

NW RAC minutes  
Aug. 23, 2012  
Rio Blanco County Fairgrounds, Meeker, Colo.

Attendance:

**Category 1**

Dave Grisso

Tom Latham

Wes McStay

John Potter

Absent: Steve Loshbaugh

**Category 2**

Dan Davidson

Pat Kennedy

Dona Shue

Steve Smith

Terry Sweet

**Category 3**

Jeff Comstock

Dean Riggs

Kai Turner

Barbara Vasquez

Lanny Weddle

**BLM:** Jim Cagney, Kent Walter, Catherine Robertson, Steve Bennett, Susan Cassel, Wendy Reynolds, Dave Boyd, Kent Lyles, Chris Joyner, Jennifer Maiolo

**Public:**

Jon Hill, Ranglely

David Ludlam, West Slope Colorado Oil and Gas Association

Ronald Daiz, Meeker

Callie Hendrickson, White River and Douglas Creek Conservation Districts

Stacy Gould, White River and Douglas Creek Conservation Districts

Toni Moore, Colorado Wild Horse and Burro Coalition, The Cloud Foundation

Brian Meinhart, Congressman Tipton's office

Jay Fletcher, Senator Udall's office

Steve Hinkemeyer, Trapper Mine

Charles Bowman, Trapper Mine

Kathleen Morrison, Fruita

Rachel Geiger, Aurora Water

Soren Jespersion, The Wilderness Society

JoAnn Baxter, Craig

Karol Bullen, Craig

Patti Williams, Rangely

8 a.m. Pat Kennedy called to order quorum is present

Jim Cagney recognized members with expiring terms:

- Dave Grisso
- Tom Latham
- Dona Shue
- Steve Smith
- Kai Turner

### **Recreational Shooting**

Cagney: Recreational target shooting is emerging as an issue. Want to hear what the RAC has to say about if and when BLM should consider closing areas to target shooting.

Cassel: Example of Kremmling RMP, where several specific areas were suggested for closures to target shooting due to conflicts with other uses. NRA sent out action alert to its members that whole office was going to be closed.

Catherine: Looking at issues in Grand Junction Field Office. 34&C road has become a problem area – lots of irresponsible shooting, and there are a number residents are out there. This is creating public safety issues. Same thing in some areas with high intensity trail use. Issues around target shooting are one of the main complaints I get as field manager. Out RMP is looking at different alternatives. Currently about 2 percent closed of the field office is closed to target shooting. Under the highest alternative in the RMP, the most that could be closed is 5 percent. In both cases hunting would still be allowed

Cagney: When should BLM consider closures to target shooting?

Riggs: Hard to enforce, have to prove you are hunting and have someone out there. We have areas that people want closed due to noise.

Latham: Dumping and shooting go hand in hand. Have to control the dumping as well. People shoot the stuff that's been dumped

Cagney: Are members saying if it is a genuine safety issue, it's ok to close?

Smith: If there is an established range, that's different. But if shooting is a safety issue anywhere, should be addressed. If it is not a formal range and people are annoyed by noise, that's something to consider as well.

Catherine: Our scoping issues from the public have been about safety, not noise

Kai: Hard when activity has been there, then people move in and complain. But if it truly a safety hazard, it needs to be addressed. At least if dumping is concentrated, you have it all in one place where you can clean it up

Susan: State saying they need more shooting ranges. Jackson County too. Very difficult for us to transfer lands to other entities for shooting areas. Have to clean lead up first.

Wes: Explosive targets banned? They should be.

Dean: How do you enforce this? Need to have a good public process where all sides can give their views. Two kinds of shooters – those who go to a controlled range, and those who just want to go out to desert and shoot, who don't want controlled environment

John P: I prefer to go out to desert. I clean up my targets. Safety concern with range unless there is a range master.

Steve S: Need to provide info about where to go shoot – organized range or otherwise. RMP is public process to consider these closures. Is that where it has been done before?

Catherine: Some areas were closed in our 1984 Resource Management Plan

Jeff C: Go through public process, weigh the comments then make your decision. RAC doesn't need to weigh in

Pat Kennedy passes out draft resolution

Jeff C: Why do we need to do this? Doesn't BLM have authority? Add language that recreational shooting is part of multiple use, and BLM should plan for it. Take out all language about conflicts, just focus on BLM planning for this

Steve Smith: Agree that it is not needed, handled during RMP. What about hunting language?

Dean: Need to make clear we are not talking about hunting

Cagney: Need to have some basic assumption that people will follow rules. How do we approach this without generating the overreaction?

Barbara: Are there rules developed by BLM for non-range shooting?

Cagney: Yes.

Grisso: Will you create safety buffer?

Wes: I have a problem with focusing mainly on urban interface, you can have problems in remote areas as well.

Kai: focus on safety and multiple use – can't have all uses on all areas

Dean: not going to get away from controversy. Give thought to other places where shooting would be allowed, need to provide for that

Jeff C: suggest we go on record that BLM needs to address this through their public planning process without a formal resolution

Barbara: Need statewide rules

Lanny: Agree with Dean with Jeff C. But if we do resolution, need to work on it and bring it back

Terry: are there designated areas for shooting?

Catherine: These is uncertainty about whether we can take on that liability. If we don't, we end up with a lot of little mini shooting areas all over the place. Some people leave a big mess.

Group decides to not do resolution, BLM has authority to address already.

Need to separate shooting from littering

### **White River RMPA**

Powerpoint

Smith: Why only 8 wells per pad? Why not 32?

Kent: technology at time we started. But 8 is good for the analysis, because it would show more impacts. Still encourage them to drill more per pad

Comstock: Concerned about BLM process, deferring areas for sage grouse. Can blow the whole thing up. That totally changes your socio economic analysis. Need to do the analysis right now.

Kent: Sage grouse are addressed. What we have it in our plan, and we are addresses a big chunk of what the National Technical Report has.

Comstock: So you are including areas with NSOs because of grosue habitat?

Kent: Yes

Pat: Where would population growth be?

Kent: Existing communities

Wes: Any limitation on number of rigs drilling at one time? How many new roads?

Kent: That's included in analysis. In the document by alternative

John Potter: Might be some modifications to minimum drilling under units?

Kent: There is give and take on well locations so that we don't get disturbance in areas we don't want at that time. They wouldn't have to do an obligation well in a sensitive area to hang onto the unit. Work with state office case by case

Barbara: What is feedback from CPW on year-round drilling?

Kent: mixed. have done this some already working with them

Smith: Does the give and take mean that leases will be held by production without being drilled?

Kent: Yes, could suspend leases under existing laws to give us that flexibility.

Smith: Will sage grouse EIS be constrained to conform with this plan?

Kent: Some things in this plan fit nicely with EIS, but EIS will look at additional measures too.

Grisso: This is an important issue. It looks like it is well thought out, but we need to read it in detail. If industry has too many increases in restrictions, it will increase our costs and we'll focus on developing elsewhere where costs are lower.

Wes: Is off-site mitigation considered?

Kent: One tool in the toolbox

### **Public comment period**

Jon Hill from Rangely. I am a rancher who has BLM permits along West Douglas Herd Area. I support the resolution on wild horse management you are considering. I recently attended a National Cattlemen Association meeting, where we discussed how the BLM and Forest Service have been very restrictive to permittees because of drought. Yet you haven't done anything to gather horses. Also, trespass horses are a problem. 170,000-180,000 abandoned horses nationally. Sage grouse technical team report tells BLM to focus on priority sage grouse areas, not other areas if funding is limited, which concerns me. Need to sell the 47,000 excess horses currently in holding facilities.

Callie Hendrickson, Douglas Creek and White River Conservation Districts – Thanks to Kent for WRFO RMPA overview. It was helpful. The Conservation Districts support the resolution you are considering on wild horses. It contains very valid info. As a member of the Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board, I toured areas in Nevada. We have challenges out here, but it is a really big problem in Nevada. Some areas we saw were more than 1000% over Appropriate Management Level. In 2013, BLM may gather only 4,700 head of horses. That's down quite a bit. BLM is running out of space for horses. Huge concern from the conservation district perspective

Toni Moore – Represent Colorado Wild Horse and Burro Coalition and the Cloud Foundation, and I am a former NW RAC member. This resolution is extremely alarming. I do take exception

with resolution and the raw data. A lot of areas in country are not over AML. AMLs are not based on good science. Now have more in capacity than on the range than we did before. There has been over aggressive gathering, and there are not places to put them all. The selling of horses means they are going to go to slaughter. Also concerned about detailed plans. NEPA documents deal with removals, don't talk about improving habitat, for example, The Grand Junction Field Office has done good habitat improvement work at Little Book Cliffs. How is selling horses in captivity going to help BLM manage horses on the range? What do the planning documents say that would help? How many of you have read the law? General public would come out against what is in the resolution. Need to do more outreach and research, and table this resolution right now. We agree that there are too many horses in captivity. We are willing to sit down with you and try to find solutions.

David Ludlam, West Slope Colorado Oil and Gas Association – I received three press calls yesterday on the White River Field Office Oil and Gas RMPA, asking me if it is good or bad? When you look at development in other areas of the country, there are fewer restrictions. Recognize complexity of what public land managers face, but we are concerned that we are seeing incremental increase in restrictions.

### **Wild Horse Resolution**

Dona: Basically a reiteration of what was passed before. Goes to the WHB Advisory Board this time, and has some more specific language about laws

Pat: Are other RACs taking this on?

Dona: We have three of the four Herd Management Areas in Colorado. We are the only RAC at this time looking at this resolution.

Jeff C: Question has come up about what is BLM responsibility of preserving historic genetics?

Cagney: This resolution does not address genetics

Jeff C: If you are selling off your horses, are you preserving genetic types?

Cagney: BLM would oppose anything that would lose the genetics of the horses on the range in the HMAs. We have to address genetics of horses we keep on range.

Jeff C: What about the concern that appropriate management levels are not based on science?

Cagney: They are based on science.

Dona: This resolution is mostly focusing on horses in holding. I agree that there are better things BLM could do on the ground. This will help because the capacity situation is unsustainable. BLM is spending too much holding unwanted horses in captivity, so there is less money for range improvements. This is not a nice issue, and it has been brought about by years of mismanagement. We have to do something about horses in captivity. No market in US right now.

Wes: I am concerned about the second to last “Be it resolved,” it would not be humane to not spend money on feeding and caring for excess horses to be sold.

Kai: What about saying we don’t want to see the amount of money for feed and caring increasing? Or number in holding increasing?

John Potter: We agree that if they are in captivity we need to feed them, aren’t we saying we don’t want that number in captivity to increase?

Comstock: We should be supporting other means of disposing of horses other than long-term storage.

Kent: If you are talking about overseas, aren’t you really talking food source?

Dona: Not necessarily. A lot of countries are enamored with the American West. The WHB Act did not anticipate this holding problem we have now, so it did not address it.

Barbara: I don’t see in this resolution that the money saved by limiting and reducing horses in holding would be used to improve horses on the range

John Potter: Are we saying sage grouse are more important than horses? Seems like we are trying to get rid of horses and save sage grouse.

Pat: We are not getting rid of horses. We are talking about horses in holding. Also horses aren’t native to North America, sage grouse are.

Cagney: Sage grouse are declining westwide, wild horses are doubling every four years.

Latham: Let’s reword the resolution a little bit and move forward.

Smith: I agree. Oppose specifying where money savings would go.

Dean: Suggests taking out sage grouse language.

Comstock: How about the NWRAC supports an amendment that prohibits the long-term holding of culled horses.

Wes: I fear that this would make the solution to hold them on the range instead.

Smith: We need to add “while maintaining AML on the range.”

Kai: moves to approve as discussed

Lanny seconds

Passes unanimously

### **CRVFO Subgroup recommendations**

Bennett: Subgroup sanctioned by this NWRAC four years ago. Most members have been on the whole time. It has worked well. They helped us with draft, then with proposed alternative this summer. They developed recommendations on areas where they had consensus, and areas that they didn't. So NW RAC needs to decide whether they won't to endorse or modify these recommendations. Any discussion where they did not reach consensus, or where they do not agree with Cooperators

Smith: Remarkable group. Actually been together about 5 years. Did detailed homework, attended meetings. A nice spectrum of expertise. Went back and checked with their constituents. Picked areas where they could find consensus, then provided competing points of view where they did not. Encourage NWRAC to endorse these recommendations.

Kai: Was oil and gas industry present when these recommendations were made?

Smith: The oil and gas representative did change a few times, but they were there and engaged. One recommendation was made when they weren't there, but they had voiced opinion meeting before.

Bennett: The oil and gas representative missed last meeting where we discussed some areas of high potential, two ACEC proposals in particular. Might not have supported consensus.

Kennedy: We have empowered subgroup to strive for consensus. What about areas they could not reach consensus, are they resolvable? Yet to be resolved?

Bennett: We are out of time. Need direction at this meeting so we can prepare analysis.

Kennedy: Not comfortable making recommendations on areas local group could not reach consensus.

Grisso: I want to see where the subgroup recommendations differ from the recommendations of the cooperating agencies.

Comstock: I am concerned if we would support an area where there would not have been consensus if everyone was there.

Bennett passes out table that shows where cooperators and subrac agree

Questions about how cooperators fit in with this

Smith: NWRAC has to decide which of the subgroup recommendations they want to carry forward. Cooperators provide input directly to BLM, not involved with this group. The subrac



makes their recommendations to this group (NW RAC), who then must decide whether to forward them to BLM.

Comstock: We shouldn't consider the areas where we don't think there would have been consensus if oil and gas had attended. They should have been there at that meeting, but it is not consensus if they would have disagreed.

Kennedy: Decisions made by people who show up. Idea of subgroups is the local experts familiar with the areas provide input to the NWRAC, who may not be familiar with the specific local issues.

Barbara moves to support work subgroup has done, support areas where consensus was reached, and pass on to BLM areas where there was not

Jim: I understand that the NW RAC approves the work of the subrac, and that some members of the NWRAC have concern about whether one point had consensus

John Potter: Is there doubt about whether these recommendations about consensus are accurate?

Comstock: Yes

Smith: If Thompson Creek, and Grand Hogback taken out, would Jeff and Dave be comfortable with the recommendations?

Barbara: This group met for a number of years, bordering on immoral to ignore this work at this point. BLM needs to be able to take into account these recommendations.

Motion is withdrawn.

Barbara moves that the subgroup's report be forwarded to BLM without making a specific recommendation

Boyd: BLM can only take recommendations from the NW RAC, not from the subgroups themselves. The subgroups make their recommendations to the NW RAC, which needs to formally forward them for BLM to consider them

Smith: Seconds

Cat 1: Potter, Weddle, Grisso, Latham no. Motion fails (three members of each category must vote yes).

### **Coal Presentation**

Smith: FLPMA requires multiple use. If coal and gas leasing has a contribution to global result, shouldn't there be a mechanism for tying the results of the decisions to the global action? There

are impacts to wildlife, water etc from global warming. Integrated approach. Shouldn't there be a discussion at a RAC meeting? We should consider.

Wes: if you could put in coal bed methane years ahead of actual mine, would it reduce methane during mining?

Jennifer: Methane seeps. Not sure there is data for that

Dona: underground mines. What about surface mines?

Jennifer: they do emit methane, but you can't measure it because it's not in a vent shaft

### **Greater Sage-grouse update**

Cagney: Right now we are trying to develop range of alternatives. We will likely have a citizen alternative that is more strict than NTT alternative, no action, and a sub-regional alternative

One issue is counties and others feel that the work of local working groups is being ignored. USFWS has already said these are too voluntary and won't help against listing the bird. My task is put something on the table that will prevent listing.

### **Subgroup updates**

#### **KFO**

Cassel – showed proposed plan a few months ago. Group voted to stay together, will show proposed plan to group again. Wanted to see better maps. Gone from 60 maps to 160 maps.

Vasquez: I am liaison now. Mostly info flowing from BLM to group, and it is incomplete info. Group will get back together, but too late to affect the proposed plan

#### **WRFO**

Kent – Now that plan amendment is hitting street, would like to point them to particular resources where they could help.

#### **McInnis**

Hasn't met since the last NW RAC meeting.

### **Public comment**

Patti Williams – Thanks to people who took time to talk to us before voting on the resolution. Last wild horse resolution the NW RAC passed before didn't pass smell test with general public. Who knew of this vote in advance? What about other uses that affect range like cattle and ohvs? European nations will want our horses for food, not dressage. Please stop looking for a quick fix. Concerning West Douglas horses, the summer gather was without merit. None of horses body scores indicated there was a problem. Thinly veiled attempt to zero out herd.

Stacy Gould Conservation Districts – District is holding tour next week looking at natural resources and we want to invite the NW RAC.

Jon Hill – Thanks to BLM for taking a better approach in the EIS than the National Technical Team report, which recommends buying private minerals, not renewing grazing permits. I would like BLM to consider an improvement alternative, NTT just talks about not doing stuff, doesn't address proactive things like improving brood habitat and dealing with predators – ravens and foxes. Have to look at those aspects as well.

David Ludlum – Subgroup report. Assumption was correct that oil and gas would not have had consensus on Mount Logan, and Grand Hogback ACECs. Areas already leased, would create issues for leaseholders.

### **CRVFO Subgroup recommendations continued**

Cagney asks if the group would consider the motion to forward recommendations acknowledging no consensus on Mount Logan, Hogback and Thompson Creek

Grisso points out that the documents say there is consensus on recommending wild and scenic river suitability on Parachute Creek complexes on the Roan, not sure where that came from and doesn't feel there would have been consensus on that one either.

Group decides not to forward any recommendations to BLM on the CRVFO subgroup.

### **Field manager updates**

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

**Sutey Ranch Land Exchange public comment period:** A 45-day comment period on the proposal ended June 20, 2012. Public open house meetings were held in Carbondale and Aspen, where the BLM and representatives of the proponent were available to provide information and take public comments. A total of 270 comment letters, forms and emails were submitted during the comment period, of which 175 indicated support that the exchange was in the public interest and 84 were in opposition. Eleven submissions were uncommitted.

The next opportunity for public involvement will be when the environmental assessment is drafted, which we currently anticipate will be this fall. We currently expect a final decision about whether or not to proceed with the exchange in early 2013. If the decision is to go forward with the exchange, closing on the exchange would follow shortly after that. Land exchange evaluations are complex, and it is not unusual for the process to take longer than first anticipated.

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.

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.

Land exchange acreages are based on land value. An appraisal of all proposed parcels will be conducted as part of the evaluation process. If the appraised value showed inequity in favor of the proponent, BLM could suggest additional acreage be included. However, it is likely the land appraisals for this proposal will show the exchange to favor the public, even without the \$1.1 million donation. It is unlikely that additional lands would be considered as part of this proposal.

BLM manages a number of small, isolated parcels across the West that have little or no public access. These are typically very difficult for BLM to manage and have little benefit for the public. BLM considers opportunities to exchange these difficult-to-manage areas for areas that would potentially offer more benefit to the public. The long, extensive process to evaluate such proposals is in place to ensure land exchanges that are approved are indeed in the public's interest.

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.

**Fall prescribed burns being considered:** The Colorado River Valley Field Office is considering two prescribed burns this fall. Prescribed fire continues to be an effective tool for improving wildlife habitat, reducing high fuel loads, improving ecosystem health and firefighter safety.

A 539-acre unit on top of the Roan Plateau may be ignited depending on favorable conditions and support by Garfield County, which continues to have concerns about burning in light of this fire season. The unit is in the East Fork Parachute Creek Drainage in the Grassy Gulch and Camp Gulch areas. It's part of a three-year cooperative project among the BLM, Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife, and Williams Production to improve aspen health on the Roan.

Fuel and weather conditions this spring alternated between too moist and too dry for a 150-acre prescribed burn planned this spring in Eagle County near Burns, Colo. A possible window for this burn is expected this fall. Last year a successful 562-acre burn was conducted in this area, and this year would have been the fifth burn since 2004 as part of the Deer Pen Project. The burns have helped increase age diversity in the vegetation and have created a nice mosaic of habitat types. This project area does involve priority habitat for Greater Sage-grouse, but the

project has been determined to maintain or enhance the habitat, and therefore conforms to BLM's interim sage grouse guidance.

**Thompson Divide oil and gas issues:** SG Interests recently notified BLM and the U.S. Forest Service that they intend to file Notices of Staking for 7 to 9 well pads on their leases in the Thompson Divide area west of Carbondale, Colo. To date nothing has been submitted. 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 Application for Permit to Drill (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.

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.

The most recent decisions that made the White River National Forest lands in the Thompson Divide available for leasing are in the White River National Forest's 1993 Final Oil and Gas Leasing EIS Record of Decision. These decisions were carried forward in the 2002 White River National Forest Plan Record of Decision. Those documents made the decision that the Forest Service lands in the Thompson Divide area were appropriate for oil and gas leasing, and under what restrictions.

Since these are National Forest Service lands, the U.S. Forest Service made the decision about whether or not these lands would be available for oil and gas leasing. BLM is the agency that conducts federal on-shore oil and gas lease sales. Parcels in oil and gas lease sales have been nominated by industry or others to be offered in a lease sale. Nominated Forest Service parcels are offered after being nominated only after BLM gets concurrence from the Forest Service.

In July 2012, Antero Resources submitted a proposal for the Wolf Springs Unit, which would encompass 11,700 acres within the Thompson Divide. Unitization is one method to manage a group of leases efficiently and reduce impacts.

On August 2, 2012, Senator Bennett released a Draft Thompson Divide Bill and has requested comments. It presents an option that would withdraw unleased public minerals in the area from future oil and gas development while also preserving existing private property rights for current leaseholders. The bill also creates an opportunity for existing leases to be retired should they be donated or sold by willing owners. The legislation was drafted at the request of local governments and following a series of conversations Bennet held with elected officials and community leaders.

**Seasonal archaeologists help with priority clearances:** This summer, CRVFO hired two seasonal archeology technicians to assist in cultural resource clearances. Because of legal requirements, cultural resource density, and lack of pre-existing information, the Cultural Program's clearance of projects can be a constraint in our timelines. Having additional support for that program is allowing us to address some of the priority workload issues. The majority of funding for the seasonal positions came through the Range and Fuels Programs. The Range Program had 12 miles of livestock trailing corridors and 150 acres of livestock allotments requiring cultural surveys to support the grazing permit renewal process. The Fuels Program had a 118 acre, WUI fuels reduction project located in Eagle County that required cultural clearance. At this point in the season, the technicians have surveyed over 230 acres and are continuing to cover un-surveyed areas of the Field Office. As part of this effort, the Cultural Program has recorded 16 new cultural sites and monitored 5 previously documented cultural resource sites.

**Native American Tribal Consultation held this month:** CRVFO invited the Northern Ute Indian Tribe to visit some cultural sites earlier this month and provide additional comments regarding our Resource Management Plan. Below are specific RMP comments received during the most recent consultation:

- Bocco Mountain SRMA is recommended to be undesignated in the revised RMP. This would reduce the recreation emphasis for an area with known cultural sites.
- The Grand Hogback ACEC is a preferred ACEC designation. The Northern Utes would like to see both parts of the proposed ACEC boundary brought forward. This would provide additional protection of cultural resources – particularly in the southern portion.
- They wanted CRVFO to keep in mind that cultural resources are not just the physical presence on the ground, but also what is near or can be seen from these locations. They emphasized that cultural resources and their management should be looked at from a landscape point of view. These sites are all interconnected and related to one another. This reinforces the need for protection buffers as proposed in the RMP – particularly for the heritage areas, which are traditional cultural properties or Native American areas of concern to protect the integrity of place, setting, and/or feeling. Heritage areas would have a 0.25-mile buffer.

**Roan Plateau Resource Management Plan Litigation:** On June 22, 2012 District Court Judge Marcia Krieger remanded the Roan Plateau Resource Management Plan Amendment Record of Decision, ruling that BLM was deficient in analyzing air quality impacts and in failing to analyze an alternative that would have required the natural gas under the top of the Plateau be accessed from areas below the plateau through directional drilling. The Judge did not overturn or invalidate existing leases, and upheld BLM's interpretation of the "Transfer Act," stating that a significant part of the Roan Plateau should be leased for oil and gas development under the law. BLM is looking at our next steps to proceed and address the District Court Decision.

**Garfield County Air Resource Study:** Colorado River Valley Field Office staff are part of a Technical Advisory Committee of researchers proposing a scientific study to examine air emissions from natural gas extraction operations in Garfield County. The data and results of the project, estimated to be completed in 2015, will be useful to BLM to inform air quality decisions and future oil and gas modeling efforts.

The study will be conducted in cooperation with industry, Garfield County, CDPHE, EPA, BLM, and the National Center for Atmospheric Research. The overall goal of this project is to produce a high-quality, peer-reviewed assessment of air emissions and dispersion from well drilling, hydraulic fracturing, and flowback activities in Garfield County. The study will review the well development process from drilling to completion, including the use of hydraulic fracturing. Emissions of interest in the study are nitrogen oxides methane, benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene and xylenes along with a wide variety of other volatile organic compounds.

The team of experts lead the project includes staff from the Atmospheric Sciences department at Colorado State, CSU's Soil and Crop Sciences department, Air Resource Specialists Inc. The team's Technical Advisory Committee includes representatives of EnCana, Anadarko, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, the Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment and the National Center for Atmospheric Research. Also assisting are CSU graduate students and postdoctoral researchers.

**Fire Restrictions specific to Oil and Gas Operations:** The Colorado River Valley Field Office and the energy industry have long had a cooperative relationship on safety issues, including wildfire risk and prevention. On June 22, the Colorado River Valley Field Office implemented stage two fire restrictions specific to oil and gas activity that had been developed when the energy activities had become very active in 2006, posing elevated risk for human caused fire starts. The requirements are very specific to oil and gas operations, such as pipeline construction involving welding and grinding, and drilling activities that involve flaring of natural gas. The intent of these restrictions is to provide for the safety of oil and gas workers, the public and firefighters, while not impeding operations. They were updated this season to reflect new technology being used by some of the more progressive operators. Based on site specific conditions, variances from the restrictions can be requested in writing from the Field Office Manager. Operators must provide a plan for mitigating fire risk so that the variances can be implemented safely. Upon request, our fire staff will arrange site visits to assess fire risk and review fire prevention and evacuation procedures. With recent precipitation, wildfire conditions have become less severe for much of our region. Because of this, the Colorado River Valley Field Office rescinded the fire restrictions.

### **Kremmling Field Office, Susan Cassel**

**Outdoor Education:** The KFO staff is focusing significant energy on outdoor education, which hasn't been well-publicized or "spotlighted." Outdoor education 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. Outdoor education activities this summer include:

Middle Park High School Sophomore River Trip - This trip was a two-day rafting and camping trip in the Upper Colorado River Special Recreation Management Area (UCR SRMA). This group had 28 students and 12 teachers. On the first day, students rafted down the river doing community service projects along the way. Some of the projects were cleaning out metal campfire rings, disassembling rock fire rings, and staining benches, picnic tables, and exteriors

of restrooms. On the second day, the group got back in the rafts and stopped at various places along the river to learn about history, river Leave No Trace, weeds, orienteering, etc. Funding was made available through the BLM's Take It Outside! program.

Boys and Girls Club of Denver Metro River Trip - This trip was a two-day rafting and camping trip in the Upper Colorado River Special Recreation Management Area (UCR SRMA). This group was comprised of 15 youths from the Denver Metro area, staff from the Boys and Girls Club, and staff from Colorado Mountain Club (CMC). The CMC organized the trip and provided meals, camping equipment, education activities and games for the evening. Community service was performed along the river during the first day. On the second day, the youth learned about the river corridor. Funding was made available through the BLM's Take It Outside! program.

MILE River Trip - Mentors in Life Enrichment (MILE) is a Grand County program that connects youth to mentors. Once a month, participants do a group activity with the other youth. One of the summer activities was a one-day rafting trip with educational activities, such as orienteering, geocaching, and vegetation identification along the river.

West Grand High School Flex Period - The West Grand High School principal started a flex period program during the 2011-2012 school year. At the end of the class day, students who did not need extra help in their studies came to the "half-hour of power" class. Kremmling Field Office employees hosted many of these classes, teaching things such as college preparedness; paths to natural resource degrees and professions; recreation, range, fire, and other resource management; and geographic information systems (GIS) awareness. A main goal was to present professional adults and careers from the Kremmling community and stress education and self-motivation. An additional goal was to present a positive view of the BLM, its employees, and some of the management challenges on public lands with which the students may be familiar.

Reeder Creek Trail Work and Learn to Fly Fish - This was a two-day trail-work project. The first day was a community event with trail work in the morning and a free learn-to-fly-fish demo in the afternoon. The BLM partnered with Trout Unlimited, Fly Fishing Outfitters, and Colorado Parks and Wildlife. On the second day, a group of youth from Pennsylvania helped continue the progress along the trail. In all, a 20-foot bridge, 60 feet of wood stairs, and 15 feet of rock stairs were built, and 1.5 miles of trail work was completed.

#### Grand Park Community Recreation Center Kids Trips-

- River etiquette and Water Safety Olympics: This class was for 5-9 year olds. BLM taught the basics of what a river campsite looks like, talked about fires outside, Leave No Trace basics, river etiquette, and conducted the Water Safety Olympics (how to fit a helmet, PFD, what's a throw bag, how to paddle, etc.)
- Fire, Geocaching & Orienteering: This class was for 9-13 year olds. BLM taught participants how to fight a fire, wind effects of fire, firefighting careers, demo of fire shelters, outdoor survival skills and wilderness first aid skills, map and compass orientation, orienteering and geocaching.



Jackson County Earth Day - BLM has an educational booth that varies every other year. This past Earth Day, we conducted an educational game where students had to think of animals in Jackson County, what happens during wet years and dry year to these animals, what noises they make, etc.

Jackson County Water Carnival - BLM conducted the Water Safety Olympics for students in K-3 grades.

**Kremmling RMP Revision:** A new writer/editor has been contracted for work on the Kremmling Proposed RMP/Final EIS. We are nearing completion of responses to 381 substantive comments received on the Draft RMP/EIS. An additional 1,600 comments were received as form letters or emails that are non-substantive, which will be grouped according to topic and receive a single, topic-related response. Travel management, target shooting, OHV use, and Wild and Scenic River designations are common topics among the substantive comments. The writer/editor has completed work on the Final Wild and Scenic River Suitability Report (which covers the Colorado River Valley and Kremmling Field Offices), and is working on the various chapters of the Kremmling RMP revision. Work on the Kremmling PRMP/FEIS is being done in-house by the Kremmling Field Office staff.

The Kremmling Draft RMP/EIS was made available to the public on September 16, 2011, in CD format and on the Kremmling Field Office website. Due to a delay in printing paper copies, the traditional 90-day comment period was extended to January 17, 2012, to allow those receiving paper copies a full 90 days for review and comment. Progress on the PRMP/FEIS has slowed, somewhat, with attention of the RMP interdisciplinary team being directed toward work on the Sage-Grouse EIS, and on completing work prescribed in the Annual Work Plan. We hope to receive permission to print the PRMP/FEIS in October or November.

**Fuels Treatments:** The Dry Gulch (near State Bridge) and Vils (southeast of Walden) fuels treatments using prescribed fire are in hiatus, pending a return to weather and vegetation conditions that will allow the projects to be implemented. Drought conditions and high fire danger have precluded work on these projects. Fuels treatments at Gore Lakes and on Independence Mountain are continuing. A NEPA analysis and burn plan are being completed for fuels treatments in the Mule Creek area near Williams Fork Reservoir in Grand County.

**Fire Management:** Stage 1 and 2 fire restrictions were imposed on public lands in the Kremmling Field Office during June, July and August, to be consistent with restrictions declared by the various Counties. All Kremmling Field Office fire restrictions have been rescinded. A number of fires were reported during the last several months. At least one fire was started by lightning, but most were human-caused fires along highways, and at the Byers Canyon shooting range. Quick action by local and federal firefighters kept each of the fires to less than an acre or two.

**Forestry:** Sale preparation work (cruising, etc.) continues on Owl Mountain, southeast of Walden, with the expectation of a 400-acre fall sale. The Hogback Sale in Grand County has been completed, including hazard-tree removal along the Hogback Road (84 acres, 400,000 board-feet). The Parsons West sale in Jackson County has been purchased (97 acres, 600,000

board feet). The Grouse Mountain sale continues, which removes hazard trees along roads (58 acres, 1,700 tons of biomass). Three sales have been offered, all in Grand County: Spruce Creek (33 acres); Black Mountain (65 acres, 500,000 board feet); and Gore Lakes, a combined fuels and forestry project offered through a stewardship contract (200 acres, 975,000 board feet and 1,060 tons of biomass). A poor timber market and an excess of timber from USFS hazard tree removals continue to affect our ability to dispose of lodgepole pines killed by Mountain Pine Beetles.

**Recreation:** A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held August 11 at the State Bridge Recreation Site, noting completion of improvements made there by Eagle County, including a boat-launch ramp, parking, a rest room, and other facilities. The site is across the river from the State Bridge concert venue. A BLM campground host is at the site and Kremmling Field Office staff are administering use there. The MOU allows the BLM to manage the site, using half of the user fees collected for river management. The BLM's management of the site fits well with recreation management of the Colorado River, from Confluence to State Bridge, and extends the length of float trips beginning there at Pumphouse or Radium sites. The State Bridge site also will be used as a starting place for trips down river in the Colorado River Valley Field Office.

**Minerals:** Silver Spur 3D Geophysical Seismic Survey – We are in the final stages of reviewing and authorizing this project, which likely will occur between late August and Mid-September. The project will take about 10 days to complete. The survey will cover approximately 15,400 acres located in Jackson County, South and West of Walden, around Johnny Moore Mountain. The entire project will use vibroseis units to generate the necessary energy source. Wellstar Corporation, a local operator, is funding this project.

Wellstar Corporation seeks a ROW for access to a well on Fee Surface/Fee Minerals. Although this is not a Federal well, a number of resource concerns have been raised regarding the proposed ROW. KFO staff will be meeting with Wellstar later this month to discuss possible alternative routes, options, mitigations, etc.

Last September, EOG submitted an APD for a well located southeast of Walden on Peterson Ridge. A decision on the APD has been deferred pending a cultural survey. A cultural survey has now been submitted; once the survey is reviewed and accepted the APD may be approved.

We have four parcels to review for the May 2013 Competitive Oil and Gas Lease Sale. Three of the parcels are in Larimer County, totaling 3,452 acres, of which 167 acres are on split-estate. The fourth parcel is in Jackson County, totaling 159 acres, entirely on split-estate.

**National Public Lands Day:** The Kremmling Field Office participates in the annual Grand County Interagency National Public Lands Day event, in cooperation with the USFS Sulphur Ranger District, Rocky Mountain National Park, and Grand County Headwaters Trails Alliance. The Grand County Interagency NPLD event is one of the largest NPLD events, and the longest continuous event site, according to the National Environmental Education Foundation, the main NPLD program coordinator. The Kremmling FO will be hosting two projects as part of the 18<sup>th</sup> Grand County Interagency NPLD event.

Kinney Creek Stream Protection: A user-created spur route short-cutting a bend along the BLM's Kinney Creek Road crosses Kinney Creek, damaging the stream banks and creek corridor. This section of stream is being considered for expansion of Cutthroat Trout populations from upstream. The project will stabilize the stream bank along Kinney Creek to prevent further erosion and sedimentation in the creek. Work will include moving rocks, stabilizing banks, scarifying and seeding disturbed areas, and constructing fences to protect completed work. Trout Unlimited has interest in partnering in this project.

4<sup>th</sup> annual Colorado River NPLD clean-up: This will be the fourth consecutive year for collecting and removing trash in and along a 15-mile stretch of the Upper Colorado River, beginning at the Pumphouse Recreation Area. The National Sports Center for the Disabled is a past and present partner for this project. A new partner is the East Grand High School, which will incorporate volunteering for the NPLD as part of its Sophomore river trip.

**Gore Canyon Race:** This popular annual event was held August 18 and 19 under a special recreation permit issued by the Kremmling Field Office. As many as 200 participants using kayaks and rafts raced through the Class 4 and 5 whitewater of Gore Canyon. In addition to the participants, a similar number of spectators watched the racers. The race began at the Confluence Recreation Site near Kremmling, concluding at the Pumphouse Recreation Site. Many of the participants and spectators camped at the Pumphouse site. KFO recreation staff and river rangers administer the permit and assist the participants and spectators.

### Little Snake Field Office, Wendy Reynolds

**Sagegrouse EIS:** #1 Priority. Staff is working with the NW District Manager Jim Cagney on amending the LSFO Resource Management Plan for sagegrouse habitat protection affecting all the resource areas.

**America's Great Outdoors Initiative:** America's Great Outdoors Initiative has been and will continue to be one of our priorities this year and the coming years, specifically focusing on the Yampa River Basin in Northwest Colorado. The BLM has been working with the Yampa River Legacy Project (a multi-partner organization) who has identified a suite of projects to implement the initiative and is strongly supported by Interior Secretary Salazar and BLM Director, Bob Abbey. The initiative is based in conservation and focuses on reconnecting the public, specifically youth, with the great outdoors in America's backyard. The projects include:

- Duffy Mountain Recreation Area – development of trails, campgrounds and interpretive education opportunities within 30 miles of Craig, Colorado to offer an “urban” connection to local residents from both Moffat and Routt Counties to enjoy the outdoor experience closer to communities. We are using youth corps and veteran's green folks to work on the project. Engineering and design occurring now for trail system and campground layouts.
- Potential land acquisition at Cross Mountain Canyon to provide hunting and fishing opportunities on the Yampa River and acquire and conserve 2.8 miles of the Yampa River adjacent to the Cross Mountain Wilderness Study Area. **New: Property is under contract through Western Rivers Conservancy and the BLM has initiated hazmat**

**clearances, preliminary access road design, and the appraisal process has been initiated.**

- \$20,000 in funding to Yampatika Outdoor Environmental Education Group
- \$150,000 in funding to City of Steamboat Springs for river riparian improvements and trail access improvements along the Yampa River.
- Working with Yampa Valley Land Trust to find matching funding to secure conservation easement on the headwaters of the Yampa River. GOCO grant has been applied for and results should be known by July. **NEW: GOCO grants 2.3 million dollars to City of Steamboat Springs and Yampa Valley Land Trust under AGO and Yampa Legacy Project**
- **NEW: 40 acre parcel of land for sale on Yampa River has been vetted by Yampa Legacy Group as a new AGO project which will complete the conservation efforts in the headwaters of the Yampa River.**

**Emerald Mountain:** Emerald Mountain, the backdrop to Steamboat Springs (and the result of a successful BLM and State Land Board land exchange and community partnership) is continuing to be a wonderful recreational opportunity, well used by mountain bikers, hikers, wildlife and skiers. The recent addition of 600 adjacent acres, acquired by the City of Steamboat Springs, has complemented the 5,000 acre parcel of BLM public lands to the benefit of wildlife and recreation activities. New trail signs and educational kiosk to be installed this summer. Local youth corps will also be doing cleanup and trail work. **NEW: The HoneyStinger bike race and marathon was held last weekend on Emerald Mountain, permitted by Little Snake F.O. and attracted several celebrity participant, in particular, Lance Armstrong, who won the marathon. Great socioeconomic benefits to City of Steamboat Springs and community.**

**Field and Fire Season:** Field and fire season is coming and the Little Snake Field Office interdisciplinary team is gearing up on grazing permit renewal efforts including new analysis for livestock trailing permits. New Craig Hotshot Facility is complete and the Craig Hotshots are on board for the 2012 fire season as are our seasonal fire fighters. We are expecting a fairly rigorous fire season this year and have already seen fire activity such as escaped agricultural burns and a bit of arson. **New: Stage II Restrictions are in place in Moffat County.**

**Transmission EISs:** Gateway South and TransWest transmission line projects are also keeping many of the staff occupied with data requests and meetings. Both of these projects are being coordinated out of Wyoming and the final decision on the rights-of-ways will be made by the Wyoming BLM State Director.

**Wild Horses:** The Sandwash Basin wild horse herd has experienced a mild winter and has come through the winter season in pretty good shape. We are seeing some foaling but the mare birth control efforts seemed to be making a little bit of difference. Lot's of interest in the herd from local horse group and this National Public Lands Day will include a wire and fence cleanup in the Sandwash Basin in August. **New: Wild horse gather being considered for 2013.**

**Oil and Gas Activity:** Applications for Permit to Drill (APDs) for gas drilling are slowing due to the low natural gas prices. Currently, we are processing 11 APDs in the Little Snake Field

Office and 1 in Kremmling. Operators are being very cooperative in siting well pads to avoid impacts to sage grouse leks and habitat.

**Travel Management:** Staff of the LSFO is being trained on ATVs to begin inventorying our existing roads for travel management consideration. We are advertising a position that will help us with our travel management planning and inventory. **New: Position has been filled and employee is on board to begin our travel management process.**

### **Grand Junction Field Office, Catherine Robertson**

#### **Resource Management Planning**

The Grand Junction Field Office, Cooperating Agencies, Northwest District Office, BLM CO State Office and Washington Office have reviewed the Draft Resource Management Plan. We are awaiting some air analysis and other edits before we post a notice in the federal register, and make the Draft Resource Management Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DRMP/DEIS) available for public review. We are scheduled to make it available for review in the fall for a 90 day comment period (exact dates to be determined). We will be conducting extensive public outreach leading up to the release of the DRMP/DEIS to help people prepare for the comment period. We would like to meet with all interested user groups and help them understand the format of the document so they can conduct an efficient review. We welcome your suggestions on how to best conduct this outreach.

#### **Cultural resources partnership wins national award**

The GJFO's Ute Learning Garden was selected to receive the Secretary of the Interior's Partners in Conservation Award. As there are only 18 partnerships across all DOI bureaus selected for this honor in 2012, this is quite an accomplishment. The Ute Learning Garden Partnership is an educational project developed through a partnership with the Ute Indian Tribe of the Unita and Ouray Reservation, Utah, the GJFO, the Colorado Master Gardener and Native Plant Master Programs and CO State University Extension, and Mesa County. The project is designed to involve and reconnect Native American youth with traditional cultural practices and native plant uses, and interpret the knowledge through an urban garden in Grand Junction (Mesa County Fairgrounds), which also introduces diverse audiences to the tribe's relationship to the landscape on the public lands in Mesa County that were their traditional homeland until 1881. Betsy Chappoose, representing the tribe, and Catherine Robertson, GJFO, will be representing the partnership at the awards ceremony in late October in Washington, D.C.

#### **Natural Resources**

**Restoration**— The Pine Ridge Fire near DeBeque burned nearly 14,000 acres in late June. We are working feverishly to get some restoration efforts in place. Aerial seeding of QuickGuard cover vegetation is now on the ground. We also developed a long term restoration plan that includes planting native seeds; maintaining and constructing silt control ponds; monitoring runoff in the major drainages associated with the fire; and other restoration efforts. We have installed two flow devices. Funding for the sediment pond construction and cleaning is still being worked. This plan is currently in Washington awaiting approval from the Burned Area Rehabilitation team. The total cost for the plan is about \$1.9 million.

**Surveys** – GJFO began working on Ecological Site Inventory (ESI) and Land Health Assessments over a decade ago as part of a National Initiative. GJFO is closing in on completing those projects for the entire field Office (minus some small isolated tracks determined not suitable). Our goal was to complete our ESI this field season; however, due to the drought this goal has been delayed a year. Public lands in the Glade Park area are all that remain for our ESI. We plan to complete our Land Health Assessments by the end of the 2014 field season with some areas remaining in Gland Park and Roan Creek.

**Wild Horses** –The BLM Grand Junction Field Office participated in an event to honor the Friends of the Mustangs for 30 years of dedicated volunteerism with the Little Book cliffs’ wild horse program. Our partnership with FOM has resulted in contributed time that has an estimated value of more than \$2 million in contributions. BLM and COPMOBA honored the group with a plaque that will be placed at the Low Gap facilities.

## **Recreation**

**Fall Events** – National Public Lands Day is September 29, and the GJFO will be hosting several NPLD events:

- A “Public Lands Festival” in the Bangs Canyon area featuring the diversity of resources and opportunities that BLM public lands have to offer. This will involve multiple partner organizations and will provide activities and learning opportunities, with a focused effort to engage high school and middle school youth.
- A shooting range clean-up and rifle sight-in event at 27 ¼ Road – the third year for this popular event.
- A desert clean-up sponsored by the Western Slope ATV Association.
- A climbing area clean-up along Hwy 141.

Several large commercial and competitive events occur on BLM or centered on outdoor recreation on public lands in the fall bringing tourism dollars to the Grand Valley. Scheduled events this fall include: the Pedal, Paddle, Pedal bike and boat race utilizing BLM lands near Palisade; the F-Town Gear Down a new event centered in Fruita, and focused on a variety of mountain biking opportunities (most on BLM trail systems) for the whole family; Telluride Adaptive Sports mountain bike clinics for individuals with disabilities, using hand-crank bikes and other specially modified bikes in the 18 Road area. Several other SRP permittees will be conducting mountain bike clinics and tours on the Bangs and NFD trail systems. Fall hunting seasons will bring a large influx of use to BLM public lands, and will support BLM permitted outfitter and guide services.

Our just completed Take it Outside project called Public Lands in Focus engaged summer day campers from the Colorado Discover Ability program in a photography program (cameras purchased with TIO funds) facilitated by junior counselors from the Tree House Center for Youth. Participants were given basic photography lessons, then took photos of their various day camp excursions. The season concluded with a pizza party and photo expo displaying the participants’ photos. This project was coordinated in part by VOC-BLM volunteer and partnership coordinator, Fran Parker.

***North Fruita Desert Special Recreation Management Area*** – Starting September 1, the BLM will begin charging a \$10/night fee for camping at the North Fruita Desert Campground on 18 Road. The GJFO is recruiting a volunteer host to help manage the campground during the busy fall and spring seasons. Construction of three new singletrack trails (two motorcycle/multiple use trails, one mountain bike trail, totaling 15.5 miles) is scheduled to begin this fall. These trails were planned in partnership with the City of Fruita, COPMOBA, RRF and GVTA. The Western Colorado Conservation Corps will be completing a large part of the trail construction for this project. Construction will also be done by COPMOBA and RRF volunteers.

***Bangs Canyon Special Recreation Management Area*** – Trail proposals by the Responsible Recreation Foundation (RRF) are being analyzed in an EA and some will likely be ready for implementation later this fall. These proposals include motorcycle trails, ATV trails and 4x4 rock crawling routes.

***Palisade Rim Trail*** – This spring and summer the Upper Palisade Rim Loop and the connection between the upper and lower loops were completed. Crews from the Western Colorado Conservation Corps spent approximately five weeks working on the final construction phase. On National Trails Day in June approximately 40 volunteers worked on this trail during a BLM-COPMOBA sponsored project. Interpretive and informational signage is currently being developed for this trail and should be ready for installation later this fall. The Town of Palisade has been working with CDOT on signage associated with the trailhead and highway crossing.

***Grand Valley Trails Alliance*** -- David Grossman, GVTA Coordinator, has continued working with multiple local user groups, government entities and business owners to establish a 501 (c)(3). The initial steps in this process have been completed allowing GVTA to secure office space and begin recruiting Board members. Mr. Grossman has also begun conducting a monthly 30 minute radio program called “United on Trails” on KAFM the local community radio station. He invites stakeholders to discuss trail-related issues on the air. Topics for this fall will include the GJFO RMP revision and travel management plan.

### **West Zone Fire Summary for 2012**

To date in 2012, West Zone Fire has responded to 109 lightning caused fires and 13 human caused. The Sunrise Mine Fire (5,742 acres) and the Pine Ridge Fire (13,920 acres) both required type 1 overhead support. The Pine Ridge Fire was the Grand Junction Field Office’s largest fire in recorded history. This summer, Energy Release Component and low fuel moisture levels reached historical levels causing the field office to increase restrictions to Stage II for an extended period. Because of the heightened fire danger and heavy work load, crews from Alaska, Arizona, California, Idaho, Missouri, and New Mexico responded with initial attack on fires in the West Zone this year.

### **McInnis Canyons NCA**

We implemented the Ruby-Horsethief permit system this year, with no fee component in this first year (the fee will start May 1, 2013, based on required publications and notices). At this point in the year, we're more than halfway through the high-use season, and have been evaluating the effectiveness of the permit system to date. We have received excellent feedback from outfitters, and field staff have indicated positive feedback from most private boaters. Boaters are

putting on later in the day and enjoying a more relaxed trip to their campsites. We are tracking minor logistical issues that come up and taking note of anecdotal trends, and will re-evaluate the mechanics of the system at the end of the high use season, to determine if any changes are needed.

Colorado Canyons Association (the non-profit community "Friends" group for McInnis, Dominguez-Escalante, and Gunnison Gorge NCAs) and the City of Grand Junction (coordinated by the Grand Junction Visitor and Convention Bureau) will be hosting a major annual gathering of similar "Friends" groups and associations. The 2012 event, known as the annual Friends Rendezvous, will be held in Grand Junction over the October 5-7 weekend, and will feature field trips, discussions, and opportunities to share information and success stories, training, and a service project. Colorado Canyons Association was recognized as the Friends Group of the year in 2011, in connection with their efforts to promote community stewardship and recognition of the three National Conservation Areas managed by BLM on the western slope. This event has a positive economic effect for the community as well, with an estimated 70 local hotel room bookings from this conference, with associated travel and tourism revenue.

Also this fall, several construction projects will be completed to improve recreational facilities for the public in Rabbit Valley. The existing Rabbit Valley campground will be redesigned and improved to better accommodate campers, and several worn-out restrooms will be replaced. Rabbit Valley is used extensively by motorized recreationists, and also by equestrians and visitors interested in cultural and paleontological resources.

### **Dominguez-Escalante NCA**

In June, the BLM acquired a 402- acre riparian inholding along the Gunnison River. This acquisition was completed with Land and Water Conservation Fund dollars, and capped three years of work to bring this area into public ownership. The transaction was facilitated by Western Rivers Conservancy, which purchased the parcel from a private landowner and held it while the BLM secured funding. The area was previously being considered for gravel development and eventual subdivision into residential home sites.

Construction of a new trailhead and parking area is anticipated to begin this fall at Bridgeport. The new parking area is an additional step forward in the process of improving public access and safety at Bridgeport. The most important phase of this project, construction of an underpass under the Union Pacific Railroad, will be completed once additional construction funding is secured. A new trail will also be constructed at that point to link the trailhead with the new crossing.

Work continues on the Resource Management Plan for the NCA, toward the goal of releasing a Draft Plan for public review and comment at the end of the calendar year. Staff are currently preparing the document itself, reviewing products from contractors supporting the planning effort and completing other policy reviews. The planning effort was kicked off in August 2010, and this first phase of the project included frequent contact with the Advisory Council, which has met frequently since January 2011 to provide input, and the public. There will be a 90-day opportunity for public review and comment in early 2013, following release of the Draft RMP/Draft EIS.



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

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

The BLM White River Field Office (WRFO) continues work to develop an Oil and Gas Resource Management Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement (Oil and Gas RMPA/EIS). The four Alternatives look at a range of development from 550 multi-well pads up to 2,550 multi-well pads, with an average of 8 wells per pad. The WRFO is finalizing the Draft RMPA/EIS and has recently completed its Cooperating Agencies review as well as the internal review of Colorado State Office, Solicitors Office, and Washington Offices. A revised schedule is being developed and a Notice of Availability for the Draft Oil and Gas RMPA/EIS is to be published in the Federal Register Sept 7, 2012. This notice initiates a required 90-day public and agency review/comment period for the Draft RMPA/EIS, as well as dates, times, and locations of public meetings/hearings that will be held during the same time period.

Phase I of the Resource Management & Monitoring Protocol (RMMP) has been completed and has been published as a BLM Technical Note #439. The RMMP is designed to serve as a cost-effective and publicly accepted approach for landscape-change monitoring and assessment. The Surface Reclamation Protocol has been finalized and will be evaluated with the RMP Amendment. In addition, the WRFO will be working with the USGS to develop a Data Monitoring System which will provide aspects of oil and gas development which will feed into the RMMP to monitor change across the landscape as future developments occur.

### **Cultural Resources**

The cultural program is busy working on providing clearances for livestock grazing. This currently entails conducting fieldwork for all the allotments that will have renewals done on them in 2012 and 2013, as well as the WRFO system of permitted livestock trails.

WRFO archaeologists are in the stages of making some rock art sites along the Dragon Trail, southwest of Rangely, interpreted for the public similar to the BLM recreation sites in Canyon Pintado Historic District. Currently project work has been completed at two sites, with two more still to be completed in the summer of 2012. A new visitors' guide brochure for Canyon Pintado, which now includes these Dragon Trail sites has been designed and is currently at the printer. This month WRFO archaeologists are also working to record Fremont granaries located within the Skull Creek Wilderness Study Area.

### **Energy Program**

#### *Oil Shale RD&D*

WRFO approved American Shale Oil, LLC's (AMSO) Plan of Development (POD) on Sept. 3, 2009. Construction of the facilities at the site location began in spring 2010 and is complete. Heater installation occurred in January 2012 with heater failure within one week of power-up. Complications with heater design have extended the expectations for re-installation of the heater and initiation of the shale oil recovery process to October 2012.

Shell Frontier submitted a POD for COC 69166 (East Lease) on Jan. 3, 2011. This is a two-step process where sodium minerals are extracted prior to recovery of the shale oil. BLM approved

Shell's East Lease POD in August 2011 and dirt work for the facility site was completed in late 2011. Construction of operating facilities and drilling of the production, heater, and observation wells began in May 2012. To date 5 of the 21 wells have been drilled. Drilling is estimated to last six to seven months and commencement of sodium leaching operations late 2012 or early 2013. Previous construction on the lease consisted of an access road, two pads (one hydrology pad and one core-hole pad) and drilling of five hydrologic monitoring wells and one core hole in late 2009 and early 2010 on Shell's East Lease. An additional appraisal well was drilled April 2011.

Chevron has announced in February 2012 they are not proceeding with their RD&D project and there has been no determination of the future status of their RD&D lease.

WRFO BLM received nominations in 2011 for two additional RD&D tracts: ExxonMobil Exploration Corp. and Natural Soda Holdings Inc. An environmental assessment (EA) to determine the projects impacts is required prior to authorization of issuance for the research tracts. Public open houses were held in Rifle and Meeker, Colorado on April 27 and 28, 2011, respectively. A 30 Day scoping/comment period concurrent with the public meetings began April 18, 2011 and ended May 17, 2011. The Environmental Analysis was available for 30 day public comment period from in May 18, 2012 to June 16, 2012. A signed Decisions Record for the EA is expected in late August early September beginning a 30 day appeal period of the EA.

#### *Oil Shale PEIS*

In 2008, the BLM published a Final Oil Shale and Tar Sands PEIS that amended the White River Resource Area Resource Management Plan (WRFO RMP) lands available for oil shale leasing from approximately 295,000 acres to approximately 341,000 acres. In 2011 BLM agreed to take a fresh look at commercial oil shale and tar sands leasing in Colorado, Utah and Wyoming as part of a legal settlement. A new PEIS was initiated. The new Draft PEIS was released for a 90-day public comment period, which ended May 4, 2012. A final PEIS is expected by the end of the year.

#### *Coal*

Blue Mountain Energy's (BME) Deserado underground coal mine produces approximately 2 million tons of coal annually. Deserado is a captive mine where all coal production is shipped, via electric train, and utilized by the Bonanza Power Plant in Bonanza, Utah. BME has seven federal coal leases that are contained in a logical mining unit (LMU). In early 2011 BME applied for an exploration license and a 3,154 acre federal coal lease (COC 74813). WRFO is in the process of writing the EA for the coal lease. A preliminary EA is expected to be available for 30 day public comment in late August Early September. Timing of the coal lease issuance is critical to avoid loss of recoverable reserves.

#### **Non-Energy Minerals Program (sodium)**

Natural Soda Inc. produced more than 130,000 tons of sodium bicarbonate from their existing in-situ solution mining operations in 2011. Upgrades to the facility including a higher capacity, more efficient boiler and an increase in production capabilities have begun. Completion of the construction is scheduled for late 2012.

American Soda well field is expected to remain idle in 2012. No production from the well field has occurred since 2004.

### **Fire and Fuels Program**

In 2011 the BLM, Rio Blanco County Sheriff's Department and local landowners south of Rangely completed a Memorandum of Understanding to allow the BLM to efficiently manage natural ignition fires for ecological benefits where this option exists.

The Field Office attempted one prescribed burn in the spring, but the conditions were not favorable for the prescribed fire to achieve the desired results. The Dragon Trail Compressor Station project is 75 percent complete but due to the warm winter conditions we were unable to complete. The current plan is to finish work on pile burning during the winter months of 2012/2013.

### **Geographic Information Systems Program**

Priorities for the GIS Program include developing data and processes to support the RMP, the travel management plan, and Threatened, Endangered, and BLM Sensitive (TES) plant management. Specific data layers include (1) well pads, right-of-ways, and other surface disturbances, (2) updated road centerlines (to match 2011 aerial photography); and, (3) TES plants including the addition of all current field surveys. In addition to data development, through the RMP and the FO will be working with the USGS on the Data Management System, which is a web-based GIS/Disturbance Tracking tool that will allow BLM staff, Oil & Gas Operators, and the Public to access near real-time updates of surface disturbance and reclamation activities in the WRFO. WRFO is also updating GPS systems to keep up with current technology. GIS is being moved to CITRIX or enterprise GIS to use corporate state data.

### **Range Program**

The FO is working to complete Permit Renewal EA's for 4 grazing permits as well as completing the necessary field work for the 2013 grazing permit renewals; plans are to finish all necessary field work and issue permits by January of 2013.

### **Weed Management**

WRFO has completed several weed spraying projects in 2012, including spraying ~300 acres of leafy spurge using a helicopter. In 2012 the WRFO has had one crew working in the field completing herbicide treatments on multiple weed infestations that include houndtongue, knapweeds, leafy spurge, thistles, and hoary cress. WRFO is on track to complete 300 acres by the end of the field season with hand crews.

### **Riparian Program**

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

### **Wildlife Program**

The WRFO continues to work collaboratively with the Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) to address the overall impacts of Oil and Gas in the Piceance Basin. The staff works with CPW in an effort to improve the Wildlife Mitigation plans within the Piceance Basin. The staff has recently completed laying out phase two of a CPW P/J encroachment project meant to mitigate some of the impacts of development on Magnolia Bench and will be monitored as part of several study projects being completed by CPW.

The WRFO biologist will be working in coordination with the District in the development of the District Sage Grouse EIS. The WRFO will also be completing a multi-year habitat modeling project to model potential habitats within the FO for midget-faded rattlesnakes, a BLM sensitive species. In 2012, the FO will be installing several enclosure fences for the improvement of wildlife and fisheries habitats within the FO.

### **Recreation Program**

The Recreation Program has accomplished a multitude of activities underway in 2012. WRFO has recently hired a new Outdoor Recreation Planner to join the team, who will begin in late October of 2012.

We are continuing with road signing, including signing dead ends road in the field office in attempt to improve wayfinding. We are also continuing ongoing work with the Rangely Rock Crawlers to install carsonites to delineate the boundaries of the rock park.

WRFO has partnered with the Eastern Rio Blanco Metropolitan Recreation and Park District (ERBM) in the development of Phase 1 of a non-motorized trail from Dorcas Jensen Park to China Wall. The construction of this trail has been completed through a partnership with ERBM and Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado (VOC) at no cost to the BLM. 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. WRFO will begin planning for Phase 3 in 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. Current SRPs include big game hunting, wilderness therapy, the Rangely Rock Crawlers, and higher education. New applicants for SRPs this year have included guided White River float trips, an organized black powder shoot, and overland endure motorcycle race and commercial trapping.

We continue to move forward with planning steps towards completing a travel management inventory and plan for the WRFO. WRFO continues on-going coordination with the Colorado Off-Highway Vehicle Coalition (COHVCO) and other partners to accomplish this goal. In conjunction with LSFO, the WRFO held a 3-day Travel Management Planning workshop in May to help in pre-planning for the future travel management process. WRFO was also awarded a \$15K grant from the Federal Highway Administration to conduct motorized route inventory. The money was utilized to pay for two employees from the Grand Junction office, along with WRFO employees, to develop a data dictionary, develop a methodology and to begin the route inventory process. 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.

The WRFO completed an inventory of portions of the Skull Creek WSA in July of 2012 and continues to actively inventory various parcels of land in the Field Office that potentially contain wilderness character.

The WRFO attended the May 2012 Rangely Rock Crawlers Annual Competition to monitor the event and provide a BLM presence. The WRFO is also preparing for the Fall Rangely Rock Crawlers Competition in early September. We also continue to periodically attend their monthly club meetings.

The WRFO completed construction of the Willow Creek OHV trail that will be open to motorized use by the public in September of 2012. This trail will provide access to approximately 21,000 acres of BLM lands currently inaccessible to the public.

### **Soil, Water, and Air Program**

The BLM will continue to fund its Financial Assistance Agreement with the USGS for continued work on groundwater and surface water monitoring projects. The FO has identified that due to funding reductions one USGS gauging stations along the White River will be dropped from the surface water system (Crooked Wash). We will continue with sampling of the 15 well groundwater monitoring system. The first sampling of the full fifteen well networks was in August 2011, we are now sampling the wells annually. The Piceance Basin Data Repository group continues to move forward with plans to coordinate with the Colorado Data Sharing Network for future data storage.

The BLM continues to support the air quality data collection at the Rangely and Meeker which are Federal Reference monitoring sites. Effort has begun to identify a new air quality monitoring site in the Piceance Basin. In addition, in 2011 the BLM was able to add two new sites to our existing precipitation network (13 total). Macroinvertebrates were sampled at the 7 BLM streamflow monitoring sites.

### **Wild Horses**

Extreme drought conditions left approximately 40 to 50 wild horses on the east side of Texas Mountain of the West Douglas Herd Area without enough available water to supply their requirements, requiring immediate action to ensure that wild horses remain in good health. The area was immediately closed to avoid additional stress on the animals most affected. Although BLM placed water in the general area with tanks, the water needed to be piped to troughs at the actual water seeps in order for the wild horses to utilize the man-made sources, which made it simply too costly to provide reliable water to those horses in this area for the remainder of the summer. A contract for the gather and removal of 40 to 50 wild horses was awarded to Warner Livestock. Gathering of horses through the use of water trapping began on July 15. Twenty wild horses were quickly gathered and removed with 19 of them transported to Canon City, and one colt was adopted. The colt was determined to be an orphan. The wild horses were photographed at all times of the day and night using the water point during gather activities. Ten days into the gather, a suspension of work was issued by the BLM. The area has received

precipitation of late to temporarily give relief to the area, which allowed the wild horses to disperse. The gather equipment has remained in the area in the event that the gather needs to be resumed.

Additionally, BLM monitored the conditions for the wild horses in both the Piceance-East Douglas Herd Management Area (HMA) as well as the North Piceance Herd Area. Supplemental water was also placed in the HMA, with one location being an existing livestock trough where the grazing operator allowed BLM to keep the trough full even after the cattle had left the area, and the other was similar to the watering identified above where previously developed spring was supplemented by transporting water.

Earlier this spring, the BLM was able to get assistance from the Department of Corrections inmate crew out of Rifle to repair portions of the HMA boundary fencing in the area known to some as Black Mountain and to others as Rocky Ridge. The crew spent two days placing new posts and several other days with general fence repair. The work was done well and BLM hopes to continue with this crew on this effort in other areas.

The BLM completed a post gather inventory of the Piceance-East Douglas HMA, the West Douglas and North Piceance HA in Feb. 2012. During the inventory, a direct count was completed resulting in:

- Inside PEDHMA = 183 horses
- Outside PEDHMA = 34 horses
- West Douglas HA = 154 horses
- Outside West Douglas boundaries = 36
- North Piceance HA = 11
- Total horses counted = 418

### **Lands and Realty**

WRFO's lands group is currently working on three interstate electric transmission line projects: The Trans West Express, which will transport renewable energy based power from central Wyoming to Nevada, the Energy Gateway South transmission project which will transport electricity from central Wyoming to Utah, and the newly proposed Zephyr line.

The permits have been issued for the first phase of the Rio Blanco County Road 5 improvement projects and the development of a parcel of public land for Rangely District Hospital is proceeding. The FO is will be working on two additional county projects this year including the County Road 5 bridge replacement and the Marvine Communication tower, which is a joint effort with the US Forest Service.

Expansion of the Enterprise Meeker Gas Plant is nearing final NEPA analysis. Proposals for construction of oil and gas infrastructure have been approved or are pending to multiple companies for construction of natural gas and water pipelines.

Next meeting Nov 29 in GJ

Field trip look at RMP issues: shooting, trails. Maybe east side of valley