

Sierra County

Comprehensive Plan



January, 2006



Sierra County Comprehensive Plan

Presented to
Sierra County Board of Commissioners

Presented by
James Kent Associates
Rural Planning Institute, Inc.

January, 2006

Acknowledgements

This Comprehensive Plan has been prepared for Sierra County. The document could not have been prepared without the participation of so many residents, elected officials, and staff people. A special thanks to all.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the independent spirit expressed in Sierra County, which was there during settlement and is there now. The work is also dedicated to Eloy Armijo who shows what it is, and what it can be, to be a public servant.

Cover Photos, clockwise from top: Fire Station at Winston, Water tower north of Truth or Consequences, the Community Area Meeting in Hillsboro, Church at Cuchillo.

Sierra County Comprehensive Plan

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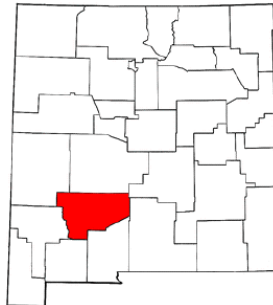
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Section One: Introduction and Planning Background

Background

Sierra County is one of 33 counties in New Mexico. It is located in the southwest part of the state (Figure 1.1) and has three incorporated communities within it, Truth or Consequences, the City of Elephant Butte, and the Village of Williamsburg. The County is 4,219 square miles, or 2,700,160 acres. Its economy was historically derived from agriculture, mining and visitation to the hot springs, and in the last 50 years from retirement and tourist visitation to Elephant Butte and Caballo Lakes. Culturally, it is oriented to ranching and a rural lifestyle. Section Eight contains a County Profile that statistically examines key features of local life.

Figure 1.1
Sierra County, New Mexico



What are current conditions in the County and how did things get that way? Where should Sierra County be headed? How can residents and officials influence the future direction of the County? These are the questions of a Comprehensive Plan.

The County is at a turning point. Many people believe the County is poised for growth. Particularly with improved infrastructure, the potential of the Space Port, and the growth of the second home and recreation market, changes are underway, leading to pivotal choices about direction. Residents highly value the “laid back” flavor of the area and do not want bureaucracy, regulation, and God forbid, zoning. Yet with greater numbers of people, the problems identified in this Plan will worsen and some intervention will be required. A number of thoughtful observers asked that the Plan provide guidelines to optimize flexibility, using regulation only as a last resort. People don’t want opportunities slowed, but want the problems associated with them handled. A County official called this approach, “common sense planning.”

Widespread Community Themes

Themes are attitudes, perceptions and values that are shared widely throughout a community. They are repeated frequently and casually in daily conversations and are reinforced in daily routines in community life. The comments below were repeated frequently during the course of preparing this Plan.

1. “Spectacular beauty.”

“I like that it’s warmer here. We are close to the river and close to the lake.”

“People are here for the quality of life, the solitude, nature.”

“We enjoy the solitude and we’re thankful everyday for where we live.”

“Dark skies at night!”

“It’s beautiful, clean air, clean water.”

2. “A friendly, small town, rural feeling.”

“There is a great sense of community here.”

“There is a small town feel here that fits.”

“We watch out for our neighbors, help them out.”

3. “There’s no bureaucracy!”

“There is no bureaucracy to deal with. No one bothers you. If ___ wants to put 20 cars in his backyard, that’s OK.”

“People used to want to be like Hatch and Doña Ana County. Not anymore. You have everybody and the dog catcher on you for this and that.”

“The attitude is that no one should tell us what to do.”

“Live free or die!”

4. “We do with less here and that’s OK.”

“I do with less here and that’s OK. I get privacy, a slower lifestyle, life the way I want it.”

“We are small but mighty. People here raised \$55,000 for scholarships at the high school graduation last year.”

“You don’t need much to make it here. The people are great and the views are super.”

5. “The culture is about getting along.”

“People here have an attitude of ‘live and let live.’”

“There are a lot of informal gatherings here and dinners. Neighbors support each other.”

“We’re sort of pioneers out here and we have to take care of each other.”

“We look after each others’ homes.”

“People live and let live here.”

“A common bond out here is the water. Water binds us together.”

Sierra County residents have made it abundantly clear that they love where they live and they value their “quality of life.” In everyday conversation, quality of life seemed to mean the natural beauty of the area, the climate, sparse population, the relaxed and rural lifestyle, outdoor activities, and friendly people. It did not seem to mean economic prosperity. In 1999 per capita income in New Mexico was ranked 49th of the 50 states, and Sierra County was in the lower end of New Mexico Counties (Section Eight: County Profile). On the other hand, many younger newcomers to the area stated that they came to live in Sierra County because “it doesn’t take much to live here.” Moreover, quality of life consideration has made the County attractive as a retirement environment, and there is some evidence that businesses are attracted for the same reasons. Particularly as U.S. business is becoming freer of geography because of information and communication technology, businesses are choosing areas with a high quality of life (See, for example, Johnson 1995; Snepenger et.al.1995). One could say that the tourism, recreation, retirement economy in Sierra County is maturing, with more diverse businesses, greater coordination and “synergy” among the many interests, an emerging artist community, and some higher paying sectors.

What is a Comprehensive Plan and Why Do It?

New Mexico state law allows and encourages communities, counties and regional development agencies to plan. The statutes of the State of New Mexico enable but do not mandate the preparation of a comprehensive plan by local governments. Much of the direction for planning within the statutes comes from the Standard City Planning Enabling Act (Section 3-19-21 NMSA 1978).

The two main reasons to plan are to accomplish the goals of the community and to

prevent the loss of valued aspects of community life. A good plan is based on the values, goals, and interests of community members, which are put in a policy framework so they can be achieved by government. The state of New Mexico website offers these reasons to plan:

1. It is a way to prepare for the future;
2. Planning identifies problems and points the way to solutions;
3. It provides a rationale for assigning priorities;
4. A good plan provides sound policies to address growth or decline;
5. Planning helps to coordinate development projects with one another; and
6. Planning can educate, involve, and inform the public and officials (<http://www.state.nm.us/clients/dft/Files/LGD/Plan>).

A planning guide developed by the State summarizes:

“A comprehensive plan is an official public document adopted by a local government as a policy guide to decisions about the physical development of a community. It indicates in a general way how the leaders of the government want the community to develop in the next 20 –30 years.” (Burstein n.d.)

Citizens had their own ideas about a plan:

“We want a healthy community, socially and economically.” [Banker]

“Why does the County need a comprehensive plan? We like our life just the way it is.” [Common]

“The purpose of a county plan should be: to protect and promote the diversity and sustainability of the county’s historic, cultural and natural resources, the health and welfare of county residence, to set forth guidelines for the regulation of future growth and development within the county which are consistent with this purpose.”

“Really? The County wants to know what we need? Wow!” [School official, responding positively about the planning effort]

“Plan but don’t have the plan discourage growth.”

The development of the plan was guided by two key goals:

1. To reflect well the vision and aspirations of Sierra County residents, so that they recognize themselves in the plan and their own goals and direction;
2. To integrate as much as possible the plans from the three municipalities and other entities so that the final product is regional in scope.

Citizen Direction in the Comprehensive Plan

Several methods were used to obtain citizen direction in the development of this Comprehensive Plan.

Extensive outreach was conducted to engage county residents in discussions about what they like and don't like about County policies and their ideas for making things better. A "snowball" method of citizen contact was used by asking individuals who else to talk with and networking throughout a community area. People whose names were brought up often were specifically sought out as informal leaders in some of the rural areas.

Figure 1.2
Photo of Truth or Consequences Looking North



Community Area Meetings were held in the rural communities. These were attended by County officials and appropriate other County, State and Federal officials. The meetings were an "open house" format, in which a short presentation summarized the planning process and available census data. The group was engaged to identify their vision for their community and for Sierra County, their goals, specific ideas (objectives and strategies) that could accomplish their goals, and their priorities. Community Area meetings were held in:

Hillsboro/Lake Valley/Kingston Community Area March 7, 2005
Arrey/Derry/Caballo/Animas Community Area March 8, 2005
Winston/Chloride/Chiz/Poverty Creek Community Area March 9, 2005

The Lake Area (County residents near Elephant Butte
And Caballo Reservoirs, Engle) March 10, 2005
Monticello/Placitas/Cuchillo Community Area April 18, 2005

A county-wide meeting was held at the Civic Center in Truth or Consequences on April 19, 2005, which summarized citizen direction to date and showcased the plans and programs of over 15 community groups.

Document review was undertaken, including the planning documents of other agencies (for example, the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Sierra Soil and Water Conservation Service, and many others), analysis and position papers of various organizations, and newspapers.

Interviews were conducted with most heads of county departments, boards, and committees, specifically the County Project Manager, the Assessors' Office, the Road Department, the Sheriff, the Treasurer's Office, the County Emergency Management Officer, the Planning Board, the Sierra County Recreation and Tourism Advisory Board, and the Lodgers' Tax Board.

Special meetings were held with members of two organizations, the Wahoo Watershed Workgroup and the Sierra County Recreation and Tourism Advisory Board that were thought to be able to offer sound direction for future policy development.

An agencies' meeting was held at the Civic Center on Wednesday, April 20, 2005, in order to get the input of officials from local, state, and federal agencies with interest and responsibility in Sierra County. Such a meeting had not been held before and participants felt that it was positive to discuss current concerns and future communication. A number of mutual issues and opportunities were discovered. The following officials and agency staff participated:

- Sierra County Commission
- Sierra County Assessors' Office
- Sierra County Project Manager
- Sierra County Planning Board
- U.S. Border Patrol
- Bureau of Land Management
- Black Range District, Gila N.F.
- Sierra Soil and Water Conservation District
- Bureau of Reclamation
- Corps of Engineers
- NM Environment Department
- Sierra County Farm and Livestock
- The Herald Newspaper
- NM Manufactured Housing
- Elephant Butte Irrigation District

- New Mexico State Parks and Recreation Division

A presentation to the Board of Commissioners was made to present initial findings and direction in the plan.

The content of citizen direction is reported in the appropriate sections of this Plan.

Organization of the Plan

The Sierra County Comprehensive Plan addresses the following six topics:

1. Land use and code enforcement
2. Economic development
3. Infrastructure
4. Water
5. Transportation
6. Housing

Sections Two through Seven address these topics by turn, outlining the existing conditions, identifying the trends affecting the topic as well as existing programs and policies devoted to it, describing the citizen direction provided for the topic, and then closing with policy considerations for Sierra County. The policy considerations are opportunity statements, like “The County could...”, that have three components:

“Goals’ are overarching statements describing the direction that a community wants to go.... Goals are general and should reflect the values of the community. Goals are visionary into the desired future.

‘Objectives’ are statements how those goals should be reached...Objectives should be measurable and achievable. Objectives are not so specific as alternative strategies or policies, nor so broad as goals.” (Burstein n.d.: 10)

‘Strategies’ are statements of actions and specific directions or approaches that should be taken to achieve the objectives.

Universal agreement about the conditions and desired future direction of Sierra County will never be achieved. Nevertheless, significant areas of common agreement emerged which are reported in these pages. The development of goals, objectives and strategies used two criteria:

- a) Direction from citizens that was more than just an individual or single group but which was expressed at least somewhat widely in the County; and
- b) A test of “common sense”, defined as “sound practical judgment; that degree of intelligence and reason, as exercised upon the relations of persons and things and the ordinary affairs of life which is possessed by the generality of mankind and

which would suffice to direct the conduct and actions of the individual in a manner to agree with the behavior of ordinary persons (Black’s Law Dictionary, 5th Edition, p. 250).

Section Eight contains a County Profile that summarizes key features of social and economic life using available statistical information.

Abbreviations Used in the Plan

ADA	American With Disabilities Act
AUM	Animal Unit Month
BLM	Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Department of Interior
BOR	Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Department of the Interior
CDBG	Community Development Block Grants
CID	Construction Industries Division, State of New Mexico
CFRP	Community Forest Restoration Partnership
CERT	Community Emergency Response Team
COE	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
EBID	Elephant Butte Irrigation District
ESA	Endangered Species Act
EMO	Emergency Management Office
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FHA	Federal Highway Administration
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NMDFA	New Mexico Department of Finance and Administration
NMED	New Mexico Environment Department
NMED/SWQB	State of New Mexico Environment Department, Surface Water Quality Bureau
NMMFA	New Mexico Mortgage Finance Authority
NRCS	National Resource Conservation Service
OHV	Off Highway Vehicle
OSE	Office of the State Engineer
RPO	Regional Planning Organization (Transportation)
R&PP	Recreation and Public Purpose Act
RV	Recreational Vehicle
SCEDO	Sierra County Economic Development Organization
SSWCD	Sierra Soil and Water Conservation District
STIP	Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan
TorC	Truth or Consequences, New Mexico
USDA	U. S. Department of Agriculture
USFS	U.S. Forest Service
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of Interior
WSMR	White Sands Missile Range
WIA	Workforce Initiative Act
WUI	Wildland Urban Interface

**Section Two:
Land Use and Code Enforcement**

This section reviews both private and public land use in Sierra County, as well as code enforcement related to private land use. Existing information and trends are reviewed, citizen direction is described, and the goals, objectives and strategies for this topic are outlined.

Existing Conditions

Land Ownership

Sierra County contains 2,700,160 acres. Land ownership within the County has three broad categories, private (18.9% of total), federal (67.7%), and state trust (13.4%). The limited quantity of private land in the County has been a challenge throughout Sierra County’s history and particularly in the last generation as the population has grown in the urban areas with limited private land. Officials and residents alike have voiced concern about this condition and the limitations it creates in the County tax base. They are interested in maintaining and even expanding private landownership in the County.

Table 2.1:
Land Ownership in Sierra County

Ownership	Acres
Private Land	871,288
Total Public Land ¹	1,828,875
Total	2,700,160

¹ Includes BLM, “withdrawn lands,” U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Reclamation
Source: BLM 1986: 2.

Figure 2.1 below shows a map of land ownership in the County. The term public lands refer to land in Sierra County owned by the State of New Mexico or one of the federal agencies of the U.S. Government. The figure shows the spatial distribution of different land ownerships, with White Sands Missile Range to the east, Forest Service land to the west, and BLM and State Lands holding the lower elevation lands in between. The breakdown of acreage is shown in Table 2.2

Figure 2.1: Land Ownership Map

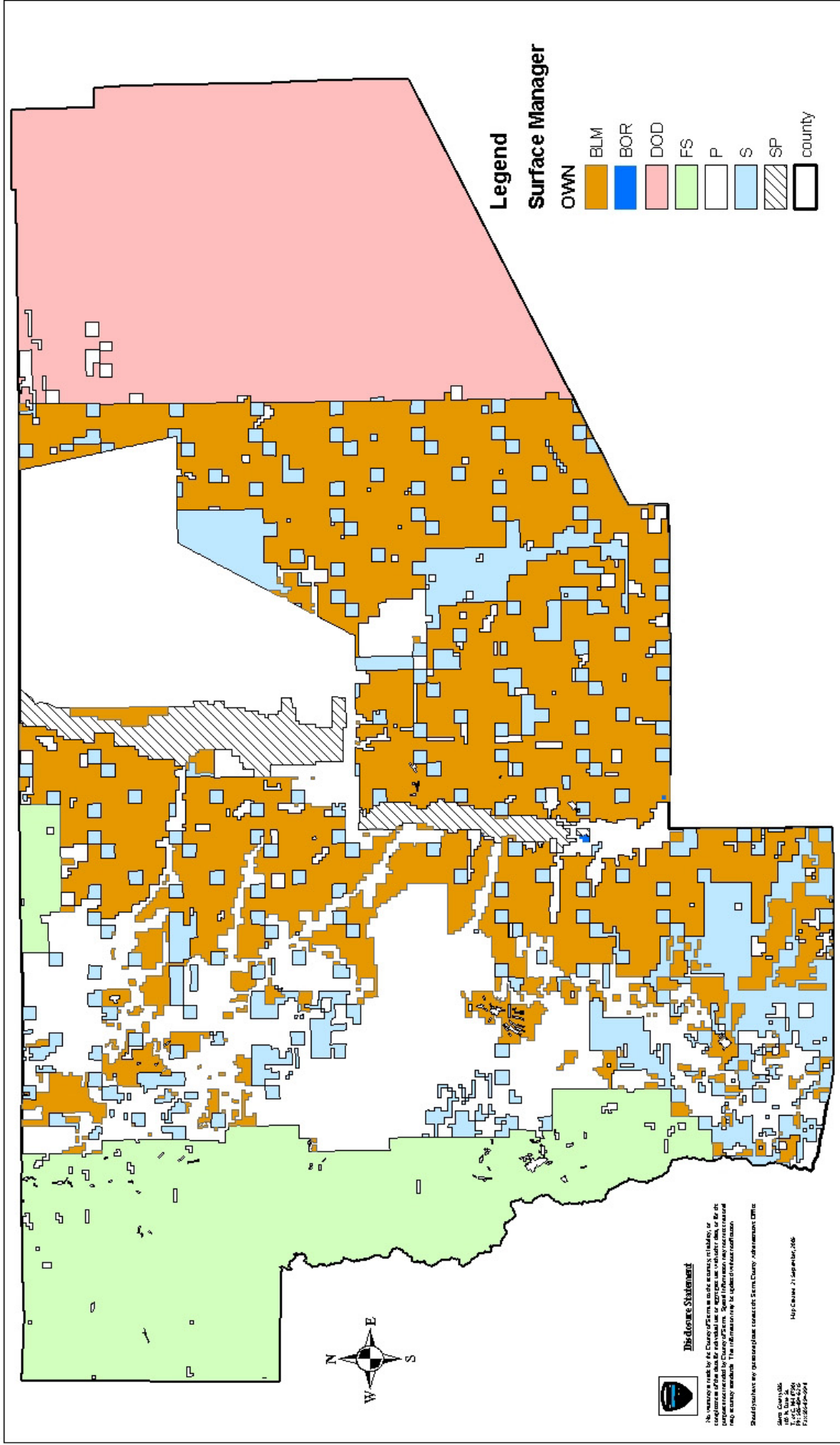


Table 2.2:
Public Land Ownership in Sierra County

Public Land Ownership	Acres
U.S. Forest Service ¹	386,854
Bureau of Land Management	822,175
Bureau of Reclamation ²	70,000
New Mexico Department of State Lands ³	361,195
White Sands Missile Range	188,651
Total Federal Land ⁴	1,828,875

¹ Forest Service ownership includes the Gila N.S. (367,891 acres) and Cibola N.F. (18,963 acres) (<http://www.fs.fe.us/land/staff/lar/LAR04/table6.htm>)

² Estimate only; includes State Park lands leased from the BOR

³ Estimate only

⁴ Includes BLM, “withdrawn lands,” U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Reclamation
Source: BLM 1986: 2.

Private Land Use Inventory

For purposes of this Comprehensive Plan, Sierra County has undertaken the first land use inventory in its history. Table 2.3 below was created by the Assessor’s Office through an analysis of building permits over time by geographic location.

Table 2.3:
Current Land Uses in Sierra County, 2005

Land Use Category	Sierra County ¹	Truth or Consequences	Elephant Butte	Williamsburg	Total
Homesite	3,482.27	285.02	3.40	5.19	3,775.88
Commercial	159.61	1,065.38	125.10	1.24	1,351.33
Grazing	617,145.46	276.02	-	-	617,421.48
Irrigated	9,085.03	88.00	-	-	9,173.03
Miscellaneous (inc raw) ²	34,727.41	2,581.24	242.16	81.60	37,632.41
Total	664,599.78	4,295.66	370.66	88.03	669,354.13

¹ The acreage for Sierra County was derived by using category “6 OT” in the tax assessors’ database. Similarly, the City of Truth or Consequences is based on category “6 IN”, Elephant Butte “6 EB,” and Williamsburg “6 OW.” Figures are approximate as not all acreages are entered into the computer for all deeded property.

² Means non-residential, undeveloped, land not used for agricultural purposes.

This land use inventory represents a baseline against which future changes can be measured. Without an earlier baseline, it is impossible, of course, to get a trend line of changes in land use over time. However, known land use patterns over the last couple of decades indicate that growth in the County is happening to the west and south of Truth or Consequences. Moreover, the triangle created by Interstate 25, Elephant Butte Reservoir, and Caballo Reservoir, which contains the three incorporated communities, represents the urban future of the County. Multi-jurisdictional land use planning for this area would assist in creating desired future conditions.

Public Land Use

Introduction

The management of public lands in Sierra County affects its residents in a number of ways. The environmental quality of public lands influences the ecological integrity of the County and the economic livelihoods that are possible from public lands. Agricultural activity, particularly grazing, as well as recreation activities, is highly dependent on public lands. Economic contributions of public lands are covered in Section Four. Public lands generate revenues, some of which make their way back to the County for roads, schools, environmental improvements, and other purposes. Public land agencies typically permit rights-of-way for utility, energy and transportation corridors, as well as for other purposes, such as landfills.

Interim Land Use Policy of Sierra County

The Interim Land Use Policy of Sierra County (No. 91-001) dates from 1991 and is devoted to the topics of Land disposition; Water resources; Agriculture; Timber and wood products; Cultural resources, recreation, wildlife and wilderness; Mineral resources; Access and transportation; and, Monitoring and compliance. It states that the intent of Sierra County land use planning is “to protect the custom and culture of County citizens through protection of private property rights, the facilitation of a free market economy, and the establishment of a process to ensure self-determination by local communities and individuals.” The general direction in the policy is that:

1. “...[F]ederal and state agencies shall inform local governments of all pending actions affecting local communities and citizens and coordinate with them in the planning and implementation of those actions.”
2. “...[A]ll federal and state agencies shall...coordinate with the County Commission for the purpose of planning and managing federal and state lands within the geographic boundaries of Sierra County, New Mexico.”

With regards to public lands, the policy supports a continued practice of multiple use.

1. “Increase opportunities for local economic development by increasing the amount of patented and nonfederal land within the County.

2. Federal agencies should not acquire any private lands or rights in private lands within Sierra County without first ensuring:
 - a. That, as a minimum, parity in land ownership status is maintained; and
 - b. That private property interests are protected and enhanced.
3. Federally managed lands that are difficult to manage or which lie in isolated tracts shall be targeted for disposal.
4. The general public, the state of New Mexico and local communities shall be notified of, consulted about, and otherwise involved in all federal and state land adjustments in Sierra County. Sierra County concurrence shall be required prior to any such land adjustments...in all federal and state land adjustments occurring within the County's political boundaries.
5. The New Mexico State Land Office shall assist Sierra County in coordinating land exchanges so as to maximize patented fee simple lands.
6. Sierra County shall determine land withdrawals for hazardous and non-hazardous waste storage as well as the types and points of origin of such waste.
7. Before federal and state land agencies can change land use, adverse impact studies on uses shall be conducted and mitigation measures adopted with concurrence from Sierra County. Adverse impact studies shall address community stability, local custom and culture, class A and B grazing rights, flood prone areas, and access.”

In addition, the land use policy states that Sierra County will establish a threatened and endangered species committee for overseeing protection and recovery of all federal and state listed threatened or endangered species.

Federal Land Policy

The National Environmental Policy Act

Federal land policy is guided by a plethora of laws, the primary one being the National Environment Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969. The law states that it is the continuing policy of the federal government

“...to create and maintain conditions under which man and nature can exist in productive harmony, and fulfill the social, economic, and other requirements of present and future generations of Americans.” (Emphasis added)

Furthermore, the law says federal decisions should be made in ways that:

1. Assure for all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings;
2. Attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk to health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences;
3. Preserve important historic, cultural and natural aspects of our national heritage, and maintain, wherever possible, an environment which supports diversity, and variety of individual choice;
4. Achieve a balance between population and resource use which will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities; The Forest Service website provides this perspective on NEPA:

“The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is our basic charter for protection of the environment. It establishes policy, sets goals, and provides means for carrying out the policy. NEPA procedures provide the direction to help public officials make decisions that are based on the understanding of environmental consequences, and take actions that protect, restore, and enhance the environment. NEPA procedures also require that environmental information is available to citizens before decisions are made and actions are taken that may affect the human environment. The Forest Service's Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) is one way of providing information to the public. The Schedule of Proposed Actions is not intended to be a substitute for scoping and public involvement.” (<http://www.fs.fed.us/sopa/components/sopa-dscr.shtml#planning>)

NEPA requires a federal agency to conduct an environmental impact statement (EIS) for any “major federal action.” The EIS must identify the purpose and need of the action, scope the issues of the public, develop a range of alternatives include “no action”, and analyze the alternatives for effects on the environment, the economy, and local communities. In addition, the EIS must at least identify, if not adopt, mitigation measures that would minimize the negative effects and maximize the positive effects of the action. NEPA is a major way by which the public can influence agency actions.

Rangeland Renewable Resources Act

This act states that the U.S. Forest Service must coordinate land use planning efforts with those of County governments by utilizing the NEPA process. The National Forest Management Act of 1976 stipulates land use planning by the Forest Service for the first time as well as calling for widespread public involvement. The law says that an interdisciplinary approach is required and that social and economic considerations must be integrated with ecological considerations when making decisions about Forest Service lands.

Federal Land Policy and Management Act

The Bureau of Land Management is guided by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 which also states that in the development and revision of land use plans, BLM will coordinate with land use planning and management programs of State and local governments within which the lands are located. Federal land managers must give consideration to local plans that are germane in the development of land use plans for public lands. It must provide for meaningful public involvement of State and local government officials as well as residents, in the development of its land use programs, regulations and decisions for public lands (43 U.S.C. Section 1701).

National Forest Management Act of 1976

This law directs the Forest service to the “preservation of important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage” (drawn from NEPA), as well as “coordination with the land and resource planning efforts of other federal agencies, State and local governments and Indian tribes.”

Endangered Species Act

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) was amended in 1988 to require the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the agency assigned to implement the law, to notify State and County governments regarding all proposed listings of threatened or endangered species, all proposed additions or changes in critical habitat designations, and all proposed protective regulations. The amendments also allow State and County governments the opportunity to participate in and influence all proposed species listing, proposed designation of critical habitat, and any other proposed protective regulation (16 U.S.C. 1533(b)(5)(A)).

The U.S. Forest Service

The U.S. Forest Service manages 386,854 acres of land in Sierra County, shared between the Cibola and Gila National Forests, about 20% of the land base of the County. The Gila National Forest is located in the western part of the County in the Black Range Mountains and contains the Aldo Leopold Wilderness.

The management of the Forest is governed by the Gila National Forest Plan of 1986. The Gila National Forest will start its new land use plan in 2007. The current land use plan is required by the National Forest Management Act (NFMA; 36-CFR 219.10{e}). The law requires the land use plan to be based on specified principles including:

- A multi-use and sustained-yield management perspective without “impairment of the productivity of the land”;
- An ecosystem perspective, recognizing the interrelationships between life forms;
- Protection and improvement of the quality of renewable resources;
- Provisions for safe use and enjoyment of the forest resources by the public;
- Coordination with State and local governments, Federal agencies, and tribes;
- Early and frequent public participation;

- An interdisciplinary approach that integrates planning and management;
- Responsiveness to changing conditions and to changing social and economic demands of the American people (USFS 1986: 1).

The current plan emphasizes planning and management of these key resources:

1. Timber management and production
2. Range management
3. Landownership adjustments to support community expansion
4. Rights of Way permitting
5. Recreation
6. Wildlife management
7. Transportation
8. Wilderness
9. Riparian management

The current management of the Gila National Forest has three points of focus that are especially well-suited to collaboration with the community:

1. A goal of restoring ecosystem functioning;
2. Contributing to economic vitality of local communities; and
3. Helping communities protect themselves against fire.

These goals are seeing expression in:

1. Its Wildland Urban Interface Fuelbreak Projects, coordinated through a National Fire Plan committee and Volunteer Fire Departments (VFDs—getting fuel breaks around Kingston and Poverty Creek, as well as the planning of future projects);
2. Supporting the Wahoo Watershed Workgroup, in its efforts toward small diameter wood utilization, using FS grants related to collaborative restoration forestry. The Forest Service has a Collaborative Forest Restoration Program that awards grants to encourage reduction of hazardous fuel loads on public land and to promote small wood utilization.
3. Development of the National Fire Plan, increasing coordination opportunities with Volunteer Fire Departments, with possible Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Sierra County regarding VFD working relationships;
4. Possible joint (FS/Sierra County) adoption of the Sierra County Community Wildfire Protection Plan;
5. Opportunities for improved permitting and regulatory process in Sierra County through: a) Wildland Urban Interface ordinances for access, ingress, egress, emphasis on forest restoration/fuels reduction; b) Transportation ordinances and or adoption of policy for obtaining access easement to include USFS; and, c) FS would work with County on initial screening process for new subdivisions/development within inholdings on the Gila National Forest; and
6. Working with livestock permittees during time of drought.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

BLM manages 822,000 acres in Sierra County, nearly 45% of its land base. The land use plan for BLM is called a Resource Management Plan and the one for Sierra County dates from 1986. BLM is in the process of developing its new “Tri-County Resource Management Plan” (Sierra, Otero, and Doña Ana Counties) that will shape its management activities for the next 15-20 years. A key issue BLM will look at in Sierra County is land tenure.

Land tenure. Disposal of public land may be accomplished by sale, exchange, or Recreation and Public Purpose (R&PP) patent, as provided by federal authority, such as Section 203 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (Public Law 94-579) or the R&PP Act (43 United States Code 869 et.seq.) Under the R&PP Act, BLM has the authority to lease or patent public land to governmental and non-profit entities for public parks, building sites, or other public purposes. Applications are processed under the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and are subject to public review (BLM 1986: 11).

What lands should be identified for disposal on the open market (and available for development)? What lands should be retained for their high resource value? What lands should be available for Recreation and Public Purpose (R&PP) leasing (BLM 1994), for example, for a school site or a park? For example, there is a current request for BLM land in order to build a private automobile racetrack. Since it is a private, commercial venture, an R&PP lease is not appropriate; rather, the land must be made available for purchase and sold for market value. The developers wanted a two-month time frame, but the typical timeframe for BLM for this kind of request is two years or more. An idea being considered in the BLM planning process is the transfer of BLM lands near TorC to the State Lands Department because the State is able to sell and issue permits more quickly than BLM. In this way, local government officials and planners have an immediate opportunity to earmark lands near growth areas suitable for development and have a timely process in place for ownership transfer.

BLM’s land use plan of 1986, currently still in place, lists several Sierra County entities which have received R&PP leases, including the Hot Springs Gun Club, Sierra County Sheriff’s Posse, several County landfills, Geronimo Springs, Sierra County Fair and Fair Extension, the City of Truth or Consequences Recreation complex, and the Village of Williamsburg Park and Municipal Building. These leases have probably gone to patent and are now owned by the recipients. Currently, BLM has only two R&PP leases in its file, one from the City of Elephant Butte and one from the City of Truth or Consequences.

Other issues BLM will address in its plan include:

1. Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) Use: The current plan allows for unrestricted access of OHVs on BLM land but the impacts are getting greater and some restrictions are likely.

2. Community Pits: Local residents can get access to sand and gravel.
3. White Sands Missile Range: BLM wants to expand its “safety area” farther west from its western boundary. The proposed Space Port must be accounted for in its plans.
4. The Lake Valley By-Way and townsite, managed by BLM, which continues to be a valued resource.
5. BLM grants utility and transportation rights-of-way (ROWs) leases, and permits to individuals, businesses, and governmental entities for the use of public land. Utility and road providers should be involved in the planning process to anticipate future needs.

The Bureau of Reclamation (BOR)

The BOR manages an estimated 70,000 acres in Sierra County, about 4% of the County’s land base. Its mission is the development of water resources primarily for agriculture and flood control. Although recreation was a peripheral benefit during much of BOR’s history, in recent years, the growth of recreation has become a major management activity in many BOR project areas. One of the first projects of the Bureau of Reclamation after its formation was the construction of the Elephant Butte Dam and Lake. BOR has primary responsibility for water storage and delivery for irrigation and municipal use along the Rio Grande in New Mexico. Currently BOR manages two water control projects in the Sierra County portion of the Rio Grande. It monitors arroyos and maintains channels feeding into the river. BOR also leases lands surrounding the reservoirs to State Parks for the four State Parks in the area, so it is strongly interested in recreation. BOR works with the Sierra Soil and Water Conservation District (SSWCD) to remove invasive species like salt cedar, which is especially bad in this area. It works with National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) on stream banks for fish enhancement.

At the Elephant Butte and Caballo Reservoir areas, the Bureau of Reclamation has a variety of permitted land uses as of 2002:

- Sixteen grazing allotments in the Elephant Butte and Caballo Reservoir areas that in 2002 allowed grazing for 1892 cattle and 13 horses on 46,455 acres, administered by BLM since 1983;
- 403 individual lease lot agreements at both reservoirs (now privatized as of 2005);
- Railway, highway segments, County roads, electrical substations, and water systems;
- Rights-of-way for electrical transmission, cable, water pipeline, natural gas, and telephone line facilities;
- The Rock Canyon Marina and Dam Site Area concessions, due to expire in 2014 and 2015, respectively;

- The State Parks were leased beginning 1973 and are due to expire in 2023. (BOR 2002).

Elephant Butte State Park, located on BOR land, holds the largest and most visited lake in the State of New Mexico. Elephant Butte dam was completed in 1916, and was, at the time, the largest dam in the world. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979. At full capacity, the lake is 31,000 surface acres of water plus another 30,000 land acres. It has 7 campgrounds, 9 comfort stations, a day use area, 4 boat ramps, 5 boat docks and 4 trails. It has a wide variety of flora and fauna, as well as large numbers of important paleontological and archaeological sites. The park's new five-year draft plan calls for:

- A parkwide tree plan to be developed in FY06;
- Development of a birding list for EBLSP;
- Development of night sky activities;
- An increase in educational programming and interpretation (A park interpretive master plan will be completed in FY06);
- A new visitor center for completion in FY08;
- Re-developed and new dump sites;
- Re-design of park entrance, FY06;
- 100 new RV sites at South Monticello, to be built as the need arises and funding permits. The drought has dampened visitation and expansion depends on appropriated dollars, so it is likely that these sites will not be developed in the near term. (City of Elephant Butte Comprehensive Plan 2003).

New Mexico Department of State Lands

In 1850, the U.S. Congress passed the Organic Act, which created the Territory of New Mexico and set aside sections 16 and 36 in every township to support the schools of the territory. The Ferguson Act of 1898 broadened the uses to which income from these lands could be used to include not just schools, but universities, hospitals, charitable purposes, and penitentiaries. The Enabling Act in 1909 added additional sections 2 and 32 in every township to expand trust lands and strengthen support for public schools.

Today, state lands owns and manages 284,097 surface acres, and 344,619 subsurface acres in Sierra County. It gains revenue from these lands through sale, rents and royalties. Rents include incomes from sand and gravel operations, oil and gas leasing, grazing, rights-of-way, billboards, business leases, and water, while royalty income is derived from mining activities. Revenues are not tracked by county, so Sierra County's contribution to the state is not monitored. However, almost all the revenue generated from state lands in Sierra County is from grazing, and the approximate annual revenues in Sierra County from state land leasing is about \$250,000 (personal communication, Robert Jenks, State Lands Deputy Commissioner, 2/19/05). The state lands office then re-distributes the revenues among 22 recipients. The sale, lease, and permitting of state lands are driven by the market and are oriented to best economic return (New Mexico State Lands 2003).

White Sands Missile Range

White Sands Missile Range (WSMR) owns about 189,000 acres of eastern Sierra County. It was established on July 9, 1945 on existing federal lands. WSMR has few ties with Sierra County residents or government. A few times per year on its west side, families are paid to evacuate for up to 12 hours at a time for training purposes. WSMR staff estimated that \$800,000 is paid per year to 75-80 ranching families in Doña Ana, Sierra, Socorro and Lincoln Counties. WSMR will contribute land and air space necessary for the “safety footprint” of the proposed Space Port (personal communication, Jim Eckles, WSMR).

Private Land Use and Code Enforcement

There are about 872,000 acres of private land in Sierra County. As discussed earlier, the predominant use by far is grazing, followed by miscellaneous and raw land, irrigated land, and homesite land.

Privatization of Lease Lots

During the last couple of years, the Bureau of Reclamation has become a major player related to private land use in Sierra County. That is because it has managed the privatization of 403 lease lots surrounding Elephant Butte and Caballo Lakes. In 2005, as per the authority provided by its Environmental Impact Statement of 2002, the Bureau of Reclamation completed the transfer of 403 individual lease lots into private ownership. The history of this change dates from the creation of the dam itself when visitors camped seasonally. The lease lot program itself was begun sometime in the 1940s. Although the original intent of the program was to support part-time, recreational dwelling, over time, permanent structures were constructed on the lots and many are now used as full-time residences.

Most lease lot owners have permanent structures on the leased property, which consists of permanent and mobile homes. A septic system with a trench is the most common type of sewage disposal system and in almost all cases septic systems are downhill and shoreward from the structures. At Elephant Butte, 32 septic systems are less than 50 feet from the high water mark, and at Caballo Reservoir, 15 septic systems are less than 50 feet (See Section 6: Water)

The roads in the area do not meet the current Sierra County standards of 50-foot right-of-way widths and there are no provisions for stormwater drainage in the lease lot areas (BOR 2002).

The privatization process is nearly complete. As of March, 2005, lots have been placed into private ownership. The County has accepted the roads within the lease lots subdivisions, although ownership and maintenance of roads leading *into* the subdivisions are not yet determined (personal communication, Eloy Armijo, Sierra County Project

Manager). The Sierra County Assessor has been meeting with lot owners to determine valuation and taxation methods. The Bureau of Reclamation projected in 2002 that the estimated value of the lots and their improvements was \$48.11 million. Furthermore, the agency estimated that tax revenues without privatization was about \$543,277, while with privatization they will be about \$905,820 (BOR 2002: 4-72). The County assessment process is nearly complete, and the net annual tax revenues generated for the County by the former lease lots will be better known.

Whether or not the additional tax revenues for the County from privatization will exceed costs to the County has not been determined. While it is assumed that Sierra County would continue to provide the fire and emergency services at the current level of service, road maintenance costs, education costs, oversight of health issues related to water and sewer systems, and police services (currently provided by State Park), can be expected to add to County spending. The BOR determined that residential development is a net drain on local government coffers—it cited a national study that claimed for every dollar of revenue generated, local government services cost \$1.16, with education costs being the main culprit (BOR 2002: 4-73). However, often fiscal cost studies do not account for the sales tax revenue generated by residents.

In this case, it is likely that the biggest drain will be road improvement and maintenance costs. This area could be designated a special improvement district and charge each homeowner a fee (usually integrated into property tax bills and paid over a number of years) to improve the roads.

Regulatory Framework Related to Land Uses

Sierra County government has little on the books by which proposed private land development is evaluated or regulated. It has a flood control ordinance (See Section 7: Water) and a subdivision ordinance. Many residents do not understand that the state controls much of the permitting related to land development activities. Well permits, septic permits, permits related to state highways, solid and liquid waste disposal, mobile home permits, and water quality issues are handled by various state agencies.

“We have very little permitting and no enforcement in the County. People have been telling us to enforce what you have before you add new ordinances. People experience many communication barriers. We get a lot of calls for the Environment Department from Arrey. We need a “go to” place in the County where all state and federal agencies can coordinate. We need a channel for permit coordination.” (County staff person)

“There were 107 instances this year in which a building permit was not obtained for new construction. It’s not clear even to us who the state inspector is or where that person is located.” (County staff person)

The subdivision ordinance (No. 99-098), adopted by Sierra County in 1996 and amended in 1999, defines a subdivision as “the division of a surface area of land...into two or

more parcels for the purpose of sale, lease, or other conveyance; or for building development, whether immediate or future” (Sierra County 1999:3). Five types of subdivisions were created based on number of units and lots per acre.

Since the ordinance was passed, 6 subdivisions have been approved:

Alamo	1 subdivision
Berrenda Creek Ranch	3 subdivisions
El Shaedai	1 subdivision
Rancho del Lago	1 subdivision

These were all Type II subdivisions, which means they have between 25 and 499 parcels, with the smallest parcel being less than 10 acres.

The approval process generally is that the developer begins a preapplication process by which the Planning Coordinator and developer discuss the project, review the data that is needed, and notify the public. The preliminary plat is provided with drawings and other project information. After review by the Planning Commission it goes to public hearing. If it is approved, the final plat is amended as needed and goes through the final plat review for approval.

The general requirements laid out in the ordinance include:

- Sufficient water quantity;
- A means of liquid and solid waste management;
- An entry and exit to each parcel;
- Appropriate utility easements;
- Terrain management to protect against flooding and inadequate drainage;
- Protection of cultural properties;

The preliminary plat is reviewed by:

1. New Mexico State Engineer’s Office;
2. New Mexico Environment Department;
3. New Mexico Highway and Transportation Department;
4. Sierra/Caballo Soil and Water Conservation Districts;
5. The Sierra County Examining Engineer (if available); and,
6. Sierra County GIS Office and Road Department.

The developer must meet all state requirements for subdivision development as listed above. The primary County requirement is road development. The subdivider must submit a Road Development plan that contains an agreed-upon schedule and must bring roads to County standards. Current County road standards are 24’ for travel plus a 12’ shoulder on each side, with base course and double penetration chip seal for the road surface, with a 1% minimum slope from center.

To date, there have been no enforcement actions on the part of the County related to the subdivision ordinance. From interviews with County officials, the County perspective can

be summarized as follows: “It is most important in this County that sellers or developers of their own land get full value for that land rather than lose some of that value in fulfilling County requirements. We try to encourage covenants and restrictions through the process, but they are not required. The contract is between the developer and the residents. The mechanisms of enforcement are the covenants and restrictions put in place. So it’s not a County matter but a civil action between the developer and residents.”

One story from a resident in the Champagne Hills subdivision illustrates how the existing system must work: “The developer did not deliver things he had promised. Two others and myself sued the developer. Following court action, when the remaining lots sold, the money was put into escrow until he delivered on promises. The developer used scare tactics, like telling us we would not get access to our homes.”

Many residents complained about the lack of enforcement of subdivision requirements. Roads that are not built to adequate standards, erosion and inadequate drainage, poor placements in arroyos or other undesirable locations, lack of demonstrated water supply, are just some of the complaints of residents. **Issues about subdivision enforcement were very widespread throughout the County and are one of the areas of clearest direction from citizens—they want better enforcement of this ordinance.**

It is clear that reliance on civil suits as a means to enforce subdivision provisions is an insufficient and inadequate tool to accomplish the job. Most communities require a performance bond or letter of credit insurance that secures the performance obligation for roads and other utilities - i.e. if the roads are going to cost \$150,000 to put in, the county will require a bond/letter of credit for that amount so that if the developer doesn't perform, the county can call the note and go do it itself. This way there is no enforcement, just guaranteed performance. Most towns/counties won't allow a final plat to be filed until this credit is in hand.

Two state offices are involved in regulation that affects land use, the New Mexico Environment Department, which primarily regulates septic systems (See Section Four: Infrastructure), and the Construction Industries Division, of which the Manufactured Housing Division is a part (Section Seven: Housing).

Institutional Support

Other institutions are not regulatory but voluntary, educational and collaborative. They include the Sierra Soil and Water Conservation District (SSWCD), the Caballo SWCD, the Jornada Resource and Conservation District, and the Sierra County Wildland Urban Interface Team.

Sierra Soil and Water Conservation District

The Sierra Soil and Water Conservation District Board, in its long-range plan, identifies its mission: “...that conservation of our natural resources is of utmost importance.

Protection of our land and water not only benefits the land today, but insures future generations a much better place to live.” The plan states:

“Soil and water conservation districts were first organized during the "Dust Bowl Days" in the early 1930's. The ever-constant wind blew dust from the barren fields of the western Great Plains all the way to the Atlantic Ocean and cotton fields in the South were eaten away by gullies. Farmers and ranchers began searching for solutions to these conservation problems. In 1935 the Soil Conservation Service became a part of the United States Department of Agriculture. The Soil Conservation Service and the Civilian Conservation Corps went out to farms and ranches to do conservation work.

In the mid 1930's national conservation leaders, headed by Dr. Hugh Bennett, felt that by getting the local population involved, the conservation needs of that area could be better addressed. A national conservation act was drafted and sent to each governor. This act, if passed, would allow the formation of local soil and water conservation districts. New Mexico passed the Soil and Water Conservation District Act in 1937. Soil and water conservation districts were made political subdivision of the state and are responsible, under state law, to direct local soil and water conservation programs within their district boundaries. The US Department of Agriculture Soil Conservation Service works hand in hand with local SWCDs, providing technical service to local conservation needs, as directed by the program established by the local District.

In November of 1993, the Sierra Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) celebrated its **50TH ANNIVERSARY**. When the District was first organized, it was comprised of 793,395 acres and was administered by a two member Board of Supervisors. Shortly after formation, the board expanded to become a five-member board, with Robert Martin, Joe Pankey, Jerry Apodaca, Del Benson, and James Knox serving as the original board members. During the next 30 years landowners petitioned to become part of the Sierra SWCD, adding 1,505,337 acres to the District for a total of approximately 2,192,635 acres. When the Sierra District Board of Supervisors was first organized, five members were elected to serve for a term of either two or three years. Approximately 15 years ago, members felt a seven-member board would be more efficient. Two members are appointed by the Governor to serve on the board for one-year terms. The Sierra SWCD is very active in national and statewide conservation programs. They are members of the National Association of Conservation Districts and the New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts.”

The Board of Supervisors of this district have for many years followed the premise that the establishment of better stands of grass and the proper management and use of grass cover is essential in the prevention-of erosion, flood damages, and water conservation and management.” (SSWCD Long Range Plan 2003)

The Long Range Plan of the SSWCD contains seven objectives on which it seeks progress:

1. To educate the public on the need for conservation of natural resources for sustained, beneficial present and future use.
2. Address water quality and quantity concerns on private and public lands.
3. Provide assistance to local farmers to improve irrigation efficiency and protect water quality.
4. Promote wise land use planning within the District.
5. To address problems associated with flooding in the District.
6. Promote wildlife and recreational potential in the District.
7. Promote conservation efforts on urbanland within the District.

Sierra County Wildland Urban Interface Team

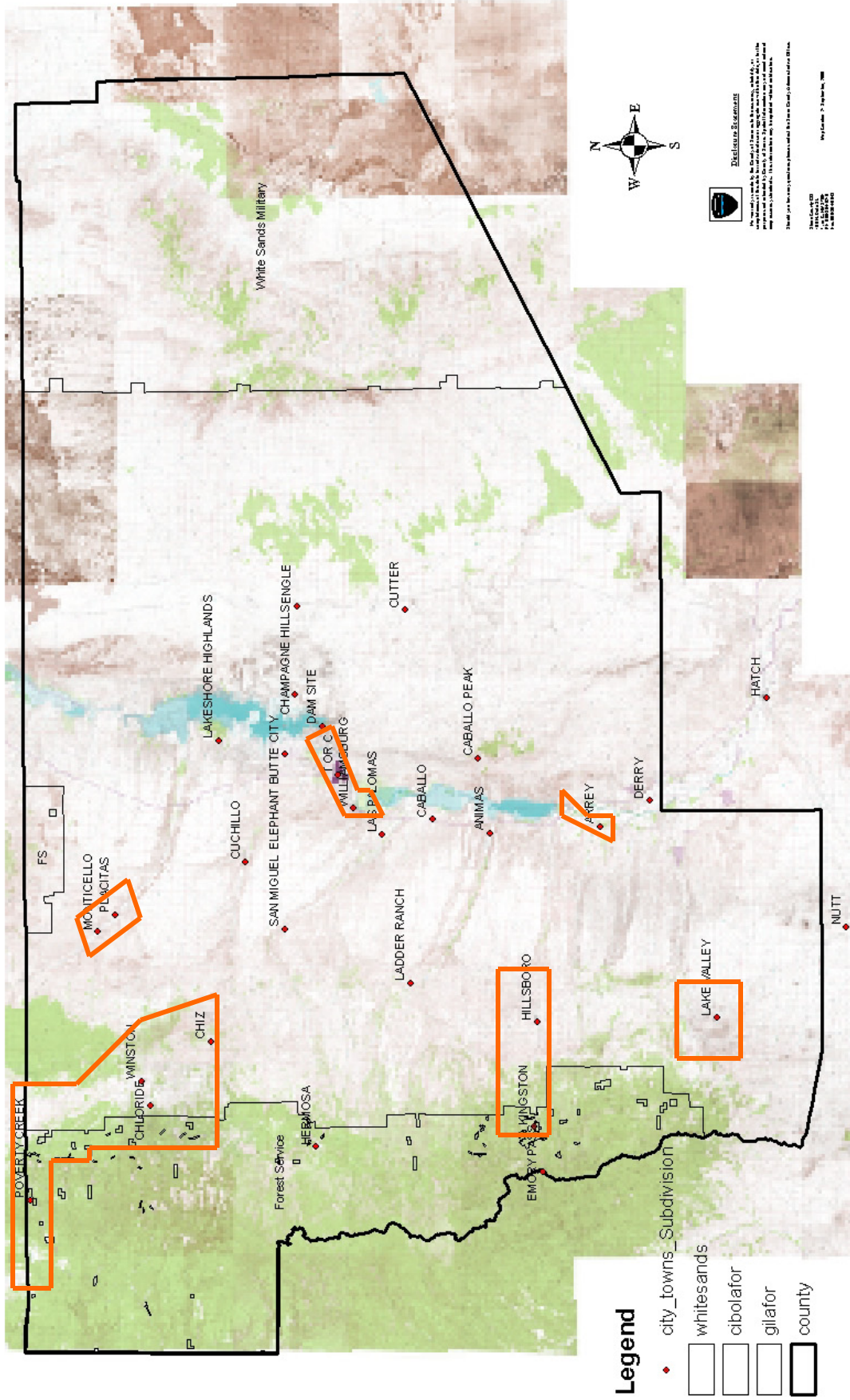
Another initiative, which depends on education and voluntary action, is the Sierra County Wildland Urban Interface Team. Its Community Wildlife Protection Plan was issued in 2005, in accordance with the requirements and guidelines set forth in the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003. The team was comprised of the natural resource management leaders of the County, including U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, New Mexico Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department, Forestry Division, many local volunteer fire departments, the TorC municipal fire department, the Sierra County Commission, the Sierra Soil and Water Conservation District, and others.

Sanctioned by the “20 Communities Initiative,” the plan calls for reduction of biomass fuels around critical areas in the County including:

1. Communication sites, utility lines and transportation rights-of-way;
2. Wildland urban interface (WUI) areas of the County; six areas were identified as shown in Figure 2.2. They are the six areas of the most human habitation: the Elephant Butte, Truth or Consequences, Williamsburg urban zone; the Arrey/Derry area; Lake Valley; the Kingston/Hillsboro corridor; the Poverty Creek/Winston/Chloride area; and the Monticello/Placitas area.

In addition, the plan calls for creating, developing, and improving the forest based industry and employment opportunities (See Section 4: Economic Development); fire department training and equipment acquisition; public education; and watershed restoration.

Figure 2.2:
The Critical Wildland Urban Interface Areas of Sierra County (Approximate)



Citizen Direction

Public Lands

About 68% of the land in Sierra County is owned publicly. The U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management manage 48% of the total land base. Ranching, grazing, mining, guiding, and outfitting have been traditional and historical activities on federal lands for many generations. Residents in these areas were very clear that these activities should be supported and encouraged. Federal decision-making in this area, primarily Forest Service, is seen by many residents as not responsive to local concerns and as a threat to ranching. Agencies are seen to be exerting pressure to reduce grazing AUMs on the basis of the Endangered Species Act. Residents believe that historical water supplies and other ranching activities are threatened by the use of what is perceived as faulty science

The Forest Service is implementing an effort to purchase in-holdings within the forest. Not only are those properties lost to tax rolls but their loss erodes the ranching lifestyle. There is encroachment of invasive species of federal lands, juniper etc.

“What is done on the land has impact on the customs and culture of the local people. Across the County there is a wide sustained use of the land and a culture attached to it. Ranching, logging, mining, hunting, all these bring economy to our County. Create land use based on County customs.” [Winston rancher]

Private Lands and Code Enforcement

Private land issues stimulate considerable discussion in Sierra County. For many people a key value of living in the County is that there is not a lot of bureaucracy. They operate in a “live and let live” philosophy and do not want to impose their views on their neighbors or, similarly, have neighbors tell them what to do. Others, especially newer residents, feel they have a right to implement regulations for the “public good,” however that is defined. They would say things like, “We have a right to create regulations to protect quality of life.” An example is junk in yards. For a large number of County residents, the presence of junk in the yards of their neighbors does not raise an eyebrow—“It’s their property, it’s their business” is the feeling. For many other residents, again this sentiment seems most shared among newer residents, a public good would be served by regulating junk and prohibiting its accumulation. A few people of this perspective even made sweeping statements that all development should be stopped unless

Figure 2.3:
A Communication Tower Set in
an Arroyo and Close to the
Highway in Arrey



stringent conditions were met. They would point to the messes created in the areas they left behind and they seem oriented to preventing the same problems from occurring in Sierra County. In addition, many leaders of economic development efforts and other officials also decry junk in yards and say it detracts from the investment the County could otherwise attract.

A third set of residents, without apparently realizing the irony of their statements, said they opposed any intrusion on private property rights, “but the placement of communication towers should be regulated for safety reasons,” or, “but the junk along the roadways in the County needs to be cleaned up,” or, “the subdivision ordinance needs to be strengthened.” Contradicting statements such as these were often said in the same breath.

What is the proper level of regulation for Sierra County? The answer seems to be, “Not much, but some.” Residents were very clear that they did not want zoning implemented yet in Sierra County, the feeling being that the cure would be worse than the disease. Most people did not feel like the problems associated with private land development yet warranted the degree of regulation that zoning would entail.

In the pages below, the regulatory and policy actions that most residents seemed to want are outlined for consideration by the Board of Commissioners.

Land Use and Regulation

“No zoning!” [Widespread attitude]

“Enforce and strengthen the subdivision ordinance.” [Very common]

“Land use development is not done with surveying and engineering.”

“Subdivision roads are approved and wash away in the rain.”

“We have to take care of the land first.” [Common]

“Regulate or zone for manufactured homes to be in different areas than conventional homes.”

“Require that developers get infrastructure in place before they start selling lots. Make sure development pays for its roads.”

“Specify age of trailer allowed in mobile home parks. That will upgrade the neighborhood.”

“Poverty Creek and Poverty Pines were approved without fire hazard standards.”
[County official]

“The big ranches are getting broken up. We want to conserve them but don’t know how.”

“We want wildlife and wildlife habitat protected.”

Clean Up and Visual Appearance

“We need code enforcement! Old cars, unkempt yards, junk must be fenced or cleaned up.”

“We have to clean up. We have to invest.” [Banker]

“There is too much trash along roadways and on some properties.”

[Common throughout the County]

“We need an ordinance for clean up. Give a credit on taxes if you clean up.” [Lake area]

“How to get people motivated to clean up their property. Someone comes into the County and right away they think, ‘This is a poor place.’” [Lake area]

“Clean up the County, clean up the highway. People don’t want to develop because it looks so bad.” [Winston]

“Salvage yards should not be allowed on either side of TorC.” [City of Truth or Consequences official, and several Lake area residents]

“A few years ago, a newcomer bought a quarter acre and turned it into a junkyard west of the freeway. There was opposition from almost everyone in Las Palomas but the County told us there was no law on the books that prevented that.”

Figure 2.4:
Trash in Yard



Figure 2.5:
Junk on the Landscape



Goals, Objectives and Strategies

These goals and objectives overlap with the other sections of this Plan and are designed to be comprehensive when considered together.

General Land Use

Goal 1: Sierra County recognizes the central importance of ecological integrity in promoting the long-term sustainability of human habitation in Sierra County. The health of the land and water resources will be protected in any land use decision.

Goal 2: Sierra County residents highly value their independent spirit and their rights under the U.S. Constitution to live with as little government as possible. Sierra County commits to minimizing the intrusive force of government regulation by using such means only when necessary to assure ecological integrity, and the health, safety and welfare of the general citizenry.

Goal 3: Sierra County is committed to ongoing consultation with its citizens to determine the correct degree and kind of land use regulation necessary to meet Goals 1 and 2. It will consider regulations that are “just enough” to accomplish their purpose and will minimize the odious effects of too much bureaucracy.

Objective 3.1. The Sierra County Board of Commission will seek specific guidance from local communities before making land use decisions in their area.

Public Land Use

Through this examination of the land use policies of Sierra County, the Forest Service, and BLM, it is apparent that there is strong convergence among these entities about coordination and consultation when respective entities undertake land use planning and decision-making. The County requires it in its current “Interim Land Use Plan.” Numerous laws directing the Forest Service and BLM require such consultation and recent regulations (“Cooperating Agency Status”) have only strengthened its importance. In practice, however, officials and residents stated that such communication does not occur on a routine basis. Although the federal agencies participated fully in the development of this plan, residents generally believe that consultation does not occur nearly enough. Many of the policies guidelines below reflect the need for more practical and effective communication.

Goal 4: Sierra County is committed to frequent and routine communication with the federal land and resource management agencies operating within its borders, and will be an active participant in federal land use planning and management decisions.

Objective 4.1. The County will immediately acquire “Cooperating Agency” status with the Bureau of Land Management’s current land use planning process, a new designation that permits not just “input” into federal decision-making, but

attendance and full participation at all planning meetings. The final rule regarding cooperating agencies (43 CFR Part 1600) was issued in March, 2005. The County will undertake a similar designation when the Gila National Forest begins its Forest Plan Revision in 2007.

Objective 4.2. The County should foster regular, even committee, meetings between the County and federal land management agencies around areas of mutual interest.

Objective 4.3. Ensure that Federal and State agencies' land use policies and plans within the County are compatible with this Comprehensive Plan, and promote the County goals.

Objective 4.4. Sierra County will consider hiring a Federal Lands Coordinator. A number of other counties in the West have undertaken such a step, notably Montezuma and Moffat Counties, Colorado, Jackson County, Oregon and other places, where the effort has fostered the development of a re-tooled woods products industry and progress on bridging environmental/economic interests. Such a person would:

- Foster communication through ongoing committee structure;
- Bring forward social and economic considerations and expand economic opportunities derived from federal lands (Section Four: Economic Development);
- Support agriculture as it relates to federal lands (Section Four);
- Ensure cooperating agency status for the County in federal agency land use deliberations;
- Collect and coordinate data;
- Foster data sharing agreements between Sierra County and federal land management agencies;
- Coordinate land use decisions with other jurisdictions;
- Foster collaborative, community-based partnerships that avoid partisan politics and focus instead on the health of the land and communities.

Objective 4.5. Many County residents feel powerless in dealing with the federal agencies, which are responsible for threatened and endangered species recovery, and other ecological challenges. The County will assist these residents by fostering a climate of “partnership” between residents and federal agencies. This means that residents understand the legal requirements of the agencies and work with the agencies to help them accomplish their mission. Residents must “join the science” of the agencies so that they understand it, make sure it is structured to reflect real conditions on the ground, and that management decisions that result are based on both ecological and economic considerations, as the law allows. In other areas of the West, the discretion of the federal agencies has been expanded when local communities are sharing in the responsibilities for species recovery, watershed restoration, and so on.

Strategy 4.5.a. Sierra County will participate in the formulation of plans for the recovery of any Federal or State listed Threatened or Endangered species. The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will provide the County with accurate population data, distribution, habitat requirements, and historical data based on sound science.

Strategy 4.5.b. The County will encourage the Forest Service to harvest invasive species if there is commercial value.

Objective 4.6. Therefore, it is recommended that Sierra County consider a land use policy that incorporates both ecological and economic considerations. Such a balanced approach would allow the County to work more productively with the federal land management agencies, which are required by law to promote such balance. Furthermore, the county policy is to encourage cooperative, collaborative approaches in federal agency management decisions.

Strategy 4.6.a. Sierra County supports Community Forest Resource Planning (CFRP), which promotes collaborative approaches to forest management.

Strategy 4.6.b. Sierra County will continue to encourage Sierra SWCD, Caballo SWCD, NRCS, and the Wahoo Watershed Workgroup to foster collaborative approaches to watershed restoration efforts.

Strategy 4.6.c. Sierra County supports outdoor education to foster better land management and environmental stewardship.

Goal 5: Sierra County will maintain or expand its private land base.

Objective 5.1. Sierra County will identify BLM lands immediately that are suitable for development and/or for public purposes and request that they be identified in the new BLM land use plan. Such a step will expedite the disposal of BLM lands on the open market for development and the leasing or patenting of BLM for public purpose through the Recreation and Public Purpose Act. This objective allows for the expansion of the private, and taxable, land base in Sierra County.

Objective 5.2. Sierra County should immediately explore with BLM its offer to transfer its disposable lands to the State Lands Office, as a means to expedite the availability of public land on the open market.

Objective 5.3. Lands to be obtained from BLM should be evaluated with the idea of getting development out of the flood plain (Section Six: Water).

Objective 5.4. Private lands within the Gila National Forest could be lost as the Forest Service attempts to acquire those properties to prevent subdivision development and to better address its own management objectives. The County will work with the Forest Service to accomplish its goal through land trades and transfers, ensuring that lost private lands are replaced.

Private Land Use

Goal 6. Multi-jurisdictional land use planning in the triangle created by the Village of Williamsburg, the City of Elephant Butte, and the City of Truth or Consequences, as the core urban area of the County, will be encouraged.

Goal 7. Sierra County subscribes to the State Water Plan (OSE 2003), which recognizes the relationship between water availability and land-use decisions and encourages land use decisions that are consistent with available water supplies.

Goal 8. Sierra County recognizes the value of its subdivision ordinance. It will work to better enforce its provisions and will explore needed changes to the ordinance.

Objective 8.1. The fire hazard reduction plan created by the Sierra County Wildland Urban Interface Team proposed that new subdivisions be reviewed according to “Firewise” standards, that is, that homes are built to foster “defensible space” with available water, ingress and egress for fire trucks, and other provisions (WUI Team 2005). The team has proposed that the Sierra County Planning Board adopt Firewise standards in its subdivision ordinance.

Objective 8.2. The entities that review subdivision requests could be expanded. Currently, the water engineer, state highways, NM Environment Department, the assessor, the flood commissioner, volunteer fire departments, and Soil and Water Conservation District are among the reviewers. The Forest Service could be a reviewing agency for the subdivision process, commenting on fire protection measures. Construction Industries Division and relevant irrigation districts could be included as well. Having a single planning/building phone number with a person linking all of the departments/agency/review levels (Objective 10.1).

Objective 8.3. The fees for subdivision review could be increased to reflect the true cost of review.

Objective 8.4. Some scale of review could be implemented for individual lot development in the County.

Goal 9. Sierra County recognizes that its citizens do not yet want a zoning approach to regulating land uses and will take smaller measures to encourage fair and orderly development in the County.

Objective 9.1. Ensure periodic analysis of land use trends to provide the Board of Commissioners with the guidance they need to make future decisions.

Objective 9.2. Sierra County will encourage development in areas contiguous with present development in order to promote orderly and cost-efficient growth.

Objective 9.3. Ensure that future development in Sierra County protects property values by making new development attractive and compatible with existing uses.

Objective 9.4. Create installation standards for communication towers that specify distance from roadways and adequate support measures to assure safety.

Objective 9.5. Develop standards for commercial and industrial land uses and direct such uses to areas deemed appropriate.

Objective 9.6. Undertake a process for developing a Future Land Use Scenario map, seeking guidance from County residents about where different types of development should go.

Objective 9.7. Ensure that commercial land exists along I-25 at major intersections and arterial though designations of such lands as “desirable for commercial development.” Such a designation would not have the force of zoning but would still serve as a development guide.

Objective 9.8. If zoning is not timely, the County could consider Performance Standards that would specify percent slope, Firewise criteria, and so on, with a fee for the cost of enforcement.

Objective 9.9. Special assessments on existing property owners could be instituted by determining a formula by which property owners would be required to pay their “fair share” for added impact on current roads, roads that lead to new development, and other infrastructure elements. This is a common tool of local government to ensure that development pays its way (Section Seven: Transportation). A line of credit insurance assures that all new subdivisions will at least start out with adequate infrastructure.

Objective 9.10. Commercial ventures such as a NASCAR racetrack should be located so that they will not adversely affect existing residential areas.

Objective 9.11. New commercial and residential development along riparian corridors, including perennial streams, shall include set backs that shall be developed for low impact recreational activities such as walking, trail biking, and horseback riding.

Objective 9.12. The County should make a commitment to work with state and federal agencies to increase access to public lands and, where that access is not available, to acquire those rights. Truth or Consequences and Williamsburg need

to establish green belt around their perimeters, but smaller villages should also be encouraged to develop parks, walking and bike trails adjacent to their communities. This is particularly important where the public lands agencies are divesting or selling properties out of the system.

Objective 9.13. Explore land trusts to buy development rights of agriculture lands, perhaps a small tax to allow purchase (Section Four: Economic Development).

Goal 10. Sierra County recognizes the need to better coordinate land use review and regulation between the County and the several state agencies involved in private land development, as well as foster better communication and coordination with its citizens regarding land use review.

Objective 10.1. Sierra County will develop itself as the first “go to” office, whose permit contains a checklist of other permits and requirements. That way, before utilities are hooked up, the County would be assured of greater coordination in review. The utility companies would not provide permits without a County permit checklist, for example.

Objective 10.2. Inspections need to be streamlined and easier to get. People need to be educated about what the rules are and whom the responsible officials are to contact.

Objective 10.3. Sierra County will hire a code enforcement officer to deal with a range of regulations currently not being enforced, including those related to land use, trash and nuisance abatement (below), and fostering greater effectiveness and coordination with State agencies (see also Section Eight: Housing).

Objective 10.4 Sierra County will work with appropriate State agencies to develop fines for those people who do not seek necessary permits.

Goal 11. Sierra County acknowledges the value of its citizens for minimal regulation and recognizes the growing importance of dealing with trash, junk yards, illegal dumping, abandoned vehicles, weeds, and others symptoms of blight that deter from the aesthetic appearance and from the economic development of the County.

Objective 11.1. Sierra County will study a program for creating incentives for property owners to voluntarily remove weeds and junk from their property and to repair or remove abandoned or dilapidated structures.

Objective 11.2. Sierra County will develop a trash and nuisance abatement ordinance, through consultation with its citizenry that will deal with junkyards, abandoned cars, and general trash along roadways. This will be designed as a “worst case” approach for situations in which voluntary measures have not worked.

Objective 11.3. Junkyards will not be located near the entrances to the incorporated communities without proper and effective landscape screening.

Objective 11.4. Currently, there is a fair amount of illegal dumping on BOR, BLM and state lands. The County will encourage the necessary cleanup through a variety of ways, like having community service people do litter pickup, using groups like 4-H and public service organizations, and brochures could be printed. The creation of higher fines is likely to be a deterrent. A BOR representative has offered to spearhead the effort.

Strategy 11.4.a. The County will research the feasibility of different programs, which could be utilized in Sierra County to address illegal dumping. This includes researching what Lincoln, Otero and Doña Ana Counties have done to make their dumpster programs work, and cost effective measures to initiate a dumpster program.

Objective 11.5. Establish more dumpster sites around the County as long as it can be done in accordance with the State Environment Department regulations.

Objective 11.6. Encourage County residents to be more responsible for their trash and to take more pride in their community.

Strategy 11.6.a. The County will research ways to educate the citizens of Sierra County about the responsibility they have as property owners to keep their property from becoming a public health and safety hazard and to help create a better quality of life for all those living in the community.

Priorities

1. Acquiring “cooperating agency” status with the federal agencies.
2. Strengthen and enforce the subdivision ordinance.
3. Create incentives and regulatory approaches to trash cleanup.
4. Hire a code enforcement officer (See also Section Eight: Housing).

Section Three: Economic Development

The County Profile (Section Eight) contains a detailed look at the economy of Sierra County and its changes over the last few decades. This section reviews the significant economic sectors in the County, and summarizes the economic contribution of public lands. Citizen direction is provided related to economic development, and current economic development planning efforts are reviewed. The Goals, Objectives, and Strategies related to economic development are provided at the end.

Existing Conditions

“The communities of Sierra County have traditionally relied on tourism generated by Elephant Butte Lake and retirees as their main source of economic growth. While these two elements continue to remain vital, Sierra County is facing several other issues which suggest that the County and its communities need to incorporate additional strategies to promote a sustainable and appropriate economic growth over the next several years.” (South Central Council of Governments Draft Strategic Economic Development Plan 2005)

The County Profile (Section Eight) describes in detail the structure of the Sierra County economy and its changes over time. From a variety of sources, including the 2000 census, local documentation and interviews with officials as part of this planning process, the following conclusions can be drawn about existing economic conditions in Sierra County:

- The Sierra County economy remains dominated by tourism, recreation and retirement, particularly by water-based amenities and recreation provided by Elephant Butte and Caballo Reservoirs;
- The proportion of retired people in the total population has been declining;
- Resettlement of the very rural areas by retired people, artists, and business entrepreneurs has contributed to the local economies;
- Tourism planning has improved, showing increased cooperation and ability to attract resources;
- Workforce readiness is questioned among residents and officials and remedial efforts are underway;
- Improved infrastructure, a recent focus of the County, will improve economic performance.

In recent years, Sierra County has become aware of the lack of readiness among its workforce. Unemployment levels, graduation rates in local schools, and employer assessments have indicated that the Sierra County workforce does not have the education, skills, and attitude to compete in the global economy.

The labor force in Sierra County comes from either local residents in the labor pool or incoming residents moving to Sierra County. While most citizens in Sierra County would like to see some form of new light industry attracted to the county, many residents and officials question if there were enough qualified employees to staff the existing employment needs much less any new industry. There is a common perception that local residents don't want to get out and work. Leaders point out that new industry requires more technically qualified employees and currently there are not people that meet these requirements.

Western New Mexico University and Southwestern Workforce Investment Act provide important contributions in creating a ready workforce for Sierra County.

Western New Mexico University has a branch community college in Sierra County, which offers a number of adult education classes, including certification programs aimed at students interested in immediate employment in certain target job markets. The school is also an excellent local resource for those who wish to expand their professional skills or take prerequisite courses that can lead to transferring to a four-year college or university.

The Workforce Investment Act, a state initiative with federal funding, provides funds to Sierra County or provides youth, ages 14-21, with work experiences through business partnerships. The practical experience reportedly is very useful, particularly because parents' transiency means that kids are moving in and out of school throughout the year.

The Southwestern Area Workforce Development Act mission is to "empower individuals in the region by providing them with the tools and training they need to acquire higher paying jobs based on the needs of local businesses." (Southwest Area Workforce Development Board, Five Year Plan, July 1, 2005-June30, 2010, p.4.) The SAWDB supports the development of a workforce that is well trained and effective in meeting the emerging needs of local employers. Young adults, adults, and dislocated workers can acquire new job skills necessary to compete with projected employment opportunities based on the Department Of Labor's top 50 occupational demand listings. They list the top 10 fastest growing jobs in the Southwest region as:

1. Paper Goods Machine Setters/operators
2. Computer Scientists, NEC
3. Correctional Officer
4. Computer Engineers
5. Electronic Semiconductor Processors
6. Systems Analysts
7. Computer Support Specialists

8. Home Health Aids
9. Social/Human Service Assistants
10. Securities/Commodities/Financial Service Sales Agents (Southwestern New Mexico Workforce Investment Area, 2001).

A Review of Significant Economic Sectors in Sierra County

This section will review the economic sectors of tourism and recreation, agriculture, forest products and restoration, and the proposed Space Port.

Tourism and Recreation—“The Lake and So Much More”

Recreation has been key to the economy of Sierra County from the

very beginning. The presence of the hot springs in what was then Hot Springs, New Mexico (Truth or Consequences) was known from a very early time and served to draw visitors from the earliest years of settlement. The construction of Elephant Butte Dam in 1916 began the focus on water-based recreation in the County, which has been a mainstay of the economy ever since. The low water of the last few years was a significant blow to the economy, as reported in the discussion below, and led residents and officials alike to the conclusion

that the County should not rely on water-based recreation as the sole tourism strategy.

“There is more here than the lake.”

“Every 30 minutes on I-25 there is a significant site for recreation. This area is rich in national and cultural history.”

Recent leadership has focused on: 1) County-wide resources in creating a multi-pronged and diverse set of tourism and recreation attractions for visitors; and 2) Strategies for increasing the length of stay of the average visitors, in particular, fostering a favorable climate for “snowbirds” or visitors who stay an entire season. There are two types of seasonal visitors to Sierra County, a) winter visitors, the so-called “snowbirds,” who come in October and leave in mid-March or April, staying in single family dwellings and mobile homes; and, b) summer weekend visitors who come intermittently through September (Stephens and Associates 2003).

Figure 3.1:
Low Water Levels at Elephant Butte Lake



Key tourism and recreation elements present in Sierra County include:

- Elephant Butte Lake and Caballo State Parks, and the Rio Grande River
- Geronimo Trail Scenic By-Way
- Cultural heritage (ghost towns, mining and settlement history)
- Hot Springs district (now a registered Historic District) in Truth or Consequences
- Birding

What makes sense in this situation is to get existing tourists to stay a day or two longer or of getting snowbirds to stay a season instead of a week or two. In an environment in the West where every small community has been working to increase its tourist profile, the tourist market is tight and getting tighter everyday. Because it is not realistic to expect Sierra County to compete with Taos or Santa Fe in the tourist market, it is more appropriate to focus on existing patterns and trends.

Water-Based Recreation

Water-based recreation made possible by the Elephant Butte and Caballo Reservoirs and State Parks is a major economic driver in Sierra County. It contributes directly and indirectly to a large portion of total economic activity as seen through jobs, business development and income.

The two reservoirs offer year-round recreation opportunities. During the winter, the mild climate attracts campers and anglers from northern areas. In spring, summer, and fall, visitors enjoy fishing, developed and dispersed camping, boating, swimming, personal water craft, hiking, biking, wildlife viewing, hunting, and others (BOR 2002)

Visitation at Elephant Butte Lake State Park has the highest visitation rate of any state park in New Mexico. In 1994, visitation to this reservoir accounted for 40% of all visits to state parks in New Mexico (BOR 2002: 3-83). In the last few years, as shown in Table 3.1 below, visitation has declined significantly which is attributed to the current drought and low water levels at the lake. About 62% of annual visitation occurs from April through July, while November and December have the lowest visitation (City of Elephant Butte Comprehensive Plan 2003: 45).

Table 3.1:
Visitation at Elephant Butte Lake State Park

Fiscal Year	Visitation
2004	1,065,006
2003	1,393,387
2002	1,334,764
2001	1,466,021
2000	1,759,813

Source: New Mexico State Parks, Five-Year Draft Management Plan, Elephant Butte Lake State Park, 2005.

The low water years have propelled park management to stress non water-based recreational development. As a result, park officials are more committed than ever to community partnerships in the area, focusing on “recurring special events” and coordination with others (New Mexico State Parks, Five-Year Draft Management Plan, Elephant Butte Lake State Park, 2005: 54).

Caballo Dam was completed in 1938 and is located approximately fifteen miles below Elephant Butte as a holding area for water necessary to irrigate the rich cropland below. Water is released during the irrigation season from Elephant Butte and held in Caballo for distribution to an extensive canal system for agriculture producers and as part of a hydroelectric system. During the winter season, the water is held in Elephant Butte. The Bureau of Reclamation manages Elephant Butte Dam, Caballo Dam, and the stretch of the Rio Grande in-between (SSWCD 2001).

The Bureau of Reclamation performed an economic impact analysis for its 2004 Environmental Impact Statement. A statewide multiplier developed by the American Automobile Association estimated that the average expenditure per person per day in 1995 was \$64.80. The BOR determined that the statewide multiplier was too high for the region because of information indicating that Reservoir visitors spend less and use less services than visitors to other parts of the state.

Geronimo Trail Scenic Byway

In 1995, citizens of Sierra County successfully obtained a scenic byway designation from the State of New Mexico for the Geronimo Trail, making way for grants to construct restrooms in Chloride and other benefits. The byway passes through Elephant Butte, Truth or Consequences, Hillsboro, Kingston, and Winston and loops through the Gila National Forest. Thus the route touches most major areas of the county and gives a stake in the outcome to a wide cross-section of the county.

A Corridor Management Plan for the Geronimo Trail Scenic Byway Project (1997) included the following goals in its list of priorities:

- Increase awareness of the historic significance of the Geronimo Trail Byway region;
- Market the trail as a unique tourism experience throughout the region and abroad;
- Develop information and interpretation services along the way to promote stewardship;
- Insure services by local communities that are authentic and high quality;
- Preserve the trail’s resources; and,
- Develop training and educational programs.

The Geronimo Trail Scenic Byway Corporation, a non-profit 501 (c) 4 corporation established in 1999, has sponsored a variety of tourist promotion initiatives for the scenic byway. Using Lodgers’ Tax revenues from Truth or Consequences and Elephant Butte and cooperative advertising funds from the State Tourism Department, it has sponsored

advertising for the scenic byway in regional tourism publications. It also operates the Geronimo Trail Interpretive Center in Truth or Consequences, which essentially serves as the visitor center for the region. Other recent initiatives, funded with Scenic Byway grants from the Federal Highway Administration, include constructing a rest area in Hillsboro, installing signs along the scenic byway, and preparing a scenic byway brochure. The Corporation has applied for Scenic Byway grants to build another rest area in Chloride and develop interpretive materials (brochures, audio CDs, kiosks) about the history of the Apaches in the area (Elephant Butte Comprehensive Plan 2003).

In 1999 the Scenic Byway Corporation commissioned a study of the economic impacts of the trail and found:

- The total daily spending per person was \$100.99.
- Visitors to the Byway spent \$14,262,980 during 1999.
- 92,494 visitors traveled the byway in 1999.
- Over 67% of visitors stayed 1-2 nights in the area.
- Visitors to Geronimo Trail generated:
 - ✓ \$238,192 in local taxes
 - ✓ \$808,711 in state taxes
 - ✓ \$891,436 in federal taxes (Seely and Associates 2000)

Golf Course

The Oasis Golf Course was begun in 1974 and expanded to 18 holes in 1999. It closed a couple of years ago but has recently been purchased by Turtleback Mountain Partners, who plan to reopen the facility in November, 2006. The company will rebuild the golf course and construct a permanent clubhouse in the short-term while long-term plans call for the creation of a destination golf resort through the construction of a hotel, tennis courts, and expensive homes. Many residents and economic development officials consider the golf course to be an important attractor of visitors, particularly snowbirds (City of Elephant Butte Comprehensive Plan 2003).

Birding

Birding in the United States has turned into a huge business. A recent study stated that some 46 million Americans spend more than \$38 billion annually to watch and feed birds. Americans spend another \$31 billion on equipment and travel, of which about \$450 million is spent annually in New Mexico (U.S. Fish and Wildlife 2001).

The New Mexico Ornithological Society states that Sierra County is one of the best birding counties in New Mexico, both for habitat diversity and potential for “rarities.” It states also that “Percha Dam State Park is the best site for landbirds along the entire length of the Rio Grande in New Mexico and one of the best sites in the state” (2002: 213). The American Birding Association will hold its 200th regional conference in Socorro, in part because of the phenomenal success and importance of the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge just north of Sierra County.

The State of New Mexico Tourism Department is now actively promoting bird watching activities in the state and states that southwestern New Mexico is fast becoming one of the most favorite birding places in the state

(<http://www.newmexico.org/go/loc/outdoors/page/outdoors-birdwatching.html>).

Elephant Butte Lake draws over 300 varieties of birds and many bird watchers because of its location along the Rio Grande flyway and its proximity to the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge (60 miles north). Marsh habitat at the northern end of the lake is one of New Mexico's top birding areas. New Mexico Audubon designated the Elephant Butte State Park as an Important Bird Area (IBA). (New Mexico State Parks 2005: 11).

A group of residents has been meeting along with officials from some of the key agencies to develop a strategy for using birding as an economic development strategy in Sierra County. During its first year, these individuals intend to form a committee of volunteers and local governments to promote bird watching, which will:

- Produce a map showing birding sites in Sierra County;
- Cover cost of production by selling adds for lodging and restaurants;
- Place at: motels, restaurants, museums, State Parks, etc. throughout the County;
- Place map on TorC, County and State web sites with links to other birding web sites.

In its second year, it intends to:

- Improve maps and web sites;
- Place adds in publications;
- Cooperate with Bosque and State Parks to promote festivals;

Tourism Development Resources

Tourism planning and development resources have proliferated in recent years due to the hard work and diligence of local residents. Here are some of the current resources

REDTT: The Rural Economic Development Through Tourism is a program started by New Mexico State University Rural Extension Program in the mid-1990s. Making use of volunteers, Forest Service staff, state park staff, and RV Park Managers, they do:

- Hospitality training;

Figure 3.2:
Church at Cuchillo



- Familiarization tours of rural areas by townspeople who are in positions to direct tourists;
- News and public relations;
- Two ghost town tours (one in the north part of the county, the other in the south);
- Tours of Truth or Consequences that includes the museum;
- Festival management workshops

The *Lodgers' Tax Board*. Lodgers' Tax receipts are distributed to three entities, the Cities of Elephant Butte and Truth or Consequences, and Sierra County. Each entity has a Lodgers' Tax Board that distributes funds to support tourism development. Many residents complained these boards were inactive until very recently.

The *Historical Society of Sierra County*, is a 501(c)(3) organization that developed the museum over the last several years.

The *Sierra County Recreation and Tourism Advisory Board* was formed by the County Commission in 2004 to receive the \$100,000 offered by the Governor's Office to support tourism and to distribute the funds to tourism promotion groups and activities. This group has done very well to represent the diversity of tourism interests in the County and to begin to shape a countywide, coordinated strategy of tourism development. An added advantage of this group is the increased competitiveness Sierra County will bring to attracting funds to the County. State agencies evaluating grant and other proposals place heavy emphasis on community partnerships which the Advisory Board embodies. In other words, 5 separate proposals coming from one community that are uncoordinated does not look as good as a single, partnership-oriented proposal.

A state *Historic District* was formed that united the hot springs owners and others to promote the historical values and the spa mineral baths of downtown Truth or Consequences. The district is comprised of 56 acres and 123 contributing properties.

The *Hot Springs Falls Committee* was recently formed to promote the idea of a hot water falls to be located near the Geronimo Springs Museum. This effort is receiving assistance from the New Mexico Rural Development Response Council to design the nation's only hot waterfall.

When the *Chamber of Commerce* proposed the promotion of wider resources than just the lake in tourism development a few years ago, some people became upset, leading to a fracturing of the Chamber and the formation of the Elephant Butte Chamber. Recently, there has been more cooperation between the two groups. Research for this plan suggests widespread support for tourism development that promotes the diversity of experiences available in the County and includes the range of tourism enterprises. The big economic key for the government in capturing the tourist dollar is the sales tax—this more than covers the cost of services the tourists demand and also provides funds for continuing investment in tourist-related infrastructure.

An *RV Parks Association* formed in 2005 to represent the 718 private RV sites in the County. The Association was invited to participate in the Tourism Advisory Board.

A number of the key tourism planners has promoted the concept of “synergy.” Two often, they said, events are not coordinated with each other and the added benefits that would be possible are lost. For example, the longhorn steer event was held in the community without ample notice or coordination with other simultaneous events. An example of synergy that was cited was the program initiated by Elephant Butte State Park in 2005 called, “Welcome Back to the Butte!” program in which camping discounts were offered to visitors who have shopped with participating merchants. Tourism planners want the concept of synergy to be central in future planning exercises.

Agriculture

The agricultural census for Sierra County (Table 3.2) indicates that 27 farms were lost between 1992 and 1997 but a net gain of 16 farms was realized between 1992 and 2002. Table 3.3 reviews the cash receipts of various commodities for 2001, 2002, and 2003. All major commodities declined significantly during these years. Some segments are consistent, such as chili, while others, such as pecans (Fruits and Nuts), are subject to frequent cycles. If the California vegetable market is good, for example, production declines in Sierra County. In addition, the drought in recent years has led to declining production. Figure 3.3 shows that farm income swings drastically year-to-year but that net income rose from \$5 million in 1970 to \$7 million in 2000.

Crop farming mainly occurs in the southern part of the county near Arrey and Derry. In this area, many farmers are going to drip irrigation through various cost share programs. Some residents, especially in Hillsboro, voiced concern about the larger ranches being broken up for development but there is little evidence that this is occurring very much. It appears that some ranches are being broken up through the inheritance process as holdings are shared among descendents of landowners. A number of residents stated that specialty agricultural uses are growing but not yet statistically measured, such as grapes, the Gruet Grape, seeds, value-added agricultural products, and so on.



Table 3.2:
Census Number of Farms

County	1992	1997	2002
Sierra County	207	180	223

Source: 2003 New Mexico Agricultural Statistics, NM Department of Agriculture

Table 3.3:
Cash Receipts by Farm Commodity, Sierra County (\$000)

Commodity	2001	2002	2003
All Farm Commodities ¹	30,337	23,862	24,822
All Livestock ¹	29,188	13,978	16,736
All Crops	12,574	9,884	8,076
Cattle and Calves	11,063	6,895	9,009
Other Livestock ²	249	247	252
Hay	3,852	3,098	2,350
Chile	1,661	1,694	1,373
Vegetables ³	5,814	4,136	3,048
Fruits and Nuts	751	472	865

¹ Does not include cash receipts received for livestock grazing. May not sum due to rounding.

² Includes mohair, poultry, hogs, other miscellaneous livestock, and a small number of sheep.

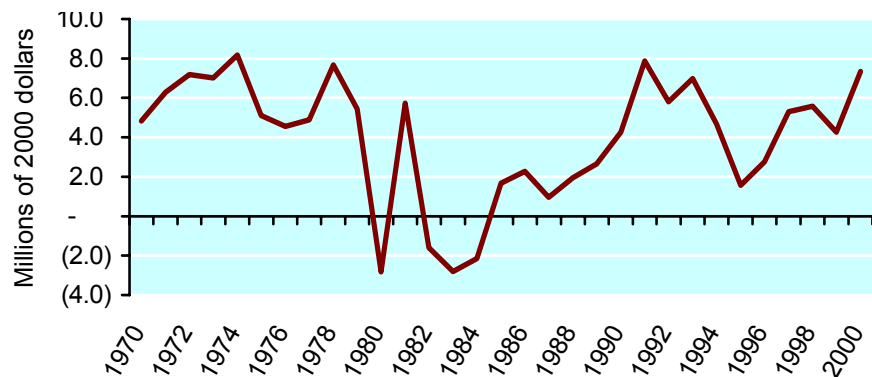
³ Excludes chili and dry beans.

Source: 2003 New Mexico Agricultural Statistics, NM Department of Agriculture

Figure 3.4:
Net Farm Income in Sierra County Between 1970 and 2000

Net Farm Income

- Net income from farming and ranching rose from \$5 million in 1970 to \$7 million in 2000.



Cattle grazing has declined in recent years because of the drought. Grazing permits appear to be fairly critical to local livestock production. It was estimated that about 36% of New Mexico livestock producers rely on Federal grazing permits, according to a Congressional Report. This is the second highest percentage for any state, following Nevada at 49%. (BOR 2002: 3-89). The Public Lands discussion in Section Two and below has more information about grazing.

The Interim Land Use Policy Plan of Sierra County (No. 91-001), adopted in 1991, states the following policy related to agriculture:

1. Opportunities for grazing livestock on federal and state lands should be continued at levels consistent with custom and culture and the protection of equitable property rights.
2. Federal and state governments should not obstruct agricultural opportunities on their respective lands.
3. Sierra County shall establish a Grazing Advisory Board. Federal and state land managing agencies shall coordinate with the Board on all matters affecting livestock grazing on public lands.
4. Sierra County shall develop, in coordination with federal and state governments, an effective Section 8 process pursuant to the Public Range and Improvement Act of 1978 and shall implement procedures and guidelines to account for the allocation and expenditure of range improvement funds.
5. Incentives for improving grazing lands and promoting good land stewardship shall be developed through:
 - a. Encouraging permittee ownership of range improvements;
 - b. Appropriate fee schedules;
 - c. Allowing subleasing of equitable property rights;
 - d. Allotment management plan flexibility; and
 - e. Increasing grazing capacity or allowing other economic benefits to accrue to permittees making investments in range betterment.
6. Sierra County shall explore market and incentive systems to reduce administrative and grazing costs on federal and state lands.

Ranchers and farmers felt that regional market conditions determined their destiny more than other factors. Because of this, they did not believe the County could do much to support their industry. However, with regard to public land use, ranchers requested County support in dealing with the federal natural resource agencies. Particularly with the Mexican wolf, leopard frog, and other species that involve the Endangered Species Act, they felt that the County should be active in fostering communication and coordination (See policies in Section Two: Land Use and Code Enforcement).

Forest Products and Restoration

Section Two described land use management as it related to forest products and restoration and elsewhere this section outlines the economic contributions of public lands in Sierra County. An additional, strong potential from public lands to the local economy relates to forest products and restoration. Some small diameter projects have been undertaken in the state, notably at Las Vegas and Cuba, but Sierra County is among the

first to develop a range of restoration projects and to seriously focus on workforce development in this sector.

In recent years, the Wahoo Watershed Workgroup and the Wildland Urban Interface projects have been initiated. The mission of the Wahoo group is to use a collaborative approach to “accomplish multi-jurisdictional forest and rangeland restoration projects and watershed improvement activities that will work to return the ecosystem function to a more healthy state.” Its operating premise is that increasing herbaceous cover will improve local watersheds, so that, when allotment review happens, ranchers will be allowed more cows.

Among the restoration projects undertaken recently by or through the Sierra Soil and Water Conservation Service (SSWCD) are:

- Riparian restoration project, a seven-mile stretch of the Lower Rio Grande Corridor between Elephant Butte Dam to the village of Williamsburg, for removal of salt cedar, restoration of native vegetation, and reduction of fire hazard. Current members of The Rio Grande Corridor Task Force include: the County of Sierra, Village of Williamsburg, City of Truth or Consequences, Sierra Soil and Water Conservation District, NM State Parks, NM State Highway Dept., NM Game & Fish, City of Elephant Butte Economic Development committee, Sierra County Economic Development Organization, Sierra County Cooperative Extension Service, USDI-Bureau of Land management, USDI-Bureau of Reclamation, USDA-Forest Service, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, Elephant Butte Irrigation District, interested private landowners (SSWCD 2001).
- An Interagency Work Group was formed of the local, state, and federal government units to fight noxious weed infestation. Federal Noxious Weed Act of 1974 (P.L. 93-629) (7 U.S.C. 2891 et seq.) as amended by the Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act of 1990; Section 1453; (Section 15, Management of Undesirable Plants on Federal Lands); State of New Mexico "Harmful Plant Act" 76-7A-11; "Noxious Weed Act" 76-7-1 through 76-7-22, 1978; "Harmful Weed Act" 76-7-23 through 76-7-30, New Mexico Statutes Annotated (NMSA) 1978 compilation, "Noxious Weed Management Act", 76-7D-1 to 76-7D-6 NMSA 1978 (SSWCD 1999).

An objective of the Wildland Urban Interface Team plan is to “improve the economy of Sierra County by implementing forest restoration and health initiatives as outlined in the National Fire Plan” (WUI Team 2005). It proposed doing this by conducting a training session for interested contractors, which was attended by 75 people in February, 2003. Since that time, five of the partners, U.S. Forest Service, BLM, SSWCD, New Mexico Forestry Division, and Sierra County Economic Development Organization (SCEDO), have worked in an ongoing way to develop contractors, develop viable markets for forest products, explore the feasibility of biomass heating systems, develop small diameter markets, and search for funding for the Wood Resource Learning Center. By the end of

fiscal year 2004, the USFS had completed prescription burns on about 90,000 acres, the BLM completed a prescription burn on Iron Mountain and the Wahoo Watershed Workgroup received a Collaborative Forest Restoration Grant for a three-year period (WUI Team 2005).

Through the Wahoo Watershed Group, 25 people were employed with the SSWCD in 2004 for a payroll of over \$200,000. In addition, the St. Cloud mine applied for and received approval for a Forest Service grant that will hire two people and allow the mine to pay \$3500 to \$5000/month for biomass fuel for heating, compared to the mine's monthly propane bill of \$20,000 (personal communication, Merry Jo Fahl, SSWCD, 5/3/05).

The Interim Land Use Policy Plan of Sierra County (No. 91-001), adopted in 1991, states the following policy related to timber and wood products:

1. Sierra County shall promote sale sizes that provide opportunities for a wide spectrum of producers and that allow for local entrepreneurship.
2. Sierra County shall explore market and incentive systems to reduce administrative and harvest costs on federal and state lands.
3. Sierra County shall examine and implement programs based on market and incentive systems to increase the profitability of harvesting small-diameter timber stands and piñon-juniper.
4. Opportunities for a sustainable wood products industry shall be encouraged at levels consistent with custom and culture and as affected by prevailing market conditions.

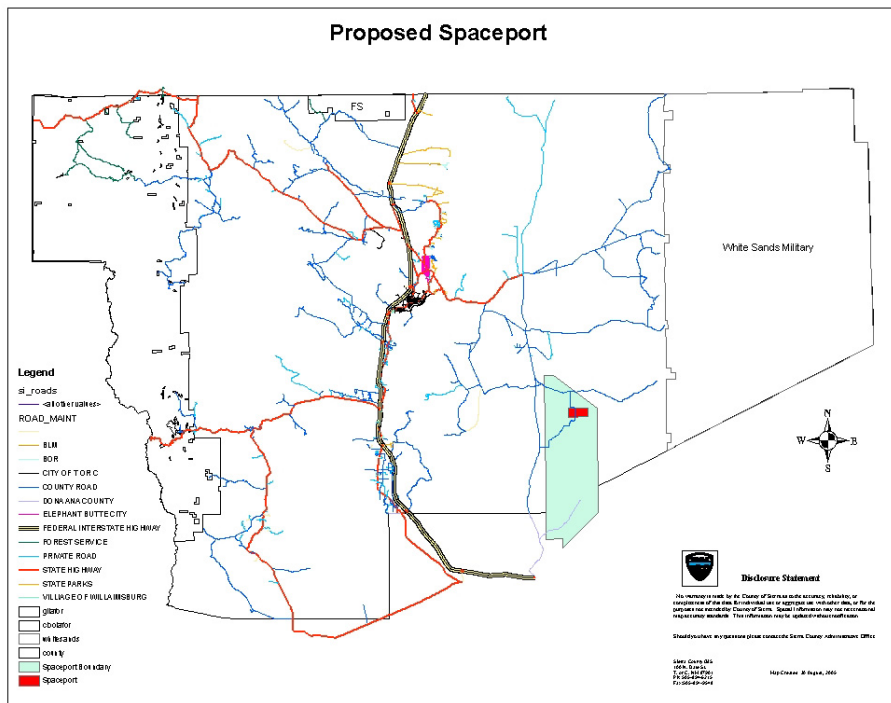
Space Port

The State of New Mexico has been active in responding to private interests wishing to develop a commercial Space Port. The state began the Office for Space Commercialization and has proposed construction of the Space Port at Upham, a site about 20 miles east of Truth or Consequences. The facility would include a "launch complex; a landing strip and aviation complex; a payload assemblies complex; a support facilities complex; a system development complex; and site and infrastructure" (www.edd.state.nm.us/SPACE/SPACEPORT). The Federal Aviation Authority requires completion of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in order to proceed with licensing which is not yet complete. Changing parameters of the project have delayed the EIS and the state of New Mexico plans to complete the assessment in 2005.

The Space Port could bring enormous benefits to Sierra County. Its reality will require the County to be prepared to host commercial infrastructure.

Space Port officials were not able to provide specific information about the scope and scale of the project despite repeated requests. County residents near the Lakes were especially supportive of the Space Port and called for infrastructure improvements to assure that benefits of jobs and investments occur in Sierra County. Some ranchers in the rural areas strongly protested about the displacement of ranching families that the development would bring. The map in Figure 3.4 shows the proposed location of the Space Port in light green.

Figure 3.5:
Location of Proposed Space Port (Light Green)



The Economic Contributions of Public Lands in Sierra County

The Bureau of Land Management manages 822,175 acres of public land in Sierra County. Grazing allotments are spread among 135 allotments and 97 individuals or companies (Figure 3.6). A total of 101,147 Animal Unit Months (AUMs—one cow and calf for one month or 5 sheep) were leased in fiscal year 2004.

Livestock use adjustments are often made with a combination of strategies including the kind and class of livestock grazing the allotment, the season of use, the stocking rate, and the grazing pattern (BLM 1986:30). BLM can either make mutual “agreements” with permittees, or it has the authority to make “decisions” independently in order to protect

the land. Recent trends in BLM grazing have been downward because of the drought of the last several years. AUMs will increase as more moisture improves range conditions.

The contributions of BLM management activities to the Sierra County economy are detailed below.

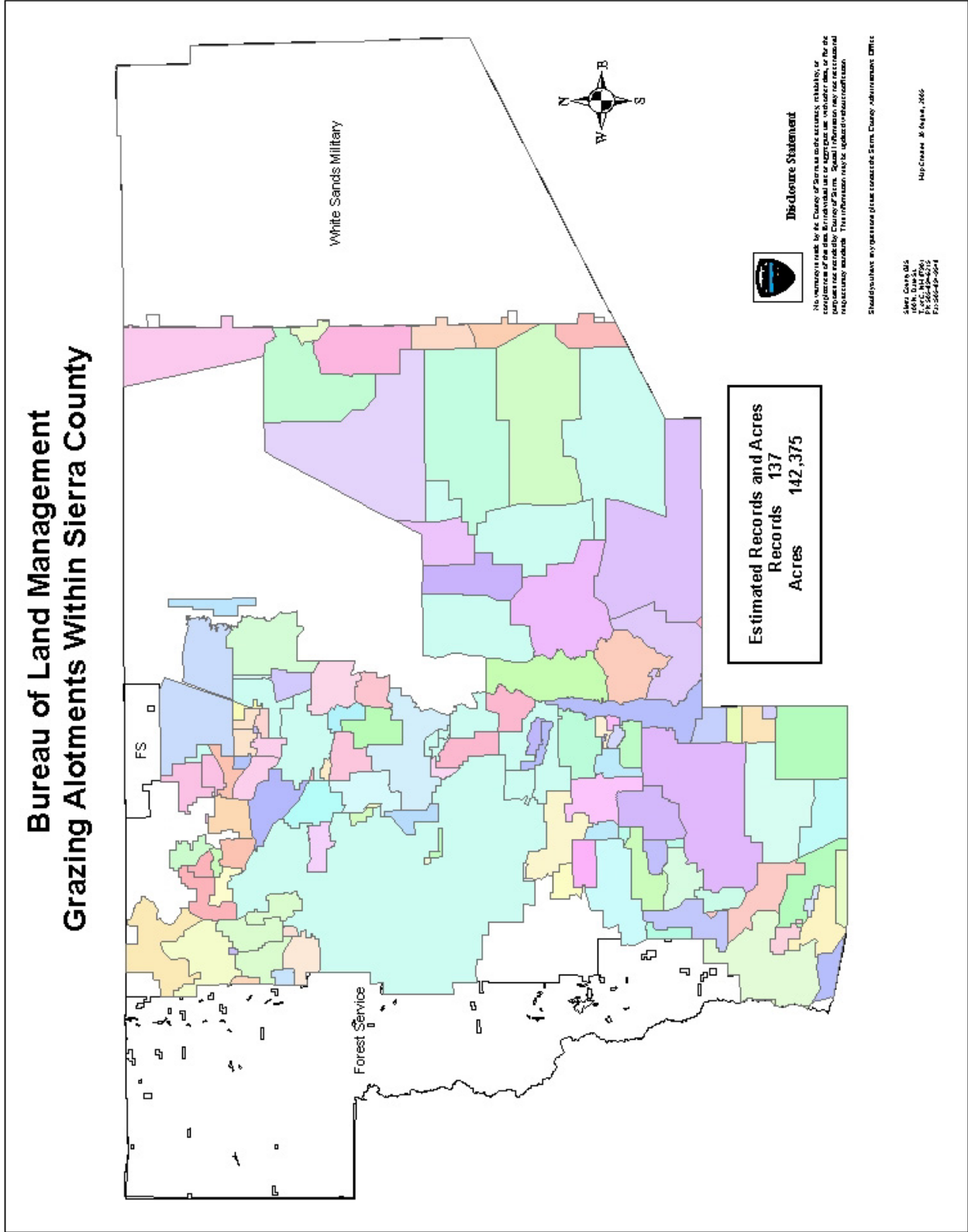
- A proportion of the fees paid by allottees for grazing by law is returned to Sierra County. Section 3 permits of the Taylor Grazing Act require that 50% of the funds be returned to the originating district of BLM for use in range improvement programs, while 12.5% is paid to the State of New Mexico and redistributed to the counties. For Section 15 permits of the Taylor Grazing Act, 25% of the grazing fees are returned to the originating BLM district for range improvement programs, and 50% of the funds are returned to the State for distribution to counties.
- The Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program was developed by Congress to offset the loss to county governments from public lands that are not part of the tax base. BLM pays the county \$1/acre for all of its public land, which is earmarked for roads and infrastructure improvements. Of the funds listed in Table 3.4, \$30,000 each year goes to the County Road Department and the balance goes to the County general fund. PILT monies contribute roughly half of the County’s budget.
- BLM also makes contributions related to fire protection. Because they are first responders, rural volunteer fire departments are invited to submit lists of equipment needs of which BLM funds a portion through its Rural Fire Assistance program.
- BLM uses “fuel hazard” monies to treat brush, to create fire lines, and to protect infrastructure on public lands. For example, it recently funded work to reduce the fire hazard near a telecommunications tower near Winston.
- Appropriated funds have been used in the BLM range program and in programs to eradicate salt cedar.
- Often, BLM revenues and county portions of these revenues that are used for range improvement projects are also leveraged against other financial resources, like NRCS and SWCD funds to create additional improvements in range conditions or agricultural infrastructure like pipelines, corrals, and so on.

Table 3.4:
Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) Paid to Sierra County

2005-2006 FY	2004-2005 FY	2003-2004 FY
\$762,903	\$744,078	\$723,243

Source: BLM, personal communication, 9/7/05

Figure 3.6:



The U.S. Forest Service owns 386,854 acres in Sierra County. Of these acres, 18,963 are managed by the Cibola National Forest and 367,891 by the Gila National Forest. The Gila Forest manages 16 cattle grazing allotments distributed among individuals and companies, which grazed about 6,127 cattle and 29 horses in 2005. A number of allottees chose not to graze because of the drought, market conditions, or personal reasons—during adverse conditions, they can apply to graze less than what is authorized under the term permit. In some cases, the permittees have elected to take non-use for an extended period of time. When the total “actual use head months” (176,806) is divided by the “permitted use head months” (292,171), grazing use is about 61% of its authorized use in 2005. Officials and County residents cited drought as the primary reason for low grazing uses.

The Gila National Forest averaged about 3 MMBF (million board feet) per year of timber production before its last sales were issued in the early 1990s. When the timber mill shut down in Truth or Consequences, harvesters were left with hauling over 200 miles (one-way) to the mill in Alamogordo. The long haul has been economically prohibitive for Sierra County businesses. Moreover, the skills and equipment are largely gone from the labor force.

In recent years, policy attention has shifted to small diameter logging, partly for forest health reasons to “thin from below” to stimulate forest health, and partly to reduce the real risk of catastrophic fire. The USDA, State and Private Forestry, initiated a program specifically for New Mexico to incubate and stimulate businesses related to small diameter harvest. Called the Community Forest Restoration Partnership (CFRP), it has been utilized by Sierra County groups to good effects, as described below. In addition, both the Forest Service and BLM now have a ten-year window of authority to utilize “stewardship contracting” whereby “goods for services” can be exchanged. These contracts allow the agencies to specify the ground conditions they desire and then allow the contractor to profit from the removal of a variety of products necessary to achieve those conditions. Whereas the last few years allowed “pilot” projects of several hundred acres, the new contracts are only limited by agency, industry, and workforce capacity. WWW and WUI represent strong local organizations capable of responding to this expanded set of opportunities.

The mill capacity may be expanding as well. Silver City now has an experimental small diameter mill, although currently it is not even able to handle the local harvest. Reserve, NM has a mill that could potentially buy saw logs 9 inches and up. PNM Gas Services is looking at the feasibility of a wood burning electrical plant northeast of Reserve, which would be good for capturing any harvest near Beaverhead and the western part of the County. Western New Mexico University is developing a training program to foster the harvest, hauling, and processing of small diameter trees. CFRP grants could be obtained to develop local mills devoted to small diameter.

About 1892 cattle are grazed on 46,455 acres of **Bureau of Reclamation** lands among 16 permittees. About 2/3 of this land is at Elephant Butte and 1/3 at Caballo Reservoir. The

total includes the Armendaris Ranch Allotment (6460 acres) and the Flying X Ranch Allotment (2060 acres). About 27% of the grazing land at Elephant Butte will not be grazed in the “foreseeable future.” Reclamation-administered lands on which the Armendaris Ranch has grazed livestock in the past has not been grazed since 1991, except illegally. Livestock grazing on the Armendaris Ranch Allotment has been put off until the BLM permit can be converted to bison use and the necessary improvements are put into place (BOR 2002).

The Bureau of Reclamation also contributes to irrigation, flood control, and domestic water supply, for which the economic value has not been calculated for this report. The recreation benefits of the waterways and lands it manages are also beyond the scope of this plan to analyze, yet they are enormously important for the economy of Sierra County.

Assessment of Current Economic Development Planning

The draft strategic plan for economic development, recently completed by South Central Council of Governments (2005) makes these conclusions about the current economic challenges in Sierra County:

- The County’s economy relies heavily on tourism for its gross receipts and lodgers tax monies, and on the public sector for many of its jobs.
- Although Elephant Butte State Park has long been one of the most popular destinations for water-based recreation in the state, the recent low water levels threaten the long-term viability of the area as a tourist draw unless the region seeks ways to build upon other attractions and amenities in the area.
- Working together to market the diversity of the recreation base is the best way to sustain the value of tourism and visitation.
- Each of the three incorporated communities, and Sierra County itself, has major infrastructure issues that need to be resolved (Section Five: Infrastructure).
- The area’s workforce needs additional training to attract businesses to Sierra County.
- The area’s population is aging, and the County is having a difficult time retaining its young people, who tend to leave the area in search of greater opportunities.
- Seniors represent a significant segment of the population, and their needs for services, recreation, and transportation must be addressed in economic development strategies.
- The hot springs and growing arts community represents another area to market for tourism.

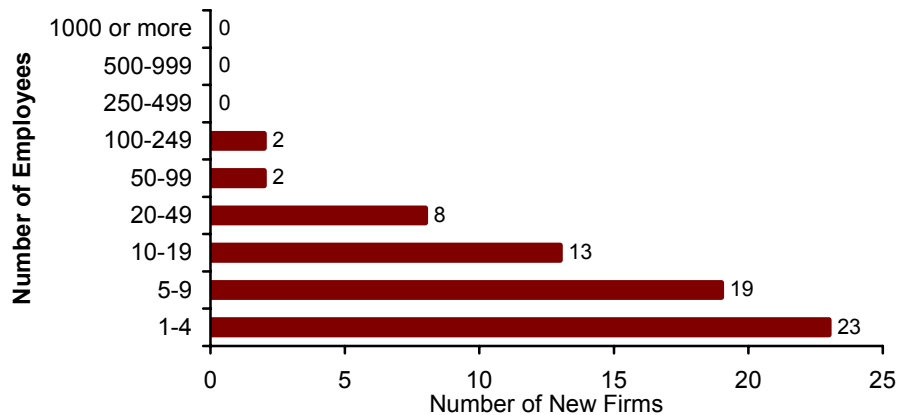
- Economic development should occur from within—the growth of existing and new small businesses to supplement recruitment of businesses from the outside.

To support these statements, it can be pointed out that they match what residents said during the course of developing the Comprehensive Plan. A key direction from residents was, “Support what we have now.” The statements are also supported by census and other quantitative data, for example, relating to the loss of young people and the aging of the population. In addition, as shown in Figure 3.7 below, the 2000 Census showed the primary growth of new business in the County was small businesses with just a few employees—the notion of growing businesses from within is consistent with these data.

Figure 3.7:
New Firms by Employment Size

**New Firms by
Employment Size
1990 to 2000**

- From 1990 to 2000 the majority of new businesses established in Sierra County, NM were small, with fewer than 20 employees.



Source: U.S. Census 2000, Sonoran Institute, Economic Profile System

The draft strategic economic development plan identified 8 objectives to address the current challenges and support future economic development. They are brought forward in their entirety under Goals, Objectives and Strategies.

In addition, the draft economic development plan reported the results of a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis performed for Sierra County by the New Mexico Rural Development Response Council. Again, these are listed in their entirety.

Strengths

- Availability of inexpensive undeveloped land and buildings for economic development;

- Location along Interstate 25 and proximity to El Paso and Albuquerque economic markets;
- Climate conducive to attracting retirees and snowbirds;
- Western New Mexico University branch;
- Excellent airport;
- County's agricultural base;
- Outdoor recreational amenities;
- Sufficient water rights through the year 2040;
- Economic Development Ordinance in place (Truth or Consequences);
- Low crime rate; and,
- Elephant Butte/hot springs.

Weaknesses

- Antiquated infrastructure that needs to be improved;
- Labor force needs improved training;
- Telecommunications infrastructure is lacking;
- Lack of entertainment for all segments of society;
- Williamsburg is landlocked and must annex to grow;
- Lack of organized tourism promotion and infrastructure in terms of guided tours, innertube/bike/raft/boat rentals;
- Lack of effective marketing;
- Need for site-built homes, over 40% of the housing is manufactured; and
- Need for road paving in Elephant Butte.

Opportunities

- Capitalize on the Rio Grande as a recreational amenity;
- Market and capitalize on the Veteran's memorial Park;
- Capitalize on tourism opportunities including the Lake, Hot Springs, proximity to outdoor recreation etc.;
- Education through Sierra Learning Center's customizable workforce training programs;
- Develop new retirement oriented businesses and services such as assisted living;
- Growth of small business through entrepreneurial training etc.

Threats

- Lack of marketing partnerships (splintered efforts dilute overall marketing of area attractions);
- Lack of customer service training for the service industry;
- Infrastructure shortcomings limit opportunities for growth; and
- Proximity to larger markets (El Paso/Las Cruces) consumes much of the region's economic growth.

Finally, the draft economic development plan lays out the many resources available to promote the goals and objectives in the plan. Primary among them are:

- Sierra County Economic Development Organization (SCEDO), a private organization, serves to promote economic development in the county through business recruitment, and the formation of partnerships with the local communities, the county, and state and federal agencies. It would be a logical group to initiate many of the actions identified in this section.
- Certified Communities Initiative, initiated by SCEDO through the New Mexico Department of Economic Development, is designed to assist communities in their recruitment of new businesses and retention of existing ones.
- Training programs that include a branch of Western New Mexico University (focus on telecommunications), the Sierra Learning Center (focus on computer, management, and leadership skills), and New Mexico Department of Labor One-Stop Career Center.
- Economic development ordinances are in place in Sierra County and in Truth or Consequences.

Sierra County currently has in place Ordinance No. 97-002 that outlines its economic development policy. The ordinance states that it is in the public interest of the county to “afford all reasonable assistance” to promote economic development through the pursuit of public resources for economic development purposes, as laid out in the Local Economic Development Act (5-10-1 ET SEQ NMSA 1078). Three main goals are described:

1. Work with existing businesses to improve the general business climate in order that they may be successful in retaining employees and creating new jobs through expansion;
2. Recruit business and industry to expand the local economic and increase employment.
3. Develop adequate infrastructure for growth and development.

The ordinance seeks to support the five major sectors of the economy: service, agriculture, outdoor recreation, health care, and retirement. Upon positive review by the Sierra County Economic Development Finance Review Committee which determines the economic feasibility of a project, the county can make resources available to a proposed project, specifically, land for lease, sale, or grant; buildings for lease, sale, or grant; infrastructure the county is willing to provide, and Industrial Revenue Bonds (IRBs) and other financial support.

Citizen Direction

Residents felt the focus of economic development should be on supporting current activities, improving the

infrastructure, and promoting small business. The census data indicate also that most job growth was in small business (Figure 3.7).

General

“Nothing happens economically and some people like it that way.”

I’d like to see better paying wages in the County. That would help people improve their quality of life and stay local.”

“We don’t want development that hurts the riparian areas, or brings in a million cars, or speeds up our lifestyle.” [Hillsboro, Kingston]

“Efforts are made to attract business to the County, but the infrastructure is so bad it doesn’t happen. It’s good that the cities and the County are moving on this.” [Common]

Business development

“Elite Shutters proposed to go in here and felt they had permission. But when they actually came it, they got stopped for one thing after another. They said, ‘Sierra County doesn’t want us.’”

Tourism

Residents pointed out that there has been a general disconnect between the many tourist interests in the past. They felt that advertising needs to be better coordinated. People have a lack of knowledge about what others are doing. Tourism should be promoted that includes trail riding, dude ranching, hunting, driving tourists, and ghost town visitors. Get a county website for tourism and create a clearinghouse for tourism. Focus on the Geronimo Scenic Byway because the byway touches most areas of the county. Better market the mineral baths. Promote birding tours at Elephant Butte State Park. Lodger’s

Figure 3.8:
Outdoor Art



tax's paid to the county should be used appropriately, and currently is not. Have private RV parks pay a Lodgers Tax, for better tourism promotion services.

“State Parks are in competition with private RV parks.” [RV

Park owner]

“The State put in so many RV spots that it is killing private RV parks.”

“Some people want a river walk. It would benefit the hot springs people and downtown in general.”

“Before the Advisory Group, everyone did their own thing. There's better coordination now.” [Tourism leader]

“The lodging tax boards for a long time were not doing anything, but they are finally spending again and there is greater agreement about how to advertise tourism.” [TorC business owner]

“The County should support the efforts of the ‘Friends of Lake Valley’ to restore the BLM caretaker at the Lake Valley Historical Site.” [Lake Valley]

“We'd like to start a coop art gallery in what was the bar next to the museum. We've got quilters, weavers, and artists.” [Winston]

Agriculture

Even residents who are not in agriculture support agriculture for the historic and economic value that it brings. Even though agriculture is now a minor part of the economy, it still dominates culturally since it is central to the identity that residents have about their county. Although people did not have strong ideas about how County policy could support agriculture, there was a common interest that the County should advocate on behalf of agriculture with the federal land agencies, as outlined above.

“The ranch next to us sold out and the new owner just wants it for a tax write off and comes up to hunt deer.” [Rancher]

Figure 3.9:
The Pioneer Store Museum in Chloride



“Farms have been cut up into little pieces and sold, there is junk yards everywhere.” [Las Palomas]

“All that’s left farming is me, _____, and a few small farmers.” [Long-time farmer]

“Agriculture should be supported throughout all areas of County government.”

Forest Products

Citizens recognize that forest watershed-wide resources exist, specifically, small diameter trees. There needs to be an active treatment for forest health and for fire hazard reduction. Residents felt that the County should encourage timber sales and the re-creation of forest products infrastructure. This would assure local jobs in forest restoration projects.

The Healthy Forest Restoration Act allows for community-based alternatives that require funding. The County could foster greater use of this act by local citizens.

Support the plan promoted by the Wahoo Watershed Workgroup to develop an economic niche of forestry workers while addressing ecosystem health.

Space Port

“I’m against the Space Port. It won’t create jobs but import them because it’s all high tech.”

“It’s hard to get to the right person with those guys. Hard to know if it is really a go or not.” [Resident, speaking about the Space Port]

“The Space Port offers real opportunity to this County in jobs and income. The impacts can be addressed. The infrastructure should be improved now.”
[Common]

“Most of the land at the Space Port is in Sierra County. Therefore, the county should ensure it receives some of the benefits.”

“Our workforce development is low. Young people are not prepared to work. We have a welfare mentality here. Some people don’t want to work.”

“The County needs to encourage people to come to Sierra County, rather than allow Las Cruces to house the Space Port labor force.”

“We should foster tourist visitation at the Space Port.”

“Get the headquarters for the Space Port to locate in Sierra County. Look into who in the County could rally the Space Port headquarters to locate here.”

“Support a “workforce development” group for the Space Port. The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) is doing a great job and should be support. Support Western NMSU in further developing job training and support services.”

Goals, Objectives, Strategies

General

Goal 12. Incorporate the current economic development policy (Ordinance No. 97-002) into this Comprehensive Plan as appropriate and worthwhile.

Goal 13. Adopt the goals and objectives of the South Central Council of Governments draft economic development plan. Specifically, this plan calls for:

1. Focus on Countywide infrastructure improvements to the area’s transportation system, water/wastewater systems, and communication systems in order to facilitate economic growth and development.
2. Identify and utilize programs designed to help existing small businesses expand, and provide the resources for new entrepreneurs to implement their ideas for business development.
3. Continue to market all the area’s recreational and outdoor amenities including Elephant Butte Lake, Caballo Lake, camping, fishing, and hiking.
4. Coordinate efforts to beautify the County and each of the communities.
5. Attract appropriate industries to Sierra County that will diversify the economic base, increase incomes, and provide benefits.
6. Partner with the State to initiate focused job training programs that will address deficiencies in the existing workforce.
7. Maintain and implement programs that meet the needs of seniors in the community.
8. Utilize programs, funding sources, appropriate incentive packages, and other forms of assistance to promote business development in Sierra County. (South Central Council of Governments 2005: 2).

Tourism and Retirement

Goal 14. Sierra County will continue to promote a unified approach to tourism development that supports the range of tourism related enterprises and which showcases the full diversity of cultural, historic, and recreational resources in the County.

Objective 14.a. Sierra County will support the permanent status of the Sierra County Recreation and Tourism Advisory Board (SCRTAB) and encourage its continued practice of inclusion and coordination between various tourism interests.

Strategy 14.a.1. Sierra County will consider the placement of all Lodgers' Tax with SCRTAB to further consolidate an inclusive and diverse approach to tourism development.

Strategy 14.a.2. Sierra County will consider imposing the Lodgers' Tax on RV Parks to further bolster tourism development revenues.

Objective 14.b. Support bird watching as a lucrative and environmentally friendly economic development activity. Objective 9.11 (Section Three) proposes riparian setbacks and promotion of low impact recreational activities as means to promote the economic value associated with birding.

Objective 14.c. Sierra County will encourage and offer incentives for a “synergistic” approach to tourism events, one that promotes linking and coordinating events so as to encourage visitors to stay longer than they otherwise would.

Goal 15: Sierra County will work with the Area Office on Aging and others organizations focusing on senior citizens and the retirement community to better identify their needs and to foster and expand their residence in Sierra County.

Objective 15.a. Work with economic development leaders, and RV park owners, to fashion an effective policy to promote “snowbird” settlement.

Agriculture and Forest Products

Section Two (Land Use and Code Enforcement) calls for actions that promote economic development, including the hiring a natural resource coordinator, a partnership focus, and accompanying strategies. Additional policy direction is suggested here.

Goal 16. A good transportation system, integrating federal, state, and local elements, is essential for timber, recreation, and fire control purposes. Ensure better cooperation with the Forest Service and the State on road easements and maintenance. The County could help with County roads and with negotiations with private landowners, so that everyone pays and everyone wins (Section Seven: Transportation).

Goal 17. Encourage WFW, WUI, and SSWCD to expand the scale of their efforts and work collaboratively with the Forest Service in addressing obstacles to expanded small diameter production.

Objective 17.a. Sierra County will explore collaborative investments with the Forest Service and other partners to re-develop a forest products and restoration industry. The success of initial pilots warrants this investment.

Strategy 17.a.1. Sierra County will encourage SSWCD and the Wahoo Watershed Workgroup to pursue CFRP grants and other sources of funding to develop a local mill devoted to small diameter timber processing.

Strategy 17.a.2. Sierra County will advocate with other partners with the State to get the high workers' compensation rate reduced or subsidized.

Goal 18. Sierra County will encourage the retention and strengthening of the agricultural sector.

Objective 18.a. Monitor the loss of agricultural lands at five-year intervals in order to inform the debate about appropriate agricultural policy. Protecting against the loss of agricultural lands is difficult to put into policy because of competing rights of property owners to dispose of their land as they wish. For now, monitoring will at least inform citizens as to the trends over time.

Space Port

Goal 19. Insist that the planning of the Space Port is grounded in the capacity and aspirations of the County. Specifically, the County should know the infrastructure and labor requirements so that it can position itself for success prior to development.

Objective 19.a. Create a public/private partnership to ensure that the local labor force will have the technical skills to compete for employment at the Space Port. Emphasize particularly the secondary market—since the County does not have the engineers and technicians that will earn high salaries at the Space Port, position County residents in the secondary market—those related businesses which will service Space Port professionals.

Objective 19.b. Seek State and Federal support for road improvements and other infrastructure as necessary to absorb the impacts of Space Port construction and operation.

Objective 19.c. Seek regular communication with Space Port officials to ensure accountability before investing.

Priorities

1. Initiate communication with federal land management agencies to develop a multi-jurisdictional, collaborative transportation plan for all levels of government.

Section Four: Infrastructure

Sierra County developed a local Infrastructure Capital Improvement Plan early in 2005. It states, “The need for capital improvement planning has reached critical proportions in New Mexico where local governments are faced with pressing demands for multiple capital improvements and a paucity of funding to support them” (ICIP 2005: 3). The ICIP is strongly encouraged by the State and is a means to set policy direction, funding time frames, costs, and justification for each project proposed. Table 4.1 below identifies the five projects that Sierra County has determined to be its greatest infrastructure needs. The projects are not ranked for importance, and should be, as called for in the policy discussion at the end of this Section.

Table 4.1:
Priority Capital Improvement Projects, Sierra County

Project	Justification	Estimated Cost
Fairground improvements	The buildings are old and in need of upgrades.	\$1,310,000
New detention facility	A new center would be in compliance with state and federal mandates; it would reduce county costs by avoiding frequent prisoner transport.	\$8,095,000
New County Administration Office	New offices are needed for Sierra County Administration, Assessor, Clerk, Treasurer, EMO, MCH and others.	\$3,770,000
Build Road Department Facilities	The existing land and building are not owned by Sierra County, and the Road Dept. has grown out of the current facility.	\$560,000
Equipment Computers & Software	For compliance with state and federal mandates.	\$120,000

This section will address key infrastructure considerations in Sierra County, specifically emergency services, wastewater, and solid waste. Existing conditions will be described, along with trends, programs and plans that affect the services. Citizen direction is described and the section will close with Goals, Objectives, and Strategies.

Existing Conditions

Human population in Sierra County is primarily located in a north south pattern along the freeway adjacent to the Rio Grande, with widely isolated rural communities located in and along the mountains and valleys outside the river valleys. Few infrastructure

improvements exist outside of the valley cores. Additionally, few east-west roads and no east-west rail lines exist in the County. “The effect of these strong patterns is that most investments in infrastructure will take place within the central corridor” (SCRPO 2002: 17).

Emergency Services

Fire

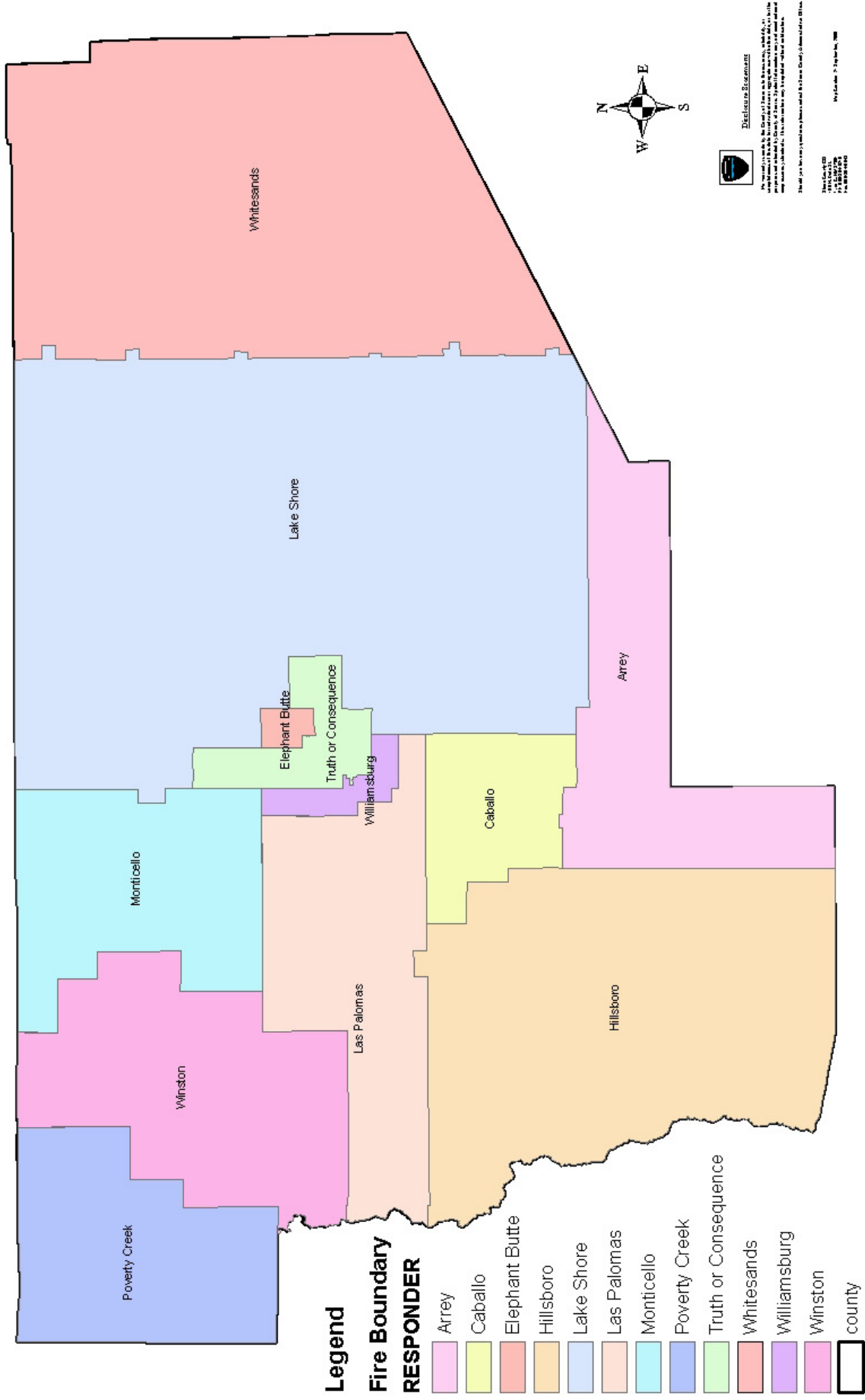
Sierra County has 11 fire departments, 3 of which are municipal, and the remaining 8 are rural volunteer fire departments (Figure 4.1). The impetus to create Volunteer Fire Departments (VFDs) in the last few years has come from Homeland Security, which has funded training and equipment to increase disaster preparedness. The National Fire Plan, administered through the U.S. Forest Service, has channeled funding and training to the VFDs in Sierra County in recent years. The Forest Service has been hiring Volunteer Fire Departments for fire hazard reduction work. They need training in wildland fire management. The classes are free and there are reimbursement agreements that are possible. Currently, they are doing patrols and prevention work.

Any group can apply to the state Fire Marshall to gain status as a rural volunteer fire department. Currently, the community area of Engle has applied for a new status. The state fire marshal takes 2-3% of all fire insurance within the state and that money goes into a state fire fund to be returned to the volunteer fire departments in each county. Each fire department must request its budget needs to the state fire marshal and in turn the state fire marshal distributes the funds to the county manager’s office for distribution. The state fire marshal keeps half of the revenues for expenses and grants, the latter of which a fire department can apply for a particular need such as new equipment. For approval, a department must demonstrate that it serves at least 200 people, the service boundaries of the department must be identified, and the fire marshal must approve.

As an example, the Arrey Fire Department was begun in 1960. They were apportioned \$30,000 a year from the State which they saved until they built the two bay station in 1972. They moved onto their present site a couple years ago after the County provided the land and the New Mexico Finance Authority provided financing for the new building. Half of the department’s current income goes for the building and the other half for equipment and expenses. The department currently has a big truck, a 2000-gallon water brush, a brush truck (for grass fires), and a hummer. Recently money from FEMA is more available, and the different fire departments attempt to coordinate their equipment purchases to provide the greatest diversity possible for their needs.

In the last several months, the Poverty Creek area has begun a fire department, and people at Engle are reportedly interested in creating one.

Figure 4.1: Rural Volunteer Fire Departments of Sierra County



Emergency Management Office

The County has an Emergency Management Office (EMO) whose purpose is to be the liaison resource for all agencies with regard to fire, police, and other emergency medical needs for both volunteer and paid positions. It is funded through the State Office of Emergency Management.

The County EMO (Emergency Management Officer) identified the following short-term goals for 2005:

- Install base radios at central dispatch;
- Receive Motorola radios at central dispatch;
- Create emergency medical command center upstairs of the courthouse. The command center will have computers;
- Create central dispatch center, whereby calls from the entire county will come into one location via one phone, capable of communicating with all 8 volunteer fire departments, the 3 municipal fire departments, the sheriff's posse, and city police;
- A total of 5 repeaters will be put on Caballo Mt.

Longer-term goals of the EMO are to:

- Update and comply with the existing 2003 comprehensive plan;
- Continue to upgrade all emergency service equipment as needed;
- Complete the inter-operator dispatch center;
- Create an amateur radio club in the area to assist in emergencies.

The EMO completed a comprehensive plan in 2003, but copies were unavailable for review.

The Sierra County Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) was established in 2002 under the administration of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). It has grown to be an active and large organization. The group states that there are 40-45 active members from the various communities in the County, all volunteers, and all having been trained as first responders in emergencies and disasters. The County currently has 9 CERT trainers. CERT volunteers have assisted with American Red Cross in setting up and staffing a food comfort station during Search and Rescue for an airplane crash, participated in hurricane relief in Florida, and were on stand-by to assist with flooding near Cuchillo in 2004.

911 Program

The 911 Program was begun in Sierra County a few years ago in response to security concerns following the destruction of the World Trade towers. The purpose has been to create a single map system that would create an address for all residences, reduce redundancy in road names, and foster the adequate marking of addresses for emergency services. The County Project Manager stated that this program is 90% complete, but that

the map is not yet ready for public distribution. While everybody has been assigned an address, the database has inconsistencies that need to be cleaned up.

Figure 4.2:
Firehouse at Monticello



Wastewater

There are two primary ways to deal with human wastewater, individual septic systems and public systems administered by a municipality or special district.

Wastewater considerations have been driven by a central environmental condition—most of the population in Sierra County lives adjacent to or within the Rio Grande valley, and a large portion of the residents' homes are connected to septic tanks. Because the depth to ground water in the valley remains close to the land surface, contamination of ground waters is an increasingly severe problem (SCRPO 2002). For example, when BOR investigated the privatization of lease lots at the reservoirs, it found that the most common type of sewage disposal system was a septic with a trench, and, further, that in almost all cases, septic systems are downhill and shoreward from the structures. At Elephant Butte, 32 septic systems are less than 50 feet from the high water mark, and at Caballo Reservoir, 15 septic systems are less than 50 feet (BOR 2002). In fact, “the groundwater investigation found fecal coliform bacteria in two of four groundwater samples; one of these samples had a concentration at the limit for primary contact recreation as set by the NMED/SWQB [State of New Mexico Environment Department, Surface Water Quality Bureau]” (BOR 2004).

The State of New Mexico Environment Department is the agency responsible for regulating septic systems in Sierra County. The state is changing the regulations on liquid waste. On May 23, 2005 the department had a meeting in Sierra County to explain the

changes. The minimum acreage requirement for a septic will go from $\frac{3}{4}$ acre to $\frac{1}{2}$ acre. The new rules went into effect around July, 2005. A primary consideration in considering septic system issues is the date of record of the lot. New changes are “grandfathered” for the older lots. Setbacks have to be met. Sometimes wells are capped if there is a public health issue. The state uses CDBG funds to bring septic systems up to standards. The Environment Department is a “complaint driven” office and responds when called. However, not all citations are successful in court and Santa Fe is working on compliance orders. Doña Ana County requires a permitted septic before a mobile home can be moved onto a site.

The City of Truth or Consequences has a municipal wastewater system in which collection systems serve the developed areas within Truth or Consequences and Williamsburg and convey wastewater to a treatment facility located along the Rio Grande in western T or C. Small collection and treatment systems are also located within Elephant Butte State Park and serve the headquarters, nearby convenience stations, and Rock Canyon park improvements. The City of Elephant Butte has only isolated collection and treatment facilities. Within its boundaries, it has three small (10,000 gpd or less) treatment facilities at separate locations. These plants serve pockets of residences within the community. They were part of the private development that created Elephant Butte during the past twenty years. The facilities are permitted through NM Environment Department.

The former lease lot areas, becoming privatized in 2005, and the unincorporated areas around the towns do not have public wastewater collection and treatment facilities. Residents and businesses within the unsewered areas use septic tanks, cesspools, or holding tanks.

In the last several years, the City of Elephant Butte initiated a wastewater collection and treatment system that would serve the region. It united with Sierra County, the Village of Williamsburg, the City of Truth or Consequences, NM Parks and Recreation Division, and the South Central Council of Governments to create a joint task force, under the Joint Powers Agreement Act, to create a regional study and to attract funding. It has been a top priority for Elephant Butte (Engineers, Inc. 2001). This section relies heavily on this report which assessed present capacity and need in the County.

If the proposed facility is built, it will absorb the three private utilities within Elephant Butte whose owners will be responsible for de-commissioning. The new system will also absorb the small system operated by Elephant Butte State Park

The collection capacity was assessed by Engineers, Inc. (2001). The Truth or Consequences collection system was first constructed in the 1930s and initially served the core community (between the Rio Grande, Broadway Avenue, and the County Courthouse. The report states:

“The system has been extended numerous times since its inception. The most significant recent extensions include the North Date Street extension, constructed

in the mid-1980s, and the Mims Addition vacuum sewer extensions, constructed in the mid-1990s. There are three lift stations and one vacuum station with the T or C system. The Clancy Lift Station is located in the central part of T or C near the Rio Grande. The Nickel Lift Station is located at the intersection of Nickel and Veater Street and the North Date Lift Station is located on North Date at Interstate 25. The vacuum system includes a station located near the Rio Grande along East Third Street.

Flow data from the treatment facility indicates that more wastewater is treated than possible without significant infiltration and/or inflow (I/I) of groundwater into the collection system. Geothermal groundwater is very near the surface in the older central portion of T or C year around, with the water still being used by several bathhouses. The old collection lines in this area most likely contribute significantly to the infiltration/inflow problem. Quantifying the volume of infiltration should be a priority for the City of T or C. Once quantified, the extent of repairs to the collection system necessary to significantly reduce I/I can be defined and made. This rehabilitation will improve the ability of the existing treatment facility to operate under current flow conditions.

The Williamsburg collection system was constructed after the T or C treatment facility was moved to its present location in 1978. The system consists of about 2.8 miles of collection lines, force mains, and interceptor sewers. There are two lift stations in Williamsburg located at the intersections of Central and Powey Street and Riverside Drive at Hyde Avenue. According to operations personnel a serious deficiency within the collection system is the 4-inch sewer crossing of Broadway that conveys wastewater from the northern segment of the Village to the treatment facility. The crossing is inadequate for near term requirements and should be replaced” (Engineers, Inc. 2001: iv).

The assessment of treatment capacity was handled in the same study. To quote again:

“The wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) for T or C and Williamsburg was constructed in 1978. The plant is located in the far southwest corner of T or C and is almost adjacent to the eastern boundary of Williamsburg. The design flow rate of the existing plant is 1.06 MGD. Based on the information obtained from the plant operator, the plant is currently receiving an average of 900,000 gpd. As such, the available plant treatment capacity at this time is approximately 100,000 gpd” (ibid: 2001: iv).

The study concludes that, overall, the existing WWTP is in marginally adequate condition and has been operating in compliance with discharge permit parameters.

“Sierra County and the municipalities in the County jointly sponsored the Sierra Regional Wastewater Collection and Treatment Plan in 2001 and 2002. They are now working together to gain funding for systems, which will serve the largest population centers in the County. If funded, the new systems will spur growth

along I-25, north of the City of Truth or Consequences and in the City of Elephant Butte.” (SCRPO 2002: 15)

Solid Waste

Landfills and transfer stations are regulated by the Solid Waste Bureau of the New Mexico Environment Department. Federal regulations mandate state regulations which in turn direct county and city regulations.

There are currently two landfills, one is Sierra County and the other is the City of Truth or Consequences. They are within a mile of one another. The County landfill is only registered and not permitted and was never intended for long-term use. A 1995 law requires all landfills to be closed by a certain date. This hasn't been done because of the alternative of having no place to dump. Sierra County is not allowed to increase the size of the current landfill.

All newly permitted landfills must be lined to prevent groundwater contamination by the landfill leaching into the soil. The question is, should the current site be lined or closed? State law requires a landfill to be lined if there is more than 20 tons per day being dumped and more than 7,000 people being served by the site. Currently, there is about 15 tons a day dumped at the site.

A new state policy regulates landfills that will go into effect “probably” at the end of 2005. It requires all non-permitted landfills to submit an application within 6 months.

The State would prefer that the City of Truth or Consequences and Sierra County share in the cost a permit application, which could run as much as \$100,000. While construction cost would be more, the long-term cost would be lower and the new combined site would reduce the liability of groundwater contamination.

Sierra County needs to approach the Environment Department to buy private or public land. After selecting a site, they would file with the secretary of the Environment Department. This process takes upwards of 2 years to get a permit. Sierra County is 2-4 years behind in this process.

Three transfer stations are now in place, one near Arrey, one in Hillsboro, and one in Winston. The Community Area Meeting held in Monticello stimulated much discussion about the need for a transfer station in that area. Although many people were concerned about trash along roadways, impacts to nearby property owners, and general management, it appeared that there was strong support for further discussions about the topic.

Existing Policy

Sierra County Ordinance No. 89-002 establishes mandatory fire hydrants in the County. They are required at 500 feet intervals, and are required as part of any new water line construction or replacement. The ordinance applies to any commercial or residential property which is supplied from a central source.

Citizen Direction

General

“Cars go too fast. When they give out tickets, it helps, but we haven’t seen the sheriff since he was elected.”

“We need infrastructure to accommodate visitors. We should do more to get snowbirds, you know, people who stay a whole season.”

“There are vicious roaming dogs.” [Arrey, Winston]

Stray dogs are everywhere. They sometimes pack up and it’s not safe for the elderly to walk. The sheriff has not responded.”

“We need better sheriff services to the lease lot areas. Sometimes incidents have occurred that the sheriff’s presence would have prevented.” [Lake area]

“There is a fire hazard along the roadways.” [Hillsboro, Winston]

Emergency Services

“The repeaters got hit by lightning and have to be replaced. We can hear the dispatcher but can’t respond.”

“We have to have a community wastewater system.” [Hillsboro leader]

“We have put together a private emergency service. Our members are licensed and certified. We contract with a helicopter service to come in and take us out during an emergency.” [Lake Valley]

“Insurance is high or has been dropped. Having the fire department will mean we can afford to live here.” [Poverty Creek resident]

“We need ambulance service out here. The fire and rescue department is disorganized with not enough volunteers.” [Hillsboro]

“Emergency calls from the Poverty Creek area are routed through Catron County to the Dispatch in TorC, drastically slowing the response times.”

“We need a First Responder Unit in Monticello, Winston, and Hillsboro.”

911 Program

“We need 911 service. We went through all the steps 4 years ago to get 911. We renamed all the streets, talked to people, and submitted it to the County, but they haven’t done anything.” [Lake Valley]

“We worked hard to get the streets named and registered with the County, but we don’t even get a call back.” [Arrey]

“We know the County got money 3 years ago to name our streets, but so far nothing has been done about it. People continue to have problems with utility companies because if they want a new service, they have a hard time telling them where it is that they need it.” [Arrey]

“UPS and FedEx will not deliver around here because the addresses are not marked.” [Common]

“We are getting charged for the 911 program but the address map is still not complete. Some roads are not yet named and local residents want the program to get local names on these roads.”

Wastewater

“We keep calling the County about septic problems but we don’t get a response. Our water quality is at risk.” [Arrey community leader]

“New trailer parks show up overnight, and next thing we know, there are more and more trailers on the site. So how is the wastewater handled then? The water well for the school is next to one of these trailer parks.” [Arrey]

“Drums are being buried [for septic purposes].” [Arrey, Winston]

“Can the Environment Department contract with Sierra County for code enforcement?” [Arrey]

Solid Waste

Section Two on land use contained a large number of citizen comments about trash.

“The trash out near the dump is horrible. People don’t cover their loads so trash flies out.” [Monticello]

Goals, Objectives and Strategies

Goal 20. Sierra County will ensure that infrastructure can accommodate future growth (See also Section Three: Land Use and Code Enforcement). These are often known as APF "adequate public facilities" requirements. Essentially they say that new development will not be approved (or allowed permits or allowed to hook up to public services) unless existing adequate infrastructure exists to serve them.

Objective 20.a. Continually upgrade existing GIS databases with locations, sizes, and types of all utilities to improve modeling and evaluation of existing and proposed utility capacity.

Objective 20.b. Sierra County will continue to work closely with the Cities of Elephant Butte and Truth or Consequences and the Village of Williamsburg to coordinate the timely provision of needed infrastructure.

Strategy 20.b.1. Sierra County will encourage the development of a public facilities matrix, that is, a chart, that shows the service levels for the County and the three municipalities for each service and/or how much/many more people/housing units they can serve.

Objective 20.c. Sierra County will prioritize its list of capital improvement projects, considering the elevation of the detention center construction to the highest priority.

Objective 20.d. Evaluate proposed residential subdivisions, commercial, and industrial developments to determine the impact on the infrastructure. Determine the requirements for each type of development, such as water demand for fire hydrants, power requirements, and so on. (This is a provision from the City of Truth or Consequences' Comprehensive Plan that seems appropriate for Sierra County.)

Goal 21. Sierra County will continue to foster high quality emergency services for all residents.

Objective 21.a. Sierra County will support the EMO effort through adequate financial and logistical support, recognizing that increased efficiencies are gained by coordination among the various emergency service providers.

Objective 21.b. Consider having only one EMO between Sierra County and the City of Truth or Consequences, fostering greater cooperation and reduced cost.

Unregulated septs relate to land use and to housing, both topics covered in different Sections of the Plan. These sections covered policy options related to code enforcement, and greater coordination between the County and state agencies. In addition, Goal 22 is listed.

Goal 22. Sierra County is committed to dealing with wastewater in healthy and sustainable ways and will undertake a variety of strategies to assure its citizens of the importance this topic deserves.

Objective 22.a. Sierra County will explore appropriate measures to take to assure compliance with wastewater provisions. It will consider contracting enforcement services through the Environment Department, as well as other mechanisms.

Objective 22.b. A public health education campaign could be developed to increase the awareness of residents about the public health risks of unregulated liquid waste. A common value of protecting children could provide motivation for voluntary restraints.

Goal 23. Sierra County will assure adequate and environmentally safe solid waste disposal capacity for its residents.

Objective 23.a. Sierra County will work with the Solid Waste Division of the Environment Department to develop a schedule for initiating a new landfill site for the County.

Objective 23.b. Sierra County will work through BLM's current land use planning effort to identify a BLM site for a landfill, and acquire the site through R&PP leasing if possible or through purchase if necessary.

Priorities

1. Continue with the County Infrastructure Program.
2. Develop new landfill.

Section Five: Water

In many ways, the history of Sierra County is the history of water. Irrigation ditches were dug from the very beginning as well as community ditches. The development of the reservoirs for flood control and irrigation is now nearly 100 years old. Residents, old and young, are very much aware of water's importance for the future of the County. Here are some things that older people had to say:

“There is a history of farmers doing fiestas in honor of San Jose, the patron saint. Then they would clean out the ditches.”

“All the men relatives in my family were ‘ditch bosses,’ and so have I over the years. I used to watch my grandfather argue with other farmers. I’d peek from behind my grandfather at the boys peeking from behind their grandfathers, and we would learn what fighting was all about. We were always *compadres* though. We never quit talking with each other.”

“What a good system Reclamation put in! These canals go underground through siphons at several points. They seldom need repair. The system was paid off I think in '72 so the farmers bought it.” [Arrey resident; this system became the basis of the Elephant Butte Irrigation District]

Figure 5.1:
The Rio Grande East of Truth or Consequences



This section will review the level of current knowledge regarding the status of water resources in Sierra County, including surface water, groundwater, irrigation, *acequias*, domestic water supplies, wells and flooding. The concerns of citizens will be brought forward and the section will review current planning and expected impacts on water resources. The section will close by proposing Goals, Objectives, and Strategies by which to promote Sierra County policy on water.

Existing Conditions

Surface Water

Sierra County receives about 8.3 inches of rain per year (www.nmcounties.org). Most of the water in Sierra County is used for agriculture along the Rio Grande Valley, for riparian evapotranspiration, and for evaporation from the reservoirs in the County. One of the most significant legal issues affecting the availability of water is the Rio Grande Compact, which apportions the river among New Mexico, Texas, and Colorado (Socorro-Sierra Regional Water Plan, Stephens and Associates 2003).

The Caballo Dam and Reservoir and the Elephant Butte Dam and Reservoir were built as part of the Rio Grande Project, as were

“...several diversion dams, about 140 miles of canals, 450 miles of laterals and 465 miles of drains in New Mexico and Texas. The Project was designed to provide a reliable supply of surface water to specific lands in what are now the Elephant butte Irrigation District (EBID) and El Paso Irrigation District No. 1, plus 60,000 ac-ft/yr of water to Mexico under the terms of a 1906 treaty. The allocation of Project water to New Mexico and Texas is approximately 57% and 43% respectively.”

“Water is released from Caballo Reservoir during the irrigation season and diverted at the Percha and Leasburg diversion dams for use in New Mexico by EBID [Elephant Butte Irrigation District] irrigators in the Rincon and Upper Mesilla Valleys” (State Water Plan, OSE 2003: A-16-18).

Other facilities of the Rio Grande Project are located south of Sierra County and serve areas of southern New Mexico, Texas, and Mexico.

Compliance with the Rio Grande Compact has been an ongoing challenge to New Mexico, particularly during years of extended drought. When storage in Elephant Butte is less than 400,000 acre-feet, which was experienced last in 2004, New Mexico cannot add water to reservoirs built after 1929, including El Vado Reservoir, which is used by the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District. “Although the Compact doesn’t represent a legal issue for the region directly, it nevertheless could impact water availability if the State of New Mexico is unable to meet delivery obligations for several years” (Stephens and Associates 2003).

In Sierra County, as in the rest of New Mexico, surface water is considered to be fully appropriated, that is, no further water rights are available. The concept of prior appropriations is well established in New Mexico water law. It is derived from Spanish law in that the first user has the right to take and use the water, and the right has priority against subsequent users as long as the first user puts the water to beneficial use (Elephant Butte Irrigation District <http://www.ebid-nm.org//static/PDF/EBIDBOOK-1.pdf>).

Surface water supply was estimated for the Socorro-Sierra Regional Water Plan by looking at the surface flows to the Middle Rio Grande in the two-county planning region, including flow from the Rio Puerco, Rio Salado, and ungauged tributaries east and west of the Rio Grande. The surface water supply in the Rio Grande and its tributaries was modeled as part of a larger ongoing surface water study of the Interstate Stream Commission (ISC). Surface water flows are highly variable. According to the modeling, the mean annual flow on the Rio Grande at the Socorro-Valencia County line is about 245,000 acre-feet per year, after accounting for Rio Grande Compact delivery obligations (Stephens and Associates 2003: ES-6).

Groundwater

There are four Underground Waterbasins in Sierra County, Hot Springs, Rio Grande, Las Animas, and the Lower Rio Grande. The Lower Rio Grande is being adjudicated which will eventually result in a re-statement of water rights and their owners (personal communication, Office of the State Engineer, 7/26/05).

The Socorro-Sierra Regional Water Plan found significant supplies of groundwater. As with surface water, development of these supplies is limited by the availability of water rights and by the Rio Grande Compact. Because of these limitations, the plan focused on groundwater outside the Rio Grande flows, including the geologic basins of San Agustin, Alamosa Creek, Jornada del Muerto, and Tularosa. Of groundwater supplies that would be free of the constraints of the Compact and are located in Sierra County, only 5 square miles of 400 square miles of the Alamosa Creek Basin lie within the County. On the other hand,

“The Jornada del Muerto Basin is a north-south trending basin lying east of and parallel to the Rio Grande Valley in the eastern portions of Socorro and Sierra Counties. It is more than 120 miles long and ranges in width from 12 to 30 miles; its area is about 2,700 square miles. The basin contains significant quantities of groundwater (approximately 11.5 million to 87 million acre-feet); however, to be suitable for most uses, much of the groundwater would require treatment to remove excess salts. Additionally, any withdrawals that would impact the Rio Grande will require the transfer of water rights” (Stephens and Associates 2003: ES-8).

Sierra County also contains 500 of the 6,500 square miles of the Tularosa Basin, which also trends north-south and lies parallel to and east of the Jornada del Muerto. The Tularosa Basin contains small amounts of fresh water (about 2.4 million to 12.9 million acre-feet), primarily in alluvial fans located in the southern part of the basin within the Socorro-Sierra planning region (Stephens and Associates 2003).

The Regional Water Plan concludes that the development of some of these groundwater resources could be undertaken, but significant challenges would be experienced. Site-specific evaluations of potential impairment and connection with the Rio Grande would be required. Also, the undeveloped nature of these basins and their large distance from major water users would be important factors (Stephens and Associates 2003).

Irrigation

The Sierra Soil and Water Conservation District described irrigation resources in its long-range plan:

“Irrigation water is derived principally from the Monticello, Palomas, Animas and Cuchillo Creeks, and from irrigation wells. Snowmelts and rainfall at the higher elevations produces the bulk of water available for irrigation. Water supplies are generally ample during the early part of the irrigation season but are inadequate by the end of June. The availability of water during the rest of the season is largely dependent upon summer rains and wells. This creates a limitation factor to the size of the farms with most of them being 20 acres or less.

Although some vast improvements in irrigation systems have been made in recent years, there is still more needed. Large flows in the main stream frequently damage canals, ditch crossings, and areas of cultivated land and other facilities. As a result, efficient use of the available water supply has not been obtained. Because of small farm units and ownership acreage, the economy of this district is dependent on the proper use, management, protection, and sustained production of our soil and water resources. Flood prevention practices and structures, the ability to store unused runoff water, and the reorganization of community and farm irrigation systems are needed to stabilize agriculture. In order to help prevent flood damage of farmland from creeks, a large amount of work needs to be done on the mainstream channels to stabilize them and keep them off of the cropland.

Realignment of stream channels, improvement of diversion dams for community ditches, planting of shrubs which will protect the stream banks, channels, and ditch bank channels are a few of the practices which can be used to help carry this out” (SSWCD Long Range Plan 2003).

Irrigation districts were formed primarily for the allocation and management of surface water. They are a quasi municipality, or public corporation, and as such it is a political subdivision of the state. Under New Mexico law, irrigation Districts are given broader powers than those granted to water user associations, including annexation, taxation, and

bond issuance. Their statutory authority in the early years of the Twentieth Century was aimed at encouraging collaboration with federal water resource development agencies, such as the Bureau of Reclamation. The Elephant Butte Irrigation District is the only such District in Sierra County.

The initial purpose of the District when it was formed in 1904 was to collect revenues from surface water users to repay the debt owed to the federal government for the construction of the District's irrigation and drainage system. When the District repaid the construction debt in 1971, negotiations began which resulted in the transfer of the operation and maintenance from the Bureau of Reclamation to the District. EBID received a deed 1992, turning over title and ownership to the District's canals, laterals, and drains to the District (EBID 1998).

The District supplies farmers and some residential users below Elephant Butte Reservoir. It serves over 8000 constituents and more than 90,000 acres through its network of diversion dams, canals, laterals, and drains. Its primary service area is the Rincon and Mesilla Valleys. It has served agricultural purposes until the last several years, when residential and urban water uses have been served. This is accomplished through leases to municipalities and the District retains water rights. However, its board remains committed primarily to agricultural uses (EBID 1998).

In Sierra County, about half of the 9,000 surface-water-irrigated acres are served by EBID and the remainder by the acequias (ditch associations) located along the drainages on the east slopes of the Black Range (Stephens and Associates 2003: 6-15).

Acequias

Although the State ostensibly owns all the water in New Mexico, *acequias* understand that they have special rights because of their historical precedence. The perception of *acequias* members is that their water rights are "grandfathered in" because they were created before the State was established. Although *acequias* are based on tradition, the New Mexico legislature has statutorily recognized their authority and spelled out certain provisions for their function and operation.

The New Mexico Acequia Association is a statewide organization of *acequias* and regional associations of *acequias*. The mission of the NMAA is to ensure the continued survival of rural, traditional communities in New Mexico by protecting the historic water rights of the *acequias* through community education, community organizing and policy advocacy.

"An *acequia* is an irrigation ditch and, in New Mexico, an acequia also refers to a centuries-old system of communal management of water and to the community of farmers that cooperatively maintain the ditch and distribute irrigation water. *Acequias* formed the basis for settlement of New Mexico's Indo-Hispano communities between two and four hundred years ago and continue to be vital to

the cultural and economic survival of the traditional communities of New Mexico” (From association website, www.acequiaweb.org).

As of 2004, there were five *acequia* systems operating in Sierra County:

1. Las Animas
2. Palomas Community Ditch Association
3. San Miguel Community Ditch Association
4. Cuchillo Community Ditch Association
5. Monticello Community Ditch Association

Each *acequia* is self-governed by an individual board of directors elected for 2 year terms. The *mayordomo* is the ditch boss, an elected person that ensures that water is distributed properly and that everyone does his or her fair share of labor in the maintenance of the system. *Acequias* must abide by statewide bylaws. The *acequias* manage both groundwater pumped from wells (regulated by the Environment Department) and by surface flow, created by springs and snowmelt. Users are allowed three acre-feet per year. Every irrigation season, each member gets so many hours of water flow to his or her property on a two-week rotation. *Acequia* rights can and often are sold off and a piece of property may not have access to water.

Domestic Water Supply

Sierra County has two Mutual Domestic water associations, as permitted by law, one in Garfield and the other in Hillsboro. The water associations pay the state Gross Receipts Tax on a per gallon basis.

The water association in Hillsboro is a nonprofit corporation run by a board. It is preparing a 40-year comprehensive water plan now, to be completed by November, 2005, in order to anticipate future needs and protect domestic wells. Three wells are in their system that are chlorinated and water is piped to members within Hillsboro, excluding Happy Flats. If members leave the association, they must drill their own wells. Most people in Hillsboro have their own wells and typically use them for irrigation. Domestic wells have irrigation rights and rights to three acre-feet per year. The association has two storage tanks. Bacteria are tested for monthly and lead and copper are tested for yearly. A radiologist tests for uranium and radon. The water system is regulated by the New Mexico Environment Department.

The Garfield Mutual Domestic Water Association provides water for the area below Percha Dam, generally south from the intersection of Highway 187 and Interstate 25; twenty-four hydrants and 5 wells make up the system (Wildland Urban Interface Team 2005). It is owned by its 800 members, most of who are in Doña Ana County, and is committed to serving the water needs of the public in its area. With the growth in Arrey, they are serving increasing numbers of people in Sierra County. The association does not serve agricultural needs except some of the chili plants and onion sheds.

New Mexico Rural Water Association (www.NMRWA.org) is staffed by grant money and gives technical support for drinking water and waste issues. Elephant Butte joined the organization in 2005 (Sierra County Sentinel, 4/13/05)

The Lakeshore City Sanitation District operates a domestic water supply system on Elephant Butte Reservoir lands that was licensed in 1963 with no expiration date. The district also received a license to maintain a domestic water supply system to the Hot Springs Landing area in 1973 that expires in 2013 (BOR 2004).

At the Hot Springs Landing Lease Lot area, community wells are the most common source of potable water, followed by cooperative wells and private wells. Well depth ranges from 80-200 feet and the average depth is 163 feet. State Parks operates a community well at the Caballo Lease Lot area that is the source of local potable water. BOR research showed the groundwater levels near the two reservoirs are shallow, groundwater flow is rapid, and flow is towards the reservoirs. The concern is that the shallow water depths could allow wastewater from the lease lot septic systems to mingle with groundwater before the wastewater has been adequately treated. In fact, “the groundwater investigation found fecal coliform bacteria in two of four groundwater samples; one of these samples had a concentration at the limit for primary contact recreation as set by the NMED/SWQB [State of New Mexico Environment Department, Surface Water Quality Bureau]” (BOR 2004).

A list of the water providers within Sierra County is provided in Table 5.1., along with population served, water rights, and consumptive use.

Figure 5.2:
Water Storage Tank With Public Art Near the Library



Table 5.1:
Water Providers in Sierra County

Water System Name	Category of Water Provision	Population	Water Right Diversion (ac-ft)	Most Recent Total Consumptive Use (ac-ft)
Hillsboro MDWCA	Public Water Supply	192	224	13.9
Lakeshore Sanitation District	Public Water Supply	1,100	192	108.6
National Utilities	Public Water Supply	2,980	1,120	156.4
Desert Aire Water Company	Public Water Supply	55	--	9.4
City of Truth or Consequences	Public Water Supply	7,816	2,742	2,056.6
Caballo Lake State Park – Leased Lots	Commercial	120	--	9.0
Caballo Lakeside Campground	Commercial	25	--	6.2
Caballo Riverside Camp Ground	Commercial	25	--	9.8
Elephant Butte State Park	Commercial	50	--	2.0
Bureau of Reclamation	Domestic, self-supplied	25	--	0.8
Caballo Dairy LLC	Livestock	90	--	217.3
Center Court RV Park	Commercial	100	--	3.9
Cuchillo Café	Commercial	26	--	0.8
Lakeside Bait and Tackle	Commercial	25	--	0.8
Lakeview KOA	Commercial	120	--	4.7
Monticello North Park	Commercial	25	--	1.0
Monticello RV Park	Commercial	100	--	3.9
Percha Dam State Park	Commercial	25	--	1.5
Rock Canyon Marina	Commercial	33	--	1.0

Source: Stephens and Associates 2003: 6-8

Wells

Residents of the unincorporated areas of Sierra County depend upon wells for their water source. Residents wishing to drill a well in the State of New Mexico are required to submit an application to the State Engineer's Office (SEO). Figure 5.3 indicates that there are 4461 well permits issued in Sierra County. The intent to drill a well must be advertised in the local newspapers for three weeks. If the application is challenged, the concerns raised must be evaluated when the Engineer's Office evaluates the impacts on the proposed well using modeling projections. If the SEO determines that the proposed well will create an "impairment," the permit is rejected.

The Engineer's Office monitors data by groundwater basin, so information on the number of wells drilled, location of wells, and trends in well drilling were not available by county. The District 4 office in Las Cruces reported a fair amount of well drilling in southern Sierra County where older wells drilled in the 1950s are collapsing, leading landowners to apply for new well drilling permits.

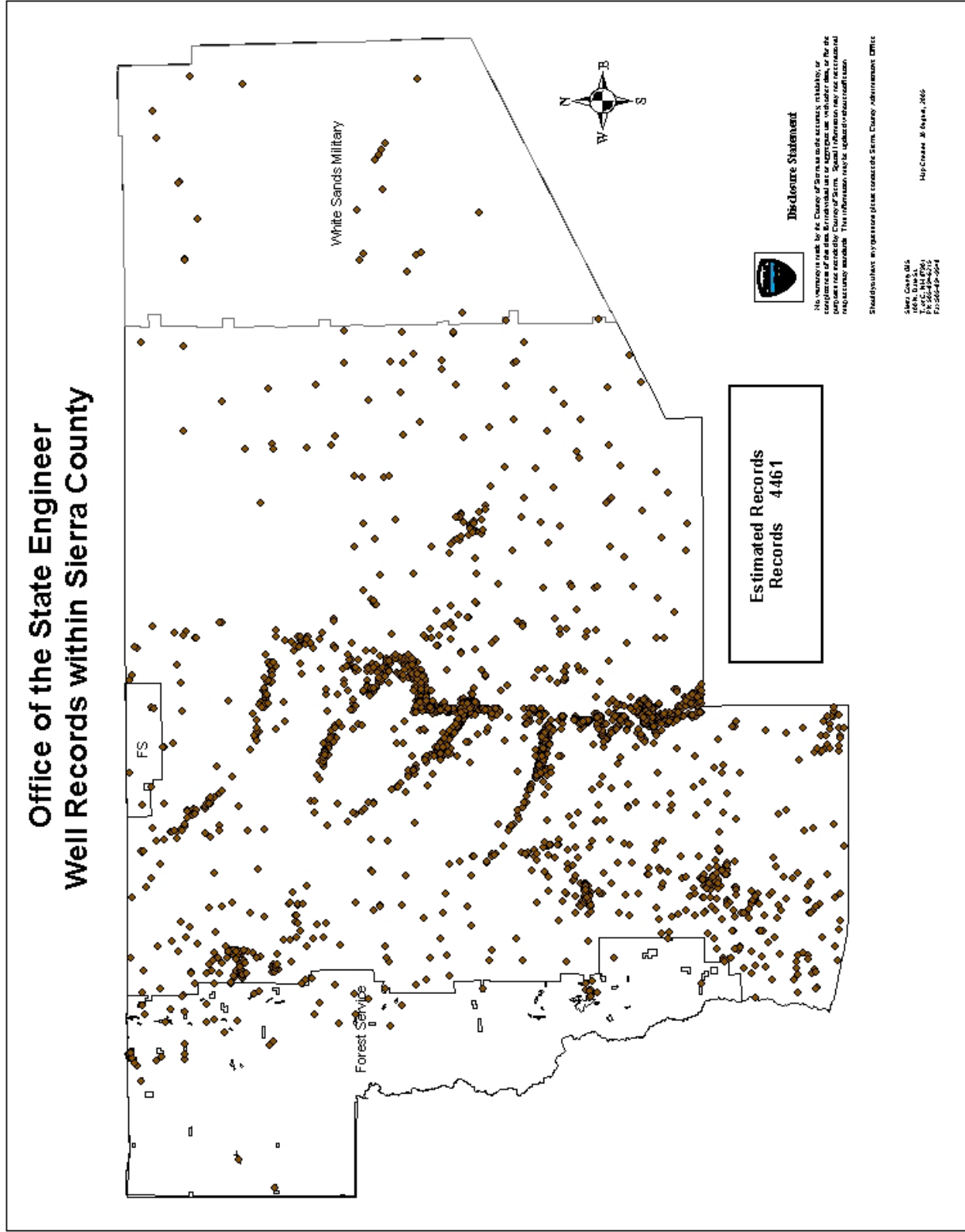
In December, 2004, the State Engineer issued an order that all wells in the Underground Water Basins of Hot Springs, Las Animas, and the Lower Rio Grande must be metered by March 2006. The responsibility, including costs, is the landowners'. The intent of the order is to better understand the impacts of wells on water resources, and to monitor how much water is really being diverted from the aquifers. It is a way to quantify the water rights. A new Water Master office is being created with responsibility to ensure metering. The well owners must read the meters and submit the results to the Engineer's Office, which will conduct random spot checks to assure accuracy. Residents who do not install meters or who use water beyond their allocation will be issued a compliance order. The order affects between 6,000 and 10,000 wells in the area. Wells are exempted that are solely for single household use or irrigation of one acre of noncommercial trees, lawn or garden, or are used solely for water livestock.

The State Water Plan calls for strategies for taking inventory of existing water wells and determining appropriate disposition of unused wells (OSE 2003: 78).

Flooding

About 80% of the deeded land in Sierra County lies within major drainages. Around 50% of the inhabitants live within the 50-year flood zone, where the land is most fertile and wet, naturally. The entire community of Truth or Consequences is in the flood plain. Flood control projects can cost from \$1-3 million per mile. The use of federal monies requires a favorable cost/benefit ratio—that is a million dollar project must be related to a million dollar property. These conditions are often difficult to meet in Sierra County so federal support has difficult to find (personal communication, Flood Director, May, 2005).

Figure 5.3: Well Records Within Sierra County



“Sierra County has a complex system of arroyos, and this, combined with very nonporous soil, has led to problems with flash floods and flooding due to rainfall runoff. The area averages about 315 days of sunshine per year, and thus most of the 10-12 annual inches of precipitation occurs within a very short timeframe, intensifying the flooding programs... Extensive flooding also occurs typically in the spring along the Rio Grande, because of snowmelt from the mountains of Colorado” (NM Flood History 2003: 65).

The Flood Control Program is described below.

Trends, Plans and Programs

Water Supply

The Socorro-Sierra Regional Water Plan estimated that the two-county region’s population would grow by 70% to reach approximately 60,000 by 2040 (Stephens and Associates 2003: ES-8). Current water demands were analyzed for the water use categories listed in Table 5.2, below. Examining the time period from 1975-2000, the analysis found that water uses for all of the categories were relatively stable except for municipal and rural public water systems, which showed slow growth in line with historical population growth. As expected, surface water and groundwater depletion for irrigated agriculture varied over time, presumably in concert with annual precipitation variability, but no clear increasing or decreasing trend was apparent in agriculture.

Table 5.2:
Categories of Water Use With and Without Elephant Butte and Caballo Evaporation

Category of Water Use	Percentage of Use with Elephant Butte and Caballo Reservoir Evaporation	Percentage of Use without Elephant Butte and Caballo Reservoir Evaporation
Domestic/Public Supply	0.6	1.0
Irrigated Agriculture	16.6	31.2
Livestock	0.4	0.7
Commercial	0.3	0.5
Mining	<0.1	<0.1
Industrial	<0.1	<0.1
Reservoir and open water evaporation	48.5	3.0
Riparian evapotranspiration	33.7	63.4

Source: Stephens and Associates 2003: ES-10.

In the two-county planning region, the plan made these conclusions about expected future demand in the primary water use categories:

- “A total of 3,900 ac-ft/yr is currently used to meet municipal, commercial, and domestic needs, and this demand is expected to grow by 5,200 ac-ft/yr to 9,100 ac-ft/yr in 2040.

- Agricultural diversion demands are about 200,000 ac-ft/yr, or 78,950 ac-ft/yr consumptive use, 96% of which is derived from surface water. Irrigated agriculture is projected to remain consistent with current levels over the 40-year planning period.
- Livestock uses about 3,200 ac-ft/yr and is not expected to increase over the next 40 years.
- Reservoir evaporation varies from year to year depending on the surface area of the reservoirs, ranging from about 100,000 ac-ft/yr to almost 300,000 ac-ft/yr.
- Riparian evapotranspiration is estimated to deplete about 160,000 ac-ft/yr in the planning region.” (Stephens and Associates 2003: ES-9)

Ability of Supplies to Meet Demand

The estimated water supply available to the two-county region, and the projected demand in the region were compared in the Regional Water Plan to determine a “water budget,” an accounting of inflows and depletions in the water system. Full satisfaction of all human and natural (evaporation, for example) demands would result in a net water deficit of about 77,900 acre-feet per year. Moreover, the water budget represents only the average annual budget—actual supplies vary from year to year. The Regional Water Plan determined that supply would fall short of meeting demand by 194,000 acre-feet in a low-flow year (calculated as the 10th percentile year, or year with annual flow lower than 90% of all annual flows measured over the long-term). The Plan comes to the following conclusion:

“The Rio Grande, including the aquifers that are connected to this river, is a fully appropriated system. Endangered species and Rio Grande Compact obligations place significant constraints on the system. Though demands in the region have mostly been met with available supplies on the Rio Grande, this condition will change over multi-year drought periods, such as the one currently ongoing, when upstream storage is insufficient to supply the needs of all the users on the Rio Grande” (Stephens and Associates 2003: ES-11).

State Water Plan 2003

New Mexico created a State Water Plan in 2003 through the office of the State Engineer and the Interstate Stream Commission. The plan attempts to balance the many demands on water, including the protection and retention of water rights and provisions for future growth. In addition to meeting its interstate water compact obligations, the State is obliged to enforce the provisions of federal water law, such as the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the Safe Drinking Water Act, among others. The State Plan also gives explicit support to the Regional Water Plans, which have more detail and policy direction.

“Estimating New Mexico’s potentially available ground water supply is also difficult. The volume of ground water stored in aquifers can be and has been estimated for many of the State’s aquifer systems, but these estimates are often highly uncertain due to data limitations. In addition, total storage does not equate to available supply, because, for example, not all the water stored in the aquifer is potable (fresh), because the aquifer character does not allow quick release of water from storage, and because wells cannot physically extract all the ground water stored in an aquifer” (Office of State Engineer 2003: 26).

Residents voiced concern about the State of New Mexico undertaking a metering program with all water wells. The State Water Plan (OSE 2003) favors the measurement of New Mexico’s water supply and water uses as key to active water resource management. In the past, metering has been done in response to court orders or in response to crisis:

“For example, almost all water diversions in the Lower Pecos River Basin are being measured in compliance with court orders. In this case, local authorities maintain the measurement devices, while OSE employees read the meters and enter data in the WATERS database. In some areas, excessive diversions noted through metering require replacement of the unauthorized water. Roswell artesian aquifer users report that the single most important factor in the substantially reduced total withdrawals from this aquifer and recovery of their water table was the insistence on measuring diversions and limiting them to the amounts for which water rights are held” (OSE 2003: 76).

The Socorro-Sierra Regional Water Plan

The Socorro-Sierra Regional Water Plan was prepared under the auspices of the Socorro Soil and Water Conservation District in 2003. The two-county water-planning region is one of 16 in the State which developed similar plans. The purpose of the plan was to assess the available supply of surface and groundwater, and to identify methods for meeting the projected demand and protecting the water resources through conservation, water resources management, and protection of the quality and quantity of existing supplies for future use within the region, including Sierra County (Stephens and Associates 2003). The results of the Regional Water Plan are reported throughout this chapter, and its recommendations are carried forward in the policy section.

Sierra County Water Ordinances

Two Sierra County ordinances pertain to water, the Interim Land Use Policy of Sierra County (No. 91-001), and the flood control ordinance, #96-994.

The first, adopted in 1991, includes the following provisions related to water:

1. “The protection of existing water rights and water uses within the County is of primary importance to the County’s economic and cultural well-being. Therefore, transfers in water use should be carefully considered in relationship to the history, traditions, and culture of Sierra County. Any federally proposed designation of Wild and Scenic Rivers and all federal policies regarding riparian management in Sierra County shall be coordinated with the County Commission and shall comply with all County water use plans. In addition, Sierra County shall prepare plans for the protection of all aquatic Threatened and Endangered species within its boundaries. Federal agencies managing waterways and wetlands containing such species shall coordinate their management activities and plans with the County Commission.
2. Sierra County shall promote or pursue development of water markets for existing as well as future water rights for agricultural, municipal, industrial, and domestic purposes. In addition, Sierra County shall explore and promote alternative uses of water, including but not limited to recreation and hydroelectric power.
3. Sierra County shall promote and shall be actively engaged in providing opportunity for the development of water-based recreation within the County.
4. Sierra County shall initiate a process for establishing a geologic, hydrologic biologic database within the county. The County shall acquire, develop, and synthesize alone or in coordination with other government agencies drilling information, water well testing information, flood prone information, riparian vegetation information and all other information deemed necessary by the County.
5. The Sierra County government shall be notified of all state, interstate and federal actions that have any impact on the water of the County prior to such actions being initiated. In addition, such proposed actions, including federally proposed Wild and Scenic River designations, shall be coordinated with the Sierra County Commission and the County water and land use plans prior to adoption and implementation. It is the intent of the County to assist federal and state agencies in the planning and management of the County’s natural, cultural, and economic resources.
6. Sierra County recognizes the principles contained in the State Water Law as they exist at this time and accepts U.S. vs The State of New Mexico, 438 US 696 57 L Ed 2d 1052, 1978, as the basis for water use planning.
7. Sierra County shall develop its water use policy to ensure both water quantity and water quality and to ensure that such policy does not adversely impact water users outside the County.
8. Sierra County shall develop Wild and Scenic River Designations of its own design and shall require full federal compliance in the acceptance and

enforcement of riparian management plans in concert and coordination with landowners, ranchers, and the appropriate state and federal agencies.”

The second County ordinance dealing with water (#96-994) is entitled “An ordinance providing for flood damage prevention and repealing all prior flood prevention ordinances,” is authorized by New Mexico statutes 3-21-1 NMSA 1978, delegating the responsibility of local governmental units to adopt regulations designed to minimize flood losses. The ordinance seeks to accomplish its mission through the following methods:

1. Restrict or prohibit uses that are dangerous to health, safety or property in times of flood, or cause excessive increases in flood heights or velocities;
2. Requires that uses vulnerable to floods, including facilities which serve such uses, be protected against flood damage at the time of initial construction;
3. Control the alteration of natural floodplains, stream channels, and natural protective barriers, which are involved in the accommodation of flood waters;
4. Control filling, grading, dredging and other development which may increase flood damage;
5. Prevent or regulate the construction of flood barriers which will naturally divert floodwaters or which may increase flood hazards to other lands.

While the Flood Commission office has responsibility to manage water flow, the County is required to have a flood plain manager. In Sierra County, this person is the Project Manager for the County. This person is responsible for regulations and decisions about building and other development that are jeopardized by possible flood events, as well as meeting the requirements of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) so that residents qualify for floodplain insurance. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) determines areas of special flood hazard, the means by which an area will qualify for flood insurance, and accompanied by maps. A Development Permit is issued by the Floodplain Administrator (the Project Manager in Sierra County). The County has authority to regulate building and zoning under these statutes.

The Flood Control Program

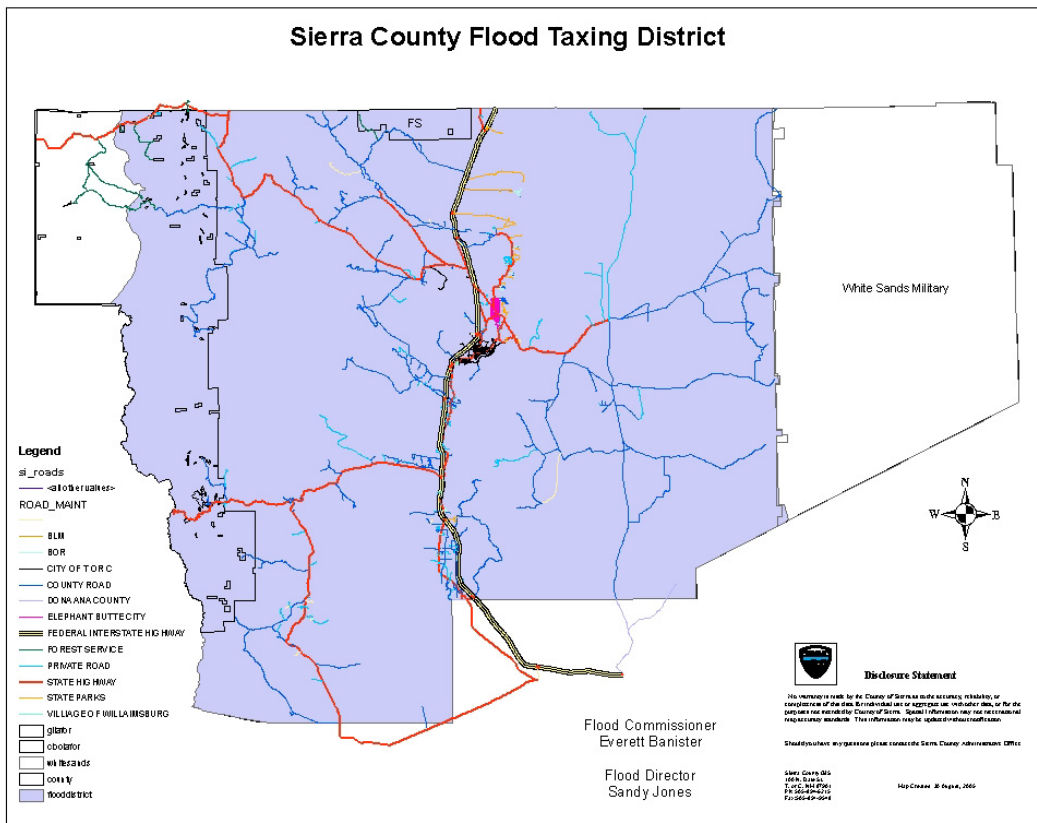
The Flood Control Program of Sierra County is run by the Flood Commission, whose commissioner is appointed by the Governor and requested by the Board of Commissioners. It is funded through property tax revenues (1.5 mil), and the program typically has about \$250,000 budget per year. Figure 5.4 below shows the Flood Taxing District in Sierra County.

The Flood Director implements the programs of the Flood Commission, especially flood control projects. In recent years, this office instituted a program called Common Ground, intended to be an objective set of indicators to measure flood risk. Nominations for flood control projects are prioritized on the basis of these indicators. In this way, residents can see where their area is on the list and when particular projects are slated for

implementation. The five criteria used to evaluate possible flood control projects, ranked according to importance, are:

1. Life and safety.
2. Potential loss of property.
3. Potential property value.
4. Environmental value.
5. Public support.

Figure 5.4:



The office works with other collaborative and regulatory agencies including Natural Resource Conservation Services, the Bureau of Reclamation, the Corps of Engineers (COE—regulator), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA—stormwater pollution prevention)

A key initiative of the Flood Commission is the acquiring of a “programmatic 404 permit” from COE, which would expedite and streamline local projects. COE is responsible for administering the Clean Water Act. Section 404 of that Act authorizes the Corps to regulate discharge into U.S. waterways. It regulates dredge material in arroyos, streams, wetlands and other waterways. COE has authority over water on public, private,

and tribal lands. The Corps has both Permit and Enforcement Programs. In the last seven years, relations with Sierra County have been very positive through joint efforts on a number of flood control projects, which have fostered widespread public involvement and broad public support.

With the completion of the programmatic 404 permit, a landowner will be saved the burden of applying for a 404 permit for small-scale activity. Rather, the programmatic permit was scaled to include a wide number of pending projects, so that just a single permit would be required.

The Clean Water Act specifies that the COE regulates below the “ordinary high water mark” while the EPA does a 404 permit above that mark through its Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP). This permit is also pending in Sierra County.

Figure 5.6 on the following page shows the location of the flood control projects in Sierra County that are covered by the 404 County-Wide Programmatic Permit for Levee Repairs. Table 5.3 lists these projects by name and describes their location.

Figure 5.5:
Flood Control Project South of Placitas



Figure 5.6:

Office of the Sierra County Flood Commissioner
404 County-Wide Programmatic Permit for Levee Repairs

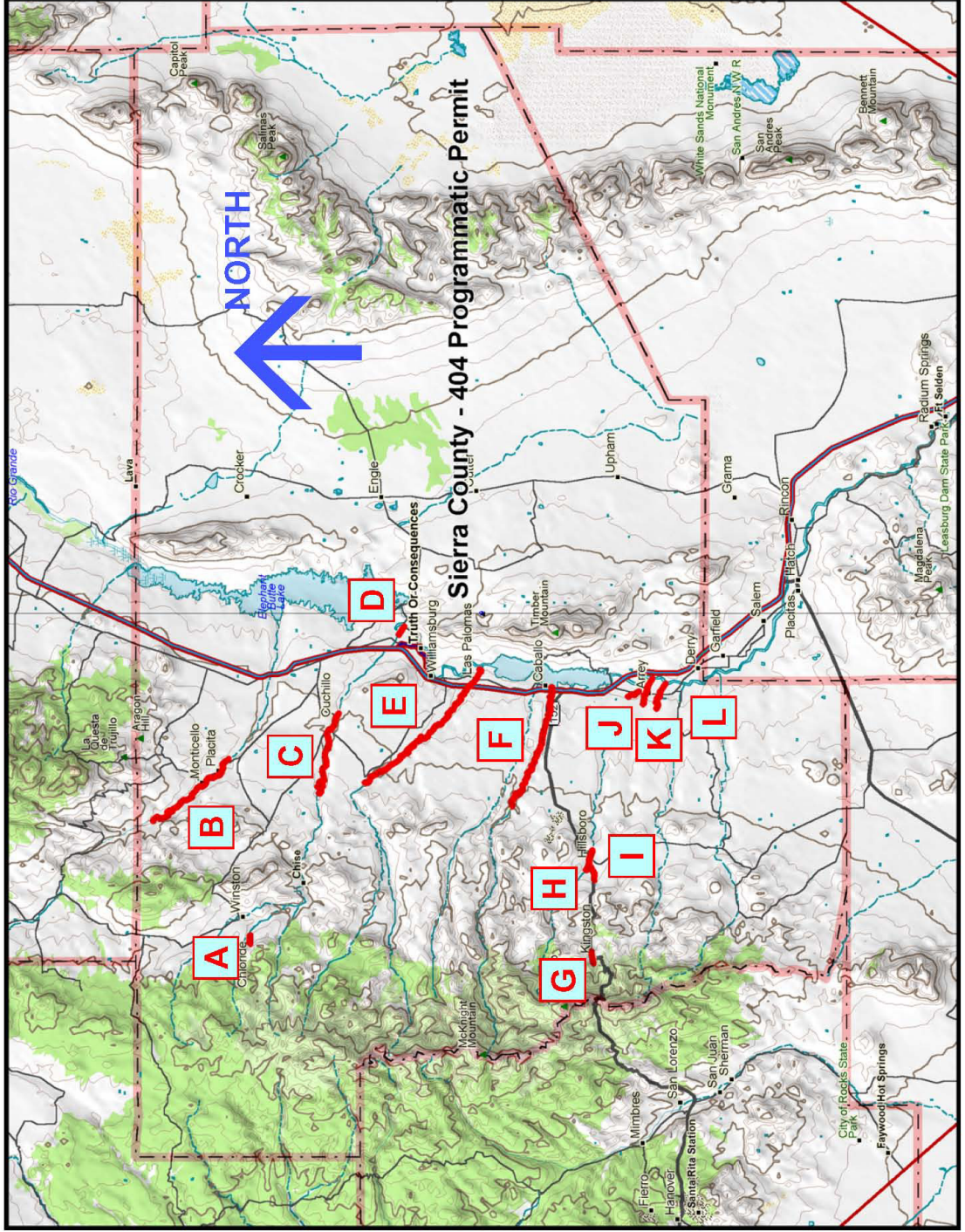


Table 5.3:

Office of the Sierra County Flood Commissioner
404 County-Wide Programmatic Permit for Levee Repairs

Location Reference Key	Arroyo Name	USGS 7.5 Minute Quad Name (NM)	General Location	Wetlands Present? (Yes or no)	Reach Length (miles)	Starting Coordinates		Ending Coordinates		Est. Disturbed Area (acres)	Est. Fill Vol. Above Normal Highwater Mark (C/Y)
						Latitude WGS84	Longitude WGS84	Latitude WGS84	Longitude WGS84		
A	Chloride Creek	Winston	THROUGH the Town of Cuchillo	NO	0.74	N33° 20' 15.38"	W107° 41' 10.95"	N33° 20' 16.15"	W107° 40' 27.75"	4	6,799
B	Alamosa River	Jaralosa Mountain, Monticello, and Priest Tank	FROM: 5.15 miles NW of Town of Monticello TO: 1.19 miles SE of Town of Placitas	NO	9.67	N33° 27' 25.88"	W107° 30' 21.09"	N33° 21' 51.47"	W107° 24' 54.08"	53	88,840
C	Cuchillo Creek	Priest Tank, Williamsburg NW, and Cuchillo	FROM: 6.82 miles NW of Town of Cuchillo TO: 0.72 miles SE of Town of Cuchillo	NO	8.67	N33° 15' 11.02"	W107° 27' 57.01"	N33° 13' 44.89"	W107° 20' 54.81"	47	79,653
D	Cuchillo Creek	Elephant Butte	FROM: 0.82 miles NW of confluence with Rio Grande TO: Confluence with Rio Grande	YES	0.82	N33° 06' 17.86"	W107° 13' 57.46"	N33° 08' 53.96"	W107° 13' 15.66"	4	7,534
E	Palomas Creek	Williamsburg NW, Saldone Tank, and Williamsburg	FROM: 12.16 miles NW of Interstate 25 TO: 1.61 miles SE of Interstate 25	NO	15.82	N33° 11' 46.63"	W107° 27' 0.48"	N33° 03' 21.73"	W107° 17' 0.99"	86	145,342
F	Animas Creek	Saldone Tank, Skute Stone Arroyo, and Caballo	FROM: 10.56 miles NW of Interstate 25 TO: 0.20 miles SE of Interstate 25	NO	12.39	N33° 00' 57.28"	W107° 29' 4.27"	N32° 56' 3.09"	W107° 18' 35.08"	68	113,829
G	Middle Percha Creek	Kingston	THROUGH the Town of Kingston	YES	1.02	N32° 54' 59.23"	W107° 42' 56.27"	N32° 55' 6.73"	W107° 41' 55.45"	6	9,371
H	Percha Creek	Hillsboro	THROUGH the Town of Hillsboro	YES	2.81	N32° 54' 50.59"	W107° 33' 42.10"	N32° 55' 3.49"	W107° 32' 56.48"	15	25,816
I	North Percha Creek	Hillsboro	NORTH of the Town of Hillsboro	YES	0.59	N32° 59' 31.22"	W107° 34' 42.12"	N32° 55' 17.76"	W107° 34' 12.86"	3	5,420
J	Nordstrom Arroyo	Garfield	NORTH of the Town of Arrey	NO	1.11	N32° 52' 25.83"	W107° 19' 0.27"	N32° 51' 36.54"	W107° 19' 0.27"	6	10,198
K	Trujillo Canyon	Garfield	THROUGH of the Town of Arrey	NO	2.38	N32° 51' 18.82"	W107° 20' 6.11"	N32° 50' 37.37"	W107° 17' 50.75"	13	21,866
L	Montoya Arroyo	Garfield	SOUTH of the Town of Arrey	NO	2.56	N32° 50' 20.59"	W107° 20' 29.46"	N32° 49' 39.43"	W107° 19' 18.35"	14	23,519
TOTALS										320	538,186

DESCRIPTION OF THE OVERALL SCOPE OF THE PROJECT AND THE REASON FOR THE PROJECT:

The Office of the Sierra County Flood Commissioner has a duty and responsibility to the public to maintain arroyo levees to project life, health, safety, and property from severe impacts due to recurring floods at various locations throughout Sierra County. The scope of the work includes heavy equipment work, erosion control, and revegetation to reinforce, repair, restore and otherwise maintain levee systems within existing arroyos as shown on the location map for Sierra County and as summarized in the above project listing.

Citizen Direction

Generally, residents were quite worried about water resources but they did not have much information. Particularly with the drought of the last several years, residents noted that traditional springs had dried up, though some are beginning to flow again. There is a widespread, generalized concern that there will not be enough water for new residents coming into the County. Alternately, many people shared the concern that water is all politics and the “deals” between high-level politicians either are happening or could happen at any moment.

“The long-term water picture is a big unknown.” [Countywide]

“No water to Santa Fe!” [Very widespread concern]

“Protect the water so that it is not bought up by Cruces.”

“My spring is threatened by government action. BLM says they found the leopard frog up there but it’s never been around before. They talk about endangered species but what’s that? My family was here before this was a state.”

“We were promised diversion dam and piping 5 years ago but nothing has happened yet.”

“The City [of TorC] drilled a well south of here without telling anyone. They are trying to get out water for the airport.” [Cuchillo]

Water Quantity

“Subdivisions are taking the water and there is not enough.”

“Subdivisions are never turned down, they don’t have to show they have water.”

“There is no water for new development. Springs are going dry.” [Winston]

“What will happen to water rights as big ranches are broken up?” [Hillsboro]

“How are the 55 lots holders at Caballo Lake going to get access to water? State Parks says that because lots are now private, they are not allowed to lease them water.” [Lake Area residents]

“The State is now requiring meters on wells, what’s that about? I think if we don’t use the water we’re entitled to that they will take it and sell it.” {Caballo]

Conservation

“Improve water conservation. Make it mean something!” [Kingston]

“We want our local and state governments to be more supportive and proactive around water conservation.” [Lake Area]

“Xeriscape landscaping is appropriate and effective in reducing outdoor water needs for residential landscaping.” [Kingston]

Flood Control

“We’ve got to do more for flood controls. There are so many families living next to arroyos who will be in trouble. The County is doing what they can.” [Las Palomas]

“About 85% of the people here live along the creek. There is a lot of concern about flooding.” [Las Palomas]

“I lost two cuttings of alfalfa to flooding a couple years ago. I’ve been trying to get the County to help me with flooding for years, and so far I have not had any luck.” [Las Palomas]

“We live in such a large flood plain and we fix our problems when needed. We just learn to live with it because it is our choice to be here.” [Monticello]

“The flood control project done here needs fixing. There is a 90° curve that has to be straightened.” [Monticello]

“There are a large number of areas nearby prone to flooding.” [Lake Area resident]

“This is a buyer-beware County. Although there are ordinances in place to regulate flood risk, they are not enforced. There is no willingness with the board [of County Commissioners] to enforce.” [Resident]

Goals, Objectives and Strategies

Goal 24. Sierra County will retain its existing policies related to water contained in the Interim Land Use Policy (Ordinance No. 91-001).

Goal 25. As per the State Water Plan (OSE 2003), Sierra County will promote river riparian and watershed restoration that focuses on protecting the water supply and improving water quality.

Goal 26. Sierra County will support the State Water Plan, which calls for strategies for taking inventory of existing water wells and determining appropriate disposition of unused wells (OSE 2003: 78).

Goal 27. Sierra County will incorporate the policy recommendations of the Socorro-Sierra Regional Water Plan, specifically,

Objective 27.a. “Agricultural water conservation. Agriculture is a large use sector in the region, and efforts to use agricultural water efficiently are becoming increasingly important. During drought periods in particular, the region can benefit by being able to more efficiently deliver water to crops. The region considered alternatives related to improving conveyance efficiencies, improving on-farm water management, and controlling brush and weeds along ditches. A comprehensive water conservation plan was developed and is amended to the regional water plan.” (Stephens and Associates 2003: ES-14)

Objective 27.b. “Reduction in riparian evapotranspiration and open water evaporation through removal of exotic species and improvements to the Elephant Butte delta. Because riparian evapotranspiration and open water evaporation are such large components of the region’s water budget, significant savings can be made through these programs. Alternatives considered included removal of exotic vegetation throughout the region, as well as a specific alternative that focused on reducing evaporative losses in the Elephant Butte delta. Though the savings from these alternatives will not result in new water rights that are available for use within the region, they indirectly benefit the region, because to the extent that more water is available to meet Compact delivery and endangered species obligations, supplies for users within the region will be more secure.” (Stephens and Associates 2003: ES-14)

Objective 27.c. “Encouraging retention of water rights in the region. A key issue throughout the Socorro-Sierra planning process has been the need to protect the local economy and values from impacts that could result from transfers of large quantities of water rights out of the planning region. The ability to prevent condemnation of water rights, which could also protect against out-of-region transfers, was also evaluated.” (Stephens and Associates 2003: ES-14)

Strategy 27.c.1. The County should prohibit transfer of water rights outside the County, or at least have a review process to evaluate transfers. To this end, a procedure shall be established so that Sierra County knows when a transfer or sale of water rights takes place.

Strategy 27.c.2. A trust should be established to purchase water rights attached to perennial streams as they come on the market, in order to preserve and improve those riparian areas.

Strategy 27.c.3. The county should take the lead in developing a Sierra County Rio Grande conservancy, which would include representatives from all entities who own or control land adjacent to the river, including the County, all municipalities, State Parks, the BOR, BLM, Sierra Soil and

Water Conservation District, and land owners through which compacts would implement regulations to protect the riparian corridor.

Goal 28. Sierra County shall engage in a coordinated and concerted effort to promote conservation and efficient use of water in all water use sectors as one of the cornerstones of New Mexico’s efforts to meet the State’s present and future water needs” (Policy adopted on behalf of the State by the Office of the State Engineer 2003: 32).

Objective 28.a. Sierra County will undertake awareness and education efforts to foster water conservation practices among Sierra County residents. The Office of the State Engineer showcases brochures from other New Mexico Counties promoting education and wise use of water.

Objective 28.b. Water conservation measures should be integrated into individual lot and subdivision requirements, including appropriate building codes, as well as commercial development requirements.

Objective 28.c. Sierra County will create incentives for conservation.

Objective 28.d. Sierra County will explore the creation of additional water associations or water districts where appropriate to promote more reliable and efficient use.

Objective 28.e. Gray water use is now permitted in New Mexico that can be applied to landscape uses, saving 30-40% on water needs. Find ways to educate people about these innovations.

Section Six: Transportation

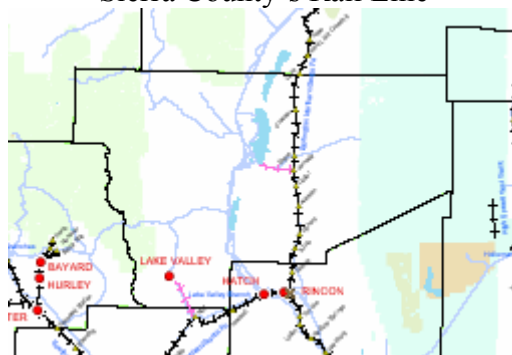
This section creates a Transportation element in the comprehensive plan by describing existing conditions related to transportation, and the trends, programs and policies shaping transportation presently. Citizen direction is summarized, and the section closes with Goals, Objectives, and Strategies.

Existing Conditions

Sierra County is bisected by Interstate 25, which runs north-south through the center of the County. No other public roads provide north-south access in the County. NM 152 is the only paved road that provides access from the communities in Sierra County to adjoining counties to the west. No roads directly link Sierra County to counties to the east. Residents for years have wanted a road to Alamogordo but the presence of the White Sands Missile Range has precluded that. The creation of the missile range eliminated NM51, which provided access between Truth or Consequences and communities to the east. There are no U.S. Highways in Sierra County. Sierra County's commercial, governmental, and cultural center is the City of Truth or Consequences, known throughout the region as "T or C," located near Interstate 25 and the Rio Grande in the central part of the County.

The Burlington-Northern and Santa Fe's railroad provides rail access to the north and south, but it is removed from the Interstate and the County's main communities by about 25 miles (Figure 6.1). There are no rail lines connecting the County to the east or west. The Truth or Consequences Municipal Airport is the only public airport in the County. The airport is capable of landing jets, although the size of the plane is limited by the length of the runway (South Central Regional Planning Organization 2002).

Figure 6.1:
Sierra County's Rail Line



Source: http://nmshtd.state.nm.us/upload/images/Maps/pdf/rail_map_dV9_3.pdf.

The South Central Regional Planning Organization (RPO) reported that the population growth in Sierra County has been concentrated in the unincorporated areas west and south of T or C. Areas of growth have particularly been noted in the Arrey/Derry areas, as well as the dispersed valley communities. A major new development in Sierra County was the incorporation of Elephant Butte in 1998. The highest rates of growth are in the unincorporated areas. The County's transportation system is heavily impacted by significant number of recreation visitors. Weekend traffic peaks more than double the County's population because of visitors to Elephant Butte Lake in the summertime. The County's mild winter weather and the presence of thermal springs make the area a popular winter destination. The impacts of the visitor population include extensive wear on roads and periodic congestion (SCRPO 2002).

Sierra County has had no mass transportation system. Some transportation services have been available through such agencies as maternal Child Health, Ben Archer health Clinic, the Office on Aging, and Council of Governments, and Safe Ride. Transportation is funded for a specific population in these cases, and the level of service can vary from year to year depending on funding. Agencies have not collaborated to create more efficient service and oftentimes their rules prevent their flexibility.

The Sierra County Transportation Initiative developed a comprehensive approach to addressing mass transit needs. The initiative included members from the County's various state and local agencies, as well as individuals from school districts, the business community, the Department of Labor, Western New Mexico University, Sierra Vista Hospital, the three incorporated communities, the TorC Housing Authority, TORCH Foundation (which has since closed), Senior Joint Office on Aging, Department of Human Services, Health and Wellness Alliance, Maternal Child Health, Council of Governments, the Department of Health, and DWI Prevention.

The group points out how lack of transportation affects the poor. With an 18% poverty rate and many language barriers, many people find it impossible to own and operate a vehicle, making job finding and retention a difficult enterprise.

Many low income people do not have cars, making it hard to get to work, get to the doctor, take the kids to school and so on. The van services that are available are all related to particular agencies and the special populations they serve. No one else can use that particular transportation. The SSCOG has a work van for migrant workers in the Arrey area to Hatch, but not available for other uses. The Sierra County Transportation Initiative was developed to address the problem. When the van starts running (projected to be in January, 2006), it will stop at regular bus stops at regular times throughout the week.

Working through the South Central Council of Governments, the group applied to the State for money to start a public transportation service. Funded through the New Mexico Department of Transportation, service is projected to begin in January, 2006. Initially, this service will serve Elephant Butte, Truth or Consequences, and perhaps Williamsburg.

It is hoped that the service would eventually be County-wide (<http://www.sierracounty.net>; Sierra Community Council 2005).

High seasonal traffic loads generated by recreational use of the Elephant Butte and Caballo Lakes are important considerations in developing a transportation plan. The recreational corridors, NM195 and the north access to Elephant Butte Lake, along with the section of NM181 that serves the airport, are the most heavily traveled areas of the County (SCRPO 2002).

Sierra County has 587 miles of roads (Figure 6.2). The County Road Department is divided into three districts, each with a “blade” (road grader), which manages about 200 miles of roads each. With a staff of ten, including two mechanics and two office staff, work crews grade the roads, put in culverts, and fix potholes. Some roads are chip-sealed for better surfaces. Sometimes cattle guards are put in, some on a donated basis. Surveys are made each year of the high priority areas, and the office responds to complaints, as it is able.

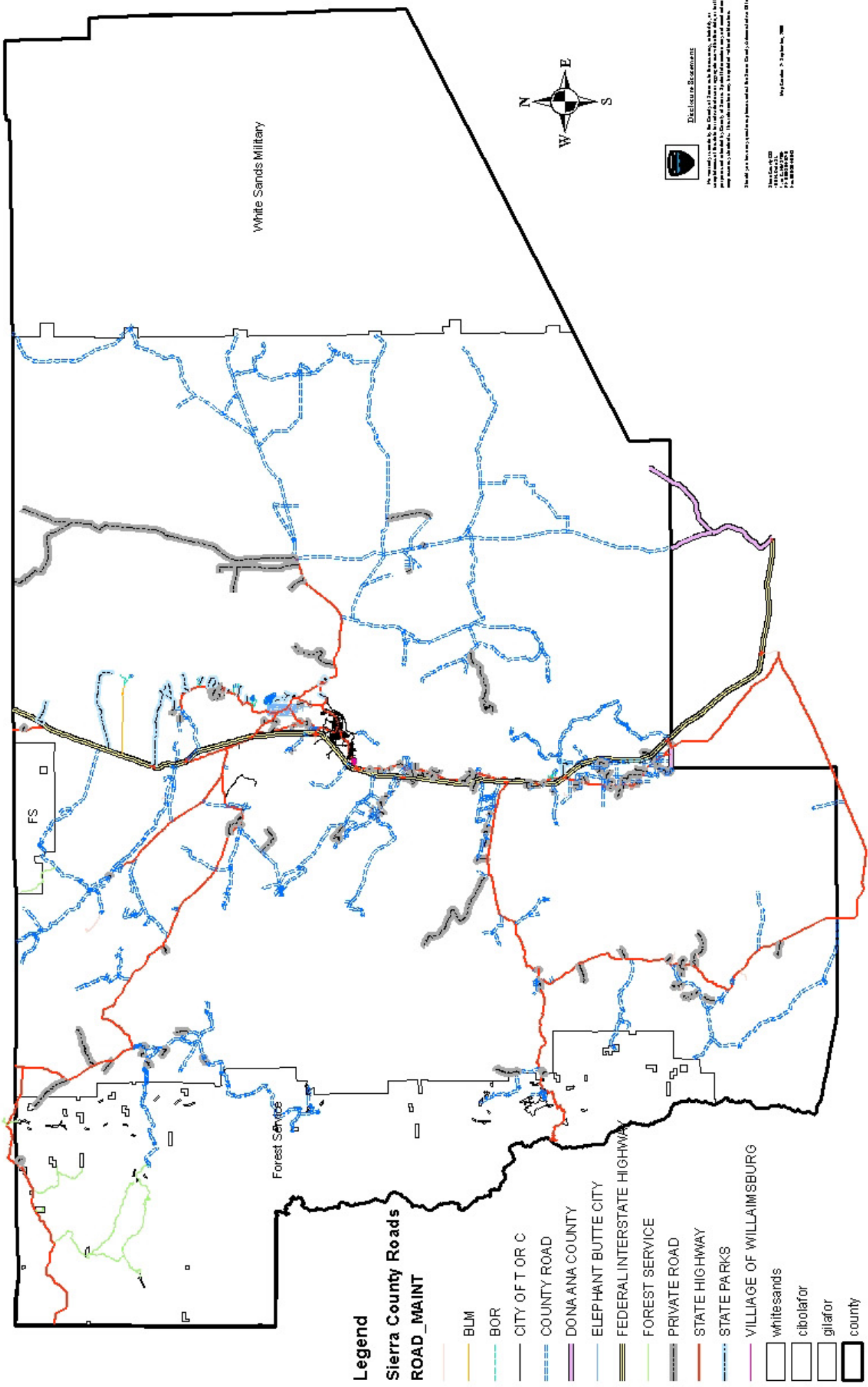
The current road system on the Gila National Forest consists of 7,431 miles, of which 5,797 miles are under Forest Service jurisdiction. Over the past 15 years, approximately 390 miles of road on the Gila Forest have been decommissioned for the benefit of wildlife and watershed. Decommissioning methods include ripped, scarified, seeded and/or water-bared. Recently, over 724 miles of Forest Service roads in the Gila National Forest were studied. Of these miles, 302 were determined to be at high risk for wildfire, or to wildlife, watersheds or cultural resources (Gila National Forest n.d.)

Trends, Plans and Programs

Trends

As population projections show (Section Eight), Sierra County is likely to continue its steady rate of growth. The impacts of these increases will depend on the location of growth. Current growth patterns are to the south and west of Truth or Consequences. North of T or C is poised for growth as well. The triangle created by the three incorporated communities will experience a large portion of future growth, as well as the Derry and Arrey area. New Mexico Highways, NM 195, NM 181, and NM 152 will be impacted more than other roads in Sierra County. “These roads serve as the primary or very important secondary accesses to existing community centers. They will require widening, curve profile changes, safety improvements, and increased signage” (SCRPO 2002: 14).

Figure 6.2: The Roads of Sierra County



Transportation Planning

The Federal Highway Administration (FHA) requires states to develop twenty-year plans. The New Mexico Department of Transportation (formerly the NM State Highway and Transportation Department) has elected to use Regional Planning Organizations (RPOs) to establish local and regional goals and priorities for inclusion in its Plan. There are seven RPOs in the state. The South Central RPO conducted public meetings and determined the priorities for Sierra County transportation projects. The RPOs planning process identified widespread interest in a mass transit system in Sierra County to serve the residents of Truth or Consequences, Williamsburg and Elephant Butte and its draft plan called for its development (SCRPO 2002).

The majority of funds under the existing funding structure will be allocated through the Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) process. Those funds are applied to corridor studies, bridge replacement and repair, interchange replacement and repair, road re-alignment and improvements, and safety and enhancement projects. Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) are used for planning studies and to develop infrastructure. Local bonds and taxes are used for matching funds to establish mass transit systems and for matching funds in CDBG programs. New Mexico Parks Department funds are used for planning and internal road improvements associated with NM 195, 195P, and NM 282 corridor and loop (SCRPO 2002).

The Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) is the planning process by which federal funds are channeled to New Mexico and to individual projects. In addition Governor Richardson's Investment Partnership (GRIP) will fund \$1.6 billion in road, rail passenger, and public transit projects utilizing low-interest rate bonds to be retired with future federal highway funds. GRIP is designed to address immediately the most critical interstate, bridge, and congestion issues in the state (NMDOT 2004).

Regional Planning Organizations provide a mechanism for prioritizing transportation needs in the state's rural areas. They are comprised of a policy board made up of local elected officials, and a technical committee made up of local transportation officials. Between 2002 and 2004, each of the state's 7 RPOs completed a long-range transportation plan. All of the projects and issues were incorporated into a statewide long-range transportation plan, the Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan (NMDOT 2004).

Figure 6.3, shows the location of transportation projects, listed in Table 6.1 that are pending implementation.

Figure 6.3:
Map of Current and Pending Road Projects (Approximate)

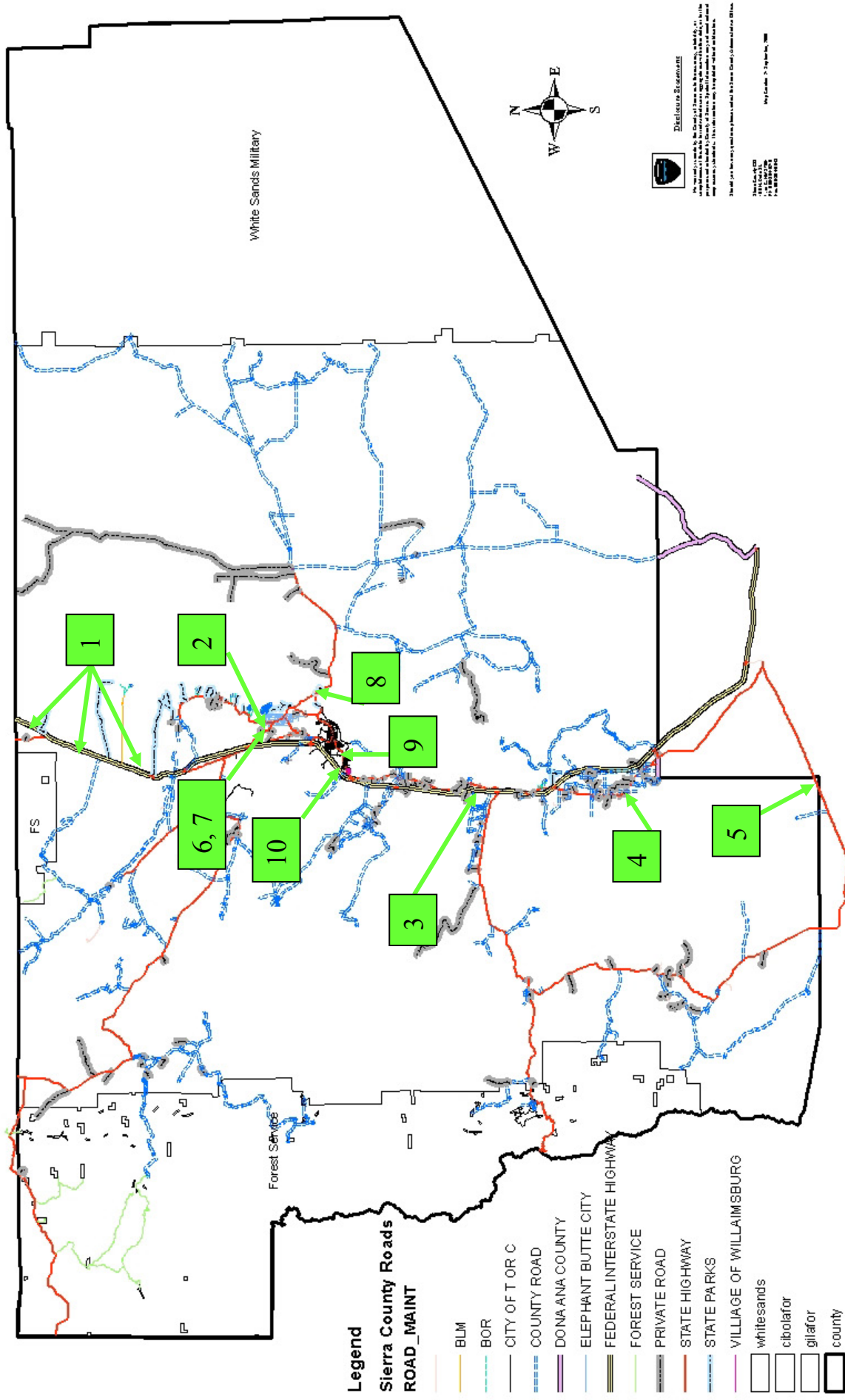


Table 6.1:
Current and Pending Improvements to Roads and Highways in Sierra County, 2005

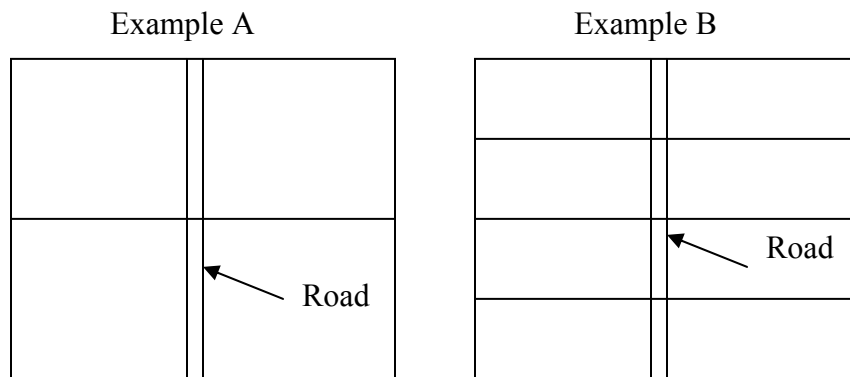
# (See map)	Lead Agent	Work Type	Location	Cost	Timing
1a	NMDOT	Pavement preservation	I-25 Truth or Cons.	\$3,500,000	Bid, April '05
1b	NMDOT	Pavement preservation	San Marcial Interchange North	3,200,000	Bid, April '05
1c	NMDOT	Pavement preservation	NM107 Interchange North	2,500,000	Bid, April '05
2	NMDOT	Miscellaneous construction	Through Elephant Butte	1,400,000	Fall, '05
3	NMDOT	Bridge rehabilitation	Animas Creek & unnamed waterway	3,000,000	'06 or '07
4	NMDOT	Bridge rehabilitation	Rio Grande bridge bn Arrey/Derry	2,500,000	85% complete
5	NMDOT	Reconstruction	Jet NM27 to Jct NM187 Segment 1 of 3	10,900,000	Fall '05
6	Elephant Butte	Paving	Balboa & Hallmark Streets	199,000	98% complete
7	Elephant Butte	Drainage improvement	Tewa Street	175,000	In negotiation
8	NMDOT	Bridge	NM51		Fall '05
9	NMDOT	Road and sidewalks	Date St to 1 mi east of Int of 195 at Bridge, MP 3.11	230,000	
10	NMDOT	New sidewalks	Int 187 & 85 to Valverde St., Williamsburg	95,000	

Source: South Central Council of Governments, June, 2005.

County Challenges of the Road System

County officials have asked for ways to fairly assess the impacts to county government from the construction of new roads or the creation of individual houses or subdivisions in which greater traffic impacts on roads could be expected. Figure 6.4 shows Example A in which subdivision development has created 4 lots whose owners then impact county roads. Example B, with 8 lots has twice the traffic impacts of the first example. The county currently has no formula for determining costs to the county from the two examples nor for assessing developers or property owners their fair share of county costs that development generates. The general engineering principal is that the average single-family residence generates about 9.8 (one-way) trips per day. This may be slightly lower in rural areas. This number is the foundation for road impact fees or charges.

Figure 6.4:
Examples of Subdivisions with Different Transportation Impacts



The Sigala Road in Arrey (Figure 6.5) is an example of what could be a high priority road for the County to adopt. It has been identified by community leaders as important for the health, safety and welfare of residents. Specifically, when it rains it gets terribly rutted and almost impassible. There are many families with school children on the road and when the school bus comes in, it is difficult for it turn around. The rough road causes school kids to hit their heads on the sides of the bus, and so on.

The County stance about roads has been that there are too many roads, and the costs are too great, for the county to adopt all roads as county roads. The county is increasingly in court related to “prescriptive right-of-way” problems. The typical scenario is that the road was put in many decades ago to serve one or a few ranching families. With water damage, the county started blading the road periodically and prescriptive rights of way were born. The rancher pays taxes for all the land, including the road.

Figure 6.4:
Sigala Road in Arrey



The roads in the newly privatized lease lot areas near Elephant Butte and Caballo Reservoirs do not meet the current Sierra County standards of 50-foot right-of-way widths and there are no provisions for stormwater drainage in the lease lot areas (BOR 2004).

Sierra County Ordinance No. 99-005 establishes a road naming and rural addressing procedure for the unincorporated areas of the County. In response to the Enhanced 911 Act 63-9D-1 to 63-9D-11 NMSA 1978, the County has undertaken a process for establishing and maintaining a uniform rural addressing policy for the naming and renaming of roads and the assignment of rural addresses. Administered by the Sierra County Project Manager, the program has identified through geographic positioning systems (GPS) all mailing addresses in the County and has entered them into a database. Moreover, almost all of the rural roads have been identified by local name or by pre-existing names. The program has experienced some delays because of disputed road names and glitches in the functioning of the database. The project manager estimates that the program is 90% complete and will be finished within six months.

Better road maintenance was probably the most widespread citizen interest in Sierra County. Whether people would be willing to pay for a higher-level service is more in question. Road department staff felt that newcomers, especially, want a higher level of service, and generally speaking, they also have a greater level of income. Even more uncertain may be how to pay for it. The road department budget is made up of several sources of revenue, including gas tax, gross receipts tax (GRT), Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) payments from the Forest Service and BLM, and project-specific money. How would people pay for a higher level of service?

The policy solution could be one of three options:

1. The property tax mill dedicated to the road and bridge fund could be increased to tax in a targeted areas. Some states use a fairly esoteric system (several communities in Oregon and on the east coast) to calculate a mill levy increase, whereby each household pays a monthly road utility fee, like a water bill or electrical bill. This is technical thing to calculate but can be done. The County uses these monthly revenues to do road maintenance. Because the fees are somewhat predicated on proximity to major roads, these fees may have some effect of discouraging sprawl (i.e. people farther away from main roads pay more each month than those with houses very close to main roads).
2. A special assessment. Each property owner is assessed a portion of the cost of improvements in front of their property, and this cost is attached to the property tax bill and paid off over a period of years; or
3. The newcomer can be taxed with road impact fees, but this could be a delicate proposition because these monies can be spent all over the county. Those who are paying the fees may or may not experience the benefit of these improvements, which will make them unhappy, too.

Citizen Direction

Road Maintenance

The most common citizen issue during the planning process was that there was not enough road maintenance. Whether people would be willing to pay more for better service was not determined, although the policy section includes ideas for doing so.

“The roads are bad out here in places.” [Chiz]

“Roads are not bad. The one out front was coated once and was supposed to get another.” [Winston]

“The arroyos run and dump gravel onto the roads. It is a major safety issue during flood season. Snow is not graded regularly and it impedes traffic.” [Hillsboro]

“The roads need work badly!” [Hillsboro]

“During the rain and snow season there are not graders on this road often enough. Our taxes are going up but not our services!” [Hillsboro]

“The rains come and wash out these dirt and clay roads. The roads were graded one or two times last year.” [Lake Valley]

“County roads should be better maintained, particularly the related complex of B004-B007. B1116 which has a gate put on it should be opened up by the County Sheriff.” [Hillsboro]

“The roads are in sad shape. I think we have one big pot hole.” [Arrey]

“The roads are not maintained.” [The Lake area, a common complaint of residents in this area]

The road on the north side of the canyon is always in bad repair. The County patches it but it doesn’t last long.” [Las Palomas]

“Street potholes are very bad. We need grading more often. Rain floods out the streets.”

“Keep the county unpaved roads unpaved. Get some gravel on the roads; otherwise it’s just the clay. Do grading after major rainstorms.”

Transportation Infrastructure

The county road leading to the Space Port site was considered inadequate by many residents for big rigs and extensive travel, making it difficult to compete with Doña Ana County. The winding section along Highway 51 near Ash Canyon is also a bottleneck. There are two bad arroyos that need bridging to adequately improve the road. The existing bridge over the Rio Grande River needs replaced because it is currently unable to bear weight in excess of 25 tons for large transport trucks, or 14 tons for compact transport trucks. Residents in favor of the Space Port, particularly near the Lake areas asked how the County would be addressing this transportation shortfall.

“Winston needs a bridge across Poverty Creek. During a storm, cars will wait on either side, waiting for the water to pass.” [Winston]

“We need warning signs for the washes during times of flooding. There has been no engineering.”

“Put measuring sticks in the ditches that are so useful during flooding.”

“There are two bad turns on Red Hill where it is especially hard on school buses.” [Winston]

“Make sure that the rail lines in the Engle/Cutter area are not lost.” [Lake Area]

Road Standards

“The developer didn’t survey the roads. He just bulldozed them in. He’s a slick talker and he duped the people and the Commissioners.” [Lake Valley]

“Roads should be engineered in subdivisions so that maintenance will be easier.”
[County official]

Lack of County Ownership of Roads

“The County grades the roads but they are not platted.” [Caballo resident]

“The County does not want roads dedicated to the County unless they are up to code.” [County official]

“It is not always clear which are county roads. There are some roads important for the community because of school kids or other reasons.”

“School busses cannot get around because of the bad roads. They get into a place and there is not enough room to turn around.”

Access to Public Land

Many residents, particularly in the rural western areas, voiced concern about restricted or closed Forest Service roads. The general experience is one of declining access to public land. For its part, the Forest Service has interest in closing more roads, partly as a cost-saving measure, and partly to reduce the environmental impacts (erosion and so on) of forest roads. Both the Forest Service and BLM have invited Sierra County to participate in a Joint Transportation Plan to mutually communicate about and address access and road issues.

“Forest Service roads are not being maintained.” [Winston]

Transportation for Special Needs

Some elderly, handicapped, and poor people have no way to get to town. Particularly in Winston and Hillsboro, residents asked for provisions for the “non-drivers” of the community. The new mass transportation system funded for the County is designed for the urban core and will not serve the rural areas.

“If you are in the poverty category, specialized transportation services are made available to you, but if you are part of the working poor, the resources are very limited.” [Community development official]

Goals, Objectives, Strategies

Sierra County’s Interim Land Use Policy Plan dealing with transportation should be retained *en toto*:

Goal 29. “Sierra County shall develop and maintain a transportation network that optimizes accessibility within the County and that minimizes the cost of movement between all communities and across public lands. Access to or across federal and state lands shall not entail encumbrances or restrictions on private property rights.” (No. 91-001)

Objective 29.a. Sierra County will make sure that it secures all future road and other utility easements when new subdivisions are approved.

Goal 30. The transportation infrastructure of Sierra County will continue to receive ongoing attention in order to best serve the citizens of the County.

Objective 30.a. Additional funding should be pursued for maintenance and improvements to County roads (SCRPO 2002).

Strategy 30.a.1. Changes should be made to the formulas at the federal level that govern funding of rural roads. Changes should take into consideration the spatial area (size) of a county, its economic status (relative poverty), and the size of its road system, and funding should be based on those formulas (SCRPO 2002).

Objective 30.b. The necessary studies, funds, and improvements to the key traffic corridors of Sierra County will be vigorously sought.

Strategy 30.b.1. New Mexico routes 195, 195P and 181 should be the subject of a corridor study within five years. New Mexico route 195 should be re-aligned and widened, and safety features should be installed, within five years. (SCRPO 2002).

Strategy 30.b.2. NM 152 should be the subject of a corridor study within twenty years (SCRPO 2002: 27).

Objective 30.c. A regional GIS system linking transportation to other land uses will be developed (SCRPO 2002).

Objective 30.d. Road signs indicating mileage to communities will be improved, especially on I-25 in the southern part of the County (SCRPO 2002).

Goal 31. The emerging mass transit system to serve the residents of Truth or Consequences, Williamsburg, and Elephant Butte should be supported through funding and education about community benefits. (SCRPO 2002).

Objective 31.a. Lower levels of matches to operate rural mass transit should be developed within five years, which take into consideration the system’s spatial area (size), its economic status (relative poverty), and the size of its road system (SCRPO 2002).

Objective 31.b Advocate for changes to Federal standards to allow multiple classes of users to ride federally funded van systems (SCRPO 2002)

Objective 31.c. Develop regional coordination of existing van systems (SCRPO 2002).

Goal 32. The County could appoint a task force to develop a County Roads program that addresses “fair share” mechanisms related to new development and to a desired increase in the level of road maintenance. The task force should coordinate its efforts with the incorporated communities of T or C, Elephant Butte and Williamsburg.

Objective 32.a. The task force will explore various options to create “fair share” mechanisms to provide residents a higher level of road maintenance, if they so desire, as well as a structure to assure that new development pays its way for the road costs it creates.

Objective 32.b. Find a way for the building department to communicate the improvement schedule to residents in order to minimize surprise.

Objective 32.c. Sierra County will consider undertaking a “Road Designation Program.” Understanding that for cost reasons the County must be careful not to adopt all roads, it is still the case that roads could be categorized regarding their “health, safety, and welfare” value to Sierra County residents, and roads with the highest value can be incorporated into the county system. For example, the state Highway Department has created a Matrix System to classify their highways by category.

Strategy 32.c.1. With planning staff, develop criteria for ranking county roads for priority status for inclusion into the county system. Such criteria should include level of traffic, roads on school bus lines, and health, safety and welfare considerations. The typology could look like this:

Category One: High priority, regularly scheduled maintenance.

Category Two: Medium priority, intermittently scheduled maintenance.

Category Three: Minor collector road, maintenance as needed.

Category Four: Insignificant, no maintenance.

Category Five: pending legal issues prohibit consideration at this time.

Over time, it is likely that new residents, particularly older residents, will buy houses on Category One and Two roads, leading to more manageable density levels and locations. Adequate signage is important in education and tourist development strategies. For example, if the County posts a big sign at the head of every road that has a “Category 4” in the suggested

system below, then there can be no complaints when people buy houses down that road and then call for the County to maintain it.

Strategy 32.c.2. Sierra County should begin this effort even with modest revenues. When thinking about revenue mechanisms, the power of leverage should not be underestimated. Even a minor increase in revenue can be used as a match in granting opportunities, or if the county bonds against a consistent revenue source, and can convince the creditors it is consistent, enormous revenues can be generated. Thus, even a small mill levy increase such as would increase property tax \$50/year can yield huge results.

Goal 33. Sierra County will initiate a Joint Transportation Plan with the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. Such an effort will lead to better coordination, management, and use of resources. Key routes that would serve all interests could be determined, and high priority access areas could be identified.

Objective 33.a. Sierra County will work to minimize public road closure as a way to promote access of its citizens to federal lands.

Goal 34. Ensure the continued presence of the single rail line in Sierra County and respond to any opportunity to promote rail service linking the communities in Sierra County with other places.

Objective 34.a. Support the State's projected support of rail passenger service between Las Cruces and Albuquerque, as called for in the State Multi-modal Transportation Plan (NMDOT 2004).

Section Seven: Housing

This section addresses housing issues in Sierra County. Local government should assure that housing stock is adequate, safe, and affordable for its residents. Although the private sector provides for the development and sale of houses, mediated through market mechanisms, citizens look to government to protect property values, and to assure that health, safety and welfare considerations are addressed. In practice, the vulnerable segments of the population, such as the poor, elderly and disabled, rely on a number of government initiatives in order to obtain and sustain adequate housing.

The section describes the existing conditions of the housing situation, looks at citizen concerns about housing, reviews the organizations and programs devoted to housing, and closes with policy Goals, Objectives, and Strategies.

Existing Conditions

The 2000 Housing Census reported that Sierra County had 8,727 housing units, of which about 70% are occupied units (Table 7.1 below). Table 7.2 shows that, of the 8727 total housing units, 2716 are located in the unincorporated areas of the county, about 31%. Significantly, nearly 30% (2,614) of the 8727 units in the County are vacant. Of this number, 1543 are called seasonal or vacation homes by the U.S. Census, leaving 1071 units that are unoccupied and some being abandoned.

Table 7.1:
Housing Census 2000 Sierra County

Total Housing Units	Occupied housing Units	Owner-Occupied housing Units	Renter-occupied housing Units	Vacant housing Units	Homeownr vacancy rate %	Rentl Vac. rate%
8,727	6,113	4,578	1,535	2,614	5.5	17.4

Source: US Census Bureau, Census 2002 for New Mexico: www.census.gov/census2002/state/nm/html.

Table 7.3 describes some of the characteristics of the housing stock from the U.S. Census. It shows that almost 18% of the homes are used for vacation or seasonal uses. Housing types are dominated by single-family detached units and mobile homes (about 97% of total stock) while apartments and RV units make up the balance. In addition 46% of the stock is 11 to 30 years old, while over 35% of the stock is over 30 years old. About 20% of the housing stock is ten years old or less. Finally, the table indicates that the mortgage median per month is \$666 while the rental median cost per month is \$348.

Figure 7.1:
An Example of Stone Architecture in Truth or Consequences



Table 7.2:
Housing Distribution in Sierra County, U.S. Census, 2000

8,727 Sierra County Total Housing Units: US Census Data

4,445 Truth or Consequences Total Housing Units

319 Williamsburg Total Housing Units

1,247 Elephant Butte Total Housing Units

6,011 Total Housing Units in the three towns

2,716 Total Housing Units in non-incorporated areas of Sierra County

Housing in Truth or Consequences is very diverse. The higher-priced homes are situated in the more central and north area of town (west and north of U.S. Interstate Highway 25). Prices in 2002 ranged widely in the old area from \$12,000 to \$200,000 (BOR 2004). The median value of a home in Williamsburg was \$57,300 in 2004 (Williamsburg Comprehensive Plan 2004). In Sierra County in 2000, the median price of a home was \$62,200, while for the State it was \$118,764 (Mortgage Finance Authority 2005: 322).

Table 7.3:
Housing Characteristics in Sierra County, 2000

Housing Characteristics	2000	% Total
Total Housing	8727	100.0%
Housing Occupancy		
Occupied Housing Units	6113	70.0%
Vacant Housing Units	2614	30.0%
Seasonal/recreation/occasional use	1543	17.7%
Tenure of owners & renters		
Occupied Housing Units	6113	70.0%
Owner-occupied housing units	4578	52.5%
-% of occupied housing units	74.99%	
Renter-Occupied housing units	1535	17.6%
Housing Types		
- 1-unit, detached	3833	45.1%
- 1-unit attached	115	1.3%
- 2 units	184	2.1%
- 3 or 4 units	231	2.6%
- 5 to 9 units	208	2.4%
- 10 to 19 units	91	1.0%
- 20 or more units	128	1.5%
-Mobile home/ Manufactured housing	3624	41.5%
- Boat, RV, Van etc.	213	2.4%
Total Housing units	8,727	100.0
Age of Housing		
- Less than 1yr old-1999 to March 2000 (for 2000)	286	3.3%
- 2 to 5 yr old – 1995 to 1998	807	9.2%
- 6 to 10 yrs old 1990 – 1994	683	7.8%
- 11 to 20 yrs old 1980 to 1989	2009	23.0%
- 21 to 30 yrs old 1970 to 1979	1871	21.4%
- 31 to 40 yrs old 1960 to 1969	772	8.8%
- 41 to 60 yrs old 1940 to 1959	1530	17.5%
- 61 yrs or older 1939 or earlier	769	8.8%
Payments		
- Mortgage Median Cost per Month	\$666	
- Rental Median Cost per Month	\$348	

Source: 2000 US Census

Table 7.4
Housing Cost Burden, 2000

Cost Burden ¹	Percent	Higher than State?
Percent of owners cost-burdened	20.0	Y
Percent of renters cost burdened	36.0	N
Percent of seniors cost-burdened	23.9	N
Percent of renter households earning less than \$35,000 that are cost burdened	49.5	N
Percent of owner households earning less than \$50,000 that are cost burdened	24.9	N

¹ Defined by HUD as households that spend more than 30% of their income on housing, including utilities and taxes.

Source: Mortgage Finance Authority 2005: 322.

Table 7.4 reveals that a higher percentage of homeowners in Sierra County, compared to the State as a whole, are cost-burdened, but renters and seniors are less so than the State as a whole. About half of the renter households earning less than \$35,000 a year are cost-burdened, and over 1/3 of all renters are cost burdened. The size of this segment indicates the continued importance of housing support programs directed to renters.

Comparatively, about ¼ of the owner households earning less than \$50,000 are cost-burdened, a figure lower than the State. When New Mexico is compared with other western states for cost-burdened households, the percent of owners cost-burdened is lower than most other states, while the percent of renters cost-burdened in other states ranges from 42 to 49%, with New Mexico being 46.8%

The New Mexico Mortgage Finance Authority (2005a), in its draft Consolidated Plan for the State, summarized data related to the South Central planning units (Socorro, Sierra, and Doña Ana Counties) and stated that the area has high rent cost burden, high population growth, high family poverty, high unemployment, and low educational attainment. On the other hand, there is a higher rate of homeownership in Sierra County (74%) compared to the State (71%).

In its Consolidated Plan for the next five years, MFA identified several program areas to which it would give assistance. These included:

- Homebuyer assistance
- New single family development
- Acquisition and rehabilitation
- Single family rehabilitation
- Rental acquisition or assistance
- Rental new construction

Of these program areas, Sierra rated a high priority score on only one item, acquisition and rehabilitation. MFA stated that, “Those counties that have an owner-occupied vacancy rate that exceeds the state’s average represent an opportunity to increase the stock of available housing through acquisition and rehabilitation” (2005a: 11).

New Mexico has the highest rate of mobile home ownership in the western states. Nearly 19% of housing stock in the State is mobile or manufactured homes, while for Montana, it is 13.5%, Arizona 13.1%, Texas 8%, Nevada 7.9%, Colorado 5.4%, and Utah 4.5%

Sierra County has a high rate of loan denials. Whereas the State average is 17%, in Sierra County the rate is 23%. The percentage of loan denials goes up even more for Hispanics and American Indians in Sierra County (MFA 2005a: V-22).

The MFA Plan states a growing concern in the preservation of the supply of affordable housing for lowest income renters. In the past, many of these have been served by federal housing subsidies, many of which are scheduled to expire in coming years. “Expiring use properties” are those that were built with U.S. government subsidies (HUD Section 221(d)(3)) and Section 236 programs, and, mortgage insurance programs (Section 221(d)(4)) and long-term Section 8 contracts. Sierra County has 31 such units and will lose them all by 2010.

Trends, Plans and Programs

Forecasted Housing Demand

Table 7.5 shows that 620 new homes are needed between the years 2000 and 2006, approximately 103 new housing units per year through 2006.

Table 7.5:
The US Census Bureau Estimated Growth in Housing Units

Year	Total Housing Units Needed
2000	8727
2003	9047
2006	9347

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Truth or Consequences plans for a demand of 427 new homes in 2005 which will be met through the sale of existing homes, the construction of new homes, or the placement of manufactured homes on new or existing sites (Truth or Consequences Comprehensive Plan 2004: 74). Williamsburg projects a demand for 171 homes between 2000 and 2030, or about 6 homes per year. Elephant Butte projects 504 housing units to meet demand between 2000 and 2030, about 17 houses per year.

The comprehensive plans for all three incorporated communities call for additional senior housing. Both TorC and Williamsburg plans call for housing rehabilitation programs and multi-family housing.

Regulatory Framework for Housing

Sierra County government has no building department, building inspectors, or ordinances on the book that regulate local building. Instead, it relies on the New Mexico Regulation and Licensing Department, which includes the Construction Industries Division (CID).

“The Division is responsible for issuing residential and commercial building permits. The Division conducts field inspections for general building, electrical, mechanical and LP Gas code compliance and safety standards. Cities and counties with local building inspection offices must adopt the building codes and standards of the Division as a minimum standard”

(<http://www.rld.state.nm.us/cid/>).

Mobile home placement requires a State permit from the Manufactured Housing Division of CID. Its Las Cruces office issues permits to new and used mobile homes, and inspects the site after placement to assure that everything was done correctly. Once the inspection is completed, the office has no way of knowing if problems develop. Hence, when Sierra County residents, particularly in the southern part of the County, complain (see below) that many mobile homes are placed on one lot, with attendant septic problems, no ready mechanism exists to remedy the problem.

“It really helps state regulatory agencies when local counties have some degree of permitting in place that allows them better knowledge and control of conditions on the ground. Regulations should stay local whenever possible.” (CID staff)

When CID becomes aware of permit violations, such as the placement of more than one mobile home on one-home permits, its authority is limited to termination of utilities. It cannot issue citations or fines.

Conventional houses also require a State building permit from the Single Family Home Division of CID in Las Cruces. It follows the International Building Code for the regulation of “stick” houses. It sends Sierra County’s Assessors’ Office a report each month on building permits, data on building costs, and a breakdown of housing categories. County officials said that if there is a complaint about a building, there is little they can do. Often, the report often comes too late to be useful, plus the County has no staffing or enforcement provisions of its own.

Agencies and Programs in Sierra County Devoted to Housing

Within Sierra County there are several programs that operate to provide affordable housing and low income housing assistance. They are:

- Community Action Agency of Southern New Mexico Inc.: This organization “provides emergency utility and rental assistance, weatherization and housing rehabilitation. The program is also responsible for payment saver counseling. It also offers first month rent grants and assistance with paperwork and forms. A significant program that the Agency oversees is the Residential Teen Housing program, which assists teenagers and single mothers with housing. The program is based in Las Cruces.
- Housing Support, Inc.: Provides full-service technical assistance and training in affordable housing matters to public and private sectors; (profit and not-for-profit). It conducts feasibility analyses, evaluation, project development and conversion. It assists homeowner association organizations. The organization has a track record of more than 9,000 units of affordable housing development and conversion. The program is also in Las Cruces.
- South Central Council of Governments: The SCCOG administers CDBG funding for housing rehabilitation and other community development programs” (Truth or Consequences Comprehensive Plan 2004: 76 and Williamsburg Comprehensive Plan 2004: 42).

The Truth or Consequences Housing Authority is devoted to the provision of adequate housing within Sierra County and the City of Truth or Consequences. Although most the public housing it owns is within the City, it serves all County residents who are eligible for HUD services. It’s mission statement states:

“The Truth of Consequences Housing Authority is committed to the pursuit of excellence. Through this commitment, we will seek out opportunities that enhance, improve and build the quality of life for families, children, elderly and our community.”

The Housing Authority provides public housing for senior and disabled people (70 units) and families (30 units) throughout the City, and additional subsidized housing at senior or disabled (32 units) and family (20 units) complexes under USDA’s rural Development “515” housing program. The 515 program is for senior congregate housing as well as family housing. It offers 85 multi-family units. The Housing Authority manages a voucher program, called HUD’s “Housing Choice Vouchers,” by which qualified recipients can rent an apartment or house from the pool of available housing offered by private landlords throughout Sierra County. Through federal funding, the agency also administers the Family Self Sufficiency Program, a Resident Council, a Drug Elimination program, and the Summer Youth Corps. The Housing Authority administers state programs including Home Program, Home Ownership and Counseling (<http://www.torchousing.org/>; Village of Williamsburg Comprehensive Plan, 2004).

Section 8 of the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) programs permits low and very low-income families, the elderly, and the disabled to rent decent, safe and sanitary housing in the private market. The Truth or Consequences Housing Authority has 32 such properties in Sierra County. Although HUD recipients rent the units, the property owners pay their appropriate share of property taxes. In

addition, four apartment buildings in Truth or Consequences, consisting of 152 units, are devoted to subsidized rental assistance for low and very low-income persons.

The Housing Authority's new Homeownership Self-Sufficiency Program will assist low-income people in purchasing a home. In order to develop the necessary housing stock, it is in the process of completing the Truth or Consequences Building Condition and Land Use Survey or residential areas of Truth or Consequences. By October 2005, the agency will have the necessary information to determine which properties would qualify for homeownership through this program.

The New Mexico Housing and Community Development Corporation (NMHCDC) was created in 2003 for the purpose of developing and/or providing decent, safe and sanitary housing for low and moderate income families and individuals, including the disabled, handicapped and elderly. They employ programs that provide multi-family rental housing through acquisition and rehabilitation, homeownership programs, self-help housing, and home rehabilitation for low and moderate-income residents. The agency recently acquired three properties in Truth or Consequences for Section 8 projects.

New Mexico Mortgage Finance Authority (MFA) is a quasi-public entity which finances housing and related services for "low to moderate income families and underserved families." As the state's designated housing agency, MFA facilitates the creation of affordable housing through services to the homeless, rent subsidies for apartments, and programs supporting home ownership (MFA 2005). The agency oversees compliance with federal and state regulations pertaining to the Homeownership program and other funding that it administers.

In its draft Consolidated Plan of 2006, MFA has prioritized the funding programs below for Sierra County. These priorities are subject to the budget allocation process of the state and federal government, and hence, subject to change or delay.

"Colonia" Designation as a County Benefit

A "Colonia" is a designation of the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Department of the federal government. It refers to a rural subdivision within 150 miles of the U.S.-Mexico border which lacks a potable water supply; has no water system; lacks an adequate wastewater system; has no wastewater facilities; lacks decent, safe, and sanitary housing; had inadequate roads; and/or contains inadequate drainage control structures. There are about 137 Colonias currently in New Mexico alone, although not all are officially designated (NMMFA 2000: 36).

To date, there is only one *colonia* officially designated by HUD, called Butte City. It is located north of Truth or Consequences between that city and Elephant Butte. Apparently, designation was sought to acquire funds for the development of the area, particularly for water. CDBG monies were used to get potable water to the city. This land was then annexed by Truth or Consequences.

The larger federal grants devoted to housing include statutory set-asides for *colonias*. Such designations trigger a stream of financial resources, which could deal substantially with housing and related needs. Residents in the Arrey area voiced strong support for creating a *colonia* designation for their area (see below). This area has experienced very strong growth, the continued prosperity of the agricultural sector, and an influx of farm workers and others for which adequate housing does not exist, according to local residents. For example, the enrollment at the Arrey Elementary School went from 130 students to 162 in 2004-05, the only school in the district to grow. A high transiency rate at the school is associated with the presence of the migrant worker population. The Arrey area is unlikely to successfully compete for CDBG monies, so the “*colonia*” route appears to be feasible and promising.

To accomplish a *colonia* designation, research is needed to document the nature and extent of the housing problems. A market study is likely to be necessary, and some planning grants and feasibility grants are available through HUD, MFA and other sources. Local, volunteer help could be used to create the necessary “matches.”

Colonias resources for the Arrey/Derry/Cabillo area include:

- Ms. Espy Holguin, Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
Project Specialist for Colonias and Farm Workers
Las Cruces, NM 88004
(505) 521-0050
- Virginia Bell
Las Cruces Affordable Housing, Inc.
P.O. Box 326
Las Cruces, NM 88004
1605 Medina St.
Las Cruces, NM 88005
(505) 527-5648
(Assists with migrant worker housing in Dona Ana County and is willing to help in Sierra County.)
- JoAnne Gonzalez (field office in Hatch)
P.O. Box 171
Garfield, NM 87936
(505) 267-5050
- Terra Del Sol
Migrant worker housing
Non-profit housing organization with a long track record of county service.
- South Central Council of Governments
600 Hwy 195, Suite D
Elephant Butte, NM 87935
(505) 744-0039

Citizen Direction

The public involvement process of MFA in Truth or Consequences to develop the state Consolidated Plan (2005a) revealed that:

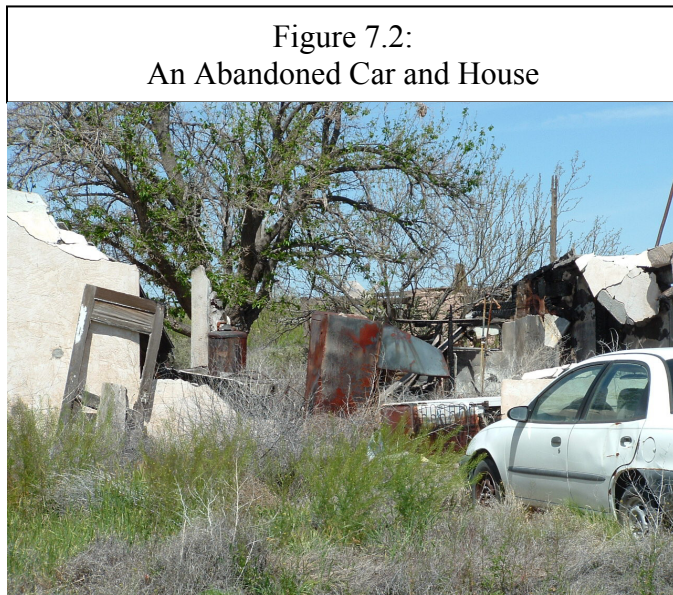
- Families with children have difficulty finding rental units;
- Residents have a lack of information about housing resources and opportunities;
- Predatory lenders are present which take advantage of the inability of low-income persons to obtain conventional loans; and
- The foreclosure rate could be lowered with education and training.

A number of citizens complained about the large number of abandoned homes in the County.

Second Homes

“The new trend is that people come in from the outside and buy homes, but they don’t live here. They are second homes or recreation homes.” [Hillsboro]

“There are more absentee homeowners now and this doesn’t help the community.” [Kingston]



Special Needs Housing

People in the small rural areas, particularly Hillsboro/Kingston and Winston/Chloride talked about the housing needs of elderly people. They wanted apartment complexes within their communities that could house long-time residents.

“Elderly people leave town to be close to their doctors because we have no services for them.” [Hillsboro]

“We need a homeless shelter in the County. The ministerial alliance gives food and a little shelter during emergencies, but we have homeless families on a regular basis in this community.”

Mobile Homes

Manufactured homes are being allowed on properties without the necessary permits, leading to overcrowded conditions and fire risk.

“This trailer park is too crowded. These people are on septics and they are close to Garfield Water Association wells. They got in under the radar and it’s too bad.”
[Arrey]

When Sierra County residents, particularly in the southern part of the County, complain that many mobile homes are placed on one lot, with attendant septic problems, no ready mechanism exists to remedy the problem, since the County has no permitting process or enforcement capacity.

Affordable Housing and *Colonia* Status

“The County missed getting a grant for a virtual business incubator in Arrey because that areas is not classified as a ‘*colonia*.’” [Housing official]

“The fear with *colonias* is that property values go down but the opposite is true.”
[Local official]

Arrey residents spoke at length of the shortage of affordable housing in their community and the number of community problems that have been spawned as a result. Overcrowded conditions, unsafe and unsanitary conditions associated with existing housing, and fire risks were discussed in detail. Many residents believed that being designated as a “*colonia*” would permit resources for the provision of farm worker housing.

Goals, Objectives and Strategies

Goal 35. Sierra County is committed to providing a diverse mix of housing types and costs so that residents of all income ranges have adequate, appropriate, and affordable housing.

Objective 35.a. Sierra County, through appropriate agencies, will encourage the necessary assessment and evaluation of housing resources in order to developed reasoned and sound housing policies.

Strategy 35.a.1. Sierra County will encourage a professional housing study to ascertain needs of elderly, disabled, indigent and other vulnerable people in the County, to assess the housing stock, and to recommend appropriate policy measures.

Strategy 35.a.2. Sierra County will work with relevant agencies to identify adequate sites for future housing needs.

Strategy 35.a.3. Noting that the comprehensive plans for both Williamsburg and Truth or Consequences contain provisions supporting senior housing, housing rehabilitation programs, and multi-family housing, on the basis of its own housing assessment, Sierra County will coordinate with the Cities' programs as appropriate.

Objective 35.b. Sierra County will undertake appropriate action to meet the goal of affordable, diverse housing.

Strategy 35.b.1. Assure existing programs are promoted and new ones developed as needed in order to create the necessary incentives for the rehabilitation of existing, usable housing stock. Consider consolidation to achieve economies of scale.

Strategy 35.b.2. Develop County policy that offers incentives to demolish old housing stock for which rehabilitation is not feasible. The County could consider bulldozing the houses for free as a public service. Utilize the Sierra County Assessor to identify vacant buildings and delete them from the tax rolls after removal.

Strategy 35.b.3. Sierra County will develop the necessary legal framework for requiring the removal of deteriorated, substandard and unsanitary residential properties.

Strategy 35.b.4. The County could consider condemning abandoned structures which are not rehabilitated or removed. The condemned properties could be dedicated and then consolidated as land donations for future affordable housing projects.

Strategy 35.b.5. The County could consider land donations/dedications and/or supplying some infrastructure to prime building sites as its contributions to affordable housing.

Strategy 35.b.6. Provide incentives for the development of affordable housing. The County might be a source of some matching funds for grants since it usually takes some leverage to get these things off the ground. Also the County can coordinate multiple applicants—grantors favors "collaborative" applications but someone has to serve as a nexus to coordinate these.

Strategy 35.b.7. In order to deal with the high numbers of residents experiencing "renters' burden," Sierra County will encourage appropriate agencies to continue to offer residents support services, understanding that the foreclosure rate could be lowered with education and training.

Strategy 35.b.8. Promote housing in Sierra County that provides a continuum of care for the senior community including assisted living facilities, independent living centers, and nursing homes.

Strategy 35.b.9. Sierra County will vigorously support efforts to create *colonia* status in the southern part of the County. State and housing officials have stated very clearly that such a designation is appropriate and valuable for the County in dealing with housing and community development issues in the Arrey/Derry area.

Strategy 35.b.10. Expiring use properties, 31 units, are to be lost by 2010, representing a significant loss of low-income units. Sierra County will vigorously develop strategies for replacement of these units.

Objective 35.c. Sierra County will consider ordinances as necessary to assure necessary compliance in housing resources related to health, safety and welfare of Sierra County citizens.

Strategy 35.c.1. Sierra County will consider an ordinance to better regulate the placement of mobile homes, so as to control septic discharge and fire hazard from overcrowding. With County authority to stipulate citations and fines, it could foster greater coordination with Construction Industries Division.

Goal 36. Sierra County is committed to encouraging the location of future housing so as to promote the health, safety and welfare of its citizens, a high quality of life in general, environmental stewardship, and the provision of efficient services such as roads, schools, and utilities.

Objective 36.a. Sierra County will generally encourage new development to be contiguous to or near existing development in order to reduce the cost of government services, to foster the efficient provision of utilities, and to reduce environmental impact. Again, consider the APF (adequate public facilities) requirements.

Objective 36.b. Sierra County will amend its subdivision regulations to assure ADA compliance.

Objective 36.c. Sierra County will work with NMMFA and other regional housing agencies to be apprised of grants and funds for rehabilitated and affordable housing.

Objective 36.d. Sierra County will encourage new subdivisions, and parks devoted to mobile homes, manufactured homes and recreational vehicles be well-planned and include open space, landscaping, play areas, and other amenities for their residents.

Priorities

1. Develop *colonia* designation in the southern part of Sierra County.
2. Develop replacement strategies for the “expiring use properties,” those low-income housing units which will be lost to the County in the coming years.

Section Eight: Sierra County Profile

Physical Description

Sierra County is located in south central New Mexico, in the Mexican Highlands portion of the northern portion of the warm, temperate, Chihuahua Desert. The climate is relatively mild with cool summers and moderate winters over most of the higher elevations and warm year-round temperatures in the lower elevations. Precipitation varies but averages about 9.6 inches annually, most of it occurring through intense, localized thunderstorms from July through September.

Figure 8.1 on the next page shows the topographic features of the County, showing the area as carved by the might swathe of the Rio Grande in the shadows of the Fra Cristobal and Caballo Mountains in the central part of the County. The presence of the Rio Grande allowed the construction of two reservoirs to control flooding and store water for irrigation. The Elephant Butte and Caballo Reservoirs have become centers of recreational activity, bringing tourists and sports enthusiasts to the area (SCCOG 2002). To the west rise the Black Range and the Mimbres Mountains, home of the Gila National Forest and the Aldo Leopold Wilderness. The eastern portion of the County is made up of the White Sands Missile Range and the San Andreas and the Hardscrabble Mountains, including the renowned Jornada del Muerto, the old Spanish Trail from Mexico City to Albuquerque on which so many people lost their lives well over a hundred years ago.

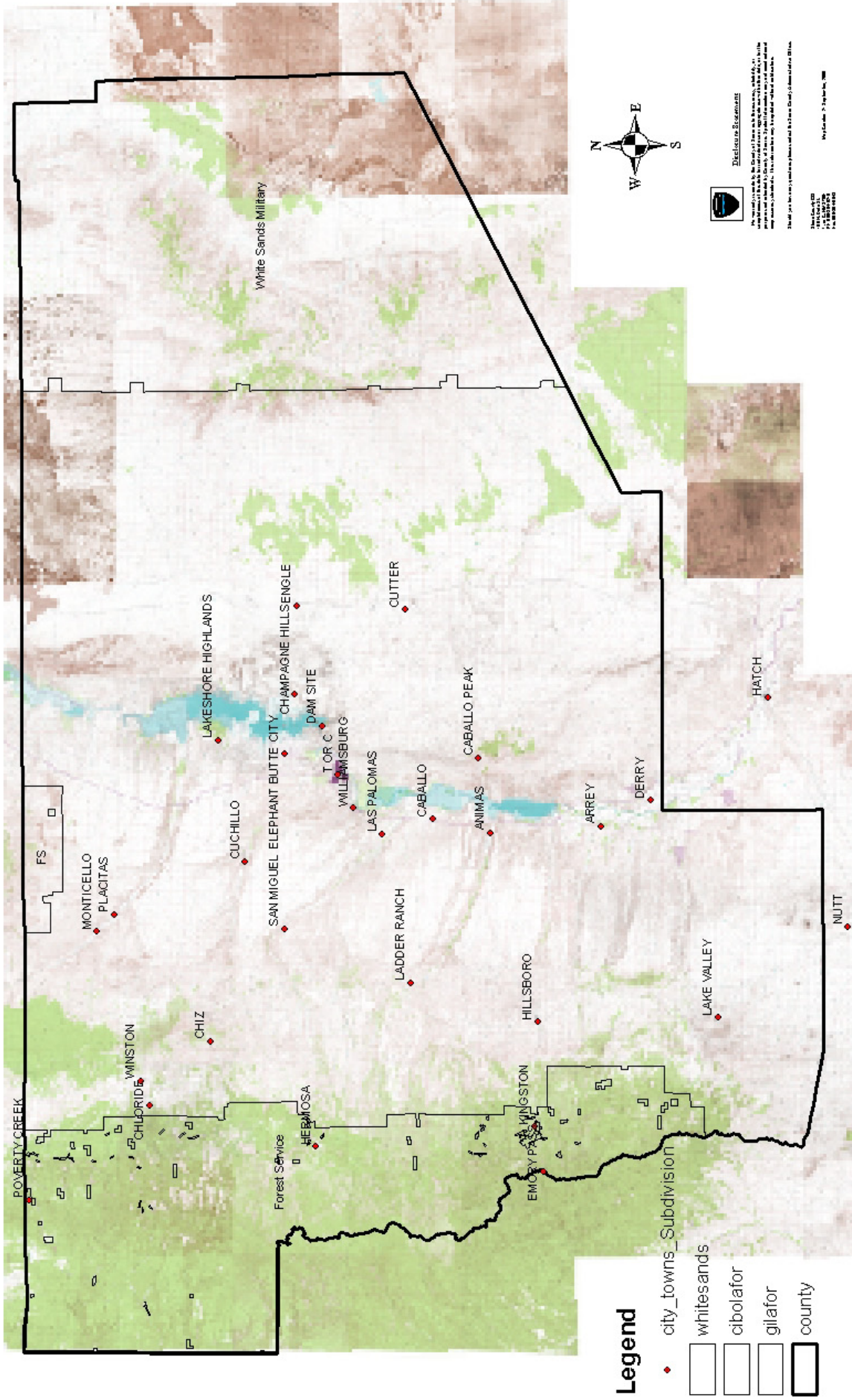
Elevations in the County range from 4,200 ft. along the Rio Grande to over 7,000 ft. on the nearby Caballo Mountains and over 10,000 ft. in the Black Range.

Sierra is a physically large county, intersected in the middle by Interstate 25, and including three incorporated communities, Truth or Consequences, Elephant Butte and Williamsburg.

Settlement History

Human occupation in the area began in the Paleoindian period of 10,000 to 6,000 B.C. Mammoth and bison fossils found along the shores of Elephant Butte Lake show that paleoindian cultures hunted those species. Archaic period (6,000 B.C.—200 A.D.) hunters and gatherers also left behind evidence of their presence. Between 200 and 1400 (The Formative Period) the Mimbres, Jornada Mogollon, and Rio Grande pueblo groups thrived, and specialized in pithouse settlements, and later pueblo villages, as well as dry-land farming (New Mexico State Parks 2005).

Figure 8.1:
Topographic Map of Sierra County, New Mexico



Sierra County historically was populated by several bands of Apaches, whose presence dates from the 14th and 15th centuries. The Mescalero Apache inhabited the region east of the Rio Grande and the Chiricahua Apache inhabited the region to the west. The cultural penchant of Apaches for raiding slowed Hispanic and Anglo settlement in the area for a long time. Spanish forays into the region began in the 1500s and substantial trade routes, including the Camino Real, were established.

Permanent European settlement dates from the 1840s, supported by the presence of military forts, and from the earliest times, agriculture and mining were the main forms of livelihood. Although some settlement of the County occurred from the El Paso area, the predominant pattern was from the long time Spanish settlements in the northern part of the State, names like Apodaca, Armijo, Baca, Torres, and Montoya. Sierra County was the southern limit of the distinctive culture of northern New Mexico.

Sierra County was formed in 1884 from Socorro, Doña Ana, and Grant Counties. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the U.S. government determined that water along the Rio Grande could be better distributed through a series of water control projects. The Bureau of Reclamation, began in 1902, by 1911 was building the Elephant Butte Dam.

The official name for the City of Truth or Consequences between 1916, when the town was incorporated) and 1950 was Hot Springs because of their importance in stimulating an early visitor economy in the area. Recreational facilities were first constructed at Elephant Butte Reservoir in the late 1930s (SCCOG 2002).

Sierra County was formed by Territorial legislation in 1884.

Demographic Overview

Table 8.1 below reviews the population changes over the last thirty years. From 1970 to 2000, the population of Sierra County grew by 6,042 people, an 85% increase in population. The average annual population growth rate during this period was 2.8% per year. That is considered a very healthy rate of growth, particularly sustained over such a long period. Many communities experience growth impacts with that level of sustained growth.

Table 8.2 indicates the anticipated population growth in 5-year increments until 2030. Many factors can influence population dynamics in an area, but generally demographers determine the growth rate over a long period of time and extrapolate that trend forward to create projections. Even so, events, especially economic changes, may conspire to change the immigration or outmigration. The dampened economy of Sierra County the last couple years because of low water levels at the Lakes is one example of such change. Nevertheless, the Bureau of Business and Economic Research at the University of New Mexico expects the growth rate to slow by 50% in Sierra County over the next 25 years.

Since one of the functions of the Comprehensive Plan is preparing for the future

Preparing for the future is one of the functions of the Comprehensive Plan. Estimating population growth in the future is an important way to anticipate and plan for change.

Table 8.1:
Population Changes in Sierra County and its Incorporated Communities

Unit	1970 Population	1980 Population	1990 Population	2000 Population	Percentage Change, 1970-1990
City of Truth or Consequences	4,565	5,219	6,224	7,289	59.7
Village of Williamsburg	367	433	463	526	43.3
City of Elephant Butte ¹	Na	na	na	1,389	na
Unincorporated County	2,257	2,802	3,225	4,066	80.2
Total	7,189	8,454	9,912	13,270	84.6

Source: U.S. Census, 2000; <http://www.unm.edu/~bber/demo/ctyshist.htm>

¹ First official census for Elephant Butte was reported in 2000 It incorporated in 1998.

Table 8.2:
Population Projections and Projected Annual Population Growth Rate,
Sierra County

Unit	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030
City of Truth or Consequences	8,145	9,040	9,853	10,641	11,385	12,068
Village of Williamsburg	589	653	711	767	820	869
Sierra County	15,656	16,723	18,328	19,857	21,301	22,672
Sierra County Projected Annual Population Growth Rate	2.41	2.09	1.83	1.60	1.40	1.25

Source: U.S. Census 2000; r/revised. Source: Bureau of Business and Economic Research, University of New Mexico. Released August 2002 and revised April 2004.

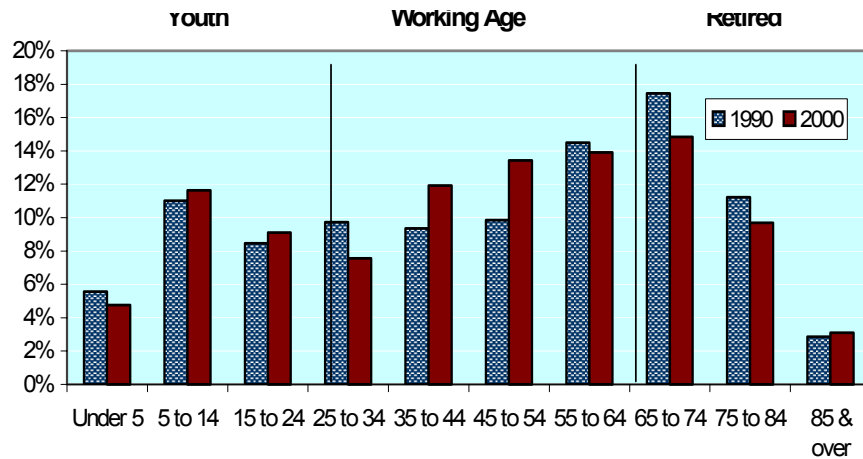
Figure 8.2 displays the age distribution over time in the County. The percentage of those over 65 and older has declined since 1990, though older people have increased in absolute numbers, and comprise 27.7 percent of the population. (SCRPO 2002). The percentage of middle-aged people has increased, on the other hand, flattening the population curve out somewhat, and likely reflecting the diversifying and improving economy.

Population growth in Sierra County is created primarily by immigration. Because of the older population, the County experiences only 0.5 births for every death. (Stephens and Associates 2003). Hence, migration must remain high for the County to maintain a positive growth rate.

Figure 8.2:
Age Breakout in 2000, Sierra County

Age Breakout in 2000

- The median age in Sierra County, NM is 48.9 years old, compared to 34.6 in the state and 35.3 in the nation.
- In 2000, the baby boom was aged 40 - 55.



Population by Category, 1990 & 2000

Source: Sonoran Institute, Economic Profile System, U.S. Census

The 2000 Census showed that while 70.5% of New Mexicans between the age of 18 and 24 have graduated from high school, only 52.5 of Sierra County residents in the age grade have graduated.

Economic Overview

Table 8.3 on the next page shows changes in the economic structure of Sierra County between 1970 and 2000. A careful reading of the table shows wage and salary employment as a total share of employment has gone down over the last thirty years by 4% while proprietors' employment has risen by the same percentage. These numbers mirror each other probably because those wage people have become entrepreneurs—a good sign. The numbers also confirm a trend that is nation-wide in scope but accentuated in Sierra County—the robust growth of the trades and services sectors. Services and Professional employment increased from 49% to 59% in three decades and services related to health, legal and business increased from 18% to 27%. Government and agricultural employment dropped about 5% in each sector, while construction declined modestly. A consistent level of government employment is valuable in rural areas because it is a good base driver.

Table 8.3:
Key Economic Sectors, Sierra County, New Mexico

Employment by Industry Changes from 1970 to 2000							
	1970	% of Total	2000	% of Total	New Employment	% of New Employment	
Total Employment	2,316		4,632		2,316		
Wage and Salary Employment	1,663	71.8%	3,133	67.6%	1,470	63.5%	
Proprietors' Employment	653	28.2%	1,499	32.4%	846	36.5%	
Farm and Agricultural Services	360	15.5%	463	10.0%	103	4.4%	
Farm	334	14.4%	345	7.4%	11	0.5%	
Ag. Services	26	1.1%	118	2.5%	92	4.0%	
Mining	41	1.8%	56	1.2%	15	0.6%	
Manufacturing (incl. forest products)	17	0.7%	78	1.7%	61	2.6%	
Services and Professional	1,123	48.5%	2,750	59.4%	1,627	70.3%	
Transportation & Public Utilities	63	2.7%	134	2.9%	71	3.1%	
Wholesale Trade	58	2.5%	129	2.8%	71	3.1%	
Retail Trade	433	18.7%	891	19.2%	458	19.8%	
Finance, Insurance & Real Estate	148	6.4%	365	7.9%	217	9.4%	
Services (Health, Legal, Business, Others)	421	18.2%	1,231	26.6%	810	35.0%	
Construction	191	8.2%	331	7.1%	140	6.0%	
Government	584	25.2%	954	20.6%	370	16.0%	

Agricultural Services include soil preparation services, crop services, etc. It also includes forestry services, such as reforestation services, and fishing, hunting, and trapping. **Manufacturing** includes paper, lumber and wood products manufacturing.

Source: U.S. Census 2000, Sonoran Institute Economic Profile System

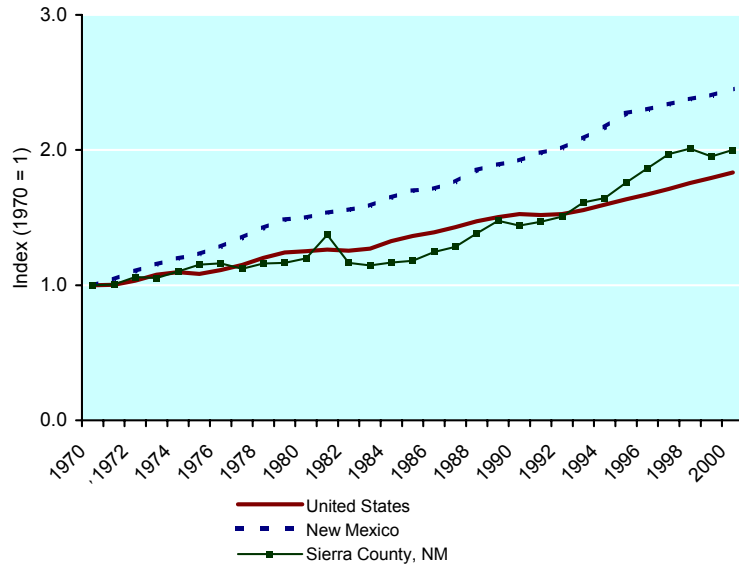
The table shows a deepening of the trades and services economy associated with recreation and retirement. Although the trades and services sector is known for having lower wages than other sectors, in the Sierra County case, this situation is ameliorated somewhat by the growing importance of Professional Services. Professional Services pay much better than other service jobs and represents a maturing of the trades and services economy. It implies a socioeconomic diversity that is healthy for a community, especially when coupled with a range of housing types and support services for lower income families.

Figure 8.3 shows the rate of job growth for Sierra County, which has outpaced the nation but has been slower than the state as a whole.

Figure 8.3:
Job Growth Compared to the State and Nation

Job Growth Compared to the State and Nation

- Over the last 30 years job growth in Sierra County, NM has been slower than the state and faster than the nation..



Source: U.S. Census 2000, Sonoran Institute, Economic Profile System

Table 8.4:
New Income by Type

New Income by Type						
All figures in millions of 2000 dollars	% of Total in 1970		% of Total in 2000		New Income 1970 to 2000	% of New Income
	1970		2000			
Total Personal Income*	87		222		135	
Farm and Agricultural Services	7	8.3%	10	4.4%	3	2%
Farm	7	8.0%	9	3.9%	2	1%
Ag. Services	0	0.3%	1	0.5%	1	1%
Mining	1	1.1%	1	0.5%	0	0%
Manufacturing (incl. forest products)	0	0.4%	1	0.4%	1	0%
Services and Professional	21	23.8%	46	20.6%	25	18%
Transportation & Public Utilities	2	2.0%	4	1.9%	2	2%
Wholesale Trade	2	1.8%	3	1.2%	1	1%
Retail Trade	9	10.4%	11	4.9%	2	1%
Finance, Insurance & Real Estate	1	1.5%	4	1.8%	3	2%
Services (Health, Legal, Business, Others)	7	8.2%	24	10.7%	17	12%
Construction	6	7.0%	8	3.6%	2	1%
Government	16	18.0%	30	13.4%	14	10%
Non-Labor Income	37	42.9%	133	59.6%	95	70%
Dividends, Interest & Rent	17	19.5%	58	26.2%	41	31%
Transfer Payments	20	23.4%	74	33.4%	54	40%

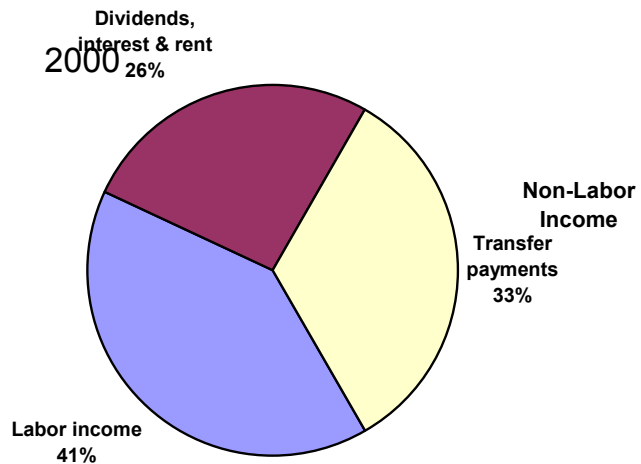
*The sum of the above categories do not add to total due to adjustments made for place of residence and personal contributions for social insurance made by the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Table 8.4, New Income by Type, again reveals the pronounced growth of income in the Services and Professional category, particularly those services related to health, legal and business. The table also indicates a phenomenal 70% of new income was in non-labor sources of income, specifically, dividends, interest and rent, as well as transfer payments. Again, this is a positive sign of retirees moving into the County. This is a trend that is being experienced throughout the country but is accentuated in Sierra County because of the importance of the retirement community. Shown another way, Figure 8.4 shows the distribution of income according to three main categories: 1) wage labor (41%--down from 60% in 1970); 2) Dividends, interest and rent (26%); and, 3) Transfer payments (33%). A few more charts and tables will further explore these changes in the economy.

Figure 8.4:
Income by Type 1970 and 2000

**Income by Type 1970
& 2000**

- In 1970, Non-Labor Income sources represented 43% of total personal income. By 2000, they comprised 60%.
- In 2000, Dividends, Interest and Rent represented 26% of total personal income. Transfer Payments comprised 33%.



Non-Labor Income includes Transfer Payments (primarily related to retirement) and Dividends, Interest and Rent (money earned from past investments).

Table 8.5 shows the components of transfer payments. It indicates that government payments to individuals account for 97% of transfer payments, which is why some people refer to these payments as “mail box money.” Retirement and disability insurance benefit payments make up 43% of this figure, while medical payments also account for 43% of total transfer payments. Welfare makes up for about 10% of transfer payments. Even though many County residents believe that Sierra County is somehow a magnet for those with the lowest incomes, this figure, at least, does not support that perception. Table 8.6, Sources of Labor Income, indicates that transfer payments grew by 49% between 1970

Table 8.5:
Components of Transfer Payments

Components of Transfer Payments								
All figures in millions of 2000 dollars	% of Total		% of Total		% of Total		New Payments 1970 to 2000	% of New Payments
	1970	TP	1980	TP	2000	TP		
Total transfer payments	20.4		35.6		74.2		53.8	
Government payments to individuals	19.6	96%	34.3	96%	71.9	97%	52.4	97%
Retirement & disab. insurance benefit payments	10.9	53%	20.5	58%	34.0	46%	23.1	43%
Medical payments	2.36	12%	5.53	16%	25.34	34%	23.0	43%
Income maintenance benefit payments ("welfare")	1.8	9%	3.1	9%	7.4	10%	5.5	10%
Unemployment insurance benefit payments	0.1	1%	0.3	1%	0.2	0%	0.1	0%
Veterans benefit payments	4.2	21%	4.7	13%	4.7	6%	0.5	1%
Federal educ. & trng. asst. pay. (excl. vets)	0.1	0.5%	0.1	0.3%	0.1	0.2%	0.0	0%
Other payments to individuals	-	0.0%	0.1	0.1%	0.1	0.2%	0.1	0%
Payments to nonprofit institutions	0.5	3%	0.8	2%	1.4	2%	0.9	2%
Business payments to individuals	0.3	2%	0.5	1%	0.9	1%	0.6	1%

Source: U.S. Census 2000, Sonoran Institute, Economic Profile System

Table 8.6:
Sources of Labor Income

Sources of Labor Income

- In 2000, proprietor's income accounted for 11% of total personal income, compared to 8% in 1990. From 1990 to 2000, proprietor's income grew by 85%, in real terms. Wage and salary income during those years grew by 42%.

Sources of Labor Income									
All income in millions of 2000 dollars	1970		1980		1990		2000		% Change 90-00
	1970	% of Total	1980	% of Total	1990	% of Total	2000	% of Total	
Labor Sources									
Wage and Salary	36	41%	45	35%	43	26%	61	27%	42%
Other Labor Income	2	2%	6	5%	7	4%	9	4%	24%
Proprietor's	14	16%	9	7%	14	8%	25	11%	85%
Non-Labor Sources									
Dividends, Interest & Rent	17	20%	37	29%	55	33%	58	26%	5%
Transfer Payments	20	23%	36	28%	50	30%	74	33%	49%

Percentages do not add to 100 because of adjustments made by BEA, such as residence, social security, and others.

- From 1990 to 2000 Non-Labor income sources grew by 26%.

Wage and salary is monetary remuneration of employees, including employee contributions to certain deferred compensation programs, such as 401(K) plans.

Other labor income is payments by employers to privately administered benefit plans for their employees, the fees paid to corporate directors, and miscellaneous fees. The payments to private benefit plans account for more than 98 percent of other labor income.

Proprietors is income of sole proprietorships, partnerships and tax-exempt cooperatives. A sole proprietorship is an unincorporated business owned by a person. A partnership is an unincorporated business association of two or more partners. A tax-exempt cooperative is a nonprofit business organization that is collectively owned by its members.

Table 8.7:
Personal Income Change by Category, 1990 to 2000

**Personal Income
Change by
Category 1990
to 2000**

The largest contributors to new personal income from 1990 to 2000 in real terms, were:

- The fastest growth was in the Producer Services sectors; 95% growth.

- The second fastest growth was in the Consumer Services sectors; 75% growth.

- The third fastest growth was in the Social Services sectors; 70% growth.

Personal Income					
All figures in thousands of 2000 dollars.	1990	2000	New Income	% Change	% of New Income
Total Personal Income	165,452	222,319	56,867	34%	
LABOR INCOME					
Transformative					
Agriculture	5,657	9,776	4,118		
Mining	1,626	1,164	-462		
Construction	5,653	7,910	2,257		
Manufacturing	1,114	994	-120		
Total	14,051	19,843	5,793	41%	10%
Distributive					
Transportation & public utilities	4,278	4,170	-108		
Wholesale Trade	587	2,722	2,135		
Total	4,865	6,892	2,027	42%	4%
Retail Trade					
	9,850	10,921	1,071	11%	2%
Consumer Services					
Hotels & Other Lodging	1,249	2,208	959		
Personal Services	871	1,108	237		
Household Services	593	681	88		
Repair Services	754	2,757	2,003		
Motion Pictures	632	516	-116		
Amusements & Recreation	219	298	79		
Total	4,318	7,568	3,251	75%	6%
Producer Services					
Finance, Insurance & Real Estate	2,775	4,008	1,233		
Legal Services	111	245	134		
Business Services	971	2,846	1,875		
Engineering & Management Service	314	1,303	989		
Membership Organizations	743	1,185	442		
Total	4,914	9,587	4,673	95%	8%
Social Services					
Health Services	5,013	8,667	3,654		
Social Services	459	691	232		
Educational Services	33	25	-8		
Total	5,505	9,383	3,878	70%	7%
Government Services					
Federal, Civilian	5,332	5,772	440		
Military	630	530	-100		
State and Local	14,627	23,434	8,807		
Total	20,589	29,736	9,147	44%	16%

Note: The sum of the above categories does not add to total because non-labor income is not included. See page P-9 for non-labor income data.

Source: U.S. Census 2000, Sonoran Institute, Economic Profile System

and 2000, further emphasizing the reliance of the local economy on this source of income.

Table 8.6 also shows that wage and salary income accounted for 27% of total income in 2000 and as a category grew by 42% between 1970 and 2000. By contrast, proprietors' income accounted for only 11% of total income in 2000, yet as a category it grew by 85% between 1970 and 2000. These data indicate that current economic development efforts that are oriented to supporting business ownership are well-placed.

Table 8.7 breaks down types of personal income according to the new categories used by the U.S. Census in 2000. Because of the large growth in the services sector of the U.S. economy, the Census Bureau began in the 2000 Census to use new and more detailed categories of service jobs. The table indicates the "transformative" sectors of agriculture, mining, construction, and manufacturing, and shows that those sectors account for 10% of the new income generated during the last decade, the largest amount of any category. But the fastest growth occurred within the services sector, in which Professional Services grew the most (95%), followed by Consumer Services (75%) and Social Services (70%).

The per capita income in 1999 in Sierra County was \$15,023, compared to \$23,594 in Santa Fe County, \$19,174 in Sandoval County, and \$12,826 in Socorro County. In 1999, Sierra County had 13.8% of its families below poverty income, while Santa Fe County had 9.4% of families in poverty, 9.0% in Sandoval County, and 24.1% in Socorro County. Within the County, the per capita income fluctuated widely. In 1999, for the City of Truth or Consequences, per capita income was \$14,415, while in Elephant Butte, per capita income was \$21,345 (U.S. Census 2000).

Section Nine: Implementation

This chapter summarizes the Comprehensive Plan by outlining the objectives and strategies under the 36 goals, and specifying a general timeline for their implementation. As one resident advised,

“The county needs good work processes. Set priorities and make them clear to the public. Match the budget with the priorities.”

Table 9.1:
Implementation Table

	Critical Need	2005- 2009	2010- 2015	2016- 2025	On- Going
LAND USE AND CODE ENFORCEMENT					
Objective 3.1. The Sierra County Board of Commission will seek specific guidance from local communities before making land use decisions in their area.					
Objective 4.1. The County will immediately acquire “Cooperating Agency” status with the Bureau of Land Management’s current land use planning process, a new designation that permits not just “input” into federal decision-making, but attendance and full participation at all planning meetings. The final rule regarding cooperating agencies (43 CFR Part 1600) was issued in March, 2005. The County will undertake a similar designation when the Gila National Forest begins its Forest Plan Revision in 2007.					
Objective 4.2. The County should foster regular, even committee, meetings between the County and federal land management agencies around areas of mutual interest.					
Objective 4.3. Ensure that Federal and State agencies’ land use policies and plans within the County are compatible with this Comprehensive Plan, and promote the County goals.					

	Critical Need	2005-2009	2010-2015	2016-2025	On-Going
Objective 4.4. Sierra County will consider hiring a Federal Lands Coordinator.					
Objective 4.5. Many County residents feel powerless in dealing with the federal agencies, which are responsible for threatened and endangered species recovery, and other ecological challenges. The County will assist these residents by fostering a climate of “partnership” between residents and federal agencies.					
Strategy 4.5.a. Sierra County will participate in the formulation of plans for the recovery of any Federal or State listed Threatened or Endangered species. The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will provide the County with accurate population data, distribution, habitat requirements, and historical data based on sound science.					
Strategy 4.5.b. The County will encourage the Forest Service to harvest invasive species if there is commercial value.					
Objective 4.6. Therefore, it is recommended that Sierra County consider a land use policy that incorporates both ecological and economic considerations. Such a balanced approach would allow the County to work more productively with the federal land management agencies, which are required by law to promote such balance. Furthermore, the county policy is to encourage cooperative, collaborative approaches in federal agency management decisions.					
Strategy 4.6.a. Sierra County supports Community Forest Resource Planning (CFRP), which promotes collaborative approaches to forest management.					
Strategy 4.6.b. Sierra County will continue to encourage Sierra SWCD, Caballo SWCD, NRCS, and the Wahoo Watershed Workgroup to foster collaborative approaches to watershed restoration efforts.					

	Critical Need	2005-2009	2010-2015	2016-2025	On-Going
Strategy 4.6.c. Sierra County supports outdoor education to foster better land management and environmental stewardship.					
Objective 5.1. Sierra County will identify BLM lands immediately that are suitable for development and/or for public purposes and request that they be identified in the new BLM land use plan. Such a step will expedite the disposal of BLM lands on the open market for development and the leasing or patenting of BLM for public purpose through the Recreation and Public Purpose Act. This objective allows for the expansion of the private, and taxable, land base in Sierra County.					
Objective 5.2. Sierra County should immediately explore with BLM its offer to transfer its disposable lands to the State Lands Office, as a means to expedite the availability of public land on the open market.					
Objective 5.3. Lands to be obtained from BLM should be evaluated with the idea of getting development out of the flood plain (Section Six: Water).					
Objective 5.4. Private lands within the Gila National Forest could be lost as the Forest Service attempts to acquire those properties to prevent subdivision development and to better address its own management objectives. The County will work with the Forest Service to accomplish its goal through land trades and transfers, ensuring that lost private lands are replaced.					

	Critical Need	2005-2009	2010-2015	2016-2025	On-Going
Objective 8.2. The entities that review subdivision requests could be expanded. Currently, the water engineer, state highways, NM Environment Department, the assessor, the flood commissioner, volunteer fire departments, and Soil and Water Conservation District are among the reviewers. The Forest Service could be a reviewing agency for the subdivision process, commenting on fire protection measures. Construction Industries Division and relevant irrigation districts could be included as well. Having a single planning/building phone number with a person linking all of the departments/agency/review levels (Objective 10.1).					
Objective 8.3. The fees for subdivision review could be increased to reflect the true cost of review.					
Objective 8.4. Some scale of review could be implemented for individual lot development in the County.					
Objective 9.1. Ensure periodic analysis of land use trends to provide the Board of Commissioners with the guidance they need to make future decisions.					
Objective 9.2. Sierra County will encourage development in areas contiguous with present development in order to promote orderly and cost-efficient growth.					
Objective 9.3. Ensure that future development in Sierra County protects property values by making new development attractive and compatible with existing uses.					
Objective 9.4. Create installation standards for communication towers that specify distance from roadways and adequate support measures to assure safety.					
Objective 9.5. Develop standards for commercial and industrial land uses and direct such uses to areas deemed appropriate.					

	Critical Need	2005-2009	2010-2015	2016-2025	On-Going
Objective 9.6. Undertake a process for developing a Future Land Use Scenario map, seeking guidance from County residents about where different types of development should go.					
Objective 9.7. Ensure that commercial land exists along I-25 at major intersections and arterial though designations of such lands as “desirable for commercial development.” Such a designation would not have the force of zoning but would still serve as a development guide.					
Objective 9.8. If zoning is not timely, the County could consider Performance Standards that would specify percent slope, Firewise criteria, and so on, with a fee for the cost of enforcement.					
Objective 9.9. Special assessments on existing property owners could be instituted by determining a formula by which property owners would be required to pay their “fair share” for added impact on current roads, roads that lead to new development, and other infrastructure elements. This is a common tool of local government to ensure that development pays its way (Section Seven: Transportation). A line of credit insurance assures that all new subdivisions will at least start out with adequate infrastructure.					
Objective 9.10. Commercial ventures such as a NASCAR racetrack should be located so that they will not adversely affect existing residential areas.					
Objective 9.11. New commercial and residential development along riparian corridors, including perennial streams, shall include set backs that shall be developed for low impact recreational activities such as walking, trail biking, and horseback riding.					

	Critical Need	2005- 2009	2010- 2015	2016- 2025	On- Going
Objective 9.12. The County should make a commitment to work with state and federal agencies to increase access to public lands and, where that access is not available, to acquire those rights. Truth or Consequences and Williamsburg need to establish green belt around their perimeters, but smaller villages should also be encouraged to develop parks, walking and bike trails adjacent to their communities. This is particularly important where the public lands agencies are divesting or selling properties out of the system.					
Objective 9.13. Explore land trusts to buy development rights of agriculture lands, perhaps a small tax to allow purchase.					
Objective 10.1. Sierra County will develop itself as the first “go to” office, whose permit contains a checklist of other permits and requirements. That way, before utilities are hooked up, the County would be assured of greater coordination in review. The utility companies would not provide permits without a County permit checklist, for example.					
Objective 10.2. Inspections need to be streamlined and easier to get. People need to be educated about what the rules are and whom the responsible officials are to contact.					
Objective 10.3. Sierra County will hire a code enforcement officer to deal with a range of regulations currently not being enforced, including those related to land use, trash and nuisance abatement (below), and fostering greater effectiveness and coordination with State agencies (See Section Eight: Housing).					
Objective 10.4 Sierra County will work with appropriate State agencies to develop fines for those people who do not seek necessary permits.					
Objective 11.1. Sierra County will study a program for creating an incentive for property owners to voluntarily remove weeds and junk from their property and to repair or remove abandoned or dilapidated structures.					

	Critical Need	2005-2009	2010-2015	2016-2025	On-Going
Objective 11.2. Sierra County will develop a trash and nuisance abatement ordinance through consultation with its citizenry that will deal with junkyards, abandoned cars, and general trash along roadways. This will be designed as a “worst case” approach for situations in which voluntary measures have not worked.					
Objective 11.3. Junkyards will not be located near the entrances to the incorporated communities without proper and effective landscape screening.					
Objective 11.4. Currently, there is a fair amount of illegal dumping on BOR, BLM and state lands. The County will encourage the necessary cleanup through a variety of ways, like having community service people do litter pickup, using groups like 4-H and public service organizations, and brochures could be printed. The creation of higher fines is likely to be a deterrent. A BOR representative has offered to spearhead the effort.					
Strategy 11.4.a. The County will research the feasibility of different programs, which could be utilized in Sierra County to address illegal dumping. This includes researching what Lincoln, Otero and Doña Ana Counties have done to make their dumpster programs work, and cost effective measures to initiate a dumpster program.					
Objective 11.5. Establish more dumpster sites around the County as long as it can be done in accordance with the State Environment Department regulations.					
Objective 11.6. Encourage County residents to be more responsible for their trash and to take more pride in their community.					

	Critical Need	2005-2009	2010-2015	2016-2025	On-Going
Strategy 11.6.a. The County will research ways to educate the citizens of Sierra County about the responsibility they have as property owners to keep their property from becoming a public health and safety hazard and to help create a better quality of life for all those living in the community.					
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT					
Objective 14.a. Sierra County will support the permanent status of the Sierra County Recreation and Tourism Advisory Board (SCRTAB) and encourage its continued practice of inclusion and coordination between various tourism interests.					
Strategy 14.a.1. Sierra County will consider the placement of all Lodgers' Tax with SCRTAB to further consolidate an inclusive and diverse approach to tourism development.					
Strategy 14.a.2. Sierra County will consider imposing the Lodgers' Tax on RV Parks to further bolster tourism development revenues.					
Objective 14.b. Support bird watching as a lucrative and environmentally friendly economic development activity. Objective 9.11 proposes riparian setbacks and promotion of low impact recreational activities as means to promote the economic value associated with birding.					
Objective 14.c. Sierra County will encourage and offer incentives for a "synergistic" approach to tourism events, one that promotes linking and coordinating events so as to encourage visitors to stay longer than they otherwise would.					
Objective 15.a. Work with economic development leaders, and RV park owners, to fashion an effective policy to promote "snowbird" settlement.					

	Critical Need	2005-2009	2010-2015	2016-2025	On-Going
Objective 17.a. Sierra County will explore collaborative investments with the Forest Service and other partners to re-develop a forest products and restoration industry. The success of initial pilots warrants this investment.					
Strategy 17.a.1. Sierra County will encourage SSWCD and the Wahoo Watershed Workgroup to pursue CFRP grants and other sources of funding to develop a local mill devoted to small diameter timber processing.					
Strategy 17.a.2. Sierra County will advocate with other partners with the State to get the high workers' compensation rate reduced or subsidized.					
Objective 18.a. Monitor the loss of agricultural lands at five-year intervals in order to inform the debate about appropriate agricultural policy. Protecting against the loss of agricultural lands is difficult to put into policy because of competing rights of property owners to dispose of their land as they wish. For now, monitoring will at least inform citizens as to the trends over time.					
Objective 19.a. Create a public/private partnership to ensure that the local labor force will have the technical skills to compete for employment at the Space Port. Emphasize particularly the secondary market—since the County does not have the engineers and technicians that will earn high salaries at the Space Port, position County residents in the secondary market—those related businesses which will service Space Port professionals.					

	Critical Need	2005-2009	2010-2015	2016-2025	On-Going
Objective 19.b. Seek State and Federal support for road improvements and other infrastructure as necessary to absorb the impacts of Space Port construction and operation.					
Objective 19.c. Seek regular communication with Space Port officials to ensure accountability before investing.					
INFRASTRUCTURE					
Objective 20.a. Continually upgrade existing GIS databases with locations, sizes, and types of all utilities to improve modeling and evaluation of existing and proposed utility capacity.					
Objective 20.b. Sierra County will continue to work closely with the Cities of Elephant Butte and Truth or Consequences and the Village of Williamsburg to coordinate the timely provision of needed infrastructure.					
Strategy 20.b.1. Sierra County will encourage the development of a public facilities matrix, that is, a chart, that shows the service levels for the County and the three municipalities for each service and/or how much/many more people/housing units they can serve.					
Objective 20.c. Sierra County will prioritize its list of capital improvement projects, considering the elevation of the detention center construction to the highest priority.					
Objective 20.d. Evaluate proposed residential subdivisions, commercial, and industrial developments to determine the impact on the infrastructure. Determine the requirements for each type of development, such as water demand for fire hydrants, power requirements, and so on. (This is a provision from the City of Truth or Consequences' Comprehensive Plan that seems appropriate for Sierra County.)					

	Critical Need	2005-2009	2010-2015	2016-2025	On-Going
Objective 21.a. Sierra County will support the EMO effort through adequate financial and logistical support, recognizing that increased efficiencies are gained by coordination among the various emergency service providers.					
Objective 21.b. Consider having only one EMO between Sierra County and the City of Truth or Consequences, fostering greater cooperation and reduced cost.					
Objective 22.a. Sierra County will explore appropriate measures to take to assure compliance with wastewater provisions. It will consider contracting enforcement services through the Environment Department, as well as other mechanisms.					
Objective 22.b. A public health education campaign could be developed to increase the awareness of residents about the public health risks of unregulated liquid waste. A common value of protecting children could provide motivation for voluntary restraints.					
Objective 23.a. Sierra County will work with the Solid Waste Division of the Environment Department to develop a schedule for initiating a new landfill site for the County.					
Objective 23.b. Sierra County will work through BLM's current land use planning effort to identify a BLM site for a landfill, and acquire the site through R&PP leasing if possible or through purchase if necessary.					

	Critical Need	2005- 2009	2010- 2015	2016- 2025	On- Going
WATER					
Objective 27.a. “Agricultural water conservation. Agriculture is a large use sector in the region, and efforts to use agricultural water efficiently are becoming increasingly important. During drought periods in particular, the region can benefit by being able to more efficiently deliver water to crops. The region considered alternatives related to improving conveyance efficiencies, improving on-farm water management, and controlling brush and weeds along ditches. A comprehensive water conservation plan was developed and is amended to the regional water plan.” (Stephens and Associates 2003: ES-14)					
Objective 27.b. “Reduction in riparian evapotranspiration and open water evaporation through removal of exotic species and improvements to the Elephant Butte delta. Because riparian evapotranspiration and open water evaporation are such large components of the region’s water budget, significant savings can be made through these programs. Alternatives considered included removal of exotic vegetation throughout the region, as well as a specific alternative that focused on reducing evaporative losses in the Elephant Butte delta. Though the savings from these alternatives will not result in new water rights that are available for use within the region, they indirectly benefit the region, because to the extent that more water is available to meet Compact delivery and endangered species obligations, supplies for users within the region will be more secure.” (Stephens and Associates 2003: ES-14)					

	Critical Need	2005-2009	2010-2015	2016-2025	On-Going
Objective 27.c. “Encouraging retention of water rights in the region. A key issue throughout the Socorro-Sierra planning process has been the need to protect the local economy and values from impacts that could result from transfers of large quantities of water rights out of the planning region. The ability to prevent condemnation of water rights, which could also protect against out-of-region transfers, was also evaluated.” (Stephens and Associates 2003: ES-14)					
Strategy 27.c.1. The County should prohibit transfer of water rights outside the County, or at least have a review process to evaluate transfers. To this end, a procedure shall be established so that Sierra County knows when a transfer or sale of water rights takes place.					
Strategy 27.c.2. A trust should be established to purchase water rights attached to perennial streams as they come on the market, in order to preserve and improve those riparian areas.					
Strategy 27.c.3. The county should take the lead in developing a Sierra County Rio Grande conservancy, which would include representatives from all entities who own or control land adjacent to the river, including the County, all municipalities, State Parks, the BOR, BLM, Sierra Soil and Water Conservation District, and land owners through which compacts would implement regulations to protect the riparian corridor.					
Objective 28.a. Sierra County will undertake awareness and education efforts to foster water conservation practices among Sierra County residents. Figure 5.7 below showcases three brochures from other New Mexico Counties promoting education and wise use of water.					
Objective 28.b. Water conservation measures should be integrated into individual lot and subdivision requirements, including appropriate building codes, as well as commercial development requirements.					

	Critical Need	2005-2009	2010-2015	2016-2025	On-Going
Objective 28.c. Sierra County will create incentives for conservation.					
Objective 28.d. Sierra County will explore the creation of additional water associations or water districts where appropriate to promote more reliable and efficient use.					
Objective 28.e. Gray water use in now permitted in New Mexico that can be applied to landscape uses, saving 30-40% on water needs. Find ways to educate people about these innovations.					
TRANSPORTATION					
Objective 29.a. Sierra County will make sure that it secures all future road and other utility easements when new subdivisions are approved.					
Objective 30.a. Additional funding should be pursued for maintenance and improvements to County roads (SCRPO 2002).					
Strategy 30.a.1. Changes should be made to the formulas at the federal level that govern funding of rural roads. Changes should take into consideration the spatial area (size) of a county, its economic status (relative poverty), and the size of its road system, and funding should be based on those formulas (SCRPO 2002).					
Objective 30.b. The necessary studies, funds, and improvements to the key traffic corridors of Sierra County will be vigorously sought.					
Strategy 30.b.1. New Mexico routes 195, 195P and 181 should be the subject of a corridor study within five years. New Mexico route 195 should be re-aligned and widened, and safety features should be installed, within five years. (SCRPO 2002).					
Strategy 30.b.2. NM 152 should be the subject of a corridor study within twenty years (SCRPO 2002: 27).					
Objective 30.c. A regional GIS system linking transportation to other land uses will be developed (SCRPO 2002).					

	Critical Need	2005-2009	2010-2015	2016-2025	On-Going
Objective 30.d. Road signs indicating mileage to communities will be improved, especially on I-25 in the southern part of the County (SCRPO 2002).					
Objective 31.a. Lower levels of matches to operate rural mass transit should be developed within five years, which take into consideration the system’s spatial area (size), its economic status (relative poverty), and the size of its road system (SCRPO 2002).					
Objective 31.b. Advocate for changes to Federal standards to allow multiple classes of users to ride federally funded van systems (SCRPO 2002)					
Objective 31.c. Develop regional coordination of existing van systems (SCRPO 2002).					
Objective 32.a. The task force will explore various options to create “fair share” mechanisms to provide residents a higher level of road maintenance, if they so desire, as well as a structure to assure that new development pays its way for the road costs it creates.					
Objective 32.b. Find a way for the building department to communicate the improvement schedule to residents in order to minimize surprise.					
Objective 32.c. Sierra County will consider undertaking a “Road Designation Program.” Understanding that for cost reasons the County must be careful not to adopt all roads, it is still the case that roads could be categorized regarding their “health, safety, and welfare” value to Sierra County residents, and roads with the highest value can be incorporated into the county system. For example, the state Highway Department has created a Matrix System to classify their highways by category.					
Strategy 32.c.1. With planning staff, develop criteria for ranking county roads for priority status for inclusion into the county system. Such criteria should include level of traffic, roads on school bus lines, and health, safety and welfare considerations.					

	Critical Need	2005-2009	2010-2015	2016-2025	On-Going
Strategy 32.c.2. Sierra County should begin this effort even with modest revenues. When thinking about revenue mechanisms, the power of leverage should not be underestimated. Even a minor increase in revenue can be used as a match in granting opportunities, or if the county bonds against a consistent revenue source, and can convince the creditors it is consistent, enormous revenues can be generated. Thus, even a small mill levy increase such as would increase property tax \$50/year can yield huge results.					
Objective 33.a. Sierra County will work to minimize public road closure as a way to promote access of its citizens to federal lands.					
Objective 34.a. Support the State’s projected support of rail passenger service between Las Cruces and Albuquerque, as called for in the State Multi-modal Transportation Plan (NMDOT 2004).					
HOUSING					
Objective 35.a. Sierra County, through appropriate agencies, will encourage the necessary assessment and evaluation in order to developed reasoned and sound housing policies.					
Strategy 35.a.1. Sierra County will encourage a professional housing study to ascertain needs of elderly, disabled, indigent and other vulnerable people in the County, to assess the housing stock, and to recommend appropriate policy measures.					
Strategy 35.a.2. Sierra County will work with relevant agencies to identify adequate sites for future housing needs.					
Strategy 35.a.3. Noting that the comprehensive plans for both Williamsburg and Truth or Consequences contain provisions supporting senior housing, housing rehabilitation programs, and multi-family housing, on the basis of its own housing assessment, Sierra County will coordinate with the Cities’ programs as appropriate.					

	Critical Need	2005-2009	2010-2015	2016-2025	On-Going
Objective 35.b. Sierra County will undertake appropriate action to meet the goal of affordable, diverse housing.					
Strategy 35.b.1. Assure existing programs are promoted and new ones developed as needed in order to create the necessary incentives for the rehabilitation of usable housing stock.					
Strategy 35.b.2. Develop County policy that offers incentives to demolish old housing stock for which rehabilitation is not feasible. The County could consider bulldozing the houses for free as a public service. Utilize the Sierra County Assessor to identify vacant buildings and delete them from the tax rolls after removal.					
Strategy 35.b.3. Sierra County will develop the necessary legal framework for requiring the removal of deteriorated, substandard and unsanitary residential properties.					
Strategy 35.b.4. The County could consider condemning abandoned structures which are not rehabilitated or removed. The condemned properties could be dedicated and then consolidated as land donations for future affordable housing projects.					
Strategy 35.b.5. The County could consider land donations/dedications and/or supplying some infrastructure to prime building sites as its contributions to affordable housing.					
Strategy 35.b.6. Provide incentives for the development of affordable housing. The County might be a source of some matching funds for grants since it usually takes some leverage to get these things off the ground. Also the County can coordinate multiple applicants—grantors favors "collaborative" applications but someone has to serve as a nexus to coordinate these.					

	Critical Need	2005-2009	2010-2015	2016-2025	On-Going
Strategy 35.b.7. In order to deal with the high numbers of residents experiencing “renters’ burden,” Sierra County will encourage appropriate agencies to continue to offer residents support services, understanding that the foreclosure rate could be lowered with education and training.					
Strategy 35.b.8. Promote housing in Sierra County that provides a continuum of care for the senior community including assisted living facilities, independent living centers, and nursing homes.					
Strategy 35.b.9. Sierra County will vigorously support efforts to create <i>colonia</i> status in the southern part of the County. State and housing officials have stated very clearly that such a designation is appropriate and valuable for the County in dealing with housing and community development issues in the Arrey/Derry area.					
Strategy 35.b.10. Expiring use properties, 31 units, are to be lost by 2010, representing a significant loss of low-income units. Sierra County will vigorously develop strategies for replacement of these units.					
Objective 35.c. Sierra County will consider ordinances as necessary to assure necessary compliance in housing resources related to health, safety and welfare of Sierra County citizens.					
Strategy 35.c.1. Sierra County will consider an ordinance to better regulate the placement of mobile homes, so as to control septic discharge and fire hazard from overcrowding. With County authority to stipulate citations and fines, it could foster greater coordination with Construction Industries Division.					
Objective 36.a. Sierra County will generally encourage new development to be contiguous to or near existing development in order to reduce the cost of government services, to foster the efficient provision of utilities, and to reduce environmental impact.					

	Critical Need	2005- 2009	2010- 2015	2016- 2025	On- Going
<u>Objective 36.b.</u> Sierra County will amend its subdivision regulations to assure ADA compliance.					
<u>Objective 36.c.</u> Sierra County will work with NMMFA and other regional housing agencies to be apprised of grants and funds for rehabilitated and affordable housing.					
<u>Objective 36.d.</u> Sierra County will encourage new subdivisions, and parks devoted to mobile homes, manufactured homes and recreational vehicles be well-planned and include open space, landscaping, play areas, and other amenities for their residents.					

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