



Río Grande del Norte National Monument Plan

Introduction

The Taos Field Office is initiating an effort to prepare a management plan for the Río Grande del Norte National Monument, designated by presidential proclamation on March 25, 2013. The monument plan will address the 242,555-acre designation predominantly within Taos County in northern New Mexico and will amend the current land use plan through the preparation of an environmental assessment (EA).

The plan will provide management direction to ensure the protection of the monument's objects of value (see descriptions below). The plan will also consider opportunities for continued traditional uses of the monument lands and resources, including wood gathering, livestock grazing, and recreation, as well as the potential for new land use authorizations.

The presidential proclamation identifies four objects, for which the new national monument was created to protect:

1. **Cultural Resources** - The Río Grande gorge lies within the traditional area of the nearby Taos and Picuris Pueblos, as well as the Jicarilla Apache and Ute Tribes, and contains petroglyphs and other archeological resources important to the tribes. More recent artifacts and images mark the passage of traders, settlers, and Hispanic explorers dating back to the early 18th century, and more recently a group of eastern homesteaders following World War I.
2. **Geologic Resources** - Between the Río Grande gorge and the Río San Antonio gorge stretches a sweeping expanse of the Taos Plateau, a center of research in geology and volcanology. Multiple volcanic cones rise above the plateau to elevations topping 10,000 feet, and springs within the Río Grande gorge are thought to be part of a flooded lava tube.
3. **Ecological Diversity** - From the cottonwood and willows along the Río Grande corridor, to the expansive sagebrush plains above the gorge on the Taos Plateau, the piñons at the base of Ute Mountain, and the spruce, aspen, and Douglas fir covering the mountain's northern slopes, the diversity of both ecosystems and species allows for, and have been the subject of, substantial scientific research.
4. **Wildlife Habitat** - The Río Grande provides habitat for the recently reintroduced North American river otter. The monument is part of the Central Migratory Flyway, a vital migration corridor for many bird species. Several species of bats make their home in the gorge, which also provides important nesting habitat for golden eagles and numerous other raptor species, as well as habitat for the endangered Southwestern willow flycatcher. Large mammals, including the Rocky Mountain elk, mule deer, pronghorn, and Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep can be found on the plateau alongside a population of Gunnison's prairie dogs. The monument also provides habitat for many species of predators, including the ringtail, black bear, coyote, red fox, cougar, and bobcat.

What's in a Monument Plan?

BLM land use plans, such as a monument plan, generally include the following types of decisions:

Goals and Objectives: The goals and objectives establish the long term vision for the monument. Goals are broad statements of desired outcomes within the monument and are usually not quantifiable. For example, a goal might be to maintain soil health by preventing soil erosion. Objectives, in contrast, are specific, can be quantified, and have set timeframes. An example objective might be to begin restoration of all areas with impaired soils within five years of their assessment.

Allowable Uses (Allocations): The monument plan must identify uses (also called allocations) that are allowable, restricted, or prohibited within the monument. These allocations identify lands where uses are allowed and where any limitations on the use are applied. Certain lands may be open or closed to specific uses based on legislative, regulatory, or policy requirements or criteria to protect sensitive resource values.

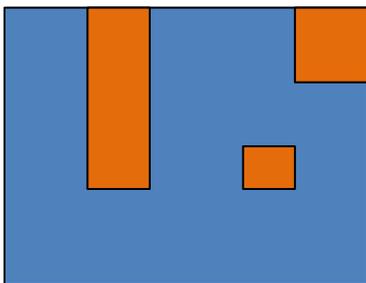
Management Actions: The monument plan must also identify specific management actions to meet the goals and objectives. These actions include proactive measures, measures that guide day-to-day activities, and establishment of administrative designations.

Different Levels of Planning

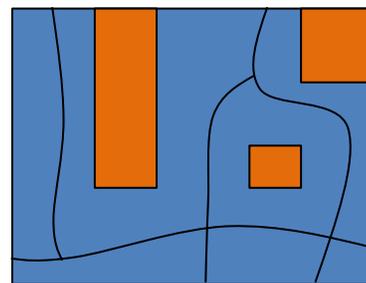
A monument plan represents the first and highest level of land use planning for the national monument. The monument plan establishes the long term vision for the monument, and sets the sideboards for what types of use may occur within the monument. All future decisions made within the monument must be consistent with the monument plan. The monument plan will focus on *planning-level* decisions and include the goals and objectives, allocations, and management actions, as described above.

The next level of planning is called *activity-level* planning. Activity-level plans will be prepared following the completion of the monument plan. Activity-level plans address site-specific decisions, such as where to place a campground within a larger area where campgrounds are allowed. Another example of an activity plan is a travel management plan, which identifies the network of designated routes within the monument.

In the diagrams below, a monument plan, on the left, identifies areas that are open or closed to motorized travel. These are the planning-level allocations. On the right, a travel management plan, which is an activity-level plan, identifies the specific routes designated within the open areas.



Areas open or closed to motorized travel within a monument plan.



Designated routes within a travel management plan

How to get involved in the Monument Plan

The following table is provided to summarize the formal opportunities for public involvement in the development of the monument plan:

STEP	OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT
<p>1. Public scoping</p>	<p>January 3, 2014 – March 6, 2014</p> <p>Scoping is the opportunity for the public to express interest in opportunities or concerns about impacts and conflicts (issues), provide relevant information, and recommend options (alternatives) for considering opportunities and resolving issues. The BLM will use this information to formulate alternatives and analyze the potential impacts in an environmental assessment (EA). The EA and monument plan are presented in a single document. Please see page 4 for how to submit scoping comments.</p>
<p>2. Review of draft plan / draft EA</p>	<p>30 day (minimum) comment period following release of draft plan</p> <p>Once the issues and alternatives are assessed and disclosed in a draft monument plan / draft EA prepared by the BLM, the public will be given the opportunity to review and comment on the document. All substantive comments—generally those on the adequacy of the alternatives, accuracy of the impacts analysis, and regulatory compliance—will receive responses in the proposed plan / final EA.</p> <p>A description of what constitutes a substantive comment can be found in the BLM’s NEPA Web Guide:</p> <p><i>http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/planning/nepa/webguide/document_pages/6_9_2_1_examples.html</i></p>
<p>3. Protest of proposed plan</p>	<p>30 day protest period following release of proposed plan</p> <p>Once the BLM releases the proposed monument plan, any person who participated in the planning process can protest the BLM’s proposed land use planning decisions to the BLM Director. A protest may only raise issues that were previously submitted during the planning process and must provide a concise statement on why the planning decision is believed to be wrong. The BLM provides no formal extensions to the 30 day protest period.</p>

How to provide scoping comments

Scoping comments are requested by March 6, 2014.

You may provide comments by mail to:

BLM Taos Field Office
Attention: Shasta Ferranto
226 Cruz Alta Road
Taos, NM 87571

Email comments to: blm_nm_tfo_comments@blm.gov

Fax comments to: 575-758-1620.

Where to find more information

If you have any questions about the monument planning process, please contact Shasta Ferranto at 575-751-4701.

Additional information is also available online at the following address:

www.blm.gov/nm/riograndedelnorte