

United States Department of the Interior

Bureau of Land Management

3028 East Main Street

Canon City, Colorado 81212

FRONT RANGE RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL

MINUTES

July 19, 2011

Category 1

Bill Dvorak
Ed Nielsen
Virginia Patton
Keary Hallack

Category 2

Jay Heeter
Lucy Bambrey
Aaron Clark
Mike Nelson

Category 3

Loren Whittemore
Al Trujillo
John Stevenson
Christopher "Kit" Shy

ATTENDEES

Greg Shoop, Designated Federal Officer (Front Range District Manager); Keith Berger, Royal Gorge Field Office Field Manager; Melissa Garcia, Acting Associate Center Manager; Tina Brown, Acting Front Range RAC Coordinator; Andrea Jones, Field Manager Conejos Peak; Melissa Shawcroft, La Jara Field Office Range Conservationist; Brian Garcia, BLM Law Enforcement; Andrew Archuleta, District Field Manager; JoLene Pavelka, Front Range RAC Recorder.

GUESTS

Brenda Felmler, Rep. Senator Tipton; Mike Gibson, Rio Grande Inter Basin Roundtable; Charolotte Bobicki, Rep. Senator Bennet; Erin Minks, Rep. Senator Udall; Jean Moyer, Citizen.

PLEDGE OF ALLIEGENCE AND INTRODUCTIONS

All RAC members, attendees and guests were greeted and the meeting was called to order. Greg Shoop asked if there was enough for a Quorum, after review there was not enough but discussion that the next meeting there would be. There was no old business discussed.

OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

Mike Gibson, Valley Water Conservative

A concern of water supply with population growth was brought to the group. Conditions of South Fork to Alamosa based on county line with river issues were also discussed.

- River corridor issues with BLM owning west side of river
- Potential for aquifer concerns
- Natural Resource development is critical in relation to risk with oil and gas drilling

Kit questioned who was represented in the Headwater Project.

Discussion of two rivers was generated and spoke of the Rio Grande once reaching this and felt some mitigation for this to happen would be great. Mike replied by saying this

particular area was not part of the current project but thought the project was a future area that was being considered.

Kit brought to the committee's attention that he felt the sub division use and consumption was not being enforced and monitored very well. Mike expressed that he feels that the water commission does watch for over consumption. Concerns on conflicting regulations and how the homeowners will react was also brought up for discussion.

Aaron asked Mike if they had any involvement in the crisis mode for watershed health and quality, 303D listed. Mike responded that the group was concerned and has mitigation process started. Restoration project is looking at sediment going into the river and where it is being carried; viewing Alamosa River for natural resource damage. Melissa Garcia spoke to the combined efforts being done on this matter.

Manager Updates

Andrew Archuleta, BLM Field Manager, Saguache

Andrew gave a presentation of Vista Grande and handed out material to the committee and guest.

- Citizen proposal for the byway started discussions with county commissioners and internal representatives
- Trailhead discussions, groups already utilizing on their own
- Research still being done on project, possible tax grant
- May be asking RAC for letter of support

Greg Shoop, BLM Front Range District Manager

District items brought to the committee

- Rio Grande Natural Commission
- Rio Grande Natural Area
¼ mile East and West of the river
- Dan Dallas is working on local designation in LaJara office, it will fall under FACA.
 - Requires BLM to have a plan to manage the natural area. One exists from long ago but did not amend the SLV so it will be redone to fix the plan and take the action to amend the RMP.
 - BLM is to provide support to commission to the plan for the privately owned east bank of the river, not sure what that is at this time.
 - Has turned into a much larger project and will be involving BLM and commission to get it going. Wants Front Range RAC and commission to be linked in some type of fashion to make it work.
 - A wild and scenic river on New Mexico side, but not in Colorado; commission is aware and involved.
- Andrew Archuleta provided names of who is currently on commission for group.
- First meeting is August 5th, Ed Nielsen volunteered to attend and represent RAC committee. Kit Shy also volunteered in this action.

UPDATE ON ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES

- District office – NEPA Coordinator has been selected.
- Associate District Manager position to be filled by mid September.

- Spoke about what the position was and how this would leave Greg more time to be engaged with public interaction and working in more communities such as SLV.
- Helen Hankins has made the decision to eliminate dual delegation as of October 1, 2011.
- Service First Organization will still be ongoing
- Andrew Archuleta will be the Field Manager in SLV.
- America's Great Outdoors
 - Link between Rocky Mountain National Park and Denver metro area
 - Bicycle Trails
 - SLV
 - Not government but public driven
 - Conservative effort
 - Query the public to see what they want that fits into the Great Outdoor plans.
 - Early stages of development
 - Website is available and asked Tina to send link out to the RAC committee.

Melissa Garcia, Acting Associate Center Manager

1. **Geothermal RMP Amendment EA** – The field office is currently in the process of preparing an Environmental Assessment to amend the San Luis Valley Resource Management Plan (RMP) for Geothermal Leasing, as presented at previous RAC meetings. As discussed previously, the Record of Decision (ROD) for the Bureau-wide Geothermal Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) amended 114 BLM land use plans but inadvertently omitted the San Luis Valley RMP even though the field office was in the area of geothermal potential. This was an oversight in the document and as a result we are doing an EA to amend our plan. The BLM geothermal decision will tier to the 2008 Nationwide Geothermal PEIS decisions, provide an updated threatened species analysis and tribal consultation, and will require governor's consistency review. The BLM is analyzing three alternative land allocations for Geothermal Energy in the San Luis Resource Area. A draft document was reviewed by NPS, FWS, DWR, and CDOW. We anticipate the EA to be out for public review sometime mid-summer, with a decision expected by the end of the calendar year.
2. **Solar PEIS** – The Solar PEIS was released for a 90-day public comment period beginning on December 17, 2010. The initial public comment period was scheduled to end on March 17, 2011, but the comment period was extended until April 16, 2011 and extended once again until May 6, 2011. This document proposes and evaluates solar energy zones in six southwestern states. In Colorado the PEIS proposes 148,072 acres available for utility grade solar energy development with 21,050 acres in four solar energy zones all within the San Luis Valley. BLM WO is presently reviewing public comments and will provide BLM state offices direction on FEIS by early July, 2011. Here is the website address: <http://solareis.anl.gov/documents/dpeis/index.cfm>

Solar PEIS public comments have been returned and will be reviewed. Zones have been established and 1 alternative has Solar Energy Zones Plus other lands that meet the Solar radiation factor requirement and the slope requirement; lots of public questions and concerns. Several RAC committee members are asking if any real companies are interested in the zones established and why the government is doing the front line work and absorbing the cost.

- Greg explained that the work being done is at a high level, establishing what lands are available and such. BLM doing front work is a planning level decision that will help overall interest in companies to come.
 - Andrew explained that the Dept. of Energy 5 years ago identified some areas and brought them to the BLM to think about preparing for what may come from DOE assessment. With this in mind working at a higher decision level will help with the process.
3. **Oil and Gas** – Twelve oil and gas lease nominations were filed on the federally owned mineral estates of the Del Norte Field Office. These will be delayed to the February 2012 sale.
 4. **Rio Grande Natural Area Commission** – On February 15, 2011 the Secretary of the Interior appointed the following members to the Rio Grande Natural Area Commission. Helen Hankins has designated Dan Dallas, Rio Grande National Forest Supervisor/SLV BLM Center Manager as the Designated Federal Official (DFO). Dan will in turn designate the La Jara Field Office Manager as the DFO. The Commission is charged with: (1) advising the Secretary with respect to the Natural Area; and (2) preparing a management plan for the non-Federal land in the Natural Area. We anticipate the Commission convening for the first time sometime this summer.

Rio Grande Natural Area Commission – On February 15, 2011 the Secretary of the Interior appointed the following members to the Rio Grande Natural Area Commission. They are:

<u>Member:</u>	<u>Represents:</u>
Helen Hankins, BLM State Director	BLM
Michael Blenden, Project Leader, SLV NWR Refuges	FWS, SLV National Wildlife
Rick Basagoitia, Area Wildlife Manager, CDOW Wildlife	Colorado Division of
Craig Cotton, Division Engineer, Division III Resources	CO Division of Water
Steve Vandiver, General Manager, RGWCD District	RG Water Conservation
Rio de la Vista	General Public
Harold Anderson	General Public
Michael Willet	General Public
Paul Robertson	General Public

The Rio Grande Natural Area, designated by Congress in 2006, includes all lands extending ¼ of a mile on either side of the bank of the Rio Grande from the

southern boundary of the Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge to the New Mexico State Border. This is approximately 33 miles of river, 5,900 acres of private land, and 2,900 acres of BLM-managed lands. The management plan for the private lands will further the mission of the Act to conserve, restore, and protect the natural, historic, cultural, scientific, scenic, wildlife, and recreational resources of the Natural Area. The Act also directs the BLM to amend the San Luis Resource Management Plan to address these same resource values in the BLM-managed lands of the Natural Area.

5. **Mammoth Find-** In March 2011, a Pleistocene mammoth was discovered on BLM lands in the San Luis Valley. The Denver Museum of Nature and Science sent personnel to assess the find and confirmed the evidence of a mammoth, a portion of a camel, a small rodent and another unidentified mammal dating to possibly 20,000-30,000 years old. The BLM is partnering with the Museum and Adams State College to do further research and excavation at the site in early summer 2011. We are planning to involve local students during this effort.
6. **Penitente Campground-** The campground will close in August 2011 for a facelift- work will include a re-design of campsites, efforts to better designate existing bike routes, and adding new bike routes. Next season, we hope to have a campground host in place.
7. **Zapata Campground-** Construction of this campground is complete. This was an ARRA project. A water cistern will be put in this summer for use eventually at a host/hostess site. To charge fees at the campground, it will need to go through a Rec RAC for fee approval.
8. **Drought Preparation** – Letters have been sent to all range permittees in the Valley as a heads-up as we prepare for a potentially tough year. The letter to permittees acknowledges the current drought conditions, lets them know that we are in a wait-and-see mode and suggests we may have to look at options including late on-dates, reductions in number, etc., if conditions do not improve.
 - From the La Jara Field Office, out of the approximately 30 BLM permittees that either have cattle or sheep allotment in the south half of the valley, 8 to 9 permittees did not utilize their allotment due to either scheduled nonuse, voluntary nonuse, dry conditions or for personal reasons. Out of the remaining 22 permittees, only about 5 permittees are currently using their allotment at this time. The remaining 14 permittees have already come off their allotment after taking either cuts in livestock numbers or a shorter grazing season. The 5 permittees that are currently using their allotments have also taken cuts in numbers or in days. This has been worked out on a case by case basis and will be adjusted accordingly as the season progresses.

9. Update on Bighorn Sheep/ Domestic Sheep EIS

10. Update on America's Great Outdoors Initiative in the SLV

11. Service First Transition Plan Update

Mammoth Field Update

- Tours went over successful, several groups came to the viewing
- Eight different species have been discovered so far.
- Camel remains dating 25-26 thousand years old were discovered.
- Denver Museum is working on the find, has been a great education and learning experience. Gives great perspective of the valley.

Penitente Canyon Campground

- Closes in August and will have host for next year

Zapata Falls Campground

- Campground is in place and had great success so far
- Water system will be in place for next year
- Garbage issues being reviewed and addressed.
- Fee's will be addressed with Rec RAC for approval

Andrea Jones, BLM Field Manager, Conejos Peak

Andrea gave EIS sheep update, public scoping period is almost over. 13 grazing allotments are being discussed.

- Memorandum with DOW as coop agency.
- Final alternatives will be reviewed after public input.

Keith Berger, Royal Gorge Field Office Field Manager

Reports no further news on EA's at this time.

- Destiny Mine
- 11 Mile Canyon
- Fort Carson Landing Zone

Lease Sale in Nov. 2011, 35 – 45 thousand acres, working through EA's with 160 comments from the public; in the South Park area heaving public comments.

- Lease sale nominations EA draft was released for 30 days for public review.
- Mid August will be posted with final parcels for sale with public comments.

Over the River EA

- Close to releasing final EIS
- 30 day public review period will occur followed by another 30 day record of review
- Final EIS will have a preferred alternative but still could have changes.