



**DENCA Advisory Council Minutes  
October 5, 2011  
Delta Performing Arts Center, Delta, CO**

Those attending:

- Chair Katie Steele of Grand Junction
- Neil “Mike” Wilson of Eckert
- Steve Acquafresca of Grand Junction
- Tamara Minnick of Grand Junction
- Terry Kimber of Delta
- Joe Neuhof of Grand Junction
- Oscar Massey of Whitewater

Absent:

- Vice-chair Bill Harris of Montrose

BLM staff attending: Katie Stevens, Andy Windsor, Ben Blom, Lynae Rogers and Brodie Farquhar.

Public attending: Doug Atchley of Delta County, Sherry Schenk, Eric Rechel, Joyce Olson, Kay Simonson, Mark Ackerman, Jan Potterveld, Joe Sperry,

Chairwoman Katie Steele called the meeting to order at 3 p.m. and noted there was a quorum.

**Public comment**

**Potterveld:** Delivered a set of recreation recommendations for Cactus Park, from the Quiet Trails Group. The recommendations were within the context of a Special Recreation Management Area designation for Cactus Park. The area east of Nine Mile Road over to the Gunnison Bluffs, Gibbler Mountain and Gibbler Gulch would be quiet use (non-motorized). The rest of Cactus Park would have an emphasis for motorized use.

**Recap**

**Stevens:** Noted the lists of sensitive species on the walls of the meeting room and suggested people look at it during the break. At the last meeting, there was discussion about establishing target shooting facilities in the D-E NCA and zone by zone recommendations that had been gleaned from the Council. Based on Council recommendations, BLM planning staff is preparing a set of alternatives, management actions and goals. Stevens emphasized the ongoing need for the Council to identify whether any choices or issues are missing in the alternatives.

### **Domestic Sheep discussion**

**Stevens** noted that past meetings started a conversation about domestic sheep and wild sheep. Division of Wildlife and Park Biologist Ben **Banulis** gave a primer on bighorn conservation issues and information about bighorn diseases. The Council also requested that they hear from the sheep grazing permit holders themselves about their operations in D-E NCA, questions about dogs, breeding, etc.

**Joe Sperry** has run sheep in the D-E NCA area for 40 years. He raises the Polypay breed -- a white, medium-sized sheep which was developed in the 1960s. Polypay has a reputation as a prolific breed, raised for both meat and wool. His band has 1,700 ewes, which graze in and near D-E NCA between September and January and are out by March 15. The rest of the year, his sheep graze in the White River National Forest. Sperry's sheep graze in Wells Gulch, on both sides of U.S. 50, up to the Mesa County line. **Sperry** explained that he rotates his sheep to take advantage of melting snow, used to water his sheep. Forage is on dormant grasses and forbs – galleta, Indian rice grass, saltbush, shadscale – which grew in the previous growing season. Up until last year, **Sperry** has never had trouble with motorized recreationists. Last year, 5-7 riders chased his sheep. **Sperry** uses Akbash guard dogs – large, white Turkish-bred – to guard his sheep from coyotes.

**Sperry** expressed concern over whether he'd be able to continue grazing in a National Conservation Area. **Acquafresca** emphasized that he's committed to the idea that grazing will remain in D-E NCA, and is not hearing voices in the public who want to eliminate grazing. **Acquafresca**, a Mesa County Commissioner, said he wants to see multiple-use continue in the D-E NCA.

**Sperry** said he was involved in the process between the sheep industry and wildlife biologists, developing a set of best management practices to minimize the risk of disease transmission. He said it is not difficult to apply those practices. He expressed concern over a nine-mile buffer zone recommendation from the Forest Service. **Sperry** said if a nine-mile buffer zone becomes required, it will eliminate all his grazing permits. **Atchley** and **Acquafresca** both noted the importance of grazing to local communities and their assessment that NCAs allow for multiple uses to occur. **Stevens** noted that grazing will continue, but the Act which created D-E NCA does not specify what kind of livestock will graze in the D-E NCA. One purpose of the NCA is to protect wildlife – it will take impact analysis to determine whether BLM can be confident that wildlife will be adequately protected.

**Ross Allen**, of Allen Ranches, raises white-faced Columbia Rambouillet cross sheep on the Alkali allotment, from December to March. Snow is an important source of water to his sheep. He believes the quality of forage has improved in the last 20-30 years. Allen has never seen a bighorn sheep on his allotment. His band is 1,000 sheep and is guarded by dogs from coyotes.

Allen does see bighorn in the Gunnison Gorge area. Allen cited increasingly tighter regulations as the biggest threat he sees. He's concerned about increasing number of conflicts between guard dogs and people, where the recreating public approaches his sheep and the guard dogs appear. To avoid trouble, Allen's herders chain up the dogs until people go away.

**Allen** acknowledged concerns about disease transmission from domestic to bighorn sheep. The ideal solution would be vaccinating domestic sheep (much more difficult to vaccinate bighorn), he said. **Rogers** said there is encouraging research along those lines at Washington State University.

### **Break**

There are three sheep grazing operations in the D-E NCA that have the greatest risk of comingling domestic with bighorn sheep. The Advisory Council has met with two of the three wool growers (Sperry and Allen) and hopes to meet with the third in December.

### **Workshops**

**Stevens** reminded the Council about the upcoming socio-economic workshops, held in Delta and Grand Junction. Invitations, a press release and letters of invitation will invite community members to the workshops. Two economists will present data about the three-county region and facilitate discussions by community members.

### **Upcoming Events**

**Stevens** told Council members they can expect to receive alternatives on recreation within a couple of weeks. She also briefly described the basic themes of the four alternatives for the D-E NCA planning effort. The alternatives include:

- A, No-Action Alternative (continue current management)
- B, Restrictions used to achieve resource objectives
- C, More ambitious biological restoration objectives
- D, SRMA approach to recreation

**Stevens** explained that the Council will be asked to review draft alternatives early. The responsibility of identifying a preferred alternative, however, is the BLM's, made with Council input.

**Kimber** worried that bureaucrats in Washington, DC would do what they want. **Minnick** said that was not her experience with the McInnis Canyon NCA. The Council discussed the need for transparency, but also the reality that much of the upcoming information to be shared with the Council is sensitive, and could be misunderstood by anyone who didn't have the same experience and context as the Council.

**Stevens** and the Council discussed the desire for future field trips, with visits to higher elevations sooner. The first field trips will be set on weekends and will be Escalante Canyon and Cactus Park. Date and time to be announced.

### **Public comments:**

**Potterveld** asked whether the relative costs of the alternatives are yet known? Stevens responded it was too early to tell, but priorities for funding would likely shift among alternatives. This would be part of the impact analysis.

The next meeting will be November 2 in Grand Junction. More detailed information will be coming on draft alternatives. **Neuhof** requested that maps be posted online.