

Minutes

Idaho Upper Snake River Resource Advisory Council Meeting February 27, 2002

Attending: Bob Bronson, Dan Olmstead (Wed), Jeff Cook, Shaun Dustin, Linn Kincannon, Jeff Baldwin, Kelly Adams, Steve Thorson, Gwen Montgomery (Thu), Ken Sanders, J.O. Cotant, Chris Christiansen (Wed), Dennis Crane

Not Attending: Morgan Evans, Pat Avery

Public Comments: Rehabilitation: Why is only crested wheatgrass being applied during fire rehabilitation? (Referred to local BLM office for clarification. Crested is not the only grass being used to rehabilitate fires, and in fact there is more use of native grass mixes being used currently.)

Applying the Standards and Guides to allotment assessments: The RAC's role (Linn Kincannon).

Lin Kincannon presented her views that the Standards and Guides on some BLM allotments are not being applied as they were meant. Cited two major allotments where she contends this is the case: Black Canyon Allotment (53,000 acres total, 121 riparian), and Pleasantview Allotment (64,000 acres).

On Black Canyon, ICL found that there are places where the Standards are not being met because of livestock grazing practices. Some infrastructure improvements are needed, but BLM doesn't have the money to make the improvements. Exclosures are not being maintained. On many allotments with upland springs, the springs are losing their functionality. This is an area that the RAC needs to pay attention to; the problems are complex, and the RAC may be able to help figure out what can be done to improve conditions.

At Pleasantview Allotment (64,000 acres total). Looking at the Pleasantview allotment, the uplands look pretty good, but the bottoms don't. Subject of ICL lawsuit against BLM. Linn explained her views of the allotment, and why the lawsuit was needed. This is the first grazing lawsuit ICL filed in ten years related to grazing.

Discussion: ICL contends that there is not enough money in the world to solve the problems on the allotment, so what is the RAC's involvement in these problems before they hit the courts? The RAC may find a role as a mediator, arbitrator to help resolve these issues before litigation.

Applying Sage Grouse management to natural resources (Bill Baker): Overview of maps where there are areas of good sagebrush habitat areas, and where there are areas that need

restoration treatments. Shoshone Field Office shown as an example. In Shoshone, there are very few areas where there are not sage grouse habitats found. This affects some of the decisions we make on those allotments.

Fire Management Direction Amendments (Terry Smith): Overview of this planning process. The FMDA will amend the 12 Land Use Plans within the USRD. The process will use an ecosystem management approach to managing resources.

RAC Executive Session Feedback: Enforcement/Implementation of Standards and Guides: (Thorson) A similar situation in Magic Valley has neighbors up in arms over a dairy with bad odor controls. The dairy is in danger of being put out of business because of state intervention. There are permittees in danger of the same thing – being put out of business – because of poor grazing management. Pleasantview is a worst-case scenario, but now that it's in the courts, it may be out of our hands for making improvements. We need to figure out what the role of the RAC is to fix these problems, and also move on (possibly) to implementing S&Gs on recreation or other activities.

Snake River Basin Adjudication (Gary Madenford)

Overview of the Snake River Basin Adjudication Process. Began in 1984 over a proposal to build a coal-fired power plant near Mountain Home. The SRBA was intended to be complete in five years, starting in 1987, but is still going on. The majority of the state of Idaho is wrapped up in the SRBA (including the whole of the USRD, with the exception of the Bear River valley (extreme SE corner)). In the SRBA area, BLM filed about 28,000 claims on sites. In 1992, Judge Hurlbutt decided to try the adjudication in three test basins. BLM was instructed to make its claims using 7 ½ minute quad maps, photos, etc. When we filed the claims for one of the test basins, residents in the area objected to BLM claims. BLM ended up going to court, and the judge ruled against us. The BLM ended up dropping more than 10,000 claims (now at 16,600 claims). The water on BLM land is used only for wildlife and livestock support. The amount of water the BLM is interested would only irrigate a 350 acre farm, but it's spread out over a large area and is located in critical areas.

The biggest issue BLM is dealing with right now is grazing. A few ranchers believe that the waters on public land are theirs and not rights belonging to the United States. If the BLM did not hold water rights on public lands, the BLM could not make changes to management without getting permission from the water rights holder. Also, the issue of water rights are also property rights; and individuals should not have property rights on lands belonging to the public.

DM Update: Planning: There are several efforts that are in processes, and we'll do our best to keep you and the public informed. ~ Shoshone-Bannock Grazing Treaty rights. The Tribe ceded some land back to the government in the late 19th century, and recently, three tribal members notified the federal government that they would like to exercise their grazing rights in the ceded lands. We don't know where it's going, but it could affect an estimated 30,000 AUMs in the area. ~ Idaho Association of Counties and BLM

have been talking about how to handle county road issues, particularly with RS2477 issues. We all agree that we have a need to work on this together. The immediate application to this is that we have an opportunity here in the Craters Planning process in developing a transportation plan. The Park Service and us would like to activate an MOU with the counties to work on this issue. ~ We have a new BLM Director on board, Kathleen Clarke, and it's nice to have her on board. Some of us are going to meet with her and other Departmental officials in March to discuss some issues in our state. ~ Jeff Steele will be leaving Pocatello to join the state office staff as the state's Emergency Services Coordinator. We will be flying an advertisement for a new Field Manager in Pocatello, and will have an acting (Joe Kraayenbrink) in place until then. His report date to Boise is March 24 or 25.

Craters of the Moon National Monument (Rick VanderVoet): Status: One of the projects on the way is a proposal by Tom Blanchard (former RAC member, resident in Blaine County) to host a symposium to discuss the science opportunities at Craters. Also, would like a sub-group of the RAC to talk about Craters-specific issues, and then report back to the RAC on activities. (Jeff Baldwin, Steve Thorson, Jeff Cook, plus recruits from other people outside of the RAC.)

Wrap-up: Goose Creek may be the next major allotment where we have a need to the RAC to get involved.

The idea of the RAC to do things by consensus may be a great ideal, but the debate is good for the BLM to hear. Sometimes there may be a majority and minority opinions formed and submitted to BLM.

Meeting Adjourned