



United States Department of the Interior



Bureau of Land Management
Crestone Charter School
330 Lime Avenue
Crestone, CO 81131

FRONT RANGE RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL (RAC) MINUTES August 20-21, 2014

Category 1

Ed Neilsen
Bill Dvorak
Steve Oswald
Carlos Garcia

Category 2

Jason Anderson
Jara Johnson

Category 3

Christopher "Kit" Shy
Dean Sandoval

ATTENDEES

Thomas Heinlein, Designated Federal Officer (Front Range District Manager); Kyle Sullivan, Front Range RAC Coordinator; Keith Berger, Royal Gorge Field Office Manager; Paul Tigan, San Luis Valley Field Office Assistant Manager; Melissa Garcia, Royal Gorge Field Office Assistant Manager Renewable Resources; John Smeins, Royal Gorge Field Office Resource Management Plan Project Lead; and Charles (Dave) Johnson, Acting Front Range District Associate District Manager.

GUESTS

Bea Ferrigno (Crestone Eagle), Julie Mach (Colorado Mountain Club), Julie Seivka (The Wilderness Society), and Barbra Felmlee (Congressman Scott Tipton)

INTRODUCTIONS AND OLD BUSINESS

All RAC members and attendees introduced themselves. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited by the group. A motion to pass the last meeting's minutes was made, however not enough RAC members were in attendance to obtain quorum. The meeting minutes will be passed at the next meeting.

OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN REVISION

John Smeins, *RMP Project Lead, Royal Gorge Field Office*

Melissa Garcia, *Assistant Field Manager (Renewable), Royal Gorge Field Office*

The Resource Management Plan (RMP) is a landscape level plan that is anticipated to last for the next twenty years. It is anticipated that the Notice of Intent will publish in late Sept. or early Oct., which will start the public scoping process. A timeline of events, list of required reports, list of cooperators were handed out (see RAC website). It is requested that the RAC carefully review these handouts and identify any missing information, especially any cooperators that may have been missed. The purpose of the scoping period is to identify issues that have changed or developed since the last RMP. The BLM needs the RAC's support and assistance in identifying any known issues. The Royal Gorge Field Office (RGFO) is currently in the process of developing the Analysis of Management Situation (AMS), which is the identification of issues. Once this document is finalized, RAC input is requested to determine if the identified issues make sense, and if the BLM has thought of known management situations? At the next RAC meeting, contractor NPSI will facilitate the RAC meeting focusing on scoping. BLM will be hosting scoping meetings in Cañon City, Salida, Leadville, Wallensberg, Fairplay, Denver and Greeley.

After scoping, the next step in the RMP process is the development of alternatives. The BLM is requesting the RAC's input on the range and quality of alternatives. The RAC may choose to develop sub RAC's for specific issues.

One major component of the RMP revision will be the development of a Master Leasing Plan (MLP) for the South Park region. The MLP is a planning tool to guide development of the federal mineral estate. It could include allocation decisions (where the development may take place), phased development, and potential stipulations for development. The BLM has engaged numerous stakeholders already. Keith Berger asked the RAC, "How would the RAC like to interact with the MLP portion of the RMP?"

After some conversation, it was determined that a sub-RAC would be appropriate to focus on the RMP. It was suggested that this sub-RAC will meet two weeks before the next RAC meeting (November 5) at the Fairgrounds.

Jara Johnson brought up that Coalition for the Upper South Platte (CUSP) was recently awarded a grant for facilitating conversations about the MLP and will subcontract to Keystone Science Center to host public meetings. The purpose is to explain the MLP and work with a series of stakeholders before BLM's public scoping starts in September.

Kit Shy - How much federal land is in South Park? What is the breakdown for federal vs. private and state subsurface minerals?

Ed Nielsen requested a list of current and potential future ACECs.

GUNNISON SAGE GROUSE

Leigh Espy, *Project Manager, Gunnison Sage Grouse EIS, BLM Colorado State Office*

The map and PowerPoint used for the presentation are available online at the Front Range RAC webpage: http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/BLM_Resources/racs/frnac/co_rac_minutes_front.html

Ed Nielsen: Are the seven subgroups in the basin genetically distinct?

Jason Anderson: Regardless of FWS decision, “We’re going to look at GuSG again.”

Jason Anderson: Sagauche County Commissioner – constituents are tired of this. I have listened to discussions across the country and sooner or later something has to be done. But more ESA issues will come up, impacting the area and the residents. Are you (the BLM) planning on doing similar efforts for every listed species?

Leigh Espy: Many of our RMPS have been updated recently, with others in the works, that account for sensitive species.

Jason Anderson: National Association of Counties passed six resolutions to provide more control and responsibility over ESA issues and measures.

Kit Shy: When listing species, does FWS define and characterize habitat? Does this impact private property?

Leigh Espy: It is a FWS decision, but to effect private property requires some sort of federal nexus. An example would be a federal grant for a thinning project on private lands.

Kit Shy: The identification of habitat must be finely done, GIS doesn’t define boundaries. What is the difference between occupied and potential habitat?

Leigh: Similar – occupy-able habitat, but BLM adopted FWS GIS boundaries as a starting point.

Kit: Are other species (listings) on the horizon going to be analyzed in the RMP?

Keith Berger: We will look at that and provide potential options. One approach is designating areas as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern. We often use this approach for sensitive plant species.

LUNCH

Mike Blakeman, *Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Forest Service*

The theme of Mike’s presentation was Forest in Flux based on recent fires in the area. After the fires of last year, there are still issues to worry about such as debris flows, flash floods, road washouts, and hazard trees. The Forest Service installed a Doppler Radar to forewarn of big storms. The spruce beetle has affected 480,000 acres. For 5-7 years after death, the logs can still be harvested as saw timber. There is a limited market for house logs, which can be viable for decades after death. The Forest Service is also looking into biomass options.

Ron Garcia, *Acting Project Manager, San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex*

The FWS is working on a comprehensive conservation plan (similar to BLM's RMP) to guide management of the refugees in the SLV. The plan will be released as a draft at the end of the month. Baca wildlife refuge has been closed to the public since acquisition. Due to the FWS's single use mission, any public use must be wildlife dependent. This means visitor use falls into the categories of interpretation, environmental education, observation, photography, hunting, and/or fishing. The issues the refugees are facing is the pending rules and regulations for the administration of groundwater, because all refuges rely on groundwater. Invasive species are always another concern. The refuge is managed using grazing/agricultural practices such as irrigation, haying and grazing. Another concern is the number of elk in the refuge and their distribution.

Fred Bunch, *Chief of Resource Management, Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve*

The mission of the National Park Service is to serve visitors and preserve resources. Visitation was up this year due to Medano Creek flowing. Recently a group of Chinese park managers visited Great Sand Dunes. They discovered American parks are more affordable. The Park Service is working on an Ungulate Management plan to manage elk and bison grazing within the park and surrounding areas. The Park is also working on reclamation of Sand Creek.

MANAGERS UPDATE

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

Thomas Heinlein thanked the RAC for being patient with the number of details in the BLM, which are becoming more common. Heinlein introduced Dave Johnson, the acting Associate District Manager. He also mentioned that Ruth was sworn in as the new State Director, and will join the RAC on the field trip on Thursday. Greg Shoop, former Front Range District Manager, has been selected as the Associate State Director, he will report for duty in October.

Brian Davis introduced himself to the RAC. Davis is filling in for Tom Heinlein, who is on a detail to the Washington Office in the planning department. Davis is currently the field manager in Jarbidge, Idaho. Davis informed the RAC that the BLM has selected Ruth Welch to be the new BLM Colorado State Director. He stated that the BLM has an attrition rate of approximately 10 people per month.

Keith Berger, *Field Office Manager, Royal Gorge Field Office*

Keith Berger updated the RAC on the status of Cache Creek planning efforts. The BLM is addressing some of the management issues at Cache Creek through the development of an Environmental Analysis. Berger also mentioned that the High Altitude Mountainous Environment Training (HAMET) environmental analysis is scheduled to start in early October, with a public meeting scheduled for October 7th in Cañon City. The final decision should come around March 2015.

Paul Tigan, *Assistant Field Office Manager, San Luis Valley Field Office*

Paul Tigan updated the RAC on the Rio Grande Natural Area plan, which had lost momentum but now has a new writer/editor. There are still abandoned and trespass animals in the natural area and enforcement actions continue. A fencing enclosure was recently constructed on the river to protect vegetation. The SLV Field Office should be at a full table of organization soon with a

new archaeologist on staff and new biologists and geologists coming soon. The big news is that the General Services Administration signed a contract for a new building. It is anticipated that the field office will start moving in mid-November.

GUFFEY GORGE DISCUSSION

Linda Skinner, *Recreation Planner, Royal Gorge Field Office*

Linda Skinner presented on the ongoing problems and safety concerns at Guffey Gorge resulting from high recreational use. The Committee discussed management options largely centered on substance bans and a fee/permit system. Keith Berger expressed concern regarding whether or not it is within the purview of the federal government to prevent people from pursuing dangerous activities, particularly when there are alternative examples of dangerous activities occurring on BLM land, that the BLM does not interfere with (rafting, OHV use, rock climbing). Staff from the BLM expressed the need for ongoing communication and coordination with local communities and law enforcement. The committee discussed the option of disposing of the property through sale, though an interested potential buyer could not be identified. Kalem Lenard discussed the outreach efforts BLM has conducted in order to better understand the concerns and desires of the public. Keith Berger suggested the decision (whatever it may be) be elevated in visibility, so that the final decision does not rest on BLM alone.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Joe Vieira, *Renewable Energy Project Manager, San Luis Valley Field Office*

Joe Vieira discussed the ongoing San Luis Valley/Taos Plateau Study in the San Luis Valley aimed at establishing a Department-wide mitigation strategy for Solar Energy Zones (SEZ). The strategy incorporates a multi-scalar, landscape-level approach to identify and facilitate investment in key conservation priorities in a region, and includes efforts aimed at early integration of mitigation considerations in project planning, and ensuring the durability of mitigation measures over time. Joe Vieira illustrated the key questions guiding the development of the mitigation strategy and solicited future input from the RAC.

PLANNING 2.0

Martin Weimer, *NEPA Coordinator, Front Range District Office*

Martin discussed the need for the BLM to pursue a more dynamic, durable, and efficient planning process. Currently, management plan updates are very cumbersome and time-consuming. BLM proposes targeted changes to planning regulations necessary for planning across boundaries and at multiple scales. Martin offered the RAC the opportunity for future involvement in the planning revision process.

PIKE TRAIL

Kit Shy, *Front Range RAC Chair*

Kit Shy brought to the RAC's attention the feasibility study currently in legislation aimed at recognizing the national significance of the 1806/1807 Zebulon Pike Expedition through a

National Historic Trail designation. The bill is sponsored by Colorado Senators Bennett and Udall. Kit proposed, and the RAC agreed to send a letter of support on behalf of the RAC.

CLOSEOUT

Meeting minutes from the November RAC meeting were not approved because a quorum of RAC members was not present. Meeting minutes will be approved at the August Meeting. The next RAC meeting will be August 20-21 in Crestone, Colorado.

NEXT MEETING DATES

The next meeting dates are as follows:

August 20-21, Crestone Co

November 19, Salida

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

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