

**The Lower Snake River District
Resource Advisory Council Meeting
Tuesday, February 18, 2003**

Council Members Present: Robert Amidon, Robert Baker, Gilbert Green, Donna Griffin, Russ Heughins, Ted Howard, William Platts, Rick Raymondi, John Robison, Chris Salove, Brian Schrage, and Don Weilmunster.

Council Members Absent: Brenda Richards, Sandra Mitchell, and Kenneth Reid

BLM Advisory Present: Daryl Albiston, Designated Federal Official (acting for Howard Hedrick); MJ Byrne, RAC Coordinator; Jenna Whitlock, Mike O'Donnell, Mitch Jaurena, Jim Schmidt, Rosemary Thomas, and Inez Dawson, Recorder.

Statements attributed to individual council members are not direct quotes unless so indicated.

Council Business and General Information: Chairman Weilmunster called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m. The agenda and various handouts were reviewed. Jack Sept, Liaison Specialist to Idaho State Director, was introduced.

Minutes: (After a couple changes) The RAC directed the Chairman to certify the Minutes of the December 4, 2002 Meeting.

Report from the Idaho State Director - Jack Sept

Jack Sept welcomed the RAC Members on behalf of State Director K Lynn Bennett. He gave a brief bio of himself, a description of his present position, and what K Lynn is looking for from the three RAC's in Idaho. K Lynn's committed to working with communities and with Secretary Norton's 4 Cs Initiative. He wants the RAC's to serve as a first line to citizen and stakeholder groups, networking statewide. Communication and keeping the public and stakeholder groups well informed on a real time basis is very important. He hopes that RAC members will continue to encourage various stakeholder groups to attend their quarterly meetings in order to get their input, solicit greater involvement and improve understanding to increase (hopefully) support for BLM and its community partnership efforts. He noted that the RAC Members need to review their charter, and work with MJ and Jerry Rohnert and forward any suggested revisions that can be forwarded Washington. Dr. Platts commented that our focus needed to be the LSRD RAC's charter.

Discussion Groups:

Donna recommended administrative support to help the RAC with taking of minutes during quarterly meetings, taking notes and gathering pertinent information for subcommittees, as well as meeting and activity coordination and planning. This is a very

active RAC group and she feels MJ needs more support with all of her other public affairs responsibilities. With this support, the RAC can publish the agenda at least two weeks before quarterly meetings so members have time to prepare for the meeting and communicate with their constituents prior to and about it. The RAC Members agreed, and Jack agreed to take this request back to the BLM State Director.

Recommendation/Action Items: Daryl will take the matter to the District Management Team about funding for the position.

Donna also reported on some statewide and local OHV meetings she attended and the issues discussed. A list was enclosed in each packet. She reported on the RAC Chairs meeting with BLM State Director, K Lynn Bennett on February 4, 2003. She reported that the RAC Chairs agreed that the three statewide issues for 2003 are the review of how Rangeland Standards and Guides are being implemented at the Field Office level, development of OHV guidelines, and Sage Grouse habitat management. Working Groups will be formed with representatives from each of the three RAC's to work with BLM statewide on these three issues. All three of Idaho's RACs will be asked to review the draft report from the working group on implementation of the Rangeland Standards and Guides, and provide comments/recommendations to the State Director prior to it being finalized.

The following are questions for the review of Rangeland Standards and Guides Implementation working group that K Lynn Bennett would like to see answered in the next 100 days.

1. Are Field Office staff and managers consistently following the Guidelines that were approved in 1997?
2. Are field staffs implementing the guidelines consistently and fairly? - If not – why?
3. Are our monitoring and assessment practices in line with regulatory requirements?
4. What are permittees and other interest groups saying during interviews with members of the working group?

Ervin Cowley, Rangeland Management Specialist, BLM-ID, reported there would be a multi-disciplinary resource workshop during the first week of April to look at the data collected during the allotment inspections, and recommendations on the grazing permit renewal process. A working draft findings report will be developed as a result of the workshop. This will be shared with the three RACs in Idaho for their review and comment. They would like to have the final report with recommendations completed for the State Director by the first of June. Erv Cowley noted that if grazing regulations change as a result of the recent Interior announcements, then, BLM's processes could change as well. The outcome of the proposed changes was unknown at this point. Bob Baker reported it would take two years before the administrative rule-making process is completed and any new regulations become law. They are still under current regulations.

Recommendation/Action Item: Donna suggested the RAC follow up with actions recommended in the December 2002 meeting minutes and approve the appointment of a chairperson for the Rangeland Standards and Guides subcommittee. The RAC agreed by

consensus to appoint Brenda Richards to chair that subcommittee. Chairman Don, on behalf of Brenda, asked for a show of hands of those RAC Members interested in serving as members of the Standards and Guides subcommittee. Erv Cowley invited interested RAC Members to participate with BLM in the field assessments. MJ will contact interested RAC Members to attend a subcommittee meeting the first week of March. Jon Foster, BLM-Idaho State Office, will set up and coordinate the RAC's review and comments of the draft report on Implementation of Rangeland Standards and Guidelines. A tri-RAC working-group meeting will be called to assist with development of statewide OHV guidelines. John will also work with Terry Heslin and Jerry Rohnert to coordinate this meeting with the three District RAC Coordinators.

Terry Heslin, Recreation Planner, Idaho lead for OHV planning, stated that when the OHV implementation strategy is in draft final form, it would be presented to the BLM Idaho Corporate Team (ICT) this year. The Strategy contains two sections: 1) policy session and 2) implementation level. The Policy would identify major needs and address OHV issues. There is a need for the RACs to get involved with regard to the development and implementation of OHV policy and develop Standards and Guides for OHV management. Donna stated that the OHV guidelines development is a statewide issue, and that the RAC's need to be involved with the development of a draft, but after the interested public, various stakeholder groups, state and local agencies have had an opportunity to provide BLM with their input.

Russ feels we should work closer and get in sync with Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG). IDFG is taking comments on All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs), and about how to manage habitat and tools of the hunt.

Discussion: Big game hunters and motorcycles damage the terrain where they shouldn't be going. With a shortage of rangers out in the field, it's hard to limit vehicles going into certain areas; the situation is critical during hunting season. We should combine resources on the ground as use goes up so all agencies and the publics become aware of the consistencies of authority. We're Public Land Managers, the Dept. of Interior and Agriculture should negotiate an MOU to work with partner agencies. Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation (IDPR) should also be involved to address wildlife harassment, which is a prohibited and illegal activity.

RAC Chair Don Weilmunster announced he would be attending the next meeting of the Chairs of the three RACs in Idaho with K Lynn Bennett on April 8, 2003. He has also received an invitation from Kathleen Clarke to attend the next National RAC meeting in Washington, D.C., April 21-23, 2003. Don said a number of RAC Chairs he had spoken with at their last meeting had agreed to request that their Coordinators also attend these national meetings. The RAC agreed by consensus that Don should ask K Lynn that MJ, attend the national meeting in April.

Sub-Committee Reports

Sage Grouse Habitat Management - Rick Raymondi

It was reported that there is not enough information showing that the western sage grouse is an endangered or threatened species. A genetics study resulted in showing no difference between the eastern and western subspecies. Russ suggested protocol for working groups and protocol to handle funding. Dr. Platts agreed on the need to move from planning to actions on the ground. We need to increase communications with other agencies involved with species and habitat management. Donna stated that BLM's efforts to preserve and protect sage grouse habitat is a statewide and national priority. She reminded the RAC that it was one of the three statewide issues that the Idaho RACs will work on together in 2003. OHV use should be prohibited in areas where known lecs exist and during spring nesting periods.

A letter was sent nominating RAC Member Dr. Bill Platts to serve on the Idaho Sage Grouse Habitat Management Advisory Committee. Rick thanked MJ for drafting and hand delivering the letter to Idaho Department of Fish and Game in a timely manner. (Note: It was learned after the meeting that he was appointed to the Advisory Committee.)

Resource Management Plans – Gil Green

The Desired Future Conditions Meetings held during the first week of December 2002, in Bruneau, Boise, and Kuna were well attended. The BLM received good comments and the forum provided good public interaction. Mike O'Donnell, LSRD RMP Team Lead, discussed the "Reflections" Workshop held January 29 regarding the Bruneau and Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area RMPs. The purpose of the meetings was to receive and evaluate the progress achieved towards meeting public expectations in response to a survey of stakeholders, by the Institute for Conflict Resolution, in early 2002. The RMP team uses facilitators for public meetings for meeting support.

OHV and Transportation Management – Donna Griffin

Donna has been attending Topical Workshops and reported some sub-groups and agencies are very active. She says IDPR is working to pass legislation that will provide a better definition of an All Terrain Vehicle and on an OHV management area demonstration project. Jim Schmidt, LSRD's Trails Specialist, discussed the mapping in Owyhee Field Office. He and Jason Sutter, ECO/GIS-OHV for LSRD, started digitizing the most used areas and designated trails in Owyhee County. Some trails should be closed or used as limited areas. Information collected from all field verification indicates the Owyhee front is used most heavily by OHV traffic. We have to find a way to accommodate trucks and heavy equipment. Jim told the RAC there are thousands of miles of user created roads and trails in Owyhee County. A cross-country motorcycle race at Rabbit Creek is being held March 8 and 9, 2003.

Jenna Whitlock, Owyhee Field Office Manager, discussed the status of a new RMP Travel Plan for recreational land-use and trail routing. It needs to go through a public hearing and review process. She also talked about a possible funding source that would

allocate \$ 500,000 per year to the project. At first 60% will be used to complete the study, and 40% for deferred maintenance. After this year they will spend less on the study and more on maintenance. Donna suggested that staff make sure that the existing money does not go to another project. The \$500,000 plus the existing allocation needs to be spent on this project with all of it eventually going into mapping, signage, education and work on the ground. The RAC asked Jenna to report back to them annually on how this money is being spent.

River Recreation Management – Donna Griffin

Payette River Fee Demonstration Project handouts: List of completed projects and those approved for funding in 2003 through funding from the fee demo project. Donna discussed how funding for the projects was prioritized on the handout. Once the money runs out for the year, work on other projects must wait until the next year.

Actions: The RAC unanimously approved this year's project list and priorities as presented, as well as a reduction in the cost of an Annual Pass from \$30 to \$20. A letter to U.S. Senator Larry Craig urging his support of the Payette River Fee Demonstration Project was reviewed by the RAC and approved. Donna agreed to mail it to Senator Craig's office.

Fire and Fuels Management – Rosey Thomas

Rosey Thomas, District Fire Management Officer, provided an update on implementation of the National Fire plan regarding communities at risk and county mitigation plans, fuels projects and budget, and rural fire assistance. She also brought the RAC current information on the land use plan review process that would indicate the level and scope of work needed to update/revise the district's Fire Management Plan (FMP). She indicated that it would be appropriate for the RAC Fire and Fuels Management sub-committee to meet and line out a schedule and process for involvement as the FMP is addressed over the next 1½ years.

Panel Discussions on Drought Conditions in Idaho

Precipitation Forecasts – Water Supply Specialist, Ron Abramovich – Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

Ron reported on the seasonal outlook as drought conditions continue to get worse in southern Idaho. Of particular concern is the hydrologic drought, the lack of surface water flow and ground water recharge. Warm January temperatures resulted in rain falling at elevations over 7,000 feet and getting much needed moisture back into the hydrologic cycle. The lowest snow packs currently are half of normal in the Boise River Basin and Oakley basins. The highest snow packs remain in the Little Wood River and Big Lost River basins at 105% of average. The NRCS coordinates the cooperative Snow Survey Program and provides water supply forecasts. NRCS gathers data through a network of 76 automated SNOTEL (SNOW TELemetry) sites and 100 manually measure snow courses. SNOTEL data provides today's snow pack as a percent of average for the day. This site also provides links to current water year and historic snow data. More information on Idaho's ever-changing water supply is available on their web site at <http://www.id.nrcs.usda.gov/snow>

Hal Anderson: Hal reminded the group that 1977 was the worst drought year in history; it was only 25% of average. Idaho had good water years after that until 1987, and then fell back into drought conditions years until 1994. Parts of Central Idaho are near normal precipitation. El Nino and– La Nino affects the average moisture levels and snow pack. If southern Idaho were to experience normal or higher levels of spring precipitation it would increase run-off and improve water supplies during the remainder of the year.

Bureau Chief of Vegetation Management, Idaho Department of Agriculture – Glen Secrist: Glen reported that the extremes in drought and precipitations levels aren't as rare as people think. The main concerns they have are 1) poor vegetation; 2) some streams go all year long; and 3) insects can be a real problem. They all have an impact on Idaho Rangeland. The Department of Agriculture will be having a meeting Friday Feb. 21 to share information and work on minimizing resource damage resulting from drought conditions. The state of Utah is taking the lead on initiatives that will improve coordination and communication with grazing permittees in order to help balance their needs and maintains healthy rangeland conditions.

Public Comment Period

Katie Fite- Committee for Idaho's High Desert addressed the RAC. She expressed concern about proposed rangeland grazing regulation changes that were recently announced by BLM's National Director, Kathleen Clarke. Specifically she talked stated her concerns about locked gates and transfer of surface title to permittees. She encouraged the RAC to ask BLM why the closest public meeting to discuss the proposed changes was being held in Reno, Nevada. She urged the RAC to ask that a public meeting be held in Idaho. MJ agreed to mail a copy of the information she had cited about the proposed regulatory changes and Director Clarke's speech to all the RAC Members.

DISTRICT DROUGHT PROCEDURES - John Biar, District Rangeland Management Specialist, and Erv Cowley, BLM-ID Rangeland Management Specialist

The RAC was reminded that BLM received National Direction concerning drought through an Instruction Memorandum No. 2003-074 that was issued on January 28, 2003 to all field offices. This basically focused staff in the LSRD in dealing with drought related issues within the district. Field office rangeland management staffs were instructed to base their drought and livestock management assessments on a site-specific, case-by-case basis, keeping mind the need to balance the long-term health and productivity on the rangelands, and potential economic hardships on the permittees. In working with each affected operator, staffs were encouraged to identify opportunities for flexibility in management that will not impair the health of the rangelands. They need to involve all interested parties including livestock operators, state and local agencies and the interested publics in their discussions and the assessment process.

From early fall to the end of November, of the approximately 144 allotments that are permitted for fall/winter grazing, operators in 43 of these allotments (approximately 30%) had voluntarily reduced livestock numbers, reduced time of use, or some had even taken complete non-use for the fall/winter grazing season due to drought conditions. These voluntary reductions demonstrated the ranchers' willingness to work with BLM to manage for long-term rangeland health.

Current activities within the LSRD for spring 2003 grazing plans in regards to drought include a bi-weekly update of current drought conditions and long-range forecast for adequate moisture to end the drought being distributed to field office staff that deal daily with grazing administration. This bi-weekly report will continue through the summer. In addition, a district wide "Drought Letter" has been prepared and is in final review awaiting signature prior to being sent to allotment permittees, staff from Congressional and Gubernatorial offices, state and local agencies, the RAC members, and interested publics. Ongoing consultations with permittees, state and local agencies, and the interested public will continue and likely increase as drought conditions persist within the LSRD. These discussions will explore opportunities for flexibility in management that will not impair the health of the rangelands for meeting all multiple use needs.

Field Office Highlights

Jarbidge Field Office – Eddie Guerrero

Eddie discussed some of the short-term vs. long-term monitoring on trend plots and that the forage base is still there. He went into detail about the proposed Browns Bench Wind Energy project in the Jarbidge area and the many steps required before an Environmental Assessment (EA) and Finding of No Significant Impact are published. The decision is to issue a right-of-way to RES North America LLC (RES) for four meteorological tower sites on public lands in the Brown's Bench area. The wind energy industry has put together maps for various parts of the country that show preliminarily where potential exists for wind farms. Because this site is only for testing a monitoring wind data, the impacts should be minimal. This action is consistent with the existing laws, regulations, BLM planning, and State and local planning and zoning.

By working in partnership with DOE to locate and identify sources of renewable energy on public lands, we maximize our efforts in implementing the president's National Energy Policy.

Recommendation/Action Item: Eddie will mail to all RAC Members a copy of the draft EA on the proposed Wind Energy project located in the Brown's Bench area of the Jarbidge Field Office. He asked the RAC through their Sage Grouse Habitat Management subcommittee to provide him comments/recommendations on the EA. Daryl recommended that Jim Clark, Wildlife Management Biologist, provide additional information to the Sage Grouse Habitat Management sub-committee and keep the RAC informed as events progress towards the development of an environmental impact statement. RAC would like to take a field trip to Brown's Bench to look closer at the

proposed project, location of anemometers and potential impacts to sage grouse habitat. This topic will be discussed at the next Wings and Roots Native Consultation meeting scheduled for February 20, 2003.

Four Rivers Field Office – Daryl Albiston

The Boise Foothills and acquisition is proceeding. Several land exchanges are in the final stages of agreement and completion. With so many OUST lawsuits still pending; we need to find another way to address the spread of noxious weeds. OUST will probably never be used again.

Owyhee Field Office – Jenna Whitlock

The Owyhee Field Office and US Attorney's Office are currently working on the annual report to Judge Winmill on compliance with Interim Measures and permit review schedule. High on this year's list is priority allotments. Another sizeable workload is the ongoing development of the Bruneau RMP. To date, the completion list includes completion of scoping, issue identification, planning criteria, and Desired Future Conditions, with heavy emphasis on public involvement to build greater consensus for the final product. She thanked the RAC Members for their continued interest and involvement in the development of both RMPs. She identified some scheduled early spring prescribed burns in the Owyhee Field Office area. Much of our their fire planning is done through the Standards & Guides process.

Garden Valley Park and Recreation Area Proposal - Jamie Anderson

The Garden Valley Recreation District was formed by citizen initiative in May of 2000. It began as a grassroots citizen effort to acquire a parcel of land for a community park. Citizens wanted to broaden this vision to include a trails system in developing their District Long-Range Plan.

The proposed project includes opportunity to increase physical access and provide community wide opportunities for pedestrians and bicycles. An impact will be made on year round opportunities for non-motorized activity. The project will design infrastructure for physical activity into the community through transportation enhancements, land conservation and recreation. No other close to home affordable venue exists like this in the community served.

A component of this project includes funding for easement purchases by Boise County on behalf of the Recreation District from Title III within the Craig-Wyden Act. Boise County is working with the Garden Valley Recreation District to present a project to the public to begin funding easements for non-motorized trails. Senator Craig has a keen interest as it addresses specifically one of the five authorized uses which directly benefits the community impacted most by the loss of timber revenue from reduced harvesting on federal land.

The trail system begins first on the private lands and then extends to opportunities onto Public Land. BLM ownership along this valley edge is seen as the next step. Including

this type of pedestrian infrastructure through private then public ownership for future discussions is desired. We request the Resource Advisory Council support this discussion in their River and Recreation Subcommittee and make recommendations to the BLM as appropriate.

Chairman Don adjourned the meeting at 5:00 p.m.

**The next meeting will be held at the Marsing Community Center, Marsing, Idaho.
The meeting date agreed upon is May 21, 2003.**