

**Upper Columbia-Salmon Clearwater (UCSC) District, Idaho  
Resource Advisory Council (RAC) Conference Call  
September 4, 2003**

**RAC Members Participating:** Dan Rix, Louise Stark, David Nelson, Doug Boggan, Mark Taylor, Ben O’Neal, Bryan Rowder

**Facilitator:** Stephanie Snook (BLM, Coeur d’Alene Field Office)

**Other Meeting Participants:** Fritz Rennebaum (BLM, UCSC District Manager), K Lynn Bennett (BLM, Idaho State Director), Evalyn Bennett (BLM, Salmon Field Office - recorder), Mark Hilliard (BLM, Washington Office - wildlife biologist stationed in Boise). BLM specialists from Idaho State Office: Ron Kay (Rangeland Program Lead), Jack Sept (Special Asst.), Tom Miles (Resources Services Staff - wild horse and burro program lead, rangeland specialist), Scott Althouse (Fisheries Biologist with Nez Perce Tribes in Lapwai)

**MEETING AGENDA**

- Meeting Logistics: Identify participants; review process and agenda (Stephanie and Fritz)
- “Refining the Idaho BLM Organization”: Overview of proposed organization changes; RAC comments (K Lynn Bennett and Fritz Rennebaum)
- Sustaining Working Landscapes Policy: Overview; RAC comments (Ron Kay)
- Draft BLM Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy: Overview of strategy; RAC comments (Mark Hilliard)
- RAC Business (Vice-Chair Boggan and Stephanie Snook)

**Refining the Idaho BLM Organization**

State Director K Lynn Bennett has already met with the LSRD and USRD RACs. He wants written recommendations from each RAC to present to Rebecca Watson. (The Assistant Secretary has the authority to approve organization restructuring.)

Goals of the organization restructuring are:

- evaluate how BLM offices operate,
- seek to improve service to the public, and
- improve cost efficiencies (e.g., travel, communications).

To develop this recommended organizational structure, Fritz Rennebaum met with more than 100 contacts, including local government officials and members of the livestock

grazing industry. To reduce costs, changes which require District staff to move would be implemented as vacancies become available on the District staffs.

### *Overview of Recommended Changes*

Lower Snake River District (LSRD): The main issue in this district is the location of the Owyhee Field Office (FO). Need for them to be closer to the people/resources they deal with so they can become more involved in the community and reduce travel distances. The Owyhee FO is comprised of lands formerly managed by the Bruneau Resource Area (RA) and Owyhee RA. Workloads in Owyhee indicate the need to split the Bruneau FO out again. Leave Bruneau FO at the District Office in Boise. Move Owyhee FO to Marsing. [Note: This restructuring is similar to BLM's moving the Challis Field Office from Salmon to Challis a few years ago.]

Upper Snake River District (USRD): Salmon and Challis Field Offices will become part of the USRD, and Shoshone and Burley Field Offices will become part of a new (fourth) district, the South Central District. Currently, Salmon and Challis area constituents must travel great distances to meet with the District Manager if Coeur d'Alene. This restructuring will place Salmon and Challis offices in closer contact with the area those staffs travel to for Fish and Wildlife Service and tribal consultation.

South Central District: Establish a new District Office in Twin Falls to support the Shoshone, Jarbidge, and Burley Field Offices (Jarbidge would move "out" of the LSRD and Shoshone/Burley would move "out" of the USRD). BLM already has an agreement with the Forest Service to co-locate fire dispatch; also feasible to co-locate a district office.

Upper Columbia Salmon-Clearwater District (UCSCD): Move the Salmon and Challis Field Offices to the USRD. Maintain the Coeur d'Alene and Cottonwood FOs and UCSC District Office in Coeur d'Alene.

### *RAC Comments on Recommended Organizational Structure*

Dave Nelson: doesn't agree with UCSC split (Salmon/Challis have different issues than the Idaho Falls area), OK with Shoshone; concerned about leaving so little land in the UCSC District – what will be the function of the RAC there?

Louise Stark: Suggested making Salmon-Challis a district by itself; different watershed and issues than the Idaho Falls part of the state; what training will be needed for staff to become familiar with issues in their "new" district?

Dan Rix: does the small acreage remaining in UCSC justify the expense of a separate district?

Mark Taylor: The BLM should facilitate ecosystem management by making interstate district boundaries; it's redundant to have Coeur d'Alene and Spokane Districts in such

close proximity; combine C d'Alene and part of WA, add Cottonwood to OR, add LSRD to parts of NV and OR.

Ben O'Neal: BLM should maintain good working relationships in communities regardless of where District boundaries lie.

*K Lynn Bennett and Fritz Rennebaum's Responses to RAC Comments*

Moving Salmon and Challis FO to USRD: Salmon and Challis FOs used to be part of a Salmon District. Although Salmon/Challis have different issues than Idaho Falls/Pocatello, Salmon and Challis deal with USFWS in Chubbuck near Idaho Falls and many people from the Salmon/Challis area are tied to Idaho Falls. Economic and staff movement considerations of implementing organizational changes nixed having a separate Salmon District. Current district level staff and support staff (fire/aviation, administration, planning) will continue to reside in Salmon and serve the Salmon and Challis offices. Existing Coeur d'Alene staff will support the UCSC District.

Costs of Implementation: K Lynn doesn't want to add staff positions to accomplish these changes. He anticipates minimal expense – some training and time to become familiar with issues.

Resource Advisory Councils: All three RACs have recommended adding a fourth RAC so each District will have its own council. The RAC will still be important in UCSC even though a smaller land area, since there are vital issues in the Coeur d'Alene and Cottonwood Districts (e.g., water, recreation, wildland-urban-interface). Each RAC should be better able to focus on local issues. The BLM would like to continue to have the RAC chairs meet with the State Director and have RAC sub-groups interact state-wide. K Lynn wants RAC input on both State-wide and local issues.

Small Acres in UCSC: UCSC will be like the former Coeur d'Alene District. K Lynn is committed to maintaining this district. There are other small BLM districts in WA and OR because they (like UCSC) have a substantial timber base which requires more intensive management.

Align District Boundaries to Improve Ecosystem Management: Right now the BLM can't identify districts that include lands across state boundaries, even though it facilitates ecosystem management

**UCSC RAC Recommendations**

The UCSC Resource Advisory Council makes four recommendations:

- The UCSC RAC accepts the proposed re-alignment of District boundaries.
- However, the RAC recommends that the BLM examine the feasibility of interstate District boundaries that match regional cultural considerations, tribal interests, and ecosystem management considerations.

- The RAC recommends that the BLM re-establish and have four RACs (one for each District) instead of three.
- The RAC recommends that the BLM continue to have the RAC chairs meet periodically with the State Director on behalf of the councils throughout the state.

David Nelson stated a motion that the RAC approve these recommendations. Doug Boggan seconded the motion. Motion passed.

### **Sustaining Working Landscapes (SWL) Initiative**

The SWL Initiative includes two components: a policy statement and changes to the grazing regulations. The RAC is asked to provide suggestions on the policy portion of the initiative, including whether this concept even merits being defined in a policy statement.

The initiative will not result in changes to the Standards and Guidelines for Grazing Management. The BLM is, however, assessing how the S&G are being implemented in Field Offices to make sure implementation is consistent.

Public meetings on SWL were held at three locations in Idaho: Salmon, Boise, and Burley.

Livestock use is authorized on most BLM lands. The purposes of the Initiative are to support grazing on public lands while also maintaining other uses of those lands.

Ron Kay explained the five concepts in the initiative (see Attachment 2-4 to 2-6).

- Conservation Partnerships: facilitate permittees' applications for grants to fund range improvements
  - Reserve Common Allotments: Can currently use a vacant allotment as a "common allotment" if this intention is stated in the land use plan. Regulations changes and SWL policy will clarify the use of these allotments.
  - Voluntary Allotment Restructuring: can combine or divide allotments today
  - Conservation Easements: can do easements already; SWL policy/regulations add direction for dealing with isolated parcels management; purpose is to maintain open space, conserve resources
  - ESA Mitigation: the first four concepts support mitigation efforts for ESA listed species
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*RAC and Tribal Comments*

Scott Althouse – Nez Perce Tribes has an interest in how the initiative might be implemented on and off-reservation. For example, the reservation has fisheries restoration projects on Big Canyon Reservoir (which includes BLM-managed lands) and off-reservation properties have habitat for listed species. Tribes are concerned about the certainty/length of time partnerships or easements will be in place. The Tribes support the initiative's tools to support restoration, but have concerns the initiative could weaken NEPA and ESA.

Mark Taylor recommends having tribal representation on the UCSC RAC; conservation partnerships are good as long as they don't restrict access for other users (besides the permittees).

Dave Nelson/Dan Rix: Concerned that control of public lands will go to private individuals rather than staying with the BLM. Dave doesn't want permittees to gain ownership/rights on land that has range improvements they contributed toward.

Ben O'Neal: Need to make it easier for the permittee to work with the agencies and maintain a viable ranching operation using public lands. Ranchers help keep land free of sub-divisions and want to implement ecosystem based management. Ranchers also help maintain access to public lands.

Louise Stark: Feels SWL concepts are in the right direction. They increase options for making changes and provide managers with flexibility to meet everyone's needs.

#### *Ron Kay and Tom Mile's Responses to RAC Comments*

Permittees have salvage rights to the improvements they contributed to only, not the land. Existing grazing regulations explain compensation procedures for range improvements.

Examples of all five concepts are currently being implemented. The regulation changes would improve BLM procedures to implement these kinds of actions on a more widespread basis.

#### *RAC Recommendation on the SWL Policy*

Dan Rix made a motion that the RAC's approve the following recommendation. David Nelson seconded the motion, which was approved.

**UCSC RAC Recommendation:** The SWL Initiative seems to be going in the right direction, but the RAC has concerns about giving away control of public lands to private entities; the federal agencies still need to manage the public lands for the public lands users. Request no change to rules regarding grazing permittee's control over public access to or use of the public lands. Do not use this initiative to weaken the other laws we are required to follow such as NEPA and ESA.

## **Sage-Grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy**

BLM manages the most sagebrush habitat in the country and has occupied Sage-grouse habitat across the species' range (in every Western state with BLM-managed lands). BLM manages habitat; states manage populations. The BLM is proposing a two-tier strategy to conserve Sage-grouse habitat:

- (1) Establish a national level support structure of information and policies that supports state-level conservation strategies for BLM-administered public lands. [Note: The BLM web site [www.blm.gov](http://www.blm.gov) has a web page that gives an overview of the strategy and a link to download the 35-page strategy.]
- (2) Develop state-level strategies that identify actions needed to protect, improve, and restore Sage-grouse habitat. (First, the BLM must review current BLM authorizations/actions that potentially impact sage grouse habitat and identify changes needed to conserve/improve/restore habitat.)

The goal of the Strategy is to manage Sage-grouse habitat in such a way as to preclude listing under the ESA. The State and National strategies must be measurable, out-come based, interdisciplinary, and based on the 4 C's process. Neither level of the strategy will be a decision document or a regulation. The principle decision document will still be the land use plans. The National strategy is scheduled to be completed by January 1, 2004, and State strategies by September 30, 2004. If listing of the Sage-grouse occurs, the national and state strategies will be a foundation for a recovery strategy.

The Sage-Grouse Conservation Strategy has a high level of interest, so the BLM extended the public/RAC comment period to November 1, 2003. Primary concern is that the BLM strategy will pre-empt state wildlife agency Sage-grouse plans and local working group strategies.

State/Federal agency MOU to cooperate in conservation planning for Sage-grouse; MOU signatories agreed to consider guidelines for managing Sage-grouse populations and habitats (Connelly et al).

There is some urgency to have a BLM strategy in place quickly to prevent T/E listing. USFWS is evaluating Sageegrouse on a range-wide basis, and looks at approved conservation and land use plans when deciding if sufficient measures are in place to support a "not warranted for listing" determination.

The National strategy will support state-level strategies. As states work on their strategies, the National strategy will complement state-led planning efforts. If State plans aren't completed when a FWS determination is made, the FWS can at least review the National Strategy as a means of satisfying the FWS Policy for Evaluation of Conservation Efforts (PECE) when Making Listing Decisions.

*Sage-Grouse Information*

The species has been in long term population decline (30% decrease since 1985, more than 90% reduction in the last century). Declines are cyclical, but population numbers haven't come back up to previous levels. 50% loss of habitat. Remaining habitat is fragmented or invaded by invasive species. Less than 10% of habitat considered to be in pristine condition.

Many species of concern live in the sagebrush biome (plants, birds, invertebrates, reptiles, mammals). 102,000,000 acres of sagebrush remaining, 28% private (more productive, well-watered), 54% public lands (9 million acres FS). Need to coordinate management across ownership boundaries and involve a broad range of stakeholders. Pygmy rabbits are petitioned to be listed throughout their range. Sage-grouse actions may or may not be appropriate for pygmy rabbits.

Sage-grouse are a landscape species that require a lot of habitat to maintain breeding populations. Food, water, shelter, space are primary habitat requirements. Many factors result in habitat and population loss: agricultural conversion, fires, roads (fragmentation), weed invasion, grazing impacts, power lines (predators).

Regional Sage-grouse habitat condition assessments have been conducted. Results are on the Internet. The BLM still needs to review land use plans for conservation provisions – see what is adequate/not. Best Management Practices (BMPs) for program management will be developed in cooperation with the states and public so they will have broad application.

This strategy is the BLM's means of taking action to maintain existing quality habitat, restore suitable habitat, and improve population numbers. Goal is to "preclude the need for listing."

#### *Expectations of the RACs*

Review the National Strategy (see [www.blm.gov](http://www.blm.gov)) to

- Identify areas that are confusing or not explained in enough detail.
- Review the document's general philosophy to determine if the Strategy fixes the problem
- Decide if the Strategy adequately addresses multiple use issues

Coordinate with local working groups to develop the Idaho (state) BLM's conservation strategy and identify BLM actions or authorizations that either adversely impact or benefit sage grouse habitat.

Note: The State Director will want the RACs' involvement many times during the process as the State plans are written, BMPs are developed, etc.

## **UCSC RAC Recommendation**

The UCSC RAC agrees with the BLM's overall Sage-grouse habitat conservation strategy at the state and national level and the agency's role of improving habitat to help recover Sage-grouse populations. The BLM needs to place emphasis on implementing actions that will maintain or improve Sage-grouse habitat on BLM-managed lands.

Motion to accept recommendation made by David Nelson and seconded by Bryan Rowder; motion carried.

**Note:** RAC members want to improve Sage-grouse habitat and numbers. The RAC made an additional recommendation to Mark Hilliard that the news release be revised to clarify that the intent of the strategy is to preclude the need to list the Sage-grouse (rather than to avoid a listing).

## **RAC Business**

Next UCSC RAC meeting will be November 12 and 13, 2003 in Missoula, Montana at the C'Mon Inn or Grant Creek Inn (meet the afternoon of the 12<sup>th</sup> and morning of the 13<sup>th</sup>). Stephanie will arrange accommodations.

### Agenda Items

- OHV sub-group meeting report by Mark Taylor
- Develop annual work plan for the UCSC RAC
- Make recommendations for how to split off RAC representation to match new District boundaries
- Sign an appreciation card for outgoing RAC members

Stephanie will distribute the meeting minutes from the June meeting via mail (hard copy). Prior to the next meeting, Stephanie will also send out information on the new RAC members and set up times to conduct an orientation for them.

Seven new RAC members should be appointed in September. Outgoing members (term expired or resigned) are Dan Rix, Bryan Rowder, Bill Madonna, Kathy Richmond, Tom Townsend, Hope Benedict, and Marilyn Brower. Kathy Richmond has applied for reappointment.

Stephanie asked how the RAC members felt about the conference call and if it worked okay. Most felt it was fine to use occasionally to deal with specific issues but not as productive as a face-to-face meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 12:25 p.m. (Pacific)

Minutes approved November 13, 2003