Twin Falls District
RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL (RAC)
Tour Notes
JUNE 12, 2009 8:30 AM
Burley Field Office

RAC Members Present:
Marc Brackett - Chairman, Category 1
Hank Mayland, Category 2
Mel Quale, Category 1
Joe Tugaw, Category 1
Kevin Bell, Category 3
Gerald Orthel, Category 1
Samantha Anderson, Category 3
Brad Brooks, Category 2
Ken Sanders, Category 3

BLM Representatives Present:
Lori Armstrong, Twin Falls Associate District Manager (Acting)
Mike Courtney, Burley Field Office Manager
Jim Tharp, Assistant Burley Field Office Manager
Heather Tiel-Nelson, Twin Falls District Public Affairs
Nathan Jayo, Shoshone Field Office Park Ranger
Jesse Rawson, Burley Field Office Wildlife Biologist
Rance Marquez, Burley Field Office Fuels Use Specialist

Guests Present:
AJ Church, Regional Director for U.S. Senator Mike Crapo

The group all met at the Burley Field Office where introductions were made and Burley Field Manager Mike Courtney gave an overview of the tour route.

I. Parks Creek Allotment (Jim Sage Mountain) - Jim Tharp

Jim Tharp spoke about improving the riparian area within the Parks Creek Allotment to ensure it met the proper functioning condition (PFC) prior to renewing the grazing permits. This took splitting the allotment into 3 pastures and reducing the grazing duration from 90 days to 30 days per pasture. When the grazing permits were renewed for the Jim Sage Mountain area all four allotments were combined into one to allow the flexibility needed to deal with wildfires and manage rangeland health issues . Fuels projects were also discussed, in particular the Parks Creek restoration where 400 acres or juniper encroachment were hand cut to connect sage-grouse habitat. There are approximately 100 big horn sheep in the area, and just within the last 4-5 years, three new sage grouse leks have been identified. This year, there were 90 male sage grouse counted on about seven leks. It will be important to maintain the juniper project by cutting down any new sprouts.

II. Mechanical Juniper Treatment Project (Cottonwood Basin)-Rance Marquez

The Cottonwood Basin had experienced juniper expansion to where there were no sagebrush or blue bunch grasses for sage-grouse habitat. The project took two years to plan, and was a cooperative partnership between the BLM and the private landowner in the area. In 2003, over 1,400 acres ($500/acre) of juniper were treated by chaining, and even though BLM was prevented from coming back in and taking care of the juniper skeletons due to an appeal, the recovery has been very nice in the area. This project also helped fire suppression crews, as it slowed the Jim Sage Fire during the summer of 2007. The goal is to maintain these sites so they do not become juniper dominant in the future.

Discussion followed about fire suppression tactics these last several years and how its improvement has probably allowed for more juniper expansion. Historically, the expansion of juniper was prevented through fires.

III. Raft River Geothermal Plant Tour - Chris Harriman, President U.S. Geothermal Services, LLC

The next stop included a tour of the Raft River Geothermal plant. The following information is taken from their website and includes the information discussed on the tour: U.S. Geothermal currently owns and/or leases approximately 8.2 square miles of land with a proven geothermal reservoir which may be capable of producing up to 110 megawatts of power based on estimates from GeothermEx Inc.

US Geothermal acquired the project in 2002 and have a 20 year contract with the Idaho Power company to sell 10 megawatts of electricity from the Raft River Unit 1 power plant. The Raft River Unit 1 began commercial operations in January 2008.

The site is attractive because of the proven 300 degree Fahrenheit hot water resource that has been developed and tested, and because of the significant infrastructure facilities that are currently in place.

Geoscientific data collected from the Raft River geothermal field provides abundant evidence that confirms the existence of a large, moderate temperature geothermal resource. Measured temperatures vary between 275°F to 300°F at depths between 4,500 to 6,000 feet. Fluids encountered in the wells drilled to date are clean and of low salinity with total dissolved solid contents between 1,200 to 6,800 parts per million. The fluids also have low non-condensable gas content.

Geothermal systems in this moderate temperature range use a binary-cycle power plant for the production of electric power. In a binary plant, the hot geothermal water is passed through a heat exchanger, which in turn heats a binary liquid. The binary liquid, isopentane in the case of U.S. Geothermal's power plant, vaporizes at a lower temperature and higher pressure than water. In a closed loop cycle, the vapor produced from the binary liquid spins the turbine-generator unit, then it is condensed back to liquid before being reused in the heat exchanger. After a portion of the heat is used from the geothermal water, it exits the binary plant and is injected back into the reservoir.

IV. Castle Rocks Interagency Recreation Area - Mike Courtney, and Brad Schilling, Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation Castle Rocks Manager

The final stop of the day was at the Castle Rocks Visitor Center, the group was prevented from hiking in the area because of a hail storm. Brad Schilling with Idaho Parks and Recreation gave a very informative presentation about how the techniques for climbing have evolved over the years, and how the most current method of bolting routes from the top down utilizing mechanical equipment has revolutionized the sport and dramatically increased its popularity. Brad emphasized the importance of carefully planning the future of bolting within the Castle Rocks Interagency Recreation Area. It is a pristine area that has been protected from access for years. Now that access has been granted, several partnering agencies are working to develop a Climbing Management Plan. This area is a hotspot for cultural resources, and mitigation for the impacts incurred from climbing must be considered in the Plan.

The tour wrapped up by about 4:30 p.m. at the Burley Field Office

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Marc Brackett, TFD RAC **Date**

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Jenifer Arnold, TFD DFO (Acting) **Date**

Tour notes recorded by: Heather Tiel-Nelson, TFD Public Affairs Specialist