

RAC Meeting
BLM Pocatello Field Office
November 19-20, 2003

Attending: Pat Avery, Kent Christopher, Loyd Briggs, Mel Quale, Steve Thorson, Bob Bronson, Dennis Crane, Steve Trafton, Doug Hancey, Morgan Evans, Ken Sanders, Chris Christiansen

BLM Attending: Joe Kraayenbrink, Bill Baker, Wendy Reynolds, Carol McCoy Brown, Phil Damon, David Howell

Windland Proposal: Brief update from Wendy Reynolds. The process is continuing on the Cotterel Ridge proposal. New technology created since the first proposal may effect the eventual outcome of the project, and the draft EIS is still scheduled for release sometime in the Spring, 2004. Running along a parallel, if slightly behind, track is the BLM's nationwide EIS on wind energy policy, which will help address wind energy use in land use plans throughout the agency. A scoping meeting on the issue is scheduled for Boise on November 20 (tomorrow), and BLM Director Kathleen Clarke is scheduled to attend, as well as Wendy Reynolds from the Burley Field Office.

Handouts: For those interested, Dave Howell passed out copies of several articles from the *Snapshots* newsletter that describe fuels projects around Idaho BLM. Also, he distributed some information on the Wind Energy Policy Programmatic EIS. S&G Schedules for Field Offices were distributed to the RAC for their review. For new members, BLM Field Managers briefly reviewed the assessment and determination process. And the BLM has released a new book: *Adventures on America's Public Lands*, published by Smithsonian Press – a sequel to the book *Beyond the National Parks*.

Wild Horse & Burro Program: Tom Miles, lead for the Wild Horse & Burro Program in Idaho, joined the RAC by telephone and gave an overview of the program in Idaho. Idaho herds increase by about 22% per year, some of which are adopted out each year. Those not adopted immediately are sent to other satellite adoptions, and those not adopted after three satellite adoptions are sent to the long-term holding facilities.

One of the concerns is over the cost of the program. The BLM had determined that the appropriate management level for the national program is about 28,000 horses (Current populations are about 35,000; populations in 1971 at the passage of the Wild Horse & Burro Act were at about 17,000-18,000, down from two to three million in the 19th Century.). The number of additional horses in long- and short-term holding facilities is currently at about 21,000. The amount of money each year – about \$29 million – about 67% goes toward the holding facilities. Short term holding facilities can cost about \$4 per day, while long-term facilities can cost a little more than a dollar per day. BLM is currently working on an immunocontraceptive of varying durations (1 to 4 years) to help control the horse population. The concern of the UCSC RAC and Mr. Miles are that with budgets tightening there needs to be another look at the costs of the Wild Horse program and see if some efficiencies may be gained.

Potential solution: sink money out of the long-term care facilities and instead give it to the adopters – probably more would get adopted. Joe & Bill will discuss with the State Director. RAC Coordinator invited interested people to get involved with the Upper Columbia RAC.

- **Recommendation from RAC:** Ken Sanders of the USRD RAC will be the liaison with the UCSC on the Wild Horse issue, and will report back to the USRD RAC as appropriate.

North Rim Project: Status on the project and the R&PP lease. Steve Thorson was interested in finding out why more information was not in the *Federal Register* Notice of the Realty Action that has been submitted to the Washington Office. (That information is available in the Field Office, as stated in the *Federal Register* Notice. The FRN will be published hopefully in the next month.) Another question was why the EA/FONSI was taking so long on the project; some of the language had to be modified for other potential purchases in the project area. Steve voiced concerns that the original project as proposed as been modified to the point that public support for the project has eroded. Bill Baker has been in conversations with County Commissioners and others in the community that have continued to express public support. When the FRN is published, Steve Thorson would to have it forwarded to the RAC.

Executive Session Feedback. New Officers: Kelly Adams, Chair; Ken Sanders, Vice-chair; Steve Trafton, Secretary. // Sustaining Working Landscapes is on hold for now, and no reason for a workgroup. // OHV: Outline of BLM's plans for OHV priorities in 2004 passed around to the RAC. // Some feedback provided from ICA & Woolgrowers meetings. Idaho Rangeland Resource Commission would like to mount an educational campaign on public/private access; they already have a lot of educational information on other topics available to schools.

Craters Update: Document is in final stages of review for the Draft EIS. The measures about 400 pages in all, and is expected to be released in late January 2004. The Interdisciplinary Team will meet via conference call on December 11 for a final briefing before the draft EIS is released. Open houses will follow the release of the Draft EIS, probably about the time of the next RAC meeting.

BLM Organizational Refinements: The UCSC RAC offered four formal recommendations on the BLM refinements issue related to the status of the RACs:

- The RAC recommends establishing a 4th RAC (The USRD had also recommended this in a previous resolution to the State Director).
- Existing RAC members should be transitioned to new RACs as appropriate.
- RAC members should have the flexibility to move from one category to another.
- New RAC members should be selected by the next fiscal year (10/1/2004)

The USRD RAC agreed with the UCSC RAC's recommendations and added two more:

- Existing RAC members should have the freedom to choose which RAC they want to participate (i.e. – Pat Avery, a Meridian resident, participates on the USRD RAC because of his interest in the phosphate industry).

- The BLM should consider staggered staggering terms for RAC members in the wake of refinements to allow for orderly transition each year, as was done when the RACs were created.

Annual Work Plan: RAC members drafted an annual work plan for the coming term. This will be completed in the next couple of weeks and sent to the State Director for information.

Land and Water Conservation Fund program. Karen Rice of the BLM Idaho Falls Field Office provided an overview of the history of the LWCF program and current trends. BLM began receiving LWCF funds in 1989, and to date has spent more than \$700 million nationally. She reviewed the history of the South Fork Snake River project, and the use of LWCF funds and other federal funds. Mark Ellsbree of The Conservation Fund talked also about how the conservation organizations help to establish priorities with BLM. The conservation agencies provide some flexibility in working with landowners in ways that are not available to BLM. The groups may also work with charitable foundations in ways that the BLM cannot.

DM Update: Range Magazine is available to all RAC members in the state. (Morgan, Ken, Bob, Chris, Steve Trafton would like to be added to the subscription list.) // S&G/Permit Renewals have not always lined up; congressional authority now lets us renew and catch up to S&Gs later. // Stubble height: state working group looking at the use of stubble height, and will make a recommendation to the BLM State Director and USFS regional forester. Being coordinated through the University of Idaho. // Bird ladders: Environmental groups have been monitoring the maintenance of bird ladders. Permittees are working with BLM to get in operating condition.

Sage Grouse local working groups: Kent Christopher – local groups don't have authority to do anything, but it has brought interest groups together. BLM needs to take the lead on recovering sage grouse. (We are working with Fish & Game, which is the lead agency, and we are also including sage grouse restoration strategies in our plans. We are using the plans that the working groups create as guidance for helping to restore habitat.)

Next Meeting: February 18-19 in Burley at the BLM Fire Warehouse Conference Room. Other meetings:

- Twin Falls/Jerome: May 19-20
- Idaho Falls: Sept 8-9, with a tour of the South Fork of the Snake River.
- Pocatello: November 17-18

NOTE: POST MEETING CHANGE: Due to scheduling conflicts from the District Manager and one of the Field Managers, the meeting will need to be changed to February 25-26.

Recommendations from this meeting:

- Ken Sanders will work with the UCSC on their concerns and potential solutions for the Wild Horse and Burro Program.

- The USRD RAC will endorse the resolution of the UCSC RAC on reorganization, with the addition of two items:
 - Existing RAC members should have the freedom to choose which RAC they want to participate (i.e. – Pat Avery, a Meridian resident, participates on the USRD RAC because of his interest in the phosphate industry).
 - The BLM should consider staggered staggering terms for RAC members in the wake of refinements to allow for orderly transition each year, as was done when the RACs were created.

- The RAC will sponsor periodic field tours in conjunction with the RAC meetings (at least warmer weather meetings). We are to discuss this at the February meeting, with a possible tour of the South Henry Fork of the Snake River in conjunction with the September meeting in Idaho Falls.

- Create a T & E Species subgroup, consisting of Kent Christopher and Steve Trafton. Others can volunteer to join the subgroup, but these two will take the lead in giving the RAC a heads up on any T & E issues.