

**Wyoming Public Lands Initiative
Gardner Mountain / North Fork
BLM – Buffalo Office
January 10, 2017**

MINUTES

Present: Commissioner Bill Novotny, Brock Hanson, David Stoetzel, J.D. Petty, Carrie Little, Nolan Davis, Rob Davidson, Chris Brock; Commissioner Bob Perry, Alternate Bob McDowell, Kelly Norris

Public: Jody Penny; Kim Graves

Game & Fish – Dan Thiel, Cody Bish – Kaycee Game Warden

BLM: Duane Spencer, Bill Ostheimer, Rachel Woods

Rachel Woods, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Ms. Woods showed a map of different resources, i.e. mineral, fire, also ownership. The items that were shown on the map have been grandfathered in prior to the land being designated a WSA. Any range improvements, pipelines, tanks, would have been done prior to the land being designated a WSA.

For the Travel Management Plan BLM has to map and inventory all roads that go through BLM surface. BLM is currently working on the I90 corridor, they have completed the inventory and mapping and are working on route evaluation, where they will classify the roads for instance if it is 2 tracks, low clearance, and high clearance. Then they will write a plan with environmental analysis with different alternatives deciding to keep some of them open, close some of them, and they will seek public input. Once that has been completed BLM will have the Travel Management Plan and signs will be placed so people will know where public access can be found.

Weed & Pest handle the weed issues in the WSA. New fencing is allowed in some of the WSA, if it is identified as pre-existing, and then they can be maintained. Chairman Novotny asked if under full wilderness designation can certain practices that are in place still be allowed. BLM stated that it would be up to Congress.

To get to North Fork WSA you have to go through private land. The access to Gardner Mountain WSA is very arduous and cross country. Neither area is easily accessible.

BLM is managing the two WSA as non-impairment and this will still be non-impairment if designated wilderness. There are other designations that the committee could pursue. This will be addressed at the February meeting.

There was a lot of discussion on the benefits of designating the two areas as wilderness. Some do not see the benefit because the areas are not easily accessible.

Question: Is there an imminent threat to the WSA that would say that it would be the best thing to designate them a wilderness. BLM stated that their Resource Management Plan is that they are not designated wilderness. The plan that was submitted to Congress is still pending. Congress hasn't acted on the recommendations by BLM.

Chairman Novotny stated that these areas are wilderness areas without the act of Congress. County Commissioners throughout Wyoming put together the Public Lands Bill and are trying to force Congress's hands and get some action. The Commissioner's did not want to make that decision and that is why the advisory committee was formed to help decide if it is full release, partial release or something completely different. The decisions from the group can be written into the bill, for instance if you want a bridge across an area to help with public access. The group can look at other areas within the WSA and designate that wilderness and not the rest.

Chairman Novotny said that at the next meeting, Mr. Gregory Cowan, Natural Resource Staff Attorney with WCCA to go through the designations. Wyoming Game and Fish may be able to attend and give an update on some information on mule deer in the area.

Question: Are there important attributes that the committee should focus on to protect, for instance aquatic or flora and fauna? The BLM Resource Management Plan did not focus on a specific resource just the wilderness characteristics and the rugged terrain.

On March 23rd in Lander all the groups that are engaged in the WPLI will meet. They are asking for a County update. So at our next meeting we will see if someone from our group is interested in going to present information to all the interested parties throughout the state about where we are in the process and where we are headed. The advisory committee can go and take part in the sessions. WCCA's website is www.wyo-wcca.org.

The next meeting will be Tuesday, February 7 at 6:00 p.m. at the Red Wall Community Center.

Respectfully submitted by,

Sheila Newcomb

A recording of the meeting is available.