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
December 5, 2012
Hampton Inn, Alamosa, Colorado

Attendees:
Andrew Archuleta, BLM San Luis Valley Field Manager; Paul Tigan, Assistant BLM San Luis Valley Field Manager; Tom Heinlein, BLM Front Range District Manager; Harold Anderson, Costilla County Rancher and Costilla County Conservation Board Member; 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); Denise Adamic, BLM Public Affairs Specialist; Michael Blenden, FWS Project Leader San Luis Valley NWR Complex; Ben Doon, Costilla County Administrator; Clayton Davey, BLM San Luis Valley Recreation; Erin Minks, staff for Senator Udall; and Brenda Felmlee, staff for Representative Tipton.

Steve Vandiver called the meeting to order at 10:15 a.m.

Group introductions were made to the new BLM District Manager, Tom Heinlein. The introductions were followed by a review of the minutes from the Commission's last meeting. Harold Anderson moved to approve the minutes, Mike Willet seconded, and the notes were approved unanimously.

Landowner letter update: The letter has been finalized; however, the Commission still needs to obtain an accurate landowner list. This list is proving to be difficult to create. The price for updating the GIS list from a private contractor has gone up from what it was originally quoted, and is now projected to cost at least $2,200. If the Commission can wait a month, the Costilla County Assessor could be used to help create the list for much less. This could save the Commission quite a bit of their limited funding. Harold Anderson said that if the Commission waited one more month to send out the letter, it would not hurt considering the current timing of the holidays. The Commission members agreed.

Writer / editor for the Commission's management plan: Steve Vandiver mentioned that he knows of a technical writer that could help with writing the management plan for the Area. He will touch base with this person and report back to the Commission. The Commission all agreed that a technical writer / editor is necessary to move forward with drafting the plan.

Public Comment

There were no members of the public present and no comments were submitted.

Erin Minks suggested a public meeting of some sort should be held to educate people about the abandoned horse issues along the Rio Grande. The BLM staff agreed and said they were working on several outreach efforts to teach the public about the legal and range issues associated with the feral and abandoned horses on the range. The Commission agreed and then discussed topics that should be covered if a public meeting were held for this purpose (e.g., range issues, how people can help horses by

adopting, funding programs, etc.) The overall theme of the discussion was that public education is a key part of solving the trespass animal issue. How and what is enforced is more difficult to determine and beyond the Commission's scope.

Denise Adamic mentioned that the BLM was organizing a media tour to begin the public education aspect. The Commission discussed this and agreed that a media tour is a good first step, but there needs to be a political outreach aspect as well.

Steve V. suggested drafting a letter-to-the-editor (on behalf of the Commission) that defines the difference between the wild and feral horses as well as the rangeland health issues. Harold suggested that the letter be written from a rangeland resources standpoint. Steve V. said the letter should briefly outline the Commission and the resource issues. Ben Doon brought up the idea that some locals really believe that there are wild horses that are descendants of those left behind by the Conquistadors in Costilla County. The Commission decided that Rio de la Vista, Sandra Montoya, Steve V. and Denise A. would draft a letter-to-the-editor to coincide with the BLM's media tour of the Rio Grande.

Cadastral Survey

The Commission revisited the topic of how to define the Natural Area's boundaries. The BLM portion of the river (on the west side, south end) has been surveyed by the Cadastral Program; however, the rest of the western and eastern portions of the Natural Area (which are made up of private land) have not been surveyed as part of the Natural Area management planning effort. One of the Commission's concerns with defining the boundary is assuring public access to the river. The BLM maintains access to both sides of the river, but on the east side this access is blocked by private land. In 2002, the BLM's Cadastral program sent letters to all the landowners on the east side of the river that were affected by the BLM's boundary survey.

The question before the Commission now is how to define the Natural Area boundary in a palatable way for private landowners. Andrew Archuleta determined that the BLM needs to have a "detailed map" that can be constructed through the Cadastral Survey program. This boundary line needs to be determined to fulfill BLM's portion of the RGNA Act. The BLM has found two options with varying prices and will move forward with the more cost effective route.

Subcommittee reports

Rio said that the subcommittees have met several times and have come up with ideas for how certain resources should be addressed in the management plan. She also said that the subcommittees need direction for how they should move forward. Andrew A. suggested the Commission hire a technical writer to begin drafting the plan. Steve V. said that he would begin working towards getting a technical writer hired to help. Rio then asked if there are completed management plans that the Commission could use as an example to begin drafting their plan. Andrew said the Rio Grande River Corridor Plan is one place to begin.

Paul Tigan pointed out that what the Commission is doing need not be as in-depth of an analysis as an environmental impact statement (EIS). The only things that the legislation requires are that the Commission develop a management plan that 1) includes an inventory of resources included in the Natural Area, and 2) a recommendation for policies regarding those resources. Steve V. added that the

document the Commission was working on need not be longer than necessary, but could reference other documents such as the River Corridor plan or the BLM's current resource management plan for the area.

Steve V. said he will discuss the need for a technical writer and editor at the January 14 Rio Grande Water District meeting.

Field Tour

Before the Commission left the meeting to begin their field trip, Ben D. asked the Commission to look at the concrete structure (what is left of a dam, south of the 142 bridge). Some of the Costilla County Commissioners view the structure as a nuisance that collects graffiti. Ben D. asked the Rio Grande Natural Area Commission to come up with a recommendation of what the County should do with it: rehabilitated it or take it out.

The Commission agreed to discuss this topic at the next meeting.

Steve Vandiver adjourned the meeting at 3 p.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for March 14, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Andrew Archuleta, Designated Federal Officer San Luis Valley, Bureau of Land Management	Steve Vandiver, Chairman Rio Grande Natural Area Commission