

SUMMARY MINUTES
PECOS DISTRICT RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL

December 06, 2017
Roswell, NM

RAC Members Present:

Lewis Derrick
Ron Black

Federal Official:

Jim Stovall, District Manager

RAC Members Absent:

Ronald Hillman
Patricia McDaniel
Stephen Peerman
George Veni

Public:

Jack Callaway
Emily Wirth
Richard Gilliland
Will Cavin
Lisa Winn
Lisa Dunlap
Beverly Allen
Kellen Casabonne

BLM Staff/Meeting Support:

Chuck Schmidt
Glen Garnand
Beau Truitt
Robert Hoskinson
Ty Allen
Knutt Peterson
Ruben Sanchez

Scribe:

Betty Hicks

CALL TO ORDER, WELCOME & OPENING STATEMENTS

The meeting was called to order by Glen Garnand, Resource Advisory Council (RAC) Coordinator in the absence of Chairman Peerman. He explained that it had been difficult to have meetings lately due to the process of having new members approved. Several members were unable to attend but will proceed with agenda information as planned. Mr. Ron Black was introduced as a new member and hopefully the next meeting will include new members awaiting Washington approval.

Chuck Schmidt, Roswell Field Manager explained that as a member of the RAC members have the ability to ask for meetings if items of interest are known. Introductions of attendees followed.

Presentations

ACEC Guidance Plan Update – Glen Garnand

Mr. Garnand explained that regulations stipulate that activity plans must be developed when an Area of Critical Environmental Concern is formed (ACEC) is formed. A subcommittee was formed from the RAC, tasked with making recommendations for who would graze the Lesser prairie chicken ACEC, work with stipulations, and bring recommendations back to the RAC and BLM. Under the Roswell Management Plan Amendment (RMPA) the 58 thousand acre ACEC was established. Biological qualities exist within the ACEC with emphasis on wildlife, mostly LPC and lizard. The ACEC is located east of Roswell, towards Tatum NM.

Issues include how to preserve the ecosystem and the biodiversity of it and how to manage it. It also includes addressing recreational use and facilities development and addressing conflicts between wildlife and recreation. The grazing issue and fire management are also addressed in the ACEC plan just released in September 2017.

The RMPA did a good job of having management goals and objectives in the area and it was decided to call this a Guidance Plan. Projects are to be managed using adaptive management and it elaborates what the RMPA was telling us to do.

A lands with wilderness characteristics inventory was done, a road inventory done, a public meeting held on January 28, 2015 and open meetings for the RAC

subcommittee. Consultation with Tribes was completed during development and information is posted to the E-planning site.

Chuck Schmidt relayed that no new firm decisions are being made. The document focused on what the issues are and what we are going to do about it. Whatever will be done must still have site specific NEPA done. There is much fluidity in writing a document that will last for 20 years.

There will be grazing and fire management done there. The RAC recommendation defined a process to decide how to find grazers for the area. By the end of this fiscal year BLM should be using grazing as a management tool on this area.

It was requested that the Plan be made available to the RAC members.

It was asked who is responsible for water on the area. BLM is and has agreements with the rancher on either side water who will work with BLM regarding the water issue.

It was explained that during the leking season BLM has bird watchers and will also train those doing the same that are not familiar with the process. Outreach and posting of “dos and don’ts” will be made available to the public.

It was asked if BLM has anything in place about restricting open campfires during the time that fire season is evident.

Mr. Schmidt explained that BLM works with other agencies and coordinates as much as possible. BLM can do restriction but if other entities are not doing the same, it is very difficult to do.

New RAC Members – Glen Garnand

It was explained that currently Jack Callaway is going through the member approval process and all the current members were named. When approval of Mr. Callaway and one other applicant, the Council will have a quorum available. All of the categories were listed and it is expected that another call for nominations may be had soon.

Recruitment information is posted in the *Federal Register* and local newspapers. Applications and a letter of recommendation must be filed. Concurrence of selections is done by the Governor’s office and then on to Washington for final

approval. When selected, members will receive notification that they have been approved.

There is a data base that must be kept updated and much coordination is necessary.

The Draft Carlsbad Resource Management Plan &

Environmental Impact Statement – Ty Allen

Mr. Allen explained to the Council that the Carlsbad Field Office (CFO) has been working on the Plan for several years. The current Plan was done in 1988. These are usually good for 20 years and BLM has now been tasked with doing a revision, looking at all aspects of BLM management. It was started formally in 2009/2010. Many changes took place and now there is much attention on getting the Plan completed.

Key points listed were that the draft is planned to be out of CFO by the end of January, to the Washington Office for review and then published in the *Federal Register*. There will be a 90-day period for public comment, public meetings will be held and comments addressed for any adjustments necessary, completing the full process in about one year.

Contact information will be made available and the CFO can be called for any information.

District Manager Jim Stovall explained that as this is on a fast track from the Washington Office, CFO has a full time team working on it for review of comments. It is hoped for more resource availability when the final printing is necessary.

Alternatives were explained and how CFO plans to complete the process under the current time constraint.

It was asked who in the Washington Office looks at the Plan when it is forwarded. The answer was BLM personnel and people in the Department of Interior

Eventually BLM must coordinate with other agencies when the alternatives are developed.

It was asked when the Roswell RMP is coming out and will it tie with CFO. It was explained that a Plan review was done about a year ago. It is approaching 20

years, but through the Plan Amendment and other documents, there is not a pressing need to do again at present.

Mr. Schmidt stated that possibly in 2021 a discussion regarding the need for redoing will occur. Currently the State priorities are Carlsbad, Farmington and Oklahoma.

Rob Jagers Campground Fee Proposal - Beau Truitt

Mr. Truitt explained that this is the main campground on the National Conservation Area (NCA). It has many amenities, including horse trails. Maintaining these has much expense, with not much return coming in. BLM is updating the business plan to have more dollars to put back into the campground. The draft has been looked at by the State Office and there is a need for more comments from the public.

A power point presentation of the proposed fee update and future campground configuration was shown, along with a listing of current amenities and configuration. These include 15 designated campsites, some with electrical hookups and potable water, some with water only and a group shelter, two vault toilets, a horse round pen and four corrals.

Currently it is free for day use, free for “boondock” camping, and free day use of the round pen and four small horse pens.

Current charges are: \$5 for water, \$5 for electricity, \$15 for dumping and \$25 for the group shelter reserved in advance. These charges are per night.

Currently about \$6500 is collected and expenses have been almost \$24,000. Proposed fees were listed as \$10 for “boondock” camping, \$20 for sites with potable water and electricity, \$30 for use of the dump stations and \$2/panel per night for horse corrals, possibly \$8 for those with four panels. These would be per night. The charge for the group shelter and free day use of sites and round pen would remain as is.

Based on the past year’s use, 450 payments were collected. Four hundred future users with increased fees would bring in about \$8,000, with two nights bringing \$16,000. The proposed fees could bring in between \$17 to \$30 thousand dollars.

This should bring us to solvency, with possible dollars to reinvest in campground upgrades.

A sketch, subject to change, of the proposed expansion was shown, as well as estimated costs. It is hoped for possible funds coming, but still short to do the upgrade of the electrical system. There are funds earmarked for 2018, but much less than the cost of the actual electrical upgrade.

The facility is used by equestrian groups, endurance riders, hunters and many day users. It was asked if the users had had any input and the response was that most are very surprised that BLM does not charge more and many are pleased with current charges. No negativity has been received over the proposed fees.

In response to a question about the cave campground, it was stated that this is low impact site two miles down the road, near the cave, but there are no plans to develop this area for resource protection of the cave. Cave access is highly managed at present with science based access only, no recreational access. A program has been developed with photos of the cave that can be seen remotely.

[Rio Bonito Wetlands Proposed Project – Randy Howard](#)

Mr. Truitt discussed this item, as Mr. Howard was unable to attend. This area is on Tract 4 of the acquired lands, on the north side of highway 380. The project is a proposed trout fishery. Tests have been done and there are several trout species in the river at this time. BLM would like to see an engineering firm look at how to change the flow of the river, to be able to sustain a trout fishery that the Department of Game & Fish would stock, open to the public.

There is concern by some that the area will “dry up”, so why spend the money. The areas west and above have an ecological difference that says there will always be water that can sustain a fishery here. The firm doing general pre-work, River Bend Engineering, including how to do and the cost for the conceptual site, specializes in this type of work. It is hoped that the fishing availability would increase recreational use of the area.

The whole tract is about three miles, the fishery would be a smaller area. An open house was held in Lincoln, with a biologist attending. There was some concern about trespass issues from adjacent landowners and some excitement about it being a good asset for more visitation to the area. There were both pros and cons to the project. It was stated that Game & Fish will help with trespass issues if necessary.

BLM law enforcement and others would be an increased presence and would help manage these issues.

Field Manager Schmidt told the group that it is a heavy partnering opportunity for BLM with several other entities and that this will help with funding opportunities as well.

Much work is being done on the Rio Bonito on salt cedar and the control of noxious weeds.

District Workload Priorities—Chuck Schmidt

The Roswell Field Office (RFO) consists of seven counties, with the bulk in Chaves and Lincoln. Oil and gas has had less impact in last years. It is picking up again, with more APDs starting to come in. When Yates sold to EOG, the approval of transfers created a large workload.

The State land exchange is currently underway, involving much RFO lands (96 allotments). This is a large workload and it is hoped to complete the process in a year's time. The State Land Office is holding a meeting in Ruidoso on Thursday, December 7 and one in Roswell on Friday, December 8. These are invitee meetings.

The County Land Use Committee meeting will be attended by BLM.

There is interest in wind development in northern Lincoln and southern Torrance counties, but no application at this time.

It was asked about comments regarding the exchange from the oil and gas industry. Mr. Schmidt relayed that there had been many phone calls, some negative and many positive. If there will be a grazing permit process change there will be a 2-year notice given.

There is much information on the web site (blm.gov). The public site shows a map of the actual lands. Zones are shown specifically.

District Manager Stovall reported that districtwide the Pecos District is the only district that has their 10-year permits done. Renewals are being done districtwide. Both offices maintain a monitoring program. The RFO is staffed well and hiring is ongoing in CFO due to retirements.

There has been an uptake in APDs, etc. in oil and gas in the CFO. It was asked how large well pad projects impact the workload and the response was that when permitted many Sundries occur. CFO received 850 in a month. Many rights-of-ways are still waiting. Two realty specialists have been hired and CFO has requested two more. News on filling positions is hoped for soon.

The Restore NM program is ongoing and projects are doing well. Two recognitions were received in the Pecos District. Ray Keller was recognized by the Cattlegrowers and rancher John Ballard received the statewide BLM award.

Currently there is discussion of a wind proposal in the Guadalupe area in the very early stages. Ten-year-old projects are being looked at.

It was asked if there would be more studies in the LPC areas regarding the listing of the chicken after fires that occurred. Mr. Stovall relayed that this is a possibility but that CCAs are still being signed and that BLM is reaching out to other agencies with information regarding the chicken.

LUNCH

CAVE UPDATE – Steve Peerman

In Mr. Peerman's absence Mr. Knutt Peterson reported that there are many activities ongoing at Fort Stanton. Mr. Peerman heads the Cave Study Project taking place in Snowy River. BLM processed 25 Special Recreation Permits on the National Conservation Area (NCA), seven off the NCA and three 10-day expeditions for the Cave Study Project members. This is a partner group with many volunteer hours (7-8 thousand hours per year).

There are now two miles of an ADA compliant trail marking system in the cave. With symbolization for color blindness as well. Maintenance on several sections of trail, new steps have been installed and reclamation on some of the old steps has been done. The gate to the cave has also been repainted.

A demonstration of the decontamination system used in the cave was provided to the National Speleological Conference held in Albuquerque, NM. Other agencies are also interested in our system.

Bat counts were done on Torgac and Crystal caves. This will be done at Ft. Stanton next year.

Three Snowy River evaluation and assessment trips were done. The water stopped flowing August. It was flowing in the spring and when accessed on August 19 it had stopped. It was checked in late September to see if another trip could be run further south, but was too fragile. This may be done in the spring.

There is a new kiosk at the Fort Stanton museum. It is an avitar based learning tool, Cave Request, which can be used to learn much, as if in the cave. New proposals are due in January for the resurvey/restoration effort.

It was explained that the Cavers have built their own lidar unit which allows a 3-d view. This can be explored in the Cave Quest game which has five miles of explorable cave.

The Study Project published a 300- page book about the history of the Fort Stanton cave. This was promoted in Australia at the International Congress meeting.

Much mud was removed from formations in the Trophy Room during three trips for restoration.

Science is also being supported. A graduate student working with George Veni is looking for viral samples.

Where the water is coming from is also trying to be determined. It is known it goes underneath Eagle Creek and Little Creek. It has been chemically connected to Little Creek by water coming out of cave. There are many insurgent points along Eagle Creek. A new hydrology working group containing many disciplines is working on this issue.

Resistivity and geophysical work is also being done.

An historical chronology is being compiled, to date back to the 1950's and prior historical writings.

A decontaminator station was shown and volunteers pictured.

It was stated that Whitenose Syndrome is known to be in Amarillo, TX and if it reaches here it will devastate the bat population.

Decontamination began in 2010 in RFO. A hospital grade disinfectant was being used. It has since been discovered that spores can be killed with high degree water temperatures. Next year the NSS convention will be in Helena, MT. BLM may show at this venue.

[UPDATE ON OIL & GAS REGULATIONS](#) - Bob Hoskinson

Mr. Hoskinson explained that he would discuss the new oil and gas Rules, 43 CFR 3173, 3174 and 3175 and the Facility Measurement Points (FMP). If all goes correctly AFMSS II will be released in 2018. This is a measurement system which tracks all information in the field. All paper work will now be electronic.

He explained that all facilities after January 17, 2017, must meet the new rules as of then. BLM is working hand in hand with operators to get all compliant under the new regulations.

Time frames for compliance were listed for different oil and gas extractions.

This does not include allocation points or gas plants.

There are new requirements this year for gas measurement. The probe must be at same ambient temperature as the device. If a thermal well, the first one closest to the meter must be used.

Valves must be sealed in lines immediately adjacent to the tank. Pictures of improper and effectively sealed vales were shown. It was explained that each unsealed or inappropriate sealed valve is a separate violation. Violators will be assessed for each one. BLM is working at educating to help avoid enforcement.

When assessments are imposed, more can be imposed if necessary. Some reasons for immediate assessments were discussed and listed as follows:

- If BLM puts on a seal, there will still be an assessment. If the seal is broken, this causes another immediate assessment.

- If the measurement system is bypassed, also immediate assessment.

- Improper reporting of theft or mishandling is an immediate assessment.

- If records were not properly retained (7 years is required).

- If operator refuses to cooperate, unable to correct or not present causes an immediate assessment.

Mr. Hoskinson also relayed that seals placed by BLM contain names and numbers of those to be contacted. An inventory must be done at the end of the month.

Information to be contained in seal records was given.

It was asked how it works if someone else owns the pipeline and the answer was that BLM works only with the operator.

Public Comment Period

The public comment period

There were no comments

At the close of all presentations Mr. Schmidt reiterated that at a future meeting when a quorum is present BLM would like a recommendation from the members regarding the proposed fee schedule for Ft. Stanton.

Also, in connection with the previous question concerning the possibility of studies,

etc. it was asked if fires in other areas would affect or tie this area to lesser populations regarding the LPC, Mr. Frank Weaver, the Fish and Wildlife Service employee based in the RFO was introduced. He explained that he will be moving to the CFO in the near future and his vacated position will again be filled in the RFO.

Mr. Weaver responded that he didn't think it will put this area in a bind; that CCAs and CCAAs assure that what is necessary is already being done.

There is a petition in place, so the process will take place again. It is felt that BLM is well postured in this District.

The next meeting date was scheduled for March 20, 2018 in Hobbs, NM.

Future agenda items were suggested as follows:

P& A Process –

Right-of-Way Relinquishment

Fee Proposal – Ft. Stanton

CFO RMP Draft

Fire Updates re LPC and Lizard surveys

Horn Shelled Muscle Update