

Twin Falls District
RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES
9/15/2011
Burley Fire Conference Room

Resource Advisory Council (RAC) members present:

Category One – Commodity Interest

- Michael Henslee (*departed after lunch, 1:20*)
- Debbie Dane
- Gerald Orthel
- Mel Quale
- Jeff Williams

Category Two – Non-Commodity Interest

- Denise Alexander
- Scott Boettger (*arrived at 2:05*)
- Peggy Stanley
- Hank Mayland

Category Three – Public Interest

- Samantha Anderson (*arrived at 2:07*)
- Afton Patrick
- Charles Howell
- Yvette Tuell

Quorum Present: Yes No

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) representatives present:

Bill Baker, Twin Falls District Manager (DM)
Jenifer Arnold, Associate District Manager (ADM)
Heather Tiel-Nelson, Public Affairs Specialist
Mike Courtney, Burley Field Manager (BFM)
Ruth Miller, Shoshone Field Manager (SFM)
Brian Davis, Jarbidge Field Manager (JFM)
Holly Hampton, Craters of the Moon Monument Manager
Chris Simonson, Fire Management Officer (FMO)
Codie Martin, Jarbidge Assistant Field Manager
Johanna Munson, Idaho State Office Division of Natural Resources
Max Yingst, Jarbidge Outdoor Recreation Planner

Public Attendees:

Tom Hiester, R.E.S. – China Mountain Project

Suzanne Leta Liou, R.E.S. – China Mountain Project

Note to readers: A copy of each attachment listed in the text of, or at the end of these minutes, in on file with the official copy of the minutes in the BLM Burley Field Office. Persons desiring to view attachments should contact Meghan 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

Meeting called to order at 8:27 by Vice Chairman Denise Alexander.

Item I: Acknowledgements

This will be the last meeting for RAC member Mel Quale.

Twin Falls District Manager Bill Baker will be retiring in December.

Item II: Introductions of new people

Brian Davis – Twin Falls District Jarbidge Field Manager

Johanna Munson – Washington Office Special Assistant, currently detailed to the Idaho State Office as a Supervisory Resource Management Specialist

Codie Martin- Assistant Jarbidge Field Manager

Megan Satterwhite – University of Idaho graduate student; will be working on Minidoka fuel break project.

Introductions were made around the table.

Item III: Minidoka Fuel Breaks

Michael Courtney presented a synopsis of the Minidoka fuel break project, along with two maps of the project (*see Handout 1:Untitled Map , and Handout 2: Minidoka Fuel Break Monitoring*). The fuel break consisted of planting Forage Kochia in 100' sections on each side of the road. Different planting methods were used, including harrowing, blading and harrowing, and using a roller harrow on certain portions. These different propagation methods were used to determine how the BLM can make their Forage Kochia fuel breaks more successful in the future.

Following the summation, the group departed to tour the Minidoka fuel break project. The group stopped at two different sites, approximately monitoring point 1, and monitoring point 13 as indicated on handout #2.

The group returned for lunch in Rupert at Henry's Drift Inn. Following lunch the group returned to the Burley Fire/Operation building conference room for the meeting.

Vice-Chairman Denise Alexander called the official meeting to order at 1:30.

Item IV: Wilderness and Wild and Scenic River

Max Yingst, Jarbidge Outdoor Recreation Planner, presented a discussion on Wilderness and Wild and Scenic River Management.

Boise District Office is taking the lead on writing a plan for the management of Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers, and hope to have a draft out next year (*see Handout 3: Wilderness and Wild & Scenic River Management Planning Update*). The plan, in draft form, will continue to allow motorized access for infrastructure maintenance. Staff is reviewing the impacts of herding and gathering livestock with motorized vehicles, and the Idaho State Office has released a statement regarding the stance that the BLM is going to take on the issue.

Patrick asked if there was any snowmobile use or issues in the area, and Yingst clarified that there was specific language in the act that excludes/exempted snowmobiles from the travel plan regulations.

Yingst continued with the discussion, stating that members of the Owyhee Initiative, Inc. (OII) will be actively involved in the Wilderness and Wild & Scenic Management Plan (WMP) and there are still many gray areas to iron out. The BLM is also still working on finalizing the boundaries of the impacted area. They are looking at acquiring any private inholdings within the boundaries. Each acquisition would cause a change in the boundary. State sections would be put into a category of exchange. If sections were declared as Wild and Scenic River segments, water rights would be considered junior.

Traffic counters were installed and monitored. There were surprising numbers visiting the Arch and the Bruneau River Scenic Overlook. The new designation of wilderness status and the corresponding publicity for it may have increased the number of visitors. The new BLM 1:100,000 maps (Sheep Creek, Glens Ferry) have the new wilderness designations on them.

There was discussion on what groups would be on mailing list for the draft WMP document.

Item V: 2011 Fire Season Overview

Chris Simonson gave an update for the 2011 fire season. He stated that we are certainly not past fire season yet, in fact right now is the driest that it has been all season. But, he would characterize this year's fire season as below or well-below average. The 10-year-average for number of fires is around 160, and this season we have had 116, burning a total of 58,000 acres. The causes of fires were split pretty evenly between human and lightning caused. Human-caused ignitions are primarily from equipment or vehicles, but also include smoking, railroad ignition, campfires, and some unknown causes.

There were only 15 large fires (over 300 acres), with seven occurring in Shoshone, six in Jarbidge, and two in Burley. The most notable fire of the season was the Blair Fire, which started on Boise District BLM, but quickly spread to the Twin Falls District. The fire totaled 40,000 acres, with 27,000 of those acres on the Shoshone Field Office. The Blair Fire burned mule deer wintering habitat, and agencies are exploring how to mitigate the issue.

BLM continues to partner with rural fire departments (RFDs). The relationships continue to get stronger with those departments. RFDs have helped with 35 of fires. BLM assisted them seven times.

The Twin Falls District has partnered with Rock Creek RFD on a new station in Kimberly. BLM is leasing space from Rock Creek RFD.

Alexander inquired if there were any accidents this season.

Simonson responded that there had been a few dehydration cases, so there has been a big focus on hydration right now especially since there was a fatality from dehydration induced hypothermia that occurred in Utah.

Simonson continued with his seasonal fire summary, stating that crews from the Twin Falls District have supported multiple states throughout the season including Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Florida and Alaska.

Chris Simonson departed at 1:59.

Max Yingst departed at 1:59.

Item VI: Public Comment

The public comment period began at 2:00. Two members from RES, America, Tom Hiester and Suzanne Leta Liou, were present to discuss the China Mountain Wind Project further, and in regards to the RAC's previous recommendation regarding the project.

Scott Boettger arrived at 2:05.

Samatha Anderson arrived at 2:07.

Tom Hiester began by restating the RACs previous recommendation of Alternative F and conservation easement funding. RES would like clarification from the RAC regarding their recommendation that RES set up a conservation easement - in addition to their mitigation plan for sage-grouse.

Hiester stated that what they would like to request, acknowledging that the decision was not unanimous, was for the RAC to re-consider alternative B1 and the southern haul route. He proposed that they discuss the economic benefits versus the resource impacts more, since they were hard to understand in the draft EIS, and to also discuss the additional engineering that would have to be done on the northern haul route if it were chosen.

Hiester yielded the floor to his counterpart, Suzanne Leta Liou, who is the development project manager. She provided the group with many handouts, including maps of each alternative (*see Handouts 4-10*), page 2-5 and page 2-103 from the draft EIS (*see Handouts 11-12*), engineering notes and map of the northern inbound haul route (*see Handouts 13-14*), and handouts for the southern access plan, south access road profile views, and south access road details (*see Handouts 15-17*).

Leta Liou stated that RES respectfully requests that the RAC reconsider their recommendation from June, and change it to support a recommendation for alternative B1. Their reasoning for requesting a new recommendation were that RES understands that not all members were in support of alternative F, that the decision may have been rushed, and was gaged on emotions, not fact.

Due to the investment already made in the project, and the goals to get the most power generated the most feasibly, RES does not believe that alternative F is the best avenue to meet those goals. RES also believes that the southern portion is the “more disturbed area” due to recent fires, where the RAC believed that the northern part was more disturbed.

As far as the suggestion for a conservation easement is concerned, RES has already worked with the two private landowners, Brackett and Guerry, to maintain public access and protect resources. The sage-grouse conservation plan is also in place to benefit multiple species. RES has also submitted their Avian and Bat Protection Plan to Idaho Department of Fish and Game.

Leta Liou reiterated that B1 has fewer impacts than phased projects because they would have a permit for the whole thing at once instead of going back in, and B1 allows them to maximize the wind resource. The different alternatives to B1 within the draft EIS have a lower capacity factor, meaning that they can produce less with the same amount of turbines. Alternative F is much lower than B1.

Leta Liou clarified what capacity factors really were. It is basically the utilization of the wind towers. Leta Lia stated that generally in Idaho there is a capacity factor of about 33% --meaning that over a year of time, the tower will be generating energy 33% of a time. The project has estimated capacity factors of 34.5% - 37% with the lowest capacity factor at alternatives B2C and F, and highest at alternative B1.

Leta Liou also commented about the differences in alternatives of revenue that would be provided to local entities.

Leta Liou stated that the northern haul route is isolated; it requires significant upgrades, while the southern haul route is an existing road but requires some upgrades. RES believes the southern route is much more feasible because it is shorter and more direct, and they could make the Three Creek crossing culvert work.

RES asks that the RAC put forth an alternative motion supporting B1 and the southern haul route.

Williams stated that as a federal lands grazer, he is worried that the project will have a negative impact across the valley if sage-grouse become more impacted, because it could mean more restraints to grazers in the future.

Leta Liou responded that RES does not want this project to negatively impact any other industry, and this concern was brought up previously. This is the reason for the sage-grouse conservation plan, which was reviewed by the NV and ID Cattlemen's Associations. The goal is to provide a net benefit to the species. Discussion continued about the impact distance on sage-grouse.

Public comment period ended at 2:32, with RES's request for the RAC to reconsider Alternative B1 and the southern haul route. This will be discussed during the Other Business portion of the agenda.

Item VII: Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve Resource Management Plan (Holly Hampton)

The Record of Decision for Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve, which was signed in 2006, is under litigation. In 2008, Western Watersheds Project (WWP) filed a claim that the BLM violated federal laws including the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), and the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA), and several of the BLM's own policies on 16 different RMPs. The judge determined that two RMPs would be examined as test cases – Craters of the Moon being one of them. Numerous briefs have been filed, and there was a hearing in July in which Judge Winnill heard arguments from the Plaintiff (WWP) and the Department of Justice (for BLM). We are unsure when there will be a ruling, but the BLM may end up looking at several issues related to the Craters of the Moon RMP to amend the existing plan to repair the issues.

Item VIII: Burley Field Office Update (Michael Courtney)

The Gateway West draft EIS is available for public review. There will be several public meetings:

- September 19 – Twin Falls, Red Lion
- September 20 – Jackpot, NV
- September 21 – Burley, Best Western
- September 22 – Almo

The Southwest Intertie Project (SWIP) is in a state of suspended activity due to the lack of subscribers for their power, as they are a private power supplier.

Cotterel Mountain/Shell Wind Energy (SWE) is looking for buyers; they are also working on an Avian and Bat Protection Plan with Idaho Department of Fish & Game.

There was a Federal Register notice published on August 23rd for Land Use Plan (LUP) amendments for rock climbing, camping, trail building, and staging. Castle Rocks had a temporary closure, but the BLM will need to do an Environmental Assessment (EA) to make the

closure permanent. Massacre Rocks (Cedar Fields) is the other area impacted. It has approximately 700 bolted climbing routes in an historic property/archaeological district. Up until now, the BLM has not recognized climbing as a managed use; it has been considered casual use. There is a proposal to close Massacre Rocks with an Amendment to the Cassia and Monument RMPs.

There will be several public meetings regarding these closures:

- September 26 – Pocatello
- September 28 – Burley, Best Western
- October 12 – American Falls

This is a very controversial issue. There is a lot of ground to cover before the groups can come to a decision. The BLM shows them the impacts, and they do not recognize them as impacts. There needs to be some coordination with the climbing groups to develop some alternatives. With a historic property, there has to be a guarantee that the number and quality of cultural artifacts will be maintained into the future. The Tribes are very concerned; the BLM will have to work with the Advisory Council, the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), and others. The impact to the cultural sites is not due to actual climbing, but standing in the staging area, trampling vegetation, destabilizing sandy soils causing deflation of the soil profile and then there are artifacts on rock with people standing on them.

There is already a motorized vehicle closure in effect for a portion of Cedar Fields.

Patrick commented that the Tribes need to involve their public to let them know that they are protecting the histories of it.

The Burley Field Office is waiting on a report regarding mountain biking at Indian Springs. The initial proposal was to come up with 40 miles of sustainable trail; they have actually come up with 60.

The Burley Field Office is also working on a permit renewal for Western Stockgrowers (WSG) for the Shoshone Basin area. The renewal has been elevated to an EIS because of the potential cumulative impacts from several different energy development projects to sage-grouse habitat in this area. Mike provided a handout (*see Handout 18*) showing a map tracking the movements of radio-collared sage-grouse. This data included 8 years' worth of data, and numerous birds. He also provided a map of the allotments that will be affected by the EIS (*see Handout 19*).

Item IX: Jarbidge Field Office Update (Codie Martin)

Heidi Whitlatch is the new RMP team lead for Jarbidge RMP.

Litigation continues for grazing in Jarbidge. There were 17 grazing allotments that were enjoined last spring, but the injunction was removed by a ruling on July 22. Grazing activities could resume if a plan was created. There is also litigation regarding livestock trailing permits. A trailing permit is a temporary authorization for permittees to move their livestock through an allotment in which they do not hold a permit for. Some other options to mitigate the issue

would be to sublease Animal Unit Months (AUMs) from the permittees from the allotments that require trailing through. Congress may give a two year window for implementation or procedures, or Districts or Field Offices may have to do a programmatic EA.

The Jarbidge draft RMP team has reviewed all comments. They are working with the Idaho State Director on the draft alternatives and comments. The draft is expected July 2012.

The public comment period for the China Mountain Wind Energy project ended July 6. An EIS is expected by October, 2012. The BLM needs an updated plan of development from RES.

The Jarbidge Field Office is also working on a fuel break. It will be 166 miles long, and 200' wide on each side of the road. A draft version of the EA is expected to be ready this fall.

According to the EA for the Saylor Creek Herd Management Area, 30 horses will be released this fall. The horses (12 mares 18 studs) are expected to be released as soon as fire danger subsides. Those that have expressed an interest may attend release.

The group briefly discussed if they would like RES to remain, or depart so that could discuss their proposal, but it was decided that the RAC would finish up with its other business and then decide.

Item X: Shoshone Field Office Update (Ruth Miller)

Miller began with an update on the Ketchum Land Exchange. She asked the RAC if they would like future involvement in the project including commenting on future studies and the EA, even though they had already submitted a letter of support. The RAC agreed that they had already discussed the issue at length, and would not require any future involvement with the project.

The Freidman Memorial Airport is suspended indefinitely due to cost and wildlife issues.

There have been meetings in Montana and Idaho refining the route options for the Mountain States Transmission Intertie (MSTI) project. The EIS has been delayed, and will probably be out next spring or summer at the earliest.

North Highway 20 Travel Management Plan Update (*see Handout 20*) – there have been four public meetings with over 100 attendees, and lots of comments from the public. The Plan is currently in the scoping period until October 14. Motorized use has been the most prominent reason for comments, especially from the Wood River Valley area. Carey focused mainly on snowmobile use. The BLM is looking at the EA and potential alternatives.

The Shoshone Field Office is also working on a special recreation permit renewal for the School of Urban and Wilderness Survival (SUWS) camp (*see Handout 21*). The renewal would be for a 10-year permit. The project just began its public scoping period. The project has some proposed boundary changes (see the map with Handout 22 - Black = existing boundary, Red = new proposed boundary) in order to expand the SUWS program and provide flexibility within the program. Some issues of concern for the project are impacts to riparian areas, sage-grouse,

wilderness impacts, migratory wildlife, fire danger, and impacts to winter range for deer. There will be a presentation on September 22 to the North Magic working group. The comment period for the project ends October 1.

Orthel commented that he has heard that SUWS is displacing deer, forcing them further west.

Miller responded that Idaho Department of Fish & Game has not commented on that issue yet, although they are part of the working group.

Item XI: Poster Presentations

Scott Boettger and Holly Hampton gave poster presentations about their background and history.

Item XII: Agenda Items for Next Meeting

Next Meeting: Wednesday, January 25, 2012 (Location TBD)

- Elect new RAC Chairman
- EIS Updates
- Poster Presentations
 - Afton Patrick
 - Brian Davis

Item XIII: Other

A special social event will be held to commemorate the retirement of Bill Baker and the departure of Mel Quale from the RAC.

- Wednesday, December 7th – 5:30, Location TBD, Spouses included.
- Social event only – not business.

At this point, the group chose to resume their discussion of the presentation given by RES members regarding the China Mountain Wind Energy Project.

Quale moved that the RAC reconsider their previous motion, and support alternative B1 and the southern haul route. The motion received a second.

The group then discussed the issue. Some of the areas discussed included whether they wanted to break out into an executive session, form a subcommittee for the project, or table the issue since it had already been discussed and a recommendation put forward.

The group called for a vote; the motion failed, with only one in support.


There was then a motion to adjourn, which received a second. Motion passed.

Meeting adjourned at 4:10.

Handouts Provided:

- 1- Untitled Map of Minidoka Fuel Break (1 p)
- 2- Minidoka Fuel Break Monitoring map (1 p)
- 3- Wilderness and Wild & Scenic River Management Planning Update (2 pp)
- 4- Figure 2.5-1 Alternative B1 (1 p)
- 5- Figure 2.7-1 Alternative B2b Phased Approach (1 p)
- 6- Figure 2.8-1 Alternative B2c Phased Approach (1 p)
- 7- Figure 2.9-1 Alternative C (1 p)
- 8- Figure 2.10-1 Alternative D (1 p)
- 9- Figure 2.11-1 Alternative E (1 p)
- 10- Figure 2.12-1 Alternative F (1 p)
- 11- Draft EIS page 2-5 (1 p)
- 12- Draft EIS page 2-103 (1 p)
- 13- Appendix A: Engineering Notes Regarding the Northern Inbound Haul Route (1 p)
- 14- North Inbound Haul Route (1 p)
- 15- South Access Plan Civil Engineering Exhibit (1 p)
- 16- South Access Road Profile Views Civil Engineering Exhibit (1 p)
- 17- South Access Road Details Civil Engineering Exhibit (1 p)
- 18- Browns Bench Sage-grouse Telemetry Information 2002-2010 (1 p)
- 19- Untitled map of Shoshone Basin Allotments
- 20- North Highway 20 Travel Management Plan Scoping Information Package (19 pp)
- 21- SUWS Special Recreation Permit Renewal Scoping Information Package (15 pp)

Minutes certified by:



 Denise Alexander, Vice- Chairman, TFD RAC

10/13/11

 Date



 Bill Baker, TFD Manager

10/21/11

 Date

Minutes recorded by:

Meghan Sorensen-Pereira, Administrative Assistant