

INTERNAL DRAFT

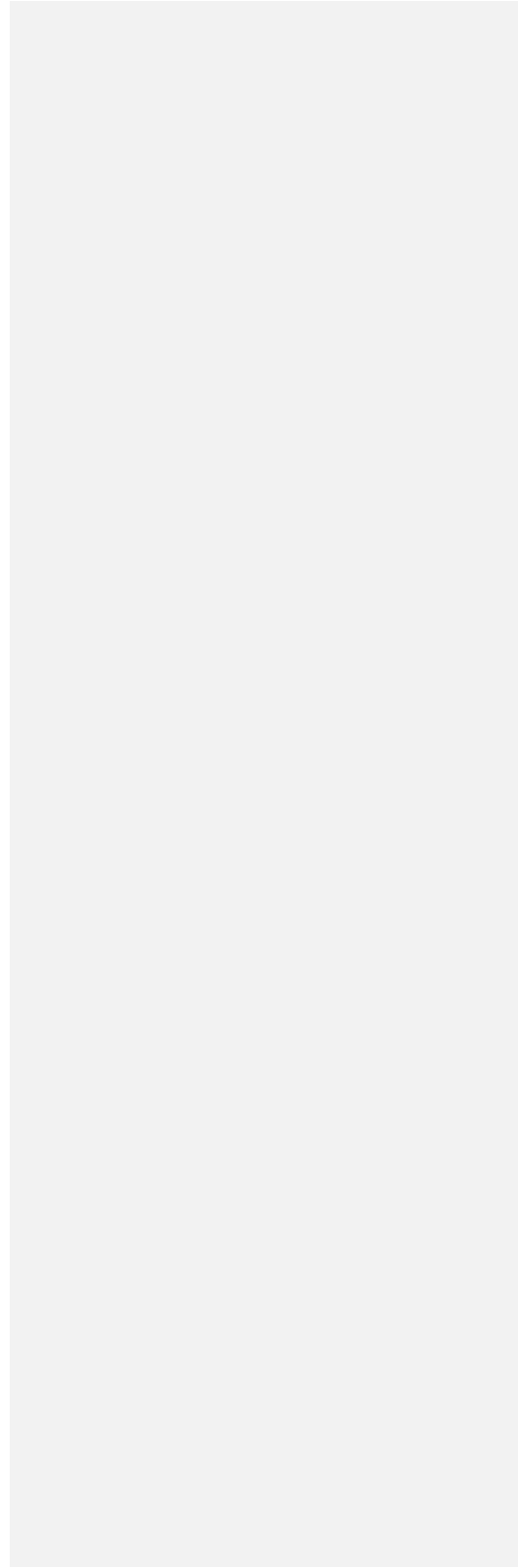
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## Chapter I

Purpose of and Need for Action

INTERNAL DRAFT

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# Chapter I. Purpose of and Need for Action

## I.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), the United States (US) Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), develops and periodically revises its land-use plans. These plans are known as “resource management plans” (RMPs), which guide management of BLM-administered public lands.

The BLM Rio Puerco Field Office (RPFO) is revising its existing RMP, originally approved in 1986 (BLM 1986). This plan, now called the *Rio Puerco Resource Management Plan*, is being prepared along with an associated environmental impact statement (EIS) in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). The RMP/EIS provides future management direction for public lands within the boundaries of the Rio Puerco Planning Area (Planning Area).

The Decision Area consists of approximately 731,600 acres of BLM-administered public surface land (Appendix S, Map I-1). There are approximately 259,400 acres of BLM-administered surface land excluded from the Decision Area. In this RMP, the BLM addresses mineral decisions on the mineral estate associated with BLM-administered public land and private surface ownership (see Table I-2).

In this Proposed RMP/Final EIS, BLM staff members on an interdisciplinary team have described and analyzed alternative ways of managing public lands, resources, and uses administered by the RPFO in the future. The Rio Puerco RMP applies to all BLM-administered public lands within the Planning Area boundaries (the Decision Area), except for the portion of the Field Office administrative area already addressed in the El Malpais Record of Decision (ROD) and RMP (BLM 2001a) and the Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument ROD and RMP (BLM 2007a). Also excluded are lands assigned to the Bureau of Indian Affairs under Public Land Order 2198.

### I.1.1 Description of the Geographic Areas

Please note that all acreages presented in the Rio Puerco RMP are estimations, even when presented to the nearest acre. Geographic information systems (GIS) is a tool designed to capture and analyze geographical data for land use planning purposes. The GIS data and maps used throughout the development of the Rio Puerco RMP are dynamic datasets pertinent to the time frame captured. Data will later be refined as site-specific planning and on-the-ground implementation occur.

Between the publication of the Draft RMP/EIS (BLM 2012) and this Proposed RMP/Final EIS, landownership changed and GIS data were refined. Acreages associated with the Proposed RMP/Final EIS have been updated. Most calculations in this EIS are rounded to the nearest 100 acres. The accuracy of the calculations presented in the EIS depends on the quality and availability of data. Given the scale of the analysis area, the compatibility constraints between datasets, and the lack of data for some resource topic areas, all calculations are approximate; they are for comparison and analysis only. Acreages associated with all alternatives were updated, so they portray the BLM Decision Area (the data were clipped to BLM surface; see Section I.4, Changes Between Draft RMP/EIS and Proposed RMP/Final EIS).

A variety of different geographic areas are associated with planning, as follows:

*Planning Area (Appendix S, Map I-1).* The geographic area within which the BLM will make decisions during a planning effort. A Planning Area boundary includes all lands regardless of jurisdiction; however, the BLM will only make decisions on lands that fall under the BLM’s jurisdiction (including subsurface minerals). Unless

41 the State Director determines otherwise, the Planning Area for an RMP is the geographic area associated  
 42 with a particular field office (43 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1610.1(b)).

43 The Planning Area extends from the eastern boundary of Torrance County west through Torrance,  
 44 Bernalillo, Valencia, Cibola, and McKinley Counties to the New Mexico-Arizona boundary, and from the  
 45 Valencia County southern boundary north through Valencia, Bernalillo, and Sandoval Counties to the  
 46 Sandoval-Rio Arriba County boundary. Interstate 40 (I-40) crosses the Planning Area east-west, while  
 47 Interstate 25 (I-25) runs north-south. These interstate highways intersect each other in Albuquerque. Other  
 48 cities and towns from east to west on I-40 include Moriarty, Grants, Milan, and Gallup. The I-25 cities and  
 49 towns from south to north are Belen, Los Lunas, and Bernalillo; the highway leaves the Planning Area as it  
 50 exits Sandoval County. These highways also cross American Indian Pueblo and tribal lands as they pass  
 51 through the Planning Area.

52 *Decision Area (Appendix S, Map I-1).* The lands within a Planning Area for which the BLM has authority to  
 53 make land use and management decisions. In general, the BLM has jurisdiction over all BLM-administered  
 54 lands (surface and subsurface) and over the subsurface minerals only in areas of split-estate.

55 *Analysis Area.* Any lands, regardless of jurisdiction, for which the BLM synthesizes, analyzes, and interprets  
 56 data and information that relate to planning for BLM-administered lands. Analyses that extend beyond the  
 57 Planning Area boundary allow management decisions to be made within the context of overall resource  
 58 conditions and trends within the surrounding area, considering local, state, other federal, and tribal plans.  
 59 Examples of such information include the relative significance of BLM-administered lands for a certain  
 60 resource (such as a threatened or endangered species), or the anticipated impacts on resources (such as air  
 61 quality and socioeconomics) based on activities on BLM-administered lands. The analysis areas can be any  
 62 size, can vary according to resource, and can be located anywhere within, around, partially outside, or  
 63 completely outside the Planning or Decision Areas.

64 Approximately 13 percent of New Mexico's lands make up the Planning Area and are home to approximately  
 65 45 percent of New Mexico's population. Sandoval County public lands exist in noncontiguous blocks of  
 66 ownership (known as a "checkerboard pattern"), creating some access and management concerns.

67 **1.1.2 Landownership in the Planning Area**

68 As defined by FLPMA, ". . . 'public lands' means any land and interest in land owned by the United States  
 69 within the several States and administered by the Secretary of the Interior through the Bureau of Land  
 70 Management . . ." The RFPO administers public lands in the area. State, tribal, and county governments  
 71 have land-use planning responsibility for other lands under their jurisdiction. **Table I-1** and **Table I-2**  
 72 break down the surface and mineral acreage in the Planning Area by ownership.

73 **Table I-1: Acreage of Surface Landownership in the Rio Puerco Planning Area**

Owner/Manager	Acreage
Private	3,957,400
Indian/Tribal	2,518,600
US Department of Agriculture, Forest Service (Forest Service)	1,022,300
BLM	991,300*
State of New Mexico	723,300
National Park Service (NPS)	230,100
US Department of Defense	49,200
<a href="#">New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF)</a>	<a href="#">7,800</a>
New Mexico State Parks	7,100
<a href="#">New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF)</a>	<a href="#">7,800</a>
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,507,100</b>

74 Source: BLM GIS 2020  
 75 \* Not all BLM surface land is included in the RMP Decision Area (see Section 1.1).

76 **Table 1-2: Acreage of BLM Federal Minerals in the Rio Puerco Planning Area**

Mineral Ownership	Acreage
Leasable minerals	<del>-1,371,600</del> -1,372,300
Locatable minerals	<del>-1,367,400</del> -1,368,900
Salable minerals	<del>-1,413,800</del> -1,415,400
Solid leasable minerals (coal)	<del>-1,357,800</del> -1,358,500

77 Source: BLM GIS 2020

78 **1.2 PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR THE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN**

79 This section of this EIS provides a context and framework for establishing and evaluating the reasonable  
 80 range of alternatives described in **Chapter 2**.

81 **1.2.1 Purpose of the RMP**

82 Section 102 of FLPMA establishes the policy for periodically projecting the present and future use of public  
 83 lands and their resources using the land-use planning process. Sections 201 and 202 establish the BLM’s land-  
 84 use planning requirements. BLM Handbook H-1601-1, Land Use Planning Handbook (BLM 2005a), provides  
 85 guidance for implementing the BLM land-use planning requirements established by Sections 201 and 202 of  
 86 FLPMA and the regulations at 43 CFR 1600.

87 The purpose, or goal, of the land-use plan is to ensure that BLM-administered lands are managed in  
 88 accordance with FLPMA and the principles of multiple use and sustained yield. This RMP is designed to  
 89 provide a comprehensive framework for the BLM’s management of public lands within the Planning Area,  
 90 along with the allocation of resources under the multiple-use and sustained-yield mandates of FLPMA. In  
 91 addition, the purposes of the plan are as follows:

- 92 • Consolidate the existing RMP ([BLM 1986](#)) and its 1992 amendments ([BLM 1992](#)).
- 93 • Reevaluate, with public involvement, existing conditions, resources, and uses.
- 94 • Reconsider the mix of resource allocations and management decisions designed to balance uses, and  
 95 the protection of resources under FLPMA and other applicable laws.
- 96 • Resolve multiple-use conflicts or issues between resource values and resource uses.
- 97 • Establish consolidated guidance and updated goals, objectives, and management actions for the public  
 98 lands in the Decision Area. The RMP is comprehensive in nature and addresses issues that have  
 99 been identified through agency, interagency, and public scoping efforts.
- 100 • Under the requirements of NEPA, its implementing regulations, and other applicable laws, disclose  
 101 and assess the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of the reasonably foreseeable future actions  
 102 resulting from the potential implementation of each proposed alternative.

103 **1.2.2 Need for Revising the Existing Plan**

104 The BLM has identified the need to revise the existing plan through a formal internal evaluation, the results  
 105 of an internal analysis of the management situation (BLM 2009a), and examination of issues identified during  
 106 the public scoping process and through collaboration with cooperating agencies. Since the ROD was signed  
 107 in January 1986 for the existing plan, new data have become available, new policies have been established,  
 108 and old policies have been revised.

109 The expanding population of the Planning Area over the last 25 years has resulted in competition for public  
 110 land resources, as was evident during the internal and external scoping process. This competition, along with  
 111 emerging issues and changing circumstances, resulted in the need to revise the existing plan.

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## I. Purpose of and Need for Action (Purpose of and Need for the Resource Management Plan)

112 In addition, some of the existing plan's decisions no longer serve as a useful guide for resource management  
113 in the Planning Area. For example, the development of the New Mexico Standards for Public Land Health  
114 and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management (BLM 2001b) and the emphasis on recreation and visitor  
115 services have resulted in different priorities that were unforeseen when the existing plan was approved in  
116 1986. Renewable energy has also become an emerging issue.

117 Additionally, BLM guidelines for specially designated areas have changed, so previously designated areas must  
118 be reevaluated to comply with these new requirements. Tribal concerns about land tenure, mineral use,  
119 access issues, and urban expansion reflect changes since the signing of the existing plan. These identified  
120 changes, along with the issues and resource conflicts identified in both internal and external scoping, frame  
121 the need for an updated plan.

122 The BLM must evaluate situations where development of commercial energy and mineral resources or high-  
123 value recreation resources may be impacted by management prescriptions proposed to protect relevant and  
124 important values of potential areas of critical environmental concern (ACECs). Management prescriptions  
125 in potential ACECs that could limit development of 1) commercial coal, oil, gas, solar, wind, or geothermal  
126 resources, or 2) recreation or other resources important primarily for their economic benefit to the  
127 Planning Area must be evaluated to avoid unnecessarily restricting these activities. The boundaries of ACEC  
128 designations should be defined as the smallest area necessary to protect those relevant and important values  
129 and minimize impacts on other uses.

130 ~~The RMP will support guidance outlined in Executive Order 13790, Promoting Agriculture and Rural  
131 Prosperity in America, by using Planning Area public lands to foster jobs and the rural community associated  
132 with oil and gas development, other mineral development (e.g., potash and sodium), livestock grazing, and  
133 recreation. In addition, the RMP will be consistent with administration priorities, including sustainably  
134 developing energy and natural resources, increasing revenues to support the Department of the Interior and  
135 national interests, restoring trust, and being a good neighbor; Executive Order 13771 (Reducing Regulation  
136 and Controlling Regulatory Costs, January 30, 2017); and Executive Order 13783 (Promoting Energy  
137 Independence and Economic Growth, March 28, 2017).~~

### 138 **1.3 DECISION FRAMEWORK**

139 As identified both internally and externally, the planning issues drive the need for this RMP. Together with  
140 these issues, the planning criteria provide the framework in which RMP decisions are made. "RMP decisions"  
141 are those decisions established or determined in the Approved RMP. For example, the BLM received several  
142 nominations for ACECs during the scoping process for this RMP. These issues fall within one of the planning  
143 criteria (refer to **Section 1.3.2, Planning Criteria**), which is the need to identify and analyze areas potentially  
144 suitable for ACEC designation. In the Approved RMP, BLM managers and staff will determine whether any  
145 ACECs will be designated within the Planning Area. In this example, the land-use planning decision is referred  
146 to as a "special designation."

147 The BLM's interdisciplinary team has developed management strategies that provide viable options for  
148 addressing the planning issues. These strategies provide the building blocks from which general management  
149 scenarios, and eventually the more detailed resource management alternatives, are developed. The resource  
150 management alternatives reflect a reasonable range of management options that fall within limits set by the  
151 planning criteria. The planning issues and planning criteria used to revise the existing plan are described in  
152 the following sections.

#### 153 **1.3.1 Planning Issues**

154 Planning issues express opportunities, conflicts, and problems associated with the management of public  
155 lands. Issues also reflect new data, new or revised policies, and changes in resource uses that affect the  
156 Planning Area.

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157 Public input was generated through a formal public scoping period, which began with the publication of a  
158 notice in the *Federal Register* on February 29, 2008. The BLM held eight public meetings during the scoping  
159 period. The formal scoping period was scheduled to end May 31, 2008, but at public request was extended  
160 through September 30, 2008.

161 For a discussion of the planning issues identified during scoping, please refer to the Rio Puerco Resource  
162 Management Plan Revision/EIS Public Scoping Summary Report (BLM 2008). This report is available on the  
163 Rio Puerco RMP website at <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/64954/570>. Other resource and  
164 use issues are identified in the BLM Handbook H-1601-1, Land Use Planning Handbook (BLM 2005a), BLM  
165 planning regulations (43 CFR 1601-1610), and the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40  
166 CFR 1500-1508).

167 **Issues Considered in this RMP**

168 Those planning issues determined to be within the scope of the RMP/EIS were used to develop one or more  
169 of the alternatives, or are addressed in other parts of the document. For example, as planning issues were  
170 refined, the BLM collaborated with cooperating agencies to develop a reasonable range of alternatives  
171 designed to address and/or resolve key planning issues, such as what areas are suitable for energy and mineral  
172 resource development. A reasonable range of alternatives provides various scenarios for how the BLM and  
173 cooperating agencies can address this and other key planning issues, including the management of resources  
174 and resource uses in the Planning Area. In other words, key planning issues serve as a guide for the  
175 development of management alternatives. The key planning issues identified for use in developing the  
176 alternatives addressed in this EIS are listed below.

177 *Land Tenure Adjustment*

- 178 • What land tenure adjustments are needed to improve access to and management of public lands?

179 *Mineral and Energy Development*

- 180 • What areas are suitable or unsuitable for energy and mineral resource development?
- 181 • What level of development should be allowed in areas suitable for energy and mineral development?

182 *Recreation and Visitor Services*

- 183 • What areas should be managed as special recreation management areas (SRMAs) or extensive  
184 recreation management areas (ERMAs)?
- 185 • What facilities should be provided?
- 186 • What services should be provided?

187 *Visual Resources Management (VRM)*

- 188 • How will the potential use of lands be analyzed along the visual inventory to decide how to manage  
189 visual resources?
- 190 • What classes should be assigned for VRM?

191 *Special Designations*

- 192 • What areas, if any, contain unique or sensitive resources requiring special management?
- 193 • Should these areas be considered for ACEC designation?

194 *Public Land-Urban Interface*

- 195 • What areas need management to improve health and safety in this interface?
- 196 • What areas need management to reduce user conflict in this interface?

197 *Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Use*

- 198 • What areas are attractive for OHV use?
- 199 • What areas have resources tolerant of or compatible with OHV use?
- 200 • How can consistency with all resource program goals and objectives be achieved?
- 201 • Who are the primary travelers?
- 202 • What are the objectives for allowing travel in the area?
- 203 • Which characteristics of the setting are to be maintained (including VRM settings)?
- 204 • What are the primary means of travel to be allowed to accomplish program objectives and maintain
- 205 the setting characteristics?

206 **Issues Not Addressed in this RMP**

207 *Policy or Administrative Actions*

208 These include actions implemented by the BLM because they are standard operating procedures, federal  
209 law requires them, or they are required under BLM policy. They are therefore eliminated from detailed  
210 analysis in this planning effort. Administrative actions do not require a planning decision for  
211 implementation.

212 *Issues Beyond the Scope of the RMP Planning Process and Eliminated from Detailed Analysis*

213 These include decisions that are not under the jurisdiction of the BLM, particularly those that are within the  
214 jurisdiction of other governmental agencies (e.g., tribal entities or state, county, or local jurisdictions), or  
215 those beyond the capability of the BLM to resolve as part of the planning process. Issues identified in this  
216 category include the following:

- 217 • New proposals for Wilderness or Wilderness study area (WSA) designation.
- 218 • Activities and uses beyond the jurisdiction of the BLM, including changes in existing laws, policies,  
219 and regulations.
- 220 • Availability of funding and personnel for managing resource and use programs.
- 221 • Consideration of alternative energy sources as substitutes for activities related to mineral  
222 development.
- 223 • The State of New Mexico and the counties addressed in this RMP/EIS may hold valid existing rights-  
224 of-way (ROWs) in the Planning Area under Revised Statute (R.S.) 2477 (Act of July 28, 1866; Chapter  
225 262262, 8, 14, Stat. 252, 253 codified at 43 United States Code [USC] 932). On October 21, 1976,  
226 Congress repealed R.S. 2477 by passing FLPMA. This RMP does not adjudicate, analyze, or otherwise  
227 determine the validity of claimed ROWs. Additionally, nothing in the RMP extinguishes any valid  
228 ROW, or alters in any way the legal right the state and counties have to assert and protect R.S.  
229 2477 rights, or to challenge in federal court or other appropriate means any use restrictions imposed  
230 by the RMP that they believe are inconsistent with their rights.
- 231 • Specific projects such as mineral extraction. The impacts of open mineral extraction are analyzed  
232 based on affecting other resources; however, the specific impacts of proposed projects cannot be  
233 analyzed in this document, but they will be analyzed as such projects are proposed.

234 Additional reasons that some issues have been categorized as beyond the scope of the planning process are  
235 discussed in **Chapter 2 (Section 2.4)** of this document.

236 **Management Concerns**

237 Management concerns are topics or points of dispute that involve a resource management activity or land  
238 use. While some of these concerns may overlap the issues, a management concern is generally more  
239 important to an individual or group, whereas a planning issue has the potential to be a more widespread



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240 source of conflict or opportunity. The management concerns that have received consideration in the  
241 planning process are as follows.

242 *Air Quality*

243 The document identifies (1) all potentially affected Class I areas; (2) actions that could be taken to protect  
244 these areas; and (3) area-wide criteria or restrictions that will be applied to any activity authorized by the  
245 RPFO to ensure compliance with all applicable air quality standards and implementation plans.

246 *Cave Resources*

247 As a part of this planning effort, BLM staff will determine whether or not caves located on RPFO public lands  
248 meet the criteria for significance as set forth at 43 CFR 37.11(c). As they meet the criteria, the RPFO will  
249 describe management objectives and prescriptions for those areas. Cave-specific wildlife may also be  
250 addressed under wildlife resources, and caves may be managed as wildlife habitat.

251 *Resources and Traditional Cultural Values*

252 Through the planning process, BLM staff members have done the following: (1) described the cultural  
253 resource values located within the Planning Area; (2) established goals for their management, including  
254 protection by preservation of significant cultural resources, reduction of imminent threats, and the resolution  
255 of potential conflicts from natural or human-caused deterioration or from other resource uses; and (3)  
256 addressed the allocation of recorded sites to use categories as identified in BLM Manual 8110. In addition to  
257 assigning use categories to known cultural resources, BLM staff are also carrying out the following: (1)  
258 developing a strategy for how those cultural resources assigned to use categories may realize their use  
259 potential; and (2) specifying that all authorizations for land and resource use will comply with Section 106  
260 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA; 54 USC 306108).

261 *Engineering*

262 The RMP provides guidance for building and maintaining resource improvements for watershed, wildlife,  
263 recreation, and livestock grazing. This guidance is consistent with resource management objectives for  
264 livestock grazing on allotments and use areas (BLM Manual 9101).

265 *Environmental Justice*

266 BLM staff have determined if actions proposed in the RMP would adversely and disproportionately impact  
267 minority populations, low-income communities, and local American Indian tribes, nations, and pueblos  
268 (under Executive Order 12989, Environmental Justice). While the analysis of environmental justice is  
269 specifically concerned with disproportionate effects on these populations, the social and economic analysis  
270 produced under NEPA has identified all potential social and economic effects, positive and negative, on any  
271 distinct group.

272 *Lands and Realty*

273 In the RMP, BLM staff have identified land use authorizations under 43 CFR 2800, 2880, and 2920, including,  
274 but not limited to, transportation and utility needs, land acquisitions adjacent to the EL Malpais National  
275 Conservation Area (NCA) in accordance with 43 CFR 2100, and needs under the Recreation and Public  
276 Purposes Act.

277 *Paleontological Resources*

278 Through the RMP, BLM staff have developed measures for managing paleontological resources. These  
279 measures are in accordance with the management classes established in the BLM Handbook 8270, the  
280 Paleontological Resources Protection Act, and current policy guidance found in various Washington Office  
281 instruction memoranda.

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282 *Recreation and Visitor Services*

283 In developing the RMP, agency staff have identified how many ERMA and SRMA will be identified within  
284 the Planning Area. For each ERMA or SRMA, the following aspects of recreation management are addressed:  
285 management of resources, visitors, facilities; marketing (outreach, interpretation, environmental education,  
286 and other visitor services); monitoring (social and environmental); and administration (regulatory, permits  
287 and fees, and concessions).

288 *Social and Economic Concerns*

289 The RPFO administers land within six counties, near larger cities such as Albuquerque, Rio Rancho, and  
290 Gallup, but also near smaller towns or communities such as Belen, Bernalillo, Bosque Farms, Corrales, Cuba,  
291 Edgewood, Estancia, Grants, Jemez Springs, Los Lunas, Los Ranchos de Albuquerque, Milan, Moriarty,  
292 Mountainair, Placitas, San Ysidro, Tijeras, and Willard. The concerns among residents about potential public  
293 land management decisions vary in the Planning Area and are being considered during the RMP process. The  
294 BLM held two economic strategy workshops in 2008 to (1) develop with rural community residents a  
295 common understanding of regional economic changes; and (2) give those citizens an opportunity to discuss  
296 challenges and opportunities with resource specialists.

297 *Soil Resources*

298 The overriding importance of stable soils on the landscape is to support vegetation. Soil properties, in  
299 combination with the precipitation and topography, are key factors in determining what vegetation types are  
300 supported. The soils support forest, woodland (piñon-juniper), brush, and grass vegetation types that provide  
301 livestock grazing, wildlife habitat, and watershed stability. Rock outcrops and rubble fields occur in many  
302 areas, which support little, if any, soil and vegetation.

303 In a semiarid landscape typical of the RPFO, naturally occurring surface water runoff and flooding may create  
304 sheet, rill, gully, and streambank erosion on some areas of public lands. A normal degree of soil erosion  
305 caused by wind or water is expected under natural conditions, but erosion that exceeds natural rates  
306 because of land use activities is referred to as accelerated erosion, which will result in the loss of soil  
307 productivity and stability. The deposition of eroded soil particles is referred to as sedimentation and is also  
308 a natural landscape process to some degree; however, sedimentation resulting from accelerated water  
309 erosion may create water quality and channel stability problems or may destructively cover upland  
310 vegetation. Deposition from accelerated wind erosion also can suppress vegetation and produce air quality  
311 problems.

312 Soil resources will be managed to maintain or improve soil health and productivity, and to minimize adverse  
313 impacts on these resources through management activities. Best management practices (BMPs) and  
314 mitigation measures will be implemented at the site-specific activity/project level to prevent or reduce soil  
315 erosion and compaction, especially for soils with severe erosion susceptibility.

316 *Vegetative Communities*

317 Distribution of vegetative types within the RPFO can be attributed primarily to a combination of climate,  
318 soils, elevation, water availability, and topography. Altitude changes between valley floors and plateau tops  
319 also affect vegetation. Disturbances, whether anthropogenic or naturally occurring, affect plant communities  
320 by creating patterns of varying plant species and age classes across the landscape. Changes in plant community  
321 composition and structure and function can be affected suddenly, resulting from wildfire, floods, drought,  
322 invasive species, and disease. As a result, some areas are devoid of diverse vegetative communities. These  
323 concerns must be addressed in order to achieve a desired plant community that supports the integrity of  
324 the ecological processes (water cycle, energy cycle, and nutrient cycle) provided by the vegetative  
325 community.

326 BMPs and mitigation measures will be implemented at the site-specific activity/project level to address  
327 invasive species and noxious weeds. Brush management will be used where species such as big sagebrush,  
328 piñon, and juniper trees are invasive. Saltcedar is a special-category, listed noxious weed that infests the  
329 riparian areas of the Rio Puerco watershed and is targeted for control from field office management areas.  
330 Cheatgrass is also a new special-category, listed noxious weed that infests the upper Rio Puerco watershed  
331 and will be targeted for large-scale treatment.

#### 332 *Visual Resources Management*

333 Based on an assessment of changing conditions, agency staff have updated the existing (1979) VRM inventory  
334 for the Decision Area. The need is to find a balance between the modification and preservation of the visual  
335 landscape. BLM staff have identified a spectrum of VRM objectives across the Planning Area that allow for  
336 varying levels of visual contrast to the characteristic landscape.

#### 337 *Water Quality*

338 BLM staff have worked closely with the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) regarding water  
339 quality planning and management. Data examined have included (but were not limited to) those pertaining  
340 to the NMED's identified impaired streams in category 303(d) of the Clean Water Act, riparian condition,  
341 land jurisdiction, water quality, and water quantity. BMPs to protect or improve water quality have been  
342 developed, including those required (1) for watersheds, as the result of regulatory sections of the Clean  
343 Water Act, (2) under the New Mexico Standards for Public Land Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing  
344 Management (BLM 2001b), and (3) under existing memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with the State of  
345 New Mexico.

#### 346 *Wildfire and Prescribed Fire Management*

347 The fire management portion of the RMP will be monitored through local fire management plan (FMP)  
348 evaluation and accomplishments. As prescribed by requirements of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of  
349 2003 (Public Law 108-148), BLM staff have also addressed working with local at-risk communities to identify  
350 and prioritize areas for hazardous fuel reduction treatments on federal lands through the use of community  
351 wildfire protection plans. Additionally, the RMP is consistent and in compliance with applicable New Mexico  
352 State smoke management requirements.

### 353 **1.3.2 Planning Criteria**

354 Planning criteria are constraints or ground rules that guide and direct the development of the plan. They  
355 ensure the plan is tailored to the identified issues, while unnecessary data collection and analyses are avoided.  
356 The criteria may be adjusted during RMP development based on management concerns and the results of  
357 the overall public scoping process. The RMP/EIS has been developed in compliance with FLPMA, NEPA, and  
358 all other applicable laws, regulations, and policies. The criteria listed below also help to guide final plan  
359 selection and are used as a basis for evaluating the responsiveness of the planning options.

- 360 • Land use decisions in the RMP will apply to the surface and subsurface estate administered by the  
361 BLM.
- 362 • For program-specific guidance for decisions at the land-use planning level, the process is following  
363 the BLM's policies in the BLM Handbook H-1601-1, Land Use Planning Handbook (BLM 2005a).
- 364 • Broad-based public participation and collaboration are an integral part of the planning process.
- 365 • BLM staff have endeavored to make decisions in the plan that are compatible with the existing plans  
366 and policies of adjacent local, state, and federal agencies and local American Indian tribes, nations,  
367 and pueblos, as long as the decisions are consistent with the purposes, policies, and programs of  
368 federal law and regulations applicable to public lands.
- 369 • In the RMP, the BLM recognizes the state's responsibility and authority to manage wildlife. The BLM  
370 continues to consult with the NMDGF.

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- 371 • The RMP recognizes valid existing rights.
- 372 • The RMP/EIS incorporates, where applicable, management decisions brought forward from existing
- 373 planning documents.
- 374 • BLM staff are working collaboratively with cooperating agencies and all other interested groups,
- 375 agencies, tribal entities, and individuals.
- 376 • The BLM and cooperating agencies have jointly developed alternatives for resolution of resource
- 377 management issues and management concerns.
- 378 • Each area with special or unique resource values has been evaluated for a potential administrative
- 379 designation, including ACEC, Wild and Scenic River, or other appropriate designation.
- 380 • Any free-flowing river and its associated land corridor found to be eligible for inclusion in the Wild
- 381 and Scenic River System have been addressed in the RMP/EIS by developing alternatives for
- 382 protective management.
- 383 • WSAs will continue to be managed so as not to impair their suitability for preservation as
- 384 Wilderness under the BLM's Management of Wilderness Study Areas (BLM Manual 6330) until
- 385 Congress either designates all or portions of the WSAs as Wilderness, or releases the lands from
- 386 further Wilderness consideration. The BLM no longer designates additional WSAs through the RMP
- 387 process, nor manages any lands other than existing WSAs in accordance with Manual 6330;
- 388 however, areas outside of WSAs identified through inventory to have Wilderness characteristics
- 389 are addressed in the RMP, as described in Appendix C of the Land Use Planning Handbook and in
- 390 accordance with Manual 6320, Considering Lands With Wilderness Characteristics in the BLM Land
- 391 Use Planning Process. Any recently acquired lands have been evaluated for Wilderness
- 392 characteristics.
- 393 • Forest management strategies are consistent with the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003.
- 394 • Fire management strategies are consistent with the Plan Maintenance Record – Updated Guidance
- 395 for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy for the RMP Amendment for Fire
- 396 and Fuels Management on Public Land in New Mexico and Texas ROD September 2004, Fort
- 397 Stanton-Snowy River National Conservation Area RMP, Prehistoric Trackways National Monument
- 398 RMP, and the Taos RMP (BLM 2017).
- 399 • In the RMP, BLM staff have considered public welfare and safety when addressing hazardous
- 400 materials and fire management.
- 401 • GIS data and metadata meet Federal Geographic Data Committee standards, as required by
- 402 Executive Order 12906. All other applicable BLM data standards also have been followed.
- 403 • The planning process has incorporated ongoing consultation with American Indian tribal, national,
- 404 and pueblo governments, and the RMP includes strategies for protecting recognized traditional uses.
- 405 • Planning and management direction have focused on the relative values of resources, not the
- 406 combination of uses that would give the greatest economic return or economic output.
- 407 • In the plan, the BLM has considered the quantity and quality of non-commodity resource values.
- 408 • Where practicable and timely for the planning effort, the best available scientific information,
- 409 research, and new technologies have been used.
- 410 • Actions proposed in the plan comply with all applicable regulations, are reasonable and achievable,
- 411 and allow for flexibility while supporting adaptive management principles.
- 412 • The Economic Profile System (EPS) has been used as one source of demographic and economic data
- 413 for the planning process. This system has provided baseline data and contributed to estimates of
- 414 existing and projected social and economic conditions.
- 415 • Planning decisions have been made with consideration of the impacts of climate change on resources,
- 416 as well as the potential contributions to climate change as the result of greenhouse gases.
- 417 • The BLM will give split-estate private surface the option of the same protection afforded on federal
- 418 surface.

419 **1.3.3 Other Related Plans**

420 BLM planning policies require that the agency review approved or adopted resource plans of other federal,  
 421 state, local, and tribal governments and, where practicable, be consistent with those plans. Plans related to  
 422 the management of land and resources such as this RMP are coordinated with the NMDGF. Specifically,  
 423 coordination addresses potential impacts on crucial wildlife habitats. The following are related plans and  
 424 environmental analyses that BLM staff members have reviewed for consistency:

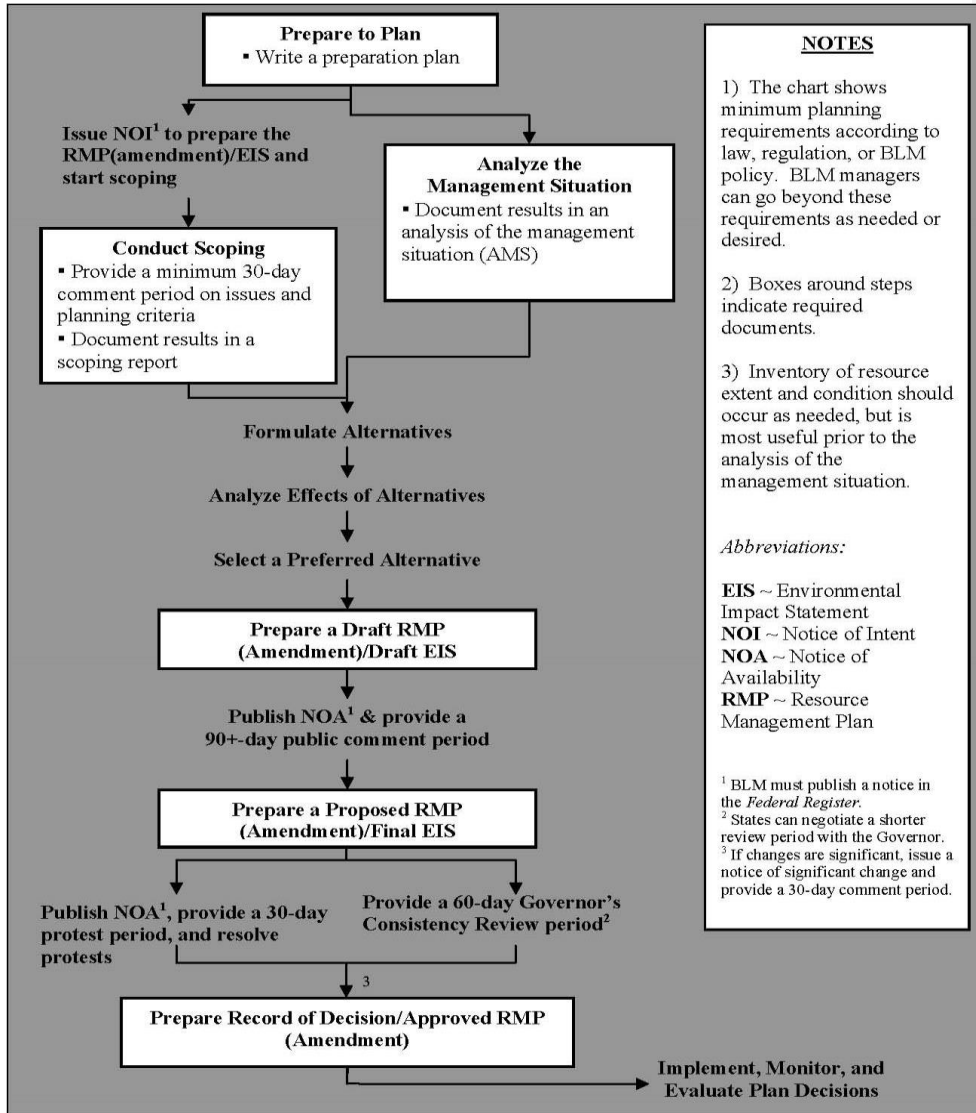
- 425 • Socorro Field Office ROD for the RMP (BLM 2010)
- 426 • Approved RMP Amendments/ROD for Designation of Energy Corridors on Federal Land in 11  
 427 Western States (BLM 2009b)
- 428 • Final Programmatic EIS on Wind Energy Development on BLM-Administered Lands in the Western  
 429 United States (BLM 2005b)
- 430 • ROD and RMP Amendments for Geothermal Leasing in the Western United States (BLM and Forest  
 431 Service 2008)
- 432 • Final Programmatic EIS for Solar Energy Development in Six Southwestern States (BLM and DOE  
 433 2012), incorporated by reference
- 434 • ROD for Travel Management on the Santa Fe National Forest (Forest Service 2012)
- 435 • Black-Footed Ferret Recovery Plan, Second Revision (USFWS 2013)
- 436 • Final Recovery Plan for the Southwest Willow Flycatcher (USFWS 2002)
- 437 • Sandoval County Comprehensive Plan (Sandoval County 2013)
- 438 • Valencia County Comprehensive Land Use Plan (Valencia County 2005)
- 439 • Placitas Open Space Master Plan (Sites Southwest 2002)
- 440 • NMDGF [New Mexico State Wildlife Action Plan Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy for](#)  
 441 [New Mexico](#) (NMGDF 2006/2019)
- 442 • Cibola National Forest Land and RMP (Forest Service 1985)
- 443 • New Mexico State Forestry Department, New Mexico Statewide Natural Resources Assessment,  
 444 Strategy and Response Plans (ENMRD Forestry Division 2010)
- 445 • El Malpais ROD and RMP (BLM 2001a)
- 446 • Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument ROD and RMP (BLM 2007a)
- 447 • Bureau of Indian Affairs Public Land Order 2198
- 448 • County and Community Wildfire Protection Plans: East Mountain Area Community Wildfire  
 449 Protection Plan (SWCA 2006, 2012a; [Arid Land Innovation, LLC 2015](#)); Middle Rio Grande Bosque  
 450 Community Wildfire Protection Plan (SWCA 2007); Cibola County Community Wildfire Protection  
 451 Plan (SEC, Inc. 2006, Forest Stewards Guild 2020); Candy Kitchen Community Wildfire Protection  
 452 Plan (BLM 2006); McKinley County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (Forest Stewards Guild  
 453 2018); Sandoval County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (SWCA 2012a); Torrance County  
 454 Community Wildfire Protection Plan (SWCA 2008, 2016); and Valencia County Community  
 455 Wildfire Protection Plan (SWCA 2012b, 2018)

**Commented [AA1]:** EMPSi checked all plans in this section to confirm that the most recent versions (dates) are listed

**Commented [AA2]:** As of 10/27/2021, this LRMP is being revised and is nearly complete. The FEIS was published in August 2021. The anticipated completion date of the objection review/resolution period is May 2022. This bullet item will be updated when the LRMP is finalized. See project timeline at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/cibola/landmanagement/planning/?cid=fseprd590157#Timeline>.

456  
457

**Figure I-1**  
**EIS-level Planning Process – Required Steps for New Plans, Revisions, and Amendments**



458

459 **1.3.4 Resource Management Plan Implementation**

460 After issuing the Approved Plan and ROD, BLM staff will develop an implementation strategy. This strategy  
461 will include workload identification, prioritization, and scheduling and will be developed in cooperation with  
462 other agencies and interest groups. Subsequent actions, such as activity plans and implementation actions,  
463 are future actions taken consistent with the management direction in the Approved RMP. Future decisions  
464 will be made using the appropriate level of NEPA.

465 The RMP provides basic program direction with the establishment of goals, objectives, and allowable uses.  
466 It focuses on what resource conditions, uses, and visitor experiences should be achieved and maintained  
467 over time. Because it involves considering natural processes with long-term time frames, the RMP must  
468 incorporate a long-term view.

469 This RMP represents only the first of these tiers. As a result, activity- and project-level plans are not  
470 considered further in this document.

471 **1.4 CHANGES BETWEEN DRAFT RMP/EIS AND PROPOSED RMP/FINAL EIS**

472 The BLM developed this Proposed RMP/Final EIS as a result of public, stakeholder, and cooperating agency  
473 input and agency internal review of the 2012 Draft RMP/EIS (BLM 2012). The Proposed RMP is Alternative  
474 ~~EC~~, which ~~includes management actions and allowable uses from Alternatives A, B, C, and D, the range of~~  
475 ~~alternatives outlined is the preferred alternative~~ in the 2012 Draft RMP/EIS (BLM 2012). Other factors  
476 contributed to the development of the Proposed RMP ~~alternatives~~, such as changes in policy and guidance,  
477 new legislation, and input and special expertise provided by cooperating agencies.

478 When ~~developing-determining~~ the Proposed RMP, the BLM focused on addressing public comments, while  
479 continuing to meet its legal, regulatory, and policy mandates. **Appendix R** contains a summary of the public  
480 comment process and the BLM's responses to the substantive comments received on the 2012 Draft  
481 RMP/EIS (BLM 2012). Some of the Proposed RMP text was corrected or reworded for clarification of  
482 purpose and intent. Redundant text in the Draft RMP/EIS was removed from the Proposed RMP/Final EIS in  
483 an effort to improve readability.

484 Notable changes in this Proposed RMP/Final EIS from the Draft RMP/EIS (BLM 2012) include the following

- 485 ~~• The addition of Alternative E, Proposed RMP, which carries forward elements from alternatives~~  
486 ~~presented in the Draft RMP/EIS.~~
- 487 • Acres were adjusted from the Draft RMP/EIS to the Proposed RMP/Final EIS to more accurately  
488 portray the BLM Decision Area more accurately. The data were clipped to BLM surface. ACEC  
489 calculations show the biggest difference in acres.
  - 490 • Some resources sections were updated to provide more recent information:
    - 491 – Air Resources was updated based on the revised reasonably foreseeable development scenario  
492 (RFDS; Crocker and Glover 2019) baseline scenario.
    - 493 – Cultural Resources was updated with current data from New Mexico Cultural Resource  
494 Information System (NMCRIIS) to determine the probability of site densities for BLM-  
495 administered lands.
    - 496 – Soil and Water Resources was updated to incorporate the BLM New Mexico Water Support  
497 Document (BLM 2019a).
    - 498 – Social and Economic Conditions was revised to reflect current data and to conduct modeling  
499 based on the Proposed RMP alternatives. The organization and breadth of the section now aligns  
500 with common conventions for socioeconomic analyses.

I. Purpose of and Need for Action (Changes Between Draft RMP/EIS and Proposed RMP/Final EIS)

- 1 – Special Status Species was updated per the ~~current~~<sup>new</sup> BLM sensitive species list (BLM 2018)
- 2 and US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC)
- 3 data ~~from the web~~ (USFWS ~~2019a~~<sup>2021a</sup>).
- 4 – Extraneous information (such as regulatory framework information or background information
- 5 unrelated to the impacts analysis) was deleted.
- 6 • Some resource sections were reorganized to ~~more~~<sup>better</sup> align with BLM guidance.
- 7 • ~~The name of the “Oh-My-God 100” area was changed to “Endurance Trails,” as detailed in Chapter~~
- 8 ~~2, Alternatives.~~
- 9 • The Trails and Travel Management section (Draft ~~RMP/EIS~~ Section 1.3.1.1.6, Travel and Trails
- 10 Management) was omitted as an issue considered in this RMP because, while the RMP designates
- 11 travel management areas (open, closed, and limited), it does not designate routes. The BLM will
- 12 complete comprehensive travel management planning after the ROD for this RMP is signed.
- 13 • ~~The addition of Appendix N, Rio Puerco Field Office Final Eligibility/Suitability Report for Wild and~~
- 14 ~~Scenic Rivers, was added.~~
- 15 • ~~The addition of Appendix O, Regional Mitigation, was added.~~
- 16 • ~~The addition of Appendix P, Recreation and Visitor Services Management Framework for Special~~
- 17 ~~and Extensive Recreation Management Areas, was added.~~
- 18 • ~~The addition of Appendix Q, Public Lands Identified as Potentially Suitable for Disposal or Further~~
- 19 ~~Study, was added.~~ This includes an additional analysis to incorporate direction from Secretarial
- 20 Order 3373, [Evaluating Public Access in BLM Public Land Disposals and Exchanges](#) (March 21, 2019).
- 21 • ~~The addition of Appendix R, Substantive Comments, was added.~~
- 22 • A new ~~reasonable~~<sup>reasonably</sup> foreseeable development scenario was incorporated.
- 23 • Additional references were cited in the document.
- 24 • Minor corrections, such as typographical errors and GIS accuracy updates, ~~were~~<sup>made</sup>.

25 Footnotes in **Chapter 2** describe additional changes since the Draft RMP/EIS.