



U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management

## Northwest Resource Advisory Council (RAC) Meeting Minutes

**June 22, 2023**

**Location:** Kremmling, CO

### RAC Members

Name	Location	Cat.	Interest Represented
Shawn Brennan	Glenwood Springs	I	Energy & Minerals
Shannon Chollett	Rifle	I	Energy & Minerals
Jeff Comstock	Craig	I	Rights-of-Way Interests
Kirk Daehling	Battlement Mesa	I	Energy & Minerals
Scott Robertson	Rangely	I	Federal Grazing
Carl Conner	Grand Junction	II	Archaeological & Historical Interests
Roy Karo	Grand Junction	II	Dispersed Recreation
Scott Braden	Grand Junction	III	Public-at-Large
Tom Jankovsky	Glenwood Springs	III	Elected Official
John Justman	Fruita	III	Public-at-Large
Kris Middendorf	Steamboat Springs	III	Colorado Parks and Wildlife
Katie Steele	Grand Junction	III	Public-at-Large
Absent: Hattie Johnson	Carbondale	II	Dispersed Recreation
Absent: Beatriz Soto Ruvalcaba	Glenwood Springs	II	Environmental Organizations
Absent: Anthony Vagneur	Woody Creek	II	Dispersed Recreation

### Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Staff

Name	Title	Office
Kyle Arnold	Assistant Field Manager	White River Field Office
Olivia Bruce-Blake	Acting Public Affairs Officer	Upper Colorado River District
Jacob Casey	Acting Recreation Planner	Colorado River Valley Field Office
Alan Czepinski	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Colorado River Valley Field Office
Jamie Dahlkemper	Assistant Field Manager	Kremmling Field Office
Tim Finger	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Colorado State Office
Erin Jones	Associate District Manager	Upper Colorado River District
Amber Koski	NCA Manager	Grand Junction Field Office
Greg Larson	District Manager	Upper Colorado River District
Steve Leonard	Field Manager	Kremmling Field Office
Laria Lovec	Acting Field Manager	Little Snake Field Office
Bill Mills	Field Manager	White River Field Office

John Monkouski	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Kremmling Field Office
Erin Paulson	Biological Field Technician	Kremmling Field Office
Isaac Pitman	Assistant Field Manager	Grand junction Field Office
Larry Sandoval	Field Manager	Colorado River Valley Field Office
Doug Vilsack	State Director	Colorado State Office
Elijah Waters	District Manager	Northwest District Office
Greg Wolfgang	Field Manager	Grand Junction Field Office

### **Congressional Staff Attendees**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Office</b>
Julie Sutor	Representative Neguse
Raven Finegan	Representative Boebert

### **Public Attendees**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Office</b>
Tara Alatorre	Ski-Hi News

## **Meeting Minutes**

### **Agenda Item: House Keeping, Introductions, and Opening Remarks**

Facilitator: Greg Larson, Elijah Waters

Greg Larson welcomed RAC attendees, facilitated introductions, provided an overview of the agenda, and discussed logistics and “housekeeping” items for the day. He highlighted this meeting was the first time in years to have a full RAC, aligning well with the timing to elect a new Chair. Greg Larson opened the floor for anyone interested in serving as the new/interim RAC Chair, in which Scott Braden volunteered to serve as interim for the meeting.

### **Agenda Item: Review and Discuss the Upper Colorado River Field Trip**

Facilitator: Greg Larson, Steven Leonard

Elijah Waters and Steve Leonard noted the high points of the Upper Colorado River rafting field trip the previous day, pointing out the trip occurred mid-week – not on a busy weekend. The boat launch was already busy and full of river recreators, leading to the main discussion surrounding the need to mitigate ecological and safety conflicts. Recreation along the Colorado River has dramatically increased in recent years, growing from 7.5 million to 10.5 million recreators in just a few years.

Due to this influx of visitors, RAC members suggested that it may be time to set limitations on the number of recreators permitted daily. Campsite fees for Radium and State Bridge were discussed. The group then discussed the reservation process and ideas they had for improvements of the system. The group discussed recreators booking campsites and never showing up and possible solutions to mitigate this issue. These possible solutions included a non-use fee or a deposit system to incentivize people to show up to their reservation or to cancel their reservation so the site can be reserved by other users.

### **Agenda Item: Management of Upper Colorado River Recreation and combined Colorado River**

## **Business Plan and Fee Proposal**

Facilitator: John Monkouski, Alan Czepinski

John Monkouski and Alan Czepinski presented on Management of recreation on the Upper Colorado River and the growing demand on the river's natural resources, as tourism and recreation has increased over the past decade. Employing an adaptive management strategy, BLM staff proposed the utilization of a Carrying Capacity Study that will be contracted for the Upper Colorado River to maintain the desired recreation management objectives for targeted activities, experiences, and benefits identified in the respective Resource Management Plans. These are directly related to the Physical, Social and Administrative Recreation Setting Characteristics the SRMA is managed for to support a well-functioning ecosystem and recreational experience for all. The Carrying Capacity Study is not a decision but a tool to provide additional information to assist in future management decisions related to current use levels and potential impacts of future uses. Fees for Kremmling Field Office (KFO) downstream to Colorado River Valley Field Office (CRVFO) would be matched to protect the Upper River and riparian areas, not funnel more traffic downstream to free put-in sites. Construction of new facilities and additional improvements at sites for KFO and CRVFO would maintain access without congestion at existing sites and reduce resource impacts.

BLM employees and the RAC members then began discussing the proposed fees, highlighting accessibility and equity in their conversation. An initial draft fee proposal was presented to the RAC in September 2022, with the RAC identifying those proposed fees were too low. The updated increased fees were proposed in the Draft Business Plan as follows, (1) \$10 for a normal vehicle, (2) \$5 for a bike or motorcycle, and (3) \$20 for a high-capacity vehicle (16+ individuals). Kirk Daehling motioned to vote on the proposed Upper Colorado River Business Plan and Fee Proposal as it is written. Jeff Comstock asked to amend the motion, agreeing to approve the fees as proposed, with the caveat that the BLM has the discretion to raise the fees within a set limit, adjusting for the current Consumer Price Index (CPI) without returning to the RAC for approval. The RAC voted to accept the proposed business plan, giving the BLM the discretion to raise their fees without returning to the RAC for approval within the following ranges: \$10 to \$15 for a normal vehicle, \$5 to \$10 for a bike or motorcycle, and \$20 to \$30 for a high-capacity vehicle, based on the 2023 Consumer Price Index (CPI). Fees would be initially implemented at the lower proposed fee schedule. The CPI would be utilized in outlying years to increase fees as needed, with CPI escalation allowed above any inflationary adjustment above "2023 dollars".

The BLM would utilize these fees to hire additional seasonal employees to help increase fee compliance, maintain day-use areas, maintain campsites, implement and manage the on-river camping permit system, and create a larger employee presence on BLM river access points. The RAC requested that the BLM increase their day use fees moving forward and that as they do, their expectations for public education and upkeep at the recreation locations will increase.

## **Agenda Item: Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area**

Facilitator: Amber Koski

Amber Koski introduced the proposed Business Plan for the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area (NCA), discussing the Environmental Analysis associated with the construction of campsites within the Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA). This presentation highlighted

the need for this Business Plan to help provide a quality recreation experience for visitors to the NCA. The RAC was interested to learn more about the carrying capacity of this stretch of river and how the BLM planned on educating the public on sustainable recreation in this area.

Advice and concern from the Council highlighted utilizing the Ruby-Horsethief Business Plan and Fee Proposal as a guideline for this project, including the sliding fee scale based on CPI. RAC members suggested setting a premium on ideal campsites alongside the river and hiring enough personnel to patrol river camps for the true “heartbeat number” residing in sites.

### **Agenda Item: Low Elevation Grazing Allotments Update**

Facilitator: Isaac Pitman

Isaac Pitman provided updates on low elevation grazing allotments that do not meet land health standards, primarily because of an abundance of cheatgrass. He explained how the BLM is looking into ways to mitigate this issue and identifying how or if these allotments can meet land health standards in the future.

He also discussed conservation measures for allotments identified in higher elevations zones that contain threatened or endangered (T&E) plants. These measures aim to protect the vulnerable plant populations from grazing by adding additional terms and conditions to grazing permits. These allotments were all meeting land health standards and grazing permits would not be reduced. The group discussed the importance of the inclusion of impacted ranchers.

### **Agenda Item: Public Comment**

Facilitator: Greg Larson

There were no public comments at this RAC Meeting.

### **Agenda Item: Field Manager Updates**

Facilitator: Greg Wolfgang, Grand Junction Field Office Field Manager; Laria Lovec, Acting Little Snake Field Office Field Manager; Steve Leonard, Kremmling Field Office Field Manager; Bill Mills, White River Field Office Field Manager; Amber Koski, NCA Manager; Larry Sandoval, Colorado River Valley Field Office Field Manager

Field Management and the RAC discussed current events in the field across the spectrum of land management programs. Success stories included several land tenure actions, business plan updates, facility improvements and collaborative efforts across the Northwest region. For the complete report, see Attachment 1: Northwest Resource Advisory Council Field Manager Updates, June 22, 2023.

### **Agenda Item: Proposed Public Lands Rule**

Facilitator: Greg Larson, Doug Vilsack

Doug Vilsack presented on the proposed Public Lands Rule to the RAC. Vilsack explained that conservation leasing could be a mechanism to engage new BLM partners to help us with our conservation actions, allowing conservation/restoration work by lessees. The Public Lands Rule would enable lessees to engage with BLM on public lands in two new collaborative forms, restoration

(i.e., native plant species, wetlands, wildlife habitat) or mitigation (high-priority oil and gas sites).

The RAC members voiced their concerns about the wording in the Public Lands Rule, asking for clarification the definition of conservation and questioning if this bill could be used to negatively impact the multiuse mission of BLM land. Vilsack encouraged members of the RAC to submit comments on the proposed rule.

**Agenda Item: Closing Remarks**

Facilitator: Greg Larson

Greg Larson thanked the group for their attendance and participation at the NW RAC meeting. The next meeting will be October 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> at the White River Field Office. He reminded the RAC that seven of the members will expire in January and that those members must reapply if they are interested in continuing as a RAC member. Greg then thanked Scott Braden for his service as acting chair in this meeting and confirmed his acceptance to act as chair again in October, with a plan to vote for a new chair at the end of the meeting on October 5<sup>th</sup>.

**Agenda Item: Adjourn**

Facilitator: Greg Larson

Meeting adjourned by Greg Larson, Designated Federal Officer, at 3:00 pm.