



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

Central California (CenCal) Resource Advisory Council (RAC) Meeting Minutes

Held Virtually on Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021, 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

ATTENDEES

RAC: Don Amador, Shaun Crook, Trent Rosenlieb, Carl Twisselman, Bart Drescher, Mary Gorden, Jim Phelan, Warren Allsup, Laurie Collom, Matt Kingsley and Nancy Muleady-Mecham.

BLM: Chris Heppe, District Manager; Ruben Leal, Associate District Manager; David Brinsfield, District Fire Management Officer; Serena Baker, District Public Affairs Officer; Steve Nelson, Bishop Field Manager; Gabe Garcia, Bakersfield Field Manager; Ben Blom, Central Coast Field Manager; Elizabeth Meyer-Shields, Mother Lode Field Manager; Nick Lavrov, Ukiah Field Manager; Rebecca Carr-Wong, Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument Manager; Lee Thompson, Central Coast Park Ranger; Joseph Rodriguez, Ukiah Fire Management Specialist; David “Lee” Helgeson, Mother Lode Fire Management Technician; Danielle Thomas, Bakersfield Forestry Technician; Vicki Campbell, California State Mitigation and Litigation Coordinator and James Newman, California State Strategic Fire Planner.

Public Registered: Josh Epstein, Alyson Heare, Gayle Totton, Bob Schneider, Alex Flores, Amy Granat and André Sanchez.

GENERAL BUSINESS

Chris Heppe provided an overview of BLM California with remarks from State Director Karen Mouritsen.

RAC BRIEFINGS

Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument Travel Management Presentation:

Ukiah Field Manager Nick Lavrov gave an overview of the Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument (BSMNM). Monument Manager Rebecca Carr-Wong explained the monument’s purpose, co-management with the U.S. Forest Service, resource objects and values and stakeholders. She detailed the focus areas: ecosystem health, communities and economic development, outdoor recreation, volunteer projects, educational events, public engagement and informational products, research and planning.

Monument Manager Carr-Wong and BLM California State Mitigation and Litigation Coordinator Vicki Campbell briefed the RAC on the BLM’s BSMNM Travel Management Planning effort, why it is needed, objectives, route designations, the NEPA process, as well as opportunities for public engagement. Maps were shown detailing the different monument segments within the planning area, the interest points provided by the public, criteria which will be used to draft alternatives, the project ePlanning website and what constitutes effective public comment.

This will be Monument Manager Carr-Wong's final public meeting for the BLM, as she has accepted a new position with the National Park Service. The Ukiah Field Office will try to fill her position with a detailer, until they are able to permanently hire a new manager.

ACTION: The RAC expressed interest in hearing an update on the Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument Travel Management Plan during the draft review period.

Central California Wildland Fire Update Presentation:

District Fire Management Officer David Brinsfield gave an overview of the CenCal Fire Program, including partnership with Fire Safe Councils, mitigation and education, as well as landscape and fuel break treatments. California State Strategic Fire Planner James Newman detailed the fire history and provided an overview of the 2020-2021 fire year impacts on central California.

Ukiah Fire Management Specialist Joseph Rodriguez explained the Ukiah Field Office's Fuels Program, which helps implement hazardous fuels reduction projects through identifying the need, the NEPA process, treatments, prescribed fire and maintenance. Several fuels treatments were highlighted including the Black Forest Fuels Reduction Project and Clearlake Highlands Fuel Break, both in Lake County; and the Point Arena-Stornetta work in Mendocino County. Treatments like this require funding, agency and cooperator resources, contracting, inspections and reporting. Prescribed fire requires planning and approval, timing and favorable conditions, resources, funding and phased treatments. Before and after pictures helped showcase work being done.

Mother Lode Fire Management Technician Lee Helgeson provided a briefing on the Kelsey Fuels Reduction Project, which is within the Wildland Urban Interface and considered a high hazard designation along Shoo Fly Road in the Sierra Nevada foothills. Ponderosa pine and black oak with chaparral understory are being removed to provide a transition vegetation zone. Some of the challenges include the slope constraint, buckbrush traffic hazards, unmarked well heads and illegal dumping. The California Conservation Corps is assisting. Before and after pictures showcased the work being done.

Bakersfield Forestry Technician Danielle Thomas updated the RAC on the Case Mountain Understory Thinning Project, which encompasses 271 acres of mixed public and private land within the BLM's only Giant Sequoia Groves near the town of Three Rivers in Tulare County. Maps helped highlight the different Forest Health Plan treatment areas each year.

The RAC members appreciated hearing from several specialists at all levels of the Fire Program, particularly those directly involved with project implementation.

ACTION: The RAC would like an update on wildland fire to be included in a future meeting.

CenCal District and Field Office Updates Presentation:

District Manager Chris Heppe gave an overview of the acreage, number of employees, counties, Congressional districts, National Conservation Land Units and field offices encompassed by the CenCal District.

Bakersfield Field Manager Gabe Garcia briefed participants on the Keysville Special Recreation Management Area showing pictures of the different uses and a map of the location.

Bishop Field Manager Steve Nelson highlighted the Legacy Projects/Issues within his jurisdiction, such as the Alabama Hills Management Plan, Campground Business Management Plan Implementation, Bi-State Sage Grouse Conservation Plan Implementation and the Casa Diablo IV Geothermal Development Project. He also detailed emerging projects such as the Long Valley Recreation Management Plan, Volcanic Tableland Recreation Management Plan, Bodie Hills Backcountry Conservation Area Designation and the possibility of district-wide Supplemental Rules. Mr. Nelson provided pictures of previous RAC engagement within the Bishop Field Office jurisdiction.

Central Coast Field Manager Ben Blom detailed some of his field office planning efforts, including the San Joaquin Desert Hills Activity Plan, Williams Hill Off-Highway Vehicle Planning and the Cotoni-Coast Dairies Plan Implementation. He gave an overview of the San Joaquin Desert Hills, which will be the focus of the November RAC meeting.

Mother Lode Field Manager Elizabeth Meyer-Shields and Ukiah Field Manager Nick Lavrov both gave updates on upcoming projects that may be of RAC interest within their respective field offices.

FUTURE MEETINGS

The RAC decided the current tentative scheduling of RAC meetings in February, June, September and November, worked well for the group and would attempt to be repeated in 2022.

NEXT MEETING

Current BLM guidance recommends public meetings be held virtually, due to COVID-19. If an in-person meeting is possible for the next meeting scheduled on November 17-18, it will be held in Coalinga, CA, with a field trip to Panoche and Tumey hills within the San Joaquin Desert Hills. If in-person is not available, then a virtual meeting will be held via Zoom on Nov. 17.

FUTURE MEETING TOPICS

In addition to the items mentioned above, the RAC members expressed interest in hearing an update on the increase in recreation caused by the pandemic, Williams Hill Off-Highway Vehicle Environmental Assessment, Campgrounds Business Plans, Keysville Special Recreation Management Area, South Cow Mountain OHV Management Area Recreation Improvement Plan and potential recreation fees at sites such as the Merced River Recreation Management Area.

MEETING ADJOURNED