

## **Southeast Oregon Resource Advisory Council**

1301 South G Street  
Lakeview, OR 97630  
(541) 947-2177

### **Day One, Thursday May 7, 2009**

#### **Meeting Location:**

Christmas Valley Lodge Restaurant and Lounge  
87285 Christmas Valley Highway  
Christmas Valley, OR 97641

#### **Members Present:**

##### Group 1

Dick Leever  
Kevin Peterman  
Jim Bishop  
Mona Drake

##### Group 2

Bill Renwick  
Diane Pinney  
Richie Johnston  
Jeff LaLande

##### Group 3

Craig Foster  
Jim Walls

**Federal Representatives:** Carol Benkosky, Kenny McDaniel, Dave Henderson, Teresa Raaf, Rick Newton, Scott Stoffel and Janell Ferguson

**Guests:** Tom Rasmussen and Theresa Romasko

**Welcome, Introductions, Housekeeping, and Agenda Review:** Carol Benkosky opened the meeting at 10:15 a.m. Carol thanked all Council members for their time and the effort they invest in Council activities. Carol introduced Scott Stoffel as the facilitator.

Scott began with introductions and asked participants to state their name and the interest they represent. He then reviewed the group agreements, meeting agenda and tour logistics.

Theresa Romasko, Assistant Field Manager for the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Lakeview Resource Area (LVRA), provided a tour overview for the Joint Fire Science Project Site and the Millican Chaining Site. Tom Rasmussen, Field Manager for the BLM's LVRA, expounded on the primary reason the two projects came to be; removal of juniper trees to expand sage-grouse lek sites and improve nesting habitat. Tom explained how sage-grouse hens avoid areas containing juniper trees over four feet tall when nesting. If nesting habitat is improved, the lek stays active. If there is no sagebrush, then there is no nesting. Eighty percent of BLM's vegetation management projects are driven by the BLM's desire to improve animal habitat needs.

**North Lake County Tour:** Theresa Romasko provided a Sagebrush Habitat Treatment Monitoring briefing upon arrival at the Joint Fire Science Project Site at 11:15 a.m. She explained how the site was

being used to research the effectiveness of fire and fire surrogate treatments for reducing the dominance of western juniper in mountain big sagebrush steppe communities.

Theresa Romasko provided a Sagebrush Habitat Treatment Monitoring briefing upon arrival at the Millican Chaining project site at 12:15 p.m. She then explained that this chaining project was conducted because: (1) the BLM's Washington Office was looking for a good place to test chaining as a potential tool for managing sagebrush sites, (2) the BLM's Oregon State Office (OSO) provided project support and funding, (3) the LVRA was looking for an opportunity to limit juniper expansion into sagebrush habitat, and (4) the Sage-grouse Working Group was looking for opportunities to protect and improve sage-grouse habitat.

Following the tour, the Council returned to the Lakeview Interagency Office to receive updates from the Designated Federal Officials.

### **Designated Federal Official Updates:**

#### Kenny McDaniel, Burns BLM District Manager

Kenny stated there is high interest in wind energy development within the Burns District. Companies continue to apply for right-of-ways to install meteorological towers.

Currently, there is a lot of activity related to the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for a transmission line across private land and public lands managed by the BLM and Fish and Wildlife Service. State Director Shepard has given his approval to move forward with this project.

The BLM is funding teams nationwide to implement energy projects on the ground. Vacancy announcements are currently open for energy team positions that will be stationed at the Prineville District.

A successful "Mustang Makeover" competition was held in Albany, Oregon, approximately six weeks ago. Over 3,500 people were in attendance and 27 horses adopted, with some bringing a good price.

Employees of the Burns District continue to spend a significant amount of time on litigation and appeals. The staff is doing a great job developing strong administrative records, which is critical when defending the agency's actions.

#### Teresa Raaf, Malheur National Forest Deputy Forest Supervisor

Teresa stated the draft decision on the Blue Mountain Ranger District's Galena Timber Sale is expected June 2009, the final in January 2010. It is anticipated that this sale will generate 25 to 30 million board feet plus potential for biomass utilization.

The Malheur National Forest will hold a public input meeting for its ten-year Stewardship Contract project. This effort is being conducted in partnership with the Umatilla, Ochoco and Wallowa- Whitman National Forests.

The Jane Project is moving ahead. Scoping is done for the purpose and need. The project will be completed this September.

Grazing permittees have filed a lawsuit against the Malheur National Forest because of grazing impacts from wildlife (deer, elk) and wild horses on the north end of the Forest.

Dave Henderson, Vale BLM District Manager

Dave indicated the Boardman to Hemingway Transmission Line Project continues to move forward. The impact is minimal to public land because most of the 298-mile line is on private property.

The Vale District has decided to transition the Trout Creek Geographic Management Area Environmental Assessment to an EIS. A Notice of Intent announcing this decision is being prepared that specifies further public scoping will occur and analysis of areas with wilderness character conducted.

The Northwest experienced a cooler than normal winter. Temperatures are expected to stay below the seasonal average through May, followed by a warm and dry summer. Some spikes in larger fire activity are expected during the summer fire season, especially during dry lightning events.

Rick Newton, Fremont-Winema National Forests Deputy Forest Supervisor

Rick stated that Erica Hupp will be present during tomorrow's meeting to brief the Council on the Fremont-Winema National Forests' Travel Management Plan.

The Fremont-Winema National Forests' Forest Plan is still a year or two out.

The Forest is busy developing a strategy for managing the "Red Zone," a mountain pine beetle infestation spanning from the Gearhart Wilderness Area to Paisley, Oregon. Safety continues to be the primary focus of this effort.

Carol Benkosky, Lakeview BLM District Manager

Carol informed the Council that Ridgeline is proposing to develop a 400 megawatt wind farm in the Winter Rim area on public lands managed by the Forest Service.

Oregon Community Wind is proposing to develop a small 10 to 12 megawatt facility on the South Warner Mountains that will tie into the existing power line running from Lakeview to Adel. The proposed facility would be constructed outside of sage-grouse lek sites and include only four to five turbines.

The Backscatter Site has been excessed to the General Services Administration (GSA). GSA is in the process of locating potential tenants. The LVRA is currently working with the Oregon Military's proposal to use the Poverty Basin in conjunction with the Backscatter Site for training purposes.

The LVRA may need to conduct an emergency horse gather within the Beaty Butte Herd Management Area this September if current drought conditions do not improve.

The meeting adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

## Day Two, Friday May 8, 2009

### Meeting Location:

Bureau of Land Management  
Lakeview District Office  
1301 South G Street  
Lakeview, Oregon 97630

### Members Present:

#### Group 1

Dick Leever  
Kevin Peterman  
Jim Bishop  
Mona Drake  
Lou Davies

#### Group 2

Bill Renwick  
Diane Pinney  
Jeff LaLande

#### Group 3

Ken Kestner  
Craig Foster  
Jim Walls

**Federal Representatives:** Carol Benkosky, Dave Henderson, Kenny McDaniel, Teresa Raaf, Rick Newton, Scott Stoffel and Janell Ferguson

**Guests:** Brenda Smith, Erica Hupp, Carolyn Wisdom, Sarah Malaby and Warren Olson

**Welcome, Introductions, Housekeeping and Agenda Review:** Carol Benkosky opened the meeting at 8:03 a.m. She welcomed all Council members and noted that meeting discussion topics are primarily information sharing in nature. She indicated there would be an afternoon discussion where the group would identify priority issues for which the Council could generate recommendations for BLM and Forest Service consideration. Carol introduced Scott Stoffel as the facilitator.

Scott began with introductions and asked participants to state their name, the interest they represent and one benefit they receive from attending Council meetings. Then he reviewed the group agreements, objectives and meeting agenda.

Scott notified the group of the State Resource Advisory Council Coordinator's determination regarding whether or not BLM contract work performed by Craig Foster's wife presented a conflict of interest with his membership on the Council. Those findings were as follows: *"The activity of Craig's wife should have no bearing on his role on the RAC unless they have a financial interest that his activities would stand to benefit from. I suppose if the RAC was going to recommend increasing landscape inventories tenfold, someone could perceive that as a benefit to the Foster family, but the recommendation would have to carry by a quorum so he could conceivably abstain (though it doesn't appear to me that recusing himself would be needed - there's just not that type of direct nexus between his financial well-being and whatever decision the manager might make)."*

Following this discussion, Jeff LaLande disclosed that he performs contract work for the Forest Service. Jeff asked Scott to check with the State Resource Advisory Council Coordinator to determine whether or not this presents a conflict of interest.

*Action Item:* Scott Stoffel will forward Jeff LaLande's ethics question to Pam Robbins seeking her determination as to whether or not his services as a Forest Service contractor presents a conflict of interest with regard to his membership on the Council.

Scott confirmed that a sufficient number of members were present within each group to constitute a quorum.

**Identification of Herbicide Planning Subgroup Chair:** Bill Renwick called for nominations to replace Heather Swartz as the Herbicide Planning subgroup chair. A motion was made and passed by all 11 Council members present to have Roger Sheley serve in this role.

### **Active Subgroup Reports:**

#### Dick Leever, Fremont-Winema Travel Management Chair

Dick briefed the Council on the Fremont-Winema Travel Management subgroup meeting held in Klamath Falls, Oregon, on April 21. He indicated subgroup members provided the Forest with input on their proposed action and maps. The subgroup will continue to offer feedback and comments throughout the travel management planning process.

#### Dick Leever, North Lake Plan Chair

Dick indicated there is nothing to report at this time.

#### Roger Sheley, Herbicide Planning Chair

No report on the activities of this subgroup was provided.

#### Craig Foster, BLM Transportation Strategy Chair

Craig indicated there is nothing to report at this time.

**American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Update:** Carol Benkosky reported that the BLM's Lakeview District received \$3.5 million to fund seven projects throughout Klamath and Lake counties. The Lakeview District projects are as follows:

- Lakeview Biomass Removal I, a renewable energy authorization project, will remove and utilize residual biomass generated from vegetation treatments within Klamath and Lake counties.
- Lakeview Biomass Removal II, a renewable energy authorization project, will remove and utilize residual biomass generated from vegetation treatments within Klamath and Lake counties.
- Green Mountain Lookout Replacement, a deferred maintenance project, will replace the site's lookout structure, improve the access road, install a radio repeater and enhance facilities at an adjacent campground.
- All Weather Road Surfacing, a deferred road maintenance project, will improve heavily traveled BLM roads, which will reduce future maintenance costs and make travel possible

during inclement weather. Examples of roads that will be enhanced are those surrounding Gerber Reservoir and the access road to the Sand Dunes east of Christmas Valley.

- South Gerber Well Drilling, a capital improvement project, will drill a well on BLM-managed lands east of the Langell Valley to provide water for fire suppression and road maintenance activities.
- Lakeview Interagency Site – Parking Lot Surfacing, a capital improvement project, will improve the parking area that serves the Lakeview Interagency Fire Center, equipment shop, warehouse and radio building. The existing base will be removed, adequate drainage installed, a new crushed rock base constructed and the surface chip sealed.
- Lakeview Wind Energy Sage-grouse Study, a renewable energy authorization project, will establish baseline sage-grouse habitat data for consideration when reviewing wind energy development proposals.

Kenny McDaniel stated the BLM's Burns District received \$3.53 million to fund three projects in Harney County. The Burns District projects are as follows:

- Steens Loop Road Reconstruction, Phase 1, will: (1) establish three rock material sources along the road alignment, producing approximately 240,000 cubic yards of base and surface aggregate for future placement, and (2) survey to identify areas where drainage must be reestablished.
- Five Creeks Rangeland Restoration, Phase 1, will complete prescribed fire and mechanical treatments to restore the project area to more historic plant community conditions.
- Otis Mountain Forest Health, will reduce hazardous fuels, increase forest health and provide a source of biomass fuel for eastern Oregon.

Dave Henderson stated the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center is getting most of the stimulus money received by the Vale District.

**Fremont-Winema National Forests' Travel Management Plan Update:** Erica Hupp, Public Affairs Officer, briefed the Council on the current status of this project. She indicated the Forest is presently preparing the Proposed Action for release this summer. Release will be conducted through a series of public meetings and media events, beginning with the public scoping period for environmental review. Route designation will be an on-going process that will continue to evolve after the initial planning process. The Forest will continue to seek input from the Council's Fremont-Winema Travel Management subgroup. Dave Henderson reminded subgroup members that their recommendations must be presented to and approved by the full Council before being provided to the Forest.

**Fremont-Winema National Forests' Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Invasive Plant Treatment:** Botanist Sarah Malaby briefed the Council on the current status of this project. The draft EIS will be available this month for a 60-day public comment period. Sarah requested Council input on the plan. She circulated a signup sheet for members to request a copy of the draft EIS. The Council

decided members would read the document and submit a single set of comments of behalf of the group by the comment period deadline.

**Strategies for Combating Medusahead:** Dave Henderson stated the Vale District has worked with private landowners to combat Medusahead only on a limited basis. The BLM is considering the use of biological controls. Funding has been made available to the Lakeview District and Burns District for burning and reseeding, both of which have generated mixed results. One issue the BLM is currently facing is that sites are being invaded by cheatgrass following treatment. The BLM continues to work with Oregon State University (OSU) on Early Detection Rapid Response initiatives.

Kenny McDaniel stated the Burns District is working with private land owners to battle Medusahead. The Burns District applies Medusahead treatments in the fall to limit the impact on other plant species.

Carol Benkosky stated Medusahead isn't a significant problem within the Lakeview District. Her staff is working with the Soil Conservation Service and adjacent landowners to prevent the spread of this species on private land. Roundup is not a preferred treatment method because cheatgrass typically infiltrates areas after treatment with this herbicide.

**EaglePicher Diatomite Mine Expansion:** Kenny McDaniel stated this operation is seeking to expand mining and drilling activities on 20 square miles of public land. The mine employs 20 workers onsite and 20 workers that haul the excavated material to processing facilities. Kenny will meet with the contractor and representatives from EaglePicher at the end of the month to continue project negotiations. The EIS is on schedule except for the late hydraulic report. A draft project scheduled will be released mid to late summer. Kenny will provide an update on this effort at the August Council meeting.

**Sage-grouse Update:** Craig Foster informed the Council that sage-grouse population trends are measured by counting males displaying on leks. There is a two-year lag in population findings. Current statistics show a slight decline in numbers. The recent rain in the area should improve chick survival by increasing the amount of forbs, grass and bugs available. The hatching season peak is May 20. Western juniper tree encroachment is one of the primary factors negatively impacting sage-grouse populations.

**Council Participation on the State Sage-grouse Team:** Bill Renwick called for nominations for a Council member to serve on the State Sage-grouse Team. A motion was made and passed by all 11 Council members present to have Craig Foster serve in this role with the stipulation that his team membership be approved by his supervisor.

**Public Comments:** No public comments were provided.

**Oregon Explorer Grant Update:** Bill Renwick indicated the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board is contracting with the Institute of Natural Resources and OSU libraries to produce a web portal that will make important natural resources information and tools available to decision makers, land-use practitioners and citizens. This web portal is part of an effort to build a natural resources digital library that employs standard information infrastructure and covers the state of Oregon. The digital library will

allow for more efficient use of investments made in natural resource management and restoration, and allow a more focused effort on gathering information.

The portal, titled the Lakes Basin Explorer, will provide integrated access to natural resources information, along with tools to assist the Harney County Watershed Council, Steens Mountain Advisory Council and the Burns District BLM. The Lakes Basin Explorer is tentatively scheduled to be completed by April 30, 2010.

**Wild Horse and Burro Update:** Diane Pinney stated that Oregon's wild horse and burro water project funding must be obligated by July 2009.

As part of its responsibility to manage, protect and control wild horses and burros, the BLM is soliciting bids for several new long-term pasture facilities located within the continental United States. One solicitation is for pasture facilities holding 200 to 1,000 wild horses; the other is for facilities holding 1,000 to 5,000 wild horses. Both solicitations, which are open for 60 days, are for dry mares, mares in foal and geldings. Each pasture facility must be able to provide humane care for a one-year period, with a renewal option under BLM contract for one-year extensions.

**Discussion on the Establishment of a Wild Horse and Burro Subgroup:** Carol Benkosky asked the Council to identify the need for establishment of a Wild Horse and Burro subgroup as outlined in the Council's Subgroup Bylaws and Procedures. The Council agreed that a specific issue related to this subject could not be identified for action. The Council determined that a Wild Horse and Burro subgroup would not be established at this time.

Diane Pinney distributed a questionnaire to all Council members asking them to provide input on wild horse and burro issues from the perspective of the interest they represent.

*Action Item:* Diane Pinney will summarize member feedback received via the wild horse and burro questionnaire and email this document to the full Council.

### **Vegetation Treatments Using Herbicides on BLM Lands in Oregon Environmental Impact**

**Statement:** Southeast Oregon Resource Advisory Council (SEORAC) comments on the EIS are due July 3. Prior to this date, the Herbicide Planning subgroup needs to develop draft comments for review and approval by the full Council. Dave Henderson suggested that the Herbicide Planning subgroup have a conference call the week of June 22 to assimilate their comments. All Council members present agreed to have a conference call on July 1 at 7 p.m. for the full Council to review and approve the final comments for submission to the BLM's OSO by the deadline.

*Action Item:* Scott Stoffel will contact Roger Sheley to confirm that July 1 is acceptable for holding the conference call to finalize SEORAC comments on the Vegetation Treatments Using Herbicides on BLM lands in Oregon EIS.

*Action Item:* Dave Henderson will provide the Council with examples of comments prepared by the John Day-Snake Resource Advisory Council for use as a source document when drafting recommendations.

**Priority Issues Discussion:** The group identified the following two issues as its top priority because both require action prior to the August meeting:

- Commenting on the Vegetation Treatments Using Herbicides on BLM Lands in Oregon Environmental Impact Statement.
- Commenting on the Fremont-Winema National Forests Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Invasive Plant Treatment. The 60-day comment period is anticipated to begin this month.

**Propose August Agenda Items:** At the next Council meeting, members and federal officials will address the Council's role with regard to the following issues:

- The Fremont-Winema National Forests' Travel Management Plan development and Forest Plan revisions
- The LVRA's Resource Management Plan decision currently under federal lawsuit
- The Vale District's Southeast Oregon Resource Management Plan decision currently under federal lawsuit
- The Malheur National Forest's Forest Plan revisions, Invasive Plant Treatment Environmental Impact Statement preparation and Motor Vehicle Use Plan development

In addition, updates on the following subjects will be provided:

- Oregon Explorer Project
- Sage-grouse Listing Decision
- Federal Energy Projects/Teams
- American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Projects
- BLM's Sage-grouse/Sagebrush Strategy

**Closing Thoughts:**

Lou Davies had nothing further to add.

Jim Walls stated the Army Guard still has an interest in the Backscatter site. He recommended that individuals voice their support for the Army Guard by writing their congressional representatives.

Mona Drake thanked everyone for sharing openly.

Rick Newton expressed his appreciation for the helpful information the Council provided.

Dick Leever indicated he enjoyed the field trip and that he felt this was a good meeting.

Teresa Raaf stated she enjoyed the field trip, especially the valuable information that was shared amongst individuals when traveling between sites.

Bill Renwick thanked everyone for their participation in the meeting discussions and for the positive solutions the group identified.

Kenny McDaniel expressed his appreciation to the BLM's Lakeview District for organizing the field trip and stated the discussion on subgroup purpose and intent was beneficial.

Ken Kestner supported the statement made by Jim Walls during the wild horse subgroup discussion, that the Council should not dismiss national interests. Ken agreed the Council can do its part by identifying recommendations for Forest Service and BLM consideration when making decisions regarding how these larger issues impact the local area.

Jeff LaLande stated that he enjoyed his first meeting. Listening to the thoughts and concerns of the interests represented at the table was helpful for him to understand the scope and objectives of the Council.

Craig Foster stated he had nothing further to add.

Jim Bishop said he appreciate the field trip and the opportunity to listen to the interests and concerns of Council members and agency representatives.

Carol Benkosky closed by stating the input provided during the meeting was meaningful, the Council is definitely moving in the right direction.

**Next Council Meeting:** August 13-14, 2009 in Ontario, Oregon

Meeting adjourned at 2:45 p.m.