



# NEWS RELEASE

US DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR ■ BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
TAOS FIELD OFFICE ■ 226 CRUZ ALTA ROAD ■ TAOS NM 87571  
Theresa Herrera ■ Public Affairs Specialist ■ 505.438.7510

## For Immediate Release

September 8, 2004

## For Additional Information

Sam DesGeorges 505.751.4713  
Theresa Herrera 505.438.7517

### BLM to Reclaim and Restore Public Lands Degraded by Unauthorized Use

Taos, NM - The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) today began the process of reclaiming and restoring public lands used and encroached upon by the Joe Sanchez family over the past 40 years. His son Casey Sanchez and other members of the family have claimed ownership to federal public lands adjacent to their property near the community of Rinconada, New Mexico (about 22 miles north of Española), relying on a Color-of-Title process, but each application was rejected and upheld under appeal.

Casey Sanchez' use and occupancy of the site -- piling up junked cars, accumulating hazardous materials (such as motor oil and old batteries) and locating buildings on the land -- caused a variety of damages to 9.5 acres of public lands adjacent to the Sanchez property. The BLM's Taos Field Office made continuous and concerted efforts to resolve this occupancy but was unsuccessful in several negotiations.

Settlement conferences with Mr. Sanchez and a Federal Judge in early 2004 resulted in a Consent Judgment, filed in U.S. District Court on June 8, 2004, in which Casey Sanchez agreed to remove all his property and animals from BLM public lands within 90 days. Sanchez began moving some cars and one structure off public land, but did not finish the work within the required deadline.

"It's been a long process and once we restore the land, we are looking forward to opening up this area again for the public to enjoy," said Sam DesGeorges, Taos Field Manager.

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