



**Minutes of D-E NCA Advisory Council meeting, July 20, 2011
Mesa County Courthouse, Annex A, Grand Junction**

Advisory Council members attending:

- Chair Katie Steele of Grand Junction
- Joe Neuhof of Grand Junction
- Oscar Massey of Whitewater
- Terry Kimber of Delta
- Neil "Mike" Wilson of Eckert
- Vice-chair Bill Harris of Montrose
- Tamera Minnick of Grand Junction

Absent members:

- Steve Acquafresca of Grand Junction

BLM staff attending: Katie A. Stevens, Ben Blom, Andy Windsor, Brodie Farquhar

Audience: Doug Atchley of Delta County, Lee Gelatt, Jan Potterveld, Jim Solomon, Kaye Simonson, Tracey Rohde, Kent Davis, Conrad Tucker, Ken Sanders, Sherry Schenk, George Seeley, Eric Rechel, Janice Shepherd

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

Public comment (Round 1)

Janice Shepherd, of the Quiet Trails group, said she was concerned about motorcycle trials in the NCA and the possibility of undue trampling of vegetation. She also expressed concern regarding the use of lights for night trials, which could disturb wildlife. She said group size of any activity is a concern, whether it be a mountain bike race, Scout jamboree or family reunion. She suggested a limit of 12, saying 25 would cause too much damage to vegetation.

Jan Potterveld, of Backcountry Horsemen, said horseback groups try to limit numbers on group rides, because large groups are unmanageable. A rule of thumb that he has seen in other areas is "25 heartbeats" meaning horses, pack animals and people.

Lee Gelatt, of Quiet Trails, urged the Advisory Council and BLM to include quiet trails within the range of alternatives. He emphasized the need to protect resources first when making decisions about recreation.

Jim Solomon of the Colorado Off Highway Vehicle Coalition, suggested that Shepherd's concerns were based on national motorcycle trials. He's looking for a smaller venue, perhaps as many as 30

motorcycles, with no spectators. Motorcycle trials were held in Cactus Park 20 years ago. He suggested the need for another route along Ninemile hill, other than the existing road (the old highway to Gateway that is now part of the Tabeguache Trail) which could then be closed.

Eric Rechel suggested that before any new routes are opened in north Cactus Park, the BLM should first close old, unsustainable routes.

Council members respond: **Kimber** asked about squatters and looters of cultural sites in Cactus Park.

Stevens said with the bad economy, the BLM has seen an increase in the number of squatters on public land. She also said that the looting is largely associated with cultural and paleontological sites. **Harris** said oil and gas workers drawn to the area sometimes park their trailers in public lands. **Minnick** asked about whether McInnis Canyons NCA currently has limits on the size of groups. **Stevens** responded that outfitters do have limits, but that the general public does not, other than in the wilderness. **Windsor** suggested that the numbers used for size limits all depends – that five people might be too much for one area, while 50 wouldn't be a problem for another area.

Discussion

Stevens asked Council members to work through a list of questions relating to recreational demand management with her.

Stevens said the public was welcome to jump in with clarifications, but to hold back until the end of the meeting to voice opinions.

The first question for Zone 3 (Cactus Park) was:

1. Should the BLM consider making a commitment for recreation in this zone?

Stevens explained that so far, public comments have highlighted a desire for mountain biking, OHV use and some quiet trails in Cactus Park. Some have strongly suggested that a Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) be created in Zone 3 for the benefit of mechanized (mountain bike) and/or motorized recreation (OHVs). SRMA-style management would not preclude having a quiet trail or two in Zone 3.

Earlier this summer, the Council explored the differences between Resource Management Areas: No Recreation Management Area (No RMA), Extensive RMA (ERMA) and Special RMA (SRMA). **Windsor** explained that there are important differences between the three. In a No RMA, the BLM would not make a commitment to recreation. In a No RMA, when recreation is in conflict with other resources or resource uses, recreation would not have priority and would be restricted. In an SRMA, the BLM would make a significant commitment to protect a specific recreation activity, use and experience, but legal protections for other resources still apply. The middle ERMA is an area where the BLM makes a commitment to protect certain activities but would allow the setting and the recreational experience to change. Finally, no money would be spent on recreation in a No RMA, while an SRMA could be expensive due to pre-construction cultural and biological survey work, and due to the construction of the trails and facilities themselves.

Stevens and **Windsor** noted that the area's Bangs Canyon and Rabbit Valley are managed at the SRMA level of commitment to recreation.

In Council discussion, **Kimber** predicted that SRMA status for Zone 3 would require more law enforcement to enforce rules. Is that affordable, he asked?

Stevens said cultural surveys are likely to uncover numerous Native American artifacts and sites in Cactus Park, making trail designation and facility construction very expensive. One survey found 16 sites, of which six were eligible for the National Historic Register. **Neuhof** said that potentially extrapolates out

to over 4,000 cultural sites in Cactus Park alone. **Kimber** said cultural sites need to be high on the list for protection. **Stevens** said a BLM archeologist will brief the Council about sites in the NCA when the Council discusses the wilderness zone of the NCA.

In discussion of special status species, the Council talked about the Colorado hookless cactus, the Grand Junction milkvetch, Gunnison sage-grouse and desert bighorn sheep. **Minnick** emphasized the goal to enhance biodiversity when re-seeding areas and avoid mono-cultures – perhaps working through the Uncompahgre Plateau project. She noted that the problem with crested wheatgrass is that it tends to form mono-cultures. **Massey** responded that crested wheatgrass is important forage for livestock and wildlife. While it is hard to restore biodiversity, **Stevens** said native species have been recovering better than expected with extra precipitation this year. Massey also noted that the Ninemile Hill area is an important desert bighorn lambing area and may need seasonal closures.

Soil erosion is a concern in Cactus Park, with so many fragile soils. That could make trail construction difficult. Windsor noted that no survey of trail sustainability has been made in the NCA. The current trails were not built for recreation or by BLM and receive little or no regular maintenance. Biggest limitations on new and existing trails are fragile soils and need to avoid cultural resources.

BREAK

Second half discussions

Neuhof recommended management of the Dominguez North area of Zone 3 for wilderness values and suggested that the Gibbler Mountain area be used for quiet use trail opportunities.

A trail density map sparked discussion about how trails might affect wildlife, particularly sage-grouse.

Harris asked when does trail density become a problem? Biologists have information on wildlife and how they're affected by habitat fragmentation and travel.

Wilson and **Harris** agreed some Cactus Park routes can be closed, while keeping others open.

Minnick would like to look at closing dead-end trails that currently exist in areas that now have less road density. **Wilson** added that a road that isn't fun won't be used. People will stay on a route if the road goes somewhere interesting, he said.

Stevens asked the Council about the SRMA-like potential for intensive management for recreation in Cactus Park. In the following discussions, it emerged that Cactus Park would not have to be one, large SRMA, but could be zoned for several, different SRMAs or even a mix of No RMA, ERMA and SRMA-type management.

Kimber said he wants to eliminate what doesn't make sense, but otherwise not make changes in the NCA – unless it is to protect cultural sites or private property. He also discouraged the idea of adding routes in areas that currently have low road density for the sake of wildlife.

Steele said it was most important to protect the NCA's cultural resources and biological sustainability.

Minnick suggested that the range of alternatives in the areas of Zone 3 with high road density could range from ERMA to SRMA, while the range of alternatives in the Zone 3 areas with low road density could range from No RMA to ERMA. **Minnick** also suggested varying the size of the SRMA by alternative

Solomon suggested the Council disregard the map of routes and try to imagine a transportation system built from scratch, so that so the trail system meets public needs, as opposed to focusing on what's there now.

Public Comment (Round 2)

Shepherd said the Quiet Use group supports using Cactus Park for OHVs, but said that his group would like to see the development of 1-2 quiet use trails in the area.

Gelatt reinforced that, stating Quiet Use doesn't ask for large closures, but wants a couple of quiet trails that are separated from motorized users. Otherwise, he said, keep it the way it is. He noted that there is only one quiet use trail in the entire NCA right now and that this trail is seeing more and more use (Big Dominguez Canyon).

Stevens asked a couple of more questions:

- What would the costs and tradeoffs be for the BLM to make a SRMA-level commitment to recreation?
- What partnership opportunities would enable the BLM to make this commitment? Has a demonstrated commitment been made by these partners?

The following discussion identified the need for more law enforcement and monitoring sites, higher costs for cultural mitigation and facilities.

There are partnership opportunities as the D-E NCA management plan comes out. Council members agreed that a motorized recreation SRMA would mean an unprecedented financial commitment needed for trails. Are there potential partners and who pays for the cultural site surveys and excavations needed before trail construction can begin?

Steele said the finances are troublesome, but can D-E NCA get labor commitments? **Kimber** said the people who show up at Council meetings would show up to help.

Potterveld said Backcountry Horsemen are ready to pitch in, while **Wilson** said OHV groups will help as well. **Windsor** reminded the Council members that there are costs and a lot of work that need to happen before any tool can hit the ground.

Next meeting

The next meeting is August 3 at the Delta Performing Arts Center in Delta. The meeting will be on the first floor. The Council will focus on Zone 5 of the NCA, the Escalante Canyon and Sawmill Mesa areas.