

**Vision 2040 Conservation/Recreation Focus Group Meeting**  
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**Workbook Summary**

**Participants**

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**Question 1: In one sentence, describe the character of Las Cruces and Doña Ana County- e.g. "Our region is..." What makes this region unique?**

- Blessed with an abundance of open space, wild lands and sunshine.
- Is booming large scale community with a small town mentality: "A big little City as opposed to a little big City."
- Doña Ana County unique with plenty of open space with arroyos
- Our region is an area that has enormous potential for outdoor recreation, but it is in many places severely degraded and under-utilized and is threatened by sprawl, poor management, and climate change.
- Our region is unique in that we've remained relatively undiscovered in the recent (several decades) boom across the West, which has been both a blessing and a curse; it has been a blessing because we've been able to retain our natural resources, primarily water, but also a curse as the relative casual approach to development has lead to some entities manipulating the weakness in the system.
- Our area is known and loved for its wide open spaces, vast public lands that provide us with places to "get away" and experience the natural world, have solitude for personal growth and renewal, and exercise and 'play' in groups as well.
- Doña Ana is situated in the Chihuahuan Desert Ecoregion and is within the Río Grande watershed. In addition, there are historical features like the Camino Real Trail and farmlands that contribute to what makes up this county. Although there is a lot of development, the unique ecological factors make this area special and worth highlighting and protecting.
- Ours is a broad blend of cultural, environmental and wildlife treasures that intersect, travel or migrate through here- diversity of unique landscapes that harbor, shelter, provide respite or rejuvenation to all life here.
- Our region is very unique in terms of history, habitat and people (cultural and diversity). It is rapidly becoming less unique with the encroaching development emphasizing "Anywhere USA." The desert habitat is mistakenly thought of as simply scrub, largely misunderstood! (ex. Creosote is actually "the redwoods of the desert") The draw to our area is its uniqueness (ex. Historical buildings are being torn down and then small structures are built in memoriam). We need to work with the natural habitat around us

instead of trying to override it/control, monopolize. Quality of life should be based on all systems not monopolized by the human system for quality of life.

- It is unique geographically- a river valley in the Chihuahuan Desert with mountains; River connected to mountains via arroyos and irrigation canals; In terms of conservation- we are threatened. Past plans have called for arroyo preservation plan, farmland preservation plan, wildlife habitat preservation plan and an open space and final authority overseeing all such lands. Nothing has been implemented and development is squeezing out our natural and agricultural resources and our connections with them.

**Question 2: What are the three most important opportunities and/or potentials for the region over the next 20 years? What are the three most important challenges the region faces?**

Opportunities

- # 1- Maintain viable populations of native wildlife; # 2- Protect arroyos for wildlife corridors; # 3- restore the Río Grande to ecological health by acquiring water rights for restoration
- Open space, habitat and natural resources; Time to plan strategically for preservation-smart build; Renewable energy sources
- # 1- Preservation/restoration of desert areas; # 2- Restoration along the Río Grande; # 3- Acquisition of all or part of golf course for public park
- Trails on irrigation canals, ditches with map; Partnerships with multiple stakeholder groups. There is lots of expertise in this community about wildlife, water systems, habitats; WalMart's drive to sustainability; Conservation easements on agricultural land; Great conservation wilderness proposal on the table being opposed by a tiny minority, it needs to move forward; existing open space and trails plan.
- To preserve these open spaces before they get developed; to thus become one of the more desirable areas for living (high quality of life); to plan ahead for development.
- Shaping planning and development in a way that complements and enhances the natural resources community and economy; using our climate to foster passive E technology; create and implement plans that are inclusive and representative of all cultural and economic interests; unifying three areas of environment, economics and community.
- # 1- Self-definition of our region in a way that accommodates the variety of life forms and people who live, play and work here; # 2- Protecting those fragile aspects of our region that will disappear without our help; # 3- create a climate (region) where we can live as well as we can imagine
- # 1- We must establish our green infrastructure preservation NOW, preserving mountains and escarpment and the Río Grande, with farmland and wetland buffers all connected by arroyos and irrigation canals. # 2- To carefully evaluate our water resources then adjust growth accordingly. # 3- Utilize smart growth ideas; education for the development of sustainable communities

Challenges

- # 1- Loss of wildlife by loss of habitat; # 2- Conversion of farmland in the Río Grande floodplain development; # 3- Development that undermines unique qualities of the region
- Open space/development; Finances acquisition fund for M&O and competition to developers; Citizen education, environmental
- # 1- Climate change and its impacts on water; # 2- Controlling growth; # 3- Restoring degraded habitat- finding funding, acquiring property, developing plans.
- Paradigm problems (more growth is beneficial, growth is inevitable, development brings more good than bad to the community, we can keep building more subdivisions forever); global climate change is creating less snow pack, which means less runoff, which reduces water in the system (aquifer and surface) which strains relationships between multiple stakeholders (conservation, recreation, agriculture, municipal)
- To implement a plan for development before it's too late; limiting growth in order to have enough resources for our residents- primarily water; preserve the valley floor for farming/agricultural use.
- Creating ordinances and mindset that foster an inclusive approach to planning and development; Bringing in financial support/incentives to promote innovation; Finding public participation processes that bring in all voices; Learning how to create win-win strategies.
- All the opportunities are challenges as well; To engender at least an appreciation, if not a love, for our regional wild treasures in all those who build here or move here.
- # 1- Implementation of good plans by qualified persons; # 2- Conservation of natural, agricultural, resources; # 3- Development of local food resources; Preventing developers from building on flood prone areas: It will bankrupt the community.

#### Simultaneously opportunities and challenges

- Better planning on , wise land swap with BLM; Better use of all properties, including the river and saving farmland; Building of dams and dam control, floods- I feel these are about the same, growth through the County; Saving parks from people destroying them; Build affordable housing to help people move from mobile homes.
- All the listed are both challenges and opportunities: # 1- Establishment of natural riparian habitat corridors before all is overlooked; # 2- Evaluation of water system present and how to increase water resources; # 3- Appreciation of ecological systems (working of all systems together for the benefit of all/not simply monetary value); Wildlife conservation plan; Implementation

#### **Question 3: How will the land be impacted by significant future growth? How can recreation and conservation initiatives be directed toward a higher quality of life?**

- Continued development will occur; conserve land, plan land blocks for parks and recreation space.
- Population in the southern part of the County and divide recreation in the North and South region; Impact of RVM out of farmland and water; Start making ball parks/pools to help keep the City's last longer, but funds are needed.
- Institutionalized sustainability concepts into every facet of planning and development. We should measure carbon and water footprints of all developments and use those metrics in same meaningful way.
- River water rights

- Do not assume significant future growth without determining water (see the 40 year water plan) and environmental impact

**Question 4: How can the completed 2040 Regional Planning Project best benefit the conservation community?**

- Incorporate specific measures to maintain/acquire/identify open space in the Río Grande floodplain, preferably natural areas but also farmland, where habitat restoration can potentially occur; Identify and meet the habitat needs of targeted vertebrate species; Acquire water rights for the river itself; Protect arroyos.
- I'm sure it will really benefit the whole Doña Ana County area.
- Provide the vision of and commitment to our area as a natural, ecologically sound place for the people who live here. Provide specific goals for public officials and a framework for public and private cooperative efforts to move us toward goals. Provide a measuring stick by which we can judge efforts of public officials, create benchmarks?
- I like the idea about wildlife plan that creates priorities for wildlife habitat and corridors; Also, I like the idea of the City targeting parcels of land for acquisition with parks and conservation as priorities; Developer restrictions are needed regarding open space, arroyos, and infrastructure; as some farmland is developed, housing can be clustered, leaving open spaces for ecological agriculture and plantings for wildlife; Long-term ecosystem sustainability needs to be a high priority.
- By coming up with specific strategies or actions that can be implemented (adopted as city/county regulations) and carried out by developers, local government, and private entities, to bring to fruition the vision of preserving our open spaces as much as practical (arroyos, public lands, river bottom, etc.)
- Don't divide plans into segments but overlay them so you can see how they interfere and complement each other. This will unite all different kinds of interests and getting everyone working together instead of competing with each other. Also, integrate "green" suggestions in other sectors with economic and community rationales; type of "systems thinking"
- If it is actually inputted and acted on and not left in the vision stage! "Manifest destiny" Energy needs to be put behind; revenue garnered to assist this from its very existence itself. Our schools could take part in it being part of the system! (Some credit for graduation in "community service" type plan)... fund raisers related. Need to establish benchmarks for "Green Community"
- Tools were mentioned in QI (additional plans needed), then implement. Funding options have been identified and listed for 20 years. Surveys have been conducted to give rationale to funding options. PDR or donated. USDA Farm and Ranch Protection Program and many other grants/watershed plans. Keep development out of flood areas; Sector planning (neighborhood overlays) to address local needs. Coordination between City, County, BLM, State Land Office.