



BLM MONTANA/DAKOTAS

Eastern Montana

Resource Advisory Council

RAC MEETING MINUTES:

Billings, Montana: July 14, 2016 8:00 AM

Hampton Inn Lewis Conference Room

Attending RAC Members: Cal Cumin, Brad Clark, Larry Pilster, Art Hayes III, Ralph (Ed) Bukoskey, Harold Guse, Lucas Line, Doug Kary

Attending Public: None

Attending BLM staff: Mark Jacobsen, Diane Friez, Wendy Warren, Jim Sparks, Ken Schmid, Irv Leach, John Carlson, Greg Liggett, Jon Raby, Donna Bradley, MT Sage Grouse Habitat- Therese Hartman

Members were welcomed and the meeting was brought to order. Members with expiring terms were acknowledged. Harold was honored for his service and presented with a BLM blanket. His informed and timely input on public land issues was appreciated.

MT/DKs, Statewide Fire program update: Ken Schmid MSO **Fire Management Officer,**

Ken presented a slide show overview of the Fire program and included an update of the current fire season.

The initial attack agency varies depending if the fire is located in Eastern or Western Montana and North or South Dakota. The public land may be protected by the FS, FWS, BLM, DNRC or County Fire Departments depending on the agreements in place. BLM pays cooperating counties for protection. All the agencies work collaboratively to fight fires.

BLM resources are available for assignment across the state and may be moved out of state for emergency support. There are 20 fire engines, two each, exclusive –use helicopters and water tenders; one large air tanker base and 1 large cache; also three single engine air tankers and one 20 person Type 2 1A crew (Vet Focus). The Dispatch centers are inter-agency.

Ken reviewed the best management practices for fighting fire in Priority Sage Grouse Habitat. Efforts are made to extinguish the fire as quickly as possible and unburned islands where fire has moved through are left intact.

Human life is our number one priority in determining what action will be taken when fighting fires. Structures, homes, infrastructure, roads, railroads and transmission lines

are key factors to prioritize fire fighter efforts. Our top natural resource priority is Sage Grouse Habitat.

Veterans Fire Crew Program-Irv Leach, BiFO Fire Management Officer

There are three types of national hand crews made up of 18-22 people. This Veteran Crew is a Type II IA team. A Type 1 crew is made up of 'hotshot' employees that are self-sufficient and have more than one year experience; the team is managed nationally. A Type II IA crew is self-sufficient, usually made up of career and seasonal employees and has supplies and equipment to manage an initial attack fire for up to 48 hours. All first year employees make up Type II firefighter crews and receive logistical support and supervision. Funding for the program was received from the BLM National Office. BLM and Team Rubicon coordinate training for the Veteran's Crews. Team Rubicon is a volunteer veteran emergency response training program. This has been a very successful experience for BLM; expect the hiring process to improve and that BLM will have more Veteran teams. Currently, there are seven Veteran Firefighter crews across the United States.

Disturbance Cap in Sage Grouse Habitat-Therese Hartman (Montana Sage Grouse Oversight Team) , MSO-Division of Resources-John Carlson

BLM will transfer all analysis for any disturbances from any BLM projects to the Sage Grouse Habitat Disturbance Cap program. This will ensure we use a consistent methodology for decisions about habitat disturbance regardless of the land ownership; the analysis process and management direction will be the same for disturbance levels. Members viewed a slide show presented by Therese. Sage Grouse Habitat disturbance is to be limited to 5%. Private land makes up 70% of priority habitat lands and it's important that producers are conserving Sagebrush in the priority habitat areas. The Montana Sage Grouse plan mirrors the program in Wyoming which has been successful for eight years. Funding is available for improving Sage Grouse habitat; projects approved have been for conifer removal treatments and conservation easements. These improvements may result in credits to the state that can be used if impacts can't be avoided, mitigated or reclaimed. The debit/credit criteria haven't been determined at this time.

The website <https://sagegrouse.mt.gov> has current information, maps, frequently asked questions section and how to submit projects etc. All land owners should submit applications for any project that will be placed in Sage Grouse Habitat. If the project is for multiple years, the project may be granted temporary approval, to be reviewed prior to work being started because Sage Grouse aren't static.

The possible listing of Sage Grouse will be reviewed in five years. It is imperative that landowners make application to the Sage Grouse Disturbance Cap Team so data will be available to FWS to make a determination.

Public Comment Period No members of the public were in attendance

RAC Member Discussion

Harold- The Sage Grouse hunting season has been reinstated and special elk permits will be issued in a 'shoulder' season. The elk permits will start August 15 but may close during Archery season. Permits will be limited to specific lands in each Region, depending on the Commissioners preference, i.e. Region 5 will be on private land and very limited Forest Service. There will be an Initiative on the Montana ballot that would ban trapping on federal and public lands in the state.

Ed- the Black tail Wildlife Management Area in Greater Yellowstone area historically had 2000 elk. Sportsman determined that elk no longer use the area, even for winter range. The State Brucellosis committee has proposed grazing 200 cattle for a short period of time, using Crystallex supplement barrels to move the cattle through the area, breaking up the thatch.

Larry- Appreciated the speaker presentations that were on the agenda.

Doug- Recent decisions by the Federal Government regarding coal leasing, and mineral rights negatively impact Montana through the loss of jobs, industry and revenues. The repercussions will have far reaching affects across the state.

Cal- Thanked the firefighters for their response to a wildfire near his home.

Lucas- He was pleased with the cooperation between Montana and BLM in managing Sage Grouse habitat; requested an update on Pumpkin Creek Ranch grazing applications.

Art- Requested an update on the Travel Management inventories. He requested that a corridor of BLM land with river access be signed to prevent trespass on private lands.

Brad- Informed members of topics that were discussed at the April State RAC chairperson meeting.

- The time WO takes to approve RAC member replacements affects the effectiveness of the RAC committee.
- Missoula FO will utilize the BLM 2.0 Planning process as a test in their RMP process.
- The American Prairie Reserve will fund the environmental analysis for the allotments that are being considered to permit Bison grazing.

He attended the Sage Grouse focus group meeting. The policies and instructions for Sage Grouse Habitat Management written in response to the WO directives were presented to attendees. RAC chairpersons at the meeting expressed concern that the public comments and Field Office plan of action to manage Sage Grouse habitat were lost and ignored when the decision was issued at the WO level and implemented into all the Resource Management Plans.

MT/DKs Paleontology Program Update: Greg Liggett

Presented a Paleontology slideshow presentation; He reviewed the Acts and Laws that encourage scientific management and protection of paleontological resources.

This year 93 research permits have been issued, the average number is 70. Items discovered on BLM land can be preserved and viewed at the permitted entity, but ownership remains the property of BLM. Any evidence of past life is considered a fossil. This includes burrows, bones, and plants, tracks, etc. A recent BLM find is a Starfish. It will be named as a new species; the full body find is very rare. Research teams return for several years in order to clear and remove bones.

The Smithsonian is renovating its dinosaur exhibit. A temporary exhibit of Hell Creek dinosaurs is on view until the renovation is completed. It is legal to collect casual amounts of common invertebrates and plants for personal use in reasonable quantities. The Forest Service allows 25 pounds per person per day for casual use. Proposed BLM regulations may be posted in the Federal Register for comments later this year. All vertebrate finds must have a permit to remove from BLM land. All indication of past life of a vertebrate requires a permit to dig; the fossil footprints of a dinosaur must be permitted.

Montana State Office Update: Jon Raby

RAC members introduced themselves to the Associate State Director.

Jon shared his experience that led to his current position.

Jon discussed BLM topics of interest and activities that have received national focus.

- Burns Oregon
- Bison grazing on an allotment assigned to the Malta FO
 - Bison grazing has been authorized on BLM land since 1978
 - Currently 33 bison grazing permits issued across the U.S.
- Sage Grouse
 - Policies to be issued in 4/6 weeks
 - \$1.5 million has been issued for new Sage Grouse positions; staffing levels and workload will be monitored closely over the next few years to determine true workload-new versus different work
- Mineral leasing
 - Oil and Gas lease scheduled for October
 - WO Programmatic review for Coal leasing
 - Public comment meetings; none in Montana
 - MSO has responded to WO requests regarding proposed exemptions
- DNRC aircraft don't meet the Federal requirements
 - Through joint command of fires and coordination with the State of Montana, the aircraft will be utilized in 2016
- Nationally, BLM received \$40 million for Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation and Monitoring

- Anticipate similar funding for FY17 as this year, but likely a continuing resolution
- Durfee Hills fence
 - Billings and Lewistown FO have agreed on the trespass settlements

Billings Field Office Update: Jim Sparks

Acton Recreation Site

- A local bike group continues to construct trails on the area
- Level of difficulty varies from recreational loops to extreme rides

The Wild Horse gather planned for 2016 has been cancelled due to the vacancy of the WHB Specialist position.

Jim reviewed the 2011 Exxon spill in the Yellowstone River. Exxon and BLM are currently negotiating the settlement for Natural Resource and Restoration Damage. BLM may be the lead on land management issues. Funding is available for purchasing easements etc.

Jim requested RAC members' help to identify opportunities and projects that would meet the BLM objectives in restoring sites.

Travel management was completed as part of the Resource Management Plan, but decisions weren't issued to implement them. BiFO is currently working in the Acton area and the decisions will be completed this year and implemented in 2017. The Pryor Mountain site specific management will be assessed in 2017. BLM requests members provide comments they receive from constituents regarding recreation and travel management in this area.

TMP Schedule for the BiFO:

- Acton: 2016
- Cottonwood/Grove Creek/Pryor Mountains/Warren: 2017
- Gage Done: 2018
- Horse thief/Shepherd/Mill Creek: 2019
- South Hills: 2020
- Tin Can Hill: 2020
- General Area/remainder of field office areas: 2020

Miles City Field Office Update: Wendy Warren for Todd Yeager

Todd is touring Eastern Montana with WO Sage Grouse representatives. The Sage Grouse habitat in Montana varies from the Great Basin landscape. These differences are important in meeting objectives and implementing action for Sage Grouse management.

The Pumpkin Creek environmental assessment is estimated to be completed next month. Wendy and Reyer Rens will finish reviews and forward it to Todd for final edits and signature.

The FO has three Travel management inventory contracts issued. Letters requesting access across private lands have been sent to affected permittees. A second post card mailing will be sent to permittees that didn't respond. The final attempt to contact non-responders will be by phone. If permission isn't granted, aerial photography will be used to determine roads and trails on the allotment. Any roads that aren't identified will not be included in the travel plan or considered for use. September through April, the travel management team will evaluate the inventories completed this summer.

Cultural information continues to be gathered for the Indemnity allotments that the state of Montana has identified for exchange.

Fuels mastication projects are beginning in Knowlton and Mosby areas. The EA is in final review for mechanical treatments at Zook Creek. The project has been funded by the tribes and they will provide crews to complete the thinning.

WO budgeted well for the Fuels program to develop multiple use projects for improving public land through thinning projects, prescribed fires, weed control and other projects. Paul Pauley has formed ID teams to identify projects that will meet the criteria for improving land health on a multiple use scale. Five projects are planned for FY2017 and funding has been approved.

Senator Daines Representative met with FWP, BLM, Powder River County, and the Army Corp of Engineers. The county is seeking funding for the Moorhead Bridge maintenance. The county has an easement for the bridge and owns the right of way, so the federal agencies aren't able to provide funding for the project. The BLM was able to suggest options that the county can pursue.

The Short Pines OHV area had a successful cleanup day thanks to about 50 volunteers. BLM will be writing a Travel and Recreation Management plan for the area.

Prairie County is seeking funding from the Treasure State Endowment and the Federal Land Access programs for the Milwaukee Bridge maintenance project. Diane has signed off in support of the applications to these programs.

Eastern Montana/Dakotas District Update: Diane Friez

We are at the time of the fiscal year that staff is working to wrap up projects and issue contracts. The District hired about 120 seasonal employees to fight fires and support all the other programs. The facilities are being evaluated for improved security measures and upgrades will be made at the offices.

Next Meeting:

Thursday, December 15, 2016; Miles City

Future Agenda items:

Irma Nansel- Travel Management status