SOUTHEAST OREGON ADVISORY COUNCIL
FINAL SUMMARY OF MEETING
January 28-29, 2013

JANUARY 28, 2013

The Southeast Oregon Resource Advisory Council (RAC) convened for its meeting on January 28, 2013, at the Gathering Place in Lakeview, Oregon. In accordance with the provisions of Public Law 92-463, the meeting was open to the public.

Members and BLM officials in attendance: Mona Drake (Developed Recreation and OHV), Wannie Mackenzie (Grazing Permittees), Anne Hiller-Clark (Archaeology and History), Mike King (Dispersed Recreation), Bill Renwick (Environmental Groups), Dr. Julie Weikel (Wild Horse and Burro), James Bishop (Public-at-Large), Chad Boyd (Academician), Philip Milburn (State Resource Agency), Peter Runnels (Elected Official), Stanley Shepardson (Public-at-Large), James Walls (Commercial Timber), Matthew Little (Environmental Groups, via conference call), Donald Hodge (Transportation/Rights-of-Way), Brendan Cain (BLM, Burns District Manager), Don Gonzalez (BLM, Vale District Manager, via conference call), Tom Rasmussen, (BLM, Lakeview Associate District Manager), Pat Ryan (BLM, Vale District, Jordan/Malheur Resource Area Manager), Todd Forbes (BLM, Lakeview District, Assistant Field Manager), Doug Jones (District Ranger, Emigrant Creek Ranger District), Fred Way (Fremont/Winema National Forest District Ranger) and Tara Martinak (BLM, Burns District, Public Affairs Specialist).

Others present for all (or a portion) of the meeting were: Chris Hansen (Oregon Natural Desert Association)

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.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND ITEMS OF INTEREST

Tara Martinak opened the meeting with review of the days' agenda, discussion of the handouts presented to the council, and basic information on housekeeping-type logistics. Council members and others in attendance introduced themselves before proceeding with the agenda. New appointments to the council left the Chairperson position vacant. There was a short discussion about the membership appointment process and the necessity of keeping continuity and historic knowledge on the RAC (reappoint incumbent members as much as possible). The Council agreed to write a letter to the Secretary of the Interior regarding the non-reappointment of a previous member in the last nomination cycle. Chad Boyd offered to serve as Chairperson and the council unanimously voted in favor of this motion (Motion by Boyd, second by Jim Bishop). Matt Little motioned for Stan Shepardson to serve as Vice Chairperson. Jim Walls seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

DESIGNATED FEDERAL OFFICIAL/AGENCY REPRESENTATIVE UPDATES

Brendan Cain:

- Case No. 3:09-cv-00862-PK (ONDA vs. BLM – "Burnt Car Road"): On Wednesday January 9, 2013, Rhonda Karges, Andrews/Steens Resource Area Field Manager, and Autumn Toelle, Rangeland Management Specialist, will participate in the Oral Arguments for the case regarding

Roaring Spring Ranch's (RSR) motion to reopen litigation concerning the Burnt Car Road and subsequent Settlement Agreement. On January 10, 2013, Judge Papak, denied the motion.

Background: The main point of contention is RSR's ability to access roads closed to the public in the settlement agreement, in which RSR was to be allowed access. In order to ensure RSR access, the BLM closed roads to the public using locked gates, with locks patterned to match other gates in the area which RSR has had a key to for years. Miscommunication between the BLM and RSR resulted in confusion on the point of access. In November, 2012, the BLM verified that RSR does have the right key and informed RSR that the key would work on all gates installed following the Burnt Car Road settlement agreement. Other issues of concern from RSR include their belief the settlement agreement is being interpreted and implemented in a way inconsistent with its original terms; the agreement has violated RSR rights due to the interpretation/implementation; and, the BLM is using the settlement agreement as a basis for other decisions (currently there is an administrative appeal on a decision denying grazing).

- December 20, 2012: Oregon Natural Desert filed in U.S. District Court a case against Rhonda Karges, Andrews/Steens Resource Area Field Manager, seeking "injunctive relief and judicial reversal of the Bureau of Land Management's decision authorizing mechanical maintenance on 133 miles of vehicle routes scattered throughout a 496,000-acre protected area of public lands on Steens Mountain in southeastern Oregon. BLM approved the "CMPA Road Maintenance" project for the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Area in a decision purporting to "categorically exclude" the project from detailed environmental review under the National Environmental Policy Act ("NEPA"). Yet the 'categorical exclusion' BLM cited in its decision is inapplicable to the extensive and landscape-scarring mechanical blading, grading, reconstruction, and improvement authorized by the project decision."
- North Steens Transmission Line current status: On March 16, 2012, the BLM issued a Right-of-Way (under Title V of the Federal Land Policy Management Act) to Echanis, LLC (the project proponent) for the North Steens Transmission Line Project. The BLM and Echanis, LLC then worked together to ensure the 10 plans necessary for the next step in the process - a Notice to Proceed authority given by the BLM - met the intent of the project's Record of Decision. On April 5, 2012 ONDA appealed the decision in Oregon District Court. On May 21, 2012 the BLM issued a limited Notice to Proceed that allows the project proponent to move forward with non-ground breaking activities in preparation for construction. A second Notice to Proceed for ground-breaking construction could be issued when the following are complete: engineered transmission line drawings, payment to the BLM as established in the Cost Recovery Agreement for Monitoring, and a map that details task schedules per section of construction. The BLM and the ONDA have filed their briefs in District Court and are currently awaiting oral arguments which will likely take place in February.
- Celatom Mine Expansion project current status: The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Burns District announced May 4, 2012, the availability of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the proposed expansion of a Celatom mine, located approximately 50 miles east of Burns and 60 miles west of Vale, Oregon. The FEIS analyzes proposed activities on BLM-administered land and cumulative effects from proposed activities on State-administered and private land, all within the project boundary. Proposed activities include expanded mining operations, new mining operations, and exploratory drilling, development drilling, sampling, trenching, and bulk sampling within the Project boundary. The Record of Decision (ROD)for the FEIS is was released June 13, 2012. On July 20, 2012 ONDA filed an appeal of the Record of

Decision to the Oregon State Director (43 CFR 3809.804, .805, and .806). ONDA raised one issue, whether the ROD for the Celatom Mine Expansion Project changed the boundary of the Rocky Basin Lands with Wilderness Characteristics. The State Director agreed to review the ROD relative to this issue. On Sept 7, 2012 acting OR/WA BLM State Director Mike Mottice replied to ONDA's request for review of the project ROD. Mottice affirmed the ROD as-is. The letter included a 30-day appeal period to IBLA. No further contact was received from the ONDA and they did not appeal within the appeal period. EP Minerals, the project proponent, began construction on the Hidden Valley mine, the first of the new mines authorized in the ROD, on December 10, 2012.

- The North American Eagle (NAE) project was supposed to take place mid-October, however, weather conditions prevented the speed trials from occurring. A "reschedule" is in discussion. As previously reported, the testing is to verify handling characteristics, aerodynamic characteristics and gather data to validate computer simulations created and tested by the NAE aerodynamics team. The project area encompasses a 12-mile length of "track" of Alvord Desert Playa including several lanes of various widths and lengths and a private land two-track dirt access road that leads from East Steens County Road to the playa. The vehicle used to make the land speed trial attempts would be equipped with a jet engine, 56 feet long and weighing 13,000 lbs. The chassis is from an F-104 A-10 Star fighter with NAE design suspension and systems integration. NAE hopes to break the women's world record for land speed.
- The final, signed, 5-Year Review of the status of the Borax Lake Chub (BLC) was released in early October 2012. The 5-Year Review assesses new information on the species' biology, habitat conditions, conservation measures that have been implemented, threat factors, and other information. Significant conservation objectives that address most of the primary threats to the BLC have been achieved due to the actions and ongoing partnerships among TNC, BLM, ODFW, and the FWS. The 5-year Review concludes with a recommendation to reclassify the Borax Lake chub from Endangered to Threatened. This recommendation is based on the substantial progress that has been made in implementing the1987 Borax Lake Chub Recovery Plan actions. The 5-Year Review also identifies remaining threats to the BLC consisting primarily of the risk of geothermal energy development on nearby private land. The 5-Year Review's recommended classification change does not change the status of the BLC. The Service will need to go through the formal rulemaking process as required in the Endangered Species Act. www.fws.gov/pacific/news/news.cfm?id=2144375123 www.fws.gov/pacific/ecoservices/endangered/recovery/documents/SignedBoraxLakeChub5-yrReview08-23-2012.pdf

Brendan asked the RAC if they were interested in hearing information on litigation and other issues particular to the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Area since there is an Advisory Council already in place for that area. The RAC agreed they would like to continue hearing this information, especially since the RAC can still comment and provide input on issues pertinent to Steens Mountain, even though there is a separate council for that area.

Mike King asked about the Miller Homestead fire and the District's ability to get seed for the area due to the high demand resulting from the numerous wildfires in the west in 2012. The Burns District was very successful in obtaining the majority of the seed needed for the area and approximately 22,000 acres were drill-seeded and 3,500 acres were aerial-seeded. In addition, 20 miles of fence were reconstructed and 14 waterholes were cleaned out in the burned area. Matt Little suggested receiving an update on fire rehabilitation efforts from each of the Districts at the April or June meeting(s).

Julie Weikel asked for a brief update on the issues at the Alvord Hot Springs (east Steens Mountain area). Cain stated the District is currently working on the Steens Mountain Comprehensive Recreation Plan, and some portions of the plan discuss/analyze recreation and developed uses on the east side of Steens Mountain. The owner of the Alvord Hot Springs and the BLM are working on how to address the public use of the private springs, associated camping and parking, and access issues across private land to public land in the area.

Tom Rasmussen, Lakeview BLM:

- The Lakeview District is still in Federal court regarding the Horseshoe Pasture issue on Juniper Mountain (ongoing case for several years). The main issues in the area are wilderness characteristics and Sage Grouse.
- The Interior Board of Land Appeals recently ruled in the BLM's favor (denying a stay requested by the litigant) in the case regarding some individuals who had left camp trailers in the Lakeview District's sunstone gathering area longer than the allowable occupancy rates as determined by mining law/regulations.
- Grazing permits are to be fully processed with an Environmental Assessment (EA) completed for each allotment (direction issued by the Washington Office), so the Lakeview District (and other Districts) has a large workload here, especially with the Sage Grouse issues involved. By this time next year, Lakeview should have EA's for 38 allotments completed.

Pat Ryan, Vale BLM:

- A chart was distributed to council members outlining the details of all the fire rehabilitation efforts in the Vale District.
- This past fall and winter the Vale District completed a very aggressive fire rehabilitation schedule. For the Long Draw fire, over 60,000 acres were seeded with combinations of native and non-native seed. Thirty miles of temporary fence has been constructed. Approximately 200 miles of fence repair remains to be completed. Cultural resource inventory in the Long Draw seeding units is complete and over 300 sites were identified. Next spring (2013), crews will return to document all sites and begin the report process to the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office.
- Approximately 1,200 acres were drill-seeded on the Ten Mile fire.
- Approximately 3,000 acres were drill-seeded and 10 miles of temporary fence were constructed on the Danner Loop 2 fire.
- Approximately 169 miles of dozer line rehabilitation has been completed on the portion of the Holloway fire that burned on the Vale District. Ten miles of temporary fence will be constructed. The Vale District will implement shrub planting and cultural resource site assessment/stabilization if funding allows in 2013.
- As a result of the various range fires from summer 2012, the Jordan/Malheur Resource Areas Field Manager sent out a draft grazing closure agreement for the livestock permittees and interested public to review. It was written broad enough to cover most foreseeable issues. The Rangeland Management Specialists will work with the permittees on the agreement and tailor it to their exact situation. If an agreement cannot be reached to implement the necessary closures and temporary suspensions, a decision will be issued.
    - Stan Shepardson asked about the options for permittees have who are burned out of their allotments. Pat Ryan stated the District is working with the Oregon Cattleman's

Association to shuffle livestock around with other permittees and allotments; some permittees have leased private ground, purchased hay, etc.

- Matt Little asked about the possibility of phasing out grazing permits where permittees are willing and open to it to potentially create grass banks for emergency situations such as wildfire. Pat Ryan said this idea has been discussed, though not pursued in much detail because the opportunities have not surfaced. Matt asked for a few more details about the potential for this – are there any permittees willing to do this? Is this even feasible?
- Stan Shepardson asked how much grass bank is available right now. Wannie Mackenzie stated there is very likely a lot of grass available out there on Federal land, simply because many folks feel it is too complicated to graze through the Federal system.
- Chad Boyd reminded the Council that when things get tight on Federal land, the value of private land and the reality of conservation changes. Grass banks could have a significant role in landscape conservation- less pressure on the private resources and helping management on a much broader scale. What happens on public land could impact and/or influence how landowners manage on private land.

Doug Jones, Malheur National Forest:

- Blue Mountain Forest Plan Revision Timeline – the proposed action for the land and resource management plan for the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests was available for comment in 2010. The notice of availability published in the Federal Register on March 29, 2010 initiated the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process for the forest plan revision. Using public comments received to date, the planning team (a "newer" team resulting from staff turnover; also a new team lead) is working to develop alternatives to the proposal and analyze the environmental effects of the proposal and alternatives. The result will be a draft Environmental Impact Statement which is expected to be available for public review in late 2013 or early 2014.
- Travel management planning – The main mission and focus of the Malheur National Forest is to continue forest restoration and retain local jobs in our communities. Malheur National Forest Supervisor, Teresa Raaf, made the decision to focus our accelerated restoration program on job retention in 2013 and resume work on travel management planning the following year. However, it is important to know that every vegetation project we have has an analysis component that could cover/include road maintenance, access, etc. Dan Haak, the Mechanized and Consumptive Recreation representative on the Steens Mountain Advisory Council, and a member of the High Desert Wheelers club recently became a partner in the Malheur travel management planning efforts and seems pleased with how the process and analysis occur. Doug encouraged Mona Drake from the Southeast Oregon RAC to communicate with Haak and keep in the loop on the issues and planning progress.
- Collaborative forest landscape restoration areas:
    - Harney County Restoration Collaborative – planning is completed on the Marhsall Devine (34,000 acres) project with planning anticipated to be completed on the Upper Pine project (32,000 acres) by Spring 2013. Data collection and surveys are occurring in the Wolf project area (35,500 acres). The Collaborative has been able to work out several issues between partners up front and avoid litigation completely to this date.

    - Blue Mountain Forest Partners – planning efforts continue on Elk 16 (42,000 acres) anticipated to be completed in May of 2013. Data collection and surveys are occurring in the Summit project area (38,000 acres).
    - The Umatilla and Willowa-Whitman National Forests are working to set up collaborative groups similar to those established on the Malheur National Forest.
- FYI – the Pine Butterfly rarely kill trees… sometimes, but not often.
- 10.3 mbf of timber sold so far this fiscal year. Malheur Lumber has been bidding but has not been awarded any sales to date.
- Mike King asked about the pre-fabrication plant that expressed interest in moving a facility to Harney or Grant County. Doug stated he had not heard anything further other than the company's initial visit to the area.
- Doug is retiring in one month.

Fred Way, Fremont-Winema National Forest:

- Collaborative partnerships are really important…they take a lot of time and a great investment from all the parties involved.
- The Antelope Allotment EA will be released to the public again in the coming weeks. We have been litigated on this project several times.
- Barry Point fire recap – 93,000 acres, with about 1/3 being on private lands. Examining historic fire behavior, we noticed the burn pattern and behavior was different than in recent years. Approximately 60 miles of federal fences were lost; many other miles lost on private land. The majority of the burned area on private land belonged to Collins Pine, which will impact their green timber for years to come. There was a third party review of this fire do to the amount of loss on private lands and a request from some of the landowners. The report on this fire was made available a few weeks ago, and tonight there is a meeting for those affected to discuss the fire and the follow-up report. Fred will be at this meeting, and will remain with the agency officials through tomorrow morning (as such, Fred will not be able to attend the Tuesday session of the RAC meeting). The agency is pushing salvage as quickly and as much as possible. There are some "roadless areas" and woodpecker issues that we are working through. We are hoping to get things moving on public lands by June 2013.
- We do a lot of large, landscape-level projects on the Fremont-Winema National Forest. The Barry Point fire actually burned through several units on one of these projects which impacts the flow of timber out of the forest and into private businesses. If the Barry Point fire could have been 2-3 miles to the west, we would have a much different outcome on the impacts to the landscape, landowners, and the commercial timber operators.
    - Mike King asked how many years do you have to salvage a burned area. Fred stated 12-18 months is the typical timeframe before there is significant timber loss (due to blue stain, other bug kill, deterioration), however, conditions vary based on weather, heat, etc.
- We hope to sell approximately 62 mbf from the Fremont-Winema National Forest this year. Our Regional Forester has shown outstanding support to both the Fremont-Winema and Malheur National Forests in these trying times.
- There are two fire dispatch centers on the Fremont-Winema. They are shared Service-First organizations with multiple agencies in the area. It was decided to combine the two centers and have the new, single dispatch center operational by fire season 2014. A location for the center has not been selected.

WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS INVENTORIES UPDATE

The Vale District completed the wilderness characteristics inventory update in late 2012. The inventory evaluated all public lands within the District. Across the three Resource Areas (Jordan in the south, Malheur in the center and Baker in the north) within the District, there are a total of 76 unique units identified that were found to have wilderness characteristics, totally approximately 1,225,000 acres. A spreadsheet was distributed to RAC members, summarizing the existing resources within each inventoried unit that was found to have wilderness characteristics. A large set of natural resources, special management area and public opportunities on these lands are provided for each wilderness characteristics unit. The intent of the spreadsheet is to provide a quick view of the values contained in each unit.

Matt Little stated the matrix is really great and shows a lot of information, and it seems to focus only on the units that the BLM determined to have wilderness characteristics. Little would like to see all the units to determine how/where wilderness characteristics were identified and how/where they weren't. Don Gonzalez stated wilderness characteristics were determined based on BLM policy for recognizing/categorizing these types of attributes.

Gonzalez asked the RAC if they were able to review the table in the 2 days prior to the meeting and if they had made any decisions based on which units they may want to further discuss or view on the ground for management recommendations/considerations. Several council members expressed confusion about the data presented, how to interpret it and the purpose of the review process. Brent Grasty (Vale District BLM) and Gonzalez attempted to explain the details, resulting in a lot of discussion for clarification and direction. Grasty led a conversation about each of the categories in the table and a short description of the values of the resources for each.

Due to the volume of data presented and the complexity of the information, the RAC elected to utilize a subcommittee to sort through the process outside of the traditional meeting schedule. The subcommittee will meet between the January and April Southeast Oregon RAC meetings and report back to the entire council at their next session.

- What specific products does the BLM want from the subcommittee? Gonzalez stated he is looking for, from the perspective of the RAC, an agreement on those lands with wilderness characteristics on how to manage that particular area/unit (as-is? Propose for wilderness? Etc.).
- How will those products be used? This information will help the State Director formulate what he wants to do with the management of those units.
- Matt Little suggested trying to find the most "fair" wait to interpret the data. Perhaps a scoring system associated with some of the variables – one score for ecological integrity and another for conflict with historical uses. There are many things that measure whether a variable is "good" or "bad." The agency can establish the scoring guidelines and the RAC can interpret from there. Utilizing a color-coded map after the RAC "scores" the variables will visually show what units have the most "weight" (interest) from the RAC.
- Chad Boyd inquired: What does it mean to have wilderness characteristics? Is that something the RAC should step back and look at before digging too deeply into this process? How will "wilderness characteristics" impact the land long-term?
- The RAC supports being proactive on the effort of recommending management strategies for the units with wilderness characteristics. All of the units are currently non-Wilderness Study Area,

and there are no pre-determined management directions for these areas....this is where/how the RAC can help.

- Lands with wilderness characteristics subcommittee: Chad Boyd, Wannie Mackenzie (will Chair the subcommittee), Matt Little, Stan Shepardson, and Mona Drake. (Brent Grasty, Don Gonzalez, and Tara Martinak from the BLM will also participate as needed.)
- Matt Little stated it would be really helpful if the BLM could provide the sideboards/policy boundaries regarding management abilities on lands with wilderness characteristics.
- Julie Weikel stated she would like to visit some of the units on the ground. Weikel also emphasized the necessity of having the subgroup come up with some really concrete information to present to the entire RAC so there is a solid, non-confusing starting point. It is also very important to not lose the field tour(s) to the subcommittee – the entire RAC could benefit from visiting some of these sites on the ground.

STATUS OF LAKEVIEW WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS ASSESSMENTS

Todd Forbes, Assistant Field Manager at the Lakeview BLM, handed out a map showing the Lakeview Resource Area boundary and all the units that have been or need to be inventoried for wilderness characteristics. As part of the settlement agreement for the litigation against the Southeast Oregon Resource Management Plan, the BLM agreed to update its wilderness inventory. This would only include areas outside of existing Wilderness Study Area. Lakeview BLM has been working on it since 2008 and has almost completed this inventory process.

- The Lakeview Resource Area is 3,161,416 acres.
- Existing Wilderness Study Area is 486,873 acres.
- Acres to update wilderness character inventory – 2,674,543.
- Acres inventoried to date – 2,240,593.
- Acres of inventory near completion – 120,950.
- Acres left to complete inventory – 313,000.
- Have found wilderness character to date on 80,228 acres.

Lakeview knew they would be doing travel management planning right along with wilderness characteristics inventories, so they have been doing a lot of leg work on the ground to locate, inspect and document routes. There are basically two steps to the wilderness characteristics inventories: 1) determine if an area has wilderness characteristics or not (does it have outstanding opportunities for solitude, what is the size, naturalness, unconfined and primitive recreation, is it roadless, etc.) (this is the step the Lakeview District is currently in), and 2) determine how are we going to manage areas with wilderness characteristics.

Julie Weikel asked how the wilderness characteristics criteria are applied to the inventory units. A unit has to have all of the criteria (excluding supplemental values), however, the criteria varies depending on vegetation and topography. The inventory process takes a long time because you have to be on the ground to get a true feel of how the criteria apply on the ground. The process is intended to be very subjective. Matt Little added that how the criteria/standards are applied could be controversial – site visits to some of the inventory units would be really helpful. Both Pat Ryan and Todd Forbes encouraged the RAC to not compare the Districts in how and where they are applying the criteria, and to really get a good understanding of how the criteria are defined.

LAKEVIEW TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PLAN/OTHER PLANNING EFFORTS

As you are aware, there are ongoing amendments to area Resource Management Plans (RMP) due to

Sage Grouse. It is very difficult to have two management plans occurring at the same time. As such, the Lakeview Travel Management Plan will be delayed until the Sage Grouse RMP amendments are completed (fall, 2014). There should be a draft of the travel management plan available in spring 2014.

SOUTH CHILOQUIN OFF HIGHWAYVEHICLE (OHV) AREA PROJECT UPDATE

Mike Lawrence, District Ranger for the Chiloquin Ranger District and Acting District Ranger for the Chemult Ranger District provided the following information. Our working group members have been out on the ground looking at existing routes and determining some proposals for future routes. A map was displayed showing some of the routes and proposals. Over 500 volunteer hours have been contributed on this project so far. On the ground, the working group has been tasked with looking at a combination of building off existing routes (there are 400 miles of existing routes in 72,000 acres that we know about), look at routes available for use "as is" or with some modification, look for routes to build for connectors, and look for routes that we can decommission. There is an agreement to not have a net increase in the number of miles within the system. There is a significant amount of data from the quad group; also some good information from the 4x4 users.

There are two big efforts happening right now: 1) grant application with the state for funding to help get through the planning process for this project (to be submitted February 4, 2013), and 2) reviewing the routes section by section in the planning area and cross-analyze with the various groups participating and the natural resource considerations in the area. Next, we will enlist the help of a trails management/design specialist to help create a sustainable system to minimize environmental and social impacts. Aside from their important work on the ground, the working group is dedicated to helping write a proposed action for the analysis. The development of the OHV area will be phased in, slowly, with adaptive management and close monitoring along every step of the way.

We would like to have the planning document available to the public in early fiscal year 2014.

Mona Drake reiterated the 500 volunteer hours given to this project already. Also, the OHV grants are designated for OHV because so many people utilize these areas and providing an area specifically for these types of uses is very necessary and valuable.

Julie Weikel stated that 400 miles of roads in 72,000 acres seems fairly dense. What is the average road density in the National Forests? Mike Lawrence said it really depends on the topography, but that the Chiloquin Ranger District has more roads than any other area he is aware of.

Lawrence thanked the Southeast Oregon RAC for supporting the project and sponsoring the working group under the official Federal Advisory Committee Act guidelines. The working group is doing the best they can to stay true to the idea of developing a sustainable system for the community and the forest. Mona Drake added the people on the working group are very appreciative of Lawrence's willingness to work together and his overall positive attitude.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Chris Hansen with the Oregon Natural Desert Association (ONDA) stated the ONDA is working to protect, defend and restore the High Desert. Lands with wilderness values falls into this order and the ONDA appreciates the RAC taking on the challenge of looking into the various units and the protection they may or may not deserve based on the inventories. Not everything has to be managed as wilderness; there is a great spectrum in which the BLM can manage these areas, however, there are some areas the

ONDA believes really need some strict prescriptions. There are some concerns with the differences in how the Lakeview and Vale Districts are applying the wilderness characteristics criteria.

Mona Drake stated she recalled someone from the ONDA addressing the Southeast Oregon RAC before and stating they would like to reduce their litigation against the Federal agencies and change the opinion of the public about the number of lawsuits on ONDA's behalf. Hansen stated it is a work in progress and that the ONDA continues to work for what is right for the landscape.

ADJOURNMENT
The meeting adjourned around 4:30 p.m.

JANUARY 29, 2012
Members and BLM officials in attendance: Mona Drake (Developed Recreation and OHV), Wannie Mackenzie (Grazing Permittees), Anne Hiller-Clark (Archaeology and History), Mike King (Dispersed Recreation), Bill Renwick (Environmental Groups), Dr. Julie Weikel (Wild Horse and Burro), James Bishop (Public-at-Large), Chad Boyd (Academician), Philip Milburn (State Resource Agency), Peter Runnels (Elected Official), Stanley Shepardson (Public-at-Large), James Walls (Commercial Timber), Matthew Little (Environmental Groups, via conference call), Donald Hodge (Transportation/Rights-of-Way), Brendan Cain (BLM, Burns District Manager), Pat Ryan (BLM, Vale District, Jordan/Malheur Resource Area Manager), Todd Forbes (BLM, Lakeview District, Assistant Field Manager), Jon Severson (BLM, Lakeview District), Doug Jones (District Ranger, Emigrant Creek Ranger District), and Tara Martinak (BLM, Burns District, Public Affairs Specialist).

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND ITEMS OF INTEREST
Tara Martinak opened the meeting with review of the days' agenda and basic information on housekeeping-type logistics. Council members and others in attendance introduced themselves before proceeding with the agenda.

REVIEW/APPROVE SEPTEMBER 2012 MEETING MINUTES
The Council reviewed the meeting minutes from the September 2012 session. A couple of typographical errors were corrected. Also, Julie Weikel stated she remembered the group having a discussion about learning the issues involved and moving toward having grazing based on plant stability and vitality, but it doesn't seem to be reflected that way in the minutes. Weikel stated she felt the RAC was going to support a letter with a stance on the RAC's support of flexibility in grazing dates based on utilization levels and ecologically based management (no hard dates). Weikel wanted to make sure this issue wasn't lost to the RAC and to continue talking about it and keeping it relevant. Perhaps the BLM would like the support of the RAC on this matter. Weikel made a motion to approve the minutes as presented. Jim Bishop seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

TUCKER HILL PERLITE MINE EXPANSION DECISION
Todd Forbes, Lakeview BLM, shared information about the Tucker Hill Perlite Mine Expansion project. Near Lakeview there is a small, prominent geological formation that has a volcanic product called "perlite." In the late 1990's a company came in to the area and developed a small open-pit mine to mine the perlite. That initial EA has worn out since that time and the mine has reached its inevitable conclusion with the amount of space they currently have available. The project proponent would like to

expand the area they have to mine. A Decision was signed in mid-January 2013 to expand from 23 acres to 70+ acres. Five comment letters were received on the Decision – 3 were in support of the project, 1 discussed some concerns about 2 cultural resources sites directly adjacent to the access road to the mine (requested those areas be fenced), and 1 comment had resource concerns that were able to be mitigated.

The existing mine falls within the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's (ODFW) "low density Sage Grouse habitat" polygons. The entire area surrounding the mine was burned by wildfire in 2001; it is not currently Sage Grouse habitat. The nearest Sage Grouse lek site is 2-3 miles to the south. The ODFW recommended a 1:1 mitigation due to the low density rating, meaning the project proponent (at their expense) needs to improve Sage Grouse habitat on a 1-acre for 1-acre exchange. With the expansion, approximately 47 acres will become unavailable for habitat, so 47 'other' acres will need to be improved to meet the give-and-take recommendation.

Matt Little asked for clarification on the recommendation from ODFW – if 1 acre is removed, 1 acre only has to be *improved*...the landowner is not required to *add* an acre for each acre removed. Forbes stated that was correct and this was the decision for this project. Forbes stated the density of vehicles coming in and out of the mine will not change and the mine is active all year long. The Mine Plan of Operation remains much the same as prior to the proposed expansion. It is a good industry and a large employer in Lake County.

SOUTH WARNER PROJECT/LAKEVIEW BLM PARTNERSHIP

Todd Forbes discussed the Lakeview BLM's partnership with the Sage Grouse Initiative partnership, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Lake County Watershed Council, several private landowners and the ODFW. This partnership mostly got started because of the South Warner project – a 70,000 acre planning area (adjacent to U.S. Forest Service-administered land) where there is 55,000 acres of BLM-administered land with the remainder being private. There are 40,000 acres of juniper stands within that entire area. The overall goal of the South Warner project is to improve Sage Grouse habitat. The project was conceived and started because of a wind power Right-Of-Way at the top of South Warner Rim... after some winter Sage Grouse surveys, we determined that those birds migrated up to the tops of the rims/wind-swept ridges (right where the wind towers were proposed for). We also determined that the nesting sites had a lot of juniper.

Forbes gave a short presentation on basic juniper ecology. There are 3 different phases of juniper: 1) co-dominant with shrubs, 2) juniper increases and shrubs begin to die and grasses begin to disappear; erosion also increases, and 3) juniper dominance.

The South Warner project needed to have landscape-level impacts. We started by looking at satellite imagery and the density and coarseness of trees present in different areas; evidence of Sage Grouse activity; noxious weeds present, etc. Individual prescriptions were developed for each area based on the needs and resources in that area. There were a variety of alternatives analyzed in the project – treating all of the young juniper stands (less than 130 years), leaving some old growth/pre-European settlement stands, adding a biomass component, etc. Some of the treatments include hand-cutting and leaving (no piling or burning); burning single, larger/higher-density trees (hand-cutting and then burning the individual trees 1-2 years later); in tall shrub/high density juniper areas, cut and pile the trees, then burn

the piles 1-2 years later; broadcast burning in areas where the slopes are steep enough that Sage Grouse will avoid it and in areas that will benefit Bighorn Sheep and have an intact grass community.

We have a lot of support from our partners on this project, and the U.S. Forest Service is now planning a landscape-level project on the adjacent lands. To date, the BLM has cut about 7,000 acres; NRCS has cut 4,000 on private lands; and the ODFW working with the Lake County Watershed Council has cut about 3,000 acres of juniper.

Wannie Mackenzie asked about the research on where juniper has come from into this Warner Valley area. Forbes stated there wasn't a great deal of focus on the patterns of encroachment because there is a scattering of "pre-settlement" (old growth) juniper just about everywhere (very small stands on thinly soiled, low-sage benches, or rocky ridges). Forbes added the cost of treatment per acre varies depending on the type of treatment (hand cutting, machine piling, single-tree burning, broadcast burning, etc.). Costs go up exponentially when piling is involved. Mike King stated there is limited knowledge in the public about juniper ecology. Some education about the issues with juniper would be beneficial for those unfamiliar with the ecological function of the environment and how juniper plays into it…and that juniper trees might actually contrast the general public assumption that "more trees are better." Chad Boyd stated there is probably not a single solution that will solve the "problem" of juniper on a regional level – it will take a package of treatments based on the areas, resources, condition/age of trees, economics, etc.

LAKEVIEW SAGE-GROUSE RESPONSE TO JUNIPER REMOVAL STUDY

Jon Severson (PhD student from University of Idaho) – Severson is the lead on the small Sage Grouse telemetry project that is generating data to be used in the event of necessary mitigation in wind energy projects. Because this study exists in an area where there is also a great deal of juniper encroachment, the data will also be used to show how Sage Grouse respond to juniper removal.

Sage Grouse are a sage brush obligate. They require large, contiguous tracts of sage brush. They are also considered as an umbrella species for other sage brush obligates. They gather on breeding grounds in the spring called leks. We have seen about a 50% decline in Sage Grouse distribution since European settlement, and because of that, the Fish and Wildlife Service considered the bird for listing under the Endangered Species Act and deemed them warranted but precluded from protection; also, Sage Grouse are currently a candidate species for future consideration with a decision to be made in 2015.

In Oregon, we've seen a slight decrease in trend since 1980 largely caused by habitat loss, a big portion of which is due to juniper encroachment. There has been an increase in fire suppression and grazing pressure in the late 1800's and the changing weather and climate patterns have contributed to the habitat loss as well. There are almost 7,000,000 acres with Western Juniper distribution in Oregon, which is a 5-fold increase since a survey completed in the mid 1930's. We know that juniper encroachment can decrease understory vegetation (shrubs, forbs and grasses); can increase run-off and erosion and lower the water table; and can increase certain wildlife species, but generally decrease species that require sage brush. Severson displayed a map showing the different phases of juniper encroachment.

How does juniper affect Sage Grouse? There haven't been any specific studies to answer this question; however, there have been a few studies that show that these birds avoid trees for nesting, brood-rearing and wintering habitat. Juniper decreases habitat suitability, increases habitat fragmentation, and

provides perches for avian predators. Juniper removal would affect Sage Grouse because it can increase herbaceous vegetation and shrubs and remove the vertical structure that provides perches and visual obstruction for predators. Juniper removal has been recommended in various strategies for Sage Grouse management; however, there haven't really been any documented studies to show the relationship between juniper removal and Sage Grouse. Severson's objectives for his project are to look at the habitat response to juniper removal and evaluate the response of Sage Grouse to removal with a field telemetry project. The study area is about 85,000 acres on the east slope of the Warner Mountains.

Phase 2 juniper is where a lot of the treatment is occurring and where we expect to see a lot of positive results. Severson showed several maps and photos in a slideshow to illustrate some of the before and after comparisons. There appears to be a healthy shrub component after the juniper is removed, which looks like adequate and sufficient Sage Grouse habitat. To really monitor the habitat response we selected 48 random points in the control and treatment areas that will be visited over the next 3 years to document progress. To monitor the birds, we are hoping to tag 40 hens and 10 males in each of the areas – will monitor locations, nests, and broods (bird counts) and develop one random point for each nest to compare to.

Matt Little asked how many years there have been on this data collection and are there long-term plans to continue? The data started in 2010 with the BLM project (South Warner) and all of the collection for Severson's project will conclude in 2014, giving 5 years of consistent data. It will take longer than that to really get a full response. The Lakeview BLM would like to continue the monitoring on Severson's project; however, funding, priorities and staff availability are variable at this point. Chad Boyd said he is really intrigued by the project because it is looking at population numbers and there is data both pre and post treatment. It is early in the project, so there is really no analysis or recommendation at this point – we are still collecting data and monitoring the responses. We are seeing some interesting things…more information to come as the project continues. The RAC would like to hear a report on the progress of the project in a year.

MEMBER ROUND-TABLE

Pete Runnels: One concern regarding the wilderness characteristics studies is that the environmental groups may try to link the contiguous sects of 5,000 acre roadless areas to create large tracts of wilderness. This would be detrimental to the agriculture community, among other users and entities. Also, regarding the Sage Grouse RMP amendments, there is an alternative that completely eliminates grazing on Federal lands. This is unacceptable and hurts the economies and the families that have been working and caring for the land for so long.

Mona Drake: This spring Drake put together a meeting for her OHV/4-wheel drive association in Portland. Drake invited 7 agency personnel that related to different aspects of OHV/4-wheel drive uses. The meeting was very successful with a lot of good information shared and discussions had.

Don Hodge: Appreciates the opportunity and allowance of his schedule to finally attend a meeting in person.

Julie Weikel: Weikel has been looking into the history of the Wild Horse and Burro Program and what is going on in the various Herd Management Areas. Weikel recently read a wonderful summary of professional statements about the wild horse and burro population issues called "Honest Horses," put

together by a writer in the Spokane, Washington area. As we move forward and discuss competing demands on public lands, climate changes issues, etc., it is going to be tough to balance wild horses and burros and their place on the land. It is clear the first priority is maintaining habitat – without that, the rest of the system falls apart.

Stan Shepardson: Emphasized considering some way to take some of the pressure off of the range and the habitat. Shepardson has an idea to think and talk about regarding voluntary retirement of grazing permits. The reality is there is decreased productivity due to climate change, resource and wildlife competition, invasive species, etc. To lessen this detriment, it may be prudent to reduce the amount of livestock on the land. Voluntary retirement of a grazing permit could happen through purchase, so the landowner is compensated for their efforts. This idea does not take away from the total amount of acres that *could* be grazed, but reduces the total number of AUMs that actually *are* grazed through voluntary retirement. The retired permit allotment(s) could be used as a grass bank, which we all agree is necessary and important. Shepardson would really like to talk about this issue at a future meeting and potentially make a recommendation on it to the BLM.

Wannie Mackenzie: From the ranching community, it is frustrating that the public points fingers at our industry for the pressure on public lands from grazing. The ranchers really know how to manage the lands and the grasses and the timing of use and so forth, however, the private use and impacts on public lands are mandated through agency policies. The timing of grazing is so important – if we could redesign the system to more effectively utilize the vegetation in the various locations, we could reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires, at minimum. We can never single-trade manage these lands. They must be managed for multiple uses. The ranchers need to educate the environmental groups, the legislators, the youth… ranchers have to be smart about how they utilize the land and look at the big picture overall to create a sustainable industry for their communities and families.

Mike King: King also supports grazing timing based on utilization levels instead of concrete dates - we need to get ecological science integrated into these decisions instead of just going off of what's always been done.

Philip Milburn: Milburn is excited to be part of the Southeast Oregon RAC. A couple of things of interest for the group may be:

- Immediately following the wildfire in the Trout Creek Mountains (summer 2013), the ODFW put some radio transmitters on some Sage Grouse in the area. We hope to recapture those birds in the next few months to put some GPS collars on them to continue with the post-fire monitoring. There is a lot of private land seeding yet to be completed and the ODFW is trying to help where they can through their Habitat and Access program.
- Another issue that is currently working through the State process and will be in the Federal process soon is the Calico Gold Mine (20 miles south of Vale and east of Nyssa) permitting. This is the first run at chemical extraction gold mining in Oregon in several decades. It is interesting working through the rules and regulations for mining that were written a very, very long time ago.

Jim Bishop: Bishops really appreciates what Shepardson and Mackenzie mentioned in their updates. We really need to continue to look at problems cooperatively, on a wide scale (regionally) and for the long term. The wild horse and burro issue seems to be some sort of an intractable problem, but only if

it's looked at from year to year – over management could be part of the problem. If you look at the treatment of juniper over many years/ the long term, you could really bring some short-term efficiency to the treatment processes. Bishop encourages some thought toward larger issues, larger solutions, and longer-term solutions because he believes those are the only ways to really fix some of the problems facing public lands.

Jim Walls: If you want some expertise on invasive species, Grace Haskins is the Lake County leader on that and she has some amazing information to share. On the forestry cooperative, Andy Kerr is a participant and has a goal to completely eliminate grazing on Federal lands – however, he is serving on the forest cooperative to support forest health. Walls suggested taking a field trip to see the state's largest solar system, which is right in Lake County. The ONDA wrote a letter complimenting the solar projects. Solar is a very valuable tool to use, and we have a lot of opportunities to do so in Oregon.

Chad Boyd:

- The issue of grazing based on utilization is linked to all the other issues we've spoken about today as a RAC – grass banks, voluntary retirement of permits, etc.
- Now is the time to focus on products as a RAC that will have impacts on the world around us. Budgets are tight and we really need to make good use of taxpayer dollars – we do need to be briefed on issues that are happening in our jurisdictional area, but we need to focus on providing some products that have meaning to the people and the land.
- Boyd wanted to discuss the non-re-appointment of a previous incumbent. Two people applied for his position and he was not selected as the primary. The incumbent was notified of this decision with a basic form letter. It is important for the Washington Office to know that decisions such as this leave an on-the-ground impact to the RAC, the knowledge and history of the council, and the decisions and recommendations made by the RAC. Boyd would like to write a letter to the Secretary of the Interior on behalf of the RAC inquiring about the re-appointment process and sharing the concerns of not re-appointing an incumbent.
    - Brendan Cain stated that part of the issue may have been that applicants are not allowed to serve on one more than one advisory council at a time, and the incumbent is also on the Steens Mountain Advisory Council.
    - Boyd agreed that could be an issue, but stated there is a right way and a wrong way to let someone know they did not get reappointed.

Matt Little: Appreciates the opportunity to participate via conference call and be on the advisory council for an area he really cares about (southeast Oregon).

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD
None.

FUTURE MEETING TOPICS

- Vegetation Environmental Impact Statements updates
- Difficulties in the wild horse and burro program, population management, sustainable rangelands, etc.
- Fire rehabilitation efforts, fuels, etc.
    - Administrative designations and how those affect firefighting (ACEC, WSA, etc.)
    - How to put fire and management ahead of those designations

    - Communication and fire management
- Fully explore ecological based management of fuels conditions
- Lands with wilderness characteristics (Vale District)
    - What does it mean to have wilderness characteristics? It seems the Vale and Lakeview districts interpret this differently and the RAC might want to think about that.
- Forage management (Weikel stated that planned stability and long-term health is very important, and we can't forget this in our conversations.) (Boyd added that a monitoring component may be necessary and essential to tie the "need to fix right now" issue into long-term solutions.)
    - Within year (move dates/grazing based on utilization and ecology)
    - Grass banks (the possibility of voluntarily retiring grazing permits, etc.)

  (Have Rangeland Management Specialists participate in these conversations.)

Brendan Cain added that no matter what we put on the agenda or when we address it, we need to make sure the recommendations are something the BLM can implement within existing policies (this information will be important for the BLM to have and share when the RAC tackles certain issues). We *can* move forward with 'vision,' but these types of ideas may require more time lead time to process and put in place.

The RAC supports more opportunities for "working" meetings (fewer presentations, less information sharing) and on-the-ground tours.

ADJOURNMENT
The meeting adjourned around 11:30 a.m.

I hereby certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the foregoing minutes are accurate and complete.

Brendan Cain
Burns District Manager

Chad Boyd
Chair, Southeast Oregon RAC

6/18/13