use conditions, the decisions are likely valid and do not need to be revised or amended. The decisions must also be adequately supported by the RMP's accompanying Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Evaluating plan implementation is closely tied to the adequacy of on-going monitoring of implementation activities and related mitigation, and the extent that the prescribed implementation actions or activity plans identified in a RMP are actually being carried out.

C. Evaluation Methodology

The El Malpais NCA RMP evaluation results were derived from three strategies. A plan evaluation questionnaire was first distributed to the Rio Puerco Field Office (RPFO) programs for completion. After completion of the questionnaires, the RMP evaluation team scheduled informal interviews and discussions with the program staff over a period of three days, using the questionnaire as a guide, and the RMP for reference. The evaluation team consisted of staff from the state office (a list of members of the RMP evaluation team can be found on page 25). Last, internal drafts of the evaluation report were distributed to the RMP evaluation team and RPFO management staff for review and comment. For additional information, refer to the interview schedule and questionnaires in the appendices.

The program questionnaire consisted of 25 questions reflecting the factors and information that should be considered for evaluating the 2001 RMP. The RPFO's responses to the questionnaire and related responses during the program interviews were grouped into thematic areas, which are interrelated. They include: the validity and effectiveness of current RMP management decisions, including mitigation such as stipulations and Conditions of Approval (COAs); RMP implementation; current effectiveness of monitoring and supporting data and information management; RMP relevance to current tribal and other government plans and issues; and on-going RMP outreach and communication. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the RMP process and cross-cutting issues identified by program staff, similar if not identical findings and

conclusions resurfaced throughout the plan evaluation. This report summarizes only the findings dealing with plan decisions and implementation and on-going monitoring activities.

The interview session at the RPFO included a discussion with management staff, along with meetings with staff responsible for the following programs/resource areas: planning/NEPA; grazing/range; recreation (including interpretation); riparian areas; wildlife and special status species; forestry; fire; soil, water, and air; lands and realty; cultural resources; archaeological resources; and paleontological resources.

D. Evaluation of the 2001 RMP and Conclusions/Recommendations

The 2001 El Malpais Plan is arranged as separate issue-specific management plans for the various resources managed by the Rio Puerco Field Office. The decisions and guidance that apply to more than one resource are duplicated in each resource section. The intent is to make each resource section complete on its own to make implementation of the plan by Field Office resource specialists as straightforward as possible.

This evaluation includes a background and finding on all resources for which interviews were conducted. The first part of this section consists of a background on the resource as analyzed in the existing RMP, followed by conclusions and recommendations relating to that resource as acquired through the RMP evaluation process. The plan decision information is derived from the 2001 RMP. Conclusions and recommendations follow the existing plan management decisions and guidance by program area.

1. General Conclusions/Recommendations

a) Conclusions

A number of common themes developed through the questionnaires and subsequent in-person interviews with RPFO staff. These themes are discussed below as they relate to the entire planning area. More specific, resource-related themes are discussed below in the specific resource chapters.

Many staff members stated that the El Malpais RMP is so vague as to not provide sufficient guidance to help set priorities. Overall, goals are relatively general but are sufficient to support proposed projects. The problem comes with prioritization of such projects. Because the RMP is so broad, it does not provide sufficient prioritization. This is a particular problem with new staff members that do not have the institutional knowledge of the NCA or the field office as a whole. New staff members generally do not understand what is in the RMP and how they can use this information in their work.

The broadness of the plan may have been purposeful, with the intent being to fill in the details through implementation-level activity plans. The El Malpais Act itself required implementation plans for programs including interpretive and public education, public facilities development, natural and cultural resources management, wildlife resources management. In addition,

implementation plans are standard for other issues including Wilderness management and signing of the NCA. Through the evaluation, it became clear that many such plans are out-of-date or have never been developed. Some areas that staff thought were ripe for the development of activity plans include wilderness, range, and interpretation, as well as business, sign, and communication plans.

Some staff mentioned that the travel management plan, which was completed after the ROD was signed, contains mistakes including major routes depicted as closed and routes with resource conflicts depicted as open. In addition, with the development of access to some private inholdings, it is out of date.

Overall, most resource specialists stated that the goals in the El Malpais RMP were relatively general, but sufficient to support most proposed projects. Numerous staff raised the issue that the plan is generally ignored by resource specialists. Overall, staff felt that there was a general lack of internal communication and coordination, especially across resources. For example, a fence proposal in the Cebolla Wilderness was proposed by the range program and put into BPS, but was not coordinated with other resource specialists. Insufficient internal communication among resource staff appears to be a major issue. Some staff mentioned the difficulty in getting programs to review and become involved in project-level NEPA documents not directly involving their resource. Staff did recognize the uniqueness of the El Malpais NCA as a part of the NLCS and not simply just a regular BLM planning area and are generally cautious when proposing projects.

Implementation of the RMP has been an issue, mostly in terms of keeping track of implementation progress. The RPFO must develop a strategy to coordinate and prioritize these implementation-level projects.

b) Recommendations

- Tie budget for projects to the projects' relevance and priority in the RMP (where applicable)
- Management should create a system where staff is mandated to keep track of implementation progress annually
- Develop a system of priority setting for resource-specific projects, especially when new staff come on board
- Create/update implementation-level activity plans for the following issues:
    - Wilderness
    - Range
    - Interpretation
    - Business Plan for the Joe Skeen Campground
    - Sign Plan
    - Communications
- Develop monitoring programs for all resources in order to comply with new policy and guidance, particularly in WSAs and Wilderness areas
- Update policy and guidance for all resources where references are out-of-date. This can be done through plan maintenance.
- Review and update travel management plan
- Develop program to keep track of annual implementation progress

    - Should be tied to RMP
    - Need coordinated and prioritized implementation
- Conduct RMP Implementation Workshop per BLM IM 2013-014
    - Or, have a less formal workshop that allows staff to prioritize and schedule their work

2. Rangeland Resources

a) Background

The primary goals of the rangeland resources program in the NCA are to manage for healthy rangelands and ensure that livestock grazing management on each allotment contributes to the accomplishment of the Potential Natural Community (PNC) vegetative objectives for grass-shrubland communities and woodland and forest communities.

There are 16 grazing allotments either within or overlapping the plan area, totaling 275,676 acres. The largest allotment within the NCA is the El Malpais Allotment, comprising 136,195 acres in the southern portion of the NCA. All allotments within or overlapping the NCA were placed into a "Selective Management Category" based on its existing vegetative condition and/or conflicts with other resources. The El Malpais allotment was categorized into Category I (Improve), which contains allotments managed to improve their ecological condition and resolve resource conflicts. Other allotments overlapping the planning area fell into either Category M (Maintain) or Category C (Custodial). Category M allotments are managed to maintain current satisfactory resource conditions. Category C allotments typically contain small amounts of unconsolidated public lands, have no resource conflicts, and/or have a low potential for improved resource condition.

b) Conclusions

Range staff in the planning area expressed that the El Malpais RMP does not constrain any implementation-level grazing actions, and that the plan sufficiently guides their work as it relates to livestock grazing.

Several updates were suggested to the Policy and Authorities section of the Rangeland Resources chapter. The term PNC is no longer used. Instead, the proper term is now "Reference Natural Communities." Additionally, one of the authorities referenced in the RMP is the Fundamentals of Rangeland Health; however, these have since been incorporated into the Standards and Guidelines for Grazing Administration. The authorities section should also reference current New Mexico Standards for Public Land Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management.

Staff mentioned that allotment management plans have been completed for all allotments overlapping the planning area; however, their current status is unclear and staff did not know whether these plans were being followed

Fence cutting and a large amount of trespass livestock in the Cebolla Canyon riparian area was a major problem raised by numerous staff. Staff expressed frustration that there was no dedicated law enforcement or a park ranger to help to prevent this trespass.

Regarding monitoring, staff stated that monitoring has been completed through rangeland health assessments. Overall health assessments are completed when grazing permits are renewed and the supporting NEPA document is over 5 years old. Staff mentioned that little trend monitoring has been completed because of a general lack of resources and time constraints. Proper Functioning Condition (PFC) assessments are conducted by the RPFO wildlife staff, although the range staff is included in these assessments as part of the interdisciplinary team. Some concern from staff was expressed that the rangeland resources program uses these PFC assessments improperly; stating that areas that meet PFC are appropriate for grazing. Resource staff stated that PFC is only a first step in determining whether an area should be grazed, not a final determinant.

In order to become eligible for funding through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) as managed by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the RPFO has begun developing a Cooperative Resource Management Plan (CRMP) for the El Malpais allotment. This is currently being developed through a contract with a former BLM employee. Although this CRMP is still pre-draft, some staff expressed concern that they have not yet had the opportunity to provide input relating to their resource. In various places throughout the specific resource chapters of the RMP, it is stated that CRMPs prepared for grazing allotments/leases will contain goals and objectives for watershed management, forests and woodlands, wildlife, riparian, and fire.

c) Recommendations

- Update Policy and Authorities section to reflect current guidance
- Review existing allotment management plans – ensure that these are current and being followed
- Prioritize trend monitoring
- Ensure that the CRMP is developed/reviewed/contains input of all potentially affected resource staff, and adheres to language in RMP stating that the CRMP will contain goals and objectives for watershed management, forests and woodlands, wildlife, riparian, and fire
- Complete use supervision on each allotment as needed to ensure compliance with the grazing regulations

3. Recreation / Interpretation / Education

a) Background

Recreation was broken into various chapters in the 2001 RMP. There are separate chapters relating to recreation itself, recreational facilities, and interpretation and education. For these purposes, and because of the close relationship between these programs, they are addressed together in this evaluation.

The goal of the recreation program in the El Malpais plan is to ensure the continued availability of quality outdoor recreational experiences that are not readily available from other sources. Emphasis was placed on a combination of developed and dispersed recreational opportunities. One developed recreational opportunity that was planned in the RMP was the development of a

campground near the Ranger Station. This campground, the Joe Skeen Campground, has been constructed and is the only campground in the NCA. A well is planned for the campground, and attempts at drilling one have been made, but none have had sufficient water to fulfill needs. BLM is negotiating with the NPS and the Acoma Tribe to extend a pipeline from an existing nearby well to both supply the campground and ranching operations of the Acoma.

One issue that was brought up is an increase in dispersed camping throughout the NCA, but especially in the Cebolla Canyon area, and particularly during the hunting season. New and expanding impacts are a concern and may require some planning to assure the impacts remain within limits. Monitoring was identified in the RMP as a way to protect recreation resources and to prevent their degradation. The plan also identified the inspection and rehabilitation of recreation-related facilities as management guidance.

The goal of the interpretation and public education program is to educate the public about objectives, goals, and the mission at the El Malpais NCA. The plan states that interpretive objectives should be developed for each resource whose management can be assisted through visitor education efforts, and includes a number of specific implementation level interpretation activities that were to be developed. Monitoring for the interpretive program was to be evaluated through the Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) system. The objective of the LAC is to control change rather than preventing it, and deciding what management actions are required to maintain or enhance desired conditions.

b) Conclusions

Since the RMP was signed in 2001, recreation usage patterns have changed. For example, while the RMP focuses on dispersed recreation, large hunting camps have become more prevalent over time. This leads to more resource damage, user conflicts and visitor safety measures.

Safety within the NCA was an issue raised by multiple staff members; currently, there is no dedicated law enforcement officer assigned to the NCA. As a result, issues relating to law enforcement are often undiscovered or unenforced. Staff noted overgrazing, illegal woodcutting, shooting at signs and wildlife, vandalism, and OHVs as problems in the planning area. Urgent safety or enforcement issues lead to NCA staff calling LEOs from the El Malpais National Monument. Although these NPS employees are generally helpful, assisting the BLM is not their priority. No formal agreement exists between BLM and NPS for the use of these LEOs; assistance is provided on an ad-hoc basis.

Staff identified the absence and age of infrastructure within the planning area as an issue. Due to funding, there has been a limited ranger staff and maintenance staff. Two examples of infrastructure/maintenance issues are the solar hot water system and solar electricity panels at the ranger station, which have been broken for a number of years and do not provide enough electricity for volunteers. Additionally, improvements to the Joe Skeen campground must be completed. Obtaining water for this campground has been an interagency issue in the past because the water source is on NPS lands.

While the RMP states that staff patrols, traffic counters, and trail counters will be used to measure and monitor visitor use, limited monitoring has occurred and minimal visitor use data exists.

Traffic counters exist but are broken throughout the planning area. The only current source of visitor data comes from the ranger station register. No other visitor use data is collected in the NCA, including the campground,

The development of an interpretive plan was mandated as part of the El Malpais Act but its status is unclear. One particular area of concern is a clear interpretive plan for rock art sites. If an interpretive plan has not been developed previously, it should be developed. If one already exists, it should be disseminated and updated.

Staff noted the need for an updated sign plan within the planning area. Signs that exist in the NCA need to be updated at key access areas and better placed for visibility. A sign plan did exist in the NCA before 1993 but this does not meet current BLM standards. Because of the close relationship to the NPS and the El Malpais NM, some staff noted the possibility of developing a coordinated sign plan with NPS.

Currently no trailhead facilities are located at the Hole-in-the-Wall Trail, Armijo Canyon Trail, or Homestead Canyon Trail. These facilities are called for in the Wilderness section of the RMP for the first two, though not for the third. This causes uncertainty to visitors about where vehicles can and cannot be, in particular because some vehicle use is evident as permitted to the grazing permitee. Current information (plans, brochures, web site) is conflicting in regards to "official trails" and needs to be revised.

Decisions relating to interpretation in the RMP states that interpretation will occur through one-on-one contacts with visitors (public programs, guided hikes, and Ranger Station contacts); printed brochures, exhibits, interpretive media, and publications at the Ranger Station; and wayside exhibit panels, self-guided trails with interpretive signs, kiosks, and informational signs. Staff mentioned that while most of these decisions have been implemented, wayside exhibits have not been implemented because of changing priorities, costs, and time limitations. Staff indicated that more temporary, cheaper kiosks or sun-sheltered bulletin boards would be a more appropriate option than formal developed wayside exhibits, and would allow for quicker dissemination of educational or informational materials. Additionally, while interpretive programs exist throughout the planning area, including at the visitors' center and ranger stations, they are in many cases old and outdated and are rarely updated.

Staff also mentioned the need to better engage with the public, including tribes, local communities, and school groups. A communications plan could increase the understanding of the NCA by identifying target audiences, key messages, and strategies for how to reach the audience.

Additionally, staff mentioned the desire to formalize and regiment the interpretive program and communications plans within the NCA. This echoes the common theme of a lack of priority and structure in the interpretive sections and throughout the RMP.

Staff mentioned that LAC monitoring had occurred throughout the NCA, but that the documentation of this monitoring had been lost over time and as a result of numerous office moves. Finally, staff mentioned the need for additional visitor use monitoring in WSAs and Wilderness areas in order to prevent, detect, and respond to disallowed uses such as cross country

OHV activity. Such monitoring is limited by the lack of staff and law enforcement available in the NCA.

Finally, the La Ventana Recreation site is a major attraction in the NCA because of the Natural Arch. The recreation site is located on the edge of the Cebolla Wilderness – the arch is in the wilderness. Two pit toilets are located at the recreation site, and these do not have an accessible design. Furthermore, they are poorly located, in that they interfere with day use of the area, and preclude picnic facilities.

c) Recommendations

- Update temporary exhibits in the Ranger Station yearly
- RMP highlights the need for permanent wayside markers. However, based on public needs and changed circumstances, these permanent wayside markers should be a reduced priority. Lower-impact sun-sheltered bulletin boards may be an adequate replacement.
- Better partner with Acoma tribe, schools, and the local community
    - As part of engaging the public, provide incentives to the public to restart a Friends program in the NCA.
- Improve understanding of BLM uniqueness and mission through signs, brochures, and interpretive programs.
- Develop a communications plan for the NCA
- Identify existing and needed hiking trails and develop trail heads and trails where needed. Construct trailhead facilities for the Hole-in-the-Wall Trail. Consideration for the other two trailheads needs to be revisited.
- Develop a new approach to law enforcement if a permanent LEO is not going to be hired
- Need better monitoring of visitation – numbers throughout the NCA are unknown
    - Traffic counters need to be fixed
- Restart Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) monitoring
- Seek funding to complete and maintain recreational infrastructure
    - Joe Skeen Campground, water supply
    - Place kiosks at major access points and trailheads
    - Improve signing throughout NCA
- Begin planning necessary to replace and relocate the pit toilets in order to upgrade them to accessible standards and move them to the opposite side of the parking lot

4. Vegetation/Riparian and Wetland Habitat/Soil, Water, and Air Resources

a) Background

The program goals for the vegetation program are to complement natural ecological processes with management practices that will provide for the establishment of Potential Natural Communities. The goal of the riparian program is to manage the riparian and wetland habitats in the planning area for their protection and enhancement. The RMP breaks riparian-wetland management goals and objectives into four general management strategies: maintenance of

existing riparian conditions, improvement of degraded riparian conditions, recovery of lost riparian areas, and development of new riparian areas. One of the major implementation-level riparian projects in the RMP was to fence a 1.5 mile section of the perennial stream along Cebolla Canyon, below Cebolla Spring, which has been completed. One key decision from the RMP states that Coordinated Resource Management Plans (CRMPs) prepared for grazing allotments will contain objectives for riparian resources, as well as forests and woodlands, wildlife, fire, and watershed management.

Proper Functioning Condition (PFC) assessments are conducted by the RPFO wildlife staff, although the range staff is included in these assessments as part of the interdisciplinary team. Some concern from staff was expressed that the rangeland resources program uses these PFC assessments improperly; stating that areas that meet PFC are appropriate for grazing. Resource staff stated that PFC is only a first step in determining whether an area should be grazed, not a final determinant.

b) Conclusions

Generally, staff mentioned that the El Malpais RMP is written broadly and allows them the flexibility to initiate most necessary projects. For the most part, the riparian and soil-water-air programs serve in a support capacity when other programs propose projects.

The only improvements relating to the plan involved updating the policy and authorities section in the Vegetation chapter to reference the 2007 *Final Vegetation Treatments Using Herbicides on Bureau of Land Management Lands in 17 Western States Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement*, as the plan currently references a 1991 vegetation EIS.

A document titled the Final EIS for Riparian and Aquatic Habitat Management in the Albuquerque Field Office – New Mexico (BLM/NM/PL-00-010-1040) was developed for the entire Rio Puerco FO, including the El Malpais NCA, in August 2000. Monitoring data for riparian areas exist but has not been fully assimilated, and has not been updated in many cases. For example, per the 2000 riparian plan EIS, monitoring requirements for the Cebolla Canyon allotment involve conducting a Proper Functioning Condition (PFC) survey every two years until reaching PFC, with a survey every five years thereafter. During interviews, staff indicated that fencing in the Cebolla Canyon has not functioned as hoped, due to trespass livestock and the fact that the wetland has expanded. This has led to the allotment in this area not reaching Proper Functioning Condition (PFC). Based on records provided by the RPFO, the last PFC data submissions for the Cebolla Canyon allotment come from 2002. This outdated monitoring therefore does not comply with the monitoring requirements from the 2000 riparian plan EIS.

A large riparian restoration project was developed for the Cebolla Canyon Creek, of which a large portion is within the Cebolla Wilderness. The thrust behind this project has been a third party partner, funded by grants from non-BLM sources. While to date the work that has been completed has been very beneficial, the project has at times not been well coordinated with Rio Puerco specialists. The proponent was not authorized to work on projects that exceeded restoration objectives, such as creating artificial wetlands in wilderness, but continues to hope to do this work in the future.

The El Malpais allotment has become a focus area for the Healthy Landscapes Initiative and so new attention is being paid to management and restoration, including the preparation of a CRMP. Staff also noted that, on page 2-150 of the RMP, that CRMPs prepared for grazing allotments/leases will contain goals and objectives for watershed management, forests and woodlands, wildlife, riparian, and fire. While such a CRMP is being completed for the El Malpais allotment at this time, some staff expressed concern that they have not been involved in the CRMP from the beginning of the process. This concern echoes the general concern in the RPFO that inter-resource coordination and cooperation relating to the NCA has not been strong.

c) Recommendations

- Update policy and authorities to reflect current guidance
- Ensure that CRMPs are developed in coordination with all programs listed in the RMP
- Conduct PFC monitoring per schedule developed in 2000 riparian plan EIS for all allotments within NCA

5. Wildlife Habitat Management and Special Status Species

a) Background

The program goals for wildlife in the NCA focus on habitats for terrestrial, aquatic, and special-status species, and on rare or representative habitats or ecosystems. For Special Status Species, the focus is on protecting and/or enhancing the habitats of threatened, endangered, and other special-status species to ensure their continued existence. One of the major implementation-level projects described in the RMP is to use the south half of the North Pasture and the Head Pasture of the El Malpais Grazing allotment as a 1,000 acre enhancement area for a prairie dog colony. The plan states that depending on the expansion of the colony, the area would also be a potential release site for the black-footed ferret.

b) Conclusions

While the RMP states that 1,000 acres in the RMP is to be used for an enhancement area for a prairie dog colony, it does not specify which 1,000 acres within the North and Head Pastures should be used. The RMP states that if the colony expands to an appropriate size (about 200 acres), the area will be a potential release site for the black-footed ferret. However, according to FWS, in order to reintroduce the black-footed ferret in this area, the habitat would need to be at least 3,000 to 5,000 acres. Therefore, in order to meet the FWS protocol for reintroduction, an amendment to the plan is warranted that would increase the size of the prairie dog enhancement area. The site is also located within the Cebolla Wilderness, and so would require analysis to determine minimum requirements under the Wilderness Act. The RMP provided an overall planning goal for prairie dog enhancement in the decision, but site specific analysis as required in the 6340 manual has not been completed. A DNA was prepared for this project. The DNA refers back to the RMP, but since the RMP did not include site specific analysis and minimum requirements analysis, the DNA should have indicated that an implementation plan EA is needed.

The BLM sensitive species lists for both wildlife and plant species (Appendices E and F of the RMP) have undergone numerous changes since the plan was completed, and should be updated. Updating these lists would be properly completed through plan maintenance.

Monitoring has been completed for certain species, but is mostly dependent on funding. Some bird and prairie dog monitoring has been completed, and there are plans to complete raptor and burrowing animal surveys. Matching funds from environmental advocacy groups (one current example being Hawks Aloft) will help to ensure that this monitoring is completed.

c) Recommendations

- Amend RMP, if necessary, to clearly address prairie dog transplantation. Specify which lands and a larger area for this transplantation. Include in the evaluation a minimum requirements analysis which addresses guidance found in BLM Manual 6340. Work with FWS to ensure that black-footed ferret reintroduction at El Malpais fits within the goals of recovery plans, and that the acreage is sufficient to support reintroduction.
- Update sensitive species lists in Appendices E and F to reflect current lists
- Continue to partner with interested advocacy groups for funding for inventories and monitoring

6. Forest and Woodland Resources

a) Background

The goal of the forest and woodland resources in the planning area is to manage ponderosa pine stands for increased reproduction, improved stand vigor, and rehabilitation of degraded sites, and to maintain healthy piñon-juniper stands. Many of the objectives and decisions for the forestry program were pasted directly in from the fire management section of the RMP. The decisions listed in the RMP are generally broad and allow for most projects to move forward on a case-by-case basis.

b) Conclusions

Staff suggested that forestry objectives and decisions should be updated to reflect issues specific to the forestry resource, as they currently focused primarily on fire management. While these two resources necessarily have a symbiotic relationship, there are some important and necessary differences particular to the forestry program that should be addressed.

Certain management decisions were questioned by RPFO staff relating to the forestry program. The first decision relates to the prohibition on the collection of green or dead wood for sale or other commercial purposes within the NCA. Field Office staff were unsure whether this was a blanket prohibition, or whether thinned material could be sold. The problem is that without thinning, threats of wildfire significantly increase, especially in the Wild Horse Canyon subdivision. One of the best ways to remove this thinned material from the NCA is through sale. This guidance should be clarified in the RMP. Overall, the terms “collection” and “commercial” need to be better defined.

Additionally, the RMP states on Page 2-130 that for a fuelwood cutting project, an EA will be completed that will implement a permit system, appropriate fees, allowable cut, clean-up enforcement, and a monitoring plan. However, such actions should be based on the appropriate level of NEPA, whether a DNA can be used or whether an EIS is warranted.

Similarly, a prescription on Page 2-128 of the Forestry chapter states that "any vegetative improvement activity that is likely to result in surface disturbance, such as timber thinning operations that involve harvesting the trees, will be subject to Class III cultural resources inventory." Staff stated that the requirement for a Class III survey would not be appropriate in all cases, and that the RMP should state that such actions "will be subject to appropriate cultural resources inventories."

Another piece of guidance in the RMP that staff were confused about related to the statement that "when thinning results in a supply of fuelwood, the AFO will notify local groups that the wood is available for home use." The purpose of this prescription is unknown, particularly because there are no size or location caveats.

c) Recommendations

- Update forestry goals and decisions
- Clarify the prohibition on the collection of wood for commercial purposes
    - Define "collection" and "commercial"
- Modify language for fuelwood cutting projects to require an appropriate level of NEPA, not specifically an EA. Similarly, thinning operations should require appropriate cultural resource inventories, not necessarily a Class III inventory.
- Determine whether notifying local groups is practical every time thinning results in a supply of fuelwood. If not, remove this prescription.

7. Fire

a) Background

The goal of the Fire Management Program is to protect visitors, other land users, wildlife, livestock, and special physical resource features of the planning area. The RMP discusses the 2001 Joint Fire Management Plan between BLM and the NPS as the guiding implementation-level document for managing fire within the planning area. This Joint Fire Management Plan is no longer operational within the planning area, as the BLM updated their Fire Management Plan in 2004, while the NPS did not. BLM still continues to rely on the EA that analyzed the impacts of the original Joint Fire Management Plan.

b) Conclusions

Some of the authorities referenced in the Fire Management section of the RMP are out of date; specifically, the fire terminology should include the 2004 *Fire and Fuels Management Plan Amendment and Environmental Assessment for Public Land in New Mexico and Texas* (BLM-NM-PL-008-2824), which amended RMPs throughout New Mexico to incorporate current fire management policy. In addition, new fire terminology should reflect the direction issued in the

document *Guidance for the Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy*, issued by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group in 2009 (NWCG #024-2010).

Per fire staff, current management practices in the NCA are sufficient and support project-level activities.

The RMP states that "once the approved fuels treatments are completed, and where objectives have been met, areas within the Conditional Fire Use Unit will be assessed for inclusion in the Wildland Fire Use for Resource Benefits Fire Management Unit (FMU)." As stated by fire staff, sufficient cultural resource surveys and treatments have been completed in the Continental Divide, Chain of Craters WSA and Cerro Brillante Planning Units (Conditional Fire Management Unit) now to be able to include them in an FMU where fire is desired. It is unclear whether the cultural resources staff have been involved in such decisions.

A programmatic noxious weed EA has been completed for the NCA, and should be added to the Policy and Authorities section of the fire management chapter.

One area in the RMP that fire staff felt was unnecessary is the statement that fires ranging in size from 50 to 1,000 acres each will be used each year. However, the 2004 Fire Management Plan simply discusses average annual treatment size and does not focus on the overall acres to be treated. Staff felt as though this requirement was not based upon sound science or the fire needs that occur in the RMP.

Staff mentioned that the Mertz Ranch area within the NCA is a current area of focus for project implementation.

Wildland-Urban Interface is not discussed in the plan whatsoever. Staff mentioned that a statement should be added to the RMP that states that while management actions are static, they may need to change to become more restrictive as populations expand

Implementation for the fire program has been ongoing since the plan was completed in 2001. The following table describes various projects, the number of acres that have had cultural resource surveys, the number of acres that have had prescribed fires, and the number of acres that have had mechanical treatments. Relating to the cultural resource surveys, questions continue to exist as to whether these surveys have been adequate for the level of treatment proposed.

Planning Area	Project(s)	Cultural Survey Acres	RX Treated Acres to Date	Mech. Treated Acres to Date
Neck	East Encerito	70	70	0
Cerritos de Jaspe	De Jaspe/Brights Well	453	323	0
Cont. Divide	Comadre/Rendija/Stair	3,334	2,130	1,462
Chain of Craters	Chain of Craters	15,800	5,500	0
West Malpais	Brillante RX	2,840	2,800	0
Cerro Brillante	Brillante RX	14,700	1000	0
Brazo / Breaks	6 Project areas	10,484	4,555	2,229
	Total	47,681	12,278	3,691

Fire and Fuels Staff conduct monitoring of First Order Fire Effects through stand exams and before and after photo points to ensure that goals and objectives are being met. Second order fire effects are monitored by other resource specialists although it is unclear to what extent such monitoring is a priority for such resources.

Some resource specialists stated that fire and fuels program work is often analyzed through a categorical exclusion (CX) with little input from other resource specialists. This limits the opportunity for other resource specialists to ensure that there are no potential resource conflicts. This echoes a recurring theme that came up through the evaluation that noted a general lack of interdisciplinary and team spirit. Particularly relating to cultural resources, project-by project review of prescribed burns is important because of the prevalence of burnable cultural resources within the NCA.

c) Recommendations

- Update the EA that was issued for the Joint Fire Management Plan.
- Ensure that CXs are only used when appropriate. Involve other potentially affected resources when any projects are proposed, even if a CX is used.
- Add language that addresses WUI and allows for flexibility as populations surrounding the planning area expand.
- Update fire management authorities section through plan maintenance to include current management guidance.
- Ensure that the fire program and cultural resources program are in agreement regarding the number of acres that have been surveyed for cultural resources and the kinds of projects that may be allowed to proceed without additional survey.
- Ensure that the fire program and cultural resources program are in agreement regarding the effects of projects on cultural resources, even in areas that have already been surveyed. Additional planning may be necessary to avoid adverse effects to known cultural resources.

8. Lands and Realty

a) Background

There are two program goals for the Lands and Realty program: 1) continue to acquire land and easements within the planning area, as they become available from willing sellers, in order to further the protection of the resources for which the NCA was established and, 2) ensure that any rights-of-way or land-use permits issued are consistent with the purposes for which the NCA was established, including management goals for other resource programs and uses. The RMP recommended a total 41,300 acres of land be acquired. The RMP recommends that areas adjoining the NCA be added through legislative action; however, the BLM does not have the mandate to recommend areas to Congress for NCA designation.

Since the plan was issued in 2001, the RPFO has acquired 2,490 acres within the NCA. RPFO staff continue to work toward acquiring more lands, and are currently in process working with five willing sellers to acquire five additional parcels. The NCA legislation allows exchange with the Pueblo of Acoma for identified parcels. This exchange authority has been exercised in the past, but future exchanges are constrained because the legislation specifies only "trust" lands and not "fee" lands. Congressional action would be necessary to correct this limitation.

b) Conclusions

As stated by most staff, the goals in the plan are generally broad and sufficiently support the lands and realty program's work. For the most part, staff felt that these goals have been met since the plan was completed.

The RMP contains language relating to acquisitions within the Continental Divide Management Unit. Staff felt that this language was unduly narrow, leaving out important acquisition goals needed to permanently locate the Continental Divide Trail (CDT). However, as long as these acquisitions fall within the criteria of protecting the resources for which the NCA was established, the program is not restricted from such acquisitions.

Additionally, filming requests have become more prevalent at various other areas within the RPFO. Based on the NCA's proximity to Albuquerque, staff suggested adding a section to the RMP that addresses filming requests and the criteria under which such permits would be granted should interest increase within the NCA.

c) Recommendations

- Continue to acquire lands within the planning are to protect the resources for which the NCA was established
- Continue to work with the Pueblo of Acoma on exchanges to consolidate ownership.
- Add language and or criteria relating to lands to be acquired for the benefit of the CDT within the larger Continental Divide Management Unit.
- Add section addressing filming requests/permits.

9. American Indian Uses/Traditional Cultural Practices/Cultural Resources/Archaeological Resources

a) Background

Cultural and archaeological resources are described in the RMP in two sections: American Indian Uses & Traditional Cultural Practices, and Cultural Resources. The goals in the AIU/TCP Chapter are to consider the effects of action on American Indian uses and traditional cultural practices and to minimize those effects. These effects can occur based upon actions from various programs including livestock grazing, recreation (including guided trips), fire, etc. The program goals of the cultural resources chapter are to protect archaeological, historic, and sociocultural properties and to provide for their use.

Guidance for the AIU/TCP program involves the maintenance of communication lines with affected tribes and issuance of prompt responses where there are tribal concerns. The RMP puts a stronger emphasis on conservation for future use in the Cultural Resources Chapter than in the existing Rio Puerco RMP and manages the Dittert Site, the Ranger Station Reservoir, the Lobo Canyon Petroglyphs, and outstanding homestead-era sites for public values. The RMP established a goal of achieving a Class III inventory of 2.5% of the NCA over the life of the plan.

b) Conclusions

Echoing many of the other programs within the planning area, the cultural/archaeological goals as described in the RMP are generally vague.

Monitoring for cultural and archaeological resources has generally been completed by volunteers in the NCA through the State Site Watch Program. While staff was appreciative of these efforts, there were concerns that the process, collection methods, and methodology of this monitoring was generally unstructured.

Inventorying of cultural resource sites within the planning area has been successful, and has exceeded the 2.5% goal considered in the RMP. Class III cultural resource surveys have been completed for almost all areas within the NCA where people are encouraged to visit. Page 2-99 of the RMP contains a map titled "Relative Density of Anasazi Sites Based on Class II Inventory." Staff suggested that this map should be updated based on updated cultural resource inventories. It was suggested that an inventory of homesteads throughout the planning area be completed, to ensure stabilization of these sites.

One major issue within the planning area is that the current Cebolla Canyon road runs directly through an important archaeological site. The major issue relating to rerouting this road is the fact that this road runs through a WSA, which was designated in the RMP. As a result, rerouting this road would require an RMP amendment to adjust the boundary of the WSA.

Another unforeseen issue in the RMP is the fact that NPS has closed lava tubes within the National Monument as a precautionary measure prompted by the westward progression of a fungal disease known as White-nose syndrome that significantly affects bat populations. The lava tubes in the National Monument have been therefore limited to approved research and administrative

uses only, with research underway to determine if the fungus is present in the caves and if the hibernating bats in the lava tubes have the disease caused by it. The BLM has not closed the lava tubes in the NCA, and this has led to increased public visitation which has caused some detrimental effects to cultural resources and has potential detrimental effects to wildlife.

One area where the RMP may be overly broad is in the Cultural Resources Chapter, page 2-97. There it states that "appropriate measures will be taken" if the proposed prairie dog enhancement area causes disturbance that encroaches into the area of prehistoric ruins. From this language, it is unclear when encroachment takes place or what "appropriate measures" would be.

c) Recommendations

- Develop framework for reporting results of volunteer monitoring.
- Reroute Cebolla Canyon road to avoid sensitive archaeological sites. Conduct RMP associated RMP amendment to amend WSA boundary.
- Develop strategy to ensure that increased visitation to lava tubes within the NCA is protective of cultural resources.
- Define what "appropriate measures" and "encroachment" means in the context of the proposed prairie dog enhancement area.

10. Paleontological Resources

a) Background

Paleontology is combined with geology in the 2001 RMP. The goal of these programs is "to protect important, environmentally sensitive geological and paleontological resources while allowing scientific collection and research, recreational and hobby collecting, and educational and interpretive activities. There are limited management decisions relating to paleontology in the RMP, focusing mainly on participation on activity-level plans and developing stipulations where paleontological resources may be involved.

b) Conclusions

Some Jurassic-period marine fossils have been collected from the eastern and southeastern portions of the NCA in the past. Additionally, lava tubes within the NCA have potential for fossils. Although the RMP discusses the need to develop prescriptions for paleontology where such resources are found, no survey of the NCA has ever been completed. As a result, the locations of any resources are unknown, and project-level NEPA therefore rarely involves paleontology. Areas with high PFYC potential should be surveyed to assist in project proposals.

The BLM 8270 Manual was issued in 1998 and provides guidance for paleontological resources for BLM lands. However, this Manual was not referenced under the Policy and Guidance section of the Paleontology chapter. Furthermore, BLM IM 2008-009 transmitted the new Potential Fossil Yield Classification (PFYC) system, which is used to classify paleontological resource potential on public lands in order to assess possible resource impacts and mitigation needs. This new PFYC system, and the requirements of the IM and the 8270 Manual, should be incorporated into the RMP.

c) Recommendations

- Separate paleontology into its own separate section
- Update Policy and Guidance to include BLM 8270 Manual and PFYC classification IM
- Conduct paleontological surveys for areas in PFYC 4 or 5
- Add paleontological resources to those resources for which interpretive exhibits are developed
- Ensure that paleontology is considered as a potentially affected resource when projects are proposed

11. Wild Horses and Burros

a) Background

The RMP currently does not contain guidance for Wild Horses and Burros within the NCA, as there are currently no wild horses or burros within the NCA. However, a proposal exists to create a private wild horse sanctuary on private lands within the York Ranch south and adjacent to the NCA. The BLM may receive requests to use lands and forage within the NCA for these horses.

b) Conclusions

A wild horse sanctuary would likely be incompatible with riparian habitats, vegetation, and other resources throughout the planning area. Such a proposal would not likely be approved based on these conflicts. However, the fact that the RMP is currently silent on the issue might lead some to think that there is the potential to use the NCA in this capacity.

c) Recommendations

- Develop a short rationale in the RMP explaining the resource conflicts and the inconsistency of a wild horse sanctuary with the purposes of the NCA.
    - Based on the amount of new information provided, this might require a small plan amendment, or could potentially be completed through plan maintenance.

12. Wilderness Management

a) Background

There are three functional wilderness management programs within the NCA: designated Wilderness (of which there are 2 areas); Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs; of which there are 3 areas); and lands with wilderness characteristics (none identified). The program goals of wilderness management in the 2001 RMP generally echo the standard management goals in place when the RMP was completed. The RMP contains four standard goals for designated wilderness and references BLM's 1981 Wilderness Management Policy. For Wilderness Study Areas, the requirements for management are based on BLM's 1982 Wilderness Study Policy. Since the RMP was completed, the BLM has updated both the Wilderness and WSA manuals. New policy also

exists for identifying lands with wilderness characteristics. In viewing that policy, there is reason to believe that an update of the inventory is needed.

The RMP includes management decisions for wilderness which generally would satisfy policy for wilderness planning. However, the level of planning is not thorough, and may no longer be consistent with updates to BLM wilderness policy. The plan is not clear about trail management within the wilderness; however, several trails are identified on maps and brochures. The plan includes a reference to two Range Improvements Management Plans for use of motor vehicles inside the wilderness, but staff has only been able to locate one. It is unclear whether that plan remains valid for the current grazing operation needs. There are several inholding access issues, but the plan is not specific about permitted use, nor does there appear to have been permits issued, though private land access is ongoing. To ensure adequate NEPA, the wilderness areas may need to have activity level plans developed.

Trailhead facilities identified in the plan are not fully implemented.

Adjustments to the boundaries of the Canyons WSA have been identified as a need. The Canyons WSA, which was established through the Plan, and can be modified by a planning amendment, has been found to have two problematic boundary issues. First, there is no setback from boundary roads. The adjacent Cebolla Wilderness has a 100-foot boundary set back, and visitors use that setback in places for camping. The boundary of the Canyons WSA is the edge of the boundary road. This is confusing to visitors, and difficult to manage. Secondly, the boundary road of the Canyons WSA passes through a cultural site, and damage to the site is resulting. The boundary of the WSA should be moved here in order to allow for moving the road out of the cultural site.

b) Conclusions

Since the RMP was developed in 2001, numerous new policies have been issued that affect the way that wilderness, WSAs, and lands with wilderness characteristics are addressed. BLM Manual 6320 addresses the consideration of lands with wilderness characteristics in the BLM Land Use Planning process, BLM Manual 6330 addresses the management of BLM WSAs, and BLM Manual 6340 addresses the management of designated wilderness areas. These new manuals and the prescriptions therein should be addressed and followed in the RMP; as a result, the Policy and Guidance section of the Wilderness Management chapter should be updated to reflect these new manuals. For the designated wilderness, this would entail writing a Wilderness Management Plan.

Trespass is the major issue facing wilderness and WSAs within the NCA, particularly relating to livestock grazing, OHV use, and various forms of recreation. The lack of time and availability for rangers, and the lack of law enforcement patrols is a major contributor to these trespass issues.

Other issues in the area have to do with various programs proposing projects within designated wilderness or WSAs. These projects need to be evaluated in accordance with the Minimum Requirement Decision Guide to determine if they are in conformance with management of the area as wilderness. This echoes concerns from various programs that interdisciplinary cooperation and coordination is lacking across resources.

c) Recommendations

- Ensure that management going forward is in conformance with new wilderness, WSA, and LWC policy
- Make sure that project proposals in wilderness or WSAs adhere to requirements of wilderness and WSAs
- Ensure that allowable motor vehicle use in wilderness is limited to identified activities and is appropriately permitted and monitored

Appendix 1 – Interviewees and Evaluation Team

Interviewees (all from RPFO unless otherwise indicated)

- Ed Singleton, Albuquerque District Manager
- Tom Gow, Rio Puerco Field Manager
- Chip Kimball, Assistant Field Manager, Resources
- Adrienne Brumley, Assistant Field Manager, Minerals
- Andrea Chavez, Wildlife Biologist
- Angel Martinez, Planning and Environmental Coordinator
- Arlene Salazar, Realty Specialist
- Connie Maestas, Realty Specialist
- Cynthia Herhahn, Archaeologist
- Dave Mattern, Hydrologist
- Gretchen Obenauf, Archaeologist
- Jack River, Forester
- Jamie Garcia, Outdoor Recreation Planner
- Jennifer Cutillo, Interpretive Ranger
- Ken Jones, Supervisory Ranger
- Martin Visarraga, Geographer/GIS Specialist
- Matt Atencio, Rangeland Management Specialist
- Paul Yoder, Interpretive Ranger
- Phil Gensler, Paleontologist (NMSO)
- Tim Crafton, Interpretive Ranger
- Todd Richards, Fire Management Specialist

Evaluation Team (all from NMSO)

- Dave Goodman, Planning and Environmental Coordinator
- Debby Lucero, Lands and Realty Program Lead
- James Sippel, NLCS Program Lead
- Jeremy Kruger, Forestry Program Lead
- John Sherman, Wildlife Program Lead
- Lisa Bye, Fuels Program Lead
- Mary Uhl, Air Resources Program Lead
- Melanie Barnes, Planning and Environmental Coordinator
- Signa Larralde, Cultural Resources Program Lead

Appendix 2 - El Malpais and KKTR Plan Evaluation Interview Schedule

Time	Wed. Jan. 16	Thurs. Jan. 17	Fri. Jan 18
Location	**RPFO FOM's Conf Rm**	**RPFO FOM's Conf Rm**	**RPFO FOM's Conf Rm**
8:45 - 9:30	Angel Martinez – Planning and NEPA	8:45 – 10:15 Jack River – Forestry, Todd Richards – Fire	Cynthia Herhahn – Cultural Resources
9:30 – 10:15	Matt Atencio – Range	Jack River and Todd Richards	Danny Randall – Retired Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner, KKTR
<break>			
10:30 - 11:15	Jennifer Cutillo – Interpretive Ranger, El Malpais	Dave Mattern – Soil, Water, and Air	Ken Jones – Supervisory Ranger, El Malpais
11:15 - 12:00	Andrea Chavez & Dave Mattern – Riparian Resources	Arlene Salazar and Connie Maestas – Lands and Realty	Gretchen Obenauf - Archaeology
<lunch>			
1:00 - 1:45	Andrea Chavez - Wildlife		
1:45 - 2:30	2 – 3:30 Ed Singleton, Tom Gow, Chip Kimball, Adrienne Brumley - Managers	Paul Yoder – Interpretive Ranger, El Malpais	
<break>	2 – 3:30 Managers		
2:45 - 3:30	2 – 3:30 Managers	Tim Crafton – Ranger, El Malpais	

Other Interviews:

1. Phil Gensler, Paleontology – 11:30am, Wednesday, January 30
2. Jamie Garcia, Recreation/Wilderness – 1:30pm, Wednesday, January 30

Appendix 3 – Evaluation Questionnaire

El Malpais National Conservation Area – RMP Evaluation Questionnaire
December 2012 – January 2013

Name/Program: _____

Duty Station: _____

Phone Number: _____

Background—The purpose of land use plan evaluation is to determine whether the land use plan decisions and NEPA analysis are still valid and whether the plan is being implemented. Land use plans are evaluated to determine if:

a) Decisions remain relevant to current issues
b) Decisions are effective in achieving (or making progress toward achieving) desired outcomes
c) Any decisions need to be revised
d) Any decisions need to be dropped from further consideration
e) Any areas require new decisions.

BLM land use planning regulations (43 CFR § 1610.4-9) require that our land use plans establish intervals and standards for monitoring and evaluation, and the Land Use Planning Handbook (H-1601-1) requires that the BLM's existing plans should be evaluated every five years. The El Malpais Plan Record of Decision was signed in 2001, which means that the 10th year evaluation was due in 2011. Due to the Rio Puerco RMP revision, NMSO got permission from WO-210 to defer the evaluation until 2012.

Instructions: Please complete the questionnaire as accurately and objectively as possible based on your experience. The comments from the respondents, along with information from follow-up interviews, will be compiled and summarized in the evaluation report.
Please type your responses directly into the questionnaire and save the file with your initials or name before emailing it to Melanie Barnes and Dave Goodman at mgbarnes@blm.gov and jdgoodma@blm.gov by COB January 9, 2013. If you have any questions while filling out the questionnaire, please feel free to contact one of us (Dave – 505-954-2181; Melanie – 505-954-2180).
* indicates questions required to be included in evaluation questionnaires as per the Land Use Planning Handbook.

Validity and Effectiveness of Current RMP Decisions

1. * *"Program goals"* are described for each program in Ch. 2 of the *El Malpais Plan*; are the goals described sufficient and relevant?
2. *Are the RMP decisions relevant, effective, and meeting program goals as stated in the plan?
3. *Are there new data or analyses that significantly affect the planning decisions or the validity of the NEPA analysis?
4. *Are there unmet needs or new opportunities that can best be met though a plan amendment or revision, or will current management practices be sufficient?
5. *Are there new legal or policy mandates as a result of new statutes, proclamations, Executive Orders, or court orders not addressed in the plan?
6. *Have there been significant changes in Tribal or other governmental plans or local/regional demographic issues that are not addressed in this RMP? What are they?
7. If your answer is yes to the above, what would be recommendations for updating the current RMP?
8. Do any decisions need to be revised, added, or dropped from the plan?
9. Do you have any recommendations to update or revise any decisions that would require a plan amendment or revision?
10. Do you have any other observations related to the validity and effectiveness of the decisions in the *El Malpais Plan*?

Implementation Progress

11. *Are the management actions described in the plan for the respective programs being implemented? About what percentage of them have been implemented since the RMP was completed?
12. Are activity level plans up to date?
    a. Travel management plan
    b. Wilderness Management Plan
    c. Allotment Management Plan
    d. ACEC plan
    e. Fire Management Plan
13. Are non-NEPA plans/schedules complete and up-to-date?
    a. Business plan
    b. Sign plan
    c. WSA monitoring schedule (if needed)
    d. Agreements (MOU, AA, if needed)
    e. Etc

14. Regulations
    a. Are appropriate public use regulations in place?
    b. Are the regulations in place still needed?
    c. Has NEPA and Federal Register steps been complete to support regulations?
15. Are actions/records up-do-date
    a. MTP
    b. Withdrawals recorded
16. How do you measure and evaluate the management actions described in the Plan or in tiered Activity Plans?
17. How are monitoring results incorporated into management actions?
18. What are the reasons for some actions not being implemented?
19. How are programs that are behind on implementation addressing the deficiencies for implementation, if any?
20. Are there implemented actions being implemented currently that were not anticipated in the plan? Would any of these actions warrant a plan amendment or a new activity plan?
21. Do you have any other observations related to plan effectiveness and implementation? What are your recommendations to improve the effectiveness and success of implementing RMP decisions?

Effectiveness of Monitoring

22. Has monitoring of plan implementation been occurring? If so, please describe. If not, please discuss potential reasons why monitoring is not occurring.
23. *Are new inventories warranted pursuant to the BLM's duty to maintain inventories on a continuous basis (FLPMA, Section 201)?
24. What are your recommendations to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of monitoring for your program?

Other

25. Do you have any other comments?

Appendix 4 – In-Person Interview Questionnaire

RMP Evaluation In-Person Interview Questionnaire

RMP being evaluated: _____
Interviewer: _____
Interviewee/Program: _____

Questions:

1. Are the RMP decisions relating to your program relevant, valid, effective, and meeting program goals as stated in the plan?
2. Are there any decisions that need to be revised, added, or dropped from the plan? Does the plan need to be updated or revised based upon:
    a. New data or analysis?
    b. Unmet needs or new opportunities?
    c. New or existing legal or policy mandates?
    d. Changes in related/neighboring plans or other local issues?
3. If your answer is yes to the above, what would be recommendations for updating the current RMP?
4. Are the management actions described in the plan for your respective program being implemented? Do you have any suggestions for improvement?
5. Are activity-level and other implementation-level plans relating to your program up to date?
6. Has monitoring of plan implementation been occurring? If so, please describe. If not, please discuss why not. What are your recommendations to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of monitoring for your program?
7. Are new inventories for your program or resource warranted?
8. Do you have any other comments?