

**SUMMARY MINUTES
BLM SOUTHERN NEW MEXICO
RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING
DECEMBER 2, 2020**

Call to Order, Welcome and Introductions - Bill Childress, Las Cruces BLM District Manager, opened the meeting and introduced himself as the Designated Federal Official for the BLM Southern NM Resource Advisory Council and that he would be serving for one year in this capacity. He explained that the area of the Council included the BLM Pecos District the Las Cruces District and the Socorro Field Office of the Albuquerque District.

Attendees also included the Pecos District Manager Jim Stovall, Roswell Field Manager Chuck Schmidt and Assistant Field Manager Randy Howard, RAC coordinator Glen Garnand, as well as Ty Bryson of the Carlsbad Field Office and Mark Mathews of the Socorro Field Office.

Assistant Field Managers from both the Socorro and Las Cruces offices were also present, as well as presenters of items listed on the agenda.

Mr. Childress mentioned that eleven (11) RAC members were present and that one member was unable to attend the meeting due to an emergency.

Update on the New RAC Charter/Training - Mr. Garnand gave an update and overview of the Charter of the RAC. This included the history of the original establishment of the Council in 1936, the responsibilities of the Council, adhering to the laws and regulations which were listed (FACA, FLPMA, GSA, BLM,) the nomination process, and the different interests covered – community interests, non-community interests and public interests. The Charter is good for two (2) years and will be e-mailed to all who need one.

Another call for nominations will be coming out soon and all were encouraged to nominate and promote through social media. Applications are sent to BLM, forwarded to the State Office, to the Governor's office and then on to the Washington Office and the Department of Interior. The timeline is usually 4-5 months to complete the appointments.

Ethics Training - Ms. Roxanne Baca, an attorney ethics advisor for the BLM and Mr. Chuck Sandau, an ethics counselor, provided a power point presentation and discussed the ethics responsibilities of the Council. It was explained that a questionnaire was sent to all members. Ethics language and requirements for

RAC members were listed. It was also explained that federal employee ethics do not apply. A copy of the presentation will be sent to Mr. Garnand and to Mr. Childress.

Travel/Mileage -Mr. Garnand also explained that when members travel over 30 miles to a meeting and/or lodging is required if a two-day meeting, forms will be supplied to apply for reimbursement.

Call for Nominations for RAC Chair -Mr. Childress called for nominations for the election of the RAC Chairman and Vice-Chairman. He explained that the Chairman would be involved in the development of meeting agendas and facilitate the meetings.

Mr. Jerry Schickedanz was nominated for Chairman and accepted the nomination. There were no other nominations and a voice vote was called for. Mr. Schickedanz was elected by all.

Mr. Schickedanz then advised all that his goal was to make the Council active and to have a quorum at all meetings. He asked for nominations for Vice-Chair and Mr. Clifton E. Greer was nominated. There were no other nominations and Mr. Greer was elected.

Chairman Schickedanz asked all RAC members to give a synopsis of their backgrounds/positions and their interests represented on the Council.

Las Cruces District program and major actions overview- It was explained that the District covers six (6) counties, 5.4 million surface acres, and Seven (7) million acres of subsurface. There are special management acres, ten (10) wilderness areas and sixteen (16) wilderness study areas. There are also twenty eight (28) areas of critical environmental concern (ACECs) two (2) monuments and recreation sites in Otero County and Luna County and on the monuments. Over two hundred thousand (200K) visitors have been documented at the recreation sites.

Recreation permits, hunting guides, diverse wildlife and plants, threatened and endangered species, are all areas that are covered in the District.

Grazing covers 605 allotments and permitting of 650K AUMs. There is a large focus on watershed management, with fire, mechanical and chemical treatments. Many small dams and dikes have been constructed to prevent loss of soils and headcutting. A trash remediation program with partnerships has resulted in 100 tons of cleanup.

The District has hardrock minerals, a geothermal plan is located in Hidalgo County and is rich in cultural resources. There are two (2) national trails and another is being studied going from east to west through several counties.

The District has three (3) recreational trails; strong partnerships with Fort Bliss, White Sands and Holloman Air Force Base. Meetings are also held quarterly with the Border Patrol and DHS.

Many Secretarial Orders were listed and work being done on projects on the ground. Work is occurring on a magnesium project, a KV line traversing to Tucson and two (2) land use plans to do this fiscal year.

Land Use Plans to do this fiscal year include fire land risk reduction and recreation opportunities and six (6) projects under the Great American Outdoors Act.

Pecos District program and major actions overview – District Manager Stovall explained that the Pecos District Presenters from the Pecos District covers the Roswell Field Office, the Carlsbad Field Office, the Hobbs office and a satellite office at Ft. Stanton. The area contains diverse properties, rivers, restoration (1.7 million acres restored with partnerships to treat watersheds), cave karst resources, and an archeological program.

The area has many oil and gas fields in the Permian Basin, more in New Mexico than in Texas, with 20 formations and several zones. The Carlsbad Field Office also contains potash mines, where 90% of the potash removed is used for fertilizer.

Carlsbad Field Office - Ty Bryson relayed that the office covers 2.1 million surface acres, and four (4) million subsurface. APDs have increased greatly, with 600 received in FY 2017 and 3,500 received in FY 20. There has also been an increase in rights-of-ways for roads and pipelines, 2,400 applications for same.

Gas wells are inspected, and the recreation program oversees restoration of the land to its natural state. The Carlsbad office works with Eddy County, the City of Carlsbad and others to develop recreation sites, trails, etc. Abandoned well pads are used in developing camp grounds.

Carlsbad has two (2) employees on the range staff. There are 202 permittees and 272 allotments. Range improvement projects and a project with the Game and Fish for safe fencing for pronghorn antelope are ongoing.

Archeology works with the Permian Basin Program Agreement. Four field studies were done costing \$10 million and the data given to Universities and the Public.

The Wildlife staff performs on-sites prior to APD permitting, works with other entities re special status species conservation measures such as the Prairie chicken.

The RMP (Resource Management Plan) revision which began in 2010 is hoped to be out in the near future.

Roswell Field Office – Chuck Schmidt explained the desire to focus on leaving areas better than they found them. They work with many partners. They oversee wildlife, rangelands and do oil field restoration where there are no others accountable.

Randy Howard relayed that the area encompasses seven (7) counties, with the bulk of the surface acres in Lincoln and Chaves Counties. Split Estate covers 1.4 million acres.

There are four (4) recreation areas. Two (2) are OHV (off highway vehicle) areas east of Roswell and another at Ft. Stanton which has high level usage and the last at the Valley of Fire with a safe walking trail across the lava flow.

The NCA (National Conservation Area) at Ft. Stanton with sub-terranean features has over 40 miles of mapped passage in the Snowy River Cave. The area is currently closed to the public and work is being done to be able to open it.

The Field Office has four (4) rangeland employees, with 375 allotments and 330K AUMs and are working with permittees during this exceptional drought.

The oil and gas program is small in comparison to Carlsbad. There are many gas fields north of Roswell but not much drilling currently.

Pre-work and review are done locally on parcels for the quarterly lease sales which are done at the BLM state office in Santa Fe.

The BLM has four (4) tracts of land in Lincoln County with the Rio Bonito River going through the area. After culmination of river restoration in the area the Fish & Wildlife Service has stocked the area and trout fishing is available.

The Sand Ranch ACEC is east of Roswell. In the 2008 Resource Management Plan 58K acres were set aside for the Lesser Prairie chicken and the Dune Sagebrush lizard. No grazing is permitted on the bulk of the area, only on the edges. Fire control was done and prescribed grazing was introduced.

Wind energy development was mentioned with maps showing large scale proposed projects. The developers are not placing infrastructure on BLM managed surface; however federal minerals are being utilized at the tower locations.

At the close of this presentation, a question was asked by Mr. Cornell as to why the release of the Carlsbad RMP was taking so long since the comment period ended two (2) years ago. He was told that the Department was briefed in November 2019 and there has been no response received. The next stage is a 60-day review by the Governor.

Socorro Field Office program and major actions overview – Mark Mathews explained that the Socorro Field Office covers primarily Catron and Socorro Counties, with 4.5 million acres in Catron County and four (4) million acres in Socorro County. The resources cover 1.5 million surface acres and six (6) million sub-surface acres. His office has the smallest staff, and if fully staffed would have 25 employees. Logistics is an issue with much travel time necessary.

Matt Atencio gave an update on the range program, which has 201 permittees and 258 allotments. Work is done with the permittees on land health, CRMPs, and range improvements. There is a horse and burro program, with 40 to 70 head.

Two (2) wildlife biologists work in habitat management, water projects and a bighorn population in the ACEC area. Elk hunting is an opportunity, working with elk and mule deer foundations. There is a fuel wood harvesting area for the communities who depend on the wood for their winter heating.

The Field Office has the equipment and works to maintain area dams, etc. and with the fuels program – about 2500 acres a year.

Ms. Virginia Alguire, the AFM for Resources discussed the recreation, visitor, land and realty, cultural and travel and transportation management planning programs. They also work with the National American Graves Protection Act. The area has many opportunities for camping, hunting, an OH area and issue 60 guide permittees a year.

Some of the recreation areas include the Datil campground, listing specifics including 22 camp sites and hiking opportunities. There is also a climbing area, the Fort Craig Historic Site located in the field office.

The lands and realty program administers disposals and exchanges. They issued a cemetery patent and are working on a school expansion patent.

The archaeology program does outreach with tribes and education. There are paleontological resources and permits are issued for mineral materials also.

A web site was given to be able to access a crane fiesta event. This is <https://friendsofbosquedelapache.org/crane-fiesta-event-recordings/>.

The Chairman was asked a question by RAC member Greer about a site given to the State of New Mexico as a recreation public purposes lease, but not able to keep open. Mr. Schickedanz answered that it may be able to be brought back on line for some purpose other than trails.

Mr. Mathews relayed that there was a Record of Decision (ROD) for the Sun Zia Project, looking to expand outside of the area. Working with the Fish and Wildlife and Forest Service regarding routes being feasible to analyze through NEPA.

While waiting for the next presenter, Chairman Schickedanz stated that it was time to get through RMPs at the District level. He proposed that a letter be sent to the Dept. of Interior about their displeasure of not being able to get these done and expand to other areas in the RAC area. The other Districts were asked to send in the status of their plans to be included in the letter.

The **Roswell** plan was done in 1997 and an amendment was done in 2008. There are no current plans to kick off a new plan currently.

Socorro - plan was done in 2010 and are in good shape.

Las Cruces – Tri-County was done in 1988 and 1992. A supplement is being worked on, trying to release a draft on initial plan and when done will merge with the original plan.

Carlsbad – Revised in 2011, in final stages for approval to go to Governor's review.

Chairman Schickedanz will draft a letter and circulate it to members for review before forwarding to the Secretary of Interior. He was asked by Member Cornell about waiting to send it to see what, if any, changes are made in Interior.

Recreation Fee Proposal, BLM – Rob Jagers Campground This is a longstanding proposal. On 9/20/2016 a *Federal Register* notice was published regarding the fee proposal; on 10/20/16 there was a modification proposal and in 2016-2017 the business plan was worked on and was sent to the state office and the Washington office. There was now a new plan and members were given the plan for review. At a 6/20/17 meeting there was not a quorum present. There has not been a meeting until now and would like a vote now to proceed.

It was stated that since the pandemic much more recreation use has been seen at other sites, Mescalero Sands and Hay Stack also. Many people from Texas are using our sites. It is planned to have a proposal for these two areas for fees to be able to do further development.

Knutt Peterson reviewed the proposal. He explained that the visitor increase has meant expansion and upgrade. A map of the area was shown of the NCA surrounding the area and Lincoln. There are 72 miles of trail and 22 miles of open road used all year round.

The area was started in 1999, vault toilet installed in 2003 and water and electricity in 2005-2007. A loop road was added 10 years ago.

There are 15 campsites, some with 30 amp & water, some with 20 amp and water, one (1) with only electricity and some with water only, no electricity.

New sites will have utilities soon. There will be gravel pad sites, a new group shelter, more RV sites and a shelter with fire pit & trash area.

The current fee schedule was shown and the new proposal fees. Costs were also shown for the expansion project.

A question was asked about the economic impact on the area. It was stated that users eat at restaurants in the area and visit sites in Lincoln and Ruidoso. There are also different categories of campers, short and long term. A handout is being planned showcasing the local area and its attractions.

As to the question of comparison to other campgrounds, the answer was that the fees are comparable or below. People using the facility that were told of the proposed fees were very supportive.

BLM was commended for trying to recover some of their costs, as expenses outweigh the income from current fees.

RAC member Jack Callaway proposed to approve the fee increase at Rob Jagers Campground. The motion was seconded by member Greer. A voice vote among members present was unanimous and the fee increase was approved.

Recreation Fee Proposal, Forest Service – Jeremy Golston discussed the fee proposals. Information on land area, visitor use and developed areas for the Cibola, Gila and Lincoln forests was given as follows:

Cibola – 1.6 million acres; visitors, 1.8 million and 174 developed areas
Gila – 3.3 million acres; visitors, 390 thousand and 197 developed areas
Lincoln – 1.1 million acres; visitors, 1 million and 56 developed areas

Information was given on how the Forest Service develops proposals and their inclusions and then goes to the RAC for recommendation as to either go or not go ahead with implementation. Fees are reinvested at the sites.

It was explained that public involvement and market analysis are used to set the amount of fees, then approved at the regional and Washington office levels before the proposals are released.

A day-use pass and an annual pass will be available for purchase either online, from vendors or local offices. It is planned to have comment cards, available as well as requesting phone comments and e-mails. At the next meeting the RACs will be informed of the general support and responses.

After refining the proposal it will be presented to the RACs and proposed changes to be implemented in later 2021.

Public Comment Period – The comment period was called at 2:00 pm. Only 1 (one) member of the public responded, indicating that he did not plan to comment. The comment period was closed at 3:00 pm.

RAC Discussion – Mr. Childress suggested to the Council that they make recommendations for agenda items for the next meeting, interest in a field trips, and possibly a recommendation for the next meeting to occur in April, 2021.

Chairman Schickedanz suggested the following topics:

A letter to the administration re RMP process
Monument planning, signing, trespass, visitor use of wilderness areas
Secretarial priorities – unnecessary regulations
Project – land/water funds (LWCF)
Grazing allotments – permit renewals
Monitoring system on federal lands
Restore New Mexico (field trips)

Mr. Day - suggested the process to get range improvements on the ground, how to go about and how long it takes, from each Field Office

Mr. Cornell – an update on access problems and how resolving the issue for the public.

Ideas for field trips - Field Manager Schmidt suggested that there is much activity to see re oil resources in the Carlsbad FO and grazing and Ft. Stanton in the Roswell FO. Jim Stovall suggested underground mine tours are also possible.

Mark Mathews suggested viewing the construction of a wind farm.

Mr. Schickedanz relayed he is participating in a project to develop curriculum to protect watershed management and training for volunteers.

Mr. Day suggested a doodle poll be set up for agenda items and field trips for members/staff to see all interests and availability.

Mr. Childress asked all about planning on an April meeting with a possible field trip and future meetings in July and October. It appeared be a consensus that this would work.

There was no further business and a motion to adjourn was made and seconded and the meeting was adjourned at 2:59 pm.