



## Colorado Statewide Resource Advisory Council (RAC) Meeting Minutes

March 29, 2023

Location: Glenwood Springs, CO

### RAC Members:

Name	Location	RAC	Cat.	Interest Represented
Shannon Chollett	Rifle	NW	I	Energy and Minerals
Jeff Comstock	Craig	NW	I	Rights-of-Way Interests
Scott Robertson	Rangely	NW	I	Federal Grazing
Kirk Daehling	Battlement Mesa	NW	I	Energy and Minerals
Carl Conner	Grand Junction	NW	II	Archaeological and Historical Interests
Roy Karo	Grand Junction	NW	II	Dispersed Recreation
Anthony Vagneur	Woody Creek	NW	II	Federal Grazing
Scott Braden	Grand Junction	NW	III	Public-at-Large
Tom Jankovsky	Glenwood Springs	NW	III	Elected Official
John Justman	Fruita	NW	III	Public-at-Large
Katie Steele	Grand Junction	NW	III	Public-at-Large
Mark Roeber	Paonia	SW	I	Federal Grazing and Ranching
Kathy Welt	Hotchkiss	SW	I	(SW Co-Chair) Energy and Minerals
Jim Haugsness	Montrose	SW	II	Dispersed Recreation
Jon Holst	Durango	SW	II	Environmental Organizations
Tif Rodriguez	Dolores	SW	II	(SW Co-Chair) Wild Horses and Burros
Wendell Koontz	Hotchkiss	SW	III	Elected Official
Matt Thorpe	Durango	SW	III	State Agency Representative
<b>Absent:</b> Ben Katz	Paonia	SW	II	Environmental Organizations
<b>Absent:</b> Starr Jamison	Telluride	SW	III	Public-at-Large
Michael Daniel		RM	II	Dispersed Recreation
Loretta Mitson	Manassa	RM	II	Archaeological Interests
John Sztukowski		RM	II	Environmental Organizations
Kent Wood	Chaffee County	RM	III	Public-at-Large
<b>Absent:</b> Curtis Howell		RM	I	Commercial Recreation
<b>Absent:</b> Irene Shonle		RM	II	Dispersed Recreation
<b>Absent:</b> Ray Douglas		RM	III	Elected Official
<b>Absent:</b> Lawrence Pacheco		RM	III	Public-at-Large
<b>Absent:</b> Travis Black		RM	III	State Agency Representative

### Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Staff:

Name	Title	Office
Doug Vilsack	State Director	Colorado State Office

Gordon Toevs	Associate State Director	Colorado State Office
Alan Bittner	Deputy SD, Resources	Colorado State Office
Steven Hall	Communications Director	Colorado State Office
Kirby Shedlowski	Public Affairs	Colorado State Office
Brittany Sprout	Public Affairs	Colorado State Office
Elijah Waters	District Manager	Northwest District
Bill Mills	Field Manager	White River Field Office
Steve Leonard	Field Manager (Acting)	Kremmling Field Office
Bruce Sillitoe	Field Manager	Little Snake Field Office
Greg Larson	District Manager	Upper Colorado River District
Erin Jones	Associate District Manager	Upper Colorado River District
Stacey Colón	NEPA Coordinator	Upper Colorado River District
Ryan Snyder	Assistant Field Manager	Colorado River Valley Field Office
Greg Wolfgang	Field Manager	Grand Junction Field Office
Amy Carmichael	Assistant Field Manager	Grand Junction Field Office
Stephanie Connolly	District Manager	Southwest District
Maggie Magee	Public Affairs Officer	Southwest District
Suzanne Copping	Field Manager	Uncompahgre Field Office
Jon Kaminsky	Field Manager	Gunnison Field Office
Derek Padilla	Field Manager (Acting)	Tres Rios Field Office
Ray O'Neil	Monument Manager	Canyons of the Ancients NM
Cathy Cook	District Manager	Rocky Mountain District
Chris Ziegler	Associate District Manager	Rocky Mountain District
Levi Spellman	Public Affairs Officer	Rocky Mountain District
Keith Berger	Field Manager	Royal Gorge Field Office
Kalem Lenard	Assistant Field Manager	Royal Gorge Field Office

**Congressional Staff Attendees:**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Office</b>
Matt Kirecker	Senator Bennet
Clarice Navarro	Representative Boebert
Naomi Dobbs	Representative Boebert
McKenna Farley	Representative Boebert
Raven Finegan	Representative Boebert
Janeth Stancl	Senator Hickenlooper

**Public Attendees:**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Office</b>
Jeff Benson	Jackson County Commissioner / Walden Fire Chief (panel member)
Karen DiBari	Conservation Consultant
Josh Dille	CO State Forest
Greg Felt	Chaffee County Commissioner (panel member)
Ted Harter	Montcrief Ranches (panel member)
Chad Hixon	Trails Preservation Alliance

Fletcher Jacobs	Colorado Parks and Wildlife, State Trails Program (panel member)
Scott Jones	Trails Preservation Alliance / CO OHV Coalition (panel member)
Arthur Koepsell	Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission
Tim Mauck	CO Department of Natural Resources (panel member)
Adam Ortega	Colorado Department of Agriculture
Mike Pritchard	Roaring Fork Mountain Bike Association (panel member)
Tom Waters	Colorado Parks and Wildlife (panel member)
Shawn Brennan	Terra Energy Partners

## Meeting Minutes

### **Agenda Item: Housekeeping, Introductions, and Opening Remarks**

**Presenters:** Kirby Shedlowski, Colorado State Office Public Affairs; Doug Vilsack, Colorado State Director; RAC members; BLM staff; interested publics.

Kirby Shedlowski welcomed attendees, facilitated introductions, provided an overview of the agenda and discussed logistics and “housekeeping” items for the hybrid meeting. State Director Doug Vilsack welcomed the RAC members, BLM staff and interested publics to the 2023 statewide RAC. He highlighted the world-class recreational opportunities on public lands in Colorado, including off-highway vehicle (OHV) opportunities; destinations for mountain biking, rock climbing, and camping; recreational hunting, fishing and sport shooting; and river recreation. Appropriated funding for recreation BLM-wide is about \$55 million, which even when supplemented with fee revenue, National Conservation Lands System funding and wilderness funding, is not adequate to meet the challenges of increased visitation and rising costs. He challenged the RAC to help BLM Colorado fill the “ten million dollar bucket” – the gap between BLM Colorado’s recreation funding and what the state needs to run a robust recreation program – through innovative fund generating and partnering, and build a recreation program that serves the needs of all of its users.

### **Agenda Item: Panel – Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area (AHRA) Success Story**

**Facilitator:** Levi Spellman, Rocky Mountain District Public Affairs Officer

**Panelists:** Greg Felt, Chaffee County Commissioner; Tom Waters, Colorado Parks and Wildlife; Kalem Lenard, Royal Gorge Field Office Assistant Field Manager

The panel discussed the challenges and rewards in partnering to create and manage the AHRA. Topics included lands management in a multi-agency environment; balancing missions, procedures and regulations; and the public response to the partnership among the county, the BLM, and Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW). The panel members acknowledged the challenges of developing and implementing a management structure, determining roles and responsibilities, enabling permitting and revenue collection and disbursement, and ensuring compliance with requirements for each partner. They highlighted the role of open communication, trust, education, and leadership in building successful partnerships with each other, commercial interests, and the recreating public, and were unanimous in the opinion that the AHRA was a worthwhile venture and a model for future partnerships elsewhere in Colorado and beyond.

**Agenda Item: Panel – OHV and Trails Grants Model Success Story**

**Facilitators:** Greg Wolfgang, Grand Junction Field Office Field Manager; Amy Carmichael, Grand Junction Field Office Assistant Field Manager (Recreation)

**Panelists:** Fletcher Jacobs, State Trails Program, Colorado Parks and Wildlife; Mike Pritchard, Roaring Fork Mountain Bike Association; Scott Jones, Land Access Consulting.

Facilitators and panelists provided background on the CPW OHV sticker program, which collects funds for the operation of more than 225,000 OHVs each year. Collections from the program fund \$60 million in grants to numerous agencies and partnering organizations, and the funds supplement limited appropriated funding to allow BLM field offices to purchase equipment, to hire additional personnel for constructing and maintaining trails, monitoring and restoring impacted resources, and do proactive work to improve the user experience. Panelists provided examples of key partnerships with the Grand Mesa Jeep Club, Western Slope ATV Association, and the Western Colorado Conservation Corps, and specific projects, including Gibbler Gulch. Panelists discussed the potential for having bicycle users participate in similar programs, how a grants program could be put to work to develop and improve non-motorized recreation opportunities in an environment of rising costs, and challenges with how to equitably include all non-motorized users in a fee program.

**Agenda Item: Panel – Partnerships for Success: Managing for Recreation Growth**

**Facilitators:** Elijah Waters, Northwest District Manager

**Panelists:** Jeff Benson, Jackson County Commissioner/Walden Fire Chief; Ted Harter, Montcrief Ranches; Matt Thorpe, Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Elijah Waters described the current status of recreation in Colorado as an \$11.6 billion industry that has seen increases of between 25% and 50% since 2019 in almost every type of use, with snow activities seeing the sole decrease. The panelists discussed the impacts of increased visitation on resources, local economies, and operating costs. In general, facilities, trails, and recreation areas were not designed for current levels of visitation, and law enforcement, emergency response, and land management agencies are not staffed to adequately maintain, patrol, and protect resources in heavily-visited areas. Conflicts between user interests, such as bikers and ranchers, have become more common, and panelists identified the need for robust internal and external communication among agencies, increased education and interaction with the visiting public, a need to coordinate and increase law enforcement to improve public safety, the visitor experience, and the BLM’s multiple use mandate. The RAC engaged the panel with several suggestions and questions on law enforcement, with a consensus that a greater presence is needed on public lands.

**Agenda Item: The Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA): Background and Partnership Opportunities**

**Facilitator:** Alan Bittner, Colorado Deputy State Director for Resources

**Presenters:** Doug Vilsack, Colorado State Director; Tim Mauck, Colorado Department of Natural Resources; Ray O’Neil, Monument Manager, Canyons of the Ancients National Monument; Stephen Leonard, Acting Field Manager, Kremmling Field Office; Kalem Lenard, Assistant Field Manager, Royal Gorge Field Office

**Topic 1: FLREA Overview.** Alan Bittner presented on the RAC’s role in recreation, with an emphasis on public involvement during the fee proposal process and the range of documents required for fee proposals. Three offices – the Uncompahgre and Royal Gorge Field Offices and the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area – are developing new business plans to set or increase fees for recreational uses, and the RAC will be called upon to affirm, modify, or not affirm each plan in the coming year. The BLM is required to apply 80% of fees to the site from which they are collected; BLM Colorado applies 100% back to the site where fees are collected.

**Topic 2: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Recreation Strategy.** Doug Vilsack re-emphasized his introductory points on developing a recreation program for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Topic 3: Keep Colorado Wild Pass (KCWP).** Timothy Mauck presented on the KCWP and how the program could benefit Federal recreation programs, and the county search and rescue programs that serve public lands, within the next three years using search and rescue and “overflow” funding from the program. At the 12-week mark, about 30% of license plate registrants are opting in to the KCWP. Mauck and Vilsack explained the rationale behind making the program opt-out, and they encouraged attendees to start exploring opportunities for Federal-State partnerships, including those presented in the topics that follow. Implementation of the following proposals would not occur until KCWP funding stabilizes in about three years, and the proposals are still in their preliminary stages.

**Topic 4: Canyons of the Ancients National Monument KCWP Proposal.** Monument Manager Ray O’Neil presented a preliminary proposal to waive the Canyons of the Ancients National Monument’s (CANM) museum entry fee for KCWP-holders in exchange for funding from program, starting at \$110,000 annually. The museum entry fee is presently set at \$7 per visitor, and though CANM is operating below its maximum projected carrying capacity, the BLM believes revenue from the single-entry fee will not increase with increased visitation. A KCWP partnership would encourage local residents to stay opted-in to the program and boost awareness and visitation that would benefit the state and the BLM. The BLM has conducted outreach with 26 affiliated tribes and the Montezuma County Board of Commissioners and has not received any concerns.

**Topic 5: North Sand Hills KCWP Proposal.** Acting Kremmling Field Manager Steve Leonard briefed a preliminary proposal for applying the KCWP to the North Sand Hills OHV Area. The North Sand Hills see visitation of about 1,500 per weekend, and 20,000 per year. The proposal would introduce a \$10 day use fee or \$100 annual fee to the area that would be waived for KCWP holders, and apply an overnight camping fee for overnight use with or without the pass. The BLM would introduce several amenities to the existing vault toilets, including trash removal, fire rings, picnic tables and staging areas. The state would benefit from the user value added to the purchase of the pass, as the state does not have an extensive network of OHV areas, and the BLM proposed to receive \$200,000 annually from the program to support the additional amenities and manage the resource.

**Topic 6: Guffy Gorge KCWP Case Study.** Royal Gorge Field Office Assistant Field Manager Kalem Lenard presented Guffy Gorge (aka Paradise Cove) as a counterpoint case study. The

area has seen a sharp increase in visitation during and post-COVID, increased destruction of riparian vegetation and the need to provide seven-day-per-week coverage throughout the summer to manage fee collection, parking, and site cleanliness, and to enforce alcohol and marijuana prohibitions. Lenard presented Guffy Gorge as an example of how BLM is analyzing potential opportunities, recognizing that it was not a likely candidate for partnering with the KCWP program

**Agenda Item: Facilitated Discussion**

**Presenters:** Doug Vilsack, Colorado State Director; BLM Staff; RAC Members.

Doug Vilsack facilitated a conversation on the direction of recreation programs in BLM Colorado, starting with how to fill the “ten million dollar bucket” – the funding gap that will need to be filled to implement a program that will serve the recreating public on BLM lands in Colorado. RAC members emphasized the need for the RAC to approve fees, considering both the appropriate amount and source. RAC members observed that there is a shift from resource extraction to recreation on public lands, and that a culture shift within the BLM will be needed. Suggestions included requesting more appropriated funds, increasing fees, and soliciting donated funds from individuals or from a foundation dedicated to BLM lands; and managing visitation, proactive development of recreation sites and amenities, and “hardening” the most frequently visited sites. RAC members were in general agreement that current funding is inadequate to support recreation, but also that the public lands are undervalued by the public and the agency, and that there is an imbalance in the sense of ownership versus responsibility seen in some of the visiting public. RAC members and BLM staff also discussed the status of the BLM Headquarters move and the status of pending RAC appointments.

**Agenda Item: Public Comment**

**Presenters:** Kirby Shedlowski, BLM Colorado Public Affairs

McKenna Farley from Representative Lauren Boebert’s office informed the RAC members that her office was preparing a letter to the Secretary of the Interior concerning RAC appointments. There were no other commenters, and Kirby Shedlowski closed the comment period.

**Agenda Item: Closing Remarks**

**Presenters:** Doug Vilsack, Colorado State Director; Kirby Shedlowski, Colorado State Office Public Affairs; RAC members.

Doug Vilsack thanked the RAC members, BLM staff, and interested publics for their insight on approaching rethinking the recreation program at the state level and nationally. He reaffirmed the BLM’s commitment to considering fee proposals, donations and partnership with the RAC’s input, and to filling the funding gap to keep up with the increase in recreation in Colorado. Kirby Shedlowski provided reminders for the regional RAC times and locations for March 30 and adjourned the meeting at 4:15 pm.