

AGENDA
Las Cruces District
Resource Advisory Council Meeting
April 23, 2013

- 9:00 a.m.** **Meet and Greet**
- 9:30 a.m.** **Call to Order, Welcome and Introductions (Tony Popp)**
- 9:35 a.m.** **Review of Agenda and Approve Minutes (Tony Popp)**
- 9:45 a.m.** **Opening Statements and Updates (Bill Childress and staff)**
- Updates on Resource Management Plans (RMPs)
 - Updates on Major Environmental Impact Statements (EISs)
 - Update on Major Environmental Assessment (EAs)
 - Update on other activities in Las Cruces
 - Administrative Details (Rena Gutierrez)
 - Other items
- 10:30 a.m.** **Tri-County Draft Resource Management Plan (Jennifer Montoya)**
- 12:00 a.m.** **Lunch on your own**
- 1:30 pm.** **Permit Renewals Drought (Leticia Lister) and ~~Wildland Fire Program (Mark Bernal)~~**
- 2:00 pm.** **Update on Access Issues (Bill Childress)**
- 2:30 pm** **Update on other issues (Tony Popp)**
- 3:00 pm** **Public Comment Period (Tony Popp)**
- 3:30 pm** **Future meeting topics (Tony Popp)**
- Off Highway Vehicle use
 - Budget
- 3:45 pm** **Next Meeting(s): (Rena Gutierrez)**
Date: _____
Start time: _____
End time: _____
- 4:00 pm** **Adjourn**

RAC Members Present:

Tony Popp
 Jim Hyatt
 Rod Hille
 Greg Magee
 Michael Quintana
 Paul Turner
 Norman Walsh
 Ed Boykin
 Billy Garrett

Absent:

Ray Trejo
 Billy Garrett
 Tim Eastep
 Howard Bartoo

Designated Federal Official:

Bill Childress

BLM Staff:

Ciara Cusack
 Amelia Underwood
 Juan Gamon
 Tom Phillips
 Edward Seum
 Jennifer Montoya
 Rena Gutierrez
 Rico Smith

Public:

Les Owen, NM Department of Agriculture
 Ryan Ward, NM Department of Agriculture
 Tiffany Rivera, NM Department of Agriculture

MEETING MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER, WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS; REVIEW OF AGENDA AND APPROVE MINUTES

09:30: Tony Popp – Calls meeting to order.

0930: Visitors introduced.

0935: Tony Popp asked members to review previous meeting minutes. There were no amendments or comments. Tony Popp motioned to accept minutes. Motion to accept agenda accepted and minutes accepted and set.

OPENING STATEMENTS AND UPDATES (BILL CHILDRESS AND STAFF)

0940: Rena Gutierrez provided the names of new reappointed RAC members to the council.

Bill Childress welcomes everyone to meeting and provides update on major actions:

1. RMPs
2. Trackways RMP

Question by Tony Popp – He asked Bill Childress if there were any major issues with the RMPs?

Answer by Tom Phillips – He stated that there were issues of more protection, less activity and road use.

Bill Childress provided update on major projects -

- New Mexico Copper project: EAs completed; Drafting of EIS has begun.
- Alamogordo Well Field – EIS completed for well and pipeline, as well as the authorization for 10 wells.
- Sun Zia – Transmission: The final EIS is nearly completed, pending discussion with cooperators. Expected to be completed this summer.
 - Question by Tony Popp: Is this the final EIS? Is the comment period complete?
 - Answer by Bill Childress: Yes, it is complete.
- Southline Project – Bill is designated authorized official; Crosses two states and two districts; 345kV line; Upgrade to powerline continue laying of heavy line; Conducting route analysis
 - Question by M. Walsh – Will there be two separate lines?
 - Answer by Bill Childress: They will determine the spacing of the two lines. The draft will not be complete until next calendar year.

Bill also stated:

- Two new power lines from El Paso. One to Afton and the second line to Sonoma Ranch.
 - Q. – Tony Popp: Will there be any controversy?
 - A. – Bill Childress: Possibly, from the new roads that may be built.
- South Road – In holding pattern. Not sure if Spaceport wanted the road. Waiting on the state and county. We are back on the agenda to finish it up, including some fencing issues.
 - Q. – Tony Popp: What is the road to be used for?
 - A. – Bill Childress: It is to be used for visitors to the Spaceport.
- Freeport McMoran – 2 MPOs for Chino and Little Rock; amendments, access roads.
- Magellan Pipeline – El Paso to new rail yard in Afton has been authorized under EA and completed.
- Kinder Morgan Pipeline – Company to make proposal to build another pipeline.
 - Q. -- Tony Popp: Is this a gas line?
 - A. – Bill Childress: I am unsure.
- EQIP Program – Lot of project work being done. Combination of vegetation treatments and improvements; replacing wells, troughs, pipelines, fences; EAs on each allotment.

Q. – Tony Popp: Sun Zia & Southline both in southern part of NM; Is there any way to make better plans at the beginning? Seems as though projects are being dealt with individually rather than as a whole; is it feasible?

A. – Bill Childress: The BLM encourages companies to use corridors. They are not always an option due to where they start and end. They also look at a range of alternatives. They often deviate from the corridors. Kinder Morgan, a good example of one keeping in the corridor.

Comment by T. Popp: If we look at all the lines, we'd be surprised at what it looks like; everyone wants to go through the southern half of the State.

Comment by B. Childress: We will assess the type of impact the lines will have on the environment.

Q. – Jim Hyatt: Gila Wilderness; WSMR not allowing Sun Zia through; limitations.

A. – B. Childress: Good example; pushing line further North because of USFWS/NPS issues. Re-opened scoping twice. We are hoping the South line won't be as complicated. There are issues with Ft. Huachuca and the San Pedro.

10:15 AM – Bill Childress opened up for questions.

Q. – Rod Hille: has the broadband cable company been issued a permit?

A. – Ed Seum: No permit has been issued. They have applied for a right-of-way.

Q. – M. Walsh: What organizations were invited to the Tri-County public meeting tonight from 5-7 PM?

A. – B. Childress: It is open to the general public. There is an extensive mailing list sent out notifying people of the meeting. He advised the council member to let him or Rena Gutierrez know if they are not getting notifications of future meetings.

10:20 AM – TEN MINUTE BREAK

10:30 AM – MEETING RECONVENED

TRI-COUNTY DRAFT RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

Comments and presentation by Jennifer Montoya: She addressed the mailing lists and stated that the Tri-County RMP is primarily a guidance document.

After J. Montoya provided a slide presentation of the Tri-County RMP (Handout #1), she opened up the floor for questions.

Q. – T. Popp: Isn't this public hearing format eliminating questions?

A. – B. Childress: it will not be in a public hearing format.

A. – J. Montoya: There will be comment forms available to submit comments to be followed up on later.

Q. - T. Popp: What are the implications for not doing oil and gas planning?

A. - B. Childress: We will have to do a standalone effort.

Q. – T. Popp: Will oil and gas be allowed in ACEC?

A. – B. Childress: A standalone analysis must be done for every oil and gas lease application and evaluated on a case-by-case basis. It is a very complicated process.

Q. – T. Popp: He asked about a hunting buffer on the Sierra Vista Trail.

A. – J. Montoya: She stated that the hunting buffer is approximately ½ mile.

Comment – J. Montoya: She referred to school kids at Trackways monument when target shooting was occurring. There was discussion about applying a uniform restriction on target shooting in recreation areas.

Q. – T. Popp: What are the restrictions in the Doña Ana Mountains and College Ranch?

A. – J. Montoya: There is no hunting allowed on College Ranch.

Comment – Ed Boykin: He stated that in 1949, four members from Las Cruces Union High School were in the area. Two of the boys found an unexploded ordnance that exploded and both were killed. Is there still ordnance in the Dona Anas?

A. – T. Popp: There may be some, but we are not certain.

Q. – J. Hyatt: What is the process for determining the need for more solar projects in the Afton solar zone?

A. – J. Montoya: You can site outside the solar zone, but you would have to do an environmental impact statement. Inside the solar zone, you have to just do an environmental assessment.

A. – B. Childress: If someone wants to site in an exclusion area, the agency must grant a permit for a plan amendment. We would have to go through and use a plan amendment.

A. – T. Phillips: There must be a criteria evaluation and possibly an amendment.

Q. – Greg Magee: Why is the Otero ACEC not excluded from mineral sales?

A. – B. Childress: It is such a large area with many county roads, we can use discretionary decision making to authorize or not allow some reasonable sand and gravel pits to service the infrastructure.

Q. – G. Magee: What was the decision plan for recreation use in Elephant Butte on the maps?

A. – T. Phillips: Part of the decision involved what areas should we be prepared to deal with recreation issues in those management areas.

Q. – G. Magee: Would that involve developing new routes?

A. – T. Phillips: We would identify in a route plan where new routes may be needed or restrictions placed on no new routes or off-road driving.

Q. – J. Hyatt: In a wilderness, aren't you still allowed on designated routes?

A. – T. Phillips: Most of the public think only of OHV use, which is on designated and existing roads and trails, which is different from Otero and Sierra County.

Q. – T. Popp: When we look at alternatives, outside of the existing roads and trails for OHV, is Alternative D still a little more restrictive?

A. – T. Phillips: Yes, it is. It makes more decisions and clarifies any limitations that may apply.

Q. – T. Popp: Are we letting the public bushwhack anymore?

A. – B. Childress: Since 1980, no.

Q. – G. Magee: is there an effort to do a baseline as to what are existing roads and trails?

A. – T. Phillips: With digital imagery and per the Mimbres RMP, we can close roads and trails based on the decision date of that document. The RMP sets criteria. Dialogue with the public can help refine that data.

A. – B. Childress: We are also doing an inventory.

Comment – M. Walsh: We set ourselves up for failure because we can't police it.

A. – B. Childress: People have to report it and we have two law enforcement rangers in the District and we will follow up on it.

Comment – T. Popp: Even with my sportsman's group putting up signs and closing roads in the Gila, we still see violations.

Comment – B. Childress: We have established OHV areas in Afton. We are trying to provide that niche. It is still rampant, but we are trying to control it.

Q. – T. Popp: What is the difference between recreation zones?

A. – T. Phillips: He explained the difference between special recreation areas and extensive recreation areas, using examples.

A. – B. Childress: He stated that there is an explanation in the Tri-County plan.

A. – D. Wallace: SRMAs are destination focused and ERMAs are broad, multi-destinations.

Comment – T. Phillips: Perhaps there is a way to designate areas with signage where you can discharge responsibility in a special recreation area.

Comment – T. Popp: He stated that the format of the public meeting will force the attendees to really look into what the plan is absence of the public hearing.

12:05 PM – BREAK FOR LUNCH; 1:35 PM – MEETING RECONVENED

PERMIT RENEWALS/DROUGHT

Rangeland Management Specialists Amelia Underwood, Juan Gamon, and Ciara Cusack provided a presentation on updates to permit renewals and an update on drought conditions.

Drought in 2011 was extreme to exceptional; 2012 was severe; and 2013 is severe to extreme; expanding on monthly basis. Forecast (NOAA) is to persist or intensify.

BLM has an Instruction Memorandum 2013-094 for guidance to follow during drought; the key point of which is communication with permittees. Range Management Specialists are on the ground with the ranchers. Highest non-use in years because of permittees helping out. Grazing preference is protected when they take non-use.

Q. – T. Popp: Are most cattle on year-long?

A. – A. Underwood: Yes, most operators maintain cattle year-long.

Q. – M. Walsh: Are 87% of cattle not being grazed?

A. – A. Underwood: On the quarterly use, yes.

Comment – J. Hyatt: Most operators are removing their cattle. It's like laying off 80% of your operation to operate 20%. It's about conservation.

Q. – J. Hyatt: What was the driest year in New Mexico?

A. – M. Walsh: I believe it was 1951.

Q. – M. Quintana: if operators are grazing on private land, it has an effect on BLM land.

Comment – J. Gamon: He explained to R. Hille the reason for the delay in EQIP projects.

Comment – R. Hille: He stated that he did not agree with the lack of action with the EQIP program.

Q. – P. Turner: Does the BLM have to return EQIP funds if they do not use the money?

A. – B. Childress: He stated that if a project is not done, they can roll the funds from the previous year in to the next year.

Q. – P. Turner: Who is the Enterprise Team?

A. – A. Underwood: It consists of a wildlife specialist, a range specialist, and a hydrologist from the USFS.

Q. – P. Turner: Is testing and monitoring done on water tables?

A. – B. Childress: It considers parameters that address surface hydrology.

Comment – J. Gamon: He stated that he has made field visits and talked to operators whose wells have stopped pumping after 45 years.

Q. – T. Popp: Do we see any plans for the BLM and the Forest Service to treat riparian areas to improve conditions in time of drought?

Q. – M. Quintana: What are the effects of city growth, such as Las Cruces, have in dropping water tables, pools, lawns, for example?

A. – None of the range specialists were able to answer the questions because it was not their area of expertise.

UPDATE ON ACCESS ISSUES

Comment – Bill Childress stated that he met with a variety of user groups: hikers, mountain bikers, climbers, and a caver. The workshop session was viewed as a success with approximately 100 people in attendance, including officials from the 6 counties. Have not rolled out Phase 2; Bill and small staff will work directly with each of the counties. He then asked members to provide their perspective.

Comment -- T. Popp: He stated that not every county provides PLAT books of city and private roads. He also stated that in general, people who express these views want to respect the rights of the ranchers.

Comment – B. Garrett: He stated that it is a big problem getting information to the public about access to public land through private land. Develop strategies to get people out.

Comment – J. Hyatt: He stated there is a need for updated detailed county maps.

Q. – G. Magee: He asked for notification for the next road trip for county meetings.

A. – B. Childress: He stated he will notify RAC members.

Comment – R. Hille: He stated that there are county roads that are not maintained by the county that the public still drives on. County gets money for maintaining roads; need to distinguish between County road and public roads.

UPDATE ON OTHER ISSUES BY TONY POPP

Comment – T. Popp: He stated that they would like to have information on pre/post-AUMs on National Monuments.

Comment – B. Childress: He stated that there is no analysis nationally on AUMs, but we provide information on which areas are closed to grazing in New Mexico.

Comment – T. Popp: Requested an update on economic studies and effects of National Monuments on the local economy.

Comment – T. Popp: He stated that the off-road transportation protocol expired in 2003.

Response – Tom Phillips: He stated there is a National guidance to develop travel management.

Comment – T. Popp: He raised the issue of agreements with Ft. Bliss, White Sands, and the BLM.

Comment – B. Childress: He stated that there is a proposal with NASA and White Sands protecting land around “A” Mountain, including Fillmore Canyon near Dripping Springs. He explained the Federal process of these proposals; currently no position, maybe in the next 30 days.

Tony Popp moved to accept the minutes of the September 19th, 2012 meeting. Paul Turner made a motion to accept the minutes, and Bill Garrett seconded the motion. The motion passed.

PLANNED FUTURE MEETING TOPICS (MEETING DATE TO BE DETERMINED)

1. Wildland Fire Program (priority 1)
2. OHV use
3. Overview of land tenure; how is public land disposed of? - B. Garrett (priority 2)
4. Budget
5. Wilderness Study Areas – M. Walsh (priority 3)
6. Otero Mesa – M. Quintana (Possible field trip in October)
7. Restore New Mexico field trip (October)
8. Update on Drought

Meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m. Next scheduled meeting mid- to late July.