



United States Department of the Interior

Bureau of Land Management
3028 East Main Street
Canon City, Colorado 81212



FRONT RANGE RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL MINUTES July 21-22, 2010

Category 1

Bill Dvorak
Charles Wm. Rech
Jim Coleman

Category 2

Donna Murphy
Tom Olson
Michael Nelson
Lucy Bambrey

Category 3

Loren Whittimore
Michael Bush
Al Trujillo
John Stevenson
Christopher "Kit" Shy

This two-day meeting was hosted by the San Luis Valley Public Lands Center and held at the Inn of the Rio Grande in Alamosa, CO.

Wednesday, July 21, 2010

ATTENDEES

Helen Hankins, BLM CO State Director; Leigh Espy, BLM CO Associate State Director; Greg Shoop, Designated Federal Officer (Front Range District Manager); Leah Quesenberry, Acting Royal Gorge Field Office Field Manager; Cass Cairns, Front Range RAC Coordinator; Dan Dallas, San Luis Valley Public Lands Center Manager; Bruce Rittenhouse, San Luis Valley Public Lands Center Manager; Andrew Archuleta, Saguache Field Office Manager; Shelley Freer, Front Range RAC Administrative Assistant.

GUESTS

Steve Sanchez, San Luis Valley Public Lands Center; Kim Schott, San Luis Valley Public Lands Center; Theresa Corless, San Luis Valley Public Lands Center; Angie Krall, San Luis Valley Public Lands Center; Lonnie Crawford, San Luis Valley Public Lands Center; Alan Ragins, National Park Service; Erin Minks, Representative Salazar's Office; and Gloria Gutierrez, Senator Udall's Office.

INTRODUCTIONS AND OLD BUSINESS

All RAC members, attendees and guests introduced themselves after the meeting was called to order by Loren Whittimore at 9:10 a.m. There was no old business.

OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no responses.

STATE DIRECTOR COMMENTS, *Helen Hankins, CO BLM State Director*

Helen gave a brief overview of her past experience including jobs in Alaska, Nevada, Washington, D.C., and most recently as the Associate State Director in Arizona. At the state-wide Leadership Team meeting last week in Alamosa, several important issues were discussed including economic sustainability, community development and assistance, and solar power. Secretary Salazar has listed five critical issues for BLM with the number one issue being energy independence. Four Colorado landmarks have been designated as special areas: Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area, Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area, Canyon of the Ancients National Monument, and McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area. She was able to tour Blanca Wetlands last week and reiterated the importance of this tremendous asset to the San Luis Valley.

Kerber Creek Restoration, *Steve Sanchez, Natural Resource Specialist, Saguache Field Office*

Kerber Creek is a 68,000-acre watershed located in Saguache County. The creek converges with the San Luis Creek and is a tributary to the Rio Grande River. In 2005, new partnerships were formed between the Bureau of Land Management, Trout Unlimited, the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service to pick up where the first restoration project left off. As the project gained recognition, additional partners joined. Together, over \$1 million was raised for the clean-up, and expertise unique to each agency was added to the project. The group addressed problems in the lower watershed along a 17-mile stretch to improve water quality, aquatic life, riparian and upland vegetations, erosion, and sinuosity. BLM primarily acts with the consent of private land owners under the Wyden amendment, which allows BLM to work on private lands for the benefit of public lands or human health and the environment. BLM has provided on-the-ground support and technical assistance, as well as financial contributions to the project. The project has been extremely successful thus far. The utility of the land is getting recognized.

Jim Coleman remembers when ranchers were afraid to irrigate in the 1940's due to tailings contamination and sees a lot of improvement today.

Greg Shoop remarked that rancher cooperation and their trust have developed over the years.

Kit Shy asked if you let irrigation lapse over time will the State reinstate the ditches or will the water rights lapse? Steve Sanchez answered that the lack of use made it impossible to use the ditches but the water rights have never lapsed.

Al Trujillo noted the difference in the presentation from one he attended three years ago; hopes from the past have come to fruition. He acknowledged the accomplishments by the BLM, particularly Steve for the work he has done to the environment. He really appreciates what has been done.

Dan Dallas, San Luis Valley Public Lands Center Manager, publicly congratulated Steve's accomplishments and lauded his commitment and hard work over the years.

MANAGERS UPDATE

Greg Shoop, *Front Range District Manager (Designated Federal Officer)*

Designated Federal Officer and RAC Roles and Responsibilities

Greg re-iterated the purpose of the RAC which is to act solely as an advisory group by giving direction to Federal officials on public comments, provide ideas for eco-systems, and advise local BLM groups. They do not provide advice on financial or personnel issues.

Recreation Resource Advisory Council (REC RAC)

Greg also handed out information on the Recreation RAC as they are looking for several new members. RAC members may not serve on more than one RAC simultaneously.

Leah Quesenberry, *Acting Field Manager, RGFO*

Shelf Road Campground - proposed campground fee increase

There are proposed recreation fee increases that the RAC supported with a resolution in April, 2009; they have not yet been approved. The fee increase must be approved by the REC RAC before they can be implemented but this cannot be completed until the vacant positions on the Rec RAC are filled.

Proposed Supplementary Rules for Arkansas River TMP

A Federal Register notice will be published on Friday, July 23 regarding the proposed supplementary rules for the Arkansas River Travel Management Program. There will be a 60-day comment period and then another notice for the Final Supplementary Rules will follow. Once the Final Rules are published, they can then be implemented and enforced.

New Elk Coal Lease

The New Elk Coal Lease Environmental Assessment (EA) was released for public comment on December 17, 2009. The proposal is to lease 1,279 acres of federal coal on an existing but inactive privately-owned coal mines. Comments from Wild Earth Guardians and EPA voiced concerns about the methane gas released into the atmosphere during mining operations. Bill Dvorak asked if the methane would be vented or flared. Greg Shoop ventured that it would be both. The BLM is looking at all means to capture methane. Chuck Rech asked if the applicant would be entering the existing coal mine and the answer is yes. BLM is in the process of re-drafting the EA to include responses to the comments.

Elevenmile Canyon (Bison) Environmental Assessment (EA)

The final draft of the Bison EA is being reviewed at the local level and will then be forwarded to the State Office for their review. The proposed decision will be in the final step of the EA which may be 30 days from now.

Destiny Mine EA

Completion of the Destiny Mine EA was postponed in order to conduct an analysis of the socioeconomic and environmental concerns and issues raised by the public during the public scoping period. Issues and concerns include potential negative impacts to property values, air and water quality, public safety, excessive noise and dust generation. The EA is going through the final edits and approval and is projected for release at the beginning of next month.

Mt. Princeton Geothermal Lease Parcel Sales

This is the first geothermal lease sale offered in Colorado. It has been deferred three times to allow adequate time for Tribal consultation, review of regulatory requirements, and to evaluate public comments. An informational web page should be available next week; a Determination of NEPA Adequacy (DNA) is scheduled for release the second week in September; and the parcels are scheduled to be included in the November 2010 oil and gas lease sales.

American Recovery and Rehabilitation Act (ARRA)

Several projects are currently being worked on including habitat improvement in Park County and the Park Center Well in Fremont County.

Youth Initiative

The youth initiative has been successful in the completion of several projects. They include: 60 Fountain Valley students providing several miles of trail maintenance in Beaver Creek; re-routing and rehabilitation of trails in the Salida area; Garden Park ACEC, and providing job opportunities to Salida area students.

Over The River Draft EIS

The Notice of Availability was published in the Federal Register on July 16 and officially established the beginning of the 45-day comment period. Four public meetings will be held: Cañon City on August 9, Salida on August 10, Cotopaxi on August 1, and Denver on August 11. The draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is available on CD or hard copy from the Royal Gorge Field Office in Cañon City. The RAC will hold a special meeting on August 19 in Cañon City to discuss this proposal.

Bruce Rittenhouse, Associate Center Manager, San Luis Valley Public Lands Center (SLVPLC)

Garcia Trespass Case

Last August, a Federal Court judge ruled that Kenny Garcia was in violation of the Taylor Grazing Act and sentenced him with the following: Garcia's livestock is not permitted to enter BLM lands; he has to provide adequate watering systems; fined \$500; and construct a five-mile long fence on private land, contingent on private landowner approval, to prevent his cattle from going into the river. BLM was ordered to purchase the fencing materials. There were delays in the arrival of the materials and when they did arrive, it was late enough in the year that Garcia had to wait until spring to begin construction. The fence should be completed sometime this summer.

Domestic Sheep EIS for 13 allotments

The SLVPLC is in the process of preparing a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an EIS for grazing permit renewals on 13 allotments for domestic sheep in the south valley. A decision was made to prepare an analysis to cover all the permit renewals rather than an individual analysis for each due to the commonality of the issues. The NOI is currently under review at the State Office and a briefing is scheduled with the State Director. The key issue is the potential of disease transferring from domestic sheep to wild bighorn sheep. RAC members received a map of the sheep allotments in the San Luis Resource Area.

Rio Grande Natural Area Advisory Council

This Council is under the Rio Grande Natural Area and is a nine member commission composed of; 1) member of the BLM representing the CO State Director, 2) Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge manager, 3) CO Division of Water Resources, 4) CO Division of Wildlife, 5) Rio Grande Water Conservation District, and 6) four members at large. The three state members of the commission are recommended by the Governor. This commission will advise the Secretary of Interior on the management of both federal and private lands within the natural area. The focus is on the restoration and preservation of biological resources in this area. The federal plan has already been completed (Rio Grande Corridor Plan, 2000) and will require a Resource Management Plan amendment. The commission is to prepare a plan for the non-federal lands in the natural area. The management plan for non-federal lands will be approved by the Secretary. A solicitation has been completed to recruit the four at-large members. The nomination period closed on July 12 and seven nominations were received. Recommended names will soon be sent to Greg Shoop to forward to the State Office.

ARRA Update

Most BLM projects are completed or are in the final stages with the exception of the Zapata Falls Campground construction project, which is scheduled to begin in the next couple of weeks. The SLVPLC will meet all the deadlines.

Dan Dallas, Center Manager, San Luis Valley Public Lands Center

Dallas re-iterated the importance of the issue of domestic vectors of disease to bighorn sheep. Future decisions may set precedence in BLM.

The wetlands program is technically under the Saguache Field Office but managed at the La Jara Field Office (LJFO). The program is in the process of shifting over to the LJFO through a delegation of authority.

SAN LUIS VALLEY INTERAGENCY FIRE ORGANIZATION, Jim Jaminet, US Forest Service/BLM Fire Management Officer

The current Agency line officers are: Art Hutchinson, National Park Service; Dan Dallas, FS and BLM; and Mike Blenden, Fish & Wildlife Service. There are nine voting members that oversee 2.5-3 million acres in the San Luis Valley. They are hoping to eventually increase the number of staff. The Colorado State Forest Service has loaned them a fire engine, which is currently stationed at the Sand Dunes. They assisted with the Medano Fire, which is currently at 6,200 acres. Firefighters battled rough terrain to create a fire line around the fire. The fire has been downgraded to a Type 3 fire. The Sand Dunes and Mosca Trail are open but Medano Pass Road remains closed.

RENEWABLE ENERGY UPDATE, Joseph Vieira, Renewable Energy Team Leader

Joe gave an overview of the duties and responsibilities of the Renewable Energy Team. They are a new group located in Monte Vista and will be supervised by the Front Range District Manager. The team includes a project manager, NEPA environmental coordinator, realty specialist, archaeologist, and a wildlife biologist. The team's focus is to develop a clean renewable energy future using wind, solar, and geothermal power. They will be evaluating allocations and developing stipulations for solar energy; providing case management for rights of

way on wind energy; and developing geothermal scope of work. A copy of the BLM Solar Energy Interim Rental Policy was distributed to the RAC members.

OLD SPANISH TRAIL, *Angie Krall, Archaeologist, Rio Grande NF*

Angie gave a presentation on the investigation and restoration of the Old Spanish Trail. The trail originally ran from Santa Fe, NM to Los Angeles, CA. Metal detection has led to the finding of artifacts. The project is continuing with historical research, a pedestrian survey, metal detecting, artifacts analysis, and working with local informants to help understand how to better manage the trail. *Artifacts are protected under the Antiquities Act of 1906 and illegal removal is punishable under this law.*

SANGRE de CRISTO NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA, *Joe Mestas, Conejos County Conejos County Commissioner Joe Mestas and Felix Lopez*

The concept of the Sangre de Cristo Natural Heritage Area (NHA) began in 2001 with public meetings and the creation of a steering committee. Congress designated the Sangre de Cristo NHA in March 2009 in recognition of the rich natural resources, variety of recreational opportunities, and unparalleled history of the San Luis Valley. The National Heritage area covers more than 3,000 square miles including the counties of Alamosa, Conejos, and Costilla, the Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge, the Baca National Wildlife Refuge, and the Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve. The Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area Board of Directors is working to protect and revitalize heritage resources, strengthen community and enhance quality of life, foster education and communication, stimulate economic development and tourism, and build organization capacity to support the NHA.

BLANCA AREA OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN (ACEC), *Jill Lucero and Sue Swift Miller, Wetlands Biologists, La Jara Field Office*

The Blanca Wetlands were designated as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) for its wildlife and recreation values, specifically fishing and watchable wildlife opportunities. There are roughly 13,600 acres in the Blanca Wetlands Area that are BLM owned; 2,500 acres are in over 200 intensively managed wetland basins. Forty-three artisan wells are the primary water sources but also included are 800-acre feet of closed basin mitigation water with additional water available from the Colorado Division of Wildlife, if needed. The area is a popular birding site and has been designated as an Audubon “Important Bird Area” in Colorado. It also provides waterfowl hunting, limited small game and elk hunting, 24 cold and warm water fishing ponds, and moderate use hiking/biking trails. Educational tours are offered annually, primarily during the closed season; February 15 to July 15. The BLM is continuing monitoring, research, and science efforts through salinity, groundwater, geomorphologic, hydrology, and soils studies. It is hoped that in the future that the South San Luis Lakes can be acquired from the Nature Conservancy to further the boundaries of the Blanca Wetlands.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

An optional field trip to the McIntire/Simpson Wetlands was offered after the meeting was adjourned.

Thursday, July 22, 2010

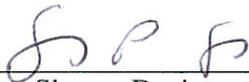
Field Trips

BLANCA WETLANDS, *Jill Lucero and Sue Swift Miller, Wetlands Biologists, La Jara Field Office*

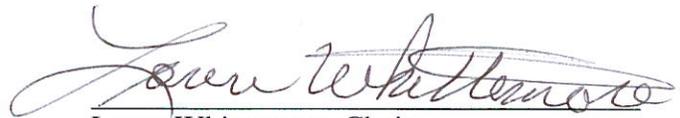
The RAC was given a tour of the Blanca Wetlands to see firsthand the ongoing work and accomplishments in the efforts. Several stops were made to view the playa lakes, ponds, marshes and wet meadows. Several species of waterfowl, rabbits, and insects were observed.

SUNPOWER SOLAR FACILITY, *Joseph Vieira, Renewable Energy Team Leader*

Sunpower Solar Company officials and local officials gave a presentation on the construction of the new Sunpower Solar Facility in Mosca, CO, highlighting the economic benefits to the local community and the utilization of a clean alternative energy source. The RAC was then given a tour of the solar facility that is in the process of construction.



Gregory Shoop, Designated Federal Officer
Front Range District Office
Bureau of Land Management



Loren Whittemore, Chair
Front Range Resource Advisory Council