PECOS DISTRICT
ROSWELL FIELD OFFICE
ROSWELL, New Mexico

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
NM-510-2005 -0005

FORT STANTON CAVE CAMPGROUND FACILITIES

FORT STANTON AREA OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN

/s/ Paul T. Happel 11/22/04

PREPARED BY_____ _____

PAUL T. HAPPEL **DATE**

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background

The Cave Campground was developed around Fort Stanton Cave to give cavers a location to camp while caving within Fort Stanton Cave. Over approximately 20 years the campground has grown and now contains a vault toilet, three tables on concrete pads, trash cans, ground grills, bulletin board (kiosk) and sun shade. Cement structures and a wood rail system was placed across from the mouth of the cave and acted as a bollard system to delineate the parking around the cave entrance. In addition a cyclone fence and gate has for many years been in place around the mouth of the cave to prevent entrance to the cave. Road improvements have occurred on the main road from highway 380 to the cave and campground over the past 20 years. Because of the campground and day use by cavers and other visitors the area has degraded and is in need of environmental repair and restoration.

The location falls within the un-surveyed portion of the Fort Stanton Military Reservation, New Mexico Prime Meridian. The location of the area is in T9S., Range 15E., 2600 feet from U.S. Highway 380 (see attached map). In 1997, the Fort Stanton Area was designated the Fort Stanton Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) in the Roswell Approved Resource Management Plan Record of Decision (RMP). The management goals of the ACEC are to protect the biological, archaeological and scenic qualities of Fort Stanton, while providing for quality recreation opportunity.

B. Purpose and Need For The Proposed Action

Recreation use by cavers and other visitors within the area has expanded to the point where the area needs to be stabilized and protected from visitors driving vehicles where ever they wish within the campground. This new 16 foot by 16 foot shelter will provide full accessibility for disabled or impaired persons and will provide shelter for larger groups using the area. An additional vault toilet will be placed in close proximity to the group shelter. The facilities will provide environmental protection for the grounds, provide a group shelter and delineate the camping areas and pull outs within the area.

C. Conformance with Land Use Planning

The Proposed action is consistent with Bureau Policy and guidance as well as actions analyzed in the Roswell Approved Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision of October 1997(RMP).

D. Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, or Other Plans

Other pertinent statutes affecting the proposed action include:

Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of October 21, 1976, as amended;
National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (36 CFR 800);
Clean Air Act (CAA) as amended (42 U.S.C. 7401);
Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA), as amended (42 U.S.C. 300f);
Clean Water Act (CWA) of 1977 (33 U.S.C)1251;
Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) of 1976, as amended (42 U.S.C. 6901);

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

A. Description of the Proposed Action

A total of four camping areas will be designated and delineated within the area. The three existing camp areas will contain picnic tables and 12 foot square sun shelters. The fourth area will contain a 16 foot square sun shelter and will be totally accessible to all users. A vault toilet will be placed in close proximity to the 16 foot shelter to accommodate larger groups. Trash receptacles will be centrally located along the existing road and turn out areas. Vehicle turn out areas will be constructed along the east side of the existing road to allow vehicles to pull off the existing main road. Wood bollards will be placed along the east side of the road to delineate the turn out areas and the cave parking lot. The existing concrete bollards and wood rails in the cave parking lot will be removed and disposed of in a proper manner. Schematics of the new facilities are attached to the EA. All facilities would be constructed to accessible standards under the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 as amended. The National Center for Accessibility (NCA) guidelines will be the standard for construction of accessible facilities.

B. **Alternatives To The Proposed Action**

1. Alternative 1 (No Action Alternative): The No Action alternative would be to not allow the facilities to be constructed and not replace the fence.

III. DESCRIPTION OF THE AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A. General Setting

The Fort Stanton ACEC is comprised of approximately 26,000 acres of public lands. Approximately 24,000 acres are controlled by the Bureau of Land Management and approximately 2,000 acres is managed by the State of New Mexico. State owned historic Fort Stanton exist within the middle of the property. Billy the Kid Scenic Byway uses U.S. Highway 380 and State highway 220 as part of the scenic byway. The horse trails parking lot has been in place since 1989 and has been improved to include a vault toilet, Kiosk, electricity and water for equestrian use.

B. Affected Resources/Critical Elements

The following critical elements have been evaluated and are either not present or are not affected by the Proposed Action or the alternative in this assessment: Air Quality, Farmland - Prime or Unique, Flood Plains, Native American Religious Concerns, Wastes-Hazardous or Solid, Wetlands/Riparian Zone, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Wilderness, Threatened and Endangered Species, and Water Quality - (Drinking/Ground). Low income or Minority populations or communities will not be affected by the proposed action.

1. Geology

Geologic formations occurring within the area are sandstone/limestone San Andres formation with occasional igneous dikes comprised of seven Tertiary rocks types.

2. Soils

Soil types present at the site are Cumulic Haplustolls, Decon Loam, Hightower-Oro Grande complex and Manzano.

3. Topography

The topography of the area is level with a slight slope to the east.

4. Water Quality

The Proposed Action area forms part of a region-wide watershed pattern of upland foothills that contribute runoff to the Rio Bonito. The road through the area has a gravel surface.

5. Climate

Temperatures vary from an average of 90 degrees F in the summer to 20 degrees F in the winter months. Precipitation averages 16.1 inches annually. The area is considered semi arid as the evaporation exceeds the precipitation.

6. Wildlife

Wildlife species inhabiting the area include mule deer, elk, coyote, pronghorn antelope, rabbit, raccoon, skunk, bobcat, badger, occasional cougars, bears, and various small rodents and reptiles. Common bird species observed include raptors, killdeer, mallard, bufflehead, mourning dove, scaled quail, and sparrows.

7. Wilderness

There is no designated wilderness or Wilderness study areas within the area.

8. Livestock

Livestock have not grazed Fort Stanton ACEC in six years. Grazing, Livestock such as cows will be excluded from the interior of the parking lot by the exterior fence.

9. Recreation.

The facilities within the area will add to the visitor enjoyment of the area and will fulfill the health and safety requirements of this portion of the area.

10. Vegetation.

There will be an improvement in the vegetation within the campground by not allowing vehicles to park adjacent to the picnic tables and shelters. Minimal Vegetation will be lost at the facilities because of the foot print of the facility and the areas covered by concrete sidewalks. Disturbed areas will be reseeded with a seed mixture of Blue Grama, Sideoats Grama, Western Weatgrass, Little Bluestem, and Gaillaridia Aristata.

11. Karst.

The area is in a high karst environment, adjacent to Fort Stanton Cave. No cave entrances or cave passages lie under the existing campground facility. Fort Stanton Cave (a significant cave) will not be affected by the proposal.

12. Nonnative/Invasive Species.

Two species of Noxious weeds are known to occur within five miles of the proposed area. They are musk thistle (Carduus nutans) and dalmatian) toadflax (Linaria genistifolia ssp. dalmatica). Other known noxious weeds in the Fort Stanton area are teasel and poison hemlock; however these are generally associated with riparian areas. Musk thistle is spread by seed and is a biennial. It spreads rapidly, forming extremely dense stands which crowd out desirable forage vegetation. Dalmation toadflax is a perennial spreading by seed and underground root stalks. It is aggressive and crowds out other desirable native vegetation. An extensive and deep root system along with a waxy leaf make this plant difficult to control. Vehicles will carry some noxious weeds into the camping area. Because of the camping area some weeds will be killed by the traffic within

the driving surfaces of the area. An approved herbicide will be used to spot kill weeds within and on the sides of the parking lot. Herbicides will be applied as per the restrictions or specifications outlined in appendix 9, Treating vegetation with herbicides, Roswell RMP1997.

13. Threatened and Endangered Species
The area has been previously inventoried for T&E Species under the environmental assessment mentioned above.

14. Cultural Resources
The area has been previously inventoried for cultural Resources under prior environmental assessments.

IV ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

A. Impacts Of The Proposed Action

Following are critical elements and other resources that may be impacted by the Proposed Action.

Critical Elements

1. Cultural Resources
During the excavation for the vault toilet and excavation of footings for sun shelters the area will be monitored for cultural resources. Additional construction of vehicle turn outs will involve fill over natural ground surfaces. If cultural resources are found during the excavation the operator will stop immediately and contact the BLM Roswell Field Office Archaeologist.

2. Threatened and Endangered Species
The camping area has been inventoried previously and no T&E Species have been found.

3. Water Quality
Observations conducted within the Proposed Action area show no dramatic erosion and arroyos do not appear to be unusually full of sediment. The gravel surface of the campground road, turn outs and the concrete sidewalks should lessen the silt load to the surrounding environment.

OTHER KNOWN RESOURCES

1. Karst
   Fort Stanton Cave is directly adjacent to the existing parking lot and campground. All surfaces that convey water in the area are directed away or naturally flow away from the mouth of the cave. There would not be any direct inflow into the cave resources within the area.

2. Soils
   Soils will not be affected by the proposed action.

3. Vegetation
   The area for the vehicle turn outs will be disturbed. Pit run gravel will be used to construct the turn out's along the existing. The top soil around the disturbed area will not be affected. Some vegetation will be crushed or obliterated by the action of the equipment excavating the concrete footers for the sun shelters. The vegetation should re-grow within one year's growing season.

4. Noxious and Invasive Species
   Vehicles which are carrying a seed source are a major transportation of noxious weed seeds. Because of heavy use within the parking lot and roads, weeds will be killed by the action of vehicle using the parking lot, vehicle turn outs and roads. Because vehicles will remain on the parking lot, the noxious and invasive species should be easily controlled by spraying the weeds when they geminate with an approved herbicide.

B. IMPACTS OF ALTERNATIVES

Relocate the Proposed Action

Relocating the camping facilities to another part of the area would be considered. However the proposed location for camping facilities is the only area adjacent to the cave that has traditionally been used for camping within the area for cave use. The area has previously been established with picnic tables, vault toilet, parking lot and road for cavers to camp adjacent to the cave. Relocation of the camping facilities would be counter productive and would require removal of the facilities that presently exist within the area.

No Action Alternative

This alternative denies the Proposed Action. This alternative will result in no new environmental impacts. However, a No Action alternative may reduce BLM's recreation management efforts within the ACEC and cave area. Further, the Proposed Action will add to the health and safety of the area by providing an additional toilet facility, new

animal proof trash facilities, sun shelters and improve the overall ground cover to the area.

C. MITIGATION MEASURES

The surface disturbance to the lands within the parking lot will be minimal and should naturally reclaim within one years growing season. Disturbed areas will be reseeded with a seed mixture of Blue Grama, Sideoats Grama, Western Weatgrass, Little Bluestem, and Gaillaridia Aristata.

CRITICAL ELEMENTS

CULTURAL RESOURCES

To prevent possible negative impacts, or loss of cultural resources, the pit dug for the vault toilet and the trenches dug for the concrete footings will be monitored during construction to determine if any cultural resources are present. In the event that cultural resources are discovered during the excavation, the Bureau of Land Management Roswell Field Office archaeologist will be notified immediately.

D. RESIDUAL IMPACTS

There will be little or no residual impacts from the Proposed Action.

E. CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Population increases and recreation demand for equestrian use, hunting, hiking and mountain biking increases are considered the primary multipliers of cumulative resource degradation effects for the future. There will be positive effects resulting from health and safety issues of providing a toilet and sun shelters for visitor use within the area.

Increase in regional metropolitan populations and collateral recreation demands may also impact Fort Stanton's natural, Cultural, and recreational resources. Other southwest recreation sites, areas, parks and facilities have experienced a general increase in resource degradation within the past fifteen years. The trend is expected to continue as the public becomes more aware of the value of public lands to the nation.

V. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

PERSONS CONSULTED
Dan Baggao, Wildlife Biologist
John A. Spain, Rangeland Management Specialist
Howard Parman, Planning Coordinator
Judy Yslas, Realty Specialist
Al Collar, Geologist
Michael McGee, Hydrologist
Jessica Rubado, Surface Protection Specialist
Pat Flanary, Archaeologist
Bill Murry, Acting Outdoor Recreation Planner
Tim Kreager, Assistant Field Manager, Resources

VI. DECISION RECORD/FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

DECISION DOCUMENT EA# NM-060-2001-0079

I recommend that the Proposed Action, be approved as proposed. I have determined that the Proposed Action, with the mitigation measures described in this EA, will not have any significant impacts on the natural and human environment and that an environmental impact statement is not required.

Authority of this action is the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321, es seq.), as amended.

RATIONALE FOR DECISION

The Proposed Acton would not result in any undue or unnecessary environmental degradation. The cave campground and its improvements have been used continually for approximately 20 years. The addition of sun shelters, an additional toilet facility, trash containers and parking turn outs will add to the visitors enjoyment of the area and improve sanitation conditions to the general area. The proposal is consistent with the Roswell Field Office Resource Management Plan of 1997.

__-s-_____ __11/22/04_____

Timothy R. Kreager **Date**

Assistant Field Manager Resources

APPENDIX

Drawings of the proposed facilities: