

Steens Mountain Advisory Council

FINAL June 12-13, 2014 Summary Minutes

The Steens Mountain Advisory Council (SMAC) met on June 12-13, 2014, in Frenchglen, Oregon. In accordance with the provisions of Public Law 92-463, the meeting was open to the public. This document summarizes attendance, discussions that occurred and decisions made. 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.

Council members participating:

Richard Jenkins (Recreational Permit Holder representative),
David Bilyeu (Vice Chair, State Environmental representative),
Stacy Davies (Grazing Permittee representative; Thursday only),
Pam Hardy (Dispersed Recreation representative),
Fred Otley (Private Landowner representative),
Mark Bagett (Fish and Recreational Fishing representative),
Richard Angstrom (No Financial Interest representative), and
Leon Pielstick (Wild Horse Management representative).

Members not participating:

Daniel Haak (Chair, Mechanized or Consumptive Recreation representative),
Grazing Permittee (vacant),
Private Landowner (vacant),
Local Environmental representative (vacant),
Burns Paiute Tribal Member (vacant), and
State Liaison (vacant).

Other participants/observers/presenters:

Designated Federal Official (DFO) Rhonda Karges (Andrews/Steens Resource Area Field Manager), and
DFO's Assistant Tara Martinak (Public Affairs Specialist, BLM).

JUNE 12, 2014

On June 12, the SMAC met on Steens Mountain for a field tour to locations focusing on juniper management and stewardship contracting.

JUNE 13, 2014

Facilitator Tara Martinak opened the meeting with official introductions. New member Mark Bagett, representing Fish and Recreational Fishing, shared he is from Canyon City, Oregon. Bagett is a native eastern Oregonian and has been a recreational fisherman all his life. He spent the first 25 years of his career as an outdoor writer and photographer and the past 28 years or better in more directly-related conservation efforts (USFS, Warm Springs Tribe, and Trout Unlimited most recently on their national staff). Bagett has a deep sense of appreciation for good land stewardship and a collaborative process. He is also a member of the Trout Creek Working Group and has a soft place in his heart for the Steens Mountain area.

Martinak shared updated contact information for the SMAC and reviewed other materials presented to Council members at the session. The nomination process for the vacant and soon-to-be expired terms closed on May 23. The BLM received adequate nominations for all available positions except for the local environmental organization and state liaison positions. Those positions will be advertised again at

the end of June. Martinak asked the Council if it would be acceptable for the BLM to continue facilitating the SMAC unless an intensely complicated issue arose that required the use of a highly trained and external (outside the agency) professional. The SMAC agreed with the proposal and will continue to operate 'as is.' Rich Angstrom offered himself for some facilitator duties should the need arise in the future. The SMAC agreed to this suggestion and thought Angstrom would be a good selection for the facilitator role.

Rhonda Karges emphasized the Burns District would like to do a more thorough job of keeping the OR/WA BLM State Director in the loop on SMAC business (if the State Director doesn't support a SMAC recommendation or suggestion, it probably won't happen – so this chain of education is vitally important). SMAC members also emphasized educating the public on the things the BLM has done regarding implementation of the Steens Act.

PREVIOUS DAY'S FIELD TOUR RECAP

Rich Angstrom stated the SMAC should receive regular updates from SageCon regarding the work they are doing and where they are headed: there will be a process for development activity; the 3% cap for disturbance is really in dispute on the ranching/farming/development side of the argument. Not all Sage Grouse core habitat areas are the same, so the 3% is going to be rebuttable. It would be smart to start advising the BLM on how development activity can come back in and restore or recreate habitat from impaired habitat and start sharing success stories – get that information compiled and shared! The BLM should focus on how they want to handle the mitigation side of things and the SMAC could proactively use Steens Mountain and the surrounding management areas for mitigation of impacts (documentation, sharing success stories, etc.).

Fred Otley responded that the OR/WA BLM State Director thinks the mitigation needs to be where there is the biggest bang for the buck. Otley disagrees –mitigation should be on a site by site basis to minimize impacts overall. "We can't walk away from areas that need mitigation because they aren't the biggest bang for the buck." Angstrom agreed and stated the SMAC could really help with this issue: where should the mitigation policy focus? Around private land where the birds really exist, or on public land where there was once good habitat? This is a fair concern and would be a great discussion for the SMAC to have, consider, and provide a recommendation on. Pam Hardy supported the discussion overall.

Leon Pielstick asked about the Page Springs Weir and what impact it really has in the river regarding fish passage. Angstrom asked what the original purpose of the Weir was and Karges couldn't be sure, though the Weir did become used for measuring water flow. The SMAC agreed this would be something they would like to continue discussing in the future.

The SMAC was very impressed with the stewardship contracting work with juniper, especially the projects done by Joseph's Juniper, LLC. The SMAC encouraged the BLM to help support the efforts by perhaps marketing the process, the good work being done, and the product available. Angstrom also suggested inviting a group from the Oregon Forest Resources Institute that markets timber in the state to see if there is interest and have a conversation about their process and how to get juniper on their radar screen.

REVIEW/APPROVE FEBRUARY 2014 MEETING MINUTES

Leon Pielstick made two suggestions for minor corrections to the list of participants for the meeting. Rich Angstrom motioned to approve the minutes as corrected. Hardy seconded. The minutes were then approved with no objections.

DESIGNATED FEDERAL OFFICIAL UPDATE (Rhonda Karges)

1. South Steens AMP – Proposed Decision signed on May 30, 2014. In the decision, we added a well on regular BLM lands and moved a fenceline slightly around a waterhole. We have to wait 15 days from the interest parties’ receipt to ensure no protests are received. If none are received, then the Decision automatically becomes final.
2. CRP – Currently working through public comments and formulating a decision. The BLM received approximately 24 comments. The main issues were:
 - a. Roads - BLM has already closed enough roads, roads have a negative effect to sage-grouse and wilderness characteristics therefore need to close them.
 - b. We didn't analyze the effects to private lands of the proposed projects
 - c. BLM should not add any new access points. How are we going to patrol these new access points? This will lead to trespass situations, new effects to sensitive plant species.
 - d. Need to provide specific plans for the development of fee campgrounds (e.g. Mann Lake).
 - e. Cold Springs redevelopment should not happen.
 - f. No more fences should be built. If we do build fences, then BLM should take down fences (the only proposed fences are around the new proposed campgrounds).
 - g. Proposed projects would negatively affect the high mountain desert fragile ecosystem.
3. Personnel Update – Mandy DeCroo was hired as an Outdoor Recreation Planner to replace John Bethea. Gary Cox was hired as a seasonal, term. We are currently re-advertising to fill in behind Daryl Bingham, Natural Resource Specialist (Fisheries/Riparian).
4. Steens Act Accomplishments - Handout (available by request at the Burns District office). Rhonda wanted to emphasize how much the SMAC has contributed to projects on Steens Mountain and that they should feel proud of the really great work they have accomplished.
5. Campbell Inholding Access – Last November Mr. Campbell put a hold on pursuing access to his Fish Creek parcels. In a letter dated May 15, 2014, Mr. Campbell asked BLM to move forward in providing reasonable/adequate access. Currently, BLM is researching all known records for the Fish Creek area to determine routes existing at the time of the Steens Act. In addition, in a letter dated April 16, 2014, Mr. Campbell requested BLM to construct a fence around his private land surrounded by wilderness. As you may remember, BLM issued a decision in 2008 regarding this issue.
6. RMP Amendments
 - a. 20,060 comments received (19,420 form letters; 1,187 substantive comments; 77 issues)
 - b. June 2-6, 2014, regional biologist team finalized responses to comment issue statements and began review of extensive list of literature recommended in public comments.
 - c. June 5, 2014, interdisciplinary team (IDT) finalized proposed plan actions. These actions will be provided to the expanded team and cooperating agencies for a brief review beginning next week.
 - d. IDT will be revising the Executive Summary and all chapters based on internal and public comments over the next 2 weeks (due date of June 13).
 - e. Bob Hopper met with his counterparts from the Great Basin region to finalize responses to common public comments and review literature related to livestock grazing and wild horses and burros.
 - f. There will be a Washington office review of draft administrative proposed plan and FEIS in late July.
7. Litigation Update
 - a. ONDA v. Cain – Honorable Judge Papak issued an Opinion and Order on April 29, 2014 and granted summary judgment to BLM.
 - b. The BLM is working with Stroemple through an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) process. We’ve met once and plan to meet again on the 24th. This will likely be a long process. There was an extensive yet vague discussion about this subject; specific details could not be shared due to the litigation and the ADR process.

- c. North Steens Transmission Line – A 9th Circuit Court mediation hearing is scheduled for June 17. ONDA and Audubon Society of Portland filed a petition last March and again this past April asking the Secretary of the Interior to revoke the Record of Decision and Right-of-Way. The ROW is valid and rent is being paid.
- d. ALJ Sweitzer denied Hammond’s request for a stay. Hammonds have appealed Judge Sweitzer’s decision to IBLA.

Fred Otley stated he wanted to make a comment on this point: it is time, and it is the belief by local folks, that this issue went away. There is a lot of anger over Hammond Ranches, Inc. not having their Federal grazing permit renewed. Most people consider this a tragedy. Pam Hardy said that she understood the issue was sensitive and that there is some tension in the community about it. Hardy wondered what percentage of the private operation is impacted by loss of the Federal grazing permit. Otley stated this decision will do away with the Ranche’s livestock grazing on public land and could essentially put them 80-95% out of business. Otley stated there is a long history here within this situation. Rich Angstrom stated that despite the fact the case is with the Department of Justice (DOJ), the DOJ is in contact with the BLM and gets advisement from the BLM on what they would see fit. At some point, the agency needs to be done punishing Hammond Ranches, Inc. Rhonda Karges clarified: for the criminal case against Hammond Ranches, Inc., the BLM is not consulted. For the civil case, the BLM does have a small advisement role. Otley reiterated that everyone wants to have this issue be a thing of the past.

STEENS INTERPRETIVE PRODUCT UPDATES (Tara Martinak)

- Alvord Desert/Mann Lake brochure: will be updated to show the Alvord Hot Springs as a private, fee site; map will also be updated.
- Steens Mountain CMPA brochure: will be updated to show improved road conditions on the ‘Rooster Comb’ section on the Steens Mountain Loop Road (map and text will be updated); will also update text to discourage trailer towing on the ‘Rooster Comb.’
- Steens Mountain Trails handout: once the Steens Mountain Comprehensive Recreation Plan is complete, will update the information to include all trails and put it in a full-color brochure.
- Steens -High Desert County map: updating the ‘Rooster Comb’ section (map and text); adding a couple of trailhead symbols and the Wildland Juniper Management Area trail; replacing cover photo; updating the Alvord Hot Springs information; discouraging swimming at Borax Lake (instead of encouraging it!); adding seasonal gates on the Steens Mountain Loop Road;
- “You are here” sign at the South Steens Loop Road junction with Hwy 205 South is in the works (same design and layout as the “You are here” sign on the North Steens Loop Road near Page Springs Campground).
- Also working on digital maps that show the layout of all of the Burns District campgrounds.
- Also considering updating our campground information signs – creating a similar look and feel for all the signs, with more permanent information (instead of multiple temporary laminated signs).
- Need to improve and update signage at the Diamond Craters Auto Tours.

MEMBER ROUND TABLE

Fred Otley, David Bilyeu, Dick Jenkins – pass.

Rich Angstrom wanted to make sure the SMAC charter was current (yes, it is). Angstrom also wanted to emphasize the importance of having the District Manager more involved in the SMAC, discussions, decisions, etc. instead of just delegating that responsibility to the Designated Federal Official (Rhonda Karges). Angstrom stressed the value of having a major decision maker in the room to hear the flavor of the conversations occurring at the meetings – the SMAC will continue to be relevant with consistent participation from decision makers and an outward show that the SMAC is a valued priority. Angstrom asked to share this information with the District Manager and share that his lack of presence and/or

interest is unappreciated. Angstrom gave great kudos to Rhonda Karges and Tara Martinak for their role and efforts with the SMAC over the years. Their work is valuable and consistent and their quality performance has not gone unnoticed. Angstrom has very much enjoyed his time on the SMAC and has mixed feelings about not reapplying for his appointment. He has a great respect for the people and the mountain and truly believes in the process of collaboration.

David Bilyeu stated he really appreciated Angstrom's ability to think out loud and stimulate ideas and progress within the council. Having a front-end thinker and an engaged personality has been invaluable. Leon Pielstick also shared his appreciation for Angstrom's contributions to the SMAC. Pam Hardy stated it has been a pleasure having Angstrom on this SMAC and his ability to bring up difficult things. He is inspirational and is really going to be missed.

Rhonda Karges shared a few things with Angstrom and his personal qualities and contributions to the SMAC: brings a balance to the group that is immeasurable; has a big picture view that includes interests outside the Steens area; is solution-oriented, thoughtful, a creative thinker, and extremely reasonable; able to summarize and bring opinions together; engaging and able to draw the audience in; carries himself in a way that makes people think and listen; very responsive to requests from BLM; and an all-around heck of a nice guy! Thank you to Rich Angstrom – you will be missed!

REVIEW FOLLOW UP ITEMS AND DEVELOP AGENDA FOR THE NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is proposed for July 17-18, which is only one month away. Agenda items could include:

- A discussion on wildland fire use for natural resource benefit,
- a field trip to the Page Springs Weir, and
- juniper development and marketing opportunities.

Follow up:

- Add Pam and Leon's position to the next round of advertising for the SMAC
- Identify more clearly the Chairperson and Vice Chairperson roles (reelect each year at the first meeting of the calendar year).
- Provide information to Dick Jenkins for the Round Barn Visitor Center (?).
- Arrange an update from SageCon for the BLM (talk to Stacy Davies, Jeff Rose, Chad Karges).
- Find historical information from the SMAC on the Page Springs Weir (talk to Jana Wilcox).
- Share information with the SMAC on the 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act celebration at Page Springs Campground (September 12).
- Reach out to the Oregon Forests Institute regarding juniper marketing and development.
- Check on the current charter status.
- Rhonda will send Joseph's Juniper, Inc.'s contact information to Mark Bagett.
- Rhonda will send the SMAC the Wildland Fire Use Checklist as well as a portion of the Wildland Fire Management Plan.
- Provide a "handbook" for SMAC members (everyone should have one during their tenure!); potentially make it electronic and available online.

The SMAC selected September 11-12 as an alternate meeting date in case fire season impedes the July session. The meeting adjourned at 12 noon.

A full digital recording of this meeting is available upon request at the Burns District office.

The Steens Mountain Advisory Council approved these minutes on November 14, 2014.

Signed by Dan Haak, SMAC Chair:

