



Northwest Colorado Resource Advisory Council (RAC) Meeting Minutes:
 October 21, 2021

8:00 a.m. Meeting called to Order by Greg Larson, Upper Colorado River District Manager and Designated Federal Official, and Mike Pritchard, Northwest Colorado RAC Chair.

Attendees:

Resource Advisory Council Members:

Shannon Chollett, Category 1	Mike Pritchard, Category 2	John Justman, Category 3
Shawn Brennan, Category 1	Joe O'Malley, Category 2	Tom Jankovsky, Category 3
Roy Karo, Category 2	Carl Connor, Category 2	Anthony (Tony) Vagneur, Category 2

Not Present: Kirk Daehling

BLM Staff:

Chris Maestas	Patty Luby
Greg Larson	Hunter Seim
Christina Rhyne	Greg Wolfgang
Heather Sauls	Amy Carmichael
Erin Jones	William Mills
Eric Coulter	Ryan Snyder
Monte Senior	Elijah Waters
Larry Sandoval	Collin Ewing

Congressional Staff:

Hilary Henry	Senator Bennet Staff
Hogan Peterson	Congresswoman Boebert Staff

Public/Other:

Visitor:	Representing:	City:
Katie Steele, Category 2 (SWD)	Term expired observer from SWD RAC	Grand Junction
Aletha Dove	Wild Horse Warriors	Craig
Cindy Wright	Wild Horse Warriors	Craig
Jeff Comstock	Term expired RAC applicant	Craig
Callie Hendrickson	Term expired RAC applicant	Meeker
Merrit Linke	Term expired RAC applicant	Granby

Scott Braden	Colorado Wildlands Project	Grand Junction
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8:10 a.m. Housekeeping and Introductions

8:25 a.m. Opening remarks

Mike Pritchard – This meeting should be professional and engaging with a goal of reaching a consensus. The field trip on Wednesday was engaging and informative. Thanks to Chris and Hunter for leading that.

Greg Larson – The RAC charter has been renewed to include the Northwest District and the Upper Colorado District. We are waiting for appointments to be made for positions so that a quorum can be present and resolutions can be made. BLM Colorado has submitted nominations, but appointments are not yet finalized. Not sure of the timeline for final appointments. Nominations were submitted earlier in the summer and are awaiting approval.

8:43 a.m. Field Trip Overview

Hunter Seim – recapped the field trip on Wednesday, Oct. 20. The first stop was skipped for concern of road conditions. Started the tour near the center of the Sand Wash Herd Management Area (SW HMA) where the holding and trap site were for the 2021 Emergency Sand Wash Wild Horse gather. Discussed why site was selected, how public viewing areas were determined, grazing and HMA history. Travelled next to a primary pond and discussed the impact of water management in the HMA. Then went to Shepherd Springs where the group saw some elk travel up the ridge. Last stop was on the north end of the Sand Wash Basin looking at an older brush beating treatment to discuss rangeland ecology and sage grouse. Looked at sage grouse habitat designations within the HMA and how that affects decisions in the HMA. The group was able to see wild horses as well as other big game species in the area.

Mike Pritchard – relayed some of his observances of the day and the challenges of the management of the area.

Tom Jankovsky – shared some comments on the field trip including appreciation for the Wild Horse Warriors’ work and sharing with the group on the field trip. Tom would like to see discussion in the RAC of the cost of the gather and the route the horses take post gather including the cost of maintaining those off range horses in the coming years.

Hunter Seim – provided that the gathered horses were transported to Canon City to be prepared for adoption events. Unadoptable horses will go to off range holding on private property contracts. His estimates were about \$1,200/horse/year.

Callie Hendrickson – provided a link for additional details for this information (<https://www.blm.gov/programs/wild-horse-and-burro/about-the-program>).

Jeff Comstock – had questions about any plans for gathering horses outside the HMA. He has heard reports of up to 80 or more horses remaining outside which could be more based on projections.

Hunter Seim – relayed that the 2021 gather tactics included guiding the horses back into the HMA. Additionally, there is also some drift from horses in Wyoming coming into the northwest corner of Colorado. They are starting a gather there [southwestern Wyoming] as well. Recent fixed wing flights in the HMA following the gather did not see numbers that high outside the HMA. Fencing and fence maintenance of the HMA continues as well.

Callie Hendrickson – weighed in on the success of the number of horses gathered and provided some data on horses in off-range holding back in August of 51,000 head (nationally). She estimated \$5-6/day for short-term holding and \$3-4/day for long range holding per horse. She reiterated the need for utilization and trend monitoring to happen in the HMA for future documentation. She encouraged that the conversation be had with the Wyoming gather along the state line.

John Justman – relayed his observations from yesterday [Oct. 20 field trip] to those several years ago and the effort to improve water distribution.

Tony Vagneur – shared some of his experience and knowledge of wild horses. Link to an article he previously wrote (<https://www.aspentimes.com/opinion/tony-vagneur-no-time-for-horsing-around/>).

Merrit Linke – commented on the critical step of managing the land in light of wild horses and sustainability.

Tom Jankovsky – circled back to some of the calculated costs of maintaining horses and the need for local field office help in managing herds.

Carl Conner – shared information of a study of cattle grazing using collars and ‘virtual fencing’ and how this technology may be applicable to wild horse management.

Elijah Waters – weighed in with a thank you to the RAC for support of the gather and HMA management efforts. This is critically important for continued management.

9:25 a.m. Field Manager Updates

Led by BLM Upper Colorado District Manager Greg Larson

Colorado River Valley Field Office (Silt)

Field Office Manager Larry Sandoval reviewed the field office updates (see attachments).

Grand Junction Field Office

Field Manager Greg Wolfgang reviewed the field office updates (see attachments).

McGinnis Canyon and Dominguez Canyon National Conservation Areas

Amy Carmichael, acting NCA Manager, reviewed the manager report (see attachments).

Little Snake Field Office (Craig)

Assistant Field Manager Hunter Seim reviewed the field office updates (see attachments). One correction to the printed field report was that the target number of horses was 733 while 684 horses were actually removed.

White River Field Office (Meeker)

Acting Field Manager Monte Senior reviewed the field office updates (see attachments).

Kremmling Field Office (Kremmling)

Field Manager Bill Mills reviewed the field office updates (see attachments). Bill also added a comment on working to identify forest health projects in preparation for potential opportunities that may be coming along.

11:00 a.m. Dominguez Escalante National Conservation Area (NCA) Business Plan Discussion

NCA Manager Colin Ewing introduced himself and his role with the NCA and the discussion of the RACs coordinating with the management of the area. He gave an overview of what the NCA is and the timeline associated with the designations leading to the 2009 Omnibus act. A Resource Management Plan Environmental Impact Statement (RMP EIS) process was initiated with an advisory council in 2010 resulting in approval in 2017. After the RMP was complete the advisory council expired. At that time, the Southwest RAC included the NCA in its area of interest until the BLM Colorado redistricting split the NCA between the Southwest and Northwest RAC. The purpose for discussion today is how to approach this split between the RACs. Collin provided an example of the planning and implementation of permitted river boating and campground use along the Gunnison River within the NCA. The original advisory council identified management concerns for this area during the RMP. These resource concerns have been relayed to the SW RAC and to the NW RAC through this meeting. Implementation of fee reservation permit system has been recommended to address and protect these resources and concerns. Feedback and input from public land users has been gathered to see what they would like for this system on the Gunnison River. They are preparing a proposed action to begin the NEPA process.

With this example, how should the NCA proceed in the future to implement projects in coordination with both RACs? Proposed methods include alternating RACs involvement or developing a sub-RAC to address decisions – this option seems like additional workload.

Greg Larson – suggested one option would be a joint meeting of the RACs to provide business decisions for the NCA and the value of the input from the RAC members of both groups.

Collin Ewing – suggested the solution of one RAC deferring to the other.

Carl Conner – noted that he felt a joint meeting would be better.

Roy Karo – weighed in on some ideas and interest in the NCA area.

Tom Jankovsky – concurred with the option of one RAC taking the lead with the NCA. BLM provided a response that this would require some research into the logistics of how this option might be implemented through Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act fee laws.

Jeff Comstock – weighed in on past experiences for fee implementation and the importance of letters of support from local government official for RAC fee approvals recommending this happen early in the process.

Katie Steele – noted that she would also like to see input from both RACs for decisions in the NCA, however wasn't sure what the most efficient way to do this might be.

Greg Wolfgang – weighed in on how the most streamlined process would be and how frequently the NCA may need advice or resolutions for implementation of projects.

Collin Ewing – relayed that it would likely be infrequent and, in many cases, related to fee implementation primarily. This would include the river use as well as campgrounds.

Mike Pritchard – relayed that he would defer to the SW RAC and then the proposal would come to the NW RAC for a reviewed resolution. He indicated that this might need a vote of RAC members to get a consensus from the group as a whole. Generally, he would expect it would be a solid business plan presented and would likely only need minor revisions.

Greg Larson- said that BLM Colorado would seek to NOT hold NW and SW RAC meetings on the same day, so that NW RAC members with an interest in the topic could sit in on the SW RAC meeting.

Joe O Malley, Jeff Comstock, Tom Jankovsky, Tony Vagneur, and Carl Connor – concurred with this proposed method to have the SW take the initial vote on the business plan and pass along that business plan to the NW RAC to take a vote.

Mike Pritchard – relayed that the general feedback was also in support of the potential fees for the area pending the presentation of a formal business plan. A proposed plan that includes fee areas and dispersed camping would be likely at this point in time.

Hogan Peterson – encouraged the differentiation between recreational camping and residential camping.

Collin Ewing – acknowledged the variation of camping methods to be considered.

11:40 p.m. Lunch

1:15 p.m. WRFO Travel Management Plan Discussion

WRFO Planning & Environmental Coordinator Heather Sauls – presented information on the WRFO Travel Management Plan (TMP). Route inventory was completed in 2014-2016. RMP amendment was completed this summer. Next step is to work on individual area travel management plans within the field office. Public review of inventory has been provided with approximately 4,516 miles of routes with over 9,000 georeferenced photos and attributes to provide data to inform decisions. RMP amendment for travel management has 5 main things to know.

1. Motorized and e bikes have to stay on designated routes.
2. Vehicles only allowed to pull off route to park.
3. Motorized vehicles and bikes are included in route density estimates.
4. Non-motorized areas overlap with areas restricted for oil and gas development.
5. Includes additional designation criteria to guide route determinations.

Public involvement has been well vetted since 2015 including scoping, field trips, etc. through the RMP amendment signing in 2021. Public involvement has been diverse in interest and locations.

WRFO has changed the typical BLM terminology to use the term ‘non-motorized’ instead of ‘closed’ to further clarify the specified use for the public user. These areas were designated as polygons where the public can easily identify these areas for use. The majority of these areas were already roadless and only affected about 15 miles of routes within the non-motorized use. A few of these areas have additional resources protected by not allowing bikes as well.

Two of the identified open areas are near Meeker and Rangely. Over-the-snow route and area designations have been defined as well.

Route density used as an analysis tool and focuses on big game areas and the seasons used in the Oil & Gas RMPA. The Rangely Oil Field was excluded from the route density because of the existing presence of routes. A chart is used by GMU to evaluate route density in miles of routes/square mile to evaluate the need for route designation decisions. This can include closures, administrative use only, or seasonal closures to meet the desirable threshold.

Cultural resources have been included in the work and decisions for travel management planning. 700 sites have a route through them and many more near routes. Consultation

for travel management is different because they already exist versus the planning for a new project. The consultation includes evaluating routes, considering mitigation options, and prioritizing mitigation work. Instead of the overwhelming task of surveying 100% of the routes, a subset of routes to inventory would be identified to meet cultural resource needs. A GIS predictive model that considers a variety of concerns has created a “heat” type map that identifies the priority areas to be inventoried. A variety of mitigation options would be available to make decisions following these inventories.

WRFO has opted to complete the cultural surveys prior to NEPA and then follow with implementation. They have 6 TMAs mostly on GMUs to use the big game route density approach. They also have some priority areas they will address as their own TMA. 7 of 10 areas have had the cultural surveys completed or are near completion of contracts. They will then be moving into the NEPA and then implementation on a variety of tracks as each step is completed separately.

Some of the areas will be able to do NEPA in house with BLM staff. As the TMAs get larger there will be a need for a third party NEPA contractor.

E-bikes vs. regular bikes will be considered separately route by route just like ATV/UTV width route decisions.

2:00 p.m. **Public Comment**

Callie Hendrickson – shared a document from the White River and Douglas Creek Conservation Districts summarizing a natural resources tour of the Piceance-East Douglas HMA. Photos and information compare two similar range sites - one with unmanaged season long grazing and another with rotational livestock grazing management. With this information, Callie relayed how imperative it is for the RAC to support efforts to implement a gather in this HMA. Callie would be happy to take anyone on a tour of the Piceance-East Douglas HMA. (callie.districts@gmail.com)

The public that was present at the meeting introduced themselves and presented information and observations to the council.

Scott Braden, Colorado Wildlands Project – kicked off the discussion reaching out to establish partnerships and engage in public lands planning (www.cowildlands.org).

Cindy Wright – (Wild Horse Warriors) thanked everyone for coming to Sand Wash Basin yesterday and visited about the agreement with the Little Snake Field Office locally and the need for changes at the national level to make the program sustainable. Need to look at other options to engage local and state governments to partner in management of local herds.

Hilary Henry – (Senator Bennet’s staff) appreciated being included in the meeting and provided some information and talking points out of the Senator’s office. They were disappointed with the news of the BLM headquarters being moved back to D.C. but

appreciated the Western BLM office remaining in Grand Junction. The Infrastructure Bill is working to fund watershed projects and they have gotten funding for orphaned oil and gas wells. The Build Back Better plan includes the priority to get outdoor recreation access and wildfire funding. (hilary_henry@bennet.senate.gov)

With the discussion returning to Callie Hendrickson's shared document, Katie Steele concurred with the urgency of the need for a gather and asked about the outlook going into the winter. Two predictions include the need for an emergency gather if a hard winter or a delayed emergency gather next summer due to lack of water if it is a light winter.

Tony Vagneur – shared some additional information about hoof impact differences between cattle and horses. Additionally, he relayed how ranchers use salt/minerals to control grazing rotations or distribution to modify livestock concentration and that might be applicable for wild horse management.

2:30 p.m. **Closing Comments / Open Discussion**

Next meeting is scheduled in January in Grand Junction.

Jeff Comstock – suggested an agenda item for next meeting that might include reviewing the wild horse resolution in light of the meeting discussion today.

Mike Pritchard – thought it might have been reviewed recently but would be good for the group to do so again for awareness of what was written and passed along in the resolution.

Tom Jankovsky – concurred with reviewing this and also suggested writing a letter of support for the Piceance-East Douglas HMA gather scheduled for fall 2022.

Mike Pritchard – asked what process and support the RAC could lend for future gather efforts.

Greg Larson – suggested the resolution be circulated prior to the next meeting so as RAC members are able to review it as an agenda item for the January meeting.

Agenda topics might include wild horses, e-bikes, recreation, and increased public land visitation for the January meeting. It was also suggested to discuss impacts to cultural sites in relation to the camping/trail areas in the NCA's. Items can be vetted and added as needed.

Jeff Comstock – encouraged BLM managers to identify and relay issues that they truly need input and advice from the RAC on. The RAC would like to provide meaningful input into BLM decision making. BLM concurs with the RAC providing this role and serving as a resource for them as well.

Greg Larson – encouraged RAC members that as they think of issues or ideas to reach out in the moment to the BLM. BLM will do the same as needed to develop proposals.

Mike Pritchard – reiterated that the RAC is waiting for appointments so that a quorum can be reached and any help from the elected officials through their representatives to move this process along would be appreciated.

Hilary Henry and Hogan Peterson both relayed the benefit of the RAC to their offices and that they had noted the need to do this as well.

2:46 p.m. **Adjourn**

Mike Pritchard adjourned the meeting.