

# Meeting Minutes

**Sierra Front - Northwestern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council**

**July 11, 2007**

[As corrected at the RAC meeting of November 16, 2007]

**Winnemucca Field Office**

**Winnemucca, Nevada**

<b>I.</b>	<b>RAC Attendance and Welcome .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>II.</b>	<b>Thomas and Tungsten Fire Briefings.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>III.</b>	<b>Summary of Motions Other Than to Approve Minutes.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>IV.</b>	<b>Summary of Action Assignments .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>V.</b>	<b>Minutes from the Meeting in Carson City, Nevada, April 4, 2007.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>VI.</b>	<b>RAC Subgroup Reports .....</b>	<b>4</b>
	<b>Black Rock NCA Implementation Subgroup.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>VII.</b>	<b>Field Manager Reports.....</b>	<b>4</b>
	<b>A. Carson City Field Manager Don Hicks' Report .....</b>	<b>4</b>
	<b>B. Winnemucca Field Manager Gail Given's Report .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>VIII.</b>	<b>RAC Questions and Answers.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>IX.</b>	<b>WFO Resource Management Plan .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>X.</b>	<b>Public Comment.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>XI.</b>	<b>Field Trip .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>XII.</b>	<b>Meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m.....</b>	<b>10</b>

## I. RAC Attendance and Welcome

8:00 a.m., Wednesday, July 11, 2007 – Meeting Called to Order by Chairman Gebhardt with the following members of the RAC present.

### SIERRA FRONT – NORTHWESTERN GREAT BASIN RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL

COUNCIL MEMBER	RESOURCE/EXPERTISE	WEDNESDAY, 7/11
John Gebhardt – Chair	State Agency	X
Patricia Herzog – Vice Chair	Elected Official	X
William Bennett	Transportation/ROWs	
Rochanne Downs	Native Americans	
Brian Doyal	Public-At-Large	X
Tim Dufurrena	Nevada Cattlemen	X
James Eidel	Wildlife	X
John Mudge	Mining	
Ernest Paine	Livestock	X
Will Roger Peterson	Recreation	X
Vernon Schulze	Wild Horses	X
Sherm Swanson	Academic	X
D. Craig Young	Archaeology	
VACANT	Energy/Minerals	
VACANT	Environment	

Chairman Gebhardt announced that Jerry Hepworth, representing Energy/Minerals, had accepted a job in Southern California and would no longer be able to serve on the RAC. This means there are currently two vacancies on the RAC.

**BLM staff present** – Don Hicks, Field Manager, Carson City Field Office (CCFO); Gail Givens, Field Manager, Winnemucca Field Office (WFO); Arlan Hiner, Assistant Field Manager – Renewable Resources, WFO; Mark Struble, Public Affairs Specialist, CCFO; Jamie Thompson, Public Affairs Officer, WFO; Doran Sanchez, Chief, Office of Communications, Nevada State Office (NSO); Jeff Fedrizzi, Fire Management Officer, WFO; Robert Edwards, Resource Management Plan Lead, WFO; Peggy McGuckian, Archaeologist, WFO; Mike Zielinski, Soil Scientist, WFO.

**Interagency Incident Management Team Incident Commanders present** – Rocky Opliger, Incident Commander (IC) of California Interagency Incident Management Team 4, Type 1 Team; Bill Kaage, IC of NorCal Interagency Incident Management Team, Type 2 Team.

**Public present** – Matthew Tuma, Field Representative, U.S. Senator Harry Reid; Richard Hilton, President, Friends of Sand Mountain; John Falen, livestock permittee and former RAC member.

## II. Thomas and Tungsten Fire Briefings

Gail Givens introduced Rocky Opliger, IC for the Thomas Fire, Bill Kaage, IC for the Tungsten Fire, and Jeff Fedrizzi, Fire Management Office for the WFO.

The ICs provided the RAC members with brief overviews of the fires they were managing.

The Thomas Fire burned 18,344 acres in Humboldt and a small area of Pershing Counties. The fire burned to the edges of Winnemucca and Grass Valley destroying several outbuildings, threatening several hundred homes, closing local roads and prompting evacuations. A collapsing thunderstorm cell caused erratic fire behavior and extremely rapid growth on the afternoon of Saturday, July 9. This fire destroyed much of the vegetation in the Water Canyon and Thomas Canyon drainages and killed an undetermined number of cattle. Flood danger from heavy precipitation events over these and other canyons in the Sonoma Mountains is an urgent issue for the Winnemucca and Grass Valley communities. Rocky Opliger said there had been no injuries on the fire and that full containment was expected at 6:00 p.m. today. He said with fire activity winding down resources were being reallocated to areas/fires with a greater need.

The Tungsten fire burned 61,951 acres in Pershing County. The fire shut down east-west travel on I-80 for a time and the main line of the Union Pacific Railroad, which also delayed the eastbound AMTRAK California Zephyr for 9 ½ hours. An outbuilding was destroyed and for a time the fire posed a threat to the community of Imlay, but was essentially held at the Humboldt River north of the town. Forage and wildlife habitat losses are an issue. Bill Kaage said there were currently 300 personnel assigned to the fire, that full containment was expected at 6:00 p.m. today, and that there had been no injuries on the fire. He said issues of concern were I-80, and cultural resources, particularly the historic California Trail.

Jeff Fedrizzi talked about the need to quickly allocate scarce resources to where they are needed most, especially when there are multiple fires as there are now. He said that the WFO had used four single engine air tankers (SEATs) based in Winnemucca on these fires, but two had now been sent to Elko to support their fire fighting efforts following a burnover incident there. He said that whenever there is a similar incident on a fire that fire immediately becomes a higher priority.

Rocky Opliger added that prioritizing aircraft is very tough.

Peggy McGuckian asked that the difference between a burn-out and a back-fire be explained.

Rocky said that burn-outs and back-fires are similar but distinct concepts. A burn-out is the intentional burning of an area well ahead of a fire to deprive the fire of fuel should it reach that area. A back-fire is when fuels are intentionally ignited, usually in a narrow line, near an advancing fire with the intention that the updrafts from the main fire will pull the back-fire toward the main fire stopping its advance by eliminating its fuel source.

### **III. Summary of Motions Other Than to Approve Minutes**

Due to the lack of a quorum in one of the pods, no motions were made at this meeting.

### **IV. Summary of Action Assignments**

- 1.) BLM Carson City Field Office was asked to work with Friends of Sand Mountain to create a map that better indicates open/closed/restricted areas.
- 2.) BLM Carson City Field Office was asked by Chairman Gebhardt to send a copy of the Sand Mountain Blue Butterfly Conservation Strategy Plan to the RAC members.

## **V. Minutes from the Meeting in Carson City, Nevada, April 4, 2007**

MOVED – by Jim Eidel to approve the minutes as written.  
SECOND – Will Roger Peterson.

## **VI. RAC Subgroup Reports**

The Winnemucca RMP Subgroup has not met since the last RAC meeting and had no report. The Wild Horse and Burro Guidelines Subgroup has completed its work.

### ***Black Rock NCA Implementation Subgroup***

Will Roger Peterson reported that the Subgroup will have a tour this Saturday, July 14, to look at damage being caused by unauthorized OHV use and to recommend ways to deal with the problem. He said a British volunteer crew was currently working in the NCA and that the Black Rock Rendezvous held over Memorial Day weekend included 8 field trips, attracted 150 people, and was a great success. Will encouraged the members to come out to the Black Rock Desert Playa in mid-August to view the Perseid Meteor Shower.

## **VII. Field Manager Reports**

### **A. Carson City Field Manager Don Hicks' Report**

1. Written summary of the report was distributed.
2. Additional items covered orally.
  - a. Fire – Don said the Adrian Fire, 15 miles south of Silver Springs, is about 15,000 acres in size. Due to scarcity of resources, just one engine could be spared for the fire. He said the CCFO had assisted on the South Lake Tahoe Fire. Aircraft are now national resources with decisions about their location and use being made above the local and state levels and we do what we can do. The air tankers at Minden were grounded because of heavy smoke for a couple of days. Fire rehab is working on flood control.
  - b. Wild Horses and Burros – Don said the water shortage was a problem that is being monitored closely.
  - c. Sand Mountain – Don said implementation of the Conservation Strategy Plan is beginning, and that changes in the Supplementary Rules for the area will be in place by fall.

**Question (Q)** – Jim Eidel asked what a Class 3 cultural resources survey is.

**Answer (A)** – Don said it is an on-the-ground inspection.

**Q** – Jim asked if you could find anything in blowing sand.

**A** – Don answered, “Yes. Grinding stones and that kind of thing.”

- d. Pine Nut Plan – The Draft is almost ready for distribution.

### **B. Winnemucca Field Manager Gail Given's Report**

1. Written summary of the report was distributed.
2. Additional items covered orally.

- a. Gail showed the RAC members the Thomas Fire point of origin and said it had been many years since there had been a major fire south of Winnemucca.

**Q** – Jim Eidel asked whether sage-grouse population management units (PMUs) had been affected by the fires.

**A** – Arlan Hiner responded that the Thomas Fire has affected the PMU in the area.

- b. Gail reiterated what Don had said about water scarcity being an issue for wild horses this year.

**Q** – Patti Herzog asked if BLM was doing any outreach concerning Wild Horses and Burros (WH&Bs) dying of thirst on the range.

**A** – Doran Sanchez said not as of yet, but that BLM was closely monitoring the situation. Gail added that the first focus will be on getting water to the WH&Bs and removing WH&Bs where necessary.

- c. Gail described the WFO proposal to reorganize from a two-tier to a three-tier organizational structure. Doran said the proposals from the field were still being finalized.

## **VIII. RAC Questions and Answers**

**Q** – Vern Schulze asked about allotments that are without approved grazing plans in accord with the Rangeland Management Standards and Guidelines.

**A** – Arlan answered that allotments without approved grazing plans would be limited to 30% utilization grazing on uplands. He added that there is one permittee who we suspect has a plan, who is meeting Properly Functioning Condition (PFC) and trending toward improvement in the uplands, but who won't tell us what his plan is.

**Q** – Jim Eidel said, you “suspect” he has a plan. BLM needs to know what his plan is.

**A** – Arlan reiterated that this permittee's operation is meeting PFC and the trend in the uplands is improving. Arlan believes the permittee won't tell us what his plan is because he thinks that would lock him into a rigid operation that wouldn't allow him the flexibility to continue to do things as he is in a way that is working.

**Comment (C)** – Sherm Swanson said there is a move to allow grazing permittees more flexibility in their operations.

**C** – Arlan said none of our other permittees without plans are meeting PFC.

**Q** – Sherm asked about the interplay between Standards and Guidelines and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

**A** – Bob Edwards said that would be discussed later in the WFO RMP report.

**Q** – Patti asked if there is an outreach strategy on the Wild Horse and Burro water shortage issue.

**A** – Doran said there was not one yet, but that a strategy would be put together when information gathering was completed.

**Q** – Jim asked what other animals were dying from lack of water.

**A** – Chairman John Gebhardt said that the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) was hauling water to water developments in the Las Vegas area now and would move the hauling operation north by August if monsoon rains don't replenish water developments there.

**Q** – Jim asked what animals benefit from the water developments.

**A** – John said, primarily bighorns, but that all wildlife including birds benefit.

**Q** – Jim asked when the water developments are monitored.

A – John said he began flying the water developments in June and monitoring flights would continue through the summer as needed.

Q – Vern asked if there was a water allocation [under State law] for wildlife.

A – John said that water must be left in natural sources for the use of wildlife.

C – Bob Edwards said the sale of public land near the airport to the City of Winnemucca would be published in the *Federal Register* this Friday, July 13.

## **IX. WFO Resource Management Plan**

Bob Edwards reported that an extension of the RMP due date had been requested from the BLM Washington Office. If approved, this will push back completion of the plan from December 08 to December 09.

He said the ID Team completed its review of Chapter 1-3 on June 29, and that review of Chapter 4 (environmental consequences of the proposed actions) will be completed by the end of September. Bob explained that because of slippage that has already occurred, there can be no further delays in the RMP schedule.

BLM will complete its internal review by May, 2008, at which time the Draft EIS will be sent out for a 90-day public review (from May to August, 2008)

Chairman Gebhardt asked Sherm Swanson to serve as Acting Chairman of the RAC WFO RMP Subgroup until the Subgroup members vote in a new permanent chair person. He asked Sherm to work with Bob in the interim. Sherm agreed to do this.

Jim asked that the RAC go on record as instructing the WFO RMP Subgroup that it must maintain time frames from this point forward.

Bob emphasized that Subgroup participation makes for better documents.

Sherm said it was important that the Draft EIS comply with Standards and Guidelines and Standard Operating Procedures.

Bob agreed and said he would get the SOPs to the Subgroup in early August, get the draft of Chapter 2 to the Subgroup by September 10, and have a meeting in September to assure that Subgroup input was included in the final draft of Chapter 2.

Sherm said it was more important to meet on the SOPs than on the Draft Chapter 4.

Bob agreed and said he would get the SOPs to Sherm as soon as possible.

## **X. Public Comment**

Richard Hilton, President of Friends of Sand Mountain, explained why he had been upset at the last RAC meeting. He said that his organization and many others worked on the conservation plan for the Blue Butterfly for 2½ years; got everyone's approval, and now the scope and the trails have been changed by BLM. He said it had been agreed that the map would be changed back to the original version, but that has not been done. He said changes were made to the map after the fact.

Richard said his group was doing educational outreach at Sand Mountain. Brian Doyal asked if the group's outreach was more than just handing out brochures at the gate. Richard said yes, that members of Friends Sand Mountain were meeting with and talking to users at the mountain.

Jim asked Richard if there isn't a specific area he was concerned about. Richard said, yes, it's an area outside the planning area that lies next to the Kearney Buckwheat habitat.

Don Hicks said that, as stated in the *Federal Register* notice, this is an area that is not closed, but is restricted until more work can be completed.

Richard said that the map should indicate that this is an area where vehicle use is restricted to "existing roads only."

Chairman Gebhardt said that since the area is outside the Sand Mountain planning area, BLM can manage it as it sees fit.

Sherm said that while that might be technically true, there is a need for the BLM to work with the public in good faith.

Brian said that BLM and the Friends need to work together to mark and designate trails that can be used in questionable areas.

Don explained that he wants to sign trails and implement the agreed upon plan inside the planning area, and has no money for cultural inventories, trail marking, or mapping in areas outside the planning area.

Richard said that people passing through protected areas to access the questionable area should be ticketed, but people accessing and using existing trails in the questionable area through open areas should not.

Don said the color coding on the map could be changed and restrictions in the questionable area defined as "limited to existing trails," but not until we know which routes do not impact resources.

Brian said the color and designation on the map should be changed to indicate that the questionable area is different from the closed areas inside the planning area.

Richard then said that a favored trail to the top of Sand Mountain and another often used and approved trail inside the planning area have "disappeared."

Don said that terrain on the backside of the old hill climb route prohibits use of the route to the top of Inspiration Point. Don also indicated that the route was removed from the map until the issue could be resolved on the ground, and to provide allowing for the contract being issued by Churchill County to move forward for installation of the rest of the trail system.

Richard said the route was very useable.

Since there may be some confusion as to the exact path of the route to the top, Brian asked Richard to send him the GPSed route and he would map it for him.

Jim reminded Richard and the group that the RAC has been shown clear evidence in aerial photos that habitat has disappeared and continues to disappear due to OHV use at Sand Mountain. Jim said flexibility is required.

Richard said that many trails had already been eliminated in the agreed upon plan.

Will asked Richard if Friends of Sand Mountain were recording their volunteers and volunteer hours with BLM. Richard said they were not. Will strongly encouraged Richard to start doing that, and said he would get more cooperation if he did.

John asked that a copy of the Sand Mountain Blue Butterfly Conservation Strategy Plan be sent to the RAC members. Mark Struble said he would send the members the plan in PDF format.

Patti told the group that she had CD copies of the John Falen/Utah State University cheatgrass grazing study and will provide copies to all RAC members.

Patti mentioned that the Great Basin Institute had requested a grant to build a mountain bike trail up Winnemucca Mountain.

## **XI. Field Trip**

**Lunch at Water Canyon** – The RAC departed the Winnemucca Field Office at 10:45 a.m. and drove up Water Canyon to the last Picnic/Campground, where sandwiches, chips, cookies, and beverages were provided. The group, along with Matt Tuma of Senator Reid’s staff, saw first-hand the effects the Thomas Fire had on this popular recreation area. The first half of the most used part of the canyon is completely burned over, with all deciduous trees destroyed by fire. The middle section is partly burned and partly damaged by intense radiant heat from fire on both sides of the canyon. The last two picnic/camp areas are essentially unaffected. The group discussed the situation informally and was told that the next concern in the area would be from flash flooding should heavy precipitation fall over burned canyon areas here and elsewhere in the Sonoma Mountains that drain toward the Winnemucca and Grass Valley communities. BLM is already removing fallen debris from drainages and working with Humboldt and Pershing Counties to assure that reclamation is performed on both public and private lands at the same time.

### **Tour of Areas Rehabilitated Following Past Fires – Host Mike “Zeke” Zielinski –**

**Stop 1** – Sage Height’s fuel break at the foot of Winnemucca Mountain, rehabilitated following a fire in 1996 using a seed mixture of 5 lbs crested wheat grass / one pound alfalfa, area grazed October 1 through April 30 each year. Cheatgrass is present in moderate to heavy amounts.

Historically, cheatgrass was first recorded in Nevada in 1904. From 1940 to the mid-1980s, cheatgrass accounted for less than 5% of vegetative composition in the sagebrush community. As a result of fires and environmental adaptations, in the mid-1980s cheatgrass exploded to establish in the salt shrub community. Zeke believes cheatgrass may have peaked at the turn of the millennium, and that other weeds such as medusa head, Russian knapweed, Scotch thistle, red brome, Japanese chess, and yellow star thistle are replacing it. Weeds spread from roads/trails to disturbed areas to the landscape.

How to increase effectiveness of fuel break and to reduce fine fuels? Cheatgrass can be reduced with a healthy perennial grass community: increase root production of perennial grasses (both

deep and shallow rooted grasses); reduce biomass by seeding less productive species; and improve grazing management system.

Can cheatgrass be reduced by intense spring grazing during the month of April? Yes, if concentrated in confined areas livestock can be effective in reducing fuels. A problem is the lack of infrastructure, water and fences. Issues are: perennial grasses are more palatable than cheatgrass; perennial grasses stop growth and transpiration if utilization is greater than 50 percent of active growth decreasing vigor and plant density; lack of transpiration from perennial grasses increases moisture to cheatgrass; cheatgrass can produce multiple seed heads (approximately every three days while plant is green 10 to 12 times per growing season); cheatgrass can produce 3,000 to 6,000 seeds per square meter. Grazing to reduce cheatgrass seeds could be effective if seed density could be reduced to below 40 seeds per square meter, but this is nearly impossible with trampling of seed and seeds stored in the seed bank. Arlan asked, when you hit cheatgrass hard (by grazing), what comes in next? Zeke answered, Cheatgrass, and said he wouldn't expect a change of composition, secondarily would be mustards.

General phenology, cheatgrass can germinate in the fall/winter and green up of perennial grasses can occur, especially Sandberg bluegrass. Cheatgrass can germinate anytime there is sufficient moisture and warmth. The critical growth period for perennial grasses is the boot stage to mature seed. This is the time when grass plants are most susceptible to grazing. Perennial grasses normally begin growth in early March. Sandberg bluegrass develops the earliest leaf growth and is the most palatable for the first three weeks of March. About the third week of March, bottlebrush squirreltail and crested wheat grass begin to develop leaf growth. Bottlebrush squirreltail is the most palatable at that time. Cheatgrass doesn't start to produce sufficient leaf growth until April and then rapidly grows to produce seed by the second week of April, the same time as Sandberg bluegrass. Sandberg bluegrass becomes bitter and loses palatability with seed formation.

Squirreltail produces seed the first week of May reducing palatability; and crested wheat grass produces seed in late May and early June.

Sherm said that fall grazing of cheatgrass doesn't compete with perennials. Fall/winter grazing can be effective at reducing fine fuel, but needs infrastructure with possible protein supplements. General discussion followed on whether or not there is a need for protein supplements, no conclusion was reached.

Zeke added that seeding is best when done before January 31, but that purchasing of native seeds is sporadic due to funding problems and wide variations in the amount of native seed needed from year to year. This makes it economically tough for producers to grow enough seeds every year to meet the demands in peak years.

**Stop 2** – Cosgrave area west slope of the East Range 15 miles southwest of Winnemucca. This area was rehabilitated following a fire in 1999. Seeded with 2 lbs crested wheat grass / 1 lb blue bunch wheat grass / 1 lb Sherman blue grass / 2 lbs. four-wing saltbush/ 0.1 lb sagebrush / 0.25 forage kochia. Area grazed November 1 to August 1; water distribution is a limiting factor, area receives light grazing. Cheatgrass is present in moderate to heavy amounts. Small areas of light cheatgrass areas are associated with good stands of Sandberg bluegrass and perennial grasses.

**Stop 3** – Dun Glen exit, flats just south of the Truck/Auto stop on I-80 about 20 miles southwest of Winnemucca. This is not a rehabilitated area but exhibits a natural die-off of cheatgrass. There were large die-off areas in 2003 and 2004, between 250,000 to 300,000 acres each year.

Currently we are experiencing a few minor die-offs. Zeke discussed cheatgrass die-offs and explained that a number of causes have been put forward, but none have yet been definitively proved to be the cause. Suggested causes include cut worms, soil chemistry (pH or manganese toxicity), an as yet unidentified biological agent and drought. Zeke said researchers at the University of Washington are working on a biological agent to control cheatgrass. The agent has been sent to the Department of Agriculture for approval. Other researchers are working on a possible acid treatment to control it, because a lower pH seems to reduce or prevent germination of cheatgrass.

**Stop 4** – On the east slope of the Humboldt Range 30 miles southwest of Winnemucca, Unionville fire rehabilitation. This area received the same seed mix and was seeded at approximate same time as Stop 2. Grazing system for the Star Peak allotment is from April 1 to October 31, this particular area is not grazed in April or May. Cheatgrass is present in very light to light amounts. The seeding was a good mixture of deep and shallow rooted plants.

Eight seeded pastures in the Winnemucca Field Office have a system of no grazing in April and May. Zeke has observed reduced cheatgrass in these pastures, and is working with research scientists to develop a research proposal to evaluate three grazing systems to determine which system is most effective in reducing cheatgrass: April grazing of cheatgrass; a rest rotation system; and no grazing in April and May.

**XII. Meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m.**