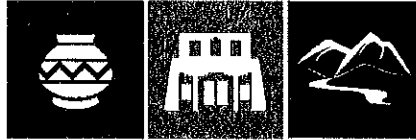


Justin S. Greene
Commissioner, District 1

Anna Hansen
Commissioner, District 2

Camilla Bustamante
Commissioner, District 3



SANTA FE COUNTY

Anna T. Hamilton
Commissioner, District 4

Hank Hughes
Commissioner, District 5

Gregory S. Shaffer
County Manager

June 27, 2023

U.S. Department of the Interior
Director (630)
Bureau of Land Management,
1849 C St. NW, Room 5646
Washington, DC 20240
Attention: 1004-AE92.

**RE: OMB Control Number 1004-ONEW and RIN 1004-AE92
Proposed Rules for Managing Public Lands**

To Whom It May Concern:

The Board of County Commissioners of Santa Fe County submits the following comments on the above-referenced Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposed rule (Proposed Rule). The Proposed Rule proposes new regulations that, pursuant to the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), as amended, would allow BLM to prioritize the health and resilience of ecosystems across certain public lands and add conservation as a “use” within the framework of FLMPA’s multi-use framework. We support the Proposed Rule and respectfully submit the below comments. Santa Fe County has many residents that will be directly impacted by the Proposed Rule.

The BLM manages 13.5 million acres in New Mexico, yet only 2.5% are durably protected. New Mexico’s public lands would benefit from increased protections. We commend the BLM on the Proposed Rule that would modernize the Bureau’s management of public lands to promote healthy landscapes, abundant wildlife, clean drinking water, and balanced decision-making. By clarifying that conservation, which includes restoration and protection, is a multiple use within the agency’s management framework on par with other uses such as development, the federal government will ensure America’s public lands can be managed to sustain their health, diversity, and productivity for current and future generations.

Public lands play a critical role in helping New Mexico remain the “land of enchantment.” Our communities depend upon the world class hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation opportunities these lands provide since our state’s culture, heritage, and way-of-life are forever connected to these protected lands. BLM lands, like Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs), conserve cultural sites and scenic areas, and can help at-risk and endangered species recover. This designation can also help improve water quality, which is especially critical for Santa Fe County and other parts of the arid Southwest.

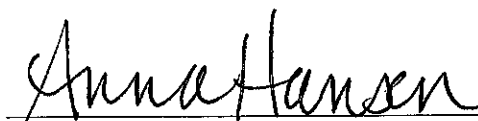
Some local ACECs in Santa Fe County have a rich history that can still be seen in the land itself. For example, the Caja del Rio, which is located on 106,883 acres of BLM and U.S. Forest Service public lands in north-central New Mexico, contains a dense concentration of sacred Pueblo sites, structures; petroglyphs, irrigation systems, and other Indigenous cultural resources. Recent history of the area also includes the passage of the Camino Real de Tierra Adentro through the area, Spanish land grant communities utilizing the land for centuries, and the continued utilization and direct connection of the area's Indigenous communities.

The cliffs of Diablo Canyon make for some of the best rock climbing in the region, and the diverse wildlife includes everything from elk and black bears to eagles and owls, with the riparian bosque along the Rio Grande and Santa Fe rivers containing a mix of piñon-juniper, grasslands, cacti, and sagebrush.

There is an urgency to protecting these areas as it is subject to many time-sensitive threats like unregulated shooting, vandalism, illegal dumping, and irresponsible and destructive off-roading. In January 2022, sacred petroglyphs in the Caja del Rio were vandalized. Through Resolution No. 2022-030 (attached), the Board of County Commissioners has called for permanent protection and responsible stewardship of the Caja del Rio landscape and supports collaboration, co-management, and co-stewardship of the Caja among responsible federal agencies, local governments of traditional Hispano communities, and sovereign Tribal Nations. Increasing and coordinating a higher level of protection of this area is the only way to prevent this kind of destructive behavior and ensure that the Caja del Rio is here for future generations.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments. We commend BLM on its draft rule that prioritizes the conservation of wildlife, cultural resources, and encourages tribal co-stewardship of BLM resources and encourage the BLM to enact a strong final Public Lands Rule that helps us ensure public lands across the state of New Mexico are safeguarded now and into the future. We remain committed to working with BLM on the subject matter of the Proposed Rule. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Respectfully,



Anna Hansen, Chair
Board of County Commissioners for Santa Fe County
505-920-0957 mobile

Santa Fe County Comments
Proposed Rules for Managing Public Lands
Page 3 of 4

Attachment:

Resolution No. 2022-030

This letter has been sent to:

Governor Michele Lujan Grisham
Senator Martin Heinrich
Senator Ben Ray Lujan
Congresswomen Teresa Leger Fernandez and Melanie Stansbury
Congressman Gabriel Vasquez
Governor of San Ildefonso Pueblo
Governor of Tesuque Pueblo
Governor of Nambe Pueblo
Governor of Cochiti Pueblo
All Pueblo Council of Governors

