

Roswell Field Office

FORT STANTON

Area of Critical
Environmental Concern



Final Activity Plan

March 2001

NM-060-2000-0141



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Roswell Field Office
2909 West Second Street
Roswell, New Mexico 88201

IN REPLY REFER TO:
8011(06000)

August 28, 2001

Dear Public Land User:

The Roswell Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management has completed the final version of the activity plan for the Fort Stanton Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). The Roswell Field Office will use this plan as the basis for management of resources within the ACEC.

Management of the ACEC was first outlined in the 1997 Roswell Resource Management Plan (RMP). This outline can be found in Chapter 1 of this plan. Development of this activity plan began in May 1999 when the Field Office formed a Planning Team made up of interested members of the public and BLM staff specialists. A list of members of the Planning Team can be found in Chapter 1 as well.

The Planning Team developed management goals and objectives for the ACEC and these are listed by issue in Chapter 2 of this plan. The draft of this plan was released for a 60-day public comment period that began on May 1, 2001 and ended on June 30, 2001. Comments on the plan and responses are included in Appendix 2.

This activity plan is neither the end of environmental analysis nor the end of public involvement for activities within the Fort Stanton ACEC. Many of the individual projects will need further analysis with public review and comment.

Questions regarding this activity plan should be directed to Howard Parman at 505-627-0212. E-mail should be addressed to www.howard_parman@blm.gov.

Sincerely,

signed by

Edwin L. Roberson
Field Manager

DECISION RECORD

Decision: I have reviewed this proposed action and have determined that the proposed project is in conformance with the approved land use plan. Therefore, no further environmental analysis is required. It is my decision to implement the activity plan for the Fort Stanton Area of Critical Environmental Concern. Any comments made to this proposed plan were considered and any necessary changes have been incorporated into the activity plan.

Any person who is adversely affected by a final decision of the authorized officer may file a written appeal to the Final Decision for the purpose of a hearing before an administrative law judge under 43 CFR 4.470. A period of 30 days after the decision becomes final is provided in which to file an appeal and a petition for stay of the decision in this office.

_____ signed by _____

T. R. Kreager,
Assistant Field Office Manager - Resources

_____ August 28, 2001 _____

Date

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CHAPTER ONE

MANAGEMENT GOAL
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MANAGEMENT GOAL

Established by the 1997 Roswell Resource Management Plan (RMP), the goal of managing the Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) is to protect the biological, archaeological and scenic qualities of the Fort Stanton ACEC, while providing for quality recreation opportunity.

PLANNING TEAM

To resolve the conflicts between existing resources and their uses, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) decided to form a Planning Team to assist in the development of implementation plans for the Fort Stanton ACEC. This Plan details the outline for the ACEC found in the 1997 RMP. Detailed project plans for the ACEC must conform to this Plan and the RMP.

This Plan was a collaborative process between BLM and private parties that have an interest in assisting in writing a plan for lands located within the ACEC. This Team met at regular intervals to accomplish the writing and review of the plan through its final format and signature phase. The Plan will be implemented over a time period set by BLM and the Team as funding allows. Planning Team members are:

Public Team Members

Jim Batdorf
Jimmy Clark
Benny Coker
Scott Daniel
Ralph Dunlap
Sid Goodloe
Kathleen Havill
Virginia Jones
Lionel Lippmann
Matt Ferguson
Reginald Richey
Margaret Richey
Tom Rogers
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Howard Shanks
Phoebe Taylor
Tommy Terrell
Alice Terrell
Dick Webber

BLM Team Members

Tim Kreager
Paul Happel
Howard Parman
Pat Flanary
Clark Taylor
Jim Schroeder
Rand French
Dan Baggao
Jim Desmond
Bill Murry
Jerry Dutchover
Irene Salas

PLANNING PROCESS

BLM announced its intention to develop an activity plan for the Fort Stanton ACEC on April 30, 1999. After gathering public comments, the Planning Team was formed in late Summer and met through November 1999.

The Planning Team began with the management prescriptions outlined in the RMP and then developed 24 management issues for the ACEC. Of those management issues, two were dropped from consideration and a third identified a larger issue. (See “Issues Not Included In this Plan.) From the Issues, the Team developed the Challenges of management for the ACEC. The Goals and Objectives were derived from the Challenges. Projects will be designed to implement the Goals and Objectives and will take place as funding allows. The impacts of the projects will be analyzed in environmental assessments that will tier off this activity plan.

The Issues (see Chapter 2) are listed in order of relative importance as agreed upon by the Planning Team. This order of priority can be changed as events and circumstances unfold.

The Fort Stanton ACEC in the 1997 Roswell RMP

The 1997 RMP lists the following management prescriptions for the Fort Stanton ACEC.

Recreation

Fort Stanton will be designated a Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) with emphasis on providing quality recreational opportunities subordinate to the management of riparian and wildlife resources.

Existing recreation developments, including trails and camping areas, will continue to be maintained and upgraded as needed to meet health and safety standards. The development of a campground, including location, size and types of facilities, will be considered during the preparation of a comprehensive ACEC/SRMA management plan.

In addition to the 40 miles of multi-use trails already in use, about 45 miles of existing roads or trails and about 20 miles of new trails will be developed and maintained as multi-use trails for hiking, horseback riding and mountain bikes. These trails, comprising about 51 acres, will be closed to the use of OHVs.

Camping at Fort Stanton will be managed by:

- Permitting “vehicle campers” (those who drive motorized vehicles to a campsite) to drive no more than 100 feet off a BLM-designated road or trail to a campsite. But, in no case will camping be allowed within 100 feet of the Rio Bonito and Salado Creek. About 250 acres will be closed to the use of OHVs in these areas.
- Permitting back country camping throughout Fort Stanton, except within 100 feet of the Rio Bonito and Salado Creek and no closer than 300 yards of any seeps or springs, man-made water hole, water well or watering tank used by wildlife or domestic livestock.
- Limiting all camping to no closer than one-quarter mile from waysides, overlooks, interpretive trails or state high ways, except at developed campgrounds and designated campsites.

A wayside stop will be considered for development along U.S. Highway 380 to interpret the historical, archaeological, and recreational opportunities of the area. Two overlooks will be considered for development on the north and south sides of the historical Fort to interpret the history of the Fort’s structures and area, in conjunction with the Boots and Saddles initiative.

Off-Highway Vehicles

Approximately 24,000 acres will be designated as limited to designated roads and trails for OHV use, to protect soils, cultural resources, and vegetation, including threatened or endangered species.

The use of OHVs will be limited to designated roads and trails, with the following exceptions:

- A 100-foot wide corridor measured from the edge of the creek along each side of the Rio Bonito and Salado Creek will be closed to OHV use to protect sensitive riparian resources, except for the use of designated roads within the corridor.
- All multi-use trails (horse, hiking and mountain biking) will be closed to OHV use. Mountain bike trails that are located on existing roads will be open for OHV use.

- The Feather Cave Archeological Complex will be closed to OHV use, except for U.S. Highway 380 and the Fort Stanton Cave Road.

Cultural Resources

Management of the Feather Cave National Register site will emphasize off-site interpretation of its religious significance while allowing for the protection of fragile cultural values. The site will be managed in conjunction with the recreation management program, which proposes to close the cave to recreational use.

Lower Stanton Pueblo Ruin is an architectural site located very close to Feather Cave. In the past, this site was being used by Eastern New Mexico University as an archeology field school. An interpretive site at Lower Stanton Pueblo Ruin could be developed and managed in conjunction with the recreation management program to interpret Feather Cave and other cultural resources in the area. Development would occur after sufficient data recovery has been completed.

Approximately 330 acres around the Lower Stanton Ruin and Feather Cave will be managed to preserve, protect and interpret unique archeological values, artifacts and architectural features. The area will be called the Feather Cave Archeological Complex. In addition to the management prescribed for the Fort Stanton ACEC that would also apply to the Archeological Complex, the following specific management actions will be applied, as well:

- Recreation development will be considered, such as trails to Lower Stanton ruin and Indian Shelter Cave, signs, an interpretive shelter, rest rooms, and a parking area;
- Off-site and on-site interpretation will be considered, including site stabilization for interpretive enhancement, exhibits, signing and brochures.

Caves

Fort Stanton Cave will be closed annually to recreation use from November 1 to the following April 15, to protect hibernating bat populations.

Feather Cave will be closed to all visitor use, except for administrative or research purposes, to protect the significant bat hibernacula and to protect visitors from extreme safety hazards associated with breakdown, vertical entrances and histoplasmosis.

Minerals, Rights-of-Way

All public lands in Fort Stanton will be open to saleable mineral disposal, except for approximately 330 acres in the Feather Cave Archeological Complex. All public lands in Fort Stanton will remain withdrawn from the general mining laws, and closed to the disposal of leasable minerals and to the leasing of oil and to the leasing of oil and gas.

Major rights-of-way will be excluded on about 24,630 acres of public land to protect important plant and animal habitat, significant riparian, wetland and aquatic habitats, and visual quality.

Possible Acquisitions

As many as 1,320 acres of private and state lands adjacent to Fort Stanton would be acquired if opportunities arise. Any acquired lands will be managed according to the prescriptions of this plan. See Appendix 1 for a list of lands and a map of their location.

Vegetation Management

Livestock grazing will be considered to the extent it would be used as a tool to accomplish management plan objectives. Livestock grazing will be limited or excluded in riparian pastures, highly erodible areas, cave entrances, campgrounds and day-use areas, and sensitive archeological sites. Livestock grazing will be excluded from the Feather Cave Archeological Complex. No grazing preference will be established.

Salt cedar treatments will be conducted on as many as 300 acres of selected riparian/wetland habitat along the Rio Bonito and Salado Creek using prescribed fire, mechanical control (chainsaws), or chemicals, except that chemicals will not be applied aerially.

Prescribed burns will be conducted in selected pinon-juniper, riparian and grassland community types at Fort Stanton to improve wildlife habitat and reduce fuels. Fuelwood sales will be permitted in selected areas.

Riparian Habitat

Riparian and aquatic habitat will be protected by maintaining minimum acceptable instream flow for Rio Bonito Creek at Fort Stanton by acquiring water rights, entering into cooperative management agreements, or other methods.

Streambank stabilization structures, native riparian plantings, riparian pastures, salt cedar control, and spring and drainage protection measures could be implemented on the Rio Bonito and Salado Creek. These practices will be used in situations including, but not limited to, areas that:

- Exhibit streambank sloughing;
- Lack riparian vegetation or regeneration;
- Exhibit invasion of exotics or undesirable plant species;
- Exhibit erosion of side drainages;
- Lack riparian pastures to control livestock use.

Wildlife

The BLM will recommend to the New Mexico State Game Commission that Fort Stanton be designated as a special hunt draw area or a restricted area open only to primitive hunting (bow and arrow or muzzle-loader). Additionally, vehicles will not be allowed off designated roads or trails to retrieve downed game.

Big game or upland game transplants and reintroductions will be conducted on public lands when cooperatively prescribed by the BLM and the NMDGF. Transplants and reintroductions include, but are not limited to:

- Pronghorn in pastures that meet the suitability criteria (see Appendix 12 in the Draft RMP/EIS);
- Mule deer in areas of low population density or areas to enhance gene pools;
- Wild turkey;
- Other big game or upland game species recommended by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish.

Native fish and sport fish introductions or transplants will be conducted in suitable waters on public land in coordination with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. Proposed introductions could include rainbow, cutthroat, brown, and brook trout in the Rio Bonito. Criteria for introductions or transplants include, but are not limited to:

- Perennial water availability;
- Existing populations indicate suitable habitat conditions but may need supplementing due to fishing pressure;
- No or low populations in stream segments with suitable habitat conditions such as water flow, temperature, stream shading, pools and rimes, and stable streambanks.

Fire Suppression

The full wildfire suppression response level will be applied at Fort Stanton to protect Kuenzler cactus habitat and the entrance to Fort Stanton Cave. Bulldozers will not be used to construct fire line.

ISSUES NOT INCLUDED IN THIS PLAN

The Planning and BLM specialists reviewed the comments submitted during the scoping period and developed management issues for the ACEC. After discussions between the Team and BLM specialists, the following issues were considered but not included in this plan.

ISSUE - Model Airplane Landing Strip

This issue arose as there is a small group of model airplane enthusiasts flying from a grass strip in the ACEC. Use by this group and others for special events is discussed in the Special Recreation Use Permits section of this plan.

ISSUE - Golf Course Construction in the ACEC

This issue arose during the first comment period for development of this plan. After much discussion involving the Planning Team and BLM specialists, it became apparent the idea behind this issue was to protect the Village of Capitan's municipal water well field. The Planning Team and BLM specialists agreed that this issue falls under the Watershed Management section of this plan. One of the objectives in that section is to protect the well field.

ISSUE - National Center for the Western Horse

In 1989 the Lincoln County Heritage Trust produced this project management plan which called for a facility dedicated to the horse which provided transportation for western expansion and the possibility for

economic prosperity on western ranches. The center was to be placed between historic Fort Stanton and state highway 380. The facility was to have horse barns, equestrian show rings, a museum, extensive horse trails, and a host of other facilities. The National Center for the Western Horse (NCFWH) plan was put on hold until the Roswell Resource Management Plan (RMP) was completed. During the RMP the plan for the center was evaluated and removed from the RMP process. The center is not compatible with the overall management goal for the ACEC found in the RMP and the goals within this plan.

The Center might be more appropriately located adjacent to historic Fort Stanton. In the discussions between the Planning Team and BLM specialists there was general agreement that locating the Center adjacent to the fort and its infrastructure (utilities) would be an acceptable alternative.

CHALLENGES RECONSIDERED

The collaboration between the Planning Team and BLM specialists developed the Issues listed in Chapter 2 of this plan. This same collaboration produced the Challenges associated with those Issues. Review of Chapter 2 revealed that a small percentage of Challenges could not be included in this plan because they were beyond the scope of BLM's authority; moved to a different Issue within this plan; or was already a part of BLM's standard operating procedures

These Challenges are listed below with their associated Issue. A short rationale is included so the reader may understand the disposition of the Challenge.

ISSUE - Riparian/Wetland Habitat Management

CHALLENGE - How do we prevent loss or degradation of vegetation and soil due to motor vehicle use and stream crossing?

Motor vehicles, specifically off-highway vehicles (OHVs), are prohibited from operating within 100 feet of either bank of the Rio Bonito and Salado Creek. Patrols and education activities by BLM law enforcement personnel should prevent damage and degradation within the riparian zones. There is only one ford crossing of either Rio Bonito or Salado Creek within the ACEC. As stated elsewhere in this plan, BLM would consider constructing hardened crossings under future development plans.

ISSUE - Vegetation Management

CHALLENGE - Consider encouraging/planting native species in the interest of ecological restoration.

The 1997 Roswell Resource Management Plan (RMP) outlines the Desired Plant Communities including that of the Fort Stanton ACEC. The ACEC's desired plant community is the Pinon-Juniper Grassland community as described in the RMP. The RMP also specifically promotes the use of native species.

CHALLENGE - Alternative livestock should be considered to manage vegetation.

This challenge is more appropriate to the Livestock Grazing Management section of this plan and has been taken into consideration there.

CHALLENGE - A goal of vegetation management should be reduction of fuel to prevent wildfires.

This challenge is more appropriate to the Fire & Fuels Management section of this plan and has been taken into consideration there.

ISSUE - Fire and Fuels Management

CHALLENGE - Suggested fire management strategies would be to provide adequate black lines and provide adequate pre-burn planning.

This challenge is already incorporated into the standard operating procedures per BLM prescribed fire regulations, manuals, and instruction memoranda.

ISSUE - Livestock Grazing Management

CHALLENGE - Bidding of the grazing should be limited to local individuals.

Should BLM sell the forage within the ACEC under a bid basis, BLM regulations do not allow restricting bidders to reside or operate in a geographic location. Therefore, BLM must open the bidding to all who are interested.

ISSUE - Wildlife & Fisheries Habitat Management

CHALLENGE - What impacts do elk, deer and antelope have on grazing within Fort Stanton and the surrounding area?

CHALLENGE - Elk within Fort Stanton should have adequate harvest and herd management.

These two challenges fall outside BLM's responsibility and authority. Measuring impacts of wildlife foraging on the lands surrounding the ACEC is the responsibility of New Mexico Department of Game & Fish. Also, establishing harvest levels for herd management is a responsibility of NMDGF and the State Game Commission. BLM can cooperate with NMDGF in any studies and the BLM range monitoring process accounts for impacts of grazing by wildlife.

ISSUE - Visual Resource Management

CHALLENGE - Be sensitive to historic and landscape qualities of Lincoln and the Rio Bonito valley.

This challenge is outside the scope of a plan for the ACEC. This concern would be more appropriately included in the pending plan for BLM's Rio Bonito Acquired Lands.

CHALLENGE - Conservation easements could be purchased to preserve adjacent view sheds on private lands.

This challenge is outside the authority and mission of BLM. It would be appropriate for private landowners and the land trust organizations to engage in this activity.

CHALLENGE - New utility lines, realignment of state highway 214 and other proposals may effect the ACEC.

The 1997 RMP includes the ACEC in areas for exclusion of rights-of-way. This means major projects such as electric transmission lines; pipelines 10 inches in diameter or larger; communication lines for interstate use; federal, state and interstate highways; and major county and private roads are excluded from crossing the ACEC. BLM has already recognized the affect these types of activities could have within the ACEC and have accounted for them.

CHALLENGE - Control heavy truck traffic on State highway 214 and the county road through the ACEC.

This challenge is outside the authority of BLM. BLM, however, can participate in discussions regarding this challenge with the State of New Mexico and Lincoln County.

ISSUE - Off-Highway Vehicle Management

CHALLENGE - Should the policy be changed to make a 100-yard wide corridor along the Rio Bonito and the Salado Creek instead of the existing 100 feet corridor that was stated in the RMP?

Current monitoring and patrols do not indicate a change in corridor width is necessary for resource protection. If future monitoring indicates a change is necessary, the environmental analysis process would begin, including public participation.

ISSUE - Recreation Trails

CHALLENGE - The ACEC could be developed as a fee area. With the decreasing budget and increase in visitation to the area fees may be appropriate for certain activities within the ACEC.

This challenge has been moved to the Visitor Use Fee section of the plan and is accounted for there.

ISSUE - Camping

CHALLENGE - Should BLM develop a campground for Fort Stanton, or should designated dispersed camping sites be located throughout Fort Stanton?

Currently, BLM has neither the staff nor the funding to develop a formal campground within the ACEC. Additionally, other recreational development priorities preclude considering this challenge at this time.

CHALLENGE - Should dispersed overnight camping be allowed within Fort Stanton or should camping only be allowed in designated areas under a fee system.

The question of visitor use fee sites has been accounted for in the Visitor Use Fee section of the plan. Until new information is available, the ACEC will host dispersed camping.

CHALLENGE - What types of camping or facilities should be allowed in the Upper Rio Bonito Recreation Area?

The area was closed because of the impacts of recreation use on the riparian resources on and adjacent

to the site. Reestablishing a campground on this site conflicts with the 1997 RMP which bars camping within 100 feet of the Rio Bonito.

ISSUE - Mineral Resources

CHALLENGE - Is casual gold mining compatible with the ACEC?
The ACEC is closed to locateable minerals and gold mining falls into this category.

ISSUE - Cultural Resources

CHALLENGE - Roads have occurred in the past either intentionally or by casual use. How will they be managed in the future to protect cultural resources?

The route designation plan (to be developed once this plan is complete) and law enforcement activities should reduce the instance of cross-country travel by OHVs and motor vehicles. Additionally, any road right-of-way location would be surveyed for cultural resources prior to the authorization of construction.

CHALLENGE - Facility construction has occurred in the past. How will it be managed in the future?

See the Visual Resource Management section of this plan. Additionally, any facility construction location would be surveyed for cultural resources prior to the authorization of construction.

CHALLENGE - Would the strategic placement and location of trail heads and parking lots assist management of cultural resources within the area?

See the Off-Highway Vehicle Management and Recreation Trails sections of this plan. Any route designation plan or proposed new trails would have to take into account cultural resources before authorizing construction. These plans would be open to public scrutiny and participation.

CHALLENGE - A class III archeological survey should be accomplished within the boundary of the ACEC.

While the location of the cultural sites within the ACEC would be useful information, the costs of such a project are outside the current budget constraints of BLM. As noted above, cultural surveys are required before any surface disturbing activities can be authorized. Therefore, as projects are developed, the cultural surveys would be completed.

ISSUE - Visitor Use Fees

CHALLENGE - Fees should be charged for hunting within the Fort Stanton Area.

See the Visitor Use Fee section of this plan. A hunter would not pay a fee for hunting within the ACEC unless BLM establishes the entire ACEC as a user fee area.

CHAPTER TWO

ISSUES

CHALLENGES

MANAGEMENT GOALS

ACTION

WATERSHED MANAGEMENT

Management of the Rio Bonito watershed is a high priority on several fronts. As part of the Hondo basin, the watershed is:

- targeted for a strategic watershed plan in the Roswell RMP;
- identified as an NRCS Geographic Priority Area;
- scheduled for development of Total Maximum Daily Loads by the NM Water Quality Control Commission;
- listed in the NM 305(b) report as not fully supporting its coldwater fishery and irrigation uses; and
- identified as a Category 1 watershed in need of restoration based on the Unified Watershed Assessments conducted by the NRCS and NMED as directed by the Clean Water Action Plan.
- included in the area planned for watershed restoration work by the Upper Hondo Watershed Coalition

A properly functioning watershed is fundamental to many resource management concerns. When properly functioning, a watershed provides (1) effective use of precipitation, which benefits plant communities and wildlife habitat, and enhances ground-water recharge and streamflows; (2) high-quality streamflow that provides benefits for fisheries, irrigation, recreation, and other uses; (3) stable soils that provide a medium for plant growth and prevent erosion and impairment of aquatic habitat; and (4) a more aesthetic setting for recreation use.

Challenges

- Incorporating the Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines into this plan which became final in April, 2000, and emphasize watershed functions. Projects that benefit the watershed will complement other resource management goals, such as vegetation management, wildlife habitat, and livestock grazing.
- Emphasizing erosion control because much of the erosion potential on Fort Stanton would be prevented by proper management of the watershed. Some areas, however, could require projects designed to address rapid erosion. These areas should be prioritized and plans developed to address them.
- Spanning jurisdictional boundaries to improve watersheds. Fort Stanton and the acquired lands are a fraction of the watershed and a major challenge will be coordinating management with adjoining landowners to achieve common objectives. Much of this effort should be simplified by the formation of the Upper Hondo Watershed Coalition, whose members share many of the same objectives as BLM in the management of the Bonito watershed.
- Coordinating efforts to take advantage of the opportunities that exist for completing projects with outside help. Assistance could include cost-sharing, in-kind support, and volunteer efforts.

GOAL:

IMPROVE WATERSHED FUNCTION TO ENHANCE WATER QUALITY AND WATER AVAILABILITY

OBJECTIVES:

- Achieve the standards for rangeland health that have been adopted for BLM-administered lands in New Mexico.
- Meet the State of New Mexico water quality standards for the Rio Bonito on the Fort Stanton ACEC reach.
- Maintain or enhance vegetation ground cover to stabilize soils, promote infiltration, maximize effective use of precipitation, and enhance ground-water recharge.
- Reduce undesirable species such as salt cedar, Russian olive, and juniper.
- Reduce soil erosion from gullies, road surfaces and ditches, streambanks, and channels.
- Protect the Village of Capitan's municipal water well field within the ACEC.

WATERSHED MANAGEMENT

Action

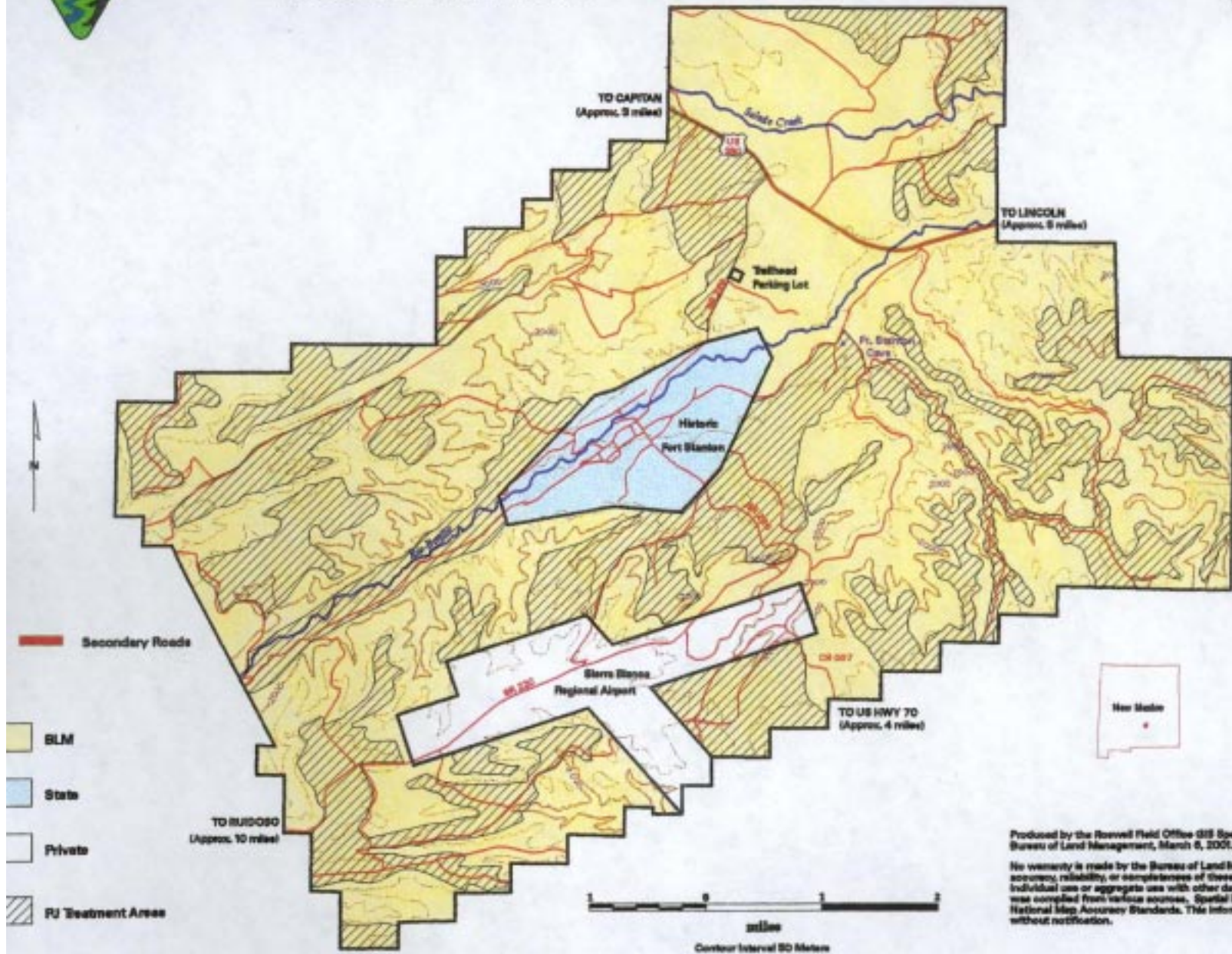
Work will begin in the following project areas as a priority for fuels reductions: Upper Rio Bonito, South Mesa, West Mesa Bench, West Spur, Dairy Pasture, and Cemetery Pasture. Other areas within the ACEC have been identified for watershed improvement. See the following maps for locations.

The projects will be designed to meet the Goals of the Watershed Management, Riparian & Wetland Habitat Management, Vegetation Management, Threatened & Endangered Species Management, Fuels & Fire Management, and Visual Resource Management sections of this plan. Goals these projects include reducing the amount of juniper invading the grasslands, altering the plant species mix to improve watershed health, eliminate or control salt cedar and other noxious, nonnative plant species, restore the watershed to a more historical condition, reduce the amount of fuels available to a wildfire in rural/urban interfaces, and enhance water quality and quantity in the Rio Bonito and Salado Creek. Methods will include mechanical (chainsaws and ground-based machinery) and prescribed fire (either broadcast burns or pile burning). Debris removal may also include chipping. Firewood and fence post material would be made available to the public. An environmental assessment will be prepared that will analyze the impacts of the project.

The Roswell Field Office and the Planning Team will review the progress and monitor the results to see if the Goals and Objectives of this plan are being met. Adjustments in planned activities will be based on monitoring results. Future projects will be based on BLM's strategic planning initiatives, funding availability, and the priorities of this ACEC plan.



Fort Stanton PJ Treatment Areas



Produced by the Roswell Field Office GIS Specialist, Bureau of Land Management, March 6, 2001.

No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual use or aggregate use with other data. Original data was compiled from various sources. Spatial information may not meet National Map Accuracy Standards. This information may be updated without notification.

RIPARIAN & WETLAND HABITAT MANAGEMENT

Riparian areas constitute only about three percent of the ACEC (about 660 acres). The riparian areas are found along the Rio Bonito and Salado Creek, several springs/seeps, and a small wetland area behind Salado Dam. Many wildlife species are dependent upon the unique and diverse habitat niches offered by the riparian areas. These habitats are valuable sources of forage. Riparian vegetation provides escape cover for fish, lowers summer water temperatures by shading, and reduces streambank erosion. Riparian awareness is the center of many recreational activities such as hiking, hunting, camping, fishing, horseback riding, bird watching, and photography.

Healthy riparian systems purify water as it moves through the vegetation by removing sediment, and retains water in streambanks and groundwater. Riparian vegetation will also dissipate the energy of flood waters, slowly releasing water over time.

BLM began riparian enhancement projects on the Rio Bonito in 1982. Other projects followed and in 1990, the area was designated as BLM's first National Riparian Showcase.

Protection and enhancement of riparian/wetland habitat may place constraints on recreational activities, livestock grazing management, and other potential uses of public lands within the ACEC.

Challenges

- Restoring native riparian species while removing invading pinon and juniper within the riparian/wetland areas.

Action

- See Watershed Management Action section on page 19. Priorities for Riparian Management projects will follow the priorities for Watershed Management activities.

GOAL:

PROTECT, MAINTAIN, AND ENHANCE RIPARIAN-WETLAND HABITATS ALONG THE RIO BONITO, SALADO CREEK, AND SPRINGS/SEEPS WHILE ALLOWING FOR OTHER BLM ADMINISTERED RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE CONSTRAINTS OF THE RIPARIAN-WETLAND MANAGEMENT GOAL

OBJECTIVES:

- Maintain the proper functioning condition of the Rio Bonito and Salado Creek.
- Establish native riparian vegetation such as willow, sedge, cattail and bulrush along the Rio Bonito and Salado Creek to stabilize banks and provide cover for the stream.
- Promote the establishment of desired tree species such as cottonwood, willow, black walnut and oak, in stands that would include various ages and sizes of these species.
- Encourage natural succession and seral stages of riparian area development through prescribed projects and natural beaver activity.
- Discourage activities that would result in a loss of riparian habitat and impair the integrity of the streams.

THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES MANAGEMENT

Kuenzler's hedgehog cactus is listed as an endangered species by the federal government and the State of New Mexico. It is found in the west half of the ACEC, typically on the upper one-third of south and east facing slopes. The Kuenzler's cactus can be found on 14,000 acres within the ACEC. The ACEC supports the largest known population of cactus in New Mexico. A 1985 Recovery Plan was prepared by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for the species and is under review for possible revision. Population studies include an intensive survey for the cactus, monitoring of recruitment of young individuals of the species, and potential livestock grazing impacts.

All BLM authorized activities must avoid modification or destruction of habitat crucial for the cactus. All proposed activities that may impact the cactus or its habitat must be evaluated by BLM for affects to the species, and may require consultation with USFWS under the Endangered Species Act.

Challenges

- Protecting the cactus habitat areas from surface disturbing recreation activities such as off highway vehicles, trails and camping.
- Collecting of the species will cause a depletion in the species.

Action

- See Watershed Management Action section on page 19. Projects must protect Kuenzler's hedgehog cactus. Ground disturbance must be avoided in areas with a cactus population. See the following map.

GOAL:

PROTECT, MAINTAIN, AND ENHANCE HABITAT FOR THE FEDERALLY ENDANGERED KUENZLER'S HEDGEHOG CACTUS TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE RECOVERY PLAN'S DOWNLISTING OF 5,000 INDIVIDUAL PLANTS MAINTAINED FOR FIVE CONSECUTIVE YEARS.

OBJECTIVES:

- Improve habitat conditions for the cactus by providing sufficient vegetative cover needed for thermal protection.
- Discourage and avoid resource or land use activities that would result in adverse habitat modification or destruction of occupied and potential habitat.
- Maintain or increase cactus population numbers at Ft. Stanton ACEC contributing to the Recovery Plan downlisting goal.

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

Grasslands and pinon-juniper are major vegetation communities within the ACEC (approximately 23,000 acres). BLM has conducted several projects within the last 10 years to enhance these upland vegetation resources. Recently, BLM has reintroduced fire to the ecosystem through prescribed fires. Pinon-juniper (P/J) dominates the landscape of the ACEC, primarily as the result of the suppression of wildfires. About 13,000 acres of P/J is growing in homogenous stands. Riparian areas and most grasslands within the ACEC have improved since 1990, but P/J prevails in many areas that could support more of a grassland aspect, such as the low hills, draws and drainages. P/J is most prevalent in the east portion of the ACEC on limestone hills.

The ACEC is the largest block of public land administered by BLM in the Rio Bonito watershed. Vegetation management of these lands is a priority as it ties to watershed health and a multitude of other resource values. The ACEC is highly visible to the public, subsequently, vegetation management is tempered by public interest. Concerns include P/J control, fuelwood sales, livestock management, noxious weed control, and fuels reduction to reduce the hazards of wildfire. Where, how and to what extent these activities would be conducted to restore and improve watershed conditions need to be balanced with other resource objectives, and the capability of the land to produce the desired outcome while considering the needs of the general public and adjacent landowners within the watershed.

Challenges

- Removing pinon/juniper so that the area resembles the historic landscape.
- Determining the amount P/J and oak brush to be removed, where should this occur, and the method to be used.
- Disposing of the P/J debris either through firewood permits, chipping the debris, by prescribed burning, or other method.
- Using the Goodloe Ranch as a model for vegetation management.

See Watershed Management, page 17

Action

- See Watershed Management Action section on page 19.

GOAL:

MANAGE THE VEGETATION RESOURCES WITHIN THE ACEC CONTRIBUTING TO THE OVERALL HEALTH AND FUNCTION OF THE WATERSHED WHILE CONSIDERING BALANCED RESOURCE SUSTAINABILITY.

OBJECTIVES:

- Develop a vegetative mosaic throughout the ACEC to provide for long-term watershed health, wildlife habitat diversity, livestock forage, and scenic quality.
- Reduce the composition of one-seed juniper in grassland areas where juniper has encroached onto the sites, and within the capability of the sites to recover.
- Maintain or improve the vigor of grassland areas throughout the ACEC.
- Maintain or improve vegetative cover in areas of fragile soils and steep slopes.
- Eliminate noxious weeds throughout the ACEC, and prevent the introduction of noxious weeds as a result of activities authorized by the BLM.
- Maintain or improve the ecological condition of range sites found throughout the ACEC while considering resource objectives for wildlife habitat.

FIRE AND FUELS MANAGEMENT

Prescribed burns have been used within the ACEC to reduce pinon-juniper, eradicate salt cedar and rehabilitate watersheds. There have also been naturally caused and man caused wild fires throughout the history of the Fort Stanton ACEC. Even so, the amount of fuels, the arrangement of those fuels, and those fuels present a wildfire risk to the resources within the ACEC and the adjacent lands.

Full wildfire suppression response level will be applied to the ACEC to protect Kuenzler cactus habitat and the entrance to Fort Stanton Cave. Mechanized equipment will not be used to construct fire line within specific areas of the ACEC. Where prescribed burns do the most good within the Fort Stanton ecosystem, lower intensity burns will be used to accomplish the prescribed management for the area. Other fuels treatments would be considered in conjunction with prescribed fire treatments and other vegetation management treatments.

Challenges

- Determining the appropriate treatment method for specific areas within the ACEC.
- Grazing should be deferred during the growing season and after prescribed burns.
- Accounting for the visual impacts in all fire/fuels management planning.
- Protecting the historical and cultural resources within the ACEC.

See Watershed Management and Vegetation Management, pages 17 and 26

Action

- See Watershed Management Action section on page 19.

GOAL:

USE FIRE AND FUELS MANAGEMENT AS TOOLS TO IMPROVE THE VEGETATIVE COMMUNITY AND REDUCE THE HAZARDOUS FUELS ACCUMULATION WITHIN THE ACEC

OBJECTIVES:

- Use fire to improve wildlife habitat, riparian areas, and other resources.
- Use lower intensity prescribed fires to manage the landscape.
- Protect the Kuenzler cactus by providing full fire suppression within the habitat areas.
- Develop pre-suppression plans with adjacent agencies and landowners to reduce both the likelihood wildfire occurring in the area and decrease the intensity of wildfires that would occur in the area.
- Use hazardous fuels reduction techniques to modify vegetation and fuel loadings within the ACEC.
- Develop a cooperative agreement with neighboring landowners to reduce hazardous levels of fuels and to reduce the risks of damage from wildfire.

LIVESTOCK GRAZING MANAGEMENT

Under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) New Mexico State University (NMSU) managed the grazing on the Fort Stanton ACEC. The MOU covered a grazing experiment station to conduct studies on grazing management for a 20-year period. The MOU expired and was not renewed by BLM.

Established by the 1997 Roswell Resource Management Plan (RMP), the goal of managing the ACEC is to protect the biological, archeological and scenic qualities of the Fort Stanton ACEC, while providing for quality recreation opportunity. The RMP recognizes the benefits and impacts of livestock grazing. Livestock grazing will be limited or excluded in riparian pastures, highly erodible areas, cave entrances, campground, day-use areas and sensitive archeological sites. Livestock grazing will be excluded from the Feather Cave Archeological Complex and no grazing preference will be established. Historic grazing practices have contributed to the loss of vegetation, soil and riparian habitat. Grazing management practices, tools and techniques used since 1988 have contributed to the recovery of riparian habitat within the area.

The ACEC is not being grazed at this time. There was a proposal in Congress to allow the BLM to lease out grazing within the ACEC. Under this proposal the BLM would lease the grazing on a yearly basis and funds generated from grazing would be used to maintain the facilities within the ACEC. Approximately 72 Animal Unit Months will be removed from the ACEC due to the Feather Cave Complex. Monitoring data indicates the ACEC could support up to 300 head of cattle from August of one year to the following April of the next year. This would leave ample forage for the wildlife numbers within the ACEC.

Challenges

- Protecting the historical and cultural resources from the impacts of livestock grazing
- Finding a level of and locations for livestock grazing that would not impact or would have minimal impact on recreation uses of the ACEC.
- Developing a grazing management plan that meets the vegetation management goals of the ACEC while accounting for the other resource uses within the ACEC.
- Developing ideas and creative approaches to grazing within the ACEC such as using ACEC as a “grass banking area” should be when forage is scarce in other areas; and types of livestock other than cattle.

Action

- BLM will offer livestock grazing within the ACEC when grazing would contribute to meeting the Vegetation Management Goals. BLM will control the number of animals and timing of grazing within the ACEC.

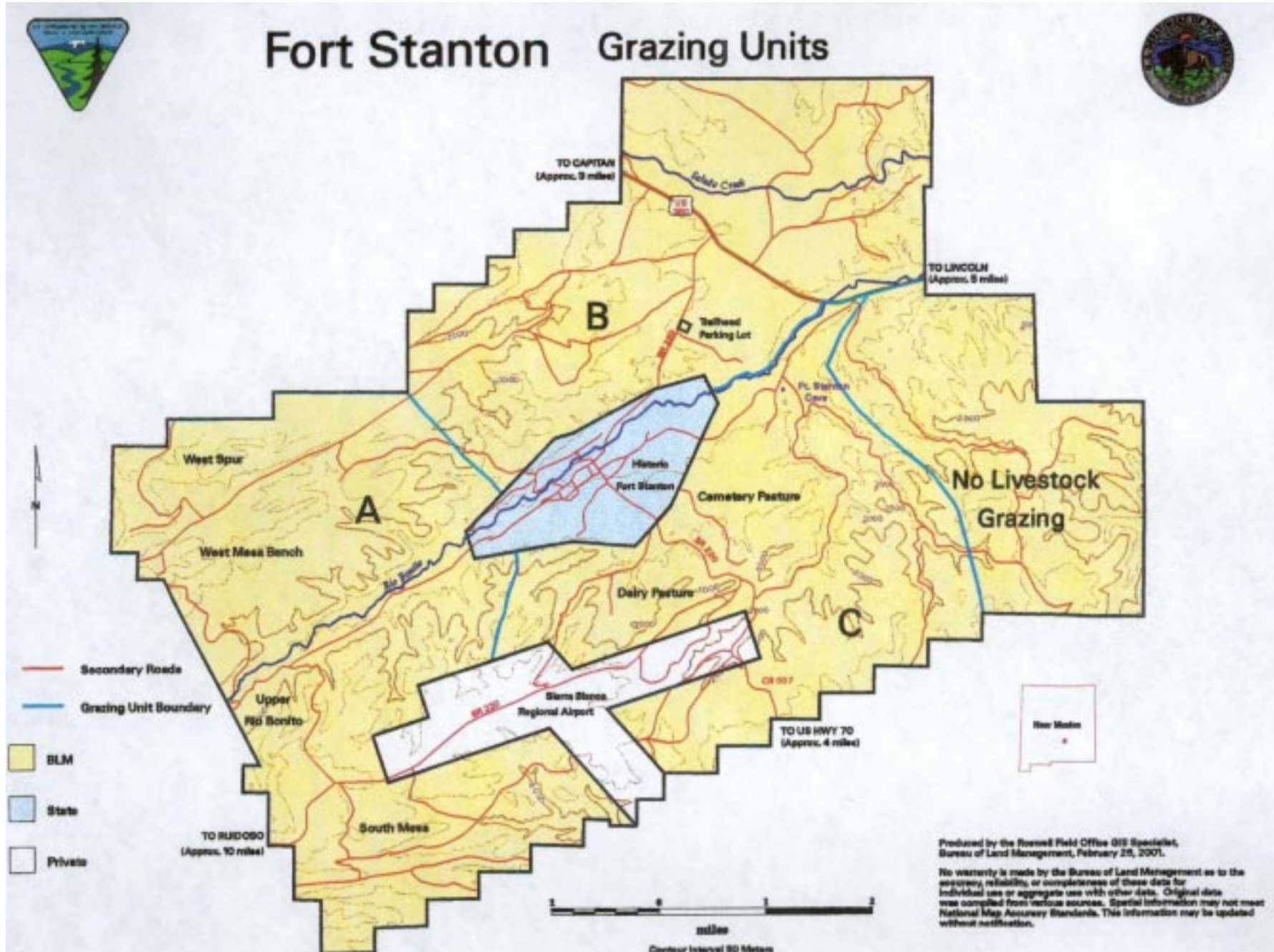
GOAL:

USE GRAZING AS A TOOL FOR VEGETATIVE MANAGEMENT WITHIN THE ACEC

OBJECTIVES:

- Balance grazing with the cultural, historical, recreation and wildlife use of the ACEC.
- Pursue legislative action to allow BLM to collect grazing fees within the ACEC and return the fees for improvements in the ACEC.
- Use creative approaches to allow grazing within the ACEC to meet vegetation management goals.

Fort Stanton Grazing Units



WILDLIFE & FISHERIES HABITAT MANAGEMENT

Consumptive and non-consumptive uses within the Fort Stanton ACEC have increased over the past decade and pressure for these uses are likely to continue. Although the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish is responsible for management of wildlife species, BLM's habitat management activities play a role in species population management. Some of the latest issues include declining mule deer populations; impacts of elk herds; increasing interest in establishing quality fishing waters in the Rio Bonito; upland game bird and waterfowl hunting; and predator control.

A habitat management plan is currently in effect for the Fort Stanton ACEC. This plan offers alternatives, activities and actions that will take place within the ACEC. Through the habitat management plan the riparian habitat has greatly improved within the ACEC. Certain riparian pastures have been set aside and fenced to preclude livestock. Salt cedar is being eradicated along the Rio Bonito and the Salado Creek. Cottonwood trees and willows have been established where possible along the Rio Bonito and Salado Creek to improve the riparian habitat. Water developments such as earthen tanks and supplemental pipelines and troughs are provided for wildlife within the area by the BLM.

Challenges

- Continue improving wildlife habitat management to maintain wildlife populations and reduce certain types of habitat.
- Determining what species of native wildlife (such as mule deer and turkey) should be transplanted into the ACEC in accordance to Chapter 1 of this plan and in cooperation with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF).

Action

- Continue control of juniper and other invasive species along the Rio Bonito and other areas within the ACEC. (See Watershed Management, page 19.)
- Close unnecessary roads within the ACEC to protect wildlife habitat, minimize wildlife harassment, and reduce conflicts with other recreational uses. (See Recreation Trails, page 33.)
- Continue transplanting mule deer in cooperation with the NMDGF, and the Safari Club International.
- Coordinate with NMDGF and establish a carrying capacity for elk between 100 and 150 animals within the ACEC.
- Continue the use of prescribed fire to enhance browse species for wildlife purposes where conflicts with other resource uses may not occur. (See Watershed Management, page 19.)

GOAL:

MAINTAIN AND IMPROVE THE BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY OF THE FORT STANTON ACEC. PROTECT, MAINTAIN, AND ENHANCE WILDLIFE HABITAT FOR THE VARIETY OF WILDLIFE SPECIES THAT USE THE ACEC WHILE ALLOWING FOR OTHER RESOURCE AND LAND USES TO OCCUR, WITHIN THE CONSTRAINTS OF THE WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES HABITAT MANAGEMENT GOAL. IMPROVE BIG GAME HABITAT TO SUPPORT POPULATIONS TOWARD THE CARRYING CAPACITY OF THE HABITAT WHILE CONSIDERING THE IMPACTS OF POTENTIALLY INCREASED POPULATIONS TO ADJACENT LANDOWNERS.

OBJECTIVES:

- Improve wildlife habitat in each of the plant community types to provide for the maintenance of existing populations or increases in populations of special emphasis wildlife species.
- Reduce habitat disturbance at Fort Stanton to minimize wildlife habitat degradation and harassment.
- Increase the quality of recreational experiences related to wildlife and fisheries resources.
- Ensure that wildlife populations are commensurate with habitat capability and concerns of adjacent landowners.

VISUAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Various activities and actions have occurred within the ACEC which have caused a myriad of visual intrusions within the area. Through good Visual Resource Management (VRM) techniques many of the intrusions within the ACEC can be avoided in the future.

Through VRM techniques, actions and activities within the ACEC should conform with the continuity of the visual aspects of the area.

Challenges

- Assuring that recreation facilities and other facilities blend into the landscape.
- Designing proposed horse, foot trails and roads to conform with the form, color and texture of the landscape.
- Providing design for BLM roads within the ACEC.

See Watershed Management and Vegetation Management, pages 17 and 26.

Action

- See Watershed Management Action section on page 19.

GOAL:

MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE THE CURRENT VIEWSHEDS OF THE ACEC.

OBJECTIVES:

- Provide architectural/design guidelines for all new structures within the ACEC which will include requiring sites to be below ridgelines and colors that blend with the natural landscape.
- Blend trails and roads into the landscape.
- Maintain trails within the area.
- Control or modify pinon/juniper (P/J) stands within the ACEC

OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE MANAGEMENT

Under the Roswell RMP approximately 24,000 acres was designated as limited to designated roads and trails for off-highway vehicle (OHV) use, to protect soils, cultural resources, and vegetation, especially threatened or endangered species and their habitat. The use of OHV's will be limited to designated roads and trails, with exceptions to the limited designation listed in Chapter 1 of this document.

The ACEC has not been signed adequately to implement the RMP OHV decisions for the ACEC. Most users have used the area in a prudent manner. Due to increased pressures from the public, users have driven over terrain and caused new two track roads. These newly formed tracks have been followed by other recreationists and have caused the two track trails to develop into established roads. A route designation plan/environmental assessment (plan/EA) will be written to designate routes of travel within Fort Stanton. From this Plan/EA routes of travel will be designated open or closed. Certain routes of travel such as mountain bike/horse/hiking trails would be closed to motor vehicles.

Challenges

- Preventing new roads being formed by users
- Closing roads to areas where appropriate, such as habitat or the endangered Kuenzler hedgehog cactus.
- Closing roads which have been traditionally used to access areas within the ACEC.
- Determining which roads should be maintained and to what standard.

Action

- See Recreation Trails on page 33

GOAL:

MANAGE OFF HIGHWAY VEHICLES TO PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT WITHIN THE FORT STANTON ACEC

OBJECTIVES:

- Protect special use trails from unauthorized use.
- Close unwanted roads through the transportation plan process.
- Designate roads, parking areas and trail heads.

RECREATION TRAILS

Recreation trail developments at Fort Stanton include the following:

- The Rio Bonito National Petroglyph Trail
- Tlaloc Mountain Bike Trail
- Fort Stanton Riding/Hiking Trails
 - Capitan Trail
 - Lincoln Trail

The majority of the 40 miles of existing roads/trails have not been adequately developed for recreation use. The Fort Stanton Riding/Hiking Trails consist of old two track and bladed roads, and these trails are not conducive to hikers who want a trail experience. In addition to the existing trails up to 20 miles of new (hiking, equestrian or OHV) trails could be developed under the RMP. The proposed new trails will exclude Off Highway Vehicles from certain areas. The Rio Bonito National Petroglyph trail has been developed for about 1.5 miles by volunteer help. The trail needs modifications and yearly maintenance. The Tlaloc trail is mostly old two track and bladed roads. Some modifications will be needed to attract mountain bikers to continue to use this trail.

Challenges

- Linking trail designation and maintenance with the route designation plan to determine which roads would be converted to trails, and the maintenance or improvements to trails within the ACEC.
- Developing a trail plan for the ACEC which would include location and length of new trails within the ACEC; coordinating trail development with the Lincoln National Forest; determining use of trails by foot traffic, horse or mountain bikes; marking all trails within the ACEC; and possibly hardening existing crossings of the Rio Bonito and Salado

Creek.

Action

- BLM will begin a route designation planning process that will guide trail development and possible road closures within the ACEC. The goal of the plan will be to eliminate as much of the current road/trail dual designation as possible. This will be a public process and include environmental analysis. See attached maps of Proposed Road Closures and Proposed Trails.

GOAL:

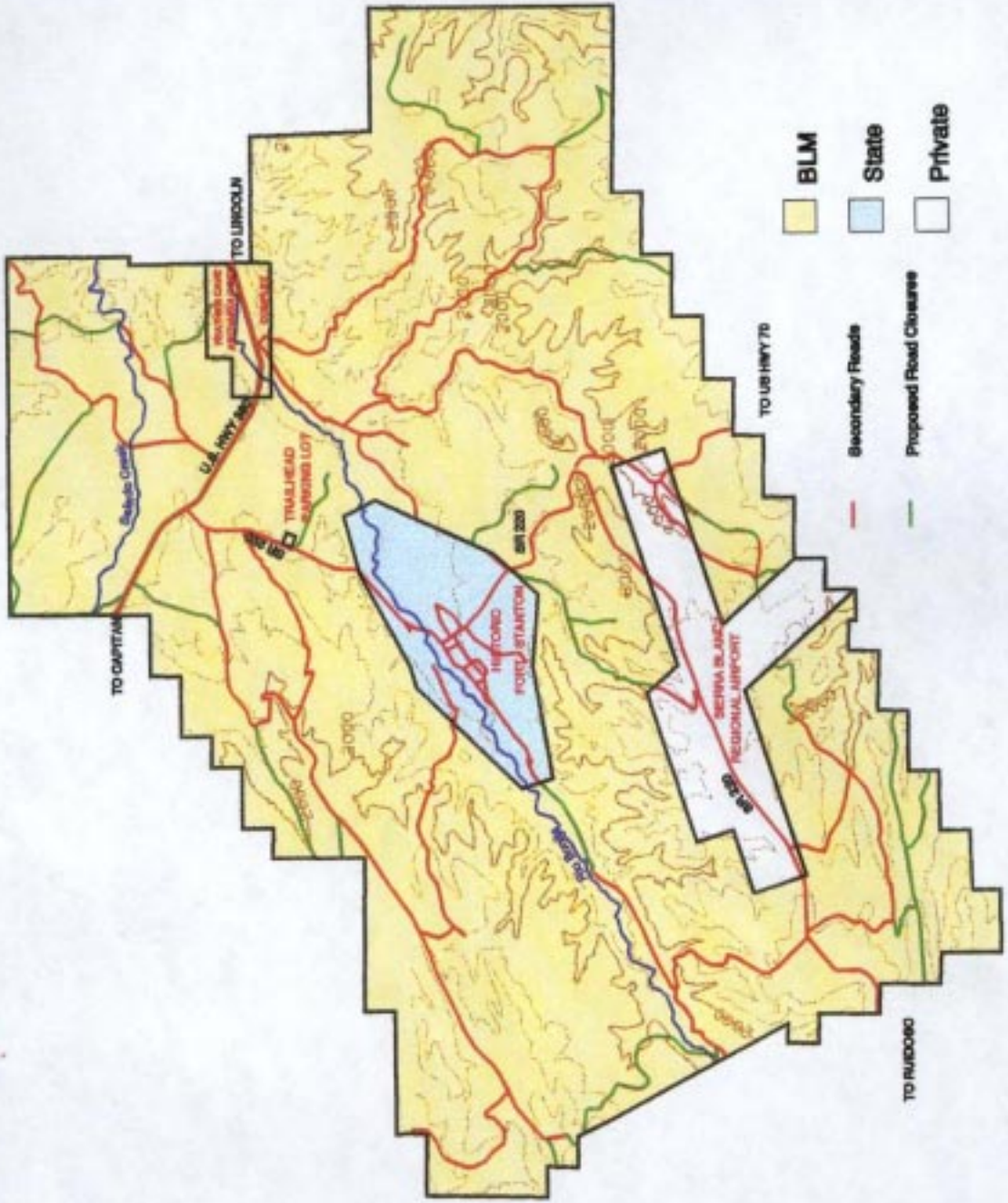
DEVELOP ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE SPECIAL USE TRAILS WITHIN THE ACEC, MONITOR POTENTIAL CONFLICTS BETWEEN RECREATION USERS OF THESE TRAILS AND MITIGATE THOSE CONFLICTS.

OBJECTIVES:

- Design, develop and designate trails that are environmentally friendly and blend into the landscape.
- Coordinate trail links with the Lincoln National Forest, Smokey Bear Ranger District.
- Sign trails and provide information and brochures at trail heads.

Fort Stanton

Existing Roads and Proposed Road Closures

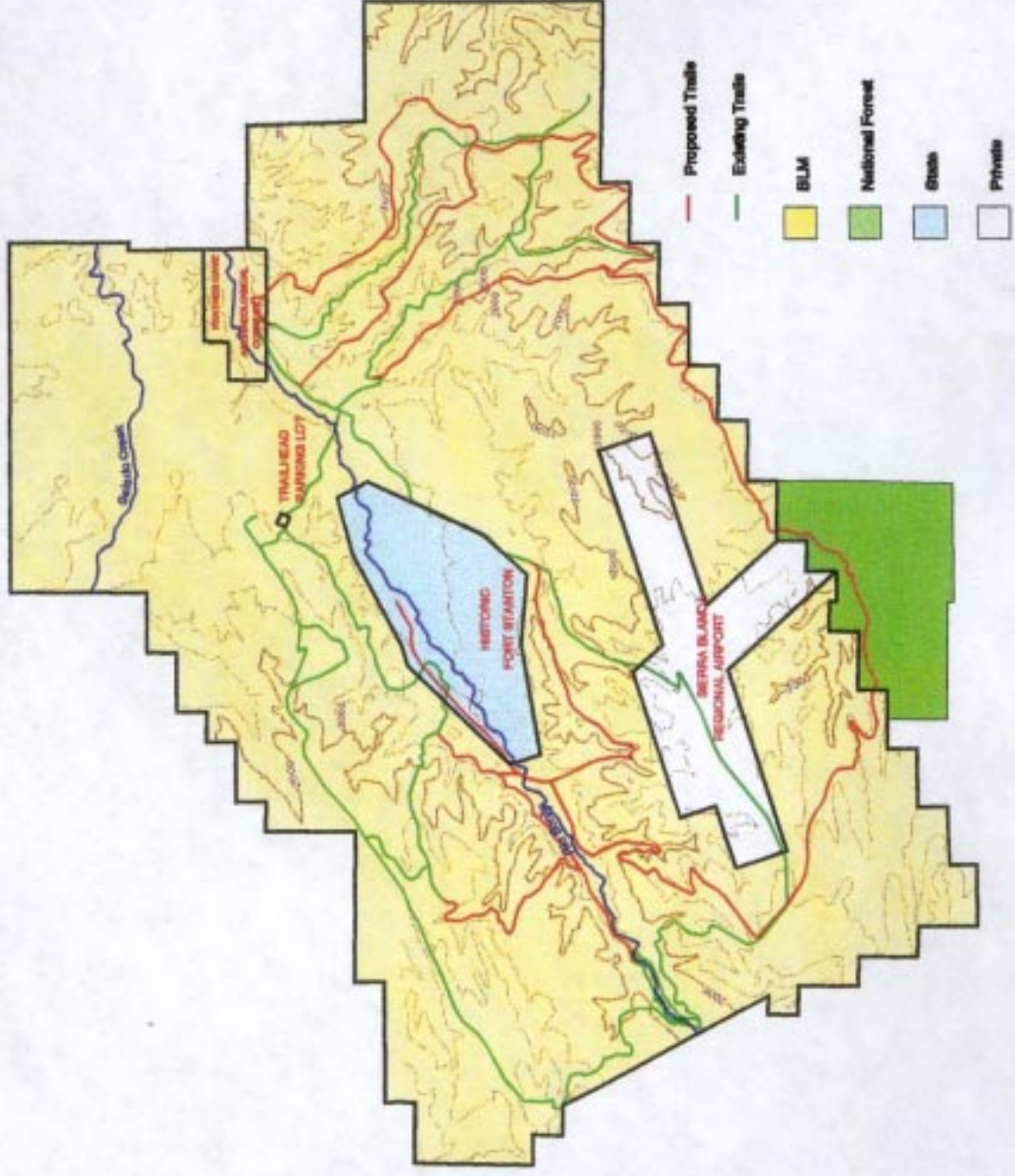


Produced by the Forest Field Office GIS Specialist,
Bureau of Land Management, March 7, 2007.

No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the
accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for
individual use or aggregate use with other data. Original data
was compiled from various sources. Spatial information may not meet
National Map Accuracy Standards. This information may be updated
without notification.

Fort Stanton

Proposed & Existing Trails



Produced by the Bureau of Land Management, March 7, 2001.
No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual use or aggregate use with other data. Original data was compiled from various sources. Spatial information may not meet National Map Accuracy Standards. This information may be updated without notification.

CAMPING

The RMP has designated how dispersed camping will take place on Fort Stanton. The following are the rules for camping within the ACEC:

- Vehicle camping will not be allowed more than 100 feet off a BLM-designated road or trail to a campsite.
- Camping will not be allowed within 100 feet of the Rio Bonito and Salado Creek.
- Back country camping is allowed throughout Fort Stanton, except for within 100 feet of the Rio Bonito and Salado Creek, and no closer than 300 yards of any seeps or springs, man-made water hole, water well or watering tank used for wildlife or domestic livestock.
- Camping is limited to no closer than one-quarter mile from wayside, overlooks, interpretive trails or state highways, except at developed campgrounds or designated campsites.
- Specific rules on conduct were published in title 36 and 43 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). These rules were published in full in the Federal Register Volume 60 No. 235 on December 7, 1995 and are found in 43 CFR 8365 as visitor restrictions.

Dispersed camping issues are fairly well laid out in the RMP but could be modified in the ACEC plan for specific areas or circumstances. The RMP mentions the development of a full or partial facility campground within the ACEC. The ACEC plan will determine the development of a campground, including location, size and types of facilities to be included in the campground.

Challenges

- Protecting cultural, riparian, and other resources while allowing dispersed camping within the ACEC.
- Monitoring camping impacts to determine if any areas possibly should have camping prohibited in the future.
- Determining if additional facilities would be developed for the Fort Stanton Cave campground.

Action

- BLM will continue to monitor the impacts of camping on the resources within the ACEC.
- BLM will close the Fort Stanton Cave Road to camping and identify dispersed camping sites within the ACEC. See the following map.

GOAL:

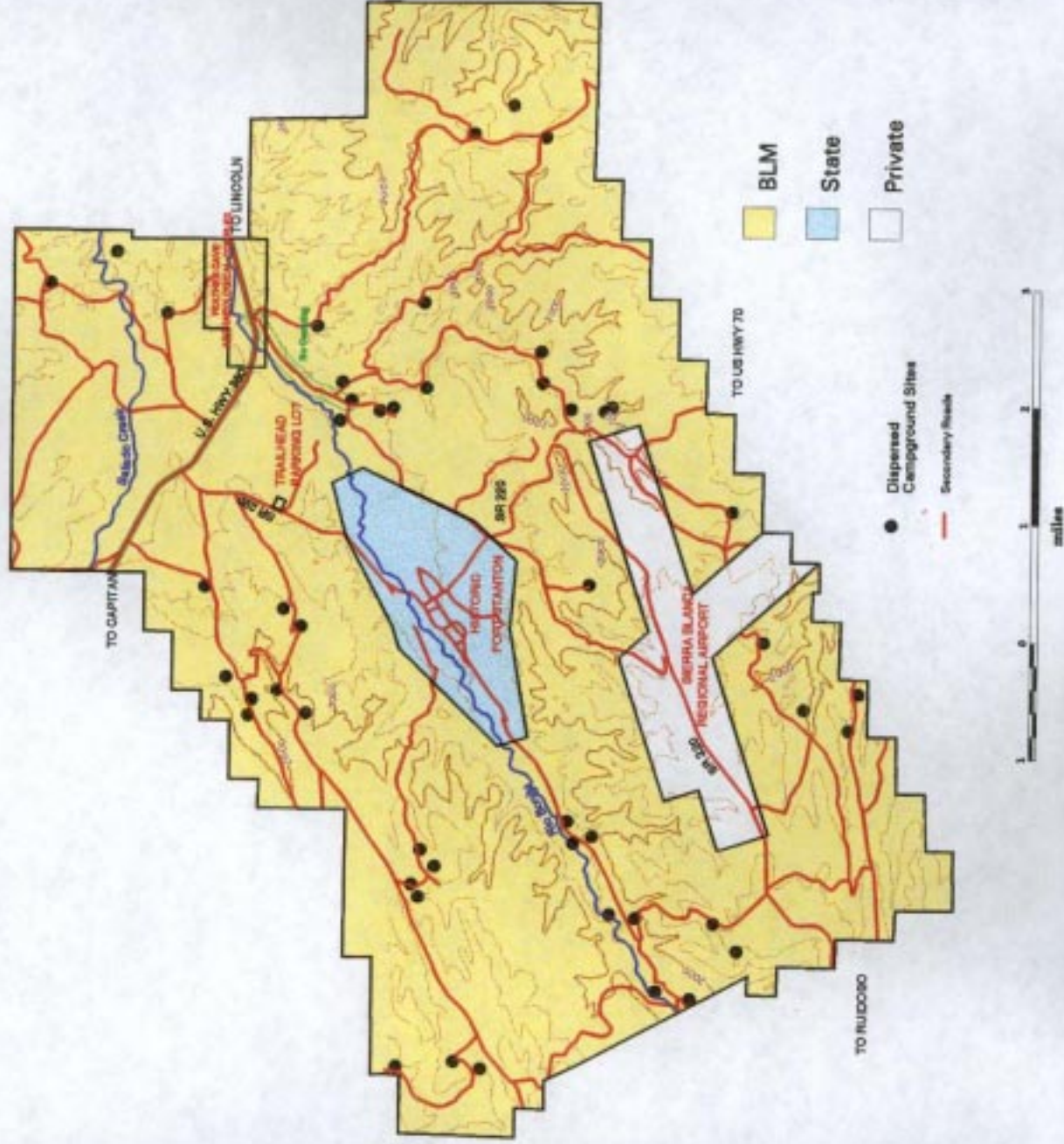
PROVIDE CAMPING WITHIN THE FORT STANTON ACEC.

OBJECTIVES:

- Provide dispersed camping where appropriate.
- Provide interpretive signs and displays for the camping public.
- Provide information through internet or printed media on camping on public lands within the ACEC.

Fort Stanton

Dispersed Campground Sites



Produced by the Ft. Stanton Field Office OLS Specialist,
Bureau of Land Management, March 5, 2001.

No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual use or aggregate use with other data. Original data were obtained from various sources. Special information may not meet National Map Accuracy Standards. This information may be updated without notification.

CAVE RESOURCES

Fort Stanton Cave is the largest known cave within the Fort Stanton ACEC, and is the third longest cave in New Mexico. The known length of the passages of the cave extend approximately 8 miles. The surface definition of the cave covers approximately 985 acres. The area encompassing the cave is designated as a National Natural Landmark. Other smaller caves and blow holes exist within the area giving rise to other cave resources within the Fort Stanton area. Fort Stanton Cave is closed annually to recreation use from November 1st to the following April 15th to protect hibernating bat populations. Feather Cave is closed to all visitor use, except for administrative or research purposes, to protect the significant bat hibernaculum and to protect visitors from extreme safety hazards associated with breakdown, vertical entrances and histoplasmosis. The caves are protected by the Cave Resource Protection Act of 1989 enacted by the U.S. Congress and other BLM policies and guidelines.

Any action that is near an opening of a cave or its watershed will indirectly or directly affect the ecosystem of the cave.

Challenges

- Protecting caves resources from ground disturbance activities that lead to soil erosion, increased pollution, collapsed passages, and degraded water quality.

Action

- BLM will continue to monitor cave conditions with the aim of meeting the Goals and Objectives of this ACEC Plan. See No Surface Disturbance map, page 25.

GOAL:

PROTECT THE NATURAL AND BIOTIC VALUES OF CAVES WITHIN THE ACEC.

OBJECTIVES:

- Protect the cave from impacts caused by
 - Grazing
 - Road Construction
 - Changes to streams that feed caves such as Fort Stanton Cave
 - Construction of new facilities along the Rio Bonito
 - Pollution such as sewage, phosphates or chemicals

LAW ENFORCEMENT

BLM has the primary responsibility to provide law enforcement on public lands. The level of vandalism is increasing within the ACEC as visitation increases. The more people use an area the more likely interaction and problems will occur.

Current staffing and funding levels allow for one BLM Law Enforcement Ranger to manage approximately 2 million acres of public lands within the field office area. With the increase in visitation to Fort Stanton and surrounding areas additional law enforcement may be needed.

Challenges

- Establishing the frequency of patrols provided by BLM law enforcement to prevent damage to resources.
- Maximizing BLM law enforcement activity within the ACEC while balancing protection to other public lands managed by the Roswell Field Office. This may include coordinating with the Lincoln County Sheriff's Office and the Lincoln National Forest.

Action

- Continue patrol and education activities within the ACEC with the aim of meeting the Goals and Objectives of this ACEC Plan.

GOAL:

PROTECT THE ACEC

OBJECTIVES:

- Use available BLM law enforcement personnel to monitor the area.
- Use volunteer groups and peer pressure to maintain a presence.
- Establish a BLM sub-office within the area.

HUNTING/FISHING

The State of New Mexico's Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF) is responsible for the management of game species by establishing hunting and fishing regulations in their annual proclamations. BLM is responsible for the management of wildlife habitat and associated activities within the ACEC.

As stated in the Roswell RMP, BLM will recommend to the New Mexico State Game Commission the ACEC be designated as a subunit area open only to limited hunting under the Deer Entry Permit System. Additionally vehicles will not be allowed off designated roads or trails to retrieve downed game. Big game or upland game transplants and reintroductions will be conducted on public lands when cooperatively prescribed by the BLM and NMDGF. Transplants and reintroductions include but are not limited to: pronghorn, mule deer, wild turkey, and other big game or upland game species recommended by the NMDGF. Naturalized fish and sport fish introductions or transplants will be conducted in suitable waters on public land in coordination with the NMDGF. Proposed introductions could include rainbow, brown and brook trout in the Rio Bonito. The criteria for introductions of transplants can be found in Chapter 1.

Challenges

- Establishing times and methods where by special recreation events do not conflict with hunting within the ACEC.
- Coordinating with NMDGF, the game commission, and interest groups to limit the number of hunters within the ACEC through a subunit designation.
- Coordinating with NMDGF to modify the current elk hunt stratifications within the ACEC.
- Determining what species of native wildlife (such as mule deer and turkey) should be transplanted into the ACEC in accordance to Chapter 1 of this plan and in cooperation with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish.
- Accommodating disabled hunters.
- Controlling predators as they affect the recovery of desired wildlife species within the ACEC.

See Wildlife & Fisheries Habitat Management, page 30

Action

- Recommend and coordinate with NMDGF to designate the ACEC as a subunit of a game management unit for public hunting purposes.
- Coordinate with NMDGF to adjust elk harvest so that the residual herd within the ACEC is between 100 and 175 animals. See Wildlife & Fisheries Habitat Management, page 30.

GOAL:

MANAGE WILDLIFE HABITAT AND ASSOCIATED WILDLIFE POPULATIONS IN COOPERATION WITH NMDGF FOR RECREATIONAL SPORT HUNTING AND FISHING WITHIN THE ACEC.

OBJECTIVE:

- Improve wildlife habitat within the entire ACEC to support game species that would allow hunting and fishing opportunities to continue.
- Continue cooperative efforts with NMDGF to maintain and/or increase game species population.
- Foster changes in the NMDGF proclamations to flexibility in population management for hunting and fishing within the ACEC. This could include special hunts for disabled citizens and the use of primitive weapons.

MINERAL RESOURCES

In the RMP, the Fort Stanton ACEC is withdrawn from mineral entry and closed to mineral leasing. The Fort Stanton ACEC is open to the disposal of mineral materials. All federal mineral estate in the ACEC, except for Feather Cave Archeological Complex, will be open to discretionary disposal of mineral materials.

Challenges

- Determining areas in the ACEC that would be precluded from disposal of mineral materials because of special resource values.

Action

- BLM will carry out the Objectives of this section.

GOAL:

DETERMINE IF THERE ARE AREAS WITHIN THE ACEC WHICH ARE SUITABLE FOR MINERAL MATERIALS EXTRACTION.

OBJECTIVES:

- Determine how the use of mineral materials from the ACEC would benefit management of the ACEC and the surrounding communities.
- Determine which areas are suitable for extraction.
- Develop the rationale for establishing short-term use of mineral material sites.
- Establish the values of the mineral materials within the ACEC and the surrounding communities.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

The diversity of historical/archeological resources within the Fort Stanton ACEC offer evidence of continuum of human occupation spanning many thousands of years. These resources are of primary importance in interpreting the past. The prehistoric cultural aspects of the area consist of known prehistoric villages, rock art, cultural cave and rock shelters and lithic scatters. The historical aspects of the area concern themselves mostly with the Fort Stanton era from 1855 to approximately 1940. These outlying historical features are in evidence throughout Fort Stanton.

The existing condition and significance of all known historical/archeological resource sites have not been quantified. Some archeological sites have been documented and excavated. Some sites have been mitigated to allow for facilities to be placed on the ground. One modification was the realignment and construction of U.S. Highway 380 at the Rio Bonito Bridge. Some sites within the ACEC have been vandalized and show some degree of disturbance.

The impact on historical/archeological resources is increasing with the increase of recreational use within the ACEC. The increase stems from illegal digging, casual collecting, induced erosion, facilities and road construction/maintenance.

Law enforcement efforts aimed at stopping vandalism of historical/archeological sites have been limited. BLM has a law enforcement ranger for the Field Office area who will patrol the area on a regular basis.

Challenges

- Controlling impacts of recreation use (camping, day use, parking, roads, facilities) on historical/archeological resources.
- Controlling impacts of other uses on historical/archeological resources.
- Preventing vandalism to cultural sites within the ACEC.
- Providing for off-site interpretation of cultural resources.

Action

- See Feather Cave Archeological Complex on page 43.
- Unauthorized use of metal detectors would be excluded from the ACEC in order to protect historical and cultural resources.

GOAL:

PROTECT CULTURAL RESOURCES FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL.

OBJECTIVES:

- Provide mechanisms to locate and protect all sites.
- Interpret cultural resources in off-site locations.
- Control impacts to sites by channeling visitor use away from the known sites.

FEATHER CAVE ARCHEOLOGICAL COMPLEX

Under the Roswell RMP approximately 330 acres around Lower Stanton Ruin and Feather Cave will be managed to preserve, protect and interpret unique archeological values, artifacts and architectural features. The area will be called Feather Cave Archeological Complex.

Recreation development will be considered within the area. The development would include trails to Lower Stanton Ruin and Indian Shelter Cave, interpretive signs, a shelter, restrooms and parking. Off-site and on-site interpretation will be considered. Included in the proposal would be site stabilization for interpretive enhancement, exhibits, and brochures. The area will be closed to OHV use, except for U.S. Highway 380 and the Fort Stanton Cave Road.

Challenges

- Providing off-site interpretation of Feather Cave and the appropriate method for both the cave and the Lower Fort Stanton Ruin. This would include displaying artifacts from the area in an appropriate site near the ACEC.
- Balancing visitor use against possible resource degradation.
- Managing fuel accumulations and fire suppressions within the complex.
- Monitoring the complex for impacts to the resource.

Action

- BLM is in the process of developing interpretive exhibits to be displayed at the Lincoln State Monument facilities in Lincoln, NM. BLM will consider interpreting the cultural artifacts in a museum at historic Fort Stanton should the opportunity arise. See No Surface Disturbance map, page 25.

GOAL:

PROTECTION OF CULTURAL RESOURCES WITHIN THE FEATHER CAVE COMPLEX.

OBJECTIVES:

- Interpretation would take place off-site.
- Protect the area from the impacts of increased visitation.
- Manage prescribed fire projects and wildfire suppression in such a manner that protects cultural resources.
- Use BLM law enforcement and cooperative groups to monitor the area.

VISITOR USE FEES

The Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993, Public Law 103-66, amended the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Act and further expanded the Bureau of Land Management's authority to collect recreation use fees and deposit these funds into special accounts, established for each agency in the Treasury of the United States. Funds deposited in this account are authorized to be available for appropriations in the following year. At this time 100% of the fees derived from the recreation site are to be returned to the Field Office that collects the fees. The fees are to be used for on the ground projects in the areas where the funds were derived. Currently Valley of Fires Recreation Area and Mesclero Sands North Dune Off Highway Vehicle Area charge visitor use fees.

User fees would be proposed to be charged at all recreation sites within the Fort Stanton ACEC.

Challenges

- Determining which recreational use areas would be fee areas, which activities would be fee activities, and the location of fee collection sites.
- Determining the best method for collecting fees.

Action

- With the completion of the route designation plan (see Recreation Trails, page 33) and the implementation of that plan, BLM will be better able to assess the potential of user fees in the ACEC.
- BLM will monitor the recreation uses of the ACEC as well as the locations of use within the ACEC with the aim of meeting the Goals and Objectives of this ACEC Plan.

GOAL:

REVIEW THE POSSIBILITY OF VISITOR USE FEES.

OBJECTIVES:

- Look for alternatives to charging fees.
- Provide a method of fee waivers for volunteers.
- Formulate a fee policy.

SPECIAL RECREATION USES

The Fort Stanton ACEC has been the site of several recreation events in the past. This type of recreational use of the ACEC is compatible with the RMP but holding large events on public lands requires the organizers to obtain a special recreation use permit. The events include mountain bike races, equestrian endurance events, mountain man rendezvous, black powder firearms and archery events. Among the requirements of the permit are insurance, trash and waste disposal, approximate number of participants, and a description of the activities to take place during the event. BLM may add stipulations to the permit to prevent damage to the site used and adjacent resources. The impacts of these events have been analyzed in current environmental assessments and if new events are presented, BLM would conduct environmental analysis before issuing a special recreation use permit.

Challenge

- Balancing special recreation use permits and their associated events with protection of resources within the ACEC.

Action

- BLM will continue to issue special use permits for events within the ACEC and will monitor the impacts of those events on the resources within the ACEC.
- BLM will identify sites within the ACEC that could serve as “base camps” for major events. BLM will attempt to rotate use of these sites so that each site is used only once in a calendar year. This would distribute impacts throughout the ACEC and lessen impacts to individual sites. See Camping, page 36.

GOAL:

ALLOW THE SPECIAL RECREATION USE PERMITS FOR EVENTS THAT ARE COMPATIBLE WITH THE CONTINUED AND FUTURE USES OF THE ACEC.

OBJECTIVE:

- Provide locations where special events would minimally impact resources within the ACEC.

INTERPRETATION

Some rudimentary interpretation signing has been produced for Fort Stanton. Fort Stanton Special Management Area portal signs have been in place since 1992. Landmark signs stating physical locations and describing areas have also been placed within the ACEC boundary in preceding years. Bulletin boards have been placed at trail heads and other locations such as Fort Stanton Cave. Under the RMP and in conjunction with the Boots and Saddles initiative of 1992, two overlooks are considered for development on the north and south sides of the historic fort. The overlooks will interpret the history of the area.

A consolidated interpretive plan is needed for the ACEC. The plan will focus on specific themes throughout the area.

Challenges

- Developing an interpretive/signing plan for the area.
- Coordinating with all resource users to consolidate signing and interpretation as well as promote the type of signing needed within the ACEC.
- Coordinating interpretation with the route designation plan and the trails plan.

Action

- See Feather Cave Archeological Complex Action section on page 43.

GOAL:

INTERPRET THE NATURAL AND HISTORIC ASPECTS OF THE ACEC.

OBJECTIVES:

- Provide interpretation for all segments of public.
- Provide information through an internet web site.
- Place interpretive areas where they are most useful to the visiting public.
- Provide accessibility to all interpretive sites.

LAND ACQUISITION

Approximately 1,265 acres of private land and 1,760 acres of State of New Mexico lands is considered suitable for acquisition. This acreage includes the Rio Bonito Waterfall, lands along the Rio Bonito adjacent to Fort Stanton ACEC, and the NMSU facilities at Fort Stanton.

Because of its historic and riparian values the Fort Stanton Waterfall and the ruin of historic Sutlers Brewery are important to acquire for the historic scene of Fort Stanton. Lands adjacent to the ACEC along the Rio Bonito form a tie between the ACEC and the Rio Bonito acquired lands. The NMSU facilities adjacent to state owned Fort Stanton could provide an administrative site for actions and activities within the ACEC.

A list of private and state lands can be found in Appendix 1.

Challenges

- Acquiring the funding and personnel necessary for a land acquisition/disposal program.
- Providing BLM regulations and policy concerning land acquisition to the interested public.

Action

- BLM will pursue opportunities for these exchanges if private landowners and the State of New Mexico are willing; and as BLM budget and staffing allow.

GOAL:

ACQUIRE LANDS THAT ENHANCE THE MANAGEMENT OF THE ACEC.

OBJECTIVES:

- Acquire lands on the west side of the ACEC along the Rio Bonito and adjacent historic Sutlers Brewery.
- Acquire adjacent State of New Mexico lands.
- Acquire the lands and structures currently managed by NMSU within the ACEC.

COOPERATIVE MANAGEMENT OF HISTORIC FORT STANTON

Historic Fort Stanton could be managed cooperatively with other groups, state and federal agencies. The BLM could assist in the management through its knowledge of the planning process, National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and cultural resource management policies. An organized group such as Fort Stanton Incorporated or a similar non profit group may be able to assist in the management of the facilities at the fort.

The State of New Mexico currently has a maintenance crew that maintains the grounds and facilities.

A group should be ready to make a proposal to the State of New Mexico to manage the historic facilities at Fort Stanton.

Challenges

- Determining which State, Federal or local agencies would be interested in and could be adequately funded to manage Historic Fort Stanton.
- Locating sources of funding are available to manage Fort Stanton from the private sector.
- Exploring the possibilities of a partnership between BLM, National Park Service, and the State of New Mexico to manage Fort Stanton.

Action

- BLM will cooperate with interest groups, local and state government so that management of the ACEC is compatible with uses of the historic fort. BLM will also cooperate in the development of plans and activities within the historic fort.

GOAL:

FORM A COOPERATIVE PARTNERSHIP WITH INTEREST GROUPS, STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS TO DEVELOP A MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR HISTORIC FORT STANTON.

OBJECTIVES:

- Provide lands adjacent to the state owned historic Fort Stanton for activities and actions created within the historic fort.
- Plan for future activities and their affects on public lands adjacent to the fort.
- Cooperate with the group or governmental agency that manages historic Fort Stanton.

APPENDIX ONE

APPENDIX 1

LANDS CONSIDERED FOR POTENTIAL ACQUISITION IN AND AROUND THE ACEC

The 1997 RMP lists the lands in and around the ACEC that might be considered for acquisition. The list of lands is reproduced as follows:

Land Status:

PRIVATE LANDS

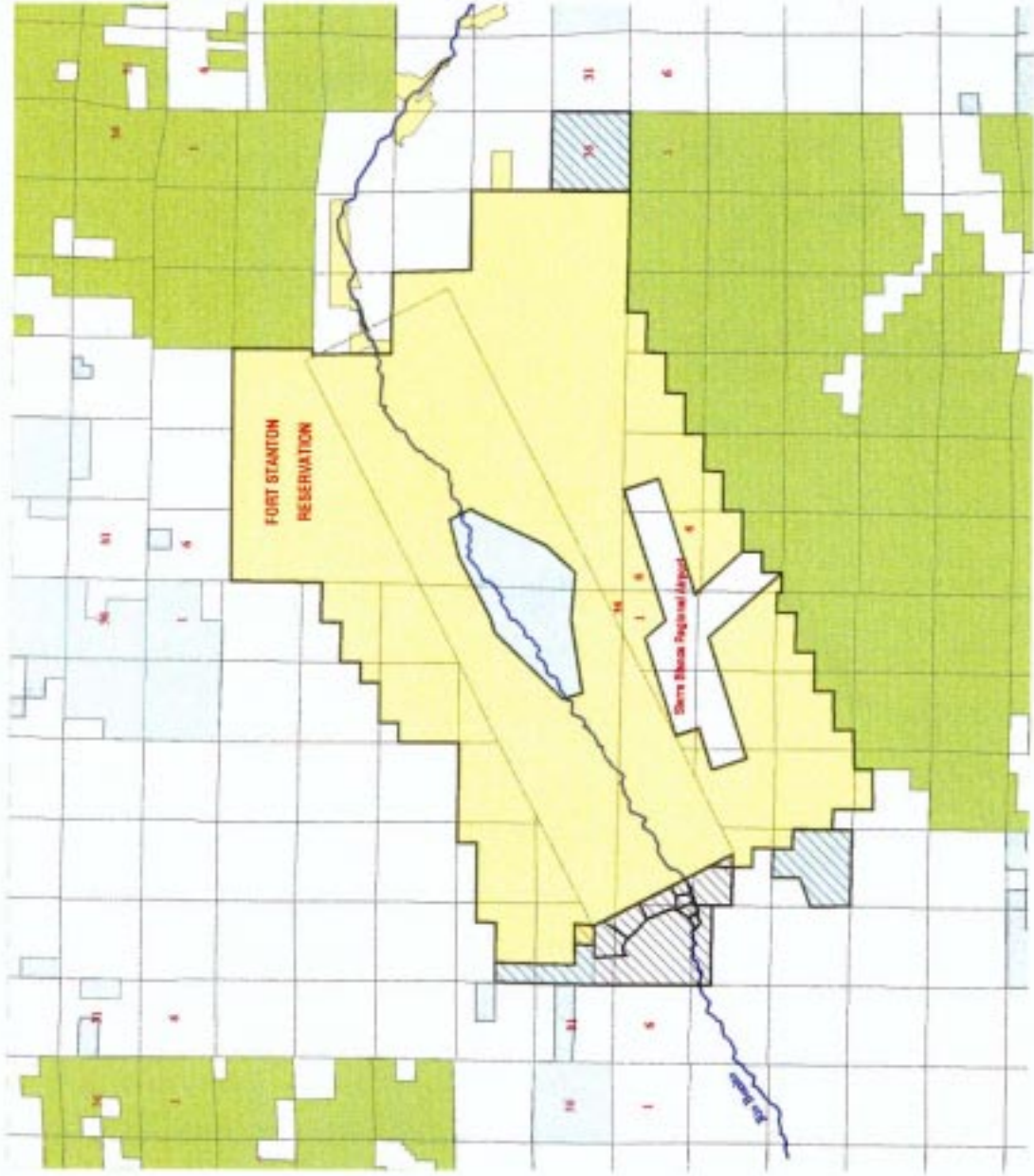
<u>Township</u>	<u>Range</u>	<u>Section/Lot</u>	<u>Acreage</u>
T.09S.	R.14E	32 Lot 01	10.68
T.09S.	R.14E	32 SW1/4 SE 1/4	40.00
T.09S.	R.14E	32 S1/2 SW1/4	80.00
T.10S.	R.14E	04 Lot 01	10.50
T.10S.	R.14E	04 Lot 02	37.14
T.10S.	R.14E	05 SW1/4 SW1/4	40.00
T.10S.	R.14E	05 Lot 01	39.78
T.10S.	R.14E	05 Lot 02	23.32
T.10S.	R.14E	05 Lot 03	32.10
T.10S.	R.14E	05 Lot 04	32.10
T.10S.	R.14E	05 Lot 05	32.10
T.10S.	R.14E	05 SW1/4 NE1/4	40.00
T.10S.	R.14E	05 Lot S1/2	360.00
T.10S.	R.14E	05 S1/2NW1/4	80.00
T.10S.	R.14E	08 N1/2N1/2	160.00
T.10S.	R.14E	09 Lot 03	16.48
T.10S.	R.14E	09 Lot 04	30.56
T.10S.	R.14E	09 NW1/4NW1/4	40.00
T.10S.	R.14E	09 S1/2NW1/4	160.00

STATE LANDS

T.09S	R14E	29 W1/2SW1/4	80.00
T.09S	R14E	32 NE1/4SW1/4	40.00
T.09S	R14E	32 NW1/4SW1/4	40.00
T.09S	R14E	32 W1/2NW1/4	80.00
T.09S	R15E	36 ALL	640.00
T.10S	R14E	16 W1/4	160.00
T.10S	R14E	16 SE1/4	160.00
T.10S	R14E	16 SE1/4NE1/4	40.00
T.10S	R14E	16 SW1/4	160.00
T.10S	R14E	16 W1/2NE1/4	80.00



Potential Acquisition Lands



Produced by the Roswell Field Office GIS Specialist,
Bureau of Land Management, August 01, 2009

No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual use or aggregate use with other data. Original data was compiled from various sources. Spatial information may not meet national accuracy standards. This information may be updated without notification.

- Bureau of Land Management
- National Forest
- State Lands
- Private Lands
- Proposed Acquisition Lands
- Proposed Ac. Permits
- Rio Grande
- Ft. Stanton Boundary



APPENDIX TWO

COMMENTS ON THE ACTIVITY PLAN

Comment - No horseback riding, Off-Highway Vehicles (OHVs), camping, mountain biking, or livestock grazing within the riparian habitat.

Response - As outlined in the Roswell Resource Management Plan (RMP), OHVs and camping are banned within 100 feet of the Rio Bonito and Salado Creek. No trails for horseback riding or mountain bikes are planned within riparian/wetland habitats. Crossings of streams, however, would occur if the proposed trails are constructed.

Comment - One hundred feet either side of the streams is not enough protection [for riparian areas]. One hundred yards would be acceptable for mountain biking and camping. There should be no horseback riding, OHV use or livestock grazing within this management area.

Response - One hundred feet should be adequate protection within the ACEC. This distance from streambanks is often outside the immediate influence of the stream and, in many places, is classified as uplands. See previous comments regarding camping, trail use and OHVs in or near riparian areas.

Comment - There should be no livestock grazing within this management area.

Response - Livestock grazing is authorized within the ACEC only as a vegetation manage-

ment tool. Livestock utilization levels proposed in this plan have been set at a very conservative level to maintain the populations of wildlife. Additionally, BLM would control livestock numbers, the season of use and the timing of the grazing. Under those guidelines, BLM and the Planning Team believe impacts on other resources within the ACEC by livestock would be minimal.

Comment - The goal of [Fire and Fuels Management] should be to slowly get this area as close to its natural fire cycle as can be. [This means] using fire in nonsensitive areas to get down fuel loads in prescribed setting. Also, eventually letting fires, prescribed or natural, return this to a more natural fire schedule. The key is not to get over zealous in prescribed burns just because of the public pressure to do so.

Response - The plan's goal to use fire and fuels management to improve the vegetative communities and reduce the hazardous fuels should bring the ACEC close to its natural fire cycle. Prescribed fire and mechanical methods would be used in combination within the ACEC to achieve the goal of this plan. Given the current rate of development adjacent to the borders of the ACEC, BLM sincerely doubts prescribed natural fires would be allowed to occur within the ACEC. Additionally, the recent occurrence of wildfires near the ACEC and the Village of Ruidoso make public support of prescribed fires shaky, at best.

Comment - Fishing should not be allowed if endangered species are found [within the ACEC].

Response - The closing of an area to fishing or setting catch limits is a function of the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish and not within the authority of BLM. BLM, however, would cooperate with NMDGF should this situation occur. Current studies indicate that no threatened or endangered species exist in the Rio Bonito or Salado Creek within the ACEC.

Comment - There should be no off-road vehicle use within the Fort Stanton management area. As far as visual resource management, off-road vehicles are an eyesore. Encourage enforcement with heavy fines of anyone getting off designated roadways while hunting or fishing.

Response - Currently the RMP confines OHV use to designated roads and trails. Off road or trail excursions are not allowed under the RMP and would not be authorized under this proposed plan. BLM law enforcement personnel have the authority to issue citations for such violations. Fines are set by the federal magistrate. Perhaps the most confusing aspect of current management within the ACEC is the concurrent designation of recreation trails that are actually roads and are maintained as roads. This plan proposes to complete a route designation plan that would do away with this dual designation and would include public participation.

Comment - Making it [the ACEC] into a fee area would also be an appropriate step.

Response - Several aspects of this draft plan, particularly the route designation plan, need to be completed before designation as a fee area for the ACEC would be appropriate.

Comment - The primary concern with this section [Visitor Use Fees] is assuring that all users are treated equitably under your proposal. If an additional user fee is collected we would like to be assured that it would be collected from all users.

Response - Several aspects of this draft plan need to be completed before designation as a fee area for the ACEC would be appropriate. Should that designation occur, then the fee would be collected from all users of the ACEC.

Comment - Hunters, fishermen and trappers already pay a \$5.00 habitat stamp fee to use federal lands including BLM lands. It is unnecessary to charge this user fee of hunters anglers and trappers that may use the area because they are already charged a user fee for BLM lands.

Response - The Sikes Act stamp generates funds for habitat improvement programs on federal lands. These funds can be used at the agency's discretion for projects on any of the lands it manages, subject to review prior to implementation. The Roswell Field Office manages 1.49 million acres in southeast New Mexico, including the 24,000 acres within the ACEC. The Roswell Field Office can and does

implement Sikes Act habitat improvement projects all across the 1.49 million acres it manages.

The Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993, Public Law 103-66 expanded the BLM's authority to collect recreation use fees and deposit these funds into special accounts which are authorized to be available in the following year. Thus, fees derived from the recreation sites are to be returned to the Field Office that collects the fees and are to be used for on the ground projects in the areas where the funds were derived.

Given the popularity of the ACEC for recreation, the Planning Team proposed the ACEC as a visitor fee area. Funds generated by these fees would return to the ACEC in the form of road and trail maintenance, recreation site maintenance, trail construction, and other improvements. See response to previous comment.

Comment - Who has the authority to collect visitor fees and enforce the fee system?

Response - BLM has the authority as outlined in the legislation mentioned in a previous response and would enforce the fee system should designation of the ACEC as a fee area occur.

Comment - This area should be closed to mineral extraction of any kind, including gold mining.

Response - The RMP withdrew the ACEC from mineral entry and closed the ACEC to mineral leasing. These actions closed the area to mining of any kind, including gold mining.

Comment - The Mescalero Apache and any other people with ties to this area should be consulted with and their advice and opinions should be heeded.

Response - Consulting with Native American tribes and their governments is prescribed by law, regulation and the BLM Manual when cultural resources and their interpretation is concerned. As an example, the displays and interpretation of artifacts from Feather Cave has involved the Mescalero Apache Tribe.

Comment - [We] would like the BLM to recognize that it is the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF) that has the authority to manage the State's wildlife resources.

Response - BLM does so on pages 2-12 and 2-22. BLM also acknowledges its role as a land manager and how that affects the habitat for various wildlife species that use the ACEC and the other public lands managed by the agency. When BLM refers to managing wildlife habitat and associated activities within the ACEC, it is referring to vegetation management, livestock grazing management, fire management and recreation uses as they impact wildlife species within the ACEC.

This draft plan is not an attempt to usurp the authority of the State of New Mexico or the Department of Game and Fish. When BLM makes recommendations to the Department or the Game Commission, it does so after careful consideration by staff specialists and as any other land owner or land manager.

Comment - In reviewing the list of cooperators for this plan, the NMDGF was not included as a member. We respectfully request that NMDGF be included in any further planning processes.

Response - To avoid further confusion the Roswell Field Office will make sure NMDGF is informed about any future ACEC development plans and will invite NMDGF to participate as a member of the planning team. NMDGF specialists were informally involved in the early development of this ACEC plan. Based on the informal consultation that occurred at the local level BLM believes NMDGF staff specialists were aware of BLM's plans and recommendations for the ACEC. The recommendations concerning wildlife, fishing, and habitat in the draft plan (pages 2-12 and 2-22) can also be found in the 1997 Roswell Resource Management Plan (RMP). NMDGF was on the mailing list and received copies of the RMP.

A habitat management plan is in place for the ACEC and NMDGF participated in the development of the plan as well as receiving copies. Further, during the development of the Draft Fort Stanton ACEC Activity Plan, representatives from the Roswell Field Office met on numerous occasions with NMDGF. During these meetings, BLM representatives talked about developing the ACEC plan and made the same recommendations found in the RMP and this Draft ACEC plan.