

**COLORADO CANYONS NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA
Wilderness Front Country Working Group Meeting Minutes
March 7, 2003**

Attendees:

Greg Gnesios	Shaun Deeney	Marcia Jones	Bob Sherrill
Gene Arnesen	Dusty Dunbar	Mel Lloyd	Cindy Sherrill
Robbie Breaux	Wade Johnson	Jack Ronzio	Palma Wilson

Greetings and Introductions

Colorado Canyons National Conservation Area (CCNCA) Manager Greg Gnesios called the meeting to order at 2:10 p.m. Greg covered today's agenda, which is attached, and a round of introductions followed.

Greg reported that several of the draft alternatives for the Mack Ridge, Rabbit Valley, and River Corridor were presented to the Advisory Council at the monthly meeting held last night.

Group Discussions

Colorado National Monument (COLM) Superintendent Palma Wilson spoke about the General Management Plan, which is also in the development stage. A number of potential trail connections into the CCNCA are being considered, one of which is the historic Fruita Dugway Trail. This trail turns into the Black Ridge Trail eventually and would require some maintenance before encouraging use. This area would provide a great opportunity for historical interpretation. Palma added that if CCNCA visitors enter the park and use park facilities, they would need to pay the park fee. The COLM hopes to work with the BLM in providing necessary facilities for these trail connections. Within the transition zone between the CCNCA and COLM, the COLM is considering allowing dogs on leashes but only in the transition zone. Palma noted that 13,000 of 20,000 acres within the Monument have been recommended for Wilderness status, and this includes acreage east of the transition area (east of the road). As a result, COLM management is treating this area as if it were already Wilderness.

Greg informed the group that two small patches of BLM land, located near the northern boundary of the COLM, might be turned over to the COLM. Greg also mentioned that discussions at last night's Advisory Council meeting included recommendations from the Advisory Council for increasing regulations for dogs in high-use areas.

Dusty Dunbar, from the city of Fruita, added that a pullout at Kings View is part of Fruita's Highway 340 Corridor Plan. This would safely allow for a potential trailhead into the Front Country from this point. Dusty also said that it is important to know that zoning is grandfathered in and would allow for development at a reduced density right

up to the CCNCA boundary. Fruita wants to avoid trailhead access problems for the public in this area.

Greg reported that the CCNCA received \$400,000 in add-on funding for fiscal year 2003, but this type of funding cannot be used for bringing on additional, permanent staff that could help with the increased use in the CCNCA.

Greg explained the existing points of access in the Devils Canyon area and discussed its recreational uses. Many of the trails lead into Wilderness, and most are used heavily by nearby residents. Some areas are experiencing overuse, and as a result, some have been fenced off to protect the resource. Horses and hikers are still allowed, but mountain bikes are not because the draw to enter the Wilderness proved too strong to ignore for those users.

Greg asked the group what they felt appropriate uses are for the area and offered that Opal Hill lends itself to mountain biking opportunities. Dusty felt that mountain biking opportunities might be appropriate on the old roadways previously created for the defunct golf course development.

Greg added that access for the disabled may also be created using these roads. Greg also announced that the dog waste bag dispenser and trash receptacle would be set up next week at the Devils Canyon Trailhead.

Dusty pointed out that many users will want the BLM to utilize these existing roads and trails in the area to provide opportunities for a wide spectrum of visitors.

Greg reported that some trails in the area might provide Wilderness interpretive and orientation opportunities. Adoptable kiosks and trails, spearheaded by BLM Interpretive Specialist Wade Johnson, offer a huge opportunity for students and friends groups to take ownership in caring for the area.

Wade mentioned the recent problems with vandalism at Dinosaur Hill and the need to instill some environmental values in the area's young people. Both Greg and Wade have been working with John Vail, principal at Fruita-Monument High School. The school is an important part of this educational initiative—changing behavior and educating users is critical.

It would be easier for the BLM to ban mountain bike riding altogether in the CCNCA Front Country area south of the river. Instead, the BLM is making Opal Hill available for riding opportunities to avoid such a drastic management action.

Someone wondered whether peer pressure would assist the BLM in enforcement if mountain bikes were allowed back into the Devils Canyon area. Some expressed their desire to see the activity allowed again in a limited capacity.

Gene Arnesen, outdoor recreation planner, wondered who the majority of users on Opal Hill would be and expressed his view that unsupervised, younger riders from the Kings View subdivision would more than likely be riding in the area. Education for this user group would be important too.

Dusty stated that BLM should strive to provide a riding area for kids, as it only adds to the positive reasons for living in Mesa County.

Greg emphasized that jog stroller use cannot be compared to mountain bike use, and mountain bike use is much more difficult to control. The BLM will use improved signs and kiosks to inform and educate Front Country visitors. Some flexibility may be possible in the interface area adjacent to the Wilderness, but no mechanized use, with the exception of wheel chairs, is allowed in the Wilderness.

Uses in the Opal Hill area should be developed with flexibility in mind since increased growth will place more demand on the Front Country.

Greg asked the group to put mountain bike use aside and focus on recommendations involving other uses. Dusty encouraged the BLM to take advantage of this planning process and consider all uses. By banning any one activity, that activity will just be displaced elsewhere, and the BLM may not get the opportunity to say how it is developed.

Greg agreed that BLM would need to work with local communities in developing nearby mountain biking opportunities. Some felt that effective signs could control most abuses of the resource.

Greg moved on to the agenda item regarding educational and interpretive trails, as well as working closely with schools. Pictures were passed around of the vandalism done at Dinosaur Hill last fall. Greg feels that part of the problem is young peoples' lack of understanding and engagement in their public lands.

Palma added that vandalism problems experienced in the COLM have resulted in preventive measures that limit resource accessibility. Dusty added that many damaging acts are not done out of rage but convenience and ignorance.

Greg feels that involving local schools in adopting trails, encouraging peer pressure, and providing educational resources can help with the vandalism problems.

Wade welcomed Fruita-Monument High School Assistant Principal Marcia Jones to today's meeting. Wade explained his patrol routine in the Front Country, which includes educating the young people. Wade stressed that BLM needs to form a partnership with the schools in educating young people and impressing upon them resource values. The BLM hopes to provide an area for the young people to adopt and mentioned the school "F" on Dinosaur Hill, which presents a management challenge. Past abuses have occurred during the students' periodic maintenance of the school letter. The BLM

recognizes students' desire to enjoy their public lands; the challenge lies in getting them to play a role in sharing and caring for them.

Marcia emphasized that Fruita-Monument is "a great school with great kids." Marcia claimed that holding the troublesome 10 percent of the kids accountable is critical. The other 90 percent of the kids can be responsive to educational efforts, so the BLM should concentrate on that group. Marcia added that achieving buy-in from the kids is important and suggested making a presentation to the kids on the adoption project. Marcia indicated that inviting a small group of kids to today's meeting would have provided an ideal opportunity for interaction with them. Education is primary and will work on 90 percent of the kids. Marcia cautioned that the other 10 percent will not be reached by education, and vandalism will be inevitable.

Marcia reported that the school is considering going to one one-hour lunch period next year, rather than the current two-hour lunch period. Marcia added that law enforcement will be required to control the problem minority and encouraged the BLM to not judge the entire Fruita-Monument student body based on a few reckless actions. The educated 90 percent can support the BLM in enforcement through peer pressure. Marcia encouraged the BLM to use the science staff as a resource, as well as consider making a presentation to the student body or set up a lunchtime exhibit booth.

Palma stated that the COLM hopes to target elementary-age students with environmental sensitivity training, if funding becomes available. Palma proposed that joint efforts among the COLM, BLM, and the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW), held in conjunction with the start of school and/or Public Lands Day, might be a good opportunity for promoting environmental sensitivity.

Greg stated that he was encouraged by Marcia's suggestions and comments and will plan some of these activities as time and funding allow.

Marcia emphasized that the students are part of the solution, not the problem.

Greg asked for any other items to bring to the Advisory Council. Dusty reminded the BLM that acquiring Snooks Bottom, with the city of Fruita as a partner, could add a positive component to the CCNCA Front Country. The city is ready to play a role as the BLM's partner and sees itself as the CCNCA's Gateway City. Dusty again encouraged the BLM to plan for the growth.

A member attending from Pollock Canyon Estates asked the BLM to work toward improving the roads in the Front Country with cooperation from the other agencies. Greg admitted that the BLM would need to address this issue with the increased use in the area.

Dusty reported that the city of Fruita is working with Mesa County in managing its portion of the roads.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:50 p.m.

Meeting Agenda

- Trail Links
- Front Country uses
 - Devils
 - Opal Hill
- Education/school interface