

CHAPTER 11: NORTHWEST RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL

Northwest Colorado

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Resource Advisory Councils (RACs) are mandated and highly formalized collaborative resource partnerships that were developed from Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt's initiatives to reform grazing. RACs are official federal advisory committees of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) with twenty-four located in the thirteen western states. Although they are unique in many ways, RACs face the same challenges as other collaborative resource partnerships analyzed by this report. Furthermore, even though many RACs differ in terms of membership make-up, structure, and the level to which they are influenced by political factors, the Northwest Colorado RAC (NW RAC) provides an excellent example of some of the challenges RACs encounter.

Interviews:

Karen Slater, BLM, Intergovernmental Affairs Group Manager, (1/29/99)

Mark Morse, BLM, Northwest Center Manager, Craig and Grand Junction Districts, (2/9/99 and 3/30/99)

Rich Whitley, BLM New Mexico Associate State Director, (2/22/99)

Clee Sealing, Colorado State Public Lands Chairman Sierra Club, (3/12/99)

Geoff Blakeslee, Member Category 2, Environmental, (2/10/99)

Walid Bou-Matar, Member Category 1, Energy and Minerals, (2/10/99)

T. Wright Dickinson, Member Category 3, Elected Official, (2/16/99)

Donald Peach, Member Category 2, Archaeology/History, (2/11/99)

Cathie Zarlingo, Member Category 2, Environmental, (2/12/99)

Troy Rarick, Member Category 2, Recreation, (2/12/99)

PART I: BACKGROUND

Origins and Issues

In Northwest Colorado (NW CO), BLM manages over 5.5 million acres of land and nearly 11 million acres of sub-surface minerals. Beginning at 4,500 feet in elevation, with peaks over 10,000 feet, the region contains several distinct ecosystems. The low-lying areas are salt desert shrubs, cactus, with large amounts of tall sagebrush going into pinon juniper stands. The higher elevations are alpine meadow and aspen stands. Much of the area slopes into the Yampa and White River watersheds that feed into the Colorado River.

BLM land in NW CO is under heavy usage. Uses include oil and gas development, grazing, wild horse and burro usage, and recreation. According to Mark Morse, BLM Northwest Center Manager, recreational uses are growing quickly in NW CO: "Recreation is going to become the biggest factor in all of Colorado, especially in the northwest." Recreation includes rafting, mountain biking, hunting large elk populations, off-highway motorcycles and other off-road vehicles.

The NW RAC has dealt with a variety of issues during its first four years. The majority of their time was spent on grazing standards and guidelines although, over the last two years, they have diversified the issues they have dealt with. Fire management, recreation guidelines, oil and gas development, and a roadless review of six proposed wilderness areas have been some of the issues the NW RAC has concentrated on since 1997.

Formation of RACs

RACs differ from other case studies in this report in terms of their origin. The RAC concept began at the highest levels of government land policy making through Secretary of the Interior, Bruce Babbitt. A son of a cattleman and an experienced politician, Babbitt is known for seeking consensus-based solutions. He set out in August of 1993 to reform grazing practices in the United States. Known as *Rangeland Reform of '94*, Babbitt's first initiative was to improve the rangeland in the West through various programs including setting national standards and guidelines for rangeland health and raising the fee ranchers pay the agency for grazing permits. Although this first proposal passed the U.S. House of Representatives, the Senate defeated Babbitt's first initiative, mainly due to opposition from western Senators. *Rangeland Reform '94* sparked fierce debate throughout much of the west, many ranchers referred to it as the "War on the West."

After this legislative defeat, Babbitt vowed to pass grazing reform administratively (Healy, 1993). However, at the same time the Clinton Administration was being urged by many Western Democrats to slow down the grazing reforms (Kenworthy, 1994). At this time former Governor Roy Romer of Colorado invited Babbitt to participate in a discussion with a small group of ranchers and environmentalists who claimed to have a solution to end the gridlock surrounding grazing reform. This small group of ranchers and environmentalists had been meeting in Gunnison, Colorado in the southwestern portion of the state. They had conceived of a plan for creating local citizen advisory councils composed of diverse stakeholders that would assist land managers in grazing reforms at the local level. These councils would work through consensus-based decisions and would be located in each National Forest or BLM district.

After meeting with the Gunnison group, Babbitt revised his plans for grazing reform to include similar groups throughout the West. Babbitt met weekly for two months with a roundtable of ranchers, environmentalists, local officials and Governor Romer to work on plans to incorporate these advisory councils into his reform efforts. On March 18, 1994 Babbitt announced his new proposals to be implemented administratively. As promised, his proposal aimed to move some of the decision-making away from Washington and do away with the BLM's grazing boards which were dominated by ranching interests and replace them with more multi-use advisory councils (RACs).

Formation of the NW RAC

Although his new proposal did not quell the fears of many in the West, Babbitt went ahead with his proposal and set up twenty-four RACs in thirteen western states.¹ The NW RAC was initially chartered in August of 1995 to advise the BLM's Northwest Center Manager in both the Craig and Grand Junction Districts in Colorado. Babbitt selected the original members of the NW RAC. Mark Morse, who had just moved to NW CO, was assigned as the official federal officer that the NW RAC would advise. Morse stated: "The first [RAC] we did not set up, that was set up by the Secretary [of the Interior]. [BLM staff in NW CO] did not even know how people got on there to be honest with you."

While each RAC varies in significant ways and there is no single RAC that can be labeled representative of them all, the NW RAC does provide insights into this unique highly formalized and mandated form of collaborative resource partnership.

Organization and Process

Organizational Structure

The objective of the NW RAC is to provide counsel and advice to the Secretary of the Interior through the BLM concerning planning and management of the public lands within the Craig and Grand Junction Districts. The RAC gives advice and counsel directly to the designated federal official, Mark Morse. Like all RACs, the NW RAC is chartered by the Federal Advisory Committee Act, an act that was designed to reduce "close door" decision-making. Administrative support and funding is provided through Morse and his staff.

Duties and responsibilities of the NW RAC include:

- a) Developing recommendations for the BLM regarding the preparation, amendment, and implementation of land use plans for the public lands and resources within Craig and Grand Junction Districts. Among these responsibilities are to gather and analyze information; conduct studies and field examinations, and hear public testimony.
- b) Except for the purposes of long range planning and the establishment of resource management priorities, the RAC shall provide advice on the allocation and expenditure of Federal funds, or on personnel actions.
- c) Assisting BLM to identify standards for ecological health and sustainability and guidelines for resource uses.
- d) Assisting the BLM to identify the geographic area to which standards and guidelines apply.
- e) Assisting in the establishing resource management priorities for range improvement or development programs.

¹ Wyoming is the only western state with out a RAC. Wyoming's RAC was disbanded when Governor James Geringer (R) and Babbitt could not agree on who should be appointed to balance interests on the group, leading Babbitt to revoke its charter. See Paul Kzra, "Cow Coup: Wyoming Governor Usurps Federal Grazing Group," *High Country News*, December 23, 1996.

- f) Developing recommendations for implementation of ecosystem approaches to management. Assist the BLM establish landscape goals and objectives.
- g) Assisting local efforts to develop and achieve ecosystem approaches to management.
- h) Recommending future council model(s) and jurisdictions that best serve the state(s) affected.

The charter that created the NW RAC uses the model with fifteen members equally distributed among three categories. Five members come from each of the three categories:

Category 1 members must be a person who:

- 1) holds a federal grazing permit in the region
- 2) represents interests associated with transportation or right-of-way
- 3) represents developed outdoor recreation such as off highway vehicle users
- 4) represents the commercial timber industry
- 5) represents energy and mineral development

Category 2 members must be a person who represents:

- 1) national of regional environmental or conservation organization
- 2) dispersed recreation activities
- 3) archeological and historical interests
- 4) wild horse or burro interests

Category 3 members must be a person who:

- 1) holds a state, county, or local elected position
- 2) is an employee of a state agency responsible for natural resource management
- 3) represents Indian tribes
- 4) is employed in academics
- 5) represents the public-at-large

Members are appointed by the Secretary of the Interior in order to provide for balanced and broad representation within each category. The first steps in the selection process go through the designated federal official, Mark Morse. In making appointments Morse receives applicants in response to a public call for nomination. All nominations are to be accompanied by letters of reference from interests or organizations one wishes to represent. According to Morse he then looks for members that can represent their interests effectively, someone who is a "team player," and "someone with the ability to stand up and argue for his constituency...but is also able to come to consensus." Morse said he also looks for "who their constituency wants." Morse will then send his nominations on to the Governor and the Secretary of the Interior for review. Speaking about how none of his nominations have been turned down, Morse states: "Once it clears the state, it's not going to be rolled by the Secretary."

Current membership of the NW RAC includes county officials, a forestry consultant, an oil and gas engineer, several ranchers, a mountain bike shop owner, a mayor who represents archeological interests, a person representing wild horses and burros, and two people representing environmentalist interests among others. Every member interviewed described

the NW RAC as containing diverse interests. Troy Rarick, a mountain bike shop co-owner, calls the group "well-rounded" and Walid Bou-Matar, an oil and gas engineer, states: "our members are very diverse."

Process

The NW RAC meets at varying times depending upon the issue they are dealing with. Currently, the group meets once every two months. Most members think this meeting schedule is working fine. Geoff Blakeslee, who represents The Nature Conservancy, said the meeting schedule was, "just right, plenty to discuss, and not a dull moment, but I can't justify additional meetings." Troy Rarick noted, "Meetings are just right, anymore frequently it would be too hard to travel to all meetings and if you don't have everyone coming you lose your effectiveness."

Meetings are open to the public with time provided for public input. Mark Morse noted that public attendance, "varies greatly with the issue we are dealing with and the time of the meetings." Meetings are held throughout the northwestern corner of Colorado in order to get different communities involved as well as to spread travel distances around for members. Don Peach noted his travel time varies greatly depending on where meetings are held: "I either have to travel two miles when it is right in Rangely, or up to eighty miles when it is further away." Members of the NW RAC are reimbursed by the BLM for travel and other expenses such as meals or lodging when necessary.

Mark Morse noted that at one point early on he felt a facilitator was necessary for every meeting: "At one time we used to run facilitation for every meeting." Morse continued that, currently, most meetings are not facilitated unless "we have a subject that could be divisive." One of those contentious issues is a debate over six potential wilderness sites in NW CO. Morse said, "Wilderness stuff always had a facilitator." Morse stressed that the facilitator helped to maintain the integrity of the group during contentious discussions.

The agenda is set prior to each meeting by the NW RAC with input from Mark Morse. Morse states: "I adjust meetings if something comes up, but not without input from RAC members." In between meetings Morse said: "I send lots of info to read over." Meetings are run by either the Chair, T. Wright Dickinson, or Co-Chair, Don Peach. Dickinson noted that the group elects the Chair and defines its role. Dickinson speaking about his role said: "I am listening and watching folks to make sure everybody gets a chance at speaking and making sure everyone is heard." The Chair also signs meeting minutes kept by a BLM staff person, and as Dickinson puts it, other "figurehead" duties.

RACs act strictly as advisory councils. For some members it appears that this role has taken a while to understand, although members seem to feel an advisory capacity is the appropriate role for the RAC. Formal recommendations require at least a majority, three out of five, from each category. If the RAC feels its advice is being arbitrarily disregarded by the BLM, the council may appeal to the Secretary of the Interior with consensus from the membership. Mark Morse noted that the group "likes 100-percent consensus." Several members expressed similar notions that the NW RAC will work hard to achieve consensus even if it takes longer,

or even has to "work backwards" if someone feels uncomfortable. T. Wright Dickinson said, "with unanimous consent, you don't have to worry about a numbers game because one person can protect the interests of others. I think [consensus] is critical to legitimize the process."

The amount of time members spend on NW RAC related issues varies widely. When asked how much time they spend, members answered anywhere from a couple hours to a couple of days a month. Mark Morse highlighted this when he was talking about how much information he tries to send the group: "I think about fifty-percent [of members] read most and fifty-percent read parts. From my observation the time spent on RAC related issues varied depending on how active subcommittees are."

Outcomes

From its inception and first meeting in August of 1995 through the end of 1996, the NW RAC focused its attention developing Standards for Public Land Health and Guidelines for Livestock Management (S&G's). Babbitt's grazing regulations, which created RACs, called for State Directors of the BLM, in consultation with the RACs, to develop S&G's by August 1997. According to Mark Morse the NW RAC started off "slowly." During this time Morse arranged for a three-day training session in February 1996 at a nearby college. The training session was used to get everybody "on the same page," to explain some of the scientific issues pertaining to rangeland health and to get to know one another. Most members on the NW RAC at the time of the three-day training thought it was very helpful and allowed the RAC to proceed more smoothly.

Because the NW RAC spent most of its first two years working on the S&G's there are not many tangible outcomes. Furthermore, outcomes are typically policy-based proposals and not on-the-ground achievements. Having the S&G's completed and approved by the Secretary of Interior prior to any other state was an accomplishment of all three of the Colorado RACs working together. Currently the State Directors of the BLM are working on plans to implement the S&G's. For their efforts in completing the S&G's, Vice President Al Gore noted RACs are, "truly fulfilling our goal of reinventing the way government does business" (Gore, 1998).

In November 1996, the NW RAC voted to sanction three subcommittees to work on policies and guidelines for management: recreation, land tenure adjustments, and fire management. In addition to those formal committees, three informal subcommittees were formed during 1996 to assist in three ongoing land management plans in NW CO: Unaweep Canyon, Bang's Canyon and Ruby Canyon. With the S&G's completed in February 1996, the NW RAC began to focus on other issues such as a transfer of a Department of Energy Naval Oil Shell Reserve to BLM, weed management, wild horse management, and a very controversial wilderness proposal.

With recreation increasing throughout much of Colorado, the NW RAC along with the other RACs in Colorado have been developing recreation guidelines. The draft guidelines were revised by the BLM's state office and are almost "ready to hit the streets." According to T. Wright Dickinson, "recreational issues are something the entire west is dealing with and

these guidelines may be a real test...If we have done it right there should not be a big blow-up, if we have missed a step then you'll see us scattered over the landscape." One major change that the recreation guidelines propose is limiting off-highway vehicles to existing roads and trails. Mark Morse noted that this proposal "is supported by all three Colorado RACs." Current management allows these vehicles anywhere but areas designated wilderness.

Many of the outcomes that members tend to speak about are related to the process and relationship building. Here is what some members thought were the greatest outcomes:

- Don Peach spoke about getting people to work together: "First is getting very disparate groups together to work and appreciate other peoples points of view. I think that has made it easier for the BLM to carry out its role. Second, it avoids the long drawn out arguments including lawsuits."
- T. Wright Dickinson thought the greatest outcomes are still to come: "The deliberateness by which we have gone about our job and the fact that we are really defining how these groups can be productive. In part, I think the better days are ahead of us."
- Geoff Blakeslee spoke about the groups ability to bring about new ideas: "I sometimes see things in my mind one way and can't think of things differently and all of a sudden someone (in the RAC) comes up with an idea that makes sense and it goes along the direction I wanted to go. I have learned respect for the group mind."
- Mark Morse talked about the credibility the RAC brought within the community, "any agency wants credibility in the community, the RAC gives that credibility."

PART II: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Why Collaboration?

Members of the NW RAC have chosen to participate in this collaborative effort for varying reasons. Due to its mandatory structure and formality in the selection of representative, members realize that if they do not participate someone else would be needed to represent similar interests as their own. Although there are several unique reasons for why members have chosen to participate, there seems to be a common belief that things can be done better with more localized input from diverse stakeholders discussing the issues that may often be divisive within their communities.

Here is a brief description of each person interviewed, their interest/role in the NW RAC and their reasons for participating in a collaborative effort.

- Don Peach, Mayor of Rangley, Colorado, represents archeological and historical interests on the NW RAC. He has been a member since its inception in 1995 and is currently Co-Chair. He chose to participate for the following reasons: "I believed much better work comes from the grassroots up than decisions from DC or the state level. If

you get people involved early, most of the time they are willing to look at other guys points of view and work to arrive at consensus."

- Troy Rarick is the co-owner of a mountain bike store in Fruita, Colorado and he represents dispersed recreational issues on the NW RAC. He has been a member for four months. Rarick chose to participate because, "If you don't get involved you can't complain when things don't go your way and to affect things on a bigger level."
- Walid Bou-Matar is a self-employed engineer in oil and gas production representing the oil, gas and mining interests on the NW RAC. He stated, "I am not a lawyer. I am an engineer, a businessman. I think we can solve problems through negotiation instead of fighting in court."
- Geoff Blakeslee is the manager of Carpenter Ranch (a Nature Conservancy Ranch) and a former red angus breeder. On the NW RAC, he represents conservation interests. He has been a member since September of 1998 choosing to participate because, "I think it is a great idea to bring people together from a variety of backgrounds. Instead of dealing with issues you are dealing with a human being. Issues remain important but dealing with a person on a human level allows you to provide dignity and self respect to individual's positions."
- T. Wright Dickinson owns and operates a commercial livestock operation and is the Moffat County Commissioner. He has been involved in several collaborative efforts and sat on Babbitt's roundtable discussion that developed the RAC model. On the NW RAC, he represents elected officials and has been a member since the RAC's inception. His answer for why he chose to participate is complex: "One of the things that was evident in the roundtable is that national environmentalists do not trust local people. There is a tremendous deep-seeded distrust. When you can get a diverse group together and agree on something it is a very powerful force to be reckoned with. None of us need the controversy the appeals and all that bring. To me something is wrong when you need to go to that, not that I haven't used that method. You can't solve these problems from top down management. You can't solve these issues in Washington. What gets lost in that process is a respect for local community."
- Cathie Zarlingo also has been on the NW RAC since its inception. In the past she has also been involved with the BLM's multi-use advisory councils. On the NW RAC she represents the National Wildlife Federation, and wildlife and sportsmen interests. She stated: "My biggest thing dealing with natural resources is the only way you are really going to get the best use out of the resource and get the best protection for the resource is to go at it from the people who use it. You have to have all players at the table, tell them what the problem is and try to problem solve within the framework of laws set up."
- Mark Morse is the designated federal official for the NW RAC. He is the Northwest Center Manager for the Craig and Grand Junction BLM Districts. His enthusiasm for the RAC process is evident: "If I was allowed to only attend one meeting a month, I would

choose to go to the RAC meeting...these are volunteers giving their time and their best, I really respect them."

While not a formal member of the NW RAC, Clee Sealing of the Sierra Club has attended all but four meetings in the last two years. He stated, "The main interest I carry to the RAC representing Sierra Club is that a great percent of the land in NW CO is BLM land and there are a number of proposed wilderness areas on those lands that Sierra Club has an interest in." He chose to attend meetings to "influence the decisions and also to lend support to the person, or persons on the RAC that support our viewpoint."

Alternatives

The NW RAC is a mandated collaborative partnership. If these members chose not to participate the BLM would seek others to fill their roles within the partnership. Although many said they were directly affected by BLM policies, prior to the RAC many stated their involvement with BLM policies were limited. Speaking to that point, Walid Bou-Matar states: "I was not really active before the RAC, although I had lots of dealings with the BLM through permitting, following their orders and the standards and guidelines."

T. Wright Dickinson had been active with BLM policies prior to the RAC and had filed appeals against BLM rulings in the past stated: "You have to realize that the RAC can not be all things and can't solve every issue and detail...but if it can create mutual respect hopefully that will percolate down the rest of the system." Dickinson also stated that one of the main reasons he is involved is to, "cut down on those other things (lawsuits, appeals etc)."

Most members said without the RAC they would go through the usual process. Don Peach noted: "The BLM has some good people, they are very professional, and they would come up with plans. There then would be public hearing with lots of arguments on both sides and no doubt suits filed. Peach continued by stating, "I think we have avoided much of that. That does not mean there will not be lawsuits down the road, but I think we have blunted a lot of that." Geoff Blakeslee stated, "I think there would be public hearings, meaningful, but not sure there would be some of the same outcomes. Not sure there would be a way to gather as much public input into topics. The RAC is good at gathering feelings within the community."

Ensuring Stakeholder Representation

Unlike the other collaborative partnerships analyzed in this report, members of the NW RAC must apply to become members and are chosen by federal officials. The process of BLM officials choosing who will sit at the table to advise them on issues has the potential to be corrupted by political and personal preferences. Most NW RAC members felt all stakeholders were represented on the NW RAC. Several members did see the challenge of politics entering the selection process and of ensuring the correct mix of stakeholder when space is limited to fifteen participants.

Challenges

Politics

As explained above, RAC members are appointed by the Secretary of the Interior after local BLM officials forward their choices. The Secretary "shall provide for balanced and broad representation from within each category." It appears the composition of statewide RACs have a greater potential to be influenced by politics than regional RACs, like the NW RAC.² With a member of the governor's office as Co-Chair, the New Mexico RAC seems to exemplify this point well. According to Rich Whitley, Associate State Director for the New Mexico BLM who often attends New Mexico RAC meetings, "politics play a much bigger role at the statewide levels than a more local RAC."

It appears as if the NW RAC has not been greatly influenced by politics in the selection of members. Most members feel all stakeholders are represented and Mark Morse has done a "good job" at selecting members. "I do not think Mark has been swayed by a lot of pressure. He put together a RAC that can work well together," said Walid Bou-Matar. Bou-Matar continued, "I think everyone is heard from." Bou-Matar's comments were expressed by several members. Not one member expressed any feeling that Morse's selection of members was swayed by politics at any level. Morse understands the challenge politics could pose and speaking generally expressed his frustration with politics: "The politics being played in and around public lands management is overwhelming and frustrating."

Selection Process

When Mark Morse moved to NW CO one of his duties was to work with the newly established NW RAC. The first members were selected by the Secretary of the Interior without his input. Since that time he has played a major role in selecting members. Morse said he, "went through and learned with them...there is a maturation of the process [by which I select members]"

Most members were satisfied with Mark Morse's selection of participants. Geoff Blakeslee noted: "I don't know how the names come to him, but I think he does his homework. People on the RAC are genuine, caring and reasonable people. We don't have any radicals." When asked if he had heard any concern that some interests had been left out of the process, Don Peach said, "No, I have not heard that, although there have been some people who have applied who have not been appointed that have expressed that." Cathie Zarlingo said, "Coming from the old multi-use boards [which often were dominated by grazing interests], it is imperative to pull in all user groups."

Environmental Interests

The only interest that several members thought might have been left out and could have proved helpful during recent debates was a wilderness advocate or "true environmentalists." Troy Rarick noted that in his opinion all stakeholders are involved "other than a wilderness advocate...maybe because they are very argumentative, people may be afraid of them. That is the one view I see missing."

² Six states contain statewide RACs. Those states are Arizona, Alaska, South Dakota/North Dakota, New Mexico, and Utah.

Two of the environmental representatives have some concerns about whether they represent the environmental population at-large. Geoff Blakeslee stated, "I am in the environmental category. I am also involved with livestock industry and also employed by The Nature Conservancy which we consider ourselves a conservation organization, not an environmental." Cathie Zarlingo had similar concerns when she said, "If there is anything I would look into changing is the environmental category to maybe conservation and environmental separate, they are different. An environmental group may look at me and say well, she is not really representing our constituents and that is probably true. I think right now we may be missing a true environmentalist."

When asked about several members feeling as if a wilderness advocate was missing, T. Wright Dickinson said, "I think you will always get that in any type of forum because you have limited membership, even with fifteen. I think they have done a good job at selecting members with balance in mind." Mark Morse noted that there was a wilderness advocate [Bill Shapley] who resigned in the middle of the wilderness debate and, "trying to bring someone in at the end of it would have been tough." Shapley represented Sierra Club on the NW RAC. Morse said he was "well liked" by RAC members and "his role needs to be filled." Morse also spoke about the difficulty in the selection of certain wilderness advocate groups for a consensus group: "There is a tendency with wilderness groups of saying no compromise in the field, we will only compromise in Congress."

Clee Sealing who was not selected to represent Sierra Club on the NW RAC said that not being selected caused, "a good deal of grief among [Sierra Club] people who sponsored me." When Mark Morse was asked why Sealing was not selected as a member of the NW RAC, he responded that a couple of things happened. Morse noted that members need to be strong enough to argue their opinions, but also must be willing to compromise. Morse continued, "Clee is very good at standing up for his constituency, but is not very good at coming to the table and having any compromise in him." Morse also stated that RACs are very fragile right now and that "several NW RAC members came to me and expressed that they did not want to have [Sealing] on." The last reason Morse stated for not selecting Sealing was that "I have been very concerned with putting ex-government, federal and state, people on the RAC." Sealing is retired from the Colorado Division of Wildlife who according to Morse, "does not have the best reputation right now in the northwest."

Dual Roles

Clee Sealing also said he had a problem with the dual interests certain participants represented. Sealing stated, "I have a bone to pick with the way these people are placed in the RAC. [T. Wright Dickinson] is representing elected officials on the RAC, not the cattle industry and that is what he really represents. The BLM impacts his cattle operation tremendously, so he actually has a dual role on the RAC and I think that is unfair...Sierra Club has a problem with that." When asked about Sealing's remarks, Mark Morse stated, "That is accurate. He is not only a county official, but he is a rancher and an advocate of ranching." Morse further said that dealing with this challenge is part of the "maturation process" on his part when selecting members.

Strategies

The NW RAC always leaves time for public comment and publishes its meeting schedule. Walid Bou-Matar noted that, "Public comment is always open, we respect that and always make room, we have time for question and answer." Several members expressed a strong desire for getting the community involved with their RAC. Members expressed the importance they felt in keeping in touch with their constituents.

The NW RAC at times goes outside its membership to gain stakeholder representation. Due to the fact that the NW RAC is currently dealing with recreation issues and there is no representative from off-highway vehicle groups, Don Peach felt it was necessary to go out and build a relationship with a particular group that "had developed the reputation of being unreasonable." Peach noted that their extreme reputation was undeserved: "That reputation was false when we sat down with them on the recreation guidelines. As I told them later, they sounded like a bunch of environmentalists by the end. It was important to recognize their problems. It was a satisfying process and it should be that way and most of the time it can be. You always have extremists, but most people try to be reasonable and recognize in the long haul we are going to have to take care of our public lands."

The formality of the selection process means that ensuring stakeholder representation falls mainly on Mark Morse and the BLM. Morse selects members that can reach greater a constituency, someone who is willing to negotiate and come to the table with a desire to express his/her opinions. Morse rarely will interview applicants and will look for someone their constituency wants on the RAC. "I want to select a member who I will only need to guide. I do not want to have to jump start an individual," said Morse. As stated earlier Morse believes the selection process is an evolving one that has no perfect formula.

To ensure that environmental groups apply for upcoming openings, Mark Morse said: "This time I will send letters out to all the environmental groups in the area and see if they want to put in a nomination. I will push a little more to get an environmentalist on the [RAC]."

Accommodating Diverse Interests

NW RAC members feel the stakeholders involved in their RAC are diverse. In comparing this RAC to her experiences on the now defunct BLM multi-use boards, Cathie Zarlingo stated: "These are much more diverse. With the multi-use boards there was not as much of an effort to get all sides." Walid Bou-Matar agreed, "Our members are very diverse, a big mixture of people that well represents [NW Colorado]."

Challenges

With such a diverse group dealing with issues that often directly affect their way of life in NW CO, the potential exists for the group to become polarized. It appears as if the NW RAC handles the diverse interests well. When speaking about their relationship with other members and with Mark Morse, words like "friends" and "respect" were often used. When

asked about his relationship with other group members Troy Rarick said, "I have only been there for four months, but I am impressed with how the group with such diverse backgrounds can sit around the table and have such intelligent conversations without letting emotions get involved." Cathie Zarlingo said, "I feel comfortable with them all."

Particularly, members felt comfortable with, and respected Mark Morse. Don Peach described his relationship with Mark Morse as, "Very good. He does a good job at getting us both sides of an issue and that is important so that we don't act on our own so called personal prejudices. We have good solid facts when facing various issues." Geoff Blakeslee described his relationship with Mark Morse as, "very open, cordial, very helpful for me, always makes himself available when I need an explanation or further information...through the RAC process I have tried to understand the issues that other members bring to the table and try to respect that, I may not agree, but I respect that." Often when participants had something negative to say about BLM they would exclude Morse and the local BLM saying that, "it is not the local office."

Mark Morse stated how he knew the NW RAC was working: "I realized my board was working was when T. Wright had Bill [Shapley of Sierra Club] out to his ranch and T. Wright said to Bill, Bill, why don't you like me? Bill looked at him and said, T. I like you, I just don't like your damn cows."

With the diverse stakeholders on the NW RAC the fear that compromise will lead to less than optimal solutions is not evident. Walid Bou-Matar stressed the necessity of compromise in collaborative partnerships when he stated: "If you want to live in this universe you need to compromise because you don't have all the truths...and if someone doesn't believe that they should have their head examined." Speaking about the prospect that compromise could potentially lead to watered down solutions, Cathie Zarlingo said: "I think this group will stand firm on sound resource management and not reach that lowest common denominator." T. Wright Dickinson noted, "I am not saying those things might not occur with other collaborative groups...trying to find workable solutions and compromise has not diminished any decision [we have made]."

As a person who attends many meetings representing the views of Sierra Club, Clee Sealing says "absolutely [watered down solutions] is what happens...nobody is really happy with the solution because everybody gives up something. It is more of a centering force." Sealing used the S&G's to explain his belief that the group would not make any decision that might financially hurt one of the ranchers on the RAC and therefore could not be effective in dealing with grazing issues. Sealing noted that the Colorado Division of Wildlife pulled out of the S&G discussion altogether because "there was not a measurable goal in the whole damn thing. No way of knowing if we were going in the right direction or even if we got there."

Some members of the NW RAC have acknowledged that there are certain issues that they personally would not compromise with. Geoff Blakeslee pointed out that, "Native vegetation issues is a no compromise issue to me. If that situation were to arise, I don't know how I would deal with it. I am going to stick to my guns. I will work hard to convince anyone who

disagrees that we can't do it any other way. Certain issues people cannot compromise." Walid Bou-Matar said, "Compromise has not diminished any decision. When it comes to the well-being of the land, the public will win, you can't compromise on that. Although when you take the environment and treat it like a religion it is tough to compromise...and that is a problem. It is a different value system and that is tough."

Strategies

Building trust is an important strategy when working with diverse interests. Each member of the NW RAC spoke about trusting other members fairly quickly. Members thought the open and honest dialogue was the reason they were able to trust one another. Cathie Zarlingo summed up many statements well: "I feel comfortable with them all. We all agreed to be open and honest. I don't feel as if there are any behind the scenes type things going on. I have learned a lot about each persons background and agenda of the groups they represent." Similarly T. Wright Dickinson said, "[Trust] came easier to this group due to the way we started off getting everyone up to speed [such as the weekend training session]. We got lucky with some personalities, we just clicked as a group."

Making sure every person's interests are being heard from and that solutions the group comes up with do not leave any interests out was mentioned by several participants. Troy Rarick noted that members have to be willing to take a stand on the issues that are important to them and not let solutions become watered down. Rarick felt that was his job with the recreation guidelines. "Each person, me being the recreation appointee, has to stand up and be willing to be workable and mellow, but also when something is of vast importance has to be willing to take a radical stance."

Having good leadership can be a strategy at accommodating diverse interests in a collaborative forum. Mark Morse's personality made members feel at ease with the diversity within the group. Each member spoke highly of Morse's role within the group. Geoff Blakeslee said, "People in charge make a big difference. Mark is one of the better government employees. I think Mark has looked at the RAC as a way to make him more effective at doing his job." Cathie Zarlingo similarly stated, "Mark has done a good job at being supportive and saying we value your input."

A facilitator has been used by the NW RAC during meetings that Mark Morse feels could potentially become divisive. For instance, the NW RAC used a facilitator from the BLM during many of their discussions about proposed wilderness regions in NW CO.

Local/National Tension

The NW RAC's sole responsibility is advising the BLM on management of their lands in NW CO. The fact that BLM lands are public lands brings in national interests that need to be addressed by this local council. Some see the job of bringing in national interests as BLM's job, others feel it is within the scope of the council. Don Peach expressed this issue by stating: "Oh sure, there is a delicate balance between national policy and local implementation of these policies, or what the locals feel should be the policy...There is a

balance that needs to be maintained and that is difficult at times." T. Wright Dickinson spoke about how he feels the west can resolve natural resource management issues: "The only way to do that is to get local people together to figure out what they want to do. The sticker is you need to figure out how to represent the broad national interests. This is a legitimate concern of nationals. Although it ultimately needs to work here or it doesn't work. What gets lost in their process is the respect for local community."

Some see the solution to the problem of combining national input into local collaborative groups is to include national interest groups such as the Sierra Club or the National Association of Cattlemen. "Yeah, out of fairness to both sides they should have to be on the RAC and have to go through the process the rest of us have to, sit and fight it out," said Troy Rarick speaking about national groups. On the other hand Walid Bou-Matar seems skeptical about those prospects, "When we invite small groups like the Sierra Club, or Colorado Environmental Council, the local people will agree, but when they go to the national group they get reputed. I think because of the big agenda, the integrity issue. It is all about how they look in the White House."

When asked about local/national tension within collaborative groups like the NW RAC, Clee Sealing stated, "It is like stepping on a landmine. When you start to talk about local/national issues it is like the old west. You come dead on with property rights, local control, right down the line. Sierra Club's position is these are national lands." Sealing also saw other ways to balance interest, "Lawsuits that are rooted in federal law depending upon the situation can level the playing field or through the political process through organizations such as Sierra Club. "The best example of how the issue of local/national tension has become evident within the NW RAC is the recent contentious debate over a wilderness proposal (discussed below).

When asked about the local/national tension and how it has effected the NW RAC, Mark Morse noted the difficulty of the issue. Morse stated, "[The RAC] has a difficult time looking at a national perspective, but I am not sure it is really a problem." Morse continued that "Secretary Babbitt said I want these issues solved at the local level...I am not even sure in this day with the age of electronics we are capable of dealing with national issues." Morse also said that he felt the NW RAC should be inviting more spokespeople from national groups and that the BLM can provide some national perspective to the RAC.

Dealing with Scientific Issues

The exact extent with which the NW RAC deals with the scientific dimensions of an issue is not clear. From the outcomes it appears that they attempt to incorporate science into their proposals, although they seem to focus more on the political and societal dimensions. Mark Morse said the RAC focuses, "Predominantly on the political side, although we bring in the academia to give a foundation for them to make decisions." Members of the NW RAC seem to be satisfied with the way the group has dealt with the scientific side of issues.

Challenges

Most members spoke highly with regards to the information made available by Mark Morse and other BLM staff (see training information below). They did not see dealing with science as a challenge. "We have a BLM representative at all meetings and we frequently call on them to explain certain issues or technical aspects," explained Geoff Blakeslee: "I feel the caliber of advice we get is very high and very good." T. Wright Dickinson gave the group, "high marks due to starting off with the educational training" and their "deliberateness in the way we deal with issues." He continued, "These are smart people, if we don't know an answer we ask. We have even asked for third party advice when someone thought the BLM was not trustworthy." Cathie Zarlingo commented, "We wanted to be data driven. We have worked hard to understand that component."

Clee Sealing has a different perspective on how well the RAC deals with scientific issues. "Most people have little interest in the technical side, only the political parts of ramifications of their decisions," he stated.

Strategies

In selecting members, Mark Morse said, "You try to select members with some academic or scientific background that allows them not to be completely overwhelmed by the public or political opinion. They then have the strength to stand up on some kind of foundation." Morse also mentioned that is one of the reasons he feels the workshops and training are necessary.

Each member mentioned that BLM staff, particularly Mark Morse, has always been willing to provide the group with any information they needed. At times members mentioned they felt it was important to go outside the BLM and have experts come and speak to a subject. Morse stated, "I just don't know how anyone can give me good advice, or work with their constituents outside, if they don't have a wider perspective than their backyard, even if their backyard is a thousand acres."

The training provided by the BLM for each member of the NW RAC also focused some of its attention on scientific issues. Troy Rarick noted that the BLM brought in professors from Colorado State University, University of Colorado, and University of Arizona during a two day training session. Rarick said, "I learned more biology and soil science...I learned a lot." Other NW RAC members mentioned lectures on ecosystem management and rangeland health provided a strong foundation for their involvement with the RAC.

Accommodating Diverse Capabilities

Diversity on the NW RAC not only is evident in the amount of issues members bring to the group, but also in varying levels of knowledge, skills, and power that each member possesses. In order for the NW RAC to be effective they must deal with the reality expressed by Walid Bou-Matar: "We don't expect one guy who knows oil and gas to know everything

about ranching, farming and the environment. There is room to listen and build trust; to know that someone is not giving you a snow job."

Challenges

Several members of the NW RAC did not believe that the varying levels of skills, knowledge and power had any impact on how the group has run. When asked if he thought varying capabilities had any impact on the group, Don Peach said, "I don't think so, we learn from each other...The group is strong enough to tell someone to stop it" if they try to influence the group improperly. "I don't think people bring in outside power," stated Troy Rarick. Rarick concluded, "Sitting at the table we all feel as if we are all equal and have equal say." T. Wright Dickinson said, "At least I hope that with myself, I try hard to listen to other people and they are getting their point of view up on the table." Dickinson continued, "I am not hesitant to talk, and I do, but trying hard to respect the other people...that is very important to me because I want the same respect. In the beginning there were some who were fearful [that varying levels of power could impact the group] but that has not played out."

Speaking about diverse capabilities, Cathie Zarlingo said, "When I first looked and saw who was representing the agriculture-ranching industry they were pretty well known and powerful people, but I have found them to be very human. They want to succeed in what they are doing, but they also bought into this process of the RAC. I think they understand that if they try to overwhelm it, that could torpedo the process and we would be back where we were before with nothing. I don't know, it may be that we just clicked [as a group]. I do suppose that on other RACs there could be a situation where a particular group bans together and takes over the process. I have not seen it with ours. We have a good system of checks and balances. You have to be confident enough in yourself to not allow someone to dominate."

In discussing his relationship with other members of the RAC, Geoff Blakeslee noted, "At the first meeting I was intimidated by [T. Wright Dickinson], but I am not anymore. If you are going to disagree with him, you better have your ducks in a row." From speaking with several members there was a sense that although Dickinson does not dominate the process, he is quite strong in his role as chair. According to Mark Morse, "He is an influential person in western Colorado. I like to have him on the board so he is in view. Even if he was not chair, he is in a leadership position [Moffat County Commissioner] and I would coordinate with him more." Morse stated that Dickinson has a great influence on the NW RAC: "He tries to downplay effecting or influencing the group. The first two years he was much more influential especially with grazing stuff. The last two years [his influence] has balanced out." Even though he is "an influential person" Walid Bou-Matar does not think he has swayed any issue. He states: "The group is strong enough to tell T. Wright to stop it. I have seen it done before. I think some people are just more outspoken, T. Wright is in that category, but he will not stop any single person."

Personalities play an important role in determining how the issue of diverse capabilities plays within a collaborative partnership. Mark Morse expressed that fact when he stated, "There are certain people who will always get their voice heard. T. Wright, if he has an opinion you will hear it. Cathie Zarlingo on the other hand, has some tremendous opinions, but for a long

time it was hard to know if she had something to say or she was just going along with the group." Morse also noted a change in his personality was needed in order deal with the NW RAC: "I have learned to sit at the side of the table and just be a part of the process, that is a big step for any BLM Manager...I usually like to be the center of attention and direct everything"

Clee Sealing called Dickinson his "arch rival at this stuff...he represents a lot of what us at Sierra Club would consider the worst in the livestock industry." And although Sealing said, "Don't get me wrong, I like T. Wright. He is a guy you can say now there is a guy you have to respect. He has no hidden agenda. You can see through him like a clear glass of water," Sealing continued by stating T. Wright has, "scared the RAC into writing a nasty letter to Ann Morgan (CO BLM State Director) regarding the outcome of the roadless review. He pushed them into doing something I am sure if they had thought about...I am sure they would have voted against." Sealing then went on to say that this RAC "for some reason is not well balanced," and "power plays out in various roles and ways depending on the issue and who has interests in the issue."

Strategies

To deal with the reality that people were going to come to the RAC with varying levels of knowledge and skills and be thrown into the complex issue of grazing standards and guidelines, the BLM set up a weekend training session for members in February 1996. Each person who attended this training session spoke highly about that experience. The BLM was "gracious at training us on landscape issues and ecology-based management," said Cathie Zarlino. She continued, "Providing training was imperative to working in these types of groups. When you do that type of training you get people past their own personal agendas and a lot of people come to these types of groups with their own personal agenda. The training allows you to look across the table and understand the other person's point of view."

T. Wright Dickinson said he "insisted" on the training session after discussions at the roundtable led him to believe both the livestock and environmental community needed to be educated about the other side's views: "As livestock people we are not looked upon by the broader community as folks that know what the heck we are doing. In reality we have an innate knowledge of these systems. We needed an educational course to begin with to kind of try to bring everyone up to the same level of knowledge. At least the basics so they could talk to each other. So rather than start the RAC off and jump right into the S&G's, I quite honestly insisted" we have the training.

According to NW RAC members and Mark Morse, the training consisted of spending a weekend at a local college where several professors from universities throughout the state came and lectured. Lectures consisted of basic ecology, ecosystem management principles, rangeland science, and discussions about their individual roles on the RAC. This training on a smaller scale was recently conducted again as some new members joined the group. Troy Rarick who is one of the new members who attended the training said, "I went to school for two days, it was neat. I thought you just start going to meetings and that was how the RAC worked but they wanted to make sure we were all speaking the same language. I learned

some biology and soil science...so if someone is speaking about an erosion process we all know."

Mark Morse stated that he felt the BLM was not adequately trained many RACs: "I think the BLM is falling down on [training RACs]. I know that other RACs have not spent the money on training that we have spent in Colorado." Morse also felt that training NW RAC members was instrumental: "I am a strong believer in exposing not only my staff, but the RAC to [training] because lands management in the west is changing so fast." In addition to the training Morse also mentioned that he would sit down one-on-one with a member if he feels the member is not stating their opinion. "My job is to more than anything make sure that nobody feels that they can't express themselves, that nobody feels they have to cow down to any person or any group."

Unique Challenges and Insights Specific to this Case

The Wilderness Proposal

In early 1997, soon after the S&G's were signed for the state of Colorado, the RAC turned its attention to a BLM policy regarding a wilderness proposal. The wilderness proposal was "contentious" to begin with. The proposal resulted in a roadless area review of six areas that have projects or plans proposed for projects within their boundaries. One of those areas was a place called Bangs Canyon.

The RAC set up an official "informal" subcommittee for Bangs Canyon. "RAC members went out with BLM staff to look at the land and see whether or not they met the criteria and we made the recommendation that some of these clearly don't; other have sufficient," said Don Peach. On May 7, 1998 the RAC gave its recommendation that Bangs Canyon did not meet the criteria of roadless areas for further wilderness study. Troy Rarick stated, "There was a strong local consensus that (Bangs Canyon) not be pursued as a wilderness area." On November 24, 1998 Ann Morgan, Colorado BLM State Director announced BLM's plan to further pursue Bangs Canyon and two other areas, South Shale Ridge and Vermillion Basin, as possible wilderness areas.

The BLM's decision to pursue Bangs Canyon as wilderness and not to follow the NW RAC recommendation caused a very difficult and contentious atmosphere not only in the RAC but throughout NW Colorado. One newspaper editorial called the decision, "Queen Ann's Decree," referring to State Director Ann Morgan (Sentinel, 1999). The editorial stated: "Morgan told council members last week that she can't be bound by what a few pesky folks in western Colorado think. She needs to consider national implications."

The wilderness situation presents a good example of several challenges such as ensuring stakeholder representation and the tension between local and national interests. The wilderness debate also highlights some other challenges that have not been written about before in this chapter such the issue of value laden topics where certain individuals have a strong, even financial stake in the outcome and the fear that an advisory council can become a "rubber stamp."

Ensuring Stakeholder Representation

For much of the time while the group discussed the proposed wilderness area in Bangs Canyon there was a "wilderness advocate," Bill Shapley from Sierra Club, on the council. Towards the end of the discussions he resigned from the group for personal reasons. Several members spoke about the void left due to the fact there no longer was a strong "wilderness advocate." Troy Rarick spoke about his feelings that a wilderness advocate, someone from a national environmental organization, should be on the RAC since they often have to power through the political process to "supercede" the RAC. He stated: "If they have the ability to straight to the state office then they almost don't want to be on our little committee. Out of fairness to both sides they should have to be on the RAC and have to go through the process the rest of us have to. Sit and fight it out." T. Wright Dickinson on the other hand felt that wilderness points of view were represented, "Rest assured, I can assure you that there are two other people there that do a good job at looking at those folks view point."

Local/National Tensions

When asked about local versus national tension, several group members immediately brought up the wilderness issue. "At our last meeting [local versus national issues] was brought up by a representative from the CEC (Colorado Environmental Coalition). They pointed out this is a clear issue that public land are owned by everyone and because they lie within one state that doesn't give anyone a claim to them,' said Geoff Blakeslee. Cathie Zarlingo said, the local versus national tension was, "very apparent with the wilderness issue. At the local level you need to talk about the financial side. Yes, we believe in wilderness but just saying it is wilderness doesn't protect it.

Contentious Issues

Through the interviews it became evident that certain issues are more contentious because they are more value-laden. This wilderness debate is a prime example most often mentioned by members as a value-laden issue that posed problems for the group. "Wilderness can polarize this group...I do not know if it could be more divisive" said Mark Morse. He continued: "Any issue with strong emotions can polarize," and when most wilderness discussions take place he tries to bring in a facilitator. Furthermore some members having a financial stake in some of the proposed wilderness areas through grazing leases may have complicated the issue.

It appears that what caused the most "anger" within the group was when they felt the BLM did not listen to their recommendations and did not pre-notify the group when they decided to go against their recommendations. Mark Morse said, "several members walked out of the meeting two meetings ago out of anger." "[Ann Morgan] asked for our opinion, but did not listen," said Walid Bou-Matar. Many felt a letter writing campaign by many environmentalists from outside NW Colorado and political pressure from environmental groups who had not even seen Bangs Canyon had too much weight in the final decision. T. Wright Dickinson said of the decision, "It was top down." Locals worked hard to come to consensus said Troy Rarick and, "the state office just overturned it and said lets pursue it as wilderness, so that was about pressure coming from above that swayed opinions.

Appeal to the Secretary

The group felt that their advice was arbitrarily disregarded by the BLM and therefore upon unanimous approval by members sent a letter of appeal to Secretary Babbitt. Mark Morse noted, "Out of no surprise to anyone the Secretary supported Ann [Morgan]." Walid Bou-Matar stated, "If you are an advisory council and they do not take your advice...then there is no value in what you are doing, it is a farce, you can't use it just when you need it." His concern seems to be echoed by most members. Some felt that Ann Morgan did not trust them and that if BLM continued to ignore their advice the RAC could just become a "rubber stamp." Furthermore, if the BLM is not going to give them the tough issues several members stated: "I would not be part of a rubber stamp."

Speaking about some members' fear of becoming a rubber stamp for BLM Mark Morse said: "[The RAC] needs to look at what they did. They did not rubber stamp anything for the BLM. The fact that BLM did not take their recommendation upsets them, but [the RAC] did its job."

To address some of these issues Ann Morgan came to the RAC meeting on January 14, 1999 to explain her position and quell some fears on the part of RAC members. According to Mark Morse, "To her credit she admitted she did not handle it right but said she would not hand over decision-making authority to the RAC." "I do not think she does not trust us. She did a good job at explaining how she needs to take other factors into consideration when making a decision. She was not discounting us. The thing that caused a problem in my mind was that she promised before going public she would come explain the decision to us first," said Geoff Blakeslee. Others expressed similar feelings and Don Peach noted, "I don't think that problem will occur again. She (Ann Morgan) is an able person and very much wants to work with the RAC."

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