

Mojave-Southern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, August 14, 2008

Caliente Youth Center (CYC), U.S. Highway 93 North,
Caliente, Nevada

Resource Advisory Council members present and category represented:

Dr. John E. Hiatt, Chairperson	Wildlife	Category 2
Steven Mellington, vice-Chairperson	Public at Large	Category 3
Douglas Baker	Transportation and ROW	Category 1
Tim Carlson	Mineral Development	Category 1
Joni Eastley	Elected Official	Category 3
Don "Skip" Canfield	State Agency Representative	Category 3
Julie Von Tobel Gleason	Wild Horse and Burro	Category 2
Elise McAllister	Dispersed Recreation	Category 2
Greg Seymour	Archeology/Historic	Category 2
Claire Toomey	Permitted Recreation	Category 1
Gracian Uhalde	Ranching/Grazing	Category 1

Resource Advisory Council members absent and category represented:

Kenny Anderson	Native American	Category 3
Ed Higbee	Ranching/Grazing	Category 1
Dr. Peter Starkweather	Academic/UNLV	Category 3

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) representatives present:

Chris Hanefeld	BLM Ely District public affairs specialist
Rebecca Hammond	BLM Ely District administrative assistant
Michael Herder	BLM Ely District Associate Manager
Hillierie Patton	BLM Southern Nevada public affairs specialist
Mary Jo Rugwell	BLM Southern Nevada District Manager
Tom Seley	BLM Tonopah Field Manager

Public

John Gebhardt	Nevada Department of Wildlife
Craig Stevenson	Nevada Department of Wildlife
Richard Orr	Sustainable Grazing Coalition

A copy of each attachment is listed in the text of or at the end of these minutes and is also on file with the official copy of the minutes in the Ely Field Office of the BLM. Persons desiring to review said minutes should contact Chris Hanefeld, public affairs specialist, at (775) 289-1842.

8:05 a.m. Dr. John Hiatt called the meeting to order, and conducted welcome and introductions.

8:15 a.m. Chris Hanefeld reviewed the reimbursement process under GOV Trip.

8:20 a.m. Dr. Hiatt conducted a review of the June 2008 minutes. It was subsequently determined that the minutes needed editing for accuracy and spelling.

9:10 a.m. District Manager reports:

Ely District Office, Michael Herder, BLM Ely District Associate Manager (attachment 1):

- Joni Eastley asked about the BLM's resolution of 14 Patriot missile sites in Lincoln County.
- Greg Seymour asked when the wind energy projects described in the Ely District Manager Report would go to the public for input/comment. Herder reviewed the scoping/comment process under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Herder talked briefly about the Ely District's website and how it's used to support the public outreach effort. Don Canfield suggested to Herder that BLM also submit project documents to the State Clearing House, with maps, for public review.
- Gracian Uhalde asked about participation in the Ely District's 2008 Teacher's Workshop. Herder provided a brief summary.

Southern Nevada District Office, Mary Jo Rugwell, So. NV District Office Manager (attachment 2):

- Mary Jo Rugwell reviewed the Las Vegas District Manager's Report. Rugwell provided a brief summary of a congressional bus tour conducted Wednesday, Aug. 13, 2008.
- Rugwell updated the RAC on the status of the Las Vegas and Pahrump field manager's positions, the upper Las Vegas Wash, and kiosks on the Old Spanish Trail.
- Rugwell also updated the RAC on the deaths of a band of wild horses in 2007 on the Nellis range. The cause of death was a natural-occurring high level of nitrates in the water at a source used by the wild horses. The construction of water developments is awaiting resolution of a stay. The U.S. Air Force is working with BLM to resolve the issue(s).
- Rugwell said the district has seen little fire activity so far this fire season. Human-caused wildfires have become less frequent. BLM determined that several fires in spring 2008 were arson, but the responsible person(s) remain unknown. The investigation continues.
- Rugwell reminded the RAC that Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act (SNPLMA) Round 9 proposals will be signed Aug. 16.
- Rugwell noted the passing of poster desert tortoise Mojave Max of natural causes. BLM is in the process of determining next steps.
- Rugwell expressed safety concerns over anti-BLM statements posted on a website by frustrated fans of the 2008 TSCO Vegas to Reno race. Issues related to the off-highway vehicle (OHV) event included miscommunication between the promoter and BLM. In the future, the BLM will more clearly reinforce procedures that are to be in place prior to the event(s). Joni Eastley said the BLM-permitted events are damaging roads in Nye County, especially on the valley floors where the breakdown of the soils are causing roads to become impassable. Eastley said county ranchers and others are complaining more frequently to the county commission about this and other OHV-related issues that include the unsanitary disposal of garbage and sewage. Eastley said the county commission has voted to not approve an event through the town of Beatty, supporting previous action taken by that town's advisory board.
- Rugwell updated the RAC on Nellis Dunes. She said Clark County hoped to develop a park (with fees) to provide the Las Vegas area public(s) an additional

recreational destination, nearby. A livestock trespass issue remains to be resolved, but is a high priority for the BLM.

- The RAC asked when a new parking area along Highway 160 would be re-opened to the public. Rugwell will find out and respond to the RAC.

Tonopah Field Office, Tom Seley, Tonopah Field Manager (attachment 3):

- Joni Eastley asked about the status of the Nevada Division of Forestry conservation camps and Type 2 wildland firefighting teams. The RAC talked briefly about raising the issue in a letter to the Nevada state legislature. The RAC determined it would be outside the scope of the RAC charter.
- Eastley asked Tom Seley about desert tortoise. Seley said BLM is preparing an environmental assessment and will present it to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
- Re: solar applications, Seley told the RAC that the Tonopah Field Office has two incomplete applications in Esmeralda County. The field office has sent 60-day letters to the proponents of three viable solar projects, requesting that they update their plans of development to conform to a new Washington Office (WO) format. Also, the firm Cogentrix has filed for the same footprint as Solar Millennium, both at the Tonopah and Beatty airports; as well as the footprint filed for by Tonopah Solar, LLC, near the Tonopah airport.

10:20 a.m. BLM Ely District Integrated Weed Management Plan, Bonnie Million, BLM Ely District Noxious and Invasive Weed Specialist: Million provided the RAC a report on the BLM Ely District Integrated Weed Management Plan. She said the Ely District is asking for the public's input on a proposed integrated weed management plan that would provide for non-native and noxious invasive weed inventory and treatment, prevention and education. The proposed district-wide plan would include weed prevention procedures and a variety of treatment options in and outside of Wilderness or wilderness study areas, including the use of herbicides. Herbicide treatments would not be authorized within Threatened and Endangered Species habitat. The 30-day public input period concludes at close of business, Friday, Aug. 29. The BLM anticipates completing a draft plan and making it available for public comment in January 2009. The final plan is scheduled for completion in March 2009. Million asked that the RAC provide input, either as an advisory council or individually. The RAC asked where in the weed abatement process are the county road departments, Nevada Department of Transportation (NDOW) and Union Pacific Railroad, and how the BLM is coordinating with them. A brief discussion ensued re: rights of ways and weed identification. Million reported that a major population of Russian Knapweed exists in Meadow Valley Wash, around Sunnyside and in White River Valley. The RAC discussed the issue of livestock transporting noxious and invasive weeds through digestion and excretion. Also discussed briefly were the potential use of herbicides to treat invasive and noxious weeds, as well as the potential use of snow fencing in the Toquop Wash area.

10:30 a.m. BLM Ely District emergency wild horse gather near Caliente, Ben Noyes, BLM Ely District Wild Horse and Burro Specialist: Noyes stated that for public and animal safety, the BLM Ely District is conducting an emergency gather on public and private lands at Indian Ridge and Highland Knolls, on the west side of U.S. Highway 93, about five miles north of Caliente. The BLM has so far gathered

and removed more than 30 wild horses. The BLM is encouraging area residents to not feed or water the horses in an effort to keep the animals within the boundaries of the Highland Peak Herd Management Area (HMA), located northwest of the housing development. Noyes was asked about Appropriate Management Level (AML). Noyes said a recent flight of the Highland HMA indicated there were 130 wild horses. He said AML is 30. A brief discussion ensued re: the accuracy of census flights. Mary Jo Rugwell pointed out that gathering horses alone will not resolve the wild horse issue in Nevada. Julie Von Tobel Gleason suggested that BLM institute a virtual adoption program as a program funding mechanism. She said Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act (SNPLMA) funding could be utilized. She also suggested kiosks in strategic locations as a program education and outreach component.

- 10:45 a.m. Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) Wildlife Water Development Program and Public Process, John Gebhardt, NDOW Wildlife Staff Biologist:
- Gebhardt explained that spring sources are fenced to protect them from damage by wild horses. He said water is provided the horses outside the actual spring source. In dry years, NDOW hauls water.
 - Gebhardt was asked if booklets identifying guzzler locations are still available to the public. Gebhardt said yes, but that GPS coordinates are no longer available to protect them from being vandalized.
 - Gracian Uhalde asked if NDOW was required to follow a public process when developing wildlife guzzlers. Gebhardt replied that the Bureau of Land Management is responsible for NEPA. Gebhardt explained that large water developments not being used are being evaluated and, in some instances, re-located. He said those too need to undergo the NEPA process, via BLM. Gebhardt said the BLM determines actual guzzler locations. Gebhardt pointed out there is no statewide list for proposed catchments available.
 - Gebhardt was asked if all NDOW guzzlers are located on public lands. He said no, some are on privately-owned properties. Gebhardt explained that a proposal to describe all proposed catchment replacements languished and processes have struggled. He cited a need for more advanced planning. It was suggested the RAC help determine the processes necessary to provide for the number of collection points that would be shared with BLM, as well as making the information available to the public. A suggestion was made that a programmatic environmental assessment (EA) be developed for the proposed sites, instead of individual EAs. Gebhardt said that lacking an identified and specific need for a new guzzler, NDOW intends to focus on maintaining its existing guzzlers. Steve Mellington suggested that the agency(ies) develop a monitoring process. Uhalde asked how the agencies coordinate to determine processes for new catchments. Herder said NDOW and the Ely District recently met at the district office and had begun discussions on how to better coordinate processes, overall.
 - The RAC decided that water needs needed to be evaluated to better provide resources to wildlife. The RAC encouraged that procedures be put in place to assist forward progress. The RAC also suggested that formal processes be established to provide for better tracking. The RAC asked how small water development effectiveness is evaluated. Gebhardt replied that cameras have been purchased to monitor small water developments.

11 a.m. Hiatt recessed the meeting.

LUNCH

1:05 p.m. Hiatt called the meeting to order and opened the public comment period.

PUBLIC COMMENT, Richard Orr, Sustainable Grazing Coalition: The purpose of Mr. Orr's addressing the RAC was to acquaint the members with the purpose and mission of the Sustainable Grazing Coalition and to ask that the coalition be placed on all BLM interested party lists for livestock grazing. Orr said the coalition reviews BLM-proposed actions to ensure that they are clear, concise, understandable, and logical in format. He suggested that BLM decision-makers maintain a close managerial eye on the processes. In regards to receiving the necessary documentation for an adequate review, Orr asked BLM to be consistent. He said not all BLM districts respond in a timely manner, which can trigger potential issues.

1:15 p.m. Mojave Desert Initiative (MDI), Ron Clementsen, Caliente Field Manager (attachment 5): Clementsen provided the RAC a brief introduction to MDI. He noted that the overall management area has been identified, but that prioritization is still in progress. The RAC asked how BLM would address drainage if the MDI management area crossed the Nevada-California state line. Clementsen responded that discussions remained to be done. He said the "fire incident commander" packet contains guidance deemed significant in fire management, otherwise criteria is developing, and being adapted and modified for BPS criteria. A Rapid Assessment Team recently completed a draft document that focuses primarily on fire, but lacks mention of noxious weeds and/or new invasive species. Weeds are a principle consideration. Clementsen said the Desert Management Team has been involved.

1:25 p.m. Healthy Lands Initiative (attachment 4, powerpoint), Mary Jo Rugwell, BLM Southern Nevada District Manager; Mike Herder, BLM Ely District Associate Manager; and Tom Seley, BLM Tonopah Field Manager: Rugwell, Herder and Seley provided the RAC a brief introduction to the Healthy Lands Initiative. The RAC asked if MDI qualified for Healthy Lands Initiative funding. The managers responded that funding would need to be requested. Rugwell described briefly experiences with the Wyoming Landscape Conservation Initiative. She pointed out the necessity of clearly defining the purpose, need and scope of a project and the necessity of implementing NEPA early in the process to better ensure success. Rugwell suggested that on-the-ground accomplishment be the focus. She also noted that funding can come at any time and project managers need to be prepared, with a plan in place if possible. Herder said meetings are currently underway on the Great Basin and Mojave Basin initiatives. Hiatt noted that none of the information provided in presentation discusses research objectives and goals.

- Eco Regional Classifications (attachment 5, powerpoint) – the RAC conducted a brief discussion on the data used to describe, and the differences in eco-region and MDI boundaries. It was noted that different data sets utilize differing methods to identify habitat. It was also noted that the Eco regional classification was developed to determine overall eco-disturbance in the West. A brief discussion ensued re: the Healthy Forest Initiative. Rick Orr stated that the NRCS has responsibility for working with landowners, as well as soil surveys and site descriptions, for use in development of state and transition models.

1:50 p.m. Update on the Ash Springs Recreation Site, Chief Mountain Recreation Area, Hell's Half Acre and Silver State Trail System; Chris Linehan, BLM Ely District Recreation Specialist:

- Ash Springs: Linehan explained that the Ash Springs Recreation Site receives about 65,000 visitors a year. Heavy use at the increasingly popular one-acre site is resulting in numerous unauthorized access points to the natural pools, trampled sensitive vegetation, accelerated stream bank erosion and increased incidences of falling trees, and increased littering and vandalism. Existing improvements are insufficient to meet current and future public demands. The BLM is scheduled this fall to ask for public input on the Ash Springs Recreation Area Management Plan. The plan would provide BLM management guidance for future planning and development of the Ash Springs Recreation Site. Linehan said BLM would hold three public meetings; at Ash Springs, and in Caliente and Las Vegas. He said bilingual specialists would be available for Hispanic speaking members of the public. Linehan said it was possible BLM could make Ash Springs a fee area. The RAC briefly discussed fee use areas and law enforcement challenges. Hiatt asked which federal agency held primary responsibility for the endangered fish species located just 30 feet from the BLM-administered site, on privately-owned property. Linehan said BLM is consulting with U.S. Fish and Wildlife. Also, documents at the (Lincoln) county recorder's office indicate three different owners of the private property. Linehan said that would be a challenge for BLM to address fish endangerment.
- Chief Mountain OHV Trail System: Linehan provided a brief update on the marked, signed and maintained trail system, and first segment of the Silver State Trail, located west of Caliente. Chief Mountain would guide OHV users to one of three trailheads accessing a 350-mile system of existing roads and trails on about 117,000 acres of public lands. Linehan said the trailheads are in place. The locations for picnic tables and shade structures are fenced in. He said BLM has contracted the earthwork, which is being conducted. The Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act (SNPLMA) provided the funding.
- Proposed Hell's Half Acre Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) System: Linehan said the trail system proposed for the rugged boulder field in the Hiko Mountain range northeast of Alamo would provide trail riding opportunities for, but not limited to, 4x4 enthusiasts commonly referred to as "rock crawlers." He said travel management planning efforts are ongoing.

- Hiatt recessed the meeting at 2:25 p.m., reconvening at 2:45 p.m. –

2:45 p.m. Update, Beatty and Tonopah Field Office discussions re: transportation planning coordination; Tom Seley, BLM Tonopah Field Manager: Seley said BLM is coordinating travel management planning efforts with the community of Beatty. He said BLM is working with the Beatty Town Advisory Board. Adequate open space, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) and off-highway vehicles (OHVs), noise

pollution and visibility (dust) are challenges, he said. The BLM and community are looking to develop trail systems that provide for habitat viewing and not high-speed driving. Seley noted that a former landfill might be available for use as a transfer site. The RAC noted that there need to be designations for protections that include, but are not limited to, the public lands, wildlife, air quality and cultural resources.

- 2:55 p.m. TSCO “Vegas to Reno” racing event; Tom Seley, BLM Tonopah Field Manager: Tom Seley provided the RAC a brief update on the recently-conducted event. Joni Eastley said event coordinators failed this year to communicate with the community of Beatty and the Beatty Town Advisory Board. Eastley said the Nye County Commission voted against passing a resolution of support for the event. She said post-race issues that were discussed by the commission included degraded road conditions, garbage, and lack of support staff. Seley said BLM will require a new environmental assessment (EA) before issuing permits for next year’s event. He suggested a new start location, and potential alternative routes. A brief discussion ensued re: the race’s impacts to the public lands. Rugwell noted that the event was the subject of discussion on a congressional bus tour conducted yesterday (Wednesday, Aug. 13). Hiatt said the issues are not limited to an individual event, referring to an upcoming event that crosses over East Pass, in the Clover Mountains. Hiatt said an alternate route would be necessary to prevent the roadway from being eroded completely away. Mellington suggested BLM take the issue to Nevada’s congressional delegation. The RAC suggested BLM address the special recreation permitting process on a statewide basis. Greg Seymour asked what entity is financially responsible for race-related damages to the public and private lands. Seley responded that it is the responsibility of the promoter. A suggestion was made to discuss the issue at the next scheduled Tri-RAC meeting.
- 3:25 p.m. White Rock Range Wilderness Management Plan and Draft Environmental Assessment follow-up; Chris Hanefeld, BLM Ely District Public Affairs Specialist: Hanefeld reminded the RAC that the 45-day public comment period ends at close of business (COB), Wednesday, Aug. 20. John Hiatt suggested the BLM consider a staging area to provide for the loading/unloading of off-highway vehicles (OHVs) to protect the “cherry-stem” roadways from further degradation.
- 3:35 p.m. Housekeeping; Chris Hanefeld, BLM Ely District Public Affairs Specialist: Hanefeld collected travel documentation from the RAC members.
- 3:40 p.m. Hiatt adjourned the meeting.

APPROVED BY:

Date: _____

John Hiatt, Chair
Mojave-Southern Great Basin
Resource Advisory Council

Attachments:

1. BLM Ely District Manager's report
2. BLM Southern Nevada District Manager's report
3. BLM Tonopah Field Manager's report
4. Presentation on Healthy Lands Initiative (power point)
5. Presentation on Eco-Regional classifications (power point)