

**Lower Snake River District
Resource Advisory Council Meeting
Idaho State Office, Sagebrush/Ponderosa Room
February 24, 2004**

Draft Minutes

Council Members Present: Don Weilmunster, Donna Griffin, Robert Amidon, Chris Salove, Bill Platts, Sandra Mitchell, Russ Heughins, Ted Howard, John Robison, Robert Baker, Kenneth Reid, Brenda Richards.

Council Members Absent: Richard Raymondi, Brian Schrage.

BLM Advisory Present: Glen Secrist, District Manager, LSRD; M.J. Byrne, Public Affairs Specialist and RAC Coordinator, BLM-LSRD.

Other BLM Staff Present: Jenna Whitlock, Owyhee Field Office Manager; Rosey Thomas, Four Rivers Field Office Acting Director and LSRD Fire and Aviation Office Manager; Jim Schmid, Trails Specialist, BLM-LSRD; Ervin Crowley, ISO; Terry Heslin, ISO; Andy Delmus, Acting Fire Office Manager; Sam Matisse, Wild Horse Specialist; Mike Courtney, Jarbidge Range Specialist; Mike Truden, Senior Realty Specialist, LSRD.

Other: Steve Goddard, Sage Grouse subcommittee member; Becky Desmond, notetaker.

Statements attributed to individuals are not direct quotes unless so indicated. (Also, please note that some reports were given in an order differing from the agenda because of arrival and departure times of the presenters.)

Council Business, General Information, Opening Remarks, and Certification of Minutes:

Chairman Weilmunster called the meeting to order at 9:05 am. He informed the group that council member Brian Schrage had resigned. MJ Byrne wished him well and reported that he has finished his undergraduate degree in Environmental Sciences with close to a 4-point average and is working on his master's degree. He also was recently married and still serves as an emergency paramedic.

Minutes for the November meeting were approved and certified with no corrections or additions. Minutes for the August meeting were approved, subject to a spelling correction (Minter) and to the inclusion of omitted remarks made by Ted Howard at that meeting. **ACTION:** Ted, MJ, and Mary Jones will reconcile this inclusion from notes taken at the meeting. Ted also pointed out that his tribe's presentation was not included on the agenda. **ACTION:** Bill Platts recommended they be on the agenda for the next meeting and this was agreed to by the group.

Election of Officers for 2004-2005:

ACTION: Don nominated Donna Griffin as vice-chairman; this was seconded by Bill Platts, and the Members approved. Bill nominated Don for the chairmanship, which was seconded by Russ Heughins, and approved by the group. (Bill clarified that the RAC charter only allows for yearly elections, but the

agenda had indicated elections through 2006.) Robert Baker complimented both Don and Donna for an excellent past year's work. Don thanked Glen Secrist for bringing a renewed enthusiasm to BLM business.

Review and Finalization of RAC 2004 Annual Work Plan--Donna Griffin:

Donna discussed the plan (included in member's meeting notebook). She said the plan was formulated from member's requests and comments, and it includes three top issues-- sage grouse, fire management/juniper management, and OHV use. Special issue projects include drought, Payette River Recreation and Wild Water Safety Program, Fee Demonstration Program, wind energy, proposed grazing regulations, district fire management plan, review of National Conservation Area and Bruneau Resource Management Plans, and budget priorities for BLM. She said she basically wants to figure a way to actually "get projects done on the ground, not just get constant updates on paper." She opened discussion to the floor but there was none. The group approved the 2004 work plan. **ACTION:** MJ will work with Donna to get a draft copy of the plan to members in time for the TRI-RAC chair meeting scheduled for March 26th.

Glen suggested that a summary of fire management and juniper management and encroachment be presented to the group by Rich Miller and Tony Svejcar. They have pictures to accompany new empirical data that can support anecdotal data collected over the years. Glen wants the RAC to emphasize the juniper issue because of the new scientific data available and because federal dollars have been allocated for it. He mentioned that a big issue in combination with juniper is the "Little Ice Age" discussed at a recent juniper conference. He said that fire is not the only answer--there must be inclusion of other techniques such as hand-cutting, use of out-of-work loggers, and emphasis on juniper products. He suggested the RAC sponsor a day-long symposium for subject experts to discuss the various issues involved with juniper management and encroachment. Bill liked the idea as an educational tool, and suggested that maps be made available showing high and low priority areas for juniper control. Glen said the Upper Columbia Report indicated that 20,000 acres per year needed to be done for there to be any positive impact at the landscape level. A lengthy discussion ensued among many in the group concerning public education on juniper management and techniques, effect on animal species, destructive effects of the old chaining methods, value of field trips into juniper ecology areas, and the need to do something quickly. Donna said a timeline was included in the strategic planning for 2004 handout. **ACTION:** Sandra Mitchell moved and Brenda Richards seconded a motion that the group form a committee to work with the BLM in planning a symposium and a field tour. *Glen is the lead and Sandra is co-lead. Brenda, Russ, Steve Goddard, and Kenneth Reid are also on this committee.* Robert Baker suggested that lots of photo documentation be included in the symposium and Brenda said her husband, Tony, has photos of juniper observation areas spanning 30 years.

Glen then discussed community concern over the Pixley Basin burn. **ACTION:** He asked for some RAC members to accompany him on a trip to Pixley Basin around mid-May or the first of June and will give adequate advance notice. Don thought the aforementioned committee should all go with him.

BREAK

Don introduced Nate Helm, natural resources coordinator for Sen Larry Craig.

Update--BLM-Idaho's Organizational Refinement:

Glen discussed this and handed out copies of the organizational refinement. (He also sent around a good article in Utah State magazine on Kathleen Clarke, national director, written by Jane Koemer.) He said the new district office in Twin Falls was coming along and a vacancy announcement for the district manager has been published. The Lower Snake River District will be renamed as the Boise District. A Bruneau Field Office will be reestablished. A search/study is on for a Marsing site for the Owyhee Field Office and its staffing assignments. He said there were several ad hoc study teams. BLM's Idaho State Director, K Lynn Bennett, he said, has pledged to accomplish the organizational refinement within the existing state budget if at all possible. Howard Hedrick will present recommendations for Marsing by July, and his ad hoc committee was looking at a range of options from "no action" to "establishment of a permanent office." Rosey Thomas has moved over to be the Acting Four Rivers Field Office Manager with Daryl Albiston's retirement, and could submit her application for the position to stay there. He may need another field manager for either Bruneau or the Owyhee Office. He talked about upper BLM management, which is either administrative (budgetary) or operative (field services). He said there was discussion about hiring an additional wildlife biologist at the District level, who would coordinate sage grouse issues. Brenda thought this would fit in with President Bush's administration and its national strategy plan for sage grouse. Glen said that BLM needed to be more pro-active and stay ahead of these issues, and would like to get the RAC's thoughts on it.

Bill: agreed, said LWG's are doing good work but need more help and money from BLM.

Glen: In order to get the Wildlife Biologist position, the District will have to give up a position (through attrition), as there will not be any new positions created as a result of the Refinement.

Bob: Susan Giannattino really helped on the slickspot peppergrass issue, and said the new sage grouse person should have both biology background AND administrative authority to bring resources together.

Steve: agreed.

Russ: said Fish and Game recently hired a person such as this and has heard good comments.

Bill: heard that money is being moved around and thought that BLM needed to recover that money.

Russ: something needs to be on the ground soon because of the 90-day decision due next month on sage grouse listing.

Robert Amidon: will the new Twin Falls district be in a separate RAC, and if so, will we still be able to get their information?

John Robison: is BLM cooperating with Forest Service? In Sawtooth they will share the same office. *He requested additional information on management of federal lands under different authorities.*

Ted: What is cost of new building in Marsing and in Twin Falls?

Glen: depends on whether they are leased or temporary status. If a site is leased from GSA, that agency provides the money. This will help BLM stay within budget.

Russ: budget data for Marsing has not been provided to public. He wondered who is the public being provided for by the Marsing office?

Glen: said answers to those questions were from everyone from congressional committees to public-input meetings. He said the state director would know the details of the public outreach sessions, but he (Secrist) would not revisit the decision--it's been made.

Ted: what new employees will be hired?

Glen: No new positions. Staffing will be handled by attrition and/or relocation. BLM will actually have fewer employees, from 750 to 745 to 740, eventually.

Chris Salove: when the office is actually in the resource area, many man-hours will be saved because of much less drive time. He said many on-the-ground staff have requested less drive time.

Ted: will the RAC and the tribes be involved in staffing?

Glen: referred to categories of positions as permanent or part-time. No lay-offs--will exhaust all administrative options before forcing someone to relocate to Marsing. He said that last year \$10,000,000 overbudget occurred in wild horse management, and that the money has to come from somewhere else this year. First time this has happened. Of this BLM incurred \$500,000 deficit. He praised Sam Matisse in doing a great job in the latest horse gathering, said they hope to adopt out 19 more horses by March and then send the rest to Salt Lake.

Brenda: agreed with Chris. Said that RAC has always said in the past that more people need to be on the ground in the field.

MJ: said that they have been hoping to get a fourth RAC in time to meet the Federal Register's announcement of four RAC's in Idaho. K Lynn Bennet still meets with all four RAC chairs to share information, in answer to Robert Amidon's question above.

Public Comments Period:

Al Logozs: asked if the BLM had begun agreements on grazing decisions that were appealed by the permittees after the original decisions. He feels BLM has violated public interest by not informing the public on renegotiated grazing decisions. He said there was no documentation of change in agreements and how they fit with the original EA's. He said the BLM should be more forthcoming in explaining why the end grazing management has been so different from the original.

Bob: Whom do you represent?

Al: Ada County Fish and Game League. We did not have a problem with the original decisions.

Steve: having worked with state attorney's office, if someone appeals, a new decision can be made and is a done deal without a new analysis.

Bill: said BLM is lax in keeping RAC up-to-date on grazing decisions. Said BLM needs to let RAC know what the process is. As a deer hunter, he has covered many allotments and sees "problems."

John: said national conservation groups are concerned about this problem, and the wilderness study areas, and RS247's, and settlements that cut the public out of the process.

Brenda: said that RAC should be cautioned that much legal information is not available, and it should not jump to conclusions.

Sandra: RAC should have copy of grazing regulations.

Brenda: is RAC on list of "interested publics"?

Glen: 1) Settlements and interested publics have nothing to do with the mail system. BLM is not a post office. 2.) Grazing decisions and implementation is a unique and well-defined process. 3.) Every decision of last two years has been appealed. Example: Last week a decision was appealed by everyone. It goes to the IBLA. If there is no settlement a hearing will be held. Since any hearing is expensive, the IBLA judge usually asks for a final attempt to settle with any appellants, and the BLM tries to do this. BLM (Glen) issues a determination of NEPA adequacy. He said all the latest appeals will be sent to everyone--interested publics, appellants, interveners, etc.

Brenda: RAC should take the responsibility to get available information.

Steve: if BLM issues settlements, is it given to the public and can the public appeal?

Glen: the key is simple. If a settlement agreement is outside NEPA, BLM must analyze the action. If it's within NEPA, BLM does not have to reanalyze. BLM has the authority to do range improvements with just an EA.

Al: The Hardtrigger settlement is completely different from the EA.

Glen: BLM disagrees.

Bob: In all fairness to the people we employ to manage the land, we make the problems worse by our eagerness to do what WE think is right. We need to allow these people to manage the land, and we can't

micromanage them. It forces the BLM to spend all its time and resources responding to complaints rather than managing the land. Is concerned about the trend to appeal everything and how it takes away from an already limited budget.

Bill: I still don't understand the process.

Glen: Once there is notice of a hearing, the judge asks for one more chance to settle. BLM tries to do this. I assign a settlement team.

Bill: more than just range people are needed on the team.

Glen: I and the range people know what the issues are, and what the EA says the conditions are.

Sandra: are settlement meetings open to the public?

Glen: no.

Steve: one concern is that if someone appeals, the other party who was satisfied doesn't see the new testimony. BLM should say what the new decision is based on.

John: asked about intervener status.

Jenna Whitlock: Intervener status is different now than it was before Jan. 9, 2004. It's not automatic.

Steve: if someone signs on as intervener, they get information.

Chris: it is the expense of the appealing party to get the notice to everyone.

Brenda: it is important to understand that if you don't appeal, you lose your position at the table. It's a \$3-5 cost for each notice to the listed people.

Steve: if everyone appeals, it creates a "God-awful mess."

MJ: referred to the meeting notebook and the "Standards and Guides Assessment Process." **ACTION:** She will provide a copy of grazing regulations to the RAC.

John: in Hardtrigger the issue is NEPA adequacy.

Al: That's the main argument.

Jenna: BLM will determine if settlement is NEPA-adequate.

Al: BLM has done a good job with EA's.

Update--Report on BLM-Idaho's Review on Rangeland Standards and Guidelines, Implementations, and Recommendations--Ervin Crowley, ISO:

Ervin presented slides that matched a handout included in the meeting notebook. He said it took a long time to look at the internal process. They reviewed all 11 Idaho field offices to see if rules were being followed and if it was consistent across the state. He referred to eleven findings. These were further explained in the handout. Some new or different shifts in BLM strategy are that a permittee's proposal will be analyzed in NEPA-compliance decisions; that the BLM's responsibility is to work with permittees; that there is a move toward more outcome-based decisions and away from a prescriptive approach. There were several questions from the group.

Brenda, as chairman of the RAC subcommittee on Rangeland Standards and Guides, thanked Ervin for his presentation. She wanted to know what role the RAC subcommittee should play. Erv said this was hard to know because so much is internal, and has legal and political implications and instructions. Brenda asked for K Lynn Bennett's direction on what role RAC should have. Bill also wanted to know what role RAC should play. He said the subcommittee put out 8 standards in a draft report and is now working on the final. He asked what the BLM's method for evaluating standards was and where they were on whether allotments are meeting standards and guides. Glen said the basic toolbox is the same and referred to a host of indicators. Stubble height is still in the toolbox. The issue of a time frame is the hardest. Bill wanted to know if he could pinpoint a map location and find out if it is meeting standards. Erv said they are on a 10-year review period of finding out on each allotment.

ACTION: Glen said he would report to the RAC subcommittee by next month. Brenda offered the subcommittee's help in whatever way was conducive. Jenna said that over a ten-year schedule 44 of 68 permits were reviewed in Owyhee Field Office. Erv said all would be reviewed by 2009. Ted thanked Ervin for his presentation and said that tribes should be included all through the document. Erv said they were. Steve wondered what was meant by "critical measurement." Erv replied that every time they tried to simplify complex systems they got into trouble. Russ wondered what happened when someone did not conform to standards. Erv said there were 4180 standards as part of "terms and conditions" and that the regulations had two judgements. If standards were being met, how to continue? If not, is progress being made? If there was no progress, then something must be done within one year. He said that stubble height is not backed up by science as being an "absolute trigger." He reiterated that they are moving toward a "desired-outcome" base.

LUNCH BREAK

MJ introduced her aunt, Myrna Benton, as her new BLM volunteer and thanked her for her contributions

BLM-ID's OHV STRATEGIC PLAN-FINAL DRAFT--TERRY HESLIN, ISO:

Terry gave a presentation on the national OHV strategy and on Idaho's progress, summarized in the "Purple Book," (included in the meeting notebook for members). Terry is a member of the National Trails and Travel Management Team. He explained the management organization and showed the goals of the Purple Book: to improve access and to protect resources. He said the Forest Service and Fish and Game, as well as BLM, all agree that "go where you want" days are over. There are too many socio-resource problems for that. He said specificity would be handled at the local level, by annual work plans; that the Owyhee Front was as complex as any in the nation; that he was glad that Jim Schmid was now a permanent BLM employee and had made great progress in that area. He said every state was moving toward a trail and travel plan; that "open" designations would probably go to "limited" with a schedule of change to the designations; and that the RAC should address questions or comments to himself, MJ, Donna, or Barry Rose.

A lengthy discussion followed, with most questions and comments relating to conflict of use (such as motorized versus equestrian), enforcement of rules or designations, education of public as to safety and proper use of resources, and where funding would come from for all these. Terry said enforcement was a huge issue nationally but that so far there was no special funding or appropriations for it. He said enhanced field presence was essential. Bob suggested an MOU with National Guard A-10's. Bill wanted to know what the actual rider will get from the BLM as guidelines. Jim Schmid is working on maps, signing, and trail maintenance. Russ said there was a lot of support from the hunting community for control of ATV use by hunters. Terry said the perception is that the BLM is behind the curve on OHV issues, and is catching up to the Forest Service. John emphasized education programs in the schools and the "Tread Lightly" program. Ted said the tribes are against increased OHV use, and that it ruins the land and pushes wildlife out. He said that archaeological and culturally sensitive sites have seen increased vandalism and wondered why "recreation was being elevated to the point that it is allowed to destroy the habitat for everyone?" He said they have seen hunters run game back and forth all day long, with little sportsmanship. He said common sense should indicate that OHV use should cease now, before more habitat is ruined, then be allowed to resume AFTER rules and designations are in place. He said the tribes speak for those who cannot speak for themselves--animals and the land. He said they believe that no one should have the right to diminish habitat just for recreation.

John said the education process would take awhile and wondered what options BLM has now for emergency closures without going through a 3- or 4- year process. What can the RAC do? Terry said procedures were codified but temporary. Glen said BLM has some authority but it is very complicated because of other public disputes. He said BLM needed good evidence for closures, and that it was hard to tell people they can't ride in an area when the RMP shows they can. Steve thought the sage grouse issue could result in some trail closures at certain times of the year. Glen concurred that the need to head off a listing could result in some closures if government entities agree, as in the slickspot perppergrass agreements. Brenda said it was imperative that any map show private lands clearly. Russ said a budget for enforcement was needed from Washington DC. One enforcement person per field office won't "cut it." The group thanked Terry for his presentation.

Progress Report on OHV Activities in the Owyhee Field Office--Jim Schmid:

Following the above spirited discussion, Jim commented that he was glad the group was "passionate" about OHV's. He went on to give a brief and also spirited summary of current activity in the Owyhee Front concerning OHV's and trails. Trail dozing has begun to knock down "whoops" at Rabbit Creek, and will begin soon at Hemingway Butte. He showed new signage and coding. He said the goal is to keep at least 80% of the use on maintained trails to help stop resource damage. The crews work in winter because they need moisture content on the trails. A scientific team will analyze areas for possible trail closure or limitation due to botanical, biological, or archaeological sensitivity. Example: no racing during lek and nesting periods. Maps showing a designated trail system will be drawn and made available to the public. **ACTION:** The RAC OHV subcommittee will be given a "show me" tour and lunch during the first part of April. Questions and comments from the group followed.

Donna wanted volunteers to be used to finish the designated trails, and recommended the hiring of only two "ologists" so that funding could be used mainly for trail maintenance on the ground rather than for more research. Jim replied that 50 miles were to be done this year, and volunteers would be nice, but as a federal agency he needed the "ologists" for more research so that more trails could be added to the system. Brenda wanted an explanation on the "wide look" of some of the trails. Jim said they were in the process of "narrowing" into trails. Donna encouraged more emphasis on Rabbit Creek, and wanted BLM to try for matching funds and to try to develop outdoor education sites, such as around leks. Robert A. agreed with the "education, then enforcement, approach" and said horsemen would volunteer. Jim said personal responsibility had to go along with education and enforcement. In answer to a question on the appeals process if someone disagrees with a trail designation, Jenna said the NEPA and EA process applies.

Remarks from Sen. Craig's Office on Recreation Fee Demo Programs:

Nate Helms from Sen. Craig's office commented on MJ's question of a rumor of congressional cut-off of recreational funds. He said Sen. Craig has made real decisions on where he stands and is currently in disagreement on recreational fees. He said everyone wants services but no one wants to pay for them. New legislation to collect fees is supported by Craig, but he will not support "disbursed recreation fees." Example: he supports fees for an improved area such as a campground or parking lot, but not for disbursed trail use. This does not affect the Payette River program as of now. Criteria for Craig are: 1) local buy-in, 2) nominal fees, and 3) cash back to local investment. John wanted to know if a "designated OHV trail" could count as an improvement. Nate said fee designation is also focused on an "ability to collect." He thought perhaps there was a 3% tax dollar opportunity for trails. **ACTION:** He

asked for RAC input into congressional hearings on the matter. He also introduced Tina Shaw, honor student from Eagle High School, as a new intern.

Subcommittee Reports:

Sage Grouse Habitat Management--Dr. Platts: This Rac's subcommittee will give the Brown's Bench area to another RAC. He said the statewide sage grouse working group is determining how local working groups (LWG's) should spend the \$400,000 from the Office of Species Conservation. They have finalized an application for LWG's to help them prioritize and choose projects. He discussed various activities going on, ranging from weather station research to reseeding projects to landowner surveys, etc. He said there would be more funding next year. Michelle Commons is developing maps for sage grouse core and habitat areas. He said the Fish and Game is going through "forgotten lands" to set up working groups in those areas. There is a move to track the West Nile Virus down the western face of the Rockies, looking for indicator birds that might predict an effect on sage grouse. Steve also discussed the draft outline for the statewide conservation group and how LWG's fit in. He said on May 15th the rangewide assessment on sage grouse population and habitat is due, and seems to show that where there is hunting the sage grouse population is higher than where there is no hunting. Bill said that Tom Hemker's (F&G Director) draft will be made available to the public soon. Brenda asked why hunting, which actually kills birds, is not considered to affect the mortality rate. Bill said that in comparison to other mortality factors, hunting is low. Steve said that hunting, done correctly, substitutes for natural mortality. Done incorrectly, it adds to mortality. Bob thought that since hunting is the only factor which could be controlled instantly, why not stop hunting sage grouse for awhile? He disagreed with Bill's assertion that hunters provide the best information. Steve said that as long as hunting is not additive to the mortality rate, it's okay for sage grouse. He said regulation should be done only in small areas with small populations. More argument ensued on this point, particularly about why hunters think the birds they shoot would be ones that would die anyway. How would they know?

Resource Management Plans--Jenna Whitlock: She reported on the RMP status for the Bruneau area and provided a handout. **ACTION:** She said RAC members would receive a draft around March 9th and that comments would be needed by March 19th. Public meetings will begin in April. In answer to questions on the handout: Yes, the entire RAC wants to receive the draft of the summary table. Yes, the RAC is interested in the April meetings. Jenna and MJ both gave the RAC a heads up for more media coverage and also that the Gannett News Organization wanted phone numbers of RAC members in order to get their comments on the proposed new grazing regulations.

Owyhee Field Office Report: Jenna continued, handing out a summary of allotments to be worked on in 2004, plus the status of 2003 allotments. Glen recognized and publicly appreciated the extraordinary efforts of Jenna and her staff in getting out the record number of decisions. He also mentioned that there was a possible exchange of federal lands in the South Mountain area for land somewhere else, handled through the Idaho Department of Lands, and there would possibly be an EA required. Jenna also reported that an EA or an EIS will be done for a 300,000- acre area at Juniper Mountain for fire rehabilitation. John preferred an EIS, and also wanted PRE-decisional draft EA's. Glen replied that action needed to be done NOW on the fire plan, citing a 15-year Purdue study that concluded oats were good for horses as an example of too much research and not enough action.

Rangeland Standards and Guides Report--Brenda Richards: She said most of this was covered by Ervin Crowley's report. She pointed out that the report on ranch-level economic analysis by Neil Rimby

(in the meeting notebook) was well-presented at the public meeting in Boise on Jan. 31. She thought it would be a worthwhile 30-45 minute presentation to the RAC. **ACTION:** After some discussion, MJ said she would see if Rimby was available for the May meeting.

OHV and Transportation Management--Sandra Mitchell: She reported that the subcommittee did not meet and that the subject was already covered well today.

River Recreation and Resource Management--Donna Griffin: Donna discussed her handout on the Payette River Work Group. It shows the status of recreation fee demonstration projects (approved, completed, or proposed). In answer to a question from John, she said the Chief Parrish asphalt project was completed. MJ said there would be more river and safety programs coming up and to watch for media spots and TV ads.

Jarbidge Field Office Reports:

Mike Courtney: Mike reported he was in the process of setting the AML (appropriate management level) for the **Wild Horse Herd Management Area**. He reported on the high number (250 head, in big herds of over a hundred horses) in the Twin Buttes allotment south of Glenn's Ferry. There are 8 permittees on 80,000 acres there, and there is an abundance of forage and lots of water available. But the land is now showing resource damage from horses (mainly patches of bare ground) and he is talking to public groups to get their ideas on how to better manage the horses. In answer to Bob's question about the quality of the horses, Mike said they periodically introduce other studs into the groups so there is not much evidence of inbreeding. Discussion included opening gates in allotments in a kind of synchronization schedule, or separating the big herds into smaller groups and moving them into each allotment rather than in just the Twin Buttes allotment. Ranchers would support this, he said. Forage studies have been done since 1997, 2001, and 2003 and include drought conditions, in answer to Ted's questions. Mike said the RMP sets the AML at 50 head as a baseline, but both the number of horses and the number of other livestock are up. Some antelope are there also. Ted suggested that the baselines are established on too-recent data, after resource damage is already done. **ACTION:** He suggested bringing this topic to the tribes in a Wings and Roots meeting and Mike agreed. Bill asked what vegetation had been removed before crested wheat was planted. Mike said that fires had made it impossible to reestablish native grasses, but Glen said that reclamation techniques were improving and that it might be possible in the future to restore more of those native grasses. MJ referred to the news release in the meeting notebook announcing an open house for Wild Horse management issues in the Saylor Creek area at Three Island State Park on Feb. 26th.

Mike Truden: Mike reported on the status of the **Brown's Bench Wind Energy Proposal**. An EA completed in October offered RES (Renewable Energy Systems) the right-of-way for three meteorological towers, but this was appealed by Western Watersheds and Idaho Birdhunters Assoc. The IBLA dismissed the petition for a stay, but will consider it again at a full board meeting. Russ said the Idaho Wildlife Federation has put together a resolution on wind power and wildlife, and cited a California study that said birds would avoid a three-mile area on either side of a wind tower operation. He also said it is known that sage grouse avoid tall structures. Glen said this was not a full-blown wind farm, just three met. towers 6 inches in diameter. Bill said that the RAC has already submitted a statement and no further action was required. Bob wondered if other BLM lands were being considered. Glen said there was a lot of activity going on but there were lots of considerations: access, market demand, sustainability of wind. Idaho Power doesn't seem to be interested. Bill said the BLM should

identify areas where wind power should NOT be considered, for whatever reason, ahead of time. Glen said that applications must show mitigation steps or BLM would not issue permits. MJ said the meeting notebook included an article on Owyhee Front land exchanges.

Four Rivers Field Office--Rosey Thomas:

Rosey discussed her handout on the Candidate Conservation Agreement for lepidium. She said it was important to acknowledge that the lepidium agreement, which precluded a listing of the species, was the result of a partnership among governmental and nongovernmental agencies and groups. It was a cooperative effort and she said that permittees really “stepped up to the plate.” This agreement is being reported to Washington DC as a model for other listing issues. Bob added that the threat matrix to the survival of lepidium showed that fire and fire rehabilitation efforts were more of a threat than was grazing. John said his constituents were more skeptical. What happens when momentum is lost? He said a listing has more guarantees than this agreement does and wants RAC to really pay attention, and to improve the model if it is to be used as a template for agreements on other species. He also asked that the RAC be given more information on how this process worked. Rosey agreed with his points and said there would be a permanent oversight committee, and that the plan was an adaptive one with measurable results and accountability. She said she sees a definite role for the RAC. Glen added that these would not be closed meetings and that the RAC should make known what involvement it wants. Brenda said that all sides needed to have a “comfort level” to assure success. She said that permanent transects were being set up across known areas of lepidium and that the monitoring system is being set up now. The species is very sensitive to moisture content, so annual and long-term monitoring are needed.

District Fire Manager Report--LSRD Fire Update--Andy Delmus:

Andy referred to a handout in the meeting notebook, “Fact Sheet: Idaho’s Statewide Fire Management Planning Strategy.” He said the fire management plan is an interagency plan, and will be done by 2004, as directed by Congress. The Idaho plan will reaffirm the federal land management plan, and will be more comprehensive. Glen said the plan will mesh with juniper suppression strategies, and that any fire use would be NEPA site-specific. MJ wondered if the RAC fire subcommittee would be involved in a review of the plan. Andy said that the Snake River District (Owyhee area) was the last to be done, and that all districts were using the same contractor, so any comment period will be short at this point.

ACTION: Andy will give a copy of the draft to the RAC.

Future RAC Meeting Dates:

May 26, 2004, Marsing OR with the tribes (Wednesday)

August 24, 2004, Boise (Tuesday)

Spring field trip--mid-April--view OHV on-ground trail work

Summer field trip--June 25, 26, 2004--tour with Society of Range Management

Mid-May around the 20th--Pixley Basin Burn trip.

The newly formed symposium subcommittee will meet during the third week of March, possibly Thursday, the 18th, in Boise at 10 am. **ACTION:** MJ will check with Ken (gone from meeting).

The meeting was adjourned at 5:15 pm.

Minutes prepared by: Becky Desmond

Certified by:

_____ date _____
Don Weilmunster
Resource Advisory Council Chairman

_____ date _____
Glen Secrist
District Manager, LSRD