

**SUMMARY MINUTES  
BLM SOUTHERN NEW MEXICO  
RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING**

**June 6, 2024**

**RAC MEMBERS PRESENT:**

John Cornell  
Kathleen Blair  
Gill Sorg  
Charles Turner  
Dr. Sabrina Pack  
Skip Gooch  
Robert Matulich

**RAC MEMBERS PRESENT VIA ZOOM:**

Jack Callaway  
Emily Wirth  
Earl Greer

**DESIGNATED FEDERAL OFFICIAL:**

Jim Stovall, BLM Pecos District Manager

**RAC MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Teofilo Holguin  
One seat vacant

**PUBLIC:**

Dan Carter, president of the Southern New Mexico Trail Alliance

**BLM STAFF/MEETING SUPPORT:**

Melanie Barnes, BLM – New Mexico Director  
Jim Stovall, BLM Pecos District Manager  
Sabrina Flores, BLM Albuquerque District Manager  
Scott Cooke, BLM Las Cruces District Manager  
Chuck Schmidt, BLM Roswell Field Office Manager  
Michelle Bell, Acting BLM Socorro Field Office Manager  
Bill Wight, BLM Las Cruces District Public Affairs Officer  
Wendy Brown, BLM Southern New Mexico RAC Coordinator  
Zach Latta, Las Cruces District Outdoor Recreation Planner  
Monica Brito, Socorro Field Office Administrative Assistant  
Allison Sandoval, BLM New Mexico Public Affairs Specialist  
Jillian Aragon, BLM New Mexico Project Manager

**SCRIBE:**

Monita Brito

**CALL TO ORDER, WELCOME & OPENING STATEMENTS:**

Wendy Brown, BLM Southern New Mexico RAC coordinator, called the meeting to order and asked for those in the room to introduce themselves. Bill Wight, Las Cruces District PAO, confirmed that the meeting had a quorum.

**PRESENTATIONS:**

**Las Cruces District updates with programs and major actions overviews, Scott Cooke, Las Cruces District manager:**

Mr. Cooke provided an update on the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument Resource Management Plan, noting that the public comment period ends July 5. In addition, Cooke reviewed the monument's 10th anniversary events that BLM staff and partners have organized. Cooke also updated the council on the BLM's reclamation work at the community pit and the status of the Starvation Draw Dams, which have been the subject of an environmental assessment. A decision is expected in 2025.

**BLM Albuquerque District update on Socorro Field Office, Michelle Bell, acting Socorro Field Office Manager:**

Ms. Bell updated the council on a planned fee increase for the Datil Well Recreation Area Campground, which the office will present in more detail at the January 2025 meeting. The January meeting will also include a visit to the site. The office is working on the draft business plan that will then go to public comment; the last one was done in the 1980s. The office received deferred maintenance money that assisted with upgrades to picnic shelters, added a new ADA/ABA accessible campsite and shelter, new vault toilet, and several campsites that now include telescope pads for star viewing. Bell also spoke about a project that included removing invasive trees within the office's footprint. In addition, the office conducted a desert Big Horn Sheep survey at The Box Recreation Area that found 53 sheep.

**BLM Las Cruces District proposal briefing on recreation fee increase for Three Rivers Petroglyph Site, Zach Latta, Las Cruces District Outdoor Recreation Planner:**

Mr. Latta informed the council that the Three Rivers Petroglyph Site has a restroom facility, group shelters, tent-camping sites, a visitor center, and an RV pull-through site. It also features the Village Trail, which is a quarter of a mile out-and-back trail, and the Petroglyph Trail, which is a three quarters of a mile out-and-back trail. Over the past eight years, visitation has increased 28%. The fee increases would be from \$5 to \$7 per car for day use; from \$15 to \$20 for a bus or van for day use; from \$7 to \$10 for camping with a car or tent; from \$18 to \$25 for RV camping; and from \$50 to \$60 for a group site.

**Socorro "FAST 41" project briefing via Zoom, Josh Fitzpatrick, Environmental Program Officer National Telecommunications and Information Administration Office of Internet Connectivity and Growth:**

Mr. Fitzpatrick updated the council on the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act, Title

41, or FAST 41, plans for the Socorro area. The project involves telecommunications infrastructure and includes 19 pueblos and the Pueblo Education Network, or PEN. The act established new coordination and oversight procedures for infrastructure projects being reviewed by federal agencies. FAST-41 is intended to improve early consultation and coordination among government agencies; increase transparency through the publication of project-specific timetables with completion dates for all federal environmental reviews and authorizations; and increase accountability through consultation and reporting on delayed projects.

**Pecos District updates with programs and major actions overviews, Chuck Schmidt, BLM Roswell Field Office Manager:**

Mr. Schmidt updated the council on Carrizozo land access, Rio Bonito restoration projects, Restore New Mexico, Mescalero Sands Prairie Restoration projects, the Pecos River Oxbow Acquisition for recreation site in Roswell, wind energy, Azotea Mesa Reclamation, and the Delaware River Restoration project. Schmidt also showed the council an infrared lesser prairie-chicken monitoring video.

**Discussion of land access issues in Southern New Mexico, John Cornell, RAC chair:**

Mr. Cornell told the council and BLM personnel that he would like to see increased access to public lands in New Mexico. For example, there is no public access to the Gray Peak Wilderness Study Area, which is about 40 miles from Lordsburg, and the public would like the BLM to become more aggressive in securing access. Mr. Cooke discussed land access issues in the Las Cruces District and attempts to increase access.

**Public Comment Period:**

Tim Sanders, an officer with the Dona Ana County Associated Sportsmen, said he is in favor of the BLM engaging in litigation for public access to public lands.

Another member of the public voiced his support for the increased recreation fees at the Three Rivers Petroglyph Site.

**RAC vote on Las Cruces recreation fee increase proposal:**

The proposed recreation fee increase passed with all RAC members present voting in favor of the measure.

**BLM annual ethics training:**

Danielle Yatrakis, a BLM attorney with the Department of Ethics Office, Office of the Solicitor, provided the council with annual ethics training.

**Future Southern NM RAC meeting dates and topics discussion, John Cornell, RAC chair:**

After discussion, RAC members and BLM staff agreed to organize upcoming RAC meetings for Sept. 16 and 17 at the BLM Roswell Field Office, including a field trip to area restoration and recreation sites, and Jan. 23-24 at the Socorro Field Office, including a field trip to area recreation sites such as The Box and the Datil Well Recreation Area Campground.

**Travel reimbursement discussion:**

The council received training on travel reimbursement. The training focused on authorizations, receipts, travel vouchers and payments, which should be made within five to seven days from the authorization.

**Meeting adjourned**