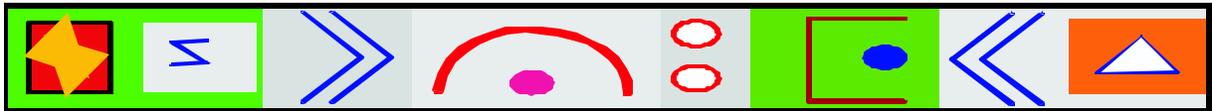


CHAPTER 2



SPECIAL AREA MANAGEMENT

SPECIAL AREA MANAGEMENT

Most actions to be implemented in the Rio Grande Corridor are described in this section, under one of the eight special management areas which cover nearly all of the planning area.

Resource Management Plans (RMPs) have been completed for the Colorado and New Mexico portions of the planning area. These broad-based plans provide general management direction for public lands and are amended periodically as necessary. The RMPs outline what uses can occur, list special restrictions when needed, and present long-term direction for specific issues such as transportation planning, land ownership adjustments, and facility development. They also identify areas of public land that warrant special consideration by BLM due to significant resources or opportunities.

The San Luis RMP, completed in 1991, provides guidance for the planning area in Colorado managed by La Jara Field Office. No changes to this RMP were made by the Rio Grande Corridor planning effort. The actions described for Colorado are designed to implement the prescriptions contained in the San Luis RMP for three designated areas: the San Luis Hills Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), Rio Grande Corridor ACEC, and the somewhat overlapping Rio Grande Corridor Special Recreation Management Area. The San Luis RMP also recommends that BLM consider a joint study and analysis in Colorado and New Mexico to determine whether the Rio Grande (41 miles in Colorado and 57 miles in New Mexico) should be recommended for designation as a National Conservation Area (no congressional action is pending).

The Taos RMP (completed in 1988, amended for oil and gas leasing in 1991, and for designation of the Orilla Verde Recreation Area in 1994) provides guidance for the planning area in New Mexico. In the Rio Grande Corridor Plan, BLM has made several amendments to the Taos RMP concerning special management areas, ACECs and recreation areas:

- C The Riparian/Aquatic Special Management Area (SMA) designation is rescinded for lands within the planning area. These areas and resources will be protected by other designations or actions.
- C The Wild Rivers SMA designation and the Guadalupe Mountain ACEC designations are rescinded, and replaced by an expanded Wild Rivers Recreation Area.
- C The Racecourse ACEC designation is rescinded. It is replaced by the 16,351-acre Lower Gorge ACEC, which also incorporates 629 acres formerly in the Black Mesa ACEC.
- C The 1988 designations for the Warm Springs SMA, Agua Caliente and Embudo Canyon ACECs and Lower Embudo SMA are rescinded. They now are included in the newly designated 17,280-acre Copper Hill ACEC.

BLM will continue to use Supplementary Rules for managing activities on public land in the Taos Field Office (*Federal Register*; May 10, 1996). These rules generally are revised every five years, with an opportunity for public input. The next revision is scheduled for 2000.



SAN LUIS HILLS ACEC (COLORADO)

The San Luis Hills Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) covers about 36,380 acres of publicly owned land which include Flat Top Mountain and the San Luis Hills. The San Luis Hills are known for their wetlands, big-game habitat, and scenic quality.

ACCESS

Vehicle use in the ACEC is restricted to designated roads or trails, as shown on Maps 6-a and 6-b (in back pocket), and described in Table 3-1. An exception is the semi-primitive, nonmotorized portion (2,000 acres) on Flat Top Mountain, which is closed to motorized vehicles.

LIVESTOCK MANAGEMENT

Livestock grazing will be managed under guidelines for Allotments 4245A, 4247, 4248, 4249, 4250, 4251, 4252, 4253, 4255, and 5256 (see Map 7 in the back pocket and Table 3-4).

MINERALS

Continue to enforce the No Surface Occupancy stipulation that has been placed for oil and gas

leasing and development on the semi-primitive, nonmotorized Flat Top Mountain portion (2,000 acres) of the ACEC. This same area will remain closed to mineral materials disposal.

WATERSHED

A research program for special-status plants in this ACEC will be developed.

WILDERNESS

The San Luis Hills Wilderness Study Area (WSA) is located in the southern portion of the ACEC and covers 12,300 acres. The BLM has recommended to Congress that the area is not suitable for wilderness designation. Until Congress decides whether to designate or not, BLM will manage the San Luis Hills WSA portion of the ACEC under guidance in the *Interim Management Policy and Guidelines for Lands Under Wilderness Review* (1995). No actions will be approved or new uses allowed that will impair the area's suitability for wilderness preservation. Valid and existing activities are allowed to affect wilderness characteristics in a WSA, if no unnecessary and undue degradation occurs.



RIO GRANDE CORRIDOR ACEC AND SPECIAL RECREATION MANAGEMENT AREA (COLORADO)

The Rio Grande Special Recreation Management Area (4,595 public land acres) follows the river for 22 miles, beginning just south of La Sauses Cemetery and extending to the New Mexico state line. The ACEC covers much of the same area, but its boundary includes some public lands that are farther west of the river. The 4,157 acres of public lands in the ACEC were designated to provide special management for the significant natural, scenic, and recreational values along this stretch of the Rio Grande. The larger recreation management area was designated to provide river-oriented recreation opportunities and facilities needed to provide for safe visits.

ACCESS

Vehicles will be restricted to designated roads and trails, which are shown on Maps 6-a and 6-b and described in Table 3-1. All routes within riparian areas between the La Sauses Cemetery and the Lobatos Bridge (on the west side) have been designated as closed to vehicle use. BLM will treat about ½ acre of these closed routes to enhance riparian vegetation recovery.

LAND OWNERSHIP AND REALTY ACTIONS

BLM will try to acquire additional acreage and access for the SRMA by fee title methods (i.e., land exchanges or acquisitions from willing sellers) or by obtaining scenic easements (allowing landowners to retain title to the land). See Table 3-2 for state/private lands proposed for acquisition.

BLM will terminate all waterpower site withdrawals in the ACEC, if a legislative designation is made by Congress to add this part of the Rio Grande to the national Wild and Scenic River System.

LIVESTOCK MANAGEMENT

Livestock grazing will be managed under guidelines for Allotments 4245A, 4249, 4251, 4253, and 4255 (see Table 3-4).

Grazing will still be allowed in the riparian areas of the La Sauses (#4255), Piñon Hills (#4249), Mesa Common (#4251), Piñon (#4245A and B), and Flat Top (#4253) allotments at small water gaps (about 2.5 acres total). The remainder of the riparian area in these allotments would be allowed to rest until the standards for a properly functioning riparian area were met on 124.5 acres. Once the standards are met, grazing will be allowed as long as a 4-inch stubble height on

herbaceous species is maintained through the May to June high-water season, or no more than 20% of the annual growth of woody riparian species is used by livestock, and the area's ecological health is maintained.

BLM will continue to work with local private and public groups to eliminate unauthorized livestock grazing in riparian areas by cattle moving from private lands on the east side of the Rio Grande.

MINERALS

Continue to apply the No Surface Occupancy stipulation to oil and gas leasing and development, continue closure of the ACEC to mineral material disposal, and maintain the withdrawal from locatable mineral entry.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

At La Sauses, Lobatos Bridge, and other sites in Colorado, information will emphasize riparian restoration, river-related resources, raptors, and historic sites. Implement interpretation of sites through Los Caminos Antiguos Historic and Scenic Byway partnerships.

RECREATION

Scattered parcels of public land along the river in Colorado between La Sauses Cemetery and County Bridge 142 will be managed for their recreation access potential, and developed as a part of the Special Recreation Management Area. At La Sauses Recreation Site and Lobatos Bridge, BLM will define parking areas to limit riparian habitat damage. BLM will continue efforts to acquire public access rights at Lobatos Bridge.

RIPARIAN AREAS

BLM will manage the 22 miles of the Rio Grande in Colorado for riparian protection. The agency's goal is to improve a total of 124.5 acres or 98% of the riparian habitat to properly functioning condition within 10 years. The BLM will implement the following actions to achieve this goal:

- C Modify 4.25 miles of net wire fence in Colorado along the state line to facilitate big game migration and movement.
- C Designate as closed to vehicle use all routes within riparian areas between the La Sauses Cemetery and the Lobatos Bridge (on the west side). In addition,

the agency will treat about ½ acre of closed routes to enhance riparian vegetation.

- C Plant 10 acres with willows and three acres with cottonwoods over the first five years following plan approval to restore native species. Additional plantings will be undertaken as additional funding and partnerships become available.

SCENIC QUALITY

Manage the foreground areas of the corridor as Visual Resource Management Class II (see Tables 3-6 and 3-7).

WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS

Protect outstanding resource values by seeking an enduring form of legislative protection (e.g., Wild and

Scenic River designation or National Conservation Area designation) for the entire 41-mile-long river corridor running through public lands in Colorado.

BLM has recommended a 22-mile segment of the Rio Grande from the La Sauses Cemetery to the New Mexico state line as suitable for designation, with 14 miles from the cemetery to the Lobatos Bridge as scenic, and eight miles from the bridge to the state line as wild. Until Congress designates these river stretches, the BLM is managing this segment under interim management restrictions to protect their wild and scenic values. The interim boundaries are 0.25 mile from the ordinary high-water mark on each side of the river.



RIO GRANDE AND RED WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS (NEW MEXICO)

The Rio Grande and Red River in New Mexico were among the original eight rivers to be designated by Congress in 1968 to initiate the National Wild and Scenic River System. From the Colorado state line to the Taos Junction Bridge, 50 miles of the Rio Grande are classified as wild, and 2.2 miles near the John Dunn and Taos Junction Bridges are classified as recreational. The lower 3.2 miles of the Red River also are classified as wild, and the .75 mile below the Red River Fish Hatchery is recreational.

In 1994, Congress amended the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to include as a scenic segment the 12-mile-long stretch of the Rio Grande from the Taos Junction Bridge to the west section line of Section 15, T 23 N, R 10 E, which is just past the County Line Recreation Site. This document constitutes the management plan and proposes boundaries for the 12-mile-long scenic segment and will be forwarded to Congress at the end of the planning process.

Congress also asked the BLM to study the eight-mile-long Bosque Segment (actual mileage is 7.6) from Rinconada to the Velarde Diversion Dam and report within three years on its suitability for Wild and Scenic River designation. A report on the Bosque Segment is included in this document and will be submitted to Congress (see Appendix 3).

Many of the BLM's actions being undertaken to manage these Wild and Scenic Rivers are described under the following Special Management Areas in this chapter: Wild Rivers and Orilla Verde Recreation Areas, and the Lower Gorge ACEC. The actions below affect lands that fall outside these other designated areas.

ACCESS

Vehicle use is limited to the designated roads shown on Maps 6-b, c, and d (in back pocket) and described in Table 3-1. Hiking trails provide the majority of access opportunities along the segments classified as wild - see the Recreation section below.

LAND OWNERSHIP AND REALTY ACTIONS

BLM will attempt to acquire all state lands through exchange, and will work with willing private landowners to acquire properties with a priority on undeveloped lands and/or those with high-value resources (see Table 3-2).

LIVESTOCK MANAGEMENT

No livestock grazing is permitted within the designated river corridors.

MINERALS

The designated portions of the Rio Grande and Red River have been withdrawn from all forms of mineral entry.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

John Dunn Bridge: Post directional signs. Continue weekend river ranger patrols to permit boating use, provide information, and direct traffic. Place sign-in to support parking and use restrictions/controls at the bridge and springs.

Manby Springs: Post interpretive signing to encourage protection of cultural resources. Acquire public access to the trailhead at Manby Springs.

Rio Grande Gorge Bridge: Develop, in partnership with New Mexico State Highway and Transportation Department, interpretive signing on the bridge and parking areas which provide information about the bridge, how the Rio Grande Gorge has affected transportation in north-central New Mexico, the region's geology, watchable wildlife in the area, and a brief history of the Nation's Wild and Scenic River system.

Other public education actions will be implemented in the Wild Rivers and Orilla Verde Recreation Areas and the Lower Gorge ACEC.

RECREATION

Prohibit commercially guided fishing along the Rio Grande from Chiflo Trail to Big Arsenic Trail (year-round) to protect fisheries resources, and on the Ute Mountain Segment (from April 1 to May 31) to protect sensitive wildlife breeding areas.

The West Rim Trail will be extended north from the Rio Grande Gorge Bridge to Chiflo in the Wild Rivers Recreation Area. The segment between John Dunn Bridge and Cerro Chiflo will be closed from May 1 to July 31 to protect big game species.

Improve the Ute Mountain, East Rim, Lee, Chiflo, Sheeps Crossing, Miners, Red River, and Manby Springs Trails, the river trail between the John Dunn Bridge and Manby Springs, and the Powerline Trail.

Sign at trailheads only.

Coordinate with Taos Pueblo in locating an East Rim Trail between the Rio Grande Gorge Bridge and the Taos Junction Bridge.

No parking or overnight use (including camping) will be allowed within 300 feet of existing trailheads or trail descent points to protect wildlife migration corridors and access routes to water. The BLM will install appropriate signs to inform users of the restriction. Restrictions on overnight use will not apply to the Raven or Powerline trailheads or to the trailheads on the east rim of the gorge within the Wild Rivers Recreation Area.

Close the John Dunn Bridge Recreation Site to camping. Additional sites could be closed if monitoring indicates that resource damage is occurring that could not be mitigated in other ways.

BLM will coordinate with Taos County and the Hondo Mesa Neighborhood Association to determine a management strategy for the Manby Springs easement area.

RIPARIAN AREAS

BLM will manage the Wild and Scenic River corridors to conserve or enhance riparian vegetation through controls on vehicle use, plantings, and removal of noxious weeds or invasive, non-native plants.

SCENIC QUALITY

The public lands adjoining the wild segments of the Rio Grande and Red Wild and Scenic Rivers will be managed following are classified as Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class I guidelines. The

developed recreation sites, including the BLM

Visitor Centers, campgrounds, river access sites, and day use sites are VRM Class III. VRM Class II applies to the remaining portions of the Wild and Scenic River corridor (see Table 3-6 for definitions).

To preserve scenic quality, the BLM will acquire state and private land in the Corridor (both surface and subsurface) when owners are willing to sell (refer to Table 3-2 for a list of these parcels). BLM will maintain the right-of-way corridor near the Rio Grande Gorge Bridge and prohibit new right-of-way crossings elsewhere.

WATERSHED

Fire suppression will be limited to those methods least disturbing to soils and vegetation. Fuelwood and timber sales will not be allowed unless such action would enhance watershed resources. Recreation sites will be designed or rebuilt to control erosion, particularly at sites used for river access.

WILDLIFE

Construct cable grates on the mine entry at Black Rock Springs and at the El Poso Cave entrance to protect bats from human contact. The agency will allow scientific studies only - the caves will be closed to the general public.

Protect southwestern willow flycatcher territories through implementation of the *Southwest Willow Flycatcher Management Plan, 1998*.

Introduce a reproducing population of river otter into the Upper Gorge in coordination with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish and Colorado Department of Wildlife.



WILD RIVERS RECREATION AREA (NEW MEXICO)

The expanded Wild Rivers Recreation Area is the most intensively used area in the Upper Gorge. It includes portions of the Rio Grande and Red Wild and Scenic Rivers (3,209 acres), the original Wild Rivers Recreation Area (12,060), the former Guadalupe Mountain ACEC (1,363 acres) and adjacent public lands (2,034 acres). Private and state land adjacent to or enclosed by the new boundary also will be included if they are acquired (1,565 acres), bringing the area's total potential public land acreage to 20,231.

About 90% of the area is in a natural condition with the remaining 10% developed for intensive recreation use. The Wild Rivers Recreation Area was first developed for visitor use in 1962, with the construction of roads, trails and facilities under the temporary management of the New Mexico State Parks and Recreation Commission. BLM reassumed management responsibility of the area in 1969. Recreational activities include hiking, fishing, camping, picnicking, biking, sightseeing, kayaking, float-boating, roller blading, wildlife viewing, and nature study.

A 13-mile-long paved road, nationally designated as the Wild Rivers Back Country Byway, provides the main access to the recreation area. Paved road access is also available through the Red River Fish Hatchery, and access to trails is available via Forest Road 9 on Cebolla Mesa and other primitive roads on the west side of the Rio Grande Gorge.

The Wild Rivers Visitor Center is staffed daily from May through September, and on weekends during the low-use season. Twenty-two developed campsites are located along the rim of the Rio Grande and Red River at four campgrounds and the La Junta Point Overlook. These sites provide sheltered picnic tables, cooking grills, water, pit toilets, and trail access to the river canyons. Five overlook sites have been developed, including La Junta Point; two of these also serve as overflow campgrounds. Nineteen primitive campsites are located within the river canyons and are accessible only by trail. Camping in the canyons is limited to these designated sites, which are equipped with sheltered picnic tables, cooking grills, and pit toilets.

Within the Recreation Area, 26.5 miles of main-tained trails are available, including six trails that provide access to the river canyons, two multi-use rim trails, and two interpretive rim trails. One trail climbs Guadalupe Mountain to an area designated for

primitive camping. Fourteen miles of rim trail are open to mountain biking, five miles of canyon trail are open to equestrian use, and 11 miles of rim trail are open to cross-country skiing. Wheelchair access is available to the La Junta Point Overlook.

Two sections of land within the recreation area are owned by the State of New Mexico. One section contains BLM recreational facilities allowed by the State under a cooperative agreement. Both sections are leased for grazing and contain minimal grazing developments. One parcel of private land lies along the western boundary of the recreation area; it is used for grazing and occasional hunting.

ACCESS

Vehicle use is limited to roads and trails designated open in 1994, as shown on Map 6-c (back pocket) and listed in Table 3-1.

To provide and maintain a safe and efficient road network, the loop drive was upgraded for recreational vehicle use. All paved roads will be resurfaced in 2001. Secondary roads providing access to campgrounds and trailheads will be graded to provide crowns, ditches, and gravel surfaces (on-going); parking areas will be defined to discourage random parking; and annual maintenance will be provided.

LAND OWNERSHIP AND REALTY ACTIONS

Private and state lands within the Recreation Area will be acquired through easement, exchange or purchase if there are willing sellers (see Table 3-2). BLM will exclude new rights-of-way unless needed for administering recreation sites.

LIVESTOCK MANAGEMENT

Manage livestock grazing on Allotments 603, 606, 608, 640 and 641 as described in the Allotment Management Plans in Table 3-4. Grazing will be eliminated in the Loop Road area of Allotment 606 once vegetative treatments (partially completed) have restored grasslands to the southwest of Guadalupe Mountain.

MINERALS

Maintain withdrawal from locatable mineral entry and mineral material disposal. Maintain the closure to oil and gas leasing on 5,000 acres (the developed rim areas); in the remainder of the Recreation Area, oil and gas leases would be issued with a No Surface Occupancy stipulation.

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PREHISTORIC AND HISTORIC RESOURCES

Protect and interpret select prehistoric and historic sites within the recreation area by conducting a 100% class III inventory, excavating/interpreting select sites for visitors, and taking active steps to protect sites. Appropriate sites will be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

Environmental education will be the primary method of developing user awareness and a sense of stewardship that will contribute to preserving the qualities of the recreation area.

Sufficient visitor information and regulatory signing will be provided to meet current and future needs while protecting scenic quality. Sign needs will be reviewed each year and new signing installed as required.

Displays at the Wild Rivers Visitor Center will be updated to describe geology, human settlement, wildlife and habitats, and resource management issues such as human manipulation of vegetation and use of fire as a management tool.

BLM will increase ranger patrols at La Junta Point to provide more contact with visitors, maintain self-guided nature trails, and install interpretive signing to orient the visitor and provide information on the rivers, watchable wildlife and habitats.

An entry sign will be installed at the main entrance to the Recreation Area to orient the visitor to the area's opportunities. As use increases, BLM will consider developing a small entry station to provide enhanced visitor services and collect fees.

An amphitheater was completed in 1988 near the visitor center to provide for an outdoor lecture area for quality programs for visitors and area residents.

RECREATION

Supervision, maintenance and visitor services necessary to operate an efficient, safe and enjoyable Recreation Area will be provided throughout the year. A variety of hosted workers such as volunteers will continue to be used to supplement the work of paid staff.

Boating Management: Outfitted and private boater use will be managed under guidelines described in Chapter 4.

Casual Uses: All but the Guadalupe Mountain area

will remain closed to hunting, trapping, and the discharge of firearms, in cooperation with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish.

Fishing: Commercial fishing access will be closed in the Wild Rivers Recreation Area on the Rio Grande from Chiflo downstream to Big Arsenic Trail. Fishing access will be enhanced along the Red River by upgrading the trail from the Red River Fish Hatchery downstream to the confluence with the Rio Grande. It will only be maintained to primitive standards, with construction limited to the use of hand tools and the minimum work necessary to define the trail. The trail system along the rivers will be maintained to provide access to the river and to disperse use.

Camping/Picnicking: All camping will take place in developed or designated sites or areas. BLM will meet user demand with the minimum number of well-designed campgrounds and campsites needed to accommodate motorized and non-motorized access. All facilities on the rim will be fully accessible. Existing campgrounds will be redesigned and expanded, although priority will be on maintenance of existing facilities over new construction. When redesign is called for, sites which block public access to the rim area or to trails will be relocated. Large RVs will be accommodated at El Aguaje campground. An overflow camping area will be designated, and additional campsites added when the expanded campgrounds reach 80% of their capacity during the high-use months of July and August (this threshold was reached in 1994 and 1995). No more than 15 additional sites will be added on the rim. The group campsite at El Aguaje campground will be expanded to accommodate 50 people. Three restrooms will be developed with showers if water rights are obtained.

Conflicts between day and overnight users will be addressed by clearly marking areas for day or overnight use. La Junta, Chawalauna and the visitor center are the primary day use areas. As needed, parking areas will be designated or constructed to separate day uses such as hiking from the developed campsites. Each campground will be kept to three acres or less, with capacity limits established to preserve opportunities for privacy. Additional picnic tables will be provided at Sheeps Crossing and Chiflo when they reach capacity at least half the time during the high use period of July and August.

In the river canyons, adequate camping opportunities will be provided without compromising the area's solitude. Campsites in the canyon will not exceed two

SPECIAL AREA MANAGEMENT

per acre, no new shelters will be constructed, and shelters visible from rim viewpoints will be removed as they deteriorate, or repaired and relocated. A reservation system will be considered when use warrants.

Public water supplies, including springs, will be monitored in accordance with State water quality standards. Personnel will be certified to meet State water system operator requirements.

Trails: Hiking opportunities will be provided for those who do not wish to descend into the canyon, and maintain the loop trail connecting the visitor center and all campgrounds/day-use sites.

Pack stock will only be allowed on Little Arsenic Trail and short portions of the River Trail as needed to access the Rio Grande.

Mountain bike trails have and will be developed where not in conflict with other trail uses. Signing, fencing and barriers will be installed/maintained as needed to control vehicle use. In 1992 the Rinconada Trail was constructed with funds provided by the New Mexico State Highway and Transportation Department, and was widened in 1999 with additional funds from the same source.

BLM will construct the Pescado Trail from the Wild Rivers Visitor Center to the Red River Fish Hatchery, if trespass concerns of hatchery personnel can be mitigated.

The Ute Mountain, East Rim, Lee, Chiflo, Sheeps Crossing, Miners, Red River, and Manby Springs Trails, the river trail between the John Dunn Bridge and Manby Springs, and the Powerline Trail will be improved. Signs will be installed at all trailheads.

SCENIC QUALITY

The wild segments of the Rio Grande and Red Wild and Scenic Rivers will be managed under Visual Resource Management Class I guidelines. VRM Class III will apply to the developed recreation sites (21 acres), and VRM Class II will apply to the remaining public lands in the Recreation Area (see Table 3-6 for definitions).

To protect scenic quality, restrictions on use have been established, such as right-of-way exclusions and protective withdrawals (described above under Land Ownership). Scenic quality will be a primary consideration in facility design. There will be no new

developments in the "loop area". Specifications for proposed structures will consider size, shape, materials, color and basic harmony with the existing landscape. Existing structures, such as the Federal Aviation Administration garage, will be repainted or relocated to meet visual requirements.

WATERSHED

Woodlands and shrub grasslands will be treated to promote forest and watershed health. Fire suppression and mechanical thinning will be limited to the methods least disturbing to soils and vegetation. Noxious weeds will be suppressed using methods deemed most effective for the particular species, but herbicides would be used only as a last resort.

WILDLIFE

Emphasize wildlife viewing as a principle use in the recreation area by promoting habitat improvement projects that will enhance the abundance and variety of wildlife in the area. Opportunities for the public to observe wildlife will be enhanced by controlling facility development, installing bird baths and nesting boxes in high use areas, and improving habitat for the reintroduction of selected species such as pronghorn and sage grouse. Such re-introductions will be in cooperation with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. Fencing and creation of a wetland environment are the types of actions required to meet this objective.

Other wildlife-related actions to be taken include implementing the San Antonio-Pot Mountain habitat management plan; locating trails and other facilities to optimize wildlife viewing opportunities; avoiding development in sensitive wildlife habitats; expanding the no-hunting zone to include all but the west rim area; and limiting fuelwood and timber sales to those that will enhance wildlife habitat.

In the river canyons, BLM will manage the aquatic habitat to achieve the rivers' full potential for fisheries by conducting studies on minimal and optimum flows.

Parking or overnight use (including camping) will not be allowed within 300 feet of existing trailheads or trail descent points, as appropriate, to protect wildlife migration corridors and access routes to water. The BLM will install appropriate signs to inform users of the restriction. Restrictions on overnight use will not apply to the Raven or Powerline trailheads or to those on the east rim of the gorge within the Wild Rivers Recreation Area.

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ORILLA VERDE RECREATION AREA (NEW MEXICO)

Orilla Verde Recreation Area provides access for a variety of activities including camping, fishing, swimming, boating, bird-watching, hiking, and general sightseeing along part of NM 570.

The east side of the river is privately owned for about the first two miles downstream of the confluence of the Rio Pueblo and Rio Grande. Camping is allowed within the recreation area only at designated sites. The west side of the river throughout the recreation area is undeveloped except for the campground at Taos Junction Bridge and two designated primitive camp sites. Four campgrounds are on the east side of the river at Petaca, Arroyo Hondo, Orilla Verde (which includes a visitor station and storage yard), and Pilar. Each site has picnic and overnight camping facilities, restrooms, and (except at Arroyo Hondo) drinking water. Public pay telephones are available at the Taos Junction and Orilla Verde campgrounds, as are group shelters that accommodate up to 50 people.

Boating access is provided at four locations—the Taos Junction, Orilla Verde, and Arroyo Hondo campgrounds, and at the Lone Juniper Recreation Site, which is designated for primitive camping.

ACCESS

Vehicle access is limited to designated routes of travel as shown on Map 6-d and listed in Table 3-1.

Shoreline access at will be restricted at selected locations in Orilla Verde Recreation Area to protect bird habitat. Restrictions will be passive (e.g., by closing off adjacent parking areas or obliterating signs of trails).

LAND OWNERSHIP AND REALTY ACTIONS

BLM will attempt to acquire the following lands if landowners consent:

- C Private land adjacent to the Taos Junction Bridge (within T 24 N, R 11 E; portions of eight protracted sections totaling approximately 2,510 acres);
- C Private land within T 24 N, R 11 E, Sections 22, 23, 29, 32 (approximately 260 acres); and
- C State land within T 24 N, R 11 E, Section 2 (approximately 271 acres).

The Recreation Area is closed to new rights-of-way, except for underground utilities and New Mexico State Highway and Transportation Department road-maintenance activities.

LIVESTOCK MANAGEMENT

Grazing will be managed under guidelines shown in Table 3-4 for Allotments 517 and 626 (shown on Map 7 in the back pocket). No livestock use will be permitted within the Gorge.

MINERALS

Continue closure of the Recreation Area to locatable mineral entry. The No Surface Occupancy stipulation for oil and gas leasing and development would be applied to any leases issued covering this area.

Except for recreational gold panning and a building stone site at Arroyo Hondo (T 24 N, R 11 E, Section 24), the removal or collection of rocks or mineral material will not be allowed.

PREHISTORIC AND HISTORIC RESOURCES

Complete an inventory of cultural resources and provide interpretation where feasible. The highest priority for inventory will be areas of intensive recreation use.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

The Rio Grande Gorge Visitor Center and selected sites throughout the Recreation Area will be used to provide visitor information and environmental education on the Rio Grande Gorge, its history, resources and uses.

Rio Grande Gorge Visitor Center: Provide displays, including interactive videos, about the Rio Grande Gorge's recreation opportunities, history and resources. Promote visitor etiquette toward resources and education about local custom and culture. The visitor center will serve as a hub for environmental education with local and visiting school groups, and formal presentations will be given on a variety of topics of interest to visitors and local residents.

Taos Junction Bridge: Acquire land or make a land use agreement and put interpretive signing in place to describe the site's history, river ethics, and leave no trace practices. Provide BLM ranger presence, including guided hikes.

La Vista Verde Trail: Install a sign at the trailhead about hiker safety, cultural resources protection and vegetation.

Orilla Verde Campground: Replace the current contact station with an unstaffed facility to provide

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exhibits describing the area's recreation opportunities, sites of interest, riparian ecosystem, cultural resources, safety, wildlife, geology, and native plants. A nearby volunteer host site will allow for personal visitor contacts in summer.

RECREATION

Boating: Enforce the supplemental rule that prohibits motorized travel on the river by prohibiting hovercraft or motorized boat launching on public lands. Outfitted and private boaters will be managed under guidelines described in Chapter 4.

Casual Uses: Continue the closure to hunting, trapping, and the discharge of firearms within the recreation area, in cooperation with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish.

Fishing: Provide universal fishing access at one or two locations in the Recreation Area, and improve trails to the river from parking areas along NM 570 to provide safer access.

Camping and Picnicking: Camping in the Orilla Verde Recreation Area will be allowed only at developed campgrounds, and at designated primitive sites at Lone Juniper and selected sites on the west side of the river.

All campgrounds will be rebuilt to improve accessibility, provide additional sites where space allows, and provide additional services such as more group sites, RV hook-ups, dish washing stations, and restrooms with showers. Each campground will have a host/information facility with full hookups. Host facilities may be provided at major river access sites if use warrants.

A fully developed campground with 9 to 13 sites including at least one group site will be constructed near the historic stagecoach stop northeast of the

bridge, if the private land adjacent to the Taos Junction Bridge is acquired.

Trails: BLM will design and construct La Cieneguilla Trail from Pilar campground to the Taos Junction Bridge Area, and continue to maintain La Vista Verde Trail. Short trails used to access the shoreline will be maintained to the minimum extent necessary to assure safety.

SCENIC QUALITY

The rim area bounded by New Mexico Highway 68 (NM 68), the north rim of Arroyo Hondo, and the rim of the Rio Grande Gorge (if acquired) will be managed under Visual Resource Management Class I guidelines; campgrounds and developed day-use areas along the river under Class III guidelines; and the remainder of the area under Class II guidelines.

WATERSHED

Fire suppression activities will be conducted in a manner least disturbing to soils and vegetation. A strategy will be developed to control tamarisk and noxious weeds and reestablish native vegetation to improve biodiversity within the Recreation Area.

Water rights for springs in Arroyo Hondo Canyon, east of NM 68 near the Horseshoe Curve, will be acquired if owners are willing to sell.

WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES HABITAT

Restrict shoreline access in designated areas, and close selected side channels to boating use to protect bird habitat.

Human use on public land in the big-game migratory corridor within Arroyo Hondo Canyon (near Horseshoe Curve) will not be encouraged.

Protect southwestern willow flycatcher territories through implementation of the *Southwest Willow Flycatcher Management Plan, 1998*.

SPECIAL AREA MANAGEMENT

LOWER GORGE ACEC (NEW MEXICO)

This ACEC covers 16,351 acres of public land along a 14-mile-long stretch of the Rio Grande from the village of Pilar to the Velarde Diversion Dam, and includes important riparian habitat along both sides of the river. The designation recognizes the area's value for recreation, wildlife habitat, and riparian vegetation. The majority of the lands within the 12-mile-long segment of the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River designated in 1994 are within the ACEC. This new ACEC will encompass the former Racecourse ACEC (1,355 acres) and 663 acres of the Black Mesa ACEC. Its boundary also encloses 5,127 acres of private and state lands which BLM will try to acquire. The boundary of the Black Mesa ACEC has been adjusted to exclude the portion transferred to the new ACEC.

ACCESS

Vehicle use is limited to designated roads and trails which are shown on Map 6-e (back pocket). BLM will work with the New Mexico State Highway and Transportation Department to identify safe pullouts for sightseeing and parking along NM 68 and 570. Road improvements will be recommended to increase safety, such as marked driveway entrances, turning lanes, or road work to increase line of sight distances at dangerous hills or turns.

LAND OWNERSHIP AND REALTY ACTIONS

Acquire selected private lands within the ACEC boundaries, if landowners are willing to sell.

Allow disposal of about ½ acre in T 23 N, R 10 E, Section 19 to address community needs and approximately five acres in T 24 N, R 11 E, Section 33 in Pilar for community purposes and a trash transfer site. Otherwise, the remainder of the ACEC will be withdrawn from the public land laws.

New rights-of-way will be excluded unless needed to administer recreation sites or to provide access or utility service to private or state lands where it was otherwise not possible. Utilities will be underground only and will be co-located with roads.

LIVESTOCK MANAGEMENT

Grazing will be managed under guidelines described in Table 3-4 for Allotments 503, 514, 516, 517 and 636 (see Map 7 in back pocket for locations). No grazing will be permitted within the ACEC's riparian and wetland areas.

MINERALS

Withdraw the ACEC from mineral entry and close it to mineral material disposal. The ACEC is closed to mineral leasing.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

Pilar North Parking Area: Provide river ranger patrols and limited informational signing.

Quartzite Recreation Site: Develop interpretive signs describing key resources and river characteristics, and increase river ranger presence.

Racecourse Parking Sites: Provide interpretive signs at larger sites receiving the heaviest visitor use, and focus on Wild and Scenic River management, watchable wildlife, and natural and cultural features of interest.

County Line/Rinconada Overlook: Provide signing focusing on riparian area protection.

Lover's Lane: Increase patrol of the site.

Embudo Station: Provide some patrol and interpretive signing on river use, local history, and good neighbor guidelines in cooperation with landowners.

RECREATION

Boating: Outfitted and private boaters will be regulated by the guidelines described in Chapter 4.

Camping and Picnicking: Close the Quartzite Recreation Site to camping. No camping will be allowed within 100 feet of the river between the County Line Recreation Site and the Velarde Diversion Dam, including the County Line and Lover's Lane sites. Additional sites could be closed if monitoring indicates that resource damage is occurring that can not be mitigated in other ways. Provide day-use facilities at the south end of the County Line Recreation Site to accommodate fishing and picnicking and, if use warrants, install a universally accessible restroom.

Fishing: Provide universal fishing access at the Quartzite and/or County Line Recreation Sites (away from the launch/takeout areas), and at Lover's Lane. Improve trails to the river from parking areas along NM 68 to provide safer access.

Trails: BLM will conduct a feasibility study in

cooperation with the New Mexico State Highway

and Transportation Department for a pedestrian underpass or overpass between the Rio Grande Gorge Visitor Center and the Quartzite Recreation Site.

Continue to improve foot trails from the NM 68 parking areas to river sites. Where terrain allows, BLM will provide a trail between parking sites to facilitate access.

Develop or improve the Rinconada Hill Trail, following old roads from the County Line Recreation Site northeast to the Rio Grande Gorge Visitor Center.

RIPARIAN RESOURCES

BLM's goal of improving riparian conditions will be achieved by closing several sites to vehicles, including the public lands at the confluence of the Rio Grande and Rio Embudo, an east shore vehicle pullout located ½ mile south of Embudo Station, and the pullout located just upstream from the Velarde Diversion Dam. The riparian area at Lovers' Lane will be closed to vehicles, and adjacent private lands, if acquired.

SCENIC QUALITY

Continue application of Visual Resource Management Class II guidelines on all public lands in the

ACEC, except at recreation sites (four acres) which will be managed under VRM Class III guidelines.

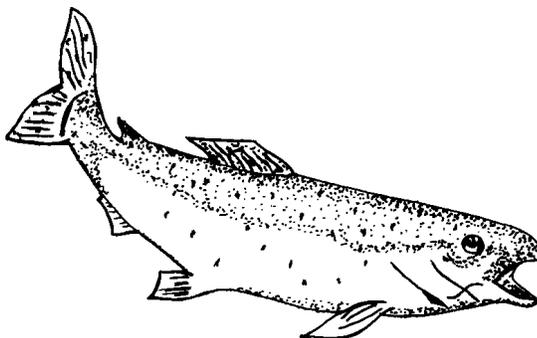
To protect the visual quality of the ACEC, rights-of-way in the ACEC will be strictly limited and the area withdrawn from public land and mining laws. BLM will redesign and landscape the Pilar North Parking Area and developed recreation sites, revegetate closed roads, and rehabilitate the old mining site near the Taos Junction Campground. BLM will develop partnerships with the New Mexico State Highway and Transportation Department and Public Service Company of New Mexico to improve the appearance of the NM 68 and 570 rights-of-way and the gas line parallel to NM 68.

WATERSHED

Shrub grasslands will be burned to improve watershed health. Noxious weeds will be suppressed with methods deemed most effective. Herbicides will be used only as a last resort. Any unplanned fires will be extinguished within the full-suppression zone. In the rest of the ACEC, fire prescriptions and burn plans will be developed to meet vegetation management objectives.

WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES HABITAT

Protect southwestern willow flycatcher territories through implementation of the *Southwest Willow Flycatcher Management Plan, 1998*.



SPECIAL AREA MANAGEMENT

COPPER HILL ACEC (NEW MEXICO)

This area, covering 17,280 acres of public lands south and east of NM 68, is named after Copper Hill, one of the higher peaks in this area. Several streams that drain this portion of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains characterize the unit, the most significant being the Rio Embudo. Access in much of the unit is limited by the steep, densely wooded terrain, but NM 75 is the main route.

The ACEC includes the now-rescinded Warm Springs (12,567 acres) and Lower Embudo Special Management Areas (SMAs), and the Agua Caliente (664 acres) and Embudo Canyon (1,212 acres) ACECs. The new ACEC is divided into four zones:

- 1 The Agua Caliente Protection Zone, which includes the area from the south boundary of the Agua Caliente Wild and Scenic River Study Area north to the ACEC boundary. The Agua Caliente drainage supplies water to the village of Pilar that is used for irrigation. This watershed is covered by stands of piñon, juniper, ponderosa pine, aspen, and Douglas fir, and contains noteworthy riparian and fish habitat.
- 2 The Rio Embudo Protection Zone, which includes the area from the north boundary of the Rio Embudo Wild and Scenic River Study Area south to the ACEC boundary. The Embudo Canyon is a deep, five-mile-long box canyon with outstanding scenic, wildlife, and recreation values. Since designation of the SMA, inventory has shown that the area also contains critical habitat for the Mexican spotted owl.
- 3 The Lower Embudo Cultural Protection Zone, which covers the same 498 acre area as the former Lower Embudo SMA. It encompasses portions of the river valley as well as flat terraces and rolling hills overlooking it. The area contains archaeological sites dating to the Coalition Period (A.D. 1200-1325); three of these are small pueblos with associated agricultural and special-use areas.
- 4 The Central Protection Zone, which covers the remainder of the ACEC (refer to Map 4 for the boundaries of the Wild and Scenic River Study Areas).

ACCESS

Vehicle use is restricted to designated roads and trails (see Map 6-e for designations, and Table 3-1). BLM will try to acquire administrative access to Agua

Caliente for fisheries management.

LAND OWNERSHIP AND REALTY ACTIONS

State and private lands within the ACEC will be acquired by purchase or exchange with willing owners.

New rights-of-way will only be allowed in the Central Protection Zone, and will be excluded in the remainder of the ACEC.

LIVESTOCK MANAGEMENT

Livestock in Allotment 521 will be managed under guidelines shown in Table 3-4. When the current permittee chooses to stop grazing, the permit will be retired.

MINERALS

The ACEC will be withdrawn from the public land and mineral entry laws. Mineral leasing will only be allowed within the Central Protection Zone.

PREHISTORIC AND HISTORIC RESOURCES

A Class III (100%) cultural resources inventory will be completed, and all archaeological sites recorded. This inventory will be phased over time and tied to priority areas (based on protection needs).

Eligible archaeological sites will be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.

Access to the pueblo ruins in the Lower Embudo Cultural Protection Zone will be limited to permitted users only.

Use limited techniques to suppress fires in the Lower Embudo Cultural Protection Zone. Suppression techniques causing earth disturbance (e.g., fire lines built by bulldozers or hand tools, off-road vehicles) will not be used within this zone.

RECREATION

Primitive camping will be allowed except within 100 feet of rivers or streams to protect riparian habitat. The area will remain open to casual recreation uses. Trails will be marked in the Rinconada Hill and Agua Caliente areas to limit surface disturbance.

SCENIC QUALITY

Visual Resource Management Class I guidelines will apply to 1,775 acres of the Rio Embudo and Agua Caliente Wild and Scenic River study segments. VRM Class II is assigned to the remainder of the Agua Caliente and Rio Embudo Protection Zones (4,789

acres). VRM Class III is assigned to the 10,716 acre Central Protection Zone.

BLM will protect the visual resources of the ACEC through land acquisitions, coordination with Rio Arriba and Taos Counties concerning zoning regulations, and other limitations on surface-disturbing activities.

WATERSHED

Manage all woodland and forestry resources to enhance wildlife habitat, ecosystem health, and scenic values.

WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS

The BLM will recommend a five-mile segment of the Rio Embudo known as the Embudo Box for designation as a wild component of the Wild and Scenic River System. Proposed boundaries are shown on Map 4, and management prescriptions will be those discussed throughout this Final Plan.

The BLM will complete suitability studies with the Carson National Forest on their adjoining portions of the following 10.1 miles of streams and river segments (tentative classifications are shown in parentheses): Arroyo Hondo (scenic), Tierra Amarilla

Canyon (scenic), Agua Caliente Canyon

(scenic/wild), Cañada de Ojo Sarco (scenic), and Rio de las Trampas (scenic). The BLM will manage these segments for protection of their wild and scenic values until the Congress determines their status. The interim boundaries will be 0.25 mile beyond the ordinary high water line.

WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES HABITAT

Acquire administrative access to Agua Caliente for fisheries management.

Prohibit all surface-disturbing projects, vegetative removal, and mineral material sales to protect Mexican spotted owl critical habitat area NM-BLM-3 in the new Copper Hill ACEC. The habitat area has been withdrawn from public land and mining laws and closed to mineral leasing.

Continue the cooperative effort with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish for the reintroduction of Rio Grande cutthroat trout to Agua Caliente Canyon after the existing population of rainbow trout is removed. In addition, the BLM will designate the Rio Grande cutthroat trout as a BLM sensitive species in New Mexico.

