

**Northwest Resource Advisory Council**  
**MEETING MINUTES**  
**Thursday, August 11, 2005**  
 Jackson County Fairgrounds, Wattenberg Center  
 686 County Rd. 42  
 Walden, Colorado

**ATTENDEES**

Resource Advisory Council Members

Geoff Blakeslee, Category 2	Wade Haerle, Category 2
Dave Cesark, Category 1	Kathy Hall, Category 3
Jeff Comstock, Category 3	Pat Kennedy, Category 2
Ken Currey, Category 1	Charles Kerr, Category 2
T. Wright Dickinson, Category 1	Forrest Nelson, Category 3
	Charlie Yates, Category 1

Not present: Jon Hill, Category 1; David Bailey, Category 2; John Martin, Category 3, and Larry McCown, Category 3

**BLM Staff**

Stacey Antilla	Mel Lloyd	
Jamie Connell	Catherine Robertson	
John Husband	John Ruhs	
	Kent Walter	
<b>Visitors</b>	<b>Representing</b>	<b>Town/City</b>
Jay Fetcher	Senator Ken Salazar	Clark, CO
John Rich	Jackson County	Walden, CO
Adriana Raudzens	Self	Boulder, CO

**Opening Remarks**

Chairman Jeff Comstock called the meeting to order at 8:02 a.m. There was a round of introductions, and today's attendance constitutes a quorum. Mel Lloyd provided an update on the Northwest Resource Advisory Council (RAC) nominations and charter renewal.

**Designated Federal Officer and RAC Chair Time**

Comstock thanked John Ruhs and Kremmling Field Office staff for the great field tour of the Owl Mountain Partnership projects. Lead DFO and Glenwood Springs Field Manager Jamie Connell confirmed that RAC members will be notified when nominations are announced.

**Field Manager Updates**

White River: Kent Walter thanked the RAC for conducting the recent teleconference as well as for their recommendation regarding the West Douglas Herd Area. The RAC's input is valuable to BLM and, by this time next week, the decision in how BLM will manage the area should be ready for distribution. Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) for two pipeline projects are finalized. Walter foresees the increase in oil and gas activity to continue. Two wildland fire use fires (allowing fire to play its natural role in the ecosystem) are continuing to burn in the Meeker area. Agreements with private landowners were initiated to allow these fires to cross over to private lands, which ultimately benefits both private and BLM public lands. Knowledge gained

through this experience proved that BLM needs to be proactive in using fire use fires. The new office building construction start will likely be delayed about four months. The BLM oil shale lease research and development scoping period ends soon. This activity will impact BLM staffing workloads.

Grand Junction: Catherine Robertson reported that the GJFO hosted a *Stay the Trail* event, an educational program for off-highway vehicle enthusiasts. Engaging business owners, as well as other trail enthusiasts, in this program will benefit BLM in managing recreation on public lands. Local Congressional staffers were taken on a field trip to South Shale Ridge recently. The Environmental Assessment (EA) should be finalized soon, and most of the unique-format public comments received favored leasing in the area. The Mesa Mood land exchange has been protested; most were regarding land appraisal values. This exchange will probably not be finalized in the near future. BLM Colorado is working on a recreational strategy for the entire state. Building strong partnerships and obtaining additional funding for BLM recreational projects are two main objectives. The FO is working with the Colorado Tourism Council to include Western Slope BLM public lands in their marketing materials.

Glenwood Springs: Connell reported on the energy bill, which was recently signed. This 2,000-page bill could have a significant impact on public lands. Pilot Application for Permit to Drill (APD) teams may be located within the GSFO, and GSFO/GJFO BLM staff may become actively involved with the national energy team currently being formed. The Anvil Points studies have been completed, and the proposal is to take waste to the dry, flat area to be capped. Approval is needed from Washington to release escrow funding to complete the clean-up. KFO and GSFO are initiating a joint Resource Management Plan (RMP) to update their existing RMPs. The pre-plan has been submitted to BLM Colorado. The grazing appropriations rider, which provides for continued livestock grazing while the NEPA process is completed, will likely be discontinued.

Kremmling: John Ruhs reported that the Smith Creek land exchange is finalized, and the Windy Gap land exchange should be finalized soon. The Blue Valley land exchange is in process. KFO is continuing to work on grazing permit renewals. A national whitewater race is scheduled for later this month, and staff is working with the railroad and county to coordinate logistics. KFO is actively working with local citizens and organizations to protect sage grouse habitat. The BLM Western Slope Center will be dissolved by October 1, with employees going to various FOs. A Northwest Unit covering LSFO, WRFO, KFO and GSFO will be formed, and a Central Unit will include Gunnison, Uncompahgre and Grand Junction FOs. Western Slope Center funding will be distributed among FOs. The fire organizations are now stand-alone units with formal delegation of authority in place with the U.S. Forest Service. Ruhs provided an update on the noxious weed resolution presented by the RAC to BLM last year. The RAC responded that it wants action out of BLM, not just words. Geoff Blakeslee will draft a letter on behalf of the RAC noxious weed working group to the State Director asking him to empower the BLM SO weed coordinator to act.

Little Snake: John Husband reported that the RMP revision is progressing and alternatives are currently being developed. The local community's participation has been outstanding thanks to

the Northwest Colorado Stewardship (NWCOS). NWCOS plans to continue working as a community group. The Sand Wash wild horse gather is scheduled for later this year, with about 200 horses expected to be removed in order to maintain a healthy habitat. Horses removed from the area will be placed in the BLM adoption program. Wyoming herds migrating over the state line have begun to impact the LSFO.

Comstock presented Geoff Blakeslee and Ken Currey with recognition plaques. Both have served multiple terms on the RAC and with their 3-year terms ending this month, they have chosen this to be their final term.

Jackson County Commissioner John Rich joined the meeting and was introduced by Ruhs.

### **Public Comment Period**

Jay Fetcher offered the Senator's assistance if working groups focused on the energy bill need his support. The Senator also believes it important that BLM appropriations be protected and available for staff working on energy development issues.

### **Roan Plateau Draft RMP Update, RAC Discussions**

The city of Glenwood Springs has joined several other agencies as a cooperator in the planning process. These cooperator meetings are open to the public and have gone very well. All meetings have been well attended with everyone actively involved. All of the public comments have been compiled in a binder then divided into issues. Each cooperator meeting is dedicated to a series of issues and BLM responses to comments provided at each meeting. All issues will have been addressed by the final meeting. Directional drilling, operator unitization, habitat fragmentation, monitoring, travel management, and leasing larger parcels (2,560-acre maximum) are just a few of the issues being discussed. Analyses are showing that there's currently no justifiable reason to not allow leasing on top *in some areas*. Charlie Kerr stated that the environmental community doesn't want drilling on top, and it was explained that drilling can occur on private lands with private mineral rights (southern and western areas). Wade Haerle updated the group on a presentation he saw on the original intent of the legislation, which focused on deficit reduction. Haerle added that the law will always be at the core of discussions, even with a good plan in place—the real question is “when” not “if.” Some expressed the importance in understanding why legislators passed the law to begin with. Connell hopes that after the cooperator meetings are complete, and BLM determines a direction from those meetings, the RAC can review the results of those meetings and make a recommendation. The RAC wants to make a recommendation prior to the document being finalized but feels it currently lacks adequate information to do so. Comstock asked RAC members to form a well balanced Roan Plateau working group with McCown as the chair. Dave Cesark, Dickinson, Kerr, Forrest Nelson and Haerle volunteered. The working group will report back to the full RAC so that an informed recommendation can be made to the BLM by the full RAC. The working group will meet at 9 a.m. on September 16 at the GSFO.

### **North Sand Hills Management Plan Development**

Stacey Antilla, KFO outdoor recreation planner, reported on accomplishments made by the citizen working group assisting BLM in developing a management plan for this Special Recreation Management Area, located in Jackson County. Safety, trash, emergency response,

law enforcement, local economic impacts and maintenance are some of the key issues for this area, which at times attracts thousands of OHV enthusiasts from the Front Range. The Mile-Hi Jeep Club has adopted the area. BLM is working closely with Colorado State Forest Service, U.S. Forest Service, Jackson County, as well as the State Land Board with which BLM has discussed a land exchange. Grants and volunteers are being utilized to accomplish management goals, and working relationships based on trust have resulted from this effort.

### **Working Group Reports**

Nelson provided a summary of the West Douglas Herd Area working group's recent efforts leading up to the July 29 RAC teleconference. Dickinson read the Resolution to be formally presented to the BLM (see minutes from July 29 teleconference). Dickinson thanked RAC members for making every effort to participate in the teleconference and WRFO staff for meeting with the working group on July 13. Comstock informed the RAC that he followed up with Jane Yazzi, a member of the public participating on the teleconference whom he had denied comment time because the public comment period had ended and the teleconference was adjourning. He said she understood but chose not to provide anything to the RAC later. The WRFO will provide its decision to Lloyd, who will then distribute the decision to the RAC by email.

Dickinson noted that the Wildlife working group needs to become active again given the growth of wild horse herds as well as sage grouse issues. To stay abreast of current issues, BLM FOs should provide pertinent information to the working group.

Comstock invited Ron Velarde, Colorado Division of Wildlife, and Beverly Rave, State Land Board, to address the RAC at a future meeting on wildlife issues, especially elk herd management.

### **Recreation Resource Advisory Committees**

Comstock explained that RAC chairpersons nationwide were contacted by BLM National RAC Coordinator Twinkle Seitts about the proposed Recreational Resource Advisory Committees. RAC chairs were advised to discuss these with their RACs. There is no decision yet on how BLM will use RACs in the fee program. Charging fees is an option and BLM management does explore ways to avoid charging fees, but FOs risk losing funding from Washington if the latter option is chosen. Dickinson cautioned that many FOs will be faced with charging fees to accomplish management objectives. Comstock will draft a letter on behalf of the RAC to the National RAC Coordinator and State Director regarding the use of existing RACs for the fee program. Discussions ensued regarding fees and how federal agencies accomplish management objectives on public lands with the increased use those lands are experiencing.

### **Emerald Mountain Land Exchange**

The Emerald Mountain Partnership and State Land Board are working with the BLM in a 3-way land exchange. The Emerald Mountain Partnership has proposed that BLM trade several isolated parcels for the large Emerald Mountain parcel owned by the State Land Board. This exchange would eliminate BLM's need to manage isolated, inaccessible parcels and allow public access to a large parcel of land previously off limits. Most of the existing grazing permittees would purchase the isolated parcels. The LSFO is reviewing titles, preparing appraisal documents and

gathering public comment, and concurrently developing a management plan for the area in anticipation of a successful exchange. The decision record on the management plan is expected in spring 2006. Husband took several questions from the RAC.

### **Blue Valley Land Exchange**

The feasibility analysis was reviewed by Washington and approved. The Notice of Exchange Proposal was published in July and KFO hosted a public meeting last week. The Blue Valley Ranch, which proposed the exchange, would trade its parcels for BLM parcels. The exchange has generated significant public interest with river and hunting access a concern for many. Neither the EA or appraisal review process has been started yet. Parcels involved in the exchange lie in both Summit and Grand Counties.

### **Next Meeting and Closing Remarks**

Dickinson proposed that the RAC write a letter to the DFO asking BLM for more information about the portions of the energy bill impacting northwest Colorado, along with asking the Washington office to listen to the local FOs and provide mentors to assist local staff in implementing the proposed pilot APD teams. The RAC will watch this bill's implementation closely and wants to be kept informed on BLM's progress. RAC members agreed, and Dickinson will draft the letter.

Dickinson proposed that the RAC host a public lands conference that would include organizations affected by BLM policy. The RAC will start by sending a letter to the State Director asking for his consideration. Dickinson will draft the letter.

### **Agenda items for Grand Junction:**

Proposed Topics: Roan Plateau update, U.S. Fish and Wild Life Service policies related to energy permitting on BLM public lands, briefing on energy bill and how it affects BLM (Jim Simms a potential speaker), update on GSFO/KRO joint RMP revision, grazing rider update and FO impacts, Emerald Mountain Partnership and Citizens to Save Our Public Lands presentations.

Options for the next meeting's field trips: Bangs Canyon Special Recreation Management Area and/or the areas involved in the proposed Mesa Mood land exchange.

### **Public Comment Period**

Adriana Raudzens was the only member of the public present and had no comment.

The meeting adjourned at 2:10 p.m.