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November 2010

BLM in the Spotlight

Recovery Along the Rio Grande

By *Laura Garcia, Public Affairs Intern, SLVPLC*



In 2005, the U. S. Senate passed legislation that established the Rio Grande Natural Area. This special designation protects a 33-mile corridor along the Rio Grande that serves as a migratory route for birds and habitat for many wildlife species. The natural area begins at the south boundary of the Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge in south central Colorado and extends to the New Mexico state border.

Historically, the Rio Grande corridor was used for travel by Native Americans and Spanish settlers and their animals. This use, along with recent illegal grazing of the BLM-managed land has led to significant damage to the riparian area.

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Riparian area refers to the plant communities along the moist banks of rivers and creeks. A healthy riparian area disperses the river's energy, decreases soil erosion, reduces potential flood damage, effectively filters pollutants and provides habitat for wildlife.

"When we first looked at the area, the riparian vegetation was in horrible condition. There had been intense grazing along the river for 200 plus years," said Jeremiah Martinez. Martinez, who is currently a recreation planner for the San Luis Valley Public Lands Center, worked for five years along the natural area as the natural resource specialist.

In 2000, a cadastral survey was conducted to determine public land boundaries and then administrative practices were used to remove trespass livestock from BLM-managed lands. Recovery of the riparian area began almost immediately.

"As each year passed, the spread and growth of coyote willow was tremendous," said Martinez.

The cottonwood trees are also making a comeback and there is a decline in noxious weeds.

"Our main goal is to have a healthy riparian area," said Melissa Garcia, wildlife biologist for the San Luis Valley Public Lands Center. "We would also like to improve the sinuosity of this river and protect the archaeological features in the area."

There is still much work to be done along the Rio Grande Natural Area and efforts will soon begin to also work with private landowners. Working with the public is an important part of this process and will go a long way to maintain the area for years to come.

Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area Video Now Online!

This recreation area stretches nearly 148 miles along the Arkansas River, near the cities of Buena Vista, Salida, and Canon City. The AHRA is managed cooperatively between the BLM and Colorado State Parks.

The video highlights several activities and special attractions in the area.

The video is online at: www.youtube.com/blmcolorado

Employee Spotlight

BLM Colorado Welcomes Tom Alvarez, Grand Junction Public Affairs Officer. Tom comes to us from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Northeast Regional Office, External Affairs Department, in Hadley, Mass. While with the USFWS, Tom was sent to New Orleans for the Deepwater Oil Spill Response and Battle Creek, Mich. for the Kalamazoo River Oil Spill Response.

Prior to his work with the USFWS, Tom was the Director of Public Information/Public Relations at Northern New Mexico College in Espanola, N.M. for two years and Director of Communications for the State of New Mexico, Behavioral Health Collaborative in Santa Fe, N.M. for one year.

Tom has lived most of his adult life in Anchorage, Ala. He worked as a Public Information Officer with Department of Health and Social Services, Community Relations Specialist with a non-profit social service agency, and photographer with defense contractors. Tom also worked as a photojournalist and reporter in Alaska, New York and California.

Prior to graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in Art (with emphasis in photography) and minor in Journalism and Public Communications from the University of Alaska, Tom served eight years with the U.S. Air Force.

Tom was born and raised in the Los Angeles suburbs of southern California. He and his wife Kristin have two daughters and two sons.

In the News

[Interior continues solar spree with approval of 1,000-megawatt project in Calif. desert](#) (10/25/10) :

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Obama administration has approved a thousand-megawatt solar project on federal land in southern California, the largest solar project ever planned on U.S. public lands.

[State park fees increase Nov. 1](#) (10/21/10) : DENVER -

Fees for daily entry and camping at many of Colorado's state parks will go up on Nov. 1 following action by the Colorado State Parks Board.

[Settlement talks fail on Roan Plateau drilling leases](#)

(10/21/10) : A federal judge will rule on whether two-year-old federal leases for oil and gas drilling on the Roan Plateau in western Colorado are valid — or not — after settlement talks between environmental groups and oil and gas companies failed.

[US approves 5th solar plant on western public land](#)

(10/20/10) : BARSTOW, Calif.—Interior Secretary Ken Salazar has approved a big solar energy plant in the Mojave Desert, making it the fifth such project on western U.S. public lands to win federal authorization.

Recent Press Releases

- [BLM begins preparing gathered wild horses for adoption](#) (10/29/10)
- [Op-Ed: Your Colorado public lands offer hunting adventures and so much more](#) By Helen Hankins, BLM Colorado State Director (10/27/10)
- [BLM to celebrate McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area 10th Anniversary](#) (10/26/10)
- [BLM seeks public comment on Upper Colorado River fee adjustments](#) (10/25/10)
- [BLM completes Colorado wild horse gather](#) (10/22/10)
- [BLM Announces 2010 Reclamation and Sustainable Mineral Development Award Winners](#) (10/18/10)

Ask BLM

Question: Which BLM Colorado field office manages the most surface acres?

Answer: White River Field Office - 1,456,000 surface acres

If you have something you want to learn about, "Ask BLM" at Colorado_News@blm.gov



Kokopelli's Trail

Places to Visit

Kokopelli's Trail

Location

140-mile bike trail sits between Loma, Colo., and Moab, Utah.

Description

This is one of Colorado and Utah's premier mountain bike trails, with hiking opportunities as well. Stretching for 140 miles with elevations that rise to 8,400 feet, Kokopelli's Trail is made up of improved roads, four-wheel-drive roads, and single-track roads. The trail begins in the McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area, west of the Loma boat launch site, and ends in Moab, Utah. It is named for Kokopelli, the hump-backed flute player and fertility symbol in the Native American cultures of the Colorado Plateau.

Directions

From Grand Junction, travel west on Interstate 70 about 15 miles to the

Hot Topics

Working together for the greater good

By Rae Brooks for Firewise of Southwest Colorado



Land: Donated by a local rancher. Building: Paid for by a state government grant. Water storage tanks: Delivery and plumbing hardware covered by a grant from the local fire council, with excavation donated by a local contractor and muscle power provided by volunteer firefighters.

The result: The fifth and newest station of the Fort Lewis Mesa Fire Protection District in southwestern Colorado. Situated on Country Road 117 about 21 miles west of Durango, Station #5 opened in April 2010.

"There's actually more work in doing it this way than going out and putting the money on the table," said Chief Steve Ebner. "Problem is, we don't have the money to put on the table."

The Fort Lewis Mesa fire district covers about 250 square miles, with 35 volunteer members providing protection from structural and wildland fire to 1,450 rural households. Station #5 is located on the district's western side, which is highly susceptible to fire, with frequent summer lightning strikes.

The 1,838-square-foot building houses a water tender, engine and brush tanker. Although it is not staffed around the clock, nine volunteers live within three miles.

The community, Chief Ebner added, was a big help in building the station. The property owners' association at Vista de Oro, a nearby subdivision, initially located the land for the station. Neighbor Ted Wiedemann agreed to donate eight acres from

Loma exit (Exit 15). Turn left (west) at the top of the exit ramp to cross over the interstate to the south. Turn right at the access road and follow the signs to the trailhead parking area about 0.5 miles down the gravel road.

Visitor Activities

Mountain biking, hiking, horseback riding, and picnicking.

Special Features

This 140-mile trail winds through remote desert sandstone and shale canyons, often overlooking or hugging the banks of the Colorado River. This is a primitive bike trail in an undeveloped area. It is very hot in the summer and subject to intense thunderstorms. The trail can be very slippery when wet. Drinking water is not available.

Camping and Lodging

No camping is allowed at the Kokopelli trailhead. Primitive camping is available on nearby public lands.

Contact Information

Grand Junction Field Office
2815 H Road
Grand Junction, CO 81506
Tel: (970) 244-3000
Fax: (970) 244-3083
www.blm.gov/co

his 100-acre holding.

Vista de Oro also maintains the county road that the station sits on, and does snow plowing in the winter.

After the parcel, worth \$68,000, was subdivided from Wiedemann's property, the fire protection district applied for a Department of Local Affairs grant to build the station, with letters of support from Vista de Oro. It received \$139,000, which covered the cost of construction.

"When the state sees that the local community really wants this to happen, it makes a difference," said J.T. Coyne, Vista de Oro Firewise Ambassador.

For water storage, Ebner tracked down two 12,000-gallon tanks in New Mexico, then asked the Firewise Council of Southwest Colorado for \$4,500 to ship the tanks to Colorado and buy parts to plumb them to the fire district's requirements. A local contractor offered to bury the tanks and volunteer firefighters did the plumbing.

With a clip of a ceremonial ribbon strung across the bay doors, the new station officially opened on April 23, 2010. Clyde Johnson, president of the fire district's board of directors, did the ribbon-cutting honors before a crowd that included two La Plata county commissioners, all five members of the fire district's board of directors, and Ebner and his assistant chief.

The new station proved its worth less than two months later. In the early morning hours of June 20, the King Coal Mine called 911 to report that fire had broken out in a large equipment-repair shop.

Station #5 lay just three miles from the mine. Previously, the nearest station was more than eight miles away. Crew from Station #5 were at the mine within 11 minutes, and successfully suppressed the fire, saving much of the equipment in the building and preventing the fire from spreading into nearby dry brush.

In September 2010 the finishing touch was put on the Station when mitigation was completed on the nine-acre parcel. Chief Ebner had asked Fuels Specialist Todd Gardiner of the Dolores Public Lands Office if the BLM would consider treating the 40-acre parcel just to the north of the Station.

"The BLM land was dense pinyon-juniper forest and definitely needed treatment," said Gardiner. Gardiner coordinated it so the contractor hydro-mowed the station land at the same time.

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