



United States Department of the Interior

Bureau of Land Management
3028 East Main Street
Canon City, Colorado 81212



Rio Grande Natural Area Commission Meeting Minutes June 12, 2014

ATTENDEES

Andrew Archuleta, BLM San Luis Valley Field Manager; Brain Davis, BLM Front Range District Manager (acting); 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 Project Leader San Luis Valley NWR Complex; Craig Cotton, District Engineer, Colorado Division of Water Resources; Kyle Sullivan, BLM Public Affairs Specialist; Rick Basagoitia, Colorado Parks and Wildlife; Charlotte Bobicki, Assistant to Senator Bennett; Michael Willett; Private land owner; Michael Gibson, San Luis Valley Water Conservation District, Sean Noonan; BLM Recreation Planner.

STEVE VANDIVER CALLED THE MEETING TO ORDER AT 10:10 A.M.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments.

INTRODUCTIONS

Michael Gibson was welcomed to the RGNA commission and is replacing Paul Robertson.

Lauren Kranzinski has resigned from the commission and no new work was accomplished on the draft since the last meeting.

Andrew Archuleta provided an overview of the RGNA Act of 2006. The commission has until 2016 to finalize the plan for private lands within the Natural Area. The BLM is also working on a management plan for BLM lands within the RGNA. The major issues to be addressed are the large number of landowners on the east side of the river (more than 400) and the feral horses that continue to cause resource damage. There is now an estimated 500 horses roaming in the natural area, even after 63 were removed by the Humane Society. The other major issue is the discrepancy in the boundary near the state line.

Steve Vandiver said that one function of the commission is to call attention to the horse issue. The deer population is pushed off onto adjacent land owners, resulting in agricultural impacts. Steve suggested that maybe the agriculture community could be engaged to care about the feral horse issue. Steve wondered about a county approach for abandoned horses.

Brian Davis stated that because of the expense of gathers, the agency would likely take a smaller approach due to limited funds. The BLM is also limited due to full holding facilities. Brian stated that the BLM needed a sale barn that was willing to buy these feral horses. Brian expressed an interest in pursuing the possibility of an MOU with the counties to turn horses over.

Michael Gibson stated that the commission needs to take the lead on approaching the community. Michael wondered if there was a law at the state or county level that could be created to deal with the horse issue. Michael brought up feral hogs, which are game species in other states. Department of Agriculture regulations define “feral horses”.

One solution that was suggested was the legalization of horse slaughter. Michael stated that the 30-day holding period needs to end because it adds additional costs. It was suggested that possibly horse rescue groups could raise funds to assist in the removal of horses from the range.

Rio de la Vista suggested that a committee should be formed to look into regulations and county partnerships.

Charlotte Bobicki suggested that a mill levy or other fee may help raise community support, because these horses are costing the public.

Michael Blended suggested that the best course of action was a round up, but in the meantime, are there any regulations that need to be changed? He recommended a group be established to focus on long term solutions to the horse issue.

Steve suggested that the commission needs additional assistance from the county commissioners.

WORK ON DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN

The rest of the meeting was spent working on the draft management plan. The edits from the work session can be found online at:

http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/fo/slvfo/rio_grande_natural/rgna_commission_meeting.html

CLOSING DISCUSSIONS AND ACTION ITEMS FOR NEXT MEETING

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on September 11, 2014 at the Rio Grande Water Conservation District Office in Alamosa.