

COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE PLAN

for

TORRANCE COUNTY, NEW MEXICO

Adopted by the County Commission
July 29, 2003

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PART I

INTRODUCTION

This Comprehensive Land Use Plan for Torrance County, New Mexico, is a general policy document designed as a framework plan for making decisions about public programs and projects affecting the future development of the County. Although a typical comprehensive plan contains many components and serves numerous functions, the emphasis in this Plan is on regional land use activities as an indicator of the character, areawide economy, and governmental functions of the County. The preparation of this Comprehensive Plan included a significant public involvement process which involved meetings, workshops, opinion surveys, and advertised hearings to gather public input and to determine general citizen expectations concerning the future direction of the County. There were many opportunities for public review and comment throughout the plan development process to ensure broad consensus for goals, objectives, and recommendations that are presented in this Comprehensive Plan document.

Purpose

Planning is a process that bridges the gap between where we are today and where we would like to go in the future. This Comprehensive Land Use Plan serves as an official policy document for the Board of County Commissioners to provide guidance in making decisions about the physical development of the County. This Plan document identifies and analyzes growth and development issues and indicates how the local residents and their elected officials want the regional community to develop in the next 20 to 25 years.

An approved Comprehensive Plan is a legally binding document of the County that establishes a basis for regulations and programs necessary to manage current and future land development within the jurisdiction of the County. Of importance is the State law requirement that the zoning regulations of the County must be in accordance with a comprehensive plan. It is also important to note that a comprehensive plan promotes consistency and continuity in making decisions to carry out the programs, projects, and operations of the County.

Background

In June of 1988, the Torrance County Commission adopted a County Comprehensive Plan Development Policy. That was essentially the first Comprehensive Plan for the County. The Development Policy contained four categories of policy statements and strategies: 1) Land Use and Natural Resources, 2) County Infrastructure, 3) Services to the Public, and 4) Economic Development. Although that policy plan served its purpose, there have been considerable changes in the 15 years since then regarding growth and development in the County and its constituent municipalities.

In late 2001, the Board of County Commissioners appointed a special working committee to begin the process of revising the County's Comprehensive Plan. Subsequently, the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee evolved from that working committee and technical planning assistance was requested and received from the Mid-Region Council of Governments (MRCOG). An application for funding assistance to develop a comprehensive plan was submitted to the Local Government Division of the New Mexico Department of Finance and Administration, for which a planning grant was approved in June of 2002. Funding was provided through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. This Comprehensive Land Use Plan document was then prepared under a Planning Services Agreement between the County and the MRCOG, and is a product of the CDBG grant award.

Summary of Report

This Comprehensive Land Use Plan for Torrance County contains the basic elements for anyone to become familiar with the County as a geographic region in New Mexico, as a governmental operation, and as a living and growing community that is continually evolving. A county profile describes the general character of the County with information and statistical data concerning historical background, population and housing, local economy, transportation and other infrastructure systems, and various county-wide services and facilities available to residents. Trends and projections of population, housing, and employment provide a basis for envisioning future development patterns in terms of the land use activities that comprise the County. Also, significant development issues are discussed and evaluated as a basis for Plan recommendations.

There are two key components that comprise the essence of this Comprehensive Plan: goals and objectives for future development of the County, and action plan recommendations. Goals and objectives seek to describe a desirable future for the County. These goals and their subordinate objectives are presented in five categories: 1) Land Use: Distribution and Intensity, 2) Transportation and Circulation, 3) Regional Infrastructure, 4) Economic Development, and 5) County Government Operations.

The goals and objectives also provide a foundation for proposed recommendations that identify strategic actions that are intended to define and implement the Plan within various time frames. These recommendations are organized into categories similar to the goals and objectives: 1) Land Use Planning and Management, 2) Transportation and Circulation, 3) Regional Infrastructure and Natural Resources, 4) Economic Development, and 5) County Government Operations. Actual implementation of this Comprehensive Plan is subject to the policy directives and actions of the Board of County Commissioners as deemed appropriate for the conditions, capabilities, and opportunities that unfold with the future.

PART II

COUNTY PROFILE

In order to rationally plan for the future of the County, it is necessary to understand the context and conditions that influence the communities that make up Torrance County. This county profile is intended to describe the County in terms of its physical attributes, development history, demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, and a brief inventory of public facilities and services currently available to the residents of the County.

Character of Development

Torrance County can be characterized geographically, historically, and developmentally. The County is a product of historical evolution and its future is generally expected to be an extension of present day development activities. A comprehensive plan however may influence the direction and intensity of future development through regulatory controls, development restrictions or incentives, and the installation of County facilities and services. Radical changes also may occur as a result of unpredictable events or conditions such as extended drought, economic disruption, or technological advancement. The current character of development is described in the following sections to establish a general sense of the County as a unique and special place in the State of New Mexico.

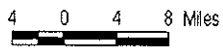
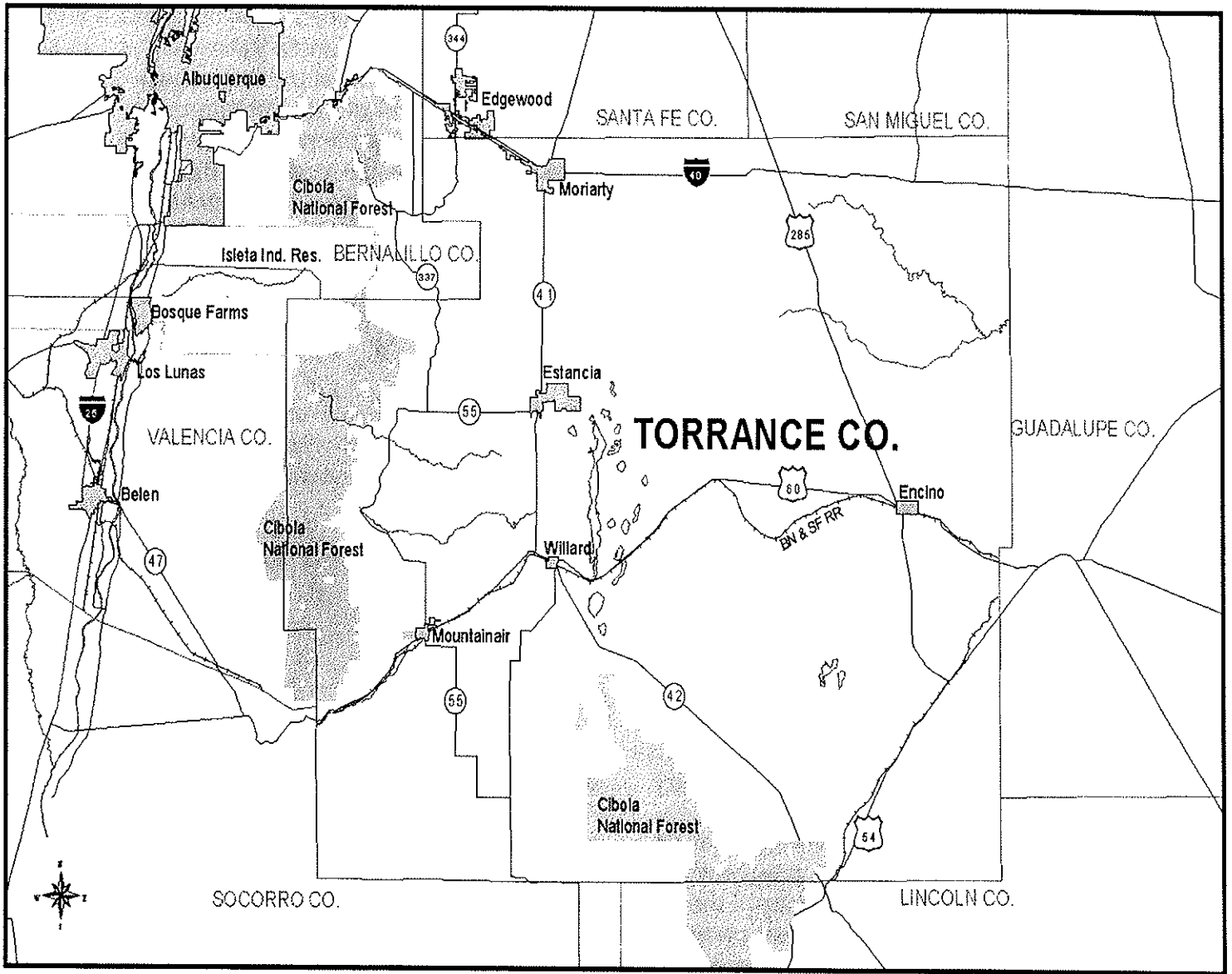
Regional Setting

Torrance County comprises a large land area some 3400 square miles in size with an overall population density of about 5 persons per square mile. Over 95 percent of the population however resides in the western half of the County. Torrance County encompasses most of the Estancia Valley as well as about 20 miles of prairie land east of the Pedernal Hills sloping into the Pecos River Basin. The Estancia Valley lies in the geographic center of New Mexico, bordered on the west by the Manzano and Sandia Mountains, on the east by the Pedernal Hills, on the

south by large mesas, and on the north by the low profile edge of the basin divide. A general location map of the region is shown on Figure 1.



Homestead in Torrance County



Torrance County Comprehensive Plan

Figure 1
Regional Map

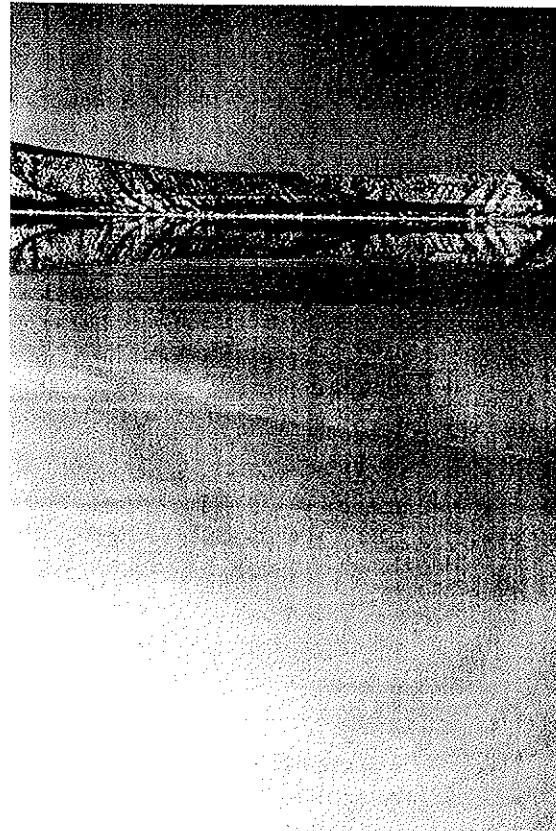

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Farming and ranching have been the traditional economic activities of the County but are diminishing as the population grows in the Estancia Valley. Today, there are growing sectors of non-agricultural commerce and business. Much of the County is situated within the “commuter shed” of the Albuquerque metropolitan region and is therefore growing in scattered residential subdivisions and housing developments. Various jurisdictions and special territories that are within the County boundaries include five incorporated municipalities, significant lands held in State and Federal ownership, and a small area within the Isleta Indian Reservation. Also, there are all or portions of four Mexican Land Grants in the County. Figure 2 presents a map of the land ownership status in Torrance County.

Development History

During the last Ice Age, approximately 300 square miles of what we now know as the Estancia Valley was covered by a lake up to 40 miles in diameter and 150 feet deep. Campsites of Paleolithic hunters of the Clovis, Folsom and Llano cultures (some 23,000 B.C.) can be found in the dunes along the edge of the ancient lake bed. Unlike most bodies of water, Lake Estancia had no natural outlet. As the sun beat on this immense lake, the evaporating waters left deposits of sand, gravel, silt and clay from 30 to 80 feet thick in the center of the lake area. These smaller basins now contain only a few inches of highly brackish water. Today, there is a chain of sizable salt lakes located in the center of the Estancia Valley, running north and south. Laguna de Perro (Dog Lake) is the largest and runs about 12 miles long, a mile wide but seldom over a few inches deep. The lake basins have long been a source of salt for the New Mexico

Pueblos and early Hispanics, hence the region was known as the Salinas Province.



Salt Lakes in Torrance County

Some time between the first and 12th centuries, Early Puebloan cultures began to appear in the Estancia Valley. Their early dwellings were pit houses,

