



Rocky Mountain Resource Advisory Council Meeting Minutes

9 a.m., Feb. 13, 2025

(All notes and conversations are paraphrased for clarity and brevity)

Members Present

Category 1

In-Person	Virtual
	Preston Larimer
	Josh Gillespie
	Chris Cooper

Category 2

In-Person	Virtual
	Josh Gillespie
	Irene Shonle
	John Sztukowski
	Loretta Mitson

Category 3

In-Person	Virtual
	Kent Wood
	Arthur Koepsell
	April Estep
	Pete Stagner
	Gina Lucrezi

BLM Employees Present

In-Person	Virtual
	Levi Spellman
	Dale Culver
	Kalem Lenard
	Sean Noonan
	Scotty Nilson
	Ray Ogle

In-Person	Virtual
	Doug Vilsack
	Doug Mayes
	Chris Arne

Public Present

In-Person	Virtual
	Justin Kurth
	Emily Paul: Federal Affairs Specialist with the CO Dept. of Agriculture

Welcome, Introductions, and Housekeeping

Chris Arne - Introduction

Introduction of BLM members

Roll call

Doug Vilsack - Updates and priorities

Priorities set at the end of 2024 with staff and stakeholders' that were set are still the same.

1. Prioritize Collaboration: We do that through RAC to get feedback and understand how to make balanced decisions.
2. Tell BLM CO Story: Struggle to tell the story of all the good work we are doing on the ground. We work with communication staff to tell the BLM story to make case
3. Support ag and healthy lands: move forward to continue processing permits and doing NEPA to keep range moving forward and have flexibility with range users.
4. Implement CO model for wild horse management. Up fertility control program
5. Advance response mineral and energy production: get back to quarter lease sells and implement plans we have finished over the last few years and doing so in appropriate places and times
6. Increase tribal initiatives and relationships: tribal implications and we continue to maintain relationships that engage in projects we work on in BLM lands
7. Focus on Lands & Realty Work staff in place to process actions
8. Elevate BLM CO as an outdoor recreation leader: huge priority we need additional resources to move forward but are being creative and working with the state
9. Reduce wildfire risk and enhance wildlife habitat be prepared and be putting resources on the ground to mitigate the wildfire risk
10. Match our workload demands to budget manage our resources wisely to do things in program areas.

Will continue to do this work as priority change with this administration

QUESTIONS:

John Sztukowski: Applications submitted in November for RAC, is there a status on those?

Doug Vilsack: they go all the way up to the White house standing by and waiting for feedback on how that process will go. We are asking about it repeatedly. It is high on the radar.

John Sztukowski: New members do not be surprised; I am glad Colorado is still continuing with the RAC meetings.

Irene Shonle: What are you seeing? Can you give us a snapshot of what you are seeing and how much things are potentially changing at even staffing levels.

Doug Vilsack: predominate is executive orders focused on energy production. We have been working thinking about organizing our structure and work on NEPA backlog and take the steps to get staff and structure in place. That is the biggest piece. There are other orders focused on reducing cost and we are thinking about how we play a part in that direction. We haven't been given direction about recreation, agriculture, or other places. We will get more direction. We just got our new secretary last week and from him all staff received an email talking about the energy and mandate we have and focusing on recreation and conservation. He has experience in both places as hunter and governor.

Kent Wood: I appreciated your discussion. What was 9 and 10?

Doug Vilsack: Reiterated priorities 9 and 10.

Kent Wood: Do you have a list of 10 you can provide?

Doug Vilsack: They are posted well but I can give a list

Chris Arne: These are updated for year 2024/2025. I will have Levi provide them.

Loretta Mitson: In October, I scheduled with regional coordinator director for History Colorado and coordinated with BLM to visit a historic site that is half owned by BLM, we have opportunity to leverage private money to buy the entire site and put it under BLM

jurisdiction. I don't want to lose track of the opportunity of the collaboration. I would like to see if it is possible to visit again when there is nice weather to tell History Colorado about what is being missed and needs to be preserved and what possible private leverage there is for it.

Doug Vilsack: I am sure we can get some more information about that and appreciate your efforts.

Hidden gem, needs to be part of the local data base

Chris Arne: Levi and I will reach out to you to discuss further.

Chris Cooper: I appreciate Doug being on, and all of you being on and available. Happy to see advancing mineral production is on the list. More so collaboration to that. The last four or five years have been trying with realty and execution. I look forward to more productive conversations going forward as far as energy. Glad to see traction and look forward to knowing more about where the leasing is headed. Glad to hear those were on your list for 2025.

Doug Vilsack: we have a benefit. The big resource management plans we have been engaged in. The benefit of that all being done now going forward we have all the plans complete and can use them to make decision when it comes to mineral and energy development around the state. It gives guidance on all areas making us in a good spot to move forward because we have all the updated information.

Gina Lucrezi: How can we help? There is not much in terms of budget and the state is lacking and looking to find creative solutions. What else can we do to make a stronger argument with the state to help BLM gain more funding

Doug Vilsack: telling our story well. There are opportunities. Provided multiple examples. Trying to make point that we are doing the collaborative model. Our budget for the state is about 3 million to manage all recreation. HRA depend on capital needs for any given year. They have staff to manage the recreation opportunity. One area has over half the budget that BLM has. There are opportunities to build and collaborate with local and state partnerships.

Preston Larimer: Where are we in reviewing resource management plans?

Doug Vilsack: We don't have much more information than what you have. None of our RMPs were identified specifically on the list. We tell the story about the balance we have in those plans. BLM is used to getting protests on planning processes. We got zero protests on our RMPs around the state or industry as well. We found a good balance and hit where we needed to hit. Confident we can tell a good story.

Preston Larimer: Doesn't the SLV plan have to be done soon?

Doug Vilsack: it is next on the list. It is one of the oldest plans in the BLM.

Chris Cooper: To follow up on Gina's question. With your oil and gas lease programs. Does any of that funding stay local or does it all go back, and you must beg for appropriations? Do you get to keep any of that locally to fund this stuff? To apply for resources in state?

Doug Vilsack: It goes to treasury. We have a budget process. Indirectly some of those funds may come back locally but not directly through BLM.

Loretta Mitson: To reference article you wrote, I would like to request if you do that, to send it to our Valley Courier as well. I am sure our Courier would love to have it and it would be helpful if you send that this way too.

Doug Vilsack: The Valley Courier is on the list for one of my articles. I have been making my way around the state.

Kent Wood: I understand that Arkansas Valley Headwaters is a model for collaboration is there any top priorities to create that kind of model in a new place in Colorado? Is there a leading candidate?

Doug Vilsack: The lead one we are talking about right now is North Sand Hills in Walden, CO. Deep in conversation on how we can get resources on the ground to build those camping areas and get more well managed recreation in that area. Working on agreement with CPW. Stay tuned on the rivers front of taking the rivers model elsewhere.

Kent Wood: there is not a top priority within RG or SLV?

Doug Vilsack: not yet. We are engaged in the Pike's peak one but that is the most current one right now in the district.

Doug Vilsack: Appreciate you all and the feedback you provide.

Chris Arne: Thanked Doug

Chris Arne: Transition into the agenda

Agenda Item 1: District Updates

Chris Arne:

- Transition period: guidance is evolving, and we are implementing best to our abilities
- Budget: Continuing resolution until March 14th.

Agenda Item 2: Royal Gorge Field Office Briefings

Doug Mayes:

- 25% vacancy rate with 11 vacancies. In Fluid minerals, trying to get those positions prioritized and waivers.
- Update on NEPA: 30 ongoing projects and 10 of those are EA's. Looking a prioritize process locally and making sure projects are still moving.
- Renewable resources: Tether lodging project clear creek reservoir to give access to steep terrain where we cant use traditional logging operations
- Range: Able to exceed most of are targets. Good year in range. Team worked hard to keep things progressing
- Riparian: Sherman Mine reclamation and stream restoration and working with partners on that project
- Wildlife: figuring out a way to get seasonals to support ongoing projects
- Minerals and lands: able to 48 FFF APDs and been working on 2-year backlog in minerals and building relationships. Filled realty position with internal applicant.
- Recreation: Turtle Rock campground camping fees is coming online in May. Combination of online booking and first come first serve. Working on Royal Gorge area management plan. This is the area that is southwest of town.

Working through with collaboration to fill the need of the city and community and get us infrastructure in place to manage recreation right outside the city.

QUESTIONS:

John Sztukowski: When you were looking to get Wildlife seasonal how many were you looking to get and what programs do they support?

Doug Mayes: We get 2 to do surveys. In the past have had 2 but this year we are looking for funding.

John Sztukowski: I know you are a part of the Colorado Restore program. I will coordinate with David to build in the gaps to work on that Colorado funded project. That has been great. Good luck on getting some techs.

Doug Mayes: excited to keep that moving forward

Chris Cooper: you mentioned your vacancy rate and is that due to the hiring freeze?

Doug Mayes: No, we have had some turn over and retirements and it has been timing.

Chris Cooper: You feel good that you will be able to fill those in 2025?

Doug Mayes: Yes, at least some of those positions advertised and filled.

Agenda Item 3: San Luis Valley Field Office Briefings

Dale Culver:

- Update on De Tilla Solar Energy Zone: Summarization about contact to terminate the lease due to struggle of connectivity in the valley to export power out of the valley. Currently there is no leasee on that energy zone. Regrouping on next steps. Holding off with transmission struggles within the valley.
- Lobatos Bridge: Background on GOCO that grant applications were awarded to Costilla and Conejos County. That is moving forward. Outhouse is going to be installed in the next few weeks and working on interpretive panels. High school students are making statues to go on top of the panels. Installing cattle guard and putting in metal fence around that recreation area with the help of SLVGO and their crew. Building parking area. Part of the plan is a boat ramp, and we are working to get that to happen.

- South San Juan Acquisition (La Jara Project): Continuing forward. Have not received official work on the land conservation funding but have heard most likely going to get it but have not actually gotten it. Everything is moving forward with Forest Service and Colorado Parks and Wildlife
- Currently working on Travel management plan for the valley. Should be out to public for review shortly.
- Working on range as always
- Application for Los Sauces grazing allotment- for full time permittee
- Highlight Fuel projects: Poncha Pass fuel project. Rock Creek using good neighbor authority
- Highlight Recreation projects: Vista Grande Trail systems- working on localized to the town and connecting to BLM. SLVGO.
- Dario Archuleta retired. Backfilling that position

QUESTIONS:

John Sztukowski: You will be working on a travel management plan?

Dale Culver: Yes

John Sztukowski: I thought there was one in place.

Dale Culver: We are updating it to determine last plan still relevant and how to adjust to help out visitors and public.

Loretta Mitson: Do you have a rough timeline for when the project will break ground in terms of landscaping and prospective finish dates

Dale Culver: Robins construction got the contract and next week they are going down to look at it. The landscaping will be over the course of spring and summer. Target date is public lands day in September.

Loretta Mitson: I am nervous about bulldozing archeology out there. I know Sean is sensitive but is someone going to be onsite when those guys hit the ground?

Dale Culver: Yes, there should be. I don't know for sure but I know our archeologist has gone through it.

Kent Wood: Is there something about the Lobatos bridge site that would make there be a lot of archeology in that site?

Dale Culver: type and structure of the bridge there is a lot of history and along that river corridor there is a lot of native American history through there.

Kent Wood: the immediate vicinity of the bridge is not significant to native Americans?

Loretta Mitson: Spoke to Adams state about that entire area be an archeological field school because of the archeological significance- provided examples "I-25 of its time" It is where the development of where the history of Colorado started. There is mining, gold, and Hispanic history. The signage is going to facilitate a lot of that. It is significant to the whole state and is important.

Agenda Item 4: Oil and Gas information brief

Ray Ogle:

- What a mineral lease is and looking at selling right to extract oil and gas minerals.
- When reviewing BLM ensures leasing complies with the laws to include land use planning process.
- Walked through BLM process and roles

QUESTIONS:

Preston Larimer: What the history of this was and how did the spilt occur originally?

Ray Ogle: Some of the earlier acts where folks were deeded allowed homeowners to take both minerals with them but later the government reserved those minerals when deeded the surface.

We have like under the railroad right of way in Weld County where BLM has minerals There is a lot of different ways where we can end up with these mineral estates under a private surface. The horizontal drilling technology has been brought from offshore to onshore. There are potential patterns of subsurface you can have there.

Chris Cooper: Has there been thought in the agency where you may have some no surface occupancy to opening up some of the federal minerals where no surface occupancy exists since you can reach those now without impacting anything on the surface? Wondering if that is something been talked about as technology has been brought on land and effective?

Ray Ogle: With the ability to drill out like that we have seen some leases being offered where the lease entirely has an SO on it. Another big one we have seen are with small partials with nowhere to put a well pad on. There is consideration given to that but there is BLM catching up to do. Takes BLM a bit to adjust to new technology.

Kent Wood: Are there areas west of the front range that are going through this mineral leasing?

Ray Ogle: We don't have anything pending leasing as far as our district. I am not familiar with other districts leasing. All of our district stuff is in Weld or Arapaho County. We have a little in Larmer. For non-leasing we have active development in estimated 18 to 20 eastern plains counties.

John Sztukowski: You mentioned there are updated areas for leasing in the Royal Gorge Field Office. Is that area updated since last year's eastern Colorado resource management plan review?

Ray Ogle: No, that is what was meant by the update from the old RMP.

Ray Ogle: Continues presentation

QUESTION

Irene Shonle: The existing regulations, are some of the guardrails coming off for the environmental protection? I am concerned that things will get railroaded through without environmental diligence.

Ray Ogle: I certainly hope that is not the case. Things we can do is update our policies. I hope there are ideas on how to make that more efficient. I do hope that is the target is to look for opportunities where we are running behind on technology causing delays and that we can flex that policy a little different.

Chris Arne: You are spot on, and we still have requirements to do what we need to do. Those things won't change. With new administration we will see shift, but NEPA requirement is still there and not going away. We are still working within our guidelines. If things change, we will roll that out and keep you appraised.

Ray Ogle: Continue presentation of requested information of process

QUESTIONS:

Kent Wood: I am getting the impression that these applications are standard drillings but, what the topic of fracking has not come up. Are any of these of the fracking nature?

Ray Ogle: Actually, where we are doing most of our permitting when drilling these wells, they have to frack it because there is no production until they do. Fracking is reviewed

by the state, but we do have a review process through our permitting through our analysis but a lot of that is with the state.

Kent Wood: does the process whether BLM or state contain seismic hazard?

Ray Ogle: It does, yes.

John Sztukowski: Once a lease is purchased how long does a lease have on that land before they utilize it or return the lease?

Ray Ogle: 10 years is primary term on a lease to prove production on it and prove it is economic.

John Sztukowski: Do you have a number of what is currently leased but not developed?

Ray Ogle: We can get back to you on that.

Chris Cooper: When a lease is purchased what is the target of execution or start production? Is there a timeframe or target to execute that lease to start production?

Ray: To transfer the lease to the bidder yes. That is out of my realm. Last one I helped with they tried to get that turned around within one to two months. Depends on the number of partials offered. Some of the sales recently have been smaller but if bigger may take a longer time.

Ray Ogle: Continues presentation of requested information of execution

Chris Cooper: Is that reinstatement process, if a lease is cancelled due to technical issues, have some focus on what the process is to help with the confusion. It is disappointing, even with the great increases that it goes back to the black hole of treasury and that in state cannot apply. It would have been great for that 4% difference to come back to the state, that would be huge! That would be huge in paying for other things such as recreation and vacancies and providing opportunities. It would be great if those royalties were divided. The place where the action is taken, where people are spending their time implementing this actually get a little bit of that back to put on the ground. If that could stay local and not have to go every year to have to beg. Its ridiculous but I understand the process.

Kent Wood: On Chris' point would it be welcome or unwelcome for the RAC to make a resolution that would propagate up the system?

Chris Arne: I think any recommendation is a valuable recommendation. That is something we can explore. There is no hesitation here at this level to have you do that.

Kent Wood: Let's not lose sight of it.

5-minute break 10:46

Returned at 10:51

Agenda Item 5: New Business

Levi Spellman: Give everyone a chance to discuss what the RAC wanted to talk on, anything of concern, etc. This is the time.

John Sztukowski: Thank you for your participation in the CPW initiatives. I will note there is a new one for Spanish Peaks Collation. There is no agency representation on that collation, so I wanted to flag that.

It has been helpful to have those agency folks in those meetings and involved.

Doug Mayes: I wasn't aware of the one in Spanish peaks. Shoot me a note so we can get linked in and get representation there.

John: You are a part of 5 if not more so I know it's a lot but I will connect you with the organizers for that one.

Doug Mayes: This is a good time to mention that we engaged in partnership with DOD with setting landscape designation with multiple federal and state agencies and locals at the table. Mostly about how we coordinate on projects and issues to support the mission of the five insulations of El Paso County including training operations on federal and state lands. It is a big effort and there is a proposal to the process and delineate what that landscape boundary might look like. We are starting to reach out to engage more partners locally with late summer the anticipation is to submit a formal proposal. More information to come of that. This is a holistic approach to how do we develop resiliency and mission support.

Chris Arne: Thank you for bringing that to the table. It is a great point to make everyone aware of.

Levi Spellman: If nothing else from RAC members, is there anything from BLM staff?

Doug Mayes: The telling the story thing is important and how we get into that. Levi is available to help but that is what I want to do across all the communities we serve and the different sectors of business and industry and how do we tell those stories and highlight the members of the community as well as the work that BLM does. That is

something I want to think about maybe it's a good thing to do and collaborate on how to get those stories out there about partnerships, about the people on the ground operators, permittees, etc. Tell the story about how we work together to get the good work done that we do.

Chris Cooper: It is a great idea. Most hear the negative stuff and they don't get opportunity hear about all the good stuff you do. We have talked about violations and the big ones are put out there but it isn't talked about the hundreds of small ones that have been resolved, that is a huge story, people need to understand it is a lot of work of balancing competing demands. Show people how you are willing to work with them and sit down and listen and even having a resource advisory committee made up of stakeholders is huge! You want to be better and are seeking input. It is a great thought. I am sure you have a communication and public relations team so there is opportunity to tell those stories instead of people just reading controversial writings. It will help them keep them stay connected a little more.

Levi Spellman: This is where the RAC can be helpful. When BLM puts out stories or press releases it is for media to have and see and decide if they want to write a story. In the 2 years, I can count on one hand how many responses I have received. Some of our RAC members who are a part of these discussions and get to see how it works you have an opportunity to advocate.

Kent Wood: I like this idea. I spend time working with NASA they have perfected the public outreach. It is a natural headline grabber. One can look to them for possible strategies that are within the scope of what BLM can do and that goes to my question which is maybe you can tell us what our limitations are on what we can do. Some of what Loretta is trying to do would have natural headline appeal but are there any red lines in the sand we should not cross.

Levi: No, one of the core components is that everything we do is public, we are recording a video and taking minutes. It is all in the public eye. Everything we discuss here you are welcome to reach out and talk about to the public there is no line. Just know when you do that you are wearing your private citizen hat, we cannot give the

impression that you are speaking on behalf of the BLM because you are not a BLM employee. Very specific people that are delegated to hold that hat. Know that you are speaking as a private citizen with an enhanced level of knowledge.

Loretta Mitson: The valley Courier has new management that has new writers and always have done a good job of putting Lobatos Bridge on the front page. There is also a Facebook page that is looking for human interest stories as well. There are ways to foster and build new opportunities that we haven't had in the past.

Levi: I will add that to my list.

Loretta Mitson: Named a few resources. Offered assistance to help in any way.

Preston Larimer: An area I have been frustrated with in the last year that we don't often have quorums, and I don't know how effective we are being or not as effective as some RACs are. This is an area we can move without a quorum. This outreach is something we can pursue. Throughout this group we have a few outlets we all know and that is something we can all feel like we are doing something.

Levi: there is a great opportunity to leverage personal relationships in that way.

Kent Wood: The Arkansas Valley Voice maybe a template for how to do cooperative things.

Public Participation and Public Comment Period

Levi- 11:08 opened for Public Comment. Looking at list the two public individuals have dropped off the meeting.

Closing Remarks

Next meeting: Scheduled for April 3, 2025.

Levi Spellman: Spoke about previous state summit, State planning on similar this year. In person/virtual has not been determined yet based on funding and travel. Virtual

option will be available regardless. Information forthcoming. It is the last meeting where we have the potential for a quorum. April 6th terms are expiring.

Irene Shonle: do you have things keyed up taking advantage of this last one?

Levi Spellman: We had a meeting last week, I brought up with the district and field managers and there was nothing that come up vital on our end. If there is anything you want to have a discussion or vote on, might want to figure out between RAC members before the next meeting.

Kent Wood: Those of us who will expire can always come to future meetings and members of the public and stay in touch in that way. We would only be able to speak at the public comment period but we could at least stay in touch.

Levi Spellman: You are correct.

Loretta Mitson: When I originally applied in 2018 my application languished for 2 plus years during that time I am not aware if there were RAC meetings or not because no applications were approved during that time. If we don't get it reapproved will there be meetings?

Levi Spellman: I believe so, there is a number of strings attached for BLM to have and maintain a RAC but I can only speak for my perspective but that is a discussion we will have with district and field office staff. The approval predates everyone on this call for the district. I can send information as I get it.

Chris Arne: This is valuable, feedback from communities is invaluable. Encouraging RAC engagements regardless of the quorum or not.

Preston Larimer: Spoke on presenter and requested Levi pass on the information to RAC and BLM.

Levi Spellman: Happy to share that with field managers and district

Gina Lucrezi: Thank you BLM and all the staff for doing all that you are doing. With budgets, you don't have a lot to work with. Everyone has friends and can reach out to

their communities, and we can inspire others to get involved to support BLM. There are ways we can support them that would be beneficial.

Chris Arne: thanked the group for their attention and participation in service to their communities and closed the meeting.

Meeting adjourned: 11:23

Presentation Materials

- 20250213_RMD_RAC Slides.pptx

RAC Recommendations

- N/A