

**COLORADO CANYONS NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA**  
**Advisory Council Meeting Minutes**  
**November 14, 2002**

Attendees:

Ken Currey	Shana Gillette	Jayashree Ratman
Art Donoho	Terry Gray	Jane Ross
John Foster	Steven Hall	Lovell Sasser
Greg Gnesios	Mel Lloyd	Harold Snyder
Bob Silbernagel	Harley Metz	Bob Sherrill
Russ Walker	Phadrea Ponds	Palma Wilson

**Greetings and Introduction**

Greg Gnesios, Colorado Canyons National Conservation Area (CCNCA) Manager, opened this afternoon's meeting at 3:05 p.m. Greg introduced Steven Hall, the new Public Affairs Officer for Bureau Land Management (BLM) Western Slope. The BLM is happy to have Steven onboard. In the absence of Warren Gore, Bob Silbernagel agreed to lead the meeting.

Bob Silbernagel asked for a recap on recent Working Group activities, which Jane Ross, CCNCA Planning Team Leader, provided.

**Working Group Updates**

Formal recommendations from the Working Groups are currently being developed and should begin to be presented to the Advisory Council early next year.

**River Corridor Working Group:**

Jane would like to see this group hold a facilitated meeting, but one has not yet been scheduled.

Art Donoho mentioned the new subdivision that has been approved at the end of 10 Road. The developer has purportedly purchased the Colorado Ute's water rights to this property and plans to pump water from the Colorado River for the subdivision's use. The BLM needs to research CCNCA access issues that may exist.

**Rabbit Valley Working Group:**

The meeting scheduled for November 18 has been postponed due to delays with the BLM office remodel. The next meeting has been tentatively set for December 2, 5:45 p.m., at the BLM office.

### **Mack Ridge Working Group:**

Brian Hopkins, Community Planner for BLM Glenwood Springs, facilitated meetings both for this Working Group and the Wilderness Working Group. The Mack Ridge Working Group has reached consensus on a number of issues regarding Mack Ridge but continues to hold productive discussions on decisions and justifications for why specified qualities are desired. Defining goals and an overall vision are expected to be accomplished at a meeting on December 3, 5:00 p.m., at the BLM office.

### **Wilderness Working Group:**

This Working Group has specified that each Working Group member's original recommendation statement, addressing his or her particular Wilderness planning issue, should be turned in verbatim with the BLM's summary cover document. While the BLM document will summarize overall benefits, experiences, goals, and visions for the Wilderness, the members' original drafts will provide the Advisory Council with detailed recommendations agreed upon by the group.

Bob Sherrill, a Wilderness Working Group member, expressed concerns with the planning process and is distressed by, what he feels to be, misinformation presented in last month's Advisory Council meeting minutes, in which Steve Yamashita, from the Colorado Division of Wildlife, made a presentation on the Horsethief Canyon State Wildlife Area. Bob indicated that he arrived late for this meeting and missed it because he had not received an email notification from the BLM. Another attendee reminded him that the Advisory Council meetings have always been held on the second Thursday of every month, with a start time of 3:00 p.m.

Extensive discussions ensued regarding the Pollock Bench area, and related issues that Bob feels are impacting the Wilderness area near the Pollock Canyon Estates subdivision. Others present from the Wilderness Working Group disagreed, stating that these issues should be between the subdivision and the Mesa County Sheriff Department.

The BLM will attempt to schedule another Working Group meeting for a thorough and final review of each member's recommendations. Jane asked for support from the Wilderness Working Group members present in getting other members to meet.

### **U.S. Geological Survey Update**

Phadrea Ponds, Shana Gillette, and Jayashree Ratnam, from the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) in Fort Collins, Colorado, are attending this afternoon's meeting to update the Advisory Council on the progress of the CCNCA survey on visitor attitudes toward paying fees, to be conducted next spring. USGS invited the attendees to complete the survey, currently in draft form, and then provide input for final revisions.

After everyone completed the survey, several good suggestions and thoughtful comments for improving the survey format and content were offered.

## **CCNCA Land Health Assessment**

Harley Metz, BLM Ecologist, was available for answering any questions that may have arisen after his presentation last month on, and the Advisory Council's review of, the CCNCA Land Health Assessment.

Harley explained the BLM's management strategy for promoting land health in the CCNCA. Several causal factors have been identified in the various grazing allotments created, and these factors can impact the different areas at different times.

Some areas being monitored have declined in health since the early 1990s, and drought is certainly one significant causal factor.

Bob Silbernagel asked for guidance in how the Advisory Council could know how best to make recommendations for specific areas' land health. Harley suggested looking at the situation as a restoration project, and then choosing priority areas for vegetal restoration. Then, the next step would be determining reasonable expectations for returning an area to a functioning plant community. Also important is deciding what should be planted—native and/or non-native species.

Jane posed a question that was asked in a recent Working Group meeting—everyone understands that grazing will remain in the CCNCA because of legislation and the activity's historical status, but can the total number allotments within the CCNCA be reduced?

Harley confirmed that certain areas could be withheld from any grazing activity for a period of time. When a ranch is sold, the accompanying grazing allotments are transferred to the new owners.

Jane encouraged the Advisory Council to address the future of sheep grazing allotments. Harley explained that suitability of range for cattle versus sheep is quite different and eliminating sheep from the entire area is not necessarily the right answer. Any activities allowed, including those of both cattle and humans, will depend upon the Advisory Council's restoration expectations. Reasonable expectations and choosing the right plants are critical to the success of the area's restoration. Jane encouraged the group to recommend land health monitoring criteria in the Resource Management Plan (RMP) that will be appropriate for the CCNCA.

Harley explained that criteria such as the amount of precipitation, how many head of cattle, objectives for the area, and actual use must be known for any successful restoration project. Some activity exclusions are necessary as well. Data would be collected every year; however, the evaluation would occur about every third year. Plant diversity is a concern, especially in areas reflecting poor diversity yet subjected to no activities such as grazing and recreation.

Harley informed the council members that plant species north of the river are not fire retardant. Much of the vegetation, south of the river, results from fire suppression, and junipers have begun to take over sagebrush communities. Some areas may not need fire, but a management strategy other than fire suppression may be wise for encouraging land health.

Russ Walker commented on the various land uses mentioned in the Land Health Assessment and feels that wording for this section could be improved.

For the purpose of making more informed recommendations, Bob Silbernagel requested a meeting early next year dedicated to land health, prior to completing the draft plan.

### **BLM Update**

Greg provided a BLM update. Since the last meeting in October, the Dinosaur Hill Trailhead has been subject to extensive vandalism. Greg reported that he and Wade Johnson, BLM Interpretive Specialist, have met with Fruita-Monument High School's Steve Orr and John Vale. To discourage further damage to the area, the BLM recently installed a gate that will be locked at night. The BLM hopes to work with the city of Fruita in locating trashcans at the trailhead as a way to discourage littering.

Greg is attending the Gateway Community Partnerships Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico, next month.

Greg also mentioned that Wade Johnson is attending the National Association of Interpreters Conference in Virginia, as one of two finalists for a national interpretation award. Wade's project focused on trail accessibility and interpretive signing, for Dinosaur Hill visitors with disabilities.

Greg reported that storm damage, caused by the recent flash flooding, has impacted trails and roads throughout the CCNCA.

Greg has contacted the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) about signage for the CCNCA, similar to that in place for the Horsethief Canyon State Wildlife Area.

Greg also met with Clint Kinney, Fruita City Manager, this week to discuss common interests, and how the BLM and city of Fruita could best work together.

Greg finished by proposing that, if the Advisory Council agreed, the December 12 meeting would be canceled, thereby providing the BLM and Working Groups time to finalize their recommendations for presenting early next year. There were no objections, and the next Advisory Council meeting is scheduled for January 9, 2003, at 3:00 p.m., 544 Rood Avenue. Jane reminded the group about the schedule change starting in February 2003, when meetings will be held on the first Thursday of every month (same time, same location).

## **Public Comment**

Harold Snyder, a member of the Wilderness Working Group, expressed his displeasure with Bob Sherrill's continuing to present Pollock Canyon Estates subdivision issues as Wilderness access issues. Harold feels the subdivision's issues are not relevant to the planning process for the CCNCA RMP. Bob Sherrill was not available for comment as he had left the meeting earlier.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 p.m.