



# United States Department of the Interior

Bureau of Land Management  
3028 East Main Street  
Cañon City, Colorado 81212



## FRONT RANGE RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL MINUTES May 8 & 9, 2012\*

*\*This meeting began on Tuesday afternoon at the Orient Land Trust and concluded on Wednesday in Alamosa.\**

### RAC MEMEBERS PRESENT

#### Category 1

Bill Dvorak  
Ed Nielsen  
Steve Oswald

#### Category 2

Jay Heeter  
Tom Olson  
Greg Labbe  
Mike Nelson  
Ted Hoefler, III

#### Category 3

Dean Sandoval  
Al Trujillo  
John Stevenson  
Christopher "Kit" Shy

### ATTENDEES

Greg Shoop, Front Range District Manager; Andrew Archuleta, San Luis Valley Field Manager; Keith Berger, Royal Gorge Field Manager (by phone); Paul Tigan, Assistant Field Manager; Denise Adamic, Front Range Public Affairs Specialist / RAC Coordinator

### OLD BUSINESS

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Kit Shy at 1:19 p.m. Kit asked for any comment on, or corrections to the minutes from the March meeting. No one had anything to offer. Ed Nielsen moved that the minutes be accepted as written; Dean Sandoval seconded. The motion was approved.

Denise Adamic reported that a FR RAC Member, Charles Rech, had resigned. The vacancy will be filled in the current round of nominations, which closes June 4. So far, the BLM Front Range District has received 12 nominations.

### ORIENT LAND TRUST DISCUSSION AND FIELD TRIP

- Andrew Archuleta introduced staff members from the Orient Land Trust (OLT) and then explained BLM's partnership with OLT. The BLM manages the lands and resources that surround the land trust. The OLT is a non-profit organization created to preserve the natural and biological resources, agricultural lands, wildlife habitat, open space, and historic and geologic features of the northern San Luis Valley for the education and enjoyment of current and future generations.

- The BLM and OLT are working together to build alternate hiking trail access to the Orient Mine (a historic but inactive mine that is well known for the various species of bats that spend time there while migrating). This new trail will provide visitors with access to the Mine from the Black Canyon Wilderness Study Area. Currently, the only way for the public to visit the Mine is by hiking from the Valley View Hot Springs.

The OLT has also been providing BLM with feedback about the potential impacts from geothermal energy leasing, should the activity be approved and managed on federal resources in the San Luis Valley.

Additionally, a longtime BLM grazing permittee has been working with the OLT to resolve water needs on his 41 Animal Unit Month (AUM)-permit.

- Suzanne Ewy, Executive Director OLT, led the group on a tour of the area. The field trip included viewing a site dig at the San Luis Valley fault, a discussion on the migration patterns and types of bats found in the Orient Mine, an explanation of the hydroelectric plant that powers all the facilities at the Valley View Hot springs, and a site visit to a major habitat restoration project the group has been working on.

At the conclusion of the field trip, Chairman Shy suggested that the meeting be recessed until the next morning. Greg Labbe moved to recess the meeting, and Ed Nielsen seconded. The meeting was recessed at 5:20 p.m. on Tuesday, May 8, 2012.

The meeting was reconvened at 8:05 a.m. on Wednesday, May 9, 2012, in Alamosa. The pledge was recited.

## **MANAGERS UPDATE**

### **Greg Shoop, *Front Range District Manager***

- *Renewable Energy Team (RET)*: The RET is a four-person group of BLM staff housed in the SLVFO but are a national resource. They offer expertise in efforts such as preparing the Solar Energy Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement, the SLVFO geothermal leasing EA, and other renewable energy planning efforts on BLM-lands throughout the country. Currently, they are working on projects for BLM California as there is no workload on solar applications in the San Luis Valley.
- *Budget reallocation*: Greg is returning from a 3-month detail in the BLM Washington D.C. Office where he worked in the Budget Office. Greg briefly explained that the current BLM budget allocation procedures in Colorado will change in the new fiscal year; the objective is to fund workload. The BLM's budget is part of the Department of Interior's budget which is proposed by the President and approved by Congress.

### **Andrew Archuleta, *Manager, San Luis Valley Field Office***

- *Blanca Wetlands expansion*: The SLVFO completed public scoping to prepare an environmental assessment (EA) for expanding the Blanca Wetlands Area of Critical

Environmental Concern. The EA will also analyze grazing on three allotments within the wetlands area. The office held a public meeting Feb. 29 in Alamosa. There were 75 attendees at the meeting and more than 200 comments filed. The SLVFO staff has been meeting with local landowners who are concerned about how this expansion could affect their lands and water rights.

- *Geothermal Leasing:* The SLVFO released for public review and comment an environmental assessment (EA) for geothermal leasing on public lands within the Valley. This EA tiers to the 2008 programmatic environmental impact statement for geothermal leasing on BLM and USFS lands across the country. When finalized, the EA will amend the 1991 San Luis Resource Area Management Plan. There was a mistake found in the EA referring to the length of time allotted for the public comment period, so the field office has extended its original public review period.
- *Rio Grande Natural Area Commission:* The next Rio Grande Natural Area Commission meeting is planned for Wednesday, May 16, 2012, in Alamosa. The Commission will discuss how to meet with local water districts and landowners in Costilla County. There are approximately 500 landowners who have land within the Natural Area boundaries.
- *Oil and Gas:* The San Luis Valley is not well known for oil and gas development; however, there are currently two active application permits to drill: one is on private minerals (administered by the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission), and the other is on federal minerals. The SLVFO received an application permit to drill (APD) for the San Francisco Creek area in which the minerals are federal and the surface is privately owned by the operator. The field office is still completing the APD review process.

Recently, the public has raised concerns and voiced confusion about the BLM's process for oil and gas leasing/development, so the SLVFO has decided to host a public education session on its processes. This meeting will be May 19, 2012, from 10am to 2:30pm at Adams State College in Alamosa. The meeting will include presentations from the BLM and the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission in the morning. There will be afternoon information sessions where the public can speak with program specialists from both agencies.

- *Trailing environmental assessment (EA):* The SLVFO is continuing work on its Trailing EA. This assessment analyzes the impact of ranchers trailing their livestock across public lands. This EA is part of a larger BLM initiative as the result of a settlement with the Western Watersheds Project (a non-profit conservation group).
- *New staff:* Paul Tigan was introduced as the new assistant field manager for the SLVFO. He began in late January and is located in the BLM's Monte Vista location.

**Keith Berger, Manager, Royal Gorge Field Office**

- *Destiny Mine:* The Royal Gorge Field Office (RGFO) is working on the environmental assessment (EA) for the Destiny Mine proposal near South Park. An application was submitted by Destiny Mining, LLC, for a proposed combination gold mine and sand and gravel operation just outside the city limits of Fairplay, Colorado. The proposed operation is on an isolated 80-acre parcel of BLM-managed land directly adjacent to a subdivision within the city limits. The project faces strong local opposition. The RGFO released a draft EA of the proposal for a 30-day public review and comment period in September 2011.
- *OTR Update:* The Over the River Corporation asked the BLM to postpone the art exhibit period. This means that the temporary art work would be displayed August 2015, rather than August 2014, and the construction phase would be pushed back from May 2012, to December 2012. The BLM is reviewing its environmental impact statement to determine if, and how, the postponement might affect the analysis and mitigations measures the agency outlined.
- *Oil and Gas Leasing:* The Front Range District, which includes the RGFO and the SLVFO, will have parcels offered for sale in the November 2012 oil and gas lease sale. The sale will include 48 parcels totaling 21,088 acres of public mineral estate in Elbert, Morgan, Cheyenne, Kiowa, Prowers, and Yuma counties.
- *RGFO Resource Management Plan (RMP):* The RGFO may begin a revision to its RMP as soon as 2013. This revision process could be an entire plan overhaul or may focus on an oil and gas development amendment.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

- Kitty Benzar from the Western Slope No Fee Coalition said that Special Recreation Permits should be applied to “uses” not “areas” as she feels they are sometimes applied. She disagrees with the BLM’s interpretation of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act. She urged the FR RAC to read the Act for themselves.
- Dave Shear, also from the Western Slope No Fee Coalition, agreed with Kitty’s comments and invited the FR RAC to read the Act.

## **SPECIAL RECREATION PERMITS PRESENTATION**

- Sean Noonan, Outdoor Recreation Planner for the SLVFO, gave a presentation on Special Recreation Permits (SRPs). These permits are required for a variety of large-scale, organized recreation activities on BLM-managed lands. There are two types of uses the permits apply to (recreation special use and lands special use) and encompass three types of permits (commercial, competitive, and organized group). The BLM has standard fees and a permitting process for SRPs.

## **VISUAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRESENTATION**

At the conclusion of the presentations, Chairman Shy directed everyone on a field trip to the BLM's Zapata Falls campground and day-use area. The group toured the overlook and day-use area before walking through the new campground. The FR RAC approved the BLM's issuance of fees in the campground area at its January meeting.

After the tour, the group continued on to the Nature Conservancy's Zapata Ranch. There the group learned of the BLM's partnership with The Nature Conservancy (TNC). The two groups have a history of working together on restoring historic wetlands habitats near San Luis Lakes and Blanca Wetlands.

#### **RECREATION RAC RESOLUTION**

At the statewide RAC meeting in March, each BLM RAC for the state was tasked with deciding whether or not to continue its Recreation RAC functions. The FR RAC passed a unanimous resolution to continue with its Recreation RAC functions, thus giving it the permanent authority to approve the increase and establishment of fees on BLM recreation sites in both the San Luis Valley and the Royal Gorge field offices.

With the approval of this resolution, the FR RAC's charter will be amended allowing it to continue with the Recreation RAC functions.

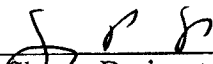
#### **CLOSING DISCUSSIONS**

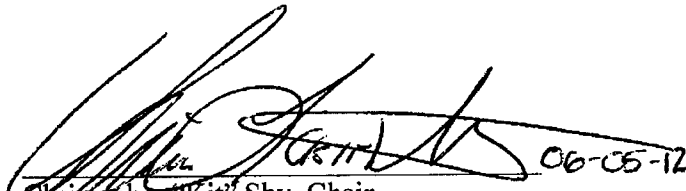
Before adjourning the meeting, Chairman Shy asked if any RAC members had further questions about anything discussed at the meeting. None were raised.

John Stevenson moved to adjourn the meeting; Tom Olson seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 1:35p.m.

#### **NEXT MEETING DATE**

August 8 in Salida, Colorado.

  
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Greg Shoop, Designated Federal Officer  
Front Range District Office  
Bureau of Land Management

  
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Christopher "Kit" Shy, Chair  
Front Range Resource Advisory Council

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