

Southeast Oregon Resource Advisory Council (SEORAC)

1301 South G Street
Lakeview, OR 97630
(541) 947-2177

Day One, Thursday, February 26, 2009

Meeting Location:

Best Western Rory and Ryan Inns
534 Highway 20 N
Hines, OR 97738

Members Present:

Group 1

Dick Leever
Kevin Peterman
Jim Bishop
Mona Drake

Group 2

Bill Renwick
Heather Swartz
Diane Pinney
Richie Johnston

Group 3

Larry Hammond
Roger Sheley
Craig Foster

Federal Representatives: Carol Benkosky, Kenny McDaniel, Larry Frazier, Teresa Raaf, Scott Stoffel, Michelle Pointere

Guests: Tara Martinak

Welcome, Introductions, Housekeeping and Agenda Review: Carol Benkosky opened the meeting at 1:08 p.m. Carol thanked all Council members for the time and effort they invest in Council activities. Carol introduced Scott Stoffel as the facilitator.

Scott Stoffel began with introductions and asked participants to state their name, the interest they represent, the length of time they have served on the Council and the reason behind their involvement. Scott then reviewed the objectives, group agreements and meeting agenda.

New Member Orientation: Scott Stoffel provided orientation to new members. Discussion topics included the geographic area covered by the Council, group objectives, Council composition, meeting procedures, voting rules, role of the Designated Federal Official (DFO) and chairperson, membership requirements, ethics, expectations and review of the Council handbook.

Chair Elections: Carol Benkosky announced the need for the Council to elect a Chairperson and Vice Chairperson. Larry Hammond nominated Bill Renwick for Chairperson and Bill accepted

the nomination. The motion to elect Bill as Chairperson was unanimously passed by all 11 Council members present. Larry Hammond nominated Diane Pinney for Vice Chairperson and Diane accepted the nomination. The motion to elect Diane as Vice Chairperson was unanimously passed by all 11 Council members present.

Subgroup Bylaws and Procedures: Scott Stoffel shared the history behind the development of this document. At the August 2008 Council meeting, the group tasked Scott with drafting subgroup establishment guidelines. Scott created a draft process based on language in the Council Charter and Standard Operating Procedures and emailed it to all Council members and DFOs for review. Feedback indicated the document should address the fact that Federal Advisory Committee Act restrictions do not apply to subgroups, therefore subgroup meetings are not public and do not require public notice. Scott shared this feedback with Pam Robbins, Oregon/Washington (OR/WA) Resource Advisory Council Coordinator. Pam informed Scott of guidance provided by the Department of the Interior Solicitor's Office on this subject. Scott added this guidance to the Subgroup Bylaws and Procedures document.

Scott distributed the current version of the Subgroup Bylaws and Procedures to everyone present, asking them to review its contents and suggest any changes for incorporation into the final draft. The Council accepted the Solicitor's guidance and made modifications to the Subgroup Formation Process text. Once agreement was reached regarding the document's contents, Roger Sheley moved that the Subgroup Bylaws and Procedures be adopted as written. Bill Renwick seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously passed by all 11 Council members present.

Action Item- Scott Stoffel will email the final Subgroup Bylaws and Procedures to the Council after making all requested changes.

Designated Federal Official Updates:

Larry Frazier, Vale BLM Associate District Manager

Larry distributed a Vale District Information Update to the Council. He briefed the group on the current status of the following geographic management areas: North Fork, Dry Creek, Mainstem Malheur, Succor Creek/East Owyhee, Louse Canyon, Trout Creek, Barren Valley/Rattlesnake, and Soldier Creek/Cow Creek. Further, he provided an update on the current status of the Southeast Oregon Resource Management Plan, Leslie Gulch Area of Critical Environmental Concern Project, and Vale District prescribed fire and fuels projects.

Public comments are still being accepted on the Boardman to Hemingway Transmission Line Project despite the official comment period ending November 14, 2008. Approximately 86% of

the 298 mile single circuit 500 kilovolt transmission line is proposed to be installed on private land and 11% is proposed for installation on BLM-managed lands. This project has generated a substantial workload for the Vale District.

Teresa Raaf, Malheur National Forest Deputy Forest Supervisor

Region 6 prepared an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Invasive Plant Treatment in 2006 that addresses herbicide application on U.S. Forest Service administered lands. It is anticipated that herbicides will be applied to national forest lands in accordance with the requirements of this document within the next 18 months.

The Malheur National Forest is currently identifying forest restoration strategies to reduce the overstock of precommercial vegetation on the public lands it manages.

Teresa reported that Mary Wagner is the new Regional Forester for Region 6 of the U.S. Forest Service.

Kenny McDaniel, Burns BLM District Manager

Kenny distributed a Burns District Update to the Council. He informed the group of the current status of the wild horse program partnership with Mustang Solutions, North Steens Ecosystem Restoration Project, Andrews/Steens Resource Management Plan, term grazing permit renewals, Steens Travel Management Plan, wind energy development, Economic Stimulus Plan projects, and the Stroemple and Campbell land exchanges.

The EaglePicher diatomite mine expansion project will impact the Vale and Burns districts. A plan of operations has been developed and will be requested for presentation at the May Council meeting.

Joan Suther is now the Andrews/Steens Resource Area Field Manager.

Rick Roy was selected as the Three Rivers Resource Area Field Manager.

Bill Dragt was selected as the new Supervisory Natural Resource Specialist for the Three Rivers Resource Area.

Carol Benkosky, Lakeview BLM District Manager

Carol provided the Council with a Lakeview District Information Update handout. She briefed the group on the following subjects: the Lakeview Resource Area and Beaty Butte Allotment Management Plan, wind development, the draft Travel Management Strategy for Eastern Oregon, the OR/WA Vegetation Treatment EIS, wilderness proposals, Backscatter Site, Sand

Dunes East of Christmas Valley, Paisley Caves, Beaty Butte Herd Management Area, and Warner Wetlands pump and fish screen.

Lakeview Resource Area Archaeologist Bill Cannon has collaborated with the High Desert Museum over the last several months to create an exhibition titled "Rock Art Perspectives: Pictographs and Petroglyphs." On display are various sculptures, paintings, photographs and archeological findings. The exhibition runs through May 31.

Brennan Hauk has been selected as the new Weeds Specialist for the Lakeview Resource Area.

Member Updates:

Diane Pinney, Wild Horse and Burro Representative

Diane informed the Council of Rahall's proposed amendment to The Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971. She indicated she would provide the Council with copies of the October 2008 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report titled "Effective Long-Term Options Needed to Manage Unadoptable Wild Horses" at the May meeting.

Action Item- At the May meeting, Diane Pinney will provide all Council members a copy of the 2008 GAO report titled "Effective Long-Term Options Needed to Manage Unadoptable Wild Horses."

Roger Sheley, Academician Representative

Roger reported on the ongoing invasion of Medusahead within southeast Oregon. He indicated the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Research Station is interested in partnering with the BLM to develop solutions to this problem. He asked the Burns, Vale and Lakeview districts to provide the Council with an update at the May meeting regarding their current and future strategies for combating Medusahead.

Mona Drake, Commercial Recreation and Off-Highway Vehicle Representative

Mona distributed handouts to the Council that informed the group of the activities of the Pacific Northwest Four Wheel Drive Association, including the Pacific Northwest Trail Jamboree.

Larry Hammond, Public-at-Large Representative

Larry expressed concerns related to federal Economic Stimulus Plan project proposals. He indicated it is important that these projects be meaningful, be long-lasting, and utilize the services of private enterprises.

Dick Leever, Transportation and Right-of-Way Representative

Dick indicated he hasn't received an update within the last several months on the Fremont-Winema Travel Management Plan or the BLM's Travel Management Strategy for Eastern Oregon.

Richie Johnston, Dispersed Recreation Representative

Richie Johnson notified the Council that the Hi-Desert Storm Troopers snowmobile association in Lakeview, Oregon, has had trail grooming equipment vandalized on more than one occasion. Fremont-Winema National Forests Recreation Manager Larry Hills is working on a grant proposal to fund the construction of a shed to store and protect the grooming equipment.

Bill Renwick, Environmental Organizations Representative

Bill updated the Council on the current status of the Steens Mountain Travel Management Plan. He indicated that although the Judge upheld the plan, the only "ding" was regarding the "obscure routes" being mapped. Consequently, the south half map for the BLM's Burns District will not include the obscure routes. Bill voiced a strong interest in working collaboratively with the BLM and USDA Agricultural Research Station to address issues such as post fire ecosystem restoration.

Heather Swartz, Environmental Organizations Representative

Heather reported that the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) and BLM have been working cooperatively on sagebrush projects in southeast Oregon.

Heather informed the Council that dead birds in the vicinity of Vale, Oregon, have tested positive for the West Nile virus. There has been a recent decline in these reports because of dry weather conditions.

Jim Bishop, Commercial Timber Representative

Jim indicated there is a significant amount of woody debris in local forests that isn't being utilized. He advocates the use of this material for biomass, rather than allowing it to be consumed by wildfire. He reported that the Harney District Hospital used 70 tons of biomass last year to generate energy for its facilities.

Craig Foster, State Natural Resources Representative

Craig reported the Warner Mountain mule deer population has not been at its established management objective since 1999. The ODFW is working to restore mule deer numbers.

Variables influencing the current trend include habitat and predator issues. Craig will continue to keep the Council informed of all action taken to restore the mule deer population.

Craig indicated last year's rain benefited Sage-grouse in southeast Oregon. The ODFW will begin inventorying this species in the near future to assess production and improvement trends.

Kevin Peterman, Energy and Minerals Representative

Kevin indicated he is excited about serving as a member of the Council. Increasing demand for energy production on public lands promises to provide opportunities for the group to generate energy and mineral recommendations.

Meeting adjourned – 5:18 p.m.

Day Two, Friday, February 27, 2009

Meeting Location:

Best Western Rory and Ryan Inns

534 Highway 20 N

Hines, OR 97738

Members Present:

Group 1

Dick Leever

Kevin Peterman

Jim Bishop

Mona Drake

Group 2

Bill Renwick

Heather Swartz

Diane Pinney

Richie Johnston

Group 3

Larry Hammond

Roger Sheley

Craig Foster

Federal Representatives: Carol Benkosky, Kenny McDaniel, Larry Frazier, Teresa Raaf, Scott Stoffel, Michelle Pointere

Guests: Norman McIntosh, Jillian McIntosh, Ramona Bishop, Jerry Hensley, Gary McFadden, Patti Wilson, Dan Haak

The meeting began at: 8:00 a.m.

Welcome, Housekeeping, Agenda Review: Carol Benkosky opened the meeting at 8:00 a.m. Scott Stoffel reviewed the meeting agenda and group agreements.

Identification of Subgroup Members: Scott Stoffel began by identifying the Council's four existing subgroups and the vacancies created within three of these subgroups by outgoing Council members. Richie Johnston volunteered to fill the vacancy on the Fremont-Winema Travel Management subgroup. Mona Drake volunteered to fill one of the two vacancies on the North Lake Plan subgroup and the Council nominated absent member Jeff LaLande to fill the remaining vacancy. Mona Drake, Dick Leever, Richie Johnston and Craig Foster volunteered to become members of the BLM Transportation Strategy subgroup. Bill Renwick notified the Council of the need to identify a chairperson for two of the subgroups. Dick Leever volunteered to be the Chairperson for the North Lake Plan subgroup and Craig Foster volunteered to be the Chairperson for the BLM Transportation Strategy Subgroup.

Action Item- Scott Stoffel will notify Jeff LaLande of the Council's request that he serve as a North Lake Plan subgroup member.

Active Subgroup Reports:

Heather Swartz, Herbicide Planning Chairperson

Heather informed the Council that the subgroup hasn't met since the August meeting, thus there are no recommendations for review by the full Council. Heather indicated she had received an update on the OR/WA BLM's draft Vegetation Treatment EIS from Todd Thompson of the Oregon State Office. The draft EIS should be pulled together in the next six to eight weeks. A 30-day internal review of this document is anticipated to begin sometime in April. The 60-day public comment period is expected to begin in July. The Herbicide Planning subgroup will participate in the 30-day internal review. A subgroup meeting will be held as soon as the draft EIS is received. Recommendations prepared by the subgroup will be reviewed by the full Council prior to being forwarded to the BLM's Vegetation Treatment EIS Team through Carol Benkosky.

Dick Leever, Fremont-Winema Travel Management Chairperson

Dick indicated there is nothing to report at this time. The subgroup is waiting for instructions from Rich Kehr regarding input the Fremont-Winema National Forests are seeking on their Travel Management Plan.

Dick Leever, North Lake Plan Chairperson

As the newly elected Chairperson, Dick had nothing to report regarding Subgroup activities. He will contact Kim McLean to receive an update of the current status of the North Lake Plan for presentation at the next meeting.

Action Item – Dick Leever will contact Kim McLean to receive an update on the North Lake Special Recreation Area Management Plan for presentation at the May Meeting.

Craig Foster, BLM Transportation Strategy Chairperson

Craig didn't have anything to report at this time, as the Subgroup members were just identified this morning. The Subgroup requested a copy of the BLM's draft Transportation Strategy.

Action Item- Scott Stoffel will email the BLM's draft Travel Management Strategy for Eastern Oregon to all members of the Council's BLM Transportation Strategy subgroup.

Oregon Explorer Grant Update: Bill Renwick informed the Council that the most recent Oregon Explorer meeting had to be cancelled because of inclement weather. Counties continue to prepare grant proposals to support this initiative. The Oregon Explorer website should be online by the end of the year. The site will be hosted by Oregon State University and will contain scientific documents from state and federal agencies, local governments, university scientists and citizens to support informed decisions and actions by people concerned with Oregon's natural resources and environment.

BLM Sagebrush Habitat Treatments: Kenny McDaniel explained that from 2001 to 2006 the Burns District completed roughly 10,000 acres of brush beating strips mainly in Wyoming big sagebrush stands. From 2003 to 2006, sagebrush along approximately 500 miles of roads in Sage-grouse habitat was brush beat to create fuel breaks. Kenny stated the Burns District is testing a new method for restoring sagebrush in wildfire areas. This involves cutting and piling sagebrush seed heads each fall in locations disturbed by fire. The Burns District is working with several nurseries to propagate forb species important to Sage-grouse survival.

Carol Benkosky reported the Lakeview District treats three to seven thousand acres of sagebrush habitat on an annual basis. Between 200 and 600 of these acres are mowed. Carol used a map to identify the location and type of specific treatment sites.

Larry Frazier stated the Vale District has actively treated Sage-grouse habitat since 2002. This includes the use of prescribed fire to reduce juniper. Additional sagebrush habitat treatments are planned for 2009.

BLM Wild Horse and Burro Program: Gary McFadden updated the Council on the current status of the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro program. He briefed the group on the following subjects: applicable GAO reports, Congressman Rahall's proposed amendment to The Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971, the November 2008 Wild Horse and Burro

Advisory Board meeting and resulting recommendations, and options for resolving problems associated with the number of horses in long-term holding facilities.

A motion was made and seconded for the Council to establish a Wild Horse and Burro subgroup. When put to a vote, the motion was not carried. The Council agreed to table the discussion on the establishment of this subgroup until the next meeting. At this time the Council will identify the following: (1) the specific issues/concerns to be addressed by the subgroup, (2) proposed action to be taken by the subgroup, (3) how the Council will benefit from the establishment of the subgroup, and (4) any non-Council members needed on the subgroup.

Ramona Bishop informed the Council that the March 2 National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Meeting can be viewed by the public via the internet.

Action Item-Ramona Bishop will email Scott Stoffel the link to the website on which the National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Meeting can be viewed. Scott will email the link to all Council members.

Action Item- Craig Foster will email all Council members a copy of The Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 that contains Congressman Rahall's proposed changes.

Public Comments:

Dan Haak notified the SEORAC of a problem the Steens Mountain Advisory Council encountered related to their Wild Horse and Burro representative being designated as a "special government employee" and their position description containing the term "expert." Dan indicated this resulted in the representative being required to file a financial disclosure statement and subject to information requests from outside parties. Dan recommended the SEORAC review the position descriptions of all members to ensure these documents do not contain the term "expert" or "special government employee" to avoid having its members be subject to the same burdens.

Action Item – Scott Stoffel will notify Pam Robbins of the concerns raised by the Steens Mountain Advisory Council related to Council members' position descriptions containing the terms "expert" and/or "special government employee" to determine whether or not this is an issue the SEORAC needs to address.

The public comment period closed at 11:09 a.m.

Round Table:

Craig Foster stated he would provide an update on Sage-grouse at the next meeting.

Bill Renwick indicated Lou Davies needs to be informed of the proposed changes to The Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act.

Action Item – Scott Stoffel will mail Lou Davies a copy of all documents outlining Congressman Rahall’s proposed amendments to The Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act.

Larry Hammond inquired into the history of the SEORAC’s actions related to wild horse and burros. Long-term Council members recalled preparing official correspondence on this subject. The Burns District recommended that a request be submitted to Pam Robbins seeking a copy of these documents.

Action Item - Scott Stoffel will ask Pam Robbins to provide copies of all official Council letters prepared on the subject of wild horses.

Heather Swartz indicated she would like to have a discussion at the next meeting on sagebrush habitat monitoring (type, data, objectives, partnerships, adaptive management, invasive species, etc.)

2009 Meeting Schedule:

May 7-8, 2009 in Lakeview, Oregon
August 13-14, 2009, in Ontario, Oregon
November 5-6, 2009, in Burns, Oregon

Agenda Items for Next Meeting:

- DFOs will update the Council on their current and future strategies for combating Medusahead.
- DFOs will update the Council on actions taken related to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.
- The Vale District and Lakeview District will provide updates on resource management plan settlement negotiations, including the designation of obscure routes.
- Craig Foster will provide an update on Sage-grouse.
- The Burns District will provide an update on the EaglePicher diatomite mine expansion.
- Diane Pinney will provide an update on Rahall's proposed amendment to The Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971.
- The Council will discuss sagebrush habitat treatment monitoring (type, data, objectives, partnerships, adaptive management, invasive species, etc.).
- Bill Renwick will provide an update on the Oregon Explorer Project.
- The Council will discuss the establishment of a Wild Horse and Burro subgroup.

Closing Remarks: Carol Benkosky thanked everyone for coming. She indicated it was obvious the Council desired to collaborate with one another in an effort to make a difference and address important issues. Carol recommended that the Council focus on the use of subgroups, as they promise to be the instrument through which the greatest movement can be made.

Meeting adjourned at 12:12 p.m.