

**Southwest Resource Advisory Council
MEETING MINUTES
Friday, May 6, 2005**

Gunnison County Multipurpose Community Ctr., 275 S. Spruce St.
Gunnison, Colorado

ATTENDEES

Resource Advisory Council Members

Don Bennett, Category 1	Howard Heath, Category 1
Mallory Dimmitt, Category 2	Nik Kendziorski, Category 2
John Field, Category 1	Drew MacLeod, Category 1
Art Goodtimes, Category 2	Andrea Robinsong, Category 2
Andrew Gulliford, Category 2	Alan Staehle, Category 3
Anthony Gurzick, Category 3	Ellen Stein, Category 3
Ann McCoy Harold, Category 3	Kathy Welt, Category 1

BLM Staff

Linda Anania	Mel Lloyd	
Arden Anderson	Maggie McCaffrey	
Dave Kauffman	Barbara Sharrow	
Dave Kinateder	Brian St. George	
Bruce Krickbaum	Mark Stiles	
Visitors	Representing	Town/City
John Whitney	Congressman Salazar	Durango, CO
Jamie & Cory Watt	Gunnison Co. Contractors Association	Crested Butte, CO
Joe Puchek	Gunnison Co. Contractors Association	Gunnison, CO

Opening Remarks/Designated Federal Officer and RAC Chair Time

Chair Kathy Welt called the meeting to order at 10:24 a.m. Today's attendance constitutes a quorum. A round table of introductions followed. On behalf of the RAC members, Welt thanked Arden Anderson for the informative tour of the Hartman Rocks area.

Uncompahgre Field Office Manager and DFO Barb Sharrow provided an update on the 2005 Southwest Resource Advisory Council (RAC) nominations and explained next steps in the process. The Cobell vs. Norton litigation has impacted BLM web sites, with the exception of fire sites, temporarily shutting them down.

Field Managers Update

Uncompahgre Field Office: Sharrow reported on the Dominguez-Escalante Stewardship planning initiative; BLM is working on the pre-plan process now. UFO/Gunnison Gorge NCA appeals have all been resolved with the IBLA upholding the area's Resource Management Plan (RMP).

San Juan Public Lands Center: Mark Stiles reported on the Northern San Juan Basin Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) status. Approximately 1,400 pages containing about 400 substantive comments are currently being analyzed. Two alternatives are being focused on; one reflects the resolutions received from local governments and a new alternative that takes a detailed look at bonding for the outcrop area. A task force with members from both Colorado and New Mexico are working on air quality issues. A July/August timeframe for the document's release is anticipated.

The Silverton Ski Area EIS is nearing completion. A 4-year lease will be issued by August between the ski area and BLM. The lease allows guided and unguided skiing for up to 450 individuals.

The combined U.S. Forest Service (FS) plan and BLM RMP revision is ongoing, with several more public meetings scheduled. Water issues are a main focus.

The Dolores River is flowing full for the first time since 1996.

The Canyons of the Ancients planning process was stalled because of contractor problems, but issues are now resolved.

San Juan Public Lands Center met with San Juan County last month and discussed the ski area, land exchanges, a land and water conservation fund request for 2007, along with road maintenance/RS-2477 issues.

Stiles asked that it be noted that, although the elected official interest is not formally represented at this meeting, there are elected officials serving on the RAC in attendance serving in other interest areas. Kelly Wilson's elected official interest vacancy (due to term limits) will be filled later this year.

Gunnison Field Office: Acting Field Manager Arden Anderson reported that the Gunnison field manager vacancy should be awarded in the next several months. Prescribed fires are being conducted with 600 acres burned this spring. Winter moisture was good and Blue Mesa Reservoir is expected to fill this season. Hartman Rocks was visited by RAC and talked about during this morning's field trip. The Alpine Loop won't be fully open until late June. T-21 federal highway funds are being used on the Loop for a mapping project to document resources. A DVD program, as well as a web site, has been developed that provides additional information.

Hartman Rocks Update

The BLM and a citizens' group met to gather public comments and develop management alternatives based on the comments received. Comments were evaluated and a preferred alternative developed. The public will have the opportunity to review the EIS, which should be out soon. Implementation is anticipated later this summer.

New Interagency Fire Organization

Linda Anania, deputy state director for BLM Colorado, explained the background and why a new organization was founded. The delegations of authority have been clarified for the three

Fire Management Units (FMU) located on the Western Slope (based in Montrose, Craig and Grand Junction). FS and BLM employees will be supervising one another for the first time. Steve Ellis with the BLM and Rick Oberheu with the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests, share the Fire Management Officer (FMO) duties for the Montrose FMU. Stiles reported that his area's 2005 fire funding is down, but additional resources and funding are needed elsewhere in the country, where the effects of drought have not decreased.

Gunnison Sage-grouse Update

Brian St. George, land-use planner with BLM Colorado, presented an update on the completed Rangeland Conservation Plan (RCP) for the Gunnison sage-grouse. U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and Colorado Division of Wildlife have developed the Candidate Conservation Assurance Agreement (CCAA), which provides a number of assurances for private landowners that have this grouse species on their lands. A statewide BLM strategy, with species-specific conservation, should be finalized in July. The Southwest RAC has asked for the opportunity to review the draft document. Art Goodtimes and Mallory Dimmitt expressed frustrations with BLM's oil and gas leasing practices, which they feel have ignored San Juan County's efforts to protect sage-grouse habitat where conservation easements have been established. Land management agencies have more latitude in managing for the species when it's not listed, and once the species is listed, there are strict criteria that must be followed. The species and habitat are the focus, rather than economics. St. George fielded a number of questions from both the RAC and public.

Fire Mitigation Video, Fuels Program

Bruce Krickbaum, Uncompahgre FO environmental coordinator, and Dave Kinatader, Gunnison FO wildlife biologist, explained the BLM fuels program, which follows the National Fire Plan and Healthy Forests Restoration Act in reducing hazardous fuels. Interagency crews use several different tools on public lands to lessen the chance for catastrophic wildfires, especially near wildland urban interfaces. Watersheds, power transmission lines and wildlife habitat are also important considerations. Each fuels treatment requires 1-2 years of planning prior to the event's occurrence. Community involvement and collaboration are key to this program.

Maggie McCaffrey, Montrose FMU fire mitigation specialist, explained that her job focuses on community assistance. McCaffrey provided a video to RAC members, which shows how property owners can defend/protect their property from wildfire. Fire plans must be developed for every burnable acre of public land and collaborative outreach is essential to the fire program.

Public Comment Period

RAC member Andrea Robinson read a statement from several grassroots groups of the Western Colorado Congress, of which she is vice chair and chair of the Public Lands Committee. The groups are concerned about several split-estate parcels contained in this month's BLM oil and gas lease offering, as the applicable BLM web sites are down making it difficult for the public to obtain information about the lease sales. Robinson moved that the RAC ask lead DFO Sharrow to petition the BLM State Director to defer all private-surface parcels until the August lease sale, and that the BLM provide effective notice to private surface owners affected and the public about the lease parcels offered, given that most of the BLM web site is off-line. Ellen Stein seconded the motion. BLM is not required by law to notify property owners of leasing activities

on those or adjacent properties. The notices of lease sales are posted in all BLM offices. There were extensive discussions on mineral rights, leasing rights, leasing qualifications, notification law, etc.

The motion failed with only two individuals in Category 3 supporting the proposed resolution. Heath felt the proposed resolution was too broad, and Harold felt that landowners, not the BLM, need to be responsible for obtaining information on the ownership and status of the mineral estates underlying their surface lands.

Goodtimes presented a Resolution for vote regarding Gunnison sage-grouse as follows:

In spite of attempts by federal, state and local agencies to prevent listing of the Gunnison sage-grouse through efforts at conserving Gunnison sage-grouse habitat and developing local resource conservation plans, the Southwest RAC would like to register its frustration with the rapid leasing of gas parcels in Southwest Colorado, which may lead to the potential loss of locally protected habitat purchased with local tax dollars in areas such as San Miguel County. This would appear to thwart local efforts to save the bird and prevent its listing.

Harold moved the Resolution and Gulliford seconded. It passed unanimously.

As Robinsong's proposed resolution failed, she asked that the topic of lease sale notices be placed on the next meeting agenda for further discussion. Additionally, she reminded the RAC about the Resolution it submitted to the State Director regarding unmarked BLM trails either being opened or closed for off-road travel. She would like an update on that at the next meeting.

Next Meeting, Closing Comments

The next meeting is in Silverton. Ellen Stein will be hosting the RAC. The start time for this meeting will be 9 a.m., July 22, with a field trip tentatively planned mid-afternoon on July 21 to the San Juan Gold land exchange area.

Other topics include:

- Discuss leasing notification process
- Review draft statewide Gunnison sage-grouse policy prior to July
- Dominguez-Escalante river tour (potentially July)
- Joint FS-BLM RMP revision (emphasis on Southwest RAC jurisdiction)
- Resource mapping project on Alpine Loop with updated hand-outs
- Update on Resolution pertaining to open or closed BLM trails

The meeting adjourned at 4:15 p.m.