

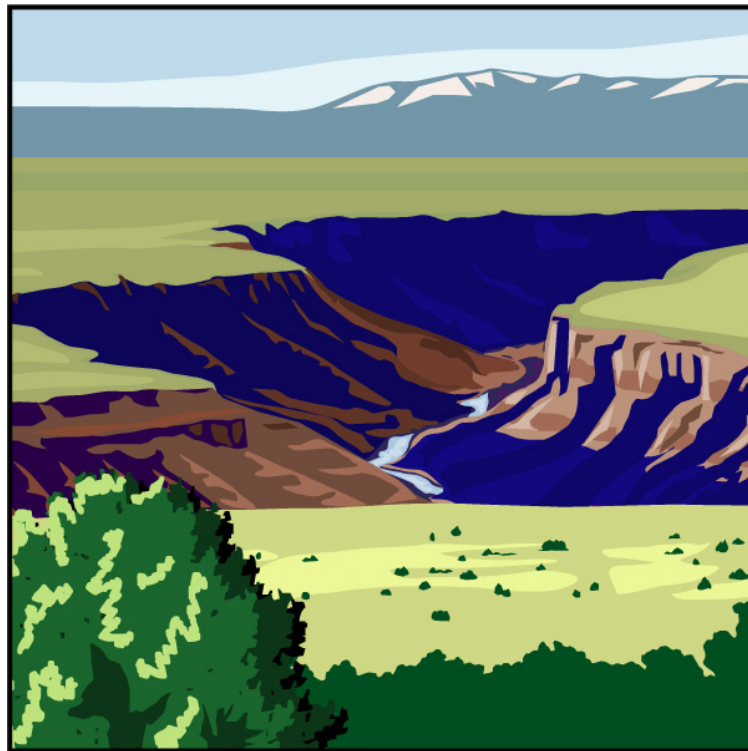
# TAOS VALLEY OVERLOOK

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## **Project Plan and Orilla Verde Recreation Area Management Plan Amendment**

Environmental Assessment

EA: NM-220-06-013



**U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management**

Taos Field Office  
226 Cruz Alta Road  
Taos, NM 87571



## **CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION & PURPOSE AND NEED**

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### **Introduction**

The 2000 Rio Grande Corridor Final Plan identified the potential acquisition of over 2,500 acres of private land to be incorporated into Orilla Verde Recreation Area (OVRA). With the assistance of the Trust for Public Lands and the Taos Land Trust, and partnerships with the pueblos of San Felipe and Santa Domingo, New Mexico Congressional delegation, and hundreds of New Mexico residents, the U. S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) recently completed this multi-year effort to preserve what is now referred to as the Taos Valley Overlook property. The well-known property offers stunning views of the Rio Grande Gorge and Sangre de Cristo Mountains from the top of the “horseshoe curve” on NM Highway 68.

The scope of this project and management plan includes components on the upland rim area as well as in the gorge near the Rio Grande. The uplands are mostly flat with a series of ridges running in a southeast to northwest direction. The property gradually trends toward the east rim of the Rio Grande gorge and is cut by numerous arroyos and covered with sagebrush, juniper and piñon trees.

The project area also includes part of the river corridor zone within the original boundaries of OVRA; along the east side of the rivers from Taos Junction Bridge upstream to the Rio Pueblo de Taos/Rio Grande confluence. The riparian zone lies below a steep escarpment which is carved by ravines and strewn with large boulders. Coyote willows, cottonwood and saltcedar (*Tamarisk* spp) trees line the bank of the Rio Grande in this area as the river winds its way through OVRA.

Located in and adjacent to the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River corridor, the legal description for the project area is T 24 N, R 11 E, Sections 1, 2, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 21, 22, 23, 28, and 29, and T 24 N, R 12 E, Sections 6, 7, and 18, Taos County, New Mexico (See Appendix A - Location Map).

### **Applicable Land Use Plans and Policy**

Listed here are a compilation of land use policies that recognize the scenic and public use values important in the area. The proposed actions are subject to the following land use plans and policies.

The Taos Resource Management Plan (RMP) approved October, 1988 developed management objectives and goals for the Taos Field Office as well as for specific designated areas. The RMP was amended in February, 1994 to create Orilla Verde Recreation Area (OVRA), designating OVRA as a special recreation management area. The goal here was to ensure the continued availability of outdoor recreation opportunities, to protect the health and safety of users, to protect the natural and cultural resource values, and to promote public use and enjoyment of public lands.

The RMP (1988) also designated the project area for Rural objectives on the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS). This objective provides for concentrated use and a moderate to high density of visitors. Human modifications from the natural environment and provision of comfort facilities and motorized use are allowed. Opportunities for convenience and social interaction are provided. Onsite controls and management presence are prevalent. Refer to Chapter Three ‘Recreation/Visual Resources’ for more information on ROS.

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 just below the County Line Recreation Site, approximately 6 miles which are within the planning area. The basic definition in the act describes this area as: those rivers or sections of rivers that are free of impoundments with shorelines or watersheds still largely primitive and shorelines largely undeveloped, but accessible in places by roads. Regardless of the classification, management is designed to maintain or enhance the river-related values and character of the river (PL 103-242, May 4, 1994).

**Taos Valley Overlook Project and Management Plan**

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Taos County and Town are collaborating with other agencies and stakeholders on a Green Infrastructure Plan. The Taos Valley Overlook has been identified as a valuable area or ‘hub’ for open space and recreation in the county.

The Rio Grande Corridor Plan (RGCP) approved January, 2000 outlined management options particular to the Taos Valley Overlook and the areas of the Rio Grande Gorge already managed by the BLM. These management prescriptions, with reference to pages in the RGCP are as follows:

**Table 1: Existing Management Direction for Recreation Resources**

<b>Access</b>	CFP (2000) p. 3-2, Table 3-1, Map 6-D
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Vehicle access limited to designated routes of travel to protect watershed and wildlife</li> <li>➤ Shoreline access restricted to protect riparian areas and bird habitat</li> <li>➤ Two (2.0) acres east of Taos Junction Bridge to remain open to vehicle access</li> </ul>	
<b>Public Education/Interpretation</b>	CFP (2000) p. 3-26
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Selected sites will be used to provide visitor information and environmental education on the Rio Grande Gorge, its history, resources, and uses.</li> <li>➤ Taos Junction Bridge: install interpretive signing to describe site’s history, river ethics, and leave no trace practices, if land is acquired.</li> </ul>	
<b>Visual Resource Management</b>	CFP (2000) p. 3-29, Tables 3-6, 3-7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Rim area managed as VRM class I, campgrounds and day use areas VRM class III, rest of OVRA as VRM class II</li> <li>➤ Re-vegetate closed roads</li> <li>➤ Partner with NM Highway &amp; Transportation Dept. and PNM to improve appearance of NM 68 and 570 rights-of-way and the gas line parallel to NM 68.</li> </ul>	
<b>Recreation</b>	CFP (2000) pp. 2-11, 4-1 to 4-12
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Develop Taos Junction Bridge site for variety of activities currently taking place.</li> <li>➤ Closed to hunting, trapping, and discharge of weapons</li> <li>➤ Camping only in developed campgrounds and designated primitive sites</li> <li>➤ Build a fully developed campground with 9-13 sites and group site near historic ruins northeast of Taos Junction Bridge (2-11)</li> <li>➤ Construct La Cieneguilla Trail from Pilar campground to Taos Junction campground.</li> <li>➤ Improve access at favored fishing sites</li> <li>➤ Monitoring</li> </ul>	



**Table 2: Existing Management Direction for Multiple-Use Resources**

<b>Land/Realty</b>	CFP (2000) p. 3-9
➤ Closed to new rights-of-way except underground utilities and road maintenance activities	
<b>Livestock</b>	CFP (2000) p. 3-14
➤ No livestock use permitted in the gorge	
<b>Minerals</b>	CFP (2000) p. 3-24
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Closed to locatable mineral entry</li> <li>➤ No surface occupancy for oil and gas</li> <li>➤ Except for recreational gold panning (non-mechanized) and a building stone site at Arroyo Hondo (T24N, R11E, Sec. 24), no removal or collection of rock or mineral material.</li> </ul>	
<b>Cultural Resources</b>	CFP (2000) p. 3-25
➤ Complete inventory of cultural resources, provide inventory where feasible.	
<b>Riparian</b>	CFP (2000) p. 3-27, Table 3-5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Improve roads and trails</li> <li>➤ Remove exotic plant species</li> <li>➤ Exclude grazing from all riparian areas</li> <li>➤ Close selected areas to vehicle use (1.4 acres total)</li> <li>➤ Monitoring</li> </ul>	
<b>Watershed</b>	CFP (2000) pp. 3-31 to 3-33
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Minimal impact fire suppression</li> <li>➤ Complete plan to determine best strategy for controlling tamarisk and noxious weeds in OVRA.</li> <li>➤ Reestablish native vegetation</li> <li>➤ Close select roads to motorized vehicles</li> <li>➤ Use best management practices on all projects to reduce environmental impacts and sedimentation</li> </ul>	
<b>Wildlife &amp; Fisheries</b>	CFP (2000) pp. 3-37 to 3-38, 4-8, Table 3-10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Restrict shoreline access in selected areas</li> <li>➤ Close selected side channels to boating use</li> <li>➤ Protect southwest willow flycatcher habitat and protect sensitive wildlife species</li> <li>➤ Monitoring</li> <li>➤ Discourage human use in Arroyo Hondo Canyon near horseshoe curve as it is a big game migratory corridor.</li> </ul>	

**Summary of Scoping and Relevant Issues**

The development of this particular management plan has been a community-based planning process, focusing on various planning issues, significant opportunities, concerns, or problems that strongly affect management decisions. Many issues have been identified by the general public, American Indian tribes, state and local governments, interest groups and BLM staff and managers.

The public was invited to offer input to the plan before any detailed proposals had been generated. A public meeting was held in Taos, as well as field tours and site visits. After proposals were generated from public comments and staff, they were presented to several clubs and groups in Taos County. Another public meeting was held to present alternatives to the public. Public meetings, field tours, and site visits were all announced in The Taos News, The Santa Fe New Mexican, The Albuquerque Journal, on local radio stations, on the BLM New Mexico website, and in flyers distributed in Taos, Carson, Pilar, BLM Taos Field Office, Rio Grande Gorge Visitor Center, and throughout Orilla Verde Recreation Area.



## Taos Valley Overlook Project and Management Plan

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Comments were received in the form of wall notes from public meetings, notes from site visits and field tours, comment forms, telephone calls, e-mail correspondence, and comments received at the Rio Grande Gorge Visitor Center. Issues were also identified by the public through Amigos Bravos.

Thirty-three comment forms were received as well as extensive notes taken from public meetings and field tours. The public who commented on this planning process clearly gave some time and thought to diligently provide relevant, useful, and substantive comments. A careful review of comments and notes was conducted using a computer software program called Atlas.ti 4.1™ (1997) where they were marked and categorized according to ideas and concerns representing the range of comments received.

Broad topics (categories) brought forward from the comment forms were related to access, cultural resources, recreation, mining, ecology, firearms, garbage, grazing, interpretation, Rio Grande Spring, and scenic quality and aesthetics. Each broad topic (category) is narrated according to the subcategories labeled with the computer software. See Appendix A: Summary of Public Comments, for a summary of comment forms and as well as bullet items from the public meeting and field trips.

### **Decision Space**

Program level decisions from this environmental assessment, such as recreation management objectives will amend the Taos RMP and the 2000 Rio Grande Corridor Final Plan. This EA adds detailed management prescriptions and actions for Orilla Verde Recreation Area as well as the newly acquired public lands, which lie within the existing OVRA boundaries.

The decisions to be made includes both broad management of the type and extent of activities that will be allowed and experiences to be provided, as well as some more project specific work.

### **Purpose of and Need for Action**

There are several issues relating to public access and how recreation might be managed. Issues, in the form of problems to be resolved, relate to one or more of the following specific locations: Taos Junction Bridge, Rio Grande/Rio Pueblo Confluence, property near the end of County Road C110, two-track routes on the rim west of NM Hwy. 68, Stakeout Road area, and Horseshoe Curve.

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### ***Access: Where are appropriate access points to Taos Valley Overlook?***

There are considerable obstacles to public access of the newly acquired public land. These obstacles need to be overcome and/or new options identified so official access points can be managed and publicized.

Currently recreation users are accessing the rim area from two locations. The most popular is the west end of County Road 110 where old NM Highway 570 dipped down into the canyon before a debris slide covered the road. At the present time there is no legal public access from C110 to the uplands portion of the project area. Many of the users in this location like to hike, walk their dogs, and mountain bike along old NM570, (which is now under Taos County jurisdiction) to the confluence of the Rio Pueblo/Grande. Recreation users also enjoy horseback riding, picnicking, and watching the sunset on the rim.

People park their cars on the C110 right of way near boulder barricades to the old slide area. They then proceed downhill or cross private land on the rim over to BLM where there are small signs marking the public land boundary and no motorized use area. At this point in time, vehicle access is limited by signs,



barbed wire, on-site education by law enforcement, and earthen berms with limited effectiveness in keeping vehicles out.

A BLM trailhead at the west end of C-110 is needed to provide access for legal, non-motorized activities (hiking, sightseeing, cycling, equestrian use), provide an increased BLM presence in the area, and to reduce the threat of illegal trash dumping and firearms use, and vandalism.

Visitors to the rim of the Overlook also access BLM land within the highway right of way on the west side of NM68 directly across from the northernmost rest area at the 'Horseshoe Curve'. The NM Department of Transportation has expressed a concern over this access area due to poor line of site to the north and south for ingress/egress.

At this time there are no other suitable access points to the Overlook for recreation users.

***Trails: What type of trail system would meet the needs of recreation users?***

Current trail opportunities include a network of existing two-track routes on the upland, rim portion of the acquired lands, ranging from heavily used tread to faint two tracks. There are also two out and back trails along the west side of the gorge; West Rim Trail system, mostly a converted two-track route, and La Vista Verde Trail. However, public scoping has shown a demand for all types of trail opportunities such as; single track bike trails, hiking trails, loop trails, and a fully accessible interpretive trail. Clearly, most of the trails within Orilla Verde Recreation Area and the Overlook have little slope variation and are converted two-track routes. This is an opportunity to expand the type and difficulty of trails offered giving the variety of skill levels and travel modes options more suited to their desires.

The BLM Overlook property is close to town and residences in Taos County, yet there is no alternative transportation routes linking homes and workplaces to this open space. Some local cyclists loop from town to the Overlook, down to the river, and over to the west side of the gorge or from town across the Overlook and back via NM68.

***Setting: What is the market for the Overlook and Orilla Verde Recreation Area?***

The current ROS objective of Rural applies to Orilla Verde Recreation Area which includes but may not be appropriate for the Overlook. ROS objectives pertain to beneficial outcomes users get by enjoying various aspects of the physical, social, and administrative setting. Through initial scoping with the public, the use on the rim appears to be seasonal and users primarily community members who highly value naturalness and scenic quality. Whereas the river canyon is a destination both regionally and beyond and where many support facilities are used.

By determining a market and understanding visitor outcome goals, management prescriptions pertaining to the type and level of services, regulations, and facilities can be selected to help provide desired experiences.



***Regulations: Should the Supplemental Rules be updated to incorporate the Overlook into Orilla Verde Recreation Area?***

Typically, the BLM manages designated special recreation areas with some additional regulations or closures. For example, the current policy for Orilla Verde Recreation Area is that camping is allowed only in designated areas and it is closed to use of firearms and hunting.

Presently, there has been no evidence of camping on the Overlook. Although the Overlook area has been used for hunting and target practice for well over 30 years and possibly up to 70 years or longer, many people consider this to be a safety issue for other recreation activity and have expressed it in meetings, comment forms, and to BLM field personnel. There are also new homes and residential developments in this area. When users such as hikers, equestrians, bikers, and dog walkers hear shots fired, they have concern about who is doing the shooting and from where.

The current firearms and hunting closures extend to one mile on either side of the Rio Grande. This doesn't cover the acquisition all the way east to NM Highway 68 and north part way up the Rio Pueblo.

***Interpretation: What are the stories we want to share?***

The Orilla Verde Recreation Area and lands within Taos Field Office are rich with examples of cultural history in the area, riparian resources, and geologic activity. However, with the current level of information provided on these topics, a visitor may leave without any knowledge of these resources.

The purpose of this plan is to determine what information needs exist and identify those sites within the project area suitable for interpretive, educational, and informational opportunities.

This management plan needs to provide a 'roadmap' for interpreters in the form of; appropriate messages or 'themes', learning objectives, and references for telling the story for multiple resources. In meetings and comment forms, the public most frequently requested interpretation of geology of the Rio Grande gorge and the cultural significance in the area. There were also several requests for interpretation of indigenous plants and wildlife and human interactions. Other requests for interpretation included: a map of the trails, interpretation at Taos Junction Bridge and east of Highway 68, the Camino Real, environmental ethics and importance, and interpretation of the river and water quality.

***How should visitor use be managed at Taos Junction Bridge?***

Significant use at Taos Junction Bridge in addition to a lack of site design has led to changes in the site's appearance that make it seem less "natural". Access to the beach is steep, rough and bisected by a spring, forcing vehicles with trailers to back in. The current practice of haphazard, uncontrolled parking is a safety and resource concern, blocks access, and can lead to frustration and conflict. Defined parking areas are needed to accommodate the volume of private vehicles and outfitter buses and vans using the area and to limit resource damage. Undefined parking, narrow access, and unrestricted motor vehicle access has had a negative impact on the riparian vegetation.

With so little vegetation to slow and filter runoff, increased sediment loads end up in the river and affects water quality downstream.

Currently, there are no opportunities for universal access at this site. The toilet facilities are rented portable units which can be used only during the warmer months of the year, are unsightly, and can be easily vandalized and overturned which can create a health and environmental hazard. Vandalism, littering, lack of



posted regulations, and unacceptable activities detract from the quality of the visitor experience in the area, and can make some visitors feel their safety may be threatened.

***How should visitor use be managed at the Rio Pueblo/Grande Confluence?***

The Rio Grande/Rio Pueblo confluence area and the historic ruins area near Taos Junction Bridge are popular camping areas. There are several user defined camp sites where users were able to camp with some distance and screening from the rest of the developed campgrounds. Unfortunately, compaction of soils is causing loss of vegetation and accelerated soil loss which are responsible for habitat and watershed degradation. Unsightly fire rings were created and wood for campfires is illegally gathered and harvested from limited resources. The lack of services such as trash bins and toilets have resulted in unsanitary and unsightly conditions.

**CHAPTER 2 – DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION**

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*The following alternatives reflect issues identified in the Purpose and Need. The decision will be made to select one of the following three alternatives.*

**Alternative A – Proposed Action**

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***Access: Where are appropriate access points to Taos Valley Overlook?***

*Please see maps provided at beginning of document.*

**Acquisition near C110**

The acquisition of additional private lands at the southeast end of C-110 (T 24 N, R 11 E, Section 1, and T 24 N, R 12 E, Section 6) would allow legal access to these new public lands as well as assist in controlling motorized vehicles and illegal activity in this area. The consolidation of public land holdings in this area would also serve to provide an excellent trailhead location for a proposed trail system.

- This would be the primary trailhead to access the Overlook. Parking would be provided to accommodate up to 10 passenger vehicles, and pull-through parking for up to eight trucks with horse trailers. Vehicle barricades would be installed marking the public land boundary.
- If use increases and unsanitary conditions follow, a single toilet would be provided.
  
- Information to be provided would include a trailhead name and BLM public land identifier, trail and recreation area maps, regulations, and interpretive messages regarding historic trails, land grants and/or geology. A two-panel kiosk would be installed to post this information.
- A gate would be installed on the existing access/easement road to allow for limited vehicle access for maintenance purposes. The BLM will coordinate with the adjacent private land owners to relocate an existing gate closer to C-110. This access road would be posted as a private drive.
- If property directly adjacent to BLM and C110 could not be acquired, then BLM would work with private land owners to pursue access easements or other property acquisitions to secure public access to the Overlook from the northernmost boundary.





### **NM Hwy. 68 near Stakeout Drive**

- BLM would work with Taos County and NM Department of Transportation on gaining approval and developing ingress/egress from the highway to public land. This would be a secondary trailhead and accommodate parking for up to four passenger vehicles and three pull-through sites for trucks and horse trailers. Vehicle barricades would be installed defining the parking area and limiting vehicles from the non-motorized use area.
- Highway and trailhead signs would be smaller and low-key. However, maps, brief regulations, and brief interpretive stories regarding historic trails, land grants, and/or geology would be provided here.

### **In Gorge East of Taos Junction Bridge**

- Parking would be defined for up to three passenger vehicles just off the shoulder of NM Highway 570 directly across from the bridge.
- Only the trail name, distance, and brief interpretation would be provided here since maps and regulations would be posted at the bridge.

### **Restrictions on Access**

- The public land boundary of the Overlook would be fenced, (where appropriate to block vehicular access) and posted to prevent encroachment by use other than public access for non motorized recreation. Other defined and formal access points would be fortified with materials such as a combination of stone or concrete block and self weathering steel.

### ***Trails: What type of trail system would meet the demands of recreation users?***

- All trails except Picuris Trail could be used for hiking, biking, or horseback riding. Picuris Trail would be a hiking only trail. *See maps at the beginning of this document.*
- Multi-use trail would follow the “Yield the Trail” etiquette and signs would be posted at trail intersections and trailheads.
- Trailhead signs would be installed at the parking site and directional signage placed at all intersections along the trail routes. Trailhead signs would include; trail name and level of difficulty.
- Four existing two-track routes would be closed to allow re-vegetation. These routes are either already becoming vegetated or have extensive soil loss. See Proposed Recreation Trails Map.
- Two existing two-track routes would be converted to single-track by covering one track with vegetation slash material from trail construction on the Rift Valley Trail, (La Gijosa and Camino Militar) while Klauer Trail, Pipeline Trail and Trader’s Trail would remain two-track for utility maintenance and administrative access.

### **Coscojos Trail:**

- The trail objective would be to accommodate the most users, including shorter visits, and to tie in interpretive themes (with a self guided brochure) from the primary trailhead off of C110.
- Five benches would be placed along the rim running from the trailhead/parking area south for approximately one mile to accommodate picnicking and sightseeing of sunrise/sunsets and the Rio Pueblo canyon. Exact placement of benches will be determined by recreation staff and the staff biologist.
- A trail up to approximately 1.65 miles, 3’ wide loop would incorporate existing two-track and be surfaced with aggregate from the C110 trailhead. Minimal grading, without major cut and fill, would be done with motorized equipment.



**Rift Valley Trail:**

- The trail objective would be to provide a long, less easy, intermediate loop for all users but especially mountain bikers and equestrians. One nine mile loop, 18” wide single-track would be newly constructed with hand tools and possibly a small ‘Bobcat’ or small backhoe designed for trail work. This loop would meander across the Overlook from C110 to the Horseshoe Curve and back. The trail would tie into Coscojos Trail, near C110 and the Camino Militar near Stakeout Drive. Sage and other vegetation would be removed to mineral soil. Earthen ramps and/or drain dips would be installed in and around arroyo crossings.

**Picuris Trail:**

- The objective for this .8 mile trail would be to preserve the historic route, open it to primitive hiking only, and research and interpret its historic use. Vegetation and small rocks would be moved only where needed to follow the old trail trace. Minimal soil movement would occur to make the trace or tread visible, incorporate drainage or crossing where the trace has completely eroded, or minimize cross slope. Every precaution would be taken to protect surviving structural features, such as retaining walls or rock piles, of the old trail. *See Figure 1 in the following pages.*

**Two-track Trails:**

- Old routes to be left open and used for non-motorized trail loops will be named after historic features found somewhere on the Overlook to facilitate interpretation. They are the **Camino Militar, Klauer Trail, Trader’s Trail, La Gijosa Trail, and the Pipeline Trail.**

**Interpretive Trail:**

- BLM would partner with NM Department of Transportation and the National Park Service Long Distance Trails Program to, if feasible, construct an up to 1/3 mile, fully accessible, interpretive trail adjacent to the Horseshoe Curve rest area. The objective of this trail would be to interpret transportation history and old trails; especially the Old Spanish Trail.

**Old 570 Slide:**

- BLM would partner with Taos County public works to install signs at the top and bottom of the old 570 slide and to conduct minor trail type maintenance in order to make it passable for non-motorized use and could be up to 3’ wide.

***Setting: What is the market for the Overlook and Orilla Verde Recreation Area?***

The following tables depict the Proposed Action for changes in management of the recreation experience. See more detail regarding visitor expectations under the Recreation section in Chapter Three.

Orilla Verde Recreation Area, encompassing the Overlook is divided into four market zones. Each zone has a unique market niche, which is a mix of the type of visitors, resources, and visitor expectations. Each zone would have setting prescriptions to manage the physical, social, and administrative setting in such a way as to provide expected beneficial outcomes. See Proposed Recreation Management Zones and Trails Maps 1 and 2.



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<b>Orilla Verde Recreation Area (Zone 1 – River Canyon Destination)</b>		
<b>Management Objectives</b>	By the year 2020 manage this zone to provide opportunities for comfort and convenience, and affiliation with large groups of people, seasonally and at designated sites.	
<b>Outcomes</b>		
<u>Primary Activities</u> Camping Fishing Boating Hiking Wildlife viewing	<u>Experiences</u> Enjoy time with friends and family. Connection to nature.	<u>Benefits</u> Sense of personal security, sense of wellness, rest Understanding and appreciation of nature.
<b>Setting Prescriptions</b>		
<u>Physical</u> Rural Near highways, modified by agriculture, modern and convenient facilities.	<u>Social</u> Seasonally and boating dependant, up to 26-50 per group, frequent noise.	<u>Administrative</u> Highway auto and truck traffic, orientation information, on site education, and personnel available. Regulations prominent, reservations, routine enforcement.
<b>Implementing Actions</b>		
<u>Marketing</u> Paid advertising by river outfitters, BLM web site, brochures at BLM visitor centers	<u>Monitoring</u> Observation by stratified sample and visitor survey or interviews every 2-5 years, vehicle counters at Quartzite and County Line, permit trip logs	<u>Management</u> Continue to replace old campground facilities through deferred maintenance.



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<b>Orilla Verde Recreation Area (Zone 2 – The Overlook Community)</b>		
<b>Management Objectives</b>	By the year 2020 manage this zone to provide opportunities for open/natural/scenic views and a place to spend time alone.	
<b>Outcomes</b>		
<u>Primary Activities</u> Hiking Dog Walking Biking Horseback riding Watching sunset	<u>Experiences</u> Enjoying personal time Exercise Enjoying nature	<u>Benefits</u> Peace of mind Improved health and fitness Greater aesthetics awareness
<b>Setting Prescriptions</b>		
<u>Physical</u> Middle Country ½ mile or w/in site of improved roads. Natural appearing except from primitive roads. Maintained and marked trails, simple and few trailhead developments, signs, and toilet.	<u>Social</u> 7-14 encounters/day off travel routes and 15-29/day en route, 7-12 per group, Vehicle track observed. Occasional noise and litter.	<u>Administrative</u> Two and four wheel drive at trailheads. Non-motorized and mechanized use everywhere else. Orientation materials and low level interpretive media. Personnel periodic. Rules clearly posted with some restrictions. Periodic enforcement.
<b>Implementing Actions</b>		
<u>Marketing</u> Local bicycle shops, Taos Chamber, on site signs	<u>Monitoring</u> Vehicle counters and visitor survey or interviews every two to five years	<u>Management</u> Develop rustic trailheads to rim; one on SE boundary and one on NE boundary. Acquire land and work with NM DOT and Taos County. Issue commercial recreation permits appropriate to setting prescriptions, Barb-wire fence the boundary where appropriate for vehicle closure, fortify and define trailhead boundaries with materials that fit setting prescriptions Frequent patrols initially to establish management presence.



**Taos Valley Overlook Project and Management Plan**

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<b>Orilla Verde Recreation Area (Zone 3 – Pilar North Undeveloped)</b>		
<b>Management Objectives</b>	By the year 2020 manage this zone to provide opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation.	
<b>Outcomes</b>		
<u>Primary Activities</u> Hiking Dog Walking	<u>Experiences</u> Independence, Exploration, Solitude	<u>Benefits</u> Sense of adventure Balanced spirit Better sense of place
<b>Setting Prescriptions</b>		
<u>Physical</u> Middle Country ½ mile or w/in site of facilities and roads.	<u>Social</u> 0-14 encounters/day en route	<u>Administrative</u> Two and four wheel drive near old vehicle access points.
<b>Implementing Actions</b>		
<u>Marketing</u> None except through staff contact. No developed trails or recreation developments.	<u>Monitoring</u> Visitor survey or interviews every two to five years.	<u>Management</u> Occasional or rare patrols. Communication with adjacent land owners.



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<b>Orilla Verde Recreation Area (Zone 4 – Horseshoe Curve Destination)</b>		
<b>Management Objectives</b>	By the year 2020 manage this zone to provide opportunities to learn about local natural and cultural history and orientation to Taos area attractions. Increase local and visitor value of nature and culture and promote land stewardship.	
<b>Outcomes</b>		
<u>Primary Activities</u> Sightseeing Interpretation	<u>Experiences</u> Enjoy views Learning local history, geology, culture Environmental Learning	<u>Benefits</u> Enhance stewardship in other locales Economic benefits in Taos County Increased value in community by visitors Enhanced pride in community Greater awareness of aesthetics
<b>Setting Prescriptions</b>		
<u>Physical</u> Rural Near highways, modified by agriculture, modern facilities.	<u>Social</u> People everywhere, 26-50 per group, frequent noise.	<u>Administrative</u> Highway auto and truck traffic, elaborate education and orientation signs. Regulations prominent, routine enforcement and maintenance of signs. Partnership with NM DOT.
<b>Implementing Actions</b>		
<u>Marketing</u> On site marketing for Taos County museums and business in general, BLM website.	<u>Monitoring</u> Communication and interviews with local agencies and businesses every two to five years.	<u>Management</u> Install interpretive signs, benches, and interpretive trail through partnerships and volunteers.

***Regulations: Should the Supplemental Rules be updated to incorporate the Overlook into Orilla Verde Recreation Area?***

- ***Firearms and Hunting:*** Amend the Taos Field Office Supplemental Rules to include a firearms closure for the Overlook area. Work with New Mexico Game and Fish Department to close the area to hunting.
- ***Camping:*** Camping would continue to be allowed only at designated sites. No camp sites would be designated on the rim within the Taos Valley Overlook.



***Interpretation: What are the stories we want to share?***

To follow is the Proposed Action for interpretation and media prescriptions in the recreation area. This was developed from a facilitated workshop.

***Overarching Theme: Deep within the Taos landscape, the Gorge illuminates connections between people and the land over time.***

<b>Theme: 1   Here people experience connections to the past, present, and future.</b>	
<u>Sub-theme Examples:</u> The Gorge’s underlying geological processes set the stage for later connections. Trails and traces reveal past and present links between peoples. This is a place where people and cultures interact. People are drawn to Taos who seek connections of healing, growth, and renewal in spirit, mind, and body.	
<b>Media Prescriptions</b>	
<u>Location:</u> 'Horseshoe Curve' NM Hwy. 68 rest area.  Taos Chamber Visitor Center and Rio Grande Gorge Visitor Center  Coscojos, Picuris, Camino Militar Trailheads	<u>Media:</u> Large multi-colored, embedded signs supported by a multi-paneled kiosk sign structure.  Brochures  Low-level signing and text and graphics that can be used on BLM trailhead signs.

<b>Theme: 2   Water flowing through the Gorge is the lifeblood of the region.</b>	
<u>Sub-theme Examples:</u> Here waters from two rivers converge. Water from the rio is caught in a complex current of history and policy.	
<b>Media Prescriptions</b>	
<u>Location:</u> 'Horseshoe Curve' NM Hwy. 68 rest area.  Taos Junction Bridge	<u>Media:</u> Large multi-colored, embedded signs supported by a multi-paneled kiosk sign structure.  Low-level signing and text and graphics that can be used on BLM trailhead signs.



**Taos Valley Overlook Project and Management Plan**

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<b>Theme: 3</b>		<b>The Gorge is an ideal place to connect to nature.</b>	
<u>Sub-theme Examples:</u> The Gorge serves as a wildlife corridor and water source. Hiking, scenic values, and water-based recreation makes the Gorge a valued resource for locals and tourists.			
<b>Media Prescriptions</b>			
<u>Location:</u> 'Horseshoe Curve' NM Hwy. 68 rest area.  Taos Junction Bridge		<u>Media:</u> Large multi-colored, embedded signs supported by a multi-paneled kiosk sign structure.  Low-level signing and text and graphics that can be used on BLM trailhead signs.	

<b>Theme: 4</b>		<b>People who feel a connection with this place take on a stewardship role.</b>	
<u>Sub-theme Examples:</u> River users, hikers, and other recreation users benefit from Leave No Trace etiquette. People are working together to preserve the Gorge's scenic, recreation, archeological, historic, cultural, and natural values. Local residents can take an active role in preserving the values of this place.			
<b>Media Prescriptions</b>			
<u>Location:</u> 'Horseshoe Curve' NM Hwy. 68 rest area.  Coscojos Trailhead, Taos Junction Bridge		<u>Media:</u> Large multi-colored, embedded signs supported by a multi-paneled kiosk sign structure.  Low-level signing and text and graphics that can be used on BLM trailhead signs.	

\*An approximately 1/8 mile barrier-free interpretive loop trail adjacent to the rest area would be constructed if approved by and in partnership with NMDOT.

***How should visitor use be managed at Taos Junction Bridge***

Vehicular access to the river bank and beach south of the bridge would be closed by posts or natural barriers that would not interfere with boat launching or takeout operations, angling, picnicking, and water play. *See Figure 1 for a site schematic.*

- A pull-through, one-directional boat launch/takeout lane capable of accommodating buses with trailers would be defined and hardened, and a culvert would be installed to allow undisturbed flow from the spring in this area. Drainage from the spring, at the lowest end of the riparian vegetation and cottonwoods, would be redirected downstream, away from the intensive use area, and into an area of existing riparian vegetation.
- Design criteria for drainage and the boat launch would be done with: no negative impacts to riparian





## Taos Valley Overlook Project and Management Plan

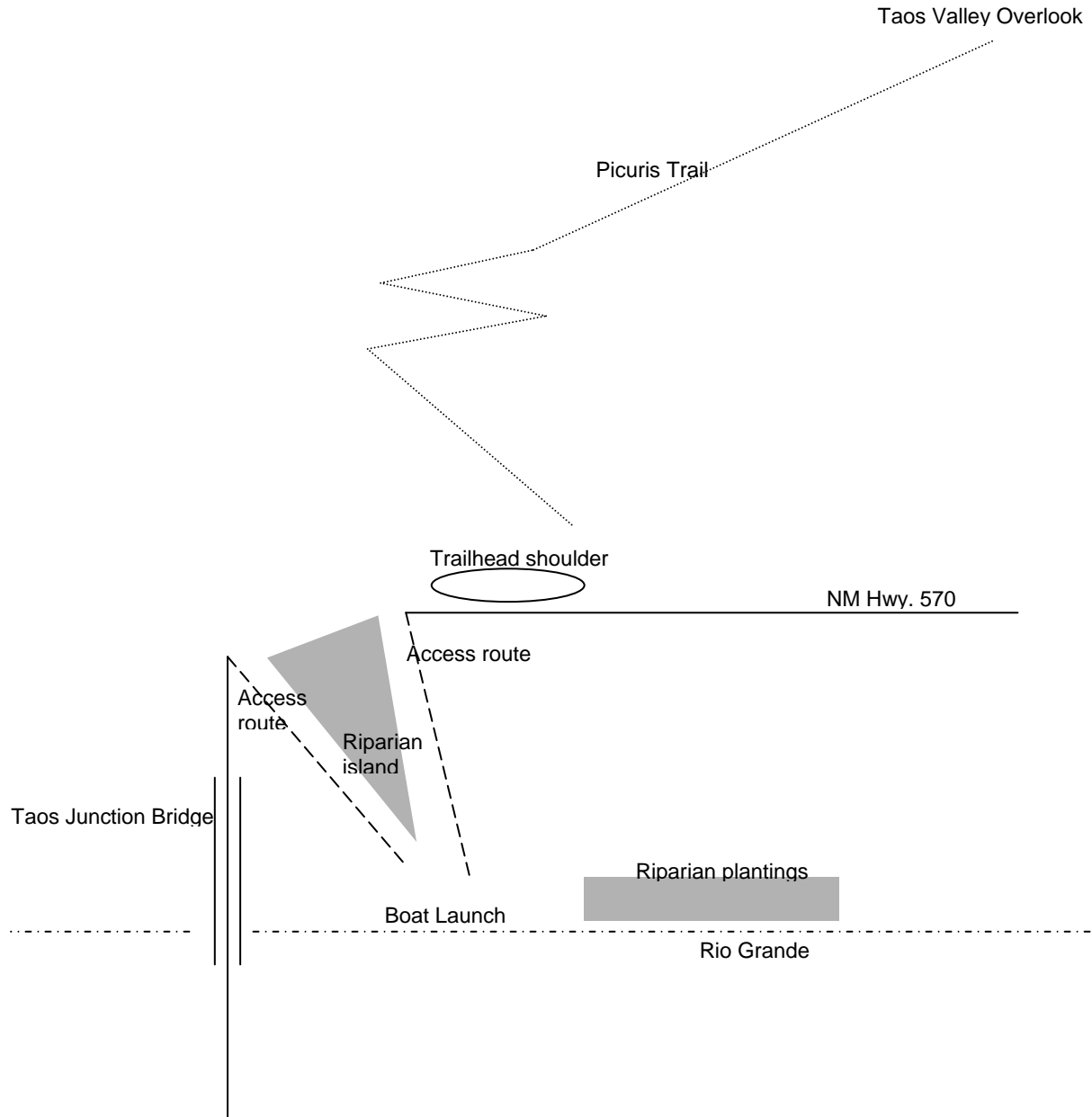
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vegetation, including the island created by the spring and semi-porous material used for facilitation of natural flows.

- Parking for five passenger vehicles would be provided near the vault toilet location immediately southeast of the bridge.
- A pedestrian path would be constructed on the east bank of the Rio Grande beneath the bridge in order to provide safe access between the parking area north of the bridge to the boat launch/beach area south of the bridge.
- Two pre-cast, concrete, barrier-free accessible vault toilets would be situated near the existing concrete pad for portable toilets. The toilets would be large enough to accommodate visitors needing to change clothing and accessible by pathway from a parking area. The toilet area would also be screened with natural fencing such as aspen latillas.
- Alleviate riparian and resource damage and improve traffic flow by blocking direct access of motor vehicles to the Rio Grande. These restrictions would be passive (e.g., by closing off adjacent parking areas or obliterating signs of trails).
- Plant trees and shrubs immediately downstream of the launch/take-out area on the river bank. This portion of the area was identified as excellent for reestablishing riparian vegetation due to high water table and seeps, and as a mitigation area for Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, (*Empidonax traillii extimus*) listed as an endangered species by US Fish and Wildlife Services in 1995. This would serve to protect and rehabilitate the banks and vegetation from excessive disturbance and facilitate the filtering of sediments.
- Site users would be educated on etiquette with all user groups via a kiosk. The kiosk would also provide a map of the area and interpretation of riparian resources and endangered species management. See proposals for interpretation under Theme 3: The Gorge is an ideal place to connect to nature.
- Directional signs would be installed to make the site more user friendly and to delineate appropriate areas for parking, boat launch and takeout, beach use, etc.
- An inventory of cultural resources at the historic ruins northeast of Taos Junction Bridge would be completed. Interpretive material for this site would be provided on the information kiosk. And this area would be closed to motorized vehicles with posts and natural barriers.



**Figure 1: Picuris Trailhead**

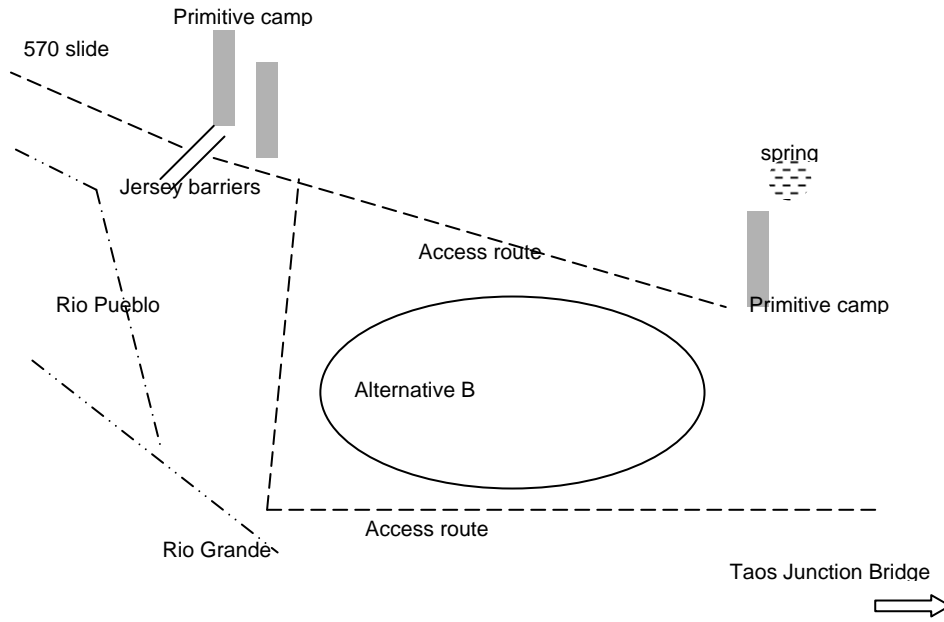


***How should visitor use be managed at the Rio Pueblo/Grande confluence?***

- Boulders, and natural appearing posts and rail barriers would be installed in order to limit vehicle access directly to the Rio Pueblo de Taos. *See Figure 2 for a site schematic.*
- Overflow, commercial bus and van parking, and additional river access parking would be provided in the existing area north of the bridge.
- There are several unofficial primitive campsites being used along the Rio Pueblo de Taos which receive heavy use. Three of these would be defined and designated as primitive campsites. Site # 1 is a shaded location near the barricade closing old St. Hwy. 570, south of the road. Site #2 is a more open location west of the first site, also south of the road. Site #3 is a heavily used shaded location behind the ruins near a low-flowing spring. Parking for one passenger vehicle would be defined by posts/natural barriers at each site. A picnic table, fire ring, fire grill, and defined space for tent camping would be available at each site. The impacted spring area near Site #3 would be rehabilitated and closed to access of any kind by fencing/natural barriers, and a culvert would be installed where foot traffic would be directed. However, water from the spring would not be re-directed.
- Existing trails to and along the riverbank would be closed and/or improved to stabilize routes, protect natural resources, and provide safer access to the Rio Grande and Rio Pueblo.
- A primitive group campsite capable of accommodating 50 people would be designated just east of the historic ruins site. Parking for 12 passenger vehicles would be designated, including space for a bus or large RV. A trash dumpster and collection service would be available as well.
- An existing campground host site would be used as such. The vault toilet at this site would serve the entire confluence area. An informational kiosk and a fee vault would also be installed at this site. Interpretive material, featuring the historic ruins, would be included on the kiosk along with a map of the area and riparian resources.



**Figure 2: Existing Primitive Campsites/  
Alternative B: Developed Campground**



**Taos Valley Overlook Project and Management Plan**

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**Table 3: Potential Funding and Project Phases**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Project</b>	<b>Source</b>
2006 2007	Picuris Trail Overlook Trail System Map printing	BLM and Rocky Mountain Youth Corp. BLM Budget Planning
2007	Coscojos Trailhead, C110	Acquisition: Land & Water Conservation Fund
2007-10	11.5 miles of new trail construction; Rift Valley Trail, Coscojos Trail, Picuris Trail.	Project work:BLM Budget Planning System NM State Parks Dept. RTP Grant Partnerships with Rocky Mountain Youth Corp.
2007-9	Trailhead interpretive media	Partnerships with NPS Long Distance Trails Program BLM Budget Planning System
2008	Taos Junction Bridge	BLM Deferred Maintenance
2009	Pueblo/Grande Confluence Camino Militar Trailhead, Hwy 68/Stakeout	NMDOT approval Transportation Enhancement Act, BLM Budget Planning System
2010	Horseshoe Curve Signs and interpretive trail	NMDOT approval Transportation Enhancement Act, NPS Long Distance Trails Program BLM Budget Planning System

**Alternative B**

Rio Grande/Rio Pueblo Confluence

Adopt Alternative A – the Proposed Action but with the following changes.

Construct a fully developed campground near the ruin site with access and loop roads, shade shelters, and additional toilets in the area including 9-12 campsites and one group shelter.

Taos Valley Overlook

If private land is acquired, motorized access would be allowed to a viewpoint at the existing northernmost BLM boundary near the end of C-110. If private land is not acquired, this would be the second choice for a trailhead for access to the northwest boundary of the Overlook.

Gijosa Trail

Discourage additional visitor use by no advertising, naming or mapping of the two track referred to as La Gijosa Trail in the Proposed Action. The intent would be to provide a buffer to the wildlife migration route in the Arroyo Hondo. The Camino Militar two-track would become La Gijosa Trail.

**Alternative C – No Action**

Closed to motorized use per the 2000 Rio Grande Corridor Final Plan.

No cultural inventory of project area would be done.

Continuing management prescribes two or three small rented portable toilets will be on site from April through October at Taos Junction Bridge.

Public education and interpretation will continue to take place on a very limited basis, based on seasonal BLM staff/visitor contact.



Continued management allows for camping in Orilla Verde Recreation Area at designated sites only. No additional primitive campsites would be designated or developed.

Hiking opportunities would continue to be limited to existing trails, mostly converted two-track routes.

### **Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from further Analysis**

Access to the Overlook from the eastern boundary directly across the highway from the Horseshoe Curve rest area was discussed. Due to line of sight distances in both directions from that location, the NM DOT has safety concerns. The NM DOT intends to conduct a corridor safety study along NM Highway 68 in the near future.

An alternate trailhead for access along the eastern boundary is one mile south of Stakeout Drive and described in the Proposed Action.

## **CHAPTER 3 - AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT**

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### **Soil and Water Resources**

Soils within the gorge are described as Orthents-Rock outcrops association, which consist of steep soil and rock outcrops typical of canyons along the Rio Grande. Orthents are deep, well-drained soils on canyon slopes, found in material that is derived from old alluvium of the Santa Fe formation. The surface layer is gravelly or cobbled loam; the underlying material is gravelly loam or gravelly clay loam. Rock outcrops characteristic of this soil association consist of nearly vertical escarpments of basalt that formed a protective cap over the alluvial sediment. The erosion and slumping hazards, steepness of slope, and stoniness restrict human use of this association. The Rio Grande riparian zone is characterized by alluvial material deposited during flood events. Alluvial soils include numerous size classes of material from silt to boulder and is subject to flooding and erosion annually.

The uplands soils are of the Sedillo-Silva association, more strongly sloping than gentle within the planning area. The Silva is a clay loam and rated as “slight” or generally favorable with minor and easily overcome limitations, for paths and trails. The Sedillo is gravelly clay loam and rated as “moderate” (due to slope) for paths and trails. When wet, where the soils are high in clay content, it may be undesirable for foot, horse, or bicycle traffic, and excessive soil damage could occur.

The area is located within the Rio Grande basin which is one of the state’s major water-producing basins. The Rio Grande forms the western boundary of the planning area and the Rio Pueblo de Taos forms the north boundary. The vast majority of the water is produced by snow pack runoff from the high mountains of the Sangre de Cristo and San Juan ranges. Other contributions are made in the form of ground water recharge to the system, evidenced by a number of natural springs along the corridor. Periodic and intense water flow resulting from thunderstorms occurs seasonally. Water quantity in the Rio Grande through the planning area is also affected by irrigation use in adjacent tributaries and in the San Luis Valley in Colorado.

The Taos Overlook area is drained by an extensive network of ephemeral channels referred to as arroyos. According to BLM surveys, arroyos account for 84 miles of drainage on the overlook as compared to 6.9 miles on the Rio Grande and Rio Pueblo de Taos. Current condition varies across the planning area with incision of up to 10 feet occurring on many of the large arroyos. Incision is an erosion process that can be accelerated by management. In this area, incision appears to be occurring as a result of high runoff from poorly designed road grades and reduced herbaceous vegetative cover.



Water quality for the 15 mile reach of the Rio Grande between Rio Pueblo de Taos and Rio Embudo was assessed by the NMED in 2001. All designated uses were supported indicating that no impairments occur. However, BLM water quality surveys in 2004 and 2005 indicated increased levels of Fecal coliform and *E. coli* bacteria. Sources of elevated bacteria have not been established.

## **Biological Resources**

### Vegetation

Vegetation in the area consists of upland and riparian vegetation types. Some of the more common plant species found on the uplands are pinyon pine, juniper, ponderosa pine, Wyoming sagebrush, rabbit brush, apache plume, snakeweed, sideoats grama, blue grama, Indian ricegrass, western wheatgrass, prickly pear, narrow leaf yucca, as well as other cacti and forbs. Some cottonwood and willow are found in the upland arroyos. Because of the steep nature of the canyon walls, there are niches occupied by a variety of plant species not common to sagebrush uplands.

Some of the project area consists of riparian areas along the Rio Grande; from Taos Junction Bridge to the Rio Grande/Rio Pueblo de Taos confluence. Vegetation in these areas is influenced by the abundance of water, making it a very productive and important part of the ecosystem. There is a greater diversity of plant species and vegetative structure found in riparian zones compared to adjacent upland sites. Vegetation found in this riparian zone include cottonwoods, willows, saltcedar (an invasive species), and a variety of grasses, rushes, sedges and forbs.

Human disturbance has contributed to altered riparian plant composition along the river. Uncontrolled access and vehicle traffic in places have degraded and severely impacted the resource. Saltcedar, an exotic tree species introduced from Asia, occupies over 25 acres within the OVRA riparian zone. It proliferates in many southwest riparian areas, often outcompeting native plants and becoming a monoculture. Perennial pepperweed is a noxious weed that also occurs in the project area adjacent to Highway 570. Perennial pepperweed is known to severely infest areas once it has been established.

### Wildlife

The portion of the Rio Grande that flows through the area demonstrates the importance of riparian vegetation to a variety of wildlife species. It is particularly unique in its ability to support large numbers of bird species. In recent studies at least 133 species of birds have been recorded in Orilla Verde Recreation area, representing over 29 percent of the total numbers known to occur in New Mexico. In addition, the area provides critical habitat during the spring and winter seasons as a migratory corridor.

Other animals that could be found in the project area include mule deer, elk, mountain lion, black bear, grey fox, coyote, beaver, muskrat, rabbit, collard lizard, bullfrog, garter snake, rattlesnake and bats. The Arroyo Hondo canyon was identified in the Rio Grande Corridor Final Plan as a big game migratory corridor and human use is discouraged in this area.



## Taos Valley Overlook Project and Management Plan

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The fish fauna within the area are represented by five major families and eleven species, and the area is a popular location for trout angling. Game species include Brown trout, rainbow trout, small mouth bass and northern Pike. Surveys completed in 2004 indicate good productivity as measured by fish biomass. However, more than 75% of the catch and 50% of the biomass is represented by non-native non-game species. Aquatic insects within the system are represented by groups most commonly observed in clean water systems.

### Threatened and Endangered Species

See Appendix B for a list of all special status species analyzed in this EA. Species list is available on file at the BLM office. Neither the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish nor the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) lists any plants as threatened or endangered in Taos County, New Mexico. There are several plants listed as a Species of Concern by the State of New Mexico, USFWS, and the Southwest Region of the U.S. Forest Service. In addition, the New Mexico Rare Plants Council lists rare plants for Taos County, of which three have the potential to occur in the project area (*Astragalus cyaneus*, *Astragalus puniceus* var. *gertrudis*, and *Selaginella weatherbiana*). At this time, none of these species are known to occur within the project area.

Pursuant to USFWS Federal Species List for Taos County, New Mexico (June 2006), the only listed species which might be found in OVRA are the Southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*), listed as endangered, and the bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), listed as threatened.

In 1993, the BLM began surveying for the Southwestern willow flycatcher along the Rio Grande in OVRA. From 1993 to 1997, nesting birds were located downstream of the project area, however, since that time there have been only migratory observations. Currently, the willow and mixed saltcedar stands provide small patches of suitable and near suitable habitat. Protocol surveys for the Southwestern willow flycatcher are ongoing and will continue throughout the life of the project, or as long as the species continues to be federally listed. Wintering bald eagles are in the project area from October through March.

In October 2005, the USFWS designated critical habitat for the Southwestern willow flycatcher along the Rio Grande, including a portion of the project area. The designation for the "Rio Grande – North Segment" begins at the Taos Junction Bridge and continues downstream to the northern extent of San Juan Pueblo lands, approximately 30 river miles (USDI, FWS 2005).

### **Cultural Resources**

Based on knowledge of the general area it is expected that archeological sites associated with hunting, camping, food gathering, travel and rock art will be located within the project area. Other significant sites include historic roads and the historic ruins east of Taos Junction Bridge. Much of the project area has not been formally inventoried for cultural resources, and therefore, only a few archeological sites have been recorded. These sites consist of rock art dating to the Archaic, Ancestral Pueblo and Historic Periods and lithic and ceramic scatters.

### **Recreation/Visual Resources**

The project area contains a deep gorge, open mesas, riparian zones, and rolling foothills. The Taos Valley Overlook property is renowned for its outstanding views of the Rio Grande Gorge, Taos Valley, and surrounding mountains. Under the Rio Grande Corridor Plan's guidelines the upland area bounded by the east rim of the Rio Grande Gorge, NM 68, and the north rim of the Arroyo Hondo drainage is assigned Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class I. Class I guidelines are to preserve the existing





## Taos Valley Overlook Project and Management Plan

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character of the landscape without precluding very limited management activity. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be very low and not attract attention. VRM Class III is assigned to Orilla Verde Recreation Area's developed recreation sites below the rim of the gorge, and Class II is assigned to the remainder of the area.

The project area contains a deep gorge, open mesas, riparian zones, and rolling foothills. The Taos Valley Overlook property is renowned for its outstanding views of the Rio Grande Gorge, Taos Valley, and surrounding mountains. Under the Rio Grande Corridor Plan's guidelines the upland area bounded by the east rim of the Rio Grande Gorge, NM 68, and the north rim of the Arroyo Hondo drainage is assigned Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class I. Class I guidelines are to preserve the existing character of the landscape without precluding very limited management activity. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be very low and not attract attention. VRM Class III is assigned to Orilla Verde Recreation Area's developed recreation sites below the rim of the gorge, and Class II is assigned to the remainder of the area.

Class II guidelines are to retain the existing character of the landscape, with the level of any changes being low. Class III guidelines are to partially retain the character of the existing landscape, allowing for moderate changes. The goal of the VRM program is to preserve scenic resources.

In comment forms, many people expressed a desire for low level or no facilities on the Overlook. Some described a desire for minimizing structures and for creating structures that are natural looking and give off a feel for the cultural history of the area.

### Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Descriptors

Broad recreation program policy for BLM is to provide a diversity or variety of resource-dependent outdoor recreation opportunities and experiences (Recreation 2000). The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS), developed in the late 70s and adopted by federal land-management agencies, is a management tool that has been used to identify and define various opportunities based on the physical, social, and managerial settings. The descriptors of these settings are: Access, Remoteness, Naturalness, Social Encounters, Visitor Impacts, Visitor Management, and Facilities & Site Management. Settings on the spectrum range from Urban to Primitive. *The general aim or concept is that different settings will provide different experiences, addressing not only the physical but also the psychological benefits of recreation.* Basically, sites with more development, facilities, and management presence offer comfort, safety, and social contacts, while sites with less developed facilities, and management presence offer solitude, challenge, and opportunities for self-reliance.



**Taos Valley Overlook Project and Management Plan**

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**Table 4: ROS Existing Conditions**

<b>ROS DESCRIPTOR</b>	<b>OVRA CANYON SITES</b>	<b>OVRA TAOS VALLEY OVERLOOK</b>
<b>Access</b>	Paved road: Rural	Non-motorized: Back Country
<b>Remoteness</b>	Too close to paved roads and higher density travel and visitation: Rural	More than ½ mile walk from motorized roads: Middle Country
<b>Naturalness</b>	Management actions and human modification is visible due to the constricted canyon: Rural	Only user created two-tracks are visible: Middle Country
<b>Social Encounters</b>	Moderate to high: Rural	Moderate to low on trails: Front Country
<b>Visitor Impacts</b>	Subtle compaction and vegetation loss from visitors at all sites: Roaded Natural	Subtle site hardening due to prevalence of two-tracks: Front Country
<b>Visitor Management</b>	Obvious and numerous onsite controls. Ranger and volunteer patrols: Rural	Only control is limited signing of ownership and vehicle use: Middle Country
<b>Facilities &amp; Site Management</b>	Many facilities and services available for comfort. Many camp hosts, contact stations, electricity, pay phones, water, showers, boat launch: Rural	No facilities: Back Country

To follow is a portrayal of the existing conditions in OVRA including the new Taos Valley Overlook property according to the criteria for the descriptors from the ROS Field Guide (USDA 1990) and Appendix C of the Built Environment Image Guide (USDA 2001). It reports where OVRA lies on the spectrum, from Primitive to Urban, for each descriptor. Recall from Chapter One that the current designation in the RMP (1988) is Rural.

Note: For clarification BLM has begun using the terms *Back Country*, *Middle Country* and *Front Country* instead of *Semi-primitive Non-motorized*, *Semi-primitive Motorized*, and *Roaded Natural*.

Visitor Use in the Gorge

Visitation is influenced by the proximity to NM Highway 68; a major tourist route. Most of the visitor use within OVRA (not including the visitor center, the Racecourse segment, Quartzite, and County Line) occurs between mid-April and mid-September, averaging over 33,000 visitors annually since 1999. As is typical for Taos County, visitors that are non-residents come mostly from Texas, California, and Colorado.

Taos Junction Bridge alone is a popular site for access to a wide range of recreational activities, including boating. During the Taos Box boating season the site becomes heavily used as a takeout for both commercial and private boaters. Visitation has increased since the early 1980s when river rafting started to become popular in the area. The popularity of water play and fishing has also been increasing, and seasonally heavy recreation use is expected to continue for this site. Boating regulations on the Taos Box segment per the Rio Grande Corridor Plan allow for up to 406 boaters per weekday and 368 per weekend day and holidays (private and commercial combined).

Much of the boating use hinges on runoff and seasonal water flows. It is expected that with normal runoff conditions on the Rio Grande the number of people accessing the site for boating alone would be over 10,000. In years prior to 1995 with average river runoff some 10,000 boaters rafted the Taos Box per season, mostly during May and June (See Table 5 below).



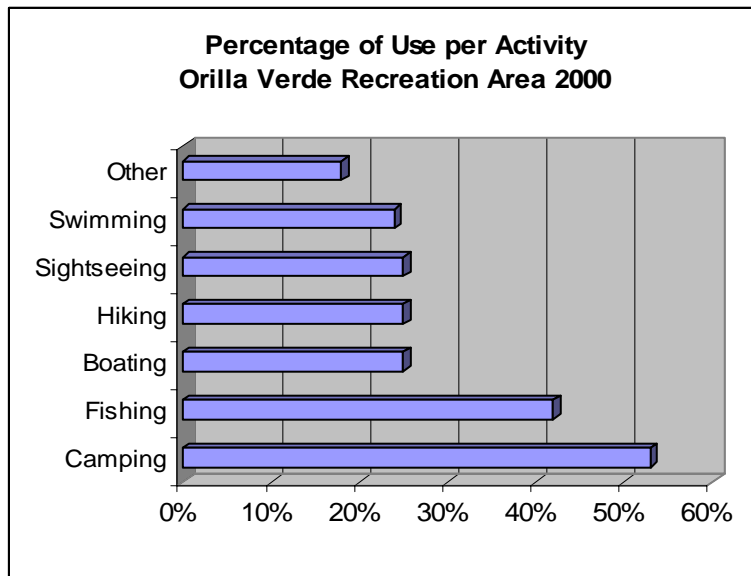
**Table 5: Commercial Boating Passengers  
Taos Box and Orilla Verde segments**

Year	Passengers
1995	14,851
1996	1,664
1997	12,962
1998	7,055
1999	3,693
2000	601
2001	9,186
2002	97
2003	1,190
2004	4,036
2005	11,491

Note: On site observation of the Racecourse reveals that private boating typically accounts for an additional 10-18 percent of boating visitors annually.

In the summer of 2000 a survey was conducted on 131 people visiting the Orilla Verde Recreation Area. Primary activities reported were camping 53%, fishing 42%, boating 25%, hiking 25%, sightseeing 25%, swimming 24%, and other 18% (Survey Report 2000). The 2000 survey results indicate that visitors return to OVRA 4.3 times a year (ibid).

**Figure 2: Percentage of Use per Activity**



Camping in Orilla Verde Recreation Area is allowed only at developed campgrounds and designated primitive sites. The west side of the river throughout the project area is undeveloped except for Taos Junction campground west of Taos Junction Bridge, which has drinking water, restrooms, picnic and overnight camping facilities, and two designated primitive boater camp sites. Four campgrounds can be found on the east side of the Rio Grande along NM Highway 570: Petaca, Arroyo Hondo, Rio Bravo (which also has shower facilities), and Pilar (which also has a visitor station). Each site has



## Taos Valley Overlook Project and Management Plan

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picnic and overnight camping facilities, restrooms, and (except at Arroyo Hondo) drinking water. RV camping, with electric and water hookups, is available at the Rio Bravo and Pilar campgrounds, as well as public pay telephones. Group shelters which can accommodate up to 50 people are available at the Taos Junction and Rio Bravo campgrounds. No RV dump station is available within the recreation area. Primitive camping is also available at the Lone Juniper Recreation Site. Orilla Verde Recreation Area is a designated fee area.

Boating access is provided at four locations—the Taos Junction Bridge site, the Rio Bravo (takeout only), and Arroyo Hondo campgrounds, and at the Lone Juniper Recreation Site. There are a small number of existing undeveloped, non-designated campsites near the Rio Grande/Rio Pueblo confluence. Existing trails currently include La Vista Verde, West Rim, and Petaca, all located on the west side of the Rio Grande. A designated rock-climbing area, Dead Cholla, also exists on the west side of the river, near the West Rim trailhead.

### Visitor Use at the Pueblo/Grande Confluence and on the Taos Valley Overlook

At present, we have observational data on the type and extent of use that occurs in these areas. We know people fish and camp at the confluence and that use occurs mostly from April through Labor Day. There are no facilities in this area except for a camp host site and a recently installed two vault toilet.

On the Overlook, many people hike down the old 570 slide, they ride their horses and bikes on top of the rim as well as hike and sit and watch the sunset and view the Rio Pueblo de Taos. It appears as though use on the rim of the Overlook is by locals and seasonally when it's not too hot. Some visitors who are non-residents get referred to the Overlook by the bicycle shop in town. In comment forms, some people said they wanted a feeling of serenity or unadulterated nature. There appears to be at least 8-10 people on site on a daily basis. At present the use on the rim is not anticipated to be nearly as high as within the lower gorge of the Rio Grande; over 217,000 in 2005.

Presently, there are no formal access points to the Overlook and no recreation signs or facilities other than 28 miles of old two-track routes designated for non-motorized use only.

### New Mexico Recreation Demand

Through public contacts and workshops conducted around the state, an understanding of demand by residents was accomplished. Demands that could affect the use on the Overlook are listed below from the New Mexico State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP p.36 2004).

- Areas closer to home have become more popular
- There is increased demand for multi-use trails and open space near urban areas
- There is desire for recreation near home with emphasis on health
- The elderly and families are more active



## CHAPTER 4 – ANALYSIS OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

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This section will compare various elements of each alternative with its compatibility with management objectives in each resource area.

### **Direct and Indirect Impacts of Alternative A – Proposed Action**

#### **Soil and Water Resources**

Access and Trails - Site visits by staff identified new disturbance for trails and existing road conditions as likely impacts of concern for soils and water quality. Direct impacts include increased water runoff resulting in increased soil erosion adjacent to trails and in arroyos. Indirect impacts include reduced water quality in perennial waters resulting from higher sediment load. Although soils within the Community Use Zones where impacts will occur are identified as having a slight to moderate erosion hazard, severe erosion has been observed throughout the planning area.

To minimize the potential impact of site development and use, the following mitigation is proposed:

- ◆ Close and rehabilitate existing roads with highest erosion indicators.
- ◆ Quantify road rehabilitation area and set limits on new trail development as a percentage of land surface restored.
- ◆ Develop trails using Best Management Practices including proper drainage and slope to reduce runoff hazard.
- ◆ Existing roads to be maintained for trails should be reduced in width by revegetating where appropriate.
- ◆ Arroyo crossings need to be designed to limit potential incision through ingress/egress layout, installation of small structures in channel, or both.
- ◆ Seasonal closure of trails may be required. Trail monitoring and maintenance records should identify problem areas due to seasonal conditions.
- ◆ Seeding with native grasses and forbs adjacent to designated trails.

Taos Junction Bridge and Rio Pueblo/Grande Confluence – Proposed improvements at Taos Junction Bridge have been discussed by staff and should result in reduced soil and water impacts due to better management of vehicle use both upstream and downstream of the bridge. Parking and road improvements must employ best management practices so that grade and drainage does not increase runoff. Defined impact areas will reduce vehicle impacts, allowing for revegetation that will stabilize soils and reduce sheet flow of water across land surfaces.

#### **Biological Resources**

##### Vegetation

Designation of parking areas may remove some upland vegetation species, however, fencing and installation of vehicular barriers across the area will limit ongoing vegetation disturbance from unauthorized use. Non-motorized use on designated routes will minimize damage to vegetation, however, where this use occurs “cross-country” there could be a negative impact on soils, microbiotic crusts and cactus species.

New construction of trails will remove some upland vegetation, however all efforts will be made to retain trees, flowering shrubs and cactus species. Protection of riparian vegetation by installation of barriers to vehicular traffic and trail closure/maintenance will allow revegetation and stabilization of those sites, while planting of trees and shrubs will bolster ongoing riparian restoration activities in the area. Closure of the ruin site will allow grasses and shrubs to revegetate the area and, with proper site



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delineation, a large primitive camping area would not remove additional vegetation as the area does not currently possess much grass, shrub or tree cover.

Currently, large bare areas in the proposed sites lend themselves to large numbers of vehicles and users that disperse in all directions impacting the vegetation and causing resource damage. The proposed action contains a finite number of parking spots, much less than current capacity at each site, which will allow vegetation to rehabilitate. It is expected that greater stand densities of native riparian vegetation, including willows, will occur which may allow for an expansion of habitat for all wildlife species. There will be no removal of riparian vegetation during construction and the restriction to vehicles will result in positive long-term impacts to vegetation, soil and water resources. The vehicular restrictions would also reduce the amount of surface disturbance and reduce erosion and sedimentation to the Rio Grande and Rio Pueblo de Taos.

The additional toilets will decrease the utilization of the shrubs adjacent to the river and thereby decrease human disturbance in these areas and pollution of vegetation and water resources for wildlife and humans alike

### Wildlife

There are no direct impacts anticipated for fisheries. Indirect impacts could occur as a result of upland soil erosion resulting in water quality impairments in the Rio Grande and Rio Pueblo de Taos.

Designation of parking areas and fencing and installation of vehicular barriers across the area will limit disturbance from unauthorized use. Non-motorized use on designated routes will minimize disturbance to wildlife, however, where this use occurs “cross-country” there could be a negative impact on soils, vegetation and wildlife habitat. New construction of trails will remove some upland vegetation, however all efforts will be made to retain trees, flowering shrubs and other habitat features important to wildlife.

The designation of Gijosa Trail could cause disturbance to wildlife species using the Arroyo Hondo as a corridor from the Sangre de Cristo mountain range to the Rio Grande, an important water source and migration corridor.

Protection of riparian vegetation by installation of barriers to vehicular traffic and trail closure/maintenance will allow revegetation and stabilization of those sites, while planting of trees and shrubs will bolster ongoing riparian restoration activities in the area. Nesting and foraging habitat will increase for all species, hiding and thermal cover will increase allowing more access to the river for all wildlife species.

Currently, large bare areas in the proposed sites lend themselves to large numbers of vehicles and users that disperse in all directions impacting the distribution and movement of wildlife throughout the area. The proposed action contains a finite number of parking spots, much less than current capacity at each site, which will allow vegetation to rehabilitate. It is expected that greater stand densities of native riparian vegetation, including willows, will occur which may allow for an expansion of habitat for all wildlife species. There will be no removal of riparian vegetation during construction and the restriction to vehicles will result in positive long-term impacts to wildlife. The vehicular restrictions would also reduce the amount of surface disturbance and reduce erosion and sedimentation to the Rio Grande and Rio Pueblo de Taos.



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The additional toilets will decrease the utilization of the shrubs adjacent to the river and thereby decrease human disturbance in these areas and pollution of vegetation and water resources for wildlife and humans alike.

### Threatened and Endangered Species

Neither the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish nor the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) lists any plants as threatened or endangered in Taos County, New Mexico. Therefore, the proposed action will have no adverse effects on threatened or endangered plants. The New Mexico Rare Plants Council lists rare plants for Taos County, of which only three have the potential to occur in the project area (*Astragalus cyaneus*, *Astragalus puniceus* var. *gertrudis*, and *Selaginella weatherbiana*), however, they have not been observed in the project site and it is unlikely they would be affected by the proposed action.

Pursuant to USFWS Federal Species List for Taos County, New Mexico (June 2006), the only listed species which might be found in OVRA are the Southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii eximius*), listed as endangered, and the bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), listed as threatened.

In 1993 the BLM began surveying for the Southwestern willow flycatcher along the Rio Grande in OVRA. From 1993 to 1997, nesting birds were located downstream of the project area, however, since that time there have been only migratory observations. Currently, the willow and mixed saltcedar stands along the Rio Grande provide small patches of suitable and near suitable habitat. As the proposed action will not remove any willows or riparian habitat, and all project related activities in the riparian areas of Taos Junction Bridge, the Rio Grande and Rio Pueblo de Taos will be performed outside the migratory bird breeding season (April 15 through September 15), there will be no adverse effects to this species from the proposed action. Protocol surveys for the Southwestern willow flycatcher are ongoing and will continue throughout the life of the project, or as long as the species continues to be federally listed.

Wintering bald eagles occur from mid-October through February or March in the project area. To avoid negative impacts to bald or golden eagles, if an eagle is observed perching or roosting within a quarter mile upstream or downstream of the active project site in the morning before project activity starts, or following breaks in project activity, all project activity will be suspended until the bird leaves of its own volition; however, if an eagle arrives during construction activities or if an eagle is beyond the quarter mile distance upstream or downstream of the project site, construction need not be interrupted. The proposed action does not pose any threat to the bald eagle and, therefore, there will be no adverse effects to this species and no mitigation measures are required.

In October 2005, the USFWS designated critical habitat for the Southwestern willow flycatcher along the Rio Grande, including the portion of the project area located downstream of the Taos Junction Bridge along the Rio Grande. As the proposed action will not remove any willows or riparian habitat, there will be no adverse effect to the designated critical habitat for the Southwestern willow flycatcher from the proposed action.

### **Cultural Resources**

All proposed projects that could result in earth disturbing activities will be inventoried for cultural resources. Impacts to cultural resources will be reduced by avoiding or mitigating effects to cultural sites found eligible to the National Register of Historic Places. Increased management of recreation activities will likely lessen impacts on cultural resources due to reduced unauthorized vehicle use, litter and vandalism and other uncontrolled activities. Increased interpretation would likely have a positive



impact on cultural resources due to the Public's increased knowledge and appreciation of the area's prehistory and history.

### Recreation/Visual Resources

- **ACCESS:** If acquisition of lands adjacent to C110 is successful, trailhead facilities such as a parking area, kiosk sign, and toilet would not be visible from the Horseshoe Curve according to a Viewshed Analysis for Trailheads and Points along NM 68. Also, recreation access to public land would be secured, and managing visitor activity, (including illegal activity) would require less money and labor due to natural barriers that exist closer to C110.
- **TRAILS:** New trail opportunities and challenges at different skill levels would be made available. Information would be provided to the public about the new public land and trails via signs and a Taos Valley Overlook Trail Map.
- **SETTING:** The Overlook Community Zone would be managed according to public comment and a distinction would be made between management and user outcome goals in different zones of Orilla Verde Recreation Area. The physical, social, and administrative setting prescriptions for the Overlook would maintain the existing condition in terms of vehicle use. Visitor impacts and naturalness, defined by vegetative disturbance or manipulation, may be slightly reduced by converting two, two-track routes to single track (approximately 3.6 miles). One new single track trail would be created, nine miles long, 18" wide. Visitor impacts defined by unauthorized vehicles, litter, and vandalism may be reduced by developing trailheads and increased management controls. Controls on use, facilities, and services would increase slightly at trailheads due to firearms and hunting closures, control of dogs, and by providing a toilet, parking, signs, maps, and interpretation. Marketing primarily to local residents would slightly increase social encounters. The addition of 11.5 miles of a new trail system would help meet the increased demand in New Mexico for multi-use trails near urban areas as identified in SCORP.
- Continuing to manage the River Canyon Zone of Orilla Verde Recreation area as a destination zone would maintain the existing physical, social, and administrative condition for a Rural experience, including the newly acquired lands at Taos Junction Bridge and the Pueblo/Grande Confluence.
- Managing the Pilar North Rim Zone as an Undeveloped Zone would maintain the existing condition, but would change the management objectives which are Rural. There are no additional facilities, services, or access points proposed for this area.
- Managing the Horseshoe Curve Zone as a destination would increase the presence of public land management and increase facilities and services due to addition of an interpretive trail and signs. Visitor impacts at the rest area might be reduced as a result of increased management presence and understanding and appreciation of resources. This area would be marketed primarily to visitors outside of New Mexico and Taos County.
- **REGULATIONS:** Including the Overlook in the firearms closure would be consistent with the current use patterns, increase visitor safety, and sense of personal security. Some target shooting opportunities would be displaced to other areas. Most of the BLM Taos Field Office public lands are open to target shooting.
- **INTERPRETATION:** Visitors to the area would gain an understanding and appreciation of the history and resources of the area. Their experience would be enhanced by learning, along with other recreation activities. Taos County residents would have another opportunity to share the natural and cultural history; especially at the Horseshoe Curve.
- **VISITOR USE AT TAOS JUNCTION BRIDGE:** Visitor impacts to soil, vegetation, and water would be reduced. Visitors could enjoy better parking and traffic flow configurations.
- **VISITOR USE AT THE PUEBLO/GRANDE CONFLUENCE:** Public opinion from comment forms was in favor of limited development for the continuation of primitive camping opportunities. Defining vehicle areas and providing fire rings would help minimize visitor impacts to soils and





vegetation while continuing to provide the variety of experiences offered in Orilla Verde Recreation Area.

- **VISUAL RESOURCES:** Moderate visual impacts from the addition of structures would meet VRM Class III objectives at Taos Junction Bridge. Only minor visual impacts are allowed under VRM Class II objectives at the Pueblo/Grande Confluence and on the Overlook. Moderate and weak contrasts could be mitigated by use of natural and natural looking materials and colors and designs that mimic the topography.
- **RECREATION OBJECTIVES:** Setting prescriptions identified under Alternative A aim to manage for the identified demand for experiences and improved quality of life according to four different market zones. This meets Objective 1 from BLMs Unified Strategy to Implement Priorities for Recreation and Visitor Services 2006. Due to the outstanding historic resources on the Overlook and the interpretive and marketing plans proposed, Alternative A would also meet Objectives 2, 6, and 7.

**Table 6: Applicable Unified Strategy Objectives**

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Descriptions</b>
<b>One</b>	Manage public lands and waters for enhanced recreation experiences and quality of life.
<b>Two</b>	Encourage sustainable travel and tourism development with gateway communities and provide community-based conservation support for visitor services.
<b>Six</b>	Enhance and expand visitor services, including interpretation, information and education.
<b>Seven</b>	Encourage and sustain collaborative partnerships, volunteers and citizen-centered public services.

### **Cumulative Impacts of Alternative A**

#### **Soil and Water Resources**

Improvements proposed for the Taos Overlook and river sections of Orilla Verde Recreation Area in this plan may result in increased use. Increased use of dirt trails and roads will increase compaction and possibly expand area of disturbed ground if users, These impacts can result in higher runoff and erosion hazard. Mitigation proposed should alleviate potential problems. Monitoring of water quality by the state and BLM, and trail condition by the BLM will identify areas that need require management review.

#### **Vegetation/Wildlife**

Additional trails and campground upgrades will have a cumulative impact on vegetation and wildlife as trails continue to fragment habitat and remove vegetation; campground upgrades may gather larger crowds for a longer period of time. To mitigate these potential impacts, all project related activities will avoid removal of special status species of plants and important wildlife habitat features, while using best management practices to minimize impacts to soils and erosion.

#### **Recreation/Visual Resources**

The Overlook was identified as a hub for open space in Taos County during the planning process for the Green Infrastructure Plan (GIP). Providing access to new public land increases recreation opportunities close to town for Taos County residents. In the future, part of the implementation of the GIP might include alternative transportation routes to the Taos Valley Overlook.

In addition to twenty-three miles of new public lands trail on the rim; there may be a 2 mile trail proposed from Pilar campground to Petaca campground which would run along the east side of NM



Highway 570. Another future action may be the upgrading of existing campground facilities at Arroyo Hondo, Petaca, and Taos Junction campgrounds. It is anticipated that no new campsites would be proposed at these campgrounds per the Rio Grande Corridor Final Plan.

### **Direct and Indirect Impacts of Alternative B**

#### **Soil and Water Resources**

Same impacts as identified in Alternative A plus the following:

- ◆ Development of Rio Grande/Pueblo confluence would require full project level analysis of storm water mitigation and potential impact to wetland resources.
- ◆ Motorized access to viewpoint on existing roads would require similar mitigation as in A, but removal of road adjacent to canyon rim may be necessary to prevent increased erosion.

#### **Biological Resources**

##### Vegetation

In addition to the impacts listed above under the proposed action, there would be an increase in vegetation loss where a fully developed campground, shelters and a loop road would be constructed. Motorized use along the rim on the north side of the BLM boundary would also increase vegetation impacts where a parking area and turn around would be necessary. Release of the proposed Gijosa trail would allow for revegetation of that two track.

##### Wildlife

In addition to the impacts listed above under the proposed action, there would be an increase level of use where a fully developed campground, shelters and a loop road would be constructed, displacing small mammal species currently using the area. Motorized use along the rim on the north side of the BLM boundary would have no significant affect on wildlife species as that use is currently taking place. Release of the proposed Gijosa trail would allow easier movement of all wildlife species through Arroyo Hondo and lands adjacent to it.

#### **Cultural Resources**

All proposed projects that could result in earth disturbing activities will be inventoried for cultural resources. Impacts to cultural resources will be reduced by avoiding or mitigating effects to cultural sites found eligible to the National Register of Historic Places. Increased management of recreation activities will likely lessen impacts on cultural resources due to reduced unauthorized vehicle use, litter and vandalism and other uncontrolled activities. Increased interpretation would likely have a positive impact on cultural resources due to the Public's increased knowledge and appreciation of the area's prehistory and history.

#### **Recreation/Visual Resources**

- **ACCESS:** Controlling motorized traffic further south of C110, adjacent to existing private property would be difficult and require extensive fencing and installation of barriers. This location would not be visible from the Horseshoe Curve, according to the viewshed analysis. However, if private land is not acquired, this area would be the closest access from a major road to the Overlook and the Pueblo/Grande confluence.
- **VISITOR USE AT THE PUEBLO/GRANDE CONFLUENCE:** Up to seven additional campsites could be provided which could accommodate demand for camping as well as use by RVs. One primitive, secluded site would be lost. There would potentially be more activity and traffic occurring in the confluence area. Additional lines and colors from developed campsites would be introduced to the characteristic landscape. However, these activities and affects are consistent with



current management objectives of VRM Class II and Rural ROS objectives. These activities were cleared in the Rio Grande Corridor Final Plan 2000.

- **TRAILS:** Closure of this trail (for a wildlife corridor buffer) would be a loss of an existing non motorized opportunity and possible loop trail. It has already proven difficult to close access in this location. However, if the NM Department of Transportation rest area at the ‘horseshoe’ is modified in the future, this informal access point may no longer be available and access points near Stakeout Drive and C110 might be adequate substitutes for current users. It would be advantageous from an interpretive standpoint (for cultural history) to rename another trail or trail segment La Gijosa.

## **Cumulative Impacts of Alternative B**

### **Soil and Water Resources**

Same as for Alternative A.

### **Vegetation/Wildlife**

Additional trails and campground upgrades will have a cumulative impact on vegetation and wildlife as trails continue to fragment habitat and remove vegetation; campground upgrades may gather larger crowds for a longer period of time. To mitigate these potential impacts, all project related activities will avoid removal of special status species of plants and important wildlife habitat features, while using best management practices to minimize impacts to soils and erosion.

## **Direct and Indirect Impacts of Alternative C – No Action**

### **Soil and Water Resources**

Same impacts and mitigation as for alternative A regarding rehabilitation of existing roads and reduction of road width.

### **Wildlife Resources**

#### Vegetation/Wildlife

Under the No Action alternative visitor impacts, such as littering, denuding vegetation, and compacting soil, would continue. This is a negative outcome to vegetation, wildlife and riparian resources in terms of loss of nesting and foraging habitat, as well as hiding and thermal cover, for all wildlife species. Due to the loss of vegetation, increased sedimentation could contribute to degradation of the water quality of both the Rio Grande and Rio Pueblo de Taos, increasing turbidity, decreasing plant growth in the water column and negatively affecting the invertebrate population, having detrimental effects to the fisheries of both systems. The lack of human waste facilities increases the despoiling of native vegetation and has possible effects to water quality due to the proximity to the river channels.

### **Cultural Resources**

There would be no impact to cultural resources from projects, since no trails, roads or other facilities would be constructed. There would be some impacts to cultural resources from a lack of increased management of recreational activities. An opportunity to educate the public about the prehistory and history of the area would be lost.

### **Recreation/Visual Resources**

- **ACCESS:** No formal access to public land on the Overlook would be provided by trailhead development and/or inter-governmental agreements. This would make it more challenging to manage vehicle use, and current problems with vandalism and litter.



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- **TRAILS:** No additional on-site information or trail signs would be installed or provided. Non-motorized trail opportunities would be limited to existing two-track routes.
- **SETTING:** No distinction would be made in management objectives between the Overlook, the canyon with developed campgrounds, and undeveloped land within Orilla Verde Recreation Area, which means the Overlook and other areas could also be managed with the same level of services and facilities as the campgrounds in the canyon. This might displace some recreation users or change the type of experience currently available on the Overlook. Visitor impacts from vegetative disturbance, litter, vandalism, and unauthorized vehicle use would continue.
- **REGULATIONS:** Continued use of firearms would be allowed, (as they are on most BLM lands that are not closed to firearms use) which may lead to continued threat to public health and safety.
- **INTERPRETATION:** Without additional opportunities to learn history and culture, visitors to the Overlook and the Horseshoe Curve might miss part of the experience of visiting Taos County as well as understanding the geology of the area. Taos County residents would miss an opportunity to share history, culture, and a sense of place, and forego increased business.
- **VISITOR USE AT TAOS JUNCTION BRIDGE:** Without defined parking and traffic flow, erosion and vegetative loss could continue. At Taos Junction Bridge vehicles would continue to be able to drive and park without restriction. Buses and vans with trailers would continue to be forced into backing down to the takeout/launch site. This lack of permanent facilities and an organized parking plan would continue to result in accident potential, user frustration and conflict, resource degradation, and unnecessary delays for visitors. Developed toilets, barrier free access, and signs would not be available and the area would not be developed to the level authorized under the existing Rural management objectives and in the Rio Grande Corridor Plan 2000.
- **VISITOR USE AT THE PUEBLO/GRANDE CONFLUENCE:** User created trails or routes to the rivers would continue to be unstable, unsafe, and add to vegetation loss and sediment into the Rio Grande. Unregulated camping in the project area would continue as is, resulting in continued degradation of natural resources, damage to riparian zones from encroachment by motorized vehicles, and compromised public safety from a lack of trash and toilet services.

### LIST OF PREPARERS

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**PERSONS OR AGENCIES CONSULTED**

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New Mexico Department of Game & Fish  
NPS, Rivers Trails Conservation Assistance Program  
NPS, Long Distance Trails Program  
Taos Pueblo  
New Mexico Department of Transportation  
Town of Taos  
Amigos Bravos  
Taos Land Trust  
Trust for Public Lands  
Rotary Club  
Lion's Club  
Taos Saddle Club  
Taos Cycle Club  
Green Infrastructure Planning Group  
Taos Historical Society  
Lower Rio Pueblo Neighborhood Association  
Talpa and Rio Chiquito Neighborhood Association  
Tony Benson

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**APPENDICES**

**Appendix A: Summary of Public Comments**

