

Bureau of Land Management
Central Montana Resource Advisory Council

Chairperson:
Clive Rooney

Vice Chairperson:
Dana Darlington

Members include:
Damien Austin
Troy Blunt
Wayne Fairchild
Hayden Janssen
Mary Jones
Ralph Knapp
Dan Kluck
Jim McCollum
Jeff LaVoi
Jeffrey Patnode
Dave Reinhardt
Hugo Tureck


MEETING MINUTES
For
January 2016





RAC Chairperson

5/14/16
Date



Mark Albers, District Manager

5/14/16
Date

CENTRAL MONTANA RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL

MEETING NOTES

Wednesday, January 26, 2016

RAC Members absent (Day 1): **Mark Wilson, Damien Austin & Clive Rooney**

New Members: **Mary Frieze, Mark Wilson, Jeffrey Patenode**

Chairman: **Dana Darlington**

Facilitator: **Jonathan Moor**

Dana Darlington calls the meeting to order and turns the discussion over to Jonathan Moore.

Jonathan Moor started the meeting. First on the Agenda is new the New Member Orientation: Facilitator welcomes the new members and asks the group to go around and introduce themselves:

-Introductions: **Dana Darlington, Mary Frieze, Jeff LaVoi, Jeffrey Patenone, Ralph Knapp, Hayden Janssen, Jim McCollum, Mark Albers, Dan Kluck, Hugo Tureck, Troy Blunt, Wayne Fairchild, Jonathan Moor.**

Jonathan states the names of absent RAC members and group has a brief discussion to determine if there are enough RAC members from the various groups to vote on any issues.

-it is decided that there are enough members present representing the various sub-groups to form a quorum and that the committee could vote on any issues that came forward in the meeting.

Jonathan puts a list of DO's and Don'ts up in front of the group and goes over the rules of engagement and proper etiquette for RAC Meeting discussions. He reads the list to the group and explains his role as facilitator by explaining that he does not contribute his own ideas, just moves the meeting along, remaining neutral, focus the group on the task on hand, will not allow attack of individuals, from the group or the public, and will defend you either verbally or physically if necessary. His role as facilitator is to get the gist of the discussion written on the board and will capture key comments to the flipchart His intent is to not copy the comment verbatim (word for word) but if the comment needs further explanation, please let him know and he will go through it word for word and make sure he has it right. If he misses a comment that you think is important, please ask him to write is down on the flip chart. The Flip chart acts as collective notes of the group's discussion.

Jonathan further explains the rules for the Public Comment Period. During this time the public can speak to the RAC, but cannot ask questions of them, yet the RAC can ask the public questions. There may be some sort of dialogue during the public discussion but generally the public comment period is for the public to comment to you. During the rest of the meeting, the public is not involved and may only observe. Questions to the BLM staff can be asked during the presentations and feel free to ask them to clarify. He will also assist with travel, explaining and assisting with forms, motel & mileage questions. He will hand these travel vouchers out later today and there will be time in the schedule to go over these, basically it is how a RAC member gets reimbursed for travel expenses.

Jonathan asks Mark Albers if there is anything else he would like to add to the orientation

Mark addresses the group's role by explained that the RAC is a consensus oriented group with a variety of diverse interests and the purpose is, as the name implies, an advisory group. Mark mentions that full consensus is a powerful statement but very rare. The voting works with a thumbs up if you fully agree, thumbs down if in disagreement, and a thumbs sideways if you can live with the decision but are not in full support or agreement. On some items we will have a majority and want to move forward with a recommendation but there will be a faction of members that do not agree. If this happens, a minority report will go into the record explaining the rationale behind disagreement.

Mark adds that personally the discussions that come from these meetings are the most beneficial and he really looks for the groups' guidance. He likes to see the interaction within the group and hearing from the different opinions and points of view, whether or not a consensus is reached, and the discussion is really valuable. He would like the RAC to identify the issues that are important to the group and find those big picture items that the group can really sink their teeth into and gain momentum from meeting to meeting while striving to make progress in between. If it is something outside of the scope of the RAC, we will let you know. Mark identified the issues that, by law, the RAC cannot make recommendations to. This includes Budget, funding, and staffing. We can give you updates on those but the RAC cannot tell the BLM how to spend their budget. Some meeting agendas are lighter than others but he believes that it is important to get together and have these discussions to keep everyone in the loop.

Jonathan asked the new members if they had any questions. None were noted.

Mark Albers asked Jonathan to go over the voting rules among the three subgroups with five members each and if three members for each category are present then the committee can vote. If we fall short of these requirements, we can still meet and have a discussion but would not be able to vote on anything until a quorum is reached at a later date. He mentions that this has only happened a few times in the past.

Jonathan Moore hand out a list of the current RAC members that has their contact information so that members can contact each other is needed. He wants to stress that this list is not a public distribution roster, just the RAC members, because it lists all of their information that some members might not want to be handed out to the public. For the public that asks, there is a list of RAC members available but does not list their personal information. Some corrections

were noted by the group and marked on the contact list. Jonathan goes over the list and points out how to read the list to tell what subgroup a member belongs to and also time served on the RAC and the date their term expires. This list is how the committee decides if there are enough members present in each category to form a quorum. Jonathan goes over the voting process of showing thumbs up to express that you are in favor, thumbs down to vote opposed, or thumbs sideways to express your vote with reservation. Some clarification may need to be addressed to note your reservations on a particular issue to add to the record.

Dana Darlington asked if everyone got a copy of the last meeting notes. Since everyone did not have a copy, the minutes were put up on the screen. Meeting notes were reviewed and read out loud to the group. These notes were from the October 6th 2015 RAC meeting at the Chinook Motor Inn in Chinook, Montana, and the full notes read today are in the October 6th 2015 meeting notes. Some changes to the notes included: in regards to the Alkali Flat discussion on page 3, Hayden Janson wanted to clarify his statement that he didn't want BLM involved as a liable party and held accountable by taking any action.

Mark Albers thanked Dana for reading the minutes and explained that our normal protocol would be for Jonathan Moore to get these notes out prior to the meeting and the group can review them before the next meeting.

Wayne Fairchild motioned that the group accept the minutes from the last meeting and Jim McCollum seconded the motion. Motion was carried by Dana Darlington and the vote was to accept the last meeting notes.

Elections for two positions were held. Dana Darlington opened the meeting up to nominations for Chairman and Vice Chair positions. Hugo Turek nominated Clive Rooney to serve another term and mentioned he has been a great chairman and has agreed to another term. Wayne Fairchild seconded the nomination. Hayden Janson expressed interest in the chairman position but offered his support for Clive if he wants to retain his position another term. Hayden mentioned the things that he could bring to the table if Chairman would be to provide some continuity of the major discussion from meeting to meeting, encourage more public participation to the meetings and community involvement through outreach and by acting as a contact for the public to bring up their concerns at the next meeting if they were not able to attend the meeting.

Jim McCollum moves that they vote if there are no other nominations. Hayden was asked if he wanted to be nominated and run against Clive but Hayden said he did not. Jim McCollum did want to note that during the last meeting Clive had said he would prefer at that time to not be the chairman for another term but if he has changed his mind then he thinks his nomination is appropriate. Nominations were closed and a vote for Clive was held and the group accepted retaining Clive as Chairman and the motion was carried.

Dana Darlington opened the floor up to the Vice Chairman position. Dana Darlington was nominated by Ralph Knapp and seconded by Dan Kluck. Nominations were closed and a vote was held. Dana Darlington was retained as Vice Chairman and the motion was carried.

Hugo Tureck asked Hayden Janson if he would clarify his statement that he made about why he was interested in being nominated for the Chairman position and Hayden made the following points:

- He would be interested in the chairman position to strive for more continuity of the agenda and said that over the past couple of meetings, the group has had some pretty serious discussions on major topics such as the Durfee Hills and Bullwhacker exchange. Hayden thinks that the agenda for today's meeting does not bring forth those issues and thus there is no appearance of continuity from the last discussion to today's meeting reflected in the agenda.
- He would attempt to do more outreach to members of the public specifically by creating an email account so that interested members of the public could send questions and comments to the either himself or the group. In the last meeting we had just one public comment and today we have none. He would like to encourage more public participation by allowing the public to voice their opinion to the RAC members thru email in addition to the public comment meetings which require attendance at a RAC meeting during the specified public comment period.

Hugo Tureck commended Hayden and thought it was a noble idea to encourage the public to participate more and wishes he knew how to get more public comment. He goes on to give examples of how, over the years, the RAC has tried to work on it. Hugo states that the RAC has moved the public comment period from 8 AM to 10AM to make it more convenient for people and thinks the continuity is a good question, and he is not sure how it would be addressed. He mentions that he wonders sometime how we can move but not follow up but maybe there will be time today bring forth those issues for continuity sake.

Mark Albers mentioned that those items are all going to be discussed in the managers update

Hayden mentions that his idea of creating an email account could also encourage members of the RAC that couldn't make the meeting so that their voices could be heard in one capacity or another.

Hugo expressed that he wouldn't know how to do that and asks the group if they thought that someone should be able to make a public comment even though there not here.

Hayden stated that no, he was not encouraging that but what he would actually do is try to develop an email account for the High-Line RAC and put out a letter to the editor in the three major newspapers on the High-line stating that if anyone is interested in providing feedback, or ideas, comments, suggestions, concerns on topics that the RAC discusses and they would prefer that those be presented by a RAC member. His idea is that those concerns could be brought up during the round table discussion by a RAC member on their behalf, especially if they were not be able to attend in person during the question or comment period. That was going to be my proposal which I could still follow thru on if that is something that the group could agree on.

Hugo asks if that is something that you could still do now.

Hayden replies absolutely and asks if that is something that the group can all agree on and comfortable with. Hayden adds then maybe we can save this for the roundtable discussion as a suggestion that he was going to propose for increasing public involvement and soliciting outreach on RAC meeting issues to encourage public participation instead of relying on the Lewistown and Great Falls BLM to get the message out to the public. Hayden adds, not that the information isn't being handed out but to encourage it to be more of a two way street.

Hugo responds that he thinks there has been a struggle and we attempt to move the meetings around to different communities. He adds that the one place we haven't been is Helena, and now we have two RAC members from Helena. He thinks we have tried to move the meetings around and that hasn't solved the problem either, but at least there was an attempt.

Jim McCollum adds that there is a good example of the issue being discussed in what he would consider a fairly prominent article today in the Great Falls Tribune talking about this meeting giving the times of the public comment period and stating that the public is welcome to attend and comment. Jim makes the point as no members of the public are present for the public comment period that you can see the response from that. Jim goes on to say that maybe there will be some people tomorrow but he thinks that this idea of having an email address that people could send comments might be a good way to give people an additional way of making contacts with the group.

Dana Darlington agrees that an email account would be a great idea and that it would probably fit in with the roundtable sessions. He gives the example that if 10 emails saying basically the same thing were received by the category 2 RAC representatives, then that RAC member could bring that issue up at the round table discussion.

Troy Blunt adds: Part of the issue is that the public is not always aware of the RAC's agenda; maybe it is there if they search for it but it's not always on the front page of the newspaper either so people aren't aware that maybe at this meeting, a certain issue is being addressed. He adds that when those issues come to the forefront, then people are pretty good about coming forward and commenting, but half the time most of the public doesn't understand what's on the agenda and we as RAC members can only get that out to the public so much. Sometimes the RAC members don't even know what exactly is on the agenda until the last minute.

Hugo adds that the agenda we send out is pretty bland, typical BLM blandness, there's really nothing there to excite the public. Mark has said he is going to bring up in his comments some of these issues up today but it is not out saying Mark Albers will be discussing these issues today. He thinks this is part of the problem; it is pretty bland and wouldn't draw his attention either but maybe that is by design not to draw you in.

Hayden follows up on his thoughts on the discussion about public participation and outreach saying:

He would like to encourage getting the agenda and the meeting notes out to the RAC members and the public at least a week in advance. He would like to be more proactive in

getting the agenda and meeting notes out to the RAC members, and then it would give the opportunity for more public involvement. That way when the newspapers do their article and say were going to meet and these are the topics being discussed a day or two before, and then encourage the public to participate. With his idea of having an email account for the public to send in their comments if they couldn't make the meeting, they could still send us an email and mention the issues that they would like to see discussed. If this account were established at least there would be some sort of meeting notice sent out from that source as well.

Troy states, that was his point, since the agenda didn't come out until the day before, he missed it because he didn't check his email. Not that it is big deal, but having at least a week or ten days before is much more relevant to prepare for the meeting and getting the word out to the public about what's going on.

Hayden adds that he would like to see the meeting notes sent out ahead of time also. If we could have them ahead of the next meeting, we could bring up to approve or make any corrections and then save Dana from having to read them at the meeting. Hayden would like to establish that the RAC meeting agenda and notes, from these two days, be sent out a week to ten days ahead of the next meeting. This in his mind would help encourage more public participation and public comment plus would be appreciated by the RAC.

Ralph Knapp asks if the BLM is required to do any posting because for the county, where he works, we cannot have a meeting for anything without posting notice.

Mark Albers clarifies the federal register process and says that because we are required to post the RAC meeting dates and agenda 30 days in advance or else we can't meet. He states further that because of this advanced notice requirements, the agendas tend to be a bit generic at that point. Mark agrees that we can do a better job at posing the agenda and having the meeting notes available in that interim

Ralph emphasizes that the county has to post their agenda in only one newspaper and having the RAC notice go out statewide with the federal register requirement; he would not be sure how to improve the agenda given those requirements.

Jonathan Moor said that he distributes a press release to all the newspapers in our area specifically to the Central Montana and Hi-Line newspapers. He generally sends this out about two weeks before the meeting. It then is up to the newspaper editors to choose to carry this or not. Helena's Independent Record, the Lewistown News Argus, Carl Puckett from the Great Falls Tribune are just some examples of where the information gets posted. Some papers pick it up; some papers post it along with all of the other events going on in the area. He suggests that you contact to your local newspaper, to impress upon the editor how important this is to the community and ask them for coverage then that might help.

Dana Darlington has done some research on the subject and has taken a look at how other RAC's present some of their issues and he makes the following comparison: Having looked at how other RAC's operate in Wyoming and other areas of the Midwest, by comparison to the

Montana/Dakotas RAC he thinks the and public participation is being stalled because we have avoided some of the hot topics

RAC Member Introductions

Dana Darlington would like to wait a few more minutes to see if anyone shows interest in the public comment period and turns the floor over to the facilitator to introduce the new RAC members.

Jonathan Moor introduces himself and starts the new member orientation portion of the meeting. Members go around the table and give their introductions stating their name and category. All members give a brief introduction including where they reside and what sub-group they represent. This information can be found on the BLM's website under RAC members or by contacting Jonathan Moore and requesting a public RAC Roster.

Public Comment Period

No members of the public arrived for the public comment period and Dana said that we will give it another 15 minutes and a decision was made to move on to introductions for the benefit of the new RAC members. Dana Darlington calls for the Public Comment period to officially close. No public comments were received today.

District Managers Report

Dana Darlington introduces BLM District Manager Mark Albers for his district manager update. Mark starts out by saying that he has a lot of topics to cover today, some of which are purely informational in nature and he will just run thru those while other announcements are some are those big ticket items that are ongoing discussions. He would like to go thru the informational updates briefly first and then when he gets into those bigger issues; instead of just being an update he will take questions and comments from the group. That way we can have a discussion instead of him just going on the whole time.

Personnel Changes Updates

Jamie Connell is on detail as State Director in Oregon for 4 months. She got called out a little earlier than expected and he suspects that she is dealing with the refuge takeover there. Filling in behind her is Aden Seidlitz, Associate State Director from New Mexico. Has Montana Connections, he grew up in Chester

Kate Kitchell retired from the Montana/Dakotas Assistant State Director position. Kate has decided to stay with the BLM a little longer and has agreed to a position in Oregon to lead a new science initiative for the BLM out of Oregon. Filling in behind Kate Kitchell is John Raby who left an Associate District Manager position in Oregon. John has really hit the ground running and seems to be a good fit our organization. He's currently getting settled in.

Pete McFadden was selected as the new Lewistown Field Manager starting March 6th. Pete is coming from the State office in Billings where he is presently Chief of the Lands Branch, before

that he was Head of Technical Services in Denver at the NOC. Pete has also served in the Associate Field Manager position for the Billings State Office so he knows the Montana/Dakotas Organization well.

Vanita Shea, the Malta Field Manager is retiring February 29th. We are moving forward with filling that position soon. He hopes to not have that position out for very long.

Stanley Jaynes is Acting Field Manager in Lewistown until Pete McFadden gets there; Stanley is the Field Manager out of Havre. Filling in behind Stanley as Acting Field Manager in Havre is Craig Miller until Stanley comes back

Oil and Gas Leasing Update

With regards to the number of Law suits and RMP's being out of date over the years, we have had to defer oil and gas leases for a long time (some 10 years or more) and over that time some 2200 parcels were deferred and now the BLM is going back in and looking at those leases and see where those lie. The RMP says we will prioritize leases located outside of Priority Sage Grouse Habitat and that is what is happening now. That process of putting these leases for sale will be in October and I will give you an update at that time.

Durfee Hills Trespass Update

I know the group was disappointed last time that we could not give you much of the particulars, prepare to be disappointed again. I can give you the broad strokes. We have prepared a report and documented what happened up there with cost estimates to correct the situation. The BLM came up with cost estimated and sent the Wilkes Brothers a Settlement plan or settlement proposal. We presented the proposal to the Wilkes Brothers noting the cost of rehabilitation to the land, where the fence needs to be moved, an assessment for timber that was damaged and the cost of the survey. Now the ball is in their court and we will wait for their response. They can accept our proposal or submit their own.

Hayden asked what the timeframe to respond is. Mark replied that it is open ended and if something does not happen in say a month, then the BLM will make a decision as to what the next steps are. Mark is convinced that there will not be any issues as the Wilkes have already corrected some of the issues and have been really good to work with.

Jim McCollum asked how many acres or linear feet were disturbed. Mark said the BLM has verified that some amount of public land was disturbed and requiring mitigation and stabilization.

Hugo Turek asked if when the Wilkes lowered or raised the wires, or both, on the fence were they only required to move it on land when the fence was adjacent to BLM.

Mark Albers responded: Yes when it was attached to or in the near proximity of the BLM. Mark mentioned that the Unlawful Enclosure act prohibits a landowner from restricting wildlife movement even if the fence is all on private land. They were really good to work with and they immediately fell into whatever BLM standards are.

Bullwhacker/Durfee Hills Exchange Land Exchange

Mark Albers stated that he looked long and hard at this issue and the decision fell upon him by virtue of Stan's retirement. He mentioned the previous discussions with the group and that there have been a series of proposals from the Wilkes. He said that after much deliberation he has decided not to engage in this and not move forward with this particular land exchange at this point. He mentioned that land exchanges take a considerable amount of staff time and there is no guarantee that they will go thru. Mark mentions that when he looks at all the other things going on he doesn't see a way to take this on. Mark did mention that doesn't mean that when a different proposal is presented in the future we won't take another look.

Jim McCollum asks where that leaves the Bullwhacker Road access. Mark says he wants to look at all of the options and will not commit to putting another road in that area. He mentions that the soils are unstable and the current road was put on top of the ridge and is in the right place for the types of soils. Mark asks the RAC if someone wants to set up a sub-committee to research the subject. Mark goes on to explain that as a BLM manger he has to decide what the organization can take on in addition to the normal day to day operations. Mark feels that there would be several responsibilities that the BLM would have to forego in order to take on something of this scale and with no guarantee of success.

Hayden asks Mark to clarify what he means when he says the exchange will not be considered in its current configuration and Mark responded that is correct. Hayden asks as a point of clarification that the BLM would still consider a land exchange. Mark adds that if any proponent were to come forward with any land exchanges, the BLM would respond and will consider the proposed action, weigh the alternatives, and respond with a decision. However, this proposal in its current configuration is not something that the BLM chooses to move forward and commit to a public process

Hugo asks if the BLM did sit down with the Wilks and Mark replied that yes they sat down with the Wilks last fall to discuss the proposal. Hugo inquires further if the BLM explained to the Wilkes what their proposal was lacking? Mark replied, no. Hugo asks why? Mark replied because it wasn't my proposal and they have to present their proposal and then the BLM assesses the proposal from a discretionary perspective, it is not up to the BLM to tell the proponent how to conduct their business.

The discussion ends with Hugo asking Mark if he could share with the RAC how many people used the road last year. The number 1000 plus was offered and Hugo stated that some of the people using the road were there purely for recreation in addition to the hunters using the road.

Dana Darlington stated that he thinks Mark should be recognized for his foresight to realize that this is not what the BLM is looking for at this time. Dana adds that he agrees that it is not the BLM's place to counter offer, it is up to the Wilks to come up with another configuration. He adds that he thinks that Mark made a wise decision based on the budget and limited resources. Mark adds that this is a tough exchange to consider.

Hayden asked Mark if the BLM gave the Wilks any advice on what necessary components were lacking.

Someone asks if there is a time frame within which they need to respond. Mark replied that the intent of our meeting was to discuss monetary value since there was a public perception about the value of the exchange.

Hayden asked Mark Albers for an update for Alkali Flats. Mark's response that we are still meeting with the county no work has been done this winter except for putting up a flashing light and a sensor. Jim McCollum asked about any law suits are coming out. Mark said yes, there were a few and the BLM is named but he is not sure what the DOT's action will be.

Dana Darlington asked if there is a timeframe for travel planning in Phillips County. Mark indicated that the BLM was following guidance to do the travel planning within 5 years of the RMP. He also said there was some travel management planning in the Little Rockies that will occur first and then the plan is to move on to travel management planning in the Sage Grouse priority habitat areas.

Hugo Turek asked about the Prairie Foundation and their proposal for removing fences on allotments. Mark said this is about the Flat Creek Grazing Allotment appended to a piece of ground that the American Prairie Foundation bought and are proposing to change 3 things: Convert the allotment to the grazing of indigenous bison, to remove internal fences, and to allow for year round grazing. Mark explained that it is the BLM's job to look at this proposal and they went thru a year- long NEPA process and when that came out we had 130 protest letters. We are in the process of cataloguing those and forming our response to the potential to move forward with a decision. Mark went on further to explain the process and reiterated that several things need to happen before the final decision is reached.

Jim McCollum asked if the BLM preliminarily agreed with their proposal and Mark responded yes we agreed with the preliminary proposal.

Hugo Turek asked if the Prairie Foundation were in the process of moving fences. Mark responded no, without a final decision, bison are not allowed on the allotment and none of the proposed plans can move forward.

Mark Albers spoke of several misconceptions that exist with the proposal. Mark mentioned that year round grazing is still only able to take a certain amount of forage off the range and would mean that only half of the allowed animals would be allowed per year as a six month grazing lease. He went on further to explain that several grazing allotments in the district that are much larger and have no internal fences so that is not the big make it or break it deal. He mentioned that any proposed action would have to express how the ranch intends to meet standards and guides and it would depend on the merit of the proposal whether the BLM approved or denied the request. The Malta Field manager Vinita Shea looked at the initial proposal and agreed that it did conform the BLM's rangeland standards and guides. He also mentions that this particular proposal is in priority Sage Grouse habitat and would also have to meet those standards and guides

Troy Blunt would like to bring attention to the fact that the Flat Creek proposals final decision was issued on December 28th and we had until January 20th to respond with a public comment and you received 130 of those. As a point of clarification, Troy would like to express his concern for the amount of attention this proposal has received.

Mark goes on to explain the comment period further and discussed the process set by 30 year old standards and the rules being followed in accordance with these regulations.

Hugo Turek asked if there is still going to be a chance for the public to comment and Marks response was that if a final decision is made, then there is an appeal period and the decision can be appealed. Mark further goes on to mention that the BLM is taking a very deliberate approach to this decision and we are going to take the time to sort thru all of the comments and see what protest points were made and attempt to address these by measuring their conformance with the law. He mentions that the process is far from over and the BLM is going to take the time sorting thru all of the issues before a final decision comes out and that even one protest letter can stop a proposed action if it is substantial.

Hayden asks how many of the 130 protests dealt with the first proposed change of converting the allotment to Bison. Mark replies that he does not know, he did not see all of the proposals and he has asked for a synopsis from the specialists and that should be forthcoming. Hayden would like to know how the bigger BLM allotments went about removing the internal fences. Marks response was that the internal fences were never built but says that is less common to remove them and he cannot think of any allotments where internal fences were removed but mention that the grazing lease still has to conform with season of use specifications even when year round use is allowed.

Hayden asks if there is a precedent set for removing fences and year round use. Mark does not think there is a precedent for removing fences but mentions that there has been precedent set for allowing year round use.

Jim McCollum asks how many AUM's are currently tied to the allotment. 385 bison year round and 1247 AUM' are mentioned and Jim asks if they are asking for year round use.

Discussion of the AUM's and grazing standards being met centers around some of the specifics of the proposal and the comment is made that the allotment would have to be very productive to meet the proposed use. Mark responds that he does not know if the numbers add up but that was something that was protested and the BLM specialists will have to go back in and look. Our intent is once we figure all that out, we will make the comments public.

LUNCH BREAK 12:30

Dana Darlington calls the meeting to break for lunch. Meeting will resume at 1:30 after lunch.

Mark Albers would like to add one more update to the managers' report on State designation selections in Hill County and BLM is in discussion with the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) and in

the process of getting some of these transferred back to the BLM. Since BLM does not manage farm ground, it will then be transferred to the DNRC.

COAL BANKS BOAT RAMP UPDATES

Dana Darlington calls the meeting to order and introduces Mike Kania who is here today to give the group an update on the Coal Banks Landing boat ramp.

COAL BANKS BOAT RAMP UPDATES

Mike Kania addresses the group to talk about the Coal Banks Landing boat ramp filling in with sediment and the result of the 2011 and 2013 flood events. Mike goes on to explain that about mid-summer, the boat launch is virtually unusable to launch a motorboat but canoes can still launch. The BLM has been approached by a local landowner and the BLM would like to pursue the possibility of another location that would be more suitable. We talked to a landowner who owns a chunk of land on the North shore of the Virgelle Ferry. He may be interested in selling or swapping that property to the BLM. This spring the landowner expressed that he would really like to do a land exchange which as Mark Albers mentioned this morning can be a long and drawn out process. The BLM's response was to ask the landowner if he would be interested in selling the property to the BLM instead. This proposal led the landowner to ask how much the BLM would offer to buy the property. Our position is that the BLM can only pay fair market value and we cannot come up with a monetary value without getting an appraisal. Mike mentioned that we came back to propose selling the BLM 5 acres along river (about ¼ mile) just past the Virgelle Ferry and he was going to think about it. That was a couple of months ago and we are still waiting to hear the landowner's response and that is where we are at in the process.

Jim McCollum asked about what happened to pursuing the property that is adjacent to the Campground just upstream. Mike Kania mentioned that that property is owned by the same landowner and he is not willing to sell that piece to maintain a buffer with the house occupied by his son or daughter just upstream.

The group asked for clarification of where this alternate proposed boat ramp would be located. Mike responded that it was just downstream of the ferry operator's house and on the Big Sandy side of the river. It would be on the North side of the river and if you came from Big Sandy or Virgelle it would be just before the ferry crossing downstream of the ferry.

Jim McCollum asked about a long term lease. Mike replied that is our next step in the negotiations. Our first preference is to purchase but if that is not an option we would pursue a long term lease.

Dana Darlington says that to sell 5 acres, the landowner would have to go thru all of the subdivision requirements and process.

Hayden asks if the BLM would offer the same services that currently exist at the Coal Banks Landing such as a vault toilet and parking area. Mike says his thoughts are to have a vault

toilet, parking area, and a concrete boat ramp. Mike also mentions that before we could move forward in the process, engineers would have to assess the feasibility of a boat ramp but preliminary examination suggests that it would be.

Jim McCollum recommends that the BLM do some sort of hydrological study of the proposed action to better predict how long this option would be viable. Mike agreed and if the landowner was in fact interested, we would do a more comprehensive study.

Dana Darlington asks what would happen to the current boat ramp and campground. Mike responded that it is still a nice place to launch a canoe and we would keep everything the way it is.

Wayne Fairchild stated that the Coal Banks Landing during mid-season is not an option to launch a motor boat. He further explains that the boat ramp can get pretty congested during the summer with just canoes launching, however there are other options for canoes to launch over the bank or off of the island. Wayne believes that it would help spread out use and alleviate the congestion that occurs at the peak of the season. Mike Kania states that he is confident that if we built a new boat launch at this alternate location it would get used. Wayne agrees and the Mike thanks the group for their time.

FORESTRY PROJECTS PRESENTATION

Bruce Reid, Lewistown BLM's Forester presents a power-point presentation about current and planned commercial forestry and per commercial thinning projects he is working on around the state. The biggest project coming this year is a 2 million board feet harvest target in the Moccasin Mountains.

Dana Darlington asks how far the logs would have to travel to a mill. Bruce responded that the lumber would have to be milled at one of the bigger yards and mentions three: RY Timber in Townsend or Livingston, Plum Creek Timber in Columbia Falls, and Pyramid Lumber in Seeley Lake. He mentions that the logs would have to travel anywhere between 150 and 300 miles to the mill but even with the cost of transport, he expects the sale to net between \$200,000 - \$250,000 and would still be profitable.

Mary Frieze asks if this project is located on the South side of the Moccasins. Bruce replied yes, it would be on the South side of the Moccasins located just above the mine.

Jim McCollum asks if the mill in Judith Gap were an option. Bruce elaborated that the mill in Judith Gap closed about ten years ago. He mentions there was an Amish run mill closer to Moore but he heard that mill just closed recently as well but they were really not able to process the volume of timber expected to be harvested in this sale.

Jim McCollum inquires if the BLM would consider opening up the bid so that 2 mills could work together. Bruce said that this happens all the time and explains that one of the major mills is usually the primary bidder but has the ability to sub or contract out some of the timber. Bruce explains that some mills want a particular species for pulp or post and pole and the primary

mill will work with those smaller mills and sub contract those tree products for that particular market. As a sale administrator, Bruce indicated that he only works with the primary bidder but in fact the timber is probably being sold to other mills depending on the species and diameter.

Mark Albers asks Bruce about the temporary roads built for logging projects and if they try to keep the public off of them. Bruce replied that they did try to but some people are going to go anywhere they want to and typically these temporary roads are built just before the sale. He mentions that when the sale is active there is equipment on site and at a minimum; they try to block these temporary roads to keep people off of them primarily for safety concerns.

Dana Darlington asks about increased wildlife in the 2-3 year period after the harvest because of all the new growth. Bruce replied that you should get increased wildlife because of all the new browse species that grow back immediately after the sale such as new aspen and other shrub species that typically wildlife desire mentioning choke cherry and snow berry as well as the grasses and forbs.

Mary Frieze wanted to know when the trees come back and are spaced closely together like hairs on the mountainside does the BLM go back and thin these trees out. Bruce replied that typically in about a 5 to 10 year timeframe, crews try to go back in and thin the new stand but mentions that sometimes funding is an issue and it can be challenging to find the money to hire the crews to do the work. Bruce goes on to say that fortunately a lot of our stands are not growing back that thick and with proper management techniques that shouldn't be an issue.

The group thanks Bruce and Dana calls for a 15 minute break.

BREAK

SAGE GROUSE PROJECT PRESENTATION

Matt Comer, the Lewistown BLM's Wildlife biologist presents a power-point presentation about current and planned Sage Grouse Priority Habitat improvement projects. The majority of the projects involve cutting conifers and junipers over 3 foot tall to reduce raptor roosts and placing tags on fence lines. Matt's presentation provides several before and after photos of the project sites.

Ralph Knapp comments that it doesn't look like that many trees were taken out and asks if the few trees that were cut really make a difference to the sage grouse habitat.

Matt replied, Yes it does. That change on the habitat really does make a difference to Sage Grouse.

Stanley Jaynes makes a comment saying that any time you have those raptor roosts in the habitat; the Sage Grouse avoid that area

Matt said yes that usually when you see a raptor they are sitting on the tallest thing around like a phone pole or the tallest tree hunting Sage Grouse; it is really easy for them to pick them off.

Jim McCollum asks if Matt had any pictures of landscapes that might have been protected from wildfire that might show what the habitat would look like if you didn't go in do these improvements to Sage Grouse habitat.

Matt replied that yes some areas that Bruce Reid showed in his presentation are good examples. Matt suggests that anywhere that you have Ponderosa and Douglas fir coming back in they grow back pretty quickly. Matt mentions Bozeman and Butte forested areas as examples. He mentions the Juniper comes in much slower

Hayden asks if there are any project areas that are adjacent to state land and if so is the state cooperating with you on these projects.

Matt replies absolutely, and mentions working with Clive Rooney in 2015 but there wasn't much, maybe 25 acres.

Bruce Reid offers that the encroachment projects around White Sulphur Springs that Rich Byron worked on where the trees were only 25-30 years old was in conjunction with the state.

Stanley asks if there are any examples of where we are losing some Sage Grouse habitat as a result of our management practices.

Bruce Reid mentions that natural processes were what have typically kept these areas clear and that by simply putting out fires on the landscape we have affected these areas. If the fires are not allowed to manage the natural landscape, there may be areas where trees are growing where they typically did not historically grow.

Hugo Turek mentions that he has both Sage brush and Greasewood on his ranch and wants to know how those two species growing together affect Sage Grouse habitat.

Matt suggests that there is evidence that Sage Grouse have nested under Greasewood and that is typically what is growing in wetter areas. Hugo and Matt discuss the potential for Greasewood to be planted in some areas and Matt suggests that there would have to be a lot of water to get greasewood to coexist with Sage brush because it is not very tolerant

Someone asks if there is a map of the project areas available.

Matt said probably not with the Leks identified but he is just using a standard Quad map in his presentation and anyone can buy this at the BLM offices around the state. He explains that you can get the priority habitat map off the internet from the Lewistown BLM site.

Hugo asks if as people find out more and more about Sage Grouse is there anyone coming to view them?

Matt said he thinks that most people are unwilling to get up that early and he doesn't see an increased interest.

Hugo asks that if that is the case maybe some of the work we are doing in Sage Grouse habitat may be unwarranted.

Matt infers that it is a matter of opinion

A member of the public speaks up and makes a comment outside of the public comment period and Jonathan Moor explains that the public comment period is over and suggests that he come back tomorrow during the public comment period.

Matt Comer wraps up his presentation and walks out with the gentleman who wanted more information to discuss

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN (RMP) UPDATES PRESENTATION

Dan Brunkhorst gives the group updates on the Lewistown Resource Management Plan (RMP) Revision process and expects a draft would be available to the public this summer and mentions that the final Record of Decision (ROD) to come sometime at the end of the Year around December 27th 2017.

Hayden asks how long has it been since the current RPM was finalized.

Dan stated that there are two that the Lewistown BLM has been operating under, the Headwaters RMP finalized in 1984 and the Judith RMP since 1994.

Hugo asks if Square Butte is a Wilderness Study Area (WSA).

Dan replies that yes among other things Square Butte is a Wilderness Study Area (WSA), an Outstanding Natural Area (ONA) an Area of Critical Concern (ACEC) and a Research Natural Area (RNA) as there are several parcels the BLM has acquired since the 1980's that are outside of the (WSA)

Hugo asks how we deal with people creating OHV areas daily.

Dan responded that is a trespass issue and in this process we are only trying to identify what roads we have as of now in the inventory process. Dan mentions that travel management planning is occurring separate from the RMP and we hope to deal with these issues.

Hugo asks if planes can land on those pirated roads.

Dan said yes that is true that planes can land on existing roads if they have ruts and have existed for some time because the BLM considers those to be open since there is no travel management plan. Dan also states that the travel management plan will have to address those issues.

Hugo asks if he thinks this would be regulated in the future.

Hugo said that the Forest Service and the state regulates this but the BLM does not.

Hayden asks for clarification of an OSV.

Dan said it refers to Over the Snow Vehicles (OSV)

Jim McCollum asks in regards to land and reality if in the RMP under disposal if the BLM is going to identify chunks of public land that they would want to get rid of.

Dan said that there would be a pool of possible lands that we would look at when exchanges occur.

Dan wraps up the presentation by stating that a lot of the current management actions would be carried forward in the RMP revision process. He states that the idea of the RMP revision is to carry forward those things that were working while trying to change what doesn't make sense anymore from a management standpoint.

10 MINUTE BREAK

ROUND ROBIN @ 3:30

Dana Darlington brings the meeting back to order and there is a brief discussion of the next meeting date and travel vouchers.

Hayden asks if the meeting notes from the July 2015 RAC meeting are posted and approved.

Jonathan responds that they are not. There was a concern brought forward by Clive Rooney that the notes did not accurately reflect the discussion and he wanted more verbatim in them.

Dana says the group will have to wait and talk to Clive to hear what his issue with the July 2015 notes is.

Jonathan says that we will get that all squared away.

Dana Darlington

Dana Darlington starts the roundtable discussion by reading a letter that he drafted and sent to the BLM and the Secretary of the Interior in response to a DOI Interior June 26th 2015 video presentation that suggests we need to concentrate people in the cities so we can let the wild lands be wild. Dana has a concern about the perception being portrayed and frustrated as a rancher.

Discussion leads to the rumor that the American Prairie Foundation (APF) is acquiring the PN Ranch along the Missouri river in the Monument.

Mark Albers explains that the BLM's position is to not advocate either way for projects like this. He said that if they buy the land then they can apply for the grazing permit if they buy the base property. He further explains that if the state of Montana allows land to be purchased and hold title then there is nothing the BLM can do. There is no BLM discretion of who can buy and hold title to land in Montana.

Dana mentions that other RAC groups in Wyoming do things a little differently and thinks their RAC is more involved in their grazing issues. Dana expresses that he doesn't feel like he has served any purpose if there is no say so on these sorts of issues and the RAC is split. He would like some sort of record that this is a real issue and would like to know how this or any RAC group could move forward to address these sorts of issues.

Mark Albers said that the hard part of being on the RAC is that the RAC cannot take these issues on but rather bring forth issues as a discussion. He mentions that if the group does identify an issue and they have consensus then they would then have a direct link to the Secretary of the Interior and that can be a powerful thing. He stressed the need for the group to seek out these issues with the public they represent and bring forth those issues that the RAC has consensus on. Mark offers the idea that the group could form a subgroup

Hugo Turek asks if standards and guides of the RAC process have changed and asked if the group should review those.

Mark Albers said that nothing has changed but he has noticed that standards and guides only set the minimum bar. Mark asks the group to think about if there is anything else they want to above the minimum bar

Hugo suggests that the group used to take on those types of big issues and that somewhere along the way have lost their focus.

Mark Albers goes on to say that the BLM is working on several management plans and stated that the travel management plan being developed for the Lewistown field office was a big deal. There are thousands of miles of roads being considered in this plan. Mark mentions that maybe this is one of the big issues that the RAC wants to take on.

Hayden wants to know if he could put forth a motion at this time.

Troy Blunt said we should probably go around the roundtable first.

Mary Frieze asks about Flat Creek and wanted to know if a sub-committee was formed.

Mark Albers responded that the group voted to defer forming a sub group at the last meeting.

Mary wanted to know where that issue lies.

Jeff LaVoi

Jeff LaVoi has nothing to add to the roundtable discussion, but mentions he still hears about the Robinson Ranch from his constituents.

Jeff Patenode

Jeff Patenode has nothing for the roundtable discussion

Hayden Jansen

Hayden said he already presented his ideas earlier

Jim McCollum brings the Durfee Hill and Bull Whacker areas into the discussion. Jim would like to compare use levels in these two areas and mentions that although a land exchange was controversial at first, he thinks that more people would see merit in the proposal and suggests that more people would be in favor and be perceived as a net benefit to more people, particularly in the hunting community. Jim thinks there will be a lot of disappointment when people hear that this proposal is not being considered. Jim doubts that this issue will go away over time and goes further to suggest that if the public were able to comment in a legal format there would be some direction coming forward as a result. Jim also states that he understands the BLM's position.

Mary Frieze

Mary Frieze asks about a subcommittee on the Bull Whacker issue would satisfy people's needs

This comment leads to a group discussion on the subject.

Jeff LaVoi speaks to the issue by saying he personally saw a significant use of the Durfee hills area. Jeff goes on to suggest that the consensus in Lewistown is that those are two different issues as they are separate parcels that the people in Lewistown consider both as resources. He mentions the community's resentment that these two areas were pitted against each other. Jeff also brings forth the quandary of why does someone in Lewistown care about Bull Whacker to suggest that the truth of the matter is that they do care about Bull Whacker and gaining access to that.

Mark Albers mentions that he has never seen such a contentious issue and that usually everyone is in agreement when a land exchange proposal is brought forward. Mark mentions the fact that although the land exchange process is hard the contentious nature of this particular land exchange is what steered him to make the decision not to move forward.

Troy Blume agrees that it is a tough subject and probably not an easy decision. He mentions that the people on the Durfee hills side are just as passionate about the Durfees hills as the people who are passionate about the Bull Whacker. He doesn't see a win-win situation and believes that unless that were to happen, there is not another solution that would satisfy both sides.

Mark reiterated that the BLM's current policy is not to entertain the thought of land exchanges and even if the proponent were to pay for the work involved the problem he sees is the perception that only the wealthy can get land exchanges. Mark this one being so contentious is the primary issue.

Jim McCollum

Jim McCollum asks if some of those parcels mentioned in the RMP would be for sale in the future. Jim McCollum said he has not ever seen any disposals but the RMP provides a list.

Hugo Turek adds that he thinks of disposal lands as exchanges and not for sale.

Mark Albers agrees that they are typically exchanged and not sold to the highest bidder. Mark also said that the BLM did have one that he is aware of and the RMP only lists the land that would fall in the category that allows for land to be disposed. He further elaborates that he would love to clean those 40 and 80 acre parcels that are everywhere but that is not the priority. Mark mentions that sometimes they do get put into settlements and that sort of thing but even then they typically are considered exchanges.

Jim McCollum adds that it is not a priority for congress either. Jim infers that the only way he sees this lands being disposed is if congress passed a line item in their budget and provided a quota of lands that must be disposed. Jim goes on to say that as long as it is left up to the agencies then the notion of disposal lands should be dropped.

Hugo Turek discusses an example on his property that he has offered the BLM to exchange. He thinks that properties but the process involved is the difficulty. Hugo thinks that because his proposed exchange couldn't have been any easier because he approached the BLM and was very willing to exchange acre for acre to block up the land. He adds that even though this would have been the perfect solution and would have taken a long time his point is that it also serves no advantage either. Hugo agrees with Mark's because he has dealt with a land exchange proposal before.

Mark Albers says in the district he manages there are over 3.4 million surface acres and double that in sub surface. He mentions that you could potentially block up 100,000 acres small parcels and it would make little or no difference on how those lands are managed and we are already understaffed.

Dan Kluck

Dan tells the group a story of what his dad told to him years ago when he was growing up. Dan's father said we would be better off if the government gave all of the land to the adjoining landowners instead of the BLM. He mentions the taxes alone that this property would generate would be a good thing for the nation. Dan says when groups like the American Prairie Foundation buy up the land, the tax base suffers and he would bet that eventually this land will eventually be sold back to the government. Dan mentions that this notion of the government buying back the land goes against the intent of the constitution to give the land to the people. Dan says that he as a problem with the government slowly taking back the lands.

Hugo Turek

Hugo Turek says that the Oregon issue has been an interesting topic in his area. It took a while for his community to figure out straighten out the issues. He talks about the different laws that the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) operates and the BLM as completely different. Hugo says that the BLM administers grazing differently than the FWS as the BLM's authority comes from the Taylor Grazing Act while the FWS is acting under the authority of congress since the 1970's. He goes further to explain that wildlife refuges which are administered by the FWS are

mandated to protect wildlife and that is their primary mission. Hugo states that under FWP's mandate, wildlife is the only thing of fair market value that they can produce off of their land. He talks about how interesting this topic is as it shows how decisive we have become. Hugo speaks candidly to the group about the idea of the BLM owning the land and says that maybe some of the ranch owners in Montana can afford to buy the adjacent public land but as a rancher in Montana, he cannot afford to pay the fair market value. Hugo says that as long as the land sells for fair market value, you can be assured that not only will he not be able to buy it but also most farmers and ranchers cannot either. He goes on to mention that the land value has changed and now it is not only sold for production but also for recreation.

Hugo discusses his introduction to the RAC was when the NWA and the Wildlife Federation asked if he would serve on the RAC to represent environmental concerns. His reply was to ask them how he could do this as he a rancher on public lands. Their response to him was we know that but we think there doesn't have to be conflict between the two and their position was that we could work together. Hugo said the first thing that happened was Bruce Babbitt proposed the creation of the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument in Montana. There was a series of public meetings all over the State including Great Falls, Roy, Lewistown, Havre, and he was the chairman of those RAC meetings. He said that the conservation groups would ask him why should they support grazing out here and he would take them to the map and ask them to look at those private properties on the land. He then asked the conservation groups to notice all of the surrounding public land surrounding the private and think about what would happen to those private ranches if they took away their grazing leases. Hugo said that their response was overwhelming and after that every conservation group supported grazing and that was their first recommendation to Secretary Babbitt. After the monument was created that became the central thesis of protecting the Monument while allowing grazing to continue. Hugo said that there is nothing more fearful to him than a subdivision going in next to his ranch and he also knows there is nothing that conservation groups want to see either. He thinks we can find some common ground between conservation and ranching and encourages the RAC to work towards finding the middle ground and work together on these issues. He makes his point by mentioning that he knows there have been initiatives brought forth by the Wilderness groups and says that not once have those groups asked for removing cows. He mentions that he has talked with Mark Goode and knows that he sees cows as an integral part of the landscape and isn't working to remove them. Hugo adds that these same conservation groups don't want to see the area roaded up and they don't want to see it subdivided. Hugo sees these issues being common to both the ranching community and the conservationist community and he urges the RAC to find the common ground and working together to sort thru the issues.

On another personal note, Hugo relates his own situation of having a private ranch with two slivers of public land access. Hugo said that he and his family were in the process of passing down land to the family. He and his wife have thought about approaching the BLM and discuss further protections of the surrounding lands by the BLM such as to never be sold off to Oil and Gas and to allow grazing, then he and his wife would consider putting a conservation easement on his land to further protect the landscape.

He says that in his area there is a lot of fear of the American Prairie Foundation which he too shares. Hugo says that he is on a lot of boards including the board of outfitters representing hunters. He says that people that he represents on this board are quite fearful of what is going to happen to hunting. Hugo asks why haven't these issues been addressed and further discusses the BLM's reluctance to talk about the issues because the transfer hasn't happened yet. His frustration lies within the fact that by the time the exchange occurs, the rumors have been around for so long that there is no turning back people's opinion and the rumor mill turns into reality. He wants to see some sort of avenue to head off this discourse. He gives the example of the Wilkes brothers and mentions that he gets the sense that people he talks do not fully understand the issues. He goes further to say that when he tries to explain it to them; he turns into part of that rumor mill. Hugo would like to explore what avenue would bring these issues forward while dispelling the rumors that exist. He goes on to explain that the biggest change in the BLM he has recognized is that now the public is claiming some degree of ownership to its' land. He mentions that it doesn't just belong to you or me anymore it is public land. He said somehow farmers and ranchers need to find that mechanism by which we can create a certain peace and give support to public lands. He thinks that mechanism is already there and reiterates that the public and ranchers both do not want to see the landscape fragmented and developed. He gives an example of when a few years ago the State of Montana was talking about selling off some of its lands. Hugo said that he was in a public meeting when a gentleman spoke up in support of selling these state parcels and went on to explained that the gentleman from Montana Land Alliance replied just let me know how many acres and where and that he will go back to New York City and have the money to buy it next week. Hugo put forth the group how do we protect the landscapes and how do we work on sharing the lands with the public. Hugo closes by saying that we have held on to ownership of these public lands for so long that somehow we have come to think of it as ours while on the other side of the issue, the public is claiming other uses of their public lands. He says he hears both sides of the issue from his constituents and sees working together being the best option to protect public land.

Dana Darlington

Dana Darlington speaks first about how he would like to believe that the general public knows why agriculture is necessary on the land to produce the nation's food supply. Dana mentions that he continues to be amazed by the rhetoric against public land grazing and sees the issues differently. He goes thru the Oregon Occupiers and brings up that it is the sentiment that is important to look at. Dana mentions that people are frustrated to the point that the public lands debate has made them believe that things are unjust and they are starting to take a stand. Dana does not agree that the Oregon group used the right approach but really sees the division between agriculture and conservation really growing and doesn't know how to bridge the gap.

Hugo Turek says he doesn't see too many of the conservation groups supporting the American Prairie Foundation.

Dana says he thinks that farmers and ranchers are the original conservationists and give an example right from the American Prairie Foundations website which states that much of the land that they are now acquiring looks as good a shape as or better than it did 200 years ago. Dana credits the farmers, ranchers, and the BLM with taking care of the land. Dana said that in the Bozeman area where Ted Turner ranches there is evidence from Ted Turner's ranch that suggests that they have already tried open season grazing, they are saying don't try it in Malta because it did not work to conserve the land but mentions it decimated the land. Dana said there is a need for more research on the subject of open season bison grazing before we allow it in our area. Dana asks Mark Albers if he agrees that here is a need for more science backed research on the subject.

Mark Albers said there is science that suggests that they can do this but does not want to take the position of advocating the actions of the American Prairie Foundation. Mark says the BLM's role is strictly regulatory and we are merely looking at what they present and making a decision based upon what our specialists say. Mark says that there is science backed research which suggests that the American Prairie Foundations proposal could be feasible. Mark adds to equate Ted Turner's operation with their proposed operation is faulty because we don't have all of the information about stocking rates and all the other factors that come into the decision. He does agree that the decision needs to use the science that is available and take a hard look at any proposed land use changes. The BLM's plan is to take all of those things into account before a decision is made on the American Prairie Foundations proposal. Mark said that even if people don't want the American Prairie Foundation moving into their area, the laws are out there that say they can be there. Mark mentions a provision that was taken out of the Taylor Grazing Act that used to prohibit the land being used in production other than agriculture. Mark goes on to explain that as that provision was removed from the Taylor Grazing Act, basically anyone can own these types of properties without being tied to production agriculture.

Troy Blunt

Troy starts his round robin discussion by agreeing with what Dan Kluck said about BLM lands. Troy stated that he believes they never should have been BLM lands in the first place; it should have been private, based on how the constitution was set up to provide for things. Troy adds that there is nothing we can do to go back and change that but the BLM doesn't pay taxes to the extent that private landowners do and their payments equate to pennies on the dollar and that hurts the tax base. He thinks the public would benefit more if the land were private but knows there is no way to change that now.

Troy addresses the issues he hears about the BLM from his constituents and informs the RAC that people in his area think that the regulations in place to save the Sage Grouse are unwarranted. He says there is occasionally talk about the Bison and how they fit into our landscape but most of the talk is centered on the Flat Creek Allotment. He says that most people in his area basically believe that the American Prairie Foundation is getting preferential treatment while local ranchers are getting unfavorable treatment. Troy sums up people's opinion on this issue by saying that basically people are mad, mad beyond just frustration,

people are mad. The biggest change he has seen with the BLM and the ranchers is that the American Prairie Foundation has driven a wedge between the ranching community and the BLM. Troy said there is distrust on both sides and he does not know how to fix that relationship but the reality is there and the BLM is not convincing anyone otherwise.

Hugo Turek makes a point that goes back to the notion that is land reverts back to the BLM from private there will be much less paid in taxes by the government. Hugo gives the example of when the PN ranch went up for sale the last time before the deal was stopped when he heard this idea being presented by the opposition. He makes two points on this said that after this particular sale was researched, evidence came back to suggest that the county would have made more money in taxes off of the BLM than they would have made off of the taxes from its remaining private.

Troy adds, not in Phillips County because of the way the formula is set up

Hugo says maybe not because Phillips County already has enough public land that maybe they are not getting paid any more when new public land is developed.

Hugo brings up another point and mentions when the homesteaders were going broke and ownership reverted back to the BLM thru the Bankhead Jones Farm Tenant Act of 1937. He said that what happened during that time is that when the government took back those lands, they also took back the mineral rights and the subsurface acres and that has created a whole new level of subsurface vs surface rights. He says we need to look at this time when the Counties were going broke and couldn't afford to take care of the land anymore so they gave it all back to the government.

Hugo wrap up by stating that he understands peoples mistrust with the American Prairie Foundation and gives the group an example of when the American Prairie Foundation purchased the Cow Island property in the Monument. Hugo explained that when the group first acquired the property there was talk of the need to keep the property in conservation because of the historical significance of the property. He said that the Reese Foundation went to the Prairie Foundation and said if we give you the money to buy this and in two years when the grazing lease are removed by the seller the land would be unencumbered and could be purchased back by the BLM, would you then sell it back. Hugo said that after two years the American Prairie Foundation said that they would not sell it back because it was too valuable to them. There was a discussion of their plans to develop the area fell thru because of the conservation lease tied to the property and so he thinks that land will never be developed anyway.

Wayne Fairchild

Wayne starts out by saying that he was on a float trip with the American Prairie Foundation that he outfitted. He said they went to Cow Island and camped at their property. As Wayne understands, there was talk about putting a couple of fire rings on the property this summer to open it up to public camping but did not hear of any further plans to develop. Wayne said that

maybe the RAC should invite the American Prairie Foundation to their next meeting so we can hear about their policies are.

Wayne says as an outfitter, his fellow outfitters are the most concerned about the Coal Banks Landing boat ramp filling in with sediment and not being usable anymore. He does appreciate Mike Kania spearheading an effort to find an alternate launch. Wayne goes on to present the outfitters position on the new fee system as being supportive and something that they have been working on for the past six years. Wayne asks Mark Albers if he is correct in saying that the new fee system is in place and being implemented this year.

Mark replied yes.

Wayne asks about the donations that were received last year and Mark replied there was very little received. Wayne says he thinks use fees will be good for the river and supports the new fee system.

Hayden asks to move a motion to receive a firm agenda no later than ten days before the meeting.

Mary Frieze asks if the RAC members have any input into the addenda

Yes. RAC members can have input.

Mark Albers tells Hayden that he can make a suggestion and we will try our hardest to come up with the agenda in advance of the next meeting. Mark suggests working on the agenda tomorrow

Hayden brings forth a suggestion that the next RAC meeting agenda is formed ten days in advance of the next meeting.

The group moves and seconds this recommendation and consensus is reached.

Meeting adjourned 5:00

CENTRAL MONTANA RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL

MEETING NOTES

Thursday, January 27, 2016

RAC Members absent (Day 1): **Mark Wilson, Damien Austin, Dana Darlington & Clive Rooney**

New Members: **Mary Frieze, Mark Wilson, Jeffrey Patenone**

Chairman: **Troy Blunt**

Facilitator: **Jonathan Moor**

Troy Blunt calls the meeting to order and turns the discussion over to Jonathan Moor.

Jonathan Moor goes over the travel voucher process and answers any questions the group has on getting reimbursed for their travel.

The next meeting's agenda is discussed. Mark Albers wants to know if the group wants to have the American Prairie Foundation speak at the next meeting. The group agrees and Hugo suggests that we invite someone to speak to the oppositions concerns. Mark agrees but cautions that we do not want to set up a public forum putting these two sides in opposition at the next meeting. Troy Blume brings up the point that each speaker would have a time limit. Hayden and Wayne ask for a presentation from the American Prairie Foundation to present their plan so they could understand what they are proposing.

The group has a discussion to the meeting format being one day vs two day meeting. Jonathan said if the public comment meeting is set at the federal register for two days, then that is what holds the meeting to the second day. Mark suggests that if the format for the meetings is set for one day, then the group would have to start early and stay the night before. Mark Albers adds that people could stay the second night if the meeting went too late in the day for them to travel back.

The next meeting is set for May 4th and the agenda will include having the American Prairie Foundation present their plan and it will be a one day meeting in Havre. The group will wait until the agenda is set to see if a one day format will work but holds on to the right to extend the meeting into the 5th if necessary. The Actual meeting location will be determined.

Consensus is reached. Wayne Fairchild asks for an update on the Coal Banks Ramp. Hugo Turek asks for some update on the Bull Whacker exchange.

Rangeland Health Assessment Presentation

Abbey Hall gives the group a Power-Point presentation on rangeland health assessments. She discusses the rangeland health assessments that the BLM has been conducting over the years and explains what exactly they are monitoring and what criteria is used to measure the rangeland function and health. Abbey goes into the permitting process and explains the permit, the permit renewal, and the NEPA process involved.

Mark Albers asks about cooperative management. Did we get a lot of interest?

Abbey said that at first people were interested but now there are not too many inquiries and it seems like it has waned off. She mentions a workshop in Chinook on February 12th and sees that workshop as a positive result of the cooperative management initiative.

Mary Frieze asks if changes to permits are done often and if so do people get upset.

Abbey replied yes and no. She says that most changes to permits are from the operator and are typically adjustments to seasonal use. She says the reasons are all over the board for requesting a change but most of the time she gets a request from the operator instead of her having to initiate changes to the permit.

Troy Blume asks Abbey how often her staff visits the operators. He indicated that he has not seen a range con come out to his operation for at least ten years.

Abbey said that she tries to request actual use from her operators every year. She said that although it is not required she finds that it helps keep the communication open because often the operators have questions on filling out their forms and sometimes they take the time to stop in the office and hand in the actual use in person.

Mark Albers asks about Western Watershed inquiries.

Abbey mentions that there are not too much more at the moment and mentions there have been some inquiries for the BLM Malta Field Office and the Monument but nothing yet for the Havre Field Office.

Hugo asks if she sees finds the groups interested in grazing issues to vary. He said that Western Watersheds was mentioned and asks Abbey if there are some groups that she enjoys working with.

Abbey responded that she hasn't worked with a lot of these groups. She indicated that sometimes when she goes to conferences or reads an article she hears something that makes her think and try to educate herself on. She thinks it makes her folks do their research so they are aware of some of these issues and will be ready if an inquiry comes to their office.

Troy Blume asks Mark Albers how many man hours are dedicated to responding to Western Watershed inquiries. He also wants to know if this is the reason his range con has not been out to visit him.

Mark Albers said that it is his understanding that they want to be an interested party in everything that the BLM does which means they want to be on the mailing list and does not think that takes a substantial amount of time.

Abbey responds to Troy's question that she thinks that it is all of the policy changes and more reporting paperwork than there was ten years ago.

Abbey tells Troy that there is a chance a range con has been out there doing compliance checks and he just picked a random day to check your operation and you might not have knowledge that someone is doing compliance checks.

Mary Frieze asks if there have ever been speakers who came to the RAC to address the states initiative to take over all of the Federal Lands. She mentions that the initiative was coming out of Utah and wanted to know if there was still talk of that in Montana.

Mark said that there is always an undercurrent of that initiative but does not know of anyone that would come to speak to the RAC about this.

Troy Blume adds that there is always an undercurrent of that issue and typically is revisited during legislative sessions because some of these groups get the attention of one of the legislators. He says that the discussion typically never goes beyond the proposal and typically dies before it gets too far.

10 MINUTE BREAK

Troy Blunt calls the meeting to order

Public Comment Period 10:00

2 members of the public arrived during the break to present their comments to the RAC. Jonathan Moor goes over the public comment period rules.

Betty Holder from the American Prairie Reserve, and Herman Floss who was the gentleman who came yesterday during the Sage Grouse Habitat Improvements presentation and was asked to come back during the public comment period.

It is decided that each will be allotted 15 minutes to comment

Troy Blume makes the recommendation to give each 10 minutes and if anyone comes in there will be that reserve.

Hayden seconds the suggestion

Betty Holder

Hello and good morning. I am here today because I heard that yesterday there was some discussion of the American Prairie Foundation and that the Flat Creek Allotment was a topic of discussion. I came because Damien couldn't be here because he had another commitment

today. I chose to come to the public comment period in case you had any questions. Betty said that she is not the range specialist but can forward on any questions the group might have that she could not address. She also mentions that Jonathan told her that there will be time scheduled at the next RAC meeting for the American Prairie Foundation to give a presentation.

Jim McCollum asks about the request in on the Flat Creek Allotment. He said he knows that they have acquired other properties in that area and asks how long it will be before they ask for changes to those grazing leases in south valley county

Betty said that right now they have two more the Box Elder Creek and the Telegraph Creek Allotments where they are currently grazing Bison. She went on to explain that right now all of the other leases with their private land are leased out to cattle ranchers. Betty said that the Flat Creek Allotment is the next place they plan to move Bison if the changes go thru. She also mentions one other property they call White Rock. She gives the group the previous landowner names that they are most likely to know instead of the Allotment. She said that Flat Creek is on the old Halsey place and the White Rock property was bought by the Yeros (SP?). She said that as their Bison herd grows, as time goes on, they will be looking for more areas to move them.

Jim McCollum asks if the leases that they graze Bison on under season long use and no internal fences is their plan for all of the other ones they have acquired. He asks if that is their intention.

Betty Replied It is yes

Hayden Jansen asks if the AUM's are you asking for at the Flat Creek Allotment.

Betty said that she does not have that but the number that they asked for was high because the BLM has the authority to lower that number but once it is requested, they cannot raise the AUM's. She did mention that there was some concern brought up by the DNRC range con Matt Pool out of Glasgow and she has not read enough of the EA to know all of the concerns.

Hayden ask a follow up and wants to know if when their intentions are to buy up large tracts of land has there been any proactive attempts to communicate or discussions held in the form of public meetings to inform the community. He wants to know if there are any plans to improve communication with the local ranchers and farmers. He said that even though the American Prairie Foundation is not a public entity, they are procuring land at an unprecedented rate.

Betty said that she was not here at the beginning but thinks there were a series of public meeting held. She thinks part of the communication issue they have is due to lack of staff but the group has recently hired a public affairs officer Hilary Park and this is definitely on her radar that we need to do a better job at this. She said that they continue to invite people out to see their operations and their private lands are open to the public so they can come out there at any time but knows they can do a better job

Mary Frieze said that a few months ago the American Prairie Foundation representatives did a presentation in Lewistown at the Yogo Inn. She said she went to the meeting and enjoyed it but could not tell the purpose of the meeting because it wasn't aimed towards farmers and ranchers. She said there was another meeting at the Rotary club as well.

Betty adds that there was one in Great Falls also. Betty said that the purpose of these meeting was exactly what Hayden was talking about, to answer people's questions and to address any misconceptions that are out there about the American Prairies Foundations mission. She said they just wanted to get the information out there and to be as clear as possible about their plans.

Mary Frieze asks her if she also got the sense that these meetings were well attended by the outlying communities or if the meetings just drew Lewistown folks.

Betty replied that she felt like these meetings were not well attended by the ranchers and farmers but rather drew a group of APF supporters which is not always the case.

Mary Frieze agreed that she got that sense as well.

Jim McCollum asks what kind of work they are doing on the CMR. He mentions that the APR bought some of the leases that are on the CMR and asks if they are using those leases.

Betty replied, no we are not using those leases in production but thinks there may have been some seed harvested on one or two.

Troy Blunt said it was off of the refuge where seed was cut.

Betty indicated that the only work she know of on the CMP property has been to spray some weeds and they have removed some fences that were in pretty bad shape.

She mentions that she has only been with the APF for about a year and does not know the full history of those leases.

Troy Blunt asks her to enlighten the committee with the APF's ultimate goal.

Betty said that their ultimate goal is to have a wildlife preserve that mimics the actual prairie ecosystems. She said that they are looking at 3 Million acres to allow all the native prairie species to come back. She said that the plan is to have these prairie species back including the native plants so that these prairie ecosystems can function as closely as possible to their natural processes.

Hayden asks if they have any Bison escape their compounds and left their property.

Betty said absolutely. A couple of times they have had about 20-30 Bison escape. Over the winter months during high snow, a couple of Bison walked over the fences and were retrieved with helicopters, and once last year some escaped during Coyote hunting season because a gate was left open, presumably by Coyote hunters. She also mentions a couple of times they have had bulls escape but every time their response has been to bring them back if possible

Troy says that the ten minutes are up and maybe she can come back at the end if there are any questions.

Herman Floss

Herman Floss greeted the group and said he was here yesterday and was a bit confused still and had a few questions for the committee. He has heard the group referred to as the RAC and wants to know what that stands for.

Several people explain that it stands for Resource Advisory Committee.

Herman Floss said so you are a group that advises the BLM on issues as they relate to a specific region. He asks if they give the BLM suggestions and vote on some issues with the thumbs up thumbs down.

Troy said that the RAC can give the BLM their opinion on issues and they can take up those issues if they decide all the way to the Secretary of the Interior.

Jim McCollum explains that their group is limited in their scope to Central Montana and their members represent the Hi-Line and Lewistown Districts.

Herman said he thought this council was deciding some of the issues on the agenda and that is why he came yesterday. He indicated that most of his questions can be answered by the BLM. Herman closes by saying that he thanks the group and does not want to take up any more of their time; he will take up the BLM's time instead. He did say that his concern is about the Sage Grouse.

Mary Frieze asks Herman to elaborate and she would like to know is his concern is how the Sage Grouse are doing.

Herman goes on to explain that he is concerned about the BLM cutting trees in the area that he has been hunting in since 1964. He said that there were some pretty big trees cut and ground Juniper as well. He still has some concerns that he will address with the BLM as to the treatments. He wants to know if there is any evidence that these treatments are a good thing as this is the first time he has heard of anything like this going on.

Troy announces that there is still 10 minutes left and asks the group if they had any more questions for Betty.

Betty Holder

Hayden asks if the APF tests their herd for Brucellosis or any other communicable diseases.

Betty explains that they get their stock from a disease free herd in Elk Island National Park Canada. She said that this herd has been known to be disease free since the 1970's. She said that these Bison are in quarantine for a month in Canada and they do test for disease annually after the first year. She mentions that they do not test every animal but rather do random sampling yearly to test for disease.

Hugo Turek asks if they vaccinate their herd

Betty replied we do not.

Hugo then inquired if they were ever run thru a chute

Betty replied that sometimes they do get run thru a chute but that depends on what is going on. She mentions that if they are hauling Bison somewhere they get loaded thru a chute and they have done some testing while these animals are in the squeeze chutes.

Troy asks how they propose to stock the Flat Creek Allotment if approved.

Betty asked Troy for clarification and he is asking about moving the Bison onto the property.

Betty indicated that they are working with one neighbors on a land exchange and have approached another neighbor for an agreement to let them trail the animals to the new lease property. She said the group plans to set up drive lines to trail them the 1 and $\frac{3}{4}$ miles. She said that their back up plan is to truck them if they have to.

Wayne Fairchild asks what the population of the herd now is.

Betty says the population is 620 counting every head.

Troy asks what does that number corresponds to in AUM's currently allowed on the two allotments.

Betty said that she thinks it meets the AUM's and they know that this year they have to move some.

Jim McCollum asks if there are any private ranches that would allow them to operate

Betty says that they are open to those discussions.

Mary Frieze want to know what the interaction between cows and Buffalo is. She said she has never seen the two being raised together.

Betty said that typically they ignore each other but has seen some interaction between the bulls of the two species snorting at each other thru the fence. She also knows of a time when two yearling Bison got into the neighbors pasture and hung out with their cows. She said that the neighbor didn't have a problem with the two yearlings and eventually pushed them back onto their pastures.

Jim McCollum agreed that from his experience the two species typically avoid each other and do not intermingle.

Mark Albers asks Betty if they have a fall back plan if the Flat Creek Permit changes are not approved.

Betty said yes we would always have the option to reduce the herd. She thinks another option if the Flat Creek Allotment were approved for Bison but not year round use that they could conform to this rest rotation season of use as they have done on their other allotments.

Hugo asked if they had any year round use on their current allotments.

Betty said yes on their Telegraph and their Box Elder Creek allotment there is year round use.

Hayden asks Betty if they own Cow Island

Betty says that is a misnomer and that although they do own land along the river they do not own Cow Island. She believes correctly that Cow Island is public land managed by the BLM.

Troy Blunt asks about animals escaping and wants to know if there has ever been an instance of a Bison that escaped and they could not retrieve it.

Betty said yes, that once there was a bull that escaped and the initial phone call went to an unoccupied building and they did not get the message until later. She said that it was unfortunate that the animal was out for longer than it would have been had they know. She said that by the time they went over the Bison was exhibiting aggressive behaviors and bluff charged their employees several times before the decision was made to shoot it. They then took the animal home and they ate him.

Hugo Turek said that in their plan to drive the Buffalo he has heard from others that you don't drive buffalo but rather lead them. Hugo asks what her experience is driving buffalo.

Betty said that their plan is to use hay bales and try to encourage them to go where they wanted them to go. She said that they have been successful driving the buffalo on occasion either when they are out or we are putting them in pens but says that it is not something they do often.

Mary Frieze asks if there is any concern about Elk transmitting Brucellosis to their herd

Betty said that the fact has crossed her mind. Betty said that their local Elk have been tested a few times and there has been no sign of the disease.

Betty closes her comment period by thanking the group for their time and handing out her business card.

Betty says to feel free to contact the APF anytime there are questions and invites the RAC group to come to their ranch for a tour of their operation. She even mentions that they have meeting rooms that would be available if the group wanted to hold a meeting at their facility.

The meeting wrap up with Troy announcing that the next item on the agenda is a tour of the Lewis and Clark Interpretive center.

Meeting adjourned