

## **John Day – Snake RAC Meeting Summary**

**Facilitator:** Lisa Clark

**Notetaker:** Erika Donaldson

The John Day-Snake Resource Advisory Council (RAC) was convened for its meeting at 12:05 A.M. on January 9, 2014, at the Umatilla National Forest Supervisors Office, Pendleton, Oregon. Carol Benkosky welcomed attendees.

In accordance with the provisions of Public Law 92-463, the meeting was open to the public.

**Council members present:** Adriane Borgias (Transportation/Rights-of-Way); Terry Drever-Gee (Energy/Minerals); Michael Hayward (Commercial Timber); Art Waugh (Developed Recreation/OHV); Kevin Peterman (Energy/Minerals); Jim Reiss (Dispersed Recreation); Patrick Dunham (Public-at-Large, Dispersed Recreation); Tim Unterwegner (Dispersed Recreation); Lawrence Brown (State Resource Agency); Chris Perry (Elected Official); Greg Cianella (State Resource Agency); Patricia Gainsforth (Public-at-Large); Erica Maltz (Tribal Representative). **Absent:** Berta Youtie (Environmental Groups); 1 conservation position vacant.

**Federal Managers present:** Carol Benkosky (Prineville District Manager); Don Gonzalez (Vale District Manager, present for Day 2 only); Kate Klein (Ochoco Forest Sup); Kevin Martin (Umatilla Forest Sup, present for Day 2 only); John Laurence (Wallowa-Whitman Forest Sup); Tom Montoya (Wallowa-Whitman Deputy Forest Sup.).

For the record, it is noted that to avoid a conflict of interest, Council members absent themselves from the meeting when the Council discusses matters in which a conflict of interest may occur.

Others present for all or a portion of the meeting in person or via conference call: Elizabeth Scheeler, Kathleen Cathey, John D. George, Fred Baldwin, Eddie Garcia.

### **ANNOUNCEMENTS AND ITEMS OF INTEREST**

Introduction of members and federal managers present; introduction of new facilitator and new Designated Federal Official (Carol Benkosky, Prineville District Manager).

Announcement that the 2014 call for nominations should be out by the end of January or early February; review of positions ending in 2014 and requests for members interested in reapplying or ideas for new members. Review of travel reimbursement process.

### **BLUE MOUNTAIN FOREST PLAN REVISION**

#### **Sabrina Stadler, Wallowa Whitman NF.**

The Blue Mountain Forests (Malheur, Umatilla, Wallowa-Whitman, and a portion of the Ochoco) are completing the Draft Blue Mountain Forest Plan Revision. The Draft EIS is scheduled for public release in March 2014 and will be available for a 90-day public review.

After a discussion on the desired role for the RAC, the council agreed to form a subcommittee to review the Draft EIS, and will receive an early copy of the document in January to allow enough time for review and development of a collaborative RAC response to meet the public comment deadline.



Council members questioned whether or not Greater sage-grouse guidelines for restoration and protection would be included (yes), and asked for clarification about the Historic Range of Variability, particularly with respect to the mixed moist forest type.

### **SUBCOMMITTEE REVIEW AND SET-UP**

Since this RAC has not met in more than a year, the group reviewed existing committees for membership, activity, and validity based on current or expected needs. Subcommittees are as follows:

**Blue Mountain Plan Revision** – Jim Reiss, chair

**Sage grouse EIS** (new; will coordinate with subcommittee on the Southeast Oregon RAC with this) – Berta Youtie, chair.

**OHV Committee** – Art Waugh, Chair

**John Day Basin Resource Management Plan** – Pat Dunham, Tim Unterwegner, chairs; waiting release of RMP.

**BLM Travel Management** – Adriane Borgias, chair. Committee on hold, not expected to be needed for at least one year.

**Noxious Weeds/Invasive Species** – Berta Youtie, chair.

**Baker Resource Management Plan** – Art Waugh, chair. Currently on hold.

**Energy** – Adriane Borgias, chair. Potential need in the future with Boardman to Hemingway, Hells Canyon/Oxbow/Brownlee projects.

### **SUBGROUP MANAGERS BREAKOUT SESSION**

Since the subgroups hadn't met in more than a year, the group opted to not have a break-out session, and asked instead for the Federal Managers to provide information about issues/topics they felt the RAC and the subcommittees could be expected to help with over the next year.

- Sage Grouse Draft EIS/Final EIS
- Ochoco Collaborative – help with this group organized to work on vegetation management for the Ochoco National Forest; some help needed with range issues.
- Crooked River National Grassland EIS – plan for vegetation management, restoration, fire, weeds and invasive juniper control.
- Wild Horse Management Plan
- Ochoco National Forest Inventoried Roadless Areas
- Eastside Strategy implementation
- Blue Mountain Forest Plan – draft review and continued help with forest plans
- Cohesive Wildfire Strategy – this strategy will help coordinate fire activities across multiple agencies and there is a pilot program on the Wallowa-Whitman NF.
- Supplemental Weeds EIS
- Snake Recreation – if Forest Service is cleared to use John Day – Snake RAC as a Recreation RAC
- Travel Management – understanding roads, a sustainable roads system analysis

**The RAC members also expressed interest in the following issues:**

- Global Warming and Climate Change
- Large wildfires in Oregon



- Wildlife and Water
- Northwest geologic pivot points (slips, faults, land movement)
- Climate vulnerability assessment of the Blue Mountains, Ochoco, Deshutes
- Climate change and effects on wildlife
- Climate change – annual change verses long term change; where are we vulnerable, what’s resilient/what’s not?/Can the RAC have a role in vulnerability assessments? Options for additional climate information/speakers: Northwest Stream monitoring, Upper Snake – landscape level climate change, University of Washington John Day Basin study. The group would like to extend invitations to other members of the public when we have information sessions to help with education and spreading information.
- More information about Sage grouse (biology, habitat, etc.)

### **RAC BOUNDARIES**

Carol Benkosky introduced a proposal to expand/change the eastern Oregon RAC boundaries to include all federal lands east of the Cascades, and to divide the two eastern RACs in a way that split fewer participating forests/districts. The proposal also included adding the Forest Service officially to the charter. The challenge with adding the Forest Service could mean that membership has to be approved by both Secretaries and it’s time consuming enough as it is. General idea with including the Forest Service would be to include the Forest, but maintain membership approval with the Dept. of the Interior, with Forest Service Regional Office approval. The shared boundaries and intermixed property that it makes sense to continue to work closely. For new boundaries, the group reviewed a map proposal and will address the issue on Friday (Jan. 10).

### **ROUND TABLE AND FEDERAL OFFICIAL UPDATES**

Patricia: Noticed and supports expansion of public transportation in Central Oregon; also noticing a migration of residents from Oregon to the southwest (NV, AZ, CA) – more than just snowbirding.

Tim: Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation project, about 13,000 acres of land purchased that will be transferred to the Forest Service.

Pat: Native Fish Society has a concern regarding power boat use on the John Day River. The development of smaller, single person jet-boats is increasing access and use on the river; The DEQ Water Summit has evaluated information on the John Day Basin, Grand Ronde and Umatilla, with gaps on the John Day so this is expected to be an area of focus.

Art: Development of a new Santiam OHV trail; with volunteer events to help create.

Terry: The Mining Association cancelled bonds with miners, who have now amended the issues. Terry would like Forest Service engagement to encourage rebonding.

Kevin: As a new member, shared interests in geology, mining, habitat, fishing and NE OR.

Larry: Kinzua Industrial woodwaste facility is having a lot of fires. The LLC walked away, leaving a very costly cleanup need. Working for compensation.

Jim: Question regarding the addition of \$9.75 on the Oregon State sportsman fee – where is this money going? What do we see from this? (No one in group familiar with project, needs follow-up). Would like to see a ban on Columbia River gill-netting and would like an update on the Cathedral Rock Wilderness proposal.

Chris – as a new member, expressed his interest in local economies.

Michael – collaboratives in place in NE Oregon now; seeing this as the new trend. Would like to get an update on Wyden’s Fire Borrowing bill.



Erica – excited to represent tribal interests at the RAC; current areas of interest include the Malheur river bull trout, salmon expansion, general fisheries.

John Laurence, Wallow Whitman Forest Supervisor (see attached briefing): In addition to the Blue Mountain Forest Plan Revision, the Wallowa-Whitman is working on an Eastside Restoration Strategy with the Umatilla, Malheur, and Ochoco NFs. This accelerated restoration effort will use focused planning and implementation teams to work at a larger scale. Teams have started working on the Lower Joseph Canyon, Dry Forest Restoration, and Strategic Fuel Treatment projects. The Forest will continue working on road construction on RD 39, for the 13 mile North Pine section, 10 miles east of Halfway. Work go through this fall and detours will be in place. Also, the powerboat reservation system in the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area will move to [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov) on March 1.

Kate Klein, Ochoco Forest Supervisor: In addition to the upcoming projects described earlier, the Ochoco received a \$500,000 Pelton-Round Butte grant for McKay Creek restoration. The forest is also working closely with the public and other agencies to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Wilderness Act.

Joani Bosworth for Kevin Martin, Umatilla Forest Supervisor (see attached briefing): For travel management, the Umatilla is done with Subpart B and is initiating Subpart A. A federal judge recently upheld the Forest Service's decision to implement the South George Vegetation and Fuels Management EIS. The Upper 204/Tollgate wildland-urban interface was identified as a priority for fuels treatments in 2005. The final EIS was published December 13, 2013 with a 30-day objection period. The Umatilla also received funding for the 5<sup>th</sup> year to support Youth and Community Engagement through their Conservation Education Program. The Umatilla Forest Collaborative Group formed in 2011 to unite diverse interests in providing pragmatic proposals to the Umatilla. The group with over 30 participants continues to meet monthly to act as a neutral advisor.

Carol Benkosky, Prineville District Manager (see attached briefing): Prineville continues to wait for the release of the John Day Basin Resource Management Plan. The current timeline is unknown; however, once the Biological Opinions from outside regulatory agencies have been received, the BLM should be able to publish the Record of Decision within two months. The BLM has asked the John Day – Snake RAC to consider a fee for the John Day River to help cover the cost of operation and maintenance of the recreation facilities. A RAC subgroup has been working on the issue and will present a recommendation to the full RAC on the second day of this meeting. Prineville is also working on an Environmental Assessment for a State Park request for a Recreation and Public Purposes Lease for 10,000 acres of land related to the Cottonwood Canyon State Park. The proposed lease would identify the terms and conditions for how Oregon Parks could use the public land. Prineville BLM expects to make a decision on the Greater Sage-grouse – Playa Management Environmental Assessment in February. The project would restore the functionality of playas in Deschutes, Crook and Lake Counties. The Prineville BLM is also working on an Environmental Assessment that would evaluate the effects of renewing grazing permits for 32 allotments. Prineville continues to analyze the more than 6,000 comments received on the Murderers Creek Wild Horse Gather Plan, which examines management actions necessary to manage the wild horse herd within the herd management area. The BLM is also working with the Malheur to develop a herd management plan that establishes parameters for



managing the herd. Prineville is making progress on the land exchanges related to the newly designated Spring Basin Wilderness, with exchange packages submitted to the Oregon BLM State Office for review. The Prineville District is also working on proposals for geothermal exploration and communication sites on or near Glass Buttes, 15 miles east of Hampton, Oregon. BLM issued a decision for modest improvements and maintenance at the Priest Hole Recreation Area north of Mitchell, Oregon. Bravo Bentonite submitted an application to explore for bentonite on the west side of the John Day River in the Clarno area. If approved, the project would run from 2015 – 2042.

**Meeting adjourned at 5:05 p.m., and reconvened on January 10, at 8:03 a.m.**

### **FEDERAL UPDATES, cont.**

Don Gonzales, Vale BLM District Manager (see attached briefing): Vale BLM is considering mitigation measures designed to at least partially offset the impacts that may result from the proposed Boardman to Hemingway transmission line project. The Baker Field Office has prepared a Determination of NEPA Adequacy that stipulates that the previously prepared Environmental Assessment addresses the High Bar Mine proponent's intent to drill a third well. The office is also addressing a trespass case in the Joseph Canyon area. For range management, the district is preparing an environmental assessment to renew grazing permits associated with the Powder River Canyon Geographic Unit. The district is also working with Idaho BLM and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to complete an analysis of the effects of domestic sheep grazing on bighorn sheep in the Pritchard Creek area. The North Burnt Timber Sale was completed, resulting in thinning 437 acres of overstocked forest lands and delivering 1.3 million board feet of timber to local saw and chip mills. Finally, the Baker Office continues to receive Oregon State ATV Grant funding to help with spreading information about OHV safety and enforcing OHV rules.

### **GREATER SAGE-GROUSE DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

Carol Benkosky, Prineville District Manager (handouts and presentation attached)

After giving an overview of sage-grouse habitat related terms, Carol showed a short PowerPoint presentation that provided a general project overview and described key differences between the alternatives in the Draft document. There were questions about the effects of hunting sage-grouse, treatments in recently burned areas to minimize invasive species, the biology/ecology of the grouse, the role of wildfire as a threat to sage-grouse, how management will differ in different geographic areas, and the origin of the 3% number that represents allowable disturbance in sage-grouse habitat in some alternatives. One follow-up question was "how many AUMs will be lost if 118,000 acres are closed to grazing within existing Research Natural Areas?" (Response: This closure is outlined in Alternative D of the Draft EIS and would remove grazing from existing Research Natural Areas. The number of Animal Unit Months removed would be 8,994).

### **JOHN DAY RIVER RECREATION PERMIT FEE PROPOSAL**

Carol Benkosky provided an overview of the previous fee proposal by the Prineville BLM (given at the last RAC meeting in 2012). The Prineville District Office proposed a new boater special recreation permit fee for the Wild and Scenic sections of the John Day River between Service Creek (River Mile 157) and Tumwater Falls (River Mile 10). The fee would



apply to day and overnight trips (floats) during the peak use season of May 20 to July 10 and may include the fall fishing season as well. If approved, fees would be added for the 2014 season. Prineville initially proposed a \$15/per person per launch fee for overnight trips up to 14 days, and a \$7.50/per person per launch fee for a day-use trip. BLM would invest 100% of recreation fee receipts in the John Day River facilities, services and programs related directly to visitor enjoyment, access, health and safety.

After reviewing comments, input from the BLM and the Guides and Outfitters for the John Day River, the subcommittee recommended a different fee proposal to the full RAC. The group recommended a one-time per launch fee regardless of the number of boats or group size up to the allowable limit on the John Day. The fee would be non-refundable, and would be \$20 per launch for overnight trips and \$10 per launch for day trips going from point to point (allowing for splash and giggle day-use when a party puts in and takes out at or near the same location). While the fee would not earn as much money as requested by the BLM, the group felt the proposal would help with maintenance and management of the river, would help alleviate a hoarding problem with permits (although this is a side benefit rather than the goal of the fee) and was more equitable to local river users who may not be able to afford a higher fee. The fee would only apply to peak season at this time, although it could be extended to include the fall steelhead season in future years if the RAC decided it was necessary. In addition, the fee would not apply to the one-mile stretch at Priest Hole that is popular for local day-use. The RAC also proposed expanding volunteer use, partnerships with local counties and other methods to help make up for the difference in the amount the BLM requested and the expected revenue from a per launch fee.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD**

Two members of the public called in during the comment period. One person from Redmond, Oregon was adamantly opposed to the fee structure the BLM had originally proposed. He felt that a per person fee was too costly, and would prohibit him from taking his family to the John Day River. He wanted to see less government management on the river. When asked about the RAC proposal, he said while he didn't want a fee, he felt that one was more reasonable and that the RAC overall showed good insight. His main concern was competing for permits with guide services.

The second comment also came in via the conference call line from Baker, Oregon. The caller wanted to know when the Blue Mountain Forest Plan would be out for public comment. He felt that the release date was misrepresented by the Forest Supervisor on a recent radio-talk show that the caller hosted. Overall, he was concerned that the public would not have enough time to evaluate the plan and that the comment period was too short.

### **JOHN DAY RIVER RECREATION PERMIT FEE PROPOSAL, CONT.**

After listening to the public comments, the RAC also discussed reviewing the fee system after the first year to determine effectiveness, how the money was used and future needs. The group recommended documenting with signs or plaques along the river where fees have been used to provide amenities or maintenance (e.g. "your launch fees have been used to pay for..."). The group reminded the BLM to not overpromise on what they could deliver and to spend time where possible educating the public about Leave-No-Trace, proper river etiquette, etc. Although the group was not tasked with identifying how fees would be used, they did mention that maintenance of launch points should be minimal because high-low water



fluctuations on the John Day -as a non-regulated flow river- made these efforts difficult. One early goal could be to establish a human-waste disposal system – from working with State Parks at the new Cottonwood Canyon State Park, to installing a SCAT machine, or something else – to encourage people to use their portable toilet systems instead of burying waste along the river. They identified this lack of disposal system as the number one reason people fail to comply with the regulation.

*The full RAC voted on the “Per launch fee proposal,” and the motion passed unanimously (RAC members Berta Youtie and Erica Maltz were absent).*

### **JOHN DAY – SNAKE RAC BOUNDARY CHANGE PROPOSAL**

After reviewing the boundary change proposals presented the previous day, Carol Benkosky and Don Gonzalez gave a short presentation about the boundary change proposals for RACs on the east side of the Cascade Mountains. Currently there are gaps of land not covered by a RAC. The proposal would attempt to cover all land by expanding boundaries to include the rest of the Ochoco National Forest, the Crooked River National Grassland, and the west side of the Prineville District BLM. The Deschutes National Forest would also be included; however, the Deschutes NF is represented by a Provincial Advisory Committee and would not likely be involved in a RAC as well. There were three options: one created a north and a south RAC in central/eastern Oregon with BLM Baker Resource Area included in the south; the second created two RACs divided more east-west; and the third created a north-south RAC with the Baker Resource Area included in the north.

The discussion examined the expanded role of the RAC and expectations, along with how key issues might affect where boundary lines should be drawn. The group acknowledged the benefit of covering more area as a means to have more interested parties in the RAC during recruitment times; however, they cautioned against going too broad. The group, including the Federal Officials, agreed that creating two RACs in central/eastern Oregon with a north RAC and a South RAC would make the most sense from the standpoint of common issues and drive times for members. After continued discussion, the group unanimously decided to extend the RAC boundary to the crest of the Cascades (including the Deschutes and Ochoco NFs, and the full Prineville District), include the Malheur NF fully into the north RAC, and keep the Baker Resource Area in the north RAC.

### **NEXT MEETINGS:**

- **March 14, Prineville** (These minutes will be formally considered by the Council at this meeting, and any corrections or notations will be incorporated in the minutes of that meeting).
- **July 17-18, La Grande**
- **November 13-14, location TBD**

**Meeting Adjourned: 12:12 p.m.**

