

**Summary Minutes**  
**NEW MEXICO RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL**  
**May 16-18, 2006**

**Cloudcroft**

**RAC Members Present:**

Gerald Chacon  
Mickey Chirigos  
Bruce Gantner  
Betty Haagenstad  
Rachel Jankowitz  
Meade Kemrer  
Robert Moquino  
Bob Ricklefs  
Joanne Spivack  
John Thompson

**RAC Members Absent:**

Philip Don Cantu  
Bill Chavez  
Matt Ferguson  
Cliff Larsen  
Mark Marley

**Designated Federal Officials:**

Ed Roberson  
Linda Rundell

**Designated State Official:**

Sally Rodgers

**BLM Staff:**

Jason Allen, Las Cruces FO  
Lori Allen, Las Cruces FO  
Eddie Bateson, Roswell FO  
Steve Bird, Carlsbad FO  
Doug Burger, Pecos District  
Ron Dunton, NMSO  
Thomas Gow, Albuquerque FO  
Steve Henke, Farmington FO  
Tony Herrell, Carlsbad FO  
Theresa Herrera, NMSO  
Jon Hertz, Socorro FO  
Buzz Hummell, NMSO  
Jesse Juen, NMSO  
Rich LaCasse, Las Cruces FO  
Mark Lane, Socorro FO  
Mark Lujan, Taos FO  
John Merino, Socorro FO  
Dorothy Morgan, Carlsbad FO  
Ed Roberson, Las Cruces FO  
Tim Sanders, Las Cruces FO  
Jim Stovall, Carlsbad FO  
Hans Stuart, NMSO

**Scribe:**

Karen Meadows

**MAY 16, 2006      FIELD TRIP**

The Las Cruces District Office hosted the Field Trip to McGregor Range and Otero Mesa.

**PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD**

Joanne opened the Public Comment Period at 6:08 p.m. No members of the public asked to speak.

Rachel spoke about the 5% surface occupancy stipulation for Otero Mesa development. She showed an aerial photo of oil field development near Carlsbad at 10-11% as an example for imagining 5%. In the Jicarilla Ranger District in Carson National Forest, she showed development of watersheds at 4-7% surface occupancy. Pinedale WY natural gas wells on mule deer wintering grounds are intensely monitored by BLM with cooperation from the O&G industry. It recently was documented that at 2-3% development, there was a 47% decrease in the number of wintering deer. She said none of those examples were strictly analogous, but her point was, "Will Otero look like those places? Is 5% a serious restriction?"

The 5% development limit is for the Chihuahuan grasslands, maybe a quarter of the area under consideration. O&G will be developed in units and operators will submit plans of development, so other factors are in play. There will be about 1,600 acres impacted within 2.1 million acres. In addition to the 5%, unitization, there will be restoration of affected land, and application of best management practices, e.g., fewer roads and limited pad size, as opposed to the checkerboard Carlsbad photo which Bruce called ‘heritage’ style. BLM will dictate the matrix. Plans will be laid out in environmental assessments (EAs).

Bruce said when O&G developers currently go into a fresh area they need 3.5 acres to set a rig. The wellhead and two-track left would be restored, so there would not be 3.5 acres cleared. The key is to stabilize the soil.

It is difficult to get a seed mix for Otero Mesa because nothing is commercially available. BLM took a pound of black grama grass seed from Nogal Canyon to NMSU for experimentation—both for growth and to produce seed. They are seeding some areas on the McGregor Range. Plants of the Southwest in Santa Fe has some native mixes. Dry land grasses appropriate to the site would be used for seeding, not creosote, but black grama, blue grama, and yucca. It’s best not to use the term ‘restore,’ reclaim or revegetate are better. The current required seed mix is appropriate to that ecological site. Bruce reiterated that stabilizing the soil gives nature the opportunity to restore. Topsoil moved aside when sites are scraped down to caliche will have seed in it. Post-development use will probably be grazing, so the grasses will be forage.

Why can’t seeds from adjacent areas be sown? That’s labor intensive. Native plants don’t produce a lot of seed and it’s hard to gather. How much impact results when developers ‘look for’ O&G? Minimal said Bruce. Posts were put up in past where tracks were made for seismic activity. They also drill. Bruce said the typical drill site is 3.5-4 acres, less if it’s a dry hole. John said they drill the well, then either produce or shrink back to a 100’-150’ rectangle. Roads to sites on federal jurisdiction will be included in the 5% development. State rules are different.

There was further discussion of possibilities, for example twinning wells from the same pad. How much does a dry well cost? It depends. Probably \$1-2 million. Normally, testing is just part of business, so a company will develop mostly on proven ground but set aside funds, maybe 5%, to explore.

Seismic exploration has been used for decades and technology has improved. But even with seismic, developers still drill dry holes. In San Juan County, the probability of success is 75-80% because the area is known, while here probability of success may be as low as 5-15%.

### Motion

Joanne moved to adjourn at 7 p.m. Rachel seconded. There was no quorum, so motions were not approved.

## **MAY 17 RAC MEETING**

### **CALL TO ORDER, WELCOME, OPENING STATEMENTS**

Joanne opened the meeting at 8 a.m.

Ed Roberson welcomed the RAC to southern NM. Linda was in court on the Otero/Sierra mineral fluid leasing plan lawsuit—to address sightings of aplomado falcons since the Record of Decision (ROD) was signed. The judge wanted to know what BLM has done and is doing as a result of the sightings. BLM has a protocol for following-up sightings on BLM land, and works to discover whether birds are migrating or establishing territory. They note transient birds, and if there is evidence of nesting, contact USF&W.

Sally introduced State Botanist Robert Sivinski. He talked about partnerships, referring to that day's *Albuquerque Journal* article on a forest restoration agreement reached between environmentalists and the USFS—a major milestone. There is a large ranch between the Horse Mountain ACEC and national forest providing a wildlife corridor with many springs. USFS, BLM, USF&W and the state all realized that that piece of private land was essential to maintaining public land values. They worked together to apply for a \$2.7 million dollar grant from Congress + \$900,000 from NMG&F. The partners sat down and planned before something happened. The rancher was considering selling that land for a subdivision. Robert hopes USFS can continue projects for resource management and shared visions, identifying unique important places and doing something permanent to protect shared values.

While BLM protects resources and quality of life, the federal government misses some opportunities to create a legacy in the Chihuahuan Desert, e.g., establishing more wildlife refuges and national parks. There are three times more protected lands in the Sonoran Desert in AZ and southern CA than NM and west TX have in the Chihuahuan Desert. We need to think far ahead to make protection more permanent. Robert would like to work with BLM and the State Land Office (SLO) to identify areas and make permanent plans.

#### **APPROVAL OF RAC MINUTES FROM FEBRUARY 2006 (Attachment 1)**

Without a quorum, approval of the minutes was postponed.

#### **2006 FIRE SEASON & BLM's COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

##### **Donna G. Hummel, Fire Mitigation & Education Specialist**

Donna began with a quiz:

1. Which month of the year does NM historically experience the most wildland fires? June
2. What are the three main criteria that the National Weather Service considers for Red Flag Warning?
  - a. wind
  - b. temperature
  - c. humidity
3. What are CARs in the WUI?
  - a. communities at risk
  - b. wildland urban interface
4. Smokey Bear was found in which national forest? The Lincoln NF in Capitan

Donna said 2006 is shaping up to be a very active and intense fire season. She showed a map, then a graph of past fires, seasons and number of acres burned. On January 1, NM had three major fires that collectively burned 60,000 acres. By April 1, 225,000 acres had burned, primarily on east side rangeland.

Factors include weather, heavy grasses and fine fuels, and human error. Of the 683 fires thus far in 2006, 36 covered more than 100 acres, totaling 276,000 acres. The historical average is only 80,000 acres, so 2006 has seen 12% more fires, 56% of which are large, adding up to 71% higher acreage.

BLM has mitigated the severe conditions with:

- a. National Severity Fund requests
- b. Special projects
- c. Restrictions and closures
- d. Year-round community assistance

The Departments of Agriculture and the Interior keep funds that have to be requested with justification at the national level for times like this. BLMNM has brought in \$2.2 million to supplement the budget. They staffed earlier and trained firefighters in January. They also provided 7-day fire staffing, rather than the typical Monday-Friday, 8-5. They brought in additional crews from OR, CA, WY, UT, with five engines and crews, two dispatchers and four fire prevention/information specialists.

Special projects underway include:

- Public awareness with red ‘Fire Alert’ flags raised at BLM offices and recreation sites during red flag warnings. NM forestry department and state parks are displaying red flags, and BLM is talking with USF&W and US Park Service about joining.
- Launching new easy access website, [www.nmfireinfo.gov](http://www.nmfireinfo.gov) for public to receive interagency fire information. The site lists contacts, FAQs, active fires, prescribed burns, etc. The public can also access information on restrictions and closures on the website used by fire managers: [www.gac.nifc.gov/swcc](http://www.gac.nifc.gov/swcc).
- Current restrictions and closures were listed. Except for Taos, all BLM offices are at some level of restriction, typically described as stage 1—visitors can light campfires and smoke in cleared areas. The intent is to keep as much public land open as they safely can.
- Ed said BLM is working closely with neighbors and the public to keep open areas safe for the public to go, like Dripping Springs near Las Cruces.
- Tribes are involved, determining closures as individual entities. One of the new fire information specialists is helping tribes and agencies coordinate. They have weekly calls, making decisions on Thursday and announcing them on Monday so the public is aware before the weekend. Doug asked for interagency news releases about flags and the new website. That is underway. The state is working on PSAs for prevention and potential evacuations. Partners are working together better than ever before.
- Ongoing year-round fuel and community assistance work expanded from BLM land to CARs.
  - Wildfire risk reduction grant program partners with NM Association of Counties for projects to plan, reduce fuels, etc.
  - FO funding for Community Wildfire Protection Plans and projects, e.g., they could fund Timberon to continue or maintain recent efforts.
  - The rural fire assistance program focuses on enhancing wildland fire protection efforts. It was eliminated and recently restored, with strong help from Senators Domenici and Bingaman, but was zeroed out for 2007.

Results

- BLM has caught most fires quickly and kept them small.
- There were fewer human-caused fires in April than in February or March.
- Regular and comprehensive media coverage.
- Continued vigilance until ‘season ending event’ predicted for June 11-July 15.

Question/Answer/Comment

- USDA representative Bud Starnes said some counties don’t even have automated weather reporting. That needs to be plugged in. The ability to generate local data is critical. BLM was not aware of that lack. They might be able to work on that with USFS. Bud was invited to meet with Ed Roberson and others. They could also work through the NM Association of Counties

(NMAC). They have actively pursued grant monies for leverage. Donna will make her contact at NMAC aware.

- Bob Ricklefs said his ranch received some stations and he understood there would be 30 new stations around the state.
- Bud said the model is Oklahoma, so Google the OK weather system. The difficulty is getting money to keep monitoring.
- Joanne introduced Michael Nebiston, Otero County Commissioner and Cloudcroft Administrator. He said Lincoln County is unique because monsoons go back and forth between TX and OK, so they get more moisture than other forests in NM—sustaining bigger and more trees. They have 800-1,500 trees per acre that are bigger than 5” in diameter. They’re working towards solutions but need to use adaptive management. They have a multi-agency effort looking at priorities, managing the Lincoln NF for the safety of citizens and ecosystem health. They studied what’s needed to keep fires out of the crowns; and are putting together a broad base of information so questions can be answered. They use both science and peer-review.
- Two years ago Cloudcroft hauled water. Local networks are needed to help people deal with emergencies.
- They have such dense biomass, it’s the same BTUs as 1,000 gallons of gas on every acre—resulting in situations where fire fighting is impossible. These fires destroy soil so it cannot regenerate. Floods follow, eroding topsoil. The ecosystem can’t absorb fires at those temperatures. You want to keep fires on the ground so you can fight them. They are using overlays to build a living map. It’s very difficult.

## **LAND TENURE ADJUSTMENT PROGRAM**

### **Jon Hertz, NMSO Land Exchange Officer (Attachment 2)**

BLM uses different tools to address land tenure, not just exchange. In the last year BLM established a Land Tenure Steering Committee made up of four district managers and two deputy state directors to help guide and determine priorities. Another major development was a Federal Land Transaction & Facilitation Act (FLTFA) Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). That MOU addresses Baca account proceeds. After the Baca Bill was established in 2000, 5% of BLM land sale proceeds were designated to go to the state, 20% to BLM for administration costs, and the remainder distributed among BLM, USFS, NPS and USF&W for acquisitions. But BLM has not yet been able to access Baca funds.

### In the Berino sale

- Property was appraised at \$900,000
- The land sold for \$2,020,000
- Had they gone with an exchange, they would have exchanged at the appraised value.
- The state share is \$101,000
- BLM administrative account receives \$383,800
- BLM acquisitions (60%): \$921,120
- USFS acquisitions: \$307,040
- NPS acquisitions: \$153,520
- USF&W acquisitions: \$153,520

Other non-Baca sales are underway, where proceeds go directly into the US Treasury. BLM’s rate of land exchange far exceeds that of the USFS or the state. In a local MOU, BLM is trying to identify processes whereby BLM could use more than 60% this year, and less next year.

It's a cumbersome process. The priority is state land exchanges, which the NM State Land Commissioner is very eager to complete.

Four state land exchanges are underway:

1. Acoma mineral exchange—mandated by an act that BLM acquire rights on 12,000 acres of mineral estate beneath Acoma Pueblo land and place it in trust for the pueblo. BIA sent the Acoma Governor a letter of intent and they expected to close by end of June.
2. Dona Ana Mountain/Truth or Consequences exchange—BLM is working with the SLO, which plans to acquire and lease the Truth or Consequences property to NASCAR and other potential developers—stimulating economic growth for the city. In return BLM will acquire prime properties in the Dona Ana Mountains north of Las Cruces adjacent to an ACEC.
3. Santo Domingo Pueblo exchange—complicated by three parcels involved. BLM would acquire the Crest of Montezuma and parcels adjacent to the Ball Ranch ACEC and Tent Rocks. The SLO would acquire lands near Las Cruces. Santo Domingo would acquire lands adjacent to the pueblo.
4. Wilderness//Wilderness Study Area (WSA) exchanges—involve every FO in NM. Jon gave a historical review.
  - BLM originally identified 26 priority-1 areas to be acquired in what was called the BLM/SLO Land Consolidation Exchange.
  - The BLM state director signed the exchange criteria April 15, 2005.
  - Additional priority-1 areas totaling 100,000 acres were established.
  - SLO developed a revised proposal to include approximately 450,000 acres of BLM/state lands.
  - FOs completed land use plan consistency reviews on about 450,000 acres.
  - On January 5, 2006, BLM received a letter from SLO redefining the exchange proposal.

Revisions included:

- Priority 1—SLO will dispose of all state inholdings, both surface and mineral estates, within the boundaries of existing wilderness areas.
- Priority 2— SLO will dispose of all state inholdings, both surface and mineral estates, within the boundaries of WSAs.
- Priority 3—SLO will dispose of those lands within wilderness areas or WSAs that are cherry-stemmed.
- Priority 4—SLO will dispose of all state lands within Special Management Areas or ACECs in very select situations where the land pattern is creating or could potentially create conflict.
- Priority 5 —SLO will consider disposal of lands outside wilderness areas or WSAs.

SLO is pursuing the exchange of lands in priorities 1&2; and is willing to consider disposal of lands that provide critical access into wilderness areas or WSAs. The breakthrough is the determination to look at these exchanges cooperatively.

Question/Answer/Comment

- What lands would the SLO most like to exchange? Jim Jackson said orphans have been discussed, and lands with mineral potential. SLO was not part of the process for designating wilderness areas or WSAs, so some mining rights cannot be activated.

- The Baca Bill relates solely to disposal of BLM lands. Other agencies' disposals do not benefit BLM.
- Can improvements in WSAs be maintained? To clean out a dirt tank, you need to give 30 days notice to wilderness groups, which slows but does not preclude maintenance. All are subject to environmental assessment. If a rancher has a right to a windmill, he will be allowed to maintain it within the process. In one or two wilderness areas there is potential to discuss with congress the possibility of treating invading species to restore grassland, then maintaining wilderness. BLM would have to demonstrate that this would improve the health of the land. Gerald knows of an area in wilderness that needs treatment but no one has been able to do it.
- Jim said all improvements on state land would stay within established ownership, e.g., fences, windmills, tanks, but not roads. Maintenance, however, is complicated. In theory, you have a right to maintain them. Discussion followed.

Guiding principles:

- Exchange lands considered 'like for like.'
- Avoid to the extent possible developing split estates.
- Seek interest group involvement throughout the process.
- Avoid trading lands that possess mineral potential. However, if state and BLM lands within the same vicinity are believed to possess similar mineral potential, BLM and SLO may determine that a trade is viable.
- Strive to streamline the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process by developing exchange packages where little if any change to the current environment would likely result.
- Wherever possible, avoid disposing of lands with cultural values.
- Involve grazing users to the greatest extent possible.
- Seek to acquire easements, such as those needed for the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail.

Jon highlighted accomplishments around the state, with most progress in the Farmington area. One never-before-used approach has been easements for non-vehicle access. There are four private exchanges underway: the Adobe Ranch exchange near Socorro for mountain access; the Intrepid exchange of 1,800 acres near the Pecos River near Carlsbad; the Phelps Dodge exchange in the Organ Mountains; and the Organ Mountain exchange to acquire private parcels adjacent to the ACEC and WSA.

## **NM MILITARY BASE PLANNING ISSUES**

**Hanson Scott, Brigadier General USAF (retired)**

**Director NM Office of Military Base Planning & Support**

General Scott has worked with the state for 8 ½ years, and has roots in Catron County.

A commission of 17 was appointed by the governor, made up of leaders that support NM military bases. It is chaired by the Lt. Governor and includes a representative of the Office of Homeland Security. Its mission is to bring together commission initiatives to address state-level issues. The commission advises the governor on measures necessary to ensure the continued presence of military bases in NM. The commission and General Scott's office provide the first-ever state-level support of NM military installations. General Scott is the liaison with the commission and communicates with staff of the state's congressional delegates.

Commission organizations include:

Clovis Committee of 50  
Alamogordo Committee of 50  
Kirtland Partnership Committee  
Las Cruces Military Affairs Committee  
Portales Military Affairs Committee

All members are volunteer community leaders. They have tied the state together through these committees and boards.

General Scott described the military installations in NM—Cannon, Holloman and Kirtland Air Force Bases, the commands they house, and their missions.

He listed economic impact of the three bases from 2004 Department of Defense reports, totaling nearly \$4 billion + value-added impact of \$2,244,818, and employment of 89,270.

He discussed the base realignment and closure process and history resulting in the recommendation to close Cannon. The AF considered issues and the governor's involvement, and visited each commissioner. As a result, stakeholders are working to find a new mission for Cannon prior to December 31, 2009. The commission that recommended Cannon's closure had misinformation, e.g., that there was excessive commercial air traffic in the area. Cannon supporters agreed to divert air traffic if necessary. The AF review directed by the Secretary of the AF was enumerated. Since November, the NM commission gathered information for a comprehensive CD, put out a prospectus and held a workshop.

Other issues:

- Airspace issues require sustained advocacy and follow-through.
- Infrastructure
- Encroachment
- NM Gross Receipts Tax deductions for military research & development

Conclusions/observations:

- NM plays a key role in national security.
- Our military installations are a source of economic development and future growth.
- Much more dialogue and coordination are needed on all levels.

**Question/Answer/Comment**

- The AF is reviewing potential new missions for Cannon with state and federal agencies and the commission. General Scott feels confident but they need the okay from the Secretary of Defense.
- How does this affect the bombing range? The Melrose Range and Cannon AFB are linked, and the state intends for the range to remain open even if Cannon closes. They have air space initiative to expand.
- How much money does a base bring to the community? Conservative estimate of the economic impact of closing Cannon is a 22-30% loss to the NM economy. It is also estimated that the economy of eastern NM would never recover if Cannon closed.
- What about payment in lieu of taxes? General Scott was not familiar with that term.
- Most economic benefit goes to Fort Bliss (85-90% in NM) and the El Paso area. A new issue is that NM firms have opportunity to participate in contracts.



## **NM SOUTHWEST REGIONAL SPACEPORT**

### **Lonnie Sumptner, Executive Director, NM for Space Commercialization**

Lonnie is responsible for getting the spaceport being established near Engle NM moving. Many issues are being worked on in a good partnership with BLM.

Spaceport background:

- Initiated in 1992
- NM Office for Space Commercialization & NM Space Commission created by NM Legislature in 1994
- Competition for sponsors has been heavy across time
- NM Spaceport Authority was created by statute in 2005
- NM legislature signed a commitment in 2006

NM's outstanding advantages include:

- Low population density
- No conflicts with commercial or general aviation traffic
- Exceptional weather
- Technical expertise
- Proximity to White Sands Missile Range
- Optimal combination of latitude and elevation
- Business friendly
- Not on a federal reservation but next to a national range
- Payload advantage puts more \$ on the bottom line
- Climate means launch on schedule

Lonnie showed maps of the spaceport location, which has evolved over many years of study and coordination with state, local and federal agencies. It is on state trust land, so money generated goes into the NM education system.

The five committed programs are: Starchaser, X Prize Cup, Rocket Racing League, Virgin Galactic, and UP Aerospace. Lonnie showed photos and described in detail their activities and plans for the future. There will be commercial, experimental, recreational, educational and research applications. He showed structures already on site and described their functions. No permanent facilities will be established until the Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision are complete.

He enumerated the state's commitment. Key milestones upcoming: RFP for spaceport design will be selected and announced by end of May 2006; EIS first quarter 2007; Launch Site Operator License end of first quarter 2007; construction starting in the first quarter 2007; and first licensed launch operations in 2008.

The spaceport brings a huge economic development opportunity into a part of the state that sorely needs it. The bulk of jobs generated will be in related retail, real estate sales and tourism. The future will bring a launch from the NM spaceport into orbit. Those vehicles are on the drawing board and one is being built.

### **Question/Answer/Comment**

- The spaceport could be a launch site for commercial satellites.

- The RAC would like to have a copy of the EIS, which is being done by the FAA, with BLM as a cooperator—because land surrounding the spaceport is BLM's. BLM will cooperate as long as large blocks of BLM land are not closed for safety reasons. Otherwise BLM would become a co-lead. Cultural resources and species protection are involved.

## **FUTURISTIC WAYS TO INCREASE WATER SUPPLIES FOR NEW MEXICO**

### **Dr. Karl Wood, Director of the Water Resources Research Institute, NMSU**

All NM water is presently claimed yet the demand for water grows. There are five major ways looked at across the West to increase water supplies:

1. Weather modification
2. Interbasin transfer
3. Suppression of evaporation and transpiration
4. Desalination (or desalinization)
5. Water conservation

**Weather modification** has been attempted for hundreds of years, by gunfire, burning dirty brush, cooling, etc. Dr. Wood showed areas across the US where cloud seeding has been done in the last 50 years—all associated with universities. Two dramatic floods with fatalities in CA and CO were associated with cloud seeding, and stimulated its demise. There is disagreement about the value of seeding in the scientific community. Success depends on type of weather modification being considered, e.g., dry ice dropped on cold fogs at airports to create snowflakes is most accepted. Treating winter clouds passing over mountains is moderately accepted; seeding individual summer cumulus clouds over small areas is less accepted; and hail mitigation is least accepted.

**Interbasin transfer** is being done, especially in TX. Central AZ pumps water to Tucson. The CO river aqueduct has existed for 70 years. He showed the All American Canal near Yuma AZ. The San Juan-Chama transfer brings water 27 miles through tunnels into the Rio Grande. Cities are using transfer more and more. Future interbasin transfers are planned for northern CA, the Snake River to Colorado, and a Central AZ project. The most grandiose brings Alaska water through Canada and the US to Mexico.

These plans require lots of money and have tremendous environmental impact. Are more interbasin transfers possible on a small scale? He showed an image of a NM chile with gradations of 'heat' associated with types of transfer. Within a local irrigation district, taking water from agriculture use to agriculture use is mild, and done already. Agricultural to municipal and industrial use gets warmer. Agricultural to environmental gets hot fast. He continued the analogy for transfer interdistrict, interbasin and interstate. At the interstate level transfer becomes explosive. Much more than money is involved.

Justifications for investing large sums of money and causing severe environmental impact:

- a. Good for regional growth
- b. Supports social welfare
- c. Wisdom of our visionary leaders
- d. Agency ambition
- e. Offers professional challenges
- f. Maintains the GNP

**Suppressing evaporation and transpiration** applies to all. Vegetation manipulation is what they're doing. For example, although desert shrubland converted to grassland has low potential for increasing water, it decreases erosion and changes timing of runoff. Ponderosa pine to

open savanna with grass understory has moderate potential. That would need fire for follow-up, and uncontrolled wildfire might replace logging. Spruce/fir/aspen to grassland savanna or strip cutting has high potential. That needs fire follow-up. Alpine low shrub, riparian trees & shrubs have high potential, including cottonwoods, willow, alder, prime recreation lands and grassland wild habitat. Salt cedar and Russian olive monoculture has few worthy values.

**Desalination** is often used in NM because  $\frac{3}{4}$  of ground water is brackish. Currently there are 15,233 desalination plants worldwide that supply 1% of the world's drinking water. Reverse osmosis and distillation of seawater are most common. Saudi Arabia, the US and United Arab Emirates lead. Inland desalination takes a lot of energy. Brine disposal depends, and saline content is variable. Technology for ocean water doesn't apply inland. Desalination is cost effective now for municipal use and is cheaper than purifying river water.

**Water conservation** has low potential. The national average is 150 gallons/day/person. Dr. Wood listed household water use averages for NM cities: Albuquerque 205 gallons/day/person; Las Cruces 194; El Paso leads the nation in conservation technology by coming down from 200 to around 140; Santa Feans use 112. We can reduce usage to about 50 gallons by choosing water-saving toilets and washers and fixing leaks.

Xeriscaping cuts outdoor use  $\frac{2}{3}$ .

We can change irrigation techniques on cropland.

- a. Apply only enough water to meet plants' production needs.
- b. Monitor soil moisture to determine irrigation frequency.
- c. Determine whether flooding, rip or sprinkling is best for each field.
- d. Adjust irrigation districts and acquire infrastructure.
- e. Alter legal and institutional barriers to efficient irrigation.
- f. Develop water capture and re-use mechanisms.

Water use is controversial. Cost affects decisions. Some of the five ways to increase water are better than others. Increasing water supply is not easy or cheap but it can be done.

### Question/Answer/Comment

- Using grey water to irrigate yards saves water. We can legally use water recycled from washers, showers or tubs.
- How about recycling oil field water? Processing a barrel of oil may create up to 5-6 barrels of salt water. O&G companies are desalinating so they only have to haul the concentrate. Industry knows more about it than government and academia put together. There's controversy over who owns that water. It's an important source for the future. Technology will bring down the expense.
- HI has a large desalinization plan.
- A plant near El Paso will send concentrates 20 miles east and reinject. It's very expensive and they don't know the life of that well—it could foul up within a year. We need to research oil field water's land application, e.g., applying it to salt grasses.
- Is anyone studying or modeling what the demand for water would be if population growth or demand stabilized? NMSU economics professor Jim Peach would know.

Ed Roberson said BLM Las Cruces FO and the Bureau of Reclamation were invited to participate with the city of Alamogordo to find out whether salt water in a well on BLM lands near Tularosa could be desalinized and used. The EIS is underway.

## **PECOS DISTRICT CARLSBAD OFFICE**

### **Steve Bird, Carlsbad Wildlife Biologist**

Steve showed footage of new undocumented lesser prairie chicken (lpc) leks (courtship areas) with about 30 birds. He said the roles of a BLM wildlife biologist include habitat, habitat, and habitat. Reclamation for rangeland health gives back habitat and increases usable acreage for wildlife. Reclamation includes removal of caliche to native soil on pads and roads, and seeding. He showed a road in three stages of reclamation. Biologists are learning how long it really takes to get everything established.

He showed slides of Black River Russian olive and salt cedar removal. Rio Grande turkeys were reintroduced there and are thriving. Projects include one with Quail Unlimited to catch rainwater for wildlife. Photo monitoring proves that wildlife uses the waterer, mainly ungulates, javelina and birds, including quail and a variety of raptors.

BLM has a proposal for an lpc captive propagation facility. Steve visited the TX Fossil Rim Wildlife Center prairie chicken propagation facility in February 2005 to learn how NM could do that. He looked at brooding and rearing facilities and flight pens. Fossil Rim needs to expand its flight pens so the birds can build muscle mass for sustained flight. Challenges include disease, staff retention and long-term funding. TX recommends close veterinary support, environmental control and quarantine on site.

Advantages to captive propagation:

- Risk management
- It's estimated that 50% of adult wild birds die annually. If that continues for several successive years with concurrent reproductive failure or poor reproductive success, the population is destined for extinction.
- Captive propagation has helped other threatened and endangered species.
- Fossil Rim is 10 years into the prairie chicken breeding program and still learning.
- A captive breeding component fosters more interest; and the profile is elevated exponentially.
- Predicted survival rates for captive propagated gallineous birds is 5-12%.
- Projected annual survival for captive-reared prairie chickens is now 38%.

If we wait until everyone unanimously decides to use captive propagation as a recovery technique, it's too late. Steve tracked the chronology of the prairie chicken decline from one million birds in TX and LA at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to 42 birds in 1996. Captive propagation began in 1993.

Steps toward recovery:

- partnership for reclamation and habitat management on public/private lands
- public outreach to generate support for recovery efforts
- population management consisting of captive breeding and reintroduction efforts
- coordination between government agencies and private interests
- research to provide information necessary for taking steps toward recovery

BLM can learn from others' mistakes. He showed an architectural drawing of the proposed BLMNM facility, listing goals and milestones. They estimate \$250,000 to start up, \$240,000 for staff, \$77,000 for equipment, and \$25,000 for supplies and support.

Potential release areas were listed. If we can raise this type of species and release birds to form their own populations, they will be okay. We need to do this ASAP. He said this is a community project and they need the RAC's help and suggestions.

Lpc habitat and timing stipulations in the Carlsbad FO area for 2006 were shown. Sightings of long-known active leks in 2004 were tracked; there were fewer in 2005, then more in 2006. BLM was granted access to new lands where they found more. In one area where birds had not been seen, they asked researchers to use game calling units to attract lpcs back to old leks. Combining efforts brings better success. Preliminary results of the Carlsbad FO 2006 survey added six new leks due to access to private lands in northern Lea County. Roswell FO encountered 10-12 new leks.

New population estimate for the Roswell FO: 10-12 new leks in 2006, and +- 1,600 lpcs compared to +- 788 in 2005 (a greater-than-100% increase) and 94 active leks (recorded).

He showed photos of sand dune lizards (sdl), their habitat and maps of their sightings. Steve spent time with experts learning about the lizards. Surveys of lizard territory in 2005 increased the sdl database by 830% to 242 sites. Staff correlated sites with type of soil and found four soil types. TX A&M experts are looking at grain size within the sand types for a habitat suitability model.

### **Question/Answer/Comment**

- Of all suitable lpc habitat, how much is BLM v. private? In Roswell, the primary population is mostly on state and private land. Moving east into Carlsbad FO, BLM has more. Total population estimates include private lands because many of the chickens are there.
- Rachel said NMG&F has 21 areas set aside for lpc conservation, with three habitat specialists out of Santa Fe and others around the state. NMG&F also distributes funds for local habitat improvement.
- Literature documents that as long as anyone's known about lpcs, they have been subject to large population fluctuations only partly explained by climate change. More study is needed.
- Will you do predator control in release areas? Skunks are the major predators (on eggs), followed by coyotes, raptors and snakes. There would be mammalian predator control, but not reptile or winged.
- Any reseeding? They are using water and mulch in different ways in different areas. About 50,000 acres of mesquite were sprayed and BLM is reducing fragmentation.
- Lpcs use water but are not dependent on it. Ravens and magpies were studied as predators in NV and found to be a small factor.
- Steve did not know of historical data on populations.

### **NOXIOUS/INVASIVE WEED PROGRAM**

#### **Richard G. LaCasse, Las Cruces Weed Specialist**

Richard distributed the NMSU College of Agriculture & Home Economics Cooperative Extension Service booklet, *New Mexico's Invasive Weeds*; and the US Department of Agriculture, USFS, NM Energy, Minerals & Natural Resources Department and NMSU *Strategy for Long-Term Management of Exotic Trees*. Noxious weeds interfere with what those agencies are trying to do. Exotic species are invasive and interfere with management objectives. The NMSU list classes species A, B or C, ranging from not plentiful, to established, to naturalized.

#### **Las Cruces FO target species are:**

- African rue
- Russian knapweed

- Malta starthistle
- yellow starthistle
- camelthorn
- salt cedar

Species undesirable in specific situations include:

- mesquite
- creosote
- tree of heaven
- poisonous plants
- Siberian elm
- onionweed
- perennial pepperweed
- spotted knapweed
- purple loosestrife
- leafy spurge
- teasel
- bull thistle
- Scotch thistle
- musk thistle
- Canada thistle

Exotics replace native species and change the surrounding environment, which:

- decreases numbers of mammals, insects and other organisms that depend on the native plants in that system
- damages watersheds by increased erosion that reduces basal plant coverage
- reduces economic returns by decreasing land uses or value of the land itself
- sometimes poisons/injures humans and livestock
- changes fire regimes and frequency

There are 30 species of thistles, one native to the Sacramento Mountains, and only four are invasive. Cactus species are disappearing from the Sonoran Desert in AZ because of more fires. Coordinating weed management pulls together partnerships for maximum effect. Local leadership works with partners including USF&W, NMDA, NPS, USFS, NMDOT, Soil & Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) and more. SWCDs are the hub of the wheel. BLM is working with:

- prevention
- education and awareness
- detection and inventory
- developing a treatment plan
- employing integrated weed management techniques
- coordinating with local cooperators
- monitoring, evaluating, supporting research and technology transfer

Richard showed photos of an area and how it might be changed by leafy spurge if no action were taken. Control methods include physical, cultural, biological and chemical. He showed photos and botanical drawings of Russian knapweed, which has a 30' taproot and lateral root systems that sprout new plants. Mechanical methods won't work. Goats are a great method. Timing is crucial for chemical treatments, e.g., it is best to spray Russian knapweed right after the first frost when nutrients are going downward into the root system. Yellow starthistle has invaded 1,000 acres along the Gila River in NM and 15-20 million acres in CA. Its sharp spikes cut off trails for humans and wildlife, and it's a fire hazard when dry. Malta starthistle spread over southern NM on road shoulders. African rue first appeared around Deming in 1928, probably spread by aircraft, and is now in every western state. He showed a clump of African rue he picked that morning near

Carlsbad. Camelthorn grows from Albuquerque south to Mexico, and along I-40 to AZ. It has 2” stiff spines.

Salt cedar is noxious weed #1 in NM. Agencies are using goats, chainsaws, herbicides, burning, and a Chinese leaf beetle that defoliates it. They hope the beetles will control it so native species can take over. They have studied it for 15 years. It’s not adapted to all parts of the US—requires cold winters.

Musk thistle is the Otero County flower. It’s a biennial; so cutting at the right time is effective. Seed weevils are naturally controlling musk thistle, but don’t discriminate between those and native thistles.

Leafy spurge is mostly in NNM. Angel Fire has a big outbreak and is working with biological controls. Leafy spurge's milky sap can blind humans and cause skin reactions.

Yellow toadflax is a problem in Durango, CO, repopulating hillsides along with Dalmatian toadflax, both in the snapdragon family. Purple loosestrife grows in artificial wetlands in Albuquerque, outcompeting cattails.

#### Individuals can:

- Minimize transport by pack and saddle stock. Use only weed-free forage.
- Purchase seed from a trustworthy source. Many noxious weeds come into the country as trash in seed mixes.
- Clean clothes, vehicles and animals when leaving weed-infested areas.
- Be careful when purchasing plants from home improvement stores and nurseries. Buy natives or non-invasive species.
- Be careful where you dispose of plant materials, especially aquatic plants.
- Keep surface disturbance to a minimum when camping. Keep bare areas weed free. Encourage shade.
- Control noxious weeds as soon as possible. Some equate them to a biological wildfire, so address the small spots before they join. Report them to responsible owners.
- Leave no survivors.
- Spread the word not the weeds.

Invasive species have the advantage during drought, and will out-compete natives. BLM treated 214 acres of salt cedar in the Tularosa watershed and approximately 600 acres of noxious weeds through partnership with SWCDs. They continue to inventory and maintain, assisting other federal agencies in their control efforts.

Richard showed a map of Otero County, Tularosa and Alamogordo, with red highlighting treated salt cedar and blue lines for 2006 treatments. Holloman AFB is spending \$230,000 to treat this year. He listed plans for inventory, treatment, evaluation, prevention, education and awareness, coordination, and gaining additional funding. His dream is to have fulltime weed coordinators in each district.

#### Question/Answer/Comment

- The NM list does not include grasses. Cheat grass is a problem. Layman’s love grass has been more invasive in AZ than in NM. Fires in 80,000 acres of Sonoran Desert last year were mostly fueled by non-native grasses.
- Sally attempted to talk about mowing schedule timing with DOT to control invasive species and help wildflowers. Very frustrating. DOT needs to be at the table. It’s important to get to the

people on the ground. Some representatives have approached mowers personally and designated invasive populations, which is more effective than agency meetings.

- BLM has had different luck with different districts.
- Notify the public when spraying. Alert locals to protect pets and children. Richard said most herbicides are greatly diluted. Still, some people are sensitive.
- Richard reiterated that we need to use all the tools in our toolbox.

## **WORKING GROUP MEETINGS**

Joanne asked whether any meetings had been held since the last RAC meeting and encouraged working groups to continue their projects between RAC meetings.

- Gerald and Mark met. Mark went to the Range School and brought back the updated manual that they will review and report on. Rachel said interested parties are planning a joint meeting for AZ/NM to put together a Range School. The RAC can't take on all the planning, but could work in conjunction with planners.
- Joanne asked what members wanted to accomplish by RAC membership.
- Meade said the RAC could be very proactive. Members can bring things to RAC that they consider important. He set up a series of presentations on cultural resource problems in Southeast NM that continues to move forward.
- Theresa invited RAC members to take part in upcoming FO RMPA public comment meetings. The tri-county plan in Ed Roberson's area starts public meetings this summer.
- The RAC is the only legal advisory board.
- Networking alone is a benefit to the public.
- Gerald said elk on public and private land are a constant problem. Permittees are never able to bring different agencies together on a smaller unit basis to talk about wildlife management issues. Permittees and ranchers are always concerned and it never gets better or goes away. We need to get people together to see what can be done collaboratively. For example, BLM and USFS could help permittees develop water that wildlife would share—drill wells, set pipelines, improve habitat that benefits wildlife. Everyone thinks it's someone else's issue. The Game Commission works on a statewide basis and is too big an entity. We need local cooperative management.
- Rachel recommended bringing a NMG&F elk biologist to speak to the RAC.
- Gerald said local game officers and a rancher are liaisons for NMG&F. They want to do something on their own. NMG&F makes recommendations up the line but the Game Commission makes the rules. So what's needed on the local level is never considered. Can we create a model that leads to a better job with wildlife management? We need to reward permittees that are providing brush control and water. Private landowners are favored, when federal land permittees are doing more. It's not a fair system.. It's a disincentive. Being compensated for habitat provided and work done on the ground would go a long way. Go to one unit and use resources and funds to share the work. Permittees are tired of digging wells, tending pipeline and drinkers, and clearing brush with no incentive. We need to work together.
- Tom Gow said Socorro FO a number of years ago asked USFS what it could do to help keep elk in the forest. As a result, BLM got a bulldozer and operator and built dirt tanks for the USFS. It worked on a handshake level between managers. Another local solution is to hunt bulls during the rut to disrupt breeding, or target cows in March before calves are born. He recommended that small landowners form an association to combine acreage to get hunting permits.
- Bob Ricklefs has been wildlife chair for the Cattlegrowers Association for years and this problem is never-ending. The Game Commission says it cannot take into consideration



improvements on public land. Maybe USFS and BLM could convince them. Ed will talk with Linda about pulling partners together to talk to the Game Commission.

- Gerald suggested coming up with a pilot project. He would like to get private landowners, the Jicarilla tribe, permittees and agencies to do something on a small scale.
- Others agreed that this is a big problem statewide and something needs to be done.
- Gerald said the even-bigger issue surfacing because we don't deal with these issues is property rights on federal lands—specifically grazing rights and historical usage. We'll never change people's attitudes or solve these conflicts without mutual respect. We reduce family rights, but not the game or the trees. We have to educate ourselves to respect rights to water and grass so we have a base for making long-term changes. Everyone is separate, pointing fingers, walled in separate silos.
- Betty reminded the RAC that cooperation is the key to getting things done. Cooperation rose in conversation throughout the RAC meeting, but is not felt by the people Gerald spoke of.
- How can decisions be made that are advantageous in every way? It's public service, building relationships and trust that allow things to happen. What's being fueled is protectionism about the last bit of rights people have against these obstacles. If BLM became a protector, they would find partners all over the place. It's common sense, like in conservation work historically with NRCS.
- The USFS was invited to take part and allow this to be a combined BLM/USFS RAC, but that didn't work. They thought after the Debbie Hughes presentation that this conversation could continue and they would find a way to solve some of these problems together.
- BLM has produced documents and recommended policy changes on off-highway vehicles (OHVs) and access, so that might be a route.
- The RAC could host something—a barbecue, an interagency social that breaks barriers. The RAC could ask for a USFS representative to attend all RAC meetings.
- Sally said she is always looking for partners on sustainability projects. She wants to identify barriers and ways to pull together to accomplish something. Her agency has been involved in a statewide three-year salt cedar project that identified and included all stakeholders.
- John Merino worked for the USFS and now works for BLM. He thought the RAC would find the USFS receptive, and it would be very good to meet with them. Things can only improve with interagency cooperation.
- This RAC could be a focal point, a vehicle for cooperation.
- Pick a topic and ask all the players to the table. Invite public involvement. This would certainly improve public comment. We may need to devote a whole RAC meeting to this. Could also have certain things on the agenda and time for people to bring up their issues.
- Gerald suggested inviting people in not to complain, but to come together to fix it. Bring in the forest supervisor, a game commissioner, and the game department director. Get permission to focus resources and do something on a small scale, a pilot or demonstration project. Get a few key people together to listen to each other and do something simple.
- Take it from a standpoint of sustaining families—they will make the difference. Do something different, not elk solely, but community partnerships with a game project. They would love to enhance turkey and mule deer for example. Pick something positive.
- Tom said some of the policies BLM has to enforce address family values. What if that family is on the very edge and this is the thing that pushes them over? Establish ground rules and set an end point to focus on.
- Sally suggested that the RAC determine a subgroup to come up with goals and outcomes, expectations, ground rules, so those going into it have some idea of what everyone is being asked

to contribute. Setting, timing, participants, all need to be carefully set so everyone is ready to come in and accomplish something.

- This is an anthropological problem. Gerald's neighbors have a background that the RAC doesn't understand. Gerald sees people getting into corners and the land grant issue is boiling. Is what's surfacing an answer that would sustain people? We need a different kind of meeting so we don't create something worse.
- A facilitator would be helpful. Include tribes.
- The RAC agreed to establish a Collaborative Management Working Group to set objectives and decide format.

### Motion

Mickey moved and Rachel seconded to adjourn the meeting at 5 p.m.

## **MAY 18 RAC MEETING**

Joanne called the meeting to order at 8:10 a.m. She recalled the previous afternoon's conversation about cooperation between agencies and asked for further thoughts.

- Meade said people who live on the land and use the land have a unique and effective relationship that doesn't always translate into the agency process. He would favor the RAC fostering a conversation.
- Joanne suggested that RAC members could talk and plan, set goals, and submit a proposal to Linda, who would then arrange contacts and a meeting.
- Linda's appearance at the court hearing based on recent aplomado falcon sightings was reported in the *Albuquerque Journal*. (Attachment 3) Ed said plaintiffs insist that BLM and USF&W did not engage in the proper process and there might be adverse effect on the aplomado falcon. Since the 2003 decision, there were eight sightings, and the judge wanted to hear what the sightings meant and what BLM has done as a result.
- How can anyone know whether the falcons are passing through or attempting to nest?
- Historically, Otero Mesa has been nesting territory.
- Experts from the USAF, NMG&F, USF&W and BLM are surveying, correlating, and sharing data. Two range specialists last August saw and photographed a bird. Another bird was seen three days later—which they suspected was the same bird. So surveys are focused on best habitat, which has been closed. BLM agreed to monitor and to establish a model for aplomado protection.
- Should climatic change bring more birds into the area, would the type of O&G activity planned discourage them? That is not known and there are varied opinions. More research is needed. Some species actually nest in drilling equipment.
- Two nests were observed in NM in recent years, one in southern Luna County.
- Green areas are thought to be best for nesting, so planning could focus on such places.
- Fragmentation of habitat is thought to be more detrimental than O&G activities. The TX release program is researching. If birds arrive to populate the area, that's great. We'll do whatever we can to mitigate activities. They fly 60 mph and travel 350 miles in a day.
- Discussion about whether raising birds in captivity is good. Does the Endangered Species Act protect them? Are they genetically altered?
- Have other RACs called agencies together? Joanne thought so, and thought the USFS would send staff to an interagency meeting. She suggested tying the specific issue with a broader one.

## **TRAVEL MANAGEMENT: DESIGNATED ROUTES & AREAS FOR MOTOR VEHICLE USE**

### **Judith E. Levin, USFS Recreation, Heritage & Wilderness Resource SW Region Director**

Judith reminded the RAC that the USFS SW region includes forests and grasslands in AZ, NM and parts of TX and OK. They expect an interagency agreement signed in the next few weeks to allow this RAC to be the recreation RAC.

She supplied background, emphasizing that USFS nationwide believes that motorized recreation is appropriate use of national forest. Unmanaged recreation causes environmental and social impacts that are among the key threats facing national forests and grasslands. Currently, 52 million users bring vehicles onto federal lands. Other issues are spread of invasive species, hazardous fuels and fire risk, and fragmentation of ecosystems and habitat.

The Travel Management Rule finalized in November 2005 provides a consistent national framework for local decisions. It requires public involvement and coordination with federal, state, local and tribal governments. Simply stated, each forest or ranger district shall designate roads, trails and areas open to motor vehicle use by vehicle class and if appropriate, by time of year. The rule calls for a designation process leading to a map for motor vehicle users. When that map is published, use inconsistent with designations will be prohibited.

This affects all vehicle entry into forests. Exemptions include aircraft, watercraft, over-the-snow vehicles, and vehicles used for administrative, emergency, defense or law enforcement purposes. There will be special use permits for mineral operations, grazing, etc.

She summarized the planning process. The MVU map will be available on the web and in hard copy. Signing is not required for enforcement. Responsibility is on users. Each forest has its own schedule, expected to be completed with maps produced by September 2009. It's a massive undertaking, with no additional funding. Historically, if BLM and USFS ticketed someone in an area where they were not supposed to be, it was thrown out of court unless the area was properly signed. There will be signs in key places. Informational signs would be very helpful.

SW Region implementation guidelines are being developed. Good coordination among neighboring forests, the public and other agencies is expected. Dispersed camping, game retrieval and gathering of special forest products will be addressed. Local forests have invited public input.

### **Question/Answer/Comment**

- USFS would go through the NEPA process for new roads. If existing roads are not designated available, access could be considered, e.g., for logging. Maps will come out annually, because there will be changes.
- Manpower for enforcement is an issue. However, the vast majority of users want to do what's right. Those who go against the rules tend to use certain areas, where enforcement would be focused. USFS will work with groups, sharing information and education.
- Will local NEPA processes have public input? If a rancher needs to use a road to fix fences and there is a permit on a section of the forest, that will stand as agreed outside this process.
- Will some roads be rehabbed?
- This will be confusing for the public. Local public input is crucial.
- How will reservation boundaries be addressed? USFS will talk with tribal governments. Most tribal governments change every year. The maps will reflect changes.
- With increasing demand and three years to reach this goal, what interim plans will address impact? Current rules remain in place and line officers can close roads where significant damage is occurring. This has to be more specific and localized.

- The USFS has clear resource directives that address issues, policy in place to direct this plan and resource-level objectives.
- Will there be public input on places with traditional use? The first maps are being produced and will be presented for comment by other agencies and the public. The maps are meant to be the beginning of discussion.
- What are the goals of the plan for recreation? What constitutes the recreation experience we're trying to achieve? Nothing addresses how many miles a user needs to have a specific experience. What does an adequate trail system look like? Is it 10 miles long or 100 miles long? USFS is talking about that and will be asking the public. Answers will be different for different users and different locations.
- The Lincoln NF has an established trail system.
- Make sure you get broad public input. Some have heard there will be restrictions on what kind of information will be allowed in what form. There are conflicting messages from different rangers. This needs leadership and organization. Gila Ranger District is using a starter map from 1999, which doesn't even include many current trails. USFS intends for starting-point maps to include trails and to be based on best data.
- Encourage users and planners to look at the desired experience before looking at anything on a map. Then ask how to accommodate that experience. The setting determines the experience. Start with the end in mind. Ask why people want to go to a certain spot.
- Ed said his district needs to coordinate with USFS, because BLM's process is different. BLM has taken aerial photos, with people who know the area categorizing and presenting to the public what we think our network is now and what we want to close. BLM needs to know what other agencies are planning and to be involved, since these roads interconnect. They make area designations in their plan, with supplemental documents for roads and trails. It is an extensive process. They could coordinate with NMG&F on proclamations for certain times of the year, e.g., hunting season.
- NMG&F too invests time and funds. One employee spends half his time coordinating with USFS.
- It is important to work with communities and tourism.

**PECOS DISTRICT EQIP HABITAT RESTORATION & RECLAMATION PROJECTS**  
**Debbie Hughes, Executive Director, NM Association of Conservation Districts (NMACD)**

Debbie's organization is a nonprofit association of 47 Soil & Water Conservation Districts. It has a voluntary program using USDA Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) funds that benefit grazing, sand dune lizards and lesser prairie chickens, using matching funds. The Natural Resource Conservation Service provides technical and financial assistance to ranchers and farmers on a voluntary basis on nonfederal lands. EQIP is one of several federal conservation programs in the Farm Bill, for both agricultural production and environmental quality. Grants fund 2-10 year contracts, with recipients responsible for 25-50% of funding, which may be in-kind. The USDA added \$2 million 1 1/2 years ago that would be spent on federal lands for collaborative grazing projects in NM. BLM decided to target SENM and the needs of lpcs and scls. In March 2005 they asked NMACD to help coordinate habitat improvement to keep species off the endangered list by removing abandoned O&G pads, and reseeding.

NMACD's role is to develop coordinated resource management plans, receive funds and provide them to ranchers. Some of the restoration projects weren't done under EQIP, for example, caliche removal, so they enlisted O&G help. They bring landowners together and consider needs of the land regardless of ownership, resulting in agreement on how the land will be restored, who

provides assistance and who pays for conservation practices installed. It is important to leverage resources.

Nine NM ranchers have EQIP contracts totaling \$2.3 million over five years. Debbie listed funding from all sources. They still need \$306,000 for equipment and \$550,000 for O&G field restoration. She showed examples of work done, including before and after caliche removal, cattle guard installation, caliche pit reclamation, soil stabilization, matting, hay mulch, and mesquite control. They are also working on several riparian restorations, burning salt cedar on the Pecos River, removing Russian olive on the Black River, fence construction, alternate water source development, and excavating and burning salt cedar on the Delaware. After salt cedar removal they are seeing native grasses, young cottonwoods and willows, higher water, and a greater variety of birds. Recovery time depends. It's most effective to start at the headwaters, but that is not always possible. It's also important to work on tributaries.

### **Question/Answer/Comment**

- Rachel said you don't always have to work on headwaters, some of those areas are clear.
- Once salt cedar is sprayed they need to let skeletons stand for a couple of years until roots die. Politics affect treatment type, e.g., communities like Taos do not want chemical treatments, especially aerial.
- Public awareness would be helpful.
- They are always testing water, soil, and residue. There are clearly areas where aerial treatment is not appropriate, for example in a city, when wind picks up, etc.
- Is BIA involved? Yes, they give input on the steering committee, but work more directly at the local level with nine pueblos, e.g., Santo Domingo removed salt cedar along I-25, and is monitoring birds in the area.
- Joanne asked Doug to bring photos of the area the RAC saw on the field trip where salt cedar was burned.

### **NEXT MEETING**

The RAC discussed the purpose of its next meeting. Gerald proposed bringing members of the public from the Taos district together with agency heads to discuss a small specific community project that all present could take part in to improve habitat. Members recommended concentrating on interagency communication leading to better solutions to issues like those brought up the day before. FO representatives offered possible field trips.

Members agreed that Albuquerque would be best for an interagency get-together, which could be held apart from the next RAC meeting. The RAC tentatively set its next meeting for August 28-30 in Farmington.

### **Agenda**

- Classic urban interface problems
- O&G issues
- Advertise public comment period
- World class O&G interactive exhibit at museum
- The Glade
- Visit a site being drilled
- Visit reclaimed pits

Gerald proposed a meeting for working groups June 15 at 9 a.m. in Santa Fe, focusing on Range School in the morning, and agency cooperation in the afternoon. He would like for agency representatives to take part. He will report results at the next RAC meeting.

Motion

Mickey moved to adjourn at 11:17 a.m. John seconded.