

Bureau of Land Management Central Montana Resource Advisory Council

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Clive Rooney

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Dana Darlington

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Jeffrey Patnode
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Hugo Tureck

MEETING MINUTES For May 2016



RAC Chairperson

___/___/___
Date

Mark Albers, District Manager

___/___/___
Date

RAC meeting minutes

May 4th, 2016 – 8:00a.m.

Attending Committee members: Dana Darlington, Mary Frieze, Jim McCollum, Mark Albers, Troy Blunt, Dan Kluck, Jeff LaVoi, Ralph Knapp, Wayne Fairchild, Damien Austin, Hugo Tureck, & Clive Rooney

Public Affairs Specialist – Jonathan Moor, meeting notes – Lori Montgomery

08:00 – Chairman, Clive Rooney called meeting to order, addressed the present attendees; missing Dana & Jeff, decision was made there was no quorum.

Previous notes for the meeting were very in depth, some would like the minutes to be electronic. Clive gave a brief description of the agenda for the day.

- ❖ American Prairie Reserve, Betty Holder – presentation
- ❖ Judith Landing Boat Ramp discussion
- ❖ Planning 2.0 – have discussion with Mr. Wood
- ❖ Henry Smith update – prescribed burn report
- ❖ Round table

Also attending; Stanley Jaynes, Havre Field Office Manager, Kathy Tribby, Kristen Boyle, & Pete McFadden, Lewistown Field Office Manager. Later Mike Kania, UMRBNM Manager joined us.

The group discussed the future roster of the RAC committee, everyone but Jim reapplying for a committee position. There are 2 new applicants to fill spots, Category 1.

Jeff LaVoi will become an elected official at the end of the year. How that would affect his RAC position was discussed, meeting subcategories explained.

Jim McCollum had question about his official date of membership, letter from Secretary with date 2014; further discussion about appointment times and process.

John advised committee to complete Travel Vouchers.

Past meeting minutes approved. Agenda sent out is a fluid document, may not be complete until next meeting.

District Manager's update:

1. Henry Smith Prescribed burn – Josh Smith coming in. 650 acres went to 800+; was briefed to the House. Discussed the occurrences, weather was good, but changed and the fire blew up. 500 acres of CMP, 240 acres of BLM, 3 affected landowners were o.k., but others were concerned. Wasn't declared a wildfire. CMP was to be renovated this year anyway. Mark doesn't see it as a big disaster, but lessons learned. There were letters to congressmen, so had teleconference with congressional staffers. 650 + 800 acres, burned long narrow strip, but got

into CRP. Burning on Easter Sunday was questioned. Crew on site covered the work didn't affect the fire dept.

2. American Prairie Reserve application – Livestock to Bison, 130 protest letters, still working thru. Concerns with removal of fences and year round grazing. No socio economics considered; relooking at this.

... the AUMs being taken wasn't considered. Change from livestock production in community. Bison taxed like livestock in the county. Letters sent were more comments than questions, people thought the process wasn't complete, needing EIS. Troy Blunt asked about the Flat Crk. allotment timeline. Mark said in discussions now with APR, they are allowing them to run animals to use their base grazing. Mark hopes to open 2 week scoping period, followed with...

Jim asked who owns the property where the fences are being removed? ...BLM, fences were built in the 70's, so old anyway. Troy mentioned public perception.

When will decision be made? ...Tureck – stated that what is public land and what isn't; becoming a concern to the public. Troy - is grazing district being informed? There was further discussion.

3. Bentonite claim – Ben Four Project name submitted. It is in the new sage grouse focus area. It has a validity report, BLM has signed the approval. They have plan of operation, everything needed. Processed under the proper procedures, they are free to move dirt, 30 to 60 days to mine 12 acres. S&P Inc. is the company. There are other claims out there but must meet validity examination. No sage grouse close to this. Clive discussed the State Report, can give out if interested. ...discussion on the history of Bentonite industry, plants in area, people employed. Mark says Billings is processing a big bentonite proposal.
4. We are half way through the districts consolidation, In Oct. it will be discussed; decision will be Jamie Connell's, Aden Seidlitz has been acting.
5. Biologists reporting good counts on the Sage Grouse. Great shape this year, Billings has large numbers. Groupdiscussed weather and chicks making it thru late storms.

Pete McFadden discussed 154 allotments, in sage grouse habitat, in sage brush area, decisions later in 2018; range and wildlife staff workload.

Durfee Hills trespass, damage assessment completed in-house, steps to be taken for mitigating.

Wilks brothers have been notified, if they don't comply it will go formal, need settlement. This hasn't been publicized due to possible litigation. Wilkes can go public at will.

6. Travel Management Plan going forward, RAC should be involved in this, Mark explained process, Kristen will discuss later. ...general schedule, process is in the RMP, general order for the Little Rockies, Sage Grouse inventory areas.

Clive requested the timeline to be made public, let people know when to plan for the workload.

9:00 - Kirsten Boyle addressed the committee.

HiLine Resource Management Plan, Trans. & Travel Management hand out

- gave her background leading up to her work on this.
- 45 TMP's to be completed in the MT. / DAK. In the next 5 yrs.

PowerPoint

- BLM Mission: use for everyone focused on sustaining use
- Goals of Trans. And Travel management. Uses, objectives
- Emergency actions don't follow the OHV restrictions
- Resources to maintain roads, funding
- Defined terms of OHV, TMP; designates routes – Open, Limited, Closed, described each and their differences
- Maps; for each road and trail, Network
- Covered Summary of Process;
 - Inventory, Evaluate, NEPA, Decision, Implement TMP, Monitor Network & Condition Assessments.

Process takes a year, can contract, or use term positions. Public Involvement; comments are helpful.

Q. Other agencies brought in?

A. ...county commissioners, back country horsemen, Ft. Belknap., old trails could be old county rds.,

Kirsten gave example of an initial route inventory data with a map showing area east of highway 191 and north of CMR, route evaluation form, etc.

Comment by Clive ...design what is maintainable and enforceable, discussion on the Little Rocky Mountains TMP/EA map.

Emergency operations are not restricted to TMP decisions. They go where the emergency is to accomplish their task.

State Office is working on standardizing the map symbols for use.

Contractors may have issues understanding other contractor's data, when separate contracts for various parts of data collection/process are completed.

Completing NEPA in spring of 2018.

RAC needs to become involved more in these processes.

The State doesn't allow airplanes to land on roads ...discussion about.

10:20 American Prairie Reserve's Mission and Goals

Betty Holder, APR representative, introduced Lars Anderson, Gary Bays & Damion Austin, also RAC member, and is their bison person.

She addressed the issue of PN Ranch purchase, not owned by the APR, they do not discuss property not owned by them.

Expressed APR's desire to be 21st Century wildlife reserve, goal is to make the largest wildlife reserve in the world.

A PowerPoint was used to share a map of the Lewis & Clark trail and Nez Perce trail. She shared examples of area of wildlife and bison range then, compared to now. APR has blocks totaling 3.5 million acres, area all in Montana. A Map showed only 4 places left in the world that would accommodate a large area; Kazakh Steppe, Mongolian Steppe, Patagonian Steppe, and the Great Northern Plains area.

They do not want to buy public property, only private that connects to public. Betty then talked about:

- Intact grasslands: 95%
- Unique wildlife history
- Big leverage opportunity
- Demographic areas

Shared map of deeded/leased acreage, plan is to connect large. Also shared was a map showing goals of obtaining property south of the Missouri river, going as far down as the north Roy, Montana area.

Betty stated that they are on their way to gathering these properties as funding comes.

A slide showing numerous organizations/supporters such as Microsoft also had the BLM emblem shown; Mark pointed out that as previously brought to Betty's attention, this is not an appropriate use of it.

The Freese Scale for grassland Biodiversity; commodity centered management vs. Biodiversity centered mgmt. was discussed.

Bison is important species, but they are not just for Bison species, they want all species. Their target population is 10,000 heard, feel that is sustainable. Current population is 500+. They want fully functioning prairie system and will do everything to maintain...

Q. ...photo of water feature, would they remove....

A. Not necessarily.

APR has goal of over 12000 bison by 2029... A student from Clemson U. is doing a study for them, Pronghorn population to 50,000... shared map of migration - Canada into US. They want unimpeded movement, no fences. Use wildlife friendly electric fence. ... Solar electric fence, top is 42" high, second wire electric.... an Elk herd to 30,000 – 40,000. A map was shared showing Montana with migration area.

Prairie dogs are important food source for others, birds such as sage grouse and burrowing owls, Long Billed Curlew, Swainson's hawk from South America.

Ultimate goal is to enter a piece of property, no encountering man-made structures, no impeded human travel between private and public lands.

Increasing Social Carrying Capacity for Wildlife – “Wild Sky” program

- Give annual price premium
- Same measures of success as APR core reserve
- Core reserve and ranchers both win
- 100% Grass Fed

Soften the Boundaries between Glacier and the reserve – ranchers' involvement

Science and education center being used by Forest Service, students, broad variety of folks. There are many opportunities for learning.

They are charging \$10 for a tent platform at the Buffalo campground, using signage with help of natives, keeping their language alive, a 200+ mile hut to hut system.

They are building a new interpretive center going in on highway 191.

APR has spent \$34.3 million including land ... shared expenditures, taxes, local charities.

They accept donations from all over the world.

Shared the importance of recreating the area as it was in the 1800's,

Q. Campgrounds on public grounds..?

A. Yes, of course.

Q. When goal is reached with the bison will there be public input on...? As a private organization it is their decision to make unlike Yellowstone Park. ...plans are being made for bison hunts, growing herd by 2500/yr.

Q. ...Leases with ranchers?

A. It is possible for income to them, still working on details, if lease lost, causes problems with animal placement.

Q. How is property selected?

A. Land values go up 3%/yr. May only be available every 20 yrs., purchases are based on availability mostly.

Q. ... Appears establishing presence on the south of the river at some point?

A. Yes, where property becomes available...

Q. Wildlife species goals, private don't get to set those?

A. ...set on social acceptance, goals are to set these with neighbors, what is acceptable, also with wildlife service...

Q. Wildlife population boundaries, they don't read signs, elk inundating farm fields..?

A. They want the capability to reimburse people for damage.

Q. Elk is said to be at high levels now...?

A. Again, social acceptance and what can be handled & tolerated. It is a Fish and Wildlife decision. They intend to work with them.

Q. Limited resources, only so much food for them...?

A. Balancing act, finding what that is and what can be maintained.

Q. Flat Creek Management Plan; ...proposal discussion, remove fences request, crops turned into native grasses, does a management plan exist?

A. We do not have one established ...

Q. Are they considering trading out property for other property outside the area?

A. Yes, they would look at that.

Q. What thinking has gone into Legislative processes....?

A. Great visions, with multiple steps, implementing this on the ground, no legislative plan, just looking at potential, public sentiment, ground based, very long term goals, APR will comply with all Legislative requirements.

Q. /Comment: Special use permits need considered and followed, if they are charging for huts, and people are using them on and off of public property...

A.APR doesn't have designated trails that people use, they have huts, and how they get to them is by given coordinates, no established trails...

Q. When purchasing property next to neighbors who have used it for trailing cattle; crossing for years, how will that be addressed?

A. APR will work with them; they are not opposed to them continuing this past use.

Q. What are the goals for area communities as a whole, changing culture and dynamics...?

A. Areas, communities that have public or protected lands are doing better or as well as before, they are thriving socially, attracts other businesses across, there will still be ranches in the middle, island areas still functioning.

Q. Vegetation monitoring...?

A. Vegetation transects, taking private land and it becomes part of the permit, because it can't be kept separate it will be BLM standards across the area.

Q. Grazing health assessments...?

A. Student doing a study, no long term data available...

Q. So, for long term assessments are they relying on BLM, agencies to use their monitoring?

A. ...do not have a permanent monitoring system at the moment... they have studies ongoing... using grad students for these; methods are changing, but looking at it continually.

Q. (Troy) ...AUM's were set long ago, he has had to go by these set by the BLM, and APR needs to go by these also?

A. A BLM Range Con told APR that good data wasn't used to set these, so APR needs to help with this....

Group discussion on the past process, AUM management, discrepancies, etc.... Shouldn't be extra workload on BLM to accomplish their monitoring...

Q. APR is a nonprofit, tax free..., they takes donations?

A. ...Wild Sky, is a for profit organization, they pay taxes.

Q. Where do the profits go?

A. Pay to the ranchers, and then back to APR.

Q. Information is out there on raising Bison; do they use any of it? Yes, they look at other data.

Q. Butcher bison?

A. Yes, they are when necessary, drought management, forage... may drill wells, other potential out there. ...hunting offered, having discussion.

11:30 Mike Kania – Judith Landing Boat Ramp

Mike shared work on land exchange, or acquisition of land. Family no longer interested. So now looking at what can be done at Coal Banks. No good options, river challenges. No realistic expectations for a good boat ramp at that site.

There may be other ownership area potential? There is a place that is being used that may become a good choice. Mike explained a fuel tax on boats as an available funding source for construction of a ramp at Wood Bottom, a potential site to upgrade. There was a group discussion on use and mileage away from White Cliffs area on the river. This upgrade would be primarily for motor boats, but has good camping and a vault toilet.

Virgelle Ferry? It was looked at, no parking, narrow county right of way, need 4 wheel drive to use, steep.

Wood Bottom, not the best spot, but provides some, since limited choices. The committee would like GPS location of Wood bottom. This is a proposed interim project until Coal Banks can be reconstructed...? Wood Bottom does not address the outfitters issues needing access 20 miles upriver.

There was discussion about the concrete boat ramp/canoe launch access at Coal Banks; river has silted in making it unusable. Canoes must be packed out further, no remaining motor boat access.

Mr. Kania agreed to have work completed on the upgrading of an existing access trail currently in use which is difficult to traverse with a canoe.

Jim... Corp of Engineers dredge the river, should be some possibilities? Further discussion about how Kipp is cleaned, river naturally silting in these areas; equipment is used where possible on concrete ramps. But the river is becoming shallow beyond the concrete.

Lunch break

1:00 – Planning 2.0

Clive summarized the past use of the Planning 2.0, and introduced David Wood.

David Wood discussed the draft regulations of this, still opportunity to provide feedback. Talked about project goals, changes, responsiveness of BLM overall.

Planning Policy

- Rule – making process
 - Initial outreach
 - Proposed Rule
 - Public Comment
 - Final Rule

Proposed Changes, Planning Cycle

- Planning Assessment
- Develop RMP, etc.

High Quality Information

Planning Framework – Goals and Objectives

- Plan components, Implementation Strategies and what quantifies each.
 - Designations
 - Resource Use Determinations
 - Monitoring/Evaluation Standards
 - Management
 - Procedures

Public Involvement

- Scoping – Planning Assessment, front load the information gathering...
 - Preliminary Alternatives
 - Draft RMP – haven't had alternate alternative's
 - Proposed RMP
 - Decision

Responsibilities

- BLM Director – who is the deciding Official & the planning area for RMPs
- Deciding Official – determines the planning area

Transition Provisions – rules of ...

Next Steps – How to learn more; public webinars

How to provide comments on the rule... comment period closes on 5/25th.

www.blm.gov/plan2

Q. At what point will cooperating agencies be brought in?

A. ...that hasn't really changed, cooperating agencies brought in soon on.

Q. What is the definition of traditional ecological knowledge...?

A. Things that is not as easy to quantify scientifically, people who have firsthand knowledge; have specific knowledge of the area from past experience, their history with it.

Q. RAC meetings; started as efficient planning process, this seems to have lost this efficiency...? Special interests groups have been given more latitude...?

A. We are bringing more people into the process early on so that it is discussed sooner. Land Use plans can take 5 – 7yrs., but supposed to be 3-4 yrs.

Q. Is this going to influence just RMP's or is it going to be used other places?

A. This process takes more time in the front loading, but should help in the end of the process, because things will already have been addressed sooner.

Dave hopes to see the success in measuring this is on the land. Issues are becoming more complex, there are more laws, etc.

1:50 – Henry Smith site - Josh Chase, Highline District Archaeologist

Henry Smith site work, gave background of area, showed photos of kill locations, project beginnings; initial site visits 2010. Changes in procedures have changed from excavation to remote sensing. 2015 was NEPA, EA, Consultation completed with Tribal and SHPO. Coordinated with the private land owner, permit tee; discussed concerns of burning; access, livestock forage...

The Missoula Fire Lab was used; prior to burn they placed mock sites. A Data Logger and Thermocouple were instruments used. The 2015 Prescribed Fire was completed, cost of \$14,000.

Aerial photos showed human effigies (rock drawing of person). UAV used for the first time; cost effective and efficient, less than 3k for entire project.

After burn it showed the rocks of teepee rings, cairn features, drive line rocks.

A DOI, man flown, USFWS Partenavia N701 was used after the first drone was out of commission.

2016 completed the burn project, explained where the fire slopped over and why.

Q. Can buffalo be herded?

A. Yes, they can be herded.

Q. Is there public access to this?

A. The property owners have a good appreciation for the site and are interested in sharing it.

Prior to 1730 the buffalo were captured without horses. So, it was a process to move the animals where they wanted to get them.

02:45 – Mark Good, Montana Wilderness Assoc.

Public Lands – a conservation perspective – overview of uses, listed numerous users, but not all uses are compatible, BLM has to manage this conflict. Mark G. focused on the BLM land and its land users.

Stated that many people enjoy multiple things that overlap in the same areas, not a straight line, talked about different species in areas, grasslands. He followed up with economics and money spent in areas. Land use for everyone is hard to quantify the value of, different requirements for individual preferences.

MWA has been trying to get people out in areas that maybe wouldn't have an appreciation for them, haven't been there to know. These places are not always signed or known.

Mark G. shared a PowerPoint of various areas:

Middle Fork Judith WSA, stated it's qualifies, but explained issues. There is a plan to reroute the road, private property owners need access to their land.

Big Snowy WSA, stated "cleanest water in town"...

Judith Mountains, managed by BLM, Collar Peak.

Musselshell Breaks, being studied for Wilderness characteristics, value to the public, rough breaks country, some camping.

Sweet Grass Hills, East Butte has profound importance, scenically interesting; concerns about mining claims, DOI will be looking at a mineral withdrawal or renewing.

Lost River WMA, State acquired land, cross over the Milk River, historical values, teepee rings, and paleo values.

UMRBNM, cow creek, very scenic, arrow creek.

Rock Creek, north of Hinsdale, "little Grand Canyon", historic values, artifacts, human use, has inconsistencies with water runoff, was homesteaded; old plow left, history of landscape.

Bitter Creek WSA, 69,000 acres, livestock ran here, historically significant, a mule deer corridor.

Burnt Lodge WSA, a rancher uses, very hard country to access, very rough country.

Sand Arroyo Area of CEC, paleo values, historic values.

Arrow Creek Breaks, has scenic art values that look as though it were a Charlie Russell Country painter's dream.

Hugo T. shared story of Auberg's concert, hard to ... mountains.

Q. Mark asked what the trends are.

A. Some Field offices aren't as helpful as Mark's.

Q. Arrow creek breaks, between Chouteau and Fergus County; speculation of PN ranch, interest? If APR were to purchase this property it would need substantial fencing. Would that be viewed as good or

bad? Some fences.... Numerous fences, currently natural barriers, but this use would need all fenced in hard places.

A. Compromise is necessary, MWA realizes that.

...discussed areas that could still be kept for use, but try to keep WSA at a minimum, there aren't any Wilderness areas in eastern Montana.

Jim McCollum explained concerns of total Wilderness where game carts aren't even usable.

Q. How many acres of wilderness are in Mt.?

A. Approx. 3.4 Million acres...?

Q. Aren't WSA's in defacto Wilderness areas?

A. Congress has left them in limbo, so they aren't.

Q. Spring season sign ups, have they been good?

A. Yes, they have been full. Mary F. says the Monument's has been full.

Mark G. discussed problems with when a lot of people are in areas, beer cans, vandalism.

3:30 – Bullwhacker Access

(Continuation from the past agenda)

Mark asked if the RAC wants to be involved. The new roads are off the table, not doable. Could a group get together to discuss options further?

Troy, we had this discussion back when, does this need to be in the Federal Register? Mark didn't think so; it has to go back to the RAC with recommendations.

Clive wasn't positive about addressing the same issues again, road or land exchange.

Q. Does subcommittee have to have representation from differing users?

A. Unsure, but could call it a work group.

Clive read rules from RAC charter, says ...

A discussion about what the RAC would like back from group. Interest from the public was discussed; no road, or yes, keep access...

BLM will continue to work on issues, can come back to this at a later date if something comes to light.

3:45 – Round Robin

Mary – Interesting topics; proposal for the National Heritage Area, BLM hasn't had anything come across Marks desk on it.

Discussion about Fergus Co. Commissioners initiatives about free roaming bison, moving them around is a gray area, livestock laws, brand laws don't apply, causing controversy.

Sheep need a permit, they aren't branded, but if they aren't considered wild... are Buffalo wild when raised domestically?

Jim – DNRC made side agreements with the Salmon Ranch about buffalo...?

Clive – explained process of easement for public access, needed value of land, State will provide exchanges in lieu of large expensive process. ...?

Troy – Flat Creek allotment, waiting to see what is going to happen. Sage Grouse issues are still popping up.

Dan – had nothing new to add to previous comments.

Jeff – Lost River purchase complete, so no issues.

Ralph – Lewistown RMP status, Pete gave overview; coming out later this summer.

Wayne – annual outfitter meeting, only 3 came to last meeting, energy is down for participation. For use to the White Cliffs area there isn't any ramps close enough, Wood Bottom is too far away.

The tree planting is going on at Slaughter and Eagle creek.

Q. Are the trees protected with fence?

A. Planting was explained, 6 to 8 ft. deep hole with perforated pipe alongside for watering, fenced.

Q. Why is outfitting down?

A. Retiring, selling businesses, long way for out of town outfitters for day trips.

Damien – Travel plan in Zortman, public concerns, interest, public think the BLM is going to close all the trails, petition going around. Mark said the BLM isn't looking to do that.

Hugo – rain would be good.

Clive – in lieu selection process is going, value State needs to receive, process for lands to be identified, in process to consummate, BLM doesn't manage crop lands, so good fit for the State.

PN ranch will take shape soon; 21 million dollars come with cattle. State has holdings in it west between Judith and Arrow Creek., he has met with Betty Holder, and discussed expectations with APR. The state

has issues with containment of bison, need to be addressed. Crop land existing isn't really suitable for this and will probably go back to grazing. Cost was discussed, fencing is a big issue, and Clive doesn't think they can achieve this.

Arrow Creek is rough area and containment has proven difficult. For years it was a grazing assoc. for a reason.

Buffalo was raised on the PN 40 yrs. ago.

Next meeting topics:

Meeting will be at Malta, actual meeting on the 12th, field trip day the 13th.

Suggested topics will be:

- ❖ Bison
- ❖ Stanley will have a Bullwhacker report
- ❖ Dr. Warner, Veterinarian, also an APR affiliate, from Billings.

Damien shared knowledge of Dr. Warner's experience with bison.

- ❖ Lewistown RMP update
- ❖ District Office structure for the Central/Highline; decision

Meeting adjourned at 4:18