



Record of the Northern New Mexico Resource Advisory Council (RAC) Meeting January 17, 2025 Hybrid (Zoom and In-Person)

Northern NM RAC Members (* indicates present):

*Andrew Black: 1- Developed Recreation
*Marcia Bruggenjohann: 1- Energy/Minerals
Nolberto Hernandez: 1- Federal Grazing Permittee
*Evan Pilling: 1- Developed Recreation
*Jacob Baca: 2- Archaeological/ Historical
*Larry Hersman: 2- Dispersed Recreation
Paul Reed: 2- Archaeological/ Historical
*Richard Sertich: 2- Dispersed Recreation
*Cameron Martinez: 3- Tribal Representative
*Charles Price: 3- Public-at-Large
*James Ramakka: 3- Public-at-Large
Norman Vigil: 3- Elected Official

Bureau of Land Management Attendees:

Micki Bailey, Farmington Acting District Manager
Melanie Barnes, New Mexico State Director
Matt Caire, Rio Puerco Field Office Planner
Lesley Elser, Public Affairs Specialist
Sabrina Flores, Albuquerque District Manager
JJ Gallegos, Albuquerque Assistant District Manager
Jamie Garcia, Northern RAC Coordinator
ELDino Henio, Rio Puerco Outdoor Recreation Planner
Maureen Joe, Farmington Field Manager
Ella Kiley, Rio Puerco Public Affairs Specialist
John Klinkel, Rio Puerco Assistant Field Manager
Adam Lujan, Rio Puerco Field Manager
Jennifer Merino, Recreation Lead
Georgina Pearson, Taos Field Office Environmental Planner
Allison Sandoval, Public Affairs Specialist
Sarah Scott, Farmington Field Office Project Manager
Eric Valencia, Taos Field Manager
Trevor Wallin, Rio Puerco Assistant Field Manager

Meeting started at 8:05 a.m.

I. Call to Order, Welcome, and Introductions

Garcia, Black, and Flores: opening remarks, introductions, and welcome.

Agency and RAC members gave brief information and introductions. Proceed to agenda.

II. Farmington District Overview

Presented by Mickie Bailey

- Presented maps and geographic data outlining the jurisdiction of the Farmington District Office, the monuments, and natural resources they manage, and their primary focus areas.
- Major mission areas:
 - Within a dual-focused approach on renewables and minerals, mission areas include recreation planning, integrated vegetation management, Tribal cultural resources and relationships, lands & realty, energy development, and grazing.
- Challenges and opportunities related to the Farmington District Office and Field Office:
 - Challenges- Complex surface ownership, wildland/urban interface, cultural landscape values vs. multiple use development, and user conflict based on the type of use (mineral development, various recreation, etc.)
 - Opportunities: partnerships, lessons learned from navigating Tribal Nation complexities, and renewable energy.

Presented by Maureen Joe

- General overview of district-wide land ownership and Federal leases and wells in the San Juan Basin
 - 2,494 Federal leases (1,811,945 acres)
 - 23,348 active wells in the San Juan Basin

RAC Question: Are there many abandoned wells in San Juan Basin area? *No*. Wells are checked every five years with priority given to higher risk wells.

- San Juan Basin cumulatively produces 33 trillion cubic feet of gas and 300 million barrels of oil.

RAC Question: Do employees actively monitor methane? *Yes*. Certified inspectors monitor the San Juan wells monthly.

- Brief overview of inspection and enforcement staff duties.
- Broad discussion of renewable resource groups- cultural resources; wildlife management; range/weeds management; riparian/soil, water, and air program; road maintenance; lands and rights-of-way; recreation/paleontology; and fire.
- Cultural resources overview:
 - 12,000 sites within jurisdiction, 68 of which are listed on the national register.
 - Looting and vandalism are stemmed by volunteer patrols and aggressive prosecution of perpetrators.
 - Focus on petroglyphs and pueblitos (including the Frances Pueblito, the largest Navajo defensive site on public lands)
- Wildlife management broad overview:
 - Water development (umbrella guzzlers)
 - Improvements and security (vegetative improvements for forage and cover; road closures to regulate motorized vehicle traffic)

RAC Question: Where are hunting areas in the jurisdiction? *Crow Mesa*.

- Range overview/grazing allotments:

- 208 allotments, 280 authorizations, 1.4 million acres of BLM grazing administered lands, and 113,000 Annual Unit Months annually
- BLM has treated 250,000+ acres of sagebrush and other uplands to improve the watershed function.
- General overviews and updates:
 - Riparian habitats- The Field Office manages 110 miles of designated riparian habitat, restoring, protecting, and expanding these habitats annually.
 - Soil, Water, and Air Program
 - Road Management Program- 5,000 miles of roads in the San Juan Basin with past problematic practices (lack of ditching, culverts, and proper road blading).

RAC Question: Are off-highway vehicles considered with collector roads? *No*, these motorists are not currently considered, but the BLM is working on meeting with local counties, the Navajo Nation, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs to discuss road maintenance and included groups.

- Lands and realty overview, including rights-of-way:
 - Rights-of-way include new public roads, electric lines, communication sites, pipelines, well pads, solar development, and carbon sequestration.
 - 17,000 rights-of-way in the Field Office area
 - \$500,000+ in annual rent collected from rights-of-way

RAC Question: What is the role of Realty Specialists? *General overview provided.*

- Recreation management areas- Glade Run Trail System, Dunes Vehicle Recreation Area, Head Canyon Off-Road Vehicle Competition Area, Thomas Canyon, Negro Canyon, Carracas Mesa, Navajo Lake Horse Trail, Rock Garden, Pinyon Mesa, Angel Peak, Simon Canyon, and Alien Run Mountain Bike Trails
- Bisti/De-Na-Zin Wilderness overview:
 - BLM manages approx. 45,000 acres of hoodoos, cracked eggs, petrified wood, and geologic features.
- Overview of lop and scatter thinning of piñon/juniper to increase forage quality.
- Overview of mastication thinning to reduce fire fuels and increase forage quality.
- Fire Program overview:
 - Farmington and Taos combined- approx. 90-100 wildfires suppressed annually (generally from April to September)
 - Summary of fire program tasks and burns
- Brief updates on the Russian olive control program

RAC Question: Has tamarisk been controlled by bug populations? *Yes*. Because of this, tamarisk has been largely replaced with Russian olive.

- Resource Management Plan (RMP) amendment process status update:
 - 2003 Resource Management Plan did not address unconventional oil and gas development (regarding air and water resources)
 - 2003 Resource Management Plan is currently in use. 2014 Resource Management Plan was terminated.
 - A new Reasonable Foreseeable Development Scenario begun this year and the agency is seeking funding to proceed with a full Resource Management Plan revision to cover all resources for the entire Field Office.

RAC Question: Is horizontal drilling still happening? *Yes*. A mix of drilling methods are in use.

- Chaco area withdrawal overview:

- The Secretary announced the approval on Friday, June 2, 2023. Effective upon publication in the *Federal Register*.
- Prohibits activities authorized by the mining and mineral leasing laws (e.g., uranium, coal, oil, gas). Does not impact valid existing rights.
- Applies to approx. 336,000 acres of Federal mineral estate.
- Does not impact rights-of-way or any other activity in conformance with the 2003 Resource Management Plan
- Does not include disposal under the Materials Act of 1947 (e.g., sand, gravel, humate, etc.)

RAC Question: Is the mule deer study completed? *Yes*. There is now an ongoing study of antelope in the area.

RAC Question: With the shift in administration, how durable are the Chaco withdrawals? Can they be undone? *Yes*, it is possible to undo the Chaco withdrawal. BLM employees are looking at Resource Management Plan revisions to add stronger protections.

RAC Question: Does the Farmington Field Office still send out notices to Tribes indicating drilling/activity on well drilling sites? *Yes*. The BLM sends government-to-government consultation letters for all proposed projects.

RAC Question: Does the Chaco withdrawal only affect future leases? Is there an overview of active leases in the area anywhere? *Yes*, active leases are available to view. RAC members were shown maps of all existing leases. Chaco is outside of the fault line of interest.

RAC Question: Are there also state land protections for Chaco? *No*. The Chaco withdrawal is only for Federal lands; however, the New Mexico State Land Office did issue a moratorium regarding the state lands around the Chaco area as well.

RAC Question: Are there any study sites and soil testing maps looking at soil structure due to climate change/desertification? Grazing also affects soil compaction, moisture porosity affected, and sediment loads in arroyos- are you looking at this? *No*, there are no current testing efforts conducted by the BLM. Range management specialists currently use Natural Resource Conservation Service Web Soil Survey and Ecological Site Descriptions to monitor changes overtime.

- RAC requested a presentation of data over the decades to monitor soil changes.

RAC Question: Where can you find planning documents? *BLM's site pages*. There should be links on each site's BLM pages online with updates/most current resource management plans.

III. Taos Field Office Updates

Presented by Eric Valencia

- Río Grande del Norte National Monument Resource Management Plan and Environmental Assessment overview:
 - Taos Resource Management Plan signed in 2012 declared the entire monument as an Area of Critical Concern
 - Presidential Proclamation 8946 declares that the BLM shall prepare and maintain a plan for the purposes of protecting and restoring Monument objects.
 - The recent amendment was designed to protect and preserve cultural and historical resources, ecological values, geological features, and wildlife/habitats.
- Recreation and Special Permits updates:
 - Petaca campground (closed 2021-2024)- addition of Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility features.

- Plans for the Taos Junction Bridge, the most visited site in the Monument- rehabilitate the campground, remove invasive plants, and expand site access.
- Klauer land acquisition- first acquisition occurred June 2024. Taos Field Office is hoping for a second in June 2025. Recreation planning in the future.
- Horse Thief Mesa Travel Management Plan (2019)- popular mountain biking area. Difficulties with funding in the past, so the plan will proceed in phases. Parking lots are now in place as part of phase one.
- Wild Rivers- almost prepared to solicit moving forward with rehabilitating the roads in that area.

RAC Question: Is the Klauer land acquisition located around Horseshoe Curve and toward the University of New Mexico-Taos campus? *Yes*. The land acquisition exists north of Horseshoe Curve. In the future, it will surround the campus.

RAC Question: A lot of hikers have been picking up archeological lithics and arrowheads because there are not any law enforcement officers around. Hikers are also parking around the overlook, which is very dangerous. Loss of artifacts is disheartening. Are you able to respond to these comments? *Yes*, thank you. We will let law enforcement know to create a plan. We are hoping to engage more with the local pueblos to address these issues and take inventory of these archaeological sites.

- Brief discussion of the challenges facing the Taos Field Office. Graffiti and tagging are common, but it was noted that trash dumping is not a frequent issue, unlike in other areas.
- John Dunn Bridge Resource Management Plan Amendment updates:
 - The second most easily accessible access point to the Rio Grande Gorge and very popular with local recreators.
 - A pinch point for traffic, leading to the addition of a Black Rock Mesa Special Recreation Management Area and three Recreation Management Zones to safely manage traffic and overcrowding.
 - This is one of many projects in the area to increase accessibility to recreation sites.

RAC Question: In the last meeting, there was discussion of an alternate trail to the hot springs in that area from the John Dunn Bridge to the springs. Are those an option? *Yes*, that trail exists. However, it is a fisherman's trail, so overuse could quickly lead to erosion around the springs.

RAC Comment: The switchback where people park for the Black Rock Hot Springs is also a bad pinch point. *Understood*. While working with emergency services, they have requested that the switchback is kept clear for safety. The BLM will be monitoring the area.

- Brief discussion of grazing allotments in the area, particularly noting the bighorn domestic sheep population in the area.
- Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo Memorandum of Understanding overview:
 - United States Forest Service and BLM are involved.
 - Protection of cultural assets within ancestral territory within Federal lands that previously faced heavy cultural degradation.
 - Regular communication and respect with the prioritization of process and environmental compliance with land exchange
- Tesuque Pueblo Memorandum of Understanding overview:
 - United States Forest Service and BLM are involved.
 - Protection of the Caja del Rio in Santa Fe County

- Secures Pueblo access to/protects cultural and natural resources, develops collaborative programs and studies, and establishes roles in regard to environmental assessment and clean-ups

RAC Question: The slide mentions an Electric Power Capacity Upgrade line- what is that? *Electric Power Capacity Upgrade*. It is a proposal from the National nuclear Security Administration and Los Alamos National Laboratory to run a transmission line across the Caja del Rio. It is a major issue happening in the area.

RAC Question: Is the Electric Power Capacity Upgrade line what's holding up the national monument designation? *No comment*.

RAC Question: Can the Electric Power Capacity Upgrade line and a national monument both exist? *Yes, it is possible*. The line already exists. Depending on how the monument proclamation is written, they can allow for one or both to exist. It is a common tension in the local community.

- Caja del Rio project and resource protection overview:
 - Surveillance cameras to protect petroglyphs 24/7.
 - Delegated funding for site clean-up in partnership with Tesuque Pueblo
 - Rael Ranch environmental assessment
 - Electric Power Capacity Upgrade line
- Brief updates on:
 - Rio Arriba County and dumping issues.
 - Santa Cruz Lake and user conflicts- separate ramps for paddleboarders and fishermen
 - Sabinoso Wilderness- seeking a right-of-way for access from the north.

RAC Question: On the High Bridge, are you working with the New Mexico Highway Department to remove a portion of the concrete barriers to allow people to access the area by foot? *Yes*. The issue of the High Bridge will require a lot of coordination with local organizations, but it is on the list to be completed.

RAC Question: What kinds of shooting range documents are coming out right now? *There are a few things going on*. To address dumping and dispersed shooting, the BLM hopes to create target shooting ranges to draw individuals to areas designated for them. The Draft Environmental Assessment that was originally created for the area will need to go through another round of changes, so another *Federal Register* Notice and public comment period will need to go out before the plans can move forward.

BREAK

Meeting resumed at 9:50 a.m.

IV. Albuquerque District Updates with Programs and Major Actions Overviews

Presented by Sabrina Flores

- Brief discussion on the differences in focus between the Albuquerque District Office and Rio Puerco Field Office
- Introduction to FAST-41:
 - Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act
 - Not always "fast" in the literal sense
 - An infrastructure projects and new governance structure – improving transparency, predictability, and accountability for these projects.
 - \$200 million threshold – FAST-41 does not apply to Tribal projects.

- Lead agency is the Federal Permitting Improvement Steering Council/Office of the Executive Director, project sponsor is the National Telecommunications and Information Agency
- Local FAST-41 projects overview:
 - Navajo Nation Broadband Project- 323 miles of fiber optic network
 - Santa Fe Indian School Broadband Project- 300 miles of broadband infrastructure
 - Laguna Pueblo was not previously interested in broadband projects, but they now are, so projects may be adjusted in the future to reflect this change.
 - Possible inclusion of other Tribes in similar projects as interest expands.
- Brief introduction to co-stewardship establishment efforts with the Pueblo de Cochiti and lessons learned.
- Brief overviews of the Indian Self Determination and Education Assistance Act (Public Law 96-63), Joint Secretarial Order No. 3342, and Joint Secretarial Order No. 3403, all of which advanced cooperation/collaboration and co-stewardship.
- Discussion of outreach efforts to invite Tribes with co-steward agreements through letters in 2024, which kick started work with Tribes.
- Cochiti 638 multi-year funding agreement overview:
 - Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument
 - Public Law 93-368 allows for funding of the self-determined pueblo for the performance of programs, functions, services, and activities in Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument.
 - Pueblo de Cochiti performs daily maintenance and operations.
 - Funding is contingent on administrative access to Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument across Tribal Road 92.
 - Committed to exploring revisions and discussions on the current Resource Management Plan
- Pueblo of Acoma Memorandum of Understanding overview:
 - Natural and cultural resources management, data sharing, and BLM fencing and boundaries as the main concerns.
 - Site protection (including from wildfires), the Tribal experience and culture sharing, and Pueblo access to Acoma homelands.
- Pueblo of Jemez Memorandum of Understanding overview:
 - Cultural and resource management (e.g., the San Ysidro Trials Area for ceremonial use and general road maintenance), forestry and fire management, and rangeland and wildlife management/conservation
- Pueblo of San Felipe overview:
 - Resource Management Plan development for the Area of Critical Environmental Concern
 - Ball Ranch Area of Critical Environmental Concern renamed to Ball Espinosa Ridge/ Shu'tu'ba
 - Future development of a co-stewardship agreement to address Pueblo concerns (e.g., paleontology excavation alternatives, degradation from feral horses)

RAC Question: Is there any way in the management process that it can be stipulated that any excavated paleontological resources be returned to the region that they came from so that the communities can ultimately benefit from them? *Not aware of any current stipulations.* One case does come to mind: the University of New Mexico excavates in this area of critical

environmental concern and retains their scientific resources for the most part, though they may lend them out. The BLM has been able to repatriate some remains, but it is sometimes hard to determine the origin of these resources, and some individuals would prefer that such materials were unmoved from their resting place.

RAC Question: Are the offices working on memorandums of understanding based on the literal location of a Tribe or where the lands that they have cultural ties to are located? *Both*. The BLM has the option to make decisions on jurisdiction and how to recognize “location.”

V. Rio Puerco Field Office Resource Management Plan Overview

Presented by Adam Lujan

- Brief timeline of Resource Management Plan revisions:
 - Resource Management Plan Revision began in 2008, a draft Environmental Impact Statement was released in 2012, and the final Record of Decision was signed in 2024.
- Rio Puerco Field Office overview:
 - Resource Management Plan revision covers 734,000 acres and 3.6 million acres of subsurface minerals.
 - Additions in the new plan include 60,000 acres in new area of critical environmental concern designations, 26,610 acres to protect lands with wilderness characteristics, four special recreation management areas (42,900 acres), six extensive recreation management areas (232,800 acres), renewable energy availability/unavailability, 131,900 acres identified for land tenure disposal, and 557,000 acres open for fuelwood.

RAC Question: The new windfarm west of Quemado- is that in Rio Puerco Field Office? *No*, that is in Socorro’s jurisdiction.

RAC Question: Why did renewable acreage decrease between the old and new plan? *It’s misleading*. At the time when the old plan was created, renewable resources were not a large concept in land management, so the BLM was considering all open land where they could feasibly occur as a part of that category in the 1992 plan.

- Overview of included areas of critical environmental concern:
 - Eight new parcels, four of which were included in the previous plan under different designations.
 - Designated for cultural resources, paleontological resources, recreation value, scenic value, and safety (legacy uranium mines)

RAC Question: Regarding the legacy uranium mine listed here, are you planning any rehabilitation efforts? Also, are any of the discussed land exchanges part of the area of critical environmental concern? *Yes*, the BLM works on legacy mines with the help of the Abandoned Mine Lands Program. When that Program has the funding and time, they will go after this particular mine. Until then, the area of critical environmental concern designation is a safety feature. As for the second question- *no*. If any lands identified for exchange identify as areas of critical environmental concern, those areas are not included.

- Overview of included lands with wilderness characteristics:
 - New plan includes seven units over 26,610 acres. Two of seven are open to multiple use per agreements.

RAC Question: When designating these areas as having “wilderness characteristics,” is that to ultimately provide a pipeline to get them to a wilderness study area? *Potentially*. Only Congress has the ability to designate wilderness, but it could help the decision process.

RAC Question: Does designating something as having lands with wilderness characteristics close it off to motorized vehicles? *Yes*. The agency manages them very similar to other wilderness areas.

- Leasable fluid minerals overview:
 - 23 percent closed, 2 percent no surface occupancy (nothing allowed above ground, but horizontal drilling is fine), 9 percent controlled surface use, 66 percent open.
 - Big change was the closure of low/no potential areas to limit speculative leases in these areas (just surface). Private owners still have the ability to develop.
- Brief Resource Management Plan subject-area overviews:
 - Locatable minerals- 87 percent open, 12 percent recommended for withdrawal, 1 percent withdrawn.
 - Salable Minerals- 88 percent open, 1 percent open to non-commercial, 11 percent closed.
 - Land tenure- 18 percent open to disposal, 82 percent retained. Majority for exchange, but some have reversionary clauses.
 - Land use authorizations – 12 percent open, 70 percent avoid, 18 percent exclude.
 - Renewable energy (solar) – 36 percent open, 64 percent excluded. Some last-minute changes to match nationwide Solar Environmental Impact Statement
 - Renewable Energy (wind) – 3 percent open, 78 percent avoid, 19 percent exclude.

RAC Question: Have you ever thought of balancing BTUs generated by oil and gas and BTUs from solar/wind to reach carbon neutrality? *Not at this time*. The BLM has not made analyses internally or received guidance on doing so at this time.

- Green fuelwood harvesting overview:
 - 557,000 acres available, 174,600 acres unavailable
 - Have historically had issues with citing unauthorized individuals who need these resources to live. Made changes to allow access to these resources while also protecting them (e.g., site specific analyses and rotation of availability)

RAC Question: Are there restrictions on cutting piñon? *The BLM has ability to change their policy to protect specific species. Right now, we are only looking at green fuelwood. The BLM does have specific species policies for open, dead, and downed wood though. For example, we are currently targeting downed piñon because of beetle kill.*

RAC Question: Is the BLM trying to rotate fuel wood areas to limit poaching? *Yes*. To limit damage, but also to try and meet high-demand areas.

RAC Question: Is there any coordination with fire management to target high fire risk areas? *Yes*, the BLM meets with them. Our previous forester stated, though, that at the current cutting rate, the concern would be running out of fuelwood. We may not have much concern of overgrowth needing to be thinned, but perhaps the opposite.

- Travel Management overview:
 - 1 percent open, 82 percent limited, 17 percent closed.
 - An ongoing issue. Major change from 41 percent available, will require education and outreach.
- Overview of challenges ahead:

- Recreation is continuing to grow, leading to conflicts with grazing (e.g., unauthorized feral horses, precipitation changes), off-road driving outside of “open” areas, trash dumping/trigger trash, and allowing fuelwood harvest while limiting off-road driving.
- RAC comment- there is an app being used in San Juan County to report locations of dumping. Volunteers can go to clean up or inform the BLM of sites based on that app.
 - The BLM is working on developing a similar process. State is working on developing this too, and we have a few locations utilizing these resources already.
- Overview of next steps in planning:
 - Travel Management Plans for five travel management areas: El Malpais National Conservation Area, Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument plan amendment, and areas of critical environmental concern specific plans

LUNCH BREAK

Meeting resumed at 1:03 p.m.

VI. Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument Presentation

Presented by John Klinkel

- Timeline of Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument updates:
 - Since 2023, Pueblo de Cochiti and BLM are in a co-stewardship agreement for the monument.
 - After reopening Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument in 2024 following a four-year closure, it was decided that recreation.gov would be used to reserve spots to the Monument and reduce resource overuse from high visitation.
- Overview of eligibility requirements for BLM to charge a standard amenity fee:
 - Picnic tables, trash receptacles, toilet facilities, parking, interpretive signage, and security services.
 - Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument currently hosts all six amenities, with potential for more to come.
 - Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument’s shelters and picnic tables are Americans with Disabilities Act compliant.
- Brief discussion of amenities available at Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument for the trails and Veteran’s Memorial Overlook

RAC Question: Is the Cave Loop considered accessible? *No, not entirely.* Portions of the trail are accessible or moderate. The Veterans Memorial Overlook is fully accessible.

RAC Question: When visitor buys the passes to access Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument, can they ask to only be directed to the memorial parking lot instead of the trail lots and be led up there? *The rangers will provide directions at the fee booth* but will not lead them. The pilot car only brings visitors to the fee booth.

- Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (2007) overview:
 - Distinct plan for this Monument
 - Plans for a maximum of 50,000 visitors annually, ensuring the best visitor experience.

- Currently \$5/person. Asking for a vote to add a \$1/person additional fee to cover the recreation.gov administrative costs that the BLM is currently covering (though fees can range from \$0.50-\$10 for recreation.gov).
- Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument visitation and fee structures:
 - Previous visitation average sited as 110,856 people annually (though 127,000 is more representative)
 - America the Beautiful passes are accepted, but Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument does not make any money from these individuals.

RAC Question: At other sites, the America the Beautiful pass covers the whole vehicle's entry costs. Will that still be the case at Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument? *Yes*, the America the Beautiful pass will cover the \$5/person cost for the cardholder and three others.

RAC Question: Is it correct to say that Booz Allen Hamilton allots \$1/head, so \$50,000/year, to manage a subpage of a website that already exists? *For this Monument, yes*. But think of it as \$50,000 that the BLM has been paying thus far on behalf of the visitors since the BLM has not been approved to request this fee of the visitor (as is the norm at most other sites).

- Brief overview of the educational field trip program- free with a reservation for elementary - college students.
- Collections (L1232) and expenses compared over five years (before closure):
 - \$137,800 collected vs. \$154,139 needed to run the Monument.
 - Deficit is why the RAC was previously asked to approve a change from \$5/person instead of \$5/vehicle.
 - Recent guidance requires that the recreation.gov fees be explicitly mentioned in the Business Plan, thus the fee structure needs a second round of approval.
- Overview of fee increase purpose:
 - BLM is asking for this approval to pay the recreation.gov fee because the BLM is currently paying on behalf of visitors, limiting management funds.
 - This fee is in line with all sites on recreation.gov.
 - This fee brings the Monument in line with inflation.
- Brief overview of annual labor and operating costs- total average expenditures are \$408,514.
- Brief overview of proposed fee structure for 50,000 visitors- \$250,000 from reservation fees (\$5/person) and \$50,000 from the recreation.gov admin fee (\$50,000). Noted that 32 percent of attendees utilize interagency passes, so the \$250,000 is a high estimate.
- Brief overview of assessed impacts from fee modification (e.g., more balanced operational costs, fee equity, limited socio-economic impacts)
- Brief assessment of not modifying the fee structure
- Summary of public comments on fee restructuring:
 - Thirteen comments received, but two were duplicates.
 - Six supported the fee modification; four did not support the modification (primarily focused on the Tribal access fee); and one was neutral.
- Conclusion:
 - The fee did not change for 25 years and needed adjusting.
 - This change is to fix the miscommunication of not including the fee for recreation.gov in the previous Business Plan.

RAC Question: Is there a "convenience fee" with recreation.gov as well? *No*.

RAC: What is the sense of the public comment? Are the public considering the nuance with the pricing going to the BLM and the Pueblo? *Yes*, they recognize the difference in the BLM fees and Pueblo fees. But there is nothing that we can do to advocate for the public and change the Tribal Access Pass fee. That is completely up to the Pueblo as a private landowner.

RAC Question: How did the access road become Tribal property? It was once a public road. *In 2022*, the Pueblo de Cochiti asked the Bureau of Indian Affairs to remove the road from the list of public roads. Their request was recognized and fulfilled in 2023.

- RAC discussed the potential mindset of a customer when faced with the current and proposed fee structures (both the BLM fees and Tribal Access fee). *The BLM recognizes this and suggests free alternatives to those who do not want to pay for Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument, such as El Malpais.*

RAC Question: Does the Cochiti Pueblo have any comments on the BLM fee increase? Are they in favor of the increase? *Yes*, they are in agreement.

RAC Question: Is there an exit time for your pass? *Yes*. With a reservation, you may stay from your entry (as early as 8a.m.) to the 4p.m. closing.

- RAC discussed the Cochiti's access pass and where those fees are utilized within the Pueblo.

RAC Question: If an accident occurs, what happens? *Sandoval County responds* to their calls. The rangers are trained to administer first aid and CPR. But they will not move the injured and will wait until first responders arrive.

- Jamie Garcia opened conversation for general discussion with the RAC while waiting for the public comment period to begin.

RAC Question: Are there any concerns of the agreement with the Pueblo disintegrating? *None that we are aware of*. The BLM and Cochiti Pueblo will review the agreement and make changes as needed. Dissolving the agreement would be up to each side's lawyers.

- BLM discussion of their intent to revisit the business plan approximately every five years to evaluate how the plan is working and make any changes. Any changes would involve the RAC.

RAC Question: What happens if the BLM makes a profit from the Monument? *It will stay with the Monument and pay for additional projects.*

RAC Question: Is the BLM capping visitors at 50,000? *Yes*. The BLM is still trying to figure out how to best manage this. We need the ability to track vehicles/people per day to ensure that there are enough parking spots for everyone who has a reservation. As time progresses, we will be able to know more and manage this issue better.

RAC Question: Have shuttles been considered? *Yes*, the Pueblo has considered this. They have one shuttle currently. But the shuttle system presents a safety issue and requires the Pueblo to have a special recreation permit. The pilot vehicle is the current solution.

RAC Question: Can the presentation be emailed out? *Yes*, we can email it now and it will be available online at a later date.

RAC Question: What stops tourist groups from purchasing all available passes online? *They should seek out special recreation permits*. Until we can more accurately track total visitors, we are considering telling these group tours that they will drop off their guests and return to pick them up later so that they do not take any parking spots away from general visitors. Bus parking spots are also available (not for reservation) online.

RAC Question: Is there bus parking? *Yes*, 4 parking spots are available for RVs and busses.

- BLM discussion of the legal implications for pulling of the 638 agreement. It is good for three years and will be in place until a new agreement is made. If the BLM and Cochiti Pueblo cannot come to an agreement at that time, the Monument would close.

RAC Question: Are there other monuments with this easement issue? *Yes*. But the BLM normally tries to get these easements in place before an area becomes a monument.

RAC Question: Are there fees for the nearby Cochiti Lake? And are they comparable? *Yes*, there are day use fees and camping fees. They also use recreation.gov. They are \$5 for day use and \$20 for overnight.

RAC Question: There is no overnight use of the Monument, correct? *Correct*.

VII. Public Comment Period

Jamie Garcia kicked off the public comment period. No comments were made by the public.

VIII. Discussion of Future RAC Meeting Dates and Topics

- RAC discussed general RAC policies and guidelines and the timelines for term expirations.
 - Quorum requirements- at least 3 of the 4 members from each category must be present to vote. A quorum is not required to hold a general meeting.
 - 75 days are required to schedule a meeting and post an announcement in the *Federal Register*.

RAC Question: Which terms are ending in April? *Seven terms end in April: Marcia Bruggenjohann, Nolberto Hernandez, Jacobo Baca, Larry Hersman, Paul Reed, James Ramakka, and Norman Vigil.*

RAC Question: Are two-day meetings standard? *Yes*. If field trips are involved, the meetings usually last two days. One day meetings are also okay. Hybrid meetings are a current standard.

- Discussion of scheduling a meeting before the April turnover:
 - RAC would like to discuss potential changes implemented by the new administration.
 - Potential to schedule a fall meeting.
 - No projects coming up in next three months from BLM would require a vote.
- Potential April meeting topics:
 - Wilderness study areas/areas of critical environmental concern- would like to know more about these areas and their unique characteristics. Proposed a field trip to El Malpais National Conservation Area in particular.
 - How recreation and oil & gas drilling are interacting in the Farmington District.
 - Recreation in Taos (with a field trip).
- April meeting proposal:
 - Farmington Field Office
 - Potential oil rig site tour, discussion of drilling, and discussion of local recreation (with a potential optional field trip outside of the designated RAC meeting)
 - April 7-8 as a tentative date. An email will be sent to confirm dates.

IX. RAC Vote on Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument Amenity Fee Increase Proposal

- BLM clarification of fees:
 - The RAC is voting on a fee increase to be paid to recreation.gov. This vote would add whatever fee the recreation.gov contract states (ranging from \$0.50-\$10).

- The current contracted fee from rec.gov for Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument is \$1.
- The BLM does not have control of the fee proposed by recreation.gov.
- RAC concerns:
 - Worried that the recreation.gov fee could increase to \$10.
 - The \$1 fee was comfortable, but they would like to meet again if the fee were to increase that much higher.

RAC Question: Why can't the BLM charge the \$6 and then pay recreation.gov \$1? *This is not possible long-term.* Recreation.gov is only offering the current solution (that BLM pay out-of-pocket) for a limited time.

- Brief discussion of recreation.gov general fee allowance structure- more complicated services produce higher fees for sites. Based on the current per-person fee structure at Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument, the recreation.gov fee is \$1.

RAC Question: Does recreation.gov have to tell the BLM when they are changing the fee? *The BLM does not control recreation.gov fees.* Recreation.gov charges based on the complication of the reservation and could change their rates without warning. A fee change, however, is unlikely without Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument's Business Plan changing and becoming more robust first.

RAC Question: Can recreation.gov change the fee unilaterally? *The contract is negotiated by Headquarters.* They would update the BLM as far in advance as they could once the fees are approved.

RAC Question: What happens if we don't vote today? *The BLM will ultimately have to collect cash only or close the Monument.*

RAC Question: Is the fee clarified when making the reservation. *Yes, there is a cost breakdown.*

RAC: Is the \$1 fee a fair fee for the services they provide? *Yes, this is a fair fee based on the work recreation.gov does for the Monument. Recreation.gov handles the scheduling, provides helpful data reports, and responds quickly to issues and concerns that arise.*

RAC Question: If the fee is increased to \$10, what would the BLM do to mitigate this? *The BLM would communicate with the RAC to decide on how to proceed.* Moving to a different vendor would be a strong consideration.

RAC Question: If the Cochiti wanted to do implement shuttles, are they aware of the recreation.gov fee change? *This would not impact the BLM fees.* The shuttles would be on the cost of the Pueblo as a commercial vendor, not the BLM. They are aware of the potential scale of the recreation.gov fee in general, though.

- RAC commentary:
 - Recommend a fee increase up to \$1, with any further updates requiring that the BLM come back to the rack.
 - Noted that the current vote is to approve/deny the \$0.50-\$10 fee range.
 - The RAC was under the impression that they were voting on specifically a \$1 fee increase.
 - The business plan was sent out 30 days prior with the \$0.50-\$10 clarification.
 - RAC would be comfortable with a smaller range- \$0.50-\$5 or \$0.50-\$2.
 - BLM noted that if recreation.gov were to increase fee to \$10, the BLM will then have an option to withdraw from the site and return to cash only.
- Vote motion:

- The RAC will approve a fee range of \$0.50 to \$2.00 rather than the proposed range of \$0.50 to \$10.00 proposed in the Business Plan. The BLM should come back to the RAC with any further fee increases.
- The motion was unanimously supported by the nine present RAC members.

Meeting adjourned at 3:24 p.m.