

Rio Grande National Forest – Assessment 12

Tribal Resources– Executive Summary



Introduction

The San Luis Valley and the surrounding San Juan and Sangre de Cristo Mountains are the ancestral homelands of several American Indian clans, bands and tribes. For other groups, the area was more peripheral and represented seasonal hunting and gathering grounds or travel corridors. Despite their forced removal by the U.S. Government in the late 1800s, several tribes maintain strong cultural and spiritual connections to the San Luis Valley in general and the planning area in particular. Tribal groups include the Jicarilla Apache, Navajo, Southern Ute, Ute Mountain Ute, and several Upper Rio Grande and Western Pueblo Tribes. Tribal population centers vary between 75 miles (Jicarilla Apache) and just over 400 miles (Hopi Tribe) from the Rio Grande National Forest planning area. There are ceremonial and culturally important sites and traditional gathering areas on the Forest for these tribal groups.

What We Asked

We began tribal consultation, facilitated by Angie Krall, Rio Grande National Forest heritage program manager, between October 2014 and May 2015. Consultation is an ongoing process that will continue

through the assessment and NEPA stages. Our goals for this phase of the forest planning process are as follows.

- Consult affiliated tribes to identify members to represent perspectives and participate in the Assessment Phase. Timeline – Winter 2015.
- Meet with tribally appointed representatives to understand and document areas of tribal importance or significance within the Rio Grande National Forest. Timeline – Winter 2015 (existing condition) on the Rio Grande National Forest.
- Identify the most effective and preferred method of communication with each affiliated Tribe.

We asked all the tribes we consulted the same questions.

- What are the conditions and trends of areas of tribal importance that may need plan direction?
- What Forest Plan-related tribal rights exist, including those involving hunting, fishing, gathering, and protecting cultural and spiritual rights?

What We Heard

Most of the Tribes affiliated with the planning area are committed to staying involved in the forest plan revision process. Terms negotiated in the Brunot Treaty of 1874 are current; and valid rights in effect for a portion of the Rio Grande National Forest. Two locales have been identified by the Tribes as important and significant areas on the Rio Grande National Forest. The Tribes propose we protect these by adding one locale to an existing special interest area through a boundary adjustment; and by creating a new special interest area, encompassing lands administered by several federal agencies and a private landowner, for the second.

Because we are required to protect confidential information that is culturally sensitive to the Tribes (36 CFR 219.1(e)), no additional information on these sites is available at this time.

Interviewees are experiencing challenges with forests closer to the Pueblo Tribe in New Mexico including the Santa Fe and Cibola National Forests. They are frustrated with the ever changing permitting system and the difficulties of clear communication between the Tribe and the Forest Service. The Tribes believe the permitting system is too complicated. They often do not know who to contact for what activity.

The tribal representatives are also frustrated that they are not permitted to access areas for ceremonial purposes during high fire danger when the nearby forests are administratively closed to the public. We suggested they might be able to access the Rio Grande National Forest during these times, if the forest contains the needed resource. Though farther afield, there are many other resources that the Rio Grande National Forest can provide.

Where We're Headed

This assessment has been informed greatly through formal tribal consultation in accordance with laws and policy. Through the consultation process two landscapes were identified to be undeniably and critically significant to all the affiliated tribes: Mt. Blanca Massive and the Natural Arch. The plants, animals and other special elements that surround these places hold great significance to affiliated tribes. With the forced removal of the indigenous peoples some 100 years ago; important features of their collective traditional ecological and cultural knowledge has been lost. Despite this set back traditional peoples of the Ute, Navajo, Jicarilla Apache, and northern pueblos continue to maintain meaningful connections to these

homelands, collecting traditional materials, making pilgrimages, and conducting traditional ceremonies within the planning area as a matter of exercising rights protected by law.

Since the last Rio Grande Forest Plan was completed twenty years ago, a lot has changed in terms of policy development and how we consult with Tribes and programmatically integrate consultative elements into pertinent planning documents, including recognizing and managing traditional and cultural landscapes. The legal framework of federal policy, case laws, and Executive Orders provide guidance and establish a higher standard for tribal consultation; authority to facilitate reburial of Native American human remains on Forest lands; allow Tribes to collect forest products; and protect sensitive information. This legal framework has also created pathways to greater collaboration and connection between us and the Tribes; from the district level up.

We will continue to consult with Tribes on important topics for the duration of the forest planning process. These topics include traditional cultural properties and their nominations, accessing traditional use and collection areas, affirming the Brunot Treaty, using and accessing forest products (trees, herbs, etc), identifying reburial areas, and protecting sensitive information.

DRAFT