

**RIO GRANDE TRAIL COMMISSION (RGTC) MEETING**

**May 19, 2016**

**1:30 PM – 3:30 PM**

**Macey Center**

**New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology**

**1 Olive Lane**

**Socorro, New Mexico 87801**

**Members Present:**

Christy Tafoya, Vice-Chair	Director, State Parks Division, EMNRD
Kelly Zunie	Indian Affairs Department
Aaron Detter	Designee, Transportation Department
Aimee Barabe	Tourism Department
Pete Mattox	Southern New Mexico Trail Coalition
Laurie Wearne	Director, Talking Talons Program
Toby Martinez	Public Member
Toner Mitchell	Trout Unlimited

**Member Present by Teleconference at Beginning of Meeting:**

David Martin, Chairman	Secretary, Energy, Minerals & Natural Resources Department (EMNRD)
------------------------	--

**Members Absent:**

Jon Barela	Economic Development Department
Dana Feldman	Public Member

**Legislators (Advisory Members):**

Senator Carlos Cisneros  
Representative Jeff Steinborn

**1. Call to Order** – The Rio Grande Trail Commission (RGTC) meeting was called to order by the Vice-Chair, Christy Tafoya at 1:38 pm.

**2. Roll Call** – Commission Coordinator Cathy Fernandez called the roll as reflected above.

**3. Approval of Agenda:**

Vice-Chair Tafoya called for comments on the agenda, and requested item 7c. Leadership Appointment, under New Business be moved up to the first order of business since Chairman Martin would be participating via

**New Mexico Trail Commission Meeting**  
**Thursday, May 19, 2016**

teleconference for this part of the meeting. Commissioner Laurie Wearne moved to approve the agenda as modified. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Toby Martinez and the motion was unanimously approved.

**4. Approval of Minutes:**

Vice-Chair Tafoya called for comments on the January 6, 2016 meeting minutes and seeing none, Commissioner Pete Mattox moved to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Laurie Wearne and the motion was unanimously approved.

**5. New Business:**

**Leadership Appointment** – Chairman Martin announced that he will be retiring as Secretary of Energy, Minerals and Natural Resource Department within the next couple months. Chairman Martin expressed his interest in maintaining continuity and momentum with the Rio Grande Trail Commission leadership. As such, Chairman Martin appointed Christy Tafoya (State Parks Director), as the new Chair and appointed Secretary Rebecca Latham (Tourism Secretary) as the new Vice-Chair. Chairman Martin expressed his appreciation for the legislation creating the RGTC, the participation by all commissioners as well as all efforts by members of the work groups and the public.

**6. Presentation:**

Mr. Matt Mitchell, Vice Chair of the Save Our Bosque Board briefed the commission on the role and purpose of the Save Our Bosque Task Force. The Save Our Bosque Task Force was formed as a nonprofit corporation in 1994 by citizens of Socorro County, concerned about degradation of the ecosystem along the Rio Grande Bosque due to dumping of trash, off-road vehicle use, illegal fuelwood cutting, and wildfire. Their mission is to enhance recreation, advance habitat restoration, and provide environmental education and community outreach. The vision of the Save Our Bosque Task Force is a riparian ecosystem that functions as naturally as possible within the 21<sup>st</sup> century infrastructure and political limitations and with respect for the customs and cultures of the people of Socorro County. Task force membership is comprised of anyone interested in the river.

The core focus area of the task force is from San Acacia to San Marcial. This is a very special stretch of river. The east side of the river has no levy and is thus more prone to flooding and other dangers. Some of the challenges to the

**New Mexico Trail Commission Meeting**  
**Thursday, May 19, 2016**

area are the invasive species of Russian olive and salt cedar trees, flooding and housing/zoning issues. Increasingly, people are building closer and closer to the river. The early work of the task force dealt with the zoning issues and invasive plant species.

Starting in 1999, the task force put together a program to write conservation easements that limit building in the floodplain and begin habitat preservation. The first meetings were comprised of a core group of landowners and to date, the task force is responsible for protecting approximately 950 acres of habitat preservation plus writing over 1,600 acres of conservation easements in the valley.

The west side of river also has Russian olive and salt cedar invasive species. The task force is responsible for installing 15 parks with tables, they have clean-up days twice annually to take care of the parks and the river. Education is a major component of the task force as well – making sure residents of Socorro understand the importance and significance of the river.

Other accomplishments of the task force are: Working with the county on applying for mitigation funds and a recent receipt of \$1 million in funding for salt cedar control.

Questions:

Senator Cisneros inquired if the lands were privately owned or if there were any public lands.

Mr. Mitchell responded that over 14,000 acres are in the floodplain area, of which 6,000 acres are private land and 1,600 acres are Middle Rio Grande conservancy land.

Senator Cisneros asked about potential obstacles to the right of way for the Rio Grande Trail.

Mr. Mitchell responded that he was not aware of any obstacles.

Commissioner Zunie asked if there a charge to use the parks along the Bosque and about other restrictions.

Mr. Mitchell responded that there is no charge, no restrictions in the parks unless the area is closed due to fire restrictions.

Commissioner Mattox asked Mr. Mitchell to comment on his biggest hopes and fears for the Rio Grande Trail, given his experience with the public.

Mr. Mitchell responded that he hopes people will use the area and he fears the potential for trash and vandalism but remains optimistic that with education and outreach, it can be a great trail system.

**New Mexico Trail Commission Meeting  
Thursday, May 19, 2016**

Commissioner Mattox asked Mr. Mitchell to follow-up with what been the experience of the task force with vandalism and mischief in the Bosque.

Mr. Mitchell commented that trouble begins when it is used as a party area and trash such as needles and other drug paraphernalia are left behind. The task force response has been to get out and clean it up and keep on top of maintenance.

Representative Steinborn asked if the Middle Rio Grande levies are the most likely and best areas for the Rio Grande Trail and if so, how many miles would this be.

Mr. Mitchell responded that there are approximately 25 miles along the levy from San Acacia to Bosque del Apache.

Representative Steinborn asked if people bike and hike along the 25 mile stretch.

Mr. Mitchell responded that yes, people bike, hike, run, and ride horses all along the 25 miles.

Representative Steinborn asked about access on the west side of the levy to the town of Socorro. Representative Steinborn indicated the desire to build a trail in a way that is environmentally sensitive, that is, showing nature but also making sure it is protected. He also wants to make sure that Socorro residents think about the economic impacts and tourism for people using the trail. Also, the commission is considering setting up regional chapters and having local involvement to help with trail maintenance. Representative Steinborn indicated that the Save Our Bosque Task Force would be a great partner to set up this trail in the Socorro area.

Commissioner Wearne asked for further explanation when there are forced closures of the Bosque and how long is the Bosque closed.

According to Mr. Mitchell, it depends on the conditions. They work with the Rio Grande Conservancy District, State Forestry and the local fire departments to determine closure. If they close, it is typically around the July 4<sup>th</sup> timeframe when conditions are dry and fireworks could pose a problem. He explained that the average closure is about 2-3 weeks or until conditions improve and the monsoon season starts.

**7. Old Business:**

**a. Update on Recreational Trail Program Funds for Rio Grande Trail Plan**

**Discussion/Questions:**

**New Mexico Trail Commission Meeting**  
**Thursday, May 19, 2016**

Chair Tafoya opened the discussion by providing some background information. At previous meetings the commission discussed the need for an overarching plan. The first step is to look at the plan developed in 2008 from Belen to Sunland Park and use this information as a baseline moving forward. Then there is a need to look at the northern segment which would be Belen to the Colorado Border. Other state and local agencies have done some work, but we hope to be able to partner with them and bring all pieces under one umbrella. This is not a plan that can be developed overnight and EMNRD will be working with the New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT). The hope was to start right away but due to some bureaucratic issues, NMDOT is still looking at identifying the match funding and working on the Request for Proposal (RFP). EMNRD will be entering into an agreement by end of September or October with the NMDOT then the RFP will follow.

- Representative Steinborn asked if the funding is still committed from the NMDOT recreational trails program and if the scope of work was the same as discussed at previous meetings. It was discussed that the NMDOT funding was still committed and that the scope of work would remain the same.

**a. Rio Grande Trail Sign Designation at New Mexico State Parks**

*Discussion/Questions:*

Chair Tafoya provided commissioners with samples of signage that incorporates the Rio Grande Trail designation. EMNRD will be installing signs in the next month or so at Elephant Butte and Mesilla Valley Bosque State Parks. Chair Tafoya noted that the signs do not include a logo at this time. She emphasized the importance of working together with the communications work group and the commission prior to designing a logo.

**8. New Business:**

**a. Report from Work Groups**

**Alignment Work Group** – The alignment work group reported a change with the Chair as follows: David Certain is the new Chair and Aaron Detter will be the Vice-Chair. Dr. Certain commented that the most significant work product of the group is getting the scope of work drafted and the RFP out to bid. As soon as that happens, information will be shared with other work groups.

**New Mexico Trail Commission Meeting**  
**Thursday, May 19, 2016**

**User Work Group** – Commissioner Toby Martinez reported that he developed a mailing list with all the members and will continue to work on establishing communication with work group members, including recruiting additional members to the work group to have broad representation. Commissioner Martinez requested assistance identifying areas where there are voids and encouraged others to join. He hopes to have group representation from all areas of the state.

**Resource Work Group** – Gina Dello Russo reported that the group has met once, with a lively discussion – resource protection and enhancement is very complex. The group is proposing to coordinate with the selected contractor to complete the master plan and implement outreach events with local communities that document area concerns. According to Gina, the work group is small but encourages others to join. Gina also mentioned the group is looking for opportunities that would attract people to the trail, including ecotourism and other opportunities for local communities to shine.

**Design and Management Work Group** – Commissioner Pete Mattox reported that similar to other work groups, this group is anticipating information from the master plan, especially, specificity of vision, multi-use of the trail, or creation of separate trails. Commissioner Mattox mentioned the possibility of inviting Mr. Matt Nelson, Executive Director of the Arizona Trail Association, to speak at the next meeting. Commissioner Mattox believes it will be helpful to have a model, such as the Arizona trail and to draw from their experiences with building and maintaining long-distance trails in the Southwest. Commissioner Mattox recommended the book “Rails to Trails” as an excellent primer for anyone interested. Commissioner Mattox reported that cyclist groups are interested in the RGT as a natural corridor for a US Bike Route System – modeled on the highway interstate system but for bicycles. Commissioner Mattox also mentioned interest from the equestrian community to have access for horse trailers and corrals and signage clarifying who yields to one another.

Questions:

- Chair Tafoya mentioned that Caballo Lake currently has corrals for horses.
- Representative Steinborn clarified that certain parts of the trail will only allow certain activities and thus there should not be an expectation that the trail will accommodate all users and all activities. It really depends

**New Mexico Trail Commission Meeting**  
**Thursday, May 19, 2016**

on the geography and terrain but there should be an effort to accommodate as many users as possible.

**Communications Work Group** – Aimee Barabe reported on behalf of Secretary Rebecca Latham. Ms. Barabe reported that Tourism Department purchased the domain name: [www.riograndetrailnm.com](http://www.riograndetrailnm.com) as well as secured handles on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter: facebook.com/rgtnm and Twitter and Instagram are both @riograndetrailnm. As they generate content, they will share with social media.

Questions:

- Representative Steinborn asked if there is a way to begin promoting the first 21 miles of the trail as designated by Governor Martinez last year. It is a great opportunity for the state and hopes the Tourism Department can help facilitate and lead the way.
- Ms. Barabe responded that she thinks there are ways to highlight specific areas of the trail and looks forward to a partnership with EMNRD.

**Interagency Work Group** - Representative Steinborn, lead; Commissioner Zunie is the Vice-Chair and will lead the outreach/tribal consultation component with Native American tribes. Representative Steinborn would like to send a survey to partners and get feedback for concerns before the next meeting.

Commissioner Zunie reported that she spoke at the Indian Resource Advisory Council (IRAC) in January during which she introduced the idea of the Rio Grande Trail and gave a brief report on progress of the RGTC to date. She talked to the tribal leaders about participation in the RGT and indicated that some were excited about the economic impact and talked about connecting with existing trails.

Commissioner Zunie also reported that other tribes don't want to have anything to do with the Rio Grande Trail effort. Commissioner Zunie indicated that approximately 14 of the 19 pueblos have annual appointments for leadership. She conveyed that the RGTC is still in the planning stages, and asked for tribal input and indicated that she intends to keep them informed. Commissioner Zunie scheduled the first interagency work group meeting on June 1, 2016 and the meeting is open to anyone that would like to attend. Commissioner Zunie will share the Rio Grande Trail fact sheet and communicate progress at the June 1<sup>st</sup> meeting and will encourage the tribes to participate early in the process.

**New Mexico Trail Commission Meeting**  
**Thursday, May 19, 2016**

Questions:

- Commissioner Detter made a general comment that he really has high hopes for the RFP as this is a great opportunity for New Mexico. There are many consultants that specialize in this type of work and he hopes to have someone on board and start sharing information with all the work groups and the public.
- Representative Steinborn emphasized that legislation specifies that participation for the Rio Grande Trail is voluntary, and there will be no eminent domain. Representative Steinborn believes that we can work around private property owners or tribal lands as this is not an all or nothing effort.

**b. Mount Cristo Rey Discussion** – Representative Steinborn reported on progress regarding the property during the 2016 New Mexico Legislative Session. The property is currently owned by Insights El Paso, a non-profit organization but received the donated land from Jobe Concrete Products, Inc. House Memorial 35 was passed during the 2016 legislative session which encourages Insights El Paso to engage in discussions with El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro trail Association, the State Parks Division the New Mexico Museum of Natural History and Science, Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA), the Rio Grande Trail Commission, the Roman Catholic diocese of Las Cruces and New Mexico State University and other stakeholders to study the possibility of a New Mexico entity acquiring the property for the continued enjoyment and preservation of the site’s natural and paleontological resources.

-Senator Cisneros noted the important contribution this segment will have to the overall Rio Grande Trail. He is interested in the next step toward acquiring the property. Senator Cisneros would like to proceed expeditiously to garner the idea and pursue this opportunity.

-Chair Tafoya noted that EMNRD, DCA and other partners, will conduct a feasibility study to find out what the property contains and evaluate what the next steps are. A meeting will be held within the next few months to take a look at the property.



**New Mexico Trail Commission Meeting**  
**Thursday, May 19, 2016**

**8. Public Comment:**

- Yasmin Najmi, Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District spoke about a RGT alignment with the conservation district, with a few caveats such as additional public input. The Conservancy serves 11,000 irrigators and 6 tribes. Many opportunities exist in Socorro for finding a multi-use trail but there will be a need for the Conservancy to maintain access to the levees. She stressed the importance to consider the environmental sensitivity to Bosque.
- Tammy Schurr, Board Member, Velo Cruces was at the RGTC meeting in Las Cruces. She wanted to introduce the concept of having a US Bike Route (USBR) system in connection with the Rio Grande Trail. Ms. Schurr provided maps for interested commissioners.
- Gabe Boyle, City of Elephant Butte discussed some concerns – they want to complete a trail in the area but don't want to wait for the RGT to be finished. They are anxious for the economic impact and tourism that will come from the trail and can't afford to wait for this process to move forward. Chair Tafoya responded that one of the first segments of the RGT are at Caballo and Elephant Butte. Representative Steinborn commented that even though the Secretary can create trails, he is fine if the City of Elephant Butte takes the lead in the area but we do need to coordinate efforts and involve all partners.
- Tom Romero, Executive Director, Northern Rio Grande Heritage Area (including Taos, Rio Arriba, and Santa Fe counties) noticed that the early maps indicated that most of the area north of Cochiti runs through heritage land that he represents. They would like to participate in any way possible and currently have contact with the pueblos and all three counties are represented on their board. He is definitely interested in coordination with RGTC.
- Bonnie Bagley – Representing the horse community, is here to stress the historic precedence for horses, pack mules etc. on trails in New Mexico. Ms. Bagley points out that this can also be used as a tourist draw. Ms. Bagley mentioned a program in the Village of Corrales for horseman to erect hitching posts around public areas. They also help subsidize small business owners to replace hitching posts in historic areas. This makes the areas horse friendly and can be part of the tourism attraction.
- Stephen Verchinski discussed his perspective and vision for trails and the Rio Grande Trail. He mention concern if the trail is closed for any period of time

**New Mexico Trail Commission Meeting**  
**Thursday, May 19, 2016**

during the year. He thinks a trail should be accessible year round, especially for foreign visitors. If it is closed for any length, could be a problem for people that come from outside the country. Word would spread that it is not reliably accessible.

**9. Future Meeting Date:**

Chair Tafoya opened the discussion by recommending the next meeting be held in Albuquerque in September. Commissioner Zunie motioned to hold the next meeting of the Rio Grande Trail Commission in September in Albuquerque, NM. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Pete Mattox and the motion was unanimously approved.

**10. Adjournment:**

Chair Tafoya asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting at 3:40 pm. Commissioner Zunie moved to adjourn and the motion was seconded by Commissioner Laurie Wearne.