

COLORADO CANYONS NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA
Advisory Council Meeting Minutes
April 11, 2002

Attendees:

Ken Currey	Dan Rosenthal	Gretchen Gore	Jerry Nolan
Art Donoho	Bob Silbernagel	Sara Daugherty	Catherine Robertson
John Foster	Russ Walker	Jim Dollerschell	Jane Ross
Doralyn Genova	Gene Arnesen	Chris Jouflas	Connie Rosenthal
Greg Gnesios	Larry Bullard	Ann Martinez	Melissa Simpson
Warren Gore	Bob Click	Harley Metz	Julie Stotler
Joe Keys	Steve Cohn	Bryan Moore	Mary Vader

Greetings and Introductions

The meeting was called to order by Warren Gore at 3:00 p.m.

Legislative Briefing and Discussion

Melissa Simpson, Washington Office Legislative Aide to Representative Scott McInnis, and Ann Martinez, from the Representative's local office, were present.

The Advisory Council viewed a videotaped recording by Representative McInnis, in which Representative McInnis discussed the intent of the Colorado Canyons National Conservation Area (CCNCA) enabling legislation as well as the history leading to the National Conservation Area (NCA) designation. Representative McInnis clarified his intent on management of recreation on the river by reiterating that the river is not a part of the NCA, and the current planning process will not include management of recreation on the river. At the same time, the legislation does not affect or change the authority of the Grand Junction field office in managing river recreation.

Following the videotape, three staffers from Representative McInnis's Washington Office joined the discussion via telephone to field questions from the Advisory Council. Linked into the telephone conference were Mike Hess, Josh Penry, and Christopher Hatcher. Much of the discussion focused on the role of the River Working Group and on what the plan will address in the river corridor. The legislation allows management of land strips along the river, river access points, and commercial use.

Also discussed with the staffers was the Resolution sent by the Advisory Council to the Department of the Interior requesting increased base funding for the CCNCA in the

coming fiscal years. Kathleen Clarke, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Director, was receptive to the request, and the Colorado State Director has been briefed. No further details on the status were provided.

Art Donoho raised the topic of land acquisition. Each Working Group has expressed a desire to pursue acquisition of in-holdings and would like to engage Congressional support, if necessary. Comment was noted by the staffers.

The briefing by Representative McInnis's staff concluded at 4:00 p.m.

Working Group Updates

Rabbit Valley Working Group:

The group recommends to the Advisory Council that target shooting be prohibited in Rabbit Valley, south of I-70.

Areas where target shooting would be allowed are still being researched.

The group is discussing camping issues, including the fate of dispersed camping, future campgrounds, camping restrictions on fire, and human waste management.

Parking issues include development of a hardened site allowing separate parking arrangements for both equestrian and off-highway vehicle (OHV) users, and identification of an area capable of handling large events.

The management of Rabbit Valley is tied to the management of the area directly across the Utah state line known as Utah Rims. The Utah Rims Recreation Area is managed by the BLM Moab (UT) field office, and a recreation management plan (RMP) is currently being developed. Close coordination in the planning processes will be helpful, especially because many Rabbit Valley users travel into Utah Rims. A representative from the Moab field office should be available to discuss these issues with the Working Group and the Advisory Council, if necessary.

Mack Ridge Working Group:

The group is extremely interested in the state land located between I-70 and the CCNCA border. This area is centrally located to many loops and is currently an undeveloped, informal trailhead. If BLM acquired the land, it would be a good place for a parking lot, restroom, and educational display. The BLM Realty Specialist, Robin Lacy, addressed one of the Working Group meetings and indicated that the State Land Board is open to discussion of a land trade. The group recommends that the Advisory Council actively pursue obtaining this land before any other entity can acquire it, and the community risk losing even the informal trailhead currently in place. Utilizing a Memorandum of Agreement with the state should be researched as an interim measure in minimizing the risk of losing access to the area.

For future educational use, the Mack Ridge Working Group is in the process of rating trails by all uses, i.e., mountain bikers, horseback riders, hikers and runners. The goal is to provide an informative method that enables both casual users and tourists to decide which trail is best for the experience they desire.

Wilderness Working Group:

A Wilderness Workshop was offered to both the Wilderness Working Group and Advisory Council on April 2, 2002. The workshop was intended to educate attendees on the planning restraints in Wilderness areas.

The group will take a field trip to the Wilderness Front Country on April 13, 2002, and then to the back country on April 20, 2002. The Front Country area will have some unique issues given its proximity to a fast-growing urban area. Field trip goals include looking at trailheads, access to Front Country trails, access to the back country on BS Road, enlarging parking lots, and seasonal road closures.

The group is currently in the process of prioritizing issues and is using a matrix of management actions to decide on possible management alternatives.

Some issues for future discussion are competition for water, impacts on grazing and wildlife, and the status of the bighorn sheep reintroduction and its future.

River Zone Working Group:

The river field trip will be Friday, April 12, 2002, with everyone meeting at the Loma boat launch at 8:00 a.m. Issues discussed so far in the River Working Group include camping capacity along the river and associated camping issues, especially fires and human waste management.

The group recommendations to the Advisory Council are:

- Portable toilet facilities required year-round by all users.
 - Rationale: The area has reached its limit for unmanaged human waste, and all users should be held to the “leave no trace” policy.
- Require all users to carry fire pans, or gas stoves, between the months of November and April.
 - Rationale: These are generally the coldest months of the year, and unanticipated situations may require users to build fires for safety (warmth and drying); all users should be prepared for this.

Discussions in the Working Group have shown the public’s appreciation for current management of the river; it is not intrusive and does not require excessive preparation or planning to enjoy the trip, especially with no permitting system in place. Members are aware that recreational use of the river will continue to expand to the point that the current system will be incapable of handling the crowds, resulting in a diminished river experience. The group is discussing the feasibility of establishing a usage threshold that would kick in a permitting system when that threshold is reached.

A roundtable poll of the Working Group at the last meeting revealed very little dissatisfaction with the current situation on the river, including types of uses and numbers of users. The biggest challenge is managing for future use.

BLM Update

Concern was expressed that use on the river is difficult to separate from other activities, because it equates to use on the land in most cases.

Ken Currey commented that the emphasis in Rabbit Valley should be to continue current management and not focus on implementing extreme restrictions on roads and trails.

Administrative access to the Wilderness by the Division of Wildlife (DOW) and law enforcement agencies, and in emergency situations, was discussed. While access by wildlife agencies is allowed by the Wilderness Act on an occasional and temporary basis, details on what access is required and determining the minimum, needs further discussion.

Law enforcement access can be necessary for both emergency and non-emergency situations. In cases where there is threat to human health and safety, there are few restrictions on access. The Advisory Council should be prepared to develop guidance on what constitutes other emergency situations. The Wilderness Working Group can begin discussion of this issue. Some interagency agreements are in place with the BLM, Sheriff's Office, and the DOW. But, the current planning process would allow public input into criteria for all types of access, and further define minimum tool analysis for all access situations (other than grazing access, which has already been defined in specific grazing management plans).

BLM Vegetation Ecologist, Harley Metz, and Rangeland Management Specialist, Jim Dollerschell, made a presentation to the Advisory Council on land health issues in the CCNCA. Jim provided a history on rangeland issues leading to the Rangeland Reform Act in 1994-5. A local team worked with the Northwest Resource Advisory Council to analyze the relative health of the system in the categories of soil, riparian areas, threatened and endangered species (see attached), and water quality compared to their potential for this area. Land Health Standards that were developed are applied to land uses, not limited to grazing. The CCNCA was the first area to undergo a comprehensive Land Health Assessment, and the final report is due this summer. Harley distributed the Land Health Survey used in the assessment, as well as the preliminary results:

Some problems discovered are:

- Tamarisk invasion in the river corridor is rampant; noxious weed and non-native species invasion is becoming a problem.
- Drought, fire, and past grazing practices in other parts of the NCA have resulted in reduction of native plant cover with some domination by non-native annuals like cheatgrass. Some sagebrush grasslands have been taken over by juniper. Natural plant succession has also been impeded.

Management actions that address the problem areas should be discussed by first prioritizing problem sites and then by setting criteria:

- Cost effectiveness.
- What areas offer the best potential for rehabilitation, taking recreational use and the current drought situation into consideration.
- Restraints on plant species used in rehabilitation, i.e., native versus non-native.
- Risk analysis if non-native species are used.
- Protection of problem areas prior to rehabilitation.
- Set reasonable, achievable, measurable time limits.

The biggest challenges will be in Rabbit Valley and the tamarisk invasion in the river corridor.

A collateral topic to be discussed in the future is how the current fire management practices are succeeding and whether any policy changes are needed based on recent lessons learned.

New Business

Based on comments made earlier in the meeting extending from the McInnis briefing, there was some confusion over the River Working Group's responsibilities in this planning process and what should be relayed back to the River (Corridor) Working Group.

The River Working Group should actually be called the River *Corridor* Working Group. The plan could cover access control to the river (i.e., through permitting), control of the land strips down to the river, and commercial permits control. Colorado State Parks is responsible for the enforcement of river regulations; however, a state employee attending the meeting made reference to the tremendous strain on resources that will probably preclude the state from its ability to enforce regulations on this 24-mile stretch of the river.

Chris Joufflas, a private landowner in the NCA, was present and made it clear that he is interested in land trade negotiations.

Public Comments

There were no public comments, and the CCNCA Advisory Council meeting was adjourned at 6:25 p.m. The next meeting will be held May 9, 2002, at 3:00 p.m., 600 White Avenue, in Grand Junction, Colorado.

**T+E Species by Field Office
As of Oct. 15, 2001**

Species	Year Plan Approved (No. of Species in FO area)	Status	Year Listed	GS 84 (12)	GJ 87 (11)	GU 93 (7)	KR 84 (6)	LJ 91 (6)	LS 89 (10)	RG 86/96 (13)	SG 91 (6)	SJ 85 (15)	UN 85/89 (10)	WR 97 (16)
Uncompahgre Fritillary Butterfly		E	1991											
Knowlton Cactus		E	1979											
Mesa Verde Cactus		E	1979											
Ute Ladies'-Tresses		T	1992											
Piceance Twinpod		T	1990											
Dudlev Bluffs Bladderpod		T	1990											
Graham Beardtongue		C	?											
Parachute Beardtongue		C	1999											
Penland Beardtongue		E	1989											
White River Beardtongue		C	?											
Penland Eutrema		T	1993											
Uinta Basin Hookless Cactus		T	1979											
North Park Phacella		E	1982											
Mancus Milkvetch		E	1985											
Osterhout Milkvetch		E	1989											

Key

	Potential Habitat in the LUP Area
--	-----------------------------------

E = Endangered, T = Threatened, PE = Proposed Endangered, PT = Proposed Threatened, C= Candidate, Pet = Petitioned for Listing, XN= Experimental Nonessential Population (treated as proposed).