

# Western Montana Resource Advisory Council Minutes

October 13, 2016

## Missoula Field Office

**BLM Western Zone Staff Present:** David Abrams, Pat Fosse, Rick Hotaling, Scott Haight, Joe Ashor, David Williams

**RAC Members Present:** Jean Belangie-Nye, Nichole Brown, Margaret Gorski, Dan Happel, Jim Hart, Larry Hoffman, Koy Holland David Krueger, Bob Martinka, Doug Midgett, Paul Putz, Mark Sweeney, Ron Tussing, Bob Walker, Chair.

**RAC Member Absent:** Whitney Tilt.

RAC Coordinator David Abrams opened the RAC meeting at 9:00 a.m. with a welcome, agenda review, travel form information and a review of action items.

Chairman Walker invited Scott H. and Koy to speak to the issue at Log Gulch Campground on Holter Lake where cabin owners are parking vehicles (including construction related vehicles) then boating to their cabins. They also use the dumpsters and potable water sources. Scott would like the recreation fee subgroup to address the issue. Outdoor recreation planner, Jamie Thompkins has taken another job and the new person (Kelly Scarborough) won't be on board until December. Scott would like Kelly involved in the decision since she will need to implement.

Scott said the Chain of Lakes area was busy over the summer with numerous improvements.

### USFS Northern Region Programmatic Fee Proposal

**Jeff Ward, Recreation Business Program Manager** – Jeff updated the group on the sites they had approved earlier this year. Miller Cabin on the Helena NF has the lowest occupancy but didn't open until August. It was 100% filled on weekends. The other two were booked up within a week of being on the reservation system.

Jeff said they are looking at a region-wide fee proposal for the USFS. Since the Federal Land Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) was implemented in 2004, there has been some resistance to proposing new or increasing fees at recreation sites. Fees for new sites and rental cabins have been added since 2010 but most fee sites have remained frozen and since the cost of doing business keeps rising, we are not keeping up with maintenance or improvements. Jeff said many campgrounds remain at the \$6-8/night and some cabins are as low as \$20/night. The FS is not trying to compete with private industry but trying to keep the FS recreation program sustainable.

Margaret asked about the status of the "no-fee coalition". Jeff said they haven't been as vocal because most of their suggestions related to trail-heads or back country use were implemented. Bob W. said that when we did the Butte fee increase a few years ago, they did receive a letter from the no-fee group. Doug asked where the fees go? Jeff said that 95% of fees generated from FLREA sites go back to the forest. Most forests distribute the fees to the host unit. The other 5% is used for administration at the Forest Service and Washington Office levels.

Most units in the USFS Northern Region recognize the need to move forward with fee proposals – it is a high priority for the agency. Forests that come under the purview of this RAC include the Beaverhead-Deerlodge, Bitterroot, Flathead, Kootenai, Lolo, and part of the Helena/Lewis & Clark. Jeff estimates the proposal would include 120-150 individual sites within all the forests. Pricing structure would be based

on FLREA guidelines while trying to be consistent across Forest and other agency boundaries. Bob W. asked about FLREA requirements for amenities. Yes, certain basic amenities are required before a fee can be charged. Jim H. asked if Region One's sites would be compared to other FS Regions. Jeff said yes although some Regions have more concessionaire sites. The Northern Region is generally less developed than some of the other Regions.

Bob W. asked if the FS was going to bring the fee proposal to the RAC in the fall of 2017. Jeff said hopefully, but administratively, some sites require a certain amount of time for public notice and summer is generally shorter in Region One compared to the other regions. Jeff is hoping to have public scoping completed by next summer. Nationally, some of the delay is that a few of BLM RACs don't meet that often. Joe asked if this is a NEPA decision. Jeff said the NEPA portion has been completed. He also said that he is in favor of doing this programmatic fee proposal to simplify the process for the Western MT RAC since geographically that is the bulk of the sites in Western MT. Jeff asked the RAC how they would prefer to see the proposals – lumped together, or by Forest. Public outreach and involvement would be simplified with a joint proposal.

Jean recommended that fees be consistent to reduce confusion with the recreating public. Jeff said presenting 120-150 individual sites to the RAC could take several days and Margaret said a decision needs to be made on what part of the proposal needs to come before the RAC – the 30K-foot level, or individual sites. Margaret mentioned that the issues the RAC would be looking at would be different than what FLREA may require. Jeff would hate to see all sites automatically increased; it might be appropriate to leave some as they are. Bob W. said he didn't think the RAC could deal with each site individually, and suggested they set up a standard recreation fee scenario and have the RAC recreation fee subgroup review it. Then the subgroup could make a presentation to the full council. Jeff said there are three categories – the standard amenity fee, the expanded amenity fee and special recreation permit. Most of the sites fall into the expanded amenity fee category (campgrounds, cabins, lookouts, etc).

Jeff asked the council their opinion on a phased-in fee increase (e.g. currently \$6, then make it \$8 or \$10, before the final price of \$12) versus just implementing the full increase. Koy mentioned the subcommittee tour of Axolotl and Henneberry cabins where they recommended going to the full fee rather than a phase-in because the increase was overdue. Pat Fosse said the cabins are full most of the year.

Jean said State Parks is doing a graduated fee increase. Doug said when we get down to presenting to the full council next year, does the RAC represent the BLM in terms of the decisions made on whether or not to accept the proposal? Jeff said yes, he would be looking for a recommendation on the proposal and it could be changed or modified. Jeff offered to meet with the RAC recreation fee subgroup to help clarify the proposal before public comment in the spring. Bob W. said that all RAC members should have a copy of the interagency agreement between the FS and BLM relating to the RAC.

### **Climate Change – David Williams, Butte Field Office Geologist**

David's presentation focused on climate change and mine permitting, which is what he does for BLM. David has always been interested on the effects of climate change in the Canadian Rockies where he climbs mountains. It's safer to climb when there are more snow fields because exposed rocks are unstable. As a mine permitter, he became interested in climate change when he worked on a major mine expansion with MT DEQ. A contractor prepared the EIS with a section on climate change which David felt was erroneous so he rewrote the section based on scientific research. He felt he needed to be proactive with the mining industry on what was expected related to climate change.

He gave a brief history of various papers written on climate change starting during Napoleon's era. The basic idea is that as carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases are released into the atmosphere, they absorb long-wave radiation which causes atmospheric warming. Many scientific groups are working on the issue with the most prominent being the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Their reports come out routinely. Many business entities are also involved because weather changes influence the severity of storms.

So what does climate change have to do with mines? David showed pictures of the Zortman-Landusky Mine in north central Montana after a severe weather event. The mine went bankrupt so Montana and the Federal Government are fiscally responsible for clean-up. Scientists are trying to figure out how climate change affects severe weather events. A warmer atmosphere holds more water so as the atmosphere warms, more severe rain events can be expected.

It is called climate change rather than global warming because some areas will be warmer but other areas may be colder. Weather and precipitation patterns are changing. Koy asked if more precipitation means more snow. David said yes and cited weather changes in New England where winter starts later and ends earlier but some really heavy snow events occur during the winter.

Declared disasters are also on the increase. From 1980-2015, insured losses from catastrophes (billion-dollar weather-related events) were on an upward trend. Weather-related disturbances to the US electric grid are also on an upward trend. This is significant because as we design and build infrastructure, catastrophic weather events will need to be considered.

In terms of mines, warmer temperatures probably aren't an issue. More precipitation may or may not be an issue but less precipitation (more frequent drought conditions) is certainly an issue in the West where reclamation and revegetation are critical to reclaim mine sites. Extreme weather events will affect placements of mines due to long-term environmental impacts, mostly water related. If you have more water to deal with there are two factors: 1) how do you design for an extreme weather event and 2) how do you deal with water treatment facilities for an extreme precipitation event? For northern climates there is a loss of permafrost (hampers travel); coastal areas need to be prepared for higher sea levels and storm surges.

Climate change has led to bigger and more intense fires in the West. From a mining standpoint, exploration or mining operations may need to be restricted during periods of high fire danger. Exploration generally is a short time frame with not much infrastructure. Mine development is a bigger impact because of disturbance level. Mine operations could be somewhat impacted. Post closure facilities could be impacted forever because they have to consider not only the current climate but what it is expected to do in the future. Dave sees a potential impact for mine site cover systems. Covers need to be of a material that will transpire and recycle the water. Engineers are concerned about cover systems being less efficient due to climate changes. Mark asked if research is being done on plant covers. Dave said some companies are trying to be proactive in identifying plants that will adapt to those conditions.

Zortman-Landusky received 18 inches of rain in one-and-a-half days in 2011. The toe of the waste rock dump was washed away. Repair costs were approximately \$2 million. Swift Gulch was also impacted which caused mine-impacted water to flow onto the Fort Belknap Reservation. A water treatment plant was constructed in 2010 but couldn't function with that type of event. When agencies are calculating what type of event to prepare for, they expect companies to consider extreme weather events that are becoming more common.

Scott H. asked about impacts on other land management activities? Dave said land health assessments are critical for land sustainability. Dave said long-term predictions for the Northwest are that we may

receive about the same overall precipitation but it may come as intense storms. Ron said it seemed like increased drought and increased precipitation are contradictory. Dave said it will likely be more “droughty” due to even minor temperature increases which makes the soil dry more rapidly. Intense storms tend to run off without soaking into the ground. Margaret asked if storm event data has been updated. Dave said NOAA has limited funds to work with and they haven’t been able to do the work.

Pat said from a land health perspective, BLM is required to meet the standards no matter what the weather. BLM tries to look at structures (beaver dams, etc) that will keep water on the land longer. They work in partnership with other agencies and private landowners. Ron mentioned that BLM spends a lot of money on weed management and wondered if climate change negatively affects native plants. Pat said yes, most definitely. Jean raised the issue of fire impacts.

Paul said climate change will migrate into environmental change. Dave said yes and it is more impactful at northern latitudes (north of 60 degrees) with the effect on permafrost. Jean said the growing season has gotten much longer in MT. Koy mentioned a conversation he had with a chemist who raised the issue of population growth and the arid West with humans being nearly 70% water. Dave said scientifically the issue relates to carbon sequestered in fossil fuels that is now being burned and released into the atmosphere. Agriculture is an interesting issue when scientists consider how the climate is changing and how to grow enough food to feed a growing population.

Jeff Ward said the FS has been doing resource planning and in the recreation program, intense precipitation events are a concern to recreation development and archeology sites. Dan H. stated that plants become more efficient and use less water when exposed to higher levels of CO2. Dave said that’s true in a greenhouse setting but not so true in the natural environment. Pat said that we don’t do a very good job of urban planning because in Montana some of our best soil and agriculture areas have been urbanized with houses and roads taking it out of ag production. Growth should be occurring on our poorest soils.

Margaret asked what federal agencies are doing to address the issue through policy? Joe said with Missoula’s current planning process, that issue wasn’t on the radar screen 30 years ago but now BLM is mandated to address it. Pat said specialists are trying to improve forest health through thinning, prescribed burning, and best grazing practices by improving riparian health. Dave said most of the larger mining companies have greenhouse gas programs to limit their own output.

Doug said he appreciated the information and presentation, but that planning needs to be ahead of the curve and not reacting to what is currently happening on the ground. Mark said in geologic time, the time frame we are looking at is miniscule. Dave said climate scientists agree that we need to develop a different energy infrastructure today not in the future.

Paul said human nature is not to act unless we are forced into it and that humans “suck at responding.” Jean said public education is a huge component of solving the problem to make people aware of the problem and possibilities.

Bob W. thanked Dave for his presentation and **opened the floor for public comment at 11:30.** (No commenters).

Jean asked how this climate change issue affects the RAC – what kinds of questions should they ask? Larry stated that agencies are becoming educated enough to address those questions and if there are issues that arise that we see as individuals or a group, then we can ask to have it addressed. Do you see climate change having an impact on weed policy? Pat stated there are noxious and invasive plants. Noxious is a legal term used when a plant is causing economic damage; invasives are plants that move in often with no disturbance (e.g. cheat grass). Larry said when soil is disturbed spotted knapweed moves

in and it is helpful on steep slopes to prevent erosion. Pat said knapweed stabilizes better than nothing but it has a deep taproot and grasses have a fibrous root that holds the soil together really well. Knapweed also has an organic herbicide that it secretes around it that prevents other plants from growing that creates a monoculture that affects diversity of plants and animals and degrades the site. Koy said the foundation of all plant life is soil. When soil is disturbed then you have a hard time restoring the natural community and it is better to introduce species (not knapweed) that will help the soil produce again.

Bob W. reminded the RAC that Jean, Mark S. and Dan H. are on the Missoula FO RMP subgroup so they will have an opportunity to ask those climate change questions. Joe said BLM is behind the curve for predictive models and used the Zortman-Landusky event as an example. Dave said meteorologists use climate data to predict future events in the context of changing climate and it's very difficult.

Paul mentioned the research underway to genetically modify plants to make them better at holding water and more drought resistant. Dave Krueger asked about modification of current mine permits – will that be necessary? Dave W. used Golden Sunlight as an example and said they are trying to figure that out, now that storms seem to be more frequent. Most of the permits predate any discussion on climate change. More thought is going into reclamation and geologically where to put the mine site to make it more sustainable.

Koy asked about climatology related to cloud seeding and Dave responded that it might be minimally effective for a small area but not on a large scale.

#### **Weed Reports – Butte FO, Scott H.**

Scott reported two seasonals were working from the Helena NF office. Priority areas were the Marysville and Chain of Lakes. BLM participated in 27 interagency/county spray days and hosted two spray days at the Limestone Hills and Clancy. BFO has weed assistance agreements with Butte-Silver Bow, Jefferson, Broadwater and Lewis and Clark counties. They also support Beaverhead and Park counties. A contract was issued for a wildland urban interface (WUI) area near Clancy.

Accomplishments included 975 acres treated by BLM, 825 acres treated through agreements, 2,275 acres inventoried and 520 acres monitored. Education events were held with the Mile High Back Country Horsemen and the Sheridan MT PALZ after-school program.

Nichole asked if BLM gets any assistance from the National Guard in the Limestone Hills area. Scott said with the withdrawal of the Limestone Hills, the National Guard is responsible for that area. Bob M. asked about any biological components to the weed control effort. Scott said BLM uses flea beetles in certain areas. He also asked about salt cedar making its way up the Yellowstone River. Pat mentioned salt cedar leaf beetles that defoliate the trees and has been effective in Utah.

#### **Butte FO Office Update**

BFO generated about \$300K in fees even with a two-week closure at one of the major campgrounds. Clark's Bay Day Use site had a volunteer there to collect fees and that site took in nearly \$20K. Devil's Elbow generated \$48K; Holter Lake \$81K; Holter Dam \$11K; Log Gulch \$68K; White Sandy \$50K; and Divide \$12K. Divide needs a new water system. Recreation fees were up overall due to the fee increase, better compliance and an increased number of users. Fees generated are used for on-site maintenance such as garbage, toilet pumping, seasonal labor, and road surfacing.

Scott mentioned Kelly Scarborough, the new outdoor recreation planner, will be here in December.

Butte is nearly ready to sign the Park, Broadwater, and Gallatin Travel Management Plan that covers about 93 miles of roads in the three counties. It hasn't been controversial. The plan establishes 17 miles of mountain bike trails near Copper City. BLM received 200-300 letters of support with a few opposed due to a potential conflict with shooters. There was a field trip with Nichole and other Broadwater County Commissioners.

Scott raised the issue of the Johnson Stamp Mill near Townsend that needs some stabilization. BLM applied for some funding and received \$25K and Scott would like some RAC members to help with ideas. Scott asked Larry, Paul, and Nichole to offer advice on what needs to be done with the funds they have. It won't be an official subgroup but a working group. Scott will coordinate with the group. Paul gave the group a brief history of the stamp mill especially during the Depression era.

### **Lunch Break**

After lunch, David A. updated the RAC members on the nomination process. Members whose terms expire in April are Bob Walker, Bob Martinka, Dan Happel, Doug Midgett, and Mark Sweeney. David reminded the RAC that they will lose their chair and vice chair after the next meeting because Bob W. and Mark cannot be reappointed. During the first meeting of the calendar year, a new chair and vice-chair will need to be elected. Bob W. said he has enjoyed being the chair and said a RAC member has expressed interest in taking over as chair.

### **Field Office Updates – Continued**

#### **Missoula FO – Joe Ashor**

Joe's handouts included the weed report and an update on the RMP process.

- 300 miles of roads have been treated for noxious weeds (about 10% of the FO roads).
- Roadside acres treated – 1,500;
- Spot treatment – 600 acres; Blackfoot River Corridor is a high-priority area especially for leafy spurge.
- While BLM has used aerial application and biological control in past years, those tools were not used in FY16.
- Bear Cr. Flat area near Clearwater Junction is an area of critical environmental concern (ACEC) where BLM has completed restoration work including thinning. BLM treated 33 burn pile areas for weeds and reseeded.
- Reseeding was also done on some herbicide seeding sites near Philipsburg.
- Three mine reclamation sites had some reseeded completed along with some reseeded at Garnet Ghost Town.
- Inventory monitoring – MFO utilized the Youth in Restoration Program fairly heavily, completing 61 miles of roadside inventory amounting to 750 acres.
- 20 acres of seeding site evaluations completed last year following up to this year when 46 treatment monitoring sites were established in the lower Blackfoot area.
- MFO also has assistance agreements for weed control, mostly with Missoula County. Did some work with private landowners this year to control Yellow Hawkweed on both sides of the fence.

- Worked this year with the FS Cooperative Weed Management Program and Granite County in the Philipsburg area.
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### **MFO RMP Update**

Joe summarized what has been done so far using the Planning 2.0 process. The envisioning process has been completed and the assessment report is now available on the website. The second phase of the envisioning process was to sit down with cooperating agencies which happened this summer. The feedback from those meetings was that other land management agencies feel like they confer annually about fire-related issues but not on coordinating other resources.

MFO was hoping to start public scoping this fall but the Notice of Intent to Plan was not published in the Federal Register in time so now it will likely be January, 2017. Joe hopes to report to the RAC on scoping the next time the RAC has a meeting.

Margaret asked if BLM is required to have citizen collaborative groups to help develop alternatives. Joe said there was an extensive mailing list and many people were met with one-on-one. The one step added to the planning process is going back to the public with a range of preliminary alternatives to see if stakeholders felt they had been heard. A series of workshops will be held to review the range of alternatives with the public. MFO also sends out a newsletter monthly so that interested parties can keep up to date on the process. BLM is always open to hearing from groups interested in the plan.

Doug asked what the public scoping workshops would look like. Joe said a table would be dedicated to different issues such as forestry, range, mining, and recreation staffed by specialists. Doug asked when the alternatives would be developed – probably summer of 2017, per Joe.

Joe updated the RAC on the 5,500-acre acquisition underway in the Belmont Creek area of the lower Blackfoot. It is progressing and should close in the next 4-6 weeks. The acquisition is between BLM and The Nature Conservancy. There are a lot of roads due to past use and most of the roads are infested with knapweed so it will be a challenge to treat.

Timber harvest is underway with the Chamberlain-Warren Sale and should last another year. It consists of 2.4 million board feet. The Marshal Creek-Fred Burr Sale consists of two non-contiguous sites near Philipsburg. One is along the new road being built to Discovery Ski Area – the 1.5 million bf sale was just offered and sold in the last three weeks.

Other vegetative management projects: in the lower Blackfoot, the forestry staff is working on the whole area in the second decade of our watershed assessment. Projects will range from thinning, burning, tree harvest, etc. The goal is to bring that area into a more fire resistant landscape and keep ponderosa pine and larch as the dominant species.

Kennecott Corporation has been looking at copper deposits in the Garnet Range. They have been doing exploration for many years and plan to drill a test site this fall and winter. Larry thought the site was about five miles south of Garnet Ghost Town.

Bob W. asked about the road to Discovery and the problem the contractors had. Joe said they ran into more rock than anticipated and it won't be open this year to access Discovery Ski Area. Mark asked about who is constructing the road. BLM granted Discovery an easement for the road and it will be maintained by the county after BLM builds the portion through BLM. (Joe later clarified that the BLM is not paying for the road—Discovery Ski Area is.)

### Dillon FO Update – Pat Fosse

- DFO inventoried 74K+ acres of weeds, treated 4,587 acres and evaluated the treatment effectiveness on 1,710 acres.
- Dillon was a pilot office to try D7 (*Pseudomonas fluorescens*), a bacteria that won't let cheat grass produce seeds. The pro and con of the bacteria is that it stays in one place, it doesn't move. It is supposed to take up to three years to work and the monitoring completed this fall didn't show any results yet.
- Staffing: six seasonals and one permanent employee. One person was in the Madison Valley all summer long. Dillon also had assistance agreements with Madison and Beaverhead counties.
- Transitioned away from ATVs due to safety concerns and transitioned to ACEs with rollover cages. They seemed to work well.
- Attended 39 community spray days in Madison and Beaverhead counties and hosted two spray days along the Beartrap trails with 55 people (a new record) on the first day. The second day was after flowering so they could see missed plants. Twenty-five people participated.
- The Montana Conservation Corps treated weeds in the Dillon FO area for two weeks in June.
- Pat summarized the weed budget and how it was spent. Dillon is concerned about the amount of cheat grass moving into SW Montana. Once it's recognized as a problem, it's probably too late.

Jim asked if the weed budget was down. Pat said it was down but the counties had some funding left from last year. It is also down for 2017.

- The Yank Swamp Timber Sale consisting of 600 acres in the Big Hole area is just finishing up.
- There is an exclusive use 100-acre ditch sale that will be starting this fall.
- The Amelia Creek TS in the Centennials east of Lakeview is under preparation – it should be about 200 acres.
- Another issue for Dillon is the Sage Grouse RMP Amendment which was completed last year. This year offices need to specify how the plan amendment will be implemented on at least 80% of the priority habitat in the next five years. Last week BLM sent out the decisions on Sage Creek and Big Sheep Creek Watershed Assessments, 30% of the priority habitat in Dillon. Along with that, they need to use a monitoring process with AIM as the acronym (assessment, inventory, monitoring). The monitoring will be consistent across the nation on BLM lands with randomly generated points that need to be set up under the same time frame. Pat asked for a variance to that requirement because Dillon has been doing watershed assessments for a long time. That request was granted and Pat felt it was paying off because when BLM did the monitoring in Blacktail Watershed this summer and set up the points, they were able to feed the results into the national data base that everyone will have access to. They can show that certain habitat standards for sage grouse are currently being met instead of waiting for five years. Pat felt the sage grouse amendment won't change operations too much in the Dillon area because they had good sage grouse stipulations in the 2006 RMP.
- The Sage Creek Watershed travel management is an issue BLM is currently dealing with and she referenced a handout with a map showing roads that are closed. Beaverhead County is a destination for 5K-10K hunters during elk rifle season. The Sage Creek Basin is 114K acres of BLM with priority habitat that winters about 2,500 elk. In the last 10 years users have created roads using trucks, ATVs and UTVs. There are 171 miles of designated open roads in the watershed, but when BLM inventoried roads people were using last year during hunting season,

it amounted to 795 miles of roads. Weed infestations have sprung up along the previously closed routes. BLM completed an EA which is out currently. MT FWP suggested closing 94 miles of road to improve elk harvest. BLM decided on a modified alternative to close some roads and also do better compliance and public education. The preferred alternative is to close 13 miles of roads currently open. It will continue to be a challenge to enforce and implement.

- The Blacktail and south Tobacco Roots watershed assessments were completed this summer and conifer encroachment is becoming an issue. BLM has a good photo record dating back to the 1960s and the amount of change in the last 50 years is incredible. The conifers use more water and crowd out the sagebrush. The other issues are noxious weeds and cheat grass especially in the S. Tobacco Roots. BLM will be offering some timber sales and recommending some prescribed burns. There is a lot of interest and cooperation from adjacent landowners. Some sagebrush species responds favorably to fire, others do not. Koy asked if the USFS was included in the sage grouse discussion – Yes, per Pat.

Bob W. complimented Pat on the tour to Dyce Creek last year. He felt the RAC learned a lot. Pat said they did complete the 2,500-acre burn that was planned for Dyce Creek. Bob talked about the off-route problem in Sage Creek. He said he had given Cornie a couple of names to contact related to off-road education and recommended that Dillon contact them.

#### **RAC Feedback to the BLM**

Ron T. asked if the RAC has ever dealt with access or landlocked BLM acreage before or if it could be tied to grazing privileges. Pat said they work with landowners for access but we are sensitive to private property rights and don't have any authority to tell private landowners to provide access. It is not legal for private landowners to lease their BLM allotment to outfitters. Pat said it is a complicated issue and BLM gets many complaints, especially during hunting season.

Joe said the number-one issue as they started the RMP process in Missoula was access to public lands. The State of MT just hired an access coordinator that will deal with access issues on State land because it's such an important issue state-wide.

Dave Krueger said several years ago BLM had "surplus lands" and generated a list of parcels for sale or trade. Joe said land use plans are required to look at lands that may make sense to dispose of. Dave asked about trades and Joe said land trades are used occasionally but they are time-consuming and BLM generally doesn't have the staff to pursue them. Pat said the Hagenbarth exchange in the Dillon FO took six years to complete. Bob M. brought up the proposed Durfee Hills exchange in the Lewistown FO that is very controversial.

Doug asked Pat about the map she handed out and wondered who owns the roads. Pat said they are mostly BLM with some county roads. Pat said they work constructively with the county and private landowners.

Bob W. talked about the trail steward grant programs through MT FWP. Butte has received grants to hire a person at Pipestone. He encouraged Dillon to check into the program. Mark asked about the penalty that can range from \$100-\$500. It's too small to be a deterrent. Mark asked if BLM has pursued ecological damages. Rick said in blatant cases, they have but you have to have strong evidence along with photos. Bob W. asked if most of the off-route damage occurs during hunting season – yes. Bob M. asked if signs were being replaced. Pat said yes but it's an ongoing challenge, costly and takes a lot of staff time.

Jean brought up the issue of unethical hunting in the East Fork that gives hunters a bad name. In that case, their licenses were revoked.

Larry suggested contacting GPS companies and Pat said they have and they are close to having the layer of open routes loaded on the Avenza mobile app. Mark asked about loss of hunting privileges since the penalty is so low. BLM has no authority to revoke hunting privileges and FWP is not currently interested in taking that on.

Bob W. passed out some information related to activities within the EQC (Environmental Quality Council). One of the handouts was entitled "Roads, Land, and Big Game Harvest," a draft report of the EQC. The report took 18 months to compile and federal and state agencies were involved. The full report is available on the EQC website. Bob said no legislation has been introduced to date.

The other handout was a memo from FWP's legal counsel and it lists nine legislative proposals for the next session. It is also available on the legislative website.

Bob W. asked David A. for his opinion since he also attends the EQC meetings. David said the BLM State Office specialists spent a lot of time providing information for the "Roads, . . ." report. He said the report keyed in on accessibility for hunting. Pat said much of BLM's inaccessible acres are not accessible because it is surrounded by private land, a typical land pattern.

Bob M. provided some insight on work from the 1980s that dealt with this same issue. Elk numbers have increased and he said subsequent studies have shown that fewer roads with more elk security lead to better hunting opportunities. Access has changed over the years partly because Montana has a different set of landowners.

Jean mentioned access near Missoula on former Plum Creek land. The land was closed by the new owner but it was still shown as open on FS maps. It was controversial locally. Hunters and recreationists need to become educated on various types of access – vehicle, walk-in, etc.

Bob M. commented that a GIS technician with a good set of data layers could combine that information with elk numbers and harvest success and come up some meaningful statistics.

Bob W. said he sat in on legislative committee hearings during the last session and he saw this effort as a way to force federal agencies to open roads previously closed. Pat said the whole issue is controversial and if people could cross at section corners, it would open lots of public land to additional access; however, that is not currently legal.

Doug said he was heavily involved with the public process for the Upper Missouri River Breaks management plan and he summarized the public process as a multi-step process over several years. At the end of the planning effort BLM was caught in the middle and was the target for all the individuals and groups that didn't get what they wanted. Doug felt it was important to go through the process and no one could argue that they didn't have a chance to be heard.

Joe said BLM has three levels of planning and they always ask "what is the appropriate level of public involvement?" The Missoula RMP will be a hybrid of the planning process and will try to involve the public through all the steps. What stakeholders need to understand is that not everyone will get what they want through the planning process but we want people to be heard and see that their concerns were addressed.

Scott mentioned that he was in Lewistown during that time period and the BLM wanted an extensive public process since there was still a fair amount of resentment locally over establishment of the monument.

David A. said he would keep in touch with Jeff Ward and get the FS recreation fee proposals to the RAC whether it is individual sites or a group proposal.

The **next meeting will be February 22, 2017 at the Butte FO**. Agenda items so far include an overview of bills introduced at the State Legislature, election of RAC officers, and the Log Gulch parking issue.

The meeting was adjourned.

Approved by:  //SIGNED// \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Bob Walker, Chairperson