

RAC Meeting
February 26, 2003

Attending: Kelly Adams, Ken Sanders, Bob Bronson, Kent Christopher, Garth Taylor, Mel Quale, Steve Thorson, Gwen Montgomery, Morgan Evans, Chris Christiansen, Jeff Baldwin, Loyd Briggs, Dennis Crane

Not Attending: Shaun Dustin, Pat Avery

BLM staff: K Lynn Bennett, Jim May, Bill Baker, Phil Damon, Glen Guenther, Bernie Jansen, David Howell

Introductions and housekeeping:

K Lynn's briefing to RAC: RACs continue to be important, and need to maintain communication through Jim May on issues that are important. National RAC meeting with all chairs coming up in April. We have already met with the Chairs in Idaho and have started looking where there may be common goals to work on statewide. While your advice is local, Kathleen Clarke also wants to broaden issues at the national level.

K Lynn's background: Started with BLM in Utah, and worked later in the Burley District (longest stay in the BLM). This kind of is my home, my kids have settled here. Left to go to Washington, then to Shoshone, then to Nevada as Associate State Director. Retired in 1992, and bought into ranch near King Hill. I've since sold my interest in the ranch, but I've had a chance to sit with BLM on both sides of the table. I've written regulations, and I've lived with regulations.

There are a lot of contentious issues coming out of BLM. WE are faced with a way of thinking called the "New West." It's BLM's job to help calm the contentions and untangle the issues so that people can live in the West. I have generally boiled our priorities down to three:

- Follow the Law,
- Protect the land and the resources, and
- Promote the economic sustainability of communities that depend on public lands.

New regulations that are about to be announced will discuss "sustaining working landscapes."

Garth: We're faced with OHV issues, and it would be nice to hear your perspective on how the RAC can help deal with this issue. (One issue is related to land use planning, and what kind of decisions we should be making. Some have advocated for route designations, and I'm not sure how to work that. You can certainly see if that can be worked into the planning process.

Gwen: How about Craters – have you had much input in that? (I haven't had a lot of involvement in that Jim can probably answer that better.)

Ken: The coordination with other agencies, particularly the Forest Service, so that recreation planning doesn't stop at an artificial boundary; is there more you can do at your level? (Right now there is a tremendous push to work together between those agencies; dovetail processes so there is not a lot of disruption. Service First is a big push for this administration. We are also looking at co-locating offices.)

Gwen: Will you also be looking at other opportunities to use fire crews to do other work when there isn't fire? (I need to look into some of the new rules on what they can be doing. I know we used to use them that way. Maybe Jim and Field Managers could shed some light.)

Bill Baker: We have been able to use them on some jobs that can be dropped for two weeks if fires start. Other constraints are sixteen hour days limits they have to work.

Bob: Are you talking with the USFS about drought conditions so there isn't a real disruption? (That was one of our major topics this morning, and we have asked them to work with us to minimize disruptions. We are aware of the drought situation, and the need for flexibility.)

Jim: All of our Field managers have been instructed to work with their USFS counterparts and any permittees that run on both.

K Lynn: We have also asked the Governor to extend the drought committee to address range issues, and we think that will happen in the next month or so that the committee will come out to the local communities to discuss the issue.

Bob: We have grazed the CRP the last two years, and we usually hear about its availability too late.

Morgan: There was some national holdup. It's good that you're talking about it.

Dennis:

Ken: Maybe the RAC could recommend to Senator Craig to help move up those dates.

Jim: May be another issue on some CRP land with Sharptail Grouse.

Bob: May not be an issue, because they use the crested wheatgrass for nesting but are off early in the year.

Kelly: Was there any conversation about Fire Management Direction this morning? (Jim: we have had some conversations about setting up polygons, and we are starting to discuss implementation with the Forest Service.)

Steve Thorson: Is there a similar conversation happening on fuels reduction and urban interface issues? (Yes, and we will be highlighting one piece of it tomorrow when we get to the Portneuf project. But we have a lot of work to go.)

Ken: Sage Grouse: Are you looking at the working groups as the primary source of plans, rather than the RACs getting deep into sage grouse? (We are looking at the groups, but we are also considering a statewide strategy. The Director is also looking at a national Strategy, and that team will be meeting here in March. Hopefully we'll be able to craft some remedies)

Kent: Sometimes traditional practices aren't good for the land, but you want to promote sustainability? If there are conflicts can you do both? (It will require thinking outside the box, certainly. There are livestock groups out there that have also participated in sage grouse lek and habitat studies. They have made progress, and we have to look at those things. In this case, they have both improved their sustainability and the grouse habitat.)

Kelly: At the State Chairs meeting you mentioned that when the RAC Revitalization team comes to Idaho, you'd like them to have nothing to do. (I'd like to see you all involved in the issues – you're the front line and we certainly need your advice. We need to consider rules regulations and laws, but hopefully we have done a good job laying that out for you.)

DROUGHT AND S&G PRESENTATIONS (Erv Cowley PowerPoints)

OHV: Kelly: RAC Chairs' meeting – highlighted OHV as an issue, but not much direction yet. The Lower Snake's RAC is already heading down the road on OHV S&Gs, but it is clear to me that we need to be moving down the road together on S&Gs for OHV. (Mel Quale handed out some thoughts on OHV use, including random considerations).

Terry Heslin (State Office): Hand out and summary of issues from the recent meeting with RAC Chairs and the state director. We are in a state where OHV use and demand have increased 300% in the last decade, but with no similar increase in funding and oversight.

Statewide strategy should really have two prongs – short term needs (like improving moguls on Owyhee Front) and mid- to longer-term solutions.

Kelly: You brought up something that shocked me – inventories aren't so simple, they are always in flux.

Terry: One of the challenges that BLM has is that it manages for multiple use. K Lynn mentioned that it's easy to close areas, but that's not our business. I think that there will always be thousands of miles of roads and trails for people to explore, we just have to figure out how to balance.

What can the RAC do? The Statewide OHV strategy will be out for review soon, probably by the next meeting, and the next step is for the RAC to assist in OHV inventories and policies when RMPs come up for revision. There are also opportunities to insert ourselves into the debate, including the IDFG Unit 47 issue, and IDPR developing trails.

Subcommittee: Mel Quale, Garth Taylor, Bob Bronson (?)

Suggest from Jim: Meet with constituencies on the local hotspots for OHV use. Email to Dave, pass along to the subcommittee. Also seasonal use.

Membership/Nominations: Options were discussed for increasing nominations for the upcoming term. Dennis Crane will talk with other county commissioners to encourage them to submit names for the RAC. Other RAC members will do the same in their areas of influence. Besides nominations for positions, alternate candidates for RAC membership can also serve as members of subgroups in order to become familiar with RAC issues. Suggestions for RAC visibility:

- newsletter to get issues out to people who may be interested in the RAC.
- Articles for constituents' newsletters.
- When you do replace members, that there is a training meeting so you don't walk in cold-turkey.

Windland Energy: Scoping meetings, about 135 attended. We received about 55 individual comments. We thought we had a good spread of the issues before the meetings, and new comments from the public didn't broaden that list. However, the comments helped to articulate well some specific issues – sage grouse is an example (habitat, brood rearing, etc.) Another issue is access – both for hunting, and potential private trespasses from people riding the maintenance road (target shooting as well). Visual resources are also a big concern. One group of comments considered to be outside the scope of the study was siting – why put it on Cotterel, why not in the desert somewhere or Nevada. We are only analyzing their proposal, not the potential for other sites. (Another company has asked for permission to conduct anemometer studies in Pocatello. If the studies prove a potential resource, we could also see another application in a year or two in that Field Office.) Jim suggested RAC members should participate get a copy of summary of comments from scoping, and a schedule of milestones on the project. Jim will definitely want a recommendation on this.

Suggestion from RAC: Should get a biologist to handle the sage grouse question (whether the area is critical winter range). But we should not make things so restrictive because the project is still a good one. Overall, the public still supports the project because of the potential economic benefits, if the natural resources questions can be answered.

Craters of the Moon: Brief update: Third newsletter displayed the alternatives, and in the recent public meetings (100 people attending), there haven't been any real surprises. We will gather the comments and bring them into alternatives discussion at the interdisciplinary team meeting next week in Twin Falls. Subgroup has about nine people interested in participating, and we are working on a mission statement to give us some life. Jim emphasized that the subgroup reports back to the RAC and that they have a task to look over our shoulders and let us know what the public is thinking. Bob asked about livestock grazing, which will be common to all alternatives. However, whatever road system chosen may have effects on livestock grazing, especially when it comes to water hauling. We need to hear from the livestock folks on how to address this.

ID Team has a block of time set aside to discuss formulation of the alternatives with the RAC. Mel Quale is interested. A potential task for the subgroup may be to host a public meeting prior to making a recommendation to the BLM.

Also, meeting on travel issues with County commissioners and transportation specialists on March 19 (1 p.m. in Shoshone).

FMDA: Review of process to date. Right now, we are in the process of describing the alternatives. We are also doing an analysis of the alternatives through a contractor. The magnitude of the treatments we're proposing is reflected in the alternatives. The proposed action will be to increase habitats in restoration so that we don't have large, catastrophic wildfires. The Sagebrush-steppe alternative takes a long view of the sagebrush steppe ecosystem, especially with respect to sage grouse habitat needs. We want a good mix of younger, mid-age, and older plants. The optimum fire rotation alternative aims at introducing fire to the levels that fire ecologists feel would get vegetation to a proper level of production and health. Currently, we are doing 3,700 acres of treatments per year. With the proposed action, we see that jump to about 45,000 acres a year; with the Sagebrush Steppe alternative, the treatments jump to more than 60,000 acres per year; and in the Optimum Fire Rotation alternative, the treatments jump to 100,000 acres per year. One concern is the potential for impacts to livestock grazing because of the need for fire recovery. The potential exists that at any give year, one to five percent of AUMs would be temporary unavailable (district-wide). This might be an adverse impact to several permittees. With the plan, we are trying to highlight the choices, and implementation becomes a next step after the plan. Ken Sanders is interested in following this through the final. Terry S. will discuss with him.

Portneuf Project: Background. This is not solely a federal problem; this is largely a private land problem, too. We have good support on this from the local fire departments. Since this is also an education issue, we have a group of people that are working with homeowners and landscapers to tell them and demonstrate firewise landscaping. The Forest Service is also involved, but they are a little slower in getting funding. Morgan has an interest,

North Rim Project: BLM and SCITRDA are working on an R&PP lease. SCITRDA is interested in developing the area into a nationally-recognized public-private partnership. Steve Thorson and Mel Quale are working with the team to determine how to manage the area with mixed ownership and uses. (An aside, Devil's Corral is in the President's budget as a potential LWCF project). Ken Sanders would also like to be involved.

DM Update: New Field Manager coming to Idaho Falls in March, Carol McCoy Brown. Theresa Hanley is now in Montana, and we have a list of candidates for the Burley Field Manager. Possibly in May we'll have a new manager. We have been really pushing the role of the RACs among the various high level projects, finding ways to integrate you into the process. I hope that has been coming through.

The Standards and Guides process is a large beast. We are working on high priority allotments, but there are questions. Should we be doing S&Gs on all allotments? Should be working in monitoring into the schedule, or do minimal monitoring? We are working on gathering data on the issue, and then we will bring this back to you to ask for your help in managing this workload. I would like you to consider making recommendations to K Lynn for how we should proceed.

Coordination between BLM and Forest Service: I would like you all to consider the question of what coordination between the two agencies looks like. AGENDA ITEM FOR NEXT MEETING. I would like to invite the forest supervisors from C-T and the Sawtooth, possibly the S-C.

S&G Assessments: Would it be possible for each office to send to the RAC members an S&G assessment to see how the different offices develop the determinations?

Malad PFC Workshops: May 28-29. Erv Cowley has information, Ken Sanders announced.

ACTIONS:

- Recommendation to Senator Craig on CRP use (WHO?)
- Garth Taylor → follow up with Phil Damon on OHV Volunteers for inventories.
- Forward OHV Subgroup to Terry Heslin: