

RAC Meeting  
August 27-28, 2003  
Idaho Falls, Idaho

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Attending: Mel Quale, Bob Bronson, Ken Sanders, Kelly Adams, Pat Avery, Steve Thorson, Garth Taylor, Chris Christiansen, Jeff Baldwin (river tour, but attended Thursday)

Not attending: Loyd Briggs, Shaun Dustin, Kent Christopher, Gwen Montgomery, Morgan Evans, Dennis Crane

BLM Attending: K Lynn Bennett, Joe Kraayenbrink, David Howell, Wendell Johnson (Pocatello, Wednesday), Phil Damon (Pocatello, Thursday), Wendy Reynolds, Bill Baker, Sky Huffaker, Rick VanderVoet (Thurs), Fritz Rennebaum (Thurs)

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**Sustaining Working Landscapes:** Dave Howell gave a general overview that summarized the packet of information sent to the RAC in July. Arn Berglund, a Resource Coordinator from the USRD, facilitated the discussion. The RAC offered general feedback on the initiative, most of which is summarized in the attached resolution. RAC members were concerned that what was being proposed was better than what existed, and that many of the proposals are already within the ability of the BLM, willing permittees, and others to implement on a voluntary basis.

The RAC drafted and approved the resolution, which was signed by the Chair and forwarded to the State Director.

**BLM Organizational Issues (K Lynn Bennett, Fritz Rennebaum):** Last meeting, Fritz came and talked to this group about organizational issues, and K Lynn mentioned he received some comments when he first came on board about creating a District office in the Magic Valley and realigning BLM boundaries for better customer service. Issues driving this proposal include:

- Owyhee Field Office needs. Customers there would like an office in Marsing to deal with local issues.
- Workload: Bruneau Resource Area merged with the Owyhee Resource Area under one manager in 2000.
- Distance: particularly in the Magic Valley, to bring managers closer to the people.

Proposal:

1. Create South Central District. We would have a RAC for this area, too.
2. Split Owyhee Field Office back out to Bruneau, and send Jarbidge to SCD.
3. USRD: Fold in Salmon and Challis with Idaho Falls and Pocatello. This would put the two new field offices with the economic center of the area.
4. UCSCD: Two field offices left for this District, which is as it was ten years ago.

We have promised the Director that if we follow-through with this proposal, we can do with minimal cost. Potential costs are the cost of finding an office in Marsing, and maybe some additional costs in Twin Falls to accommodate a new District Manager in Twin Falls. BLM will also need an additional field manager in Marsing. All of this may require some internal shuffling, but we believe it can be done while adding no more than three to four positions statewide. We will be taking advantage of vacant positions to move positions around. We will be taking about a year to make sure this is done right.

Motion: Fully support the proposal. Motion carried. Resolution drafted, approved and forwarded to the State Director.

**District S&G Workshop Review:** Members of the District range staff met on July 30 met with State Office range staff to check and see if the field offices are consistent in their application. The RAC requested this meeting, and three RAC members attended. Some observations from the meeting that the BLM staff raised included:

- The USRD should have these periodic meetings to clear up any consistency issues between the field office and point out any obvious misunderstandings.
- One of the biggest issues was tracking the issues from assessment through decisions. Issues in the field should be resolved among team members before leaving the field. Specialists should be specific about applying the S&Gs – is the problem on the whole allotment, or on a portion?
- If issues not related to grazing that contribute to not meeting the standard, some of these are dropped, but they should be captured and discussed when the opportunity comes up for land use plan amendments and revisions.
- S&Gs on isolated tracts: Some field offices have a “short form” that they deal with for small tracts, but there is not a set process across the state for dealing with this. This may leave the agency exposed. The state office should provide guidance for how to deal with these to reduce the level of exposure. Pocatello is perhaps a model for this issue.

Overall, the attending members though that there was a lot of thought put in ahead of time before teams go and assess an allotment.

**ACTION:** Wendy Reynolds to check on a final determination for Meadow Creek (2002) and send Bob Bronson.

**RAC Executive Session:**

*Attendance:* The group’s attendance was the biggest topic. There is some follow-up work from the Chairman that needs to take place with those members who are not attending. He may need to explain the rule of the quorum and how important attending the meeting is to conducting business.

*New RAC members and the training process:* Statewide training needs to take place, along with field trips. Dave will work with the other RAC coordinators statewide for consistent approach.

Potential topics for training include Range health, NEPA process, Standards and Guides, BLM and multiple use.

*Recruitment:* New members need to understand the time commitment involved in attending the RAC meetings.

*Windland tour:* Burley – pick a day, and RAC members RSVP.

**Craters of the Moon Update (Rick VanderVoet):** We have selected a preferred alternative that has been approved by the State Director and the Regional Director of the Park Service. We have also visited the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes for government-to-government coordination. We are working now to whip the draft into shape, and we are coordinating with the state office and the Park Service. The present draft is about 400 pages. We are anticipating a 90-Day comment period when the draft hits the street in the fall. Rick reviewed the alternatives with the RAC.

*Mel Quale:* Attended the ID Team meeting in Twin Falls, and a review copy of the EIS and Draft Plan is on the way. Does the RAC want to send resolution saying that we have all been involved in the process, and say that we agree with the preferred alternative, Alt D? (BLM would like that within the next 30 days; you maybe could have something prepared and ready to vote on. Subgroup can take the lead on developing that. It would help with the documentation on the Departmental level as we prepare to release this for public review.)

**ACTION:** JEFF BALDWIN & MEL QUALE → Draft resolution for inclusion in the next 30 days for the rest of the RAC.

**Sage Grouse National Habitat Conservation Strategy (Mark Hilliard, Washington Office):** Lots of activity happening on various levels related to sage grouse, and that has created some amount of confusion in public circles. Director Clarke commissioned this study in the wake of many requests for listing. Consultation with USFWS suggested there were some benefits to a BLM strategy for sage grouse habitat. The strategy is to be interdisciplinary in nature.

March workshop among BLM experts discussed current state of sage grouse and latest information on the species' needs. BLM discussed it later with other groups, conservation and political, and released a draft strategy in July. Comments were originally due on August 20, and after feedback, extended to November 1. Extending the comment date allow us to clear up some of the confusion. This effort doesn't supplant the efforts happening locally, and really only affects management on BLM lands.

Where state level strategies are in place, the BLM strategy helps to support them. In Idaho's case, the state has an oversight group but no plan, and also has local working groups. There is now more of a push to develop a statewide strategy through Idaho Fish & Game that gives each of the six or so groups some consistent guidance. If the USFWS Policy for Evaluation and Conservation Efforts sees that the state level plan is sufficient for maintaining the species'

habitat, the state plan will take precedence. If not, the BLM will have a plan ready through this strategy to provide habitat management guidance for BLM Staff.

A complication to all of this is the introduction of West Nile Virus to Wyoming populations of sage grouse. If a new disease is widely introduced to this species, you may see some emergency petitions for listing. Also, there are some reported problems around the Utah-Nevada-Idaho border with Gray Moths, which are degrading the condition of sagebrush ecosystems.

Mark reviewed PowerPoint presentation that will be publicly available on the Web. Some key issues of interest:

- Private land owners have about 31+ million acres of sage steppe ecosystem under their control. They are a major player.
- There is some discussion about interagency, intergovernmental committee to provide guidance.
- Statewide (BLM) strategy will examine the present conditions of the land use plans that may be threatening to continued conditions of sage grouse habitat.
- One of the potential effects for which we have little information is the effect of livestock grazing on sage ecosystems. The research that comes out of that will help guide the present national strategies, and future state strategies.

**FMDA:** Terry reviewed the process and the preferred alternative. In summary, the USRD Leadership Team has selected the Sagebrush Steppe Alternative as the Preferred Alternative. This alternative addresses needs of ecosystem and species across the District. Annual treatment acres are about 500,000 (160,000 annual footprint acres, but with multiple treatments), at an estimated cost of about \$17 million annually (Annual present fire expenditures are about \$14 million). This alternative best restores the sagebrush steppe to a more natural condition and provides a conservation strategy for sage grouse. While the Optimum Fire Rotation Alternative is intended to bring all BLM lands to a fire condition class 1, it's an unrealistic alternative for the time and expenditure of resources that would need to be committed. Draft EIS is in the process of being reviewed, and we will be going to the state office for a review in September. After that, we anticipate that the Draft EIS will be in place between mid-October to Mid-November. The final EIS would be anticipated in about mid FY 2004 (March).

BLM would like a general letter of support for the Draft EIS and Preferred alternative. (General consensus from the group is that there has been no heartburn on the alternatives. They support the preferred alternative and recommend proceeding with the preferred alternative. BLM will draft a proposed resolution and forward to Ken Sanders for completion with the members of the RAC.)

**Shoshone Land Use Plan Amendments (Bill Baker):** The Amendments are complete and at the printer, and the public should see it soon. The big workload ahead will be completing land exchanges that have been pending for the past 13 years. The Amendments will allow us to dispose of our isolated wildlife tracts, but we have to do that in consultation with the Idaho

Department of Fish & Game; some we will dispose of, some we will keep. We are working now on prioritizing workloads (including DOI Appraisers) for how all of this will be implemented beginning in 2004. We will brief the State Director on the implementation plan in September.

**Tri-RAC OHV Strategy (Mel Quale):** Review of the process to this point. Mel coordinated public comments on the Statewide OHV strategy on behalf of the RAC. Highlights of comments received at the state office:

- Draft is an excellent OHV management strategy, according to IDPR.
- WWP, CHD suggested that OHV use is not permissible for grazing management. Permittees should look at other means of transportation (i.e., horses).
- Many comments didn't have anything to do with strategy. Some opposed the Arco-Mackay-Challis trail, which was outside the scope of the strategy.

Shortly, there should be a final strategy for us to take a look at.

**District Managers Update:** District Manager's vacancy now working through the hiring process. // Fire Update: The year has been the lightest on record for the South Central Fire organization, and the Eastern Idaho organization, while experiencing a more normal year, has supported many efforts on the Forest Service through the interagency dispatch center. // LWCF: Funding is expected to be far less the next few years than historic levels have been.

**Next meeting:** November 19-20, 9 a.m., Pocatello.

AGENDA:

- Officer Elections
- RAC Annual Work Plan
- Windland EIS Update
- FMDA/Craters/ Pocatello RMP Update (may be written, if not substantial)
- SWL/Sage Grouse Strategy Updates (follow-up from this meeting)
- Organizational Realignment Update
- National Vegetation EIS: Status Report
- Brief Overview of other BLM programs:
  - Wild Horse & Burro Program
  - Abandoned Mine Lands
- North Rim Park (30 minutes, Steve Thorson)

RESOLUTION  
Sustaining Working Landscapes Initiative

Upper Snake River Resource Advisory Council  
August 28, 2003

The Upper Snake River RAC applauds the BLM for proposing the Sustainable Working Landscapes concept. It seems to focus agency resources and brings together stakeholders, with the goal of improving working landscapes. The Sustaining Working Landscapes Initiative (SWL) is an idea with merit, and has the potential of working if BLM managers, permittees, and other agencies and interests are open to new possibilities. A sense of trust, agency incentives, and public incentives are needed before proceeding with the concepts presented here. In addition to incentives, developing trust between agencies, including resource specialists, is paramount in order to make this initiative work.

*Conservation Partnerships:* The idea is a good one, and worth exploring. However, such partnerships can easily get tied up in appeal by outside interests with no ownership in partnerships; we suggest the BLM consider contingencies for dealing with this issue. Though the concept of expanding partnerships is good, the first few projects will have a high degree of attention and controversy. BLM should circulate success stories to help these overcome issues, many of which stem from a lack of trust.

*Reserve Common Allotments:* Although the concept is sound, there are many potential stumbling blocks that prevent successful implementation of this initiative. We recognize that many initiatives through conservation groups seek to remove grazing from public lands, and there are also regulatory restrictions under which BLM must operate. We also recognize that removing grazing from an allotment also creates economic impacts on local communities. We make the following recommendations:

1. The BLM should not be a partner in terminating grazing on an allotment. Grazing should continue on an allotment that becomes vacant, even if it's held in reserve.
2. If a permittee on a key allotment desires to become a willing seller of the grazing rights on an allotment, the RAC encourages the government to purchase the right for use as a reserve common allotment.
3. BLM should also pursue exchanging/disposing of isolated tracts to create larger blocks for new reserve common allotments.

*Voluntary Allotment Restructuring:* This is something that the BLM can do now through a decision process, and there is little additional incentive in the proposal to make it economically viable to permittees. The RAC feels that the example in the July summary package is not realistic, and if BLM wants this to work, it should come up with another example. The key to the success of this is through voluntary involvement of the permittees; restructuring boundaries or management is okay as a concept, but in reality it will be hard to implement.

*Landscape Habitat Improvement:* This idea is good in concept, but participation with other or all interested parties is uncertain. This initiative relies on the willingness of participants in order to be successful. Adding the word "Voluntary" to the title would make the idea more palatable, but it will be difficult to find the right mix of parties/individuals to make it work. There should be a more firm commitment from other agencies like the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the marine division of the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to help develop partnerships that don't entrap the partner/private landowner for any takings that may occur in the interest of improving resources on the landscape level. There must be an advance commitment from the regulatory agencies to buy into the concept before proceeding. Mitigation banking/habitat banking for off-

site impacts is a good idea in concept, but there are still many unresolved questions about management on public lands.

The RAC appreciates the opportunity to provide input, and stands ready to help at any stage of development and implementation.

Signed by:  
Kelly Adams, Chair

Authenticated by:  
David Howell, RAC Coordinator

RESOLUTION  
Proposed BLM Idaho Boundary Adjustments

Upper Snake River Resource Advisory Council (USRD RAC)  
August 28, 2003

The USRD RAC fully supports the proposal to realign District boundaries as proposed by K Lynn Bennett, Idaho State Director. It appears that the issue of cost has been adequately mitigated and that the proposal will bring the BLM closer to constituents. The USRD RAC encourages BLM to reconstitute the RACs to correspond to new District boundaries and to better address BLM issues on the local level.

Signed by:  
Kelly Adams, Chair

Authenticated by:  
David Howell, RAC Coordinator