



Southwest District Resource Advisory Council Minutes

October 2021

Members Present

Southwest District RAC:

Category 1:

Mark Roeber (Grazing), Kathy Welt (Energy and Minerals)

Category 2:

Jim Haugsness (Dispersed Recreation), Cody Dyce (Environmental Organizations)

Category 3:

Grady Ham (Outdoor Recreation/OHV), Christi Arnold (Public-at-Large), Steve Garchar (Elected Official)

BLM Employees Present:

Lisa Dawson, acting District manager, Jon Kaminsky, acting GFO Field Manager, Suzanne Copping UFO Field Manager, Connie Clementson, TRFO Field Manager, Collin Ewing, acting Associate District Manager, Edd Franz, GGNCA Manager, Shawn Reinhardt, Public Affairs Officer, Stacey Colon, Administrative Officer, Candis Fischer Administrative Assistant.

Public Present:

Adam Ortega, Colorado Department of Agriculture, Helen Katich of Senator Hickenlooper's office, John Whitney of Senator Bennett's office, Hogan Peterson, of Congresswomen Lauren Boebert's office.

Welcome, Introductions & Housekeeping

Acting District Manager Lisa Dawson called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m. with brief introductions from all RAC members and an overview of the meeting agenda.

Meeting minutes from May 2021

Minutes from May 2021 meeting could not be approved due to lack of quorum.

Interim Chairperson

No discussion for interim chairman could take place due to lack of quorum.

Recruiting for New Members

New and expiring members were encouraged to apply for the RAC from September 21 to October 2 through Public Affairs Officer, Shawn Reinhardt. The SWD RAC is currently processing applications to fill four spots and will accept applications for a further three spots.

SWD RAC Charter

The SWD RAC reviewed the new charter, no votes could be made to approve it due to lack of quorum.

The Alpine Loop with Jim Lovelace

- Jim Lovelace presented on resource complexities in the Alpine Loop noting the Gunnison Field Office saw a ten percent increase in visitor use of the Alpine Loop over the past year. He affirmed the field office is working closely with Hinsdale and San Juan counties to address parking congestion issues at popular trailheads, law enforcement, and maintenance at existing campgrounds and facilities.
- Jim Lovelace asked that the RAC discuss and consider a change in campground fees noting that the Mill Creek Campground is among many that only charge \$7.00. With maintenance and upkeep costs going up, pricing needs to be comparable to other campgrounds.

Feedback for Jim Lovelace:

- Jim Haugsness stated that the BLM should not be competing with private campgrounds, but should consider a different fee schedule, Jim Lovelace agreed and stated that while not competing, we need to be on a realistic playing field with the costs of management for the campgrounds.
- Grady Ham stated that the public opinion was that the traffic on the Alpine Loop had not changed too much from the previous year. Most people also thought that accidents required increased law enforcement or EMS services. Grady stated that the road damage could be making it harder for users, which may

keep the public from using them as much as expected, and there may need to be a discussion with local officials about road upkeep in the future.

Updates from Field Managers

Gunnison Field Office with Jon Kaminsky, acting

- The Gunnison field office is implementing a zone approach for renewing grazing permits. This approach allows us to efficiently complete the grazing permit renewals by focusing on a group of allotments in a specific geographical area.
- On August 27, 2021, The Bureau of Land Management Southwest District Office released two proposed decisions for the final Environmental Impact Statement for Domestic Sheep Grazing Permit Renewals in Gunnison Field Office. BLM has received written protests, communications expressing concerns with the proposed decisions, in addition to communications expressing support for the proposed decisions.
- The Gunnison Field Office is evaluating a programmatic hazardous fuels reduction project on public lands managed by the BLM near Powderhorn, CO. The total project area comprises 90,725 acres and includes 53,877 acres within the Powderhorn Wilderness and Wilderness Study Area.
- BLM plans to initiate an environmental analysis to consider allowing electric bicycles, or e-bikes, on non-motorized single-track trails managed by the Gunnison Field Office.
- The GFO 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.

Feedback for Gunnison Field Office:

- None.

Uncompahgre Field Office with Suzanne Copping

- Uncompahgre Field Office has been working to renew expiring grazing permits in Grizzley Gulch and Poison Springs. This summer, three AIM crews collected land and aquatic health data at dozens of sites to help inform conversations regarding the future and management of those allotments. For allotments not meeting land health standards, environmental assessments are planned through 2025 in collaboration with the Fish and Wildlife Service, working groups, and permittees.

- Construction of the Rim Road Staging Area and campground is currently underway and is expected to be completed this fall.
- Uncompahgre Field Office is working closely with Delta County regarding the dumping of trash on public lands in the Adobes. Delta County has been very proactive in the coordination of several volunteer cleanups this year. BLM staff have been investigating, logging, and addressing dumping sites with local law enforcement as best as possible with limited staff and financial resources.

Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area:

- BLM has funded a contract for the initial interpretive design at Eagle Rock Shelter, one of the oldest known human occupation sites in Colorado. There is a site visit with the Uncompahgre Field Office, Ute Tribes, History Colorado, Ute Indian Museum, and others planned for late fall 2021.
- With the cancellation of our fall Cottonwood Days Education Program, we are hopeful to get it restarted this spring. We anticipate that the regular fall schedule will resume in 2022.
- The Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area is working with Colorado Canyons Association, the Town of Paonia and the IDSA to explore the possibility of becoming a dark sky park.

Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area:

- Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area is looking for a little clarification regarding some cross boundary issues between the NW RAC and the SW RAC and would like an open discussion to decide who should be responsible for the unit.

Feedback for Uncompahgre Field Office:

- None.

Tres Rios Field Office with Connie Clementson

- BLM is planning on burning 240 acres of Tamarisk slash piles along McElmo Creek and Yellow Jacket Canyon in (CANM), 104 acres in Dry Creek Basin and 27 at Summit Reservoir in TRFO.
- Spring Creek Basin Wild Horse and Burrow Herd Management Area (HMA) – The BLM will continue to administer the fertility control vaccine PZP to manage the wild horse population within the HMA. The current population is 65, which is deemed appropriate management level. Three mares were introduced from the Sand Wash Basin gather to aid in maintaining healthy herd genetics.

- Box Elder Campground updates were completed in late April 2021 and a loop was created at the end of the campground to allow vehicle to easily turn around.
- Numerous free use gravel pit permits were given out to local communities for road and bridge upkeep.

Canyons of the Ancients National Monument:

- The Visitor Center and Museum is now open to the public Thursday through Saturday and the number of days it is open will expand starting spring 2022. The book sales space, which has been vacant for over a year will have a new operator. BLM can now announce that the Glen Canyon Conservancy will begin operations in the spring of 2022.
- There will be a special exhibit for the 50th anniversary of the Free Roaming Wild Horses and Burro Act with photos of Colorado's Herd Management Areas, open until December 2021.
- The Painted Hand road relocation and trailhead improvements projects are set to start spring 2022, which will relocate a road from private property onto nearby public lands managed by BLM.

Feedback for Tres Rios Field Office:

- Steve Garchar thanked Tres Rios Field Office for its updates and help with the gravel pits permits.

Public Comment Period

No comments from the public.

Input from elected officials and their representatives

John Whitney of Senator Bennett's office:

- Both Senator Hickenlooper and Senator Bennett advocated for the BLM Headquarters to stay in Grand Junction and think retaining a western HQ is a positive outcome for Colorado and the BLM. They want to ensure that the office grows and is still staffed with senior leadership. They are working with the appropriations committee and DOI to have a robust western headquarters with decision-making abilities in Grand Junction.
- We prioritize getting more money for forestry and forest management for drought and climate change. Working toward \$60B for priority work in the urban interface. We were able to get \$40B into a bill for forest work out west. The bill

is shrinking, and the money will probably shrink, which will fund the forestry work, but it includes \$300M over five years for watershed protection programs, plus more for western water infrastructure in the infrastructure bill.

- We have been advocating to the appropriations committee that BLM is underfunded, so glad to see the bill out of committee with 1.54B for BLM, a 17.7% increase over the previous fiscal year. More money for WHB (35M increase) to accelerate removals; 900M for land and water conservation fund/GAOA to support USFS and BLM.
- Methane capture in the North Fork & Roaring Fork; wanting to put together proposals for BLM/DOI to accelerate those programs using administrative action.
- Continue to work with Dolores & San Miguel Counties on proposed Dolores River National Conservation Area legislation.

Helen Katich of Senator Hickenlooper's office:

- Competes Act just introduced and will send the RAC a summary. Amends Mineral Leasing Act will know more about its status as bills go through Congress this week

Hogan Peterson of Congresswoman Boebert's office:

- The Congresswoman is working on wildfire and forestry management legislation. The bill would address mismanagement/non-management of public lands to prevent additional historically sized fires and set a minimum level of annual treatment.
- It's the tenth anniversary of the Colorado Canyons Association, congrats and kudos to the organization and the positive relationship they've built over the years.

Feedback for representative staffers:

- Adam Ortega thanked the staffers for their information.

Jumbo Mountain Travel Management Plan with Caroline Kilbane

- BLM employee Caroline Kilbane presented on formalizing the trail system on Jumbo Mountain near Paonia, Colorado. She highlighted the need to balance access needs with protection of resources.
- BLM's goal is a manageable, sustainable route network that meets protection and access goals.

- To include the community, the BLM hosted two public meetings in Paonia complete with maps, statistics and subject matter experts.
- We are currently analyzing and summarizing the 100 comments and preparing materials for route evaluation (identifying the resource concerns, route by route). The BLM aims to conduct final surveys in spring 2022.

Feedback for Caroline Kilbane:

- None.

Animas City Mountain Prescribed Burn with Ian Barrett

- BLM employee Ian Barrett presented on a planned prescribed burn on Animas City Mountain in Durango, Colorado. We have good collaboration with the city of Durango to plan to employ a broad use of treatments in different ecological sites. There is an increased urgency due to the recent history of fires and continued drought in the region.
- The burn is planned to take place over 2-3 days and will include a brief closure of Animas City Mountain during the ignitions for public and firefighter safety.
- The containment lines used for the project will consist of BLM designated trails. The units will be ignited using a combination of ground and aerial resources and will be patrolled/mopped up until out.
- Whether or not the BLM will conduct operations will depend heavily on weather conditions and firefighter availability. The prescribed burns could occur as early as spring of 2022.

Feedback for Ian Barrett:

- None.

Closing Remarks and Open Discussion

- Acting District Manager Lisa Dawson Suggested going around to each Field Office Manager for future RAC meeting subjects
- Gunnison Field Office Manager Jon Kaminsky suggested exploring the Powderhorn Wilderness where we have a fuels project in the works. We will be working on public participation and ask for RAC engagement to foster interest and partnership.
- Tres Rios Field Office Manager Connie Clementson said there was a need for increase developed campsites due to growing demand. Therefore, we will need to consider potential camping fees.

- Uncompahgre Field Office Manager Suzanne Copping said the top two things to keep on the RAC's radar are the Jumbo Mountain Travel Management Plan and grazing permit renewals.
- James Haughness: likes competitiveness, doesn't want to see federal agencies take over the camping industry. Wants a way to show how much ranchers are paying into the system so that the public can see the difference between grazing on public & private land.
- James Haughness: given an external threat of climate change, is doing mitigation work on fuels reduction, etc., in a wilderness appropriate given that climate change is "manmade"?
- Jon Kaminsky: Yes, climate change needs to be considered in management decisions/actions among "wrongs we're trying to right" in current fuels management strategy/intervening in restoring a natural fire regime. Climate change is a factor.
- James Haughness to Collin Ewing: campground fees – \$7 (public) vs. \$20 (private), should raise them but make sure the private sector is competitive and encourages private sector engagement in camping.
- Collin Ewing: The BLM does market research when setting fees and the process involves taking new fee proposals to the RAC. The process to change prices is not responsive to fluctuations in the market if we're only looking at it every 4-5 years. Perhaps look at automatic rate increases in our business plans.
- Lisa Dawson: We will look at the CANM plan to see if rate increases can be built-in rather than requiring RAC input every time.
- Connie Clementson: Plan also must account for differences in services provided at campgrounds
- Steve Garchar thanked the Field Managers and staff for the presentation and a wide range of topics. He thought it was a bit skewed toward recreation but would like to see more on multiple uses (such as grazing and energy production). He would like to reinforce the positive aspects of other industries. Climate change is a "bucket that collects a lot of drips" that maybe it shouldn't be, but he recognizes it is a consideration.
- Grady Ham thanked the staff for their time and effort and looks forward to future in-person meetings. Open to all kinds of discussion, overall encouraging the diverse conversation.
- Cody Dyce is interested in tuning in and staying up to date on what's going on. His appointment to RAC is coming to a close, and he regrets that his time was during COVID. He hopes for more opportunities to have the RAC be engaged in person.

- Kathy Welt echoed thoughts of the others, regrets there wasn't a quorum, but glad that the online forum was available to start discussing/engaging.
- Christi Arnold is moving to Arizona and will be withdrawing from the RAC. She has sent info to several people encouraging them to apply and will be available to help make a quorum through the end of the year.
- Edd Franz thanks everyone and looks forward to seeing everyone in person.
- Lisa Dawson thanked everyone for their participation and reminded everyone that our next meeting and field trip will be the first week of February to Jumbo Mountain. The deadline is today for applying to the RAC and asks that the member help get the message out to the community on future public engagement events/public meetings.

Adjourn