

**Southwest Resource Advisory Council
MEETING MINUTES
Friday, Jan. 21, 2005**

Bill Heddles Recreation Center, 530 Gunnison River Drive
Delta, Colorado

ATTENDEES

Resource Advisory Council Members

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

Not present: Anthony Gurzick, Category 3; Howard Heath, Category 1; Andrea Robinsong, Category 2

BLM Staff

Dave Kauffman	Barbara Sharrow
Mel Lloyd	Duane Spencer
	Ron Wenker

Visitors	Representing	Town/City
Steve Smith	The Wilderness Society	Denver, CO

Opening Remarks/Designated Federal Officer and RAC Chair Time

Chair Kathy Welt called the meeting to order at 8:10 a.m. Today's attendance constitutes a quorum. Welt spoke highly of yesterday's rangeland ecology RAC training.

Uncompahgre Field Office Manager Barb Sharrow announced that the Northwest RAC will join the Southwest RAC for a joint meeting later this morning. Sharrow explained the purpose of the RAC handbooks distributed today. Sharrow also reported that Kelly Wilson's term as a Category 3, elected official, ended due to the term limits of his elected position. The Southwest RAC will operate with 14 members until new nominees come on board in August.

Field Managers Update

Uncompahgre Field Office: BLM Colorado State Director Ron Wenker will be joining the RAC meeting later this morning. The UFO is working on several land health assessments. A second recreation planner will be hired. Oil and gas lease activity is on the increase. The UFO is meeting with surrounding counties, which have formed the Healthy Landscapes Partnerships. Subgroups will focus on specific issues, such as fuels and wildfires. The Uncompahgre Plateau Project has gained national prominence, winning several awards. Sharrow reminded the Southwest RAC of this year's schedule of RAC meetings: March 4, Montrose; May 6, Gunnison; and July 22, Silverton. The UFO is slated to update its Resource Management Plan (RMP) in 2008. The BLM Colorado State Leadership Team (SLT) formed a recreation committee, of which Sharrow is the lead, to focus on recreation funding and strategies.

Gunnison Field Office: Vern Rholl is acting Field Manager. Barry Tollefson retired in early January. A meeting on the Hartman Rocks Recreation Management Plan is scheduled for 6:30 p.m., January 26.

San Juan Public Lands Center: Mark Stiles could not attend today. Uncompahgre Associate Field Manager Dave Kauffman provided an update on the Northern San Juan Basin Coalbed Methane (CBM) EIS. The San Juan Public Lands Center oversees both BLM and Forest Service lands in that area and has initiated an interagency RMP. The RAC asked to be updated in March on the San Juan Gold land exchange.

Northern San Juan Basin CBM EIS Update

Kauffman reported that a Content Analysis Team from the San Juan Public Lands Center is working to extract and evaluate over 60,000 public comments received throughout the past several months. Stiles apologized for not being present today but will update the RAC at the March meeting.

Oil and Gas Leasing/APD Update

State Office Fluid Minerals Program Lead Duane Spencer explained that through historic legislation, 564 million acres are available for oil and gas leasing. A Reasonable, Foreseeable Development Scenario is developed for the life of an RMP, which is around 15 years. Alternatives are discussed in RMPs, which identify public lands available for leasing, as well as those leases subject to various stipulations. Major constraints (such as geologic hazards or extremely steep slopes) allow no surface occupancy (NSO). Some areas are closed entirely to oil and gas leasing, but many areas have leases that have existed for decades. BLM Colorado is required to hold lease sales on a quarterly basis. Any party can nominate any parcel for leasing; any party can protest those parcels being leased. If parcel leases don't sell, they are available for lease non-competitively for two years. Leases expire after 10 years without minerals development or production and, if a parcel is renominated, it may be leased again. A NEPA process must be completed and any issues identified addressed prior to leasing. All environmental laws (NEPA, ESA, etc.) apply to the leased parcels, as well as lease requirements and stipulations. BLM is the authorized agency for all federal mineral leasing. Field offices must be responsible for final review of areas made available for leasing to ensure that site specific issues are considered and addressed in the final offering. Wenker offered that certain stipulations and conditions listed in the RMP guide leasing activity, such as providing buffers near sensitive species areas, like the Gunnison Sage Grouse.

An Application for Permit to Drill (APD) is tightly regulated and the review process is initiated by visiting each site and evaluating potential impacts and issues. Operators are usually willing to promptly mitigate any issues so that APDs can be more quickly and efficiently processed. Private land owners are always invited to participate in BLM processes, which are strictly regulated by NEPA and include a 30-day public comment period.

The Northwest RAC joined the Southwest RAC for the remainder of the day.

BLM Colorado Happenings

Wenker thanked the Northwest and Southwest RACs for the valuable service they provide the BLM. Oil and gas development is important to the West, and leasing has remained consistent. The “by nomination” leasing process occurs on a quarterly basis. The next lease sale is February 10. APDs have increased to over 500 this year. The public can currently participate in several planning efforts throughout the state, including the Roan Plateau RMP and Northern San Juan Basin CBM EIS. The Advisory Council for Canyon of the Ancients has helped BLM with that area’s RMP. Fuels management is increasing, using stewardship contracting and following guidance from the Healthy Forests Initiative. Recreation remains a prominent activity in the state as well. The BLM is conducting internal audits to improve its regulatory processes. A general management evaluation will be conducted this spring, and the lead team as part of this process may contact RAC members. Wenker addressed questions regarding the fee program, land management demands and budget.

RAC Community Stewardship Plan

Grand Junction Field Manager Catherine Robertson and Sharrow presented an update on the proposed Dominguez-Escalante Community Stewardship Plan, which would provide management guidance for an area that includes the Dominguez WSA, the Old Spanish Trail and Escalante Canyon. Once approved funds are received, the BLM will begin work on a pre-plan. Southwest RAC’s Drew MacCleod and Andy Gulliford, and John Martin and Charlie Kerr of the Northwest RAC, volunteered for the RAC’s new Community Stewardship work group. BLM would like to see both Mesa and Delta Counties work with this work group, and the Forest Service will be included in discussions.

Western Slope Center Status Report

Western Slope Center Manager Juan Palma thanked RAC members for submitting their comments on the WSC’s reorganization. A concise chain-of-command is needed for Western Slope interagency fire organizations, which the SLT has agreed to continue supporting. Two organizational alternatives have been proposed for the WSC, and a final decision is anticipated later this year. Several RAC concerns and comments were addressed.

BLM National Sage Grouse Strategy Conservation Program

Wenker introduced Robin Sells, COSO lead conservation biologist, who assisted him with today’s presentation. The Gunnison Sage Grouse is a candidate 2 priority species, but the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service did not list the Greater Sage Grouse. A sage grouse population objective was developed for each area in the state, and there is a coordinated effort among agencies and private interests for implementing the plan. Key program highlights and tasks were covered for each species. This program will remain a high priority for managers. Wenker addressed several questions from the group, including monitoring, migration and conservation assurances.

Public Comment Period

Public comment opened at 1:45 p.m. Lee-Ann Hill, with the Colorado Environmental Coalition in Grand Junction, thanked BLM and the RACs for embarking upon the CSP and encouraged the BLM to work closely with the Forest Service. Eric Rechel, Sierra Club-Grand Junction, also encouraged the Bureau to look at the overall landscape of Dominguez-Escalante and cooperate

with the Forest Service. Monica Wiitanen, representing the public-at-large, emphasized the importance of the Dominguez-Escalante watersheds and expressed concerns with not including the Roubideau area in the CSP. David Warren, representing the public-at-large, supports the CSP and would like to see the Camelback WSA included in the CSP.

T. Wright Dickinson proposed that the Bureau establish a statewide forum for presenting consistent, current scientific data and include the public, agency specialists, managers and other public land users. Art Goodtimes volunteered to work with Dickinson on this. Gulliford recommended Dickinson establish a 501(c)3 organization.

Glenwood Springs Field Manager Jamie Connell reminded the Northwest RAC about the February 9 public hearing and meeting on the Roan Plateau Draft RMP, scheduled to begin at 2 p.m. Organized groups will have the opportunity to provide comments to the RAC, with general public comment following.

The meeting adjourned at 2:10 p.m.