

**Southwest Resource Advisory Council
MEETING MINUTES
Friday, July 21, 2006
Ouray County 4-H Event Center
22739 Hwy. 550
Ridgway, Colorado**

ATTENDEES

Resource Advisory Council Members

Mallory Dimmitt, Category 2	Drew MacLeod, Category 1
Kenneth Emory, Category 1	Andrea Robinsong, Category 2
Anthony Gurzick, Category 3	Alan Staehle, Category 3
Nik Kendziorski, Category 2	Ellen Stein, Category 3
Gerald Koppenhafer, Category 3	Kathy Welt, Category 1
Betsy Marston, Category 2	Kelly Wilson, Category 3

Not present: Don Bennett, Category 1; John Field, Category 1

BLM Staff

Arden Anderson	Mel Lloyd	
Amanda Clements	Barb Sharrow	
Bruce Krickbaum	Melissa Siders	
	Mark Stiles	
Visitors	Representing	Town/City
John Whitney	Congressman John Salazar	Durango, CO
Ann McCoy Harold	Senator Wayne Allard	Bayfield, CO
Lee-Ann Hill and child	Colorado Environmental Coalition	Grand Junction, CO

Opening Remarks, Designated Federal Officer and RAC Chair Time

Chair Kathy Welt called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. Today's attendance constitutes a quorum. There was a round of introductions.

Tony Gurzick had a correction to the May 19 meeting minutes. He had abstained from the RAC's vote on antler shed hunting.

Barb Sharrow reported on this year's Resource Advisory Council (RAC) nominations, which are going through the approval process and are reportedly one-step away from the Secretary's Office. The BLM Director is expected to sign off in the near future.

The BLM Split-Estate Listening Team continues to work on a report to Congress regarding the listening sessions held this past spring. There's no news on the Mancos shale report, and a member noted the article in yesterday's *Montrose Daily Press* regarding the petition to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife on the clay-loving wild buckwheat in areas of Montrose County. Alan Staehle complimented the Montrose Interagency Fire Management Unit on their efforts to keep the public informed on the Red Creek Fire. Sharrow handed out a press release on the upcoming Department of Energy (DOE) uranium leasing program programmatic environmental

assessment, which included a schedule for public meetings. Much of the land involved is BLM public lands.

Field Managers Update

Uncompahgre Field Office (UFO): Barb Sharrow announced that several west-end parcels in the UFO are included in BLM's August oil and gas lease sale. There are some split-estate parcels, as well as several parcels in the Manti La Sal National Forest. The BLM will participate in a meeting on Sunday in Naturita arranged by Western Colorado Congress on the lease sales.

Gunnison Field Office (GFO): Arden Anderson reported on behalf of Kenny McDaniel. The new lead range conservationist, Tara de Valois, starts Monday, and staff is looking forward to that. BLM staff will be assisting with a temporary sheep camp on the Alpine Loop, set up for the purpose of educating the public on the benefits of historic sheep grazing in the area. The Alpine Loop will also be the site of a centennial celebration of the Antiquities Act. BLM interpretive staff will be stationed at the various historical sites along the Loop offering talks to the touring public. The event is scheduled for September 16 and the public is invited to participate. This will also be the highlight of BLM's September "Road Trip." Mel Lloyd will distribute that to the RAC when it's issued.

The Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) deferred any decision on shed hunting and specifying time limits and restrictions. The GFO continues to address that activity because of its serious impacts to BLM public lands and stress on wintering wildlife. The GFO also continues to implement the Gunnison sage-grouse (GuSG) Rangewide Conservation Plan. A meeting took place with Gunnison County on this spring's road closures. The RAC was briefed on these closures at the May meeting. Overall, it worked out well in protecting critical GuSG habitat. May 15th was determined to be the date when roads would be opened for coming seasons, and several gates will also be installed to assist with enforcement.

The interagency Gunnison Basin travel management planning process is underway with several meetings being held, including focus group and public meetings. After next Tuesday's public meeting in Gunnison, Forest Service (FS) and BLM staff will begin to develop a Comment Analysis Summary with expected completion this fall. Information on the project can be found on the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison (GMUG) National Forest website (http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/gmug/policy/travel_mgmt/gun/index.shtml).

Water sampling on the Lake Fork of the Gunnison and Lake San Cristobal has begun given the numerous historic mine sites in the area. Remediation and mitigation work is ongoing. Elk browsing, especially to aspen, is a major problem basin wide. Significant patches of aspen are dying, in part due to high elk populations and in part due to insects and drought conditions. BLM will be collaborating with CDOW to develop population targets for the herds. The GFO is looking at deer and elk wintering range where browse impacts are also severe. The GFO will be reporting this data to CDOW.

The revision to the Recreation Management Plan for the Alpine Loop is starting up in August/September 2006 with completion expected next year. SWCA was selected as the consultant for the Plan. Local governments and the public will be involved in the planning process.

In response to a question, there has been no formal nomination made to date to create an Alpine Loop National Conservation Area (NCA). NCAs, like wilderness areas, can only be designated by Congress. The fuels budget for the Uncompahgre and Gunnison Field Offices is declining, and it is expected to be reorganized under the fire program with specific changes yet to be defined. The number of acres treated will likely be reduced with other cost-saving measures implemented. Brush mowing covering a 700-acre area will occur this fall to benefit habitat.

San Juan Public Lands Center: Mark Stiles provided a brief history on the Northern San Juan Basin Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). As a result of industry's proposal to explore and develop coal-bed methane on public and private lands in and near the HD Mountains on the San Juan National Forest, an EIS was conducted with 68,000 public comments gathered. The RAC was very helpful in hosting public hearings and providing information to the San Juan Public Lands Center (SJPLC). The NEPA process is nearing completion with the decision expected 31 days after the final EIS is issued (early September 2006 anticipated). Stiles invited the RAC to provide any editorial comments they have on the final EIS. In anticipation of the release, several meetings with constituents, industry, local governments, and state and congressional staffs have been held. There is a preferred alternative outlined in the final EIS; two new ones were developed after the draft was released as a result of the extensive public comment. The majority of the roadless area, because of the resource values it holds, would be protected by the preferred alternative. Phases of drilling and monitoring are proposed to ensure compliance. Stiles talked at length about the process taken to develop the alternatives and details of the final EIS, as well as public reaction to date. Again, the RAC's input and comment summarization was invaluable to the internal process of developing the final EIS.

The joint FS and BLM workforce planning process has been underway for the past few years in an effort to resolve budget and funding concerns with fixed costs and labor. There are a total of 261 positions at the SJPLC, and 66 positions are expected to be dissolved. Thirty of the positions are currently vacant, however, and the remaining 36 positions will be eliminated by 2009 if funding continues to decline. Several positions will incur changes such as grade or work-week reductions. The Fire Program will also lose 17 positions. The agencies will continue to focus on clarity and priorities with position assignments.

Travel management, water and wild & scenic rivers (W&SR) have been key topics of discussion throughout the joint FS/BLM management plan revision process. The Dolores River has previously been found as suitable as a W&SR, and the San Juan River is being inventoried now.

The Canyons of the Ancients National Monument (CANM) Resource Management Plan (RMP) was delayed for some time as they looked for a replacement planner. SWCA was selected as the planning consultant, and the analysis should begin in September after a presentation to the BLM State Director.

Three protests were received on the Hamilton Mesa grazing allotment. The appeal by Wesley Wallace was recently dismissed by the judge and a grazing permit was issued on July 19, 2006.

Uncompahgre Field Office Wild & Scenic River Inventory (W&SR)

Bruce Krickbaum made a presentation on the W&SR inventory being initiated by the UFO. There are seven watersheds to be inventoried in the process that has not previously been conducted by UFO, and the increasing demands on BLM public lands dictate that the process

begin now. Either Congress or, through a request by a state's governor, the Secretary of the Interior can designate a W&SR. River segments must be identified and then several specific criteria inventoried to determine the river's eligibility. Krickbaum covered the various criteria necessary to determine both eligibility and suitability. First it must be determined whether the body of water meets the definition of a river. Then, free-flowing, regular and predictable flows, and Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORV) are evaluated. ORVs include scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic and cultural. The values are documented and eligibility then considered. Classification categories, which are wild river areas, scenic river areas, and recreational river areas, are then assigned to the rivers declared as eligible. Lastly, the status of suitability would be determined during the revision of the UFO's RMP, which is scheduled to start in 2008. If rivers are determined to be eligible or suitable, BLM would manage to maintain those characteristics. The public will have the opportunity to be involved in the process that focuses on "*could* rivers be designated and then *should* rivers be designated." Water rights are fueling controversy nationwide in designating W&SRs. The Interstate Water Compact is of particular concern in designating W&SRs in Colorado.

Different Approaches to Monitoring and Restoration

Amanda Clements presented on the monitoring and restoration program of the UFO, which will be presenting this to the Public Lands Partnership later this summer. Clements explained what monitoring entails and the reasons for it: if you're going to measure something, you need to have effective objectives. Objectives at the landscape level were established in the late 1990s by the UFO, and these provide important guidelines for today's monitoring program. The emphasis of monitoring has changed since the Bureau was first created. Where grazing and timbering played a big role in the 1970s and 80s, such things as riparian areas, threatened & endangered species, and vegetation mapping now garner the attention of the monitoring program as well. Land health standards are a major focus, and the UFO is nearing completion of land health assessments for the entire FO, which has resulted in detailed maps showing the land health status. Mapping the location of weed infestations and roads is also helpful in managing the various areas of the FO. Staff has been awarded grants that will assist in reclaiming sites.

The Range Trend Monitoring Program has been monitoring grazing allotments for over four decades. Having this data is invaluable to BLM scientists in developing management goals to restore and/or maintain rangeland health. Monitoring is also helpful in managing deer winter range and such recreational sites as boat launches and campgrounds. Fire rehabilitation requires stringent monitoring to justify the funding received for such projects. Vegetation treatments for wildlife habitat and land health restoration are also an important part of this program and are closely monitored. Clements pointed out that water quality benefits from successful monitoring projects as well. Scientists from the U.S. Geological Survey have been monitoring the Mancos shale to provide valuable information on the impacts of salinity and erosion.

Public Comment Period

Lee-Ann Hill, with the Colorado Environmental Coalition (CEC), commented on behalf of the Dolores River Coalition, who has concerns with DOE's uranium leasing program, which they feel could have significant impacts on human health. The Environmental Assessment (EA) should be looked at very closely and 30 days is not enough time to evaluate this very important document. Many are not aware of the program or EA, and they'd like to see an EIS developed instead. Another alternative should be considered and that is keeping the lands within DOE's management and holding them for future extraction rather than returning the lands to BLM.

Andrea Robinsong made a motion asking BLM, as a DOE cooperater, to ask DOE to extend the comment period from 30 to 60 days, and to set additional public meetings in Grand Junction and Cañon City. Mallory Dimmitt seconded the motion. Staehle had concerns with extending the comment period and unforeseen problems that might create, and whether scheduling additional meetings was cost prohibitive. Sharrow confirmed that cost was an issue for DOE in scheduling the meetings; there was only enough funding for three meetings. Welt reminded the RAC of the May meeting where we learned that trucking uranium ore is not a public hazard as the ore has not yet been refined. She also pointed out that the mill site in Cañon City is apparently a private facility and is not on public lands that require NEPA-based decisions, so a public meeting there is not needed.

After further discussion, the above motion was altered by Robinsong and split into two motions: 1) extend the comment period from 30 to 60 days; and 2) BLM/DOE should consider additional public meetings in Grand Junction and any other interested communities. Dimmitt seconded these two revised motions. A vote was called and three members were opposed to the motions. Because two of the members are from Category 1, there was not a majority in Category 1 and therefore, the motions did not carry.

San Miguel Watershed Coalition: Watershed Health Assessment

Dimmitt spoke about the first-ever “2005 Report Card,” a snapshot of the ecological health of the San Miguel Watershed. The purpose of the project was to establish a baseline and report on the health status of the San Miguel Watershed. Partners with the San Miguel Watershed Coalition in this project included The Nature Conservancy, BLM, Telluride Foundation, Telluride Institute, and others. Dimmitt covered the high points of the report, which can be found in its entirety on the Coalition’s website. The results were: water quality received a “B” score, aquatic life a “C,” wildlife a “C+,” vegetation a “C+,” and soils “C+.” The overall grade average was “C.” Climate wasn’t scored, but the report states that it needs attention in the coming years. Threats include fragmentation, invasive species and recreation. There will be a 5-week series of meetings, with each covering each of the five topics.

Next Meeting and Closing Comments

The next meeting is September 15 in Durango. Topics of interest are:
Uranium mining and comment summary (if completed) and BLM regulations and mining claims (1872 mining law)
SJPLC planning update
New member orientation
Schedule next year’s meetings

Some suggested a “meet and greet with new members” for the evening of September 14.

This is Dimmitt’s and Tony Gurzick’s last RAC meeting. Sharrow thanked them for their service to the RAC, and the meeting adjourned at 3:40 p.m.