

## **Northwest Resource Advisory Council Meeting, June 4, 2015**

### **District Manager Update**

#### **Northwest District, Joe Meyer**

Northwest Colorado District filled the Associate District Manager position vacated when Dave Rosenkrance departed for the Bureau of Reclamation. Alicia Austin Johnson. Accepts the position and reported to work June 1. Johnson comes to the agency from the U.S. Corps of Engineers in Albuquerque, New Mexico where she was a senior project manager. She has a bachelor's degree in watershed hydrology, and a master's degree in environment and community. Johnson has extensive experience in managing multiple resource programs, ecological restoration and project management. Among her skills are budget planning duties, team leadership, public meeting facilitation and developing adaptive management plans.

### **Field Manager Updates**

#### **Little Snake Field Office, Wendy Reynolds**

Travel Management Planning Continues - Route Inventory work continues for Travel Management Planning – The Rocky Mountain Youth Corps has again provided the LSFO with three interns during the 2015 summer months to assist with route inventories for travel management planning. Since mid-May, 2014, the interns completed over 2,760 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. We have inventoried approximately ½ of the 1.3 million acres of the field office. However, the real work begins as we go into the checkerboard land ownership pattern.

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.

Wild Horses – The PZP darting program is continuing in the Sand Wash Basin this spring as weather allows. We are beginning to see some success of the darting program which will be measured by this 2015 spring foal crop. We are already seeing a reduction in foals from the same time last year. We are keeping our fingers crossed. Herd estimate at this time is approximately 550 horses including new foals.

Energy Gateway South and Transwest Power Transmission Lines The Final EIS for EGS is anticipated to be available toward the end of September with a Record of Decision in December, 2015. The Final EIS for Transwest was released at the end of April, 2015. Currently, micro-siting discussions are occurring for certain stretches of the route. A final decision is anticipated by the end of 2015 or early 2016.

Field and Fire Season – While we were able to get an early start on field season this year, the weather has slowed some of our field activities down. Roads have been muddy and impassable in some areas of the field office. Fire activities have been minimal and the fire crews are giving us a hand with fencing projects and other work in the interim. We are presently undergoing a fire readiness review for the upcoming fire season. We anticipate a change in the weather patterns to get us back out in the field shortly.

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

EIS on Previously Issued Leases in the White River National Forest: The Colorado River Valley Field Office held its fourth cooperating agency meeting on this EIS on Feb. 19, 2015, focusing on alternatives and analysis planning. CRVFO also held three “webex” conference calls with subsets of cooperators specifically focused on transportation analysis (3/10), water resources analysis (3/19), and socioeconomics analysis (4/16). CRVFO has finalized alternatives (very similar to those presented to the RAC in the last meeting), and its contractor is in the process of analyzing them. BLM has reviewed a first draft of the Affected Environment section, and will review a first draft of the Environmental Consequences section next. A scoping report summarizing comments received during scoping was posted to the project website in February. A Draft of the EIS is due in fall/winter 2015.

Roan Plateau SEIS/RMPA: The Colorado River Valley Field Office has been working with the contractor to complete analysis and review of first draft sections of the SEIS since the last RAC meeting. BLM has reviewed the Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences section, and is working with our contractor to revise the draft per BLM comments. The CRVFO has not met with cooperators while we complete internal reviews and prepare for compilation and review of the Preliminary Draft SEIS, which will be reviewed internally prior to publication of the public Draft SEIS. BLM plans to provide key sections of the Preliminary SEIS to cooperating agencies for a brief review concurrent with internal BLM review. A Draft of the SEIS is due in fall 2015.

OHV groups remove nearly 6 tons of garbage from public lands -- Despite rainy conditions, more than 30 volunteers removed more than six tons of garbage, including 70 tires and 31 gallons of used motor oil, from public land north of Rifle on April 25 as part of an annual clean-up. The annual Hubbard Mesa Clean-up is sponsored by several off-highway vehicle groups in the area. This year, volunteers from the High Country 4 Wheelers and the White River Trail Runners filled two 40-yard trash containers with a variety of garbage that had accumulated since last year’s clean-up. Local businesses donated the large trash containers, which volunteers filled using a front-end loader and a skid-steer also donated by local businesses.

Colorado River Valley RMP – The final Record of Decision is anticipated to be released this summer.

**Kremmling Field Office, Stephanie Odell**

Kremmling intern wins National Making A Difference Award, Outstanding Youth -- Volunteer River Ranger Intern Eric Klammer was recognized at a national ceremony last week for his work in the Kremmling Field Office. Eric took the initiative to train as a whitewater guide, volunteering almost 600 hours conducting river and backcountry patrols and then obtaining

certification through a commercial outfitter. Eric also helped to teach education programs, organize volunteer days, perform maintenance at recreation sites, and conduct compliance checks. Eric's leadership skills as a River Ranger Intern freed KFO staff to work on other projects. The annual "Making a Difference" Award recognizes exceptional volunteers who have contributed thousands of hours improving the public lands. A national panel of BLM specialists and partner representatives selected the award winners from dozens of nominees submitted by BLM state offices. These hard-working volunteers have helped the BLM maintain recreation trails, protect archaeological sites, provide environmental education and other visitor services, and monitor and protect wildlife and other natural resources. Eight awards were given this year, and Eric was one of two who received the Outstanding Youth recognition.

**Bark Beetle Mitigation work continues** -- The Owl Mountain Sanitation Salvage Sale in Jackson County was awarded in September 2014 and harvest operations are continuing. More recently, the KFO has sold three biomass/timber sales encompassing 180 acres in Grand County. The KFO is planning to advertise the Smith Mesa Sale of approximately 370 acres later this summer. The project is located just north of Byers Canyon and was authorized through the Grand County Hazardous Tree Removal Environmental Assessment. Currently, the KFO is administering 18 timber and biomass contracts encompassing approximately 1,700 acres of harvest units in Grand and Jackson counties.

**Gore Canyon Whitewater Park completed** – The wave park on the Colorado River at the Pumphouse Recreation Site was completed this spring and is already popular with kayakers and other whitewater enthusiasts. The \$1.7 million Gore Canyon Whitewater Park was funded by Grand County, Eagle County, the Colorado Department of Local Affairs, the Colorado River Basin and the Colorado Water Conservation Board. BLM staff completed the environmental assessment on the project and worked to mitigate potential impacts. The feature consists of boulders and block-like concrete objects placed across the river channel that are not visible at normal flows and should allow for fish passage at all flow rates. Grand County was awarded historic water rights for the park, which will provide permanent protection for water flows in the Colorado River.

**Weather dampens North Sand Hills holiday weekend visitation** – An estimated 1,400 visitors braved the rainy weather at the North Sand Hills over the Memorial Day weekend, a significant drop for previous years that neared 2,000 visitors. Overall there were few associated problems. BLM rangers issued 27 citations and 18 warnings for violations such as no OHV registration, juvenile riders with no adult supervision, and littering. Three known medical incidents occurred and one OHV vs trailer accident was reported.

**Kremmling RMP** – The final Record of Decision is anticipated to be released this summer.

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

**WRFO Wild Horse update** – The White River Field Office anticipates a decision on the West Douglas Herd Area and the Piceance-East Douglas Herd Management Area in June. The BLM is proposing to use a helicopter to locate and guide wild horses toward a set of corrals as well as using water and bait trapping. The gathers could begin as early as September 2015. Up to 167 wild horses could be gathered and removed from the White River Field Office in 2015. The

Piceance-East Douglas Herd Management Area currently has an estimated 377 wild horses, but the appropriate management level for that area is between 135 and 235 wild horses. The adjacent West Douglas Herd Area is not managed for wild horses but currently has an estimated population of 365 wild horses. Gathers could occur in either area as well as areas within the White River Field Office outside these boundaries. The BLM received more than 10,000 public comments when the environmental review documents were released for public review in April. Staff are currently reviewing those comments.

Travel Management and NW RAC Travel Management Subgroup – The White River Field Office held a public review period for its 2014 route inventory from March 30 through May 31, which gave the public a chance to review the inventory for completeness. This included a public meeting in Meeker May 6 attended by about 20 people. In March the Field Office hosted a training session on travel management that Cooperating Agencies and some NW RAC Subgroup members attended. The Field Office expects to begin publically scoping the Environmental Assessment that will identify area designations for travel management in June. The first meeting of the 13-member NW RAC Subgroup for WRFO Travel Management will be scheduled once scoping on this EA has begun.

Natural Soda Plant plans expansion – The White River Field Office is currently evaluating plans by Natural Soda, Inc., to expand its sodium bicarbonate plant on the Piceance Basin. The planned expansion would double its current production of 250,000 tons per year and add 30 full-time employees over four years. The field office issued a preliminary EA in March. It is reviewing the comments received and awaiting response from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on consultation.

Oil Shale RD&D update – American Shale Oil continues to actively conduct research geomechanics, characterize the illitic oil shale, and finalize their heater design on its RD&D oil shale lease. Natural Soda Holdings, now called Simple Oil LLC, is in the preliminary planning and permitting phase for its lease. They have constructed one water monitoring well and began baseline water sampling. Shell is continuing to do reclamation on its three leases. Chevron converted one of their monitoring wells to a BLM livestock watering well. They have completed the plugging and abandoning process on all of the remaining wells and completed site reclamation. Exxon holds an RD&D lease as well, but no new information was available.

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

#### **GJFO RMP**

Released April 11

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

The Dominguez-Escalante planning team is briefing the Washington Office Final EIS/Proposed RMP and hope to release it to the public this summer. This NCA is in both the Northwest and Southwest Districts but has it's own Advisory Council to advise BLM throughout the RMP process. As directed by the legislation that Advisory Council will sunset one year after the RMP is completed at which point the Northwest RAC will likely be more involved in D-E land management issues.

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

The Colorado River Ruby-Horsetheif Recreation Area permit system continues to grow in popularity drawing tourists from all over the world. BLM issued 1,220 camping permits in 2014 and are well ahead of that pace this year. In 2014 75% of the users were from out of the county (mostly Front Range) and 15% were from out of state. Approximately 12,000 people floated the river and camped under permit in 2014. For the convenience of the visitors, in 2016 we plan to transition to the online reservation system Recreation.gov. This will allow users to make their reservation without having to call the office (often having to call multiple times on multiple days to get through). There is a \$6 transaction fee for all online reservations. We believe the users will really benefit from this new system and it should free up some BLM staff time to do more on the ground work in the river corridor.

### **Recreation**

Epic Rides - The 3rd Annual Grand Junction Off-Road mountain bike event included a 20% increase of participation from the 2014 event. The event draws competitors from around the world. The 2014 winner from Columbia said, "This event is one of the most unique events in the U.S.... The [trails are] the most technical course you can find in the U.S." The trails for this course are in the Bangs Canyon Special Recreation Area. This is an area where the management goals reflect specific quality trails based experiences.

North Fruita Desert Campground Expansion - Over the winter, the BLM partnered with Mesa County to enhance facilities at the North Fruita Desert Campground at the end of 18 Road. Mesa County provided gravel to resurface existing campground roads and finish new loop roads and pullouts servicing 21 new campsites at this very popular campground. Those sites have proven popular among visitors during the peak spring mountain biking and camping season. The campground continues to be full to overflowing every weekend during the spring and fall. Campground improvements are made possible by the \$10/night camping fee and the ongoing partnerships between the BLM, Mesa County and the City of Fruita.

North Fruita Desert Visitor Information Kiosks – The BLM has been working with the Delta Corrections Crew to build two new visitor information kiosks near the entrance to BLM-managed public lands on 18 Road. These kiosks will include maps of the area and information about recreation opportunities and regulations.

Western Colorado Conservation Corps - WCCC crews of 8-10 youth have been performing trail maintenance and other facility maintenance projects. One crew spent a week in McInnis Canyons NCA working on Steve's Loop, Lion's Loop, Rustler's Loop and Moore Fun trails. Another crew spent a week doing trail maintenance and installing post and cable barriers, gates and cattleguards in the North Fruita Desert area. They worked on the following trails: Western Zippety, Frontside and Joe's Ridge. These crews were funded by youth initiative dollars from the BLM Washington Office.

Rabbit Valley Trail Maintenance – This spring the BLM partnered with the Western Slope ATV Association to perform trail maintenance on several of the multiple use trails in Rabbit Valley. A BLM equipment operator ran a WSATVA-owned trail dozer to improve drainage on Trails 2, 3 and 4.

### **Wild Horses**

Nothing to report

**Range**

Nothing to report

**Fuels Projects and Wildland Fire Mitigation**

Nothing to report