

New Mexico Trail Commission Meeting
9:00 am Wednesday, July 29, 2015
State Capitol, Room 309
Santa Fe, New Mexico

Members Present:

Dave Martin, Chairman	Secretary, Energy, Minerals & Natural Resources Department (EMNRD)
Wade Jackson	Designee, Economic Development Department
Kelly Zunie	Secretary, Indian Affairs Department
Tom Church	Secretary, Transportation Department
Rebecca Latham	Secretary, Tourism Department
Pete Mattox	Southern New Mexico Trail Coalition
Christy Tafoya, Vice Chair	Director, State Parks Division, EMNRD
Laurie Wearne	Director, Talking Talons Program
Dana Feldman (Via Conf call)	Public Member
Toby Martinez	Public Member, former State Forester

Members Absent:

Toner Mitchell	Trout Unlimited
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Legislators Present:

Representative Jeff Steinborn
Senator Carlos Cisneros
Senator John Ryan

Other Participants:

Terry Heslin	Bureau of Land Management – NM office
Michelle Jacquez-Ortiz	Senator Tom Udall
Joshua Sanchez	Senator Tom Udall
Paul Haidle	Senator Martin Heinrich
Jeremiah Ritchie	Office of the Governor
Ann McLaughlin	NM Dept of Transportation
Robert O’Brian	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Gina Dello Russo	Ecologist, Socorro Community
Larry Hersman	Public
Ernie Bean	Public
Staci Matlock	Santa Fe New Mexican

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1. New Business

- A. Introduction of Commissioners
- B. Introduction of Commission Legal Counsel – Cheryl Bada
- C. Introduction of Elected officials

Chairman Martin welcomed all participants in the audience, asking everyone to introduce themselves.

2. Roll Call - The first meeting of the New Mexico Trail Commission was called to order by the Chair, Secretary Martin at 9:05 am.

3. Action Items:

- A. Approval of Agenda – Chairman Martin called for comments on the agenda. Commissioner Tom Church moved to approve the agenda. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Rebecca Latham and the motion was unanimously approved.
- B. Approval of Open Meetings Act – Chairman Martin asked commissioners to review a copy of the Open Meetings Act and asked for comments. There being none, Commissioner Tom Church moved to approve the copy of the Open Meetings Act, Commissioner Tafoya seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved.

4. Comments from Sponsors of the RGT Legislation:

Chairman Martin asked the sponsors of the enabling legislation to provide some brief remarks.

- Representative Steinborn emphasized that the idea of a Rio Grande trail was not new but rather a culmination of past ideas and concepts. He emphasized that this is a significant effort that crosses multiple jurisdictions and one that will require a long-term integrated effort. Representative Steinborn thanked previous State Parks Directors, Governor Martinez and everyone that supported this effort and the legislation. It is going to be a great effort for all New Mexicans.
- Senator Cisneros commented on the significance and potential of establishing a Rio Grande Trail and its potential to become a national and international tourist attraction for New Mexico. He believes it will

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showcase the natural beauty of New Mexico and is pleased to be a part of the effort and looks forward to walking the trail.

- Senator Ryan expressed his initial hesitation for the concept of a trail that would go through the north valley of Albuquerque, due to the many parcels of private land that it would cross. Once the new concept was developed and explained, he realized it was bigger but still would like to see how it affects his district and constituents. He hopes the commission will look at creating the trail in a non-intrusive way paying special attention to private-property owners and allowing them to have input into the process.

5. Review of Video on Appalachian Trail:

Chairman Martin asked members to review the YouTube video documentary of the Appalachian Trail. The video is very informative and lasts about 1 hour. The link to the video was sent to all commissioners to convey the concept that would be similar to what the commission is trying to accomplish.

6. Handout of Governor's Press Release:

Chairman Martin directed commissioners to the Governor's Press Release provided in the binders. He briefed members on the news conference held on Tuesday, July 28th during which the first 23 miles of trail were designated as the first pieces of a network that would someday span the length of the New Mexico along the Rio Grande. The trail would stretch more than 500 miles from Texas to Colorado. Chairman Martin emphasized the Governor's commitment and support for this effort.

Commissioner Toby Martinez commented that he would like to see local press releases in order to generate input from the public. He is aware of various organizations in his community that are interested in trails.

Chairman Martin committed to getting out information quicker to members and will provide more advanced notice of commission meetings.

7. Presentation from State Parks Division (SPD):

- Commissioner Christy Tafoya, SPD Director provided the commission with a brief background starting in early 2000 when the effort to create a trail originally began. Commissioner Tafoya mentioned that the Rio Grande Trail Coordinating Committee was the organization that was the precursor to the

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RGT commission. In early 2000, the Rio Grande Trail Coordinating Committee created a charter, mission and vision statement. She will send the documents to everyone.

- Commissioner Tafoya explained that geographic stakeholder meetings were held, a full-time position was created in the State Parks Division, Dr. David Certain was hired and EMNRD contracted for a plan to align parks in the lower Rio Grande, between Belen and Sunland Park. The initial meetings also included discussions with property owners and with the Mid-Region Council of Governments and Bureau of Land Management.
- According to Commissioner Tafoya, the 23 miles designated lie in six state parks: Elephant Butte Lake, Caballo Lake, Leasburg Dam, Mesilla Valley Bosque, Percha Dam and the Rio Grande Nature Center. Many of these state parks have existing designated trails and educational centers in addition to various recreational activities such as fishing, hiking, birdwatching etc. Commissioner Tafoya emphasized that the trails are not interconnected. She then provided highlights of each of the six parks. Commissioner Tafoya emphasized the significance and role that volunteers have in creating trails in New Mexico. She concluded by stating that this is an amazing opportunity to connect trails of the past such as the Camino Real and trails of the present.

Questions/Comments on the presentation:

- Senator Cisneros expressed interest in connecting existing trails in southern New Mexico to northern New Mexico including relevant signage from the start to finish.
- Commissioner Zunie asked how many tribes might be affected by the new trail. Commissioner Tafoya responded that the Rio Grande pueblos but likely will affect many other tribes and she committed to consulting all tribes. Commissioner Zunie asked if the tribes were consulted in the past. Dr. David Certain from SPD responded that they were not, since previous work only involved existing trails with agreements already in place. Commissioner Zunie encouraged the commission to begin outreach to the tribes sooner rather than later.
- Commissioner Maddox asked who would be responsible for maintaining the entire trail. Commissioner Tafoya responded that SPD would guide the effort but further discussion would be necessary to designate responsibility.

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8. Discussion:

A. A Path Forward

B. Concept of the Trail

C. Stakeholder Involvement

D. Engagement of the Various Land Holders

Chairman Martin asked for discussion on items 8 A-D.

- Senator Cisneros commented that funding to maintain the future trail will be necessary. Consideration may need to be given to developing a state funding source or possibly a user fee. He suggested developing a budget and presenting to LFC.
- Representative Steinborn commented about the possible subcommittee structure and thinks the majority of work will take place outside the regular meetings. As a starting point, he requested Commissioner Tafoya bring a map with jurisdictions, existing path routes and other data from previous work that would be helpful.
- Commissioner Latham would like to explore the possibility of packaging and promoting both the Continental Divide Trail and the Rio Grande Trail.
- Commissioner Mattox relayed his knowledge and experience hiking the Continental Divide Trails. He believes similar issues and challenges that occurred with the Continental Divide Trail will arise with the Rio Grande Trail. Creating and promoting the trail will be a long-term project.
- Terry Heslin representing the Bureau of Land Management provided the commission with a background on the Continental Divide Trail from the national perspective. He also identified potential partners and stakeholders.
- Representative Steinborn suggested obtaining a “national scenic trail” designation which would provide a permanent federal funding source and would help in the promotion of the trail. Chairman Martin indicated there is also potential funding from various non-profit organizations that are interested in the Rio Grande Trail.
- Commissioner Mattox explained that the Appalachian Trail conservancy is comprised of 13 separate chapters but they have one with oversight responsibility.
- Commissioner Church thinks a good way to organize the structure would be to segment or break it into areas such as cultural or community. It makes the 500 mile trail more manageable and easier to focus.

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- After a robust discussion of the significance and importance of engaging the many land holders, Chairman Martin committed to sending out all of the previous work completed by the department and discussed by Commissioner Tafoya in order to have a full discussion with land holders. The commission also discussed the significance of involving private land holders and tribal governments so that all parties can have “ownership” in creating the trail.
- E. Webpage Development – Gabe Sisneros from ENMRD briefed the Commission on the “framework” for a webpage for the Rio Grande Trail which includes a Home Page, Commissioners, an “About” section that links to the original legislation, a “Meeting” section that will include future agendas and meeting minutes and finally a section with the webcast of each meeting. Commissioners asked Mr. Sisneros to research the possibility of creating the website outside of EMNRD and the ability to link back or to other agency’s such as Tourism Department.
- F. Proposal for Committees and Work Groups – Commissioner Tafoya proposed the following: User Groups/Technical Issues; Property Ownership; Marketing and Communication; Safety, Liability and Law Enforcement; Tribal Consultation; Funding; Chapter Discussion; Resource Protection and Blue Trails. Commissioners discussed adding the following: Recreation Group; Birding Group; Route; Education and Interpretive Group. Commissioners also discussed limiting the number of committees that participate. Suggestions are to create a committee, subcommittee structure with duties and functions, circulate to commissioners and receive comment. Commissioners asked Christy Tafoya to look at consolidating the list and review other models such as the “segment” approach taken by the Appalachian Trail and provide a list for circulation prior to the next meeting.
- G. Next Steps/Other – Commissioners discussed having representation on the commission from Department of Cultural Affairs and the State Land Office

9. Public Comments:

Several members of the public indicated that they were interested in being involved in committees. In addition, several individuals had suggestions related to consolidating committees and moving a future plan forward, indicating that they were willing to assist.

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10. Action Items:

- A. Future Meeting Date – Chairman Martin will circulate the next potential meeting date to commissioners and noted that it will likely be in Taos with a follow-up meeting around November in the southern part of the state such as Las Cruces or Elephant Butte.
- B. Adjourn – Commissioner Toby Martinez moved to adjourn, the motion was seconded by Commissioner Wearne. The meeting adjourned at 11:15 am.