**Cibola National Forest Sandia Ranger District**

*Evaluation Criteria Definition Matrix and Comment Form*

Date: September 24, 2015 Name: Virginia Seiser

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Address 11024 Montgomery NE #272, ABQ NM 87111

Inventory ID/Location: **D5-ADJ4** Las Huertas Canyon Sandia Ranger District

*Criterion 1-Apparent Naturalness:*

The upper slopes of Las Huertas Canyon are an undeveloped area covered with natural vegetation.

*Question 1a. Composition of plant and animal communities? Invasives?*

Provides habitat for wildlife including deer, bear and turkeys. Las Huertas Creek is an important water source for wildlife.

*Question 1b. Ecological conditions associated with area w/o human intervention? Change from historical conditions? Vegetation restoration treatments? Natural appearance?*

The upper slopes of Las Huertas Canyon are an undeveloped area covered with natural vegetation.

*Question 1c. Improvements? Landing zones? Roads or unauthorized routes? Fencing or pipelines? Mining activity? Range or wildlife improvements? Watershed treatments? Departure from naturalness of area as a whole?*

The upper slopes of Las Huertas Canyon are a roadless area covered with natural vegetation.

*Criterion 2-Opportunities for solitude or primitive & unconfined recreation?*

Upper Las Huertas Canyon is a little visited area with no developed trails, offering good opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation, including hiking, backpacking, wildlife viewing and winter snowshoeing and cross-country skiing.

*Question 2a. Pervasive impacts on opportunity for solitude? Topography, sights and sounds of civilization? Proximity to recreation developments and high use areas?*

Upper Las Huertas Canyon is a little visited area with no developed trails, offering good opportunities for solitude. A small private summer camp and several homes are located on an inholding on the eastern border of the area. A Forest Service managed snowplay facility is south of the area.

**Cibola NF Mountain RD** *Evaluation Criteria Definition Matrix and Comment Form*

ID: **D5-ADJ4** Las Huertas Canyon Sandia Ranger District page 2

Date: September 24, 2015 Name: Virginia Seiser

*Question 2b. Primitive & unconfined recreation opportunity?*

Good opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation, including hiking, backpacking, wildlife viewing and winter snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. The potential exists to connect the area to the Capulin Snowplay facility with cross-country ski trails.

*Criterion 3-Stand-alone area <5,000 acres not adjacent?* NOT applicable.

*Criterion 4- Unique and outstanding qualities?*

The slopes of Las Huertas Canyon offer sweeping vistas to the east, including a view of rugged Palomas Peak. Las Huertas Creek is an important water source for area wildlife.

*Question 4a. Rare plant or animal communities?*

No specific information about this.

*Question 4b. Outstanding landscape features? Unique geologic features? Scenic features?*

The slopes of Las Huertas Canyon offer sweeping views to the east, including rugged Palomas Peak. A shelter cave has been reported in the cliffs above the private summer camp.

*Question 4c. Historic & cultural resource sites? Structures, relics or RR beds?*

No specific information about this.

Question 4e. Water resources or watershed features?

Las Huertas Creek is an important water source for area wildlife.

*Criterion 5-Management*

*Question 5a. Can area be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics? Configuration? Relevant laws? Non-federal lands? Management of adjacent lands? Cultural & traditional uses? Wildland urban interface? Management activities or restrictions? Motorized uses? Special use permits? Cherry-stemmed roads?*

This area can be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics. It is completely within the National Forest and is bounded on the north and west by the existing Sandia Mountain Wilderness. The area is a natural extension of that wilderness. A lightly-used gated private road (Ellis Ranch Road) and associated in-holdings have been cherry-stemmed. This is the only interface with human habitation. Motorized use is limited to this road and the dirt road forming the eastern boundary of the area.

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Address 11024 Montgomery NE #272, ABQ NM 87111

Inventory ID/Location: **D5\_ADJ5** Tree Springs Sandia RD

*Criterion 1-Apparent Naturalness:*

This is a beautiful forested slope descending from the Sandia Crest, populated with deer and bear.

*Question 1a. Composition of plant and animal communities? Invasives?*

This is a beautiful forested slope descending from the Sandia Crest, populated with deer and bear. The area includes Oso Corridor which seems to be ideal habitat for natural stands of bear corn.

*Question 1b. Ecological conditions associated with area w/o human intervention? Change from historical conditions? Vegetation restoration treatments? Natural appearance?*

Naturalness of the area has not been noticeably altered.

*Question 1c. Improvements? Landing zones? Roads or unauthorized routes? Fencing or pipelines? Mining activity? Range or wildlife improvements? Watershed treatments? Departure from naturalness of area as a whole?*

Some forest thinning was done along highway and at Tree Springs Trailhead to remove dangerous snags; care was taken to preserve naturalness of the area as a whole. No roads, mines or pipelines. A wood gateway marks the existing wilderness boundary near the top of Tree Springs Trail.

*Criterion 2-Opportunities for solitude or primitive & unconfined recreation?*

Good opportunity for solitude in the area south of Tree Springs Trail along Oso Corridor. Prime opportunity throughout the area for primitive and unconfined recreation, including hiking and winter snowshoeing.

*Question 2a. Pervasive impacts on opportunity for solitude? Topography, sights and sounds of civilization? Proximity to recreation developments and high use areas?*

Tree Spring Trail itself is a popular trail. I hike it frequently myself and usually meet other parties when I do. However, the heavily forested slopes and mountainous terrain keep groups of hikers visually separated. There is a latrine and picnic table at the Tree Springs Trailhead. The area is bounded to the north by the downhill ski area, but visually separated by trees. Oso Corridor and southern section of the 10K Trail offer good opportunities for solitude.

**Cibola NF Sandia RD** *Evaluation Criteria Definition Matrix and Comment Form*

ID: **D5\_ADJ5** Tree Springs Sandia RD page 2

Date: September 24, 2015 Name: Virginia Seiser vseiser@unm.edu

*Question 2b. Primitive & unconfined recreation opportunity?*

The area includes several trails that afford prime opportunity for primitive and unconfined recreation, including hiking and winter snowshoeing. Wilderness designation would protect the area from overuse because it would exclude mountain bikers. Tree Springs is not a good trail for hikers to have to share with bikers because steep terrain and frequent blind corners increase the chance of collisions.

*Criterion 3-Stand-alone area <5,000 acres not adjacent?* Not applicable.

*Criterion 4- Unique and outstanding qualities?*

This is a mountainous area leading to the crest of the highest peak in the region.

*Question 4a. Rare plant or animal communities?*

Wonderful displays of summer wildflowers.

*Question 4b. Outstanding landscape features? Unique geologic features? Scenic features?*

Several switchbacks on the Tree Springs Trail offer sweeping vistas to the east.

*Question 4c. Historic & cultural resource sites? Structures, relics or RR beds?*

No specific information.

Question 4e. Water resources or watershed features?

The spring for which Tree Springs is named seems to have diminished to a seasonal marsh, maybe due to climate change. The marsh area is fragile and is protected from trampling by a wooden walkway.

*Criterion 5-Management*

*Question 5a. Can area be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics? Configuration? Relevant laws? Non-federal lands? Management of adjacent lands? Cultural & traditional uses? Wildland urban interface? Management activities or restrictions? Motorized uses? Special use permits? Cherry-stemmed roads?*

The area can be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics. It is completely within Forest Service land and is bounded on the west and south by existing Sandia Mountain Wilderness and should be managed as an extension of that area. The area is roadless. The only interface is with the downhill ski run.

**Cibola National Forest Sandia Ranger District**

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Date: September 24, 2015 Name: Virginia Seiser

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Address 11024 Montgomery NE #272, ABQ NM 87111

Inventory ID/Location: D5-ADJ6 Foothills Sandia Ranger District

*Criterion 1-Apparent Naturalness:*

This is an urban interface area. It is native scrub land.

*Question 1a. Composition of plant and animal communities? Invasives?*

An occasional bear may amble across this area on his way to raid garbage cans, but heavy use by bicyclists and dog walkers tends to discourage wildlife. Mostly native plants, which make a nice backdrop for the suburban homes along the western border of the area. Threat of cheat grass invasion.

*Question 1b. Ecological conditions associated with area w/o human intervention? Change from historical conditions? Vegetation restoration treatments? Natural appearance?*

Mostly native vegetation but the city is always in view from this area.

*Question 1c. Improvements? Landing zones? Roads or unauthorized routes? Fencing or pipelines? Mining activity? Range or wildlife improvements? Watershed treatments? Departure from naturalness of area as a whole?*

There is at least one wildlife drinker in the area. Some wire fencing present, maybe marking boundary with existing Wilderness area.

*Criterion 2-Opportunities for solitude or primitive & unconfined recreation?*

The area offers lots of recreation but no solitude.

*Question 2a. Pervasive impacts on opportunity for solitude? Topography, sights and sounds of civilization? Proximity to recreation developments and high use areas?*

The area is bordered by a city of half-a-million people to the west. The vegetation is open and the land gently sloping so there is little visual screening. Simms City Park and Elena Gallegos Picnic Grounds are a high use zone bisecting the area.

*Question 2b. Primitive & unconfined recreation opportunity?*

Heavily used by bicyclists, joggers, dog walkers and day hikers year round. Visual openness makes it easy for bikers and walkers to share trails safely.

*Criterion 3-Stand-alone area <5,000 acres not adjacent?* Not applicable.

**Cibola NF Sandia RD** *Evaluation Criteria Definition Matrix and Comment Form*

ID: D5-ADJ6 Foothills Sandia Ranger District page 2

Date: September 24, 2015 Name: Virginia Seiser vseiser@unm.edu

*Criterion 4- Unique and outstanding qualities?*

Albuquerque is remarkable in having so much well-managed public land along it’s borders. This area is an asset to the city, but doesn’t in itself have outstanding features.

*Criterion 5-Management*

*Question 5a. Can area be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics? Configuration? Relevant laws? Non-federal lands? Management of adjacent lands? Cultural & traditional uses? Wildland urban interface? Management activities or restrictions? Motorized uses? Special use permits? Cherry-stemmed roads?*

This area is not suitable for wilderness preservation. While it is adjacent to existing wilderness to the east, it is bounded by developed private land to the west, and bisected by a high use city park. It is a textbook example of wildland-urban interface. There is a little-traveled cherry-stemmed road leading to the Academy Easement.

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