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## Interior Department Takes Steps to Protect Sacred, Sensitive Lands in New Mexico

*Mineral withdrawal near Placitas would protect Tribal sites, boost local recreation opportunities*

**WASHINGTON** – The Department of the Interior today announced a [proposal](#) by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to protect more than 4,000 acres within the Placitas area in Sandoval County, New Mexico, to safeguard sacred Tribal lands, boost important local recreation opportunities, and support wildlife habitat connectivity. The proposed mineral withdrawal would prevent new mining claims and oil and gas development in the area for a 50-year period, subject to valid and existing rights.

The Pueblos of San Felipe and Santa Ana have long sought protections for the Placitas area, which they consider ancestral and sacred lands. The site, located near the Albuquerque metro area, also provides close-to-home outdoor recreation opportunities and is popular for hiking, camping, sightseeing and hunting. The proposal would help protect, preserve and promote the scenic integrity, cultural importance, recreational values, and wildlife habitat connectivity within the Placitas area.

“Today we’re responding to call from Tribes, elected leaders, and community members who want to see these public lands protected,” said **Secretary Deb Haaland**. “We look forward to hearing more from the public to inform decisions about how activities, like gravel mining, may impact these lands, including the important cultural and natural resources.”

“We recognize the importance of the Placitas area, both for Tribal Nations and for the local community who visit and recreate in this area,” said **BLM New Mexico State Director Melanie Barnes**. “We look forward to receiving public feedback during the 90-day public comment period, as we consider protections for this area.”

The proposed withdrawal is located on four separate tracts and contains known archaeological resources that range from as early as the prehistoric Paleoindian period through the historic Statehood period and beyond.

As a member of Congress, Secretary Haaland sponsored The Buffalo Tract Protection Act to protect the Placitas area. Legislation has been introduced by members of the New Mexico congressional delegation five times in recent years.

Today's announcement begins a 90-day public comment period to gather input on the proposed withdrawal. Additionally, the BLM will host a public meeting on Nov. 14, 2023, from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at the Placitas Library. The comment period closes Dec. 19, 2023.

More information on the proposal, including maps, and information on how to provide comment, as well as future public meeting dates, can be found on [BLM's e-Planning website](#).

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