

RIO GRANDE TRAIL COMMISSION (RGTC) MEETING
September 25, 2018
Coronado Hall, El Taoseño Room
120 Civic Plaza Drive, Taos, NM 87571

1:00-3:00 PM

Members Present:

Ken McQueen, Chair	Secretary, EMNRD
Christy Tafoya, Vice-Chair	State Parks Division, EMNRD
Fernando Martinez	Designee, EMNRD
David Griscom	Designee, Department of Tourism
Shannon Glendenning	Designee, NMDOT
Toner Mitchell	Public Member

Legislators

Senator Steinborn

Members Absent:

Commissioner Kelley	Designee, Economic Development
Commissioner Shije	Secretary, Department of Indian Affairs

Vacant:

Toby Martinez (resigned)	Public Member
Laurie Wearne (resigned)	Public Member
Pete Mattox (resigned)	Public Member
Dana Feldman (resigned)	Public Member

1. Call to Order – The Rio Grande Trail Commission meeting was called to order by Chair McQueen at 1:04 PM.

2. Roll Call – Commission Coordinator Busemeyer called the role as reflected above.

3. Approval of Agenda – Chair McQueen requested that the agenda be amended to move the proposed designation of Rio Grande Trail segments in the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument up to follow the approval of the minutes. A motion to approve the agenda as amended was made by Vice-Chair Tafoya and seconded by Commissioner Glendenning. The motion passed unanimously.

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4. Approval of Minutes – Chair McQueen asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the August 29th meeting. A motion was made by Vice-Chair Tafoya and seconded by Commissioner Martinez. The motion passed unanimously.

5. Old Business

a. Rio Grande Trail Designation in Rio Grande del Norte National Monument

John Bailey, the Superintendent of Rio Grande del Norte National Monument stated that in March, 26.5 miles of Rio Grande Trail were designated within the monument and today they hope to add an additional 30 miles. Mr. Bailey thanked Jeff Tafoya, Whit Patterson, and Brad Higdon for all of their work on the designation process. All of trail segments are on land managed by the State Land Office, Bureau of Land Management or the Department of Game and Fish.

Mr. Bailey then presented a map showing the location of the proposed East Rim Trail Alignment starting at the Colorado border. The trail consists of two-track and will stay open to vehicles and there are several single-track trails that lead down to the river in the area. Some proposed trail alignments go through State Land Office parcels. The BLM is still hoping to acquire some of that land within the monument, but that may not happen for several years.

There are trailhead facilities at Sheep's Crossing where the East Rim Trail ends. The BLM has planned a trail from Sheep's Crossing to Las Vista de Questa. EMNRD has leased a portion of this trail segment from the State Land Office.

Whit Patterson, with the BLM was introduced and showed some photographs of portions of the trails along the Rio Grande Gorge. He stated that the Rim Trail is very close to the Rio Grande and using the existing two-track has some advantages. The Red River Fault Loop Trail to the south will be a desirable place for users to find campsites. The BLM is considering adding some primitive sites in the area later. The Pescado Trail leads to the trailhead at the Red River Fish Hatchery where there is wi-fi, cell service, and other amenities. The Pescado Trail connects to the Rinconada Loop Trail and the Wild Rivers visitor center is also in the area.

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Mr. Bailey showed several more images of the area. He stated that the BLM will work with the Carson National Forest to develop a trail through the Cebolla Mesa area that connects to the Horse Thief Mesa Trail. The BLM and Forest Service are currently working on getting a foot bridge installed over the Red River. They are hoping to have a contractor start working on that in the fall. At this point it is not clear where other connections and crossings will be made.

Whit Patterson stated that earlier today BLM staff signed a decision record concerning the programmatic plan for the monument earlier today, which will include trail portions that are not currently in the monument's Travel Management Plan. A large buffer is included around the areas in case the trail needs to be rerouted. The BLM has spoken to the Rocky Mountain Youth Corps and others concerning future trail implementation in the area of the John Dunn Bridge. The trail work would stop at the Taos Junction Bridge because they have not made a decision about where the trail would go from that point. The BLM will do more environmental assessments and tribal consultation and outreach in future.

An attendee asked if any planned Rio Grande Trail designation goes into the Rio Grande Gorge. Mr. Patterson responded that the Rio Grande Trail would not go into the gorge but there are a lot of trails that go down to the river that are mapped and marked but not included in the designation.

Chair McQueen directed the commissioners to their handbooks and where the details of trail segments are described. Chair McQueen asked for a motion to approve the proposed trail segments on BLM land as Rio Grande Trail.

A motion was made by Commissioner Glendening and seconded by Commissioner Martinez. The motion carried unanimously. Chair McQueen thanked all of the BLM employees for all of their hard work in making the dedication possible.

Vice-Chair Tafoya directed the commissioners to tab B in their handbooks, which showed the proposed trail alignment through State Land Office lands. Ms. Tafoya stated that EMNRD had reached out to the State Land Office and established a right-of-way for the proposed trail segments, some of which

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would need to be built. EMNRD conducted a cultural resource survey of these areas, and conducted tribal consultation. EMNRD hopes to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with the BLM so that they could manage the trail segments.

Commissioner Glendening asked what the plan would be moving forward, after the two-year right-of-way lease expires. Chair McQueen responded that the State Land Office and the BLM are negotiating a land swap for segments within the monument, and if that occurs, there would be no need to renew the lease. If a land swap does not happen, EMNRD would need to extend lease.

Chair McQueen asked for a motion to approve trail designation. A motion was made by Vice-Chair Tafoya and seconded by Commissioner Martinez. The motion passed unanimously.

b. Update from Alta Planning and Design

Jean Crowther, with Alta Planning and Design stated that a draft of the Rio Grande Trail Master Plan was being reviewed by the Commission. She reviewed the plan's content and timeline. The Alta team is currently in the public outreach phase of the planning process. The team hopes the master plan will be accessible to the general public and stakeholders.

Mike Rose with Alta Planning and Design reviewed the results of the current "Virtual Open House," which will be available to the public through October 9th. About $\frac{3}{4}$ of the participants in the current open house did not participate previously. The average age is older than expected, too. There is an even split of genders. Establishing "gateway communities" and trail branding were identified as the highest priority strategies moving forward. People want the trail to have connectivity in general, but also to connect to the history, ecology, and cultures in New Mexico. Some people also stated that they would want virtual access to the Rio Grande Trail in order to learn more about New Mexico, which people from other places want to visit.

An attendee asked if there was an effort for trail marketing to tie into events in gateway communities and places nearby. Ms. Crowther stated that they have made a recommendation to have a structure in place that would support and

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promote communities near the trail. Culture and events were one of the main things people mentioned that they wanted to see along the trail.

An attendee asked if there would be interpretive signs along the trail. Ms. Crowther responded that they don't get into the specifics of signage like that, but they hope that would be done. Chair McQueen added that before today there were just smaller segments of trail, but now that there is a more continuous trail hopefully the public will see more action concerning the trail from the Department of Tourism and other entities.

Another attendee noted that the Camino Real is called out as a significant aspect of the trail in the Rio Grande Trail Act and suggested that north of Ohkay Owingeh the focus could shift to the Old Spanish National Historic Trail. The alignment isn't exactly the same, but there are areas where both could interface. Someone else asked how much of the preferred alignment follows the Camino Real National Historic Trail. Mr. Oberdorfer responded that the Alta team hadn't tracked that exactly, but there are several places where the trails cross each other. It may be around 15-20 miles where alignments are shared. The attendee then asked if there will be an app to follow trail and get information. Ms. Crowther responded that a consistent online presence is a goal. The process has not started yet, but creating a unique app for the trail could be an option.

Senator Steinborn asked what the process will be to gather data from Pete Livingstone who hiked the length of the state along much of the preferred alignment. Ms. Crowther stated that he is still hiking and once he finishes, they would learn more, but they have been in contact with him since the beginning and will incorporate what they can. Senator Steinborn stated that some of the information will be critical, such as water infrastructure and challenging areas. By knowing where water supplies should be augmented, it would be possible to create fresh water opportunities for people. If commission could identify places where water is needed, it would be possible to ask the legislature for money to that end.

Senator Steinborn also asked if shelter locations would be included in the plan. Ms. Crowther stated that those things would be included in plan by getting information on what people would need or expect and using that information

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to make recommendations on where shelter and water is needed. Senator Steinborn asked if opportunities for river recreation would be included in the plan and Ms. Crowther stated they would, and access points would be mapped.

Mr. Oberdorfer added that Mr. Livingstone had been in touch through the course of the hike and sent a text message that one of the most important discoveries at this time was that the north end of Elephant Butte Lake State Park was the most difficult portion so far. There was little access to water and lots of mesquite. About 150 miles of the hike was on highway in order to avoid going through pueblos and other places where there was private property. There is very little road shoulder on much of that stretch, which was dangerous. Mr. Oberdorfer plans to join the hikers at the Texas border at noon tomorrow.

Rosemary Romero, with the Alta Planning team, stated that she and Vice-Chair Tafoya had met with Tom Romero, executive director of the Northern Rio Grande National Heritage Area and they will be coordinating with Heritage Area to collaborate on things like non-profit outreach and fundraising. Vice-chair Tafoya and Ms. Romero also met with elected officials from Truth or Consequences and the City of Elephant Butte. The more they have interfaced with officials, the more engaged people are aware. For the next two months they will be meeting with county officials along corridor.

6. New Business

a. Possible Trail Designation in the City of Elephant Butte.

Vice-Chair Tafoya stated that the City of Elephant Butte's City Council asked the Commission to look into adopting 1.9 miles within the municipality. Vice-Chair Tafoya met with elected officials to talk about the alignment proposal. The resolution put forth at the City Council meeting is similar to the resolution adopted by the City of Las Cruces to have the La Llorona Trail designated. The trail is on the west side of Elephant Butte Lake State Park. The city will have a formal request for designation within next couple of weeks. Chair McQueen stated that at this point the proposed designation is an informational item and the proposed alignment will be posted online.

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7. Update from Chair

Chair McQueen thanked the BLM for working so hard towards today's designation. Vice-Chair Tafoya and Rosemary Romero made a presentation about the Rio Grande Trail to board members of the Northern Rio Grande National Heritage Area. Vice-Chair Tafoya and John Busemeyer will meet with the International Boundary and Water Commission to discuss the possibility of trail designation along some of their levees. Commissioner Shije, Vice-Chair Tafoya and Chair McQueen met with Anthony Ortiz of San Felipe Pueblo about the Rio Grande Trail. He expressed opposition to trail going through the Pueblo. Vice-Chair Tafoya and Chair McQueen also met with the Governor of Taos Pueblo this morning to extend an invitation to the dedication event on October 2nd. The Commission will continue to engage the Northern Pueblo community.

8. Report from Work Groups

David Certain, with the Alignment Work Group reported that a subset of the group reviewed scores for the Rio Grande Trail alignments in the monument that were introduced today. He has also been talking to Ms. Crowther about meeting soon to review the Rio Grande Trail Master Plan and provide feedback.

User Workgroup- no report.

Resources and Design and Management Workgroups- Ms. Crowther stated that the groups were involved in developing methodology for the plan but have not met recently.

Interagency Workgroup- no report.

9. Public Comment

Tom Romero thanked Vice-Chair Tafoya and Rosemary Romero for presenting to the National Heritage Area's board members and said that they are excited about the potential of spreading out the trail to link the communities along the Rio Grande.

Mr. Oberdorfer added that Mr. Livingstone had been updating his trip on social media regularly and brought up the topic of "trail angels" who have

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helped him out along the trail including Tom Romero, who brought him lunch, and fishermen who helped him out with water.

Ms. Crowther reminded people to log into the virtual open house if they haven't done so already.

Mark White, of Cerro, NM stated that he hoped the BLM could provide some facilities in the area near the lava tube springs. There are great wildlife and cultural natural resources in that area.

Ms. Romero mentioned that she had heard that paraglider is traversing the length of the Rio Grande and hoped that some photos would result from that.

10. Future Meeting Date

Chair McQueen stated that the next meeting would be in November or December depending on the trail segment designation process. He also reminded attendees of the Oct. 2 event at 11 am at the Rio Grande Gorge Bridge. Governor Martinez and the Deputy Director of BLM will be there to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Trails Act and Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. John Bailey added that it is also the 50th anniversary the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River segment, since it was one of the first river segments to be designated. A hike will take place before the ceremony north of highway 64 to determine possible future trail alignment.

11. Adjournment

Chair McQueen asked for a motion to adjourn, which was made by Commissioner Glendenning. The motion passed unanimously and the meeting was adjourned at 2:34 pm.