

ID 88066967

#38166696

HD
243
.NL6
I363
1996



88066967



United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Albuquerque District Office
Rio Puerco Resource Area

AUGUST 1996

**Environmental Assessment
and
Plan Amendment
For Vehicle Use in the**

Ignacio Chavez Special Management Area





United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Rio Puerco Resource Area
435 Montano N.E.
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87107

8340 (017)
1610 (017)

August 19, 1996

Dear Reader:

Enclosed are the Proposed Plan Amendment to the Rio Puerco Resource Management Plan for vehicle use in the Ignacio Chavez Special Management Area (IC SMA) and a Finding of No Significant Impact. The Rio Puerco Resource Area, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has prepared these documents. Under the Plan Amendment's Proposed Action, if approved, the agency would seasonally close BLM Road 1103 for up to 7 months per year, and change the off-road vehicle designation of 36 miles of secondary routes in the IC SMA to "closed." Two other alternatives are analyzed, including No Action (Road 1103 open year round) and Alternative 1 (Road 1103 closed year round).

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts and extensive public scoping, we have determined that the impacts of the Proposed Action would not be significant. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not needed.

In accordance with BLM regulations, the Proposed Plan Amendment may be protested within 30 days. Any person who participated in the planning process and has an interest that may be adversely affected by the Proposed Action may submit a protest. All protests must be postmarked on or before September 20, 1996. The protest procedures are detailed in the planning regulations (43 Code of Federal Regulations 1610.5-2). Protests must include the following information:

1. Name, mailing address, telephone number and interest of person filing the protest;
2. A statement of the issue(s)/concern(s) being protested;
3. A statement of the part or parts of the document being protested;
4. A copy of all documents addressing the issue(s)/concern(s) that were submitted during the planning process by the protesting party, or an indication of the date on which the issue(s)/concern(s) were discussed for the record (e.g., in a letter or oral statement at a meeting or in a telephone discussion with BLM staff); and,
5. A concise statement explaining why the BLM New Mexico State Director's proposed decision is wrong.

All protests must be filed with the Director (480), Bureau of Land Management, Resource Planning Team, 1849 C Street NW, Washington, DC 20240. Only those persons or organizations that participated in the planning process may protest.

Those not wanting to protest the Proposed Plan Amendment but having comments may send them to Kathy Walter of my staff at the address below. All comments received will be taken into consideration in the decision-making process. The comment period ends on September 20, 1996.

For further information, contact Kathy Walter at the BLM Rio Puerco Resource Area Office, 435 Montano Road NE, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87107 or telephone (505) 761-8794. The BLM Hotline number for a report on current Road 1103 status (open or closed) is (505) 761-8768.

Sincerely,

Hector A. Villalobos
Area Manager

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
FOR
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT/
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
FOR
VEHICLE USE IN THE IGNACIO CHAVEZ
SPECIAL MANAGEMENT AREA**

EA Number: NM-017-94-104

Project: The Proposed Action is to amend the off-road vehicle (ORV) designation of the Rio Puerco Resource Management Plan for the Ignacio Chavez Special Management Area (IC SMA), and to seasonally close the SMA to all unauthorized motor vehicle users.

Project Location: Ignacio Chavez SMA - Townships 15 & 16 North,
Ranges 3, 4, 5, & 6 West,
New Mexico Principal Meridian (NMPM)

Applicant: Bureau of Land Management **County:** Sandoval & McKinley
Rio Puerco Resource Area
435 Montaña Rd. NE
Albuquerque, NM 87107
Telephone No. (505) 761-8700

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT


Based on the analysis contained in the attached Proposed Plan Amendment/Environmental Assessment, no significant impacts are expected to occur. An Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

Consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer is not required for ORV closure or limited designations because these activities have no potential to disturb the built or natural environments (USDI, BLM 1982--Programmatic Memorandum of Agreement NMSO-168, Section V.B.).


This action would not adversely affect low-income, minority or rural populations.

Recommended:

Approved:



District Manager



State Director

8/8/96

Date

8/8/96

Date

**PROPOSED PLAN AMENDMENT/ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
FOR VEHICLE USE IN THE
IGNACIO CHAVEZ SPECIAL MANAGEMENT AREA**

NM-017-94-104

Albuquerque, New Mexico

August 1996

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Albuquerque District
Rio Puerco Resource Area**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acronyms and Abbreviations	ii
<u>Section 1--Introduction</u>	1
History and Background	1
Need for the Plan Amendment/EA	6
Planning Issue and Criteria	6
Conformance with Land Use Plan	6
Consistency with Other Plans	7
<u>Section 2--Proposed Action and Alternatives</u>	7
Summary of Scoping	7
Proposed Action (Seasonal Closure)	7
Alternative 1 (Total Closure)	11
No Action Alternative (Open Status)	11
Alternatives Considered but Dropped from Further Analysis	14
<u>Section 3--Affected Environment</u>	14
Regional Setting	14
Natural Environment	14
Human-Created Environment	17
<u>Section 4--Environmental Impacts</u>	21
Impacts of the Proposed Action (Seasonal Closure)	21
Impacts of Alternative 1 (Total Closure)	25
Impacts of the No Action Alternative (Open Status)	26
Cumulative Impact Assessment (Proposed Action)	28
<u>Section 5--Consultation and Coordination</u>	30
 <u>Tables</u>	
Table 1--Summary of BLM Actions, IC SMA	5
Table 2--Summary of Alternatives & Environmental Components	8
Table 3--Status of Road & Route Segments Under Alternatives	9
Table 4--Special Status Animals in IC SMA	17
Table 5--Summary of Impacts	22
Table 6--List of Preparers	30
Table 7--Summary of Public Involvement	31
Table B--List of Special Status Animals Reviewed for Occurrence	B-2
 <u>Maps</u>	
Map 1--IC SMA & Wilderness Study Areas	2
Map 2--RMP Route Closures & Limitations (1986)	3
Map 3--Emergency Route Closures in IC SMA (1987)	4
Map 4--IC SMA Route Closures--Proposed Action	10
Map 5--Routes Authorized for Limited Use by Grazing Permittees	12
Map 6--Secondary Routes Off Road 1103 Closed Under the Proposed Action	13
Appendix A-1	A-1
Appendix A-2	A-1
Appendix B	B-1
References	R-1

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AUM	Animal Unit Month
BLM	Bureau of Land Management
CDNST	Continental Divide National Scenic Trail
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
EA	Environmental Assessment
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
FONSI	Finding of No Significant Impact
FR	Federal Register
FSR	Forest Service Road
FWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
IC SMA	Ignacio Chavez Special Management Area
NMDG&F	New Mexico Department of Game & Fish
NMPM	New Mexico Principal Meridian
ORV	off-road vehicle
R.	Range
ROS	Recreation Opportunity Spectrum
RMP	Resource Management Plan
RPRA	Rio Puerco Resource Area
SMA	Special Management Area
T.	Township
WSA	Wilderness Study Area

SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has prepared this Resource Management Plan (RMP) Amendment/Environmental Assessment (EA) to analyze the impacts from alternative levels of vehicle use in the Ignacio Chavez Special Management Area (IC SMA). In 1986, through its Rio Puerco RMP (updated in 1992), the BLM limited motorized vehicle use in the Upper Rio Puerco Resource Area to existing roads and trails. The agency also closed or limited use on five route segments totalling 12 miles within the IC SMA.

The SMA contains 43,182 acres, and includes the Ignacio Chavez and Chamisa Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). The Ignacio Chavez WSA contains 33,264 acres and the Chamisa WSA 13,692 acres, for a total of 46,956 acres. (The WSA boundaries in general are larger than the SMA boundaries, which explains the difference in acreage.) Map 1 outlines the SMA and the WSAs. Map 2 displays the RMP off-road vehicle (ORV) closures in the SMA.

In 1965, the BLM constructed Road 1103 (which crosses what is now the IC SMA) as a logging road. (Road 1103 also serves as a boundary between the Ignacio Chavez and Chamisa WSAs.) This road is located in T. 15 and 16 N., R. 4 and 5 W., Sandoval and McKinley Counties, New Mexico (refer to Map 1).

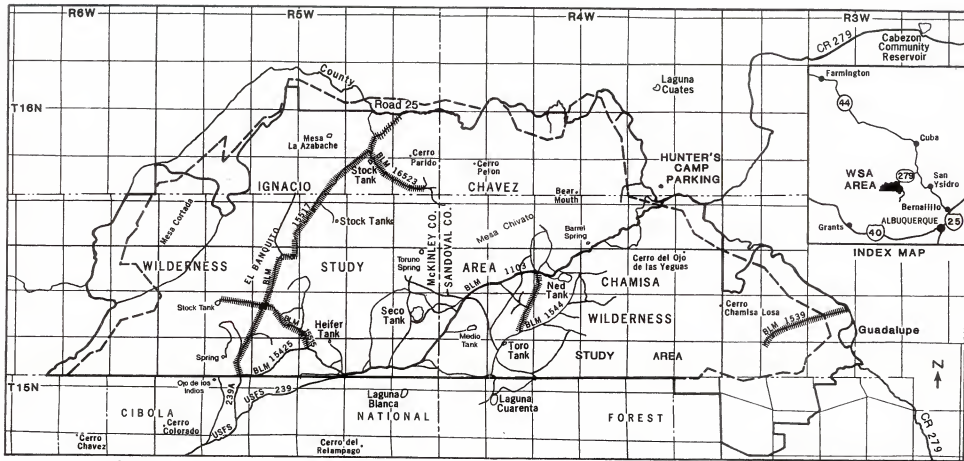
Road 1103 provides access to areas ideal for limited consumptive uses (hunting, livestock grazing and piñon gathering) and non-consumptive uses (sightseeing and wildlife watching). Peak road use occurs mainly during years of heavy piñon nut crops, such as in the fall of 1991, and during the fall and spring hunting seasons. In 1991, BLM rangers observed a total of over 200 people gathering piñon nuts during a single weekend. In 1991,

the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDG&F) issued 501 bow permits and 901 muzzleloader permits to hunt elk in their Management Unit 9, which includes the Ignacio Chavez SMA (Johnson 1991).

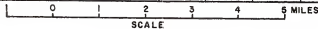
Approximately 10,812 acres of the IC SMA are located on the top of a long, flat mesa known as Mesa Chivato, northeast of Mount Taylor. During the fall and winter of 1986 and the spring of 1987, unusually high precipitation occurred in this part of the Upper Rio Puerco Resource Area, causing the unsurfaced roads on Mesa Chivato to be saturated with water. Also, because of construction and lack of maintenance, water did not properly drain from the unsurfaced roadbed. Vehicle use in the area created deep ruts in Road 1103 and numerous deeply rutted tracks parallel to this road. (These types of occurrences have been common in wet years since the road was built in 1965, although the 1986-87 period was much wetter than normal.)

To prevent further damage and allow recovery of the area, the BLM temporarily closed a 9-mile segment of Road 1103 that traverses the SMA (refer to Map 3, and to Table 1 for a chronology of actions taken in the SMA since 1965). However, adverse effects on soils, vegetation and wilderness suitability continued because secondary routes provided vehicle access into areas saturated with moisture. To prevent further resource damage to the SMA, two secondary routes (totalling 4.5 miles) were also blocked under emergency road closure authority in 1987.

The first route segment, in T. 15 N., R. 4 and 5 W., is approximately 1.5 miles in length and begins near Toro Tank. The route proceeds south from Toro Tank and turns west to meet Road 1103. The second route segment, located in T. 15 N., R. 5 W., begins at the southern end of Road 1103 and proceeds in a



- LEGEND**
- WILDERNESS STUDY AREA
 - SPECIAL MANAGEMENT AREA
 - MAIN ROADS
 - ACCESS ROUTES



Source: Rio Puerco Resource Management Plan, 1986.

||||||| ROUTE CLOSURE OR LIMITATION

MAP 2

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN ROUTE CLOSURES AND LIMITATIONS

(1986-12 MILES)

TABLE 1

SUMMARY OF BLM ACTIONS,
IGNACIO CHAVEZ SMA/ROAD 1103/SECONDARY ROUTES

Action	Date	Comments
Construction of BLM Road 1103	1965	• Logging road
Development of Rio Puerco Resource Management Plan	1986	• Motorized vehicle use in Resource Area limited to existing roads & trails; five route segments (totalling 12 miles) in SMA closed/limited. • <u>Federal Register</u> notice 4/16/87 (Vol. 52., No. 73)
Occurrence of unusually high precipitation in SMA	Fall-Winter 1986, Spring 1987	• Unmaintained, poorly constructed roads saturated w/water did not properly drain. • Vehicle use created deep ruts (Road 1103) & parallel tracks.
Temporary emergency closure, Road 1103 (9 mi.) *	May 1987- September 1991	• <u>Federal Register</u> notices 5/18/87 (Vol. 52, No. 95) & 9/20/91 (Vol. 56, No. 183); BLM guidance @ 43 CFR 8341.2 & Manual 8341
Closure amended to include two additional access routes (4.5 mi.) *	October 1987	• <u>Federal Register</u> notice 10/15/87 (Vol. 52., No. 199)
Road 1103 open to motorized vehicles	September 1991	• Administrative opening for fall hunting & piñon gathering
Second emergency closure initiated for Road 1103 & entire SMA	November 1991	• <u>Federal Register</u> notice 12/13/91 (Vol. 56, No. 240)
Culverts installed, ½ mi. Road 1103 realigned	August 1992	
Split-rail fencing (¼ mi.) installed, Ned Tank & Barrel Spring meadow	Fall 1992	
Notice to amend Rio Puerco RMP, including public scoping	January 1992	• <u>Federal Register</u> notice 1/23/92 (Vol. 57, No. 15)
"Operation Respect" in effect in SMA	9/16-11/15/94	• BLM resource specialists monitored SMA when environmental conditions allowed.

Note: * Closures did not apply to authorized users.

CONSISTENCY WITH OTHER PLANS

No known inconsistencies exist between the Proposed Action and officially ap-

proved plans, policies and programs of other federal agencies, state and local governments, or local American Indian tribes.

SECTION 2

PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

SUMMARY OF SCOPING

Table 2 lists the three alternatives analyzed in this EA, as well as two alternatives considered but not selected for detailed analysis. These alternatives and issues were raised by the BLM and the public during the public meeting in September 1987 and the February 1992 RMP Update meetings. Table 3 contains information on the status and mileage of Road 1103 and secondary routes under each alternative.

PROPOSED ACTION (SEASONAL CLOSURE)

The Proposed Action is to amend the Rio Puerco RMP off-road vehicle (ORV) designation for the IC SMA and to seasonally close the SMA to all unauthorized motor vehicle uses. The Rio Puerco RMP ORV designation for the IC SMA specifies that vehicular travel is "limited to existing roads and trails" (page 81). Approval of this planning amendment would change the ORV designation on 36 miles of secondary routes in the IC SMA to "closed." Road 1103 would remain open for motorized vehicle use except during seasonal closures, and 19 miles of secondary routes would remain open for authorized administrative and emergency uses (including maintenance of range improvements). Seasonal closure of Road 1103 would be on July 1 to September 15, and on November 15 to March 30 (approximately 7 months). Road 1103 would be periodically

maintained by Sandoval County or another qualified entity to ensure it was safely passable.

During seasonal closure, southern access to the SMA would be at FSR 239A near Los Indios Spring (Ojo de Los Indios—refer to Map 4) and El Banquito. The northern entrance to the mesa along Road 1103 would be closed ½ mile northeast of Ned Tank. The northern access would provide a reasonable turn-around point for vehicles during the closures. Vehicles would be requested to park at the Hunter's Camp area outside the SMA. One access point located at El Banquito would be closed seasonally, while the access at Azabache Mesa would remain closed year round to the public. (These access points lie at either end of BLM Road 15517, which was limited in the RMP process.) Access to BLM Road 1544 near Toro Tank (as indicated in the RMP Transportation Inventory; USDI, BLM 1986b) would be closed, as would the southern access route approximately 1 mile east of Toro Tank.

When Road 1103 was open (from September 16 through November 14, and March 31 through June 30), northern access to the SMA would be from County Road 279 to BLM Road 1103. Access from the south would be from FSR 239 to FSR 239A at the El Banquito gate. All other southern entrances to the SMA would remain closed. Vehicle use in the SMA would be limited to Road 1103 and the 3-mile road segment of BLM Roads 15425 and 15515 connecting to El Banquito gate. All other vehicle routes in the SMA would be closed to motorized vehicle use.

TABLE 3

 ROUTE SEGMENTS IN THE IGNACIO CHAVEZ SMA
 PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES ^a

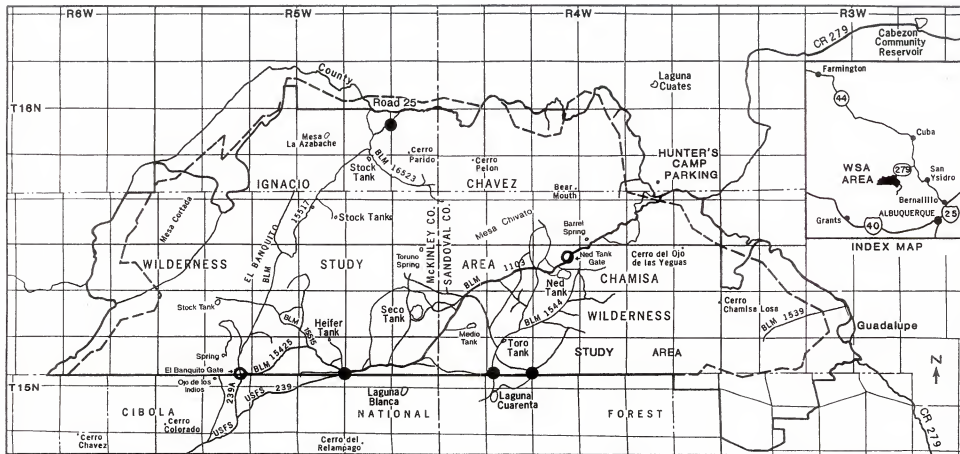
Status		
Action Closure	Alternative 1 (Total Closure)	No Action Alternative (Open Status)
eral public 5 - March 30)	Closed year round to general public	
ited use only (BLM azing permittees)	Open year round for limited use only (BLM staff, NMDG&F staff, grazing permittees)	Open to public year round
13	Open year round for limited use only (BLM staff, NMDG&F staff, grazing permittees)	Open to public year round
	Closed year round	Open to public year round
	Closed year round	Closed year round
ited use only (BLM azing permittees)	Same status as under Proposed Action	Same status as under Proposed Action for 8 mi. (RMP); 8 mi. open to public year round
l to public season- limited use only closed to public sea- for limited use only : closed year round : open year round for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · 9 mi. Road 1103 closed to public year round, open year-round for limited use only · 36 mi. secondary routes closed year round (#3+#4) · 19 mi. secondary routes open year round for limited use only (#2+#5) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · 9 mi. Road 1103 open to public year round · 35 mi. secondary routes open to public year round (#2+#3) · 4 mi. secondary routes closed year round (RMP) · 8 mi. secondary routes open year round for limited use only (RMP), 8 mi. open to public year round

^a I status.

reclaimed (disked & reseeded w/native grasses or allowed to revegetate naturally).

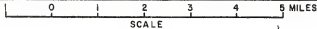
io Puerco RMP (USDI, BLM 1986a). Under the Proposed Action & Alternative 1, these 4 miles would be closed

io Puerco RMP. Their status would not change under any of the three alternatives analyzed in this EA.



LEGEND

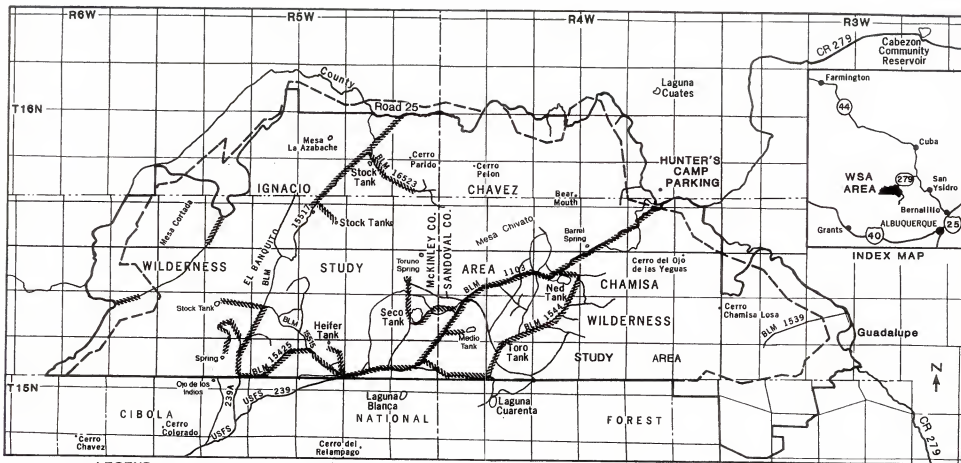
- WILDERNESS STUDY AREA
- SPECIAL MANAGEMENT AREA
- MAIN ROADS
- ACCESS ROUTES



- PERMANENT CLOSURE
- SEASONAL CLOSURE

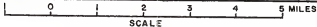
MAP 4

IGNACIO CHAVEZ SPECIAL MANAGEMENT AREA
ACCESS CLOSURES—PROPOSED ACTION



LEGEND

- WILDERNESS STUDY AREA
- - - - SPECIAL MANAGEMENT AREA
- MAIN ROADS
- ACCESS ROUTES



MAP 5

- ACCESS ROUTES FOR PERMITTEES AND ADMINISTRATIVE/EMERGENCY USE (BLM, NMD&F)

VEHICLE ROUTES AUTHORIZED FOR LIMITED USE BY GRAZING PERMITTEES
IN THE IGNACIO CHAVEZ SMA

(19 MILES OF SECONDARY ROUTES AND 9 MILES OF ROAD 1103)

as established in the RMP. The 4 miles of secondary routes closed through the RMP would remain closed. However, other emergency road closures could be applied if the conditions warranted.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT DROPPED FROM FURTHER ANALYSIS

Consideration was given to upgrading Road 1103 to an all-weather road. This would include sloping the road with drainage ditches, adding gravel to the road surface, installing culverts, and elevating and crowning the road. The BLM estimates the cost of upgrading the road to be approximately \$400,000 for 6 miles,

making this alternative not feasible at this time.

Another alternative considered was closing Road 1103 seasonally while keeping the secondary routes open in accordance with the RMP off-road vehicle decisions. Approximately 51 miles of routes would be open to the public and grazing permittees. The New Mexico Wilderness Study Report (USDI, BLM 1991) recommends that Road 1103, which separates the two WSAs, remain as the boundary and be open to allow access to the two large WSAs. (However, if the Congress designated the area as wilderness, all secondary routes would be closed to motorized vehicle use.)

SECTION 3

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

REGIONAL SETTING

The Ignacio Chavez SMA is located about 25 miles west of San Ysidro and 50 air miles northwest of Albuquerque, at the approximate center of northwestern New Mexico. The U.S. Geological Survey topographic maps showing portions of the SMA (T. 15 and 16 N., R. 4, 5, and 6 W., NMPM) are the Mesa Cortada, Cerro Parido, and Guadalupe 7.5-minute quadrangles. The SMA is accessible from the north by proceeding southwest from New Mexico Highway 44 to County Road 279, a maintained dirt road to the south. Approaching from the south, FSR 239 to 239A provides access to the SMA.

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Climate

The IC SMA has a semiarid climate with temperate summers and fairly long, cold

winters. The average annual precipitation is approximately 14 inches, with the amount and distribution of precipitation being extremely variable. The average growing season is approximately 153 days beginning in late March or early April.

The spring and summer seasons account for approximately 65 percent of the total annual precipitation, with 15 percent falling during April, May and June and 50 percent during July, August and September. (Note: The road closure in the SMA would occur during the latter period, from July 1 through September 15.) During the summer, drought periods are interspersed with torrential showers that cause rapid runoff on open slopes and flash floods in valleys and arroyos.

The winters are dry and most moisture is snow, with some sleet and rain. A measurable amount of snow can be expected any time between October 1 and April 30.

meadow-like openings. Although the pine is scattered throughout the area, the few viable stands are on the rock outcrops. The pine understory includes prairie Junegrass (Koeleria cristata), mountain muhly (Muhlenbergia montana), and Arizona fescue (Festuca arizonica).



Woodland on the mesa is increasing; the dominant community on the mesa consists primarily of piñon (Pinus edulis) and juniper (Juniperus spp.). Piñon-juniper (primarily juniper) is slowly replacing the ponderosa pine and the meadow-like openings.

The remaining meadow-like openings are variable in composition. Some openings are dominated by blue grama (Bouteloua gracilis), snakeweed (Gutierrezia spp.) with some fringed sage (Artemisia frigida), rabbitbrush (Chrysothamnus spp.) and horsebush (Tetradymia canescens). In the wetter openings, western wheatgrass (Agropyron smithii) is prevalent, mixed with the species found in the drier openings. Small junipers dot the edges of the openings, indicating the start of woodland invasion.

The shrub component has been largely replaced by woodlands. Shrub thickets, including oak (Quercus spp.), mountain mahogany (Cercocarpus montanus), and currant (Ribes spp.) are few and scattered.

The RMP emergency closures have allowed partial revegetation of the ruts and scars created by vehicle use parallel to Road 1103 and on secondary roads.

Wildlife Habitat

The Ignacio Chavez SMA provides one of the most diverse and productive wildlife habitats in the Rio Puerco Resource Area. Approximately 298 vertebrate species may inhabit the area, including 167 species of birds,

83 species of mammals, 44 species of reptiles and 4 species of amphibians. Of the birds, 108 species are classified as neotropical migrants.

The mixed vegetative types (piñon-juniper woodland, ponderosa pine with oak understory, and open grassland parks) along with the protection afforded by steep slopes and cliffs (of Mesa Chivato, Guadalupe and Chamsa Canyons) provide potentially excellent habitat for many species of wildlife. The SMA contains at least six game species, including mule deer, elk, Merriam's turkey, black bear, tassel-eared squirrel and mourning dove. The Ignacio Chavez SMA is considered important deer and elk habitat all year and has been assessed as critical winter range for these species. Other animals representative of the area are the coyote, badger, porcupine, cottontail rabbit, Gunnison's prairie dog, chipmunk, deer-mouse and woodrat.

The birds most representative of the coniferous forest type are the northern flicker, red-breasted nuthatch, brown creeper, American robin, hermit thrush, golden-crowned kinglet, dark-eyed junco and chipping sparrow. Other birds that may be encountered include the golden eagle, sharpshinned hawk, red-tailed hawk, Stellar's jay and piñon jay.

Special Status Plants and Animals

The list of special status animal species reviewed for this environmental assessment is found in Appendix B. Table 4 contains a smaller list of the species that are most likely to occur in the IC SMA.

Three of these species are listed, while eight others are being considered for listing. The Southern spotted owl is listed as threatened. The gray vireo and the spotted bat are listed as endangered Group 2 by the State of New Mexico, a listing similar to the federal listing of "threatened."

The federal government has placed eight animals likely to be found in the SMA, including the spotted bat, in their "Species of Concern" group. The remaining seven species of concern are the burrowing owl, ferruginous

Subsequently the ownership of the grant passed through several parties. In 1911, 1,300 acres of the grant around the Village of Guadalupe were deeded to individuals who had acquired rights by continuous settlement. In 1940, the U.S. Government purchased the remaining land and placed it under the administration of the Department of Agriculture. In 1958, jurisdiction of the remaining land grant was transferred from the Department of Agriculture to the Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management.

Livestock Grazing

Road 1103 traverses the IC Grant Allotment, a community allotment with three individual operators whose total grazing preference is 2,686 Animal Unit Months (AUMs). Also overlapping the IC SMA is the El Banquito Allotment, with one operator whose grazing preference is 1,656 AUMs. Road 1103 and 19 miles of secondary routes are currently used by these four grazing permittees for livestock management, to perform range improvement maintenance and inspections, and to transport livestock. The IC Grant Allotment is presently grazed and intensively monitored in accordance with the Allotment Management Plan implemented in 1994.

In the current grazing system, cattle are moved to the top of Mesa Chivato between June 15 and July 1 and moved off between October 15 and October 31. These livestock operations require the use of motorized vehicles. The BLM has contacted the permittees before each grazing season begins to authorize their use of motorized vehicles and to list stipulations that will prevent vehicle impacts to the resources of the SMA.

Three grazing permittees have been issued gate keys to access the IC SMA during the seasonal closure. They are requested to access the SMA only for emergencies or livestock maintenance operations during this period.

Both allotments are managed as I ("improve") category allotments. During a seasonal closure, BLM staff would access the SMA to in-

spect the allotments, and to conduct range monitoring studies and related activities.

Visual Resources

BLM Visual Resource Management (VRM) class ratings identify the suggested degrees of human modification that should be allowed in various landscapes. Based on landform, coloration, water, vegetation, lack of intrusions, and uniqueness, the IC SMA (including the Ignacio Chavez WSA and portions of the Chamisa WSA) has been rated in the Class II VRM category (USDI, BLM 1986a).

VRM Class II areas are areas with high to moderate scenic quality in the foreground/midground distance zone, with high visual sensitivity. The management objective of this class is to retain the existing character of the landscape. Areas formally designated by the Congress as wilderness are managed under Class I VRM objectives, which allow less human modification of the landscape. (Note: Wilderness Study Areas are managed under VRM Class II objectives.)

The mesas and their escarpments, along with the diversity of vegetation, contribute to the high scenic values within the SMA. From within the Ignacio Chavez SMA, expansive scenic vistas into the Cabezon, Empeдрado, and La Leña WSAs and the Nacimiento Mountains are available. Therefore, to maintain a Class II rating, changes in any of the basic elements (form, line, color, texture) caused by a management activity should not be evident in the characteristic landscape.

Recreational Opportunities

Recreational use of the SMA includes such activities as hunting, camping, piñon gathering and picnicking. Driving for pleasure is a favorite leisure activity in New Mexico (New Mexico Natural Resources Department 1986). Non-motorized activities in the SMA include mountain bike riding, bird-watching, hiking and equestrian travel.



Opportunities for Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

Wildlife viewing, backpacking, hiking, hunting and camping opportunities within the two WSAs are considered excellent. Non-motorized sightseeing opportunities are plentiful along the rims of Mesas Chivato, Cortada, La Azabache, and El Banquito. Sightseeing opportunities related to historical, geological, botanical and archeological values; big- and small-game hunting; horseback riding; bird-watching and photography exist throughout the WSAs. A tremendous variation in terrain, environmental transition zones, and vegetation provides the user with numerous opportunities to experience a high-quality, primitive and unconfined type of recreation.

Special Features

Visual appeal and the diversity of landforms and vegetation are perhaps the most outstanding special features of the Ignacio Chavez and Chamisa WSAs. The rising green slopes and mesa tops contrast sharply with the arid desert lands to the north, east and west. Environmental transition zones exhibit excellent scenic and educational values, providing a "living laboratory" in which to observe natural systems.

Cultural Resources

Cultural resource inventories within the IC SMA are limited to reconnaissance and intensive surveys for small in-house BLM projects (generally less than 20 acres each). The reconnaissance includes a 1992 Class II (10 percent) stratified sample survey that involves a systematic Class III (100 percent) inventory of 345 acres on Mesa Chivato. For the most part, the BLM has little specific information about the types and distributions of cultural resources throughout the SMA; the information presented here is based primarily on extrapolations from sites in the general Mount Taylor area.

It is assumed that early human use of the SMA and surrounding area involved hunting and gathering of plants and nuts. Isolated lithics (tooled stones and/or fragments), lithic scatters, and a few lithic and ceramic (pottery)

scatters are commonly found in upland, mesa-top locales in ponderosa and piñon-juniper zones in the SMA. Prehistoric architectural sites are generally not found in upland zones. Early historic Navajo forked-stick hogans could be found, particularly in sheltered, elevated alcoves and near natural rock outcrops. These sites would most likely be located on escarpments or broken slopes near canyon heads and in piñon-juniper grassland environments.

No PaleoIndian sites have been recorded within the SMA, but recent survey suggests that human use of the area may date back 7,000 years or earlier. Only one probable Archaic site has been documented in the SMA; however, Archaic populations have made extensive use of the adjacent middle Rio Puerco Valley and it is assumed they also used resources within the SMA. Archaic sites from the general Mount Taylor area are found in upland zones that are diverse topographically, particularly at the heads of canyons or near seasonally available water. One Archaic dart point was documented during a recent survey near Ned Tank.

Prehistoric Pueblo use of the area is limited to small lithic and ceramic scatters that are thought to be special use, hunting and gathering sites. These types of sites occur in low frequencies in upland ponderosa and piñon-juniper zones in the Mount Taylor area. Most Pueblo sites (especially architectural sites) are found at lower elevations near or adjacent to alluvial floodplains. Extensive Pueblo occupation occurred in the middle Rio Puerco valley, particularly during the Pueblo II and Pueblo III periods. Pueblo sites tend to be located near the Rio Puerco and its major tributaries, and along riverine terraces or mesas. The closest concentration of these sites is associated with a Chacoan Outlier, Guadalupe Pueblo.



SUMMARY OF IMPACTS,
PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

Affected Resource/Use	Proposed Action (Seasonal Closure)	Alternative 1 (Total Closure)	No Action Alternative (Open Status)
Soils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Mileage of routes would be reduced; soil erosion and compaction would decrease. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Soil erosion, deterioration of northern Road 1103 to Ned Tank would continue. · Impacts by administrative vehicles would be minimal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Increase of 5 to 10% in unauthorized route density may occur over the long term. · Vehicle use during inclement weather could result in increased compaction, erosion and creation of parallel tracks.
Vegetation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Closure of 36 mi. of secondary routes would allow revegetation of 44 acres. · Approximately 22 acres bordering Road 1103 (9 miles) would be minimally affected during seasonal openings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Natural revegetation would not occur on Road 1103 from Barrel Springs to Mesa Chivato. · Impacts by administrative vehicles would be minimal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Vehicle use would break and impact herbaceous species.
Wildlife Habitat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Time and duration of vehicle-related disturbance would be restricted. · Wildlife habitat fragmentation by roads would be reduced. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Disturbance from vehicles would be eliminated. · Approximately 47,000 acres of habitat would be rejoined. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Habitat fragmentation & disturbances to animals would increase. · Vehicle-related disturbances would not be restricted.
Special Status Plants and Animals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Time and duration of vehicle-related disturbance would be restricted. · Habitat fragmentation by roads would be reduced. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Disturbance from vehicles would be eliminated. · Approximately 47,000 acres of habitat would be rejoined. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Habitat fragmentation & disturbances to plants & animals would increase. · Vehicle-related disturbances would not be restricted.
Livestock Grazing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Road 1103 would be open approximately 44% of grazing season (60 out of 135 days). · During seasonal closure, permittees would be asked to limit motorized vehicle use to emergencies, including range improvement maintenance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Permittees would be allowed to use motorized vehicles only for emergencies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · No impact would occur to motorized access by grazing permittees.

revegetation of 0.3 acres of the meadow at Ned Tank. However, about 10 feet of vegetation on each side of Road 1103 (22 acres--refer to Appendix A-2) may be minimally impacted by vehicle use when the road is open. As discussed under the "Soils" section above, closure of approximately 36 miles of secondary routes would allow for revegetation of the roadbeds.

Wildlife

Several management changes to be made under the Proposed Action would affect wildlife. These include restricting the time of year and duration of vehicular disturbances, reducing the mileage of vehicle routes, and reducing the acres of habitat fragmented by the routes.

Under the Proposed Action, motorized access would be restricted to the spring and fall months, including parts of the legal hunting season. The Proposed Action would reduce wildlife habitat disturbance by providing 7 months, including winter, free from authorized vehicle access.

The second benefit to wildlife would be the closure and reclamation of 36 miles of secondary vehicle routes. The reclaimed routes would discourage vehicular disturbance to all wildlife. The seed mixture used for revegetation would include large seeded grasses of the species already found in the SMA; these would be intended to be of value to turkeys and other birds during the winter months. This positive impact would occur on 44 acres of secondary roadbed closed and reseeded.

The third and most beneficial impact to wildlife from the Proposed Action would be the reduction of habitat fragmentation by the closure of secondary vehicle routes. This positive impact would occur on two separate large blocks of habitat in the Chamisa and Ignacio Chavez WSAs. This aspect of the Proposed Action would support the NMDG&F's Operation Plan (1987), which seeks to reduce the mileage of routes in big-game winter range such as the critical deer and elk winter range in the IC SMA.

Special Status Plants and Animals

The impacts on special status plants and animals would be the same as those discussed above for other vegetation and wildlife. Under the Endangered Species Act, the administrative determination is that the worst consequence anticipated is the "No Affect," and the best is a "May Affect--Positive."

Livestock Grazing Operations

Grazing permittees would be able to continue using 19 miles of designated routes during the grazing season (between June 15 and October 31). Road 1103 would be open approximately 44 percent of the grazing season (a total of 60 days out of the 135-day-long grazing season.) During the closure, the permittees would be requested to limit motorized vehicle use to times when they were treating sick or injured livestock or maintaining existing range improvements. The permittees would experience minimal inconvenience in managing livestock operations during the road closure. However, vandalism to range improvements (such as fence cutting) could increase, especially during hunting season and years with good piñon crops.

Visual Resources

Actions such as closing 36 miles of secondary routes would result in long-term improvement to the visual integrity of the SMA by removing visual evidence of unauthorized vehicle use. However, in the short-term, such closure activities as ripping and seeding, posting of signs, and berm construction may degrade the SMA's visual quality. Therefore, the BLM would complete a Visual Contrast Rating to determine the short-term impacts and mitigation measures for closure activities. The Limits of Acceptable Change system would be used to determine the amount of visual change to be allowed over the long term.

Recreational Opportunities

Seasonal closures would result in continued but decreased visitor access for

Deterioration of this section of Road 1103 would restrict administrative access to the SMA. The administrative use of vehicles elsewhere would have a negligible impact on soils.

As the result of already existing soil compaction, vegetation would not readily re-establish along the roadbed. However, the relatively flat secondary roadbeds on the mesa top would eventually revegetate (approximately 17 miles).

Vegetation

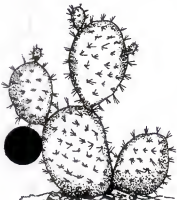
As the result of soil loss and compaction, natural revegetation of the roadbed itself would not occur along the stretch of Road 1103 from Hunter's Camp to Mesa Chivato (approximately 3 miles). However, the natural revegetation of the ruts and parallel routes along Road 1103 (6 miles) and the secondary routes (36 miles) would continue, recovering approximately 42 miles (102 acres). The impacts to vegetation caused by vehicles used for administrative purposes would be minimal.

Wildlife

Aspects of Alternative 1 that would affect wildlife are the elimination of vehicle access and related disturbance to wildlife, and the closure of 36 miles of secondary routes. The first action would impact wildlife by minimizing the human disturbance associated with vehicles. Closing the secondary routes would produce a single wildlife habitat block of approximately 43,000 acres.

Special Status Plants and Animals

The positive impacts on special status plants and animals would be the same as those described above for other vegetation and wildlife. Under the Endangered Species Act, the administrative determination is that the worst consequence anticipated is the "No Affect" and the best is a "May Affect--Positive."



Livestock Grazing Operations

Grazing permittees would be allowed to use motorized vehicles only for emergencies in the SMA, including maintenance of range improvements. This limitation would cause minimal inconvenience for permittees in managing their livestock operations. However, vandalism to range improvements (such as fence cutting) could increase, especially during hunting season and years with good piñon crops.

Visual Resources

The visual quality of the SMA would improve as the result of the road and route closures, and the reclamation of 36 miles of secondary routes.

Recreational Opportunities

Physically challenged visitors and senior citizens with limited mobility would not be able to traverse the IC SMA using motorized vehicles. Hunting activities would be limited to those done on foot and by horseback. Recreation opportunities would be restricted to non-motorized activities; this would change the majority of the SMA's ROS classification to primitive or semi-primitive, non-motorized. The number of visitors could decrease to between 20 and 30 during each weekend.

Wilderness Values

Wilderness values, especially opportunities for solitude, would be enhanced along Road 1103 and the secondary routes located in the two WSAs.

Cultural Resources

Closure of Road 1103 and the secondary routes in the IC SMA would result in a reduction of casual collection at archaeological sites.

IMPACTS OF THE NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE (OPEN STATUS)

Motorized vehicle use would be in accordance with the 1986 Rio Puerco RMP

though possible. The No Action Alternative would not restrict casual collecting at archaeological sites.

CUMULATIVE IMPACT ASSESSMENT (PROPOSED ACTION)

The Council on Environmental Quality defines cumulative impact as "the impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions . . . Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time" (40 CFR 1508.7).

This analysis of the cumulative impacts that would occur from implementing the Proposed Action focuses on soils, vegetation, wildlife, special status plants and animals, recreational opportunities, visual resources, and wilderness values.

Other Actions In or Near the SMA

The following past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, when considered with the Proposed Action, may have the cumulative impacts discussed below.

The BLM would manage BLM Road 1103 for seasonal use as a maintained dirt road, with high-clearance vehicle use in dry weather. The owner of the L/Bar Ranch (who holds the majority of interspersed checkerboard lands within the forest boundary) has closed off access across private lands, so the only access to the southern boundary of the Ignacio Chavez SMA is from FSR 239A. The U. S. Forest Service's management of FSR 239 is for seasonal use, and the management strategy for use of FSR 239A is by high-clearance vehicles in dry weather.

Road 1103 was elected to remain open in the 1986 RMP and serves as a boundary road for two WSAs. The BLM New Mexico Wilderness Study Report (USDI, BLM 1988) recommended that the contiguous Ignacio Chavez, Chamisa, La Leña, and Empedrado WSAs should be units of the proposed Boca del

Oso Wilderness. The existing dirt roads that separate these WSAs would remain as their boundaries.

In 1992, the BLM carried out a prescribed fire on the north slope of Mesa Chivato to regenerate the oak forest (impacts were analyzed in EA NM-017-90-30). Approximately 2,000 acres were burned, creating a diverse ecosystem with higher forage (grass and shrub) production for elk and deer.

Soils and Vegetation

If another prescribed fire were to be done, it would expose the SMA's soils to the forces of nature, thereby increasing erosion potential. However, subsequently resting the allotments for two growing seasons over a 2-year period (as the BLM usually does after prescribed fires) would provide opportunities for revegetation. From the fire, the change in the mix of vegetation from piñon/juniper and interspersed grasslands to grasslands and interspersed piñon/juniper would improve soils and vegetation (including big game forage) and reduce erosion. Access to the southern boundary of the SMA from FSR 239A may limit unauthorized vehicle use across private land, which may also help reduce soil erosion.

However, increased numbers of deer and elk may lead to more permits being issued by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, attracting more hunters during the open season for Road 1103. This would increase soil compaction and vegetation trampling by hunters driving over areas immediately adjacent to the road. On balance, the cumulative impacts of the Proposed Action and other actions (such as a prescribed fire) in the SMA may result in increased soil compaction and vegetative disturbance if game numbers increased after habitat improvement, and if more hunting occurred.



SECTION 5

CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

Table 6 contains a list of BLM staff specialists who prepared this document. The BLM has involved the public in all facets of its

decision-making processes for Road 1103 in the Ignacio Chavez SMA. For a summary of these efforts, refer to Table 7.

TABLE 6

LIST OF PREPARERS

Name	Title/Role	Office
Kathy Walter	Project Coordinator, Outdoor Recreation Planner	Rio Puerco Resource Area
John Arwood	Rangeland Management Specialist	Rio Puerco Resource Area
M'Lee Beazley	Desktop Publishing, Cartography	Albuquerque District
John Bristol	Resource Program Manager	Albuquerque District
Kent Hamilton	Community Planner	Albuquerque District
Pat Hester	Geologist	Rio Puerco Resource Area
Barbara Laskar	Word Processing	Rio Puerco Resource Area
Randy Legler	Wildlife Biologist	Rio Puerco Resource Area
Tony Lutonsky	Archaeologist	Rio Puerco Resource Area
Dave Mensing	Wilderness Coordinator	New Mexico State Office
Sarah W. Spurrier	Writer-Editor	Albuquerque District
Gene Tatum	Natural Resource Specialist	Rio Puerco Resource Area
Dwain Vincent	Natural Resource Specialist	Rio Puerco Resource Area
J.W. Whitney	NEPA Coordinator	New Mexico State Office

APPENDICES AND REFERENCES

APPENDIX A-1

CALCULATION OF ROADBED ACREAGE RECLAIMED UNDER THE PROPOSED ACTION

Under the Proposed Action, 36 miles of secondary routes would be closed, disked and re-seeded with native grasses or allowed to revegetate naturally (refer to Map 6 in the text). The road is approximately 10 feet wide, so the acreage reclaimed is calculated as follows:

$$5,280 \text{ feet/mile} \times 10 \text{ feet} = 52,800 \text{ square feet (ft}^2\text{)/mile (mi)}$$

$$\frac{52,800 \text{ ft}^2/\text{mi}}{43,560 \text{ ft}^2/\text{acre (ac)}} = 1.21 \text{ ac/mi reclaimed}$$

$$1.21 \text{ ac/mi} \times 36 \text{ miles of road closed} = 43.56 \text{ or } 44 \text{ acres reclaimed}$$

APPENDIX A-2

CALCULATION OF ADJACENT ACREAGE POTENTIALLY IMPACTED DURING SEASONAL OPENING OF ROAD 1103

Based on previous experience with off-road vehicle use in the IC SMA, the BLM is anticipating that some acreage on either side of 9 miles of Road 1103 may be impacted by vehicles when the road is open to limited vehicle use (from September 16 through November 14, and from March 31 through June 30). The impacts would likely occur within 10 feet on each side of the road, and would include soil compaction, vegetation disturbance, littering and unauthorized vehicle use in wilderness. The potential acreage affected by such impacts would be approximately 22 acres, calculated as follows.

$$5,280 \text{ ft/mi} \times (10+10) \text{ ft} = 105,600 \text{ ft}^2/\text{mi}$$

$$\frac{105,600 \text{ ft}^2/\text{mi}}{3,560 \text{ ft}^2/\text{ac}} = 2.42 \text{ ac/mi potentially disturbed}$$

$$2.42 \text{ ac/mi} \times 9 \text{ mi of Road 1103 open} = 21.78 \text{ or } 22 \text{ acres potentially disturbed}$$

APPENDIX B

REVIEW OF SPECIAL STATUS ANIMAL SPECIES IN THE IGNACIO CHAVEZ SMA

INTRODUCTION

To determine the potential impacts of the Proposed Action and alternatives, the BLM has reviewed the list of special status animal species shown in Table A. These species inhabit either juniper-piñon woodland or the pine-Douglas fir forest ecosystems (as established by A. W. Kuchler). The species were reviewed in the context of geographical distribution and special habitat requirements. The absence of major riparian areas or bodies of water led to the elimination of a number of species from the final list in Table 4 in the text of this EA. The most improbable species were dropped from this list and not further considered.

FEDERAL STATUS DEFINITIONS

Endangered species--Any species that is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range.

Threatened species--Any species that is likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant part of its range.

Species of Concern--Animals for which U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service information indicates that proposing to list (as endangered or threatened) is possibly appropriate, but for which conclusive data to support proposed rules are not currently available. Further biological research and field study usually are needed to determine the status of animals in this category.

STATE OF NEW MEXICO STATUS DEFINITIONS

Endangered (Group 1): Species whose prospects of survival or increase within the state are in jeopardy.

Endangered (Group 2): Species whose prospects of survival or increase within the state are likely to become jeopardized in the foreseeable future.

TABLE B

LIST OF SPECIAL STATUS ANIMALS REVIEWED FOR OCCURRENCE
IN THE IGNACIO CHAVEZ SMA *

Class/ Common Name	Genus/Species/ Subspecies	Federal Listing	State (NM) Listing	Ecosystem(s) for Habitat
<u>Birds</u>				
bald eagle	<u>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</u>	Threatened	Group 2	juniper-piñon woodland, pine-Douglas fir forest
burrowing owl	<u>Athene cunicularis</u> spp. <u>hypugaea</u>	Species of Concern	Not listed	juniper-piñon woodland, pine-Douglas fir forest
ferruginous hawk	<u>Buteo regalis</u>	Species of Concern	Not listed	juniper-piñon woodland, pine-Douglas fir forest
Northern goshawk	<u>Accipiter gentilis</u>	Species of Concern	Not listed	juniper-piñon woodland, pine-Douglas fir forest
gray vireo	<u>Vireo vicinior</u>	Not listed	Group 2	juniper-piñon woodland
loggerhead shrike	<u>Lanius ludovicianus</u>	Species of Concern	Not listed	juniper-piñon woodland, pine-Douglas fir forest
peregrine falcon	<u>Falco peregrinus</u>	Endangered	Group 1	juniper-piñon woodland, pine-Douglas fir forest
Southern spotted owl	<u>Strix occidentalis</u> spp. <u>lucida</u>	Threatened	Not listed	juniper-piñon woodland, pine-Douglas fir forest
Southwestern willow flycatcher	<u>Empidonax trailli</u> spp. <u>extimus</u>	Endangered	Group 2	juniper-piñon woodland, pine-Douglas fir forest
<u>Mammals</u>				
big free-tailed bat	<u>Tadarida macrotus</u>	Species of Concern	Not listed	juniper-piñon woodland
fringed myotis (bat)	<u>Myotis thysanodes</u> spp. <u>thysanodes</u>	Species of Concern	Not listed	juniper-piñon woodland, pine-Douglas fir forest
long-eared myotis	<u>Myotis evotis</u> spp. <u>evotis</u>	Species of Concern	Not listed	juniper-piñon woodland, pine-Douglas fir forest
long-legged myotis	<u>Myotis volans</u> spp. <u>interior</u>	Species of Concern	Not listed	juniper-piñon woodland, pine-Douglas fir forest
occult little brown bat	<u>Myotis lucifugus</u> spp. <u>oculius</u>	Species of Concern	Not listed	juniper-piñon woodland, pine-Douglas fir forest
small-footed myotis	<u>Myotis subulatus</u>	Species of Concern	Not listed	juniper-piñon woodland, pine-Douglas fir forest
spotted bat	<u>Euderma maculatum</u>	Species of Concern	Group 2	juniper-piñon woodland, pine-Douglas fir forest
Townsend's big-eared bat	<u>Plecotus townsendii</u> spp. <u>palescens</u>	Species of Concern	Not listed	juniper-piñon woodland, pine-Douglas fir forest
Yuma myotis	<u>Myotis yumanensis</u> spp. <u>yumanensis</u>	Species of Concern	Not listed	juniper-piñon woodland, pine-Douglas fir forest
meadow jumping mouse, New Mexican	<u>Zapus hudsonius</u> spp. <u>luteus</u>	Species of Concern	Group 2	pine-Douglas fir forest
<u>Reptile</u>				
Texas horned lizard	<u>Phrynosoma cornutum</u>	Species of Concern	Not listed	juniper-piñon woodland

Note: * The management goal for all species listed here is recovery.

REFERENCES

- Johnson, Mike. 1991. Telephone conversation regarding hunting permits in Management Unit 9. Albuquerque, NM: New Mexico Department of Game & Fish.
- New Mexico Department of Game & Fish. 1987. Operation Plan: Terrestrial Management of New Mexico Wildlife, 1987-1995. Santa Fe, NM.
- New Mexico Natural Resources Department. 1986. New Mexico Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan. Santa Fe, NM.
- U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management. 1979. Final Environmental Statement on Grazing Management in the East Socorro ES Area. Socorro, NM: Socorro District.
- _____. 1980. Wilderness Intensive Inventory. Albuquerque, NM: Albuquerque District Office.
- _____. 1981. Wilderness Management Policy. Washington, DC: Washington Office.
- _____. 1982. Programmatic Memorandum of Agreement/Interagency Agreement No. NMSO-168, among the Bureau of Land Management, the State Historic Preservation Officer, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. Santa Fe, NM: New Mexico State Office.
- _____. 1986a. Rio Puerco Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision. Albuquerque, NM: Albuquerque District, Rio Puerco Resource Area.
- _____. 1986b. Rio Puerco Resource Management Plan, Final Transportation Management Plan Inventory. Albuquerque, NM: Albuquerque District, Rio Puerco Resource Area.
- _____. 1987. Interim Management Policy Update Document, BLM Manual H-8550. Washington, DC: Washington Office.
- _____. 1988. New Mexico Statewide Wilderness Study, Volume 2: Appendices--Wilderness Analysis Reports. Santa Fe, NM: New Mexico State Office.
- _____. 1991. N.M. Wilderness Study Report, Statewide Summary. Santa Fe, NM: New Mexico State Office.
- _____. 1992. Rio Puerco Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision, Update. Albuquerque, NM: Albuquerque District Office, Rio Puerco Resource Area.
- _____. 1995. Interim Management Policy Document, BLM Manual H-8550-1. Washington, DC: Washington Office.



United States Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Albuquerque Field Office
435 Montano Rd. NE
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87107-4935

IN REPLY REFER TO:

8340 (010)
1610 (010)

MAY 26 1998

Dear Interested Party:

The enclosed document is the Decision Record for the 1996 Plan Amendment/Environmental Assessment (EA) for Vehicle Use in the Ignacio Chavez Special Management Area (IC SMA), August 1996, NM-017-94-104. The EA amends the off-road vehicle (ORV) designation of the Rio Puerco Resource Management Plan (RMP) for the IC SMA, and seasonally closes the SMA to all unauthorized motor vehicle users.

The Decision Record serves as the final step in the National Environmental Policy Act process. The RMP ORV designation for the IC SMA specified that vehicular travel is "limited to existing roads and trails." The Bureau of Land Management can now implement the "closed" ORV designation on 36 miles of secondary routes in the IC SMA for resource protection and rehabilitation within the two Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs).

Road 1103 will remain open for motorized vehicle use except during seasonal closures, and 19 miles of secondary routes will remain open for authorized administrative and emergency uses (including maintenance of range improvements). Road 1103 will be periodically maintained by Sandoval County or another qualified entity to ensure it is safe for vehicular passage.

We appreciate your participation on this planning process and hope you will support the decision.

Sincerely,

Amy L. Lueders
Acting Field Manager

Enclosure

INTRODUCTION

This document records the decision of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) regarding the Rio Puerco Resource Management Plan (RMP) Amendment for Vehicle Use in the Ignacio Chavez Special Management Area (IC SMA), August 1996, NM-017-94-104.

DECISION

The decision is to select the proposed action as described in the Environmental Assessment (EA) and Plan Amendment for Vehicle Use in the IC SMA. The authority to amend the existing Rio Puerco RMP is contained in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 and as further defined under Title 43 of the Federal Code of Regulations, Subpart 1610.5-5.

THE PROPOSED ACTION AND OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Three alternatives were considered and analyzed in the EA/Plan Amendment. The preferred alternative is the proposed action which serves as the basis of the amendment to the current RMP.

No Action Alternative (Open Status)

Under this alternative, motorized use by the public, grazing permittees, BLM staff and New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDG&F) staff in the SMA would be allowed in accordance with the Rio Puerco RMP off-road vehicle (ORV) decisions. Under this alternative, Road 1103 (9 miles) would remain open on a year-round basis and would be periodically maintained to ensure it is safe for vehicle use. Secondary routes not closed through the RMP would also be open for motorized use. A total of 43 miles of secondary routes would be open for public and administrative use year round, with another 8 miles open for limited use only as established in the RMP. The 4 miles of secondary routes closed through the RMP would remain closed. However, other emergency road closures could be applied if the conditions warranted.

Alternative 1 (Total Closure)

Under this alternative, 39 miles of existing secondary routes and 9 miles of Road 1103 in the IC SMA would be closed to motorized vehicle use by the general public on a year-round basis. This alternative would change the RMP ORV designation from "limited to existing roads and trails" to "closed." The closures would be at the same locations as those described for the Proposed Action. Motorized vehicle access on 19 miles of secondary routes and 9 miles of Road 1103 would be provided for BLM and NMDG&F administration, and other administrative purposes.

Proposed Action (Seasonal Closure) - Preferred Alternative

The preferred alternative is to amend the Rio Puerco RMP ORV designation for the IC SMA and to seasonally close the SMA to all unauthorized motor vehicle uses. The Rio Puerco RMP ORV designation for the IC SMA specifies that vehicular travel is "limited to existing roads and trails." The plan amendment changes the ORV designation on 36 miles of secondary routes in the IC SMA to

be open to the public and grazing permittees. The New Mexico Wilderness Study Report (USDI, BLM 1991) recommends that Road 1103, which separates the two WSAs, remain as the boundary and be open to allow access to the two large WSAs. (However, if the Congress designated the area as wilderness, all secondary routes would be closed to motorized vehicle use.)

MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

The decision to choose the proposed action is based on: (1) the need for resource protection within the IC SMA and two WSAs; (2) input received from the public, BLM specialists, tribal governments and state land management agencies; and (3) the EA of the proposed plan amendment.

IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

The approved amendment to the RMP will provide the basis for vehicles in the IC SMA. Mechanical rehabilitation of the closed routes will begin in the spring of 1998. Road 1103 and secondary routes will be signed as "open," "closed," or "limited to authorized use only." Where the terrain permits, small wire gates and fences will be installed across "limited" routes.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public opinion and input have been sought throughout the planning and decision process. A summary of public involvement for the IC SMA and Road 1103 decisions can be found on page 31 of the EA and Plan Amendment for Vehicle Use in the IC SMA, August 1996, NM-017-94-104. As required the plan was sent to the Governor's office for the Governor's review in accordance with the consistency requirements of 43 CFR 1610.3.2.

PROTEST RESOLUTION/COMMENTS

Four letters and two telephone calls were received in favor of the Proposed Action (Seasonal Closure). One letter was received opposing the Proposed Action and preferring Alternative 1 (Total Closure). Two letters were received opposing the Proposed Action and preferring the No Action Alternative (Open Status).

Two protest letters were received by the Resource Planning Team in Washington DC. The protest letters stated that the No Action Alternative (Open Status) should have been the Preferred Alternative.

The issues and concerns to the BLM Director were carefully reviewed. It was determined that the BLM New Mexico State Director and Albuquerque Field Office Manager followed applicable planning procedures, laws, regulations, policies, relevant resource considerations and public input in developing the EA and Plan Amendment for Vehicle Use in the IC SMA. Based on the above finding the Director then dismissed the two protests which had been received.

CONSISTENCY

No inconsistencies with the plan, programs and policies or other federal agencies or state, local, and tribal governments were identified during the EA and plan amendment process, including the Governor's Consistency Review.