

COLORADO CANYONS NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA
Advisory Council Meeting Minutes
March 6, 2003

Attendees:

Ken Currey	Dan Rosenthal	Terry Gray
Art Donoho	Bob Silbernagel	Scott Larson
John Foster	Russ Walker	Mel Lloyd
Warren Gore	Gene Arnesen	Mike Perry
Greg Gnesios	Belle Chesnick	Jane Ross
Doug Hall	B. Boeschstein	Harold Snyder
Joe Keys		Roland Reynolds

Greetings and Introductions

Chairman Warren Gore called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m. This evening's agenda includes:

- Update by Bureau of Land Management (BLM) staff
- Budget issues for 2003
- Continue discussion on alternatives (BLM staff available for clarification, if desired)

BLM Update

Greg Gnesios, Colorado Canyons National Conservation Area (CCNCA) Manager, noted that the Wilderness Front Country Working Group has been meeting to address issues unique to that area and should have recommendations finalized by next week.

Congress approved the omnibus bill providing BLM with a budget. The CCNCA has received a budget add-on of approximately \$400,000 for FY 2003. The funding is not base funding and therefore will not allow bringing on additional full-time employees. The CCNCA staff has six months to fully obligate its funding, although the next few weeks will be critical. CCNCA projects will likely focus on cultural, signing and facilities needs. FY 2004 requests have been submitted, and that funding will be separate and distinct from FY 2003.

Gene Arnesen, CCNCA outdoor recreational planner, noted that after FY 2004, no planning dollars would be funded for the CCNCA.

Bob Silbernagel talked about hiking with the new BLM Colorado State Director Ron Wenker, who visited the Grand Junction field office last week. Grand Junction Field

Manager Catherine Robertson and other CCNCA staff were on the hike as well. Bob was pleased that Ron took the time to see the CCNCA Front Country firsthand.

Jane Ross, CCNCA planning team leader, reported on last week's Wilderness Front Country Working Group meeting and indicated that progress is being made. Pollock Canyon Estates residents have been a part of these discussions and support the planning efforts, recommending that additional signs be placed along the perimeter of their property and area kiosk information be improved.

Greg added that discussions should conclude tomorrow so that alternatives for the Front Country can be developed.

It was noted that both grazing and mechanized use for Wilderness are addressed in the Wilderness Act of 1964, and as a result, considering any mechanized use in the Wilderness is moot.

Alternative Discussions

Warren summarized the alternative themes used in the CCNCA planning process:

Alternative 1: No action

Alternative 2: Maximize multiple use and recreation

Alternative 3: Adaptive Management

Alternative 4: Maximize conservation

Overall, alternative 3 seems to be the predominant choice among the Advisory Council, with some mixing and matching.

The Advisory Council had several questions that were covered with the CCNCA staff:

Issue: Acquire water rights to assure that water is available for present and future uses, and address salinity issues in the Colorado River Basin.

The BLM hydrologist drafted this language, and after consulting with this expert, language will be added ensuring that the plan will not conflict with existing legislation. The Advisory Council was uncertain that water rights language is even needed.

The Big Straw project was discussed in relation to its impact on the CCNCA. The Advisory Council agreed that language should be added to the plan for the purpose of protecting the resource from impact should the project go through.

Language for salinity issues was suggested to include “. . . work with the Grand Valley Selenium Task Force to reduce salinity and sediment.”

Issue: Dog control in high-use areas.

The Advisory Council felt that Wilderness Front Country, Mack Ridge, and Rabbit Valley areas should fall under special restrictions given the high number of dogs accompanying their owners on outings in these areas.

A policy was suggested for the entire CCNCA, which would read, “Dogs should be on leashes in high-use areas, such as trailheads, campgrounds, parking lots, and other areas where safety is a concern, including the Wilderness Front Country area.”

Issue: Springs will not be developed.

Warren thought that legislation allows for spring development, and this alternative conflicts with that legislation. Clarification on this will be developed and presented to the Advisory Council for continued discussion prior to the next meeting.

Issue: Fuel wood cutting and cutting of fence posts in the Black Ridge area.

Warren questioned whether these activities are currently allowed. This issue is only found in alternative 1 (the no-action alternative) and indicates that, while this may not be currently being practiced, it is allowed under existing management.

Issue: Wildlife monitoring.

The Advisory Council agreed that the BLM and its experts should leave wildlife management to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife. These alternatives should be reworded to reflect this.

Issue: Grazing, south of the Colorado River.

The Advisory Council is not prepared to recommend no domestic sheep use within the CCNCA. Warren expressed concerns with approving this action when it is not known whether the Joufflas family has been notified of this potential action. The BLM will clarify why the elimination of sheep grazing is desired.

Jane encouraged the Advisory Council to think about the CCNCA's future and to consider that sheep grazing has already been eliminated in the CCNCA through individual Grazing Use Permits. However, Warren insisted that the Advisory Council would not take any action impacting sheep allotments until checking with those permittees that would be affected.

Issue: Grazing in canyon bottoms.

This applies to canyon bottoms in the Wilderness only, and Warren provided some history on this issue. Some of the canyon bottoms are impossible to fence. In the 1970s, the Gore and Aubert families were asked by the BLM to discontinue grazing in the bottoms of Knowles, Mee, and Rattlesnake Canyons to protect riparian areas. Sieber, Jones, and Bull Canyons do not contain riparian areas and were not included at that time. The language for this alternative will be revised to be more specific, and the following was suggested: In order to offer increased protection of riparian areas, discontinue grazing in select portions of Jones Canyon and other small canyon bottoms as necessary to maintain accordance with standards for rangeland health.

Issue: Alternative 2—restrict sheep grazing on allotments within the CCNCA to meet the 9-mile buffer zone for protecting bighorn sheep.

The Advisory Council is concerned with creating buffer zones of any kind. The Advisory Council questions whether 9 miles is really necessary, and this language will be clarified after consulting the BLM expert. Warren recommends that this alternative be struck altogether.

In the interest of protecting bighorn sheep, a grazing policy for domestic sheep should be established for the entire CCNCA. Warren again stressed that permittees should be contacted prior to making a decision on any sheep grazing policy.

Jane encouraged the group to look at future permittees; the Joufflas family may not always be the permittee and others may not possess similar land ethics.

Doug Hall emphasized that Congressman Scott McInnis was adamant that grazing rights were not to be impacted by this Resource Management Plan (RMP).

Issue: Improve vegetation and prairie dog habitat.

The Advisory Council wanted clarification on this language, and Jane explained that prairie dogs play an important role in the ecosystem, especially with the potential reintroduction of the black-footed ferret.

Issue: Tamarisk.

Language addressing the “release of bio-agents if approved” was questioned, and Jane explained that an insect that selectively targets tamarisk has been identified and could potentially be released for controlling tamarisk. This method has not been approved by the BLM or the Department of the Interior at this time, but may be an effective method of eradication in the future.

Issue: Paleontological alternatives.

John Foster noted that some paleontology alternatives focus on hobbyists and others for scientific uses. Specific clarification language should be inserted for each use.

Greg asked what John’s position is on hobby collecting within the CCNCA, and John indicated that he did not have a problem with the activity unless valuable scientific materials are taken.

Only small hand tools should be allowed, and the hole-size restriction noted in the alternative is for scientific excavation only. Currently, as per Washington Office Interim Management Policy, no recreational collecting is allowed in the CCNCA.

The Advisory Council agreed that surface-only collection should be allowed for hobbyists outside of the Wilderness and specific paleontology areas. All Wilderness and specific paleontology areas are closed to any collecting.

Mack Ridge

Issue: Trail proposals regarding hiking, equestrian, and mountain biking use.

The Advisory Council suggested signing the single-track portions of Mary's Loop trail with the message that equestrian use is not recommended. The Mack Ridge Working Group recommended no horses on Moore Fun and a portion of Mack Ridge Trail anyway, so this suggestion should be acceptable.

Issue: Construct Trail K alternative.

Jane explained that the frontage road proposal (Trail K) evolved into a non-issue with the Mack Ridge Working Group. The group would like this proposal moved back into alternative 3 and worded so it could be incorporated in the future if deemed necessary for reasons of safety.

Issue: Dirt road proposals.

The Advisory Council suggests rewording alternative 3 regarding restricting motorized use. This language should allow river access by motorized vehicles within a reasonable distance to the river. This request is consistent with the River Corridor Working Group recommendation.

Issue: Provide restrooms at high-use parking areas.

This language should be in alternative 3, as well as alternative 4.

Issue: Permit program.

A question was asked about the language limiting commercial mountain bike permits. The Mack Ridge Working Group recommended that commercial mountain bike permits be limited to four commercial groups per day at 15 individuals or less per permit.

BLM Grand Junction staff will be meeting with the BLM Moab staff to discuss the inter-office (Grand Junction, CCNCA and Moab) permitting processes.

Desired Future Conditions

Issue: Unlimited motorized use.

The Advisory Council wants language added “. . . and access to within one-quarter mile of the Colorado River.”

Rabbit Valley

Issue: BLM Utah and BLM Colorado management coordination.

The coordinated management efforts between BLM Moab and BLM Grand Junction would be accomplished through a Memorandum of Understanding.

Gene explained that, in the area of Harley Dome, trail systems are proposed only and may not be reflected on a map in the draft plan. Jane stressed that, according to BLM policy, the proposed trail system must be mapped and discussed in the plan.

Warren suggested that those Advisory Council members more familiar with the Working Group discussions should review the proposed individual trail recommendations for accuracy. Comments implied that most alternatives presented have been consistent with group discussions.

Issue: Target shooting.

The Advisory Council recommends no target shooting within the entire CCNCA.

Discussions turned to Advisory Council recommendations and their role in the planning process. The members voiced their concerns and strongly agreed that time dedicated to this plan's development is wasted if the BLM overrides or disregards their preferred alternative recommendations.

River Corridor

Issue: Portable toilet systems.

Russ Walker pointed out that language should be specific in requiring all river users and all campers (regardless of how they access the river corridor) within the River Corridor to use a portable toilet system. Anyone on the river needs to use the system, regardless of his or her mode of access to the river.

Issue: Personal watercraft.

The Advisory Council agreed that mentioning personal watercraft (PWC) will be struck from the alternatives. No one was comfortable denying those users access to the river.

Ken Currey thought it might be appropriate to explain that the RMP does not address uses on the river itself, but the river corridor only. Jane confirmed that a description of the status of the Colorado River in relation to the CCNCA would be included in the RMP.

A motion was made to accept the management objectives and draft alternatives for Mack Ridge, Rabbit Valley, and the River Corridor as discussed above, with the exception of the sheep grazing issue needing further clarification. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously. Overall, alternative 3 as amended is the preferred Advisory Council alternative.

BLM will make revisions to the draft alternative document in red for easier review.

The Advisory Council will meet unofficially on its own before the April 3 meeting, and a date will be determined soon.

Tentative April Agenda

- Continue discussions on alternatives.

Public Comment

Bennett Boeschenstein noted that the Advisory Council is already aware of the city of Fruita's desires in partnering with the BLM. No other notable comments were made.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:00 p.m.