



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

Southwest Colorado Resource Advisory Council

Meeting Minutes: February 7, 2024

Tres Rios Field Office, 29211 State Highway CO-184, Dolores, CO 81323

Designated Federal Officer: Stephanie McCormick, Southwest District Manager

Chair: Lynn Padgett; **Vice Chair:** Steve Garchar

Southwest RAC members attending:

In person: James Dietrich, Tif Rodriguez, Linda Gann, Steve Garchar, Lynn Padgett, Roger Cesario, Grady Ham, Justin Musser, Matt Thorpe, Gary Crisp, and Victoria Atkins

Remotely: Ben Katz, Starr Jamison, and Mark Roeber

BLM Employees attending:

In person: Stephanie McCormick, Jon Kaminsky, Derek Padilla, Maggie Magee, Ray O'Neil, Brandon Lewis, Ken Vicenzio, Scott Stewart, Michael Jensen, Vince MacMillan, and Laura Heaton

Remotely: Edd Franz, Laria Lovec, and Randi Lupardus

Public in attendance:

In person: Harrison Hallmark, Colorado Department of Agriculture and Al Heaton, Rancher

Remotely: Mark Pearson, San Juan Citizens Alliance, Paul Szilagyi, Nuvemco CEO, and Naomi Dobbs, staffer from Representative Boebert's office.

MORNING DISCUSSION

The Southwest RAC was pleased to have a quorum, which included two newly appointed members (Gary Crisp and Victoria Atkins) and two reappointed members (Tif Rodriguez and Mark Roeber). Chair Lynn Padgett and DFO Stephanie McCormick conducted the meeting and each thanked the presenters and participants for the previous day's field tours of Canyons of the Ancients Visitor Center and Museum, led by Visitor Services Lead Amala Posey-Monk, and Painted Hand Pueblo, led by Archeologist Vincent MacMillan, Rangeland Management Specialist Mike Jensen, and Monument Manager Ray O'Neil, in Canyons of the Ancients NM.

The meeting was available to attend via Zoom (which required registration), with 360° conference camera, mic, and speaker support from a Meeting Owl. RAC Coordinator Maggie Magee ran the Zoom, monitored participant questions and requests to provide input, and took meeting notes.

The three SWD field offices provided highlights of germane activities, issues, and accomplishments in their respective Field Manager reports and fielded RAC member questions:

- Gunnison Field Manager Jon Kaminsky:

Lake San Cristobal Fuels EA Update

Jon highlighted the proposed fuels treatment project near Monarch Pass intended to open up the landscape for recreational access and use.

Roger Cesario noted that the Wilderness Land Trust was not willing to get involved and Jon mentioned that it was a different land trust.

Bonita Peak Mining District Update

Fens are good at filtering metals; shut off diversions and allow water from Burrows Creek to continue down Animas.

Lynn Padgett noted that Jon had reached out to Ouray and San Miguel counties and that Uncompahgre Partnership is supportive.

North Powderhorn Fuels Reduction Project Update

Q: Grady Ham wondered whether the original proposal was for more acreage and James Dietrich wondered whether we were pulling off saleable timber.

Brandon Lewis noted that no mechanical treatments are authorized in wilderness; only prescribed fire; both treatment types are authorized outside of wilderness.

Justin Musser noted that there is a lot of standing dead, but no market for it.

Stephanie noted that when timber is available for sale, having local sawmills open reduces our costs.

Gunnison Weeds Treatment Project Update

Best options for treating cheatgrass are indaziflam and esplanade.

Brandon noted that these are awaiting an upcoming decision on approval for BLM use through a national-level programmatic EIS.

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

Transportation and Access Planning for Area 2 (TAP2)

After starting and stopping the process a couple of times, scoping should be starting shortly. Currently doing route evaluation to determine whether something is (and should be) a route. The team is hoping to get something out to the public

for review by fall 2024.

Prescribed Fire

Grassy Mountain - Working closely with the National Forest Foundation, USFS, and State of Colorado to achieve fire benefits and reduce the risk of wildfire around Durango. The BLM has about 411 acres in the project area.

Good community support for Animas City Mountain Prescribed Fire. Recent 416 Fire raised tolerance for smoke in pursuit of fewer large wildfires.

Conducted Grandview pile burn last month.

Continued work along Dolores River burning 2-3 year old mechanical piles

Q: Lynn Padgett wondered whether BLM had looked into partnering with local governments to notify residents via social media; possibility of charging for 911 calls.

Brandon Lewis noted that La Plata County brought in extra dispatchers for ACM.

Stephanie noted that the BLM should relook at our fire communications for pile burns and not get complacent.

Steve Garchar noted that such communications can be done through the Emergency Management System, but indicated that it might be different for rural communities.

Brandon noted that BLM makes extensive use of contacts for burns.

Derek noted that the Colorado Department of Transportation has been a great partner; making use of COTRIP app, which provides statewide travel alerts.

Q: Lynn wondered whether the type of pile (push vs. stack) impacted the quality of the burn.

Enforcement

Have seen a reduction in unauthorized use during winter wildlife closures; BLM has been working closely with CPW.

Matt Thorpe gave a shoutout to Tyler Fouss for getting out to places and enforcing regulations.

Q: Justin Musser wondered whether there were any projects in Gunnison sage-grouse habitat.

Rangeland Management

Spring Creek Basin Wild Horse Herd Management Area is within the Appropriate Management Level in large part due to partner involvement; effective PZP contraceptive protocol; no gathers have been necessary since 2011.

Have one range permit under IBLA review.

Recreation

Travel and Access Planning, Area 1 (TAP1): One parking structure being installed at Aqueduct; Cultural Resources Inventory not conducted to level required; will

require some reroutes; some motorized trails slated for closure.
Successful relationship with Durango Area Trails Alliance.
Analysis for Chutes & Ladders under protest.
Evaluating potential for interpretive trail at Uravan Mineral Belt.
Expect to engage with the public on TAP2 in fall 2024.

Fluid Minerals

Paradox Resources - GNG Partners purchasing assets; get equipment back in working condition.

Q: Linda Gann asked who picks up bond moving forward?

Derek indicated that the purchaser picks up the cost.

Q: Starr Jamison wondered who the new owner is.

Derek noted that GNG purchased pretty much everything and to reach out to Ryan Joyner (TRFO Assistant Field Manager) for more detailed information.

Kinder-Morgan

Sunday Mine Plan of Operations going forward.

Q: Ben Katz wondered whether it would be this year or next.

Draft document is expected late winter/early spring 2024; Derek noted that it has already undergone technical revisions; received a number of comments.

Mineral Materials

Dolores County gravel pit will expand about 5 acres.

Q: Tif Rodriguez wondered where the expansion would occur in relation to the HMA.

Lands and Realty

Have been unable to find someone to fill the Realty Specialist vacancy due to lack of applicants.

Victoria Atkins noted the impact of the vacancy related to the Mary Austin acquisition.

BLM parcel under R&PP to City of Durango; begun building infrastructure for storm retention control project.

- Acting Uncompahgre Field Manager (and Gunnison Gorge NCA Manager) Edd Franz:

Planning

Held two virtual public meetings in late January and one open house in early February for Uncompahgre Field Office RMP Amendment; will consider more acres closed to Oil and Gas leasing.

Conducted tribal outreach in October.

Rangeland Management

UFO is happy to have Ken Vicencio on board as the supervisory Rangeland Management Specialist; UFO has lost one RMS position, but continues to chip

away at high profile allotments.

Will conduct new Land Health Assessment for Crawford area allotments; area has bighorn sheep habitat and sustains Crawford population of Gunnison sage-grouse. Looking at converting southern half of Cactus Park Allotment from sheep to cows; considering water development proposals; initiating NEPA for water catchments.

Decision reached and permit executed for Mailbox Park Allotment.

U.S. Geological Survey is conducting a study quantifying corvid predation on Gunnison sage-grouse.

S-80 bighorn sheep herd in Gunnison Gorge NCA are Rocky Mountain (*Ovis canadensis*), while in Dominguez-Escalante NCA the sheep are desert bighorn (*Ovis canadensis nelson*).

Dolores River Restoration Partnership continues to do good work on shared management actions with TRFO, including tamarisk removal, revegetation, treatment of resprouts, secondary weed treatments, and cottonwood plantings. Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding will enable us to conduct tamarisk mastication in the wilderness study area on BLM and Bureau of Reclamation lands.

Recreation

R&PP lease with Montrose County for the Electric Hills/Rimrocker Trail; area is closed to all uses seasonally.

Jumbo Mountain trail system is designed to concentrate use around Paonia, taking pressure off surrounding areas with high wildlife use.

Q from Paul Szilagyi (public): Is raven/jay study going to include population changes as well as predation impacts to Gunnison sage-grouse?

North Fork Mancos Master Development Plan was approved in September 2023 (for portions of MDP on BLM and private surface) with updated air quality analysis.

Gunnison Gorge NCA is seeking Dark Sky certification.

Potential acquisition of Escalante Ranch, an inholding in Dominguez-Escalante NCA; EA.

Q: Ben Katz wondered about public participation/turnout for the public meetings.

Edd noted that there was decent turnout both virtually and in person.

The group broke for lunch.

AFTERNOON DISCUSSION

Monument Manager Ray O'Neil reviewed topics discussed on the previous day's field tour of Painted Hand Pueblo:

- Unclaimed trespass horses

- The challenge of managing for livestock grazing given the sensitive cultural resources throughout Canyons of the Ancients NM.

Presentation

Ray O'Neil, Canyons of the Ancients NM Archaeologist Vince MacMillan, and Tres Rios Field Office Rangeland Management Specialist Michael Jensen provided a [PowerPoint presentation](#) on issuing livestock grazing permits in areas such as Canyons of the Ancients NM with significant sensitive cultural resources and evaluating the impacts of livestock grazing on cultural resources; provides a different way to look at the impact of grazing on cultural resources.

If the BLM reneges on livestock grazing without good justification, then we are not likely to garner county support for future projects in CANM; need to strike a good balance under our multiple use mandate.

Q: Justin wondered how grazing is impacting use.

Vince noted that the BLM was directed to do additional analysis, including Section 106. The BLM must make a reasonable and good faith effort; 35% of the two allotments has been surveyed for cultural (BLM typically averages 10%), with much of that focused on the allotment's base property purchased by the BLM in 2009.

In addition, Flodine Park had significant seismic surveys (23%).

The BLM does not manage for archeological sites, but rather historic properties.

Survey found that Yellow Jacket had 22 eligible sites per square mile while Flodine Park had 39 sites per square mile. (Colorado average is 2 sites per square mile.)

Three types of sites were surveyed:

- Rock art
- Shelters
- Standing architecture

Surveys help predict risk to cultural resources in sites not surveyed.

Q: Lynn Padgett wondered whether paleo-hydrology was included in the assessment; the relationship between structures/rock art and springs.

Mike Jensen noted that livestock tend to concentrate near water sources and man-made pit reservoirs.

Randi Lupardus noted that the model has already been adjusted and improved upon based on internal discussion and public comments.

Q: Steve Garchar wondered whether there was any indication of how trespass livestock might be impacting allotments.

It is estimated that as much as 4/5s of the two allotments is not susceptible to impacts from livestock grazing.

Q: Ken Vicencio asked whether CANM has reevaluated stocking rates.

Mike indicated that utilization had been overestimated.

Q: Victoria wondered whether they had adequate staffing to perform monitoring and noted that it was an admirable presentation and program.

Mike responded that they were attempting to leverage as much outside money as possible and noted that this was just for the cultural aspect.

Vince noted that the BLM makes hard choices every day on how to protect and manage resources and that CANM is managed for multiple uses.

Q: Lynn wondered about the mitigating impact of using wire fencing as barriers.

Vince said that the BLM is keeping its fingers crossed over the success stories being reported on virtual fencing.

Public Comment Period

One member of the public requested to speak during the public comment period. Local rancher Al Heaton acknowledged the complexities involved in managing for livestock grazing in areas with significant cultural resources and thanked the BLM staff members (who were present to present on the issue) for their hard work related to the Yellow Jacket-Flodine allotments.

The public comment period was closed at 2:37 p.m. and the presentation resumed.

Designated Federal Official Stephanie McCormick adjourned the meeting at 3:30 p.m.

Next RAC Meeting: May 1-2; Joint Northwest-Southwest RAC in Delta

Recommendations

The SWRAC agreed through a show of hands to a 9:00 a.m. start time for the remaining 2024 meetings and field tours (not yet publicized in the Federal Register).

Decisions

No formal decisions were made.

Comments

Zoom participants reported experiencing poor audio quality during the last hour of the meeting, attributed to bandwidth issues and a major snowstorm moving into the region.

The DOI Ethics Office conducted an Ethics Training for RAC members following the field trip on February 6. Eleven members attended; the remaining four were notified of the next opportunity to attend on February 28.