

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

**June 12, 2018**

**Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum**

**Las Cruces, NM**

**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
Suzette Shije	Acting Secretary, DIA

**Legislators**

Senator Rue  
Senator Steinborn

**Members Absent:**

Benjamin Cloutier	Designee, Economic Development
Toner Mitchel	Public Member
Representative Armstrong	
Representative Gonzales	

**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 1:03 PM.

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

**3. Approval of Agenda** –

Chair McQueen asked the commissioners if there were any changes to the agenda. Seeing none, Chair McQueen asked for a motion to approve the

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agenda. A motion was made by Commissioner Griscom and seconded by Senator Steinborn. The motion passed unanimously.

**4. Approval of Minutes** – Chair McQueen asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the March 14<sup>th</sup> meeting. A motion was made by Vice-chair Tafoya and seconded by Senator Steinborn. The motion passed unanimously.

**5. Update from the Chair**

Chair McQueen thanked the Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum for hosting the meeting and gave a brief background on the Rio Grande Trail Commission. Chair McQueen stated that leading up to the meeting, the BLM has been working on NEPA documents and planning to designate an additional 20 miles of trail in the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument. The Commission is hoping to designate additional trail segments on state land within the monument during the summer. The BLM is working with the USFS to connect trails along the Rio Grande Gorge.

Vice-Chair Tafoya and Chair McQueen met with the Department of Game and Fish to discuss using the Red River Fish Hatchery as a trailhead for the Rio Grande Trail. State Park staff and Rosemary Romero met with Tom Romero of the Northern Rio Grande National Heritage Area to discuss possible partnership opportunities with that entity.

Vice-chair Tafoya met with Mike Hammond of the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District and the City of Albuquerque to discuss possible inclusion of the Paseo del Bosque and other trails as part of the Rio Grande Trail. Vice-chair Tafoya and Chair McQueen met with the International Boundary and Water Commission to discuss the possibility of designating trail segments on land they manage.

Rosemary Romero met with Senator Steinborn to discuss motorized use on Rio Grande Trail segments. Segments that are included in the Rio Grande Trail that already have motorized use can still be included without change, but newly constructed segments will be non-motorized. Senator Steinborn has also had discussion with the County of El Paso about connections and to the Rio Grande Trail at its termination in New Mexico.

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Chair McQueen and Commissioner Shije have initiated formal government to government consultation with the Pueblos.

**6. Old Business**

**a. Rio Grande Trail Planning Contractor Update, Alta Planning & Design**

Chair McQueen introduced Jean Crowther of Alta Planning and Design. Ms. Crowther reviewed the overall schedule of the Rio Grande Trail planning project and the process of how alignments were chosen and scored. So far, the Alta Planning and Design team has mapped about 189 miles of existing trail along the primary alignment and an additional 290 miles of potential trail segments. Ms. Crowther then presented maps of the proposed alignments to the Commission.

The Alta Planning team has also been working on design guidelines, which Ms. Crowther presented to the Commission. The guidelines included the range of trail context, from urban areas to rural and backcountry trail types. They also determined who the users of the trail would be, which could range from people taking short strolls locally to through hikers. Wayfinding is also a critical component of trail planning, which should be consistent throughout the trail, but the types of signs would vary depending on location and trail type.

The Alta team is also in the process of drafting a trail oversight and management component for the plan. A non-profit would be an important component of the trail and could help facilitate trail management and convene stakeholders. The chapter will also help define the roles for different land management agencies, provide ideas on how to promote the trail, strategies for managing trail use and maintenance, and ways to galvanize support for the trail.

The next phases will be to have a draft in July followed by outreach and a virtual open house.

Senator Steinborn asked if there were estimates of the miles of trail that would be single-track and back-country, two-track, or along levees. Ms. Crowther responded that those estimates would be a next step in trail planning and they will have specifics in the draft and final plan.

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The Senator mentioned that the legislation specifically mentions river recreation opportunities and asked if that was something Alta had been looking at. Ms. Crowther responded that they were mapping river access spots. Senator Steinborn asked if they were looking at restrooms and shelters and other amenities along the way. Ms. Crowther responded that they will be mapping river access, trailheads, and campsites along the actual alignment. Beyond that, they will provide guidance on the frequency of shelters and water access.

The Senator asked, as far as the frequency of shelters, would the plan include recommendations on potential spots for the shelters. Ms. Crowther responded that she didn't think they would be getting to that level of detail, but there could be a discussion about making that a priority. The Senator said that he believed that was an important consideration for long distance trails. Vice-chair Tafoya stated that some of those data may be available in GIS databases.

Senator Rue asked when the creation of a non-profit should happen. Ms. Crowther stated that the creation didn't necessarily have to happen now, since there is strong institutional support for the trail. Chair McQueen added that creating a non-profit sooner rather than later would be beneficial, especially after the contractor has completed the plan.

Senator Rue asked what the process is for National Trail designation. Ms. Crowther stated that it is her understanding that designation of a National Scenic Trail has to be approved by Congress. Senator Rue asked if there would be opportunities later to change the alignment after the plan is in place. Ms. Crowther stated that it is a dynamic process and the master plan is an attempt to gather information and get everything as close to ready as possible and create a guiding document. There are always things that come up and new opportunities present themselves. Chair McQueen stated that he saw the Rio Grande Trail as a backbone through New Mexico that can provide opportunities for communities to connect to the trail and create new trail networks.

Commissioner Griscom added that the process for designating a National Scenic Trail begins when New Mexico's congressional delegation formally submits a request to Congress, which then determines what the administering

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agency would be. The administrating agency would then proceed with a feasibility study, which would take several years. The administrator would then start a public process to determine final alignments and such things as a logo.

Theresa Martinez of the Continental Divide Trail Coalition added that much of the work the Commission is currently undertaking would help to expedite the process of National Scenic Trail Designation.

**7. New Business**

**a. Presentation of potential Rio Grande Trail Logos by the New Mexico Department of Transportation.**

Commissioner Griscom presented five logos designed by New Mexico Magazine, which include aspects of color schemes and fonts approved by the Commission in 2017. The draft options represent what they hope represent the Rio Grande Trail. Some of the logos have a shield shape, which if inverted are the same shape as a National Trail logo. The first logo presented included the shape of a cottonwood leaf. The color of the leaf is the same color orange as used by the Department of Tourism's New Mexico True campaign. The second logo presented uses the campaigns font and prominently shows the RGT letters on a maroon background. The third is the shape of a waypoint marker with the outline of New Mexico with the river flowing through the middle. The fourth logo is a colorful scene with the river and mountains in the background, and the final logo is a black and white hand-drawn scene with mountains and a river, with an orange sun and maroon border.

Senator Rue wondered if basing the logos partially on the New Mexico True theme would present problems if that particular campaign ceased in the future. Commissioner Griscom stated that they tried to tie in the theme but kept them distinct enough to stand alone.

Senator Steinborn expressed his preference for the fourth option with some modifications. He also stated that he believed that the shield should be inverted to match the National Trail systems logo since the Rio Grande Trail will be a long-distance trail even prior to National Trail System designation.

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Several attendees also expressed their preferences and suggestions for the different logos.

**b. Presentation and discussion of proposed trail on State Land Office land within the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument.**

Chair McQueen stated that within the boundary of the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument there are several parcels not owned by the Bureau of Land Management. There has been an effort with the State Land Office to trade acreage with the BLM in order for the National Monument to have consistent ownership. Currently, the trails in the monument that have been used for many years go through the State Land Office parcels. There has not been any legal egress through these areas. The Energy Minerals and Natural Resources Department is negotiating with the State Land Office for a short-term, three-year lease for these trail segments so that they might be designated as part of the Rio Grande Trail and have a continuous trail from Colorado to Pilar, NM. If there are any future issues with the land trade between the State Land Office and the BLM, the short term lease will enable the Commission to designate the trails before the land trade between the State Land Office and the BLM is completed.

A complicating factor is that the current State Land Commissioner is not running again, and the future Land Commissioner may not be in favor of the land trade. A lease would enable legal egress onto the segments on State Land Office Land and it is hoped that these segments could be designated at the next Commission meeting.

Another issue is that some of the trails that go through state land are currently outside of the monument boundary and the BLM is attempting to move some alignments to within monument boundaries.

The lease for the trail would accomplish two things; it would enable there to be continuous trail designated within the monument sooner, rather than later, and it would also protect the established alignment in the event that the land trade between the State Land Office and the BLM fell through.

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**c. Presentation of by Theresa Martinez of the Continental Divide Trail Coalition.**

Theresa Martinez, the Executive Director of Continental Divide Trail Coalition provided a brief background of National Historic and Scenic Trails, which were created by an Act of Congress 50 years ago.

The Continental Divide Trail's managing agency is the Department of Agriculture, since much of the trail is located within National Forest land. The trail was designated as a National Scenic Trail in 1978 and is 3,100 miles spanning the Continental Divide from Canada to Mexico. It goes through 20 National Forests, four National Parks, and 13 areas managed by the Bureau of Land Management. It is a high elevation trail and has the highest point along any national or historic trail. The ecosystems range from desert to glacier. The trail is 95% complete.

The Continental Divide Trail Coalition was created to preserve and promote the trail corridor and surrounding lands, and protect and manage the values, features, critical to trail experiences and enjoyment. The coalition took a grass-roots approach that includes 14 communities in all five states. These communities are gateway communities that help promote and protect the trail but also benefit economically from the trail. The coalition has a small business toolkit that help promote and advertise small business along the trail that are resources for hikers.

The Coalition also has an adopt-a-trail program and helps with volunteer construction projects. They help with education and outreach by providing information like trail alerts, hazards and closures, newsletters, and trail planning guides. They function as a clearing house for information and provide partnership opportunities for various entities including outdoor retailers, private corporations, state and federal agencies, and local communities. Non-profits are able to accomplish many things that federal agencies and local governments cannot and are critical in the management of National Trails, which could not function without a private partner.

Chair McQueen asked if the Continental Divide Trail crosses any tribal lands. Ms. Martinez stated that it does not and could not, since National Scenic and

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Historic Trails must be opened to the public at all times, which is typically not possible if a trail goes through tribal lands.

**d. Report from Work Groups**

Alignment Work Group-

David Certain, Chair of the Alignment Work Group, stated that the group had not met recently but continue to provide input periodically.

User Work Group - No updates.

Resources Work Group- Ms. Crowther stated that the Alta team had been working to collect the necessary data that apply to the corridor to identify constraints and areas to avoid as they determine the preferred alignment.

Design and Management Work Group- Ms. Crowther said that the Design and Management work group has been providing feedback on the design and management portions of the draft plan and they will be meeting with the workgroups after the meeting.

Communications Work Group-

David Griscom, Chair of the User Work Group, informed the Commission that the group has provided feedback on the logos and will work with the contractor on outreach during the open house stage of the planning process.

Interagency Work Group-

Senator Steinborn said that the contractor and others have been doing a great job at reaching out to agencies and partners recently. Ms. Romero added that they have been meeting with the International Boundary and Water Commission, the Elephant Butte Irrigation District, the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District and Commissioner Shije has been in touch with the tribes. Meeting with the counties will be the next step.

**8. Public Comment**



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Peter Livingstone stated that the Southern New Mexico Trail Alliance has been working with the US Forest Service to establish a trail summit in Las Cruces at the end of September and encouraged those interested to log into their website. They will also be organizing a through hike along potential alignments of the Rio Grande Trail.

Theresa Martinez informed the Commission that there is a trail conference in Vancouver, Washington about the National Trails System that people are encouraged to attend and would be a great opportunity to network and learn about the National Trails System.

Commissioner Glendenning stated that the New Mexico Department of Transportation announced calls for projects that could be funded through the Recreational Trails Program. Tribal, local and public agencies can apply for funding for their projects. The final deadline is November 30<sup>th</sup>. There is also a call for projects that may be eligible for Federal Land Access Program funding.

**9. Future Meeting Date**

Chair McQueen stated that potential meeting dates for the Commission have tentatively been identified as August 21<sup>st</sup> in Santa Fe and September 18<sup>th</sup> in Taos. October 2<sup>nd</sup> is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Trails Act and the Commission hopes to have the bulk of the designation through the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument in place at that time, and hopefully there will be a ribbon cutting event.

**10. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 3:11 pm.