

**SUMMARY MINUTES
PECOS DISTRICT RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL
NOVEMBER 12, 2014
FORT STANTON, NM**

RAC Members Present:

Steve West
Robert Armstrong
Steve Peerman

BLM Staff/Meeting Support

George MacDonell
George Veni
Howard Parman
Chuck Schmidt
Phil Watts
Adam Ortega
Jerry Dutchover
Johnny Chopp
Doug Lynn
Emily Wirth

RAC Members Absent:

Jack Callaway
Alisa Ogden
Patricia McDaniel
George Farmer
Reginald Richey
Gregory Fuller
Neal Christopher

Scribe:

Betty Hicks

Public

Joel Alderete
Katie Kruthaupt
Lacy Levine
Catherine Green
John Corcoran
Dianne Stallings
Kathy Peerman
Tom Pollock
Matt Mathis

Federal Official:

Jim Stovall, Pecos District Manager

NOVEMBER 12, 2014

CALL TO ORDER, WELCOME & OPENING STATEMENTS

Steve West opened the meeting, thanked all for coming that that very interesting topics were on the agenda. Many members were unable to attend so no quorum was present. The Council will work toward having attendance be more appropriate in the future. All new (returning) appointees were welcomed back.

Jim Stovall, Pecos District Manager echoed these sentiments and asked Jerry Dutchover, Assistant Field Manager for Resources in the Rowell Field Office (RFO) to discuss the Fort Stanton National Conservation Area (NCA), where the meeting was being held.

Overview of the Fort Stanton-Snowy River Cave NCA

Mr. Dutchover explained that the building where the Council was meeting was originally part of the Fort. BLM leased the building from the State and renovated for BLM use at minimal cost. He invited all to tour what has been done regarding the restoration.

A power point on the National Conservation Area (NCA) was shown. It was explained that the area was designated by Congress in 2009 and what the designation entailed. It includes 25,000 acres of land in Lincoln County. It includes 95 miles of trails for horseback riding, bicycling and hiking. There are 16 developed camp sites including the newly designated Rob Jagers area which includes the equestrian trails. There is a smaller campground area near the cave entrance.

Special Recreation Permits are issued for several events held each year. One of these is the enactment of the March on Rome, which occurs each year and a 4-day event call the Mountain Man Rendezvous. A map of the trail system was shown and one of what has been mapped to date in Snowy River, as well as signs currently being constructed for identification of the areas.

Chuck Schmidt, RFO Field Manager introduced himself and welcomed all as well. He discussed the area relative to the historic Fort which has much history and told all the State Monument took over management of the area in 2010. BLM partnered with State Monuments and leased the building for 20 years. He explained the need for a firmer BLM presence in this area and possible “shuffling” of employees to fully use the rest of the building. Other agencies have been informed of the possibility of occupying space as well.

The Fort Stanton Cave Study Project – Steve Peerman

Mr. Peerman introduced himself as the Project Director of the Cave Study Project. He also acknowledged Mr. John Cochran who has had over 50 years of involvement.

He explained that the central feature of the NCA is the Ft. Stanton Cave. The name is in recognition of a major portion of cave discovered in 2001. Snowy River is a passage within the cave. Mr. Peerman showed a symbol of the logo of the Project. An icon was shown which is in recognition of Native Americans that lived in the area. Discover, Explore, Research, Education is depicted in the logo.

Mr. Peerman stated that his discussion will be on how Snowy River can be presented now and in the future and that he would also show a simulation demonstration;

Many methods of presentation were listed including visits, written scripts, photos, maps, etc..

The only known entrance to the cave was shown, about 1000 years old. It is the best way is to go in and explore, not the easiest way. There are many management issues to prevent this.

The cave has been visited for over 150 years, the Ft. since 1855. Many people have been in the cave. A man named Tom Gould grew up on the Fort and his father took him in the cave in the late 1940's. He has a very interesting connection with Cave and is the oldest visitor to Snowy River.

The earliest records of a visit to the cave was an article in a newspaper in Colorado Springs, Colorado called the Great Divide. It appeared in the July 1891 edition. Three names were written inside the cave; the author of the article was one of those. He explained that descriptions today are more formal. A cover page of a July 4, 2013 expedition report was shown.

Photographs – a recent one received was discussed. A part called Ward Thirty was visited for resurvey. Graffiti was found with names of people in 1958. One of those people was found and he had pictures, so it is now known who discovered it and when.

A cover of the Nov. 2014 National Speleological Society News was shown, with a medal winning photo of the Society's meeting. This cave is completely different of any other cave in the world, with a floor covered with pristine crystals.

Maps - Fort Stanton Cave was mapped in 1877, the 2nd cave in the US. The Wheeler expedition was responsible for this map. An updated map of the same portion of the cave was also shown.

Mr. Peerman also showed an overlay telling where the cave goes in the NCA, partly under Lincoln National Forest. There is joint management by both BLM and the National Forest. An issue with the Cave is the size, it is longer than Carlsbad Caverns. The longest is Lechuguilla Cave.

Snowy River contains the most remote cave passages in the world, by far. The end of the cave is over 11 miles from the entrance. The map showed a comparison with other known caves in the world. The plan is to make a map which will be about 70 ft. long. Mr. Peerman told all that John Cochran is the chief cartographer of the cave at present.

A profile map was shown, showing what a passage might look like if you could see it from the side.

Exhibits – One available on the Ft. Stanton area was shown.

Audio Visual Presentations – availability of one given during Ft. Stanton Live in 2014 was discussed.

Surface Visits – An auto tour is being worked on. Many roads cross over the cave on the NCA. Much can be learned in these areas and a booklet is envisioned that will describe much to drivers crossing these areas. Different stops envisioned along the way were shown. The booklet would also include history, discovery, management and different aspects of what the cave is all about.

Scientific Documentation – This is a treasure house of different scientific disciplines. A paper was given on crystals at the Geologic Society Conference this year. World class research is going on.

Interactive Simulation called “Caver Quest” – This is a 3-4 dimensional of what the cave is all about. There is no other being done this way in the country. Mr. Peerman acknowledged BLM and the Forest Service for their leadership and guidance. Also all the volunteers that contribute to the success of the Fort Stanton Project.

The Caver Quest simulation was then viewed. Mr. Peerman explained that viewers must first take an entrance exam. He described some of the questions to be asked and answered. There was also an explanation of the White Nose Syndrome and what precautions are needed for decontaminate methods.

The next section showed where viewers will go with a picture of information available and then proceeded further into the cave during the simulation. It showed the “avatar” walking through the corridor. It is hoped to document all passages. Turtle Junction is where Snowy River actually begins. There are informational plaques in the cave and then a small quiz is shown.

It is being taken to schools for the education of the children and they are very interested. Pictures show actual pictures and profiles, what it does actually look like.

Question – if want to explore the furthest area, how long would it take to get there?

Answer - it can be done in 7-9 hours, by the fastest cavers. The very farthest point is probably 10 hours but much protection must take place first. There I much preparation going in and out is necessary.

Mr. Peerman explained that from where the group is located now, the entrance is 1-1/2 miles away. It cannot be entered without a permit and right now bat hibernation is taking place and no entering is

allowed. The bats are primarily Townsend Bats, 500-900 in recent years. It is a significant bat roost. Attempted break-ins occurred but no entrance is known.

George Veni told all that at last year's International Conference of Speleology, held every four (4) years, the most significant exploration in the last year is selected. This cave was selected for exploration, protection and good science done. It is the highest recognition given if selected for this award.

Mr. Schmidt stated that cavers, while working, don't look up much but this simulation was able to show information not seen by cavers. It is a very educational tool. Ron Lipinski, a scientist from Sandia Nat'l. Labs is the individual most responsible.

FSCSP.org allows downloading the program as well.

BLM Planning 2.0 & IT4RM- Howard Parman/Phil Watts

Mr. Parman explained that Planning 2.0 is BLM's effort to make the planning process as transparent and user friendly as possible for the public. If an individual has questions, large or small, they should be able to go to a central website and query for the state and possibly the name of a project and have the opportunity to make public comment.

Adequate public comment is difficult to achieve. Comments need to include reasons for what is liked or not liked, otherwise the comment does not get any attention. Hopefully this will help get better comments. Those making comments will be able to do a simpler version.

Every BLM office in NM is using a form of this. It automates the system and keeps BLM aware of what needs to be done. The effort is made as smooth as possible internally.

IT4RM – This is an internal process with two sides, the development side and the live side. The development site is not used after a project goes live.

Internal – There is an icon that opens the application. Several options were shown. APDs in the system were shown and how to look into and see all aspects concerning the project. It contains much information. A map can also be seen.

How projects are entered in for the different types was demonstrated. Specialist receiving the application is usually the one entering it into the system, as they will have all the pertinent information. Most of what was shown is the **internal** process.

The "live" side of the demonstration showed a map and the documents contained within the project.

It was stated that for the public to comment they will need an e-mail address. It was explained that this is not currently available, but is being worked on.

A document showing all the information available to the specialists on a particular action was shown. This eliminates the "package" going from desk to desk and the possibilities of errors occurring and makes all information available to all electronically.

Question: Could this be used for a project for an application other than what is known but the possibility does exist, if not the type already in the system?

Answer: It can be done.

Question: Is this something that will streamline the process and move them along faster?

Answer: Yes, it will help in the future. When staff is not available, can enable easier completion of the steps necessary.

This will also eliminate the loss of paper records if something should occur to affect them. Companies are being encouraged to submit any electronic requests when possible for integration. This will be a great time saving tool.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD – The public comment period was called as schedule and there were no comments.

Open Trench Monitoring – Johnny Chopp/Doug Lynn of CEHMM.

Mr. Chopp, from the Carlsbad Field Office (CFO) demonstrated this stipulation with a power point presentation. He explained the Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA) and Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA). This is included in the workshop on this process which is held monthly..

The BLM Mission Statement and the definition of the FLPMA Act of 1976 were reviewed.

The objectives of trenching were also reviewed. This included the purpose, equipment, situational awareness, procedure, etc.. A map of DSL habitat was shown and the boundaries within the RFO and CFO were reviewed. Ninety eight percent (98%) of all oil and gas activity is currently in CFO.

Purpose and Need – In 2010, 1.24 miles of a 40-mile open trench measuring 4.8 ft. deep and 3 feet wide was surveyed. Twenty four (24) individual of 10 species of mammal, amphibians and reptiles were found trapped in the trench.

Question: – what was the origin of the open trench?

Answer: – a pipeline

The stipulation includes personal safety as a priority and OSHA compliance. Both are stressed. What is required and when it applies was reviewed. Any project within the boundary of the DSL must be reported to BLM prior to any construction or ground disturbing activities taking place.

Escape ramps are not necessary if a trench is open for eight (8) hours or less. The trench is walked before backfill and removed of all trapped vertebrates. All will be released a minimum of 100 yards from the trench. The bottom surface will be disturbed a minimum of two (2) inches in order to arouse any trapped vertebrates.

Any trench left open for more than eight (8) hours must have earthen escape ramps, built no more than a 30 degree slope and spaced no more than 500 ft. apart, placed in the trench. No metal structures will be authorized.

Types of materials were shown and explained why some may not be used. Trenches must be monitored once a day between 11 and 2. BLM receives a daily report, showing where have been, what found, and status of species. Stipulation applies to entire length of project in the DSL habitat polygon regardless of land ownership and enrolled or not in CCA or CCAA. In the NEPA process analyze length of the project.

Question: – if there is no land ownership by BLM, how does company notify BLM if going over state or private land.

Answer: - If enrolled in a CCAA (state land) is notified and then the information goes to CHEMM, and then to BLM.

CHEMM is holder of all documents and agents of record for the species within these documents. A plan was developed with CHEMM and the State to assure good communication and seems to be working well.

Question: -Are there enough staff to keep up with daily reports and how do you manage that.

Answer: - A centralized e-mail to the specialist and compliance people at the same time. Challenges have been overcome.

Question: - Are there records kept?

Answer: - Yes, photos are kept and this is encouraging more public involvement in conservation.

A closeout is required within three (3) business day of completion of a project.

Equipment is discussed to ensure safety with the elements and wildlife (snakes, etc.). BLM provides a workshop dealing with all aspects of trenching stipulation. These include the procedure summary, pre- construction contact with BLM, daily report and closeout procedure. The monthly workshops are encouraging public engagement and are very successful. The next one will be November 20. Only December has no workshop.

Question: - what about areas other than DSL.

Answer: - This option is being viewed and it may grow into other areas in the future.

Doug Lynn told the Council that 24 different trenches were explored and 3500 extractions were taken from these. CHEMM sends techs out in teams, with equipment. They are trained by highly trained individuals. There are thousands of miles going through these areas. Field guides have been developed to be able to identify the species being removed from the trenches. The Great Plains Narrow Mouth Toad, Milk Snakes and Massasagua Rattlesnakes have been found.

Everything that is found is reported. They are an independent third party monitor, looking above and beyond that in CCA and CCAA. Try to educate all about what kind of snakes are found to avoid destroying species that are harmless. Photos of several other animals, including turtles and horned toad, kangaroo rat, etc. were shown. Rains brought more amphibians to be extricated.

Frac ponds also effect many species. One had 16 box turtles. If enrolled in a CCAA, an escape ramp in any kind of open water source must be constructed.

All field techs are highly trained by both oil and gas and BLM personnel and standards. There are monitoring teams for every three (3) miles of open trench.

The last law suit filed was dismissed due to proactive measures taking place. CEHMM has a web site that informs all aspects of the agency.

Lesser Prairie-Chicken ACEC Committee Report - Adam Ortega

Mr. Ortega reported that the subcommittee met on September 17. They were looking for members to advise the subcommittee and BLM on this issue. They took a tour of the ACEC in late September to

become more familiar with the area. In October the group toured the Sand Ranch and around the TNC to see how grazing had been used. A good discussion was had.

At a meeting following the tour in Milnesand there was discussion of the monitoring done on TNC and the obstacles created by drought. It was decided to focus on a smaller portion of the ACEC for grazing where chickens are and either grow or scale back as necessary. It was decided that this would be a fluid management process.

On Dec. 11 OSU will tour the ACEC and then advise the BLM on fire management. In the afternoon the subcommittee will formulate a formal recommendation to be presented to the RAC.

Adam informed the group of those who are participating on this subcommittee.

Chuck Schmidt advised that at the first meeting there was much interest and participation. As time went on it became a core group which is expected will come up with a formal recommendation to present to the RAC re management of the area.

He was asked if this was part of the process to identify habitat and was told that this is existing habitat on which there is currently no grazing and is being looked at for grazing as a process to preserve the habitat.

It was suggested that the F&WLS should be encouraged, if possible, to designate what will be critical habitat.

It was mentioned that possibly wild horses and burros could be used on this area rather than cattle grazing. The group was advised that this would entail a totally different set of circumstances and management issues.

**Status of BLM's Section 7 Consultation with USFWS Regarding
The Lesser Prairie-Chicken** – Howard Parman.

Mr. Parman explained that it is always necessary when have newly designated species. It began last May. There are several no effect determinations. These were also listed on the handout to members of the Council. May effect, not likely to adversely affect determinations were also listed. Most apply to New Mexico.

The Resource Management Plan lists March 1 through June 15 for no activity in habitat areas and has now been extended to July 15. Other key components were also listed.

“Still to do” issues were discussed. Will only consult on allotments not enrolled in CCA. A map showed these. However, what is required of CCA or permits must be done or will not be renewed without consultation. It is hoped formal consultation will take place in the near future. It will take less time than informal which is being currently done. Further consultation will be required if not meeting Grazing Standards and Guidelines.

Consultation will only take place on oil and gas leases not enrolled in CCA. In the planning area established in the RMPA, less than 20,000 acres are not enrolled. The Conference Opinion is done, to be rolled into a Biological Opinion in the next 3 months.

There are two (2) stages – leasing and how to develop existing leases not enrolled in CCA.

BLM is still working internally to be able to start on informal process. It is hopeful this will be done by spring.

Mesquite Treatment and Prescribed Fire - Mr. Parman stated that all should a consult with BLM on project or project based basis. Mesquite must be healthy before it can be destroyed. BLM will treat aerially next spring. Need to discuss with F&WS. This has been done and know how will move forward. If there is an area in the defined area that chickens are not using, will treat aerially. Will use fire within used areas but will leave for the time being. A decision has not been reached on use between fire and herbicide. Will work on this further.

It works well having a liaison within the BLM from F&WLS. This will be continued.

Question: - Can we continue operations after 6/15.?

Answer: - Only if enrolled in a CCA.

Question: - What does mesquite treatment do to other species and their habitat?

Answer: - When applied aerially, treatment hits only mesquite, leaves grass alone. Under CCA do other monitoring and surveys to see that other inhabited areas by other species are protected.

Mesquite spraying is done by hand in LPC dunal areas.

Question: - How small an area can you spray aerially.

Answer: - As small an area as wanted, cost is a factor. It can be controlled easily.

Concepts and Application of Regional Mitigation for Projects on Public Land – Howard Parman

Mr. Parman explained that BLM wants to go to a landscape scale type of planning. They want to do this in other places as well. If cannot mitigate on site, an applicant can be required to either perform mitigation somewhere else or provide funds for mitigation in other places. BLM has a manual on this process. On those leases not enrolled in a CCA, BLM will use regional mitigation to allow development of their existing leases.

Example – RFO has a project with 70 wells on 40-acre spacing. Some leases are enrolled in CCA; can allow use of monies to mitigate in another area. Regional mitigation will be a way to continue leasing and development. This concept will conserve the ecosystem as a whole; it is a tool to help accomplish this.

Question: - What is the timeframe?

Answer: - It goes into a biological assessment for oil and gas. There are many details to be worked out but maybe May or June of 2015, hopefully.

NEXT MEETING - March 10, 9:00 Roswell, NM

Suggested Agenda Items:

- Hydrology
- Riparian Corridor (Pecos River)
- Cultural
- ACEC Committee Recommendations

Approved: Steve West
Steve West, Chairman

Date: 10 March 2015