

Executive Summary



Fort Selden was designated a State Monument on July 2, 1973 by Governor Bruce King. Initially a part of what is now the Leasburg Dam State Park, on January 1, 1972, the State Parks and Recreation Commission agreed that the fort could be more properly administered by the Museum of New Mexico as a state monument. The State promptly provided funds for construction of a visitor center in 1973. The Fort was entered on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974.

Established in 1865 along the eastern bank of the Rio Grande and facing the Robledo Mountains to the south, the fort is now accessed off State Highway 185, one mile west of Interstate Highway 25 in the community of Radium Springs.

Fort Selden was part of a system of military forts across southern New Mexico that was established to protect the post Civil War westward expansion. It has gained some prominence because of the Black Soldier troops that were assigned to the post and who came to be known as Buffalo Soldiers. It was also the boyhood home of Douglas McArthur whose father was Fort Commander between 1884 and 1886. The fort was abandoned in 1891.

During its thirty-year history as a State Monument, a number of issues have arisen as to its management. Some of the more critical issues concern the continued deterioration of the remaining adobe ruins that will eventually melt into the ground. Decisions must be made at this time on how to forestall that eventual deterioration and how to interpret the fort at the time of their eventual loss. Other issues concern the low visitation numbers that do not reflect the importance of the fort to the history of the State. Better ways of marketing the fort must be developed. The continued loss of the surrounding historic landscape to modern development is another. This issue of external encroachment must be addressed. And finally, the issue of adequate funding to properly operate the monument must also be addressed.

This management plan, the first such effort in the monument's thirty year history, identifies and describes the fort's cultural resources and their conditions and outlines the desired future conditions that must be achieved to properly protect and preserve the extant fort resources and to best interpret them to the public. It identifies the management, use and preservation, and development appropriate to achieving and maintaining those conditions. It forms the foundation for long-term decision making.

The management plan evaluates two alternatives for the future management of the fort. The first alternative, called the No Action Alternative, would continue the status-quo of its operations. The second alternative, called the Preferred Alternative, contains a prescription for a well-balanced program of preservation, resource protection and interpretation that will enhance the operation of the monument. It places an emphasis on improving partnerships with nearby Leasburg Dam State Park, the Friends of Fort Selden, the Mesilla Valley Museum Consortium, and others. It accepts the eventual loss of all extant fort ruins and proposes the expansion or replacement of the visitor center to provide for that eventuality by the addition of new exhibits and other visitor amenities.