

**Environmental Assessment
For
Continental Divide National Scenic Trail
Alamocita Creek: Land Acquisition
DOI-BLM-NM-A020-2016-0026-EA**

Preparing Office: Bureau of Land Management - Socorro Field Office, New Mexico

Serial/Lease/Case File Number:

Land Use Plan: Socorro Resource Management Plan, 2010
BLM-NM-PL-10-03-1617

County: Catron

Applicant: Bureau of Land Management

Address: Socorro, New Mexico

Date: 6/7/2016

Lands Description:

<u>Meridian</u>	<u>Township</u>	<u>Range</u>	<u>Section</u>	<u>Acres</u>
NMPM	2N	9W	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	3,305.48
NMPM	2N	10W	1, 2, 3, 4	2,561.84



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Introduction

Background

In 2007, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) New Mexico State Office (NMSO) began working with multiple landowners, counties, and local governments to establish an acceptable route for the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDNST); from Pie Town to Grants, New Mexico. With the assistance of Trust for Public Land and a third party partnership with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, the NMSO negotiated a potential purchase from willing sellers for Alamocita Creek property. The Alamocita Creek property could provide connection for the CDNST. The land acquisition or property would jumpstart a successful landscape initiative to reroute 52 miles of highway shoulder hiking. The reroute would provide enhanced recreational and high-quality scenic experience for the public. This acquisition is ideal to achieving continuity of the CDNST corridor and protecting the largest trail gap in New Mexico. The current temporary location on highway shoulders (dirt and paved roads) is inconsistent with the nature and purpose of the CDNST.

The Grants and Pie Town trail gap is at high risk for failure due to expanding subdivision developments occurring on adjacent private land; and a trend toward large private land holdings for exclusive hunting opportunities. The Trust for Public Land (TPL), Continental Divide Trail Coalition (CDTC), US Forest Service (USFS), State of New Mexico, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF), Back Country Horsemen (BCH), government entities, and other public organizations have a shared vision in establishing a permanent high quality trail location in the Pie Town to Grants area; letters of support are in Appendix A.

Description of Proposed Action

In 2014, the BLM with assistance from the RMEF, applied for Land and Water Conservation Funding (LWCF) to purchase Alamocita Creek property; a Collaborative Landscape Planning (CLP) initiative. BLM received 2016 LWCF funding to purchase the surface ownership of Alamocita Creek (5,867-acre parcel) property from the private landowner. The LWCF program provides an opportunity for BLM to purchase land needed to manage key natural resources, to acquire legal ownership of land to enhance the management of existing public land and resources, and to provide public access.

The acquisition property provides an opportunity to reroute and connect the CDNST; it also offers a number of important benefits including two miles of legal public access to the northern

portion of the Datil Mountains of the Cibola National Forest, and potential hunting opportunities. The property encompasses eight miles of the Alamocita Creek containing riparian habitat with stands of large cottonwoods which provides for many species of wildlife. BLM and RMEF are cooperatively working through the acquisition process to purchase Alamocita Creek property, whereby the RMEF would acquire the property from the private landowners and prepare a special warranty deed to convey fee title to the BLM.

Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

Purpose: The purpose for the action is to acquire 5,867 acres of private surface within the Alamocita Creek Area in Catron County, New Mexico. The proposed acquisition meets several goals identified in the 2009 Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDNST) Comprehensive Plan as amended. In 2009, the amended Comprehensive Plan describes the nature and purposes of the CDNST; “The nature and purposes of the CDNST are to provide for high-quality scenic, primitive hiking and horseback riding opportunities and to conserve natural, historic, and cultural resources along the CDNST corridor.” The BLM’s goal is to follow guidance of the 2009 Comprehensive Plan to “...facilitate and insure the coordinated location, development, operation, and maintenance of a high-quality travel route corridor, extending along or near the Continental Divide from Canada to Mexico”. Also, Section 205 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, as amended, (FLPMA) authorizes the BLM to purchase lands provided that such purchase is consistent with the BLM’s mission and applicable land use plans.

Need: The need of this proposed action is identified in the Socorro Field Office Resource Management Plan, 2010 (RMP). The RMP states the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail will be managed for recreational use and to protect scenic values within the BLM’s Planning Area. Trail corridors will be identified and legal access acquisition in the Pie Town and Quemado areas pursued to the extent possible from willing sellers. Acquisition of legal access will facilitate establishing a continuous trail route throughout the state. The action will facilitate meeting the objectives of the enabling legislation, establish and maintain a trail route through the Planning Area that will meet up with trail routes to the south and the north, and provide a long distance trail hiking experience for the users.

Decision to be Made

This Environmental Assessment (EA) discloses the environmental consequences of implementing the proposed action or alternatives to that action. The Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) describes the findings of the analysis in this EA. The BLM Socorro Field Office Field Manager (FM) is the Deciding Official. The decision and rationale for that decision will be stated in the Decision Record. Based on the information in this EA, the BLM Field Manager will decide whether to proceed with the acquisition of 5,867 acres of fee land for the Continental

Divide National Scenic Trail and public access into the Cibola National Forest or to reject the proposed action.

Conformance with Land Use Plan

The proposed action is in conformance with the terms and the conditions of the approved resource management plan for the public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management-Socorro Field Office, the *Socorro Resource Management Plan, August 2010* (BLM/NM/PL-10-03-1617) [Socorro RMP], as required by 43 CFR 1610.5. Legal access acquisition for the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDNST) would be acquired in the Pie Town area and pursued to the extent possible from willing sellers. Acquisition of legal access will facilitate establishing a trail route (Socorro RMP, page 31). The management decision for the CDNST Special Management Area (SMA) directs BLM to pursue acquisition of legal access (Socorro RMP, Page 56).

Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, or Other Plans

This Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, the President's Council on Environmental Quality regulations to implement NEPA (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508), and BLM's regulations implementing NEPA (NEPA Handbook H-1790-1). BLM is required to consider potential environmental impacts before approving actions and projects.

The purpose of this acquisition meets several goals identified in the 2009 Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDNST) Comprehensive Plan as amended. The management policies and directions of the Comprehensive Plan is to facilitate and insure the coordinated location, development, operation, and maintenance of a high-quality travel route corridor, extending along or near the Continental Divide from Canada to Mexico (CDNST Comprehensive Plan, page 8 of 26). The right-of-way acquisition on non-Federal lands directs each Federal or State agency to use the most approximate existing authorities for acquiring lands or rights in lands for CDNST purpose (CDNST Comprehensive Plan, page 12 of 26). The National Trail System Act [sec. 7(e)(2)] allows the Secretary "to acquire such lands or interests therein to be utilized as segments of the national scenic trail:..." and [(f) (2)] "...with consent of a landowner, acquire whole tracts notwithstanding that parts of such tracts may lie outside the area of trail acquisition." This part of the Act was written to provide for this very circumstance, where willing sellers are only willing if the entire tract is purchased.

Scoping and Issues

Preliminary scoping was conducted by the preparer and the other members of the Interdisciplinary (ID) Team. Potential issues, including the resources that could be affected by the proposed action, were identified at that time. The proposed project was entered into the Bureau of Land Management's National Register for Land Use Planning and National

Environmental Policy Act documents: https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/nepa/nepa_register.do.

Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives

Alternative 1: No Action

The BLMs NEPA Handbook (H-1790-1) provides guidance that for Environmental Assessments (EA) on externally initiated proposed actions, the no-action alternative generally means that the proposed activity will not take place. This option is provided in 43 CFR 3162.3-2 (h) (2). This alternative would deny the approval of the proposed application and the current land and resource uses would continue to occur in the proposed project area. No mitigation measures would be required.

Alternative 2: Proposed Action

Alternative 2 would authorize the Alamocita Creek Land Acquisition for establishing a continuous CDNST. The BLM proposes to purchase 5,867 acres of real property from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation to establish a permanent route for the CDNST. By acquiring the property, the BLM would be able to ensure a continuous trail route for the CDNST and manage natural resources. The acquired property would become part of the CDNST and be subject to all management prescription currently applied under the Socorro RMP. The acquisition would also protect and manage cultural, wildlife, riparian, and scenic resources; and provide public access to Datil Mountains of the Cibola National Forest.

Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis

Adjustment of the Cibola National Forest Boundary Alternative

The BLM New Mexico State Office would assist the Magdalena Ranger District of the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to develop a justification to adjust the northern Cibola Forest boundary to include the Alamocita Creek property. According to the *1985 Cibola National Forest Land and Resources Management Plan*, as amended, the primary emphasis for the Magdalena Ranger District is range and wildlife management activities which would increase both grazing capacity and wildlife habitat carrying capacity. The Alamocita Creek property provides additional wildlife habitat and potential riparian habitat as well as sources of water by way of the intermittent Alamocita Creek.

A boundary adjustment would require the Magdalena Ranger District Office to develop a supportive proposal for review and approval at the U.S. Forest Service Washington Office level. The USFS has not initiated this effort in their workload because the property is located outside of

their administrative boundary. USFS has provided BLM with funding to support administer costs of the acquisition.

Upon approval at the U.S. Forest Service Washington Office level, the Forest Service would pursue legislative action for boundary expansion. If a bill passes into law, the Forest Service may pursue acquisition depending on appropriation of funding to purchase the property. The legislative process can be long and complex. This alternative would require considerably more time than other alternatives and presents a multitude of obstacles and approval requirements at the local and national level; it was considered but eliminated from detailed analysis.

10 *Western Routing of the CDNST Alternative*

The BLM has considered an alternative routing of the CDNST west of the proposed project. Limited public land exists west of the proposed CDNST routing and proposed project area (see Map in Appendix B). BLM identified a preliminary trail route in this western area that would utilize BLM and State Land parcels to the greatest extent possible. However, this route could pass through as many as 17 different landowners, of which BLM has not determined their level of interest. This routing would also require many miles of easement acquisition from the New Mexico State Land Office. BLM would work with each individual private landowner one-on-one to develop an agreeable route. Unknown challenges may also exist connecting across private land to formulate one continuous trail.

Routing the CDNST in the western area would require approximately three times more miles of private land and state land easements than the proposed routing. The administrative costs associated with this routing are anticipated to be high. The western route poses a multitude of challenges and obstacles such as connecting a trail across 9 miles of private land, negotiating terms and conditions of each individual easement, multiple appraisals, and limited or no camping areas for hikers along a 26-mile stretch of trail. Due to the complexity and potential administrative cost, this western route was eliminated from detailed analysis.

Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences

General Setting

ID Team Review

The affected environment was described and analyzed by the Interdisciplinary Team. They determined whether resources would be potentially impacted, not affected, or if they are not present. The following resources will not be impacted: Area of Critical Environmental Concern, Caves and Karst, Fire and Fuels, Forestry, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Wild Horse and Burro, and Wilderness; and wetland/riparian areas, floodplains, , Wilderness Areas, Wilderness Study Areas, and National Land Conservation System Lands. Only those elements that were deemed to

be potentially affected or sensitive will be analyzed in this document. The following section describes each of these potentially affected resources.

Affected Components of the Environment

5 Critical Elements that may be present, sensitive, or affected are: Air, Cultural, Environmental Justice, Hazmat, Lands and Realty, Livestock, Minerals, Paleontology, Recreation, Soils, Threatened and Endangered (and Migratory) Species, Tribal, Vegetation, Visual, Water, Weeds, and Wildlife. The impacts of each Alternative on these resources will be analyzed below.

Continental Divide National Scenic Trail Special Management Area

10 Affected Environment:

The proposed project is adjacent to the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDNST) Special Management Area (SMA) and the property would be incorporated into the CDNST SMA Management goals and objectives.

Environmental Consequences:

15 No areas of special designation would be negatively affected by the acquisition of Alamocita Creek property. The proposed project would expand the CDNST SMA and allow a prime opportunity to reroute and connect the CDNST trail from Pie Town to Grants in Catron and Cibola Counties, New Mexico.

Soil/Water/Air

20 *Soils*

Affected Environment:

25 The proposed private land acquisition is located within the Salado NM Soil and Water Conservation district, Region III. The ecological site description of the project area varies greatly. There is a diverse classification of 26 soil types with complex slope variations ranging from 0 to 100 percent; the Hydrologic Soil Groups also vary. The soil classification for the project area is contained in the Soil Survey of Catron County, New Mexico.

Environmental Consequences:

30 The proposed land acquisition would not have an impact on soils. Any proposed future use would follow Best Management Practices (BMP's) as described in Appendix C of the Socorro Field Office, Resource Management Plan (2010).

Water

Affected Environment:

Water quality complies with State water quality standards. The New Mexico Environmental Department (NMED) has designated water quality-limited streams or reaches as required by Section 303 (d) of the Clean Water Act, in which water quality standards are not being met. None of the watersheds encompassing the project area are listed in the Final Record of Decision for the 1998-2000 State of New Mexico 303(d) List for Assessed River/Stream Reaches Requiring Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs). There are intermittent and ephemeral streams located within the project area. There is a defining intermittent stream identified as Alamocita Creek that meanders through the center of the proposed land acquisition. The entire proposed land acquisition is within the Alamocita Creek Watershed (HUC 10) and spans across 6 Subwatersheds (HUC 12).

Environmental Consequences:

The proposed land acquisition would not have an impact on water quality. Any future use would follow The Clean Water Act of 1987 as amended, Nonpoint Source Management Program (NMED 1999), and all additional Best Management Practices (BMPs) as described in Appendix C of the Socorro Field Office, Resource Management Plan (2010).

Air

Affected Environment:

Air quality throughout the project area is good. Intermittent dust storms occurring during the spring generate particulate materials that are a source of air pollution in the area. Other sources of airborne pollutants are seasonal prescribed fires on different agency lands, and burning of fuel wood for heat during the winter months. Dust storm events and other sources are not of a frequency or duration to detract from the overall good air quality of the area.

Environmental Consequences:

The proposed land acquisition would not have an impact on air quality. Any future use would follow The Clean Air Act of 1990 as amended and all additional Best Management Practices (BMPs) as described in Appendix C of the Socorro Field Office, Resource Management Plan (2010).

Cultural

Affected Environment:

A Cultural Resource inventory was not done for this acquisition proposal because transfer of ownership from private individuals to BLM would not affect cultural resources or be subject to section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). However, some resource inventory has been conducted for other projects. Previous inventories indicate that the area

likely contains significant historic and prehistoric sites; presumably related to the presence of Alamocita Creek. In general terms, federal ownership would provide a degree of protection to these sites because of requirements to comply with section 106 of the NHPA when considering proposed undertakings.

5 **Environmental Consequences:**

The BLM acquisition of the land parcel would not have an effect on Cultural Resources as discussed above. Consideration of cultural resources would be required for subsequent proposals for CDT trail development, and for any other undertakings proposed within the area.

10 **Environmental Justice**

Affected Environment:

Executive Order 12898 requires Federal agencies to assess projects to ensure there is no disproportionately high or adverse environmental, health, or safety impacts on minority and low-income populations. There would be no disproportionately high or adverse
15 environmental, health or safety impacts to minority and low-income populations by the proposed action.

Pie Town, New Mexico has a population of 186 (2010 Census) and is approximately 22 miles from the subject property. Grants, New Mexico has a population of 9,224 (2012 Census) and Magdalena has a population 926 (2012 Census), New Mexico which about is 87
20 miles away. The closest high density urban population is Albuquerque, NM with a population of 545,852 (2010 Census).

Historically, the economic base of Catron County has been timber, cattle ranching, recreational uses, and mining. Timber and mining production have decreased dramatically in the last 30 to 40 years. Several ranches have been converted to subdivisions; fragmenting
25 wildlife habitat and scenic character. Evidence of this trend is all around the subject property where lands have been subdivided down to 20 acre parcels.

Environmental Consequences:

The long term vision of linking and improving the experience CDNST hikers between Pie Town and Grants would provide positive benefits by attracting additional visitors to Pie
30 Town and Grants businesses, provides outdoor recreation opportunities for local area residents, and enhance opportunities to connect public and local communities together. With the assistance of our partners such as Continental Divide Trail Coalition, who are committed to building strong trail community-based relationships through volunteer activities, construction, maintenance and stewardship would be achieved. They've worked with the
35 community of Pie Town to provide trekkers of the CDNST with hospitable accommodations which contribute to the overall experience of the trail. Pie Town offers free camping at Jackson Park, the Pie-O-Near Restaurant reaches out to trail users. Involving volunteers on

the ground and hands-on projects are the most powerful way to build community stewardship to preserve and protect the CDNST in perpetuity.

An additional benefit to the public is to provide access where it is currently not present on the northern part of the Cibola National Forest, Magdalena District. The proposed project would enhance access for the public and local communities to hunting and recreational areas.

Hazmat

Affected Environment:

Real Estate Environmental Service Company (REECO) has performed a Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment (ESA) for the Alamocita Creek Acquisition property located in all or parts of section 1 through 6, T. 2 N., R. 9 W.; plus all or parts of Section 1 through 4, T. 2 N., R. 10 W.; NMPM which is 8± miles northeast of Pie Town, Catron County, New Mexico. Under the requirements of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA), 602 DM 2, and BLM policy H-2101-04; for any BLM proposed acquisition of real property or an interest in real property to which environmental liability can attach, whether discretionary or nondiscretionary, specify that the subject property/interests to be acquired undergo an environmental site assessment (ESA) prior to acquisition by BLM. The only exception would be a determination, with the concurrence of the Office of the Solicitor (on behalf of the Department of Justice), that no environmental liability will attach to such interest. This Phase I ESA is intended to permit the Phase I ESA's User to satisfy one of the requirements to qualify for the innocent landowner, contiguous property owner, or bona fide purchaser limitations on CERCLA liability (hereinafter, the "landowner liability protections," or "LLPs").

This report's findings identify known or suspected recognized environmental conditions (RECs), including controlled recognized environmental conditions (CREC) and historical recognized environmental conditions (HRECs), and/or any de minimis conditions which are associated with the property. REESCO presents the following findings regarding the property:

- The property comprises scrubby juniper/oak stands and grasslands away from the arroyos and thickets of cottonwood trees and other riparian vegetation within the arroyos, all of which is currently held as an investment while being used for limited livestock grazing and for limited private elk hunts.
- REESCO discovered no evidence of the property's previous use as other than undeveloped acreage used for limited livestock grazing.

- REESCO observed no structures at the property other than a few corrals and a solar-panel powered stock-well at the Single Well and a few small old abandoned stacked-stone structures (houses?, storage sheds?) scattered along the north side of Alamocita Creek.
- REESCO discovered no records of previous or current mining activity at the property.
- 5 • REESCO discovered no evidence of hazardous substances or petroleum products associated with the property's previous or current uses and no evidence for the presence or likely presence of any hazardous substances or petroleum products in, on, or at the property and which are due to any release to the environment; under conditions indicative of a release to the environment; or under conditions that pose a material threat of a future
10 release to the environment.

Environmental Consequences:

The Phase 1 ESA has revealed no evidence of any de minimis conditions or any RECs, including HRECs and CRECs, in connection with the property and REESCO concludes that no additional environmental investigations are necessary to be conducted at the property.

Lands/ Realty

Affected Environment:

The subject lands are bordered on the south by the Cibola National Forest Service and to the north is checkerboard BLM, State and private land. The Continental Divide National Scenic
20 Trail (CDNST) Special Management Area (SMA) is located in the northwest corner of the subject property and to the west is the Pueblo of Acoma. The proposed project would connect the CDNST trail from the CDNST SMA to the Cibola National Forest Service and on to Pie Town, New Mexico. The BLM checkerboard land to the north of the subject property has been identified as suitable for disposal according to the 2010 Socorro Resource Management
25 Plan (RMP). The subject property contains a county road maintained by the Catron County road department, a buried telephone, and a private road easement to adjacent landowners.

Environmental Consequences:

The proposed action would transfer 5,867 acres of private surface lands into public ownership and management. The subject lands or portions thereof may be managed in
30 accordance with the CDNST SMA. The county road, buried telephone, and a private road easement would be "subject to" the warranty deed acquired by the BLM.

Livestock

Affected Environment:

Historically this land has been grazed by livestock and currently leased to a rancher.

Environmental Consequences:

BLM would evaluate and determine if livestock grazing is a compatible use of the acquired lands through the NEPA process. If determined to be compatible a carrying capacity, and a season of use would be determined and the acquired lands would be advertised for availability for livestock grazing.

Minerals

Affected Environment:

Oil, gas and coal were reserved by the U.S. in T. 2 N., R. 10 W., section 4, SE1/4NW1/4, NW1/4SW1/4, SW1/4SW1/4 and SE1/4SE1/4. All other minerals and/or oil and gas are under private ownership.

The Mineral estate is reserved by multiple private landowners. The subject property appeared to have no evidence of mining operations according to the REESCO phase I environmental site assessment, the property's mapped topography showed no ponds or depressions of any evidence of previous or existing mining activities across the property's area (USGS, 1995). Acquisition of the mineral estate is not required to establish a primary route for the CDNST. Over time, BLM may acquire the mineral estate if the opportunity arises and future management of the property permits it.

In split estate situations, the surface rights and subsurface rights (such as the rights to develop minerals) for a piece of land are owned by different parties. In these situations, mineral rights are considered the dominant estate, meaning they take precedence over other rights associated with the property, including those associated with owning the surface. However, the mineral owner must show due regard for the interests of the surface estate owner and occupy only those portions of the surface that are reasonably necessary to develop the mineral estate. The owner or operator must work with the surface owner (in this case the United State of America) to obtain access to surface. The owner, lessee/operator will discuss access arrangements and terms of a surface use agreement. BLM would work closely with the owner or lessee/operator to address surface construction and reclamation issues on the surface estate.

Environmental Consequences:

As a surface owner under split estate, mineral and/or oil and gas development would be subject access arrangement and terms of a surface use agreement as well as surface construction and reclamation issues. Within increase in mineral interest and available resources staff, BLM may conduct a mineral potential report to determine the potential future development of mineral estate. The results of the report would also assist the BLM in

establishing a priority of mineral estate to acquire initially depending on willingness of owner.

Paleontology

5 Affected Environment:

Presence of paleontological resources is closely tied to the geologic units (i.e., formations, members, or beds) that contain them. The probability for finding paleontological resources can be broadly predicted from the geologic units present at or near the surface. Therefore, geologic mapping can be used for assessing the potential for the occurrence of paleontological resources.

Using the Potential Fossil Yield Classification (PFYC) system, geologic units are classified based on the relative abundance of vertebrate fossils or scientifically significant invertebrate or plant fossils and their sensitivity to adverse impacts, with a higher class number indicating a higher potential. This classification is applied to the geologic formation, member, or other distinguishable unit, preferably at the most detailed map scale.

The proposed project falls within Potential Fossil Yield Classification (PFYC) Category: Class 1 and Class 3.

Class 1 – Very Low. Geologic units that are not likely to contain recognizable fossil remains. Management concern for paleontological resources in Class 1 units is usually negligible or not applicable. Assessment or mitigation is usually unnecessary except in very rare or isolated circumstances. The probability for impacting any fossils is negligible. Assessment or mitigation of paleontological resources is usually unnecessary. The occurrence of significant fossils is non-existent or extremely rare.

Class 3 – Moderate or Unknown. Fossiliferous sedimentary geologic units where fossil content varies in significance, abundance, and predictable occurrence; or sedimentary units of unknown fossil potential.

Environmental Consequences:

Future project proposals in the parcel that have the potential to affect fossil resources would be evaluated, and Paleontological survey may be required.

Recreation

Affected Environment:

The proposed project would provide public access to 5,867 acres of newly acquired federal lands and adjacent to Cibola Forest Service lands. This area is remote and diverse within the scenic Sawtooth Mountain range.

Environmental Consequences:

- 5 If lands were acquired the building and maintenance of the CDNST would minimally effect the ground surface. Presently, there are no facility-based recreational improvements proposed for this area, only dispersed recreational opportunities would occur on these lands.

Threatened and Endangered (and Migratory) Species

Affected Environment:

- 10 The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has prepared a list of sensitive species to focus species management efforts toward maintaining habitats under a multiple use mandate. The authority for this policy and guidance comes from the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended; Title II of the Sikes Act, as amended; the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976; and Department of Interior Manual 235.1.1A. Refer to Appendix L of
15 the September 2010 Socorro Field Office Resource Management Plan for a list of Special Status Species.

Special Status, T & E Species *

- Several state of New Mexico listed species and BLM Special Status Species (SSS) may occur within the project area. These species mainly include migratory bird species and bat species,
20 some of which may be considered Migratory Bird Species of Conservation Concern (MBSCC) and/or Game Birds Below Desired Conditions (GBBDC). Management of known populations of MBSCC/GBBDC and their associated habitats, would be managed in accordance with IM No. 2008-050 and/or SFO or NM State Office directive, to minimize adverse impacts to habitat conditions. A supporting Wildlife/Special Status Species Survey
25 would be conducted and incorporated into the NEPA document. Refer to survey report for a list of species encountered and potential species present. Should such species be found, appropriate mitigation measures would be developed and applied in consultation and coordination with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, U.S Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and BLM contract surveyors.

- 30 New Mexico Department of Game and Fish Species of Concern:

- The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish has identified several species of concern which may occur or have suitable/potential habitat within the proposed project area (see list of species below). Although those species may have been documented close to the project area, the BLM-SFO currently lacks sufficient survey data for the above-referenced species
35 within the proposed acquisition area to propose any “on the ground” mitigation at this time. When sufficient survey data is gathered, appropriate “on the ground” mitigation measures

would be applied. The BLM-SFO, along with Wildlife Survey Contractors, would be completing work survey work under an existing assistance agreement. Any SSS documented as part of these monitoring efforts would be addressed and appropriate mitigation applied.

New Mexico Species of Concern

Chiricahua Leopard Frog
Northern Goshawk
American Peregrine Falcon
Mexican Spotted Owl
Gray Vireo

Sensitive Plant Species

The NM Rare Plant Technical Council lists twenty rare plants for Catron County (nmrareplants.unm.edu August 2008). Of these, potential habitat for ten rare plants (Federal or state listed sensitive species) may exist in the proposed acquisition area (see Appendix B for detailed species information).

Federally Listed Threatened and Endangered Species

In addition, the USFWS has listed several wildlife and plant species which may occur within Catron County. These include:

ENDANGERED

Mexican gray wolf (*Canis lupus baileyi*) Experimental Nonessential
Black-footed ferret (*Mustela nigripes*)
Least tern (*Sterna antillarum*)
Southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*) (Note: Critical habitat was set aside by the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals on 5/11/01)
Gila trout (*Oncorhynchus gilae*)
Yellow-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*)
Loach minnow (*Tiaroga cobitis*) with critical habitat
Spikedace (*Meda fulgida*)

THREATENED

Mexican spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis lucida*)
Spikedace (*Meda fulgida*) with critical habitat
Chiricahua leopard frog (*Rana chiricahuensis*)
Zuni fleabane (*Erigeron rhizomaius*)

Northern Mexican gartersnake (*Thamnophis eques megalops*)

Narrow-headed gartersnake (*Thamnophis rufipunctatus*)

PROPOSED ENDANGERED

Gila chub (*Gila intermedia*) with critical habitat

PROPOSED THREATENED

Mountain plover (*Charadrius montanus*)

Roundtail chub (*Gila robusta*)

Headwater chub (*Gila nigra*)

Of these, only bald eagles, Mexican gray wolves, and Zuni fleabane are known to utilize or may occur within the proposed acquisition area.

The proposed action would not adversely affect the bald eagle. Because this determination of effect did not reach an adverse effect level, the BLM is not required to consult with the FWS on this determination.

Mexican gray wolf (*Canis lupus baileyi*)

Mexican gray wolves have been documented to temporally utilize the area as a travel corridor between lands administered by the U.S. Forest Service. The proposed action may cause habitat fragmentation in areas of habitat that may support the Mexican gray wolf; however, it is not likely that there would be adverse impacts on this species and the proposed action would not jeopardize the continued existence of the species. Therefore the effect determination of May Affect, Not Likely to Adversely Affect is the appropriate effect determination for the Mexican gray wolf and the BLM is not required to consult with the FWS on this determination.

Authorized activities such as rights-of-ways could fragment habitat however no single activity or combination of activities in the future authorized by the Socorro Field Office is likely to jeopardize the continued existence of Mexican gray wolves. On January 12, 1998, the FWS published an Endangered Species Act (ESA) section 10(j) rule on the Mexican gray wolf that provided for the designation of specific populations of listed species in the United States as “as experimental populations”. Species that are designated a nonessential experimental population under Section 10(j) of the ESA are considered a “proposed” species for BLM for purposes of compliance with Section 7 of the Act. Under section 7 of the ESA, Federal agencies are under obligation to confer with the FWS, as opposed to consult, on their proposed actions that are likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the species. However, BLM policy (Manual 6840.06B) states that the BLM shall confer with the FWS on any action that is likely to adversely affect a proposed species or proposed critical habitat.

Zuni Fleabane (*Erigeron rhizomatus*)

Status: The Zuni fleabane was listed on April 26, 1985 as Threatened (50 FR 16680). It is also listed as Endangered in New Mexico and as a Special Status Species for BLM lands.

Description of the Species: The Zuni fleabane is a herbaceous perennial with creeping rhizomes; stems 2.5-4.5 dm tall, sparsely branching from near the base, growing in clumps to about 3 dm in diameter; leaves alternate, oblong, and about 1.0 cm long, glabrous except for occasional ciliate hairs on the margins. The flowers are white or tinged with blue-violet, approximately 6-7 mm long and 1.3-1.5 mm wide. It flowers in May and June.

Distribution

Range-Wide: Found in New Mexico (McKinley, San Juan, and Catron Counties) and Arizona (Apache County, Red Valley/Cove area on the Navajo Reservation).

New Mexico: Approximately 31 populations are now known from two counties in New Mexico. Three populations are known in the Zuni Mountains on the Cibola National Forest in areas south of Fort Wingate in McKinley County, 27 (potentially more) on the Cibola National Forest, and 1 population on an adjacent area administered by the BLM northwest of Datil in Catron County.

Catron County: Found in the Sawtooth and northwest Datil Mountains in Catron County.

Habitat: It is found on nearly barren clay hillsides with soils derived from shales of the Chinle or Baca formations (often seleniferous); most often on north or east-facing slopes in open piñon-juniper woodlands at 7,300-8,000 ft. Specifically, it is distributed in highly localized population sites in the Zuni, San Juan, Datil, and Sawtooth mountains of west-central New Mexico. The largest and most extensive populations seem to be in the Datil Mountains. Throughout its range it is restricted to clays of the Chinle formation in the Zuni Mountains and to similar clays of the Baca formation in the Datil and Sawtooth ranges (Fletcher, 1986). These formations are associated with uranium deposits, and many of the populations are found on existing abandoned uranium mining claims.

Effect Determination

Reasons for Decline/Vulnerability: The primary threat to this species is habitat disturbance through mining operations, since most populations sit on historic and current mining claims, and there has been a recent increased interest in uranium due to increasing value. Most of the populations are on US Forest Service managed lands with the exception of the Sawtooth ACEC (BLM managed lands) with a single population. The BLM is the only agency to withdraw mineral development for this single population of this species. At the time of the 1988 USFWS Recovery Plan, off-road/recreational vehicles did not threaten to disturb habitat. These vehicles have since become widely popular, and may pose a threat to more accessible Zuni fleabane populations. Livestock do not apparently graze Zuni fleabane,

which may contain some toxic element such as selenium. Heavy grazing may cause habitat damage and erosion in Zuni fleabane habitat, which may be a threat. Wildfire in Zuni fleabane habitat may be detrimental, but wildfire effects should be studied since Zuni fleabane probably evolved with fire.

5 BLM Determination: BLM has determined that implementation of the proposed acquisition identified in this EA would result in a "May Effect, Not likely to Adversely Effect" determination for the Zuni fleabane.

Rationale: Populations of this species are known to occur within the Baca formation in the Datil and Sawtooth ranges, which are present within the proposed acquisition area..

10 Environmental Consequences:

A supporting Wildlife/Special Status Species Survey would be conducted and incorporated into the NEPA document. Refer to survey report for a list of species encountered and potential species present. Should such species be found, appropriate mitigation measures would be developed and applied in consultation and coordination with the New Mexico
15 Department of Game and Fish, U.S Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and BLM contract surveyors.

Tribal

Affected Environment:

20 The BLM has discussed the proposed project with the Pueblo of Acoma, an adjacent landowner. They are supportive of the effort to connect the CDNST. A letter was sent to all tribes who have expressed interest in proposals within Catron County on June 15, 2016. Previously BLM received a letter of support from the Pueblo of Acoma to support BLM's proposal for Land and Water Conservation Funding to purchase Alamocita Creek property in
25 April 2014. BLM also received a letter of support from The Hopi Tribe on June 14, 2016 (Appendix A).

Environmental Consequences:

No tribal concerns with the acquisition proposal have been expressed to date. Tribal consultation may occur in the future on a project-specific basis as proposals are developed.

Vegetation

Affected Environment:

The area falls within the Mixed Grass Plains and Pinyon-Juniper Land Resource Units of the Colorado Plateau Major Land Resource Area (MLRA). Plant species common to area include blue grama, side oats grama, galleta, needle and thread, Indian ricegrass, alkali sacaton, prairie junegrass, muttongrass, western wheatgrass, squirreltail, greasewood, rubber rabbit brush, four-wing saltbush, winterfat, oneseed juniper and pinon pine. Riparian areas are also present in areas of the canyon.

Environmental Consequences:

Vegetation management on the acquired lands would emphasize maintaining and restoring healthy, diverse, and productive native plant communities. Future management actions will be to enhance riparian habitats.

Visual

Affected Environment:

The lands proposed for acquisition are of fairly high scenic value. The adjacent “Sawtooth Mountain, on the Cibola National Forest, are a dominant feature in the landscape and add diversity in form, line, color and texture. The lands are in a remote area with limited vehicle access. Viewing locations would primarily be along roads or a future trail. The proposed acquisition lands are similar in character to visual resource management objectives for a VRM Class II area.

Environmental Consequences:

Acquisition of the lands would not impact the visual resources.

Weeds

Affected Environment:

Noxious weeds are entering New Mexico on vehicles, heavy equipment, hay, seed, highways and rivers. The proposed action will not impact noxious/invasive species.

Environmental Consequences:

Future surface disturbing activities would be analyzed through the NEPA process and to prevent weed reproductive parts from being introduced by construction activities, all equipment will be cleaned by air blasting or power washing if soils or vegetative materials are present on the equipment prior to entering the project area. Ongoing monitoring or project inspection and maintenance would likely detect any such introduction so it could be treated and eliminated before becoming established. BLM required weed prevention stipulations would be followed during any construction activities.

Wildlife

Affected Environment:

Species currently present within the area include mule deer, elk, gray fox, coyote, black bear, mountain lion, bobcat, red-tailed hawk, turkey vulture, great horned owl, scaled and Gambel's quail and the potential for variety of songbirds, reptiles, bats, rodents, and other raptors. A Wildlife/Special Status Species Survey would be conducted on the acquired lands.

Environmental Consequences:

A supporting Wildlife/Special Status Species Survey would be conducted. Should special status species be found, appropriate mitigation measures would be developed and applied in consultation and coordination with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, U.S Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Cumulative Impacts

Alternative 1: No action

Acquisition of the Alamocita Creek property is a feasible strategy for successfully realigning the last major segment (52 miles) of the CDNST and opening public access to large, contiguous blocks of Forest Service Lands. If the opportunity to purchase this strategic parcel is lost, the BLM and other trail partners would face a difficult and time consuming task of negotiating individual public easements across 18 to 20 separate private parcels. These alternatives would increase costs significantly, and increase the odds of any one owner denying access and negating the support of other landowners. The public would lose the opportunity to significantly improve access to more than 35,000 acres of Cibola National Forest lands.

Alternative 2: Proposed Action

The acquisition of this property would complete a significant link for the Pie Town to Grants trail gap. This gap has been identified as a critical trail gap by the Continental Divide Trail Coalition and is high priority for both BLM and USFS. This portion of the trail is the largest and most difficult gap remaining along the entire length of the CDNST between Mexico and Canada. The acquisition would enable the relocation of trail from its temporary routing along a 52 mile section following state road utilizing the right of way as trail access. This highway right of way is mainly on private land where protection of the trail corridor is not possible. Crossing federal lands would further enable the establishment of a trail corridor to protect scenic quality and opportunities for primitive hiking and horseback riding commensurate with the nature and

purpose of the Congressional Designation of the CDNST. Federal acquisition would further stabilize the protection of prehistoric and historic cultural resources, wildlife habitat, and botanical and riparian resources in the area. The property if acquired would eliminate a bottleneck for the trail in this area. This would facilitate the purchase of several minor easements and properties needed to complete the Pie Town and Grants trail gap; and for which the BLM is currently in negotiation. This acquisition would enable the trail to be routed through the scenic Sawtooth Mountains outside of the Pie Town community. Hikers and horseback riders interested in day-trip opportunities (who are more numerous than long distance hikers) would have a quality trail destination, and this new opportunity would bring visitors to local businesses in the area.

Monitoring and Mitigation Measures

Special guide stipulations, including mitigation measures described here, shall be included in the stipulation compliance checklist and shall be carried out during the implementation of the action.

If lands are acquired, the following inventories would be required in the administration and management of such property in accordance with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) as Amended, Sec. 102 (a) (7) and (8), and Sec. 201:

- Outdoor recreation inventory would be required;
- Visual Resource Inventory would be required;
- Biological Assessment (BE) would be required;
- Rangeland Inventory would be required;
- Lands with Wilderness Characteristics (LWC) inventory would be required;
- Cultural Inventories would be required as undertakings are proposed;
- Paleontological Inventory may be required as undertakings are proposed;
- If lands are acquired, the inventory of the acquisition (public lands) would not be limited to the above requirements and additional data collection may be required.

Consultation and Coordination

Agencies, Organizations, and Persons Consulted

This section includes individuals or organizations from the public, public land users, interdisciplinary team, and permittees that were contacted during the development of this document.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Resource/Agency Represented</u>
Mark Matthews	Field Manager	
Jonathan Smith	Assistant Field Manager	Multiple Resources
Matthew Atencio	Assistant Field Manager	Renewable Resources
Sarah Naranjo	Realty Specialist	Project Lead
Carlos Coontz	Planner	NEPA Coordinator, ACEC, Environmental Justice, Soil/Water/Air
Kevin Carson	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Visual, Wilderness, Caves & Karst
Brenda Wilkinson	Archaeologist	Cultural, Paleontology, Tribal
Jeff Fassett	Project Manager	Engineering and Operations, Weeds
Lann Moore	Fuels Specialist	Fire and Fuels, Forestry
Virginia Alguire	Realty Specialist	Hazmat, Lands/Realty, Minerals
Chris Hill	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Recreation
Carlos Madril	Wildlife Biologist	T&E/Migratory, Wildlife
Bethany Rosales	NRS – Range	Wild Horse Burro, Livestock, Vegetation

List of Preparers

Signature of Project Lead

Date

Signature of NEPA Coordinator

Date

Signature of the Responsible Official

Date

References Cited

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Chapin, Charles E. 1983. *Socorro Region II. New Mexico Geological Society Thirty-Fourth Annual Field Conference, Socorro, New Mexico, October 13-15.* New Mexico Geological Society. Socorro, New Mexico.

Endangered Species Act of 1973.

Executive Orders

11593. *Protection and Enhancement of the Cultural Environment.*

11644. *Use of off-road vehicles on the public lands.*

11989. *Off-road vehicles on public lands.*

12898. *Federal Actions To Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations.*

13112. *Invasive Species.*

Federal Cave Resources Protection Act of 1988.

Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1988.

United States Code of Federal Regulations

40 CFR. Protection of the Environment. All parts and sections inclusive. Revised July 1, 2008.

43 CFR. Public Lands: Interior. All parts and sections inclusive. Revised October 1, 2003.

43 CFR 1600. Public Lands: Interior. *Planning, Programming, Budgeting.*

43 CFR 4600. Public Lands: Interior. *Leases of Grazing Land – Pierce Act.*

- 43 CFR 2800.** Public Lands: Interior. *Rights-of-way, Principles and Procedures*
- 43 CFR 3710.** Public Lands: Interior. *Public Law 167; Act of July 23, 1955.*
- 43 CFR 4100.** Public Lands: Interior. *Grazing Administration – Exclusive of Alaska.*
- 43 CFR 4600.** Public Lands: Interior. *Leases of Grazing Land – Pierce Act.*
- 43 CFR 5000.** Public Lands: Interior. *Administration of Forest Management Decisions.*
- 43 CFR 5400.** Public Lands: Interior. *Sales of Forest Products: General*
- 43 CFR 6300.** Public Lands: Interior. *Management of Designated Wilderness Areas.*
- 43 CFR 8340.** Public Lands: Interior. *Off-Road Vehicles.*
- 43 CFR 8360.** Public Lands: Interior. *Visitor Services.*
- 43 CFR 8372.** Public Lands: Interior. *Special Recreation Permits Other Than on Developed Recreation Sites.*

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- . Web Site. <http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html>

United States Department of Agriculture, National Resource Conservation Center.

- . Web Site. <http://www.nm.nrcs.usda.gov/soils/>
- . Web Site. http://soils.usda.gov/survey/online_surveys/new_mexico/
- . Web Site. <http://soils.usda.gov/survey/geography/mlra>
- . Web Site. <http://www.cei.psu.edu/mlra>
- . 1988. Soil Survey of Socorro County, New Mexico. Johnson, William R. Washington, DC.
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- . May 2003. *The BLM's Priorities for Recreation and Visitor Services, BLM Workplan Fiscal Years 2003-2007*. New Mexico State Office. Santa Fe, New Mexico.
- . March 2009. *Omnibus Public Land Management Act*. Title IV Department of the Interior Authorizations. Subtitle D. Paleontological Resources Preservations. Public Law 111-011. (SEC. 6301).

United States Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management and Office of the Solicitor (editors). 2001. *The Federal Land Policy and Management Act*, as amended. Public Law 94-579. (43 USC 1701 et seq.)

Appendices

Appendix A: Letters of Support

TOM UDALL
NEW MEXICO

1000 CAPITOL BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20510
(202) 224-6401
(202) 224-1001 FAX
http://tomudall.senate.gov

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510
643201

COMMITTEES:
APPROPRIATIONS

ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

FOREIGN RELATIONS

INDIAN AFFAIRS

JOINT ECONOMIC COMMISSION

RECEIVED
2014 APR 23 PM 3:53

OFFICE OF THE
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

April 21, 2014

Secretary Sally Jewell
U.S. Department of Interior
1849 C St, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Jewell,

I am writing to support funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund for the conservation of the 5,867-acre Alamocita Creek property in Catron County, New Mexico needed to complete the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail in New Mexico. The effort to acquire this property has been a joint effort between the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), US Forest Service (USFS), Trust for Public Land (TPL), and the Continental Divide Trail Coalition (CDTC).

The Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDNST) is a 3,100 mile long trail designated by Congress in 1978. In addition to providing a unique connection to nature, it creates unparalleled opportunities for solitude, reflection, and outdoor recreation. The CDNST also plays an important role in strengthening New Mexico's outdoor economy and providing recreation opportunities that bring visitors to our communities. Outdoor recreation is an increasingly profitable and important part of our nation's economy, especially in states like New Mexico that boast abundance of magnificent natural resources and pristine lands, generating \$646 billion in annual spending and supporting 6 million jobs.

In New Mexico, the CDNST has been properly located in all but three locations in the state. One area in need of final location is a 52-mile section between Pie Town, NM and El Malpais National Conservation Area. The BLM portion of the Trail in this area is a unit of the BLM's National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS). In this section the trail is located, on an interim basis, on the shoulders of county and state highways. This situation is not consistent with a primitive hiking and horseback riding experience, and also presents a safety issue for those using the trail.

The Pie Town to El Malpais segment may be properly located to a primitive, high-quality, and scenic location on USFS and BLM land through the Sawtooth Mountains and across Alamocita Creek with the acquisition of private land and easements for approximately three miles across two land owners. Both Landowners are willing sellers: one of an easement, the second (owner of the Alamocita Creek property) of fee title only. The Alamocita Creek property is situated in such a way that is impossible to bypass: to successfully locate the CDNST, the trail must pass through this property. This property also contains perennial surface water, the only reliable naturally occurring water source in the vicinity. Upon completion of this section of trail, the creek and cottonwood gallery it supports will become a major identified landmark and camping location for trail users, and its inclusion in the NLCS will assure that wildlife will retain unimpeded access to this water source.

STATE OFFICES

Albuquerque
219 Central Avenue, NW, Suite 2010
Albuquerque, NM 87102
505-246-6781

Las Cruces
102 W. Hartman, Suite A
Las Cruces, NM 88020
575-234-0366

Los Alamos
201 N. Church Street, Suite 201B
Los Alamos, NM 87501
505-576-5475

Portales
130 South Avenue A,
Suite 112
Portales, NM 88130
505-356-6811

Santa Fe
100 South Alameda, Suite 100
Santa Fe, NM 87501
505-833-1111

TOM UDALL
NEW MEXICO

UNITED STATES SENATE
WASHINGTON, DC 20510
202-224-6801
202-224-6801
http://tomudall.senate.gov

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

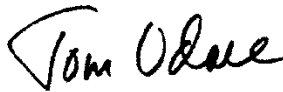
COMMITTEES
APPROPRIATIONS
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS
FOREIGN RELATIONS
INDIAN AFFAIRS
RULES AND ADMINISTRATION

The purposes for this acquisition are to:

1. Secure necessary public access in order to safeguard a "continuous" CDNST as mandated by Congress
2. To complete the CDNST in conformity with the provisions of the Trail's Comprehensive Plan, specifically providing a high-quality primitive hiking and horseback riding experience.
3. Provide for public safety by removing 52 miles of the CDNST from highways.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) is the primary federal conservation program that sustains economic growth in gateway communities, ensures recreational access, and protects wildlife habitat and water resources. I urge you to support robust funding for the LWCF including the Alamocita Creek CDNST Project, for FY 2016.

Sincerely,



Tom Udall
United States Senator

Cc: Neil Kornze, Director of Bureau of Land Management

STATE OFFICES:

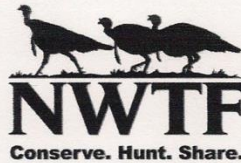
ALBUQUERQUE
215 CENTRAL AVENUE NW, SUITE 210
ALBUQUERQUE, NM 87102
505-346-6791

CARLSBAD
102 W. HARRISMAN, SUITE A
CARLSBAD, NM 88201
575-234-0060

LAS CRUCES
201 N. CHURCH STREET, SUITE 201B
LAS CRUCES, NM 88001
575-526-5475

PORTALES
100 SOUTH AVENUE A
SUITE 113
PORTALES, NM 88130
575-366-6811

SANTA FE
121 SOUTH ALVARADO
SUITE 202
SANTA FE, NM 87501
505-988-6111



30 June 2014

Jesse Juen
New Mexico State Director
Bureau of Land Management
301 Dinosaur Trail
Santa Fe, NM 87502

Dear Director Juen:

The National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF), and the New Mexico State Chapter of the NWTF supports the New Mexico State Office of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) request for funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund to acquire the 5,867 acre Alamocita Creek parcel located in Catron County, NM from a willing seller. Purchase of this parcel would provide protection and access to outstanding riparian wildlife habitat which is important to Merriam's wild turkeys and hundreds of other wildlife species.

Conservation of wildlife habitat and increasing access to public land is a priority for the NWTF and the outstanding values associated with Alamocita Creek support our priorities. As such the NWTF strongly encourages the BLM and the Department of Interior to prioritize acquisition of this unique property for the benefit of all citizens of the United States. The possible inclusion of over 8 miles of riparian habitat to the protection of the BLM should be an utmost priority for the Department of Interior.

The NWTF is very supportive of this request and we thank you for your continued work to protect New Mexico's wildlife habitat and natural resources.

Sincerely,

Scott P. Lerich
Senior Regional Biologist (AZ/NM)
National Wild Turkey Federation
P. O. Box 1281
La Luz, NM 88337
575-434-2936 (office)
575-443-4002 (mobile)
slerich@nwtf.net

National Wild Turkey Federation

P.O. Box 530 • 770 Augusta Road • Edgefield, South Carolina 29824 • Phone: (803) 637-3106 • Fax: (803) 637-0034



ROCKY MOUNTAIN ELK FOUNDATION

June 26, 2014

Jesse Juen
State Director
BLM New Mexico State Office
301 Dinosaur Trail
Santa Fe, NM 87502

Dear State Director Juen:

The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) is pleased to provide this letter of support for the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) proposed Land and Water Conservation Fund acquisition of the 5,867-acre Alamocita Creek parcel located in Catron County, New Mexico.

This rare acquisition opportunity represents a significant "Win" for the public, federal and state land management agencies, and local rural economies. Acquisition of this strategic parcel will not only allow for uninterrupted scenic back-country rerouting of 52 miles of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (currently routed along a rural state highway through private land), but will also provide permanent protection to nearly 6,000 acres of exceptional wildlife habitat, including critical water resources and approximately 8.6 miles of important cottonwood galleries and riparian habitat. Hunters, hikers, horseback riders, other non-trail users, and state and federal agencies will all benefit from the parcel's improvements to connectivity of our public lands. Acquisition will also provide much needed new and improved public access to more than 40,000+ acres of BLM and Forest Service lands. These lands offer economically-important deer and trophy elk hunting opportunities for the public. Elk numbers remain above management objective in this Game Management Unit, so providing additional alternative access opportunities for hunters will greatly assist the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish in meeting wildlife population objectives, while boosting local rural economies.

Conserving wildlife habitat and unlocking public lands are national priorities for RMEF. Given the exceptional wildlife/habitat resources and public access values associated with the Alamocita Creek parcel, and the rapidly changing land use patterns across the west, RMEF strongly encourages the Department of Interior and the BLM to prioritize acquisition of this unique property.

Thank you for your continued efforts to conserve our nation's public lands. RMEF appreciates our long-standing partnership with the BLM, and we look forward to working with you and your staff on this and future projects. Susanne Roller, RMEF Lands Program Manager for New Mexico and Colorado, is ready to assist the BLM staff in completing this project. She can be reached at sroller@rmef.org or 720.883.1990.

Sincerely,

Blake Henning
Vice President, Lands and Conservation

5705 Grant Creek Rd. | Missoula, MT 59808-8249 | (800) CALL ELK | WWW.RMEF.ORG



Herman G. Honanic
CHAIRMAN
Alfred Lomahquahu Jr.
VICE-CHAIRMAN

June 24, 2016

Mark Matthews, Field Office Manager
Attention: Virginia Alguire, Realty Specialist
Bureau of Land Management, Socorro Field Office
901 South Highway 85
Socorro, New Mexico 87801

Dear Mr. Matthews,

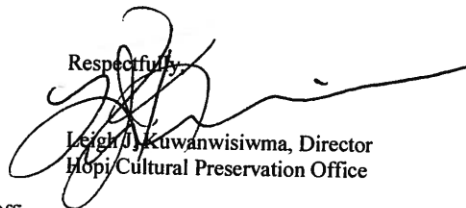
This letter is in response to your correspondence dated June 15, 2016, regarding a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposal to purchase 5,867 acres of private land in Catron County. The Hopi Tribe claims cultural affiliation to Ancestral Pueblo cultural groups in New Mexico. The Hopi Cultural Preservation Office supports the identification and avoidance of our ancestral sites, and we consider the prehistoric archaeological sites of our ancestors to be Traditional Cultural Properties. Therefore, we appreciate the BLM's continuing solicitation of our input and your efforts to address our concerns.

The Hopi Cultural Preservation Office understands the parcel proposed for purchase includes Alamocita Creek and significant prehistoric cultural resources, and is intended to provide a better route for the Continental Divide National Scenic trail as well as improve access to Cibola National Forest.

Therefore, we support this proposal and recommend a cultural resources survey of the 5,867 parcel be conducted so that the BLM can determine what it is purchasing. And therefore, we request continuing consultation on this proposal including being provided with a copy of the cultural resources analysis or survey report for review and comment.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Terry Morgart at the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office at 928-734-3619 or tmorgart@hopi.nsn.us. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,



Leigh J. Kuwanwisiwma, Director
Hopi Cultural Preservation Office

xc: New Mexico State Historic Preservation Office

RCVD JUL 05 2016



White Mountain Apache Tribe
Office of Historic Preservation
PO Box 1032
Fort Apache, AZ 85926
Ph: (928) 338-3033 Fax: (928) 338-6055

To: Virginia Alguire, BLM Realty Specialist
Date: July 8, 2016
Re: Proposed Purchase of Lands in Catron County, New Mexico 5,867 Acres

.....

The White Mountain Apache Tribe Historic Preservation Office appreciates receiving information on the proposed project, dated June 15, 2016. In regards to this, please attend to the following checked items below:

 N/A The proposed project is located within an area of probably cultural or historical importance to the White Mountain Apache tribe (WMAT). As part of the effort to identify historical properties that may be affected by the project we recommend further discussions with the tribe's Cultural Heritage Resource Director Mr. Ramon Riley may be contacted at (928) 338-4625.

Please refer to the additional notes in regards to the proposed project:

We have received and reviewed information regarding the above BLM proposal to purchase lands in Catron County from a private land owner, northeast of Pic Town, New Mexico, and we have determined the proposed plans will not have an impact on the White Mountain Apache tribe's historic and/or traditional cultural properties. Regardless, any/all ground disturbing activities should be monitored if there are reasons to believe that there are human remains and/or funerary objects are present, and if such remains and/or objects are encountered they shall be treated with respect and handled accordingly until such remains are repatriated to the affiliated tribe(s).

Thank you. We look forward to continued collaborations in the protection and preservation of places of cultural and historical importance.

Sincerely,

Mark T. Altaha - THPO

White Mountain Apache Tribe - THPO

Appendix B: Maps

