



# NEWS RELEASE

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## **BLM Issues Proposed Management Plan for Oil and Gas Development in Otero and Sierra Counties**

LAS CRUCES — The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has issued a proposed Resource Management Plan (RMP) Amendment covering oil and gas leasing and development in Otero and Sierra Counties in southern New Mexico. The document outlines decisions that will guide management of almost two million acres of federal public lands and mineral estate administered by the Las Cruces Field Office.

The proposed RMP Amendment analyzes potential development of fluid minerals and identifies management measures necessary to protect the area's natural resources. The plan does not approve individual projects, but provides overall guidance on managing public lands and federally owned minerals.

"This plan balances the nation's need for energy resources with conservation of the area's natural resources," said Linda S.C. Rundell, State Director of the BLM in Santa Fe. "We worked with the counties, ranchers, conservationists, the oil and gas industry, and other interested parties to develop a plan that will allow for environmentally responsible energy development, requiring that all disturbed areas be successfully revegetated."

Special conservation measures would be applied in Areas of Environmental Concern (ACECs), Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs), intact grassland areas in Otero and Sierra Counties, plus three core habitat areas for the Aplomado falcon.

Leasing will not be allowed in six existing and eight proposed ACECs (19,257 and 23,718 acres, respectively) and four WSAs (45,311 acres). Core areas for the Aplomado falcon (27,696 acres in Otero County and 8,097 in Sierra County) will be withheld from leasing for at least 5 years until the effects of oil and gas development in adjacent areas are better understood and evaluated. Other areas, including cultural resource and recreation sites, wetlands, and riparian areas, will be open to leasing but will require no surface occupancy on the sites.

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In addition, no more than 5 percent of the surface within new leaseholds on 105,000 acres of grasslands on Otero Mesa and on the 16,000-acre Nutt grasslands in Sierra County may be disturbed; disturbed areas must be re-vegetated before other areas can be developed.

The original RMP for BLM lands and federal minerals in Sierra and Otero Counties was completed in 1986, opening federal public lands to fluid mineral leasing. The RMP, however, did not anticipate or plan for large-scale oil and gas leasing in the two counties.

Following a sharp increase in nominations of federal lands for leasing in 1998, BLM saw the need to identify and study the impacts of potential increases in development of these resources. BLM deferred further leasing until a Resource Management Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) could be completed.

The BLM's 'Reasonable Foreseeable Development' (RFD) analysis examines available geologic and seismic data for the area plus past oil and gas activity, including recent discoveries of natural gas in Otero County. The RFD anticipates that 140 wells would be drilled in the two-county area, of which 84 would result in economically recoverable resources. This level of activity would account for 1,600 acres of short-term and 800 acres of long-term surface disturbance from well pads, roads, and pipelines.

The proposed RMP Amendment provides criteria for BLM to determine when reclamation is successful. "Reclamation is tied to the restoration of ground cover," said Amy Lueders, manager of BLM's Las Cruces Field Office. "This includes healthy, mature native annuals and perennials in the density and composition found at each site."

Copies of the proposed RMP Amendment are available from the BLM in Santa Fe, Roswell and Las Cruces, New Mexico, or online at [www.nm.blm.gov](http://www.nm.blm.gov).

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Individuals or groups that participated in the planning process may protest a proposed decision in the document. Protests must address items submitted during plan preparation and be submitted in a letter filed with the Director of BLM by February 9, 2004.