

SNMRAC chairman certified the minutes for accuracy May 2, 2025.

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

January 23, 2025

RAC MEMBERS PRESENT:

Jerry Atkinson
Kathleen Blair
Jack Callaway
John Cornell
Roy “Skip” Gooch
Clifton “Earl” Greer
Dr. Sabrina Pack
Gill Sorg
Charles Turner
Emily Wirth

RAC MEMBERS ABSENT:

Teofilo Holguin
Robert Matulich

PUBLIC:

George Pack, volunteer

BLM STAFF/MEETING SUPPORT:

Denny Apachito, BLM Socorro Field Office Outdoor Recreation Planner
Matthew Atencio, BLM Socorro Field Office Manager
Wendy Brown, BLM Southern New Mexico RAC Coordinator
Scott Cooke, BLM Las Cruces District Office Manager
Sabrina Flores, BLM Albuquerque District Manager
Jamie Garcia, BLM Public Affairs Specialist
Dawn Jones, BLM Carlsbad Field Office Manager
Ella Kiley, BLM Public Affairs Specialist Intern
Michael Mora, BLM Socorro Field Office Assistant Field Manager
Charles Schmidt, BLM Roswell Field Office Manager
Ashley Shreves, BLM Carlsbad Field Office Outdoor Recreation Planner

SCRIBE:

Wendy Brown, BLM Southern New Mexico RAC Coordinator

CALL TO ORDER, WELCOME:

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.

FIELD TRIP VISITS:

Socorro Nature Area:

The Socorro Nature Area is a 120-acre environmental education area in the Rio Grande Bosque. The area includes a half-mile, self-guided nature walk with interpretive signs, a pond, and amphitheater. It also has picnic tables, a group shelter, and a restroom.

Johnson (Gordy's) Hill Off-Highway Vehicle Area:

Johnson (Gordy's) Hill offers diverse recreation opportunities including many roads and trails traversing deeply dissected canyons, high sandstone and limestone bluffs, terraces, and escarpments. On the higher ridges, there are scenic views of the Rio Grande Valley to the west. There are a variety of recreational opportunities, most notably off-highway vehicle riding on existing routes, offering challenges for all experience levels.

The Box Recreation Area:

The 640-acre Box Recreation Area is a highly scenic, rugged area which is popular for technical rock climbing and bouldering. The five cliffs on either side of this box canyon provide popular rock climbing for even highly skilled technical climbers. Challenging climbing opportunities include the Waterfall Wall, Corner Block, and the Fillet, a Papillon Wall.

Datil Well Recreation Area Campground:

Datil Well Recreation Area Campground includes one of 15 water wells along the old Magdalena Livestock Driveway. The old cattle trail was established in the 1800s and stretched 120 miles from Springerville, Arizona, to Magdalena, New Mexico. The area includes 3 miles of hiking trails in pinyon-juniper and ponderosa pine woodlands, with scenic views of the San Augustin Plains. The trail and vistas also offer an occasional glimpse of wildlife in a setting of quiet and solitude.

Meeting adjourned

January 24, 2024

RAC MEMBERS PRESENT:

Jerry Atkinson
Kathleen Blair
Jack Callaway
John Cornell

Roy “Skip” Gooch
Teofilo Holguin
Dr. Sabrina Pack
Gill Sorg
Charles Turner
Emily Wirth

RAC MEMBERS ABSENT:

Clifton “Earl” Greer
Robert Matulich

DESIGNATED FEDERAL OFFICIAL:

Jim Stovall, BLM Pecos District Manager

PUBLIC:

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

BLM STAFF/MEETING SUPPORT:

Denny Apachito, BLM Socorro Field Office Outdoor Recreation Planner
Matthew Atencio, BLM Socorro Field Office Manager
Wendy Brown, BLM Southern New Mexico RAC Coordinator
Lindsey Chavez, BLM Roswell Field Office Outdoor Recreation Planner
Scott Cooke, BLM Las Cruces District Office Manager
Amanda Eavenson, Assistant Field Manager, Roswell Field Office
Sabrina Flores, BLM Albuquerque District Manager
Juan Gamon, BLM Las Cruces District Office Supervisory Rangeland Management Specialist
Jamie Garcia, BLM Public Affairs Specialist
Dawn Jones, BLM Carlsbad Field Office Manager
Warren Kasper, BLM Fort Stanton-Snowy River Cave National Conservation Area Manager
Ella Kiley, BLM Public Affairs Specialist Intern
Don McClure, BLM Las Cruces Office Assistant Field Manager for Resources
Jennifer Merino, BLM – NM Outdoor Recreation Planner for Branch of Planning, Recreation and Cultural Resources
Michael Mora, BLM Socorro Field Office Assistant Field Manager for Renewable Resources
Allison Sandoval, BLM New Mexico Public Affairs Specialist, BLM – NM RAC coordinator
Charles Schmidt, BLM Roswell Field Office Manager
Ashley Shreves, BLM Carlsbad Field Office Outdoor Recreation Planner
Jim Stovall, BLM Pecos District Manager
Jesse Vinson, BLM Roswell Field Office Outdoor Recreation Planner

SCRIBE:

Wendy Brown, BLM SNMRAC coordinator

CALL TO ORDER, WELCOME & OPENING STATEMENTS:

Wendy Brown, BLM Southern New Mexico RAC coordinator, called the meeting to order and noted that the meeting had a quorum. Melanie Barnes, BLM – NM state director, attended via Zoom to welcome everyone to the meeting. John Cornell, SNMRAC chairman, provided welcoming remarks and asked everyone in the room to introduce themselves. Matthew Atencio, BLM Socorro Field Office Manager, also welcomed everyone.

PRESENTATIONS:

BLM Albuquerque District update, Michael Mora, Assistant Field Manager for Renewable Resources, Socorro Field Office, and Denny Apachito, Outdoor Recreation Planner:

Michael Mora, assistant manager of the BLM Socorro Field Office, provided an update on the Alamosa Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Improvements. The Alamosa Creek property, 5,867 acres, is open to the public and provides access to Cibola National Forest land and other BLM-managed lands. The completed improvements have included tree thinning and structures to control sediment along the creek. Mora answered questions from the RAC about continued maintenance and fencing. The BLM will continue maintenance of the area and will also leave fencing in place, he said.

Denny Apachito, BLM Socorro Field Office outdoor recreation planner, gave a presentation on a proposal to increase the standard amenity fee at Datil Well Recreation Area Campground. The amenity fee helps enable the agency to improve services at the site, offset operating costs, and reduce dependency on appropriated funding. The draft business plan for the Datil Well Recreation Area Campground would incorporate the Recreation.gov reservation fee into the visitor entry fee, raising the fee from \$5 to \$20 per standard site, and \$5 to \$30 for sites with electrical hookup. Group site fees remain the same at \$15 for day use and \$30 for overnight camping. This proposal is to ensure that the facilities remain operational for years to come.

RAC members had several questions and concerns about the plan. Their concerns regarded public input, the amount of the proposed increase (\$15 increase for a campsite), the cost to senior citizens, and the use of the Recreation.gov website to reserve camping spaces. RAC members were concerned that use of the website would cause people to drive all the way out to Datil only to find that all the sites were already reserved through Recreation.gov. In addition, the RAC expressed concern about the lack of public comments to review. The BLM began the 30-day public comment period on January 16, or about a week before the meeting. The RAC was also concerned that the BLM had not advertised the need for public comments enough. In addition, the RAC had questions about potential fee increases due to the Consumer Price Index. Jennifer Merino, BLM – NM Outdoor Recreation Planner for Branch of Planning, Recreation and Cultural Resources, explained the potential fees to the RAC.

Las Cruces District updates, Scott Cooke, Las Cruces District Office Manager; Juan Gamon, BLM LDCO Supervisory Rangeland Management Specialist; Don McClure, BLM LCDO Assistant Field Manager for Renewable Resources:

Scott Cooke provided updates on the Afton Solar Energy Zone Auction, the New Mexico State Land Exchange, the Achenbach Land Acquisition, the Southline Transmission Project, and the

Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument Resource Management Plan. In addition, Juan Gamon, a supervisory rangeland management specialist, gave a presentation on virtual fencing and how it is used in ranching.

Also, Don McClure, LCDO assistant district manager for renewable resources, gave a presentation about Starvation Draw. The LCDO is preparing to reclaim five earthen dams located within Luna County in and around a Wilderness Study Area. Personnel are analyzing five Starvation Draw dams with full involvement by the community of Deming. Analysis currently underway will inform decisions on how to best ensure that the dams give another 70 years of service controlling stormwater and sustaining watershed health. The benefits from the dams no longer support the resource management program.

Pecos District updates with programs and major actions overviews: Chuck Schmidt, BLM Roswell Field Office Manager; Dawn Jones, BLM Carlsbad Field Office Manager; Warren Kasper, Fort Stanton-Snowy River Cave National Conservation Area; Amanda Eavenson, BLM RFO Assistant Field Manager; and Ashley Shreves, BLM CFO Outdoor Recreation Planner;

Chuck Schmidt, BLM Roswell Field Manager, updated the RAC that the office plans to close on the 247-acre Pecos River Oxbow Acquisition near Roswell in the next six weeks. The office plans to use the land to provide recreation opportunities. Schmidt also updated the RAC on the status of idle oil and gas wells at the Cato Unit, a decades-old oil and gas field outside of Roswell.

Dawn Jones, BLM Carlsbad Field Office manager, provided an update on the office's Resource Management Plan. The office plans to have a draft ready for review by the fall, Jones said.

Warren Kasper, Fort Stanton-Snowy River Cave National Conservation Area Manager, gave a presentation on proposed fee increases at the Rob Jagers Campground and Valley of Fires Recreation Area. As proposed, RV camping fees would increase at both campgrounds by \$5 or \$7 to \$25 per night; camping fees with horse corral access at Rob Jagers would be \$30 per night; tent camping at Valley of Fires would increase by \$8 or \$3 (depending on the site) to \$15 per night; the dump station fee at Valley of Fires would increase by \$15 to \$30 or be included in camping fees (the fee is already \$30 at Rob Jagers); at Valley of Fires the daily cost for use of a group campsite would increase by \$10 to \$35 (the cost is already \$35 at Rob Jagers); a new site-specific annual pass at Valley of Fires would cost \$30; and the fees for all day-use single vehicles at Valley of Fires would be \$5 (currently it is \$3 if there is only one person in the car).

Amanda Eavenson, assistant field manager for resources for the BLM Roswell Field Office, gave a presentation on proposed fee increases at the Haystack Mountain and Mescalero Sands OHV areas outside of Roswell. As proposed, the fees for all day-use single vehicles with up to nine occupants would be \$5 (currently it is \$3 per car for single occupant and \$5 per car for up to nine occupants); day-use fees for vehicles with 10 or more occupants would remain \$15; camping with no hookups, a new fee, would cost \$10 per night; camping with hookups, a new fee, would cost \$20 per night; once a newly established dump station is constructed at Haystack there would be a \$30 dump station charge; and once a newly established group shelter is constructed at Haystack there would be a \$25 a day fee.

RAC members had several questions and concerns about the plans. Their concerns regarded public input and the use of the Recreation.gov website to reserve camping spaces. In addition, the RAC expressed concern about the lack of public comments to review. The BLM began the 30-day public comment period on January 13, or about a week and a half before the meeting. The RAC was also concerned that the BLM had not advertised the need for public comments enough. The RAC also had questions about potential fee increases due to the Consumer Price Index. Jennifer Merino, BLM – NM Outdoor Recreation Planner for Branch of Planning, Recreation and Cultural Resources, answered several questions.

Ashley Shreves, an outdoor recreation planner in the BLM Carlsbad Field Office, gave a presentation on Carlsbad-area recreation sites, which do not charge any fees. Shreves said the office is moving toward implementing fees at sites, but they have to meet certain criteria before the BLM can ask to implement fees. The BLM has no solid plans to implement fees at this time, but Shreves said the office is moving in that direction and wanted the RAC to know.

New Mexico Oil and Gas Association presentation on oil and gas industry, Andrea Felix, Senior Regulatory Policy Advisor, New Mexico Oil and Gas Association; Bradley Bishop, Regulatory Manager, Mewbourne Oil; and Tim Baker, Permian Regulatory Manager, ConocoPhillips:

Andrea Felix introduced the RAC to the New Mexico Oil and Gas Association, which is a coalition of more than 180 companies that promotes the safe and environmentally responsible development of oil and natural gas resources in New Mexico. She also shared that New Mexico is the second largest oil producing state in the United States, the fifth largest natural gas producing state, and produces 13% of crude oil in the United States. In New Mexico, most energy production takes place in the San Juan Basin in the north and the Permian Basin in the south. New Mexico produced \$13.26 billion in oil and gas revenue in 2024.

John Cornell, Southern NM RAC chairperson, asked if the organization had opposed the 10-mile exclusion zone for Chaco Canyon. Felix said the organization did not oppose it.

Discussion of land access issues in southern New Mexico, including Cowboy Spring south of Lordsburg:

John Cornell, Southern NM RAC chairperson, led a discussion of land-access issues, focusing on the Cowboy Spring Wilderness Study Area south of Lordsburg. Unless someone wants to hike five miles one way or can secure permission from a private landowner to cross private land, there is no public access to the land due to a locked gate on private land. Doña Ana County Associated Sportsmen has money and plans to buy a right of way from the New Mexico State Land Office that would provide access to the land. Cornell outlined the plan.

Subcommittee discussion:

Allison Sandoval, BLM – NM RAC coordinator, provided a presentation about RAC subcommittees. RAC members had expressed an interest at a previous meeting about forming a subcommittee about land issues. Sandoval outlined how to create a subcommittee and the logistics of a subcommittee. RAC members concluded they were not interested in forming a subcommittee at this time and would continue to discuss land access issues at regular meetings.

Public Comment Period:

There were no public comments.

While waiting for comments, the RAC discussed future meetings, tentatively deciding to have a meeting May 1 and 2, 2025, at the BLM Las Cruces District Office. The first day would be a field trip. The second day would include district office updates and potential discussions of wild horses; shooting on public lands; an update on the impact of a large conveyor belt near Carlsbad; and recreators defacing public recreation sites with items such as rock-climbing bolts.

Vote on proposed recreation and campground fee increases:

The RAC voted on Datil Well Campground, Rob Jaggers Campground, the Valley of Fires Recreation Area, Haystack Mountain Off-Highway Vehicle Area, and Mescalero Sands OHV Area. With conditions, all members present voted in favor of the proposals: John Cornell, Jack Callaway, Dr. Sabrina Pack, Roy “Skip” Gooch, Charles Turner, Gill Sorg, Teofilo Holguin, Kathleen Blair and Jerry Atkinson. Emily Wirth had to leave the meeting early and was not present but participated virtually via Zoom and voted in favor of the proposals.

For the first vote, Councilor Sabrina Pack made a motion to approve the recreation fee proposals for Rob Jaggers Campground, Valley of Fires Campground, and the Roswell Field Office’s Haystack Mountain Off-Highway Vehicle Area and Mescalero Sands OHV Area, on the condition that the Bureau of Land Management change the proposed business plans to reflect a clarification regarding the fact that senior discounts apply to the fees. Also, the proposed business plans should state that if the sites do adopt the Recreation.gov reservation system, only 50% of the campground sites will be available for reservation. The council would like some of the campground sites available on a first-come, first-served basis. The motion was seconded. With conditions, all members present voted in favor of the proposal: John Cornell, Jack Callaway, Dr. Sabrina Pack, Roy “Skip” Gooch, Charles Turner, Gill Sorg, Teofilo Holguin, Kathleen Blair and Jerry Atkinson. Emily Wirth had to leave the meeting early and was not present but participated virtually via Zoom and voted in favor of the proposals.

For the second vote, Councilor Sabrina Pack made a motion to approve the recreation fee proposals for the Datil Well Campground, on the condition that the Bureau of Land Management change the proposed business plan to reflect a clarification regarding the fact that senior discounts apply to the fees. Also, the proposed business plans should state that if the sites do adopt the Recreation.gov reservation system, only 50% of the campground sites will be available for reservation. The council would like some of the campground sites available on a first-come, first-serve basis. This would be fixed on page 19 of the proposed business plan. In addition, the proposed business plan should be clear about possible Consumer Price Index increases being a maximum of 20%, not 25%. The proposed business plan should also be clear what the target demographic is for the recreation site and conduct a visitor survey within two years. The motion was seconded. With conditions, all members present voted in favor of the proposal: John Cornell, Jack Callaway, Dr. Sabrina Pack, Roy “Skip” Gooch, Charles Turner, Gill Sorg, Teofilo Holguin, Kathleen Blair and Jerry Atkinson. Emily Wirth had to leave the meeting early and was not present but participated virtually via Zoom and voted in favor of the proposals.

Meeting adjourned