

RPW Steering Committee Meeting Summary January 10th, 2014

Present: Bruce Whitehead, Darlene Marcus, Chuck Wanner, Steve Fearn, Jimbo Buickerood, Suzanne Sellers, Ann Oliver, John Taylor, Jeff Widen, with contract staff Tami Graham. Observers: Mark Lambert, Ron Archuleta, Ty Churchwell, Emily Orbanek, Mark Pearson, Sandy Young, Mely Whiting

Observer Comments

- Sandy Young, participant in San Juan and Animas workgroups, submitted a letter to the Steering Committee.

Next meetings

- Thursday, February 13th, 10am-1pm (lunch provided)
- Thursday, March 13th, 10am-1pm (lunch provided)
- Both meetings at LPEA small conference room.

Hermosa legislation update

- No updates as of now. House just got back this week.
- There is a meeting on Monday, January 13th with the Hermosa drafting committee and DMR to discuss some water rights issues DMR has raised.

Forest Plan Update

- Mark Lambert reported that the appeal period for the forest plan ended on December 19th, 2013. 22 appeals received (Mark will email Tami a list of entities that filed appeals, which will be forwarded to the SC). A team of experts in the Washington DC office are reviewing appeals now. Local and regional offices can't dialogue with the DC office at this stage. Responses to appeals will be forthcoming to appellants 160 days after February 17th. If groups that appealed are interested in participating further at this time, suggests looking at regulations that address the appeal process. Appeals processes for BLM vs. FS are totally separate.
- The FS plan is in effect now and projects are going forward.

Approval of summary from prior meeting

- Edits and corrections to the December 17, 2013 meeting summary were discussed and approved.
- It was agreed that Tami will email the SC the draft summaries following each meeting. SC members will email Tami with any suggested edits or corrections. Tami will compile these comments and email them to the SC prior to the subsequent meeting. This should expedite the review of summaries during meetings.

Phase II/Regional Discussion

Range of current issues, viewpoints and considerations on various streams:

San Juan

East Fork:

- Bruce distributed two maps that showed diversion points on both the East and West Forks. This was a follow-up from the previous meeting regarding water rights that may have points of diversion on public lands, which could potentially be impacted by the suitability finding during a federal permitting process, or through designation by Congress. There are both conditional and absolute water rights that are decreed, or that have existing diversions on USFS lands according to the maps supplied by the Colorado Division of Water Resources.

Animas

WSA's:

- Two maps provided to the SC via Ty, clarifying locations and boundaries of WSA's.
- There are a few areas that include patented mining claims in the Weminuche Contiguous. If boundaries adjusted to take those out and access issues addressed, could lead to buy in from San Juan County, as part of a package to remove suitability on Animas.
- A map was requested that would show the proposed release area of the West Needles contiguous area. It is understood to be mostly the canyon wall on the west side of the WSA. If a partial release occurs, would not be difficult to enforce the boundary, due to the geography.
- When thinking about WSA boundaries, important to think about manageability for the land managers.
- A consideration to leave the West Needles Contiguous out of a potential package.
- Some in conservation community would be more comfortable releasing suitability on the Animas if the three WSA's became Wilderness.
- If the entire West Needles isn't released, could consider one of the options discussed above as part of a package.
- If West Needles WSA became part of a package, the actual WSA boundary on Whitehead Gulch would extend down to the river boundary, as well as a piece of private land on the east side of the river.
- If some or all of WSA's were designated as wilderness, the private land around the edges would not be included.
- A major concern with a WSR designation from the County and SWCD perspective is the issue of a federally reserved water right and how that relates to the distribution of private land in the upper reaches of the watershed.
- If suitability released on the upper reaches, would like to see something that reflects back on the public land piece and protection of ORV's. Start with protection ideas the workgroup explored, noting that some of those ORV's are water dependent.
- A question was asked about the pending San Juan County water right application (10 cfs), and the locations of the proposed diversion points. Those points are Eureka, Howardsville, Cement Creek at Gladstone, Chatanooga (where

highway crosses Milk Creek), Animas River bridge just east of town hall, Mineral Creek bridge.

Observer Input

Mely:

- Comment regarding December 17th summary: final report on San Juan stated that on the West Fork a mineral withdrawal could be acceptable as part of a package, as an alternative to WSR.
- Questioned if SC meetings should be longer, so as to allow for more substantive discussion, as well as asking if it might be time for SC members to consider bringing forth proposals for the entire basin.

Mark Pearson:

- The SC needs to find a mix of foregoing suitability protections and finding others. Would love to see some designations around the State, so WSR isn't such an unknown. Wilderness has existed for 50 years and there's a lot of familiarity with it.
- Would like to see a more robust compromise than removal of suitability on everything but Hermosa.

Ty:

- Part of Handies Peak WSA is also in San Juan County (about 1,400 acres). TU has a campaign for Alpine Triangle, which included protections for non-wilderness areas and resolution for pending WSA's. Deferred the discussion of WSA's to the RPW process. As part of the Animas discussion, he encouraged that workgroup to address WSA's. There is still an opportunity for resolution of this issue. WSA's take an act of congress to be released or enacted. If a legislative package comes out of the regional discussion, portion of Handies Peak WSA in San Juan County could be addressed.

Other

- It was requested that there be more discussion on the East Fork diversions at the next meeting.
- The idea of extending the SC meetings to 3 hours was discussed. All SC members present could extend the February 13th meeting to 10am-1pm (vs. 10am-noon). Tami will send out an email to see if those not present could do this as well. If extended into the lunch hour, pizza's can be ordered.

Meeting adjourned at 12:08pm.