

**NW RAC minutes**  
**Feb. 13, 2013**  
**Golden, CO**

**Attendance**

Category 1: Dave Grisso, Steve Loshbaugh

Category 2: Stacy Beaugh, Pat Kennedy

Category 3: Dean Riggs, Kai Turner, Barbara Vasquez

Absent: Wes McStay, Tom Latham, John Potter, Dona Shue, Dan Davidson, Terry Sweet, Lanny Weddle, Jeff Comstock

BLM: Jim Cagney, Steve Bennett, Katie Stevens, Kent Walter, Wendy Reynolds, Don Hoffheins, David Boyd

Public: Katie Steele, Chip Taylor

Pat Kennedy called the meeting to order at 1 p.m. A quorum is not present.

**Grand Junction RMP:** Katie Stevens gave a Powerpoint overview of the GJ RMP.

Suggestion was made to present the acres open and closed to shooting with a bar graph.

Loshbaugh: Focus on showing people where they can do things, not where they can't

Riggs: If you close the 34<sup>th</sup> Road area to shooting, will you direct people to an alternate area?

**Public comment:**

Katie Steele: On the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area Advisory Board. A few thoughts on the GJ RMP: How would you enforce the proposed closures at the North Desert? I don't know how you would be able to rehabilitate the area without being able to enforce closures. What about trade-offs – Are you going to leave other areas open in exchange for closing this area? That use has to go somewhere.

**Sub RAC Discussion:**

Cagney: If the NW RAC forms a subcommittee, or "sub RAC," we need to give that group clear, concrete direction.

KFO – a meeting of the KFO RMP NW RAC subcommittee March 13 to go over proposed RMP. SubRACs for CRVFO and GJFO are disbanded for now as they have met the purposes for which they were formed. WRFO could be disbanded, but need the NW RAC to approve that.

McInnis Canyons NCA subRAC can reconvene if there is an issue that needs to be addressed. Since this group now reports to the NW RAC, the NW RAC would have to reconvene the group.

Barbara: I saw two difficulties with the CRVFO sub RAC report at the last meeting. There was a question about whether that group actually came to consensus – we need to define what consensus is. And some of the NW RAC disagreed with their recommendations. What do we do in that case?

Cagney: The group needs to define consensus early in the process and keep the NW RAC in the loop. The NW RAC needs to make any direction given to a subRAC very clear.

Since the subRACs report to the NW RAC, it is up to the NW RAC whether to forward their recommendations to BLM.

Walter: The liaison – a NW RAC member assigned to assist the subRAC – should help provide guidance and be in tune with the group. They need to make sure the subRAC is on the right track.

Barbara: Need to have a sheet about what the duties of the liaison is as well.

Cagney: Right. Every time a sub RAC is sanctioned, the NW RAC needs to provide written direction to the subRAC and the liaison.

Dean: The group needs to stick to its original mission. They need to explain if there is not a consensus.

### **Greater Sage-grouse**

Cagney: Working on the impact analysis right now. Specialists from all five offices wrote the analysis, and the contractor condensed it. Another cooperating agency meeting will be scheduled soon. Developing the preferred alternative will begin soon.

Barbara: When will the NW RAC be able to give feedback to BLM?

Jim: Under the current schedule, at the August meeting.

Barbara: About the percent disturbance cap in the National Technical Team Report – how are you taking into account private land?

Cagney: We can't tell people what they can and can't do on their private land. Things we know about we can include in our impact analysis, but we have no jurisdiction over private land. If there are federal minerals underneath private land, we would count that in the percent disturbance.

### **Drought**

Cagney gives a Powerpoint on drought.

We are essentially below average 7 out of 10 years in areas like this that average 7-inches of rainfall annually. Spring moisture is the most important for forage production. Currently there is very little forage out there – it can't be overgrazed because there is nothing to graze.

Supplemental feeding is only allowed in an emergency, and in this case drought is not considered an emergency.

## **WRFO RMMP**

Kent Walter gives a Powerpoint on the WRFO RMMP.

Stacy: How closely have you been working with industry in developing this, since they will be the ones filling it out?

Kent: They have been involved as the approach was developed.

Barbara: What does CPW think of the year-round drilling proposals?

Dean: We are on-board with the concept. There is not hard science either way.

Kent: we are working closely with CPW right now on this very topic.

## **Little Snake, Wendy Reynolds**

**Drought Management:** In January, 2013, the Little Snake Field Office sent a letter to all of its winter grazing permittees regarding the potential for upcoming changes in grazing conditions this spring. We asked our permittees to provide to us their use levels and locations at this time. We intend to work with our permittees on a case by case basis to determine how to best manage the spring turnout and the remainder of the winter grazing season. We sent letters to 13 winter use permittees and the majority of the responses were that they were not grazing at this time and if so, with significantly reduced numbers.

**Drought Management Plan:** We are currently evaluating a drought management plan for the Little Snake Field Office and are developing a broad programmatic environmental assessment that will provide the tools needed to make decisions regarding how we will manage for drought in the future. This tool will be very helpful as it will identify the triggers based on monitoring for when or if reductions need to be implemented, what to do with the wild horse herd during drought conditions, how range improvements can be utilized, etc. We are looking at several different management plans from other field offices to see how things are being done in different areas.

**Shed Hunting (antlers):** The field office is experiencing some resource damage to the landscape by shed hunters driving ATVS off roads and trails and “gridding” areas to locate sheds. This is becoming an increasingly large problem and there are few mechanisms in place to

prevent this from occurring other than our law enforcement ranger giving tickets. However, since the area is extremely large where the shed hunting takes place, there are not enough resources to effectively stop the gridding so we are considering other alternatives. I have directed my staff to explore the use of special use permits that allow for shed hunting but would outline under what conditions they can retrieve the sheds. Stipulations in the permit would require all hunters to stay on designated roads and trails for example and education will be a key component. We will be seeking the assistance of Colorado Parks and Wildlife on this matter and looking to see where other programs have been successful.

Kennedy – Is this area designated open to cross country motorized travel?

Wendy: This area is limited to existing roads. We have local people shed hunting, but we see big set-ups from people coming from out of state.

Kennedy: Is there local leaders among the shed hunters? I suggest we get with the people who are doing this activity and ask them first.

Wendy: I know at least one individual that could help. Maybe we can discuss at the next RAC meeting.

Dean: Some other states have shed hunting seasons. State wildlife agencies set those seasons in other states.

**Law Enforcement:** We have been successful in a recent conviction of a local 22-year old who, along with his intoxicated buddies, chained up, dragged and destroyed a kiosk in the Sand Wash Basin. Thereafter, the group went on to crash their pickup truck into a camper containing a family that was sleeping and terrified the children and parents. Fortunately, the children were not hurt but are afraid to camp again. The jury found the party guilty of several misdemeanors but because the individual was already on probation, a felony conviction was added. Sentencing will take place in March. We have also been dealing with significant trespass and dumping issues as well as illegal grazing activities.

**Wild Horses:** The Sandwash Basin Wild Horse herd has a new advocate group that is forming that looks very promising in terms of working together to the benefit of the herd. This group has already established a wild horse sanctuary outside of Denver and have adopted the last of the Sandwash wild horses in holding at Canyon City. They are forming a non-profit organization and will be working closely with us in the future.

**Oil and Gas Leasing:** The Little Snake Field Office recently deferred offering three oil and gas leases near the Dinosaur National Monument until an analysis of the area proposed for leasing can be done to determine whether or not there are lands with wilderness characteristics involved. The field office expects to complete that analysis once the snow is gone in the spring. A total of 14 parcels in the Little Snake Field Office will be offered at the Feb. 14 lease sale.

## **Kremmling Field Office, Don Hoffheins**

**Kremmling RMP Revision:** Work on the Proposed Kremmling Resource Management Plan (RMP) is being completed in-house by the Kremmling Field Office staff except for contracted writer-editor services. BLM met with cooperating agencies on April 25, 2012, to discuss the Proposed Plan. The attendance at that meeting was good and other than the topic of socioeconomics, there were not a lot of questions. The Proposed Plan has changed very little from that last meeting. The primary focus of the team has been on completing the analysis of Environmental Consequences and Cumulative Impacts for the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The final reviews of the Proposed Plan by the BLM Colorado and BLM Washington offices will occur this spring and summer. Following those reviews, the Proposed RMP/Final EIS should be ready to print in August.

The Kremmling Field Office has scheduled a meeting with the Northwest Colorado Resource Advisory Council Subgroup the evening of March 13, 2013, at the Kremmling Field Office. We plan to show a short briefing PowerPoint along with maps of the Proposed Plan. The Proposed Plan is most similar to Alternative C, but includes a mix of actions from all alternatives.

**Greater Sage-Grouse Environmental Impact Statement:** The Kremmling Field Office is working with the other Northwest District field offices and the Forest Service to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) and appropriate land use plan (LUP) amendments to incorporate specific conservation measures across the range of the Greater Sage-Grouse. This EIS/LUP amendment is one of seven that are ongoing within the eleven western states that have Greater Sage-Grouse occupied habitat. A goal of all such LUP amendments is to ensure consistency across the sub-region, as well as across the range of the Greater Sage-Grouse.

KFO staff have functioned on an interdisciplinary team to develop alternatives and prepare the analysis of environmental consequences for a draft EIS to be released during the summer 2013.

**Fuels Treatments:** Completed 245 acres of pile burning in Jackson County and Grand County. Currently working with Jackson County to complete 125 acres of roadside hazard tree removal through the North Park Stewardship for this summer. Completing the planning process to conduct the Fischer Draw prescribed Fire, north of Walden CO, in May/June. The Gore Lakes Stewardship should start this spring once the snow melts. The interdisciplinary team is working on the Mule Creek and Grand County Hazard Tree Removal Environmental Assessments.

### **Forestry:**

**Jackson County:** Sale preparation work (marking boundaries, cruising, etc.) continued last summer on Owl Mountain, southeast of Walden, with the expectation of a 400-acre sale in the summer/fall of 2013. The Parsons East timber sale (110 acres, 881,000 board feet) on Independence Mountain is nearly complete with little remaining product to be removed. The Parsons West sale in Jackson County was purchased last August (97 acres, 600,000 board feet).

**Grand County:** The Grouse Mountain sale continues in Grand County, which removes hazard trees along roads (58 acres, 1,700 tons of biomass). Harvest operations continue on the Reed Creek sale about 4 miles southwest of Granby, where about 47 percent of the work has been completed (207 acres, 2,008,000 board feet). Four sales have been offered recently and purchased: Gorewood Salvage (28 acres, 843 tons of biomass), Spruce Creek (48 acres, 480,000 board feet); Black Mountain (65 acres, 500,000 board feet); and Gore Lakes, a combined fuels and forestry project offered through a stewardship contract (200 acres, 881,000 board feet and 1,169 tons of biomass). Sale preparation is nearly complete on Walden Hollow, about 4 miles northeast of Granby; the sale likely will be offered for sale this winter (151 acres).

**Minerals:** The May 2013 oil and gas lease sale discussed at the previous NW RAC meeting will include three of the four nominated parcels. Two parcels are in Larimer County, encompassing 2,164 acres; one parcel of 80 acres is in Jackson County. The public comment period ended on December 14, 2012. The Environmental Analysis was posted on the Kremmling website for the 30 day protest period on February 8, 2013.

There is one pending APD, submitted by EOG Resources, Inc. An on-site review will be scheduled as soon as weather permits and when EOG and the surface owner reach a surface use agreement.

**Cultural Resources - Ute Trail Landscape Study:** The Ute Trail Landscape study was started in 2003, with work at Peterson Ridge and Ballinger Draw. During the past nine years, the University of Northern Colorado (UNC) has investigated four designated research areas for the Kremmling Field Office in Jackson County. The objective is to complete a comprehensive site inventory and landscape analysis on two major land forms within North Park on Peterson and Owl Ridges and to extend that work into Middle Park and Sulphur Gulch. Ongoing American Indian participation is crucial in this effort to relocate past paleoenvironments, cultural behavior related to subsistence, procurement, site location, spiritual practices, and modern botanical ecosystems.

The 2012 field work was conducted using students from UNC to document a large bison drive line system with associated stone artifacts and a spring camp site at the north end of Buffalo Ridge. Stone projectiles show an occupation and use of the feature(s) over the past 9,000 years. Numerous rock features, both domestic (tipi circles) and spiritual (game blinds) in function were located on Buffalo Ridge in association with the bison drive line. In 2013, the task is to continue the long relationship with UNC and Dr. Robert Brunswig to document and map features and associated artifacts, to test the area where bison would have died, and to have American Indian Tribal representatives from the five affiliated tribes visit the site.

**Community Education:** The KFO staff continues to focus significant energy on outdoor education, which highlights the BLM's mission and programs, develops BLM contacts and mentors, provides opportunities to identify possible future employees, and provides services to the BLM, among other benefits. Recent efforts included providing numerous judges for the high school science fair projects, holding mock interviews, and hosting many West Grand High

School Flex Period classes teaching topics such as college preparedness; paths to natural resource degrees and professions; recreation, range, fire, and other resource management and geographic information systems (GIS) awareness.

### **Colorado River Valley Field Office, Steve Bennett**

**Sutey Ranch Land Exchange:** CRVFO staff is currently reviewing a draft environmental assessment of this exchange proposal. The draft is expected to be released for public review this spring.

Under the proposal, the BLM would exchange three parcels totaling 1,268 acres in Pitkin County south of Carbondale that are mostly surrounded by private land and are difficult for the public to access. These parcels would be transferred to the Two Shoes Ranch. In Eagle County, BLM would exchange three parcels totaling 195 acres on Horse Mountain southwest of Eagle which have little public access. The parcels would be transferred to the Lady Belle Ranch. Conservation easements that would prevent development from occurring on the lands that would become private would be placed simultaneously at closing by Two Shoes Ranch and Lady Belle Ranch. BLM and the public would gain the 557-acre Sutey Ranch adjacent to the popular Red Hill Special Recreation Area in Garfield County, including the historic water rights from the ranch, along with 112 acres in Pitkin County along Prince Creek Road near the Crown. This private parcel is a highly popular area with mountain bikers and is used to access BLM roads and trails. The proponents would donate \$100,000 specifically for BLM to develop the site-specific management plan, and \$1 million for the area's long-term management. BLM is exploring options for how to manage the \$1 million donation to ensure the best return for the public and management of the area. BLM would develop a site-specific management plan for these lands if they were acquired. Public participation would be a key part of developing that management plan.

Pitkin County recently endorsed the land exchange after negotiating a separate agreement with the proponent. This agreement is completely separate of the exchange proposal, but would be put into place if the exchange were to take place. The proponent agreed to an additional conservation easement, extinguishing development rights for 10 single family homes in the Crystal River Valley, and contributing \$700,000 to acquire property needed to create a 1-mile trail parallel to Prince Creek Road.

**Roan Plateau SEIS begins:** BLM recently announced it would be conducting a supplemental environmental impact statement for the Roan Plateau Resource Management Plan Amendment that will consider a full range of possible alternatives. CRVFO is currently working to secure funding to hire a project manager for this high-profile effort. The effort is already underway with the public scoping period running through March 30. Public scoping meetings are scheduled Feb.

27 in Silt and Feb. 28 in Grand Junction. The SEIS will address deficiencies identified in the June 2012 District Court decision on the current Roan Plateau Management Plan.

**Proposed RMP and Final EIS expected this fall:** The CRVFO proposed alternative for its RMP revision is currently undergoing internal reviews at the State Office. Reviews by Washington staff and Solicitors will follow and are scheduled to be completed in April 2013. A Cooperating Agency meeting is expected to be scheduled in late April or early May, ahead of final State and National director briefings. The Proposed RMP/Final EIS is scheduled for publication in September, 2013. The Record of Decision would be published in June of 2014. This schedule will still provide for the NW Sage Grouse Amendment to amend the Proposed RMP/Final EIS as may be appropriate.

**Thompson Divide oil and gas issues:** BLM and the White River National Forest have now received six applications for permit to drill within the Thompson Divide area west of Carbondale from SG Interests. SG Interests holds valid existing oil and gas leases under U.S. Forest Service lands in this area that give them legal rights to the oil and gas resources under their leases, subject to the terms of those leases. Before any drilling could take place, SG Interests would need an approved APD for each well. BLM will not approve any APDs on U.S. Forest Service lands without a signed NEPA document from the U.S. Forest Service (such as a Decision Record on an Environmental Assessment) approving that action. SG Interest's leases will begin expiring in May 2013. BLM expects SG Interests will file suspension requests for their leases. Once BLM and the Forest Service deem the APDs are complete, the Forest Service will take the lead on a NEPA analysis of the proposed wells.

In May 2011 SG Interests submitted a proposal for the Lake Ridge Unit, which would encompass 32,406 acres within the Thompson Divide: 28,410 acres are federal leases, about 4,000 acres would include private (fee) surface and minerals. SG has 16 leases in the proposed area; EnCana holds two (totaling 4,483 acres). BLM, in consultation with the U.S. Forest Service, is still reviewing that unit proposal. Decisions about whether or not to place leases in a unit is a BLM decision, even for leases on U.S. Forest Service lands. In July 2012, Antero Resources submitted a proposal for the Wolf Springs Unit, which would encompass 11,700 acres within the Thompson Divide. The Forest Service is currently working on the Environmental Assessment for a single APD filed in this area.

**New transmission line proposed between Rifle and Parachute:** CRVFO is preparing an environmental assessment on Xcel's proposed 230kV transmission line proposed between Rifle and Parachute. The transmission line would connect the Rifle Ute Substation, which is about 1.5 miles southeast of Rifle, with the Parachute Substation, which is about 1 mile northeast of Parachute. The estimated length of the route is 18 miles, of which approximately six miles could cross BLM lands. The routes being considered generally follow designated corridors with



existing facilities. The permanent right-of-way requested averages 150-feet wide. BLM and Xcel held a scoping period in November that included public meetings in Rifle and Parachute. The scoping period was productive and led to consideration of additional alternatives. A final decision is expected late this year.

## **White River Field Office Program Updates, Kent E. Walter**

### **White River Oil and Gas RMP Amendment**

The comment period for the White River Field Office Oil and Gas Draft RMP Amendment ended on January 28, 2013. The contractor is still loading the comments into the database but so far the WRFO has received over 19,800 submissions, which contained over 1,100 unique comments. The WRFO will be working on addressing these comment letters over the next couple of months prior to beginning work on the Final EIS.

### *Coal*

On February 1, 2013 a final decision was issued to offer 3,157 acres of federal coal reserves in Rio Blanco and Moffat counties in a future competitive coal lease sale. Blue Mountain Energy Inc. submitted a Lease by Application for this parcel adjacent to its Deserado Mine, which is seven miles northeast of Rangely, Colo., and currently employs 164 people. The BLM estimates this parcel contains 21 million tons of saleable coal. A 30-day appeal period follows the decision. A sealed bid, competitive coal lease sale will be scheduled following the appeal period.

### **Range Program**

The WRFO is continuing to monitor drought conditions for the Resource Area. On January 7, 2013 the WRFO issued a final decision regarding the drought. The letter resented the original proposed decision requiring that livestock operators make reductions in their operations. The WRFO held a meeting on January 31, 2013 to further discuss the issues with the livestock permittees and interested publics. The meeting was well attended and well received with over 80 attendees. The January 7, 2013 letter suggests that the livestock operators begin working with their respective Range Management Specialists and prepare for three scenarios for grazing in 2013.

The WRFO has planned to complete the necessary environmental review and processing of 12 expiring grazing permits as well as completing the necessary field work for the 2013 grazing permit renewals. In addition, the range staff will also complete the necessary trailing analysis to allow for spring trailing permit issuance in 2013.

**Drought** – Currently the U.S. Drought Monitor categorizes the intensity of the drought in this area as severe to extreme. As an example, as of November 2012, all of the six weather stations within the Field Office were at least 70 percent below normal with two being 40 percent below

normal. In addition, the current SNOTEL data indicates that while we have seen some additional snow in the upper elevations the White River is still at approximately 70 percent of its average annual snow fall. Although we saw some green-up early last spring as well as some fall green up, by early summer the drought conditions caused cool season grasses, such as Indian ricegrass; bottlebrush squirrel tail; needle and thread grass; wheat grasses and rye grasses to stop growing and go into dormancy. They never had the opportunity to complete their growth and seed out.

The WRFO staff understands the seriousness and difficulty the drought is causing for permittee livestock operations. Many BLM areas need to be rested to ensure long-term health of the rangeland conditions. Resting these areas now will allow them to recover more quickly when moisture returns.

### **Weed Management**

In 2013, the WRFO anticipates that that it will be able to continue to provide support for the leafy spurge treatments as well as maintaining its ongoing field work and herbicide treatments throughout the Resource Area.

### **Riparian Program**

Weed treatment evaluation, initial treatment, and inventory have been completed on approximately 20 miles of riparian emphasis on the Olive Garden and Divide Creek Reservoir sites. One new enclosure was installed on Moosehead Mountain to protect a wet meadow for sage grouse and surrounding riparian.

### **Recreation Program**

WRFO has partnered with the Eastern Rio Blanco Metropolitan Recreation and Park District (ERBM) in the completion of Phase 1 of a non-motorized trail from Dorcas Jensen Park to China Wall and is working on planning for Phase 2; design has been completed. ERBM has also agreed to pay for and construct Phase 2, leading from China Wall to Ute Park, site of the world famous Meeker Sheepdog Trials. The analysis of Phase 2 was initiated 01/29/2013 and should be complete by the end of April. Construction of this trail is planned to start in May and be complete by the end of June 2013 WRFO will begin planning for Phase 3 May and June of 2013, which will involve a looped trail system on top of China Wall.

The WRFO continues to manage its Special Recreation Permit (SRP) program; now totaling more than 54 SRPs. Over the past two months there have been 3 big game SRP applications received and all three are in the planning stage. Another SRP application is being reviewed for a trapping camp with field work planned to be completed this summer. 2012 Post Use reports are being processed for big game SRPs. The Annual WRFO SRP meeting is scheduled for March 5<sup>th</sup> from 5:30-7:30pm.

We continue to move forward with planning steps towards completing a travel management inventory and plan for the WRFO. The WRFO recently submitted a grant to the State OHV committee to continue travel management efforts, specifically route inventories of the WRFO. The BLM WRFO will provide a presentation to the OHV state committee on February 12, 2013. Related to travel management, the WRFO is continuing participation on the newly formed committee, the Rio Blanco County Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) Committee (Wagon Wheel Trail Pilot Program), intended to promote OHV tourism in the county primarily using public lands. In Spring/Summer of 2013 we will construct the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of the Willow Creek OHV Trail, Horseshoe Bend, which will further provide additional access to BLM public lands.

The WRFO continues to make LWC inventories a priority and has completed 16 inventories of the 30 identified LWC units. The WRFO is currently reviewing 11 of these LWC inventories recently completed by a third party contractor.

A WRFO Recreation web page is being developed that will contain numerous linked pages covering topics such as SRPs, camping, WSA's, trail, hunting, boating, fishing, etc. It is anticipated that these pages will be available to the public in the beginning of April 2013.

### **Wild Horses**

In 2013, the WRFO has begun to prepare a gather plan and NEPA analysis to complete a gather of the West Douglas Herd Area. As well as continue to monitor drought conditions throughout the wild horse herds. The WRFO has begun monitoring of both herd areas looking at condition of the range as well as horse condition. Monitoring of these areas will continue throughout the year due to extreme drought conditions last year as well as anticipation of persistent drought conditions in the 2013 season.

### **Lands and Realty**

WRFO's lands group is continuing to work on three interstate electrical transmission line projects: Trans West Express, Energy Gateway South, and Zephyr.

Construction has been completed on a parcel of public land for Rangely District Hospital, and the new hospital is in operation. The FO is working on the Rio Blanco County Road 5 stock passes project. The proposed BOPCO produced water treatment plant project is currently being analyzed.

The ROW for expansion of the Enterprise Meeker Gas Plant has been issued. Proposals for construction of oil and gas infrastructure and power lines have been approved or are pending to multiple companies.

## **Katie Stevens, Grand Junction Field Office**

### **Resource Management Planning**

The Draft Resource Management Plan/Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DRMP/DEIS) is currently available for public review for a 90 day comment period which ends April 25, 2013. Public open houses were held in Collbran, DeBeque, Gateway, Fruita and Grand Junction between January 29<sup>th</sup> to February 7<sup>th</sup> with over 500 participants.

### **Natural Resources**

**Restoration**— The Pine Ridge fire near DeBeque burned nearly 14,000 acres in late June into July. We have applied an annual cover crop to help reduce runoff events by slowing overland flow and increasing infiltration on site. Recent reports are that germination was far from optimal due to dry conditions. If this seed will germinate in the spring, it will help with the spring runoff as well as perennial seed establishment. We are currently working on a contract to aerially apply native seed in the next few weeks.

**Drought** – The GJFO Board of Grazing Advisors requested a meeting with their permittees on February 11, 2013 in Loma, Colorado to discuss the RMP amendment and ongoing drought conditions. The gathering was well attended with over 50 permittees. BLM staff presented status updates to both issues and answered all questions.

### **Recreation**

**Epic Mountain Bike Event** – The Grand Valley will be hosting an Epic Mountain Bike Event in September 2013, recently permitted by BLM. This event is expected to bring major economic benefits to local communities like Palisade, Grand Junction and Fruita.

### **Lands and Minerals**

**McClane Coal Lease Modification** - The public comment period on the preliminary environmental assessment (EA) ended on November 9, 2012. There were 6 public comments received on the preliminary EA. All of the public comments that were received were reviewed and addressed in the final EA. The final EA for the proposed 317 acre lease modification has been reviewed by the Northwest District Office and is currently being reviewed by the Colorado State Office (CSO). After the CSO finishes reviewing the EA it will be sent to the Department of Interior Solicitors for final review. A decision on the lease modification is anticipated to be made in early March.

**Book Cliffs Lease by Application** - CAM's proposed Book Cliff lease by application (LBA) will be processed in a separate NEPA document from CAM's pending ROW applications for their proposed rail road, conveyor belts, waste rock pile and other support infrastructure for the Red Cliff Mine. A cooperating agency coordination meeting was held on December 11, 2012 to provide information to potential cooperating agencies and to discuss the NEPA process for the application. After discussions with cooperators the BLM has determined that the LBA should be analyzed under an EIS and is preparing the federal register notice to initiate the EIS process. No site specific analysis will be conducted under the EIS because the coal would be leased under a competitive process. The future lease and their plan of development are currently unknown. If the coal is leased then the Office of Surface Mining (OSM) and the Colorado State Division of

Reclamation, Mining, and Safety (DRMS) will oversee the environmental review and permitting for the development of the coal. The BLM is working with CAM to determine if a dedicated project manager will be hired to oversee and facilitate the preparation of the EIS.

**Mountain Island Land Exchange** - The Draft EA went out for public review in September and the comment period closed on September 26. We are currently responding to comments and finalizing the EA. Once the EA is finalized, the draft decision package will be sent to the National Land Exchange Team and Washington Office for review and approval to issue a notice of decision. If the final decision is to approve the land exchange, title transfer is expected in January or February.

**Dominguez-Escalante NCA Land Acquisitions** - We are working with a third party facilitator, Western Rivers Conservancy (WRC), to purchase private inholdings.

Upchurch Property, Gunnison River (135 acres) - WRC is in negotiations with the landowner. Closing anticipated in March 2013.

American Mountain Men Property, Upland (160 acres is Gibbler Gulch) - WRC is in negotiations with the landowner. Closing anticipated in March 2013.

**Black Hills – DeBeque Exploratory Plan** – A Programmatic Biological Assessment has been prepared for this project and is currently being reviewed by the USFWS. A response from the USFWS is expected in mid-February if the USFWS concurs with BLM's determination that the project is 'not likely to adversely affect' sensitive plants. SHPO and tribal consultations regarding cultural resources are ongoing and expected to conclude by mid-March, 2013.

The Preliminary EA was completed and made available for 30 days of public review and comment from January 7, 2013 to February 6, 2013. BLM has received about a dozen comments from the public on the Preliminary EA. Following receipt of comments and any revisions that might result, the EA will be finalized and the BLM expects to make a Decision regarding the proposal around the end of March, 2013.

**Fram Whitewater Unit Development Plan** - Based upon comments received from CPW during the scoping process, Fram consulted them and added wildlife mitigation BMPs to their proposal. One result is consideration of an existing access route (on private and BLM) from the northwest to minimize seasonal impacts to wintering big game.

Federally-listed plant species in the development area will require submission of a Biological Assessment for consultation with the USFWS, which could take up to 130 days.

SHPO and tribal consultation regarding cultural resources are ongoing and expected to conclude before the end of April, 2013.

A Preliminary EA will be available for public comment for 30 days, in April-May of 2013.

Following review of the public's comments, the EA will be ready for the BLM to make a Decision regarding Fram's proposal. Such Decision is anticipated in June or August, depending on the results of USFWS consultation.

**Genesis Oil and Gas, The Breaks Well Development** - Genesis has completed coordination with the BLM for site specific surface siting to reduce impacts to visual resources and surface disturbance. Genesis has also finalized their access planning through private and public lands to

reach their proposed sites. New construction on public land is proposed for both the east and west sides of the Genesis project.

The proposed action has been through public scoping which was extended and end on January 18, 2013. The Environmental Analysis is currently being written and will have a public comment period when it is completed.

**Transwest Express Transmission Project** – The DEIS Corridor map was released to the public in July, 2012. This map can be found on the BLM project website. The TransWest team is currently finishing the Draft EIS and the BLM has completed their internal review. The DEIS is expected to be released to the public in late spring 2013.

**Enterprise WEP II** - 96 mile pipeline to carry fluids from Dragon, near Vernal, UT through Rio Blanco, Garfield and Mesa Counties to Cisco, UT. The Decision Record approving the project was signed on 9/12/12 and the ROW Grant and Temporary Use Permits were issued. Enterprise has notified us that they are going to begin construction in the spring of 2013.

**Energy Gateway South Transmission Line** – Internal work on the Draft EIS, as well as route refinements to avoid sensitive resources is on-going. The EGS team is currently finishing the Draft EIS and the BLM is in the process of completing their internal review. The DEIS is expected to be released to the public in the summer of 2013.

**Zephyr Transmission Line** - The Zephyr project is another large transmission line originating in Wyoming and terminating near Las Vegas, NV. It is in the early stages (pre-scoping). A national project manager has been identified (Lorraine Salas, out of Las Cruces, NM). Alternatives cross all field offices in Colorado with the exception of Royal Gorge, San Luis Valley and Gunnison. The BLM is currently working with Zephyr to select a third party NEPA contractor that will assist the BLM with preparation of the EIS. The BLM anticipates receiving a revised Plan of Development from Zephyr containing a single proponent proposed route along with alternatives in May of 2013.

### **Cultural**

The cultural team has completed the Black Hills and Fram Master Development Plans and are working on the DENCA Class I Inventory review. They've also submitted new monitoring information on some rock art sites in the DENCA (including one that was recently vandalized). The recently vandalized one was supposed to go to court and the US Attorney thought we had a good case, but the defendant died 2 days before trial. They are working on an MOA between SHPO and BLM for the Airport transfers, the Bridgeport overpass work and the Epic race.

### **Fire Program - Upper Colorado River Fire Management Unit – West Zone**

This winter the West Zone has been involved with our normal preparedness activities preparing for the 2013 fire season. Training has been occurring with our local cooperators and the busy training season is upon us. Locally we will be fielding the same assets as last year although our staffing may be down due to federal budget cuts. At this point we are looking at having less capacity with our seasonal employees on the engine crews.

WZ fire employees have worked this winter implementing several fuels mitigation projects. The Sunnyside Habitat restoration continues south of Debeque, and the crew has nearly completed

the Beiser WUI/habitat improvement masticating (chopping mechanically) the wildland fuels near Glade Park.

Fire refresher trainings begin in March and a busy schedule continues with preparedness and training into fire season.

Outlook – Despite a cold winter locally and some limited moisture, models suggest a warm and drier than normal late winter and early spring. There is talk of a normal precipitation and wetter March possible. At this point snowpack and moisture is below normal for this time of year.

### **National Conservation Areas**

#### **McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area**

A new recreation planner will be reporting to the MCNCA in March. Her primary duties will be public outreach, partnerships, grants, and the Ruby-Horsethief permit system.

NCA staff are gearing up for the first season of fees (as approved by the NW RAC in December 2011) on Ruby-Horsethief. Staff have also made some adjustments in how permits are issued based on experience in 2012.

#### **Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area**

The Draft Resource Management Plan / Draft Environmental Impact Statement is awaiting final approval from BLM Washington office to print the Notice of Availability. Depending on the date of publication, the NCA is planning a series of public open houses and Resource Advisory Council meetings from late March through May.

The DE-NCA is exploring the establishment of a weed management area in collaboration with the Uncompaghre Partnership, local counties, and U.S. Forest Service. The group has submitted a joint grant application to initiate the planning and project work.

DE-NCA has been working closely with grazing permittees and Colorado Parks and Wildlife on a bighorn sheep collaring project. The project would track movements of both wild and domestic sheep to better understand interactions and mitigation effects. DE-NCA is also consulting with interested parties regarding these sheep collaring activities in the Dominquez Canyon Wilderness.

### **NEXT MEETING AGENDA ITEM IDEAS**

- Election of officers
- Antler hunting – dig up materials
- FM Updates
- KFO subgroup feedback
- Drought update
- USGS water study monitoring
- Wild horses
- Subgroup guidance to KFO

