



Southwest District Resource Advisory Council Minutes

March 2022

Members Present

Southwest District RAC:

Category 1:

Mark Roeber (Grazing), Kathy Welt (Energy and Minerals), Grady Ham (Outdoor Recreation/OHV)

Category 2:

Jim Haugsness (Dispersed Recreation), Rodger Cesario (Dispersed Recreation), Tif Rodrigues (Wild Horse and Burro)

Category 3:

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, McKenna Farley, 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 October 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

The SWD RAC is currently processing applications to fill seven spots.

SWD RAC Charter

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

Updates from Field Managers

Gunnison Field Office with Jon Kaminsky

- There are growing challenges for BLM due to increased public recreation on public lands brought on by the pandemic.
- The housing shortage has caused a drastic increase of people living on public lands, creating issues for wildlife displacement.
- There is a significant strain on law enforcement and the general load on all field crews and management.
- BLM is also having a tough time with employee recruitment and employee retention. The Gunnison Field Office is looking to adjust the camp fees for four campgrounds.
- Gunnison field office is looking to address other issues like Sage Grouse, Bighorn-Domestic Sheep litigation issues, and environmental factors, including drought and human-caused disturbances.

Uncompahgre Field Office with Suzanne Copping

- The challenges for the Uncompahgre field offices are drought and the constant changing of environmental conditions.
- UFO has been working on water distributions to help ease drought conditions for grazing allotments. Other management challenges are:
- The UFO field crew is strained to keep direct contact with grazing permit holders, day-to-day data collection, and public recreational use.

- UFO's current focus is on the North Fork Valley drought conditions, Gunnison Sage Grouse habitat, and Big Horn Sheep in the North Fork area that directly affect grazing allotments.
- Private lands that transfer hands are also making it difficult for current permittees with access to allotments and water for grazing.

Tres Rios Field Office with Connie Clementson

- The management challenges for Tres Rios Field Office are drought and, like the other field offices, the considerable increase in the public living on BLM land, creating wildlife conflicts.
- Advocacy groups confront Tres Rios Field Office with a strong interest in stopping grazing on public lands.
- Canyon of the Ancients National Monument constantly addresses concerns brought forward by conservation advocates in and out of the area.
- The field office is also working to be proactive with invasive weed control programs.

Southwest District Fire and Aviation with Brandon Lewis

- Challenges for SWD Fire are increasing drought conditions, housing for seasonal employees, and wages for the seasonal staff, which has been an ongoing issue and getting worse in our area. Without affordable housing, we cannot bring in seasonal staff to cover the increasing fire season, and with low wages, they cannot afford the accommodation in our area.
- The team is looking into creative ideas to be able to draw more seasonal fire staff.
- BLM Colorado has received 3 to 4 million dollars more for base funding to assist with fuels management.

Public Comment Period

Input from elected officials and their representatives

John Whitney of Senator Bennett's office:

- Congress is working to finish appropriations for 231 million dollars for BLM budget.
- Senator Bennett has introduced a public lands bill to assist in the abandoned mine cleanup efforts.

Helen Katich of Senator Hickenlooper's office:

- Senator Hickenlooper is working with congress on the infrastructure bill that would distribute 55 billion dollars to drinking/waste-water management, hydro-electricity efficiency projects, hard rock mine cleanup and a bill for the Upper Colorado/San Juan endangered fish program.

McKenna Farley of Congresswoman Boebert's office:

- Rep. Boebart is also working on the endangered fish program and has asked to have an extension on the Gunnison Sage Grouse study.

Robbie LeValley

Regarding the Sage Grouse issues – is there any way to have the habitat maps updated? Using old habitat maps is not giving accurate information. What options does BLM have when all avenues have been exhausted and there is still a decline in numbers for the grouse?

Closing Remarks and Open Discussion

- Acting District Manager Lisa Dawson urged the RAC to brainstorm ideas to address some of the challenges the BLM is facing and suggested forming a sub-RAC dedicated to grazing.
- There was interest from the RAC members to create such a committee and three volunteers to be a part of the sub-RAC.
- The RAC will reassess interest at our next meeting when we may have more members appointed to the committee.
- Lisa thanked everyone for their participation and time spent to assist BLM with the constant challenges faced by management.
- She encouraged RAC members to engage in conversations amongst themselves for ideas on how BLM can better serve the public while still holding the core values that BLM stands for.
- Having the RAC members in-put and ideas are in-valuable for the Southwest District mission.

Adjourn

