

Southeast Oregon Resource Advisory Council
October 21, 2020
Meeting held via Zoom

ATTENDANCE

SEORAC Members - Kenneth Kestner, Stan Shepardson, Jeremy Austin, Mark Doverspike, Jason Kesling, Tim Davis, Richard Watts

BLM - Jeff Rose (Burns DM), Todd Forbes (DFO), Pat Ryan (Vale ADM), Brenda Lincoln-Wojtanik (OR SO), Teal Purrington (Presenter), Brent Grasty (Presenter), Lisa McNee (Lakeview PAO)

Public - Michael O'Casey and Susie Koppert.

Pre-meeting Ethics Training: All current SEORAC members in attendance completed the required ethics training presented by Roxane D. Baca, Acting Deputy Ethics Counselor for the Bureau of Land Management. Training Materials: [Improving the Department of the Interior's Ethics Programs through Consolidation](#), [Deputy Secretary's Message on Strengthening and Expanding the Department of the Interior's Ethics Program](#), [Ethics Training PowerPoint](#).

CALL TO ORDER 9:00 a.m.

Welcome, Introductions, Housekeeping, Review Agenda

Review and approve past meeting minutes: no previous minutes available.

Designated Federal Official Report/District Updates:

Todd Forbes, DFO and Lakeview District Manager, Update –

- Beaty Butte Targeted Grazing EA - The EA is now effective, and the project is underway. The project aims to provide temporary water sources in a linear fashion with the goal of targeting grazing to establish and maintain a defined fuel break in the Beaty Butte Allotment. The fuel break will be established in a cheatgrass and non-native grass community to protect other native vegetative communities from fire. The final Decision was issued in January. The EA was Appealed by Wildlands Defense who requested stay that was denied by OHA. A motion to dismiss was submitted by BLM on 05/18/2020, which was subsequently granted. Wildlands Defense did not appeal to the IBLA.
- Beaty Butte Wild Horse Training Facility_– So far in 2020, 14 horses have been adopted, for a total of 51 horses that have been adopted from the facility during its lifetime. There are 7 horses remaining at the facility and we expect to bring in more horses to the facility from recent gathers.
- Paisley Desert HMA Emergency Gather – This fall, due to lack of water and a population well above AML, an Emergency Gather Request was submitted and approved at the

national level for the gathering of approximately 750 wild horses. Operations were successfully conducted the week of October 11th. Horses were transported to the Burns facility for care. Some of these horses will be selected to go to the Beaty Butte Wild Horse training facility to be trained and prepared for adoption.

- Prescribed Fire/Warner Wetlands – A broadcast burn on up to 3000 acres is planned for the week of October 19th in the Warner Wetlands near Plush, Oregon. The objectives of the burn are to create more open water habitat for waterfowl, reduce hazardous fuel loads, and improve access for noxious weed treatments.
- Prescribed Fire/Clover Flat – This project is gradually removing post-settlement juniper from a 19,000-acre project area near Valley Falls, Oregon. To date approximately 4000 acres of juniper treatment and 4000 acres of Prescribed fire (pile burns) have occurred in the Clover Flat Area to restore Sage Grouse and Mule deer habitat. In FY20, approximately 2000 acres of primarily cut/pile/cover treatments have been completed. This fall we plan to burn approximately 1000 of those acres.
- Brattain Fire – This nearly 51,000-acre wildfire threatened the town of Paisley, OR and began on September 7th and was contained on October 6th. The fire started on Forest Service land south of Paisley, then burned through private and BLM lands. BLM lands burned were approximately 10,000 acres. Suppression repair has been completed on BLM land and an Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation Plan has been submitted with requests for funding treatments including herbicide, seeding and fence rebuilding.
- Lakeview Vegetation Management EA – This project seeks to approve some additional vegetation management projects for the Lakeview Field Office. This includes three general areas of consideration:
 - Maintenance of Existing Projects and Facilities – manual and chemical control of vegetation around campgrounds, trails, admin areas, and some past projects.
 - Human Health and Safety – Manual and chemical vegetation control around Dams and Wildland Urban Interface areas.
 - Habitat Improvement and Protection – Juniper reduction for sage-grouse and mule deer as well as vegetation management projects for Special Status Wildlife and Plants.

Litigation / Protests / Appeals

- ONDA v BLM – On 9/27/2019 ONDA filed suit challenging the BLM's decision to reverse the key RNA grazing closures in the 2015 SG plan amendment. In October 2019, the District Court in Idaho enjoined BLM from implementing the 2019 amendments and ordered BLM to comply with 2015 plans.

Jeff Rose, Burns District Manager, Update –

WILD HORSE AND BURRO PROGRAM

- On Monday, June 8, Oregon's Wild Horse Corral Facility reopened for adoption and Trainer Incentive Program pickup by scheduled appointment. Based on Centers for Disease Control guidance, a maximum of two appointments are available per day; group size is limited to three visitors or fewer per appointment; adopters are

encouraged to submit an adoption application for approval ahead of their scheduled appointment; and an outdoor workstation will be used for the completion of any adoption paperwork.

- The Wild Horse and Burro Adoption Incentive Program (AIP) launched in March 2019 contributed to a significant increase of animals placed into private care. In the first 12 months of the AIP, the agency adopted out 6,026 animals (300 of those were adopted out of Oregon's Wild Horse Corral Facility in Hines!), compared with 3,158 during the previous full fiscal year. That increase of 91% revives and accelerates an upward trend of adoptions that began in 2015. Each animal successfully placed into private care is estimated to save taxpayers approximately \$24,000 in lifetime off-range holding costs. That amounts to over \$170 million in lifetime savings generated during Fiscal Year 2019 alone, in large measure due to the AIP.
- Since early May, the Burns District has been bait trapping wild horses that have strayed to private land in the Stinkingwater area. To date, 11 horses have been captured and removed (goal is 20). Spring green-up of native forage has postponed bait trap effectiveness for the time being.

BRIDGE CREEK ALLOTMENTS

- Secretary of Interior issued an order to the Burns District to conditionally offer grazing preference for 4 allotments on the Steens. BLM advertised the conditionally available forage on March 25 for the Mud Creek, Hardie-Summer, Hammond and Hammond Fence Federal Range (FFR) allotments under the project name 'Bridge Creek Allotments'.
 - Mud Creek Allotment has a total of 8,245 BLM-managed acres within two pastures. The RMP currently authorizes 590 total permitted AUMs. A portion of this allotment is located within the Bridge Creek WSA.
 - Hardie Summer Allotment has a total of 6,008 BLM-managed acres and 3,775 privately owned acres for a total of 9,783 acres across 4 pastures. The RMP currently authorizes 408 total permitted AUMs. A portion of this allotment is within the Fir Creek Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) and a portion is within the Steens Mountain Wilderness.
 - Hammond Allotment is 11,009 BLM-managed acres, 2,077 privately owned acres, and 635 other federally managed acres for a total of 13,721 acres across 12 pastures. The Andrews Steens RMP authorizes 473 total permitted Animal Unit Months (AUMs). A portion of this allotment is located within the Bridge Creek Wilderness Study Area (WSA).
 - Hammond FFR Allotment has a total of 1,158 BLM-managed acres, 6,145 privately owned acres, and 13 state owned acres across 4 pastures. The RMP currently authorizes 32 total permitted AUMs. A portion of this allotment is within the Bridge Creek WSA. The BLM is planning to analyze adjusting the pasture boundaries within the Hammond FFR through the Bridge Creek Allotment Management Plan NEPA process. If selected, this would result in an increase in private property within the Hammond FFR, and a decrease in private property within the Hammond and Hardie Summer Allotments.
- The application period ended April 25 and BLM received 4 qualified applications.

- BLM has established a panel to evaluate the applications and may send a request to the applicants for additional information clarifying details of their grazing plan.
- The District is working with the OR/WA State Office and National Office to determine the best path forward to coordinate, cooperate and consult with affected permittees and interested publics.
- Grazing plans will be analyzed through NEPA and the Andrews/Steens Resource Area Field Manager will authorize grazing to resume based on the NEPA analysis.

PUEBLO PILOT PROJECT

- The purpose of the project is to determine the feasibility of installing a linear fuel break and maintain that fuel break through grazing management in an area of high fire danger within Greater Sage-grouse habitat and Wilderness Study Area. The total project area is 26,400 acres. The primary feature is a 9-mile fuel break.
- The project is being conducted in cooperation with the Harney County Wildfire Collaborative (HCWC) facilitated by the High Desert Partnership (HDP).
- The BLM worked with the diverse membership of the HCWC to identify the primary factors that increased the risk of large wildfire in the area. Invasive annual grasses, poor access for firefighting resources and large continuous area of homogenous structure fuel were the primary factors increasing the risk of wildfire. The fuel break was placed along an existing road (Funnel Canyon/Oregon End Road).
- The Environmental Assessment was completed, and a Decision was signed May 2019.
- In the first year, the initial phases of the fuel break were implemented. Actions included a prescribed burn and herbicide treatment (Imazapic) to reduce the fuels in areas dominated by invasive annual grasses. Portions of the road were brushbeat (mowed) to reduce woody vegetation (150 ft both sides)
- Future actions include a well at the west end of the road, and a pipeline will be placed within the road boundary to supply temporary water troughs. Maintenance of the fuel break will be completed utilizing livestock controlled by water.
- The project has a detailed monitoring plan to help with adaptive management. HDP, Oregon State University, and U.S. Department of Agriculture (Agricultural Research Service) are conducting the monitoring and reporting back to the BLM and HCWC.

OTHER

- This week, 17 new and/or collateral duty employees are eyes-deep in training at the Harney County Fairgrounds. Wildland fire Guard School is a course required of all state and federal employees who are training to become wildland firefighters. The week-long session includes instruction, discussion and testing on safety, fire readiness and fire organization, fire behavior, basic fire leadership, suppression methods and tool use, ignition devices, map reading and compass use, engine and pump operations, hazardous materials, working in the wild land/urban interface, air resources, and lessons learned from previous wild land fire incidents. A second Guard School for approximately 10 employees will take place in Frenchglen beginning June 15.
- Rec sites opening: The Steens Mountain Loop Road is officially open on the south side to Big Indian and Little Blitzen Gorge overlooks, and on June 12 will be open on the north side to Fish Lake and Jackman Park Campgrounds. South Steens, Page Springs and Chickahominy Reservoir Campgrounds have been open and in full service since May 15.

These three sites were closed for a period to overnight camping, but day-use remained available.

- Thanks to the enduring and successful conservation efforts of federal, state, and local partners, on June 10 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is delisting the Borax Lake chub from the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and moving the fish to its Sensitive Species List. Threats to Borax Lake and its namesake chub have been eliminated or greatly reduced, and the fish no longer meets the ESA definition of an endangered or threatened species.

The Borax Lake chub exists solely in Borax Lake, a unique spring-fed lake nestled in the Alvord Basin of Harney County in southeastern Oregon. This tiny and resilient fish evolved to withstand harsh living conditions in the remnant desert waters of the Great Basin, including surface water temperatures that can reach up to 104 degrees Fahrenheit. Oregon has the only population of Borax Lake chub on the planet.

In the late 1970s, the Borax Lake chub's habitat was at risk due to geothermal energy exploration, diversion of Borax Lake's water for irrigation and legacy effects of mining for borax, a compound used in a variety of cleaning, cosmetic and other products. These threats led to an emergency listing of the chub as endangered under the ESA in 1980. Since then, conservation partners have spearheaded efforts to protect Borax Lake and its unique chub.

Pat Ryan, Burns District Update –

SEORMP - The SEORMP Interdisciplinary team (IDT) has drafted and submitted to managers, Oregon State Office, and Regional Solicitor's Office responses to approximately 1,000 substantive comments on the Draft EIS. Based on these comments and District recommendations, in April, State Director Linares approved the conceptual basis for the Proposed RMP Alternative which will be carried into the Final EIS. The IDT has re-engaged and has begun developing the FEIS. The District intends to complete the administrative draft FEIS this summer and to begin briefings of the State Offices, Washington Office, and the Department in late summer. The District will provide advanced notice to the public of their opportunity to review the FEIS. Current documents on the Southeastern Oregon RMP Amendment are available on the ePlanning website: at <https://go.usa.gov/xnsQx>.

Boardman to Hemingway Transmission Line (B2H) – BLM is coordinating with Idaho Power Company (IPC) and the Cooperating Agencies on the implementation steps for the Geotechnical Plan of Development. The Navy and IPC finalizing the easement documents in April 2020. In 2020 IPC expects to receive the Proposed Order from Oregon Department of Energy (ODOE) In 2021 – IPC Expect to receive State of Oregon Energy Facility Siting Council Site Certificate (EFSC) Permit for State & Private Lands.

Grassy Mountain - Calico submitted an updated Plan of Operations in February. BLM performed a completeness review of the revised Plan of Operations and provided comments to Calico to respond to before BLM can full determine the Plan of Operations is complete. Calico will provide an additional revised Plan of Operations to the State and BLM late summer or early fall.

Recreation and Deferred Maintenance - The Vale District has received deferred maintenance funding and this year some of the recreation sites will receive updates. Work is planned to occur during the slow recreation use season of that site. Between July 6th and July 30, the Castle Rock and Riverside Camp areas will be getting new CXT Vault Toilets and will be closed. Chukar Park Campground will be open and available for visitors.

Range The field office hired a new rangeland management specialist in January 2020. As a native Oregonian, Logan Whitten is an entry-level RMS who is excited to serve OR/WA BLM. Logan has been assigned allotments in both the northern and southern half of the field office. The field office is actively recruiting range technician positions that were vacated through attrition the last two-three years.

An Interdisciplinary Team (ID Team) continues to work on Louse Canyon GMA NEPA analysis. Formal scoping and a 30-day comment period occurred in September 2019. A Draft EIS is in development. Given the complexity of the analysis and the alternatives being considered, issuance of the DEIS is likely postponed to FY2021.

Monitoring in Spring Mountain and Mahogany Mountain allotments within the Cow Lakes Project Area to support OR/WA Standards and Guidelines has begun for the 2020 field season.

The MFO range program is involved with NW Malheur sage-grouse project implementation. The temporary grazing closure process continues. Discussions with permittees continue and permittees affected by temporary closures in the 2020 grazing year have applied for non-use within the treatment areas. Discussions for out-year temporary closures also continue with affected permittees before agreements and/or grazing decisions are issued.

Kivett and Squaw Creek Allotment re-evaluations for permit renewals are drafted. Standards continue to be met, and there is no indication in needing to change the grazing permit. MFO has drafted a Categorical Exclusion (CX) for NEPA analysis for the grazing permit renewal due to Standards being met and no changes to the grazing permit are proposed. NEPA analysis and proposed decision are on schedule to be issued in June 2019. These allotments are both under "Custodial" management.

Continued coordination between Oregon State University, Vale District BLM restoration and fuels programs, and the MFO range program is occurring for the Fuels Reduction Grazing Research and Education Project within the Three Fingers allotment. OSU will be conducting monitoring of study plots in June/July 2020.

Wildlife - Annual spotted frog inventories will begin in early June.

Botany – Vale is continuing to partner with Institute for Applied Ecology and Snake River Correctional Institution (SRCI) to grow sagebrush for restoration activities. Vale continues the process of developing genetically appropriate forb seed that is beneficial to sage-grouse, but seed collection has been delayed one year due to Covid-19. Vale is also working with Idaho BLM to coordinate efforts to increase the same species which should lower production costs.

Vale is continuing our collaboration with Oregon Parks and Recreation Department and Oregon Department of Agriculture to develop methods to restore habitat for two Bureau-sensitive plants: smooth blazing star and Owyhee clover.

Due to Covid-19 no interns were hired to work on botanical projects this year. A recent graduate from Eastern Oregon University was hired to work with various resources starting mid-summer, with the intent of giving the intern the opportunity to experience the full scope of work the BLM does.

Aquatics 1160 - The 2020 OR/WA Aquatic AIM contract has been put on hold due to COVID-19 preventing necessary trainings to be held. The contract and work will be rolled over to FY21

Partnership established with Malheur Watershed Council initiating the plan and design phase of a stream restoration project on Willow Creek upstream of Malheur Reservoir in northern Malheur County. Implementation planned for fall of FY21.

Weeds- Weeds, Range and ESR conducted a collaborative effort to control Russian thistle on areas within 2017 Owyhee Canyon and Bowden Fires that included late fall targeted grazing and concluded with aerial herbicide treatments. A portion of the treatments was to improve growing conditions for seedlings. In other areas, treatments were in preparation for reseeding within the fire areas. Treatments were in coordination with and through the cooperation of permittees affected by the fires and resulting actions. (5360 acres)

Aerial imazapic treatments on invasive annual grasses are planned for September as part of NW Malheur Fuels treatments following cutting and burning of juniper in Bendire and Bully Creek areas. Treatments will be evaluated and, if needed, seeding of desirable perennials will occur the following year in areas that do not naturally revegetate. (6660 ac).

Wild Horses - Since the wild horse field darting birth control application has been successful in two herds in north end of Vale District, we are starting our largest attempt in the Barren Valley Complex which includes three HMAs. The 10 - year population management plan is currently being reviewed by management and includes intensive birth control applications as well as gathers and removals. This project will start in Sand Springs HMA which has an Appropriate Management Level of 100-200 but currently has approximately 400-450 horses. BLM will be applying Gonacon by field darting and trapping and working mares through a chute on site.

Draft Lakeview RMPA Update (Todd Forbes): Staff are working on a second round of revisions from the State Office and solicitor review. The amendment contains 6 alternatives that focus on addressing provisions for a 2010 Settlement Agreement including the management of Lands with Wilderness characteristics, Off Highway Vehicle Use and Grazing permit relinquishment. Our estimated date for publishing the Draft for public comment is December 2020.

Purposed Southeastern Oregon RMPA Update (Brent Grasty): After reviewing and responding to over 4,000 public comments, and with then-Acting Oregon State Director Linares' approval, Vale developed the Proposed Amendment. The Final EIS and Proposed

Amendment have been drafted and delivered to the Oregon State Office for review. Staff have made revisions in response and the document is now under review by the Regional Solicitors Office. Following receipt of the Solicitor's comment, Vale will make final changes and prepare for briefing the Oregon State Director.

Programmatic EISs and CXs (Teal Purrington and Brenda Lincoln-Wojtanik):

[Programmatic NEPA & Great Basin Fuel Break EIS RAC Presentation](#)

[BLM's Newest Categorical Exclusions Presentation](#)

Other RAC business and Wrap-Up:

- Call for nominations is open, and applications will be accepted through November 11, 2020.
- 2021 meeting dates and location: January 13 and 14 – Burns; April 29 and 30 in Lakeview; June 23 and 24 in Prineville (joint meeting with John-Day Snake RAC); and October 20 and 21 in Ontario.

MEETING ADJOURNED 3:28 p.m.