

SEORAC – Harney County Community Center

July 13 -14, 2015

E.Lynn Burkett, Brendan Cain, Lisa Bryant, Julie Weikel, Jean Findley, Rich Watts, Chad Boyd, Ken Kestner

1:15 Welcome, Introduction, Housekeeping and Agenda Review by E.Lynn Burkett.

Discussion and comments were expressed about the previous two meetings minutes, to update and screen followed by review by RAC.

Brendan Cain gave Burns District Update pertaining to (see Brendan's update)

E.Lynn Burkett gave Lakeview Update (see E.Lynn's update)

Discussion pertaining to Charter – Chairman called for a discussion of the charter to take place the next day.

Presentation by Joan Suther – update on Sage Grouse EIS

A short pause for public comments – public comments were given

***Meeting ended 1 hour early because of intense flooding and hail affecting meeting. Meeting changed for the next day to the Burns District Office.

8AM – Don Gonzales gave the Vale District update (see Don's update) Questions were asked about the possibility of an Owyhee wilderness designation. ONDA responded that it was mostly press and speculation although ONDA will put out a proposal. A RAC member asked that speculation that grazing would be completely removed needs to be clarified to the public. Dan Morse agreed that there needs to be increased public education on exactly what a wilderness is and entails.

Discussion on RAC Charter

The RAC has a big role to play with public lands. Historically the SEORAC had a lot of input to the Steens and the Lakeview RMP. Reasons for absences might be that members do not see the relationship between the RAC and the BLM business. There has been some difficulty in recruiting members. A RAC member asked about the "two meeting rule, if it was standard among RAC's and if the SEORAC was being selective on when to enforce. Chairman agreed to keep tabs on attendance of RAC members. Caution was expressed by the BLM in that there are currently no alternates so if a RAC member was removed for lack of attendance, we would be unable to fill that position until the next recruitment cycle. RAC members were asked to participate in: the LWC discussion, travel management, Sage Grouse, and the Tri-State Fuels project. Enough RAC members were passionate about participating in the Wild Horse and Burro Program that they chose to participate rather than being asked. Some sub-committees were established to address these issues and provide information back to the BLM. The Leslie Gulch fence project was very informative and of interest to Ranchers.

Questions were asked about the role of the RAC and what the SEORAC business model is.

The Chairman expressed that the role of the RAC seems to have changed from the District Managers asking for information to the RAC coming up with their own subjects.

It was mentioned that some subjects are difficult to contribute to – and example would be the Sage Grouse EIS – other than public comment.

The RAC agreed that there were many issues that could be addressed and asked that the DFO's create a running list. This running list could also help with recruitment.

It was expressed that the issues could be prioritized, monitored and apply more locally.

The RAC asked that by the end of Dec. to receive a list of priority projects for restoration including noxious weeds. Once the Sage Grouse EIS is out the RAC will have the opportunity to engage in the Vale and Lakeview RMP.

One RAC members stated that the Sage Grouse EIS could be modified by local input and could also evaluate some practices pertaining to Sage Grouse.

The Field Review (tour) of the Miller Holmstead fire was beneficial and the RAC requested a follow up tour.

It was mentioned that the RAC needs more background information before proceeding forward with an issue. An example would be ACEC's – what they are for and how they operate. This information would be a good educational opportunity

(Don) – input and review on seismic activity for gas.

Q The question was asked if there is a different approach to RAC's.

DFO stated that some new RAC's are being created on the Westside to address title II funds. All DFO stated that the RAC's are important to the Secretary of the Interior and that they provide a valuable contribution locally.

Q The DFO's also asked if the RAC wanted to be invited to participate on issues formally or informally.

The RAC thought it best to be asked formally through a letter that would include a definition of the work in order to allow for more meaningful input. RAC's are here to stay.

It was stated that the RAC's have the potential danger of becoming a symbol, a show-piece, rather than really contributing. The RAC has to make a commitment.

The RAC asked that more things rather than less things be brought to them, that people need to be held accountable to bring information to the table, and the more local the better.

RAC members expressed frustration at the length of time it takes to appoint members and asked that the message get to the Secretary. The DFO explained the process of recruiting a year in advance. The RAC asked that the BLM communicate more back to the applicants on the process in order to create patience.

- It was agreed that the BLM would update the RAC about the status of appointments and a reminder at every meeting of appointments set to expire.

Dan Morse expressed a recent conversation with Juan Palma about encouraging RAC to be more active. Overall people are not compelled to join – we need to have people want to join. Pressure, Power, Projects. Make RAC's task oriented. RMP's are a narrow enough subject. Find something discrete.

- The RAC asked if they could put out a press release discussing issues that they are working on and also what issues they will be working on within the next year.

Make sure the public understands what the RAC is and the difference between the RAC involvement and the public involvement.

In review of the Charter – 1) be sure that there is an attendance policy – 2 absences in a year you're out. 2) RSVP of a meeting is two weeks in advance. If there is not a quorum within one week of the meeting then the meeting will be cancelled. 3) RAC will put together a list of accomplishments that will feed the press release. 4) Chairman will send out a frank letter to RAC members about the need for participation and the Charter. 5) An update will be given at each meeting pertaining to membership and the expiration of terms. 6) It is the responsibility of each expiring RAC member to seek out members and help to recruit for the represented group. 7) a press release will be created with the help of the BLM 8) Meeting will be set a year in advance with a 2-3 week lead on location, time and date. 8)

The RAC will receive at least 3 tangible, fruitful projects from each District at the beginning of the year.
9) The SEORAC website will be updated on a more regular basis.

Julie Weikel – Presentation on the WHB subcommittee.

- History - January 2014 RAC meeting – RAC members expressed an interest in moving forward to address the BLM WHB issue. Julie shared some raw data that included the spaying, via a technique called colpotomy, of 110 mares as well as the vasectomy of approximately 250 studs by two different methods over a period of 5 years (2008-2013). The reproduction rate at Sheldon had gone from 22 percent to 6 percent over that same time period.
- The RAC expressed interest in supporting an existing proposed spay trial by BLM. Although only one mare of the 110 Sheldon mares was known to have died as a result of spaying, Julie urged the RAC not to pursue the endorsement if it could not support a death loss of up to 10 percent. We invited Dr. Leon Pielstick, the veterinary surgeon who performed the Sheldon spays, to present at the next RAC meeting (??? 2014). Subsequently, SEO RAC produced a letter to BLM supporting Dr. Pielstick's proposal for a BLM spay trial (XXXXXXX).
- Unfortunately, the minutes of the Jan 2014 RAC meeting read as though that 10 percent death loss "caution" as a personal (Julie's) surgical failure rate. She had been unaware of that interpretation until April 2015, when that 10 percent figure was being widely used at a national level to discredit spaying of mares. For the record, she has never spayed a single mare via colpotomy. She has no personal record for that procedure in mares, but has performed a similar procedure in approximately 100,000 cattle. And she did observe, in an official capacity, most of the Sheldon mare spays and their subsequent regather.

A letter from the RAC to the BLM WHB Division Chief was drafted.

*** see Julie's Fertility control handout. ****

The BLM nationwide is using PZP less and less because it hasn't been as useful in the field as hoped.

The BLM has announced 8 fertility control research projects.

The BLM has committed to finding a birth control that is both reversible and long lasting.

Fertility control projects are under the endorsement of academic (OSU) institutions. This RAC has endorsed one of those projects.

Current situation:

There are 60,000 in the wild "on-range" – mostly in Nevada.

There are 47,000 horses in long term holding facilities.

One problem with long-term holding facilities is that some are electing not to continue.

Every time horses are moved, some have the potential to die. Naturally, many are aging in place.

National Wild Horse and Burro Committee

BLM is looking for long-term holding in Oklahoma and other Midwestern states.

Horses in long term holding will be tested in safety trials. There is a commitment to looking at changes in behavior as well.

The research budget is about \$15 million; \$11 million of that is committed to the eight approved research projects.

*** insert Oregon population data sheet****

DFO to ask about Pokegama herd. Is it part of the SEORAC? E.Lynn will ask the SWO RAC.

Beaty Butte is bookended by refuges – north and south. There are Sage Grouse Focal Areas (SFA) at Beaty Butte. (Insert draft letter to BLM Division Chief)

PZP (Porcine Adjuvant – the immune system fights it) and PZP2 (tuberculosis adjuvant) are not getting the desired effect.

Horses are polyestrous breeders but there is some variation and some mares cycle throughout the year. We are wanting a full one year effect.

There are also some side effects observed. – With PZP2, sometimes there is a delayed birth of foals so the foal does not have time to build enough fat to last the winter. PZP2 can cause damage to the muscle and it is difficult to assess pain associated with the damage.

Big Pharma is not interested because there is not consistent and specific results to attach to a patent or there may not be a large enough market.

(insert link to BLM website – WHB site)

Adoption season runs spring to spring and adoption rates have declined for the past several years.

The cost per adoption is going up because the BLM is expending more resources into the adoptions for horse care – especially the East Coast adoptions.

Program budget –

63% - spent on off-range holding

2% - on gathers and removals

7% on adoptions

27% on other activities such as monitoring.

Trying to use prison contracts but those are expensive as well.

The RAC asked how Oregon can be the positive model?

- Suggestion to wait until there is a more permanent birth control.

Open public Comment period

Ken Kestner – Suggestion to get a well written proposal on fertility and gathering. PZP is not working. Spaying will likely not be accepted. Someone has to keep addressing this issue. Legally, can an agency move forward with a spaying project?

Julie responded – The eight recently announced research proposals are moving into implementation. Three of them are spay trials. If the research is done in the wild as opposed to in long term holding, NEPA would have to be done.

Q There is currently a lot of support for a horse solution at Beaty's Butte. Can Beaty's Butte be the focus for research?

There is a lot of difference between herds and between stages that those herds are in. There are huge variables which make research more difficult.

Horses on BLM lands are wild. Horses on other public lands, including the Refuge system, are feral and are not held under the Wild Horse and Burro Act.

The Chairman suggested that the letter (WHB) be directed at the national level as well. It should include some specifics, maybe a budget plan and maybe a case study.

Julie

The Genetics Act references genetic diversity, it does not speak to a spaying program. Dr. Griffin will guide the research. For 2016 gathers there is still not a helicopter contract in place. Upper management in BLM is routinely attacked by advocacy groups. BLM is going to assess public opinion on the wild horse and burro program by conducting focus groups to survey their views and solutions to the WHB program. The company that got the contract to run regional focus groups throughout the U.S. has elected Las Vegas as the West's focal site because there are adequate facilities.

With the current focus group plan Las Vegas is going to represent the entire west. ~~If you ask a specific sector of the population that does not know the issues, the background and may not have any education on the subject, then their opinions will be skewed.~~

A recommendation was made by Dan Morse (ONDA) for a robust LWC discussion at the next meeting.

Don Gonzalez – Tri-State Fuels Project

The tour was successful and prompted a fruitful conversation. This time of year many people that would normally be working on this kind of project, are out fighting fires. This project is going to need some fine tuning specifically for creating more access. RAC members need to talk with the groups they represent about this issue, especially the idea of creating fuel-breaks. Use this as a learning opportunity or a model for others.

Q One RAC member asked if there was any opposition in the Interdisciplinary team?

There was discussion about areas of goo habitat and why would we grind it up or manipulate it. Some want to leave enough vegetation so that sage brush can come back if this project is not successful. There were some questions about compatibility with LWC's.

Q At what point should the RAC provide comments?

When alternatives are developed as there would be more to work with and focus on. It should be ready in November or potentially Oct.

A comment was made that the project sounded like too much fragmentation. This project should not be only about fire.

No one has defined placement of projects – the devil is in the details.

This is a huge problem that will need a huge solution. The RAC may be able to collate the diversity of issues.

The realities of budget and the overlap of travel management will come into play.

Q Would a joint set of comments be more helpful? If the RAC can help in formulating the alternatives, let us know.

Q Has the ID team over-laid the Sage Grouse EIS?

Don Rotell has been working closely with Joan Suther (Sage Grouse project manager). Some things will change between now and the Record of Decision.

There are many steps to figure out and overlays with many things like existing roads, powerlines, etc. Fire breaks help to protect Sage Grouse leks – this project is a broader issue, it is not one or the other. We will still take aggressive action with fire control. Sage Grouse is somewhat in conflict pertaining to fuel-breaks. We have to bring Science into this picture so in reality we are conducting an experiment. Monitoring and reporting back will be important.

Look at the refuge and it's use of Adaptive Management. The project needs to be flexible. And that could be related to the type of prescription. A reduction in fuels rather than blading a road is more acceptable.

If the RAC can be helpful in pre-screening, let us know.

Reporting back to the RAC will be important - Qualitative story telling along with the Science. The project needs more science and needs more content and context.

Round-table

Philip-

Sage Grouse counts are up overall. The Kit-fox video is showing good reproduction. We have funding for another year – monitoring and DNA capture – we are using more passive techniques. They seems to be in salt-desert communities and it has to be flat like the Alvord basin and the Coyote basin. We are starting Mule deer habitat projects with a lot of work being done on the Steens. Many projects to promote bitterbrush with NEPA ready projects – lots of projects on the Malheur N.F.

Julie –

Lets move the minutes forward in two stages. The first with comments and the second for approval. Hopeful to get the minutes in July or first part of August.

Rich –

Lots of drought and fire and a lot of interest in the tri-state fuels project.

Chad – LWC letter out - maybe put it in the Oregon Field Guide.

Next meeting is October 26 and 27, joint with Prineville. Potential meeting subjects might be a grazing presentation. The DFOs and Chairs with Prineville to construct the agenda.

Adjorn