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## **Introducing *Land, Water and People***

**By Mike Blakeman**

*Land, Water and People* is a new bi-weekly column from the SLV Public Lands Center. By now, some folks know that the SLV Public Lands Center (SLVPLC) is composed of the Rio Grande National Forest and the SLV Bureau of Land Management. These two agencies linked up in an effort to improve efficiency while providing better service to SLV residents and visitors.

Presently, the SLVPLC manages approximately 2.4 million acres of public lands ranging in elevation from 7,400 feet along the Rio Grande to 14,345 feet on top of Blanca Peak. The lands include many local attractions, such as Wheeler Geologic Area, North Clear Creek Falls, Penitente Canyon, Conejos Canyon, Crestone Needle, Blanca Wetlands, San Luis Hills... and many more areas which will be mentioned in future columns. That's a lot of *land*!

The lands managed by the SLVPLC include most of the mountains that surround the Upper Rio Grande Basin. In other words, the eastern side of the San Juan Mountains from the New Mexico border to Poncha Pass and the western side of the Sangre de Cristos from Poncha Pass to Blanca Peak. The high peaks of these mountain ranges wring snow and rain out of the clouds providing most of the water used by Valley residents. That's a lot of *water*!

Both the Forest Service and the BLM are multiple use agencies, meaning their lands are managed for a variety of purposes, including: forage production for cattle and sheep; preservation of cultural resources; commercial timber production; many types of motorized and non-motorized recreation; oil, gas and hard rock mining; wildlife and fisheries; clean air and water; and preservation of natural ecosystems in backcountry and Wilderness areas. Well over a million people work on and visit these lands each year. That's a lot of *people*!

So by now you should be getting the idea as to why this column is called *Land, Water and People*. Some employees came up with other names for the column, such as, *The Bureaucratic Bugle*, *The Federal Fiasco* and *The Valley Vacuum*, thus proving that federal government workers have a sense humor. Ultimately, we decided to go with a more positive name since we have feelings too!

This column will touch on many topics over the next year and it will be written by a variety of SLVPLC employees. You will read about the workings of natural ecosystems; the recreational opportunities that abound on these public lands; upcoming and ongoing projects; and the many challenges of managing multiple uses while conserving and preserving land and water resources. Additionally, since this is the 100 year anniversary of the Rio Grande National Forest, we will make sure to sprinkle in a few historical articles.

We hope that you will find this column informative, engaging and fun. Until next time....

*Mike Blakeman is currently the public affairs officer for the San Luis Valley Public Lands Center. When not working, he's most often found scrambling around the mountains in the Upper Rio Grande Basin with a camera in his hand.*