Prineville District – Issue/Project Briefing Paper
Bureau of Land Management
John Day – Snake RAC: January 2014

BLM
Prineville District Office

John Day Basin Proposed Resource Management Plan

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Prineville District, has prepared a Proposed Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement (PRMP/FEIS) for management of BLM-administered lands in the John Day Basin. The PRMP was prepared by the BLM in consultation with cooperating agencies and the public and will provide future direction for managing 456,000 acres of BLM-managed public lands located in parts of Sherman, Gilliam, Morrow, Umatilla, Grant, Wheeler, Jefferson and Wasco counties in the State of Oregon.

When finalized in a Record of Decision, this document will revise the Two Rivers RMP (1986); the John Day RMP (1985); and the Baker RMP (1989) and will provide objectives, land use allocations, and management direction to maintain, improve, or restore resource conditions over the long term. It will specify where and under what circumstances activities will be allowed on BLM-administered lands. The plan will also provide practices that ensure a healthy and productive landscape, and add to community stability through resource use and enjoyment.

Timeline

- The Notice of Availability for the John Day Basin Proposed Resource Management Plan was published in the Federal Register April 20, 2012; beginning the 30-day protest/comment period and the concurrent 60-day Governor's review.
- Protest resolution – will be released with Record of Decision (ROD).
- Record of Decision – Delayed for final resolution of issues.

Expectations of the Resource/Recreation Advisory Committee - going forward

- The JDBRMP RAC subcommittee may provide input to proposals to modify decisions in the ROD based on protests, public comment, or internal review.
- The District would like to see the RAC subcommittee stay as an integral part in developing the implementation plan within the 6 months following signing of the ROD.

Current Timeline

The JDBRMP is awaiting the receipt of the Biological Opinions (BOs) from the regulatory agencies. Formerly identified issues appear to have been resolved, and both regulatory agencies have completed draft BOs. The BOs are undergoing internal reviews; however, because the review process is outside of BLM's control it is difficult to estimate when we will receive the BOs. Upon receipt of both BOs, the Record of Decision could published within two months.

John Day River Fee Proposal

BLM issues Special Recreation Permits (SRPs) and Recreation Use Permits (RUPs) to ensure that everyone receives a fair and equitable return for the use of facilities while enjoying public lands. The fees collected in conjunction with these Recreation Use Permits are used in that area to help recover the cost of operation and maintenance of the recreation facilities.

The John Day River area was first established as a Fee Area in 1998 under the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program, and includes 13 developed recreation sites; four of these are developed camping sites with fees. Fees collected from these sites vary as a function of weather, river flows and season of use (by activity). Generally, collections are less than $12,000/year ($4,000 campground and $8,000 commercial SRP) and are used to cover maintenance and operations costs. Currently there is no fee to get a non-commercial boating permit.

In 2011, the BLM began to consider implementing a Boater Special Recreation Permit Fee as a means of providing additional maintenance services such as garbage dumpsters, and boat ramp improvements, and increased funding to protect and enhance the outstanding remarkable values of the Wild and Scenic River through monitoring, cleanup and safety. The fee is not intended to allocate use or keep visitors from "hoarding" boating permits; however, this may be an unintended benefit.

The Prineville BLM initially proposed a per person/per launch overnight Boater Special Recreation Permit Fee, to be implemented during the 2014 boating season. The day use fee is proposed to be half of the overnight fee. The fee would only be applied during peak boating season (May 20 – July 10) and only between Service Creek and Tumwater Falls.

Data supporting this change have been identified in the Fee Business Plan, which outlines cost recovery for operations and maintenance, including savings for using volunteers, an analysis of impacts of fees to local users, anticipated budget impacts based on current trends, and the continued use of appropriated funds as the major source of funding for operations/maintenance. Fees will protect the River by supporting management of recreation use, reducing user conflicts, informing users, gathering use information and protecting natural and cultural resources.

The Boater Special Recreation Permit Fee is expected to contribute to:

- Boat-in campsite clean-up
- Launch/take-out site staffing and increased law enforcement presence
- Additional services including trash service at Clarno & Cottonwood take-outs, and the establishment of a boat ramp improvement fund
- River protection monitoring to assess whether BLM river management (education, law enforcement and public communication) is effective at protecting ORVs

Current Status:
BLM is waiting for a recommendation from the John Day/Snake River Resource Advisory Committee (RAC), and believes the recommendation will differ from BLM's original proposal. Early discussions with a RAC sub-group indicate that the RAC might propose a daily per person fee that would exclude youth or a per permit fee. The RAC might also look at adding the fee to the fall fishing season, while shoulder seasons in between would be fee-free.

The BLM has published a Notice of Intent in the Federal Register. This triggered an official 30-day public comment period on the fee proposal, although BLM will continue to take comments and outreach the proposal to the public. BLM will also work through local contacts, newspapers, and media releases for continued outreach. If approved by the RAC, the fee would go into effect March 1, 2014.

Cottonwood Canyon

The Cottonwood Canyon State Park project is a state and private land exchange initiative between Oregon State Parks Department (ORPD) and Western Rivers Conservancy to create an 8,000-acre state park along the lower John Day River. Western Rivers purchased parcels collectively known as the Murtha Ranch in 2009. The project will ultimately create non-contiguous land ownership and unmarked boundaries between BLM and State Parks within the John Day Wild and Scenic corridor. BLM has a definite interest in assuring that the management of any State lands within the Wild and Scenic River (WSR) is in compliance with the WSR Act.

Prineville BLM is currently requesting public input on options to issue the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (ORPD) a Recreation and Public Purpose (R&PP) lease for about 10,000 acres in the lower John Day River basin, 22 miles northwest of Condon, Oregon. The State

would manage the leased lands together with the Cottonwood Canyon State Park. The proposed lease would identify the terms and conditions for how ORPD could use the public land, including the development and maintenance of almost 32 miles of roads and trails. Without this lease, ORPD would not be able to connect trail segments and would limit public access in this area for hiking, mountain biking and horseback riding. If the lease is approved, camping would also be limited to ORPD's designated sites within the park boundary.

As a result of the new State park, the BLM is also considering setting a boating use level to this segment (Segment One) of the John Day Wild and Scenic River to account for the possibility of increased use and interest. BLM is considering limits to the number of groups per day between May 15 and December 31.

These actions are needed to work with ORPD to provide the public a seamless recreation experience with access to both the land and water. An environmental assessment is required as part of the R&PP process and to identify the kinds and amount of public use that the river can sustain without impact to the Wild and Scenic River values, such as fisheries and recreation.

Greater Sage-grouse Playa Management

The Sage-Grouse Playa EA planning project is south of Brothers and Hampton and falls within Deschutes, Crook and Lake Counties. The proposed project involves cutting juniper, restoring functionality of playas by filling in dugouts and in some cases excluding cattle from playas, and installing new wells, pipelines and water troughs. One of the alternatives being considered would change the OHV designation from open to limited and eliminate grazing from the entire project area (143,000 acres). From a NEPA sense; the issues are the potential effects to sage-grouse, grazing permittees, off-road recreationists and wilderness characteristics. The BLM is currently analyzing public comments and plans to have a decision out by the end of February, 2014.

Multiple Grazing Permit Renewal Environmental Assessment

The Multiple Grazing Permit Renewal EA is an environmental assessment evaluating the effects of renewing grazing permits and installing range developments. In total there are 32 allotments spread across the Prineville District that are being considered for renewal in this EA. Scoping has already been completed for this project and we are in the process of writing the EA and doing the analyses. The EA is anticipated to be completed later this year and will be released for public comment before any decisions are made.

Murderers Creek Wild Horse Gather/Management Plan

Wild Horse Gather: The BLM, Prineville District, released an Environmental Assessment (EA) to the public for a 30-day comment period September 2012. The EA analyzed the effects of capturing and removing wild horses in excess of Appropriate Management Levels (AML) and analyzed other management actions necessary to manage the wild horse herd within the Murderer's Creek Herd Management Area (HMA). The initial gather may look at removing up to 113 horses, with subsequent gathers bringing the herd below the AML of 140 horses. The HMA is located south of Dayville, OR and southwest of John Day, OR.

The Prineville District is in the process of analyzing over 6,000 public comments that were received in response to the release of the Environmental Assessment (EA) to public in September of 2012. The BLM will respond to substantive comments and release a Decision Record later this year. Gather operations could begin once the Decision Record is approved.

Management Plan: BLM is working concurrently on completing revision of the Murderers Creek Wild Horse Management Plan and developing an MOU to establish the parameters for managing the herd as a single population with the Malheur National Forest. The Management Plan is in

the early stages and specialists are conducting herd monitoring at this point. Monitoring is expected to go into the summer or fall, after which, the Malheur and BLM will begin a joint NEPA process to complete an Environmental Impact Statement. BLM and FS are expected to work cooperatively on the NEPA; however, each agency may issue separate Decisions.

Spring Basin Wilderness

The National Land Exchange Team is continuing to work on Omnibus Exchange responsibilities for the Spring Basin Wilderness Area, and will continue processing tasks for the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon and the McGreer Family acquisitions, and the Keys exchange over the next several years.

Within the McGreer exchange, two parcels have been appraised and BLM has split the transaction to include one exchange and one acquisition (purchase) to equalize land values. LWCF funds were used for the purchase parcel. On both exchanges, Environmental Assessments and exchange packages have been submitted to the Oregon BLM State Office for review; further reviews will need to occur at the Washington Office and Solicitor's Office. The BLM will also have to request an appraisal update later in the spring for both exchanges – the purpose will be to determine through market analysis if values have changed. If values have changed, then we'll have to update the values through the appraiser.

Glass Buttes - ORMAT Application and Communication Site Proposals

Ormat submitted a proposal for geothermal exploration in the Glass Buttes (east of Hampton, OR) that would use existing roads, build new temporary roads, create a new gravel pit and use an existing one, create 16 temporary well pads on BLM managed lands and private land that is surrounded by BLM managed land, and drill holes at these pads to test for a geothermal resource. Some of the wells would be within Core (PPH) Greater sage-grouse habitat within the project area. The action alternatives included a number of design features (e.g., seasonal limits on drilling) to minimize effects on sage-grouse. The Klamath Tribes and The Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs have expressed concerns about the project's effects to the Glass Butte area's sacredness and have requested that additional studies, such as an ethnographic study, be performed prior to approval of any of Ormat's proposed activities.

Status: Due to seasonal restrictions and mitigations proposed by the Prineville BLM, Ormat has withdrawn the portions of their application that fall on the Prineville District and will be working with the Burns BLM District to implement the remaining well sites and exploration.

Glass Buttes Communication Site and VRM Plan Amendment

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Prineville District Office is also developing an Environmental Assessment (EA) for a proposed project to establish a Right-of-Way (ROW) agreement with each of Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) a federal entity under the U.S. Dept. of Energy and American Towers LLC, a private company, to construct two new communication facilities on the top of Glass Buttes, 15 miles east of Hampton, Oregon. The EA will identify a range of alternatives to address the potential of granting the ROWs, including a No Action alternative that would deny the proposed actions.

The proposed BPA facility would provide BPA telecommunications services, and would also host the State of Oregon's State Radio Project (SRP), which would enhance emergency response and other crucial communications services throughout the State of Oregon. American Towers would lease its new facility to multiple telecommunication service providers for the area of Glass Buttes and its surrounding residents and communities. Lessee/providers would provide local telephone service as well as 911 and other emergency responder services to the area. The communications site proposal would also require an amendment to resolve a conflict in the 1989 Brothers-La

Pine Resource Management Plan, which allows the development of communication sites on Glass Buttes while at the same time directing the BLM to exclude activities that have long-term visual changes to Glass Buttes. **BLM is currently in the early stages of developing the EA and is working through the tribal consultation process.**

Priest Hole Site Plan Environmental Assessment

A decision was issued in April 2013 incorporating a combination of the actions from various alternatives. The BLM conducted public meetings in Mitchell, OR before making a final decision to address public issues, concerns and questions. The project underwent significant change to address public concern over changes to the landscape and altering traditional use. The decision now includes the following:

- Forego camping and day-use facilities,
- Add an additional vault toilet; first installing a port-a-potty in heavy use seasons for a few years to see if the additional toilet reduces the amount of human waste.
- Converting two fields (70 acres total) currently used for commercial agriculture to wildlife food and cover plots; periodically replant these fields (in cooperation with Oregon Hunters Association). Seeding and planting native and/or non-native species. Replant up to 60 acres in the fields each year thereafter.
- Switch from the existing flood irrigation on the two fields to a sprinkler irrigation system.
- Plant up to 100 acres of grass, shrubs and/or trees in riparian and upland areas
- Remove cattle guard near the existing toilet and repair or remove associated fencing

BLM has prepared an implementation plan to improve the access roads, which are narrow, curvy, and laden with drainage issues and shoulder failures. They will be adding turnouts, curve widening, rolling dips, and in one location straightening the road.

Current Status:
BLM is working to gravel the parking lot and make minimal improvements on the boat launch and plans to have this phase of the work completed by September. Oregon Hunters Association (OHA) has taken over management of the agricultural fields and has been working more closely with community members in the management of these fields.

Bravo Bentonite

Bravo Bentonite submitted an application to explore for bentonite in the Clarno area of the Prineville District. Bentonite is a type of clay that can absorb several times its mass in water – it's commonly used in everything from foundry clay to kitty litter to cosmetics. The BLM will be completing an Environmental Assessment of the project and will identify and recommend appropriate design features in order to best protect all the resources BLM manages. The BLM mineral regulatory language is "in order to prevent undue and unnecessary degradation." The EA will identify if there are any impacts; for example, issues with the John Day River Outstandingly Remarkable Values (although the site is outside the Wild and Scenic River corridor), changes in visual resources, the potential for noxious weeds, and impacts to traffic on Highway 218. The project is proposing an open cut surface mining operation that would remove the bentonite in benches with an excavator. The project proposes operating from 2015 – 2042 with a planned capacity of 345,000 tons/year and a 5-day/week operation. When complete, the site would be revegetated, all structures removed, and any roads removed. BLM is currently in the early stages of completing an environmental assessment and plans to issue the EA for comment in July 2014.

Greater Sage-grouse RMP amendment

In April 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) found that the greater sage-grouse warranted the protection of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), but that listing the species was precluded by the need to address other, higher-priority species first. One reason for the FWS

identification of the greater sage-grouse as a species to protect was an identified need for more adequate and consistent regulatory mechanisms to ensure species conservation. The FWS greater sage-grouse decision placed the species on the candidate list for future action, which provided stakeholders such as Federal agencies, states, and private landowners with additional opportunities to continue working cooperatively to conserve the species and restore its habitat.

As part of a joint effort with the U.S. Forest Service to conserve the Greater Sage-Grouse and its habitat across 10 western states, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) issued a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for a 90-day public comment period in January 2014. The draft Oregon Sub-Regional Greater Sage-Grouse Resource Management Plan (RMP) Amendment/EIS would amend the BLM land management plans covering the Andrews, Baker, Lakeview, Steens, Three Rivers, Brothers LaPine (east), Southeastern Oregon, and Upper Deschutes RMPs in Oregon. It considers six possible management alternatives for maintaining and increasing habitat for Greater Sage-Grouse on BLM-administered lands in Oregon. Approximately 10 million acres of Oregon's Greater Sage-Grouse habitat is on BLM-administered lands. The decisions in this RMP Amendment apply only to BLM-administered lands in Oregon. They do not apply to private land.

The six alternatives include:

- Alternative A, a no-action alternative, would retain the management goals, objectives, and direction specified in the current Resource Management Plans for the state.
- Alternative B, that analyzes management actions outlined in the multi-agency National Technical Team (NTT) report, which includes such protections as right-of-way exclusion areas and a fluid mineral leasing closure.
- Alternative C, that analyzes management recommendations submitted by conservation groups, which includes the creation of an Area of Critical Environmental Concern covering approximately 4,547,043acres of Greater Sage-Grouse habitat and removal of grazing in the planning area.
- Alternative D, the Oregon sub-regional alternative, incorporates local adjustments to the NTT report which were developed with cooperating agencies. The BLM has identified Alternative D as its preferred alternative. Although the BLM identified a preferred alternative, it will consider the range of alternatives when developing the proposed plan.
- Alternative E is based on recommendations included in the ODFW Sage-Grouse Conservation and Assessment Strategy (2011), which includes an emphasis of protecting Core Areas with no development permissible for major surface disturbing activities.
- Alternative F, that analyzes other management recommendations submitted by conservation groups, which includes creation of an Area of Critical Environmental Concern covering approximately 4,040,202 acres of Greater Sage-Grouse habitat and reduced grazing in the planning area.

The draft Oregon Sub-Regional Greater Sage-Grouse RMP Amendment/EIS is available at http://on.doi.gov/H9NDe1 or http://on.doi.gov/I26YQt. The comment period will end on February 20, 2012. The ID Team has been working closely with cooperators such as Oregon Cattleman's Association and the counties.