

**Northwest Resource Advisory Council**  
**MEETING MINUTES**  
**Friday, July 29, 2005**  
 Via Teleconference

**ATTENDEES**

Resource Advisory Council Members

David Bailey, Category 2	Kathy Hall, Category 3
Geoff Blakeslee, Category 2	Jon Hill, Category 1
Dave Cesark, Category 1	Pat Kennedy, Category 2
Jeff Comstock, Category 3	John Martin, Category 3
T. Wright Dickinson, Category 1	Forrest Nelson, Category 3
Wade Haerle, Category 2	

Not present: Ken Currey, Category 1; Charlie Yates, Category 1; Charles Kerr, Category 2; and Larry McCown, Category 3

**BLM Staff**

Fran Ackley	Bob Fowler
Denise Adamic	Mel Lloyd
Valerie Dobrich	Tamara Sadoo
	Kent Walter

<b>Visitors</b>	<b>Representing</b>	<b>Town/City</b>
Barb Flores	American Mustang & Burro Assn.	Greeley, CO
Dave Robertson	Twin Buttes Ranch	Rangely, CO
Dan Johnson	Chevron	Salt Lake City, UT
Reed Morris	Colo Wilderness Networks	Steamboat Springs, CO
Mike Marinovich	Council, Twin Buttes Ranch	Denver, CO
Jane Yazzi	NWCOS	Craig, CO
Toni Moore	Colo Wild Horse & Burro Coalition	Fruita, CO

**Opening Remarks**

Chairman Jeff Comstock called the meeting to order at 12:02 p.m. Comstock explained the purpose of today's meeting, which is for the RAC to hear a presentation from the West Douglas Herd Area (WDHA) Working Group. The RAC will then present a recommendation to the Bureau of Land Management. Comstock covered a few ground rules and confirmed that today's attendance constitutes a quorum.

**Working Group Presentation**

Working Group Members: Forrest Nelson, T. Wright Dickinson, Geoff Blakeslee, Charlie Yates

Forrest Nelson explained that the Working Group met with BLM White River Field Office staff on June 30, followed by a Working Group teleconference meeting on July 13. T. Wright Dickinson provided a summary of RAC activities regarding this and the past WDHA Environmental Assessment (EA) (see attached). The Working Group reviewed the EA, as well as

the public comments received by the WRFO, to assist them in developing their presentation and recommendation.

### **RAC Discussion**

Pat Kennedy asked what would happen to horses removed from the area, and BLM's Valerie Dobrich explained that horses removed from the WDHA would be placed in the BLM adoption program. Fran Ackley added that the horses could be adopted, placed in a long-term holding facility, or sold. Blakeslee suggested several edits to the summary document and will forward those edits to Melodie Lloyd for inclusion. Kathy Hall asked what the required herd size needed to be to support a genetically healthy herd. Dickinson stated he thought it to be 150 to 200 horses. Blakeslee added that research shows this number of horses would cause significant resource damage. David Bailey stated that his research revealed that a herd containing only 25 to 60 horses is not genetically viable. Dobrich explained that BLM had herd blood samples analyzed, and professionals confirmed that by periodically introducing young mares to the herd, a genetically viable herd could be maintained. This could also be accomplished by increasing the ratio of breeding mares to studs. The Working Group confirmed that it did consider this information. John Martin asked about funding considerations in maintaining a genetically viable herd. Kent Walter, field manager for WRFO, stated that there would be no substantial increase in costs to manage for a genetically viable herd of this size.

### **Public Comment Period**

Reed Morris, Colorado Wilderness Network, questioned the Working Group's rationale and position that Alternative B is outside the scope of the plan amendment process. Morris said he had commented and protested on the previous EA, and this EA did not provide the RAC or public with sufficient information for reaching informed conclusions. Issues suggest that the BLM should consider an alternative that addresses genetic issues, and land health and uses. This EA falls short of providing a reasonable range of alternatives. BLM also needs to provide an analysis regarding oil and gas activities.

Dickinson explained that the Working Group agreed with public comment pertaining to land health and allocated Animal Unit Months (AUM). They felt the scope of the EA was too narrow to adjust grazing allocations to accommodate wild horses in the area.

Mike Marinovich, council for Twin Buttes Ranch, had reviewed the cost run report and questioned the information regarding genetic viability related to maximum herd size.

Toni Moore, Colorado Wild Horse & Burro (WH&B) Coalition, stated that it appears the RAC doesn't have a good interpretation of the WH&B law. The Act can't be managed through a Resource Management Plan; this Act is similar to the Threatened & Endangered Species Act. Biotic needs of horses must be taken into consideration before anything else, including livestock, which should not be a concern. BLM cannot arbitrarily decide management of the West Douglas herd; 150 to 200 horses are needed to sustain a viable herd. She felt that the Working Group did not have good facts to base their decision on.

Dave Robertson, Twin Buttes Ranch Company and BLM grazing permittee, reminded the group that removal of the horses has been planned for many years. The resource area needs attention,

and the 1973 inventory was definitive. Rangeland health and grazing conflicts will always be a problem because the horses prefer the Texas Mountain area.

Barb Flores, American Mustang & Burro Association, stated that the 1974 horse inventory was not thorough and did not cover the entire area. Horses in many of the areas were missed. Rangeland health is a problem because of extensive livestock grazing and has nothing to do with horses. When questioned about her reference to a professional, Flores explained that Dr. Jeff Powell is an expert in range management practices. It was thought that he wrote an article, and Toni Moore offered to obtain copies for the RAC.

### **RAC Discussion and Recommendation**

Dickinson presented the draft Resolution to the RAC (see attached), which recommends supporting Alternative A, which calls for removal of the entire herd from the WDHA.

Walter thanked the Working Group and RAC for their efforts in involving the public and holding this special meeting to discuss the WDHA. Walter stated that every issue brought forward by the public and RAC will be adequately addressed in the comment analysis. Today's RAC recommendation will be taken into consideration by the WRFO.

There was a unanimous vote for supporting the Resolution presented by the Working Group. Lloyd will formalize the Resolution for signatures and send to the WRFO.

### **Closing Remarks**

Jane Yazzi asked to speak. Comstock indicated that the call was ending and attendees were invited to speak during the public comment period, which had already closed. Yazzi was asked to send her comments by email to the RAC.

Lloyd announced that an agenda has been finalized for the upcoming meeting in Walden, and a field trip is planned to Owl Mountain on Wednesday.

The meeting adjourned at 1:02p.m.

North West Resource Advisory Council West Douglas Wild Horse Working Group:  
Forrest Nelson Chair, Charles Yates, T. Wright Dickinson and Geoff Blakeslee

### West Douglas Wild Horse Herd Summary

The North West RAC formed the working group several years ago when the BLM White River Field Office proposed to amend the White River RMP regarding management actions for wild horses in the West Douglas Herd Area.

The NWRAC held a field tour in the area and received a briefing on the issues on May 7, 2003.

Though subsequent working group meetings the working group reviewed EA CO-WRFO-03-050 and provided recommendations, which the NWRAC endorsed and forwarded to BLM. (See attached June 1 04 Letter to Kent Walter). That letter included supporting Alternative B—the removal of Wild Horses from the area.

BLM subsequently withdrew that EA.

In April 2005 BLM proposed a new EA CO-WRFO-05-083.

Which Alternative A implements the previous record of decision from the 1997 RMP to remove wild Horses from West Douglas creek or Alternative B, which proposes the creation of a Herd Management Area to manage a herd of 29-60 horses.

On June 30, 2005 the working group (with the exception of Charles Yates who was unable to attend) and NWRAC chairman Jeff Comstock met with BLM staff to obtain BLM's information and perspective. Endeavoring to meet BLM's decision time lines (decision by early August) and to obtain input from affected parties, on July 13, 2005 the working group sponsored a teleconference to receive input from affected parties. Known representatives of affected interests (Wild Horse, Grazing, Oil& Gas, Wilderness/ Environmental) were invited to participate and provide comment on this EA. All of the public comments received by the BLM White River Field Office were forwarded to the working group for review.

The NWRAC is holding a special teleconference call July 29, 2005 to receive the working group's recommendation and to allow the NWRAC to submit a recommendation, if they choose, to Kent Walter, White River Field Manager.

Recommendation of the working group members Nelson, Blakeslee, Dickinson:

The working group recommends that the NWRAC support adoption of Alternative A by the BLM as the Record of Decision.

The working group finds that it is not feasible to manage wild horses as proposed in the West Douglas Herd Area.

All of the previous planning decisions for the area have supported the same conclusion.

Based on public comment and the member's knowledge of the issues, we agree that it is not feasible to maintain a genetically viable population of horses at these levels and in a thriving ecological balance. This EA does not reconcile the past EA finding of detrimental impacts from year-long wild horse grazing with which we share similar concerns.

The BLM's ability to retain horses within the prescribed area is not feasible without the construction and maintenance of a fence in the WSA, which is of concern both legally and aesthetically by certain interests.

The existing gas leases and subsequent development complicates the feasibility to manage the horses and will only bring greater complexity.

Alternative B in regards to livestock grazing is outside the scope of the plan amendment process and coordinated resource management agreements signed with the Colorado Department of Agriculture and grazing permittee.

The working group is also concerned that the economic analysis is seriously inadequate in this EA and recommends a complete and thorough analysis be completed.

The working group seriously weighed the value of limited tax payer resources and BLM management capacities, and recognizes that a viable wild horse population and area exist nearby in the East Douglas Creek Area, which effectively and efficiently allows for recognition and enjoyment of wild horses as provided for under the Wild Horse and Burro Act.

In conclusion, based on the above mentioned factors, therefore the West Douglas Working Group recommends that the NWRAC supports Alternative A and the complete removal of wild horses from the West Douglas Herd Area as the most logical and practicable management decision, and encourages the BLM to adopt the same in the Record of Decision.

DRAFT RESOLUTION 7-29-05

Whereas the BLM North West Resource Advisory Council (NWRAC) has established the West Douglas Wild Horse Working Group (WDWHWG) to consider, inform and make recommendations to the NWRAC on BLM planning issues for that area, and

Whereas WDWHWG has made reasonable efforts to become informed on BLM planning issues for the area by holding: a tour of the area, multiple meetings over several years with BLM staff, reviewing all public comments submitted to BLM over several EAs and by asking for input from representatives of major stakeholders interest, and

Whereas the NWRAC finds that it is not feasible and practicable to maintain a viable Wild Horse Herd in the West Douglas Creek Area as out lined in the July 29, 2005 Summary of the WDWHWG.

Therefore, the North West Resource Advisory Council respectfully recommends and encourages the adoption of Alternative A of CO-WRFO-05-083-EA, the removal of all wild horses from the West Douglas Creek Herd Area.

Mr. Kent Walter  
BLM  
White River Field Office Manager  
73544 Highway 64  
Meeker, CO 81641

June 1, 2004

Dear Kent,

I am writing on behalf of the Northwest Resource Advisory Council Wild Horse subcommittee.

As you know our sub-committee has been following the development of the West Douglas Herd Area Amendment for the past couple of years. We thank you and your staff for the time you have spent with us during this process.

Since the last sub-committee meeting with you and your staff on May 20, 2004, we have developed the following recommendations.

1. We support the process that BLM has followed in developing the alternatives for the West Douglas Herd Area amendment.
2. We fully support your recommended preferred alternative (Alternative B).
3. We would recommend that a more thorough economic assessment and analysis of economic impacts to the local community be done to more fully evaluate the effects of reduced livestock grazing as proposed in Alternative B.
4. If Alternative H or a variation of this alternative is selected, we would recommend that before the forage allocation to livestock is reduced from 9080 AIIM's to 6947 AUM's, BLM and the existing permittees work together to develop a management strategy that would maintain an AUM level similar to the existing level while complying with accepted land health standards. The reduction to 6947 AUM's should be viewed as a minimum and should only be implemented if agreed upon management actions do not achieve the desired land health outcomes. Any reduction in AUM's should be temporary, placing them in suspended non-use and should not be removed from the permittees preference until it is determined that they cannot meet accepted land health standards.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide input and participate in this planning process.  
Sincerely,

Geoff Blakeslee