

Summary Minutes

Farmington District Resource Advisory Council Meeting

July 10 and 11, 2018

Taos, New Mexico

July 10th attendees

RAC Members:

Wendy Hageman (Category 3)
Mick O'Neill (Category 2)
Carmen Johnson (Category 3)
Cory Styron (Category 1)

BLM Staff /Support:

Richard Fields, FFO
Jeff Tafoya, FFO
Zach Stone, FDO
Tami Torres, TFO
Whitney Patterson, TFO

Visitors:

July 10th Morning Session (8:00-11:45)

Call to Order, Introductions

Mick O'Neill called the meeting to order at 8:35 A.M. RAC, BLM staff, and visitors introduced themselves. Mick noted that once again this was a non-quorum meeting, so that formal decisions would not be binding. Present were Wendy Hageman and Mick O'Neill whose terms expire in December 2018; Cory Styron and Carmen A. Johnson whose terms expire in January 2020.

Opening Remarks

Rick Fields, Farmington Field Office opened the meeting, noting that the District Manager and acting District Manager were not present; there were no power point slides for this meeting, and there would be plenty of time for questions. He then turned the meeting over to Mick O'Neill.

Mick O'Neill noted that once again there was not a quorum and that therefore no official decisions could be made by the RAC. The agenda would be shuffled to reflect changes in presenters and time.

2017/2018 RAC Nominations Update/Charter Update – Zach Stone

The RAC asked Zach Stone to give an update on the RAC nominations and the new Farmington District Office RAC Charter.

He reported that the meeting at this point could be more of a Q & A process. He stated that the nomination process for new RAC members was now closed and that there had been no response to the call for nominations. Objections were immediately voiced by RAC members, protesting that they had not been informed that the RAC nomination process was ever open. Zach reported a second call for nominations comes out in August or September. Zach said that a new call for nominations should be announced for some time in the fall, or possibly January or February through May 2019, but at this time he has not received an update. Leonard Martinez' appointment to the RAC expired in 2018, so that he is currently not on the RAC. He has however, re-applied. Carmen stated that the Taos area is under-represented on the RAC.

Applicants that have applied can write a letter requesting an update on their application process. There appears to be some misunderstanding of the process since the RAC is again unable to make a quorum. The RAC can contact Mark Mathews, the acting District Manager, but address the letter to Secretary Zinke, and sign the letter from the RAC members. RAC members indicated that when applications are made and then no information is returned as to where the applicants are in the process it is very discouraging. Applications require that the applicant compile recommendations, educational records and other matters so that if nothing is going to come of that effort they are reluctant to apply.

Cory agreed to draft a letter addressed to the Senator, indicating that the absence of a quorum was the direct result of the bottleneck in the Secretary of the Interior's office. Cal Curley, staff member of Senator Udall's office advised that the letter should be addressed to the Senator with copies to the relevant federal delegation indicating that highly qualified applicants have not been moved forward as needed in order to fulfill the RAC mission. Mick suggested that we need to get the number of applicants from 2016 and 2017 as well as 2018, and where each applicant currently is in the review process. Cal suggested we include a description of who can apply and how they are selected. Zach suggested that we go to the Department of the Interior website to check for relevant information regarding Executive Orders and Secretary's Orders.

Carmen indicated that the 2018 RAC charter required information on staffing levels by department, job descriptions and job openings, information which has not been provided to RAC members. Zach said he will provide current information regarding staffing levels, and BLM managers indicated that Farmington has 20 positions open; Taos has 4 career positions and 6 temporary positions open.

Wendy said she feels that conservation has the utmost priority among agency goals. That includes educating the public. One glaring example is the mountain biking trail in the Farmington area. The trail is often trashed and even destroyed in part. "How do we implement the needed conservation actions. We want more recreation opportunities on our public lands." Wendy would like more information on the #3 priority of conserving our resources. "What can the RAC do?" Zach offered the idea of partnerships when the BLM doesn't have enough resources. One example is the Friends of the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument group

that works with John Bailey. The Friends group has acted as a kind of clearing house with a contact list of perhaps a dozen other groups with direct interests in the many and various aspects of the Monument. When an action is needed the Friends can spread the word widely throughout the entire Taos valley. Carmen mentioned another example, the Sitewatchers, who are trained to work as lay volunteers with law enforcement to guard the petroglyph treasures in the entire valley. Mick mentioned that on some occasions the schools have been a great help with signs. Early childhood education is so very important in long range conservation goals. Rick pointed out that the Farmington field office has one person assigned to recreation and no specific budget. Seasonal employees have filled some jobs. Wendy noted that the Mountain Biking group split off at some time in the past and that she can contact this group.

Cory pointed out that Oil and Gas was the only thing that was important until about five years ago. The Farmington office is officially designated an oil and gas office. The slogan was “oil and gas all the time”. But we are now at a pivot point where fossil fuels are declining in importance and recreation is being recognized as a valuable community resource. And the community is OK with that. We have remarkable recreation resources and are opening up more and more.

Wendy remarked that she has been riding on BLM land virtually every day for years and knows the horse trails and bike trails intimately. “Help us do what is in this charter, how can we do this, how would you like us to do that?”

Rick Fields responded “We don’t have the staff, we would have to go through Doug to get a permit” Zach added “our job is multiple use”. Wendy: “then we should tell the BLM how this can be done. Jeff Tafoya added “the BLM can host, it can issue permits, but someone in the community can bring forth the ideas and volunteers and events. We might reach out to other RAC groups for ideas, and do some community outreach.

Further discussion among Rick, Wendy, Cory, regarding what we need to do to make recreation a priority for the Farmington field office. Cal Curley offered ideas about coordinated programs; Zach and (Bill) offered suggestions about community outreach. Rick mentioned that the Farmington office does not have fee sites whereas the Taos office does. Mick noted that non-profits are among other organizations that should have special consideration regarding fees. Can we make recommendations regarding waiving fees. Wendy pointed out that fees can help build resources. The BLM can do a letter of recommendation. What about liability insurance? How does the game and fish stamp work? Cory noted that individual fees must be treated differently from fund-raising activities

[Farmington Resource Management Plan Amendment update – Rick Fields](#)

Rick Fields gave a brief update on the Farmington Field Office RMPA. He informed the RAC that a finished draft including an alternative decision matrix, and a copy has gone out to co-lead agencies, tribal governments and Pueblos. We are reviewing approximately 1000 comments on 1200 pages next week, Tuesday through Thursday in Gallup. Under an order from the Secretary

of the Interior the 1200 pages must be reduced to 700 pages. The information will still be there as an appendix, including maps etc. but the final report must be 150 to 300 pages. We will let the RAC know when the draft goes online for review. The public then has 45 days to review the draft.

Taos General Recreation Plan Update - Tami Torres

Tami Torres, Recreation Planner for the Taos Field Office, presented the General Recreation Plan update for Taos: The transportation plan starts with an inventory of transportation routes that include inventorying all two tracks, and also indicates where the primitive road category is appropriately applied. We can recommend alternatives to each decision in next year's plan, particularly for the Santa Cruz recreation area; we are also thinking about what exactly we should interpret in new signage.

We are planning toilets for the Taos Overlook trailhead. We can get back to some of these projects now that the 2006 plan amendment is coming to the end. The Overlook needs picnic tables and interpretation. Another current project are the trails in Santa Fe by the river and ending in Diablo Canyon with a shelter and a vault toilet.

The interpretive sign for the Taos Junction Bridge at Pilar is ready to be installed. Tami displayed the large sign with the worded narrative. For signage a brown background is used for road requirements, but interpretive signs will now have a black background. The new sign will be installed in September. As with all project, we continue to work to comply with NHPA requirements.

Two positions need to be filled. The Special Permit Specialist has been vacant for five years. The Santa Cruz manager position is also vacant and very much needs to be filled.

Farmington General Recreation Plan Update – Rick Fields

Rick Fields presented the General Recreation Plan for Farmington on behalf of Doug McKim, Farmington Field Office Outdoor Recreation Specialist.

Vault toilets have been installed at the Glade Run Recreation Area. We are looking at getting a vault toilet at the Bisti Wilderness area. Cory questioned the difference between a wilderness area vs a wilderness study area. Rick explained that under the wilderness designation the toilet (for example) would already be in place whereas under a wilderness study designation the study would be in process.

A shelter is being built at the Bisti Wilderness. There is a problem with salt water runoff from a nearby well, this requires the installation of a galvanized culvert. The well has to be capped, it is not potable water. The runoff is coming from a nearby well on tribal land and the runoff has made its way to public lands.

Brown Springs will have a renovation including 10 picnic tables, horseshoe pits, and grills. This will be finished by the end of the year. The 3rd Saturday in September, the 22nd, is Public Lands Day. We are expecting over 1000 visitors this year. Tami Faust has taken the lead, working with the city and the county. This will be a cleanup as well as a celebration of public lands.

Reviewing the Recreational Trails Program (RTP), we have an award of \$700,000 issued for ATV facilities in the Glade Recreation area. They are working on trails and a pavilion in Simon Canyon below Navajo Dam. There has been increased interest in SRP's (Special Recreation Permits). Arches are a big interest in the San Juan area. Rick reported that we are working hard to increase recreation, but we are not funded for recreation. Oil and Gas is still the priority in Farmington. Cory noted that Farmington needs support in this, and that a letter from the RAC to the state BLM office can request a change in the designation of priorities in Farmington area from oil and gas to recreation and an increase in recreation funds.

Farmington Field Office postponement of 2018 Oil and Gas Lease Sale – Rick Fields

Rick Fields gave an update on the postponement of the 2018 spring oil and gas lease sale for the Farmington Field Office. He reported that the survey of cultural sites has received funds for completion of the Section #106 requirements and the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) requirements for a comprehensive study of cultural and ethnographic data relevant to site protection. This study is estimated to take between 1 and 1 ½ years. The San Juan Basin is the site of multiple tribes and Pueblos, notably Acoma, Navajo, Hopi, Ute Mountain Utes, altogether some 28 total indigenous nations. Chaco Canyon is tied to many of the tribes and Pueblos. The BLM has a legal and moral obligation under Section #106 to consult with each of these tribes and Pueblos regarding what is important to them; more specifically, where to avoid areas that will not be used for oil and gas. Some examples of avoidance indicators include sacred lands, plants and the location of special activities. The BLM must also fulfill its obligations under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). Talking to each of the tribes and Pueblos will require more staff. We need more contract help to review the files and consult with the tribes and Pueblos. We are looking to hire a large archaeological firm which can review sites on 24 parcels which have been identified for Section #106 process. We now have 105 days to review these parcels in order to go forward with the lease sales in December.

Taos Field Office General Update – Jeff Tafoya

Jeff Tafoya, acting Taos Field Office Manager, presented an update on the San Pedro area. There's not a lot of BLM there, it's mostly Santa Fe County and private land. It offers recreation, mining and shooting. In 2009 this public land was brought to the attention of the Taos Field Office. It's a high fuels risk area. An Environmental Assessment was signed this year to do the work in this canyon. There is the need to close the open mine shafts on the site. Mine closing will start in August, then the fuels team will go in and thin the area. Next spring there will be a prescribed burn.

Shooting in this area caused the Golden Fire last year. There will be no shooting during the mine closure work and thinning process. There is a need for more closed roads and there should be more of a specified area for shooting.

July 10th Afternoon Session (1:00-4:00)

Santa Fe National Forest Recreation Fee Presentation – Jeremy Goldston/Francisco Valenzuela

Jeremy Goldston of the Santa Fe National Forest presented fee proposals which are being considered by the Forest Service. He explained that the managers of the Forest take the requirements of the Recreation Enhancement Act (REA) very seriously. This act is posted in the Federal Register and announced in local newspapers. Public lands are for everyone so the Forest must reach out to the public for fees, which produce money that is put back into the sites. The Forest looks to the RAC for advice and assistance with recreation fees. There are three levels of fees: the standard; the expanded; and the special. Without public involvement, engagement and collaboration we could not do what is best in managing the fee program.

Francisco Venezuela, with the Santa Fe National Forest then presented a request to the RAC. We wish to hear from the RAC, and to ask what the public wants to do regarding fees and recreation on National Forest lands as required by the Recreation Enhancement Act (REA). There is currently a standard amenity fee for day use facilities or service provision; there is an expanded fee. There is also a Special Recreation Permit for commercial activities. The fee program requires that the RAC should support the decisions regarding fees and thus the public must be involved. The Santa Fe National Forest is wanting public input regarding the fees to be charged in recreation areas. This is then, a proposal presented to the public for discussion. The Forest is also responsible for the maintenance of historic homes, such as the Aldo Leopold house and fire lookouts which are offered for camping for a fee. The fees bring in an estimated \$200,000 additional revenue.

Rio Grande Trail/State Partnership – Whitney Patterson

Whitt Patterson, Assistant Outdoor Recreation Planner, Taos Field Office, presented an update on the Rio Grande Trail which, when complete, will allow hikers to walk from the Taos Junction Bridge to Colorado. This project is a partnership with the BLM and the state. It will connect 6 existing trails along the gorge with bike and horse trails and camping. The proposed new trails will provide an additional 15 miles from visitors center at Wild Rivers to Colorado. We are waiting now for a state land exchange with the environmental assessment in process for new trail construction. Carmen asked if any cultural sites are near the new trail segments. Whitt assured that the environmental assessment would identify any such resources. Carmen requested that areas within the gorge that currently have no trails should be treated as protected habitat. Whitt said that virtually the entire trail is on the rim, not in the gorge.

July 11st – Rio Grande Trail Field Tour

A field site visit was conducted on July 11, 2018 at 8:00 a.m. from the BLM Taos Field Office to the Rio Grande Trail improvement areas. Taos Field Office BLM staff gave an overview of the Rio Grande Trail improvement areas to further connect the Rio Grande Trail. The field trip ended at 12 p.m.

Along with BLM staff, four RAC members and one member of the public attended the field trip. Attending the field trip were, RAC members: Wendy Hageman, Mick O’Neill, Cory Styron, and Carmen Johnson. BLM representatives: Richard Fields, Zach Stone, Jeff Tafoya, Whitney Patterson, and Teddy Lucero.