

**Southwest Resource Advisory Council  
MEETING MINUTES  
Friday, April 20, 2007  
Holiday Inn Express  
1391 S. Townsend Avenue  
Montrose, Colorado**

**ATTENDEES**

**Resource Advisory Council Members**

Don Bennett, Category 1	Betsy Marston, Category 2
Jim Cochran, Category 3	Dan Morse, Category 2
Kenneth Emory, Category 1	Andrea Robinsong, Category 2
Andrew Gulliford, Category 2	Alan Staehle, Category 3
Nik Kendziorski, Category 2	Kathy Welt, Category 1
Gerald Koppenhafer, Category 3	Kelly Wilson, Category 3

Not present: Drew MacLeod, Category 1; Al Heaton, Category 1

**BLM Staff**

Roxanne Falise	Barb Sharrow	
Lynn Lewis	Missy Siders	
Mel Lloyd	Mark Stiles	
Kenny McDaniel	Julie Stotler	
John Morrone		
<b>Visitors</b>	<b>Representing</b>	<b>Town/City</b>
Matthew McCombs	Senator Ken Salazar	Grand Junction
Jim Omer	Alternative Youth Adventures	Montrose
Bill Patterson	Montrose County Commissioner	Montrose
Brian J. Meinhart	Senator Wayne Allard	Grand Junction

**Opening Remarks/Designated Federal Officer and RAC Chair Time**

Chair Kathy Welt called the meeting to order at 9:02 a.m. This morning's attendance constitutes a quorum. [Welt had to leave at noon, and as a result, there was no longer a quorum.]

Barb Sharrow, Designated Federal Officer (DFO) for the Southwest Resource Advisory Council (RAC), reported that Jim Hughes remains acting director for the agency. Final budget figures were recently received, and Colorado faired well compared to other states.

**Field Managers Update**

**Uncompahgre Field Office (UFO):** Barb Sharrow updated the group on her field office's travel management planning initiative that's underway. She thanked those RAC members who attended the recent public scoping meetings. The Dominguez-Escalante initiative will be the focus of a public meeting in early June in Grand Junction. Senator Salazar is anticipating introducing legislation this summer. An oil and gas company has submitted an application for permit to drill (APD) in western Montrose County. There is some interest near Paonia as well. The Department of Energy (DOE) has not yet issued a decision on its uranium lease tract

environmental assessment (EA). The DOE/EPA clean up in the Uravan area will be completed this year, and they are in discussions with BLM on whether some of the lands should be restored to the public domain. UFO land health assessments are on course for completion in 2008. Conditions allowed the season's first prescribed burn to be initiated yesterday. The Paonia fuels project continues, and the working group is meeting to discuss various alternatives. An experimental rehab of the 2006 Stucker burn site has been initiated. Part of the area was treated with vinegar, part with roundup, part was left untreated, and one small area was fenced to determine what works best to eradicate cheatgrass. The burn will be monitored for the next several years. An EA was completed and a decision made to approve a small uranium operation in western Montrose County, and another is being reviewed.

**Gunnison Field Office (GFO):** Kenny McDaniel reported on a notice of intent for gold exploration in Lake City. It is in the vicinity of the historic Golden Wonder Mine, which is owned by the same company. The programmatic environmental impact statement (PEIS) to analyze the impacts of designating energy corridors on Federal lands in 11 western states will be out soon for a 90-day public comment period. This PEIS was required by the 2005 Energy Policy Act (Sec. 368). One such corridor travels through Gunnison County toward Montrose County. A draft proposal for BLM Colorado's new three-tier organization is due soon, and the RAC will be included in the distribution and review of the proposal. The GFO has finished the first route-by-route analysis of its joint travel management planning initiative with the USDA Forest Service. Three public meetings are scheduled on the project from May through July. The alternatives will be developed and an EIS written following those meetings. The USFS is the lead agency, providing the majority of the workforce for the project. There's been significant activity with the area's Gunnison sage grouse (GuSG) because of the early spring. The Audubon Society Rendezvous is coming to Gunnison in June and, while in town, members will be conducting some riparian habitat monitoring for the GFO. The GFO worked with Gunnison County to implement 38 road closures this spring to protect GuSG habitat, as well as road surfaces. While there has been some vandalism to gates and signs, McDaniel feels that road closure/management signage has been a successful effort. The GuSG population is on the rise. The RAC's resolution passed last year regarding antler shed hunting will assist the GFO in pushing through road closures to restrict this high-impact activity.

**San Juan Public Lands Center (SJPLC):** Mark Stiles reported that the record of decision was recently issued on the Northern San Juan Basin EIS. A total of 127 well pad locations were approved, and the majority of the roadless area will be protected. About 5,000 acres of that roadless area (approximately one-quarter of the area) that already contains roads will be potentially impacted. Ignacio Canyon will not be developed. There are restrictions for development along the coal outcrop, with no activity within 1.5 miles of the La Plata County line in that county. Activity will be allowed on the Archuleta County side within 1.5 miles of the county line, if it can be proven safe. More information can be found on the website at [www.nsjb-eis.net](http://www.nsjb-eis.net). New requirements using best management practices for air quality are also provided. The Canyons of the Ancients National Monument (CANM) resource management plan is currently in Washington for review and will be released soon. The joint planning effort between USFS and BLM is moving forward but not without challenges. The goal is for the draft to be out in September.

### **Healthy Lands Initiative**

Roxanne Falise, branch chief at the BLM State Office for biological resources, made a presentation on the new Healthy Lands Initiative. BLM public lands are becoming more popular than ever. Nine out of 12 western states are experiencing increased growth and development, which results in increased pressure on public land resources. The effort began in Wyoming, and at Secretary Kempthorne's directive in February, the initiative is now the bureau's number one priority. BLM Colorado is receiving \$1.3 million of a total of \$15 million to build on existing efforts and complete appropriate resource improvement and enhancement projects on private, federal and state lands primarily in southwestern Colorado. The landscape affected by this nationwide conservation initiative encompasses several Western Slope field offices. BLM is partnering with U.S. Fish and Wildlife, as well as the U.S. Geologic Society, in this effort. Success will be measured in a broad scope, across several BLM programs. Monitoring will be an important part of this, and the goal is to see positive results from the effort in 3 to 5 years. Some of the RAC comments included listening to the local people, building on existing efforts, and redefining what effective mitigation means to the agency. Use of native vegetation and preservation of migration corridors were other comments offered. The RAC would like to stay involved and receive timely feedback on the progress of the initiative, which is focused in their jurisdiction. Andrea Robinsong made a motion to have the Healthy Lands Initiative placed on each RAC agenda. Andy Gulliford seconded, and it was carried unanimously.

### **Lower Dolores River Planning Activities**

Stiles provided an update on planning activities for the Lower Dolores River by the SJPLC. Eligibility has been determined, and portions are likely suitable but that has not been formally determined as of yet. Establishing Wild and Scenic River status for the entire Dolores River system would be difficult because of complex issues, including water rights and legal, established uses. There is great interest by the public to preserve the Dolores River system, and it will take a community effort to move it forward. Stiles supports some form of protection for the river, and he'd like to see different levels of protection for the various segments of the river. Adjacent areas are pristine wilderness and also deserve protection. The initiative is gaining momentum and will need to be evaluated on a landscape level, considering all uses.

### **Uncompahgre Field Office Travel Management Plan**

Julie Stotler, outdoor recreation planner for the UFO, provided an overview. The UFO is proposing that travel within the entire FO be changed from open to limited-to-existing routes and trails for motorized travel, with the exception of designated open areas, and the North Fork area and the Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area which already have travel plans in place. The Dry Creek area northwest of Montrose, encompassing 115,000 acres, would have designated routes and trails for all modes of travel. With today's increased demand placed on public lands, BLM feels these actions are necessary bureauwide to protect and preserve resources for future generations. BLM is working closely, on the planning process, with local businesses, user groups and local, state, and other federal agencies. Local RAC member Ken Emory is playing a key role as liaison to the motorized community. He feels strongly that once adequate signing is on-the-ground, the majority of problems will resolve themselves. He has volunteers ready and waiting to assist the BLM in implementing whatever actions come out of the planning initiative. There will be several opportunities for public input, and the anticipated completion date is summer 2008. Partnerships and public outreach are important to the BLM in conducting a successful planning process and then implementing the final decisions. More information, along with maps and comment forms, can be found at [www.co.blm.gov/ubra](http://www.co.blm.gov/ubra).

### **Update on BLM Colorado Recreation Strategy**

Sharrow reported that the Colorado RACs asked to review the draft strategy prior to its being finalized. Several RAC members submitted comments, which were considered and incorporated as appropriate for a strategy document. Sharrow stated that concerns about inappropriate partnerships are unfounded, and she addressed some of those voiced. While partnerships truly leverage BLM's resources, BLM will always maintain control and have final say in how public lands are managed. Another issue highlighted was user fees. BLM RACs will see fee proposals, and these proposals will be formally addressed by the new USFS Recreation RAC. The strategy should be finalized and sent to print later this year. Dan Morse explained his concerns with the strategy. From his perspective, he felt it would not be a useful document to field staff but conceded that it would probably be useful to managers.

### **Public Comment Period**

Matt McCombs, representing Senator Ken Salazar, talked about the initiative regarding the National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS) by Senators Salazar and Bingaman. Introduced on April 19 to codify the NLCS, this legislation would establish a law that would group all of the special areas into one system, which would be intended to improve funding for and enhance management of the areas. The NLCS was formed administratively by BLM and does not have permanence through Congressional law. Robinsong proposed a resolution that the RAC support Senate Bill 1139, codifying the NLCS, but no vote could be taken because there was no longer a quorum. The bill does not create any new management authority and does not change the authorities for any of the previously designated areas within the system. A copy of the bill will be distributed to the RAC.

### **Update on Uranium Mining Activities**

John Morrone, BLM Colorado, provided a background on the BLM minerals program, which is still guided today by the 1872 Mining Law. During the Cold War Era, public lands were leased to the DOE for the purpose of uranium mining. There is considerable world demand for uranium today; approximately 16 percent of the world's energy comes from nuclear reactors. Mining claims and the price of uranium are on the rise. The Blanding mill is being reconfigured to handle Uravan ores. There are currently no operational mills, but large stock piles will be necessary when they do begin processing ore.

Lynn Lewis, UFO geologist, noted uranium is now \$113/lb and that if the price of vanadium increases, currently around \$6/lb., there will be a marked increase in activity. There have been a total of 8,100 claims to date for uranium mining in the counties of Mesa, Montrose, San Miguel and Gunnison in the past couple of years. The five plans of operations (POO) currently being handled by UFO are quite small, involving two to five individuals, and all are inactive at this time. UFO has received ten notices for exploration of drilling. These numbers do not include the DOE lease tracts, in which exploration has already occurred.

### **Potential Topics for July 20 meeting:**

Gunnison Basin Travel Management Plan  
UPP Native Seed Program  
Tamarisk Coalition (tamarisk eradication)  
Healthy Lands Initiative

The meeting adjourned at 3:31 p.m.