

Colorado Statewide Resource Advisory Council (RAC) Meeting Minutes

April 2, 2025

Location: Virtual

RAC Members:

Name	RAC	Cat.	Interest Represented
Sean Burke	NW	2	Dispersed Recreation
Scott Braden	NW	3	Public-at-Large
Shawn Brennan	NW	1	Energy and Minerals
Michael Camblin	NW	1	Federal Grazing
Carl Conner	NW	2	Archaeological and Historical Interests
Kirk Daehling	NW	1	Right-of-Way Interests
Hattie Johnson	NW	2	Dispersed Recreation
Merrit Linke	NW	3	Elected Official
Sherry Schreiner	NW	2	Public-at-Large
Callie Scritchfield	NW	3	Public-at-Large
Absent: Jeff Comstock	NW	1	Right-of-Way Interests
Absent: Kathy Chandler-Henry	NW	3	Dispersed Recreation
Absent: Kris Middendorf	NW	3	State Natural Resources
Absent: Scott Robertson	NW	1	Federal Grazing
Absent: Beatriz Soto Ruvalcaba	NW	2	Environmental Organizations
Kelly Collins	RM	2	Dispersed Recreation
Michael Daniel	RM	2	(RM Chair) Dispersed Recreation
April Estep	RM	3	State Agency Representative
Josh Gillespie	RM	1	Grazing
Curtis Howell	RM	1	Outdoor Recreation
Arthur Koepsell	RM	3	State Agency Representative
Preston Larimer	RM	1	Commercial Recreation Activities
Gina Lucrezi	RM	3	Elected Official
Loretta Mitson	RM	2	Dispersed Recreation
Irene Shonle	RM	2	Dispersed Recreation
John Sztukowski	RM	2	Environmental Organizations
Kent Wood	RM	3	Public-at-Large
Absent: Chris Cooper	RM	1	Energy and Minerals
Absent: Pete Stagner	RM	1	Grazing
Absent: Lawrence Pacheco	RM	3	Public-at-Large
Victoria Atkins	SW	2	Archeological and Historical
Roger Cesario	SW	1	Outdoor Recreation
James Dietrich	SW	1	Outdoor Recreation
Linda Gann	SW	2	Environmental
Steve Garchar	SW	3	(Vice Chair) Elected Official
Grady Ham	SW	1	Outdoor Recreation

Jon Holst	SW	2	Environmental
Justin Musser	SW	3	Public-at-Large
Lynn Padgett	SW	3	(Chair) Elected Official
Tif Rodriguez	SW	2	Wild Horse and Burro
Mark Roeber	SW	1	Federal Grazing
Matt Thorpe	SW	3	Government Agency
Absent: Starr Jamison	SW	3	Public-at-Large
Absent: Ben Katz	SW	2	Environmental

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Staff:

Name	
Doug Vilsack	Charley Morgan
Brian St. George	Jon Kaminsky
Steven Hall	Jim Michels
Kirby Shedlowski	Stephanie McCormick
Katie Palubicki	Rob Potts
Donna Eberhart	Bob Swithers
AG Elmadani	Dan Ben-Horin
Allan Bittner	Ray O'Neil
Joel Humphries	Malia Burton
Kemba Anderson	Derek Padilla
Erin Jones	Ray O'Neil
Lisa Dawson	Diane Mastin Dixon
Greg Larson	David Gauthier
Stacey Colon	Bill Mills
Jim Lovelace	Levi Spellman
Kymm Gresset	Doug Mays
Dale Culver	Chris Ziegler

Public Attendees:

Name		
Ali Longwell	Aaron Mattix	John Whitney
Janelle Ghiorso	Erin Walter	Riley Scott
Ernest Saeger	Amber Swasey	Cathy Garcia
Hannah Harn	Vanessa Trout	
Josh Kling	Lisa Pool	
Chris Rackens	Patrick Ortiz	

Meeting Minutes

Agenda: Housekeeping, Introductions, and Opening Remarks

Presenters: Kirby Shedlowski, Colorado State Office Public Affairs; Doug Vilsack, Colorado State Director; RAC members; BLM staff; interested publics.

Kirby Shedlowski opened the meeting with logistics and introductions, thanking RAC members and staff. BLM Colorado State Director Doug Vilsack welcomed participants and emphasized BLM's appreciation for RAC contributions. He highlighted BLM Colorado's focus on oil and gas, timber, and mineral production, each guided by recent executive orders. Vilsack also discussed staffing challenges, BLM's ten state priorities for 2025, and the importance of RAC input during a time of administrative transition. RAC members voiced concerns about potential staffing reductions. Doug responded by underscoring the importance of each employee in maintaining operational capacity and noted that retirements have already impacted key programs. RAC members raised a question about delays in RAC application approvals under previous administrations. Doug noted that BLM Colorado is actively working with headquarters and White House liaisons to expedite the process.

Agenda Item: Economic Contributions of BLM Colorado

Presenter: Lisa Strunk, BLM Colorado Economist

Contributors: Jim Michels, Northwest District Acting Manager; Stephanie McCormick Southwest District Manager, Dan Ben-Horin, Uncompahgre Field Office Manager; Chris Ziegler, Rocky Mountain District Deputy Manager; Rob Potts, Southwest District Deputy Manager; John Kaminsky, Gunnison Field Office Manager; Greg Larson, Uncompahgre Field Office Manager

Lisa Strunk discussed BLM Colorado's economic contributions total nearly \$9 billion, with oil and gas as the largest contributor (\$5.7B), followed by recreation (\$1.5B). With a \$100M operating budget, BLM activities support over 39,000 jobs statewide. RAC members asked questions about how contributions are calculated and how economic benefits—particularly for recreation—are distributed across counties and local communities. Lisa clarified that economic estimates are modeled at the field office level, not by individual counties, and that they account for local spending, job creation, and commuter patterns. Metrics such as jobs, income, and economic output are calculated using production data, market prices, and economic modeling to reflect both direct and secondary impacts.

Agenda Item: Colorado Rivermap and 21st Century Recreation

Presenter: Doug Vilsack, Colorado State Director; Hattie Johnson, American Whitewater

Doug Vilsack presented the “Colorado Rivermap” initiative, highlighting efforts to build a coordinated statewide vision for river recreation, safety, and stewardship. The project has received major grant funding and includes technical teams with representatives from local governments, NGOs, state agencies, and user groups. Hattie Johnson (NW RAC) discussed development of a geodatabase to map river-based recreation, access, and potential economic contributions. The initiative is still in development, but aims to support public access and management decisions.

RAC members raised questions about funding, staffing to meet growing recreation demands, inclusion of additional counties, and availability of data. Doug emphasized partnerships and the role of RACs in shaping fee proposals and recreation business plans.

Agenda Item: Virtual Fencing

Presenter: Alan Bittner, Colorado Deputy State Director for Resources

Alan Bittner presented updates on virtual fencing as a grazing management tool. The technology, which uses GPS collars to direct livestock, has been piloted across Colorado. Benefits include increased flexibility, improved ecological outcomes, and potential cost savings. RAC members discussed privacy concerns over GPS data, terrain limitations, and the importance of maintaining some physical fencing for boundary enforcement. Alan reiterated that virtual fencing is voluntary and complementary to traditional practices. RAC members expressed strong interest, sharing success stories and raising questions about data privacy, signal coverage, and the need for continued staffing. Alan emphasized that participation is voluntary, data typically remains with the permittee, and the technology is best used case-by-case. Members also noted the importance of physical fences for boundary management and preventing trespass livestock or wild horses.

Agenda Item: Public Comment

Presenter: Kirby Shedlowski, Colorado State Office Public Affairs

Lisa Pool and Patrick Ortiz from Senator John Hickenlooper’s office emphasized the senator’s support for BLM employees during recent federal workforce reductions and ongoing legislation around wildfire resilience, forest health, and public lands protection. John Whitney from Senator Michael Bennet’s office discussed reintroduction of the Dolores River National Conservation Area bill and raised concerns about public land sales. He affirmed the senator’s commitment to protecting federal lands and supporting BLM staff.

Agenda Item: Forest Health and Wildfire Risk

Presenter: Joel Humphries, Branch Chief of Natural Resources; John Ring, Forestry Program Lead; Diane Mastin Dixon, Natural Resources Specialist; Jon Kaminsky, Gunnison Field Office Manager

Presenters provided an overview of BLM Colorado's forestry and fuels programs, emphasizing new direction under recent executive orders aimed at increasing timber production and reducing wildfire risk. The orders call for expanded use of Good Neighbor Authority, streamlined NEPA processes through categorical exclusions, and development of timber volume targets. BLM Colorado is implementing projects such as the North Powderhorn Fuels Project, a long-term effort to enhance forest health and reduce hazardous fuels through thinning, monitoring, and prescribed fire. BLM staff acknowledged current challenges, including limited forestry staffing, funding constraints, and lack of in-state milling capacity. Despite these barriers, the state is working with partners to increase outputs and prepare for future implementation of federal priorities. Staff emphasized the importance of maintaining ecological safeguards while increasing operational efficiency and noted that wildlife and watershed protection remain key considerations. RAC members asked about BLM's capacity to meet new mandates, potential risks of streamlining NEPA, and how collaborative approaches might support larger-scale treatments. There were concerns about the long-term impacts of rapid implementation, the need for investment in timber infrastructure, and the limited economic viability of salvage timber. Presenters responded that all legal requirements will still be met, funding for FY25 is secure, and partnerships will be critical to advancing forest health goals while managing risk and maintaining accountability.

Agenda Item: Energy, Lands, and Minerals

Presenters: AG Elmadani, Colorado Deputy State Director of Energy, Lands, and Minerals; Kemba Anderson, Branch Chief of Fluid Minerals; Malia Burton, Branch Chief of Lands

BLM staff provided an overview of the Energy, Lands, and Minerals program in Colorado, which manages fluid and solid minerals, renewable energy, and realty actions. The program oversees thousands of oil and gas wells, active leases, and processes applications for permit to drill (APDs). Staff highlighted BLM Colorado's role in managing lease sales, bond oversight, and permitting for renewable energy and transmission infrastructure, with several large-scale, multi-state projects currently underway. The presentation also addressed BLM's responsibilities in managing orphaned and abandoned wells. Staff explained that when a company goes defunct, the BLM works to identify responsible parties. If no responsible party can be found, the well is classified as orphaned and BLM assumes responsibility for plugging and restoration. The agency has strengthened bonding requirements, phasing out nationwide bonds in favor of site-specific and state-level bonds with significantly higher financial thresholds, which aim to reduce future orphaned well liabilities. RAC members asked whether original permittees could obtain new

permits without cleaning up prior sites, and how financial safeguards are applied. AG explained that if a company still exists, they are held accountable for clean-up. If the company is no longer viable, BLM accesses bonds or state-level funding to complete the work. Additional questions focused on funding availability. Staff clarified that processes are in place to request funding through headquarters, and state-level partnerships continue to support well-plugging and reclamation efforts. AG emphasized the importance of early monitoring and permitting oversight to avoid long-term liabilities.