



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 June 11, 2015

Category 1

Ed Neilsen
Mike Barningham
Bill Dvorak
Diana Leiker

Category 2

Julie Mach
Scott Braden
Kristin Ann Salamack
Jason Anderson
Jara Johnson

Category 3

Laura Benjamin
Brett Ackerman
Christopher "Kit" Shy

ATTENDEES

Ruth Welch, BLM State Director; Leah Quesenberry, Designated Federal Officer (Acting Front Range District Manager); Kyle Sullivan, Front Range RAC Coordinator; Shelley Freer, Front Range RAC Administrative Assistant; Keith Berger, Royal Gorge Field Office Manager; and Andrew Archuleta, San Luis Valley Field Office Manager.

GUESTS

John Smeins, Eastern Colorado RMP Coordinator.

INTRODUCTIONS AND OLD BUSINESS

All RAC members and attendees introduced themselves after the meeting was called to order by Kit Shy at 9:10 a.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited by the group.

STATE DIRECTOR REMARKS

Ruth Welch, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) State Director welcomed the new members and stated that BLM relies heavily on the Resource Advisory Council (RAC) involvement. She apologized for the length of time that it takes for nominations to be approved. She is committed to having a state-wide RAC meeting early next year and appreciates this RAC's participation and advice.

Resource Management Planning (RMP) is moving forward. John Smeins is the Eastern Colorado RMP Coordinator.

The final draft of the Northwest District sage-grouse planning effort amendment has been released.

Brown's Canyon was recently named a National Monument; a dedication will be held on July 17 and 18 with many dignitaries in attendance.

Leah Quesenberry, Associate District Manager, will be moving to Idaho in July. Her expertise and knowledge will be greatly missed.

OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

Bills Betts from Guffey brought up concerns about Guffey Gorge. Last year, there were over 2,000 visitors to the area. There is under-age drinking, drug use, fires, weapons being fired, trash not disposed of, dangerous cliff diving. Visitors are parking on private land and staying overnight. Mr. Betts would like to see an alcohol ban, a weapons ban, and a Law Enforcement official who could patrol more often and give citations to the offenders. More trash cans would also be helpful. Park County deputies are patrolling more often but are now allowed to go down into the Gorge where the problems are located. BLM officials are aware of the multiple issues and are currently working on possible solutions.

MANAGERS UPDATE

Leah Quesenberry, *Front Range Associate District Manager (Acting Designated Federal Officer)*

Leah thanked the RAC for their continued service and welcomed new members. She also thanked them for their participation at meetings and field trip and encouraged meeting attendance to ensure a quorum. She reviewed a hand-out of frequently asked questions and RAC member roles and responsibilities. The RGFO RAC charter, BLM Colorado organizational chart, Front Range District leadership team chart, and thumb drives with the orientation handbook were also distributed.

The Brown's Canyon Monument dedication will be on July 17 and 18. The two-day event will include a river trip with dignitaries and a community celebration in Buena Vista. An agenda will be forthcoming. A map was distributed that shows the Monument boundaries. The Presidential Proclamation established the area as a Monument, showed the basis of managing the monument and identified special objects that will need further attention. The RAC can assist with planning efforts and public announcements. The question was raised as to whether or not a separate RAC would be initiated for the Monument but that has yet to be determined.

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

Andrew presented a pictorial view of the San Luis Valley (SLV) and their various projects. The SLV covers over 500,000 acres with 8 areas of critical environmental concerns, more than 600 miles of roads and trails and three Wilderness Study Areas. They are working with other agencies and entities on recreation, wildlife, rangeland, and solar energy projects.

Three BLM offices in the San Luis Valley have merged into one office in Monte Vista. The new building is a "mobile first environment" where cell phones are used for communication. Please come visit our new building!

The Rio Grande Natural Area was established by Congress in 2006. It is 33 miles long and includes private land, land grant, and public land. The San Luis Valley Field Office (SLVFO) is working with the Taos, NM Field Office on this project. A land advocacy group is also assisting with habitat issues.

The Blanca Wetlands is an area of Critical Environmental Concern (CEC) that serves as a refuge for birds, fish and other wildlife. There are 160 bird species with 15 of them being threatened, endangered, or special stakes species. The wetlands had been completely destroyed but BLM has begun to restore them and they have become an increasingly important ecological habitat.

RMP amendments are underway for the Gunnison sage-grouse threatened species. They are currently monitoring transplanted birds on Poncha Pass to determine further mitigation strategies.

Penitente Canyon is a rock climbing and mountain biking trail system. There are two developed campgrounds. A bike endurance race will be held there in mid-October and will be the first of its kind in the SLV.

There are several solar energy zones in the SLV. They are conducting landscape assessments and developing mitigation strategies. An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) has been completed and they are attempting to pave the way for industrial size development.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund is a collaborative proposal with the Upper Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust. The Federal Government is working on purchasing land next to the Blanca Wetlands. This is the number one BLM priority for fiscal year 2016 funding.

Keith Berger, Field Office Manager, Royal Gorge Field Office

There is a great deal of attention on the Guffey Gorge issues. Social media has increased popularity for the area. BLM has developed rules and regulations regarding parking as well as glass and fireworks prohibitions. In 2008, hazard signs were posted and a bridge was built for public safety. Meetings occurred in the last few years with stakeholder groups, Park County Commissioners, and BLM Solicitors to work on solutions. BLM is continually working on these safety and health concerns to formalize a parking lot, permit system with fees, adding a vault toilet, and providing supplemental rules for an alcohol ban.

Work is continuing on the High Altitude Mountain Environment Training (HAMET) request from Fort Carson. HAMET provides training to military helicopter pilots at altitudes similar to those in combat. They are requesting a long-term use agreement. An amended plan is pending. There is an increasing demand on mining activity at Cache Creek. BLM is looking at how to manage the area more effectively and may include special recreation permits.

Melissa Garcia, Renewable Resources Supervisor at the RGFO, gave updates on highway closures at Phantom Canyon and the county road from Wellsville to Howard. She also briefed the RAC on an Environmental Assessment (EA) in the New York Avenue area to connect BLM trails to the riverwalk.

RESOUREC MANAGEMENT PLAN REVISION

1. John Smeins, project lead for Eastern Colorado RMP
 - a. June 1, 2015 Federal Register Notice of Intent initiated the RMP process
 - b. Eastern Colorado RMP will be pilot project for Planning 2.0
 - c. How contractors fit into the RMP process
 - i. Contractors assist the BLM
 - ii. The BLM writes the RMP
 - iii. The RMP is a big workload, so the BLM hires contractors to assist so that BLM staff can keep doing their usual workload while the contractor is assisting with the RMP
 - d. Public scoping meetings will be held in the same seven communities where the envisioning meetings were held

- e. EMPSi is assisting the BLM with scoping
- 2. Kate Krebs, EMPSi – RMP 101/Nuts and Bolts
 - a. PowerPoint presentation (provided as a handout to RAC members)
 - b. *Question (Bill Dvorak):* How will the BLM allocate time and people to the various in-progress planning efforts? *Response (Keith Berger):* There is ebb and flow in all the planning processes; for example, there are times in the RMP where the BLM staff is very involved and other times when the contractor can do more of the work. We have a flow chart/timeline for the RMP; we are working on one for the Browns Canyon National Monument and are developing one for the Arkansas River Management Plan.
 - c. *Question (Kyle Sullivan):* Does travel route planning require an RMP amendment? *Response (Kate Krebs):* No. Route planning tiers to the RMP. An RMP amendment is only required if the larger polygons (i.e., Open, Closed, Limited to designated routes) are changed. Designating the routes and uses of those routes within Limited areas is the implementation-level decision that tiers to the RMP's land use planning-level decisions (i.e., Open, Closed, Limited to designated routes).
 - d. *Question (Kit Shy):* Does the BLM consider state, local, and other plans so that the RMP is consistent with those? *Response (Kate Krebs):* At the Proposed RMP/Final EIS stage, the document undergoes a 60-day Governor's consistency review. *Response (Keith Berger):* Cooperating Agencies can also assist with this.
 - e. *Planning 2.0 (John Smeins):* Envisioning would normally happen before the Analysis of the Management Situation, but for this RMP it happened immediately before scoping. That is one big difference of Planning 2.0. The other is during the alternatives development phase when the draft alternatives and a draft impact analysis strategy will be shared with the public for review. Then BLM will revise the alternatives and strategy, analyze alternatives (do impact analysis), and publish the Draft RMP/EIS.
 - i. *Question (Kristin Salamack):* Will these two steps increase the RMP timeline? *Response (John Smeins):* The goal is that getting this information up front rather than at the Draft RMP/EIS stage will shorten the overall timeline.
 - ii. This initial process will include the envisioning report and scoping report. Next the BLM will prepare draft alternatives report (draft planning issues, draft purpose and need, draft alternatives) and a draft impact analysis strategy (with data to be used).
 - iii. *Question (Bill Dvorak):* Will the alternatives be the usual suite of low, medium, and high? *Response (John Smeins and Keith Berger):* It is unknown at this point. The public review of the draft alternatives will help define this.
 - iv. There are several other studies being done to support the RMP, such as the wild and scenic rivers study. A draft eligibility report is available.
 - v. Draft alternatives for public review: There may need to be a facilitated discussion (potentially in the seven towns where envisioning and scoping meetings are being held) about the draft alternatives and soliciting public

- feedback on them, and soliciting public written comments on the draft alternatives. Will also use the Cooperating Agencies to assist in alternatives development. Written public comments would be solicited on the draft impact analysis strategy; would not facilitate discussions on this.
- vi. Keith Berger: The BLM is looking for RAC members' input on how to do Planning 2.0 and how to better involve the public. Do RAC members want more information on Planning 2.0 sent to them? *ACTION*: The BLM will provide pertinent Planning 2.0 information to the RAC.
 - f. Keith Berger: GIS and mapping will be done in house. The BLM is hiring a term staff position. The BLM is considering having their current full-time GIS specialist do the GIS for the RMP and the term position do more of the other day-to-day GIS. Socioeconomics and air resources will be done by the BLM Colorado State Office.
 - g. Question (Diana Leiker): Is there a better way to collect infrastructure data from industry? We have had experiences where the BLM does not seem to have all of the infrastructure mapped or where their information is different from ours. That should be a coordinated effort to get the BLM the most up-to-date information.
3. Angie Adams- RAC Role in the RMP Process
- a. The RMP is one piece of the RAC's role.
 - b. Some RMPs have the RAC be the body that provides feedback in the RMP process. The RAC stays informed through updates at the RAC meeting. In this method, the RAC is not as involved in alternatives development, just reviewing information that is developed.
 - c. Another option is a RAC Subgroup. It would represent the different categories that the RAC represents and would be a sanctioned group by the RAC. This group would meet more often than the RAC.
 - i. Some RAC Subgroups' mission is a "thumbs up" on the range of alternatives. There are a lot of resources so there is a lot of education that has to go into this type of involvement. This is so the group knows enough to provide meaningful feedback.
 - ii. Other groups have had a specific purpose, such as to help develop a range of reasonable alternatives for a specific resource, such as recreation.
 - d. RAC Subgroups not give the formal advisement to the BLM; the RAC is still responsible for that.
 - e. *Question (Melissa Garcia)*: Does anyone from the RAC participate in the Subgroup? *Response (Angie Adams)*: It depends on the charter. Typically, there is at least one RAC liaison in a Subgroup. Since the RAC Subgroup is not an official FACA [Federal Advisory Committee ACT] sanctioned group, those meetings do not need to be noticed in the Federal Register. This would also be why a member of the RAC would need to be present. The RAC started to form a RAC Subgroup about a year ago for the Master Leasing Plan but it did not go very far because it took a while for the RMP to get started.
 - f. The RAC will think about which direction they would like to go.

- g. Angie's opinion is that a focused Subgroup is more beneficial. A group that is not focused requires a lot of education and there is less involvement in developing alternatives.
 - h. *Question (Leah Quesenberry):* What is a good timeline to form a RAC Subgroup? *Response (Angie Adams):* To have an effective Subgroup you want them in place prior to alternatives development.
 - i. *Question (Keith Berger):* Did RAC Subgroups that focused on a certain issue participate at cooperating agency meetings? *Response (Angie Adams):* No. They have different purposes so they did not participate in meetings together. You could have meetings back to back but you are soliciting different types of feedback. The cooperating agencies are also engaged during the whole process. The RAC Subgroup is only engaged to fulfill their purpose.
 - j. *Question (Kit Shy):* Would BLM staff be available to the RAC Subgroup in the same capacity that they are to the RAC? Such as having Kyle arrange the meetings and take notes, etc. *Response (Keith Berger):* I assume so but it might be a District Office decision.
 - k. **ACTION:** The RAC will think about how to be involved and whether to create a RAC Subgroup and discuss at the next RAC meeting.
 - 1. *Question (unknown):* Do you know what disciplines might be hot topics besides the Master Leasing Plan? *Response (Keith Berger and John Smeins):* Possibly recreation and wilderness characteristics. Scoping will give us a better idea.
4. Kate Krebs – Scoping Preview
- a. Distributed several of the handouts that will be available at the scoping meetings that start next week
 - b. Meeting format: all will be from 5:30-7:30pm. Open house format. Approximately half-way through the meetings, Keith Berger will present a PowerPoint about the RMP process. There will not be a meeting recorder, so we are encouraging people to write down their comments on the comment forms or via email.
 - c. Several RAC members plan to attend a scoping meeting. RAC members may be pointed out to the public during the meetings.
 - d. Scoping meeting handouts will be available on the RMP website early next week.
5. John Smeins – Eastern Colorado RMP Website
- a. The documents and reports page includes special studies completed to date.
 - i. Keith Berger: The draft Wild and Scenic Rivers Eligibility report is available. That is simply an inventory of which streams and stream segments meet the eligibility criteria for consideration. Identified 372 segments, approximately 14 of which are eligible. Next will evaluate all of these for suitability. The suitability phase runs concurrently with the RMP alternatives development.
 - b. As special studies and reports are completed, they will be added to the RMP website.
6. Next RAC meeting: Thursday, September 10 (field trip) & Friday, September 11 (meeting) in Monte Vista. The BLM will give RAC a summary of scoping comments.

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

Christopher “Kit” Shy, Chair
Front Range Resource Advisory Council