



United States Department of the Interior

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



FRONT RANGE RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL MINUTES March 7 & 8, 2012*

This meeting was a breakout session from the combined statewide Resource Advisory Council meeting in Montrose, Colorado, March 6, 7, and 8, 2012.

RAC MEMEBERS PRESENT

Category 1

Bill Dvorak

Ed Nielsen

Category 2

Jay Heeter

Tom Olson

Greg Labbe

Category 3

Dean Sandoval

Al Trujillo

John Stevenson

Christopher "Kit" Shy

ATTENDEES

Leah Quesenberry, Acting Front Range District Manager; Andrew Archuleta, San Luis Valley Field Manager; Keith Berger, Royal Gorge Field Manager; Denise Adamic, Front Range Public Affairs Specialist / RAC Coordinator

OLD BUSINESS

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Kit Shy at 3:20 p.m. Kit pointed out that the pledge was not recited at the last meeting. The group agreed that it should be said at the beginning of every meeting, so the pledge was said. Kit asked for any comment on or corrections to the minutes from the January meeting. No one had anything to offer. Ed Nielsen moved that the minutes be accepted as written and Dean Sandoval seconded.

OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no responses.

SAN LUIS VALLEY FERAL HORSE ISSUES

- Ed Nielsen sometimes sits in on the Rio Grande Natural Area Commission (RGNAC) meetings and reported that he had not attended a RGNAC meeting since the last Front Range

Resource Advisory Council (FR RAC) meeting in January. The next RGNAC meeting was the week after the present FR RAC meeting, so Ed agreed to attend that meeting and report back to the FR RAC in May about how feral horse issues were being handled in the RGNA.

- Andrew Archuleta discussed abandoned horse issues in the San Luis Valley Field Office (SLVFO) area. Over the winter the SLVFO, along with the Humane Society, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the County Sheriff found several horses from a rescue facility that were turned out on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands. The group traced the horses to a local rescue facility. The Human Society rescued several more animals from the facility when investigators found a lack of feed and frozen water tanks. As a result of these animal seizures, the BLM has met with the FWS, brand inspector, state patrol and the state district attorney to discuss how to handle future abandoned horse and cattle issues. The group discussed the possibility of filing state charges against the individuals abandoning or allowing their livestock to trespass on BLM land. The group also discussed the potential liability and expense that would apply to whoever had to round-up the abandoned animals. If the group could prove there was a case of animal cruelty the Human Society could offer assistance.
- The RAC raised several questions which Andrew answered: Q – Why are the state patrol and state attorney involved? A – Because the animals provide a public safety concern. Q – Is there a memorandum of understanding or a formal agreement between the groups involved in this issue? A – The law enforcement officers within each group have working relationships with one another.
- Kit Shy asked Andrew to keep the FR RAC apprised of the issue as it progresses.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

- Before adjourning the meeting for the day, Kit Shy asked the group if they had any topics they would like to discuss beginning with the FR RAC's opinion of the statewide meeting. The group discussed the benefits of having all three of Colorado's Resource Advisory Councils annually meet in one location. Ed Nielsen said that each RAC seems to benefit from meeting the other two RACs, discussing what unique issues each group faces, how each group addresses similar issues, and meeting other members within the same categories as themselves.
- As part of the statewide RAC meeting, each RAC was tasked with writing a resolution either to continue acting in a Recreation Resource Advisory Council function or not. If the decision was yes, the RAC would be able to make decisions about recreation fee increases and establishments on BLM lands. The group unanimously agreed to take on the Recreation RAC function. Chairman Shy assigned Denise Adamic to draft a resolution to amend the FR RAC's charter accordingly so the resolution could be voted on at the next meeting.
- Ed Nielsen suggested that the group seek out new members within the minerals, mining, and energy industry to help round out the group's interests. The group agreed.

- Al Trujillo said that he enjoyed having general discussion time during regular meetings to brain storm topics and presentations for future meetings. The group agreed, so Kit asked that Denise add ten to fifteen minutes into each meeting's agenda for brainstorming sessions.
- This discussion led to the suggestion of a future presentation about commercial uses on BLM land. Bill Dvorak raised several questions: what are all the commercial uses on BLM lands? Why does it take so long for commercial permits to be processed? Has the BLM ever issued commercial permits in Browns Canyon area, and if not, why? Leah Quesenberry suggested that this topic could be covered at a future meeting with a presentation on special recreation permits.
- Chairman Shy noted that there is no one on the FR RAC who represents the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) even though there is overlap between BLM and USFS issues. He suggested that maybe there should be an annual report written to discuss the issues. Leah Quesenberry suggested that this could be handled during the managers' updates at each meeting by inviting the Forest Supervisor to give a brief overview.
- Chairman Shy also requested a cadastral survey presentation at a future meeting so the group could understand how surveys work and how they may or may not impact RAC issues.

Chairman Shy suggested that the meeting be recessed until the next morning. Greg Labbe moved to recess the meeting, and Ed Nielsen seconded. The meeting was recessed at 5:20 p.m. on Wednesday, March 7, 2012.

The meeting was reconvened at 8:02 a.m. on Thursday, March 8, 2012.

MANAGERS UPDATE

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

- *America's Great Outdoors:* Andrew mentioned the Secretary of the Interior's visit to the San Luis Valley in January. The visit corresponded with the Department of the Interior's America's Great Outdoors initiative to get people involved with their public lands. As a result of the Secretary's visit, the SLVFO is creating a proposal within the RGNA for trails within the Area to connect to other trails throughout the Valley.
- *Summitville Mine Clean-up:* The BLM is working with the Rio Grande National Forest, Alamosa River Keepers, Terrace Irrigation Company, Alamosa River Washed Restoration Foundation, and the State of Colorado on river restoration projects along the Alamosa River. The projects are part of clean-up and restoration efforts tied to the Summitville Mine rehabilitation efforts.
- *Blanca Wetlands expansion:* The SLVFO is in the public scoping stage of preparing an environmental assessment (EA) for expanding the Blanca Wetlands Area of Critical Environmental Concern. The EA will also analyze grazing on three allotments within the

wetlands area. The office held a public meeting February 29 and the comment period ends March 16. There were 75 attendees at the meeting and more than 200 comments filed.

- *Solar Energy:* The SLVFO through the BLM Colorado Renewable Energy Team is wrapping up efforts on the Supplemental to the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) for solar energy. The final PEIS is expected to be published sometime in the summer of 2012. Bill Dvorak asked if transmission lines had been considered yet. Andrew Archuleta said that is a reoccurring issue and something that will need to be addressed if solar energy development moves forward in the Valley. Chairman Shy asked if anyone has brought up the issues of Payment In Lieu of Taxes funds on the lands where solar energy development may occur. Andrew Archuleta said that is one of the many issues that the BLM Washington D.C. office is trying to figure out.
- *Geothermal Leasing:* The SLVFO is also working on 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. The SLVFO will publish the preliminary EA March 12 and have a 30-day public review and comment period. When finalized, the EA will amend the 1991 San Luis Resource Area Management Plan.
- *Grazing:* Livestock grazing in the San Luis Valley has been less than normal on BLM-managed lands this year. Andrew Archuleta explained that most permittees decided not to go out on their BLM allotments because the snowpack was so poor this winter resulting in less water and forage. The Saguache Basin is at 55 percent of what it should be this year for snowpack.
- *Rio Grande Natural Area Commission:* The next Rio Grande Natural Area Commission meeting is planned for Wednesday, March 14, 2012.
- *Oil and Gas:* The San Luis Valley is not well known for oil and gas development. The SLVFO received an application permit to drill (APD) for the San Francisco Creek area. The field office is still completing the APD review process. Chairman Shy asked if there have been any seismic activity studies done in the area; Andrew Archuleta said no.
- *New staff:* Paul Tigan is the new assistant field manager for the SLVFO. He began in late January and is located in the BLM's Monte Vista location.
- *Next RAC meeting:* The next RAC meeting will be in the Valley and the group will either visit Zapata Falls or Penitente Canyon. The group could even visit the Orient Mine area as the BLM and the Orient Mine Land Trust have entered into an agreement for trail access.

Keith Berger, Field Office Manager, Royal Gorge Field Office

- *Destiny Mine:* The Royal Gorge Field Office (RGFO) is working on the environmental assessment (EA) for the Destiny Mine proposal near South Park. An application was submitted by Destiny Mining, LLC, for a proposed combination gold mine and sand and gravel operation just outside the city limits of Fairplay, Colorado. The proposed operation is on an isolated 80-acre parcel of public land directly adjacent to a subdivision within the city limits. The project faces strong local opposition. The RGFO released a draft EA of the proposal for a 30-day public review and comment period in September 2011.
- *Garden Park Fossil Area:* 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. Now the proposal will move to the National Park Service (NPS) for further analysis and public review. If the designation is approved by the NPS, the 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. Chairman Shy mentioned that the RAC should take a field trip to the Garden Park Fossil Area at one of its future meetings in Canon City.
- *Browns Canyon Wilderness Study Area:* Senator Udall has initiated a community-based discussion about designating Browns Canyon as a Wilderness Area within a National Monument. No legislation has been proposed yet, but the Senator has begun public discussions about designating the area. He drafted three alternatives all of which include the BLM-managed Browns Canyon Wilderness Study Area and some adjacent USFS lands. There appears to be a lot of support from local interest groups. The BLM has not and will not take a stance on the proposal.
- *Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area:* The RGFO is working with Colorado Parks and Wildlife to update the river management plan for the Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area. The BLM and State are early in the process and trying to determine how each agency's planning requirements interact with the other's.
- *Fort Carson Landing Zones:* For several years the RGFO has had a casual use agreement with Fort Carson to allow the army to use several locations for helicopter training. BLM lands on the Front Range provide the same elevations that many U.S. forces are facing overseas. Current BLM guidance considers the arrangement "casual use" because the army helicopters touch down and then take off immediately, and the training period lasts only a short time from February to May. Fort Carson wants to extend its training duration, and BLM is considering preparing an environmental assessment to determine the implications should it extend the army's amount of use.

- *OTR Update:* The Over the River Corporation asked the BLM to postpone the exhibit period. This means that the temporary art work would be displayed August 2015 rather than August 2014, and the construction phase would be pushed back from May 2012 to December 2012. The BLM is reviewing its environmental impact statement to determine if and how the postponement might affect the analysis and mitigations measures the agency outlined.
- *Oil and Gas Leasing reform:* As part of the BLM's attempt at a more transparent and public process in oil and gas leasing, the BLM Colorado State Office is creating a new website to outline the public involvement process. This website will also house all the necessary information for the public to review and comment on through the process. Another aspect of the oil and gas leasing reform is how quarterly lease sales are conducted. The Front Range District, which includes the RGFO and the SLVFO, will have most of its parcels offered for sale in the November lease sale.
- *Cache Creek:* The RGFO is revising the recreational uses allowed on BLM lands in the Cache Creek Placer Area. Beginning Memorial Day 2012 (May 28), high-banking will no longer be allowed. Recreational-level gold panning and other non-mechanized/non-motorized mining will still be allowed in the area.

Leah Quesenberry, Acting Front Range District Manager

- *Renewable Energy Team (RET):* The RET is a four-person group of BLM staff housed in the SLVFO but are a national resource. They offer expertise in such efforts as preparing the Solar Energy Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement, the SLVFO geothermal leasing EA, and other renewable energy planning efforts on BLM-lands throughout the country.
- *Youth Involvement:* The Front Range District is engaged in many activities that try to get the area's youth involved with work on their public lands. Both field offices offer internships and project work for local youth corps groups. The SLVFO is working with Adams State College to create a natural resources certificate program. This initiative is a short program of study that provides students with a fundamental understanding of the natural resource problems facing society today.

Field Office Resource Management Plan (RMP) Updates

Andrew Archuleta, Field Office Manager, San Luis Valley

- The SLVFO plan was written in 1991. Some new resource issues have come up since the plan was written that the BLM did not address in the RMP (e.g., geothermal energy leasing). Those concerns are being addressed on a case-by-case basis. For example, a Valley-wide travel management plan has been completed and is being implemented. Also, visual resource management (VRM) decisions are being considered through planning efforts like the solar energy programmatic environmental impact statement. VRM considers how the BLM manages resources to maintain view sheds and scenic qualities. In every new project the SLVFO takes on, it includes those analyses necessary to supporting the current plan as well as those that will make the overall revision process easier. The SLVFO is not sure yet when

their plan revision will take place as that depends on funding and other planning priorities throughout the state.

- Chairman Shy asked if the field office budget is part of the RMP. Andrew Archuleta said that the budget is an annual assignment based on how the federal budget is allocated.
- Al Trujillo asked if the Valley's view sheds had been mapped. Andrew Archuleta said yes and that project could be discussed at a future FR RAC meeting.

Keith Berger, Field Office Manager, Royal Gorge

- The RGFO resource management plan (RMP) was completed in 1996. Some new issues (e.g., air quality analyses) have come up since then and those concerns will be included in a plan revision. The air analysis is important because the RGFO manages public lands along the Front Range which is beginning to have air quality issues. Colorado has an agreement with the Environmental Protection Agency to keep air quality from moving further into the non-attainment zone, which is an area near Weld County that has poor air quality including high levels of ozone. The RGFO has sent proposals to the BLM Washington D.C. office requesting support for either an oil and gas amendment to the RMP or a complete plan revision. The oil and gas amendment would be an up-to-date and in-depth analysis of the possible impacts of oil and gas activities within the RGFO. Either approach would be an environmental impact statement level of analysis and could begin as early as 2013.
- In addition to air quality issues on the Front Range, the RGFO staff has come up with other issues to be addressed should there be a complete plan revision. These issues include: wildlife and endangered species, migratory birds, wildland fire use, special recreation permits, playas and fens in the South Park area, updated boundaries for the Garden Park area of critical environmental concern, and visual resource management.

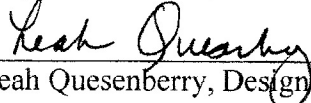
CLOSING DISCUSSIONS

Before adjourning the meeting, Chairman Shy asked if any RAC members had further questions about anything discussed at the meeting. The group reiterated their appreciation for the annual statewide RAC meeting.

John Stevenson moved to adjourn the meeting and Dean Sandoval seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 11:15 a.m.

NEXT MEETING DATE

May 9 in Alamosa, Colorado.


Leah Quesenberry, Designated Federal Officer

Acting Front Range District Office
Bureau of Land Management


Christopher "Kit" Shy, Chair

Front Range Resource Advisory Council