

**COLORADO CANYONS NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA
Front Country Wilderness Working Group Meeting Minutes
February 21, 2003**

Attendees:

John Foster	Robbie Breaux	Ronald Kissell	Jane Ross
Greg Gnesios	Jim Cooper	Robin Lacy	Troy Schnurr
Doug Hall	Randy Engle	Mel Lloyd	Bob Sherrill
Bob Silbernagel	Debbie Erbisch	Rusty Ludwig	Cindy Sherrill
Harley Armstrong	Charles Hardy	Mike Perry	Palma Wilson
Gene Arnesen	Wade Johnson	Jack Ronzio	
B. Boeschstein	Marcie Kissell	Judy Ronzio	

Greetings and Introductions

Colorado Canyons National Conservation Area Manager Greg Gnesios called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m. A roundtable of introductions followed. Greg explained the reasons for meeting today, which include addressing special issues involving the urban interface with the Front Country Wilderness, working relationships among multiple federal agencies, local communities, and organizations, etc. Better signage, parking and sanitation, partnerships, land issues, and the level of use are just a few of the items to be discussed (see attached agenda). Regulations mandated by the Wilderness Act must be followed as well.

Jane Ross, CCNCA Planning Team Leader, summarized the planning process and explained the four alternative themes that will lead to one preferred alternative for the CCNCA Resource Management Plan (RMP):

Four Alternative Themes

- No action
- Emphasize recreation opportunities
- Emphasize conservation and land health
- Modified recreation balancing conservation with recreation

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) recognizes that as population increases, management actions should increase accordingly to lessen impact to the resource. Jane described the four zones defined within the CCNCA for planning purposes, as well as the Working Groups created for these four zones and their accomplishments throughout the past year's meetings. The River Corridor, Wilderness, Mack Ridge and

Rabbit Valley Zones have all been addressed, and alternatives developed. Feedback from this and subsequent meetings will be included in the Wilderness Working Group's recommendations to the Advisory Council. Timing is critical because the draft RMP/Environmental Impact Study (EIS) must be completed by July to allow time for printing. The draft RMP/EIS is expected to be issued by October 2003 for public comment.

Colorado National Monument Update

Colorado National Monument (COLM) Superintendent Palma Wilson reported on the progress of that agency's general management plan. Monument planning staff and CCNCA staff are working together closely in developing their respective management plans. The COLM alternatives consist of three planning alternatives: 1) no action, 2) management on a regional basis, and 3) an emphasis on conservation. COLM planning staff anticipate reaching their preferred alternative by the end of next week. COLM staff intend to consult with CCNCA staff to determine their preferred alternative's compatibility with the CCNCA's management direction, prior to finalizing the preferred alternative. Palma added that both agencies hope to provide a full spectrum of recreational experiences, but not everyone will find all opportunities in every portion of the CCNCA or COLM.

City of Fruita

City of Fruita Community Development Director Bennett Boeschenstein explained that Fruita's history has always been linked to federal lands, and the city sees itself as the Gateway City to those lands. Fruita has practiced extensive planning for many years and has a desire to integrate its planning initiatives with the area's land-use planning.

Development is slated for the area near the CCNCA's Front Country Wilderness, and Fruita seeks partners in acquiring the Snooks Bottom land to save it from development. Fruita wants to continue the trail interface established in surrounding areas and has many ideas on working with the BLM to accomplish common goals.

Bennett indicated that the city of Fruita sees the Dinosaur Journey building, which is owned by the city, as a potential location for an interagency visitor center. Fruita has also offered its police services in patrolling Dinosaur Hill. Bennett added that Fruita-Monument High School plays an important role in this working relationship as well. Fruita looks forward to working with the BLM.

In answer to a question regarding resources, Bennett mentioned that Great Outdoors Colorado funding obtained by the city is threatened if it is not used soon, so the city wants to act as quickly as possible in acquiring Snooks Bottom.

A point was made that controlling access to the Wilderness through Front Country trailheads will be critical. Greg reported that the BLM has requested future funding for

an improved trailhead with facilities at Devils Canyon. BLM also hopes to develop Rabbit Valley as the western portal to the CCNCA, as resources allow.

Group Discussions

A resident of Pollock Canyon Estates questioned whether the BLM really wants to market and promote the Front Country Wilderness, through more signs, when the area is already facing increased pressures and impacts.

Greg assured everyone that increased signage would be designed to encourage user education rather than promote more use. Greg added that the agencies, involved in managing this Front Country area, are holding meetings and making an effort to improve upon information presented at kiosks.

Debbie Erbisch added that the Fruita Chamber of Commerce continually receives inquiries about the area, and providing good information to the public is critical in preventing unnecessary impacts to the resource.

The general consensus was that more use is inevitable, and signs will be needed to guide people.

Another individual expressed a concern with the current road conditions and suggested that increased use will only worsen these conditions.

Greg offered that, if the Devils Canyon Trailhead is improved, road use is sure to increase, and the BLM would need to be concerned with increased use on the access road.

Bennett agreed that it would be good for the city of Fruita to coordinate road maintenance for its portion of the road with Mesa County. The city maintains the road to the boundary of the King's View subdivision.

Randy Engle, with Colorado State Parks, encouraged the BLM to plan and prepare for the increased numbers of visitors that are sure to seek out recreation in the CCNCA Front Country.

Museum of Colorado Executive Director Mike Perry views these partnerships as a great opportunity for promoting the Museum's mission, as well as strengthening its relationship with public lands.

Greg added that the Fruita area was recently included in the new Dinosaur Scenic and Historic Byway. While the area's paleontological resources must be protected, providing ways for people who want to see them are just as important.

A question was asked about river use. The Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) owns the land on which the Loma boat launch is located, while Colorado State Parks

manages use on the river itself. The BLM authority focuses on activities along the river corridor and shoreline.

A question was asked about grazing, and it was explained that grazing use was provided for by the enabling legislation as an historic use of the area. The Wilderness Act also allows grazing activities. BLM permittees must follow regulations mandated by a grazing allotment agreement.

Greg emphasized that the CCNCA was set aside for its uniqueness and special qualities, and the BLM must look at what actions are suitable, or not suitable, for conserving the CCNCA.

Bob Sherrill spoke briefly about why he actively participated in the Wilderness Working Group during the past year. The group looked at a number of issues, including both general and emergency access, no target shooting areas, and hunting.

Greg asked who would like to continue meeting in order to accomplish the necessary discussions on the Front Country Wilderness. A big concern for the BLM is what kind of use is occurring in the area adjacent to the Front Country Wilderness, as this use will ultimately impact the Wilderness.

Gene Arnesen, outdoor recreation planner for the CCNCA, asked Randy about the Colorado River State Park's volume of use, and Randy indicated that most weekends are filled during the summer months. Use through the week is less, and Interstate-70 travelers mostly use both this park and the Island Acres State Park for overnight stays. Campers traveling to these parks as their final destination are a secondary use.

Gene mentioned a current issue with CCNCA staff is how the increasing volume of visitors wanting to camp will be accommodated, especially for those using Mack Ridge and the Loma-to-Westwater stretch of river.

Advisory Council Vice-Chair Bob Silbernagel asked about complaints from users, and Troy Schnurr, CCNCA recreation ranger, indicated that no reports on user conflicts have been received. Horseback Riders appear to be accepting designated trail use. Dog waste is becoming a Front Country issue with increased use, and an attempt is underway to control this problem by installing a bag dispenser and trash container for pet waste at the Devils Canyon Trailhead.

Troy added that other user groups in the area include families from the nearby King's View subdivision, as well as mountain bikers. Trail systems for mountain bike riders at Devils Canyon proved to only entice mechanized use to the Wilderness, and this use was ultimately pulled from that area. Opal Hill is intended to provide recreational opportunities for this user group. Access to open space is important for everyone, and the group meeting tonight will help the Advisory Council and BLM in developing recommendations for the CCNCA's management.

A concern was expressed about the newly installed fence and the danger it creates for raptor enthusiasts and their birds. It was suggested that PVC piping be added to the top wire for better visibility.

Signing placed on fences near the Pollock Canyon Estates was questioned, and Troy explained his efforts in that regard. Residents were appreciative but reported that hikers continue to trespass through their property. Troy suggested that privately owned signs might gain more respect and attention from the public than government signs do, as the BLM continually sees its signs disregarded. Comments indicated that some trespassing traffic has been mitigated with the help of BLM signs.

Troy also reported that launching personal watercraft and camping are not allowed at the Loma boat launch.

Greg reiterated that public education and interpretation are key components. Many people don't know any better, and the BLM's goal is to reduce user impacts through education.

Palma agreed that the COLM has much to do in educating its users as well and added that the interagency visitor center would further these education initiatives.

Someone pointed out that camping is an important issue that needs to be addressed. Wade Johnson, CCNCA interpretive specialist, responded that all of the Working Groups provided recommendations on camping in their respective zones.

Greg asked the group to prioritize the list of issues on the agenda and set a time for the next meeting. The group agreed to meet next Friday at 2:00 p.m., at the Fruita Civic Center.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:30 p.m.

Meeting Agenda

- Opening Remarks by Greg Gnesios
- Brainstorming Preliminary Issues
- Access and Signage
- Parking and Sanitation
- Fruita as Gateway City
- Trail Connections (w/ NPS, Fruita, et al)
- Snooks Bottom Acquisition
- Kings View Subdivision
- Parking and Sanitation
- Urban Interface Issue:
 - What types of use should be allowed
 - Newly fenced area around Opal Hill
 - Vandalism
 - Urban Encroachment
- Future fee demo
- “The Hook” @ Dinosaur Hill
- Our Continuing Relationship with BOR/DOW with Regards to Horsethief and Pollock Bench Trailhead
- Future Interagency Visitor Center or Contact Point
- Trash Pickup
- Neighborhood Engagement (i.e. Parkwatch-type Program)
- Planning Update:
 - Jane Ross
 - Palma Wilson
 - Bennett Boeschenstein
 - Mesa County