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# Old Spanish National Historic Trail

Cottonwood Canyon. Bureau of Land Management

## National Historic Trail

The Old Spanish National Historic Trail, an enduring symbol of America's pioneering spirit and cultural confluence, traces a historical corridor of travel from Santa Fe, New Mexico, to Los Angeles, California. The Trail traverses the rugged landscapes of the American Southwest and is more than a mere route; it is a living museum of the interactions between Native American tribes, Mexican and American traders and settlers. Despite its historical significance, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is making controversial decisions that mar the pristine vistas and cherished landscape with the blight of oil and gas development, mining, forest mastication, off-road vehicle allowances, and solar energy developments.

## Treasured Heritage at Risk

Congress designates National Historic Trails under the National Trails System Act (NTSA) to protect and preserve scenic, cultural, and historic values, and recreational opportunities. There are 32 National Trails. The majority are managed by the National Park Service. The NTSA states, "*National scenic or national historic trails may contain campsites, shelters, and related-public-use facilities. Other uses along the trail, which will not substantially interfere with the nature and purposes of the trail, may be permitted by the Secretary charged with the administration of the trail. . . . to the extent practicable, efforts shall be made to avoid activities incompatible with the purposes for which such trails were established.*" 16 USC §1246(c)



## Missing Management Plan

Despite the Old Spanish Trail's 2002 designation as a National Historic Trail, federal administrators are **19 years past due** in completing the trail inventory and preparing the legally required Comprehensive Management Plan. This oversight is a glaring deficiency in the stewardship of this historical asset. The National Park Service, Co-Administrator of the Trail, has recommended a prudent approach during this interim period, advocating for a 5-mile buffer zone on either side of the Trail to protect its scenic, natural, recreational, and historic integrity. However, the BLM regularly disregards this expert advice, opting without explanation for arbitrary buffers or even allowing complete destruction of the Trail. BLM is undermining the National Park Service's guidance and exposing the Trail to significant risks.

## Recommendations for BLM

- We urge BLM and the National Park Service to complete the Comprehensive Management Plan for the Trail. We must ensure that piecemeal development approvals do not collectively destroy this irreplaceable heritage.
- BLM must implement stricter protections against industrial encroachments that threaten to obliterate the Trail's scenic and cultural values.
- Until a Management Plan is in place, when planning BLM must include 15 mile buffer zones on either side of the centerline to ensure that the required Viewshed Analysis can be completed (as laid out in BLM Policy 6280 and 6250).



A spectacular Old Spanish Historic Trail viewshed in Colorado - looking upstream from Castle Rocks in McClinnis National Conservation Area to Ruby Canyon. Photo credit: John Hiscock

## PEER's Response

Over the past ten years, PEER and Trail advocates have commented on at least 39 separate projects with detrimental impacts and ad hoc management. Each project chips away at the Trail's integrity, cumulatively eroding the historical and cultural tapestry that it represents.

The Gemini Solar Project in Nevada stands as a glaring example of how unchecked energy development can lead to the complete destruction of segments of the Trail. In August 2024, PEER filed a protest with Colorado BLM because BLM allowed oil and gas development just 164 feet from the Trail in spite of the protective measures of the National Trails System Act.

*The Old Spanish Trail is more than a relic of the past; it is a bridge to our shared history and a source of inspiration for future generations. Protecting it from the encroachment of energy projects is not just a local concern but a national imperative. The integrity of the trail must be upheld, and its scenic vistas preserved to honor the legacy of those who traversed it centuries ago.*

## Contact Us

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