

# BLM Resource Advisory Council

*Final Minutes*

*Approved September 27, 2011*

June 28-29, 2011

Pocatello, Idaho

In attendance: Otto Higbee, Dave Farnsworth, Lawrence Fox, Ken Koller, William Schutte, Vic Phillips, Louise Stark, Tom Bassista, Ross Goddard, David Pennock, Chad Colter. Other attendees: Joe Kraayenbrink (BLM Idaho Falls District Manager), Todd Kuck (BLM, Challis Field Office Manager), Jeremy Casterson (Upper Snake Field Office Manager), David Pacioretty (BLM, Pocatello Field Office Manager), Sarah Wheeler (BLM, Upper Snake RAC Coordinator),

## ROUND ROBIN DISCUSSION

No public comments were received.

The RAC discussed Draft Meeting minutes from last meeting. Dave F. noted a correction on Page 2 and Gary V. (via email) noted a correction on Page 5. Meeting minutes were approved with corrections.

Discussed selecting a secretary for next meeting, no volunteers thus none selected. Tom B. will take minutes for June 28th and Sarah W. will record on June 29<sup>th</sup>.

## *Salmon Field Office- Blaine Newman*

Salmon Field Office update was presented by acting Field Manager Blaine Newman. Blaine presented a power point presentation describing the Canyon-Big Timber Landscape Assessment. Blaine described the new approach to issuing grazing permits with the goal of reducing paperwork, making grazing renewals more efficient and working within a distinct geographic area. The hope of the program is to provide a more ecological and practical approach rather than issuing grazing renewals by individual permittees. The new system utilizes a landscape approach with renewals broken down into geographic areas and done on a 3 year cycle. The Salmon Field office utilized fire management units with some adjusting and ended up with 10 distinct units identified within watersheds boundaries. The 3-year cycle will consist of: year 1-data collection and write up (habitat evaluations); year 2-work together with partners and develop projects; year 3-sign decision and begin implementation. Dave F. had a question concerning public involvement in designing and implementing the new assessment. Blaine explained there were some public comment opportunities. Blaine was going to work with field office staff and follow up the question with more information. Ken K. asked why the Canyon-Big Timber area was selected first. Blaine explained it was because of a combination of litigation and grazing permits that needed renewal and also some water diversion issues in watershed. Bill S. asked if there was any way to retrieve historical biological condition data to use in the evaluation. Blaine said that historical data would be used when available and relevant. Kevin P. asked about the potential for future lawsuits. The response was briefly discussed and that lawsuits are always a possibility. Lawrence F. asked about the use of photos. Blaine said the use of photos is highly relevant and a back bone to monitoring habitat condition. Louise S. asked if the permittee can provide their own information. Blaine answered yes.

## *Wild Horses and Burros*

Wild horse and burro program-Bill S. introduced the concept of using CRP lands to house the wild horses. Chairmen Farnsworth asked the Committee to consider a decision to support the idea or not. Pros and cons of the idea were discussed and the conversation was tabled until June 29<sup>th</sup>.

### *Pocatello- Dave Pacioretty*

David P., Pocatello Field Office Manager gave an update of the Pocatello field office RMP and ROD. Dave explained the protests that were received 1 year ago from today. He indicated that the lawsuits brought on by nonprofit groups were basically settled. The RMP is moving towards a final ROD via the Directors office. Dave discussed the always present potential for future litigation concerning adequate sage-grouse protections in the midst of grazing. Louise S. asked that after 10 years of having the RMP will the process have to start over. Dave explained that RMP's will typically be used beyond 10 years.

David P., Pocatello Field Office Manager gave a presentation of the Soda Hills and presented a power point entitled "Working together to preserve a shared heritage." The Soda Hills area is a total of 14,000 acres near the town of Soda Springs that is critical big game winter range for mainly mule deer and to a lesser extent elk and moose. Dave discussed the history of land acquisitions and protections starting back in the 1970's. Soda Hills land acquisition has been a collaborative effort between the tribes, state and federal agencies as well as the Safari Club, the Mule Deer Foundation and Congressional Delegation. Major issue for the Soda Hills area is the need for a current Travel Management Plan (TMP). BLM asked the RAC to help participate in developing a TMP. Dave F. motioned that the RAC establish a sub-committee to help develop a TMP for Soda Hills. There was a second motion and all RAC members were in favor. A move was made to form a Soda Hill TMP Sub-Committee. Ken K would be Chairman and Wayne B., Chad C., Lawrence F., and Dave F all volunteered to be members.

Chuck Patterson and Dave P of the Pocatello Field Office gave an overview of the Chinese Peak/Blackrock Trail System. The trail system is located within the urban interface of Pocatello and other local towns. The area has an active Travel Management Plan which was designated in the mid 1990's. Trail system mainly caters to OHV's and has a serious of looping trails totaling approximately 40 miles. It is ranked as the #2 trail system in Idaho. The trail system is home to a wintering mule deer herd so there is a seasonal closures in place to protect wintering ungulates. During the closure walk-in access is provided to the public. The major issue discussed was that the season opener for the trail system is April 15<sup>th</sup>. However, the trails are typically still snow covered so the opener needs to be delayed every year, typically into May or June and one big challenge is to decide if all trail are opened at once or are some trails opened and some stay closed due to trail conditions. Other issues that plague the area are illegal target shooting in designated safety zones and pioneering illegal trail as well as parties and bomb fires. BLM does not have the enforcement staff to keep up with all the illegal activity. The BLM requested the RAC provide recommendations to help with the issues. It was decided to discuss after the RAC had a chance to tour the area (later in the day).

There was discussion by Pocatello Field Office staff concerning the ARRA project on Chinese Road. The project was completed and was labeled as a successful stimulus project. RAC members will tour the road today.

The RAC adjourned to lunch and afternoon field tours.

### DAY 2 – JUNE 29<sup>TH</sup> SODA HILLS TOUR

Ken K. started out meeting and verified the travel management plan subcommittee members. Discussion also centered on the Wild Horses and Burros concept paper written by Bill Schutte. Bill S. further explained that as a concept paper this would:

1. Would still require agencies to work out all the details

2. Would necessitate a pilot program
3. RAC could work out specific details but the overall paper might sell the concept

Ken liked the idea that the RAC is submitting a proactive response. Could elaborate on the proposal and then send it forward to acting authorities. In addition, other members were wondering if non CRP property could be added to the list of potential places to house WH&Bs. Private properties could allow horses to graze and be compensated like the CRP program. Vic P. iterated the fact that the public isn't aware of how large the problem is. Lawrence F. commented on the potential logistical problem of rounding the horses up when the 10 year CRP lease is up. Understanding that there are technical issues that need to be worked out for the program to be functional & that this represented a concept paper, the RAC voted to send the letter forward with some additional modifications.

#### *Soda Hills Grazing Management:*

Mike Kuyper, Natural Resource Specialist, discussed the Soda Hills Grazing Management strategy and the history of the area. In 1973, 50% of the allotment was private and 50% public. In 2009, the permit expired and Idaho Dept. of Fish and Game, the Shoshone-Bannock tribes and permittees worked out how to run livestock in the area to manage diverse goals and objectives. The decision was released in 2011 and put into implementation. 500 acres of CRP acquired lands and 350 acres are on a defined rotation grazing system, where livestock rotate between pastures. One of the problems the FO faced was that there was no water in ninety percent canyon or Swensen Canyon. To implement this project they are drilling a well and laying a pipeline.

*Soda Hills Fuels Reduction and Restoration:* Gregg Man, Fire Ecologist, discussed the fuels work being completed in the area. The FO targets the southern edge in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) area. 1500 acres have been treated since 2004. Not only do fuel reduction efforts help with wildland fire operations, but it benefits wildlife by helping with habitat restoration as they work to restore aspen stands.

#### SODA HILLS TOUR

*Soda Hills Stop #1:* The RAC stopped at the Soda Hills entrance and was able to view a piece of land proposed for protection under a conservation easement. Monsanto is working with BLM to place the land under a conservation easement as mitigation for the Blackfoot Bridge Phosphate Mine. The land will reside in perpetuity for wildlife management and eliminates all future development. Jim Mende from Idaho Fish and Game said that Soda Hills Ninety Percent Canyon is very important for mule deer. The idea of conservation as onsite/offsite mitigation is a win/win for everyone. Wayne B. asked what the conservation easement did to the tax base. Dave F. said the land is still taxed as dry ag, so the county didn't lose money. Gregg M. pointed out that they try to take advantage of fuels projects by utilizing ridgelines to reduce fire hazards. The FO also looks for small types of stewardship opportunities for commercial timber logging. Costs about \$200 acre for a lop and scatter approach and \$500 an acre for lop and pile approach.

*Soda Hills Stop #2:* Mike K. pointed out that cattle graze about 35 acres before reaching the fence line. The Big Spring development is trying to float troughs to encourage wetland development. Soda Hills is having a lot of issues with OHV use in some of the riparian areas. Greg Mann pointed out the 2009 fuels projects. The FO used a lop and scattered approach and burned some of the area. The prescribed burn has really helped to rejuvenate aspen and provide better habitat for large game animals.

*Soda Hills Stop #3:* Upper Valley/Idaho Ranch pasture is about 205 acres. It was irrigated in the 1980's so there is a waterline adjacent to the road. Trying to use spring water to fill the tank to prevent having to pump water up the canyon. The fence around the site was put up to keep cows out of the prescribed burn areas and promote aspen rejuvenation. Blaine Newman discussed some of the travel management ideas/concepts for the area. Soda Hills has lots of spur roads that are redundant or don't lead anywhere. The FO would like access on main roads and not going up and down the hills. In response to some public concern, the BLM is considering adding a

proposal for a ridge road and working on changing dates for access to minimize public resistance. While everyone was still in attendance, Dave F. suggested picking a date for the next RAC meeting. The group voted to meet September 27-28 in Challis, Idaho.

### BLACKFOOT RESERVOIR CAMPGROUND

Chuck P. talked to the group about the Blackfoot Reservoir Campground/Recreation Site. Discussed some of the challenges with water levels and how the FO has difficulty working with high spring run-off and then extremely low water later in the year due to irrigation. This year, the high level of water damaged the boat ramps. The Blackfoot Rec. Site is a fee system; which allows the PFO to maintain the site. It costs approximately \$800 to pump a one chamber pit toilet. Some fishermen complain about the fees and launch system, but the money obtained is returned back into the site. There is a \$5.00 per vehicle per day charge and the FO sees lots of day use. Currently, there are 16 developed fee sites.

### BLACKFOOT BRIDGE

Jeff C., minerals branch chief for Pocatello discussed the phosphate program in the PFO. There are 83 leases that have been “claimed” in the last 50 years. The company can develop those leases within the terms of the lease. Royalties go back to the Bureau of Reclamation and the treasury. The phosphate program operates under a service first approach, which combines both the BLM and FS to reduce redundancy. BLM takes an active role in managing the phosphate leases. Cundick discussed the selenium issues and the impact that has on animals and local vegetation. Levels of selenium in the Blackfoot river have increased and exceeded the recommended levels. In 2008, the river was listed as impaired. BLM went to work to address the problem in new mining plans. Dave F. said that selenium has probably always resulted in the area, but we just didn’t have the technology to measure it at the time. The three mining companies are dealing with the sites and doing all they can to remedy the situations.

Cundick explained that Monsanto approached the BLM in 2005 with a mining plan for the Blackfoot Bridge area, but due to selenium issues, they would not be allowed to release any measurable amount of selenium into the river. Monsanto responded by coming up with a geosynthetic layer that would be able to capture the water run-off and trap all the selenium. Cundick asked if the RAC would be interested in having input into mining mitigation measures. The group said yes.

Next meeting: Challis, Idaho, September 27-28.