

**Environmental Assessment
For
San Antonio Elementary School Recreation & Public Purposes Act Lease and Subsequent
Patent**

EA #: DOI-BLM-NM-A020-2015-0018-EA

Preparing Office: Bureau of Land Management - Socorro Field Office, New Mexico

Serial/Lease/Case File Number: NMNM131595

Land Use Plan: Socorro Resource Management Plan, 2010
BLM-NM-PL-10-03-1617

County: Socorro

Applicant: Socorro Consolidated School District

Address: 700 Franklin Street, Socorro, NM 87801

Date: 1/20/2015

Lands Description:

Meridian	Township	Range	Section	Subdivision
NMPM	04S	01E	Sec 31	SESE, E2SWSE



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Introduction

The Socorro Consolidated School District, has requested the authorization to lease with subsequent purchase option the proposed public land located in:

New Mexico Principal Meridian, T. 4S., R. 1E., section 31, SE1/4SE1/4, E1/2SW1/4SE1/4 (60 acres) (see map Appendix 1).



Photo1-Existing elementary school constructed in 1928

The Applicant proposes to construct new facilities to replace the existing San Antonio Elementary School built in 1928 to meet the NM Statewide Adequacy Standards [6.27.30 NMAC-N, 9/1/2002], as amended by the Public School Capital Outlay Council (PSCOC) on June 17, 2010. The new facilities would support over 100 student enrollments, grades K-5. The new development plans include a trail system for outdoor learning, fitness and recreation. The trail system would be open to use by on-site students, off-site students (i.e., other local school groups), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service educational groups, and the local community.

The lease would be issued for a period of up to 5 years to assure development of the lands in accordance with the approved Plan of Development (POD). Upon a determination by the authorized officer that the lessee has successfully developed the land in accordance with the POD, a patent may be issued.

In addition, there is an unauthorized fitness track and building constructed by the Applicant that is currently in trespass on this parcel of public land. Authorization of an R&PP Act lease and subsequent patent would resolve this trespass issue.

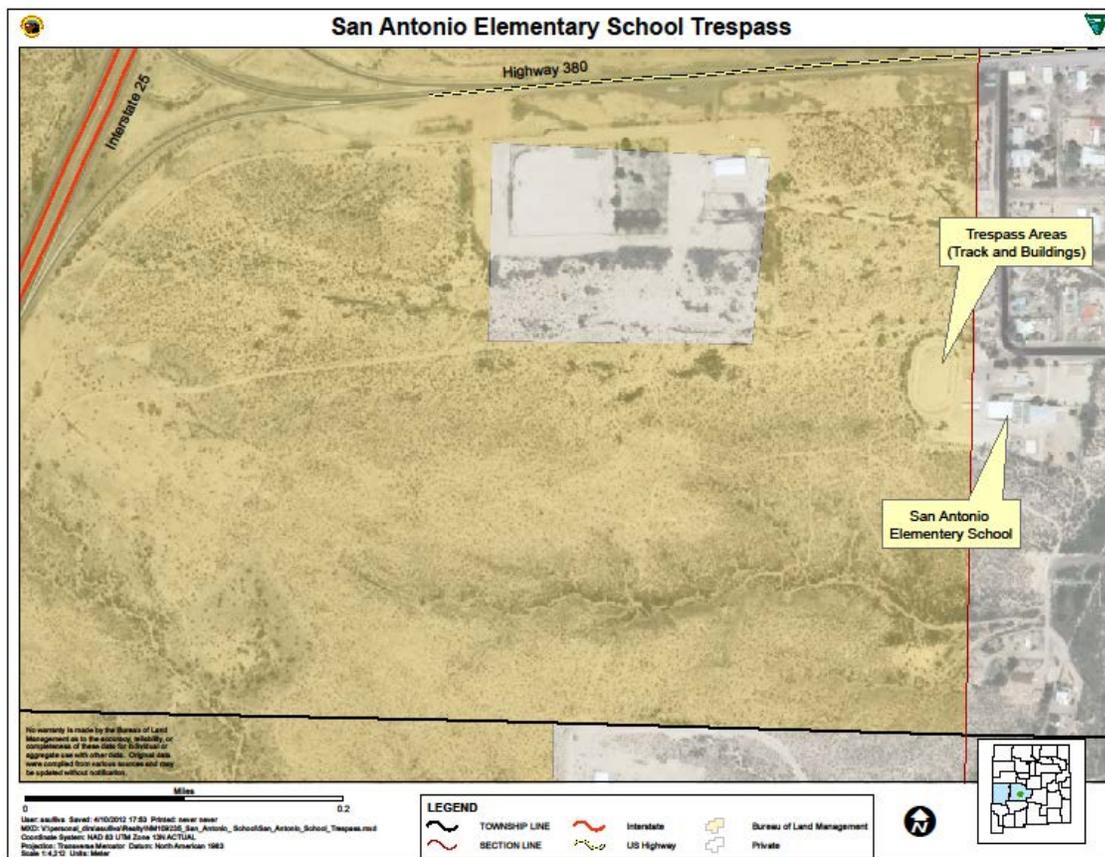


Figure 1. San Antonio Elementary Track and Building Trespass

Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

Purpose: The purpose of the proposed action is for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to issue a 5-year lease with subsequent patent; a parcel of public land adjacent to the existing San Antonio Elementary School for the construction of a new elementary school, related facilities, and trail system. Additionally upon issuing an R&PP lease and subsequent patent, the trespass for the unauthorized use would be resolved.

Need: The need for the proposed action is established by the BLM’s responsibility under the R&PP Act to respond to a request for sale or lease of public lands for recreational or public purposes to state, and local governments. Examples of typical uses under the R&PP Act include historic sites, campgrounds, schools, firehouses, law enforcement facilities, hospitals, parks, and fairgrounds.

Conformance with Land Use Plan

The proposed action is in conformance with the terms and the conditions of the approved resource management plan for the public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management-Socorro Field Office, the *Socorro Resource Management Plan, September 2010* (BLM/NM/PL-10-03-1617) [Socorro RMP], as required by 43 CFR 1610.5.

Chapter 2, page 17: **Lands and Realty, Management Goal**, “Respond to public requests for land use authorization, sales, and exchanges; support the multiple-use management goals and objectives of other resource programs as they relate to land and realty actions; and acquire access to provide continuing administrative and public needs and to facilitate the acquisition and disposal of public land, or interests in public land, in order to promote enhanced management and multiple uses of resources.”

Chapter 2, page 18: **Rights-of-Way**, “Under the authority of FLPMA and the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920, the Socorro Field Office will continue to grant right-of-way leases and permits to qualified individuals, businesses, and government entities for use of public land.”

Chapter 2, page 20: **Map 2**, The subject lands are included in the 85,591 acres identified as suitable for disposal.

Appendix F, page 123: **Recreation and Public Purposes Patents**, “The Socorro Field Office will continue to issue patents to qualified governmental and nonprofit entities for public parks and recreations sites under the Recreation and Public Purposes (R&PP) Act. These patents may be issued at less than fair market value as outlined in 43 CFR 2740. Applications for patent of public lands under the R&PP Act will be processed as a Socorro Field Office priority under the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act and will be subject to public review...”

Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, or Other Plans

This Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, the President’s Council on Environmental Quality regulations to implement NEPA (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508), and BLM’s regulations implementing NEPA (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508). BLM is required to consider potential environmental impacts before approving actions and projects.

“Recognizing the strong public need for a nationwide system of parks and other recreational and public purpose areas, the Congress, in 1954, enacted the Recreation and Public Purposes (R&PP) Act (68 Statute 173; 43 United States Code 869 et. seq.) as a complete revision of the Recreation Act of 1926 (44 Stat. 741). This law is administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

Decision to be Made

This Environmental Assessment (EA) discloses the potential environmental consequences of implementing the proposed action or alternatives to that action. This document serves as written communication of the environmental impacts of the proposed construction of the facility, including analysis of the project alternatives and identification of impact minimization measures. The EA also serves as written communication of the environmental evaluation for public and interested party comment. Public involvement is a component of NEPA to inform an Agency’s determination of whether to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). The FONSI describes the findings of the analysis in this EA. The BLM Socorro Field Office Field Manager (FM) is the Authorized Officer and deciding official. The FM’s decision and rationale for that decision will be stated in the Decision Record. Based on the information in this EA, the BLM Field Manager will decide whether to issue an R&PP lease and subsequent patent for the construction of a new elementary school and related facilities, or to reject the proposed action. The BLM will publish a notice in the *Federal Register*. Upon the conclusion of the public review period, and considering any comments, the BLM would then proceed to issue a Final EA, sign the Finding of No Significant Impact and Decision

Record. Then proceed to issue a five-year lease to Socorro Consolidated School District. Upon the conclusion of the five-year period, the BLM would conduct a compliance inspection to determine that the improvements on the property are consistent with the R&PP lease. The Socorro Consolidated School District may at that time apply to the BLM for an R&PP patent.

Scoping and Issues

Preliminary scoping was conducted by the preparer and the other members of the Interdisciplinary Team. Potential issues, including the resources that could be affected by the proposed action, were identified at that time. The proposed project was entered into the NEPA log available on the BLM's public website: http://www.blm.gov/nm/st/en/prog/planning/nepa_logs.html.

Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives

Proposed Action

The proposed action is for the BLM to issue an R&PP lease to Socorro Consolidated School District on 60 acres of BLM-managed lands for the construction of a new elementary school, associated facilities and trail system located in:

New Mexico Principal Meridian,
T. 4S., R. 1E.,
section 31, SE1/4SE1/4, E1/2SW1/4SE1/4 (60 acres) (see map Appendix 1).

The subject parcel is adjacent to the existing school facility built in 1928. The development would include newly constructed school buildings, service areas, bus drop-off/ pick-up lanes, parent drop-off/ pick-up lanes, parking for staff, visitors and American's with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant parking, and additional exterior play areas. The facility would accommodate over 100 students, grades K-5.

Future developments include: fitness trails, outdoor learning classrooms, horseback riding trails, and a greenhouse garden. The fitness trail would encompass the existing track currently in trespass. The trail system would be open to use by on-site students, off-site students (i.e., other local school groups), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service educational groups, and the local community.

The proposed date of occupancy is for the 2017 School Year.

The intent is to issue an R&PP lease with the option to acquire title. The lease would be for a period of five years, during which time Socorro Consolidated School District would develop the parcel. BLM would monitor the development and terms and conditions of the lease, ensure compliance, and move towards transfer of title to the Socorro Consolidated School District.

Alternative 1: No Action

Under the No Action Alternative, the 60 acres of land would remain in federal ownership and would continue to be managed in accordance with the SFO RMP. The land would remain vacant and undeveloped. The existing school built in 1928 would continue to be used and would not meet the NM Statewide Adequacy Standards [6.27.30 NMAC-N, 9/1/2002], as amended by the Public School Capital

Outlay Council (PSCOC) on June 17, 2010. Under the No Action the school would be required to remove the trespass building and fitness track from public lands.

Alternatives Considered and Removed From Further Analysis

An alternative for 70 acres with access off Highway 380 was eliminated and the parcel was reduced to 60 acres to eliminate traffic congestion and potential safety concerns.

An alternative to demolish the existing elementary school and re-build the new facility on the school property was considered. The school is a potential historical site as it was built in 1928. The current school property is not sufficient in size to accommodate the new facility and future developments. For these reasons this alternative was eliminated from detailed analysis.

Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences

General Setting

The tract is located at approximately 4,600 feet above sea level. The tract is about ten miles south of Socorro, New Mexico and adjacent to the west edge of the town of San Antonio. The land is adjacent to the Socorro County San Antonio Fire Station and community park. The land is largely undeveloped public land covered with desert scrub with the exception of an unauthorized fitness track, a building constructed by the applicant, a power transmission line, and a two-track road.

The climate in the area is characterized as warm, semi-arid to arid with a mean annual precipitation of 12 to 14 inches per year. The majority of the precipitation is received in July, August, September, and October.



Photo 2- Primary Vegetation Cover Creosote (Larrea tridentata)



Photo 3-Authorized Powerline Right-of-Way

ID Team Review

The affected environment was described and analyzed by the Interdisciplinary Team. They determined whether resources would be potentially impacted, not affected, or if they are not present. The following resources will not be impacted: Area of Critical Environmental Concern, Caves and Karst, Cultural, Engineering and Operations, Environmental Justice, Fire and Fuels, Forestry, Hazmat, Livestock, Paleontology, Recreation, Threatened and Endangered (and Migratory) Species, Tribal, Visual, Wild Horse and Burro, and Wilderness. Only those elements that were deemed to be potentially impacted or involve unique or unknown risks will be analyzed in this document. The following section describes each of these potentially-impacted resources.

Affected Components of the Environment

Critical Elements that may be present or affected are: Air, Cultural, Lands and Realty, Minerals, Soils, Paleontology, Vegetation, Water, Weeds, and Wildlife. The impacts of each Alternative on these resources will be analyzed below.

Soil/Water/Air

Soils

Affected Environment:

The gravelly/sandy loam soils typically exhibit moderate susceptibilities to both water and wind erosion. Desert pavement is also typical of the area. Desert pavement is created by the removal of

small particles by wind and water but does not continue indefinitely, because once the pavement forms, it acts as a barrier to resist further erosion. Located on the northern portion of the parcel is the historic San Antonio ditch adjacent to an old two-track road that is no longer in use. There is some erosion associated with these historic uses. The area identified for the building site construction is virtually undisturbed and has an overall naturally occurring landscape with minimal to no impact from any identified resource use.



Photo 4- Typical desert pavement and gravelly/sandy loam soils occurring on the parcel



Photo 5-Erosion associated with historic San Antonio Ditch adjacent to old two-track

Environmental Consequences:

Rutting and compaction of soil would occur if construction activities occur when the soils are wet. Construction will employ Best Management Practices (BMPs) to reduce erosion impacts on steep slopes and drainage crossings. There will be minimal, short term negative effects to soil; soils should recover within one year.

Water

Affected Environment:

There are no perennial streams in the proposed area. Water is present in ephemeral streams and drainages during and after precipitation events, usually occurring during summer months. Water quality in these drainages is largely dependent upon the intensity of precipitation events.

Environmental Consequences:

There will be no/negligible effects to water quality. Ground disturbance activities will occur during the dry season (late spring, summer, and fall) when there is little or no risk of any runoff from the project area.



Photo 6-Arroyo drainage located on the southern portion of the parcel

Air

Affected Environment:

Under normal conditions, air quality is generally good in the project area. There are no air quality stations located in the vicinity. The New Mexico Air Quality Bureau website has no available data or Air Quality Index Guide for this area. The nearest station is located approximately 50 miles north of the project area.

Environmental Consequences:

The primary emission sources associated with the operations phase of construction would include windblown dust from ground disturbance, road dust and vehicle emissions during the construction caused by grading and earth moving associated with the development of access roads and building foundations. However because emissions from project activities would be temporary and localized to

the immediate vicinity of the project, no/negligible effects are anticipated. The Clean Air Act of 1990, the Clean Water Act of 1987, and all additional Best Management Practices (BMP's) would be followed as described in Appendix C of the Socorro Field Office, Resource Management Plan (2010). During construction Best Management Practices will be used such as watering down the site to reduce dust.

Cultural

Affected Environment:

Cultural resource report No. CRR-NM-02-15-12. Three sites (1 new), none are NRHP (National Register of Historic Places) eligible.



Photo 7-Representation of historic can dump

Environmental Consequences:

In the event that any previously undiscovered cultural resources are encountered during the implementation of the proposed actions, work will be halted immediately and the authorized BLM representative shall be consulted. Efforts should be made to protect any such finds from looting, erosion, or any other human or natural damage. The details of the inventory and its findings are recorded in SFO cultural resources report CRR-NM-02-15-12. Because such reports are, by law, proprietary, the contents are incorporated into this environmental assessment by reference.

Lands/Realty

Affected Environment:

The proposed project area is designated as open to new rights-of-way and the land tenure designation is in a disposal area.

The Socorro Electric Cooperative (SEC) holds a Right-of-Way (ROW) NMNM 0467996 for a 69KV distribution powerline that crosses the property from east to west.

Environmental Consequences:

Should an R&PP lease be issued, it would be subject to valid existing rights. During the 5-year lease period new ROW applications would be analyzed on a case-by-case basis. Once the parcel is patented the Socorro Consolidated School District (SCSD) would determine if utility or other easements would be authorized. The existing ROW to SEC would remain under the jurisdiction of the BLM or be transferred to the SCSD.

Minerals

Affected Environment:

The subject tract has high potential for the occurrence of sand and gravel resources and moderate potential for geothermal. All other mineral resources are believed to have low or no mineral potential. No mining claims, leases or material sites were found to encumber the tract.

Environmental Consequences:

The proposed R&PP development could pose an impediment to sand and gravel sales. However, sand and gravel deposits are widespread around Socorro and future demand will be met from other sources.

Despite the moderate potential for geothermal resources, the likelihood for exploration and development is low given that there is a much more favorable area to the north around Socorro.

There is a low probability of surface interference with mineral development.

Paleontology

Affected Environment:

In *Appendix M: Paleontological Resource Management in The Socorro Field Office Resource Management Plan (RMP), September 2010*, the BLM has classified geologic formations in the Socorro Field Office according to the Probable Fossil Yield Classification (PFYC). This planning tool provides for the development of sensitivity levels based on specific geologic units, usually at the formation level, and are classified according to the probability of yielding paleontological resources. This proposed project falls within a Class 2 Management Prescription.

Under Class 2, the management prescription states that “No concern related to paleontological resources unless other site-specific surveys note fossil resources in the project area.” Class 2 indicates that the area is characterized as sedimentary geologic units that are not likely to contain vertebrate fossils or scientifically significant non-vertebrate fossils.

Environmental Consequences:

The proposed action would have no effect on paleontological resources as the proposed project is in an area that is not likely to contain vertebrate fossils or scientifically significant non-vertebrate fossils. However, if paleontological resources are found during the implementation of the proposed project, the proponent or any of his agents would: (a) stop work immediately at that site if significant fossil resources are discovered; (b) contact the appropriate BLM representative, typically the project inspector, as soon as possible; and (c) make every effort to protect the site from further impacts, including looting, erosion, or other human or natural damage. Work may not resume at that location until approved by the official BLM representative.

Vegetation

Affected Environment:

The primary vegetation species occurring on the parcel is Creosote (*Larrea tridentata*)(see *Photo 2 under General Setting*). Some Apache Plume (*Fallugia sp*) occurs in drainages. Some sparse cacti and grass species occur on the parcel.



Photo 8-Cacti

Environmental Consequences:

Some permanent displacement of vegetation will occur where school building, associated facilities and trail systems will be constructed.

Weeds

Affected Environment:

No weed populations have been identified during visits to the project area.

Environmental Consequences:

The project would have low probability to contribute to the introduction and spread of noxious weeds or non-native weed species. During the construction phase, equipment will be cleaned prior to entering the project area, which will minimize the probability of noxious weeds becoming established. Continued monitoring would be required over the 5-year lease period.

Wildlife

Affected Environment:

Wildlife species known to occur in the area are coyotes and various reptiles, quail, rodents, raptors, and songbirds. For a complete list of species present in the proposed project area, refer to the Integrated Habitat Inventory Classification System, which is on file at the Socorro Field Office.

A Wildlife/Special Status Species Survey was conducted on May 28th, 2015. Habitat within the proposed project can be described as a creosote scrubland bisected by several arroyo type habitat. Suitable nesting substrate, which includes mesquite bushes and an elm tree is present within the proposed project area. Due to the texture of the soil, suitable prairie dog habitat is not present. No active raptor/breeding bird nests or prairie dog towns were detected. Wildlife species observed during the survey included one jackrabbit, Gambel's quail, and various songbirds. Although no javelina were observed, fresh sign (tracks) were observed within a wash/arroyo.

Environmental Consequences:

Wildlife would be directly impacted by being displaced due to disturbances caused by activities described in the proposed action. The proposed actions may cause temporary habitat fragmentation and disturbance in areas of habitat that may support the general wildlife in the area. However, it is not likely that there would be adverse impacts on the species and the proposed action would not jeopardize the continued existence of the species.

The Wildlife/Special Status Species Survey results concluded that the project would not result in any adverse impacts to the special status species or other general wildlife species

Cumulative Impacts

The proposed action will likely have minor additive effects on the recreation, wildlife and soil resources in the project area. Soils would be expected to be negatively impacted by construction projects in the short term due to ground disturbance and equipment traffic. Cumulative impacts to Recreation and Wildlife resources in the area would be expected to be more long term if soil erosion continues; however the proposed action is not expected to be a significant addition to either the long term or short term impacts to the resources discussed due to the relatively small scope, both spatially and temporally, of the project.

Monitoring and Mitigation Measures

Special guide stipulations, including mitigation measures described here, shall be included in the stipulation compliance checklist and shall be carried out during the implementation of the action.

- **Restrict unauthorized UTV use on the parcel**
- **Clean all equipment and vehicles prior to surface disturbing activities to reduce the introduction of noxious weeds and continue to monitor for noxious weeds during the 5-year lease period**
- **Use Best Management practices to reduce air pollution from dust, i.e., watering down construction sites, etc.**

Consultation and Coordination

Agencies, Organizations, and Persons Consulted

Name	Title	Resource/Agency Represented
Mark Matthews	Field Manager	BLM Socorro Field Office Authorized Officer
Carlos Coontz	Planner	NEPA Coordinator, ACEC, Environmental Justice, Soil/Water/Air
Kevin Carson	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Visual, Wilderness, Caves & Karst
Brenda Wilkinson	Archaeologist	Cultural, Paleontology, Tribal
Jeff Fassett	Project Manager	Engineering and Operations, Weeds
Lann Moore	Fuels Specialist	Fire and Fuels, Forestry
Virginia Alguire	Realty Specialist	Hazmat, Lands/Realty, Minerals
Nathan Combs	Range Specialist	Livestock, Vegetation
Chris Hill	Recreation Planner	Recreation
Carlos Madril	Wildlife Biologist	T&E/Migratory, Wildlife
Bethany Rosales	NRS – Range	Wild Horse Burro

List of Preparers

Signature of Project Lead

Date

Signature of NEPA Coordinator

Date

Signature of the Responsible Official

Date

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Endangered Species Act of 1973.

Executive Orders

11593. *Protection and Enhancement of the Cultural Environment.*

11644. *Use of off-road vehicles on the public lands.*

11989. *Off-road vehicles on public lands.*

12898. *Federal Actions To Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations.*

13112. *Invasive Species.*

Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1988.

United States Code of Federal Regulations

40 CFR. Protection of the Environment. All parts and sections inclusive. Revised July 1, 2008.

43 CFR. Public Lands: Interior. All parts and sections inclusive. Revised October 1, 2003.

43 CFR 1600. Public Lands: Interior. *Planning, Programming, Budgeting.*

43 CFR 4600. Public Lands: Interior. *Leases of Grazing Land – Pierce Act.*

43 CFR 2800. Public Lands: Interior. *Rights-of-way, Principles and Procedures*

43 CFR 3710. Public Lands: Interior. *Public Law 167; Act of July 23, 1955.*

43 CFR 4100. Public Lands: Interior. *Grazing Administration – Exclusive of Alaska.*

43 CFR 4600. Public Lands: Interior. *Leases of Grazing Land – Pierce Act.*

43 CFR 5000. Public Lands: Interior. *Administration of Forest Management Decisions.*

43 CFR 5400. Public Lands: Interior. *Sales of Forest Products: General*

43 CFR 6300. Public Lands: Interior. *Management of Designated Wilderness Areas.*

43 CFR 8340. Public Lands: Interior. *Off-Road Vehicles.*

43 CFR 8360. Public Lands: Interior. *Visitor Services.*

43 CFR 8372. Public Lands: Interior. *Special Recreation Permits Other Than on Developed Recreation Sites.*

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United States Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management and Office of the Solicitor (editors). 2001. *The Federal Land Policy and Management Act*, as amended. Public Law 94-579. (43 USC 1701 et seq.

