

Summary Minutes
NEW MEXICO RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL
April 2-4, 2003
Socorro

RAC Members Present:

Crestina Trujillo-Armstrong
Dennis Braden
William Buss
Max Cordova
Mike Eisenfeld
John Hand
Cliff Larsen
Raye Miller
Anthony Popp
Jerry Ryburn
Joe Stell
Robyn Tierney
Don Tripp

RAC Members Absent:

Larry Baker
Gretchen Sammis

Designated Federal Official:

Linda Rundell

Designated State Official:

Joanna Prukop

BLM Staff:

Bob Alexander, NMSO
Len Brooks, Las Cruces FO
Danita Burns, Albuquerque FO
Charles Carroll, Socorro FO
Kevin Carson, Socorro FO
Bill Condit, NMSO
Thomas Gow, Albuquerque FO
Mark Hakkila, Las Cruces FO
Steve Henke, Farmington FO
Theresa Herrera, NMSO
Ron Huntsinger, Taos FO
Rob Jagers, Socorro FO
Jon Hertz, Socorro FO
Dave Mensing, NMSO
Kate Padilla, Socorro FO
Ed Roberson, Roswell FO
Ed Singleton, Albuquerque FO
Cindy Smith, Socorro FO
Leslie Theiss, Carlsbad FO
Christine Tincher, OK BLM

Facilitator:

Na'ama Tubman, NMSO

Scribe:

Karen Meadows

APRIL 2 FIELD TRIP

The Field Trip was hosted by the Socorro Field Office. RAC members attending were Robyn Tierney, Crestina Trujillo-Armstrong, Tony Popp, Jerry Ryburn, Raye Miller, Cliff Larsen, Bill Buss, John Hand, Joe Stell, Don Tripp and Michael Eisenfeld. BLM employees on the tour were Kate Padilla, Jon Hertz, Wes Anderson, Rob Jagers, Kevin Carson, Charlie Carroll, Mark Matthews, Matt Wohlberg, Carlos Madril, Tom Gow, Na'ama Tubman, and Theresa Herrera.

The first stop was on the Johnson Hill Overlook. Rob Jagers discussed the OHV area. Some of conflicts/issues in the area include livestock permittees, motorized spillover on neighboring private lands, residential conflicts (dust, noise, partying) and a neighboring wilderness area. The next stop was the Rio Grande Overlook. Kevin Carson discussed the wilderness issues in the area. Additionally, Wes Anderson talked about the work that's being done on the Bosque. Community involvement is changing the perception of the Bosque, as being a nuisance and dumping ground, to a place to preserve, protect and use responsibly. Kevin Carson and Mark Matthews discussed wilderness issues and the commercial thinning project taking place within the Ladron Mountain ACEC. Charlie Carroll discussed BLM lands surrounding the Town of Riley. BLM Socorro's plans are to protect the historical properties of the area. Carlos Madril led the group on a view of the Pound Watershed Rehabilitation Project. Some of the objectives/benefits of the watershed work are to restore watersheds to ecologically functioning systems, reduce active erosion and soil loss, allow drainages to naturally heal and revegetate.

WORKSHOP—Identifying Opportunities & Changes

RAC members attended an optional evening workshop hosted by the Socorro Field Office. The workshop is part of the Socorro Resource Management Plan outreach activities.

APRIL 3 RAC MEETING

CALL TO ORDER, OPENING STATEMENTS & CHECK-IN FROM RAC MEMBERS

Robyn called the meeting to order and welcomed RAC members. Linda said budget shortfalls resulted in selecting a BLM employee to facilitate the April meeting, and introduced Na'ama Tubman.

Joanna Prukop was introduced. She is Secretary of Energy, Minerals & Natural Resources, and a 26-year NM Department of Game & Fish employee, representing Governor Richardson and Lt. Governor Denish. Joanna said she is very interested in the work the RAC does. In her DG&F career, she worked with private landowners as well as federal agencies, especially considering use of resources. She went back to Washington, DC, after retiring, to work on a special project in organizational management for DG&F nationwide. She worked for collaboration, cooperative solutions, and a "yes" attitude. Joanna was involved with Otero Mesa issues and is glad BLM postponed a decision so the current administration could become involved. She is committed to working with a wide range of public interest on behalf of the Governor. One of his goals is to be known as the Conservation Governor, which includes a renewable energy agenda and working closely with federal agencies to preserve and protect New Mexico's unique environment. The issues are broad and complex and collaboration is needed. She said she might not be able to be consistently involved with the RAC, but will think about how the Governor's office might best be represented with full involvement.

Members of the RAC introduced themselves.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA (Attachment 1)

Addition: 9:30 a.m. Friday 15-minute presentation on sustainable working landscapes.

Motion

Tony moved to accept the agenda with the proposed addition. Crestina seconded. Motion approved.

APPROVAL OF RAC MINUTES FROM ALBUQUERQUE, JANUARY 8-9, 2003 (Attachment 2)

Motion

Crestina moved to approve the minutes of January 8-9 as presented. Raye seconded. Motion approved.

WSA PROPOSAL

Cliff Larsen (Attachment 3)

Public comment about the Cabezon Wilderness at the Albuquerque meeting made it clear that the issue of WSAs needs attention. Cliff sent a memo after that meeting, speculating that those opposed to Cabezon might not realize the threat of burgeoning population. He provided statistics, emphasizing that Cabezon is being preserved "from" rather than "for" the people of Rio Rancho. Time is not on our side. He suggested that the RAC take on the project of creating a multi-area wilderness bill out of the least controversial of the WSAs identified in 1991.

Question/Answer/Comment

- What is “hard release”? A hard release takes out of WSA status forever those areas recommended by BLM as non-suitable. “Soft release” areas remain on the table as potential wilderness. However, definitions reflect the person asked.
- If you don’t turn WSAs into wilderness, they will be chewed away at the edges. Wilderness might be respected more, and be better protected. WSA standards say nothing can be done that might impair that area’s quality. For example, a rancher wanted to drill water wells in a WSA when stock and wildlife water sources dried up, but that is not allowed. Wilderness designation might provide greater latitude, and Washington might provide greater resources for protecting wilderness.
- Linda thinks it is best to move forward out of the gray WSA zone that causes management problems and confusion.
- Minnesota removed portage platforms and other human construction in an area designated wilderness. Dave Mensing said such actions are addressed in an area’s wilderness management plan. The Wilderness Act does not prohibit human construction, but managers need to show that structures contribute to area objectives.
- Can roads be “undone”? BLM does not use mechanized equipment even for reclamation. However, WSAs do allow use of roads, and objects could be removed. Designated wilderness calls for non-motorized minimal tools. Legislation is flexible, and could be written to allow creative solutions, unlike the strictness of WSAs.
- The Esperanza allotment near Chama includes a road established prior to WSA status that provides access to Dennis’ property. To lose it to wilderness would not be appreciated.
- BLM has a multiple-use approach, and is concerned with issues like trash dumping near communities. Controlling and managing multiple use is more important than creating wilderness.
- At the last RAC meeting, Northern NM was presented as pro-wilderness, when most long-time residents have a strong relationship with the land and use it for many real-life purposes. We need extended public comment and care to tread this wilderness conversation.
- Preservation is one of the multiple uses, ever more important as population grows. We want our children’s children’s children to know the natural world. Despite controversy at last night’s meeting people listened with great tolerance. Make ecosystem preservation the structure for discussion and decision.
- At the last RAC meeting those living in proposed wilderness agreed that preservation is important; but they feel imperiled and unheard. We need to work with those affected, and may need to make exceptions.
- Get Senators Domenici and Bingaman and other legislators to support a citizen (RAC) proposal.
- It’s vital that residents not be barred from water sources. Water and fire risk are primary concerns.
- These rangelands are watersheds for communities. Can we envision a structure that allows affected communities to participate in identification of valuable areas?
- Best to pick one WSA that obviously should be listed, create a structure and learn from that.
- There are a few WSAs not considered controversial, including two lava flow areas. But even there, reach out to those who feel disenfranchised. Bring people in and make them feel comfortable.
- It would be difficult to get congressional support without some hard releases. Whether hard or soft, some should be released. Releases will not necessarily be open to anything; they may qualify for other kinds of protection.
- Best to work with areas identified in the 1991 inventory, not alter them.
- Resolve controversies over what is suitable, including those with the Wilderness Alliance, or the congressional delegation will not undertake this.
- Recommend that a subcommittee work with FOs to identify the 10 least-controversial WSAs. If there are some we can solve, let’s go ahead. Otherwise let’s find something else to work on.
- Identify extremes and provide opportunity for their support. Caren Cowan of the NM Cattlegrrowers Association said she would take part. James Scarantino of the Wilderness Alliance said it is unlikely

that any WSA is non-controversial, and hard release is an unlikely option for agreement. He recommended using the word “modification” rather than release.

BLM WSA REVIEW PROCESS

Dave Mensing, BLM Wilderness Coordinator & FO Representatives (Attachment 4)

Dave outlined the BLM Wilderness Review Process, from the initial inventory in 1979 for roadless blocks of 5,000 acres or more, to the report to Congress in 1992. Legislative efforts in 1987, 1991, 1992 and 1998 failed. Key for future legislative efforts is inclusion of reserved water rights and specific language about grazing.

Mark Hakkila, Las Cruces FO

Las Cruces has 25 WSAs. Of 480,000 acres, 245,000 are recommended as suitable, and 30,000 acres were designated in the 1993 RMP. There may not be any areas that all citizens would support. Issues include mining, grazing and endangered species. One potential easy release is the 22-acre Hoverrocker along the Arizona border.

Question/Answer/Comment

- How do you manage places like Guadalupe Canyon? Inaccessibility works for its protection.
- ACECs and WSAs differ only in who designates them. ACECs may be designated for scenic quality, recreational values, biological resources, even public health and safety. Wilderness is designated to protect natural values, and only Congress can do that.
- Areas of less than 5,000 acres can be combined with adjacent areas under other management, and whichever agency manages the most land leads.
- At what point are local communities involved? Wilderness review involves the public from Day 1.

Kate Padilla, Socorro FO (Attachment 5)

The summary of wilderness recommendations distributed on the Field Trip lists 12 WSAs. The FO recommends five: Continental Divide (partly), Horse Mountain (partly), Jornada del Muerto, Sierra de las Canas, and Sierra Ladrones. The Ladrones, while controversial, are most highly recommended for wilderness. Jornada and Sierra would be least controversial. Sierra and Continental Divide land exchanges resulted in changes in BLM boundaries. Advocates for wilderness want all 12 to be designated. Boundaries for all areas recommended could be suitably altered to respond to public requests. Veranito was recommended for release. Rationale for recommendations was listed. Kate reviewed the acreage of all recommendations and land acquired. Those will be included in the RMP process, which will be open for public comment when drafted.

Question/Answer/Comment

- All acquired land was exchanged, not bought. The FO is trying to acquire parcels in the Ladrones.
- Public input was included in 1991 for establishment of WSAs. The RMP is being readied for public input; and the public was advised of land exchanges during scoping.
- There is state inholding in the Ladrones. The Continental Divide WSA is opposed by the energy, grazing and (potentially) hunting communities.

Tom Gow, Albuquerque FO (Attachment 6)

Albuquerque FO has 10 WSAs and two wilderness areas, totaling 21% of public land. All the WSAs are controversial, because they can be claimed by tribal entities, Spanish land grant heirs, or the city of Albuquerque. Eight of the 10 were in the Presidential Recommendation. The public was part of the process, but residents of the area objecting now were children at the time. House Memorial 26 is the result. Issues include the Cebolla Wilderness south of Grants, part of a huge unit where there is mule

deer and elk hunting. Acoma Pueblo controls its elk herd for premium big game hunting, resulting in thousands of applicants and hunters. BLM finds hunters' trash, cut fences, and new roads—all in designated wilderness. The FO is in discussion with Acoma Pueblo, US Park Service and USFS to cooperatively advertise trophy quality hunts for elk, and sponsor a draw to limit numbers. Safari Club International has transplanted mule deer to the Fort Stanton area. There's depredation by mule deer along San Juan River, so BLM favors transplant.

Question/Answer/Comment

- Manzano is probably least controversial, but is contentious because it might hinder grazing.
- Cultural issues make Petaca Pinta Peak controversial.
- Zia Pueblo would like to acquire Ojito lands, but the Natural History Museum and UNM say this must remain public land.
- The Wilderness Alliance was in Washington with Zia Pueblo when it received strong support for Ojito and surrounding areas to be made wilderness, with support from the Governor, Sandoval County, Representative Madalena, the State Land Commissioner, the All-Indian Pueblo Council, Sierra Club and landowners.

Ed Roberson, Roswell FO (Attachment 7)

Two WSAs were proposed for wilderness: Carrizozo Lava Flow and Little Black Peak. The lava flow would probably easily be designated wilderness, following the example of the Malpais. Adjacent land could be acquired. It has excellent wilderness qualities and little controversy.

Question/Answer/Comment

- What funds are available for acquisition? Nothing now, but potentially—Baca Bill sales, three-way exchange with state, and other strategies.

Leslie Theiss, Carlsbad FO (Attachment 8)

None of Carlsbad's four WSAs (Devil's Den Canyon, Lonesome Ridge, McKittrick Canyon and Mudgetts) are recommended for wilderness designation. There have been no changes since 1991, no controversies, no land exchanges; and no boundary adjustments are planned. Mudgetts would probably be controversial.

Question/Answer/Comment

- Mudgetts and Lonesome Ridge are part of an ACEC, and Mudgetts might be adjacent to current wilderness.
- Lonesome Ridge is adjacent to USFS land.

Steve Henke, Farmington FO (Attachment 9)

Farmington has one WSA, Ah-shi-sle-pah, a badlands area that the FO does not recommend for wilderness designation. It is suitable in value, but so controversial that designation is remote.

Question/Answer/Comment

- There might be opportunity for alternate protective designation.

Ed Singleton, Albuquerque FO (Attachment 10)

Of the three WSAs in the Taos area—Rio Chama, San Antonio and Sabinoso, Chama is partly recommended for designation. It adjoins a wild river corridor and current wilderness. The FO is talking to the Jicarilla Apache tribe about a land exchange for adjoining tribal areas.

Question/Answer/Comment

- Reasons that areas were not recommended include results of overuse by public, need for patrolling, lack of access leading to trespass, and inability to manage.
- Inaccessibility works toward protection of natural resources; but it is inappropriate to drop wilderness designation because it is inaccessible and would be hard to manage. How else could this be handled?
- There are ways other than wilderness designation to protect land. When these are considered by Congress alternatives will be considered.
- Would there be objections to soft release? Probably. All these areas are controversial.

NM BLM STRATEGY FOR CONSIDERATION OF CITIZEN WILDERNESS PROPOSALS
Dave Mensing, NMSO (Attachment 11)

The BLM strategy responds to requirements of FLPMA sections 201 and 202. Dave mapped out a sequence of planning activities incorporating timeline, public participation and actual planning steps.

Step 1

- detailed maps identify specific boundaries
- detailed narratives document differences
- photographic documentation

- prioritize/schedule inventory
- conduct inventory using BLM handbook H-6310-1
- determine wilderness characteristics

Step 2

- gather existing BLM inventory data
- evaluate changes in resource condition since initial inventory
- determine significance of changes
- determine need for inventory
- document analysis

Step 4

land use planning & proposed actions
 (where most of the workload would be applied)

Step 5

- approve
- deny
- postpone

Step 3

His point was that there are significant workload and budget implications in making any of these areas wilderness.

Question/Answer/Comment

- SE quadrant proposals were not included in the morning presentation. Is this an ongoing process? Yes, people can keep coming forward with areas to include.
- This will affect county budgets and taxation. How are these proposals opposed? There's no easy answer. But Congress has to designate WSAs. During scoping, BLM looks at issues like impact on the county.

Subcommittees announced meeting times and locations

Cliff asked for consideration and comment on constructing a wilderness bill that would put forward:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ojito ▪ Jornada del Muerto ▪ Sierra de las Canas ▪ Aden Lava Flow ▪ Cowboy Springs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Carrizozo Lava Flow ▪ Little Black Peak <p><u>And release to ACEC:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Guadalupe Canyon |
|--|--|

- Veranito
- Devil's Den Canyon
- McKittrick Canyon

Question/Answer/Comment

- Designation of ACECs would bring about RMP amendments.
- There are land use/management issues as well as legislative issues.
- Linda clarified that BLM will not redo the wilderness inventory. When proposals come in, BLM will look at what has changed since the 1980s. Unless something has changed, it will go no further, and the percentage of land changed is nominal.

NEPA & THE PLANNING PROCESS

Socorro Field Office, Kate Padilla, Charlie Carroll, Cindy Smith

The FO's main objective was to obtain solid recommendations from RAC on ways to improve Socorro's RMP. Kate began with the NEPA infrastructure, presenting a case study to indicate its simplicity. She said NEPA basically tells us to:

- Cooperate with state and local government
- Write and use regulations and policies
- Use an interdisciplinary approach
- Disclose adverse impacts, and
- Gain public involvement

Case Study

Cave Gulch has numerous O&G leases, with all wells producing and being capped. NM has a strong reservoir management group that determined the number of cubic feet in place, spacing and economic life. They identified where the wells would be located, nesting sites and roads; and looked at cumulative effect, incremental development, and potential foreseeable development. They saw that impact would be significant and that impact could not be completely mitigated. They needed to identify alternatives. When they closed to further drilling, there was significant public reaction, including threats and litigation. Staff sat at the table with environmentalists for one-and-one-half years to come up with a plan; and worked with federal agencies for three months to come up with mitigation plans and terms for wells. Impacts were minimized through a difficult and lengthy process. The Socorro RMP therefore needed amendment.

It's not NEPA that's the problem; it's our ability to get people to the table and work through it. Current projects, like the Ridgeway CO₂ development, are very complex. The law is simple; rules and regulations are complex. Litigation influences the process. Documents are lengthy and costly. With staff time, consultant and other expenses, even without litigation, an RMP costs about \$2 million.

RAC Role

1. Streamline suggestions
2. Educate the public
3. Provide alternative suggestions for public involvement

SOCORRO RMP REVISION & EIS

Charles Carroll (Attachment 12)

The RMP provides a comprehensive framework for managing public land and allocating resources.

Current activities include

- *Save Our Bosque* Task Force
- Interagency Watershed Program
- Archaeology Field School
- Public Lands Day
- Fort Craig
- El Camino Real International Heritage Center

Charles walked the RAC through the process, commenting on steps taken and advice for others. He recommended reaching out early to partners, including counties, tribes and regional entities; and submitting *Federal Register* notice early.

Planning Step 1 led to a scope of work, the basic assumptions they began with—a 3-bullet preliminary planning criteria page. It is important not to waste energy on red-herring alternatives. Use current scientific information; research more. The pre-plan went to the Washington office and after turnaround for revisions three times was approved in June 2002. Using a team approach, staff interviewed eight potential contractors and solicited bids from three, selecting the highest-scoring bidder. The scoping bulletin was produced in two weeks with extensive contacts, and they conducted scoping meetings within five weeks. Much of their success depended on the team's experience with the previous RMP. Contact with the public is ongoing. The public is most upset by being asked to comment when BLM has already decided, so the FO has carefully held meetings before decisions are made.

Step 2 is to collect and analyze information and generate alternatives—mostly involving agencies, tribes, and communities. The Opportunities Analysis is the next step, and leads to Alternatives Development.

Step 3 is a period of extensive agency contacts, and will include two workshops with the Sonoran Institute on how public lands fit in with the local economy—to get ideas on how to adjust future management to more creatively participate in and sustain local economies. Economic need in the region is a primary influence.

Question/Answer/Comment

- Why are you working on this if the DOI places no importance on it? Congress funds planning. If there is no funding to appropriate, there will be delays; but that does not mean that DOI does not value this process.
- Linda said the BLM has as many as 70 plans underway. As schedules adjust, budgeting shifts. . Socorro is on budget and on schedule. When another state falls behind schedule, that funding allows NM to complete its plan.
- Could this be a more regionalized plan, like USFS does? Nothing prohibits that. It has been done by FOs, with fire management plans and OHV use, for example. But a statewide approach might not work for detailed issues.
- Linda said every state has scheduled multi-layered plans, with a finite number of people. Laying on more levels of work spreads people too thin.
- Kate emphasized that scoping meetings were held with cooperators on board—unusual and with happy results; and that it is important for everyone to take part in selecting contractors—lengthy but unanimous—setting the stage for the one-and-one-half year process.

BLM uses a simple sequential planning process. The FO drives the process, making decisions from information provided by the contractor. The contractor alleviates the burden of extensive work, does research, helps with public involvement, organizes, documents, and, in this case, maintains a comprehensive web-based database. The contractor prepares documents and BLM and cooperating agencies review them throughout the process. The 2nd preliminary draft incorporating comments has just been completed. The contractor is tracking public comments in the database. Analysis is critical because it forms a basis for alternative plans. Ideas resulting from original public input will be

assembled as preliminary alternatives and presented to the public again. They will either incorporate each comment or document why they couldn't.

Question/Answer/Comment

- Cooperating agencies can be involved as deeply as they care to be. Jurisdiction is a concern, for example development of subdivisions, building roads. Those interests, primarily socioeconomic, are vital and play an active part.
- The contractor went with BLM staff to potential cooperating agencies before the scoping process. Many said they'd like to take part but didn't have time or other resources. BLM keeps them informed and coordinates with them to address citizen needs.
- Specialists are used as needed, from a small core team to 25 at certain times in the project.
- How do you validate and collect data? Wildlife surveys, for example, don't respect political boundaries, so how do you find what's pertinent and create alternatives from sketchy data? BLM is required to use "best available data," not new studies. Staff updates its own data, and goes to other agencies. The contractor confers with her own and BLM biologists to determine what makes the most sense for that area.
- In the field, we know of situations impacting agencies. Is there opportunity to present that knowledge so that alternatives could be created? The process allows for comment throughout, and data collection is thorough. Conversations with other agencies continue. Even if something has been missed, there is further opportunity to include it. It would be beneficial to hear comments now, to add to comprehensive resource maps.

Question/Answer/Comment

- Diverse community representation, tolerance, desire to learn—show FO did its homework.
- Tony's handouts are his committee's recommendations. (See Attachment 24)
- Getting preliminary alternatives is a good start.
- Make it clear how a person could participate—newspaper ads, posters at Allsup's, something saying, "Here's where we are; here's how you can contribute." Put people together, hand them markers, get work groups going.
- Rough out ideas. Advertise those topics, then meetings might excite more interest.
- With additional time there would have been more recommendations. We are jumping to accomplish all this in a tight time frame.
- Put together focus groups early in the process to work all the way through.
- The public meeting needed more structure. Ask people to respond, even writing down their responses to RAC recommendations.
- Following the timeline, the process will be flawed and miss primary issues, resulting in amendment after amendment. Put alternatives together in a way that allows study of potential impacts. Then make an RMP that's realistic and allows you to do different things in different areas.
- Public comment doesn't necessarily improve anything. It may be a tool to assure that nothing gets done. And you can't make the public comment. Write your plan and go on.
- It's not good to plan forever; 23 months is a good time frame, forces maximization.
- Haste does exclude the public.
- It takes 18 months for a plan, another six months for public comment, so the RMP can be done in two years. Sometimes up to another year is called for, but four years is too long. Going beyond 18 months to two years also wears out involvement. New people have to be brought in and up-to-date. Getting sued is part of the process.
- BLM pitched Congress for funding to plan, and promised to keep plans on schedule. FOs actually start a planning process about two years before the official process begins. At best we're involving people all along.

- There were three meetings with eloquent speaking but no lines on the map until the last moments of the last meeting.
- Collaboration takes longer, but shouldn't. We need to design it in.
- RAC members have gone to scoping meetings and felt they weren't heard, just like the general public. Get buy-in. Invite those who have expressed interest and tell them how their comments were incorporated.
- This middle piece has been missing for a long time.
- Normally, after initial scoping meetings, BLM rolls out the 1st draft with alternatives incorporated. Socorro is offering a 2nd opportunity. Concentrating on critical issues of public interest will bring in more people than an announcement that the proposal is ready. Newsletters go out after meetings like this enumerating what was discussed.
- This process will lessen contentiousness. People will feel included. It's public relations.
- Suits are usually won by BLM.
- External influence is becoming more stringent as population grows.
- BLM wants the public to help and to appreciate the results. What can the RAC specifically recommend?
- BLM deals with some issues we may never gain consensus on; and ultimately has to make decisions. Robyn said she would not have stood up at last night's meeting and drawn a line on the map. Consider examples of what an alternative looks like and engage people in stating their own.

APRIL 4 RAC MEETING

The meeting was called to order, and agenda changed to shorten FO manager's reports, and plan the next meeting as the first piece of business.

Robyn invited suggestions for structuring the next meeting in Ruidoso June 4-6. Members want to tour the biomass plant, see examples of Sid Goodlow's work, visit Ft. Stanton, observe salt cedar removal, and go caving.

June Agenda Proposals

- Len Brooks and access problems (Tony)
- Finalize proposal and come to decision on RMP process (Raye)
- Land Use Planning Subcommittee proposal, discussion, conclusions
- How a citizen might submit proposals for land use alternatives (Robyn)
- Healthy Forest Initiative preliminary discussion (Cliff)
- Grazing (Cliff)
- Regulation issues/changes, some published in *Federal Register* (Cliff and Ed Roberson)

Robyn will send out a draft agenda for written feedback.

FIELD OFFICE REPORTS

Steve Henke (Attachment 13)

Farmington FO has worked to include greater community participation. They did community partnership training a year before their plan started. A consultant helped identify issues alongside the scoping process, working with the "informal network." Concerns were not so much on allocation and O&G development, but on managing impacts associated with those activities—compression noise, road conditions, and interference with ranching operations, which the FO set up collaborative working groups to address. Some consensus decisions were achieved and included in the RMP.

Question/Answer/Comment

- Ozone is a broad issue, so the FO joined with state and federal entities to form a Four Corners Task Force, and developed an adaptive RMP to respond to study results.
- Air quality and noise policy changes will be retroactive. The industry, represented on the Task Force, is aware and early indications are that there will be protest.
- Concerning streamlining and NEPA analysis, there have been conversations with the Energy Committee and gathering of downloaded info. The goal of the language in the draft bill is to have other surface management agencies work closely with BLM on site so there is more timely issuance of APDs. The bill is not specific.
- The FO expects as many as 15,000 participants and spectators for the upcoming OHV rally. There's been good preparation. The operator pays BLM a 3% fee, but the local FO doesn't know what's done with it.
- The consultant hit major topics: roads, noise, fundamental conflicts; but some community linkage, structure and economic analysis was new information.

Ed Singleton, Albuquerque FO (Attachment 14)

Albuquerque FO will update in-house, not do a major plan amendment—of OHV designations, issues around Placitas and prescriptive work for protection from recreation use. They engaged Cochiti Pueblo in a cooperative partnership at Tent Rocks. Preparation for the Rio Puerco plan has included outreach, gathering GIS database info, and maintaining lines of communication with all entities. Since the RMP process has been static since the early 1980s, process is being addressed, including public involvement at critical points. They found Tony's proposal helpful; and welcome amendments to gain public support.

Question/Answer/Comment

- Have you thought of inserting a contact point for floating draft alternatives to the public before plans are solidified? Yes, we need to think ahead and clarify process.
- Status of trespassing horses? Owner has been gathering them, a few left, not currently a problem.

Leslie Theiss, Carlsbad FO

Carlsbad FO's RMP amendment is due next fiscal year. In-house info is checked through, so the FO is up to speed with a good foundation. Once their website is fully functional, it will be a tool for outreach and communication. Staff is working on third-party contracts. One year ago they hired a NEPA coordinator who is working with staff for quality control. They hope to get the next segment of community partnership done. And they hired a GIS specialist one year ago to update their database.

Question/Answer/Comment

- Do you anticipate doing anything differently to engage the public? The FO plans a lot of meetings alerting communities, because of large O&G use and interest, therefore conflict; and is using technology to better reach the public.
- Linda was in Carlsbad in the 1980s for its RMP, and spent a year resolving protests. Technology doesn't necessarily reach individuals who will be impacted. Get someone to sit individually with them and do not leave anyone out.
- In Wyoming, Leslie found it successful to meet in informal settings, with established stations where specialists, maps, etc., are available as people walk around.
- With the new Farm Bill signed it seems that considerable funding will be available to upgrade watersheds. Does BLM have dollars in cooperative programs to match that? Linda said BLM is in the planning process for 8100 funds disbursement, and they do give higher priority to matching. Congress has a bill including stewardship contracting to exchange goods for services. For example, a range permittee could contract for watershed work in exchange for waived grazing fees.

- Senator Bingaman provided funds that compensate tebuthiuron.
- Has there been a land exchange concerning potash? Leslie will find out.
- There are noxious weeds funds for nine miles of salt cedar removal. With over \$2 million for range improvement, the FO cleared pinon/juniper that was then used for erosion dikes.
- What is the difference in cost for chemical v. mechanical salt cedar removal? It's heavy equipment cost v. a plane flying over applying chemicals.
- The price discrepancy is based on labor. On the Pecos it costs \$185/acre for helicopter use. Time and price depends on how thick, whether completely removed, whether chipped, etc.

Ron Hunsinger, Taos FO (Attachment 15)

Efforts continue to resolve a course all interested parties could agree to. There's been only one protest, which didn't have to do with the plan. The FO has modified every planning effort to provide for public input, alternatives, and analyzing impact. Ongoing efforts include the Cerrillos Hills, where the community has taken the lead. Agencies are providing expertise. Overall, the FO is informing locals who will be impacted about BLM process and recent changes. Trash, target shooting, trespass, etc. encourage citizens to seek BLM backing as stewards for the land. The FO is meeting with community groups to bring in the partnership series program from the BLM training center—focused specifically on economic opportunities. They're working with the community on modification of the John Dunn Bridge and associated impacts. The Rio Arriba County management plan has included significant outreach, with BLM working to assure that plans coincide. BLM process has been modified and the FO will continue to respond to communities.

Question/Answer/Comment

- Concerning water management at La Puebla and Clower Springs: the FO has nine projects underway, and is working with communities to assure that water development is consistent with the BLM plan. Utility easements and access to water development sites are an issue.
- They're working with one mine operator who has blocked public access on a county road. The major issue with access is public safety in mining areas.
- Most beetle kill is not on BLM land, but all are affected. Because of the scope, cutting is not a solution. The real issue is protecting high priority areas. The FO is working with communities on stewardship, assistance. Impact is so extensive it's hard to secure resources to have significant impact. It costs \$3/cord for permits, with necessary clearances and documentation, for example, impact on cultural resources. The FO is working hard to bring about an effective work plan, and needs documentation in place to make the process effective.
- The FO is collaborating with "Fun Valley" user groups to clean up, develop a management plan, and coordinate with the Rio Arriba County plan.

SUSTAINABLE RANGELANDS SUSTAINABLE RANCHING—GRAZING POLICIES TO ENHANCE CONSERVATION PERFORMANCE

Bob Alexander, NMSO (Attachment 16)

Under the Secretary of the Interior's four C's philosophy, BLM is developing new grazing policy tools: to enhance permit management to enable new partnership and conservation opportunities. These efforts fall under the Sustaining Working Landscapes (SWL) initiative. He pointed out the kinds of changes needed (rules and policy) to support SWL concepts.

The Five Concepts

1. Conservation Partnerships—for example, performance-based contracts, permittee incentives, stewardship grants or contracts
2. Reserve Common Allotments—areas set aside for grazing while improvements are made or temporary use when forage is lost
3. Voluntary Allotment Restructuring
4. Conservation Easements—locked land with BLM restrictions
5. Endangered Species Act Mitigation—using creative tools to provide a mitigation bank for endangered species

From the public, BLM wants to know:

- How could these concepts be implemented efficiently and fairly?
- Are there other concepts you would like to offer that would meet SWL expectations, intent and objectives?

He is setting up a team to meet in May.

Question/Answer/Comment

- Conservation easement is a good idea, but may or may not be effective at keeping ecosystems intact. Permit holders are now “owners” and can do what they want. Is it worth retaining those areas where we have little to do with management? This concept may be a way to ensure they’re not further developed, but not an answer to all issues.
- This is a giveaway of public land. Work ecosystem maintenance into these “gifts.”
- Conservation easement could be tailored more specifically.
- USFS already does this well in collaboration with the Nature Conservancy, a good model.
- First priority seems to be grazing. But natural resources like sand, gravel, and pumice are vital in Northern NM. Where’s their priority? Law says multiple use, BLM doesn’t numerically rate them. Land use plans establish priorities in specific areas.
- Have range management meetings in two or three locations in NM close to people affected, maybe one in each quadrant.
- Good plan, although grass banking is a concern. This may actually improve ecosystems. Forty acres of public land probably would get no attention, while that amount of private land would.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

The Public Comment Period was opened at 10 am.

Debbie Hughes, Hughes Brothers Ranch, Executive Director of Association of Conservation Districts

She is a permittee in the Guadalupe Mountains on land managed by the Las Cruces FO. There are three WSAs on her property—Devils’ Den, Brokeoff and McKittrick—ranging from 80-320 acres, attached to NF. Two are too small for wilderness designation. The ranch borders Guadalupe National Park, so water tanks, etc. were taken out. There is now no water for wildlife or backpackers. Most of the land is naturally protected—steep and rocky. Hughes Brothers Ranch has been involved in a 10-year conversation with the Las Cruces FO concerning four 40-acre BLM properties and one or more 120-acre properties entirely surrounded by the ranch with no access. The Baca Land Exchange includes language for such disposals, and she would like to see this moved forward. Isolated tracts preclude ranch projects, call for fencing, and can’t be used as managed big game hunt areas. She thanked Representatives Stell and Tripp for their support, and commended BLM for a lot of great work with S&W Conservation Districts.

Question/Answer/Comment

- Any land sales or swaps with Baca? No, but language put in so we could do that.
- How will the Farm Bill \$20 million be used? Through Soil & Water Conservation districts, prioritized by local work groups based on private land within a conservation district. There is 50-75% cost sharing, but in NM limited resource farmers/ranchers get a 90% cost share. Can be used on BLM land in a limited way if it benefits private land.
- Land can rarely be exchanged between USFS and BLM, because USFS exchanges need Congressional approval.

Doug Moore, Otero County Commissioner (Attachment 17)

He read a letter from the Otero County Commission voicing the Commission's concern that approximately 500,000 acres of Otero County are being considered for wilderness designation. They feel that a number of existing tools already in place will provide appropriate management of the land; that ranching families deserve consideration; and that wilderness designation would result in negative consequences to the county's social, historic and economic values.

Question/Answer/Comment

- Elaborate why WSAs would remove families from the land. Those families are ranchers. If you remove the water and close the roads it's no longer good for ranching.
- Looking at the map, are there disconnected areas? It's a bunch of small areas. Map also shows areas non-suitable for wilderness. The WSA skirts public roads, ranchers maintain others.

Carlos La Popolo, New Mexican Horse Project (Attachment 18)

NMHA does not rescue or save horses. They round up wild horses, DNA test them, and if horses have a certain level of Spanish purity, establish preserves for them. They are not sold. NMHA would like for BLM to work with them to establish a test reserve in NM. These "founding horses," descendants of the first horses brought to this country, now have the highest purity of Spanish blood found in the world. NMHA wants to set up facilities open to the public but maintained as preserves where these horses are allowed to run free. The organization researches and educates about what these horses are, where they came from, what they did for the country.

Question/Answer/Comment

- How large a population is kept on how many acres? On a 10,000-acre preserve in the Sandias there are 17. Young are sent to other preserves. This project is associated with good range management. A biologist evaluates potential preserves using worst conditions to determine how many will survive on those acres. They use the roughest land possible—which is what these horses are used to.
- These are foundation and breeding horses. NMHA is using the University of Kentucky's database (largest in the world for horses), and went to archaeological sites for horse bones dating back to the 1600s to establish DNA.
- What percentage determines level of purity? NMHA doesn't publicize that information, but BLM's highest percentage in wild horses was 66% and that wouldn't qualify. NMHA will pay for roundups, testing, and purchase, anywhere horses aren't wanted.
- NMHA has rounded up free-range horses on reservations or large ranches in NM, CO, MT, WY, and AZ. They also have places in the wild for horses that don't qualify.
- Were you involved with the Carson National Forest roundup? NMHA submitted a bid that was not accepted. They are more expensive than others because they do roundups on foot with outriders rather than by helicopter.

Bobby Jones, NM Cattlegrowers Association, Chair of the Association's Federal Lands Committee, Otero Mesa rancher

He does not think Otero Mesa should be designated wilderness. It was inventoried in 1979 and deemed unsuitable. Some of the area is ACEC, which is protection enough. The recent influx of people has also changed the nature of the area. It is intermingled land, so the burden is on ranchers to protect from trespass. Talk to the permittees in the region. They are against the proposal. Given the history of wilderness in NM, we know that it affects the county tax base and puts ranchers out of business. The land is what it is now because the local people kept it that way.

Question/Answer/Comment

- Making Otero Mesa a potential wilderness brought in more visitors, including magazine and Internet reporters. One magazine even trespassed on his property to take photos.
- We appreciate your coming up. In ranchers' examples of changes, culture makes a difference.

Jim Tarantino, Executive Director of the NM Wilderness Alliance (WA) (Attachment 19)

He said his organization represents more than 1,000 businesses. Attachments included a proposal for the Cabezon Wilderness, with support from the Mayor of Gallup, McKinley County Commission, and State Senator Linda Lopez. The WA will work next year to repeal memorials that contained falsehoods. He brought letters of proposal on Ojito from the Sandoval County Commission and Governor Richardson. He is interested in sitting down with all parties to work out a plan that accommodates all interests. He encourages and invites talk. Polls show growing support for wilderness in NM.

No wilderness legislation involving hard releases has ever been passed, so that is not a realistic possibility. Since Guadalupe Canyon, McKittrick Canyon, and Devils Den tie into the wilderness system, it's best to transfer them to the USFS. NM Tech is working on projects in the Veranito area. He encouraged the RAC to talk to community members before suggesting releases.

The WA inventoried all BLM lands in NM. He will work with the RAC on joint proposal WSAs for Little Black Peak and Carrizozo Lava Flow; and with the RAC and ranchers to release part of the proposed Cabezon area.

Question/Answer/Comment

- The WA made an inventory, not a proposal. It shows an additional 20,000 acres on the south end of the lava flow extending beyond the boundaries of the WSA that qualify for wilderness. He offered to fashion a proposal that follows the lines of the WSA, releasing the other possible land, if that brings rancher support.
- The RAC attempted mediation on Otero Mesa about a year ago. What of that? Things have changed. We need to check with other parties. The WA is willing to work something out to avoid further controversy.
- Position on soft release? That has been done, for example, the Clark County Wilderness Bill in Nevada, where it made sense. All parties came to the table, consolidated and soft released some areas. With all partners at the table, we can discuss tradeoff possibilities.
- We need to resolve increasing differences in our complex lives. There can be advantages for those who live there if we work this out well. Could we combine with all users as an advisory committee to the Governor? Jim wants a solution.
- Who takes these polls? The premier polling organization in NM, scientific, with margin of error. Read the questions. Can the NM and national polls be provided to RAC? Who do they poll? They try to reach a representative sample.
- Jim paraphrased the Governor's two-page letter stating that he opposes opening Otero Mesa to O&G development without establishment of wilderness areas, but doesn't prohibit O&G development

entirely. Jim is in frequent contact with the Governor's office to resolve Otero Mesa issues. He is looking for solutions, not to sue.

- Linda said their conversation yesterday gave her hope for resolution, but that seems gone now as release is no longer considered a possibility. She was concerned about his statement on a Little Black Peak and Carrizozo Lava Flow compromise—because he would be giving up what was not a proposed area. “Your compromise is for something you don’t have,” she said, “it was not included in the BLM inventory. You are negotiating on getting more, not on what’s been included. We have to deal in good faith with all those affected.”
- Jim reiterated that he has authority to release areas of Cabezon as well. The WA view is that WSA boundaries are starting points. A lot of time and money has gone into inventory, and historically wilderness supporters have been able to protect those additional areas. It’s best to start with little pieces. Contact him if other releases make sense.

Bob Jones, NM Cattlegrowers Association, 3rd generation rancher on Otero Mesa

He participated in the inventory for the Otero map under discussion, then went back a few years later to cooperate with the designated ACEC. There have been several attempts to run boundaries outside roads, but no area constitutes 5,000 acres without roads—mostly county roads. The families on Otero Mesa have been there for generations, sometimes on the same land. The public uses the land for various activities and locals spend a lot of time cleaning up after them. He sat on the Game Commission for nine years, dealt with hunters and developed respect for them. And he served on the BLM National Advisory Council. Wilderness’ track record is not good from rancher perspective. Ranchers feel stuck, concerned, and have worked for settlement. Local landowners should have a hold on this land because they’ve been on the land that long and taken care of it. He said it scares him when somebody wants to negotiate, because the families on the land never gain. The ranchers he represents think the area is adequately protected for most uses, and they have a good relationship with BLM. Those deciding need to know and reach what’s least destructive or harmful to residents.

Question/Answer/Comment

- What’s least destructive and harmful is important to all of us; but we’re concerned about BLM’s ability to protect the area under current circumstances.
- We want to see it protected but not as wilderness. We need a new look at what’s permissible and how to protect the resources. There’s been no problem on ACECs thus far. Most visitors are good people, and with the bad ones there’s not much you can do because it’s too large to police—whether wilderness or not. Give us consideration because we’ve maintained it for more than a hundred years.

G.B. Oliver, Western Bank, Alamogordo

Local businesses are concerned with what’s decided about Otero Mesa because ranchers there have more than \$5 million in loans and lines of credit. Western Bank is proud of its clientele and how they have taken care of their property. If our country’s concern is “clean and pristine,” it couldn’t be done better than it has been by Otero Mesa ranchers. Economic impact of changes would fall on Otero County and Alamogordo; which would like to be included in meetings planned. We are struggling. There are ways of working things out. Go down and look at those properties. Nothing could have been kept more pristine. If we are not able to work things out, we will poll our county.

Question/Answer/Comment

- The current administration's language puts ranchers in the area of collateral damage. There's conflict between people living on the land or drilling on the land. Ranchers ought to have a say in that too. "No change" is unlikely to be one of the choices. Probably the choices will be drill or protect. I have faith in these ranchers' ability to protect their land.

Caren Cowan, Executive Director, NM Cattlegrowers Association

Two memorials passed in the recent Legislature requested removing lands from WSA designation. One by Representative Madalena was signed by the Governor—although that is not a requisite. The second memorial was carried by Senator Fidel, and voted in on the Senate floor 23:1. She showed letters from Cabezon area residents opposing wilderness. The track record for economic development following wilderness designation is poor—Gila Wilderness is in Catron County, one of the poorest counties in the country. And whatever the reasons, ranchers were forced off areas around Gila Wilderness. We need to sit down and talk and then go back to the members of our organizations. She worries about bargaining with people using chips they don't own. We can't choose sides, we have to solve it for all of us. Population is growing and changes land use impacts. Her family has been ranching in NM for 119 years. We can't shut people out but don't want to be shut out either.

Question/Answer/Comment

- Reduction of cattle in the Gila illustrated livestock industry concern. We're not opposed to wilderness, but are opposed to its results on ranchers. Do you have the percentages of cattle in the Gila 20 years ago through time to now? She will get those figures, but thought an 80% reduction was probably close.
- Cattle numbers are decreasing for numerous reasons. USFS, for example, has moved out permittees under pressure from federal environmental laws. We need to keep in mind that food supply is a national security issue,
- Those two memorials went through the subcommittee system and then to the floor in both House and Senate, with proper procedure and hearings. Senator Fidel is from McKinley County, and sponsors stay in touch with their constituents.
- The wealth of our nation is in our natural resources. The forestry industry and mining have been shut down, now there's an assault on agriculture. We already import 38% of fruits and vegetables. This move to hurt agriculture through further limits to cattle grazing will make us a second-class country. US agriculture has sustained the whole world, and steps like these will have detrimental impacts that make me fear for my grandkids.

Steve Wilmer, Grant County

Steve was among the ranchers who came off the Gila, where 25 families dwindled to four; and is one of a number of Peter Schilling's grandsons who left because they had no employment. Mining and livestock could not sustain Grant County. Opportunities for employment in agriculture for young people are declining throughout the US. In five-to-seven years the US won't have a sheep industry. Australian sheep are already cheaper. Pressures from regulations are a major part of the problem. This is no longer a discussion of whether wilderness is right for us. The choice is whether to continue the surrender of agriculture.

Question/Answer/Comment

- Attrition in the sheep industry has been recognized by the US government. Navajo-owned sheep reduced from 350,000 10 years ago to less than 50,000. The change is drought and land related but

also related to how and where you slaughter them, and to regulations, for example, requiring running water and electricity in sheep camps.

- Polarization of industry is dangerous. In farming, big companies have bought out individuals, so as things change losses are greater. We need to preserve job opportunities.
- The CS Ranch in Cimarron said it was hindered not by regulations but by access to meat processors. Look at security and risk. These types of actions build risk.

Randell Major, NM Cattlegrowers Association, permittee in Cibola County

Randell's family makes its living on an allotment near El Malpais National Monument, and opposes the government taking their allotment to add to the Malpais. We should be working to keep ranchers on the land, improving the agriculture economy and helping them preserve the land in its natural state.

Question/Answer/Comment

- Two-thirds of his land is WSA, and the rest is proposed WSA, managed by the Albuquerque FO. Tom Gow thought his land was already included within the national conservation area adjoining the wilderness.
- Does wilderness designation knock off allotments? Livestock grazing is grandfathered in under the Wilderness Act, but wilderness designation restricts easements and ability to operate.
- Has there been greater visitation? Not much influx. His land is 64 miles south of Grants, and does get hunters and some bicyclists. There have been no problems with those users.
- His children can go to school in Magdalena or be home schooled.

Bebo Lee, NM Cattlegrowers Association, Otero Mesa rancher

One-and-one-half years ago Steve Capra, Director of the NM Wilderness Alliance talked to Otero Mesa residents at several meetings. They talked about O&G problems and why to oppose that development, but did not talk about a wilderness proposal. Ranchers explained that O&G was the same as hikers and birders—not a problem for ranchers. A short time later, Capra made a presentation at a RAC meeting about making that a wilderness area. The two different wilderness proposals include different things. It's confusing. If you want to stop O&G, do that. If you want wilderness, do that.

Greg Dugger, Otero Mesa resident, 5th generation NM rancher

Does wilderness designation interrupt livestock permits? He had a Lincoln NF permit handed down through his family that was taken from him. He wants to support the County Commission, state representatives and his ranching heritage and ranching neighbors. We want to condemn development of resources, but we all used resources to get here today. Otero is our home, our backyard, and hopefully our future.

The Public Comment Period was closed. (The RAC recommended using cards to show speakers the time in the future, rather than announcing it—which was startling.)

FIELD OFFICE REPORTS

Ed Roberson, Roswell FO (Attachment 20)

The FO has community meetings and works with interest groups and an advisory committee. They send out letters and post meetings on their website, but could get more response. By end of year the FO will assess how its five-year RMP is going. They want consensus on activity planning but need to know when to move on. Ed and his assistant are planners, so have always worked this way. He puts other staff into lead roles so they can understand how to work collaboratively too.

The FO is working with the 1997 OHV plan to inventory roads, limited by available staff and time. Response to the draft plan for Lincoln acquired lands is being incorporated. The FO is working with NM State Parks to pull salt cedar with a tree plucker. Prescribed burns have been successful. They are documenting before/after/over time. Raye, Leslie and Ed have had two meetings with a stakeholder group, evaluating an ACEC proposal. In response to appeal, the environmental community will ask BLM to refrain from recommendations until the stakeholder process is complete, and comments can be incorporated.

Forest Guardians has appealed the Pecos Gambusia Habitat Protection Zone decision record. It is concerned that water around seeps and springs in the Bitter Lakes Wildlife Refuge will affect unique species. BLM thinks the monitoring requirements and management proscriptions are enough protection, and it's all right to approve permits and move forward.

The pilot Vegetative Monitoring and Analysis Program allows the variety of monitoring processes currently used in NM to provide analysis and basis for prediction. The FO is working with the National Guard and COE about closing a current firing range and moving it to a better location.

Question/Answer/Comment

- Can you gauge success of salt cedar removal by monitoring water levels? Yes, and that is included in the budget planning system. Flow coming off wetlands sites where salt cedar was removed is three times what it used to be.
- Are there creative ways to find money for these special activities? Linda said the NMSO grant writer is looking at nonprofits nationally for that purpose, and for innovative projects to contract out, possibly through trade. The Energy Bill makes that possible, and the Governor's buy-in would help. It's not sensible to spend taxpayer dollars in the same area collected. We want ranchers to benefit from these efforts.
- The Nature Conservancy is working with Linda.
- It wasn't known whether new salt cedars would sprout after existing ones are pulled out.

Len Brooks, Las Cruces FO (Attachment 21)

Unique to the Las Cruces FO are: international border issues that require care in planning, numerous military entities, a large NASA facility, and White Sands National Monument. Scoping is an ongoing process as planning occurs, not an event.

The Otero Mesa process has taken longer than hoped (five years) but there's good in that too, for example, extensive public contacts. Issues necessarily develop. The wilderness proposal came out only recently, consequently, another element must be considered. Even doing an outstanding job doesn't preclude a lengthy process.

Land use revisions are scheduled to be funded for a 2004 start. The FO works extensively with officials from Dona Ana, Las Cruces and Sierra counties. The majority of issues lie with Las Cruces County, particularly because of population growth. The FO will have notice of intent out in October and a preplan together shortly thereafter for approval by Washington. The best land use planning process varies according to specifics of locale, so it's good to concentrate on the preplan. The FO is bringing in an environmental consulting firm to define the preplan. Exciting changes in past years, for example, GIS and electronic communication, enhance the mechanics of the land planning process.

Question/Answer/Comment

- Our aging workforce means loss of staff knowledge of landscape and people that is not computerizable. Is there interest in capturing that institutional memory? USFS recently dealt with this in addressing fire expertise. Hiring retired annuitants on contract is one remedy. That could be extended.

- The Cuchillo Negro Spring development has been there for 150 years but water rights were filed seven miles downstream at a point of diversion, so the work they plan on the spring—on public lands—implies that the spring rather than the diversion is the source of the right. Implications are out of the well-defined arena.
- The FO plans to have the final EIS on Otero Mesa out by end of summer.

Kate Padilla, Socorro FO (Attachment 22)

Kate distributed photos of construction of the El Camino Real International Heritage Center, which the FO is waiting for funds to exhibit. Don Tripp brought about legislative funding of \$25,000 for the Center, with more than \$1 million to follow, and opportunity for economic revenues.

BLM met extensively with interested tribes and the Salt River Project to finalize and implement a treatment plan for Traditional Cultural Properties associated with the Fence Lake Coal Project. The FO expects to work with tribes for the next five years to recover burial sites. The federal government signed a permit that includes stipulation that the mining company use water from the Atarke formation, not the Dakota formation. Zuni Pueblo is testing the Atarke to show it's connected to the Dakota. The miners say it is not, and the Mines and Mineral Service is reviewing findings.

Question/Answer/Comment

- The actual Camino Real is not near the center, which was located where the 5,000-acre view gives people a feel for the past. The trail is within sight below on Ted Turner's Ranch.

REPORT ON OTHER WESTERN STATES' RAC PROJECTS

Crestina Trujillo Armstrong

- AZ is working on planning, standards and guidelines, wildlife and burros, recreation and tourism. It has a public relations committee.
- UT is working on recreation guidelines, particularly OHV use. It wants to revise RMPs. Fuels and fires are the biggest issue.
- Northwest CO is getting a new president. Its philosophy is that ranchers are good stewards and closet environmentalists. The RAC is working on recreation guidelines, and through committees getting communities more involved. It came up with a set of guidelines that is more understandable, and is working with USFS to better coordinate. Southwest CO has a RAC whose representative Crestina spoke to a while back.
- Crestina will go to Washington DC for the national RAC meeting in April, will visit with Western RAC representatives and report back to the next NM RAC meeting.

Question/Answer/Comment

- Crestina has offered our *Standards & Guidelines* to other RACs with no response.
- It is difficult to stay in touch, but would be good to have at least the 4-Corners representatives get together.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

Range Improvements Subcommittee (Attachment 23)

John Hand spoke about range management, the beetle problem and thinning projects. Can permittees thin on their own, supervised by BLM? What about cost share, donating grazing fees? Trees would be healthier if there were fewer. Is the Roswell biomass plant on Indian land? No, it is part of the wood shavings plant, a demo project used to run the lights. Cuba HS has a grant with BLM and

USFS to power the HS. One demo John has seen used little water. This needs to be explored. Environmental clearance has been an issue. None can be competitive without tax credits from state and federal government, so can't compete if they have to put up their own infrastructure. Public is paying for it one way or another, as with wind generation. Clearing brush is a continuing obstacle.

Concerning funding possibilities, the NM Legislature created a Wildlife Partnership Fund, and Robyn is working with nine statewide projects involving some treatments, using grants as seed money to get people started—leading to NRCS and other programs, plus larger grants from nonprofits.

Dennis Braden reviewed the extent of problems statewide with pinon/juniper, salt cedar and sage removal. The cost in equipment, supplies and manpower statewide is enormous. Archaeological clearance is also a major challenge in certain areas. John said costs indicate this would never get done without permittee cooperation. Reserve has an experimental machine that drives over thinned materials up to 6" and makes sawdust, so there is nothing to clean up.

Linda said BLM is looking at lots of ways to get things done, including trade, cost of new-technology equipment, etc. BLM is interested in monitoring studies to show impact, including effect on water flow.

Ad Hoc Wilderness Committee

Cliff posted maps and his list of Wilderness Bill possibilities, hoping for unifying characteristics that the RAC could propose to carry things along. He pointed out locations, broadly distributed across several counties. There is no agreement on Otero Mesa facts or desirable outcome. Even the starting points for discussion are significantly different. Going back to the RMP, they considered trades; and finally looked at the Jornada and Little Black Peak to make some progress. What do the anti-wilderness people get in return? Does the RAC belong in or have anything to contribute to this discussion? The committee decided that it does not.

Question/Answer/Comment

- Who constitutes the "expert" on wilderness? Will all those experts come to the table? BLM has done what it is charged to do. Someone with will and finances is needed to bring it about.
- BLM will respond to proposals, hopefully resulting in two maps that are closer together. Then the RAC might reenter the process.
- Linda: Dave Mensing ran through a draft recommendation for responding to citizen proposals. We will accept new information from anyone. With previous inventory data and what's provided as others' data, BLM will determine whether anything has changed. In areas where there has been change, new action may be taken. BLM does what is mandated and members of the public do what they are philosophically behind. There may never be agreement. It is unlikely that the Legislature will step in unless consensus is reached.

Raye reiterated that the subcommittee attempted to find small pieces as starting blocks but couldn't. He asked what other issues the subcommittee might look at.

Suggestions

- Look at the September Charter revision.
- Look at inholdings, for example, on the Hughes Brothers Ranch.
- We may not be ready to take action at this time.

Urban Interface/Community Involvement Subcommittee (Attachment 24)

Tony reported that he would write a proposal for discussion and voting at the next meeting. He requested input on the documents he distributed addressing public involvement in the RMP process.

The gist of his proposal is: include work sessions or work groups in both formulation of alternatives in draft RMPs and selection of preferred alternatives.

Linda clarified that identification of the preferred alternative happens at the time of the draft. She asked for guidelines on managing alternatives. The RAC requested copies of Tony's proposal before the next meeting.

Question/Answer/Comment

- Raye recommended that BLM give public notice that it is involved in review, and then notify the public when decisions are reached. People will know they've been heard; and will not associate BLM with the WA.
- Once approved at the next meeting, RAC minutes go on the website, which takes three months. FOs would like to receive minutes earlier.
- Some recommended that Cliff work on Ojito, which BLM has found suitable and has little controversy. There is agreement between Zia Pueblo and the WA. Linda met with Senator Domenici about Ojito, and he asked, "What will we get in return?"
- Robyn will draft a letter to those who made public comment at this and the January meeting, to clarify the RAC's afternoon conversation, to say that we couldn't reach consensus on the releasing, designating, public involvement or process of WSAs.
- Wilderness won't go away, and we will keep hearing from the public about it, but the RAC needs to go on to other things.

Proposed June Meeting Agenda

- Tony's two proposals
- Range Improvements Subcommittee information for discussion leading to recommendation from RAC
- BLM presentation on stewardship, probably Ron Dunton
- Linda recently gave Senator Bingaman a briefing on pinon, etc., with university and USFS specialists. She will attempt to bring them to RAC to give stewardship and range management presentations.
- Biomass input, for example, how complete removal of trees affects soil nutrient cycle. There are two kinds of chips, clean and dirty. Biomass needs clean chips of a certain size. USFS is chipping and leaving onsite, which creates acid and a layer that could burn. Technology is not yet appropriate. Max is working with a group using chips for growing mushrooms, then recycling it as sheep and goat feed.
- USDA/USFS may have outreach materials for projects they're doing in this area.

Meeting adjourned.

/s/ Robyn Tierney
RAC Chairperson