

John Day Snake RAC

Planning Subcommittee – Thirtymile Canyon; John Day Fee season expansion
subcommittee call
12/19/2019

Attendees: Randy Jones (JDS RAC chair), Bob Krein (Dispersed Recreation), Art Waugh (Commercial recreation/motorized use), Jim Reiss (Dispersed Recreation). Don Gonzales – District Manager, BLM Vale; Amanda Roberts – Central Oregon Field Manager, Prineville BLM, Kirstin Heins – Assistant Field Manager for Recreation and Partnerships, Prineville BLM, Heidi Mottl – Outdoor Recreation Planner, Prineville BLM

Kirstin provided an overview of where the BLM is in the planning process for the Thirtymile acquisition. The BLM is in the process of refining priority projects for 2020 and is still working on when to start Thirtymile. The BLM will bring more information to the February full RAC meeting about the project.

The BLM added the discussion on the John Day River permit based on an urgent timeline regarding the move to Recreation.gov. The District needed to define the permit period sooner, as the contractors are currently building the website.

BLM: Heidi provided a brief history of limited-entry boating permits on the John Day River, which were set through the John Day River Plan Environmental Assessment (EA), implemented successfully in 2011 and 2012, then not implemented thereafter due to a lack of website server space. In 2014, the RAC approved the current use fee, which has been charged during the peak use season of May 20 - July 10 between Service Creek and Tumwater Falls starting in the 2015 season. Beginning in 2020, boating permits will be limited again during the peak use season and all limited permits will be issued through Recreation.gov. Due to a change in use patterns, the BLM has identified the current peak use season is now from May 1 – July 15 instead of May 20 – July 10. During the peak use season dates, the number of launches per river segment per day will be limited. The Recreation.gov developers are currently building the program and need to be able to build the program to allow the standard use fees to apply each day during the peak use season (May 1 – July 15).

The BLM proposal for RAC consideration is to expand the fee season dates to match the new peak use season dates of May 1 – July 15, expanding the fee season by 24 days.

Jim: Who operates Recreation.gov? Does some money come back to the BLM from the Recreation.gov transaction fee?

BLM: Heidi and Kirstin explained that Recreation.gov is operated through a federal government contract administered by an interagency group called Recreation One Stop. The current contract is issued to Boose Allen Hamilton (BAH) to issue permits, tickets, and campground reservations throughout the country. The BLM is required to use Recreation.gov for any new permit systems.

Currently, a small portion of each transaction fee (approximately 22%) is returned back to the BLM directly into the fee area account, along with the use fees collected from the customer. The BLM currently allows the local office to keep this money and use it where it was collected, however, this is not guaranteed and could potentially change in the future.

RAC question: Can we extend the fee season into April? Can we consider a per person per day fee instead of \$20 per group per day, so that a small group doesn't pay so much? Can kids be free to somehow lower this cost?

BLM: Heidi explained that the new peak use season dates of May 1 – July 15 were determined by looking at launch data from the past 4 years. The peak use season was expanded to include those dates in which launch limits were exceeded or nearly exceeded. Kirstin explained that we understand the use season actually begins earlier.

The current use fee was designed by the RAC, and is \$20 per group for an overnight trip, or \$10 per group for a day trip. The use fee is not charged per day, or per person, but per group for the entire trip. The group size limit is 16 and an overnight trip may last up to 14 days. All permits issued by Recreation.gov will include a \$6 transaction fee per permit. Permits for non-limited seasons and segments will continue to be issued on the BLM website and will not incur a fee. RAC Comment: In 2014, some people had a difficult time understanding the fee, so the RAC decided to keep the fee very simple.

RAC Question: Do we expect to collect less money once the limits are in place, because fewer people will be able to get permits?

BLM: Kirstin and Heidi explained that if people can't get a permit because their preferred date is sold out, we hope they will move their trip dates instead of coming on Memorial Day or Father's Day weekend.

RAC Comment: The expanded fee season dollars may balance out the loss of fees due to fewer permits under limited-entry. You may not see an increase in revenue.

RAC Question: Is use up in general? Does it help protect the Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs) if you manage and set limits based on the ORVs for a given river segment?

BLM: Kirstin explained that the BLM is eager to get the limits back in place so that we can monitor the ORVs and see how things work with the limits in place.

RAC Question: What are the fees used for?

BLM: Kirstin and Heidi explained that the fees are primarily used for dumpsters at Clarno, portable toilets at Thirtymile, River Ranger patrols and user education. We will have an increased need to educate the public this year about the move to Recreation.gov and the return of limits.

Amanda is new to the Central Oregon Field Manager position and realizes that John Day has not received the attention it deserves. She plans to change this and prioritize

the John Day for the next 3 years. Amanda also shared her enthusiasm for doing good things for the river and the group was very receptive.

RAC Question: Have we considered reducing the group size, say to 10? Why don't we charge a fee in April and limit use in April? The use season is shifting and may shift to be even earlier. The RAC wants to be flexible with the BLM and the RAC wants to be flexible with the fee season.

BLM: again, the fees are geared toward peak use seasons, so at this time, we'll keep looking at the numbers and let those take us in the right direction.

BLM Question: Amanda had to leave the call, but first she asked, are you in support of the fee proposal and if so, are you in favor of taking this to the RAC?

Art, Bob, Jim, & Randy said 'yes', they support the proposal. The group was interested in what Don thought. Don thinks it's a simple push. **Don instructed the BLM to assemble a proposal to expand the fee season and send it to Randy. Randy will put it on the February agenda and formulate the agenda after he hears from BLM.**

BLM: Next, Heidi and Kirstin explained the new fall limits in Segment 1 downstream of Cottonwood Bridge, from September 1 – November 30. These limits were set in the 2018 Cottonwood Canyon EA and are designed to help the fish. The BLM is proposing to charge the same fee, \$20 per overnight trip and \$10 per day trip during the fall limited season in Segment 1. The EA determined that fee revenue collected in Segment 1 will go to Oregon State Parks to be used to manage the river within the park boundaries. Since 2014, the standard use fee has been charged in Segment 1 during the peak use season. An official agreement between the two agencies will dictate that this money comes back to the John Day where it was collected.

RAC Question: Are there motorized boats using this segment?

BLM: Heidi explained that motorized boats are allowed from October 1 – April 30 between Cottonwood Bridge and Tumwater Falls, however there is not much motorized use occurring. The water usually comes up enough by February and there are a few motorized trips from Feb. through April.

The group suggested that the BLM provide boat access at John Day Crossing downstream of McDonald Crossing.

Randy: Let's consider the fee proposal for Segment 1 in the fall separately, at our June meeting. This should allow enough time for a decision before the limited season begins in September.