

**SUMMARY MINUTES
PECOS DISTRICT RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL
October 20, 2016
CARLSBAD, NM**

RAC Members:

Steve Peerman
Jack Callaway
Steve Wes
Reginald Richey
Lewis Derrick
George Veni
Tish McDaniel

BLM Staff/Meeting Support

George MacDonell
Glen Garnand
Robert Hoskinson
Ty Bryson
Chad Young
S. Bergmam
M. Agee
Beau Truitt
Randy Howard

RAC Members Absent:

Ronald Black
Ron Hillman
George Farmer

Scribe:

Betty Hicks

Federal Official:

Jim Stovall, District Manager

Public:

Donny Worthington
Maddy Hayden

CALL TO ORDER, WELCOME & OPENING STATEMENTS

Chairman Steve Peerman opened the meeting, welcomed all, and asked BLM District Manager Jim Stovall to address the group. Mr. Stovall suggested that Chairman Peerman discuss the RAC function to update new employees present from the CFO.

Mr. Peerman introduced himself as a “caver” in the District and how other RAC members represent many other interests in the District. He offered to take questions and comments

regarding RAC functions and discussed the public comment period, which will take place on the agenda. Mr. Stovall discussed categories of the membership and how diverse it is.

Mr. George Veni told the group of his affiliation with the National Cave and Karst Research Institute and distributed their annual report.

Public Comment Period

There were no comments made during the Public Comment Period

The Draft Carlsbad Resource Management Plan & Environmental Impact Statement – Chad Young

Mr. Chad Young, Carlsbad Field Office, informed the group that in August 2016 briefings with the State Office and Washington Office were given and in September with the BLM Director. He explained that they are now addressing some of the Washington Office questions and hopefully after the responses and dialogue with Washington, the document can go to the publisher, be posted in the *Federal Register* and available to the public in early January.

When the draft is published, public meetings will be held in several venues and locations. Outreach has been occurring throughout the process, updating the status. The public comment period will be 90 days. Questions were called for and there were none.

Planning 2.0 Update – Glen Garnand

Mr. Garnand relayed that the proposed Final Rule is out and 600 comments were received. These comments will be addressed and the goal is late December/early January for Final Rule publishing. It was asked what the essential elements of the Rule are.

Mr. Garnand explained that it aimed to increase public involvement and changed how the process of RMPs is done. Part of the change is that BLM will now have to incorporate best current data, do inventories and nominate ACECs, publish a paper and solicit public comment.

Mr. Stovall relayed that alternatives will be stated prior to doing a plan and comments will be solicited at that time, rather than commenting after the plan is written. Coordination with local governments will continue in the process.

BLM will be looking at broader landscapes, crossing boundaries to look at mitigation availability. Alternative development will involve more opportunities for the public. Concern was expressed about how much impact comments from outside the area might be considered.

BLM's Workload Changes Due to the Drop in Oil Price Update – George MacDonell

Mr. MacDonell gave statistics and trends seen throughout the past year. He stated that APD's received in the last fiscal year were the lowest in the previous 10 years, 413. They processed 910 applications which was the most processed, reducing the backlog. Currently pending are 374. Of those 172 are complete packages; the rest are missing key components to complete analysis. This month 25 were processed which is better than the past three months.

A change in the process has been the introduction of AFMSS 2. It places a burden on operators to enter electronically for submission. There has been local involvement in this system with CFO having a key operator to see that concerns are communicated to the Washington Office and to those creating the system. This has been in place since April with 160 APDs submitted. Only seven have been processed so far, as “bugs” are being worked out. The top three operators were Devon, COG and EOG.

The trend lately has been a focus on Master Development Plans (MDP). This looks at potential cumulative impacts and development for the next 20 years that a company has. An environmental review is to be done up front, NEPA done, to insure compliance with what was submitted previously. This is recommended as a management prescription to help prevent habitat fragmentation, etc..

This is a major undertaking and BLM is encouraging an MDP be done. Two have been completed with 12 more in the works. Size varies by what the company wants to develop in the future. This helps BLM to accomplish the most efficiency. The process streamlines for BLM and the company at the same time by evaluating impacts on an area. If nothing significantly changes, it makes the process faster.

Rights-of-Ways (ROWs) – 1,044 were processed. There was concern from the Washington Office about the number of outstanding ROWs and made funds available for overtime in Realty. Of 200, oil and gas is now down to 65. Currently there are a total of 524 Realty actions. This includes all types. There are seven Category 6 projects, large reimbursable projects. There were 20 and the number is now down to seven.

FRAC lines is an issue that has arisen. CFO is working on an internal process for large lines impacting ranching areas. BLM is working with a NMOGA working group on this issue.

It was asked if there has been any staffing issues as a result of the workload change. The answer was that there has been no new staffing lately. CFO had previously worked with NMOGA to hire contractors and these appointments are expiring. Currently there are many vacancies in-house and CFO is working on filling these.

BLM has been told that there may be stepping up of oil rigs in the near future.

As to a question of the size of an MDP, it depends on what the company envisions future development to be. NEPA done upfront makes permitting a faster process.

Venting and flaring seems distant from master development planning. These can change if regulations change. It was asked how this is handled. It was stated that NEPA is done on the best information available and if something significant occurs must go back and redo analysis.

CFO has worked with a NMOGA workgroup regarding communication concerning companies submitting information the same way.

Rio Bonito Wetlands Proposed Project – Randy Howard

River restoration planning is being looked at and it is hoped for the RACs support. Much support has been received from the town of Lincoln regarding this water system. There is cold water in a two mile stretch along Tract 4. Springs feed into it and it runs year round. BLM is proposing to make a quality fishing area available to the public. The Game & Fish Department concurs there is great potential.

A sampling of many species was done with good results. BLM has been working with a company regarding river restoration and good habitat. This is in the planning stages. Trout Unlimited has looked at the proposal and is also interested in participating. Long term, BLM will look at Tract 3 if all goes well.

It was asked what specifically is included in restoration and the answer was natural wood, boulders, etc. to keep all natural.

It was stated that the current flow of the Rio Bonito is not indicative of what it has been in the past.

Tract 4 has many springs, so it runs year round. It is being fed from streams from the Capitan mountains. The River has the oldest water rights in the State. Mr. Richey stated that this is a good project, a good fit for the area.

Mr. Howard was referred to information regarding predicted droughts that should be looked at in further development, as this would be critical to sustaining the flow, depth and temperatures.

Removal of vegetation has been done in the area and kept down. Habitat in the area was discussed and how it would be enhanced. The RAC expressed individual support for the process but since a quorum was not in attendance no official action was taken.

It was asked if the area was fully adjudicated and the answer was that it has been.

As to the question of grazing impacts it was stated that grazing is a management tool in the management plan.

Much discussion was heard on the brush control of the area to be able to enhance the ability of water to go into the area.

The RAC asked for a presentation of what the Engineering firm will propose be given at the next meeting, with pictures as well.

An update will be given at that time.

The Forest Service has a burn plan for the area and hopes to continue when conditions are optimum.

A break was taken and Mr. Peerman showed the group some pictures of the Fort Stanton/Snowy River expedition, including interesting formations. He mentioned that there was currently an expedition ongoing at Ft. Stanton cave and the pictures support the presentation to be given on the overview of the National Conservation Area (NCA) later in the meeting.

Update on Venting and Flaring – Bob Hoskinson

The end of December is looked at for the Final Rule. There were 300,000 comments received and narrowed down to working with 3,000 comments. When the Rule is passed and official, an APD will have to have a gas capture plan in it. It was suggested that this issue be looked at ahead of time.

Mr. Hoskinson stated that the two Rules will be CFR 3178, Royalty free use of lease production, and 3179, Waste Prevention and Resource Conservation.

Previously discussed facts were presented. 375 cu. ft. of natural gas and \$23 million dollars were lost over the past several years. Gas must be captured and used beneficially. Inaction will not be an option. Impacts are expected to be minimal. The 60-day comment period ended in April, was extended one month, and finally closed.

These will apply to federal lands only, the State and EPA are doing their own plans.

It was asked if BLM gets increased fees from the capture of the gas and the answer was it is in the form of royalties which go to the people, not BM directly.

Leak detection and repair will be required and a plan on how operator will do. Vapor recovery units will be required. All flaring will be metered, trying to get away from venting entirely.

All gas not beneficially used will be paid by royalty. Well tests will be required periodically.

Composition of vented gas was explained. Emergency venting/flaring will be allowed when a plant goes down. Sundries will be required.

Onshore Orders 3, 4 and 5 have gone to the *Federal Register* and are available on BLM.gov.. These will now be 43 CFR 3173: Site Security, 43 CFR 3174: Oil Measurement and 43 CFR 3175: Gas Measurement.

Seeds of Success – Interns, Brooke Palmer and/Meridith McClure

Ms. Palmer explained that she and Ms. McClure were working with the Conservation and Land Management Intern Program through the Chicago Botanic Garden and involves conservation efforts and field botany.

It was explained that they are collecting seeds in the Carlsbad area, a unique area in the middle of the Chihuahuan Desert, with gypsum soil and unique plants and eco types. Their motto is to collect the right seed in the right place at the right time. These become part of a native seed bank for revegetation.

This is a national partnership established in 2001. A map of the United States where collection teams are working was shown. It was explained that there is much expansion room available. There are 2.3 million acres to do recon and scout for collection sites. This is the 2nd year in the area. Many eco regions are available, home to plant and animal species. Photos of endangered plants were shown.

There are protocols to be followed. A sizeable population must be located to collect in, then collect specimens, monitor until fruiting and collect at time of natural dispersal. They then are treated with pest strips and send to the Extractory in Bend, Oregon for addition to the national collection population.

More photos of species of plants collected were shown. There have been 71 collections in two years, 31 this year. A minimum of 10K is needed for the seed bank. This year 780,000 seeds have been collected. Partnering with Guadalupe Nat'l Park work is being done in McKittrick Canyon and Smith Spring Trail.

While in the office work is done on data entry, cleaning and storage. Seeds can be returned to the CFO for local use and research. Herbarium vouchers are prepared (3), one in CFO, one sent to NMSU and one to the Smithsonian.

The interns have participated in other activities – lizard studies, boat training, caving, soil erosion surveys, bat surveys, NEPA documents, wildlife waters repair.

Ms. McClure discussed the Monarch butterflies which are in decline. She explained that the caterpillars will only eat milkweed.

Milkweed was planted in four different areas. It is hoped will continue in years to come. There is planting going on to establish way stations.

It was explained that the interns apply to the program, and that different locations are offered. They get to choose their locations and they are funded by Chicago Botanic Gardens.

As to the plant selections, they must be native, help stabilize soils, for pollination and be culturally significant for revegetation.

Storage facilities are located in Colorado and Oregon.

LUNCH

Overview of the NCA/Proposed Fee Structure at the NCA – Beau Truitt

Mr. Truitt showed a power point of long term plans he would like to see accomplished for the NCA. These plans/projects are such that will take time and funding, if can even be accomplished. These included recreation projects consisting of a fishery project, bike trails, rifle/bow range, recreation access to Bonito Falls, expanded camping, Jagers expansion.

He also listed the possibility of a State or National Recreation Trail system with the Forest Service, an Historic Trail, tie in history of the Fort, etc..

Improve the trail system on the Rio Bonito Acquired Land tracts near Lincoln

“Shoulder season” opportunities outside of peak season when Forest Service land is not open.

It was mentioned that there is a rifle range in use near the Ft and the question was asked if this proposed one would be located away from the Fort. Mr. Truitt responded that it would.

Mr. Truitt continued on with other proposed plans which included:

Education-Outreach

Hands on outdoor activities/Teachers on the Land

Project Archaeology

Promotional video for the NCA and Cave

Improve materials available in the display at Fort Museum, add a cave quest station

PLIA and Friends Group to maintain a social media presence

Establish a local radio and newspaper “Conservation Area Minute”, covering many subjects

Work with NMI or West Point as far as historical projects, research or renovation

Local Boy Scout Council

Develop improved maps, brochures and kiosks

Mr. Truitt explained that a Friends Group could mean establishing a group to tie in with the Cave, NCA, fort and all multiple uses. He would also like to partner with locals to maintain the orchards.

Regarding partnerships, Mr. Truitt listed some groups to make contact with. He also mentioned the possibilities of Grants funding. Some of the groups mentioned were NCLS, DOT, HOL, Teachers on the Land, National Recreation Historic Trail System, BLM, and ESR Funds.

Mr. Truitt continued with further ideas including:

Archaeology – this could include archaeology areas/interpretive structure, a potential for an archaeology display at the Museum with artifacts from other areas.

Reconstitute the “Sitewatch” program in partnership with the State Historic Preservation Office.

Wildlife/Habitat – would include a prescribed burn program, fuel treatments, thinning, and spraying.

Water infrastructure improvement.

Coordination with New Mexico Game & Fish re an NCA bow only elk season.

Ensure protection of bats from White Nose Syndrome and support initiatives

Handicapped/Veteran/Underserved Initiatives

Veterans Memorial Initiative, buy a brick program, State cemetery

Handicap access at Jaggers and other areas

ADA funding through deferred maintenance

Collaborate with the Mescalero Apache Tribe (history, and youth, tie in HOL program)

Research – a Science Plan

Collaborate with FWS re Kuenzler Hedgehog Cactus

Support of ongoing cave, antelope and quail research

Valley of Fire -

Water system improvements

Trail system through the lava field

Revamp the business plan, examine the fee structure

HOL site; reach Tularosa, Socorro, Alamo

Ft. Stanton Cave -

Amphitheater or outdoor classroom at cave entrance, kiosks

Interpretive cave trail over the cave (surface)

Potential communication system in cave
Ecologically sound portal system for emergencies- science driven
Training with local/state emergency responders
Formalized MOUs or Conservation Easements for portions of the cave under the airport and private land
Allowing the public back in the cave – a pilot program with limited number of entries, dedicated cave gear, decontamination procedures.

Mr. Truitt asked for any questions or comments.
A trail system on the Salado Site was suggested.
The Fort Stanton Study Group was mentioned as a Friends Group
It was suggested to establish one more focused on the NCA.
It was suggested that the NCRC, a cave rescue group should be considered as they are already trained.
Communication system – ideas regarding a relatively inexpensive way to do this are being explored

Mr. Stovall suggested that Mr. Truitt provide briefings for program leaders in the State Office on these ideas.

Volunteers for Site Watch are needed.

It was stated that more interpretation of the cave to the public should be a real focus. Efforts to bring public into the cave, must be done properly. BLM should work toward a program to provide access to the cave.

Private land issues must be explored, dialogue with landowners to be able to continue exploration to understand the hydrologic system there.

Mr. Truitt discussed the Jagers Campground Business Plan. He provided a draft to the RAC members and is going through the process to be able to bring the issue back to the RAC for a resolution.

He relayed that the funding is no longer available to update as was wished and plans are currently on hold.

It was stated that updating the business plan should be considered anyway.

Operating costs were shown, very much in the hole.

A regional fee analysis was shown.

Discussion Points: should fees be raised, should fees be a flat rate or a la carte, designate 4-8 of current hookups as non-equestrian sites.

It was suggested that a summary of visitation, fees, usage should be compiled. When amount of visitation known, plug in the number of how many will use and what kinds of usage will occur. Hopefully this information can be brought back for action at the next meeting.

AFMSS II – Melissa Agee

Ms. Agee explained that AFMSS II is the automated fluid minerals support system for processing NOSs and APDs. It was created to electronically process the submissions of these documents. It will be done in two installments. Sundry Notices, Well Completions, etc. will be done at a later date. The process was started on May 2. BLM has been receiving both paper and electronic submissions, looking to the electronic process only.

There have been 485 NOSs received, 411 paper and 74 electronic, processed 188 so far. APDs received are 204, 84 paper, 120 electronic. Seven have been processed. Over 300 in the old system are still being processed.

BLM is still trying to learn the system and workout software bugs and is working with operators. Requests of problems are now able to be input individually. This integrated system lessens the time to work the submissions.

There has been much communication with operators and workshops have been held with industry in Carlsbad, as well as Artesia.

Set Date, Place and Agenda Items for Next Meeting_ - Steve Peerman/Jim Stovall

Date: January 24, 2017

Place: Roswell BLM Office

Proposed Agenda Items:

Carlsbad RMP

NCA

Planning 2.0