

# **RIO GRANDE NATURAL AREA COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES**

**June 17, 2015**

## **ATTENDEES**

Andrew Archuleta, BLM San Luis Valley Field Manager; Harold Anderson, Costilla County Rancher and Costilla County Conservation Board Member; Steve Vandiver, Rio Grande Water Conservation District (RGNA Commission Chair); Rio de la Vista, Private Citizen (Vice-Chair); Michael Blenden, FWS Refuge Zone Manager; Craig Cotten, Division Engineer, Colorado Division of Water Resources; Rick Basagoitia, Colorado Parks and Wildlife; David Montgomery, San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council, Clay Hudson, Judy Barnes.

-Steve Vandiver, Commission Chairman, called the meeting to order at 10:00

## **INTRODUCTIONS, REVIEW LAST MEETING, APPROVE MINUTES**

Guests were introduced.

Minutes from previous meeting were not available for review.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD**

Clay Hudson (Costilla Co. Landowner)- Inquired about which location the BLM would recognize as the BLM/Private Landowner boundary (i.e. middle of the river or the high water mark on the left bank of the river). Mr. Hudson suggested that by advocating mgmt. action on the east side of the river within the high water mark, the Commission would be advocating trespass.

Judy Barnes (Spirit of the Wild Horses)- commented that there are two distinct populations of horses, "Brownie Hills" "wild horses" and "domestic" horses that are abandoned in the RGNA. Note - The "wild horses" are not managed by the BLM as wild horses under the Wild Horse and Burro Act.

Judy commented that there are "Brownie Hills" "wild horses" that come onto the BLM could be pushed onto adjacent private land; primarily the Brownie Hills area. Ms. Barnes proposed to round up the "domestic" horses and move them to sanctuaries or have them adopted. Based on her experience and time spent within the RGNA, Ms. Barnes estimates that there are 150-200 wild domesticated horses utilizing the riparian area and 150-200 "wild Spanish horses" "roaming the hills. Mr. Hudson asked about getting approval from adjacent private landowners to push horses onto their land.

David Robbins (Attorney for the Rio Grande Water Conservation District) – Mr. Robbins provided background on the RGNA legislation and summarized the basis for BLM's determination of the high water mark on the east side of the river as the BLM/Private Land

boundary. Mr. Robbins suggested that it was not the responsibility of the Commission to weigh in on the boundary issue, but rather to acknowledge the issue.

Mr. Hudson suggested that due to the Commission's status with the Secretary of the Interior, that the Commission could recommend to the Secretary that she direct the Solicitor's Office to review the Solicitor's opinion regarding the boundary issue and direct BLM to review the issue.

Mr. Robbins was asked if he could draft such a letter and he said he could. Rio de la Vista made a motion to have Mr. Robbins draft a letter for the Commission to the Secretary. Harold Anderson seconded the motion.

Judy Barnes introduced Dr. Paul Polechla, Jr. Dr. Polechla described his experience as a wildlife biologist/researcher and his experience working with "wild horses". Dr. Polechla described a 2 phase project to move horses off BLM lands.

Phase one: Spirit of the Wild Horses would capture limited numbers of domesticated horses at a time and put them in shelters as not to over whelm horse rescue programs.

Phase two: manage the "Spanish" population of horses and conduct research on BLM and private lands which would include vegetation analysis, to determine the carrying capacity of the land and manage accordingly.

Ms. Barnes and Dr. Polechla said that they would meet and discuss the horse issue with BLM officials and develop a written proposal and submit it to the Commission.

The Commission discussed the proposal.

## **MANAGEMENT PLAN**

Molly Pitts (Writer Editor) – reviewed the public comments received on the draft Management Plan.

Comments Received:

"Would the commission support the cleanup of the graffiti off the little box dam."

"Would the commission recommend that Costilla County and other counties work together to have information signs placed at Lobotos Bridge."

The Commission also discussed the comment/request for the Commission to work with BLM or other entities to acquire the De Vargas Crossing site. The Commission discussed the pros and

cons of the De Vargas Crossing being under public ownership. The Commission proposed that Molly and Andrew develop a response to this comment.

Mr. Hudson proposed a plan to close county road 1.5 and state line road near Rio Grande del norte National Monument.

The Commission agreed to draft a letter to the County Commissioners recommending that the roads be closed.

The Commission worked with Ms. Pitts to edit and make revisions to the draft management plan.

The Final Management Plan should be completed near the end of September 2015.

Andrew suggested that the Commission write a cover letter to the Colorado BLM State Director to submit the final plan. The cover letter should have some background information about the commission.

Molly indicated that she expected to have a revised draft out by July 15 and to notify the public to give them 2 weeks for comment on the new draft. Commission decides to put out an article in the newspaper to inform the public. August 3rd would be the deadline for new comments.

Final draft should be completed on August 24<sup>th</sup> and out for review before the September 24<sup>th</sup> meeting. The cover letter for the final draft should be completed by September 7<sup>th</sup>. At the September meeting the commission will decide how many copies need to be bound.

### **CLOSING DISCUSSIONS AND ACTION ITEMS FOR NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting was set for September 16 and the meeting was adjourned at 3:15 P.M.