

RIO GRANDE TRAIL COMMISSION (RGTC) MEETING

January 6, 2016

8:30 AM – 12:00 PM

Hotel Encanto

705 S. Telshor Blvd.

Las Cruces, New Mexico

Members Present:

David Martin, Chairman	Secretary, Energy, Minerals & Natural Resources Department (EMNRD)
Christy Tafoya, Vice Chair	Director, State Parks Division, EMNRD
Jon Barela	Economic Development Department
Kelly Zunie	Indian Affairs Department
Aaron Detter	Designee, Transportation Department
Rebecca Latham	Tourism Department (via telephone)
Pete Mattox	Southern New Mexico Trail Coalition
Laurie Wearne	Director, Talking Talons Program
Dana Feldman	Public Member
Toby Martinez	Public Member
Toner Mitchell	Trout Unlimited

Legislators (Advisory Members):

Representative Jeff Steinborn

Senator Carlos Cisneros

1. Call to Order – After introduction of commissioners and audience members, the New Mexico Trail Commission meeting was called to order by the Chair, Secretary Martin at 8:42 am.

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

3. Approval of Agenda – Chairman Martin called for comments on the agenda and Commissioner Mattox moved to approve the agenda. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Feldman and the motion was unanimously approved.

4. Approval of Minutes – Chairman Martin called for comments on the October 11, 2015 meeting minutes. Commissioners Laurie Wearne and Toby

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Martinez proposed revisions to the minutes. Commissioner Martinez moved to approve the minutes as revised. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Zunie and the motion was unanimously approved.

5. Adoption of Open Meeting Resolution - Chairman Martin asked commissioners for comments and input regarding the Open Meeting Resolution for 2016. Commissioner Mattox moved approval of the 2016 Open Meeting Resolution, Christy Tafoya seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

6. Discussion of Work Groups – (Vice-Chair Tafoya) – Chairman Martin turned over the discussion of Work Groups to Christy Tafoya. Christy provided an overview of the goals of the various groups.

User Groups Work Group – The goal of the group is to define user groups and user needs for the Rio Grande Trail. The group would also identify river recreation opportunities along the trail and define and recommend features, facilities and enhancements for the trail related to user needs. For now, this group would be comprised of hiking groups, equestrian groups, wildlife enthusiasts and others.

Resource Work Group – The goal of the group is to work on natural and cultural resource protection along the Rio Grande Trail.

Alignment Work Group – The goal of the group is to define trail segments and locations of the trail and provide a timeline for establishment. They will work with the Resource Work Group to minimize environmental and habitat impacts. The group will review the Southern Rio Grande plan alignment, the Bernalillo to Belen (middle Rio Grande) alignment planning and the Northern Rio Grande plan alignment. We will hear the most from this group today. Not much planning has been done in the Northern area of the state so they will be doing much more work in this area.

Design and Management Work Group – The goal of the group is to propose standards and guidelines for design and operation of the trail. They will also deal with safety and liability issues and questions with property owners.

Communications Work Group – The goal of the group is to ensure good communication between work groups and the general public. The group will work on a plan for marketing, branding and expanding trail partnerships.

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Interagency Work Group – The goal of the group is to reaching out to other agencies such as tribes and pueblos that have an interest in Rio Grande Trail issues related to trail planning and implementation.

7. Presentation:

Ms. Ellen Esposito, Board President & Mr. Phil Goodell, Board Member and Geologist at UTEP, and Mandy Kirchgessner, Ph.D., Executive Director at Insights El Paso Science Center (Insights).

The purpose of the presentation is to discuss a piece of property owned by Insights which may be a potential start for the Rio Grande Trail.

Who we are - Founded in 1980, Insights is a private, not for profit organization. They have a STEM center, located about 3 blocks from the Juarez border. Insights is the owner of 211 acres of dinosaur trackways at the border of 2 countries and 3 states.

Why are we here – Insights has a New Mexico resource with many stories to be told about the property. Dinosaur trackways are located at the base of Mt. Cristo Rey, adjacent to the Rio Grande. The property was donated by Stanley Jobe after the trackways were found. Each year, about 35,000 pilgrims climb up to Mt. Cristo Rey, which is on the Juarez, Mexico side.

Cultural Significance – Historic roads and railroads were a part of the history of this location; this area is along the historic Camino Real; the Butterfield Overland Stage route ran through the area. This site has proximity to Interstate 10 and the Rio Grande, and also has a nice trail used by hikers and bicyclists.

Political Jurisdictions – This site is located at the juncture of 3 states, 2 countries and the property is located in the city of Sunland Park, New Mexico. Santa Theresa is located just north.

Industry – This site was previously quarried for brick making, and is close to Asarco Smelter (defunct), Toto Cement Plant (defunct) and El Paso Brick Co.

People – There is evidence of Native Americans, Spanish explorers and settlers following the Camino Real, as well as Missouri volunteers.

Scientific Significance – UTEP, NMSU, and the Museum of Natural Sciences have many projects ongoing and many more are possible.

Biology – This site is in the Chihuahuan desert with a very diverse ecology due to the proximity of the property to the Rio Grande.

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Geology and Paleontology – The tracks at the site include fossils from the Cretaceous period. They are 100 million years old, and include dinosaur tracks and trace fossils. The abundance of fossils is enormous, exceptionally well exposed and many studies continue.

Trail Map – This map has pictures of tracks and walking trails even though many tracks are not uncovered and will be protected. Eric Kappus, discovered the tracks while on a geology field trip for a class, when he found tracks and sent pictures for verification. He was later instrumental in protecting the property and getting it donated to Insights El Paso.

Numbers of parties of interest – 212 paid tours since May (only public tours), 120 self-reported visitors since August. UTEP and NMSU teachers and students, boy girl scouts, Texas Master Naturalists all use and enjoy the property.

Other Property Features – There is a QR code self-guided tour; easy access from 1-10, ample parking spaces; and excellent stargazing. This property holds countless opportunities for this site such as hiking, nature explorations and multicultural experiences.

Joint Goals – Insights is trying to preserve the property and RGTC is creating a trail to enjoy the beauty of the land and enjoy the history. Insights has the same goal for education and cultural preservation. However, Insights does not have the resources to preserve the land on its own and they need help. They have also talked to the New Mexico Museum of Natural History as well as other organizations about partnerships.

Questions:

Representative Steinborn asked about ownership of the land. Ellen Esposito responded that Insights owns the land but they are open to opportunities for land to be transferred to anyone else, ideas for protecting the property and open for opportunities for collaboration. She also mentioned that due to a lot of erosion, more tracks have not been uncovered. They want to focus on educating the public. They don't want to limit the possibilities and look forward to getting advice from other organizations. Ellen Esposito clarified that the entire property owned by Insights is located in New Mexico. Representative Steinborn thanked them for the informative presentation and looks forward to future collaborations.

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Senator Cisneros – Mentioned a conservation easement statute that exists and thinks there is an opportunity for Insights to continue to own the land but make it tax free and open to the public.

Commissioner Barela – Commented on a couple of points. First, he suggested the possibility of working with El Paso County and City of El Paso on ideas to preserve the site. Second, he pointed to an anomaly that could affect the Rio Grande Trail. There is approximately 8-10 miles of the Rio Grande that runs through Texas then back into New Mexico. He thinks the Commission will need to consider the 8 mile stretch and work with the City of El Paso and Texas.

Commissioner Zunie – Asked about the annual cost to maintain the property. Dr. Kirchgessner responded that the biggest expenses are taxes and insurance which currently run about \$4-5 thousand/year on the 211 acres. Right now, they do not have the resources to properly maintain the property. She estimated it would cost about \$10-20 thousand to properly maintain and preserve the property.

Commissioner Tafoya – Asked about the sources of funding currently supporting the property. Dr. Kirchgessner responded that mostly corporate philanthropists in the area such as the junior league provide donations. She also added that the board is trying to cultivate corporate relationships for additional sources of funds. Commissioner Tafoya asked about trail alignment and Dr. Kirchgessner responded that while trail alignment does exist, it needs to be cleaned up and maintained.

Commissioner Zunie – Asked about opportunities to transfer ownership. Ellen Esposito responded that yes, they would be interested if it protects property.

Representative Steinborn – Asked about the number of visitors per year. Dr. Kirchgessner responded that from last May to January 2016 there were over 200 plus over 130 self-reported. Representative Steinborn asked if they have applied for federal grants. According to Ms. Esposito, they are always applying for grants. She also commented that this is a great opportunity for New Mexico and there has been discussion with New Mexico Museum of Natural History to take ownership.

Commissioner Barela - Expressed interest in being a part of a sub workgroup that can work with Mexico and other organizations since he currently has established working relationships in his role as Secretary of Economic Development Department.

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Senator Cisneros - Mentioned the possibility of legislation that would assist in providing funding for conservation easement and ownership. Ellen Esposito clarified that the property is located in New Mexico.

Commissioner Mattox - Underscored the importance of the anomaly that Commissioner Barela raised – the Rio Grande does leave New Mexico into Texas then comes back into New Mexico.

8. Old Business:

Discussion of Rio Grande Trail Domain Name

Commissioner Latham discussed her research regarding a domain name and reported that she was able to purchase and secure the name “Rio Grande Trail NM.com” but it redirects to NM.org/riograndetrail. She also acknowledged the need for a future free standing website. Commissioner Latham recommends a phased approach to build and market this website with the work to be conducted by a professional web designer. Commissioner Latham indicated that the Tourism Department can provide marketing support, photos, etc. with the understanding that they will later transfer the domain ownership over to EMNRD.

Questions:

Representative Steinborn asked how soon the commission can begin to promote the existing segments of the Rio Grande Trail, the segments the Governor has designed as the start of the trail. He thinks this is a great way to incentivize other communities. Commissioner Latham responded that she believes it can be done with relative ease. Tourism does not have resources to write or design the content but can partner with EMNRD to create content very quickly.

Commissioner Christy Tafoya also responded that New Mexico has 6 parks with great trail alignments that are in great shaped and are signed. EMNRD can start promoting immediately with improvements to signage.

Commissioner Feldman asked about the need to secure the corresponding domain name for other social media. Commissioner Latham responded that this has not been started but it is possible to start at any time.

Senator Cisneros mentioned that the Association of Counties approached him for sponsorship of legislation related to water, creating an advanced mapping fund. The legislation was written to include an appropriation of \$1 million to use Lidar technology for mapping of the Rio Grande Trail. This was

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discussed during a presentation to the interim legislative Science, Technology and Telecommunications Committee. Lidar is surveying technology that can create 3 dimensional mapping and can help mapping efforts of the RGTC.

9. New Business:

a. Report from Work Groups

Alignment Work Group - Commissioner Detter led the discussion and presented the draft scope of work under Tab B. In October, Secretary Church announced dedication of \$500 thousand with a state match of 14.56 percent. NMDOT still needs to work out the details of the match. The RFP is seeking a consultant to assist EMNRD and the RGTC in managing the planning process, and to develop the master plan and subsequent regional alignment studies. Commissioner Detter emphasized this is a draft and can be changed.

There are two phases: The first phase is the development of master plan and the second phase is detailed planning and alignment identification by region.

Phase One – The first task is identifying existing conditions, opportunities and constrains analysis, and the second task is developing an overarching vision and goals. Phase one includes a robust GIS component and heavy narrative component that summarizes legislative context; history of trail development; existing plans and policies; cultural resources and contemporary cultural sensitivities; environmental settings and sensitivities; jurisdictional context; and contemporary cultural settings. The narrative will be broken down by regions to include the Southern Rio Grande and Central Rio Grande and Northern Rio Grande regions. The Southern Rio Grande corresponds with the existing body of work and includes the Texas/Mexico border area, extending north to Belen. The Central Region extends from Belen to Pilar and includes the master planning in the Belen to Bernalillo section. The Northern Rio Grande region is from Pilar to the Colorado border and encompasses the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument master plan. The second task is to develop overarching vision and goals and includes three deliverables – a wall size exhibit map, single-page brochure and a social media plan. The third task is

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to develop a preliminary and final master plan and includes four deliverables.

Phase Two – This phase will include detailed planning, alignment identification by region. The first task will include the analysis of alternatives the second task will be a report on preferred alignment plan for implementation.

Discussion/Questions:

Chairman Secretary Martin acknowledged and thanked Secretary Church for identifying the funding source for this important task.

Senator Cisneros – Indicated that Lidar technology could assist with the mapping. Mr. Wright with SF County can help with the local application of the Lidar technology. Senator Cisneros supports moving forward.

Commissioner Tafoya is excited about working on the project and appreciates working with NMDOT. She thinks the scope of work is realistic.

Commissioner Toby Martinez – Asked about the timing of deliverables. User Group would want to interface. Commissioner Detter responded by discussing a start point – it would begin with approval of RFP from commission. The organization answering RFP would need to provide a calendar of due dates.

Chairman Martin - Noted that timing is critical, need to get RFP out by March. Chairman Martin also suggested fixing the reference in the document to “bi-monthly meetings” and spelling out acronyms.

Representative Steinborn - Commented on the importance of working with different user groups and finding ways to embrace alternate opportunities on the trail. He hopes this is included in the proposal and encouraged the commission to move forward, it looks comprehensive.

Commissioner Zunie - Suggested a subcommittee look over and approve small changes.

Chairman Martin - Asked for tentative approval with the understanding that commissioners can provide comments in the next few weeks but prior to the start of the legislative session.

Commissioner Zunie - Moved to move forward with RFP. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Barela and was unanimously approved.

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User Work Group – Commissioner Toby Martinez – Nothing to report was waiting for additional volunteers from this meeting and he has reached out to other volunteers in his area. He will establish a mailing list for communication.

Resource Work Group – Gina Dello Russo is still contemplating the scope of work and has not contacted group members but wants to make sure she can take it on and thinks this group can work with the alignment work group.

Design and Management Work Group – Commissioner Pete Mattox – Touched base with members of this group. He believes it would be useful for the work group to have specificity from the commission regarding the multiple users. Commissioner Mattox commented that a lot work has already been completed but requires more study and review.

Approximately 64 miles of the trail are in the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument. About a 148 mile stretch – Belen to Pilar needs more work. Belen to Sunland Park – 2008 document exists of a Rio Grande trail corridor analysis. Not a large population in New Mexico, but most of New Mexico's population lives along the Rio Grande. Two major points – sustainable trails are more economical in the long run and economical trails are not always sustainable. Second point is that multiple users need to be defined.

- Representative Steinborn asked Commissioner to further explain his two points.

Communications Work Group – with regard to securing names for social media, Commissioner Rebecca Latham commented that after further consideration, she recommends not doing this. Between State Parks and Tourism, there is already a good social media outreach and it is very active. She stated that the group really needs a designated person to constantly post new content and manage. Commissioner Latham recommends sticking to NM True social media outreach and NM State Parks social media outreach to further promote the Rio Grande Trail. She expressed concern with splintering efforts. For example, if each New Mexico state park or tourist destination had a social media channel, it might splinter efforts. She believes there is not enough content right now to make social media relevant for the Rio Grande Trail. She suggested we continue using outreach via target e-mail and other media to engage stakeholders.

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- Commissioner Feldman commented that she was just suggested grabbing the names for social media. She does not want to splinter and dilute the message.
- Commissioner Latham raised concern that just grabbing the names and not actively using them makes the RGTC look lazy – it has a negative connotation.

Interagency Work Group - Representative Steinborn, lead; Commissioner Zunie will lead the outreach/tribal consultation component with Native American tribes and Fernando Martinez (EMNRD) will take the lead in the northern part of the state. The group expressed an interest in having more materials on hand to begin this effort, a fact sheet helps. Commissioner Zunie's group has not met yet.

b. Discussion of Rio Grande Trail Fact Sheet – Members were provided with a draft fact sheet for the Rio Grande Trail created by EMNRD staff to review and approve. Commissioner Mattox moved to approve the fact sheet. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Mitchell and was unanimously approved.

Discussion/Questions:

Senator Cisneros requested that all members of the Legislature receive a copy of the RGT fact sheet.

Commissioner Zunie commented that the fact sheet will be a great document to reference while communicating with tribal governments and it would also be helpful to have a map showing tribal and pueblo boundaries as related to the trail.

Commissioner Tafoya commented that State Parks can pull together a more general map for a dialogue with tribal governments.

Commissioner Wearne commented that she would also like a copy of the fact sheet and map from Commissioner Tafoya digitally.

10. Public Comment:

- Andrew Bencomo commented on the significance of the trail as an economic development driver but is also interested in how can local communities access the trail easily on a daily basis. He also commented that recognizing the many multiple uses is important.

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- Dan Carter – Southern NM Trail Alliance – Thanked the commission and commented that they are already working to align efforts, outreach in Southern New Mexico and engaging volunteers to help. They also represent non-motorized users. Mr. Carter mentioned that parallel routes are a good idea for various users and finally, that the community is excited about this effort.
- Tammy Schurr – A tour leader and event planner, she is interested in adventure cycling and the work on the Rio Grande Trail. She commented that destination marketing is very important, especially to establish a partnership with EMNRD and Tourism. She is excited about the Commission and is interested in making all New Mexico trails adventure cycling destinations.
- Dr. Mandy Kirchgessner – Stated that she was highly encouraged the Commission to consider using Facebook to keep in touch with users in various regions of the state.
- Bonnie Bagley – Representing the horse community, is ready to support this trail. The organization has many chapters in New Mexico, which specialize in building trails and are very successful working with other groups on multi-user trails.
- Nathan Small – A Las Cruces resident, complimented the Commission for creating an open dialogue with the community. Mr. Small also commented on destination marketing in Southern NM and highlighted many of the outdoor attractions and existing gems in the area. He encouraged outreach to the sportsman community such as water fowl hunting, back country horseman etc. This will help avoid conflicts in the future.
- George Pearson – bicycling enthusiast – Commented on the importance for different users to have access along the route.
- Pat Bowls – Back country horseman, commented on the need to have a trail that allows pack horses which includes keeping the trail wide enough.
- Carlos Rivas – with Run Culture – asked if the RGTC anticipates charging a fee. Commissioner Tafoya responded that it is premature to be talking about fees. She commented that existing New Mexico State Parks do have required fees so it likely will be a consideration.
- Ken Coppedge – Commented that the trail would be a great resource for educational purposes for use by NMSU students without applying for commercial permit. He also mentioned the Lidar technology in Ft. Stanton cave study project.

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- Susanna Santillan – NM Commission for Deaf and Hard-of Hearing -
Expressed interest in helping the effort, specifically by disseminating information. Accessibility for the deaf and hard-of-hearing and others with disabilities would be great.

11. Future Meeting Date:

Chairman Martin discussed having the next meeting in March or April. Prior to picking a date, a list of dates will be circulated to commissioners to try to accommodate as many commissioners as possible. Chairman Martin would like to continue to have the meetings along the Rio Grande Corridor. Commissioner Zunie suggested a location central to everyone such as Albuquerque which would also be central to many of the pueblos and other user groups along the Bosque.

The optional tour to Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park was moved up to 1:00 p.m. for those interested in participating.

Representative Steinborn thanked the public for attending, participating and supporting the Commission and encouraged the Commission to post the Fact Sheet so the public can have more information about the Rio Grande Trail. He also noted some of the major challenges and expectations for the group.

Commissioner Zunie also thanked the public for participating, especially for such an enthusiastic turn out from the citizens of Las Cruces.

12. Adjournment:

Chairman Martin adjourned the meeting at 11:13 am.