



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

Southwest Colorado Resource Advisory Council

RAC Meeting Minutes - Thursday June 15, 2023

Uncompahgre Field Office, 2465 S. Townsend Ave, Montrose, CO 81401

Zoom option: <https://blm.zoomgov.com/meeting/register/vJlsduiorj4uHpqYI2Mt9TXrtNxfC6ee6BY>

ATTENDANCE

Designated Federal Officer: Stephanie Connolly, Southwest District (SWD) Manager

RAC Chair: Tif Rodriguez, Chair (absent); RAC Vice Chair: Kathy Welt (remote via Zoom)

Southwest RAC (SWRAC) members:

Jim Haugsness; Matt Thorpe; Linda Gann; Lynn Padgett; Mark Roeber; Justin Musser; Steve Garchar; James Dietrich; and Grady Ham (in person); Ben Katz; Kathy Welt; Starr Jamison; and Jon Holst (remote via Zoom); Roger Cesario (via cell)

BLM employees:

Stephanie Connolly (SWD Manager); Derek Padilla (Tres Rios Field Manager); Brandon Lewis (SWD Fire Management Officer); Suzanne Copping (Uncompahgre Field Manager); Ray O'Neil (Canyons of the Ancients National Monument Manager); Edd Franz (Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area Manager); Maggie Magee (SWRAC Coordinator); and Candis Fischer (SWD Administrative Assistant) (in person); Caroline Kilbane (Uncompahgre Outdoor Recreation Planner) presented in the afternoon.

Congressionals:

McKenna Farley and Raven Finnegan, Representative Boebert's office (remote in the morning).

Public:

Adam Ortega, Colorado Department of Agriculture (in person); 2 unidentified (remote via Zoom).

MORNING SESSION

In the absence of the RAC Chair, Stephanie Connolly conducted the meeting assisted by RAC Coordinator Maggie Magee. The meeting was available to attend via Zoom (which required pre-registration), with a 360° conference camera, mic, and speaker support from a Meeting Owl. Maggie Magee and Administrative Assistant Candis Fischer ran the Zoom and monitored participant questions and requests to provide input.

SWRAC was pleased to have a quorum and to welcome four new members: James Dietrich, Category 1; Linda Gann, Category 2; Justin Musser, Category 3; and Lynn Padgett, Category 3.

Field Manager Updates

The three SWD field offices provided highlights of germane activities, issues, and accomplishments.

1. Uncompahgre Field Manager Suzanne Copping and Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area (NCA) Manager/Uncompahgre Field Office Recreation Program Supervisor Edd Franz -

Uncompahgre Field Office (UFO):

- [Electric Hills](#): Non-motorized trail system.
- [Rimrocker Trailhead Recreation & Public Purposes Act](#): Montrose County is working on a staging area; seasonally closed to all uses; could improve big game habitat.
- [Jumbo Mountain Special Recreation Management Area Travel Management Plan](#): Great story map developed for public comment period; preparing to issue decision.

Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area:

- Stopped at Eagle Rock Shelter on the SWRAC field tour.
- Cottonwood Days - held annually in October for 6th grade students of Delta, Olathe, and Montrose county schools since 2009 with extensive partnership involvement (including Colorado Canyons Association).
- Applied for [Dark Sky Place](#) certification.
- Illegal dumping on public lands continues to be an issue.
- [Colorado Canyons Association](#): A Year in the Canyons Art Show, Artist-in-Residence, Andrea Stolarczyk, Austin, CO, August 17.

DISCUSSION

- Jim Haugsness asked about range and law enforcement staff; Edd responded that staffing is at 50%; UFO has signed agreement with Montrose County Sheriff's Office; deputy sheriff goes out with UFO Law Enforcement Office (LEO) Sam Flourney; good relationship; Stephanie Connolly noted that Tres Rios Field Office (TRFO) has two LEO positions and Gunnison Field Office (GFO) has one LEO position; all SWD LEOs are required to participate in State and National level assignments.
- Jim Haugsness remarked on the recent transfer of law enforcement personnel to Washington DC and asked whether there is coverage when law enforcement is required to perform details; Stephanie Connolly said there are times when local BLM offices have no coverage; Edd Franz noted that LEO from adjacent field office is typically on call.
- Ben Katz commented that he has not received a response to comments he submitted on Dominguez-Escalante NCA in December 2021; Edd noted that Grand Junction FO manages D-E NCA and that every comment should receive a response.
- Justin Musser noted that historically one of the range staff positions has handled the weeds program.
- Jim Haugsness asked about Electric Hills recreation improvements and fee structure; Edd noted that the business plan is going through State Office review.

2. Tres Rios Field Manager Derek Padilla and Canyons of the Ancients Monument Manager Ray O'Neil -

Tres Rios Field Office (TRFO):

- Receive good LEO support from Colorado Parks & Wildlife; have four officers in Dolores with the ability to enforce.
- [Transportation and Access Planning area 2 \(TAP2\)](#): Will move forward in fall 2023.
- West Rim timber sale; upcoming Dawson prescribed burn.
- Grassy Mountain hazardous fuels project, Durango: National Forest Foundation coordinates; will put out a contract in 2-3 months.
- [Animas City Mountain Prescribed Burn](#) (May 2023): 495 acres completed; seventy 911 calls on the first day (fewer than expected); excellent support from partners (USFS, La Plata County, State).
- [Durango Area Wildlife Closures](#): Have seen an increase in public honoring closed gates.
- Range: On track with permit renewals; one-person weed crew.
- Spring Creek Basin Herd Management Area: 3 foals; 1 died; fertility control attempting to match mortality with recruitment.
- Aqueduct parking lots: Completing work.
- Phil's World: Completing cultural mitigation work.
- Burrow Mine Site near Mancos: Neat historic structure; possible interpretive trail.
- Paradox Resources LLC: Shut-in order in place due to failure to pay; bankruptcy court requested lifting of shut-in order
- Kinder Morgan: Southern Ute Applications for Permit to Drill
- Staffing: Geologist now on staff to process mineral applications; two vacant lands & realty positions

Canyons of the Ancients National Monument (CANM):

- Visitor Center & Museum: Sits on sinking slab; engineer drilled holes and jacked up floor; temporarily opening with bare concrete floor; will close again July 26 to apply leveling compound and epoxy.
- [Southwest Colorado Canyons Alliance](#) Art Fair: July 24.
- Yellow Jacket/Flodine grazing allotments: Require further study; programmatic agreement with State Historic Preservation Office to map potential effects to cultural resources from livestock grazing.
- [Keep Colorado Wild Pass](#): Obtain through vehicle registration; hoping to partner with State to receive funds.

DISCUSSION

- Steve Garchar wondered whether dumping is an issue in TRFO or CANM; Derek Padilla responded that TRFO LEO Tyler Fouss has mentioned that it is not a major issue; Ray O'Neil noted that cars have been dumped in CANM.
- Steve Garchar thanked the BLM for their response to Dolores County road washout and cited the support of BLM Assistant Field Manager Ryan Joyner; Derek Padilla noted that the County did the repair work.
- Jim Haugsness asked whether lack of guaranteed funding from KCW would cause heartburn; Ray O'Neil noted that CANM would only move forward if and when the program becomes a stable funding source; the State would need to figure out how to make that happen; Stephanie Connolly noted that it could serve as a pilot program for filling gaps in opportunities.
- Matt Thorpe observed that KCW is in its first year, with little sense of what kind of revenue it will bring in or how to provide stability; Doug Vilsack (BLM CO State Director) was the architect; number one priority is to fund state parks, followed by search and rescue, avalanche awareness, and wildlife conservation; if money remains then State would consider including BLM and other partners.
- Lynn Padgett mentioned they had to obtain a mail order pass to enter Saguaro National Park.
- Ray O'Neil noted that the money goes to higher level in agency.
- Montrose County School District has provided free recreation passes to teachers purchased through GGCA.
- Jim Haugsness asked about the status of Chutes and Ladders.

Derek Padilla continued the TRFO update.

- Derek Padilla noted that routes in the area are now designated, with a seasonal closure, through the [TAP1 decision](#); TAP1 is currently with IBLA to resolve protests.
- [Indian Minerals Development Act](#) proposal: Working with Ute Tribe on 12 well sites; ensure legality; liability from post-activity would transfer to tribes.
- Southern Ute Tribe: Commented on proposed rule on waste prevention; could hinder ability to compete with non-federal entities; tribe appreciated the input.
- Will discuss feral horses on BLM lands at February RAC meeting.
- Stephanie commented that the Southwest District is happy to have Derek on staff; sworn in in May and immediately sent to serve as agency administrator on Animas City Mountain prescribed burn.

3. Gunnison Field Manager Jon Kaminsky -

Gunnison Field Office (GFO):

- GFO staff have moved into [new office building](#) in Gunnison Rising complex near FedEx; been in temporary quarters since office fire in 2013.
- [Domestic Sheep Grazing EIS](#): Working with [Sheep Grazing Sub-Committee](#) to resolve issue of interaction between domestic and bighorn sheep involving three allotments; sheep carry various pathogens, some of which bighorn lack natural immunity to; two more meetings in July and August.

Stephanie introduced the SubRAC members who will make a recommendation to the full RAC.

- [North Powderhorn Fuels](#): Introduce prescribed fire into the wilderness; a lot of dead standing beetle

kill creates safety issue; not allowing natural fire has exacerbated the situation; Wilderness Act authorizes managing for disease; conduct “manned” manipulations; small strategic burns to generate mosaic with natural fire breaks; EA has been completed; moving toward decision and burn plan; the project may take 10-15 years.

- **Gunnison Weeds Treatment:** Tiering to programmatic EIS using Esplanade and Rejuvra; BLM cannot use beyond the boundary.
- Lake San Cristobal Fuels EA: Hinsdale County; EA contract (EMPSi) extended through March 2024; staff looking at the feasibility of building strategic fuels breaks to support winter recreation.
- Alpine Loop: With increased use, looking at designated campsites, fire rings, and minor amenities in cooperation with Hinsdale and San Juan counties.
- O Be Joyful and Mill Creek campgrounds: Camping reservations can now be made through [Recreation.gov](https://www.recreation.gov).
- Mineral Point Water Right Purchase (Ouray County): Acquisition of a water right for Mineral Point Ditch would return water to Burrows Creek, restoring natural flow regimes, diluting heavy metals, and benefiting wetlands and downstream communities; would be implemented as part of BLM’s Abandoned Mine Lands program; worked with Commissioner Lynn Padgett – the Board of Ouray County Commissioners supports the acquisition of the water right.
- Bonita Peak Mining District (BPMD), a Superfund Site: on private, USFS, and BLM; shared jurisdiction with counties and EPA.

DISCUSSION

- Comment: Grady Ham noted that there has been a lack of transparency on project results.
 - EPA has Citizen Advisory Group; R&PP conveyance with Silverton takes time; BLM must do environmental site assessments for transfer to occur.
- Question: Linda Gann asked how BPMD is paid for by the mining company.
 - Activity was pre-NEPA, so there is little ability to recoup from Sunnyside Mining Co.; Surface Mining Act now requires bonding so we can reclaim areas
- Comment: Kathy Welt noted that AML funds have been a source of historic funding.
 - AML funding is for use on areas with no potentially responsible parties.
- Question: Steve Garchar asked about target plants for weeds treatments.
 - Higher elevation cheatgrass; burrs; henbane
- Question: Justin Musser wondered whether Monarch Pass fuels treatments would be longlined/tethered.
 - Helicopter logging would be used to create open areas between trees.

4. Southwest District Manager Stephanie Connolly -

- **Thompson Divide Withdrawal:** U.S. Forest Service leading NEPA.
- **Gunnison Sage-Grouse RMP Amendment:** Thanked Adam Ortega for his review of internal draft; public draft will be available for review and comment before Thanksgiving; Big Game RMP Amendment is on similar schedule.
- **Illegal Dumping Campaign:** Public lands are within 10 minutes of Montrose in any direction; rise in landscaping/household waste around Delta; people residing on public lands; will hold tire event in Montrose October 7.

DISCUSSION

- Jim Haugsness wondered whether BLM is looking at conservation allotments (leasing for purposes of conservation) with Public Lands Rule still in progress.
- Jon Kaminsky noted that conservation as a use is not tied to grazing.
- James Dietrich wondered about utility solar projects.
- Stephanie Connolly noted that there are not many opportunities for solar in the Southwest District.

AFTERNOON SESSION

Uncompahgre Field Office Recreation Issues and Activities

Uncompahgre Field Office staff members Caroline Kilbane, Outdoor Recreation Planner; Edd Franz; and Suzanne Copping reviewed topics discussed during the previous day's Gunnison River raft field tour and provided a [PowerPoint presentation](#) on current recreation activities throughout the field office likely to require RAC consideration at some point, as well as on the need to consider potential wildlife conflicts during planning for recreation activities.

- Gunnison Forks boat ramp ownership.
- Cottonwood Days annual outdoor education event.
- Eagle Rock Shelter interpretation considerations; 7,000-year old basket found at site now housed at CANM; [Light Detection and Ranging \(LiDAR\)](#) scan allows public to view.
- Smith Mountain non-motorized trail: DAM bikers submitted conceptual proposal.
- [Jumbo Mountain Travel Management Plan](#) update: Just outside Paonia; receives high local use; scoped in spring 2021; developed story map for release of draft EA; received around 100 individual comments; will use to clarify language in final EA; e-bike use is proposed; first TMP that addresses aging with pedal assisted technology.

DISCUSSION

- Justin Musser noted that Class 1 cuts off power assist at 20 mph.
- Mark Roeber noted that there are now e-bike shops in Paonia; excited about level of public engagement.
 - UFO Business Plan on recreation user fees: RAC provided good comments, helping to clarify some language; sent up to State Office for review and HQ by end of month; seeing high demand for non-motorized opportunities on BLM lands; receive state grant money (\$80,000) to hire handful of OHV staff every year; might attempt same approach with non-motorized.
- Jim Haugsness asked whether the pass would be per person or vehicle.
- Lynn Padgett asked whether a pass would generate an income stream that could support staff.
- Caroline noted that it would be per vehicle (displayed in the window) and believed it would support staff; fund routine maintenance and greater park ranger presence
- Stephanie Connolly noted that people do not always park at parking areas (such as with Ridgway Area Trails); might become an enforcement issue.
- Jim Haugsness wondered whether trailhead hosts might be an option to prevent fee leakage.
- Justin Musser wondered whether the BLM had data available for review; sounded like an enforcement issue.
 - Montrose County West End: Looking into potential future motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities; Paradox Valley Extensive Recreation Management Area; area has been hit hard with loss of extractive industries; looking to encourage tourism; recreation could be a potential economic driver for residents, West End Trails Alliance.
- James Dietrich wondered what the potential noted Cortez to Rimrocker; seeing an increase in gravel grinding routes/events (that typically combines riding on a variety of surfaces including asphalt, gravel, dirt, and singletrack); West End Gravel Rush; more requests for bike packing; could be some opportunities to help our neighbor.
- Starr Jamison provided a link to Camp V showing how it intersects with public lands.
- Justin Musser asked whether the BLM is tracking increased use and has plans for mitigating potential impacts from increased use; if we don't build it, the users will build themselves; he wondered whether it would be worthwhile to have discussions with counties who are seeing increased traffic; weed management has increased due to increased use.
 - Edd noted that UFO has increased their number of counters significantly.
- Jim Haugsness wondered whether BLM had put in the Dry Creek staging area yet and whether it

would accommodate large groups?

- Edd noted that an organized rock crawling event is planned there for end of July; any organized group of 75 or more requires a special recreation permit; Dry Creek is a deer/elk winter concentration area that requires timing limitations on recreation use; UFO now sends partners to [CPW habitat site](#), which has been beneficial in guiding partner proposals.
- Edd noted that no NEPA has been conducted for Smith Mountain yet; cultural/sensitive species surveys have been completed
- Suzanne remarked that the BLM is continually looking for way to move forward and negotiate conflicting management between recreation use and impacts to big game and winter habitat.
- Lynn Padgett mentioned that regional Ouray Regional Recreation and Conservation Alliance (ORRCA) is in final stages of developing habitat sensitivity model; will be looking at seasonal/focal areas for conservation.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

No members of the public requested to speak. RAC Coordinator opened the public comment period at 2:30 p.m. and closed the comment period at 2:34 p.m.

CONCLUSION

The meeting concluded with a round robin during which RAC members and BLM participants provided input on the quality of the meeting and expectations for future meetings.

- Matt Thorpe provided insight into CPW funding; significant funding goes to trail development now; grants for start-ups such as flights to identify sensitive habitat; commitment to sustainable efforts benefiting economy and natural resources (wildlife and habitat); must be balanced and use a landscape/watershed level approach to receive funding; Jamin Grigg is lead for Montrose area.
- Several members appreciated receiving detailed field manager reports in advance of meetings.
- A number of members expressed their appreciation for the collaborative nature of the group.

RECOMMENDATIONS

No formal recommendations were made. Informal recommendations included:

- Hold a meeting to update new RAC members on RAC sheep grazing sub-committee discussions.
- Survey RAC members on potential future RAC meeting dates.

DECISIONS

The RAC nominated and voted to approve a new RAC Chair and Vice Chair to serve in one-year terms:

- Chair: Lynn Padgett (Steve Garchar nominated; James Dietrich seconded).
- Vice Chair: Steve Garchar (Mark Roeber nominated; Lynn Padgett seconded).