

**Southwest Resource Advisory Council
MEETING MINUTES
Friday, March 4, 2005**
Holiday Inn Express, 1391 S. Townsend Ave.
Montrose, Colorado

ATTENDEES

Resource Advisory Council Members

Don Bennett, Category 1	Ann McCoy Harold, Category 3
Mallory Dimmitt, Category 2	Howard Heath, Category 1
John Field, Category 1	Nik Kendziorski, Category 2
Art Goodtimes, Category 2	Andrea Robinsong, Category 2
Andrew Gulliford, Category 2	Alan Staehle, Category 3
Anthony Gurzick, Category 3	Kathy Welt, Category 1

Not Present: Drew MacLeod, Category 1; Ellen Stein, Category 3

BLM Staff

Julie Coleman	Jane Ross
Dave Kauffman	Barbara Sharrow
Mel Lloyd	Mark Stiles
Vern Rholl	

Visitors	Representing	Town/City
Ann Brown	Senator Salazar	Durango, CO
Troy Wallace	San Miguel Forum	Naturita, CO
Lee-Ann Hill	Colorado Environmental Coalition	Grand Junction, CO
Margie Welch	Western Colorado Congress	Montrose, CO
Mike Nadiak	Western Slope No-Fee Coalition	Montrose, CO

Opening Remarks/Designated Federal Officer and RAC Chair Time

Chair Kathy Welt called the meeting to order at 8:15 a.m. Today's attendance constitutes a quorum.

Uncompahgre Field Office Manager and DFO Barb Sharrow announced that the 2005 RAC Call for Nominations was published today in the Federal Register. The nomination packages will be distributed to RAC members, who were encouraged to get the word out to potential candidates. Individuals whose terms are expiring August 20, 2005 are Andrew Gulliford, Kathy Welt and Howard Heath. The elected official position, vacant since Kelly Wilson's departure due to term limits, must be filled this year as well.

Field Managers Update

Gunnison Field Office: Vern Rholl reported that activities in Gunnison have been quiet. The office remodel is complete, and operations are getting back to normal.

Uncompahgre Field Office: The Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area (NCA) resource management plan was signed in November 2004. A petition for rulemaking was received from the Center for Native Ecosystems regarding OHV use on Mancos shale areas in both the NCA and UFO. A response will be issued in the near future. The UFO has also received an appeal from the Colorado Off-Highway Vehicle Coalition regarding OHV use in the Gunnison Gorge NCA plan.

San Juan Public Lands Center: Mark Stiles reported that the comment period ends today on an environmental assessment for the Hughes grazing permit renewal and increasing the size of the resident wild horse herd. A wild horse group had previously purchased an adjacent grazing permit and then requested that it be retired to allow grazing for the wild horses. They would like to see the herd's size increased to 200 animals, but the land health assessment deemed the land unsuitable for supporting that number of animals. Stiles also reported that discussions are continuing with San Juan County, Sunnyside Gold, San Juan Gold and BLM on a possible land exchange.

RAC Charter Discussion

Suggestions for Charter revisions include:

Duties of the Council: 6. a. through h, one sentence addressing cultural resources was requested by Andrew Gulliford, such as "Advise the BLM in the identification and protection of cultural resources."

Others agreed that all RAC category interests should be represented in this section, including tribal interests. For example: "Advise the BLM on grazing; transportation; OHV/commercial recreation; commercial timber; energy/minerals; environmental organizations; dispersed recreation; cultural resources; wild horse and burro groups; State, county or local elected office, State natural resources; Indian tribes; natural resource academicians; and public-at-large."

The charter needs updated to lessen the emphasis of RAC duties on range improvement, and broadened to include other resources and resource interests managed by the BLM.

10. Subgroups: Keep item a. and d. but eliminate all others under 10. Andrea Robinson made a motion to make this change, then it was seconded and passed.

11. Council Officers: The wording was questioned, and Stiles explained the background. Three different models exist for forming RACs, and Stiles recommended that RACs statewide consider eliminating wording on TRTs and RRTs, since they are rarely used.

12. Meetings: There was a concern with this language, but the RAC agreed that it has not been a problem in the past.

Mel Lloyd explained that the RAC's recommended Charter revisions are sent to Washington, where they are reviewed for inclusion in the final document. All suggestions must correlate with the CFRs.

Recommendations were voted on and passed by the RAC. Sharrow and Lloyd will compile the comments and distribute the edited charter to the RAC for comment.

RAC Working Groups Discussion

Sharrow sought the RAC's input on when to use informal RAC working groups, or the more formal subcommittees or subgroups, as set forth in the RAC charter. Staehle pointed out that the RAC normally uses informal groups, or information gathering teams. These teams bring back ideas to the main RAC, which is administered under FACA and submits formal recommendations to the BLM. Stiles recommended using subcommittees for the higher profile issues. The RAC agreed that using informal groups should continue with local notices published to invite any interested public to attend.

Northern San Juan Basin Coalbed Methane EIS

Stiles provided a quick update. Comments received at the November 2004 RAC meeting are playing a critical and positive role in finalizing the EIS. Approximately 67,956 pieces of correspondence were received during the comment period. Of those, only 1,400 are original communications; all others were form-type letters. There are 4,500 groupings of comments now being analyzed. Most comments address adequacy of alternatives, opposition to CBM development, potential impacts to the HD Mountains and the coal outcrop area, industry development activities, lease stages and enforcing existing stipulations, delaying development of lands already leased, wildlife management, ground water quality, and air quality. The final document will more likely be out in late August, rather than June or July as originally planned. Stiles reminded the RAC that the BLM and Forest Service have no jurisdiction over private minerals, and several leases on private lands lie near the outcrop. Stiles fielded several questions regarding the EIS.

Revision of San Juan National Forest Plan and BLM Resource Management Plan

This planning process, which started in December, is using study groups and will involve 21 meetings in the initial process. Core participants from the Cortez, Durango and Pagosa Springs areas are actively participating in evaluating such things as dominant uses, opportunities and key issues. The draft document should be issued early next calendar year.

Dominguez-Escalante Pre-Plan Process

Jane Ross explained the Pre-Plan process, which will encompass the Dominguez Canyon Wilderness Study Area, Gunnison River, as well as the significant cultural and historical values in the area that presently have little protection in place. General topics in the Pre-Plan will include travel management, human activities, natural resources, wilderness values, grazing, land tenure adjustments, cultural and historic values, wild and scenic river designations, and landscape management. The RAC's involvement will be key in getting the public involved, along with advising BLM. Ross encouraged the RAC to contact her with any further suggestions or comments on both short- and long-term goals. Issues and criteria are to be completed by April 30, 2005, and the Pre-Plan must be delivered to Washington by September 30, 2005. Sharrow added that BLM will continue to work closely with the Forest Service throughout the process.

Hanging Flume

Julie Coleman reported on the historic Hanging Flume preservation project in Montrose County. Critical to hydraulic mining activities in the late 1800s, the Hanging Flume was built to provide water for those operations. Jill Seyfarth, a cultural resource planner, explained the importance of preserving the flume, and that efforts are supported by several cooperators. Preservation and interpretation is critical, and one strategy is to reconstruct a short segment of the flume. RAC comments included reconstructing a section at Naturita's visitor center, rather than at the actual site, and preservation shouldn't damage sensitive areas.

Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA), Recreation Fee Program

Sharrow presented highlights of the new Act's key provisions, explaining the different fee levels, special recreation permits, public involvement, passes, fee expenditures and enforcement under the Act. Funds must be reinvested at the site where fees are collected. Sharrow reported that nearly 100 percent of fees collected at nearby Gunnison Gorge NCA have been returned to the area. Sharrow added that discussions are ongoing regarding using existing RACs, or establishing new councils, to advise BLM on FLREA issues.

Canyons of the Ancients Resource Management Plan Update

Welt recognized Kelly Wilson with a plaque for his service to the Southwest RAC from 1999 to 2004.

Wilson, a member of the Canyons of the Ancients Advisory Committee, reported that more than half of Montezuma County's revenue comes from the Monument. Drilling for carbon dioxide is a major activity in the area, as is grazing, which involves 163,000 total acres. Elk are beginning to have a significant impact on vegetation. Recreation user groups will be asked to help develop a long-term plan for the area. The committee, which has worked well together, has strived to get the Tribes involved, and the project is ongoing.

Public Comment Period

Lee-Ann Hill, with the Colorado Environmental Coalition, clarified that organization's intentions in questioning BLM about a recently scheduled meeting involving a few members of both western Colorado RACs on the Dominguez-Escalante Community Stewardship Plan (CSP). They want to ensure that BLM follows FACA guidelines. The group appreciates the BLM focusing on landscape issues in the CSP and would like Camelback included in the planning area.

Mike Nadiak, representing the Western Slope No-Fee Coalition, expressed his group's concern with FLREA. They ask land management agencies to work closely with their constituents in building consensus when implementing this new Act. Stiles assured the RAC that any implementation action will be carefully considered.

Next Meeting, Closing Comments

Mel asked the RAC to e-mail any suggestions to her attention for improvements to the National RAC handbook by March 11. The next Southwest RAC meeting is Friday, May 6, in Gunnison. The RAC has requested an 8 a.m. (onsite) Hartman Rocks field trip prior to the meeting's start at 10 a.m., as well as a discussion on the National Sagebrush Strategy. Most preferred the start time to be 9 a.m. for future meetings.

The meeting adjourned at 3 p.m.