

**Southwest Resource Advisory Council
MEETING MINUTES
Friday, September 21, 2007
Ouray County 4-H Event Center
22739 Hwy. 550
Ridgway, Colorado**

ATTENDEES

Resource Advisory Council Members

| | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Jim Cochran, Category 3 | Betsy Marston, Category 2 |
| Kenneth Emory, Category 1 | Andrea Robinsong, Category 2 |
| Al Heaton, Category 1 | Alan Staehle, Category 3 |
| Nik Kendziorski, Category 2 | Kathy Welt, Category 1 |
| Gerald Koppenhafer, Category 3 | Kelly Wilson, Category 3 |

Not present: Andrew Gulliford, Category 2; Dan Morse, Category 2;

BLM Staff

| | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| LouAnn Jacobson | Heather Musclow |
| Mel Lloyd | Barb Sharrow |
| Kenny McDaniel | Mark Stiles |
| | Julie Stotler |

| Visitors | Representing | Town/City |
|-------------------|----------------------------|------------------|
| Ann McCoy Harold | U.S. Senator Wayne Allard | Bayfield |
| Matthew McCombs | U.S. Senator Ken Salazar | Grand Junction |
| Ann Brown | U.S. Senator Ken Salazar | Durango |
| Peter | | |
| Mary Huff | U.S. Senator Ken Salazar | Durango |
| Chad Kennard | CEC | |
| Robert G. | ROCC | Ridgway |
| Sheelagh Williams | ROCC | Ridgway |
| Amber Clark | San Juan Citizens Alliance | Cortez |
| Chris Pike | Ouray County Watch | Ridgway |
| Bill Patterson | Western Colorado Congress | Montrose |

Opening Remarks/Designated Federal Officer and RAC Chair Time

Chair Kathy Welt called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m. There was a round of introductions. Barb Sharrow, Designated Federal Officer (DFO) for the Southwest Resource Advisory Council (RAC), explained that appointments were expected to be announced last week but were held up. With three members present in each category, this morning's attendance constitutes a quorum. Judge Bill Ela, who submitted an application for appointment to the SWRAC, was attending today's meeting as a member of the public. Sharrow reported on Director Jim Caswell's satellite broadcast to employees last week. The new director of the BLM has four goals for the bureau: 1) continue the "Managing for Excellence" initiative, 2) support the current planning process and schedule, 3) continue the Healthy Lands Initiative, and 4) strengthen the National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS). BLM managers fielded several questions from the RAC on the

bureauwide three-tier reorganization to be implemented by 2009, as well as the changes that initiative will bring to the bureau's operations.

Sharrow handed out the new BLM Colorado Recreation Strategy, the result of a statewide team effort that worked on the project for well over a year. State Director Sally Wisely is traveling to Washington, DC, later this month to brief the Colorado delegation on BLM Colorado affairs.

New RAC Appointments, Introductions and Orientation

During the meeting, Sharrow received word that the letters to the new RAC appointments, as well as reappointments, were signed by Secretary Kempthorne and mailed today. Reappointments are Andrea Robinsong (environmental) and Alan Staehle (public-at-large), and new members are Jevin Croteau (energy), Jim Young (grazing) and Judge Bill Ela (public-at-large). Sharrow also mentioned that Ken Emory was recently appointed to the Colorado Recreation RAC. With that, Judge Ela was invited from the audience to sit at the RAC table.

RAC Charter and Standard Operating Procedures

The new RAC Charter was signed in July by Secretary Kempthorne and distributed today. The charter can be viewed at http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/BLM_Resources/racs/swrac.html. A Statement of Operating Procedures (SOP) will be finalized after the Northwest RAC meets.

Field Managers Update

Gunnison Field Office (GFO): Kenny McDaniel reported on the Gunnison Basin Travel Management Plan being conducted jointly with the U.S. Forest Service (FS). The public comment period ended earlier this month, and the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is anticipated next spring. More comments were received from outside the Gunnison Basin than locally. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) plans to issue the results next month on the survey of the Gunnison Prairie Dog. GFO grazing permit renewals are progressing. One of the two range management specialists is leaving, and this position, as well as a new range technician position, will be advertised soon. A vacant fuels biologist position will also be filled.

San Juan Public Lands Center (SJPLC): Mark Stiles stated that planning remains a major activity for the Center. The joint FS/BLM plan is about one month from going to print. The Canyons of the Ancients National Monument (CANM) draft Resource Management Plan (RMP) will be issued soon. Anasazi Heritage Center and Canyons of the Ancients staff will accept a prestigious award from the National Trust for Historic Preservation on behalf of the Canyon of the Ancients National Monument later this month. The draft Mancos-Cortez Travel Management Plan, which proposes to limit travel to designated routes, should be issued soon. A wild horse gather was recently conducted on the Spring Creek Herd Management Area. A total of 76 horses were removed from the range, bringing the number of horses to within the BLM's appropriate management level of 35 to 45 horses.

Uncompahgre Field Office (UFO): Sharrow mentioned the endangered clay loving buckwheat plant located in the Fairview Area of Critical Environmental Concern. The ditch company working with the Bureau of Reclamation caused damage to a small amount of these plants in the area. BLM will continue working with the FWS and Colorado Natural Areas Program to protect the site. The same endangered plants were found between Montrose and Ridgway, so grazing

permit renewals will take longer to complete this year. The UFO's Montrose Complex is undergoing improvements, which includes a newly surfaced parking area. The UFO volunteer staffing program for the interagency front desk is working well. The UFO is beginning their pre-plan activities for the RMP revision. UFO geologist, Lynn Lewis, will likely retire this year, and in anticipation of that, another geologist position will be advertised. The tamarisk leaf beetle was released on the Gunnison River near Delta this summer; results won't be visible for a few years. The Gunnison River float trip scheduled for tomorrow will be postponed until next May when more members can participate.

Canyons of the Ancients National Monument Draft Resource Management Plan

LouAnn Jacobson acknowledged CANM planner Heather Musclow for her efforts in finalizing the draft RMP, which is now at the printer. The draft document should be issued in about four weeks. The Southwest RAC subgroup and congressional staffers were recently briefed on the proposed alternatives. About 80 percent of the monument is leased (unitized) for fluid minerals development and 18,000 acres of private land are involved. Major planning issues for the 165,000-acre planning area are cultural resources, grazing allotments, fluid minerals, recreation and transportation. Consultation and coordination with numerous local and regional organizations have been conducted to date. There are five alternatives, covering a broad spectrum of management, proposed in the draft RMP, and Jacobson briefly explained each of these. The area produces a significant amount of carbon dioxide, and the dry ice plant, which has operated since World War II, remains active. Six Special Recreation Management Areas (SRMA) and some smaller recreation zones are considered in the plan. The preferred alternative promotes an undeveloped management strategy in four of the SRMAs. While hunting would be allowed, recreational shooting and geocaching would be prohibited under the preferred alternative. Roads and their purposes have been identified, and travel would only be allowed on designated roads. Again under the preferred alternative, nearly 39,000 acres would be closed to motorized and mechanized use, and limited on just under 127,000 acres. There will be a 90-day public comment period for review of the draft RMP, and the plan will be available to the public on the Monument's planning website and on CD. In order to conserve natural resources, paper copies of the document are not being printed in bulk. The Record of Decision is anticipated in the fall of 2008. CANM depends on over 260 volunteers to operate on a day-to-day basis, and adequate funding remains a challenge.

Uncompahgre Field Office Travel Management Plan

Outdoor Recreation Planner Julie Stotler updated the RAC on current travel planning efforts in the UFO. Two proposed actions that would amend the RMP are being proposed; one is field office-wide, changing travel from "cross-country travel" (open) to "limited-to-existing travel." The other is specifically for the Dry Creek area and restricted to designated travel only. Eight sub-regions, or travel management areas, were created for planning purposes. While four ranges of travel alternatives have been developed for the entire transportation system in both areas, a preferred alternative will be determined once public comments on the data have been gathered and considered this fall. A 45-day public comment period opens soon, and public meetings are scheduled for 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. and 7 p.m. to 9 p.m., on November 8, at the DMEA Building in Montrose.

Dolores River Wild and Scenic River Inventory

Stiles explained that in 1968, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act was passed to protect the nation's rivers in their wild state. Federal agencies were mandated to inventory the rivers under their jurisdictions. Twelve Colorado rivers fell under Section 5A of the Act. Section 5B mandated agencies to look at all other rivers, and the SJPLC is now doing this. The three categories of rivers are: 1) wild, 2) scenic, and 3) recreational. The SJPLC has inventoried all rivers under its jurisdiction through its RMP planning process. About 76 stream segments in the SJPLC were initially found to possess outstanding remarkable values (ORV), and 26 segments are viewed as eligible. The BLM is required to determine eligibility but can go beyond that to establish suitability. The Dolores River was studied from McPhee Reservoir down to Bedrock (BLM portion begins 13 river miles downstream of McPhee Reservoir). Staff analyzed whether eligibility versus suitability is appropriate for the river, and a preliminary suitability determination has been considered in the RMP. The SJPLC is working closely with the river protection group, Dolores River Dialogue, which has provided valuable contributions to the planning process. Wild and Scenic River designation by Congress holds Federal reserve water rights, adding to an already complex issue. The public will have the opportunity to provide input on the river study during the public comment period for the Draft RMP. Feedback will be considered in developing the Final RMP, but determining wild and scenic designations for southwestern Colorado rivers will likely continue beyond the ROD for this plan.

Public Comment Period

There was no public comment.

Current Oil and Gas Activity

Sharrow showed the RAC a map of parcels nominated for lease in the upcoming November oil and gas lease sale. The UFO and Dolores Field Office have a significant number of parcels in the sale, with most in San Miguel County and the remainder in Montrose County. Most parcels are on public lands, and nominated parcels located in riparian and Gunnison sage grouse habitat have been deferred. The UFO has worked with four counties—Montrose, Delta, San Miguel, and Ouray—to develop a website (<http://www.southwestdata.org/projects/dip/interagency.htm>) hosted by the Southwest Data Center that provides the public with a tool to determine federal minerals, specific stipulations that would apply, nominated parcels, affected private lands, etc. Stiles added that recent drilling activity in the Dolores area is being done from existing well pads. The SJPLC is analyzing the area north of the Glade through its current RMP process for potential leasing. There is the potential for uranium mining in some of the same areas leased for oil and gas.

Healthy Lands Initiative (HLI)

Funding was appropriated in FY 2007 to improve land health on a landscape basis in specific areas of Colorado. The initiative, intended to benefit federal, state and private lands on a landscape basis, continues into FY 2008.

GFO: The GFO did not receive a significant amount of HLI funding, but other funding was received to use for noxious weed mitigation and Gunnison sage grouse habitat enhancement.

SJPLC: A total of \$70,000 in HLI funding is being used on South Spud habitat improvement to benefit big game and the Gunnison sage grouse. Treatment of approximately 3,000 acres includes mowing down service berry and pinyon-juniper for the purpose of taking pressure off of agricultural lands in the Dove Creek area, as well as desert bighorn sheep winter range in the river canyons.

UFO: Funding was received for Spring and Dry Creeks, the San Miguel River stabilization project and tamarisk removal, west-end meadows roller chop, Roubideau-Potter Creek weed treatment, Conservation Corp ditch diversion and upgrade, Carpenter Ridge fuels treatment, Gunnison River weed eradication project and riparian restoration, and weed mitigation and water guzzlers for Gunnison sage-grouse habitat.

Potential Topics for November 16 meeting:

Tamarisk Coalition

Colorado Oil & Gas Conservation Commission: state regulations

Healthy Lands Initiative

New member RAC orientation

Schedule 2008 meetings

The meeting adjourned at 3:40 p.m.