



United States Department of the Interior

Bureau of Land Management
3028 East Main Street
Canon City, Colorado 81212



FRONT RANGE RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL (RAC) MINUTES November 14, 2012

Category 1

Ed Neilsen
Mike Barningham
Carlos Garcia

Category 2

Mike Nelson
Greg Labbe
Mark Hesse

Category 3

Laura Benjamin
Dean Sandoval
Al Trujillo
Christopher "Kit" Shy

ATTENDEES

Tom Heinlein, Designated Federal Official (Front Range District Manager); Denise Adamic, Front Range RAC Coordinator; Shelley Freer, Front Range RAC Recorder; Keith Berger, Royal Gorge Field Manager; Leah Quesenberry, Associate Front Range District Manager; Andrew Archuleta, San Luis Valley Field Manager; Holly Fulton, member of the public; Deloris Krewl, member of the public; and Allison Sandoval, BLM National RAC Coordinator

INTRODUCTIONS AND OLD BUSINESS

The meeting was called to order at 9:20 a.m. by Chairman Shy. The RAC members, attendees and guests introduced themselves. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited by the group. Chairman Shy asked if there were any edits or additions to the last meeting's minutes; there were none. Mike Nelson moved to approve the last meeting's minutes, which was seconded by Ed Neilsen. The minutes were approved unanimously.

Mike N. inquired as to how many people frequent Cache Creek (which was the topic of discussion at the August meeting). Keith said he would have to track down that information and share it at the next meeting.

Mark Hesse commented on the recent changes at the BLM's Penitente Canyon Special Recreation Management area, such as increased user fees. He said that members of the climbing community want to be good stewards of the land who want funds and fees to go back into maintaining that area's resources.

Tom Heinlein introduced himself as the new Front Range District Manager. He has previous experience as a BLM Field Manager in Utah as well as time with the National Park Service. Tom

H. thanked Leah Quesenberry for her time as Acting District Manager, as well as Denise Adamic and Shelley Freer for their efforts in organizing the RAC meeting. He then recognized Tom Olson and Keary Hallack for their service as outgoing members of the RAC. Neither was able to attend the meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Holly Fulton inquired about solar energy. Andrew Archuleta gave a brief overview of the BLM's national Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) for solar energy. Through the EIS the BLM has identified specific areas or solar energy zones (SEZs) that are suitable for solar development. There are four SEZs in Colorado, all of which are on lands managed by the San Luis Valley Field Office.

ETHICS TRAINING

Tom Heinlein, *Front Range District Manager (Designated Federal Officer)*

Tom H. gave a synopsis of ethics rules as applied to Resource Advisory Councils: RAC members are individuals who are specifically appointed to an advisory committee and serve as the voice of groups or entities with stakes in a particular matter. The Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) dictates that a FACA member may not participate in offering any advice or recommendation concerning a license or permit in which such a member has a direct interest. When in doubt about ethics rules, please ask the Designated Federal Official (DFO). Each situation will be discussed on a case by case basis with the DFO.

Keith Berger gave an example from a previous situation where an ethics question was asked and answered stating that RAC members may not provide recommendations if they have a permit or a direct interest in a person's individual permit.

MANAGERS UPDATE

Tom Heinlein, *Front Range District Manager (Designated Federal Officer)*

Veterans Green Corps: The BLM has entered into an agreement with an organization known as the Veterans Green Corps. The group is focused on bringing veterans into the federal work force, similar to how the Youth Corps recruit youth. Those veterans who are selected will come into the BLM as interns. Both the Royal Gorge and San Luis Valley field offices have submitted proposals requesting to be part of this initiative.

The BLM is also working to hire employees through Operation Warfighter. The RGFO will hire a Petroleum Engineering Technician through a partnership with the Veteran's Administration.

Andrew Archuleta, *Manager, San Luis Valley Field Office*

National Historic Park: Senator Mark Udall has proposed a bill to identify national historical, heritage, and cultural sites to be designated as National Historic Parks, including the Sangre de Cristo Heritage Park in the San Luis Valley. Historical sites may also be designated on the

National Historic Register. The bill may be introduced later this year and more information can be found on Senator Udall's website at <http://markudall.senate.gov/sangredecristo>.

Feral horses along the Rio Grande: There is a growing problem with feral and abandoned horses. The Rio Grande Natural Area Commission continues discussions on a draft management plan, including how to manage the feral and abandoned horse issues in the area. This summer a Valley resident was tried and sentenced for letting his horses trespass on BLM lands. If the individual is caught in trespass again, he will face impoundment of his animals. The BLM staff has seen nearly 100 horses in the area. Some of these animals are abandoned, some are feral, and others are in trespass.

Solar Energy: The Secretary of the Interior signed the Record of Decision for the Solar Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement on Oct. 12. The PEIS is a national document that establishes an initial set of 17 Solar Energy Zones (SEZs), totaling about 285,000 acres of public lands, that will serve as priority areas for commercial-scale solar development, with the potential for additional zones through ongoing and future regional planning processes. The program also provides a possibility of carefully sited solar projects outside the SEZs on about 19 million acres in "variance" areas.

Locally, the PEIS identified four SEZs, all of which are within the San Luis Valley Field Office area. The BLM has received an application from one company for two of the SEZs. The office is determining a competitive and public lease process for that application to be processed.

Geothermal Leasing Environmental Assessment: Earlier this year, the SLVFO released for public review and comment an environmental assessment (EA) for geothermal leasing on public lands within the Valley. This EA tiers to the 2008 programmatic environmental impact statement for geothermal leasing on BLM and USFS lands across the country. When completed, the EA will amend the 1991 San Luis Resource Area Management Plan. The final EA was released in October for a 30-day public protest period and a 60-day Governor's consistency review. There were no public protests on the EA.

Dan Hughes / San Francisco Creek #1 APD: The SLVFO is completing an environmental assessment for the San Francisco Creek #1 Application for Permit to Drill (APD). The APD is for a proposed exploratory oil and gas well that would be drilled on land owned by the Dan A. Hughes Company, five miles south of Del Norte. The federal mineral rights below the private land were leased from the BLM in 2006.

Rio Grande County recently passed a temporary moratorium on the approval of oil and gas permits until a county-funded hydrologic study can be completed. The BLM does not anticipate the County's study will be completed in time to be incorporated into this APD's environmental analysis, but the SLVFO will consider water impacts and current data in its analysis. The County is still completing its study.

Keith Berger, Manager, Royal Gorge Field Office (RGFO)

Cache Creek placer mining area (follow-up from August meeting): BLM has been involved in discussions with the Colorado Division of Water Resources regarding illegal water diversions at the Cache Creek recreational mining area. The RGFO is still waiting to hear from the Colorado Division of Water Resources Engineer's Office for suggestions on how to manage water uses at Cache Creek.

Oil and Gas leasing: On Nov. 8, the BLM Colorado State Office held an oil and gas lease sale; 32 of 48 parcels offered within the RGFO were sold. Most of the unsold parcels are in Elbert County. The next quarterly oil and gas lease sale will be Feb. 14, 2013. The RGFO is offering 146 parcels for sale including 70,289 acres. Six parcels in the South Park area have been deferred from the February sale for further analysis.

Fort Carson helicopter training: The RGFO currently has a casual use agreement with Fort Carson for the Army to conduct helicopter High-Altitude Mountainous Environmental Training (HAMET) on a temporary basis. The Army has requested approval of a longer term agreement. Before formalizing another agreement, the BLM will complete an environmental assessment. The Army's proposal is to use approximately 360 acres of BLM-managed lands for high-altitude helicopter training. Through consultation with both the Army and the Colorado State Historic Preservation Office, the BLM identified 36 areas (landing zones) as potentially suitable for these purposes.

The Royal Gorge Field Office is conducting internal staff work to prepare for public scoping of a HAMET agreement after the first of the year. The public scoping will help shape how the BLM conducts its assessment of the agreement.

Park Center Well: The BLM's oversight of work on the Park Center Well in Fremont County continues. The BLM is in the process of obtaining funding and contracts to complete the well. Currently, a BLM contractor is running a set of logs to determine the condition of the well's casing. The BLM will use this data to determine how to move forward with completing the well.

Resource Management Plan (RMP) revision: The RGFO may begin a revision to its RMP as soon as 2013. This revision process could be an entire plan overhaul or may focus on an oil and gas development amendment. The pre-plan is being reviewed in the BLM's national office.

GARDEN PARK FOSSIL AREA PRESENTATION

Melissa Smeins, Geologist, Royal Gorge Field Office

Melissa gave an overview of the Garden Park Fossil Area National Natural Landmark (NNL) designation. The NNL program recognizes and encourages conservation of sites that contain outstanding paleontological and geological resources. NNL's are selected for their outstanding condition, illustrative value, rarity, diversity, and value to science and education. There are nearly 600 NNL sites in the U.S.

This summer the RGFO finished and signed the EA for expanding the National Natural Landmark (NNL) designation for the Garden Park Fossil Area. The EA was released for a 30-day public comment period. BLM received several comments, all of which were in support of expanding the designation. The proposal is now with the National Park Service (NPS) for further analysis and a 60-day public review, which closes Nov. 26.

If the designation is approved by the NPS, the NNL designation will be expanded from 40 acres to several hundred acres, depending upon which alternative is accepted. The NNL expansion would include fossil sites on federal lands not currently protected by the designation. The designation is not a land withdrawal, does not change the ownership of the area and does not dictate activity. It is a voluntary program administered by the NPS and offers assistance to land managers to protect natural heritage resources. The current Garden Park Fossil Area NNL was originally designated because it is one of the most important and diverse late Jurassic period fossil sites in North America. It was one of the primary areas responsible for generating worldwide interest in dinosaurs during the late 1800s.

GARDEN PARK FOSSIL AREA FIELD TRIP

After Melissa S.'s presentation, the group then took an informative field trip to the Garden Park Fossil Area. Heather Germaine, National Natural Landmarks Coordinator from the National Park Service, was also in attendance.

CLOSING DISCUSSIONS

After the field trip, the group came together for closing comments. Al Trujillo recommended a commendation for Leah Quesenberry for doing an excellent job assisting the RAC during her duration as Acting District Manager. As the RAC does not make commendations, Tom H. will ensure that Leah Q. is made aware of the RAC's appreciation. Ed N. made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Al T. seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 4 p.m.

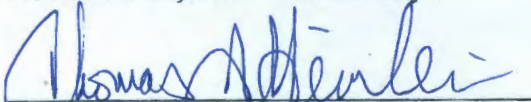
NEXT MEETING DATES

The 2013 meeting dates are as follows:

February 13, 14 & 15, 2013 – Denver, statewide RAC meeting (*tentative*)

July 10, 2013 – San Luis Valley

November 20, 2013 – Cañon City


Tom Heinlein, Designated Federal Officer
Front Range District Office
Bureau of Land Management


Christopher "Kit" Shy, Chair
Front Range Resource Advisory Council