

Galisteo Basin Archeological Sites Protection Act

The Galisteo Basin, located south of Santa Fe, New Mexico is a region of barren sandstone ridges and clayey arroyos sparsely clothed by piñons, junipers and hardy grasses. Drained by muddy, red-streaked Galisteo Creek, the basin epitomizes the stark, empty landscapes of the American southwest . . . except, these days, the Basin is no longer empty. Increasingly, its large ranches are being sold, sub-divided, and purchased by well-to-do homeowners seeking a gentrified brand of southwestern solitude.

Seven hundred years ago, there was even less solitude in the Basin. The entire watershed was the scene of a prehistoric land rush resulting from the abandonment of Mesa Verde and the San Juan Basin by ancestors of today's Pueblo Indians. The settlements constructed by these Tewa and Keres immigrants over the next four hundred years are now some of the largest and most significant archeological sites in the United States. The pueblo of San Cristobal, for example, founded in the 1300s, and occupied until the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, contains over 30 roomblocks, and has an estimated 2,500 masonry and adobe rooms. Its deep trash middens allowed archeologist Nels Nelson to perform the first seriation of southwestern pottery types. The masonry walls of its Spanish church, surrounded by a convento and corrals, still dominate the massive pueblo.

Concerns about preserving these magnificent monuments to the Puebloan and Spanish Colonial past have been mounting for decades. Some sites like Pueblo Blanco, an equally impressive village with stunning petroglyph panels, are threatened by severe erosion, while others have been damaged by thoughtless vandalism and uncontrolled excavations. In the early 1990s, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and The

Archeological Conservancy (a non-profit organization that acquires and preserves archeological sites) began exploring ways to preserve the Basin's sites.

Their farsighted efforts have finally borne fruit. The Galisteo Archeological Sites Protection Act, passed by Congress, and signed into law by President Bush in March of 2004 provides "for the preservation, protection, and interpretation of the nationally significant archaeological resources in the Galisteo Basin in New Mexico." The legislation identifies 24 individual "protection sites" containing large and small pueblos, spectacular rock art sites, and Spanish Colonial settlements.

The sites are to be preserved through cooperative agreements established between the BLM and private landowners as well as county, and state agencies. Sites may also be acquired by the BLM through donation, purchase or exchange. Private owners are under no obligation to participate; if they choose, their property will be removed from the protection site list. Furthermore, the legislation authorizes the BLM to search for additional sites worthy of preservation, and to make boundary alterations to the existing sites. The law also directs that a general management plan for the identification, research, protection and public interpretation of the sites be submitted three years after the appropriation of funds. Unfortunately, no funding has been appropriated so far.

Despite this impediment, the BLM has begun working with the National Park Service, the State of New Mexico, Santa Fe County, The Archaeological Conservancy, the New Mexico Congressional delegation, tribal governments, local communities, landowners, developers, and preservationists to seek input and guidance on how to implement the Act's requirements. A "coordination group" representing these diverse interests is being formed as the result of recommendations provided by participants at an

initial stakeholders meeting held in October. Individual meetings with private landowners and tribal representatives are being scheduled and cooperative agreements with the Archeological Conservancy and Santa Fe County are being drafted. A web site providing information on the Galisteo legislation, the protection sites, and contact information, is under construction. A list of vulnerable sites needing immediate preservation and protection measures is being compiled, and strategies for obtaining funding are being explored.

Public response to the Galisteo Act has been enthusiastic, and overwhelmingly positive. Many people have voiced their support and expressed an interest in helping out. If you would like to become involved in the planning effort, or if you would just like to learn more by receiving our regular updates, please contact us at the e.mail addresses below.

We have a once in a lifetime opportunity to preserve a fabled place. We need your help.

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