



**DENCA Advisory Council Minutes
March 22, 2012
Delta County Courthouse, Delta, CO**

Those attending:

- Chair Katie Steele of Grand Junction
- Joe Neuhof of Grand Junction
- Oscar Massey of Whitewater
- Neil "Mike" Wilson of Eckert
- Steve Boyle, of Montrose, representing wildlife interests
- Doug Atchley of Delta, representing Delta County
- Tamara Minnick of Grand Junction
- Terry Kimber of Delta

Absent:

- Steve Acquafresca of Grand Junction
- Vice-chair Bill Harris of Montrose

BLM staff attending: Katie Stevens, Andy Windsor, and Brodie Farquhar.

Public attending: Terry Gray, Bob and Doris Janowski, Erich Rechel, Janice Shepherd, Dave Upchurch, Mark Ackerman, Del Martin, Nancy Martin, Doris and Bob Janowski,, Mary and Conrad Tucker, Barney and Dianna Roberts, Jan Potterveld, Lee Waggoner, Thomas Panter, Jerry Smith, Tom Derryberry, Joyce Olson

Katie Steele : Council member **Tamera Minnick** will leave in August for a year's sabbatical, to work with restoration ecologists in Australia. Minnick will remain as an active Council participant, however, participating via Internet conferencing.

Katie Steele: BLM has hired a contractor to analyze all four of the proposed management alternatives for their environmental impacts. The Council will also provide their input about the proposed alternatives, especially for the D-E NCA users they represent. **Katie Stevens:** reviewed the role of the Council, to give BLM input. BLM will get a draft of the environmental impact analysis in April. BLM will then draft a preferred alternative, with a better understanding about the environmental impacts on grazing, biological and cultural resources, and recreation. By November, BLM will compile a Draft

Resource Management Plan, which will go out to the public for a 90-day comment period. After comments are received and considered, BLM will develop a final EIS and proposed management plan, which will trigger a 60-day protest period.

Public Comment

Thomas Panter: a retired teacher, he's building a yurt and off grid system along US 50. Voiced concerns about too much wilderness in the state. Doesn't want to see the public forced out from public lands. Favors Alternative A, the no-action management approach. Questioned any trail closures. **Doris Janowski:** noted that as she and husband getting older, they need to drive to access points before starting a hike. **Barney Roberts:** lives near Hunting Grounds. Urged BLM to keep lands open and trails as they are. **Eric Rechel:** urged Council and BLM to acknowledge that wildlife need wild places. Supports closing redundant trails to increase amount of wildness for the wildlife. **Lee Waggoner:** has plenty of mule deer and antelope in yard -- don't see how humans affect wildlife. **Bob Janowski:** doubts there's enough left of Old Spanish Trail to provide much of a retracement opportunity. **Jerry Smith:** urged quiet use advocates to visit the wilderness.

Alternative Review

Katie Steele: in review process, Council needs to look at everything, soup to nuts, at all alternatives. **Terry Kimber:** reviewing alternatives and then again review the preferred alternative seems like a redundant process. **Katie Stevens:** contractor will provide analysis of alternatives, so BLM will have that insight before it writes the preferred alternative. All designed for efficient development of management plan. BLM specialists will advocate for own ideas about a preferred alternative. **Terry Kimber:** perception that a lot of what we're doing may not be listened to. **Tamera Minnick:** asked if Council feedback on alternatives is best as big and general or focused on specific resources? Specific resources is preferred, answered Stevens.

Bill Harris wrote and emailed his comments about the proposed management alternatives to **Katie Steele**, who passed out copies to the rest of the Council. (Comments posted online with minutes.)

Katie Steele started leading Council through the proposed alternatives, as they relate to resources and activities on D-E NCA. Themes that emerged from Council comments include:

Geology and Paleontology:

- Impacts assessment should examine the interaction of interpretation and education on resources
- Note that interpretation and education are valuable but higher cost (discussion: may be more upfront costs but these may diminish over time)

Natural and Biological

- Impact analysis should note that systems in harsh environments don't necessarily recover – erosion and species composition issues of particular note. In an alternative like Alternative B, may not have the tools necessary to overcome these issues. Alt B would be the most impacting on natural ecosystems and wildlife, followed by Alternative A and then Alternative D. Alternative C would be best, by design, for veg and wildlife, because designed that way, but higher tradeoffs with human use/enjoyment.
- Natural processes alternative: Anticipate increased weeds and cheatgrass because of less ambitious treatment priorities and emphasis on using fire as a management tool.

- Ecology comment: In considering desired future conditions set in C and D, impact assessment should consider site potential and long-term time frames for recovery.
- Cheatgrass should be noted as a consideration in using fire as a tool in lower elevations.
- Discussion: would Alternatives that limit active treatments in pinyon/ juniper have an effect on fire danger? Highest fire danger is just after dying when needles are still on. Seeing good deterioration of p-j “skeletons” in D-E-many are now falling over, with good grass stands coming in. This may be more of a concern in other habitat types, however.
- Is pinyon/juniper encroachment a natural process or a restoration issue? Steve and Tamera—sage parks are high value and the amount and quality of sage parks has been affected on the large scale by human use, making sage a scarce and valuable habitat type. Suggest active management because natural processes are not working on a large scale, due to the value of these habitats to wildlife. Alternatives C and D provide the right tools to restore and enhance.
- Decadent sagebrush—value to certain wildlife species, but also crowds out herbaceous component which has value for both wildlife and livestock.
- Crested wheatgrass has value, but also suppresses native species at certain densities. May be better mixes to use now, but also note that crested is available early as forage (which may decrease browsing on natives) and it keeps the ground damp.
 - Consider potential to work with Uncompahgre Plateau Project on native species that are locally adapted and provide higher diversity.
- Riparian: Specific to alternatives that would consider limitations on trailing in Rose Creek, note that B and C would have impacts on livestock operations. Would like to see comparison for these areas vs. areas where this restriction doesn’t apply.
- Restrictions on trailing in Dry Fork-no other way to get through or water in these areas. Examine impacts on livestock management. Note that elk trails are fairly large too.
- Riparian areas are critical in these ecosystems—everything depends on them and biodiversity is tied to them. Evaluate protections for them and manage to protect. Potential for alternate water sources or identification of smaller critical areas in Alternatives where they would be restricted?
- Camping restrictions in riparian areas -- would these lead to shifts in enforcement priorities?
- Removing tamarisk-does this lead to erosion? Tamera and Steve-generally no, willows come in pretty quickly but some areas may need restoration to ensure this.
- In alternatives where riprap would be discouraged, consider effects on hydrology and erosion.
- If considering removal of man-made structures to enhance fish passage, consider that some of these are cultural resources because of their age.
- Seasonal closures for wildlife and soils could have some impact on recreation, but note that most of these areas are closed by the weather anyway -- increased unneeded restrictions can change the enjoyment of recreationists.
- Wildlife don’t seem to be bothered by recreation-Steve notes that reactions that aren’t visible still can have an effect; stress is a big deal for wildlife.

Wilderness

- Wilderness-impacts could be more significant in alternatives that don't rely on zone management. Use varies significantly by zone so if management approaches don't respond by varying by zone, may see more tradeoffs than needed.

Scenic

- Scenic/VRM-consider whether restrictive management options would allow for future needs/expanding use of technology. Might be some future developments that couldn't be allowed.
 - Counterpoint—scenic value is huge in this NCA-consider flip side of not protecting.

Cultural

Overall: Implementation of Alternative A will not provide enough protection for the natural resources in the NCA, or give the BLM the tools to respond to anticipated impacts.

Cultural Resources comments by **Bill Harris**:

Cultural resources are protected by several federal laws, so any management plan must work within the framework of those laws. The development of a site stewardship program, a public education program and law enforcement monitoring plan will be a very important aspects of cultural resource protection program.

Alternative B: Emphasizes a hands-off, more restrictive approach. I think we need to be more active management addressing threatened and problem areas. Visitation to rock art sites should not be restricted unless the site is experiencing degradation.

Enforcement of such restrictions would be difficult to maintain.

Alternative C: More active management is a plus with this alternative, but that could be more expensive, and harder to enforce. Avoiding impacts where development is desired would be the best option.

Alternative D: An emphasis on trail-based recreation could have a major negative impact on cultural resources. Avoiding significant cultural resources when developing new trails would be critical. I like the idea of heritage tourism, but put the emphasis should be on off-site interpretation, and a limited number of on-site interpretive sites. Interpretation of the Old Spanish Trail should be off-site. The remaining segments of the Old Spanish Trail within the NCA are very fragile and wouldn't tolerate direct use without radically changing the character of the trail. The concept of people experiencing what it was like to travel the Old Spanish Trail has very limited potential since the trail is in close proximity to highway 50. Heritage tourism in Escalante Canyon sounds good. But what sort of impact will that have on private property and the road? Landowners and Delta County should be involved in any development of tourism. Several of the well-known historic resources in Escalante Canyon are on state lands. What sort of involvement will Colorado Parks and Wildlife have in any tourism effort?

Air

- Consider effect of dust from recreational events-also may affect cultural and biological resources

Recreation

- In areas where Escalante Canyon is noted for some targeted recreational experience, note the impact that increased traffic will have on that road. Road already can't handle traffic it has-safety issues with narrow width and blind corners. Delta county won't likely have resources to improve it.
- Use is increasing-in areas where you used to see 4-5 cars, you're now seeing 15-30 people (e.g., Captain Smith's cabin). Consider effect on increased facilities e.g., parking areas.
- Consider unique effect of micro geocaches—because so small, they're harder to find, which can lead to more disturbance as people search for them. Could lead to more trails and negative impacts on soils.
- Mountain biking comments by **Bill Harris**:
- *General: Route closures as recommended in all the alternatives would reduce the routes mt bikers could travel. We don't have any opposition to those closures as long as there is a good reason to do so. The criteria used to recommend closures seem warranted. Mt bikers want access, but understand that other considerations such as PPSV standards, land health assessments and wildlife impacts must be part of the process. Mt. bikes should be considered as non-motorized except in wilderness and where conflicts with other muscle-powered uses are anticipated (very limited scenarios).*
- *Alternative A: This alternative allows mt. bikes to go anywhere. Not a very good*
- *option in terms of potential impacts and management needs. Mt biking is trail-based. Mt. bikers want a defined trail system with a variety of trail challenges and scenic options.*
- *Alternative B: Very restrictive overall, since mt. bikers use the roads as well.*
- *Alternative C: The most restrictive of all alternatives – doesn't provide a balance between protection and access.*
- *Alternative D: The most accommodating alternative to all uses except horse and foot only trails, although those trail uses are allowed in the wilderness, and the mileage for those trail uses aren't included in this process. The mileage recommended for mt. bike use can be used by foot and horse use as well.*
- *The designation of the purple routes will deny access to uses that are currently*
- *allowed. The mountain bike community would like to sit down with the motorized groups to see if some shared use is possible. Mt. bikers are certainly open to sharing roads and trails with other users with a good representation of motorized and non-motorized choices. As far as a need for some non-motorized*
- *trails for mountain bikers, it is a priority, since we can't just go ride in the nearest wilderness area to avoid the noise and odors associated with motorized use. For*

- *many riders it is a highly desired. The close proximity of several excellent trail systems around Grand Junction certainly provides a place for mountain bikers to ride in a non-motorized setting, but the NCA should have some non-motorized trails open to bikes especially closer to Delta. Mountain bikers' request for non-motorized trails has very little to do with conflicts with motorized users, but has a lot to do with the type of trail desired – narrow, sustainable, flowing.*
- Consider effects-recreational shooting and lead accumulation on wildlife? Noted as conservation issue for condors-what other species. Also effect on safety of others from shooting, differentiate recreational target shooting from hunting.
- Effect of paintball and shooting on cultural resources esp. rock art. Paintball leavings degrade slowly here. Ute charcoal paintings (type of arch resource) sensitive.

Highlights

- Exotic weeds won't go away naturally – active management is needed.
- General unhappiness with Alternative B, which would rely on natural processes, rather than active management.
- A “very good” status for some vegetation not a realistic goal – Council prefers a *trend* toward improvement.
- No active management for wilderness area – leave it alone.
- Education interpretative sites can be positive tool and benefit public.
- Fire can be an effective management tool at upper altitudes, while mechanical treatments work best at lower elevations. Fire at lower altitudes helps spread cheatgrass.
- Alternative A, the no-action alternative, isn't viable since humans already affect D-E NCA and will have greater impact as human population grows.
- If riparian areas get closed to livestock, ranchers need alternative water for herds.
- Trailing cattle keep trails from getting overgrown.
- Consider developing thresholds and triggers before closing trails or habitat.
- Before encouraging heritage tourism in Escalante Canyon, consider traffic growth and state of county road, as well as impact on residents.
- Micro-geocaching sites could trigger wear and tear on habitat.

Public Comment

Eric Rechel: nice to show all the different D-E NCA ecosystems, see what is out there. Map should also show habitat for different animal species. Also emphasized the value of Wilderness Zone 1 for desert bighorns. **Doris Janowski:** encourage educational signage for trails, cited successful Texas program example “Don't Mess with Texas”, which helped clean roads and public lands.

Next meeting

April 4 meeting in Grand Junction at the Mesa County Courthouse Annex.

May 2 in Delta, at the Delta County Courthouse.

Council discussed how they should discuss alternative preferences. Also discussed what field trips to take this summer, while BLM is working on a preferred alternative and the draft resource management plan.