



Southwest District Resource Advisory Council Minutes

June 2022

Members Present

Southwest District RAC:

Category 1:

Mark Roeber (Grazing), Kathy Welt (Energy and Minerals), Grady Ham (Outdoor Recreation/OHV)

Category 2:

Jim Haugsness (Dispersed Recreation), Rodger Cesario (Dispersed Recreation), Tif Rodriguez (Wild Horse and Burro), Ben Katz (Environmental Organization), Jon Holst (Environmental Organization)

Category 3:

Starr Jamison (Public-at-Large), Steve Garchar (Elected Official), Matt Thorpe (Government Agency)

BLM Employees Present:

Lisa Dawson, acting District Manager, Jon Kaminsky, GFO Field Manager, Suzanne Copping, UFO Field Manager, Connie Clementson, TRFO Field Manager, Collin Ewing, DENCA Manager, Stacey Colón, acting Deputy District Manager, Edd Franz, GGNCA Manager, Shawn Reinhardt, Public Affairs Officer, Candis Fischer, Administrative Support Assistant.

Public Present:

Adam Ortega, Colorado Department of Agriculture and Doug McGuire Cortez, resident.

Welcome, Introductions & Housekeeping

Acting District Manager Lisa Dawson called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m. with brief introductions from all RAC members and an overview of the meeting agenda.

Welcoming New Members

The SWD welcomed four new members to the RAC and expects to accept applications to fill additional spots in late summer.

Voting on a Chairperson and Vice Chairperson

RAC members Kathy Welt and Tif Rodriguez nominated themselves. Kathy Welt then pulled her nomination to give Tif the opportunity to become Chairperson and volunteered to be Vice Chairperson. Mark Roeber seconded the nomination, making Tif Rodriguez the Chairperson and Kathy Vice Chairperson. Shawn Reinhardt asked for a motion to approve, motion granted.

Updates from Field Managers

Gunnison Field Office with Jon Kaminsky

- Gunnison field office is looking to address issues like sage grouse, bighorn-domestic sheep litigation issues, and environmental factors, including drought and human-caused disturbances.
- The GFO is currently evaluating a programmatic hazardous fuels reduction project on public lands managed by the BLM near Powderhorn, CO. The total project area consists of 90,725 acres and includes 53,877 acres within the Powderhorn Wilderness and Wilderness Study Area.
- The GFO saw significant increases in visitor use on the Alpine Loop in the last year, particularly in July and August, 2021. Plans for 2022 include improving and designating dispersed campsites, modernizing the Mill Creek Campground, adding additional toilets, working with partner groups on outreach and education, and working with the counties to supplement and define parking areas.
- The GFO plans to have all campsites at the Oh-be-Joyful Campground and a percentage of the Mill Creek campsites reservable through Recreation.gov.
- The GFO plans to initiate an environmental analysis to consider allowing electric bicycles, or e-bikes, on non-motorized, single-track trails managed by the GFO.

Uncompahgre Field Office with Suzanne Copping

- The UFO is implementing the third year of a five-year strategic plan to fully process and renew expiring grazing permits. As moderate to extreme drought conditions persist, they are working with permittees one-on-one to manage grazing accordingly.

- Construction of the Rim Road staging and camping area is complete. This development will help BLM support trail events and increasing use in the area. Just 15 minutes from downtown Montrose, check it out sometime!
- UFO continues to appreciate Delta County's proactive coordination of volunteer cleanups in 2022 in the Adobes with the Thunder Mountain Wheelers and Delta High School Honor Society.
- Raptor and plant surveys are under way at Jumbo Mountain, and a route-by-route inventory and evaluation is planned for June, followed by alternatives development.
- The oldest known human occupation site in Colorado, Eagle Rock Shelter, has piqued the curiosity of locals and visitors alike. In 2019, after several years of methodical excavation by professional archaeologists, the excavation concluded, and the site was backfilled to close the excavation pits. The site is well known locally and receives substantial public visitation. The BLM has funded a contract for the initial interpretive design at the site.
- Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area is working with the International Dark Sky Association to explore the possibility of certification as a Dark Sky area.

Tres Rios Field Office with Connie Clementson

- A part of the Durango Area Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project was delayed due to not being within burn plan parameters for a 717-acre prescribed burn. Conditions will be monitored to determine potential for burning later in the summer/early fall.
- The Tres Rios Field Office continues to participate in an inter-governmental working group with the City of Durango, La Plata County, CPW, and the San Juan National Forest on recreation concerns.
- Canyons of the Ancients National Monument will welcome DDAT, a Native American jazz trumpet ensemble, as a part of the Artist in Residency program.
- Canyons of the Ancients will host a field trip to the Yellowjacket and Flodine grazing allotments to address concerns brought forward by conservation advocates and the grazing community.
- The field office is also working to be proactive with invasive weed control programs.

Public Comment Period

New Chairperson Tif Rodriguez welcomed everyone to the public comment period and invited the public to submit their comments for the record.

Input from elected officials and their representatives

John Whitney of Senator Bennett's office:

- Not present, no updates

Helen Katich of Senator Hickenlooper's office:

- Not present, no updates

McKenna Farley of Congresswoman Boebert's office:

- Not present, no updates

Members of the Public

- An open letter addressed to the RAC from Cortez resident Gregg Esenwein was read aloud by Shawn Reinhardt.
- Cortez resident Doug McGuire expressed concerns regarding Chutes & Ladders dispersed camping, specifically concerning the severe drought and the proximity of campsites to a nearby sub-division. He asked whether providing free camping is worth property and loss of life using open campfires at Chutes & Ladders.
- An open letter addressed to the RAC from Mancos Fire Protection District Chief Tony Aspromonte was read aloud by Shawn Reinhardt.
- An email from Montezuma County Sheriff Steven D. Nowlin was forwarded by Doug McGuire to Shawn Reinhardt expressing his intent to write a letter supporting residents' fire concerns in the Chutes and Ladders dispersed camping area. However as of 7/1/22 that letter had yet to be submitted for public record.

Dispersed Camping in Chutes and Ladders with Jeff Christianson

Jeff Christianson, Tres Rios Field Office Recreation Planner, presented on dispersed camping at the Chutes and Ladders area in Cortez. The presentation was an overview of dispersed camping in the area for RAC members who were not present at the field trip to Chutes and Ladders the previous day. He emphasized that BLM has been engaging in adaptive management to address camping needs and impacts. He noted that dispersed camping on public lands has exploded in recent years and asked the

RAC to advise on whether the BLM should increase, decrease, or maintain the current managerial oversight of Chutes and Ladders.

- Acting District Manager Lisa Dawson opened the floor for RAC members to contribute their thoughts on the matter.
- RAC member Grady Ham proposed a vote to further develop the camp sites.
- The vote was seconded by Steve Garchar.
- Chairperson Tif Rodriguez asked if there were any objections to the proposed motion that the BLM further develop the sites at Chutes and Ladders.
- There were no objections.
- The Southwest District RAC unanimously voted for further development of the Chutes and Ladders campground.

Camping Fees Increases with James Lovelace

James Lovelace, Gunnison Field Office Recreation Planner presented on camping fees around Gunnison. He pointed out that BLM camping fees are very low, not keeping pace with other campgrounds in the area or inflation.

- Jim Haugsness proposed voting to raise camping fees and to implement a plan to raise them based on inflation so recurring consultation with the RAC was not needed.
- Jim Haugsness's motion was seconded by Steve Garchar.
- Chairperson Tif Rodriguez asked if there were any objections to the proposed motion that BLM should raise camping fees in the Gunnison Field Office.
- There were no objections.
- The Southwest District RAC unanimously voted to raise camping fees recurringly based on inflation in the Gunnison Field Office.

Closing Remarks and Open Discussion

- Acting District Manager Lisa Dawson thanked the RAC for their participation and noted that the next meeting will be held in Gunnison, September 2022.
- She encouraged RAC members to engage in conversations amongst themselves for ideas on how BLM can better serve the public while still holding the core values that BLM stands for.
- She asked that they consider reaching out to their peers and colleagues to apply to the Southwest District RAC during the next call for nominations late this summer.

Adjourn