

Notes from the Colorado Recreation Resource Advisory Committee meeting 24 June 2008

Disclaimer: These are a compilation of notes taken at the meeting by various members of the RRAC and Forest Service employees; actual minutes were not taken or recorded.

Action items/Recommendations

- Place a comment book/journal in each cabin to help document visitor satisfaction and suggestions for improvements.
- Provide a briefing paper to committee members on HIRAs: addressing the policy that justifies them, the criteria for charging fees, and other points.
- Schedule a field trip to Green Mountain Reservoir and ANRA in July.
- Provide a follow-up report next year showing occupancy rates, maintenance and cleaning costs and other data for cabins whose fee proposals were recommended for approval at the meeting.

Initial comments from the audience: The following summarizes, to the best of our ability, comments made at the beginning of the meeting by members of the public who were in attendance.

Cara York - Business owner in Heeney

- The Forest Service does not talk to Heeney residents about the management of Green Mountain Reservoir.
- The FS opens the campgrounds late (late June) and closes them early. The result is a loss of activity at local businesses, especially hunter related business.
- There was no notice, no public participation when campsites were put on the reservation system. This caused undue inconvenience to campers.
- Few amenities are provided for the fees charged.

Debra Gregory-Mitchener - Business owner in Heeney

- The Forest Service thinks fees are the “ay to go,” but there are no amenities that justify the fees.
- The Forest Service is threatening to close campgrounds because of “no revenue.” As a result there are fewer campsites all around the reservoir than there used to be.
- If you charge fees, you must provide tables, restrooms, water, and other amenities.
- Expressed concern that the Forest Service is trying to shut down the reservoir.

Dave Scherer, Western Slope No-Fee Coalition – Provided flyer to committee with comments.

- Many of the historic cabins are old houses with safety problems like lead paint and pipes. They are a danger to children. The safety concerns must be fixed before they are rented.
- The building in downtown Saguache is not in a rural setting: It is not a cabin. Fitton cabin on the Rio Grande has been open, not locked, to everyone for years and has been used for free by recreationists, especially in the winter. It even hosts international visitors and saved lives because you could get into it during severe weather.
- Sent 12 pages of comments to Steve Sherwood. The comments are attached to these meeting notes.
- Green Mountain and Cataract are separated by two miles of private land. The access to Cataract has no interpretation, only fee notices. Should Cataract Lake really be part of the HIRA?
- Two-thirds of visitors to the ANRA buy a one-day pass, not multi-day passes. The public support alleged by the Forest Service is not real public support.
- Kudos to Dan Dallas on providing public information on the Rio Grande proposals.

Kitty Benzar – Provided a handout to the committee.

- Expressed her belief that HIRAs are not authorized in FLREA, only in FS policy in 2005.
- Some members of Congress are not convinced that HIRAs are authorized under the Act.
- In 2005, Mark Rey promised to submit HIRA proposals to RRACs for approval, but it didn't happen. Recently he said that they **had** been submitted – not true – so he committed to submitting them in the future.
- The four HIRAs in Colorado were never approved by a RRAC. The committee should look at the whole concept first, instead of considering fee increases in HIRAs.

Following comments from members of the public who were in attendance, the meeting continued as outlined in the agenda.

Steve Sherwood -- R2 recreation program

- Discussed the size and complexity of the outdoor recreation program in Colorado.

- See attached data on recreation use and how the Colorado Outdoor Recreation program is funded
- Described the numerous management challenges of such a diverse program.

Paul Cruz - “general public support” - : See paper on “General Public Support” which is posted on the Colorado RRAC website in the Library section.

- Paul’s presentation was a follow-up from the last RRAC meeting in which the meaning or definition of the REA term, “General Public Support” was questioned.
- His opening remarks were centered around the things that are really important in managing the recreation program. He surmised that, while discussions and decisions about fee increases and new fee proposals for cabin rentals are important, they are secondary to considerations of family, friends and personal safety.
- These over-riding considerations should help us put things into perspective.
- Paul then talked briefly about the Forest Service mission, “Caring for the Land and Serving People.”
- Inherent in the mission is balance.
- Many fee areas under REA started out as projects under Recreation Fee Demonstration project and often focused on human health and sanitation as the main reasons for establishing the fee.
- The fees were also used to provide for ease of access, public safety and security, and interpretation and education.
- The experience of each RRAC member in the outdoor recreation field and their representation of many people with similar outdoor recreation interests and perspective, in essence, mean that their vote represents general public support or lack thereof.
- Paul pointed out that the RRAC process is not a consensus process.
- Instead, he urged each individual member to vote based on the information provided and their independent assessment of adequacy of the proposal.
- We also discussed the value of the RRAC extending beyond the review of new fees or increases to fees: Their role is also to serve as a forum for larger discussions around the role of public lands, their niche and the challenges land managers face in providing outdoor recreation opportunities for the public.
- Lastly, Paul suggested that when assessing general public support, RRAC members need to recognize this is not simply a question of supporting fees or not, it is a matter of understanding whether the public values the benefits and services provided as a result of the revenue generated by the fees.

Scott Babcock – SCORP Update – A PowerPoint/handout will be posted on the Colorado RRAC website in the Library section as soon as obtained.

- Reviewed SCORP survey results
- Handout – four recommendations
- Questions from the committee about who was surveyed at Black Canyon of the Gunnison. Doubted the level of support reported in survey. How do you survey the people who **don't** use the facilities? “Are locals being priced out?” Steve Sherwood suggested that we might want to consider at what point price exceeds benefits.
- Question from the audience on Forest Service surveys: if they are done on-site, aren't lower-income people who don't use the forest overlooked?

Mary Allman-Koernig, Colorado Preservation Inc.

- Discussed the diversity of FS cultural sites, including historic cabins, and their importance to the history of Colorado.
- Expressed belief that renting historic cabins is the most efficient way to maintain/repair/monitor them.
- Explained to the RRAC that cabins are rented for a nominal fee, but generally not under local market prices, in order to avoid competing with private sector operations.

Questions from the audience:

Are HIRAs legal? Mark Rey committed to review by RRACs. Paul referred to Colorado RRAC Handbook, FLREA tab, Section 3, (f) (4) “An Area” as defined in the Act. He stated that the Act provides for fee “areas,” and High Impact Recreation Areas are a USFS term used to clarify common characteristics of these areas. Katie Donahue said that the WO will conduct a nationwide review of HIRAs. Janelle Kukuk asked what this review would entail. Steve suggested that it would likely include a review of the area boundaries, available amenities, and the revenue generated. Steve offered a field trip to all four HIRAs in Colorado. Katie confirmed that all HIRAs would be presented to the RRACs for appropriateness of areas and fees.

Following are Notes from the forest-by-forest presentations:

Rio Grande National Forest

- **Q:** In reference to what funding was used to fix up the forest's cabins so that they could be rented to the public the questions was, “How were

- improvements funded?” **A:** The forest responded that funding derived from the conveyance of excess government facilities was the primary source of funding. Appropriated funds were also used.
- **Q:** The forest was asked, “Has the public provided positive comments (regarding the cabin rental program)?” **A:** Response indicated that the forest had not received many positive comments, pointing out that satisfied people rarely comment.
 - RRAC member(s) suggested that all rental cabins have a journal to provide documentation of people’s experience as well as general comments and suggestions for improvements. Forest employee indicated that some cabins do not contain comment books/journals.
 - IT was pointed out that County Commissioners and congressional members and staffs support the cabin rental program and associated fee proposals.
 - **Q:** Are the cabins self-supporting? **A:** At least half the conveyance money, funds collected from the sale of surplus Forest Service facilities, goes to support the cabin rental program at this point in time. The forest’s intent is that the program becomes self-supporting over time.
 - **Q:** Can the FS carry over revenue for multiple years? **A:** Yes.
 - **Q:** Is Hantavirus a concern? **A:** Cabins are cleaned every spring using the appropriate safety gear to prevent exposure to the Hantavirus. Using them regularly mitigates habitation by mice and reduces risk.
 - An audience member affiliated with the Western Slope No Fee Coalition questioned the extent of public participation. When asked if the two local motels had been approached about the Saguache bunkhouse, the reply was negative. The RRAC directed the forest to discuss the proposal with local motels before a recommendation is made.
 - Kitty Benzar questioned expenditures to clean cabins. FS should not make a profit. She also expressed doubt about the extent of the public benefit.
 - **Q:** Saguache - could the museum operate the site under an agreement, perhaps sharing revenue? **A:** Steve said this would be explored. The Saguache rental proposal was tabled until next meeting and pending FS follow-up to the RRAC’s questions.
 - Suggestion that the Fitton cabin be “adopted” by friends group. The fee proposal was tabled while the forest investigates options.
 - Alder: suggestion to have public meeting in South Fork to sense support.
 - Platoro: Concern was expressed about amount of fee and competing with the local motel. Forest Service employee reported that the local motel owner supports the proposal. Approval of fee recommended but RRAC requested that the agency report back after one operating season to assess financial viability of the operation.

PSICC

- One concern was expressed that the maintenance and clean-up cost figures in the analyses did not show any economies of scale.

GMUG

- Committee was concerned that the public was not involved before proposals were brought to the RRAC as required by the statute. Conditional approval was recommended pending outcome of public involvement efforts. The GMUG will report back at the next RRAC meeting on public involvement efforts. If negative comments are received, GMUG is required to resubmit sites for future consideration.
- RRAC members expressed concerns that the fees were too high; several fee reductions were recommended.

Uncompahgre

- All proposals were recommended for approval.
- The Cold Springs Cabins were recommended for approval contingent upon the forest doing additional public involvement, specifically publishing a request for comments in the local paper.
- The RRAC will revisit the recommendation at the next meeting if negative comments are received.

White River

- The discussion for the White River centered on Green Mountain Reservoir.
- Forest Service employee Ken Waugh explained the benefits of expanded fees at Green Mountain Reservoir to include a longer operating season. He briefly described the consequences of not having them approved.
- **Q:** Can FS not charge for parking at Cataract Trailhead? **A:** Yes, but there is a demand for services at the site. New toilets are already funded.
- There was a general discussion of public support. Given that 2 residents of Heeney spoke in opposition of the fee proposal, committee members suggested that the White River should have brought supporters to the meeting. It was noted that supportive comments were quoted in the proposal prepared for the RRAC.
- Mike Blanton said that local residents don't believe that Forest Service promises of improvements will be kept.
- Some committee members were very reluctant to table the proposal a second time but a decision was made to table the fee increase proposal until after a field visit could be conducted.

- The question was asked if it would be possible to “raid the Regional five percent fund for one year” to get a jump-start on installing amenities at Green Mountain?
- Separating Cataract Lake from the Green Mountain reservoir area as either a separate fee area or as a non-fee areas was discussed and will be considered by the forest.
- Consider day-use annual pass and an overnight use annual pass as separate passes.
- It was suggested by committee members that the forest needs to “recruit support” before further consideration of the fee proposal

The meeting ended late without considering proposals from the Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest, Arapaho National Recreation Area (ANRA).

Summary of votes on individual proposals: Results of the individual votes on each of the proposals are on the attached Excel spreadsheet. Based on the rules spelled out in FLREA, the majority of proposals were recommended for approval. The River Springs Guard Station on the Rio Grande NF was not recommended for approval. Recommendations and a vote on the Saguache Bunkhouse and Fitton Cabin proposals were tabled to give the agency time to do additional analysis and public involvement. Mesa Lakes Cabins A and B on the GMUG and Cold Springs Cabins A, B, and C on the Uncompahgre were recommended for approval pending the outcome of additional public involvement work.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 pm.

/s/

Michael A Blanton
CRRAC Chair

June 24, 2008, Colorado RRAC Mtg. Proposal Summary Spreadsheet										
Unit	Project Proposal Name	New?	Old \$	New \$	RRAC Member, Outfitters and Guides, Local Environmental Group					
					Steve Pattel		Leslie Millar		Vera Smith	
					Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Rio Grande NF	Ellwood Cabin	N	\$20	\$50	X		X		X	
	Carnero Guard Station	N	\$35	\$50	X		X		X	
	Brewery Creek GS	N	\$35	\$50	X		X		X	
	Upper Crossing GS	Y		\$75	X		X		X	
	Stone Cellar GS	Y		\$50	X		X		X	
	Saguache Bunkhouse	Y		\$50	Tabled in order to allow further analysis. See minutes for details					
	Fitton Cabin	Y		\$50	Tabled in order to allow further analysis. See minutes for details					
	Alder GS	Y		\$50	X		X		X	
	River Springs GS	Y		\$75	X		X		X	
	Platoro Cabin 1	Y		\$75	X		X		X	
	Platoro Cabin 2	Y		\$75	X		X		X	
San Isabel NF	Dawson's Cabin	Y		\$65	X		X		X	
	Crescent Mine Cabin	Y		\$55	X		X		X	
Grand Mesa NF	Mesa Lakes Cabin A	Y		\$180	X		X		X	
	Mesa Lakes Cabin B	Y		\$120	X		X		X	
Uncompahgre NF	Cold Springs Cabin A	Y		\$120	X		X		X	
	Cold Springs Cabin B	Y		\$60	X		X		X	
	Cold Springs Cabin C	Y		\$40	X		X		X	
	Jackson GS Cabin	Y		\$75	X		X		X	
	Silesca RS Cabin: summer	Y		\$120	X		X		X	
	Silesca RS Cabin: winter			\$80	X		X		X	
	25 Mesa Cabins: summer	Y		\$120	X		X		X	
	25 Mesa Cabins: winter			\$80	X		X		X	
Arapaho NF	Arapaho Nat'l Rec. Area	N								
	1-day pass/vehicle			\$5	\$0					
	3-day pass/vehicle			\$10	\$10	The RRAC did not vote on any of the proposals from the Arapahoe				
	7-day pass/vehicle			\$15	\$0	Roosevelt National Forest				
	ANRA annual pass			\$30	\$25					
	ANRA/RMNP pass			\$50	\$50					
White River NF	Green Mtn. Reservoir	N								
	camping & day use/vehicle			\$5						
	season pass			\$25		The RRAC postponed its vote on Green Mountain pending a field trip				
	day use/vehicle			\$5	to the site					
	camping/night			\$10						
	season pass			\$65						

June 24, 2008, Colorado RRAC Mtg. Proposal Summary Spreadsheet										
Unit	Project Proposal Name	New?	Old \$	New \$	RRAC Member, Tourism, Tribes, Local Government					
					Vacant		Ernest House		Mike Blanton	
					Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
							X		X	
Rio Grande NF	Ellwood Cabin	N	\$20	\$50			X		X	
	Carnero Guard Station	N	\$35	\$50			X		X	
	Brewery Creek GS	N	\$35	\$50			X		X	
	Upper Crossing GS	Y		\$75			X		X	
	Stone Cellar GS	Y		\$50			X		X	
	Saguache Bunkhouse	Y		\$50	Tabled in order to allow further analysis. See minutes for details					
	Fitton Cabin	Y		\$50	Tabled in order to allow further analysis. See minutes for details					
	Alder GS	Y		\$50			X		X	
	River Springs GS	Y		\$75			X			X
	Platoro Cabin 1	Y		\$75			X		X	
	Platoro Cabin 2	Y		\$75			X		X	
San Isabel NF	Dawson's Cabin	Y		\$65			X		X	
	Crescent Mine Cabin	Y		\$55			X		X	
Grand Mesa NF	Mesa Lakes Cabin A	Y		\$180			X		X	
	Mesa Lakes Cabin B	Y		\$120			X		X	
Uncompahgre NF	Cold Springs Cabin A	Y		\$120			X		X	
	Cold Springs Cabin B	Y		\$60			X		X	
	Cold Springs Cabin C	Y		\$40			X		X	
	Jackson GS Cabin	Y		\$75			X		X	
	Silesca RS Cabin: summer	Y		\$120			X		X	
	Silesca RS Cabin: winter			\$80			X		X	
	25 Mesa Cabins: summer	Y		\$120			X		X	
	25 Mesa Cabins: winter			\$80			X		X	
Arapaho NF	Arapaho Nat'l Rec. Area	N								
	1-day pass/vehicle		\$5	\$0						
	3-day pass/vehicle		\$10	\$10	The RRAC did not vote on any of the proposals from the Arapahoe					
	7-day pass/vehicle		\$15	\$0	Roosevelt National Forest					
	ANRA annual pass		\$30	\$25						
	ANRA/RMNP pass		\$50	\$50						
White River NF	Green Mtn. Reservoir	N								
	camping & day use/vehicle		\$5							
	season pass		\$25		The RRAC postponed its vote on Green Mountain pending a field trip					
	day use/vehicle		\$5		to the site					
	camping/night		\$10							
	season pass		\$65							