

FORT STANTON AREA OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN

ROUTE DESIGNATION PLAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT



**ROSWELL FIELD OFFICE
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
EA # NM-060-2002-0119**





United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Roswell Field Office
2909 West 2nd
Roswell, NM 88201

In reply refer to:
8322
Fort Stanton ACEC

JUL 09 2003

Dear Reader:

Attached is the final document for the Route Designation Plan / Environmental Assessment (RDP/EA) for the Fort Stanton Area of Critical Environmental Concern. The Planning Process for the RDP/EA is concluded with the signing of the plan and environmental assessment. The completion of the RDP/EA process also makes the beginning of the implementation phase of this plan.

The final RDP/EA records the acceptance of the Draft Route Designation Plan / Environmental Assessment. Eight public comments were received during the sixty day public comment period. These public comments slightly modified the document and changes were made to reflect the comments.

Implementation of the approved plan and environmental assessment will involve many people and much effort over the years. Your continued interest and involvement in the BLM's management of the public lands and resources of the Fort Stanton Area of Critical Environmental Concern is appreciated and will be an important part of successful implementation of the RDP/EA. If you are interested in more specific information about the plan implementation or would like to become more involved in the management of the resources, please write to the address on the letterhead or call (505) 627-0272.

Sincerely,

Edwin L. Roberson
Field Manager

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

ROUTE DESIGNATION

	Page
Introduction/Background	1-2
Challenges/Goals and Objectives	
Off-Highway Vehicle Management	2-3
Recreation Trails	3-4
Map, Designated Routes of Travel	6
Map, Designated Trails	7
Proposal	8
Transportation Network	8
Road and trail Construction	9
Trail Criteria Guide	9
Signing	10
Examples of Signing	11-12
Public Announcements	13
Post designated Actions	13
Sign Installation	13
Use Supervision	14
Environmental Monitoring	14
Enforcement	14
Maintenance	14
Cost Estimates	14
Environmental Analysis	15
Approvals	15

TABLE OF CONTENTS CONTINUED:

CHAPTER TWO

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
FOR FORT STANTON ACEC
ROUTE DESIGNATION**

	Page
Introduction	16
Background	16
Purpose And Need For The Proposed Action	17
Conformance With Land Use Planning	17
Relationship To Statutes, Regulations, Or Other Plans	17
Proposed Action and Alternative	18
Description Of The Proposed Action	18
Transportation Network	19
Sighing	20
Alternatives To The Proposed Action	20
Alternative 1 (No Action Alternative)	20
Description Of The Affected Environment	20
General Setting	20
Affected Resources/Critical Elements	21
Topography	21
Climate	22
Vegetation	22
Lands/Realty/ROW	23
Minerals	23
Description of the Affected Environment	24
Air Quality	24
Water Quality	24
Water Quality Drinking/Ground	25
Soils	26-27
Floodplains	28
Non-Native, Invasive Species	29-30
Terrestrial and Aquatic Wildlife	
Habitat	30-31
Cultural Resources	32
Cave/Karst Resources	33
Outdoor Recreation	33
Visual Resources	34
Road/Trail Maintenance	34

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

Table of Contents Continued:	Page
Cumulative Impacts	35
Mitigation Measures	36
Residual Impacts	36
Persons and Agencies Consulted	36
Literature Cited	36-37
Appendix B.	
OHV Definitions and Designations	38-39
Public Comments 60 day public comment period	39-48
Decision Record	49
Finding of No Significant Impact/Rationale	50-51

CHAPTER ONE

FORT STANTON

AREA OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN

ROUTE DESIGNATION PLAN

INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND:

During 1999-2001 The Fort Stanton Area of Critical Environmental Concern collaborative activity plan (ACEC Plan) (NM-060-2000-0141) was developed with local communities and representatives from Lincoln County following the recommendations of the Roswell Approved Resource Management Plan of October 1997(RMP). The ACEC Plan was completed on August 28, 2001. One of the outgrowths of the ACEC plan is to develop a Route Designation Plan/environmental Assessment (RDP/EA). This RDP/EA will designate vehicle routes of travel as open or closed. Certain designated routes of travel for mountain bike/horse/hiking trails will be closed to motorized vehicles. The attached base map from the ACEC Plan, page 2-16, "Fort Stanton Existing Roads and Proposed Road Closures", will be used as a basis for the proposed route designation within the ACEC. Refinements in Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) management will be based on the aforementioned map.

The location of the Fort Stanton ACEC is within the un-surveyed portion of the Fort Stanton Military Reservation, New Mexico Prime Meridian. The location of the ACEC is T9S., Range 14 & 15E., T 10S., R14 & 15E(see attached map).The management goals of the ACEC are to protect the biological, archaeological and scenic qualities of Fort Stanton, while providing quality recreation opportunities.

The proposed Designated Trails map on page five shows the proposed trails on the Fort Stanton ACEC

The management goal in the 1997 RMP are to protect the

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

biological, archaeological and scenic qualities of the ACEC, while providing quality recreation opportunities. The RMP states the use of Off-Highway Vehicles (OHV's) will be limited to designated roads and trails. The plan is also consistent with 43 Code of Federal Regulations 8342, and BLM Manual 8342.

The RMP lists the following details regarding OHV travel within the ACEC:

- A 100-foot wide corridor measured from the edge of the Rio Bonito and Rio Salado will be closed to OHV use to protect sensitive riparian resources, except for the use of designated roads within the corridor.
- All multi-use trails (equestrian, hiking, and mountain bike trails) that are located on existing roads will be open to OHV use.
- The Feather Cave Archaeological Complex will be closed to OHV use, except for U.S. Highway 380 and the Fort Stanton Cave Road.

The Fort Stanton ACEC plan developed the following Statements, challenges, actions, goals and objectives as a baseline for this Plan/EA:

OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE MANAGEMENT

Under the Roswell RMP, approximately 24,000 acres was designated as limited to designated roads and trails for OHV use, to protect soils, cultural resources, and vegetation, especially threatened and endangered species and their habitat. The use of OHV's will be limited to designated roads and trails, with the exceptions to the limited designation listed in Chapter 1 of the ACEC Plan.

The RDP/EA will provide the basis for signing the ACEC to implement the RMP OHV decisions. Most users have used the area

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

in a prudent manner. Due to increased pressures from the public, users have driven over terrain and caused new two-track roads. These newly formed tracks have been followed by other recreationists and have caused the two-track trails to develop into established roads. A route designation plan/environmental assessment (Plan/EA) is the outcome of the recommendations in the ACEC Plan. The Plan/EA will develop routes of travel as open or closed. Certain routes of travel such as mountain bike/horse/hiking trails would be closed to motor vehicles.

Challenges:

- Preventing new roads being formed by users.
- Closing roads to areas where appropriate, such as habitat for the endangered Kuenzler hedgehog cactus.
- Closing roads which have been traditionally used to access areas within the ACEC.
- Determining which roads should be maintained and to what standard.

GOAL:

Manage OHV's to protect the environment within the Fort Stanton ACEC.

Objectives:

- Protect special use trails from unauthorized use.
- Close unwanted roads through the transportation plan process.
- Designate roads, parking areas and trail heads.

RECREATION TRAILS

The majority of the 40 miles of existing roads/trails have not been adequately developed for recreational use. The Fort Stanton Riding/Hiking Trails consist of old two-track and bladed roads, and are not conducive to hikers who want a trail experience. In addition to the existing trails up to 20 miles of new trails (hiking, equestrian or OHV) could be developed under the RMP. The proposed new trails will exclude Off

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

Highway Vehicles from certain areas. The Rio Bonito National Petroglyph Trail has been developed for about 1.5 miles by volunteer help. The trail needs modifications and yearly maintenance. The Tlaloc trail is mostly old two-track and bladed roads. Some modifications will be needed to attract mountain bikers to continue to use this trail.

Challenges:

- Linking trail designation and maintenance with the route designation plan to determine which roads would be converted to trails, and the maintenance or improvements to trails within the ACEC.
- Developing a trail plan for the ACEC which would include location and length of new trails within the ACEC; determining use of trails by foot traffic, horse or mountain bikes; marking all trails within the ACEC; and possibly hardening existing crossings of the Rio Bonito and Salado Creek.

Action:

- BLM will begin a route designation planning process (this document) that will guide trail development and possible road closures within the ACEC. The goal of the plan will be to eliminate as much of the current road/trail dual designation as possible. This will be a public process and include environmental analysis.

Goal:

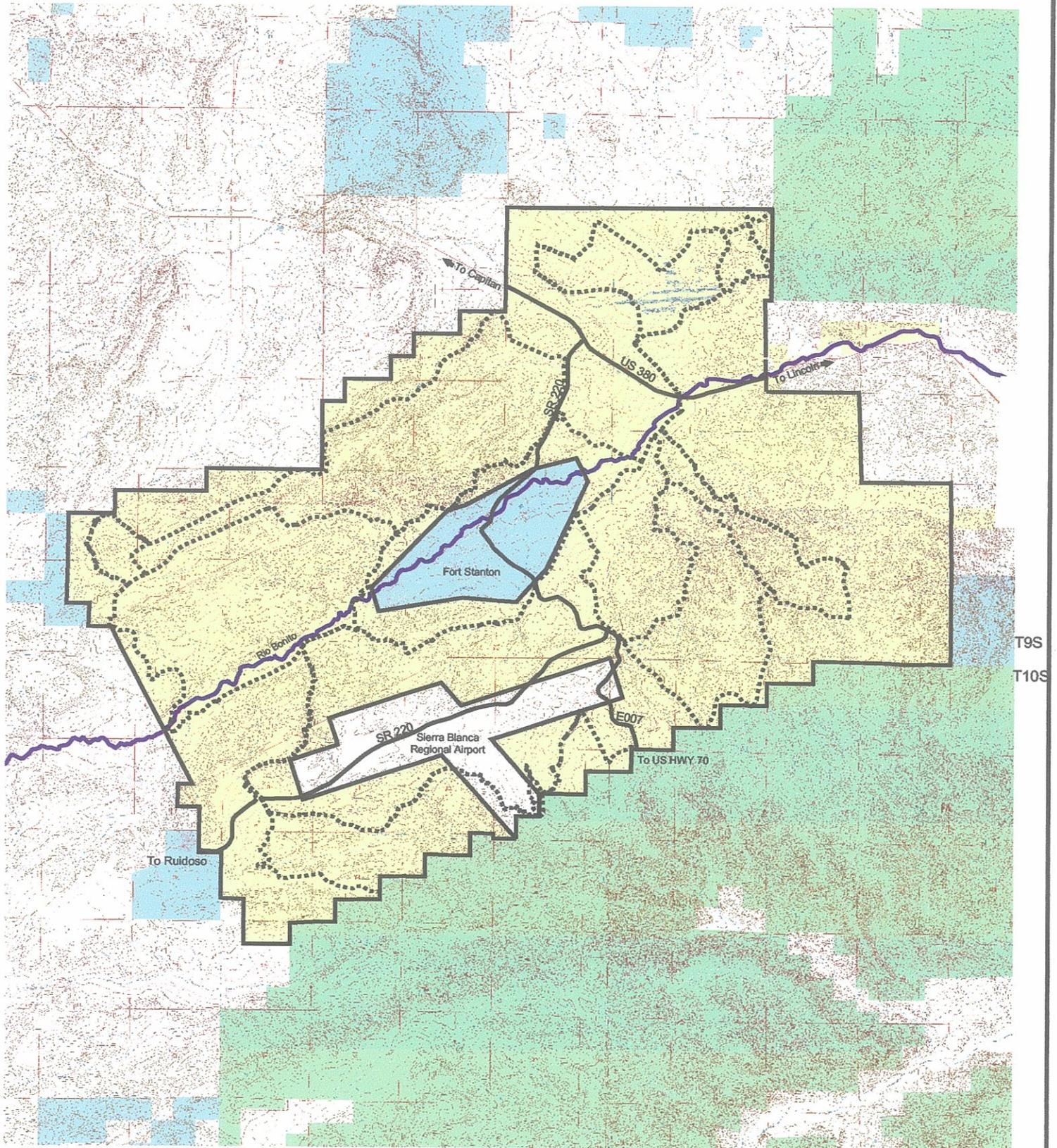
- Develop environmentally responsible special use trails within the ACEC, monitor potential conflicts between recreation users of these trails and mitigate those conflicts.

Objectives:

- Design, Develop and Designate trails that are environmentally friendly and blend into the landscape.
- Sign trails and provide information and brochures at trail heads.



Fort Stanton Designated Trails



Produced by the Roswell Field Office
GIS Specialist on June 17, 2003.

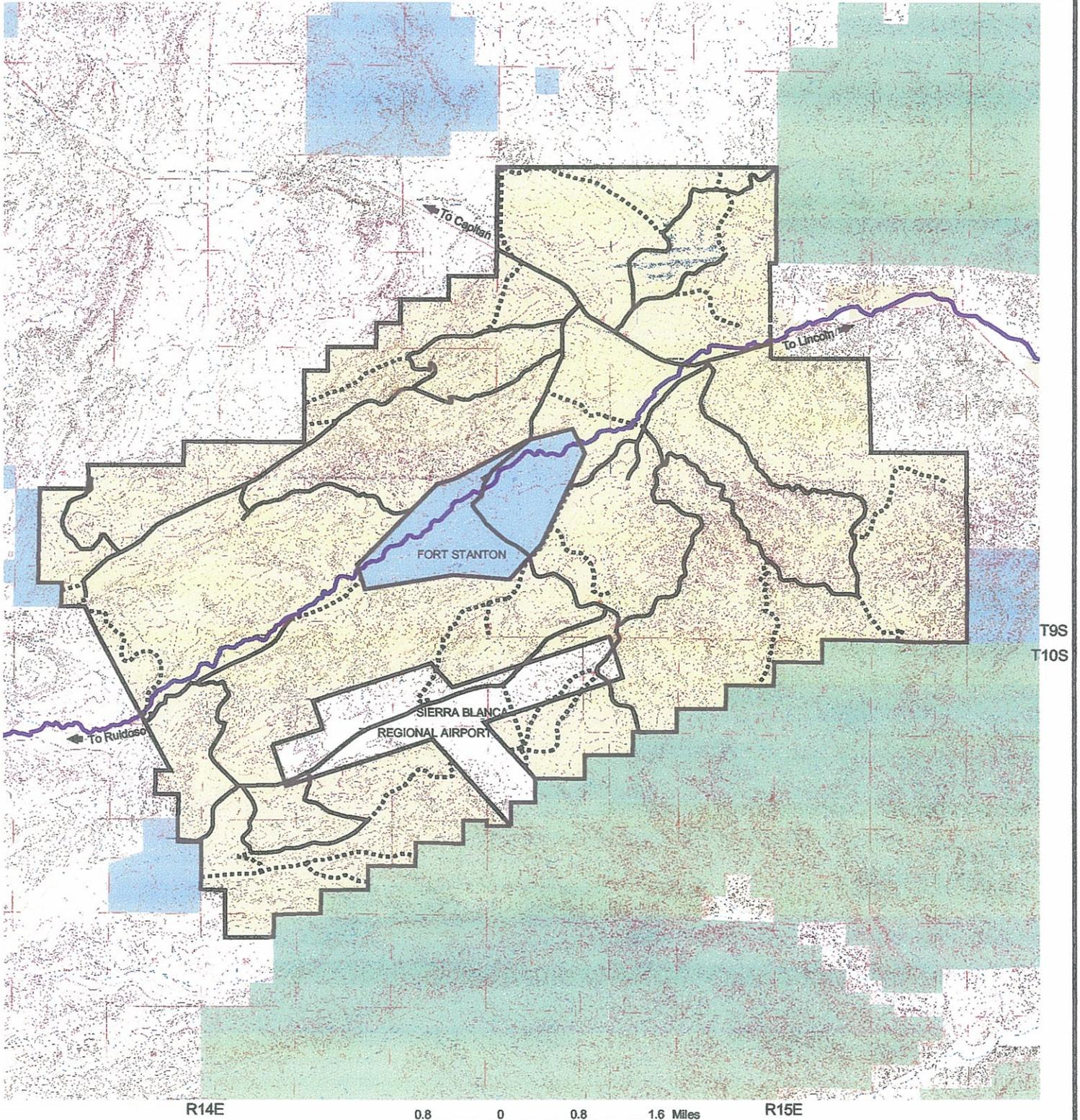
- State
- Forest
- Private
- Public
- State and County Roads
- Designated Trails

No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual use or aggregate use with other data, or for purposes not intended by BLM. Spatial information may not meet National Map Accuracy Standards. This information may be updated without notification.



Fort Stanton

Designated Routes of Travel and Road Closures



- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|-----------------------------|
|  |  |  |  |  | Designated Routes of Travel |
| State | Forest | Private | Public |  | Roads Closed |

Produced by the Roswell Field Office GIS Specialist on April 17, 2003.
 No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual use or aggregate use with other data, or for purposes not intended by BLM. Spatial information may not meet National Map Accuracy Standards. This information may be updated without notification.

PROPOSAL:

Transportation Network:

Implementation of the route designation network within the ACEC will reduce the 54 miles of traveled roads and two track roads within the ACEC to 35 miles of active maintained roads within the ACEC. The existing roads proposed for abandonment are redundant or cause resource problems, have no function, no legal access, or are not needed within the ACEC. The proposed road and trail network would provide visitor access to the majority of the ACEC, while providing protection of threatened and endangered species, riparian areas, cultural resources, special use trails, and other special areas.

The proposed trails will add 60 miles of multi-use trails to the ACEC. All of the proposed trails will be located away from existing roads or in some cases on previously closed roads within the ACEC. The proposed trails all have been ridden, Global Positioned (GPS), and designed by equestrian riders. The American Endurance Ride Conference(AERC), Lincoln County Sheriffs Posse, and many other interested riders have volunteered thousands of hours to mark, design, and ride the proposed trails. Three national endurance events have used the trails under BLM special recreation permits to try out the trails for equestrian purposes.

In the past, roads were used as trails within the ACEC. Through the Route Designation Plan (RDP) some roads will be closed to motor vehicle travel and reserved for non-motorized use. Other roads will be closed completely and reclaimed. Existing trails such as the Rio Bonito Petroglyph Trail and established mountain bike trails will be maintained or improved on an as needed basis. Newly proposed trails will be developed using the trail criteria set out in this document.

Administrative vehicular use of non-designated routes may be allowed on an as needed basis. Use of non-designated routes will be kept to the minimum possible and may include limited vehicular access to maintain wildlife guzzlers, existing pipelines and other resource facilities within the ACEC.

Road and Trail Construction:

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

Roads within the ACEC will be managed to BLM Road Standards. Trails, if constructed, will be built and designed to U.S. Forest Service standards for trail construction. If existing roads are used, they will be allowed to narrow down using the existing vegetation, such as pinon and juniper trees, to lessen the road width. Some of the proposed closed roads will be narrowed by mechanical means to lessen the trail width and OHV use.

Trail location objectives are to provide a facility on the ground that produces a minimum physical impact on the land, is visually pleasing, requires minimum maintenance, and functionally provides for the intended use.

Trail Criteria Guide:

The following general and specific trail criteria will be used as a guide:

- A. Use existing trails as much as possible.
- B. Terrain and elevation variety should not be extreme; suitable for family backpacking and mountain biking.
- C. Route is suitable for long season use.
- D. Locate where suitable for both winter and summer activity to the degree terrain and climate patterns permit.
- E. Provide access points to towns, villages and National Forest.
- F. Trail should meander to take advantage of scenic panoramas, historical and resource management situations for interpretation purposes.
- G. Trails should not make great or sudden changes in elevation.
- H. Trail grades should contour rather than undulate up and over steep topography.
- I. Trail networks should disperse visitors away from fragile riparian areas and areas of environmental concerns.
- J. Avoid trail locations along heavy use roads.

Signing:

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

Route designation signing is proposed for the roads and trails within the ACEC. The signing will be designed to inform the public of the status of the road or trail. Every effort will be made to complement the route signing and numbering of the adjacent U.S. Department of Agriculture, Lincoln National Forest sign plan.

All open routes are designated by route number signs, Trail routes are marked with "T" before the number. Roads will be marked with an "R" before the number. Signs will have vehicle symbols to designate the types of vehicles allowed on the roads and trails. Symbols with a Red Slash indicate activity that is not allowed (see examples of OHV signing). Absence of a route designation sign on roads, two-track roads or trails means the route is closed to motorized vehicle use. Unless otherwise designated, travel by foot or horseback is welcome on undeveloped BLM Public Lands.

Signs will be placed at access points to the ACEC stating "do not drive off designated roads" to deter the proliferation of additional unplanned vehicle routes. If new unplanned routes are created, they will be signed "Closed to Vehicles"

PROPOSED SIGNING FOR AREA

**LIMITED USE AREA
TRAIL OPEN TO**

(ORANGE BACKGROUND WHITE REFLECTIVE LETTERING)



**CLOSED TO ALL
MOTORIZED
VEHICLES**

White reflective background with black letters

TO PROTECT NATURAL RESOURCE VALUES



THE NATIONAL SYSTEM OF PUBLIC LANDS
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
FEDERAL OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT



BUREAU OF
LAND MANAGEMENT
(BLM)
ROSWELL FIELD
OFFICE
2500 W. SECOND
ROSWELL, NM 80701
(505) 827-5072



**LIMITED
USE AREA**

(ORANGE BACKGROUND WHITE REFLECTIVE LETTERING)

**VEHICLES MUST REMAIN ON
DESIGNATED ROADS
NO CROSS COUNTRY TRAVEL**

White reflective background with black letters

TO PROTECT NATURAL RESOURCE VALUES



THE NATIONAL SYSTEM OF PUBLIC LANDS
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
FEDERAL OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT



BUREAU OF
LAND MANAGEMENT
(BLM)
ROSWELL FIELD
OFFICE
2500 W. SECOND
ROSWELL, NM 80701
(505) 827-5072



**OPEN
ROUTE**

(ORANGE BACKGROUND WHITE REFLECTIVE LETTERING)

**THIS ROAD OR TRAIL IS OPEN
TO ALL VEHICLE USE**

White reflective background with black letters

TO PROTECT NATURAL RESOURCE VALUES



THE NATIONAL SYSTEM OF PUBLIC LANDS
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
FEDERAL OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT



BUREAU OF
LAND MANAGEMENT
(BLM)
ROSWELL FIELD
OFFICE
2500 W. SECOND
ROSWELL, NM 80701
(505) 827-5072



**CLOSED
ROAD**

(ORANGE BACKGROUND WHITE REFLECTIVE LETTERING)

**THE ROAD BEYOND
SIGN OPEN TO
ADMINISTRATIVE
USE ONLY**

White reflective background with black letters

TO PROTECT NATURAL RESOURCE VALUES



THE NATIONAL SYSTEM OF PUBLIC LANDS
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Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

Approximately 24,000 acres have been designated as limited to designated roads and trails for OHV use under the existing RMP.

In the event of route closures, it may be necessary to construct physical constraints to routes of travel. This will be accomplished either with pipe fences or steel gates cemented into the ground across routes, or with a series of boulders, high berms, or deep ditches depending on the terrain. Smaller four foot gates and small cattle guards can be used to designate mountain bike and equestrian travel routes when these routes pass through fences or next to administratively approved routes that are closed to vehicles. Zig/Zag pedestrian gates will be used as access through fences on designated trails.

E. PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENTS

Public notification of vehicle designations was conducted extensively during development of the 1997 Roswell RMP. The RMP contains a list of agencies, organizations, and individuals notified of the planning effort, as well as associated Federal Register Notices, newspapers, television and radio stations notified through press releases. The Proposed RMP/Final Environmental Impact Statement includes all public input received during the planning process, and the BLM's responses.

Public notification of the proposed designated routes is part of this plan and the Environmental Assessment process for this route designation plan. Additional public notifications through the Federal Register and the local news media will be conducted for any proposed closures.

F. POST-DESIGNATION ACTIONS

1. Sign Installation: Signs denoting all routes of travel will be installed as the first priority of the finalized plan. Routes closed to vehicles will be signed when the Federal Register notice is finalized (for existing routes) or as they are discovered (for new, trespass routes).

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

2. Use Supervision: The BLM will conduct regular field patrols using volunteers and employees, at least once per month, to check signs and watch for new, unplanned routes.

3. Environmental Monitoring: The BLM will use enlarged aerial photographs at least once every ten years to evaluate long-term changes in natural resource conditions. On the ground monitoring will be conducted by BLM specialists and by contract. The impacts on natural resource values are not anticipated to be significant as analyzed in Environmental Assessment NM-060-2002-0119.

4. Enforcement: BLM Law Enforcement Rangers will be used to ensure compliance with the vehicle designations, and may issue citations for violators. Trespass procedures can also be used to reclaim administrative costs from violators, vandals attacking signs or vehicle barriers, etc.

5. Maintenance: Signs and vehicle barriers will be maintained or replaced as needed to insure public understanding of and compliance with OHV rules.

G. COST ESTIMATES:

The anticipated costs of implementing this plan are:

1. Plan preparation and approval ½ work month.
2. Sign requisition and procurement \$5,000.
3. Federal Register Notice \$500.
4. Use supervision and enforcement, two work month annually.
5. Vehicle barriers. It is anticipated that vehicle barriers are needed at an approximate cost of \$500 each.

H. ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

An environmental analysis of this plan is found in Chapter Two in EA-NM-060-2002-0119.

I. APPROVAL

The Fort Stanton Off-Highway Vehicle Route Designation Plan and Environmental Assessment has been

Prepared By:

Paul T. Happel 6/17/03
Paul T. Happel, Natural Resource Specialist Date

Reviewed By:

Tim Kreager 4/19/03
Tim Kreager, Assistant Field Manager for Resources Date

Approved By:

Edwin L. Roberson 7/7/03
Edwin L. Roberson, Field Office Manager Date

CHAPTER TWO

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FORT STANTON ACEC ROUTE DESIGNATION PLAN

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT NUMBER NM-060-2002-0119

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background

The Fort Stanton Area was designated as the Fort Stanton Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) in the 1997 Roswell Approved Resource Management Plan (RMP), Record of Decision (ROD). On August 28, 2001, a decision record was signed for the Roswell Field Office, Fort Stanton Area of Critical Environmental Concern Final Activity Plan, Number NM-060-2000-0141 (ACEC). One of the outgrowths of the ACEC Plan is to develop a Route Designation Plan/environmental Assessment (RDP/EA). This RDP/EA will designate vehicle routes of travel and trails as open or closed, and develop the potential for new trails within the ACEC. In addition, certain routes of travel such as mountain bike/horse/hiking trails will be closed to motor vehicles. The attached base map from the ACEC Plan page 2-16, "Fort Stanton Existing Roads and Proposed Road Closures" will be used as a basis of the proposed route designation within the ACEC.

The location of the Fort Stanton ACEC is within the un-surveyed portion of the Fort Stanton Military Reservation, New Mexico Prime Meridian. The location of the ACEC is in T9S., Range 14 & 15E., T 10S., R14 & 15E (see attached map). The management goals of the ACEC are to protect the biological, archaeological and scenic qualities of Fort Stanton, while providing for quality recreation opportunity.

B. Purpose and Need For The Proposed Action

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

The ACEC has not been signed adequately to implement the RMP Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) decisions for the ACEC. Due to increased pressure from the public, users have driven over terrain and caused new two-track roads. These newly formed tracks have been followed by other recreationists and have caused the two-track routes to develop into established roads. This Environmental Assessment (EA) will designate routes of travel within the ACEC. The routes of travel will be designated open or closed (see definitions in appendix). Also, certain routes of travel such as mountain bike/horse/hiking trails would be developed solely for that use and closed to motor vehicles.

C. Conformance with Land Use Planning

The Proposed action is consistent with Bureau policy and guidance as well as actions analyzed in the Roswell Approved Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision of October 1997 Record of Decision(RMP).

The Fort Stanton Area of Critical Environmental Concern, Final Activity Plan, was developed March 2001 , # NM-060-2000-0141, as an activity plan derived from the RMP.

D. Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, or Other Plans

Other pertinent statutes affecting the proposed action include:

Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of October 21, 1976, as amended;
National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (36 CFR 800);
Clean Air Act (CAA) as amended (42 U.S.C. 7401);
Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA), as amended (42 U.S.C. 300f);
Clean Water Act (CWA) of 1977 (33 U.S.C)1251;
Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) of 1976, as amended (42 U.S.C. 6901);
43 Code of Federal Regulations 8342 Designation of areas and trails.
BLM Manual 8340 Off-Road Vehicles of 9/13/1885.
BLM Manual 8341 Conditions of Use (Off Road Vehicles) of 5/25/1982.

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

BLM Manual 8342 Designation of Areas and Trails (Off-Road Vehicles) of 9/13/1985.

New Mexico Motorized Vehicle Access Program, Supplemental Guidance for Off-Highway Vehicle Management of February 24, 1994.

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

A. Description of the Proposed Action

Transportation Network:

Implementation of the route designation network within the ACEC will reduce the 54 miles of traveled roads and two track roads within the ACEC to 35 miles of active maintained roads within the ACEC. The existing roads proposed for abandonment are redundant or cause resource problems, have no function, no legal access, or are not needed within the ACEC. The proposed road and trail network would provide visitor access to the majority of the ACEC, while providing protection of threatened and endangered species, riparian areas, cultural resources, special use trails, and other special areas.

The proposed trails will add 60 miles of multi-use trails to the ACEC. All of the proposed trails will be located away from existing roads or in some cases on previously closed roads within the ACEC. The proposed trails all have been ridden, Global Positioned (GPS), and designed by equestrian riders. The American Endurance Ride Conference (AERC), Lincoln County Sheriffs Posse, and many other interested riders have volunteered thousands of hours to mark, design, and ride the proposed trails. Three national endurance events have used the trails under BLM special recreation permits to try out the trails for equestrian purposes.

In the past, roads were used as trails within the ACEC. Through the Route Designation Plan (RDP) some roads will be closed to motor vehicle travel and reserved for non-motorized use. Other roads will be closed completely and reclaimed. Existing trails such as the Rio Bonito Petroglyph Trail and established mountain bike trails will be maintained or improved on an as needed basis. Newly proposed trails will be

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

developed using the trail criteria set out in this document.

Administrative vehicular use of non-designated routes may be allowed on an as needed basis. Use of non-designated routes will be kept to the minimum possible and may include limited vehicular access to maintain wildlife guzzlers, existing pipelines and other resource facilities within the ACEC.

In a USDA/Forest Service publication dated June 2000, on Forest roads, A Synthesis of Scientific Information the text states that: "Terrestrial vertebrates are affected by roads on populations act along three lines: Direct effects, such as loss and fragmentation; road use effects, such as traffic causing vertebrate avoidance or road kill; and additional facilitation effects, such as over hunting or over trapping, which can increase with road access".

Within the ACEC some of the roads cause fragmentation of habitat, vertebrate avoidance and over hunting by visitors to the ACEC. Some existing roads proposed for deletion are redundant or are presently causing resource damage within the ACEC, such as erosion and loss of vegetation. Administrative vehicular use of non-designated routes may be allowed on a as needed basis. Use of non-designated routes will be kept to the minimum possible and may include limited vehicular access to maintain wildlife guzzlers, existing pipelines and other resource facilities within the ACEC.

In the past roads were used as trails within the ACEC. Through the RDP some roads will be closed to motor vehicle travel and reserved for non-motorized use. Other roads will be closed and reclaimed. Existing trails such as the Rio Bonito Petroglyph Trail and established mountain bike trails will be maintained or improved on an as needed basis. Newly proposed trails will be developed using the trail criteria set out in this document. The RMP proposed 20 miles of new trails within the ACEC. New trails will be developed using the trail criteria guide in the attached Route Designation Plan.

Signing:

Route designation signing is proposed for the roads and trails within the ACEC. The signing will be designed to inform the

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

public of the travel status of roads or trails within the ACEC. Road and trail numbers will be placed on signs to correspond to maps and brochures available at wayside parking lots within the ACEC and at BLM administrative offices. Informational signs would be posted at entry points within the ACEC. Other signs which display the types of route markers used, may be found at numerous locations within the ACEC. All open roads and trails would be marked with signs. Some roads and trails would also have symbols restricting certain activities. The proposed signs are located in the attached proposed Route Designation Plan.

Every effort will be made to compliment the route signing and numbering of the adjacent U.S. Department of Agriculture, Lincoln National Forest sign plan. Interpretive kiosks will be constructed and placed in the vicinity of wayside parking lots and trail heads within the area. Interpretive kiosks will be used within the ACEC for road and trail systems and other aspects of the ACEC.

B. Alternatives To The Proposed Action

1. **Alternative 1 (No Action Alternative):** The No Action alternative would be to not sign or close roads that are causing resource damage or are redundant within the ACEC. Trails within the ACEC would also not be developed or designated.

III. DESCRIPTION OF THE AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A. General Setting

Fort Stanton ACEC is comprised of approximately 26,000 acres of public land. Approximately 24,000 acres are administered by the Bureau of Land Management and approximately 2,000 acres is managed by the State of New Mexico as historic Fort Stanton and a portion managed by the New Mexico Penitentiary. The Sierra Blanca Regional Airport is also within the boundary of the ACEC and is surrounded by the ACEC.

Many of the roads that exist within the ACEC were developed or improved during The past 30 years by New Mexico State University under their stewardship of the area. In 1997 the Roswell Resource Management Plan established the area as an

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

ACEC. An Activity Plan was finalized in August 28, 2001. The attached Route Designation Plan and Environmental Assessment are a part of the management prescriptions of the ACEC Plan.

The area is heavily used by recreationists. Major equestrian and mountain bike events have taken place within the ACEC mostly on existing roads. The area is used daily by equestrian riders, mountain bikes, hikers and sightseers. Billy the Kid Scenic Byway uses U.S. Highway 380 and State highway 220 through the ACEC. Lincoln County road E007 is also included within a part of the ACEC.

B. Affected Resources/Critical Elements

The following critical elements have been evaluated and are either not present or are not affected by the Proposed Action or the Alternative in this assessment: Air Quality, Farmland - Prime or Unique, Flood Plains, Native American Religious Concerns, Wastes-Hazardous or Solid, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Wilderness, Low Income or Minority populations or communities and Environmental Justice.

1. Topography:

The topography of the ACEC is highly variable, with rolling hills, wide flat-topped mesas and narrow, rocky canyons and ridges. It is situated in the foothills of the Sierra Blanca and Capital Mountains. Elevation above sea level ranges from 6,000 feet in the east to 7,020 feet in the west. The drainage's in the south portion of the ACEC are in a southeasterly direction. The runoff from these drainage's flows into Little Creek and eventually into the Rio Ruidoso. Runoff from other drainage's in the northern portion of the ACEC flows into the Rio Bonito, and Salado Creek which eventually joins the Rio Bonito.

2. Climate:

The climate is semi-arid with normal monthly temperatures ranging from 35°F in January to 70°F in July (Dunkel, 1984). Observed minimum and maximum temperatures were -28°F and 101°F, respectively. Average annual precipitation is 13.9

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

inches, with average annual snowfall of 20 inches. Annual precipitation has ranged from 6.1 inches to 25.6 inches, and snowfall has been as high as 64 inches (Dunkel, 1984).

3. Vegetation:

Grasslands, pinyon-juniper (PJ) and riparian are the major vegetation communities in the ACEC. PJ dominates the landscape of the ACEC, primarily as the result of wildfire suppression. About 13,000 acres of PJ are growing in homogenous stands. PJ prevails in many areas that could support more of a grassland aspect, such as the low hills, draws and drainage's.

The grassland vegetation type, found on less hilly sites and mesas, is dominated by blue grama. A typical blue grama community is composed of blue grama, hairy grama, sidebars grama, cane bluestem and western wheatgrass, with sagewort and verbena, as common for species. The muhly-blue grama community is dominated by creeping muhly, blue grama, verbena, scarlet globemallow, and broom snakeweed. A third community within the grassland vegetation type is characterized by walking stick cholla, blue grama, verbena, and, invading one-seed juniper.

The pinyon-juniper vegetation type is characterized by pinyon, alligator juniper, one-seed juniper and wavyleaf oak. It should be noted that the dominant tree species in the "PJ" type is one-seed juniper. Pinyon pine and alligator juniper are not as an aggressive invading species, and in most areas are low in density. These trees and shrubs are dominant in the communities of the lower slopes. Blue grama, New Mexico muhly, pinyon ricegrass, sidebars grama, Plains lovegrass, and wolftail are the typical understory of grasses.

Within the brush on the upper slopes, however, pinyon and juniper are less predominant and scattered with the woody species wavyleaf oak and skunkbush sumac. The understory of this community is typically forbs, commonly western yarrow, coast wallflower, purple geranium, and the half-shrub tasselflower brickellia.

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

Riparian areas constitute only about three percent of the ACEC (about 660 acres). The riparian areas are found along the Rio Bonito and Salado Creek, several springs/seeps, and a small wetland area behind Salado Dam.

The majority of the riparian vegetation type occurs along two waterways, the Rio Bonito and Salado Creek. Woody plants of the Rio Bonito community are coyote willow, peachleaf willow, narrowleaf cottonwood, lanceleaf cottonwood, Arizona walnut, boxelder, Russian olive and saltcedar. Kentucky bluegrass, bentgrass, bulrush, cattail, inland rush, gaura, summer-cypress, horsetweed, poison hemlock, and stickseed are the typical wetland grasses and forbs.

4. Lands/Realty/ROW:

New Mexico Highway 220 connects U.S. Highway 380 with Alto, New Mexico via Fort Stanton and the airport. Lincoln County Road E007 junctions with NM 220 east of the airport and connects with U.S. Highway 70 to the south. Roads through the ACEC provide access for the public and administrative use of the area. The water line serving the fort is south of the Rio Bonito running from the west boundary of the ACEC to the fort. Power lines in utility corridors supply electricity to the fort and airport.

5. Minerals:

The Proposed Action would not affect BLM's management of minerals in the ACEC. The ACEC is withdrawn from mineral entry.

DESCRIPTION OF THE AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

1. Air Quality:

The ACEC is surrounded by U. S. Forest Service lands, State Lands and private property. The Capital Wilderness is located approximately nine miles northeast of the ACEC and the

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

White Mountain Wilderness is located approximately eight miles west of the ACEC. Both are classified as a Class I airsheds.

Environmental Impacts:

There will be some fugitive dust when the roads are maintained in late summer but it should not affect the air quality of the area.

The No Action Alternative would cause fugitive dust as vehicles use the area.

2. Water Quality:

The proposed area is in the upper Rio Hondo drainage basin, which consists of the Rio Bonito and Rio Ruidoso watersheds. The two streams come together to form the Rio Hondo at the town of Hondo approximately 11 miles southeast of Fort Stanton. Except for South Mesa, the entire area lies within the Rio Bonito watershed. The Rio Bonito flows for approximately nine miles through Fort Stanton, including 3.3 miles through the Upper Rio Bonito area. The South Mesa area drains to Little Creek, which eventually reaches the Rio Ruidoso at the mouth of Devil's Canyon below Glencoe.

The New Mexico Water Quality Control Commission (WQCC) has been delegated authority to designate uses and establish water quality standards for waters of the State. The WQCC (2000a) has identified perennial reaches of the Bonito below Angus, and the Rio Ruidoso below the U.S. 70 bridge near Seeping Springs Lakes as parts of Segment 2208. Designated uses for Segment 2208 include fish culture, irrigation, livestock watering, wildlife habitat, a coldwater fishery, and secondary contact (e.g., wading).

The WQCC (2000a) has also established water quality standards to protect the designated uses, and directs periodic water quality assessments to ensure that standards are met. According to the WQCC (2000b), the coldwater fishery and irrigation use are not supported on the Bonito due to stream bottom deposits (i.e., sediment). The probable sources of sediment listed were agriculture, removal of riparian vegetation, streambank modification/destabilization, and other

unknown sources.

Environmental Impacts: The Proposed Action would improve water quality from current conditions by eliminating unwanted roads and roads that cause excessive silting of the rivers. The cumulative benefits provided under the Proposed Action could be significant when coupled with other BLM projects and similar efforts on Lincoln National Forest, State, and private lands.

Minor, adverse impacts to surface water quality could occur for a short period during and after road blading and trail construction. The soil disturbance could result in a small amount of sediment loading to streams, though rapid regrowth of ground cover species would quickly offset these effects.

No ground-water impacts would be expected under any Alternative. Neither the long-term benefits nor the short-term impacts expected under the Proposed Action would be realized under the No-Action Alternative.

3. Water Quality Drinking/Ground

Hydrogeology:

The rocks that outcrop in the project area range in age from Permian to recent. Several geologic formations are present on the surface of the project area. Terrace gravels outcrop from the Quaternary Alluvial deposits. Reddish brown mudstone outcrops from the Chinle Formation. Black shale, sandstone, and limestone outcrop from the Mancos Shale Formation. Gray to white sandstone, local shale and conglomerate outcrop from the Dakota Sandstone Formation. Brown buff and red sandstone and local conglomerate outcrop from the Santa Rosa Formation. Dolomite and limestone outcrop from the Bonney Canyon Member of the San Andres Formation. Dolomite and limestone outcrop from the Rio Bonito Member of the San Andres Formation. The groundwater in the project area moves generally in the east and southeast direction. Groundwater that moves in the eastward and southeastward direction recharges the Artesian Limestone aquifer, perched aquifers and also discharges into springs. A sufficient quantity of water of good quality for stock and domestic supplies can be obtained from wells that

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

range from 100 to 750 feet deep in the San Andres Limestone and up to 80 feet deep in perched aquifers in arroyos. Chlorides range from 30 to 200 mg/l. Specific conductance ranges from 700 to 1800. The water quality is considered good for human use. Water from perched aquifers can be obtained from shallow unconsolidated gravels in arroyos. Depth to groundwater in the San Andres Limestone ranges from 20 to 300 feet. Depth to groundwater in the perched aquifers ranges from 20 to 80 feet. Recharge to the groundwater in the San Andres Limestone and perched aquifers in the area is primarily from rainfall and storm flood events

Environmental Impacts:

A variety of alternatives are possible under the Proposed Action, and specific impacts would depend on the methods used. Roads and trails would be water barred to prevent excessive acceleration of soil loss. Trails would be constructed on the contour to prevent soil erosion. Any expected adverse impacts would be negligible to the hydrogeology of the area.

Under the No-Action Alternative, The effects to the hydrogeology would be negligible within the area.

4. Soils:

The *Soil Survey of Lincoln County Area, New Mexico (USDA Soil Conservation Service, 1983)* was used to describe and analyze impacts to soils. Soils in the treatment area can be grouped into three general categories.

Valley Bottoms. Cumulic Haplustolls are found in the Rio Bonito valley. Manzano loam is found on low terraces above the river bottom and in draws in Cemetery Pasture. These soils are derived from alluvium and are deep and well-drained. Surface textures range from loam to gravelly sandy loam. Permeability is typically slow and runoff is moderate. The hazards of water and wind erosion are moderate.

Uplands on the East Side. Deacon loam and Tortugas-Rock outcrop association are found on uplands, breaks, and ridges in Cemetery Pasture and the east side of South

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

Mesa. The Deacon loam and Tortugas soil are derived from alluvium and limestone, respectively. The surface texture of the Tortugas soil is very cobbly loam. The Deacon loam is deep, but the Tortugas soil is shallow. Both are well-drained and have moderate permeability. The runoff is moderate for the Deacon loam, but is rapid for the Tortugas soil. Therefore, the water erosion hazard is high for the Tortugas soil and moderate for the loam. The wind erosion hazard is high on the loam, but only slight on the Tortugas soil.

Uplands on the West Side. Uplands, valley sides, swales, and ridges on the west Spur, West Mesa Bench, South west side of South mesa, and the Dairy pasture are represented by Hightower-Oro Grande complex, Pena-Dioxice complex, Remunda clay loam, and Romine extremely gravelly loam. Oro Grande very cobbly clay loam is also found in Dairy Pasture. Most of the soils are derived from alluvium, though residuum, andesite, sandstone and igneous rock are also sources. They are generally well-drained and range in depth from very shallow to very deep. Permeability is typically moderate, and runoff medium to rapid. The hazard of water erosion can be moderate to high, and wind erosion can be slight to moderate.

Environmental Impacts:

A variety of alternatives are possible under the Proposed Action, and specific impacts would depend on the methods used. Roads and trails would be water barred to prevent excessive acceleration of soil loss. Trails would be constructed on the contour to prevent soil erosion. Any expected adverse impacts would be minor and mitigated at the time they are observed.

Under the No-Action Alternative, the short-term risks of accelerated erosion would not occur, however, the expected long-term benefits would also not be realized.

5. Floodplains:

The floodplain has been changed from prehistoric conditions by construction of Bonito Dam, grazing, upstream development, road construction, alteration of the stream channel, and brush encroachment.

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

For BLM administrative purposes, the 100-year floodplain provides the basis for floodplain management on public lands. It is based on maps prepared by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (1983).

Environmental Impacts:

The Proposed Action would improve floodplain functions, and benefit the stream corridor overall. There would be a small amount of disturbance associated with the project, but it would be limited by restricting vehicle traffic from floodplain areas. None of the benefits provided by the Proposed Action would be realized under the No-Action Alternative.

6. Non-native, Invasive Species:

On February 3, 1999, the President signed Executive Order 13112 (EO), Invasive Species. The EO dictates that "each Federal Agency whose actions may affect the status of invasive species shall, to the extent practicable and permitted by law: prevent the introduction of invasive species; detect and respond rapidly to and control populations of such species in a cost-effective and environmentally sound manner; monitor invasive species populations accurately and reliably; provide for restoration of native species and habitat conditions in ecosystems that have been invaded; conduct research on invasive species and develop technologies to prevent introduction and provide for environmentally sound control of invasive species; and promote public education on invasive species and the means to address them." The Noxious Weed Management Act of 1998 for the State of New Mexico finds that noxious weeds have caused extensive economic damage in New Mexico.

Specifically, the presence and spread of noxious weeds: decreases land values and productivity, forces out nutritious forage for livestock and often causes the death of livestock and crops; harms the environment by crowding out native vegetation and endangered species, increasing fire danger, increasing water usage; and; increases government and industrial costs by increasing highway cleanup costs, decreasing the lease value of state and federal public lands and curtailing the hunting, fishing and recreational use of

the land.

"Class A" weeds are considered to be non-native species with limited distribution in New Mexico. Preventing new infestations and eliminating existing infestations is the highest priority. "Class B" weeds are non-native species that are presently limited to portions of the state. They are designated for control in regions where they are not yet widespread. Preventing infestation in these areas is a high priority. In regions where a "Class B" species is already abundant, control is decided at the local level with containment as the primary goal. "Class C" weeds are other non-native weeds found in New Mexico. Many of these are widespread in the state. Long-term programs of suppression and management are a local option, depending upon local threats and the feasibility of management in local areas. The area will be monitored for weeds by the BLM staff and weed eradication programs will be initiated as weed species are found.

Environmental Impacts:

Vehicles which are carrying a seed source are a major transportation of noxious weed seeds. The unwanted species seeds would usually drop off of vehicles and grow along roads within the area. If unchecked the species would spread from the roads into adjacent pastures within the ACEC.

The No Action Alternative would result in a "status quo" situation. Native vegetation would decrease, productivity would decline and a monoculture of invasive species would become established. Use of the area would not be conducive to recreationists, such as bird watchers or picnickers, as noxious weeds are not extensively used by wildlife and have a tendency to be irritating to pass through. The sites would also become a "nursery area" or seed source for noxious weeds, spreading up and down the Rio Bonito valley.

7. Terrestrial and Aquatic Wildlife Habitat:

Fort Stanton provides diverse habitats for approximately 151 species of birds, 38 species of mammals and 9 species of fish.

Several bird species associated with pinyon-juniper woodlands

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

are the common flicker, ladderbacked woodpecker, acorn woodpecker, pinyon jay, scrub jay, mountain chickadee, common bushtit, plain titmouse, white-breasted nuthatch, blue-gray gnatcatcher, gray vireo, rock wren, and Montezuma quail.

The blue grama grassland habitat supports such species as scaled quail, roadrunner, western meadowlark, Northern harrier, brown-headed cowbird, vesper sparrow, lark bunting, rufous-crowned sparrow, and horned lark.

Several species of birds occur in the riparian community or near other sources of water. Representative species are acorn woodpecker, killdeer, mourning dove, mallard, bufflehead, belted kingfisher, blue grosbeak, lesser goldfinch, yellow-rumped warbler, Northern waterthrush, and yellow-breasted chat. In addition, the bald eagle winters throughout the area, and the Rio Bonito drainage is an important wintering area.

The diversity of small mammals provide for an excellent prey base for carnivores such as the coyote, gray fox, bobcat, raccoon, badger, striped skunk, long-tailed weasel, and occasionally black bear and mountain lion.

Blue grama grassland mammal species include the spotted ground squirrel, pocket gopher, silky pocket mouse, Ord's kangaroo rat, bannertail kangaroo rat, northern grasshopper mouse, southern plains woodrat, and the pronghorn antelope.

Other mammals use the pinyon-juniper woodland habitat to some extent. Mule deer occur throughout the Fort Stanton area. During winter, some deer migrate from the higher elevations of the Sierra Blanca Mountains to the Fort Stanton area. Since 1990, a number of Rocky Mountain elk have used the area on a yearlong basis.

Beavers use the riparian habitat to the exclusion of upland habitat. Over the past years, beavers have built dams and lodges on the Rio Bonito. Annual floods that wash out the dams seem to be the most serious problem for beavers. Beavers may also leave the area when water levels drop.

Fish species found in the Rio Bonito are the Rio Grande sucker, brook trout, rainbow trout, cutthroat trout, fathead

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

minnow, white sucker, Rio Grande chub, longnose dace, and mosquitofish.

In addition, an extensive list of aquatic insects and herptiles can be found in the Fort Stanton Habitat Management Plan on file at the Roswell Field Office.

Environmental Impacts: Blading and constructing trails would be a temporary displacement of terrestrial wildlife during the actual activities due to human activity and noise levels. Wildlife would shy away from roads and trails when vehicles and pedestrians are using the roads and trails within the area.

Long-term positive impacts will result from the proposed action due to the increased amount of habitat that will be left alone or have reduced vehicle traffic. More seclusion areas for wildlife will be available

Threatened and Endangered species such as the Kuenzler cactus would receive a positive affect due to vehicles staying on designated roads and away from Kuenzler cactus habitat. Roads would be closed in Kuenzler cactus areas to protect the species.

Under the No Action alternative more actions would be unregulated and cause additional problems for wildlife and impacts to the Kuenzler cactus.

8. Cultural Resources:

Human occupation of the Fort Stanton area extends back in time to about 9,000 years before the present. This date is based on isolated paleoindian projectile points and not in association with paleoindian archeological sites. The Archaic time period is represented by a number of sites as is the Formative, also called the Ceramic time period. The variety of prehistoric sites ranges from open sites to rock shelter, cave, architectural and petroglyph. Site density is high along major drainage's such as the Rio Bonito.

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

In the first half of the nineteenth century Hispanic people began settling in the area. By 1855, Fort Stanton was built to provide protection for the local population from the Mescalero Apaches. Besides Fort Stanton proper, there are known historic sites dating to the same time frame and associated with Fort Stanton.

There have been several large cultural inventory surveys on the Fort Stanton Reservation. One of these was undertaken prior to the construction of the Sierra Blanca Regional Airport. Other large surveys have focused on the Rio Bonito drainage. Smaller surveys have occurred prior to small scale surface disturbing projects such as water line and fence construction.

In addition to cultural surveys, excavations have been permitted as part of archeological field schools, for research and ahead of construction projects.

Environmental Impacts:

Depending on the techniques implemented for road maintenance and trail construction, identification and protection of cultural resources will vary. However there will be more than minimal surface disturbance, cultural inventory and avoidance will be required.

The No Action alternative would have no impacts on cultural resources in the area.

9. Cave/Karst Resources:

The Fort Stanton ACEC has a number of significant caves or karst features. The management goal of the Roswell RMP is to protect the natural and scenic values of caves while allowing for limited recreational and educational use of the caves. Under the 1997 Roswell RMP, surface disturbance will not be allowed within 200 meters of known cave entrances passages or aspects of significant caves or significant karst features.

Environmental Impacts:

The Proposed Action would not effect cave/karst because there are no roads or trails where significant caves are known to

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

exist or there is high potential for cave/karst resources. If, during or after road or trail construction or maintenance, a cave or karst feature is located, an inventory would be initiated to determine the significance of the cave resource. Residual impacts of surface run off and silting should not have a significant affect on the cave/karst resources and would be diverted from known cave/karst resources.

The No Action alternative would have little short-term impacts on cave/karst resources in the area.

10. Outdoor Recreation:

The Proposed Actions are located within areas of high potential for recreation activities. The attached Route Designation Plan has been developed for equestrian, mountain bike and foot trails within the area. Presently there are recreation developments at the Fort Stanton Cave/campground, Horse Trails Parking lot and the Lower Rio Bonito recreation area. Roads are currently used as ways of travel for equestrian/Mountain Bike/foot travel. The proposed trail network will move the trails off of roads and into the surrounding country side. The recreation enthusiasts would have a quality recreation experience and not be in competition with motorists using the same roads.

Environmental Impacts:

The Proposed Action would, in the long term, benefit recreation activities by channeling the visitor to areas that can take recreation impacts. Impacts of the Proposed Action on casual recreation use would be short-term, occurring when the projects are being carried out. Once roads and trails are designated or closed to public use the ACEC will benefit, No new roads are anticipated within the area.

The No Action alternative would have little short-term impacts on recreation use of the area.

11. Visual Resources (VRM):

The Visual Resources within the proposed area are Class II and III. The Class II rating means that any changes in any basic

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

elements (form, line, color, texture) caused by a management activity should not be evident in the landscape. A contrast may be seen but should not attract attention. The Class III rating means the contrasts to the basic elements caused by the management activity may be evident and begin to attract attention in the landscape. The changes, however, would remain subordinate to the existing landscape. The Proposed Action should result in short term visual impacts to the casual observer. New trails will be constructed on the contour to blend into the surrounding landscape. Roads would be closed or rerouted that are visually intrusive to the area.

Environmental Impacts:

There should be very little visual impacts from road maintenance and trail construction. The impacts of blading the roads should not be noticeable after a two month period.

The No Action alternative would cause no impacts on visual resources.

12. Road/Trail Maintenance:

Roads within the ACEC will be maintained to BLM Road Standards. Trails would be designed and constructed to USFS standards. Trail location objectives are to provide a facility on the ground that produces a minimum physical impact on the land, is visually pleasing, requires minimum maintenance, and functionally provides for the intended use.

Environmental Impacts:

Impacts would be minor if BLM Road Standards and USFS standards for newly constructed trails construction are followed.

The No Action alternative would have little short term impacts. The area would suffer long term impacts on the roads and trails within the ACEC due to lack of maintenance and proliferation of roads within the area.

IV. CUMULATIVE IMPACTS:

Population increases and recreation demand increases are

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

considered the primary multipliers of cumulative resource degradation effects for the future. There will be positive effects providing designated roads and trails for visitor use within the area.

Increase in regional metropolitan populations and other recreation demands may also impact Fort Stanton's natural, cultural, and recreational resources. Other southwest recreation sites, areas, parks and facilities have experienced a general increase in resource degradation within the past fifteen years. The trend is expected to continue as the public becomes more aware of the value of public lands to the nation.

The No Action alternative maintains the status quo. The No Action alternative avoids short-term impacts such as road maintenance and trail construction while its long term impacts of poor road placement and redundancy of roads would continue to cause environmental damage to the area.

V. MITIGATION MEASURES

See the Proposed Action for mitigation measures to impacts.

6. RESIDUAL IMPACTS

There should be no residual impacts to designated roads and trails that are constructed and maintained to BLM road policy standards and trail construction to USFS standards.

7. PERSONS AND AGENCIES CONSULTED

PERSONS CONSULTED:

Dan Baggao, Wildlife Biologist
Michael Bilbo, Outdoor Recreation Planner
Richard Carlson, Recreation Specialist, Lincoln Natl. Forest
Al Collar, Geologist
Jim Desmond, Fire Management Officer

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

Pat Flanary, Archaeologist
Rand French, Wildlife Biologist
Tim Kreager, Assistant Field Manager, Resources
Michael McGee, Hydrologist
Helen Miller, Rangeland Management Specialist
Bill Murry, Park Manager/Recreation
Albert Najjar, Park Maintenance
Joseph Navarro, Rangeland Management Specialist
Howard Parman, Planning and Environmental Coordinator
Chuck Schmidt, Rangeland Management Specialist
Jim Schroeder, Hydrologist
John Spain, Rangeland Management Specialist
Irene Salas, Realty Specialist
Randy Vinson, Range Technician

VIII. LITERATURE CITED

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IX APPENDIX A.

OHV DEFINITIONS AND DESIGNATIONS

OHV DEFINITIONS:

The OHV definitions are derived from the current RMP and are uniform definitions for current RMP's within the BLM.

OFF HIGHWAY VEHICLE (OHV):

An OHV is considered to be any type of vehicle designed for or capable of cross-country travel on or immediately over land, water, sand, snow, ice, marsh, swampland, or other terrain.

OHV DESIGNATIONS:

Open:

Vehicle travel is permitted in the area (both on and off roads) if the vehicle is operated responsibly in a manner not causing, or unlikely to cause significant undue damage to or disturbance of the soil, wildlife, wildlife habitat, improvements, cultural, or vegetative resources of other authorized uses of the public lands.

Limited:

Designated areas and trails where the use of an OHV is subject to restrictions, such as limiting the number of vehicles allowed, or dates and times of use (seasonal restrictions); limiting use to designated roads and trails. Combinations of restrictions are possible, such as limiting use to certain types of vehicles during certain times of the year.

Closed:

Designated areas, roads, and trails where the use of an OHV is permanently or temporarily prohibited. Emergency use of vehicles is allowed.

OFF HIGHWAY VEHICLE (OFF ROAD VEHICLE)

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

Any motorized vehicle capable of, or designed for, travel on or immediately over land, water, or other natural terrain, excluding: (1) Any non-amphibious registered motorboat; (2) Any military, fire, emergency, or law enforcement vehicle while being used for emergency purposes. (3) Any vehicle whose use is expressly authorized by the authorized officer, or otherwise officially approved; (4) Vehicles in official use; and (5) Any combat or combat support vehicle when used in times of national defense emergencies.

APPENDIX B.

PUBLIC COMMENTS AND RESPONSES, 60 DAY PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD January 3 2003 through March 4 2003

1. Barney Fleming DVM, Deming, NM , E-mail message

Comment: Thank you for all the effort and hard work on all those trails and facilities at Fort Stanton ,The trails look great.

Response: Comment Noted.

2. Randy H. Eiland AERC SW Regional Director E-Mail message

Comment: The Ft. Stanton Draft Route Designation Plan aka RDP/EA will benefit many users of the public lands. The BLM, AERC, and other organizations and individuals are to be commended for their land work to make trails and amenities available at Ft. Stanton.

Response: Comment noted.

3. James N. Judson E-Mail Message

Comment: The historical significance and use of the land is

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

bring honored. My personal interest is in the plan for equestrian access to the land and the preservation of this privilege.

Response: Comment note

Comment: Consider this plan as one that is a "work in progress", and that in the future additional refinements and improvements will be considered.

Response: The plan can be amended as needs arise.

**4. DK Brown
40 Camino Bajada
Corrales, NM 87048**

Comment: I support the Bureau's proposal to designate vehicle routes of travel as "open or closed" and using the "closed" routes as designated routes of travel for bike, horse, and hiking trails.

Response: Comment noted

Comment: I feel that it is extremely important to minimize contact of equestrian trail users and motor vehicles.

Response: The BLM has tried to move the trails off of the roads to minimize conflicts between users.

Comment: The "closed" trails as proposed by the plan are suitable for non-motorized use and appear to me to be duplicative of other trails/roads within the ACEC that will be preserved for motorized use.

Response: Due to the small scale of the map in the draft plan some of the roads and trails may look like they are in the same place on the small scale map. The proposed trail system removes the trails from the existing roads and places them to other areas that will not be used as roads. Some of the roads that are proposed for closure will be turned into trails. The closed roads will be narrowed to form trails and vegetation will be allowed to grow in the area not used as trails.

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

5. Roger W. Taylor
AERC SW Regional Director
500 Camino Del Bosque
Albuquerque, NM 87114

Comment: My interest is with the trails being open to horse, hikers, and bicyclers.

Response: Comment noted

Comment: Since the plan was drafted the AERC has added more trails into your mapping system, 1. Change the Salado trail to stay away from the rifle range. 2. Cleared and mapped the old jeep trail to stay off roads. 3. Mapped a route through the airport property with a MOU and to stay off the Lincoln National Forest Service land.

Response: The above mentions actions will be incorporated into the plan.

6. David D. Clinton
110 Monte Rey Dr. N.
Los Alamos, NM 87544

Comment: I have reviewed this environmental assessment and believe that this proposed action will not have any significant or detrimental environmental impacts and that Fort Stanton Route Designation/Environmental plan be accepted as written.

Response: Comment noted

Comment: The effort by BLM personnel and 3rd parties in laying out and expanding the equestrian and other non-motorized use has been exemplary.

Response: Comment noted

Comment: The actions proposed will greatly expand the trail system and improve access to all areas of the Fort Stanton ACEC, while protecting all critical or sensitive areas.

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

Response: Comment noted

Comment: The involvement of all those involved in the trails effort should be a model for all BLM Regions.

Response: Comment noted

Comment: The closing of several motor vehicle roads is a wise move for the protection of the area from off-road impacts.

Response: Comment Noted.

Comment: The need for motor vehicle access is not required for an area of this size.

Response: Comment noted.

**7. Martin A. Clifton
71 Arroyo Venada Road
Placitas, NM 87043**

Comment: BLM provides a high quality recreational site for equestrian, hikers and non-motorized vehicles users and has been an overall success, and that the Fort Stanton ACEC RDP/EA is consistent with the past ACEC plans.

Response: Comment noted.

Comment: Respondent commends and supports the BLM management goal and past activities to protect the biological, archaeological and scenic quality of the ACEC, and your RDP/EA plan to limit off-highway-vehicle (OHV) use.

Response: Comment noted.

Comment: Fort Stanton trail users spend a significant amount of money in the adjoining communities for groceries, lodging, horse feed, supplies and food.

Response: Comment noted

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

Comment: Water source for horses on trails - The plan does not mention development or maintenance of water supplies, although we understand that your water resource division is working on a water source for the main campground/parking lot. I recommend that a camping and trail water resource plan be incorporated with the ACEC.

Response: Through a cooperative effort by the American Endurance Ride Association (AERC) and the BLM a water line was extended to the horse trails parking lot for equestrian use. When funding is received a chlorinator will be placed at the parking lot for potable use. The ACEC plan states that water development such as earthen tanks and supplemental pipelines and troughs are provided for wildlife within the area by the BLM. A series of water wells, pipelines, troughs and earthen tanks have been installed within the ACEC and are used by wildlife and equestrian riders using the area. The camping issue has been covered in the previous Fort Stanton ACEC Final activity plan of March 2001.

Comment: Camping resources for horsemen, hikers and mountain bikers- At present, there appears to be two overnight camping areas for the ACEC, neither of which is mentioned in the ACEC plan. AERC endurance riders have received temporary permission to camp at the Horse Trails Parking Lot, we have used the group camping area east of the stage coach road. It appears that some camping development may be underway on the northwest part of the ACEC, adjacent to the Brewer Ranch (private). We recommend that the plan address camping accommodations be provided for at least 4 levels of ACEC users; i.e., 1.) large event camping, 2.) Smaller group camping accommodations. 3.) Single unit overnight camping. 4.) Areas along the trail or otherwise picnic along the way.

Response: The ACEC Activity Plan of 2001 addresses camping within the ACEC. The ACEC Plan uses a dispersed camping approach to camping within the area. The ACEC Plan also lists areas suggested as dispersed camping sites. The BLM Roswell Field Office believes that dispersed camping provides better distribution of camping within the area. We are moving away from hardened camping sites because of the impacts associated with those types of sites. The BLM also believes that if

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

there is a need the private sector will fill that need for hardened camping sites outside of the ACEC.

The AERC and other events are sanctioned by BLM Special Recreation Permits. These events allow for camping or activities in a designated area for a short period of time. After the event is over the area is allowed to rest and recover. By moving events around the ACEC we can be lighter on the land and have less impact. At present the only hardened sites within the ACEC are the Horse Trails Parking Lot, and the Cave Camping Area. Permanent "stall type pipe fencing" or hardened sites were discussed and dismissed in the Fort Stanton ACEC Final Activity plan of March 2001.

Comment: Small group event permits should be required to pay a fee for portable commodes and trash site removal. Dumpsters need to be provided for group users.

Response: Under the BLM Special Recreation Permits the proponent of the event is stipulated to provide portable commodes and trash cans or dumpsters as a part of his/her contractual agreement to use the BLM lands under the permit.

Comment: Coordination of trail links with the National Forest, New Mexico State Land (including the Historic Fort Stanton Site), Lincoln County, City of Ruidoso, State Lands and private land- While some discussion was included in the plan regarding trail links with the National Forest and New Mexico State Land, there are other trail links which need to be taking into consideration for public and private accessibility... Links into historic Fort Stanton Site, City of Ruidoso Air Port, adjacent property owners access,

Response: BLM is using all of the roads that are open to public use that connect to the Smokey Bear Ranger District of the Lincoln National Forest Lands. BLM has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Village of Ruidoso to use the land east of the airport to develop a trail across that area to connect trails on each side of the airport property. At present New Mexico state owned Historic Fort Stanton is not available for use by equestrians or other types of use. State of New Mexico lands adjacent to the ACEC at present are leased and are not available to public use. Private access is not

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

allowed from private property unless authorized by the BLM.

Comment: The Lincoln County Sheriff's Posse rides to Lincoln every year could the ACEC plan include a Fort Stanton to Lincoln route trail in the future for individual or small groups of riders.

Response: The Lincoln County Sheriff's has a special recreation permit to cross BLM Fort Stanton ACEC lands for their yearly ride to Lincoln. To establish a route to Lincoln the proponent would have to gain permission or easement to cross private land in Priest Canyon. The BLM has not pursued this issue at this time.

Comment: Adequacy of budget- The budget will be inadequate to provide for the needs of the ACEC if it is to be properly monitored and maintained. Provisions for trail condition monitoring, sign repair, water tank maintenance, trail repairs and general supervision and security need to be fully evaluated and provide for in the plan.

Response: The BLM will rely on fees from Special Recreation Permits such as the AERC event and other events to offset the cost of management of the area. Presently we have an adequate staff to maintain the ACEC. As the area grows in popularity a daily use fee could be instituted to offset the management of the area. Volunteer help from AERC, the Lincoln County Sheriffs Posse and other groups also offset the labor cost of the BLM

Comment: Capital items (Water tanks, water pipelines restrooms, dumpsters, etc.) Need to be discussed in the RDP/EA

Response: The above items were covered in the Fort Stanton ACEC Final Activity Plan of 2001. The Route Designation Plan/Environmental Assessment covers only the roads and trails within the ACEC.

Comment: Use of trails and system for equestrian and other non-motorized uses- It is our understanding that an original objective of the Fort Stanton trails area was to provide a site which would be especially conducive to equestrian use.

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

Response: BLM is a multiple use agency and provides recreation for all types of activities. Users have to share the lands and be respectful to all uses that occur on the public lands.

Comment: It is our recommendation that the plan not allow off-road vehicle use of trails, roads, camping and parking areas used by equestrians, hikers and not motorized vehicles. In addition to environmental considerations, the safety of equestrians and their animals, hikers and bicycle riders should be a primary planning and management objective for the ACEC trail plan.

Response: The Route Designation Plan/EA has attempted to move all non-motorized use off existing roads within the ACEC. This will provide some safety aspects to the area by diminishing motorized and non-motorized conflicts.

8. Charles W. Nolen
P.O. Box 310
Capitan, NM 88316

Comment: "A good number of the roads you are suggesting to be closed have met the criteria and the recognition of the different agencies as public rs2477 road easements. They have met the required time, they have had uninterrupted use for many years, there has been construction by several different public agencies".

Response: Attached is the response on the Fort Stanton Route Designation Plan and Proposed Road Closures regarding RS 2477:

Enacted in 1866, RS 2477 states in its entirety, "The right-of-way for construction of highways over public lands, not reserved for public uses, is hereby granted."

Labeling the roads and trails within the Fort Stanton ACEC as RS 2477 rights-of-way is a misapplication of RS 2477 authority

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

for the following reasons:

1. Fort Stanton and its Military Reservation (the ACEC) were established in 1855, predating the enactment of RS 2477 by 11 years.
2. As a military reservation, the Fort Stanton Military Reservation does not meet the definition of unreserved public lands and has been continually under control of the Federal government.
3. The boundaries of the Fort Stanton ACEC and the Fort Stanton Military Reservation are synonymous.
4. The roads and trails within the ACEC do not meet any of the use conditions to be labeled as RS 2477 rights-of-way found in case law applying to this issue.

Since the lands that make up the ACEC were originally a military reservation, have been under continuous federal jurisdiction since 1855, and case law does not apply to the uses of the roads within the ACEC, RS 2477 does not apply. Therefore, the Bureau of Land management is free to propose roads within the ACEC as open for public use or closed to public use.

Comment: "Access for recreation, service of water lines, waterers, allotment fences and fire control is a constant and necessary requirement for access on both north and sides of Little Creek to Eagle Creek. There are major subdivisions adjoining the western boundary of this forest area that these accesses have repeatedly been used to save private property and lives".

Response: The Route Designation Plan/EA provides adequate access to all areas within the ACEC. Authorization can be obtained to maintain boundary areas of the ACEC from the Roswell Field Office. Health and Safety of the surrounding areas will take precedence over proposed and existing plans for the ACEC.

Comment: "A very large amount of Sikes monies has been collected from the public, and Forest Service and the BLM has used it in this area".

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

Response: The Sikes Act program has been used within the Fort Stanton ACEC for the benefit of wildlife. This plan does not preclude access to any portion of Fort Stanton for hunting, recreation or any other activities. Some of the roads proposed for closure are redundant to other roads proposed for closure are causing resource damage.

Comment: "Remember the horsemen and walkers are not limited anywhere in Fort Stanton in Fort Stanton. They do not need a road to ride or walk on. If they do not want to see a vehicle they do not need to ride or walk in the middle of the road".

Response: The Route Designation Plan/EA provides designated roads and trails for public use within the ACEC. The designated roads and trails will provide the recreating public a road and trail network for their use. Designated roads and trails will also protect the endangered species within the ACEC boundary.

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

XI. DECISION RECORD

DOCUMENT EA# NM-060-2002-0119

DECISION RECORD

Decision: I have reviewed this proposed action, including the environmental impacts and have determined that the proposed project is in conformance with the approved land use plan. Therefore, no further environmental analysis is required. It is my decision to implement the Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan and Environmental Assessment. Any comments made to this proposal were considered and any necessary changes have been incorporated into the Environmental Assessment.

Any person who is adversely affected by a final decision of the authorized officer may file a written appeal to the Final Decision for the purpose of a hearing before an administrative law judge under 43 CFR 4.470. A period of 30 days after the decision becomes final is provided in which to file an appeal and petition a stay of the decision in this office.



Edwin L. Roberson
Field Office Manager
Roswell Field Office
Bureau of Land Management

7/7/03
Date

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

XII. DECISION RECORD

DOCUMENT EA# NM-060-2002-0119

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT/RATIONALE

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT: I have reviewed this environmental assessment including the explanation and resolution of any potential significant environmental impacts. I have determined the proposed action will not have significant impacts on the human environment and that preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required.

Rational for Recommendations: The proposed action would not result in any undue or unnecessary environmental degradation. Designation of roads and trails within the Fort Stanton ACEC will provide for quality recreation opportunities for the visiting public. Implementation of the route designation network within the ACEC will reduce the 54 miles of traveled roads and two track roads within the ACEC to 35 miles of active maintained roads within the ACEC. The existing roads proposed for abandonment are redundant or cause resource problems, have no function, no legal access, or are not needed within the ACEC. The proposed road and trail network would provide visitor access to the majority of the ACEC, while providing protection of threatened and endangered species, riparian areas, cultural resources, special use trails, and other special areas.

The proposed trails will add 60 miles of multi-use trails to the ACEC. All of the proposed trails will be located away from existing roads or in some cases on previously closed roads within the ACEC. The proposed trails all have been ridden, Global Positioned (GPS), and designed by equestrian riders. The American Endurance Ride Conference(AERC), Lincoln County Sheriffs Posse, and many other interested riders have volunteered thousands of hours to mark, design, and ride the proposed trails. The proposed trail network will provide visitor access to the majority of the ACEC while providing protection of threatened and endangered species, riparian habitat and cultural resources. The proposed action will be in compliance with the Roswell Resource Management Plan and

Fort Stanton ACEC Route Designation Plan /Environmental Assessment

Record of Decision (October, 1997).



Edwin L. Roberson
Field Office Manager
Roswell Field Office
Bureau of Land Management


Date