

**Bureau of Land Management
Albuquerque District Resource Advisory Council
Socorro BLM Office
March 31, 2016**

RAC Members Present

Keith Banks
Michael Coleman
Ethan Giedraitis
John Kelly
Robert Moquino
Bob Nordstrum
Don Tripp
Juan Vigil

RAC Members Absent

Kristin Salisbury

Federal Representative

Danita Burns, BLM Albuquerque District Office

BLM Staff Present

Virginia Alguire, Socorro Field Office
Carlos Coontz, Socorro Field Office
John Brenna, Albuquerque District Office
Angel Martinez, Rio Puerco Field Office
Mark Matthews, Socorro Field Office
Jonathan Smith, Socorro Field Office

Welcome & Introductions

Danita Burns called the meeting to order at 9:35 a.m. and welcomed those present. She introduced new RAC member John Kelly. Mr. Kelly said he is a retired civil engineer, working part time with an engineering firm, on the board of the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District and working on a levee project with Socorro. Danita announced that there was a quorum present; and turned the meeting over to RAC Chair Ethan Giedraitis.

Renew Charter in Accordance with Section 14 of the Federal Advisory Committee Act

Ethan asked that charter discussion be tabled until the afternoon.

Review/Discussion of Minutes of September 17, 2015

Bob Nordstrum asked for a change on page 12, paragraph 2, line 3. He said the minutes read that Bob Nordstrum recommended a campout. He asked that campout be changed to field trip. After consideration it was determined that term had already been changed by staff prior to the RAC meeting. On page 9, second full paragraph, Blue Water Creek—Bluewater is all one word.

Michael Coleman noted that under open discussion concerning the Gold King Mine and water being pumped to the water treatment plant in Questa—that was actually being done at the former Questa Mill Site.

Motion

Keith Banks moved and Juan Vigil seconded to approve the minutes with requested changes. Motion passed with one abstention by John Kelly.

Term Length/Membership and Designations (Vacancy)

Danita said there were RAC vacancies, and reviewed the term lengths and designations of current members. She said she appreciated and had come to depend on this RAC, and invited members to re-apply or to recommend qualified applicants to fill vacant positions.

Resource Update

Rio Puerco

National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council (NOHVCC)

John Brenna said he recently attended the national NOHVCC meeting, in order to reach out to the OHV community. He was the only BLM field manager present. NOHVCC wanted BLM to come up with areas where they could use OHVs. Cimarron Mesa is an area they want. They have funding, and gaining access is their largest issue. John told NOHVCC members they could come to the BLM office and make a proposal. He thinks OHV use brings economic development; therefore BLM supports it and thinks it's a good project.

Don Tripp asked what the process was when a group wanted to use a certain area. John said the NEPA process was undertaken to analyze and determine whether the Resource Management Plan (RMP) slated an area for that type of activity. It would take a while, since the new RMP had not yet been finalized—and even if prioritized, a federal project takes a while—as much as several years.

Ethan said around Albuquerque there was no consideration for effects on hydrology. He asked whether NOHVCC might be asked to work with erosion control. John said NEPA documents include that, and BLM has a hydrologist on staff. They also plan for remediation. Test beds are used. It's a constant battle for Socorro, and a challenge for all BLM offices to deal with existing roads and trails, and often OHV users make their own trails. Albuquerque area recreation opportunities are about tapped out, so BLM is working to make more recreation areas available.

Keith Banks asked whether there was a grazing program for the Cimarron Mesa area NOHVCC would like to use. John Brenna and Danita thought not.

RMP Update

Angel Martinez called in to report. He said the RMP was given to the new state director a few weeks back, and she wanted changes in how they presented alternatives. For example, they needed to address locatable materials—gold, silver, etc., within the metro area. And an issue was how to handle claims. Locatable metals fall under the old mining laws, with no discretion. The RMP recommended about 170,000 acres for withdrawal. That process involves a BLM recommendation and a Congressional mandate. Ultimately they decided that a lot of mineral estate was within land grants, where, technically, metal is left for heirs. So they would stick to that—all locatable materials areas would be closed to all but heirs. There would be about 20,000 acres not part of that. Angel said he had written that section, and a GIS person was reckoning the acreage. They intended to have it completed the following week. Once changes were made it would be resubmitted to the state director for approval.

Danita said she would need RAC help in rolling out this RMP. She knew there were areas of contention, particularly the Buffalo Tract in the Placitas area. She asked the RAC to think about how BLM should proceed with getting the RMP to the public.

Juan Vigil asked about the Buffalo Tract, wild horses and mining issues. Angel said the horse issue was no longer a problem on federal lands. They were to be considered livestock rather than wildlife. There were issues with horses outside BLM land. Mining was still being discussed and would probably be the most protested item in the RMP. Danita said she understood the opposition of neighbors to mining. They had to find middle ground. BLM has shut down 95% of public land to mining.

Juan asked what they were accomplishing by meeting again with the public when they had an approved document. What do they tell the public is the purpose of those meetings? Angel said when the document comes out it will be a “proposed RMP.” So the public will still have the ability to protest within a 30-day window. Protests will go to the BLM national office and then return to the BLMNM staff. Protestors have made it clear that they will object to any mining, so that is expected. Any help from the RAC in educating the public will be of value, he concluded.

El Malpais Venue Improvements

John Brenna distributed maps of this national conservation area near Grants, surrounding the National Park Service (NPS) monument. It encompasses 250,000+ acres and has its own RMP. Despite lack of staff, BLM is putting in new signs, which John called the face of BLM. The area has a lot of hiking trails. BLM helps the NPS manage its multi-agency center with museum and store. Grant funds this year are dedicated to bringing in and educating school children. Bob Nordstrum said the Albuquerque Wildlife Federation would be working there soon, and invited RAC members to become involved. They hope the Forest Service will once again become involved. Danita thought it was a good idea to have everyone involved with this gateway—an exceptional recreation area.

Danita said two wilderness areas and WSAs are in that area. There is a lot to see, and also the last piece of the Continental Divide Trail to be worked on. BLM is working with Acoma Pueblo to move the trail away from the highway. They are in the midst of an exchange with Acoma. John said they’re hiring for several positions at El Malpais, from maintenance to rangers to trail work. It is difficult to recruit, so he asked the RAC to refer people.

Don Tripp asked whether the Continental Divide Trail was well marked. John said the challenge was to get across private lands. Cooperation was better in some places than others. There were only a few spots of contention, one off Highway 117, and some near Cuba. They need to assure that people stay on the trail when crossing private property. Don asked how they mitigate that. John said they would sign it heavily and if necessary put up a fence.

Keith asked whether the RMP proposed any changes in grazing permits. Angel said it did not. BLM looked at the past three-to-four decades of usage, and the only difference proposed was to use any allotments that had not been used for an extended period as grass banks. Even there, grazing would be allowed under certain circumstances, for example, drought.

Socorro**San Antonio Elementary School, Recreation & Public Purposes Act Lease**

Mark Matthews introduced BLM Realty Specialist Virginia Alguire and Jonathan Smith—soon to be Assistant Manager of the Socorro Field Office. Virginia distributed a news release, “BLM Seeking Comments on Proposed Elementary School in Socorro County.” BLM was running a Federal Register notice accepting comments on this issue through April 11. The proposal was for 60 acres designated as a disposal area in the RMP to be leased for the site of a new school. The current school was built in 1928. The new school would be built adjacent to it, and the city and county would use the old school as a recreational center.

On the 60 acres there would also be a trail system that could be used by the public as well as students. BLM would retain the mineral rights. John Kelly asked whether there was a lease payment due, and an appraisal. Virginia said the school had special pricing as a city/county/state entity, of \$160 per year rent, and then a sale price of ~\$50 per acre. John said it sounded like this was to everyone’s benefit.

They would start construction as soon as April 11, when the comment period was over. Don asked what would cause BLM to stop this process. Virginia said if Socorro Consolidated School District lost its funding, or was not able to continue as a school, etc., the agreement would be revoked.

Keith asked about nearby BLM land. Was this the area where there had been dumping? Mark said that was New Mexico Highway Department land. Keith asked whether BLM could facilitate the Highway Department finding a better place to dump waste. He said it’s getting worse. John Kelly said that waste was potentially recyclable. Discussion.

Mark said he’d find out what their plans were and get back to him. Keith encouraged them to cooperate to get the children in San Antonio a new school.

Arizona Interconnection Project Access Roads Permitting

Carlos Coontz reported that they were still methodically going through the plan. BLM wanted all entities involved to review it again before putting it out to the public. The challenge in working with the Forest Service (USFS) was that its rules and processes were not like BLM’s. They were haggling about sources of rights of way, and were being cautious because there were resource concerns in that area. Mark showed on the map the potential line of poles and access proposed. In the 1980s the utilities company opened many roads that were later closed. Now they wanted to reopen those roads.

Ethan said it was common that utilities needed access to lines, and there might be misunderstanding about where and how they would be used. BLM and the utility should be clear about what was needed beyond public roads and that should be reflected in the agreement. He has developed access atlases in the past that helped. Mark said the company had been very vague about access. So that’s why the agreement had been at a standstill for a while. Virginia pointed out the Continental Divide Trail on the map and said staying away from that has also been an issue.

Discussion. Keith asked what kind of access was requested. Mark said at first they wanted anything. Ethan said you may need a pickup truck, but when something breaks you may need to get a semi-tractor trailer in there. It's best to get it all clarified now. Mark said he would be glad to give the RAC the agreement to review.

Virginia said this had been going on since 2007; and also involves the BLM Las Cruces DO, USFS, and the New Mexico State Land Office. The poles are mostly wood, with a few metal lattice ones in a brown color. They had to replace several wood poles because they caught fire. BLM gave them emergency authority to get in and fix the grounding wires.

E-Planning

Carlos said with E-Planning when BLM has a NEPA project it's on the national map. Six-to-seven NEPA projects are underway in the Socorro FO. The new ones are all going onto the planning web map. Viewers can click on the link to a project page. BLM is phasing into it. He showed all resources that could be accessed, including RMPs. Apparently the USFS and others are also doing this, showing what's being done on public lands. And viewers can make comments.

Referring back to the interconnection project, Keith said if they give a big rig access to all those poles that's a lot of land impacted. Mark said this is not a major corridor. The RMP is not granting access to any other power line corridors. New Mexico is going north/south. El Paso Electric is ranging from cross-country travel to graded road. It's flat enough so they can get trucks in without a full-service road. Virginia said there were many places where they would use an existing road, and they could get approval for off-road access where necessary.

John Kelly asked whether remediation addressed different life zones. Matthew said they determine seed mix by site.

Public Comment Period

Danita opened the Public Comment Period at 11 a.m. No one chose to speak. The RAC remained in session in case members of the public might arrive. They recessed for lunch at 11:30 a.m. and reconvened at 1 p.m.

Alamocito Creek Acquisition

Carlos Coontz read Project Lead Sarah Naranjo's report. BLMNM, with the assistance of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, received \$ 2.7 million of Land and Water Conservation Funding (LWCF) for fiscal year 2017. The funds will be used to purchase 5,867 acres near Pie Town in Catron County. BLMNM has been applying for LWCF funds for this project since 2003.

This property offers public access (especially for hunting) into the northern portion of the Cibola National Forest near the Datil Mountains, which have little to no vehicle access. The area contains significant elk populations, eight miles of Alamocita Creek and riparian habitat providing for many species of wildlife. Ownership of that property eliminates the need for highway routing and allows the Continental Divide Trail (CDT) to pass through the Sawtooth

Mountains area of the Cibola National Forest along Alamocita Creek through BLM's CDT specialist management area, Cebolla Wilderness and El Malpais.

This routing is particularly scenic and mostly undeveloped landscape that would provide for a primitive hiking and horseback riding experience; and would allow conservation of natural, historic and cultural resources along the CDT corridor. This relocation would eliminate 52 miles of CDT trail segments temporarily routed along the shoulders of paved highways and county roads.

At the beginning stage, there was not even a draft Environmental Assessment, so they were talking about it and coordinating efforts. Danita said the USFS is going through a forest revision plan. They are talking about making several areas wilderness—which she pointed out on the map. There are cottonwood stands and many cultural resources. Acoma Pueblo says its oral history has shown that this is their ancestral land.

John Kelly asked about the private section. It might be homestead land. Should that parcel be included? Danita said BLM was seeking absentee owners. There were 400 landowners in the area. Discussion. Danita said they were hoping to move forward. Mark said the appraiser was coming in mid-April. Money had been set aside for the acquisition.

Juan said testing oil tank fatalities had been in the news recently. It was also reported that some areas of fracking were becoming more earthquake prone. He wondered what BLM might know about that. John Brenna said people in the oil fields had traditionally tested oil tanks, and there were safer ways in place but he hadn't heard of any changes. Concerning fracking, NEPA requires analysis for that. He said oil fields have always had a well to take the produced water and pipe it back into the ground. Fracking is different from that. Danita had heard of earthquake areas primarily in mid-America, depending on geological formations. The BLM is taking a better look at that. Fracking has been tracked for 50 years, so it may be that it takes 50 years to have results. She said we can learn more and talk more about that; and suggested discussing this at the next RAC meeting.

Albuquerque District Resource Advisory Council Charter

Ethan said the RAC Charter needed to be renewed every two years. The Charter included requirements for record keeping, member responsibilities, etc. He asked whether there were concerns or suggestions. Danita said they would take any suggestions, or the document would be forwarded as it was to the state office. No suggestions were made.

Motion

Bob Nordstrum moved and Juan Vigil seconded to accept the RAC Charter with no changes. Motion unanimously approved.

The RAC also looked at the Bylaws, which did not need to be renewed. No changes were suggested.

Bob Nordstrum said he had attended Forest Revision Plan meetings. In Cibola, he said wilderness comes up often and he's concerned about wilderness designation. He was thinking

about a certain wild area that has roads and development but unique habitat. An agency wants to make that a wilderness area. He likes wild areas he can hike into or drive into and take a hike. He asked RAC members to think about separating wilderness from wild country. It might help to have that awareness when talking to people.

Ethan thought if decisions couldn't even be made about current WSAs, shouldn't we have a clear idea of the process to evaluate and decide on additional areas for protection before doing so. Danita said there were very specific rules about what's wilderness and what's not. She said the area Bob described sounded like a hybrid, and suggested asking what the agencies' intent was. Danita said there are administrative guidelines that are Field Office specific and she has leeway as a land manager. John Brenna said these guidelines were set by the Wilderness Act. Bob said he was just concerned that putting the term wilderness on something sets limitations. Discussion.

Danita said she was hearing that Bob would be in favor of those places having a different level of protection. She said she would look into that with the Forest Revision Plan meetings.

Don Trip asked whether the letter to Secretary Jewell about existing access routes through WSA's had gone out. Ethan sent out the letter certified and received notice that it had been received, but nothing further. Danita said she would look into that. Ethan indicated that the landowner, Mr. Roy Farr wrote and thanked the RAC for sending the letter.

Bob Nordstrum said the Valles Caldera was another area people would like to call wilderness. It currently has 13 pages of regulations for hunters. Jemez Pueblo has cattle in the caldera. Santa Clara and San Felipe Pueblo lands reach that far.

Roundtable

Identify Next Quarterly Meeting

In order to meet again within the current charter, the RAC chose Wednesday June 9 for its next meeting, in Albuquerque.

Open Discussion

Carlos announced that they needed to put minutes out within 30 days after a meeting. Once provided, he would send them to all members.

The Federal Register notice on a proposed rule for resource management planning was included in RAC member packets. The comment period ended on April 25. In summary, the BLM proposed to amend existing regulations establishing procedures used to prepare, review or amend land use plans, pursuant to the Federal Land Policy and Management Act. The proposed rule would enable BLM to more readily address landscape-scale resource issues and to respond more effectively to environmental and social changes.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 2 p.m.