



Southwest District RAC Minutes

May 2021

Members Present

Southwest District RAC:

Category 1:

John Reams (Chair, Energy and Minerals), Dale Irby (Grazing) Grady Ham (Outdoor Recreation) Mark Roeber (Grazing), Kathy Welt (Energy and Minerals)

Category 2:

Tif Rodriguez (Wild Horse & Burros), Jim Haugness (Dispersed Recreation) Roger Cesario (Dispersed Recreation), Cody Dyce (Environmental Organizations)

Category 3:

Renzo DelPiccolo (State Agency Rep), William Gleason (Public-at-Large), Steve Garcher (Elected Official) Bill Gleason (public-at-large)

Not in Attendance: None

BLM Employees Present:

Lisa Dawson, acting District manager, Brady Owens, acting GFO Field Manager, Suzanne Coping acting UFO Field Manager, Connie Clements, TRFO Field Manager, Colin Ewing, DENCA Manager, Edd Franz, GGNCA Manager, Shawn Reinhardt, Public Affairs Officer, Stacey Colon, Administrative Officer.

Public Present:

None

Welcome, Introductions & Housekeeping

Chair John Reams called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. with brief introductions from all RAC members and an overview of the meeting agenda.

Fall 2020 District Boundaries realignment and current SW RAC Composition

District Boundaries and Realignment

SWD has Gunnison, GJ moved to Upper Colorado River (Silt and GJ), NW (White River, Little Snake, Kremmling), Rocky Mountain – San Luis Valley and Royal Gorge; SWD – Gunnison, UFO and TRFO; DENCA is shared between SWD and Upper Colorado River District. Realign fire districts to get them aligned with district boundaries.

Recruiting for New Members

Flew FRN – opened May 21. It's open for 30 days. Time to reapply and recruit new members. Submit through Public Affairs Officer, Shawn Reinhardt. All 3 RAC's recruiting

Charters

We are currently working on reviewing and renewing the RAC charters.

Public Comment Period

No comments from the public.

Input from elected officials and their representatives

John Whitney – Sen Bennett, think about the state of forests after last year's fire season. Working on the Outdoor Restoration Act, which aims to reduce hazardous fuels 40 billion to fed programs, 20 billion for local groups to apply for funding, and will create 2 million jobs if fully funded. The senator is also working on investing in infrastructure out West.

Helen Katich – The senator is watching the infrastructure package carefully with ears open to critical projects and requests over the next two weeks.

Feedback for Elected Representatives:

Jim Haugsness asked a question directed at John Whitney regarding whether the insurance industry is involved in the discussion? Whitney responded by saying this bill does not really address the insurance industry.

Updates from Field Managers

Gunnison Field Office with Brady Owens, acting

The GFO is implementing a zone approach for renewing grazing permits. This will approach allows us to efficiently complete the grazing permit renewals by focusing on a group of allotments in a specific geographical area.

Plans to initiate an environmental analysis to consider allowing electric bicycles, or e-bikes, on non-motorized single-track trails managed by the GFO.

The GFO saw significant increases in visitor use on the Alpine Loop in the last year, particularly in July and August. Between 2018 and 2020 there was about a 23% increase in visitation.

Plans to have all campsites at the Oh-be-Joyful Campground and a percentage of the Mill Creek campsites reservable through Recreation.gov. Reservations will be available up to 14 days in advance.

The Gunnison Field Office accepted and approved a Plan of Development from the Town of Silverton in the Summer of 2020 and will be completing an environmental assessment (EA) in fiscal year 2021.

Grand Junction Field Office with Greg Wolfgang

The Pine Gulch Fire, which was a Type 1 fire, briefly broke records by expanding more than 30K acres overnight (August 18). We did lose some secondary structures but maintained a good safety record for firefighters.

Burnt Area Restoration Team (BARE team), a long-burning fire but not very intense, reported few significant debris flows or landslides. The field office is moving to open the area again to big game hunters by focusing on unburned grazing portions.

Palisade Plunge: Phase 1 is opening this weekend (May 29). There are 32 miles of new trail, 34 miles total. 6000k feet elevation loss. Phase 2 (upper portion) should open in July.

North Fruita Desert (18 rd and 27 1/4 road) GJFO is working on cleanups and getting more events back in 2021. 27 ¼ events center and the trailhead.

Uncompahgre Field Office with Suzanne Copping, Acting

The UFO is collaborating with the Crawford Gunnison Sage Grouse Working Group, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, various agencies, permittees, and the public concerning recovery efforts

The UFO is in year two of a five-year plan (2020-2024) to renew expiring permits. We have hired additional seasonal and permanent staff to gather and analyze data to

support using categorical exclusions on allotments where land health issues are not present.

Welcomed a new full-time archeologist in March. UFO plans to add a seasonal archeological technician to our team this summer, greatly enhancing our cultural program.

The UFO continually strives to increase recreational access, which meets local community demand and provides tangible and intangible benefits to our communities.

Feedback: Renzo (Cat3). Complexity in range management while dealing with changing climate. Glad to hear that 60% of permittees are taking voluntary rest. On how to interact: RAC site visits to see issues on the ground. Get base knowledge of issues and

The UFO is moving forward with a proposal for a staging and camping facility in a heavily used area off the Rim Road in the Dry Creek Travel Management Area. We completed the EA in December 2019 and subsequently finished engineering and site design. The first phase of construction is expected to begin in spring 2021.

In coordination with Delta County Board of County Commissioners, the UFO completed an environmental analysis and issued a decision to grant a right of way grant to permit an American flag installation on the east side of Highway 50.

Feedback for Suzanne Copping:

John Reams brought up about drought monitoring from the permittee side. Specifically, the BLM has been working well with permittees on the west side of Montrose County. He also touched on spring developments, cleaning ponds, developing new ponds good for wildlife and cattle.

Mark Roeber noted that part of complexity of range program is that livestock is still one of the greatest economic drivers of the area.

Tres Rios Field Office with Ray O'Neil, Acting

CANM: Visitor Center open again (since mid-April). Painted Hand area is one of the premier public access sites. Having an access issue with private landowner, will be working on a new road to restore access. Initiated section 106 process for reopening grazing, working on programmatic agreement with SHPO

Travel Area Plan 1 (TAP1) - TRFO worked closely with Montezuma, La Plata and Archuleta counties, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), and the City of Durango to

develop a Proposed Action for a transportation network on 100,000 acres of public land managed by the BLM.

Travel Area Plan (TAP 2) - The BLM is working with CPW, Dolores, San Miguel, and Montrose counties in a process similar to TAP1.

Durango area hazardous fuels project reduce hazards associated with vegetation in close proximity to values at risk in the Durango area.

Dominguez-Escalante Gunnison River Permits and Campsites

BLM employee Zack Kelley presented on river permits and reservable camp sites at DENCA.

Feedback for Zack Kelley:

Katie Welt asked what are the comments on impacts of on-site density and availability? Zack Kelley responded by saying most comments are in favor of increasing availability, most in favor of a reservation system.

Katie Welt asked what the status is of the alternate trail, and of the washed-out pedestrian bridge? BLM employee Dan Ben-Horin responded: The bridge has been repaired; landowner piped past the bridge. Do not have authorization from the railroad in any location other than where the trail currently crosses. No immediate change foreseen.

Closing Remarks and Open Discussion

Chair John Reams asked for and alterations to the minutes. None were suggested and he moved to approve. Mark Roeber approved, and Katie Welt seconded.

Motion carries, minutes approved

Open discussion on next meetings field trip options:

Mark Roeber showed interest in discussing Jumbo Mountain Travel Management Plan.

Tif Rodriguez said any of the field trips sound good.

Renzo Del Piccolo asked a question on e-bikes: what does "waiting for the facts" refer to WRT the EA and learning about e-bike use.

Brady Owens answered: motorized vs. non-motorized trail design (curve radius, etc.) rural-urban interface (access from the university, forest service land, etc.). Impacts to ungulates in locations where they haven't "met" bikes before.

Field Manager Connie Clements asked for a vote on which location to visit next and thus which field office will host the next meeting.

Vote on the field trip:

Kathy Welt – Jumbo Mountain

Mark Roeber – Jumbo Mountain

John Reams – Jumbo Mountain

Grady Ham – Silverton, Alpine Loop

Jim Haugsness – Silverton, Alpine Loop

Tif Rodriguez – Silverton, Alpine Loop

Katie Welt – Silverton, Alpine Loop

Christi Zeller – Silverton, Alpine Loop

Renzo DelPiccolo – Jumbo Mountain

Bill Gleason – Jumbo Mountain

Steve Garcher– Silverton, Alpine Loop

Stan Whinnery – Jumbo Mountain

Jumbo and Alpine Loop are tied, so based on weather considerations in August, Alpine Loop might be the best choice and we will do Jumbo Mountain a couple of months later.

Katie Welt – if this is Renzo's last meeting: Many thanks

Chair John Reams motioned to adjourn, Renzo Del piccolo approved, and Kathy Welt seconded.

Adjourn