

**Bureau of Land Management
Albuquerque District Resource Advisory Council
Rio Puerco Field Office
August 25, 2016**

RAC Members Present

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

RAC Members Absent

Kristin Salisbury
Don Tripp

Federal Representative

Danita Burns, BLM Albuquerque District Office

BLM Staff Present

Matt Atencio, Socorro Field Office
John Brenna, Jr., Rio Puerco Field Office
Carlos Coontz, Socorro Field Office
Adam Lujan, Rio Puerco Field Office
Mark Matthews, Socorro Field Office
Calvin Parson, Rio Puerco Field Office
Jonathan Smith, Socorro Field Office

Welcome & Introductions

Mark Matthews called the meeting to order at 9:40 a.m., and welcomed those attending. A quorum was present.

2016 Charter Renewal and Standard Operating Procedures

Ethan Giedraitis introduced the RAC Charter, which the RAC had agreed not to alter, and the Bylaws & Standard Operating Procedures. He asked for a vote to ratify the Charter.

Motion

John Kelly moved and Bob Nordstrum seconded to accept the Charter without change. Motion unanimously approved.

Review/Discussion of March 31, 2016 Meeting Minutes

Ethan Giedraitis and Michael Coleman had reviewed the minutes and made no changes.

Motion

Juan Vigil moved and Michael Coleman seconded to approve the March 31, 2016 minutes as presented. Motion unanimously approved.

Second Call for Nominations

The RAC is made up of three categories:

- 1.) Three members who represent federal grazing permittees; transportation or rights-of-way; developed outdoor recreation, off-highway vehicle users, or commercial recreation activities; the commercial timber industry; or energy and mineral development interests;

- 2.) Three members who represent environmental organizations; dispersed recreational activities; archaeological and historical interests; or wild horse and burro interests; and
- 3.) Four members who represent state, county, or local elected officials; state agencies responsible for management of natural resources, land, or water; local Indian Tribes; academicians in natural resources management or natural sciences; or the affected public-at-large.

Mark Matthews said a call was put out for nominations for new RAC members, and some nominations were received. But there were not enough nominations received in category #2, so BLM was sending out a second call for nominations. Without a new category #2 member there would not be a quorum at RAC meetings.

RAC members said they would attempt to recruit new members. Mark agreed to send all RAC members a link that applicants could use. He agreed that the timeline was cumbersome because applicants have to be approved in the Washington office—and the upcoming change of federal administration might further delay the process.

Resource Update

Rio Puerco

John Brenna said he and Mark Matthews were able to assign new assistant field managers including Calvin Parson, Adam Lujan, Jonathan Smith and Matt Atencio.

John reported that all was going smoothly with Rio Puerco Field Office. Cabezon was good. There had been a trichomoniasis scare in cattle. Nearly 20 allotments and 1,600 cattle were quarantined. That had been reduced to four allotments that would be cleared by a second testing.

He said when wild horses appear on Rio Puerco Field Office BLM land, BLM calls San Felipe Pueblo and the horses are picked up.

John spoke about Stern's Quarry—where there are 40 million year old prehistoric horses the size of hippos. One is eroding out of the soil in a steep wash area. After several months of communication, John decided to allow the University of New Mexico (UNM) to remove the horse remains to protect and preserve them and retain historic information. San Felipe Pueblo was not happy with that decision, so appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals. BLM is attempting to divert water around the remains, and agreed not to proceed with removal until the appeal is resolved.

The Resource Management Plan is in the BLM state office, and Danita is working with them to make suggested changes. There are some issues with Placitas residents claiming they can see the mining area from their homes, and fear for air quality, arsenic and decreased home values.

John Kelly said he toured in 2009 with a conference including New Mexico Tech representatives. One stop was at the Lafarge pit, and he was informed that we are blessed with

the sand and gravel resources in the area. His understanding was that those gravels do not have the alkali silica content that caused building problems in the past. The quality of the rock is an argument that needs to be made. He volunteered to look into that and provide information.

Danita needs to present the RMP again to the BLM state director. Then it will go for the governor's review. John thought November was likely timing for the RMP to be approved. Bob Nordstrum reminded the RAC that members of the public who commented before would have 30 days to comment again.

Juan Vigil asked about visitation at Tent Rocks (Kasha-Katuwe) National Monument. Hours and parking had been improved. Visitation was 115,000 this year. El Malpais claimed 175,000 visitors per year. BLM had lost staff at El Malpais. However, one new one had been hired and they were working to hire another.

Robert Moquino asked who managed Tent Rocks. His son is a firefighter and went to Tent Rocks with other firefighters when a small lightning strike fire was reported. But the gates were locked and no one had a key. It was too far to hike in, and it appeared that the fire had burned out, so the firefighters left. John Brenna said he would get them a key.

John Kelly asked about fossil protection. John Brenna said the eroding remains are in an arroyo, and the BLM hydrologist was working with authorities to protect them. Both San Felipe Pueblo and UNM want to take action. BLM has to make hard decisions along resource lines, doing its best to compromise. This is on the Ball Ranch. San Felipe Pueblo bought 2½ sections north of the Ball Ranch. Keith Banks asked whether New Mexico had made a case that this was a scientific issue. The National Science Foundation has an opinion. San Felipe claims they weren't consulted, and removal would cause spiritual upheaval.

John Brenna explained that the remains under discussion are on a steep slope, and both gravity and weather will bring the remains down. This is on BLM land. BLM legal process demands that they send invitations to consult with tribes that might be affected. Discussion. The decision on this will set precedent.

John Kelly asked what pending issues they might see in the newspaper.

Robert Moquino asked for an update on the land exchange with Acoma Pueblo along Highway 117. John thought it was moving forward positively. Robert said there's a new Acoma administration every year that has to catch up on that.

Socorro

Mark Matthews showed slides of current projects. One tracked SunZia Southwest Transmission Project proposed routes across time. SunZia made an agreement with the New Mexico State Land Office and will complete their plan. BLM will then have 60 days to comment.

The El Paso Electric Arizona Interconnection Project power lines were indicated on a map. The company proposed the action of allowing access for maintenance and to replace wooden structures with metal. Access now can be anything from a paved road to cross country travel. The comment period ended August 25.

Fort Craig was being worked on, including sidewalks and stabilization. Datil Campground has new bathrooms. The Alamocito property acquisition to provide public access should be complete in October; and the San Antonio School project was underway. Socorro herbicide treatments, masticators and chainsaws were being applied for vegetation work. Mark showed several examples, and said at the rate of 200-400 acres per year it added up. This was made possible by working with partners.

They were starting over on the Datil Campground fee increase. Jonathan Smith said management plans weren't strong on decisions for how to manage campgrounds. Datil was special because it's a throwback to the 1950s and 1960s. There are no plug-ins, and water comes out of a spigot. It's quiet, no reservations, simple—and they want to keep it that way. They plan to upgrade the water system and add restrooms. Mark thought fees of \$5 per night paid for maintenance but not improvements. The 10-acre campground was used primarily by migrating snowbirds and hunters. He and Jonathan thought rising fees, for example, in national parks, were making it difficult for the average family to camp. They can keep Datil the way it is for reasonable cost.

Keith asked whether visitors were increasing. Jonathan thought usage remained the same. He said it was also a day-use area for locals, and they were upgrading for Americans with Disabilities Act use without cutting down trees or increasing the parking lot.

Robert Moquino said he got a call from a rancher asking about the San Augustin Plains water mining project. Mark said there were 17 wells over 3,000 feet deep on private land near Datil. The original application for a permit to drill, raise water and sell it didn't go through. They had not contacted BLM about a right-of-way. Bob Nordstrum explained exactly where it was located and said everyone in the area was on wells, so they're concerned with what the impact would be when those 17 wells are drilled. Mark said the applicant also claims they can harvest runoff.

Robert said Acoma Pueblo got a call about drilling around Chaco Canyon and in Rio Rancho. John thought the city council shot down the Rio Rancho drilling. Mark said the Farmington Field Office was responsible for proposed fracking near Chaco Canyon. There was an August 30 meeting at the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center. A similar plan for Rio Puerco was discussed.

Keith confirmed that the last route on the maps Mark showed was the one SunZia was going with. Mark said they were in a holding pattern because early investors disappeared. SunZia hoped that by January 2017 they would have a plan for development. Keith read that in Germany their transmission lines were all put underground. SunZia claimed that would be too expensive. Ethan said it was at least 10 times more expensive and the technology hadn't been created yet. Mark said they would find out after it's built how habitat rehabilitation would best be applied. He said SunZia had only contacted about 60% of those who would be affected by these lines. PNM is not involved. Discussion.

There are several recreation areas under Socorro Field Office jurisdiction that have minimal facilities and no fees. Datil has the only campground and is the only fee area.

John Brenna said the Rio Puerco Field Office's only fee area was Kasha-Katuwe. To charge fees, there must be amenities. The public can camp for free on BLM property for up to 14 days.

Public Comment Period

Ethan opened the public comment period at 11 a.m. No members of the public asked to speak.

Lunch

RAC members recessed for lunch at 11:30 a.m.

Danita Burns reconvened the meeting at 1:20.

Fee Proposal Presentation for Recreation Sites

United States Forest Service (USFS) Representative Sharon Cuevas

Sharon Cuevas said there are 11 national forests in Arizona and New Mexico, and the USFS will be bringing fee proposals to the RAC in future, so this presentation was informational.

Cabin Rental/Historical Site Restoration Program

Historic sites including fire lookouts can be rented out on recreation.gov. The fee program allows the USFS to rehabilitate and keep up these historic sites. Sharon showed before and after views of sites in Arizona and New Mexico. Some are right outside wilderness areas. The USFS works with archaeologists and historians to restore the cabins and lookouts as closely as possible to their original state. Caboose cabins are also being considered, and have been established in Cloudcroft and Ruidoso New Mexico.

When the USFS brings a fee proposal to the RAC, Sharon said they would indicate what they think it will bring in—to make these cabins sustainable. The current range of rental rates is approximately \$60-\$200. Most have good capacity. The Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act, she said, was invented to give broader experiences for the public. The USFS accommodates all kinds of users.

Campgrounds with picnic tables and bathrooms are one example. Without fees they might have to close sites or turn them over to a concessionaire. They get feedback, and largely the public wants the government to manage campgrounds and other sites.

Sharon spoke about the rising cost of wildfire operations. That was now 52% of the USFS budget, which seriously decreased all other areas. They anticipate wildfire operations will rise to 67%.

Fee proposals will give an overview of the setting, facilities, rusticity, what comparable sites cost, financials, maintenance needed, and what fee revenue they think will address needs. They will include public involvement and techniques used, comments, reasons for the fee, how funds are leveraged, amenities and photos. She said 98% of the forest is free.

Danita asked whether anyone on the RAC or staff had experienced a USFS presentation on fees. None had. Danita thought this fee proposal was similar to BLM's. Comments could be gathered on a 3x5 card at a campground.

The RAC would make recommendations to the BLM state director that would then go to the USFS. John Kelly clarified that Danita and staff would check that things were being done properly and the RAC would make a decision.

Roundtable

WO Response Letter (June 3, 2016)

The RAC had written a letter to the Secretary of the Interior concerning road access in an area regularly traveled by rancher Roy Farr. That road, adjacent to the Continental Divide Wilderness Study Area (WSA), is affected by water, and hunters traveling through during wet seasons avoid flooded areas by making new tracks.

Ethan said he had not received a copy of the response to that letter. Mark thought it had been sent to the RAC. Copies were made and distributed to RAC members.

Mark said BLM was preparing an Environmental Assessment and a proposal to use timber or rock to make changes that would address water flow and protect the integrity of the road. They hoped it would be done by fall. Juan thought the road could not be improved because it was next to a WSA. Were they looking into whether the WSA was approved? Mark said if it was approved, the road would be closed to public access, but it would depend on how the bill was written. Danita clarified that it was considered a “way,” not a road. Discussion.

Mark said that “way” is a main artery to get back to the country including Farr’s ranch. Danita asked whether that road could be cherry-stemmed out if Congress declared the WSA a wilderness area. Mark said that depended on whether the bill was written with input from people in that area. He pointed it out on the map. Hunting is the primary public activity. Rains commonly come during elk hunting season. When the road floods out, hunters drive around it, creating other ruts. It’s an ongoing problem because of restrictions on what can be done in WSAs. Roy Farr met with BLM staff and Mark. They had an agreement on what Farr would do and what BLM would do to maintain the road. And then Farr addressed the RAC in April 2015. Road access is extremely limited. Discussion.

The road is in the bottom of a canyon. Mark didn’t think it was possible to fix the road so it didn’t wash out, or so no one could jump out of it. In 2012, the road turned into a stream for several months. Then new tracks were made. The Environmental Assessment was for permission to use hand tools to fix the road as best as possible. Ethan asked what options there were to get something on the record if and when the bill was written.

Motion

Bob Nordstrum moved and Michael Coleman seconded to write a letter to the BLM District Office stating that the RAC would like to have input on road locations, based on providing adequate access, as they were designated in WSA bills affecting the Albuquerque District. Motion unanimously approved.

Ethan will draft and distribute a letter to RAC members to be approved and forwarded to the BLM District Office. He will also let Mr. Farr know by phone call and follow-up letter that they are requesting to have input if and when the WSA is designated.

Planning 2.0

Carlos Coontz spoke to Angel Martinez, who said they are doing everything now as Planning 2.0 designates. The only change is that when the RMP is done, the field or district manager will now be the responsible official and the state director will be the deciding official.

Open Discussion

Juan asked whether masticator operators have firefighting equipment with them in case sparks are caused. Danita said they do have firefighting equipment and training, and this has happened. Inexperienced contractors with the USFS started a fire with a masticator. Discussion. Danita said BLM operators stay at least an hour after treatment to assure there is no fire. And BLM makes sure their contractors know that. Albuquerque District's masticator drivers are firefighters.

Bob Nordstrum asked about access to public lands being cut off by private landowners. He said this was an issue for hunters. Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation has a trust fund they are using for access issues—buying easements. He wondered how many examples there might be.

Keith said the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish website said you have to have permission to cross private land. John Brenna had one or two complaints and one was on tribal land. BLM took care of the other one. Bob said financial help would be available if they needed it. Discussion. Keith said the ways are what the hunters use and permittees maintain the ways. Most people don't realize that.

John Kelly said he had always used BLM status maps. And it is a challenge to keep the newest map in his vehicle. Some sections are very out of date. When BLM makes a map, what is the process to make sure other entities are shown properly? Danita said other entities are supposed to give data to BLM but they don't have a process for that. BLM has to request it to update their maps. The maps are on a 5-year cycle. USFS also has some areas where a land exchange doesn't have Congressional approval so it hasn't been changed on the map.

Danita spoke about access by flying in. The New Mexico Department of Transportation wanted to talk to her about a series of small airfields near public land to fly wealthy hunters in in small planes. Bob Nordstrum suggested they contact private owners about allowing airfields. Discussion. Danita said the information was also given to the state office in Arizona. And she gets calls every now and then that it's still on the radar.

BLM has a drone policy. They are widely banned on public lands.

Adjourn

Ethan thanked retiring RAC members for their service. He said there would be no RAC meeting until new members were approved.

Motion

Ethan Giedraitis moved and John Kelly seconded to adjourn the meeting at 2:50 p.m.
Motion unanimously approved.