



United States Department of the Interior

Bureau of Land Management
3170 East Main Street
Cañon City, Colorado 81212



FRONT RANGE RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING CANON CITY, COLORADO January 25, 2007

MINUTES

ATTENDEES

GROUP 1

Virginia Patton
Jim Coleman
Gene King
Keary Hallack
Charles Rech

GROUP 2

Donna Murphy
Aaron Clark
Tom Olson
Lucy Bambrey

GROUP 3

Francis Matthews
Michael Bush
Loren Whittemore
Al Trujillo

GUESTS: Charlotte Bobicki, Senator Salazar's Alamosa Office, Doris Morgan, Senator Allard's Pueblo Office and Richard Skorman, Senator Salazar's Colorado Springs Office

BLM/USFS PERSONNEL: Roy Masinton, Jim Rhett, Linda McGlothlen, Ken Smith, Leah Quesenberry, Dave Walker, Erik Brekke, Joe Vieira, Barb Sharrow, Cora Whisenhunt and Helen Crow

PUBLIC COMMENT:

No public comment.

MANAGERS UPDATE:

San Luis Valley Issues; Jim Rhett:

Personnel Changes - Peter Clark, the Rio Grande National Forest Supervisor / San Luis Center Manager, retired January 2, 2007. Jim Rhett is temporarily acting in his place until February when Dianne Chung will be detailed into the position until it is filled. Dianne currently works for the Forest Service and has previous BLM management experience.

Tom Goodwin, Saguache Field Manager, was recently detailed to the Forest Service Regional Office as a Human Resource Officer. Gary Snell is the acting Saguache Field Manager. Mark Sweeney will fill in behind Gary as acting Range Conservation Lead until he returns to his position.

BLM Director, Kathleen Clarke, will retire February 2, 2007. U.S. Forest Service Chief, Dale Bosworth, is also retiring February 2, 2007. Gail Kimbell, who spent part of her career as the Forest Supervisor in Pueblo, will succeed him.

Service First - Jim recently attended a meeting with the new Great Sand Dunes Superintendent, Art Hutchinson, regarding Service First. Three years ago, Congress reauthorized Service First to

include the National Park Service and Fish and Wildlife Service. These agencies will not be part of Service First to the same extent as BLM and FS; however, the Valley agencies are exploring ways to share resources. The July Resource Advisory Council (RAC) meeting in the Valley may be held at the Great Sand Dunes National Park.

The Rio Grande Natural Area Act established a commission to perform specified functions relating to the Natural Area. The Commission consists of nine individuals appointed by the Secretary of the Interior, of whom one must represent the BLM Colorado State Director, one must be a specified Federal employee, three must be appointed on the recommendation of the Governor of Colorado to represent various Colorado governmental entities, and four must be knowledgeable local citizens to represent the general public. BLM may have a lead role.

Travel Management Plan –Mark Sweeney is in the process of getting the BLM draft Travel Management Plan to the State Office. Internal comments are expected back in about three weeks. The draft will be released to the public about May.

The new Valley Transportation Specialist, John Murphy, is the Recreation Program Lead in Monte Vista for both the BLM and Forest Service. He expects to have the Forest Service draft plan out towards the end of February.

Roy Masinton, Royal Gorge Field Manager:

Landscape Health and NEPA Training – There will be a healthy landscape training and a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) training for the 3 Colorado RACs. This is optional for the RAC members and will tentatively be 1 1/2 days during the week of March 19 in the Salida area. Barb Sharrow is working with the CSU Extension Office in Delta, to put on the training.

New Charter Format - GSA and the Dept. of the Interior are requesting all Interior charters be streamlined to 3 pages or less. The excess information being pulled from the charters will be compiled into a Standard Operating Procedure document; this document will be reviewed by the Solicitor's office and does not require the Secretary's signature. There could possibly be draft copies for the March or May meeting, however it is doubtful there will be much opportunity to comment.

Recreation RACs - The U.S. Forest Service has not selected the Recreation RAC yet. They have nominees for all the categories except “State Tourism Representative” and can not make selections on any of the positions until they have nominees for all the categories.

RAC Nomination Period – The 45 day nomination period is expected to begin in March. Front Range RAC members whose terms end this year are:

Jim Coleman – Grazing
 Donna Murphy – Environmental Groups
 Dusty Yaeger – Dispersed Recreation
 (vacant position) – Elected Official
 Michael Bush – Public at Large

Over the River - RGFO staff has been meeting with the Over the River representatives to work on an MOU. The MOU is critical, as it lays out the process for the third party contractor. It is expected BLM will receive the 800+ page Proposal from them in another month or two.

Cooper Mountain Land Exchange – BLM is about to close on this acquisition. The land being disposed of is totally landlocked and difficult to manage. BLM is acquiring land that was formally owned by the Chess family.

Grazing Permittee – The grazing permit for the Eleven Mile Canyon Allotment, east of Hwy 9 and south of Colorado Hwy 24 in Park County, is up for renewal. They run cattle and bison, have a history of trespass and there has been controversy with the adjoining neighbors because of their livestock getting loose. BLM has talked to them about tighter control, which has resulted in some changes being made to the fence. No decision has been made on the permit renewal yet. Some newspaper coverage and perhaps congressional inquiries are expected.

Heath Right of Way – BLM has been processing this right of way request for approximately ten years in Boulder County. BLM has authorized an access trail to his property on the side of a hill, which Mr. Heath is appealing. He claimed BLM and Boulder County were trying to take his land. He filed a complaint that BLM did not release all the documents he was entitled to under his Freedom of Information Act request. The Office of Inspector General did an investigation and found that Mr. Heath received everything that he requested in the FOIA. There was no evidence to substantiate the claim that BLM and Boulder County were trying to take his land. A hearing is scheduled for Feb. 14th. BLM has made a 2nd settlement offer.

PRESENTATIONS:

Energy Projects in the San Luis Valley:

Keary Hallack - RAC Member, Xcel Energy Transmission Group employee briefed the Council on energy projects in the San Luis Valley.

Central Solar (also known as the Alamosa Power Plant) is located 20 miles north of Alamosa. Xcel is partnering with SunEdison on the plant, and will purchase the power from them. The plant will be rated at 8 megawatts (MW), making it the largest solar photovoltaic (PV) power station in the United States. Construction will begin as soon as the Colorado Public Utilities Commission gives regulatory approval for the plant.

The San Luis Valley has the highest solar energy resources in Colorado. The Valley's peak load comes mid-day, which is great for solar power, because that's when solar generates. Wind turbines would not be as successful in the Valley as they can only operate during wind gusts between 7- 56 mph. From a land use prospective, the solar power stations require a lot of acreage. There are issues with bird nests and visual issues.

All renewable resource facilities require transmission. Managers of public lands should be anticipating the needs for right-of-ways where renewable resources will start to be utilized. Because of growth, existing lines are starting to get maxed out and construction of new lines is highly controversial. All citing issues in the state are dealt with on the local level.

BLM – Colorado Recreation Strategy:

Barb Sharrow - Uncompahgre Field Manager, Chair of Strategy Team.

The Strategy Team, has been working on the draft for approximately two years. The plan has changed considerably due to the input from the various stakeholders. State Director, Sally Wisely would like to sign the Strategy by the end of February. It will be presented to each of the three RACs. Sally wants to take the Strategy to Washington in early March to get some more support. After it is signed, local offices will look at the Strategy and decide how it will work for their areas.

During 1999-2000 the three RACs worked together on the Recreation Guidelines. It was signed in 2000 by the State Director (Ann Morgan). Those Guidelines still stand. The new Strategy does not diminish that work; it will hopefully take it a step further. The Guidelines mostly involve on-the-ground projects. The Strategy is tiered to the National Strategy and provides strategic direction for applying recreation objectives in recreation planning and everyday recreation operations.

The SW RAC met last week. They also reviewed the BLM's Colorado Recreation Strategy. Barb would like all comments by February 15, 2007. There may be a conference call with Barb on this subject after the comments have been considered. Ken will let everyone know if a call is going to take place.

Aaron Clark made a motion for a resolution stating that the RAC supports the general concept but would like to see the next draft document after the comments have been taken into consideration and before it is signed by the State Director. After some discussion, the following Resolution was drafted and reintroduced by Aaron.

The Front Range Resource Advisory Council supports the concept of the "Recreation and Visitor Services Strategy for Colorado's Public Lands," but would like to see items such as the Standards for Public Land Health, stewardship of the resources and public education identified as important considerations in the Strategy. The RAC would also like the opportunity to review the Strategy again before it is finalized.

Gene King seconded the motion. The resolution passed unanimously.

La Jara Creek Trespass:

Jim Rhett - Associate San Luis Valley Public Lands Center Manager

The trespass involves a corner of BLM land that has private land on two sides. La Jara Creek runs through it and has a lot of willows. Nearby lands are being developed for a vacation home subdivision and the developers set boulders into the Creek to create a dam (presumably for fishing). About a ¼ mile of the project was on BLM, however they didn't check with BLM before starting. The developer was apologetic and agreed to pay BLM's fines, rehab fees, etc.

Damage was not terribly extensive. BLM specialists will monitor it through the spring and nesting season and hopefully by summer it will be rehabilitated.

BLM has been working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service because of endangered species. At this point they are considering pursuing legal action. BLM does not anticipate seeking legal action

since it does not appear that any serious harm was done. The Corp of Engineers was not involved. It is estimate that reclamation work will total around \$46,000 (the price includes some fencing to be done by the developer). The BLM also received a right of way from the developer.

South Park Land Tenure Adjustment Amendment:

Joe Vieira – RGFO, Natural Resource Specialist

The purpose of the Plan is to amend BLM's current Land Use Plan to re-identify those lands in Park County that will be retained as public lands managed by BLM and those that may be disposed to other ownership. New information has come up since the Land Use Plan was written in 1996.

As part of the amendment process, resource values and parcels were ranked. Parcel ranking was based on a number of factors including: Mountain Plover and wetlands, elk and bighorn sheep habitat, riparian habitat, adjacent to open space lands, public interest, etc. This information was used to perform a cumulative rank and weighted rank.

BLM briefed the Park County Commissioners and had a public meeting in Fairplay on December 13, 2006. Two weeks ago, the County Commissioners held a public meeting to gather comments that they will forward to BLM. As a result of public request, the public comment period was extended until March 1.

The general public does not have legal access to many of the BLM parcels. In some cases, the parcels are landlocked inside private land. Some of the parcels are as small as 20 acres and some as large as 700 acres. A large number of negative comments have been received from people who are upset that BLM is getting rid of the open space in their backyard. The intention is to get rid of parcels that do not have legal public access. BLM will maintain the subsurface mineral rights of those parcels.

Depending on the type of value associated with the lands, there may be stipulations that are attached to the parcel and anyone acquiring it would need to agree to those stipulations to protect the special values. Sometimes Conservation easements are used.

Arkansas River Travel Management Plan update:

Dave Walker – Outdoor Recreation Planner.

The Colorado Mountain Club (CMC) wanted the names of the alternatives changed in the Arkansas River EA. The alternatives are named high, moderate and low. The CMC felt that the names didn't describe the level of use. They would prefer that the alternative names describe the setting and experience. After consideration, it was found that any one name wouldn't fit every action. Descriptive names are always going to be inaccurate in some cases. Dave Walker is recommending naming them A, B, C and D. Descriptions of each one will be included in the document.

The roads and trails that BLM is considering reopening were open prior to 1990. Roads and trails which were open prior to 1990 are considered existing versus user created. No user created roads will be reopened.

The Comprehensive Travel Management Planning and OHV Designations memorandum and the Arkansas River TMP handout were discussed.

The next meeting is Wednesday, March 21, 2007

The meeting was adjourned.

Roy L. Masinton
Royal Gorge Field Manager
Bureau of Land Management

Loren R. Whittemore
Chairman
Front Range Resource Advisory Council