



# *Southwest Colorado Resource Advisory Council*

## MEETING MINUTES

**Tuesday October 10, 2023 - Field Tour of Silverton Area Trails**

**Wednesday October 11, 2023 - RAC Meeting**

**Gunnison Field Office, 2500 E. New York Ave., Gunnison, CO 81230**

**and virtually via Zoom (registration required):**

**<https://blm.zoomgov.com/meeting/register/vJlsceCtrTosGlpt-9w2dH9X1P6U60zcWjE>**

### **SWRAC Members Present:**

Category 1: Mark Roeber, Grady Ham, Roger Cesario, and James Dietrich; Kathy Welt via Zoom  
Category 2: Linda Gann, Jim Haugsness, and Ben Katz; Tif Rodriguez via Zoom  
Category 3: Lynn Padgett (Chair), Steve Garchar (Vice Chair), Matt Thorpe, and Justin Musser; Starr Jamison via Zoom.

### **Bureau of Land Management staff present:**

Stephanie Connolly (Southwest District Manager), Jon Kaminsky (Gunnison Field Manager), Maggie Magee (SWD Public Affairs), David Gauthier (SWD Administrative Officer), Ryan Joyner (acting Tres Rios Field Manager), Ray O'Neil (Canyons of the Ancients Monument Manager), and Suzanne Copping (Uncompahgre Field Manager); Rusty Stark (SWD Assistant Fire Management Officer) via Zoom.

### **Public Present:**

Terry Meyers (Rocky Mountain Bighorn Society), Bonnie Brown (Colorado Wool Growers), Jamin Grigg (Colorado Parks and Wildlife), Les Owen (Colorado Department of Agriculture), and Victoria Atkins (contract facilitator for the SWRAC Sheep Grazing Sub-Committee); Teri Lamers (Snyder Ranch); John Whitney (Senator Bennet's Office); Lisa Pool (Senator Hickenlooper's Office), Nicole Inda (sheep grazing permittee), and Robin Cascade (Great Old Broads for Wilderness) via Zoom.

## **Welcome and Introductions**

Stephanie Connolly opened the meeting and expressed appreciation to the four outgoing SWRAC members, Tif Rodriguez, Kathy Welt, Jim Haugsness, and Mark Roeber. Their time and commitment is much appreciated and noted.

Lynn Padgett and Steve Garchar, the newly elected SWRAC chair and vice chair, began the meeting with introductions, determined that a quorum was present, reviewed the agenda, and expressed appreciation to all the members of the Sheep Grazing Sub-Committee.

## **Sheep Grazing Sub-Committee Recommendations to SWRAC**

Jon Kaminsky began by reminding those present of the September 2022 SWRAC field trip, meeting discussion, and subsequent decision to form a Sheep Grazing Sub-Committee. He

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reviewed the timeline of the Environmental Impact Statement for Domestic Sheep Grazing Permit Renewals (see detailed minutes from the 9/7/2022 SWRAC meeting) including extensive work with stakeholders leading up to today's PowerPoint presentation by the Sheep Grazing Sub-Committee.

The presentation was introduced by Stephanie Connolly. Sub-Committee members Matt Thorpe, Jim Haugsness, Steve Garchar, and Mark Roeber took turns presenting the findings and recommendations. Sub-Committee member and critical contributor Jon Holst was unable to attend, but his participation was appreciated and acknowledged. The PowerPoint presentation is posted on the BLM SWRAC webpage.

The presentation followed the format of the six public meetings beginning in March 2023. Topics include Framing the Issues; Legal Framework; Economics; Mitigation Opportunities; Best Management Practices (BMPs) and Public Outreach Tools; and Conclusion and Next Steps. The monthly meetings ended in August and Sub-Committee members met several times to finalize the recommendations.

Matt Thorpe described the 'deeper dive' into the best management practices and which aided the process of coming together. Recommendations encouraged voluntary adoption of BMPs options by permittees, including improved communication and response planning; GPS collars on domestic sheep; use of drones and virtual fences; more monitoring of bighorn and herd health; testing of domestic sheep before release on the public landscape; options to move into vacant allotments, with the closing of allotments as a last resort. The Sub-Committee determined that the more tools that exist, the better the management options.

At this point the bighorn herd is healthy to the point that CPW is issuing hunting licenses that include ewes.

Public outreach and public testimony occurred at each meeting. Affected permittees were specifically invited and attended the August meeting.

Matt Thorpe summarized the Guiding Principles by stating that all concepts had been reviewed prior to formulating recommendations. The short-term recommendations could be implemented immediately with no further NEPA analysis, while the long-term recommendations would require additional NEPA analysis by the BLM.

Jim Haugsness emphasized the Sub-Committee premise that zero risk of disease is not attainable—whether or not there is domestic sheep grazing—because of the distance that bighorn rams foray. He considered the Sub-Committee meetings an exercise in risk management and described learning about the significance of a "Tier 1 herd" and the effects of the 1980 die-off.

Jim stated that, in the process of meeting, he learned that the strategy is two-fold:

- CPW is actively limiting (managing) the herd to not exceed 400–500 animals.
- Permittees have also reduced their domestic herds to no more than 1,000 animals.

This reduced ratio logically reduces the risk of contact (ROC) from 1980 levels.

Jim then proceeded to review the short-term recommendations of the Sub-Committee:

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1. During the annual review, new herd numbers/data and BMP implementation should be adopted.
2. GPS collars should be put on the (lead) domestic sheep.
3. Communications need to be strengthened. All involved need real-time location information and a “Robust Communication Plan” involving satellite phones for domestic herders (e.g. Garmin In-Reach system). Any language issues should be resolvable using cell phone apps.
4. Tabletop exercises should include an after action report – the good, the bad, and the ugly (e.g. dog bite occurrences) – and what went right and requires changing.

Steve Garchar added that available technologies should be implemented to the fullest extent, including the use of drones monitored by CPW, and satellite imagery.

The Sub-Committee offered the following long-term recommendations:

1. Update the 2020 Final EIS for Domestic Sheep Grazing Permit Renewals to incorporate a more comprehensive set of options/tools to minimize ROC
2. Develop a landscape-scale cross-jurisdictional approach to managing domestic grazing and reducing ROC.

Jim Haugsness added that relinquished allotments should be reassessed before being returned to active grazing use by others.

Mark Roeber remarked that bighorn and domestic sheep should be looked at as a whole, with as much adaptability as possible to change what is best for both. He added that, somehow, the parties must move past the two sets of rules (BLM and USFS) to look at the landscape and move where needed and be flexible and adapt; set rules lead to failure on all sides.

Steve Garchar commented that the Tier 1 bighorn herd has survived hungry miners and settlers for over 100 years. Domestic grazing is down from the past and the wild sheep rut is not occurring when the domestic sheep are there. He emphasized the importance of restoring the salt and mineral licks provided by CPW and noted that it is heartbreaking to see bighorns licking mag-chloride off the highways. He also expressed support for the increased testing of harvested bighorns.

Jim Haugsness noted that there appears to be an adversarial relationship, with domestic sheep permittees/woolgrowers feeling picked on. He stressed the importance of the tabletop meetings to help develop teamwork and know where everyone is coming from, which could lead to a reduction in perceived threats. He also expressed support for both pre- and post-(after action) meetings, which could help determine the number of herders needed per 1,000 sheep.

Matt Thorpe stated that all the different perspectives had been heard and expressed the sub-committee’s desire to build maximum flexibility into solutions. Vacant allotments should be considered as alternative sites for domestic sheep grazing so that effective separation can be achieved.

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Stephanie Connolly noted that the BLM is currently re-examining the grazing rules and encourages public participation and added that the long-term recommendations from the Sub-Committee could be affected by the Grazing Rule re-examination.

At the conclusion of the Sub-Committee presentation, the other SWRAC members were called on for comments and questions:

Kathy Welt noted that she had completed reviewing the Sub-Committee minutes and that all the issues she had questions on had been covered.

Tif Rodriguez had no questions and stated that the work done by the Sub-Committee addressed all her questions and comments; a lot of information was gathered. She thanked the Sub-Committee for their work.

Starr Jamison had no questions and thanked the Sub-Committee members.

Linda Gann appreciated the notes and was pleased to see the long-term recommendations, especially addressing the different set of grazing rules for the BLM and USFS. She considers technology as a new opportunity and recognizes that the Tier 1 herd has survived and is viable. She also expressed support for the mineral block supplements and tabletop exercises and appreciates the consensus formed by the Sub-Committee.

Matt Thorpe explained the CPW's current policy on mineral supplements, stating that the CPW veterinary staff no longer supports mineral licks as they believe the potential risk of disease spread from concentrating animals around a lick is worse than mineral deficiency.

Jon Kaminsky noted that the EIS identifies mineral block supplements as a risk.

Roger Cesario recused himself from voting on the acceptance of the recommendations as he currently has a business relationship with one of the permittees. He offered his opinion that the RMP amendment to allow eliminating allotments is currently not being used. He expressed support for eliminating allotments after third party buy-outs. Roger's grandfather grazed sheep in the Schofield Pass area.

Q: Ben Katz expressed curiosity about short-term mitigation measures that could happen now.

A: Jon Kaminsky responded that currently a spring meeting occurs between the BLM and permittees with the intention of getting all information available, but that currently there is no 'after action' review.

Matt Thorpe added that CPW and the BLM currently do communicate about the movement of bighorn groups.

Jon Kaminsky responded that it would be ideal if there were more concise plans and CPW information that could be used to alert all involved to potential conflict.

Q: Ben Katz asked what the BLM is waiting for.

A: Jon Kaminsky answered that the finalized EIS would offer new terms and conditions, with stronger language (e.g., "we are going to..." instead of "we will strive to...").

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Stephanie Connolly added that currently the short-term recommendations can be voluntarily adopted by the permittees. Funding could be secured to assist with the cost for purchasing GPS collars so that the added expense is not all on the permittees.

Q: Ben Katz asked what would happen if the proposed communications do not happen.

A: Jon Kaminsky responded that a robust plan should include addressing scenarios such as, if Matt Thorpe is not alerted regarding a bighorn siting, that the phone tree does not breakdown.

Q: Ben Katz: regarding Roger Cesario's comment about the amended RMP, is it the same as an EIS update?

A: Stephanie Connolly responded that closure of allotments options were removed from the EIS. A supplement would be needed to restore this option.

Justin Musser commented that he found the presentation encouraging and it was good to have consensus. He expressed support for adaptive management and recognizes that there are still unknowns regarding bighorn herds. He was cautious of too much dependence on technology, noting that it is not always a good fit (e.g., if tracking collars not accurately reporting the front end and back end).

James Dietrich noted the different regulations and management approaches of the two federal agencies (BLM and USFS) and supported flexibility. He added that he gets nervous when he hears talk about retiring allotments permanently and prefers deferring.

Stephanie Connolly responded that closing an allotment permanently requires Congressional action; the BLM can only close an allotment for the duration of an RMP.

Jon Kaminsky added that the BLM can do an amendment, with permit terms in effect for ten years.

Grady Ham stated that he appreciated the Sub-Committee's efforts on what he called a "daunting task." He noted that there is really no perfect solution; it all comes down to communication and the willingness and involvement of all parties. He recognized that there is a problem of interaction between bighorn and domestic sheep with no clear fix and that the worst case scenario has not happened.

Q: Lynn Padgett commented on the importance of the genetic purity of the RBS-21 Herd in Ouray County and asked Jamin Grigg why there isn't an elevated sense of concern, with CPW reporting a recent drop of 100 animals?

A: Jamin Grigg, CPW Senior Biologist for Southwest Colorado, responded that the Diamond (author) herd management report was written in 2012. It includes the history of the bighorn population, including the rebound/decline cycle. The 1980 population count declined to only 40-50 bighorn. Current management focuses on intentional reduction to maintain a 400 to 500 animal count. While still a high risk, the herd is currently stable.

Q: Lynn Padgett asked whether the short-term recommendations could be accomplished without additional funding?

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A: Steph Connolly responded that while the RAC makes recommendations, BLM still makes the decision and will worry about the implementation details.

Q: Lynn Padgett asked whether acceptance of the Sub-Committee's recommendations could come with a request for follow-up details on the next RAC meeting agenda?

A: Stephanie Connolly responded that updates can be presented through each field manager's report. The Federal Register notice (with meeting agenda) is already set through the February 2024 meeting and possibly May 2024.

Q: RAC Member Linda Gann asked how follow-up would be reported?

A: Jon Kaminsky responded that the document can be edited with recommendations incorporated.

Stephanie Connolly stated that the BLM is moving forward in good faith but is still dealing with protests. The BLM may ask for the decision back from the judge.

Lynn Padgett observed that the proposed recommendations do not include the elimination of grazing or after-action review.

Q: Justin Musser asked BLM staff present whether the recommendations are implementable?

A: Jon Kaminsky responded that the BMPs are doable, but doesn't know about other's voluntary cooperation. He added that CPW needs to reply regarding the timeline for updating habitat management. Funding for this is unknown.

Stephanie Connolly noted that the BLM has no jurisdiction over the state/CPW.

Jon Kaminsky added that currently everyone is in agreement that we need to work together.

**MOTION:** Justin Musser made a motion to accept the Sub-Committee's short and long term recommendations as presented to the SWRAC and BLM.

Grady Ham seconded the motion.

Ben Katz proposed to include after-action reviews as a recommendation.

Jon Kaminsky replied that the content of the recommendations are broad enough to include the implementation details later.

Lynn Padgett asked if there was any opposition to the motion? None was noted.

The motion passed, with Roger Cesario abstaining.

### **Field Manager Reports**

Following a break, the meeting reconvened with Field Manager Reports, which are posted in full on the BLM SWRAC webpage at: <https://www.blm.gov/get-involved/resource-advisory-council/near-you/colorado/southwest-rac>

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Assistant Field Manager Ryan Joyner (filling in for Derrick Padilla) reviewed the Tres Rios Field Office report and responded to the following questions:

Q: RAC Member\_Jim Haugsness asked why the Paradox Resources site was not reclaimed?

A: Ryan Joyner responded that 3 million was asked for to do reclamation and the company went bankrupt.

Q: RAC member Lynn Padgett asked whether the Paradox Resources “orphan wells” reclamation work would have impacts on Gunnison sage-grouse?

A: Ryan Joyner responded that if the agency contracts reclamation work they would have to address NEPA prior to any action.

Monument Manager Ray O’Neil encouraged all to come visit Canyons of the Ancients, noting that the museum has reopened with a new floor and exhibits. Canyons of the Ancients will host the next RAC field trip on February 6, followed by a February 7 meeting at the Tres Rios Field Office in Dolores.

Field Manager Jon Kaminsky reviewed the Gunnison Field Office report, including expressing appreciation for their new office building. The staff has been in temporary quarters since a 2013 arson fire destroyed the former office building. Jon received the following questions on the North Powderhorn Fuels Reduction project:

Q: Ben Katz asked if the Western Colorado University’s prescribed fire white paper observations/ recommendations are part of the Powderhorn project?

A: Jon Kaminsky replied yes; it is connected and the Need for Action was identified in the Western Colorado University whitepaper.

Q: Justin Musser asked if the goal was to avoid wildland fire or restore the natural habitat?

A: Jon Kaminsky answered that the goal includes both of these goals. If another year like 2020 happens, we would have to be very heavy handed, so we want to avoid this for the safety of firefighters and the impacts of sterilizing soil and invading weeds. Burned areas of subalpine fir are changing into chaparral and shrubs.

Field Manager Suzanne Copping reviewed the Uncompahgre Field Office report and responded to the following questions and comments:

Q: Jim Haugsness asked about staff safety during contact with the homeless population camping on public lands?

A: Suzanne Copping responded that they have excellent contact with the Sheriff working with folks camping on public lands near town and expressed equal concern for the safety of the BLM law enforcement officer, who does not approach until a deputy is available.

Q: Ben Katz expressed appreciation to UFO staff for the Jumbo Mountain Travel Management Plan. He then asked about the status of the North Fork Mancos Master Development Plan Supplemental Environmental Assessment, including Applications for

Permit to Drill in the Iron Point Unit and whether there would be drilling in the Trail Gulch Unit before the end of the year?

A: Suzanne responded that the APDs for Iron Point have been issued, but she did not know the Trail Gulch drilling timeline and would get back to him.

### **Gunnison Field Office Recreation**

Jon Kaminsky began the next agenda item by recapping the previous day's field trip, including the Silverton Trail System. Jon also distributed a recent pertinent article "Hiking Needs New Rules" published 10/2023 in The Atlantic, which includes the BLM Hartman Rocks Recreation Area and interview segments with David Wiens of Gunnison, who is the current executive director of the International Mountain Bicycling Association.

Jon Kaminsky described the pattern of recreation proposals and noted that the public perception of most proposals is a yes. Private recreation often pays for the projects. Jon referred to the recent success of the Signal Peak trail system in partnership with Western Colorado University. The initial 48 miles of social/user-created (and sometimes wildlife) trails was reduced to 22 miles of trails. All of the trailheads (and access) originate on the campus of WCU. Tons of public engagement occurred in 2017 and 2018, with numerous interests groups and practical compromises, including area closures for sage-grouse lekking and winter wildlife that mirrors antler sheds. No mountain biking is permitted until after May 1 and then for sage-grouse not until after 10:00 a.m.

Recreation management in a conservation landscape is similar to the Silverton trails and collaboration. He stated that the takeaway is to get all parties involved early, including in this case CPW and IMBA design input for wildlife conservation, which can help forego after-action litigation. Furthermore, Jon predicts that Silverton will become a greater destination point and economies will increase. Currently Lake City is seeing an increase in the winter economy because of ice climbing.

Jim Lovelace, the supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner and Recreation Program Lead then presented a PowerPoint on the Business Plan for Gunnison Campground Recreation fee increases (posted on the SWRAC webpage). Jim then responded to the following RAC member questions:

Q: Jim Haugsness complimented Jim Lovelace on a great presentation and was pleased that the RAC advice to increase campground fees was acted upon and asked which Consumer Price Index (CPI) was used for the business plan?

A: Jim Lovelace responded that the Colorado CPI was used.

Jim Haugsness agreed that the Colorado CPI made sense and noted that the Gunnison CPI may be higher than Denver's.

Q: Jim Haugsness asked if the Business Plan anticipates growth?

A: Jim Lovelace responded that growth is assumed and calculated at a 5% increase. It is definitely climbing up since the "Covid decline." He stated that there would be recommendations for additional campgrounds in the new RMP, including Bent Creek near Lake City and Cunningham Gulch and Molas Pass on the Silverton side.



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Q: Starr Jamison asked about impacts from the Oh Be Joyful Campground increase on its adjacent location to the dispersed campground next door on USFS?

A: Jim Lovelace noted that it was a good question and that Oh Be Joyful is part of the recreation.gov system. Currently the USFS is not sure how to manage recreation reservations for dispersed camping. Jim believes recreation.gov is a good thing and he does not anticipate an increase in dispersed camping.

Jim Haugsness mentioned the Tres Rios Chutes and Ladders “hardening” to protect the resources and recommended alerting the USFS about hardening their dispersed campgrounds too.

Q: Ben Katz asked if recreation.gov charges a reservation fee in addition to the BLM fee?

A: Jim Lovelace responded that recreation.gov does charge a non-refundable fee on top of the BLM fee.

Lynn Padgett then asked what would be helpful from the SWRAC?

Stephanie Connolly suggested making a recommendation to proceed with the proposed recreation fee increase.

Lynn Padgett asked for a motion to recommend the business plan.

Jim Haugsness recommended adding a local Consumer Price Index, with several members noting that they use the Denver-based CPI.

**MOTION:** Linda Gann moved that the SWRAC recommend the proposed Business Plan for Recreation fee increases.

Steve Garchar seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

**Public Comment Period (began at 2:30 p.m.)**

1. Bonnie Brown, Colorado Wool Growers Association, expressed appreciation for the Sheep Grazing Sub-Committee’s use of the term ROC rather than disease transmission. She stated that it was overreach to recommend increasing the number of domestic sheepherders and that it is not our role to manage details. She expressed approval for the increased testing of hunted bighorn and commented that the USFS Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forest Plan is coming out and there is no inclusion of the ROC model or bighorn species. She hopes the BLM will follow GMUG’s example.

Jim Haugsness responded to Bonnie Brown’s comment on the number of herders per sheep, noting that the affected permittees had no problem with the ratios of 1 herder to 1,000 sheep.

2. Les Owen, Colorado Department of Agriculture, echoed Bonnie Brown’s comments. He appreciated the concern for time and costs that are passed on to permittees as grazing is not

a high-margin business. He also expressed appreciation for considering actions to lower the risk of species interaction. The BMPs are key to healthy populations of both. He noted that were more domestic sheep years ago and that he was disappointed in the long-term recommendation that when there is overlap, domestic sheep would be moved off. He urged the BLM to adopt the BMPs to lower the risk.

3. John Whitney, Senator Bennet's Durango office, provided a brief legislative update: Their office has been working closely with the committee on the CORE Act (Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy Act) <http://www.bennet.senate.gov/COREAct> There is community support for the Thompson Divide Administrative Withdrawal. The Dolores National Conservation Area is hoping to come out of committee this year and has received lots of support, including from Dolores County and the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe. Also working on GORPA (Gunnison Outdoor Recreation Protection Act). Senator Bennet is supportive of mining reform (e.g. "orphan wells") and is leading its introduction in Congress.
4. Lisa Pool, Southwest Regional Director for Senator Hickenlooper's office, which includes Delta and Gunnison counties to the Four Corners Region, along with Archuleta and Hinsdale counties, has been on the job for one month. Their office is awaiting public input on the BLM Public Lands Rule. Noted their office's focus on the ongoing western water crisis and Colorado River water issues. Senator Hickenlooper is happy to support the Dolores NCA, the CORE Act, and good Samaritan remediation of abandoned hard rock mining.

With no additional members of the public present or online requesting to comment, the Public Comment period was closed at 2:44 p.m.

### **Closing Remarks and Open Discussion**

Lynn Padgett expressed appreciation to outgoing RAC members Jim Haugsness, Kathy Welt, Mark Roeber, and Tif Rodriguez, whose terms expire in January 2024.

Stephanie Connolly offered closing remarks, which included:

- Encouraging SWRAC members to read through the new charter which is still up to BLM for decision.
- Watching for the Gunnison Sage-Grouse Draft RMP Amendment/EIS, which was expected to be released in October for a 90-day comment period.
- Looking for the Big Game Draft Resource Management Plan Amendment to be released for comment in November.
- Noting that the approved June SWRAC meeting notes are posted on the website.
- Noting that the next SWRAC meeting is scheduled for February 6 & 7 and that it takes about three months to put out a Federal Register notice for meetings. SWRAC Coordinator Maggie Magee will send out a Doodle poll to SWRAC members in January on optional 2024 meeting dates.

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Jon Kaminsky commented that the CORE Act directly affects the Gunnison Field Office because currently there is no boundary with the Curecanti Recreation Area. Originally the Bureau of Reclamation asked the BLM to withdraw public land laws from the area and the National Park Service to develop recreation sites in the area, but nothing went through Congress. There is currently a scattered grazing system, with no grazing permitted on the lake periphery. The disparate legal authorities create an administrative burden. Part of the CORE Act would establish/designate boundaries and let the BLM and USFS move on. It is not good for permittees to answer to two agencies or for the public to not know where the park is.

Jim Haugsness expressed appreciation to the SWRAC and stated that he had learned a lot during the sheep grazing Sub-Committee meetings and it had been a good education for him on balancing resources, including commercial activities and mining interests. He also noted that, from his attendance at the joint RAC meeting, he came away with a greater appreciation for how undervalued BLM public lands are by the general public and users, which also translates to undervaluing the employees. RACs are critical advocates for BLM employees as well as public lands. What RACs do is important. The RAC needs to support actions like the increase in campground fees and recognize perceived employee hesitancy/fear because of pushback from the public.

Stephanie Connolly added that the BLM manages the largest public land acreage in the country, yet currently has only 8,700 employees nationwide compared to the USFS (which has no minerals management responsibility) at 33,000 employees and the NPS with 24-27,000 employees. During her 32-year career, the budget has stayed the same and it is common to wonder whether there will be enough funding to cover needs. The BLM is “the backyard” of the country. She expressed appreciation for the advocacy for the BLM’s difficult mission.

Kathy Welt echoed Jim Haugsness’ comments regarding funding, recognition of employees, and mission, and noted that the USFS does not have RACs.

Mark Roeber agreed to the need to advocate for the staff, noting that the RAC is set up to bring decisions closer to the area they affect and that this is the way to solve problems. He has appreciated being part of the RAC for the nine years he has served.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:13 p.m.