

**Lower Snake River District
Resource Advisory Council (RAC) Meeting
Idaho State Office, Sagebrush/Ponderosa Room
August 24, 2004**

Council Members Present: Don Weilmunster, Donna Griffin (pm), Robert Amidon, Robert Baker, William Platts, Russell Heughins, Gilbert Green, John Robison, Sandra Mitchell, Ted Howard, Brenda Richards, Chris Salove.

Council Members Absent: Kenneth Reid, Rick Raymond.

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

Other BLM Staff Present: Mitch Juarena, Deb Epps, Rosey Thomas.

Other: Steve Goddard, Becky Desmond, note taker.

Statements attributed to individuals are not direct quotes unless so indicated.

Council Business, General Information, Opening Remarks, and Certification of Minutes: Chairman Weilmunster called the meeting to order at 9:15 am and turned the meeting over to Glen Secrist. Glen discussed the Juniper Management Workshop co-sponsored by the RAC and BLM on July 22, 2004. Notes from the meeting were included in the RAC's meeting folder. General impressions included the following: good meeting; larger juniper stands already exist in northern California and eastern Idaho and will continue to invade Idaho's sagebrush and steppe sites; no matter how many juniper products are developed, it won't be enough to control the spread of juniper and so the two options left are use of juniper to create energy (difficult and expensive so far) and elimination of juniper by mostly burning; speaker Dr. Jon Bates of Oregon State University said there will not be control of juniper in his lifetime. MJ recalled Brian Collett's remark about BLM's commitment to burn 15,000 acres of juniper per year (referred to Owyhee RMP), but that it was not happening. Brenda Richards said there was a niche market for juniper products, but that prescribed fires, sooner rather than later, are what will be needed. Gil Green added that cabinet makers would go to California and Oregon, where the number of juniper stands is higher, for their raw material. So, "fire-- and lots of it" is what is needed.

John Robison asked what would control cheat-grass and other noxious weeds after a juniper burn. Glen said that if you look at the Pixley Basin burn result, weeds are not a problem at higher elevations, but at lower elevations there was a small problem with some cheat-grass, white-top, and some bind-weed. Steve Goddard said that a man in Emmett who is a chipper said that burning is more appropriate in later-growth juniper stands, but not in early-growth areas because it is more harmful to sage brush and aspen. He said cutting juniper was more appropriate in those areas. Steve said that cutting out small juniper growth sets back the invasion by 10 to 15 years. Brenda quoted a different opinion, and Glen said that cutting is very labor-intensive but that it does also save plants like bitter-brush for mule deer. Steve also said that chaining juniper is less destructive to the soil than originally thought, according to a man from BSU (didn't get name).

Bill Platts said that burning, chaining, etc. were all needed and should be done by firefighters. He said the fire management plan should have a juniper management/control plan as part of it. He mentioned that California uses prison labor to control salt cedar and thought perhaps a similar program could be developed here. Glen said that the juniper control plan under the fire management plan was halfway done. Ted Howard said that the chaining in the 60's that "we got by with" would not work today because juniper stands have spread into areas of archaeological and cultural sites. He said the tribes have concern about this, as would Ken Reid, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer and RAC Member. Russ Heughins said that plans should not be rushed, that the public should be involved, and that sage grouse habitat should be considered.

ACTION: Brenda Richards moved, and Bill Platts seconded, that the RAC support BLM's juniper management program by writing a letter to Glen Secrist (cc'd to Rosey Thomas and K Lynn Bennett) stating this and helping to seek funding to supplement BLM's burn budget. The draft letter will be written by the RAC juniper subcommittee and submitted to Don Weilmunster. It will also signify that RAC has an interest in participation. Brenda, Steve, Sandra Mitchell, Glen (ex officio member of RAC subcommittee), and Ken Reid will work on the letter. The group passed this motion.

Ted warned that BLM would be in violation of federal laws if cultural sites are destroyed and also said that Oregon was already in violation of these laws.

Russ said that the RAC needed to go through the process of making the juniper subcommittee an actual subcommittee. Bill said that Don, as chairman, could either appoint this committee or there could be a RAC motion addressing this issue. **ACTION:** Russ moved and Bill seconded that the same subcommittee be charged with an expanded charter to address the juniper management plan being developed by BLM. This motion also passed.

Don then introduced Deb Epps, acting district manager for the Four Rivers Field Office. She said she had worked in fire-fighting for years and was now learning a great deal about the other side of BLM – natural resources and public lands management. Don also introduced Ivan Julianto, a student from the Shoshone-Paiute Native American Indian Tribes, who is being sponsored by BLM in a work-study program. Brenda complimented Ivan's work, as did Glen, who also said that the best way to understand tribal concerns and issues was to have a Tribal representative here in the BLM office. He wants to continue this program. Ted also complimented Ivan and said the Tribe was proud of him, and had high expectations of him. But he said that Glen's comment on "understanding" was a foreign concept, and that many times Native Americans were viewed as one big group. He said this was not a matter of "One size fits all."

Hot Topics: Glen said that "monitoring" was the big issue at BLM lately. There have been lawsuits filed that have resulted in much paperwork requiring many man-hours. BLM has fallen behind in some of its required work because of this. Two aspects of the monitoring issue are implementation and the long-term consequences of management of public lands. He said there is a lot of controversy on what the starting point of

monitoring should be and that so far everyone is good at squabbling. He said studies need to be done and “trend plots” need to be kept up. He said everyone agrees that monitoring is very important but that daily pressures prevent the real work on it. He did mention that there is quite a bit of excitement about a possible new way to monitor data that has been done at the Dubois Sheep Station, located near Dubois. Steven Seefeldt, a scientist from Dubois, reported at the ICT meeting on a method of using ultralight aircraft at an altitude of 100 meters to collect data along a transect. The ultralight is equipped with a high-resolution digital camera and a computer, and can collect, sort, and interpret data ten times more cheaply and with more accuracy than a human can slogging across the ground. Data includes canopy cover and species differentiation. Glen gave the RAC members a handout on this information.

BLM will try to coordinate with Seefeldt for a trial run using flexible funding, after FAA approval is granted for the use of the ultra-lights. He said the Snake River Plain or the Jarbidge areas would be good for this technique, but that mountainous terrain was not suitable unless the ultra-lights could fly at 300 meters or if drones could be used. Both are being considered. Steve Goddard said that the Statewide Sage Grouse Conservation Plan has a habitat monitoring section, with possible funding available, and that this technique might be very good for that purpose. Bill said there was a need to archive data, and Glen said that the digital photos made it very easy to file and compare. **ACTION:** MJ will invite RAC members to the BLM workshop on this technique, probably in November or December. Bob Baker said he was very encouraged by this as he (as a livestock grower) has always been on a crusade for consistent monitoring data.

Another hot topic Glen reported on was BLM organizational refinement. Jenna Whitlock will be the Bruneau Field Office Manager; a new manager will be named soon for the Owyhee Field Office; Deb Epps is the acting Four Rivers Field Office Manager; the Marsing site for the Owyhee Field Office is almost ready; Mr. Jerry Taylor will be the new Associate District Manager (Glen said, “Jerry is one of the best soils/vegetation people I know.”); and Howard Hedrick has been selected as the District Manager for the new Twin Falls District. Mr. Taylor will attend the next RAC meeting in October. Glen said they had completed a security assessment of the Marsing Field Office site and had found no credible information about threats toward BLM staff or their children.

On September 23 BLM will sponsor a public tour to observe the Juniper Mountain project. The tour will start at the district office and go by way of Givens Springs and the Mud Flat Road.

BREAK

Don asked for corrections or additions to the minutes for the May meeting. Ted, Bill, Russ, and Steve gave corrections to Becky, who will incorporate these into the draft minutes. **ACTION:** MJ will resend the minutes of the May 2004 meeting for certification at the October 2004 meeting, along with minutes from this meeting.

Candidate Conservation Agreement for Slickspot Peppergrass: Mitch Juarena, Associate Field Manager for the Four Rivers Field Office, spoke on this subject. He gave

a brochure and a briefing paper to the group. Highlights included the following:

- Triggers have been set for adaptive management;
- LEPA survived better than expected in the Kuna fire of 75 acres;
- Five fires burned in or around management areas;
- There was a triggering of a penetrating trampling near Jarbidge, but it has not been determined when it happened or if it is significant, and;
- The purchase of a mobile wash rack for vehicles was made for \$40,000 which has been very effective in preventing weed invasion off OHV's and other vehicles at a fire site. (See breezeco.com for information on the wash rack.)

Difficulties include:

- It is a unique program that needs a lot of cooperators;
- Permittees must be notified when observation takes place and this had not always happened;
- It's better to set triggers too low rather than too high, and;
- Had to do a "season of use" change for several grazing allotments that most permittees agreed to. Western Watersheds filed a protest. Mitch indicated that overall the agreement is going well and cooperation is good so far.

Brenda applauded the ranchers who have stepped forward and said their efforts to cooperate need to be recognized. Mitch agreed and said the ranchers "have been superb." John wanted RAC members to be able to go along on any upcoming field trip. Mitch replied that the first field trip should not include others so that procedures could be worked out, not to hide anything. Bob Baker agreed, saying that at least a year's data was required to set a good baseline. The first trip should just include permittees, Idaho Office of Species Conservation (OSC), BLM, and some botanists.

Rosey Thomas, District Fire and Fuels Manager, said that the mobile wash racks would have other applications, such as for Southern Idaho Desert Racing Association (SIDRA) races. She said that their fire strategy regarding the Slickspot CCA involved 1) educational awareness, 2) prevention and protection (including suppression, avoidance of slickspot while still doing effective fire-fighting, decision-making and prioritizing); 3) future protection measures; 4) restoration and rehabilitation; and 5) monitoring.

Glen gave high marks to both Mitch and Rosey for their hard work on the Slickspot Peppergrass issue, citing countless evening meetings and phone calls. Mitch again talked about the great cooperation from all involved parties.

Public Comments--none.

Before the next topic came up, there was a short discussion on exactly how RAC comments should be submitted to any other group. It was reiterated that in order for any comments to represent the RAC, there must be a consensus from the RAC. **ACTION:** Since the Statewide Sage Grouse group is trying to formulate its draft state plan and incorporate comments from groups, MJ will contact Rick Raymondi to see if he wants the RAC sage grouse subcommittee to meet.

Miscellaneous before working lunch: A congratulatory card was passed around for Howard's new job. MJ said she puts press releases out announcing RAC meetings, and they also appear in the Federal Register and in a RAC subsection of the BLM website. Bill said the meeting notices should be sent to the Idaho Statesman, for inclusion under the "Meeting" section of the Outdoors' Supplement published every Thursday.

Cindy Fritz, BLM District Emergency Stabilization and Restoration Coordinator, then passed out a lengthy plan and one-page fact sheet on the Normal Fire Year Rehabilitation Plan. **ACTION:** RAC members are to look at these and respond by September 8, 2004. The biological assessment will also be finalized by the end of August.

Future RAC meetings were set for Oct. 26, 2004, January 25, April 19, and August 23, 2005.

Working Lunch--Review of LSRD Charter: Each RAC member was provided with a copy of the RAC charter in their meeting folder. Brenda led this discussion, saying it would be beneficial for RAC members and subcommittee chairmen to review the charter since there had been and would be several "outside" meetings that RAC members attend. She said it was important to review how RAC opinions were to be shared as opposed to individual opinions at these meetings. Glen emphasized sections #2, (COUNCIL OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE), and section #3, (PERIOD OF TIME NECESSARY FOR THE COUNCIL'S ACTIVITIES), of the charter and said the existence of the RAC was not cast in stone, but was formed and kept at the pleasure of the Secretary of the Department of the Interior. He also discussed section #6, (DUTIES OF THE COUNCIL), saying that RAC needed to put more emphasis on the development of RMP's (Resource Management Plans). He said he was impressed with the public input so far, but wondered how best to get people excited BEFORE the development of final drafts.

There was a good discussion of section #6.e (Advise the BLM regarding working with local groups to develop and achieve resource management programs). Suggestions ranged from sending RAC members to more meetings of other groups, having an annual "listening" day, to hosting more open- house-type workshops that could also show exhibits on BLM projects.

Brenda then discussed how votes take place at other meetings. It was reiterated that RAC members cannot vote as representing a RAC opinion without prior approval from the RAC, and that votes should represent all interests of the RAC, not just one interest. Glen said if the RAC has approved a person to represent it at another meeting, then it was okay. Brenda asked if a RAC member votes at the Statewide Sage Grouse meeting. Bill said no, not without prior approval. In this instance, however, the RAC gave this approval to vote at committee meetings when they passed a motion that I represent the RAC on the State Sage Grouse Committee.

MJ said that each subgroup has a charter (i.e. action plan). Steve wants to see the one for the sage grouse subcommittee. Glen said RAC can have ad hoc committees, as well as “technical review teams.” RAC charter requires these teams to be made up of federal employees or federally paid consultants. Glen said that BLM’s range resource teams could help the RAC in this regard. Brenda wondered how RAC would fund these teams, and Glen said RAC could make a request to BLM for funding. Ted asked why these teams were limited to federal employees. Glen replied that it was because of both the RAC charter and the Federal Advisory Committee Act.

Gil Green asked about Section #8.h. (Council members will be required to complete a course of instruction in the management of rangeland ecosystems and other appropriate and applicable topics approved by the BLM Idaho state Director.), noting that he was not aware of such a course ever offered to this RAC. MJ reminded the RAC about the offer last fall by Jack Sept, ISO, to provide training in this area, and the RAC members determining to opt for it at a later time. MJ said she had requested additional funds for the RAC for this and other activities. RAC members were encouraged to take advantage of all the workshops, tours, and field trips offered by BLM and Glen said these would qualify as the above-mentioned instruction. Bill said the charter was scheduled to be reviewed and approved in the next year.

Subcommittee Reports

1. Resource Management Plans (RMPs)--Gil Green said he had attended many meetings and noted that the more opportunities, the sparser the attendance. Mike O’Donnell wants the RAC to be more involved with the RMP process. A power-point presentation plus booklet were offered to RAC for discussion. Mike said there were not many comments on the RMP’s but they were good ones and were representative of a variety of interests. The next steps are feedback and finalization, and then the RMP’s will be sent to the contractor. **ACTION:** The next RAC meeting in October will include a detailed, approximately four-hour discussion of the RMP’s. Brenda thought this was a great opportunity for RAC members and will help Gil prepare for this part of the agenda.

Aimee Betts was introduced to the RAC. She is participating in the Presidential Intern Program with the BLM’s Washington Office, working in the National Landscape Conservation Program. She is on a detail to the LSRD providing assistance to the two RMP teams.

2. Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) and Transportation Management: Jenna Whitlock passed out information and said that planning and designation of routes was going on in the Bruneau Field Office and that implementation was beginning in the Owyhee Field Office (OFO), because OFO already has an existing RMP. She said the term “route” was being used, as they were not differentiating now between “road” and “trail.” Ted Howard stated that additional law enforcement personnel are needed to make these plans more than “just a piece of paper.” Sandra Mitchell thought the public would mostly obey the rules and regulations as soon as they knew what they were. There were positive comments on the progress and methods of the Forest Service in regulating OHV use.

With regard to sage grouse and OHV's, Steve Goddard said the statewide committee has considered "seasons of disuse" to protect lek-nesting and brood-rearing periods. Steve said that the statewide plan will set minimum standards and that LWG's (local working group plans) can be more specific as long as they do not conflict with the state plan. Glen said the BLM does not want to deal with two plans--he wants to use the LWG plan as the BLM plan as long as it meets the Policy for Evaluation of Conservation Efforts (PECE) requirements. Steve said his opinion as an attorney was that LWG's could not be PECE-compliant because of the four requirements of jurisdiction, funding authority (not available to LWG's), doable implementation, and monitoring with an adaptive management plan.

More discussion followed on whether LWG's could meet PECE requirements. However, Glen said that the state director has hammered the point to him that the OSC wants all LWG's to be PECE-compliant, and that if the LWG in a particular area IS PECE-compliant, then that would be the plan that BLM uses.

3. Rangeland Standards and Guides: Brenda reported that comments from RAC members had been compiled and sent to the BLM. There was a memo from the BLM concerning the "reissuing and issuing of livestock grazing permits and leases" in the meeting notebook. Its purpose was to provide consistent procedures in the above. Glen said the BLM could train RAC members, if they were interested in doing spot-checks across the state to ensure consistency.

Break

District Fire Manager and Field Office Reports

1. LSRD-Fire Update: Rosey Thomas gave stats on the fire season so far. Way below normal in number of fires and acreage covered. She said a fire management plan would include sagebrush protection and juniper control when it was finished. It will include guidelines that operate in line with RMP's, and be updated as RMP's are updated.

Crews have worked on numerous projects, updating facilities, and performing controlled burns at Reynolds Creek and in the Bruneau area. She said that funds for rural fire education programs have decreased to \$50,000 from \$278,000, and that contacting Congressional Representatives was the best bet for getting more of these funding levels increased. Bob Baker said he hoped this good program could be kept alive and that Holly LeFevre did a great job with the rural fire education program this year.

Rosey reported that all fire mitigation plans except for Owyhee County's were done. She also answered MJ's question about having enough fire crews in September if fires increased by saying that people can quickly be brought on line if necessary.

2. Owyhee Field Office: Jenna provided several handouts to the group with information on the Juniper Mountain Fuels Management project. She also discussed grazing allotment updates, saying that a proposal is out for South Mountain and Trout Springs; the Con Shea allotment has to deal with the spring snail issue, and is not finished yet. Glen said the snail issue actually involved 42 allotments. Brenda wondered what jet

boats do to snails. Glen also said there have been no settlement agreements--some have been appealed and some have been stayed--much paperwork and frustration.

3. Four Rivers Field Office: Deb Epps, Acting Field Office Manager, provided a briefing paper to RAC members that summarized her issues update--mostly dealing with the LEPA Candidate Conservation Agreement. She said her office was in the process of catching up on allotment grazing proposals. She also reported that the Boise Front Land Exchange proposal went to BLM's office in Washington, D.C. in August and that approval was expected soon. In Placerville, a first-year stewardship project involves forest thinning; a firewood sale was planned for Bennett Mountain; and the Ridge to Rivers Trail Project was on-going.

4. Jarbidge Field Office: Glen said that the new manager, Bill Baker, would be at the next meeting, and then reported that the myriad of litigation items including snails, bull trout, and the conversion of TNR's to permanent grazing were keeping BLM staff so busy that addressing other resource issues were having to be postponed. This BLM District is facing huge court expenses. He said Eddie Guerrero had taken a job in Las Cruces, New Mexico. There was no new action on the Brown's Bench Wind Energy proposal. An anemometer was not yet constructed and the deadline is Dec.1, 2004 or else it must wait until July 1, 2005. He thought the Bennett Mountain Wind Application had been withdrawn, in part because the Air Force said their Doppler was affected by the "Long Tom."

The meeting was adjourned at 3:45 pm. Agenda items for the next meeting will be RMP's and the statewide sage grouse management plan. A list of handout titles appears in the appendix.

Minutes prepared by
Becky Desmond

Certified by

_____ date _____	_____ date _____
Don Weilmunster RAC Chairman	Glen Secrist District Manager, LSRD

APPENDIX

1. Juniper Management Workshop Notes (MJ)
2. Where We Are: Where We Are Going With Rangeland Monitoring (Seefeldt)
3. Slickspot Peppergrass (outline and brochure from M. Jaurena)
4. Normal Fire Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation Plan EA (C. Fritz)
5. RAC Charter (MJ)
6. Resource Management Plan Update – Power Point Presentation (Mike O'Donnell)
7. Route Designation Information Workshop (J. Whitlock)
8. Snapshots 2004 --BLM projects supporting Nat'l Fire Plan (R. Thomas)

9. BLM memo re: issuance of grazing permits (K Lynn Bennett)
10. Juniper Mountain Project (thank-you letter, tour paper, planning meeting, scoping meeting)—J. Whitlock
11. Briefing paper (D. Epps)