

## TRANSCRIPT OF AUDIO RECORDING:

**HERE IS WHAT THE SAN JOAQUIN RIVER GORGE MANAGER TOLD THE CALIFORNIA RECREATION RESOURCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE (RRAC) ON JUNE 24, 2010 IN ORDER TO GAIN THEIR APPROVAL FOR THE FEE PROPOSAL AT THE SJRG.**

**COMMENTS IN BLUE.**

**Tracy Rowland:** What was done was, the March 20<sup>th</sup> briefing paper was done on March 20<sup>th</sup>, and it was done for my field manager, uh, March 24<sup>th</sup> actually is the date on the briefing paper, which is what is now posted on the webpage. This was done March 24<sup>th</sup> I sent it to Tim Smith and to my boss Steve Larson. It was prepared for the Central California RAC [*Resource Advisory Council – a BLM advisory committee*] and it was presented at the Central California RAC meeting. Tim Smith presented it. He said there were no major objections or substantive comments received, everything looked fine with it. [*The information was presented as part of a routine briefing. The Central California RAC was not asked for their comments or approval. No vote was sought or taken.*] And at that point I had to wait until after our RAC meeting . . . (pause while everyone gets copies of a handout) . . .

This information was put into the press release, the press release was put out two weeks before our scheduled public meetings as is customary. It was put into the Mountain Press, which is our local Auberry paper. [*Auberry, CA population 2,053 in 2000*] It was also published in the Sierra Star, which is over on the other side of the river in Madera County. [*No, it was not. The Sierra Star was not on the distribution list.*] We get a lot of users from there too. And it was published in the Fresno Bee. Now the other staff writer that Kitty mentioned, Marek Warszawski, and we have corresponded with him before, he's done numerous articles on the Gorge so he's well aware of the Gorge. His was published June 10<sup>th</sup>. [*Three weeks after the two public meetings in Clovis and Prather.*] Because he did not see the press release for some reason. He said usually they're routed to him as well but it didn't happen this time.

**RRAC Member:** What publication was that?

**TR:** This was the Fresno Bee. There was a press release sent to the Fresno Bee, two weeks before the public meetings.

**RRAC Member:** But this is the only story in the Fresno Bee that came out of that press release? The press release itself didn't get published until June.

**TR:** Yes it did.

**RRAC:** But not prior to the public meetings.

**TR:** Yes, it did. They were done. They were all sent out to the papers.

**RRAC:** But it wasn't published prior to the meetings.

**TR:** Yes, it was published prior to the meetings. [*No, it was not.*]

**RRAC:** The Fresno Bee published the press release, and then there was a follow up . . .

**TR:** This was a follow up article. A follow up article.

**RRAC:** So in three newspapers it was published . . .

**TR:** Two weeks before the public meetings. [*No, it was not.*]

**RRAC:** Ok, thank you. It's just that reporter, he didn't see it for some reason, so then he did a follow up.

**TR:** Yeah, he did a follow up story and put it out in time that if anyone had comments or was interested in coming to this meeting, and we received I think a couple more email comments on that. *[This is a false statement. There was a single article in the Fresno Bee three weeks after the meetings occurred.]*

**RRAC:** Ok.

**TR:** Then, where the process became somewhat less perfect, I did not get the briefing paper put on the webpage until this past week. *[The briefing paper first appeared on the website on June 21, only four days before the meeting.]* It just slipped through the cracks. This is our major busy season and my priority was on serving the public that was at the Gorge. We had school groups and a lot of different things going on and I just let it slip through the cracks. So I take responsibility for not having that published on the webpage. *[Four months elapsed between the date of the briefing paper and its posting on the website.]* But we still, we have it posted on site, we have a notice at all the campgrounds, of which there's only two. The notice contains the briefing paper that you're now looking at, and there was an envelope where they could take a comment card.

**RRAC:** When were those posted?

**TR:** These were posted after the public meeting, the next day. And we said, we encourage your comments, we're still taking comments, we got some comments from users from that. So I got some emails and one mailed. *[Three comment cards were submitted: one supportive, one opposed, one ambiguous.]*

**RRAC:** A reminder for me. When were the public meetings?

**TR:** The public meetings were May 18 and 19. This was posted the next day the 20<sup>th</sup>. *[Posted on site after the public meetings were over.]*

**RRAC:** And you did receive some written comments?

**TR:** Uh huh.

**RRAC:** And the tenor of that was?

*[Twelve individuals submitted comments: one supportive, seven opposed, four ambiguous.]*

**TR:** Ok, I will read you a couple of excerpts. This is from one local person who's always writing letters to the editor. He says, "I am not opposed to charging fees to enter the Gorge as long as these fees are not used to add to the infrastructure of the area. If the fees are to be paid for regular cleanups of garbage left by careless visitors, or for a limited number of interpretive hikes led by experts on the natural history of the area, fees are acceptable." So his basic premise was he didn't want to see a whole lot of trails up there. He wanted to see it left primitive. *[Mr. Chip Ashley's message also said: "I have often noted that public agencies plans to add 'improvements' to areas for 'public good' tend to have the ulterior and self-serving motive of solidifying and preserving bureaucracies. I believe this is the case with the proposal here under consideration." She did not quote that part.]* And then I got another one, this was actually the one mailed. Most of them were emails. "Certain park services must be paid for and I encourage the adoption of fees for overnight camping, guided tours in the park, even though such fees may not offset costs completely. And should the Department of the Interior choose to adopt an entrance fee" – which it's not, it's a Standard Amenity Fee – *[She is dissembling because the BLM is prohibited from charging fees for parking or*

*entrance, and it's clear from the proposal that those are exactly the kind of fees that would be charged.]* "I trust the monies generated will exceed the costs in collecting them." So he's not opposed to that either. *[Mr. Radley Reep's letter also says his purpose in writing is to "make the case for not charging an entrance fee."]*

The only opposition, *[In fact, there was only one comment that supported the proposal. All the others either opposed it or were ambiguous.]* this man showed up at the public meeting, Ted Kimbler, he's a local person, he was opposed to fees because he's part of the Sheriff's department search and rescue, they train down there several times a year and he said that would be a hardship for the all-volunteer group, if they had to come up with the money to pay a fee. And I explained to him that we are working on a memorandum of understanding with the Sheriff's department, we would never charge them for coming down, even though we charge fees, because they're a partner and they play a role in the management of the area because they provide search and rescue services. And he said, "Oh, then I guess I have no problem with that." *[Mr. Kimbler submitted a letter seriously questioning the proposal's budget and visitation numbers. His search and rescue concern was only one of many. She did not share his other concerns with the RRAC.]*

**RRAC:** Great. Thanks very much. Next can I ask a question?

**TR:** Uh huh.

**RRAC:** You said you brought this proposal before the Central RAC in May?

**TR:** My field manager did. I believe it was May.

**RRAC:** Do you know what the tone and direction of that conversation was?

**TR:** Tim said everybody was fine with it, nobody asked any questions. There was no comment. *[There was no request made for their approval. No vote was sought or taken. At least one member of the RAC later expressed his very strong opposition to the proposal.]*

**RRAC:** So you did have support from the RAC?

**TR:** Yes. Yes. *[No, she did not.]*

*Based on the above misinformation, the RRAC deemed that public participation had been sufficient, and proceeded to approve the fee proposal.*