

Twin Falls District (TFD)
RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL (RAC)
MEETING MINUTES
JANUARY 8, 2009 9:00 AM
Red Lion Canyon Springs Inn

RAC Members Present:

Ken Sanders - Chairman, Category 3
Yvette Tuell, Category 3
Scott Boettger, Category 2
Hank Mayland, Category 2
Mel Quale, Category 1
Joe Tugaw, Category 1
Kevin Bell, Category 3
Gerald Orthel, Category 1
Denise Alexander, Category 2
Samantha Anderson, Category 3
Brad Brooks, Category 2
Debbie Dane, Category 1
Dennis Crane, Category 3
Lynn Messman, Category 2

BLM Representatives Present:

Bill Baker – DFO, District Manager (DM)
Jenifer Arnold, Associate District Manager (ADM)
Lori Armstrong, Shoshone Field Office Manager (SFOM)
Mike Courtney, Burley Field Office Manager (BFOM)
Jim Tharp, Assistant Burley Field Office Manager (ABFOM)
Aimee Betts, Jarbidge Resource Management Plan (RMP) Lead
Heather Tiel-Nelson, Public Affairs
Beckie Wagoner, TFD Records Assistant

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 the Chairman, Ken Sanders. 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.

Public Comment started at 9:00 - there were no public members present

Public Comment ended at 9:30

I. RAC Member Orientation – Heather Tiel-Nelson

Tiel-Nelson gave a power point presentation for the RAC member's orientation which covered the roles, responsibilities and duties of the RAC members as well as a brief overview of the resource areas and the projects the BLM has within the Twin Falls District.

II. Wood River Land Trust Presentation - Scott Boettger

The Wood River Land Trust works with local agencies such as the BLM as well as land owners to help them find solutions to their land needs. In 1997 the Land Trust program started their open space conservation work. Through the land transfer program, Land Trust works with land owners who want to develop their properties, conserve open space or work with lands that would have critical impact on sensitive areas.

One example is a Ketchum landowner with an ongoing trespass issue onto BLM managed lands; their private land is adjacent to BLM and development had extended 17 acres onto public land. Wood River Land Trust is proposing to exchange the 17 acres of public land he trespassed on and BLM will receive approximately 1,200 acres of equal value, Wood River Land Trust would facilitate the effort. Thus far there has been no net loss in any of the BLM exchanges.

The Land Trust has purchased and received several large land donations that have allowed them to make exchanges with the monies they receive from the land sold which allows Land Trust to acquire lands that can later benefit the program.

Discussion: If the government acquires lands, then they should have to exchange equal amounts of acreage, so the amount of public lands is always the same for county tax collection purposes. On the other hand, exchanges, even though they are not acre for acre, will benefit the program due to the value of the lands. In the exchange with the land owner who trespassed, it will give Blaine County better tax revenue than the 17 acres. Tribal members are generally in favor of the government acquiring more land, because where there is an increase in federal lands, Tribes acquire more resources, the Tribes have fewer rights if the lands are removed from federal ownership. Some RAC members thought more value trades rather than dollar to dollar would be better.

The private landowner is picking up all costs on the exchange process for the proposed exchange.

III. RAC Roles/Responsibilities – Bill Baker

In response to the question regarding defining RAC member's roles, Baker went over the Twin Falls District RAC Charter, the position narrative and the different subgroups and their compositions. RAC members are always welcome to contact the BLM if they are interested in finding out more information about projects, or would like a field tour.

The importance of regular meeting attendance was emphasized, as was the need to let the BLM know if one is unable to make a meeting.

It is important to note that any RAC member may make individual comments on planning documents during any public comment period. It takes a majority vote by the entire membership of the RAC to form a recommendation on such planning documents to the BLM. Also, subgroups will be referred to in the future as teams.

IV. Goal Setting – Ken Sanders

The RAC determined they would vote for recommendations either by a voice vote, or silent ballot depending on the topic being discussed. As part of the goal setting discussion, each RAC member gave their opinion on what projects they would like to work on for the BLM in 2009. It was also reiterated that a personal goal for each RAC member should be to attend each and every RAC meeting. The onus is on the RAC member to stay informed about the issue(s) being discussed at the upcoming meeting and to let the BLM or the Chairperson know whether they will be at the meeting or not. It has been a struggle for the RAC to have a quorum for the last two years. The present RAC members are frustrated because they cannot make recommendations because of the lack of participation at the meetings.

It was suggested that there be a designated person to make phone calls to the RAC members who cannot make a meeting to notify them of items needing a vote for a recommendation. The caller would then get a proxy vote from the absent RAC member so the item could move forward rather than wait another three months until the next meeting.

It was also made clear that if there is information that a team had gathered, it is the team's responsibility to get the information out to the full RAC prior to the next meeting. This will ensure everyone has a chance to review the information prior to the meeting so they can take action on it at the following RAC meeting. That will allow the RAC to handle action items in a timely matter and allow them to have good discussion on the items. However, if a RAC member needs additional information from the team, it is the member's responsibility to get it from the team.

It would be helpful if BLM came to the RAC with specific projects they want help or feedback on. The RAC needs to know what the BLM priorities are to figure out what goals will best help the BLM. This could take the place of the regular Field Office reports.

The Jarbidge Field Office is still working on the RMP so will still need the RAC's input on the RMP. It is important to know what issues/portions of the RMP are the most important to the RAC so they can keep them in the loop for those areas.

This brought the discussion back to goal setting and the need to figure out what goals will help RAC be more effective as a group. It was brought up that the RAC needs to have SMART (Specific Measurable Attainable Relevant Timely) goals, and timelines must be set for accomplishing these goals. It was also suggested that the RAC pick two or three items for the year to allow quality feedback to the BLM, with fewer items to work on.

It was requested that BLM provide training on how to use the management plan, and how the RAC members could make more helpful comments on planning documents for BLM.

*The RAC can reserve the BLM conference line to help facilitate getting the information out and discussing the information.

**NOTE: *If the entire RAC meets via conference call, a federal register notice must be published 30 days in advance of the call.*

V. Burley Field Office (BFO) Report – Mike Courtney

The BLM is currently working with the Idaho Parks & Recreation (ID P&R) and Forest Service (FS) to complete a management plan for Castle Rocks State Park. There is a meeting at the BFO on January 20, 2009 at 9:00 am. The management plan for this park will develop rock

climbing routes in Castle Rocks State Park and associated Forest Service and BLM land. The RAC could provide assistance or a recommendation for this plan.

BFO renewed 22 grazing permits in 2008 and all were protested, appealed, and then dropped. The decisions to renew 27 more will be made after the first of March 2009. There are still 271 permits left to process.

The RAC discussed how they can help prevent appeals on grazing. More partnerships with other organizations need to be fostered during the permit renewal process.

Some members commented that litigation sometimes forces BLM to do a better job. BLM would prefer to take care of issues upfront rather than winding up in court.

There were 28 fire starts within the BFO in 2008. Shoshone Basin and North Minidoka fires each burned significant acreage. The Shoshone Basin fire burned 6,773 acres and did not require rehabilitation other than sagebrush seed on the BLM portion of the burn. The North Minidoka fire burned 31,616 acres which included the last large block of sagebrush in the Minidoka desert. 200 foot wide forage kochia strips will be placed along existing roads to help reduce the size of the fires for that area. BFO is currently working through the NEPA process to add fuel breaks along existing roads connecting to non-burning anchor points such as lava. It would be helpful to have RAC input on these fuel break plans, as well as the vegetation used for re-seeding efforts.

There is controversy surrounding using forage kochia as a rehabilitation tool. Forage kochia is a perennial, succulent plant that tends to be more fire resilient and has good forage value. However, it can be invasive.

A botanist was requested to come in and give information on the pros and cons of forage kochia.

BFO has several energy projects going. There was a geothermal lease sale in Salt Lake City, Utah in December 2008. Three additional parcels were leased.

The Southwest Intertie Project (SWIP) has had its biological surveys completed along the Idaho portion of the corridor. There were no sage grouse leks, pygmy rabbits nor threatened or endangered plants found. The construction and operations plan will be ready for BLM review by mid March 2009 as well as a draft NEPA adequacy by end of January 2009.

Gateway West has met with the BLM to discuss proposed routing issues to include conflicts with the Oregon/California Trail, Right-of-Way (ROW) restrictions and winter motor vehicle closures. All routes were adjusted to mitigate these issues.

Wind Power has several projects going as well. Cotterel Mountain Wind Energy Project was issued a ROW grant in 2006, but they do not have a buyer for the power at this time. Jim Sage Narrows received a ROW application to construct met towers at two locations at the south end of Jim Sage Mountain. Middle Mountain has had interest in receiving a ROW to construct met towers but no application has been filed yet. The South Hills has three applications on file to construct met towers.

Priority items for 2009 for the BFO are seeding, Castle Rock Park with an emphasis on climbing and energy projects.

VI. Election of new RAC Chairperson

Due to not having a quorum, this was tabled until the next meeting.

VII. Shoshone Field Office (SFO) Report – Lori Armstrong

Shoshone has the largest area in the Twin Falls District with 2.1 million acres. Resources for the SFO include 17 WSA's which is the most for any Field Office in Idaho, recreation to include a ski resort, and special recreation permits for hunting and guiding. The Lands and Realty program is large, Idaho Power's main substation with huge energy demands is located on private land within the SFO boundary. Additionally, there is livestock grazing on over 200 large acre allotments for both cattle and sheep grazing. There is a lot of fire history, so there are many ongoing rehabilitation and fuels projects. The local wildlife includes sage grouse, pygmy rabbits, and wolves. SFO is noted for being the BLM Field Office with the most caves and lava tubes in the Bureau.

The Craters of the Moon National Monument travel plan group has put together alternatives from all the comments and feedback that BLM has received. There are a few areas that are going to be closed seasonally and one road will receive improvements. The draft plan is due out to the public in February 2009 for formal comment and review. Once the Craters of the Moon National Monument travel plan is out, BLM will start the Blaine County transportation plan. This plan will deal mainly with the Wood River Valley area.

The Airport has three sites to be analyzed in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), two are on private property and one is solely on federal lands. The airport authority has submitted a proposal to congress for a 2480 acre direct sale of the federal land on the Blaine/Lincoln County site. There is no FAA preferred location. The RAC can help by giving comments on this proposal. The sale would be based on Fair Market Value and the funds would go to the Treasury. The tribes will also have a say through consultation in the NEPA process. The purchase funds will come from FAA and the sponsor, the sale of the land at the existing airport will contribute to the funding for the sponsor.

The Craters of the Moon Monument Management Plan lawsuit was received in early December, the BLM received the notification from Western Watershed Projects (WWP). The basis of the lawsuit is sage grouse and livestock grazing based on BLM not having a "no grazing" alternative.

SFO currently has one term permit being challenged for grazing. It was filed four days late and the allotment is surrounded by private land, there is a chance it may get dismissed.

There is need for help from the RAC on the energy projects.

VIII. Jarbidge Field Office Report – Aimee Betts

JFO is probably one of the most remote field offices in the lower 48. The JFO has three WSAs (one is shared with the Bruneau FO, another with the BFO) as well as paleontological resources of the Glens Ferry Formation and portions of the Oregon Trail. For recreation, there is a narrow window for river rafting and kayaking on the Bruneau and Jarbidge Rivers as well as cross-country OHV use primarily in the northern portion of the field office. JFO also has 96 grazing allotments, and contains the Saylor Creek wild horse herd. The Murphy Complex Fire also occurred in the JFO.

Today is the last day of the ten-day evidentiary hearing for the WWP litigation; the hearing was originally scheduled for five days, but it was extended. Once the evidentiary hearing is completed, there will still be a lot of work reviewing the hearing transcripts and writing final arguments. The complaints for the litigation are damage to sage grouse, pygmy rabbit, and slickspot peppergrass habitat from the Murphy Complex Fire and livestock use of unburned areas; inadequate NEPA on post-fire temporary fences and fence repair; and inadequate criteria for resumption of grazing following the Murphy Complex Fire.

The Murphy Complex Fire Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation has been a big project. A fence contractor completed over 390 miles of fence repair before winter set in. The majority of the work has been completed; remaining workloads include weed inventory and treatment, recovery monitoring, and additional shrub plantings. In 2008, after looking at over 50 pastures that might meet criteria for resumption of grazing, BLM was able to open 20 pastures that did meet the criteria for grazing within the Murphy Complex Fire.

The RMP subgroup has been very helpful; their input, along with the workshops they hosted have been much appreciated. Chapters 1 – 3 of the RMP are mostly done, and Chapter 4 is currently being written; there are roughly 35 sections of analysis for Chapter 4. There has been a lot of collaboration between the RMP Team and the Idaho State Office (ISO) and cooperating agencies throughout the process of writing Chapter 4. The plan is to finish Chapter 4 around March 2009.

Once the Draft RMP has been completed, it will go to the ISO for review; once the ISO has reviewed the draft, it will go to the Washington Office for final review. BLM would like to have the RAC continue to stay involved in this process by reviewing the draft once it comes out and provide comments once again. The RAC members are encouraged to sit in on any part of the RMP process and help go through the comment letters. It would be helpful if the RAC could get the local communities involved in providing comment on the draft. There will be a series of public meetings once the draft comes out; it would also be good to have RAC members at these meetings to talk to the public as well as other local groups they are involved in. In the near future, it would be helpful if the RAC could develop a list of its top three priorities for selecting the preferred alternative and have that to the BLM in February.

The China Mountain Wind Energy Project has eight meteorological towers erected now; four are on Idaho BLM land, one on Nevada BLM land, two on private land, and one on state land. There are three more towers proposed; a draft EA for these will be out for public review in about a month. Because of the 30-day comment period, RAC members will need to respond individually if they would like to comment. The Environmental Impact Statement has been contracted, and we should have a rough draft of Chapters 1 – 3 in February. BLM is working on establishing cooperating agency agreements with state agencies. RAC members can find additional information about the project on the project website at http://www.blm.gov/id/st/en/prog/planning/china_mountain_wind.html

VIII. Other Business

The RAC reviewed the existing designated teams and created new teams where needed and listed their goals. The list is as follows:

Resource Management Plan (RMP) Team:

Marc Brackett - Chairperson

Ken Sanders

Samantha Anderson

Mel Quale

Joe Tugaw

Denise Alexander

Kevin Bell

Brad Brooks

The goal is to recommend an alternative from the draft once the draft is out.

Blaine County Airport Team:

Scott - Chairperson
Brad Brooks
Lynn Messman
Kevin Bell
Yvette Tuell

Armstrong will send out a map and will have FAA make a presentation during the next meeting. Armstrong will let FAA know that the RAC plans to form a recommendation. *Present recommendation at the next RAC meeting.

Castle Rock Management Area Team:

Brad Brooks - Chairperson
Debbie Dane
Gerald Orthel

Goal - recommendations on management of the area. ID P&R, FS, BLM meeting on the 20th at BFO at 9:00 am. Emphasis for this group is on climbing. *Need to present what they think their purpose is to the RAC at the next meeting and a tentative timeline for achieving the goal.

Fire/Fuels Management Team:

Ken Sanders - Chairperson
Hank Mayland
Joe Tugaw
Mel Quale
Samantha Anderson
Marc Brackett

Recommendation after a tour and talking with IDL, ISDA, IDFG.

Goal - to address reducing frequency, size and intensity and when to resume grazing.

FMDA & Craters teams were dismantled
Lands team was tabled

Next meeting set for April 2, 2009 in Twin Falls, location to be determined.

Agenda items for next meeting:

Recreation RAC Report
Elections
Handling Goals
Airport
Team for Energy to include China Mtn and corridors
Training/Education on management and assessment process
Summer Tour

*Wagoner will send out the designated team list and a draft of goals out along with the map for the airport project and the next meeting date tomorrow.

Handouts provided at this meeting:

2008 RAC Handbook

Perspectives on Land

Various Maps on Land Exchange Projects

BFO RAC Briefing

Map of proposed Airport site

Website for the Proposed China Mountain Wind Energy Project EIS

Minutes certified by: /s/

Kenneth Sanders, TFD RAC

Date

Bill Baker, TF DFO

Date

Minutes recorded by: Beckie Wagoner, TFD Records Assistant