



United States Department of the Interior

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



FRONT RANGE RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL MINUTES April 22, 2009

Category 1

Charles Wm. Rech
Gene King
Virginia Patton
Jim Coleman

Category 2

Donna Murphy
Aaron Clark

Category 3

Loren Whittemore
Michael Bush
Al Trujillo
John Stevenson

ATTENDEES: Roy Masinton/Royal Gorge Field Manager and Designated Federal Officer, Bruce Rittenhouse/San Luis Valley Public Lands Center Associate Manager, Cass Cairns/Front Range RAC Coordinator, Shelley Freer/Front Range RAC Administrative Assistant

GUESTS: Michael Holmquist representing Congressman Lamborn's office; Dan and Jewel Ainsworth, Jim and Karen Barton, Connie Rogers and Cathey Young representing ROAR; Kelly Smith and Bruce Meighen representing EDAW; Ron Sering representing The Mountain Mail (Salida newspaper); Kathryn Wadsworth, Ann Oatman-Gardner representing Senator Bennet

INTRODUCTIONS AND OLD BUSINESS

All RAC members, attendees and guests introduced themselves after the meeting was called to order by Loren Whittemore at 9:20 a.m. Roy requested that all RAC members take one final look at Resolution – FFRAC 01-09 which recommends The Bank and Sand Gulch Campgrounds fee increase. There were no changes or clarifications to the resolution and the group agreed to it as written. A draft version of a thank-you letter to former employees and citizens who assisted the RAC was also approved. Christopher "Kit" Shy is still awaiting approval of his RAC nomination; he has re-applied along with many other applicants. Gene mentioned that they are looking for nominations for the Recreation RAC.

OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

A question was asked regarding the decision process of RAC nominations and selections. It was explained that names and write-ups are submitted to the BLM State Office; the Secretary of Interior makes the final decision which may take up to four or five months.

2009 FIRE SEASON OUTLOOK, *Ed Skerjanec/RGFO Fire Management Officer and Glenda Torres/RGFO Fire Natural Resource Specialist*

Ed distributed the current Energy Release Component (ERC) chart and explained how it is the best index for long-term fire severity based on temperature, humidity, cloud cover, precipitation,

and other factors. The fire severity level at this time is lower than the March level and is extremely improved over the last several months due to recent significant weather events. We are at 60% of our normal precipitation level for the current season and 85% normal for the last year. Ed also explained fire risks which included needles on dry trees as well as the need for proper mitigation to reduce hazardous fuels. There have been 34 fires covering approximately 7,000 acres since January, most of which were on private lands and Fort Carson. Funding for BLM and FS fire staff is normal this year. Charles inquired about the age of the current tanker fleet and Ed explained that they have grounded most of the old tankers from World War II and are inspecting the remaining tankers for quality and durability. Donna asked about the BLM coordination with Fremont and neighboring counties and Ed explained that they work closely with all county personnel regarding fire/burn restrictions on county and Federal lands.

Glenda informed the group about how they perform fire mitigation utilizing mechanical operations, hand thinning with saws, and prescribed fire. She provided handout information covering the RGFO 2009 fuels program projects within and outside the wildland urban interface (WUI). Projects within the WUI are priority. She pointed out the window of opportunity for prescribed burning projects are limited and dependent on several factors including weather conditions, fuels moisture and air quality. The RGFO has 940 acres targeted this year that includes a stewardship project and pile burning.

RAGS OVER THE ARKANSAS (ROAR) ON THE OVER THE RIVER PROPOSED PROJECT, *Dan Ainsworth/ROAR President*

Dan gave a PowerPoint presentation on behalf of ROAR. ROAR was formed in 1997 in an attempt to defeat the Over The River Project to protect people, ecology, wildlife, and the Arkansas River. Christo and Jean-Claude claim that this is a temporary project but ROAR feels that in actuality, it will be a 3-year event. ROAR believes that several major problems will occur if the project is approved: anchors will be drilled into concrete or existing rock which will harm the environment; the project will put a strain on local services including trash pick-up, emergency care and response, and law enforcement; and there will be increased county road use as well as the potential for numerous accidents along Highway 50. Other major concerns include the use of large heavy equipment during the construction phase that will obstruct the flow of traffic. According to ROAR, Christo claims there will be \$195 million revenue for our area but only about 8% will be given to the local economy. Most of the money will go to contractors, builders, and engineers out of the area who will work on the project.

Lucy requested that the RAC list this topic as an agenda item for the next meeting so that they can discuss the project and make a recommendation to management and potentially to the Secretary of the Interior.

GARDEN PARK AND SHAWS PARK TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PLAN EA ALTERNATIVES, *Leah Quesenberry/Outdoor Recreation Planner*

Leah informed the group about two parcels that were acquired through a land exchange with the City of Blackhawk in 2008. The Garden Park parcel is 320 acres and the Shaws Park parcel is 1,280 acres. BLM has issued a temporary closure to motorized vehicles until the travel management plan is completed. A draft Environmental Assessment (EA) has been developed by the BLM ID Team and was made available for a 30-day public review period which ended on April 13, 2009. Leah explained the various alternatives to the plan:

Alternative A – provides a motorized connection between Dinosaur Flats area and Seep Springs would allow a new trail connection into Seep Springs for ATVs, and would designate most of the routes in the Garden Park parcel for motorized use.

Alternative B – maximizes non-motorized recreation opportunities by designating all routes on the Seep Springs parcel for non-motorized use and most of the routes on the Garden Park parcel for non-motorized use.

Alternative C – would designate most of the routes in Shaws Park for non-motorized recreation, would allow a new trail connection into Seep Springs for ATVs, and would allow some motorized use on routes in the Garden Park parcel.

Primary concerns are protection of rare plants and fossil resources. BLM resource specialists are reviewing the comments and the ID Team will meet in May to consider comments and formulate the proposed action. EA/FONSI/DR should be completed in June and implementation will be in later summer/early fall.

MANAGERS UPDATE

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

Bruce began with a discussion on renewable energy and the possibility of solar generated power in the SLV. There are several projects in the works which they hope to reduce to four sites. Site specific analyses need to be completed before final decisions can be made.

Near the Town of Antonito in Conejos County, a railroad company is requesting assistance in obtaining a rail line and developing an industrial park 3000 feet to the east of Highway 285. A linear right-of-way could be a possible solution. This is an important winter range habitat location; therefore, it is unlikely the project will be approved.

Brian Garcia, new Law Enforcement Officer in the SLVPLC, has started his new job and is currently undergoing many training sessions to prepare him for his new duties.

Lucy expressed gratitude and thanked Bruce's staff as they volunteered to lead several field trips at a recent function.

Roy Masinton, Royal Gorge Field Office Manager (Designated Federal Officer)

Roy informed the RAC that council member Dusty Yaeger, who suffered a stroke last year, has formally resigned from the RAC. A selection will be made from this year's RAC nominations to finish out his term.

He announced the selection of the new Colorado Front Range District Manager (DM) Greg Shoop, who will arrive in late June. He will have both the Royal Gorge Field Office (RGFO) and the San Luis Valley Public Lands Center under his area of responsibility and his office will be in Cañon City. Mr. Shoop is currently a senior mineral leasing specialist in the BLM National Office in Washington, DC. Roy said the new DM will overlap with him for about a month

before he retires at the end of July. The new DM will likely become the new Designated Federal Official for the RAC.

Roy provided an update regarding the selection of a third-party contractor EDAW/AECOM and commencement of the Over The River (OTR) proposed project environmental impact statement (EIS). EDAW/AECOM has begun the development of the range of alternatives. Comments previously received will be considered and comments will be accepted anytime throughout the process, not just during formal comment periods. He explained that the RAC can provide their recommendation(s) considering information OTR provided through their presentation at the September 2008 RAC meeting and the presentation provided by ROAR today. However, he strongly advised that the RAC hold off making any resolutions (pro or con) until they have an opportunity to review the EIS and the range of alternatives.

The RAC held a lengthy discussion about OTR and it was decided that this topic will be discussed further at the next meeting in July. A sub-committee has been formed to develop discussion points and a list of concerns regarding the OTR project for discussion at the July meeting. Virginia, Chuck, John, and Lucy have agreed to serve on the sub-committee.

The July 15 meeting originally scheduled to be held at the SLVPLC will be held in Cañon City to allow for further discussion regarding OTR. The October 21 meeting will be held at the SLVPLC allowing the agenda to focus on management issues pertaining to the San Luis Valley.

A brief update regarding the Park Center Well noted that there have been no significant changes in the condition of the well. BLM has not secured funding at this time. A Statement of Work (SOW) to contract the plugging of the well has been done and the old well is expected to be plugged in June. A right-of-way permit for the Park Center Water District (PCWD) is currently being processed for the drilling of a new well. PCWD has been approved for a loan from the Colorado Water Conservation Board to drill a new well. PCWD is working on their SOW so they can put out a contract to drill the new well. The objective is to drill the new well concurrently with the plugging of the old well. The BLM may be able to buy back the new well if funding is secured in the future.

Rangeland management for the RGFO includes administering 480 grazing permits/leases. All have been renewed except 90, which will be renewed by the end of this fiscal year. The Elevenmile Allotment EA (aka Bison EA) located in Park County is included in those to be renewed this year. Initial scoping was conducted in 2007. The permittee requested additional bison grazing on parcels currently authorized for cattle only so additional scoping was conducted earlier this year. Comments received will be in the draft EA.

The RGFO will conduct public land health assessments on 40 individual allotments (25,000 acres) this fiscal year to ensure conformance with standards for public land health.

The BLM received an application from El Paso Exploration and Production in February of this year to establish a gas exploratory unit called the Ball Hill Unit in Park County. The Unit falls within the boundaries of the towns of Hartsel, Fairplay and Jefferson. The Unit will be comprised of 37,000 acres, 48% Federal minerals, 40% State minerals and 12% private lands.

Within six months after the Unit Agreement is approved a test well will be drilled on State minerals. Production from the Unit is not expected in the near future.

The South Park Land Tenure Environmental Assessment (EA) 60-day Governor's consistency review and 30-day protest period have been completed. No protests were filed and the BLM State Director will be the authorizing official for the final decision. This EA amends the current RGFO Resource Management Plan by increasing BLM land retention in Park County from 12% to 63%, decreasing exchange-restricted lands from 68% to 30%, and decreasing land disposal from 20% to 6%.

Roy concluded with an update on the Arkansas River Travel Management Plan (TMP) implementation work in the Upper Arkansas Valley. He noted some of the closures of user-created routes, volunteer assistance from the Quiet Use Coalition in building fences, installation of signs, and other work in the Castle Gardens area. He also noted the RGFO received a letter from the Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area Citizen's Task Force requesting the re-opening of the Stockyard Road closed by the TMP. He further explained that this was not possible because the road is within a Union Pacific Railroad right-of-way and the BLM does not have administrative jurisdiction to provide that access.

OVERVIEW OF FEBRUARY 2009 STATEWIDE RAC MEETING, *Loren Whittemore/RAC Chair and Cass Cairns/RAC Coordinator*

Loren provided a short brief of the 3-day Statewide RAC meeting in February. Most of the council members were able to attend. The BLM Colorado State Office has created a Web site with the posting of the meeting's agenda and links to documents and PowerPoint presentations given at the meeting. Cass provided the Web address so members could review the material if desired. (www.blm.gov/co/st/en/BLM_Resources/2009_colorado_joint.html)

STATEWIDE RAC PROPOSED RESOLUTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION (SOCIAL SCIENCE CAPABILITIES AND AIR QUALITY), *Loren Whittemore/RAC Chair and Michael Bush/RAC member*

Two resolutions were drafted by a committee represented by each geographic RAC during the Statewide RAC meeting. Each geographic area RAC was asked to discuss the proposed resolutions at their upcoming meetings for consideration as a possible resolution under their geographic area. Both proposed resolutions cover common issues that all BLM managers face during the process of land management decisions.

The first resolution is a recommendation to strengthen the BLM's social science capabilities in the social and economic analysis of the decision making process. More information regarding this resolution proposal is forthcoming so the council tabled it for further discussion at a future RAC meeting.

The second proposed resolution is a recommendation to develop a coordinated, timely, effective approach to air quality analysis and management. Several questions were asked by the group and a lengthy discussion was held on whether or not this resolution was actually needed and if so, how it should be revised. Roy recommended that the group table the resolution to the next meeting and they agreed. Aaron and Chuck will talk with their local contacts to assist in determining if the resolution is necessary.

**CHARTER AND STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES REVIEW, Loren
Whittemore/RAC Chair**

The group reviewed these items prior to the meeting and there were no comments or changes.

Loren Whittemore adjourned the meeting at 3:30 p.m.



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



Loren Whittemore, Chair
Front Range Resource Advisory Council