

BLM needs your thoughts and ideas!

BLM is interested in hearing from the people who have a stake in BLM's management decisions for the public land in Socorro and Catron Counties. Because the goal of the RMPR is to guide future resource management for the long-term needs of future generations, an effective RMPR cannot be prepared without your input. As discussed above, BLM has identified some areas of the current RMP that require revision; however, your suggestions are important to ensure that all necessary revisions are made.

The first opportunity for you to participate will be the upcoming public scoping open house meetings. These meetings will begin with a brief presentation that will provide an overview of the planning and EIS process. Details of the meetings are provided below. The meetings also will be announced through media releases. Your thoughts, comments, and concerns are important

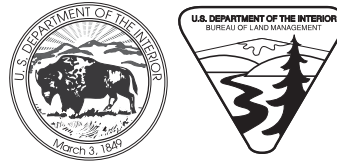
to us throughout the process, but especially right now at this early step! Please attend one or more of the three scoping meetings and/or send us your written comments on the enclosed pre-addressed comment form before the scoping period ends, which is **September 13, 2002**.

BLM will provide other opportunities throughout the process to discuss the status of the process, and BLM will ask you to review the Draft RMPR/EIS, which will be released to the public for review for a 90-day period. During that 90-day period, BLM will conduct public hearings to accept comments on the draft document. Written comments also will be accepted during that time.

A mailing list will be maintained throughout the entire process. ***If you wish to remain on the mailing list, please let us know by sending the enclosed comment form back to us. Otherwise, your name will be removed from the list so you will not receive RMPR/EIS information in the future.***

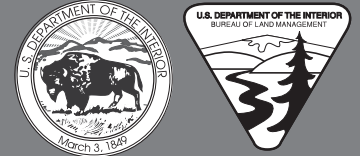
For your reference, the 1989 Socorro RMP and informational materials like this Bulletin will be available on the Socorro Field Office website at http://www.nm.blm.gov/www/sfo/sfo_home.html

If you have questions, would like to be on the mailing list, or would like to speak to someone, you can call our toll-free information line at 1-866-702-3318, leave a message, and someone will return your call as soon as possible.



Resource Management Plan Revision & Environmental Impact Statement

Bureau of Land Management, Socorro Field Office
Bulletin 1 and Scoping Notice



August 2002

Background

BLM is responsible for balanced management of public lands and resources considered in a combination that will serve the needs of the public most effectively. In accordance with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), management is based on the principles of multiple use and sustained yield, an integration of uses that takes into account the long-term needs of present and future generations for renewable and nonrenewable resources.

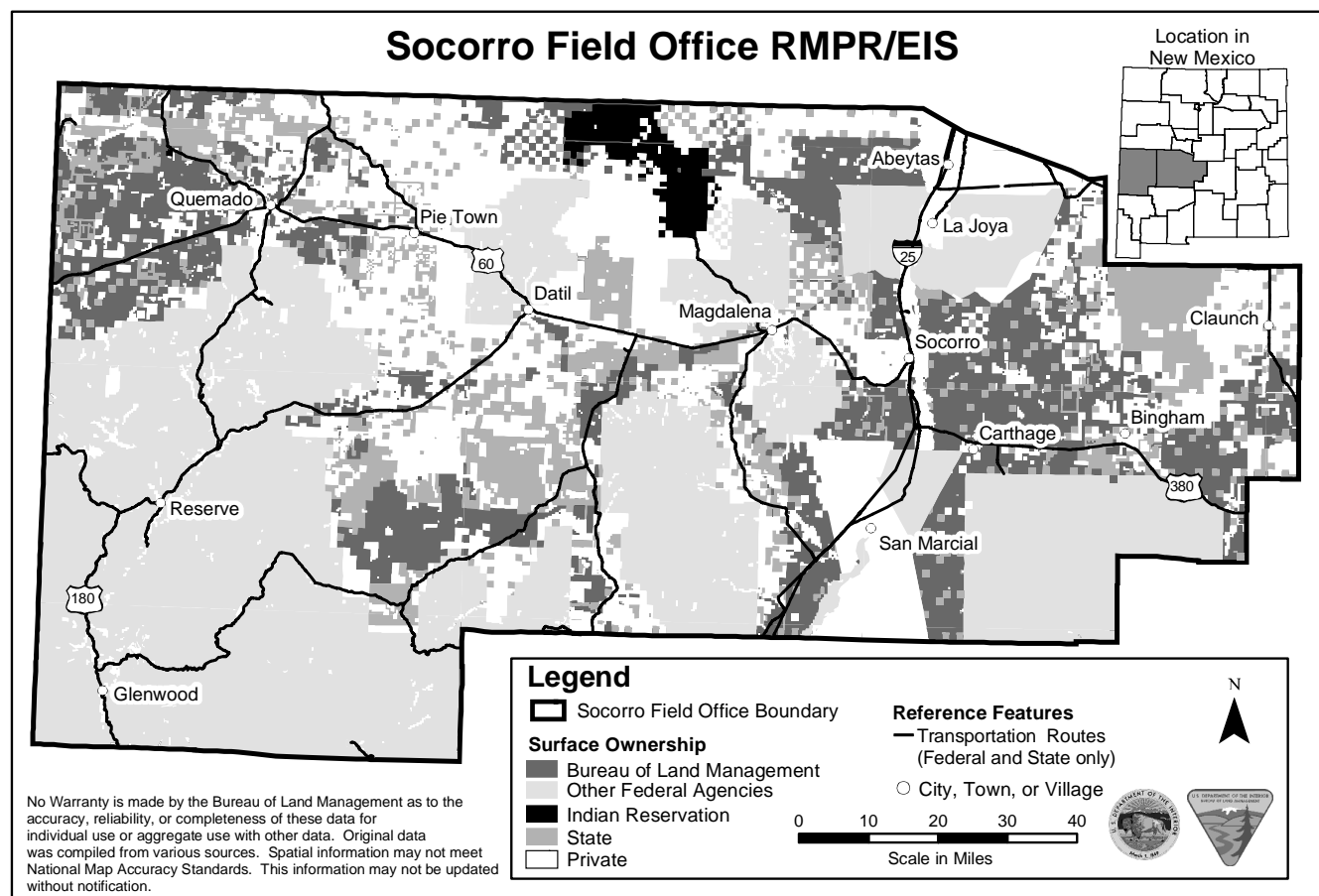
In 1989, the BLM Socorro Field Office completed an RMP for public land in Socorro and Catron Counties. BLM manages 1.5 million surface acres and 2.2 million acres of Federal minerals in the two counties. The purpose of the RMP is to provide a comprehensive framework for managing the public land and for allocating resources over a planning period of 15 to 20 years. The RMP sets forth land use decisions, terms, and conditions for guiding the management of activities on public land. Also, the RMP resulted in the development of activity plans for specific programs to provide goods and services to the American people.

Since the Socorro RMP was implemented nearly 13 years ago, many of its programs have achieved success and BLM plans to continue the successful elements of those programs into the future. Much of the success is attributed to the collaborative efforts with other Federal, State, County, and local agencies, Tribes, organizations, and individuals. A few of the successes include the following:

- Improving and maintaining watershed conditions through construction of rehabilitation and erosion control structures, watershed agreements with landowners, and implementing cooperative efforts with State and other Federal agencies.
- Developing the Ladron Mountain Habitat Management Plan for support of the transplanted Desert Big Horn Sheep.
- Acquiring lands to manage them for their highly unique wildlife, geologic, scenic, recreational, and wilderness values. Achievements include acquiring more than 12,000 acres of lands containing wilderness and recreation values, enhancing public access by disposing of 15,000 acres of isolated BLM tracts, and completing the 100,000-acre New Mexico State Exchange to consolidate public ownership of lands.
- Increasing and enhancing recreational opportunities through completion of Recreation Management Plans (Datil Well, The Box and San Lorenzo Special Management Areas). Issuing Special Recreation Permits for commercial outfitters and competitive events.
- Managing more than 303,000 acres of land in 12 Wilderness Study Areas.
- Improving the ecological conditions for and maintaining the Bordo Atravesado Wild Horse Herd.
- Participating in Socorro County's Strategic Plan for managing invasive/noxious weeds.
- Cooperating with the State of New Mexico to develop El Camino Real International Heritage Center where visitors will learn about the history of the trail and its influence on the history of Mexico and the United States.
- Promoting cultural resources protection through public outreach and education, continuing surveys to identify archaeological sites important to the cultural record, protecting at-risk sites, and addressing resource conflicts involving cultural site protection in wilderness study areas.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Socorro Field Office is beginning the planning process to revise its 1989 Resource Management Plan (RMP) and prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) to analyze and update BLM's management of public land in Socorro and Catron Counties, New Mexico. The revision will update current management in response to new legislation, changing policies, and changing uses of public land and its resources. The local governments of Socorro County, Catron County, and Zuni Pueblo have joined BLM as cooperating agencies, and BLM will work collaboratively with other agencies, Tribes, communities, organizations, and other public interested in participating in the planning process.

This bulletin is the first in a series to inform you about the planning process and request your comments on the scope of the RMP Revision (RMPR)/EIS.



Why revise the existing RMP?

During the 15- to-20-year life of an RMP, the RMP is evaluated periodically to see if it remains adequate and continues to meet legislative and policy requirements, and land use and resource needs. If it does not meet the requirements and needs, the RMP is revised. The revision involves the preparation of a new RMP to replace the existing RMP.

Time and experience have demonstrated that many elements of the current Socorro RMP work well and it is BLM's intent to carry these elements forward. BLM has determined that some of the existing management decisions are not current with changing circumstances, demographics, resource conditions, and/or policies. Population growth in the region has increased recreational uses of public land, and land acquisitions and disposals have created new areas for the public while closing others. Preserving and protecting certain areas while still allowing recreational use with updated Federal requirements is one important reason for revising the current RMP. In addition, changing emphasis on fire management, noxious weeds, increasing urbanization and consequent urban-rural interface, new subdivision development, oil and gas and carbon dioxide (CO₂)

development, off-highway vehicle use, and other resource programs necessitate revision of the RMP.

The EIS studies will identify the potential impacts that implementation of the RMPR could have on the human environment and identify appropriate measures to mitigate those impacts. The EIS will be prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations for implementing NEPA, FLPMA, and other associated regulations and policies.

What are the steps in the planning process?

The planning and EIS process, which is scheduled for completion in approximately 24 months, consists of nine basic steps including (1) identification of issues, (2) development of planning criteria, (3) inventory data and information collection, (4) management situation analysis, (5) formulation of alternatives, (6) estimation of effects of the alternatives, (7) selection of the preferred alternative, (8) selection of the plan amendment, and (9) monitoring and evaluation. The steps of the planning process are shown in the flow chart below. At this early stage in the process,

the range, or scope, of public and agency issues and concerns is being identified through comments received in response to this notice and during public scoping meetings to be held on August 27, 28, and 29, 2002 (see next page).

BLM welcomes your thoughts and ideas on the planning criteria, resources, and development of plan alternatives to be addressed in the RMPR/EIS.

The study team will develop an inventory of resource information by gathering data representing human, natural, and cultural resources within the planning area. Integrating and using the issues identified, inventory of resource data, and existing management direction, the team will conduct an analysis to identify (1) areas of limited or restricted uses, (2) levels of resource production, (3) allowable resource uses, (4) resource condition objectives, (5) program constraints, and (6) general management direction.

A range of reasonable alternatives, including an alternative considering no action, as required by NEPA, will be developed and analyzed in the EIS. Through scoping and subsequent discussions, the public will assist in developing the alternatives to be addressed in the planning and EIS process.

The potential impacts of the alternatives will be assessed and the results of the analyses will be documented in a Draft RMPR/EIS, which the public will be asked to review. Comments on the Draft RMPR/EIS received from agencies and the public will be considered and incorporated into the Proposed RMPR/Final EIS. After a Governor's Consistency Review and public protest period, BLM will issue a Record of Decision.

What are the preliminary planning criteria?

At the beginning of the planning process, BLM will work with other agencies and the public to develop standards, or criteria, for collecting data, formulating alternative plans to evaluate, estimating the effects of the plans, and selecting a preferred alternative. Preliminary criteria for guiding the development of the RMPR/EIS include, but will not be limited to, the following:

- Recognize valid existing rights.
- Follow existing law, executive orders, regulations, and BLM policy and program guidance.
- Collaborate with agencies and the public.

- Consider adjoining nonpublic land when making management decisions to minimize land use conflicts. Consider planning jurisdictions of other Federal agencies, State and local governments, and Indian tribes.
- Develop alternative management descriptions that are reasonable and avoid analysis solely based on maximum and minimum output, uses, and activities.
- Use current scientific information, research, new technologies; and the results of inventory, monitoring, and coordination when determining appropriate management strategies.
- Address social and economic conditions and environmental justice.
- Determine which decisions and analyses in the existing RMP are valid and should be carried forward in the RMP revision.
- Provide for public safety and welfare.
- Address effects on natural, human, and cultural resources.

What are the preliminary resource concerns?

BLM will be updating its existing inventory of natural, human or social, and cultural resources data to serve as a basis for the analyses and assessment. These resources include the following:

Natural

- Geology and soils
- Water resources
- Air quality
- Vegetation
- Wildlife
- Special status species
- Noxious weeds
- Wild horses

Human/Social

- Lands and real estate
- Recreation
- Visual
- Local and regional socio-economic conditions
- Native American issues and concerns
- Livestock grazing
- Fire management
- Hazardous substances management

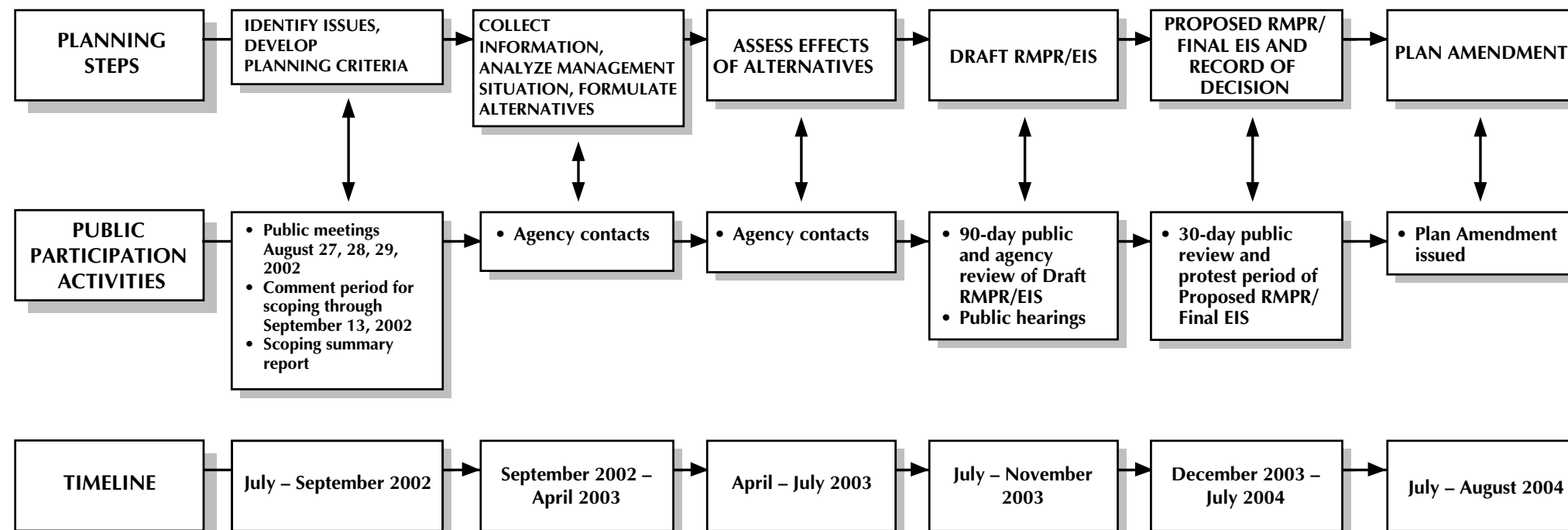
Cultural

- Historic and archaeological resources
- Paleontological resources
- Living traditional cultures

What decisions will result from the RMPR/EIS?

Generally, the anticipated decisions will respond to the following questions:

- What areas will be open, closed, or designated as limited to motorized access?
- What types of constraints should be placed on resource uses?
- What are the desired levels of resource production or the conditions of those resources and what are the allowable levels of resource use?
- What should be the limits and magnitude of BLM's management?



PUBLIC SCOPING MEETINGS

Please Attend!

Tuesday, August 27, 2002
6:30 PM – 8:30 PM
Holiday Inn Express
1100 California NE
Socorro, NM 87801

Wednesday, August 28, 2002
6:30 PM – 8:30 PM
Quemado Community Center
Country Store,
near the Texaco Station
Quemado, NM 87829

Thursday, August 29, 2002
6:30 PM – 8:30 PM
Zuni Tribal Conference Room,
Zuni Tribal Building