

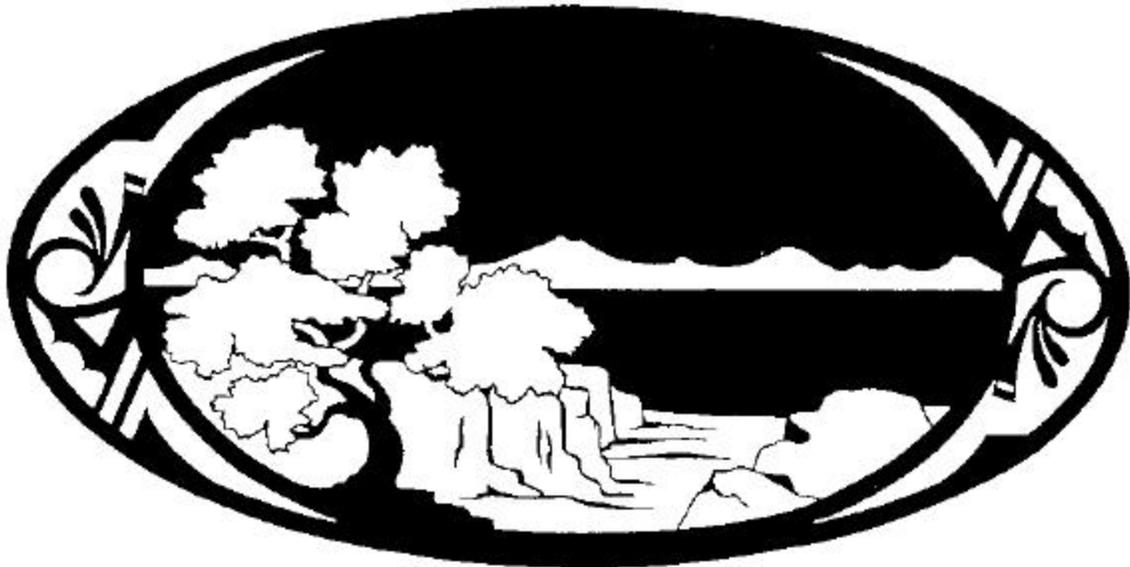


United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management



Albuquerque Field Office

**PROPOSED
EL MALPAIS PLAN
AND
FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
VOLUME I**



September 2000

The Bureau of Land Management...

is responsible for the balanced management of the public lands and resources and their various values so that they are considered in a combination that will best serve the need of the American people. Management is based upon the principles of multiple use and sustained yield, a combination of uses that takes into account the long-term needs of future generations for renewable and non-renewable resources. These resources include recreation, range, timber, minerals, watershed, fish and wildlife, wilderness, and natural, scenic, scientific, and cultural values.



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Albuquerque Field Office

435 Montaña Rd. N.E.

Albuquerque, New Mexico 87107- 4935

www.nm.blm.gov

IN REPLY REFER TO:

1610 (010)

September, 2000

Dear Reader:

Enclosed for your review is the Proposed El Malpais Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement.

The Planning Area includes El Malpais National Conservation Area (NCA) and recently acquired contiguous lands. It provides the vision for managing the natural resources of the NCA and contiguous lands to meet the intent of the enabling legislation, P.L. 100-225, and the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) land management policies. With minor changes based on public comment, the BLM has selected Alternative D from the draft as the Proposed Plan. This Proposed Plan includes plan amendment decisions related to four of the Resource Management Plan issues (Recreation-Visual Resources Management, Access and Transportation, Wilderness Suitability, and Boundary and Land Ownership Adjustments). The plan also includes integrated activity plan decisions related to nearly all the resources in the planning area.

Protests related to the Resource Management Plan (RMP) level decisions (pages 1-11, 2-68, 2-70, 2-71, 2-73, and 2-77 shaded portion) must be filed in writing to: Director (WO-210), Bureau of Land Management, Attention: Brenda Williams, 1849 C Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20240. Protests must be postmarked no later than October 30, 2000.

To be considered complete, your protest must contain, at a minimum, the following information:

1. The name, mailing address, telephone number, and interest of the person filing the protest.
2. A statement of the part or parts of the RMP amendment being protested. To the extent possible, this should be done by reference to specific pages, paragraphs, sections, tables, or maps included in the document.
3. A copy of all documents addressing the issue(s) that you submitted during the planning process or a reference to the date the issue(s) were discussed by you for the record.
4. A concise statement explaining why the Proposed Plan is believed to be incorrect. *This is a critical part of your protest.* Document all relevant facts and as much as possible reference or site the planning or environmental analysis document. A protest that merely expresses disagreement with the Proposed Plan without any data will not provide us with the benefit of your information and insight. In this case, the decision maker's review will be based on the existing analysis and supporting data.

At the end of the 30-day protest period, a Record of Decision may be issued approving all decisions not affected by a protest. If there are protests they will be resolved and a Record of Decision will be issued based on the protest resolution. Following the protest period and resolution of protests, the Plan will be prepared as a separate stand-alone document and distributed to interested parties. Progress on the Plan's implementation would be reported through RMP Updates for the Albuquerque Field Office.

Thanks to those who have participated in the planning process. Continued public involvement in implementing planned actions will allow us to effectively manage the public lands and resources in the area administered by the Albuquerque Field Office.

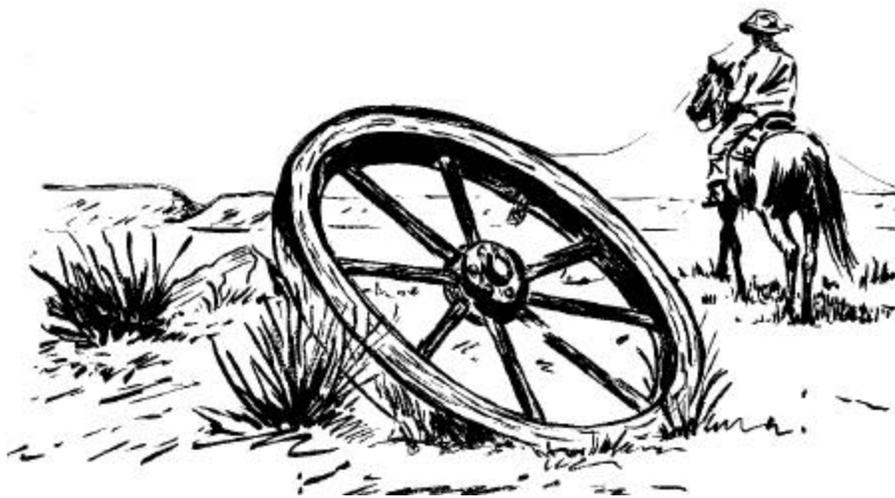
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Edwin J. Singleton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Edwin J. Singleton
Field Manager

Enclosure

Rio Puerco Resource Management Plan Amendment
Environmental Impact Statement
for
El Malpais National Conservation Area
and
Chain of Craters Wilderness Study Area



United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Albuquerque Field Office

**Rio Puerco Resource Management Plan Amendment
and Environmental Impact Statement
for El Malpais National Conservation Area
and Chain of Craters Wilderness Study Area**

Draft () Final (X)

United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management

1. Type of Action: Administrative (X) Legislative (X)

2. This Proposed Resource Management Plan (PRMP) Amendment and Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) describes and analyzes four alternatives for managing the public land and resources of the El Malpais National Conservation Area, Albuquerque Field Office, New Mexico, and contiguous lands. The alternatives are: (A) Existing Management (No Action) Alternative, (B) Resource Use Alternative, (C) Natural Processes Alternative, and (D) Balanced Management (Preferred) Alternative.

3. Comments on the Draft RMP/EIS from the individuals, groups and agencies and the BLM's responses to those comments are included in this document.

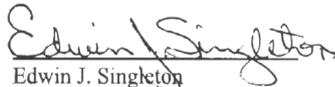
4. For further information contact:

 Kent Hamilton
 Planning & Environmental Coordinator
 Bureau of Land Management
 435 Montañño Road NE
 Albuquerque, New Mexico 87107-4935
 Telephone (505) 761-8746

5. Date Document Filed with Environmental Protection Agency: October 29, 2000

RECOMMEND:

APPROVED:



Edwin J. Singleton
Field Manager
Albuquerque Field Office



Richard A. Whitley
Associate State Director
New Mexico

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SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

This document includes the Proposed Rio Puerco Resource Management Plan Amendment/Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the El Malpais National Conservation Area (NCA), Chain of Craters Wilderness Study Area, and contiguous lands. The Plan considers alternatives for managing the natural resources and uses in the NCA, addresses amendments to the Rio Puerco Resource Management Plan, and assesses the suitability of the Chain of Craters area for wilderness designation. The plan is intended to meet the Public Law 100-225 (Enabling Legislation) requirements for the preparation of a General Management Plan (GMP).

The document includes the complete EIS as printed in the draft document. Changes were made in response to comments requiring corrections or clarifications. These changes, where they required changes in text are shown in ***bolded italics***.

The Proposed Plan is comprised of the “Continuing Management Guidance & Actions Common to All Alternatives” and “Alternative D-Balanced Management (Proposed Plan)” sections of Chapter 2. The Chapter 4 section “Alternative D-Balanced Management (Preferred Alternative)” reflects the impacts of the Proposed Plan.

Table A-Summary Table summarizes the actions considered by alternative and Alternative D summarizes the major actions of the Proposed Plan by the planning issue.

Chapter 5 of the document includes copies of the comment letters we received on the draft document and the response we prepared to the comments. The Transcripts of the public hearings held during the comment period and responses to comments found in the transcripts.

TABLE A
SUMMARY TABLE

Issue/Action Item	Alternative A (Existing Management)	Alternative B (Resource Use)	Alternative C (Natural Processes)	Alternative D (Balanced Management)
Recreation Overall Emphasis	Providing dispersed recreational opportunities & maintaining existing developed recreational facilities	Providing increased facility development to support recreational use & protect resources	Providing dispersed recreational opportunities using few facilities; some existing facilities removed	Providing combination of developed & dispersed recreational opportunities
Recreational Opportunity Spectrum Classes (acres/% of Planning Area)	Roaded Natural --79,200/28 Semi-Primitive Motorized --85,000/30 Semi-Primitive Nonmotorized --122,100/42	Roaded Natural --79,200/28 Semi-Primitive Motorized --82,200/29 Semi-Primitive Nonmotorized --124,900/43	Roaded Natural --72,700/25 Semi-Primitive Motorized --56,900/20 Semi-Primitive Nonmotorized --156,700/55	Roaded Natural --79,000/28 Semi-Primitive Motorized --72,000/25 Semi-Primitive Nonmotorized --135,300/47
Dispersed Camping & Picnicking	Allowed throughout the Planning Area; The Narrows recreation site providing limited facilities	Allowed throughout the Planning Area; additional facilities developed	Allowed throughout the Planning Area; no additional facilities provided. Related facilities @ The Narrows removed.	Allowed throughout the Planning Area; additional facilities developed
Visitation @ Cultural/Historical Sites	Opportunity @ 9 sites through guided/interpretive services	Opportunity @ 14 sites through guided/interpretive services	No formal opportunity provided; available as dispersed activity	Opportunity @ 12 sites through guided/interpretive services
Back Country Byways	One designated byway would continue to be available.	Five byways would be designated (1 existing, 4 new).	No designation; existing byway decommissioned.	Three byways would be designated (1 existing, 2 new).

TABLE A (cont'd)

Issue/Action Item	Alternative A (Existing Management)	Alternative B (Resource Use)	Alternative C (Natural Processes)	Alternative D (Balanced Management)
Assignment of Visual Resource Management (VRM) Classes	Visual resources on 22,000 acres unclassified & managed on case-by-case basis	Would amend RMP to modify current VRM objectives & classify unclassified lands. <i>Management Class assignments would emphasize preservation of scenic values while still providing opportunities for resource use and facility development.</i>	<i>Would amend RMP to modify current VRM objectives and classify unclassified lands. Management Class assignments would emphasize preservation of the natural scenic values and low levels of change to the landscape.</i>	<i>Would amend RMP to modify current VRM objectives and unclassified lands. Management Class assignments would emphasize preservation of scenic values while still providing limited opportunities for resource use and facility development.</i>
Recreation, concl'd VRM Classes (acres)	Class I--125,130 Class II--86,760 Class III--14,110	Class I--104,450 Class II--129,440 Class III--14,110	Class I--128,440 Class II--119,500 Class III--60	Class I--104,730 Class II--143,210 Class III--60
Facility Development Camping Facilities	Four single-family units @ existing Narrows recreation site available	40 single-family units & 1 multi-family/group unit developed @ new campground in Spur Unit; Narrows recreation site rehabilitated & converted for picnic & trailhead use	No units developed	20 single-family units & 1 multi-family/group unit developed @ new campground in Spur Unit; Narrows recreation site rehabilitated & converted for picnic & trail-head use
Picnic Facilities	<i>Four single family units @ existing Narrows recreation site available (same units that serve camping at site)</i>	Provided @ 3 sites (The Narrows, La Ventana Natural Arch, Cerro Americano CDNST trailhead)	Not provided	Provided @ 1 site (The Narrows)

TABLE A (cont'd)

Issue/Action Item	Alternative A (Existing Management)	Alternative B (Resource Use)	Alternative C (Natural Processes)	Alternative D (Balanced Management)
Hiking Trails	<i>Existing: 36 miles of trail, 4 trails & 4 trailheads Approved but not yet built;.5 mile of trail, 1 trail & 1 trailhead Total of 36.5 miles of trail, 5 trails & 5 trailheads</i>	<i>Total of 77 miles of trail, 25 trails (5 existing/approved, 20 new) & 16 trailheads</i>	<i>Total of 33 miles of trail, 4 trails (existing/approved) & 2 trailheads. Narrows Rim Trail (3.5 miles) not available</i>	<i>Total of 57 miles of trail, 15 trails (5 existing/approved, 10 new) & 11 trailheads</i>
<u>Access & Transportation</u> <i>Closed to Motor Vehicle and Mechanical Access. Access by Nonmotorized, Nonmechanical Means Available</i>	<i>100,800 acres closed to vehicle and mechanical access</i>	<i>104,450 acres closed to vehicle and mechanical access</i>	<i>128,440 acres closed to vehicle and mechanical access</i>	<i>104,730 acres closed to vehicle and mechanical access</i>
<i>Open to Cross-Country Vehicle Access</i>	<i>12,000 open or undesignated acres available</i>	No acres available	Same as Alternative B	Same as Alternative B
<i>Limited Off-highway Vehicle Access</i>	135,200 acres available for access on existing routes	143,550 acres available for access on designated routes	119,560 acres available for access on designated routes	143,270 acres available for access on designated routes
<i>Vehicle Routes</i>	354.5 miles existing	337.5 miles designated	199.7 miles designated	273.1 miles designated

TABLE A (cont'd)

Issue/Action Item	Alternative A (Existing Management)	Alternative B (Resource Use)	Alternative C (Natural Processes)	Alternative D (Balanced Management)
<p><u>Wilderness Management & Suitability</u> Designated Acres (public land)</p>	100,800 acres	104,450 acres (including those recommended)	128,440 acres (including those recommended)	104,730 acres (including those recommended)
<p>Suitability Recommendations [reviewed Chain of Craters WSA (18,300 acres) & land contiguous to Cebolla Wilderness (10,380 acres) for suitability as wilderness]</p>	No acres recommended to Congress as suitable	3,650 acres recommended to Congress as suitable, through expansion of Cebolla Wilderness	27,640 acres recommended to Congress as suitable, through inclusion of entire Chain of Craters & expansion of Cebolla Wilderness	3,930 acres recommended to Congress as suitable, through expansion of Cebolla Wilderness
<p>Interim Management/Release from Wilderness Review</p>	18,300 acres managed under Interim Management Policy for Lands Under Wilderness Review (IMP--BLM Manual H-8550-1, 1995)	21,950 acres managed under IMP; 6,730 acres released	27,640 acres managed under IMP; 1,040 acres released	22,230 acres managed under IMP; 6,450 acres released
<p>Amending Cebolla Wilderness Boundary</p>	No recommendation to Congress	Recommendation to Congress to include additional 3,650 acres of public land, & exclude 160 acres of Acoma Pueblo land	Recommendation to Congress to include additional 9,340 acres of public land, & exclude 160 acres of Acoma Pueblo land	Recommendation to Congress to include additional 3,930 acres of public land, & exclude 160 acres of Acoma Pueblo land
<p><u>Cultural Resources</u> Use Allocation</p>	Emphasize conservation for future use	Emphasize management for public & scientific use	Emphasize sociocultural use	Emphasize conservation for future use
<p>National Historic Preservation Act Compliance</p>	Standard procedures	Standard procedures w/expanded consideration of secondary impacts	Strong preference for avoidance of any disturbance or impact to sites eligible for National Register	Expanded consideration of secondary impacts & emphasis on avoidance of impacts

TABLE A (cont'd)

Issue/Action Item	Alternative A (Existing Management)	Alternative B (Resource Use)	Alternative C (Natural Processes)	Alternative D (Balanced Management)
Cultural Resources, cont'd Inventory & Baseline Condition	6,553 acres of new Class III inventory (2½% of Planning Area)	13,105 acres of new Class III inventory (5% of Planning Area)	No special inventories to identify resources & define baseline condition	6,553 acres of new Class III inventory (2½% of Planning Area), plus thematic reconnaissance
Scientific Investigations-- General --Wilderness	Standard procedures; 3-5 projects over next 20 years Extractive activities allowed if no significant short- or long-term impacts to other resources.	Scientific use encouraged; 5-8 projects over next 20 years Extractive activities allowed if no long-term impacts to other resources.	Generally no investigations causing physical alteration of sites; no projects over next 20 years No extractive activities, short- or long-term impacts to other resources allowed.	Discourage investigations causing physical alteration of sites; no such projects over next 20 years Extractive activities allowed if no significant short- or long-term impacts to other resources.
Pottery Collection	No special provisions	“Traditional use” collection allowed under special-use permit	No special provisions	“Traditional use” collection allowed under special-use permit
Signs	Small, inconspicuous antiquities signs @ 100 sites	Inconspicuous signs @ 200 sites	No antiquities signs	Small, inconspicuous antiquities signs @ 100 sites
Access Easements & Consolidation of Ownership	Seek easements & consolidation for specific cultural resources.	Seek easements & consolidation for areas containing major archeological & historical values.	Seek easements only when needed for law enforcement; no consolidation.	Seek easements & consolidation for areas containing major archeological & historical values.
Cadastral Survey	Cebolla Canyon Schoolhouse	Cebolla Canyon Schoolhouse	None	Cebolla Canyon Schoolhouse
Road Closure	Close Cebolla Canyon Community road; other closures possible.	Vehicle access least restrictive. No special closures for cultural resources.	Vehicle access most restrictive. No special closures for cultural resources.	Close Cebolla Canyon Community road; other closures possible.

TABLE A (cont'd)

Issue/Action Item	Alternative A (Existing Management)	Alternative B (Resource Use)	Alternative C (Natural Processes)	Alternative D (Balanced Management)
Cultural Resources, concl'd Special Designations	No special emphasis on National Register nominations, but 4-5 likely, plus 1 nomination to World Heritage List	High priority on expansion of existing National Register Districts and new nominations. Actively encourage World Heritage Listing of Dittert Site.	No special designations	No special emphasis on National Register nominations, but 4-5 likely, plus 1 nomination to World Heritage List
Boundary Modifications	No additions or boundary modifications to NCA	Recommend addition of adjacent AFO lands w/high density of cultural resources to NCA	Recommend addition of adjacent AFO & SFO lands w/high density of cultural resources to NCA	Recommend addition of adjacent AFO & SFO lands w/high density of cultural resources to NCA
Public Interpretation	Limited	Emphasize onsite & offsite interpretation	No onsite interpretation; offsite interpretation would not encourage visitation.	Onsite interpretation @ limited number of sites. Discourage visitation to some other sites. Develop offsite interpretation.
Long-Term Impacts, Summary of Alternatives	Continue as @ present. Cultural resources managed essentially like other cultural resources on Albuquerque Field Office lands.	Would emphasize scientific & interpretive use of cultural resources, while maximizing active protection of those values.	Maximum sensitivity to American Indian values, & prevention of human impacts, including those resulting from scientific & interpretive use. Would allow degradation through natural processes.	Increased emphasis on active management of cultural resources, relative to other areas in AFO. Would emphasize long-term preservation of scientific values, while discouraging scientific use. Limited provisions for interpretive use.

TABLE A (cont'd)

Issue/Action Item	Alternative A (Existing Management)	Alternative B (Resource Use)	Alternative C (Natural Processes)	Alternative D (Balanced Management)
<p>Wildlife Habitat Vegetative Enhancement (Prescribed Fires/Woodland Thinning) (Short-term impacts occurring annually to help improve wildlife habitat)</p>	<p>1,500 acres--includes 1 prescribed fire & 1 wildland fire under prescription. No woodland thinning projects.</p>	<p>4,100 acres--includes 4 prescribed fires & 1 wildland fire under prescription, 1 woodland thinning project (100 acres)</p>	<p>1,000 acres--includes no prescribed fires & 1 wildland fire under prescription. No woodland thinning projects.</p>	<p>3,100 acres--includes 4 prescribed fires & 1 wildland fire under prescription, 1 woodland thinning project (100 acres)</p>
<p>Wildlife Developments [Long-term impacts lasting the life of the plan (15-20 years)]</p>	<p>20 acres; no riparian fencing</p>	<p>60 acres; 1.5 miles of riparian fencing</p>	<p>3 acres; no riparian fencing</p>	<p>40 acres; 1.5 miles of riparian fencing</p>
<p>Prairie Dog Enhancement Project</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>1,000 acres</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>1,000 acres</p>
<p>Impacts of Recreation Activities on Wildlife [Long-term impacts created by human activities that would last the life of the plan (15-20 years)]</p>	<p>6,480 acres (refer to Chapter 2 for activities)</p>	<p>14,080 acres (refer to Chapter 2 for activities)</p>	<p>5,200 acres (refer to Chapter 2 for activities)</p>	<p>9,820 acres (refer to Chapter 2 for activities)</p>
<p>Vegetation Coordinated Resource or Allotment Management Plans (CRMP/AMPs)</p>	<p>Continue to develop new plans, & periodically review/revise existing plans.</p>	<p>Same as Alternative A</p>	<p>Same as Alternative A</p>	<p>Same as Alternative A</p>
<p>Minimum Rest Period included in CRMP/AMPs</p>	<p>May 15-September 15 for @ least one pasture/ allotment</p>	<p>Same as Alternative A</p>	<p>All year for at least one pasture/allotment</p>	<p>April 15-October 15 for @ least one pasture/allotment</p>

TABLE A (cont'd)

Issue/Action Item	Alternative A (Existing Management)	Alternative B (Resource Use)	Alternative C (Natural Processes)	Alternative D (Balanced Management)
Vegetation, concl'd Range Improvement Projects	Considered with or without CRMP/AMPs	Same as Alternative A	No new projects developed	New projects could be developed if needed to provide rest from grazing.
Erosion Control Structures	Small structures to control/divert water would be considered.	In addition to small structures, large structures to impound water would be considered.	No structures completed.	Same as Alternative A
Noxious Weeds	Treated by mechanical, chemical or biological means	Same as Alternative A	Treated by mechanical or biological means	Same as Alternative A
Woodland & Forest Management	No tree removal permitted.	<i>Estimate</i> 100 acres of woodland thinned/year to meet vegetative objectives.	No tree removal permitted.	<i>Estimate</i> 150 acres of woodland thinned/year to meet vegetative objectives.
Riparian Vegetation Management	Springs used by livestock would be fenced, but developed for continued use by livestock and wildlife. No riparian vegetation planting completed.	Same as Alternative A. In addition, riparian areas would either be scheduled for regular rest from livestock grazing or fenced to exclude livestock use.	No new fences constructed. Wet areas around springs scheduled for regular rest from livestock grazing.	Same as Alternative B. In addition, riparian planting could be completed.
Exotic Species Invading Riparian Areas	No control or removal treatments performed.	Same as Alternative A	Same as Alternative A	Removed by mechanical, chemical, or biological means

TABLE A (concl'd)

Issue/Action Item	Alternative A (Existing Management)	Alternative B (Resource Use)	Alternative C (Natural Processes)	Alternative D (Balanced Management)
Boundary & Land Ownership Adjustments				
Current NCA Acreage	262,100	262,100	262,100	262,100
Changes Recommended to Congress				
--Additions	0	26,200	41,300	41,300
--Reductions (Acoma)	0	(960)	(960)	(960)
Modified NCA Acreage	262,100	287,340	302,440	302,440
Planning Area Acreage				
--Outside NCA	24,200	0	0	0
--Managed Under Rio Puerco RMP	2,000	0	0	0
Outside Planning Area (Recommended NCA) Managed Under Socorro RMP	15,100	15,100	0	0
Wilderness in NCA (acres)				
--Cebolla	62,000*	65,490	71,180	65,770
--West Malpais	39,800	39,800	39,800	39,800
--Chain of Craters WSA	0 (unsuitable)	0 (unsuitable)	18,300 (suitable)	0 (unsuitable)
Total	101,800	105,290	129,280	105,570
Public Land Outside NCA, Open to Public Land & Min- eral Laws (acres)	22,000	0	0	0

Note: * Rounded.