

SUMMARY MINUTES
PECOS DISTRICT RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL (RAC)
LESSER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN HABITAT PRESERVATION AREA OF CRITICAL
ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN (LPC ACEC) – LIVESTOCK GRAZING
SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING
September 29, 2015

Chuck Schmidt opened the meeting and all attendees introduced themselves. He explained to those attending that the group is a subcommittee of the Pecos District Resource Advisory Council (RAC). Ms. Tish McDaniel, along with George Farmer, RAC members, are the Co-Chairpersons. The subcommittee is looking into the management of an ACEC on BLM property recently acquired and consolidated with other lands. The BLM is looking to manage this area for vegetation and habitat and the question is whether there is a place for grazing and if so, how.

The Committee made a report to the RAC, who then recommended to BLM that grazing of the areas be explored. BLM was told to move forward with using grazing as a tool. However, there were many legal issues needing to be looked at. This meeting will address these issues.

The consensus was that management would be necessary. An application process was compiled for producers to graze in the area. Monitoring is an important component of grazing and funding from other than BLM would be necessary. A ranking process was drafted containing eligibility questions and ranking criteria. This still needs to be refined.

At the last meeting there was a question as to whether BLM could accept funds from permittees and how to do so. The Solicitor brought up a free grazing permit. It was discussed with BLM's national lead in the Washington Office and ideas were given. It was mentioned that a National Monument (Carrizo Plain National Monument) managed by the Bakersfield, CA BLM Field Office was currently doing this.

After looking at the RMP for that area it was seen that much could be applied to this ACEC area as well. A power point of the Carrizo Plain National Monument management tool was shown and it was seen that the same issues were found. This was discussed with the grazing manager on the Monument and she will visit the RFO in October to consult with BLM on these issues.

Management under a free use grazing permit was shown and reviewed. Two of the three options listed fit this area. A working model has been found to work from.

The Monument's Cooperative Agreement showing that the ultimate goal is habitat species management was reviewed. Common Understandings and Terms of Agreement were referred to as well as the Studies/Research and Livestock Management portions.

Range Improvement maintenance was discussed. This involves a Cooperative Agreement and voluntary contributions. If there is **no** voluntary contribution, the grazing cooperator will be responsible for all costs to maintain to BLM standards.

If there **are** contributions, BLM will maintain the facilities.

A map was shown and discussed whether to have three (3) grazing units, with one or more than one Cooperator.

Ms. McDaniel explained that she had brought an Agreement from a group in Missouri doing the same type of work as well.

On the Monument funds from producers to graze are only used on the Monument to enhance and maintain the facility. They have a charting process in their RMP and look to see if criteria is met.

They pay for technicians and wildlife biologists to work short term with Range Techs doing monitoring.

It was stated that the ACEC area currently looks good, due to good rainfall.

It was asked if the Committee thinks BLM is on the right path and if there was a need for more.

Grant Beauprez, NM Game & Fish Department, stated that it was good that what has been done before has been looked at and that all available information should be looked at. It was asked how grazing co-ops were arrived at and the answer was that they were mostly handed down through families, and some neighboring ranchers.

Many stipulations are very specific to assure good habitat remains.

Ms. McDaniel stated that she believes BLM is on the right track.

It was asked if an Agreement would be drawn up similar to the one discussed and it stated that it is planned to learn from those using the one on the Monument when they visit BLM in the next weeks. It is hoped to be able to proceed and receive good legal guidance.

Chuck Schmidt reiterated that first and foremost is preservation of the habitat and being held accountable. How to implement the grazing tool which is in the RMP, is the task at hand.

Attendees were asked to e-mail any further questions they may have to BLM to be considered when the CPNM Monument managers arrive.

To the question of their use of fire as a tool it was stated that they have very little, but is used in small patches.

A voluntary contribution occurs only when being grazed, on actual use.

Chuck asked if the Committee would like those interested to submit a grazing plan and asked if they still wanted to incorporate what is being done on the Monument.

Ms. McDaniel suggested waiting until after discussions with those already using the plan.

It was asked if outsiders are used for their monitoring or if all is done in house. The answer was that they have a large staff and they do it themselves.

Term lengths can be established by BLM. Flexibility for the producer was a concern and this needs to be looked at up front. This was agreed but focus must be kept on the goal of **habitat management**.

Grazing plans done the right way up front will protect both BLM and the producer should changes occur. Flexibility is important and should be addressed in the plan.

Objectives and goals must be developed that are measurable and should be outlined specifically and transparently to the producer for **habitat management**.

Ms. McDaniel asked for notice to be given with a date for the visit so questions can be forwarded for their meeting. The Carrizo RMP and Agreement will be e-mailed to attendees for their perusal.

It was suggested a meeting of the Subcommittee be held again in January and use the committee's recommendations in scoping meetings for the activity plan.

It was asked about legal requirements to choosing a permittee. Mr. Schmidt relayed that this is still being discussed with the solicitors (free use permits) so may not have to get too involved past the ranking process.

Who ranks the applications is a question.

Discussion occurred concerning the funding – how to collect, the difference between repair and maintenance, etc.

It was asked about the intensity of monitoring and this was explained as Robel once a year and other every 3-5 years.

In answer to how much time is involved, it was stated one month for vegetation. It was offered that NMACD – SWAT biologists could easily help with monitoring to alleviate some of the costs.

It was decided that the next meeting would be **December 1, 2015, at 1:00 pm at the Roswell Field Office**, rather than in January. A draft of the grazing portion of the ACEC activity plan will be sent to the Committee for review prior to the December 1 meeting.