

Fremont County WPLI Advisory Committee Minutes

FINAL

January 9, 2017 | 6:00 p.m. | Fremont County Commissioners Chambers

Meeting called by	Douglas L. Thompson, FCPLI Chairman	Advisory Committee: Travis Becker, Reg Phillips, Gary Horton, Rick Mickelsen, Ginger Bennett, Josh Milek, Nick Dobric and Julia Stuble
Type of meeting	Regular	Public: Lauren Heerschap, David Lloyd, Jennifer McCarty, Juan Laden, Butch Parks, Cody Booth, Nick Hunkerstorm, Jaz McDonald
Note taker	Becky Enos Amy Amack	Agency: Jared Oakleaf (BLM)

AGENDA TOPICS

Welcome | *Chairman Doug Thompson*

Doug welcomed everyone to the meeting and had Advisory Committee members and members of the public introduced themselves.

Approval of Agenda | *Chairman Doug Thompson*

Josh Milek was added to the agenda to talk about the ORV and Snowmobile Recreation Reports provided by the Wyoming Department of State Parks & Cultural Resources.

Approval of Minutes | *Chairman Doug Thompson*

Julia moved, Ginger seconded, to approve the minutes of the Regular Advisory Committee meeting held on November 28, 2016. Motion carried unanimously. Nick submitted typo errors to be corrected prior to being published on the website. Ginger added under Senate File 56 there needs to be clarification that the Senate File 56 and the study of state management of federal lands are issues separate from the WPLI being discussed by this group.

Sweetwater Rocks Complex Site Discussion | *Chairman Doug Thompson*

Doug discussed with Natrona County Commissioners at the County Commissioner Winter Meeting held in Lusk. Natrona County expressed that they have confidence in Fremont County WPLI Advisory Committee making a recommendation for the Sweetwater Rocks Complex. Doug discussed the Sweetwater Rocks involvement with Natrona County Commissioner John Lawson. John said the Natrona County Commissioners would like to see the Sweetwater Rocks Complex to be treated as a whole even with a portion located in Natrona County. John hopes to be assigned as the liaison to the Fremont County WPLI Advisory Committee for Natrona County when that recommendation is made. At the time of the discussion, these assignments had not been made by the commission in Natrona County. John expressed that the Natrona County Commissioners are confident in the recommendation of the committee for the Sweetwater Rocks Complex as a whole. Doug discussed that there would be advertising in Natrona County about the Sweetwater Rocks site visit, meetings, and the committee's

recommendation. Doug was satisfied with the discussion and communication with Natrona County at this point in reference to the Sweetwater Rocks Complex. Julia asked the group how the committee could receive public comment from Natrona County residents and be available for the hearing of the WPLI recommendation. Julia wants to see if there is way for someone from the WPLI Advisory Committee to go to Natrona County instead of always asking them to travel to us. Ginger suggested that the committee should give that same respect to Riverton, Dubois, and other communities in Fremont County. Doug suggested that this being a separate county it would be beneficial to have meetings with a presentation there as well as in other areas of the Fremont County once a recommendation is made so the public comment would be focused on the WPLI Advisory Committee recommendation.

Sweetwater Rocks Complex Site Visit | *Chairman Doug Thompson*

Doug is concerned about the upcoming site visit since the ground is covered with snow at the Sweetwater Rocks Complex. He said driving around the complex may not be an option under the current weather conditions. Doug would like to hear from the committee about deferring until weather warms up so as to be able to do a full analysis of the complex. If the committee would still like to have the site visit on January 14th, the best location for that would be to meet at the rest area near the site, have a presentation by Jared, but is it worth it to do so. Reg is familiar with the area and would rather have an opportunity to see the complex without the cover of deep snow instead of just driving by it and would be in favor of postponing the site visit to a later time when there is less winter. Travis is concerned that the site visit has been advertised in Natrona County and that there is not a good line of communication to let people know that the site visit has been canceled until a later date and that would be the drawback to postponing the site visit. Travis agrees with Reg and prefers to have the site visit when the site could be seen in depth instead of from afar. Doug asked for suggestions of how to cancel the site visit for Saturday. Julia mentioned to post it on the website and to write on the posters that have been distributed but was concerned it would only reach people who visited the website or looked at the posters. Julia suggested to keep the scheduled site visit for a half of a day by going to the rest area for a viewing and go back in the spring. Reg asked if there was any other place to see Sweetwater Rocks besides the rest area. Jared mentioned if you had land owner permission there may be other areas to meet. David mentioned that there may be potential to hike in from Agate Flats but even at this site you may not have a full sense of the magic of the area without getting in there such as amongst the domes. He said Agate Flats Road is a better location than the rest area this time of year but would recommend waiting until the complex is more accessible at a later date. Doug confirmed that Agate Flats is a county road that is maintained during this time of year. Doug suggested he would go down to the rest area if the site visit was cancelled so if people showed up he would apologize and let them know it would be rescheduled when an in depth site visit could be done. Doug said he would notify the Natrona County Commissioners of the postponement and they would also communicate it to the community as well. Travis agreed and is concerned that the site visit would not be productive due to the current weather conditions. Reg asked if there were any stipulations in the spring in regards to access to the Sweetwater Rocks Complexed. Josh said there are no winter closures by BLM however landowners in the area particularly in the in Lankin Gap country have unbranded cattle in the state lease and typically do not like to have people traveling in the area due to loss of livestock since people leave gates open. He is confident that with coordination with the landowners, Doug and Reg they shouldn't have a problem with a site visit in these areas at a later date and making sure gates are closed and livestock are undisturbed by the visit. Reg asked if there were any problems with a site visit in this area that would affect sage grouse areas. Jared was not sure and would have to bring that information back to the committee. He confirmed there are no closures to the public therefore that would not be a concern for a site visit to this area. David stated that there is an area where signs are posted from the state saying do not enter from this date to this date. You can still get a sense of the area of the complex without entering that portion. Doug proposed cancelling the site visit for January 14th with no objections from the committee. He will notify Natrona Commissioners and ask them to put out a public service announcement and will wait at the rest area as mentioned before. Julia will post to the website. Doug suggested Gregory at the state be notified as well so he can post on the website, Julia mentioned

Oil City and Josh mentioned County 10 as well.

Sweetwater Rocks Complex Overview | *Jared Oakleaf, BLM Outdoor Recreation Planner*

Doug asked if the committee would want to hear the presentation about the Sweetwater Rocks Complex now or closer to the site visit. Jared was in agreement with whatever the committee wanted to do. Travis asked that Jared not present information on the Sweetwater Rocks Complex until closer to the site visit since it could be two to three months before an in depth site visit can be conducted due to the weather conditions so as to have it fresh in their minds prior to the site visit. Julia suggested to ask the audience if they attended tonight's meeting and was here to specifically voice their opinion about the Sweetwater Rocks Complex. Doug asked Jared to answer any questions from the audience about the Sweetwater Rocks Complex and to postpone the presentation until before the site visit. Jared distributed handouts about the Sweetwater Rocks Complex to the audience that the committee had received prior to the meeting. There were not any questions from the audience at this time.

Decision Making Process (Recommendation) | *Chairman Doug Thompson*

Doug said we do not have to all site visits done before starting work on the recommendation process. He asked the committee if they were comfortable with starting the recommendation process during the January 23rd meeting. Doug is working on an instrument similar to the site visit evaluation tool. He mentioned documenting the recommendation on a Google spreadsheet talked about at a previous meeting. Doug wants to make sure we are able to quantify the activities occurring in each of these landscapes. Relevance and importance of this activity occurring there at present, potentially in the future and historical data which is similar to the initial evaluation of the landscape done by the BLM. This would better explain the WPLI recommendations of why an activity should continue there or these new activities should occur there or not occur there. This instrument will be crucial to document the WPLI Advisory Committees work to congress. Ginger has been talking with a GIS specialist about this type of instrument in terms of spatially so the already existing maps of roads, game and fish walk in areas, elk areas, deer areas and etc plus the BLM's ACEC and wilderness study areas would be pulled altogether. Doug is hopeful that this process and instrument will show us where we need to do more homework, so this process may not be completed in one night. Doug asks that everyone bring their ideas to the next meeting to give them a starting point of what is needed within this evaluation instrument. Doug reminds the committee that in Fremont County the committee will come up with a set of recommendations and that there are eight other counties that are going to be doing the same thing. Doug has proposed to Gregory that this committee's evaluation instrument could be used as a template for them as well. If each county can use a similar template for a recommendation it will make aggregation of all the recommendations from across the state easier to do and more fluid for Congress as well. It may be easier said than done and each recommendation may carry a data portfolio with it of supporting information. But if the recommendation process has a template that we can use across the state he thinks we will do better with Congress. Rick said that's great foresight to have consistency with the recommendations.

Doug asked the group which site they would like to start with. Rick mentioned Cooper Mountain as a starting point for the recommendation process due to its simplicity. Several committee members did not like the idea of having a full recommendation for one site without seeing all of the sites. Doug agrees this would just be a starting point and nothing would be final until all sites have been visited.

Ruckelshaus Institute- Public Comment Documentation Availability | *Chairman Doug Thompson*

Gregory has informed Doug that the Ruckelshaus Institute in Teton County <https://tetonwpli.org> has developed an interactive website for the public to leave comments on. Julia stated that Teton County is soliciting public comments in two different ways: a form and an interactive map that can be accessed by a smart device or through the internet. The interactive map is where you can geo reference your comment to a specific location. Doug said once

a draft recommendation is created for a particular site it can be placed out on the interactive map and people can comment and tag it through their smart phone or the internet. He likes that it can be placed on the WPLI website and the group can open/close access to the draft recommendation for an allotted period of time. Making sure advertisement is done so the public knows of its availability. Doug likes that the comments are recorded within the interactive map. The downside is this type of format can be bombarded with generic comments of like or dislike with no substance to the comments. He said the group would need to make the public aware, like the BLM has done, that this is not a vote but a place for substantive comments. Doug will get the link to Josh to put on the website for the interactive map for public comment, then the committee will open and close the forum by committee action. Ginger would like to preview it before making it available to the public. Julia commented that Teton is using this interactive map to solicit information from the public in how they use this area, where do you bike, where do you hunt. Doug would like to use this interactive map for the next step to comment on the draft recommendation, for example a person could comment if you close access to this area I will not be able to hunt my favorite spot. Travis would prefer to have the public use the form that is on the website instead of using this interactive map because he is concerned that the majority of the comments would not be substantive. Julia likes the interactive map because it is more site specific since the comment would be geo referenced, where with the form you may not be able to write down the GPS coordinates. Julia thinks the interactive map would be a better resource for information gathering than to use it for comments on the draft recommendation. For example, a person could geo reference a location on Copper Mountain with the comment, at this vantage point I can't see any marks of human development and I value that. Doug will see if a presentation can be done for the January 23rd meeting and the committee can make a decision after the presentation if the committee will use the interactive map for public comment. Gary agrees with Travis and Julia and would like to see the committee formulate a question for the public to answer such as what do you use the area for would limit what their responses could be and will hopefully eliminate non-substantive comments. Travis agrees and wants to see the committee take the time to develop that or the interactive map may not be a valuable resource to the committee. Doug tabled the issue until after the presentation at the next meeting on January 23rd.

Wyoming ORV and Snowmobile Recreation Reports | *Josh Milek*

Josh passed out handouts on two economic studies completed in 2012 for the state of Wyoming, one for snowmobile recreation and the other for off road vehicle activities around the state. These studies will be difficult to directly relate to the WSA sites mainly because this activity is not allowed in these areas. Nick clarified that these activities are not allowed in the majority of these areas. Also these studies are statewide, and the majority of identifiable recreational trails are on national forest and most of the sites are on BLM. Key information Josh would like to point out is the off road vehicle use brought in roughly \$244 million per year of economic activity to the state of Wyoming. Also in the study, the survey's showed 15% of ORV use had a primary destination of central Wyoming to the east side of the Wind River Mountain Range. Meaning roughly \$36 million of that economic activity was in this area. Snowmobile use in this area was 6% of the state's total which is roughly \$9-10 million in revenue to this area. These studies were conducted by mail out surveys to addresses of resident and non-resident people who registered their ORV's or snowmobiles in the state of Wyoming. Out of the 2000 surveys sent ORV owners returned 40% of their surveys and the snowmobile responded was considerably less. Overall this information is based off of 1000 surveys per each study.

New County Commissioner Orientation | *Chairman Doug Thompson*

Doug updated the committee on Fremont County Commission news. Two new commissioners were sworn into office on January 3rd, one of the newly elected commissioners was present at the meeting, Jennifer McCarty. Also Travis Becker was voted as the new chairperson for the Fremont County Commissioners. Doug would like to invite the commissioners to the next meeting since they will eventually be voting on the recommendations of this committee and would like them to know or be involved in the process this committee is using to make these recommendations. Travis appreciated Jennifer for attending the meeting and hopes other commissioners will take

interest in attending these meetings or at least the next meeting. Julia would like that all of the commissioners receive a charter of what the group is doing. Reg would like each member to talk about what they are doing for their represented groups. Doug wants the committee to provide the commissioners with an overview of what the committee is doing and its progress in the recommendation process and each member introduce themselves and give the commissioners a brief background of themselves and who they represent.

Public Comment | *Audience*

Juan Laden, a resident of Lander, would like aerial target practice to be added as a historical use at the Sweetwater Rocks Complex. Juan has spent over 40 years in the Sweetwater Rocks Complex personally rock climbing, camping, photography as well as teaching rock climbing there through NOLS during the 1970's. He is glad the committee has postponed the Sweetwater Rocks Complex site visit until a later date when the complex can be better evaluated. He is very fond of the area's uniqueness and natural beauty with its box canyons, dikes that are eroded out, and reminds him of a rock garden or sculpture where you can remove yourself from the rest of the world within the complex. There are very few places that you can climb to that elevation in Wyoming and see that much wildland free of human presence. Also there are ventifacts, sandblasted rock formations, located within the rocks that he has only seen in one other place which was Antarctica. He wants it to be protected as a wilderness area. He also commented on the bolts already in place in the area and to his knowledge are on Lankin Dome, Moon Stone, and the right side of Split Rock. He feels the permanent impact of leaving these bolts in place is fairly minimal which to the average person traveling by can't see with the naked eye. Now if a sling is left up there which has happened in the Wind River Mountain Range and the wilderness can sometimes be seen.

David thanked Doug for talking with Natrona County and wanting to manage the Sweetwater Rocks Complex as a whole. He was glad that the site visit had been postponed so it can be seen during a better time of year. He did ask the committee why Tin Cup and Long Creek Mountains were not included in with Sweetwater Rocks Complex since they are located in the same vicinity. They are not managed as WSA's. He is concerned they will be turned into a granite mine in the future. He was wondering if these two domes could be included in the recommendation of the Sweetwater Rocks Complex. Doug stated that there is a significant amount of private land on Long Creek Mountain also Tin Cup Mountain has significant visible signs of previous granite mining.

Julia asked David the location of Long Creek and Tin Cup Mountains to which he responded that they were located west of Lankin Dome.

Jared wanted to clarify that the Sweetwater Rocks Complex WSA's are areas where currently, granite mining is not allowed.

Next Meeting, Committee Comments and Adjournment | *Chairman Doug Thompson*

Doug set the next meeting for Monday, January 23rd at 6 pm.

Reg is concerned about the recommendation process tool. Such as if the use of a spreadsheet or Google document format could accurately calculate or put a value on the use of these sites by the public and the effects of one activity to another. Travis agrees with Reg that this will be an obstacle to determine what that value is and how does that rate in comparison to some of the other activities. Nick hopes as they start evaluating the sites some of these questions will be answered and the value will develop itself as they move through the recommendation process.

Julia is pleased at the committee's progress and looks forward to setting up a recommendation process tool even though as they move along through this process they may find holes or gaps. As they initiate this next step and start to move towards recommendations, it will not be done hastily. But the need to start in necessary so they can formulate a process so they can make a recommendation.

Doug believes the success or failure is dependent on how the committee approaches this process and how they

work through this process to develop the draft recommendation. He expects each member on this committee raise the concerns of the constituency they represent in how these areas will be used and its value to the site. As this process continues each member voices the importance and relevance of that activity to the site. To start the recommendation process, seeing how it works and having those interactions will be educational. The committee needs to start moving from the information gathering stage to the analysis stage by working through the recommendation process on one of these sites. Nick asked if the meetings will be hosted closer to the communities of the sites during the recommendation process so public comment could be included. Doug was concerned by doing this so early in the recommendation process that it may create a weighted recommendation toward that certain community instead of the group as a whole. He thinks the committee should have a drafted recommendation to take into the community instead of going to the community first. Gary agrees to have ground work done within the committee so as to decide what is important and what is relevant to this process and take a draft recommendation back to the community would be best especially since the committee doesn't know how this recommendation process is going to go, there may be review of the same site several times prior to a recommendation being developed.

There being no further business, Travis moved, Nick seconded, to adjourn the meeting at 7:00 p.m.