

**Southwest Resource Advisory Council  
MEETING MINUTES  
Friday, August 8, 2008  
Chipeta Sun Lodge  
Ridgway, CO**

**ATTENDEES**

**Resource Advisory Council Members**

Nik Kendziorski

Kathy Welt

Andy Gulliford

Bill Ela

Betsy Marston

Jevin Croteau

Jim Cochran

Kelly Wilson

Dan Morse

Ken Emory

Al Heaton

Alan Staehle

Andrea Robinsong

Gerald Koppenhafer

**BLM/FS Staff**

Barb Sharrow

Karen Tucker

Barb Hill

Kenny McDaniel

Mark Stiles

**Visitors**

Dick Miller

Gary Dawes

Ann Harold

Andy Trehorne

Trudy Kareus

**Representing**

Escalante Ranch

Citizen

Senator Allard

Senator Allard

Senator Salazar

**Town/City**

Delta, CO

Ridgway, CO

Durango, CO

Grand Junction, CO

Grand Junction, CO

**Opening Remarks**

Chair Kathy Welt called the meeting to order at 9:08 a.m. There was a round of introductions. Today's attendance constitutes a quorum.

Barb Sharrow explained that BLM has gone to a new government travel payment system (called "Gov Trip") and that there are still some problems with the system. RAC members have not yet been reimbursed for their last travel. She asked RAC members to let her know when they did receive their reimbursement. Barb discussed the new financial system BLM will be implementing in the fall ("FBMS"). The new 3-tier organization for BLM Colorado has been approved by the Washington office. Colorado BLM has 2 years from the date of approval to implement the new 3-tier organization. BLM will be advertising three new District Manager positions. The new organization should have no effect on the RAC because it will still include the same southwest Colorado area of the Uncompahgre Field Office (FO), Gunnison FO, and San Juan Public Lands Center.

Ken Emory is on the statewide Recreation RAC. He updated the SW RAC on recent activity. Any BLM fee proposals in the southwest RAC area will go to SW RAC then the statewide Recreation RAC.

### **Field Manager Updates:**

**Gunnison Field Office (GFO)** – Kenny McDaniel – There have been several personnel changes in the GFO recently. A new Archaeologist has been hired that has lots of experience in restoring and stabilizing historic structures. The GFO will also be hiring a Hydrologist, Administrative Assistant and another Wildlife Biologist. Grazing permit renewals continue to be challenging. A Range Specialist has been brought in from Vale, OR on a detail to help with renewals. The GFO is mandated to have all permits renewed by end of 2009, but they may get an extension. The GFO has submitted all of their analysis for the joint travel plan to the Forest Service. The draft travel plan should be out this fall. The same is true of the Alpine Loop plan.

**Uncompahgre Field Office (UFO)** – Barb Sharrow - There have been several wildfires this season, with one being a very successful fire use fire. The UFO has also had several personnel changes. They've hired a new fuels person, a new Wildlife Biologist, a new Recreation person, a new minerals person and a new Administrative Assistant. The draft for the Dry Creek route to route travel plan should be out in September. The UFO is working with Ouray County and the Forest Service to make sure public roads stay public, as they have been having some issues with access to mining claims and also private people wanting to close access to public roads.

**San Juan Public Lands Center (SJPLC) and Canyons of the Ancients National Monument (CANM)** – Mark Stiles – The SJPLC is doing a supplement to the draft San Juan Land Use Plan EIS. The draft has to be out to the public for 90 days of review time. An additional 180 proposed gas wells were added this year and there are concerns because the modeling indicates that air quality standards will be violated. Gas wells are also being proposed in the CANM and will be problematic in terms of cultural resources. BLM can't approve them under Section 106 of the under the National Historic Preservation Act.

Biological staff did some hummingbird banding this year. The SJPLC is concerned about climate change and taking a proactive approach by adding analysis in the SJPLC plan. There have been several personnel changes in the SJPLC as well. Mark has been trying to fill FS/BLM Associate Field Manager position for a year. Howard Sargent, who vacated the position about a year ago for a position in Utah, died unexpectedly this summer. The District Ranger in the Columbine unit will move into Durango to head up travel management. Mark is also bringing in the Paonia District Ranger, Levi Broyles, on a two month detail, and has filled two new law enforcement positions and some positions in the mineral staff.

**Gunnison Gorge NCA** – Karen Tucker - Karen handed out a copy of the newspaper put out by the Park Service and BLM for the Black Canyon, Curecanti and the Gunnison Gorge NCA. The Gorge provides outstanding rafting opportunities and has miles of Gold Medal trout streams. The Gorge's highest visitation is usually in June. The Flat Top/Peach Valley area has visitation from all over the world. There are trails for ATVs, motorcycles, horseback riding and mountain biking, as well as hiking. They have started using recycled steel covered by vinyl decal signs instead of wood signs. They have upgraded all trailheads. The travel management study on the

East side is looking at elk migration impacts on Sage Grouse. A 4-day bat study with BLM, US Fish & Wildlife, Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) and the US Forest Service was recently finished. CDOW is studying restocking with a native rainbow-cross trout, bringing stock that had been shipped to and raised in Germany back to the area. Resource protection and restoration are big areas of emphasis within the NCA. They are trying several techniques for invasive plant species control and do a lot of native plant seedings. They also do inventories of cultural sites and spend a lot of time doing visitor outreach and education, including several educational programs for the schools.

#### **Update on Uranium and mining:**

Barb Sharrow – Some of the SWRAC members took a field trip yesterday to look at uranium mining in the area. Exploration affects a larger landscape than the actual surface area of the mines because they drill an average of 30-100 holes within a relatively small area following ancient river corridors, although each individual well site is small. There is a lot of exploration activity going on right now. The Dolores Field Office is currently working on 30 exploration notices and 6 mining plans. The Grand Junction Field Office is working on 12 exploration notices and 3 mining plans, while the UFO is working on 25 exploration notices and several mining plans. The Pinyon Mill is planned for construction in the Paradox Valley as a new uranium processing mill on private land. Being on private land, the BLM will not be involved in the permitting of that mill.

#### **Update on Antler Shed Season in the Gunnison Basin:**

Kenny McDaniel said that 2 years ago the SWRAC passed a resolution supporting an antler shed collection season to protect the Gunnison Sage grouse. This idea was turned down by the Wildlife Commission in 2007, but they did enforce a closure during the 2007 grouse lek season and in 2008 it was continued with a full closure due to the snow levels. Closures are difficult to enforce and balance with hikers and other recreational users. Gunnison Basin will have a full closure again in 2009 during the grouse lek season, approximately March 15 to May 15.

#### **IBLA decision on LKA's Mine proposal near Lake City**

Kenny McDaniel – Last April, BLM turned down LKA's proposal to increase their mining operation outside of Lake City. There were a number of factors why the Field Manager declined the proposal. The BLM decision was appealed and the IBLA has ruled in favor of LKA. City, county and state officials will be watching LKA's operations closely.

#### **Update on Canyons of the Ancients:**

The CANM Resource Management Plan will be out by October, 2008. They have been struggling with mountain bike trails, and the definition of "community" in relation to cultural resources. Andy Gulliford was asked to review the language for the actual proclamation and the original intent of Secretary Babbitt and President Clinton in relation to landscape-wide preservation of cultural resources.

#### **Front Range Resolution:**

The Front Range RAC has passed a resolution asking the BLM State Office to consider having a statewide RAC meeting at least every 2 years beginning in early 2009 to share concerns, information, problems, etc. Andrea Robinsong made a motion to endorse the Front Range

resolution, was seconded by Andy Gulliford, and the motion carried to endorse the Front Range's resolution.

### **Uranium Mine Resolution:**

Kathy Welt reiterated a subject brought up during yesterday's field trip that with the increase in uranium exploration and mining applications, there are concerns with the lack of consistency in the way that the different BLM field offices handle and process applications – both in the analyses and information required from the applicants and timeframes. There is an internal BLM conference in Salt Lake City next week where this topic will be discussed. The SWRAC members agreed to wait and see what comes out of next week's meeting before making any kind of recommendation addressing this matter.

### **Healthy Lands Initiative (HLI):**

Mark Stiles said there is a large scale improvement project going on to protect and improve habitat within his field office area. The SJPLC is doing several kinds of treatments such as mowing, thinning, fire use, and mechanical removal to improve habitat on thousands of acres for big game winter range and sage grouse, etc. The SJPLC has been successful in obtaining Healthy Lands Initiative money as well as partnership money to do so. They plan to expand the HLI program and add one position. CDOW is looking at what treatments are acceptable and are also looking at a 30,000 acre project. The Uncompahgre Field Office has gotten money to work on stream bank erosion on the San Miguel River.

### **Sunnyside/Eureka Town Site Land Exchange:**

San Juan Commissioner Pete McKay asked Andy Gulliford to tell the BLM that he knows they are doing a good job on the Sunnyside/Eureka town site land exchange. Andy would like an update on this exchange at the next meeting.

### **Dominguez – Escalante NCA/Wilderness:**

Trudy Kareus from Senator Salazar's office discussed the proposed Dominguez – Escalante NCA/Wilderness legislation, per draft bill #S.3065. The area is 211,000 acres and of that, 65,000 acres are to be designated as Wilderness. The Delta, Montrose and Mesa County Commissioners have all voted to support this bill. Mr. Dick Miller is the largest landowner in the area. The Senator's office has met with him several times to discuss boundaries and water issues. The water language in the bill was drafted by some of the best water attorneys in the state. Mr. Miller expressed his continued concern with the boundaries. There was discussion about how the Resource Advisory Council for the new NCA would be set up and what would it do? Would it be a new RAC or combined with the NWRAC or SWRAC as a subgroup? Andy Trehorne from Senator Allard's office said that Senator Allard is pleased with the discussions for the proposed area, but is not supporting the proposal at this time as there are still a few issues that need to be resolved. Kelly Wilson expressed concern over the water language. Dan Morse said that the environmental community feels that they have worked hard to compromise on water issues, especially on water ponds within the Wilderness. He felt there was a need to get this bill passed ASAP and that the SWRAC should do anything they could to help. Andy Trehorne iterated that Senator Allard's position was not politically based, but out of concern for the good of the land and Mr. Miller and his family. Andrea Robinsong expressed concern about the lack

of language in the bill explaining the role of the NCA RAC. Alan Staehle proposed the following resolution.

“The Southwest RAC feels that expeditious establishment of the so-called Dominguez - Escalante NCA, as roughly outlined in S3065, is in the interest of the American public, once various issues are resolved. The SWRAC therefore encourages further BLM collaborative work to address concerns raised and then support a consensus based bill to move forward for adoption.”

The motion was seconded and passed.

**Public Comment Period:**

There were questions about permitting towers for emergency communications. The process was explained.

Barb said that the BLM should hear something from Washington about the new RAC members sometime in September. Kelly Wilson is the only RAC member whose term is expiring that did not reapply, so the group thanked him once again for his dedication and service to the RAC. The next RAC meeting will be in Gunnison on November, 14, 2008.

Meeting adjourned at 4:19pm.