

Northwest Resource Advisory Council Meeting Minutes
Thursday August 14, 2003
Battlement Mesa Activity Center
0398 Arroyo Drive
Parachute, CO 81635

Attendees:

Resource Advisory Council Members - Charlie Yates, Ken Currey, Jeff Comstock, Kathy Hall, Forest Nelson, John Hill, John Husband, Geoff Blakeslee, Ed Baker, Don Peach, T Wright Dickinson, John Martin

BLM - John Husband (Little Snake Field Manager (FM) and RAC Designated Federal Officer (DFO)), Kent Walter (White River FM), Jamie Connell (Glenwood Springs FM), Catherine Robertson (Grand Junction FM), Dave Harr (Acting Kremmling FM), J. O. Ratliff (Special Assistant, Office of the Secretary, DOI, Land & Minerals Management), Tom Forre (Colorado Range Program Lead)

Visitors

Steve Bonowski, Colorado Mountain Club

Mike McKibbin, Daily Sentinel

Kathleen Anderson, Natural Resource Writer

Maxene Stuart Green, former State Land Board Commissioner

Janey Hines Broderick, Grand Valley Citizens Alliance

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by Geoff Blakeslee. It was determined there was no quorum in Category 2 (must have 3 out of 5 members present) so this meeting can result in recommendations only.

Introductory Remarks

Geoff Blakeslee

- Eye opening tour of Roan Plateau Aug 13 illustrated challenges of planning process
- Also very complimentary of Aug 13 evening tour of American Soda plant
- Attended July 23 joint RAC Chair meeting in Gunnison to determine interest/issues in continuing. Will form RAC Coordinating committee to include DFOs to discuss common challenges, ways to work together as RACs, e.g., weed subcommittee, on issues that cross political boundaries. If action needed, broader front to work with. Good meeting, not a lot of issues, step in right direction, if issues appropriate to engage other RACs, this will be a great tool. Will meet twice a year. Meeting grew out of discussion of do we need statewide RAC meeting (of all RACs). SW RAC having difficulty getting attendance at meetings they already have.

John Husband

- Today we are here to discuss Sustaining Working Landscapes

- Director has determined Sage grouse Conservation Strategy needs to be in place. RAC will likely get opportunity to be involved from the get go. Idea is to have national then state then local strategies in place. Sage grouse on verge of being listed. In Colorado, serious efforts to document, encourage healthy populations so is not listed. Discussion ensued.

T. Wright Dickinson - need FWS commitment up front - if we commit and bird is listed. We have done it before with endangered fish recovery.

Kent Walter - fish example is with a species already listed, if we aggressively pursue the sage grouse, will be viewed positively.

John Martin - relaxing national schedule to have RAC involved is a big deal.

Catherine Robertson - what is relationship between what we are doing and what DOW is doing?

T Wright - coordinate with Pam Schnurr re how can we help DOW, involve other RACs, need for subcommittee, also should be tied to other local interest groups that have been active in this and last but not least need appropriate level of decision makers involved for this to be meaningful.

Public Comments

Steve Bonowski showed a recent copy of The Intrepid Investor magazine, cover story "America's Kuwait" about coalbed methane deposits in Eastern Kansas and commented he couldn't help thinking there is better infrastructure in Kansas for this type of thing.

John Husband

- re Statewide RAC - share resolutions that are passed, e.g., our cultural resolution which John is tracking, currently Dan Hass, BLM Colorado State Office cultural lead has it.
- Current charter is good through August 20. John is tracking the status of new charter as well as new appointments for expiring seats daily - both in Department's court. Has responded to minor questions on language, recordkeeping by BLM WO staffers who will get Charter in shape for Secretary's signature but there have been no questions re substantive charter changes (FMs as DFOs, broadening of scope).

Field Manager Briefings

Catherine Robertson (Grand Junction Field Office)

- Bangs Canyon update. Meeting scheduled August 20, 7-9 pm at Grand Vista in Grand Junction, additional opportunities in area 4 will be presented to Ad Hoc group. Ken Currey will be attending for RAC (official designee). Moving ahead with trail project. Have signed agreement (not a formal contract) with jeep club

- to monitor trail weekly which is a serious commitment. Discussion of "stewardship contract" that goes beyond adopt a trail ensued.
- □ North Fruita update Federal Register Notice published early June. EA close to done but oil & gas trail designation, and private land issues still need some attention. No preferred alternative at this point. Public meeting will discuss 7 alternatives. Challenge is how to close trails where no vegetation or structure exists to do so, how to provide a full range of opportunities. Internet still actively promoting unauthorized trails. Contentiousness of shared use trails sidelined for the moment. Fat Tire Festival did not result in anything new. Engagement of RAC has been helpful. Challenge will be closing things that are not closable. Will have to get users to buy into plan by offering a trail system that gives them what they want, enjoyable recreation experience. Plan area is 8000 acres.
 - □ NCA Management Plan on target and on schedule □ Draft will be published October.

Kent Walter (White River Field Office)

- □ Streamlining of APD process in progress □ Began last year with Director's initiative to improve consistency across field office boundaries, processing, conditions of approval. Block surveys for cultural can better address cumulative impacts, not having to do separate EAs.
- □ Results of Energy Policy Conservation Act (EPCA), a White House study to streamline access to energy. Have asked us to look at our Resource Management Plans to determine what stipulations associated with resource issues that might not be appropriate, for example, a VRM class II area immediately adjacent to a VRM class IV area across a state line might be questioned. Also opportunity to make more restrictive if appropriate. White River RMP only 6 years old. Offices in the 5 main basins including Uinta Plateau, San Juan Paradox, and Greater Green River, are directed to do this. Must review RMP by Sept 5 and make recommendations. Mid September will find out how these might be implemented (plan amendment and public planning process). Existing leases will not be affected. Kent says 99.9% of stipulations are well thought out with good reasons to be there. One of the things we will be looking at is does plan allow for exception. Definitions of when/how variances applied not necessarily in plans.

T. Wright commented a plan can promote energy development but VRM class can prohibit it, wants to know more about VRM classes and how we are going to deal with them □ Kent will keep RAC up to date on the integration of EPCA into our plans. Someone asked what is appropriate management response to what resources are out there, e.g. RMPs and stipulations vs. CWP and temporary leasing policies. Discussion was tabled until the next meeting.

- □ BLM/Industry Oil & Gas Workshop in Grand Junction October 29. Kathy Hall is coordinating with Colorado Oil and Gas Commission - more information will be coming. RAC is invited.

- □ Energy Streamlining Council established and has had first meeting. Don Davis, Rio Blanco County commissioner is local representative.
- □ Appropriations bill (Sen. Dominici) contains language/funding establishing regional planning teams to expedite APD process. Glenwood Springs Field Office would be prototype office if passed.

Because all of these various/new energy initiatives are a little complicated, RAC asked can we please try to use email to keep us up to date. Kent will follow up with email.

Jamie Connell (Glenwood Springs Field Office)

- □ ISTEA update. In 2002 BLM director decided BLM would be a public road agency. Will use existing travel routes as defined in existing management plans.
- □ Roan Plateau update. Draft plan will be out in September. Jamie asked for informal RAC contact to bounce off what we are doing with public input. John Martin, Geoff Blakeslee, Kathy Hall & T Wright all volunteered. T Wright suggested "formal" cooperator status for other than local governments but it is too far along in the process. John Martin requested review of documents before they go to public.

Dave Harr (Kremmling Field Office)

- □ John Ruhs has been selected as new Field Manager.
- □ Travel Management Plan on 80,000 acres north of town - inventory completed and will begin public planning process this fall. Area includes shooting range, hiking, biking, 4wd, rock climbing. First meeting with public will be scoping for alternatives. John Martin suggested first meeting ought to be to distribute and comment on inventory to get started without controversy. Dave will let Geoff know when first meeting is scheduled. It took 2 years to complete inventory, planning process is in infancy.

John Husband (Little Snake Field Office)

- □ Emerald Mountain exchange. State Land Board (SLB) parcel - backdrop of Steamboat Springs - was proposed for disposal by SLB and public was not happy. 3-way exchange with scattered BLM parcels was suggested whereby BLM will trade scattered parcels for the 6300 acre Emerald Mountain block, SLB can sell scattered parcels to raise revenues for the school trust. Internal feasibility process will determine whether we will go ahead with the land exchange, which would include a public process. Many layers of internal review - will keep RAC updated. T Wright asked whether BLM's ability to manage an urban park is part of the feasibility process - answer is no. Public process would include development of management plan with very willing partners like City of Steamboat. It was suggested that John get commitments to help manage this 6000-acre urban park in writing.
- There is an organized opposition to the land exchange, primarily people who own property adjacent to BLM parcels that are inaccessible to the public that would end up in private ownership after the exchange. Essentially BLM is reviewing the

exchange proposal as a business proposal from the proponent (Emerald Mountain Partnership) through a 3rd party (Western Land Group) who has lined up the agreements for disposal of the scattered parcels to adjacent landowners. BLM will be considering resource value trade offs, manageability of the acquired block of land as opposed to the many scattered parcels, public access, etc. to determine whether the exchange is in the public interest. Mostly section 15 grazing lands - in 95% cases largest adjacent private landowner is grazing lessee who would end up with the parcel. For the remaining 5% where the existing grazing lessee would not acquire the parcel they would have 2 years to continue grazing after transfer to a new landowner.

Committee Reports

Wildlife Committee has not met since reported last.

West Douglas Wild Horse Management Plan - Don Peach. Don would like to consider continuing to serve in a private capacity. Don will summarize various issues for new RAC. Group should be sanctioned. Big issue for Kent.

Weed Subcommittee - Geoff Blakeslee. Weed subcommittee met and Geoff was directed to write letter to bring other RACs up to speed on BLM statewide strategic weed plan. No other RAC has this subcommittee. Tim Carlson with Tamarisk Coalition in GJ wants to work with, support RACs in this, will speak at RAC meeting if interested. T Wright asked to move forward, need assistance and kudos for what we are doing right.

Don Peach: fragmented by agency/successes, not coordinated, other state RACs should be involved.

Geoff Blakeslee: focus on consistency in BLM, adopting statewide BLM strategy.

Catherine: Consider State Director involvement, planning and energy also cross boundaries.

Lunch Break 11:40 - 1 p.m.

Don Peach said T Wright had a good idea about weed funding, and that RAC ought to send copy of resolutions to elected officials.

Weed Committee Wrap-up - Geoff Blakeslee:

1. Ensure that findings of 1997 internal BLM review of weed program are addressed.
2. Letter to other state RACs.
3. Engage SD to make this a priority and share RACs vision
3. Consistent funds dedicated to weed eradication not only in Colorado but throughout the western states

Will keep trying to work until something happens.

Northwest Colorado Stewardship - Jeff Comstock

July 8 facilitated session with 48 or so attendees. Listed priorities for collaborative work. Fire Management an issue they could find most in common on. August 12 Meeting toured fire management project areas. Meetings set to determine what do we want to learn and how will we use it. Will use Nature Conservancy's fire learning network.

SUSTAINING WORKING LANDSCAPES - RAC intends to work on the draft Resolution #3-03, NW RAC conclusions & recommendations regarding SWL initiatives proposed by the BLM, that was developed by Don Peach after the July 2 meeting (see attachment 1).

John Husband gave a very quick slide show and overview of SWL and history to date.

Passed out letter from Kathleen Clarke extending deadline for feedback to November 1 (see attachment 2).

Do we have correct objectives?

Are process and strategy of SWL on target?

Are concerns and comments of April workshops addressed?

Other issues/concerns that we need to address first?

Any examples of pilot projects.

RAC input due to State Directors November 1, November-December input will be reviewed at Washington Office and by Summer of 2004 policy will be issued. RAC can involve public. Discussion ensued.

Why directed to livestock industry? Why not directed to all permitted users? Other users should be encouraged to join partnerships and be given a credit for doing so. How do you accommodate for recreation?

T Wright wants some acknowledgement up front that grazing use is permitted and beneficial, acceptable use.

Specific comments on Resolution #3-03, primarily by T Wright -

- In our where-as(s), a recognition of the benefits of the grazing use of public land and the recommendation that we want to retain that use on public land. Sustaining and keeping ranching community is an important objective, grazing can be used as a management tool. Benefits beyond those to permittees - biological, ecological, cultural.
- Under #1 Conservation Partnerships, bullet # 2, remove incentive for anyone to think they are going to be able to "retire" grazing/aums for example, "Temporary nonuse is acceptable with restoration of livestock grazing the long term objective." It is not a retirement of AUMs. It is not a retirement of grazing.

- □ Under #1 Conservation Partnerships, bullet # 3, objective is key. Nongrazing needs to be managed just like grazing needs to be managed.
- □ Under #2 Reserve Common Allotments, issue that needs to be resolved for these to work is "Why/what would motivate you to get involved in one of these?"

It was 2:30 already and time again for public comments.

Maxine Green: Why is this only directed at livestock industry? Should encompass all permitted uses that might get interrupted; acknowledge long term sustainability is the goal, may be temporary interruptions or postponements along the way. How are you going to define performance based recovery and restoration and how are you going to measure it? Suggested the following language "Whereas long-term sustainability may incorporate the temporary interruption or postponement of permitted uses, ..."

Steve Bonowski:

- □ There is body of evidence disputes grazing being beneficial to public lands.
- □ Likes partners, all should bring something to the table.
- □ Favors a balanced approach, not necessarily all or none cows.
- □ Promises evolving comments.

Kathleen Anderson: Seems far reaching implications on all extractive users. Oil and Gas industry, for example, might balk at having a multi-million dollar project interrupted. This major shift in philosophy might warrant attention by other industries from the beginning.

Tom Forres explained SWL process started, then stopped to engage RACs in non regulatory policy changes. There is going to be more opportunity for public involvement in nonregulatory and regulatory changes. Reference the BLM homepage. Began as effort to update and refresh grazing regulations and wanting to think outside the box. John Martin added the magic will be in the mix.

Janey Hines Broderick, representing the 200-member Grand Valley Citizens Alliance, left a letter to the RAC re the Roan Plateau Plan, but had to leave the meeting for awhile. John Husband began reading the letter to the RAC as public comment and Janey returned to finish reading the letter. The letter requested no drilling on top and directional drilling from existing pads under the rim only, at least for the next 15 years citing transfer language allowing for continuation of production under the rim, specialness of area, ownership on 3 sides by energy companies. (See attachment 3)

SWL Discussion Continued, Specific comments on Resolution #3-03, primarily by T Wright...

- □ Under #3 Voluntary Allotment Restructuring, bullet #2, strike these words "as a condition of retirement of AUMs." Objective is grazing use is allowed.

Objective is land still suitable for grazing. The alternative use of AUMs such as elk ranching.. "Alternative use" versus "retirement" language should be used. Permittees would have options and get economic value for their options.

Permittees may use their AUMs for other societal goals, e.g., running elk. If objective is to completely eradicate livestock, T Wright doesn't like it.

- □ Strike #4 Conservation Easements in its entirety per latest BLM direction.
- □ #3 Voluntary Allotment Restructuring and #5 Endangered Species Mitigation go together. #5 needs same bullets as #3. Safe Harbor provisions given to permittee. May require not only regulatory but statutory changes. Permittee will need guarantee that whatever changes he makes..., needs assurance... This "assurance" allowed for on private property. Acknowledge BLM permittees do control larger landscapes □

RAC agreed that it wants to meet the Director's deadline. The following plan was made.

(1) subcommittee will tweak Resolution #3-03 and email to RAC within a month, (a first cut at revising the resolution based on RAC discussions at the 8/14/03 meeting is included as attachment 4 - Comments of the Northwest Colorado Resource Advisory Council on the Sustaining Working Landscapes Initiative August 14, 2003 □ (Attachment 4 is subject to further revision by the SWD subcommittee)

(2) Get consensus on revised Resolution #3-03 within RAC.

(3) Opportunity for informal or otherwise public involvement.

(4) Vote on resolution needs to be public so there will be a special RAC meeting on October 30, 10 a.m.-2 p.m., in Rifle or Parachute □ John Husband can do Federal Register notice. John will also call all RAC members 48 hours prior to 30th to determine if a quorum exists.

Catherine Robertson: Next regularly scheduled meeting on November 13th will include a presentation of management plan by NCA.

Discussed need to update website with current information.

Thanked Don Peach.

Meeting adjourned at 4 p.m.