

**Summary Minutes**  
**NEW MEXICO RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL**  
**June 4-6, 2003**  
**Ruidoso**

**RAC Members Present:**

Crestina Trujillo Armstrong  
Larry Baker  
Max Cordova  
Mike Eisenfeld  
Cliff Larsen  
Raye Miller  
Anthony Popp  
Jerry Ryburn  
Gretchen Sammis  
Robyn Tierney  
Don Tripp

**RAC Members Absent:**

Dennis Braden  
William Buss  
John Hand  
Joe Stell

**Designated Federal Official:**

Linda Rundell

**Honorary Chairperson:**

Sally Rodgers

**BLM Staff:**

Bob Alexander, NMSO  
Ron Dunton, NMSO  
Thomas Gow, Albuquerque FO  
Theresa Herrera, NMSO  
Ron Huntsinger, Taos FO  
Mark Lane, Socorro FO  
Amy Lueders, Las Cruces FO  
Sarah Naranjo, Socorro FO  
Ed Roberson, Roswell FO  
Ray Sanchez, Farmington FO  
Hans Stuart, NMSO  
Leslie Theiss, Carlsbad FO

**Scribe:**

Karen Meadows

**JUNE 4                      FIELD TRIP**

The Roswell Field Office hosted the field trip. RAC members attending: Crestina Armstrong, Jerry Ryburn, Gretchen Sammis, Tony Popp, Joe Stell, Raye Miller and Don Tripp. BLM employees attending: Linda Rundell, Tom Gow, Ron Dunton, Hans Stuart, Ed Singleton, Ray Sanchez, Ron Huntsinger, Ed Roberson, Tim Kreager, Howard Parman, Mike Bilbo, Dan Baggo and Alan Weingard. Sally Rodgers, State Designated Official also attended.

The field trip consisted of the following sites:

SBS Wood Shavings in Glencoe. Sherry and Glen Barrow are owners of SBS Wood Shavings. Sherry Barrow conducted the tour of their bio-mass operation. The Barrows convert low-value forest wood into shavings. These high quality shavings are used for animal bedding. Also, SBS is one of seven demonstration sites chosen to install and evaluate a biopower system called BioMax 15. The system is fully automated and environmental friendly and uses forest residue to produce electricity and heat suitable for small enterprises, rural homes and schools.

Fort Stanton Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). Mike Bilbo led the group on a tour of Fort Stanton ACEC. He discussed BLM's working in partnership with the community to manage and protect the 1855 Fort and its resources. Additionally, Field Office representatives discussed the fuels reduction projects, BLM's first riparian show case area and watershed improvement activities.

Lincoln State Monument. Dee Kessler, Manager of the Lincoln State Monument, led the group on a walking tour of historic Lincoln.

Fort Stanton Cave. Mike Bilbo led the group through Fort Stanton Cave. Fort Stanton Cave is the largest known cave within the Fort Stanton ACEC and third longest cave in New Mexico. Mike discussed some of the challenges BLM faces in protecting the cave.

## **JUNE 5                      RAC MEETING**

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

Robyn called the meeting to order and welcomed RAC members. She introduced Governor Richardson's representative, Sally Rodgers. Sally said she is pleased to be part of the RAC, and considers it a wonderful learning opportunity. She is a state environmental ombudsman with the NM Department of Energy, Minerals & Natural Resources. Her family includes dairymen, ranchers and farmers. She's been a horse breeder and worked in state government, with a lifelong interest in natural resources.

Ed Roberson welcomed participants to the Roswell FO area. He referred to the SBS wood shavings facility in Glencoe, built around the concept of broadening use of wood byproducts with funds available from technical and academic resources. (Attachment 1)

Linda welcomed participants and said she's enjoying getting to know RAC members better. She introduced Hans Stuart, NMSO Chief of External Affairs, former BLM and wildlife worker—who will be doing proactive outreach. She said the Secretary of the Interior wrote a letter to several members of Congress on how to deal with WSAs, based on settlement of a lawsuit with Utah. Although the decision is not binding on other states, it will become agency policy. There is no overall WSA guidance or policy yet; but she expects to know more by the next RAC meeting.

Also out of Utah has come an agreement on how to handle public road claims—RS 2477—that will become a template for other states. Guidance and policy will be forthcoming.

Bob Alexander's presentation at the last RAC meeting on *Grazing Policies to Enhance Conservation Performance*—the kinds of changes needed to support the Sustaining Working Landscapes Initiative (SWLI)—received many critical comments from NM and other Western states. BLM was criticized for disorganization, and for moving too quickly. Use of the word “voluntary” was questioned. The fact that “tools were described but not where they were going” was criticized. In future, Bob thinks BLM will try to describe where such efforts are going.

Linda said there is discussion in the Washington office about working with RACs to address the SWLI.

Robyn asked for feedback on what's been transpiring in the past three months. Raye said verbiage about multiple substructure groups might be deleted in order to shorten the Charter, because many of those tiers have not been used. The Washington office recommends an ethics provision, and a clause for dealing with potential conflicts of interest. And no one seems to want to have more than one NM RAC.

Members of the RAC introduced themselves.

### **APPROVAL OF AGENDA (Attachment 2)**

John Selkirk replaced J.W. Whitney to present the Fire and Fuels Management Plan Amendment. There was discussion on whether to have another RAC meeting before the end of the fiscal year. Washington is reviewing 13 applications for RAC membership, anticipating selection of five new members no sooner than October. Election of officers was dropped; so Review of the RAC Charter was moved to Thursday at 3:45.

Motion

Tony moved to accept the agenda with the proposed changes. Gretchen seconded. Motion approved.

**APPROVAL OF RAC MINUTES FROM SOCORRO, APRIL 3-4, 2003 (Attachment 3)**

Motion

Crestina moved to approve the minutes as presented. Tony seconded. Motion approved.

**WATERSHED REHABILITATION AND MANAGEMENT IN THE SOUTHWEST**

**Sid Goodloe, Rancher**

Sid asked participants what NM's most important natural resource is, and affirmed that it is water. He served on the RAC and knows it influences BLM policy. He hoped what he had to say would help with on-the-ground vegetation management. Watersheds in the West are in terrible shape, with invasions in woodlands and grasslands, and over-population of woodlands. Human population is growing exponentially and calls for drastic adjustment of vegetation. The invaders and population growth are rapidly affecting water. Demand for water in Lincoln County will outstrip supply even if invasions of water-hungry plants were stopped right now. Sid wishes the USFS had a RAC, since most high precipitation areas are on USFS land.

Watersheds aren't producing the flow they should. This is different from past times of surviving drought because of the tremendous demographic shift as well as invasive water-hungry species. He has ranched for 48 years in a pinon/juniper ponderosa ecosystem about 30 miles from Ruidoso; and uses "cowboy research."

Public land management of high precipitation areas has been primarily custodial in past years. He showed comparative photos across time from 1900 to the 1990s. One significant change is juniper invasion. Juniper roots affect land in a circle 40 feet out from their trunks, depriving grass of nutrients and moisture, resulting in erosion. The one-seed juniper has a palatable seed about the size of a bee-bee, which birds drop. Alligator pinon seeds are about marble size, and spread by larger animals including cattle, horses, coyotes and turkey.

From 1990-2000, Lincoln County's population increased 59%. Sid is concerned over the demise of family ranching, which includes the privilege of raising children where they can develop a work ethic—affecting the country's future leadership. Animals don't know when it's a holiday, he said. They have to be taken care of.

Ranchers' extra 40 acres are their 401K plan. BLM needs to be concerned about that because if base property is taken away from permittees, it gets developed. Where is this leading us?

- Water flow in the Pecos River is down 30%.
- One hundred 6-inch diameter junipers per acre use 9 inches of annual precipitation.
- Woody species are less efficient water users for production of biomass.

Causes of Western Watershed Deterioration:

- settlement from high to low precipitation
- excessive livestock
- yearlong grazing
- land claim procedures
- priorities—conquering mood that doesn't understand the land
- fire suppression by Euro-forestry management (He recommended reading about the 1910 fire.)
- Smokey the Bear syndrome—all fires are bad/all trees are good
- Subdivisions

Watersheds Can be Returned to Productivity by:

- knowing goals—pre-settlement or “climax” conditions
- vegetation management using prescribed fire, mechanical or chemical treatments
- marketing the off-take (firewood, fence posts and vigas) to pay for rehabilitation
- holistic management of wildlife and livestock
- sustainable (rotational) grazing methods

Mechanical treatments, like disturbing soil with a caterpillar, facilitate seed growth, so Sid follows with native seed. Leave wildlife habitat. Use dead trees to kill live trees—push slash up against thickets and set them on fire. A USFS demonstration project at Carrizozo did experimental chaining of brush (not pinon) followed by burning.

We need to be able to treat larger areas. To catch up, trees need to be large enough, and soil moisture is necessary. Results improve water storage and infiltration. One area was chained, seeded, and chained in other direction. It was burned when the grass was green. Native seed was used, and after two years the area was returned to productive grassland.

Junipers do not decompose. Animals deposit seeds, so growth continues. Ponderosa removal takes hand grubbing and fire. The problem is 80-90 years of buildup, so prescribed burns are dangerous but must be done. We are aiming for open woodland with grass that holds the soil and infiltrates water. University of AZ tree-ring data shows that historically Western forests burned about every 10 years. In conditions of 30-mph wind, 75-80 degree temperature and about 6% humidity, get out of the way. Those fires kill everything and are followed by unbelievable erosion. This is a different type of fire than in the past, “gasoline” rather than "asbestos" fires.

We can no longer afford to sit and watch continued watershed deterioration. In the past year, 52% of all autos sold in the US were SUVs. BLM needs to change its open-roads policy. Protect watersheds with restricted access, selective thinning, short-duration grazing, and the correct kind of cattle—particularly Alpine Black. Riparian areas cannot be successfully rehabilitated and maintained without first solving the problems in the watershed above.

Question/Answer/Comment

- What has been accomplished in the past two years? Increase in both interest and knowledge. Need to get around appeals, lawsuits, NEPA, etc., but the ball is beginning to roll.
- Healthy Forest Initiative is more than a handout to loggers.
- The Southern Rockies Agricultural Land Trust is meant to protect family ranching and open space. Some people think government will then control the land. That thinking process is the same as thinking the Forest Initiative is for loggers.
- Need to generate electricity with biomass. Have to make it pay. It’s coming, but takes time. Public land agencies are undertaking projects.
- Sagebrush, mesquite, creosote, etc., are doing the same thing. Private landowners are taking steps. Sid’s been doing this for more than 30 years, and things are improving.
- Misconception that this work is final, rather than cyclic. It’s never-ending. Sid goes back every five years. Can drop a pellet on a tree. Need to program in money for maintenance. USFS has maintenance funds.
- Is re-burning effective? Yes, but pellets give an option. Alligator juniper is very hard to kill with fire. During current conditions all fires are prohibited. Sid burns when grass is green and soil moist; burns ponderosa in fall when humidity is up and nights are colder. Never start a fire before 3-4 p.m.
- Is this approach economically feasible? Very difficult, but possible, because he worked on a cost-share program with NRCS. Hunting income contributes, so wildlife habitat is part of his goal.
- The cattle business ought to be designated 501(c)(3), because it is nonprofit. On public lands, money has to come from somewhere.

- Savanna is desirable for humans and wildlife—esthetically, ecologically and economically.
- Other uses besides co-generation? Shavings and bark for plants. The Mescalero Tribe has retooled its mill for smaller trees. Companies are making juniper signs, and extracting juniper oil. If government subsidizes, it should be spent on transportation to mills.
- There are new techniques for using small-diameter timber on the horizon, including two pilot projects in Northern NM using technology from Europe and Brazil.
- Are Cattlegrowers' Association members and fellow ranchers accepting? After many years of being considered “Pyro Goodloe,” Sid is gaining support. These techniques are economically beneficial. When they see his ranch, they change their tune.

## **FIELD OFFICE ACCESS ISSUES**

### **Roswell FO, Ed Roberson (Attachment 1)**

The booklet Ed distributed at the beginning of the meeting has a copy of the plan he signed two years ago on Ft. Stanton, with a section on recreation trails and access. On page 216, there is a map of existing roads and proposed closures, and proposed and existing trails. Roswell FO has problems with both too much and too little access. Sometimes the public can be directed, but sometimes private land stands in the way. Land exchanges have helped, but as protestors said at a RAC meeting two years ago, access has been denied in some traditional hunting areas. Many counties have committees that review potential road closures. Since road maintenance is expensive, counties may favor closure. Some agreements have been made with the county for BLM to take over maintenance. Roswell FO works to get potential protestors to county meetings to provide their viewpoint. Three-party exchanges or purchases from willing sellers are a good solution

The Ft. Stanton issue was too-much access. Steps were taken to relieve pressure for those lands. Ranchers call when OHVs are in non-designated areas, and BLM enforces.

On the Corn Ranch at Cedar Hill, for example, hunting with small OHVs over the years has torn the watershed to shreds. The ranch family presented its issues to the RAC four years ago, and the Roswell FO began a series of public meetings culminating in road closure. The Ft. Stanton plan was completed two years ago after a slow and painful process. It designated routes of travel and closed areas that led into cultural sites or were causing erosion. The horse corral site visited during the RAC field trip provides access to more than 20,000 acres of public land.

### **Question/Answer/Comment**

- It's a dynamic process. Will some of these roads need to be closed in future? Yes, there is a 5-year review. The western end of Ft. Stanton has a proliferation of subdivisions, leading to trespassing and vandalism. The ranger there spends a lot of time educating people on the land. Minor amendments to the plan can be taken, like erecting barriers.
- When the Assistant Secretary visited recently, Sid spoke about public support for closing more areas. We need to educate the people above us too.
- Route designation and the ACEC are to be completed by September, and will go on the website.
- The prairie chicken meeting recently was very lively. It got to the point of discussing practices to address threats and improve conditions for creatures in that habitat. The next meeting, June 26 and 27 in Portales, will focus on solutions. BLM will point out critical habitat on maps, with recommendations. Stakeholders encourage moving more rapidly. The National High Plains Partnership is a collaborative group making proposals to Washington on multi-species issues. They're looking for projects to fund, and Roswell FO projects may be right for them. The FO plans to have a conservation strategy by August, with a funding proposal for federal legislators.
- The ACEC proposal is not from the prairie chicken group, but from an interdisciplinary team that will wait to see the outcome and consider how that affects the ACEC. There was confusion that the

meeting was about the ACEC; and many were there to vent to BLM. Have to sort out what the group is and its goal.

- The prairie chicken group has expanded, and educating new participants is a challenge. There was misunderstanding and disruption at the last meeting. The next meeting will bring in the NM Farm & Livestock Bureau, and include a public evening event. People will be educated then, separate from the recommendation-making process.
- Except for one representative, the environmental side has, by choice, not been actively involved since the first meeting.

**Carlsbad FO, Leslie Theiss (Attachment 4)**

Leslie said it was very important to have the public comment meeting in Carlsbad. Many constituents feel very strongly, so it is important that they be involved in the process.

Most of Carlsbad (90%) has open access. There are access problems in the boot heel of Chaves County with an active hunting population. She referred to a map where access issues were identified, including an area near Carlsbad Caverns. The FO has not taken a close look at access in those areas, but will with its RMP process beginning in October. An upcoming road inventory will bring further attention to access. An engineering tech is putting together a work plan.

**Question/Answer/Comment**

- There is no database.
- When the county closes a road, can it give an easement so that BLM maintains it? BLM attends hearings about potential road closures but Leslie wasn't sure about use of easements. County budgets call for lower maintenance funding.
- Hope RAC recommendations on roads and trails will be applied during planning. Start planning now. Include working groups. Inventory.
- The land to be received in the proposed land exchange is good. Appraisals depend on source. Mississippi Potash needs that land, which makes it very valuable. The original proposal was 1 acre received for 3 acres exchanged. The FO still hasn't received an appraisal, and Mississippi Potash is going through bankruptcy procedures.
- Linda said that as a rule BLM gets more land than it gives, sometimes 10-20 acres for 1. An analysis 4-5 years ago of the rate of exchange showed that government agencies were acquiring more than they gave up.
- There is no state or federal regulation dealing with reclamation of potash lands, so land given is a sacrifice.
- This company has been in business for many years. The byproducts are hazardous to move. BLM is doing its best with a bad situation. Many issues are involved.
- The proposed exchange might be best for the public because we know the company won't reclaim that land.

**Las Cruces FO, Amy Lueders (Attachment 5)**

Las Cruces FO has a mechanism to address lands being too open. But processes to address inadequate access are more difficult. Staff has identified access concerns for a little more than 1/4 of a million acres, approximately 5% of the public lands managed by the FO. Sportsmen groups, particularly during hunting season, show the most concern—80%. Current access problems, like locked gates, are one level of problems. Others are emerging access issues being addressed through easements, exchanges, and working with counties. They look at building roads, which takes money and other resources, or may be impossible because of terrain and private ownership. The FO is now prioritizing issues and addressing them one at a time. Growing problems: 1) change in ownership brings gates and locks; 2) more people = greater impact. Access is politically charged with strong vocal interest on all

sides. Solutions take a long time. The FO prevailed in court action over the Soledad Canyon exchange, but that was a clear-cut case. And litigation is the last choice.

**Question/Answer/Comment**

- Soledad Canyon is a property in the Organ Mountains where landowners put up a gate in a BLM easement, and locked out the public. The FO negotiated with a magistrate judge to resolve the issue, then went to court. The judge issued a restraining order with a 21-page decision strongly worded in BLM favor. The gates are open but not down.

**Farmington FO, Ray Sanchez (Attachment 6)**

Farmington access is tempered with more than 15,000 miles of O&G infrastructure. There has been controversy and disruption, but primarily there has been alternative access. So access is a small problem at present, despite certain areas of dispute.

**Question/Answer/Comment**

- There is seasonal closure for wildlife. The FO wildlife biologist identified special management areas for migratory big game—winter range for elk and mule deer. Gates with combination locks were set up, with limited access to public while accommodating O&G and water vehicles. Industry is protesting additional closures.
- A slew of nationally-advertised rock crawling events have brought 5,000-15,000 spectators to recent events. What’s the long-term planning for such events? Moab, UT, has implemented fee areas. Resource issues become greater as the city gets closer to the Glade. What will BLM do? These are permitted events, requiring a process. There has been public input.
- The five-page EA does not address cumulative effects and does not appear to include public input. What can we do?
- These events bring in a great deal of money for the organizers. BLM gets 3%, but it goes into the general treasury.
- Three percent counts. These users are owners of that land too.
- Linda suggested hooking Rich Simmons up with Michael Eisenfeld to talk about this.
- Mike has already spoken with Rich. He remains concerned that Farmington is becoming well known as an OHV area. Bringing that many people in is problematic. Health, safety and density issues arise and should be evaluated more astutely.
- The enforcement ranger who spoke at the last RAC meeting in Farmington mentioned inadequacy of resources for breadth of use. We need to be able to run it properly.
- Linda said BLM would analyze making the Glade a fee demonstration area.
- It is positive that it brings in revenue, but also calls for better management by those protecting public lands. Irresponsible users can create incredible long-lasting damage.
- The RAC has several times recommended institution of a California-style fee structure. Don Tripp said the bill will come up again in the State Legislature and if no one else sponsors it, he will.
- Linda repeated that BLM would look at the Glade for instituting a fee demonstration area. But we should not expect OHV users to pay for what they’re impacting. It seems best to let them continue in areas already in use, rather than encouraging proliferation by imposing fees or limitations. However, where fees are paid, people do seem to be better campers.
- Farmington FO sells more than 3,500 permits annually for firewood cutting.
- In summation, multiple use dilemmas are rearing in Farmington, especially associated with the Glade. Discussion continued.
- Linda said we have to contain these impacts by providing areas where the users cause the least damage. Irresponsible public is a greater problem than we can get our hands around. People need education and containment.

- In-fill drilling for the low productivity area of the Fruitland coal formation was authorized by the state Oil Conservation Division in October 2002. Is BLM prepared to deal with compliance issues with the increase in well density? This is a riparian corridor with high-density population. If a decision is made to accommodate in-fill in the high-productivity area of the formation known as the “Fairway,” there will be a strong response. Without resources, BLM will have difficulty.
- Barry Adams is compiling a report addressing concerns of the Joint Task Force on Terrorism. Farmington is considered the #2 target nationally after the Alaska pipeline. It’s a work in progress.

**Taos FO, Ron Huntsinger (Attachment 7)**

Taos has the same problems already discussed. About 60,000 acres have access problems, mostly associated with WSAs, but landowners have been cooperative. Too much access is a greater problem, because of expanding population and OHV use. Taos is a hunting destination, which is becoming more problematic as hunters bypass barriers. The FO is working closely with NM State Police, Department of Game & Fish and USFS. They have issued a number of citations for violations. Need to maintain focus on the issue. The FO is working with a crawl club after finding out about an area on public land that it developed. The FO discovered the development when usage increased in response to an article in a nationally distributed journal. Increased usage might impinge on a neighboring WSA.

Use is expanding in areas adjacent to Espanola, Taos and Santa Fe, particularly by kids on OHVs. The FO has an inventory, but it’s changing rapidly. They are working with Espanola and Santa Fe organizations to identify areas needing maintenance, and establish management of use. Education is needed. Regulation is unrealistic, because of safety issues, not enough resources, etc. The FO wants to identify an area where OHV use is appropriate, plan with the community, and then close other areas to that use. Ron spoke to RAC members who live in the Taos area about forming a subcommittee to address FO management; and they are very interested. The FO is also working on a grassbank, and with Rio Arriba County on its plan.

**Question/Answer/Comment**

- Cerrillos Hills County Park, which includes BLM land, opened over Memorial Day. What’s the timing on the plan to close some of the open roads in that area?
- No specific time. Complex land ownership. Planning an effort like this will probably take about 18 months. The FO worked with the County Commission and landowners on management of the park and ongoing planning. There is now a fixed plan, so BLM can do its EA and plan modification.
- Disappointed to read that the regional land fill plan for Rio Arriba County was scrapped. Could BLM take a lead?
- The plan was not “scrapped.” Planners are going back to other potential sites after the first one was not accepted by local people. The county needs new procedures for trash pickup. Now, besides illegal dumping, people put out bags along the highway and the bags break, so trash is scattered.
- In addition to loss of pinon, juniper and shrubs—particularly sagebrush—are dying. Some of it is drought, but there seem to be other vectors as well. The FO hopes to use some of the vegetation approach Sid Goodloe described.
- Where sagebrush is dying, Western wheat grass is coming up. The seed source in the soil is still viable. That’s great news. Let’s take advantage of what nature is doing.
- Picuris and Taos Pueblos have been invited to meetings.

**Albuquerque FO, Thomas Gow (Attachment 8)**

Albuquerque has all the issues heard so far plus:

- One access route was kept in the land exchange with San Felipe Pueblo.
- Along the Continental Divide National Trail in the Rio Puerco basin, hikers sometimes wander onto private land.

- The cultural issue of livestock drives is being addressed. Highway 550 has widened and the speed limit is 75 mph, so BLM asked NM Highway Department to make a new bridge high enough so a rider on horseback can go under it.
- The bulldozer on a WSA was removed.
- There is a proliferation of locked gates during hunting season.
- Big B Mesa is affected by a permittee. BLM had an access route approved by the county, but the owner locked it.
- Lindrith O&G routes are being inventoried.
- The Ignacio Chavez Grant land is seasonally closed.
- The public has requested designated areas for OHVs.

**Question/Answer/Comment**

- Albuquerque FO provided assistance to Amarillo FO. Spraying salt cedar in TX is done via OHV. Some will be cut and sprayed, some just sprayed.

**FIRE & FUELS MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT/ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

**John Selkirk** (Attachment 9)

Robyn asked the RAC to read and respond to the attachment addressed to Signa Larralde about public input on the BLM Fire & Fuels Management Plan Amendment/Environmental Assessment. She encouraged RAC members to stay in communication with Signa Larralde and BLM. It's our opportunity to insist on an environmentally sensitive approach, she said.

John said 2000 was a watershed year for fire and fuels management, leading to changes in public and congressional interest, and to the National Fire Plan—which is a conglomeration of policies. The 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy & Program Review led to a 2001 revision, the National Fire Plan and the 2003 Healthy Forest Initiative. Many policies prior to 2000 are obsolete. For example, emphasis on fire management was unique. With that in mind, existing BLM RMPs do not adequately address fire impacts, fuel reduction treatments or the use of wildland fires for resource benefit. Fire plans in RMPs must be updated by September 2004. Nine plans will be amended in a consolidated effort to achieve consistency, and to reflect what is being done today and will be done in the future. They will make it possible to implement the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (1995, 2001 Update). Some RMPs are 10 years old, and may be self-limiting or silent on fuel reduction, etc. Land will be divided into units. Fire management objectives will be identified. Objectives will be measurable, and RMPs will include prescriptive criteria.

**Fire Management Categories**

- a) Areas where fire is not desired at all
- b) Areas where unplanned wildfire is not desired
- c) Areas where wildland fire is desired, but there are significant constraints
- d) Areas where wildland fire is desired and there are few or no constraints

Fire management categories would be based on ecosystems and fire management objectives, with attention to socioeconomic factors. Fires would still be managed with a tightly controlled plan including contingencies, limits and precise steps.

**Proposed Action**

- Delineate fire management units a) through d)
- Identify broad vegetation treatments, including prescribed fire
- Identify general restrictions of fire management practices
- Amend nine RMPs to comply with the updated Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy



- Areas recently thinned or logged (especially with poor slash management)

Pine beetles cycle through every 15 years or so. Most trees taken out are in mixed conifer areas, lowering diversity. We are concentrating on the ips beetles because they have a higher reproductive potential than other beetles, up to 4-5 generations/year.

#### Ips Bark Beetles:

- live under the bark of host trees
- are a natural component of forest ecosystems
- fill an ecological role to weed out stressed or damaged trees
- generally breed in slash, but will attack trees weakened by drought, competition, fire, etc.

They are tiny and attack trees in great numbers, breeding and developing under the bark, forming galleries as they transition from egg to larva to pupa to adult. They feed on the tree cambium. They hibernate, mostly as adults, November through March. The red trees we see probably no longer host beetles, because they've moved on to green trees. The mass attack kills tree in two ways: introducing blue stain fungus that blocks water-conducting tubules; and feeding on nutrient-rich inner bark.

#### This Outbreak is:

- Spectacular and often occurs over large landscapes—over 4 million trees have been killed in NM. The ips beetle will only attack pinon, not ponderosa, with a mortality rate of nearly 100%. There may be pinon seedlings under these trees that will emerge when drought ends.
- Historically, outbreaks in the SW have been short-lived, lasting from 3-7 years.
- Even though millions of beetles took flight this spring, they might have died for lack of hosts. Aerial surveys on federal lands beginning July 5 will tell more.

#### Causes and Scope of Current Outbreak:

- The last major outbreak recorded in NM occurred during the mid-1950s drought. After that we moved into very wet decades.
- In 2000, ips-caused tree mortality was spotty and scattered, with landscape-level mortality first observed in 2002. Outbreaks are occurring through the entire Southwest, including CA.

These trees are dying because they shouldn't be here. At the turn of the 19th century these areas were savannas with grasses and some pinon/juniper. During wet decades pinon/juniper populated areas they shouldn't have been in. People are scared and don't like this because it affects property values.

The base year for this change would be the time of European settlement, when we changed the West as we settled. Before that, natural fires burned until they ran out of fuel or were put out by rain or snow. After settlement, ranches and towns lobbied Congress to do something so their homes and lands wouldn't be burned. The fledgling USFS took on the role of fire suppression.

Terry showed a graph and aerial survey map of trees affected by bark beetles. The loss of both pinon (600,000 acres) and ponderosa (80,000 acres) increases. Drought is the main reason.

The AZ five-spined ips has decimated ponderosa forests, but is not found in NM. It has attacked lower-elevation ponderosa where there was little or no monsoon or snowpack.

We could not have stopped this. We might have been able to mitigate it with thinning and fire, but our hands are tied. Private landowners could only have watered their pet trees.

#### Management Considerations:

- Green slash greater than 3" in diameter is breeding habitat.

- Successfully-attacked trees cannot be saved. Even with green tops, those with sawdust and pitch tubes indicate loss.
- Infested wood should be burned, removed from host type, or (as a last resort) solarized under clear plastic. Put black plastic on the ground, cut wood into 3-4' lengths, stack 3-4' high. Bury the edges of the plastic.
- If trees have not yet been attacked, they can be protected by spraying trunks and all branches greater than 3" in diameter.
- Control is labor-intensive and expensive.
- Fresh chips may attract the ips beetle.
- New technologies may help, for example, mechanical thinning, a technique that takes down trees and produces very small chips that are widely distributed. Those chips would dry out quickly and not draw ips beetles.

#### Preventing Bark Beetle Outbreaks:

- When possible, conduct forest thinning later in the year, from late July-December.
- Monitor green slash and standing trees, especially during drought.
- If cutting during warm months in late spring and summer, treat the slash. Green slash greater than 3" in diameter is breeding habitat.
- Aggressively remove infested green and fading trees in high value areas.

#### USFS Current Efforts

- Supplemental sketch-mapping flights
- Evaluation of satellite imagery (FS Remote Sensing Applications Center—not funded)
- Protection of high value trees in recreation sites using insecticide (short-term) and thinning (long-term). Treating trunks and branches protects for one year.
- Bark Beetle Communication Plan (Attachment 11)
- Studying pinon and ponderosa pine mortality with pinon ips trapping

#### Question/Answer/Comment

- Fire has to be included in the prescription.
- Utilizing resulting products would help.
- As long as the drought continues, we will see more mortality. Altitude is important because trees lose moisture at lower altitude. Have not yet seen significant mortality in pure pinon stands, for example, on Glorieta Pass.
- Once needles drop, fire possibility drops.
- Once trees fade, they are no longer infested. If still green they are infested.
- Has anyone been watching woodpeckers following the beetles? Woodpeckers have gone through ponderosa stands, but trees are still infested.
- Mixed conifer forests are not so involved because they get more moisture.
- Soil health is affected. Dead standing trees add to poor soil health. We have had too many trees competing for nutrients in soil, with results magnified by drought. Terry doesn't expect to get a handle on it within 25 years. There are no natural fires anymore; the last one was in 1910-1915 at Fort Apache.
- Sally was recently made aware of micorrhizal fungi application to thinned forests to provide nutrients where depleted. Any application of that methodology? Terry said there's quite a bit of information online. USFS has investigated this relationship for quite some time; but it was not known whether it's being applied in NM.

Hans spoke about the Draft Bark Beetle Communication Plan (Attachment 11) he is proposing to inform the public about steps taken on bark beetle control. The long-term goal is to create community-based efforts toward stewardship. He asked for comments.

Sally said NM Forestry Division has taken similar efforts in her neighborhood that were well received.

## **HEALTHY FOREST INITIATIVE for Wildfire Prevention & Stronger Communities** **McKinley Ben Miller, Natural Resource Specialist, Albuquerque Field Office**

### Common Wildland Fire Threats

- Wildfire effects
- Economic impacts
- Grass, shrubland, woodland and forest conditions
- Ecotone changes, climate fluctuations
- A biological wildfire—insects and diseases

### Changes in Governmental Emphasis Include:

- Emphasis on community outreach, involvement and buy-in
- Utilization of small diameter woody materials (treatment by-products)

McKinley showed forested areas in 1909, 1938, 1948, 1979, and 1989, and quoted William Wallace Covington, professor of forest ecology, “We are at a fork in the road in the American West... choosing between healthy diverse landscapes and landscapes that are a liability.”

### Benefits of Healthy, Resilient, Diverse and Sustainable Forest Wood and Grass/Shrub Lands

- |   |                                      |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| ▪ Grass for cattle, moisture on the ground      | ▪ Feeling of safety                  |
| ▪ Fewer catastrophic fires                      | ▪ Easier to hike                     |
| ▪ Restoration of biodiversity—ecological health | ▪ Improved watersheds                |
| ▪ Greater resilience to disturbances            | ▪ Economic development               |
| ▪ Improved wildlife habitat                     | ▪ More water for irrigation          |
|   | ▪ Better rivers, hunting and fishing |

Interior Secretary Gale Norton states “active and adaptive management must replace static approaches....” The President said, “Let us act.”

### Key Points

- Improved and accelerated treatment and restoration actions in collaboration with local communities and governments
- Streamlining of environmental reviews
- Development of short- and long-term risk guidance
- Development of long-term contracts to exchange public products for private services
- Renewing the commitment to a balanced conservation strategy

The HFI is an administration’s statement of what it feels should be done, a concept the country should follow—but not a law. Congress needs to meet on these concepts.

McKinley attended a workshop on fire regime conditions classifications. That technique measures degree of departure in two areas: fire frequency and severity. It is expressed as a risk of losing key ecosystem components and processes; comparing numerically; telling us where to take steps.

1. Condition Class 1 is an area where we can determine whether the young/middle/old vegetation is represented similarly to the time when man had little influence—the historical range of variability.
2. Condition Class 2 is a moderate departure of frequency/severity.
3. Condition Class 3 is a high departure from NRV vegetation—in fuel composition/structure and/or fire frequency/severity.

The Meat of the HFI is in HR Bill 1904 (which has passed):

- Expedited hazardous fuels treatments on 20 million acres of public land
- Priority of treatments near communities and municipal watershed drainage basins
- Abbreviated judicial review with agency priority
- Biomass energy and product support
- Improved insect and disease detection and response

To this point, the bill does not reference locations or how those acres will be shared among agencies. Agencies will identify high-risk areas. The bill includes public participation early and often, judicial review, and injunctive relief for stopping action. The court was asked to evaluate progress. There is \$25 million available for appropriation over 5 years to undertake projects.

The young forester and the experienced man on the land need to be sharing information.

McKinley said Rio Grande Products, employer of 130 in Espanola and the only major mill in NNM, closed down for several months last year because it didn't have materials to work on. The mill has now closed for good, which means that we don't have a local market. There is opportunity to make a big difference. McKinley said he wanted the RAC to understand the balance between HFI and House Bill 1904, and encouraged them to read the bill. He does not believe these documents give timber companies free reign.

Question/Answer/Comment

- With shortened judicial review, etc., how does the spotted owl fit? Bill language involved fish and wildlife and the Endangered Species Act, encouraging agencies overseeing fish and wildlife to be proactive and more flexible, to accommodate actions.
- If flexible, some groups will be going to court, delaying the process. Are we telling the judges to bend rules?
- For those individuals or groups adamant on specific issues, this act says, "Say it up front." Peer pressure should encourage solutions that meet the objectives of maintaining that species while fulfilling the concept of fire safety and healthy forests.
- We may need to convince others of our definition of healthy forests.
- There are protocols for evaluating whether or not species exist in certain areas. Environmental groups will be concerned that streamlining process will bypass analysis.
- We are making a distinction between active and potential habitat—and now trying to eliminate potential areas.
- Sally said her agency has discussed this bill and the Miller Bill offered as an alternative—that it hopes will pass in the Senate. There's uniform support that something be done. She encouraged the RAC to become familiar with the Western Governors' Association's (WGA's) current policy and 10-year plan—suggestions they hope will be reflected in the Senate version of the bill. The WGA's proposal included full funding for projects that have completed review and await funding. She is also hopeful that Stewardship Contracting will encourage the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior to work in partnership with Governors, who will in turn work with federal agencies on the ground and at the local level. She hopes Senators Domenici and Bingaman will incorporate many of the solutions already identified by the WGA.

- The *University of Wisconsin Arboretum Journal* March 2003 issue centered on ecological restoration.
- The Communication Plan Packet (Attachment 11) includes an article from *Evergreen Magazine* and sheets on fire regime and condition classes.
- Pre-settlement times were fine for pre-settlement times. That's only one side of things. We can work well with more trees.
- Germany imports half of its wood fiber. A prudent forester doing the right thing wants to grow the greatest array of products—young, middle and old. Public land managers have not had to think about profit.

**Socorro FO, Mark Lane** (Attachment 12)

Mark introduced Sarah Naranjo, a NM Highlands University student intern. He said one of Socorro FO's biggest problems is that they don't know what they have. In 1989, the FO divided the area into nine blocks and since has gotten into only one block. That is a big issue in the RMP amendment. The staff member looking at OHV access is now on extended leave. There are problems with permittees locking gates; but the FO now has a FT ranger helping correct that.

**Question/Answer/Comment**

- Elaborate on the treatment plan for cultural properties. Zuni Pueblo is concerned. But Mark didn't know exactly what the plan covers.
- It is under review, appeal, and IBLA did not grant a stay. The FO anticipates moving forward and completing plans. No barriers are known at this time.
- The vacancy announcement to replace Charlie is out. NMSO will take up the slack. He had worked on environmental planning for 20 years, so finding someone with nearly that much knowledge is impossible.
- Things are going along well with the RMP, although a couple of months behind schedule, partly because of the need for an environmental planner and a recreation specialist, but the FO thinks it can take up the slack.

**REVIEW OF THE RAC CHARTER, Raye Miller** (Attachment 13)

Two changes are proposed:

- Council officers would be elected at the last meeting of the fiscal year, rather than the first.
- There would be a quorum of 10 rather than 12. The requirement of at least three members from each area remains unchanged.

**Question/Answer/Comment**

- Theresa Herrera said the Washington office recommended a sample ethics section in a three-sentence paragraph that other states are also having trouble understanding. It will be reworked, but that probably will take months.
- Linda thanked Raye for offering to buy dinner for the RAC, which she declined for ethical reasons.
- The 10-person quorum does not change the fact that decisions will be made by consensus.
- Is this within our power to adopt?
- Theresa has been unable to determine whether approving these changes is within the RAC's scope.
- Adopting another model would involve significant change.
- Cliff read the section on quorum, and thought the proposed changes would move the group from model B to model A.

### Motion

Cliff moved to adopt the language proposed for the charter change. Tony seconded. Although the motion could not be passed because there was not a quorum, those present agreed.

### Motion

Cliff moved that if denied the charter in this form, the NM RAC adopt model A.

Discussion continued. Some recommended changing to model A, although it is very valuable to have a representative of the Governor's office meeting with the RAC. A quorum could include votes by phone.

Tony requested that information on dress codes or special gear needed for future RAC meetings be provided in advance.

## **JUNE 5                      RAC MEETING**

### **AGENDA REVIEW**

Theresa called the Washington BLM office for clarification on determining a quorum, and the representative she spoke to had to call the solicitor's office. She has not received further word.

Members discussed whether to hold another meeting before the end of the fiscal year, and if so, what kind of meeting. A proposed agenda included; confirming charter changes, electing new officers, guidelines for the public submitting alternatives for RMPs, amendments to the planning process and continuing discussion on access.

Concerning orientation for new members in October, Ron Huntsinger proposed to include a two-day *Partnership Series* workshop on "Learning Communities," based on how communities function—to develop a management plan for addressing issues, and build relationships among new and old RAC members. Discussion followed. Although the workshop sounded valuable, several thought it more important for new RAC members to be introduced to BLM, and to FLPMA, FACA and other pressing issues facing BLM. Ron was asked to find out whether the workshop might be condensed.

September 17-19 in Farmington was set for the next meeting. Members proposed that public comment be set for Wednesday evening, and matters needing a quorum for voting be on the agenda for Thursday. The two RAC members from Farmington will help plan the field trip. The RAC would like to see problem areas.

### **STEWARDSHIP CONTRACTING**

**Ron Dunton, Special Assistant to the NM BLM Director** (Attachment 14)

Stewardship is a brand new capability for BLM. It gives authority to enter contracts of up-to-10 years with persons, or private or public entities, to achieve land management goals involving road and trail maintenance, wildlife habitat, control of noxious weeds, etc.

Through stewardship contracting, BLM trades goods for services. USFS has had such authority for five years as a pilot—to thin forests. That caused controversy with environmental groups because it was seen as an excuse to allow logging. The new approach expands beyond forestry to every program in NM where goods or services come off the land—including woodland products and grazing. Ron has been meeting with BLM FOs to look at opportunities.

As an example of how it might be used, if someone removes noxious weeds, BLM would lower their grazing fees. Two projects are planned in the Socorro and Carlsbad areas. A rancher with heavy equipment will grade a waterway and mend structures. Another permittee will chain brush.

BLM is looking for ways to use stewardship for:

- Using beetle kill in Northern NM. A small plant in Cuba, one going in around Farmington, others in Raton and Mountainair—hope to utilize biomass.
- Habitat restoration for endangered species or soon-to-be-endangered species. One permittee in prairie chicken country will improve habitat.
- Though currently restricted, BLM would like to exchange mineral materials for reclamation of hundreds if not thousands of abandoned mineral sites.

This is a concept to consider for the future, and there will be third-party monitoring—discussed under section G of the bill. The RAC qualifies as a potential monitor, and if RAC members were interested, Ron would develop protocols and report to the RAC quarterly. NM is the first to do stewardship contracting, so monitoring has not yet been instituted. Soil & Water Conservation Districts were recommended as potential monitors. Ron thought BLM would monitor accomplishment of objectives and report to the RAC. Future field trips could visit stewardship projects. Discussion followed.

There was concern over the chaining project, because that was found to be ineffective and caused unintended consequences in Northern NM in the 1960s. Ron clarified that the project he mentioned is a pilot for chaining brush, with follow-up. All of the projects are meant to leverage resources based on needs of local people. It's a collaborative approach to improve range and watershed. BLM is not limited to bringing about better grazing.

Is this program paying ranchers for building better conditions for their cattle by undertaking projects they should be doing anyway? Gretchen said brush on her private land is choking out plants that feed not only livestock but also wildlife. Fire doesn't work. Tebuthiuron application is not preferred. She wants to find another way. And these projects are meant to provide new ways for BLM to work with individuals and communities on pilot projects that benefit the land.

But is this something that should have been required of the rancher in the first place? No. It is BLM's responsibility to take care of the land. In the Rio Puerco, for example, stewardship maintenance is required to keep structures functioning, and BLM does not have time or personnel to do that. Permittees can do it to benefit all. Think about how to plan and prioritize projects. The long-range plan includes tying in and leveraging other funding.

Concern was expressed that bad stewardship not be rewarded. Good structures are built on solid foundations. Find the right projects. Projects #1 and 2 seem straightforward; #3 and 4 do not seem appropriate. Linda emphasized that BLM identified these projects that needed doing and BLM cannot get to, so this is an opportunity to get them done. It's not about increasing AUMs or cattle. There will be a small economic impact. The ranchers are interested in trading grazing fees for services because they're sensitive about being considered welfare ranchers. BLM will try these pilots and see how they work. The ultimate goal is to improve land health. Monitoring is meant to assure that BLM goals are appropriate, doable, and valuable. The RAC is being asked whether it wants to be a monitor. RAC members asked that documents supporting choice of these projects be provided.

Jerry has talked with Ed Singleton about arranging for a thinning and biomass demo project on 10,000 acres with BIA. A lot of different objectives would be met, including employment.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

The Public Comment Period was opened at 10 am.

### **Stephen Capra, NM Wilderness Alliance (NMWA) (Attachment 15)**

Mr. Capra said he submitted to BLM a study based on scientific analysis of the impact of O&G development on Otero Mesa. He distributed a consolidation of four different impacts, including those on birds and prairie dogs. All come to the conclusion of severe impact on wildlife. He quoted Dr. Walt

Whitford, saying O&G development, “would forever destroy the grassland habitat of Otero Mesa.” NMWA is also working on an economic analysis that will be complete within 45 days.

### **Question/Answer/Comment**

- Where are you in the Ojito process? The Ojito process is moving forward, with a delegation in Washington now and unanimous support. Most of the County Commission signed. There is some dissension from BLM but NMWA has worked to find means all can be comfortable with.
- There were face-to-face meetings beginning last Monday. Ojito is simpler than Otero Mesa, a small tract of land without giant conflict.
- NMWA was shocked by dismissal of some WSAs. That is a disturbing development that even shocked the Governor. Legislation has been introduced in Congress to override the decision. Most disturbing is that it was done without public comment. Seventy million acres in Alaska alone were taken out of consideration.

No further public speakers were present, so the meeting continued.

### **FEEDBACK FROM RAC MEETING IN WASHINGTON, Crestina Trujillo Armstrong**

Crestina attended the national RAC meeting April 22-23 in Washington, DC, which had a full agenda that included working landscapes, stewardship, noxious weeds in the West, and the HFI. Participants were walked through the new website. They talked about BLM telling RACs what they want them to do, although some RACs are opposed to that. She visited with CO, UT, and AZ RAC representatives, and they would all like to have a joint meeting with as many 4-Corners RACs as possible. Secretary Norton addressed the group and introduced the department’s actions on wilderness. Presentations were intense and well done, but left no time for interaction—which participants would have liked. Another meeting is being planned—in the West.

The RAC nomination process was discussed. BLM’s Washington office assured RAC members that they would be more sensitive to timelines. They were assured that HFI includes the whole landscape, rangeland as well as forests. It was agreed that the rangeland recommendations of several years back should be rewritten to include forests and watersheds. NM BLM does apply those guidelines to lands in general.

### **Question/Answer/Comment**

- It seems that the RACs share a wish to be of service to BLM. Perhaps a 4-Corners Regional RAC might help figure that out. We need to find a way.
- The RAC is the starting point for getting the public involved in BLM’s process.
- Since we share common issues, it might be helpful to schedule at least one RAC meeting per year as a 4-Corners meeting; and invite USFS.
- Mike attended the SWCO RAC meeting in Durango in early May. He was struck by the sense that that RAC is also grappling with its role. It was very interested in NM issues—particularly those in Northwestern NM, and in Farmington FO’s RMP, and air, water and noise quality. Some of those impacts know no boundaries. The Farmington RMP notes the potential for Farmington area activities to impact visibility at Mesa Verde. The SWCO RAC was also concerned about the San Pedro Wilderness and Chaco Canyon in NM, as well as the Weminuche in CO.
- We might consider such topics for the September RAC meeting.
- Theresa will formally invite the SWCO RAC to the Farmington NM RAC meeting.

## **FURTHER PUBLIC COMMENT**

### **Van Gorden**

I didn't know you existed until I got an email from the Paragon Society early this morning, Mr. Gorden said. He didn't recognize anyone in attendance from Lincoln County Government. He asked whether RAC members had read *Agenda 21*—a United States/United Nations document, and whether the RAC knew that Governor Richardson had worked with the UN and that all border Governors favor *Agenda 21*. He said *Agenda 21* is the UN plan for merging the Southwestern United States with Mexico along a 300-mile zone. He said there is no way the RAC can function adequately without understanding *Agenda 21*. Governor Richardson will bring about the aims of *Agenda 21* he said, and the three other Southwestern Governors will follow his lead.

### **Question/Answer/Comment**

- Is there a way to receive this document? People could contact Congressmen, or get it through the Government Printing Office. Van said it governs the BLM and what is done here now.

## **SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS**

### **Urban Interface/Community Involvement Subcommittee, Tony Popp (Attachment 16)**

The two documents that had been sent to RAC and staff prior to the meeting were discussed.

#### **1) Public Input in the Planning Process Recommendations for Change**

Tony said the public perceives that having no input in the process beyond scoping disenfranchises them. BLM does analyze and apply public comments, but it is not always known that it does. Page 4 is the crux of the recommendation. The planning process as amended would have the following steps:

1. Scoping
2. Inventory data and information collection
3. Management situation analysis
4. Formulation of alternatives—involves public/working group
5. Develop draft EIS
6. 90-day public comment period
7. Develop proposed plan and final EIS—involves public/working group
8. 30-day protest period
9. Issue decision

The purpose is to change how alternatives are formulated and dealt with. The main changes would be in formation of alternatives and records of decision. After the scoping process, BLM works with state and local agencies and public comments, then studies and drafts an EIS. Although alternatives are listed and considered, the public feels it is no longer influential.

The point is to help the public know and understand why some alternatives are or are not studied, and to consider a wide range of alternatives. The recommendation is to allow people to comment again on the draft EIS. Tony thinks this would limit reaction to the plan, reduce litigation and provide more buy-in; and that more groups would understand the workings of BLM—leading to more support. He hopes this will be approved at the next RAC meeting

### **Question/Answer/Comment**

- Concerning solidity of working groups—if many people are able to enter the process early on, is there potential for difficulty bringing people up to speed later in the process? Certainly it won't be

an easy or quick process. The point is to take more time at the beginning to get public buy-in. Since BLM is committed to community development and interaction, staff can identify groups of people that represent the broader public to be involved in the process. Once identified, those groups could be called on again.

- Some of this is already employed, for example, the prairie chicken group is asked to make a time commitment for agreed-upon dates. There are established groups that will want representation. Many people recognize how significant RMPs are, so there will be good participation.
- In response to Tony's bold sentence on page 5, "No preferred alternative would be identified. The purpose again would be to look at the range of alternatives to see what the impacts would be." De-emphasize having a preferred alternative. We don't want to have to get a clearance from CEQ. It is agency policy that we have one, but we can get an exception. If we don't identify preferred alternatives the public wonders what the agency wants to do. The preferred alternative is generally where you're analyzing impacts in comparison with others.
- If local groups have had help developing an alternative, that's different from presenting it as a completed thing.
- Linda thought it best to have some preferred alternative, even if not the agency's proposed one.
- A lot of the document is background. The changes are actually the list on page 5 enumerated above, upon which the RAC could vote. Linda will visit with the Washington office and solicitor to see whether they would support not having a preferred alternative as policy for the state.
- Evaluate in terms of NEPA compliance, considering that what's recommended is a broad consensus alternative.
- Tony recommended identifying a range of alternatives. What bothers him about a preferred alternative is the tendency not to move away from that one even if the public does not prefer its impact. He'd prefer blending to a consensus alternative.
- Why is it preferred? Do you really know the impacts? You need to hear about them from the public.
- The first time the preferred alternative comes up is in the draft. The biggest debate is over the alternatives. Then you examine the impacts and finish the draft. At that point it would be helpful to tell the public where you're leaning—as a focus—to further elicit input.
- Take what the public suggests and study the impacts. How can the public help identify a preferred alternative without data on impact?
- Staff experience has been that people come in with a concept of what they want—their own preferred alternative. So the issue is identifying which are feasible, studying impacts, making a final decision—and assuring public input first in up-front scoping and second in agreeing to the most acceptable final proposal. Assuring public understanding of the alternatives and final decision is where we need sufficient public input.
- Farmington FO has not had good results from working groups.
- We rush into RMPs with no frame of reference. It is time now to develop a real range of alternatives. That's why the public distrusts. Much of the work needs to be done ahead to fend off breakdowns in the process.
- People need to know where to focus so they know how it will affect them. Their comments can then show what's been missed.
- We need more public involvement in determination of alternatives and the last step, so the public is aware that a working group representing them was involved.

Tony will tweak the language, make a one-page proposal and send it out ASAP to be acted upon at the September RAC meeting. Linda will submit what's agreed upon as an instructive memo to influence NM BLM policy. Tony thanked Las Cruces FO staff for intensive help with his proposal.

## **2) Guidelines for the Submission of a ‘Management Alternative’ to the Resource Management Plan Revision Process**

Tony said he hopes these guidelines will not be necessary; however sometimes a group may not wish to be involved. If an alternative is provided, staff spends time and money studying it; so with these guidelines, alternatives can be proposed in a manner useful to the agency.

### **Question/Answer/Comment**

- Public input must meet BLM’s own timelines and come in as early as possible in the process.
- Best that a submission be a fully developed “sub-alternative.” Have groups include why they think their alternative would work; and offer possibilities for how the resource might be managed.
- Add cultural and environmental requirements.
- The “adaptive management” concept is good, but it means to some that BLM will change the game to the detriment of interest groups. Needs a sideboard that users would be involved in proposed changes.
- We don’t expect responders to be experts, but want something substantial.
- The point is to change the process enough for greater success, better input and reduction of litigation. We’re saying that if groups make a good-faith effort, their alternative will be studied.
- Farmington FO is concerned that local contentiousness makes this not feasible.
- People in Farmington feel disenfranchised waiting for and not being given the opportunity to speak, and thinking their comments have had no effect.

### **UPDATE ON FT. STANTON CAVE RESCUE, Ed Roberson**

There was a positive outcome to the Search & Rescue effort at Ft. Stanton Cave. One hundred volunteers worked all night, headed by NM Search & Rescue under direction of NM State Police, which provided commanders both above and below ground. The accident occurred at 2:30 p.m. and it took 45 minutes for those involved to contact help. BLM crews arrived at the scene of the accident by 4:15. Roswell firefighters went down at 6:30 p.m. and spent 13 hours in the cave. Lincoln County EMTs were joined by an MD and stayed all night with the hurt Boy Scout, who had a serious gash on one thigh. There was national media coverage. The rescue was a phenomenal partnership, including volunteer cavers from all NM and about 10 agencies. A rescue had recently been staged to prepare for such an emergency. The Roswell FO will follow-up with the agencies involved, complete a rescue strategy and potentially stage yearly training events.

### **DIALOGUE ON FUTURE INITIATIVES**

Linda said access came up as a topic at the last RAC meeting so was addressed in FO reports. The question before the RAC is whether BLM should be handing access differently. Right now there is not much guidance. Access is handled case-by-case, as was shown in FO reports. She wanted a sense from the RAC whether it wants to help BLM develop criteria for when and how to address access issues.

### **Question/Answer/Comment**

- Len Brooks’ document handed out at the last RAC meeting was a stepping stone.
- BLM could prioritize areas. Since the last RAC meeting, Washington asked all BLM state offices to identify large areas with blocked access. The Urban Interface/Community Involvement Subcommittee is willing to help with this issue.
- Useful to get summary of materials on access issues and discussion of what size parcel is a cutoff point. Whatever size parcel, classification information is needed, for example, extremely limited access, access from only one side, etc. What’s happening to land without access? Does lack of access favor health of the land? Need further clarification of facts already provided.

- Need to address larger pieces and come up with policy, for example, what to do about locked gates. There are things RAC could do. Time between meetings could be used for fact gathering; or this could be a platform for the new RAC.
- Tony will provide all the information he can gather. He asked Theresa for an updated list of email addresses for FOs. Linda confirmed that she would appreciate having this help.
- Can micro land exchanges be made for access? Easily?
- Significant cultural resources and other issues may impede exchange. The process itself is costly, far beyond the value of the land itself.
- Would it be valuable to create a solution to small exchanges, perhaps resulting in legislation—with rules that are easier to deal with? Linda will check into the rules and possibility of changing them.

Cliff read part of a letter (Attachment 17) from Pat Hester, BLM Regional Paleontologist. “The public lands of NM contain some striking geological features that are used by Universities and Museums for scientific research and education...” she wrote. She requested that RAC consider “establishing a subcommittee to assist the BLM in identifying, evaluating and recommending land management alternatives that protect geologic features on public lands and allow for use by researchers and students.” In a two-year study in CO in the 1980s Hester identified small areas of value in paleontology that were subsequently made ACECs. The RAC could invite Hester to address the RAC.

- Linda would like to know exactly what Pat Hester wants.
- A Farmington mesa is being designated a scenic and fossil area, because of paleontological value. Hester could be invited to come to the Farmington meeting, and that mesa could be included in the field trip. Tom Gow will contact Pat Hester.
- There was interest expressed at the public meeting in Socorro from a NM Tech professor who is concerned about an area he takes students to that needs protection from OHV damage.
- Roswell FO has five National Natural Landmark designated areas that need monitoring and protecting.

### **Proposed Agenda for September Meeting**

- Crestina will act as Chair at the September meeting.
- Elections
- Joint Southwest Four-Corners meeting
- See what Pat Hester intends and include geological paleontological presentation/discussion another time
- Review/revise planning process
- Access
- O& G compliance
- Charter, if needed
- Orientation of new RAC
- 3<sup>rd</sup> party monitoring presentation
- Land exchanges/sale light
- Dwayne Sikes overview of BLM recreation program—impact on society, public lands, economic and societal benefits, shift in values
- Plan public meeting 6-10 p.m. night before meeting, bring in pizza
- Field trip focus: interacting with landowners with issues about O&G and BLM involvement

The meeting adjourned.

/s/ Robyn Tierney  
 RAC Chairperson