

Minutes

Idaho Upper Columbia-Salmon Clearwater Advisory Council Meeting June 13-14, 2001

C'MON INN, MISSOULA, MONTANA

Attending RAC Members: Chuck Boyd, Lin Cannell, Bryan Rowder, Doug Boggan, Ben O'Neal, Tom Townsend, Greg Tourtlotte, Kathy Richmond, Bill Madonna

Attending BLM Personnel: Fritz Rennebaum, Ted Graf, Pat Garbutt

June 13, 2001

The meeting of the UCSC Resource Advisory Council was called to order at 1:10 p.m. District Manager Fritz Rennebaum (the RAC's Designated Federal Official) welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked each RAC member to briefly introduce themselves and tell what interests they represent. Fritz noted that the agenda was a full one and he was glad those members present were able to make it to the meeting.

Ted Graf, RAC Coordinator, provided information on the agenda, information packets and travel forms.

Following some introductory remarks by Fritz, Pat Garbutt, District Fire Management Officer, began her presentation about fire and fuel management. She began by showing a video of the major fires in Montana during the summer of 2000. The video generated quite a bit of discussion about protection of private property, having a defensible space around dwellings in the wildland urban interface, priorities for fire fighters, and the use of military personnel to fight fires. These topics were expanded upon as Pat discussed the Federal Wildland Fire Policy, the National Fire Plan, funding from Congress for fire suppression and the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI).

Pat described how Congress provided \$1.9 billion for federal agencies to use for fire fighters, Rural Fire Departments (RFDs), fuels treatments and protection of communities at risk. As a result, BLM and the Forest Service have developed the National Fire Plan. Each RAC member received a copy of Delivery of the National Fire Plan in Idaho, which summarizes how that plan will be implemented by the various agencies in Idaho.

Next Pat described how our Field Offices are in the process of developing Mitigation Assessments, Mitigation Plans and project plans. Some of these will be implemented this field season and some are for projects in future years. As a quick summary of planned activities for this year, UCSC will treat 10,000 acres for fuel reduction (prescribed burns, mechanical removal, chemical application) involving 60 projects. Nine Mitigation

Assessments will be completed, 50 Rural Fire Departments will have the opportunity to apply for fire funding, and 5 fire engines will be on duty throughout the district.

At 3:00 p.m., it was noted that the public comment period was in session. With no one present to make comments to the RAC, the briefing by Pat Garbutt continued.

Pat pointed out that education is a key component of the fire/fuels program. Several members of the RAC agreed that it is very important that the public become aware of the need for fuels reduction projects and the dire consequences that will result if fuels are not managed properly and constantly. Ted noted that several public education tools are already available and that more are being developed each day. TV spots, brochures about defensible space, information about the urban interface and educational kits for schools are currently available and in use. Home Depot is a partner in providing information on fire proofing homes and offers seminars on clearing vegetation from around structures. It was suggested that BLM and the Forest Service make an effort to obtain some national news coverage of the key components in the National Fire Plan so that public support can be obtained for prescribed burns and other necessary fuels management actions.

Following her presentation, Pat answered questions and passed out a Fuels/Fire Information Survey for each RAC member to complete that evening.

At 4:45 p.m., the meeting was adjourned for the day.

June 14, 2001

The RAC reconvened at 8:00 a.m.

Ted facilitated a discussion about the survey and other issues related to the fire/fuels program. The RAC made the following observations:

BLM needs to continue to be proactive in its approach to fire and fuels management. Being reactive is inefficient and costly.

BLM should work with the Idaho Department of Lands, the Idaho legislature and counties to educate prospective home builders about the risks of building within the WUI.

While the cost of protecting homes is high, it is bad PR to let homes burn. Currently it is up to the Incident Commander to determine fire fighting priorities. A consistent approach to determining priorities should be established.

Prescribed burns result in smoke. Several members noted that while there is a great deal of opposition to the smoke from grass burning which occurs each summer in northern Idaho, most of that opposition is because people see grass burning strictly as a means for a few farmers to make money. It was felt that with the proper education, most citizens would be willing to put up with several days of smoke if they understood it was for the good of the local ecosystem and protection of the community.

Several members noted that BLM needs to provide a synopsis of the National Fire Plan to everyone involved in land management, including the timber industry.

BLM needs to consider the influx of visitors for the Lewis and Clark commemoration activities as it plans its fire and fuels projects. Smoke management may be a big issue.

Kathy Richmond mentioned that one theme of the education effort should be, "A burned forest is not a dead forest."

After a break, Ted provided updates on three topics - weeds, OHV strategy and Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project.

Weeds

The weed control program in the Coeur d'Alene Field Office is growing as new partners join the fight against weeds through the Panhandle Weed Management Area. The Field Office has recently hired a couple of seasonal employees and will be adding a second 200 gallon truck-mounted spray unit. Over 800 acres will be treated this year with the primary focus being on spotted knapweed, Canada thistle, dalmatian toadflax and yellow hawkweed. In addition to herbicides, biological controls (insects) and manual removal are being used in sensitive areas. Two species of knapweed eating insects and two species which destroy Canada thistle are being released.

The Cottonwood Field Office is a partner in four weed management areas. They now have two crews on board and have hired another seasonal employee to work on biocontrol and rehabilitation monitoring. This year, large numbers of sportsmen who are fishing from the river banks for salmon, are hampering control activities at recreation sites. There's just not enough room to bring in equipment. This problem should resolve itself in the near future. In addition to weed control activities, the FO has been working to complete sensitive plant clearances in new spray areas and BLM personnel have assisted Idaho County weed control employees in the inventory and flagging of proposed spray sites. Last week, BLM employees assisted in inventorying the lower 30 miles of the Grand Ronde River for dalmatian toadflax and leafy spurge. This project was a cooperative effort involving partners in the Tri-State Weed Management Area.

The Salmon and Challis Field Offices are also fully engaged in weed control activities. This spring, the Noxious Weed Control Environmental Analysis was rewritten to detail the comprehensive weed control strategy they have adopted for implementation. Six seasonal weed control employees are on board and two Environmental Careers Organization (ECO) employees have been hired to assist with inventory efforts for spotted knapweed and leafy spurge. Recent inventories have revealed a much larger than anticipated leafy spurge infestation in the Carmen-Badger Special Management Area. A contract has been let to a private company to spray that area. In addition to the use of herbicides for control, experimental use of goats to control leafy spurge is occurring. Also, the Field Offices are expanding the use of biocontrol insects. This year, 80 releases

each of two spotted knapweed root-feeding insects and 100 releases each of two spotted knapweed seedhead-eating insects are planned. The Salmon Field Office will be putting out 40 releases of leafy spurge beetles and 6 releases each of two different insects for Canada thistle. Employees will also be collecting leafy spurge flea beetles for release within infested areas.

OHV Strategy

In January 2000, BLM announced plans to develop a national strategy for ensuring environmentally responsible off-highway vehicle use on BLM-administered public lands. Why?

- + Population growth in the West is the highest in the nation.
- + 8 of the 10 fastest growing cities in the US are located in the West.
- + Popularity of motorized off-highway vehicles has risen dramatically. Motorized OHVs are selling at a rate of 1500 units per day.
- + Competition between recreation users of the public land has increased greatly over the past 10 years.

Last summer, BLM held 49 public "listening" sessions throughout the west. In August, several RAC members assisted with the meeting in Lewiston. The listening sessions resulted in about 5,000 comments from the public. A team was assembled and a Draft National OHV strategy was developed by BLM.

On December 3, 2000, the draft strategy was made available over the Internet with printed copies going to all those who participated in the initial meetings or requested a copy. The response from the public was overwhelming with over 14,000 comment letters submitted either through the mail or electronically. What were the major concerns of the public?

Approximately 60% of the comments were concerned about including nonmotorized activities, such as mountain biking, in the same category as motorized vehicles. Based on comments and an analysis of the issues and concerns, BLM determined that mountain bike and other nonmotorized vehicle management warrant their own strategy and management guidance.

Many of the public suggested that BLM close all Wilderness Study Areas and "roadless" areas to OHV use.

Open all designated wilderness areas, National Monuments and WSAs to OHV use.

Close all BLM lands, including roads, to OHV use unless posted as open to use.

Open all BLM lands, including roads, to OHV use unless posted as closed to use.

BLM should establish a registration, licensing or new identification permit system for OHV riders or vehicles.

These and numerous other issues are addressed in the final strategy, which was released to the public on January 19, 2001

In very general terms, the strategy - promotes consistency in OHV decision-making across BLM, highlights the need for additional people and money to manage OHV use, promotes responsible OHV use, recommends revising the current OHV regulations and plans, recognizes that specific solutions must come from local public land users, and recognizes that restrictions and constraints must be clearly posted at key boundaries

So what's happened since January?

A national BLM OHV team has been formed and is working on several products including a field guide or tool box of suggestions for managers on how best to incorporate OHV management into the standard mix of resource issues. The tool box will also provide inventory standards, GIS guidelines, signage requirements, etc. At first it will be available only to BLM managers but will eventually be available to the public over the Internet

Most states are hiring an OHV coordinator. BLM in Idaho will be hiring someone who will handle OHV management and several other duties sometime this summer.

An annual report will be posted on the Internet in November.

BLM in Idaho is in the process of preparing a state strategy which builds on the basic concepts of the national strategy. The team hopes to have a draft completed in August. A review of the draft strategy by the three Idaho RACs is a key component of the public involvement plan for the state strategy.

Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project

Chronology of ICBEMP: In July 1993, President Clinton directed that the Forest Service and BLM "develop a scientifically sound and ecosystem-based strategy for management of eastside forests." This geographic area was expanded to incorporate most of the lands in the Interior Columbia Basin. Two Draft EIS documents were released in June 1997 and over 83,000 public comments were received. The comment period ran for 335 days. In response to the concerns expressed in these comments and based on several other factors, a Supplemental Draft EIS (SDEIS) was prepared and released in March 2000. During the 90-day comment period, 525 comments were received. The project released a Final EIS and Proposed Decision in December 2000. The release of the Final EIS initiated a protest period that began on December 15, 2000 and ended January 16, 2001. Seventy-four protest letters were received. The protests are currently being addressed.

The project's Executive Steering Committee is considering options for bringing the project to completion. Options include signing an overall Record of Decision (ROD), signing a ROD for each land use plan in the Basin, or not signing a ROD but

incorporating the science findings into existing land use plans. Before any type of ROD was signed, the protests would be resolved.

Several RAC members asked about how ICBEMP would relate to on-the-ground projects. Fritz briefed the members on the step-down process that is one of the key components of ICBEMP.

Training

The issue of training for RAC members was discussed. Several members stated that training for the whole RAC would be beneficial and a kick-off from the new Secretary, similar to that from Bruce Babbitt in 1995, would be very useful in making the RAC feel its time is being well spent. Ted and Fritz will see if anything is being planned. If not, they will recommend that training be considered for the near future.

Election of Officials

Each year the RAC is to elect officials. Since a quorum was not present for this meeting, an election could not be held. Instead, the RAC recommended they wait until the new members come on board in September before they hold an election. In the interim, Doug Boggan will continue to serve as Chairperson (he was Vice-Chairperson but became Chairperson when Larry Drew was no longer a member). The RAC thought they should have someone designated as a Vice Chairperson in case something came up while Doug was out of the area guiding. Kathy Richmond was selected to be the interim Vice Chairperson, unless members who were not present have objections. Ted will determine if anyone has objections.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:45 a.m.

I certify that this summary is an accurate record of the subject meeting.

Doug Boggan, Chairperson