ORGAN MOUNTAINS
NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA

MANAGEMENT PROSPECTUS

JULY 1989
PURPOSE

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has been actively preparing for the legislative action which will create the Organ Mountains National Conservation Area (NCA). The Organ Mountains Coordinated Resource Management Plan (CRMP), which has just been completed, outlines specific management actions for over 50,000 acres of BLM-administered public land in the Organ and Franklin Mountains of south-central New Mexico. The CRMP will constitute the initial management plan for the NCA.

This prospectus has been developed to present a status of the work that has been, and is continuing to be accomplished toward a fully operating National Conservation Area.
The BLM has long recognized the Organ and Franklin Mountains as an area with special resource values in need of special management and protection. In 1971, the 27,167-acre Organ Mountains Recreation Lands (OMRLs) were designated. The OMRLs Management Plan was prepared in 1971 and Updated in 1975 and 1985. In 1984, the 8,947-acre Organ Mountains Scenic Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) was designated. In 1987 a Habitat Management Plan (HMP) was prepared for the Sneed's pincushion cactus, which is Federally-listed as endangered. The HMP covered the Bishop's Cap and Franklin Mountains areas. The Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the New Mexico Statewide Wilderness Study was completed in 1988. The EIS recommended the designation of a 7,144-acre wilderness area in the Organ Mountains. Recent land acquisitions will make it possible to designate nearly 17,000 acres of wilderness within the area. The Organ Mountains CRMP, that was just completed, consolidates the multiplicity of previous designations and management plans into one, single comprehensive document.
LAND EXCHANGES

A scattered, multi-ownership land pattern has contributed to management problems in the area. BLM has taken on that challenge. In cooperation with the New Mexico State Land Office, all (approximately 6,600 acres) State trust land has been acquired through exchange in the last 3 years. In 1988, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) acquired the 2,800-acre A.B. Cox Ranch. BLM then acquired the property through a complicated land exchange with TNC, thus protecting this ecologically important and strikingly beautiful area. TNC will remain an active partner in helping BLM manage the Cox Ranch property. Land acquisition efforts are continuing, with about 7,700 acres of private land and 2,100 acres of property owned by New Mexico State University (NMSU) to be acquired. A land exchange with NMSU should be completed in 1989, along with several private exchanges.

Illustration courtesy of Sara Hopkins
KEY FEATURES OF THE NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA

Once designated, the Organ Mountains would be BLM's sixth National Conservation Area. The NCA would be established to protect and maintain unique and nationally significant ecological, scenic, wilderness, recreation, cultural and scientific resources in the Organ and Franklin Mountains for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations. Some of the special features of the area include:
CULTURAL VALUES: The area exhibits evidence of human occupation since approximately 9,500 B.C. The greatest numbers of prehistoric sites date from the Jornada Mogollon cultural period, approximately A.D. 200 to A.D. 1400. Midden deposits at the Pena Blanca and La Cueva rockshelters are representative of this period. The Pena Blanca Site has produced the earliest cultivated corn in the United States. The area has a wealth of archeological sites ranging from historic mining-related sites to the well-known Van Patten's Mountain Resort in the Dripping Springs area. Van Patten, a Confederate Colonel, opened the resort in the late 1870s. It became one of the most prominent retreats in southern New Mexico. It later became a tuberculosis sanatorium operated by Dr. Nathan Boyd in the early 1900s. The CRMP calls for partial restoration, stabilization, and interpretation of this site.
RECREATIONAL VALUES: The Organ and Franklin Mountains currently receive about 150,000 recreation visits per year, most of which is attributable to the Aguirre Spring campground and immediate area. Developed camping and trails, in a mountain setting, are extremely limited in south-central New Mexico. This area provides the closest recreation opportunities of this type for the Las Cruces-El Paso area. Other areas on the Gila and Lincoln National Forests are another 1½ to 2 hours further by car. As such the Organs and Franklins are to Las Cruces and El Paso as the Sandias are to Albuquerque. The Aguirre Spring Campground lies on the east side of the Organ Mountains. This 55-unit campground also includes a large group site that is fully handicap accessible. Two National Recreation Trails also start at trailheads located within the campground. The 6-mile Baylor Pass Trail traverses the Organ Mountains from east to west. The 4½ mile Pine Tree Trail is a loop beginning and ending at the campground. There is a small 6-unit picnic area near La Cueva that was developed by the Cox family. The CRMP calls for upgrading this facility to a 55-unit day-use area. The CRMP also calls for establishment of the A.B. Cox Visitor Center, utilizing the existing ranch house. The Visitor Center will become a cornerstone for BLM/TNC interpretive programs in the area. The Visitor Center complex will also consist of a parking area, 10-unit picnic area, day camp facilities, and a maintenance center utilizing existing outbuildings. The CRMP also calls for developing roughly 40 miles of hiking, horseback and bicycle trails, including a trail to link the Organ Mountains with the Franklin Mountains State Park in Texas. The Organ Mountains also provide nationally significant technical rock climbing on quartz monzonite.
ECOLOGICAL VALUES: The Organ Mountains rise over 5,000 feet above the Mesilla Valley and encompass 3 major life zones. Their elevation, geology, and geographic position contribute to tremendous biological diversity. The area supports approximately 250 species of birds, 70 species of mammals, and 60 species of reptiles and amphibians. The Organ Mountains contain one of the highest concentrations of threatened and endangered (T&E) plant species found anywhere in New Mexico. There are 24 known State-listed or T&E plant species that occur within the area, many of which are found on or near the Cox Ranch property. These include the Organ Mountain evening primrose and Sneed's pincushion cactus. There are also up to seven species of State-listed endangered birds and two State-listed mammals that occur in the area.
BLM'S MANAGEMENT TASK

Key management direction from the CRMP, which will constitute the initial plan for the NCA, directs BLM to:

- Maintain ecological integrity as well as the quality scenic, wilderness, recreation, and natural values of this unique area.

- Acquire remaining private and NMSU lands within the area through purchase or exchange.

- Develop a Cooperative Management Agreement with the U.S. Army at Fort Bliss for joint management of the area.

- Develop a Cooperative Management Agreement with local governments and private institutions to form a *Friends of the Mountains* group for implementation of the CRMP.

- Develop a Visitor Center, day-use facilities, trails, and interpretive program.

- Inventory and protect significant cultural resources and populations of T&E plants and animals in the area.

- Partially restore, stabilize, and interpret the historic ruins at Dripping Springs.

- Implement grazing systems, rangeland improvements, and water developments to benefit wildlife, riparian, and watershed values.
WORKLOAD AND BUDGETING

The workload and budgeting needs for implementing the Organ Mountain CRMP can be grouped into three categories: (1) implementation (initial development costs), (2) field operations (operations and maintenance costs), and (3) land acquisition. Each of these categories are discussed below.

IMPLEMENTATION: These are the costs of survey/design and construction of facilities such as the Visitor Center, picnic areas, trails, cost of resource inventories, etc. They are one-time costs as opposed to recurring costs such as operations and maintenance.

FIELD OPERATIONS: In order to provide on-the-ground management of the proposed NCA, BLM's operations and maintenance activities will need to be expanded. The current staff consists of one Permanent Full-Time (PFT) Maintenance Worker, one Temporary Maintenance Worker and several full-time volunteers. Over the next 5 years, this staff will be expanded (funding permitted) to include:

1 PFT Project Leader
1 PFT Law Enforcement Ranger
1 PFT Maintenance Worker
3 Temp Maintenance Workers
1 Temp Interpretive Specialist
4 Full-Time Volunteers
Other miscellaneous volunteers

TNC will also be stationing a full-time Naturalist at the A.B. Cox Visitor Center. It is planned that this person will also function as a BLM volunteer.

LAND ACQUISITION: The emphasis for land acquisition will be on exchanges. Costs reflect the approximate average value of all inholdings if purchased. The value of specific parcels will vary greatly. A separate appraisal will be performed to determine the fair market value of individual parcels for each exchange or acquisition. If all lands were acquired by exchange, direct costs would be considerably less. Direct costs are for appraisals, cultural clearances, etc.
## ORGAN MOUNTAINS ESTIMATED COST

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