

## **BLM RAC FINAL Minutes**

**January 20, 2010  
Upper Snake District Office**

Attending RAC Members: Tom Bassista (Natural Resources), Wayne Butts (Dispersed recreation), David Farnsworth (Mining), Lawrence Fox (Public-At-Large), Otto Higby (Elected Official), Ken Koller (Dispersed recreation), Dino Lowrey (Archaeological and Historical), Vic Phillips (Commercial Timber), Bill Schutte (Dispersed recreation), Rick Snyder (Grazing Permittee), Louise Stark (Outdoor Recreation), Gary Vecellio (State Employee, Fish and Game).

Also present from the BLM, Joe Kraayenbrink (Idaho Falls District Manager), Wendy Reynolds (Upper Snake Field Manager), Dave Rosenkrance (Challis Field Manager), Dave Howell (State and District ARRA Coordinator), Dave Pacioretty (Pocatello Field Manager), Jessica Gardetto (acting RAC Coordinator and Facilitator), A. Scott Fieldhausen (Acting Salmon Field Manager), and Karen Rice (Idaho Falls Associate District Manager). Also present, Julie Cox and Tricia Callaghan from the Salmon-Challis National Forest, and Amy Taylor and Jeremy Field (Senator Risch's Office).

Jessica Gardetto opened the meeting by reviewing the agenda, requesting public comments (with no public comments received) and brief introductions of all present followed. New RAC officers were then elected: Dave Farnsworth was elected Chairman, Ken Koller was elected Vice-Chairman, and Dino Lowrey was elected Secretary.

Monica Zimmerman (BLM-Upper Snake Field Office Recreation Planner) presented an overview on the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (REA), in a nutshell, why and how fees are collected, what the fees used for, and the role of the RAC in this REA process. Millions of people use public lands for hunting, skiing, camping, hiking, boating, fishing, winter sports, wildlife viewing...often for free. There are 2 million acres in the Upper Snake District and most of it is free to use. In 2005, there were 205 million visitors to Forest Service lands, and 69 million to BLM lands. The BLM has 237 District Offices, mostly within the Western U.S. Ken Koller inquired, are surplus funds held over for more than a year? Yes, at least for the BLM. For example, the South Fork Snake River is in its fifth year of improvements. Forest Service, yes, funds for improvements can be held over. Wayne Butts asked, are the costs associated with collection high? A Forest Service representative answered, we can't spend more than 15% of budget for collection, and REA helps to keep dollars going towards facilities. Joe added that there are significant administrative costs associated with collection of fees. Ken asked, do you do deficit spending? The answer was an emphatic no, but they can plan for pending work in a 5 year plan. REA has a 10 year authority, and the goal is to charge fees locally and keep the fees locally (campgrounds, rental cabins, day-use sites.) There are principles for establishing fees, and these fees are not the only funding strategy for the sites (i.e., the fees compliment appropriations.) Business plans are required for

these increases and the fee program provides about %10 of what is needed. The BLM does all of the administrative work for it's sites as well as clean and collect the fees. Louise asked if REA sites are becoming bigger players in the picture and expected to bring in more revenues, thus appropriations might decrease? Joe said no, litigation and cost of living increases eat up appropriations. Trish said that the fees just augment appropriations. Joe reminded people that the public is involved in the decision making process when it comes to fee increases and the BLM is accountable for fiscal responsibility. Detailed discussion we held about fees and permits (i.e., standard amenity fees, expanded amenity fees and special recreation permits), and then RAC members watched a video out of the Washington Office on public participation and the role of REC RACs. Louise was happy to see that funding for sites now stayed in the local community and did not go back to a black hole in Washington. Bill asked if the BLM and Forest Service had a system in place to monitor how users felt about specific areas? Monica replied that they have Working Groups to help determine where fees are best used, and they have comment sections on envelopes and they have also completed surveys on this issue. Monica pointed out that most people can see site improvements and respond positively. RAC involvement is consistent with REA legislation, and RACs are often used to review proposals. Fee expenditures, the local agency retains 100 percent, with 85 per cent for projects and 15 per cent for administration and indirect costs. Permanent employees can not be paid with these fees, and no biological monitoring is done with the fees, but there is some flexibility to use the fees among districts. RAC comments are actually part of the larger public involvement effort. Joe indicated that they have an Annual South Fork Report that can go out to anyone who used the river, so again, the public is aware of what is happening to the area. Our RAC is officially an advisory board for the Forest Service and BLM on REA issues.

Trish Callahan (Recreation Staff for the Salmon-Challis National Forest) presented proposed fee increases for 25 sites, a slimmed down version of the 44 sites originally proposed. The fees are divided into three categories:

- 1) new fees of \$5.00 at 8 campgrounds (Banner Creek, Bench Creek, Blind Creek, Custer #1, Flat Rock Extension, Lake Creek, Mill Creek, and Mt. Borah),
- 2) Fee Increases from \$5.00 to \$10.00 at Beaver Creek, Flat Rock, Lola Creek, Meadow Lake, Mill Creek, Pole Flat, Thatcher, and Wildhorse campgrounds, and
- 3) Increases from \$20.00 to \$40.00 at the following Cabins: Cabin Creek A-Frame, Cape Horn GS Winter Rental, Iron lake A-Frame, North Basin A-Frame, Peel Tree A-Frame, Sheephorn LO Rental, Wallace Lake A-Frame, Williams Creek A-frame, and Yellowjacket GS Rental.

The handout provided by Trish contained specific site figures for current and proposed fees, annual O & M, predicted annual revenue, difference in revenue, and deferred maintenance costs. In addition, the handout showed what amenities were available (or lacking) at each site. Ken Koller asked what might be included under deferred maintenance and has that maintenance been prioritized? Most of the maintenance goes

towards replacement of aging items and a Recreation Facility Analysis provides a ranking for developed sites along with prioritized work. The fee increases are comparable to surrounding areas, with significant improvements slated for most sites. Dave Farnsworth questioned, who is the typical user of these places, locals or outsiders? RAC members were informed that the permitted rivers (Main and Middle Fork of the Salmon) draw many long-distance users, but the rest of the area is utilized at an estimated 80% by locals (i.e., Idaho Falls, Pocatello, Blackfoot, Boise, and Salmon and Challis.). Louise inquired if the estimated for use rates went from Memorial Day to Labor Day, or do the use days spill over into the fall? Trish said there is no charge at sites before and after the water is turned on and off, so very early spring and late fall counts are not known. The fee increase sites all have drinking water, but now they have to mail water samples to Idaho Falls instead of taking them in to Salmon, so water testing expenses have increased substantially since they test water monthly. Four of the sites have garbage stations (and pick up is also expensive). Louise pointed out that Beaver Creek and Wildhorse Creek have very high deferred maintenance figures and wondered if these figures were correct?

The Yellowjacket cabin was built by the CCC, and cabins are stocked with firewood, and a national reservation system is used to book occupancy at the cabins. The Forest Service cleans the cabin. People from all over use the various cabins (Jackson Hole, Missoula, all of Idaho), and the current fees are out of alignment with the current marketplace (i.e., much lower than surrounding area). Public involvement actions have been completed for fee changes, Federal Register notification appeared in July of 2008, and proposed changes also posted on the Salmon–Challis Forest Service webpage in the summer of 2009. We were informed that river fees generated stay on the river, so a site like Meadow Creek would not be eligible for those fees, however, Corn Creek and Boundary Creek do use river fees. The Forest Service did not receive many comments, and the results were mixed with some opposing fees and others okay with fee increases. There were few site specific comments. Tom Bassista inquired if riparian improvements have been considered for sites that are in close proximity to streams or rivers (or sediment concerns). Answer, no, this would be part of a NEPA process for a larger undertaking. Wayne Butts had concerns about Mill Creek in the Challis area, he said the camp gets a lot of local use but the road is so bad that he has questions about implementing a new fee when the access is so dismal.

RAC members decided to discuss and vote on the three groups separately, starting with the proposed cabin increases from \$20.00 to \$40.00. Wayne Butts made the motion to accept all fee increases for cabins, and this motion was seconded by Bill Schuttes. The vote was unanimous for an increase from \$20.00 to \$40.00.

The second discussion and vote was on those sites that currently have a \$5.00 fee with a proposed increase to \$10.00. Wayne Butts made a motion that all campsites except Flat Rock, and Custer #1(a new fee site) should be increased. The vote was 3 nay and 9 yes, with discussion about poor access road conditions to Flat Rock. All participants were reminded that the vote was just a recommendation to the Forest Service, they can go with it or not. It was recommended that the Salmon-Challis Forest Service be advised that waterless sites and sites with poor accessibility should not have fee increases, and this

provided a message to them with the vote. Otto Higbee said that fees should be reflective of amenities. Joe pointed out that wells cost a lot and fees don't even begin to cover those costs. Wayne Butts again motioned to accept all new fee increases from zero to \$5.00 except Pole Flat and Mill Creek (specifically, the Mill Creek Campground located in Challis, again with poor access being the issue), and his motion was seconded by Bill Schuttes. There were 8 Nays. A second motion was then made by Tom Bassista to accept all new fee increases, Ken Koller seconded the motion and it passed with 3 nays and 9 yes votes. It was requested that a letter be drafted to the Forest Service from the RAC with the vote results and expressing concerns about poor road conditions to some of the sites. Dave Farnsworth (new Chairman) will draft letter, email the draft to RAC members to review and then forward to the Forest Service.

Wendy Reynolds (Upper Snake Field Manager), provided an update on the Upper Snake Resource Management Plan (RMP), essentially where they are and where they have been. Back in 2008 they issued a Notice of Intent in the Federal Register to initiate public scoping efforts associated with the RMP revision and broached the possibility of a new plan (of how to manage 1.8 million acres). Currently the district has 4 (outdated) plans; the Big Lost, Big Desert, Medicine Wheel, and Little Lost. To reiterate, the first step was public involvement and over 1,000 people got a handout in June of 2008, and several open-house meetings were held during that same summer. An Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS) has just been completed (650 pages), and this document describes the field office's current management guidance and the area's unique biological, physical, social and economic qualities. In their assessment, an interdisciplinary team considered what direction was good or bad (given public input and knowledge of the resources) and the team was asked to weigh different alternatives. The Tribes were also involved, and the effort was heavy on public scoping. Wendy stated, we constantly asked people, "what is important to you", and consistently received the answer "open spaces and maintenance of traditional values and land". Eight community assessments provided interesting enlightenment. Issues that the BLM must consider are, melding multiple use with the need to protect land, a need for change (so many more people using the land), vegetation concerns, trails and travel management, increased OHV use, and proposed energy and utility corridors (wind farms, new lines, etc). Things have changed on the landscape with new species endangered or threatened, along with numerous fires and new suppression policies, and the BLM must do a balancing act to accommodate all of these changes (and try to anticipate future demands). Grazing activity will continue, but with the increase in multiple use (especially recreation), how to manage grazing becomes more complex. Five (5) alternatives have been developed A) No Action (status quo/existing conditions); B) Conservation/Restoration Theme (not a lot of change, more historical approach), C) Sense of Place (user values, average Joe, based on what people like to do, E) Recreation Based theme, and lastly, (E) A Commodity based theme, associated with commodity production for profit (minerals/grazing/resource extraction). They are close to fleshing out these alternatives, and then we must explore the effects of each alternative. The AMS is not a NEPA document, no decision is required, and it is really just a disclosure of existing conditions. The Draft EIS is due out in the Fall of 2010. This EIS will present a range of alternatives, an analysis of the alternatives impacts, and will identify the preferred alternative. Completion of the Draft

RMP/EIS is announced through a Notice of Availability (NOA) in the Federal Register, as well as through other public outreach methods such as media releases and mailings. A public comment period of at least 90 days commences with the publication of the NOA. Victor Phillips asked, is there a mandate to improve the management plan? The current land use plans are very old and do not address all of the changes (mentioned above), making management difficult and more open to litigation. Most Land Use Plans have a lifespan of 10 to 15 years, and these plans are way past their expiration dates. The target for the RMP/EIS release is January 2012.

After Wendy spoke, the minutes from the previous meeting were approved and the group also approved the printing and handing out of Upper Snake RAC member e-mail addresses.

Joe Kraayenbrink (Idaho Falls District Manager), began by discussing personnel changes, Tom Dyer (Boise) is retiring, and Peter Ditton will be the temporary State Deputy Director. The BLM lost some leadership in Washington D.C. The Upper Snake District is pretty stable. The budget is about the same as last year, with more centralized state budget discussions anticipated. In 2011, it is rumored that the BLM/Interior might have to take an 11% reduction to help with the overall deficit problem. The BLM is currently using stimulus dollars very conservatively for 8-10 projects in the Upper Snake (approximately 1 million dollars).

When looking at Land Use Plans, we hope to combine goals in the future and expect the plans to last 10 to 15 years out. Washington DC really directs this effort and Federal Register notices are legal obligations (notices of intent). The Challis Travel Plan is in place (some people are unhappy with road reductions), the Salmon Travel Plan is almost out, and Pocatello is close to being finished. Energy Corridors are a big issue for us, several lines are coming through this district and our staff is in review mode. Phosphate mining is also high on our list with Simplot expanding and currently in appeals court. A new mine is proposed by Monsanto, and the EIS out for the Blackfoot Bridge Mine and we anticipate expect watershed issues. Again, lots of phosphate issues.

The Thompson Creek/Broken Wing Ranch land exchange is still on track with the EIS due out in approximately 6 months. Special sale authority allows us to sell public land to consolidate and buy better habitat or access for the BLM, and contiguous land patterns are more efficient for us to manage.

We have been hit hard by litigation in the Idaho Falls District with 12 active litigation cases, Challis 6 lawsuits, 1 in Salmon, 1 in Upper Snake and 4 in Pocatello. The adverse impact on staff and managers is phenomenal, cutting into our time to actually be out in the field working and monitoring land. It was asked if RAC members could be "Friends of the Court" or interveners in BLM issues, and the answer is no. Joe added that when the BLM loses a court case, they have to pay all the legal fees, even those associated with the opposing side, but not vice versa. There are 4 ½ full time attorneys in Boise to work on settlement decisions and risk analysis. We hope the L & W Stone case is dismissed as water rights issues clearly favor L & W Stone. Endangered species lawsuits are out there

and the BLM is possibly looking at settlements, but this will depend on level of risk and will be determined by lawyers. Louise wondered, once a case is settled in court, can the people (or group) suing come back. The answer is yes, if there is a reasonable cause. There was a lawsuit over commercial outfitting on the South Fork of the Snake, but it is the State and not the BLM that sets license numbers (11) for that stretch of river. The State also sets the regulations, and the Judge ruled in favor of the State guideboard.

Dave Howell (BLM State and District American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Coordinator and former RAC coordinator), gave a brief presentation on The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (stimulus package). The AR/RA has three goals: 1) create and save jobs, 2) spur economic activity and invest in long term economic growth and, 3) foster unprecedented levels of accountability within government. Some of the projects and activities involve road resurfacing and repair, safety and security upgrades, replacing comfort stations, trail construction and improvements to the Lewis and Clark Trail site (Tower Creek). A full list of projects can be found on the BLM web site.

Dave Pacioretty, Pocatello: We are busy with some grazing litigation and the Blackrock Land Exchange. Tom asked: what if the BLM issued no grazing permits? Answer: that would not work in Idaho. Vic commented that most grazers know what is happening and most try to comply. It was acknowledged that the Western Watershed Project is just trying to shut all grazers down, and ranchers in Idaho must have federal and state lands to graze if they are to survive.

Dave Rosenkrance, Challis Field Manager: We have 9 appeals on the Challis Travel Plan, including 1 from the County, and the County appealed because they thought we closed too much, most of the others appealed because they thought we closed too little. It will take 6 months to work through the Federal Registration process. We are implementing the Travel Plan now and there is a new ATV trail from the Land of Yankee Fork to Bayhorse. If roads and trails are signed, they are open, if there is no sign, they are to be considered closed. There are seasonal restrictions in some areas, and we have 2200 to 2400 miles of roads. There are some short segments of roads closed in sage grouse habitat and we've had help from law enforcement to protect those areas seasonally. Stimulus dollars have helped to implement the Travel Plan in sage grouse areas and also with roadbed rehab and road closure signs. We still get complaints about road closures and there are a few errors in the maps that need to be addressed. Our Wilderness Study Area received ½ million dollars from the stimulus package. Wayne Butts commented that the County did not actually make the appeal, the appeal had to be made by individuals.

Scott Fieldhausen, Acting Salmon Field Manager: We have focused on amending the 2001 Land Use Plan, in 2001 all routes were open and we have moved towards designated routes. The Bureau of Land Management has proposed 4 alternatives; 1) Existing (open), 2) Proposal that three quarters be left open, 3) Closing everything behind gates where there is no legal access, and, 4) Most restrictive, few roads open. We are a bit behind schedule on this due to litigation. Louise Stark asked when the office position

for Special Use would be filled since that spot was recently vacated, and Scott hoped it would be soon.

Finally, the schedule for future meetings was tentatively set with the spring meeting in Salmon, on Tuesday and Wednesday, June 22nd and 23rd. The fall meeting is scheduled for September if possible, with the exact place and dates to be determined, although Idaho Falls was suggested with a trip down the South Fork. A motion to adjourn was made by Otto Higbee, the motion passed unanimously.