

FORT STANTON-SNOWY RIVER CAVE NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA

Decision Record

DOI-BLM-NM-P010-2010-149-EA

Decision

The decision is hereby made to approve the proposed Resource Management Plan Amendment (RMPA) for the Fort Stanton-Snowy River Cave National Conservation Area (NCA) and select Alternative A (Preferred) as presented in the Final Environmental Assessment (EA). An environmental assessment was prepared for the plan in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969. The Plan and specific management decisions for the NCA are included in this Decision Record (DR).

Compliance

This decision complies with the requirements of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) (43 USC 1701), and NEPA (42 USC 4321). The decision amends the 1997 Roswell RMP to conform to the requirements of the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 (Public Law 111-11), subtitle C, Section 2202, which replaced the Fort Stanton Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) boundary with the new boundary for the NCA, which is addressed in this RMPA. This plan is consistent with plans and policies of DOI and BLM, other federal agencies, tribal governments, state government, and local governments to the extent that the guidance and local plans are also consistent with the purposes, policies, and programs of federal law and regulation applicable to public lands. No formal comments were received from federal or tribal governments indicating the proposed plan was inconsistent with other existing plans or policies.

Selected Alternative

Features

The selected alternative is Alternative A, the preferred alternative as presented in the Final EA. The selected alternative would adopt the goals and objectives of the 1997 Roswell RMP, the 2001 Fort Stanton ACEC Final Activity Plan and the Rio Bonito Acquired Lands (RBAL) Final Activity Plan.

Mitigation and Monitoring

Mitigation measures are incorporated into the approved RMPA. Sensitive resources are protected through resource allocations, recreation use management, and limitations and restrictions on developments and other activities. All practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm is carried forth in the RMPA. During implementation and, in some cases, the next tier of planning, additional measures may be taken, as necessary, to mitigate potential impacts on the environment. Monitoring will determine how effective these measures are in minimizing environmental impacts.

BLM will monitor the plan at a minimum of five-year intervals to ensure that decisions are effectively implemented, and to evaluate indicators of change identified in the various natural resource and program decisions. During the life of the approved plan, BLM expects that new information gathered from field inventories and assessments, research, other agency studies, and other sources will update baseline data or support new management techniques and scientific principles. To the extent that such new information or actions address issues covered in the Approved RMPA, BLM will integrate the data through a process called plan maintenance or updating. As part of this process, BLM will periodically review management actions and the Approved RMPA to determine whether the objectives in this and other applicable planning documents are being met. Where they are not being met, BLM will consider adjustments of appropriate scope. Where BLM considers taking or approving actions that would alter or not conform to the overall direction of the Approved RMPA, BLM will prepare a plan amendment and an environmental analysis of appropriate scope, and seek additional public comment.

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

The FONSI supporting EA DOI-BLM-NM-P010-2010-149-EA considered the context and intensity of implementing the Selected Alternative. The FONSI concluded that (1) implementation of the Selected Alternative would not have significant environmental effects; and (2) the Selected Alternative did not constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement was not necessary and was not prepared.

Public Involvement

In April 2010, the Roswell Field Office held two public meetings in the communities most directly affected by the NCA – one in Capitan, New Mexico and one in Ruidoso, New Mexico. A total of twenty-four people attended those meetings. Fourteen comments were received at these public meetings and 58 comments were received from letters and e-mails. The oral and written comments about Fort Stanton Cave and the Snowy River Passage included cave management in general, visitation limits, discovery and survey criteria, bat habitat and hibernaculum, air quality and water quality. Comments about surface management within the NCA included livestock grazing, development of a campground, trails, vegetation management, and management prescriptions for areas now included in the NCA that were not part of the Fort Stanton Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

Information was also sent to and comments were solicited from Comanche Nation, the Pueblo of Isleta, the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo, the Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma, and the Mescalero Apache Tribe. A meeting between the BLM and the Mescalero Apache Tribal Historic Preservation Officer was conducted in August 2010. All the agencies and groups cited in Section VI of this document were invited to comment. The BLM also conducted internal scoping with an interdisciplinary team of resource specialists. Internal and external scoping efforts identified

several issues and management concerns that should be considered in developing the NCA management plan.

Decision Rationale

The decision was based on requirements of the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 (Public Law 111-11), subtitle C, Section 2202; as well as interdisciplinary review from specialist at the Roswell Field Office and public comments.

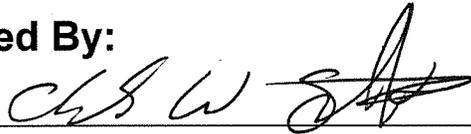
Alternative A, the preferred alternative was selected; sensitive resources are protected through resource allocations, recreation use management, and limitations and restrictions on developments and other activities. All practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm is carried forth in the RMPA.

Protests and Appeals

The Proposed RMPA was circulated for a 30-day protest period in accordance with 43 CFR 1610.5-2. The protest period began August 23, 2013 and ended September 22, 2013. No protest letters were received. The decision of the BLM Director is the final decision of the Department of the Interior and exhausts internal appeal opportunities.

Recommended By:

Signature:



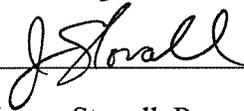
Date:

1/6/2014

Charles Schmidt, Roswell Field Office Manager

Concurrence By:

Signature:



Date:

1-6-2014

James Stovall, Pecos District Manager

Approved By:

Signature:



Date:

1/10/14

Jesse Juen, New Mexico State Director