

# Overview

## *Vision for Countywide Open Space and Trail System*

This Vision outlines an interconnected open space and trail system for Doña Ana County designed to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of our region. The Vision both describes the components of the open space and trail system, and provides some implementation recommendations for achieving the Vision.

The structure of the open space and trail system is simple—an array of Core Natural Areas and River Valley Projects, linked together by a network of Connectors. As much as possible, the Vision builds upon existing protected areas, projects that are ongoing, or plans that have already been approved.

*Core Areas.* The scenic and natural treasures identified as the core areas of the Vision represent the wide diversity of natural habitats and landscapes within Doña Ana County (see Overview Map). The Core Natural Areas contain lands with significant scenic, wildlife, and wilderness values. The desert lands of these Core Natural Areas also provide numerous recreational opportunities and contain sites of cultural and historic significance.

The river valley provides a striking contrast to the surrounding desert. To reflect the diversity of landscapes within Doña Ana County, the Vision highlights several ongoing projects concerned with preserving working farms and restoring wetlands and bosques along the Rio Grande.

*Connectors.* Links between sites are critical to the creation of a robust open space and trail system. Open space corridors allow for the movement of native plants and wildlife between Core Natural Areas and the river valley, while trail corridors allow people to move between sites and to access them from urban areas.

Core Natural Areas	Core River Valley Projects	Connectors
Organ-Franklin Mountains Doña Ana Mountains Potrillo-Aden Volcanic Area Greater Robledo Mountains Area Caballo-Jornada Area West Mesa Escarpment Tortugas Mountain Mount Cristo Rey Regional Open Space Parks	River habitat restoration sites Agricultural buffer along river Town and village buffers	Major Arroyo corridors and trails Irrigation canal and drain trails Rio Grande trail Columbus Highway Scenic Corridor and trail

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*Implementation.* The Vision is intended as a tool for long-term, regional planning and prioritization. As such, the implementation recommendations are project- or site-specific, and no attempt has been made to develop a single plan for achieving the entire Vision simultaneously. However, to truly achieve connectivity, coordinated planning must underlie all individual projects.

Six Core Natural Areas are on lands already managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), which makes their protection relatively straightforward; the most important step to conserve these areas is simply making sure they are designated for “retention,” not “disposal,” in the BLM’s management plan. Some other projects, such as the Mesilla Valley Bosque Park, already have initial funding in place, which will allow these projects to move forward relatively quickly. For the remainder of the projects, the Vision attempts to lay out some of the necessary steps for their completion.

Underlying all the implementation recommendations is one simple idea: in order to create an interconnected open space and trail system, all jurisdictions need to be working toward the same overall goal—the Vision—in a cooperative and coordinated fashion.