

COLORADO CANYONS NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA
Advisory Council Meeting Minutes
May 9, 2002

Attendees:

Art Donoho	Doug Hall	Mike Click	Shane Henry
John Foster	Dan Rosenthal	Steve Chaney	Dave Price
Greg Gnesios	Bob Silbernagel	Steve Cohn	Catherine Robertson
Warren Gore	Russ Walker	Jim Cooper	Jane Ross
			Derek Wagner

Greetings and Introductions

Warren Gore opened the meeting at 3:05 p.m. Doralyn Genova and Ken Currey were not present. The group introduced themselves.

Field Trip and Working Group Updates

Advisory Council Field Trips:

The council discussed when to begin conducting council field trips within the National Conservation Area (NCA). Jane Ross, Colorado Canyons National Conservation (CCNCA) Planning and Environmental Coordinator, reminded the group that if the council goes on a field trip, it would need to be published in the Federal Register and could take up to 45 days. The council discussed which areas were the most important to visit. Greg Gnesios, CCNCA Manager, suggested the council visit all four zones. The Front Country and Rabbit Valley could be done in one day, and the River corridor and Glade Park could be done another day.

The council discussed whether going on a weekday, or a weekend, would be better. Visiting some of the areas on a weekday was possible with other areas on a weekend; however, the river would be better visited on a weekend.

After discussing the problem about gnats, and going on a weekday versus a weekend day, the council decided on August 3 for floating the Colorado River and August 17 for visiting the Glade Park area. July 23 (Tuesday) will be the alternate date. The group will visit the Front Country, Rabbit Valley, and Mack Ridge areas on July 26. Jane will check the availability of BLM guides and equipment for the August 3 river trip.

River Corridor Working Group:

Russ Walker discussed this Working Group's activities. They have met twice, and the group's consensus is that, right now, things with the river are all right. The overall

concern is that changes will occur in the future. The group has discussed such things as implementing a campground permit system during weekends. However, nobody is really interested in having a permit system. The group will continue to work on this to generate more ideas.

At this time, there are no signs showing people where the preferred campsites are, except for the sign located at the Loma boat launch. The group was asking if these are designated campsites or only preferred campsites. At this time, there are no designated campsites. The group felt that if some of the campsites are limited, this might take care of some of the river traffic. However, most people camp overnight; there are very few day-use only float trips. A suggestion was made to collaborate with Colorado State Parks on how to better manage people. A member asked if the map at the Loma boat launch shows where private land is located. The map does but only shows white blotches. Some of the private land is posted with "no trespassing" signs.

Mack Ridge Working Group:

Dan Rosenthal and John Foster discussed the Mack Ridge Working Group. They have ridden most of the trails, beginning at the east end, and most areas need better signage. The group still needs to do the Lions Loop, Horsethief Bench, Mack Ridge and Troy Built trails. They are running out of time and hopefully will have the trails rated by the next meeting.

The group had a field trip two weeks ago, meeting at the Kokopelli Trailhead. They drove the double-track and overlooked Rustlers Loop and Horsethief Bench. Another field trip will be required to complete looking at the area. They hope to get all the way to Mack Ridge, and in the process, are looking for the best trail systems. Dan referred to the map and discussed the single-track at Mary's Loop. They would like to keep horses off this loop. Someone asked if there were a lot of horses on this trail, and the answer was no; however, this could become a problem in the future.

A member asked if the state land acquisition has progressed. Shane Henry, Colorado Department of Natural Resources, was present at the meeting and stated that he visited the property this morning. Colorado is looking at a statewide swap with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and this is one parcel being considered, especially the portion south of I-70.

Rabbit Valley Working Group:

The issue of dispersed camping needs to be addressed in Rabbit Valley. Dispersed camping is increasing and impacting the area to the point of possibly requiring fire pans and port-a-potties. We need to discourage cutting vegetation. The consensus is that the best place for a developed campground is located on the Joufflas property, if it could be acquired. The council would like to see this acquisition happen, probably done through a land exchange.

Another issue is dealing with trails. Jim Cooper, BLM Transportation Planner, has been working on the motorized trails. An outline is needed for an off-highway vehicle (OHV)

system. Some of the dead-end trails should be closed, and loops created where possible. The McDonald Creek cultural resource area should remain closed to vehicles. The consensus from the council is that the broad plan Jim presented is a good one. The council would like to see Jim remain at this BLM office, and Catherine Robertson, BLM Grand Junction Field Manager, said this office would be able to keep Jim on staff.

The group would like to see the motocross track kept open but with more regulations and better signage. The council discussed the motocross track, its size, as well as necessary improvements.

The council discussed the issue of BLM Utah getting involved. Greg said some of the NCA staff visited the BLM Moab field office earlier this week. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will be created for the portion of the NCA located in Utah. The NCA staff believes that it places a higher priority on this area than Moab's staff does. Catherine will be speaking with the field manager in Moab on this issue.

Wilderness Working Group:

Joe discussed the Wilderness Working Group. They have had one meeting and two field trips since the last Advisory Council meeting. The field trip attendees consisted of the Wilderness Working Group and some employees from BLM. The group visited the BS Road where Troy Schnurr, BLM Ranger, presented maps and explained road closures. Harley Metz, BLM Ecologist, gave a presentation on rangeland health. Troy also pointed out some dispersed camping issues.

There is a parking problem at the Mee Canyon Trailhead. The current Wilderness boundary includes the Mee Canyon parking lot and this needs to be taken care of. There is a lack of parking near the gate and BLM has closed some areas, but people need a place to park. A suggestion was made to have either the Wilderness boundary moved, or the fence moved. It would take congressional action to move the boundary and could be easier to move the fence.

The group then moved to Knowles and Jones Canyons and went back through the former Gore property. The group looked at the Knowles Canyon Trailhead, where the parking area needs to be enlarged, as vehicles are packing in here. Camping is occurring right across from the Knowles Canyon Trailhead.

There is also a problem with dispersed camping off BS Road. As a result, a lot of the land is being torn up. The council discussed the fire restoration seeding that took place in this area, as well as the benefits of aerial seeding versus mechanized seeding. The consensus is that mechanized seeding has had better results.

The council continued to discuss the dead-end roads that are getting heavy OHV use (all-terrain vehicles, in particular)—especially during hunting season. This is affecting some of the landowners. Catherine asked Warren if he would take the lead in discussing this issue with the landowners and get back to the council.

The Working Group discussed having designated dispersed camping areas. Most of the group did not like this idea, as even with designated camping, people are going to find other places to camp. A question was asked if this was a seasonal problem, and it is thought to be, increasingly, a year-round issue. Also, there are more people living in Glade Park, and a lot of these people are interested in the Wilderness and visiting these places.

Jane discussed the half-day Front Country field trip. The field trip began at Devils Canyon, where there are issues with parking for both cars and horse trailers. The group continued on to Pollock Canyon, noting that Pollock Bench definitely has a good trailhead and could be used as an example. The group spent some time visiting with residents of the Pollock Canyon Estates. These people are interested in continuing a good relationship with BLM.

Because the Front Country area gets so much day use, there should be good signage and toilet facilities. The BS Road should remain as primitive as possible, and any money available should be used for the Front Country.

At this time, Warren presented Steve Chaney from the Great Sand Dunes National Monument and Preserve. Steve is gathering ideas about the NCA, as he and his staff are establishing an Advisory Council.

BLM Update

Greg said the write-up on the Land Health Assessment field trip should be available by the end of this month.

The meeting in Moab this past Monday went well, and Greg felt that the group should get together more often. Some of the NCA staff were at the Colorado State Office on Tuesday to meet with program leads. Greg has been working with the NCA web site people to get the site up and running. The group also discussed the paleontological resources in Rabbit Valley. The NCA staff is working on submitting capital improvement projects, such as the Devils Canyon and Fruita Paleontological Areas, on the new portal concept.

There is a Western Tourism Expo going on at Two Rivers Convention Center until 9:00 p.m. tonight.

Jane talked about what the council would be discussing after the break. Bob Silbernagel asked about the budget; however, there is nothing new to report. The NCA did get \$10,000 from the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to assess visitor attitudes in charging fees within the CCNCA. However, this morning's newspaper had an article about the legality in charging visitor fees.

The last day of the Northern Arizona University (NAU) survey will be May 20, and hopefully we will get some good information from this project.

The council took a 10-minute break at this point.

After the break, Warren asked Shane if he would like to speak.

Shane said that the Department of the Interior and the Bush Administration are interested in cooperating with both state and local agencies. Working through partnerships, the Department of Wildlife, Division of Natural Resources, and other state agencies will not be stumbling blocks in this initiative. An agreement will help formalize these partnerships, and the State of Colorado is interested in partnering with the BLM.

Jane discussed cooperating agencies, a requirement of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), as well as the regulations behind this requirement. Jane suggested that we do an MOU, and the council should have recommendations for this. We should be thinking about this and where we want it to go.

Request for Extension of Deadline:

Greg compared the NCA to the Gunnison Gorge NCA plan, which is also time-sensitive and under the same constraints. The Gunnison Gorge group asked for a 5-month extension to its plan. Greg and Jane feel that the CCNCA should ask for an extension at this time. Staying on the original project timeframe is going to cause problems. We should probably go for a 9- to 12-month extension; however, we do not want to extend it forever. We would have to get approval for this extension from the Colorado State Office. The council discussed this issue, and the consensus is that we should get an extension.

Doug Hall made a motion to support the request for the extension BLM is asking for, Russ seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

A question was asked if the Advisory Council would meet every month with the extension. The answer is yes, the meetings will continue.

Jane will draft a resolution for the council to review. When finalized, Warren will sign the resolution before the next meeting in order to move forward.

Land Use Planning:

Jane discussed the Land Use Planning Handbook - Appendix C. (Please visit the BLM Electronic Freedom of Information Act Reading Room at <http://www.blm.gov/nhp/efoia/wo/handbook/h1601-1.pdf>, page 73.)

Economic Analysis and Upcoming Meeting:

Steve Cohn, here from BLM's Washington Office for a 90-day detail, discussed social and economic impacts.

In preparing the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), the analysis for the plan will look at social and economic impacts on the area. These are two-fold, the current context and projecting this into the future. Visitor use will increase because the population will increase.

The economic analysis of the local economy, for both recreation and tourism, supported 8 percent of Mesa County jobs in 1999. This will only continue to increase. Visitors to the area from other parts of Colorado will also increase. The questions will be where the money is spent and how this will affect the area.

The social analysis is more difficult to determine; however, benefits-based management (BBM) will take care of most of this.

After these analyses are completed, we can build plans around them. On May 14, at 2:00 p.m., several local agencies, including the Riverfront Commission, Mesa State College, Colorado State Parks, National Park Service, Division of Wildlife, and local governments, are meeting. Anyone serving on the Advisory Council is invited to attend.

Steve discussed an agreement with the Sonoran Institute in Bozeman, Montana, which is looking at both land use and socioeconomic issues for the future. These analyses are being done for every county in the Western United States and facilitate a discussion on current trends and what the future will hold. These discussions are scheduled for May 30-31 and are open to the community, along with every level of government. A location has not been selected yet, as Glenwood Springs will also be involved.

Someone asked if this basis was being used only for the NCA, and it is not. This will affect every state, at every level.

Public Comment

A comment was made that the previously set deadline should be kept and no extension requested. Instead of delaying field trips, people should use insect repellent and conduct the trips, as the process is not moving fast enough. Also mentioned, all these problems are caused by people and we need population control.

Warren commented that a field trip has to be published in the Federal Register and would take 45 days. This is out of the control of the Advisory Council.

Doug Hall made a motion to adjourn, Russ Walker seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.