

Southwest Resources Advisory Council
MEETING MINUTES
Friday, May 30, 2008
Holiday Inn Express
1391 S. Townsend Avenue, Apex Room
Montrose, Colorado 81401

ATTENDEES

Resource Advisory Council Members

Jim Cochran, Category 3	Betsy Marston, Category 2
Jevin Croteau, Category 1	Dan Morse, Category 2
Bill Ella, Category 3	Andrea Robinsong, Category 2
Andrew Gulliford, Category 2	Alan Staehle, Category 3
Al Heaton, Category 1	Kathy Wells, Category 1
Nik Kendziorski, Category 2	

Not Present: Kelly Wilson, Category 3; Jim Young, Category 1; Gerald Koppenhafer, Category 3

BLM/FS Staff

Arden Anderson	Mel Lloyd	David Sinton
Dave Hunsaker	Maggie McCaffrey	Mark Stiles
Julie Jackson	Ginny Piles	
Bruce Krickbaum	Barb Sharrow	

Visitors

	Representing	Town/City
John Whitney	U.S. Congressman John Salazar	Durango
Randy See	U.S. Senator Ken Salazar	Montrose
Brian Meinhart	U.S. Senator Wayne Allard	Grand Junction

Opening Remarks/Designated Federal Officer and RAC Chair Time

Chair Kathy Welt called the meeting to order at 9:07 a.m. There was a round of introductions. Today's attendance constitutes a quorum. Barb Sharrow, Designated Federal Officer (DFO) for the Southwest Resource Advisory Council (RAC), welcomed Associate State Director Dave Hunsaker to today's meeting. Sharrow announced that this would be Mel Lloyd's last RAC meeting as her four-year term with the BLM is ending in June. The position was advertised to fill permanently, but Lloyd was unsuccessful in her bid for the position. Sharrow will coordinate RAC activities until someone is onboard. BLM has initiated public scoping on a Solar Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS). More details to follow. Sharrow mentioned that FBMS is being implemented for the Bureau, the third federal agency to convert to the new budgeting/finance system.

Welcome BLM Associate State Director

Dave Hunsaker is pleased to be here and strongly supports the BLM RACs. He values their recommendations and provided a brief overview of his career.

Field Managers Update

San Juan Public Lands Center (SJPLC): Mark Stiles reported that comments have been received on the Canyon of the Ancients National Monument (CANM) draft Resource Management Plan (RMP), and the final is expected out this fall. The draft Joint Management Plan is out for the U.S. Forest Service (FS)/Bureau of Land Management. The Reasonable Foreseeable Development (RFD) scenario for the plan must undergo additional analysis, which will change components of the plan and delay its completion. Air quality will be further analyzed as well. The development of the Travel Management Plan for the San Juan Public Lands Center also continues. There will be several more such plans in the coming years. The Associate Center Manager position remains vacant, but the position should be filled soon. A third law enforcement officer is being hired this year, which will allow increased coverage in the Silverton area. Two individuals from Durango received a Preserve America's Treasures award from the First Lady in Washington, DC. Efforts behind this award have directly benefitted SJPLC resources. Stiles fielded several questions from RAC members regarding Wild & Scenic River status and motorized user group concerns.

Gunnison Field Office (GFO): Arden Anderson stated that BLM is working closely with local and state governments on flood control. Last winter's snows are melting, but high-altitude roads are still blocked by snow. An avalanche destroyed the historic Empire Mill on the Alpine Loop. Weather has delayed range turn-out, but some recovery from the drought is expected. The GFO is short on range staff, but work continues on range permits. Russ Japuntich was selected as the wildlife biologist. Archaeology, soil and air, and administrative assistant positions are being advertised. The GFO was unable to reach a settlement agreement with the Golden Wonder Mine in Lake City, and the case will return to the Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA). BLM is monitoring some road and access issues between Saguache County and the public. A member of the public decided to drop his proposal of a land exchange for a Trout Creek parcel because of T&E issues. The Wildfire Academy, which provides training in wildland firefighting, is being held in Gunnison next week.

Uncompahgre Field Office (UFO): Barb Sharrow reported that the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area (NCA) and Dominguez Canyon Wilderness legislation was introduced last week by U.S. Senator Ken Salazar and U.S. Congressman John Salazar. A hearing is scheduled for June 18. Water flows are up, and Crystal Dam is spilling. This has impacted fishing and outfitters in the Gunnison Gorge. BLM has been working with Ouray County and the motorized community on trail issues in the Ridgway/Ouray area. The UFO has partnered with the San Juan Mountain Association to improve the FO public room. A new recreation technician has been hired to oversee special recreation permits, and a geologist, wildlife biologist, natural resource specialist, and environmental protection specialist have all been hired recently. Uranium, coal, and oil and gas activity continue to increase. The pre-plan for the RMP revision is at the state office for review, and community assessments will begin in August. The last Land Health Assessment for the UFO should be finalized this season.

Getting to Know GeoCommunicator

Ginny Pyles, from the BLM National Operations Center at the Denver Federal Center, showed the RAC a live demonstration of GeoCommunicator, which is a product of the BLM/FS National Integrated Land System (NILS). GeoCommunicator is a Geographic Information System (GIS), which provides for the management and integration of cadastral records and land parcel information. Data on BLM records for mining claims, rights-of-way, land and mineral use, LR2000 public reports, and the General Land Office can be found at www.Geocommunicator.gov. Only the data of lands that have been surveyed is included in the system. Pyles fielded a number of questions regarding use of the valuable online tool.

Gunnison Basin Travel Management Plan

Anderson updated the RAC on the travel plan, which the GFO is conducting jointly with the FS. A transportation system that provides reasonable access, among other things, is the ultimate goal. A preliminary proposed action was developed on a map as a result of extensive public input. Weeks of work by staff then resulted in several alternatives, which are being fine-tuned now for integrating into a draft EIS yet to be developed. The public will have the opportunity to review and comment on the document, when released. Routes and their designations will be updated, mostly to "limited to designated." There will be some seasonal closures for both motorized and mechanized travel. Implementation of the plan will involve maps, brochures, signs, visitor contact, and online information. Routes that are open to travel will be signed; closed routes will not be signed. Camping guidelines are still under discussion. Providing protections for the Gunnison sage grouse is paramount, even in the "no action" alternative.

Community Wildfire Protection Plans

Maggie McCaffrey noted that RAC member Alan Staehle worked closely with the Montrose Interagency Fire Management Unit in developing a DVD to encourage communities to develop and implement plans for mitigating the risk of catastrophic wildfire. Ouray and other counties, and the Colorado State Forest collaborate with BLM/FS on the project. These plans benefit the federal agencies through community preparedness and knowledge of which areas are at highest risk. NEP A clearances for fuel reduction programs are part of these programs, which are successful because the communities and counties buy in and accept the programs as their own. People must recognize the need and then implement the plans for them to be effective. With the help of this program, Federal agencies have begun to manage the wildfire program in a way that reduces federal dollars spent on fighting wildfires. Communities that have implemented wildfire protection plans will be given priority in the event of a catastrophic wildfire event.

Dry Creek Travel Management Plan

Julie Jackson provided an update on the travel planning activities for the UFO. Both a field-office wide and site specific (Dry Creek) travel plan are being development. The comment period for the Environmental Assessment will likely be early fall. The RAC will be updated as planning activities progress.

Public Comment Period

Randy See introduced himself as the new local representative for U.S. Senator Ken Salazar based in Montrose.

Brian Meinhart, U.S. Senator Wayne Allard's local staffer, indicated that the Senator has chosen to hold off on formally supporting the Dominguez-Escalante legislation. While he does support it, he wants to wait and see what the final language is prior to signing on.

Gulliford made a motion that the Southwest RAC submit a Resolution in support of the Dominguez-Escalante NCA and Dominguez Canyon Wilderness. Staehle seconded the motion. A friendly amendment was accepted that ensures the Resolution provides support for the concept only and not the bill itself. A vote was taken but failed in Category 1. Jim Cochran suggested this item be placed on the August agenda when RAC members will have had the opportunity to review the proposed legislation. BLM will forward a copy of the legislation, as well as the Northwest RAC Resolution passed last week, to RAC members.

John Whitney, U.S. Congressman John Salazar's staffer, introduced himself and took RAC questions.

Sharro introduced Bruce Krickbaum, who is the new NEPA coordinator and planner for the UFO. He will be the project lead on the RMP update.

Update on the USDA Forest Service Recreation RAC

Ken Emory provided an update on the Recreation RAC. The first two meetings focused on getting organized. The Recreation RAC requested an interpretation of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) by a solicitor so that it could better advise the FS and BLM.

Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Geothermal Resources Leasing

Sharro made the RAC aware of the Geothermal PEIS, required by the Energy Policy Act of 2005 and recently initiated jointly by the FS/BLM. The PEIS will provide a generic evaluation for the commercial development of geothermal resources. More information can be found at www.blm.gov (select programs/energy).

Update on Healthy Lands Initiative (HLI)

The initiative remains a priority for the bureau, but funding was less than expected for the field offices/SJPLC. Twelve projects were planned in the UFO, but that was cut to three after receiving news on the funding. Two projects will be no problem to complete, but the third project may not be completed because of timing required for contracting and logistics. Two projects have been funded for the SJPLC. Partner funding has come from Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, which matched \$50,000 for big-game winter range. Quail Unlimited is providing, funding for quail habitat; grouse habitat will also benefit. A \$500,000 grant is being pursued

through the Habitat Partnership Program. The GFO will be working on another project that will benefit Gunnison sage grouse habitat.

Next Meeting and Closing Comments

The Associate State Director asked Welt to inquire about RAC interest in an annual joint Colorado RAC meeting. Members felt it to be of value for the RAC as a whole but especially so for the two Western Slope RACs.

Potential Topics for August 8 meeting in Ridgway

Dominguez- Escalante NCA legislation
Field trip to uranium mine
Uranium claim and mining activities
Dry Creek and Alpine Loop Travel Management Plans
County and Federal land use regulatory powers

Future topic: BLM river rangers

The RAC thanked the excellent boat crew for yesterday's Escalante to Dominguez float trip on the Gunnison River. The meeting adjourned at 3:50 p.m.