

Twin Falls District
RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES
06/21/2011
Department of Labor, Twin Falls, ID

Resource Advisory Council (RAC) members present:

Category One – Commodity Interest

Michael Henslee
Gerald Orthel
Mel Quale
Jeff Williams

Category Two – Non-Commodity Interest

Denise Alexander
Scott Boettger
Hank Mayland

Category Three – Public Interest

Samantha Anderson
Charles Howell
Kelly Crane

Quorum Present? Yes

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) representatives present:

Bill Baker, Twin Falls District Manager
Heather Tiel-Nelson, Public Affairs Specialist
Mike Courtney, Burley Field Manager
Ruth Miller, Shoshone Field Manager
Meghan Sorensen-Pereira, Administrative Assistant

Public Attendees:

Michael Guerry, Guerry Inc., private land owner involved with the China Mountain Wind Project
Marc Brackett, Antelope Springs, private land owner involved with the China Mountain Wind Project
Mike Mathews, Office of U.S. Senator James E. Risch

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 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*

Chairman Kelly Crane called the meeting to order at 8:19 a.m.

Heather Tiel-Nelson introduced Meghan Sorensen-Pereira as the new RAC assistant.

Last meetings minutes were approved by the RAC Chairman, Kelly Crane, and will be routed to the BLM for approval and posting to the RAC website.

Item I: Ketchum Land Exchange

Scott Boettger discussed the subcommittee's findings on the proposed Federal Land Exchange, hereafter known as the Ketchum Land Exchange, between the BLM Shoshone Field office, the Wood River Land Trust, the City of Ketchum, and Blue Canyon Corporation. The subcommittee had prepared a letter (*see handout: Ketchum Land Exchange and R&PP*) in support of the land exchange, and Scott led discussion of the letter, highlighting the facts from the Ketchum Land Exchange: The BLM would convey approximately 19.86 acres in exchange for 1,298 acres from the areas of Square Lake, Cowcatcher Ridge, and Sheep Bridge. The Exchange would result in no net loss of public land. The subcommittee found that the exchange would meet land tenure adjustments and provide public benefit.

After discussion of the letter with a chance to review, Mel Quale moved for the approval of the Ketchum Land Exchange letter.

The motion was seconded by Jeff Williams. The RAC voted and the motion passed without opposition.

Item II: Discussion of BLM News Release by Heather Tiel-Nelson

Heather presented information regarding the upcoming public meeting about the Wilderness and Wild and Scenic River Management Plan. This meeting will be held on June 28 in Twin Falls (see handout).

Mike Henslee arrived at 8:31.

Hank Mayland arrived at 8:32.

Item III: Public Comment

Public comment period opened at 8:30 a.m. Two private land owners, Mike Guerry and Marc Brackett, were in attendance to discuss the China Mountain Wind Project in regards to their opinions about it and how it would affect their operations.

Michael Guerry began with a short history of his operation. Guerry, Inc. runs sheep and cattle on private, state and federal permits. When the China Mountain project first began around 9 years ago, they knew they were going to have to decide if they wanted to fight it or embrace it.

Guerry admitted that the significant economic effect from the project is a major driving force; they are not allowed to run on several allotments due to fire, litigation, and may possibly be off of more due to wildlife restrictions. Without being able to graze on their allotments, they see the China Mountain project as a potential salvation for their operation. In order to maintain the viability of his operation, Guerry would much rather have wind towers present than be forced to subdivide his property into ranchettes. Guerry stated that he believes that public access would be restricted if the land was parceled out and sold, and believes public access would remain strong, if not stronger with the China Mountain project present.

Williams asked if any other permittees would be affected other than Guerry and Brackett. Guerry answered that other permittees would be affected, but they were the only private landowners affected.

When questioned by Howell about whether he felt there would be impacts to the livestock on the ground, Guerry responded that he didn't think there would be. He stated that he had not had any livestock around wind towers personally, but he did have a friend that did, and they could not observe any effect.

Marc Brackett presented a handout (*see handout: Brackett Summation of China Mountain Impacts*) outlining the impacts of the project by each alternative. He found the draft document a challenging read so he developed the handout as a way to compare all of the alternatives side by side. Brackett's basic conclusion was that the impacts were basically the same for building one tower and building 120 or 170 towers, so he felt that we should recognize the maximum benefit of the project by building the maximum.

Brackett also expressed several other advantages from the project: He believed that it would make our local economy more diverse, and therefore stronger. He stated that the project with its revenue would add to the county tax base and the state endowment fund, and would be the largest supplier of funds for both. He also stated that he likes that it is a renewable resource, and could be used to create jobs that could not be offshored.

Brackett believes the biggest deterrent to the project would be sage-grouse.

Brackett also stated that it is inevitable that things change; so he supports a change such as this that would benefit the community. He agreed with Guerry that he does not want to subdivide his land either, but stated that their private land has too high of value to continue farming operations, so at some point they will have to choose some alternative whether it be subdividing or letting a wind project go in.

Boettger stated that he understood the struggles of trying to keep operations such as theirs going, but worried that everyone was putting too much emphasis on the economic benefit of the project.

In response, both ranchers stated that due to allotment closures, fire, and other economic changes, it will come to a point where their operations will still be viable, but will require some sort of other sustenance. Both ranchers were adamant that they did not buy their properties to sell them, and did not want to be forced to subdivide. The both felt it was important to realize the substantial economic benefit from the China Mountain project.

Several other areas of concern were discussed amongst the RAC and the public, such as: expanded recreational use because of the roads put in by the project; Golden Eagle nests and the Avian and Bat Protection Plan, and wildlife disturbance.

Public comment period ended at 9 a.m.

Item IV: Other Business

- Bill Baker stated that Ruth Miller would not be able to go on the tour due to litigation that needs worked on.
- Baker will leave around 10 tomorrow for the ICA tour.
- China Mountain comment period closes July 6; if all goes well, a the contractor can be working on the final EIS soon thereafter and start with response to comments; brief state directors by the end of September and see where they want the preferred alternative at they are thinking about alternatives.

Baker presented Kelly Crane with a plaque to thank him for his dedicated service on the RAC. This was Crane's last meeting with the RAC.

Meeting concluded at 9:25 a.m.

The group departed for a tour of the China Mountain Wind project site. Representatives from RES, America joined the tour at the Lud Drexler campground to answer any technical questions the RAC had. Brackett and Guerry also accompanied the group on the tour. Also present were Scott Barker, BLM Project Manager to lead the tour, Jeff Ross, BLM Archaeologist, and Heather Feeney, BLM State Office Public Affairs. Tour stops included an area near Monument Springs, the top of China Mountain, and then along the proposed southern haul bound route. More discussion occurred related to cultural resource issues, sage-grouse habitat, type of turbines, as well as haul routes.

Following the tour the group met at Flying Spear Outfitters at House Creek. Barker and Ross departed prior to dinner and RES Representatives, Brackett, and Guerry, departed after dinner. The remainder of the group camped overnight.

The group reconvened in the morning for breakfast where Howell and Baker gave poster presentations providing background and history about themselves. Holly Hampton, BLM Craters of the Moon Monument Manager, and Scott Boettger, Wood River Land Trust Director will give poster presentations at the next meeting.

The group then departed for Rogerson Guard Station for further deliberation about the Proposed China Mountain Wind Project.

Handouts Provided:

Ketchum Land Exchange and R&PP Letter
BLM Press Release
Brackett Summation of China Mountain Impacts

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Rogerson Guard Station, Rogerson, ID

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Scott Barker, Project Manager
Mike Courtney, Burley Field Manager
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Chairman Kelly Crane called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m.

Item I: China Mountain Wind Project

Following the tour, the China Mountain Wind Project was the sole topic for this meeting. Discussion was held where members expressed their views, based on their representative constituency, regarding the merits of the project.

As the group shared their opinions, it was clear the RAC believes that the China Mountain Wind Project is a worthwhile project to consider, but they did have some concerns.

Quale moved that the RAC recommend the project be approved to move forward contingent upon the discussion and solution of their concerns.

The motion received a second from Mayland, but was withdrawn due to the desire of the group to have further discussion before making a recommendation.

Bill Baker departed at 10:31.

In order to help clarify the project and facilitate the recommendation process, BLM Project Manager Scott Barker was asked to explain the different Alternatives outlined in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). He clarified that all alternatives created a viable project for RES. Any alternative could be used with any haul route.

- Alternative B1: The full scale project consisting of 170 wind turbines. This is the proposal from RES.
- B2a, B2b, B2c are all phased projects. Each begins with 100 turbines placed during phase 1. Those turbines are then monitored for 7-10 years; then the proponent may continue with phase 2, adding up to 70 more turbines.
- Alternatives C and D were created to mitigate impacts on wildlife. They were created from information from the Wildlife Working Group. Alternative D would have the least impact on sage-grouse leks.
- Alternative E was designed to be in conformance with the 1987 Jarbidge RMP.
- Alternative F was created to protect cultural resources.

The group continued with their discussion of their concerns with the project. Discussion was held regarding wilderness disturbance, future decommissioning of the project, repeated disturbance caused by the phased-in project approach, the ramifications of development on private property and the potential impacts to public access, where the power generated by the project was going to be disbursed, the legacy to future generations, sage-grouse and grazing impacts, and the major disturbances caused by the proposed haul routes.

After some discussion, Boettger suggested that if the development were to occur, it should remain on the northern end where the land was already more developed and disturbed. He suggested that the group proceed cautiously and at a limited scale for the project. He suggested considering Alternative F and Alternative B2b.

Barker informed the group that the weakness of Alternative F from the RES standpoint was that it did not have the most optimal placement of the wind turbines on private land. The group also discussed the fact that the transmission line has to be hooked in Nevada, so even with Alternatives F or B2b which restrains towers to the northern portion, there would still have to be a road to the south. Barker clarified that it would be a much smaller road in comparison to the proposed haul route road.

The group agreed that they preferred Alternative F to Alternative B2b because Alternative F was most conducive to development on private land, and also was a one-time build instead of a phased project.

The group paused for lunch at 11:43 a.m.

The meeting resumed at 12:39 p.m.

Boettger moved that the RAC put forth a recommendation in favor of Alternative F with a northern haul route; eliminating the southern haul route.

The motion received a second by Williams. The motion passed with three opposed.

Motion voted: 3 Opposed, Motion passed.

The group clarified their reasoning for choosing Alternative F. They like the idea of the focus on the development on private land, it keeps the project condensed to the northern part which is more accessible and already disturbed, and it makes it possible to eliminate the southern route and it avoids towers in valuable sage-grouse habitat in the northern end.

There was discussion about BLM implementing seasonal closures or other restrictions while still allowing access to maintenance personnel.

Anderson moved that the RAC recommend for BLM to review the current policy regarding seasonal closures in order to mitigate increased access and associated impacts to wildlife, public safety, and natural resources.

The motion was withdrawn. There was no second, and the RAC believed that this issue would probably work itself out and did not merit further emphasis at this time.

Further discussion took place on the northern haul route. Concerns were brought up about who would be liable for maintaining road conditions. They discussed the idea of the counties holding bonds from the proponent, but decided that the issue would be protected under county permit requirements and agreements with highway districts.

Boettger addressed the fact that just because the project may go in did not mean that the land would not later be subdivided by the private landowners. He would like a way to mitigate those effects.

Boettger moved that the RAC recommend that the applicant establish an additional fund to maintain open space and mitigate potential impacts to public access and recreational opportunities. These funds could be used to acquire conservation easements from willing landowners.

The motion received a second from Howell. The motion passed with two opposed.

Action Item:

Dissenting voters from either recommendation are to write up a brief explanation on why they are opposed.

Thank you again for the work involved in the tour and presentations associated with the China Mountain project. There is nothing better than a hands on and visual recognition of projects. I support the recommendation of the RAC Board and will enter my reasons for voting no. The impact of the project is more evident during the construction phase

with the daily disturbance of the wildlife from road building and the transporting and construction of the towers cables, and associated projects. These impacts are the same whether the project is constructed on private or public lands. To get the most value from the disturbance the towers should be placed to produce the most power from the project. This is not alternate 7. Thank you Charles M Howell, June 29, 2011

As one of the opposing votes for each of the motions I appreciate the chance to explain my position(s). I understand my comments will become part of the record.

On the motion to recommend Alternative F and the northern haul route:

My reasoning in opposition to the motion:

We (RAC members) are under pressure to make a recommendation today, yet many of us have not taken time to thoroughly study the many ramifications of each Alternative prior to the tour. This is evident by the RAC request for Scott Barker to explain them to us now. Our recommendation will therefore be based largely on emotion rather than fact. Many of us are in a "want to go home mode" where getting something done is more important than getting it right.

By choosing Alternative F and the northern haul route we risk elevating cultural resource considerations to levels neither anticipated nor considered during the study. It was pointed out by BLM staff that cultural resources in some societies can include just about anything including wildlife, geographic features and plants.

On the motion to recommend, "The applicant be required to establish an additional fund to maintain open space and mitigate potential impacts to public access and recreational opportunities via conservation easements from willing landowners":

My reasoning in opposition to the motion:

If BLM were to adopt this recommendation it could very well be the straw that breaks the back of the applicant. It risks the appearance of favoritism toward a former RAC member and fails to appreciate the applicant's previous generous good-faith offer for funding of sage-grouse restoration. The RAC should avoid suggesting rent-seeking stipulations that could easily kill the project, resulting in serious negative economic consequences for Southern Idaho and Northern Nevada.

Sincerely,

Mel Quale

June 29, 2011

Agenda Items:

Next Meeting: September 15, 2011. Location TBD.
Denise Alexander will be acting chair.
Wilderness and Wild and Scenic River Management Plan
Craters of the Moon National Monument Travel Management Plan
A possible fuel break tour
Field Office reports

Meeting adjourned at 2:20 p.m.
Minutes certified by:



Kelly Crane, Chairman, TFD RAC

11 AUG 2011

Date



Bill Baker, TFD Manager

8/11/11

Date

Minutes recorded by:
Meghan Sorensen-Pereira, Administrative Assistant