

**LAS CRUCES DISTRICT
RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
LAS CRUCES, NEW MEXICO
APRIL 11, 2012**

AGENDA

- 9:30 a.m.** **Meet and Greet**
- 10:00 a.m.** **Call to Order, Welcome and Introductions** (Tony Popp)
- 10:05 a.m.** **Review of Agenda and Approve Minutes** (Tony Popp)
- 10:15 a.m.** **Opening Statements and Updates** (Bill Childress and staff)
- Updates on Resource Management Plans (RMPs)
 - Updates on Major Environmental Impact Statements (EISs)
 - Administrative Details (Charter)
 - Other items
- 10:30 a.m.** **BLM Socioeconomic Strategic Plan** (Tony Popp/J. Montoya)
- 11:30 a.m.** **New Mexico Copper-Copper Flat MPO/EIS** (Doug Haywood)
- 12:00 p.m.** **Lunch**
- 1:30 p.m.** **Illegal Trash Dumping** (Rusty Stovall)
- 2:30 pm.** **Public Comment Period**
- 2:45 pm** **Update on Access Issue** (Tony Popp)
- 3:00 pm** **Break**
- 3:15 pm** **Future meeting topics** (Tony Popp)
- Fire (Wildfire & Rx Fire)
 - Off Highway Vehicle use
 - Restore NM
 - AML
 - Budget
 - PTNM RMP Field Trip and Briefing
- 3:45 pm** **Next Meeting(s):** (Rena Gutierrez)
- Date: _____
- Start time: _____
- End time: _____
- 4:00 pm** **Adjourn**

RAC Members Present:

Tony Popp
Jim Hyatt
Mike Walsh
Howard Bartoo
Ed Boykin
Rod Hille
Billy Garrett
Tim Eastep
Greg Magee
Michael Quintana
Paul Turner
Ray Trejo

Designated Federal Official:

Bill Childress

BLM Staff:

Rico Smith
Tom Phillips
Leticia Lister
Jim McCormick
Edward Seum
Jennifer Montoya
Rena Gutierrez

MEETING MINUTES

REVIEW OF AGENDA AND APPROVE MINUTES

Tony Popp, Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. The Agenda was reviewed and accepted. Minutes from the January 25, 2012 meeting were reviewed, accepted and set.

OPENING STATEMENTS AND UPDATES

LAND USE PLANS

TRICOUNTY RMP

Jennifer Montoya provided an update on the TriCounty Resource Management Plan. The New Mexico State Office is currently reviewing the document, with comments due by April 2012. After incorporating comments, it will be sent to the Washington Office for review (May 2012). Not sure on the time it will take for this review.

PREHISTORIC TRACKWAYS NATIONAL MONUMENT

There are still refinements being made to the Draft document. The document should be out to the public in May 2012. Then maybe the document can be scheduled for discussion at an upcoming July meeting.

MAJOR EIS PROJECTS

Bill Childress provided updates on several ongoing major projects:

- Alamogordo Regional Water Supply Project—completed Draft EIS phase; weeks away from issuing Final EIS on the well field (ground wells north of Alamogordo).
- Sun Zia Transmission Line—still negotiating with some alternative issues with various groups. Once EIS is published, public meeting will be held on Draft EIS.
- Southline—Scoping period for the project is open. Scheduled public meetings in Arizona and New Mexico; May 8 in Las Cruces at 5:30 p.m.; May 9 in Deming; and May 10 in Lordsburg. Partnering with Western Area Power Administration on this project.
- South Road EA—upgrade off I-25 at the Upham Exit to the Spaceport. EA is adequate for this project. Converting dirt road to paved. Dona Ana and Sierra County are involved.

Question by Michael Quintana: Why are you doing an EA on land that is already disturbed?

Answer by Bill Childress: Federal Policy Act requires that since the road is being restructured and realigned, and since it crosses an historic trail, an EA is required.

Question by Tony Popp: Is the road two-lane?

Answer by Bill Childress: Yes.

- Several EAs underway for mining projects. EA level amendments to existing mines. We are very close to reissuing EA for an Application for Permit to Drill by HEYCO. Will keep the Council posted.

Question by Michael Quintana: Is the EA complete?

Answer by Bill Childress: Yes, EA is completed.

Question by Tim Eastep: Is public participation limited to an appeal process?

Answer by Bill Childress: They are added to a mailing list to receive input on sensitive EAs.

Comment by Jennifer Montoya: We ask for public input prior to the EA and ask them to contact us. After EA is written, it is posted for the public to review for 30 days prior to the FONSI.

Question by Tony Popp: Otero Mesa, what is the status of the drilling?

Answer by Bill Childress: It has been remanded back for reconsideration. We did not adequately analyze the impact on the grasses. So for now we go back to the original decisions (White Sands Resource Management Plan).

Question by Tony Popp: Is it on BLM or State land?

Answer by Bill Childress: BLM land. We are obligated to entertain applications to drill because there are existing leases in place.

Question by Rod Hille: Are you talking about year ago a plan for oil lease drilling in Sierra County?

Comment by Tom Phillips: There were 250,000 acres proposed in Otero County, not Sierra County, 4 years ago. The decision that was remanded covered Sierra and Otero County.

Question by Tony Popp: Is it gas or oil drilling?

Answer by Bill Childress: Gas

BUDGET UPDATE

Comments by Bill Childress: We received funding we were hoping for projects in Jornada, Bootheel, vegetation projects. Many projects being implemented this year.

RECREATION FEES (Tom Phillips)

Information sent to public. Target for fee increase is May 1, 2012. We rolled out pamphlets last weekend (Easter), in English and Spanish. Over 500 vehicles came to Aguirre Springs. Majority of visitors were very supportive of the fee increase.

Comment by Bill Childress: This will help with the tight budget and allow us to maintain the sites.

Question by Michael Quintana: How much revenue will be generated?

Answer by Tom Phillips: Potentially a 70 percent increase, due to people driving shorter distances.

ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

Question by Tony Popp: What are our official dates for our appointments?

Answer by Bill Childress: July 1; we are still a standing committee for July meeting.

Question by Tony Popp: When should we do nomination for Chairperson again? Should it be an agenda item for next meeting?

Answer by Bill Childress: We will check; possibly for October.

BLM SOCIOECONOMIC STRATEGIC PLAN

Comments by Bill Childress: It is more important that people got a chance to look at the Plan. When we do an analysis, the BLM has very few economists that support our endeavors. We struggle with these issues. This plan addresses our inadequacies in this area. We have an expert in Tony Popp in the area of economics.

Comments by Jennifer Montoya: The RAC has been involved in trying to improve implementation of this strategy. In communities that were traditionally agricultural, how to we adjust to the changes? How do we make changes with the Western economy?

Comment by Tony Popp: The way I read it, it is a process by the BLM to include more socioeconomic analysis in future plans. I found it interesting that on the Sun Zia, BLM received a lot of comments. You got reactions from the socioeconomic perspective. I think the idea is very good. As an economist, there are things I wouldn't do, so it is good that we are receiving input.

Question to Council by Tony Popp: Do we want to address this or make comments on this issue?

Comment by Jennifer Montoya: With the changing demographics in the West, this changing face, if the BLM does not recognize who is using our public land, we may be marginalized by Hispanic groups. There is a social aspect as to who is using our public land.

Comment by Tony Popp: Noted that Jennifer's point was well put. More and more families are using our parks.

Tony Popp asked Council to comment on questions 1-4 (in Handout).

Comment by Ed Boykin: Have been a cardholder for over 50 years. One of the great things he has seen in Hispanic families—large number of families camp and play softball at KOA—seen at Willow Creek. Jennifer cleared up some questions in the plan. In trying to read through document, has always held BLM in high regard. I have definite conviction, if something is working, don't change it.

Comment by Tony Popp: Your reasoning is good. What is changing is the urban interface with the BLM. The growing expansion is forcing the BLM to react to these changes, i.e., Dripping Springs, Aguirre Spring, etc. Big impact from El Paso leads to increase in usage. What else should we consider from an economic point of view?

Comment by Ed Boykin: Commented on size of Las Cruces in 1937. Espina was the edge of the desert.

Comment by Tony Popp: Asked for additional comments on 4 questions in socioeconomic strategy.

Comment by David Wallace: Stated that regional impact, we are jumping scale, local and regional. We are looking at biological impact on regions. This document identifies different scaling info and will be included as we look at future and changing demographics.

Question by Mike Walsh: Will this process make it worse?

Comment by Bill Childress: No, this will give us a tool to move in on issues we have been struggling with.

Question by Michael Quintana: Will this make the process quicker?

Comment by Bill Childress: No, but it will make it better.

Comment by Tony Popp: How does BLM pull these issues back into the process, making them permanent? The stated goals in this plan are fine, but it may take 1-3 years for plan to be put in place.

Comment by Michael Quintana: I don't think anyone questions the legitimacy of the plan, but it does become another long, slow agenda item.

Comment by Mike Walsh: He was shocked at the first meeting on how long it takes for a plan to be implemented.

Comment by Tony Popp: The initiative has to be made somewhere, so resources have to be available to achieve information.

Question by Michael Quintana: Is this just another lay of bureaucracy?

Comment by Bill Childress: No, this is another tool to help us analyze and address the socioeconomic issues. It will not increase the bureaucracy that is already in place.

Question by Jim Hyatt: As far as local governments, it will change drastically for Dona Ana, Sierra, and Luna Counties. How do you get local counties involved?

Comment by Bill Childress: Unsure of distribution to counties; will be rolling it out to the counties.

Question by Jim Hyatt: How does it affect tax base of Counties?

Comment by Tony Popp: More information will have to be obtained by local offices. It may mean funding will have to come from somewhere to provide information to the public. What does it mean to the smaller community? Training will be necessary to assist county staffs in learning about plans and projects.

Comment by David Wallace: This is a strategy. There are step down tactics to help move the strategic plan along.

Comment by Tony Popp: He would like to see historic documents and manuals referring to the plan.

Question by Bill Childress: How do we want to proceed? Do you want to establish comment period?

Comment by Billy Garrett: I am skeptical. My skepticism relates to the relevance to the overall mission of the agency. The BLM has remained connected to the people. Now, who are the people who will be affected by Federal decisions? One way to respond is to wrap around everyone who's relevant. Everyone is relevant. Socioeconomic analysis sketches out the boundaries as to who you are looking at. Problems, twofold. Getting the data down to the local level. The challenge is how to relate a powerline and a campground to the value to the communities. It is a compliment to what the BLM does, engaging the public. We need strong public engagement. How do we take these policies and drill them down? It has to be community comment.

Comment by Tony Popp: The socio part is more important than the economic part.

Comment by Billy Garrett: Yes, we need both.

Comment by Tony Popp: It can help us, but it doesn't give us all the information.

Question by Bill Childress: Do we want to think about it more?

Comment by Tony Popp: We have comments, so let's get them down and back to us by April 30th.

Comment by Rod Hille: We need to find a way to get public comments on the plan.

Comment by Tony Popp: This plan is independent of the public. Our RAC comments are important for the implementation process.

Comment by Bill Childress: One comment. Will this plan be exposed to local government?

Question by Tim Eastep: Does this plan go towards addressing resources?

Comment by Jennifer Montoya: We will figure the problem out. There is no system for it. It's not efficient.

Comment by Bill Childress: The strategy will suit us in this process.

11:40 a.m. – BREAK (5 minutes)

NEW MEXICO COPPER—COPPER FLAT MPO/EIS

Doug Haywood, Project Manager, gave a quick rundown on the project. The project is near Hillsboro, NM, 4 miles to the northeast. Copper Flat is an old existing mine which was shut down which New Mexico Copper now wants to start up.

Two EAs in place: EA #1 would allow New Mexico Copper to put pumps on wells 8 miles east of the mine. This would provide water to the mine; also to excavate and examine the copper. This EA is final. We received no public comments on EA#1.

EA#2 –referred to as the aquifer test, which involves pumping 2 test wells at a site for 16 days; to pump 180 feet of water. Working very hard with New Mexico Copper and the State on EA#2. We are anticipating a draft EA#2 within the next week. The EA will be open for public comment a month from now.

These EAs are important because we have to make sure that water is good. Our preferred method for the BLM, State, and New Mexico Copper is to dump water back to gray back. The EPA has to make a decision to allow the water to be dumped back into gray back. The EPA is looking for drinking quality water.

The draft EIS is now proposed for December, but it may get pushed back. Public scoping meetings have been conducted. Over 200 comments were received; should be up on the website within a week. Major concerns out of scoping meeting: Contamination and water consumption. Another concern was Animas Creek and water for the wells.

Comment by Bill Childress: Good participation at scoping meetings and local counties and communities are fully engaged.

Question by Tony Popp: Are there any other wells other than Animas Creek that are of concern?

Comment by Doug Haywood: They are going to look at many areas, but the major concern is Animas Creek.

Question by Paul Turner: Are the wells east of the Ladder Ranch?

Comment by Doug Haywood: They are east of the Ladder Ranch.

Question by Rod Hille: What is the association with State Engineer? There are water rights in place.

Comment by Bill Childress: It is their discretion to rescind their water rights.

Comment by Doug Haywood: The water tests should determine if they can pull more water than their water rights allow.

Question by Tony Popp: Were there comments on transportation?

Comment by Doug Haywood: Yes, a few; concerns about trucks driving through Hillsboro. The company projects 8 trucks being used per day, depending on production piles.

Question by Tim Eastep: On pump test, how high are they pulling the pumps?

Comment by Doug Haywood: 10 acre-fee a day for 16 days.

BREAK FOR LUNCH

1:30 PM--Meeting called to order by Tony Popp. Stated a conference call could be arranged with the Washington Office on the Socioeconomic Strategy Plan. No one interested. Will provide an update at a later date.

ILLEGAL TRASH DUMPING

Rusty Stovall, Operations Supervisor and Vanessa Duncan, District Safety Officer along with County and City partners presented discussions on the illegal dumping issue.

Question by Tony Popp: This is mostly solid wastes in the community, right?

Answer: Yes.

Question by Michael Quintana: What role can private industry play in this role?

Comment by Rusty Stovall: On GPS'd sights that are being illegally dumped on, subcontractors are the worst offenders.

Claudia Marez, Health & Human Services Division gave a presentation on Community Outreach.

Comments by Ray Trejo: Thinks that community education is the answer. Have you thought about creating a hotline?

Answer: Yes.

Question by Michael Quintana: Turnaround time in response to a call?

Answer from Kevin Apodaca, Codes Enforcement: Right away if not busy. Fines are \$1,000 or 90 days in jail.

Closing remarks by Vanessa Duncan; how can the Resource Advisory Council help?

Comment by Tony Popp: He suggested that hunting organizations might be willing to provide sponsorship money.

Question by Michael Quintana: Can the BLM provide land for sites in rural communities?

Answer by Bill Childress: We do. Ninety-nine percent of the rural sites are on BLM land.

Comment by Billy Garrett: Commented on the large amount of tires being dumped and the number of inoperable vehicles. Stated that we need to follow up on what the communities feel the real issues are.

Comment by Bill Childress: Encouraged the RAC to reach out to their communities to help address the dumping problem. Networking with counties to establish a model to share with other communities.

3:00 PM – **BREAK**

3:15 – **MEETING RESUMED**

Tony Popp called meeting to order.

Tony Popp asked the council if there were any more comments on the illegal dumping issue. He stated that individually, we should talk to hunting and community groups and make them aware of the problems.

Comment by Billy Garrett: If organizations have newsletters to promote illegal dumping awareness in them, or on their websites.

Comment by Tony Popp: The difference between New Mexico residents compared to Colorado and other western states is the independent spirit attitude. We need to educate them to think about the common good and protecting our environment.

Tony Popp addressed future meeting topics and land access issues.

Comment from Tony Popp: He asked the council to think about where we move from here (regarding access). What does the council want to do? Do we need a subcommittee? There are big areas of public land that are not accessible—how do we get people to those areas? Are there ways to deal with issue?

Comment from Jim Hyatt: There are incentives that can be presented to private property owners to grant access to BLM land.

Comment by Bill Childress: Stated that the BLM has an Easement Acquisition Program in place to create agreements with private and state land owners. Funds are limited. Also with the State, need to relook at areas that are difficult to access—no County roads, abandoned county roads. What should the priorities be for public access? We would like the RAC to develop a position.

Comment by Greg Magee – He suggested researching access programs in other states; particularly Arizona (referenced Angel Montoya’s discussion from previous meeting). He said he would be willing to look at other states programs and report back to the RAC.

Comment by Ray Trejo: He stated that the Game and Fish instituted an ‘open gate’ program that is in its infancy.

Question by Billy Garrett: Referred to the list of problem areas—22 sites; 3 resolved; down to 19. What is the problem of getting into the specific area? We should focus on the areas and look at a tool kit to solve the problems. He asked Bill Childress for clarification on what the access problems are in particular areas. He suggested that the more specific the focus, the better the proposed subcommittee can respond to the problem.

Reply by Bill Childress: He recommended that these areas be explored at the subcommittee--evaluate the areas; are they valid efforts?

Comment by Tony Popp: He asked for volunteers for a subcommittee. Greg Magee and Tony will make up the subcommittee.

Comment by Billy Garrett: He recommended that RAC members be available to take calls to answer questions regarding the access issues--told Greg and Tony to call if they need help.

Comment by Bill Childress: Will relook at handout of access issue areas and add a column on the key issues for each area and add any areas that need to be considered.

FUTURE MEETING TOPICS:

1. OHV use
2. AML – Abandoned Land Mines
3. Council nominations

NEXT MEETING:

July 18th-19th, 2012

3:55 PM – **MEETING ADJOURNED**