

## RIO GRANDE MULE & DONKEY ASSOCIATION PROPOSAL FOR NEW STRUCTURE

I have heard from several board members that RGMDA should consider shutting down and going out of business. This topic is likely to be discussed at the next Board of Directors meeting.

Most of the reasons given for terminating the organization are compelling but are not unique to RGMDA. Many nonprofit organizations face similar problems in the post modern age. RGMDA, however, faces a couple of issues that may make its situation a bit different than other clubs.

Here is what I, as a relative outsider to the group, have observed over the past couple of years.

1. The total membership is small, and most of the members, myself included, are starting to get a bit long in the tooth. Younger folks with a couple of exceptions are not joining the organization.
2. A small percentage of the members, as is typical in most clubs, does most of the work. The same people have done this work year after year. They are burned out, but no one is stepping forward to take over their jobs.
3. RGMDA covers a large geographical area, posing communication and participation problems for members.
4. RGMDA members have widely divergent interests in what they do with their mules and donkeys and accordingly what they want the organization to do.
5. RGMDA has effectively become two clubs - the Central and East Mountain Chapters, whose members like to participate in events like shows and trail rides, and the Northern Chapter, whose members primarily like to socialize and learn about mule and donkey topics. The Southern Chapter for all practical purposes no longer exists.
6. Donkey owners and non-owners interested in donkeys predominate in the organization. Donkey driving, donkey trail, donkey packing, and more recently pack burro racing appear to be the activities of greatest interest within the club. The number of mule owners who participate actively in RGMDA can be counted on one hand.
7. In my opinion, the number of donkeys and donkey activities are growing in New Mexico. Mule activities are not. That is not to say that there are not a lot of mules in the State, but they are primarily on the trail and in the backcountry. Last week I encountered five pack strings containing mainly mules in the Pecos Wilderness. These mule owners, however, are generally not interested in joining a general purpose mule and donkey association. They may join BCH or no organization at all. Donkey people are I think more likely to join a club. Donkeys are the perfect animal for aging baby boomers, former horse riders, and young kids. They also tie in nicely with the culture,

history, terrain, and climate of New Mexico. They eat less and are less expensive to keep than mules and horses.

Given the above, I would like to make a proposal for restructuring RGMDA to allow at least some organizational representation of long ears going forward. Let me state up front that I do not expect everyone to agree with my proposal and will not take offense if it is rejected in whole or in part. I would like the Board and members to consider it, however, as an alternative to complete dissolution. I believe there are benefits to doing some things with donkeys and mules collectively as opposed to just doing these things as individuals.

Here is my proposal:

1. Abolish all chapters of RGMDA. Meetings should be limited to meetings of the organization as a whole. Quite frankly one problem the organization has now is too many meetings of different groups of people. RGMDA has lost its identity as a statewide organization, and the chapters have gone their own way with their own meetings.
2. RGMDA, with a new name, should become an organization focused on shows, events and trail rides (or anything else it wants) in Central New Mexico, essentially the Greater Albuquerque area. The core of its membership would come from the old East Mountain and Central Chapters with new members coming largely from that geographic area. It should change its name to reflect the new geographical and activity focus of the organization. It would, however, remain the same non-profit corporation. The only thing that would change legally would be the name. Starting out, the revised organization might consider limiting itself to just a couple of sponsored activities a year to allow members time to recover from burnout.
3. The Northern Chapter members would either form a new, separate group in the Santa Fe area or would join the Northern New Mexico Horsemen's Association and form a donkey and mule committee within that group. If enough donkey and mule people join NNMHA, they might convince the organization to change its name to the Northern New Mexico Horse, Mule and Donkey Association or something similar. One advantage of joining NNMHA would be getting insurance coverage under that organization.
4. Both of the new clubs should consider whether their focus should be on both mules and donkeys or just donkeys. I would suggest that it should be only donkeys. As discussed above, donkeys are where the greatest interest and possible growth may come. Both clubs should not try to be all things to all people. Working on just key donkey activities would potentially involve less work and produce better results and member satisfaction. This decision in turn should determine the choice of the new names by the two clubs. Perhaps names like the Central New Mexico Donkey Driving and Show Association or the Northern New Mexico Donkey Events and Cultural Association would be appropriate. The members will need to think this through.
5. With regard to donkey racing in Cerrillos, races in the future will be organized and run by the Cerrillos Fiesta Committee as to the sprint races and by the Cerrillos Hills

State Park and the Friends of the Park organization as to the pack burro race. The Fiesta Committee is running and insuring the sprint races on September 21st (please note that as always Joyce Davis is doing most of the work). I have also spoken with Park Manager Peter Lipscomb. He would like to tie a pack burro race into a new, annual signature event celebrating the mining history of the Park and the town of Cerrillos. Hopefully this will happen next year. In any event, neither of the new proposed clubs would be responsible for these races. The only thing they would need to do is send runners and donkeys to participate or volunteers to help with race day activities.

On a personal note, I would plan on joining both of the new clubs. However, I would devote most of my organizational time to working with Cerrillos on the races and other donkey activities. I would be willing to help with the legal reorganization of RGMDA should my proposal or something similar be adopted. However, I do not intend to serve as Secretary of RGMDA beyond the annual meeting in November. My other projects include getting Dynamite ready for Bishop Mule Days next Memorial Day and spending more time in the backcountry with Poncho and my new hip.

RGMDA is a great organization. I read its website years before I moved to the State and that contributed to my decision to come here. Its members have always been very welcoming and helpful to me, which I greatly appreciate. But RGMDA cannot continue as it is. The world has changed and it must too. I hope, however, that there is an alternative to going out of business, if not my proposal than some other type of reorganization.

Please call me if you would like to kick any of this around. Otherwise, I will see you all on September 27th and also at the Fair.

Allen H. Olson  
Secretary and Director  
August 25, 2019