



Bureau of Land Management Las Cruces Field Office

TriCounty RMPs/EIS



Newsletter 1 and Scoping Notice

February 2005

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Las Cruces Field Office is beginning the planning process to revise its 1986 White Sands Resource Management Plan (RMP), amend its 1993 Mimbres RMP, and prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) to analyze and update BLM's management of public land in Sierra, Otero, and Doña Ana Counties in south-central New Mexico. The revision and the amendment will update current management in response to new legislation, changing policies, and changing uses of public land and its resources.

This is the first in a series of newsletters about the planning process and requests your comments on the scope of the revision and the amendment.

BLM is responsible for management of public land and its resources considered in a combination that will serve the needs of the public most efficiently. In accordance with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), the BLM's management of public land is based on the principles of multiple use and sustained health, diversity, and productivity of public land for present and future generations.

Population growth in the Southwest in general and in this region has resulted in increased interface between urban and rural areas. As a consequence, increased use of and pressure on public land and surrounding areas have an effect on how the BLM manages public lands under its jurisdiction. Growth is expected to continue. With it, land uses will continue to increase. In response, BLM is changing its policy emphasis on many of its resource and land use programs, and these changes warrant analysis and updating of BLM's management direction.

The BLM Las Cruces Field Office administers public land in Hidalgo, Grant, Luna, Doña Ana, Sierra, and Otero Counties in southeast New Mexico. Until 1988, public land in these counties was managed by BLM by two separate BLM offices—the White Sands Resource Area (later renamed the Caballo Resource Area) and the Mimbres Resource Area. Combined in 1998, the public lands in the six counties are managed by the Las Cruces Field Office through two separate RMPs—the 1986 White Sands RMP for public land in Sierra and Otero Counties and the

1993 Mimbres RMP for public land in the other four counties.

Why update the existing RMPs?

During the 15-to-20-year life of a plan, the plan 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 plan is updated by revision or amendment. The Las Cruces Field Office has determined that the 1986 White Sands RMP needs to be revised to provide an updated, more comprehensive framework. The 1993 Mimbres RMP needs to be amended to address the issues associated with the significant growth in Doña Ana County (and nearby El Paso, Texas) that has resulted in changes in demographic characteristics as well as increased use and consequent pressure on public land. Of the 6.65 million acres in the three-county Planning Area, the Las Cruces Field Office manages about 2.9 million surface acres (about 43 percent of the total acres) and 5 million acres of Federal minerals.

The outcome of the planning process will include benefits such as better guidance for management decisions, more consistent decisions for the Planning Area, updated and improved information for the public and BLM, an understanding of the needs and desires of an expanding and increasingly diverse population (especially in Doña Ana County), reduced staff time to process



management actions, and collaborative relationships between the public and Las Cruces Field Office.

The EIS studies will identify the potential effects that implementation of the revision and the amendment could have on the human environment and identify measures to mitigate, or lessen, those effects. The EIS will be prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Quality Act of 1969 (NEPA), the 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 36 months, is organized in nine basic steps including (1) identification of issues, (2) development of planning criteria, (3) inventory and collection of data and information, (4) analysis of the

current management situation, (5) development of alternative management strategies, (6) estimation of the effects of the alternatives, (7) selection of the preferred alternative, (8) selection of the RMP revision and RMP amendment, and (9) monitoring and evaluation of the plan. The steps of the planning process are summarized in the flow chart below.

At this early stage in the planning process, the range, or scope of public and agency issues is being identified through comments received in response to this notice and during public scoping meetings to be held March 15, 16, 22, and 23, 2005. BLM welcomes your thoughts and ideas on the planning criteria, resources, and development of the alternative management strategies to be addressed during the planning process.

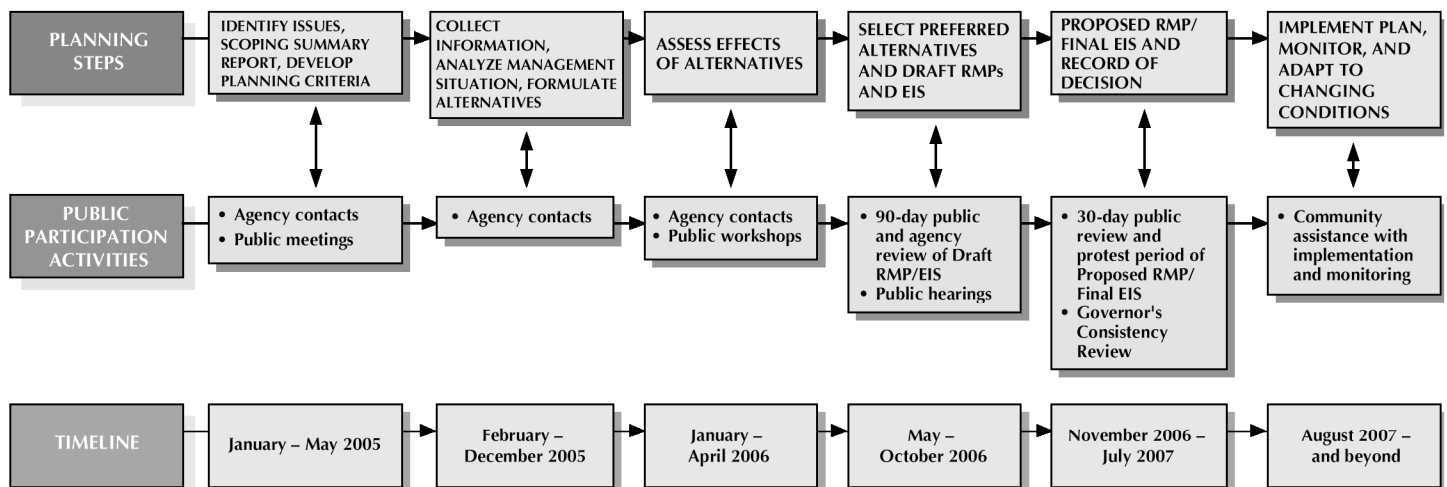
The study team will develop an inventory of resource information by gathering data representing human, natural, and cultural resources in the Planning Area. Integrating and

using issues identified, the inventory of resource data, and the 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 alternative management strategies, including an alternative considering no action, as required by NEPA, will be developed and analyzed in the EIS. Through scoping and subsequent discussions, the agencies and public will assist in developing the alternative management strategies to be addressed in the planning and EIS process.

The potential effects of the alternatives will be assessed and the results of the analysis will be reported in the Draft RMPs and EIS, which the public will be asked to review. Comments from the agencies and public will be considered and incorporated into the Proposed RMPs and EIS. After the Governor's Consistency Review and public protest period, BLM will issue a Record of Decision.

Sequence of Planning Activities



What are the preliminary planning criteria?

In preparation for the planning process, BLM developed a preliminary list of objectives and criteria for guiding the planning effort. We ask that you review them and provide comment during the scoping period. Preliminary criteria include the following:

- Actions must comply with laws, regulations, executive orders, and BLM manuals.
- Actions must be reasonable and achievable and allow for flexibility where appropriate (i.e., adaptive management).
- A social and economic analysis and environmental justice assessment will be conducted to determine the effect that each alternative will have on users and the diverse population of the Planning Area.
- Actions will be considered in an interdisciplinary approach.
- The planning team will work cooperatively with county and municipal governments; other Federal, State, and local agencies; and interested groups and individuals. A process of collaborative public involvement and participation will be carried out throughout this process.
- The revision and the amendment will cause the protection and enhancement of the biodiversity in the Planning Area while allowing the public the opportunity for access to public land in a productive and meaningful way.

- The revision and the amendment will recognize valid existing rights related to the use of the public land. It will define the process that the Las Cruces Field Office will use to address applications of notices filed after the completion of the revision and the amendment on existing land use authorizations.
- The process will involve Native American Tribal governments and will provide strategies for protection of cultural resources on public land.
- Decisions will strive to be compatible with existing plans and policies of adjacent local, State, and Federal governments and agencies, as long as the decisions are made in conformance with BLM management policies.

What are the preliminary resources and uses to be addressed?

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

Natural resources

- Air
- Water
- Soils
- Geology
- Vegetation
- Wildlife
- Special status species
- Noxious weeds

Human/Social

- Lands and realty
- Livestock grazing
- Minerals
- Recreation
- Visual resources
- Social and economic conditions
- Fire management
- Hazardous substances management
- Native American issues and concerns

Cultural

- Prehistoric, historic, and archaeological resources
- Paleontological resources

What decisions will result from the TriCounty RMPs/EIS?

Generally, questions such as the following will be considered:

- *How can the Las Cruces Field Office accommodate potentially competing interests (e.g., grazing and recreation)?*
- *Given the need for urban expansion, how much land should be disposed of in the Planning Area?*
- *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 or the allowable levels of resource use?*
- *What should be the limits and magnitude of BLM's management?*



BLM needs your thoughts and ideas!

In 2003, BLM personnel informally met and conversed with citizens in the Planning Area to better understand community interests related to public land, issues about public land management, and opportunities identified by residents to improve public land management. Now, as the planning process begins, BLM's goal is to continue and expand this public outreach to foster collaborative planning and problem-solving.

BLM is interested in hearing from the people who have a stake in BLM's management decisions for the public land in the three-county Planning Area. Because the goal of the RMPs is to guide future resource management for the long-term needs of future generations, an effective RMP cannot be prepared without public input.

The first opportunity for you to participate in the planning process 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. Your thoughts, ideas, and comments are important to us throughout the process, but especially right now during this early stage. Please attend one or more of the scoping meetings and/or send us your written comments on the enclosed preaddressed comment form before the scoping period ends, which is March 28, 2005. Details of the meeting are provided below. The meetings also will be announced through local media.

BLM will provide other opportunities throughout the process to discuss progress of the process, and BLM will ask you to review the Draft RMPs/EIS, which is scheduled for release in summer 2006 for a 90-day public review period.

During that period, BLM will conduct public hearings to accept comments on the adequacy of the Draft RMPs/EIS. Written comments also will be accepted during the period.

A mailing list will be maintained throughout the process. If you wish to be removed from the mailing list, please let us know. Otherwise your name will be retained on the list and you will receive information on the TriCounty RMPs/EIS in the future.

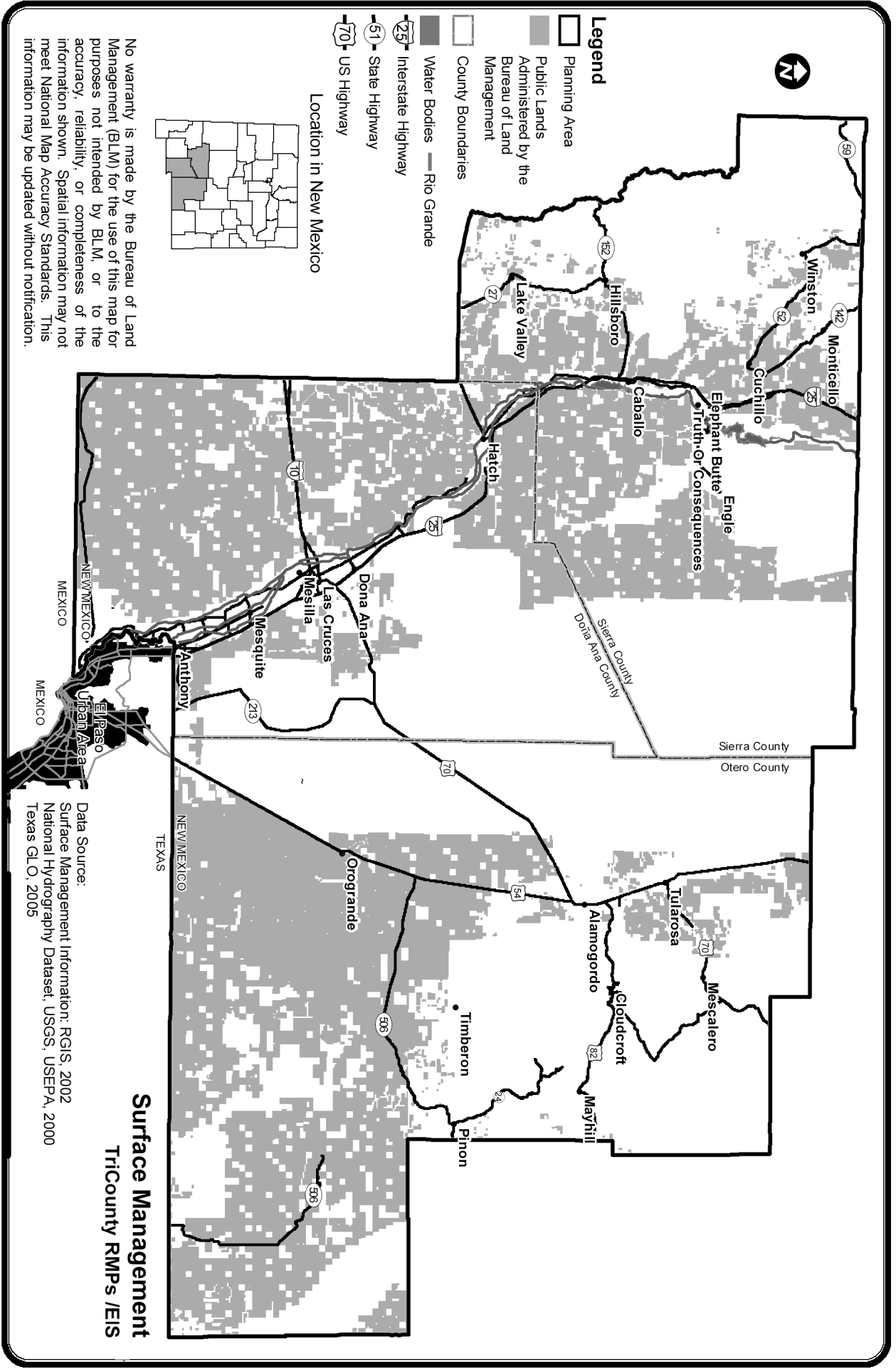
Informational materials like this newsletter will be available on the Las Cruces Field Office website at www.nm.blm.gov under the Planning/NEPA link.

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 1-877-877-0918, leave a message, and someone will return your call as soon as possible.

PUBLIC SCOPING MEETINGS

Please Attend!

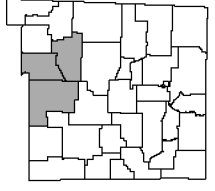
March 15, 2005 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. Las Cruces Field Office 1800 Marquess Las Cruces, NM	March 16, 2005 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. Otero County Courthouse 1000 New York Avenue Alamogordo, NM
March 22, 2005 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. Civic Center 400 W. 4 th Street Truth or Consequences, NM	March 23, 2005 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. Women's Intercultural Center 303 Lincoln Street Anthony, NM



Legend

- Planning Area
- Public Lands Administered by the Bureau of Land Management
- County Boundaries
- Water Bodies — Rio Grande
- Interstate Highway
- State Highway
- US Highway

Location in New Mexico



No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for the use of this map for purposes not intended by BLM, or to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of the information shown. Spatial information may not meet National Map Accuracy Standards. This information may be updated without notification.

Data Source:
 Surface Management Information: RGIS, 2002
 National Hydrography Dataset, USGS, USEPA, 2000
 Texas G.I.O., 2005

**Surface Management
 TriCounty RMPs /EIS**



Bureau of Land Management Las Cruces Field Office

TriCounty RMPs/EIS



PUBLIC SCOPING MEETINGS

Please Attend!

March 15, 2005

6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

Las Cruces Field Office

1800 Marquess

Las Cruces, NM

March 16, 2005

6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

Otero County Courthouse

1000 New York Avenue

Alamogordo, NM

March 22, 2005

6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

Civic Center

400 W. 4th Street

Truth or Consequences, NM

March 23, 2005

6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

Women's Intercultural Center

303 Lincoln Street

Anthony, NM

US DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
LAS CRUCES FIELD OFFICE
1800 MARQUESS
LAS CRUCES, NEW MEXICO 88005

PRESORTED
FIRST-CLASS MAIL
POSTAGE & FEES PAID
U.S. Department of the
Interior Permit No. G-76