

NW RAC Minutes
May 22, 2013
Grand Junction, Colorado

Attendance

Cat 1 – Steve Loshbaugh, John Potter, Wes McStay, Tom Latham
Cat 2 – Stacy Beaugh, Terry Sweet, Dona Shue, Dan Davidson, Pat Kennedy
Cat 3 – Barbara Vasquez, Jeff Comstock, Dean Riggs, Kai Turner

Absent: Dave Grisso, Lanny Weddle

BLM: Jim Cagney, Susan Cassel, Steve Bennett, Kent Walter, Wendy Reynolds, Tim Wilson, Katie Stevens, Erin Jones, Bridget Clayton

Public: Soren Jaspersen, The Wilderness Society; Luke Schafer, Conservation Colorado; Sam Montoya, XTO-Energy; Callie Hendrickson, White River and Douglas Conservation Districts; Daniel Padilla, Oxy; Doug Dennison, Bill Barrett Corp.

Housekeeping

Lanny Weddle was on his way but is blocked by the Glenwood Canyon closure. Dave Grisso had a previous work commitment.

Elections

Dean Riggs was elected to chair, Terry Sweet as vice chair

Sage Grouse EIS

Erin Jones: The EIS will analyze four alternatives. No action, conservation alternative, NTT alternative, sub-regional alternative. Conservation alternative includes no grazing. The draft is currently in Washington for review. The draft is currently anticipated to be released for public review in Aug.

Jeff Comstock – Moffat County was part of the Cooperating agency process. Had to work within hard parameters, tried to work more uses than just the National Technical Team report. That alternative is better than NTT report.

Jim – I appreciate Jeff's leadership with the Cooperating agencies. He didn't totally support the option, but he did best with what we gave him to work with.

Jeff – could there be changes from WO review?

Jim – yes

Roan Plateau

Steve Bennett Powerpoint

Would be helpful to me to hear advice from NW RAC

Cagney – We could use advice on sideboards for plan

Barbara – What is BLM's legal position on this?

Jim – We placed no sideboards on scoping. That's where we are.

Jeff – What is status of leases?

Steve – Suspended.

Jeff – Did court take any lease area off table?

Steve — No. Judge remanded on three specific issues. We need to recognize valid existing rights.

Dean – BLM set the expectation that you would be looking at entire plan when you opened scoping so wide.

Barbara – Is there new info from CPW?

Dean – Greater Sage-grouse range

Jeff – Shouldn't you just address the remand in this case? You should only address what the judge told you. You would consider new information in a new planning process later

Steve – We need to incorporate new info to be legal

Jim – We are going to analyze grouse info in this EIS. It's not part of the NW Greater Sage-grouse EIS

Steve – We would adopt the analysis from the EIS

Dean – So question is, do you open whole thing again, or limit it. Should avoid opening whole thing up again. Huge effort. Many meetings

Jeff – If you analyze for grouse, you are opening it all up again. What are cooperators saying?

Steve: They are saying stick to jus the remand points

Jeff: Don't understand need to look at new issues. You are finishing a plan. You would looke at new info in a new planning process

Jim – Need to analyze a new alternative, need to use current info

Jim: need a vote on this one. What do you think the scope of the EIS should be?

Jeff: Need to use cooperating agencies and community group. Don't get ahead of them.

Jim: "Limited scope" means focus on the remand points and new information

Wes: The oil and gas would have new info, too. Could you incorporate information or approaches from the White River Field Office RMP Amendment?

Steve: Some ideas from WRFO could be incorporated

Steve: We will come back to the NW RAC with conceptual alternatives at Aug meeting

Dean: Jim, Steve and I will talk about draft resolutions and how to get to the group to review ahead of August meeting.

Blueway designations, America's Great Outdoors – Jeff Comstock

Jeff: When Club 20 was back in DC recently, representatives talked about secretarial order that allowed for designation of a "Blueway system." We had not heard about this. Met with acting BLM director, and the deputy director (Jamie Connell). The assistant secretary briefed us. DOI considering this designation, non-regulatory. Intended to have local government support. Local groups would nominate, \$3.3 million set aside for this. Not just focused on waterways, but watersheds. So we are talking significant acres. Take home point is Club 20 is quite concerned. Moffat County is quite concerned. We want local official buy-off, and we formally asked for that. Asked for a firm commitment that BLM would not be required to do additional analysis. I wanted to bring this to the RAC's attention. AGO another administrative designation. Does the RAC want to send message to the Secretary about this?

Barbara: I am uncomfortable voting on something I haven't reviewed.

Pat: How does it compare to Wild and Scenic River designation?

Jeff: This is a new program from DOI, not a Congressional designation. Covers entire watersheds. Comfortable putting this off until next meeting

Jim: I support Jeff's concern. Analysis up to judge.

Public comment

David Ludlum, Western Slope Colorado Oil and Gas Association. Comments regarding Roan plateau discussion. The Roan Plateau has become more of a symbolic discussion. Little substance involved, mostly politics. Industry has \$114 million invested in Roan Plateau from the lease sale. Losing 5 percent return each year. You have already done the study. All this is coming from political appointees in DC. Our comments are to simply deal with items judge remanded. The Roan Plateau is the most studied piece of land in Colorado. Agency had budget shortfalls.

The NW RAC didn't go on field trip this time because of the sequester, and now we are looking at another multi-million EIS. The top securities of government retirement programs are oil and gas. We are talking real dollars here. There are significant financial impacts to local government. This is more than just a political debate. It is a real issue with real impacts. I don't see the need for the RAC to wait to vote on what best use of agency dollars is. The RAC is a political group. Request you not wait and encourage the agency to do their job. The other issue for us is the separation issue. BLM should separate the leases on top from the leases on the bottom. The bottom leases already have development all around them. The bottom leases could be developed right now. Conservation community has long said they don't have problem with developing the bottom. Do bottom leases as an EA.

Jeff: What is the answer to the idea of splitting the leases from top and bottom?

Steve: We received that comment during scoping, so we will address it through the process. Since it is all one planning area and they are tied together, it would be difficult to defend.

Ludlum: You're going to get sued either way. Take decisive action knowing you are going to get sued.

John: Was there anything in judge's plan about timeline? Can this go on forever?

Steve: No timeline in the decision.

Callie Hendrickson, White River and Douglas Creek Conservation Districts. I appreciate Blueways and America's Great Outdoors being on the table. Concerned from district about federal government purchasing land, through Blueways in particular. We hear about nothing but budget cuts, yet Washington continues to create these orders that take local time and resources from local staff. Blueways addresses full watersheds – source to mouth. Huge amount of land affected, and it by-passes Congress. Letter from western caucus in February to Secretary requesting he withdraw this order. It's very overreaching. The BLM is not hiring seasonals this year, yet we are spending time and money on these issues. Unintended consequences will be groups will use designation to try to halt actions like grazing and oil and gas. Pressure on private landowners -- even though they aren't a part of it, they are a part of it. Yellowstone being considered, but so far there hasn't been a local effort, It's all federal agencies that are on the committee. Encourage the RAC you to pass message on to your constituents.

Jeff: David Ludlum made a request of us. We as a RAC should address request. When public makes comment like that we need to address it, whoever it is. How do you want to address?

Dean: Good thought. He did request something of us.

Dona: Agrees

Jeff: Need to decide whether we want to take action today on the Roan Plateau planning effort.

John: What can we do? No deadline from court. Can we set a deadline? Also, we need to offer advice on this Blueways issue.

Barbara: Do NW RAC members feel you have enough information at this point to vote? I don't.

Pat: More than enough info. Agree let's move on. Agree with David. Do it today.

Dean: Open it wide, or open it up narrow seem to be the two options.

Wes: Problem with public setting our agenda and telling us to vote

Jeff: We need to answer his concern. May not be that we vote today, but we need to answer him either way. I move that we vote today on the Roan Plateau issue.

Dona seconds.

Cat 1 votes, two and two. So doesn't carry. Need three from each category.

GJFO travel planning

Katie Stevens – Talked about the RMP revision at the last meeting. This is an update on the process and a few things we've learned. First, the comment period is open thru June 24. We are revising our full RMP, as well as developing a comprehensive travel management plan. There is a lot of interest, concerns, and comments from the public related to travel management. Through this process we have learned what information is most important to the public. We posted a database online that shows rationale for proposed closures for each route. Also posted FAQs and clarified acreages. Did an additional public meeting that included a workshop about how we do travel management. Put them thru BLM travel training. Folks felt it was helpful. Public has a lot of concern about North Desert, 27 ¼ road. One of densest areas for routes in the field office. Staff envisioned doing most of the decisions in implementation, but we didn't make that clear. There is an opportunity for specific public involvement for specific routes. Does rac want to be involved? Need to define what rec objectives are for zone L. need help on Zone L and the public comments.

Jim: I wasn't expecting level of furor on this issue. It didn't happen for KFO or CRVFO. Any thoughts from NW RAC?

John: I have spoken at length to Katie about zone L. Public doesn't have the info to Make a decision. Glad to see better chance for public involvement. Need to get on the ground, can't necessarily tell from a map. Glad to see this additional opportunity.

Dan: best Field trip was one we did out here to see shooting areas. Very difficult mission for BLM.

Dean: People seemed surprised by the process. Do you agree?

Katie: A little bit of that. Some people haven't interacted with us before, hadn't worked with us on other areas because they don't use them. We have more flexibility in individual routes than we conveyed. It's overwhelming for public, lots of other BLM plans going on at the same time. Underestimated how maps would look, we were focused on bigger picture decisions. Format of public meeting wasn't set up for a lot of people to come with specific questions.

Tom: First time they are being regulated. Every other use on BLM land is. It's hard at first.

Katie: Needed to better explain bigger goals. Learned a lot about public outreach.

John: My suggestion is that the only way to do it is to inventory them as to width so we can tell what's good for jeeps, atvs, motorcycle. In zone L.

Katie: Route system should fulfill objectives of recreation experience. Agency is concerned about objectives that set what will be on the ground. If public can comment on objectives, then that will help us set what routes look like on ground.

Dean: average guy who takes motorcycle out there may not be involved in planning process. Hard to get them to come in and look at maps.

Barbara: need to involve OHV groups

John: That's what we are doing. I belong to two. That's what we are trying to do.

Pat: Our organization has to go thru years of planning to get trails. OHV groups haven't had to do this. Now stipulations and restrictions being imposed on them. All groups have had these restrictions except OHV groups. Thrust upon them, and it's a big learning curve.

Steve L: I'm coming from the Piceance Basin, where there are designated routes, not the free-for-all I saw on GJFO tour. Huge problem to move something forward, but it is a mess. I am surprised people aren't killed out there.

Jim: Dust on snow is a big deal. Run-off occurs earlier. Can't change that with zone L, and it's not just OHVs. But it is a critical issue for all BLM lands in the Colorado River Basin.

Barbara: I agree.

Dean: More than 20 years ago you did whatever you wanted on BLM property. This is example of that still occurring. It is just now being changed.

Jim: It will be difficult to make decisions about this any time. We need to make it clear that we can make adjustments once the plan is out there. Too important to bag the whole thing, or defer because it will never happen if we do.

John: You need to give yourself deadline.

Terry: Who is going to police all this? Would clubs be involved?

Wes: Noxious weeds is another problem. I drove here along Highway 139. The right-of-way is infested. Need to work with CDOT on that.

Katie: Travel management planning helps address those kinds of issues.

Pat: Most user groups have a fringe that do things illegally. Within our own user group, we apply peer group pressure. Difficult, but it has been successful with my user group.

Katie: How would the RAC like to be engaged in this issue?

Barbara: I would like a report from Katie on alternatives and from the user groups on what they think.

Dean: Because of the high public interest the RAC should be involved at some level

Pat: Need to reward groups that do things right and follow the process.

Jim: Does there need to be subgroup within this RAC for public to go to? A NW RAC sanctioned group for public?

John: I think existing groups would be more effective, like the Grand Valley Trails Alliance or the Grand Valley Motorized advocacy group. Maybe you could leverage them to this role.

Jim: We need to have organized way for updates and information so it is not chaotic

Field office priorities

Jim: We don't talk about budget issues at NWRAC, but we do talk about priorities. We have 24.6 percent less budget between 2013 and 2010. Most offices in NW are looking about a 1/3 cut since 2010. Asked each field manager to describe what is most important in your field office and what you will get done. Not just sequester. This is long-term problem.

KFO – Susan
Powerpoint

LSFO
Excelpowerpoint

Jeff: Why lands with wilderness characteristics inventories? And where?

Tim: Field Office wide. We need to be able to analyze impacts

Jim: have to have that information analyzed in order to win lawsuits

WRFO
Powerpoint

Wes: seems like monitoring is poor step child. Opportunity for volunteers?

Kent: teaming with NRCS, soil conservation districts. Still will do monitoring, not just at level of the past

Jim: Have to be careful about who is collecting data you use to make decisions

GJFO
Powerpoint

CRVFO
Powerpoint

Dean: What about furloughs? State workers furloughed several years ago.

Jim: Not this year. Don't know for next year.

Kai: How many employees in NW District?

Jim: 297

Kai: Can we let Congress know how we feel as the NW RAC?

Pat: We can advise the secretary, executive branch. Not legislative

Steve L: Glad to see that each field office had their own priorities. Speaks well of Jim.

John: Priorities made sense. Keep priorities to things that affect Americans' livelihood.

Jeff: I don't like to see monitoring falling off. You will lose appeals. Also need to resist all new programs coming from DC. Staff needs to push back.

Barbara: BLM is also charged with values like wildlife and recreation. Can't compare just dollar value, there are other values you are charged to support. Water and air quality, for example.

Jim: We have to finish stuff we already started. Respond to partner leveraging. Cannot let fee areas decline.

Wes: I commend Wendy on cross-training staff to get things done

Next agenda items:

Roan plateau

Sage grouse

Swear-in new field manager

Conditions of approval on grazing permits

GJ RMP comment summary

Put out call for agenda items one month out