

Southeast Oregon Resource Advisory Council Conference Call

August 2, 2007 – 9:00 a.m.

In attendance: Tara Martinak, Dana Shuford, Dick Leever, Bill Renwick, Pete Mehringer, Dave Henderson, Tom Harris, Diane Pinney, Bob Kindschy, Walt Van Dyke, Fred Cramer, Roger Sheley, Chris Knauf, Miles Brown, Theresa Raaf, and Shirley Gammon.

Facilitator Tara Martinak reviewed the agenda and noted the reasons for the conference call instead of an in-person meeting were a short meeting schedule and heavy wildfire activity across the Districts.

Designated Federal Official updates

Dana Shuford shared the following information for the Burns District:

- The Burns District has had an incredibly busy fire season already, beginning July 5. Over 180,000 acres have burned so far and the agency has received much political and public scrutiny regarding firefighting activities. Fire season seems to have started early in Harney County this year; the District is hoping for less activity in August than usually occurs.
- The Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA) issued a decision on the Ankle Creek Inholder Access Environmental Assessment. The ruling was in favor of BLM on both protested accounts. The findings showed BLM appropriately applied wilderness guidelines and considered the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Act of 2000 direction for reasonable and adequate access.
- Regarding Oregon Natural Desert Association's lawsuit against the Andrews Resource Area/Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Area (CMPA) Resource Management Plan (RMP), Judge Ann Aiken ruled in favor of BLM on accounts, except for BLM's production of a comprehensive transportation plan for the Steens CMPA. Judge Aiken felt the Steens Mountain Travel Plan (which was in process at the time of the ruling) may be sufficient enough to address the comprehensive transportation plan issue, but would not rule on it.
- The Steens Mountain Travel Management Plan decision was rescinded in late May to consider Judge Aiken's ruling on the Andrews/Steens RMP. The decision is expected to be re-issued in mid-August.
- The North Steens Ecosystem Restoration Project Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is completed and expected to be distributed from the printer August 17.

Shirley Gammon shared the following information for the Lakeview District:

- The Lakeview District has had a minimal wildfire season with only 312 acres burned to date.
- The lawsuit against the Lakeview RMP was dismissed in favor of BLM.
- The District is looking to begin work (again) on the North Lake Plan this fall. Tom Harris asked to be notified when this process is underway so the sub-committee can be involved.
- Decommission of the Backscatter site continues.
- A biomass plant is scheduled to break ground in Lakeview mid-September.

FINAL

- The District is in the process of an emergency wild horse gather in the Beauty's Butte Herd Management Area. Herd numbers are nearly triple Appropriate Management Level and the area drought has left many animals without sufficient water. Approximately 150-250 animals are expected to be brought in off the range and kept at Oregon's Corral Facility in Hines.
- Currently there are six different companies looking into wind management on the Lakeview District.

Dave Henderson shared the following for the Vale District:

- Like Burns, the Vale District has had a very active fire season for July. Over 22 fires have been reported and over 77,000 acres have burned.
- The District is very busy working on permit renewals.
- The Jackie's Butte Herd Management Area wild horse gather is still set for this fall.

Teresa Raaf shared the following for the Malheur National Forest:

- Teresa is currently the acting District Ranger for the Emigrant Creek Ranger District of the Malheur National Forest. The Forest is hoping to select a new, permanent District Ranger by the end of August.
- The Malheur has also had a tough fire season so far, sharing some of their burned acres with the Burns District (with the Burns Interagency Fire Zone). The Egley wildfire complex had a big impact on permittees, private landowners, hunters and recreationists. Opportunities for alternate pastures for permitted livestock are being discussed. Bill Renwick suggested contacting the Soil and Water Conservation District to make sure affected permittees are given first priority for use of the solar watering systems.

Chris Knauf, OR/WA BLM State Office, discussing the Transportation Strategy for eastern Oregon:

At the last John Day/Snake RAC meeting, their Council had a great work session and produced a considerable amount of feedback on the Strategy. Chris is looking to have a similar session with the SEORAC at their November meeting. The Strategy is expected to be wrapped up by the end of the calendar year and the RAC will have another chance to look at it at their January/February meeting.

Tom Harris suggested the agency include user groups up front in the planning process instead of later. Dick Leever echoed this opinion and added that most of the public is just now figuring out what the Strategy is all about. It seems people are ill-informed of the process and how to be involved, or when they can participate later on. The Council continued discussing the necessity to educate the public and ensure their participation right away.

Miles Brown, OR/WA BLM State Office, discussing the Vegetation Treatments programmatic EIS:

FINAL

The Final Vegetation Treatments programmatic EIS was issued June 29 (a 30-day comment period followed). Some comments were received, but none that merited substantial changes to the EIS, so the Decision Record is in progress. The EIS contains risk assessment contains, among other things, risk assessments for new herbicides – which may allow us to expand our breadth of applicable chemicals, and an environmental report – which discusses other kinds of vegetation treatments such as brush beating, but is not a decision document.

OR/WA BLM will have to do a statewide step-down NEPA document from the programmatic EIS. Miles will be discussing this need with the State Leadership Team and collaboratively deciding what levels of NEPA should be accomplished to address all vegetation treatment issues statewide. The agency expects to begin this process by January 2008. Prior to, public scoping meetings regarding treatment ideas and statewide issues are being tentatively planned for October.

Pete Mehringer stated there were many comments that emphasized BLM may be only treating the problem (weeds) and not the cause (spread from off-highway vehicles, animals, people, etc.), and wondered if there would/could ever be a solution. Miles mentioned the agency has done a significant job trying to mitigate the cause and that education is indeed essential, but that weeds may still be a problem without the human spread factor.

Roger Sheley volunteered to help in any way possible with the statewide vegetation treatment document and Miles greatly appreciated and welcomed the offer.

Transfer of command; SEORAC administration changes from Burns to Lakeview:

Tara let the Council know administration (facilitation, organization, record keeping, and Designated Federal Official duties) of the SEORAC would change hands at the next meeting (November), from the Burns District to the Lakeview District. The new facilitator and agency contact for RAC members is Scott Stoffel, Lakeview BLM Public Affairs Specialist. The new Designated Federal Official is Lakeview District Manager Shirley Gammon.

The next meeting also signifies the expiration of service terms for several positions on the Council. Positions up for nomination on the RAC include:

- Commercial timber
- Environmental organizations
- Historical and/or archaeological interests
- Local elected official
- Local Indian tribes
- Public-at-large

After two extended recruitment periods, only 3 nominations have been received. The Council brainstormed possible recruitment techniques and agreed to: have the State RAC Coordinator consult with previous applicants (from past years) who were not selected; emphasize that members who have terms expiring actively search for a replacement for their role; and share any information about possible interested persons or qualified persons that may not have applied with the RAC facilitator or Designated Federal Official (or any agency representative for the SEORAC).

FINAL

Next Meeting

Diane Pinney suggested moving the next meeting from October 31-November 1 in Lakeview to November 8-9 in Burns. The Kiger Mustang adoption is in Burns that weekend and Diane thought it would be nice for the RAC members to experience the event in conjunction with their business meeting. The Council agreed.

The Transportation Strategy discussion was put forward for the November meeting agenda, with other items to follow at the discretion of the agencies and input from RAC members.