

**Draft Proposed Action for the Alamosa Ranch  
By the Citizens for the Alamosa Ranch- CFAR  
February 3, 2009**

*This is an excerpt from our draft management plan document.*

This management plan continues and extends the historic uses of the Alamosa Ranch since its acquisition by the city in 1996. It honors the management and hard work of the ad hoc Ranch Committee formed in 1997 and followed by the Alamosa Ranch Advisory Board created in 2003.

This plan uses the existing water delivery features and fence lines already in place. It recognizes the two special management units that are being guided by mutual agreement between the city and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Partners in Wildlife Program.

This plan can be adopted immediately with little effort or expense.

**A. Global Criteria-** These are considerations that pertain to the entire Alamosa Ranch.

All of the ranch should be retained for public recreational use with no disposition of any land to private commercial development (buildings, retail, RV parks etc.)

Municipal, interpretive or administrative structures should only be placed at the Dairy Site or on the Polston Property.

No structured sports complexes should be created on the ranch or parks developed that require traditional lawn watering, grooming and maintenance.

The focus of ranch management will be to supply opportunities for walking, jogging, bicycle riding, wildlife and bird watching and the other benefits associated with open space.

Motorized access is only allowed for maintenance, emergency or administrative purposes.

Plantings of trees and shrubs should be native species. Eradication of Siberian Elm and Russian Olive trees is important to maintain native cottonwoods and willows.

The natural character of the ranch shall be maintained in perpetuity.

**1. Grazing**

Grazing should continue to be an integral part of the ranch use matrix. This is important to utilize the native plants, control pest plant species, and generate revenue.

Open bidding to lease the ranch should occur at reasonable intervals.

Grazing practices should conform to the recommendations put forth by the NRCS grazing plan.

Rotational closures of some trail segments may occur to avoid liability issues with insurance underwriters as trail use increases and new trails are created.

The areas of prime forage production should be identified as a result of the NRCS study as well as historic practices and should be used for grazing as long as possible into the future. This will help to maintain irrigation use in the context of the historic and cultural tradition of livestock grazing. It is possible to acquire funding to maintain grazing practices through the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area (see Appendix A.)

Current revenue from leasing has been showing three to five thousand dollars profit after outlay of maintenance and upkeep funds to ranch related parameters annually. (This does not include city staff cost.)

It is important to maintain grazing to use and support the important water rights on the ranch.

We encourage the adoption of the latest grazing techniques that focus on intense short term grazing and frequent pasture rest and rotation.

## **2. Trail System**

There are currently roughly eight miles of trails in use on and around the ranch. Additional segments are proposed and should be phased in as use and population expand. There is also current opportunity to lay out primitive trails in the north end of the ranch that can be used by more hearty individuals.

Consideration should be offered to try to identify at least one equestrian trail route with a possible start point at the dairy complex. The dairy site offers parking potential for truck and trailer rigs off of heavily traveled roads.

There should be a prohibition of all motorized use of the trails except for maintenance, administrative or emergency uses.

## **3. View Shed**

The Alamosa Ranch offers an excellent introduction to the town when arriving from the north on Highway 17, a major route from the Sand Dunes National Park. We refer to this area from Splashland to the State Avenue bridge as the Commons. This refers to the traditional use of common pasture by traditional communities.

This area is a precious visual asset to the community, displaying an exciting mixture of meadow, ponds, river, sky, trees, shrubs, wildlife and waterfowl.

The visual integrity of the ranch should be preserved by careful landscaping plantings and thoughtful cooperation with building projects around the periphery of the ranch to maintain this pastoral setting. This can be done through cooperative measures and specific zoning guidelines by the city and county.

#### **4. Water Management**

Rio Grande irrigation water from the Excelsior and Independence ditches should be maximized to establish historic water use for the Alamosa Ranch.

The best way to accomplish this is to continue the historic uses for water in flood irrigation which has also offered tremendous support of wetlands. The agricultural element will be vital to retain the water rights attached to the ranch.

The city of Alamosa will most likely be required to augment its impacts to the Rio Grande in the near future. Maximizing current use will help to offset the dewatering of ranchlands once augmentation levels have been established.

#### **5. Education/Research**

The ranches proximity to the schools in Alamosa allows for many opportunities to study and interactions with the natural systems and the river corridor. Efforts should be made to take advantage of this scientific resource that lies at our doorstep.

The Polston Site would be an obvious place to retain one of the portable classrooms as a science and nature center to be used by the school district. One of these building could be relocated closer to the ranch after the building site is sold off. The Alamosa School Board owns the alfalfa fields surrounding the Polston School and we suggest some of that be retained as a nature center site.

Another obvious tie-in is with Adams State College. College level environmental science research and observation could easily be accommodated.

#### **6. Special and Seasonal Use**

The ranch can provide seasonal activities. Ice skating areas can be laid out in the winter as well as cross country ski courses. Primitive camping can be accommodated in the El Bosque and Cottonwood units by permit to Boy and Girl Scout groups, for instance. This should be on a pack-it-in pack-it-out basis.

Fishing opportunities for carp are available currently at the East Commons pond.

Other special use requests should be directed to the ranch advisory board.

## **B. Management of Study Units- Management Prescriptions**

### **1. W- Wetlands & Wildlife and W+ ( areas already under an agency cooperative agreement)**

This prescription is for units identified for their existing and potential characteristics to enhance wetlands, wildlife and natural ecosystems. Efforts may be made to work in conjunction with other organizations and government agencies to acquire grants, easements or other arrangements that will aid in the development of natural attributes and water structures that will enhance waterfowl production and other wildlife.

It is important to mention here that there are already two parcels of the ranch, marked W+, that are under management in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, a division of the U.S. Department of Interior. Both the Dos Lagos and El Bosque units are being managed under the Partners in Wildlife Program to benefit vegetative recovery and provide waterfowl nesting habitat.

The W prescription is for areas deemed eligible for inclusion in similar programs with the NRCS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Some of these programs with the NRCS such as the Wetlands Reserve Program offer monetary benefits back to the city for inclusion in this program. (A full discussion of these programs is laid out in Appendix A.)

Management of this prescription should continue beyond the formal agreement timespan.

The order of importance in making management decisions for this prescription are as follows:

- a. Wetlands/Wildlife
- b. Trail Recreation
- c. Grazing

### **2. G- Grazing**

This prescription is for units that have been identified for their forage production qualities. Efforts may be made to work in conjunction with other organizations and government agencies to acquire grants, easements or other arrangements that will aid in the development of forage production and elimination of invasive plants.

The order of importance in making management decisions are as follows:

- a. Grazing
- b. Wetlands/Wildlife
- c. Trail Recreation

### **3. TR- Trail Recreation**

This prescription is for units that have been identified for their proximity to parking and population centers. They also are readily visible and accessible. The focus of these units is on maintaining the aesthetic values of these areas while offering jogging, walking and bicycle opportunities. Efforts may be made to work in conjunction with other organizations and government agencies to acquire grants, easements or other arrangements that will aid in the development of trail systems and wildlife viewing platforms and blinds.

The order of importance in making management decisions are as follows:

- a. Trail Recreation
- b. Wetlands/Wildlife
- c. Grazing

### **4. C- Cultivation**

This prescription is for units that are identified as being under cultivation. These units can be used to generate revenue from cash crops such as alfalfa, oats and barley or to grow crops to aid wildlife, such as grain to encourage sandhill crane activity. There are several units in the ranch that have been under cultivation, although currently there is only one unit actively being used in this way.

### **5. HI- Historical/Interpretive**

This prescription is for units that have been identified for their historical, cultural or interpretive qualities. Efforts may be made to work in conjunction with other organizations and government agencies to acquire grants, easements or other arrangements that will aid the development of the historical, cultural and interpretive aspects of the unit.

## **C. Prescriptions Assigned to Units**

1. **Commons Group** ( Highway 17 frontage, State Ave, North River Road, Rio Grande Frontage)
  - a. **Dos Lagos-W+** This unit was physically altered to create two shallow ponds on 80 acres. The ponds are flooded in sequence and one area is rested from grazing to grow up cover for nesting waterfowl. The subsequent year the other half of the parcel is rested. Extensive dike and fence construction were funded by the Partners in Wildlife program. This field was the

site of a landing and an overnight stay by legendary woman pilot Amelia Earhardt in the 1930's.

b. **East commons-W** This unit has been identified as an ideal candidate for wetland restoration and maintenance by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the NRCS Wetlands Reserve Program.

c. **La Cienega-TR** This unit is the only parcel within city limits. It has been proposed to be upgraded to a city park. Plans are to improve the loop trail within this unit. It has a pleasant picnic area and already receives substantial use. It could also be an interpretive site.

d. **West Commons- G** A healthy, natural meadow that offers excellent forage.

e. **Cottonwood-TR** The proximity to the Cottonwood Subdivision makes this unit a good candidate to focus on the trails potential and esthetic qualities. It is also a productive native meadow and offers good forage.

f. **Rio Grande-TR** This unit runs along the river and is one of the most heavily used areas of the ranch for walking, biking and jogging.

## 2. Dairy Group

a. **Dairy Complex- HI** This unit holds a historic ranch, dairy and stage stop. It has adequate room for future parking and is logical start point for a trail system into the north part of the ranch.

Interpretive exhibits highlighting such subjects as pioneer and agricultural history, river morphology, wildlife, etc. could be an eventuality.

b. **East Dairy- C** This unit is the only piece of the ranch that is currently under cultivation. This use should continue to raise cash crops and retain the water rights for this field.

c. **West Dairy- G** This unit produces good grass and is a favorite spot for calving operations.

## 3. North Pasture Group

a. **El Prado – G** This parcel is the largest unit on the ranch. It has variability in plant communities and terrain and is a consistent forage producer. It also possesses extensive shallow wetlands.

b. **North River West- W/C** This unit has been cultivated at one time. It is a candidate for the Wetland Restoration Program by the NRCS. This unit can go either direction as needs be.

c. **North River East- G** This section is a fair to good lot for grazing.

- d. **La Vega North- W** This unit is a prime candidate for the NRCS Wetlands Restoration Program and is bordered on the east by a private property that is already in a wetland/wildlife easement, which gives it more scoring points for eligibility. This section has topographic relief and has some preexisting marsh and slough features.
- e. **La Vega South- G** An excellent source of forage- it also has some old river meanders that host shallow ponds during the irrigation season.

#### 4. **El Bosque-W+**

The El Bosque unit possesses many features that are unique to the ranch as well as along the entire Rio Grande corridor in the San Luis Valley. This unit has qualities that set it apart and warrant unique management directives. It has extensive cottonwood groves surrounding a deep oxbow as well as chico and chamisa uplands. The El Bosque unit is also eligible for funds to restore and stabilize the Rio Grande.

It is currently under management in conjunction with the Partners in Wildlife Program.

The main purpose for the management of this area was and is to encourage vegetative restoration, especially in the regeneration of cottonwoods. This is being accomplished by limiting grazing to times that do not impact the emerging cottonwood shoots.

The growth of young cottonwoods is evidence of the success of this program.

## APPENDIX A Agency Resources to Augment Alamosa Ranch Management Goals

### Natural Resources Conservation Service ( USDA)

#### **Environmental Quality Incentives Program**

*Updated*

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) was reauthorized in the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Farm Bill) to provide a voluntary conservation program for farmers and ranchers that promotes agricultural production and environmental quality as compatible national goals. EQIP offers financial and technical help to assist eligible participants install or implement structural and management practices on eligible agricultural land.

EQIP offers contracts with a minimum term that ends one year after the implementation of the last scheduled practices and a maximum term of ten years. These contracts provide incentive payments and cost-shares to implement conservation practices. Persons who are engaged in livestock or agricultural production on eligible land may participate in the EQIP program. EQIP activities are carried out according to an environmental quality incentives program plan of operations developed in conjunction with the producer that identifies the appropriate conservation practice or practices to address the resource concerns. The practices are subject to NRCS technical standards adapted for local conditions.

EQIP may cost-share up to 75 percent of the costs of certain conservation practices. Incentive payments may be provided for up to three years to encourage producers to carry out management practices they may not otherwise use without the incentive. However, limited resource producers and beginning farmers and ranchers may be eligible for cost-shares up to 90 percent. Farmers and ranchers may elect to use a certified third-party provider for technical assistance. An individual or entity may not receive, directly or indirectly, cost-share or incentive payments that, in the aggregate, exceed \$450,000 for all EQIP contracts entered during the term of the Farm Bill.

## **Wetlands Reserve Program**

The Wetlands Reserve Program is a voluntary program offering landowners the opportunity to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands on their property. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides technical and financial support to help landowners with their wetland restoration efforts. The NRCS goal is to achieve the greatest wetland functions and values, along with optimum wildlife habitat, on every acre enrolled in the program. This program offers landowners an opportunity to establish long-term conservation and wildlife practices and protection.

## **Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program**

The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) is a voluntary program for people who want to develop and improve wildlife habitat primarily on private land. Through WHIP USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service provides both technical assistance and up to 75 percent cost-share assistance to establish and improve fish and wildlife habitat. WHIP agreements between NRCS and the participant generally last from 5 to 10 years from the date the agreement is signed.

WHIP has proven to be a highly effective and widely accepted program across the country. By targeting wildlife habitat projects on all lands and aquatic areas, WHIP provides assistance to conservation minded landowners.

The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 reauthorized WHIP as a voluntary approach to improving wildlife habitat in our Nation. Program administration of WHIP is provided under the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

## **Program Priorities for Fiscal Year 2008**

- Promote the restoration of declining or important native wildlife habitats.
- Protect, restore, develop or enhance wildlife habitat of at-risk species (candidate species, and State and Federally listed threatened and endangered species).
- Reduce the impacts of invasive species on wildlife habitats.
- Protect, restore, develop or enhance declining or important aquatic wildlife species' habitats.

SANGRE DE CRISTO NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA (U.S. Department of the Interior)

This Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Act was put into law in 2009. It offers federal assistance to Alamosa, Conejos and Costilla counties. It will bring “tangible financial support to restore historic buildings and sites; develop interpretive programs and museums; build regional trail systems; and fund other improvements and enhancements.”

Up to 10 million dollars will be available on a matching fund basis.