

Environmental Assessment

Town of Edgewood

EA# NM-220-07-032

NM-109919

November 6, 2006

U.S. Department of the Interior

Bureau of Land Management

Taos Field Office

226 Cruz Alta Road

Taos, NM 87571

Environmental Assessment

Town of Edgewood, New Mexico

Chapter 1

1. Introduction/Purpose & Need

The Town of Edgewood (Town), New Mexico, located in Santa Fe County, has submitted an application under the Recreation and Public purposes Act (R&PP) for a parcel of public land whose legal description is T. 10 N., R. 7 E., section 34, lots 1, 2, 3, 4 and N1/2SE, containing approximately 248.72 acres (see attached project area map). Throughout this document, these 248.72 acres are referred to as “the parcel.” As the Town continues to grow, the demand for open space and recreational opportunities increases. The Town wishes to develop the parcel into a recreation area that is immediately adjacent to the Town of Edgewood and within two miles of the current town business center.

The parcel is approximately one hundred miles from the Taos BLM Field Office, and is a problematic property to manage. The Taos Resource Management Plan, October 1988, places the parcel within their Disposal Zone. The agency would like to sell it to the Town of Edgewood; however, because of increasing property values in subdivisions adjacent to the parcel, the Town cannot afford to purchase at an appraised rate.

Incorporated on July 16, 1999, Edgewood is a town of approximately 2,600 people with about 20,000 people living in the greater Edgewood area. At this time, recreational opportunities for area residents are limited, and many people seek out parks, open space areas and trail systems in nearby Albuquerque (20 miles west), the Santa Fe National Forest (25 miles west), and Santa Fe (60 miles northwest).

A trail system for Edgewood that utilizes New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT) R/Ws along state roads and the historic Old Route 66 location is underway. A 30 acre trail terminus for a 60 mile long trail that would allow hikers, bikers and equestrians to travel from Santa Fe to Edgewood has been purchased adjacent to the Town by Santa Fe County. The 248.72 acres of BLM land being studied in this document are only one and one half miles south of the current Town center and would compliment this new trail system.

When the recreation opportunities of the parcel are opened to the public, the Town of Edgewood would have exceptional recreational opportunities very close to town, and much needed recreation land in reserve to meet future needs. The parcel would also serve as a prime location for environmental education opportunities and land improvement projects for volunteer organizations and Edgewood's own youth population. In addition to quality of life and education enhancement, the parcel can also serve as a tourist destination and economic benefit. The Town of Edgewood Parks and Recreation program would like to continue research into the viability of hosting recreation events and races to draw tourism to the area.

1.2 Decision to be made by BLM

The BLM would decide whether or not to grant a 5 year lease to the Town, with the potential to issue a patent at the end of the five year lease period and with completion of the development plan.

1.3 Proposed Action

The Town is proposing the following improvements to the parcel if the lease is issued. These items are also described in greater detail in the attached Development and Management Plan:

- Fencing and signing to exclude ATVs and dirt bikes from the parcel and to define the boundaries of the recreation area;
- Recreational facilities including multi-use and interpretive trails, picnic facilities, nature gazebo;
- A dog park would be constructed on the parcel according to the approved management/development plan (attached);
- Creation of a safe entrance into the parcel. A gate would be placed at the western entrance to the parcel that is locked in the evenings and opened mornings to control access to the area.

The Town of Edgewood considers forest health and sustainability as the secondary goals of the lease. If the aesthetic character of the parcel is diminished, its use as a desirable recreation experience would also diminish. When BLM completes the fuel's reduction program for the parcel, the threat of wildfire would be greatly reduced, and the additional sunlight that reaches the ground would encourage native ground cover growth. The Town would continue vegetation management with youth groups, and future projects that move the parcel toward ecosystem sustainability. As drought, beetle infestation and human encroachment take their toll on piñon/juniper wildlands around the Edgewood area, the Town's stewardship of this 248.72 acre ecosystem would allow the parcel to be healthy and attractive for future area recreational activities.

1.4 Relationship to existing plans

The leasing of the parcel through the Recreation and Public Purposes Act is compatible with the Town of Edgewood's Comprehensive Plan that was published in October, 2000 and revised and adopted in February 2007. The first goal stated in the Community Facilities Goals, Objectives and Policies portion of the document states, "**Goal C: Balance community development with the natural resources in the Edgewood area** **Goal C; Objective 1:** designate, acquire and protect open space areas and parks to preserve natural and scenic assets for the community. **Goal I:** Provide health, education, and social services in the community. Be a leader in open-space and trail acquisition for recreation and educational opportunities, to promote a healthy quality of life. **Goal K: Develop a community-wide system of recreation and park facilities. Goal K; Objective 4:** Seek alternative funding from a variety of resources for the purposes of acquiring lands for open space, conservation initiatives.

Regionally, proposed action on this parcel by the Town adheres to the goals of The State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan to increase multi-use trails and open space.

The proposed action on the parcel located in Santa Fe County is also in compliance with Santa Fe County's Open Space and Trails Program mission statement, "to create a network of cultural, historical, recreational and natural open spaces and trails throughout Santa Fe County that achieve the goals outlined in the Open Land and Trails Plan to benefit current and future generations."

Development of this parcel, as proposed by the Town, is not only compatible with the Town of Edgewood's Parks and Recreation Five Year Plan adopted March 9, 2005; the development of the parcel is actually included as an objective to be accomplished.

This document was prepared in accordance with the Taos Resource Management Plan (October 1988), which was prepared by the Taos Field Office of the BLM. The BLM's Recreation and Public Purposes Act also served as a guideline in the preparation of this document.

State of New Mexico Statute, 1978 (Annotated), Section 3-18-18 allows a municipality to acquire property for park purposes.

1.5. Public Participation

A public meeting pertaining to the granting of the proposed lease was held in the Town's Community Center on March 29, 2005. Ads for the scoping meeting were placed in the two newspapers that serve the Edgewood area - The Independent and The Mountain View Telegraph, by BLM staff. Posters that announced the meeting were posted in the seven locations in Edgewood used by the Town Council and Commissioners to announce their meetings. Posters with the same message were hand delivered to residents that are immediately adjacent to the parcel on the east and south boundaries. There are no radio stations in the Edgewood area, and television stations in the Albuquerque area 25 miles west do not carry Edgewood meeting announcements. The meeting was announced at the monthly Town Council meeting on March 9, 2005.

The intent of the scoping meeting was to address concerns and issues in the neighborhoods adjacent to potential project sites on federally managed public lands. The BLM's planning process was discussed with the group as well as discussion on both the prescribed fire/thinning project and the Town's proposal.

Comments received during the meeting and after supported both the thinning project on the parcel and the lease of the parcel to the Town of Edgewood for recreation purposes. Approximately 19 people attended the meeting and approximately 3 comments were received.

Comments received before the scoping meeting follow:

- In late April of 2004, the Town received two telephone complaints from people living adjacent to the parcel about trespass ATV use, shooting, dumping, night time chainsaw operation and possible late night drug trafficking. Many of these callers have asked the Town to perform law enforcement work in the area or to close the parcel to unauthorized use.

- In early May, 2004, several people inquired about ownership of the parcel and asked if the Town could take over management of the area.
- At a May 15, 2004 Parks and Recreation Committee meeting in Edgewood, a woman whose home abuts the eastern boundary of the parcel attended the meeting to ask the Town to stop ATV and dirt bike users from crossing her property to get to Section 34. There is no fencing left on this portion of the eastern boundary.
- On June 7, 2004, the Mayor of Edgewood and the Parks and Recreation Director consulted with officials from the Taos Field Office began a dialogue about leasing the parcel to the Town of Edgewood. The Parks and Recreation Director were given a list of items that must be completed before a lease can be offered. BLM officials also sent one of their Law Enforcement Officers to meet with the Edgewood Parks and Recreation Director to see the condition of the parcel and to discuss the installation of prohibitive dumping signing by BLM.
- On November 8, 2004, The Town received a written complaint from a neighbor on the east side of the parcel. She is confined to a wheel chair and said that people are driving vehicles across her property to get to the BLM parcel at all hours of the day and night. She states that one kid on a dirt bike spun his tires and covered her with gravel as he sped off. She says that they have placed no trespassing signs all over their property, as have their neighbors, but no one pays any attention to them. The Parks and Recreation Director notified the BLM of the problem and he was told that the matter was being turned over to their Law Enforcement Officer.
- October 2006, the Town's Parks & Recreation Department met with the Town's engineer, Dennis Engineering, and requested a quote, scope and a feasibility statement on creating a safe and viable entrance off Edgewood Road 7 into the northwest corner of the parcel. Dennis Engineering responded that the project is feasible and practical.
- On November 30, 2006 at 6 pm, a public meeting was held to take comments on the proposed development and management plans for the parcel. The meeting was held at the Edgewood Community Center at 27 E. Frontage Road, Edgewood, NM. The meeting was a regular scheduled Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission meeting, held every 4th Thursday of the month. In attendance were: Stacey Boyne, Edgewood Parks and Recreation Program Manager, Parks & Recreation Advisory Commission Members: Sue West, Dennis Gallagher, Faye Neisen, and members of the public: Karen Mahalick, Roger Holden, and Aleta Niggler. Public comment was taken and the Parks & Recreation Advisory Commission voted unanimously to accept the proposed plans for submission in the lease process. The plans were posted to the Town's web site for an additional 30 day period for public comment. None was received.

Chapter 2

Proposed Action and No Action Alternatives

Proposed Action

BLM is proposing to authorize a lease under the R&PP to the Town. If the lease to the Town is approved, initial facility development would begin, which would include:

- Wildlife friendly fencing and signing would be placed to mark the parcel boundaries and deter ATV and dirt bikes from continuous trespass.
- A gate would be placed at the entrance and parking area on the northwest corner of the parcel.
- Through collaborative efforts from at least two funding sources and trained volunteers, the Town would develop the parcel into a recreational use facility that consists of a primitive multi-use trail system, picnic areas, and a small fenced dog park in accordance with the proposed development plan (attached).
- The trail system would accommodate pedestrians, bicyclist, and equestrians. Short hiking trails with benches would be provided for a variety of skill leveled trail users, and would provide an environmental educational opportunity as an interpretive nature trail. A short loop trail would be surfaced to accommodate users with disabilities.
- Day use picnic areas would be placed in the larger, upper southwest meadow (cleared area) to take advantage of the view shed and would only be accessed by foot, bike or horse. Meadow areas outside the recreation facility complex and parking area would be protected from vehicular use by barriers and appropriate display of maps and signage. Seeding of smaller meadow areas with native wildflowers and grasses would take place and encourage opportunity for youth environmental education programs.

The lease to the Town would move the responsibility for management of the parcel to the Town, but the parcel would remain under BLM management. The Town may apply for a patent to the property once the Plan of Development has been completed.

No Action Alternative

The No Action Alternative means that management of the parcel would remain the responsibility of BLM and development would be at the discretion of BLM. It is understood that BLM would continue with thinning of the parcel as noted in the CX (copy attached), that examines the need for thinning work on the parcel. As long as the parcel remains the property of the BLM, it may not be incorporated into the Town of Edgewood.

The Town would provide, within its means, a reasonable amount of management to attempt to control adverse environmental impact to the parcel, wildfire risk, trespassing by ATV's and threats to public safety.

Chapter 3

Affected Environment

The parcel is located in a piñon pine/juniper ecosystem at an elevation of about 6,800' above sea level. A relatively flat ridge traverses the center of the parcel from the western to the eastern boundary, and the rest of the property drops away down gentle slide slopes to meadows below.

An un-maintained dirt road moves across the flat ridge from the western to the eastern boundary. Numerous dirt track roads radiate out from the main road. A large clearing, containing approximately 15 acres, and a smaller clearing, approximately 10 acres, that accommodated the former YMCA camp, are located adjacent to the central roadway.

At this time, almost half of the fencing around the parcel is down or in poor condition, and a survey plat of an adjacent subdivision indicates that some existing fencing is not located on the property boundaries. Dirt bike and ATV use is increasing at an exponential rate on the parcel, and new trash dumping is occurring with greater frequency.

Currently, this portion of the Southwest is experiencing a protracted drought. Unmanaged tree cover on the parcel is dense with heavy fuels buildup in almost half of the parcel. Sporadic rains can temporarily reduce fire danger in Northern New Mexico during fire season; however, most of this portion of the State remains in extreme fire danger during the summer. Some of the greatest fuels buildup in the parcel occurs immediately adjacent to subdivided lands that lie to the south and east of the parcel boundaries.

The view shed from the smaller western clearing is limited due to tree cover around the edge; however, the upper eastern clearing offers about a seventy degree view of a panoramic landscape that extends to the southeast and south for more than thirty miles. The parcel is the highest point in the view shed, which heightens the perspective of the landscape that drops away from the ridge top. When the visitor approaches the boundaries of the parcel, adjacent subdivisions become evident.

Along the ridge top, however, development is not noticeable except at the eastern boundary. On the north side of the ridge, some limestone outcropping appears giving more character to the side slope of the ridge, and the meadows at the bottom of the ridge begin to move into view. As the visitor approaches the meadow areas, subdivisions along the northwestern boundary become the dominant visual element. The view north from the northeastern boundary has less development. Houses line the eastern and southern boundaries, and near the southern boundary, private backyards come into view. The view from the western boundary is of an adjoining forested lot and another subdivision.

During the spring and summer, wildflowers, cactus and some woody shrubs grow new leaves, bloom and then change colors in the fall. There are no large deciduous trees in the area to bring masses of color to the fall landscape. The two clearings on the parcel are progressing into the grass and shrub successional stage of the forest since the past lessee removed all the trees. These two native wildflower and grass meadows add a great deal to the variety of the parcel.

Subdivisions about the southern and eastern boundaries of the property. An adjoining subdivision borders the property on the north side.

The parcel is becoming a major nuisance for the residents living adjacent and near the property. The garbage that is being dumped on the parcel is beginning to evolve into construction junk, dead tree slash and lots of broken glass. Neighbors adjacent to the parcel are calling the Town Office about gun shots in the night, loud partying, burning cars, deserted vehicles and the presence of drug paraphernalia.

The threat of a human-caused wildfire beginning on the parcel and spreading to surrounding areas is very real. Evidence of fireworks and small campfires can be found along the main road through the parcel.

The current dirt road at the entrance to the parcel joins Windmill Road at an angle that is difficult and unsafe for vehicles to negotiate. Windmill Road ends at the section line along the southern boundary of Section 34 at the section corner with Section 33. The road that continues south from the section line is in Torrance County and is designated County Road A-099. The proposed new entrance which includes a road into the northwest corner of the parcel would join Edgewood 7 with a “t” intersection.

Chapter 4

Environmental Effects

4.1 Soils

The parcel is characterized by the long ridge that runs east to west through the mile long lower portion of Section 34. The side slopes of the ridge are gentle. Small limestone outcrops two to three feet high run along the contour of the ridge, especially on the north side. Slopes on the north side with less than 3% grade have deeper soil, and this includes the small meadow areas at the bottom of the ridge. The majority of the ridge top has shallow soil with scattered limestone fragments and bedrock at or close to the surface.

Soils on the site consist primarily of Harvey Loam (HC) and the Laporte-rock outcrop complex (LH). HC soils, typically on 1 to 9 percent slopes, exhibit moderate permeability and moderate hazard of erosion. Effective rooting depth on this soil type is about 60 inches and available water holding capacity is 9 to 10 inches. LH soils are found on 5 to 25 percent slopes and exhibit moderate permeability, rapid runoff, and moderate hazard of erosion. Effective rooting depth is 8 to 20 inches and available water holding capacity is 1.5 to 3 inches.

No Action Alternative - Conditions would remain as they are. ATVs and dirt bikes would continue to disturb surface soils, especially on the east end of the parcel. Their travel is not restricted to existing dirt roads; they move freely across the face of the ridge loosening and scattering soil and rock as they go. The longer this illegal use continues, the greater the possibility of damage to shallow area soils would be.

Proposed Action – The parcel would be fenced and signed for law enforcement purposes. All ATVs and dirt bike use would be prohibited inside the park area. Motorized vehicle use would be restricted to the arterial road that traverses the center of the ridge. When BLM finishes the thinning project on the parcel, trace roads would be closed off and re-vegetated. Further erosion in the parcel during facility construction would be prevented.

4.2 Water Resources

The parcel is dominated by a long, flat east to west-oriented ridge. Side slopes along the ridge

are relatively gentle and free of erosion and gully cutting. Water resources on the parcel have not been developed, and there are no wells or stock tanks within the boundaries. Due to a very dense, over-grown piñon pine/juniper forest, there is little runoff and competition for absorbed surface water is great. A prolonged Southwestern drought and the lack of surface water are beginning to show in the increasing number of dead piñon pines on the parcel. If any rainfall manages to reach the toe of the ridge slope from the ridge top, it would be immediately absorbed by subdivision backyards on the east and south sides or meadows that are adjacent to the parcel on the north side.

BLM staff conducted an analysis to authorize a thinning project on the parcel that can reduce natural competition for water in an over-stocked forest. Once the forest is thinned, a healthier piñon pine ecosystem with increased water retention capabilities would support a greater diversity of plants and animals.

There are no developed or undeveloped water resources on the parcel.

No Action Alternative – resources would remain the same.

4.3 Vegetation

The Town selected an ecologist to survey the parcel and identify existing plant and animal species. The Taos Field Office Wildlife Biologist provided the ecologist with a list of endangered species, threatened species and species of concern in New Mexico. The Santa Fe cholla is listed as a species of concern in New Mexico; however, the proposed lease area lies outside the potential range for this species.

In addition to rare species, the area was inventoried for noxious weeds with one individual plant, *Ulmus pumila* (Siberian elm), a New Mexico Class C weed, encountered. The absence of both noxious weeds and the presence of few non-native plants is surprising considering the widespread crisscrossing of roads, all terrain vehicle trails and foot trails throughout the parcel.

This piñon/juniper woodland is far denser than in the pre-European settlement era when a natural fire regime was in place. Average tree canopy cover is above 50%, with significant portions of the area approaching 80-90 percent cover. While the north slope was naturally denser than the ridge-top and south slope, the average cover is expected to have been in the 20% range when the fire regime was in place. The un-naturally dense woodland of today provides heightened competition for light and moisture resulting in a much reduced composition of both plant and animal species.

Like much of the piñon/juniper community on the east side of the Sandia Mountains (eight miles east of the parcel), *Ips* beetles are widespread and abundant in the parcel, and small groups of dead and dying trees are present, especially in denser stands. Trees dead long enough for needles to have dropped, and for the needles to have lost their inhibitive terpenes, had more vigorous and somewhat denser understory vegetation. The flush of nutrients released by the dead trees and sunlight that can now reach the forest floor may permit establishment of species not present elsewhere on the parcel, and certainly would permit greater site specific diversity. Piñon tree deaths are of relatively recent origin as fallen trees are rare. Piñon losses can be expected to continue unless the current regional drought is replaced by a period of several cold winters and

above average moisture. The beetle outbreak is expected to result in a more open juniper dominated community if the outbreak persists for the next couple of years. The most piñon survival can be expected on the northern slope, particularly toward the steeper western edge of the parcel.

Meadow remnant plants are weedy, but the presence of several grasses, winterfat and four-wing saltbush shrubs reflect a trend toward site recovery from an extensive period of livestock use. The amount of shrub presence in these meadows in the pre-European settlement period would have been determined by the fire return interval, but a fire on the order of once every ten years would have still permitted the presence of some winterfat and four-wing saltbush.

No Action Alternative – Condition and trend will remain the same.

Proposed Action – Once the BLM thinning project is complete, the Town would use summer YCC crews to ensure that forest density does not increase. All vehicular traffic would be confined to the main arterial road and the parking areas. Ground cover and other native plants should regenerate. Only native plant materials would be used in re-vegetation within the parcel, and periodic checks would be made for noxious weeds.

4.5 Wildlife

The following information was taken from the Edgewood WUI HFR Biological Report, prepared by Leslie A. Boby, Biological Technician, BLM, Taos Field Office.

This report will address each of the species identified in the *FEDERAL, ENDANGERED, THREATENED, PROPOSED, AND CANDIDATE SPECIES AND SPECIES OF CONCERN WITHIN COUNTIES IN NEW MEXICO September 26, 2007* (Consultation Number 2-22-04-I-XXX) for Santa Fe County, NM.

Endangered

Black-footed ferret (*Mustela nigripes*) - This small mammal eats prairie dogs as its food of choice, lives in empty prairie dog burrows and is extant in New Mexico. The ferret can occupy a wide variety of habitats including sagebrush, closed piñon -juniper woodland and juniper savannah. “It is closely associated with the prairie dog whose burrows provide retreats for ferrets. The dependency of the black-footed ferret on this food item is so great that reduction in numbers of ferrets is directly correlated to reduction in prairie dogs.” (Hoffmeister 1986) This species has been extirpated from New Mexico and as such would not be affected by the proposed action.

Southwestern Willow Flycatcher (SWWF) (*Empidonax trailii extimus*) – The Southwestern Willow Flycatcher is an obligate riparian species, which requires dense stands of riparian vegetation. The flycatcher is associated with stream and river corridors. Since the proposed action won't be taking place inside or near a riparian area, the flycatcher will not be affected by the proposed action.

Rio Grande silvery minnow (*Hybognathus amarus*) – The Rio Grande silvery minnow occupies a variety of habitats in low-gradient, large streams with shifting sand or silty bottoms. In New

Mexico, both the Rio Grande and Pecos River are typical of plains lotic ecosystems characterized by flashy or unpredictable flow. Rio Grande silvery minnows have adapted to the environs of these rivers. No habitat for this species has been identified within the project area, therefore, the project will not affect this species.

Threatened

Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – This large raptor is noted for “seeming to prefer timbered lowlands areas along coasts, large lakes or rivers, but they also occupy other areas.” (O’Gara 1994) They nest in trees near water or in riparian areas and primarily eat fish and waterfowl, though they will eat carrion and small mammals. Because this site is located in a dry upland area and the Bald Eagle prefers riparian areas for nesting and hunting, the proposed action would not affect this species.

Mexican Spotted Owl (*Strix occidentalis lucida*)- Habitat characteristics highly sought by Mexican spotted owls include high canopy closure, high stand density, a multi-layered canopy, uneven-aged stands, numerous snags, and downed woody matter. These are best expressed in old-growth mixed-conifer forests. These characteristics may also develop in younger stands that are unmanaged or minimally managed, especially when stands contain remnant large trees or patches of large trees from earlier stands. This description does not correspond with the characteristics of the project site; which is a piñon-juniper association. This association has a relatively open canopy, low stand density, and an undeveloped understory. It is unlikely that the owl would be found in this habitat; therefore it will not be affected by the proposed action.

Candidate

Yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*)- This migratory bird winters in tropical forests. It is associated with broadleaf riparian areas in the Interior Mountain West where it is considered to be extremely rare. It has been documented along The Gila River in central New Mexico. No habitat for this species has been identified within the project area; therefore it will not be affected by the proposed action.

Species of Concern

New Mexican meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius luteus*) – The New Mexico Jumping mouse is associated primarily with riparian habitats in New Mexico (Frey and Yates, 1996). They are usually found in marshes, moist meadows and riparian habitats in open prairie (Finch, 1992). No habitat for this species has been identified within the project area; therefore it will not be affected by the proposed action.

Townsend’s big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus townsendii*) - Townsend's big-eared bat is a western species occupying semidesert shrublands, piñon -juniper woodlands, and open montane forests. It is frequently associated with caves and abandoned mines for day roosts and hibernacula but will also use abandoned buildings and crevices on rock cliffs for refuge. They do not move long distances from hibernacula to summer roosts nor do they move or forage far from their day roosts. No habitat for this species has been identified within the project area; therefore it will not be affected by the proposed action.

American peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus anatum*) – This raptor feeds almost exclusively on other birds. They are found in Douglas fir, Hemlock-Sitka spruce, redwood, ponderosa pine, larch/white pine, lodgepole pine, fir-spruce, aspen (hardwoods), chaparral, and piñon-juniper forest types. Peregrine falcons breed on cliffs usually near water. In New Mexico, the breeding territories of peregrine falcons center on cliffs that are in wooded/forested habitats, with large "gulfs" of air nearby in which these predators can forage. They use a wide variety of habitats for foraging, including riparian woodlands, coniferous and deciduous forests, shrublands, and prairies. No nesting habitat for this species is located near the project site; therefore the chance of this species using the site for foraging is very low. This species would not be affected by the proposed action.

Arctic peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus tundrius*) - The Arctic peregrine falcon is a rare migrant in the state of New Mexico. The species winters in South America and typically migrates through eastern and middle America, bypassing New Mexico. Because the species does not reside in New Mexico and only rarely migrates through the state, it is highly unlikely that it would ever be found at the proposed project site. Therefore, the proposed project will have no affect on the species.

Baird's Sparrow (*Ammodramus bairdii*) – This migratory species breeds in short grass prairies and eats invertebrates and plants. In New Mexico it has been found in a variety of habitats, ranging from desert grasslands in the south to prairies in the northeast and mountain meadows in the San Juan and Sangre de Cristo mountains. Migrants arrive as early as the first week of August and by November most appear to have moved farther south. This species has been seldom detected in the state during spring migration. No habitat for this species has been identified within the project area; therefore this species would not be affected by the proposed action.

Mountain plover (*Charadrius montanus*) - This is a lowland grassland species and is not found in the mountains, in spite of its common name. Mountain plovers are considered to be strongly associated with sites of heavy grazing pressure to the point of excessive surface disturbance. Mountain plover nesting sites are dominated by short vegetation and bare ground, often with manure piles or rocks nearby. No habitat for this species has been identified within the project area; therefore this species would not be affected by the proposed action.

Northern goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*)- This raptor primarily occupies three types of forest in the southwest; ponderosa pine, mixed-species, and spruce-fir. Northern goshawks of New Mexico occur locally in mature, closed-canopied coniferous forests of mountains and high mesas. Goshawks are predators of forest birds and mammals and prey may be captured on the ground, in trees, or in the air. Northern goshawks show a preference for foraging in mature forests. Northern goshawks may also prey on other Northern goshawks. Goshawks occur primarily at lower elevations (2800 - 5500 ft). No habitat for this species has been identified within the project area; therefore, this species would not be affected by the proposed action.

Western burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia hypugea*) – Long legs distinguish this ground dweller from all other small owls. This species nests in single pairs or small colonies, often in abandoned prairie dog towns. They breed in grasslands, prairies, or open areas near human

habitation such as golf courses and airports. Their prey consists primarily of beetles, grasshoppers and crickets, with occasional use of small mammals. They associate with open to dense stands of shrubs and low trees, including big sagebrush, saltbush, greasewood, or creosote bush. The role of natural disturbance, such as fire, is important in the maintenance of burrowing owl habitat; reducing plant height and cover around burrows, controlling woody plant invasion, and creating conditions which support a more diverse prey base. No burrowing owls have been documented within the proposed project area; therefore, this species would not be affected by the proposed action.

Rio Grande sucker (*Catostomus plebeius*) - The native range of the Rio Grande sucker includes the Rio Grande and its tributaries in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado, The Rio Grande sucker lives in small to large, middle elevation (2000-2600 m) streams usually over gravel and/or cobble, but also in backwaters and in pools below riffles. It is rarely found in waters with heavy loads of silt and organic detritus. No habitat for this species has been identified within the project area; therefore, this species would not be affected by the proposed action.

Santa Fe cholla (*Opuntia viridiflora*)- This shrubby plant has many branches and extends to about 0.8 m in height and about 2 meters across. It is found in gravelly rolling hills in piñon-juniper woodland from 5,800-7,200 feet. The Santa Fe cholla is known from only two areas, Fort Marcy Park in Santa Fe and Chimayo, New Mexico. Common scientific opinion suggests that *O. viridiflora* is a hybrid derived from *O. imbricata* × *O. whipplei*. All plants produce full crops of fertile seed which when germinated show individual variation, never toward any supposed parent, but rather well within the norm for *O. viridiflora*. Populations of this species are impacted by urban development and human activity. As with other opuntias, this species is subject to a fungal disease believed to be *Gleosporium lunatum*. *Opuntia viridiflora* is a popular "cold hardy" landscape cactus due to small shrubby habit, and its orangish flowers. There is little commercial trade in the species. It is easily propagated vegetatively and by seed, and collecting seems to offer no threat. The uses of this plant as an ornamental may help with the survival and possible recovery of the species should it become extinct in its natural habitat. The proposed project lies outside the potential range for this species. The proposed action would not affect this species. Concurrence by Valerie Williams, BLM Wildlife Biologist has been given for this project.

No Action Alternative – Resources would remain the same.

4.6 Cultural Resources

The Town contracted with an archaeological survey firm to examine the parcel for any traces of relevant historic or prehistoric use and/or occupation. To date, they have found five arrowheads and no living sites. They are speculating that the ridge down the center of the parcel was largely used as a vantage point for hunting. The results of their final analysis of the area will be included in this document. A prehistoric lithic site and an historic building foundation have been identified. It was determined that the site was not eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places; therefore no further work is needed. Concurrence by Paul Williams, BLM Archaeologist has been given for this project.

No Action Alternative – Condition and trend will remain the same.

4.7 Land Use and Socio-Economics

Proposed Action – Town closure of the parcel to all off-road vehicles may send off-road vehicle owners to other areas, such as the southern portion of the Cibola National Forest, where trails are open to these types of vehicles, or to adjacent lands that are not fenced.

Controlled access to the parcel would eliminate existing problems with off-road vehicles, night parties, and possible illegal drug users and sales.

Neighbors adjacent to the parcel would have a fenced boundary between their property and the parcel.

Trespass across private property and onto the parcel should cease, and the New Mexico State Police would respond to reports of trespass and fence cutting violations. Ordinances put in place by the Edgewood Town Council would be enforced to protect the property from illegal use and vandalism.

The lease of this parcel to the Town would provide area residents, regardless of income level, with opportunities to picnic and hike or bicycle within one and one half miles of the current Edgewood business center. Recreation facilities would be “no fee areas”, and open to all visitors.

The Parks and Recreation program would have an area for use as a potential economic draw through special events, such as: hold Community classes that entail things such as wildflower walks, native species identification, GPS classes, etc. As far as economic, the trail systems could host a 5k run or walk, as well as programming capabilities for the local residents and those wishing to venture outside of neighboring urban areas.

No Action Alternative - Existing conditions would remain the same.

Chapter 5

Agency Consultation and Coordination

Federal Agency Contacts

U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Taos Field Office

Sam DesGeorges, Field Office Manager

Sher Churchill, NEPA Coordinator

Lora Yonemoto, Realty Specialist

Tami Torres, Outdoor Recreation Planner and Visual Resource Specialist

Town of Edgewood

Bob Stearley, Mayor

Karen Alarid, Municipal Clerk and Treasurer

Stacey Boyne, Parks and Recreation Director

Ellen Wymer, Town Councilor

Mark Lowry, Town Councilor

Chuck Ring, Town Councilor

Paul Hoffman, Town Councilor

David Henderson, Town of Edgewood Attorney

Document Preparer - Rod Replogle and Stacey Boyne, Town of Edgewood, former and current Parks & Recreation Director

Archaeological Consultant - Lone Mountain Archaeological Services

Ecological Consultant - Ecological Interpretations, Albuquerque, NM

Site Planning - Sites Southwest - Albuquerque, NM

Project Engineering Services - Dennis Engineering, Edgewood, NM

Chapter 6

Addendum

Edgewood WUI Thinning Project Categorical Exclusion, prepared by Justin Dean, BLM Biological Technician

Edgewood WUI HFR Biological Report, prepared by Leslie Boby, BLM Biological Technician

Proposed Project Area Map

Class III Cultural Resource Survey, prepared by Lone Mountain Archaeological Services

Section 34 – Open Space and Trails Development and Management Plan