

Draft
Twin Falls District Resource Advisory Committee Meeting
Meeting Minutes
April 27, 2011
Sawtooth Best Western Inn, Jerome, ID

Resource Advisory Council (RAC) Members Present:

Kelly Crane, Chairman, Category 3
Peggy Stanley, Category 2
Afton Patrick, Category 3
Mel Quale, Category 1
Debbie Dane, Category 1
Hank Mayland, Category 2
Mike Henslee, Category 1
Jeff Williams, Category 1
Denise Alexander, Category 2
Charles Howell, Category 3
Scott Boettger, Category 2
Samantha Anderson, Category 3

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) representatives present:

Bill Baker, Twin Falls District Manager (DM)
Heather Tiel-Nelson, Public Affairs Specialist
Mike Courtney, Burley Field Manager (BFM)
Ruth Miller, Shoshone Field Manager (SFM)
Holly Hampton, Craters of the Moon National Monument Manager
Barbara Bassler, Planning and Environmental Coordinator

Public Attendees:

Mike Mathews, Office of U.S. Senator James Risch
Dave Jones, Twin Falls Highway District
Karen Dalton, Twin Falls Highway District

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 Megan Sorensen-Pereira, (208) 677-6627.

Copies of certified minutes are posted on the Idaho BLM website at http://www.blm.gov/id/st/en/res/resource_advisory/twin_falls_district/meeting_minutes.html

Chairman Kelly Crane called the meeting to order at 9:18 a.m.

I. Upcoming 2012 RAC nominations

Heather Tiel-Nelson updated the group on the upcoming 2012 RAC nominations. Several people have expressed interest in applying or reapplying for the vacancies. Mel Quale is retiring. The nomination form is on the web-site. Please send names of any possible candidates to Heather. Nominations are due to Heather by May 2.

Public comment period at 9:30 – there were no comments by the public.

Public comment period ended at 10:00.

(Scott Boettger, Category 2, arrived at 9:35 a.m.)

(Samantha Anderson, Category 3, arrived at 9:45 a.m.)

II. Update RAC subgroups

Chairman Kelly Crane reviewed the various RAC subgroups for current status.

- Jarbidge RMP: Afton Patrick will be added to this subgroup.
- Threatened & Endangered Species: Kelly Crane suggested dropping this subgroup. No one objected so it will be disbanded for now.
- Wild Horse and Burro: Information on this subject will be presented later today. Afton suggested keeping the subgroup to inform the other RAC members.
- Castle Rock Management Area: Rock climbing issues that prompted this subgroup have been resolved so may no longer need this until revision of the land use plan is completed. Subgroup will be disbanded for now.
- Blaine County Airport: This is currently being addressed. Jeff Williams will join this subgroup.
- China Mountain Wind: Jeff Williams and Mike Henslee will join this subgroup.
- Gateway Transmission Lines & MSTI: Charles Howell will join this subgroup.
- Fire and Fuels: This subgroup will disband but the RAC will deal with site-specific fires as they occur.
- Recreation Resource Advisory Council (RRAC): This subgroup dealt with fee increases with the Forest Service that are now completed. Subgroup will disband for now and will form again as needed.
- Lands: Tabled until further notice.
- Restoration /Timber Thinning: Disbanded.

III. Lands with Wilderness Characteristics

Holly Hampton reported that the issues are being worked on at the Department level (U.S. Interior Department). Further guidance will be forthcoming. District Manager Bill Baker reported that we still need to consider lands with Wilderness characteristics in our NEPA analyses. Secretarial Order 3310 still exists but Congress has acted to withhold funding through the end of this fiscal year (September 30), so no money can be spent at this time to deal with these lands.

IV. Idaho State Director Meeting with RAC Chairmen

Chairman Kelly Crane was unable to attend, so Mel Quale attended the meeting in Boise with Steve Ellis, Idaho BLM State Director and Twin Falls District Manager Bill Baker. Mel distributed a handout of highlights from the April 6 meeting. Mel reported about guidance that is given to BLM managers on how to deal with the new issue of lands with wilderness characteristics as Ellis explained on how Idaho BLM managers would be dealing with this. Ellis said BLM welcomes both comments from RAC groups as well as individual comments. He wants to hear from RAC particularly since RAC members represent certain groups. EAJA (Equal Access to Justice Act) fees were denied in Idaho to one of BLM's litigants in Idaho. (See handout for more details)

V. BLM's Proposed Strategy for Future Management of America's Wild Horse and Burros

Bill Baker directed RAC members to two news releases in RAC folders on this topic. Bill Baker and Mike Courtney served on two different teams that contributed to the national strategy. The reforms are aimed to improve the wild horse and burro program as well as improve the health of the public lands. Some changes will be dropping number of gathers down from 10,000 to 7,000 per year to save funds, developing "ecosanctuaries" on private land, looking for private partners to help, and trying to perfect fertility control. BLM Director Bob Abbey met yesterday with employees of the Jarbidge Field Office and reaffirmed that he is striving to improve this program. This will partly be accomplished by reviews by the National Academy of Science to make recommendations on how the BLM should proceed in light of the latest scientific research. Transparency and openness are of key importance in this area. Anyone with questions about the wild horse and burro program strategy, should let Bill, Mike or Heather know.

VI. Field Manager Reports: Jarbidge Field Office

Acting for Rick Vander Voet, Bill Baker gave the Field Manager's Report for the Jarbidge Field Office. Rick is currently on leave and will be leaving permanently July 5 for Lander WY, where he will be the new field manager there. Applications for the assistant field manager position (vice Ralston) are currently being reviewed. Aimee Betts, the Jarbidge RMP lead, is leaving June 5 to take the position as the assistant field manager for the Bruneau Field Office. Amanda Nisula, former writer-editor for the Jarbidge RMP, is now working in Carlsbad, NM. The comment period for the Jarbidge RMP revision ended January 31, 2011. Analyzing comments will start as soon as all the comments have been categorized.

Bill referred everyone to a map on the status of grazing allotments decisions as of April 2011. Grazing on eleven allotments was extended for two years, until 2013. For seventeen other allotments there was no agreement. On February 28, 2011, grazing on these allotments was enjoined to have cows off the lands no later than midnight, May 3, 2011. On June 15, there will be an evidentiary hearing for the plaintiffs in Judge Winmill's court. Grazing on the seventeen allotments is enjoined until the permit renewals are done, which could take several years. Winmill's 2009 order upheld BLM after the 2007 emergency stabilization plan.

The Draft EIS and Draft RMP Amendment to the 1987 Jarbidge RMP for the proposed China Mountain Wind Project was released April 8, 2011; the 90-day public comment period ends July 6. RES Americas, the project proponent, is working with USFWS to prepare an Avian Protection Plan, which has to be completed before BLM can issue the Record of Decision. There will be three public meetings, one in Jackpot, NV, Elko, NV, and Twin Falls, ID, the week of May 16-20. A suggestion was made to meet with Elko RAC and go on a field tour and work on China Mountain Wind Project comments together. Heather has contacted the Elko RAC about having a joint meeting but has not heard back from anyone. Kelly suggested that the Twin Falls RAC concentrate on just our comments and not add another layer. Kelly suggests possibly working with Boise RAC.

Bill reported on other projects in the Jarbidge Field Office, including the implementation of Owyhee Public Lands Management Act, Jarbidge Wildfire Fuel Breaks, and Saylor Creek Herd Management Area. (See handout).

VII. Highway District Issues

Mike Henslee introduced Dave Jones and Karen Dalton from the Twin Falls Highway District. Dave spoke about some issues facing the highway district. Money is tight at the District as well as within BLM. With rising costs, it's hard to cover maintenance of backcountry roads on the District. Cattle ranchers, the BLM, and many recreationists use the county roads and material sites. Increased usage leading to additional maintenance, now requires a higher level of coordination between the TFHD and other users. Additional rules and regulations are adding costs that cannot be met by the budget of the local highway district. Dave would like to reduce issues and increase funding. Samantha Anderson asked what Mr. Jones would like the RAC to do to help.

Dave said that BLM has stepped up to conduct required environmental studies. However, Dave says new gravel sources need to be opened up. Cost right now is \$1,500/mile for construction and labor which comes from state and county highway districts.

Bill Baker suggested having a RAC subgroup for the highway district to work with BLM to do a programmatic agreement across the Twin Falls BLM district, develop a strategy to come up with Programmatic Agreement and also come up with potential material sites for both BLM and highway districts. Dave said that the public (BLM) gravel pits are essential to the highway district. Seventeen Mile Road serves ranchers in northern Nevada and southern Idaho. He says the roads now must provide access for heavy, modern trucks and also fire-response equipment. Mike Henslee will head the subgroup to explore possibilities and bring them to the RAC.

VIII. Modular Airborne Fire Fighting System Certification (MAFFSC)

Heather reported on the partnership between the U.S. Forest Service and the military, where C-130 aircraft are converted into modular air tankers for retardant drops. Eight of these will be going through certification in May in Boise and at the Twin Falls Air Base. There are three sites located south of Twin Falls where they will be dropping 3,000 gallons of water. Training will be

May 3-6 and the planes will be reloading and refueling out of Twin Falls. The drop sites are located on Boise National Forest, Sawtooth National Forest and BLM-managed lands. (See handout news release)

LUNCH BREAK: 11:30

Meeting resumed at 1:00 p.m. The afternoon session continued with Field Manager Reports.

IX. Field Manager Reports: Burley Field Office

Burley Field Manager Mike Courtney referred to a map of Burley Field Office (BFO), as he gave his report. The BFO has issued a permit to authorize geothermal wells. So far, the proponent has not proceeded. Another geothermal permit will be offered for sale on May 24th. Gateway West has multiple routes proposed to go through Cassia County, including one that six southern Idaho counties are supporting. The Gateway West project has to do inventory of lands with wilderness characteristics that is being done by Idaho Power. Southwest Intertie (SWIP) already has a ROW granted; that line will go up to Midpoint Substation near Shoshone, Idaho. Northern route will go from Ely, NV, to Midpoint.

Cotterel Mountain Wind: Shell WindEnergy has filed with the Public Utilities Commission to run this as a series of PURPA projects (less than 10MW each). The rule changed so may have to refile. Since the NEPA analysis was completed over five years ago, a DNA (Documentation of NEPA Adequacy) will have to be done and then may have to do another NEPA document.

Castle Rocks Recreation Site: There are many issues with cultural sites and rock climbing activities in this area, so Mike had to close BLM site to rock climbers. There will have to be a land use plan amendment to close this longer than the current two year closure. The BFO will start on a plan amendment and then consider this issue again during the revision of the land use plan.

In the South Hills, there is a large system of user-created mountain bike trails and use has increased over the past few years. The BFO worked with International Mountain Biking Assn and local Mountain Biking Assn to inventory trails. Their recommendations on which trails are sustainable, or not, etc, will be considered to develop a multiple use trail system. An educational kiosk will be used to advertise and help manage use. For the Desert Fuel Breaks project, the BFO is working with the University of Idaho on a graduate project to establish long term monitoring and produce research that can be used by BLM in future seeding efforts. (See handout).

X. Field Manager Report: Shoshone Field Office

Ruth Miller, Shoshone Field Manager, reported the Craters of the Moon Plan Monument Management Plan (MMP) is currently under litigation as part of a regionwide case involving 18 RMPs for the BLM. Travel plan implementation began last year and is continuing this year.

Ruth referred RAC members to a handout in their folders on the Ketchum Land Exchange. The exchange involves two parts—the Exchange part and R&PP (Recreation & Public Purposes Act) and non-federal parcels. The Wood River Land Trust would be a partner. Two parcels would go to the city of Ketchum and be managed as public lands parcels. A public meeting was held in Ketchum in January 2011. Additional public comments are invited as the early comments are being compiled. An Environmental Assessment will be prepared. The exchange will adhere to no net loss in public lands according to most recent Shoshone Land Tenure Amendments. Not many written comments were received. Scott Boettger, Wood River Land Trust, will bring a draft comment from the RAC to the next meeting for consideration.

Other projects on the Shoshone Field Office include the North Highway 20 Travel Plan. This will designate travel routes and types of use, to be responsive to current and future demand for access. Public meetings will be held in Twin Falls, Carey, Fairfield, and Jerome. In addition, the BLM has reviewed the administrative draft EIS for the replacement airport for the Freidman Memorial Airport and submitted comments back to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). FAA is now reviewing those comments. North Magic local working group for sagegrouse is very interested in the location north of Shoshone. The Draft EIS is scheduled to be released this summer. Scott Boettger, Yvette Tuell, and Jeff Williams are on the RAC subgroup for the Airport. Bill Baker said BLM will share a recent letter received from the Fish and Game regarding sagegrouse using the 10A site for winter habitat with the subgroup. (See handout)

XI. Poster Presentations

Ruth Miller and Kelly Crane both gave informative “poster presentations” on their lives and travels that brought them to Idaho and the Twin Falls District RAC. The next poster presenters are Afton Patrick and Bill Baker. They will give their presentation during the June tour and meeting.

XII. Other Business

The RAC summer field tour is scheduled for June 21st and 22nd. No location has been selected. A suggestion was made to go on tour of China Mountain and follow with half-day working session to finalize comments. Heather and Bill will finalize arrangements. There will be a BLM presentation as part of the work session. Also, BLM will give RAC members a presentation on the China Mountain Wind project prior to the open houses. This meeting will be held on Monday, May 16 from 6pm to 8 pm at Sawtooth Best Western Inn, prior to the Twin Falls public meeting on May 19.

The meeting adjourned at 2:40 p.m.

Handouts provided: Mel Quale’s highlights from April 6 Idaho State Director and RAC chairperson meeting, two news releases on the BLM wild horse and burro program, Jarbidge FO Grazing Allotment Status map, Jarbidge FO Update, MAFFS news release, Ketchum proposed land exchange letter, Burley FO update, Shoshone FO update,

Minutes certified by: /s/



Kelly Crane, TFD RAC

6-22-2011
Date



Bill Baker, TF District

6/30/11
Date

Minutes recorded by:
Barbara Bassler, Planning & Environmental Coordinator