

Draft
Twin Falls District Resource Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes
January 21, 2010
2653 South Lincoln, Jerome, ID

Resource Advisory Council (RAC) Members Present:

Marc Brackett - Chairman, Category 1
Kelley Crane - Category 3
Hank Mayland, Category 2
Mel Quale, Category 1
Jeff Williams, Category 1
Kevin Bell, Category 3
Gerald Orthel, Category 1
Samantha Anderson, Category 3
Brad Brooks, Category 2
Debbie Dane, Category 1
Lynn Messman, Category 2
Scott Boettger, Category 2
Charles Howell, Category 3
Denise Alexander, Category 2

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) representatives present:

Bill Baker – DFO, District Manager (DM)
Jenifer Arnold, Associate District Manager (ADM)
Ruth Miller, Shoshone Field Manager (SFM)
Mike Courtney, Burley Field Manager (BFM)
Rick Vander Voet, Jarbidge Field Manager (JFM)
Holly Hampton, Craters of the Moon National Monument Manager
Heather Tiel-Nelson, Public Affairs Specialist
Beckie Wagoner, TFD Records Assistant

Public Attendees:

None

Note to readers: A copy of each attachment listed in the text of, or at the end of these minutes, is on file with the official copy of the minutes in the BLM Twin Falls District Office. Persons desiring to view attachments should contact Beckie Wagoner, (208) 735-2063. Copies of certified minutes are posted on the Idaho BLM website at http://www.blm.gov/id/st/en/res/resource_advisory/boise/meeting_minutes.html

The meeting was called to order by Chairman, Marc Brackett at 9:11 a.m. RAC members and BLM employees were introduced. The chair noted that the minutes from the previous meeting had been approved, and that the minutes were posted on the Internet.

Tiel-Nelson started with new member orientation covering the RAC charter and updates in the RAC handbook. Then she provided an overview of BLM, our mission and current projects as well as the history of RACs with the aid of a PowerPoint presentation.

Public comment started at 9:30 a.m. - No public was present to comment

Boettger arrived at 9:36 a.m.

Anderson arrived at 9:40 a.m.

Bell arrived at 9:46 a.m.

I. Wilderness Act Training Review – Mel Quale

Quale attended the wilderness management training in Boise July 21-23, 2009. The goal of the training was to familiarize the BLM managers and specialists with the laws unique to managing designated wilderness, RAC members were also invited to attend.

Quale gave a PowerPoint presentation based on the training and stated, “Wilderness management is about protecting and managing an area to preserve its natural condition.” There are 756 congressionally designated wilderness areas totaling 109 million acres. BLM manages about 9 million acres of wilderness. Idaho has approximately 4.5 million acres within the National Wilderness Preservation System. There are six new wilderness areas in the Lower Snake River area: Big Jacks Creek, Bruneau-Jarbidge Rivers, Little Jacks Creek, North Fork Owyhee, Owyhee River, and Pole Creek. All are within the Owyhee County and part of the Bruneau-Jarbidge is within the Twin Falls District.

Public comment period ended 10:00 a.m.

There are two concepts for managing public lands to include wilderness areas: Anthrop-centered which means managed to meet human needs and Bio-centered which means managed to preserve and minimize impacts. The BLM uses the Bio-centered management technique.

Discussion: Cheat grass in wilderness areas are allowed to be treated if the cheat grass will overtake a Wilderness Study Area (WSA). Restoration depends on what can be done in that area. Grazing is allowed if it was established prior to the act existing, this is also true with most activities within the WSA.

Vander Voet gave some background on WSAs, Land Use Plans and Jasper Mines. WSAs are set up under FLPMA. A WSA stays such until congress either designates it as wilderness or releases it. A WSA has multiple uses; it is never a single use area. Part of our WSA was released and part was designated as Wilderness area. Once designations of areas are made, inventories are required of what is in the wilderness area. There are mineral claims within the Jarbidge wilderness area and Jasper Mines, they are not large operations, but more of a “hobby,” or low-impact, small mining operations. BLM has been consulting with the holder of the claims to see where they want to go now that the area is designated wilderness. The claim holder still has rights, so we will work with them to figure out where we go from here.

Alexander arrived at 11:06 a.m. and took over presidency for the next topic then turned it back over to Brackett for the remainder of the meeting.

II. BFO Juniper Encroachment Treatment Project Discussion –Marc Brackett

Marc briefed on the Juniper encroachment treatment project for Burley Field Office (BFO), and provided a draft letter for the RAC to review concerning the management actions for the control of Utah juniper encroachment within the BFO. The letter covered concerns and suggestions for the encroachment areas. Courtney gave some history on how BLM arrived at the project. Idaho Department of Fish & Game (IDFG) has a project to help mule deer by improving their habitat, but they did not have land or enough funds for the project, so BLM is working on the project with IDFG along with the juniper encroachment. BLM also added improving sage grouse habitat to this project.

Discussion: BLM is mainly dealing with the smaller trees. Native grass usually grows when the trees are removed. Chains do not work for pulling out the smaller trees; it is only effective on the larger trees. The junipers are increasing considerably in numbers. This project will deal with just the juniper expansion in the area. The cheat grass colonizes in the dead areas quicker after a fire than any other grass.

The RAC took a few minutes to review the letter, then Brackett moved to submit the letter as it stood. There was a second, the motion passed unanimously.

III. Team Reports

Orthel gave the update for the Energy team:

Gateway West - The line runs from the new Hemingway substation near Marsing, east into Wyoming. The BLM review is expected in mid-summer of 2010 and will identify one of three routes across the Magic Valley as being the preferred route. The three routes include:

1. The current preferred route across Golden Valley in Cassia County, along the foothill road in Twin Falls County to a new substation at Cedar Hill (just east of the mouth of Rock Creek Canyon), and then west to Salmon Falls Creek canyon and along several possible routes to the west.
2. A route farther south along the state line of Utah and Nevada that potentially would create a substation location near Amsterdam rather than Cedar Hill.
3. A route that runs southwest near Elba and the City of Rocks then it turns west toward Twin Falls County.

Regardless of which route is selected, it is anticipated that challenges will be made against the selected route.

The Hemingway substation has a footprint of 160 acres and construction has started on the facility. This large substation ties Gateway and the line to Boardman, Oregon, and serves as a hub for the Treasure Valley area. An alternative substation to replace the Cedar Hill substation has been proposed for Hub Butte, south of Twin Falls.

Discussion: There were several questions on what area and how much area would be used for the project. There is a rifle range by hub butte which is in use, how would this project affect those users? The range is maintained by the military, so that would be a military decision.

There is no specific area or size of area identified on the site for the location of the substation. The individuals Orthel talked to were not aware of a shooting range in the area.

Currently Cassia County has two ordinances in the works, one for ingress and egress into the county for large transmission lines such as the Gateway line, and one for location of smaller transmission lines that run from local substations to substations located within cities and country areas. The ordinance for the large transmission lines identifies the corridor as being along the Stateline route. The second ordinance, which will have no impact on the BLM studies, was originally limited to smaller transmission lines up to 138 kV, now being renegotiated for up to 230 kV.

The Hemingway substation is currently under construction with no completion date set. The release of BLM results on these routes will be in July with an administrative draft in March 2010.

We are looking at three routes, Almo, (close to the City of Rocks), Golden Valley (which crosses the foothills), and the State Line route. Cassia County selected the State Line route so the line can enter and exit on the State Line. There is a separate ordinance where lines cannot be larger than 138 kV to move power from one substation to another. There is a new substation by the hospital.

The original proposal had a large substation that would have been one and a half miles from Rock Creek. The State Line route, if chosen, will be closer to Amsterdam off of HWY 93. Hub Butte substation was brought up because public voiced that they did not want another substation in that area. Hub Butte station is already established so would be a benefit to use it and it is in the area of crossing of lines. Twin Falls County proposes crossing Salmon Falls Creek, it is the middle of the canyon, but there are issues that need to be dealt with first as that portion of Salmon Falls Creek is considered an Area of Critical Environmental Concern, and regulations prevent spanning the canyon.

Boettger's report on the Airport: The Airport Authority is leaning towards the BLM site. There are lands outside of Blaine County, in Lincoln County, that have wildlife habitat that are coming up for rezoning (i.e. commercial use, not agricultural). This may affect private lands, so the impacts could be greater than just a conversion of the public land to an airport. There is concern it will affect the animals and their habitat as well. There have been further studies on the orientation of the runway and only the east and west runway will be needed, so now only one runway is required rather than the two that were originally requested.

Brooks and Courtney gave the report on Castle Rocks Climbing Management Plan:

Last summer BFO inventoried the cultural resources, the Shoshone/Bannock and Shoshone/Paiute Tribes both expressed that they wanted to keep the areas pristine. BLM is nearing completion of the plan but still needs to find a balance where we can have some of the areas open while some are closed. Brooks feels it is important to educate people on the closures, and that this project is headed in the right direction.

Dane arrived at 12:55p.m.

III. New RAC Member Recruitment, Chair Election – Marc Brackett

Several RAC members will be ending their terms this year, it is important to think ahead about re-nominating or not. The members whose terms expire this year are: Boettger, Brooks, Tuell, Bell, and Brackett. Most of the members were undecided about whether they would re-nominate or not, Brackett announced he would not be returning after this term.

Those that plan to re-nominate or know of someone who would like to apply for a RAC position will need to complete a nomination package. Those packages are due to Tiel-Nelson by the end of March 2010.

A new chairman will need to be elected for this year. Brackett suggested a couple options for this: 1) Push the new chairman election back until the next meeting so that the new RAC members have a chance to get to know the other RAC members and vice versa 2) Go ahead and elect a chairman this meeting without the opportunity for the existing and new members to interact.

Anderson moved that the election of a new RAC chairman be pushed back until the next meeting, it was seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

IV. Round Table with Field Managers

All three Field Managers provided briefing packets on main projects in their areas and briefly went over the projects.

BFO – Mike Courtney

Energy Projects - Geothermal Exploration - Seismic studies started on January 18, 2010, by the University of Utah and will be completed this summer. The internal draft of the EIS for Gateway West is scheduled for release on March 15, 2010, with final EIS in June 2011, and Record of Decision in March of 2012. The Southwest Intertie Project will most likely need NEPA done since they are moving the line west of Minidoka Internment Camp National Monument, which is outside the existing Right-of-Way (ROW). Windland is transferring the ROW from Cotterel Mountain wind project to Shell Wind Energy. Shell is waiting to see if their bid is accepted for power, if so they will move forward. Agua Caliente submitted application to drill five geothermal wells last summer. Just finished an Environmental Assessment (EA), Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), and Decision Record (DR) for the wells. The DR is anticipated out this month.

Recreation – The Castle Rocks Climbing Plan draft document is completed and scoped. Cultural inventory is also completed and the report submitted to Shoshone/Bannock and Shoshone/Paiute Tribes. Numerous cultural sites were located and recorded. Currently working with the Shoshone/Bannock Tribes to establish a Traditional Cultural Property in the area. The EA is currently being worked on and DR should be out in the spring.

Milner Recreation Site will have three new comfort stations added as well as the replacement of three existing stations. Lud Drexler's three existing comfort stations will be replaced this spring. In the South Hills, trails have been developed by users which are causing a conflict with known shooting areas, making the trails dangerous.

Grazing Permit Renewal - 178 grazing permits renewed have been challenged in Battle Creek lawsuit as well as 22 permits renewed through NEPA on the Jim Sage Allotment. BLM received an appeal for the North Cotterel grazing permit renewal. We have renewed ten grazing permits on the South Cotterel allotment and one permit on the Warr/Pickett Allotment.

Fuels – we have been working on desert fuel breaks, 577 acres along Arco/Minidoka Road have been bladed, harrowed and seeded to forage kochia for fuel breaks.

Elba 2 WUI – The 325 acre juniper thinning WUI project has been completed. Juniper/Aspen thinning began in the South Hills, Middle Mountain, Jim Sage Mountain, Cotterel Mountain and Middle Hill areas. Two and a half sites were completed in the South Hills for 2009.

Burley Landscape Sage-Grouse Habitat Restoration – We are working with IDFG and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation in a three phase plan to clear Utah juniper out of all treatment areas over the next 15 years. The overall objective is to mimic the natural disturbance process and not to clear the landscape of juniper entirely. The effort is not a permanent solution to the encroachment into the sage brush steppe habitats, but it is expected to improve conditions for the sage-grouse.

Jarbidge Field Office (JFO) – Rick Vander Voet

RMP – It has been at the same stage since before the holidays. We are waiting for the Washington Office (WO) to schedule a briefing for the Director. We do not expect any serious comments or concerns from the WO and hope to receive permission to print immediately following the Director's briefing. The plan would then be available for public comment for 90 days. It will contain two volumes, approximately 1400 pages. Let Vander Voet know your preference on how to receive the material. It can be given out by hard copy, CDs, or downloaded from the web site for review.

China Mountain Wind Energy – Working diligently on the EIS with the third party contractor. The draft EIS is scheduled for release in late Oct 2010. More information can be found at: http://www.blm.gov/id/st/en/prog/planning/china_mountain_wind.html

Stipulated Settlement Agreement - Still working with Western Watersheds Project (plaintiffs) and livestock permittees (intervenors) on these 28 allotments. If you would like more information you can call or come in and we are happy to talk to you about it.

Judge Winmill's 2/26/09 Ruling on WWP vs Tom Dyer & Rick Vander Voet - We continue to implement this ruling in the affected 34 allotments. We will continue to make changes to benefit special status species, particularly sage-grouse, in the 2010 grazing year which begins March 1, 2010.

Resumption of Grazing on the 2007 Murphy Fire – Almost the entire fire area has met the monitoring criteria and has been re-opened to grazing. While the Murphy fire was not a "cheatgrass" fire, we are planning some small cheatgrass restoration projects within the fire perimeter. These areas would receive a chemical treatment prior to reseeding. We are lining up substantial sage brush seedling planting. This has been a continuing effort each year since the fire and will be ongoing for probably the next ten years. Hand planting of seedlings, while time consuming and expensive, can be more successful than aerial seeding particularly several years after the fire. We welcome additional proposals for rehabilitation if the RAC has any suggestions.

Slickspot Peppergrass (LEPA) – The threatened species listing has not changed day to day management. We have been working hard on improving LEPA management for the past ten years. We now have to consult with the Fish & Wildlife Service on all the actions that could affect LEPA. The biggest threats to the species are fire and weeds including cheatgrass. The plant is distributed across the Snake River plain, south and west towards Oregon. The population covers a large area in JFO, with scattered populations across the Boise District. There are substantial differences in the management challenges between our population and those found in the Boise District.

Implementation of Owyhee Public Lands Management Act – The Act designated Wilderness, Wild and Scenic Rivers and released Wilderness Study Areas in Owyhee County. Other provisions included limiting motorized travel to existing routes in Owyhee County. Inventories of the areas are being completed. We are working closely with Boise District to ensure consistency. Informational kiosks are being designed and will be installed at the entry points this year. Visitor information and education are a high priority for these areas.

Shoshone Field Office (SFO) – Ruth Miller

Craters of the Moon National Monument – The Travel Plan was signed in September 2009 and it was appealed by Blue Ribbon Coalition in November. A response was submitted in December 2009. The appeal was because of the loss of a single route that was changed from open to administrative use only; the loop is in the Bear Den/Thumb area and covers a 1.7 mile route.

Litigation on Craters of the Moon National Monument – The administrative record was submitted to courts in November 2009, currently waiting for reply. Judge Winmill approved the Stipulated Case Management plan in December and denied the interveners' case management plan (state of Wyoming et al.).

The question was posed about whether Rochelle Oxarango, sheep grazing permittee within Craters of the Moon National Monument, had her issues resolved with the travel management plan for craters. Hampton responded that due to her comments at the previous RAC meeting during the public comment period her issue was addressed and resolved.

Shoshone and Burley RMP – Lisa Cresswell was hired to be the team lead. Public scoping will most likely be next fiscal year due to funding.

Mountain States Transmission Intertie (MISTI) – The farmers are concerned so they met with the NPS and BLM in American Falls (meeting was set up by Power County - a cooperating agency on the project). Power County prefers the line go through the monument. EIS is scheduled for spring.

Rock Creek Land Exchange - A third party contractor for the exchange has been hired by Mr. Rinker. The proposal is to exchange approximately 512 acres of surface estate in which the United States currently owns the mineral estate as well as 466 acres of surface and mineral estate and about 63 acres of access easements in Blaine County. In return, Mr. Rinker would receive 1,656 acres of surface and mineral estate. BLM would acquire prime habitat for sage-grouse, including active leks, a deer migration route, and other key winter wildlife habitats well as water right claims and buffers around spring's public access to many of our areas that are currently private, and the disposal of lands that are hard to manage because of the lack of public access.

The exchange would be made on an equal value basis. The agreement to initiate the exchange has been executed. The notice of exchange is being finalized and will be released with a 45 day comment period. The public scoping has not started yet.

Discussion: Boettger expressed that there were some concerns about access to one of the proposed lands to be acquired.

**RAC Requested to look at the land exchange area in June for the summer tour.

West Camas Forest Restoration and Timber Sale – This project will contain a combination of thinning and regeneration/sanitation harvests on about 300 acres northwest of

Fairfield. This will cover about 185 acres of thinning and 115 acres of mixed regeneration. Scoping went out, the comments were due in December, and we only received one comment. We will not know what will be temporary or which will be permanent roads until the EA is completed, which is in the process now.

Discussion: There was concern primarily with the roads that are being built. The roads that are proposed for construction appear to be on the steep slopes close to a creek bottom, and they are permanent. From a water quality standpoint, this is potentially very problematic. The Forest Service spends millions of dollars every year reclaiming old logging roads they built decades ago near creek bottoms because of the problems they are causing, which costs taxpayers untold amounts of money. The concern here is why the project is proposing to have a timber sale using arcane practices that have proven to cost more in the long run than they are worth, and were abandoned many years ago because they are so problematic.

Restoration/Timber Thinning Team formed:

Brooks - chair

Mayland

Anderson

The FAA is developing an EIS in response to the proposal to relocate the Friedman Memorial Airport; BLM is a cooperating agency to the FAA on this project because one of the proposed relocation sites is on public lands. Currently, sections of the EIS are being written, connected actions (e.g., power lines, phone, etc.) are being developed, and a draft EIS should be available for internal review in a few months.

Other Business:

Wild Horse & Burro Team formed:

Anderson - Chair

Howell

Tuell

Crane

Mayland

Goal- Recommendations on EIS and upcoming gather.

*Baker and Tiel-Nelson are serving on different national teams that were formed to provide direction and outreach for the Wild Horse and Burro program. There is an all-hands Wild Horse and Burro meeting set for April if there are comments you want addressed.

Next Meeting Agenda Items:

Marc Brackett talked about the importance of the RAC members getting to know one another, and used the example of the Leadership Idaho Agriculture (LIA) poster program - where participants share information about themselves during a short presentation. Brackett requested Tiel-Nelson and Anderson, both former LIA graduates, to give a poster presentation 5-7 minutes

long during the next meeting. This will serve as an example for future meetings and RAC members as well as BLM staff to get to know each other better.

Next Meeting May 13, 2010 at 9 a.m. – 2653 South Lincoln, Jerome, Id. (same location)

Summer Tour:
June 23, 2010

Moved for adjournment at 2:34 second- adjourned.

Handouts provided:

- Wilderness Act of 1964 power point
- Wilderness Act
- Wilderness Management Training
- Scoping Information Package – Burley Landscape Sage Grouse Habitat Restoration
- RAC comments for the Burley Landscaping Sage Grouse Habitat Restoration
- SFO Update
- Notice of Exchange Proposal
- JFO Update
- BFO Update
- Meeting Minutes September 2009 RAC meeting
- Wild Horse and Burro Quick Facts (handed out but not reviewed)
- Various maps of Wilderness area, Sage Grouse Habitat Restoration and Rinker Exchange

Minutes certified by: /s/

Marc Brackett, TFD RAC

Date

Bill Baker, TF DFO

Date

Minutes recorded by: Beckie Wagoner, TFD Records Assistant