

# Al Black to close, new fishing sites under development

by Ernest Jahnke and Douglas Bailey

After three years of effort by the Albuquerque District, in cooperation with Pueblo de Cochiti, the Environmental Impact Statement has been completed for the closure of the Al Black Recreation Area at the Cochiti Dam Outlet Works. Brig. Gen. Joseph Schroedel, Commander of the South Pacific Division, signed the Record of Decision (ROD) on July 14. This action now clears the way for the relocation and construction of the facilities at two new sites on the lake.

Two new fishing sites are under

development that will include American Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant restrooms, picnic tables with shelters, and universally accessible parking facilities and fishing docks at both the Cochiti Lake and Tetilla Peak Recreation Areas. The Cochiti Lake Recreation site will be on the left side of the boat ramp. The new ADA fishing access site on the Tetilla Peak recreation area will be developed about a mile south of the existing boat ramp off Santa Cruz Road.

Each new facility will cost about \$50,000. In addition, planned

improvements to the Santa Cruz access road at Tetilla Peak total about \$500,000. Leverett Bogle, Albuquerque Operations Division Technical staff, has been leading the design team for the new facilities and the road construction. Dan Murray, CAD technician, along with other staff members of the General Engineering office, has also provided valuable assistance.

The District is looking forward to a facilities opening ceremony with the Pueblo de Cochiti in early November. □

## Adobes mark history, culture of Conchas

Story and photo by Julie R. Stone  
Park Ranger, Conchas Lake

“Come on in,” draws a tall cowboy in a white hat with years of western living worn into him. Proprietor Tony Gabel and his wife Fran of the Adobe Belle Resort at Conchas Lake greet visitors to their cabins that were once home to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers workers and staff.

Built from the remnants of the Conchas City construction camp, the eight Santa Fe style adobe homes and their inhabitants have witnessed countless events on Conchas Lake, the erection of WWII guard posts on the dam, and the regular rise and fall of the lake elevations over the years.

On a hot July day in 1935, Tucumcari rang its bells and sirens for the return of the New Mexico Flood Commissioner Arch Hurley on the 3:15 p.m. train from Washington D.C. Hurley helped secure the Presidential authorization for the construction of Conchas Dam and the community rejoiced. On August 2, 1935, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers received the “Notice to Proceed” construction and the work began.

Initially, workers lived in road camps while building what is now State Highway 129 from Newkirk to Conchas, but shortly thereafter a complete construction camp sprang up out of the sagebrush. San Jon resident and former Works Progress Administration (WPA) worker Earl Flint remembers the dilemma builders faced at first.

“There were no trees in the area for lumber to build with. So one fellow came up with the idea of making the buildings out of adobe.”



**This is one of the cabins that is now part of the Adobe Belle Resort at Conchas Lake.**

More than 700,000 adobe bricks were used to build the camp, known as Conchas City, that included a town hall, grocery store, churches, a 500-seat movie theater and a 24-bed hospital complete with operating room. The camp had its own power plant, water purification plant, and telephone operators. Yet with the completion of Conchas Dam in September 1939, the camp was dismantled.

The adobe bricks used to build Conchas City, however, were salvaged and brought to the north end of the dam where an administration building and permanent housing was constructed for employees. The houses consisted of a single residence for the Project Superintendent and four duplex homes for the workers.

Employees of Conchas Dam continued to live in the adobe homes until 1997. The last resident moved out in January 1999. Two years later the houses were put up for bid to be leased out. The Gabels received the contract and have been operating the houses as the Adobe Belle Resort since.

“I like this business,” said Gabel, “I enjoy the customers and visiting with interesting people.” Gabel explained that some visitors come just to enjoy the adobe architecture. “People from Santa Fe especially marvel at the construction of the buildings,” he said.

The Conchas Dam adobe houses have been on the New Mexico Register of Cultural properties since April 2000. □