



Mescalero Apache Tribe Proposed Land Exchange With the New Mexico State Land Office

Frequently Asked Questions February 25, 2026

Given that the majority of lands the state currently stewards were once Indigenous lands, Commissioner Garcia Richard reached out to all recognized Pueblos, Nations, and Tribes in New Mexico to gauge interest in potential land exchanges of importance to their communities. The New Mexico State Land Office (NMSLO) has a long-standing practice of engaging in land exchanges with tribal governments. The Mescalero Apache Tribe approached the NMSLO in September 2024 to propose a land exchange that would return to the Tribe some ancestral lands near Las Cruces. The Tribe has since identified a new parcel that it is seeking to acquire under the exchange that is located west of Las Cruces near the airport. In return, the NMSLO would receive land that is of equal or greater value (based on an independent appraisal of both parcels).

Who proposed the land to be considered for exchange? The Mescalero Apache Tribe based in Mescalero, New Mexico.

What where is the new parcel under consideration located? The area now under consideration is located west of Las Cruces in Township 23 South, Range 1 East, Section 30 and encompasses approximately 320 acres of state land. The parcel is south of I-10, near the Las Cruces International Airport within the municipal boundaries. (See attached map.)

How is Mescalero's current proposal different from its initial proposal? The Tribe is no longer pursuing a land exchange for 330 acres of state land near A Mountain on the eastern side of Las Cruces. Instead, the Tribe is now pursuing about 320 acres of state land west of Las Cruces near the airport.

Why did Mescalero choose the new parcel? The identified parcel falls within the traditional homelands of the Apache peoples, and this land also holds cultural significance to the Tribe. This location also provides opportunities for economic development projects beneficial to the Tribe and to the surrounding community.

What will happen to the parcel Mescalero initially identified in September 2024? The parcel initially identified for exchange near A Mountain will remain in the State Land Office's control. The State Land Office and the Tribe intend to enter into an agreement to provide non-exclusive access to the parcel near A Mountain for traditional Tribal uses. This agreement would not preclude recreational access to the parcel by others holding a valid Recreational Access Permit or by other entities seeking similar agreements.

Are there any existing leases on the new parcel? What will happen to them? There is currently a grazing lease associated with the identified parcel, a municipal lease, and a lease for a communications tower. If the exchange is completed as is, the Tribe would take the land subject to those existing agreements.

Will the exchange affect local neighborhoods? The proposed footprint of the land that would be conveyed to the Tribe is about one mile from the nearest residential neighborhood, west of Las Cruces.

If this land is conveyed in an exchange, will it become sovereign tribal territory? As currently contemplated, the land would be conveyed to the Tribe without involvement of the U.S. Department of the Interior. The land will not automatically become sovereign territory, and will be a private holding of the Mescalero Apache Tribe. However, in the future, the Tribe could seek to have the federal government take the land into trust for the benefit of the Tribe.

What land would the State Land Office get in exchange for these lands? The state trust land would be appraised and the Tribe would purchase other land selected by the NMSLO that is of equal or greater value with commercial potential. The land to be acquired by the state could be located anywhere in New Mexico.

Will there be a public meeting? The NMSLO is committed to meaningful public engagement to hear from residents. A previous neighborhood-focused meeting was held in Las Cruces on November 7, 2025.

General Public Meeting

WHEN: Wednesday, February 25; 6:00 to 7:30 p.m.

WHERE: New Mexico Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum; 4100 Dripping Springs Road
Las Cruces, N.M. 88011

Where can I find more information about the public meetings? The NMSLO has created a webpage dedicated to sharing information about this proposed land exchange.

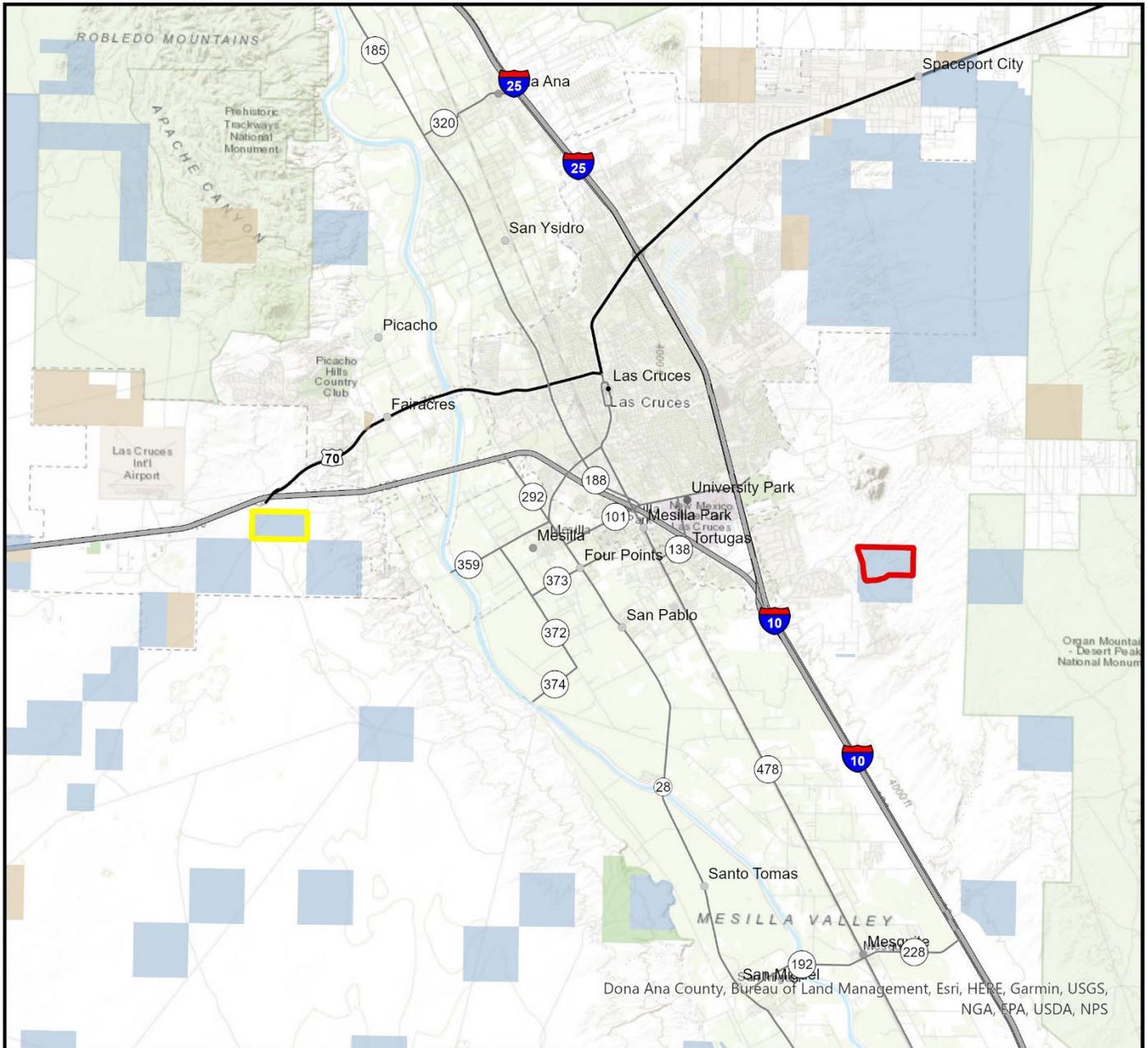
<https://www.nmstatelands.org/proposed-mescalero-apache-tribe-land-exchange/>

Can I share my comment prior to the public meeting?

Yes, you can submit a public comment

- Follow the link below or scan the QR code to share your perspective:
- <https://www.nmstatelands.org/public-comment/>
- Or mail to: P.O. Box 1148, Santa Fe, NM 87504





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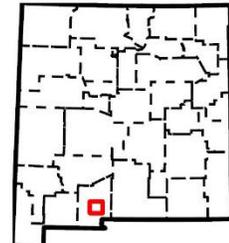
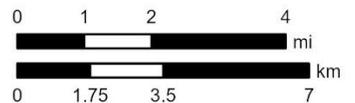
Project Location Overview

Proposed Mescalero Apache Tribe
 Land Exchange

This map contains confidential and privileged information relating to the location of cultural resources and should not be shared without the approval of the New Mexico State Land Office. The NMSLO assumes no responsibility or liability for, or in connection with, the accuracy, reliability, or use of the information provided here, in NMSLO data layers or any other data layer.

Map Key

- Surface Estate
- Subsurface Estate
- Surface and Subsurface Estate
- Previously Proposed Parcel
- Current Proposed Parcel



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