

**Northwest Resource Advisory Council
Minutes
March 6, 2014**

Colorado River Valley Field Office, Silt, CO

Attendance

Category 1: Dave Grisso, Wes McStay, Tom Latham, John Potter

Category 2: Stacy Beaugh, Dona Shue, Terry Sweet

Category 3: John Justman, Joe Nuehof, Dean Riggs, Kai Turner, Lanny Weddle

BLM: Jim Cagney, Steve Bennett, Stephanie Odell, Wendy Reynolds, Katie Stevens, Kent Walter, David Boyd, Chris Joyner, Megan Stoffer, Bridget Clayton, Erin Jones, Sylvia Ringer, Darren Long, Allen Crockett, Shauna Kocman, Steve Ficklin, Ryan Snyder

Public: Mark Rinehart, Town of Silt; Michael Warren, Colorado Parks and Wildlife; Dorothea Farris; Taylor Elm, Colorado Parks and Wildlife; Jason Riley, WPX Energy; Dennis Webb, Grand Junction Sentinel; Peter Hart, Wilderness Workshop; Petrike Peters, Conservation Colorado; Ron Milhorn, KMTS; Jessica Dooling, XTO Energy; Jeff Kirkland, WPX Energy; Bob Millette, Roaring Fork Sierra Club; Tom Rutledge, Roaring Fork Sierra Club

Dean Riggs called the meeting to order at 10 a.m.

New members were welcomed, introductions

Greater Sage Grouse, James Cagney

There are 21 management zones in Colorado. Some areas that are important to grouse are on private land, so it's not just a federal issue. Need to work together.

Best time to count birds is on lek, but difficult to do. Hard to get good population data. Best data from North Park right now.

USFWS needs to make decision about whether to list the bird by 2015. BLM said we would revise management plans by Sept 2014, right now looking at final in Feb. 2015.

The National Technical Team report is a good reference for science, but there are some unintended consequences in its recommendations. For instance, valid existing rights. Tried to scrub the unintended consequences and keep its protections for the bird. Stuck to NTT framework, some have said that was too narrow. But with a range of alternatives we can pick and choose from various alternatives, don't have to pick just one from the draft. How valid existing rights are handled probably has biggest

impact to grouse and to economics. Multi-well pads significantly reduce footprint, but old way of reducing impacts – timing limitations – becomes challenging. Need more time to drill. Sensitive period for grouse is breeding and early brood rearing.

Contrast the valid existing rights and oil and gas development with grazing. Most people would agree that grazing is not a big issue for sage grouse in Colorado. Some tools are out of the picture, like intensive pasture management requiring lots of fencing, eg. Also, sage grouse nests and young have to hide on last year's cover, which grazing can affect.

Wes – Early season grazing is the worst thing for grouse that I've seen. April-May.

Jim: A lot of people ask me about predators. BLM does not have a predator program. We don't manage wildlife. we manage habitat. Ravens are now a big deal. They are new predator in area. All we can address is habitat. 1950s had lots of grouse, but also lots of poison baits. May not have been a representative time. Clear that there are fewer birds now than in 1950s, but not clear that Colorado numbers are down in the past 15 years.

Tom – is that true throughout west, that you just focus on habitat?

Jim – Yes. USFWS will have to consider predators.

Jim -- We will almost certainly have disturbance caps in final despite some concern from others. We need those disturbance caps to be able to manage disturbance. USFWS wanted disturbance caps. We will manage to ensure mosaic of habitat for grouse. Will have different language. The 5 percent cap will likely drop to 3 percent for each management zone. Sage grouse don't care whether it's public or private lands. We would take into account private lands in the disturbance on big projects like a powerline, or something with a federal nexus, but overall not counting private land disturbance like houses. Looking at disturbance cap somewhat differently.

Potter: How is three percent not arbitrary and capricious?

Cagney: That's what's in the NTT report, which is based on latest science from grouse biologists.

Most areas are below cap except for magnolia bench in WRFO. Will count things with a federal nexus, not going to count things like peoples' houses.

Wes: What about split estate?

Jim: We will count split estate in the caps for federal minerals. But overall not trying to dictate private land use

Joe: What is mechanism for interacting with private lands

Jim: NRCS has some programs.

Dean: At the end of the day it will depend on how you count disturbance. Most areas aren't at cap at this point, but what happens when you get there?

Jim: Reclamation standards are big part of that. Probably not going to say has to go to all the way back to sage brush. But may not grant NSO exceptions if over cap. Trying to set up adaptive management.

Exception criteria may be biggest issue in proposed plan. Not going to go with huge tracts of NSO. 85 percent of birds in Colorado are associated with 37 percent of the leks. Especially North Park and Great Divide. Need to recognize that some areas are more important than others. The 4-mile buffer is designed to protect nesting.

Garfield County says you can't take models from Wyoming and apply it to Garfield County where terrain is so different. We don't disagree – terrain features may mitigate impacts. Have to look at that issue really hard, and work how we deal with it with real skill. The most important aspect of this document is that the exception criteria allow for the flexibility we need for economic uses but still protect grouse.

We expect we'll have the Proposed RMP/Final EIS in June or July, and the ROD in Feb 2015.

Mike Warren: What's the concern for not having sagebrush in reclamation mix?

Jim: Takes too long, would disturbance blow caps. If reclamation standards are too strict the disturbance caps won't work. Big issue. Not currently sagebrush seeds available.

Wes: Because of sage grouse issue, better overall management will occur.

Dean: Looking at cumulative impacts better than in the past.

Lanny: Challenge is to convince USFWS that we are taking this seriously and doing what needs to be done to ensure healthy grouse populations and a healthy economy. I think some progress is being made, but need to keep working on this.

Jim: Need a measure that protects bird but keeps sage grouse from being the enemy of the people.

Public Comment -- none

Air quality presentation – Megan Stoffer gives powerpoint

Wendy: Are we modeling for fugitive dust?

Megan: Yes. A lot of dust is at site specific analysis.

John: How many years until we “air quality” ourselves out of farming, etc.?

Field Manager Updates

Little Snake Field Office, Wendy Reynolds

BLM assists refuge with first NPLD event – Conservation Colorado, the Little Snake Field Office and Browns Park National Wildlife Refuge teamed in November for the Refuge’s first annual National Public Lands Day event. Sixteen volunteers helped plant 68 cottonwood seedlings along the Green River. The project included digging up 10-inch and taller seedling cottonwoods from the nursery, planting seedlings, and then fencing in the seedlings.

Little Snake oil and gas leasing update – Recent oil and gas lease sales in Colorado have included parcels from the Little Snake Field Office. The BLM sold six parcels totaling 6,705 acres in the Little Snake Field Office in the February 13, 2014 oil and gas lease sale. The Little Snake parcels were the only parcels listed, netting \$413,440 in bonus bids and rentals. In February 2013 BLM leased 13 parcels in the Little Snake Field Office, generating \$317,092, with the highest per-acre bid was \$200 per acre for an 80-acre parcel in Routt County. The February 2013 sale included LSFO parcels in Moffat, Rio Blanco and Routt counties. On August 8 three parcels totaling 2,125 acres were leased for \$478,845, with the highest per-acre price being \$425 per acre for a 908-acre parcel in Moffat County. Revenue from oil and gas development on public land in Colorado is split with the State of Colorado.

Transmission line projects continue: Two major power transmission line projects, Transwest Express and Energy Gateway South, continue to be analyzed in the Little Snake Field Office. Both are major transmission lines that are proposed to originate in Wyoming. Transwest Express will end in Las Vegas, Nevada, and Energy Gateway South will end at Mona, Utah. Both lines will parallel each other over most of their proposed routes. Transwest Express has released a Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Energy Gateway South will be releasing its Draft EIS shortly. Both lines are being proposed to help facilitate wind energy transmission to help ensure renewable energy development.

Fertility control efforts continue at Sand Wash Basin: Wild horses in the Sand Wash Herd Management Area continue to be treated with fertility control. This past year 90 mares were successfully darted with PZP, which delays fertility in mares. The LSFO has been partnering with the Humane Society of the United States since 2008 to minimize the reproduction rate within the herd. The herd is currently estimated at 406 horses. We are considering male fertility treatment and may ask the NW RAC for its thoughts next meeting. The Facebook page for the Sand Wash has 18,000 followers. GEMS is the

friends group for the Sand Wash Herd and is very interested in helping us, and helping us dart mares with fertility treatments.

Grand Junction Field Office, Katie Stevens

GJFO completes gather at Little Book Cliffs Wild Horse Range: The Grand Junction Field Office held a successful wild horse gather in the Little Book Cliffs Wild Horse Range in September. A total of 37 horses were gathered using bait trapping, with 24 returned to the range and 13 removed from the range. Twelve of the wild horses removed were adopted Sept. 28 at the adoption event held at the Mesa County Sheriff Posse Grounds. A stallion that was injured by other males prior to the gather was placed in foster care to heal. No wild horses were injured or killed during gather operations. This was the first time a bait trapping operation was used at the Little Book Cliffs. Gather operations were completed by BLM personnel and Friends of the Mustangs volunteers with no money spent on outside contractors. Unprecedented rain in September suspended gather operations multiple times. The field office will continue to monitor herd and range health to determine if another gather is required in the future.

Dominguez-Escalante NCA Draft RMP comment period closed: The public comment period for the Draft RMP for Dominguez-Escalante NCA closed on Sept 23. The BLM received 1,250 comments with a total of 255 unique submissions. Most of the comments centered around recreation and travel management. The proposed RMP is scheduled for fall 2014.

Inholding acquired in Dominguez-Escalante NCA: On Sept. 18, the BLM completed purchase of 160 acres of private property in Gibbler Gulch in the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area. Funding for the purchase came from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Western Rivers Conservancy helped to facilitate the acquisition. The property was completely surrounded by BLM and includes several springs, riparian areas and an historic cabin. It will soon be open for members of the public to enjoy.

Upcoming dates of note:

- Grand Junction Proposed RMP/Final EIS – anticipated summer 2014
- Dominguez-Escalante Proposed RMP/Final EIS – anticipated fall 2014

Travel management update. About 2/3 of all comments on the RMP were related to travel management. Of the 4,200 miles of existing routes, 10 percent have no current legal access, and we're calling those administrative routes. Under the preferred alternative, another 14 percent would be administrative access for permittees and BLM; 54 percent would be open; 22 percent closed. We may do more planning on Zone L based on public interests. GJFO is doing an extensive, route-by-route analysis for the proposed plan. CPW and Mesa County have sat in.

White River Field Office, Kent Walter

Oil Shale RD&D lease status: Shell and Chevron have discontinued operations on their BLM oil shale RD&D leases in Colorado. One of Shell's three leases has a BLM approved plan of development. Building and equipment are being removed from this lease. Shell is working towards reclamation of all their BLM oil shale related activities associated with this and their other two leases. American Shale Oil is continuing with work on their RD&D lease and is currently in the process of redesigning their heater after previous heater failure. BLM is currently reviewing plans of development submitted by both Natural Soda Holdings Inc. and ExxonMobil for their RD&D leases.

Piceance-East Douglas HMA update: The White River Field Office is accepting public comments through March 10 on an environmental assessment on its proposal to construct additional fencing along the border of the Piceance-East Douglas Herd Management Area. In 2013, the WRFO secured labor from the Rifle Department of Corrections Center to repair and maintain approximately five miles of the Piceance-East Douglas Herd Management Area fence. The office hopes to continue this cooperative work in 2014. Volunteer Dona Hilkey is working on an inventory of horses in the HMA by collecting horse identification data, taking pictures, and compiling GPS information about horses and their respective bands. Not including 2013 foals, the current wild horse population for the Piceance-East Douglas Herd Management Area is estimated at 225. The Appropriate Management Level is up to 235 wild horses.

WRFO / CSU transplanting project on hold: A project between the BLM and Colorado State University examining the feasibility of transplanting and seeding Dudley Bluffs bladderpod and Dudley Bluffs twinpod is now on hold. The objective was to increase efforts that may eventually lead to the delisting of the threatened plants. Both plants are endemic to Rio Blanco County and are found nowhere else in the world. The planned project area is approximately 27 miles southeast of Rangely in the northern part of the Piceance Basin. The West Slope Colorado Oil and Gas Association filed an appeal and request for stay of the decision to implement the project with the Interior Board of Land Appeals.

Dates of note:

- WRFO Proposed RMPA/EIS – Currently anticipated fall 2014

Additional items: Looking at historic data for West Douglas to review excess determination

Working with Rio Blanco County on master travel planning process. Local volunteers and state funding helping us with inventorying routes.

Putting together programmatic EA for proactive fire management.

McStay: Is oil shale dead?

Kent: Several companies have pulled out, put others continue to work on their leases. Potential for other companies to pick up leases that aren't active.

Colorado River Valley Field Office, Steve Bennett

Energy staff recognized for high quality inspections – Acting State Director John Mehlhoff recently traveled to Silt to recognize 20 employees from the Colorado River Valley Field Office for their high quality work on the more than 3,000 oil and gas inspections they have completed the past two years. Inspection and Enforcement work and responsibility have continued to grow within the Field Office despite fewer wells being drilled in recent years. There are currently more than 2,300 active federal wells currently within the Field Office boundary, and another 2,500 with some federal interest that require inspection and enforcement. Since 2006, when the pilot energy office was established, CRVFO staff has averaged more than 1,200 oil and gas inspections annually. Prior to the establishment of the energy office, less than 200 inspections were conducted annually. In FY 2013 energy companies submitted 184 applications for permit to drill to CRVFO, less than half of what was submitted in FY07, when 381 were submitted.

CRVFO teams with Town of Eagle on re-route of popular mountain bike trail – The Field Office and Town of Eagle completed a 1.75-mile re-route of the popular Pool Ice Trail on Sept. 30. This trail was designated as a mountain bike trail in 2004; however, one mile of the trail followed a fall line that made mountain biking and trail sustainability difficult. In March the Town approached BLM about a possible re-route. CRVFO recreation staff worked with the Town of Eagle on the new alignment. The Town paid the cultural survey (\$3,000) and hired a contractor to complete much of the work (\$30,000). The Rocky Mountain Youth Corps was also hired to work on the trail. With the new alignment, the 4.5-mile trail has been extremely popular with mountain bikers. The Town of Eagle has also recently completed the 6-mile Haymaker Trail on newly acquired open space land that ties into the Pool Ice Trail. There is now a 20-mile single-track trail system in the East Eagle area, all accessible from town. The Town of Eagle is proposing more such trail partnerships on BLM lands in the area.

CRVFO partners with Town of Gypsum, HPP on reseeding -- The BLM, Town of Gypsum, and the Lower Colorado River Habitat Partnership Program worked together to reseed 140 acres of public land that burned in the 1980s in the “Hardscrabble” area south of town. The area is an important winter concentration area for mule deer and elk but is currently dominated by thistle and other non-native vegetation. The BLM sprayed the weeds in the fall before the area was aerially re-seeded with 1,750 pounds of seeds from 10 species of grasses, forbs and shrubs to the area in December. Specialists from the BLM Colorado River Valley Field Office developed a wildlife friendly native seed mixture ideal for the Hardscrabble area. The Town of Gypsum contributed \$15,000 to this project, the BLM \$10,000, and HPP \$5,000.

Dates of Note:

- Proposed RMP/Final EIS release – anticipated in late March 2014
- Sutey Ranch Land Exchange proposed decision – anticipated spring 2014
- Roan Plateau Draft SEIS – anticipated late 2014

- Scoping for Existing White River Leases – anticipated spring 2014

Justman: Has Bill Barrett Corp asked for their money back on the Roan?

Steve: Settlement discussion are ongoing, and I can't discuss them.

Kremmling Field Office, Stephanie Odell

KFO staff joined by 80 volunteers on National Public Lands Day – Rafters and anglers using the Upper Colorado River will have a much nicer experience thanks to the dedication of 80 volunteers who joined Kremmling Field Office staff for a river clean-up and improvement on National Public Lands Day Sept. 28. The volunteers, many from the High Country River Rafters Club, cleaned shorelines and camping areas along 18 miles of the Upper Colorado River, between Pumphouse and Two Bridges. Eighteen large trash bags were removed along with about 200 pounds of metal such as fencing, barrels and culvert scraps. The volunteers also constructed two Americans with Disabilities Act compliant privacy blinds and 210 feet of trails accessing the blinds.

Moderate interest in KFO oil and gas resources continues – KFO is seeing a small increase in interest in its oil and gas resources. The comment period closed Dec. 30 on an environmental assessment evaluating five parcels in Jackson County being considered for BLM Colorado's June 12 quarterly oil and gas lease sale. In May 2013, two parcels totaling 2,165 acres in KFO sold for \$21,828 at a quarterly oil and gas lease sale. The highest per-acre price was for a 960-acre parcel in Larimer County that was sold to Context Energy in Denver for \$9 per acre. Also, fiscal year 2013 saw the first applications for permit to drill submitted and approved in the KFO in several years; a company called EE3 submitted three APDs in Jackson County. Two of the three wells have been drilled. So far KFO has received five APDs in FY14, in Jackson County.

Bark beetle mitigation work continues in KFO -- With 289 miles of roads within the Kremmling Field Office directly affected by beetle-killed trees, the field office has initiated the NEPA work to treat up to 5,300 acres through multiple projects along and adjacent to roads in Grand County beginning as early as FY 2014. The goal of the work is to reduce the threat to public safety and infrastructure by removing and utilizing beetle-killed trees in travel corridors and other high-use areas. Reducing hazards and risk along roads in neighboring Jackson County has been a priority in many of the previous and current projects in the Kremmling Field Office, including several of the 13 currently active contracts covering a total of 1,352 acres, and an additional four projects for more than 1,000 acres that could begin as early as FY 2014. With the market for lumber and wood pellets rebounding from the recession, the demand for access to beetle-killed trees is also rebounding, helping ensure these projects will continue to have interested bidders. New products using material from beetle-killed trees are also creating more opportunity, such as for bioremediation and absorption in the oil and gas industry.

Fire crews burn slash piles in Jackson County – Fire crews are continuing to burn slash piles this winter generated from thinning and reducing hazardous trees on

Independence Mountain west of Cowdrey and Buffalo Ranch near Rand. More than 500 slash piles have been generated from a combination of salvage timber sales and hazardous fuels reduction projects on more than 500 acres since 2010. Fire crews wait to burn piles until there is at least three inches of snow on the ground to reduce the risk of the fires spreading. They typically burn on days when weather conditions allow the smoke to disperse away from area communities. Treatments are planned on another approximately 350 acres over the next several years.

Dates of Note:

- Anticipated release of Proposed RMP/Final EIS – March 2014

North Sand Hills – There are three ownerships: BLM, state land board, state parks. Difficult to manage. Met with state to move toward a more cooperative approach to managing of the area, including sharing law enforcement. Hope to have MOU among state, County, BLM.

Lanny: Instant study area in NSHs dating from 60s. It could have negative ramifications. County has contacted legislators, proposed to lift ISA is being attached to San Juan Wilderness bill.

Public comment

Bib Millette -- Roaring Fork Sierra Club: We are deeply concerned about sage grouse, and urge BLM to provide adequate protection for these birds' habitat. Once in millions, now extremely decimated from habitat loss. They are in pretty bad shape. BLM is doing the right thing by taking initiative to improve management of this bird. If you don't, the bird will be listed. We are disappointed that Alternative D in the Draft fails to provide sufficient caps for habitat protections, and has inadequate buffers from leks. Don't rely on NSO because they can be waived. Should permanently withdraw areas in highest habitat to mineral leasing. Very concerned about plan submitted by Garfield County, which was put together by hired biologists. Severely restricts connectivity, clearly designed to benefit extractive industry. Adopt conservation alternatives of alternatives B and C. Restrict uses in priority habitat, protect sage grouse migration corridors, restore sage grouse habitat.

Justman: How do you document "millions" of birds?

Millette: It's in the literature, but regardless, populations are down.

WRFO WRDMS presentation. Ryan gives powerpoint.

Fencing update. Proposed what state land board uses for fencing. Share 50/50 cost with lessee. Forest service requires all private land owners to fence, same as National Grasslands in Colorado. In Kansas, a fence-in state, USFS pays 75 percent using grazing fees. NPS pays 100 percent, using grazing fee money. Would like BLM

to do more for fencing for its grazing permittees. Currently BLM is not required to do any fencing right now. Should we keep subcommittee going?

Committee dissolved, group decides not to pursue the issue further.

Cagney: Field Managers need to address any specific concerns with permittees if there is a problem with private landowners that permittees refuses to deal with.

Jim Cagney announced that he would be retiring May 3, so this was his last NW RAC meeting.

Dean Riggs recognized Jim Cagney for leadership and common sense approach.

Next meeting dates

May 28,29 in Craig

Aug 20,21 in Kremmling

Dec. 3,4 in Grand Junction

The first day will consist of an afternoon field trip and group dinner. The actual meeting will be on the second day, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

May issues

Sand wash management

More interaction, less FYI items