

Recreation

The Jicarilla Ranger District is not heavily used for recreation, is far from any major city, and is extensively industrialized due to natural gas development. The major recreation use on the district is big game hunting. There are three small primitive campgrounds found on the district that are used primarily during big game hunting seasons in the fall. The district receives light use at other times of the year from non-consumptive users such as wildlife and bird viewing, family camping, scouting events, and wild horse observation. Personal use woodcutting occurs in moderate amounts.

Wild horses impact some recreational uses. The quality of non-consumptive viewing activities is increased by the presence of horses. Many people come to the district just to view the horses. On the other hand, some big game hunters feel their hunting experience is decreased because of horse competition with wildlife.

In 1997, Forest Service resource specialists conducted a study to determine which rivers on the Jicarilla Ranger District were eligible for designation as a “wild and scenic river” as part of the national Wild and Scenic Rivers system. [67] Carracas, Bancos, and Cabresto canyons are identified as eligible for consideration under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

Carracas Canyon from the Jicarilla Apache Reservation boundary to the Colorado border is eligible for its outstandingly remarkable values:

- Wildlife - key winter migratory corridor and holding area for deer, significant security area for large bucks, wintering bald eagles.
- Historic - Boiler Springs and wagon road from Arboles to Dulce.

Bancos Canyon from the Jicarilla Apache Reservation boundary to the Forest boundary is determined to be eligible for its outstandingly remarkable values:

- Recreation - popular hunting and hiking area and visiting historic sites.
- Wildlife - key winter migratory corridor and holding area for deer, wintering bald eagles.
- Cultural - looking at proposing whole canyon as National Historic Site due to density of Anasazi and Navajo sites.

Cabresto Canyon from the Jicarilla Apache Reservation boundary to the Forest boundary is determined to be eligible for its outstandingly remarkable values:

- Wildlife - key wintering area at east end, wintering bald eagles at east end.
- Historic - old school house and several homesteads.
- Cultural - major petroglyph area up Lion Canyon.

Comparison of Alternatives

Past, Present, and Reasonably Foreseeable Activities

The past, present and reasonably foreseeable activities that will be used to analyze the cumulative effects on recreation are: Horses, livestock, and wildlife grazing and activities associated with natural gas development (roads, pipelines and well pads).

Alternative A

Impacts to some recreation activities could happen under this alternative. There would continue to be conflicts between big game hunters and horses. The amount of forage available to elk and deer would decrease due to the large number of wild horses. The Wild and Scenic River characteristics of the river segments that have potential for designation would not be affected, except for the riparian vegetation in Carracas Canyon. As the horse herd increases in size, key winter range within Carracas Canyon would be impacted. This may preclude Carracas Canyon from being eligible for Wild and Scenic River designation.

Alternatives B and C

Conflicts between wild horse and big game forage use would decrease, thus improving the quality of recreational hunting opportunities. Other recreational activities would remain the same. The Wild and Scenic River characteristics of the river segments that have potential for designation would not be affected.

Alternative D

During extended drought periods conflicts between wild horses and big game forage use would increase, thus decreasing the quality of recreational hunting opportunities. Horse viewing opportunities would essentially stay the same. Other recreational activities would remain the same. The Wild and Scenic River characteristics of the river segments that have potential for designation would not be affected.

Cumulative Effects

Effects described above include the cumulative effects of livestock with the impacts of horses on soils, specifically ground cover. Both wild horses and natural gas development and production would have cumulative effects on soils through reductions in ground cover and soil productivity. Natural gas related activities would tend to have more extensive effects than wild horses.