

Date: August 14, 2012
Report to: **Rio Grande Natural Area Commission**
From: **Scenic and Recreation Committee**
Members: Rio de la Vista, Commissioner; Mike Blenden, Commissioner;
Sean Noonan, BLM; Ben Doon, Costilla County

Introduction:

This report will cover identified issues and items related to the Scenic and Recreation aspects of the Rio Grande Natural Area. We recognize that the work of other committees, addressing wildlife and grazing issues will have significant affects on the recreation and scenic values of the area and will work together for integrated recommendations for the final plan. This is clearly a work in progress and we look forward to input from other Commission members and interested people.

Recreation:

Gathering and referencing studies from various relevant agencies- including:

- 1) BLM's Recreation Area Management Plan
- 2) BLM's Transportation plan - key to accessing recreation sites on the BLM's Rio Grande corridor land

Note that there are existing conflicts/lack of alignment between the BLM's Travel Management Plan, America's Great Outdoors and the RGNA legislation. A BLM Rio Grande Corridor Plan from 2000 also informs the work of the Commission, and the plan that we will develop will replace it and hopefully resolve these and bring the plans and the legislation into agreement. Land Health Assessment is also underway by the Watershed Health folks in the BLM. This information will be useful to the Recreation and Scenic Committee as well as others.

- 3) Costilla County's new Trails, Recreation and Open Space Plan (TROS)
- 4) Conejos County- to be determined
- 5) SLV Great Outdoors- Trails and Rec planning for entire SLV, Steering Committee meeting and raising funds for projects, including a request to Americas Great Outdoors for developing facilities at Costilla County's site on Rio Grande
- 6) Others?

Key recreational uses currently and future potential:

Boating: while there is a limited boating season due to water levels, this is an attractive use of the area. The key issue is access. The existing access points are at Road Z bridge, at Hwy 142 Bridge. The Lobatos bridge is another major access point, especially for those that are intending to experience rapids in New Mexico. There is trespass is at the State line in the vicinity of the last gauging station, where people exit on the east side and ascend a user-created trail that is privately owned. This relates to road access - to be discussed and explored for Commission recommendations to the BLM.

Birdwatching: Much of the boating has a bird watching element, as the river is flat water through the Natural Area, even in high water flows.

Fishing: There is fishing activity especially at the bridge sites and expected once Costilla County develops facilities at the 142 location.

Hunting: need to clarify closure timing with Colorado Parks and Wildlife. Most hunting on the BLM is for deer and waterfowl along the river corridor and antelope on the uplands.

Hiking: At this point, much of the river corridor on the BLM is accessible via two-track road along the west side of the river. Therefore, the addition of a trail seems inappropriate. The RGNA legislation calls for removal of road south of the Lobato Bridge. We will discuss in more depth in order to make Commission recommendations to the BLM.

Other: There is use of the area by people driving along the river for “scenic access” – road locations and issues will be discussed.

Scenic:

Gathering and referencing studies from various relevant agencies- including:

- 1) BLM’s Visual Resource Management (VRM) inventory
 - The current management classes in the RGNA are 3 and 4. That is from the BLM’s 1991 Resource Management Plan and pre-dates the NA. They have a current ‘inventory’, which states how the land actually is, which is different than how they choose to manage it. In the case of the NA, the Sean Noonan’s proposal is that it be managed entirely as VRM Class 2 (see attached sheet for explanation).
- 2) Costilla County’s TROS—planning for possible Open Space acquisitions and/or conservation easements to consolidate small parcels along the east side of the river corridor when opportunities arise and landowners are willing.
- 3) Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust and conservation partners – available to work with landowners. RiGHT and others will continue to prioritize conservation easements on private lands along the river corridor whenever opportunities arise and landowners are willing. Would ask that funding for conservation in the Natural Area be recommended in the final plan, allowing for future appropriations for easements.
- 4) Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project—will approach them about possible removal of old dam and river function rehabilitation at Costilla County owned site—would enhance scenic and recreation qualities

Issues for discussion:

- Ways to encourage consolidation of lots on Costilla County side of river
- Ways to encourage conservation opportunities on private land
- Dam site rehabilitation
- Possible recommendations for future buildings on private land to maintain scenic qualities of the area
- Trash dump sites- locate on maps and discuss how to address