

**Gunnison Basin Wild & Scenic Stakeholder Group
March 23, 2011**

DRAFT NOTES

SUMMARY

The meeting included follow-up on questions remaining from the 3-9 meeting on the Rose and Big and Little Dominguez stream segments and then focused on Gunnison River segments 1 and 3 in the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) staff gave introductory information on the segments and their Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORV's), and the group shared information on current uses as well as potential threats to the ORV's and potential options for protecting them.

The group identified the following needs for additional information:

- BLM and local landowners agreed on the need to review and verify the property boundaries in BLM's eligibility report, particularly around Bridgeport.
- Whether the railroad owns the property it uses in the corridor or simply has a right-of-way should be investigated.
- What is the mineral rights ownership in the corridor?
- Need more information on how nomination of cultural & historical sites to National Register of Historic Places could work & BLM's role in that.
- Need more information on how management of an NRHP District would differ from NRHP site(s).

Next meeting:

Tuesday, April 5, 6:30 – 9:00pm

Location to be announced. This was added after the group reassessed the planned schedule. The agenda will include follow-up on questions from 3-23 meeting on Gunnison River segments and discussion of Cottonwood and Escalante Creeks.

DETAILS

Introduction

The meeting opened with participant introductions and a review of the meeting expectations and agenda.

Financial Update

Chris Treese of the Colorado River District then provided a financial update. He reported that a check had been received from the Terror Ditch and Reservoir Company, and several more were coming in. A representative from the Delta County Farm Bureau said their check was on the way. He also noted that the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) had paid the latest invoice, so Hannah and Callie would get paid for their work through February.

A representative of the CWCB, Suzanne Sellers (on the phone), was asked about the CWCB's attitude towards this process & about concerns that had been raised about

environmental groups withdrawing from the stakeholder process. She replied that she didn't have the details on that but could check.

Follow-up from March 9 meeting

During the March 9 stakeholder meeting, which focused on Rose Creek and Big and Little Dominguez Creek Segments 1 and 2, participants identified the need for additional information on potential threats to Canyon Tree Frogs (the wildlife ORV for the area) and how the “Special Recreation Management Area” management tool and “no surface occupancy” stipulations could work in a Wilderness.

Canyon Tree Frogs

CO Division of Wildlife representative Ryan Swygmán reported that the biggest concern was that the frogs lay eggs in ephemeral pools when snow melts in the spring. The water in the pools needs to stay fairly clear, and hikers could muddy the pools. BLM National Conservation Manager Katie Stevens noted that DOW's information was consistent with BLM's information, that the main condition important for the frogs was the availability of water in pools in the spring, and that BLM herbicide guidelines prevented herbicide actions for weed control from being a problem for the frogs.

Comments and questions:

- One participant noted that on a recent hike to the area, he saw a lot of beaver activity and raised the possibility that this could disrupt the frogs, as well as chewing down willows and cottonwoods. Someone else noted that the beavers could actually be helpful by promoting pooling.
- In response to a question about if the frogs' presence was verified by observation, the response was that yes, on-the-ground surveys had been conducted.
- In response to a question about whether there were any diversions above the frog habitat where the water they need could be depleted, the response was that Rambo's diversion was the only one, and the in-stream flow right (ISF) applied for by the CWCB would take care of the frog's water needs.
 - The water right has been applied for but not yet adjudicated; it quantifies a development allowance that can be senior to the ISF in order to allow for stock ponds and other uses – some areas were reserved for potential reservoirs before the Wilderness was designated.
- In response to a question about what measures could be taken to protect the frogs, the following comments were made:
 - They are plentiful & don't seem to be at risk.
 - They do fine without perpetual flows; Oscar Massey used to play with them as a kid and found them in side draws, areas dry 6-8 month/ year. Katie Stevens said this was consistent with BLM information. Another participant noted that they use dew when they can't reach flowing water.
- In response to a question about how the presence of the frog was related to potential Wild & Scenic River protections, Katie Stevens replied that the presence of the frog made the stream segments eligible for the classification. As far as the frog's protection needs, as long as they have the necessary water in ephemeral pools in the spring, they seem to be fine.

Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) and No Surface Occupancy tools

Andy Windsor of the BLM reported that:

- An SRMA is a tool that prioritizes recreation.
- A “no surface occupancy” stipulation associated with an SRMA in a Wilderness wouldn't provide any additional protection.
- For a “scenic” ORV, the “Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class 1” tool BLM applies in Wilderness areas already provides protection.

Discussion:

- In response to a question about if BLM is satisfied that Wilderness provides sufficient protection for the scenic ORV on these segments, Katie Stevens said she hadn't made that determination yet and was looking for stakeholder input.
- When the group was asked if they thought Wilderness protection was enough, one person commented that she thought so & had hiked in the area without seeing trash.
- In response to a question about what “no surface occupancy” means, Katie Stevens said it is usually related to mineral development & prohibits surface disturbing activity, but that it doesn't mean people can't go into an area.
 - In response to a comment about using the stipulation for trail re-routes, Andy Windsor reported that recreational trails are also covered by the visual resource management standards applied by BLM. He further noted that existing trails are inherited from historic uses in the area and are for horse and foot travel in the Wilderness.

Eligibility Report Overview for Gunnison River Segments 1 and 3

In providing her overview of the Wild & Scenic Rivers eligibility report for the Gunnison River segments, Katie Stevens noted that the Vegetation ORV had been dropped due to a reassessment of the rareness of the vegetation in question.

Discussion:

- In response to a question about the link between water and rock art (Cultural ORV), Katie Stevens replied that the cultural sites are there because of the water. They are not as dependent on specific flows as some other ORV's may be, but some amount of water is important to provide viewers an experience of the context in which the art was created.
- It was noted that there was a gap between the segments at Bridgeport where there was private property – but there is no gap in other private property areas.
 - BLM and local landowners agreed on the need to review and verify the property boundaries in BLM's eligibility report, particularly around Bridgeport.
 - There was also discussion of whether the railroad along this segment was on land owned by the railroad or on an exclusive easement for the railroad.
 - In response to a question about the manageability of areas along private land, Katie Stevens reported that that would likely vary depending on the ORV that needed protection.

Current and Future Uses along Gunnison Segments 1 and 3

The group listed the following uses in the stream corridors:

- Power lines owned by Delta-Montrose Electric Association (DMEA) and Grand Valley Power.
- Agriculture:
 - fruit growing
 - hay
 - grazing
- Recreational prospecting – especially Rattlesnake Gulch, which was reported to be not particularly scenic or special for any other purpose and lies along a Bureau of Reclamation/ BLM property line. Several prospectors present described what recreational prospecting involves: they move large rocks to get to gravel and then put it in a sluice box down at the river or pump water uphill to sift out sand and keep gold – no chemicals are added, and to qualify as “recreational,” no pipes can be more than 4” in diameter.
- Fish and Game land also exists in the area.
- Canoeing and rafting.
- Wildlife: birds, reptiles, etc.
- Railroad
- Hunting
- Fishing
- Roads on west bank
- Motorized boating
- Camping (on private land as well as public)

ORV Threats & Protection Tools

After listing the uses in the corridor, the group addressed threats and protective measures for each of the identified ORV's – see attached worksheet.

Several questions requiring additional information emerged in the course of discussing the ORV's:

- What is the mineral rights ownership in the corridor?
- Need more information on how nomination of cultural & historical sites to National Register of Historic Places could work & BLM's role in that.
- Need more information on how management of an NRHP District would differ from NRHP site(s).

Next Meeting

The group reassessed its planned meeting dates and decided to add an additional meeting date 4/5 and potentially drop the planned 4/27 meeting date. The next meeting will be: **Tuesday, April 5, 6:30 – 9:00pm**, Location to be announced.

Agenda will include follow-up on questions from 3-23 meeting on Gunnison River segments and discussion of Cottonwood and Escalante Creek segments. The following meeting after that is scheduled for April 13.