

Southwest Resource Advisory Council
MEETING MINUTES
Friday, February 20, 2015
Montrose, Colorado

Southwest Resource Advisory Council Members

Tif Rodriguez, Zane Odell, Paul Joyce, James Dietrich, John Reams, Mark Roeber, Phil Chamberland, Eric Sanford, Bill Gleason

Staff

Lori Armstrong, Marietta Eaton, Barb Sharrow, Connie Clementson, Elijah Waters, Shannon Borders

Visitors

Kathy Welt, TJ Holmes, Kat Wilder

The meeting was called to order by vice-chairperson John Reams at 9:10 a.m. A quorum for the meeting was not determined. Everyone introduced themselves. A motion was made to approve the minutes via email by Mark Roeber and seconded by Eric Sanford. An email vote will be solicited following the meeting. Election of the chair and vice chair was postponed.

RAC Orientation

Lori Armstrong reviewed the RAC roles and responsibilities for the benefit of the new members.

Spot Update

Shannon Borders and Connie Clementson presented an overview of the Spot Tracking device. The GPS devices will be used to track sheep herds on allotments starting in the summer 2015 to help the public better understand where Livestock Protection Dogs maybe present on public lands.

Gunnison Sage-Grouse Update

Leigh Espy, BLM Gunnison Sage-Grouse Project Manager, gave an overview of the Gunnison Sage-Grouse planning for the Environmental Impact Statement. The BLM GUSG Project Team is developing the draft EIS. The team has completed initial work on several portions of the document and is beginning work on the analysis of the draft alternatives. One side benefit of the project is the ongoing work to collect and consolidate relevant data across the GUSG range for use in the project analysis. This work includes digitizing existing information from hard-copy BLM files. The resulting information will inform the project team's analysis and be available to field office staff across the range. The project schedule targets late June 2015 for a public release of a draft RMPA/draft EIS.

Tri-State Line Upgrade Update

The RAC toured the site where Tri-State has proposed a generation line upgrade. Currently, it is 115 kV and they are proposing a 230 kV line. The BLM is analyzing the proposal and the line runs through the

Dry Creek Basin and Gunnison Sage-Grouse habitat. We are analyzing two alternatives. One considers the current route and the second looks at moving parts of the line outside of the current corridor. We expect a draft available of the preliminary Environmental Assessment in April 2015.

Public Comments

Kat Wilder asked Gina Jones to specify where the line crosses the Dolores River versus what is proposed. The span is over one mile long and was built in the 1950s. The slopes are eroding and the concern is the structure is not stable. The proposed site to reroute it is about one mile north along the river. Additionally, she asked about the route in the Dry Creek Basin and it will include eight miles rerouted along the highway.

Kathy Welt welcomed Todd Bacon to the RAC. She said that energy is a huge issue and a part of southwest Colorado as well as BLM. BLM's mission is to enable energy development and there are established processes including NEPA that requires EA, EIS, CX, etc. for any federal land action. She has witnessed in her 30 year career, the NEPA process has been hijacked by NGOs. An example is the recent public meeting on the Bull Mountain Master Development Plan. The public was demanding development plans so that drove agencies to require MDPs. The company proposed the MDP, because part of the land was federal mineral and part was private. She encourages the BLM to continue NEPA training for new members and ongoing training for current members. She also gave an overview of the NEPA process. She feels the Paonia meeting was a missed opportunity to educate the public on the NEPA process. She said it was a huge theatrical process including a Native American who did an emotional plea. She felt there weren't substantive comments and that the public didn't understand MDP. She didn't feel like she could make a comment at the meeting, and it was not of value except to give them a grandstand. She encourages more public education in the future.

Paul Joyce said he has felt he isn't always able to speak in the forum.

Eric Sanford agreed that it was a missed opportunity to educate the public as well. There were people that were at the meeting that are supportive of the Bull Mountain MDP.

Barb indicated that since the meeting, the BLM has received multiple letters and calls of support. She asked how we could make the meetings better.

Eric suggested having an oil and gas forum where there were breakout sessions. He also said he held a meeting to educate the public, and he asked the BLM to remember that NEPA is not a popularity contest. Lori Armstrong reiterated that NEPA is not a public voting process.

Oil and Gas Sub-group Update

The original members were Eric Sanford, Wally White and Ernie Williams. Eric Sanford explained the intent of the group was to educate the public. Wally is no longer on the RAC, so the RAC needs to decide how the sub-group should proceed. Eric Sanford suggested that a sub-group should be focused on a specific project instead of an issue at large, and he made a motion to dissolve the sub-group. Tif Rodriguez seconded the motion. An email vote will be distributed to ratify the decision.

Rec Fee Site Discussion

Lori Armstrong explained that any place that BLM charges a fee and subsequently wants to increase or initiate new fees requires a Recreation RAC decision. Prior to the decision, the agency develops a business proposal that includes public participation. The offices are working on proposals, so the managers wanted to start giving the RAC more insight into the process.

Barb indicated there are sites within the Uncompahgre Field Office that have fees associated with camping, floating, etc. and those fees go back directly into Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area for maintenance, resource management, etc. UFO has four campsites along the San Miguel River along with the Ledges area as well as Cottonwood Campground that are being considering for a camping fee to help maintain those sites.

Elijah indicated the Gunnison Field Office has fees at campgrounds along the Alpine Loop with various amenities. The GFO is considering a fee increase in those areas as users increase and the maintenance requires more funding. Additionally, GFO needs to better manage the Oh Be Joyful camp site in order to contain the impacts to resources.

Connie indicated that the Tres Rios Field Office is developing a recreation program. Currently, they have two camping sites that offer services without fees. There are no plans for fees in the near future, but it will be considered as they develop Recreation Area Management Plans.

Marietta indicated that the AHC charges \$3 person from September to March. They are considering increasing fees and expanding to year round. They are also working to increase visitation by encouraging bus tours. They also want to make sure the local community has access whether it's fee free days or local rates for annual passes, etc. The fees would be used to minimize impacts to natural resources and cultural resources.

Suggestions from RAC Members:

- Locals get a reductions in fees
- Charge fees only on weekends and holidays
- Suggest donations rather than charging fees
- Develop a socio-economic study to determine the public's willingness to contribute
- Door prize system for donations
- Consider opposition to fees

Question & Answer

Gunnison Sage Grouse GPS backpacks: Barb showed a map of their movements in the Crawford area. Elijah provided clarification on the Signal Peak trail system near Gunnison. The BLM is planning to provide travel options while reducing trails in Gunnison Sage-Grouse habitat. Paul brought up the zip line and Connie said the analysis is in process. Salinity project: The BLM is a cooperating agency on this Bureau of Reclamation EIS. David Justice was found guilty for vandalizing federal property in the Cushman Creek vandalism case, and sentencing is on Mar. 13, 2015. The Silverton Single Track Society is

a new mountain bike club and the group is planning to bring forth a trail proposal. Tif expressed appreciation for initiating the bait trap EA for the Spring Creek HMA.

Upcoming Meetings and Field Trips

- May 7-8: Durango @ San Juan Public Lands Center
- Statewide RAC-TBD

Suggested Agenda Topics

- GUSG backpacks and data analysis
- NEPA training

Adjournment

John Reams adjourned the meeting.