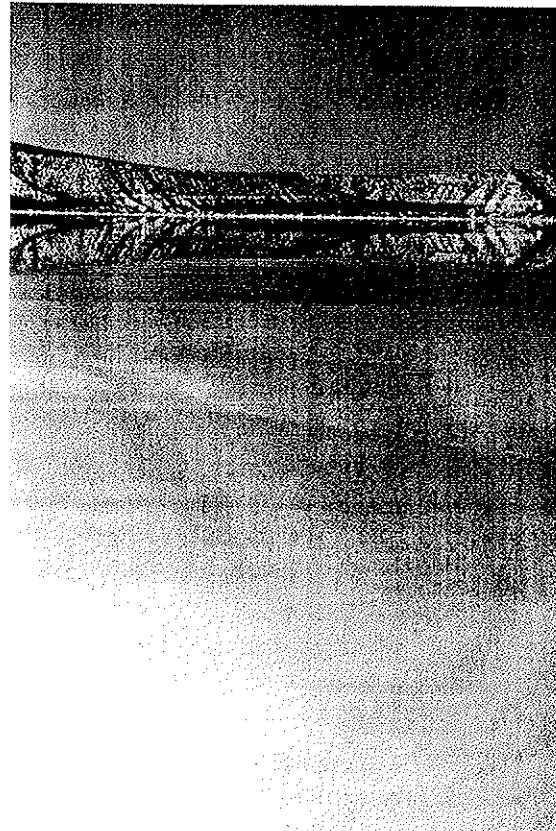


Farming and ranching have been the traditional economic activities of the County but are diminishing as the population grows in the Estancia Valley. Today, there are growing sectors of non-agricultural commerce and business. Much of the County is situated within the “commuter shed” of the Albuquerque metropolitan region and is therefore growing in scattered residential subdivisions and housing developments. Various jurisdictions and special territories that are within the County boundaries include five incorporated municipalities, significant lands held in State and Federal ownership, and a small area within the Isleta Indian Reservation. Also, there are all or portions of four Mexican Land Grants in the County. Figure 2 presents a map of the land ownership status in Torrance County.

Development History

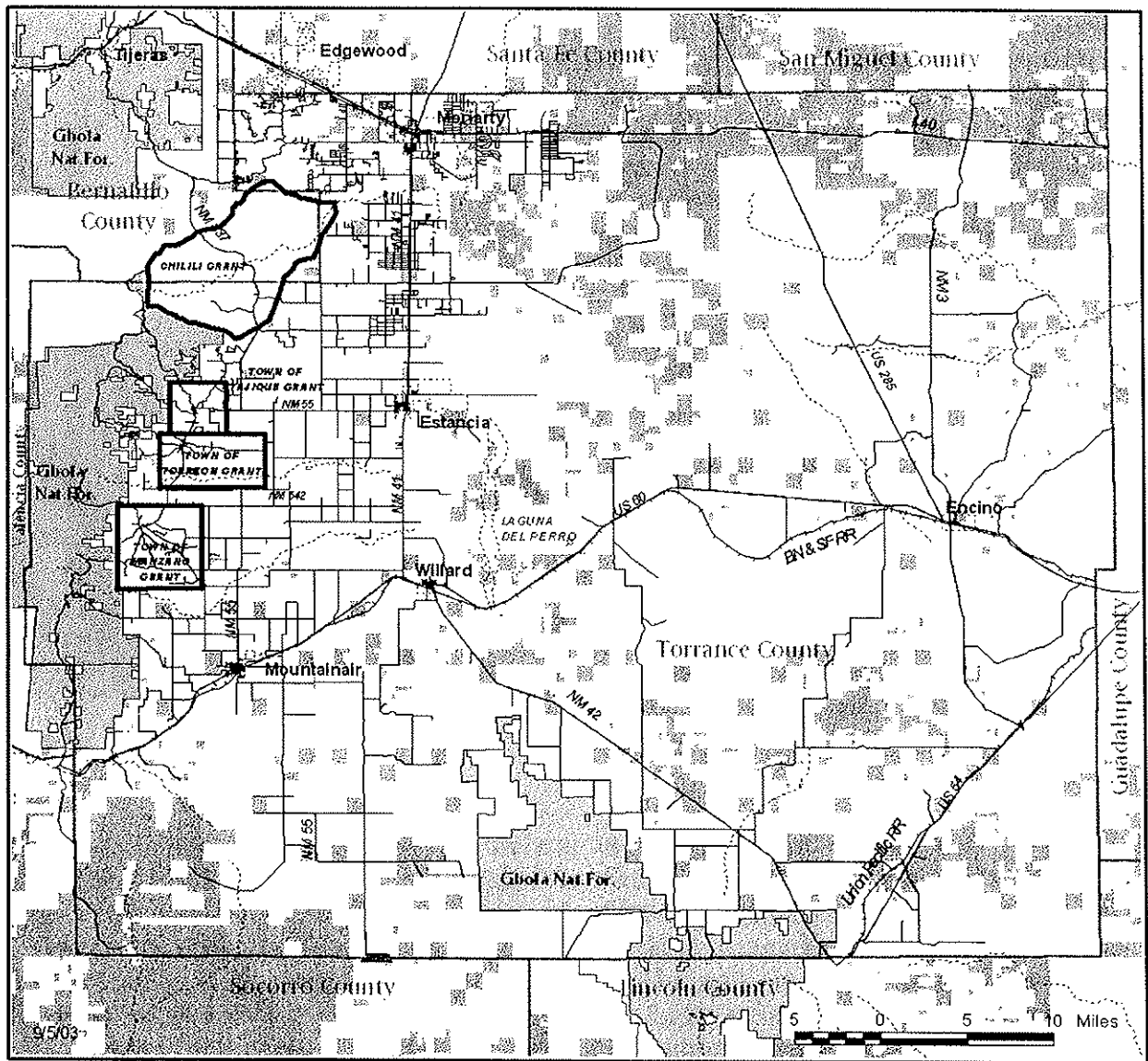
During the last Ice Age, approximately 300 square miles of what we now know as the Estancia Valley was covered by a lake up to 40 miles in diameter and 150 feet deep. Campsites of Paleolithic hunters of the Clovis, Folsom and Llano cultures (some 23,000 B.C.) can be found in the dunes along the edge of the ancient lake bed. Unlike most bodies of water, Lake Estancia had no natural outlet. As the sun beat on this immense lake, the evaporating waters left deposits of sand, gravel, silt and clay from 30 to 80 feet thick in the center of the lake area. These smaller basins now contain only a few inches of highly brackish water. Today, there is a chain of sizable salt lakes located in the center of the Estancia Valley, running north and south. Laguna de Perro (Dog Lake) is the largest and runs about 12 miles long, a mile wide but seldom over a few inches deep. The lake basins have long been a source of salt for the New Mexico

Pueblos and early Hispanics, hence the region was known as the Salinas Province.



Salt Lakes in Torrance County

Some time between the first and 12th centuries, Early Puebloan cultures began to appear in the Estancia Valley. Their early dwellings were pit houses,



- Land Management Status**
- Bureau of Land Management
 - US Forest Service
 - Indian Lands
 - National Park Service
 - Private
 - State, State Park, State G&F

CHILILI GRANT Land Grant Boundary and Name

Torrance County Comprehensive Plan

Figure 2
Land Status Map with
Land Grant Communities

Map prepared by:

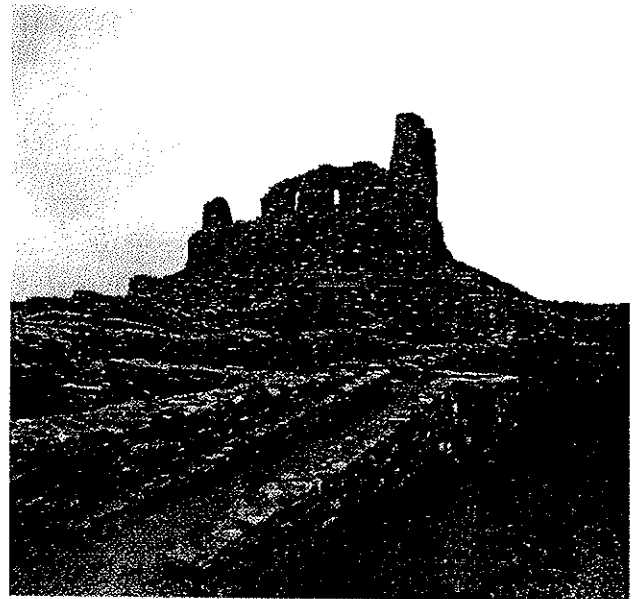


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Source: BLM, NM State Office.

built partially above and partially underground, constructed of cobblestone and primitive masonry. By the 14th century these people integrated with neighboring pueblo cultures from the west side of the Manzano Mountains, developing into the Late Puebloan cultures who built the large villages found by the Spanish.

Several stone-constructed villages were established in the Estancia Basin at this time. The ruins of the three southernmost villages remain today at Quarai, Abo and Gran Quivira (or Las Humanas as it was named by the Spanish). They create points of a triangle around what is today Mountainair. Water was scarce even back then. Quarai and Abo had springs flowing from the nearby mountains. The people at Gran Quivira compensated as best they could, building surface water catchment systems, cisterns and wells. The pueblo residents were mostly dryland farmers, growing several varieties of corn, squash, beans and cotton. Amaranth seed was used as grain. The Indians augmented their diet with hunted game and gathered wild seeds and plants.



Abo ruins

Indian pueblos dotted the area when the Spanish explorers first made their expeditions seeking the Cities of Gold. Coronado's expedition in 1580 apparently missed this pueblo area. It was the expedition of Don Juan de Oñate, Spanish colonial governor of New Mexico, in 1598 which first recorded visiting the pueblos of Quarai, Abo and Gran Quivira. Oñate's expedition is said to have been one of colonization rather than exploration. He brought 400 men, many with families. They reported the pueblo inhabitants living in "many storied houses." There may have been as many as 600 residents in Quarai at that time.

Between 1622 and 1629, the Franciscans sent friars to oversee the Indians in constructing mission churches at Abo, Quarai and Gran Quivira. The Missions contained kivas, the historic religious centers of the Indians. By combining traditional and Christian elements in the churches, the priests had an easier time making converts and keeping order. The church at Quarai was considered one of the most impressive mission buildings in New Mexico. It was a massive edifice of red sandstone towering over the pueblo.

As Spanish citizens colonized areas surrounding the pueblos, civilian authority and church authority rarely saw eye to eye. Those who suffered were the Indians. Unfortunately, the Indians of the pueblos were living at a mere

subsistence level when the Spanish arrived. The Indians were often treated like slaves by both church and civilian authorities. They tended livestock in the fields and mined gold, silver and copper for the Spanish in the mines in the mountains.

But it was the shortage of water that brought final demise to the Pueblos. In the late 1660s drought and famine hit the area, which didn't daunt the priest at Gran Quivira who ordered the weakened Indians to build a new, larger church. Disease followed drought and famine and both Indians and Spaniards died.

Gran Quivira was abandoned first in 1671. By 1673 the storerooms at Abo were empty and either Apaches or the Pueblos themselves burned the *convento*. Quarai, with its nearby springs, lasted the longest, but was finally abandoned in 1677. Survivors ran north to neighboring pueblos and west to the Rio Grande Valley. It would be over 150 years before communities would again emerge in the region.

On September 12, 1819, the Estancia Valley, from the Manzano Mountains to the Pedernal Hills, some 1,280,000 acres, was granted by the government of Spain to Col. Bartolome Baca, a respected soldier and public servant to develop a ranch for his horses, sheep and cattle. In 1874, Don Manuel Antonio Otero, a descendent of an aristocratic Spanish family which had large holdings in the Rio Grande Valley, purchased land which encompassed the Estancia Valley from Bartolome Baca.

Meanwhile, Mexico had declared independence from Spain and laid claim to the provinces of New Mexico. The land transaction was never validated by the new government of Mexico. Otero felt the land was his and he built a ranch house at Estancia Springs which he used in his vast sheep ranching operations.

On December 7, 1845, Governor Armijo, acting in behalf of the Republic of Mexico, granted 300,000 acres of the heart of the Baca grant to Antonio Sandoval. When the Mexican-American War erupted, Sandoval deeded his New Mexico land to Gervasio Nolan who sold it to Boston millionaire Joel P. Whitney.

By this time a younger Antonio Otero was head of the Otero family. He was using land in the Estancia Valley for his flocks, confident in his right to the land through the grant from the King of Spain. Whitney was just as certain that the United States would uphold his right to the extensive property. James Whitney, Joel's brother, and young Otero met at the ranch house at the Estancia Springs on August 17, 1893. A gun battle followed which left Otero dead and Whitney critically wounded. Whitney's trial was originally scheduled to be held in Los Lunas, but his attorney obtained a change of venue and the trial was finally held in Clayton, NM. The jury brought in a verdict of "not guilty."

Otero's heirs then brought suit for their claim to the Baca grant. In 1899, after several years of bickering, the Court of Private Land Claims ruled that

neither the Oteros nor the Whitneys had legal claim to the coveted Estancia Valley and it was thrown open to homesteaders.

Meanwhile, in the early 1800s, settlers of Spanish descent settled in villages along the east side of the Manzano Mountains. These villages—Chilili, Tajique, Torreon and Manzano—applied for land grant status from Mexico and with the blessings of Colonel Bartholome Baca were granted perpetual use of these lands by the residents and their descendants. Manzano, the largest of these land grants grew to be a major community in New Mexico at the end of the 18th century. Manzano Land Grant included several small villages, such as Punta de Agua, near the site of the Quarai Pueblo.

The Homestead Act of 1862 opened the West, offering free land to settlers agreeing to farm and populate the land. By the turn of the century, settlers were looking to the New Mexico territory that was being aggressively promoted. People were attracted by the warmer, dryer climate, especially people with tuberculosis and other ailments. Early homesteaders (such as the Sedricks and the Moriartys in what is now Moriarty, and the Kaysers and Spencers, north of what is now Mountainair) moved into the area during the end of the 19th century.

The Southern Pacific was the first railroad to arrive as it ran through the southeast corner of what was to become Tarrant County. In 1902, the New Mexico Central (later the Santa Fe Central) was built south from the Santa Fe Railroad terminal in Lamy through what became the towns of Moriarty, Estancia, Willard, Progresso and Tarrant to connect with the Southern Pacific. In 1908, the Belen Cutoff of the Atchison Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad was completed through the Abo Pass south of the Manzano Mountains, through Scholle, Abo, Mountainair, Willard, Encino and points east to Texas.

Willard, “the hub city,” was established in 1902 at the juncture of two railroads. It was the first to thrive, but a few relative drought years and disappointing traffic on the New Mexico Central turned it into a relative ghost town by the mid-1920s. Mountainair was incorporated in 1903, in anticipation of the Belen Cutoff. It was located on the summit of Abo pass, where the railroad would need to put a terminal. Sawmills appeared along the south and east face of the Manzano Mountains, providing lumber for the new towns and ties for the railroads. Upon the decline of Willard, commerce moved to Mountainair, which became the shopping area and warehousing center for bean farmers as much as 30 miles to the west, south and east.

Tarrant County was carved from portions of Valencia, Lincoln, Socorro, and Bernalillo counties in 1903, by action of the territorial legislature, and was one of the last counties to be created in the Territory of New Mexico. Original county officials were appointed by the Governor of the Territory. The county seat was located at Progresso, a train stop south of Willard and the sheep ranch of Col. J. Francisco Chavez, a state legislator. The offices were a passenger car

supplied by the New Mexico Central Railroad. The county was named after the prime financial backer of the railroad, Francis J. Torrance of Pennsylvania.

On January 1, 1905, the first elected county officials took their oath. The new legislature, meeting a few days later, made a number of changes and relocated the county seat to Estancia. Estancia was incorporated in 1909 and thrived in the early years because of the county government business and the railroad.

By the 1920s, thousands of homesteaders had migrated to Torrance County by train, covered wagon and by horseback. While there was some ranching and gardening, the major industry was the dryland farming of pinto beans. And the bean farmers mostly did very well through the 1920s.

While bean farmers had a great year in 1929, the Depression did hit Torrance County and times were hard, as in most of the country. The WPA and CCC had locations here and many significant public buildings were built in the county at that time. Okies from the dust bowl traveled through Mountainair on Route 60 (the major east-west highway) on their way to California.

Dryland bean farming had its ups and downs but held up pretty well until World War II when a stretch of dry years turned Torrance County into another dust bowl. The beans wouldn't grow and the top soil blew away with the wind. In the drought years between 1943 and 1955, thousands of families left Torrance County seeking a new life elsewhere. Much of the land was bought up by the government land bank and later sold to ranchers. Through the following years, the County became mostly ranch land and the towns tended to lose population as high school graduates emigrated to Albuquerque and other areas where they could find work. The Santa Fe Central Railroad did not prove to be profitable. By 1974, the Santa Fe Central had completely ceased operation and the entire 116 miles of track had been pulled up.

When U.S. Route 66 was built from Tijeras Canyon east to Texas, it ran through the Village of Buford, north of Moriarty, which grew to become a major service area to travelers on the highway. Buford eventually merged with and became part of Moriarty. Interstate Highway 40, paralleling and for the most part replacing Route 66, brought Moriarty into easy commuting distance to Albuquerque. By the year 2000, commuters from Albuquerque and growing commerce along the interstate corridor have brought significant new population and development to the northwestern portion of the County.

The trains run through but don't stop in Mountainair anymore. In the past ten years, Mountainair has developed an art community and retirees have been attracted by the pleasant weather and low cost of living. Tourists are attracted to the pueblo ruins, now designated as the Salinas Pueblo Missions National Monument. Open land has also been broken up for large-acreage residential

tracts that has brought some higher-income residents into picturesque areas north of Mountainair and along the foothills east of the mountains.

Current-day residents of the land grant towns are struggling to maintain their cultural identity as are the descendents of homesteaders who work in subsistence ranching and farming or those who are presently commuting daily to Albuquerque, Santa Fe, or Belen.

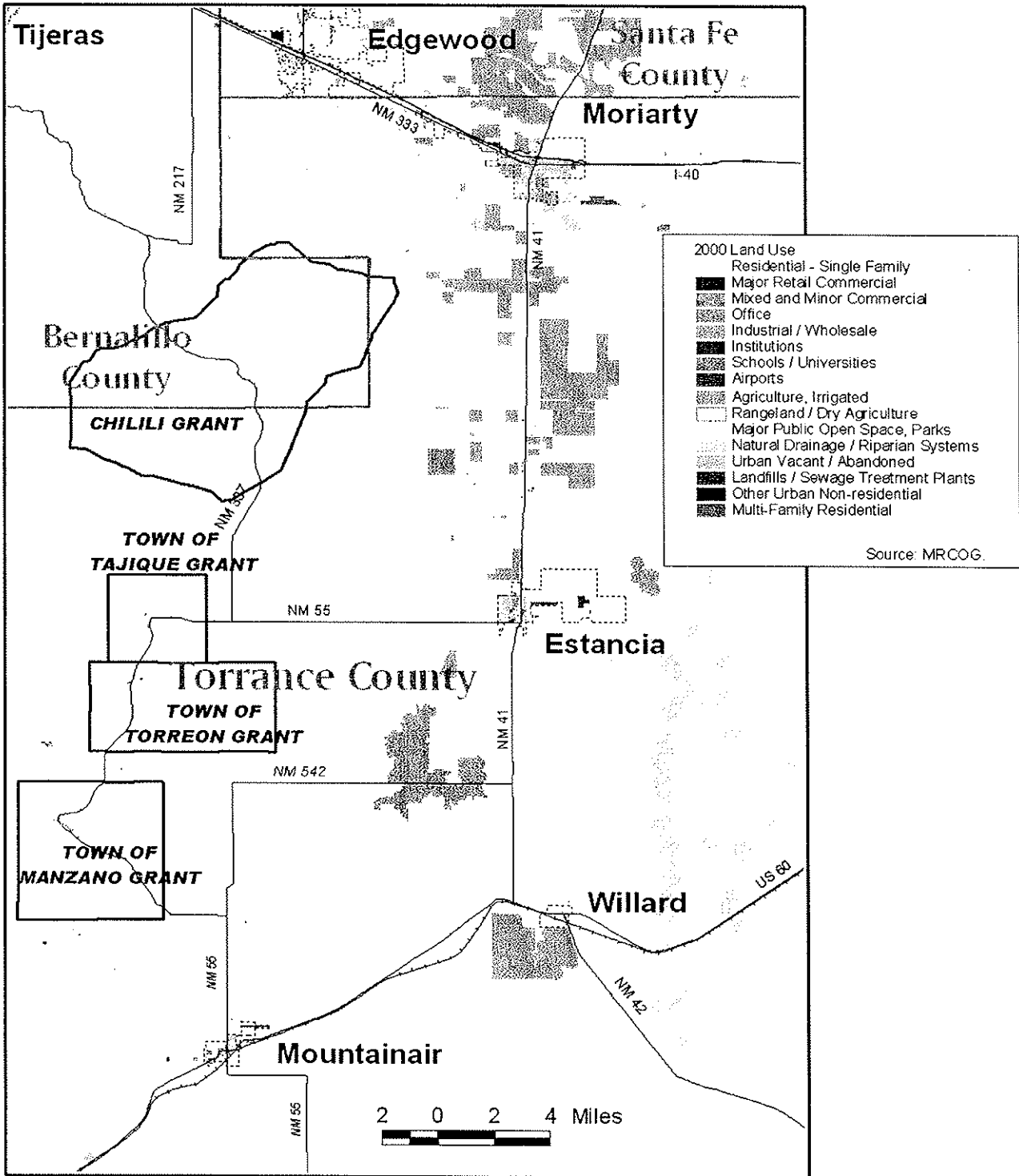
Current Land Use Patterns

A variety of factors have all played a part in the historical development and use of land in Torrance County. Settlement patterns have influenced the form and distribution of communities throughout the County in four significant ways. First of all, the ancient Indian and Spanish settlements occurred primarily along the eastern foothills of the Manzano Mountains. These village clusters were typically independent, self-sustaining, and relatively isolated communities. The Chilili, Tajique, Torreon, and Manzano land grant communities are examples of those historic communities. Secondly, railroads and highways crossing the County have induced development along major corridors and at intersections of these corridors. All of the incorporated municipalities and most of the commercial and industrial activities in the County are situated on major travel corridors. Thirdly, large-scale irrigated agriculture has become a major feature in the central portion of the Estancia Valley. Although these agricultural croplands rely solely on groundwater pumping, there is a reluctance to eliminate such land uses any time soon. And lastly, the expansive, but semi-arid rangelands throughout the County have attracted a ranching livelihood for a small but dispersed segment of the population.

The relatively recent emergence of land subdivision and suburban residential development has spread across the western portion of the County and overlays all of the historical development patterns. Nevertheless, current development patterns are basically an expansion and infill of the historical settlement patterns. Torrance County continues to maintain its character as a rural and small town county located on the fringe of the Albuquerque metropolitan area. The current land use (for the year 2000) of the County is portrayed on a map shown on Figure 3. Outside of the five incorporated municipalities and the land grant communities, there are relatively few development clusters and none that might have a density and concentration of commercial and business activities to justify municipal incorporation.

Demographic and Socioeconomic Information

Torrance County is a large and rather sparsely-populated county located in central New Mexico, southeast of the City of Albuquerque. The year 2000 Census population of Torrance County was 16,911. Table 1 displays Torrance County's population and housing data from U.S. Census information since 1960.



Map prepared by:

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Torrance County Comprehensive Plan
Figure 3
2000 Land Use