

BLM Resource Advisory Council

Final Minutes

Approved September 22, 2010

June 22-23, 2010

Salmon, Idaho

RAC members in attendance: Tom Bassista, Wayne Butts, Claire Casey, Chad Colter, Dave Farnsworth, Lawrence Fox, Otto Higbee, Ken Koller, Dino Lowrey, Dallan Nalder, Vic Phillips, William Schutte, Rick Snyder, Gary Vecellio, and Jason Wright. Other attendees: Ken Gardner (BLM Challis Field Office, Geologist), David Pacioretty (BLM, Pocatello Field Office), Sarah Wheeler (BLM, Upper Snake RAC Coordinator), Joe Kraayenbrink (BLM Upper Snake District Manager), Kevin Lloyd (BLM, Challis Field Office, Wild Horses), Steve Hartman (Salmon Field Office).

After welcoming everyone to the beautiful Sacajawea Center in Salmon, public comments were requested. There were no public comments given. Sarah Wheeler presented a brief overview of the meeting agenda. Minutes from the last meeting were reviewed with a few minor changes requested. This was followed by a brief round robin update from the field offices with Dave Pacioretty first discussing Pocatello items. The EIS for the RMP has been released for the 30 day protest period (issued out of Washington) with two protests registered (Greater Yellowstone Coalition and Western Watersheds). The next phase is to address the protests and produce a Record of Decision. The Pocatello Fuels Project has been successful and the Blackfoot River Project is going well with stimulus money used for fencing improvements. Cattle are allowed to graze along the river for about two weeks and the fences should improve riparian habitat. The Gateway West Transmission line is moving along with a draft EIS due out in mid to late summer.

Ken Gardner (Challis) reported on CEDRA Bill activity (or lack thereof) and discussed grazing litigation issues which seem to take up much of the staffs' time. The Thompson Creek Mine land exchange will go through an internal review (may take a long as 9 months), then appear as a Notice of Intent in the Federal Register, and will be followed by public scoping. The notice for the mine expansion and land exchange is grouped together since they are so interconnected. The draft EIS is expected to be out in the first part of 2012.

Jason Wright (Upper Snake) noted that the Upper Snake Field Office RMP is making progress and the RMP Alternatives should be out this summer. Field work is starting, along with gold mine cleanup work to mitigate acid run-off for the Champagne Mine.

Steve Hartman (Salmon Field Manager) said we will be visiting Dug Out Dick's tomorrow and told RAC members that figuring out what to do with this particular site is a major challenge for the field office. Road work in the area continues, and they are addressing fish issues as well as spending time on the usual litigation and appeals.

Joe Kraayenbrink mentioned that a lot of new exploration is going on for gold mines (prices for gold are up), so permitting for those actions is taking more staff review time.

On another note, Dave Farnsworth and Rick Snyder met with many Idaho RAC chairs and Peter Ditton (Acting Idaho State Director) in Boise, to review RAC activities. The State seemed pleased with our District's professionalism and noted how important RACs were in helping to make recommendations on such diverse national and state issues. Joe stated that they had an excellent slate of nominations to fill RAC new positions this season.

Weed Control:

Daniel Bertram (Lemhi County Weed Supervisor) presented information on weed control. Daniel worked formerly for the Forest Service and hails from the University of Idaho with a fish and wildlife background. He began by saying that the State of Idaho experiences a loss of production from noxious weeds to the tune of \$300 million. Control programs are funded federally, through the state, and also privately. Last year the BLM, Lemhi County and the Forest Service worked together on several control projects. There is an agreement between Lemhi County and the BLM Field Office to facilitate work. Lemhi County charges \$35/hour, there is a charge for herbicide, but no other charges are made unless it is specifically written into the agreement (they do pay for gas and equipment replacement/repairs). Lemhi employees cost about 2/3rds of what a BLM employee would, so that saves taxpayer dollars. Last year's budget was \$400,000.

Weed projects (BLM) involve ATV sprayers and truck sprayers. The trucks have GPS units and show exactly where and what has been sprayed. The applicators record approximately ten pages of information about the spraying. The Kilpatrick area has been sprayed twice for cheat grass. Maps are marked and prioritized for future spraying efforts, and funding is expected to be released for this soon. There are Cooperative Weed Management Areas (CWMA) where all parties work towards the common good. Database management has improved tremendously over the years (as reported by Greg Armstrong), and an example given was Rush Skeleton weed which takes a while to treat. They use GIS and Google earth shape files to track and treat this weed. They also employ susceptibility maps (like Tower Creek) and predictability models.

Besides spraying, they also use bio-control projects (bugs). Insects are especially effective for Knapweed control. They use a solar radiation map to look for good sites to release bugs (look for hot and dry places) and also involve youths (science classes) to help with insect dispersal. The goal is to cultivate an insect "farm" so supplies of needed insects are more readily available. Goat grazing has also been used to help control Leafy Spurge in the Carmen Creek area. Spurge is fairly easy to spot out of helicopters, so aerial surveys are often done to select areas for treatment. Again, shape files are used to record and track information about weeds and the efficacy of weed treatment.

Dave Farnsworth inquired, how do you get the word out about GPS, GIS, and other high tech approaches? Answer, we have conferences with tech support and this has helped to break down the boundaries between agencies. Ken Koller commented that this seems like an endless job and it seems like coordination (possibly a state program) to inventory and treat weeds should be a long term objective. Dave Bertram stated that some species can be eradicated more easily than

others, they currently spend about 30K a year to control leafy spurge. He also said that some counties are more aggressive in treating weeds than others. Lawrence Fox asked if BLM Districts or Field Offices can close areas with lots of weeds and Joe replied that they can, but enforcement is not warranted for every case. There are 15 CWMA's in the Upper Snake District.

Wild Horse and Burro Program:

Kevin Lloyd then spoke to the RAC about the Wild Horse and Burro (WH&B) Program. Kevin has been in Challis for three years and prior to that, worked in Utah and Wyoming, also with the WH&B. As noted in our handout, by the mid-1900's wild horses and burros were rapidly being displaced in the U.S. by farmlands and communities and in 1971, Congress called on the BLM to protect the vestige populations. Kevin informed us that in 2009 the Government Accountability Program found that the WH&B program was not sustainable (too many animals and not enough range) and that RACs have been asked, along with the general public, for recommendations on what to do about long term horse management. A survey from February 2009, showed the wild populations of horses and burros to be almost 37,000 strong, with most horses in Nevada followed by California (Idaho had 913 at that date).

Suggestions provided to date have focused on sterilization, removal of excess animals, humane euthanizing, and increasing the effort to find good homes. Currently, managing the horses is a big ticket item for the BLM, last year it cost about \$53 million and \$76 million has been requested in 2011 for humane care and holding (short term holding is very expensive). Congress has requested that a new and comprehensive long term solution be developed, and RAC involvement has been requested. Kevin spoke about "treasured herds" and the DNA testing that has been conducted to provide a genetic background database. One RAC member stated that adoption rules should be changed and that communication issues (within the general public) needed to be addressed. RAC members agreed that we must be factual in our statements (about horse issues) to the public. Another member noted that better fertility drugs may also be helpful, and we need a better estimation of horse populations. Claire Casey asked, "How is the general public being made aware of this issue"? The BLM is using a public interest list and federal notification. Claire suggested that they also utilize newspapers (local) to announce public comment. It was pointed out that currently the BLM uses all weekly and daily newspapers in Idaho for notification purposes. It was suggested that a RAC subcommittee be formed to make recommendations to put before the RAC, and to eventually submit comments to the BLM. Dave Farnsworth stated that we owe it to the BLM to look at the report and the subcommittee would draft a letter to RAC members by July 23 with specific comments and recommendations. Subcommittee members are Dave Farnsworth, Claire Casey, Ken Koller and they will ask Louise Stark to also be a member (she was not available for this meeting, but is an outfitter with years of horse experience). The comments are due by August 3rd and Dave will email RAC members to seek interest.

Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)/Cox Property Donation Float Field Trip:

RAC members spent the afternoon on a float trip (on a replica of the original scow that floated the Salmon River) and looked at property along the Salmon River, focusing on property donated to the BLM by Mr. Dale Cox (30 acres). This property (a nice, flat bench) is adjacent to the river and currently is used by boaters who stop to picnic and fish. The donated property is accessible only by boat or by foot. Claire asked if the area will be fenced to protect it from grazing, and the

answer was yes. The BLM intends for the site to remain primitive with no development planned. This stretch of river is not designated as Wild and Scenic, but it is already a Special Values Area. A RAC member asked, can we make a value judgment about properties such as this? The consensus was that land such as the Cox property would probably be appreciated by the public, if held in stewardship by the BLM, as less and less access to rivers (i.e., more private property) seems to be the trend. Tower bottom was also purchased using LWCF funds to provide a conservation easement. The take out was at Morgan Bar (once homesteaded and owned by the Morgan family), a developed camping area that sees heavy use at times (there is a camp host there to mow and ensure the premises are properly cared for), but the area was peaceful and not directly on Highway 93.

Discovery Hill/Travel Management Planning:

We also traveled to Discovery Hill within the Lewis and Clark Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA). We overlooked a motor-park that is used fairly extensively by motorcycles and ATVs, along with equestrians, bikers, and joggers, especially on weekends and after school. Discovery Hill is very close to town, very accessible, and Lemhi County is currently authorized to manage this area. The land looked pretty ravaged by motorized vehicles with tracks well beyond the authorized routes. There are 1 to 2 races held here per year and it does cost money to keep the track up. The BLM wants to see the track continue, but keep folks focused in on one condensed area. Chad questioned if that was possible. The current Travel Management Plan process has suggested routes that are more sympathetic to the landscape, while still maintaining a multiple use facet (since Native American cultural sites have been identified in the area along with a remnant of the Lewis and Clark trail, and sage grouse leks are located next to the river). Motorized use within this area is limited to designated routes (with obvious disregard in some places) with no restrictions on non-motorized use. We were provided with a map of proposed action routes. RAC members generally agreed that it is necessary to have places such as this to concentrate motorized use rather than have tracks dispersed and uncontrollable, but cultural resource protection should be paramount. One strategy suggested was to sign open routes only, with monitoring and law enforcement being part of this plan. Chad said Lemhi County must be responsible, be accountable for protection and law enforcement in this area. Lastly, it was mentioned that the Cooper property (60 acres) across from the pit, may possibly be incorporated into the SRMA.

Visit to Dugout Dicks's:

Members had a chance to visit the primitive homestead property of Richard Zimmerman, better known as Dugout Dick, who dug numerous caves and built cabins on this property adjacent to the Salmon River first starting in 1948 (utilizing a mining claim). Zimmerman died in April of 2010 at the age of 94, but not before his popularity grew with exposure from television. Zimmerman was able to stay on this public land due to an authorized Cooperative Management Agreement that was signed in 1990. During this time, he allowed several tenants on the BLM land, and the BLM has notified the tenants that they must relocate within 60 days. The BLM is currently considering how to best manage the land as there are many hazards that need to be mitigated (or removed) before it is safe for the public to venture onto the premises. Potential hazardous issues are garbage accumulation, hanta virus, fecal matter, rats, uneven ground and possible frail structures. The Field Office "estimates rehabilitation of the site will involve five phases: 1) Site closure and cleanup of the hazardous materials; 2) ALM closures; 3) Removal of

non-hazmat debris; 4) Site Interpretation Plan; and 5) Day use recreation development”. It is estimated that it would take \$225 K to remove all the structures, and some structures may remain to assist with the interpretive process if it is to be a day use park. Public input will be solicited. Except for the haphazard nature of the dugouts, cabins, and general debris, the site was beautiful.

Lemhi River Total Maximum Daily Load Project:

The State of Idaho DEQ has identified sediment, mostly from roads, as being the primary pollutant on BLM managed roads in seven watersheds of the Lemhi River Basin. RAC members were driven up Hayden Creek which is the largest perennial creek that feeds the Lemhi and holds all three listed fish species, bull trout, steelhead and Chinook salmon. The ultimate goal of the BLM is to reconnect streams to the Lemhi, but this will take a huge effort and cooperation from farmers and ranchers. Originally, the BLM road went through the ranch, and this was the point source for the sediment, so the owners allowed the BLM to move the road away from this source thus reducing the sediment load by 3/4ths. Surfacing material was brought in, which required a lot of work, and one BLM concern is that they do not “overkill” when it comes to road construction (i.e., look at traditional use and time of use). The project is in a grazing allotment with riparian downstream habitat. Chad asked about impact assessments (they were completed) and this led to a discussion about how the grazing permit process was simple in the past, now it is a 2 -2 ½ year process if there is no appeal. The permitting process includes range assessments, NEPA analysis and time for appeals. Chad asked what are the common points of appeal. This has not been analyzed, but major concerns tend to be about spreading of noxious weeds, reduction of pygmy rabbit habitat and watershed/quality issues. A RAC member asked about recalcitrant grazers, those who trespass? The BLM has a standard fine or fee for intentional versus unintentional trespass. The BLM has to have a good case (defensible) to prove that intentional trespass has occurred, and this is not always easy, and it is very expensive to go to court. The cost to graze is \$1.37 a month per cow on BLM land (this has been derived through a complicated formula).

During lunch at the McFarland Campground, we heard about thorium mining and how 40 acres (considered “hot”) out of 88 acres of public land contaminated by thorium mining will be remediated. Thorium is a naturally occurring radioactive material and there are still active claims in the area. 15 acres were remediated in 2009 and the remaining sites should be remediated by 2011. The Buckhorn Mill site, located near Cedar Gulch, is part of a multi year project. In 2003 there was a heavy micro cell rain event that filled one of the tailing ponds with an acre of water. The dam built across the drainage to contain overflow failed, sending a torrent of sediment and tailings down the drainage and through a home at the mouth of the drainage (we saw that the house was still standing). The sediment was carrying zinc and lead, thus there was concern about contamination in the Lemhi that could affect salmon. Federal funding was provided to bury lead tailings at the Buckhorn Mill site (on-site repository with a 3 foot impermeable cap with straw seed on top) and three dams were removed. Sixteen acres of the site was reclaimed and returned to its natural state by recontouring and seeding of the entire construction disturbance footprint. Needless to say, the project was costly. The BLM is now looking at open mines as a safety issue, especially with more people poking around old mine sites. Claire asked about the contractors used (North Winds and local contractors from town) and hoped that the reclamation would hold up to the next flood event.

The meeting was adjourned, but not before setting a tentative date for the next RAC meeting in September, in Idaho Falls (dates probably the 21st and 22nd). Dave reminded everyone to look at the Wild Horse report and check out emails and comment if possible on that subject.