

Hidalgo County
Public Land Advisory Committee (PLAC)
Minutes - January 25, 2017

A regularly scheduled meeting of the Hidalgo County Public Land Advisory Committee (PLAC) was held January 25, 2017. Those in attendance: Meira Gault, Buddy Jensen, Roger Payne, Butch Mayfield and Judy Keeler - PLAC members; Gerald Hancock - US Border Patrol; Don McClure - Las Cruces BLM; Brandon Kempton - NM Game and Fish Dept.; Darr Shannon - Commissioner and Bob Hill - County Manager - guests.

New Business:

Minutes: Roger moved the minutes of November 2nd be approved; seconded by Buddy. The motion passed unanimously.

The Chairman gave several reports on issues impacting public lands including: The Draft Jaguar Recovery Plan; a lawsuit 18 Attorney Generals', including NM Game & Fish, have filed regarding the tweaking of the definition of critical habitat by U.S. Fish and Wildlife; the proposed delisting of the Lesser Long-nosed bat; the NM State Land Office's policies relating to range improvements that might pass through an archeological site on state lands.

Darr reported on the Gila Travel Management and the Gila Resources Management planning processes.

Following discussion, Roger moved the Chairman be granted permission to submit comments for the PLAC on the Jaguar Recovery Plan, seconded by Meira. The motion passed unanimously after discussion.

Meira moved the Chairman be granted permission to submit comments on behalf of the PLAC, regarding the delisting of the Lesser Long-nosed bat, seconded by Buddy. The motion passed unanimously.

Election of Officers: After discussions on the value of the PLAC on a local level and a description of the offices, Meira nominated Judy as Secretary; seconded by Butch. The motion passed unanimously.

After discussion and several nominations for the Chair position, Judy moved Meira be nominated as Chairman; seconded by Roger. The motion passed unanimously.

After discussion, and the flip of a coin, Meira moved Buddy be elected as Vice-Chairman; seconded by Roger. The motion passed unanimously.

Discussion followed on the importance of attending PLAC meeting so all public land user interests, i.e., hunting, ranching, mining, and recreation, are represented to the Commission.

Old Business:

The Chair explained Meira had a question on the legal standing of a citizen's committee. Discussion followed on the responsibilities and function of the Secretary.

Darr explained her main concern was how a motion is made and voted upon. She explained there should be a motion, then a second, followed by discussion and then a vote. If a member doesn't agree with the majority, they should be recognized as dissenting in the minutes. Bob stated it might be better to count votes in lieu of a voice vote.

The Chair reported she had attended the DOT meeting regarding blowing dust along I-10 on December 5th. She stated the impacted ranchers were well represented. They presented information on historical remediation measures taken in previous years and the weather phenomena on the Lordsburg Playa. Trent Botkin, DOT, was very receptive to their discussion. She felt it had been very productive.

Agency Update:

BLM Las Cruces District: Don stated he had not been able to attend the DOT meeting, but was glad to hear how it went. He had encouraged DOT to engage the community at the earliest possible stage of the NEPA process. The next stage will be the surveys and then to plan the projects. After discussion, Don assured everyone he would have the Hidalgo Commission added to the DOT's contact list.

Don explained BLM is still at the same stage in the NEPA with the Sun Zia line as the last time the PLAC met. BLM is working on their scurf-pea and archeological surveys.

He also reported that BLM will be issuing decision notices on their current EQIP projects in March. He will send a list of these projects to the PLAC. BLM is coordinating with NRCS and hope to start 12 more projects after the current NEPAs are finished. In the future, he hopes for a 6 month turn-around on these projects.

A new Rangeland Specialist, Chris Henson, has been hired. His last position was in Taos. Due to budget constraints this may be the last new hire for a while. Discussion followed on the importance of hiring range cons that are familiar with a desert environment.

In reply to a question about Restore New Mexico, Don stated BLM is looking at about 10,000 acres of brush control projects on 4 different allotments. They are considering Sendero for mesquite infested areas because of the higher kill ration. Discussion followed on the economic state of the cattle industry, the PRIA formula and the grazing bill process. Don will follow up on the PRIA formula.

Meira asked about Desert LCC www.desertlcc.org. She had met some of the scientists at a Malpai Borderland Group's meeting in January and was curious what connection these folks had with BLM and some of the other federal agencies. Discussion followed. Don will research their connection to BLM.

Coronado National Forest: Doug was not in attendance so the Chairman moved to the next agenda item.

NM Game & Fish: Brandon reported there was not a lot of new stuff with his agency. The Commission had recently allowed trapping on private land which caused a new lawsuit to be filed against the agency. The new legislative session is just starting so he must wait to learn what's on their agenda for this session.

He stated there was some discussion with the Commission about developing new tags for the hunters'. Discussion followed on current web permitting and the loss of revenue funding for the Department at the state level.

Border Patrol: Agent Hancock explained he was not up to speed on all the Border Patrol's issues. Agent Pena, Community Liaison, is leaving at the end of next month. Thus, attending PLAC meetings is now his job.

He reported BP did receive some new agents but then lost some other agents. Nine (9) supervisors have been transferred out recently. He has 5 years to retirement, lives in the area, has ties to the community and does not plan to leave.

In response to a question, Agent Hancock replied he's not sure if Agent Gardea will be back. Gardea is still very involved in picking replacements and still very interested in the horse patrol. Agent Hancock now supervises the Las Cruces and Deming horse patrols, in addition to Lordsburg. Discussion followed on the violence in Mexico.

Meira announced the Coronado National Forest is still working on their Travel Management Plan. They are also starting on another round for their Resource Management Plan (RMP). To get ready for the next RMP, they will be doing an EA on all the new endangered species that have been recently listed. Discussion followed on the ESA.

The meeting was adjourned. The next regularly scheduled PLAC meeting will be April 26, 2017.

Respectfully submitted,

Judy Keeler, Secretary
Hidalgo County PLAC