

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

September 16, 2024

RAC MEMBERS PRESENT:

John Cornell
Dr. Sabrina Pack
Roy Gooch
Charles Turner
Gill Sorg
Emily Wirth

RAC MEMBERS ABSENT:

Kathleen Blair
Teofilo Holguin
Robert Matulich
Earl Greer

PUBLIC:

George Pack, volunteer

BLM STAFF/MEETING SUPPORT:

Charles Schmidt, BLM Roswell Field Office Manager
Scott Cooke, BLM Las Cruces District Manager
Matthew Atencio, BLM Assistant Field Manager, Division of Renewable Resources, Socorro Field Office
Jesus Gallegos, BLM Las Cruces Assistant District Manager, Socorro Field Office
Wendy Brown, BLM Southern New Mexico RAC Coordinator
Amanda Eavenson, Assistant Field Manager, Roswell Field Office
Warren Kasper, Fort Stanton – Snowy River Cave National Conservation Area Manager
Ty Carter, Reclamation Coordinator, Pecos District
Ricky Flores, Natural Resource Specialist, Roswell Field Office
Danica Cooke, Wildlife Biologist, Roswell Field Office
Dominic Bell, Fuels Specialist, Pecos District
Allison Nelson, Natural Resources Specialist, Roswell Field Office
Trevor Howe, Natural Resources Specialist Intern, Roswell Field Office

SCRIBE:

Wendy Brown, BLM Southern New Mexico RAC Coordinator

CALL TO ORDER, WELCOME & OPENING STATEMENTS:

Wendy Brown, BLM Southern New Mexico RAC coordinator, called the meeting to order. The meeting was a field trip, and participants got into various vehicles and followed the main vehicle, a large van containing the RAC members.

PRESENTATIONS:

Presentation on oil and gas reclamation sites in the Cato Unit, Ricky Flores and Allison Nelson, Natural Resources Specialists, Roswell Field Office:

In the Cato Unit outside of Roswell, Mr. Flores spoke about the work oil companies do on the ground, such as plugging wells, decommissioning sites, and site reclamation. Mr. Flores spoke about the progress of enforcement actions against operators and current/past record title owners. He also discussed field meetings with operators to discuss work. In addition, Ms. Nelson, discussing vegetation growth on reclamation sites, talked about research she has conducted on two oil and gas reclamation sites in the Cato Unit outside of Roswell. Companies seeded the sites differently for grass regrowth, and Nelson compared the sites.

Presentation on reclamation projects in the Lesser Prairie Chicken Area of Critical Environmental Concern, Ty Carter, reclamation coordinator, Pecos District:

Mr. Carter spoke about why BLM conducts reclamation projects, explaining they are to help species such as lesser prairie chicken and dunes sagebrush lizard. Mr. Carter also discussed how the BLM conducts the projects by spraying vegetation such as mesquite and masticating it afterward. Mr. Carter explained the benefits of the projects, such as increased grass and better habitat. He also included information about the Lower Pecos Restoration Area and the fact that the BLM is launching a BLM-wide restoration program that got a jump-start from our Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act efforts.

Presentation on prescribed burns in the Lesser Prairie Chicken Area of Critical Environmental Concern, Dominic Bell, fuels specialist, Pecos District:

Mr. Bell spoke about a prescribed burn in the LPC ACEC in February 2024. In addition, he spoke about why prescribed burns are important and the precautions fire teams take before starting them.

Presentation on features of the Mescalero Sands OHV area, Amanda Eavenson, assistant field manager, Roswell Field Office:

Ms. Eavenson spoke about the area's establishment as a designated recreation area in 1989 and that it provides more than 610 acres of sand dune terrain to ride. In addition, Ms. Eavenson discussed that the area has six camping sites equipped with shelters, picnic tables, grills, and fire rings at each. All sites are dry with no water or electric hook-ups, and the area has a single vault toilet. Fees are \$3 per vehicle with single occupant, \$5 per vehicle with more than two occupants, and \$15 for buses (more than 10 occupants). These fees are per day and camping is included with day-use. Recent improvements include a new vault toilet, new entrance kiosk and all new BBQ grills installed. Common recreation activities include OHV riding, camping, picnicking, wildlife viewing and horseback riding.

Presentation on recreation activities available at the BLM's Fort Stanton – Snowy River Cave NCA, Warren Kasper, manager of the NCA:

Mr. Kasper discussed the 70-plus miles of trails at the NCA and several permitted activities that took place in the last year, such as an endurance run, horse events and a wedding. Mr. Kasper also discussed Fort Stanton Cave: why it is closed to recreation, explorers have completed 50 miles of exploration within the cave, and Caver Quest Academy, a program that brings local seventh graders into the cave. Mr. Kasper spoke about visitation impacts at the NCA and the nearby Valley of Fires Recreation Area from the fire/flood events in Ruidoso. In addition, the BLM has a new trail at VoF and plans to install new interpretive signs soon.

Presentation on how wildlife biologists survey for dunes sagebrush lizard, Danica Cooke, wildlife biologist, Roswell Field Office:

Ms. Cooke showed the council an example of a bucket wildlife biologists bury in sand dunes to catch lizards and determine if certain species, such as the dunes sagebrush lizard, are in an area. The bucket did not have a lizard in it, but Ms. Cooke explained how the process works and safety precautions. In addition, Ms. Cooke spoke about the ACEC in general and management the BLM does there for the LPC and DSL specifically. Ms. Cooke also discussed how mesquite treatments and mastication help the LPC because they remove places for LPC predators to perch.

Presentation on the Oxbow land acquisition, Chuck Schmidt, manager of the Roswell Field Office:

Mr. Schmidt discussed the Oxbow land acquisition and the day-use recreation activities it will include, such as fishing, picnicking, horseback riding and walking. Mr. Schmidt explained how the RFO plans to install informational kiosk at the entrance, several shelters with tables, barbecue grills, improved roads, a parking lot, and a loop hiking trail. No shooting would be allowed within 150 yards of the developed site. Motorized travel would be limited to the established roads and cross-country travel would be prohibited. RFO also plans to remove salt cedar around the pond and river.

Meeting adjourned

September 17, 2024

RAC MEMBERS PRESENT:

John Cornell
Jack Callaway
Dr. Sabrina Pack
Roy Gooch
Charles Turner
Gill Sorg

RAC MEMBERS PRESENT VIA ZOOM:

Clifton Greer

DESIGNATED FEDERAL OFFICIAL:

Jim Stovall, BLM Pecos District Manager

RAC MEMBERS ABSENT:

Kathleen Blair

Teofilo Holguin

Robert Matulich

Emily Wirth

PUBLIC:

Jennifer Pierce, Chaves County Soil and Water Conservation District

Sandi Wilkie, District Manager, Carlsbad Soil and Water Conservation District

Ethan Wright, Regional Manager, New Mexico Farm and Livestock Bureau

Brett Riley, local rancher

George Pack

Tom Phillips

BLM STAFF/MEETING SUPPORT:

Jim Stovall, BLM Pecos District Manager

Matthew Atencio, BLM Assistant Field Manager, Division of Renewable Resources, Socorro Field Office

Scott Cooke, BLM Las Cruces District Manager

Jesus Gallegos, BLM Las Cruces Assistant District Manager, Socorro Field Office

Chuck Schmidt, BLM Roswell Field Office Manager

Michelle Bell, BLM Roswell Field Office Operations Chief

Bill Wight, BLM Las Cruces District Public Affairs Officer

Wendy Brown, BLM Southern New Mexico RAC Coordinator

Allison Sandoval, BLM New Mexico Public Affairs Specialist

Jonathan Smith, BLM Roswell Field Office Administrative Officer

Amanda Eavenson, Assistant Field Manager, Roswell Field Office

SCRIBE:

Brenda Maese

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 and confirmed that the meeting did not have a quorum.

Allison Sandoval, BLM New Mexico Public Affairs Specialist, went over unanswered questions from the last meeting in June. Ms. Sandoval explained term expirations for current RAC council

members and how to proceed in getting reappointed to their current positions. Nominations will start to be accepted next month; applications will be posted online on website. Discussed RAC charter, gave a brief overview of future meetings, next meeting will be held in Socorro, N.M., and agenda will be posted on website.

PRESENTATIONS:

BLM Albuquerque District update, Matthew Atencio, Assistant Field Manager, Socorro Field Office:

Mr. Atencio spoke on the 2024 Bordo Atravesado Wild Horse Gather specifically gathering methods used and number of wild horses gathered, shipped, treated and released. Played a video show casing WHIP (Wild Horses Inmate Program) located in Colorado. Mr. Atencio went over the SunZia Southwest Transmission Project. Information provided included an overview of two planned 500 kilovolt transmission lines that will traverse 520 miles across central New Mexico to central Arizona. Construction dates and information regarding issues with plan implementation were also discussed as well as discussions regarding wind turbine locations and expected completion dates. Mr. Atencio also updated the council on the Johnson OHV Staging Area and Compound. Atencio gave a brief history of how the project began and funding amounts. The project is currently in the designing stage for day use recreation sites, there is currently no facility for offloading purposes specifically. Mr. Atencio stated that they hope to receive funding by November or December of 2024, and they hoped to start the project in Spring of 2025. The Datil Well Campground was the last project presented by Mr. Atencio. History and amenities were discussed as well as a business plan that will be presented at the next meeting to discuss a proposal to increase recreation fees.

Las Cruces District updates, Scott Cooke, Las Cruces District manager:

Mr. Cooke began his presentation with an update on the GILA Lower Box Ramp, specifically speaking about coverage area and that they are currently working on agreements for trail and road closures. He also stated that they received around 377 public comments regarding parking concerns. Mr. Cooke provided an update on the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument Resource Management Plan, discussion included public involvement numbers, a summary of alternatives labeled A-E, grazing permit renewals, and project schedules to include milestones and dates. Mr. Cooke went over the Programmatic EIS for Utility-scale Solar Energy Development to include planning efforts and proposal, a map was presented that illustrated the solar development planning areas. Information was presented about Afton Solar Energy Zone, the competitive lease auction is scheduled for Nov. 19, 2024, bid information was provided to included parcel number and acreage. There was an update given on remote off-grid kiosks that were installed over the Labor Day weekend in three spots, a video was played on how the kiosks work. Discussion regarding kiosk costs and budget. Mr. Cooke stated that they will provide more information at January meeting to include usage numbers and more public feedback information. An update of the Three Rivers Petroglyph Site was presented that included a review of new fee modifications, no negative feedback from fee increases at this point in time.

Pecos District updates with programs and major actions overviews, Chuck Schmidt, BLM Roswell Field Office Manager and Ty Allen, Assistant Field Manager, BLM Carlsbad Field Office:

Mr. Schmidt updated the council on wind energy projects, APEX Clean Energy and RADIA, discussion included wind energy locations. Mr. Allen presented information on solar energy, specifically the Cowboy Solar Energy proposal to include proposed location maps and information regarding management of site. Mr. Allen spoke about the Azotea Mesa Restoration project to include project development history and restoration process and reclamation efforts. Cody Layton, Assistant Field Manager of Land and Minerals, Carlsbad Field Office joined the presentation to explain how most of the wells located in this area are gas wells and that many pipes are located above ground due to rock, he stated that this is a unique area to develop due to rocky landscape. Mr. Allen went over the Carlsbad Resources Management Plan to include completed tasks and remaining tasks. A December of 2025 completion date is anticipated for this plan. Mr. Layton gave an overview of oil and gas and the process involved with APD's. Mr. Layton explained who is involved, what steps are taken, and number of employees involved for proper permitting. He also discussed number of APD's received, processed and worked this fiscal year. Mr. Allen presented information regarding BLM sites and dark sky. He explained what dark sky means and gave examples of light pollution comparisons that showed images of increased light pollution several years apart. Mr. Allen gave examples of how we can reduce light pollution by using different light minimizing methods. He also gave a brief review of a certification that can be obtained if parks meet specific criteria.

Presentation of Introduction to the Public Lands Rule by Amelia Taylor, Project Manager-Restoration Coordinator, BLM – NM State Office:

Ms. Taylor gave a presentation on the Public Lands Rule to include explanation of three main components, a Public Lands rule timeline, what the rule contains, and the objectives the rule intends to achieve as well as a timeline of next steps in moving forward.

BLM New Mexico Recreation Summit by Glenn Simpson, Branch Chief for Cultural Resources, Planning and Recreation:

Mr. Simpson discussed the Blueprint vision, assessment background, staff and housing issues, recreation challenges, and recreation opportunities. Mr. Simpson also went over some priority projects to include contract costs and budget.

Discussion of land access issues in southern New Mexico:

Chuck Schmidt, Roswell Field Office Manager went over land access issues. The Carrizozo Land Partnership agreement is still not up and running due to internet access issues. We are working with the county for access through Diamond A Ranch. Scott Cooke, Las Cruces District manager, went over Achenbach Canyon access issues, stated that they are trying to acquire land that will connect two BLM land areas together, no time frame known on this acquisition proposal. Access issues to the Gary Peak Wilderness Study Area, Cowboy Spring, and Alamo Hueco were discussed with no changes to report at this time.

Public Comment Period:

Jennifer Pierce, lead at Chaves County Soil and Water Conservation District, made a comment that she would like to get more information on the Public Lands Rule and how it will affect landowners with grazing leases.

Brett Riley commented on the Public Lands Rule and stated that a system set up to notify producers would solve a lot of problems.

Ethan Wright, Regional Manager of the New Mexico Farm and Livestock Bureau, read a statement from his organization that stated the N.M. Farm and Livestock Bureau opposed national monuments specifically the Luna County monument. He also read that the Public Lands Rule threatens the future of farming and ranching families by destabilizing established rules on grazing lands.

Sandi Wilkie, District Manager Carlsbad Soil and Water Conservation District, commented that she also agreed with the other comments regarding the Public Lands Rule regarding notification for operators.

Tom Phillips, who attended the meeting virtually, commented that he would like to see more public participation and encouraged the council to develop a subcommittee to refine input on future issues to include land access and the Public Lands Rule.

Subcommittee discussion:

The council discussed budget and travel issues tied into forming a subcommittee, advertising for future meetings, and current council vacancies.

Meeting adjourned