

JAN 25 2005

SURNAME
U. Ortiz 1/24/05
John 1/25/05

In Reply Refer To:  
R2/FA  
NM E-60-RL

Ms Joanna Prukop  
Secretary  
New Mexico Energy, Minerals, & Natural Resources  
P.O. Box 6429  
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87502

**Attn: Anna Montoya, Fiscal Assistant**

Dear Ms Prukop:

Enclosed are the **conditionally** approved copies of the Application for Federal Assistance and the Grant Agreement for grant number E-60-RL, Acquisition of Blue Hole Cienega for Pecos Sunflower Habitat located in Santa Rosa, New Mexico. This grant under the Endangered Species Section 6 Recovery Land Acquisition program approves the New Mexico Endangered Plant Program within the Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department, Forestry Division (EMNRD-Forestry), as grantee, to acquire the fee-simple interest of the 130-acre Blue Hole Cienega. The cost-share will consist of \$107,000 Federal (62.21%), \$37,500 Grantee Share (21.80%) and \$27,500 Third Party (15.99%) match. The agreement period is from January 1, 2005, to January 1, 2008. Pre-agreement costs associated with this acquisition are approved, as requested. An interim financial status report and interim performance report are required 90 days following the 1-year anniversary of the effective date on the grant agreement, which is April 1

Acquisition of this property, and its permanent preservation, will protect 130 acres of natural wetland habitat which provides a refuge for numerous native plants and animals, including the endangered Pecos sunflower. The sole activity of acquiring land is categorically excluded from the National Environmental Policy Act documentation based on 516 DM 6, Appendix 1, A (4). Also, a cultural resource review is not needed since acquisition of the property will not adversely impact archeological resources or historic properties.

Title to these lands will vest with the State of New Mexico through EMNRD-Forestry, as grantee. It is imperative that the Federal interest in those lands be maintained and delineated. This also includes any lands used as in-kind match. As outlined in the Fish and Wildlife Service Manual, (Part 522 Federal Aid Program Guidance, 1.15 Real Property), the State agency is responsible for exercising sufficient control over real property to ensure that the property is used

for the purpose(s) for which it was acquired. The following apply to this acquisition: 1) control may be exercised through agreement or other means consistent with State procedures, but must contain the requirements for use of the property and a prohibition against the disposition or encumbrance of its title or other interest, 2) if the property is no longer needed or can no longer serve the purpose for which acquired, EMNRD-Forestry, as grantee, must request disposition instructions from the Regional Director, and 3) if the use of the property is not compatible with the approved purposes, either the use must be returned to the approved purposes or the property must be replaced. The replacement property must be at least equal in value and benefits to the Endangered Species Recovery Land Acquisition program under which the property was acquired.

Please note that this grant is **conditionally** approved subject to this office receiving the following documentation:

1. Submission of a certified appraisal indicating the market value of the interest (i.e., fee simple, conservation easement in perpetuity, in-kind match properties, etc.) of each property to be acquired. The appraisals should conform to Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice (USPAP), and the Uniform Appraisal Standards for Federal Land Acquisition (UASFLA). UASFLA is available for download at [www.usdoj.gov](http://www.usdoj.gov).
2. An appraisal review of each appraisal, which also conforms to USPAP and UASFLA.
3. Receipt of the notification to the landowner of just compensation for each property to be acquired (Example form enclosed).
4. Surveys, maps, and legal descriptions for all lands acquired including in-kind match properties.
5. Title Vesting Evidence, such as a title insurance policy or a certificate from the Attorney General or other authorized State official that title to the property acquired is vested with the State of New Mexico, through EMNRD-Forestry, as grantee.
6. As outlined in the Division of Federal Assistance Assurances form, EMNRD-Forestry, as grantee, will record the Federal interest in the title for all real property acquired by Endangered Species Recovery Land Acquisition program grants funded by the Secretary of the Interior (including in-kind match properties). EMNRD-Forestry, as grantee, will also include a covenant in the title of real property acquired in whole or in part with Federal Assistance funds to assure nondiscrimination during the useful life of the project.

Before any property can be acquired, conditions 1 through 4 must be met by the grantee. This office will notify you in writing once these conditions have been met, and final approval is granted for the property to be acquired. Upon completion of the acquisition, please provide a copy of the summary of land costs form (copy enclosed), deed, settlement statement, survey, map, and title vesting evidence.

Ms. Joanna Prukop

3

If you have questions about this grant, please contact Penny Bartnicki at (505) 248-7465 regarding biological issues or Carlotta Ortiz at (505) 248-7456 regarding realty issues

Sincerely,

*/s/ N. Joyce Johnson*

N Joyce Johnson  
Chief  
Division of Federal Assistance

Enclosures

cc:  
ARD - Ecological Services, Region 2

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**RECOVERY LANDS ACQUISITION PROGRAM**  
**PROPOSAL**

**Blue Hole Cienega, Santa Rosa, New Mexico:  
Core Conservation Habitat for  
Pecos Sunflower (*Helianthus paradoxus*)**

**By**

**New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department  
Forestry Division  
Endangered Plant Program  
P.O. Box 1948  
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87504**

**For**

**Regional Director  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
500 Gold Avenue SW, Room 4012  
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87102**

**May 4, 2004  
(Revised January 18, 2005)**

## PROJECT STATEMENT

**NEED:** Blue Hole Cienega in Santa Rosa, New Mexico is one of the last, best habitats for the threatened Pecos sunflower (*Helianthus paradoxus*). It is also an excellent example of a climax cienega wetland. The term "cienega" is here applied to mid-elevation wet meadows associated with large-area spring seeps in broad, relatively flat headwater situations. Our present usage of the word "cienega" is probably a contraction or corruption of the Spanish "cien aguas" meaning "a hundred fountains" or "a hundred waters" in reference to spring seeps that saturate surface soils in many places over a large area. Being well-watered, biologically productive sites surrounded by dry lands, they are extremely important to plants and animals of the desert southwest. Cienegas of the American Southwest have all but vanished due to environmental changes brought about by man. Aquifer depletion, drainage channel incision by erosion, over grazing, conversion to agriculture or urban use, and proliferation of non-native weeds have taken a serious toll and continue to threaten the remnants of this unique climax wetland community.

Pecos sunflower is a wetland plant that is confined to spring and cienega habitats in New Mexico and west Texas. Its ability to thrive on extremely salty, alkaline soils makes this species an obvious source of salt-tolerance genes that could be used to improve the productivity of the closely related agricultural sunflower (*Helianthus annuus*) on cultivated fields, which can become increasingly alkaline under irrigation. This sunflower is abundant and highly productive in its few remaining habitats. As such, it is a dominant element of the wetland biota and an important food source for small mammals and migrating granivorous birds.



Pecos sunflower is listed as an endangered species under the NM Endangered Plant Species Act (Section 75-6-1, NMSA 1978) and was given threatened species status under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) on October 20, 1999 (64 FR 56582-56590). Habitat loss and degradation were identified as the primary threats that could cause this species to become endangered. Critical habitat has not been designated under the ESA, however, the draft recovery plan prescribes permanent protection of core conservation habitats in the Santa Rosa, Rio San Jose, Roswell/Dexter populations in New Mexico, and the west Texas populations. Core conservation habitats for Pecos sunflower are occupied habitat areas that are managed for the perpetuation of native wetland vegetation and comprise stable, self-perpetuating stand of sunflowers within a regional population. Progress has already been made on this criterion for recovery. Significant areas of habitat at both Pecos sunflower locations in west Texas have been purchased and protected by The Nature

Conservancy (TNC) and satisfy the core habitat criteria for that state. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service protects two large-area habitats near Roswell, New Mexico at Bitter Lake National Wildlife as core conservation locations. At least one core conservation habitat is needed within each of the regional populations at Santa Rosa and Rio San Jose, New Mexico to fulfill this recovery criterion and allow the Pecos sunflower to be removed from the federal list of threatened and endangered species.

All of the Pecos sunflower locations in and around the City of Santa Rosa are within municipal recreation parks or on private property. The largest, most significant stand of Pecos sunflowers in Santa Rosa is within a privately owned wetland of approximately 130 acres called Blue Hole Cienega. During some years this habitat can contain patches of several hundred thousand sunflowers and represents at least one-third of the total habitat area of the Santa Rosa population of Pecos sunflower. This cienega is relatively intact, but needs management to control encroachment by non-native Russian olive trees and periodic removal of dead vegetation accumulations with prescribed fire. It is qualified and highly suitable for a core conservation habitat.

Blue Hole Cienega is for sale, and is not being offered only to a conservation buyer. Anyone who will meet the asking price can purchase this property. Therefore, an immediate conservation purchase is needed before this land falls into the hands of someone who might not protect its wetland values.

**OBJECTIVE:** The State of New Mexico and project partners propose to purchase Blue Hole Cienega under the NM Endangered Plant Program within the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department – Forestry Division (EMNRD-Forestry) for the purpose of protecting and managing this unique wetland for the perpetuation of its natural wetland values, especially as habitat for Pecos sunflower. The ability of EMNRD-Forestry to purchase and own land is provided in Section 68-2-12 NMSA 1978. The state and project partners also propose to use Blue Hole Cienega as an educational resource for biological research and public interpretation opportunities. This purchase would be a fee-simple acquisition, which would involve a title binder, appraisal (to federal land acquisition standards), boundary survey, and title insurance at closing. The end point of the federal grant would be the transfer of title from the present landowner to ownership by the State of New Mexico.

Management objectives will be accomplished by the State of New Mexico with project partners, NM Highway and Transportation Department (NMHTD) and City of Santa Rosa, and will include weed control, exclusion of vehicles and trespass livestock, fire prescription, construction of an interpretive nature trail, and long-term plans for maintenance and monitoring. The management plan and tasks must be supported by a baseline biological survey of the property, monitoring methodology and schedule, identification of research needs, and formal agreements between project partners.

**EXPECTED RESULTS OR BENEFITS:** Acquisition of Blue Hole Cienega will provide protection, in perpetuity, for 130 acres of natural wetland within the Town of Santa Rosa. This



property will preserve a rare climax wetland community that will provide a refuge for numerous native plants and animals, including the threatened Pecos sunflower. Protection of this property for conservation purposes will fulfill a recovery criterion of the Pecos sunflower recovery plan, which prescribes the goals that must be achieved to remove this species from the federal list of threatened and endangered species.

Blue Hole Cienega is a relatively large spring-fed wetland that is strategically placed between, and connecting, two Santa Rosa municipal parks, Blue Hole Spring Park and Janes-Wallace Park, which also contain many acres of springs and wetlands. This cienega is also visible from two other municipal parks, Perch Lake Park and Park Lake. Therefore, this property is important to the City of Santa Rosa for open space that enhances the city's viewscape and educational or recreational opportunities.

**APPROACH:** The State of New Mexico proposes to purchase Blue Hole Cienega under the NM Endangered Plant Program at EMNRD-Forestry with due-diligence and funding assistance from NMHTD. Title to the property will be held by the State of New Mexico.

The following partners are working together for the purchase and management of Blue Hole Cienega:

**NM Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD).** The EMNRD Cabinet Secretary administers the NM Endangered Plant Program through the Forestry Division of EMNRD. The Forestry Division's Inmate Work Camp Program is a potential source for work crews that can eliminate the hundreds of Russian olive trees encroaching upon Blue Hole Cienega.

**NM Highway and Transportation Department (NMHTD).** This state agency has disturbed cienega wetland in the Highway 91 right-of-way (south border of Blue Hole Cienega), and proposes construction of a pedestrian trail within this right-of-way. As mitigation for these impacts, NMHTD proposes to pay up to \$75,000 the due-diligence work and purchase price for acquisition of Blue Hole Cienega.

**City of Santa Rosa.** City of Santa Rosa supports a conservation purchase of Blue Hole Cienega and passed a resolution (attached) to participate in the long-term management of this property. The City will help with weed control and periodic prescribed fire to remove accumulations of dead vegetation. City of Santa Rosa also hopes to, eventually, extend its interpretive nature trail down El Rito Creek on the west side of Blue Hole Cienega.

**NM Game & Fish Department (NMG&FD).** Biologists from this agency are helping with the baseline biological survey of this property.

**Native Plant Society of New Mexico (NPSNM).** This non-profit educational society has offered to assist with educational interpretation at Blue Hole Cienega and will also assist in monitoring this property, especially the Pecos sunflower habitat.

**Wallace Genetics Foundation.** This Washington, DC foundation has made a grant for the initial standard appraisal to determine the fair market value of Blue Hole Cienega

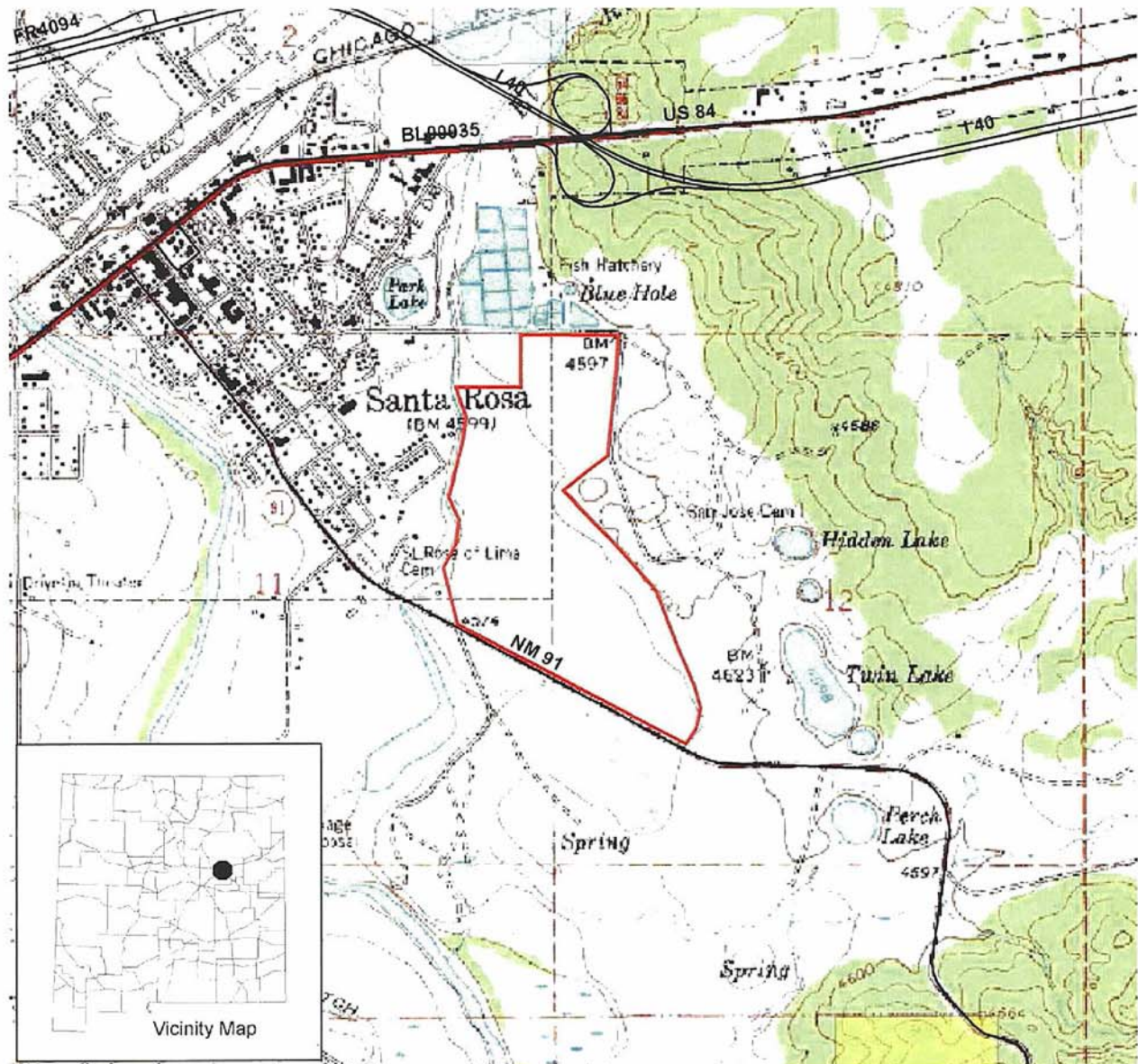
Acquisition of Blue Hole Cienega would be a standard real estate transaction with title being the State of New Mexico. This transaction should close in March 2005. In the mean time, the standard appraisal would need to be updated to conform to uniform appraisal standards for federal land acquisitions. A boundary survey of the property lines would also need to be accomplished. Fencing for the control of vehicle trespass and exclusion of livestock already exists around most of the property. A baseline survey to document the existing condition of the cienega is already underway. Plant species diversity has been assessed by EMNRD-Forestry (see attached). The NMG&FD has completed mammal, bird and fish surveys of the property and will conduct a mollusk survey this summer. Finally, formal agreements and contracts between project partners would be established for the long-term protection, management and monitoring of the Blue Hole Cienega preserve.

**LOCATION:** Blue Hole Cienega is within, and adjacent to, the city limits of Santa Rosa in Guadalupe County, New Mexico. It is approximately 130 acres of wetland that is bounded on the north by Blue Hole Spring Park and on the south by Highway 91. The western boundary is El Rito Creek, except for an 8-acre square that is held by a different landowner. The eastern boundary is approximately along a gravel road (not on map) that passes the San Jose Cemetery and connects with Highway 91.

There are two perennial streams on the property. El Rito Creek (on the west boundary) has distinct channel with riparian woodland margins consisting of Russian olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*), plains cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*), coyote willow (*Salix exigua*) and seep willow (*Baccharis salicina*). The other stream is a 3,000 gallons per minute discharge from Blue Hole Spring that enters the property at its north boarder and traverses the northern one-third of the property before emptying in to El Rito Creek. This spring run is not in a well-defined channel and spreads out, creating large marshy area dominated by rush (*Juncus* sp.), hairy fimbry (*Fimbristylis puberula*) and bullrush (*Schoenoplectus* sp.). This marsh habitat contains a significant population of the rare Wright's marsh thistle (*Cirsium wrightii*), which is a federal species of concern. NMG&FD has identified the Blue Hole Spring run across this property as a potential reintroduction habitat for the Pecos gambusia (*Gambusia nobilis*), which is listed as an endangered fish species under both federal and New Mexico endangered species acts.

There are no water rights belonging to the title of this property. There is, however, a diversion gate at the lower end of the Blue Hole Spring run that captures and transports irrigation water across El Rito Creek for farm fields on the other side of the creek near the Rio Pecos. This point of diversion on the subject property is fortuitous since it will guarantee continued flow of the spring run across the property to satisfy existing water rights on adjacent properties.





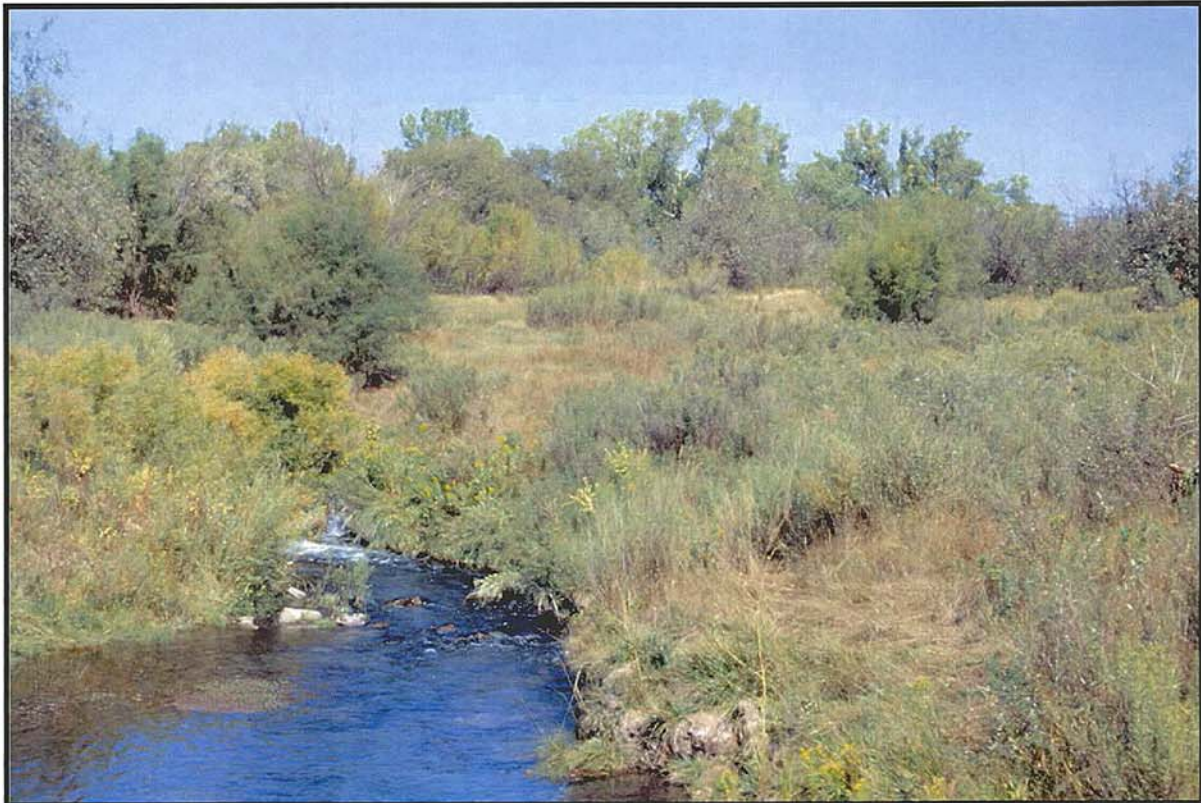
Location of Blue Hole Cienega at Santa Rosa, New Mexico

Shallow ground water seeps to the surface over all of the property creating two distinct types of cienega communities. The most extensive cienega type occurs on alkaline, fine sand soils that may be dry at the surface during summer months, but are well watered (subirrigated) in the root zone. These alkaline soils are dominated by salt grass (*Distichlis spicata*), baltic rush (*Juncus arcticus*), alkali sacaton (*Sporobolus airoides*), and southern jimmyweed (*Isocoma pluriflora*). This is the primary habitat for Pecos sunflower, which occurs in several large and small patches across the property. The other cienega type is a rare stand of indiagrass (*Sorghastrum nutans*) that covers several acres of permanently wet, deep sandy soils in the southeast corner of the property.

This entire property consists of native wetland and riparian plant and animal communities. The natural soils and vegetation are intact and have been well managed. Encroachment of non-native Russian olive woodland on El Rito Creek and the somewhat drier, eastern side of the property is



the only serious management issue that needs immediate attention. Blue Hole Cienega is continuous with other wetland habitats on adjacent private and municipal properties. Significant portions of these adjacent properties are being seriously impacted by development and lack weed control for Russian olive. Therefore, Blue Hole Cienega is an extremely important refuge for the wetland biota of this region. It is also a corridor for plant and animal movement between the remaining wetlands in Santa Rosa's Blue Hole Spring Park (an abandoned fish hatchery) and the undeveloped cienegas and springs to the south of Highway 91. The upland habitats north and east of the city are connected to the Rio Pecos by a continuous corridor of riparian and wetland vegetation along El Rito Creek.



El Rito Creek at west property boundary (looking north)





Blue Hole Spring run with Wright's marsh thistle (pink flowers)



Blue Hole Cienega with Pecos sunflower

**ESTIMATED COST:**

	<u>Federal Grant</u>	<u>Non-federal Share</u>
<u>Appraisal</u>		
➤ Wallace Genetics Foundation		\$3,200
➤ NMHTD		\$300
➤ USF&WS Section 6 grant	\$2,000	
<u>Land Purchase</u>		
➤ USF&WS Section 6 grant	\$105,000	
➤ NMHTD		\$45,000
<u>Closing Costs (2%)</u>		
➤ NMHTD		\$3,000
<u>Boundary Survey</u>		
➤ NMHTD		\$6,000
<u>Property Fence (where needed)</u>		
➤ NMHTD		\$3,000
<u>Baseline Biological Survey</u>		
➤ EMNRD-Forestry		\$2,500
➤ NMG&FD	_____	<u>\$2,000</u>
TOTALS	\$107, 000	\$65,000

**ESTIMATED TOTAL COST OF PROJECT = \$172,000**

**FEDERAL SECTION 6 GRANT REQUEST OF \$107,000 = 62.2%**

**NON-FEDERAL MATCH OF \$65,000 BY PROJECT PARTNERS = 37.8%**

EMNRD-Forestry has a full-authorities agreement with USFW&S under ESA, Section 6 and is eligible for a Recovery Lands Acquisition grant. The baseline biological survey of Blue Hole Cienega will be, and has been, conducted independently by the State of New Mexico and not charged to other Section 6 grants. Long-term management costs cannot be estimated at this time and will be the subject of future grant applications or appropriations by the state and the City of Santa Rosa.

**CONTACT INFORMATION:** Robert Sivinski, EMNRD-Forestry, P O. Box 1948, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87504 (505)476-3347 or bsivinski@state.nm.us



# United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

P O Box 1306

Albuquerque New Mexico 87103

January 19, 2005

In Reply Refer To  
Region 2/FA  
NM E-60-RL

## Memorandum

To File (NM E-60-RL)

From Grant Manager, Division of Federal Assistance

Subject Modification to Original Proposal

The original proposal was dated on May 4, 2004, and is included as part of this file since this proposal was the basis for the competitive award. In this proposal, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) was a partner. Since the award was made, TNC has been replaced with the New Mexico Highway and Transportation Department as a partner

The updated proposal includes a revised date of January 18, 2005, and replaces TNC with New Mexico Highway and Transportation Department

*Carlotta L. Ortiz*

**RECOVERY LANDS ACQUISITION PROGRAM**  
**PROPOSAL**

**Blue Hole Cienega, Santa Rosa, New Mexico:  
Core Conservation Habitat for  
Pecos Sunflower (*Helianthus paradoxus*)**

**By**

**New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department  
Forestry Division  
Endangered Plant Program  
P.O. Box 1948  
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87504**

**For**

**Regional Director  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
500 Gold Avenue SW, Room 4012  
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87102**

**May 4, 2004**



**PROJECT STATEMENT**

**NEED:** Blue Hole Cienega in Santa Rosa, New Mexico is one of the last, best habitats for the threatened Pecos sunflower (*Helianthus paradoxus*). It is also an excellent example of a climax cienega wetland. The term "cienega" is here applied to mid-elevation wet meadows associated with large-area spring seeps in broad, relatively flat headwater situations. Our present usage of the word "cienega" is probably a contraction or corruption of the Spanish "cien aguas" meaning "a hundred fountains" or "a hundred waters" in reference to spring seeps that saturate surface soils in many places over a large area. Being well-watered, biologically productive sites surrounded by dry lands, they are extremely important to plants and animals of the desert southwest. Cienegas of the American Southwest have all but vanished due to environmental changes brought about by man. Aquifer depletion, drainage channel incision by erosion, over grazing, conversion to agriculture or urban use, and proliferation of non-native weeds have taken a serious toll and continue to threaten the remnants of this unique climax wetland community.

Pecos sunflower is a wetland plant that is confined to spring and cienega habitats in New Mexico and west Texas. Its ability to thrive on extremely salty, alkaline soils makes this species an obvious source of salt-tolerance genes that could be used to improve the productivity of the closely related agricultural sunflower (*Helianthus annuus*) on cultivated fields, which can become increasingly alkaline under irrigation. This sunflower is abundant and highly productive in its few remaining habitats. As such, it is a dominant element of the wetland biota and an important food source for small mammals and migrating granivorous birds.



Pecos sunflower is listed as an endangered species under the NM Endangered Plant Species Act (Section 75-6-1, NMSA 1978) and was given threatened species status under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) on October 20, 1999 (64 FR 56582-56590). Habitat loss and degradation were identified as the primary threats that could cause this species to become endangered. Critical habitat has not been designated under the ESA, however, the draft recovery plan prescribes permanent protection of core conservation habitats in the Santa Rosa, Rio San Jose, Roswell/Dexter populations in New Mexico, and the west Texas populations. Core conservation habitats for Pecos sunflower are occupied habitat areas that are managed for the perpetuation of native wetland vegetation and comprise stable, self-perpetuating stands of sunflowers within a regional population. Progress has already been made on this criterion for recovery. Significant areas of habitat at both Pecos sunflower locations in west Texas have been purchased and protected by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and satisfy the core habitat

criteria for that state. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service protects two large-area habitats near Roswell, New Mexico at Bitter Lake National Wildlife as core conservation locations. At least one core conservation habitat is needed within each of the regional populations at Santa Rosa and Rio San Jose, New Mexico to fulfill this recovery criterion and allow the Pecos sunflower to be removed from the federal list of threatened and endangered species.

All of the Pecos sunflower locations in and around the City of Santa Rosa are within municipal recreation parks or on private property. The largest, most significant stand of Pecos sunflowers in Santa Rosa is within a privately owned wetland of approximately 130 acres called Blue Hole Cienega. During some years this habitat can contain patches of several hundred thousand sunflowers and represents at least one-third of the total habitat area of the Santa Rosa population of Pecos sunflower. This cienega is relatively intact, but needs management to control encroachment by non-native Russian olive trees and periodic removal of dead vegetation accumulations with prescribed fire. It is qualified and highly suitable for a core conservation habitat.

Blue Hole Cienega is for sale, and is not being offered only to a conservation buyer. Anyone who will meet the asking price can purchase this property. Therefore, an immediate conservation purchase is needed before this land falls into the hands of someone who might not protect its wetland values.

**OBJECTIVE:** The State of New Mexico and project partners propose to purchase Blue Hole Cienega under the NM Natural Lands Protection Act, Section 78-5-1 et seq., NMSA 1978, for the purpose of protecting and managing this unique wetland for the perpetuation of its natural wetland values, especially as habitat for Pecos sunflower. The state and project partners also propose to use Blue Hole Cienega as an educational resource for biological research and public interpretation opportunities. This purchase would be a fee-simple acquisition, which would involve a title binder, appraisal (to federal land acquisition standards), boundary survey, and title insurance at closing. The end point of the federal grant would be the transfer of title from the present landowner to joint ownership by the State of New Mexico and a non-profit corporate partner.

Management objectives will be accomplished by the State of New Mexico with project partners TNC and City of Santa Rosa, and will include weed control, exclusion of vehicles and trespass livestock, fire prescription, construction of an interpretive nature trail, and long-term plans for maintenance and monitoring. The management plan and tasks must be supported by a baseline biological survey of the property, monitoring methodology and schedule, identification of research needs, and formal agreements between project partners.

**EXPECTED RESULTS OR BENEFITS:** Acquisition of Blue Hole Cienega will provide protection, in perpetuity, for 130 acres of natural wetland within the Town of Santa Rosa. This property will preserve a rare climax wetland community that will provide a refuge for numerous native plants and animals, including the threatened Pecos sunflower. Protection of this property for conservation purposes will fulfill a recovery criterion of the Pecos sunflower recovery plan,

which prescribes the goals that must be achieved to remove this species from the federal list of *threatened and endangered species*

Blue Hole Cienega is a relatively large spring-fed wetland that is strategically placed between, and connecting, two Santa Rosa municipal parks, Blue Hole Spring Park and Janes-Wallace Park, which also contain many acres of springs and wetlands. This cienega is also visible from two other municipal parks: Perch Lake Park and Park Lake. Therefore, this property is important to the City of Santa Rosa for open space that enhances the city's viewscape and *educational or recreational opportunities*.

**APPROACH:** The State of New Mexico proposes to purchase Blue Hole Cienega under the NM Natural Lands Protection Act (NLPA). This statute allows the State of New Mexico to acquire ecologically significant properties that are jointly held by the state and corporate non-profit conservation partner. The corporate partner must contribute a minimum of 10% of the purchase price and assume stewardship responsibilities for the land. The corporate partner also pays annual in-lieu of tax assessments to the county. TNC has been the state's NLPA during five land acquisitions and will participate in the Blue Hole Cienega acquisition. At this time, NLPA is not funded by the state. A minimum of 18 months would pass before an NLPA appropriation could be made through the legislature and subsequent bond issue, if a bill was passed and signed by the Governor. Therefore, alternative funding sources are needed.

*The following partners are working together for the purchase and management of Blue Hole Cienega*

**NM Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD).** The EMNRD Cabinet Secretary administers NLPA. The NM Endangered Plant Program is in the Forestry Division of EMNRD. The Forestry Division's Inmate Work Camp Program is a potential source for work crews that can eliminate the hundreds of Russian olive trees encroaching upon Blue Hole Cienega.

**The Nature Conservancy of New Mexico (TNC).** Most of the due-diligence work of the real estate transaction will be accomplished and paid for by TNC. As a corporate nonprofit partner, TNC will pay 10% of the purchase price and make annual in-lieu payments to Guadalupe County to approximate values of private property taxes. TNC's land stewardship role under NLPA will be shared by the City of Santa Rosa.

**City of Santa Rosa.** City of Santa Rosa supports a conservation purchase of Blue Hole Cienega and passed a resolution (attached) to participate in the long-term management of this property. The City will help with weed control and periodic prescribed fire to remove accumulations of dead vegetation. City of Santa Rosa also hopes to, eventually, extend its interpretive nature trail down El Rito Creek on the west side of Blue Hole Cienega.

**NM Highway and Transportation Department (NMHTD).** This state agency has disturbed cienega wetland in the Highway 91 right-of-way (south border of Blue Hole Cienega), and proposes construction of a pedestrian trail within this right-of-way. As mitigation for these

impacts, NMHTD proposes to pay a minimum 20% of the purchase price for NLPA acquisition of Blue Hole Cienega.

**NM Game & Fish Department (NMG&FD).** Biologists from this agency are helping with the baseline biological survey of this property

**Native Plant Society of New Mexico (NPSNM).** This non-profit educational society has offered to assist with educational interpretation at Blue Hole Cienega and will also assist in monitoring this property, especially the Pecos sunflower habitat

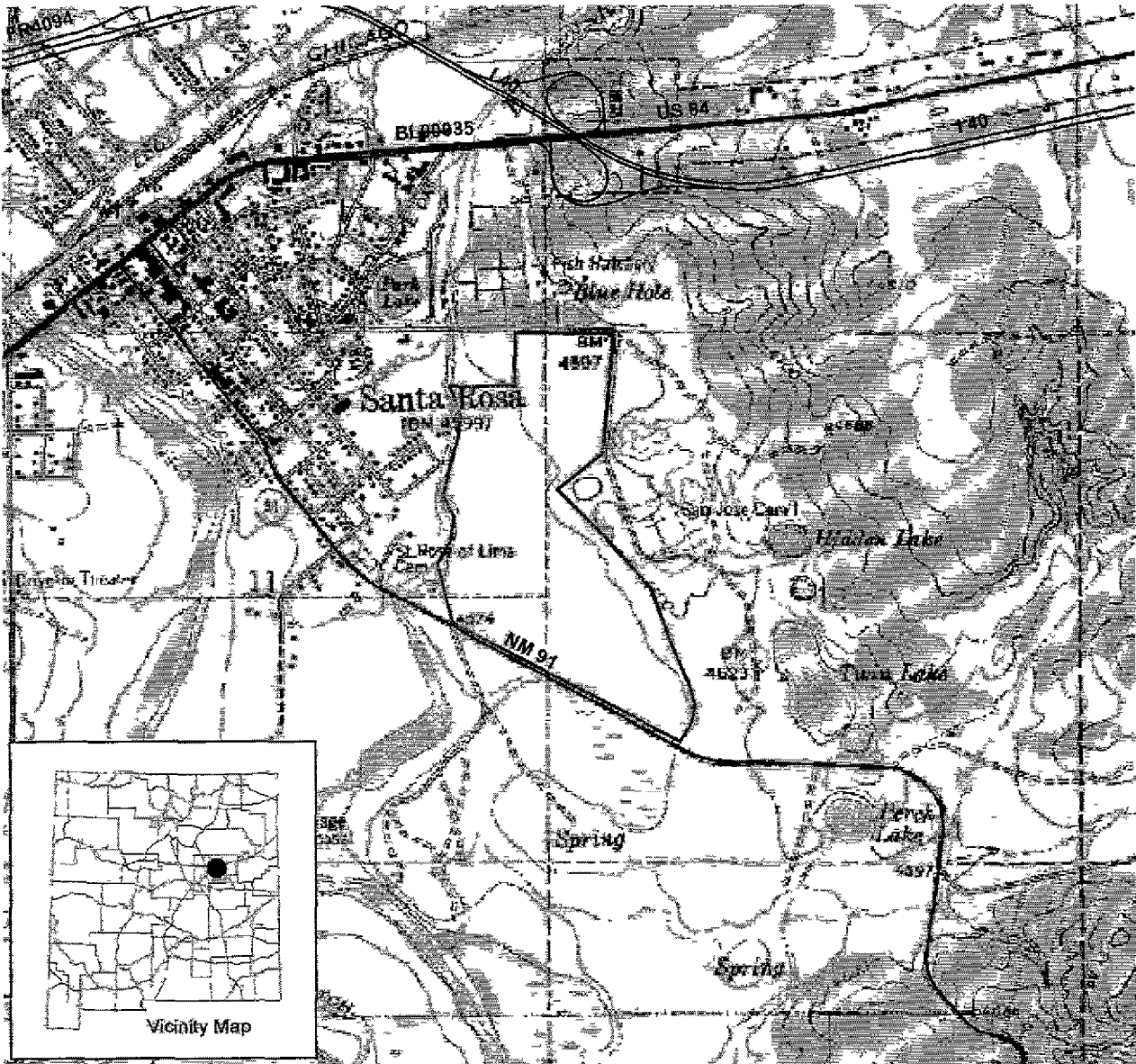
**Wallace Genetics Foundation.** This Washington, DC foundation has made a grant to TNC for the initial standard appraisal to determine the fair market value of Blue Hole Cienega.

Acquisition of Blue Hole Cienega would be a standard real estate transaction with title being jointly held by EMNRD and TNC. This transaction should close in January 2005. In the mean time, the standard appraisal would need to be updated to conform to uniform appraisal standards for federal land acquisitions. A boundary survey of the property lines would also need to be accomplished. Fencing for the control of vehicle trespass and exclusion of livestock already exists around most of the property. A baseline survey to document the existing condition of the cienega is already underway. Plant species diversity has been assessed by EMNRD-Forestry (see attached). The NMG&FD has completed mammal, bird and fish surveys of the property and will conduct a mollusk survey this summer. Finally, formal agreements and contracts between project partners would be established for the long-term protection, management and monitoring of the Blue Hole Cienega preserve.

**LOCATION:** Blue Hole Cienega is within, and adjacent to, the city limits of Santa Rosa in Guadalupe County, New Mexico. It is approximately 130 acres of wetland that is bounded on the north by Blue Hole Spring Park and on the south by Highway 91. The western boundary is El Rito Creek, except for an 8-acre square that is held by a different landowner. The eastern boundary is approximately along a gravel road (not on map) that passes the San Jose Cemetery and connects with Highway 91.

There are two perennial streams on the property. El Rito Creek (on the west boundary) has distinct channel with riparian woodland margins consisting of Russian olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*), plains cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*), coyote willow (*Salix exigua*) and seep willow (*Baccharis salicina*). The other stream is a 3,000 gallons per minute discharge from Blue Hole Spring that enters the property at its north boarder and traverses the northern one-third of the property before emptying in to El Rito Creek. This spring run is not in a well-defined channel and spreads out, creating large marshy area dominated by rush (*Juncus* sp.), hairy fimbry (*Fimbristylis puberula*) and bullrush (*Schoenoplectus* sp.). This marsh habitat contains a significant population of the rare Wright's marsh thistle (*Cirsium wrightii*), which is a federal species of concern. NMG&FD has identified the Blue Hole Spring run across this property as a potential reintroduction habitat for the Pecos gambusia (*Gambusia nobilis*), which is listed as an endangered fish species under both federal and New Mexico endangered species acts.

There are no water rights belonging to the title of this property. There is, however, a diversion gate at the lower end of the Blue Hole Spring run that captures and transports irrigation water across El Rito Creek for farm fields on the other side of the creek near the Rio Pecos. This point of diversion on the subject property is fortuitous since it will guarantee continued flow of the spring run across the property to satisfy existing water rights on adjacent properties.



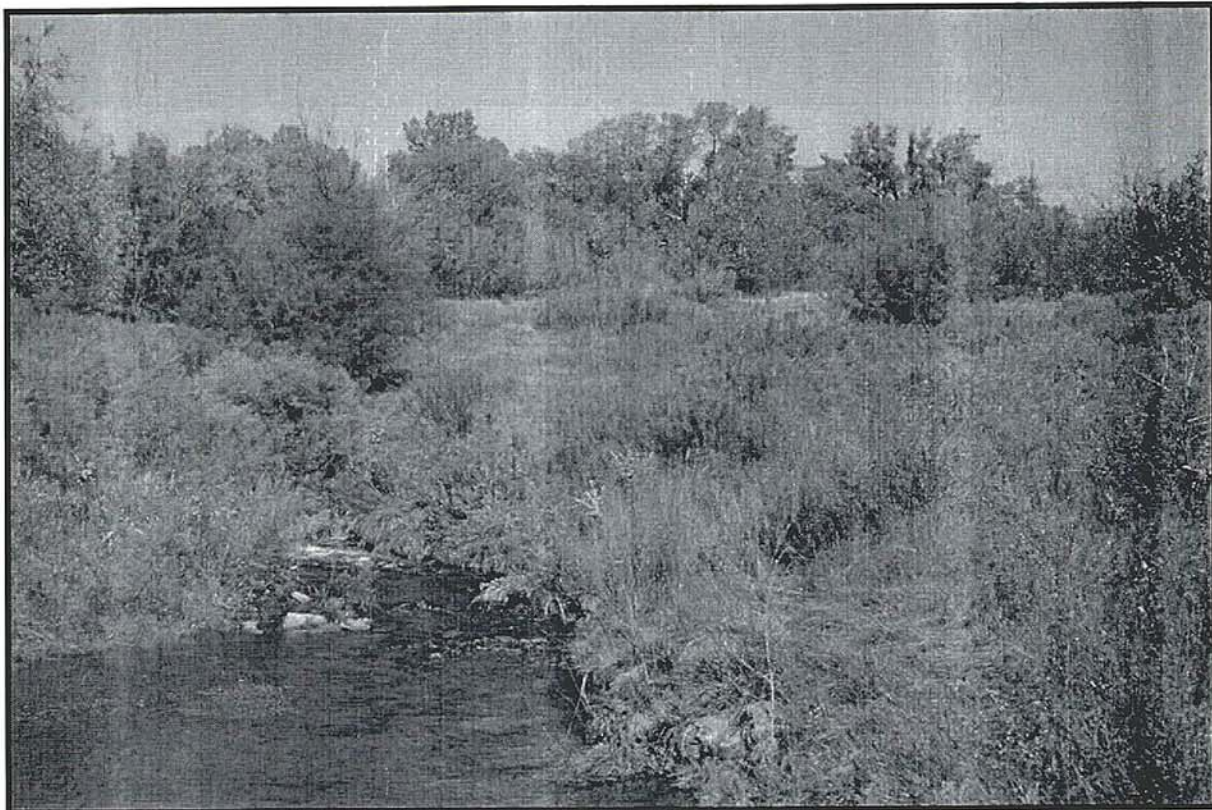
Location of Blue Hole Cienega at Santa Rosa, New Mexico

Shallow ground water seeps to the surface over all of the property creating two distinct types of cienega communities. The most extensive cienega type occurs on alkaline, fine sand soils that may be dry at the surface during summer months, but are well watered (subirrigated) in the root zone. These alkaline soils are dominated by salt grass (*Distichlis spicata*), baltic rush (*Juncus arcticus*), alkali sacaton (*Sporobolus airoides*), and southern jimmyweed (*Isocoma pluriflora*). This is the primary habitat for Pecos sunflower, which occurs in several large and small patches across the property. The other cienega type is a rare stand of indiagrass (*Sorghastrum nutans*).



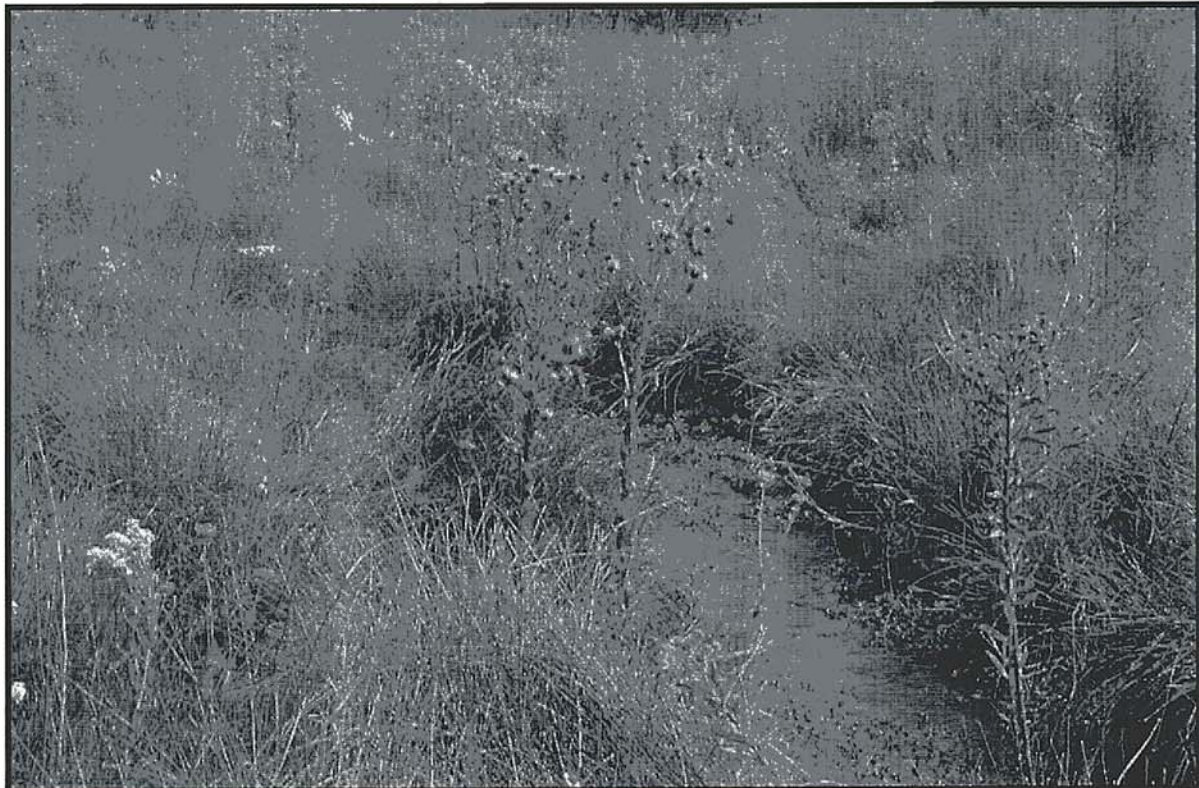
that covers several acres of permanently wet, deep sandy soils in the southeast corner of the property.

This entire property consists of native wetland and riparian plant and animal communities. The natural soils and vegetation are intact and have been well managed. Encroachment of non-native Russian olive woodland on El Rito Creek and the somewhat drier, eastern side of the property is the only serious management issue that needs immediate attention. Blue Hole Cienega is continuous with other wetland habitats on adjacent private and municipal properties. Significant portions of these adjacent properties are being seriously impacted by development and lack weed control for Russian olive. Therefore, Blue Hole Cienega is an extremely important refuge for the wetland biota of this region. It is also a corridor for plant and animal movement between the remaining wetlands in Santa Rosa's Blue Hole Spring Park (an abandoned fish hatchery) and the undeveloped cienegas and springs to the south of Highway 91. The upland habitats north and east of the city are connected to the Rio Pecos by a continuous corridor of riparian and wetland vegetation along El Rito Creek.

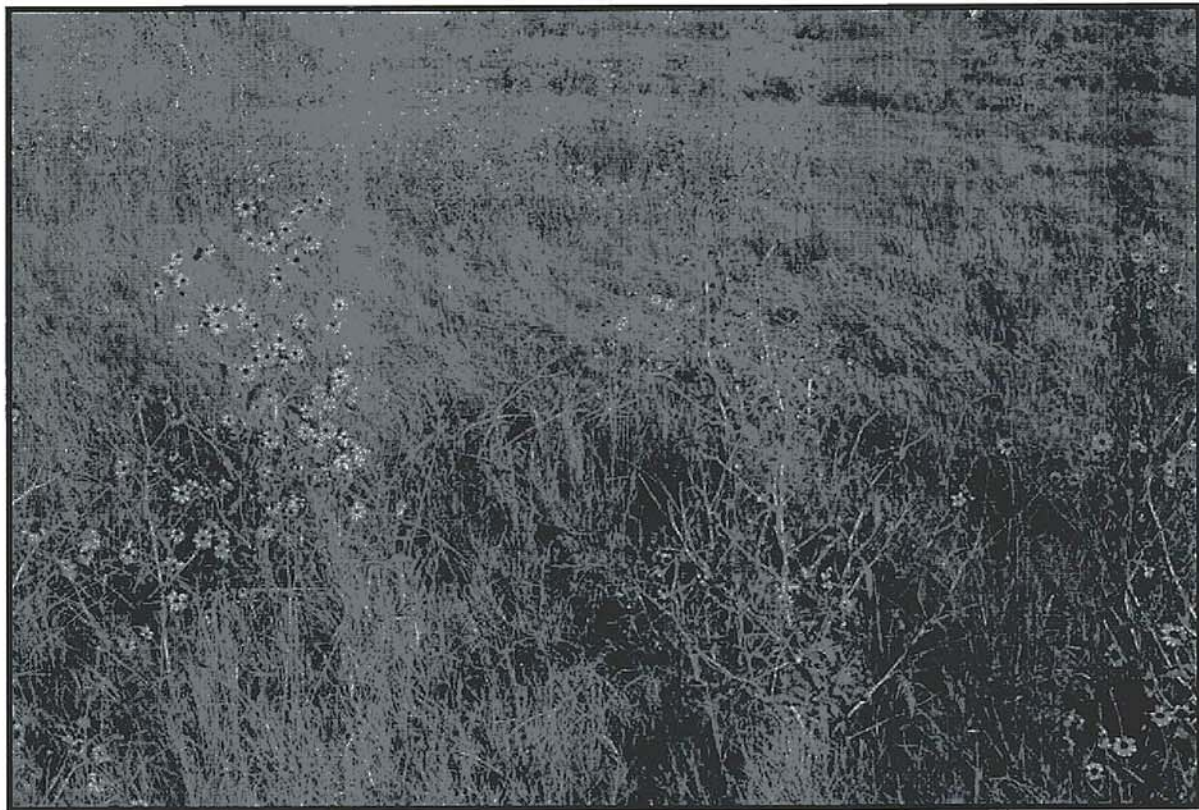


El Rito Creek at west property boundary (looking north)





Blue Hole Spring run with Wright's marsh thistle (pink flowers)



Blue Hole Cienega with Pecos sunflower

**ESTIMATED COST:**

	<u>Federal Grant</u>	<u>Non-federal Share</u>
<u>Appraisal</u>		
➤ Wallace Genetics Foundation		\$3,200
➤ TNC		\$300
➤ USF&WS Section 6 grant	\$2,000	
<u>Land Purchase</u>		
➤ USF&WS Section 6 grant	\$105,000	
➤ TNC		\$15,000
➤ NMHTD		\$30,000
<u>Closing Costs (2%)</u>		
➤ TNC		\$3,000
<u>Boundary Survey</u>		
➤ TNC		\$6,000
<u>Property Fence (where needed)</u>		
➤ NMHTD		\$3,000
<u>Baseline Biological Survey</u>		
➤ EMNRD-Forestry		\$2,500
➤ NMG&FD		<u>\$2,000</u>
TOTALS	\$107, 000	\$65,000

**ESTIMATED TOTAL COST OF PROJECT = \$172,000**

**FEDERAL SECTION 6 GRANT REQUEST OF \$107,000 = 62.2%**

**NON-FEDERAL MATCH OF \$65,000 BY PROJECT PARTNERS = 37.8%**

EMNRD-Forestry has a full-authorities agreement with USFW&S under ESA, Section 6 and is eligible for a Recovery Lands Acquisition grant. The baseline biological survey of Blue Hole Cienega will be, and has been, conducted independently by the State of New Mexico and not charged to other Section 6 grants. Long-term management costs cannot be estimated at this time and will be the subject of future grant applications or appropriations by the state and the City of Santa Rosa.

**CONTACT INFORMATION:** Robert Sivinski, EMNRD-Forestry, P O. Box 1948, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87504. (505)476-3347 or bsivinski@state.nm.us.



# United States Department of the Interior

## FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

P.O. Box 1306  
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87103  
<http://ifw2es.fws.gov>

REC'D, FA.

OCT 12 2004

In Reply Refer To  
R2/ES-TE  
CL 9-24

OCT 08 2004

Ms Joanna Prukop, Secretary  
New Mexico Energy, Mining, Minerals,  
And Natural Resources Department  
2040 South Pacheco  
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87505

Dear Ms Prukop

Federal funds are now available for the non-traditional section 6 Recovery Land Acquisition (RLA) grants that were selected during Fiscal Year 2004. Your agency submitted one RLA proposal for consideration. I am pleased to inform you that Region 2 of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is able to offer your agency full funding in the amount of \$107,000 for the following proposal:

Blue Hole Cienega, Santa Rosa, New Mexico Core Conservation Habitat for Pecos Sunflower (*Helianthus paradoxus*)

Questions regarding this offer and other section 6 matters may be directed to Susan MacMullin, New Mexico Ecological Services Field Office at 505-761-4781. Please advise, within 2 weeks of receipt of this letter, if you concur with our offer to fund this project.

Sincerely,

ACTING  
Regional Director

cc Supervisor, Ecological Services Field Office, Albuquerque, NM  
Lorraine Manzanares, Federal Aid, Region 2, Albuquerque, NM  
Carlotta Ortiz, Federal Aid, Region 2, Albuquerque, NM  
Recovery Coordinator, Region 2 (ES), Albuquerque, NM