

**Northwest Colorado Stewardship (NWCOS)
 Combined Subcommittee Meeting
 July 19-20, 2005
 Meeting Summary**

Action Items

NWCOS/public	Submit individual comments on alternatives to Jeremy Casterson (970-826-5071 or jeremy_casterson@blm.gov) by August 5. Comments should be based on the July 14 draft and state the page number of concern, the specific problem, and proposed language to insert into the alternatives draft. Comments should be limited to one page per topic and recognize that BLM is within days of completing its draft. This is not the time to raise major new ideas. Suggestions should not contradict consensus ideas agreed to by NWCOS. If you are unsure of whether your ideas are in contradiction, please contact Heather at: hbergman@keystone.org or 1800-842-7485, ext. 5806. We strongly encourage you to copy Helen Littrell on all comments (hlittrell@keystone.org). Helen will compare notes with Jeremy to ensure that all documents are accounted for and will post comments on the NWCOS website.
T. Wright Dickinson, Suzanne Jones, Ann Oliver, and Vanessa Cameron	Discuss Citizens' Wilderness Proposal and the appropriateness of creating Areas of Critical Environmental Concern or other special areas on these lands. Report discussion and decisions back to the group. [Facilitator Note: This action item was completed on July 19 and the subcommittee acted on the topic on July 20.]
T. Wright Dickinson, Reed Morris, and Ann Oliver	Meet to discuss T. Wright's idea about allowing ranchers to use their allotments for conservation purposes and report back to the group. [Facilitator note: This action item was completed on July 19 and the subcommittee acted on the topic on July 20.]
BLM/Tim	Provide a summary to NWCOS of the situation leading up to the move to get the sage grouse listed as an endangered species.
BLM/Tim	Look at the proposals on sage grouse from the working group and from Renee Taylor and see where/how they might fit into the RMP. Get back to group as soon as possible with a revised approach to sage grouse management.
NWCOS	Anyone who is interested should contact Reed with their name and email address to be added to his email distribution list for data on sage grouse needs. Reed's email address is cwcraig@indra.com . His phone number is (970) 824-5241.

Attendance

Suzanne Beauchaine, Steve Bonowski, Vanessa Cameron, Jeremy Casterson, Jeff Comstock, Fred Conrath, T. Wright Dickinson, Tom Gray, Rick Hammel, Steve Hinkemeyer, Lisa Irvin, Suzanne Jones, Rich Levy, Wes McStay, Ned Miller, Andrea Minor, Catherine Morris, Reed Morris, Tim Novotny, Ann Oliver, Kasey Pearson, Brad Petch, Anne Pogoriler, Marianna Raftopoulos, Luke Schafer, Rob Schmitzer, Renee Taylor, Liz Twomey, Jane Yazzie, Kristi Parker Celico, and Heather Bergman.

Items on Agenda

- Review of Where We Are and Where We're Going in the RMP Process
- Sage Grouse Stipulations (including report from Working Group)
- Vermillion Basin (including report from Working Group)
- Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) [Note: This issue was addressed as part of the "Review of Where We Are" discussion.]
- Special Designations: Lands with Wilderness Characteristics (LWCs) [Note: This issue was addressed as part of the "Review of Where We Are" discussion.]
- Adaptive Management (including discussion of Appendix X)
- Travel Management

[Facilitator's Note: This summary refers to the July 13 version of BLM's alternatives document, which is available at http://nwcoss.org/Resources/BLM Documents/BLM Draft Alternatives_7-13-05.pdf. NWCOS members' comments on this version are available at <http://www.nwcoss.org/7155.html>.]

Review of Where We Are and Where We're Going in the RMP Process

The group discussed a variety of issues that pose challenges to NWCOS's ongoing participation in BLM's planning process. These challenges included lack of clarity about NWCOS's role in selecting the preferred alternative, lack of clarity about NWCOS's role in the impact analysis, lack of clarity about BLM's ability to vary stipulations on energy leases across the four alternatives, and lack of funds to pay for facilitation by The Keystone Center after June 30. The discussion proceeded along the following lines:

There was concern about these issues making NWCOS's participation in the planning process pointless, but many participants expressed an interest in continuing to move forward. Some participants felt that even if NWCOS doesn't have a role beyond helping BLM flesh out the 4 alternatives, NWCOS should finish its current work on the alternatives. There is agreement on some issues, and BLM has already improved the alternatives because of NWCOS input. Others expressed concerns about BLM's willingness and ability to accurately interpret and integrate NWCOS's ideas into their versions of the alternatives.

In response to questions about how the preferred alternative will be selected, John Husband stated that BLM does have to pick a preferred alternative for the draft Resource Management Plan (RMP). Jeremy Casterson clarified that whatever alternative John selects as the preferred alternative in the draft RMP, the proposed alternative in the final RMP will still be at least somewhat different from it. He also noted that at this point, BLM plans to pick one of the 4 alternatives as the preferred alternative and does not plan to mix and match between the four alternatives, though there may be mixing and matching among alternatives to create the proposed alternative in the final RMP. However, if NWCOS is able to come up with a "community" alternative, it will receive special consideration by BLM. John stated that he is very committed to getting NWCOS's input on the RMP, but there are still procedures and other requirements that BLM must follow. BLM maintains as a priority getting this RMP completed on time and on budget.

Regarding questions about BLM's ability to vary stipulations across the alternatives, one participant stated that this is a serious problem for collaboration, because it severely constrains

the creativity of the group in their discussion of some "big ticket items."

With regard to the lack of funds to pay for facilitation by The Keystone Center, some participants stated that NWCOS could continue to work together without facilitation, having done so before The Keystone Center was hired. Others disagreed, saying that facilitation by Keystone is important to the group's success. One participant reminded the group that without Keystone's facilitation, there would be issues surrounding NWCOS's compliance with the requirements of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA).

Regarding NWCOS's role in the impact analysis, John said that BLM does not have the time or money for this to be an iterative process between BLM, Booz Allen Hamilton (BAH), and NWCOS. However, John is open to making drafts of the impact analysis available to NWCOS, as long as NWCOS members agree not to overwhelm BLM staff with phone calls and emails about these drafts. If NWCOS can review these drafts and come to consensus on what should be changed, BLM will take that recommendation very seriously. Colorado State University faculty who are preparing the socioeconomic portion of the impact analysis will meet with NWCOS when they have a draft completed in January or February of 2006. They will listen to and incorporate where possible NWCOS comments on their draft.

Several NWCOS members stated concerns regarding the above approaches, including:

- A desire for NWCOS to develop an alternative and have it be considered for a preferred alternative, in keeping with Department of Interior document #_____.
- A desire for NWCOS to be able to mix and match between the four alternatives and not be limited to selecting one of the current alternatives.
- A desire for NWCOS to be able to barter between topics to build a NWCOS alternative;
- A desire for NWCOS to be closely involved with the Impact analysis to help avoid the events of the Roan Plateau RMP;
- A desire for BLM to pay for the analysis of a NWCOS alternative prior to the publication of the Draft RMP; and
- A desire for BLM to pay for continued facilitation of the RMP process;

Despite interest by many in developing a NWCOS alternative, a variety of participants noted that this will be extremely difficult for the group given the wide diversity of opinions.

The group agreed to let the Planning Committee discuss the situation further in their July 21 meeting.

Approach for Comments

Kristi proposed, and the group agreed to, an approach for sharing with NWCOS the subcommittees' ongoing work on BLM's alternatives document. NWCOS comments on the current (July 13) version of the alternatives will be addressed as have comments on previous versions: comments will be discussed during subcommittee meetings and a vote will be taken to determine if there is consensus on the issue or not. BLM staff will note all ideas, both consensus and not, and will attempt to include these in the next version of the alternatives. In the past, NWCOS members have been able to comment on BLM's revised version of the alternatives, starting another round of subcommittee meetings, discussions, and attempts at consensus.

However, as BLM's deadline for completing the alternatives is rapidly approaching, NWCOS will not get to comment on the next version of the alternatives. Anyone who wants to submit further individual comments is welcome to do so; the deadline for submitting individual comments to Jeremy Casterson is August 5.

When the subcommittees set out to work on the alternatives, the goal had been to create a list of issues discussed that could then be presented to NWCOS for approval (which is necessary because subcommittees do not have decision-making authority). Unfortunately, the iterative process described above makes that extremely difficult, as approaches to many issues evolved over time and the language in the alternatives document changed a lot. The group was unsure of how to solve this problem and agreed to allow the Planning Committee to discuss it further and devise a plan.

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Clarification from BLM on Leasing Stipulations, VRM, and ACECs

Leasing Stipulations

Jeremy explained the current status of BLM's internal discussion about its ability to vary stipulations on energy leases across the 4 alternatives, though he acknowledged that BLM's State Office is still reviewing this issue. (His written summary of this issue is available at <http://nwcoss.org/Resources/BLM Documents/The question of using the least restrictive stip.pdf>.) As the situation is presently understood, BLM does have guidance saying that the agency will apply the least restrictive stipulations necessary to meet its resource objectives. There is a question about whether this means that there can be no variation across alternatives or whether stipulations can vary in the alternatives if the objectives the agency has for a particular resource or area require different stipulations. Jeremy stated that he is waiting to hear back from BLM's State Office on this. In response to this, some participants raised concerns about this precluding creativity and meaningful discussion on several issues (including but not limited to sage grouse), that not varying stipulations across alternatives violates the "range of alternatives" requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and that it will limit BLM's ability to analyze a variety of options to help determine what stipulations are most appropriate. Other participants stated that resources can be protected without stipulations, because energy developers must still complete an Application for Permission to Drill (APD), which requires an on-site analysis of what protective measures are required. Some participants also stated concerns about using the RMP to commit energy developers to a specific set of actions for the next 20 years, even though new science might come out indicating that those requirements are no longer relevant or necessary.

Ultimately, in response to a proposal for NWCOS to encourage BLM to vary management actions and stipulations on energy leases based on science and reasonability, incorporating Appendix X on adaptive management, the following votes were indicated: a fairly diverse majority voted yes on this proposal. However, this majority did not include any members of the energy sector. Individuals from the energy sector voted thumbs neutral and stated that they desired more information before they felt comfortable voting. **The group did not come to consensus on this issue.**

Visual Resource Management (VRM)

Jeremy explained that BLM's current approach to Visual Resource Management is to vary the

VRM class of different areas in different alternatives--more areas would have stricter VRM classes in Alternative D and fewer areas would have less strict VRM classes in Alternatives B and C. Jeremy said that an area does not have to have a special designation in order to be assigned a VRM class. BLM will work for consistency between VRM classes and other goals, objectives, and management actions within each alternative. The group discussed a variety of concerns about what certain VRM classes would mean for various uses, including grazing and energy development. After some discussion, Jeremy stated that BLM now understands NWCOS's concerns on this topic and will try to address them in the next version of the alternatives. Definitions of each of the VRM classes are available on page 8-9 of the Analysis of the Management Situation, which is available at [http://nwcoss.org/Resources/BLM/Documents/Little Snake AMS 1-3-05.pdf](http://nwcoss.org/Resources/BLM/Documents/Little_Snake_AMS_1-3-05.pdf). **The group did not come to consensus on this issue.**

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs)

Jeremy stated that after it received a long list of ACEC proposals from an environmental group, BLM had to come up with a set of criteria for evaluating them. These criteria focused on how globally rare a particular plant species was. In order to achieve consistency in evaluation of all ACECs, BLM applied these criteria to the existing ACECs as well. The result of this evaluation was that some existing ACECs were found not to meet the criteria and were removed from Alternatives B, C, and D. BLM only included one of the environmental group's ACEC proposals (for a white-tailed prairie dog ACEC) in its next version of the alternatives document, because the other proposals did not make a compelling case for the "relevance and importance" (part of BLM's legal requirements for ACECs) of their ACEC nominations. Jeremy said that BLM's State Office is still working on the issue of how to evaluate ACECs, so this situation may change. Tim Novotny told the group that BLM will continue to work to protect rare plants, though it may not always use the ACEC designation as a tool for doing so. Jeremy stated that BLM can also maintain the existing management approach in current ACECs even if the official designation is retired in the new RMP.

The group also discussed whether lands in the Citizens' Wilderness Proposal should be included as ACECs in Alternative D. Some participants expressed support for this idea or for creating Special Recreation Management Areas (SRMAs) for backcountry recreation out of some of the CWP lands or other designations to protect the values in these areas. Others said that the Citizens' Wilderness Proposal does not have any legal standing in the group and does not merit discussion or special designation. Jeremy reminded everyone that BLM has not completed its review of the wilderness character in the CWP lands, so its current approach to these lands might change. After much discussion, a small working group on CWPs was created and agreed to discuss these issues and get back to the group. This group included T. Wright Dickinson, Suzanne Jones, and Vanessa Cameron. This group later came back with a proposal, which **was approved by consensus by the subcommittee** with the following variations:

- Alternative A: The 1989 RMP language on this issue. [Facilitator Note: Vermillion Basin is considered open to oil and gas drilling and open to OHVs.]
- Alternative B: All CWP lands would be open to oil and gas drilling and open to OHVs. Grazing would be specifically noted as an appropriate multiple use. The only exception would be Vermillion Basin, which is addressed separately below.

- Alternative C: [NWCOS remained silent on this issue for now, except to note that grazing would be specifically noted as an appropriate multiple use.]
- Alternative D: All CWP lands (including 1) the majority of the CWP lands that BLM had already protected in alternative D, **and** 2) the approximately 10,000 acres of CWP lands that BLM found not to have wilderness character) would be closed to oil and gas drilling and closed to OHVs. NWCOS remained silent on whether these would be closed through special designations or some other management approach. Grazing would be specifically noted as an appropriate multiple use

Jeremy noted that any such language in the alternatives would probably not refer to CWP lands, but rather would refer to backcountry uses or some other term.

Sage Grouse

Steve Hinkemeyer reported on the discussion of the Sage Grouse Working Group. The notes from the working group are available at [http://nwcoss.org/Subcommittees/Sage Grouse Working Group Notes.pdf](http://nwcoss.org/Subcommittees/Sage%20Grouse%20Working%20Group%20Notes.pdf). Renee Taylor discussed her document (available at [http://nwcoss.org/Subcommittees/Sage Grouse Protection Measures Concept presented by Oil and Gas industry.pdf](http://nwcoss.org/Subcommittees/Sage%20Grouse%20Protection%20Measures%20Concept%20presented%20by%20Oil%20and%20Gas%20industry.pdf)), which proposes a way to meet the needs of sage grouse without severely impacting the oil and gas industry. The group discussed several issues relating to sage grouse, including using lease exceptions in areas where there are no grouse, the scientific support for various sizes of protective areas around leks, and the idea of having the RMP refer to a separate document containing the current science on sage grouse as a way to avoid locking the RMP into current science which could change at any time. BLM and BAH staff stated that both the state and national offices of the BLM have demonstrated that they are interested in how the Little Snake Field Office decides to manage the sage grouse issue. One member of the group stated that it would be easier to discuss sage grouse if it were clear what had led to it almost being listed as an endangered species. BLM agreed to provide such a summary as soon as possible. Reed stated that folks could contact him if they want the references and information he submits to BLM on the range of sage grouse stipulations. Tim said that he and the rest of BLM's Core Team will look at the various NWCOS proposals on the table, come up with a revised approach to sage grouse, and get back to the group as soon as possible.

Vermillion Basin

Suzanne Jones reviewed her notes from the Vermillion Basin Working Group, which are available at [http://nwcoss.org/Resources/NWCOS 7-13-05 Alts Comments/Vermillion Basin Working Group Notes 7-11-05.pdf](http://nwcoss.org/Resources/NWCOS%207-13-05%20Alts%20Comments/Vermillion%20Basin%20Working%20Group%20Notes%207-11-05.pdf). Vanessa Cameron said that she did not agree with this assessment of what occurred during the working group meeting, based on her discussion with Randy Ray. [Facilitator Note: After the meeting, Vanessa asked whether Randy Ray could prepare a separate summary of the discussion from his perspective. Keystone agreed that he could, but that it would need to be posted in draft form to allow for a one-week comment period. When it is available, Randy's draft summary will be posted to the NWCOS website at <http://www.nwcoss.org/7155.html>.

The group discussed (but did not agree on) several ideas for protecting and developing Vermillion Basin, including selling leases for large areas, controlled surface use in the entire area, and various options for surface occupancy (including NSO) in the southern portion.

The group also discussed the idea of either leasing or developing Vermillion in phases. BLM staff said that phased leasing was problematic and not an option. Some participants expressed an interest in pursuing phased development, while others said they not want to discuss this further. **There was no agreement on including phased development anywhere in the RMP.**

The group discussed a proposal by T. Wright Dickinson to allow exploration in the areas of Vermillion Basin where there is low or unknown oil and gas potential, but having strict rules about how any resources that are found there can be developed to protect the scenic value of the area. Some participants said that they are open to including this idea in Alternative C, but that Alternative D should be more protective. **There was no agreement about how to move forward with this proposal.**

The group discussed a proposal to have all of Vermillion open in Alternative A, have controlled surface use of the whole area (allowing development) in Alternative B, having part of Vermillion open and part closed in Alternative C, and having it all closed in Alternative D. Given the various limited options, **the group agreed by consensus to have BLM analyze this range of alternatives for Vermillion Basin.**

Adaptive Management

“The group discussed Appendix X of the current version of BLM's alternatives document, which begins to outline BLM's approach to adaptive management and lease waivers, exceptions, and modifications (WEMs). Some participants felt that this approach is too prescriptive, while others felt that it is too vague. Jeremy reminded the group that this a rough outline of their approach, and he said that BLM intended to include in this document Vanessa's ideas on year-round drilling, as well as references to new science, incentives for certain behaviors, and greater flexibility. The Core Team was simply unable to get all of these items in this rough draft in time. Kasey stated that BLM and BAH are discussing creating a separate list of stipulations for each species of interest. One participant expressed concerns about how BLM would ensure accountability in this approach, and some options were discussed. The group did not discuss or agree to any particular approach, but BLM staff said it is open to the possibility of creating some type of accountability mechanism. **The group agreed to let BLM continue to flesh out this document based on the above input.**”

Travel Management

The group discussed several different proposals for travel management, all of which are available at <http://www.nwcos.org/7155.html>. Some participants stated that BLM should include in at least one alternative as many of the ideas in these proposals as possible. Jeremy responded that BLM would look the proposals over carefully and try to include the ideas that are RMP-level decisions. One participant suggested that BLM work to achieve a balance between opportunities for motorized and non-motorized recreation. Concerns were also expressed about allowing motorized access for hunters and about closing recreation areas to energy development. **The group agreed that BLM should look over the lists of areas of interest to both OHV advocates and environmentalists and make its own decision. The group also agreed that BLM should insert a statement on adaptive management to Alternative C on page 88 of the alternatives document and make reference to a list of criteria for how it will decide how travel designations of open, limited, and closed will be applied.**

Livestock Grazing (added to agenda with group's approval)

The group discussed T. Wright Dickinson's proposal for changes to the livestock grazing section of the alternatives document (page 47). His proposal for allowing ranchers to use their grazing allotments for conservation purposes was of particular interest, though several participants acknowledged that the legal issues would need to be explored further. T. Wright, Reed, Ann, Jeremy, and Kasey agreed to discuss this issue further. T. Wright's written suggestions are available at [http://nwcoss.org/Resources/NWCOS 7-13-05 Alts Comments/TWD Comments on July 13 Alts Doc.pdf](http://nwcoss.org/Resources/NWCOS%207-13-05%20Alts%20Comments/TWD%20Comments%20on%20July%2013%20Alts%20Doc.pdf).