



Steens Mountain Advisory Council

September 22-23, 2011 Summary Minutes

The Steens Mountain Advisory Council (SMAC) met on September 22 and 23, 2011 at the Frenchglen School in Frenchglen, Oregon. Council members in attendance included: David Bilyeu (Chair, State Environmental Representative, Bend), Daniel Haak (Vice Chair, Mechanized or Consumptive Recreation, Burns), Richard Angstrom (No Financial Interest, Salem), Paul Bradley (Wild Horse Management, Hines), Tom Davis (Fish & Recreational Fishing, Sisters), Stacy Davies (Grazing Permittee, Frenchglen), Pam Hardy (Dispersed Recreation, Bend), Richard Jenkins (Recreational Permit Holder, Diamond), Fred Otley (Private Landowner, Diamond), William Renwick (Local Environmental Representative, Burns), and Hoyt Wilson (Grazing Permittee, Princeton). Members not present included the Burns Paiute Tribal Member (vacant), and the State Liaison (vacant). Other participants included the Designated Federal Official (DFO) Kenny McDaniel (BLM District Manager, Hines), the DFO's Assistant Tara Martinak (SMAC Coordinator, BLM, Hines), and Facilitator Wendy Green Lowe (P2 Solutions, Idaho Falls, ID).

Observers/presenters included: Michelle Franulovich (NLM Outdoor Recreation Planner, Hines), Eric Haakenson (BLM Wilderness Recreation Planner, Hines), Rod Klus (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife), Jerry Magee (BLM Oregon State Office), Tara Martinak (BLM Public Affairs Specialist, Hines), Bill Pieratt (BLM Rangeland Management Specialist, Hines), Rob Sharp (BLM Range Management Specialist, Hines), Joan Suther (BLM Steens/Andrews Area Manager, Hines) and Autumn Toelle (BLM Rangeland Management Specialist, Hines).

Members of the public who attended included Melissa Cain, DePui Culy, Lynn DeGuire, Susan Hammond, and Pete Runnels (Harney County Commissioner).

This document summarizes discussions that occurred and decisions made. A tape-recording of the meeting provides a more detailed record and can be accessed by request to Tara Martinak, Public Affairs Specialist in the Burns District of the BLM (tmartina@blm.gov or 541-573-4519).

Thursday, September 22, 2011

Chairperson Update

Dave Bilyeu welcomed everyone in attendance. He mentioned that the meeting would begin at 8:30 a.m. on Friday rather than 8:00 a.m. as stated in the final agenda. With that change, the agenda was approved (attached to the official minutes as Appendix A).

All meeting participants introduced themselves.

Dave reported that the recommendation on the draft Comprehensive Recreation Plan was delivered on September 6, 2011. He observed that Stacy Davies of Roaring Springs Ranch hosted a number of SMAC members for an optional tour on September 21. All SMAC members except Rich Angstrom and Dick Jenkins were joined by Kenny McDaniel, Joan Suther, Rob Sharp, and Autumn Toelle, along with Craig Miller from the Oregon Natural Desert Association (ONDA). Tour participants went to the Broken Leg Springs area and Three Springs area; a few people also went to the Tabor Cabin area.

Dave mentioned a possible meeting with the Burns Paiute Trib to see if they will nominate a member to the SMAC. He has also spoken with Rich Angstrom and things are still proceeding with identifying a representative of the state to sit on the SMAC.

Designated Federal Official Update

Kenny McDaniel noted:

- Jeff Rose accepted a permanent position as the Associate District Manager for the Burns District. He brings a strong background in resources and quality leadership skills.
- A large horse gather being conducted cooperatively by the Vale District and the Burns District in the "Barren Valley" area (east of Steens Mountain) will be completed next week.
- The North Steens Transmission Line Environmental Impact Statement will be released soon. The preferred alternative will be the northern route. The final decision will be out approximately 60 days after the final EIS is published.

Field Manager's Report

Joan Suther referred to a handout (attached to the official minutes as Appendix B) and noted:

- BLM submitted information to ONDA and the Federal judge about activities planned for fall of 2011 related to the North Steens Ecosystem Restoration Project litigation. BLM is hopeful the judge will allow those projects to proceed.
- BLM submitted a proposal with maps to the Federal judge related to routes being challenged by the ONDA in its request for an injunction against road maintenance. The court accepted BLM's proposal in full.
- Mike Kelly is supervising trail construction and installation of rock cairns related to the Wildland Juniper Management Area.
- A large number of lightning strikes were experienced recently, causing over 40 fires. None were allowed to burn.

Tara Martinak provided statistics about 57 fires in the Burns Interagency Fire Zone in 2011, affecting a total of 16,870 acres. That included 7 human-caused fires affecting a total of 10 acres; the rest were lightning-caused fires. Kenny McDaniel explained how decisions are made about when to fight wildfires and when to let them burn, including the availability of fire-fighting resources, forecasted weather, and what is known about fuel loads in wildfire areas. Joan Suther added that fire use plans provide a decision tree to help make decisions.

Observations from the September 21 Field Trip

Dave Bilyeu observed that field trips are an important way for the group to learn together, to stay connected to the land the SMAC seeks to find solutions for, and to keep focused on the objectives of the SMAC. Dave observed that the springs in the field trip area look pretty bad.

Dan Haak observed that one person on the tour repeatedly suggested the best solution would be to remove wild horses, but wild horses have their advocates. The tour revealed agreement that something needs to be done and that there is room for common ground.

Fred Otley observed that the allotment is large enough to absorb a hundred new reservoirs without detriment to wilderness values. He thinks the water problem in the area was in part created by fencing wild horses away from the river; solutions must consider reversing that prior decision.

What most impressed Tom Davis was how significant the damage was to the riparian zones around the existing water developments. Tom commented the whole area would be in much better shape if those problems could be addressed.

Paul Bradley noted the availability of natural materials in the vicinity of the Broken Leg Spring to help enlarge the bottom spot and improve the situation.

Pam Hardy thinks some of the group's best conversations happen on field trips. She appreciated the ONDA representative participating. There is an argument to be made that the wilderness characteristics could be enhanced if the project is designed carefully.

Bill Renwick believes collaborative approaches work best when all perspectives are present and for that reason, he appreciated ONDA's participation. He also thought he heard willingness to consider alternative approaches. Disturbance helps keep ecosystems healthy.

Rich Angstrom had not attended the tour, but wondered whether there were visible changes in the allotment in a wet year as opposed to what was observed in tours in drought conditions.

Hoyt Wilson observed that the thing that struck him was there were a lot of junipers and a lot of grass, but not much water and not much wildlife. He believes that wilderness needs wildlife and wildlife needs water. Providing water would benefit wildlife.

Fred Otley thinks science on juniper, the role of fire, and lack of diversity in the plant community will support the need for water developments.

Pam Hardy suggested that the best available science – particularly documentation demonstrating the research on the benefits of distributed water - needs to be presented to support what is proposed; if the science is not conclusive, that should be honestly portrayed.

Dick Jenkins stated that Oregon State University has been doing research for fifty years that documents water consumption by juniper and the results of juniper removal.

Tom Davis observed that science is not always conclusive.

Stacy Davies expressed his appreciation to people for attending the tour. He is impressed by his fellow SMAC members' dedication of time to learn more about the situation on the ground. He is willing to conduct additional tours to identify a plan that could benefit wilderness values.

It was agreed that the SMAC would craft a letter inviting ONDA to send more representatives to attend a field tour. (The letter, mailed on October 11, 2011, is included as Exhibit 1).

Working Draft South Steens Allotment Management Plan/Environmental Assessment – Purpose and Need for Action

Autumn Toelle explained the purpose for action is to provide additional water on the South Steens and Tombstone Pastures as presented in the working draft South Steens Allotment Management Plan/Environmental Assessment (AMP/EA). The need for the action is two-fold:

1. To support on-going management of the allotment in a manner that allows continued achievement of three of five Rangeland Health Standards that are already being met and to make significant progress towards achievement of two standards (water quality and riparian) not being achieved within the South Steens Pasture.
2. To provide additional sources of reliable late season water for wild horses and livestock in the South Steens Allotment to replace water historically available from the Donner and Blitzen River, consistent with an obligation BLM had to provide additional water consistent with the 2006 Cooperative Range Improvement Agreement.

Four needs would be addressed by this decision-making process:

1. The allotment is failing to meet two standards because livestock and wild horse use are reducing water quality
2. Existing water sources are forcing congregation of use which is resulting in a degradation of habitat quality in the immediate vicinity of those sources

3. The allotment authorization allows more livestock use than are currently grazing and BLM is obligated to provide more water in case the permittee wants to take full advantage of the permitted number of animals
4. BLM must review and renew grazing permits consistent with grazing regulations.

Fred Otley noted that wild horses are on the allotment for the entire year, and livestock are only present during a permitted season of use. Rich Angstrom encouraged Autumn Toelle to provide additional justification in the Purpose and Need section, including photographs. Bill Renwick pointed out the importance of reminding the reader that wild horses are part of the challenge so as to avoid the misinterpretation that the problems are caused entirely by livestock.

Reflections on the Alternatives Being Considered

A panel of four presenters¹ was introduced to provide their reflections and perspectives on the alternatives being considered in the AMP/EA. The panelists had been asked to address two questions:

1. What should be considered during BLM's decision-making process related to addressing the purpose and need for action
2. What creative solutions should BLM evaluate (in addition to the current list of alternatives) before making its decision.

Rob Sharp - a wild horse expert from the BLM Burns District - encouraged the SMAC to suspend personal opinions and beliefs about whether wild horses should be allowed on the allotment as that public policy is beyond the scope of this decision making process. Fundamentally, wild horses need food, water, cover, and space. Various actions taken after the passage of the Steens Act made no changes in the herd size and they were restricted to the South Steens Allotment. Fencing was installed to control their range and restrict their access to historical water sources. Unlike livestock and wildlife, wild horses are on the allotment year-round; they have nowhere else to go for water. Elimination of water sources must take the horses into consideration; replacement water sources will be required. Once a horse finds a water source, it will return to that water source and define its own range around reliable (perennial) water sources like wells and springs. Equipping water sources with power will ensure their reliability. New wells could be beneficial, if equipped with solar power for example. Troughs, pipelines, and overflow ponds can work if water is available year-round. Juniper may need to be removed if water gaps are established as wild horses will not use water surrounded by trees. In response to a question, Mr. Sharp explained that horses will range up to three miles from perennial water sources and up to seven miles under drought conditions.

Rod Klus – an Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Biologist - stated that three sage-grouse leks are located in the allotment (one is very large) and two additional leks are located close to allotment. Mule deer are another high priority for ODFW, but they have a large range and will go a long way for water. Wildlife don't expect water to be reliable; if water goes away, they will move on. ODFW would be supportive of water developments, but would be opposed to placement of new water developments in the immediate vicinity of a lek as the additional use might disrupt use of lek areas. He was asked about elk; elk will travel a long way for water. They are passing through in late fall and water is available in other locations. ODFW is more concerned about the quality of the habitat than they are about additional water for wildlife.

Jerry Magee - a wilderness expert with the Oregon State Office of BLM - provided a handout (attached to the official minutes as Appendix C). Three WSAs (Home Creek, South Fork Donner and Blitzen, and Blitzen River) had been designated in the Steens Mountain area prior to the designation of the Steens Mountain Wilderness. In passing the Steens Act, a portion of

¹ ONDA had also been invited to provide the organization's perspective, but declined the invitation.

each of those WSAs was defined as part of the Steens Mountain Wilderness, but another portion of each was not designated and therefore these “remnant” WSAs remain. They are still WSAs and must be managed as such until Congress either designates them as wilderness or releases them. Since the passage of the Steens Act, these WSAs have not been reassessed to determine whether they possess wilderness characteristics. Whether or not they possess wilderness characteristics in isolation, they would possess those characteristics “in association with” the adjoining Steens Mountain Wilderness Area.

In addition, the Donner und Blitzen River was designated as a Wild and Scenic River (WSR) in 1988. The river, its special values, and now its WSR status were considered to be “supplemental features” of the original WSAs and remain so for the wilderness area and, in association, the remnant WSAs. The water in the WSR has since been excluded from livestock grazing use to protect river values and to implement the No Livestock Grazing Area.

The South Steens AMP/EA is considering the possibility of new range developments in the remnant WSAs, including new water sources to replace the excluded river source. The new, permanent range developments proposed within the remnant WSAs must be able to meet BLM's *Interim Management Policy* (IMP) requirements to “not ... impair the suitability of such areas for preservation as wilderness.” Mr. Magee went on to explain that the way proposed actions are evaluated against the IMP hinges on whether the proposed activity would impair the suitability of the WSA for preservation as wilderness. BLM uses a three part test to conduct this evaluation. First, new activities or structures must enhance wilderness values. Second, they must be substantially unnoticeable. Third, they must not require motorized access if the area were designated as wilderness.

Mr. Magee believes the proposed water developments being considered for the South Steens Allotment, could be designed and constructed to be unnoticeable and to not require motorized access. The harder question is whether they would enhance wilderness values. He suggested that the strongest case might be based on an evaluation of all related actions on the allotment rather than on each project. In other words, if new water developments are evaluated along with the impacts associated with decisions to fence the Wild and Scenic River and to create the livestock free zone, a stronger case might be made that these related decisions will ultimately enhance the wilderness characteristics of the WSAs. He noted that this approach has not been tested in the courts. A decision to proceed with the water developments would not be defensible in court if it does not document how wilderness values would be enhanced. He explained that the definition of wilderness does not include consideration of naturalness. It is not a function of ecological integrity but rather of appearance to a casual observer. Ecological integrity is not considered until the supplemental characteristics are considered.

Stacy Davies - the permittee on the South Steens Allotment - offered his opinion that the SMAC should focus on what makes the most sense for sound management on the ground. He believes permittees must be able to operate in a sustainable fashion. He does not see a good reason to hurry the AMP/EA, and he would rather see a solid recommendation from the SMAC to advise BLM in making a decision that can be implemented and can sustain legal challenge. It would be inappropriate to say that man has had no impact on the landscape within the allotment historically and it should be assumed that humans will be a part of the equation into the future. Healthy watersheds and springs can be accomplished, even when horses are present.

Jerry Magee stressed that the description of the impacts that would be associated with the no action alternative should emphasize what will happen absent a change in management. In response to a question, he explained that the determination of whether an area has adequate wilderness characteristics to warrant designation is conducted first, then the supplemental considerations are taken into account. Naturalness is one of the supplemental considerations; it is not one of the wilderness characteristics. The analysis needs to focus on the larger scale.

Stacy Davies asked Rod Klus where the sage-grouse leks are; the SMAC could suggest avoiding placement of the water developments in close proximity to the leks. ODFW is reluctant to identify lek locations on maps to avoid human disturbances in those sensitive areas. In addition, the leks are not the only sensitive habitat area for sage-grouse.

Bill Renwick observed that the SMAC is charged with developing innovative and creative solutions. It is worthwhile for the SMAC to pursue this discussion; but it may be false economy for the SMAC to get involved in the details of the decision. Jerry Magee suggested it might be most helpful for the SMAC to focus on advice based on concepts, priorities, and values.

Jerry Magee explained that key observation points are used to conduct a visual analysis of wilderness area; key observation points are chosen as locations from which the wilderness can be observed by the public. The object is to consider whether they look natural. Changes that do not remain looking unnatural, or that naturalize over time, are acceptable. Portions of a wilderness area that cannot be viewed from a key observation point are called seldom seen areas. Non-native vegetation is not necessarily a problem, as long as it looks natural.

Stacy Davies observed that the designation of the Steens Mountain Wilderness was an act of Congress. He completely agrees that wilderness areas are inappropriate for development. Leaving the WSAs as remnants makes his job as a land manager very frustrating - his hands are tied and he is prevented from doing what is most appropriate for his allotment because the WSAs continue to have to be managed as if they are wilderness areas, even though Congress already decided against designating those locations once.

Fred Otley suggested that BLM should analyze an alternative that would relocate the wild horses. The horse population was imposed on this allotment without federal action to provide additional water for them. There should be an alternative that would allow Stacy to increase the number of livestock on the allotment to what his permit allows. His voluntary reduction is commendable, but should not be the only way that this can work.

Alternatives Being Considered

Wendy Lowe reviewed the approach she had planned for considering the alternatives evaluated in the AMP/EA. Autumn Toelle would provide a brief explanation of each. The exercise was designed to find out if any of the alternatives enjoyed more support than others.

Autumn Toelle referred to a series of maps that had been provided with the draft AMP/EA. She asked the SMAC to share its rationale for preferences. She is also interested in additional ideas that the SMAC might come up with and suggestions for project design elements. She would appreciate feedback from the SMAC again, after the public comment period, before a decision is made. Autumn suggested her preference would be to build a proposed action that includes as much of the SMAC's suggestions as possible.

Stacy Davies suggested that additional options would include water gaps for the river that would allow access for wild horses but not livestock, pumping out of the river, and a well at Long Dam.

Autumn Toelle explained that the No Action Alternative would renew the existing livestock grazing permit for ten years, including continuation of the current grazing management for 9,577 animal unit months (AUMs) on public land and use of the existing terms and conditions. One impact of the No Action Alternative would be that the allotment would not meet the Standards and Guides in the future due to poor distribution due to limited reliable water sources. No range improvements would be constructed; existing improvements would be maintained.

Autumn Toelle described common features for the action alternatives. All would entail a renewal of the permit for 9,577 AUMs on public land, but with a shortened season of use (from April 1 to October 31 to April 15 to October 31). Billing would be based on actual use of each of the three pastures – and leave the permittee to choose which pasture to use and when. A

different grazing system would be adopted, allowing rest in each pasture once every other year. Each of the alternatives would entail a different set of proposed range improvements.

She briefly summarized the developments that would be included in Alternative B – the Proposed Action, including ongoing maintenance for 15 existing reservoirs, three new reservoirs – all in WSAs, four new spring developments – including three in WSAs and one on private land; three new wells – only one of which would be on a WSA, two new pipelines on private ground, nine new troughs – four of which would be on a WSA, and a riparian enclosure on a WSA that would entail 0.3 miles of fence enclosing 2.2 acres.

Hoyt Wilson said he could not reflect on each alternative; he didn't think he knew enough about the locations of the proposed water developments. Pam Hardy agreed. There was general agreement that it is not possible to consider how appropriate each proposed development is. Paul Bradley suggested another alternative would be to discuss each type of development option that could be available (like wells, seeding, juniper removal, troughs, etc.). Autumn Toelle responded that having the sort of discussion suggested by Paul would be valuable as well. Tom Davis said he would like to talk about design concepts rather than the alternatives in the Draft AMP/EA. Pam Hardy observed that the document will not survive a legal challenge if the document is not well designed and carefully crafted. Dick Jenkins wanted to know what Stacy Davies thinks about each proposed project. Tom Davis suggested that he doesn't just want to know how Stacy Davies feels about each but whether there is science behind each proposal.

Autumn Toelle explained the thinking around Alternative C, the Maximum Water Development alternative – the purpose of which is to maximize distribution of livestock, wild horses, and wildlife. Stacy Davies pointed out that some water developments included in Alternative C would seek to develop unreliable water sources.

Autumn Toelle described the remaining alternatives. Alternative D would focus water developments along existing roads, including some roads that are currently closed. The purpose would be to limit surface disturbance and improve access for construction and maintenance. Alternative E would maximize water developments on BLM managed land that is outside wilderness and the WSAs. It would include spring protection around four springs. The alternative also includes a pasture boundary realignment and installation of water gaps to provide access to water for wild horses. It does include a minimum number of water developments within the wilderness as well as some in the WSAs.

Rich Angstrom made note of principles that people seem to agree about, including avoidance of sage-grouse leks, removal of reservoirs without reliable water, spring protection, etc. Pam Hardy pointed out that abandonments can be counted as positive impacts. If there is a balance of positive and negative impacts, that will make the alternative more acceptable in light of impacts on wilderness characteristics. Dick Jenkins asked why any water developments would be abandoned. Autumn explained that some aren't worth holding onto. The rationale is to show net impacts that are not negative on wilderness characteristics.

Fred Otley asked about impacts on the viewshed, referring to the maps provided. Viewshed is a concept that is important in wilderness areas – the concept relates to how visible a development is from distance. Autumn Toelle explained that she developed viewshed maps for all water developments evaluated in the document. The viewshed maps were prepared using standardized (worst case) assumptions (6 foot tall observer, construction approach and materials, no vegetation, etc.) about how they would be constructed so that the impacts of each can be evaluated. Fred Otley would prefer development of another set of maps that are based on more realistic assumptions.

The SMAC members were provided the opportunity to share their thoughts. The following were recorded on flip chart paper.

Dave Bilyeu: The SMAC could invite experts and the interested public into collaboration to reach agreement on what the SMAC should recommend.

Rich Angstrom: The Proposed Action should be minimalist to accomplish objectives but allow implementation of developments until BLM meets management objectives. In addition, the Purpose and Needs section needs significant revision to make the document more defensible.

Hoyt Wilson: This AMP/EA is vastly improved over the prior document, but it still needs a bit more work. The SMAC could probably develop a Proposed Action that we could all agree to and then focus on how to defend it.

Stacy Davies: The SMAC should focus on the goal and describe what it proposes to do and show how that would benefit wilderness values. The SMAC should build the rationale for how the proposed action would enhance wilderness values.

Bill Renwick: He is concerned about the depiction of the impacts on the maps; the 2-mile circles of influence make it look like there would be greater impact than will likely occur. BLM should accept the offer of support offered by the two SMAC members who are attorneys; they know how to fix the document.

Paul Bradley: Support Alternative C with the stipulation that it should be developed in phases, using monitoring and adaptation during implementation. He indicated that he is willing to help Autumn Toelle deal with the viewshed analysis.

Dick Jenkins: BLM needs to consider not making the document too complex. It's hard to explain and to defend. Nice big documents look nice, but the public may be overwhelmed by it.

Tom Davis: The group should pass a recommendation addressing the six categories that Paul Bradley suggested. The soundscape is as important as the viewshed. BLM should not overlook the groundwater emergence zones (springs) and associated riparian potential. In addition, the document needs references to back up the opinions. Brevity and clarity are paramount.

Fred Otley: Evaluation of the No Action Alternative is very important. But in this case, it should include allowing the horses access into the no grazing zone. If they don't have enough water, BLM will have no choice but to do that.

Public Comment

Pete Runnels (County Commissioner) read a letter supporting BLM's plans for new water developments on the South Steens Allotment. The letter is attached to the official minutes as Appendix D. Stacy Davies expressed his appreciation for Commissioner Runnels' comments.

Friday, September 23, 2011

August 2011 Minutes

A few minor changes were noted to the draft minutes from the August 2011 meeting.

Motion: Rich Angstrom moved that the SMAC approve the August meeting minutes.

Second: Seconded by a SMAC member (not recorded).

Objections: David Bilyeu called for objections; there were none.

Vote: The minutes were approved.

Action: Tara Martinak will make the changes and print a final version for signature by Dave Bilyeu. The final minutes will be posted on the Internet.

Road Closures in Alternative D of the Steens Mountain Comprehensive Recreation Plan

Eric Haakenson passed out the map of Alternative D from the Comprehensive Recreation Plan. Alternative D was developed based on what ONDA had proposed for closure (evaluated as Alternative E). Some roads were deemed necessary for fire suppression, access to private lands, and access for utility companies; one road was precluded from closure in the Steens Act. Joan summarized what the alternative would entail: 35 miles of roads closed (use allowed for permittees). In considering which to convert to trails, BLM looked at how appropriate they would be as trails (going somewhere that people might want to go, desirable vistas, etc.). Alternative D retains all suggested road closures and conversions to trails that are not necessary.

Dan Haak is concerned about closing so many roads as it would severely restrict access to motorized vehicle users. He would prefer not making dead end roads. He is particularly concerned about the changes that would result in the Burnt Car Road area. Trespass concerns will not be fixed by road closures. He is opposed to road closures that are in effect 12 months of the year to appease a group that only uses the mountain a few months a year. The decision should not play favorites among user groups.

Tom Davis liked the way the alternative was developed. Tom Davis thinks that BLM should evaluate the alternatives presented in the plan. It might be unrealistic to think that the SMAC would ever reach complete agreement about this topic.

Stacy Davies doesn't like the alternative and suggested the only way he could support any road closure would be if each mile closed was matched with a mile of new road.

Fred Otley appreciates the rationale for the alternative and agrees that it must be evaluated. He is opposed to dead end roads; he encourages as many loop roads as possible.

Rich Angstrom suggested that if Joan Suther moves forward with an alternative that was not explicitly analyzed in the document, BLM may want to consider re-notifying the public.

Dick Jenkins suggested that any further road closures should be considered in light of prior road closures and the impacts of those previous road closures. Cumulative impacts should be evaluated, particularly in light of access problems that have been created.

Hoyt Wilson is opposed to any more road closures. Alternative D is catering to one group of people at the expense of other users who have used the mountain historically. The SMAC should have an opportunity to weigh in on whatever alternative is chosen for roads.

Bill Renwick observed that the SMAC's comments on the Travel Management Plan should be revisited; they are germane to this discussion as well.

Dave Bilyeu objected to the idea that the SMAC should go to war over divisive issues like roads.

Pam Hardy noted that there may be benefits of road closure for wildlife and for dispersed recreation/wilderness values. Some of the routes that are on the map for conversion to trails might not get used very much as they offer little protection from the sun and no water.

Paul Bradley reminded everyone that the mountain is supposed to be managed for multiple users. The Steens Act provided Congress with an opportunity to close roads, and the roads designated for closure in Alternative D were not identified by Congress. To support trespass enforcement, use a motion sensitive camera and capture violators on camera.

Winter Recreation

Wendy Lowe reminded the SMAC that no agreement had been reached at the August meeting on a recommendation related to winter recreation and the Steens Mountain Comprehensive

Recreation Plan. Dave Bilyeu suggested additional time for discussion to see if the SMAC could reach agreement on a creative solution.

Stacy Davies suggested that BLM isolate the North Loop Road for non-mechanized users (snow shoes, cross country skiers) only. Mechanized users could have the rest of the mountain including the Moon Hill Road, the Kiger viewing road, Stonehouse Creek Road, and anywhere else they can access, except the North Loop Road. Stacy Davies would like to close the rest of the mountain because he has a trespass problem for non-mechanized users.

Tom Davis is concerned about the impact of mechanized winter recreation on critical winter range for wildlife, like deer and elk. He does not want to say they can go wherever they want to go without considering potential negative impacts on wildlife.

Dan Haak appreciated Stacy's proposal. The gate at the Burnt Car Road is closed when the snow flies. He doesn't think there is benefit of opening up that road for mechanized recreation.

Paul Bradley likes the idea of discussing this topic again as the snowmobilers have not had an opportunity to provide input yet. Road closure should not be the only option considered. The snowmobilers can comment during the public comment period.

Pam Hardy responded to Stacy's proposal that it is not acceptable to her or the environmental community. The larger issue is that the council has historically wanted to keep things the way they had been in the past. Change in favor of any particular user group is going to be difficult for the SMAC as a whole to approve. Balance is needed.

Dick Jenkins is opposed to complicated rules that will be impossible to enforce.

Fred Otley noted some of the roads not currently open in winter were closed through previous decisions. Stacy's idea should be considered. The Steens Act did not close roads to winter use; what limits motorized winter use is access once there is snow on the ground.

Rich Angstrom expressed a desire to move on. Stacy's proposal is provocative and raises the issue of fairness. BLM should be advised that some user groups are more vocal than others, some have given up more in the past than others. BLM should engage motorized user groups.

Dan Haak moved that the SMAC recommend BLM include an alternative that would expand opportunities for motorized winter recreation access (in addition to the North Loop Road) and investigate the possibility of entering into cooperative agreements with private landowners to provide motorized play areas. Pam Hardy proposed an amendment to the motion to include the explanation that this could reduce conflicts between motorized and non-motorized recreation. The amendment passed by a vote of ten in favor, one abstention (Tom Davis).

Motion: BLM should include an alternative in the CRP that would expand opportunities for motorized winter recreation access and investigate the possibility to enter into cooperative agreements with private landowners to provide motorized play areas to minimize conflicts between motorized and non-motorized recreationists.

Second: Seconded by a SMAC member (not recorded).

Objections: David Bilyeu called for objections; there were none.

Vote: The motion passed nine to two (Tom Davis and Dave Bilyeu).

Action: Dave Bilyeu to send a letter to BLM transmitting the recommendation.

The final letter is attached as Exhibit 2.

Draft South Steens Allotment Management Plan/Environmental Assessment

Stacy Davies encouraged his fellow SMAC members to stay a level above the specific alternatives and let him (the permittee) work with BLM to implement whatever is decided. He left so as not to influence the discussion inappropriately.

Autumn Toelle provided copies of maps for the alternatives being evaluated. Tara Martinak provided copies of the prior advice submitted by the SMAC in 2008 regarding the South Steens AMP/EA.

Rich Angstrom prepared a draft set of principles that he thought enjoyed broad support within the SMAC for how BLM should proceed with preparing a document for public review and comment. The SMAC discussed the list of principles, edited and finessing the language and meaning, and added a few more. Additional suggestions were made.

The SMAC members reviewed and discussed the list of draft statements. Following discussion, Wendy Lowe confirmed that the SMAC was in consensus to support sending the statements to BLM as advice related to the preliminary AMP/EA for the South Steens Allotment. It was agreed that Dave Bilyeu should transmit the statements on the SMAC's behalf. The final letter transmitting the comments is included as Exhibit 3.

The SMAC intends to review the Draft AMP/EA as well as comments received from the public on the document after the comment period and will provide additional advice to BLM then.

Public Comment

Susan Hammond informed the SMAC to the fact that the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) has conducted scientific studies demonstrating benefits in disseminating cattle. The ARS might be willing to establish a monitoring program for this project. In addition, she noted that there is a great deal of variation in precipitation from one year to the next so monitoring should span more than one season to make certain the results span wet and drought years.

Tara Martinak read aloud a comment submitted by Peggy Smack.

Objectives for Future Meetings

Objectives for future meetings were identified, including:

- 2012 meeting schedule
- Areas for restricting non-mechanized recreation
- Search and rescue policy, cost reimbursement, and how to inform users
- Steens Loop Road project (which was funded using American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds) and what might be done with remaining funds
- Report on Wendy's interviews and recommendations
- South Steens AMP/EA (after public comment period)
- Elections for chair and vice chair.

It was agreed that the November meeting would be cancelled. The public comment periods for both the Comprehensive Recreation Plan and the South Steens Allotment AMP/EA will end in early 2012. It makes sense to move the November meeting until after the two comment periods end. Dave Bilyeu, Dan Haak, and BLM will schedule the next meeting. There may be quorum challenges depending on how quickly the new member appointments happen. Terms currently held by Paul Bradley, Pam Hardy, Bill Renwick, and Hoyt Wilson end November 19.

Action Items

The status of each action items from the prior meeting was discussed. New action items were noted. The list of action items is attached as Appendix E.

September Meeting Evaluation

SMAC members provided feedback to Wendy Lowe regarding the August meeting related to what they believed had gone well as well as opportunities for improvement in the future.

What Went Well at the August 2011 Meeting	Opportunities for Improvement at Future Meetings
Craig Miller's participation in the field trip	Get all comments from the SMAC recorded before taking breaks or leaving for lunch
Donuts – thanks Tara!	Never acknowledged some members of the public (visitors) who attended
Focus on options rather than the alternatives	We had some trouble with deciding what process to use – but once we got past that, it went quite well
Field trip – good to have discussions out in the field	Try to let one person speak at a time, take turns respectfully
Chair did a nice job	Follow the established guidelines for conducting meetings
Flexible process	
Lots of good work over the last three meetings	
Personal dedication, sacrifice, and commitment of the SMAC members	

Meeting was adjourned at: 2:30 pm

Next meeting date: To be determined, Bend, OR

Exhibits:

1. Letter to Oregon Natural Desert Association, dated October 11, 2011
2. Letter to BLM providing additional comments on winter recreation, dated October 20, 21011
3. Letter to BLM transmitting comments on the South Steens Allotment Management Plan/Environmental Assessment, dated October 11, 2011.

Appendices:

- A. Final Agenda
- B. Field Manager Update
- C. Comments from Jerry Magee
- D. Letter from the Harney County Commission to BLM
- E. Action Items

Submitted by: Wendy Green Lowe, Facilitator

The Steens Mountain Advisory Council approved the minutes on: August 17, 2012

Signed by David Bilyeu, SMAC Chair: */signature on file/*