



**DENCA Advisory Council Minutes
February 1, 2012
Delta Performing Arts Building, Delta, CO**

Those attending:

- Chair Katie Steele of Grand Junction
- Joe Neuhoof of Grand Junction
- Oscar Massey of Whitewater
- Neil "Mike" Wilson of Eckert
- Vice-chair Bill Harris of Montrose
- Steve Boyle, of Montrose, representing wildlife interests
- Doug Atchley of Delta, representing Delta County
- Tamara Minnick of Grand Junction

Absent:

- Terry Kimber of Delta
- Steve Acquafresca of Grand Junction

BLM staff attending: Katie Stevens, Andy Windsor, Ben Blom, Collin Ewing and Brodie Farquhar.

Public attending: Terry Gray, Bob and Doris Janowski, Sherry Schenk, Lee Gelatt, Jan Burch, Erich Rechel, Janice Shepherd, Rhonda Edwards, Therese Davis, Dick Miller, Dave Upchurch, Mark Ackerman

Katie Steele noted the presence of a quorum. Agenda featured a discussion about Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, a summary from Katie Stevens on the Council's input on management alternatives, and finally a report on how BLM developed a travel management inventory, set designation criteria and developed three different alternative management plans.

Katie Stevens: spoke of the role of council, under the 2009 Omnibus Act, is to provide advice to the BLM. The council's role is to help BLM *before* the draft plan goes out for public review. The council was designed to represent specific groups and interests in the wider community. BLM staff have come up with four potential management plans. A preferred alternative management plan **has not** been developed yet. Development of a preferred alternative is the BLM's function, though it will have feedback from the Council.

Stevens asked for more feedback from the council on the four alternatives at this meeting. After that, the focus would then turn to travel management. The last step before the draft RMP goes out is for the

council to discuss the environmental impacts. The council can expect to be engaged through April or May, then there will be a hiatus for several months.

Public Comment:

Erich Rechel (wildlife advocate): suggested that shooting ranges be located outside the NCA, perhaps east of Highway 50. Also urged council and BLM to acknowledge the “travel effect zone,” where the presence of and activity on a road can affect wildlife. Different species have different sensitivities to roads, and can have greater or lesser zones.

Lee Gelatt (Quiet Use advocate): hopes to see non-motorized routes in Hunting Grounds and Cactus Park. Acknowledged management problem of having trails of different usage in the same area. Emphasize that he’s not asking for entire zones to be non-motorized. Would appreciate hiking trails to Gunnison Rim.

Janice Shepherd (Quiet Use): suggested that BLM post signs on roads going in to private property, so as to avoid trespass or the frustration that can create new, cross-country routes.

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

Joe Neuhof reported that the goal of ACECs is to protect sensitive areas. It appears that there is a reasonable range of alternatives regarding ACECs. All ACECs are nominated by either BLM staff or the public. Explained that the ACECs not carried forward into alternative management plans were protected in the ACECs that remained. Consensus that ACECs avoid economic burdens for ranchers.

Steven Boyle: asked what ACEC designation would mean for recreation management? **Ben Blom** responded that it simply added another layer of protection for NCA resources, adding that that same additional protection could be done with travel management rules as well. **Stevens** and **Blom:** explained that there is no surface disturbance and no mineral collection in an ACEC. Each proposed ACEC must meet criteria of relevance and importance and require special management for adequate protection. Acknowledged that many cultural and paleontological sites are not included in the proposed ACECs. Protection for some sites is heightened if the public is not aware of those sites. Sites are classified as to how they’ll be used or conserved or interpreted.

Other topics

Katie Steele: asked whether council members had concerns about the range of management alternatives regarding Wild & Scenic Rivers, woodland products, science and education, land tenure, land use authorizations, and watchable wildlife. Comments were primarily for clarification.

Summary of Advisory Council input To date on Range of Alternatives*

Biological (facilitated by Tamera Minnick, Steve Acquafresca, Doug Atchley, Oscar Massey)

- 1: Alternative B: all members of the group questioned the desirability of management via natural processes.
- 2: Closing riparian areas to trailing cattle didn’t seem appropriate to some members
- 3: The group did not consider it realistic to move vegetation health from “good” to “very good.” Recommended a focus on trends rather than specific end results.
- Consider soils health along with vegetative health.
- Discussion on fencing to protect resources, as well as grazing management, and the tradeoffs in retaining crested wheatgrass on the land.

Cultural (facilitated by Katie Steele and Bill Harris)

- Inclined to think that the NCA cultural resources needed interpretation and education, that it was necessary to monitor cultural resources and not much more.
- Heritage tourism could have impacts on cultural resources, even though some are fragile and easily damaged. Escalante Canyon could be overrun with visitors and triggers are needed so growth can trigger appropriate management responses.
- Sees opportunities for on-site interpretation where the cultural site is well known by the public.
- Old Spanish Trail is fragile and will need off-site interpretation.
- Not much to establish a range of alternatives—many management approaches are required by law.

Wilderness (facilitated by Joe Neuhof and Mike Wilson)

- Interested in tradeoffs between bolting and resource protection
- More access to the boundary of wilderness is needed (?) was this a statement or a request that we consider this? (Tamera Minnick would like discussion about wilderness permits, to be implemented when popularity thresholds crossed, triggering the need for permits, as has happened with river permits.)

Livestock Grazing (Facilitated by Tamera Minnick, Doug Atchley, Oscar Massey, Steve Acquafresca)

- 98 percent of the NCA is currently open (Oscar clarifying that not all of that is actually use-able)
 - Questions from Council on both sides of range of alternatives: Does this allow BLM to protect important resources? Does this satisfy the legislation's intent that grazing continue (which was also important to key stakeholders such as the Delta Co. Board of Commissioners)
- Trailing: Discussed concerns with a one-size fits all approach to trailing—e.g., a requirement to get cattle up Big Dominguez in one day would not be desirable. (Clarification: When trailing is specifically discussed in the RMP, it is to clarify that conditions may need to be established, but that doesn't necessarily mean that all conditions would be identical).
- Should certain areas be fenced to protect sensitive resources?
- Grassbanks: good idea. Original suggestion was that grass banks only be open to adjacent permittees; through discussion, the Council agreed that conditioning their use on a benefit to the resources of the NCA would also be acceptable (as opposed to letting in new operators who might not be familiar with local practices)
- Motorized use agreement: in the works
- Condition: What does BLM know about condition of vegetation (in addition to type)?
- Should there be an alternative that requires recreation tradeoffs to benefit grazing? (A and B rec and grazing are commensurate, C and D would include areas where rec might be prioritized over grazing). (Clarification: this objective may be oversimplified, BLM will review).
- **Oscar Massey** asked whether grazing management will be by NCA staff. **Katie Stevens** clarified that she would coordinate with respective field offices.

Recreation (facilitated by Mike Wilson, Joe Neuhof, Terry Kimber)

- Target shooting: Management approaches considered to date either close the NCA to target shooting or close sensitive areas to target shooting. Designating ranges is another management approach. Perhaps one area should be designated for shooting?
- Clarify in recreation section whether something would be prohibited, or allowed but not specifically managed for.

- Public values shared recreational use in certain areas of the NCA: repeated public interest in shared use including motorized for Hunting Grounds, Cactus Park.
- Consider establishing triggers for a permit system on the Gunnison, while noting that some areas may be too ecological fragile to allow large groups.

Recreation

Katie Stevens: Based on policy, BLM typically tries to pass shooting ranges to more appropriate partners. Preferable to transfer responsibility for picking up lead, shells and trash to either a community or non-profit. Land disposal would not be allowed in the NCA.

Break

Travel Management

Katie Stevens : reviewed how the travel management plan was developed. Omnibus Act limits motorized and mechanized travel to designated routes – no cross-country. The plan will provide for recreational, traditional, casual, agricultural, commercial and educational uses and provides for *all* modes and conditions of travel, including hiking, biking, horseback, bicycle and motorized.

Travel management decisions are made at two levels:

- Area allocation decisions are RMP-level and require a plan amendment for changes. Areas where travel is limited to designated routes, limited to a specific season of use, limited to a type of use, or is closed. (Open areas are not allowed, based on Omnibus Act language.)
- Implementation decisions, which can be changed without a plan amendment. Individual routes are designated as open, closed or limited.

BLM staff inventoried and digitized D-E NCA spatial data from 1998 to 2010. Public input about trails and roads was accepted through D-E NCA and Grand Junction planning efforts through mid-2011, focused on the accuracy of the inventory and the uses of routes.

The final inventory (excluding county roads and wilderness routes) is **572 miles** of trails and roads.

The current (or no action alternative) situation is that travel is limited to the 572 miles of existing routes (plus county roads); wilderness study areas and wilderness are closed to mechanized and motorized travel, some areas are seasonally closed to protect big game calving or winter refuge areas; while hikers, horseback riders and mountain bikers can travel cross country.

BLM regulations require the agency to locate OHV trails to minimize:

- Damage to soils, watershed, vegetation, air or other resources.
- Harassment of wildlife or disruption of wildlife habitat (especially threatened and endangered species)
- Conflicts between OHVs and other existing or proposed recreational uses.
- Ban trail location in wilderness, primitive areas or natural areas.

Andy Windsor described the route-by-route review conducted by BLM specialists and representatives from cooperating agencies. The first question is “Does the route have a use?” This considers:

- Trail-based recreation, recreation access or overlook/camping spot?
- Access to range developments or is it needed for livestock management?
- Access to private or state property, or a right-of-way?
- Fire suppression, science, management or Native American traditional use?

For two-and-a-half weeks, BLM staff specialists gathered in a room with two large computer screens – one could display trail inventory data, while the other could display Google Earth images of the same area. Looking at these two displays, BLM staff could ask and answer additional questions:

- Are there environmental concerns?
- Are there erosive soils, slopes of greater-than 40 percent or soils with erosion potential?
- Is this trail within big game winter range, calving areas or raptor nesting areas?
- Are there known cultural or historic properties nearby?
- Is this route parallel to a preferable, existing route?
- Is this a dead-end route (0.5 miles or less, not leading to a facility, campground, overlook or access point)?
- Does this trail lead to private property and is it liable to lead to trespass problems?

(BLM dealt with discrete segments or of trail. A single trail might have a dozen branches of turn-off trails – thus a dozen segments. All told, the NCA had 3,239 arcs, each of which received one of the following route designations:

- Open to all modes of travel (**O**)
- Closed (**R**)
- Limited to administrative use only (**C**)
- Limited to foot and horse travel (**H**)
- Limited to bicycle, foot and horse travel (**N**)
- Limited to motorcycle, bicycle, foot and horse travel (**M**)
- Limited to ATVs, motorcycles, bicycle, foot and horse travel (**A**)

Andy Windsor explained that there was also a designation for each management decision (B, C and D). Designations might differ (or stay the same) under different management alternatives, given how different alternative objectives drove the decision-making process. Travel decisions are made in support of other resources and their goals and objectives.

Alternatives would have some similarities, such as:

- Routes that could lead to trespass typically closed or available for admin use only across all alts (about 6 percent of current routes)
- Redundant or dead end routes typically closed across all alts (about 20 percent of existing routes)
- Routes without a use (for livestock grazing, recreation, lands and realty, access to private, rights-of-way) typically closed across all alts (about 1 percent of existing routes)
- Routes to private, livestock grazing facilities, or FS routes left open or available for admin use

Alternatives would also vary:

- Alternative B: More areas with multiple types of recreation, but fewer recreation objectives
- Alternative C: More active intent to reduce route density to reduce disturbance to wildlife, soils and riparian. Paired with fewer specific recreation objectives, fewer miles of routes
- Alternative D: More recreation objectives (but would still protect cultural and cactus). Hunting grounds: would be managing for heritage tourism (fewer routes)
- Variations in timing and acreage of area closures

Katie Stevens: BLM did three travel management plans, in total.

Public Comment:

Janice Shepherd: urged BLM to pay more attention to map dimensions and labels. She also recommended conversion of roads to single track.

Lee Gelatt: wants shared trails and some separations between motorized and quiet. Wants to see that spelled out in alternatives clearly.

Eric Rechel: Would like to see Cottonwood Canyon an Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

Dick Miller: sought clarification about the current Escalante Canyon ACEC, on whether county commissioners and the Division of Wildlife had input into how the ACEC was run. **Katie Stevens** said BLM would re-evaluate ACECs each time they came up in the resource management planning process. Thanked **Ben Blom** for his work and noted he was leaving for a four-month detail with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Collin Ewing will step in as needed in Blom's absence, before he returns this summer.

Next meeting is March 7 at the Mesa County Courthouse Annex.

