

Southeast Oregon Resource Advisory Council Meeting

June 10, 2020

Meeting convened at 2 p.m. via teleconference

Members present: Tim Davis, Jeremy Austin, Richard Watts, Ken Poole, Mark Owens

Agency Reps and others: Todd Forbes, Lakeview District Manager and Designated Federal Official; Jeff Rose, Burns BLM District Manager; Don Gonzalez, Vale BLM District Manager; Larisa Bogardus, Vale BLM PAO

Public: Susie Koppert, rockhound; Sergio Arispe, OSU Extension Service

NOTE: Due to the lack of a quorum, the RAC could discuss items on the agenda, but could not vote on them.

Time for public comment and response

None.

District Updates

Jeff Rose reported 300 wild horses have been adopted from the Burns corrals under the incentive program and an additional 80 have been adopted through other programs.

Ken Poole asked what's driving the increase in wild horse adoptions. Adoption incentives and online adoptions account for the largest increase, but in-person adoption is up, too. Don Gonzalez noted that shelter adoptions are up due to COVID and that could factor into wild horse adoptions as well.

There was discussion of a potential field trip to view the Harney County Wildfire Collaborative's pilot project to create fuel breaks at the south end of the Burns and Lakeview districts using treatment, mowing and herbicide. Jeff Rose said the site is very far out and a virtual tour during a future meeting might be a better option.

Don Gonzalez reported the Southeast Oregon Resource Management Plan Amendment (RMPA) Final Environmental Impact Statement should be released by the end of September and the Record of Decision signed by the end of the year.

More information was requested for the Grassy Mountain Plan of Operations and the Environmental Impact Statement should start at the end of the summer.

The COVID closure allowed recreation staff to catch up on deferred maintenance at six sites managed by the district, including the popular Castle Rock and Riverside sites.

BLM Deputy Director Mike Need was briefed recently on the Three Fingers Allotment review.

Lakeview completed the Tucker Hill Environmental Impact Statement and the Record of Decision was signed this spring.

The Lakeview RMPA is being revised with feedback from the state office. Todd Forbes said he hopes the draft will be released in August.

Nine wild horses have been adopted from Beaty Butte Wild Horse Training Facility to date, compared to 22 adoptions in 2019.

Lakeview has burned juniper piles on 1,200 acres, averaging 60 to 70 piles per acre, to improve sage-grouse habitat. An additional 2,000 acres of juniper treatment is planned.

Lakeview is also partnering with the Prineville District and several national forests to develop a network of fuel breaks extending from Prineville to Reno, primarily following rights-of-way addressed under the existing Lakeview Vegetation Management Environmental Analysis. The project is intended to protect habitat and also special status species and plants.

Fire Season 2020

Jeff Rose said predictive services is anticipating that large fire potential start in July. All wildfire agencies are working to integrate COVID precautions in preparedness. The primary goal is always firefighter and public safety. Protocols include daily screenings, temperature checks, masking, and isolating crews as units.

Todd Forbes noted that the highest fire threat appears to be on the west side, which would include the Klamath Falls Resource Area.

Roundtable

Richard Watts and Tim Davis said they have observed a huge increase in use of closed campgrounds, which is resulting in negative impacts to the sites and resources and asked what is being done.

Don Gonzalez said the BLM has chosen to educate members of the public rather than ticket them. Law enforcement is working with sheriff's offices to encourage non-use of closed sites. Even in day use areas, 70 percent of contacts are occurring after hours. He expects overall use to get back to normal soon.

Sergio Arispe reported that his team will be gathering data in the Three Fingers area in the coming weeks. Up to 10 participants will be driving their own vehicles due to COVID precautions.

Jeremy Austin said he'd like to see a future agenda topic about categorical exclusions and programmatic Environmental Impact Statements and how these directly relate to land management in eastern Oregon, including how they play out on the ground.

Richard Watts asked for a followup report from Burns on the Pueblo Mountain project.

Decision was made to reschedule the April meeting, which was postponed due to the COVID shutdown, for Aug. 26-27 in Burns, to include a field trip to the corrals. It was also decided to hold a meeting in Ontario Oct. 21-22.