



MONTANA/DAKOTAS BLM

Eastern Montana Resource Advisory Council

RAC MEETING MINUTES:

Billings, Montana: March 24, 2016

BLM Miles City Field Office Conference Room

Attending RAC Members:

Category 1: Lance Kalfell, Brad Clark, Lucas Line

Category 2: Cal Cumin, Rita Harding, Art Hayes III; Steve Hanson, Ed (Ralph) Bukoskey

Category 3: Harold Guse, Tim Lehman, Doug Kary, Sharla Sackman, Jenny Olson

Attending BLM staff: Mark Jacobsen, Diane Friez, Wendy Warren, Jim Sparks, David Wood, Lori Harbaugh, Jeff Herriford, Donna Bradley

Attending Public: Ken Holmlund, MT Representative, House District #38, John A Beardsley, Rae Ellen Bird

Members were welcomed and the meeting was brought to order, housekeeping items for the meeting were reviewed. New members were welcomed and introductions were made.

Election of Co-Chairperson for 2016. Brad will move from Co-Chairperson to the Chairperson position. Cal nominated Lance for Co-Chairperson position; Rita seconded the nomination. Rita called for a motion, unanimous vote in favor.

Amendment to the agenda

Prepare a letter supporting the grant application for the Milwaukee Bridge CTAP that the Prairie County Commissioners are submitting.

Montana Indemnity Selection- (Wendy Warren and Jim Sparks)

Wendy and Jim shared a PowerPoint presentation and history of the Enabling Act of Statehood for Montana that allows the state to obtain federal lands. Montana filed an application for the lands held in seven counties and total acreage of 16,000 acres. The PowerPoint is located on the BLM website for public viewing.

Public meetings are scheduled for May in Billings, Miles City and Havre. Current operators that have BLM allotments included in the state application were notified of the proposed transfer January 2016. The presentation was followed by a question and answer time from RAC members. The completion date is targeted for July 2017.

Mark will email the link to RAC members:

http://www.blm.gov/mt/st/en/prog/lands_realty/indemnity.html

Travel Management Plan Subcommittee report (Art Hayes III)

Report was from the subcommittee March 10 meeting. BLM is completing road inventories in Carter, Rosebud, Custer and Prairie counties. When funding is available, contracts will be issued for Garfield County. The members observed the BLM process of reviewing each individual road. They commended the team on the process and detailed review they used in determining the road assignment category.

The inventory is the first step in the process; public scoping and NEPA will be completed in 14 Travel Management Areas for Miles City Field Office. There are 10,000 miles of routes that will be reviewed. The Glendive OHV inventory has been completed and the plan will be completed in the winter of 2016.

The Billings Field Office will write decisions for 11 Travel Management Areas. The Acton area will be completed in 2016 and Grove Creek, Cottonwood, Warren and the Pryor's in 2017. Areas without a specific plan will be limited to existing roads. The inventory has been completed for the office and provides baseline information for future decisions.

Art recommended that the RACs role would be a 'go-between' with the public. Lance noted that the support gives validity to the BLM process. **The subcommittee recommends that affected landowners be permitted to review the roads and alternatives, prior to the public comment period. This would allow for private management needs and support for the process.**

If members want to travel with the inventory contractor this summer, contact Wendy Warren to arrange.

Pumpkin Creek Grazing update (Reyer Rens)

Reyer informed the RAC members and the public in attendance of the regulations that permit BLM to take application for the AUMs available on Pumpkin Creek. He reviewed the application process that MCFO followed to provide public notice and accept applications. The applications were evaluated for eligibility using mandatory and regulatory requirements, as well as the objectives identified by the RAC.

Mandatory requirements

- Have commensurate base property
- Be a citizen of the United States
- Satisfactory compliance history

Regulatory consideration

- Historical use of public land
- Proper use of rangeland resources
- Needs of applicants operation
- Public ingress/egress
- Topography
- Unique management situations
- Demonstrated stewardship to maintain, improve or protect the rangeland ecosystem

BLM scored the applications most heavily on the management plans that applicants submitted and how the plans would meet the RAC objectives.

Applications were accepted through December 24, 2015; 99 applications were received. Reyer was the BLM point of contact for all applicant visits and phone calls. The Interdisciplinary team was made up of BLM employees representing the Weed, Range, Archeology, Hydrology, Recreation, and Wildlife programs. The team listed the objectives to be reviewed and developed a scoring mechanism to provide a rationale for the decision. Applications were reviewed after the applicants names were redacted from the documents.

The scoring mechanism was rated zero to three.

- 0=the objective was not mentioned in the documents
- 1=the objective was mentioned, but how it fit into the management plan was not addressed
- 2=the objective was mentioned, and identified in the plan, but not how it would be implemented and the plan matched the proposed action
- 3= the objective was addressed in the management plan, was consistent with the current knowledge of the resource and likely would meet the objective by actions described in the plan

The next step for BLM is to develop alternatives and write an EA. The EA will be signed by the Field Manager. There is a 15 day protest period of the proposed action, followed by 30 days to appeal the decision. All applicants will receive the notice of the proposed decision with instructions for the protest and appeal process. The Field Office is involved in several large projects and may have only one specialist to represent specific concerns (hydrology, soils), this workload will determine when the document is issued.

Milwaukee Bridge Tour Review (Lance and Brad)

Lance provided the history of Prairie County obtaining the Bridge. This bridge provides the only motorized access into this area. The RAC finalized a letter supporting the Prairie County Commissioner efforts in completing grant (FLAP and CTAP) applications for funds to repair the Bridge. Rita made a motion to accept the letter as amended, Art seconded the motion. All RAC members voted to approve the motion.

Public Comment Period

Public in attendance but all declined the opportunity to speak.

RAC Member Briefings

Sharla Sackman

She was pleased that members visited Prairie County for the RAC tour and could experience the Badlands. She reminded members and BLM staff that 50% of the county land is managed by BLM and that it is important to keep that in mind when making decisions because of the effects on the local economy.

Rita Harding

Visited with groups she interacts with to hear positive or negative comments. The Audubon Society requested that she thank BLM for hearing their concerns and responding to those concerns regarding the Muddy Springs Wind Farm.

Art Hayes

Art stated that he recently became aware of hunters flying into public lands in the Birney area. He suggested that it should be considered in the Travel Management plans.

Steve Hanson

Steve reported that permittees had a good experience with the Travel Management contractors, but there was confusion regarding access from county roads to the public land. Users must have permission to cross private land to reach public land.

Harold Guse

There will be extended elk hunting seasons in some areas of the state; each FWP Region will develop their own plans. Hunting areas may be limited to private land or no National Forest but may include DNRC and BLM. Eastern Montana will allow the extended hunts only on private land.

Brad Clark

Despite rumors, coal mining is not dead. Companies are declaring bankruptcy, but that is to protect the investors. Expect that coal will remain part of the energy mix; the amount will be determined by energy prices and politics. No new tracts will be eligible for lease until the Interior Department completes a review of the program. Coal lease applications have been submitted. It is important that the review process continue on applications to prevent gaps in mining operations.

Lance Kalfell

Thanked BLM for arranging the tour of the Terry Badlands. The Montana Wilderness Association and Prairie County have updated the Badlands map and it includes the scenic view location. Pleased with the Pumpkin Creek application process and encouraged that it continues to move forward.

Cal Cumin

Sits on the Board of the Montana Wilderness Association and the MWA is in support of the Milwaukee Bridge project. The MWA will also be supporting the grant process for Prairie County to receive funds for the project.

Tim Lehman

He enjoyed the Badlands tour and the historical information provided as well as the scenic view.

Doug Kary

He noted that public groups and some states are pursuing taking control of federal lands. Montana has some groups that are interested in the change, but overall; Montana is not supportive of having the management of the land.

Ed Bukoskey

Recently became a member of the Private Land, Public Wildlife committee. Primarily working with Block Management lands at this time. He will take comments forward. He sees drone use in the Missouri Breaks being an issue this year.

Eastern Montana Dakota District Manager (Diane Friez)

Informed members that Jamie Connell, BLM Montana State Director is working a detail at the Oregon State office; Aiden Siedlitz is the Acting Montana State Director during her absence.

Presented members with the State Directors response to the RAC letter regarding the Coal program review. The WO review has scheduled public scoping meeting in April; it will be a three year process to complete the programmatic EIS. Updates are expected in 2016.

The Western Environmental Law Center has filed a lawsuit against implementing the MCFO RMP. The lawsuit is available for review on line. The complaint states that the plan is not in conformance with NEPA. MCFO and BiFO are working on the administrative record response. Todd Yeager is on assignment to the WO, working on the Regional Sage Grouse implementation plan.

Members will be notified of meetings related to the implementation. Bureau and State Workshops are scheduled this spring.

Montana offices are being inspected to identify potential security risks. Facilities will be remodeled to improve employee security.

Billings Field Office Manager (Jim Sparks)

The BiFO is working to fill critical vacancies.

The Wild Horse and Burro specialist position is vacant. Fertility control will continue, but the small gathers that were planned are on hold. Also vacant is the Recreation Planner, and Biologist positions.

There are two lawsuits in federal court regarding horse gathers. Briefings were due last week.

BiFO is having an Oil and Gas lease sale in October. The Sage Grouse habitat sites are not being offered. The RMP allows leasing in Sage Grouse habitat, but no surface occupancy can occur in harvesting the minerals. MCFO has six parcels and BiFO has one. The Billings parcel is in Golden Valley county and is split estate.

BLM and several Bike groups are continuing to cooperate on work at the Acton Recreation site. Users are coming from Bozeman and Kalispell, it's a destination site.

Trails are being built at Four Dances, will be considered as bike trails.

The formal implementation for a travel plan for Action will be released soon.

The Green Mountain timber project will be completed this summer. Timber work will also be completed around Roundup to improve forest health. Another location will be Enos Mountain near McCloud.

BiFO has hired a Fire Hand Crew of Veterans that will be housed in Billings. This program received special funding to get Veterans back to work. There are 16 Veteran members that will be able to complete projects around the state, but will return for fire suppression work.

Planning 2.0 Update (David Wood)

David presented an updated PowerPoint presentation on the status of WO draft regulations and the process of Planning 2.0. Public comments are being accepted for 60 days. Planning 2.0 is a process that allows BLM to become modern, and respond to the challenges of today in overall land management.

3 Goals:

- Allow BLM to respond differently to the issues, quicker and allow for planning
- Improve more meaningful collaboration with the public, appropriate timing of input
- Improve BLM's ability to implement actions across boundaries and landscapes

The Regulations will establish what will be accomplished, the detailed process will be written in manuals.

A webinar on Planning 2.0 has been posted on www.blm.gov/planning/plan2 for the public to view.

BLM Law Enforcement (Lori Harbaugh -MCFO, Jeff Herriford-BiFO)

Presented a PowerPoint presentation overview of the Law Enforcement program. They discussed coordination efforts and Memorandum of Understanding agreements with law enforcement agencies. Federal Regulations guide the actions that BLM Law Enforcement can take. There are ten Law Enforcement Rangers in Montana. They noted their appreciation of reports from the public and permittees on violations that they are able to act on.

Acting Miles City Field Office Manager (Wendy Warren)

MCFO staff often has responsibility in all of EMDD and BiFO. Position vacancies are currently being filled or are to be announced; positions are Hydrologist, Soil Scientist, Wildlife Biologist and Petroleum Engineer.

Employees of R Montana are completing a cultural inventory at Reynolds Battlefield.

Training for Fire Resource Advisors was completed last week. They report to fire and identify resource issues during or after a fire.

Construction on the Butte Pipeline is scheduled for Aug 1-Dec 1, 2016. This will replace an existing pipeline and the line will remain in the current corridor.

Miles Community College plans to build an Equestrian center and an indoor rodeo arena on currently-held BLM land. Currently there is an outdoor arena and barns for the rodeo team. They have a Recreation and Public Purpose Act permit for the current facility; at issue is third party use of the new facility.

The Interior Secretary has issued a statement that BLM will complete a discretionary programmatic environmental impact statement regarding the Coal leasing program. There are exceptions for leases that are less than 160 acres or emergency leasing to meet contract obligations and necessary to maintain average level of production in the next three years. All new or modification applications that exceed this will not be fully processed.

Prescribed fire and mechanical treatment projects are being completed at Yarger Butte. The Knowlton fire projects were fully funded for 2016.

Funding for Sage Grouse conservations has been received. Seasonal employees will be monitoring allotments for concerns. District employees have developed a monitoring program that may be adopted for Sage Grouse monitoring. Due to the status of the work MCFO has been selected as a pilot office for utilizing tablets for field work.

Next Meeting:

July 13-14 @ Pompey's Pillar

Tour suggestions

Urban Recreation management in BiFO area

Acton

Sun Dance

17 Mile

Shepherd Ah-Nei

Pompey's Pillar

Future Agenda items:

Send requests to Brad or Lance

Coal Program review

Travel Management sub-committee updates and Presentation by Irma