



# Rio Mora Partnership and National Wildlife Refuge Proposal

*Planning Update #1 July 2011*

*Mora River flowing through restored riparian habitat on the Wind River Ranch. USFWS*

## Thank You for Participating!

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is studying opportunities for landscape-level conservation efforts throughout the Rio Mora Watershed. In addition to partnerships with other landowners, we are exploring the feasibility of establishing a new national wildlife refuge at the Wind River Ranch near Watrous, NM.

We are accepting comments through September 19, 2011, about issues, concerns, and ideas that we should explore further through this process.

This is the first in a series of updates to keep you informed about our efforts. Please share your ideas with us by attending one of the public meetings, mailing in a comment card at the back of this form or via email to [fw2\\_rw\\_lasvegas@fws.gov](mailto:fw2_rw_lasvegas@fws.gov). Your participation and input is a critical part of this evaluation and planning process.

Thank you  
Steve Kettler  
Land Protection Planner

## Public Meetings

- Monday, July 25  
5:30 p.m. — 7:30 p.m.  
Mora High School  
Lecture Hall  
Mora, New Mexico
- Tuesday, July 26  
5:30 p.m. — 7:30 p.m.  
Donnelly Library  
Leveo V. Sanchez Lecture Hall  
New Mexico Highlands University  
900 University Avenue  
Las Vegas, New Mexico

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### The Mission of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

*is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people*

## Issues and Opportunities Considered

During this first phase, commonly referred to as “scoping,” we gather input from the public, various organizations, and other agencies to gain an early understanding of issues, concerns and opportunities that need to be considered through the planning process. The information gathered during scoping provides the basis for considering the viability of the proposed action as well as different approaches that may be taken.

### Rio Mora Partnership

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and the non-profit Wind River Ranch Foundation are advancing a partnership approach to address landscape-scale conservation efforts in north-central New Mexico. This effort, currently referred to as the Rio Mora Partnership, will seek to identify opportunities for the Service to work with landowners throughout the Rio Mora watershed to conserve, restore and protect the tremendous land, wildlife and cultural resources found in this area.

A key component of the proposal is the potential establishment of a new National Wildlife Refuge on the lands currently operated as the Wind River Ranch. The ranch headquarters area was formerly known as El Larrazolo. If established, this new refuge would serve as the heart of a broad landscape-level conservation effort throughout the Rio Mora watershed.

As part of this effort, the Service will engage with local residents to study land protection opportunities, as well as opportunities to share information and resources for landscape-level conservation in parts of San Miguel, Mora, and Colfax Counties. The study will also explore opportunities to bring additional lands, on a voluntary basis, under the conservation umbrella of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

### Wind River Ranch

The Wind River Ranch near Watrous, New Mexico, sits at the heart of the proposed Rio Mora Partnership. The 4,500-acre Ranch is owned by the Thaw Charitable Trust and is currently managed by the Wind River Ranch Foundation for wildlife and ecological restoration. The ranch has been offered as a donation to the Service to serve as the heart of the Rio Mora Partnership and as the base for a new National Wildlife Refuge.



### National Wildlife Refuge System

The National Wildlife Refuge System, managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is the world’s premier system of public lands and waters set aside to conserve America’s fish, wildlife and plants. Since President Theodore Roosevelt designated Florida’s Pelican Island as the first wildlife refuge in 1903, the System has grown to more than 150 million acres, 553 national wildlife refuges and other units of the Refuge System, plus 38 wetland management districts. There are currently seven National Wildlife Refuges in New Mexico.

## Steps of the Planning Process

*We are here*  
**What should we consider?**

*Identify the Issues (Scoping)*



**How can we act on the issues?**

*Develop Alternatives*



**How well will each alternative work?**

*Analyze Alternatives*



**Which would work best?**

*Select an Alternative*



**Public review and comment**

*Distribute Draft Plan*



**Any revisions to make?**

*Publish Final Plan*

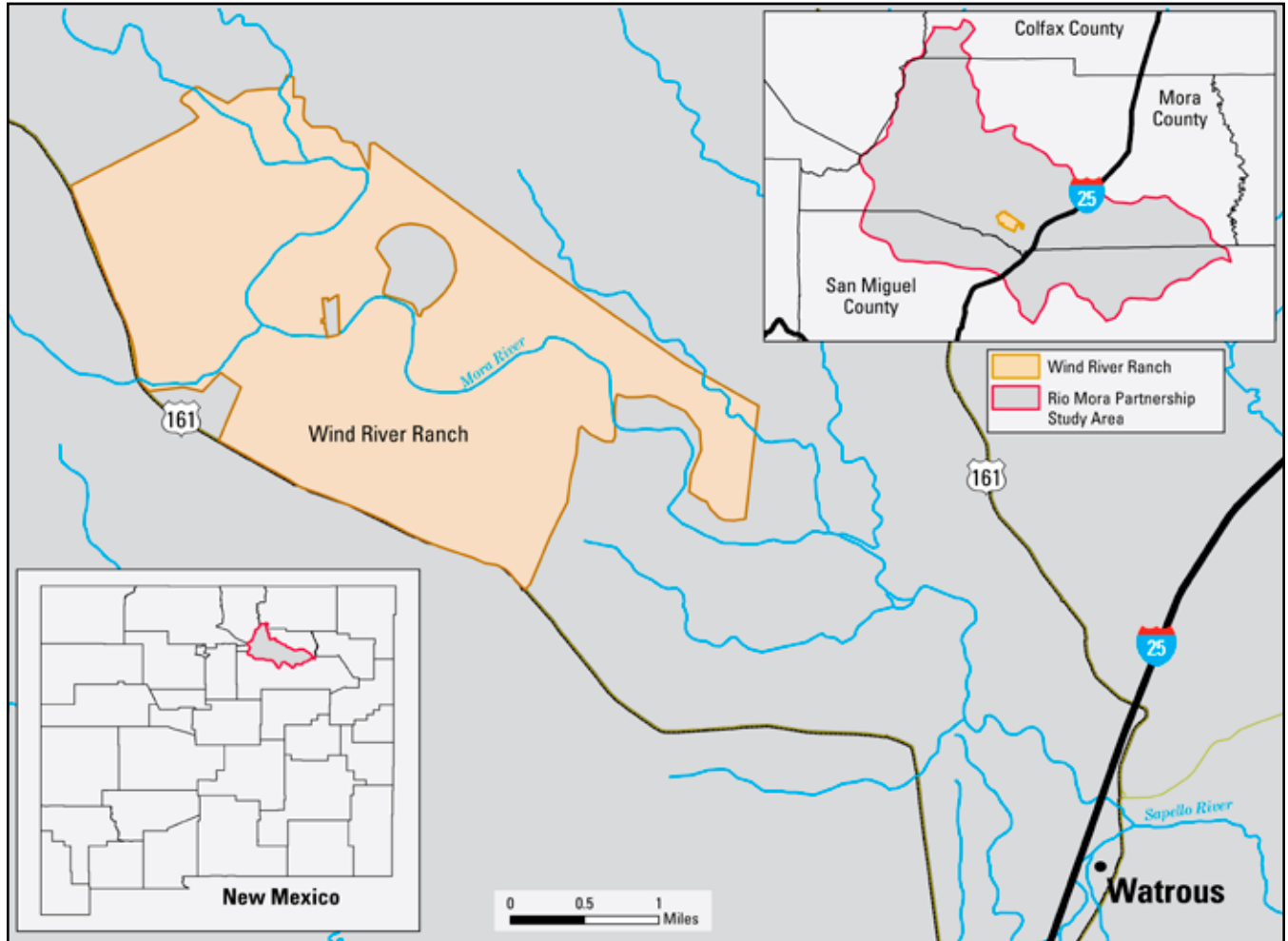


**Final decision made public**

*Publish Decision Document*



**Implement Plan and revise as needed**



**The Vision**

Establishing a watershed conservation area; serving the public through conservation; contributing to a local economy; engaging underserved youth in the great outdoors; educating future conservation professionals; conducting science-based research; demonstrating land management techniques and the benefit of habitat restoration for wildlife and people.

**How it would be done**

1. Expand and formalize existing scientific research and conservation partnerships with tribal governments, schools, colleges, universities, non-governmental organizations, natural resource agencies and private landowners in the watershed.

2. Provide opportunities to expand and formalize a watershed partnership to conserve water, reduce erosion, and protect wildlife and habitat.

3. Promote riparian revitalization and grassland management in the watershed through the demonstration of habitat restoration.

4. Expand and continue the habitat restoration and conservation work of the Wind River Ranch Foundation, by maintaining a staff of dedicated wildlife conservation professionals, educators, volunteers and partners.

5. Provide opportunities to engage underserved youth in the great outdoors by expanding existing environmental education programs.

6. Provide high school and college students with the scientific research and hands-on habitat restoration experience needed as they consider careers as conservation professionals.



## **Frequently Asked Question about New National Wildlife Refuges**

*Q. If I own land in one of the study areas, would I ever be forced to sell?*

A. No. Study areas are not refuge boundaries. All habitat restoration and preservation by the Service would be on a voluntary basis (willing buyer/willing seller only) and only lands in which the Service acquires a realty interest would become part of the Refuge. Lands identified in the study areas are in private and public ownership. It is not the intent of the Service to acquire lands already in public ownership. Only the presence of willing sellers and only after detailed planning could lands be acquired for the Refuge.

*Q. If I own land in or around an area that the Service says has high natural resource values, will my property ever be condemned?*

A. No. While the Service has condemnation authority, it rarely used. Service policy is to acquire land only from willing sellers only. Landowners retain all of the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of private land ownership. The presence of Refuge lands does not afford the Service any authority to impose restrictions on any private lands. Service control of access, land use practices, water management practices, hunting, fishing, and general use is limited only to those lands in which the Service owns.

*Q. Will my rights as a property owner be infringed as a result of refuge designation?*

A. No. If lands are developed into a national wildlife refuge, the Service will have no more authority over private land within or adjacent to the boundaries of the refuge than any other landowner. Landowners retain all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of private land ownership, including the right of access, control of trespass, right to sell, and payment of taxes.

*Q. How will the creation of a wildlife refuge affect the area's tax base?*

A. The Refuge Revenue Sharing Act of June 15, 1935, as amended, provides for annual payments to counties or the lowest unit of government that collects and distributes taxes based on acreage and value of national wildlife refuge lands located within the county. The monies for these payments come from two sources: (1) net receipts from the sale of products from National Wildlife Refuge System lands (oil and gas leases, timber sales, grazing fees, etc.) and (2) annual Congressional appropriations. Annual Congressional appropriations, as authorized by a 1978 amendment, were intended to make up the difference between the net receipts from the Refuge Revenue Sharing Fund and the total amount due to local units of government.

Payments to the counties are calculated based on the following formulas which provides the largest return to the counties: (1) \$.75 per acre; (2) 25 percent of the net receipts collected from refuge lands in the county; or (3) three-quarters of 1 percent of the appraised value. Using this method, lands are reappraised every five years to reflect current market values.

It must be noted that revenue sharing payments are only made when lands are purchased in fee title. Less-than fee purchases (such as conservation easements) remain in private ownership and thus are subject to taxation.

*Q. Is a federal national wildlife refuge automatically closed to hunting, fishing and other recreational issues?*

A. No. The alternatives considered in refuge planning are mandated to allow, where appropriate, compatible wildlife dependent recreational public uses such as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, environmental education and interpretation. Goals and objectives are identified for the refuge (with public input), and the specific public uses are determined based on their consistency with the objectives established for the refuge.

**Rio Mora Partnership and National Wildlife Refuge Proposal *Planning Update #1***

\_\_\_\_ (Yes) Keep me on your mailing list/add me to your mailing list. \_\_\_\_\_ Email Only.

Please specify in which form you would like to receive a copy of the draft plan for review.

\_\_\_\_ Electronic (CD) \_\_\_\_\_ Hardcopy

\_\_\_\_ (No) Take me off your mailing list.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please Print)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

If you are acting in an official capacity as the representative of an organization please complete the following two items.

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Please note that names on our mailing list and any submitted comments become part of the public record for this project. The Service must release names, if requested, under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act of 1974.

**Please Share Any Comments:**

*Thank you for your time!*

**National Wildlife  
Refuge System  
Mission**

*“...to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans”*

**Email Address**

Comments may be submitted via email to:

fw2\_rw\_lasvegas@fws.gov

**For any comments or concerns, contact:**

Steve Kettler  
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