

# Steens Mountain Advisory Council

## **FINAL** September 11, 2014 Summary Minutes

The Steens Mountain Advisory Council (SMAC) met on September 11, 2014, via conference call to tend to regular administrative business. This document summarizes attendance, discussions that occurred and decisions made.

### *Council members participating:*

Daniel Haak (Chair, Mechanized or Consumptive Recreation representative),  
David Bilyeu (Vice Chair, State Environmental representative),  
Mark Baggett (Fish and Recreation Fishing representative),  
Pam Hardy (Dispersed Recreation representative),  
Richard Jenkins (Recreational Permit Holder representative), and  
Fred Otley (Private Landowner representative).

### *Members not participating:*

Richard Angstrom (No Financial Interest representative),  
Leon Pielstick (Wild Horse Management representative),  
Stacy Davies (Grazing Permittee representative; Thursday only),  
Cecil Dick (Burns Paiute Tribe member representative),  
Grazing Permittee (vacant),  
Private Landowner (vacant),  
Local Environmental representative (vacant), and  
State Liaison (vacant).

### *Other participants/observers/presenters:*

Brendan Cain (Burns District Manager),  
Designated Federal Official (DFO) Rhonda Karges (Andrews/Steens Resource Area Field Manager),  
DFO's Assistant Tara Martinak (Public Affairs Specialist, BLM), and  
Lisa Grant (Wild Horse and Burro Program, BLM).

## **DESIGNATED FEDERAL OFFICIAL UPDATE (Rhonda Karges)**

1. Population Management Plan for the South Steens Herd Management Area Draft Environmental Assessment (update from Lisa Grant) -
  - a) The BLM proposes to gather and remove excess wild horses and implement population control measures on wild horses from the South Steens Herd Management Area (HMA) in order to achieve a thriving natural ecological balance and manage the wild horse population within Appropriate Management Level (AML) over a ten-year time frame.
  - b) Various methods of gathering and removal of wild horses are available (i.e. helicopter drive trapping, bait/water trapping, horseback drive trapping). The method(s) to be used would be determined by the authorized officer.
  - c) The RMP/ROD allocates South Steens HMA an AML of 159 – 304 wild horses. A June 2012 helicopter inventory documented a total of 383 wild horses (333 adults and 50 foals) within the HMA. Wild horse herds have an average annual population growth rate of 20%. Based on numbers observed during the 2012 inventory the estimated fall 2014 wild horse population is approximately 480 adult wild horses (plus 96 foals). By fall 2014, use by wild horses would exceed the forage allocated to their use (3,648 AUMs at high AML) by approximately 58 percent.

- d) Alternatives being analyzed to address the purpose and need for action are:
- Alternative A. Proposed Action – Remove Excess Wild Horses and Apply Available and Approved Fertility Treatment (*Preferred Alternative*).
  - Alternative B. Alternative A *without* Applying Available and Approved Fertility Treatment.
  - Alternative C. Alternative A *plus* Geld Up to 30 Return Stallions.
  - Alternative D. Gate Cut Removal
  - Alternative E. No Action – Defer Gather and Removal

Dick Jenkins asked if the BLM would be able to get any plans passed to merchandise some of the horses for other avenues other than adoption (pet food, human consumption, etc.). Grant stated “no, that will not be a possibility.” Jenkins continued with his concern with the insurmountable issues currently facing the Wild Horse and Burro Program.

District Manager Brendan Cain stated the national effort at this point is to focus on population growth suppression and that lack of holding space is the leading cause for the agency’s inability to complete most necessary gathers. Cain agreed there are big issues in the program right now and that the agency is in a tough spot.

The Burns District put in a gather request for 2015 to remove 40 horses from the South Steens area via bait trap and a full gather of the Kiger and Riddle HMA’s via helicopter.

Dan Haak inquired about the wild horse situation on Beatys Butte at this time. Grant stated there is a working group trying to tackle the issue and that the BLM’s Rob Sharp and the SMAC’s Stacy Davies are both part of that collaborative and could potentially provide an update to the SMAC at the November 2014 meeting. Haak asked if there was anything the SMAC could do to help with the wild horse program issues. Tara Martinak, Facilitator, stated there isn’t anything the SMAC can do at this point since the problem is widespread and much beyond the SMAC, the Burns District, and Oregon/Washington BLM. Mark Bagett asked if the tribes could help at all. Martinak stated the tribes are exempted from the Wild Horse and Burro Act because the tribal horses roam on tribal lands; the horses protected by the Wild Horse and Burro Act exist on Federal land.

2. South Steens AMP – No appeals. Implementation will begin as funding becomes available, starting with the fence enclosures around springs.
3. Steens Comprehensive Recreation Plan (CRP) – Finalizing responses to public comments and writing rationale for the decision. It is not likely the decision will be issued by the end of September as hoped.
  - a. Also working on obtaining easements from private landowners to access areas of the CMPA through private lands and placement of informational signs on private lands.
4. Personnel Update – Jerod Lemos was hired as a Natural Resource Specialist (Fisheries/Riparian). His reporting date is the first part of October. He is from Burns and has family here. He is currently working for EOARC.
5. Litigation Update - The BLM is working with Stroemple through an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR). We’ve met twice and negotiations are continuing. There are several issues that have been identified through the ADR process; the process is meeting expectations that it will be long and tedious.
6. RMP Amendment –
  - a) Cooperating agencies and expanded team have been reviewing/commenting on sections of the proposed plan.

- b) Team is re-vamping appendices and contractor is working on various sections and analysis.
  - c) Expect to publish the FEIS/Proposed Plan this fall, with a Record of Decision this winter.
7. Moon Hill Prescribed Burn - The Moon Hill prescribed fire is set to go this weekend, with Friday, September 12 as the “show me” day for incoming resources and others unfamiliar with the project/area. Fire base camp will be at the Catterson Cabin (private land) area on Moon Hill. We will be in contact with permittees (Krumbo Mountain and Ruby Springs allotments) Dan Nichols, Bill Otley, and Larry Otley throughout the project. Black-lining likely on Saturday, then lighting by helicopter beginning Sunday.
- a. Project area – 6,155 acres
  - b. Contingency Boundary – 10,543 acres
  - c. Krumbo Ridge Area

Fred Otley stated the Burns Interagency Fire Zone during firefighting purposes could utilize the pond that is right next to his house.

8. National Public Lands Day – September 27; clean-up project and fun run at the Radar Hill OHV play area (Three Rivers Resource Area).
9. Wilderness Act - President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law the Wilderness Act on Sept. 3, 1964, and over the past 50 years, Congress has added over 100 million acres to this unique land preservation system. The 170,000-acre Steens Mountain Wilderness was dedicated in October 2000 and comprises some of the wildest and most remote land in Oregon.
- a) The anniversary celebration at Page Springs Campground starts at 9 a.m. on September 12, 2014, with a 1-mile walk along the Blitzen River Trail to Page Springs Weir. Interpretive presentations and discussions, light trail maintenance and repairing a water crossing are on the agenda for interested volunteers. A picnic lunch will be provided to those volunteers in attendance. Volunteers must provide their own transportation to Page Springs Campground.
  - b) Key Facts
    - The BLM manages 221 Wilderness Areas that total 8,710,640 acres.
    - The BLM manages 528 Wilderness Study Areas that total 12,760, 472 acres.
    - Wilderness accounts for 3% of the BLM’s total acreage in the United States.
    - Wilderness accounts for almost 30% of the NLCS.
    - The BLM manages 28% of all Wilderness Areas
    - The BLM manages 94% of all WSAs
    - The BLM’s largest wilderness is Nevada’s Black Rock Desert Wilderness, at 315,000 acres.
    - The BLM’s King Range Wilderness in California has the longest coastal wilderness trail network in the U.S., over 100 miles.
    - The first administratively protected wilderness area in the United States was the Gila National Forest, 750,000 acres.
  - c) The Great Swamp in New Jersey was the first formally designated wilderness refuge in the United States.
  - d) The first BLM-managed wilderness area was the Bear Trap Canyon unit of the Lee Metcalf Wilderness in Montana.

**BLM State by State Comparison of Wilderness Areas**

State	# of Units	Acreage
Arizona	47	1,396,826
California	87	3,843,998
Colorado	5	205,814

Idaho	7	517,362
Montana	1	6,347
Nevada	45	2,055,781
New Mexico	5	170,163
Oregon	8	246,953
Utah	18	260,356
Washington	1	7,140
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>8,710,640</b>

**Agency by Agency Comparison of Wilderness Areas**

**Wilderness Areas**

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Total Units</b>	<b>Total Acres</b>
Bureau of Land Management	221	8,710,640
Fish and Wildlife Service	71	20,702,488
Forest Service	439	36,165,620
National Park Service	61	43,926,153
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>792</b>	<b>109,504,348</b>

**Wilderness Study Areas**

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Total Units</b>	<b>Total Acres</b>
Bureau of Land Management	528	12,766,472
Forest Service	33	1,968,730
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>563</b>	<b>14,735,202</b>

**MEMBER ROUND TABLE/OTHER**

Tara Martinak, Facilitator: We received nominations for the remaining two positions that were open on the SMAC – state liaison and local environmental representative. A big thank you to David Bilyeu for the encouragement for our applicant to the local environmental representative position. All nominations/applications have been submitted to the Washington Office for the vetting and appointment process. It will likely be a few months before we hear any update from the Washington Office on the nominations. The next two positions that we will advertise for are Dispersed Recreation and Wild Horse and Burro representative. The nomination period will open after the New Year.

David Bilyeu: will be out of the country for a month but will be back well before the November 13-14 SMAC meeting. Also, David sent out an email to the group about strategic fire management – check it out!

Dan Haak: The Harney County Restoration Collaborative meets today and will discuss fuels management and creating fire breaks. Also, the November SMAC meeting is in the middle of Dan’s elk hunt, which could interfere with his ability to attend that session.

Fred Otley: The Steens Mountain Landowners Group is going to try to get together before the SMAC meeting and will try to leverage some support regarding fuels management and preparing for catastrophic large wildfires.

Pam Hardy: Took a new position with Oregon Wild, an environmental group mostly focused on forest issues. Pam will continue on the SMAC as a private individual and is hoping to have some more/new insight on fire management and better experience to share with folks through her new endeavor.

Mark Bagett: Would still like some additional information on the Page Springs Weir, including past SMAC discussions and recommendations on the topic.

Dick Jenkins – pass.

Dan Haak asked about the circumstances surrounding the allotments for Hammond Ranches, Inc. since their Federal grazing permit was not renewed. Rhonda Karges stated no decisions will be made for those allotments until the case is completely through the court system.

**REVIEW FOLLOW UP ITEMS AND DEVELOP AGENDA FOR THE NEXT MEETING**

- Beatys Butte working group update
- Wildland fire use for natural resource benefit panel discussion; fuels management (current sideboards, creative ways to plan for more effective use of prescribed and natural fire; prescribed fire in wilderness (?))
- Rhonda will share information on the solicitor's session in Burns and their review of the Page Springs Weir project.
- BLM will provide more information to Mark Bagett and the SMAC on the Page Springs Weir.

The conference call concluded at 10:09 a.m. 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:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dan Haak", written in a cursive style.