

Environmental Assessment

El Valle de Cristo Church R&PP

EA# NM-020-06-003

NM-98042

July 10, 2006

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Taos Field Office
226 Cruz Alta Road
Taos, NM 87571**

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Need for the Proposed Action

A Recreation and Public Purposes Act (R&PP) application, #NM-102549, was received from El Valle de Cristo Church (Church) for the lease and eventual patent of approximately 8.34 acres of public land located in Ribera, in San Miguel County, NM. The Church has determined that there are very few recreational facilities in the area of Ribera. The closest recreational facilities are located in the Village of Pecos approximately thirty miles from the proposed recreation area. As a non-profit entity, the Church would be able to lease and/or purchase the selected lands at 50% of the fair market rental or value. The Church proposes to bear the full cost of developing the project for the community. They had previously received a State grant of \$20,000.00, however BLM was not able to process the application at that time because the site required a survey. The survey was completed in mid 2005. The Church does not own vacant land in the Ribera area; therefore they approached the BLM for a site.

B. Conformance with Land Use Plans

The proposed use is in conformance with the Taos Resource Management Plan approved in October 1988, which has identified the selected land within a disposal zone (map 6-7). The RMP states that requests for public land authorizations for public purposes may be considered on a case by case basis (pg. 2-15).

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

A. Proposed Action

The Church is proposing to construct a recreation area containing a baseball field, basketball court, volleyball court, picnic area, and parking area. The site would be patented to the Church once fully developed according to their Plan of Development. The recreation area would provide for the development of a community recreation site that could meet the needs of the residents in the area.

The recreation area would be directly managed and maintained by the Church, a non-profit entity. The Church would be responsible for maintenance of the improvements and grounds, and security. The Church will work with the community and the State of New Mexico Legislature to identify future funding sources for the recreation area. Final responsibility for the development and maintenance of this project would vest in the Church as lessee and patentee.

The proposed site is described as follows:

T. 13 N., R. 14 E., NMPM
Sec. 10: lot 11

Containing 8.34 acres, more or less.

B. No Action Alternative

As the Church does not own additional land in the Ribera area, and the adjacent site has been

used as a baseball field for several years without authorization, only the BLM site was chosen. The no-action alternative would mean that the proposed action would not take place and the existing field would remain as an unauthorized encroachment on public lands.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A. General Setting

Proposed Action

The proposed action would occur on a site located in Ribera in San Miguel County at an elevation of approximately 6,100 ft. The site is located adjacent to El Cristo del Valle Church and is bounded by BLM on the north and west and by private property on the east and south. County road B41E is the southern boundary and would provide access to the site. The vegetation on site is sparse and mainly consists of a few Pinon-Juniper, blue grama and sand dropseed grasses and large patches of bare ground. The soils in the area consist of Vibo and Ribera soils on fans and Tuloso Rock outcrop on ridges. Low, rolling hills, as well as open fields among private residences, characterize the surrounding landscape. The site is totally disturbed but for a portion of the hill between the baseball field and proposed basketball/volleyball site.

No Action

The no action alternative would result in the community of Ribera continuing to use the existing baseball field without authorization. Improvements would not be allowed without authorization.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action

Soils and Vegetation

Clearing, leveling and soil compaction are actions that would take place if the proposed action were approved. There would be some dust in the short term from construction activities. The access road would be built to BLM standards with stipulations to alleviate any erosion and control for runoff.

Other

Air quality would be affected in the short term by use of heavy equipment during construction which could create dust and fumes from the exhaust. This alternative would not result in negative impacts to ACECs or SMAs, cultural resources, floodplains, hazardous or solid wastes, Native American religious concerns, prime or unique farmlands, threatened or endangered species, wild and scenic rivers, wilderness or WSAs. None of the areas within or adjacent to the proposed project site contain permanent surface water. The proposed construction will not significantly affect any wildlife, vegetation, or habitats. Approving the R&PP lease/purchase would assist the community by providing an area for recreation that is within reach of the

community. The benefit of a recreation area in Ribera would create a strong sense of community and ownership among the local residents. The result would be a much needed facility for the community.

Impacts of No Action

Soil and Vegetation

There would be no impacts to soils and vegetation if the application were not approved. However, if the baseball field was continued to be used, the area could deteriorate and be susceptible to erosion.

Other

The no-action alternative would not result in negative impacts to ACECs or SMAs, cultural resources, floodplains, hazardous or solid wastes, Native American religious concerns, prime or unique farmlands, threatened or endangered species, wild and scenic rivers, wilderness or WSAs.

The result of the no action alternative would deny the proponent the authorization to construct, improve, and operate a recreation site forcing the community to find another location close to the community of Ribera for recreation activities. The community would eventually have to stop using the site due to disrepair. Should the Church not be able to locate another site, the residents would be forced to continue to travel 30 miles to the nearest recreational site. The Church would possibly have to look for property elsewhere and the cost of land could prohibit the Church from going forth with their plans. The no-action alternative would leave the community of Ribera without a site for their proposed recreation facility.

V. Mitigation Measures

Proposed Action

Should the proposed action be selected it would require erosion control methods for runoff such as water bars and landscaping.

Compliance visits would determine whether current practices are addressing erosion and if necessary, additional requirements could be imposed to avoid and alleviate additional problems. Any fill mixture brought in would be from a weed free source. The selected site would be inspected for noxious weeds and weed control to minimize reproduction and movement of noxious weeds to other areas. All heavy equipment would be required to be cleansed of mud and dirt prior to entering and exiting public lands to remove noxious weed seeds. The lessee and BLM would monitor the site for noxious weed infestation, and the lessee would provide for treatment of noxious weeds. The method of treatment would be required to be approved by the Authorized Officer.

VI. Environmental Justice

The adverse impacts of granting a lease or issuing patent on this property are not expected to

occur disproportionately to low-income groups, minorities or Indian tribes.

VII. Cumulative and Residual Impacts

In light of the rural community of Ribera, the cumulative and residual impacts are not expected to be great as the baseball field already exists on site. There has not been much development in the area, but for a few new homes or remodels, nor are any major developments likely. Long term impacts to visual quality would not be extensive as the baseball field exists on site and the other proposed improvements would be placed against sloping terrain blocking them from the line of site of the surrounding community. The impacts to the social environments would be slight as the improvements would be contained close to the community in an area that has already seen previous development and disturbance. Mitigation measures described under the mitigation section would alleviate impacts.

VIII. PROGRAM SPECIFIC EXAMINATIONS

Threatened and Endangered Species/

To determine presence or absence of sensitive, threatened or endangered plant and wildlife species in the project area, information was obtained from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service *Federal Endangered, Threatened, Proposed, Candidate, and Species of Concern for San Miguel County, New Mexico*; New Mexico Department of Game and Fish *New Mexican Wildlife of Concern for San Miguel County*; and New Mexico Rare Plant Technical Council *New Mexico Rare Plants in San Miguel County* (see attached species list).

The threatened and endangered species analysis conducted on January 11, 2006, determined that no state or federally listed threatened or endangered species are likely to be found at the project site, nor adjacent to it. It also determined that application will likely have little to no affect on any of the species listed by the state or federal government as rare, sensitive, proposed, candidate, or species of concern.

Cultural Resources

The parcel was visited by the Taos Field Office Archaeologist on February 15, 2006 and it was determined that an archaeological inventory is not needed. The proposed action will have no effect on cultural resources.

Range

The proposal is not within a grazing district, there is not livestock grazing on the subject parcel and there would be no impact to grazing.

Hazardous Materials

There were no contaminants identified on the site during inspection on February 15, 2006 and approval was recommended (see attached report).

Minerals

A field inspection of the site and a review of the geologic literature was conducted in February and March of 2006 and locatable and leasable minerals were not identified within the boundaries of the subject property (Taos Resource Mineral Inventory, 1981). See report in file.

IX. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

A. Persons and Agencies Consulted

Valerie Williams, BLM Wildlife Biologist
Will Gabonay, BLM Cadastral Surveyor
David McInnis, DOI Appraiser

Paul Williams, BLM Archaeologist
Joe Mirabal, Geologist
Greg Gustina, BLM Hydrologist

X. ADDENDUM

Plan of Proposed Development
Archeological Report
Threatened & Endangered Report
Mineral Report
Hazardous Materials Report
Topo map

XI. REFERENCES

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service. 1981. Soil Survey of San Miguel County Area, New Mexico. National Cooperative Soil Survey, USDA.

DECISION RECORD AND
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Finding of No Significant Impact: Based on the analysis of the potential environmental impacts contained in the attached environmental assessment, I have determined that the impacts of the proposed action are not expected to be significant and an environmental impact statement is not required.

Decision: It is my decision that the following lands be classified for recreation and public purposes. The land will be made available for lease and eventual disposal, under the authority of the Recreation and Public Purposes Act of June 14, 1926, as amended (43 U.S.C. 869 et seq.) and Sec. 211 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (43 U.S.C. 1721) to El Valle de Cristo Church for use as a recreation area. During development of the area, the land should be leased at an annual rental of \$2,000 per year. Upon completion of the construction of the facilities, the land may be patented for the appraised value of \$25,000.00.

The lease should be subject to the terms and conditions of 43 CFR 2912.1-1. The land should be patented subject to the procedures of 43 CFR 2740, Executive Order 11988, and the patent should be subject to valid existing rights. All minerals, ditches and canals should be reserved to the United States. The land is described as:

T. 13 N., R. 14 E., NMPM
sec. 10: lot 11

Containing 8.34 acres, more or less

Details of the selected alternative are provided in the Environmental Assessment accompanying this decision. The mitigation measures as identified for the proposed action in the environmental assessment and attached stipulations will be applied to the project.

Rationale for the Decision: In accordance with 43 CFR 4210.1(c) the classification of the land is consistent with State and local government programs, plans, zoning, and applicable regulations. The principal criteria, in allowing El Valle de Cristo Church application for lease/patent, are that the use is legal, the land is suited for the uses proposed, and the land is to be used for a definitely proposed project. Additionally, the actions do not result in any undue or unnecessary environmental degradation and are in conformance with the Taos Resource Management Plan, approved October, 1988. In addition:

- There are no adverse impacts to federally listed threatened or endangered plant or animal species or to cultural resources.
- The major resource issues identified through BLM interdisciplinary review have been addressed in the analysis and considered in the decision. Impacts of the activities to be

authorized are not significant.

This project will help meet a community need to address the need of a recreation facility near the community.

Field Office Manager

Date

Attachments:

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