



Rocky Mountain District Resource Advisory Council Minutes

Day 1 - August 16, 2022

Members Present:

Category 1: Curtis Howell (Outdoor Educator)*, Frederick Henderson (Energy and Mineral Development)*

Category 2: John Sztukowski (Environmental Organization), Irene Shonle (Dispersed Recreation), Mick Daniel (Dispersed Recreation)

Category 3: April Estep (State Agency Representative will replace Travis Black from CPW if approved), Arthur Koepsell (State Agency Representative), Lawrence Pacheco (Public-at-large)*,

BLM Employees Present: Ray Ogle (RGFO Assistant Field Manager/Non-Renewable Resources)*, Alan Bittner (BLM Deputy State Director/Resources)*, Roxanne Baca (BLM Ethics Office Attorney Advisor)*, Doug Vilsack (BLM State Director)*, Stephanie Carter (BLM Rocky Mountain District Planning & Environmental Coordinator), Cathy Cook (BLM Rocky Mountain District Manager), Karla Koch (BLM Administrative Assistant RGFO), Dario Archuleta (BLM SLVFO Assistant Field Manager), Keith Berger (BLM RGFO Field Manager), Kalem Lenard (BLM RGFO Assistant Field Manager & Brown's Canyon Monument Manager).

Public Present: Dennis Crowther (BLM Grazing Permittee, Interested Public), Adam Ortega (Colorado Department of Agriculture), Erin Minks (Representative from Senator Michael Bennet's Office)

* Denotes online meeting attendance via ZOOM

Welcome, Introductions & Housekeeping

The August 16, 2022 RAC meeting was called to order by Cathy Cook at 10:04am. The meeting was held at the BLM Royal Gorge Field Office in Canon City, CO with an online attendance option via ZOOM. The meeting was also recorded via ZOOM for those unable to attend.

Introduction-Cathy Cook

Cathy welcomed attendees and summarized the state of the RAC committee. Three vacancies still exist on the council, and a chair needs to be selected. After four years without a quorum, the council is now able to resume decision-making and take action on issues that will be discussed. Cathy went over the meeting agenda, housekeeping items, and gave a presentation about the Rocky Mountain District. She shared updates regarding BLM staff, vacancies, etc.

Ethics and Statewide Presentations from the Colorado State Office

The new BLM State Director Doug Vilsack (attending via ZOOM) gave a presentation introducing himself and touching on topics including the upcoming statewide planning efforts including the Big Game, Sage Grouse and Gunnison Sage Grouse Resource Management Plan Amendments (RMPA), , and the fallen BLM Firefighter Collin Hagan.

Roxanne Baca from the BLM Ethics Office (attending via ZOOM) gave a presentation regarding the Federal Advisory Committees Act and BLM Advisory Committees. She explained purposes and objectives, ethics responsibilities/requirements detailed in the committee charter, and charter language specific to BLM committees. Her presentation defined situations when committee members must recuse themselves from participation in discussions and decision-making.

Deputy State Director Alan Bittner (attending via ZOOM) presented information and updates for statewide planning efforts regarding Big Game and Gunnison Sage Grouse. Comments must be received by September 2, 2022 for the Big Game Amendment/EIS and more information can be found online at <https://go.usa.gov/xzXxY>. Comments for the Gunnison Sage-Grouse Resource Management Plan Amendment must be received by August 22, 2022, and more information can be found online at <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2019031/510>.

Updates from Field Managers

Dario Archuleta gave a brief update regarding the acquisition of Shaw Reservoir and the newest Press Release dated 8/16/2022 (available at <https://www.blm.gov/press-release/partners-work-together-acquire-shaw-reservoir-people-and-wildlife>). Copies of the press release were shared with in-person attendees and the link was provided to those on Zoom.

Royal Gorge Field Office- Keith Berger

- Keith summarized that the Royal Gorge Field Office manages over 600,000 acres of land and 6.8 million sub-surface acres. The Browns Canyon Monument Plan was completed in 2020 and includes both BLM and USFS. The Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area is jointly managed with Colorado Parks and Wildlife.
- The Eastern Colorado Resource Management Plan (ECRMP) is in progress. Keith discussed timeline and alternatives. More information can be found online at <https://go.usa.gov/xQcZT>.
- The Hardrock Main Pit - Development and Road Realignment Environmental Assessment was discussed. The Public Review and Comment Period has ended and finalization of the document is in progress.
- Keith talked about the Midland Hills Tunnel Improvement Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). The Midland Hills Tunnels support the railway's eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places, and these tunnels are in need of stabilization. This project includes cooperative efforts between the BLM, Chaffee County, the town of Buena Vista, etc.
- The US Army/Fort Carson has requested a Right-Of-Way (ROW) permit to conduct High Altitude Mountain Environment Training on lands managed by the Royal Gorge Field Office. An Environmental Assessment is in progress regarding this request.
- A ROW was requested by the city of Aurora, CO to access the proposed Wild Horse Reservoir near Hartsel, CO. NEPA analysis is taking place regarding this request.

San Luis Valley Field Office- Dario Archuleta

- Unauthorized use/trespass on the Lower Rio Grande area has been an ongoing issue for many years. Trespass notices and fines have been issued repeatedly and new fencing has been constructed, but problems and challenges persist. The GIS "Collector 1-2-3" program is now being used in the field to document and track unauthorized/illegal grazing use and efficiently provide photos and forms to the Range Management Specialist for drawing up Notices of Trespass.
- Dario discussed the San Luis Valley Field Office (SLVFO) Management Plan Revision. Data collection has begun and Notice of Intent is proposed to be released October 2024.
- SLVFO is taking part in a proposed land acquisition located near La Jara, Colorado. The Colorado State Land Board hopes to sell the La Jara Creek parcel to the USFS, BLM, and Colorado Parks and Wildlife to keep the area available for public use. This acquisition would align with current RMP efforts, the Biden Administration's 30x30 initiative and environmental justice goals, etc.

- Mick and Dario explained the Sangre de Cristo Dark Sky Reserve Coalition and work that is in progress to achieve Dark Sky Reserve certification. The proposed reserve would include lands managed by federal and state agencies, along with private lands.
- Other items discussed included the 7 Peaks Music Festival and anticipated dispersed camping impacts on SLVFO and the roads and trails becoming inaccessible due to recent rain events.

Public Comment Period

Cathy Cook took the floor and began the Public Comment Period at 2:58pm.

Input From Elected Officials and Their Representatives

- Erink Minks (Senator Michael Bennet's Office) did not comment during this time, but had joined the meeting via ZOOM and took part in earlier discussion.

Members of the Public

- Adam Ortega (CDA) submitted a comment via ZOOM that he did not have any public comments to contribute at this time but thanked the council.
- Dennis Crowther (BLM Grazing Permittee, Interested Public) contributed his perspective as an interested member of the public, who is also a BLM grazing permittee. He shared concerns regarding fire, trespassing livestock, how to reach members of the public who do not regularly use email/facebook/ZOOM, etc.

At 3:10pm, a final call was made for public comments prior to closing the official Public Comment Period.

Closing Remarks and Bin Items

Cathy Cook made closing remarks, went over the agenda for Day 2, and adjourned the meeting at 3:17pm.

Day 2- August 17, 2022

Members & BLM Staff Present

Ray Douglas (Park County), Arthur Koepsell (State Agency Representative), Irene Shonle (Dispersed Recreation), Curtis Howell (Outdoor Educator), April Estep (State Agency Representative), Keith Berger (BLM RGFO Field Manager), Frederick Henderson (Energy and Mineral Development), John Sztukowski (Environmental Organization), Mick Daniel (Dispersed Recreation), Stephanie Carter (BLM Rocky Mountain District Planning & Environmental Coordinator), Cathy Cook (BLM Rocky Mountain District Manager),

Kalem Lenard (BLM RGFO Assistant Field Manager & Brown's Canyon Monument Manager)

Public Present: None

Kalem Lenard (BLM RGFO) gave a brief presentation about BLM Recreation Trends, Visitor Trends, Impacts, and Management. A field trip followed. Attendees visited the Guffey Gorge/Paradise Cove and Penrose Commons BLM recreation sites. The trip illustrated the concerns with public overcrowding, dispersed camping, and associated concerns with illegal residence on public lands.

Day 3- August 18, 2022

Members & BLM Staff Present

Frederick Henderson (Energy and Mineral Development)*, John Sztukowski (Environmental Organization), Irene Shonle (Dispersed Recreation), Mick Daniel (Dispersed Recreation), April Estep (State Agency Representative), Arthur Koepsell (State Agency Representative), Stephanie Carter (BLM Rocky Mountain District Planning & Environmental Coordinator), Cathy Cook (BLM Rocky Mountain District Manager), Karla Koch (BLM RGFO Administrative Assistant), Kalem Lenard (BLM RGFO Assistant Field Manager & Brown's Canyon Monument Manager), Sean Noonan (BLM SLVFO Outdoor Recreation Planner)

Public Present: None

* Denotes online meeting attendance via ZOOM

Cathy Cook called the meeting to order at 8:14am.

Additional RGFO Updates- Kalem Lenard

Browns Canyon National Monument Update

- Rafting, kayaking, and fishing make up a majority of the recreational use at Browns Canyon National Monument. BLM is working on an Interpretation, Education, and Signing Plan and will likely use partnerships to implement the plan once complete. Updating kiosks at places like Ruby Mountain and Hecla Junction that see high visitor use are high priorities.
- Dark Sky Designation is being explored as a possibility for Browns Canyon National Monument by Friends of Browns Canyon.

- An Ethnography study is ongoing for the Browns Canyon area. BLM is working with tribes to learn more about cultural resources, significant cultural sites, and ways to help tribal youth connect with these lands. A report out from the archeologist leading the study was proposed for our Spring RAC meeting.

Chaffee County Camping and Travel Management Plan

- Areas of Chaffee County have seen unexpected, significant increases in visitor use. Places such as Shavano do not have their own Travel Management Plan, and without clearly defined designated travel routes this area has been greatly impacted by visitors creating their own routes. Similar impacts are happening with dispersed camping. Visitors are trespassing on adjacent private lands, encroaching on permitted grazing areas, leaving trash and impacting vegetation.
- Public input was received through a formal scoping process. Kalem discussed three Action Alternatives for the Travel Management Plan which included components of seasonal restrictions, closures, and also the creation of new roads.
- The Camping Management component of the plan proposes limiting camping to only designated sites in certain areas that see high visitor use and impacts. Education, monitoring, and adaptive management would be key to carrying out this plan. Alternatives were discussed for the Shavano and Pass Creek areas.
- It has been proposed to develop a business plan covering all campgrounds within RGFO (instead of individual plans for each campground) for increased consistency regarding fees and management. This would be discussed by the RAC in a future meeting.

Additional SLVFO Updates- Sean Noonan

- Sean addressed trends and concerns relating to population, climate change, capacity, durability, flexibility, and resilience.
- The Zapata Falls area has seen increased visitor use in recent years, especially during the pandemic when Great Sand Dunes NP was closed. The road was badly in need of repair and realignment. Sean showed the significant road repairs. This has prompted conversations about campground expansion, the picnic area, privately-owned RV campgrounds in the area, in order to provide the visitor services to meet demand.
- San Luis Valley Great Outdoors (SLVGO!) is a key partner in implementing the BLM Recreation Strategy of Connecting with Communities. Together, they reach all 18 communities and 6 counties within the San Luis Valley.
- SLVFO also hopes to create a new partnership with The Great Outdoors Fund that would increase recreational access and opportunity for underserved communities. The Great Outdoors Fund can assist by leveraging funding and

planning efforts. The Rio Grande Natural Area has been identified as a possible project location.

- Other SLVFO updates included a new Kiosk, interpretative signs and expanded parking area recently dedicated along the Rio Grande River. This is a result of a great partnership with the Del Norte Salazar Center through Adams State University.

Questions and discussion followed the presentation. Cathy took the floor at approximately 10:30am. She proposed having RAC meetings in the spring and fall of next year, and mentioned Federal Register requirements surrounding these meetings. Attendees gave suggestions regarding agenda topics for the next RAC meeting. Cathy requested that members consider who they would like to nominate for the chairperson position and that we can run the elections at our next meeting.

Public Comment Period

Cathy Cook announced the Public Comment Period which began at 11:00am. No elected officials or members of the public were present on ZOOM or in person to participate in this Public Comment Period. It remained open until 11:03am at which time Cathy dismissed the RAC membership. The ZOOM session remained open for another 5 minutes and then the meeting was adjourned at 11:08 am.