



The Farmington Mancos-Gallup RMP Amendment/EIS Newsletter

US Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management and Bureau of Indian Affairs

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Preliminary Draft Alternatives Developed for the Farmington Mancos-Gallup RMP Amendment/EIS

The United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), have developed preliminary draft alternatives that will be further refined and analyzed in the Farmington Mancos-Gallup Resource Management Plan (RMP) Amendment/Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The agencies have formulated these alternatives in response to the issues and concerns identified during two rounds of public scoping: the first in 2014 and the second conducted from 2016 to 2017 after the BIA joined as a co-lead agency. Per the National Environmental Policy Act, the agencies developed these alternatives because there were unresolved conflicts concerning different uses of available resources. These alternatives are reasonable and respond to the project purpose and need, are technically and economically feasible, and are consistent with the basic policy and management objectives for the BIA and BLM.

Between September 2014 and August 2017, the BLM and BIA planning teams met numerous times to develop management goals, objectives, and actions. They developed separate alternatives for the BLM RMPA/EIS and the BIA EIS concurrently. Cooperating agencies were invited to attend and participate in some of these meetings.

The BIA and BLM each have developed one no action alternative and four action alternatives. The action alternatives—A, B, C, and D—for both agencies offer a wide range of possible management approaches for responding to the planning issues. While the goals are often the same across alternatives, each alternative contains a discrete set of objectives and management actions, each constituting a separate BLM RMPA or BIA management program. Each alternative addresses resource program goals in varying degrees, with the potential for different long-range outcomes and conditions. The relative emphasis given to particular resources and resource uses also differs, including allowable uses, mitigation measures, and specific direction pertaining to individual resource programs.

The planning area for these alternatives encompasses 4,189,460 acres in San Juan, Rio Arriba, McKinley, and

Sandoval Counties, about 75 percent of which is managed by the BLM or BIA. This includes communities such as Farmington, Aztec, and Bloomfield, along with the Navajo Chapters of Pueblo Pintado, Ojo Encino, Counselor, Nageezi, Lake Valley, Huerfano, Upper Fruitland, and San Juan, as well as portions of the Hogback, Burnham, Whiterock, Becenti, Whitehorse Lake, and Torreon Chapters. These BIA- and BLM-managed decision areas are varied and include a mixture of BLM and BIA (both Tribal trust lands and individual Indian allotments) surface land over mineral estate, as well as split estate, where the surface land ownership does not match the mineral estate ownership. On split estate, the BLM or BIA may manage only the minerals or only the surface. An example of where both BIA and BLM alternatives and management would apply is a scenario where the surface is Navajo Trust land and the mineral estate is federal, making the BIA responsible for decisions related to surface impacts from fluid mineral development while the BLM would manage the actual leasing of the fluid minerals.

The sections below summarize the preliminary draft alternatives that will be analyzed by each agency.

BLM No Action Alternative

This required alternative continues the current management direction and prevailing conditions derived from existing planning documents. Goals and objectives for resources and resource uses addressed in this RMPA/EIS are based on the applicable portions of the Farmington RMP (BLM 2003), along with associated amendments, activity and implementation level plans, and other management decision documents. Other relevant laws, regulations, and BLM policies would still apply.

The goals and objectives for BLM-administered surface lands and federal mineral estate would not change. Appropriate and allowable uses and restrictions pertaining to such activities as mineral leasing and development, vegetation management, lands with wilderness characteristics, and land use authorizations (LUAs) would also remain the same. The BLM would not modify existing or establish additional criteria to guide the identification of site-specific use levels for implementation.

BLM Alternative A

BLM Alternative A focuses on managing and enhancing habitats in the BLM decision area. This alternative emphasizes returning ecological systems to a healthy condition and maintaining and enhancing the resiliency of healthy ecosystems. To achieve this desired future condition, Alternative A integrates adaptive management and prioritizes natural and nonrenewable resource programs. Goals and objectives focus on environmental outcomes achieved by sustaining relatively unmodified physical landscapes and natural resource values. This alternative would establish the greatest number and extent of specific measures designed to support natural ecosystems. Vegetation communities would be managed to create a diverse and resilient ecosystem. The BLM would manage all lands with wilderness characteristics to protect those characteristics as a priority over other multiple uses under this alternative. Appropriate and allowable uses and restrictions placed on fluid mineral leasing and LUAs would focus on minimizing impacts on natural resources.

BLM Alternative B

BLM Alternative B emphasizes the preservation and protection of the Chacoan and cultural landscapes unique to northern New Mexico, including cultural and paleontological properties. Management direction would recognize and expand existing uses and would accommodate new uses, consistent with protecting the Chacoan and natural landscapes in the BLM decision area. The BLM would manage all lands with wilderness characteristics to protect those characteristics as a priority over other multiple uses under this alternative. Vegetation communities would be managed to enhance the unique landscapes while sustaining and increasing native vegetation communities.

The appropriate development scenarios for allowable uses (such as mineral leasing and ROWs) would emphasize protection of the natural and cultural landscape and associated viewshed and soundscape. Appropriate and allowable uses and

restrictions would emphasize social and cultural resources, while mitigating impacts on land health.

A suite of measures that form portions of Alternative B, which maximize protection of the Chacoan landscape, are based on proposals from various groups between 2010 and 2015, including The Wilderness Society, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Chaco Alliance, and the San Juan Citizens Alliance. These proposals expressed concerns about impacts of oil and gas development on CCNHP, the Great North Road, and other Chacoan sites. Specific impact concerns relate to viewsheds and night skies, noise, recreation experience, air quality, water quality, lands with wilderness characteristics, and Traditional Cultural Properties (TCPs). Proposals requested that the BLM prepare a Master Leasing Plan (MLP) for the Greater Chaco Landscape. Because there is no clear definition of this landscape, the BLM is not preparing a MLP as part of the RMPA. However, many of the measures suggested by these groups are included in Alternative B.

BLM Alternative C

BLM Alternative C focuses on a strategy that balances community needs and development while enhancing land health. This alternative places a particular emphasis on the Tribal and local perspective of the landscape and prioritizes resource development while minimizing impacts on the traditional, historic, socioeconomic, and cultural lifeways of the planning area. Goals and objectives focus on socioeconomics, human health and environment, traditional communities, recreation opportunities, and tourism.

The BLM would manage a smaller portion of lands with wilderness characteristics to protect those characteristics as a priority over other multiple uses under this alternative. Vegetation communities would be managed to facilitate traditional and historic uses of the vegetation while allowing for resource development. The appropriate development scenarios for allowable uses would emphasize resource use without disrupting surrounding communities.

Next Steps

The preliminary schedule below outlines major steps in the RMPA/EIS process and what happens at each step.

<u>Public Scoping and Resource Data Collection</u>	<u>Alternative Development and Draft RMPA/EIS Preparation</u> (We are here!)	<u>Draft RMPA/EIS Publication</u>	<u>Proposed RMPA/Final EIS Preparation and Publication</u>	<u>Records of Decision & Approved RMPA Preparation and Publication</u>
Spring 2014—Summer 2017	Summer 2014—Spring 2018	Spring—Fall 2018	Fall 2018—Spring 2019	Spring—Fall 2019
Conduct special studies	Use comments from public scoping to develop alternatives	Publish draft RMPA/EIS	Review and incorporate public comments on draft RMPA/EIS	Write and publish records of decision
Host public scoping meetings	Analyze impacts of alternatives	Host public meetings	Publish proposed RMPA/final EIS	
Gather public comments over two scoping periods		Accept public comments on draft RMPA/EIS during 90-day comment period	30-day public review and protest period	
Publish scoping reports summarizing public comments				

BLM Alternative D

BLM Alternative D focuses on maximizing resources that target economic outcomes, while sustaining land health. Management direction would promote development of fluid mineral resources and would accommodate new uses to the greatest extent possible. The BLM would not manage any lands with wilderness characteristics to protect those characteristics as a priority over other multiple uses under this alternative. Vegetation communities would be managed to sustain healthy conditions and to promote responsible commercial development.

The appropriate development scenarios for allowable uses would emphasize maximizing resource production, while maintaining the basic protection needed to sustain resources. Appropriate and allowable uses and restrictions would emphasize social and economic outcomes, while mitigating impacts on land health. The BLM would accept that there could be adverse effects on historic properties associated with the Chacoan landscape that may or may not be mitigated under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

BIA No Action Alternative

In accordance with the Indian Affairs National Environmental Policy Act Guidebook (59 IAM 3-H; BIA 2012), the BIA is required to consider a no action alternative, which would continue current management, or business as usual. The BIA no-action alternative would continue present management direction from practices contained in existing laws, regulations, policies, and standards.

BIA Alternative A

BIA Alternative A focuses on protecting and enhancing natural environments while emphasizing protection of sensitive wildlife areas and ecological resources. This alternative would establish the greatest number and extent of specific measures designed

to protect or enhance natural resource values. Appropriate and allowable uses and restrictions would focus on minimizing impacts on natural resources.

BIA Alternative B

BIA Alternative B emphasizes the preservation and protection of the cultural and natural landscapes unique to northern New Mexico, including cultural resources such as CCNHP. The appropriate development scenarios for allowable uses (such as mineral leasing) would emphasize protection of the natural and cultural landscape and associated viewshed and soundscape. Appropriate and allowable uses and restrictions would emphasize minimizing and mitigating impacts on natural, social, and cultural resources.

BIA Alternative C

BIA Alternative C focuses on allowing development to occur in harmony with the traditional, historic, socioeconomic, and cultural lifeways of the planning area. This alternative places a particular emphasis on the Tribal and local perspective of the landscape and traditional lifeways, while prioritizing management with the fewest impacts on human communities from oil and gas development, such as increased traffic and crime or decreased human health, air, and water quality.

BIA Alternative D

BIA Alternative D focuses on making the most of resources that target economic outcomes, while protecting land health. Management direction would promote development of fluid mineral resources and would accommodate new uses to the greatest extent possible. The appropriate development scenarios for allowable uses would emphasize maximizing resource production and royalty income for the landowners—both Navajo Nation and Individual Indian landowners or allottees—while minimizing and mitigating impacts in surrounding communities.





Want More Information?

While the BLM and BIA are not soliciting public comments at this time, we encourage you to stay informed on the process and future opportunities for submitting your comments. Visit www.blm.gov/nm/farmington for more information. Anyone wishing to be added to or deleted from the mailing list, wishing to change their contact information, or requesting further information may contact the BLM and BIA by any of the following methods:

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Before providing your phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information, you should be aware that your information may be made publicly available at any time. While you can request that your personal identifying information be withheld from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

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