

Southeast Oregon Resource Advisory Council Meeting

Monday, January 13, 2014

Review/Approve June 2013 Meeting Minutes

(Kevin Abel)

- Minutes cannot be found, so will review them over email.

Designated Federal Official/ Agency Representative Updates

(ELynn Burkett, Brendan Cain, and Don Gonzalez)

Lakeview District (see handout for more detail)-

- Resource Areas 11 grazing permits EAs
- Horse Shoes oral arguments in Portland. Sage grass and ____
- Have litigations on this only in the Lakeview area. Can't talk much about this.
- Expecting a heavy drouth this summer. How does this affect us?
- Vegetation management EA coming up... having issues with current contractor so working on getting a new one
- Fuels- lots of burning this winter, but had to stop recently because air quality issues. Because stove burning in Lakeview air quality, this take precedence over burning.
- Analyzing 1.2 miles of a Thousand Springs Road. Hope to get EA complete in April.
- S Warner- planned to cut 25K acres of western juniper between 2012-2017. Have cut 17K acres so far
- Foscket speckled dace is threatened. Species occurs only in two small springs. Population has been declining since 1900's. What is creating the decline? There was 1,800 fish at one point. Conducted a prescribe burn in the area and dug out 8 additional small pools for them. In 2013, we have over 13K fish ☺ As far as we can tell, the burn helped. Still working on the data to prove this. Fish are about 3 inches long.

Burns District (see handout for more details)-

- Litigation
 - Stenes Mt. wind farm was on private land. 12.1 miles on right of way to get transmission line out. Did an EIS. Judge ruled in our favor, however, the litigant appealed.
 - Measurement tool to measure the mitigation monitoring? Yes
 - Proponent does not have a notice to proceed
- Energy
 - Wind energy tax credit went out in 2013
 - EDF renewable energy has backed out
 - OPF Dessert wind energy on Wagon Tire Mountain. Project is going slow
 - Warm Springs hydroelectric dam on Malheur River- want to get this area fitted for hydroelectricity. Have to figure out how to do this with low the water level? Can we get some sort of fish waiver?
 - Midnight Thermal project EA signed in July. Approved for 7 exploratory wells on the Burns side. This has slowed up because working with State of Oregon to get permits. This is on Little Glass Buttes.
- Other Projects
 - Using juniper for furniture
 - Have 4-5 stewardship projects to utilize juniper for these projects

- Large fire in Warms Springs, which burned up a lot of areas for the Wild Horses to graze. Had to put up a fence, which is a concern with the Wild Horses. Need ecological stabilization
- Greater Sage Grouse Draft Plan- about 300 participants. Lots of people interested in this topic.
- JMK farm is having a coyote hunt. The proponent is not going to get a recreation permit. Proponent is going to advise participants to only hunt on private lands.

Vale District (see handout for more details)-

- New wildlife biologist and her specialty is in Sage Grouse
- Inventoried .5 Million acres of noxious weeds
- Didn't have to reseed any crown areas where fires occurred
- Bretz Abandoned Mine, do they have to do NEPA? If they have access to private land, it may not be necessary. The only time when Public employees get involved is if they need access to public roads or land. Might hit water and have to pump out the water. Has the water issue been addressed? Not sure. The State would have deal with the water issue.
- Owyhee River expects it will have low water levels again this summer. This past summer, there was a survivor type TV show that was filmed out there for a few days.
- Range- the Tribe really wants to get the horses off the land. The Tribe pays to get the horses off their land. This is a tribal action. Estimates 900 horses (conservative estimate).

Oregon RAC Boundaries-

- **Proposal #1**- adjusting the boundaries for RAC around the Snake River and Baker Resource Area. This will keep the National Forest together and consolidated. This proposal makes it simpler for resource managers. (see handout for more details)
- **Proposal #2**- all the Vale, Lakeview and Burns Districts consolidate into one RAC area. This proposal is essentially dead.
- Will email the map and proposals today's so that we can vote and make a decision by tomorrow.

Wild Horse and Burro Program update; Three Fingers Herd Management Area fence issues

(Julie Weikel and Shaney Rockefeller)

- Cross out "Smack" and put "RAC"
- This program is floundering
- Historically gaged/inventoried how many horses are out there, contacted public to come get their horses (adopt them out) and then the Government is left with remaining horses
- This is where the bottleneck occurs
- 49K+ head in the US. The Western States hold the majority
- The adoption pipeline is the bottleneck because the cost of having horses is expensive
- At this rate, this program will cost \$1billion by 2030
- 895 head estimate in Beatty Butte, when our horse management amount (HMA) is 100-250 in this area.
- Without the fence on Sheldon Hart Mountain many more horses would be up on the Mountains
- Sterilized horses to reduce the number of heads. Each year would sterilize at a different age to control the number of heads. Each sterilized horse is branded.

- The goal now is that all the horses will come off the mountain by next year
- This is a very healthy horse population
- In 2009, stopped surgical vasectomies because anesthesia risk. Used stronger drugs
- **Proposal- Spay 100 mares in Burns that go back to the range. Asking for 100 mares to avoid drastic statics if a couple mares died. Can RAC be supportive of this proposal? Yes**
- Data on the chart (handout) is from Fish and Wildlife. It will be published at some point
- How much does it cost to spay? \$200/ head for top quality drugs for spaying mares.
- \$30/day mare for top quality drugs
- Cons:
 - There are a few individuals with the skills to spay mares. We would need to head the trainings.
 - There will be a death loss. We don't know what the long term survival rate after returning to the range.
- Thriving ecological balances? Long and short term holdings are full. We have the funds to move forward, but we are waiting on Congress to allow us to hold more.
- Consider 10%+ death as a failure rate (Julie's personal failure rate)
- **Review Committee for Proposal: Jean Findley, Phillip Milburn, Don Hodge, Chad Boyd and Julie Weikel**
- What the committee needs to do? Bring forward current proposal, bring forward other proposals and consider timing for the proposals.
- Wildlife Society and other organizations should have info on experimentations. Check out those sources too.

Public Comment Period/ Response to Public Comments

(Interested Public)

- Estimated horse population in the wild? 25K. There is more being held captive than in the wild
- Missing a person from the RAC. Concerns for losing a member. We're not sure why Stan was not accepted when Jason was.

Discussion/Presentation on the Draft Greater Sage Grouse Resource Plan Amendment (RMPA) EIS

(Joan Suther and Don Gonzalez)

- In March 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service determined that the Greater Sage-Grouse warranted protection under the Endangered Species Act. One reason for this decision was an identified need for "improved regulatory mechanisms" to ensure species conservation...the principal regulatory mechanisms for the BLM are Resource Management Plans. **(NEED)**
- The FWS Greater Sage-Grouse decision placed the species on the candidate list for **future** regulatory action... giving federal agencies, states, tribes and private landowners the opportunity to continue working cooperatively to conserve the species and restore habitat.
- The FWS has until 2015 to make a final determination on whether or not to list the Greater Sage-Grouse under the ESA. The amendments to the BLM's Resource Management Plans are intended to show the BLM's long-term commitment to conservation and habitat restoration measures for the species. **(PURPOSE)** We hope to maintain the widest possible range of

options for managing the public lands and for our neighboring landowners.

Alternative A: This alternative continues current management direction and prevailing conditions derived from the existing RMP. Goals and objectives for BLM-administered lands and mineral estate would not change.

Alternative B: This alternative contains all the applicable and appropriate conservation measures that were developed in the National Technical Team's 2011 Report (NTT Report).

Alternative C: An alternative which consolidate suggestions made by non-governmental organizations (individuals and conservation groups) during the scoping process. Conservation measures in Alternative C are focused on a passive restoration approach to PPMA and PGMA.

Alternative D: This is the Oregon BLM Alternative. It emphasizes balancing resources and resource use among competing human interests and land uses and conserving natural and cultural resource values; at the same time it sustains and enhances ecological integrity across the landscape, including plant, wildlife, and fish habitat. Alternative D incorporates local adjustments to the NTT report and habitat boundaries.

Alternative E: An alternative which analyzes state-proposed conservation strategies. As part of their alternative submission, states provided the BLM with GIS data depicting their preferred Preliminary Priority Habitat (PPH) and Preliminary General Habitat (PGH) areas, conservation measures that should be applied to these areas, and rationale as to why their measures deviate from those outlined in the NTT Report.

Alternative F: An alternative which consolidate suggestions made by non-governmental organizations (individuals and conservation groups) during the scoping process. Conservation measures under Alternative F are focused on PPMA and PGMA. A noteworthy difference between Alternatives C and F is that Alternative F provides greater restrictions on allowable uses and less resource management flexibility.

- Reminder: The identification of a preferred alternative does not constitute a commitment or decision in principle, and there is no requirement to select the preferred alternative or any of the separate individual alternatives as they are presented in the Draft within the ROD. The BLM has the discretion to select any of the alternatives as the agency's preferred alternative and can modify the preferred alternative between the Draft EIS and the Final EIS, as long as the actions presented in the proposed alternative within the PRMP Amendment / Final EIS are analyzed somewhere in the previous Draft EIS. Various parts of the separate alternatives that are analyzed in the draft can be "mixed and matched" to develop a complete alternative in the final.

- Alternative D is the preferred alternative for BLM
- Decision will only apply to BLM management decision, but it will have impacts on other organizations.
- How is different than Sage Con? Sage Con looks at all lands, and we're not sure if it is a decision or planning effort? Made up of wide array of public individuals
- Right of way priority versus avoidance in the different alternatives
- Alternative D, how would work with 3% cap? If there's fire that further degrades the area, this would get us over the 3% cap. How do we mitigate this? Mitigation would be required. Project proposals would need to present restoration efforts.
- Proposals are available on many BLM websites and available by CDs. There are very limited hard copies available (1100-1200 pages long)
- Comment period on the document closes on 2/7/14

- How do we balance regulated versus non-regulated mechanisms for Sage Grouse? This is a question that's on everyone's mind.
- Talk about travel management. This doesn't have a super wide range in the alternatives. In Alternative D, there are no roads proposed for closure. Priority habitat would go from open to a limited OHV designation. This would limit off road travel in priority habitat
- More offensive strategies? Take land that is not core and move it into core? Can you identify these sorts of areas? The plan presents some focal areas where we would emphasize these areas. We want to put the money in areas where we have most success. Section 2.2. There are areas where you can raise Sage Grouse, but they usually go back to the original area to nest. 40% of the birds still stay and nest in the new areas.
- True management of the bird would be Managed by Fish and Wildlife or another agency, not BLM

Tuesday, January 14, 2014

Oregon RAC Boundaries

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- Proposal #2- all the Vale, Lakeview and Burns Districts consolidate into one RAC area. This proposal is essentially dead.
- The boundary for the Fremont-Winema National Forest will not be affected.
- Potential issue-Army County won't like losing a voice.
- **Decision: Proposal #1 is approved!**

Lands with Wilderness Characteristics (WC) discussion

(Brent Grasty and Chad Boyd)

- See handout for more details
- Trying to figure a way like screening process to determine with plots of lands to work on for the RAC Committee
- Vegetation, Hydrology and connectivity are broken down into 3 categories. Each are broken out specifically in the handout
- 3 broad categories definitions
 - Largely intact (prevention/monitoring, spot treatments)
 - Moderately disrupted (prevention/monitoring, moderate scare restoration)
 - Severely disrupted (monitoring, large scale restoration)
- Issues with connectivity- road maintenance and how it's used. The level of road use depending on the season. How do we incorporate something so variable?
- Right now, how do we prioritize wilderness characteristics? This is our first step
- What do we mean by manage priority? If these areas met wilderness characters, weren't they already a priority? No, what begins the management is the RMP. This recommendation will be kicked up the ranks for approval to begin management.
- Possibly include elevation and climate change? This is an important distinction to determine prioritization. It is sort of incorporated already into these categories

- Measurements are not perfect because we are using the information that is available. This is based on on-the-ground knowledge. We also need to discuss how often to review and update these because information is always changing.
- Elevation might be cheaper to determine than vegetation. Can we possibly go this route?
- It's much easier to monitor when it's broken down into categories
- How do you manage/repair damaged hydrology? What are the tools? Are there? Proper Functioning Conditions (PFCs) help identify these areas and what you need to adjust. This is an area where you need to have an understanding of the ground water systems because that will feed into the surface water systems
- Determined 72 units that met the Wilderness Characteristics. We're hoping that RAC can come to a consensus
- Vegetation and hydrology is more tangible than connectivity
- Input for connectivity:
 - Do we include Wilderness Study Areas (WSA)? Or do we base it on how many other units the area affects? If we do include WSAs, how do we distinguish that from WC?
 - Do we have bona fide WSAs? This can be expensive to produce or difficult to find specific to each wilderness area.
 - Some WSAs have certain restrictions on how much you can manage. Potential problem for including WSAs. Don't want to see WSAs and WCs linked, but can use WSAs for management material
 - Congress dictates WSAs. Whether or not we can release them or do more management efforts on these areas. Can the RAC have influence on this? WSAs are studied, but then aren't we supposed to be able to manage those areas?
 - Hard to ignore the WSAs when determining WCs
 - Might need 2 connectivity scores. Does it connect and maintain the wilderness and does it connect ecological functions?
 - Current connectivity scores look at how much bang for our buck
 - How is connectivity going to be used to prioritize WCs for BLM?
 - Should connectivity be the primary filter before looking at vegetation and hydrology?
 - Need some definitions for connectivity, land with characteristics, WSAs, etc.
 - **Proposal- Keep Categories 1-3, but in parenthesis say "including WSAs and other LWCs". Need to play with the language**