

**BOISE DISTRICT RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL (RAC)**  
**Field Tour and Meeting**  
**Friday, July 18, 2008**  
**Minutes**

**BD Council Members Present:** Gil Green, Donna Bennett, Rich Just, Ralph Richardson, John Robison, Nate Helm, Neil Rimbey, Gary Aman, Rick Raymondi.

**BD Council Members Absent:** Ted Hoffman, Brenda Richards, Grant Simonds, Dale Dixon, Margaret Soulen-Hinson, Ted Howard.

**BLM Advisory Present:** Aden Seidlitz, Boise District Manager, and MJ Byrne, BD RAC Coordinator.

**Other BLM Staff Present:** Dave Wolf, Boise District Associate Manager; Ryan Homan, Owyhee Field Office Recreation Planner; Owyhee Field Office (OFO) Manager; Steve Jirik, and Tim Acting OFO Assistant Field Office Manager **Other:** Jerry Hoagland, Chair., Owyhee County Commissioners; and Karen Steinhoff, a member of the County's Recreation Task Force.

**Statements attributed to individuals are not direct quotes unless so indicated. Titles of handouts and/or other presentations are listed in the appendix following the minutes, and detailed notes are not provided for these.**

Chairman Gil Green convened the meeting at 8:45 a.m., at the Walters Ferry Fish and Game Parking area near the Snake River on Highway 45. He welcomed everyone and introduced Jerry Hoagland, Chair. , the Owyhee Co. Commissioners, and Karen Steinhoff, a Raptor Biologist retired from the United States Geological Survey, and member of the county's Recreation Task Force, who joined the RAC on their field tour.

He asked if any RAC members had any changes to the agenda. No one did, so it was finalized without changes. Gil indicated that Aden Seidlitz, BLM's Boise District Manager had asked him to request help from the RAC through their OHV & Transportation Management Subgroup with outreach to interested stakeholders and the public as BLM works on development, finalizing, and implementation of the Murphy Sub-region Travel Management Plan (TMP). He asked RAC members in attendance, and those who could not attend the tour to seriously consider joining this subgroup. There was further discussion about this at the end of the meeting.

The tour began at the Wilson Creek Recreation Trail Head, where Ryan Homan, BLM's Owyhee Field Office Recreation Planner, gave an overview of the Wilson Creek Recreation TMP. This area, encompassing approximately 30,000 acres, is much smaller than the 230,000 acre area comprising the Murphy Sub-Region TMP. Wilson was targeted for non-motorized users, primarily equestrian, hikers, and mountain bikers. The Plan was begun in 2005, finalized in 2007, and its implementation is nearly complete. The Murphy Sub-region's Plan will emphasize motorized uses.

When the Wilson Plan was begun in 2005, through the use of maps, GPS trail mapping and on-the-ground "ground-truthing" (verification), over 173 miles of equestrian, hiking, biking and motorized routes were identified, 140 miles of motorized and 33 miles of non-motorized routes. The completed Plan has 55 miles of motorized routes, 49 miles of non-motorized or single track routes and 2 miles of hiker/equestrian only trails. Thirty-eight miles of routes were closed based on key values identified in the area including, sage-grouse, sensitive plants, private property, and wild horse issues.

Implementation of the Plan was begun in 2007. Wilson Creek Road was graded and thirty culverts were added; two parking areas have been redesigned, including the entrance changed on one of them; a wayside parking area was created; new restrooms have been installed, kiosks, portal signs and trail signs continue to be installed; educational information and kiosk maps have been produced; and gates were installed for twenty-six administrative access roads. Fences were repaired, and installed for seasonal closures for sage-grouse. Boulders have been brought in to help define parking areas; to help close routes, and narrow trail entry points. Numerous trails have been rehabbed using BLM Operations Division crews. This summer, five young people from the Idaho Youth Conservation Corp's Pilot Project also helped with trail rehabbing. The youth worked on ripping up trails that are now closed to use, putting in water bars, raking and reseeding the trail areas.

The Boise District recently received funding through grant monies from Idaho Department of Transportation for produce maps and brochures for distribution to the public that will describe the area identify the trails and tell the reader whether they are designated for motorized or non-motorized use.

This fall, BLM plans to reroute two trails that were identified in the environmental assessment completed for the Plan. One will to help avoid a cultural site, and another to mitigate user conflicts. On that one, equestrians on horses had to climb up a steep section of a trail that had limited visibility, and mountain bikers potentially travelling down the same steep route.

Second Stop: Hemingway Butte Recreation Area Trailhead, often called a “play area”, consists of 192 acres of enclosed public lands that are fenced, unrestricted, with two rest-rooms, information kiosks, loading and unloading ramps, and with cattle guards placed at the entrance to the trail head to prevent cattle from entering the area. Stiles in the fencing allow users access to the maintained trail system outside the play area. A map was used to point out the location of Hemingway Butte, and how the area now transitions between the play area and to a designated route area. The map showed the large number of routes both motorized and non-motorized in the sub-region.

The sub-region has three key anchor points; Hemingway Butte, Rabbit Creek, and Fossil Creek, because of the huge number of routes, roads and trails in the sub-region. The area is being managed for up to six motorized competitive events per year.

John Robison asked what are the sideboards that were used during the process of trail designation as “open” or “closed?” He asked whether density requirements were established. Dave Wolf responded that none were established.

An informal recommendation was made that trash bags be made available for individuals and groups the county is aware of who would like to help pick up trash, to keep the play area and parking areas clean.

Drove by Chalky Butte temporary parking area, and the location of the Windy Point pipeline was pointed out. The RAC members were asked to provide BLM with input on their decision whether to leave this parking area open or to close it.

Stopped at Kane Springs Parking Area, this consists of two parking lots. There is an issue with the Windy Point Pipeline in that there is an OHV motorized trail that runs over the top of the pipeline. There are a few points along the pipeline where it is above ground, thus posing a safety hazard to recreationists and the general maintenance of the pipeline. BLM is proposing to re-open this trail, which will mean heavy maintenance along it. Some boulders have already been added where the trail had to be moved slightly, because of the exposed pipeline. The parking area would be kept open as well. There are ageing and maintenance issues that BLM is working on with the owner and permittee.

Pointed out where two wetland ponds are located and more are being created. BLM is in discussion with the Owendorf’s about how many ponds are needed as there are emerging issues including of salinity of the water for nearby land owners and permittees.

The tour passed an old school house that was built in the 1920’s where eight to 14 students from first through six grades studied in a one-room classroom. We then drove past Soldiers Camping Area to the west along the route. Commissioner Hoagland told the passengers the historic story about how it got its name.

At this point along the field tour, Dave Wolf pointed out that the group was transitioning out of the heavy use area. Neil Rimbey asked about the number of Wild Horses in the two Herd Management Areas (HMAs). Dave Wolf said after the gather in 2007, a helicopter flight was taken to survey the area and confirm the count of horses remaining in the two HMA.

Approximately thirty more horses were counted than during the flight after the gather. Due to the unexpectedly high numbers, BLM did not return as many horses as had been previously planned. Following the gather horse numbers were slightly above the low end of appropriate management level.

Next stop on the tour was the Black Mountain Recreation Parking Area. This is a proposed new parking area. Ms. Steinhoff noted the Owyhee Recreation Task Force (ORTF) had agreed to this as an addition to Hemingway Butte Play Area EA.

Owyhee County Sheriff, Gary Aman, RAC Member and Chair of the ORTF, noted that as it becomes hotter during the summer, recreation users tend to move up in elevation where it is naturally cooler.

At the Black Mountain Recreation Parking Area Gary Aman noted the number of boulders that have been placed around the perimeter to help with containment. He said this has really helped. He noted the need for additional signage at the area. John Robison pointed out two golden eagles flying above the group. Karen Steinhoff pointed to nearby rock cliffs where their nests have been located. BLM noted Owyhee County's cooperation in helping with safety issues that have been identified by locals by striping designated routes across the paved roads. One suggestion was made to add a small American Flag just below the signage, to help prevent them from being shot-up. It has helped in other locations in the western U.S. Passed the storage tank and well to the east of the road where the Windy Point Pipeline ends. Additional signage was recommended by Karen Steinhoff. BLM asked her what she thought the signs should say.

This parking area is used by OHV recreationists on their way to Silver City, to Black Mountain, and other areas further to the south.

John Robison asked BLM managers whether they had considered adding additional amenities, such as restrooms and or picnic tables. This is where the distinction between a trailhead and parking was discussed. Parking Areas have no rest-rooms, where as trailheads do. Signage is provided at both parking areas and trail heads.

BLM asked the RAC to consider in their subgroup giving BLM advice on which parking areas should remain open and which should be closed.

Gary Aman and Commissioner Hoagland urged BLM to establish this as a designated parking area, or even a trail head.

A question was asked about the spread of invasive weeds in the area. Scotch thistle, and Medusa Head are being seen in the area according to Commissioner Hoagland, as well as lots of cheat grass.

Gary Aman brought up the need for signage along old two-track roads and other trails where people are getting lost or injured. He said it will not take a lot of additional signs to help out a lot of lost recreationists out in this area, and potentially cut down on the number of reports his deputies get about lost or injured individuals.

Next stop was at the entrance to the Briar subdivision, which is approximately 2-3 miles from the Black Mountain Parking Area. The road we were on went through the Black Mountain Wild Horse Herd Management Area. Another map was spread out on hood of a truck to show where OHV routes are coming off BLM-managed public lands and onto private. BLM noted there was a potential to acquire easements throughout the entire region in the future.

Karen Steinhoff noted there are a number of trails radiating out from the designated trails, including OHV's riding close to the fence that surrounds the subdivision. She felt the area at the entrance to the subdivision that is becoming a recreation parking area needs to be closed. The OCRTF recommends closing the area. The issue is the damage being done to the public land, not, an issue of interaction between equestrian and OHV riders.

Drove down Old Stage Road to Silver City Road. One issue pointed out was of competitive use of areas that do not already have used trails in them.

RAC Member Rick Just, a manager at the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation (IDPR), pointed out that IDPR has equipment and funding for trails maintenance. "This is finding that both BLM and Owyhee County could use for trail rehabilitation. It may not be used, however, for trail obliteration or closing. There is funding as well for developing signage and mapping," Rick said. Dave Wolf confirmed that the sub-region's trails are identified as "limited to existing" until the TMP is completed which will identify them as either "closed" or "open".

During the tour, we passed a number of de-facto parking areas that appear to be getting a lot of use. Commissioner Hoagland pointed out the increased usage he has observed over the last few years. Karen Steinhoff noted that when BLM and other agencies' smoke jumpers are training out in the sub-region during the spring, they practice jumping onto cloth targets. Some of these are not being picked up.

Action: Karen will send Dave Wolf an email giving him some additional details and approximate locations.

The tour next went along Silver City Road to Sinkers Creek. This is the only 303-D listed creek in the area. During a make-your-own-sandwich lunch, three reports were given by RAC members.

A report was given by Rick Just about the Field Trip he participated in with BLM staff and members of the Twin Falls District RAC that took him into a designated Wild and Scenic Area (WSA), called the King Hill WSA, located in an area of public land that straddles the Twin Falls and Boise Districts. Hammett is the closest town to this WSA. A local rancher there is concerned with the impact of pioneered (unauthorized) motorized recreation trails into the WSA being created primarily by horn hunters. Other concerns include cut fences, gates left open and harassment of wildlife by OHVs and snowmobilers. Recreationists are beginning to discover the area and are likely to create even more trails once they routinely explore the WSA.

The WSA is not marked on the Boise District side. The Twin Falls District side does have about a dozen signs. The rancher requested that the WSA be signed as such to inform users of its special status. He further offered to purchase and install signs approved by BLM, and see that they are maintained. His suggestion was that the signing be installed, and then enforcement personnel inform/warn people as an educational effort for a couple of years before writing any tickets.

Rick and members from the Twin Falls RAC are working on a joint letter regarding signing and the possibility of emergency closures for WSAs in southern Idaho. The letter is intended to request a meeting with Tom Dyer to discuss the situation.

John Robison provided a report about his participation on the field trip with members of the Twin Falls RAC to see the China Mountain Wild Energy Proposed location. This proposed Wind Energy project is located in the Jarbidge Field Office, which formerly was located in the Boise District. In 2004, an environmental assessment was completed addressing placement of metrological towers for the project. The Boise District RAC urged BLM to deny the placement at the locations proposed, because they felt the risk of impacts were too high to sage grouse leks, and opening up the area that has several cultural sites to significant disturbance from construction of roads, and increased traffic. While BLM went ahead and agreed to the placement of the towers, they did so with the stipulation that monitoring be done and a report issued addressing the impacts of the met towers to the leks.

A short discussion was held about a letter Rick Raymondi had prepared for the RAC to send to the BLM following the RAC's request of this letter following his report at their March meeting. The report addressed his review of the Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact statement for Designation of Energy Corridors on Federal Land in the 11 Western States, participation in a briefing by Boise District BLM for RAC members and a public meeting, both held in January 2008. Rick Just asked that Bruneau Sand Dunes be added to the report as the biggest concern by IDPR. John Robison noted the concern by Idaho Conservation League about the potential impacts to the Birds of Prey National Conservation Area (NCA). Neil Rimbey had some edits to the letter as well. He noted the issue of impacts to the area goes much further than OHV's. There are potential impacts by the spread of invasive weeds resulting from construction of roads for installation of the wind towers, as well as to sage-grouse leks and cultural sites.

All agreed to send Rick their comments and recommended modifications to the letter. He will incorporate them and send a modified letter to MJ for RAC Vice-Chair, Brenda Richards to sign next week. It then will be sent to Aden Seidlitz, BLM's Boise District Manager, and the appropriate individual at BLM in Washington, D.C.

The next stop along the tour was the Stage Road Junction that has become a major recreation parking area. Dave Wolf pointed out that BLM's interests are that this parking area is located where OHV's can come and funnel onto Silver City Road. Commissioner Hoagland said Owyhee County will begin holding public hearings on which roads they propose to close to OHV use for public input in the near future. Gary Aman recommended that the County leave roads open that are currently open and close the remainder.

John Robison noted that this would be a great place for boulders and rocks to be placed that would help direct OHV and other trail users; and BLM managers agreed. Commissioner Hoagland commented on the need for additional signage, especially for safety reasons, on the Silver City Road coming up to Stage Road Junction. Dave wolf pointed out an example of a trail (of which there had been several spotted) that are marked, but without numbers, therefore, BLM has no ability to track or inventory them.

The tour then drove back to Murphy on highway 78. Dave Wolf noted this highway was being proposed as the western most boundary for the Snake River Birds of Prey NCA in the new Resource Management Plan for the area.

The RAC continued its meeting in a conference room at the Owyhee County Historical Museum. A map showing the location of the Tongue complex fire that burned in Owyhee County in 2007 was laid out on tables for the RAC members to visually see where temporary metal fences had been built in pastures where cattle could be allowed to graze and where the land would have to rest. Aden Seidlitz noted that there were no fixed two-year rest areas, rather where needed pastures were being rested depending on the intensity of the burn in that specific area. It was noted that no reseeding was being done for rehabilitation. Natural re-growth was occurring quite well. Donna Bennett asked whether BLM had found any springs were coming back, especially where Jumper trees are located.

Action: BLM will provide Donna with information about whether and research is being done documenting the reoccurrence of the springs.

The discussion about what routes and issues were shown during the field trip was summed up by Dave Wolf and Ryan Homan by showing them three maps. The first was recreation routes that BLM had identified through maps; GPS trail mapping and ground truthing. The second one was the preferred alternative that was being developed and analyzed in the EA for BLM's TMP. The third map showed the proposed routes identified in the proposed plan of the Owyhee County Recreation Task Force.

Dave Wolf said in preparing the map of proposed travel options in the sub-region, BLM looked at two and four-wheel routes that were there and decided they would stay open. If there are not issues (e.g. sage-grouse leks), then those will remain open. Others are being eliminated, based on specific issues in the areas. Most are being dealt with taking in mind the desire for there to be routes linked together, and to eliminate those who just go off in various directions from the larger trail.

Gary Aman, the Task Force Chair, and Commissioner Hoagland were asked to provide additional information about that map. Gary said they left the resolution open-ended to BLM for them to identify routes that needed to be opened or closed. He stated the Task Force did not want to limit BLM's options. They worked to get input and support for their proposal from many local stakeholder groups including the permittees, recreation and conservation groups.

Commissioner Hoagland agreed that they had worked with many stakeholder groups and made as many concessions as they felt could be managed. He said the OHV competitors wanted all trails opened, which was a request they could not accommodate.

RAC Chair, Gil Green, asked who was interested in being a member of the OHV and Transportation Management sub-group. Rick Just indicated he would ask whether Todd Wernex, a recreation specialist for the Owyhee Area for motorized vehicles for Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation could be made available to participate in the task group. RAC members Ralph Richardson, Grant Simonds, and John Robison or two other members of the Idaho Conservation League said they would join. Karen Steinhoff also indicated her interest in joining the sub-group. A tentative meeting date, time and location are set of August 11<sup>th</sup>, 7:00 p.m. in Murphy at the Owyhee County Historical Museum.

Action: By July 25<sup>th</sup>, all sub-group members will email MJ and let her know whether this date is compatible with their schedules.

Jim Collord, President of Thunder Mountain Gold, and Steve West, President of Centra Environmental Engineering and Regulatory Affairs Consulting, Inc. provided the RAC with a briefing on the status of their activities at South Mountain Mine located in Owyhee County. He said the key "take home" points for the RAC are that they were NOT mining, and that this is NOT a gold mine. Steve West is the former Director of Idaho's Dept. of Environmental Quality. It is an underground mining operation exploring for zinc, silver, lead and other minerals. He provided information about the history and geology of south Mountain, and background on Thunder Mountain Mining Company. The mine is located six miles inside the Idaho border with Oregon at Jordan Valley. BLM's South Mountain Fire Lookout is located approximately one mile from the mine. The mine was discovered in the 1870's. It was initially mined for high-graded silver ore.

Thunder Mountain purchased 17 patented mining claims that included information about 800 feet miles of exploration inside the mountain. The mine has been in a "care and maintenance"

status since the 1970's. Diagrams showed tunnels that have explored areas going as deep at 1,200 feet below the surface. They were pleased to discover large quantities of an acid neutralizing stone near the mountain called laxie marble. A sample was passed around the group. Mr. Collord reviewed their planned work schedule which included surface core drilling and re-opening the Sonneman portal and Texas shaft. They will be going in those portions of the mine to verify the potential amounts of various minerals identified in an independent analysis they had conducted that was recently completed.

John Robison asked about the mill tailings reclamation activities. The mining company contracted with Northwind, an environmental rehabilitation company. The site was wrapped in 14 inch plastic and then 18 inches of clean soil was put on top, with straw matting placed over the soil. Fencing was placed around the perimeter of the reclamation area. Mr. Robison asked whether any contaminates were found then the mill tailings were sampled. Steve West answered, that none were found. Centra, however, is monitoring the site looking at seasonal changes. He asked about whether they were planning on building a production facility at the site. Mr. Collord said they were not. He emphasized the site is not planned for open pit mining, rather only a small underground mine. They will need to have additional power brought to the mine site as well as additional water. The company would like to exchange a right-of-way with BLM. Mr. Collord thinks the road may be an RS 2477 issue.

The claims they have on BLM lands are not intended for mining activities. At the present, their purpose is to add a buffer around the area. When asked about how many trucks he thought would be hauling material out of the area, Mr. Collord said seven to ten loads a day would go out in large trucks. He said they would employ 50 to 75 individuals. Most of the workforce would be underground. The ore would probably be marketed to Japan and India.

Action: MJ will send all BDO-RAC members a copy of the power-point presentation given by Thunder Mountain Mining Co.

MJ gave a brief summary of the status of the French John Wind Energy Proposal. The area of interest has been divided into four sections. Dan Wood, a representative from Ridgeline Wind Energy Company told her via email on Thursday, July 17<sup>th</sup> he had mailed an amended proposal to the BLM's Owyhee Field Office that was changing their request for placement of 25 metrological towers to six. He said that should simplify writing the environmental assessment and hopefully speed up BLM's environmental analysis of the proposal and their ability to move forward.

Aden Seidlitz announced a company had met with BLM during the week of July 7<sup>th</sup> to outline their interest in leasing public lands in the Four Rivers Field Office for exploration of geothermal resources. He asked the RAC whether they would be interested in forming a non-renewable energy subgroup whereby he and they could work together to learn more about the issues that

