



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Royal Gorge Field Office
3028 East Main Street
Canon City, Colorado 81212

Rocky Mountain Resource Advisory Council (RAC) Meeting

May 27, 2021 10:00 am – 3:00pm
Virtual Meeting held on Zoom

ATTENDEES

RAC members

- David Bieber – Category 1 (RGFO)
- Bob Hamel – Category 1 (RGFO)
- Fred Henderson – Category 1 (RGFO)
- Grady Ham – Category 1 (Gunnison)
- Stan Whinnery – Category 3 (Gunnison)
- Ray Douglas – Category 3 (RGFO)
- Arthur Koepsell – Category 3 (RGFO)
- Kent Wood – Category 3 (RGFO)

BLM staff

- Cathy Cook
- Connie Clementson
- Lisa Dawson
- Keith Berger
- Melissa Garcia
- Brady Owens
- Linda Skinner
- Kate Miyamoto
- Brant Porter

Partner agencies/public

- Vanessa Mazel DNR
- Adam Ortega Col. Dept of Agriculture

Congressional Staff

- Jacqueline Armendariz – Sen. Bennet's Office (Pueblo)
- Erin Minks – Sen. Bennet's Office (SLV)

10 a.m. Virtual meeting began with Housekeeping, Introductions and opening remarks by Cathy Cook, BLM Rocky Mountain District Manager.

FALL 2020 DISTRICT BOUNDARIES REALIGNMENT

- A realignment of the BLM Colorado districts was implemented to help with emergency planning, safety and improve communications. Maps showing statewide RAC boundary changes were shared. The current district boundaries include a new 4th district, the Upper Colorado River District. Gunnison Field Office was moved to the Southwest District (SWD).
- The charters are currently being adjusted due to the realignment and multiple vacancies. Some of the attending members of the RAC will remain with RMD while 2 will shift to the SWD. RMD has 2 vacancies in Category 1, 5 vacancies in Category 2 and 1 vacancy in Category 3. Solicitations were released on May 21 and will be open until June 21. Past applicants can apply.
- A request for help spreading the word to fill vacancies during the nomination process was made.
- Cathy shared information and a video on the fire and fuels program and the importance of communication which triggered the realignment boundary effort.

MANAGERS UPDATE – ROYAL GORGE FIELD OFFICE

Keith Berger, Field Manager

- Keith started with a general description of the Royal Gorge Field Office (RGFO) then described some of the current larger projects.
- Minerals and energy programs just approved an EIS to allow expansion of a mine that will become one of the largest aggregate suppliers in the United States.
- Recreation in BLM land and Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area (AHRA) has seen an increase in visitation of 127% over the last year. AHRA and RGFO have co-managed the Arkansas River recreation since 1989.
- Other busy Recreation sites include the Gold Belt Byway, Guffey Gorge, Cache Creek, Shelf Road, and mountain bike destinations around river towns.
- Browns Canyon National Monument's project manager, Joe Vieira, completed a joint management plan in 2020 between RGOFO and USFS Salida Ranger District.

Current Projects

- The Eastern Colorado Resource Management Plan (RMP) will replace the 1986 Eastern Colorado RMP and the 1996 Royal Gorge Resource Area RMP. There are 4 alternatives the BLM asked for public comments on how each community envisions their public lands to help make decisions.
- The Chaffee County Camping and Travel Management Plan is addressing dispersed use and just completed public input.
- Guffey Gorge is an exceptionally busy 80-acre site and has added management controls over the years to protect the resource, while experiencing high numbers of visitors. Trail maintenance and attention to fee collection was discussed.
- Mineral exploration in Grape Creek Wilderness Study Area had a lot of attention last summer. Keep in mind that it is in a WSA, and it is not the same as Wilderness. There may be more discussion on this operation in the future considering the political climate.

MANAGERS UPDATE – SAN LUIS VALLEY FIELD OFFICE

Melissa Garcia, Field Manager

- Highlights of the SLVFO include the Rio Grande Natural Area which encompasses 33 miles of the Rio Grande. It has been highlighted over the summer with a ribbon cutting celebration of the Highway 142 Bridge interpretive kiosk. There are impacts to this area caused by unauthorized livestock grazing and stray horse trespass. The BLM is working to build a west fence along the river corridor and add new enclosures to protect willow habitat for the Southwestern willow flycatcher, as well as permitted livestock uses.
- Blanca Wetlands Area of Environmental Concern (ACEC) is a nationally significant shorebird/waterbird flyway and breeding/nesting habitat that is also used for outdoor education.
- Recreation in the SLV includes 4 SRMAs Rio Grande Natural Area, Blanca Wetlands ACEC, Zapata Falls, and Penitente known for rock climbing and mountain biking. All areas attract nature-based tourism.
- The SLV has noticed a shift in the type of visitors from backcountry hunters to more urban style recreational users.
- Zapata Falls is doing a major road realignment project with Great America Outdoors Act funds.
- Other significant programs in the SLV are Cultural Heritage, Wildlife, Recreation, Range Management, a District Fuels program, and other resources that work towards landscape management of uses and resources on the Public Lands.
- Poncha Pass has Gunnison Sage Grouse habitat that the BLM manages. The Fish and Wildlife Service is considering changes in the species status so we are moving cautiously and awaiting upcoming direction prior to approving a vegetation management EA.
- The office uses grazing management as the main form of vegetation management with 132 allotments and an active Assessment Inventory Monitoring Program.
- Solar Energy & regional mitigation are a focus for the office.
- Land and Water Conservation Fund proposals focusing on water augmentation and recreation access at Middle Creek and Shaw Reservoir are a focus, as well as community and youth engagement.

Current Projects

- PonchaVilla Zone: Authorized Uses EA and Vegetation Management EA are being reviewed.
- Evaluation Plan for a revised SLV RMP was completed and potentially moving forward with a Preparation Plan for an RMP revision.
- Unauthorized use issues continue to require attention of focused resources.
- Lands and Realty ROWs and Solar Energy Applications do require some State Office support.

MANAGERS UPDATE – GUNNISON FIELD OFFICE

Brady Owens, Field Manager

- Brady is the Acting Field Manager while GFO tries to fill 7 vacancies out of the 20 employees they normally have.

- Their larger projects include grazing permit renewals, lands and minerals project on Bonita Peak, and a proposed Recreation and PP conveyance.
- Recreation has also had a huge increase in visitation.
- The Alpine Loop had a 23% increase since 2020. They are working on an eBike EA for Signal Peak area and the Oh Be Joyful campground serves a large part of the Crested Butte tourist destination.
- Brant shared several resources: access to the ePlanning site, webpages, and social media links.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

- No members of the public attended the meeting.

Open discussion:

- Visitation increases and if it was triggered by COVID or do we think it is going to continue. Most people believe that the increases in visitation will continue.
- It was suggested that Envision Chaffee County is a good model for community engagement and BLM should carry that program to other counties.
- The value of partnerships for the BLM - each field office has unique community partnerships, as well as benefits from Youth Corps internships.

- Brant let the group know that the asks will be addressed, and he will investigate the tools for sharing the recording of the meeting.
- Fred requested email addresses for RAC members. A contact list will be shared.
- When will the next meeting be? Typically, the RAC meets 2-3 times a year. The goal is to meet after the positions are filled and there is a quorum possibly late fall.
- Fred and others would like to use Mt. Princeton as a meeting venue.

MEETING ADJOURNED AT 2:15 PM

Cathy Cook
BLM RMD RAC
Designated Federal Official