

**COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE PLAN**

**for**

**TORRANCE COUNTY, NEW MEXICO**

Adopted by the County Commission  
July 29, 2003

This document was prepared by the Mid-Region Council of Governments staff through the New Mexico Community Development Block Grant Program, and funded in part by the Local Government Division of the New Mexico Department of Finance and Administration in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

MID-REGION COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS OF NEW MEXICO  
317 COMMERCIAL NE, SUITE 104, ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO 87102

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>PART</u>		<u>PAGE</u>
I	INTRODUCTION .....	1
	Purpose .....	1
	Background .....	1
	Summary of Report .....	2
II	COUNTY PROFILE .....	3
	Character of Development .....	3
	Regional Setting .....	3
	Development History .....	5
	Current Land Use Patterns .....	11
	Demographic and Socioeconomic Information .....	11
	Population Data .....	13
	Housing Data .....	17
	Employment Data .....	21
	Other Demographic/Socioeconomic Data .....	23
	County Facilities and Services .....	25
	County Government Operations .....	25
	Tax Collection .....	25
	Road Maintenance .....	28
	Law Enforcement .....	29
	Land Use Management .....	29
	Transportation Systems .....	30
	Solid Waste Disposal .....	33
	Water Resource Management .....	33
	Health Care .....	35
III	TRENDS AND PROJECTIONS .....	37
	Population, Housing, and Employment Projections .....	37
	Population .....	37
	Housing and Households .....	39
	Employment and Employed Persons .....	41
	Economic Trends .....	43
	Future Development Patterns .....	44
IV	GOALS AND OBJECTIVES .....	46
	Citizen Participation Process .....	46
	Overview of Goals and Objectives .....	47
	Goals and Objectives .....	47
	Land Use: Distribution and Intensity .....	48

	Transportation and Circulation .....	50
	Regional Infrastructure .....	51
	Economic Development .....	52
	County Government Operations .....	53
	Discussion of Major Development Issues .....	54
	Governmental Role and Responsibilities .....	55
	Land Development and Land Use Management .....	56
	Water and Natural Resource Limitations .....	56
	Roads and Transportation Services .....	58
	County Economy and Economic Development .....	60
	Housing Opportunities .....	60
V	ACTION PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS .....	62
	Land Use Planning and Management .....	62
	Transportation and Circulation .....	66
	Regional Infrastructure and Natural Resources .....	68
	Economic Development .....	70
	County Government Operations .....	72
VI	IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN .....	76
	APPENDIX A – Population and Employment by DASZ	
	APPENDIX B – Resolution 2002 – 36	
	APPENDIX C – Resolution 2003 – 20	

## FIGURES

<u>FIGURE</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
1. Regional Map .....	4
2. Land Status Map with Land Grant Communities .....	6
3. 2000 Land Use .....	12
4. 1990 and 2000 Household and Family Composition for Torrance County .....	15
5. 2000 Nativity and Migration: Torrance County Residents .....	17
6. 1990 and 2000 Housing Tenure: Torrance County .....	18
7. 1990 and 2000 Housing Type: Torrance County .....	20
8. 2000 Housing Heating Fuel for Occupied Units: Torrance County .....	21
9. Transportation Facilities and Related Information .....	32
10. Surface and Groundwater Geography .....	34
11. Elevation Map .....	57
12. Land Cover .....	59
13. Scenic Byways, Cultural and Recreational Attractions .....	61
14. County Subcommunities .....	63
15. Potential Economic Development Zones .....	71

## TABLES

<u>TABLE</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
1. 1960-2000 Torrance County Population, Housing, and Households .....	13
2. 1990 and 2000 Trends and Comparisons Torrance County, New Mexico, and U.S.: Age and Sex Distributions .....	14
3. Education Level for Persons Age 25 and Over in 2000 for Torrance County, New Mexico, and U.S. ....	16
4. 2000 Race and Hispanic Origin Distribution for Torrance County .....	16
5. 2000 Age of Occupied Housing: Torrance County .....	18
6. 1990 and 2000 Housing Type: Torrance County .....	20
7. Year Householder Moved into Unit: Torrance County .....	21
8. 2000 Labor Force and Employment: Torrance County, New Mexico, and U.S. ....	22
9. 2000 Civilian Occupations for Employed Residents Torrance County, New Mexico, and U.S. ....	22
10. 2000 Industries for Residents of Torrance County .....	23
11. 2000 Commuting to Work for Residents of Torrance County .....	24
12. 1999 Household Income: Torrance County, New Mexico, and U.S. ....	24
13. 1999-2001: Torrance County Receipts .....	27
14. 1999-2001: Torrance County Disbursements .....	28
15. Torrance County Population, History, and Forecast .....	38

16. 2000-2025 Forecast Torrance County Age Distribution ..... 39

17. 1960-2025 Population in Households, Household Size, and  
Households: Torrance County ..... 40

18. 1970-2025 Housing Units by Type and Percent Occupied: Torrance County 41

19. 2000-2025 Forecast Employment by Sector for Torrance County ..... 42

20. 1990-2025 Forecast of Employed Residents ..... 43

21. Strategic Action Priorities ..... 74

## PART I

### INTRODUCTION

This Comprehensive Land Use Plan for Torrance County, New Mexico, is a general policy document designed as a framework plan for making decisions about public programs and projects affecting the future development of the County. Although a typical comprehensive plan contains many components and serves numerous functions, the emphasis in this Plan is on regional land use activities as an indicator of the character, areawide economy, and governmental functions of the County. The preparation of this Comprehensive Plan included a significant public involvement process which involved meetings, workshops, opinion surveys, and advertised hearings to gather public input and to determine general citizen expectations concerning the future direction of the County. There were many opportunities for public review and comment throughout the plan development process to ensure broad consensus for goals, objectives, and recommendations that are presented in this Comprehensive Plan document.

#### **Purpose**

Planning is a process that bridges the gap between where we are today and where we would like to go in the future. This Comprehensive Land Use Plan serves as an official policy document for the Board of County Commissioners to provide guidance in making decisions about the physical development of the County. This Plan document identifies and analyzes growth and development issues and indicates how the local residents and their elected officials want the regional community to develop in the next 20 to 25 years.

An approved Comprehensive Plan is a legally binding document of the County that establishes a basis for regulations and programs necessary to manage current and future land development within the jurisdiction of the County. Of importance is the State law requirement that the zoning regulations of the County must be in accordance with a comprehensive plan. It is also important to note that a comprehensive plan promotes consistency and continuity in making decisions to carry out the programs, projects, and operations of the County.

#### **Background**

In June of 1988, the Torrance County Commission adopted a County Comprehensive Plan Development Policy. That was essentially the first Comprehensive Plan for the County. The Development Policy contained four categories of policy statements and strategies: 1) Land Use and Natural Resources, 2) County Infrastructure, 3) Services to the Public, and 4) Economic Development. Although that policy plan served its purpose, there have been considerable changes in the 15 years since then regarding growth and development in the County and its constituent municipalities.

In late 2001, the Board of County Commissioners appointed a special working committee to begin the process of revising the County's Comprehensive Plan. Subsequently, the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee evolved from that working committee and technical planning assistance was requested and received from the Mid-Region Council of Governments (MRCOG). An application for funding assistance to develop a comprehensive plan was submitted to the Local Government Division of the New Mexico Department of Finance and Administration, for which a planning grant was approved in June of 2002. Funding was provided through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. This Comprehensive Land Use Plan document was then prepared under a Planning Services Agreement between the County and the MRCOG, and is a product of the CDBG grant award.

### **Summary of Report**

This Comprehensive Land Use Plan for Torrance County contains the basic elements for anyone to become familiar with the County as a geographic region in New Mexico, as a governmental operation, and as a living and growing community that is continually evolving. A county profile describes the general character of the County with information and statistical data concerning historical background, population and housing, local economy, transportation and other infrastructure systems, and various county-wide services and facilities available to residents. Trends and projections of population, housing, and employment provide a basis for envisioning future development patterns in terms of the land use activities that comprise the County. Also, significant development issues are discussed and evaluated as a basis for Plan recommendations.

There are two key components that comprise the essence of this Comprehensive Plan: goals and objectives for future development of the County, and action plan recommendations. Goals and objectives seek to describe a desirable future for the County. These goals and their subordinate objectives are presented in five categories: 1) Land Use: Distribution and Intensity, 2) Transportation and Circulation, 3) Regional Infrastructure, 4) Economic Development, and 5) County Government Operations.

The goals and objectives also provide a foundation for proposed recommendations that identify strategic actions that are intended to define and implement the Plan within various time frames. These recommendations are organized into categories similar to the goals and objectives: 1) Land Use Planning and Management, 2) Transportation and Circulation, 3) Regional Infrastructure and Natural Resources, 4) Economic Development, and 5) County Government Operations. Actual implementation of this Comprehensive Plan is subject to the policy directives and actions of the Board of County Commissioners as deemed appropriate for the conditions, capabilities, and opportunities that unfold with the future.

## PART II

### COUNTY PROFILE

In order to rationally plan for the future of the County, it is necessary to understand the context and conditions that influence the communities that make up Torrance County. This county profile is intended to describe the County in terms of its physical attributes, development history, demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, and a brief inventory of public facilities and services currently available to the residents of the County.

#### Character of Development

Torrance County can be characterized geographically, historically, and developmentally. The County is a product of historical evolution and its future is generally expected to be an extension of present day development activities. A comprehensive plan however may influence the direction and intensity of future development through regulatory controls, development restrictions or incentives, and the installation of County facilities and services. Radical changes also may occur as a result of unpredictable events or conditions such as extended drought, economic disruption, or technological advancement. The current character of development is described in the following sections to establish a general sense of the County as a unique and special place in the State of New Mexico.

#### Regional Setting

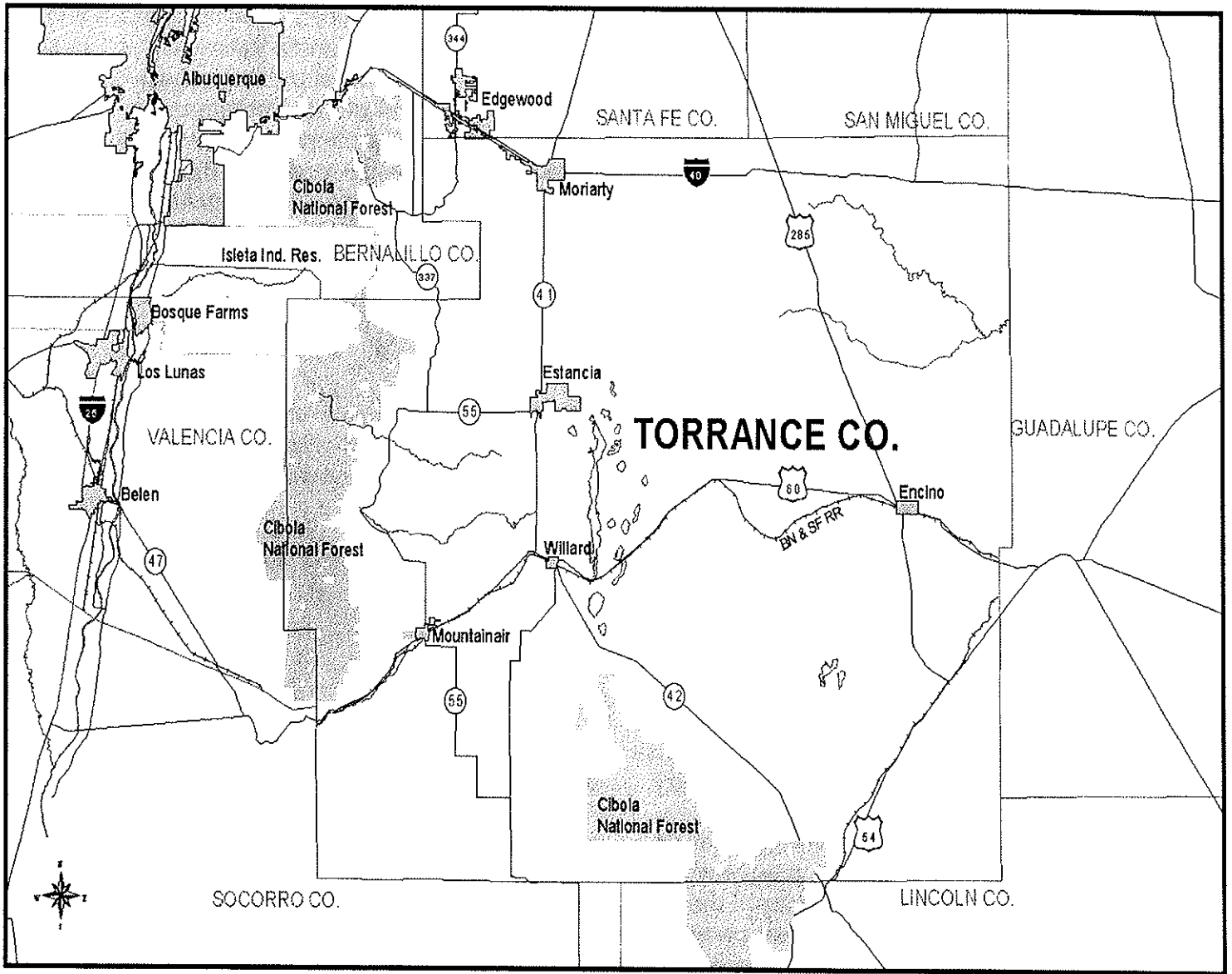
Torrance County comprises a large land area some 3400 square miles in size with an overall population density of about 5 persons per square mile. Over 95 percent of the population however resides in the western half of the County. Torrance County encompasses most of the Estancia Valley as well as about 20 miles of prairie land east of the Pedernal Hills sloping into the Pecos River Basin. The Estancia Valley lies in the geographic center of New Mexico, bordered on the west by the Manzano and Sandia Mountains, on the east by the Pedernal Hills, on the

south by large mesas, and on the north by the low profile edge of the basin divide. A general location map of the region is shown on Figure 1.



Homestead in Torrance County





4 0 4 8 Miles

Torrance County Comprehensive Plan

**Figure 1  
Regional Map**

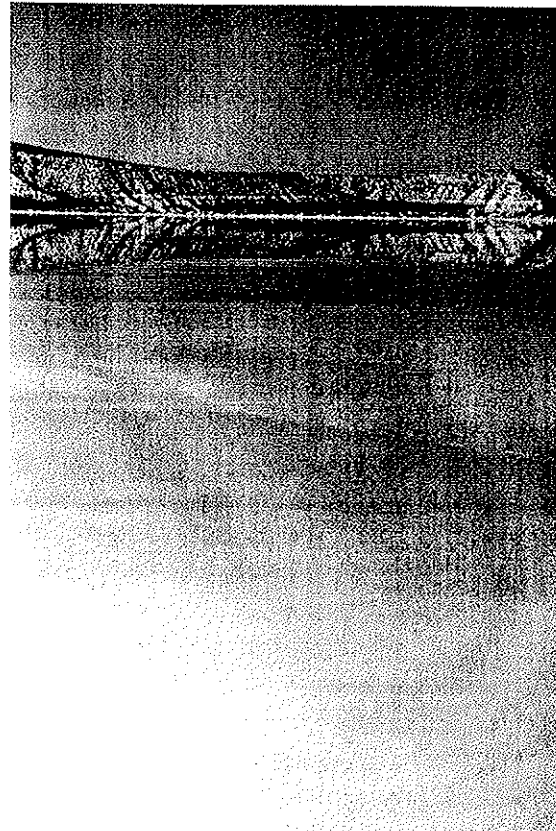

**Mid-Region  
Council of Governments**  
 317 Commercial NE, Suite 104  
 Albuquerque, NM 87102  
 505-247-1750

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

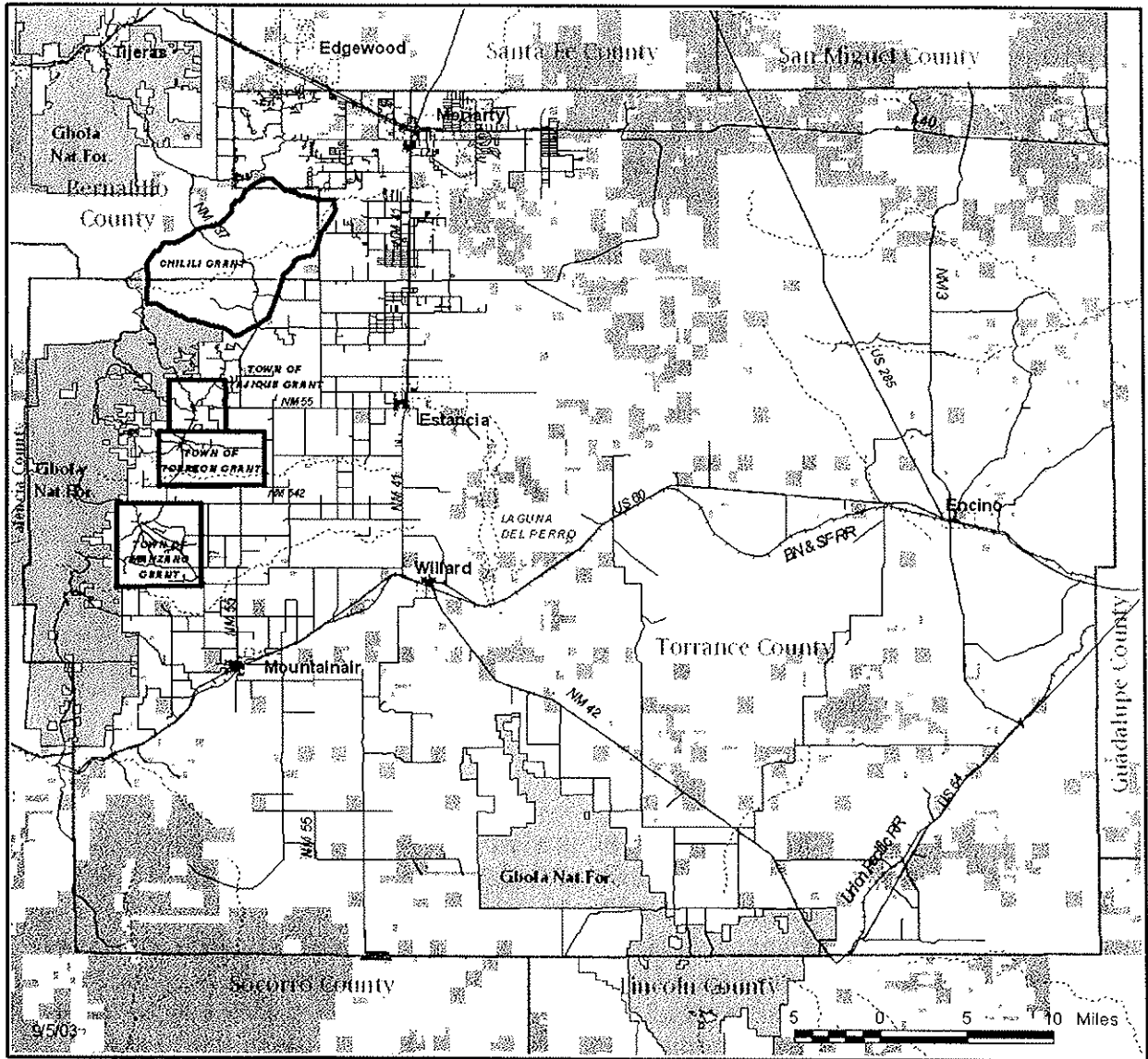
During the last Ice Age, approximately 300 square miles of what we now know as the Estancia Valley was covered by a lake up to 40 miles in diameter and 150 feet deep. Campsites of Paleolithic hunters of the Clovis, Folsom and Llano cultures (some 23,000 B.C.) can be found in the dunes along the edge 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:

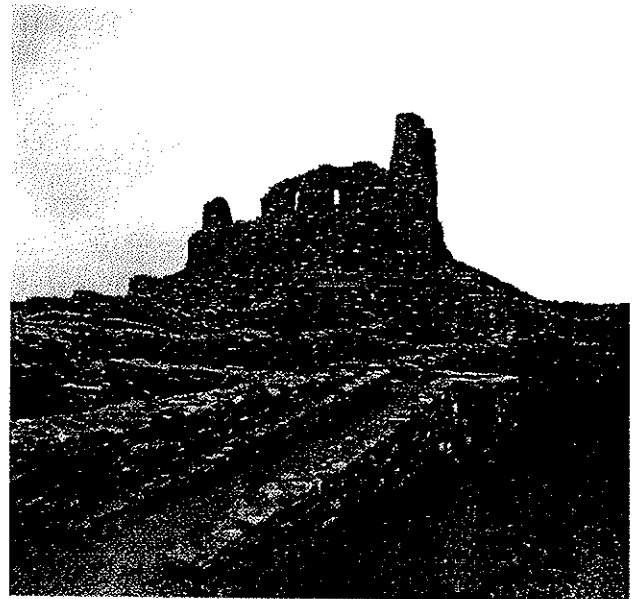


**Mid-Region**  
**Council of Governments**  
317 Commercial NE, Suite 104  
Albuquerque, NM 87102  
505-247-1750

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**

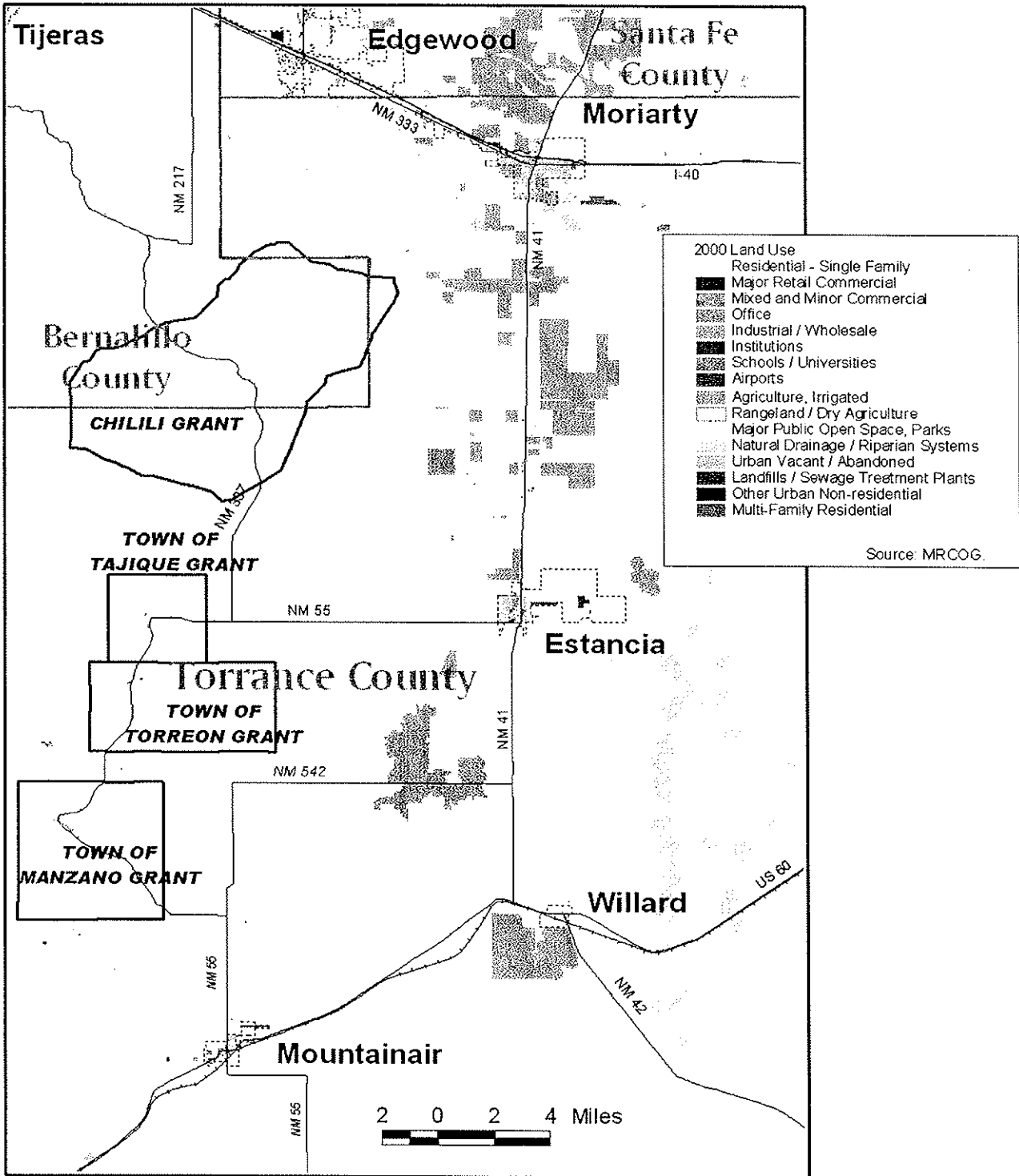
A variety of factors have all played a part in the historical development and use of land in Torrance County. Settlement patterns have influenced the form and distribution of communities throughout the County in four significant ways. First of all, the ancient Indian and Spanish settlements occurred 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:  
**Mid-Region Council of Governments**  
 MR COG  
 317 Commercial NE, Suite 104  
 Albuquerque, NM 87102  
 505-247-1750

**Torrance County Comprehensive Plan**  
**Figure 3**  
**2000 Land Use**

Although Torrance County lost population during the 1960s, the County has been increasing in population since 1970. The average annual growth rates for Torrance County were 3.54 percent during the 1970s, 3.22 percent during the 1980s, and 5.10 percent during the 1990s. In terms of percentage growth during the last decade (from April 1990 to April 2000), Torrance County had the highest growth rate of any county in New Mexico at 64.4 percent, followed by the New Mexico Counties of Lincoln (58.9 percent), Valencia (46.2 percent), and Sandoval (42.0 percent).

**Table 1**  
**Torrance County**  
**Population, Housing, and Households**  
**1960-2000**

Year	Population	Housing Units*	Households	Torrance County Average Household Size**	National Average Household Size
1960	6,497	2,098	1,710	3.80	3.33
1970	5,290	1,621	1,579	3.35	3.14
1980	7,491	3,180	2,645	2.83	2.76
1990	10,285	4,878	3,670	2.80	2.63
2000	16,911	7,257	6,024	2.72	2.59

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census and MRGCOG

\* Includes vacant units

\*\*A portion of the population does not live in households, but in group quarters, dormitories, etc.

Another trend indicated in Table 1 is the decreasing ratio of persons per household. National housing trends for decades have been toward smaller families, more childless couples, and more singles. Torrance County appears to be following these national trends, and coming close to the national average household size.

**Population Data** The age/sex characteristics of the County have changed to some extent over the past decade; the population is slightly older in 2000 than in 1990. The median age of Torrance County residents increased from 32.8 years in 1990 to 34.8 years in 2000. In 1990, 32.1 percent of the population was under 18 years of age; in 2000, the percent of the population under 18 had decreased to 30.4 percent. Also, the proportion of the population between ages 45 and 64 increased from 19.0 percent in 1990 to 23.2 percent in 2000. The actual number of Torrance County residents age 65 or over increased from 1,171 persons in 1990 to 1,647 person in 2000. However, the proportion of the population age 65 or over actually decreased from 11.4 percent in 1990 to 9.7 percent in 2000. The reason for this decrease is most likely because of Torrance County's tremendous growth over the last decade and the ages of the persons migrating into the County. Compared to persons in other age brackets, a lower proportion of persons age 65 and over would have migrated into Torrance County for two main reasons: 1) persons age 65 and over generally do

not migrate as much as younger persons, and 2) Torrance County is not generally known as a retirement area.

Despite an aging population, County residents are slightly younger than residents of New Mexico and the United States. The County has a lower percentage of retirees (9.7 percent) than both New Mexico (11.7 percent) and the United States (12.4 percent). The County's percentage of children (30.3 percent) is higher than that of New Mexico (28.0 percent) and the United States (25.7 percent). Trends and comparisons of the age and sex characteristics with those of New Mexico and the United States are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
**Trends and Comparisons**  
**Torrance County, New Mexico, and U.S.:**  
**Age and Sex Distributions 2000 and 1990 (by percentage)**

**2000**

Age Group	Torrance County		New Mexico		United States	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
< 18	30.1	30.6	29.0	27.0	26.9	24.6
18-24	8.2	6.7	10.1	9.5	10.1	9.2
25-44	29.7	28.8	28.6	28.1	30.8	29.6
45-64	23.0	23.4	21.9	22.5	21.8	22.2
65-over	9.0	10.5	10.4	12.9	10.4	14.4
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total Persons	8,681	8,230	894,317	924,729	138,053,563	143,368,343

**1990**

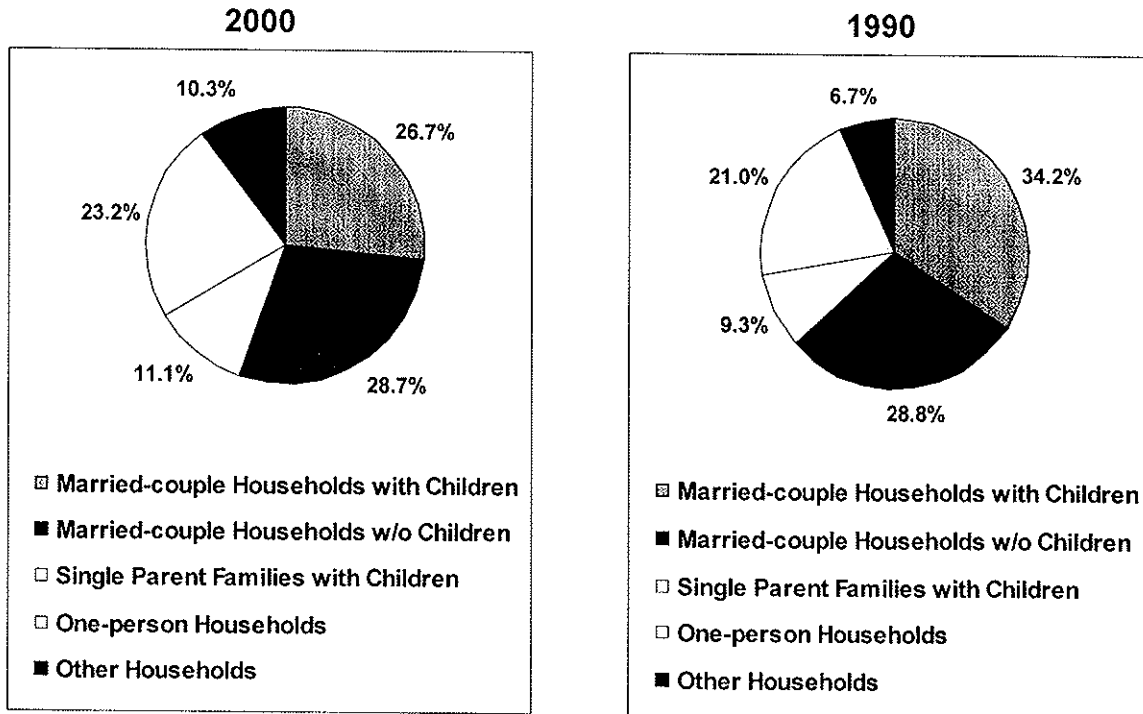
Age Group	Torrance County		New Mexico		United States	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
< 18	33.0	31.3	30.6	28.4	26.9	24.3
18-24	6.7	6.6	10.3	9.8	11.2	10.3
25-44	30.5	31.3	32.2	31.7	33.1	31.8
45-64	19.3	18.6	17.4	18.1	18.4	18.9
65-over	10.5	12.2	9.5	12.0	10.4	14.7
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total Persons	5,164	5,121	745,253	769,816	121,239,418	127,470,455

Source: 1990 Census and 2000 Census

The composition of households and families in 1990 and 2000 are provided in Figure 4. In 1990, 63.0 percent of the households were headed by a married couple; the percentage of married couple households decreased considerably, to 55.4 in 2000. The percentage of single parent families with children increased from 9.3 percent in 1990 to 11.1 percent in 2000. The

percentage of one-person households also increased, from 21.0 percent in 1990 to 23.2 percent in 2000. The percentage of non-traditional households increased as well, from 6.7 percent to 10.3 percent during the decade.

**Figure 4**  
**1990 and 2000 Household and Family Composition**  
**for Torrance County**



Source: 2000 Census

Source: 1990 Census

In general, the educational attainment of Torrance County residents is somewhat lower than the residents of New Mexico as a whole. Among Torrance County residents, 77.1 percent had at least graduated from high school and 14.5 percent had graduated from college. The corresponding percentages for the State of New Mexico were 78.8 percent and 23.4 percent. Among residents of the United States, 80.3 percent had graduated from high school and 24.4 percent had also graduated from college. Compared to the State and the nation, a smaller percentage of persons had graduated from high school and a smaller percentage had finished college.

**Table 3**  
**Education Level for Persons**  
**Age 25 and Over in 2000**  
**for Torrance County, New Mexico, and U.S.**  
**(in percentages)**

	<b>Torrance County</b>	<b>New Mexico</b>	<b>U.S.</b>
Less than 9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	8.4	9.3	7.6
9 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> Grade, No Diploma	14.5	11.9	12.1
High School Graduate	33.0	26.6	28.6
Some College, No Degree	24.7	22.9	21.0
Associate Degree	4.9	5.9	6.3
Bachelor Degree	10.3	13.6	15.5
Graduate or Professional Degree	4.2	9.8	8.9
<b>Total Percent</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Total Persons</b>	<b>10,556</b>	<b>1,134,801</b>	<b>182,211,639</b>

Source: 2000 Census

The responses to the race and Hispanic origin questions have been cross-tabulated in Table 4, and indicate how individuals categorize themselves. A little more than a third (37.1 percent) of Torrance County residents identified themselves as Hispanic. Also, nearly half of the persons who considered themselves to be of Hispanic ancestry selected "other" as the best description of their race. By contrast, 42 percent of the residents of the State of New Mexico considered themselves to be Hispanic.

**Table 4**  
**2000 Race and Hispanic Origin Distribution**  
**for Torrance County**

<b>Race</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>Non-Hispanic</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Total Population:</b>	6,283	10,628	16,911
White	2,818	9,677	12,495
Black	25	255	280
American Indian	88	266	354
Asian or Pacific Islander	3	51	54
Other	2,968	89	3,057
Bi-racial	361	288	649
Multi-racial	20	2	22

Source: 2000 Census

More than half of the residents of the County (53.6 percent) were born in New Mexico (see Figure 5), which is comparable to the statewide average of 51.5 percent. There were few foreign born persons in the County (4.2 percent); this is less than a third of the statewide average of 14.4 percent.

