

*John Day-Snake Resource Advisory Council
Meeting Minutes
July 20, 2010- John Day, OR*

Business Meeting RAC Attendees:

CATEGORY 1		CATEGORY 2		CATEGORY 3	
X	Adriane Borgias	X	Aaron Killgore		Ellen Bishop
X	Terry Drever-Gee		Bill Lang		Craig Ely
	Dan Forsea	X	Dave Riley		Pat Dunham
X	Mike Hayward	X	Tim Unterwegner	X	Patricia Gainsforth
X	Art Waugh	X	Berta Youtie		Mark Webb

Quorum: No

RAC Federal Official Attendees:

AGENCY	MANAGER		AGENCY	MANAGER	
BLM Prineville	X	Debbie Henderson-Norton	Ochoco NF		Jeff Walter
BLM Vale	X	Don Gonzalez	Umatilla NF	X	Kevin Martin
Malheur NF	X	Doug Gochnour	Wallowa-Whitman NF		Steve Ellis

Presenters: Mike Tatum, Monte Kuk, Bob Hopper

Visitors: Jeff Shannon, Margaret Carey

Designated Federal Official: Debbie Henderson-Norton

RAC Chair: Berta Youtie

Notetaker: Pam Robbins

Facilitator: Christina Lilienthal

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Meeting Called to Order - Berta Youtie, Chairman

Thanks to the Malheur NF for hosting and for the field trip view of the Middle Fork of the John Day River work and progress. Fish have arrived, indicating restoration is helping. Partnerships across the board have produced results.

DFO Welcome

Debbie regrets that a conference call prevented her from attending the field trip. She had an opportunity to see some of the territory on her own, though. The work is impressive.

Subcommittee Reports –

****Noxious Weed Subgroup*** – Berta Youtie reported that the group has not had topics between meetings, but have a comment from the field tour: she noted sulphur cinquefoil in the work area, and wondered about why it wasn't treated before equipment began operations. The FS cannot use herbicides, so few preliminary

treatment options were available. The Forest's weed plan is expected this September, and that may help in the future.

***JD Basin RMP Subgroup** – Berta Youtie reported no activity between meetings.

***OHV Subgroup** – Art Waugh had nothing to report.

***BLM Travel Management Subgroup** – This topic has been completed until BLM begins specific area plans.

***Baker RMP Subgroup** – Berta Youtie commented that the RAC hasn't been tasked with any work ahead of the current status of the Baker plan. The RAC would have liked to be more involved, but were unable to meet for several months waiting for member appointments to be approved in Washington DC. The Council could not participate during the most involved part of the Baker RMP process.

***John Day River Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC)** – The issues will be rolled into the "John Day River Study", and the John Day Basin RMP Subgroup will have the lead.

***Energy Subgroup** – Adriane reports the Boardman to Hemingway meetings taking place. The Cascade Crossing effort will cross the John Day River, and the RAC could invite someone to do a briefing if that's desired. If we have a presentation on this, it would be nice to have an overview from the BLM and Forest Service to put it into context. Geothermal projects have not really been covered by the RAC, and the ongoing projects are currently on Forest Service lands. If MOUs or other Agreements are being arranged, those would be good opportunities for the RAC to surface any concerns or inputs before those things become "policy." This is an issue that might be emerging, but not much going on within the boundaries of this RAC. The BLM will be establishing permitting requirements for energy siting as part of the state sagegrouse plan. Berta will follow up on the closing dates for comments.

*****ACTION:** Berta will check on the closing date for comments on the sagegrouse step-down plan and notify Debbie if there is interest in providing RAC comments.

*****ACTION:** Don is wondering what level of agreements the RAC would like to see. Would they like to review all draft interagency agreements? Might be best to look at the overall vision types and the detailed items within specific interest areas.

Planning Updates

Doug Gochmour – Malheur Travel Planning will give emphasis to the areas where the Forest Supervisor is allowed some discretion. Doug will brief the RAC on this at the September meeting.

*****ACTION:** Set aside agenda time in September for Doug to discuss the alternatives in the Malheur Travel Plan.

Debbie Henderson-Norton – Monte will brief the RAC on the John Day RMP, which is progressing. The District hopes to have the final EIS out by the end of 2010. Portland General Electric is proposing the Cascade Crossing Transmission Line project, with comment period ending July 27. The route crosses the JD River on the Prineville District. Wilderness planning for the Spring Basin wilderness along the John Day River includes completion of land exchanges prior to the plan. Prineville is in the consultation process with National Marine Fisheries Service on grazing renewals.

Commercial feasibility of some proposed actions in the Rudio Highlands Environmental Assessment, are being looked at.

Kevin Martin – Steve Ellis asked Kevin to share the update on the Wallowa-Whitman, as he couldn't attend the meeting. He is dealing with issues related to the fire at the Enterprise Ranger District (RD). The current intent is for the Enterprise RD to set up modular buildings onsite until a new facility is arranged. The office will use the elementary school at Joseph for the immediate short term. Travel management consultation is taking somewhat longer than the forest initially expected – it will likely be January before the decision is issued. OPB is visiting NE Oregon for a rural community focus today, so the forest has been involved with that.

On the Umatilla NF, the ARRA recovery work and youth activities are the highlights. Trail maintenance and facilities work are the primary job focus, and they're working across the forest, accomplishing a lot. Student Conservation Assn has a blog on their website where kids in these jobs are sharing about their experience. Fuels and stewardship work is mostly done for this season, with some still in process. Invasive species EIS was signed July 7, and is at the printers. It will probably go out at the beginning of August, so that will start the appeal period. The Wallowa Whitman appeal period for their plan may already be done by now.

Road construction is ongoing on the forest, so some detours are in place. The first Environmental Career Camp for women was held at the start of summer, involving the National Forests & Kennewick School District. Presenters came from Forests, US Fish & Wildlife, Corps of Engineers, Department of Energy, National Weather Service, Department of Ecology, Oregon State Parks, Safari Club Int'l, Umatilla Soil & Water Conservation District, Blue Mountain Wildlife, and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. The 3-day camp was held along the Umatilla River. The Fire & Fuels Camp will be in October, and there are more applications than slots for that training.

Don Gonzalez – The OR/WA BLM Weed EIS final is at the printer, and Vale expects it back in two weeks. The Record of Decision will follow. The State Office issued a contract for developing the step-down portion for herbicide treatments specific to the Districts. By next summer, Districts upon completion of additional NEPA may be able to use the broadened chemical treatments that have been evaluated in the Statewide EIS.

'The Nature Conservancy's Big Look'

Mike Tatum, USFS

The standard 10-year plan process was expanded to look at the overall strategic vision for the full landscape of the Forest. That plan was completed in 2007, and the Forest analyzed the information they had in detail for sub-basins across the Forest in things they could measure. There were 14 quantitative values scored, and 28 qualitative values. Quantitative factors measured were fire, heritage, aquatic condition, insects & disease, roads, etc. Qualitative looked at "Chief's 4 Threats" and the "Regional Forester's 7 Emphasis Areas" as well as other key rankings. The assessment then ranked the sub-watersheds based on the top 10, 15, 20 and 25 percent of areas of importance. Many of the Local Collaborative Groups started at about the same time this effort began.

'Big Look' Scored Criteria: Stand density, frequent fire systems, key habitat, old growth, ecological departure, adjacent private lands, and economically feasible harvest areas. The margin between relative values was exceedingly small, because many of the areas share very similar conditions. The current effort is to set the framework for the Forest that meets the array of needs as quickly as possible. Some areas were already at highest priority levels for Collaborative Groups and the Forest as a whole. They discovered several areas and/or subjects where there was not data available. They decided to have the

plan reviewed annually, limit changes to the schedule, and make only essential changes to plan choices/boundaries, etc.

The Forest used ARRA funds to hire 52 people (mostly local) to gather data to feed into future projects here. The Landscape Collaboratives required projects to be contiguous, so that helped weight the decision matrix.

Q: Can the plans be revised based on the data that is gathered by the temporary crews hired with ARRA funding?

A: Yes, the data gathering is work that the Forest did not have the staff or funding to complete before ARRA. The information will be folded into current plans and will provide baseline data for future project development.

John Day Basin RMP Alternatives for Grazing Decisions Monte Kuk

There has not been much to update on since the last visit with the subgroup. The BLM State Office review and Washington Office review are completed, and the Solicitor's review is nearly complete. Assessment of sound transmission was done at Little Canyon Mountain OHV area so that issue could be evaluated. One area of work is the grazing relinquishment determination: what would the BLM do with those lands if a lease/permit is turned back to the District. BLM tried to develop a strategy for adjusting the previous grazing matrix in those circumstances, taking all criteria into account. They attempted to set factors for social, grazing demand, and ecological elements that could balance resource needs. There are about 240 allotments in the area, and most are small, isolated parcels. Invasives are a concern; weed transfer is not a stand-alone factor, but is included in the Rangeland Health Assessment. Three of the RMP alternatives used the grazing matrix. The primary public comments received on the draft EIS focused on how complicated the matrix seems to be. Reserve Forage Allotments require more administrative involvement, where the BLM grazing regulations already allow use of some open areas for time-limited, non-renewable grazing activity. It would require additional NEPA clearance. The Grazing Decision Tree was intended to simplify the process.

Q: Did BLM look at other use conflicts besides recreational?

A: Prineville did look at other uses/values that might conflict with grazing. On this land base, it was already established that the public did not like cows in the campgrounds, etc. The main goal was having a process in place to guide the process if a lease/permit is voluntarily relinquished.

Q: The decision tree doesn't necessarily talk about demand. It seems like the tree gives current permittees more options if they choose not to graze lands where they hold lease/permit for?

A: That's right. This gives some decision space and clarifies what is required in that case.

Comment: There are social impacts if a rancher stops using their permitted area – the economic impact of what they buy in the community and employment they support has an effect too. Commendations to the BLM for making this effort on such a complex land base.

Comment: The allotment adds value to the ranch (economic or heritage) so there is motivation to take care of the public lands.

Blue Mtn. Forest Plan Revision

Mike Hayward

A letter was drafted by the planning subgroup containing comments for the RAC to consider and adopt. There was no quorum for that meeting, so material was forwarded to the forest without adoption by the full RAC. The forest will fully consider the input, but the effect may have been greater if the letter had had unanimous RAC consent.

Significant issues that will drive the alternatives are access (motorized & non-motorized, by season), ecological resiliency (acres treated, desired conditions, etc), economic and social resiliency (sale quantities, recreational use, etc), large trees & old forest, wilderness recommendations/designations, budget variables/realities, climate change impacts and the effects of forest activities, eligible WSR, grazing, and wildlife corridors.

Next step will be using the scoping inputs and drafting alternatives. Those alternatives should be ready for the RAC's September meeting in LaGrande.

Comment: The forests are trying to balance their instructions to formulate plans based on actual budgets over the past 3 years. There is some demand to have the plans display all the landscape work that needs done, regardless of budget constraints. This would allow counties and cities to realistically evaluate the situation across a given forest and the opportunities for restoration and employment if funding became available. The planning document should have an alternative that reflects what actually needs done on the landscape for sustainability.

Comment: The International Scientific Conference on Climate Change recommendations for planning include selecting the areas most vulnerable to climate effects, and opting for plans that retain the most flexibility

Wild Horse & Burro Program

Bob Hopper

The current strategy document is important to the future of the agency's Wild Horse and Burro program. There's a lot of material being taken into account as the BLM moves toward sustainability of the populations.

Q: Was this developed by the National Wild Horse & Burro RAC?

A: They were part of it, working with managers that were tasked with developing a starting point for review.

About 35,000 horses were removed from the range and have not been placed. The Appropriate Management Level (AML) bureau-wide is about 7,000 lower than the numbers presently on the range. Much of the BLM's budget is used for housing horses previously gathered. This is not a sustainable operation plan for the future. The agency will not use the authority for euthanasia or mass transfer, so other actions must be taken. Success of any strategy will be measured by population control for healthy herds/lands and overall sustainability.

The agency is waiting for the public comment closing date, and hopes to have the draft plan available to Congress by the end of October. Comments should be directed to sussie_stokke@blm.gov, or sally_spencer@blm.gov, or by mail at BLM Wild Horse & Burro Program, Office of the Assistant Director, Renewable Resources and Planning (WO-200), 1849 'C' St NW, Mail Stop 1050LS, Washington, DC 20240

Q: Why are we afraid to consider establishing/supporting tribal or other efforts for slaughterhouses to meet the demand for horse meat and for ranchers who cannot dispose of their infirm animals?

A: The topic is too emotional and politically volatile. It is a hard topic to discuss objectively and rationally.

Q: What shape are the herds in right now? Are they emaciated, unhealthy?

A: The horses from the Calico gathers in Nevada were in very poor condition, and several horses died from lack of water sources. Numbers are very high elsewhere. In Oregon, our horses are in reasonable shape, but some animals have come from other HMAs and they add to pressure on our rangelands.

*****ACTION:** Christina will send an email to RAC members with Bob Hopper's contact information.

Open Public Comment Period

No public in attendance

North End Umatilla Sheep Plan

Kevin Martin

The primary issue is a domestic sheep allotment in proximity to bighorn sheep. The draft recommendation is ready for preliminary review by the RAC. The Subgroup has begun reviewing the document, and the RAC will get an on-the-ground review at September 9th field trip. Group can draft a letter that can be refined at the RAC's business meeting, so they can adopt a final comment letter. Dave, Art, Patricia, Mike and Craig are the ones who got the preliminary draft. There are five alternatives ranging from "no action" to very restrictive. Is it realistic to plan for a consensus recommendation on an alternative from the RAC on this topic? Would it be better for the RAC to submit specific principles that they would want the forest to include in the alternatives? There are some boundary/acreage changes, but the alternatives have not shifted greatly from what was discussed at the April RAC meeting.

The currently proposed alternatives have no provision for the rest rotation cycle that was discussed in April.

Q: Does the subgroup feel they have enough information to draft a recommendation for the RAC to review?

A: They can draft a letter, but want to be sure there would be consensus.

*****ACTION:** Kevin will prepare a one-page summary of the current alternatives for the field visit in September.

*****ACTION:** Christina will send electronic versions of the current draft to RAC members with a hard copy to Tim Unterwegner.

Ground Rules/Participation for Making Progress between Meetings

This RAC has taken on a lot in the past quarter, and needs to establish the process they will use to go forward. General discussion included:

Berta began discussion dealing with the Blue Mountain Revision letter. The subgroup worked well together, but the full RAC conference call was not successful. There was no quorum, and uncertainty about how to proceed next. RAC membership denotes participation when decisions are made or recommendations are given. The Federal Official has the capacity to drop members who miss successive meetings, but to date we have not done that.

Full RAC conference call meetings should probably be avoided between meetings, as it is difficult to arrange for them and be successful. If the RAC could “front-load” topics so that they have the lead time to formulate their comments, it would be more effective.

It is difficult to manage a new topic or a quick turnaround when meeting by conference call. If members have not submitted changes prior to the call, it puts pressure on the person preparing the letter and all other members to consider last minute changes.

The training & orientation might fall short of what is needed. Do we remind members of the impact they can have on decisions the agency makes?

Maybe the RAC needs a form letter template to send to managers reminding them of the meeting dates and their need to get preliminary information to the RAC in a timeframe that allows them to fully consider the issue and provide meaningful comments or advice.

As volunteers, the members only continue if they find value in the time exchanged. Participation requires careful facilitation so that members can get and review materials in a timely and focused way, and prepare comments or participate in discussions. The most successful period for the RAC was when the DFO would call ahead of each meeting to verify who would be there and stress the importance of having a quorum.

Would it make a difference if the DFO called each person to find out what might be preventing them from meeting their commitment? Does the location of meetings affect member turnout? Would it be more constructive to have work sessions built into every agenda?

*****ACTION:** Debbie will call RAC members to confirm the date, time and place of the next meeting and get their tentative commitment to be in LaGrande Sept 9th and 10th.

Comment: A long term member noted that the decisions and other actions of the RAC have been good, but almost more important is the opportunity to interact with agency heads and other stakeholder groups on issues of importance to their day job and their general resource values.

*****ACTION:** A member of each category will contact their group to encourage attendance. Terry Drever-Gee will coordinate Category 1, Aaron Killgore will coordinate Category 2, and Patricia Gainsforth will coordinate Category 3 and will take that role this time in advance of the meeting.

Wild Horse Strategy - Preliminary Draft letter

Draft letter presented for RAC consideration, urging that all solutions be considered. This could be a moment for the BLM to show true leadership and a more complete stewardship of the issue. Broader public communication of the general principles that the Bureau is committed to would be helpful, including the impacts of a growing horse population on other species and resources. Possibly “reframe” the concept of humane treatment, ie. reduce (population control), reuse (adoption), recycle (food).

It was moved/seconded to accept the general concepts letter from the RAC on the wild horse strategy. Motion carried.

*****ACTION:** Adriane will edit Dave’s general principles letter and send it to Christina by Wednesday to transmit to all RAC members prior to submitting to the agency.

*****ACTION:** Members will respond with any revisions by Sunday July 25.

*****ACTION:** Category contacts (Terry, Aaron, and Patricia) will confirm their group approval to Adriane NLT July 28; she will submit it on July 29. This did occur ontime thanks to the group for all being responsive to Adriane's short timeframe.

*****ACTION:** Christina will send the application form for the Wild Horse & Burro board to Patricia Gainsforth.

Next Meeting Agenda Items

Will be in LaGrande 9/9-10/2010

Boardman to Hemingway Update – Don Gonzalez

Cascade Crossing Update – Robin Estes

Baker RMP – Don Gonzalez

Blue Mountain Plan Alternatives – Kevin Martin

ESA 101 Training – Kevin Martin, Gary Miller, Spencer Hovecamp, Tracy Hickman

Malheur NF Travel Planning – Doug Gochnour

State Sagegrouse step-down plan – Berta Youtie

Field visit:

North End Sheep Allotment , September 9th– Kevin
Issue of Moist Forest Entries

RECAP OF ACTION ITEMS

*****ACTION:** Berta will check on the closing date for comments on the sagegrouse step-down plan and notify Debbie if there is interest in providing RAC comments.

*****ACTION:** Don will find out what agreements the state director is willing to have the RAC review.

*****ACTION:** Set aside agenda time in September for Doug to discuss the alternatives in the Malheur Travel Plan.

*****ACTION:** Kevin will prepare a one-page summary of the current North End alternatives prior to the field visit in September.

*****ACTION:** Kevin will send Christina an electronic version of the current draft North End Sheep Allotment Plan so she can send to RAC members; a hard copy should be sent to Tim Unterwegner.

*****ACTION:** Debbie will call RAC members who weren't here to confirm the date, time and place of the next meeting and get their tentative commitment to be here.

*****ACTION:** A member of each category will contact their group to encourage attendance. Terry Drever-Gee, Aaron Killgore, and Patricia Gainsforth will take that role this time.

*****ACTION:** Adriane will edit Dave's general principles letter and send it to Christina by Wednesday to transmit to all RAC members prior to submitting to the agency.

*****ACTION:** Members will respond with any revisions by Sunday July 25.

*****ACTION:** Category contacts (Terry, Aaron, and Patricia) will confirm their group approval to Adriane NLT July 28; she will submit it on July 29.

*****ACTION:** Christina will send the Wild Horse & Burro board application form to Patricia Gainsforth.

*****ACTION:** Christina will send the current roster information to all members in pdf format to verify information.

Approved as written:



Berta Younie

RAC Chair



Debbie Norton

Designated Federal Officer