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Southeast Oregon Resource Advisory Council Meeting

November 16, 2006 - Burns, Oregon; 8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Business Meeting

In attendance: Tara Martinak, Sally Nelson, Jill Workman, Bob Kindschy, Roger Sheley, Cody Hansen, Fred Cramer, Tom Harris, Bill Renwick, Diane Pinney, Dick Leever, Lou Davies, Walt Van Dyke, Margaret Bailey, Dave Henderson, Stan Bennice, Dave Vandenberg, Shirley Gammon, Chris Knauf, Gary McFadden, Kelly Hazen, Mark Sherbourne, and Pete Mehringer.

Facilitator Tara Martinak welcomed new members Lou Davies, Bill Renwick, Fred Cramer, and Roger Sheley and recognized Walt Van Dyke's reappointment to the Council. It was announced the vacant Public at Large position will remain empty until advertising for nominees occurs next spring/summer. Following review of the agenda and opening remarks from Tara, Resource Advisory Council (RAC) Chair Jill Workman announced this was her last meeting and informed the committee that all previous meeting minutes had been reviewed and approved by the Designated Federal Official and Chair.

Designated Federal Official updates

Cody Hansen began the Designated Federal Official updates and shared the following information for the Burns District:

- This wildfire season, there were 216 fires and approximately 130,000 acres burned, primarily in sagebrush plant communities. This resulted in seven Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation (ESR) Plans for seeding of 10,800 acres, repairing 93 miles of fence, construction of 28 miles of new fence, cleaning existing water catchments to reduce potential for large scale erosion, surveying 91 cultural sites for future protective treatments, seeding 7,000 acres of forage kochia and Wyoming big sagebrush, planting 200 acres of ponderosa pine, and planting 5,000 acres of bitter brush. Fall weather has been good and ESR projects will be completed by December.
- There have been funding concerns for the Wild Horse and Burro Program. The National Wild Horse and Burro Futuring Committee will make recommendations to the Washington Office and Steering Committee on how to handle this situation, but has stated clearly the intent is to keep the program within the Bureau (as opposed to abolishing it altogether).
- Wild horses are almost at Appropriate Management Level (AML) in the Burns District. In 2006 over 1,000 horses were gathered. There are currently 468 horses at the Burns Corral Facility.
- Bob Hopper is new at the OR/WA BLM State Office (OSO). He replaced Hue Barrett with the monitoring program.

Following the update, a brief and general discussion occurred on how the new annual operating instructions are working with the changes in the grazing rules.

Members complemented the monitoring progress and asked if it was policy to notify permittees when monitoring should occur. Cody responded the assumption was correct and noted the Burns District encourages environmental groups to join in monitoring as well. Forest Service welcomes the same. Bill Renwick added similar efforts have been made with riparian areas with great success.

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Shirley Gammon shared the following information for the Lakeview District:

- Grazing contracts are currently on track.
- The 2006 wildfire season was relatively easy with no major fires.
- Wild horse herds are currently at AML.
- No changes have been made regarding bio mass projects since the update given at the last meeting.
- The District is currently completing all permits for wetlands. Wetland permits will be a nice addition in the area.
- The District is working more with the Klamath Resource Areas on hydro power.
- Decommission of the backscatter site is continuing; the towers are coming down.

Dave Henderson shared the following information for the Vale District:

- Fire season was busy in Vale, shutting down all other operations for at least 6 weeks. Fires were spread across most of the District, from Hells Canyon to Nevada. Even though less than 80 fires occurred, approximately 230,000 acres were burned, causing some disturbance in sagebrush areas identified in the Southeast Oregon Resource Management Plan (SEORMP). Over twenty rehabilitation plans resulted from the fires, requiring everyone to be creative in finding seed. The Oregon State Office (OSO) supplied the money for the seed and the District is seeding at this time. Fires burned out fences and most of a Herd Management Area (HMA) (Sand Springs), increasing future fence projects and necessitating removal of 130 horses from the area. The number of horses removed was comparable to the number of cows removed.
- Louse Canyon Geographic Management Area (GMA) is working its way through appeal. Other GMA's are in various stages of progress and appeal. The SEORMP is still in the 9th circuit court; some decisions are expected soon.

ACTION → Tara Martinak will remind people of their affiliations with each district (who from the RAC associates with whom from which district).

Stan Benes, new Forest Supervisor for the Malheur National Forest, introduced himself to the Council for the first time and shared the following information for his jurisdiction:

- The Malheur National Forest has noticed a heavy decrease in active management in past years and litigation workloads have been time consuming since the 52 percent staff reduction. Service first opportunities and zoning personnel have helped with accomplishments.
- The High Desert Partnership and the Desert Blues stewardship programs have been good for the Malheur and have encouraged more collaboration.
- The 2006 wildfire season resulted in a major fire of approximately 15,000 acres (Shake Table Complex). The fire reminded us of how collaboration can help in these areas and the need to spend more money on high risk fuels areas to keep such fires under control.
- The Malheur is currently dealing with ongoing appeals and lawsuits effecting grazing, watershed management and fish passage.
- Co-location efforts are continuing.

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Chris Knauf, Transportation Strategy Coordinator, OR/WA BLM

Chris updated members on the OR/WA BLM/FS Transportation Strategy. Recent areas of focus have been collaboration, seamless transition across public lands and consistency in signage, clarifying definitions using proposed language, designating routes to limit access, inventorying all historical data and providing a current inventory to make decisions on.

Recommendations on these areas of focus and the overall Strategy will come from the SEORAC, John Day/Snake (JDS) RAC, and Central Oregon. Groups and individuals are encouraged to participate in the inventorying process. Defining road/route types and uses has been a contentious issue among various public groups, emphasizing the need for an inventory of every road/route out there without debate and establishment of use areas to make recommendations on. Monitoring these areas for vandalism and health will be difficult.

The real issue is managing people; education is essential to meeting the objectives put forth. Concepts such as access for in-holders and permittees are possible, but language will be very important. Chris took note of several monitoring suggestions from the Council, along with comments on defining routes and motorized vehicle types, and continued to emphasize building relationships. Concerns of cross representation were raised. It was clarified that FS and Tribal representatives existed but there is currently no horse representative.

A bulletin will most likely be posted once the statewide Strategy is complete. Currently various marketing venues to inform the public are being researched. The next transportation sub-committee meeting will be December 12, 2006 in Redmond.

ACTION→ Chris Knauf will provide a update paper for the SEORAC February meeting.

Jill reviewed the process for formal recommendation from the SEORAC and emphasized the importance of putting sub-committee meeting information before the entire RAC. RAC can make formal recommendations with sub-committee information, but sub-committees cannot make recommendations without the rest of the Council. Bill stated there will be a meeting/workshop sponsored by the Sierra Club in Bend on December 9-10 that will focus on the collaborative process of decision making and public contributions to public land management activities. Bill encouraged those interested to attend and will share the meeting materials for those interested.

Gary McFadden, Wild Horse and Burro Specialist, OR/WA BLM

- Wild horse and burro populations nationwide are down to 31,000 with AML at 27,000. BLM is on the verge of achieving AML and it's very critical for this to happen. Once AML is reached, heads gathered per year will only be an estimated 5,000-6,000, reducing our overall workload and dollars spent in the program.
- Oregon has been very proactive with gathering and adopting animals and maintaining herd health and quality. Horses that meet specifications for herd improvement will continue to be returned to the wild. The OR/WA adoption market is very poor right now; only about 200 of 400-500 head are being adopted. The remaining horses are sent back East for adoption or to holding facilities, which puts us in a tight budget situation. Over half of Oregon's current funding is going towards holding facility costs, and budget allocations will be flat beginning in 2007.
- Creative ways for promoting adoptions are being tried – for example, offering free hauling – with some success. Gary took note of promotion ideas suggested by Council members while

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explaining the limits to some suggestions. There is no question – with BLM being responsible for the health and habitat of the horses and other resources they affect, horse management will continue.

- A draft of the Statewide Environmental Assessment (EA) concerning waterhole development in HMAs is in progress. The project is necessary to encourage distribution of horses while limiting disturbance. The draft EA is in the process with hopes of completion this winter. Some comments were received during the scoping period in Spring of 2006.
- Discussions followed on how age affects adoptability, birth control methods, use of high quality hay, death of horses recently gathered, policy on horses that leave the HMA, elimination of HMAs, sale authority usage and its limitations, views on slaughtering, conflict with horses and recreational users, long term facility costs and options locally, and overall funding.

Jim Kenna, Acting State Director, OR/WA BLM

- Jim commented on the agenda and complemented the validity of discussions occurring about the transportation strategy and horse program. Coming forth with the real reason for his visit, Jim recognized Jill Workman for her exemplary dedication to the SEORAC for the past 11 years...and with perfect attendance throughout her entire tenure! Jim complemented Jill on her outstanding ability to make sure all views within the room were expressed and for her continuous effort to better our public lands with the help of all opinions and interests. Thanks were given with a large plaque accompanied by a commemorative Lewis & Clark Bi-Centennial survey stone cap. Numerous compliments and memories followed from others.

Jill closed the awards presentation with thanks to Dave Henderson for staying in Vale and creating the stability they needed. Throughout her service on the RAC, Jill personally showed her passion to bring various entities to the table for a common goal and asked that this continue within the Council. She had fond memories of holding meetings on the land and encouraged the SEORAC to continue taking public comments into consideration, giving advice when needed, and making change where change is needed. Jill also thanked the members for all the valuable friendships created.

Margaret Bailey, District Ranger, Emigrant Creek Ranger District

- Forest supervisors have taken an active role in commenting on the Malheur National Forest/Blue Mountain Revision Plan. Chapter 2 of the plan is expected to be available for review near the end of November.
- A package of roadless areas is being reviewed for objective clarity for all three forests. A group of counties have hired the law firm Mason, Bruson, & Brenard, for representation in the Blue Mountain Plan. Steve Grasty will be the liaison for Harney County.
- The forest had previously been working under the 1992 Forest Plan and is currently working under the 2005 Plan. A draft plan will be out summer of 2007, with another round of public meetings. It was noted that current contact information for the Plan and its progress should be shared and is important to the public. Dave Henderson stated the SEORAC and JDSRAC may want to comment and will need to coordinate a chairs meeting.

Dianne Pinney, Wild Horse and Burro Representative, SEORAC

- Dianne shared her personal background and experience working with horses and land use planning in New York State. Her desire to speak at the meeting came from the need to raise

the awareness and interest in wild horses and burros. Several handouts were given regarding the history of wild horse theories, timelines of documented introduction, and their representation of the United States. Wanting the audience to view them as more than just this, Dianne continued by sharing the need to keep horse lineage in tact to maintain specific markings among breeds that may be becoming extinct in other countries. Genetics, an area of interest that Dianne studied, tracks lineage within a population.

- Wild horses are a zoological treasure and have had the ability to continue to survive in Southeast Oregon. The agency may not be able to solve the problem of holding facilities costs, but they have done a great job managing herds for color and beautiful horses. Promotion efforts may need to change to reflect genetic preservation. Marketing needs to remain positive to meet people's needs. Council members agreed the horses need to be presented as a valuable resource or the over-population in holding facilities problem will not be solved.

Sub-Committee/Liaison Reports and Member Round Table

Pete Mehringer shared an update from the Andrews Resource Area (Burns District).

- The Pickett Rim Big Horn Sheep Transplant EA is available for public comment. Pickett Rim is just west of Frenchglen.

Walt Van Dyke gave an update from the Jordan Resource Area (Vale District).

- Trout Creek GMA was sent out for comments and the District will be producing an EA on grazing efforts focusing on renewing grazing permits.
- The Lower Owyhee Plan currently has had no activity. With a recent change in personnel, some delays in writing the plan have occurred even though the scoping is complete. Fly fishing groups have expressed interest in the plan and have since had a clean up on the river to show that interest.
- West Nile has been found in sage grouse at the south end of Malheur County. Crooked Creek Ranch had normal counts at the beginning of the summer, but took a downturn in late summer when a rancher reported numerous dead sage grouse in and around an alfalfa field. Positive results for West Nile occurred in some (but not all) cases after several sage grouse carcasses, along with some other species, were sent off to the National Wildlife Health Lab for testing. Counts showed approximately a 70 percent mortality rate of the birds that were using the alfalfa field. The die-off occurred after a period of approximately 10 days of extremely high temperatures (over 100 degrees).

Samples collected from other locations around Jordan Valley came back negative for West Nile, but did show *Mycoplasma*, which is a respiratory disease. Symptoms were running noses and loss of feathers. It is uncertain what impact this disease may have on sage grouse populations. Use of lek counts for population monitoring will continue to allow Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) to keep track of population trends.

West Nile Virus in sage grouse was first found in Wyoming, Montana and Alberta, Canada three years ago. Since then, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, and Utah have all had cases of West Nile. After birds contract the disease there are no antibodies found – when they get it, they die. A decision to continue with the hunting season in Oregon has allowed ODFW to take blood samples to see if there is any presence of antibodies building up against West Nile.

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Other studies have shown that chukars and other upland gamebirds also typically acquire West Nile, but have low mortality rates; unfortunately they still become carriers. Most deaths of sage grouse to West Nile reported in Oregon have been associated with irrigated alfalfa fields. West Nile is known to cause fairly high mortality rates in corvids (ravens, crows, starlings, magpies, blackbirds) but those that survive are immune to the disease.

Human cases have also been on the rise with over 800 in southern Idaho, 4-5 resulting in death. Other cases have been reported in Jordan Valley, Harper, Vale, and Harney County. Lou mentioned when people think of West Nile, they think about the refuge and other areas where there may be lots of standing water. It's important to notice the cases typically arise in areas of flood irrigation and locations surrounded by sagebrush, which is key habitat for sage grouse. Spraying for mosquitoes does not help the sage grouse because it does not kill the larvae. Spraying does help humans, however.

Dianne Pinney gave an update from as the Wild Horse and Burro representative:

- A brief rundown was given of recent adoption events.
- Temperaments of the Sand Springs horses, gathered in the fall of 2006, were discussed.
- A suggestion for marketing the Adopt-a-Horse Program is to hold a wild horse adoption and demonstration event in California.

Tom Harris gave an update from the Three Rivers Resource Area:

- The Kiger/Riddle adoption is in the planning process for Fall of 2007.
- The Three Rivers Resource Area will be having a land sale on December 13 – 24 parcels totaling approximately 3,000 acres will be available for purchase. Selling these types of parcels (1/2 an acre to 240 acres) is more cost effective compared to land exchanges, since the funds from the sales can be used in public land purchases that may be more efficient to manage. Currently \$800,000 is in the land sale fund.
- There was a small but successful timber sale in the Black Rock area recently.
- A final decision was made for Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) use on the dunes site located at the west end of the Christmas Valley Sand Dunes. The area is to remain closed since it was proven too difficult to manage fossil protection and motorized vehicle use at the same site.

Dave Vandenberg gave an update from his sub committees:

- Regarding the transportation joint sub-committee with the JDSRAC, a majority of the issues and meeting results were previously covered by OR/WA BLM Transportation Strategy leader Chris Knauf.
- Litigation continues on the Beatty's Butte Plan and Lakeview's range involvement.

Jill Workman gave an update on issues and a reminder for the RAC:

- The Sierra club continues to look at how they can be involved with transportation planning up front.
- It is important to remember the SEORAC advises the FS as well as the BLM.

Bill Renwick gave a quick update of current political topics occurring locally.

- Senator Wyden instigated the study an Oregon Inspector General study of NLCS units, and since the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management Protection Area is one of them, several local landowners and BLM personnel were interviewed. It seems that everyone interviewed stressed the cooperative nature between all entities and the positive points in

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implementation. It was noted private landowners may be ahead of the game, while federal agencies continue with litigation knowing this is tying their hands on implementation. This dilemma is being recognized as a hot topic with diversified interest.

Tom Harris, OHV/Commercial Recreation Representative, SEORAC

Tom provided information to the Council on the Resources and People (RAP) CAMP and asked for their support in recommending federal agencies continue funding the youth program. Tom provided the history on the program and advised it uses volunteer teachers to educate youth about environmental resources available to them. Scholarships for the program are typically available for low income families. Dave Vandenberg stated additional grants are also available through local groups such as the Lakeview Rotary Club. Overall the program provides a great learning opportunity for all involved and introduces youth to federal career possibilities.

ACTION → Tom Harris will draft a letter of recommendation for continuation of federal funds toward RAP CAMP. The Council will review the letter at the February meeting.

February Meeting Agenda Items

- Formal recommendation for RAP CAMP funding
- Liaison assignments
- OHV
- Wind energy (items in the packet need be reviewed)
- Travel management
- Working Group updates – Walt Van Dyke
- Northlake plan update – Dick Leever
- Litigation update – Lou Davies
- Adaptive Management (monitoring) – Roger Sheley

2007 SEORAC Meeting Schedule set for:

February 8-9, 2007 in Burns, Oregon

May 10-11, 2007 in Vale/Ontario, Oregon

August 9-10 in Frenchglen /Fields, Oregon (Pete would like to lead a field trip at this time)

October 31-November 1 in Lakeview, Oregon

Elections

Walt Van Dyke was voted in as Chair and commented he hoped to be able to fill Jill's shoes.

Tom Harris was re-elected as Vice Chair.

Meeting adjourned at 3:20pm.