

**Central Montana Resource Advisory Council
Lewistown, Montana
February 5-6, 2008**

The meeting convened at 10:00 a.m. on February 5 at the Yogo Inn. RAC members in attendance were Lisa Huestis, Bob Schoonover, Barb Cole, Dan Teigen, Dan Clark, Pat Gunderson, Troy Blunt, Vicky Marquis, Larry Epstein, Terry Selph, Ron Moody, Clay Vincent, Mike Bryant, Bob Valach, and Francis Jacobs.

Attending for the BLM were Scott Haight (Designated Federal Official), Gary Slagel, Willy Frank, Craig Flentie, Kaylene Patten and Kay Haight.

Public Comment Period

One member of the public offered comments, which are attached to these minutes.

Meeting Notes/Welcome

The notes from the July 18-19, 2007 meeting were signed as approved. Lisa Huestis, Vice-Chairperson, welcomed everyone. RAC members and BLM staff introduced themselves.

Charter Review

Scott Haight reviewed the Charter for the Central Montana RAC and the Bylaws and Standard Operating Procedures for all Montana/Dakotas RACs.

Facilitator Overview

Kaylene reviewed the process followed for agenda items, meeting notices, meeting notes, a list of “Do’s” for Council members, and the facilitator’s role.

The RAC uses a consensus/collaboration process rather than a voting process. Consensus means each party can live with a group decision, both in the meeting and outside. Consensus does not mean compromise. When the chairperson calls for the question, a thumb turned up means “I agree with the motion, I can live with it, I will support it in and outside the RAC.” A thumb turned sideways means “I will agree with the concept, and I will support the decision of the RAC.” A thumb turned down means “I cannot agree with the motion, have questions, or need more information.” If any thumbs are turned down, more discussion may be held, the motion may be withdrawn, or a fallback vote may take place in which all up, sideways or down votes are recorded. All three categories must have a majority of up or sideways votes in order for a fallback vote to pass.

Collaboration is a process of building trust and respect through consensus to achieve a common objective from uncommon perspectives. Parties seek a win-win solution incorporating multiple

perspectives to find the collective good. Concerns are heard and addressed, information is provided, technical knowledge is sought, and action plans are developed.

A suggestion was made that presentations and discussion could take place on the first day of a RAC meeting, and any needed decision would be made the second day of the meeting. This would allow for discussion in smaller groups and time to think about an issue.

Kaylene reviewed the procedure for completing travel vouchers. Reimbursable expenses include motel fees (plus taxes) and mileage. A per diem rate is paid for meals so it is not necessary to save meal receipts. A RAC member must travel more than 50 miles to the meeting location in order to be reimbursed for travel expenses.

Phone cards are available for RAC members to use when working on RAC issues.

Under the Privacy Act, the BLM will not provide the public with the address or phone number of a RAC member unless the member specifically agrees the information can be released. As an alternative, a RAC member may choose to have all correspondence routed through the Lewistown Field Office and forwarded by Kaylene. Social security numbers are used only for travel reimbursement, and are never revealed to the public. Travel reimbursement is made through direct deposit (preferred and much faster) or by a U.S. Treasury check mailed to the RAC member.

Public comments are scheduled for the first 30 minutes of each day's meeting. The chairperson determines the time allotted for each speaker.

The public is welcome at all RAC meetings; however, while the meeting is in progress discussions must stay between RAC members, without involvement of the public. A RAC member should request a break if a need arises to talk with someone in the audience.

BLM personnel often use acronyms in discussions and written material, and RAC members are encouraged to ask what an acronym means if they are unfamiliar with a term. A four-page list of BLM acronyms is included in each member's notebook and a suggestion was made to add the list to the RAC's web page.

2008 RAC Work Plan

Craig Flentie gave an overview of the 2008 RAC Work Plan. Five action items are to be addressed by the RAC in 2008:

- Recreation Fees;
- Travel Management Plan – Judith and Moccasin Mountains;
- Resource Management Planning (RMPs);
- Watershed Planning, Grazing Management and Grazing Permit Renewals; and
- Judith Moccasin Landscape Projects.

Informational items to be included in 2008 RAC meetings will include:

- Field Manager Updates;
- Noxious Weed Management; and
- Zortman/Landusky Mine Reclamation.

Discussion of Action Items

Resource Management Plans

Pat Gunderson noted that the Malta and Lewistown RMPs will be the most important issues covered by the RAC for the next several years. He suggested that the RAC discuss, on a broad level, the areas where they could provide advice to the BLM (e.g. oil and gas, wildlife, etc.).

Dan Clark added that if there is an opportunity to be proactive in framing issues, rather than serving in a reactive role to developed information, it would be a better use of the RAC.

Scott Haight stated there is an opportunity to involve the RAC in developing the Lewistown RMP Preparation Plan, which details the interdisciplinary team members to be involved, how the RMP will be developed, and a preliminary schedule.

The Work Plan will be revised to include the Lewistown RMP Preparation Plan as an Action Item.

Recreation Fees

If recreation fees are part of an approved RMP, a public process will be used to develop such fees. It is unknown at this time how legislation proposed by Senator Baucus would affect such fee development.

Watershed Planning

An action item for watershed grazing may be added following tomorrow's presentation by Willy Frank.

Discussion of Informational Items

The sale or exchange of BLM lands should be added as an informational item so the RAC learns about it before the sale or exchange has taken place.

The informational side should not outweigh the decisionmaking side of the RAC's work.

Undaunted Stewardship should be added as an informational item.

Orientation

Scott Haight stated that the BLM values the RAC's input, and even if a recommendation is not made, the discussion is very helpful. If the issues were easy, they would not need to be discussed by the RAC.

Lisa Huestis stated that specific requests by the BLM would help focus the RAC's discussions.

Ron Moody suggested getting more information to RAC members prior to meetings so that meeting time can be used for discussion. For example, an informational page on a new watershed plan could replace 10 minutes of valuable discussion time at a meeting.

Dan Clark reiterated the desire to be involved at the front end of a process, rather than react to something already developed. Also, has the RAC ever assisted the BLM with landscape goals and objectives? Response: They were involved in developing goals and objectives for the Monument RMP and the Judith Moccasin Travel Plan.

Ron Moody noted it is hard to keep continuity, stay focused and build trust when there is a gap of several months between meetings. People don't do business with strangers, and to work through issues effectively, the RAC members need to know each other as a group.

Mike Bryant agreed that meetings should be held more frequently. It would be helpful to not have the charter expire around the same time as new members are being appointed. The 2008 term ends September 20, 2008, so a September meeting should be scheduled prior to that date.

RAC's Expectations

Lisa Huestis discussed the expectations of the chairperson and vice-chairperson. The chairperson assists Kaylene with running the meeting and making sure all RAC members are heard from. The chairperson needs to be open to everyone's discussion and input. Formal recommendations are drafted by the chairperson and sent to Kaylene for finalization, who then returns it to the chairperson for signature. It is a one-year term, elected at the first meeting of each year. The vice-chairperson serves in the absence of the chairperson.

Election of Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson

A motion was made by Francis Jacobs and seconded by Troy Blunt to nominate Lisa Huestis as chairperson. Nominations closed. Lisa was elected.

A motion was made by Bob Valach and seconded by Bob Schoonover to nominate Ron Moody as vice-chairperson. Nominations closed. Ron was elected.

Question-and-Answer Session

Do we ever have any interaction with Canadian policies and management plans?

BLM is not aware of any coordination with Canadian officials.

Will this be an aspect of corridor development?

No. Our interest stops at the Canadian line.

Is BLM starting to get comments on the Monument RMP?

We are in a 30-day protest period that is handled by the Washington Office. The Lewistown Field Office could be involved in resolving protests after the protest period ends.

Is the Governor's Consistency Review concurrent with the protest period?

It is concurrent, but lasts for 60 days. The consistency review could look at state plans, local plans, or tribal plans.

Is there an energy leasing process planned in the Bear Paw area before the Malta RMP is completed?

Consideration of the South Blaine Oil and Gas Development Plan has been put on hold pending completion of the Malta RMP.

It would be helpful to receive a written update from Mark Albers on Malta Field Office issues that would have been covered in a presentation to the RAC.

Scott will follow up with Mark, who was unable to attend this meeting.

How are the Russian olives on the river?

The BLM has funding for at least two years, and will focus efforts on the PN area and keeping Russian olives out of the lower area of the river.

Is there anything new regarding wildlife?

Work on sage grouse has focused on the Teigen Ranch area. A challenge cost share project involves counting birds on historic leks. Numbers in the last three-year period have not varied from the 10-15 year average. A total of about 150 historic leks were monitored in Fergus and Petroleum Counties.

Every prairie dog town is mapped as they are found. Plague was found in the northern end of Petroleum County.

Lewistown Field Office Update

Scott Haight, Willy Frank and Resources staff members discussed the following items:

- The Monument Proposed RMP/Final EIS is out.
- Four or five FOIA requests have been received recently, almost all on grazing or riparian issues. Considerable time and research will be required to comply with the requests.
- The Lewistown RMP will begin with development of a Preparation Plan by September 2008. The RMP process will begin in the fall. The three biggest components of the Preparation Plan are schedule, cost, and who will be involved in development of the plan. If workloads allow, the scoping meetings could be held sometime between fall and late winter. This will be added as an agenda item for the May meeting. Ron Moody suggested that general information would be helpful on the geographic area to be covered, etc.
- The new BLM ranger in Fort Benton is Tracy Awberry. He will report in March.
- A new Lewistown Field Manager, Stan Benes, has been selected and will report in April. June Bailey, the previous Field Manager, retired in January.
- The Petrolia Watershed Plan EA has been completed. Fencing is taking place on riparian pastures to implement deferred or rest-rotation grazing.
- Reservoir cleanout work is being planned in south Blaine County.
- The Limekiln Trail loop was completed this last year. Work will continue in partnership with the Backcountry Horsemen and others to maintain the trail.
- Riparian areas adjacent the Dry Blood and South Fork of Dry Blood Reservoirs will be fenced out for fisheries enhancement.
- The BLM is looking at constructing a road to Payola Reservoir across BLM land. An Environmental Assessment (EA) is in progress.
- Buffaloberry seed was collected last year and sent to a nursery in Columbus that will grow plants to re-establish in several allotments in the Dry Blood Reservoir area.
- A channel in Collar Gulch with the easternmost population of westslope cutthroat trout was rerouted this past year. The channel was moved because a historic mining structure in the previous channel had potential to blow out and cause loss of the trout population.
- Several reservoir projects are planned zonewise as part of the range improvement program.
- All water development projects (e.g. wells, pipelines to water tanks, reservoirs) must go through the NEPA process, either through a watershed plan or on a site-specific basis. The RAC requested a report on the impacts of water developments: who pays for them and the current status.

Other Items

The Bitter Creek wind farm project is on hold, maybe indefinitely.

RAC members should excuse themselves from discussion of specific issues if they have a vested interest in a discussion item (e.g., discussion of a specific allotment leased by a RAC member).

The meeting adjourned for the day at 4:05 p.m. and reconvened at 8:00 a.m. on February 6.

Public Comments

One member of the public offered comments, which are attached to these minutes.

Agenda Items

A list of agenda items from the previous four RAC meetings was reviewed to determine if any items should be brought forward to the action plan or placed on the next meeting's agenda.

- Commercial Use of the Marias River – move to agenda item.
- Coal Bed Methane – should be considered in the Lewistown RMP, including impacts to sage grouse.
- Missouri Breaks Interpretive Center Tour – move to agenda item.
- Zortman/Landusky Mine Reclamation – move to agenda item.
- Malta RMP – action item.
- Road Classifications–What is a Road – save for discussion in the context of an RMP.
- Undaunted Stewardship – move to agenda item.
- Public Access to Public Lands – save for discussion in the context of other discussions.
- Bowdoin Draft EA – move to agenda item.
- Weed Management – move to agenda item.

Energy Transportation Corridor EIS

Scott Haight briefed the RAC on a draft national programmatic EIS related to energy development which would designate corridors for oil, gas and hydrogen pipelines and electricity transmission and distribution. A total of 102 miles of the proposed corridor would cross federal land in Montana, none of which is in the central Montana area.

Judith Moccasin Travel Plan

Terry Selph led a discussion of RAC Subgroup recommendations on the Judith Moccasin Travel Plan. Specific recommendations include:

- North Moccasins
 - Should be left as a motorized vehicle access area.
 - Closing spiderweb trails over 30 degrees would impact motorcycle riders, but BLM regulations call for such closures to control erosion.
 - Motorcycle group would like two access loops added in the North Moccasins.
 - Trails closed to motorized access should be labeled on the map for hiking/biking.
- Limekiln Canyon
 - Horse loop alternative route will avoid using horses in highly erosive areas.
 - Access should remain closed above the Ludeman property.
 - Access to Crystal Cave and considerable BLM land to the east is needed.
 - A new overlook should be created.
- Judith Peak
 - Access may be granted from mining claim owners.

Although the report is labeled as “Final” the subgroup would like the process to remain fluid, so that access could be gained in other areas as opportunities arise. The current version of the

summary does not include the motorcycle folks' recommendations from their last meeting (the two trails they want added). Terry will follow up with this group on the two new proposed trails.

Willy Frank stated that at least part, if not all, of the RAC's recommendations today will be used for the preferred alternative in the EA. As other issues come forward, they will also be considered in the analysis process. The EA will be prepared by an interdisciplinary team and the process will include a 30-day public comment period.

A motion was made by Terry Selph and seconded by Larry Epstein that the BLM consider the subgroup's summary of recommendations as the Judith Moccasin Travel Plan goes forward from this point, with special consideration given to include the two extra motorcycle loop trails in the North Moccasin Mountains.

RAC Discussion

- The motorcycle loop recommendations were brought up at a meeting last Saturday that was not attended by the full subgroup, so not everyone in the subgroup has had a chance to consider those recommendations.
- The word "special" should be dropped.
- The entire clause should be deleted after "point."
- The clause shows that it was informally brought up and not fully vetted by the subgroup.
- A bullet point should be inserted in the report that would capture in writing that the two loop trails were not fully vetted by the subgroup. BLM could bring that information into the NEPA process.
- The loop trails should be added to the maps.

The motion above was retracted.

A motion was then made by Terry Selph and seconded by Larry Epstein that the BLM consider the subgroup's summary of recommendations as the Judith Moccasin Travel Plan goes forward from this point. Consensus was reached.

U.S. Forest Service Fee Proposal

Joni Packard and Jane Weber made a presentation on fee proposals for the Lewis and Clark National Forest. The Forest Service has gone through a strategic planning process and placed all USFS facilities in a long-term plan. Public meetings were held and feedback received on changing or adding facilities. Three action plan items that tiered from the strategic look are proposals to add two cabins for public use (fee sites) and to raise fees at the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center.

Proposal 1: Monument Peak Lookout. \$45.00 expanded amenity cabin rental program, as a new cabin rental opportunity.

Proposal 2: Kenck Cabin. \$45.00 expanded amenity cabin rental program, as a new cabin rental opportunity.

Proposal 3: Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center. Current fee: \$5.00. Proposed Fee: \$8.00. The existing \$5.00 fee has been in place since the facility opened in May 1998.

RAC Discussion

The RAC members asked to be on the mailing list for notices of public meetings of this type and that notices are placed in the Lewistown newspaper. It was also suggested that people who currently rent cabins be placed on the mailing list for proposed fee increases.

The proposals for consideration today were previously presented to the RAC in April 2007.

A motion was made by Larry Epstein and seconded by Barb Cole to approve all three fee proposals presented. Consensus was reached.

Visitor Use Statistics

Wade Brown presented the RAC with visitor use information for the Upper Missouri River through 2007.

- Total use during 2007 was 4201, compared to 5484 in 2006.
- Watercraft use included 393 motorized (20%) and 1573 nonmotorized (80%).
- Visitor use by segment was 23% in the upper segment (Fort Benton to Coal Banks Landing), 63% in the White Cliffs segment (Coal Banks Landing to Judith Landing), and 23% in the lower segment (Judith Landing to the James Kipp Recreation Area).
- Use by group type included 23% commercial, 10% organized, and 5% administrative.

U.S. Forest Service Fee Template

Ron Moody requested discussion on the fee template, whether this is a good tool to use when recommending fee changes, and the differentiation between fee proposals for highly developed services as opposed to a campground in a national forest. Does the template fairly present public opinion? Does the RAC have a role in developing the template? Is it within our scope?

Joni Packard and Jane Weber stated that the template was developed for use nationwide by the Forest Service and the BLM, although modifications can be made for specific regions. It is also a checklist to make sure all requirements under the law are being met. The template is used by all other RACs. It is up to this RAC whether to use the template or not.

RAC Discussion

- This subject should be added to the agenda of the joint RAC meeting in Billings.

- This template is a good starting point from which future changes could be made as needed on a site-specific basis (e.g., changes in local economy which could drive a need to lower rental rates).
- The RAC does not need to see fee proposals at the beginning stage, before they are completed at the district level and sent to the regional forester.
- The RAC prefers to have such information included in pre-meeting packets in the future, as far in advance of a meeting as possible (over one month), so the information can be presented to their constituencies.

Oil and Gas

Don Judice from the Great Falls Oil and Gas Field Station gave a PowerPoint presentation to provide a basic understanding of oil and gas permitting and development.

As stated earlier in the question-and-answer session, the South Blaine EIS process has been tabled until after the Malta RMP is completed. No new field development will occur before then.

The Bowdoin EA is still being revised prior to undergoing internal review.

Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument RMP

Jerry Majerus provided an update on the Monument RMP. About 1300 companies, organizations and individuals received a hard copy of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS and over 200 CD versions were mailed out. The RMP/EIS is also available on the BLM web site. The public has an opportunity to protest during a 30-day period which began when EPA published a Notice of Availability in the Federal Register on February 1, 2008. The ending date of the protest period is March 4, 2008.

The Dear Reader Letter in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS explains procedures to be followed in filing a protest, which must be sent to the Washington Office.

The Governor's Consistency Review is currently underway. The purpose of the review is to make sure the RMP is consistent with state laws, policies and programs. The 60-day time period began at the same time as the protest period and will end in April.

After the protest period ends, the Lewistown Office will be notified of any protests. The Washington Office will determine the level of involvement needed by the state and field offices to respond to the protests. There are no regulatory timeframes on resolving protests. A 90-day turnaround time is preferred, but that depends on the number of protests, the issues involved, and the complexity of the issues. All protests must be resolved before a Record of Decision is issued, with the exception of a protest dealing with a specific part of the plan that may take an extended period of time to resolve. In that case, a partial Record of Decision may be issued.

Implementation of the plan occurs after the Record of Decision is completed. A Resource Management Plan has no specific expiration date.

Grazing Permit Renewal Planning

Willy Frank updated the RAC on grazing permit renewal planning for the Lewistown Field Office. The order of completion of watershed plans in Fiscal Year 2008 is proposed as follows:

- Upper Arrow Creek Watershed Area
- NE Fergus Watershed Area
- Snowies/Little Belts Watershed Area
- Great Falls Land Unit Area (Fiscal Year 2009)

The key parts of the watershed planning process are:

- Assess rangeland health following Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management
- Identify management actions necessary to meet Standards
- Coordination/cooperation with permittees and other interested publics
- Environmental assessment and public involvement
- Approval and implementation
- Monitoring and reassessment

Existing watershed plans are scheduled to be reassessed on a staggered schedule, beginning with the Woodhawk Watershed Plan in Fiscal Year 2008 and ending with the Arrow Creek/Upper Missouri River/Whiskey Ridge Watershed Plan in Fiscal Year 2014.

Public meetings will be held on February 28, March 11 and March 14 to begin this year's planning process. Notices of the meetings will be published in the newspaper. The meeting format will include a presentation on rangeland health, data collection efforts and findings to date. The public will then be asked for comments and concerns. The rest of the meeting will be an open house to allow one-on-one discussions with permittees and interested publics.

Actions will then be developed to manage vegetation in order to sustain a healthy ecosystem. After a watershed plan is completed, grazing permits are issued for 10-year periods that incorporate the management actions that were developed.

RAC Meeting Dates/Agenda

May 19-21, 2008	Billings (Joint Montana/Dakotas RAC meeting)
May 19 from 1-5	Central Montana RAC (at Montana State Office)
May 20 from 8-12	Central Montana RAC (at Montana State Office)
May 20 from 1-5	Joint Meeting (at Hampton Inn)
May 21 from 8-12	Joint Meeting (at Hampton Inn)

A block of rooms has been reserved at the Hampton Inn. RAC members should call 248-4949 and ask for a room in the BLM/RAC block.

Proposed agenda items for the Central Montana RAC portion of the meeting include:

- Lewistown RMP (discussion of the Preparation Plan, the issues that should be included and RAC member involvement on the team)
- Forest Service Fee Proposals
- Range Monitoring/Coordination
- Undaunted Stewardship Program Presentation
- Judith Moccasin Travel Plan Update (submitted in advance for RAC review)
- Monument RMP Update
- Malta RMP Discussion

Updates and briefings should occur the afternoon of the 19th.

Proposed agenda item for the joint meeting: Forest Service fee proposal template.
OHV
BLM fee proposal templates

Sept. 2-3, 2008 Fort Benton and Great Falls

- 1:00 – ? Tour Fort Benton Interpretive Center and meet in their conference room; then adjourn for travel to Great Falls and evening work session if needed at Hampton Inn in Great Falls.
- 8:00 – 5:00 Meet in Great Falls

Wrap-Up

Travel vouchers were completed and the meeting adjourned at 3:45 p.m.

Central Montana Resource Advisory Council
Public Comments
February 5-6, 2008

Dyrck Van Hyning

My name is Dyrck Van Hyning. I live in Great Falls. I am going to talk about oil and gas this morning and kind of a 101 presentation, but then kind of put that into perspective on the oil and gas. What I am handing out here is basically what I'm going to say this morning. I have a map that comes out of this final proposed RMP on oil and gas that we'll talk about at the end. I printed this off the web but it's the same map that you have in your hard copy book.

The Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument and the proclamation by President Clinton, I just want to read a couple parts out of there. The Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument consists of spectacular array of biological, geological, and historical objects of interest. Objects of interest. Then going further down there it says the Secretary of Interior shall manage development on existing oil and gas leases within the monument, subject to valid existing rights, so as not to create any new impact that would interfere with the proper care and management of the object protected by the monument.

Then I want to read another part of this proclamation that deals with basically where the BLM and where history has shown that most of the oil and gas is located. And that's in the Bullwhacker area and that's in this area right here. I can always pick out where this area is simply because this private holdings here. This is the Robinsons private holding. Here's the Robinsons. Here's Lisa right over here. That's how close she is to this area and is affected by all of this area.

The Bullwhacker area of the monument contains some of the wildest country on all of the great plains, as well as important wildlife habitat. And you can read the rest of this later. Are the existing leases in compliance with their lease terms and conditions? That's my question to you, and that's my question to the BLM.

Now I thought I would go through, and some of you are experts on oil and gas, and the rest of us this is a totally new field. So I put just some basic information on the next part here. The Mineral Leasing Act of 1920 gave the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service and others the ability to lease 570 million acres of federal land. Basically during this period, a person interested in developing this land can go out and say, this land is where I want to have a lease and I want to develop this land. Then the federal onshore oil and gas reform came in 1987 and it basically changed that and it said that the BLM or the Forest Service, or whoever manages this group of land, a NEPA document needs to be conducted before any leasing activity could take place. So then in this area the agency did studies to see if all of this land could be developed for oil and gas. So then this person that wanted to lease land could come in and say, I want to lease this part right here. So that's how that law changed.

There's also a maximum amount of land each individual can lease. That number is there. Since passage of the Energy Policy Act of 1992, both competitive and noncompetitive leases are leased for a 10-year period. So these leases when you buy a lease are leased for 10 years. Both types of leases continue as long thereafter as oil and gas is producing in paying quantities. I'm known throughout my friends as the 'paying quantity guy' and I hammer this paying quantity all the time.

Lease terms and conditions. There's some information on the second page there of lease terms and conditions. Basically, a lease has to have a well producing in paying quantity at the end of this 10-year period or that lease expires. There's information on this page of how a lease expires.

Based on my findings, and this has been through the court systems, the IBLA and the federal district courts, there is 170 wells drilled in the Monument. At this time there are no producing wells in three of the four counties. None in Fergus, none in Phillips, none in Chouteau, and only in Blaine County is there any producing wells.

I have a dispute with the information that's in this final RMP and my biggest dispute is there is so little gas in the monument that to do an analysis the BLM had to take land outside of the monument to do analysis. I think this is not helpful to the public, to potential investors, well owners and well operators because I come up with a figure of a possibility of hitting gas in the monument based on these past wells and the 10 wells the BLM says is producing of a rate of 5.8 percent. Now the BLM says by taking all of these wells, the analysis says there is a 33 percent chance of hitting gas in the monument. So I would ask Ron Moody for some money. And I say, Ron, I want you to buy into my company. There is a 33 percent chance that I'm going to hit gas here. Not only that, but the chance of hitting gas, each well, is going to be 333 thousand thousand MCF. Okay, Ron says yeah, I think that's a good deal. I think I can go with that. I've got some money that my interest rate in the bank is 3 percent, I'm going to do this. But if I told Ron the chance of hitting gas is only 5 percent and if you do hit gas, it's only going to produce 220 thousand thousand MCF, you're not even going to make paying quantity. Would he still invest with me? He would have to really contemplate that. So that's one of my biggest problems.

There are two more pages here. One of them is the manual for extending the lease. The third to the last page is how many MCF there is coming from each one of these wells. You can look at this. This well is shut in. This well is shut in. This well is shut in. This well is producing. This well right here, plugged and abandoned. This well is producing. That well is only two years old, almost out of production. This one is still producing. So that's all you have going on in the monument. So if you have any questions, ask me later. Thank you for your time.

Mary Jones

My name is Mary Jones, and I'm with Friends of the Missouri Breaks Monument here in Lewistown. We were one of the groups that got that 10 pound box of information on the RMP that just came out. I know last night a presentation was given to the Farm Bureau about it, and I

wanted to come today and give you some of our feelings about that RMP. But I think I would just have to sum it up by saying that we are extremely disappointed. I know the BLM said they were going to be balanced in the results, the final results, but I think it's pretty much one-sided and I hope all of you have a chance to look through it, read it. Anyway, we're very disappointed, but we aren't finished yet. Thank you.

**Central Montana Resource Advisory Council
Billings, Montana
May 20, 2008**

The meeting convened at 8:00 a.m. in the BLM Montana State Office. This half-day meeting preceded a joint Montana/Dakotas RAC meeting.

RAC members present were Lisa Huestis, Ron Moody, Clay Vincent, Troy Blunt, Bob Valach, Vicky Marquis, Robert Schoonover, Barb Cole, Mike Bryant, Terry Selph, Dan Tiegen, Francis Jacobs and Pat Gunderson. Members absent were Larry Epstein and Dan Clark.

Attending for the BLM were Stan Benes, Gary Slagel, Willy Frank, Rich Adams, Claire Trent, Kaylene Patten and Kay Haight.

Public Comment Period

No public comments were offered.

Welcome/Chairperson Synopsis/Meeting Notes

The minutes of the February 5-6, 2008 meeting were approved and signed. Introductions were made between Stan Benes, Lewistown Field Manager, members of the RAC, and BLM personnel in attendance.

Field Manager Updates

Lewistown Field Office

Stan Benes has been getting acquainted with members of the public. His three main concerns are customer service, community support, and common sense. Ongoing issues in the Lewistown Field office include:

- Monument RMP
- Drought potential and threat of wildfire
- OHVs and cross-country travel
- Judith-Moccasin Travel Plan
- Weed management
- Wildland fire/resource concerns (including sage-grouse habitat)
- Grazing program
- Staffing concerns – additional personnel are needed for the ongoing workload
- Opportunities for fuels treatments to prevent catastrophic fires
- Public access concerns

Malta Field Office

Rich Adams offered the following update:

- Casey Buechler is the new Assistant Field Manager in the Glasgow BLM office.
- The Havre and Glasgow offices have moved to new quarters.
- A grazing decision was signed yesterday for the American Prairie Foundation, changing the Box Elder allotment from cattle to bison.
 - Rangeland health standards must be met, as with other permittees.
 - The Telegraph allotment decision was previously signed to allow for bison grazing.

- BLM regulations allow for bison grazing. The grazing decisions deal with stocking rates and Standards for Rangeland Health for particular allotments, not with the social/economic concerns that the public may currently wish to see addressed.
- Is there a process to follow the effect of the fencing (for bison) on the local elk population? Yes, documentation is required by the permittee. The neighbors will also be watching.
- Concerns of the RAC include:
 - Will there be more conversion proposals coming into the Malta Field Office from American Prairie Foundation?
 - How much has the public been involved in the conversion?
 - How can the RAC get involved and keep current? Members of the public (including the RAC) can call the Malta Field Office, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, County Commissioners, or American Prairie Foundation.
 - Will fences be removed on the interior of the allotment?
 - Will local wildlife populations be affected by the bison herd?
 - RAC members would like a representative of the American Prairie Foundation to talk to the RAC about their operation.
 - Is there a definition for a grazing animal? It must be privately owned, can be indigenous.
- All bison on this operation must meet state livestock health standards, including vaccinations and testing that cattle ranchers must follow.
- Havre office will complete rangeland assessments this summer.
- Bowdoin oil and gas EA has gone through internal review and revisions are being made.
- Fuels reduction has taken place in the Zortman/Landusky areas, including thinning, understory burning. Approximately 1,600 acres have been treated.
- BLM is working with local fire departments in the Zortman/Landusky area for fire management in the Little Rockies.
- The Malta RMP is ongoing. RAC members will have an opportunity to ask questions and be engaged in the process.

Malta Resource Management Plan

Claire Trent, project lead for the Malta Resource Management Plan (RMP), made a presentation on the history and current status of the Malta RMP process.

- The planning area includes 2.5 million acres of public land and 3.5 million subsurface acres.
- The goal is to have a draft plan out for public review and comment by January 2009.
- 15 cooperating agencies are involved in the planning process, including federal, state and local government and several grazing districts.
- Greater sage-grouse conservation is one of the key issues addressed in the RMP. This topic was chosen as an example to explain how alternatives and associated management actions were developed by the ID Team. However, if any RAC members have questions on other issue alternative being developed within the RMP/EIS they should call Claire in the Malta Field Office.
- The preferred alternative may be a mixture of alternatives (e.g., Alternative B for one subject, Alternative C for another).
- All alternatives must meet management objectives.
- Global climate change must be addressed in the BLM planning process, including the Malta RMP.

Questions from RAC members included the following:

How was the distance determination made for the alternatives dealing with power line construction near sage-grouse leks? The alternatives are based on an appropriate level of protection, based on science and current practices. The alternatives also tier back to the sage-grouse management plan.

Do you also look at social and economic impacts? The team economist will analyze the impacts of burying a power line versus an overhead power line for that particular range of alternatives.

Is the ID team going to look at drought, or will it be deferred to watershed plans? Once the plan is implemented, drought considerations can be addressed through adaptive management. Livestock allocations also consider drought conditions.

It will be important to address the mechanism of adaptive management – how it will work.

Were there changes to the Analysis of the Management Situation? When did the sage-grouse concern arise? BLM is mandated to revisit management plans on a periodic basis, usually every 15-20 years. New technology can also push the need for a new planning effort. The importance of Greater sage-grouse was identified during both internal and public scoping at the start of the planning effort.

Is the RMP an umbrella document that will cover specific environmental concerns? The RMP has an associated environmental impact statement. Management actions will accommodate various landscapes and habitat within the planning area. Subsequently, site-specific planning within the area covered by the RMP would be addressed in an environmental assessment or at appropriate activity level planning.

How involved are the cooperating agencies? The cooperators have been very involved in the development of alternatives.

How does the BLM see the RAC being involved in the Malta RMP process? The RAC should make sure the range of alternatives is adequate. It would seem appropriate for the RAC to follow the process and make recommendations. RAC involvement will be needed for selection of the preferred alternative. After internal review has occurred between the State Office and Washington Office, and a more finished product is ready, an entire RAC meeting could be devoted to making recommendations for the preferred alternative. This would seem to be the most efficient way to engage the RAC. The key is to balance RAC involvement with the level of detail needed to reach the point of choosing a preferred alternative.

The RMP should focus on multiple use, not just on sage-grouse. The alternatives cover a wide variety of issues, including energy development and travel planning. The agency mission is multiple-use management, and scoping identified a broad range of issues that are dealt with in the RMP. The hand-outs were a sample from the 76 pages of alternatives. We selected these alternatives so that the RAC would have an understanding of how these issues were potentially covered in the RMP and as warm-up for the joint RAC session.

The RAC should let the professionals do their job, and once the alternatives are identified, aid BLM in the selection of a preferred alternative.

Claire will provide RAC members with a copy of the entire table showing the draft alternatives. Four hard copies (Barb, Francis, Pat, Terry) and 11 CDs were requested.

Forest Service Recreation Fee Proposal

Joni Packard gave a preliminary report on the recreation fee proposals for the Lewis and Clark National Forest. A formal proposal will be made at the RAC's September meeting, including results of public involvement that will occur this summer. The proposal will be sent to RAC members prior to the September meeting.

A region-wide schedule of fee increases is being considered. A working group would develop a process, and RAC involvement is welcome. Ron Moody stated he would like to participate in the working group.

Stay limits include dispersed areas and cover hunting camps. The Forest Service would like to develop a region-wide pilot policy for extended stay permits that respond to both traditional use and opportunities for other people. Public and RAC involvement are requested.

Monument Resource Management Plan

Stan Benes gave an update on the status of the Monument RMP. The protests have involved grazing management, travel management, seaplanes, and motorized use on the river. Responses to identified issues are currently being

crafted and will be sent to the Washington Office for finalization. The goal is to have the protests resolved by late September. The Record of Decision will be signed by the State Director once the process is complete.

There will be opportunities in the future for involvement by the RAC on specific issues within the Monument. Stan would welcome any ideas from the RAC.

Gary Slagel stated that RAC involvement will be requested for future discussions on fees, which will involve a public process.

Clarification: A question was asked how those that protested the RMP would be notified about their protest. Gary stated the protests would be addressed briefly in the Record of Decision. That is correct; however, each person or group that protested the RMP will also receive a letter from the Director explaining how their protest was addressed.

Next Meeting/Agenda

The next meeting is scheduled for September 2-3, 2008, beginning at Fort Benton and then proceeding onto Great Falls. On September 2nd the meeting will begin at 1:00 p.m. with a 30-minute public comment period at the Upper Missouri Breaks National Monument Interpretive Center in Fort Benton. If the agenda topics require additional meeting time the RAC will reconvene after supper in Great Falls at the Hampton Inn conference room. If not the September 3rd meeting will begin at 8:00 a.m. with a 30 minute public comment period at the Hampton Inn, Great Falls and end around 3:00 p.m.

Reservations can be made by the RAC members at the Hampton Inn, Great Falls by calling 406/453-2675, and reserving a room under "BLM RAC". More information will follow closer to the date.

Travel vouchers were handed out and only two specific agenda items were discussed: The Forest Service will have fee proposals for the RAC to make recommendations on and if recommendations are needed on the Malta RMP Preliminary Draft Preferred Alternative the RAC will hold a special meeting to discuss this; but if not it will be addressed at the September meeting.

RAC members will complete travel vouchers at the Joint RAC meeting beginning at 1:00 p.m. at the Hampton Inn, Billings.

This meeting adjourned at 11:30 a.m.

**Central Montana Resource Advisory Council
Fort Benton and Great Falls, Montana
September 2-3, 2008**

The meeting convened on September 2 at 1:00 p.m. in the Fort Benton Interpretive Center. RAC members in attendance were Ron Moody, Francis Jacobs, Clay Vincent, Barb Cole, Troy Blunt, Terry Selph, Pat Gunderson, Larry Epstein, Lisa Huestis, Dan Teigen and Mike Bryant. Absent were Vicky Marquis, Bob Valach, Dan Clark and Robert Schoonover.

BLM personnel in attendance were Stan Benes, Mark Albers, Wade Brown, Connie Jacobs, Kaylene Patten and Kay Haight.

Public Comment Period

Two members of the public offered comments, which are attached to these minutes.

Welcome, Meeting Notes, Synopsis

Kaylene reviewed the meeting agenda. The May 2008 meeting notes were approved and signed.

Lisa Huestis, RAC Chairperson, gave a brief synopsis.

Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument Interpretive Center

Connie Jacobs made a presentation on the Interpretive Center. The mission of the Interpretive Center is to help the public understand how the river and land have shaped the lives of people in this area, and how people are now shaping the river and the land. Over 4,000 people have visited the Center this year to date, and local volunteers have contributed over 2,000 hours of their time to greet visitors, assist with school tours, etc. RAC members then toured the Center and viewed a video that is shown to visitors.

River Use Update

Wade Brown reviewed river use statistics for October 1, 2007 through August 31, 2008. (Note: No statistics are kept for launches from the James Kipp Recreation Area.)

Registered boaters	3,900
Projected for September	<u>641</u>
Total projected for year	4,541

River usage by residents versus non-residents:

	<u>2003</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>
Residents	45%	46%	52%	58%	60%	62%
Non-Residents	55%	54%	48%	42%	40%	38%

Busiest Launch Days:

Friday and Saturday (versus Sunday and Monday historically)

Craft Type:

Canoes	59%
Kayaks	14%
Motorized	23%
Rafts, Other	4%

Group Types:

Commercial Use	21%
Organized	11%
Private	62%
Administrative	6%

Group Size:

10 people or less	94%
4 people or less	70%

Fall Usage:

October 2007	178 people registered
November 2007	109 people registered

Other:

Most people stay at the developed campgrounds.
60% to 70% of launches are from Coal Banks Landing.
All costs of pumping toilets and garbage disposal are covered by Special Recreation Permit (guide) fees.

The meeting adjourned at 3:30 for travel to Great Falls and reconvened at 5:00 p.m. at the Hampton Inn.

Malta Resource Management Plan (RMP)

Claire Trent, Project Manager for the Malta RMP, briefed the RAC on the status of that planning effort. Latest developments include the need to revise Alternative A (current management) to include only the RMP decisions from the West HiLine RMP and Judith-Valley-Phillips RMP, without taking into consideration a subsequent federal district court decision on oil and gas leasing and the suspension of leasing in the planning area.

The planning area includes 2.5 million BLM surface acres and 3.5 million subsurface acres. RAC members viewed several maps showing wildlife habitat areas, oil and gas potential, and wind energy development areas. Input from the RAC was requested as to whether the planning team is on track with their alternatives, including identification of a preliminary preferred alternative. The input of the RAC, the public, the State Office, and the planning team will all be considered in identifying a preferred alternative for the Draft RMP.

Troy Blunt noted concerns that the cooperators haven't been involved in the RMP process for a couple of months and BLM should not imply that the preferred has already been chosen.

The RAC then made a list of topics to be addressed during review of the RMP alternatives table the next day, including:

- Endangered species/stipulations
- Management of wildlife species, particularly prairie dogs and interplay between federal and state authority to manage wildlife
- Crested wheatgrass management

- Management of Wilderness Study Areas and concerns that management will change with the new RMP. (Mark Albers noted that the current management plans will be brought forward into the new RMP.)
- Feedback from operators in the area regarding future demand for drilling.

The meeting adjourned for the day at 5:45 p.m.

* * *

The meeting reconvened at the Holiday Inn Express at 8:00 a.m. on September 3. RAC member Vicky Marquis was also present.

BLM personnel in attendance were Stan Benes, Mark Albers, Scott Haight, Gary Slagel, Claire Trent, Don Judice, Kaylene Patten and Kay Haight.

Public Comments

One member of the public offered comments, which are attached to these minutes.

Field Manager Updates

Stan Benes, Lewistown Field Office

Stan spoke about his interest in developing collaboration between various interest groups to find issues of agreement. For example, among the contentious issues in the Monument, everyone agrees that noxious weeds need to be reduced, and no one likes to see the visual reminders of cows having been in a campground. A potential collaboration could include efforts focused on weed treatment, maintenance and improvement of the 14 cattle exclosures on the river, and possibly the addition of more exclosures. A work crew could include tribal college students, volunteers from Malmstrom Air Force Base, and other interested publics.

Ongoing issues in the Lewistown Field Office include:

- Monument RMP – The Record of Decision should be out about the first week in November.
- Judith-Moccasin Landscape Analysis – A public meeting will be held in Lewistown on September 17 concerning treatment of the blowdown area in Limekiln Canyon. The RAC's involvement is welcome.
- Weed control efforts are expanding.
- Stan would like to utilize isolated blocks of BLM land; perhaps block up parcels or trade with the State of Montana to gain more public access. RAC ideas on this issue are welcome.
- A lead engineer position is being interviewed for the Lewistown Field Office.
- Three watershed plan assessments are in the process of being completed.
- The National Riparian Service Team recently interviewed several people in the Lewistown Field Office area. A follow-up workshop is scheduled for September 23-24 in Lewistown at the Yogo Inn for interviewees and RAC members who are interested in attending.

Stan noted that involvement in BLM issues by the RAC, other than listening to updates, is very important and he encouraged RAC members to contact him at any time. He offered to plan a one-day jet boat trip on the Upper Missouri River so they could see the river and issues firsthand, and RAC members expressed interest in doing so.

Mark Albers, Malta Field Office

- A new realty position will soon be added to the Montana State Office to address land access issues. A list of priority areas is being developed.
- The Keystone Pipeline will enter by Port Morgan and cross the Missouri River by the mouth of the Milk River. It will be a 36-inch line going to Galveston, Texas.
- WAPA is planning to reroute a line to private land in Chouteau County.
- The Bowdoin EA is ongoing.

- The grazing permit renewal process in Havre is almost finished, which will complete all renewals for the HiLine.
- Several vacant positions are open in HiLine BLM offices (Havre, Malta and Glasgow).
- New signage helped improve game harvests in the field office area, but also added to road issues.

Ron Moody noted it would be helpful to have presentations on collaborative efforts in Hay Coulee (Miles City) and Larb Hills (Malta).

Don Judice, Great Falls Oil and Gas Field Station

- The Bowdoin EA was released and the public comment period closed on August 8. 41 comments were received. A contracted interdisciplinary team is preparing the EA.
- The Blackleaf well has been plugged and abandoned. This was the last producing well (on federal minerals) on the Rocky Mountain Front. 25 leases are still left, held by companies that have not taken advantage of tax incentives for retiring their leases.
- A company called Kykuit has drilled 5 wells on fee minerals south of the Missouri River, and they are interested in acquiring the Macum Energy leases inside the Monument.
- Once the Monument Record of Decision is signed, it will provide management guidance for all oil and gas leases in the Monument. Environmental Assessments will be prepared for every action proposed by oil and gas companies.
- Klabzuba recently sold to NFR Energy out of Houston.
- Primary’s discovery in Teton County was oil, not natural gas.

Gary Slagel, Monument Manager

The National Riparian Service team will send out a situation assessment, based on interviews held the third week in August. Kaylene will send the report to RAC members when it is received. All RAC members are welcome to attend an interactive workshop in Lewistown on September 23-24 at the Yogo Inn. The purpose of the workshop will not be to dwell on the report, but to move forward with the information learned during the interviews.

Malta Resource Management Plan

RAC members reviewed the alternatives table for the Malta RMP and were asked to bring forward any missing aspects, or to advise if BLM is not on the right track with a given issue.

The internal BLM planning team preparing the RMP consists of 35 resource specials from across the HiLine, the Lewistown Field Office, and the Montana State Office, as well as cooperating agencies consisting of county commissions, cooperative state grazing districts, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Bureau of Reclamation.

The alternatives table does not represent final decisions on the alternatives, and the identified preferred alternative is merely a preliminary direction the team is going in. The alternatives generally are defined as follows:

Alternative A	Current management
Alternative B	Greater degree of protection for resources
Alternative C	Middle-of-the-ground approach
Alternative D	Greater degree of resource development
Alternative E	Preliminary preferred alternative

RAC discussion included the following items:

Air Resources/Geology/Soils/Water

Comment: Page 6, Action 9, more than 5 barrels a day. Does this create a surface standing pool of water, which invites West Nile virus and would impact sage grouse? It would be more meaningful to say when the surface discharge creates a standing pool of water (rather than stating an arbitrary number).

Response: Based on evaporation rates for our area, 5 barrels (42 gallons per barrel) is the triggering mechanism because more than that amount would not evaporate. Discussion has included whether the pits need to be covered. Language of the alternative is still under consideration. The 5-barrel standard is established under law (Onshore Order No.7). Flexibility comes in how the water is handled.

Comment: It might be good to start a list of where existing law is going to impede ability to manage the resource.

Response: Under NEPA review, water disposal and items like bird ramps are considered before a permit is issued.

Comment: What is the quality of the water being pumped out of the wells?

Response: Water quality ranges across the planning area. The Bowdoin area has a high concentration of total dissolved solids. Water quality in the Toole County oil field is very good. MPDES permits allow surface discharges. Perhaps a mitigating measure could be added to treat standing water by chemical additive.

Comment: Page 7, Action 3. Does this refer to waterfowl values?

Response: The intent is to not place water developments in riparian areas or create a disconnection of stream hydrology.

Comment: Page 7, Alternative D. What does no similar action mean?

Response: It means this is a brand new action. For example, if installing a pit to enhance livestock grazing, one would not be constrained by a similar action as would be the case in Alternative B or C.

Leasables – Fluid Minerals

Comment: Action 3. Once the RMP is in place, is there an ability to adjust stipulations included in the RMP if new information comes in during the life of the plan? For example, if in year seven, new information comes out that in order to protect xxx, this is a better stipulation than the one in the plan.

Response: The RMP language would apply to new leases that would be developed. A plan amendment would be needed to address a specific topic based on new technology or new information; or another means to address it would be to add conditions of approval. They key would be to not impede the rights of existing leases.

The RMP will determine how federal minerals are managed, even in split estate (private surface, federal minerals).

Comment: Action 6, page 9. With the changes (to Alternative A) required by the State Office, will the acreage figures change?

Response: Baseline acreage figures will change. Currently under Alternative A, over 3 million subsurface acres are discretionally closed to leasing. No plan ever stated that, and Alternative A should reflect the actual language of the West HiLine RMP. Alternative A will change quite a bit. The other alternatives should remain close to the way they are; except No Surface Occupancy (NSO) figures may change due to guidance from the State Office.

Comment: Is there a way to depict areas that will be closed to leasing?

Response: A map will be available at the next planning team meeting that will depict the areas proposed as closed to leasing.

Comment: Page 15, prairie dog and mountain plover habitat. Would rather they be referred to as colonies or town, or places where mountain plover are known to be. All of Phillips County is habitat for prairie dogs and mountain plover. A suggestion would be to say “occupied” or “recently occupied” habitat.

Response: The discussion and intent looks at the prairie dog as a “keystone” species because of association with burrowing owls, etc. The Region 6 MFWP plan guides the language we can use.

Comment: Page 13, Action 18, NSO within 1 mile of a lek. How firm is that distance?

Response: The 1-mile radius came about from discussions with the planning team and cooperators (MFWP and USFWS).

Comment: No consensus exists on the science of correct distances of oil and gas wells from critical habitat. It should be based on the most up-to-date science. If it is determined oil and gas activity would have a detrimental effect on sage grouse, then the industry must live with it. However, other issues such as turning sagebrush over, drought, West Nile, etc. must also be considered.

It is in the common interest of all groups to keep sage-grouse from being listed as a threatened and endangered species. Keeping it off the list must be a key consideration for the Malta RMP.

Whether talking about 1 mile for leks or winter range for mule deer, the team should get balanced input from everyone, not just the wildlife groups.

Response: The RAC will have an opportunity to review chapter 4, a discussion of impacts by the various alternatives. Maps will show the relationship of sage grouse habitat and identified leks to potential oil and gas activity areas. The BLM oil and gas group out of Casper, Wyoming helped assimilate potential areas of activity, and industry also submitted information used to craft the map. Waivers, exceptions and modifications (WEMs) can be applied based on certain conditions. An example is a December 1 restriction to protect mule deer. If the winter is mild, the wildlife may not even be in the area and a WEM could be implemented to allow drilling during a given timeframe in December.

Comment: What is the classification of oil and gas wells in this area?

Response: It is considered shallow gas drilling. The geology does not support coal bed methane-type activity in this area.

Wildlife and Fisheries

Comment: Page 44, Objective 4, “manage habitat and populations.” Populations are managed by the State.

Response: The word “populations” will be stricken.

Comment: Page 47, Action 9, Alternative C. 20 miles is a huge distance for bighorn sheep.

Response: The purpose is to prevent disease transmission from domestic sheep, and it follows recommendations of the western sheep group (Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies – Wild Sheep Working Group).

Clarification: Pat Gunderson in consultation with Mark Sullivan wanted the response above clarified to read: The purpose is to prevent disease transmission from domestic sheep, and since the current distance of domestic sheep from the wild herds is 20 miles, it was suggested by FWP staff to keep that distance as a minimum.

Comment: How many allotments are affected?

Response: Only one is close, but not within the 20-mile constraint. This would apply, for example, if someone requests a switch from cattle to sheep or goats and the allotment is within the 20-mile area, the request would be denied. The team may also look at reclassification language.

Comment: Is there any provision to protect an existing sheep allotment if MFWP decides to reintroduce sheep somewhere within the range of that sheep allotment?

Response: Consideration would be included in the reintroduction process, but it is not covered under the Malta RMP.

Comment: Would this conflict with noxious weed mitigation (i.e., goats and sheep used to control infestations)?

Response: Levels of infestations are not great enough to include this as a consideration. Activity level planning could include biological and chemical control of noxious weeds.

Comment: Most operators running sheep or goats are operating on private land close to the 20-mile range. This would limit their ability to expand or change their operation.

Response: It would have to be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

Comment: Page 51, Action 3. What does it mean?

Response: The language could be clarified by mentioning that species of special concern would be a trigger for considering fish screens.

Special Status Species

Comment: Page 52, Objective 3. The word "populations" should be removed.

Response: "Populations" will be stricken.

Comment: Page 54, prairie dogs. The main purpose of the prairie dog complex is to introduce ferrets. Ferrets seem to like cover between the holes for them to thrive. 5,000 acres may be too much all in one area; cover density should be considered.

Response: The preliminary preferred alternative would do away with the 7km complex ACEC because of management complexities. As a keystone species, we must manage prairie dog towns, and not just for reintroduction of black-footed ferrets.

Comment: Page 55. The concern that merits more discussion is that a state agency should be managing prairie dog numbers, rather than a federal agency.

Response: The preliminary preferred alternative is to adopt the Region 6 plan. It is clearly defined that BLM manages habitat, and MFWP manages wildlife.

Comment: Page 58. It would be nice to put into context in the Draft RMP that there are huge areas of habitat for sage grouse in the planning area. Also, prescribed burns could help rejuvenate acreages to create habitat for sage grouse.

Response: The planning team has tried to identify contiguous areas of public land of 10,000 acres or more in which they would, for example, reduce road building. Maps will show key habitat areas.

Comment: The debate should not be over quantified issues, but rather the overall goal of a sustainable sage grouse population. The watershed planning process localizes the NEPA process for smaller, defined

areas. Is it possible to measure populations in the smaller areas instead of through an RMP? This would facilitate a sustainable population.

Response: The purpose of an RMP is broad-scale planning to allow latitude to manage specific areas within defined parameters. The broad-scale measures in an RMP are a starting point for site-specific planning. If the NEPA analysis identifies specific issues, mitigation measures can be applied which allow flexibility.

Land Ownership Adjustment

Comment: Clarification was requested on land ownership adjustment. Is the Malta RMP looking to acquire land? There can be some concerns over BLM wanting more land for wildlife issues and wanting private land under BLM ownership.

Response: The BLM is not actively identifying lands they wish to acquire. The West HiLine RMP and the Judith-Valley-Phillips RMP identified properties listed as suitable for disposal because they have no resource values of overall benefit to the BLM and are generally small, isolated tracts that are difficult to manage. Those disposal lands have been brought forward to the Malta RMP. Unless lands for exchange are identified in an RMP, a plan amendment would be required with NEPA analysis and another public process before an exchange could be made.

Comment: Page 30, Action 3. Why would BLM want to convert land to crested wheatgrass when it is not good for wildlife?

Response: In some places grazing can be consolidated on crested wheatgrass (in the spring) to relieve grazing on other public lands. The RMP includes tools to manage the acres of crested wheatgrass that already exist; there are no plans to increase the acreage.

Comment: Page 76, Action 12. Ron requested copy of WO IM 2006-159 referenced in the action item. Access to the boundary of public land is a crucial problem that is not addressed. Boundary access is an entirely different subject from travel planning within a specific area.

Response: A copy of the IM will be sent to Ron. His concerns will be conveyed to the planning team.

Special Designations

Page 98, ACECs. The RMP proposes creating several new ACECs for the protection of geologic and other resource/wildlife concerns. The ZLM ACEC would address public safety concerns and protect the reclaimed areas from new development.

Comment: What are the protections and prohibitions of the special management?

Response: Specific actions are not allowed (e.g., mineral development, surface-disturbing activities).

Comment: Were the proposed designations the result of public input?

Response: This came from the internal planning team, who felt greater protections were needed for the specified areas.

Back Country Byways

Comment: Are roads being designated as byways?

Response: In previous RMPs no roads were identified for possible designation as back country byways. The planning team reviewed this past work and did not identify any roads to designate as byways.

Discussion Wrap-Up

Claire asked RAC members to contact her, either directly or through Kaylene, with any further questions on the RMP alternatives. The current proposed timeline would have the Draft RMP out for public comment and review in May or June 2009. Claire will be sending notice to cooperators soon about the RMP schedule.

It was suggested that mailed updates between meetings could help RAC members stay up-to-date with the planning process.

Forest Service Fee Proposal

Jane Weber, Director of the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center, briefed the RAC on Forest Service fee proposals for the Lewis and Clark National Forest. In February 2008, the RAC made three recommendations on fee proposals presented by the Forest Service, and following is the current status of those fee sites:

1. The rental program at the Monument Peak Lookout cabin will begin this fall.
2. Kenck Cabin has been undergoing work all summer long and is not ready to be rented. This cabin rental will likely be implemented in June 2009, after a private dedication ceremony with the Kenck family descendents. Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places will happen in winter 2009.
3. The fee increase at the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center will not be implemented until January 1, 2009, as originally intended.

Jane then asked the RAC for a recommendation on reducing the West Fork Cabin fee from \$65 to \$45 a night. The fee was set arbitrarily some years ago, prior to the availability of the pricing tool and prior to the Forest Service's partnership with the RAC. The public has complained that the \$65 rental fee is too high based on the limited amenities available. Jane presented the pricing schedule based on the use of the pricing tool and the worksheet was reviewed by RAC members. The reduction in fee is based on the limited amenities and access, not from reduced scenic quality resulting from the 2007 Fool Creek fire. It was noted that visual quality is not a consideration on the worksheet and that the acreage around the cabin was burned as a result of the 2007 Fool Creek Fire. Jane mentioned that the cabin location provides easy access to many hiking trails in the area. **A motion was made by Lisa Huestis and seconded by Barb Cole to approve the recommended fee reduction to \$45 a night. Consensus was reached.**

Four campground fee proposal recommendations will be formally requested by the Forest Service at the next RAC meeting:

1. VandeRiet Campground (new fee of \$8-\$12)
2. Dry Wolf Campground (phased-in increase to \$15)
3. Indian Hill Campground (new fee of \$5)
4. Hay Canyon Campground (new fee of \$5)

Question for the next meeting: How many people are allowed to camp per campsite?

Francis Jacobs

On behalf of the RAC, Lisa Huestis thanked Francis for his two terms on the RAC. Stan presented a letter of thank-you from the BLM and a gift in appreciation of his service.

Next Meeting

Agenda Items

Forest Service Fee Proposals
American Prairie Foundation
Malta RMP Changes/Revisions

Presentations on Larb Hills and Hay Coulee collaborative efforts
National Riparian Service Team Update
Wild Horse and Burro Information and Discussion
Monument RMP Update

Meeting Location/Date

Location: Malta

Date: January 13-14, 2009

* Due to availability of meeting room date changed to January 14-15, 2009 in Malta.*

Times: 10:00 – 5:00 on January 13

8:00 – 3:00 on January 14

Other

Larry invited everyone to float the White Cliffs section of the river on October 10-12.

Travel vouchers were completed by RAC members and the meeting adjourned at 2:30 p.m.

**Central Montana Resource Advisory Council
Public Comments
September 2-3, 2008**

Glenn Monahan

My name is Glenn Monahan. I live here in Fort Benton. I operate a small canoe outfitting business on the Upper Missouri River and I hold a geology degree from Montana State University. I am here today to address the RAC on a subject that I have presented to the RAC before, but it's been a number of years and there are a lot of new faces here since that time. Riparian conditions on the Upper Missouri River.

First of all, I think you all know what a riparian area is. But it is interesting to note on the BLM website for the Monument they state that the riparian zone immediately adjacent to the river bank is the most important vegetative type in the river valley that the Monument occupies.

Typically the riparian zone is composed of a zone along the banks of the river that is impacted by groundwater that can enter the soil from the river. It has the potential to be a very lush place that supports cottonwood gallery forest ecosystems and interestingly, cottonwood gallery forest ecosystems have been identified in the proposed RMP as an object of the Monument, which to my understand means that the agency is mandated to protect those ecosystems.

I want to make clear here that a cottonwood gallery forest ecosystem consists of more than cottonwood trees. According to Paul Hansen, who has been commissioned by BLM in the past to do studies of these ecosystems on the river, he has identified what should be growing underneath the cottonwood trees and that would include species such as red-osier dogwood, chokecherry, currant, gooseberry, willows, green ash, and box elder.

I don't know how many of you have actually been on the river and looked at these ecosystems but essentially, and this has also been documented by scientists that have been commissioned by BLM, essentially there's no understory left. All of those important species, and they are important for many reasons including wildlife, which is a big one, have been essentially eliminated from the river. The citation for that would be from Greg Kudray's paper that was commissioned by BLM and published in 2005. I would like to just quote from him. He states in this report: "Past management practices such as continual hot season grazing over the last 70 years have resulted in a severe loss of two age classes of cottonwoods . . ." and then he goes on to mention all of those other woody species that I just mentioned to you that should be growing there. They're all gone, completely eliminated from the entire Monument because of grazing.

On May 3, 2001, this body, the Central Montana Resource Advisory Council, drafted a letter to Secretary Gail Norton. The letter started out describing how disparate the views were among the RAC members regarding creation of the Monument and management of the Monument and all of that. They asserted that there was a lot of differences among the RAC members. They also mentioned the things that they were able to reach consensus on, and I'm going to read to you number 5 on this list of 8 consensus items. "Riparian cottonwood bottoms would be cooperatively restored." I'm going to tell you with my average of 25 days a year that I am spending on the Upper Missouri for the last 14 years, that there is nothing being restored right now. We have a collapsing ecosystem on this river and the only thing that's going to change that is aggressive changes to grazing practices.

Cattle are the reason why all of these species are missing and cattle are also the reason why the Draft RMP contained the following statement, if you'll bear with me for a moment, if I can find that. Here it is. The Draft RMP said that the lack of replacement trees, they are talking about the cottonwoods here, means that in the near future floaters and campers will have to rely on artificial shelters for shade because all of the big four-foot diameter cottonwood trees that people like to camp under when it's a 100 degrees out are going to be dead in about 20 to 30 years. And BLM has asserted and acknowledged in its documents that the replacement is not occurring and it's happening essentially because of hot season grazing. Sure, there are other reasons. We've got beavers that chew down some of the big trees. We've got some upstream dams that are impacting the flow regime. We're not getting the big floods that cottonwoods have a tendency to rely upon. But the regeneration does not occur, and it's occurring because of grazing.

I would recommend that this Council form a subcommittee, form a committee, and take a serious look at this. I would also recommend that any of you who have not been on the river, if you commit to doing that, and I would help you achieve that, if that's what you want to do. Before I'm done speaking I'll give you my phone number. You can call me and I'd be willing to help you out if you actually want to see what's going on on the river.

I know that you've received reports from BLM at some of your meetings where the BLM has told you what it's doing. I will certainly grant that there have been some improvements, but they are all small improvements. The statements that I have been reading to you indicate a crisis situation with the vegetation on this river, and incremental tweaking of grazing is not going to fix it, folks. It's going to take aggressive, bold action.

If you want to get hold of me, my home phone is 406-563-2770. Any questions?

Question: I'm sorry, I missed your name.

Glenn: It's Glenn with two 'n's and my last name is Monahan. M-o-n-a-h-a-n.

Question: Have you seen any salt cedar?

Glenn: I haven't seen any. But I'm not a botanist. I can't identify every single plant down there, but I've been down there long enough that I know what should be growing there and what's not.

Question: Russian olive, is there a big problem on the river with that?

Glenn: There's definitely Russian olives there. It's to BLM's credit they do have a program going right now to eliminate those. But eliminating Russian olives is not going to bring back the red-osier dogwood, the chokecherry, the currant, the gooseberry, serviceberry, unless we do something about the grazing situation. The other thing I'd be able to do for any of you who are interested is I could provide you with bibliography because I think it's incumbent upon you to not just take what the agency is telling you is happening down there. I think you should all be doing some of your own research and I would be happy to provide you with a bibliography. Other questions?

Question: Your business is what?

Glenn: The name of my business is Upper Missouri River Guides based out of Fort Benton. One of the other things that I'm going to bring up, apparently on your agenda today is a discussion of river usage. Is that correct? Well, what you are going to be hearing from the people who present those statistics is that probably for about the last 5 or 6 years the numbers have been dropping, and I think this year we're probably going to have another significant decrease in the number of people floating the river. I am sure that there's enough hypotheses to explain why that is happening as there is the number of people in this room. Gas prices, of course, would be the obvious one. But you have to ask yourself, why did the numbers start dropping 4 or 5 years ago? I would submit to you that it's because of the conditions on the river. Nobody, nobody likes pulling into a canoe camp to be presented with a camp full of cow crap. Not only is there cattle feces in the camping areas, just about any riparian area where there's still cottonwood trees left that a person would pull into, there's a pretty darn good chance that when you pull in there with your canoe that it's going to be fouled with cattle feces and the vegetation is going to be completely in a disruptive state. I've had a number of people contact me by telephone and email who have asked me about that. They have specifically said, "We've heard that there's a lot of cattle on the river and it can be a relatively unpleasant situation paddling the river." I can tell you with a high degree of certainty that of the hundreds and hundreds of people that I have taken down the river, the comments from them while they are there, personally telling me what they are experiencing, are quite negative regarding the situation with cattle on this river.

Thank you very much.

Nancy Schultz

My name is Nancy Schultz and I work with Glenn and I have also spent a lot of time on the river. As he's been talking, I'm going to kind of dovetail what he's said. In the RMP there are two riparian references. One he already

pointed out, and that's the Paul Hansen paper, his study on the river. Paul Hansen says livestock managers, and this is for the green ash, chokecherry, which is a habitat type, which is a dominant type on this river also in the same habitat type as the cottonwoods, "Livestock managers should reduce or eliminate hot season grazing use of this type." He goes on to say how it could happen.

Greg Kudray, the other riparian reference in the RMP, says a browsal evaluation indicated the more palatable shrub species have been heavily browsed and some, like the red orchard dogwood, have been virtually eliminated. In many BLM evaluations of their allotments they cite as a reason why an allotment is not producing woody plants is that flow, dams are the cause. Greg Kudray says, however, the wild and scenic portion of the Upper Missouri although affected by upstream dams, still retains a semi-natural flow regime. Thus unlike most other large western rivers, the Upper Missouri probably still possesses the natural hydrological processes necessary for successful cottonwood regeneration.

So those are the two that are in the RMP. I don't see the transfer of the science to the management actions. There's lots of language that says why this riparian area is so important, and BLM has lots of language that says it's important. For example, in their '07 budget they say "Riparian area restoration continues to be a high priority in the BLM." Well, I asked June Bailey, the previous Field Office manager, I said, "Well, what have you been doing?" She said, "If you want to know what we've been doing, go to the NEPA logs." I went to the NEPA logs, pulled up NEPA logs for three years, and there was one riparian project in three years. So, I mean, it doesn't seem to be a priority.

This Monument is part of the National Landscape Conservation System and these are the gems of the BLM land. Their mission statement is to "Conserve, protect, restore those nationally significant landscapes that have outstanding cultural, ecological, and scientific values for the benefit of current and future generations." That's what Glenn and I have been working for, is to get a management plan, hopefully a one-river management plan looking at riparian conditions that will make this resource sustainable. Because, you know, it's not about us. I'll have a cottonwood tree to stand under, but future generations, it doesn't sound good.

He already mentioned how the RAC, as one of the seven things they could agree on, there's lots of support, people who commented, the scoping comments that came in were 98.9 percent in favor of conserving and protecting riparian areas. You know, BLM language for this Monument, the riparian zone immediately adjacent the river bank is the most important vegetative type in the river valley. Riparian habitat like that along the Upper Missouri makes up less than one percent of the vegetative mosaic of the west. It has a greater variety of wildlife species dependent on it than any other vegetative type in the west. The riparian zone is a complex ecological community. It is fragile and its survival depends on many of the natural forces that at first glance appear to be quite harsh. It goes on to explain what the mammals are, and the birds.

Speaking of birds, Montana Wetland News and this is done by Montana Audubon prepared for DEQ and wetland development grant, and they have, it just came out last month, scientific recommendations on the size of stream vegetative buffers. They basically they are saying, and I know this will not be possible on many parts of this river because of other considerations, but they say for wildlife habitat the vegetative buffers need to go 300 feet. Fisheries at least a hundred feet. Water quality at least a hundred feet. So there is some science out there that says how large these riparian areas should be.

Here's the final environmental assessment, Upper Missouri watershed. The data indicates grazing has had a major impact on the regeneration of woody vegetation. Winter, spring, or late fall grazing appears to be more compatible with the revegetation of the riparian vegetation. And yet in the latest language of the RMP, so it basically says not hot season grazing, but in the RMP it says most grazing occurs from May through November. For the operators the season of grazing is more important of a concern than the AUMs and they need, they want, the primary grazing period is May through October. What is considered the hot season is July, August, and September. The latest livestock authorizations backs it up that they have a big range of when they can use those riparian bottoms.

Now back in 1993 there was a study done. It's called the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River Management Plan Update, and in this plan they went through, and as you know, all of the river bottom is not, you know, high priority, high potential riparian areas. But they did go through and they ranked by allotments, those allotments and how many high priority acres they had, how many high potential acres they had in the river corridor.

Even though that's been 15 years, we're not seeing protection of even the ones that were, that showed potential 15 years ago. And for example, there was one allotment, I'm not going to name the allotment, but basically it has 17 high priority acres, 30 high potential acres. The recommendation in 1993 was fence the campsite and the riparian site. So you protect that riparian site. And let's see if I can find it. But when I went to the logs of the BLM to see what, you know, what their BLM monitoring information showed, it did not show. I'm afraid I don't have that one handy, that showed the date and the time, but it was a pretty repeating pattern of cattle grazing, hit hard, needs fencing, need fence, and this goes on until the last assessment, which is, I think, 2006. There are other areas here too that also, you know we advocated, Glenn and I advocated for a larger protection site. There's one site down there that has an excellent riparian site, and they've like 43 high priority and potential sites, and we lobbied to protect all the riparian areas and what the BLM's final decision was we will try to eliminate the livestock/recreation conflict, so their final protection was less than a quarter of an acre.

You know, we're not seeing it transfer into action. I did ask the BLM in a previous administration to let us present and this is nice, having all of this time, because we expected two minutes and that's all we've ever been guaranteed before is two minutes. We asked for a subcommittee on riparian conditions and we were told no. So you know, we've never been able to present this much to this many people.

You know, looking at, the BLM goes back to their watershed plans and riparian areas are protected allotment by allotment, we went back to the watershed plans because that's what they, how they manage the riparian areas – through a watershed plan, through an allotment. I just copied out the riparian inventory and health assessment for those, out of some of those watershed plans, and you know, hopefully you'll have time to sit down, but you know functioning, basically this row is functioning at risk. This row is PFC, proper functioning condition.

So hopefully you will be able to, you know, get on the record. Please contact us. We've got lots of information that we would like to share with you, we'd like to share with a subcommittee because this is an issue that we're passionate about and it deserves more than this. This is our Monument. This is our legacy that we're going to leave, and I want to leave it better land than is out there now.

Glenn Monahan

There's a number of stakeholders that are impacted both negatively and positively by what's going on right now by the present condition of grazing management on the river. Right now, the permittees to a large extent are getting what they want. The AUMs on the river have not changed in a number of years. For the permittees, probably what they want is for things to stay the way that they are right now. And maybe that's okay for them to keep fighting for that. My belief is that the day is going to come when the court of public opinion, and possibly another court make some decisions about what is going on on the river. I think that if it comes to that, if a group does file a lawsuit against the BLM for what's going on, obviously if something like that should happen, who knows who's going to win, who knows what the determination is going to be. I think the best thing is for all the parties involved to get together and everybody to make some concessions. And from my standpoint, I think that the stockgrowers, permittees on that river, really do need to begin making some concessions. If they do that I think we can come up with a working relationship where the riparian areas are benefiting; we are still having grazing and watering occur on the river. I like to think that if it gets past that and goes to litigation that the outcome could be very punishing for the permittees. So what I'm advocating for is let's deal with this right now. Let's deal with it up front. Let's get the parties together talking, and more important than talking, acting to improve the conditions on the river.

Thank you.

Mark Good

I appreciate the opportunity to talk to you a little bit. I want to talk a little about the resource management plan. It's my understanding you're going to talk a little bit about that, or raised some issues about that, I think yesterday. I want to talk first about access. I guess about a month ago I traveled out to the Burnt Lodge wilderness study area. It's a great place, from what I've read about it anyway. It was recommended by the Bureau of Land Management as a wilderness area, and that's sort of unusual. All of it was recommended, almost 14,000 acres there. High wilderness values, scenic values, a great place. The problem: we came to a tee in the road and on one side says a public road and that ends up onto some private land that's gated now. It's my understanding in the past there's been some good

will access. Some guy, I think from out of state, bought that property and now it's become sort of a private hunting preserve. If you went the other way, it said private road, friends and guests only, Heartland Ranch. That's, I think, owned by some kind of consortium of people, I think from the Malta area. I do remember about eight years ago that that issue came up. I think this group might have even talked about it, but I don't remember the specifics.

So what I was wondering is if in the process of talking about some of these issues today, that someone probably know some of that history of what's happening. Then I think there's some questions about that road. It looked like a bladed road. On the map it shows it as a BLM public road. So something's happened there and I think that's recent. I talked to BLM people and they weren't aware of that sign.

I understand landowners sometimes wanting to lock people out when people abuse it. They don't close gates. They drive off road. They spread noxious weeds. I can understand that. And there are places where I'm not even sure that I like to see the public be allowed to go because of the way the land has been treated. That said, I think I'm enough of a populist that I believe that the public ought to have access to their own public land. I think that's important. I am like most Montanans. I don't own land aside from a house, so these public lands are important. They're important to me, they're important to a lot of people in this state. We value them highly, and getting access to them is important.

I think this issue about access, it doesn't just affect us who want to hike or ride horseback, or for recreation purposes. I think that implication is beyond that for those who are trying to manage wildlife. I think BLM even to be able to monitor these areas, if they can't get into them, it becomes hard. It's my understanding there is another access into this, but the road is so difficult, rutted, and it's not practical for many people to do that, to get to it. I'm not talking about driving into the wilderness study area. Of course, it's a wilderness study area. I'm just trying to get the public to the border so people can walk or ride and do whatever they need to do in there and it has some protection. So I think it needs to be discussed and I think I may even go so far as to say that if the private landowners aren't going to provide access to the public, that maybe the public shouldn't provide access to the private landowners to get to those areas either. I think it's something that needs to be considered.

Now that might not be the case at all. I don't know the facts. So I think it would be important to get the facts out as we know them in terms of the road, who has control of those roads, and what has happened. I would like to call the landowners. I don't know who they are. Someone maybe knows that. If they could give me some names I'd appreciate that, so I could talk to them and see if they will provide some access or what the conditions are that they're denying and why they are denying that access. So that was kind of one issue, and I hope you will kind of take that up today.

The second issue had to do with the other wilderness study area, Bitter Creek. I was also up there. Beautiful area again. I've got a friend who says it's easy to love the mountains, but you have to learn to love prairie landscape. This is an area that it's easy to love. It's a beautiful vast landscape. I hadn't been there for a number of years, came back. It was disappointing to me to see the kind of eco use, there's damage going on up there. So my only comment there is to say I don't think we should be managing just like we have been managing. I think we need to look at restoring the wilderness character of this area. It's not good enough, I don't think, to say well, it could be an ACEC in the future or something. I think we need to take some action to restore the wilderness character so the BLM can recommend it for wilderness in the future. I think it's getting control of the vehicle use up there.

Those were my two comments, but I would hope maybe some of that could be talked about in your discussion about the Malta Resource Management Plan. Again, I do appreciate your time. Thank you.