



**Northwest Colorado Resource Advisory Council (NW RAC) Meeting Minutes:**  
January 27, 2022

**8:04 a.m.** Meeting called to Order by Greg Larson, Upper Colorado River District Manager and NW RAC Designated Federal Official, and Mike Pritchard, Northwest Colorado RAC Chair.

**Attendees:**

**Resource Advisory Council Members:**

Shannon Chollett, Category 1	Shawn Brennan, Category 1	Scott Robertson, Category 1
Mike Pritchard, Category 2	Roy Karo, Category 2	Carl Connor, Category 2
Anthony (Tony) Vagneur, Category 2	Katie Steele, Category 3	John Justman, Category 3
Tom Jankovsky, Category 3		

Not present: Joe O'Malley

**BLM Staff:**

Chris Maestas	Hilary Boyd
Greg Larson	Patty Luby
Carrie Richardson	Bruce Sillitoe
Greg Wolfgang	Nada Culver
William Mills	Brian Klein
Larry Sandoval	Elijah Waters
Collin Ewing	Kyle Hensley
Erin Jones	Eric Coulter
Steven Hall	Heather Sauls
Whit Patterson	John (Ike) Pittman
Leah Waldner	Amanda Watkins

**Congressional Staff:**

Hilary Henry	Senator Bennet Staff
Sarah McCarthy	Senator Hickenlooper Staff

**Public/Other:**

Visitor:	Representing:	City:
Adam Ortega	Colorado Dept. of Agriculture	Broomfield
Soren Jespersen	Colorado Wildlands Project	Steamboat Springs
Scott Braden	Colorado Wildlands Project	Grand Junction
Juli Slivka	Wilderness Workshop	Carbondale

Taylor Elm	Colorado Parks and Wildlife	Grand Junction
Jeff Comstock	RAC Category 1 Resubmit	Craig
Callie Hendrickson	RAC Category 3 Resubmit	Meeker
Kirk Daehling	RAC Category 1 Resubmit	Battlement Mesa
Dennis Webb	GJ Daily Sentinel	Grand Junction

**8:12 a.m. Housekeeping and Introductions**

Nada Wolff Culver, BLM Deputy Director of Policy and Programs – addressed NW RAC members thanking them for their participation, provided a brief update on NW RAC nominations and offered an opportunity for questions from RAC members.

**8:33 a.m. Opening Remarks**

Mike Pritchard – The field trip on Wednesday was successful and informative. For those who attended, it is worth noting that we visited during a very quiet winter day. For the North Fruita Desert especially, use can be very high, crowded even, during busy spring and fall seasons when the area is popular with out-of-town visitors from Colorado and beyond.

Greg Larson – Excited to see Katie Steele’s RAC member appointment. Looking forward to future discussions.

**8:37 a.m. Field Trip Overview**

Greg Wolfgang – Recapped the field trip on Wednesday, Jan. 26. Three sites were visited. The goal of the field trip was to highlight some high-use recreation areas and develop solutions for the challenges presented within the interface between recreation, dumping, and residing on public lands. One goal is to continue to develop recreation areas and bring in responsible users.

The group departed from Grand Junction Field Office (GJFO) and the first area visited was the Grand Valley Open Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) Area, which is about 10,000 acres. The area has trailheads that attract responsible users. The group encountered people residing on public lands and a recliner. The group was joined by BLM Law Enforcement Officer (LEO) Don Love and obtained his perspective on the issues. The LEO is trying to gain compliance through education, connecting people to community services, and law enforcement. Greg emphasized the importance of partnerships with the community and adjacent landowners, such as the airport, permittees, and the event permit holders. The BLM received funding from the airport to develop the recreation area. The Grand Valley Open OHV Area has approximately 125,000 visitors per year.

The next field trip stop was the North Fruita Desert Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA). The focus in this area is on the impacts of dispersed camping and how we have evolved from dispersed to developed camping by implementing fees and

working with RAC members to mitigate dispersed camping impacts. The group at this site was joined by Fruita City Manager Mike Bennett, who provided perspective on the importance of outdoor recreation on the local community and businesses. Mr. Bennett wants to work with BLM as a partner and share resources to improve the quality of life for Fruita residents. The North Fruita Desert SRMA area currently has 115 campsites. Camping fees increased to \$20 and it is projected to generate \$276,000 in revenue annually with these fee increases and installation of more campsites to eventually have about 200 campsites total. The North Fruita Desert SRMA has approximately 107,000 visitors per year.

The last site visit was to a trailhead in McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area (NCA). This is currently a high-use area. The City of Fruita helps with some of the waste maintenance and general management. Dumping and vandalism is rare in this area. McInnis Canyon has approximately 46,000 visitors per year.

Mike Pritchard – It was wonderful to visit these trailheads and to see how the North Fruita Desert SRMA has evolved over the last few decades.

Katie Steele – 27 ¼ Road (GV OHV Area) was informational because of the variety of involvement from land managers, the airport, and the county. The LEO appears to be handling the squatting issues effectively. Katie wanted to know about signage that could advise the public of possible grazing and multi-use conflicts.

Greg Wolfgang – Emphasized the importance of signage and language that addresses potential conflicts on multi-use trail systems, one example is signage on the Palisade Plunge Trail.

Scott Robertson – Very appreciative to attend the field trip and is impressed to see what the GJFO has done with these areas over the years. Enlightened to see the accommodations put in place by the BLM and hopes this will improve attitudes towards the BLM.

Mike Pritchard – For Special Recreation Management Areas (SRMAs) - concentrated recreational use can be useful for deterring conflicts elsewhere on public lands. Land for grazing and wildlife can be set aside in a different area.

John Justman – Observed large crowds at the North Fruita Desert SRMA.

Tom Jankovsky – Asked how much of the recreation fee revenue goes to the local BLM office vs. federal general fund.

Greg Wolfgang – All money collected from special recreation permits and recreation fees stay at the local office and must be expended within the fee area. The money goes to maintenance/cleaning of facilities, hiring staff, and education/outreach. The land sale from the airport – the motocross track already existed, and the money was used for the building of jumps and other improvements. The funding was supplemented by the BLM

engineering program and state park money.

Mike Pritchard – Emphasized the importance of community partners with the BLM to advance and improve trail systems, based on the limited resources of the BLM.

Greg Larson – Emphasized the importance of creating concentrated high-value opportunities that meet public demand for new routes and combat dumping.

**9:15 a.m. Field Manager Updates (See NW RAC Consolidated Manager Reports for all updates)**

**White River Field Office (WRFO) (Meeker)**

Field Office Manager Bill Mills reviewed field office updates.

Tom Jankovsky – Asked about the status of Q1 leases in conjunction with Royal Gorge Field Office (RGFO).

Bill Mills – Q1 leases are business as usual, despite climate concerns.

Callie Hendrickson – Concerned about the significant amounts of dead roots in Piceance East Douglas area. The land appears to be turning into a desert. Thank you for removing horse access from the area.

**Little Snake Field Office (LSFO) (Craig)**

Field Office Manager Bruce Sillitoe reviewed field office updates.

**Kremmling Field Office (KFO) (Kremmling)**

Acting Field Office Manager Kyle Hensley reviewed field office updates.

Kyle Hensley – BLM proposes to exchange nine parcels, totaling 1489 acres in Grand County (Blue Valley Land Exchange).

Kyle Hensley – We are seeing significant increases in boating and camping within the Upper Colorado River Recreation Area. We plan to add vault toilets, picnic tables, and we are working on a business plan to increase fees. Soon we will have a list to select from for the Associate Field Manager position.

**9:47 a.m. Break**

**9:57 a.m. Resume Field Manager Updates**

**Upper Colorado River District (UCRD) (Grand Junction)**

Erin Jones – Looking for creative strategies for a range of alternatives as it pertains to areas that are open and closed to oil and gas leasing.

Tom Jankovsky – Concerned about how the analysis will be conducted for downstream emissions.

Erin Jones – We will have our best subject matter experts conduct that analysis with support from our Colorado State Office. BLM is still streamlining the documents and the timelines are currently flexible.

Shawn Brennan – Offered to help obtain the most current data on actual emissions.

### **Grand Junction Field Office (GJFO) (Grand Junction)**

GJFO Field Office Manager, Greg Wolfgang reviewed field manager updates.

Greg Wolfgang – Asked the RAC to help identify parcels for river access and for acquiring land using the land and water conservation fund.

Tom Jankovsky – More public land decreases county tax revenue. Emphasized the importance of a good balance between private and public land.

Jeff Comstock – Emphasized the importance of funding to remove small, isolated BLM parcels that are on the disposal lists.

Carl Connor – Agreed that disposing these parcels would boost tax revenue.

Greg Wolfgang – Wants input from RAC in developing alternatives to improve outreach for Zone L travel management.

Mike Pritchard – asked about public comments on e-bikes at North Fruita Desert SRMA.

Greg Wolfgang – 70% of the public are in favor of e-bikes at North Fruita Desert SRMA. The current data does not show a significant difference in impact for the various classes of e-bikes.

Katie Steele – Asked about the status of the CR 200 High Lonesome Ranch court decision.

Greg Wolfgang – CR 200 access remains open to the public.

### **McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area (NCA) (Fruita)**

Associate District Manager Collin Ewing reviewed NCA updates.

### **Colorado River Valley Field Office (CRVO) (Silt)**

Field Office Manager Larry Sandoval reviewed field office updates.

Larry Sandoval – The pilot program with virtual fencing (or “Vence”), in collaboration with Pat Luark, Natural Resources Conservation Service and United States Forest Service last year was a great success. Looking for RAC input for concerns with new trails at Consolidated Reservoir, The Crown, Parachute, and Grand Hogback.

**10:35 a.m. Greater Sage Grouse Update (See GRSC Scoping for briefing slides)**

BLM Colorado Sage Grouse Coordinator Leah Waldner provided an update on Greater Sage Grouse (GRSG).

Leah Waldner – How to submit comments in ePlanning: <https://go.usa.gov/xMMd>. Submit comments by mail: *BLM – Utah State Office, Attn: Patricia Deibert, 440 W 200 S, Suite 500, Salt Lake City, UT, 84101*. Comments must be received by 2/8/2022.

Jeff Comstock – This has been a world class effort put forth to date. Hopes that Colorado continues to use the habitat maps that cost over \$1 million. Northwest Colorado regulations have forced renewables onto private land, not public land, causing habitat fragmentation on private land.

John Justman – Asked if wolves are a significant GRSG predator.

Leah Waldner - Biggest predation issues are related to common ravens, which prey on eggs and chicks. Coyotes prey on GRSG as well. There is not a lot of literature on wolf predation on GRSG. BLM manages habitat rather than wildlife, so its focus is on reducing predation on public lands by providing cover for GRSG. Some other agency programs are in place, such as shooting coyotes and poisoning ravens.

Tom Jankovsky – Data shows that livestock grazing can improve GRSG habitat. Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) nomination for habitat adds more layers of rules and regulations.

Leah Waldner – ACEC’s don’t always add more regulations. There are currently no ACEC’s for GRSG. This is worth future conversations.

Katie Steele – Asked if the presentation map shows occupied or potential GRSG habitat, or both.

Leah Waldner – The map has a wide range of planning effort areas. Known habitat is very broad and some areas on the map may not be habitat.

Tony Vagneur – Recommends getting in contact with the Wildlife Biodiversity Initiative, which has mapped wildlife corridors for big game, sheep, etc. This resource may be helpful for GRSG research.

**11:15 a.m. CRVFO / East Fork Cattle Grazing Discussion (See CRVO East Fork Cattle Grazing for briefing slides)**

Larry Sandoval – New developments for the project: the largest permit holder, Jack Ferris, is planning on selling his permits to a sheep operator and an investment company, unknown if the investment company will run livestock.

Larry Sandoval – reviewed the updates (see attachment). Asking RAC for thoughts on fencing alternatives. Seeing success with enclosure fencing. We were planning on having a Sheep Alternative and an alternative that reduced cattle by 75%.

Mike Pritchard – Asked if Larry is foreseeing a future in sheep grazing.

Larry Sandoval – The sheep alternative is anticipated to be the proposed action if the sale goes through.

Tony Vagneur – Asked if there was a cow camp at the top of the study area.

Larry Sandoval – There is a cow camp. Jack Ferris has been hauling water and moving cows.

Katie Steele – Asked about concerns with potential interactions with native sheep.

Hilary Boyd – The Roan Plateau is not a part of the bighorn core range. It is extremely rare to see bighorn in this area.

Callie Hendrickson – Asked if the BLM will do a Section 8 consultation and if the Animal Unit Months (AUMs) will change.

John (Ike) Pittman – There is no section 8 currently, but there is potential for one. No planned changes to the AUMs. Sheep are controlled in a denser group. The sheep permittee is in the next-door allotment. The BLM would use a pasture previously used by cattle for a much shorter period.

Hilary Boyd – In this area, sheep have different biological behaviors than cows. Sheep typically will use steep slopes that cows will not. Cows tend to stay in riparian bottoms. Sheep stay in impacted areas for shorter durations. The sheep go to riparian areas to drink and move on. We have seen remarkable recoveries in impacted areas with sheep. We were not seeing the bank alterations with sheep, and sheep eat weeds that cattle do not eat.

Larry Sandoval – documents for this project are not on ePlanning yet.

Tom Jankovsky – Asked if there were isolated native trout species above the waterfalls in East Parachute Creek.

Hilary Boyd – We have had a lot of conversations with Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) about native trout in this area. Degraded systems and water quality issues could be having negative impacts on trout. Bank alteration exposes soil, bare ground, and weeds, contributing to erosion and impacts on downstream areas.

Mike Pritchard – Hopeful that this conversion from cattle to sheep will have a positive impact on land health.

Larry Sandoval – There is enough forage in this area to sustain sheep.

Greg Larson – Asked if other BLM staff in the meeting had questions for the RAC on grazing more generally.

**11:52 a.m. Lunch**

**1:15 p.m. Recreation Management Discussion – LSFO Travel Management (See LSFO Recreation RAC Presentation for briefing slides)**

Whit Patterson described the planning and implementation process for the LSFO Travel Management Plan.

Tom Jankovsky – Expressed concern regarding 55 areas designated as Land with Wilderness Characteristics (LWC). Asked if some of these should be pulled off.

Whit Patterson – These areas are for inventory units only, to assess their wilderness characteristics, and are not managed as wilderness areas or to protect their characteristics.

Mike Pritchard – Asked for clarification on how LWCs, SRMAs, and Extensive Recreation Management Areas (ERMAs) are similar and different.

Whit Patterson – Emphasized that in this process, LWC only refers to an inventory of characteristics, not management. They are used for analyzing data and making decisions and are not designations.

Jeff Comstock – These are not proposed wilderness areas.

John Justman – Expressed concern that there are too many Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) in the Grand Junction area. They are “out of control” and never passed by Congress.

Bruce Sillitoe – Clarified the difference between WSAs and LWCs. LWCs are important for inventory and data on environmental changes over time.

Whit Patterson – A contractor will be working with the BLM to develop these rec areas. We are open to letting the community lead the way and speed up the process. The Northwest Colorado Outdoor Coalition is becoming a regional partner with CPW to help facilitate conservation and



recreation. A conference in Vail in May will help keep the community involved in our process. How can the RAC assist in building capacity with partners at LSFO for recreational planning?

Roy Karo – Asked for clarification on the type of powerlines through Moffat County that provide electricity to Craig.

Bruce Sillitoe- The TransWest Express (TWE) Transmission Project is a high-voltage electric transmission system that will deliver renewable wind energy (direct current) produced in Wyoming to the Desert Southwest region (California, Nevada, Arizona). TWE will provide the transmission infrastructure and transmission capacity necessary to deliver approximately 20,000 GWh/yr.

PacifiCorp will construct the Energy Gateway Transmission Expansion, a 500-kilovolt (kV), overhead, single-circuit, alternating-current transmission line. The project extends approximately 425 miles (230 miles on BLM lands) beginning near Medicine Bow, Carbon County, Wyoming, at the Aeolus Substation to the Clover Substation near Mona, Utah.

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

Greg Larson – Katie Steele’s RAC application was approved on January 19, 2022. We now have a quorum with full attendance. There are nine application packages in. Also, as a reminder the public comments section of the RAC meeting is meant to hear from the public, not as a two-way dialogue.

Soren Jespersen (CO Wildlands Project) - Commended LSFO’s efforts to reach out to the community for their efforts. There is an opportunity for the NW Outdoor Coalition to partner with the BLM to help with amenity needs and to deal with changes occurring on public lands. The Coalition is focused on recreation management. Appreciative of the efforts between Moffat County and BLM.

Hilary Henry (Senator Bennett’s Office) - In regard to the bipartisan infrastructure law, joint chiefs land partner initiative, tribal water, emergency watershed protection program, and fund remediation of orphan wells: how can Senator Bennett’s office advocate for these associated needs? The Restoration Partnership Act from last April: water to watersheds to increase restoration efforts and wildfire mitigation by building stronger partnerships between federal agencies and communities. Build Back Better: \$27 billion for conservation that addresses the changes we are seeing in our forests. Omnibus appropriations going through – additional funding for BLM for methane capture and waste methane from old coal mines. The regulatory process for BLM is pursuing two tracks on this: 1) Thompson Divide methane either destroyed or reused by burning off and powering homes 2) Asked by DOI to expand work on methane destruction projects and capture policy.

Sarah McCarthy (Senator Hickenlooper’s Office) - Infrastructure package: state allocations coming out next week for orphan well program. Under 650 orphan wells in Colorado and 19,000 low-producing wells, many of those will become orphan wells. Recharge Act: Builds grid resiliency and asking for more interaction on BLM lands. Leading on a bill that would

extend Upper Colorado and San Juan endangered fish recovery program – the bill extends the program for one more year. Hoping to co-lead this effort with Senator Romney’s office.

**Dates for Future Meetings:**

Wednesday, 5/25/2022: North Sand Hills field trip

Thursday, 5/26/2022: virtual meeting

Wednesday, 9/14/2022: CRVFO virtual fencing field trip

Thursday, 9/15/2022: virtual meeting

**2:17 p.m. Open Discussion**

Greg Larson – Asked how well the BLM staff did on soliciting input on the issues presented today and on the field trip.

Tom Jankovsky – Expressed the need to clarify the process for obtaining resolutions.

Katie Steele – Suggested that field managers request RAC input ahead of time on their topics so the RAC can do some research and do a better job at providing feedback during the meetings.

Kirk Daehling – It would be helpful to have a lead-off for the general expectations and protocols at the beginning of each meeting.

Mike Pritchard – Land use plans and processes are very complicated. It’s difficult to provide RAC feedback on travel management plans due to the complexity of the projects.

Greg Larson – Suggested soliciting recommendations from the RAC that are even more valuable by asking more specific questions in the future.

Mike Pritchard – Disposal lists are not being acted upon. Requesting action and resolutions on the part of the BLM.

Greg Larson – Requested input from the RAC on where to prioritize the disposal parcels.

Mike Pritchard – Asked if there were national policies on tackling wild horse and land disposal resolutions.

Tom Jankovsky – Asked if new well permits go through the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission (COGCC) and/or BLM.

Greg Larson – Clarified that new permits go through both the COGCC and BLM.

**2:30 p.m. Closing Comments**

Mike Pritchard – Appreciates the BLM staff for the hard work on a diversity of projects.

Greg Larson – Appreciates the RAC members and members of the public for their time and efforts.

Elijah Waters - Thanked everyone for all of the great input.

**2:35 p.m.    Adjournment**

Mike Pritchard adjourned the meeting.