

## **BLM releases proposed Taos resource plan**

**By Matthew van Buren**

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The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has released a proposed Taos Resource Management Plan that Taos Field Manager Sam DesGeorges said would better protect natural resources in Taos County.

According to information from the BLM, the Proposed Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement for public lands administered by the Taos Field Office considers a variety of options for public lands in counties including Taos, Mora, Colfax and Rio Arriba. The plan would revise the BLM's 1988 Resource Management Plan.

DesGeorges said most of the BLM's management is driven by issues that come up during public scoping, and the proposed plan identifies a significant number of new areas of critical environmental concern.

"We have a lot more information, and there's a lot of local interest in special areas," he said.

He said much of the lands managed by the Taos Field Office will be under new administrative designations, which highlight unique values and resources. The proposed plan also contains more information about cultural resources, special wildlife areas and new special recreation areas. DesGeorges also said the BLM's approach to watershed management will change from a "patchwork of special designation" into an "umbrella" designation to meet the needs of wildlife and recreational users.

"I believe we've gone more toward a holistic approach," he said.

Among the plan's goals for fish is to manage streams "to ensure that the natural integrity of aquatic ecosystems are protected, restored and/or managed in an ecologically sound manner," expand recreational fisheries, and "manage BLM-affected streams to meet water quality standards" and protect them from impairment or degradation.

Wildlife goals include managing lands "to achieve healthy watersheds and landscapes, sustained biological communities and an improved understanding of ecosystems and resources through integrated, multi-party and interdisciplinary assessment," enhancing habitat conditions to promote optimum populations and diversity of wildlife resources, and providing data "to better understand the dynamic nature and condition of BLM lands and to provide reference points for comparisons with other, altered environments."

DesGeorges said the plan will help the BLM plan trailheads into the future and identify places where special attention will be devoted to managing recreational uses. For example, in areas where different activities are taking place, the BLM will devote more time and attention to potentially segregating uses, creating different trailheads and better organizing how users access the land to diminish conflict.

The proposed plan contains 11 “areas of critical environmental concern” comprising more than 400,000 acres, including the Taos Plateau. The plan would provide for special protections for important historic, scenic and natural resources.

“The (proposed plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement) evaluates a full range of management options, with varying emphases in resource use and development, conservation and protection,” a BLM announcement states.

The plan would affect nearly 600,000 surface acres and about 1.5 million subsurface mineral acres administered by the BLM in a 15.5-million-acre area of Northern New Mexico. DesGeorges said new designations in the plan will help to accommodate Taos’ unique qualities.

“Taos is indeed a very special area,” he said. “We have some extremely important resources.”

According to information from Amigos Bravos Projects Director Rachel Conn, the Taos nonprofit is pleased with several components of the plan, such as increasing areas with special protections and incorporating some of the group’s suggestions with regard to “prioritizing collaborative efforts for river restoration and water-quality-related projects.”

However, Conn said the BLM needs to do more to address climate change, including limiting greenhouse gas emissions and developing mitigation measures to enhance the watershed’s ability to absorb the impacts of climate change. The plan does include language about climate change, but Conn said it is not proactive enough and should take steps, for example, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions at oil and gas wells.

DesGeorges said the BLM hopes to publish the final Resource Management Plan in the spring, on resolution of any protests it receives. The newly released proposal contains changes made in response to public comments submitted during earlier stages of the draft, and at this point members of the public may only protest aspects of the plan.

“It allows people to protest, and those protests go directly back to Washington,” DesGeorges said.

Another recently released BLM plan — the 15-year management strategy for the National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS) — also seeks to implement management strategies for areas, including the R’o Grande in Taos County, where the BLM will place conservation above development. DesGeorges said the NLCS gives such areas national attention and helps the BLM in finding funding to conduct improvements such as building boat ramps, toilets and trailheads.

DesGeorges said the BLM has also expressed support for the National Conservation Area designation for the Rio Grande del Norte, including part of the Rio Grande Gorge currently designated as a Wild and Scenic River. An act U.S. Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-NM, has sponsored would create a 214,600-acre conservation area and two wildernesses of 8,000 acres and 13,400 acres. DesGeorges said only public lands would be affected, and Sunshine Valley was intentionally excluded because of the quantity of private and state owned land there. DesGeorges said if the land is designated as a National Conservation Area, the BLM would have a few years to prepare a specific management plan after bringing the issue before local governments, tribes and other interested parties.

“We would re-engage with our constituents,” he said.

The NLCS can be viewed at [on.doi.gov/pttikY](http://on.doi.gov/pttikY).

The Proposed Taos Resource Management Plan can be read in its entirety at [http://www.blm.gov/nm/st/en/fo/Taos Field Office.html](http://www.blm.gov/nm/st/en/fo/Taos_Field_Office.html). It is also available at the Taos Field Office, 226 Cruz Alta Road. Protests can be mailed to: BLM Director (210), Attention: Brenda Williams, P.O. Box 66538, Washington, D.C. 20035.