

**Upper Snake River Bureau of Land Management
Resource Advisory Council Meeting
November 29-30th, 2005
Idaho Falls, Idaho**

Attending Members: Pat Avery, Jeff Baldwin, Chris Christiansen, Doug Hancey, Jim Hawkins, Dino Lowrey, Earl Skeen, Mark Stauffer, Dennis Thornock, and Mike Whitfield (one member shy of a quorum).

RAC members received a welcome from David Howell (Public Affairs Specialist-and BLM RAC Coordinator), who then called the meeting to order and passed out minutes from September's previous meeting. He urged people to briefly scan the minutes for any corrections prior to finalization (Earl Skeen pointed out that his name was missing from the roster), and suggested members fill out travel vouchers and submit hotel receipts as soon as possible for timely processing. David then distributed the meeting agenda which contained a list of the current RAC members and reminded members to keep personal information included on the list confidential. Updated RAC Handbooks were distributed. Most importantly, Dave reminded everyone that we need a quorum to officially forward any RAC recommendation(s) along, therefore we need to encourage all members to attend (i.e., use peer pressure if necessary!). Finally, Dave asked us in the spirit of team building to ponder one characteristic that contributed to good teamwork we experienced in the past (i.e., efficiency, diversity, positive improvement, making things work, sharing, etc.).

Member Introductions:

Dennis Thornock (Challis): voiced an interested in Right-of-Way issues and stated because approximately 96% of Custer County falls under federal management, he is very interested in policy development. Dennis also manages Custer Telephone.

Jim Hawkins (Challis): represents "Academia", and he is the Custer County Agent and noxious weed control is a priority and primary interest.

Earl Skeen (Challis): representing Dispersed Recreation, was asked by the Challis BLM to apply for a position on the RAC. He is also a member of the Central Idaho Forest Service RAC and is a school teacher.

Mike Whitfield (Driggs): representing an Environmental Organization, is the Executive Director of the Teton Regional Land Trust. Mike works with farmers and ranchers to help conserve land/habitat, and he is a biologist by training.

Mark Stauffer (Howe): representing the Elected Official category, Mark has been a Butte County Commissioner for 12 years and lives in a county where the federal government manages an estimated 83%-87% of the land, so the tax base is very limited. With the extended drought, citizens have come to realize that agriculture cannot sustain the county. Mark is Chairman of Lost River Economic Development.

Dino Lowrey (Idaho Falls): representing Archaeological/Historic, she has worked in the field of archaeology for 34 years and has been an archaeologist at the Idaho National Laboratory (formerly INEEL) for 18 years.

Doug Hancey (Rexburg): representing Public-At-Large, Doug was the Upper Snake River RAC Chairman during 2005, and is a member of Friends of the Teton River and a board member of Idaho Parks and Recreation. He is also interested and involved in a variety of land use, stewardship, and parks and recreation issues.

Pat Avery (Meridian): representing Energy/Minerals, and Mining (specific area of expertise is Simplot), his goal is to be an information conduit for these areas and to find common ground on the various issues the RAC tackles.

Jeff Baldwin (Blackfoot): representing Dispersed Recreation, Jeff has been a school teacher for 24 years, uses public lands for recreation, and in the summer works for the Idaho Department of Water Resources

(monitoring diversion flows, working with canal managers and land owners). He has previously been on the RAC and looks forward to the challenges ahead.

Chris Christiansen (Blackfoot); also representing Dispersed Recreation, Chris has expertise in the natural sciences, was a teacher and also worked for the INL (27 years in security administration). Chris likes to fish and recreates mostly in central Idaho. Idaho Farm Bureau members encouraged Chris to apply again, as he was previously on the RAC).

Other Introductions (RAC Advisors/Mentors/BLM Employees):

Joe Kraayenbrink (Idaho Falls): District Manager for the BLM Upper Snake River District with 29 years experience on resource issues for the BLM (including range and wildlife programs in Washington, D.C.), and 10 years in Idaho Falls.

David Howell (Idaho Falls): is the BLM-RAC coordinator and Public Affairs Specialist. Dave has 15 years service with the government.

Scott Feldhausen (Salmon): has been with the BLM for 13 years, with expertise in fisheries biology. Scott is currently the Field Office Manager for the Salmon District.

Wendy Reynolds (Idaho Falls), is the new Field Manager for the Upper Snake River District (replacing Carol McCoy-Brown), she has 16 years of government service. Wendy believes that the RAC is a great place to tell our story, that RAC and public input is very important, and diverse opinions are valued.

Dave Rosenkrance (Challis); Challis Field Manager, Dave has worked in various BLM offices since 1991 and has expertise in civil engineering. Dave has family in the Mackay area.

Blaine Newman (Pocatello): Blaine has been with the BLM for 15 years as a designated Outdoor Recreation Planner, and he was just promoted to Supervisor.

Phil Damon (Pocatello): Currently Field Manager for the Pocatello District, he has an outdoor recreation background.

As a “Team Building Exercise”, Dave Howell asked members how we would gauge our success (as a team)? Answers were varied and are summarized below:

- Recommendations are heeded/and we get positive feedback
- See results/group has a voice
- Collaborative efforts, decisions are based on the entire councils point of view
- The sum (solution) of the whole is better than the individual parts
- A better understanding of regional problems
- Impact on final results from the group
- Agree to disagree, then proceed on commonalities

A question was then raised, can we call someone during the meeting to get a quorum or use e-mail polls if we are lacking the appropriate quorum? Dave said he would check on this (and call Ben O’Neal, if needed, for a quorum vote this session).

Blaine Newman presented information on the upgrades (current and scheduled) for the Blackfoot Reservoir Campground, also known as the Dyke Lake Campground. Located about 15 miles north of Soda Springs, this is a destination campground for boating and fishing excursions and has received task specific grants for improvements. Blaine will be looking for “fee recommendations” for the campground from the RAC. Blaine described how the campground will be divided into four loops with three water hydrants and possibly two drinking fountains per loop. Boat ramps will be installed (two), and additional grants have been applied for in order to install docks. Currently, plans are for 16 camp units, 6 day-use areas, potable water, and a dump station. Between now and next summer, the Pocatello BLM will go to the public and present a fair market value plan for use fees and address comments received. Approximately 1 million has

been spent on improvements to date, but it will take more money to complete the tasks. It is expected that the 2nd phase will cost around \$300,000. Yearly maintenance is estimated to run from 10 to 15 K. When the work is completed, the campground will have 52 sites with electrical hook-ups and access to water. It is well anticipated that the campground will be an economic benefit to surrounding communities, and it is expected to draw numerous groups from northern Utah, especially those who have RV's. The question was asked, "do you have current use counts", and the answer was, last year, 4 to 6 thousand individuals visited the campground.

Chris asked, how do you justify the money and effort spent on this project when water reductions may be mandated during the summer (often by ½) or the potential continuation of the drought may portend no water availability for recreation? The answer was, we hope to get the water back (i.e., that the drought is broken), because historical use of the area has been high. RAC members voiced a general concern over water issues (given the lawsuits that are occurring around the state) and it was noted that the water in the reservoir is earmarked for Shoshone-Bannock irrigation. Blaine stated that he is optimistic about future water levels, and that OHV users like the area no matter what.

Joe Kraayenbrink stated usually camping fees are accepted and expected by the public, especially in improved areas. Additionally, funding for the campground does not come from a general BLM fund but is a line item decided by Congress. Fees collected at this campground will stay in this area. Of BLMs numerous national goals, this campground will fulfill the goal of providing recreational opportunities.

Blaine then presented slides of the project, and the parking lots, boat ramps, and camp pads are similar to those at Mackay Reservoir.

General questions and discussion followed this presentation. RAC members asked, will there be a separate fee for the dump station? We were informed that roads will not be paved, that they are hard gravel. We were given comparisons of the Mackay fee structure to consider: \$6 for a tent space, RV spaces go for \$10, \$14 for hook-ups, and \$20 to reserve the group shelter (otherwise the shelter is first come first serve and free, so you take your chances if you do not reserve the structure). There are no day-use fees at Mackay.

Blaine was asked, how do you establish a fair market value? He replied that the BLM is required to go to the public and he also solicited RAC input, but first they look at similar campgrounds in the area (Soda, Mackay) to get comparative (and suggested) prices. They also check smaller campgrounds in town and try not to undermine local campgrounds by having lower prices, i.e., they want to be competitive. The fee structure will be published in the Federal Register and every 3 to 5 years the local BLM Office will re-examine fees and make adjustments if necessary.

Bill Boggs (BLM Outdoor Recreational Planner for the Upper Snake River District) provided comparative information on the Sand Dunes Campground in St. Anthony, which has a user base with a lot of "disposable" income. The Dunes campground caters to big RV's, and the campground contains 48 units (16' x 75' long, to 40' x 100' long) and 2 private campgrounds that go for \$25 to \$45 a night. The larger pads (units) with a shelter go for \$30, for a smaller unit with no shelter the fee is \$16, and the Dunes has no day-use fee as of yet. There are 75,000 visitors per year at the Sand Dunes which caters to a pack mentality or culture, i.e., these vacationers like to be situated in a large group. Another question came up, do you have overflow problems, i.e., people that cannot find a space so they squat on other surrounding but off-limits land? Bill replied that they do not have much of a problem with this, that the vacationers have adequate money and usually stay in town campgrounds if the Dunes is full. He also mentioned that while many people return again and again to the Dunes, new clients or tourists comprise about 25% of the total visitor population every year. Finally, he pointed out that Federal fees are still cheaper than private fees. Fees usually average \$10 for Federal government sites and \$20 for privates, but in contrast, the private campgrounds usually have showers and other amenities.

Additional pertinent information was then provided to RAC members, i.e., the Mackay Campground is usually full year-round, and it has had a fee associated with camping since its inception. Mackay brings in

about \$10K per year, the St. Anthony Sand Dunes garner \$50K plus, (from May until winter), and hopefully the Blackfoot Reservoir will net \$10-15K per year (which is exactly the projected annual maintenance).

While discussing the potential for day-use fees, it was noted that a potential problem with this fee structure is you may need someone at the campground full-time to collect fees. Since there is a 90 to 95% compliance with voluntary fee collection for day use at most Idaho campgrounds, it makes more sense to just have an unmanned fee station at the campground if day-use fees are charged. The idea of a season pass for locals at a reduced rate was explored. Everyone agreed that it was not good to have the camp host be the “regulator/policeman” for fees, the host is busy enough with sanitation problems (trash pick-up, cleaning restrooms, etc.). Local law enforcement can be helpful and cruise occasionally to make their presence known, and a wigwam arm might allow access to restrooms and facilities for a fee and require no manned station. It is expected that day-use fees would go to maintenance, and not expansion of the campground.

Another consideration is that dump stations are more expensive to maintain than people realize (they average 100 gallons per dump and it costs about 12 cents a gallon to pump out), so Blaine is hoping to go for recovery costs on the dump station. Because the Blackfoot Reservoir does not have a leach field, the BLM will pay to pump and haul waste out. A RAC member asked if the dump station will be pro-rated for big RV's versus small campers, but it seemed easier to just have one flat rate for this service.

It was suggested that “undeveloped” areas could become overflow areas (usually there is no gate system associated with overflow areas), and perhaps you could charge 50% of what you charge for developed sites.

Can the BLM develop a statewide seasonal pass, was a question that followed? The BLM at one time did develop a pass, it was called a V.I.P., but it was too difficult to administer. Another question asked was, could you collect money at one site and give it to more “needy” sites? Generally fees from a campground stay with that campground, and heavy-use campgrounds take more money to keep clean and maintain. With some questions still unanswered (mostly as to what are the local campground fees in the Soda-Southeastern Idaho area), it was suggested that a reasonable use fee for Dyke Lake/Blackfoot Reservoir should be \$10 and that the dump station fee should cover recovery costs. RAC members Chris and Jeff (from the Blackfoot area) will assist the Pocatello Office in their efforts.

General Updates from Joe Kraayenbrink:

Budget: First the good news, the Appropriations passed before October 1st, so we actually know how much funding we will have for the entire season instead of the usual, which is guesstimating well into the fiscal year. The bad news is that budgets are declining at a rate of about 3-5%, and labor is the greatest cost for the BLM (and most federal agencies) at 70-80% of the total budget. It is fully anticipated that times will get tougher. We laid off 20 people last year, and these reductions in the work force will help this in years budget efforts. Rescissions will probably run at about 2 to 5%, and rumors about bird flu will probably shrink the federal budget even further. The recently passed National Energy Bill mandates that 7 new pilot offices be established in OPEC states (Wyoming, New Mexico etc.), but no new money was allocated for this effort so money might be redirected from existing budgets (such as the BLM's) to this new effort.

CIEDRA: Pombo had his hearing, and testimony from the BLM opposed the transfer of federal lands or the buy out of mining lands, so the BLM officially stands in opposition to the Bill. The Bill is out of committee and on to the floor.

L and W Stone and Diversion Dams, still working through the process (no resolution to date). Pleasantview Lawsuit was settled, but the BLM was sued again by Western Watersheds on this issue.

For a long term outlook, federal funding is not going to resource agencies, so they must leverage partnerships. As always, litigation really chews up fees, which translates to less staff, which means less

groundwork is completed, which translates to more litigation, an unfortunate vicious cycle. The budget on noxious weeds is holding its own, and we are maintaining or increasing funding for this effort. Noxious weeds are a high profile problem with state agencies as well as all federal agencies. 13 million has been designated to the Fire Science Program and our Fire Programs have been lucky the last two years with wet springs. In Salmon, heavy helicopters were able to immediately suppress the numerous small fires that sprung up this last summer, and the two Pocatello fires were contained in reasonable time.

The big concern with the OHV issue is how do you manage requirements? Challis is actively engaged because of CIEDRA Bill expectations. Perhaps we can review what Salmon and Challis are doing and leverage this for other areas. Also, Barry Rose and Terry Heslin, OHV specialists from the Boise Office may be able to help. They could possibly examine the Pocatello and Upper Snake River areas and see what's out there, what's been done and how we should direct future efforts. Jim Hawkins asked if any campaign was afoot to alert the general public that OHV use is off-limits in the Salmon River corridor? The BLM hopes to address this issue in their Travel Management Plan (i.e., when funding becomes available).

The State Plan for Sage Grouse Preservation is still undergoing internal review, and will then roll over for interagency review, public review and RAC review by mid-February if it is released on schedule (for various reasons, this document's release has been delayed). It is anticipated that local working groups are integrated into the State Plan, and if no local working group is present in a physical area of concern, the State will take precedence. The document will be 450 pages at least, so it is hoped that RAC members will have time to review this important document prior to the next meeting. Sage grouse preservation is important to the BLM, other federal agencies and the State, and risks to habitat along with potential mitigation strategies should be of paramount importance to these agencies. It was stated that the local Fish and Game agency should be responsible for bird counts, and it was asked if Fish and Game could do a presentation for the RAC?

The PEIS/PER for Vegetation Treatments Using Herbicides was briefly discussed, the documents basically deal with streamlining the process to obtain new chemicals, because better products with less risk to human health are now on the market. While the EPA has already done an analysis of health risks (to humans and various animals) of these chemicals, the BLM must also prove the safety of new products given specific tasks under their jurisdiction.

Dave Howell then introduced Dave Rosenkrance and discussions about the Challis Travel Management Plan were initiated. David Howell interjected that Pocatello gets two line items in the national budget this year to develop their Travel Plan. Rosenkrance stated that the Challis Plan was implemented in 1999, and OHV-use is considered in this plan. A map is being developed that will deal with OHV requirements and he would like RAC involvement on future route decisions.

Dave Rosenkrance stated there are 1800 miles of existing routes around Challis, but we need to produce a map of "legal" routes for public distribution, only then can we realistically start enforcement. Some areas, like Bayhorse, need routes established, while others, such as Falls Creek which has five routes, needs to see a reduction. We have to ask ourselves, do we want the public to have more access, and if so, where and how will we enforce the rules? A lot of routes were closed by the 1999 RMP and we need a system to identify existing routes. We have started the process with aerial photos and assistance from Portage Environmental (ground-proofing). It is a monumental task and the BLM could use assistance from interested RAC members, State Parks (perhaps in the form of grants) and OHV user groups. A sub committee of RAC members Jim Hawkins, Dennis Thornock, Earl Skeen, and Chris Christiansen were selected to assist the Challis office with this decision making process. The group voiced concern over new scars and recognized that the sheer number of people out there are bound to cause problems. Primary off-trail abuse comes during hunting season, but not from recreational groups who are well versed and aware of abuse issues. OHV travel is wide open on BLM land, and a travel plan is needed to identify where people can and cannot go. Decisions are made by local BLM, and BLM does not want to close access, but we must be able to manage what we identify as open.

Phil Damon added, in Pocatello, no routes have been designated to date, and because a lot of private land will be involved, route development will be a cautious process.

Election of New Officers

Because the RAC did not have a quorum, Ben O'Neal was patched in on a conference call. Doug Hancey voiced that he did not want to continue as Chairman, and Jim Hawkins was nominated for that position. The vote for Jim was unanimous, and after brief debate, Chris Christiansen was nominated for Vice Chairman, and the vote for Chris was also unanimous. Dino Lowrey, by unanimous vote (and possibly default), will continue as Secretary.

Meeting Schedule

Meetings dates for next year (2006) were discussed and tentatively scheduled for:

- March 14th and 15th Idaho Falls (Sage Grouse State Plan),
- June 6th and 7th Pocatello (Simplot and Blackfoot Reservoir),
- September (possibly 19 and 20th) for Salmon or Challis.

Presentation by Monica Zimmerman on the Snake River Activity Operations Plan (SAROP)

Monica began with a brief history of the Plan. During the 1980s, given the bio-diversity of the rivers in Eastern Idaho, U.S. Fish and Wildlife encouraged agencies in the area to work together to protect natural resources. In 1985, this region was recognized in the Medicine Lodge RMP to be an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). In 1991, the first activity plan was developed by an interdisciplinary team of resource specialists (BLM, Forest Service) with feedback from a task force of 15 local interested citizens.

Most of the information in the 1991 plan is still valid (such as grazing guidelines and principles of wildlife management), however, in the last 10 to 15 years "changes in land uses, fueled by population growth and increasing numbers of recreational users", require the BLM and Forest Service to revise and update this plan to reflect these changes. The areas of concern include the South Fork of the Snake, lower Henrys Fork, and a portion of the main stem of the Snake River. Some issues the plan will address are:

- 1) Winter Access and Recreation (South Fork only) - How should the BLM manage this increased demand, especially because it may adversely impact nesting bald eagles and other wintering wildlife.
- 2) Designated and Dispersed Camping-how to keep campers in designated areas, and how to manage the dispersed camping issue at Wolf Flats. In 1991, the BLM began rating camp site condition with either "excellent, good, fair, or poor", and we are closing sites that are fair to poor. However, if a site is closed, it tends to impact other sites or areas adjacent to that site with increased use, so it is a problem that ultimately must be addressed. There is a lot of use at the Wolf Flats area and we hope to get new areas developed into the cottonwoods.
- 3) Commercial and Non-Profit Uses - how many boats should be allowed on the river each day (commercial and non-commercial fishing)? How to handle the increased use requests from non-profit groups, colleges/universities, city and county organizations, filming companies.
- 4) Facilities and Trails - where do you decide to put in boat ramps, parking lots, toilets and camping sites? To what degree should these amenities and trails be developed?
- 5) Visitor Services - how do you maintain a "world class" natural resource in the face of increased use (i.e., the rivers are not a Disneyland theme park)

Other issues that will be addressed are turkey hunting and search and rescue efforts. The BLM also considered plowing boat ramps in the winter, but will hold off on this because of the amount of ice that generally accumulates on the ramps.

Current BLM and Forest Service permit fees do not cover the costs to manage the rivers. There are no permits for general public day-use (on the weekends, 70 to 80% of the floaters/visitors are general public), but during the week the rivers see more commercial activity (guiding) which is permitted. The fee for overnight sites on South Fork is a mere \$3.00. Managers are also grappling over how to deal with trash and underage drinking associated with river use. Most visits on the rivers (about 60%) occur between Memorial and Labor Days. 250,000 people per year visit the rivers, and during peak holidays, crowding can be an issue. It is acknowledged that limiting people on the river would be difficult due to the availability of access points (enforcement can't be everywhere). Many of the access points (public) are mingled with private access, making it even more difficult to sort out.

The Swan Valley area is becoming more populated and popular, so we are seeing an increased use on the Teton and Fall Rivers by locals shifting to avoid the crowds on the South Fork. The majority of users of these river stretches are from Idaho Falls, Jackson, Pocatello, Rexburg and other local areas.

The timeline for the SRAOP puts public involvement (to gather and identify issues) for the Summer and Fall of 2005 (completed). The comment period closes December 15, 2005. The Draft Alternatives will be released to the public in January or February of 2006, the Draft Plan Preliminary EA to the public in March or April of 2006, with the Final Plan, EA scheduled for release to the public in June or July of 2006.

Joe Kraayenbrink informed RAC members that 10,000 acres along the river corridors have been accumulated to the tune of 30 million dollars. It is important that federal agencies partner up with groups like the Teton Land Trust and Nature Conservancy to continue to protect and maintain river corridors. Doug Hancey asked, what would happen if cut throat were listed (as an endangered species)? The BLM will try to avoid listing, and one technique is to fish rainbows out, as they are direct competitors. The BLM has also established a weed control program on the South Fork, and leafy spurge bugs have been released as well as thistle bugs as biological control methods.

At Wolf Flats, portable toilets are installed (2 along a five mile stretch) and if money is available in 2007, the BLM hopes to install real toilets in that area. Wolf Flat will be closed to OHVs in July 2007, and posted barriers to hill climbs and off-limit trails are slowly being placed in the area. The SRAOP recommends all river corridors should be closed to OHV's, but this isn't in the Federal Register as of yet, and BLM Plan is not in place. Doug Hancey and Mike Whitfield were identified as RAC members interested in helping with the SRAOP.

On a final note, Mark Stauffer brought up the issue of noxious weeds again and stated that ranchers in Butte County have expressed a concern about the potential encroachment of noxious weeds from the INL on to private and public lands in Butte County that boarder the "site". He said that the noxious weeds are propagating in the Big Lost River corridor and expanding northward, and that the DOE needs to respond to this threat. Jim Hawkins, the expert on noxious weed issues, was requested by the RAC to draft a letter of concern to DOE urging weed control measures on INL property.

In conclusion, and prior to RAC adjournment, we were reminded that the next meeting will take place in Idaho Falls on March 14th and 15th; and the following items are anticipated to be on the agenda:

- Sage Grouse Conservation Plan/ Review and Recommendations
- Pocatello RMP Presentation
- Snake River Group Update
- Smoky Canyon Mine (phosphate)
- OHV Feedback
- Noxious Weeds
- Budget Roadmap