

**San Juan National Forest
Secure Rural Schools Resource Advisory Committee (RAC)
Meeting Minutes, March 18, 2011
Prepared by Elysia Retzlaff**

Board Attendees: RAC Members: Barbara Betts, David Guilliams, Ali Sabeti, Jimbo Buickerood, Jim Davis, Kenneth Feyen, John Beebe, William Heaton, Adrian Watson, Ernie Williams, Nik Kendziorski, Jan Foster, Jim Davis, Tracie Hughes, Al Heaton

Replacement Member in Attendance (non-voting): Sandy Young

Forest Service staff: Bill Dunkelberger, Beth Redmond, Jed Botsford, Elysia Retzlaff

Project proponents and others: Mary Monroe – Trails 2000, Pam Wilson – Southwest Colorado Firewise Council, Rich Graeber - Upper Pine Fire District, Scott Streit – Rep. Tipton’s District Director

RAC Chairman Ernie Williams convened the meeting at 9:03 AM and everyone introduced themselves, including attending USFS/BLM representatives and individuals from Trails 2000, the Southwest Colorado Firewise Council, and the Upper Pine Fire District.

Bill Dunkelberger, San Juan National Forest Deputy Forest Supervisor and the Designated Federal Official for the RAC thanked everyone for attending. Mr. Dunkelberger then explained Beth Redmond’s (USFS) role in preparing SRS agreements and obligations. Mr. Dunkelberger apologized for confusion about application requirements that were on the website. The application changed from last year and no longer indicates that county support is required. He explained however, that the San Juan Forest Supervisor is maintaining the requirement to provide documentation of Board of County Commissioners support for project proposals.

Mr. Dunkelberger requested an update of 2010 projects. Member Feyen provided an update on Archuleta County’s Piedra Road Rehabilitation. This project stayed below budget and remaining funds are currently being de-obligated and rolled into 2011 funding. The main focus of the project has been monitoring to evaluate road conditions, surrounding environments (i.e. wetlands) and how much it would cost to repair. A document had been prepared with results from monitoring and is available for review. Chairman Williams provided update on Dolores County West Fork project. This project is schedule to begin this spring. Jim Davis and Mary Monroe provided update on La Plata County/Trails 2000 project. The agreement is in progress and work is schedule to begin this summer. Montezuma County’s project on the Dolores-Norwood road is schedule to begin this spring. Agreement is currently out for signature.

Mr. Dunkelberger provided an overview of application procedures and requirements for next year. These requirements will be posted with the application on the website:

- 1) Meet with Forest Service staff to ensure project can be legally funded under SRS Title II funds.
- 2) FS staff and project proponent contact county to make presentation and get support documentation
- 3) Complete and submit application, including a map and documentation of county commissioners support

Mr. Dunkelberger suggested that RAC members participate in a monitoring field trip this summer to observe progress of projects. Chairman Williams suggested early August and as date gets closer we will set a specific date that works for the majority and create an agenda. Chairman Williams requested a quorum vote which passed.

PROJECT PROPOSALS

Archuleta County

Member Feyen presented a proposal to fund gravel replacement on County Road 400 in Archuleta County. CR 400 is the second heaviest traveled road in Archuleta County. CR 400 begins off Highway 160 at eastern end of Pagosa Springs. Five miles of the road is residential, but then it turns into a Forest Service road. This road is also used by Hinsdale County and may be used as an emergency route for residents. The project proposes to regrade drainage swales, repair and replace culverts and place gravel on approximately 2 miles of roadway. Proposal is just for material costs as the county will be providing labor and equipment. Archuleta County has committed \$75,000.

Member Watson inquired if this road ties into the area where FS travel management is going on. Member Buickerood said no. Member Beebe asked if funds requested were total amount of funding available. Mr. Dunkelberger and Member Feyen said yes.

La Plata County – Trails 2000

Mary Monroe, Director of Trails 2000, presented a proposal to continue funding for the Log Chutes trail network in La Plata County. This project will improve the existing road cuts and connect them with other roads and trails to create a more usable network. Rolling grade dips and grade reversals will be installed to assist with drainage. Additional signage and mapping will also be placed for education purposes.

Member Beebe asked if phase I (2010) has transpired. Mary Monroe replied that work will begin this summer when conditions allow. Member Beebe inquired how long funding can be allocated for this project. Mr. Dunkelberger responded that as long as funds have been obligated it remains available until expended.

Member Buickerood inquired if the area had been surveyed to identify what would make good loops. He asked how routes were considered. Mary Monroe responded that they would be doing on-the-ground walks and surveys with Jed Botsford (FS Recreation) and Matt Janowiak (Columbine District Ranger) to determine best areas for trails. Trails 2000 will clarify trail network – what is there, what works, what doesn't, and what creates loops.

Member Buickerood asked what the integration was with the Forest Service. Mary Monroe explained that this project consists of heavy trail maintenance and trail delineation and Trails 2000 will work on closing access points that Forest Service wants closed. Chairman Williams asked if trails being repaired in accordance with travel management plans and whether or not they will be working on trails that will later be closed. Mary Monroe explained that the project proposed fits in with Forest Service plans per Jed Botsford and Matt Janowiak.

Member Foster raised the question as to whether or not the bike trails would be separate from hikers. Mary Monroe explained that Trails 2000 does not designate trails, they only maintain them. The Forest Service designates trail. Presently these trails are non-motorized – bikes, horses and hikers are allowed.

Member Foster inquired how wide the trails would be. Mary Monroe said they will be single-track trails, which are 24-36 inches wide.

Member Buickerood asked if Trails 2000 would be using Forest Service specifications. Mary Monroe said yes.

La Plata County – Upper Pine Fire District

Pam Wilson from the Firewise Council presented a proposal on behalf of Chief Rich Graeber of the Upper Pine River Fire Protection District for funding to perform fire mitigation in several high risk residential subdivisions bordering Forest Service land. Project is located on the west of Lemon Reservoir over to Vallecito and down to Bayfield on the Archuleta County line and would mitigate 6 subdivisions with 500 homes and 2500 residents. Funding in the amount of \$6,000 is requested to hire one additional crew member for 12 weeks.

Member Beebe explained that he lives in one of the subdivisions and that they are private land surrounded by Forest Service land on three sides. There is a two-way mitigation concern – homes are in danger if a wildfire on National Forest were to get out of control. Likewise, if a fire started on private land, it could easily spread to Forest Service lands. Residents would like to have mitigation done before controlled burning starts.

Member Buickerood asked if there was a fire protection plan for the area and if the details of that plan guidance are being used for this project. Pam Wilson said yes. Pam also explained that the fire protection plan is broad so the Firewise council is working with individual subdivisions to set up individual plans.

Member Buickerood inquired who would be making decisions in each subdivision. Member Beebe replied that plans are put in place by each subdivision. They determine where mitigation should take place and how it should be done. There is a great deal of strategy put into it. Travis Wright, the Upper Pine Fire Protection crew leader on this project, also meets with subdivisions to develop a plan. Residents are doing a cost-share for this project. Pam Wilson also explained that all crew members are red-carded and can assist with wildfires.

Chairman Williams pointed out that all La Plata funds have been allocated so other projects would have to give up money. Member Davis replied that the application was late and did not include county approval. Pam Wilson replied that the application online did not indicate county support so they did not know. She explained that it was not their error and they should not be penalized. Member Davis pointed out that Trails 2000 was allowed to submit a late letter last year.

Member Beebe inquired if the grant that Upper Pine received from BLM will be used this year and next. Pam Wilson said the grant is for two years.

Chairman Williams said that in all fairness, if we look at the project and approve it and the county is willing to share funds then why not allow it? Member Beebe commented what is the purpose of having a committee to select projects, if the county is already allocating funds and determining what proposals to accept. Chairman Williams replied that commissioners represent the county so they should decide. Member Watson said it should be a joint effort. Member Beebe commented that if commissioners approve a project ahead of time, then the committee doesn't really have much of a role in which projects go forward. If the county approves projects in advance, then they have already decided and the committee's input is moot.

Mr. Dunkelberger asked if there should change the process so county support comes after the RAC meets. He also asked if RAC members thought it should be required with the application. Chairman Williams recommended that proponents should have to go through the county first for support.

Member Foster said she supports the fire project and that RAC should postpone decision until they can get support from the county. She suggested holding off on all La Plata decisions until Upper Pine can get a letter. She said committee should consider this project. Mr. Dunkelberger explained to the group that he and Forest Supervisor Mark Stiles actually approve the proposals. The RAC's role is to review proposals and recommend approval or not, however it would be rare that the RAC's recommendations would not be approved.

La Plata County –County Road 124

Member Jim Davis presented a proposal for road and drainage improvements to La Plata County Road 124. This is a historic mining road and currently serves 8 campgrounds, private cabins and cottages and Forest Service lands. This project would provide a gravel base and magnesium chloride on the first 3.12 miles of the road. In addition drainages will be repaired to prevent wash outs during spring runoff. La Plata County would like to begin this project by Memorial Day. Member Watson added that opening the road each year is delayed due to wash-outs. The county would like to fix this permanently so it does not have to be redone every year. They will be using Southwest Conservation Corps members to do this which makes this a very low cost project – it puts a lot of people to work for the dollars spent.

Member Bonds inquired if Wildcat Mining would be using this road. Member Davis said they would not be using this road for access.

Member Buickerood asked to be reminded of the roads status. Member Davis said this has been a county road for many years and they did not take it over from the Forest Service. Member Buickerood asked where the county jurisdiction ends. Member Davis replied at the notch at the top of the road.

Member Young explained to the group that the recreation in the canyon will be changing as campground facilities are reduced so there may not be as many people using the canyon as we think.

Member Beebe asked why they would be using magnesium chloride on the road. Member Davis replied that it controls dust and holds the road together.

Member Buickerood asked if there are any other commercial activities on this stretch of road. Member Davis said no.

Dolores – West Fork Road

Chairman Williams presented this proposal as a continuation of last year's project. This project will re-gravel 3.2 miles of the West Fork Road.

Member Betts asked why the application requests "all continued funding". Chairperson Williams replied that the county wants to continue to use all future SRS funds for maintenance of this road. Mr. Dunkelberger explained that the Forest Service cannot obligate funds that have not yet been appropriated, but Counties certainly can document their intent for the use of future funds.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

There were no public comments. Member Davis recommended that he abstain from voting on La Plata County projects. If the RAC recommends that the County reevaluates the three projects they will do so. He pointed out that the Forest Service should make it clearer that county approval is needed and give adequate time.

Member Young suggested that projects look for county approval up front so they also get county funding. Mr. Dunkelberger responded that without matching funds, the agreement the Forest Service must use to allocate the funds is more restrictive. If you can show contributions from other sources, a cost-share agreement may be used.

Member Young asked if any of the landowners are contributing to the fire mitigation project. Member Beebe replied that the average cost for the project is approximately \$500/acre +/- . Landowners are being asked to pay 25%. Member Beebe explained that no money has been collected yet but if they had funding available from Forest Service it would be easier to get money from landowners.

Member Foster inquired if the subdivisions affected by mitigation project have access to Forest Service lands and road. Member Beebe said he can't speak for all subdivisions but his has four common roads with gates that go to Forest Service land and ten walk through gates. The general public does not have access to Forest Service lands through subdivisions.

Mr. Dunkelberger said if the RAC supports the Upper Pine project, one scenario for funding it could be for the other projects to take a 12% cut. He asked how the RAC felt about that. Member Watson recommended that there would be a reduction in funding for all La Plata county projects including the fire mitigation proposal.

Member Kendzioriski asked Pam Wilson if Upper Pine had other money in place for this project. Pam said yes they have other funding in place, that the SRS funds would enhance the project but without SRS funds the project would go forward regardless but accomplish less. Upper Pine would apply for SRS funds again next year.

Member Beebe said that all project proposals are the same as the fire district's – all counties have other funding but would like this money to enhance the project.

Member Foster asked how many homes will be mitigated. Pam Wilson responded that the project would mitigate 500 homes and affect about 2500 people. Member Beebe added that each homeowner is going to incur some cost per acre but on a volunteer basis.

Member Watson asked Pam Wilson if the grant received from the BLM was the full amount requested or if there was potentially more available at the time. Pam Wilson responded that Upper Pine received the full amount that was available.

Member Watson asked if Upper Pine has absolute commitments from property owners that they will contribute. Pam Wilson said not at this time, but they continue to receive a great deal of public interest and more and more subdivisions want to be a part of this.

Member Davis questioned whether the RAC should even consider the Upper Pine request since they did not have county commissioner support documentation. Member Feyen pointed out that commissioners

were looking for this committee to prioritize because they don't have the expertise to choose. The committee should be deciding what projects get selected.

Mary Monroe said that Trails 2000 would be willing to cut their budget in order for Upper Pine to receive money because we need to all work together as a community.

Member Davis said he will take the Upper Pine project to the La Plata County Commissioners' board to determine if they will give the project support.

PROPOSAL VOTES

At 11:02 Chairman Williams called for votes on recommending proposals for funding:

Archuleta: Approved

In favor: Barbara Betts, David Guilliams, Ali Sabeti, Jimbo Buickerood, Jim Davis, John Beebe, William Heaton, Adrian Watson, Ernie Williams, Nik Kendziorski, Jan Foster, Jim Davis, Sandy Young, Tracie Hughes, Al Heaton

Opposed – None

Abstained – Feyen

Dolores: Approved

In favor: Barbara Betts, David Guilliams, Ali Sabeti, Jimbo Buickerood, Jim Davis, Kenneth Feyen, John Beebe, William Heaton, Adrian Watson, Nik Kendziorski, Jan Foster, Jim Davis, Sandy Young, Tracie Hughes, Al Heaton

Opposed – None

Abstained – Chairman Williams

La Plata County/ Trails 2000: Approved

In favor: Barbara Betts, David Guilliams, Ali Sabeti, Jimbo Buickerood, Kenneth Feyen, John Beebe, William Heaton, Adrian Watson, Ernie Williams, Nik Kendziorski, Jan Foster, Jim Davis, Sandy Young, Tracie Hughes, Al Heaton

Opposed – None

Abstained – Member Davis

La Plata County/ CR 124: Approved

In favor: Barbara Betts, David Guilliams, Ali Sabeti, Jimbo Buickerood, Kenneth Feyen, John Beebe, William Heaton, Ernie Williams, Nik Kendziorski, Jan Foster, Jim Davis, Sandy Young, Tracie Hughes, Al Heaton

Opposed – None

Abstained – Member Davis and Member Watson

La Plata County / Upper Pine Fire

Member Feyen recommended a stipulation that requires property owners to match funding. Mr. Dunkelberger said that this could make it difficult for timing of projects and funding.

Chairman Williams said if this proposal is approved it needs to also receive county support and there will be a reduction in funds for other projects. Member Watson suggested that Upper Pine get a commitment from residents that they will contribute funding. He requested that Upper Pine at least

pursue commitment from residents. Member Foster pointed out that as the advisory committee we can recommend to put conditions on the funding.

Chairman Williams suggested that if approved, the other 2 La Plata County projects would have a proportionate reduction in funding.

Two additional funding scenarios for all 3 La Plata County proposals were discussed as well but motions to vote on them failed for lack of seconds.

Chairman Williams put forth the following motion:

Funding for Trails 2000 would remain as recommended. CR 124 funding would be reduced by \$4500.

Upper Pine Fire District funding would be reduced by \$1500 and they would receive \$4500.

The motion was seconded by Member Feyen.

The Chairman called for a vote.

In favor: 5 members

Opposed: 8 members

Abstained: Member Davis

The motion failed.

Member Foster explained that committee supports all three projects. Member Kendziorski suggested putting contingencies on funding. Member Buickerood said that RAC supports all 3 projects and recommended that the commissioners figure out how to split hairs with funding for all three.

Member Guilliams put forth the following motion:

Trails 2000 would receive \$15,000.

CR 124 would take a \$6,000 reduction and receive \$61,580.

Upper Pine River Fire District would receive \$6,000 contingent on the following –

- Upper Pine must receive a 25% minimum match from landowners in order to receive funding
- If Upper does not collect a minimum 25% match from landowners, \$6,000 dollars will roll back to La Plata County
- Upper Pine must get county support

Motion 2nd by Member Feyen.

In favor: 8 members

Opposed: 4 members

Abstained: Member Davis

Motion passed

Mr. Dunkelberger informed committee members that project application only asks if a proposal has county commissioner support – not a formal approval for funding. He said he will make that clear to the counties, in information requesting proposals, and on the application. He stated that Counties certainly may recommend funding amounts as well, but should understand that the RAC may recommend not approving some projects and/or revising funding amounts.

Chairman Williams adjourned the meeting at 11:43 AM.