

**Northwest Resource Advisory Council Meeting,  
Feb 19, 2015**

**District Manager Update**

**Northwest District, Joe Meyer**

Northwest Colorado Greater Sage Grouse EIS Update: The Northwest District Sage Grouse Interdisciplinary Team has finished drafting responses to public comments on the Draft EIS. The BLM received about 7,500 public comments during the public comment period on the Draft EIS. The team is working on developing the impact analysis for the Final EIS and is completing the remainder of the Proposed Plan. The NW District is coordinating with the State and Washington offices and expects to release the Proposed Plan/Final EIS in the Summer of 2015.

**Field Manager Updates**

**Little Snake Field Office, Wendy Reynolds**

**Travel Management Planning Begins - Route Inventory work continues for Travel Management Planning** – in 2014, the Rocky Mountain Youth Corps provided the LSFO with three interns during the summer to assist with route inventories for travel management planning. The three interns rotated two week shifts in the field with GIS work in the office. Two of the interns utilized ATV's to perform inventory work while the third downloaded data gathered the previous day for input into GIS. Since mid-May, 2014, the interns completed over 2,000 miles of route inventory. This ongoing travel management inventory is being performed as part of the implementation of the LSFO Resource Management Plan signed in October 2011 which requires a Travel Management Plan to be completed.

In addition to the route inventory, LSFO is beginning its travel management planning to determine designations of roads in trails in the field office. LSFO met with Moffat County Land Use Board Representatives to compare maps of our inventoried routes to their maps of RS2477 assertions. Internal scoping has begun with resource specialists to determine what areas will be analyzed. Sand Wash Basin and Hiawatha areas are most likely to be analyzed first. It is anticipated there will be 4 separate travel management plans done over time.

**NEW! America's Great Outdoors Sarvis Creek/ Hubbard Summer Camp Acquisition** –

The BLM, in partnership with the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest, has completed the acquisition of a 45-acre parcel of river-front property along the Upper Yampa River below Stagecoach Reservoir. This private inholding lies between BLM, U.S. Forest Service, and State lands, adjacent to the Sarvis Creek Wilderness Area. The land and historic cabin were once used by the Hubbard Family, who ranched in the valley for many years, as a summer retreat for several weeks each year. The original main Hubbard Ranch now lies beneath Stagecoach Reservoir. Funding for BLM's portion of the purchase has been secured from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. These funds are generated by royalties from offshore oil and gas leasing. The LSFO has currently drafted a business plan for the property, more specifically the cabin, and will develop a management plan for the area.

**Wild Horses** – The PZP darting program is starting to gear up again as weather has been cooperating to allow for access early this year. We are keeping our fingers crossed that the

success of the darting program will be measured with this 2016 spring foal crop. We had a surprise foal in January which is not common. In addition, we lost a well-known stallion that was injured on a t-post while fighting with a stud on the other side of the fence and did not survive. A small band of horses got out of the HMA, due to the public leaving a gate open, which contributed to this death. We will be working with our advocates this summer on new fencing and fence repair in certain portions of the HMA.

**2014 Hunting Season and 2015 Horn Hunting Season Begins Early** - This past hunting season saw good weather, making the hunting success a little more difficult with animals staying high until much later in the seasons. Overall success rate was good, with many hunters taking home game. The horn (antler sheds) hunting season has begun early due to good weather and we are experiencing an influx of horn hunters in the Brown's Park area. This continues to be a resource problem as there is a lot of off road hunting by multiple vehicles that occurs. Chasing of game has also been reported. We continue to work with the Brown's Park Refuge and Colorado Parks & Wildlife on making a presence in the area and educating horn hunters.

**Oil and Gas Consolidation and Coal Program** – We have begun implementing the consolidation of our field office oil and gas program into the White River Field Office in Meeker, Colorado. Little Snake Field Office will no longer process O&G applications and all related activities will be handled by the White River Field Office. However, the Little Snake will manage the coal program for the entire Northwest District BLM.

**Colorado River Valley Field Office, Karl Mendonca (Acting)**

(We're discussing the Roan Plateau SEIS and the EIS for Previously Issued Oil and Gas Leases in the White River National Forest at other points during the meeting.)

**Sutey Ranch Land Exchange:** After the BLM dismissed the three protests it received to this land exchange, one party appealed the exchange to the Interior Board of Land Appeals. The BLM is still awaiting a decision from the IBLA regarding the appeal. When the BLM acquires the property on the public's behalf, it will develop a land management plan for the site.

**Colorado River Valley RMP update:** We expect the record of decision in the first half of this year.

**Oil and gas consolidation** – we are now processing APD's for GJFO

**Kremmling Field Office, Stephanie Odell**

**Upper Colorado River Pump house Whitewater Park:** Grand County submitted a right-of-way application and was awarded historic water rights to build the Gore Canyon Whitewater Park across the Upper Colorado River upstream of the Pumphouse Boat Launch 2. The feature consists of engineered designed boulders and block-like concrete objects that are not visible at normal flows and allow for fish passage. The retaining wall and stairs should be completed this week. The contractors believe they will be finished with most of the project by next week and will just have to come in and do clean-up of the area, install the railings on the viewing area and

replant the vegetation when it warms up a bit (sometime in March). Construction is expected to be completed earlier than the April deadline.

**Bark beetle mitigation work continues:** The Owl Mountain Sale in Jackson County was awarded for the salvage of 3.4 million board feet of dead lodgepole pine from 405 acres. The Grand County Hazardous Tree Removal Environmental Assessment is being implemented. The project area includes approximately 9,150 acres of forested lands in Grand County administered by the BLM. Under the proposal, all dead, disease-infested and other hazard trees within 125 feet of BLM roads, trails and other infrastructure would be removed. The EA also identifies potential areas available for large-scale mechanical salvage and fuel reduction and potential areas where fire could be used to treat slash piles resulting from mechanical treatment. There are more than 289 miles of roads within the Kremmling Field Office directly affected by beetle-killed trees. Currently, KFO is administering 17 timber and biomass contracts. With the market for lumber and wood pellets rebounding from the recession, the demand for access to beetle-killed trees is also rebounding, helping ensure these projects will continue to have interested bidders. New products using material from beetle-killed trees are also creating more opportunity, such as for bioremediation and absorption in the oil and gas industry.

**Fees at the North Sand Hills:** The Kremmling Field Office Proposed RMP includes developing a fee proposal for the North Sand Hills with public involvement. The purpose of a fee at the NSH is to assist in management costs, protect natural resources and provide for public health and safety while providing recreational opportunities in a unique environment. KFO will be requesting input from the RAC or development of a sub-RAC to provide input and guidance during the fee development process. Because the NSH is managed by several agencies, a fee structure would involve a fee sharing agreement with an amended cooperative management agreement to identify revenue sharing and how funding is to be utilized within the NSH management area.

**Kremmling RMP update:** The Kremmling Office Final Record of Decision has been approved by Director Kornze for printing. However, it is not expected for release until May.

### **White River Field Office, Kent Walter**

**Proposed Resource Management Plan Amendment (RMPA) and Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for Oil and Gas Development:** The WRFO has received permission to print the Proposed RMPA/FEIS and is working with their contractor to publish the document and make it available for a 30 day public protest period and 60 day governor consistency review. The BLM decided to update the 1997 WRFO RMP because the 2007 Reasonable Foreseeable Development Scenario identified substantial changes in the way oil and gas development is expected to proceed in the planning area compared to what was considered in the 1997 WRFO RMP. Changes include an increase in the number of wells to be drilled, a transition from single well pads to multi-well pads, and a shift in the location of development to the Mesaverde Play Area. Public availability is tentatively anticipated for late March 2015.

**Piceance-East Douglas HMA Fence:** The final EA, FONSI and Decision Record (DR) for the HMA fencing project are anticipated to be completed the week of February 16, 2015. The WRFO received funds through the BLM Colorado State Office to contract construction of the fences but do not expect to have enough funding to complete all 4 sections of fence in 2015. The WRFO would continue to seek funding for the construction of all the fence segments but it is likely that only one fence section could be completed each year. The priority order for construction is: 1) State Highway 64, 2) County Road 5, 3) Main Barcus Creek, and 4) Tommy's Draw.

**Wild Horse Gathers:** Through a two-week scoping period, the WRFO solicited public feedback on proposed wild horse gathers within the West Douglas Herd Area and the Piceance-East Douglas Herd Management Area. The purpose of scoping is to have the public identify any issues or alternatives that should be considered during the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) reviews of the proposals. The scoping period closed Saturday, February 14, 2015 and the public will have another opportunity to review and comment on the WRFO's analysis of the proposed gather plans in April.

**Prescribed Fires FY15:** The White River Field Office and the Northwest Colorado Fire Management Unit are planning on burning 550 acres of decadent sagebrush in Dry and Little Dry Gulches in the Piceance Basin. Depending on weather conditions and forecasts this project could begin as early as March. Later this spring, the Galloway Pinyon-Juniper (PJ) removal project, also in the Piceance Basin, will treat 339 acres by selectively cutting and scattering the trees.

**Travel & Transportation Management:** Prior to beginning implementation-level (route-by-route) travel management planning, the WRFO plans to 1) inventory (map) all the travel routes in the field office and 2) amend the travel and transportation management decisions in the 1997 RMP. For the inventory effort, the WRFO is finalizing the 2014 Travel Route Inventory project which mapped existing travel routes across 650,000 acres within the eastern portion of the field office. The Travel Route Inventory (including associated maps) will be available for public review this spring. For the RMP amendment, the BLM is identifying key partners prior to beginning the formal public scoping process. The BLM has received support from the RAC to establish a subgroup and anticipates the RAC will make a final decision on the nominations for the subgroup by the 2/19 meeting. Additionally, the WRFO has sent letters inviting federal, state, and local agencies to participate as cooperating agencies. The WRFO will host a Travel & Transportation Management training in Meeker on March 18 & 19; both cooperating agency staff and members of the RAC's subgroup are encouraged to attend. In addition to briefing the RAC about our travel management planning strategy at the December 2014 meeting, the WRFO has also met with the Moffat County Land Use Board (February 2015). Public scoping of the

proposed travel management RMP amendment will begin with publication of a Notice of Intent (NOI) in the Federal Register, which is anticipated to be in May 2015.

**Natural Soda Inc.'s Proposed Plant Expansion:** Natural Soda Inc. (NSI) is proposing to construct an additional processing facility and associated infrastructure adjacent to their existing processing facility that would increase the current plant design capacity from 250,000 tons per year (tpy) to 500,000 tpy of sodium bicarbonate. The proposed action was made available for public scoping in December 2014. The BLM is nearing completion of the impacts analysis for this proposal and anticipates that the preliminary environmental assessment would be available for public review and comment in mid-March 2015.

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

As reported at our last update, we're still on schedule for the Proposed RMP and Final EIS to be released in the spring of 2015.

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

The Dominguez-Escalante planning team is putting the finishing touches on the Final EIS/Proposed RMP and hope to release it to the public this summer.

Mesa County and BLM cooperated to secure a grant for engineering a Bridgeport Underpass. This project has been of high interest to the public, BLM, and railroad because of the potential danger associated with entry into Dominguez Canyon from Bridgeport. The project will allow visitors an opportunity to pass under the railroad en route to trails in the Dominguez Canyon Wilderness. Currently visitors must pass along the railroad tracks before they can reach the opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation they get inside the wilderness.

### **Recreation**

**Epic Rides** - The 3rd Annual Grand Junction Off-Road mountain bike event, which will include courses on the Lunch Loops trail system and the Tabeguache trail, is scheduled for May 29-31, 2015. Event organizers requested this change from Labor Day weekend to increase professional rider participation and take advantage of possibly cooler weather. On-site monitors and other mitigation measures will be in place at the event for protection of potential plant and cultural resources.

**Three Sisters** - The planning process for the Three Sisters area is currently wrapping up, and two work days are scheduled for March and April, with trails in the Three Sisters area expected to open by late April. The area was recently purchased by the Mesa Land Trust and deeded to the City of Grand Junction with a conservation easement providing preservation and public trails connecting to the adjacent BLM Lunch Loops and Tabegauche trail system.

**Tabeguache Connector**-we hope to have an EA analyzing a short motorized connector to 141 out to the public for review within the next couple weeks.

### **Wild Horses**

Five members of the Friends of the Mustangs have assisted BLM with a Fertility control program on the Little Bookcliff Wild Horses for a number of years. Colorado BLM recognized their efforts and

dedication with Colorado's Volunteer of the Year Award recently, and they are in the running for national recognition.

**Fuels Projects and Wildland Fire Mitigation**

Funding from the BLM Community Assistance program will help accomplish mitigation work on private lands on Glade Park. Mesa County Sheriff's Department, Glade Park VFD, Colorado State Forest Service and the BLM will help work with land owners to reduce hazardous fuels.