

Candelaria Nature Preserve Public Meeting  
September 11, 2019  
Peggy Norton, TAG member  
Presentation – recommended option for access and recreation

The Technical Advisory group, after discussion and consideration of public comments, determined that the preferred option for public access and recreation is the limited access option. This option provides guided tours rather than open access and best supports the mission of creating a wildlife preserve in the middle of Albuquerque. Public comments received after the June 22 public meeting were split fairly even on this topic; stakeholder meetings held earlier were much more supportive of people having visual access rather than physical access. The comments supporting this option supported the mission of being a wildlife preserve. Comments supporting more access were a little more variable in what they wanted from this property. Individuals and groups thought that it should be open access, that more property is needed for public recreation. However, each Open Space property has unique characteristics that should be preserved. This land will support a diversity of wildlife and habitat, provide a great addition to the Rio Grande corridor flyway, and provide opportunities for public recreation and education of wildlife viewing. It sets aside 1/1000 of the Albuquerque land area to be preserved for biological importance and wildlife, adding to nature study knowledge.

Judy Kowalski, the state liaison to the Land and Water Conservation Fund, has spent considerable time as a member of TAG. She has added leadership and helpful advice and we feel confident our plan will comply with LWCF guidelines. A legal case, *Shawangunks vs Clark*, expanded/clarified the definition of public outdoor recreation uses to encompass uses not involving the public's actual presence on the property. Providing guided access, research and volunteer opportunities represents a balance between LWCF guidelines and Major Public Open Space Facility guidelines.

Candelaria Nature Preserve was initially intended to be a wildlife preserve with no access according to the original Predock Plan which was approved with minor changes by the Environmental Planning Commission. Size and location were important determinants of our decision. People and their toys/playmates do impact wildlife. Bosque del Apache, which is 57,000 acres, has only a small portion of the preserve open to the public. The size of CNP (two parcels of 90 and 30 acres) does not allow that privilege. From October through May no bicycles are allowed on the tour loop; dogs are not allowed out of the car. Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area, close to CNP size, is on the outskirts of Belen, a town of 7,000 people and no dogs allowed. Valle de Oro, 570 acres, is on the outskirts of Albuquerque, is in the process of building out their property and will probably be making access changes. CNP is in the center of a city with a population of 500,000, adjacent to the Rio Grande Nature Center State Park which attracts more than 200,000 people per year. There are recreational options nearby – miles of ditch, bosque and bike trails. Los Poblanos is managed as a farm and allows total access and advertises as a place for walkers, runners, bicyclists, dogs. While the cranes and geese continue eating, other wildlife isn't present. Not every Open Space property has to provide the same opportunities. Hubbell Oxbow has farming but no public access. Open Space

Visitor's Center closes their wildlife preserve area to the public. The County recently purchased 147 acres of farmland on Rio Bravo, and plans to keep it as such.

Candelaria Nature Preserve will be, and is now, a unique spot for viewing wildlife. The South Tract is fairly undisturbed and should be appreciated for that aspect – recent sightings have included a bobcat and a badger. Cameras will show us more as time goes by. It will also provide native habitat, in conjunction with the philosophies of Valle de Oro and Whitfield to provide natural, diverse habitat for protection and migration.

Currently, bird walks are offered Saturday and Sunday mornings into the property directly north of the Nature Center. The routes of these walks may be altered to include the South Tract and the North Tract at appropriate times of year. Friends of the Rio Grande Nature Center has expressed interest in becoming involved with activities. We plan to form a friends group for the Preserve which will also provide volunteers to lead walks. Open Space staff has offered to lead quarterly walks on the North Tract.

The South Tract will have a trail and a viewing platform. There will be guided walks and opportunities for group activities with a special use permit.

Activities in the North Tract will include guided walks, citizen science activities. Viewing blinds/platforms will be located on the south side, east side, and northwest side. Educational signage will be included. The periphery will allow exceptional viewing of cranes and geese. Many people use the Duranes lateral which also has natural blinds of trees and shrubs.

The Tree Farm will provide some parking with a permeable surface and landscaped. The area will include educational displays, making a nice presentation for the Preserve.

We are excited to see this vision move forward. Further discussion is needed to complete this plan. A pollinator area of native plants has been discussed for the area just south of the Woodward house. Decisions need to be made as to numbers of tours, people per tours and how citizen science will work. Oversight and transition needs further discussion.

I'd like to introduce Heather McCurdy, Superintendent of the Rio Grande Nature Center State Park and TAG member, would like to present activities offered by the Nature Center, which is included as part of this Management Plan.