



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Uncompahgre Field Office
2465 S. Townsend Avenue
Montrose, CO 81401



RAC SUBGROUP MEETING #9

Tuesday, November 15, 2011 (9:00 AM – 12:00 PM)

Meeting Location:
Holiday Inn Express (Jordan Room C)
1391 South Townsend Avenue, Montrose, CO

Meeting Notes

Attendees:

RAC Subgroup: Shelby Bear, Walt Blackburn, Bill Day, Richard Duran, William Ela, Barbara Hawke, Peter Mueller, John Reams, Steve Weist, Kathy Welt (via telephone)

BLM Uncompahgre Field Office: Bruce Krickbaum, Barb Sharrow

EMPSi: Jennifer Whitaker, Kate Wynant

General Public: None

Handouts: Agenda; Highlights of the RMP Process to Date; Major Changes to Chapter 2 (Alternatives); Comments on June 2011 Internal Draft Chapter 2 for BLM Field Office, Cooperating Agency, and RAC Subgroup Review (via E-mail)

1. Welcome (Bruce Krickbaum)

- The purpose is to review comments received on and major changes to draft Chapter 2.
- BLM received about 1,300 comments on Chapter 2. All responses are included in the document that was emailed to you prior to this meeting (approximately 300 pages).

2. Introductions (all present)

3. Planning Process to Date (Kate Wynant)

- See handout: *Highlights of the Resource Management Planning Process to Date*
- The only thing new on this handout to note is that BLM is making a few revisions to the Reasonably Foreseeable Development (RFD) scenario to address shale gas. It is not anticipated that these changes will change Chapter 2 (Alternatives).
- *Question:* What is the status of the coal report? *Answer:* The Coal Potential report is near complete; it will be posted on the UFO's RMP planning website when it is final. The second coal report provides details on the unsuitability criteria, which will be an appendix to the RMP.
- Chapter 2 is being revised; GIS is being updated. Chapter 2 will be hand delivered to the BLM Colorado State Office on Monday, December 12, 2011. Bruce and Barb will also have a briefing with the State Office on this day. The State Office will have four weeks to review and comment on Chapter 2. BLM will start impact analysis once all State Office comments have been resolved.

- Barb added that as you review the comment response matrix, you will see polar opposite comments for the preferred alternative.
- *Question:* can the RAC Subgroup see the whole picture again after the State Office review?
Answer: Yes, you will see the document once the analysis of the alternatives is complete. Prior to that, BLM will decide if State Office comments are significant enough to bring you back together to review those changes.
- In many instances, the BLM's decision space is very small. BLM is working under 100 years of legislation.

4. Comments on June 2011 Internal Draft Chapter 2 for BLM Field Office, Cooperating Agency, and RAC Subgroup Review (Kate Wynant)

- See handout: *Major Changes to Chapter 2 (Alternatives)*
- Desert bighorn sheep issue is a huge in this area because there are no natural boundaries for domestic and Rocky Mountain sheep.
- *Question (Recreation & Forestry):* Does Ridgway Trail Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) Recreation Management Zone (RMZ) 1 allow personal firewood cutting? *Answer:* No, Ridgway Trail SRMA RMZ 1 does not, but RMZ 2 does.
 - *BLM Action:* BLM will reevaluate the distinction between Ridgway Trail SRMA RMZ 1 and 2 to ensure the management actions are accurate.
- *Comment (Recreation [#619]):* Walt meant for the comment to read, "Change the numbers more than 24 people in all other areas gathering at a single location for more than 2 hours to read....20 people & 8 hours..." The action was changed to restrict the number of people to no more than 16 in WSAs and 25 elsewhere, unless otherwise restricted. Walt agreed that this was ok. There was no discussion on the timeframe.
- *Comment (Travel Management [#719 Alternative D]):* Walt has requested that BLM change the distance to 250 feet; BLM agreed to make this change in Alternative D.
 - *BLM Action:* BLM will change Alternative D to 250 feet (row 438).
- *Question (Recreation):* What is the difference between an SRMA and Extensive Recreation Management Area (ERMA)? *Answer:* The dominant use in SRMAs is recreation. BLM will focus on recreation by applying use limits, actively seeking funds, working with user groups, etc. In an ERMA, BLM knows recreation activities are occurring in the area, but there are many other uses that BLM will also manage for. BLM may provide recreation trails and facilities in these areas, but not at the expense of other resources. If an area is managed as both an SRMA and an Area of Critical and Environmental Concern (ACEC) (e.g. for plants), then management actions will be carefully evaluated to ensure consistency between the two.
- *Question (General):* are there other tools you have if multiple uses are happening in one area? *Answer:* Yes, BLM has laws and regulations we must follow. For example we are mandated to protect threatened and endangered species in all areas.
- *Question (Recreation):* Are there more SRMAs being proposed in this plan than what's in existence? *Answer:* Yes.
- *Question (Recreation):* What's the status of the Dolores River Canyon? If the Wilderness Study Area goes away, what would happen to the area? *Answer:* Under Alternative D that area would be managed as an ACEC and an SRMA.
- *Question (Travel Management [#664 and 700]):* Right now the Adobe Bandlands OHV Open Area is open to any motorized vehicles. Walt's comment was intended to mean that BLM should eliminate full-sized motorized vehicles in this area, and instead limit all vehicles to 50 inches or less. Also, Walt wants this area designated as Open to allow for cross-country travel. This is an area where a lot of training occurs. *Answer:* the issue in this area is the hookless cactus. At this time, all existing routes would be designated. *Comment:* to clarify, whether the travel management designation is *Limited to Designated Routes* or *Open*, the request by the OHV community is to limit vehicles to 50 inches or less in this area.

- *BLM Action:* BLM will provide additional review of the management proposed in the Adobe Badlands area.
- *Comment (Recreation):* BLM will run into opposition if the Ridgway SRMA does not allow competitive events.
- *Question (Travel Management [#739]):* Equestrian use has more effects on wildlife than motorized vehicles sometimes. A seasonal closure should be closed to equestrian users in addition to motorized and mechanized users. Particularly if the seasonal closure is for wildlife.
 - *BLM Action:* BLM will re-evaluate seasonal closures and determine if the action should include equestrian users.
- *BLM Comment (Coal):* BLM revised Stipulation CSU-51 to exclude operations that capture or pipe methane from a mine for beneficial use (new text below).

“STIPULATION CSU-51: Federally Leased Coal. Where oil and gas operations are proposed within the area of federally leased coal, relocate them outside the area to be mined or so as to accommodate room and pillar and long wall mining operations. This stipulation does not apply to operations that capture or pipe methane from a mine for beneficial use. (Refer to Appendix B.) (Figure 2-52, 2-53, 2-54, Appendix A)”

 - *BLM Action:* BLM will email this stipulation (row 491) to Steve Weist, Kathy Welt, and Bill Ela for review.
- *Question (Fluid Minerals):* In certain instances, I don’t feel that a No Surface Occupancy (NSO) stipulation provides adequate protection. For example, in a sensitive watershed, I don’t feel convinced that an NSO stipulation has the same level of certainty as a No Leasing designation. My main concern is underground impacts. *Answer:* Some sensitive areas have been designated as No Leasing areas, such as municipal watersheds. Major river corridors also have 0.25-mile NSO stipulation (under Alternative D). These areas are also protected by other types of management tools available to BLM, such as Visual Resource Management (VRM) classes.
 - *BLM Action:* BLM will E-mail the NSO and VRM maps to the RAC Subgroup to review the level of protections across the field office.
- *Question (ACECs):* I’m not comfortable that the uses/level of preservation are robust enough in SRMA north around Paradox Valley, and an ACEC. *Answer:* The impact analysis should help address these concerns. There is an ability to protect an area even if the area doesn’t have a formal designation (e.g., ACEC), which will be described in the analysis. There are other tools that BLM has available such as designating rights-of-way as avoidance areas and managing landscapes according to VRM classes.
- *Question (Biological Resources):* Can you explain the main changes to the biological resource sections (fish, wildlife, threatened and endangered species)? *Answer:* We combined all of the management actions for raptors since they were basically all saying the same thing. There are still separate sections for wildlife and threatened and endangered species. We also eliminated redundancy (i.e., many rows said the same thing). Watchable wildlife areas were dropped because the District Manager said these areas should be reserved for very special areas.
 - *BLM Action:* BLM will reconsider designating 23 acres north of Ridgway as a watchable wildlife area.

5. Next Steps (Kate Wynant)

- As we mentioned, we are sending Chapter 2 to the BLM Colorado State Office December 12th so it would be most useful to get comments from you by the end of December. However, we will always accept comments identifying fatal flaws in the plan.
- *Comment:* We need to remember that applying layers and layers of restrictions is going to make life very difficult for BLM to manage.
- *BLM Comment:* Our District Manager reviewed Chapter 2 row by row. All of her comments have been incorporated into the document at this time.

6. Other Items Not on the Agenda (Kate Wynant)

- If you weren't able to open the attachment containing the responses to comments on Chapter 2, let us know and we will send you a PDF version.
 - *BLM Action:* BLM will send Bill Ela a paper copy of the Chapter 2 Comment Response Matrix.

7. Public Comments / Questions (Kate Wynant)

- No members of the public were present.

8. Action Items / Next Meeting (Kate Wynant)

- Pending BLM's State Office review, the RAC Subgroup will either meet again early 2012 to discuss major changes resulting from the State Office's comments, or in summer 2012 to review Chapter 4 (Impact Analysis).
 - *BLM Action:* BLM will reevaluate the distinction between Ridgway Trail SRMA RMZ 1 and 2 to ensure the management actions are accurate.
 - *BLM Action:* BLM will change Alternative D to 250 feet (row 438).
 - *BLM Action:* BLM will provide additional review of the management proposed in the Adobe Badlands area regarding OHV use.
 - *BLM Action:* BLM will re-evaluate seasonal closures and determine if the action should include equestrian users.
 - *BLM Action:* BLM will email this stipulation (row 491) to Steve Weist, Kathy Welt, and Bill Ela for review.
 - *BLM Action:* BLM will E-mail the NSO and VRM maps to the RAC Subgroup to review the level of protections across the field office.
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