

RIO GRANDE TRAIL COMMISSION (RGTC) MEETING

April 6, 2017

10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Wendell Chino Building

Porter Hall

1220 S. St. Francis Dr.

Santa Fe, NM 87505

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
Benjamin Cloutier	Designee, Economic Development
Dana Feldman	Public Member
Toner Mitchel	Public Member
Pete Mattox	Public Member
Laurie Wearne	Public Member

Members Absent:

New Mexico Department of Transportation
Department of Indian Affairs

Vacant:

Toby Martinez (resigned) Public Member

Legislators (Advisory Members):

None

1. Call to Order – The Rio Grande Trail Commission meeting was called to order by Chair McQueen at 10:02 AM.

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

3. Approval of Agenda – Chair McQueen asked those present to introduce themselves. After introductions Chair McQueen asked for the agenda to be amended to include the User Work Group under the “Report from Work Groups” item. Vice-Chair Tafoya motioned to amend the agenda and Commissioner Wearne seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

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4. Approval of Minutes – Chair McQueen asked if there were any additions or corrections to the minutes. Seeing none, Chair McQueen asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Commissioner Martinez moved to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Vice-Chair Tafoya. The motion was approved unanimously.

5. Rio Grande Trail planning contractor update – Chair McQueen introduced Judy Kowalski for an update on the process of obtaining a contractor to work on the Rio Grande Trail master plan and alignment study. Ms. Kowalski stated that there were four very qualified contractors that submitted proposals. A review committee identified the top-scoring team as Alta Planning and Design. No contract is in place at this time, but the process has started and hopefully work can begin soon. Ms. Kowalski stated that members of the Alta Planning and Design team were present and would share some of their experience with long-distance trail planning and respond to questions.

6. Old Business – None.

7. New Business –

a) Report from Work Groups-

Chair McQueen introduced Dr. David Certain to report on the progress of the Alignment Work Group. Dr. Certain stated that the Alignment Work Group had met via conference call shortly after the Rio Grande Trail Meeting in January. He noted that it was clear that the group was very interested and knowledgeable. Some members of the group are interested in getting out on the ground and doing work. Dr. Certain said that he had also spoke with Mike Hammond, who is the engineer and CEO of the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District. Mr. Hamman expressed enthusiasm about participating in the planning of the Rio Grande Trail alignment.

Chair McQueen asked for an update from the Resources Work Group. Gina Dello Russo stated that they had not met since the last meeting but did have new members sign up.

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Commissioner Mattox, who is chair of the Design and Management Work Group, stated that the group has expressed a desire to have the next Rio Grande Trail meeting in the southern part of the state, since it had been about a year since there was a meeting in the south. Commissioner Mattox added that he was interested in finding out how Alta Planning and Design was planning on working with both the Rio Grande Trail Commission and the work groups.

Chair McQueen asked for an update from the Communications Work Group. Commissioner Griscom stated that the group had not met since the last meeting and had nothing to report.

There were no members present from the Interagency Work Group.

b) Report from Alta Planning and Design-

Chair McQueen introduced Mike Rose, from Alta Planning and Design. Mr. Rose stated that he was interested in having an informal dialogue in order to make sure that the team understands what has been accomplished so far, and the direction that the design and planning process should head.

Alta Planning and Design works and specializes in active transportation projects only. Mr. Rose has worked on trails for 13 years and worked in New Mexico with Design Workshop. He has worked on the Albuquerque Bikeway and Trails Master Plan, the trails master plan for the Pueblo of Laguna, and has worked on several other projects in New Mexico, as well. He is very excited about the scope of the Rio Grande Trail project and believes that the opportunities the trail can provide for tourism in New Mexico is extensive and believes that the New Mexico True campaign run by the New Mexico Tourism Department will be integral to the effort.

Although Alta Planning and Design does not have a contract in place yet, they are eager to start the listening and learning part of the process to figure out how to tailor the scope of work to fit the needs of the state. The Alta Planning and Design team has done work on other long-distance trails in other states such as California, South Carolina, and Florida.

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Mr. Rose stated that the Alta team had two main questions. The first question concerned the roles that the work groups would play in the planning process and the best way to use them. The other question is how to work with groups that have geographic disparity.

Mr. Rose went on to introduce Bob Oberdorfer, with Sites Southwest, and Rosemary Romero, with Rosemary Romero Consulting. Mr. Oberdorfer stated that he had 26 years of experience in New Mexico including trail planning, such as the Santa Fe River Trail and a feasibility study for the Sandoval County Rail Trail. He also worked on the Bosque Trail in Albuquerque, and some early work on the Rio Grande Trail. He stated that he was very excited to be working on the Rio Grande Trail with the Alta Planning and Design and emphasized that they were excited that people already had interest in the trail and that work had already started.

Rosemary Romero stated that she had worked with Western Network for 15 years and developed watershed plans, and created her own consulting firm 15 years ago. She has worked with the Forest Service, and was a Santa Fe city councilor, where she gained experience working with regional transit districts and other organizations. She has written nine watershed plans, mostly in the Upper Rio Grande, but also in the Gila area. She has worked with the Interstate Stream Commission, the Office of the State Engineer, and developed regional water plans.

Mr. Rose said that the team had been talking about the project for over a year and found the best team to work on the project. He then asked the Commission if they had any questions.

Commissioner Wearne asked the team if they could explain their strategy and methodology for dealing with threatened and endangered species and other species including plants. Mr. Rose responded that every trail plan has some type of sensitive habit that people need to be aware of and either work through or work around. The first step is knowing where they are and usually trying to avoid them, if possible. There are people on the team that can identify special cultural and natural resources. The trail can also be used as an educational opportunity. If a trail goes by a wetland there can be an opportunity there to educate the public about their special nature. Education

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is one of the best ways to protect a resource. He added that there was an omission in the proposal concerning cultural and natural resources but Sites Southwest will be leading those efforts. The team includes archaeologists and biologists. Commissioner Wearne asked if they would be bringing that information to the Commission and User Groups and Mr. Rose responded that they would.

Vice-Chair Tafoya added that Gina Dello Russo, the head of the Resources Work Group would be an excellent resource for the team to use.

Commissioner Mattox asked if the team had had an opportunity to look at the 2008 Alignment and Constraints Analysis conducted by Anasazi Trails. Mr. Rose replied that the team had seen it and asked Mr. Oberdorfer to give his opinion. Mr. Oberdorfer stated that the alignment study was extensive but there was a lack of back-up documentation that he could find. There are five major potential constraint areas that the team has identified, including where to bring the trail at the Colorado border. There are also areas with a lot of development along the river, such as Espanola, and in the past, the Pueblos have not expressed interest, nor did the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge. However, that may have changed with new leadership. The Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District could also be a constraint, although working with them now sounds promising.

Commissioner Mitchell stated that there are a lot of communities in Northern New Mexico that are looking for expanded recreation opportunities and that Rio Grande Trail and connecting spur trails may be a good opportunity to do that. Mr. Rose replied that he believed the trail could be a backbone for a lot of other opportunities as it is pieced together.

Commissioner Mattox asked what the biggest challenges have been during the process of long distance trail planning. Mr. Rose responded that every trail is different and has its own unique challenges. Some plans end up on shelves collecting dust and nothing gets built as a result of them. Trails can also be difficult to fund because it is hard to identify the demand and benefit of trails. It can take a long period of time from design to implementation because some trails have to be approached on a piecemeal basis, but if funding sources have been identified for trail construction, it doesn't have to be that way. Mr. Rose

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added that the more public interest a trail has, the easier it is to create, and the Rio Grande Trail seems to have a lot of public interest. Other obstacles to construction can be cultural and natural resources. A key piece to the Rio Grande Trail Plan will be identifying funding sources and creating an action plan.

Vice-Chair Tafoya stated that there has been a lot of public interest and there a lot of stakeholders. She wondered what the Alta team's plan was for soliciting input and meeting with the public. Mr. Rose responded that the first component of the scope of work was to come up with a plan for doing that, so at this time, a plan is not in place. Rosemary Romero added that obtaining lists of stakeholders is the first step in the process. Once the contract is in place, the public involvement plan will contain more details. Tribal outreach and outreach to community leaders and elected officials will be a key part of the process. Mr. Rose added that one challenge is that the word trail can mean different things to different people, so it is important to develop a glossary of terms so that the public knows what the contractor is talking about. The team plans on giving concrete examples of what a multi-use trail is compared to other types of trails. This provides a common expectation. Ms. Kowalski noted that the project management plan is one of the first deliverables and it may be available for the next Commission meeting.

Chair McQueen asked if Mr. Rose had any questions for the Commission. Ms. Romero said that one of the questions the team had was concerning the roles that will be played by the work groups and how best to interface with those groups.

Dr. Certain responded that each group has its own thoughts about what they will provide. The alignment group will help identify potential and existing alignments. Members of this group are often associated with one or more type of trail user group. Mr. Rose asked what areas of the state are covered and Dr. Certain responded that there was good representation around the Rio Grande Del Norte National Monument, in Santa Fe, the National Trail system, and people who are interested in the entire corridor, but there are probably gaps.

Ms. Dello Russo stated that the Resource Group was diverse as well and wanted to look at opportunities and constraints because it is possible to turn

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constraints into opportunities. The group has not been on the ground yet, since they don't know exactly what is needed. Ms. Dello Russo hoped that all of the work groups could meet together to explore what overlaps exist between the groups. For example, the idea of having trail spurs could be viewed as both an issue that the Resources Work Group and the Alignment Work Group would be interested in. The Resources Work Group is geographically diverse and they have worked on a communications strategy to contact small communities up and down the state.

Mr. Oberdorfer asked if the work groups had heard from anyone interested in "blue trails", or water trails, and if there are formalized groups of blue trail users. Ms. Dello Russo stated that she wasn't aware of formal groups in the central part of the state but informally there are many people interested in paddle sports along the Rio Grande. Dr. Certain added that he knew of at least one person on the Alignment Work Group that was a blue trail user. Vice-Chair Tafoya stated that there were usually one or two people at each meeting that expressed interest in those types of trail.

Commissioner Mattox stated that the Design and Management Work Group was tasked with proposing standards and guidelines for design and operation of the trail as well as safety and liability issues. Commissioner Mattox expressed a desire to work with the Alta team and asked that they reach out to the Design and Management Work Group and use them in whatever capacity needed. Mr. Rose asked how many people were in the group and Commissioner Mattox said there were around ten members spread across the state. He added that within the work group there has been some confusion as to whether the trail is multiuse, and what that means. Some people would be OK if the trail was part of a road and others would find that less optimal.

Bon Bagley, with the New Mexico Horse Council and Back Country Horsemen, introduced herself as the co-chair for the User Work Group. She stated that she hoped that the Alta team would consider the group as a tremendous resource. A multi-use trail presents design and philosophical challenges but can be a benefit to many different users and communities. There are people in the work groups that are ready to help and would even be interested in trail building. There are good resources to use within the groups.

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Mr. Rose stated that he had worked on equestrian trails in many areas and he anticipated that there would be interest in the equestrian stakeholder group. Ms. Bagley added that it is also important to note that New Mexico's natural diversity will represent a challenge and benefit as well.

Vice-Chair Tafoya stated that Senator Steinborn and Commissioner Zunie work together to head the Interagency Work Group and that Senator Steinborn had been instrumental in the designation of the La Llorona Trail as part of the Rio Grande Trail system. Commissioner Zunie has been key in reaching out to the tribes and Pueblos and the work group has been meeting with many of the Pueblos, some of which have concerns about the trail. Even if some Pueblos do not want the trail going through their property, it is important to meet with them to gather feedback. There are many resources along the Rio Grande that the Pueblos have a cultural affiliation with, and it is important for the Commission to know about them.

Ms. Romero noted that she had worked on the Cibola National Forest plan, which included working with the Navajo Nation, equestrian users, and conservation organizations. The public involvement plan will build on experiences like this and she hopes that the plan will be implementable.

Vice-Chair Tafoya stated the Chair McQueen was very interested in meeting with interagency groups, too, such as the Bureau of Land Management and the International Boundary and Water Commission which already have trails through their properties.

Mr. Oberdorfer asked if there were administrative steps established in order to designate an existing trail as part of the Rio Grande Trail. Vice-Chair Tafoya responded that the Commission would have to work with the Alta team members during the planning process to come up with a process that everyone is comfortable with. Commissioner Mattox added that the City of Las Cruces had a previously existing arrangement with the International Boundary and Water Commission that allowed the city to establish a trail on the International Boundary and Water Commission's Land, but tracking down the agreement and establishing whether the Rio Grande Trail designation was acceptable was harder than expected. Mr. Oberdorfer added that they would probably experience similar difficulties in Albuquerque considering the

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complexities of land ownership and management along the Rio Grande in the central part of the state.

Commissioner Griscom stated that the Communications Work Group was looking forward to collaborating with the Alta team and the Tourism Department has been working on the New Mexico True brand since 2012 and is planning on deepening the brand and integrating the Rio Grande Trail into the brand.

Ms. Kowalski asked Steve Burns, with the National Park Service to share what they had spoken about prior to the meeting. Mr. Burns said that ideally, the Rio Grande Trail and the Camino Real de Tierra Adentro National Historic Trail would be one in the same. In many places they are. There will be more opportunities along the length of the Rio Grande Trail for the two trails to correlate. The Camino Real de Tierra Adentro National Historic Trail is the only National Scenic or Historic Trail that is also a designated World Heritage Route. The National Park Service has been working on a request for proposal to come up with a plan for a section of the Camino Real Trail through Bernalillo County. The City of Albuquerque and some federal partners have contributed funding to come up with the plan, which will help in coordinating with the planning of the Rio Grande Trail.

8. Public Comments – Chair McQueen asked for public comments from the meeting attendees. Tom Romero with the Northern Rio Grande National Heritage area said that he had talked with the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area in Colorado about how the Rio Grande Trail could be included into their planning efforts and linking the trail across the border. People at the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area are very interested in the Rio Grande Trail.

Deirdre Monroe, who introduced herself as a member of a number of local trail organizations and a trail advocate, stated that there are people with a lot of trail experience in the Santa Fe area. Existing trails within the Caja del Rio area within the Santa Fe National Forest could have the potential to become a part of the Rio Grande Trail and could link to other existing trails. Ms. Monroe provided a trail map of the Caja del Rio area to the Commission that she had worked on to encourage trail use. The area has grown in recognition, and the

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recognition increased with the establishment of the National Historic Trail in the area and it would be possible to create a trail network from the framework that is already in place.

Tim Rogers with the Santa Fe Conservation Trust stated that the Grand Unified Santa Fe Trail Organization (GUSTO) could be integrated into the Rio Grande Trail through the Caja del Rio area of Santa Fe National Forest. The National Forest is currently working on a Forest Revision Plan. One of the proposals in the plan is to designate part of the Caja del Rio area as a wilderness study area, which would prohibit creation of new trails, and potentially interfere with creating a trail that stretches from La Bajada Village up to the Buckman area of the Rio Grande. With regards to blue trails, Mr. Rogers recommended that the Alta team contact Attila Bality, with the National Park Service's Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program. Mr. Rogers also noted that the New Mexico Department of Transportation would be a key partner in the Rio Grande Trail effort since they own the right of way for the New Mexico Rail Runner, which stretches between Albuquerque and Santa Fe. Another important partner would be metropolitan planning organizations, such as the Mid-Region Council of Governments.

Jeff Saul with the New Mexico Bike Summit asked if having accommodations at set distances along the trail would be considered during the planning process. It is something that both bikers and hikers will consider and it could make a big difference in tourism for some areas.

Vice-Chair Tafoya responded that the Commission would look at all different aspects of the trail including accommodations but that the location of various accommodations had not been addressed yet. Commissioner Mattox added that it might fall under the purview of the Design and Management Work Group and encouraged Mr. Saul to join the group. Ms. Kowalski mentioned that the subject had been brought up in previous meetings, not just in terms of providing a resource to trail users, but also as a potential for economic development and potentially mapping amenities that might of interest to trail users such as restaurants, restrooms, hotels and other accommodations such as campgrounds. There has been an increase in recognition of the importance of outdoor recreation for economic development, which is a component of the

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scope of work in the request for proposals so that it can be communicated to stakeholders and the public.

Ms. Bagley added that there are many local festivals and other events and attributes in New Mexico that can be used to bolster support from local communities.

Vice-Chair Tafoya noted that Commissioner Cloutier with the Economic Development Department could be used as a resource, as well. Ms. Dello Russo added that the Resources Work Group has also had a discussion concerning amenities along the Rio Grande Trail and it is possible that a lot of local governments and chambers of commerce would be interested in supporting the effort.

Carl Colonius with the Enchanted Circle Trails Association in Taos stated that Taos and Colfax Counties were working on an intensive recreational plan and encouraged the Commission to look at what has been done with trail planning recently in local communities. The Carson National Forest, the Bureau of Land Management and the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument are in the process of revising their management plans. The Enchanted Circle Trails Association has been involved in those processes and has been involved in the Enchanted Circle Recreational Master Plan. The Town of Taos also has a bicycle master plan that has been in place for eight years. The Association has been involved in maintaining the recreational infrastructure in the area and is excited to be involved in the Rio Grande Trail planning process.

Chair McQueen asked if there were any further comments. Seeing none, he moved on to the next item on the agenda.

9. Future Meeting Date - Vice-Chair Tafoya recommended that the next meeting be held in the third week of July, possibly on July 20th at the Whitfield Wildlife Center in Belen, which had offered to host the meeting. Seeing no objections, Vice-Chair Tafoya set the tentative date as stated. Chair McQueen then asked for a motion to adjourn.

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10. Adjournment – A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Feldman and seconded by Commissioner Martinez. The motion was approved unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 11:41 am.