

# **Draft Description of Alternatives 1 – 5**

**Carson National Forest  
Forest Plan Revision**

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# Alternative 1 (Current 1986 Forest Plan)

The regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) require the alternatives analysis in an environmental impact statement (EIS) to "include the alternative of no action" (40 CFR § 1502.14(d)). There are two distinct interpretations of "no action" that must be considered, depending on the nature of the proposal being evaluated. In the situation that involves an action such as revising a forest plan, the "no action" is "no change" from current management direction or level of management intensity. To construct an alternative that is based on no management at all would be a useless academic exercise. Therefore, the "no action" alternative may be thought of in terms of continuing with the present course of action until that action is changed. Consequently, projected impacts of alternative management schemes are compared in the EIS to those impacts projected for the Carson National Forest's existing plan. In this case, alternatives would include management plans of both greater and lesser intensity, especially greater and lesser levels of resource development.

Alternative 1 is the Carson National Forest's current plan (1986), which is over 30 years old. It emphasizes producing timber products; managing quality habitat for Mexican spotted owl and northern goshawk and its prey; providing recreation opportunities to meet demand; and range management. The current plan has no articulated desired conditions for wetlands, seeps and springs, and various riparian ecosystems. It does not recognize the traditional communities and uses that occur on the Carson NF or reflect changes in economic, social, and ecological conditions, new policies and priorities, and new information based on monitoring and scientific research. Since this alternative reflects no change in current management, no additional wilderness is recommended. This alternative provides a baseline for estimating the effects of the other alternatives.

# Alternative 2 (Preliminary Draft Proposed Plan)

Alternative 2 is the [draft proposed plan](#) and was developed to respond to key issues identified during the [assessment](#). This alternative provides for restoration and diverse ecosystem services.<sup>1</sup> Alternative 2 addresses the need to better recognize and enhance the Carson National Forest's role in contributing to local economies, including service-based sectors such as recreation and tourism, timber and forest products, livestock grazing, and other multiple-use related activities and products. Alternative 2 also includes plan direction that allows for adaptive management, to address potential ecological changes that have the potential to alter the provision of ecosystem services from the Carson NF. These include:

- Forested fire dependent ecosystems are departed and prone to uncharacteristic stand replacing fire.
- Grassland communities and herbaceous understories are less productive than they were historically.
- Surface water is at risk across much of the forest, due to temperature, turbidity, and degraded riparian and aquatic condition and function.
- The ability of the Carson NF to remain relevant and responsive to changing recreation user demands is at risk of being unsustainable.
- The ability of the Carson NF to continue contributing to the social and economic benefits desired by local communities and the visiting public is at risk of being unsustainable.

Alternative 2 proposes roughly 11,780 acres of recommended wilderness.

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<sup>1</sup> Ecosystem services are benefits people obtain from ecosystems, including: provisioning services (e.g., clean air, fresh water, energy, food, fuel, forage, wood products or fiber, & minerals); regulating services (e.g., long-term storage of carbon, climate regulation, water filtration, purification, & storage; soil stabilization, flood and drought control, and disease regulation; supporting services (e.g., pollination, seed dispersal, soil formation, & nutrient cycling); and cultural services (e.g., educational, aesthetic, spiritual, and cultural heritage values, recreational experiences, and tourism opportunities).

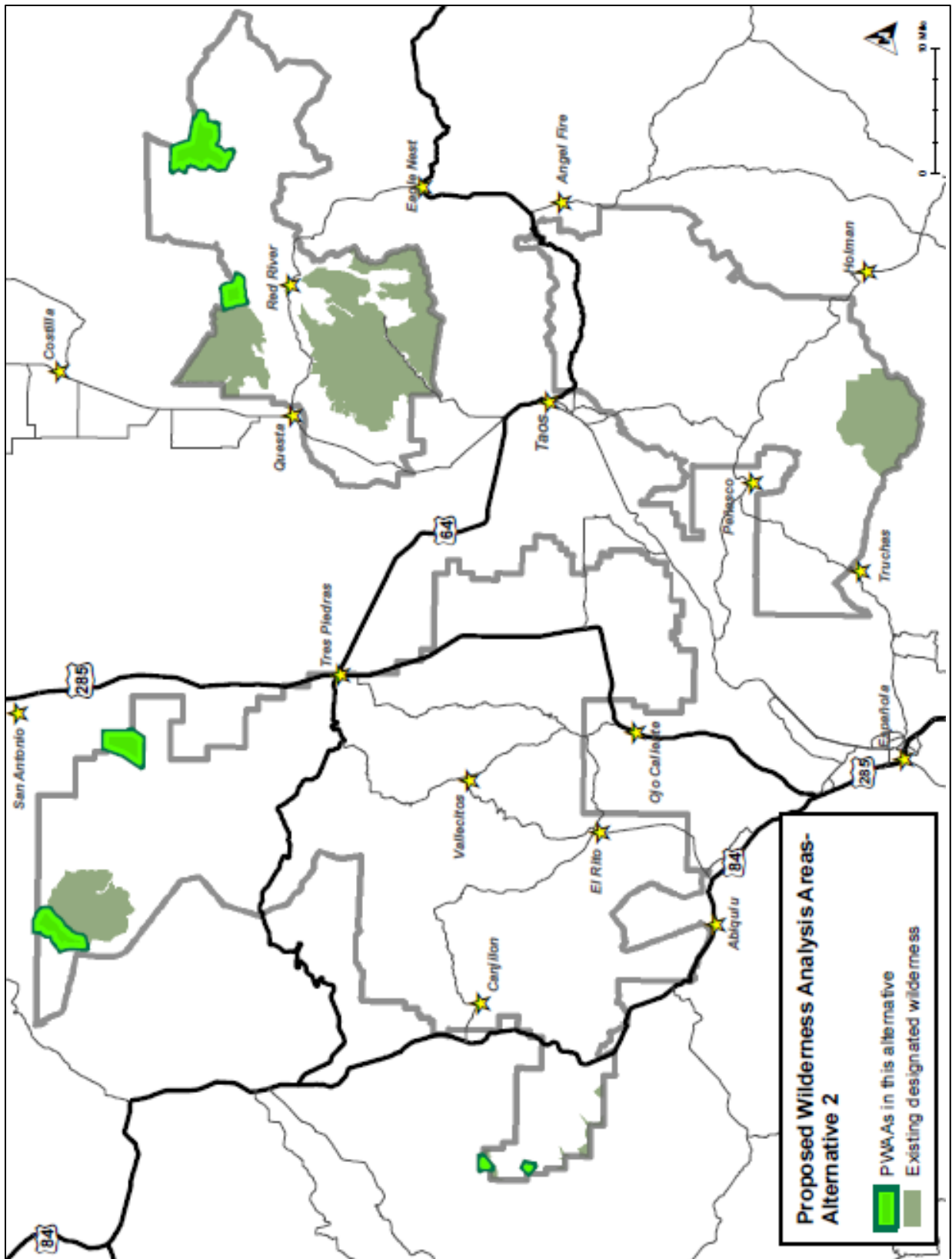


Figure 1. Recommended wilderness management areas for Alternative 2

# Alternative 3

Alternative 3 was developed to respond to requests for more motorized recreation opportunities, enhanced mountain bike trails, and increased opportunity for fuelwood and timber production for local economic development. This alternative also addresses public comments from those who do not want any additional wilderness on the Carson National Forest (NF).

Alternative 3 emphasizes mechanical treatments for restoration and decreases the use of prescribed fire as a restoration tool. This alternative deemphasizes road decommissioning and looks for opportunities to convert nonsystem routes to off-highway vehicle (OHV) and/or mountain bike trails. This alternative does not propose any recommended wilderness areas, to maximize the areas suitable for timber production and to respond to requests for no new wilderness. Both Valle Vidal and the San Antonio Management Areas are not included in this alternative, to increase the amount of land suitable for timber production. Alternative 3 adds the Off-Highway Vehicle Management Area (OHVMA) to provide OHV use in a rugged terrain on the Questa and Camino Real ranger districts.

Alternative 3 is the same as Alternative 2 - Preliminary Draft Proposed Plan (PDPP), except for the following sections:

Black text indicates the wording is the same as Alternative 2.

~~Strike through text~~ indicates the wording will not be in this alternative.

Blue text indicates a change in wording in this alternative.

## Chapter 2. Forest-wide Plan Components

### Ecological Sustainability and Diversity of Plant and Animal Communities

#### Mixed Conifer with Frequent Fire (VEG-MCD)

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##### MCD Objectives (FW-VEG-MCD-O)

- 1 Mechanically treat at least ~~5,500 – 10,000~~ 15,000 – 30,000 acres, during each 10-year period following plan approval.

#### Ponderosa Pine Forest (VEG-PPF)

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##### PPF Objectives (FW-VEG-PPF-O)

- 2 Mechanically treat at least ~~22,000 – 50,000~~ 50,000 – 100,000 acres, during each 10-year period following plan approval.

### Social, Cultural, and Economic Sustainability and Multiple Use

#### Sustainable Forestry and Forest Products (FFP)

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##### Timber Suitability

Acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands suitable for timber production would be more under Alternative 3 than Alternatives 2, 4, and 5. Timber suitability acres will be calculated during analysis of effects.

## Recreation (REC)

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### Recreation Objectives (FW-REC-O)

- 7 Convert 25% of existing campsites in 5 developed campgrounds from single use sites (i.e., one family) to multiple use sites (e.g., group, RV, horse riders) during the 10 years following plan approval.
- 8 Redesign existing trails or construct new trails to create 1 trail system for mountain bikes, during the 5 years following plan approval.

## Transportation and Forest Access (TFA)

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### Transportation and Forest Access Objectives (FW-TFA-O)

- ~~1 Obliterate or naturalize at least 20 miles of routes not identified on the MVUMs (e.g., unauthorized, decommissioned), within the 10 year period following plan approval.~~
- 2 Grade surfaces and clean culverts and ditches on at least ~~100~~ 150 miles of open National Forest System roads annually.
- 3 Maintain at least ~~100—300~~ 200 - 400 miles of trails (including motorized) annually.

### Transportation and Forest Access Management Guidelines (FW-TFA-G)

- ~~2 Construction of new or temporary roads should be accompanied by a mitigating action (e.g., decommissioning, obliteration, restoration, closure) to other roads, unauthorized routes, or trails to offset any resource damage resulting from construction.~~
- 3 ~~Temporary~~ Roads that support ecosystem restoration activities, fuels management, or other short-term projects should be **considered for conversion to system roads or motorized trails**. ~~closed and rehabilitated upon project completion, to protect watershed condition, minimize wildlife disturbance, and prevent illegal motorized use.~~

## Scenery (SCEN)

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### Scenery Desired Conditions (FW-SCEN-DC)

- 2 The **Areas of the forest** ~~appears predominantly~~ **appear** natural, and includes **including** cultural landscapes valued by forest users and local communities for their scenic, and traditional values.



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## **Wildland Fire Management (FIRE)**

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### **Wildland Fire Management Guidelines (FW-FIRE-G)**

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| <p>1 To restore fire on the landscape, naturally ignited fires (including those occurring in designated areas) should be managed to meet multiple resource objectives when fire weather conditions facilitate progress toward desired conditions (per Desired Conditions of various resources throughout the plan), <b>but should be suppressed in suitable timber or when they would impact trails.</b></p> |
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## **Chapter 3. Plan Components for Designated Areas and Management Areas**

### **Management Areas (MA)**

#### **~~Recommended Wilderness Management Area (RWMA)~~**

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Since this alternative would not include any recommended wilderness areas, plan components for this management area are not included.

#### **Valle Vidal Management Area (VVMA)**

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Under Alternative 3, Forest-wide Plan Components would apply in the management of Valle Vidal.

#### **San Antonio Management Area (SAMA)**

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Under Alternative 3, Forest-wide Plan Components would apply in the management of the San Antonio area, in the northern part of Tres Piedras RD.

#### **Off-Highway Vehicle Management Area (OHVMA)**

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This area has the unique and specific characteristics required for trials motorcycle riding including rugged terrain, rocks and obstacles, as opposed to trails or roads. Intensive OHV use in an undeveloped setting provides a range of challenges and opportunities not found on other parts of the Carson NF. This area provides a unique and valuable recreational resource to the trials motorcycle community, and allows for frequent, casual use for practice and skills development without having to rely on infrequent, permitted events.

### Off-Highway Vehicle Management Area Desired Conditions (MA-OHVMA-DC)

- 1 Cross-country travel opportunities provide challenging terrain for trials motorcycles and OHV rock crawling.
- 2 Trail and road system development is limited to preserve rugged terrain and obstacles.

### Off-Highway Vehicle Management Area Standards (MA-OHVMA-S)

- 1 No new improvements are allowed except for management area boundary markers, a parking area, an information kiosk, and a restroom.
- 2 Non-motorized recreational uses are prohibited.

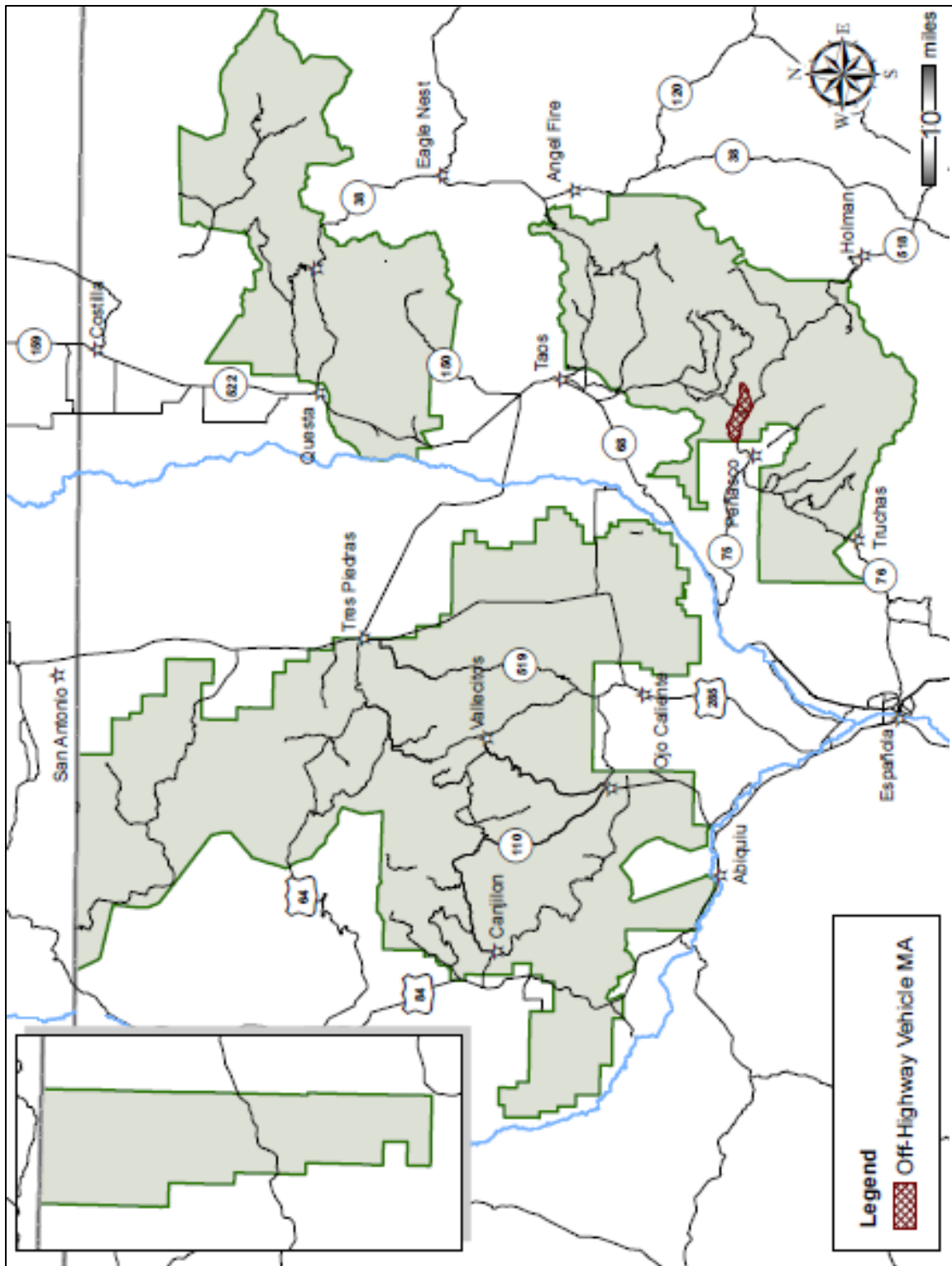


Figure 2. Off-highway Vehicle Management Area in Alternative 3

# Alternative 4

Alternative 4 was developed to respond to requests to allow natural fires to burn and use more prescribed fire as a management tool. This alternative also addresses public comments from those who want greater protections for water resources (specifically key wetlands), wildlife movement (specifically big game migration routes), and areas supporting Rio Grande cutthroat trout, and less motorized use. This alternative also addresses public comments from those who want more wilderness on the Carson NF.

Alternative 4 emphasizes the use of fire and natural processes for restoration and decreases the use of mechanical treatments as a restoration tool. This alternative stresses road decommissioning and obliteration of Forest Service system and non-system roads, as well as temporary roads. To respond to requests for more wilderness and primitive non-motorized areas on the forest, Alternative 4 proposes roughly 48,897 acres of recommended wilderness. This would reduce areas suitable for timber production and motorized and mechanized use. Overall, Alternative 4 would decrease motorized use, both winter over-snow and motor vehicle use. Like Alternative 2, Valle Vidal is identified as a management area (VVMA) in this alternative, but with added protections, including no timber harvesting. This alternative would also expand the San Antonio MA (SAMA) proposed in Alternative 2, to include Cebolla Mesa on the east side of the Rio Grande Gorge. SAMA includes objectives for wildlife connectivity, standards for seasonal road closures, and restrictions in the management of vegetation. Alternative 4 adds the Wetland Jewels Management Area (WJMA), to recognize 10 areas on the forest that are significant wetlands and need added protections. WJMA includes objectives that prioritize work around wetlands and prohibits new roads, military ground operations, new utility infrastructure, or the establishment of new mineral rights. The Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout Management Area (CTMA) is added under this alternative to identify areas on the Carson NF where restoration of Rio Grande cutthroat trout habitat should be emphasized.

Alternative 4 is the same as Alternative 2 - Preliminary Draft Proposed Plan (PDPP), except for the following sections:

Black text indicates the wording is the same as Alternative 2.

~~Strike through text~~ indicates the wording will not be in this alternative.

Blue text indicates a change in wording in this alternative.

## Chapter 2. Forest-wide Plan Components

### Ecological Sustainability and Diversity of Plant and Animal Communities

#### Mixed Conifer with Frequent Fire (VEG-MCD)

##### MCD Objectives (FW-VEG-MCD-O)

- 1— Mechanically treat at least 5,500—10,000 acres, during each 10-year period following plan approval.
- 2 During each 10-year period following plan approval, treat at least 20,000—40,000 25,000—50,000 acres using a combination of prescribed fire and naturally ignited wildfire to make progress toward or to maintain desired conditions.

#### Ponderosa Pine Forest (VEG-PPF)

##### PPF Objectives (FW-VEG-PPF-O)

- 1— Mechanically treat at least 22,000—50,000 acres, during each 10-year period following plan approval.
- 2 During the 10 years following plan approval, treat at least 80,000—125,000 100,000—175,000 acres using a combination of prescribed fire and naturally ignited wildfire to make progress toward or maintain desired conditions.

#### Riparian Management Zones (WSW-RMZ)

##### Riparian Management Zone Objectives (FW-WSW-RMZ-O)

- 1 Restore structure and function of at least 200—300 acres of nonfunctioning and functioning-at-risk riparian areas annually. Treatments align with priority watersheds.

## Streams (WSW-RMZ-STM)

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### Stream Desired Conditions (FW-WSW-RMZ-STM-DC)

- 2 Stream ecosystems, including ephemeral watercourses, are not fragmented by infrastructure or development, **except when the fragmentation serves to protect native aquatic species from nonnative aquatic species**. Streams provide connectivity important for dispersal, access to new habitats, perpetuation of genetic diversity, as well as nesting and foraging for at-risk species.

### Springs and Seeps Standards (FW-WSW-RMZ-SNS-S)

- 1 Management activities in and around seeps and springs shall use decontamination procedures to prevent the spread of non-desirable fungus, disease, nonnative and/or invasive biota.
- 2 **No new spring development shall be allowed.**

## Wildlife, Fish, and Plants (WFP)

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### Wildlife, Fish, and Plant Objectives (FW-WFP-O)

- ~~3— Reduce nonnative fish within native fish populations in 4 – 6 stream reaches, during each 10-year period following plan approval.~~
- ~~4— Improve wildlife or aquatic habitat connectivity by removing unneeded structures (e.g., fences, roads, cattleguards, culverts, and spring developments) or completing improvement projects (e.g., removing barriers and connecting fragmented habitat) in at least 10 – 20 locations, during each 10-year period following plan approval.~~
- ~~5— Complete at least 5 projects to improve habitat connectivity for aquatic and riparian species (e.g., remove barriers, restore dewatered stream segments, connect fragmented habitat, wildlife passage friendly fences, etc.), during the 10 years following plan approval.~~

## Social, Cultural, and Economic Sustainability and Multiple Use

### Sustainable Forestry and Forest Products (FFP)

#### Timber Suitability

Acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands suitable for timber production would be less under Alternative 4 than Alternatives 2, and 3. Timber suitability acres will be calculated during analysis of effects.

### Recreation (REC)

#### Recreation Standards (FW-REC-S)

- 3 Cross-country motorized over-snow use shall not be permitted.

### Transportation and Forest Access (TFA)

#### Transportation and Forest Access Objectives (FW-TFA-O)

- 1 Obliterate or naturalize at least ~~20~~ 40 miles of routes not identified on the MVUMs (e.g., unauthorized, decommissioned), within the 10-year period following plan approval.

#### Transportation and Forest Access Management Standards (FW-TFA-S)

- 3 Construction of new or temporary roads shall be accompanied by a mitigating action (e.g., decommissioning, obliteration, restoration, closure) to other roads, unauthorized routes, or trails to offset any resource damage resulting from construction.
- 4 Temporary roads that support ecosystem restoration activities, fuels management, or other short-term projects shall be closed and rehabilitated upon project completion.

#### Transportation and Forest Access Management Guidelines (FW-TFA-G)

- ~~2 Construction of new or temporary roads should be accompanied by a mitigating action (e.g., decommissioning, obliteration, restoration, closure) to other roads, unauthorized routes, or trails to offset any resource damage resulting from construction.~~
- ~~3 Temporary roads that support ecosystem restoration activities, fuels management, or other short term projects should be closed and rehabilitated upon project completion, to protect watershed condition, minimize wildlife disturbance, and prevent illegal motorized use.~~

## Chapter 3. Plan Components for Designated Areas and Management Areas

### Designated Areas (DA)

#### Wilderness (WILD)

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##### Wilderness Standards (DA-WILD-S)

5 Pack goats shall not be allowed in areas where bighorn sheep occur.

### Management Areas (MA)

#### Recommended Wilderness Management Area (RWMA)

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Alternative 4 proposes roughly 45,412 acres of recommended wilderness.

#### ~~Grassland Maintenance Management Area (GMMA)~~

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Under Alternative 4, Forest-wide Plan Components would apply in the areas where Alternative 2 identifies GMMA.

#### Valle Vidal Management Area (VVMA)

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##### Valle Vidal MA Standards (MA-VVMA-S)

- 21 Timber harvest for the purpose of timber production is prohibited.
- 22 Military ground operations are prohibited.
- 23 Motorized over-snow use is prohibited.



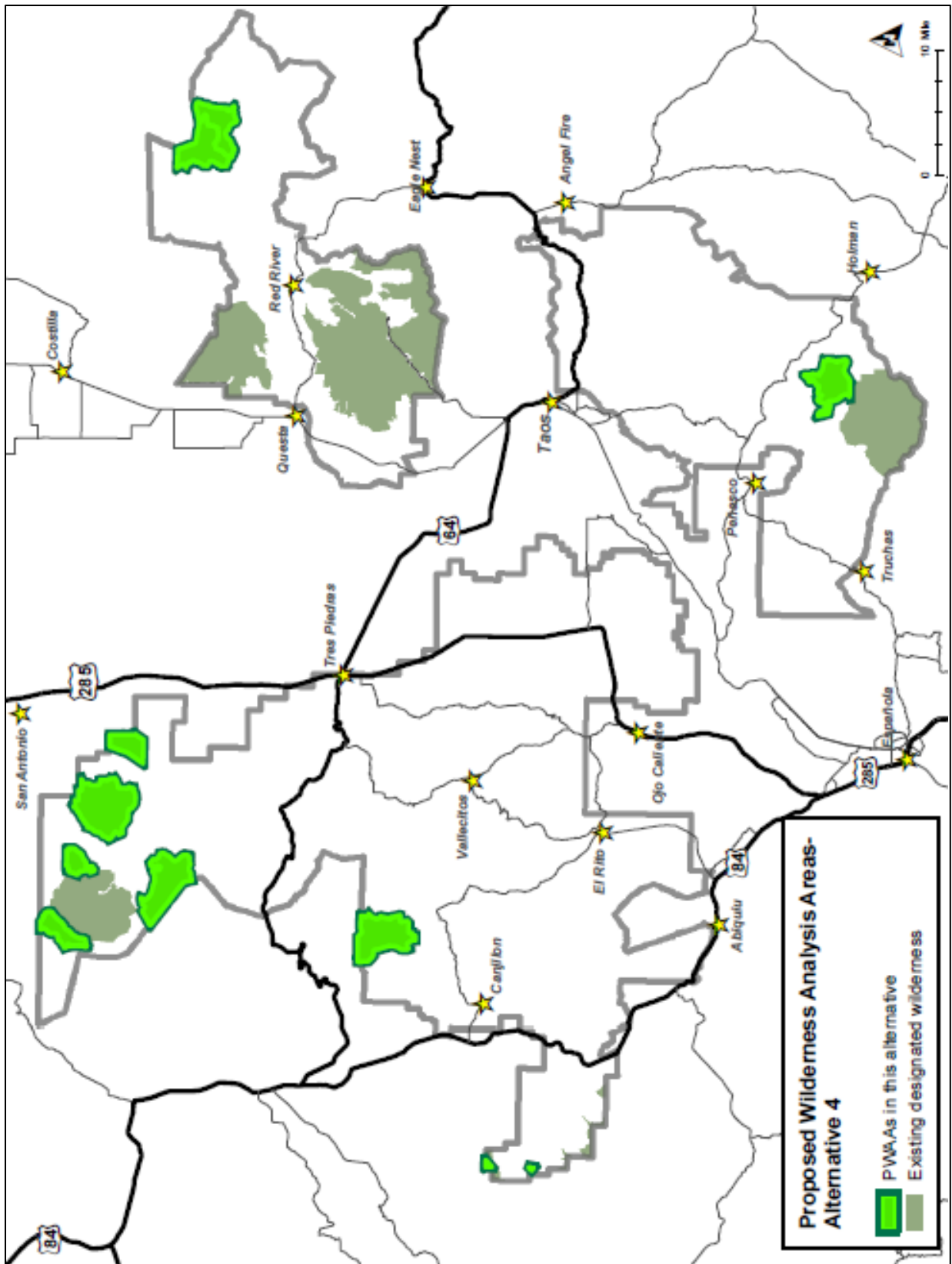


Figure 3. Recommended wilderness management areas for Alternative 4

## **San Antonio Management Area (SAMA)**

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Alternative 4 expands the San Antonio Management Area (SAMA) proposed in Alternative 2 to include roughly 31,000 acres of Cebolla Mesa on the east side of the Rio Grande Gorge, on the Questa RD, for a total of around 148,000 acres.

### **San Antonio MA Objectives (MA-SAMA-O)**

- 1 Improve wildlife or aquatic habitat connectivity by removing unneeded structures (e.g., fences, roads, cattleguards, and culverts) or completing improvement projects (e.g., removing barriers and connecting fragmented habitat) in at least 10 to 20 locations, during each 10-year period following plan approval. This objective may be accomplished outside of the San Antonio Management Area if improvement opportunities no longer exist there.
- 2 Complete at least 5 projects to improve habitat connectivity for aquatic and riparian species (e.g., remove barriers, restore dewatered stream segments, connect fragmented habitat, wildlife passage friendly fences, etc.), during the 10 years following plan approval.

### **San Antonio MA Standards (MA-SAMA-S)**

- 8 Except for travel on open public roads, all public entry (including hiking) is prohibited on the Tres Piedras RD portion of this MA from January 1 to March 30 and May 1 to June 30, to provide security for elk winter range and calving.
- 9 Except for travel on open public roads and Cebolla Mesa Trail, all public entry (including hiking) is prohibited on the Questa RD portion of this MA from January 1 to March 30, to provide security for elk winter range.
- 10 Timber harvest for the purpose of timber production is prohibited.
- 11 Motorized over-snow use is prohibited.
- 12 Military ground operations are prohibited.

### **San Antonio MA Guidelines (MA-SAMA-G)**

- 2 Vegetation management activities should not impact more than 3% of the management area in any one year period.

## **Wetland Jewels Management Area (WJMA)**

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The Wetland Jewels Management Area (WJMA) is made up of 10 areas containing a single wetland or complex of wetlands that provide important ecological functions to the terrestrial and aquatic landscape. These wetlands and wetland complexes provide habitat for wildlife, contribute clean water to downstream communities, mitigate downstream flooding, help maintain downstream flows, and sequester carbon. The protection of ecological function is focused in these wetland areas on the forest, by making them a priority for protection and

restoration. Emphasis on management activities in WJMA to maintain and restore riparian function would compensate for degraded wetland conditions in the broader landscape. Actions that degrade the structure, function, and composition of Wetland Jewels are constrained or prohibited.

### Wetland Jewels MA Desired Conditions (MA-WJMA-DC)

- 1 Priority wetland functions are aquatic invertebrate habitat, fish habitat, waterfowl and water bird habitat, groundwater recharge capacity, streamflow maintenance capacity, surface water detention capacity, and carbon sequestration capacity are maintained or improving, consistent with the wetland's potential.
- 2 In cases where a WJMA is smaller than a watershed, the WJMA portion of the watershed is functioning properly (according to the Watershed Condition Framework or similar current protocol) and exhibits high geomorphic, hydrologic, and biotic integrity relative to its potential condition.

### Wetland Jewels MA Objectives (MA-WJMA-O)

- 1 Restore structure and function of at least 200 - 300 acres of nonfunctioning and functioning-at-risk riparian areas annually. Over ten years, distribute these restoration activities among at least 6 of the WJMAs.
- 2 Annually install 35 to 100 erosion control treatments, to stabilize headcuts, road drainage impacts, and other erosional features.
- 3 Within the 5-year period following plan approval, identify, prioritize, and schedule implementation of mitigation and restoration actions in all WJMAs, to address wetland stressors (e.g., recreation, wildlife and livestock grazing, road drainage).
- 4 Obliterate or naturalize up to 40 miles of non-system roads (e.g., unauthorized, decommissioned), within the 10-year period following plan approval. If all needed obliteration and naturalization has been accomplished in the WJMA, this objective may be met through work in other areas of the forest.

### Wetland Jewels MA Standards (MA-WJMA-S)

- 1 No new permanent roads or motorized trails shall be constructed.
- 2 No new communication or electronic equipment, pipelines, powerlines, fiber optic lines, or associated infrastructure may be constructed.
- 3 Outstanding (existing) mineral rights shall be recognized as authorized by the United States mining laws (30 U.S.C. 21-54). Any entry to access existing mineral rights will be conducted in an environmentally sound way through appropriate administration of mineral laws and regulations so as to minimize adverse environmental effects on National Forest System resources. Site-specific analysis shall occur to evaluate potential effects and develop

appropriate mitigation measures. Operating plans and bonds shall be used if needed, to ensure protection and restoration of surface resources.

- 4 Military ground operations are prohibited.

## **Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout Management Area (RGCTMA)**

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The Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout Management Area (RGCTMA) is made up of three high value areas for the Rio Grande cutthroat trout: (1) north of Cruces Basin; (2) in the Comanche Creek Basin; and (3) the Rio Grande del Rancho and nearby streams. Management for the recovery of this species is a high priority in RGCTMA.

### **Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout MA Desired Conditions (MA-RGCTMA-DC)**

- 1 Habitat conditions are capable of supporting self-sustaining native aquatic species populations and are consistent with New Mexico Department of Game and Fish's fisheries management plans.

### **Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout MA Objectives (MA-RGCTMA-O)**

- 1 Reduce nonnative fish within native fish populations in 4 - 6 stream reaches, during each 10-year period following plan approval.

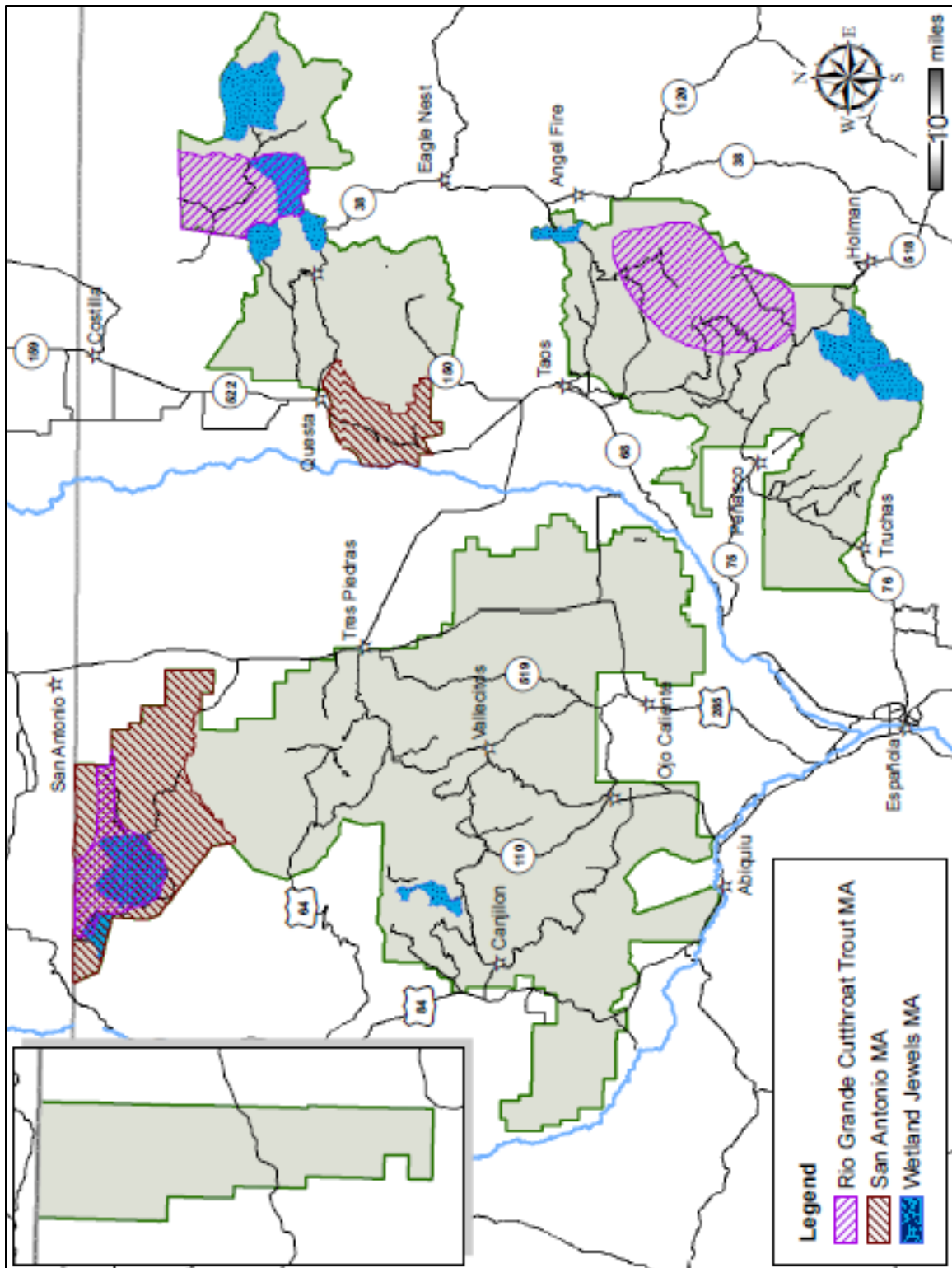


Figure 4. San Antonio, Wetland Jewels, and Rio Grande Cutthroat Management Areas in Alternative 4

# Alternative 5

Alternative 5 was developed to respond to requests that all of the areas evaluated to have wilderness characteristics on the Carson NF need to be recommended for wilderness.

Alternative 5 emphasizes wilderness opportunities of solitude, apparent naturalness, and non-motorized or mechanized recreation in a primitive setting. Since not all of the evaluated areas fit into the other alternative themes, this alternative responds to the request that at least one alternative analyze 100% of the areas with wilderness characteristics. Alternative 5 also includes all of the forest-wide plan components, designated areas, and management areas identified in Alternative 2, but proposes as recommended wilderness all 13 areas (67,941 acres) identified as having wilderness characteristics.

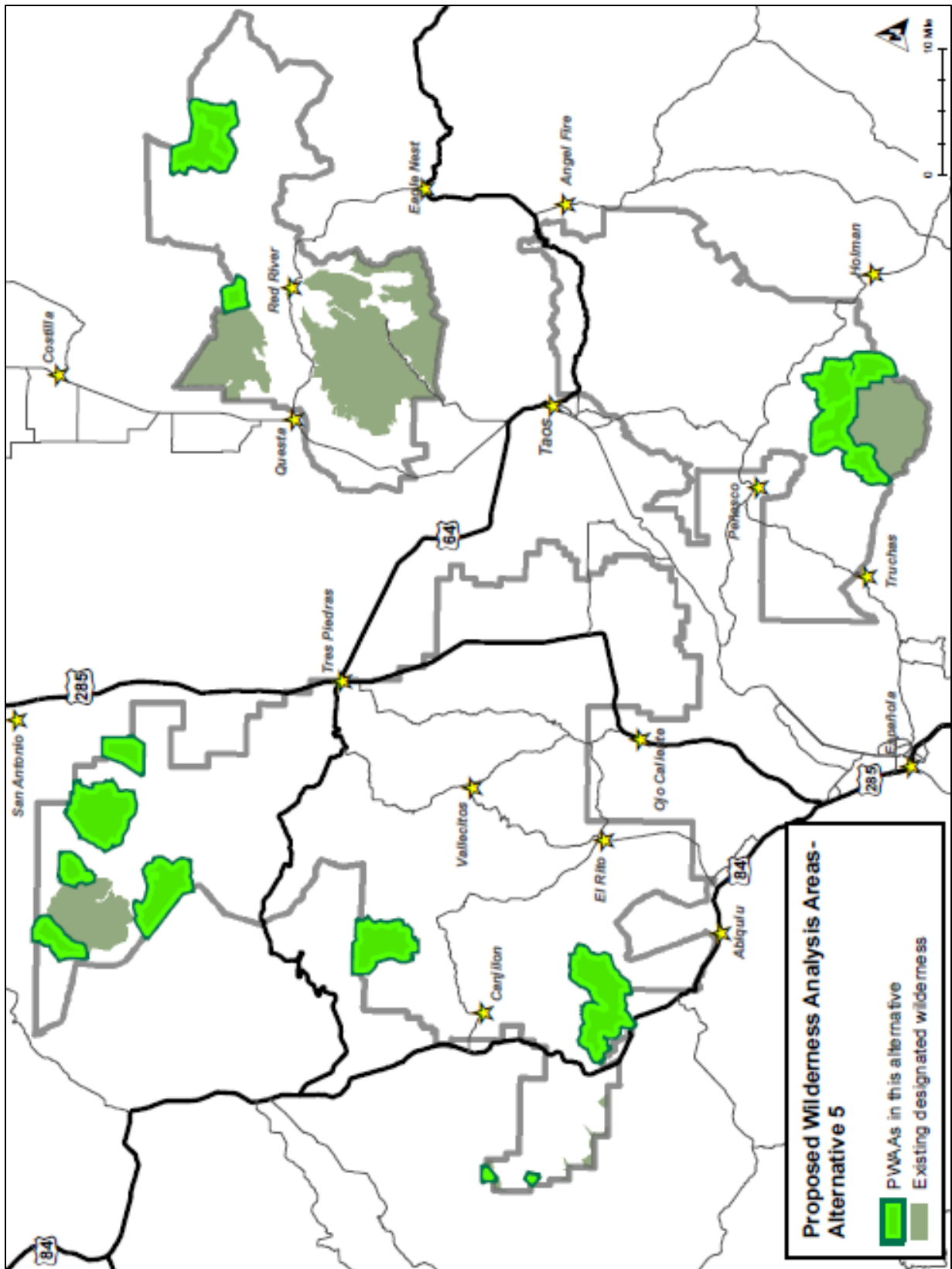


Figure 5. Recommended wilderness management areas for Alternative 5