



Twin Falls District Resource Advisory Council



MEETING MINUTES
1/19/2014

Resource Advisory Council (RAC) members present:

Category One – Commodity Interest

- Gerald Orthel
- Mike Henslee
- Daniel Butler (*arrived at 10:00 a.m.*)
- Jeffrey Williams
- James Wills

Category Two – Non-Commodity Interest

- Dayna Gross
- Shauna Robinson
- Denise Alexander
- Peggy Stanley
- LaMar Orton

Category Three – Public Interest

- Tom Courtney
- Todd Wadsworth
- Charles Howell
- Katie Shewmaker
- Hunter Osborne (*arrived at 9.45 left at 2:00 p.m.*)

Quorum Present: Yes No

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) representatives present:

Codie Martin, Jarbidge Assistant Field Manager
Chris Simonson, Acting DM and ADM Twin Falls District
Christine Vance, Contact Representative TFD
Beth Maclean- Shoshone Field Office Manager
Holly Crawford-Craters of the Moon Monument Manager
Heather Tiel-Nelson- Public Affairs
Ken Crane- Jarbidge Range Supervisor
Michael Courtney- Burley Field Office Manager
Brent Ralston- Idaho State Office, Planning and Environmental Coordinator
Paul Makela- Idaho State Office, Wildlife Biologist
Brandon Brown- Twin Falls District Fuels Manager

Public Attendees:

AJ Church- Senator Crapo’s Office
Kari Emond-Senator Risch’s Office
Michel Matthews- Times News

Note to readers: A copy of each handout listed in the text of, or at the end of these minutes, is on file with the official copy of the minutes in the BLM Twin Falls District. Persons desiring to view handouts should contact Christine Vance at (208) 736-2350, or by email at cvance@blm.gov.

*Copies of certified minutes are posted on the Idaho BLM website at:
http://www.blm.gov/id/st/en/res/resource_advisory/twin_falls_district/meeting_minutes.html*

Meeting called to order at 9:12.

Item I: Welcome and Introductions

Public comment period opened at 9:12. No members of the public present. Public comment period closed at 09:42 without comment.

Item II: Elect Chairperson and Vice Chairperson

*Item was tabled until there were enough individuals present to make a Quorum
Resumed at 1:25 p.m.*

Chairperson:

Mike Henslee- nominated, seconded, Mike accepted the position as RAC Chairman

Vice Chairperson:

Peggy Stanley-nominated, seconded

Tom Courtney- nominated, seconded, Tom declined the nomination

Peggy Stanley accepted the position as RAC Vice-Chairperson

Item III: Update RAC Sub-committees

*Tabled until after Field Office Manager presentations
Resumed 1:30 p.m.*

TFD RAC Subcommittees

Updated 1/17/2014

Jarbidge Resource Management Plan

Email – BLM_ID_TF_RAC_Jarbidge_RMP@blm.gov

Denise Alexander – Chair

Peggy Stanley

Jamey Wills

Todd Wadsworth

Shauna Robinson
Dayna Gross

Wild Horse and Burro

Email – BLM_ID_TF_RAC_Wild_Horse@blm.gov

Katie Shewmaker – Chair
Charlie Howell
Mike Henslee
Todd Wadsworth
Jamey Wills
Peggy Stanley

Gateway West Project

Email – BLM_ID_TF_RAC_Gateway@blm.gov

Gerald Orthel – Chair
Charlie Howell
Jeff Williams
Daniel Butler
Hunter Osborne

Committee tabled until
further notice

Cedar Fields and Castle Rocks Closures

Email – BLM_ID_TF_RAC_CedarFields_CastleRocksClosures@blm.gov

Peggy Stanley – Chair
Denise Alexander
Katie Shewmaker
Jeff Williams
Jamey Wills
Charlie Howell
LaMar Orton
Shauna Robinson
Hunter Osborne

Greater Sage-Grouse

Email – BLM_ID_TF_RAC_Sagegrouse@blm.gov

Jeff Williams – Chair
Mike Henslee
Daniel Butler
Todd Wadsworth
Katie Shewmaker
Denise Alexander
Jamey Wills
Tom Courtney
Dayna Gross

Item IV: Idaho and Southwest Montana Sub-regional Sage-Grouse Draft Environmental Impact Statement Discussion/Recommendation Proposal

Jeff Williams, Greater sage-grouse subcommittee chair, brought to the RAC that the subcommittee focused their attention on Alternatives (ALT) D&E. The subcommittee supports the Governor's ALT E, and invited discussion from the group as a whole to further flesh out any necessary changes to ALT E that they could forward as a recommendation. Brent Ralston and Paul Makela from the Idaho State office were on hand to answer questions and discuss the primary differences between the co-preferred Alternatives D and E, which include some mapping differences in core (State) and priority habitat designations.

Concern was voiced during several different public meetings about the threat of predators on sage-grouse. However, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) does not manage predator species or hunting seasons. Predator control is managed by the State of Idaho under the authority of Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG). The BLM has no jurisdiction on the possible reduction or control policies currently in place. There is a review being conducted by the IDFG examining current predator species (Magpies, ravens) affecting sage-grouse. There are also protection laws currently in place for migratory birds and eagles.

Makela pointed out the predator issues are site specific and there are many variables that will impact a single area. There was a recent study conducted near Jackpot, NV that observed how ravens and magpies affected sage-grouse near populated areas where the human element is evident. This study showed that a transfer station within a few miles of sage-grouse habitat, attracted more predator birds which were in turn destroying sage-grouse nests and removing eggs.

Most all management issues were addressed in ALT D, including invasive species (weeds) fire, livestock grazing, and a host of other management actions in priority sage-grouse habitat. Core issues in ALT E were fire, development, invasive species, and grazing.

Fire was addressed in both alternatives and the main focus is on resource positioning and fuels control. Fuels control will consist of, but not limited to, targeting grazing and fuels breaks. Additionally, there is a focus on invasive, noxious weed species, prioritizing weed control in priority sage-grouse habitat.

Livestock grazing could be used as a tool for targeted fuels management in specific areas that are addressed in the standards and guides.

ALT E is categorized with adaptive management strategies. Every three years all the sage-grouse data for particular areas will be analyzed using the average number of male sage-grouse found each year, habitat loss, and sagebrush. If there is a decline of at least 10% it will trip a soft trigger, which also triggers an evaluation of cause. If grazing management is determined to be the cause then current practices would be reviewed. This trigger will not require an immediate reduction in grazing but will suggest that management practices be looked at. If there is a reduction of over 20% it will trip a hard trigger, if grazing is determined to be the cause, then re-evaluation of current grazing would take place and adjustments would be made to the permit.

ALT D incorporates sage-grouse habitat management objectives into grazing permits within all sage-grouse habitats. BLM would follow existing policies including rangeland health assessments to determine any needed adjustments to grazing practices.

Review of each of the maps used for every ALT

ALT A: No action required by any agency

ALT B: Technical teams reported a map that identified the priority and general habitat. 8.3 million acres identified as priority and 1.9-2 million listed as general.

ALT C: No distinction between the priority and general habitat. It is all listed as priority and handled the same.

ALT D: Areas listed as priority, medial, and general. Priority areas same as those listed in ALT B. Medial areas are those areas in B that could be less restrictive yet still identified as needing protection. 85-90% of leks are accounted for in this ALT

ALT E: similar mapping to D but broken into different criteria: Core areas, important, and general. Conservation areas fall into core and important areas. 75-80% of leks are accounted for in this ALT.

The next step in the process will be to review and respond to the comments received during this public comment period. The plan will then be released for a 30-day protest period and concurrent 60-day Governor's review and hopefully a Record of Decision will be released by the end of September 2014.

This plan should be a helpful regulatory mechanism for the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) for their 2015 decision whether or not to list the sage-grouse as a threatened or endangered species.

Shoshone-Bannock Tribal input and support for more conservation measures is forthcoming based on their review and guidelines.

Jeff Williams made a motion that the Twin Falls Resource Advisory Council support ALT E.

Lamar Orton moved to amend the motion to include the leks that are omitted in ALT E maps but are included in the mapping of ALT D so that a greater number of recognized leks are included.

Discussion: The maps between the two alternatives need to be brought closer together, it is important to maintain flexibility to address issues that may arise. This flexibility is more available in ALT E. Appreciate that there are management protocols in place in ALT D that could respond to issues that may arise.

Amended motion: Recommend ALT E, with the exception that the maps be adjusted to include the increased number of leks (85-90%) that are included in the maps within ALT D.

Motion Passes:

In Favor: 12

Opposed: 1

Abstain 3

Denise Alexander- abstained due the fact that she did not feel familiar with the document and felt that her vote would be ill informed.

Hunter Osborn- had mentioned earlier that the Tribal recommendation would be submitted in the near future

Peggy Stanley

Item V: Budget/Sequestration/Rehabilitation Discussion

Budget overview given by Chris Simonson, Acting Twin Falls District Manager and Associate District Manager

The Appropriations bill has passed the Senate and is waiting on the House. We have a rough idea of what the budget is going to be but will not see real numbers until March. We do expect to see some reductions from the budget that we have seen in the past. Areas where we will be seeing funding reductions are Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation. In the past we have seen funding for several years of post-fire rehabilitation instead we may only see first year funding.

Rehabilitation discussion by Brandon Brown of the Twin Falls District fuels program. He gave a presentation on the Healthy Lands Initiative and treatments being conducted in the Jim Sage/Cotterel Mountain areas. He used a PowerPoint presentation, and handout, accompanied by a video of the masticator at work. [See handout 1]

Since 1996 the Twin Falls Fuels team has conducted 500 treatments on just fewer than 1 million acres across the Twin Falls District.

Treatments include: sage brush planting, chaining, Chain sawing to thin juniper, Grinding, seeding, mastication, prescribed burns, and some chemical applications.

Recently, the Twin Falls District has worked to form a multi-agency corporation project.

Agencies include state, federal, and private individuals working together to rehabilitate priority sage-grouse habitat in the Burley Landscape Restoration Project.

Through these coordination efforts the BLM has been able to greatly reduce rehabilitation costs, and capitalize on a larger pool of resources to accomplish significantly more on the ground work than we could have as a stand-alone agency. Once the Burley Landscape Restoration Project is complete, over \$3 million will have been spent to restore habitat. Below are some of the cost figures that Brown presented:

| Year | Cost of Rehabilitation efforts (dollars) | Amount BLM Spent |
|------|--|------------------|
| 2012 | 254,000 | 32,000 |
| 2013 | 968,000 | 83,000 |

This rehabilitation primarily includes juniper control. Juniper control consists of removing and/or thinning juniper from areas where it has encroached down the mountainside and outcompeted sagebrush and understory vegetation important for sage-grouse.

Brown showed a video of the masticator mulching the junipers. The masticators are effective tools that leave little impact on the soil, and the results create nearly instant habitat, as it opens areas the birds find favorable. At one location a day after treatment BLM employees observed several sage-grouse move into the area.

When asked why the BLM doesn't own a masticator it was explained that the cost of the equipment, operator training, maintenance, and repair are too much for the BLM. Instead we collect bids and contract that work out.

Item VI: Burley Field Office update [See handout 2]

Mike Courtney, Burley Field Manager, presented the update.

Gateway West: Keep in mind that the BLM can only make decisions on public land. They have no influence on private property

South Hills Motorized Vehicles closures: start January 15, 2014 and will run until March 15, 2014. This is to reduce stress on wintering mule deer, and has been in effect for a long time. Our Land use plans do allow for these types of closures.

Drought: The Burley field office is talking to permittees about actions they might need to take in the event of a drought. This includes voluntarily reducing Animal Unit Months (AUMs) during their grazing season, turning out later, or a reduced use season. If need be, the Burley Field office will issue orders to minimize drought impacts on the land.

Item VII: Jarbidge Field Office Update [See handout 3]

Codie Martin, Jarbidge Assistant Field Manager, presented the update.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the signing of The Wilderness Act. Codie is working with several partners to visit the Bruneau Overlook to discuss ideas for its improvement. Potential partners include Shoshone-Paiute Tribes, The Wilderness Society, Idaho Conservation League, Owyhee County Commissioners and several others.

Drought- Ken Crane and staff are also in discussion with permittees about voluntary actions due to drought. These actions may include a reduced number of grazing livestock or a reduction in grazing season dates.

Item VIII: Shoshone Field Office Update [see handout 4&5]

Beth Maclean, Shoshone Field Manager, presented the update.

Dry Creek Trespass: A Notice of Assessment was issued for an Archeological Resources Protection Act violation due to damage caused while illegally removing material from BLM land. There was a decision to assess a \$100,000 fee for the violation. At this time there is a 30 day appeal process for this decision.

Beth was asked if the money collected would go back to the Shoshone Field office or if it just gets paid to the Treasury – she will follow up on this. ***This money is paid to the Treasury.*

The two other trespass charges are being reviewed by the Interior Board of Land Appeals and are separate from this assessment.

Holly Crawford, Craters of the Moon Monument Manager reviewed the Scoping Report for the Craters of the Moon Management Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement [see *handout 5*]

Item IX: Poster Presentation

Shauna Robinson, Historical and Archaeological
Beth Maclean, Shoshone Field Manager

Next Presenters:

Daniel Butler

Christine Vance

Item X: Future Business

- The meeting dates were set for the year and are as follows:
 - April 23, 2014: Mike Courtney suggested that RAC members could benefit from touring a federal grazing permittee's operation to see all of the work they have to do to meet the parameters of their permits. Mike Henslee graciously agreed to host a tour of his operation in Hagerman. He will work with Heather on this date, but for right now, April 23 is tentatively set. June 24, 2014: Field tour to the Bruneau Overlook and the Saylor Creek Wild Horse Herd Management Area
 - September 18, 2014: location to be announced.

Meeting adjourned at 4:20 p.m.

Handouts Provided:

- 1- Jim Sage/ Cotterel Mountains Map (1 pp)
- 2- Burley Field Office Update (3 pp)
- 3- Jarbidge Field Office Update (3 pp)
- 4- Shoshone Field Office Update (2 pp)
- 5- Scoping Report- Craters of the Moon Management Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement (28 pp)

Minutes certified by:

Mike Henslee chairman
Mike Henslee, TFD RAC Chairman

4/11/14
Date

Chris Simonson
Chris Simonson, Associate District Manager (Acting)

3/19/14
Date

Minutes recorded by:
Christine Vance, TFD Contact Representative