

NORTHWEST RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

**Thursday, February 12, 2004
Glenwood Springs Community Center
100 Wulfsohn Road
Glenwood Springs, Colorado**

Geoff Blakeslee called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m

Attendees:

Resource Advisory Council Members: All RAC members were present. Category 1 - Ken Currey, Charlie Yates, David Cesark, T. Wright Dickinson, Jon Hill; Category 2 - Geoff Blakeslee, Charles Kerr, Patrick Kennedy, David Bailey, Wade Haerle; Category 3 - Larry McGown, Jeff Comstock, John Martin, Kathy Hall, and Forrest Nelson.

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), Dave Harr (Kremmling Assistant Field Office Manager), Steven Hall (Western Slope Center Public Affairs Specialist), Catherine Robertson (Grand Junction Field Office Manager), Jim Cooper (Grand Junction Field Office OHV Specialist), Lynn Barclay (Western Slope Fire Education and Mitigation Specialist)

<u>Visitors:</u>	<u>Representing</u>	<u>Town/City</u>
George Rossman	Senator Campbell's Office	Grand Junction, CO
Steve Bonowski	Colorado Mountain Club	Golden, CO
Don Gillespie	Balcomb and Green	Glenwood Springs, CO
Derek Wagner	Senator Allard's Office	Grand Junction, CO
Clare Bastable	Colorado Mountain Club	Carbondale, CO
Shane Henry	Colorado Dept of Natural Resources	Denver, CO

Introductory remarks- John Husband and Geoff Blakeslee

Geoff will be attending the National RAC Chair Meeting in Phoenix May 11-13, 2004. Twinkle Thompson is coordinating this. Any issues that need to be brought up let Geoff know.

Next meeting of NW RAC will be on May 6th in Browns Park at Lodore Hall. Bunk houses or camping will be available, but there are no motels out there. We will have to decide how we will handle accommodations out there.

John read a letter from Don Peach, expressions of appreciation for working with all of us while he was on the RAC.

BLM National Sage Grouse Strategy is now set to be finalized beginning in June 2004. Delay in the schedule is due to comments such as those made by the NW RAC suggesting the strategy should build on local/state efforts already underway. The

Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Association range wide assessment is due to be finished in May.

Public Comment

Steve Bonowski Colorado Mountain Club - Comment is related to Roan Plateau. He thinks there has got to be a better way to go about extracting natural fuels. Through research he found some common ways of getting energy with out drilling everywhere. He provided an information packet called Energy Briefing: Renewable-Economic Opportunity for America.

Ken Currey presented a letter that was sent to him from the Western Slope ATV Association. They expressed their needs for access in the Bangs Canyon area. There is a need for additional access for loop roads. See hand out Western Slope ATV Association.

Field Office Managers' Update

Little Snake Field Office - The Northwest Colorado Stewardship group continues to gather momentum. The group has brought together a wide variety of interests to help find shared visions for land a resource management. At their meeting Monday evening, February 9, BLM presented an opportunity for the group to engage in a community centered landscape scale resource planning and management effort. This would be a pilot project to explore new ways to engage the community in BLM public land management. There is interest for this type of a pilot project in DOI and BLM at the national level.

Kremmling Field Office - Travel management planning continues on the area known as the Wolford Mtn. Travel Mgt. Plan. The plan covers approximately 50,000 acres immediately north of the town of Kremmling. A handout was passed out to the RAC members that summarized the efforts to date, the proposed action, need for the project and a brief explanation of the "Decision Tree" process. There will be a second public meeting March 17th at 7:00pm at the CSU Extension Hall, Grand County Fairgrounds in Kremmling. Alternatives will be presented at this meeting. The Kremmling Field Office has been working with a contractor out of California to prepare the plan. The contractor utilizes a patented process known as the "Decision Tree" process in which individual route data is applied to a flowchart format resulting in a choice of designations at the end. The field office is trying to involve user groups. The Colorado Mountain Club has been involved but others have not been as much as the field office would like. Various RAC members requested a formal presentation of the proposed plan, especially the "Decision Tree" process, be provided at the August RAC meeting.

White River Field Office - West Douglas herd area planning team has developed seven alternatives that will be going out for public review in mid March or early April. Scott Pavey is the project lead.

Encana has proposed a new 125 wells oil program located primarily in Rio Blanco County Plan. Associated with the development of gas resources there is interest in constructing a new interstate gas pipeline from Piceance area up to Wyoming. No official applications yet until the proponents get FERC approval.

A few parcels around the Dinosaur National Monument Headquarters totaling about 640 acres were removed from the February oil and gas lease sale due to concerns about visual impacts from the monument. The Park Service seems satisfied with the negotiated solution.

Glenwood Springs Field Office – Roan Plateau management plan draft is not out yet.

There has been some controversy on the February oil and gas lease sale over one parcel in the Grand Hogback. The parcel is within a citizen's wilderness proposal and it is being protested.

The Glenwood Springs FO and the White River National Forest are working on an EA for the US Air Force High Altitude training center, which is based out of the Eagle Airport. The proposal involves allowing the use of landing sites within a wilderness study area. Letters to the public should be going out in a few weeks.

The GSFO is working on four geographic areas plans and NEPA analysis for up to 500 new gas wells with four different oil and gas companies in Garfield County, Colorado.

Grand Junction Field Office - Update for the Colorado Canyons NCA—The comment period closed on the Draft RMP and we only received 83 comments. The NCA staff held over 120 meetings last winter and through that process all stake holders participated well and understood all the alternatives that were on the table. Advisory council will go through the comments.

-Last fall BLM leadership group met and nominated Colorado NW Regional Office of the Division of Wildlife for a Director Clark "4 C's Award. GJFO will send out a copy of Colorado Outdoors Magazine with coverage on one of the partnership efforts that is a highlight of the relationship between DOW and GJFO.

-Update for Fire Management Plan—as GJFO's was one of the first in the state and focused on prescribed burn and not as much on mechanical and we need to update it using new template out of Boise. We are taking advantage of the update and comparing the plan to area's recent fire history to update the landscape prescriptions for the plan. We are preparing the Plan in conjunction with the CO National Monument, which borders the CO Canyons NCA.

Committee Reports: Invasive Species -Geoff Blakeslee

Geoff has a letter he'll be sending to Ron Wenker inquiring as to how BLM Colorado has done to address issues brought out in the 2001 National Validation Review of the Weeds program. He's interested in consistency of funding and coordination with the State of Colorado and their Strategic Plan for Noxious Weeds. He'll be working with the other RACs in Colorado to draft a joint resolution regarding cooperation with the State of Colorado.

At a future meeting he's like to see if we could get a presentation by Tim Carlson of the Tamarisk Coalition or Steve Anthony from Garfield County.

Catherine noted that Sparky Tabor was named 2003 weed manager of the year and award that was given by his peers. Congratulations to Sparky and acknowledgement of the BLM efforts related to invasive weeds. Next month Sparky will be holding a 101 weeds education.

Proposed Grazing Rule and Draft EIS - Jeff Comstock

John Husband gave a power point presentation on the proposal and then Jeff Comstock led a discussion with the RAC. A few key points of the regulatory changes are that they aim to improve and promote cooperation between BLM and grazing permittees, protect health of rangelands, and increase management efficiency and effectiveness. Comments on the Draft EIS are due back by March 5th.

The grazing subcommittee of the NW RAC consisting of Jeff, T. Wright Dickinson, Jon Hill, and Geoff Blakeslee met in Craig on February 3 and recommends to the full RAC that they support the Modified Alternative 3 in the Draft EIS with a couple of exceptions as follows.

Regarding Implementation of Changes in Grazing Use the subcommittee recommended support for the proposed action which would assure that changes in active use in excess of 10% would be implemented over a 5-year period with some exceptions, rather than allowing a discretionary 5 – year phase in period.

Regarding the Basis for Rangeland Health Determinations the subcommittee recommended support for the proposed action which would assure that both monitoring and assessments occur, verses discretionary use of either monitoring or assessment when making Rangeland Health Determinations.

DECISION - After some discussion the RAC voted unanimously to prepare a very short resolution to adopt the recommendations of the grazing subcommittee to support the Modified Alternative 3 in the Draft EIS with agreed upon changes.

North Fruita Desert plan- Jim Cooper/GJFO

Upper portion of the Bookcliffs area in Mesa County. BLM provided an update to the RAC on the types of comments received on the Draft Plan and how the comments were incorporated into the Final Plan. BLM published a draft plan late last year. Four alternatives were established. Separate but equal recreation opportunities and developed ways that all users would be able to use the land. Multiple use alternative took from all interests to add modifications to the final plan as to how this area should be managed. The plan is designed to better manage all recreational opportunities. Environmental sector suggested that we designate certain areas as shooting areas. User conflicts are an issue. Reduce user contact by informing the public as to what they can expect when they visit this area.

Highlights of the plan that differ from Draft Plan Multiple Use Alternative-

-We won't have dead end motorized routes running into bicycle routes.

-The only areas that camping is allowed is in designated camp sites.

- Plan to go to designated routes over the next few years, but allow the system to establish.
- Routes leading to the riparian/wash area will be closed.
- Seasonal closures due to wildlife activities.
- Prairie Dog concerns

On going monitoring is in the plan in managing the area, with a pretty consistent presence. The majority of use comes from mountain bikers. The area receives about 20,000 bikers a year, with the majority, about 5,000 of them arriving during the Fat Tire Festival. Special events bring in more bike patrol, rangers and provide some donations and funds in addition. Mountain Bike trails need to be brought up to standards due to the fact that they were not professionally created. Want to create a schedule to maintain the bike trails similar to the way that we maintain roads. Debate over cost and fees for this area and for the use of public lands, possible fee area in the future. Plan gives the option to concessionaire out the campground or charge fees in the camping area. \$4,000.00 fees are contributed for a year, and there is a debate over whether that money can be used to maintain this area.

Conclusion: Lot's of comments and concerns to be brought in to the EA. The RAC concurred that GJFO really took care giving a hard look at incorporating comments into the Final Plan. The RAC was pleased with the process and gave GJFO a round of applause for getting things done. Geoff in favor of supporting the effort that everyone went through. Job well done and thank you for the update.

Roan Plateau Draft Management Plan- Update-

Thousands of comments already and there is not a draft yet. Still hoping to have something out soon. Plan has gotten a lot of scrutiny through out the country. Seems to be a lot of good open comments but, it's still not out there for discussion. Stay tuned for the next meeting. There will be a 90 day comment time, and there will be several public meetings. The meetings will be spaced out in different locations through out the county and will be more of an open house format. Comments are being requested in writing, and there is a web site to make public comments or you can send written comments.

Colorado Wildfire Academy and other Fire Topics – Lynn Barclay

The Annual Academy will be held June 7-13, 2004 in Carbondale. The goal of the academy is to train fire crews from different agencies and local cooperators together to ensure consistency and smooth operations. There are over 35 courses offered over the course of the week and the Academy brings in about \$600,000 to a community during this one week. The public is allowed to come in and observe. Watch the web site for a VIP day which is usually a Thursday or a Friday.

This year's Academy is taking place near the 10th anniversary of the Storm King incident, and there will be opportunities to remember those who lost their lives and the lessons we learned from the tragedy.

The wildland fire outlook for 2004 as of now is near normal overall, but not with an early fire season. The Southwest is the driest area right now. Their normal season starts in

April but they have already had a small fire. We have seen generally improved snow pack 80-105% this year. June is expected to be hotter and drier across the west.

Public Comment

Steve Bonowski spoke about the Colorado Outdoor Training Initiative (COTI). This volunteer group is very committed to giving back to the community. They put in 3,000 to 4,000 volunteer hours a year. Steve would be glad to speak in more detail at a future meeting about opportunities for COTI to help with public lands projects.

Next Meeting May 6th in Browns Park at Lodore Hall

Potential Topics: Roan Plateau, Northwest Colorado Stewardship, Bangs Canyon Update, weeds with possible speakers Tim Carlson or Eric Lane, cultural resources and wildlife subcommittee reports

Possible tour for RAC members to talk about visual resource management, history of Browns Park, Browns Park Wildlife Refuge.

Potential Topics For future meetings: Social and environmental assessment, Public Forum, COTI and volunteer efforts, land disposal legislation/land exchanges