

Recreation Resource Advisory Subcommittee (RRAC) Meeting  
April 10, 2008  
Idaho Commerce and Labor Building  
450 Falls Avenue W. Twin Falls, ID  
Meeting Minutes

*Attendees*

TFD RRAC Members: Scott Boettger, Samantha Anderson, Yvette Tuell, Denise Alexander, Hank Mayland  
BDO RRAC Members: Grant Simonds (RRAC Chair), Nate Helm, John Robison, Rick Just,  
TFD BLM: Bill Baker, Beckie Wagoner, Heather Tiel-Nelson, Dennis Thompson  
BDO BLM: MJ Byrne, Aden Seidlitz, Robin Fehlour  
FS: Jim Keller, Terry Clark, Scott Nannenga, Lisa Machnik, Liz Close, Tim Garcia  
Public: Katie Shewmaker & Layne Bangerter - Senator Crapo's Office, Lauri Baldwin – Secretary on behalf of Scott Phillips, Jayson Armstrong – Lease Holder

The meeting was called to order by MJ Byrne at 10:10 am

Introductions were made around the room. A quorum was present.

The previous meeting's minutes (Nov 14, 2007) were reviewed; John Robison moved for approval of the minutes to include minor clarification to the declared date within the minutes, Samantha Anderson seconded the motion; motion passed.

Terry Clark, Recreation Program Representative, Sawtooth Forest (SNF) gave a presentation on the proposed \$2.00 per site/night fee increase for ten individual sites within the lower Penstemon campground in the SNF, increasing the current fees from \$6.00 to \$8.00. This would make this campground the same as the other developed sites with amenities. The qualifying requirement for a fee increase is to have five of the nine listed possible amenities within the campground; the lower Penstemon campground includes eight of the nine possible amenities. There is no trash collection on the individual sites; however there are dumpsters in centralized locations within the upper Rock Creek Drainage for campers. The additional \$2.00 increase will raise approximately an additional \$1,000.00 per year. There is no day use charge.

Signs/notices were posted to inform visitors of the proposed changes May 1, 2007 and Scott Nannenga, SNF, also talked with the Twin Falls County and the Cassia County commissioners along with the district rangers in regular meetings as part of their outreach prior to bringing the proposals to the RRAC. A press release also announced the proposed changes; no comments were received during the outreach period, however, one email was received from Dave Scherer showing that he opposed the increased fees. Two handouts were then provided to the RRAC members: 1) Letter sent to the RRAC, 2) E-mail from Dave Scherer. The fees are reviewed approximately every five years or if there

are upgrades to a site. This campground was overlooked in 2005 when the adjacent sites were reviewed.

The operation and maintenance contract at Rock Creek is approximately \$6000.00 annually; another \$6500.00 is used to develop the camp sites. The deferred backlog for these sites include replacement of the picnic tables, (which generally have a 15 year life-span), fire rings, and the restrooms. The sites have been there since before 1989. This seasonal use area is open from Memorial Day to Labor Day, no fees are charged before or after these dates. There is reasonable visitor protection provided by regular law enforcement patrols, but there are no camp ground hosts. Fees are collected via drop tube. Users in the campground are dispersed, and mainly consist of fishermen in the lower sites and ATV users in the upper sites. Over the past couple of years Rock Creek has become increasingly popular, there is a 75% usage rate to date. As the snow melts people tend to move up the canyon toward the ATV areas, there is a lot of ATV use in this area. The third fork trail gets mostly mountain bike use. Equestrian use is on the Rimview Trail. Not many hunters use these sites.

The fee increase proposal is to bring the Lower Penstemon Campground fee up to standard. In 2004, Porcupine Springs Canyon had a better water system installed, which actually benefits the Lower Penstemon. Porcupine Springs Canyon fee was increased in 2005.

There are several dispersed recreation sites close by that are still non-fee to include 12 - 13 sites in the canyon; two are abandoned camp grounds that have asphalt, some still have tables and fire rings, three are trail heads.

The question was posed, “what kind of feedback is Senator Crapo receiving?” Katie Shewmaker answered the question and shared that there really was not much feedback on the proposed increases in the Twin Falls area, but there were a few comments that were generated from Hailey/Ketchum area, in response to the letter to the editor that Scott Phillips submitted prior to the RRAC meeting.

#### **Discussion on SNF sites:**

Since 2002, the Forest Service budget has declined. They have vacancies that they are unable to fill due to the declining budget. During the George Bush Sr. administration the FS had a larger budget and was able to do more. The budget slightly increased with the Clinton administration.

It was stated several times by different RRAC members that education is the key for the public to accept the new fees. Without proper education about the need for a fee increase, there will not be public support. The agencies need to better explain to the public the benefits and reason behind the fee increases. MJ, BD BLM, suggested that the FS also provide the RAC more information so they are prepared to answer questions when asked why the proposed fee increases or fee implementations should be approved for the FS. Rick Just, BD RRAC said, “This is a small “catch-up” fee for one campground.”

Samantha Anderson, TFD RRAC, agreed and shared that she had talked to several people concerning this fee increase and had received no complaints, everyone she talked to agreed to the increase, but she did receive complaints, however, that the South Hills is overcrowded. Nate Helm, BD RRAC, added that no one wants to be the one to support fee increases, but it is the RRAC's job to challenge the agencies requesting fee increases to ensure that all interests are accounted for prior to implementing fee increases. If we can see real benefits, then the public will be willing to pay the increases, if the FS can not show that amenities equal the increases, the public won't be willing to pay the new fees. Nate Helm also stated that the increase should not go towards trail heads or other backlogs but rather to where the fees are charged. Grant Simonds, BD RRAC and chair, mentioned that the outfitters and guides are the ones who pick up the funding for the upkeep of the roads going to these sites and that those concerns were shared with D.C. staff. John Robison, BD RRAC, explained that there is a need to fund the services; the public does not care how the sites are maintained, they just want them maintained for use. John Robison also suggested that alternate sources for funding would be welcome.

Layne Bangerter, Senator Crapo's office, added that the Senator is not targeting campground fees, but rather fees on entrance and access to trailheads. The Senator does not want to start dictating how the FS disperses its funding.

Yvette Tuell, TF RRAC, suggested that the expected occupancy in these areas be examined. If there are approximately 6,000 people using the sites, they are the ones that need to agree to the increases by using the sites once the fees have been raised. They need to understand that there will be litter issues with out the fees. Grant Simonds then asked Yvette Tuell if there has been reasonable consultation with the Tribes to which she responded that there has been very good consultation with the Tribes on these increases.

Jim Keller, Recreation Program Manager, Boise National Forest (BNF) sent out CD's prior to the meeting with information and pictures of the proposed fee sites. A lot of the facilities are used and appreciated by the public, but FS is having a hard time maintaining them within their limited budget. Currently, there is a \$230,000 gap between revenues and operations and maintenance costs with a \$1.3 million backlog of deferred maintenance (needs replaced or general maintenance that wasn't accomplished on schedule). The FS is going through a Recreation Facility Analysis process to examine ways to fix the gap between the operations and maintenance costs and the available budget. They have looked at: adjusting management, reducing services in less used campsites, adjustments to water distribution systems, and site decommissioning. However, recreation in these areas is increasing, so the FS does not favor decommissioning in most cases at this point.

There is still a shortage of \$63,000 after all the possible cutbacks, so FS is now looking at fee increases to fill the remaining cost gaps. The Regional Forester approved the last set of fee increases after the joint RACs recommendation for approval. Those increases will be implemented later this year. The BNF is proposing the establishment of 12 new fee campgrounds. The new fee proposal is for existing sites that are not currently charging a

fee; Badger Creek, Castle Creek, Cottonwood, Evans Creek, Golden Gate, Ice Hole, Neimeyer, Powerplant, Queens River, Riverside, Troutdale, and Yellow Pine.

There were concerns that the Yellow Pine campground was burned in last year's fire. Actually, the fuels were removed from the area in a prescribed burn, but the campground was not greatly affected by the fire; there were pictures passed around of the campground that were taken after the fire. The handpump well sometimes goes dry in the Yellow Pine campground; FS may look into drilling it deeper in the future. In addition to the 12 campsites, there are three other new fee site proposals: Johnson Creek Guard Station, Swanholm Lookout (both cabin sites), and Campbell Creek Boat Ramp.

Handouts were provided:

- List of proposed sites
- Typical Campground Photos
- Recreation Facility Analysis (RFA)
- Public and Tribal Outreach Summary
- Emails & Letters from Public

The Boise National Forest completed a fee study in 2007 in an effort to determine the fee levels and structure would be most appropriate. - Contributing factors were economics, adjacent campgrounds, State Park fees, and consistency across the Forest. The FS has completed a number of outreach efforts to the public with postings of proposals, a news release (September 21, 2007), newspaper articles, notification to congress and public meetings. The Rangers also meet regularly with the commissioners. There was almost no feedback during the outreach period until the current proposal for the establishment of the new fee sites. They had received a few letters that express concerns about opportunities, wanting to know what opportunities are available. The end result of the RFA is a five year action plan. That plan includes the 57 site increases that were recommended for approval last fall by the RRAC and RACs. The site-by-site actions proposed for each site in the 5-Year plan have been posted on the BNF website since September of 2007. Signs notifying the public of fee increases and new fees were posted at the sites during the summer of 2007. Some proposed fees will go up to \$15/night. The BNF is adopting a two-tier structure similar to one that the Payette National Forest (PNF) originally proposed; premium and standard fee sites. All fee proposals meet the REA amenity requirements with most having eight or nine out of the nine amenities, only five are required. The FS is looking at doing stage increases in some areas so the fee is gradually raised until it reaches the proposed amount; stage increases could be part of the recommendation the RAC sends forward.

The establishment of fees at a previously free site may displace some of the users to remaining non-fee sites or dispersed sites. However, if use plummets at a campground because fees were too high it could be re-visited. The five year plan shows exactly what sites are being looked at and what the planned management action are for that site. There is sometimes a grace period involved with new fee increases, since visitors may not be aware of the increases until they get to the campground.

Some of the emails received from the public compare the cost of administering fees vs. the benefit received from the fees; which is addressed in the RFA. The most difficult part of a fee increase is to demonstrate the value of each proposed site. There is a need to see what has changed at each site to give it a new value. The FS will increase their efforts to get more information out that will justify the proposed increases. It was requested to have Rangers at the next RRAC meeting to be able to ask them questions and get them more involved since they are patrolling the sites and are more familiar with them.

Emails also questioned Yellow Pine Campgrounds availability due to the fire last year, the FS assured the RRAC that the campground was not greatly affected and hosts, amenities and some services are still planned for the summer of 2008. The FS also shared that much of the information in the letters/emails on Yellow Pine is inaccurate. Yellow Pine has a permanent population of approximately 40 people. There is an option to defer the increased fees in Yellow Pine until all evidence of the fire around the area is gone, even though it did not affect the amenities or the tree cover within the campground area.

The campground season of use depends on the weather (accessibility) and usage. Seasonal occupancy is calculated by fee envelopes, random counting and impressions from the camp ground hosts or staff if there are no fees. The Anderson Ranch sites have become popular and are getting more use each year.

At 1:35 pm discussion was opened up to any public who wanted to comment, although there was public present none commented. During this time MJ Byrne read the letter Scotty Phillips sent per his request. John also read a letter from Katy Macintosh. The letters/emails that were sent in response to the fee increases were inserted and read into the minutes.

\*The RRAC neither endorses, nor supports the comments that were read into the minutes.

At 1:45 pm the public comment period ended.

It was mentioned that the meeting minutes and agendas are not posted on the websites until the next meeting. MJ Byrne explained the process for approval for the meeting minutes follows Federal Advisory Committee Act regulations, but will further check to see if minutes can be approved via email to get them posted faster. It was requested that even if the minutes cannot be posted quicker that the agendas be posted as soon as they are completed. It was also requested that the BLM and FS get together to work out a process to get all information to the RRAC quicker.

At this point Grant Simonds suggested that they vote on each of the recommendations individually for each Forest starting with the Sawtooth, then breaking down the BNF areas.

**Action:** John Robison, BD RRAC, moved to forward the recommendation to the joint RAC for the Lower Penstemon Campground as presented and proposed at the April 10, 2008, meeting by the Sawtooth National Forest.

Hank Mayland, TFD RRAC, second the motion

The motion was passed unanimously

**Discussion on BNF sites:**

There are 15 new fee sites, 13 of which were available for use by the public before and two that are new sites with cabins. The FS still has several free campsites that can be used in proximity of the fee proposal sites.

It was suggested to organize the BNF sites by access and campground as well as separate the cabin and boat ramp sites for the purposes of approving a motion. All FS cabins rent for \$30 - \$50/night. The cabin closest to Johnson Creek is Warm Lake and it is rented for \$50/night, which is the proposed fee for Johnson Creek. It was mentioned that cabins are in demand and these types of facilities have frequent use.

\*The proposed sites cover three ranger districts.

**Action:** Hank Mayland moved to accept the Boise National Forest proposal as stated on April 10, 2008, for the two new cabin sites Johnson Creek Guard Station and Swanholm Lookout.

Nate Helm, second the motion

The motion passed unanimously

Discussion then started on the Campbell Creek Boat Ramp, this would be a new fee. The ramp has been in place for many years with no fee; this is a day use fee only, there is no camping at this location. The boat ramp was constructed and funded by the FS and the parking lot is asphalt. There was a written complaint from the public that the docks need replaced. The FS has requested grants but they have not been approved. FS shared that the Valley County Commissioners supported the repairs on the dock and they understand the need to charge the proposed fee of \$5.00/day, but are concerned about the public reaction. Funds collected at one site do not always go back into that same site; they go into a account which is allocated at a Forest level. No recreational clubs have been contacted to see if they would help repair or help support the repairs to the dock. It was mentioned that it would be hard to recommend approval of a fee increase on the dock when there is no guarantee it would be fixed. Generally speaking, the public would be more willing to support the fee, if improvements to the site were easily recognizable.

Suggestion for future fee proposals to the RRAC is to have a Ranger available for clarification as well as prior to the joint RAC meeting May 8, 2008. It would be good to have a face-to-face meeting for any questions the RAC may have and this recommendation may be discussed more at the May joint RAC meeting. It was also suggested that the FS have something documenting where the commissioners stand on the fee proposals, and that all appropriate managers and Rangers be present at the

meetings. It was requested that the RRAC meet prior to the joint RAC meeting in May to review any proposals that the RRAC does not have a recommendation on due to requesting more information.

\*Seasonal/Annual passes are available for this site: Interagency Pass - \$80/year, Access Pass – free, and Senior Pass - \$10 one time.

**Action:** Samantha Anderson, moved to table the boat ramp recommendation until more research is done.

Rick Just, second the motion

Motion passed unanimously

Continued discussion:

Evans Creek & Castle Creek are both established campsites with no current fee. Neimyer has received a complaint that the site is not worth the value as a fee site. At this point, FS mentioned that to receive funds for deferred maintenance on a site, that site must be a fee site. It was reiterated a couple more times that the RRAC needs more information on some of these sites even if it means slowing down the process.

There are six sites with no drinking water or trash removal: Troutdale, Badger Creek, Neimyer, Castle Creek, Golden Gate, and Cotton Wood. Two of those are not handicap accessible. FS shared that they are not required to be handicap accessible if there are other sites near by that are. The RRAC is trying to represent the public with no comment from the public saying they need improvements in the campsites. The RRAC is not familiar enough with the sites to make recommendations. Perhaps specific sites should be identified for improvements. It was suggested that FS should do more outreach at Yellow Pine so they have the local feedback. If there are misunderstandings about the Yellow Pine area, then outreach this year in the area could clear those up. It was mentioned that a recommendation be made with the exception of Yellow Pine. RRAC would like to see feedback from the County Commissioners. At this point there is limited information on these sites; could make recommendations with provisions. Need to know if the public users of these sites are wanting more out of the sites, it is hard to make a recommendation without that information. Not enough supporting information to recommend approval at this time.

**Action:** Hank Mayland moved to recommended approval of the remaining sites as stated by the Boise Nation Forest on April 10, 2008, with the exception of the boat ramp.

John Robison, BD RRAC, second the motion

The motion failed

**Action:** Rick Just moved to approve the Forest Service proposal as proposed on April 10, 2007, for Castle Creek, Evans Creek, Riverside Campground-03, Ice Hole, Yellow Pine, and Power Plant campgrounds.

Hank Mayland second the motion

**Discussion**

It was suggested that Castle Creek be removed from the list as there was no water and was not handicap accessible. There are adjacent facilities that are handicap accessible.

Yvette Tuell suggested an addition to the motion with: propose to support if the Forest Service demonstrates written support from the public or evidence to their efforts to gain support.

Hank Mayland second the addition

The motion failed

**Action:** Samantha Anderson moved to approve fees in the Queens River, Riverside Campground-03, and Powerplant campgrounds as stated by the Forest Service on April 10, 2008.

Rick Just second the motion

**Discussion:**

Not comfortable with Queens River. Queens River is proposed to be \$12/night; the others on the list are \$15/night.

Scott Boettger, TFD RRAC, moved to amend the motion to remove Queens River.

Rick Just seconded the amendment

Motion passed but it was not unanimous

**Action:** Nate Helm moved to recommend the proposal as Forest Service proposed on April 10, 2008, on the fees for Evans Creek.

Hank Mayland second the motion

Motion passed, it was not unanimous

RRAC would like to get testimony about the conditions for the rest of the sites from the FS as well as feedback from local officials on the fees.

**Action:** Hank Mayland moved that the agencies making proposals for new fee sites provide written feedback, which could include meeting minutes, from elected officials and service providers as well as the site users for each site proposal.

FS interjected that there are limitations on the way they can collect information for the outreach period.

Rick Just second the motion

Motion passed unanimously

It was suggested to move back the time of the joint RAC meeting. The joint RAC meeting can start at 1:00 pm which leaves the morning for the RRAC to get the requested additional information from the FS and make a recommendation based on that information prior to the joint meeting.

\*It was requested by the RRAC that a link to the agenda be put out and that the meeting minutes be put out for review to the RRAC in draft form as soon as possible.

The meeting was adjourned by Chairperson Simonds at 4:10 pm

Approved by: /s/ Bill Baker May 8, 2008  
Bill Baker Twin Falls District Manager Date

Approved by: /s/ Grant Simonds May 8, 2008  
Grant Simonds Recreation RAC Chairman Date