

**SUMMARY MINUTES
PECOS DISTRICT RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL
FEBRUARY 26-27, 2013
ROSWELL, NM**

RAC Members Present:

**Steve West
Robert Armstrong
Tish McDaniel
Jack Callaway
Steve Peerman
Alisa Ogden
George Farmer**

BLM Staff/Meeting Support

**Chuck Schmidt
Jerry Dutchover
Howard Parman
Christopher Brown
Jim Stovall
Grant Beauprez - presenter
Steve Owens
Justin Stevenson - presenter
George Veni
Joe Stell**

RAC Members Absent:

**Neal Christopher
Reginald Richey
Gregg Fulfer**

Scribe:

Betty Hicks

Federal Official:

Douglas J. Burger, District Manager

Public:

Howard Hicks

FEBRUARY 26, 2013

CALL TO ORDER, WELCOME & OPENING STATEMENTS

The meeting was called to order and agenda time changes were discussed. Discussion on the legislation regarding public lands transfer in New Mexico and the sequestration issue was requested. Hearing no other items requested, Chairman West thanked all for coming and asked the members to give a firm commitment if possible to attending the scheduled tour for the next day.

As there was not a quorum present a procedure of requesting acceptance for the record of the previous meetings by e-mail/telephone was discussed and will be pursued.

Update on Hunting Unitization – George Farmer

Mr. Farmer explained that the Department of Game and Fish has been restructured and that he now works out of Santa Fe, rather than the area office in Roswell. He will be working with big game enhancement funds and will be able to fund projects in the future.

He explained that a quick way to describe unitization is to say “a land swap”. The purpose is to ensure larger access of definable hunting, trapping and fishing areas. This is totally voluntary from the land owner. In all cases, the land owner comes to the Game and Fish Department with an issue or wants to help hunters not to be in trespass. These definable areas of private land help the landowner with trespass, safety and less monitoring.

Deer and barbary sheep hunters could only hunt on private land but will allow more.

This is was good for one year and public comments will be solicited for the upcoming season. Areas are selected by habitat quality and management needs for the area. They are now working on areas with BLM where historically it was only with state lands.

The group was shown what the agreement looks like, covering the number of acres open and those being closed. The rancher provides the management practices being used for enhancement of wildlife and Game and Fish will give specifics of what they will allow.

If there are state lands involved it must go to the Land Commissioner and then the Game and Fish Director signs off. It is then posted on the internet for the public to know where they can and cannot go.

When opened, the public may access private land without permission. The state land cannot be hunted if closed.

Question: What would be a common reason for non-acceptance?

Answer: It depends on what is being opened and closed. It must be a good area for hunting and give good access.

There are programs available for Game and Fish to pay for access when necessary. The area worked this year with BLM was shown.

In rules and information booklet, a young hunter is shown being able to hunt on private property. There have been mixed comments on this issue but no trespass issues were known of by Mr. Farmer.

Access is now available where county roads have been closed. Southeast New Mexico is currently the only area doing this unitization.

Question: Is habitat restoration used as criteria for unitization?

Answer: A program is being worked on called "open gate" where access can be paid for and hopefully these funds will be spent on habitat work.

Question: Why is the southeast the only ones doing this?

Answer: No one else seems to be interested, both private owners and Game and Fish.

Question: Will this be a re-do every year?

Answer: Outcomes will be looked at and areas dropped when necessary and offered where good.

Question: How is public input done?

Answer: It is advertised in the *Federal Register*, newspapers and public meetings.

Question: Have relationships developed through Restore (New Mexico) had anything to do with the success, having less skepticism?

Answer: It is hoped that it helps, that once it is seen and heard about that it will show that it works and has good opportunities.

If areas are opened for specific species (deer/barbery sheep) cannot hunt other species and there is an ending date.

Doug Burger explained that this process is ongoing in other states and since it is the first time in New Mexico, there are concerns. It is expected that when land owners see that the process is working, there may be more interest by land owners.

Chuck Schmidt stated that being able to evaluate this first time occurrence will allow a better product in the future. Definable boundaries are shown on the maps that help hunters in the field.

Question: is there a written explanation of what was shown visually?

Answer: Not at this time – will get something out soon.

State Land Office/BLM Land Exchange – Tate Salas

Mr. Salas provided all with a map explaining the state lands being looked at for acquisition by BLM and also what the state will acquire. He also provided a copy of the Agency Range Program Comparison.

He explained that the acreage involved is 15,00 of BLM and 63,000 of New Mexico state land. The end appraisal balances out the acreage; it is not an acre-for-acre, but a dollar-for-dollar value. The reason for this exchange is the Lesser Prairie Chicken (LPC) and Dune Sagebrush Lizard (DSL) protection. It will benefit both species. It will help BLM manage focal areas. Properties will be closed to mineral leasing and allow the state to develop lands outside of these areas.

BLM selected lands based on LPC /SDL data. All are adjacent to the RMPA boundary.

Chuck Schmidt explained that all properties for oil and gas are unleased by both agencies, with the exception of two within the ACEC. The State is looking for high mineral value to be able to generate funds for their trust.

Six important steps in the process were shown. Acreage is still being identified, but it is very close to being completed. A feasibility analysis will then be done. A Notice of Exchange will be done and then an Agreement to Initiate (ATI).

A map of areas being looked at for acquisition and the state property is located in the CFO area. The maps distributed may change a little when final adjustments are done. It was explained that the areas shown on the screen are general areas, that the maps are more specific.

Areas where there are 68 active leks and 20 inactive leks, were shown. Also, areas of DSL habitat. The Weaver Ranch and TNC areas that BLM is looking at acquiring were also shown. Some Game and Fish LPC areas and the ACEC area being managed for LPC were also shown.

Another screen showed the concentrations of LPCs. If property given up contains access, it will remain in place.

Question: How does it affect ownership of split estate?

Answer: BLM will only acquire where State owns surface and minerals and State will do the same.

Question: What is the estimated finalization date?

Answer: About one and one-half to two years.

Question: What is the general opinion of this land exchange?

Answer: Outreach meetings with ranchers have been held. There are many questions regarding value and what does federal management mean to them.

The area in CFO is not very controversial. The map showing lands BLM will acquire in the RFO has generated much controversy. It is hoped to assure that management will remain where good practices are currently in place. Lands within the acquisition will not be leased.

There are different opinions among ranchers about working with BLM and the State. There are also different options available to the public on BLM and State lands.

Mr. Armstrong stated that due to CCAs and CCAAs in place, they will be able to conduct activities in areas adjacent to the exchange boundaries.

Question: Are there any downsides to these agreements?

Answer: One is that it is too costly. Some companies have said they will not do this and they do not understand that it may be more costly, if possible at all.

Doug asked that as a Council, if opportunity presents, that they make all aware that if the species is listed, problems will be large. New Mexico is only a small part of the 5-state area that is being looked at.

Question: Is there any discussion regarding BLM saying we have restrictions in place for protection? Will there be any restrictions on the State?

Answer: We are trying not to put restrictions on the lands to be exchanged.

NM legislature is asking to step in and take over federal land. Utah passed such and was ignored. New Mexico's Bill was tabled. It requested a task force to look at this process, ramifications, etc.. It was not an implementation bill. Doug Burger relayed that where this has been pursued, it has caused strained relationships and much money.

A handout was provided of what New Mexico Tech prepared relative to the appraisal of the lands.

LPC-Habitat Information – Grant Beauprez

Mr. Beauprez, a biologist with the Game and Fish Department showed a picture of the chicken, which is in the grouse family. It is unique to the five-state area, NM, TX, OK, KS and CO. He explained the visual differences of the male and female. A map of the five states was shown, with an outline of the historic range. The current range has been reduced from about 85% in a depicted area to

The eco region is primary shinnery oak in this area. In Kansas & Colorado the shrubbery is sage brush.

CRP in Southwest Kansas was shown .

Lekking habitat usually consists of lower vegetation. The chickens need to see well and have good escape cover. Lekking has already been seen and will continue further into the spring. During the lekking season the males are very territorial. A demonstration of this, including audio, was shown.

During nesting the chickens need good cover, very tall, 11-20 inches. Their strategy is to “stay put” if threatened. During periods of drought they will seek out water at tanks. Escape ramps in tanks are provided for chickens, as well as other wildlife.

Question: Are other species monitored?

Answer: This was not known and chickens are easy to monitor.

Fire has helped to bring back areas to a healthier state. Rain is needed to sustain good health of the area. Many predators influence the population. Better habitat will do much for protection of the birds. Prescribed burns work well for the first year, but recycle is needed and this is difficult to manage. The frequency of the firing is important.

Question: Has there been any Restore New Mexico activity done in these areas?

Answer: Yes, have been trying to get this done .

When mesquite has invaded it makes an area inhabitable.

Abundant insects are necessary. Mortality of adults is large when there is drought in areas.

Chicks can fly within five to six weeks, necessary to escape predators. They need large blocks of habitat, 25,000- to 50,000-acre areas. The Game & Fish Department owns properties devoted to the chicken. The largest is in the Milnesand area. Surveys are done every spring and getting ready to begin now. Survey routes were shown. TNC and BLM also do surveys and all are combined to achieve a good showing of data. Different agencies do different types of surveying. It is difficult to consolidate. A helicopter was rented in 2012 and surveying done. Thirty seven thousand birds were found range wide. Four different ecotypes within the range were sampled.

Threats to the species were listed and an explanation of what is being done to address same. Incentive programs to maintain grass and shrub communities and to convert croplands back to native grasses are in place. These include increasing public awareness, providing technical and financial assistance to use prescribed fire and same for mechanical control of woody plants.

Energy development, including pads and power lines are also threats. A solution is to work with companies to avoid critical areas, apply best management practices (BMPs) and provide mitigation. A website has been developed for companies to access showing information regarding chicken areas.

Livestock grazing can be very beneficial as well as a threat. Overgrazing is one of the threats to the chicken.

Climate change is a threat but not fully known. Connectivity zones are encouraged to allow movement and population shifts.

Oklahoma and Kansas have more mortality due to collisions with structures. Pastures are smaller. Removing fences is a good way to help prevent this.

The five-state area working group is working to help foster good habitat. Since 1998, the chicken has been proposed for listing. It is now on the “front burner” and decision made to be proposed as threatened.

A range-wide management plan is being worked on to create large blocks of habitat in each of the five states. Working is being done with Fish & Wildlife Service and other agencies on different programs to get all States working in the same way..

The plan development steps were listed and population goals were listed. Sixty-seven thousand is the total goal, double of last year's total.

We have about 37,000 now and it is felt this goal can be reached. Would like an average 10-year population here of 8,000.

Focal areas have been designated for conservation efforts to be concentrated. This is not difficult in New Mexico. Ways that these focal areas were selected were shown. They are generally larger than 25K, an average of 50K in size.

Seventy (70) percent high quality within the focal areas is desired, with 40% in the connectivity zones. There are 800K acres in focal areas. CCA, and existing BMP, as well as new initiatives in the focal areas are in place. A 2-mile area is necessary to support a lek.

The summary of conservation strategy includes setting population and habitat goals, strategy emphasizes these areas and minimizing and avoiding impacts within the focal areas.

It was stated that if the bird is listed, it may bring people together to look at helping to increase habitat, but it may be too little, too late.

LUNCH

Feral Hogs – Justin Stevenson

Mr. Stevenson explained that he has worked for the past 10 years with different agencies and has worked with feral hogs in his career. He referred to a map in the brochure distributed showing the spread of feral hogs through the years. He then showed the group a power point presentation.

Feral hogs are very reproductive. They breed very early, have 3-18 offspring. Food available helps them with reproduction. Within two years, a population increases by 150. One lead sow is responsible for a home range size and use. Hunting and random hunting allows the other pigs to roam and are lost sight of. Their ranges shift seasonally, depending on resource availability and avoidance of hunting or predation pressures.

Pigs wallow and when they are out of water, they disappear quickly. They will rub and tusk trees. This causes invasive weeds to be able to germinate and spread. A slide of a large rooting was shown.

The expansion in NM has increased greatly since 1988. They are spreading, particularly in Hidalgo County.

It is very difficult to enforce the “dropping” of hogs, unless actually seen.

Damage in the US is estimated at eight million dollars annually, assuming an approximate hog population of four million.

Invasive weeds – while foraging for worms, hogs initiate soil erosion and promote the invasion of exotic weeds. Weeds are also spread through their feces.

Acorns have been identified as critical and preferred food for both wild boars and feral hogs.

New Mexico has 180 listed and sensitive species, all susceptible to feral hogs. They kill lambs and kid goats. Much research is done on the losses of lambs. The hogs destroy stock tanks, impoundments and irrigation lines. This can lead to water contamination.

Damage increased from \$300 in FY 05 to \$218,000 in FY 08. Texas estimates \$52million in damage from destroyed crops, fences, predation and diminished forage for livestock and wildlife.

They are susceptible to at least 30 viral and bacteriological diseases. They can carry a vast array of disease transmissible to livestock.

Descriptions of what has been found in stomachs of pigs were given. Many T&E species in many states have been affected. Quail nests and ducks in the wetlands have been found to be consumed.

Examples of traps were shown. This is advocated to be the best way to help eradicate the hogs. Different types of traps were explained and how they work. Many of these are humane traps. In the southeast dog hunting is used.

Question: If hunting for meat, how careful do you have to be?

Answer: Wear gloves and be careful! If a disease is contracted it may be very hard to identify. Wear gloves and be careful.

Javalinas and wild pigs tend to avoid the same site at the same time.

Question: Is it easy to identify which did the rooting if a site is found?

Answer: Not easily.

Research is being done to develop nitrate bait, pig specific. The problem is other species getting into it.

Question: Is there any research into developing bates for sterility?

Answer: Yes, but the same problem occurs with other species

Working with those who are working toward eradicating these hogs was encouraged, rather than just trying to take out one or two.

Question: Are there any specific properties in the Pecos District with problems?

Answer: Not found as yet.

Public Comment Period – this was called for on schedule and no comments were made.

Buried Utilities – Jack Callaway

Mr. Callaway introduced Mr. Donny Payne and Mr. Steve Owens, who work with CVE Electric Coop. They showed samples of overhead conductors, and showed the equivalent of what is needed to do underground power lines. The area is twice the size of an overhead conductor.

Underground vs. overhead – reliability and costs were discussed. Costs are subjective. There are many variables underground. Reliability is based on the frequency of outages. There are fewer underground, but they are hard to fix, long to repair and much more expensive.

Municipalities have passed laws requiring new distributions to be placed underground. Winds, ice and snow will not cause outages underground. Other natural occurrences can still cause this problem.

Transmission - 69K volts and above – less than 2% of all outages are due to transmission system outages.

Underground has physical limitations. There are more restrictions underground.

Question: It was asked if there was a 115 KV.

Answer: Yes

It was stated that a line cannot run very far with a large KV.

Capacitance is much higher underground. 345KV cannot deliver power after 26 miles. Many impractical uses were listed. Other transmission issues were also listed which may be 20 times more costly, as well as other problems.

Much 35KV subtransmission has been done and is becoming common. Problems are occurring. Switchgear and cable failures have occurred. Time to repair underground lines exceeds overhead lines and charging current switch limitations of available breakers/reclosers limit line length to less than 15 miles.

Many regulations and reporting requirements are necessary now and there are many issues involved with outages. Eighty percent of outages in distribution systems are due to quantity. Underground systems are harder to modify. Overdesign/underdesign present many problems. Overhead is much easier.

Long range planning is done but cannot always predict what might happen.

Changing from radial to looped distribution system to greatly reduce outages can be done. This is not always practical and areas are a consideration.

Transmission – Cost can be 4 to 20 times the overhead, depending on various factors. Soil and terrain and voltage size, as well as length, all affect the costs.

Subtransmission – same, Distribution – 2-10 times.

Question: How do you splice a large one?

Answer: You do not, you replace the whole conductor.

Long range planning – the challenge is large. A POD is needed and commitment that it will be put in, (financial).

Doug explained that within the proposed rule for listing of the LPC, there is a listing of threats. One is the avoidance issue with tall structures. Predators use these structures. Doug discussed the fact that there are 400 wells served with underground power lines, mandated by the Forest Service. This is in much exposed rock areas. Safety and cost was a big issue to the entities in

this area. BLM was looking into underground powerlines only in areas where there is a high concentration of prairie chickens.

Question: When electricity is buried, do we know the impact on the soil?

Answer: It may depend on the insulation

Question: Is there regulation for deepness of burying?

Answer: It depends on the voltage and the terrain.

Question: If come in overhead and lateral off to underground, would this be considered?

Answer: Yes, probably not a big issue.

It was stated that after a trip to see first hand, there are still many questions. .

It was stated that anything generating noise over 75 decibels it must be quieted.

It was asked about feedback other than cost. This has been good. Cable is better but there are other issues to be considered. It is not possible to go in and build off of as can be done with overhead.

Doug reminded all that the Sequestration was set to happen on Friday, and that both sides were still not talking. BLM will try as an agency to deal with a five percent cut, which is five million dollars, and should be able to continue without furloughs or layoffs. It is felt this can be handled with minimum "pain".

Fort Stanton NCA Recreation Fees – Chris Brown

Mr. Brown, BLM Recreation Planner, explained that he would be giving a presentation regarding fee collections at recreation sites. The proposal must be run through the RAC s. He described a business plan and how it is created by BLM. A draft was provided. The Plan is a way of looking at an area that requires a fee. The Federal Land Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) is used to determine if a site meets the criteria for creating a new fee area. These fees are for services only, water, electricity, dump station, group shelter.

The Horse Trails parking area at Ft. Stanton is being considered for charging an expanded amenity fee at this time. The history of the trailhead was explained; that it came about through volunteer partnership. A map of the area was provided.

The area is currently signed only with "equestrian trailhead". It will now be recognized with a memorial identification and be known as the Rob Jagers Camping Area.

The Pavilion area was shown and it was explained that the AERC group provided materials to help BLM build services for users. Special Recreation Permit holders for the are include AERC and Zia Rides. State Monuments, Re-enactors, Back Country Horsemen, the Cave Study Group and multi-use individuals are others who currently use this area.

Information was shown of data available for previous costs associated at the site. A market approach was used. The goal is for the public to enjoy the area at an affordable rate.

BLM must develop a Business Plan, discuss what is needed, publish this in the *Federal Register*, and discuss with all related partners, with a target date for implementation of September 15, 2013. This Business Plan was provided to the RAC for perusal and suggestions.

No fees will be collected until the Business Plan is approved and a possible electronic payment system is being looked into.

The RAC members were requested to provide comments on the document.

Question: Is there some sense of how much money might be generated and are there any plans to include the cave campground area?

Answer: There is insufficient data to know how much money will be generated; the cave campground is not included in this proposal.

The fees would be picked up once a week. For the most part BLM has had good luck with another fee collection area, but occasionally there have been instances of theft.

Chris provided his e-mail address and asked that comments be submitted by March 7.

Next Meeting Date:

The next RAC meeting was scheduled for June 4 and 5 in Carlsbad. An agenda will be developed through Mr. West and Jim Stovall.

Suggestions were given relative to long range planning for the BLM eco-region analysis, water issues, Potash, etc. Other suggestions were brought up and Doug Burger asked that if there are issues that members want to look into, get them to Steve and a draft will be provided for comments.

It was suggested that the RAC look into any conservation measures that might be considered to preclude future suggestions of listings (by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service).