

**Rio Grande NF Forest Plan Revision  
Cultural and Historic Preservation Meeting  
March 9, 2015  
Alamosa, CO  
Meeting Summary**

**Attendees**

Forest Plan Revision Team

- *US Forest Service*: Mike Blakeman, Andrea Jones, Angie Krall, Adam Mendonca, Erin Minks, Henry Provencio, Earl Robinson
- *National Forest Foundation*: Marcus Selig
- *Peak Facilitation*: Kristin Barker, Heather Bergman

Approximately 50 members of the public were also present.

**Meeting Overview**

The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) recently began revising the forest plan for the Rio Grande National Forest (RGNF). Members of the public attended this meeting to discuss cultural and historic uses and resources on the RGNF. Information gathered from this discussion will help inform the initial assessment phase of the forest plan revision process.

**Forest Plan and Revision Process**

Adam Mendonca, Deputy Forest Supervisor of the Rio Grande National Forest, introduced himself as the USFS employee primarily responsible for the forest plan revision. Mr. Mendonca explained that the forest plan guides every activity on the forest and is typically revised every 15-20 years. The last forest plan for the Rio Grande was finalized in 1996; the process of revising the plan recently began.

During this first year of the four-year revision process, USFS will assess current conditions on the forest (derived from the 1996 forest plan) in order to determine desired changes in the revised forest plan. Input from a series of public meetings discussing various topics related to the forest will help inform this assessment process, which will culminate in a report summarizing the identified need for change. Next, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) phase of the revision process will begin, and a new series of public meetings will be held.

Public meetings are not the only way people can participate in the revision process. Mr. Mendonca handed out business cards containing contact information for the forest plan revision team as well as the address of an interactive web site, <http://riograndeplanning.mindmixer.com>.

**RGNF Cultural and Historic Resources**

Angie Krall, USFS Heritage Program Lead, discussed the importance of cultural resources on the RGNF. In her work specializing in cultural sites, Ms. Krall strives to strike an appropriate balance between informing the public of important cultural sites and keeping those sites safe from looting, vandalism, and destruction. She is particularly interested to hear from the public about cultural sites currently being harmed and what agents may be causing harm to these places.

Ms. Krall explained the importance of cultural and historic resources to local residents. Preserving cultural and historic resources on the RGNF helps support the local economy by encouraging tourists to visit the San Luis Valley. Traditional cultural uses and current lifeways supported by the forest are also important to preserve, and USFS is holding discussions with native tribes to identify and protect these uses. Cultural sites provide residents with a sense of place and character. Ms. Krall detailed many unique sites on the RGNF, including the Old Spanish Trail, the Pole Creek Stamp Mill, the Duncan Town Site, expedition sites in the Cochetopa area, trees peeled by the Utes and Apaches for food and medicine, and artifacts including pottery and rock art.

### **Panelist Presentations**

Ms. Krall introduced three members of the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Board, a clearinghouse for collaborative efforts related to local culture and history. Each board member spoke about resources and uses related to his or her area of expertise.

*Jamie Greeman*, Executive Director of the Alamosa Convention & Visitors Bureau, discussed the relationship between cultural resources and the tourism industry. Agriculture and cultural heritage play important roles in the San Luis Valley and surrounding areas. The recent economic decline has led vacationers to seek more economical options for travel and enjoyment, resulting in increased agritourism and heritage tourism in the area. Ms. Greeman noted the importance not only of promoting heritage tourism but also of preserving the historic sites visitors come to see. She also noted a need for more resources to connect visitors with the many tourism opportunities available to them.

*Dennis López* discussed traditional cultural uses of the forest based on his research of Hispanic heritage around the San Luis Valley. Mr. López listed ways the forest benefitted early Spanish settlers, from providing products such as wood, pitch, stone, clay, and minerals to providing sustenance through hunting, fishing, trapping, and grazing opportunities. Mr. López expressed his desire for a symbiotic relationship between people and the land, which would allow cultural and historic uses of the forest to continue sustainably into the future. Mr. López also discussed the negative impacts of historic land grants to local citizens, explaining that the RGNF was originally part of an area granted to 40 local families. After the federal government took control of the land and later turned it into the national forest, the descendants of these land grants lost their ability to remain economically sustainable using traditional means. Livestock grazing, wood gathering, and plant harvesting required expensive permits that often proved difficult to afford. Descendants were then driven into low-wage labor positions and became disconnected with the forest and their traditional uses of it. Mr. López stressed the need to identify land grant descendants and to provide them with special use permits. In addition to benefitting the land grant descendants, this action would also benefit forest health by allowing increased harvest of trees and plants to help mitigate fire risk, particularly in light of the recent beetle epidemic.

*Loretta Mitson* discussed preservation of cultural resources based on her extensive experience in archaeological excavations throughout the state. Ms. Mitson referred to the local area as a “living laboratory,” emphasizing the pristine quality of local archaeological sites as compared to those in other areas of Colorado. Because early Spanish settlers entered the state at the southern end of the San Luis Valley, the history of the entire state is based in the history of this area – without

successful Spanish settlements, Colorado may have been dominated by French influence instead. Additionally, the area holds uniquely old archaeological sites dating back to the Clovis culture. Ms. Mitson stressed the importance of preservation and rehabilitation of cultural sites on and around the RGNF, especially in light of constantly changing archaeological research technologies which may allow for the discovery of more sites in the future. Ms. Mitson stressed that interpretation is the key to preservation, because interpretation allows people to better understand and respect sensitive sites. She suggested that USFS and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) collaborate to create cultural resource narratives and information that can be accessed via smartphones rather than via expensive signage.

### **Small Group Discussions**

Participants broke into small groups to discuss their answers to questions related to the assessment phase of the forest plan revision. Following these small group discussions, the small groups shared the highlights of their conversations with the larger group. The highlights of the small group discussions are summarized below.

### **What cultural or historic resources or uses are important in and around the RGNF?**

<b>Natural Products</b>		
Tree Products	Plant Products	Additional Products
Firewood, timber, cottonwood roots, pitch, piñon nuts	Pigments, medicine, oshá, tobacco, yucca, chamiso	Mushrooms, earthen pigments, plaster, clay, minerals, tools
<b>Historic Sites</b>		
Archaeological and cultural sites, historic mine sites, old fisheries, traditional recreational areas		
<b>Ongoing Cultural Uses</b>		
Recreation, fishing, ranching, livestock grazing, irrigation, tourism, hunting, labor economy		
<b>Additional Resources</b>		
Arrowheads, ecosystem service (from balanced ecosystem pre-settlement)		

### **What conditions and trends are influencing the condition of, or the demand for, cultural and historic resources (either positively or negatively)?**

<b>Human Trends</b>	
<b>Condition or Trend</b>	<b>Influence</b>
Electronic age	Potentially increases access to maps and information
Lack of knowledge about resources	Causes lack of respect, vandalism, and resource degradation
Recreation	Can impact sites and resources
Increasing human population	Affects use and amount of resources
Tradition of arrowhead collection	Creates tension between tradition and overutilization
Grazing and ranching	Can protect important sites if ranchers are informed
Drone use	Positively and negatively impacts forest and its visitors
Focus on education & interpretation	Improves knowledge about and respect for resources
<b>USFS Management</b>	
<b>Condition or Trend</b>	<b>Influence</b>
Excessive rules and regulations	Hamper current lifeways (e.g. grazing, resource gathering)
Roadless designation/road closure	Impairs access; concentrates use in other areas
Management for multiple use	Requires better balance to protect and preserve resources
Bureaucracy	Reduces ability to clear archaeological sites in timely manner;

	requires frustrating NEPA process
Lack of staff	Causes inadequate monitoring and water maintenance
Inadequate public communication	Imperfectly balances sharing site information with protecting sites
Unrecognized land grant heirs	Negatively impacts many generations due to loss of land and access – heirs deserve recognition and special permits
Decreased logging allowances	Increases fire risk to historic areas and sites
Decreased grazing allotments	Negative impacts to economy and access (via loss of stock trails)
Insufficient site maintenance	Degradation of important cultural and historic sites
<b>Ecological Conditions</b>	
<b>Condition or Trend</b>	<b>Influence</b>
Loss of ecological balance	Threatens destruction of cultural resources and lifeways
Bark beetle epidemic	Increases fire danger, increases wood gathering opportunities, opens new rangeland, hampers trail access
Climate change; drought	Decreases water availability, tourism, and skiing

**What opportunities are there to foster a greater connection between people and cultural and historic resources and landscapes in and around the RGNF?**

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>
Enhance public education	Increase interpretive signs/maps/information; put informational kiosks at all entries to valley; better inform people of available information; foster understanding of cultural importance and acceptance; use “friends” group and/or volunteers to interpret sites; provide visitor information using current technologies
Engage more youth	Include local history as core curriculum in schools; hold clean-up days with youth; encourage local field trips; use local historians and elders; connect with colleges and universities; help local youth create and maintain garden of traditional plants
Increase outreach efforts	Connect to local chambers of commerce and visitors centers; increase public-agency discussions; put USFS office numbers on government listing page in local phone books; open office on Saturdays outside of normal working hours
Improve permitting process	Decrease permitting bureaucracy; help people understand importance of permitting process; increase transparency and disclosure; inform permittees about resources on their allotments
Decrease USFS staff turnover	Achieve and maintain connection with community; coordinate volunteers and staff for projects more efficiently and effectively
Reduce negative impacts of connection to land and resources	Avoid overutilization; encourage people to stay on valley floor; identify heritage areas to promote and areas not to advertise; protect sites by telling what they are but not where they are
Connect with cultural uses	Waive fees for traditional artists and community members to harvest traditional resources (e.g., clay, piñon nuts)

**How are the use and enjoyment of cultural and historic resources or uses contributing to social, economic, or ecological sustainability?**

Use or Enjoyment of Resources	Sustainability Contribution		
	Social	Economic	Ecological
Tourism (trains, dunes, historical sites)		X	
Forest permits		X	X
Grazing and ranching	X	X	X
Understanding of importance for conservation and preservation	X		

**Additional Comments and Suggestions**

- Comments
  - 78% of the important historic “firsts” in Colorado took place in san Luis Valley (e.g., first roads, bridges, schools, and churches).
  - Centralizing your operations and moving your office to one main location is inconvenient for many locals and makes it more difficult for us to get information and permits. *Additional information provided by Mr. Mendonca: USFS is not moving our office; the Bureau of Land Management is.*
- Suggestions
  - Allow people to go through your permitting process at local Post Offices instead of having to travel to your office. This will increase the viability of Post Offices while making the permitting process more convenient.
  - Hold a meeting at the senior facility to gather information from elders who don’t typically travel to public meetings held at night.
  - Encourage people to visit <http://www.slvgo.com> to access local maps and information.
  - Each Forest Service office should have a list of cultural sites and their locations.
  - Clear debris and reduce the risk of forest fire to preserve cultural and historic sites.