

# **NORTHWEST RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES**

**Holiday Inn  
755 Horizon Drive  
Grand Junction, Colorado**

**November 13, 2003**

Geoff Blakeslee called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. Geoff welcomed new RAC members and asked everybody to introduce themselves.

## **Attendees:**

Resource Advisory Council Members: Category 1 - Ken Currey, Charlie Yates, David Cesark, T. Wright Dickinson; Category 2 - Geoff Blakeslee, Charles Kerr, Patrick Kennedy; Category 3 – Larry McGown, Jeff Comstock, John Martin, Kathy Hall, and Forrest Nelson.

David Bailey, Wade Haerle, and Jon Hill were absent.

BLM: John Husband (Little Snake Field Office Manager and RAC Designated Federal Officer), Kent Walter (White River Field Office Manager), Jamie Connell (Glenwood Springs Field Office Manager), John Ruhs (Kremmling Field Office Manager), Steven Hall (Western Slope Center Public Affairs Specialist), Robin Sell (Colorado State Office Wildlife Biologist), Ron Lambeth (Grand Junction Field Office Wildlife Biologist)

| <u>Visitors:</u>     | <u>Representing</u>                 | <u>Town/City</u>   |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Claire Bastable      | Colorado Mountain Club              | Grand Junction, CO |
| Steve Bonowski       | Colorado Mountain Club              | Golden, CO         |
| Toni Moore           | Colorado Wild Horse and Burro       | Fruita, CO         |
| Bill Endriss         | Congressman McInnis' Office         | Grand Junction, CO |
| Dean and Audrey Gent | NW Colorado Sage Grouse Committee   | Craig, CO          |
| Tom Blickensdorfer   | Colorado Dept. of Natural Resources | Denver, CO         |
| Erin McIntyre        | Grand Junction Daily Sentinel       | Grand Junction, CO |
| Pam Schnurr          | Colorado Division of Wildlife       | Denver, CO         |
| KJCT TV crew         |                                     |                    |
| KKCO TV crew         |                                     |                    |
| KREX crew            |                                     |                    |

**Introductory Remarks, Committee Structures, Priorities** - Geoff discussed the different subcommittees of the RAC and encouraged new members to become active on one or more of the subcommittees. The NWRAC tends to operate through the committee structure whereby the smaller subcommittees get into specific issues in depth and bring their findings, observations and recommendations to the full RAC for consideration.

John Husband explained that David Bailey would be absent. Kathy Hall and Ken Currey will be here around 10:30 a.m. There is a quorum present. John thanked John Martin for hosting the dinner last night.

John Husband discussed some housekeeping issues. Geoff has been the chair person for one year. Election of officers was postponed until Kathy and Ken arrive.

John handed out new guidance on wilderness policies (BLM Colorado Instruction Memorandum 2004-012 and BLM Washington Office Instruction Memoranda 2003-274 and 2003-275). This could be a future meeting topic.

John also distributed a letter from Don Peach to RAC members with a list of publications and documents Don accumulated over his years of service on the RAC. If anyone would like copies of some of these materials they need to let Don know.

**Public Comment** – Steve Bonowski discussed the Sustaining Working Landscapes initiative and the agreement to hold public meetings on this issue prior to October 30. These meetings did not occur and Mr. Bonowski expressed his disappointment by this. He feels this is an important issue and should be addressed at public meetings.

**Election of Officers** – Will wait until the other members arrive.

**Committee Reports** – Kent Walter discussed the amendment to the West Douglas Wild Horse Area Plan. Hopefully this amendment will be out by February. There are nine alternatives and seven will be analyzed in detail.

The RAC discussed with Kent the importance of the RAC reviewing this document before it is put out to the public.

John Husband reminded the RAC this is a plan amendment with required review time frames. Using a subcommittee to help develop and review this document is probably the way to go.

Geoff discussed weeds (or invasive species). There was a tamarisk workshop last month. Geoff was not able to attend but did read over some of the presentations. The RAC needs to be involved in tamarisk eradication.

Eric Lane of the Colorado Department of Agriculture is preparing a statewide strategic plan for invasive weeds and would like BLM to come on board with this plan. Right now the RAC subcommittee is gathering information before a resolution will be written. It is important to know what level the state is at with weed control and trying to find where improvements are needed. Consistent BLM funding is a problem.

Cultural Resources – Don Peach and Dave Bailey have been on this subcommittee. T. Wright Dickinson and Pat Kennedy also volunteered to serve. New resolutions from previous meetings will be given to new subcommittee members.

Larry McCown discussed energy and minerals and felt this should be a subcommittee for the RAC. Geoff agreed there was a need for this subcommittee. Members will be Dave Bailey, Larry McCown, chair person, Charlie Kerr, and John Martin.

**EPCA – Kent Walter** – Kent gave a report on the Energy Policy Conservation Act of 2000 (see attachment). Kent encouraged RAC members to review this policy on the BLM Colorado State Office web site.

The RAC discussed this act and how it will affect field offices.

**Election of Officers** – Kathy Hall and Ken Currey arrived at 10:30 a.m., so election of officers was held at that time. Nominations were opened for Chairperson and Vice chairperson. John Martin nominated Geoff Blakeslee for Chairperson, Kathy Hall seconded, Geoff accepted the nomination and all members are in agreement. Kathy Hall nominated Ken Currey for Vice chairperson, T. Wright Dickinson nominated Kathy Hall and Jeff Comstock. T. Wright moved to cease nominations, Jeff seconded. Members will vote on paper. Jeff Comstock was voted in as Vice chairperson.

**Field Office Managers Updates** – John Husband of the Little Snake Field Office discussed the Northwest Colorado Stewardship Project his office is working on. The Stewardship is looking at a project area for vegetation and fire management west of Craig. John discussed fire management and ecological changes in different fire areas.

Jamie Connell of the Glenwood Springs Field Office discussed the five top workloads her staff will be working on. Energy related issues such as compliance, issuing permits with NEPA analysis for oil and gas development, grazing permit renewals, annual work plan commitments, prescribed fire program for fuel treatments, and the Roan Plateau. Jamie wanted to remind the RAC of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Storm King Fire. Events are being planned for this.

The fire academy will be held in Glenwood Springs this year. The RAC discussed the fire academy and what it entailed and whether any of them should attend or not. The RAC will be provided with information on the academy as it becomes available.

John Ruhs of Kremmling Field Office discussed two major issues his staff is working on, the travel management plan for the Wolford Mountain Area. Comments are being solicited for inventory and resource information. They are trying to get comments collected by the end of this week. His staff is also working on a land exchange that will consist of several parcels. It will be some time before this becomes a major issue.

Kent Walter of the White River Field Office discussed the significant increase in APDs. This will impact his staff as 55 APDs a year are normal and his staff will process over 200 this year. There is also an increase in rights-of-way. His staff is also working on an interstate pipeline. Kent's staff is trying to balance all this out with other renewable resources. Fire planning is also a big issue.

Steven Hall (for Catherine Robertson) of the Grand Junction Field Office discussed the North Fruita Desert plan. The comment period was extended through November 14 at the request of local motorized and mountain bike recreation leaders. Hundreds of comments have been received. A decision will be made in the spring.

**Roan Plateau Draft Management Plan Update** – Jamie Connell gave a timeline presentation for management of the Roan Plateau.

**2004 Meeting Dates and Locations and Next Meeting Agenda** – The RAC discussed the best days to have their quarterly meetings. Listed below are the dates for the meetings for the year:

- February 11 and 12 (Glenwood Springs or Rifle will host)
- May 5 and 6 (Craig will host, probably at Browns Park)
- August 11 and 12 (Kremmling will host)
- November 9 and 10 (Grand Junction will host), this meeting is scheduled for Tuesday and Wednesday because Thursday, November 11 is Veteran's Day.

The RAC broke for lunch at 12:10 p.m., agreed to return at 1:10 p.m.

Geoff Blakeslee called the meeting to order at 1:10 p.m.

**BLM National Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy** – Robin Sell of BLM, Colorado State Office and Pam Schnurr of Colorado Division of Wildlife gave a power point presentation on Greater and Gunnison Sage grouse and the BLM National Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy that is currently being prepared.

**Public Comment** – Toni Moore expressed her opinion that BLM too often applies the Wild Horse and Burro Protection Act as a “second class law.” She asked that BLM give more priority to wild horse and burro protection in land use planning.

Dean Gent and his wife Audrey of Moffat County expressed their concern over the sage grouse habitat and how important it is to have a plan in place.

**BLM National Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy continued** - The RAC discussed the draft sage grouse habitat conservation strategy resolution. Changes were made to the document. After the changes were discussed the RAC agreed the resolution was correct and was approved, the RAC was unanimous. The final document is attached.

**Committee Membership** - Before adjournment, Geoff asked RAC members to email him if they are interested in serving on a subcommittee. Currently the committees and members are as follows. The RAC category is listed with each member to indicate where we might need to balance the subcommittees.

- West Douglas Wild Horses – Forrest Nelson, Chair (3), T. Wright Dickinson (1), Geoff Blakeslee (2). This committee will interface with Don Peach and the local workgroup in Rangely.
- Invasive Species – Geoff Blakeslee, Chair (2), Jeff Comstock (3), Jon Hill (1)
- Wildlife – T. Wright Dickinson, Chair (1), Geoff Blakeslee (2), Jeff Comstock (3), Charlie Yates (1), Forrest Nelson (3)
- Cultural Resources – David Bailey (2), T. Wright Dickinson (1), Pat Kennedy (2)
- Energy and Minerals – Larry McCown, Chair (3), Jeff Comstock (3), Dave Cesark (1), Charlie Kerr (2), John Martin (3), Kathy Hall (1), Ken Currey (1)

T. Wright discussed the next agenda and new items he would like to see added to the RAC meetings. Social/economic analysis, Visual Resource Management (VRM), and a public forum for education and outreach some time during the coming year.

The meeting adjourned at 4:15 p.m.

**A Resolution Providing Suggestions on the Draft BLM Sage-Grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy**

Northwest Resource Advisory Council (NW RAC)  
November 13, 2003

WHEREAS the BLM issued a draft Sage-Grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy in August 2003, hereafter referred to as the BLM Strategy; and

WHEREAS the Colorado BLM State Director has requested Resource Advisory Councils in Colorado provide comments on the draft BLM Strategy; and

WHEREAS various local/grass roots Sage-Grouse recovery plans exist or are in progress throughout the country; and the BLM Strategy should represent a culmination of these locally generated plans rather than the reverse.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Northwest RAC requests the following 13 points be incorporated into the Final BLM National Sage-Grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy:

1. **Local grouse plans-** The NW RAC recommends section VIII (Outreach and Coordination) of the BLM Strategy should emphasize the importance of sage-grouse plans that have been, or are being developed, at the local or grass roots levels. The NW RAC suggests the BLM Strategy should clearly state in the Executive Summary and section VI (Guiding Principles) that implementation will complement state BLM sage-grouse plans, which in-turn will complement local / grass roots plans regarding appropriate action items and implementation steps. In areas of the country that local plans do not exist, the NW RAC suggests the BLM participate in locally based groups to develop grouse habitat and population management plans. Section VI (Guiding Principles) of the BLM Strategy should clearly acknowledge that different approaches to species recovery and habitat management will likely be different throughout the country, and that it is the intent of the BLM Strategy to not override or conflict with existing or developing plans, but rather support and honor the directions for sage-grouse recovery identified in local plans showing positive progress.
2. **Local grouse projects** – The NW RAC recommends section III (Other programs/initiatives) identify projects that are being implemented and partnerships that have been formed to enhance grouse habitat and population management. This section can help justify the need for place-based decision making regarding grouse management (see # 1 above).

3. **Local land use plans** –The NW RAC recommends section VI (Guiding Principles) articulate the need for the BLM Strategy to complement local government land use planning documents and regulations.
4. **Existing land uses** – The NW RAC recommends section VI (Guiding Principles) and VII (Vision, Goals, Strategies and Actions) of the BLM Strategy should acknowledge that every effort will be made to work in cooperation with existing land uses to manage sage-grouse and sage-grouse habitat. Due to the interdependence between varying land uses it is imperative that sage-grouse management does not take an overriding role and is balanced with existing land uses. Any conflict between existing land uses and sage-grouse management goals should be resolved using the best available information in collaboration with local planning efforts.
5. **Monitoring** – The NW RAC recommends section XI (Effective Monitoring) of the BLM Strategy should adequately fund and effectively monitor sage-grouse and sage-grouse habitat conservation efforts. This shall include monitoring for the achievement of goals based on performance and outcomes, rather than process oriented goals. For example, if a certain habitat type is desired for sage-grouse recovery, the BLM should provide the flexibility to land users or permittees to accomplish the desired habitat outcomes without micromanaging the process to achieve the desired outcome.
6. **Incentives** - In Section VII (Vision, Goals, Strategies and Actions), of the BLM Strategy, the NW RAC suggests adding a goal recognizing the BLM as a key agency in providing incentives for the maintenance and enhancement of sage-grouse habitat and populations. Incentives should recognize those who assist in sage-grouse habitat or population enhancement. Incentives should also reward BLM offices that encourage and support innovative approaches to species or habitat enhancement with collaborative processes that focus on incorporating those recovery goals into existing land uses. Incentives for species and habitat conservation and safe harbor protections are currently available to private property owners and should be extended to public land permittees.
7. **Safe Harbor/CCAA** - Section XII (Authorities and Responsibilities) should identify “Safe Harbor/CCCA-like” protections should be extended to all public land users that benefit sage-grouse management and promote stewardship contracts with private landowners and permittees to aid in the management of sage-grouse populations across the West. This same section of the BLM Strategy should assure that investments to improve habitat and species are not negated by an administrative change in policy or agreements. In addition, the BLM Strategy should acknowledge that changes in policy will not be done unilaterally, rather multilaterally. The NW RAC also recommends that the BLM Strategy articulate a definite commitment from BLM to implement the Strategy, even if the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service lists the sage-grouse as candidate or threatened and endangered species. This is imperative to providing for continued implementation of an existing plan that considers local economies and supports the socio-economic benefits communities realize from a multitude of uses occurring on federal lands. All

too often across the West, communities are devastated by the rippling effect of singularly managing for candidate or threatened and endangered species without consideration of other existing land uses.

8. **Private Landowners** – The NW RAC suggests Section X (Implementation Schedule), XII (Authorities and Responsibilities), and VI (Guiding Principles) include a commitment by the BLM to cooperate with private landowners to manage the species, as private landowners provide the crucial nesting and chick rearing habitat integral to grouse survival on federal lands.
9. **Sage-Grouse Matrix** - Several times throughout the BLM Strategy, the “Sage-Grouse Matrix” is mentioned, but not shown in this document. The NW RAC requests an opportunity to review and comment on the Matrix prior to finalization of the BLM Strategy.
10. **Role of grouse in existing plans** -Section VII 1.6.1 describes several planning efforts related to fire, travel, operations, grazing, and vegetation management. The NW RAC acknowledges the need to incorporate sage-grouse conservation in these areas, but requests this section acknowledge that sage-grouse management complement the existing goals of these plans Sage-grouse must be only one factor, along with many others, considered while implementing management plans.
11. **Special Species Management** – The NW RAC suggests section XII C. (BLM National Policy Guidance) clarify that ‘special status species management’ does not mean ‘single species management’ and recommends clarifying that sage-grouse or any single species must be managed by incorporating that species with existing land uses. See # 10 above.
12. **Citations** – Although section XIII lists the relevant literature, the NW RAC suggests providing citations of literature throughout the text each time facts have been stated. This is common in many grouse management plans in place or currently being developed. Citations provide defense for statistics and statements. They also allow the reader to understand the context in which facts are being used.
13. **Merge habitat and population management** – The NW RAC requests a section be incorporated into this document that clarifies the intent of BLM to collaborate with state wildlife management agencies regarding sage-grouse management. It is all too often interpreted that the BLM’s role is sage-grouse habitat management and the state wildlife agencies’ role is population management. The BLM Strategy should emphasize that the two areas are not independent of one another and articulate their relationships. We also recommend clearly articulating the need to share resources between private, state, and federal agencies, especially scientific data that state wildlife management agencies have been collecting for years (i.e., chick survival studies, wing counts, hunter kills, predation information, etc.).
14. **Consideration of other factors** – The BLM strategy must recognize that it is not just habitat management, but must consider the five ESA factors in developing their conservation strategy.



Passed, approved, and adopted this 13th day of November 2003.

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Received by Designated Federal  
Officer, John E. Husband

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Geoff Blakeslee, Chair, Northwest Colorado  
Resource Advisory Council