

BLM Northern New Mexico Resource Advisory Council

Field Offices' Reports

November 2022

Rio Puerco Field Office

Kymm Gresset, Field Manager

1. SUBJECT: Rio Puerco Field Office (RPFO) Oil and Gas development in Sandoval County

SUMMARY: BLM-RPFO was included in the Oil and Gas Lease Sales starting in December 2018. The following bullets include the status of recent Oil and Gas Lease sales.

- December 2018 Lease Sale was issued November 1, 2019, to include 30 parcels totaling 40,802.37 acres. This lease sale was under litigation (*Dine Care v. BLM*, Case No. 1:20-cv-00673). On July 31, 2022, the BLM signed an Environmental Assessment (EA), Finding of No Significant Impact, and Decision Record (DR) affirming the BLM's original decision to issue the lease.
 - The Ford Development EA, FONSI and DR were signed on December 17, 2020. 122 Applications for Permit to Drill (APDs) have been issued to date. One well has been drilled and is in production. Another well pad has been built but not drilled; the area is currently being used as a temporary use area.
 - RPFO authorized a right-of-way grant to EOG Resources that provides access from NM 550 to the December 2018 Lease Sale parcels. Road has been completed providing access to the currently active Oil and Gas well.
- November 2019 Lease Sale occurred November 7, 2019, four Parcels totaling 2,838.34 acres. This lease was under litigation (*Dine Care v. BLM*, Case No. 1:20-cv-00673). On July 31, 2022, the BLM signed an EA, FONSI, and DR affirming the BLM's original decision to issue the lease.
- February 2020 Lease Sale occurred February 6, 2020, seven parcels totaling 1,250.08 acres. This lease was under litigation (*Dine Care v. BLM*, Case No. 1:20-cv-00673). On July 31, 2022, the BLM signed an EA, FONSI, and DR affirming the BLM's original decision to issue the lease.

2. SUBJECT: RPFO Resource Management Plan

SUMMARY: The BLM RPFO administrative area is in central New Mexico and includes approximately 731,599 acres of BLM-managed surface land in Bernalillo, Cibola, Tarrant, Valencia and Sandoval counties. Within those counties, the RPFO administers approximately 3,600,047 acres of federal mineral estate. The RPFO began drafting its revised Resource Management Plan (RMP) in 2008 and released the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in 2012. The BLM was under contract to finalize the EIS, draft the Proposed RMP, and complete the Record of Decision (ROD) by October 20, 2020 and the formal DOI Review Team briefing was cancelled on July 31, 2020. RPFO briefed Department of the Interior on the status of the RMP in February 2021 and Headquarters on in June 2022 and is awaiting guidance on what alternative to proceed with in the PRMP/FEIS.

3. SUBJECT: Public recreation access

SUMMARY: The Rio Puerco Field Office (RPFO) provides highly sought recreational access to public lands. During the pandemic the field office closed only one recreation site, Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument (KKTR) and that location remains closed. Access along NM-22 is currently limited to tribal members only to reduce COVID-19 exposure to the gateway community of Pueblo de Cochiti. BLM is continuing to work in close cooperation with the Pueblo de Cochiti to develop a reopening plan to address long standing issues including over-visitation, long wait times, staffing needs, and resource protection.

It is BLM's hope that through these efforts, the Monument will re-open in a way that reduces impacts on the land and resources, as well as to the Cochiti people, and will provide an improved experience for all visitors. As reopening plans become more solidified, BLM will be releasing new information to the public via <https://www.blm.gov/visit/kktr> and our social media pages. We look forward to seeing our visitors when we reopen!

4. SUBJECT: RPFO National Public Lands Day Events

SUMMARY: On September 24, the Rio Puerco Field Office held a National Public Lands Day event at El Malpais National Conservation Area Ranger Station. The event had a total of 16 participants including 12 adults and four youth. Two benches were installed at the rim of the Ranger Station Nature Trail. In addition, one and a quarter mile of trail was maintained, weed and grass trimming occurred in the parking lot, driveway, picnic area, and around the Ranger Station premises.

Farmington Field Office

Maureen Joe, Field Manager

1. SUBJECT: Farmington Mancos-Gallup Resource Management Plan Amendment (RMPA) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

SUMMARY: The RMPA/EIS is currently in "Draft Proposed Final" stage, awaiting completion of the Section 106 Programmatic Agreement (PA) before final reviews and publication. As a reminder, the PA will line out the process for undertakings authorized by the Amendment. Although the PA has been in development since 2019, much of the progress slowed over 2020 as focus shifted to the higher priority of caring for communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. In February of 2021, the Assistant Secretary of Lands and Minerals approved a "pause" on the RMPA/EIS to allow work on the PA to catch up. We have resumed meetings with consulting parties and have made been making additional progress on the PA.

In the interim, several other initiatives have arisen that are likely to impact the RMPA/EIS:

- Ethnographic studies
- Chaco Area Withdrawal
- Honoring Chaco Initiative

Currently it is unclear how and to what degree these initiatives will impact the RMPA/EIS, thus the timeline of the RMPA/EIS is uncertain.

2. SUBJECT: Chaco Area Withdrawal

SUMMARY: On January 6, 2022, the BLM published notice of the Secretary of the Interior’s proposal to withdraw public lands located within a radius of approximately 10 miles surrounding Chaco Culture National Historical Park (CCNHP) for up to 20 years. Under the proposal, public lands would be withdrawn from location and entry under the United States mining laws and from leasing under the mineral leasing laws, subject to valid existing rights. If approved, the withdrawal would be specific to certain minerals, depending on which law they are regulated under. For example, the withdrawal would apply to minerals that are regulated under the Mining Law of 1872 such as uranium, silver, gold, etc., as well as minerals that are regulated under the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920 such as coal, oil and natural gas. It would not apply to minerals regulated under the Materials Act of 1947, such as humate, sand, gravel and clinker. The withdrawal would apply only to federally owned minerals and does not preclude Navajo allottees and other mineral owners from leasing their minerals for development.

If approved, the withdrawn lands would be subject to valid existing rights, therefore activities associated with existing, active leases or approved mining permits is not impacted by this withdrawal. There are many existing leases within the proposed withdrawal boundary; on these leases, Applications for Permit to Drill (APDs) and/or other permits for activities associated with valid existing leases may continue to be submitted and approved in accordance with the parameters of the 2003 RMP and ROD (as amended). Additionally, the withdrawal would not impede other actions consistent with the FFO’s 2003 RMP and ROD (as amended).

An environmental assessment (EA) has been prepared to analyze and disclose the environmental consequences of the proposed 20-year withdrawal. On November 10, 2022 we released the EA for public review/comment period through December 10, 2022. Following the comment period we will compile the necessary reports to submit to the Secretary of the Interior as outlined in 43 CFR 2310.3-2. The Secretary will either approve or deny the withdrawal, and if approved, a Public Land Order would be issued making the withdrawal official.

For more information, visit <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2016892/510>.

3. SUBJECT: Honoring Chaco Initiative

Summary: Pioneered by the Department of Interior, BIA and BLM leadership, this initiative aims to develop a vision for a broader cultural approach to all land management decisions across the Greater Chaco Landscape by bringing together BLM, BIA and interested Tribes, Pueblos and other tribal interests in the Greater Chaco area. Currently the initiative has kicked off with interviews and scheduled meetings to further refine the process.

Taos Field Office

Pamela Mathis, Field Manager

1. SUBJECT: Proposed Recreation Target Shooting Ranges in Santa Fe County

SUMMARY: The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Taos Field Office values public recreation and proposes to develop recreational shooting ranges in the greater Santa Fe area to enhance New Mexico sportsmen activities while resolving increasing conflicts from undeveloped and unmanaged target shooting activities on public lands. At present, the BLM is considering the construction of up to three shooting ranges to offer recreational opportunities while addressing user conflicts in Santa Fe County: Buckman, Camel Tracks, and San Pedro Mountains.

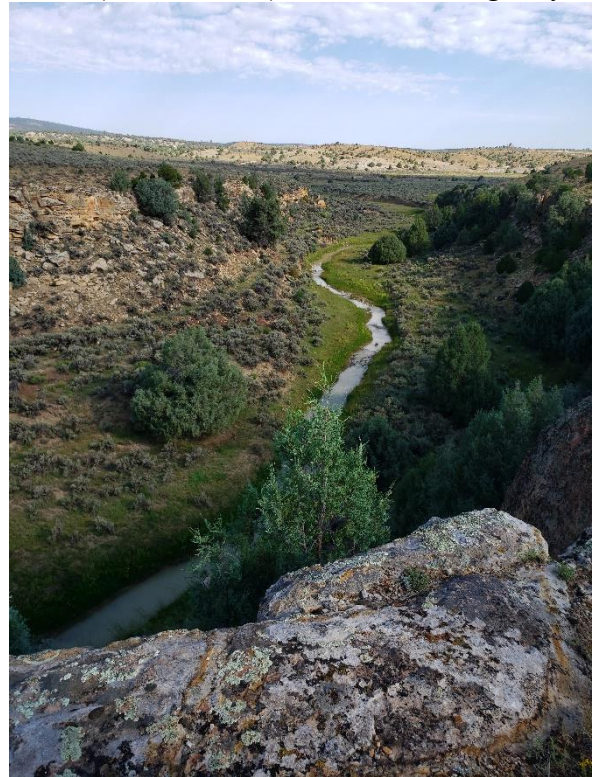
Should ranges be developed, the agency proposes to relocate disbursed shooting to developed sites and could restrict, through buffer zones, target shooting where there is current conflict. Conflicts include stray bullets and concerns for public safety, waste accumulation, threat of wildfire, and noise. The San Pedro Mountains and Buckman area locations are particularly close in proximity to residential areas. The BLM conducted three public scoping sessions in October. The public comment period closed October 24. The agency also sponsored a site visit for cooperators and has been invited to speak three times with the national sports shooting roundtable. To review project newsletters and other information, visit <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2013605/510>.

2. SUBJECT: Rio Grande del Norte National Monument Plan – Status of the Taos Resource Management Plan Amendment environmental impact statement

SUMMARY: The Rio Grande del Norte National Monument was designated through a Presidential Proclamation on March 25, 2013. The Monument consists of approximately 245,290 acres of public lands in Taos and Rio Arriba Counties in north-central New Mexico, managed by the Taos Field Office. In 2022, the field office hired a dedicated monument manager, Eric Valencia. Now, it is a national and local priority to create a stand-alone land use management plan, which the BLM refers to as a Resource Management Plan (RMP). Although a plan was initiated in 2014, it was suspended by the former administration in Executive Order 13792 (Review of Designations Under the Antiquities Act). Executive Order 13792 was rescinded in March 2021.) The Field Office has a contractor to assist with public scoping in the formation of an environmental impact statement consistent with the National Environmental Policy Act. The internal RMP kick off occurred November 9, 2022. Once the Washington Office approves the Preparation Plan and Analysis of (the current) Management Situation, the Field Office will public a *Federal Register* notice and initiate public scoping in 2023. The project is slated for completion by the end of 2024.

3. SUBJECT: Ohkay Owingeh Tribal Proposed Land Exchange

SUMMARY: Over the past 20 years, Ohkay Owingeh Tribal Council (“the Pueblo”) has worked diligently with the Bureau of Land Management, Taos Field Office (“the BLM”) on obtaining ancestral lands adjacent to their tribal lands in Rio Arriba County, New Mexico. The Taos Resource Management Plan (RMP), approved in May 2012, identified several parcels along the Pueblo eastern boundary which included two partial sections in the Sombrillo Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). These parcels contained significant deposits of paleontological resources found in Tesuque Formation and Santa Fe group. These sections also contained traditional cultural properties (TCPs) and cultural resources that have strong traditional and spiritual connection to the Pueblo. In 2019, the Pueblo and the BLM developed an agreed-upon land exchange with low to moderate impacts to resources values. The proposal provides an opportunity for the BLM to acquire 83.57 acres in the Chama Canyons ACEC along the northern rim of Rio Nutrias, a tributary of the Rio Chama Wild and Scenic River, in Rio Arriba County, New Mexico. The Ohkay Owingeh purchased the Rio Nutrias land specifically at the request of the agency for the exchange. In 2022, the BLM and Ohkay agreed upon a modified exchange of equal value that would not impact existing grazing allotments or existing recreation travel routes. The agency is finalizing a Feasibility Report that goes to Washington for review. If approved, the Taos Field Office would initiate an environmental assessment in 2023.



Rio Nutrias land for Wild and Scenic River

4. SUBJECT: Horsethief Mesa Travel Management Plan

SUMMARY: The Horsethief Mesa Travel Management Plan (TMP) is completed. The TMP designates routes and trails within the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument as Open, Closed, or (administratively) Limited. The Taos Field Office is working with the Carson National Forest to complete a Right of Way and associated US Forest Service NEPA analysis that will permit the BLM to build a road and a new trailhead with designated dispersed camping as well as winter parking areas ensuring the safety and improved access to Horsethief Mesa. Further analysis and clearances will be needed prior to the building of new trails.

5. SUBJECT: Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River Scenic Easement / Manby Hot Springs

SUMMARY: The Taos Field Office completed a restoration project in October 2022 within the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument and a “scenic easement” that protects the viewshed and aims to protect the Wild and Scenic River from cliff line erosion. In 2021, the scenic easement was closed to public use pursuant with its legal acquisition. The easement it is landlocked with no public roads leading to the property. Nonetheless, visitors trespassed on private roads and the easement, causing harm to the conservation value and negatively impacting the homeowners. The Field Office worked with the Taos County Commission and Sheriff’s office, two homeowner associations and the public. The scenic easement

sits above Manby Hot Springs. The public has access to Manby Hot Springs by floating the Rio Grande and via the remnants of the old John Dunn Trail from John Dunn Bridge.



2020 before closure in illegal parking lot

2022 same location -regrowth after closure

6. SUBJECT: Federal Highways New Mexico Federal Lands Access Project-B007 John Dunn Bridge

SUMMARY: The Central Federal Lands Highway Division (CFLHD) of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), in cooperation with Taos County and the Bureau of Land Management (Taos Field Office), began construction to rehabilitate the John Dunn Bridge structure #5243, and demolish and construct a new replacement for the Rio Hondo Bridge #3807 on Rio Hondo creek on August 8, 2022. The area is closed to the public through the construction period.

7. SUBJECT: La Cieneguilla Recreation Site

SUMMARY: The Taos Field Office seeks a professional services contract to restore sacred petroglyphs at the La Ceineguilla recreation site north of Santa Fe. In January 2022, the site was decimated by purple graffiti. The FBI and BLM continue an investigation of the event, which is a federal felony crime and for which there is \$10,000 in rewards offered for information. On October 19, 2022, the Santa Fe Sheriff's Office apprehended an adult male after spray painting graffiti next to the other occurrence. Federal investigators are also handling that case. The two are likely not related. Since the first event, the agency installed surveillance, increased educational awareness of the site and has weekly Law Enforcement inspections. New Mexico's *SiteWatch* organization volunteers also conduct monthly archaeological inspections. After tribal consultation, the agency completed a categorical exclusion NEPA document for restoration, which will employ a contractor for restoration. Tribal leaders will be invited to observe.

8. SUBJECT: Status of Sabinoso Wilderness Cañon Ciruela public access

SUMMARY: The Farmington District, Taos Field Office, completed the Cañon Ciruela acquisition of a portion of the Hobo Ranch. The Taos Field Office (TFO) completed the largest donation of land under the Wilderness Act of 9,617 acres of Cañon Ciruela land. The donation increased the Sabinoso Wilderness to 29,242 acres--an increase of nearly 33 percent! The Sabinoso Wilderness is located about an hour east of Las Vegas, NM. The Trust for Public Land and BLM worked in 2022 to have an access easement transfer to the BLM. The BLM would

create a road, parking area, and trail to access to newly acquired Wilderness. The base landowner has changed and approvals for the easement are not secured.

9. SUBJECT: Status of Habitat Stamp Program, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grants, and ongoing habitat improvements

SUMMARY: The area between San Antonio Mountain and the Taos Plateau within the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument contains critical winter use areas and big game migration corridors (mule deer, elk, and pronghorn). Utilizing grant funds from the Habitat Stamp Program and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the TFO has been working on replacing existing fences with wildlife friendly fences in critical winter use areas and migration corridors (~17 miles total). A recent project included replacing 13 miles of fencing with the Taos Soil and Water Conservation District, the Mule Deer Foundation, the New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts, and several volunteers from across the state. Fences are modified to a four-strand fence with a smooth wire on the bottom and three barbed wires above so pronghorn can pass under the fences safely. These projects also save local ranchers time in fence repair. In addition to improvements to wildlife habitat, the TFO is currently working on a predictive habitat model for two sensitive plant species: Taos springparsley and Ripley's milkvetch. The final predictive habitat models will assist TFO personnel in understanding when plant surveys would be needed for NEPA analysis.