

Meeting Minutes
Rio Grande Trail Commission
Tuesday, September 14, 2021
Zoom Webinar

Members Present:

Deputy Secretary Todd Leahy, ENMRD, Chair
Toby Velasquez, ENMRD, State Parks Division Representative
Alexandra Navas, Economic Development Department, Outdoor Recreation Division
Peter Livingstone, Southern NM Trails – Trail Management Agency Representative
Jerry P. Valdez, Department of Transportation Designee
Kevin Cobble, Friends of Bosque del Apache – Bird Ecology Organization
Steve Harris, Rio Grande Restoration – River Ecology Organization Representative
PoQueen Rivera, Indian Affairs Bureau Designee
Lancing Adams, New Mexico Tourism Department Designee

Absent:

1. Call to Order

The Rio Grande Trail Commission meeting was called to order by Chair Leahy at 9:08 AM (MT).

2. Roll Call

Commission Coordinator David Certain called the roll as reflected above.

3. Approval of Agenda

Chair Leahy requested a motion to approve the meeting agenda. A motion was made by Commissioner Livingstone and seconded by Commissioner Navas. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Approval of Minutes

Chair Leahy requested a motion to approve the minutes from the previous Commission meeting. A motion was made by Commissioner Livingstone and seconded by Commissioner Adams. The motion passed unanimously.

5. Establish Trail Alignment Sub-Committee

Chair Leahy introduced the establishment of a Trail Alignment Sub-Committee to serve the Commission. Commissioners Livingstone, Cobble, and Harris each volunteered to serve on this Committee. Commissioner Valdez recommended Shannon Glendenning to serve. Additionally,

Robert Oberdorfer, Michael Madden, Dan Carter and Linnea Hendrickson volunteered to serve this sub-committee. To confirm, the initial members of the Trail Alignment Sub-Committee are:

- Commissioner Livingstone
- Commissioner Cobble
- Commissioner Harris
- Shannon Glendenning
- Robert Oberdorfer (coordination and support)
- Michael Madden
- Dan Carter
- Linnea Hendrickson

Additionally, the following volunteers were added to the Tribal Outreach and Infrastructure Sub-committees:

Infrastructure

- Linnea Hendrickson

Tribal Outreach

- Rosemary Romero (coordination and support)

6. Proposed Infrastructure Projects

Commissioner Livingstone introduced the process by which the Infrastructure Sub-Committee solicited and vetted project proposals for infrastructure additions along trail segments. He opened the floor to Commissioner Navas who provided a presentation outlining further details regarding the selection process and outcomes.

Commissioner Navas began by describing the origins of the funding, which was made through Senate Bill #377 for an appropriation of \$297,000 for the Outdoor Recreation Division to provide funding for the construction of shelters, restroom facilities, drinking water infrastructure and other needed trail infrastructure on the Rio Grande Trail. This funding needs to be invested by June 20, 2022, to the sub-committee solicited input for potential shovel-ready projects. Eligible applicants could be political subdivisions, tribal entities or nonprofits and funding requests could not be greater than \$100,000. The sub-committee received 14 project proposal submissions of which 8 were eligible applicants and 4 were eligible projects. There 4 selected projects are described below:

1. **City of Albuquerque** – Requests \$100 k for improved green and blue trail access and signage, shelter and picnic tables through sections of the City and Bernalillo County.
2. **Insights, Sunland Park** – Requests \$70 k for an improved trailhead which is to include an outdoor classroom, signage and shade shelter.
3. **City of Sunland Park** – Requests \$100 k for a shelter, trail, signage and trailhead improvements.

4. **Village of Tijeras** – Requests \$28 k for trees, native plantings and improvements around public infrastructure.

Commissioner Harris asked a clarifying question regarding the discrepancy between the overall project budgets and the appropriation. Commissioner Navas responded that she included the matching funds for these projects in her description to highlight the importance of collaboration between entities in support of these projects. For the four projects, the total was actually just \$400 over the appropriation amount. The balance of \$400 would be covered by the Outdoor Recreation Division.

Senator Jeff Steinborn was present and asked what plans the Commission had to seek additional funding to support this in the future. Commissioner Navas responded that they were committed to growing this funding in the years to come.

Attendee Susan Hering asked whether projects received special consideration due to the presence of matching funds. Commissioner Navas responded that this was not the case, but she had highlighted the amounts of matching funds for these projects because the underline the importance of cross-sector and departmental collaboration to implement these kinds of projects. Commissioner Navas offered to share a budget breakdown for the projects.

Commissioner Rivera asked if there had been any submissions from tribes for this funding? Commissioner Navas responded that they had not received any, but that notification had been shared with tribal representatives.

Commissioner Harris made a motion to recommend these projects be approved by the Outdoor Recreation Division. This was seconded by Commissioner Cobble. The motion passed unanimously.

7. Logo and Merchandise

Chair Leahy highlighted the importance of brand unity in both physical and digital marketing materials and on future wayfinding elements along the Trail. He indicated a need to consider trademarking the RGT logo to improve this coordination. They agreed that this was something to address as an action at the next Commission Meeting.

8. Public Comments

Question: Senator Jeff Steinborn opened up public comments. He asked about trail alignment and expressed interest in seeing this trail alignment continuing to grow with measures to fill infrastructure gaps along the way. He hopes to see folks be more proactive about seeking funding and continuing designations. Three particular areas look like low-hanging fruit: 1) Albuquerque, 2) Middle Rio Grande Conservancy, and 3) U.S. International Boundary & Water Commission (65 miles of trail waiting to be designated). Where are we with designation?

- Response: Chair Leahy said that he and Commissioner Navas have had conversations with the City of Albuquerque for those sections. International Boundary & Water sections have

been more challenging to move forward. Conversations with MRGCD are looped into conversations with COA.

Comment: Senator Steinborn: What about the Infrastructure Sub-committee? He offered to volunteer. He would love to see an alignment worked out and picking alternative routes that take advantage of alternative alignments through mountains, other areas. We could have alternative alignments until the day we choose a preferred alignment. We should continue to reach out to communities to get their buy-in.

- Response: Commissioner Livingstone noted that on some sections of preferred alignments, there are communities and nonprofits that would be interested in joining, but often there is a hurdle trying to coordinate these organizations or municipalities with local land management agencies. Sometimes there are barriers where these organizations don't know how to interact with each other.

Question: Dan Carter offered a comment about the alignment sub-committee, noting that this group might consider an alignment "corridor" with an official alignment, plus options for connecting trails – especially in more rural areas – that would connect to communities and offer more options for navigation. For example, the Continental Divide Trail is 50 miles on either side of the trail. Another comment, this group could consider drafting an interagency MOU to clarify some of the relationships and communication between agencies, so that everyone understands their role (this has been successful with the CDT). Finally, a note on working with IBWC: there have been reports on Doña Ana County of IBWC kicking recreational users off the Rio Grande Trail in areas that they manage. It is unclear what kind of users are being targeted, but this is creating a poor experience for users along this section of the trail.

- Response: Commissioner Livingstone mentioned that in the RGT Master Plan, it specifies that sections of the trail could be in parallel for different uses. Parallel paths can definitely be a part of this.

Question: Michael Madden (East Mountain Regional Trail Council & Sandia Collaborative) noted his excitement for the funding designated for Tijeras. He noted that a spur may be appropriate through the Sandias ("Albuquerque High Road") from Algodones to Placitas and hook up to the Grand Enchantment Trail south. He also offered to support the Alignment sub-committee.

Question: Susan Herring noted that infrastructure funding, particularly for the amphitheater, seems tangential to the original goal of expanding trail access and use.

- Response: Commissioner Navas said that the initial statute for the funding calls out infrastructure such as shade structures, shelter. Signage and trailheads are important to bring people to the trail and help orient themselves to the spaces.

Comment: Linnea Hendrickson noted that trail alignment should consider historic and religious sites for the preferred alignment, as well, such as El Camino Real. These could be possible pilgrimage routes for long-route walkers. Small communities could benefit by providing lodging and seeing economic benefits.

- Response: Chair Leahy noted that this is an important consideration.

Comment: Mayor Jake Bruton wanted to express gratitude for recommendation of funding for the Village of Tijeras. This is supportive of several adjacent projects that will benefit from this trail.

Comment: Senator Steinborn noted that it is important for the Commission to advocate for it's needs and future funding. Ideally funds would be used to provide day-to-day professional support and someone (staff?) who could continue to advocate for these needs and move projects forward. We need to move into the next steps to have trail segments adopted and change the dynamic to change the trajectory and increase momentum.

- Response: Chair Leahy noted that he is grateful for the open door to discuss possible future staffing.

9. Future Meeting Date

Chair Leahy proposed avoiding the December holiday and scheduling the next Commission meeting for early January. Sites Southwest will send a doodle poll to the Commissioners to determine the exact date and time. A motion was made by Commissioner Livingstone and seconded by Commissioner Valdez.

10. Adjourn

Commissioner Valdez made a motion to adjourn the meeting and was seconded by Commissioner Livingstone. The meeting was adjourned at 10:07 AM.

Meeting Chat

08:59:14 From Danielle Wilson to Danielle Wilson(Direct Message) : Please go ahead and rename yourself!

09:02:13 From Linnea Hendrickson to Everyone : Good morning from Linnea Hendrickson, Albuquerque Chapter of American Pilgrims on the Camino. Good morning.

09:04:04 From Michael McAdams to Everyone : Hello, Michael A. McAdams, Mesilla Valley MPO

09:06:11 From Bruce Hickson (US FWS, ABQ, NM) to Everyone : This is Bruce Hickson, US FWS, ABQ, NM

09:10:40 From Meghan Curry to Everyone : Meghan Curry – Insights

09:10:48 From Meghan Curry to Everyone : meg@insightselpaso.org

09:11:16 From Hallie Brown to Everyone : Nicolas Kennedy, Deputy Clerk, Village of Tijeras - nkennedy@tijerasnm.gov

09:11:26 From Johnny Chavez to Everyone : Johnny Chavez (Conservation Program Manager) Valencia Soil and Water Conservation District - johnnychavez@valenciaswcd.org

09:11:36 From Chris Ellis to Everyone : Chris Ellis

09:11:39 From Michael McAdams to Everyone : Michael A. McAdams, Mesilla Valley MPO, e-mail: mmcadams@las-cruces.org

09:12:51 From Shannon Glendenning to Panelists : Thanks, Jerry!

09:13:07 From Chris Ellis to Everyone : Chris Ellis, Taos Mountain Bike Association (TMBA); email: chrisellis@taosnet.com

09:14:09 From Shannon Glendenning to Panelists : Happy to be on alignment sub-committee. Here's my contact info: Shannon Glendenning, Bicycle, Pedestrian, Equestrian Coordinator, NMDOT. Shannon.Glendenning@state.nm.us 505-231-4300

09:14:53 From Ed DiBello to Panelists : Ed DiBello representing New Mexico Volunteers for the Outdoors - e.dibello@nmvfo.org

09:14:57 From Danielle Wilson to Shannon Glendenning, All Panelists : Thank you for volunteering and sharing your info, Shannon!

09:15:00 From Jerry Valdez to Shannon Glendenning, All Panelists : Thank you!!!

09:21:50 From Joan Hashimoto to Panelists : Joan Hashimoto

09:22:42 From Jeff Steinborn to Everyone : Will all of these projects signage incorporate the branding of the Rio Grande Trail?

09:23:21 From Rosemary Romero to Bob Oberdorfer, All Panelists : I think you must be on the Alignment Committee, right?

09:23:23 From Joan Hashimoto to Panelists : Joan Hashimoto,joanhashi@gmail.com Corrales Bosque Advisory Commission

09:26:20 From Jeff Steinborn to Everyone : Is there any plan to seek additional funds or use new or future appropriated funds for more infrastructure?

09:26:38 From Linnea Hendrickson to Everyone : These look like wonderful projects.

09:28:12 From Susan Hering to Panelists : If there's time, I'd appreciate a brief overview of the matching funds, inc how the presence or lack of these may have impacted project selection.

09:35:22 From Dan Carter to Everyone : Great work everyone! This is exciting stuff

09:40:54 From Dave Simon to Everyone : Thank you to the Commission! The City of Albuquerque is excited about these projects and we look forward to a long-term relationship with the State to support the RGT. We see opportunities for many more projects down the road and we'll get as many of them done as possible using all of our available resources. We also invite the Commission to tour RGT areas w/in the City/Bernalillo County some time in the future at their convenience. Dave Simon, Director, Parks & Recreation Dept., City of Albuquerque.

09:41:05 From George Pearson to Everyone : Seeing the Sunland Park projects is very exciting. Has there been any discussion with the El Paso MPO to connect the trail through where the river runs in Texas? There is some existing trail along the Rio Grande in Texas, so using that part of the trail seem obvious.

09:42:56 From Ellen Esposito to Everyone : There has been some discussion with the EP Community Foundation who is has a trail project through El Paso County. Ellen Esposito, Insights Science Center, Sunland Park

09:43:06 From Mario Juarez-Infante to Panelists : We have commenced El Paso County, city of El Paso, and IBWC with respect to the NM/TX alignment, connection point, and possible regional endeavor led by Sunland Park.

09:47:08 From Hallie Brown to Everyone : We at the Village of Tijeras would like to express our gratitude to the Commission for their support of our Community Planting Initiative. This project will go a long way toward beautifying and improving the accessibility of our outdoor spaces in the Village. The Community Planting Initiative also dovetails wonderfully with several other ongoing projects intended to safeguard and promote the cultural, historical, and natural heritage of the Village of Tijeras and the broader Tijeras Creek Watershed. We are thrilled that our community falls along a potential alignment of the Rio Grande Trail and look forward to an ongoing partnership with the Commission.

09:47:17 From Meghan Curry to Everyone : The Paso del Norte trail through El Paso County, Rio Grande Trail, the City of Sunland Park's master trail plan and Insights DinoTracks site trials will provide a wonderful range of trials for Border Region residents to utilize.

09:47:47 From Susan Hering to Panelists : Coming from an org which has had difficulties w online board meetings, I'd like to congratulate you on how well run this was conducted by Todd Leahy

09:48:27 From Dan Carter to Everyone : Commissioner Livingstone. Thank you for clarifying that point about alignments from the master plan

09:50:59 From Dan Carter to Everyone : If needed, I will also volunteer for the alignment subcommittee

09:53:15 From Susan Hering to Panelists : Thanks, Axie, for your attention to my amphitheater question!

09:53:16 From Linnea Hendrickson to Everyone : I would like the alignment committee to also consider historic sites, especially churches and places along the old Camino Real, as being considered as possible pilgrim sites. There is a move across the country to develop local pilgrimage routes along the lines of the Camino de Santiago in Spain, which could encourage long-distance walking with possible involvement of local communities in providing inexpensive lodging for pilgrims — small communities could find this an economic advantage — hosting walkers.

09:55:04 From Susan Hering to Everyone : Love Linnea's thought

09:57:01 From Linnea Hendrickson to Everyone : I would be willing to work with the alignment committee.