

Southwest Resource Advisory Council (RAC)

Minutes of Meeting on Friday, December 12, 2003
Ridgeway State Park
Ridgeway Reservoir

9:15 a.m. Mark Stiles began the meeting with introductions.

Attendees:

<u>BLM:</u>		<u>RAC Members:</u>	
Mark Stiles - DFO		Don Cardin	Nik Kendziorski
Duane Spencer		Mallory Dimmitt	Andrea Robinsong
Jim Sazama		John Field	Alan Staehle
Steven Hall		Andy Gulliford	David Ubell
Lynn Lewis		Ann McCoy Harold	Kathy Welt
Desty Dyer		Howard Heath	Kelly Wilson

Guests:

Rhonda Palmer	Ridgeway State Park Officer
Mark Pierson	Director, San Juan Citizens Alliance
Dan Larson	Government & Public Affairs officer for BP
Jeff Stitler	BP
Craig Meese	Cordillerian ??Nepa Survey ****, ****

Dave Ubell opened noting several land management related news releases. Mark Stiles determined there was a quorum. Mark also announced the anticipated arrival of guest speakers later in the meeting. He briefed the RAC on the status of the hiring process for the BLM Uncompahgre Field Office manager position at Montrose and the Department of Interior FY05 budget appropriations. He noted the continuing diminishing budgeting funds expected for BLM.

Rhonda Palmer was introduced and spoke about the Ridgeway State Park, its functions, and recent park attendance records for 2002 and 2003, especially noting that the fires and drought of 2002 were a factor in reducing both attendance and quality of experience. She also answered questions about fees.

Mark Stiles gave a summary of both USFS and BLM fee demos, particularly mentioning current bills being debated that encompass issues known to be controversial. The RAC did discuss this topic. Andy Gulliford then asked Mark to address the newly signed "Healthy Forest" law. Mark outlined the effects of the law mostly in regard to USFS management, but did note that there it impinges on BLM management decisions, also.

Andy Gulliford gave some pertinent facts about a national register nomination near Animas Forks that involves a federal/private trade with several private land-owners and the BLM as interested parties. Mark said he would review this matter and have comments available at the next RAC meeting.

OLD BUSINESS

David Ubell expressed thanks to Mallory Dimmitt for writing the RAC response letter to the draft Sage-Grouse Plan.

Andy Gulliford spoke to the need for an “information package” to provide to RAC members. He was particularly interested in providing a map of the public lands for which the RAC provides counsel. There was some discussion about this need, and Mark agreed that it would benefit the RAC.

Discussion took place regarding protocol for taking of the minutes of a RAC meeting and Mark explained that it had to be a federal agent taking the minutes. There was also a discussion regarding recent memos having the subject of roads on public lands. Mark provided an explanation of federal laws from the beginning of federal land management (especially in the western states) to the present time.

Mark Stiles outlined the purpose and intent of both “Wilderness Study” and “Wilderness” Areas and new policy for related land-use-plans (LUP). Duane Spencer listed particular areas now being considered by Colorado BLM for LUP updates. There was discussion including a conclusion that there is a possibility of designating new Wilderness Study areas before current Colorado Congressman Scott McGinnis retires.

Jim Sazama explained a fact-sheet hand out regarding new grazing rule proposals. During the discussion that followed there were a few questions raised which were answered by both Jim and Mark. Jim expressly clarified the BLM intent to monitor effects of grazing pertaining to rangeland health while giving attention to social and cultural issues. There was some modest debate about BLM receiving comment on the “day-to-day” management decisions.

Note: Guests arrived at about 11:00 a.m.

Mark Stiles gave a presentation on the proposed Silverton Ski Area. He explained current operations and presented the proposed expansion. Questions about BLM liabilities were raised and discussed. Mark noted that an EIS is being written by a private contractor to address an expansion from 80 skiers to 400 skiers per day.

12:00 – 12:45 Lunch

Introduction of Guests by Mark Stiles

Duane Spencer, Branch Chief of Fluid Minerals – BLM Colorado State Office, outlined EPCA with a focus on round 1 of 4 rounds expected. He gave results of the round 1 study with a view toward Colorado reserves, and noted that they are available in detail on the internet. He then handed out three hard copies and several CD computer disks with the same information as the hard copy. He also summarized results for the SW Colorado area for which this RAC has interest. He mentioned BLM has a fairly aggressive

schedule to update certain LUP's. There was discussion about national use of natural gas reserves related to reserves available.

Jeff Stitler of BP gave a presentation on oil & gas production in SW Colorado. He commented on newspaper editorials regarding the Bush administration wanting streamlining in which the editorial expressed opinions that such streamlining would simply lead to industry "run-amuck". He argued that these interpretations could not be further from the truth, noting that the streamlining is meant to run reviews of separate agencies concurrently (to introduce processing efficiencies) rather than to "ditch" regulatory requirements. He entertained questions and was asked several questions about water & air quality, number of holes in projected drilling expansions, archeological surveys, and the Paradox drilling project. He described water disposal methods, exhaust emissions controls, the 10K hole coal-bed methane project, the cultural survey with regard to the permitting process, and explained that BP is not involved in the Paradox drilling project. He also added that BP is the "biggest player" in Colorado natural gas production and listed other Colorado "players" as well.

Craig Meese of Cordillerian spoke about the environmental study process with regard to oil & gas leasing and permitting. He provided additional insight to the issue of water quality and water disposal.

Mark Pierson, Director of SJCA, noted that the organization he represents has about 500 members, and that the SJCA exists to monitor oil & gas development on public and private land so that private land owner concerns can be embodied. He included rural developments as those needing to have their rights protected. He explained that the goals of SJCA are accomplished primarily through county laws and regulations. He outlined several instances where SJCA believed industry had "run-amuck" and implied that BLM could not possibly have enough inspectors to enforce their regulations, especially with additional holes projected to be drilled. He described complaints registered by the grazing community, and made it clear that the greatest annoyance coming from the presence of the oil and gas industry was noise (which is mostly expressed by rural residents). He also mentioned the presence of methane in domestic well water, property devaluations, poor air quality, coal outcrop fires, and methane seepage to surface. He articulated a preference to working with BLM Colorado, expressing his opinion that they "do a better job" in comparison to BLM New Mexico. Finally, he offered hope that horizontal drilling technology would serve to alleviate some surface disturbances in the future. Kathy Welt asked about the SJCA status of offenses they list concerning the oil & gas industry with regard to age of wells, size of operations, and current procedures. Mark said many offenses of the past are contemporary today.

The RAC then briefly discussed possibilities of solving problems. Dan Larson addressed air quality issues. He said that data for the entire region is being gathered for the purpose of implementing an air quality model, and will include all sources of emissions from coal plants to automobiles. He insisted that it would not be fair to impose higher standards of emission controls on the oil and gas industry than currently existing standards, before that

data is modeled. He implied that it is possible that the oil & gas industry emissions may not be a significant contributor to regional air pollution.

There was some discussion about water quality and the costs of water treatment. The BP representatives noted that water can be treated to the point of being available for domestic use; however, the cost for current technology prohibits that option. Generally the water is also too poor quality for agricultural use. Mallory brought up the issue of fragmenting the wildlife habitat and Kathy Welt asked what constitutes fragmenting.

2:15 p.m. Break – end of Industry presentation and all guests excused themselves.

Mark Stiles presented the North Basin proposed drilling area near Durango. He outlined the EIS process and explained that the proposal called for about 293 holes with 56 being located on USFS managed lands in the H.D. Mountains. He said that USFS roadless issues would introduce complicated issues. He also suggested that the BLM & USFS management would better function as a “judge of available information” hence making a higher quality decision if they were perceived by the public as “not owning” the proposed drilling project. To achieve this, he described a process whereby the RAC could be set forth as the body gathering public comments on the project and consolidating them for presentation to the federal agencies.

The RAC raised questions and discussed the matter at length. Eventually Alan Staehle made a motion that a subcommittee of the RAC be formed to gather public comments on the North Basin EIS with the charge that they bring them to the full RAC to be consolidated for presentation to BLM. His motion included naming Lon Abadie, Nik Kendziorski, and Ann McCoy Harold to the subcommittee. The motion had a second and passed unanimously.

Black Canyon presentation was dropped from the Agenda.

The February meeting was set for Friday, February 20, 2004 in Silverton. The Topic will be roads.

Meeting was adjourned by David Ubell at 3:45 p.m.