



United States Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Front Range District Office
3028 East Main Street
Cañon City, Colorado 81212



Rio Grande Natural Area Commission Meeting Minutes

May 16, 2012

Hampton Inn, Alamosa, Colorado

Attendees:

Greg Shoop, BLM Front Range District Manager
Paul Tigan, BLM Assistant Field Manager, San Luis Valley Field Office
Paul Robertson, Director of San Luis Valley Nature Conservancy
Harold Anderson, Costilla County Rancher and Costilla County Conservation Board Member
Andrew Archuleta, BLM Field Manager San Luis Valley Field Office
Steve Vandiver, Rio Grande Water Conservation District (Chair)
Craig Cotten, Colorado Division of Water Resources
Mike Willet, Private Citizen
Rio de la Vista, Private Citizen (Vice Chair)
Rick Basagoitia Colorado Parks and Wildlife
Denise Adamic, BLM Public Affairs Specialist

Steven Vandiver called the meeting to order at 10:20 a.m.

Introductions were made followed by a review of the last meeting's minutes. The RGNA Commission rafting trip that has been planned at the last meeting was canceled due to low water levels. There were no other comments offered about the last meeting's minutes. Follow-up was given regarding tribal consultation: Alicia Beat has been consulting with the Navajo and Hopi generally about what BLM is doing in Valley (the BLM is doing an ethnography study). The RGNA and its Commission were mentioned to the tribe.

Rio moved to approve the minutes, Harold seconded, approved unanimously.

Review of the draft plan

At the last meeting, Paul Tigan shared the framework for what a management plan for the area could look like. The framework is built around seven resource sections: natural, historic, scientific, scenic, wildlife, and recreation.

The Commission discussed inventorying and summarizing information for the area that has already been compiled such as the BLM's resource management plan, as well as the information The Nature Conservancy and the Counties have created about the area. The RGNA plan should not involve doing more on the ground research, but should synthesize what has already been done.

Water issues were also discussed such as where does it come from (rights and volume) and how do those details apply to the RGNA and its management. The group discussed that however water is addressed in the management plan; the plan should consider that water levels and allocations are

variable and governed by the Rio Grande Compact. This means that water levels should not be relied upon for adequate management of the area, but recommendations in the plan will recognize the water variability.

Subcommittee discussion

The group decided that the best way to approach writing a management plan for the Area is to break the committee into subcommittees that could focus on specific elements of the plan. The seven sections of the plan were combined into three subcommittees: a) natural, scientific, and wildlife resources; b) historic resources; and c) scenic and recreation resources. The Commission then assigned members to each committee:

- A) Head: Paul Robertson, Members: Rick Basagoitia, Rio de la Vista, and Harold Anderson
- B) Head: Harold Anderson and Steve Vandiver, Members: Helen Hankins, Mike Willet
- C) Head: Rio de la Vista, Members: Mike Blenden and Sean Noonan

The group discussed how other local groups' expertise could be drawn into these committees. For instance, the Recreation committee could work with the BLM and the San Luis Valley Great Outdoors Committee, and the historic committee could work with the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area. Angie Krall (USFS/BLM) would be asked to work on the Historic committee, and the BLM will share information from its ethnographic report when it is finished. Andrew Archuleta pointed out that the BLM has a river corridor plan for the area already in place which the Commission could use this as well.

After a review of the Commission's Charter, it was determined that there is a requirement to have the Designated Federal Official (or a representative) at every subcommittee meeting.

For the next RGNA Commission meeting, each subcommittee will review the plan framework specific to those sections that apply to them and determine if the information provided in the sections is sufficient or not. If not, the group will identify what other details need to be added. For example, in the wildlife section, the subcommittee will develop a list of species affected by the plan. Likewise, in the recreation section, the group will list the uses in the area. In each recommendation section of the plan, the subcommittees will add details about what actions need to be taken or policies need to be made. For instance, in the recreation section, a recommendation could be for signs to designate areas open or closed to certain uses.

Public involvement and how to gather comments discussion

Steve Vandiver drafted a letter and shared it with the group. The letter is meant to be sent to the public who own lands within the Area. The purpose of the letter is to inform the public of the Natural Area and let them know that there is a management plan being developed. The letter is also meant to let them know how they can offer input, and stress that their adopting the plan is voluntary. The group recommended that the letter should highlight how the Commission's plan will interact with the public/private property owners, and stress that this is a community effort, not a federal action.

Andrew suggested sharing the letter with the County Commissioners before sending it out. He also pointed out that the BLM sent a letter previously letting landowners know that a new survey had been completed when the Act occurred.

Paul Tigan presented a map of area with the private land subdivisions highlighted.

Public Comments

Clay Hudson: Signs would help protect private property rights. It would be nice to have boundaries determined and some clarifications about what the Natural Area means to private land. What is the BLM's stance on grazing the West side of the Area? *Andrew Archuleta:* There is no intention for new grazing allotments. There are some in the area; however, they are not being used. *Clay:* What is the fencing issue? *Harold Anderson:* There is a fence above the old bridge that goes up passed Road 142; it goes for several miles north. The fence was court ordered to be built out of a trespass case BLM had with someone who runs cattle on the Costilla County side of the Area. The fence was built to prevent cattle from getting into the Area's riparian zone. BLM will finish the fence soon.

Jerry Freeman: Long term funding for the Commission is important. If the Commission can get rid of livestock trespasses and feral horse problems, that will benefit the resources a lot. Is there any consideration for fencing south of Road 142? *Paul Tigan:* The riparian zone south of the bridge is in better shape than the north side. There are no plans to continue the fence south.

Clay Hudson: Are there any "wild" horses there? *Harold Anderson:* No, all the horses in the area are feral. *Clay:* What is the solution to this situation? *Andrew Archuleta:* The state patrol is concerned because there is a public safety issue with the horses on the highway, but most horses are not branded so it is hard to determine whose animals are whose.

The Commission pointed out that the feral horse issue is something the natural resources subcommittee should address in the management plan. Rick pointed out that horses are domestic animals. Because of this, they are handled by the Department of Agriculture, not the Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

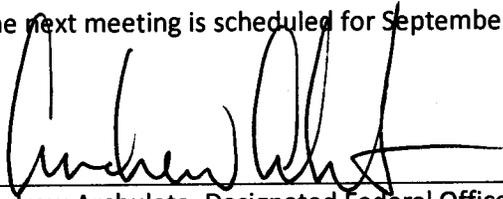
Cooperative Agreement

In the last meeting the BLM talked about entering a cooperative agreement with the Rio Grande Water Conservation District to share funds for the RGNA. A document is being drafted and will be shared at the next RGNA meeting.

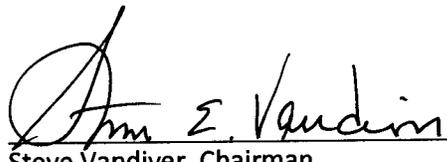
Short term funding is \$10,200 for mailing, GIS mapping, travel, mileage, maps, miscellaneous. Long term funding is \$10,450 for public meetings, federal register notices, GIS, map printing, paperwork, miscellaneous. The current budget for the RGNA Commission for the next 6 years is \$20,000.

Steven Vandiver adjourned the meeting at 3:00 p.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for September 13, from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM.



Andrew Archuleta, Designated Federal Officer
Front Range District, Bureau of Land Management



Steve Vandiver, Chairman
Rio Grande Natural Area Commission