

**United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management**

**Special Recreation Permits for Non-Motorized Competitive Events
in the Río Grande del Norte National Monument**

DOI-BLM-NM-F020-2014-0001-EA



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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

The BLM Taos Field Office proposes to authorize three Special Recreation Permits (SRPs) for non-motorized competitive events in developed recreation or concentrated use areas of the Río Grande del Norte National Monument, potentially on an annual basis. The specific areas to be covered in this programmatic plan are the existing authorized road and trail system and certain staging areas within several zones of the Rio Grande Gorge Recreation Area, including the Wild Rivers, Guadalupe Mountain, and the Taos Valley Overlook zones. See attached event location maps in Appendix A.

The proposed project is consistent with management prescriptions in the 2012 Taos Resource Management Plan (RMP). The decision whether or not to authorize permits of this nature, however, would be in the *interim* while monument management planning is ongoing. In this case, any decision made authorizing the SRPs would be subject to change under an approved National Monument plan, anticipated in 2016, which will amend the Taos RMP.

With the ranks of trail runners increasing each year growing from 4.5 million to more than 6 million just within the United States between 2006 and 2012, organized trail races have become very popular, now well into the hundreds in North America alone (wiki 2013). Although endurance racing, off road triathlons, adventure racing and trail running have become increasingly popular around the United States and internationally, the races around Taos listed below are typically located off public land.

Races hosted around Taos County include road and trail. Traditional road events include the Enchanted Circle Century, the Gran Fondo de Taos, Rough Riders 200, Run for the Health of It (5 and 10K), the Taos Marathon, Taos Turkey Trot and the Red River High Mountain Half Marathon. However, the only competitive trail events in Taos County are the Angel Fire Endurance Runs (half marathon to 100 miles), Taos Ski Valley Up and Over Trail Run (10K), the Low O2 Challenge (5 and 10K snowshoe races) at the Enchanted Forest X Country Ski Area, and the Big Mountain Enduro Series for mountain bikes on the Carson National Forest. With the increasing popularity and demand for trail running competitive events in particular, the need is evident for more trail races in Taos and surrounding communities.

Occasionally these sorts of competitive events draw local vendors of food and outdoor gear and at times include music and art venues. Frequently, in addition to the social, fitness and competitive nature of these events, the purpose is to raise funds for a worthy cause or charity. It is assumed that businesses or other organizations in Taos and the surrounding area may be drawn to participate in or collaborate on such an event.

Potential race promoters have submitted applications for SRPs or have otherwise approached the Taos Field Office with interest in SRP applications for two different foot races and an endurance mountain bike race on designated roads and trails within the Río Grande del Norte National Monument. Since the Taos Field Office has formally initiated the planning process for a monument plan, the BLM's consideration and analysis of the applications is considered to be an interim action, which cannot establish a precedent

or limit alternatives in the monument planning process. Any authorization of the competitive events based on this analysis is subject to change by the approval of a monument plan.

1.2 Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of this action is to provide opportunities for non-motorized competitive events on the BLM's developed network of trails within the Río Grande del Norte National Monument. The BLM needs to respond to applications for SRPs in accordance with its land use planning decisions, policies, and the provisions of the Presidential Proclamation which established the monument. The BLM must also exercise its discretion to issue or deny permits for organized groups, commercial use, and competitive events involving recreation activities on public lands in accordance with 43 CFR 2932 and BLM Manual 2930-1.

SRPs require an analysis of impacts in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The Taos Field Office has not previously issued permits for any endurance races within the monument, and an analysis is needed in the interim while comprehensive monument planning is ongoing to evaluate the potential resource impacts of authorizing these events. However, any decision made in response to the applications would not establish a precedent for future decisions in the monument plan.

1.3 Land Use Plan Conformance

Issuing SRPs for competitive events in the Taos Valley Overlook, the Guadalupe Mountain, and Wild Rivers zones of the Rio Grande Gorge Recreation Area is consistent with the 2012 Taos Resource Management Plan (RMP). Relevant recreation program objectives are to provide exercise close to home, high quality recreation opportunities and experiences, and issue special recreation permits in an equitable manner for specific recreation uses of public lands and related waters as a means to provide for private and commercial recreation use.

One of the priorities of the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) 2010 is to Enhance Economic Vitality by continuing to promote outdoor recreation events, programs, and facilities that attract day travelers and overnight visitation by creating partnerships with businesses such as convention and visitor bureaus, recreation equipment vendors, and guide services.

1.4 Identification of Issues

The proposal for non-motorized events in the monument was carefully considered during multiple NEPA compliance and planning meetings conducted by an interdisciplinary team of BLM resource specialists beginning in November 2013. The proposed action and potential alternatives were thoroughly vetted to identify relevant issues in preparation for this analysis. The BLM has determined the following issues to require detailed analysis:

1.4.1 Río Grande del Norte National Monument—Objects and Values

The presidential proclamation which designated Río Grande del Norte National Monument specifically identified cultural and historic resources, ecological diversity, geologic resources, and wildlife resources as objects and values to be protected and enhanced. Of these, the following have the potential to be affected by this action:

Wildlife Resource:

- Big game habitat—how would the proposed action and alternatives affect big game wildlife habitat?

- BLM sensitive species—how would the proposed action and alternatives affect special status species habitat?
- Migratory Birds—how would the proposed action and alternatives affect bird nests, including habitat for migratory birds, within the project area?

Ecological Diversity:

- Vegetation—how would the proposed action and alternatives affect the quality and extent of native and non-native vegetation within the project area?

1.4.2 Soils

- What impact would the proposed action and alternatives have on the integrity and stability of soils within the project area?

1.4.4 Recreation

- What are potential benefits to the public of authorizing such permits?
- What are the potential conflicts with other users on trails, day use sites, or campsites?

1.5 Issues considered but dismissed from detailed analysis

Río Grande del Norte National Monument—Other Objects and Values: No issues regarding cultural and historic resources or geologic resources were identified as relevant to this analysis of potential impacts. The use of existing or designated disturbances such as roads, trails, and staging areas would eliminate the potential to effect objects and values associated with cultural and historic resources. Also, since no new surface disturbing activities are proposed as part of this action, no geologic feature would be impacted.

Threatened or Endangered Species: It is determined that there is no habitat for species federally listed under the provisions of the Threatened and Endangered Species Act of 1973 within or adjacent to the project area, so there are no such species likely to be found in the project area. Nor is there any designated critical habitat for any such species listed by the US Fish and Wildlife Services within the project area. Therefore, it is determined that the action would have no effect on federally listed species or designated critical habitat.

Chapter 2: Description of Alternatives

2.1 Alternative A: Proposed Action

The proposed action is to authorize three Special Recreation Permits (SRPs) for non-motorized competitive events in developed recreation or concentrated use areas of the Río Grande del Norte National Monument. These events may be authorized to occur annually, subject to the approval of monument planning decisions. The specific areas to be covered in this interim plan are the existing authorized road and trail system within several zones of the Río Grande Gorge Recreation Area, including Wild Rivers, Guadalupe Mountain, and Taos Valley Overlook. See attached event location maps in Appendix A.

Race or event promoters must stage events at areas that have been previously approved and used or in locations where developed facilities currently exist. Events may include non-motorized foot or bike races in duration of four to 24 hours that may include such attractions as food and outdoor gear vendors, art exhibits, and music.

In general all designated roads and trails may be used within the Taos Valley Overlook, Guadalupe Mountain, and Wild Rivers zones of the Río Grande del Norte National Monument for competitive running or mountain biking events. The Slide Trail and the river canyon within Orilla Verde and Wild Rivers zones would be closed to racing events as part of this interim action.

The proposed action would authorize the following activities with mitigation for each area:

WILD RIVERS

Permit and Participant Limits

- One annual event
- Number of participants and associated event personnel limited to 400
- Up to 10 vendors/educational booths allowed in designated staging areas only (commercial vendors may include art, crafts, food or live performances)

Assigned Race Location and Staging Areas (See attached map)

- Non-motorized race routes only on designated roads and trails
- Trails leading into the river canyon closed to competitive events
- Start/Finish on paved loop road directly in front of Zimmerman Visitor Center
- All aid stations must be located at trail intersections and/or two track trails to avoid any vegetative disturbance
- Parking allowed at Zimmerman Visitor Center or offsite with shuttle service, if necessary. If needed overflow parking may occur in the previously disturbed area adjacent to Zimmerman Visitor Center in vegetative treatment area near cattleguard.
 - If the previously disturbed area is used for parking, impact monitoring must be completed to determine if seeding of native species is required. The area would be re-seeded if disturbance levels negatively impact soils resulting in higher potential for soil loss.
- Applicants required to submit a sign and public information plan for use of county roads to Taos County Public Works, if applicable
- Vending would be located in the Zimmerman Visitor Center parking lot
- Parking and event parameters would be flagged prior to event and monitored on site to enforce parameters

Other Permit Stipulations

- Participants must be courteous to other users and share roads and trails
- Event must follow campground quiet hours: 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.
- Permittee responsible for public safety
- Permittee responsible for security above and beyond BLM staff or law enforcement
- Permittee must inform other visitors of event at trailheads, access points, and trail intersections
- Monitor impacts of events to determine carrying capacity of facilities and resources to sustain such use and to determine whether future reductions are necessary to mitigate social or resource impacts (such as noxious weeds)
- A portion of the fee program funds would be used to pay for noxious weed inventory and treatment as well as buy seed for potential disturbed areas. (The BLM Range Ecologist would provide a relevant seed mix at that time)
- If impacts from this event damage any trail, it would be rehabilitated
- If high use causes any site-creep around currently disturbed areas, new disturbances would be reduced in width by re-vegetating where appropriate.
 - Seeding with native grasses and forbs adjacent to designated trails and other affected sites.
- Other current year Land Based SRP stipulations may apply

BLM Monitoring

- Prior to the events, the BLM would monitor areas to establish baseline conditions to document existing impacts or problem areas such as any ground disturbance, areas where trails may need erosion rehabilitation, established non-native species invasion, etc. to determine pre-event issues.
- Prior to the event, BLM staff will monitor trail condition to ensure trails can withstand high use. If not, those trails will be unusable for the event.
- Post-event monitoring would include:
 - Survey trails for areas where “site-creep” (i.e., in this case, the expansion of wear caused by pedestrian or vehicular traffic, typically characterized by the loss of vegetation and compaction or erosion of soils) may have occurred and use 5 meters (16 feet) transects in these areas to survey for impacts and recommend mitigation, if needed. Survey within a 5 meters buffer outside the impacted area
 - Use 5 meters transects (belt width) in aid station areas as well as any unhardened parking areas. Survey for non-native weed introductions, areas of soils disturbance, and other impacts related to the events
 - To monitor impacted areas larger than 50 meters (165 feet) in diameter, a modified Assessment, Inventory, and Monitoring (AIM) plot can be used to measure vegetation composition and cover among other indicators to determine if the site is declining due to repeated impacts

TAOS VALLEY OVERLOOK

Permit and Participant Limits

- One or two annual events
- Number of participants and associated event personnel limited to 400
- Up to three vendors/educational booths allowed in designated staging areas only (commercial vendors may include art, crafts, food or live performances)

Assigned Race Location and Staging Areas (See attached map)

- Non-motorized race routes only on designated or existing roads and trails
- The Slide Trail would be closed to competitive events
- Orilla Verde area and the Río Pueblo de Taos and Río Grande corridors would be closed to competitive events
- Parking would occur at the trailhead, along the adjacent administrative access road, along C110, or offsite with shuttle service
- Applicants required to submit sign and public information plan for use of county roads to Taos County Public Works, if applicable
- Camping and pit area for mountain bikes on administrative access road only
- Vending would be located at the BLM trailhead at the end of C110
- Start/Finish may be located anywhere on administrative access road as well as parking area and vendor staging area (see attached map)
- All aid stations must be located at trail intersections and/or two track trails to avoid any vegetative disturbance
- Parking and event parameters would be flagged prior to event and monitored on site to enforce parameters

Permit Stipulations

- No amplified music on the Taos Valley Overlook
- No camp fires
- Permittee responsible for public safety
- Permittee responsible for security above and beyond BLM staff or law enforcement
- Permittee must inform other visitors of event at trailheads, access points, and trail intersections
- Participants must be courteous to other users and share roads and trails
- Event must follow Orilla Verde campground quiet hours: 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.
- Monitor impacts of events to determine carrying capacity of the facilities and resources to sustain such use, and to determine whether future limits are needed to mitigate social or resource impacts (such as noxious weeds)
- A portion of funds from the fee program would be used to pay for noxious weed inventory and treatment as well as buy seed for potential disturbed areas. (The BLM Range Ecologist would provide a relevant seed mix at that time)
- If impacts from this event damage any trail, it would be rehabilitated
- If high use causes any site-creep around currently disturbed areas, new disturbances would be reduced in width by re-vegetating where appropriate.
 - Seeding with native grasses and forbs adjacent to designated trails and other affected sites.
- Other current year stipulations for Land Based SRPs may apply

BLM Monitoring

- Prior to the events, the BLM would monitor areas to establish baseline conditions to document existing impacts or problem areas such as any ground disturbance, areas where trails may need erosion rehabilitation, established non-native species invasion, etc. to determine pre-event issues.
- Prior to the event, BLM staff will monitor trail condition to ensure trails can withstand high use. If not, those trails will be unusable for the event.
- Post-event monitoring would include:

- Survey trails for areas where site-creep may have occurred and use 5 meters (16 feet) transects in these areas to survey for impacts to recommend mitigation, if needed. Survey within a 5 meters buffer outside the impacted area.
- Use 5 meters transects (belt width) in aid station areas as well as any unhardened parking areas. Survey for non-native weed introductions, areas of soils disturbance, and other impacts related to the events. Non-native weed introductions may take 3 years to detect subsequent to the events.
- To monitor impacted areas larger than 50 meters (165 feet) in diameter, a modified Assessment, Inventory, and Monitoring (AIM) plot can be used to measure vegetation composition and cover among other indicators to determine if the site is declining due to repeated impacts.

2.2 Alternative B: No Action

Under this alternative, the three SRP applications would not be approved. Permit applications of this nature would be reviewed individually by resource staff as they are submitted. Separate analysis would be completed for each or denied and/or deferred until a monument management plan is completed. Regular non-motorized visitor use on existing Taos Valley Overlook and Wild Rivers Trails would continue.

2.3 Alternatives Considered but not Analyzed in Detailed

National Monument Interim Programmatic SRP Plan Alternative: An alternative to analyze SRPs for non-competitive events in the monument programmatically, whereby the analysis would be at a much broader scale, was considered but dismissed from detailed analysis at this time. A programmatic plan for SRPs would consider use levels and numbers of permits in the long term, in various locations, and with expanded activities. The analysis and decision space would be broader and more flexible and would have considered allocations for SRP activities rather than specific SRP applications. However, the decision was made to postpone that analysis for the monument management planning process.

The programmatic SRP proposal, ultimately dismissed by the BLM, originally provided for SRPs to be authorized within the Río Grande corridor. However, during a January 2014 interdisciplinary team meeting, the issue was raised regarding the potential for impacts to various wildlife, particularly in riparian areas. Subsequently the proposed action was developed to exclude the opportunity for any competitive events below the rim of the Río Grande gorge or within other stream corridors.

Seasonal Restrictions Alternative: An alternative that would apply seasonal restrictions to activities in the Taos Overlook area in order to protect a peregrine falcon nest was considered by the BLM but dismissed. The Taos RMP provides a buffer zone of 1.0 mile around peregrine falcon nests to preclude surface disturbing activities from February 1 to August 31. The RMP also provides for the avoidance or minimization of noise disturbance and management activities within a mile. The activities, however, are not considered surface disturbing, and staging for the activity is beyond a mile of the nest and is otherwise mitigated through design features incorporated into the proposed action.

Chapter 3: Affected Environment

3.1 Río Grande del Norte National Monument--Objects and Values

3.1.1 Wildlife Resources

Wildlife Habitat:

Wildlife species expected to inhabit the area include rabbits, coyotes, ravens, and various bat species, as well as big game species. Numerous small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and insects can be found and include prairie dogs, field mice, ground squirrels, kangaroo rats, small lizards and rattlesnakes. Seventy-three bird species are reported to breed in pinon-juniper habitat (Balda and Masters 1980). Not all these species occur at any one site and the mix of species varies greatly with stand characteristics. The bird species considered obligates or semi-obligates of pinon-juniper habitat include the gray flycatcher, ash-throated flycatcher, western scrub-jay, pinon jay, juniper titmouse, bushtit, Bewick's wren, gray vireo, black-throated gray warbler, and lark sparrow. Total breeding density increases as total tree density increases, and large annual fluctuations in breeding densities may occur. Juniper seeds, when present in winter, are an important food source for a variety of thrushes (LaRue 1994). Sagebrush obligate or semi-obligate birds include Brewer's sparrow, sage sparrow and sage thrasher.

The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish used the Southwest Regional Gap Analysis to delineate landscape scale key wildlife habitats in the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy for New Mexico (2005). Two key terrestrial habitats are located in the project area: Inter-Mountain Basins Big Sagebrush Shrubland and Rocky Mountain Montane Mixed Conifer Forest and Woodland (New Mexico Department of Game and Fish 2005). The project areas include important summer and winter range for mule deer and elk, with the greatest limiting factors being habitat fragmentation and unsuitable vegetative structure.

Primary big game species in the project areas are mule deer, elk, and as a result of recent reintroduction, Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep. The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (Game and Fish) is the agency with the authority and responsibility for managing big game population numbers. The BLM works in partnership with Game and Fish to establish population goals in big game management units that include public land and to manage habitats to try to achieve those goals. Other big game species which occur in the project areas are black bear and mountain lion. Neither species occurs in large numbers nor has there been any specific habitat management directed toward them. Merriam's turkey, listed as a big game species by Game and Fish, also occurs in the project area.

The project area contains critical winter range, summer range and a migratory corridor for elk, mule deer and pronghorn. Winter range is considered the most limiting habitat type for elk and mule deer, and includes sagebrush-steppe, pinon-juniper woodlands, mountain shrub, and ponderosa pine below 7,500 feet. Winter diets for mule deer are a combination of forbs, browse, and new growth on cool-season grasses. Browse becomes an increasing portion of the diet as snow accumulates or forbs and grasses become depleted.

In northern New Mexico, mule deer become concentrated on winter ranges with densities of 20-100 deer/square miles in suitable habitat (Watkins and Bishop et al. 2007). Winter ranges are critical because these areas support higher densities of mule deer and elk on less available forage, are less tolerant of high herbivore rates, are prone to non-native weed invasion, and are potential areas for development.

BLM Sensitive Species that are known to occur, or have potential habitat, in the area include the Gunnison's prairie dog, bald eagle, ferruginous hawk, Western burrowing owl, pinon jay, loggerhead

shrike, several bat species, and Ripley's milkvetch. (See section 3.2 for a description of Ripley's milkvetch.) A list of the BLM Sensitive Species is provided in Appendix B.

Gunnison's prairie dog

The Gunnison's prairie dog is a BLM Sensitive Species and its habitat occurs in the Taos Plateau planning unit (as shown on Map 1 of the Taos RMP). In 2010, there were 39 active prairie dog colonies on the Taos Plateau planning unit, a slight decrease from the 44 colonies reported active in 2006. Estimated cumulative spatial coverage in this planning unit is approximately 1,201 acres for the 28 active colonies where perimeter was measured. This total spatial coverage was nearly identical to that measured in 2006; however, the number of colonies contributing to the cumulative total in 2006 was much higher (n=44), thus the mean acreage per colony increased from 27.5 acres in 2006 to 42.9 acres in 2010 (Hawks Aloft 2010).

There has been an upward trend in the population in the Taos Plateau, increasing from an average estimated cumulative spatial coverage of 363 acres in 2005 to 1,209 acres in 2006 (Hawks Aloft, 2006). The major threat to this subspecies is plague due to the isolated nature of the colonies and inability to repopulate after a colony is wiped out by the disease.

Western burrowing owl

The Western burrowing owl is a BLM Sensitive Species and is known to nest in the Taos Plateau planning unit. A minimum of 14 adults and 11 young owls were documented in 2006, a sizeable increase over a total of 5 observations from 2003-2005 (Hawks Aloft 2006). In 2010, there were 8 adult owls at 6 locations in the Taos Plateau planning unit, with documented breeding at two of these sites (Hawks Aloft 2010). Future monitoring will determine if the apparent increases continue and provide a better understanding of the prevailing factors influencing this population in this area.

Bald Eagle

The bald eagle was removed from federal threatened status in 2005, however it is a New Mexico BLM Sensitive Species. Bald eagles are known to migrate along the avian flyway of the Rocky Mountains from the Colorado/New Mexico stateline down to Velarde and beyond during the winter, and can be observed along the Río Grande and Taos Plateau planning unit, as well as other areas adjacent to the waterways in the area. Populations are small but stable. There are no known roost trees, however, frequent observations of bald eagles along the Río Grande from Orilla Verde south to Velarde are common. Formal surveys are not conducted during the winter for this species, although reports are made.

Ferruginous hawk

Ferruginous hawk is a BLM Sensitive Species and there is only one known location for a nesting pair in the Taos Plateau planning unit. Additional surveys of this area will continue and mitigation measures applied when land use activities are proposed in this area. The project area is potential foraging habitat for this species.

Loggerhead Shrike & Pinon Jay

The loggerhead shrike and pinon jay are BLM Sensitive species and have been documented in the Taos Plateau area. Loggerhead shrikes are known to use mixed shrub, sagebrush and pinon/juniper in the planning area. Pinon jay are seen in small flocks in pinon-juniper woodlands. Populations seem to be stable, but no intensive surveys have been conducted for these species.

Bat species (various)

Important habitat for bats can include cliffs, trees, caves and abandoned mines. Piñon-juniper habitats can also serve as important habitat for several species of bats. Of the 27 species of bats in New Mexico, the BLM planning area is known to contain habitat for 15 of those species, including those listed as BLM Sensitive Species in Appendix A. Auditory inventories of bats in the Río Grande Gorge have documented over 900 passes in one night over three survey dates.

Key management prescriptions for wildlife are summarized in the Taos RMP, Rio Grande Corridor Final Plan (2000), and the San Antonio/Pot Mountain Habitat Management Plan (1992). Management goals and objectives for wildlife in the project area include improving browse vigor and availability; increasing density and composition of cool season herbaceous species for deer, elk and antelope; and improving habitat for small mammals and big game by improving structural diversity and increasing edge and cover.

In general, priority wildlife habitats (large areas of BLM land important for big game, raptors, and special status species) are located in the Taos Plateau planning unit, which includes the project areas.

The Upper Río Grande in the Taos Plateau planning unit is particularly important nesting habitat for raptors, including golden eagle, red-tailed hawk, ferruginous hawk, prairie falcon, peregrine falcon, American kestrel, osprey, Northern harrier, Swainson's hawk, Cooper's hawk, and great horned owl. In addition, in cooperation with the NMDGF, reintroduction of the river otter has resulted in a self-sustaining population in the Río Grande adjacent to the project area.

Prairie dog towns occur throughout the planning area and serve as important habitat for many wildlife species. Several species of birds, such as horned larks, ferruginous hawks, and golden eagles frequent prairie dog towns in search of food. Three species of wildlife of management concern are very closely associated with prairie dog towns: the ferruginous hawk, Western burrowing owl and black-footed ferret.

Riparian areas, such as the Río Grande and other perennial streams adjacent to the project areas, represent corridors necessary for migration of amphibians, bats, migratory waterfowl and other wildlife species (i.e., Yuma skipper, sand hill cranes). Big game corridors exist along the New Mexico/Colorado state line from the San Juan Mountains range to the Taos Plateau and the volcanic cones of Pot Mountain, Wind Mountain, Montoso, Chiflo and Ute Mountain to the Sangre de Cristo's. Critical winter and summer range for elk and mule deer is located throughout the planning area.

Migratory Birds:

Migratory bird species of conservation concern that have the potential to occur in the project area include bald eagle, golden eagle, peregrine falcon, ferruginous hawk, prairie falcon, Western burrowing owl, black-throated gray warbler, juniper titmouse, olive-sided flycatcher, loggerhead shrike, pinon jay, Brewer's sparrow, pygmy nuthatch, sage thrasher, yellow warbler, Grace's warbler, Virginia's warbler, Williamson's sapsucker, red-naped sapsucker, mourning dove and sage sparrow. The Southwestern willow flycatcher is federally and state-listed as endangered and is the highest priority special status species for Taos Field Office due to the riparian habitat found along the major river systems. The Southwestern Willow Flycatcher Management Plan (1998) describes the background and history of the species and outlines various tasks to be accomplished to protect, improve or reestablish nesting/foraging habitat on BLM administered lands within the planning area.

The only critical habitat designation within the Taos Field Office planning area is that for the Southwestern willow flycatcher. The Final Rule establishing Critical Habitat for the Southwestern willow flycatcher was published on October 19, 2005 (Federal Register Vol. 70 #201), for lands identified along the Rio Grande from Taos Junction Bridge to the border of the Pueblo of Ohkay Owingeh.

The Rio Grande, adjacent to the project areas, is important migratory stopover habitat for the Southwestern willow flycatcher as it moves from its winter grounds in Mexico and Central America to the northeast extent of its range in San Luis, Colorado. Nesting has been documented along the Río Grande in the vicinity of Orilla Verde Recreation Area as recent as 2009, however, successful reproduction has failed due to the narrow and linear nature of riparian vegetation and nest predation by brown-headed cowbirds.

For migratory birds, the Central Migratory Flyway is centered on the north/south ridges of the mountains of central New Mexico, including the Sangre de Cristo and San Juan Mountains, adjacent to the project areas. The Sandia Mountains have been noted for the large number of migrating raptors utilizing the prevailing winds and thermals generated by these ridges (NMAPPWG 2004). These migration patterns include BLM lands.

3.2 Ecological diversity

Vegetation:

Ecological diversity includes the health of the ecosites that supports native plants and animals. An ecosite is defined as the variation in growing conditions described by the difference in physical site characteristics such as soil texture, climate, topography (i.e. formation type), and the description of the plant community typically occupying the site. In Wild Rivers there are two dominant ecosites within the project area: loamy (R036XB006NM) and pinyon-pine – one seed juniper/Gamel's oak (*Pinus edulis-Juniperus monosperma/Quercus gambelii*, F048AY015NM). In the Taos Overlook area there are three dominant ecosites: gravelly slopes (R036XA004NM), loamy site (R036XB006NM), and breaks (R036XB001NM).

The loamy site (R036XB006NM) occurs on mesas, plateaus, fan remnant and broad upland valley side. Slopes are typically level but may range up to 15 percent. Mean annual precipitation range from 9-14 inches. This is a grassland site with scattered shrubs throughout the site. The dominant species are big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), fourwing saltbrush (*Atriplex canescens*), western wheatgrass (*Pascopyrum smithii*), Indian ricegrass (*Achnatherum hymenoides*), winterfat (*Krascheninnikovia lanata*), and fringed sagewort (*Artemisia frigida*). Surface soils range from sandy loam to clay loam with moderate permeability and medium runoff potential. Soils are generally deep and well-drained with medium to high available water-holding capacity.

The pinyon-pine – one seed juniper site (F048AY015NM) site occurs on summits, dip slopes of mesas, plateaus and are gently to moderately sloping. Mean annual precipitation is roughly 9 to 14 inches. The dominant plant community is a pinyon-pine overstory with western wheatgrass, Indian ricegrass, needleandthread (*Hesperostipa comata*), bottlebrush squirreltail (*Elymus elymoides*), and aster species. The surface texture is very gravelly loam to cobbly clay loam as the second layer. The soils can be rocky or shallow with a low water holding capacity.

The gravelly slopes (R036XA004NM) site occurs on rolling to steep hills, mountain footslopes, and side of mesas, benches, and ridges. Slopes range from 15-35 percent on varying exposures. Mean annual precipitation ranges from 12-14 inches. The dominant plant community is a mixed grassland-shrub complex with some pinyon-juniper. Species include needleandthread, Indian ricegrass, blue grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*), big sagebrush, fourwing saltbrush, winterfat, mountain mahogany (*Cercocarpus montanus* var *paucidentatus*), and pinyon-juniper. Soils are alluvial but generally moderately deep to deep and are well drained. Surface soils gravelly loamy sand, gravelly sandy loam, and gravelly loam.

The breaks site (R036XB001NM) occurs along canyon edges, side slopes, ridges, and benches with slopes ranging from 10-55 percent. Mean annual precipitation ranges from 9-14 inches. Typically this site is diverse in exposures composed of big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), fourwing saltbrush (*Atriplex canescens*), black grama (*Bouteloua eriopoda*), sideoats grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*), juniper (*Juniperus monosperma*), and pinyon pine (*Pinus edulis*). The soils range typically from loams to clay loams with moderately slow permeability. Runoff in this site can be medium to rapid depending on slope, coarse fragments, and vegetation.

Ripley's milkvetch

Ripley's milkvetch is a BLM Sensitive species. Due to the palatability of Ripley's milkvetch and documented small sites of the plant in the Taos Plateau area, it is possible there were more Ripley's milkvetch on rangelands in the past. Currently there are small patches of known populations of the species in the planning area but not known to occur within the proposed project area.

3.3 Soils

The upland soils at Wild Rivers are Fernando-Hernandez (FHB) and Orejas-Montecito (OMD) associations. The Fernando-Hernandez is a nearly level clay loam and rated "somewhat limited" with moderately favorable features for paths and trails. Any limitations were minimized by special design, planning, or installation. When wet, where the soils are high in clay content, it may be undesirable for foot, horse, or bicycle traffic, and excessive soil damage could occur. The Orejas-Montecito is a strongly sloping very stony loam and also rated "somewhat limited" for paths and trails. This soil is more suitable for recreation uses that require heavy foot traffic.

The upland soils at the Taos Overlook are of the Sedillo-Silva (SED) and Silva-Sedillo (SSC) associations. The Silva is a clay loam and rated as "slight" or generally favorable with minor and easily overcome limitations for paths and trails. The Sedillo is gravelly clay loam and rated as "moderate" (due to slope) for paths and trails. When wet, where the soils are high in clay content, it may be undesirable for foot, horse, or bicycle traffic, and excessive soil damage could occur. SED is more strongly sloping while SSC is gentle sloping.

3.4 Recreation

The demand for trails, non-motorized activities and events on public land and their economic benefit is demonstrated in New Mexico. In 2012 there were 404,714 Visitor Days (12 visitor hours) attributed to hiking and biking and 219,280 Visitor Days engaged in specialized non-motor sports and events on BLM lands in New Mexico (BLM 2013). Results from a 2009 BLM Pilot of the National Visitor Use Monitoring strategy indicate that \$17,887,200 was spent by visiting parties to BLM lands administered by the Taos Field Office, about half of which were traveling from 50 miles or more (BLM 2009). In addition, "Recreation on BLM-managed lands and waters in New Mexico supported more than 1,600 jobs and contributed more than \$140 million to the state's economy in fiscal year 2011" (BLM 2013). Within Taos County, many recreation opportunities are available on public lands managed by BLM and the U.S. Forest Service to local, regional, national and international visitors, which include general tourism and outdoor adventure, as well as enjoying scenic beauty and natural resources.

SRP holders provide many services, including recreation and education opportunities to visitors traveling through the area. Between 2000 and 2014 Taos Field Office typically authorized up to 54 SRPs, many of which are continually active each year. Between two to twelve new permits are issued each year during the same timeframe, but many times the permittee does not re-activate their permit in subsequent years. Consequently, the total number of SRPs does not vary much from year to year. Within the past few

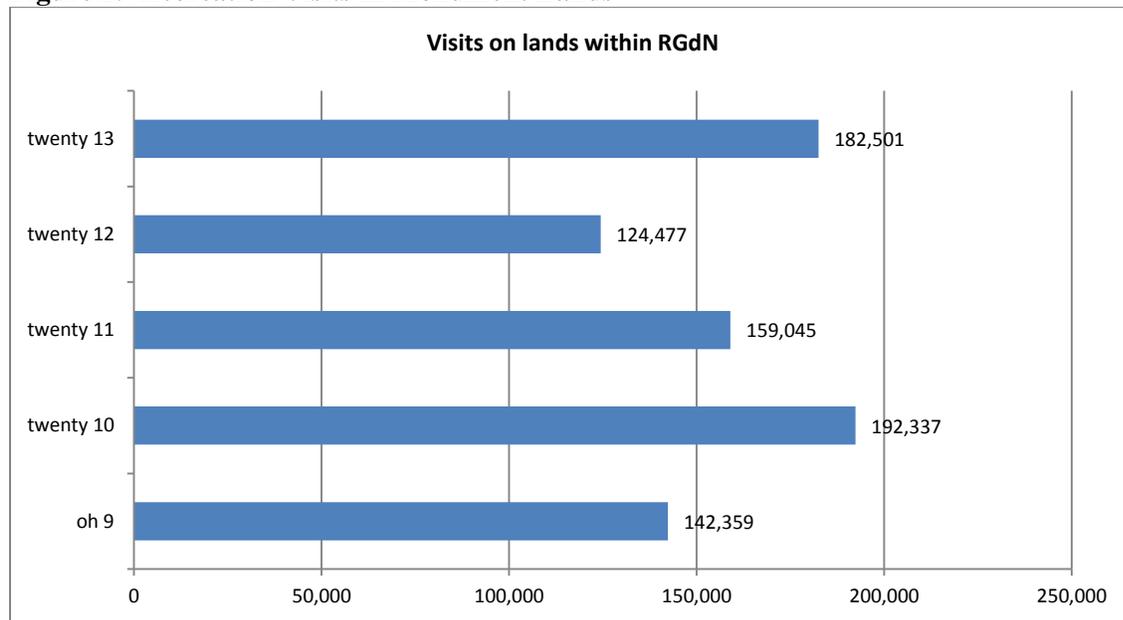
years, permits have been authorized for the following activities: guided big game hunting, guided and outfitted whitewater rafting and kayaking, kayak instruction, guided climbing and instruction, hiking and interpretive tours, horseback trail rides, llama packing, hot air ballooning, rocket launching, motorcycle races, photography, angling, target shooting, and vending services.

There are almost 66 miles of non-motorized trail within the Río Grande del Norte National Monument and trail use is a significant portion of visitor use. About 38 percent of respondents in the 2009 survey reported participating in hiking, while 2 percent said they rode horses, and 3 percent said they mountain biked (BLM 2009). Statewide participation in running was 56%, road bicycling 52 percent and special events at outdoor facilities 52 percent (NMSP 2010).

The Rio Grande Gorge Recreation Area, part of the monument, includes developed recreation sites, concentrated use areas, and trails within the river corridor. Among these are the Wild Rivers, Orilla Verde, and Taos Valley Overlook zones.

As Figure 1 illustrates, visitation varies from year to year within the monument. The increase from 2009 to 2010 may be a result of a new vehicle counter installed on the newly acquired public land on Taos Valley Overlook. The increase in visitor use from 2012 to 2013 could be a result of the new monument designation in March of 2013 and its publicity. The average recreation visitation for the monument over the last five years is 160,144.

Figure 1: Recreation Visits in Monument Lands



The Taos Valley Overlook includes almost 2,600 acres on the rim adjacent to the Orilla Verde area and is connected to the river by The Slide Trail (a decommissioned state highway and county road 570) along the Rio Pueblo de Taos and Picuris Trail to Taos Junction Bridge. A 10-mile single track trail was added to seven and a half miles of old two track routes on the Overlook property. On the Overlook, many people hike or ride mountain bikes down The Slide or on top on the rim where visitors like to ride horses and run trails as well. In 2013 there were 20,257 visits on Taos Valley Overlook where virtually all activity stems from trail use. Orilla Verde received 25,397 visits the same year, where popular activities

include camping in the six available campgrounds, boating, fishing and hiking. La Senda del Medio, La Vista Verde and West Rim Trails can be accessed from Orilla Verde.

The Wild Rivers area is named after the Rio Grande and Red River, both charter rivers with the passage of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968. The two most popular recreation activities reported in a BLM Visitor's Survey Site Report in 2003 at Wild Rivers were sightseeing and hiking, followed by camping, fishing, biking, swimming, interpretation, and hunting. Wild Rivers received approximately 13,591 visits in 2013. Trails located on the rim and in the woodlands include Rinconada, Pescado, Red River Fault Loop, Guadalupe, and Vistas de Questa. The area also includes five campgrounds, four day use areas (one on NM State Lands), and a visitor center as well as additional trails leading into the gorge to the Rio Grande and Red River.

Chapter 4: Environmental Effects

4.1 Direct and Indirect Effects

4.1.1 Alternative A: Proposed Action

4.1.1.1 Río Grande del Norte National Monument—Objects and Values

Wildlife Resources

Wildlife Habitat:

The proposed action in general is not likely to have an adverse effect on wildlife habitat because of the small scale and scope of the proposed events. Harm at the population or species level is unlikely for non-special status species because of the size and distribution of the project areas relative to the dispersal of wildlife populations, foraging opportunities, and the behavior of individual animals. Implementing the stipulations, mitigation and monitoring procedures herein should reduce the effect of non-motorized competitive events to wildlife species and habitat and ecological diversity.

The proposed action is anticipated to have only negligible impacts on winter range habitat for big game species, since no vegetation that could be used as forage would be intentionally removed (BLM 2014). Any loss of forage along designated trails and around staging areas due to event-related trampling of vegetation would also be negligible in terms of available forage within the contiguous habitat types.

Short term effects of the proposed action on big game populations could include disturbance from increased vehicles in the area and non-motorized activity associated with the competitive events, and noise and commotion from any vendors or support services provided for the duration of the events (about 4 to 24 hours, plus event set-up and take-down). This could result in temporary displacement of some animals from areas where the events are taking place, particularly those nearer to the staging areas.

BLM Sensitive Species:

For the following reasons, the proposed action is not expected to have adverse effects on BLM Sensitive Species:

Gunnison's prairie dog: All of the project segments are located within the known range of the montane Gunnison's Prairie Dog, and at least portions of the project segments contain suitable habitat for this species. During the surveys, the only Gunnison's Prairie Dog sighting was an abandoned town in Wild Rivers.

During the proposed activities, only minimal impacts to suitable habitat are expected to occur because activities would occur on existing trails and vegetation present would not be removed. Therefore, the proposed project may impact individual Gunnison's Prairie Dogs, but it is not likely to result in a trend towards Federal listing or loss of viability (BLM 2014).

Western burrowing owl: No burrowing owls, signs, or potentially suitable burrows were observed during the surveys of the project segments. However, individuals may be present in areas where suitable prairie dog burrows occur for this species. All of the project segments are located within the known range of the montane Gunnison's prairie dog. Portions of all the trails contain suitable open habitat for prairie dogs and, therefore, burrowing owl as well (BLM 2014).

During the proposed activities, only minimal impacts to suitable habitat are expected to occur because activities would occur on existing trails where no potentially suitable burrows were observed. Therefore, the proposed project may impact Burrowing Owl, but is not likely to result in a trend toward Federal listing or loss of viability.

Bald Eagle: Due to the location of the project segments adjacent to the Río Grande, all areas would be considered foraging habitat used by wintering bald eagles. In addition, bald eagles may be present in these areas during spring and fall migration. The proposed project may temporarily disturb or displace foraging bald eagles, but is not likely to result in a trend towards federal listing or loss of viability (BLM 2014).

Ferruginous hawk: Open desertscrub and grassland habitat potentially supporting prey species for Ferruginous Hawk is present in the vicinity of Wild Rivers project segments. During the proposed action in Wild Rivers, only minimal impacts to desertscrub and grassland habitat are expected to occur because vegetation present would not be removed. The proposed action may impact individual Ferruginous Hawks through the disturbance of habitat supporting prey species, but it is not likely to result in a trend towards Federal listing or loss of viability (BLM 2014).

Loggerhead Strike: All of the project segments are located in areas demonstrating at least one aspect of what constitutes suitable habitat for Loggerhead Shrike, such as open areas with scattered trees, desertscrub, or pinyon-juniper woodland. During the proposed action only minimal impacts to suitable habitat are expected to occur because no vegetation present would be removed. Therefore, the proposed action may impact individual Loggerhead Shrikes, but it is not likely to result in a trend towards Federal listing or loss of viability (BLM 2014).

Pinon Jay: Portions of all project segments contain pinyon-juniper habitat suitable for Pinyon Jay. During the proposed action, disturbance to vegetation would be minimal and no trees would be removed thereby maintaining Pinyon Pine foraging habitat for this species. Therefore, the proposed project may impact Pinyon Jays, but is not likely to result in a trend towards federal listing or loss of viability (BLM 2014).

Bats species: No potential roost sites for bat species were observed during the surveys. However, various combinations of open grasslands, pinyon-juniper, and desert scrub that could be used as foraging habitat by bats were observed on all of the project segments. During the proposed action, only minimal impacts to suitable foraging habitat are expected to occur because no vegetation present would be removed. Therefore, the proposed project may impact individual bats, but it is not likely to result in a trend towards Federal listing or loss of viability (BLM 2014).

Migratory Birds:

There may be short-term impacts to individual birds due to disturbance during the events themselves. The proposed action has the potential to have a negative effect upon individual birds, eggs, young and/or the nesting habitat of ground or tree nesting birds; however, if that were to occur, there would likely be no noticeable impact to the population or to the species as a whole (BLM 2014).

If the proposed action is implemented during the primary breeding season (March 1 through August 1) there is the potential to impact reproductive and/or foraging activities, resulting in a negative effect on individual birds, eggs, young, and/or nesting habitat that would be due to trampling or disturbance from human noise and commotion. This would likely not have a measurable negative effect at the population or species level. If project activities commence during the nesting season, a bird survey would be required to ensure there are no nesting birds in trees, shrubs or grounds that may be trampled. If active

bird nests are found, coordination with the USFWS is required and a permit must be obtained in order to move or disturb any active nest.

Ecological Diversity

Vegetation:

Under the proposed action, vegetation within the areas of the designated trails and roads, parking and staging areas could be directly affected by trampling. In the event of large spectator crowds, there could be some site-creep off the designated trails affecting native vegetation, especially at designated aid stations. The designated parking area at the Wild Rivers site would receive heavy use related to vehicle trampling. Plants vary greatly in their sensitivity to disturbance, and impacts may vary with different climatic and soil conditions as well as the intensity of the disturbance. The impact of trampling by humans or vehicles could negatively impact vegetation by causing mortality or by introducing non-native or noxious species. However, these potential impacts would be minimized by use of existing disturbed areas (e.g., roads, trails, and trailheads).

Depending on the type of vegetation being disturbed, impacts from these events should be minimal and not adversely influence desired condition for the resource. Grass species recovery is dependent upon post-event precipitation, plant vigor prior to disturbance, and post-event pressure (e.g. livestock, wildlife, recreation). Depending upon the amount of post-event influences, grasses can recover as quickly as the first growing season. Without sufficient post-event moisture, recovery could take much longer to reach pre-event levels and support less desirable species during the interim. Since the events may take place annually, the recovery time may not be sufficient, as it depends on the impact each year and subsequent climatic conditions. The parking area at the Wild Rivers site has the potential to be impacted the most as the soils are loose. Since the soils are loose, re-seeding hearty native grasses to hold the soil may be required as mitigation following the events. The post-event monitoring would determine if the impacts from vehicles on the parking area merit restoration seeding.

Disturbance, plant mortality, or soil exposure along with a new introduction of a non-native or noxious species may cause a new infestation in the project area. Non-native invasive plants and noxious weeds could out-compete native vegetation, thus creating degraded and less diverse ecosites. Many non-native invasive plants and noxious weeds if left untreated can change soil composition. Invasions of alien plants can indirectly affect native plants and change ecosystems by altering soil stability, promoting erosion, and colonizing open substrates, affecting the accumulation of litter, salt, or other soil resources (Brooks et al., 2004). The project area would be monitored prior to the event as well as three years following events to ensure new infestations are documented and treated. Any seen noxious weeds would be treated according to BLM standards and regulations and according to the Taos Field Office Programmatic Treatment Plan for the Rapid Response to Weeds (DOI-BLM-NM-F020-2010-0008-EA).

4.1.1.2 Soils

Intense use could degrade trails and existing road conditions. Soils could be destabilized and left vulnerable to erosion. Potential impacts also include increased water runoff resulting in increased soil erosion adjacent to trails where vegetation trampling and disturbance may occur. The previously disturbed parking area in Wild Rivers may receive the most impact to soils by parking heavy vehicles. These vehicles may remove vegetation with tire movement or break soil surfaces with their weight, all of which can increase wind or water erosion. Although soils are identified as having a slight to moderate erosion hazard, severe erosion has been observed throughout the planning area.

By using constructed and maintained trails and roads designed for pedestrian use, these potential impacts should be substantially avoided, and the additional mitigation features incorporated into the proposed action should further serve to reduce potential impacts to soils.

4.1.1.3 Recreation

Special Recreation Permits are required for the privilege of making a profit or raising funds on public land. The action would occur on existing developed sites, trails and roads and in a manner consistent with the current uses of these recreation areas.

Additional recreation opportunities would be provided by permitting three annual non-motorized competitive events. In particular competitors would have opportunities on dirt trails at distances and on terrain that is currently not available in Taos County. Local competitors may benefit more because an opportunity for them to compete in their niche training activity would be provided close to home, allowing them to avoid travel time and cost.

There may be some displacement of non-permitted visitors on trails used during a mountain biking race. However, it's most likely that hikers, bikers, and horseback riders would simply use other trails on the day of the race. Visitors would be informed of events at trailheads, access points, and trail intersections by event permittees. Wild Rivers and the Taos Valley Overlook zone would remain open to other visitors during the events.

As previously indicated, visitation in the recreation areas within the Río Grande del Norte National Monument can vary from 30,000 to 50,000 or more from year to year. If visitor use remains constant over the next couple of years, three permitted events could result in an additional 1,200 race participants in addition to the potential for around 600 spectators. However, overall visitor use may decrease as well.

Participants of competitive running and biking events would benefit from increased physical fitness not just at the event itself but in the training leading up to the event. "Over the last decade, the rates of overweight and obese adults have increased across the nation as well as in New Mexico" where "Over 60% of New Mexican adults were overweight or obese in 2007" (NMSP 2010). Providing opportunities to get active outdoors can save money from the cost of health care. "An estimated \$324 million is spent in New Mexico annually on medical expenditures that are attributable to obesity in adults" (NMSP 2010).

Taos County local businesses would receive at least modest direct economic benefits in the form of expenditures from participants and/or spectators of large events of 150 or more. Direct benefits would include spending on food, gas, lodging, admissions, services, and retail purchases. For example, at the Foot Levelers Blue Ridge Marathon in Virginia, about 36% of runners responding to a survey stayed one or two nights and 46 percent traveled with family or friends (Roanoke 2013). Visitors who come from farther away and stay one or two nights are likely to contribute the most. Similarly, in the 2009 survey Taos BLM visitation was found to be about 50% from over 50 miles away, contributing greatly to the economic benefit in Taos compared with some other BLM offices. A study of the Cooper River Bridge 10K Run in South Carolina found that, "the larger the number of out of town participants, the greater the likely economic impact" (Davakos 2007).

4.1.2 Alternative B: No Action

4.1.2.1 Río Grande del Norte National Monument—Objects and Values

Wildlife Resources

Wildlife Habitat and Migratory Birds:

The No Action alternative would not affect wildlife habitat and migratory birds as there would be no additional disturbance beyond baseline levels of recreation (about 20,200 visits to Taos Valley Overlook and 13,600 visits to Wild Rivers annually), specifically to sagebrush or woodland obligates and grassland species. Generally, wildlife would find more permanent habitat niches within existing conditions and, therefore, the No Action alternative would have no negative impacts to wildlife habitat or migratory birds.

Ecological Diversity

Vegetation:

The No Action alternative would not affect vegetation as there would be no additional disturbance beyond baseline levels of recreation, specifically sagebrush or woodland and grassland vegetation cover types. Generally, vegetation would not be subject to additional disturbance or increased potential of introduction of non-native species and would remain within existing conditions and, therefore, the No Action alternative would have no negative impacts on vegetation.

4.1.2.2 Soils

The No Action alternative would not affect soils as there would be no additional disturbance beyond baseline levels of recreation. Generally, soils would not be subject to additional disturbance and remain within existing conditions and, therefore, the No Action alternative would have no negative impact on soils.

4.1.2.3 Recreation

A decision to deny authorization of non-motorized competitive events in the interim of the monument plan would completely limit those recreation and economic opportunities in the next two years or more during the planning process for the monument. Regular visitor use on the existing trails would continue. Visitation of up to 1200 race participants and potentially 600 spectators from three potential races would not contribute to the overall annual visitation in the monument. However, as indicated, non-permitted visitor use may vary as much as 30,000 or more in the monument lands from year to year as it has in the past.

4.2 Cumulative Effects Analysis

A cumulative impact, as defined in 40 CFR 1508.7, is the impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions regardless of what agency (Federal or non-Federal) or person undertakes such other action.

4.2.1 Cumulative Actions

4.2.1.1 Past and Present Actions

New trails have been incorporated into the Río Grande Gorge Recreation Area over the past 13 years. These trails include Las Vistas de Questa, The Slide (converted road/trail on a public right-of-way), Rift

Valley, and Picuris Trails. Two track routes were also designated for non-motorized use on the Taos Overlook in the 2000 Río Grande Corridor Final Plan. These trails receive substantial use.

The BLM acquired approximately 80 acres of land in 2013 at the top of the Río Pueblo de Taos rim adjacent to County Road 110 (C110), which provides additional public access to the Taos Overlook area. A formal trailhead with interpretive exhibits and an interpretive trail is being constructed at the end of C110 using existing linear disturbances with some minor modifications. This project will provide access to the current trail system, consisting of approximately 20 miles of primarily single-track trails.

4.2.1.2 Reasonably Foreseeable Actions

The BLM has initiated the planning process for management of the Río Grande del Norte National Monument. A new National Monument plan, anticipated to be completed and approved in early 2016, will provide programmatic guidance and allocations on SRP opportunities within the monument among its comprehensive management decisions.

4.2.2 Cumulative Effects

4.2.2.1 Río Grande del Norte National Monument—Objects and Values Wildlife Resources

Wildlife Habitat:

Cumulative impacts of the proposed action on wildlife populations include disturbance from non-motorized recreation, administrative and public motor vehicle use, and staging area activities. There would be short-term elevated cumulative impacts to individual species due to disturbance during the events in combination with ongoing recreational activities (hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, dog walking, bird watching, camping, etc.).

Cumulative impacts of the proposed action on wildlife populations include displacement from increased administrative and public motor vehicle use, foot and bicycle traffic, noise and commotion from staging the organized events. In general, however, the proposed activities represent a very small incremental change to the ongoing recreational activities in the respective areas which together may cause some area-wide displacement of wildlife from foraging habitat, depending on the season.

Migratory Birds:

Cumulative recreational pursuits in the areas proposed for use could result in a slight reduction in habitat quality of these areas due to human disturbance.

Ecological Diversity

Vegetation:

Any disturbance, even mild, has the potential to increase the chances of non-native and noxious weed infestations. There is also more of a risk of non-native or noxious weed spread with this proposed action because of the increase in humans as a vector of dispersal, especially at a newly constructed trailhead in the Taos Valley Overlook area (at C-110) where soil disturbance is recent. If mitigation is followed and any new non-native or noxious weed is controlled, there should not be cumulative impacts. If small occurrences are not controlled, there is a chance non-native or noxious weeds could occupy bare ground and high concentration areas and subsequently be spread elsewhere within the monument.

With any vegetation disturbance, sites would be reseeded to aid in a faster recovery. This should not affect cumulative impacts to the ecosite integrity over time. If they are not reseeded, however, ecosites could experience slow degradation over time by these high intensity, short duration events.

4.2.2.2 Soils

SRP for competitive events would result in increased use for short durations. Increased use of dirt trails and roads would increase compaction and possibly expand area of disturbed ground if there is site-creep by spectators. These impacts can result in higher runoff and erosion. The potential increased use, however, represents a small increment in the context of substantial use the trails generally receive from horseback riders, mountain bikers, hikers, and dog walkers. Mitigation proposed should alleviate potential problems, also.

4.2.2.3 Recreation

There is a demonstrated demand for public access at the end of County Road 110. The recent 80-acre acquisition in 2013 will result in positive effects of increased management, as the BLM is able to control unauthorized vehicle use and trash dumping. A trailhead, as outlined in the 2006 Taos Valley Overlook Project Plan, in this location will tie together the trail networks of Orilla Verde and Taos Valley Overlook.

The addition of this formal trailhead will probably not create much more recreation use than what already occurs. However, there could be a slight increase in use or a change in the type of user due to an increase in management presence. The management prescription for the recreation setting on the Overlook is Middle Country. Further defined social and physical setting prescriptions are: 29 encounters per day and a ½ mile from or within sight of improved roads. The new trailhead would complement the opportunity for organized recreational events.

Chapter 5: Consultation and Coordination

5.1 Summary of Public Participation

5.1.1 Public Comments Analysis

To be completed following public review and comment of the EA.

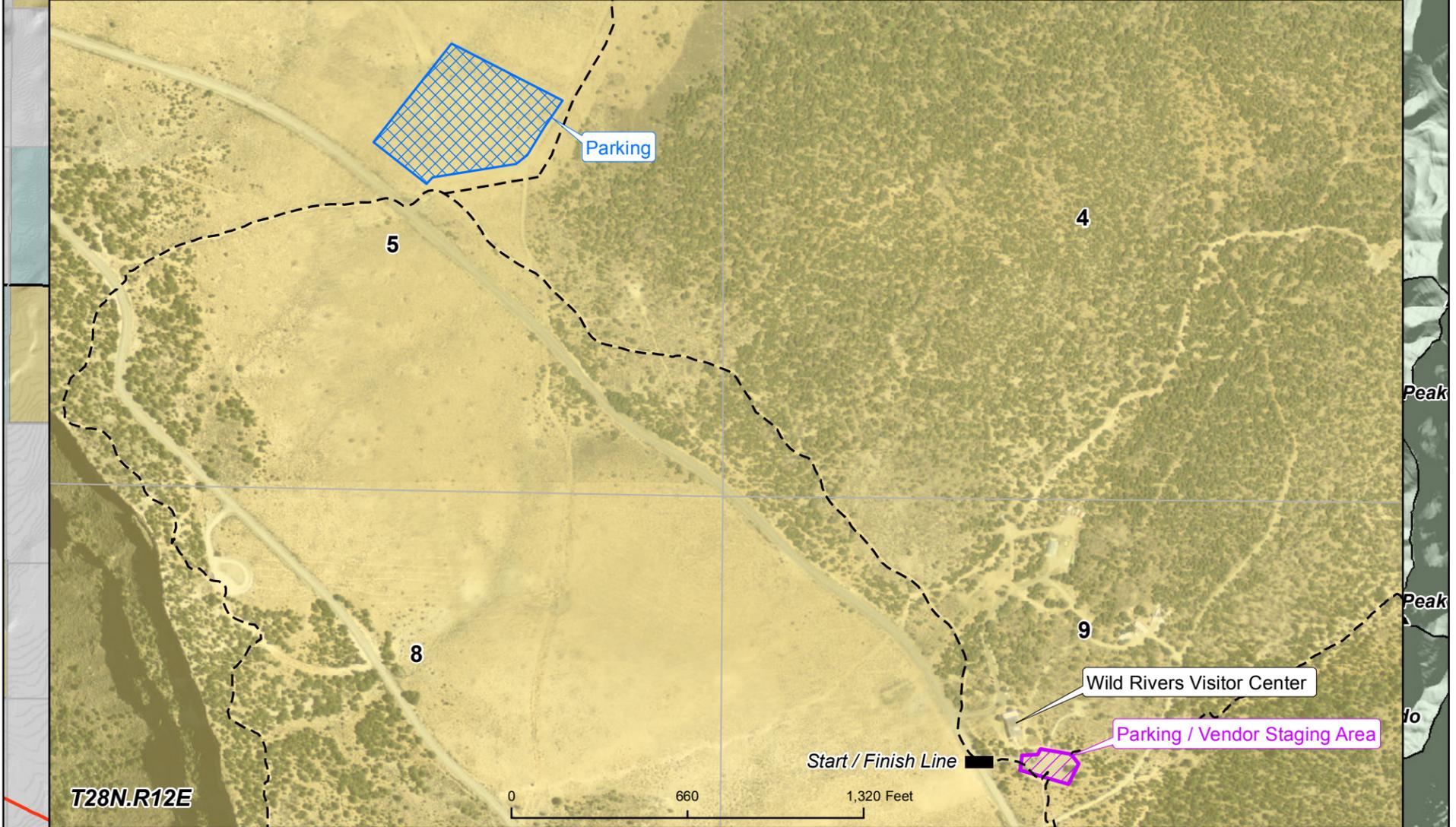
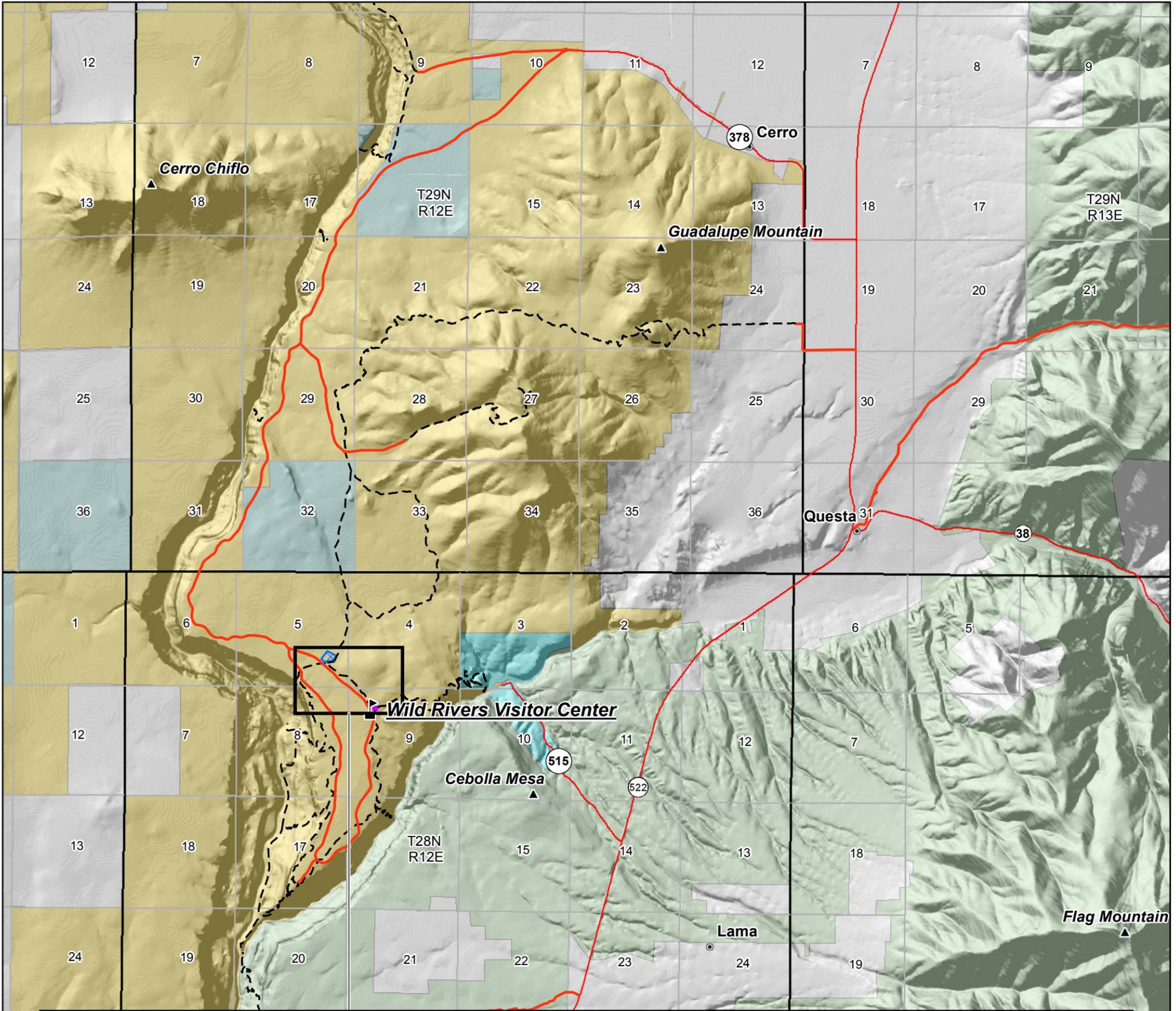
5.2 List of Preparers

Tami Torres	Outdoor Recreation Planner
Valerie Williams	Wildlife Biologist
Zoe Miller	Rangeland Ecologist
Pam Herrera-Olivas	Wildlife Biologist
Brad Higdon	Planning and Environmental Specialist

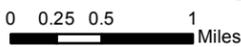
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Appendix A: Trail Maps—*Taos Valley Overlook and Wild Rivers Event Locations*



**Wild Rivers
Interim Non Motorized Competitive SRP's**

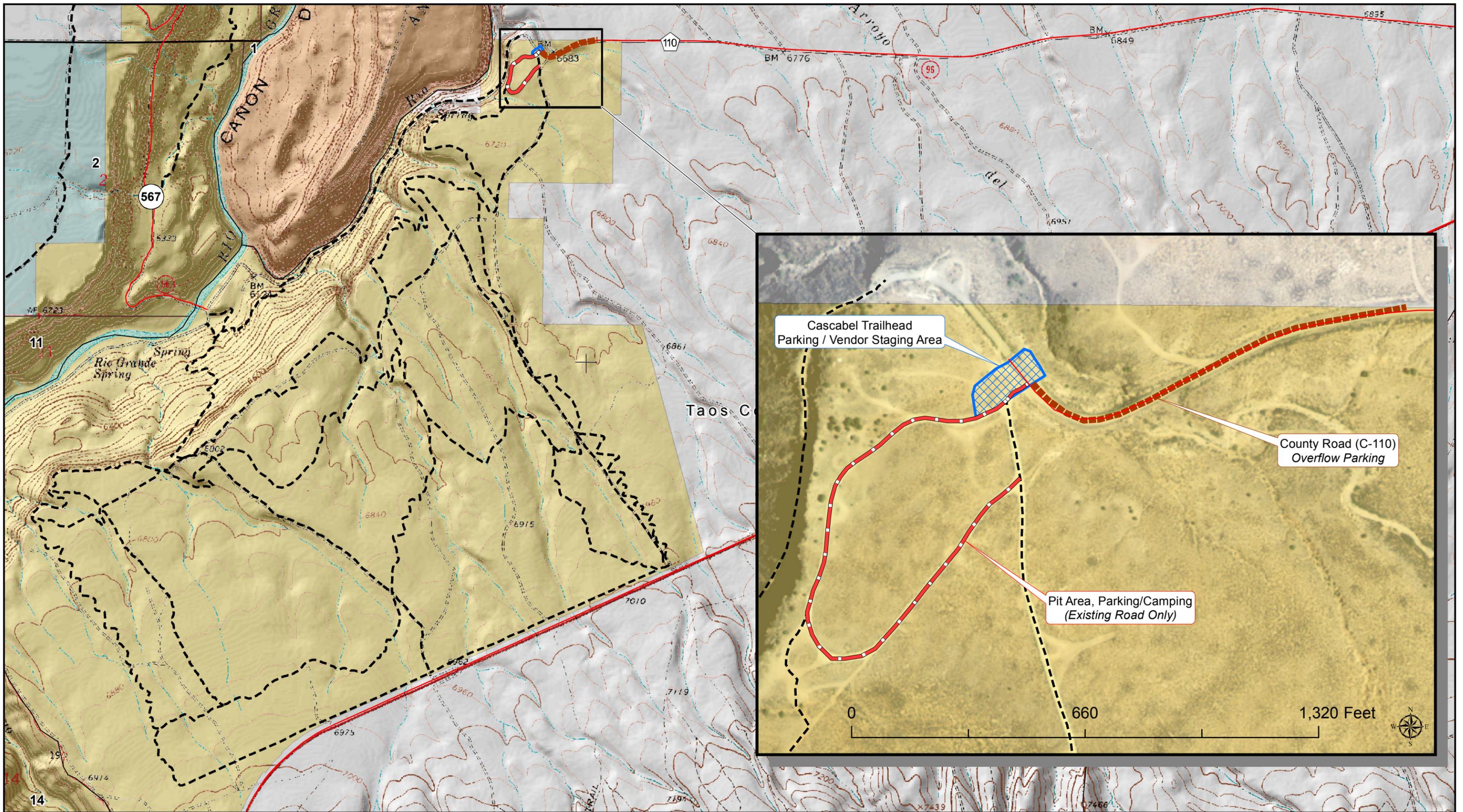


Legend	
Wild Rivers Visitors Center	Bureau of Land Management
Trails	Forest Service
Label	Tribal
Parking	Private
Parking / Vendor Staging	State
	State Game & Fish

Gualaupe Mountain - 7.5' USGS Topographic Map

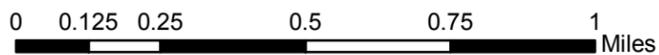
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Date: 3/28/2014



T24N.R12E
 Taos SW 7.5' USGS - Topographic Quad

Taos Valley Overlook Interim Non-Motorized Competitive SRP's



Legend

- | | |
|--|---------------------------|
| C-110 Overflow Parking | Bureau of Land Management |
| Pit Area, Parking & Camping - Road Only | Forest Service |
| Existing Trails | Tribal |
| Parking Vendor Staging Area-Cascabel Trailhead | Private |
| | State |

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.

Appendix B: BLM Sensitive Species

BLM-listed sensitive species were determined through a review of Appendix G: Special Status Species Management of the 2012 Taos RMP. The Taos RMP states that commitments to avoid adverse impacts to special status species will be met by applying appropriate stipulations (e.g., timing or seasonal restrictions or site-specific limitations).

BLM Sensitive Species in the Taos Planning Area

Species	Known occurrences on BLM land	Habitat Present			Comments
		Present	Not Present	Present, but Not Adversely Affected	
Northern Goshawk (<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>)	Occurs in the Taos Plateau planning unit.		X		None of the project segments are located in dense, forested areas. No further analysis required.
Burrowing Owl (<i>Athene cunicularia hypugaea</i>)	Occurs in the Taos, Río Arriba and Santa Fe Counties.			X	Prairie dog burrows and potentially suitable for this species may be present in the vicinity of the project segments. Analysis required.
Gunnison's Prairie Dog (<i>Cynomys gunnisoni zuniensis</i>)	Occurs across the TFO in all planning units.			X	Most of the project segments contain suitable habitat for prairie dogs. Analysis required.
Ferruginous Hawk (<i>Buteo regalis</i>)	Occurs in the Taos Plateau planning unit.			X	Open grassland and desertscrub habitat is present in the vicinity of Wild Rivers project segments. Analysis required.
Pinyon Jay (<i>Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus</i>)	Occurs across all TFO planning units.			X	Habitat occurs within the project segments. Analysis required.

Bald Eagle (<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>)	No known roost sites in TFO.			X	May occur in the vicinity of the project segments during winter and during migration in spring/fall. Analysis required.
Loggerhead Shrike (<i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>)	Occurs across all planning units in TFO.			X	The project segments are located in open country with scattered trees and shrubs suitable for this species. Analysis required.
Río Grande Sucker (<i>Catostomus plebeius</i>)	Occurs in the Río Grande River.		X		There are no perennial waterways within the project segments. No further analysis required.
Río Grande Chub (<i>Gila pandora</i>)	Occurs in the Río Grande River.		X		There are no perennial waterways within the project segments. No further analysis required.
Plains Minnow (<i>Hybognathus placitas</i>)	Occurs in the eastern side of TFO planning area.		X		There are no perennial waterways within the project segments. No further analysis required.
Arkansas River Shiner (<i>Notropis girardi</i>)	Occurs in the Canadian River near the New Mexico/Texas border.		X		There are no perennial waterways within the project segments. No further analysis required.
Flathead Chub (<i>Platygobio</i>)	Occurs in perennial		X		There are no perennial

<i>gracilis</i>)	streams in planning area.				waterways within the project segments. No further analysis required.
Pale Townsend's Big-eared Bat (<i>Corynorhinus townsendii pallescens</i>)	Occurs in Taos and Los Alamos Counties.			X	Project segments are located in pinyon-juniper and desertscrub habitat suitable for this species. Analysis required.
Spotted Bat (<i>Euderma maculatum</i>)	Occurs in Río Arriba County.		X		There are no known occurrence of this species in Taos County, and none of the project segments are located in Río Arriba County. No further analysis required.
Small-footed Myotis (<i>Myotis ciliolabrum melanorhinus</i>)	Occurs in Río Arriba, Taos, and Los Alamos Counties.			X	Several of the project segments are located in pinyon-juniper and desertscrub suitable for this species. Analysis required.
Long-eared Myotis (<i>Myotis evotis</i>)	Occurs in the Taos Plateau and Chama planning units.			X	Project segments located in Wild Rivers are located in pinyon juniper and/or Ponderosa Pine suitable for this species. Analysis required.
Fringed Myotis (<i>Myotis thysanodes</i>)	Occurs in Taos County.			X	The project segments in Taos County are located in pinyon-juniper and desertscrub suitable for this species. Analysis required.

Long-legged Myotis (<i>Myotis volans inteRior</i>)	Occurs in Taos and Los Alamos Counties.			X	The project segments are located in pinyon-juniper and desertscrub suitable for this species. Analysis required.
Yuma Myotis (<i>Myotis yumanensis</i>)	Occurs in Taos County.		X		The project segments do not occur within riparian habitat suitable for this species. No further analysis required.
Big Free-tailed Bat (<i>Nyctinomops macrotis</i>)	Occurs in Río Arriba County.		X		There are no known occurrence of this species in Taos County, and none of the project segments are located in Río Arriba County. No further analysis required.
Ripley's Milkvetch (<i>Astragalus ripleyi</i>)	Recently verified occurrences on BLM land In Taos and Río Arriba Counties.			X	Project segments in Wild Rivers contain pinyon-juniper habitat suitable for this species. Analysis required.
Santa Fe Cholla (<i>Cylindropuntia viridiflora</i>)	Occurs in one known population in the planning area near Chimayo.		X		None of the project segments are located in the vicinity of Chimayo. No further analysis required.
Grama Grass Cactus (<i>Sclerocactus papyracanthus</i>)	Occurs in the Chama, Lower Gorge/ Copperhill, Ojo Caliente, El Palacio,		X		There are no known occurrence of this species in Taos County, and none of the project segments are located in Río

	West Santa Fe, and Galisteo planning units.				Arriba County. No further analysis required.
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