

**Southeast Oregon RAC
Ochoco National Forest, 3160 NE 3rd Street, Prineville, OR
Oct. 27, 2015**

Federal staff present:

E.Lynn Burkett, Brendan Cain, Larisa Bogardus, Julie Weikel,

SEO RAC members present: Chad Boyd, chairman; Brent Beverly, Pete Runnels, Jean Findley, Jason Kesling, Anne Hiller-Clark, Mia Sheppard, Ralph Stout, Julie Weikel, Richard Watts, Don Hodge, D. Wannie Mackenzie and Jim Bishop

Public present: Marika Ruppe, representing the American Wild Horse Preservation Campaign
Gayle Hunt, Central Oregon Wild Horse Coalition
Carolyn Ellertson of Prineville
Dan Morse, of Oregon Natural Desert Association (phone)

Review/Approve November 2014, January, April, July 2015 Meeting Minutes

Julie Weikel and Jean Findley had minor corrections for the January 2015 minutes. The minutes were approved as amended, with a motion by Julie Weikel and second by Richard Watts.

Julie Weikel also had several corrections to the April 2015 minutes, which were approved as amended with a motion by Jim Bishop and second by Pete Runnels.

Julie Weikel had numerous corrections to the July 2015 minutes and It was decided to table them so she could work with Larisa Bogardus to develop a better draft.

The meeting shifted to discuss two proposed edits to the joint RACs' Wild Horse and Burro proposal letter. It was suggested that the letter be copied to the secretaries of Agriculture and Interior; and that herd growth rate of 20 percent per year be added. The changes were unanimously approved and referred to the John Day-Snake River RAC for approval.

Designated Federal Official Report/Agency Updates

Lakeview District Manager (E.Lynn Burkett), Vale District Manager (Don Gonzales) and Burns District Manager (Brendan Cain) presented written reports accompanied by short oral reports. It was noted the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) was amended to allow categorical exclusions for grazing allotment renewals.

Chad Boyd, Wannie Mackenzie and Jean Findley were recognized for their terms of service to the RAC, which expire in December. All three have chosen not to re-apply.

Richard Watts suggested including interest areas in outreaches for new applicants.

Election of chair and vice chair for FY2016

Chairman Chad Boyd said Philip Milburn had indicated a willingness to chair the RAC in 2016, assuming he is reappointed. Julie Weikel offered to serve as vice chair. Both were approved unanimously.

Chairman Boyd also suggested the creation of a subcommittee to consider the Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness designation proposal, and inviting representatives for and against the issue to speak at a future meeting.

Julie Weikel asked what the role of the RAC is in lands designation. Wannie Mackenzie said he felt the RAC is to advise federal agencies, and since Malheur County is in the SEO RAC, the RAC should take a position. He said it was important to keep the ecosystems intact and maintain the fencing. A change in designation would restrict management options.

Mia Sheppard noted there is potential for an end of term Executive Order, and the RAC should be proactive with suggestions. Don Hodges said there are 6 million acres in Malheur County, and a 2.5 million acre designation would change it forever.

Brendan Cain said the public needs to be involved, the RAC can help craft an Executive Order, or help create the law for a Wilderness designation that could include ecological restoration. It's not unusual for Congress to ask agency leadership for their opinion, and the RAC's views could influence that.

Chairman Boyd reminded the group that the SEO RAC played a major role as a facilitator in the development of the Steens Mountain Wilderness designation. The RAC is not an interest group, it represents constituencies across the board, which would make its position more valuable.

Time for public comment and responses

Marika Ruppe American Wild Horse Preservation Campaign, which represents 60 wild horse advocacy groups, presented an online petition that received 20,000 e-signatures opposing the upcoming Beaty Butte wild horse gather, stating it was not in the best interest of the taxpayers or the mustangs and asking that 1. The gather be cancelled; 2. A humane fertility control program be implemented; and 3. Compensation be paid to ranchers who voluntarily surrender their grazing rights in Herd Management Areas.

She asked Julie Weikel to explain the three stages of equine pregnancy. After the first 60 days, a pregnant mare can go to term without ovaries. A pregnancy is only affected by sterilization in the very early stages of pregnancy. Dr. Weikel said there is potential for sterilization to terminate some pregnancies, but sterilization is a BLM research program.

Ms. Ruppe encouraged expanding the use of PZP (equine birth control) and said she is working with several tribes to implement comprehensive PZP programs.

Gayle Hunt of the Central Oregon Wild Horse Coalition said new, out of the box solutions are needed, and she hopes to participate in the Ochoco Wild Horse Management Plan. Mustangs are a native species and should be part of range restoration and ecology.

Carolyn Ellertson of Prineville said if private citizens treated horses like the BLM does, they would go to jail. Roundups have up to 30 percent mortality rates, which could be cut to 10 percent by leaving lead mares with their bands. The government needs to allow taxpayers to give their input, not just ranchers. Wannie Mackenzie encouraged her, and the general public, to attend the Beaty Butte gather and see for herself how roundups are managed.

Karla Bowers, a wild horse advocate, said she felt the RAC's Wild Horse and Burro proposal letter is premature, because sterilization is not supported by available science because it impacts natural selection and genetic diversity. Gathers also destroy social hierarchy of horse bands, which raises

reproduction rates from 10-15 percent to 20 percent or more. She suggested raising Appropriate Management Levels, since only 14 of 17 herds are below sustainable numbers. Livestock animal unit months on BLM land total 1 million, while horses are only 16-32,000. She also advocated for bait and water trapping, in lieu of PZP and sterilization.

Dan Morse of the Oregon Natural Desert Association said he would be happy to present to the RAC regarding the Owyhee Wilderness proposal, as he feels it is mischaracterized and misunderstood. The proposal is for a National Conservation Area, which would include Wilderness and six Wild and Scenic Rivers. Pete Runnels said it is important to see how much support there is among residents of the proposal area. Consensus was there should be ecological stewardship in wilderness management, and the RAC can contribute to the discussion.

Julie Weikel added that rangeland health should be the ultimate outcome. Mia Sheppard said the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership is working on a new administrative designation that would emphasize multiple use with flexible management for fire, noxious weeds and other issues. Backcountry conservation areas are another option, and a proposal has been submitted to Lakeview and Vale BLM Districts.

It was decided to defer further discussion for an agenda item at the next meeting to hear various perspectives on the Owyhee proposal and organize a subcommittee.

Chairman Boyd also suggested inviting the State Office to discuss a productive role for the RACs to add ecological restoration to Wilderness management. E.Lynn Burkett added the districts are supposed to ask the RACs for input on three areas, and that Lakeview will be coming to the RAC for input on the RMP amendment.

RAC Charter, quorum and attendance policies
Discussion was tabled.

Wrap up

Dates were selected for 2016: Jan. 25-26; April 4-5; June 13-14; and Oct. 17-18. Locations are to be determined. The Designated Federal Official will shift to Vale District Manager Don Gonzales.