

**Steens Mountain Advisory Council
Public Lands Access Subcommittee Meeting
December 16, 2020 Summary Minutes – FINAL**

The Public Lands Access Subcommittee of the Steens Mountain Advisory Council (SMAC) met December 16, 2020 via Zoom from 11:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. PST. In accordance with the provisions of Public Law 92-463, the meeting was open to the public. This document summarizes attendance, discussions that occurred, and decisions made. For the record, it is noted that to avoid any conflict of interest, Council members absent themselves from the meeting when the Council discusses matters in which a conflict of interest may occur.

December 16, 2020

SMAC members in attendance

- Ruthie Danielsen, Private Landowner Representative
- Eric Hawley, Burns Paiute Tribal Representative
- Rod Klus, State Liaison Representative
- Fred Otley, Grazing Permittee Representative
- Terry Turner, Fish and Recreational Fishing Representative
- John F. Helmer, Dispersed Recreation Representative
- Jake Jakubik, No Financial Interest Representative
- Leon Pielstick, Wild Horse and Burro Management Representative

SMAC members absent

- Kali Wilson, Grazing Permittee Representative
- Pete Runnels, Commercial Recreation Permit Holder Representative

Vacant SMAC positions

- Environmental interests for the State as a whole Representative
- Environmental interests from the local area Representative
- Mechanized/consumptive recreation Representative

Members of the public

- Rand Campbell, private citizen, Silvies Valley Ranch / Nature's Advocate, LLC
- Teresa Wicks, Eastern Oregon Field Coordinator, Portland Audubon
- Karen Withrow, private citizen, volunteer caretaker at Riddle Brothers Ranch
- Paul Davis, private citizen, Alvord Ranch
- Tom Phillips, private citizen
- Dave Haugeberg, private citizen, edgeworker to Steens Mountain CMA
- Sarah Ratay, private citizen
- John Malarky, private citizen

BLM

- Tara Thissell, BLM, Public Affairs Specialist
- Jeff Rose, BLM, Burns District Manager and Designated Federal Official
- Don Rotell, BLM, Andrews/Steens Resource Area Field Manager
- Matt Obradovich, BLM, District Biologist

- Lisa Grant, BLM, Planning and Environmental Coordinator
- Mandy DeCoo, BLM, Natural Resource Specialist – Recreation (Supervisory)
- Bill Hart, BLM, Law Enforcement Ranger
- Autumn Toelle-Jackson, BLM, Assistant Field Manager for Andrews/Steens Resource Area

Tara Thissell welcomed participants and shared some tips for using videoconferencing. Attendance was recorded. Tara gave a brief administrative update:

- Teresa Wicks' nomination for the Local Environmental Representative position is still in vetting with BLM Headquarters/Department of the Interior.
- An application period for vacant or to-be-vacant-in-2021 positions closed recently; received applications from Terry Turner (incumbent, Fish and Recreational Fishing), Rod Klus (incumbent, State Liaison), Mike Fox (Mechanized and Consumptive Recreation), and Amy Bilbeisi (Commercial Recreation/ Recreation Permit Holder). We are still looking for additional applicants for Burns Paiute Tribe, Private Landowner, State Environmental Representative, and Grazing Permittee. Another application period should open in the coming months, hopefully February or March.
- Public comment period is set for 2:30 p.m. today.

Designated Federal Official update

Jeff thanked everyone for their patience while we navigate our first Zoom meeting. He also thanked Tara for her work to make this meeting happen.

- Wild Horse and Burro program – last year, we adopted 388 animals into private care from the Corral Facility in Burns. This is about 2.5x more than we have managed in previous years. We had no helicopter gathers scheduled in 2020 for Oregon, however, we did have two Herd Management Areas with horses that strayed onto private property (Stinkingwater and South Steens). Also, the Paisley Desert HMA in the Lakeview District was emergency gathered due to drought. With these three efforts, there are now around 1,000 horses at the Corral Facility and staff is busy preparing those animals for adoption. We don't have any gathers on the national schedule in 2021 either. Stinkingwater, South Steens, and the Barren Valley complex remain priorities for gathering if able. The spay research trial that we tried in Oregon (twice) in recent years is moving down the line in the state of Utah now.
- Recreation – we saw a pretty big increase in use across the board in 2020, starting in March. The recreation staff is working to piece together the data for campground use, trail use, road counters, etc. Its looking like a 2-3x increase in just about every capacity and some road counters are showing 5-6x more use. Campgrounds were regularly full and people were turned away often – there was a period of 40 consecutive days were campgrounds were full! Vault restrooms were heavily used and staff was incredibly busy keeping them clean and stocked throughout the District, especially on the Steens. The east side of the Steens, particularly the Alvord Desert, was the busiest it's ever been. Human waste and garbage were significant issues there. This may be an area where the SMAC can engage and help the BLM with some creative solutions on how to deal with these situations.
 - John Helmer reiterated that it was a huge year in recreation. As a caretaker at Riddle Brothers Ranch, John said he and his wife saw nearly 700 people just in the month of July. In previous years, visitation was around 250 for that period. He felt that dispersed camping increased overall as well and hopes the SMAC can be involved in tackling the issues. Many private landowners in the area also very likely felt the increase in use and the stress level of the public trying to share this space.
 - Ruthie Danielsen added there was some trespassing, which is expected when you get a lot

people in areas they haven't been before.

Jeff added the Southeast Oregon Resource Advisory Council will also be helping with this effort (the Alvord and east Steens aren't technically in the advisory area for the SMAC). He also mentioned that the eastern part of the state may see an even bigger increase in recreationists in 2021 because of the 2020 wildfires in western Oregon – many popular areas for camping and hiking were lost, which could send people in our direction in 2021.

- Bridge Creek – the Burns District put out an Environmental Assessment out on December 8 for public review and input regarding grazing in four allotments in the Bridge Creek area on Steens Mountain. The comment period closes on December 20 and a final decision is expected as soon as January 15, 2021. One of the reasons for the tight timeline is to try and implement the plan for grazing in Spring 2021. Jeff thanked the staff for their hard work on this project and encouraged the SMAC to look at the document and provide input.
 - o John Helmer stated that this project and its importance likely slowed progression on other projects / NEPA in the district.
- Office remodel update – Harney County was listed as a green county in the state for the level of pandemic, which is good news. Our front office is open to the public, but we are limiting in-person meetings as much as possible. In the office at any one time, there are 15-20 folks at the most. The majority of people are teleworking. We have a new conference room, front entrance, public restroom, public meeting space, updated office space layout, added file storage, etc. Our next phase will be to start increasing the number of people back in the office – this will be pandemic and construction dependent. We have worked hard to continue providing regular services to the public, despite all the changes.
- Jeff said it is great to be able to meet in December, even though it's a virtual session. We usually don't meet with the SMAC at this time of the year because of weather and travel conditions.
- Jake Jakubik asked about the public relations work on the wild horse and burro program and if the marketing has been effective. Tara Thissell answered that the program has a dedicated marketing team at the national level, and that additional funds are put toward contractors who also help with design work and other facets of the program's public interface. Marketing has been successful with the help of program extensions like the Mustang Makeovers, Trainer Incentive Program, Adopter Incentive Program and Sale Authority. We continue to face the issue of oversaturation of animals in the equine market, which has been the case for at least the last decade.
- Jake said he is a member of the Deschutes County Sheriff's Posse and would like to present the program to the state posse and have them present it to their local groups. Tara said that would be a great idea and that the program is always looking for partnerships and other ways to spread information about adoption.

SMAC's Definition of Reasonable Use

The SMAC's definition of reasonable use document was last distributed to the group in May for the June session. John thanked Terry Turner, Ruthie Danielsen and Teresa Wicks for their work on the effort to put the document together with John. John reviewed the document with the following details:

- o Why is this on the agenda? This document has deep roots – we've been talking about this for a long time, all the way back to 2013 when we started discussing the access issues for Nature's Advocate, LLC.
- o The group thought it would be helpful to put together a document that helped define 'why' decisions were made or recommendations put forward regarding reasonable use.
- o This is not a policy, and continues to be a work in progress. The SMAC expects the

document to evolve and that the principles therein apply to the Steens Act alone. It also emphasizes the other tools available for addressing access issues like cooperative agreements.

- Section 3 of the document talks about the main issue and hand and what the SMAC concluded. The Steens Act and the Wilderness Act disagree/are different in terms of access. On those conflicts, the SMAC concluded the Steens Act is primary because it is specific to the Steens and is the more recent act.
- What does reasonable mean? The Steens Act requires reasonable access for reasonable use, but reasonable surely doesn't have a firm definition. The SMAC concluded the basic dictionary definitions of reasonable apply.
- What is reasonable use and reasonable access? The SMAC concluded it was outside of their purview to determine what is 'actually' reasonable use – those determinations should be left up to state and county land use laws. If the land use laws allow for certain things, those things would be legal, and the access – at the lowest impact – serve the reasonable use and maintains the current character and uses of the lands and is consistent with the purpose and objectives of the Steens Act.
- The document outlines how the SMAC can examine access issues in the future with questions to consider and principles to apply.
- Neither the principles of access or the principles of wilderness can necessarily always be pure – we are looking for balance and compromise among sometimes competing goals. This document can help shape conversations and recommendations on this effort.

Ruthie Danielsen added there seems to be a line in the sand in the Steens Act, depending on what side of an issue a person may be on. The group that worked on the Reasonable Use document tried to pick out the maybe-conflicting issues in the SMAC and apply some language or a process to emphasize the intent of the big principles and to work together for a compromise.

Terry Turner said there will always be opposing views and a necessity to compromise. He felt it was important to look at the county land use laws and how those could impact other laws.

Teresa Wicks added that the process was a great learning opportunity and it opened up a lot of discussion on really difficult issues. John emphasized the group was very fortunate to have Teresa participate, even though she isn't yet a member of the SMAC.

Rod Klus shared a concern about deferring to land use Planning Laws may be too low of a bar, and we can't really anticipate what land uses will be desired and/or approved. The step by step outline in the document also seems to lead toward the person wanting access to provide a "permit" – this might be putting the cart before the horse. Some people might not want to apply for a permit until they know they have access. John clarified the spirit behind the 'permit' would be to have a way to inform about what exactly is "allowed" or what the applicant is seeking for use on their private land.

Leon Pielstick said that defining reasonable access has been a problem for years and it should've been hashed out and determined in court by now. It seems we can't put forward some creative ideas for fear of litigation and that seems wrong.

Jeff Rose said the BLM cannot have any connection whatsoever in dictating private land use. It is also important for the public and the SMAC to know that we are, indeed, asking for their creative input. This was a good process for the SMAC to go through and Jeff believes it will be really helpful in the long term. For now, it has given us the possibility to analyze the current inholder access situation in the best possible way.

John will update the SMAC's Reasonable Use document with "final" and the current date – showing the current membership agreed with it as written – and redistribute to the group. So moved. Leon seconded the motion. Approved.

Nature's Advocate, LLC, Inholder Access Environmental Assessment

Lisa Grant, Burns BLM Planning and Environmental Coordinator, introduced herself to the group. She is new to the P&EC position and gave a summary of what she has been doing on the project since she received it (Summer 2020). Lisa spent a significant amount of time getting up to speed on the history of this effort and the proposed access routes, both on the ground and in the office. The SMAC's Reasonable Use document was very helpful. Lisa worked on updating the EA and had several meetings with the project proponent and Andrews/Steens Resource Area Field Manager. Through these conversations, Lisa learned the project proponent may have another route to add to their proposal / the EA for analysis. This route was received by the BLM on Monday (two days before this conference call), so Lisa will dig into that as soon as possible.

Lisa gave a brief overview of the routes / alternatives that are currently in the EA.

- No action / current inholder access : Steens Loop Road to Cold Springs Road as weather and road conditions allow, and then no motorized access beyond
- Proponent's request: Full access at three points - Historic grazing route, 2 small pieces of road plus an extension and widening the route; Cold Springs road (widening the road) to Renie Access Route to a new construction extension to their private inholding; Trails End Waterhole route
- SMAC recommended alternative: Similar to proponent's request, without the use of Trails End Waterhole.
- Maintenance on Cold Springs Road, build a parking area, and non-motorized access thereafter (except for periodic use of a dozer for work on the inholding/waterholes/etc.).
- Limited maintenance on Cold Springs to widen turns, build a parking area in the Wilderness setback, and non-motorized access thereafter; construct a non-motorized trail to the inholding.

The alternatives will likely be adjusted with the new proposal from the project proponent.

John Helmer reminded the group about their previous (years ago) recommendation to provide the absolutely minimum level of maintenance on the Cold Springs Road. Lisa stated the Cold Springs Road is a Maintenance Intensity 1, which is relatively little maintenance, though no preventative maintenance. Maintenance "intensities" refer to the frequency in which the road is maintained, not necessarily the geometry in how it is maintained. Don Rotell added the intent was always to maintain the Cold Springs Road to the upper end of its designated maintenance level (a 2 for Cold Springs Road) to give as much access we could.

Fred Otley stated there are many, many roads that have deteriorated in quality and passage ability due to lack of maintenance. FLPMA gives an obligation to BLM to prevent watershed degradation or overall road degradation, erosion, etc. This should be considered.

Rand Campbell, project proponent, discussed some of the alternatives. The BLM Solicitors said the SMAC alternative is a violation of the law, so Nature's Advocate went back to the drawing board and came up with the new proposal – the "Coole route" – that Lisa referred to earlier. Rand said the new proposal is, indeed, an actual road and he has satellite imagery and other photos for documentation. Rand described the Coole route and said that even though it isn't the shortest access, it seems to be more in line with the Steens Act. He offered to give a presentation on this route to the SMAC at their next meeting.

Leon Pielstick said he doesn't remember any discussion about the Coole route and that he is excited about the possibility! Lisa said this route was actually presented to the SMAC in 2013 and she doesn't know why it was dismissed by the group at that time. Don Rotell gave a summary of how we got where we are...we started with a "yes": how can we provide this necessary access? From there, we've looked at various routes and consulted with Solicitors and reviewed the Steens Act and others. The Steens Act explicitly limits new construction in Wilderness, and we need to follow that direction. We are also in a new position with travel management planning where we are essentially starting over, and it would be ideal if the Coole route was part of the new road inventory.

Ruthie Danielsen asked if the SMAC's alternative was reviewed by BLM Solicitors and if they looked at the Steens Act in its entirety, or just at the reference to roads in wilderness. Don Rotell said there is an opinion out there that the Steens Act is not in conflict with the Wilderness Act, and that it actually enforces the Steens Act in terms of roads and access in wilderness. Of course, the access question is not closed and travel management planning will be a huge part of the outcome. Ruthie added that in the original travel management planning effort, many of the historic access routes were left off the inventory provided to the BLM from private property owners (or anyone else that new of or used a particular route). Don stated that the BLM is essentially starting over, so all information will be welcome.

John Helmer stated that decisions have to include a look at risk – what is the risk and where? In this case, with the SMAC alternative, there is a trade-off with a much shorter section of new road to be built in wilderness versus the longer route on existing roads and all the maintenance required there. Don added the BLM does have to take into account the Solicitor opinions and their interpretations of what is legal and what isn't. The BLM absolutely can't move forward with an action that is illegal. Rand Campbell added that Nature's Advocate is fine using any route that provides the access they need for the uses they are allowed by land use laws. The historical Coole route seems to make sense, though it does need some maintenance. Lisa added that it will be important to have evidence of the Coole route to the point it can be defended in court as existing and historically used. Discussion continued about points of access to the Nature's Advocate inholdings.

Teresa Wicks asked if an administratively closed road becomes "unclosed" to provide access to an inholding, who maintains it? Teresa was concerned about public perception on a closed road available only for private access being maintained by the BLM. The answer depends on a lot of things, but the BLM will try to dig into that and provide information.

Pike Creek Parking Area Environmental Assessment

Matt Obradovich, District Biologist for the Burns District of the BLM, gave a short presentation regarding the access at Pike Creek on the east side of Steens Mountain. Matt put a map up on the screen for everyone to look at during the discussion.

There is an existing BLM easement (public access across private land) at Pike Creek Canyon to afford visitor access to Pike Creek and the trail leading into the canyon. People have been parking along the very-narrow easement on private land for quite some time. In 2016, a public parking area at the end of the easement was proposed by BLM staff and we are still in the process of completing an EA for that action. The parking area is proposed to the south of Pike Creek, which means users would have to cross the stream to get to it. It is approximately one mile from the East Steens Road to the proposed parking area, which could accommodate eight vehicles and room to turn around.

Right now, there is a parking area along the East Steens Road that accommodates visitor parking. One of the problems with the proposed parking area and having to cross the stream to get to it is that Lahontan

Cutthroat Trout are in this water system. Lahontan are on the threatened species list and having vehicles in the stream presents problems during migration times (spring, when the water is higher). Sedimentation in the water column could cause problems with fish viability. Increasing traffic in that area means we have to go through the consultation process with Fish and Wildlife to allow for “take”.

As it is now, the EA proposes excavating on either side of the stream above the high-water marks and hardening the crossings/approaches (using rock and fabric) to prevent erosion. Again, we would have to go through consultation with Fish and Wildlife to implement this kind of alternative. One thing that was considered was to put in a bridge or some sort of structure across the stream to keep vehicles out of the channel. Consultation on this topic (pre-fab cement or pre-stressed metal) already exists and may get approval much sooner. Right now we are still looking at our options. The Burns District Engineer is looking at the costs and logistics for these types of structures so we have a clear picture overall on how this would work.

John Helmer asked about a timeline for moving forward with the project. Matt said it wouldn't be too quickly, at least for awhile, since he is tied up in some other priority projects for the district. Don Rotell added that our timelines have been changing on the district and are difficult to accurately portray right now. However, this is within the top three priorities in the district. John said the SMAC had extensive discussions about not crossing Pike Creek, but that the challenge would be building the parking area in a Wilderness Study Area or on private property.

Jake Jakubik said a potential consideration should definitely be contamination of the water by vehicles driving through it. Matt said that is a consideration and is one of the reasons to look at the pre-fabricated bridge options. Jake asked which option is less expensive – hardened crossing or the bridge. Matt said the hardened crossing are less expensive on the construction side, but that doesn't include the time and effort required for the consultation process.

John reminded the group about the parking area on the East Steens Road and wondered if that satisfied the public or if they wanted more. Don said there has been a good demand for access in Pike Creek Canyon. There is emphasis on improving access to public lands with the current administration as well. We are trying to balance the need for public access with the concerns for resources. We will continue to encourage people to use the East Steens Road parking area and walk up the easement to the creek and canyon trailhead. Right now, driving on the easement is leading people to a dead end with no place to turn around without trespassing onto private land. The BLM is considering a closure to motorized traffic on the easement until the parking and turnaround issue is solved.

Paul Davis (private landowner in the area) asked if the new parking area would only support eight vehicles but at least 20 vehicles are accessing the canyon every day, what will happen to the overflow? Jeff Rose said the BLM has no authority to deal with anyone not on public land, but that we can work together to better educate users on how to navigate the situation (full parking areas). Private property issues (trespass, etc.) are handled by the county – let's try to make it so we don't have to deal with the issue in the first place. Paul said he sees the problem happening very quickly – the parking lot will be full and no one is talking about protecting Steens Mountain.

Travel Management Planning

Don Rotell gave a short overview of what travel management planning efforts occurred within the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Area. The first go was a Travel Plan as part of the Resource Management Plan for the area. The Travel Plan was litigated and the BLM then began work on a Comprehensive Recreation Plan and a Travel Management Plan. This was litigated as well and the TMP was remanded back to the BLM. The BLM entered a stipulated agreement with ONDA (the litigant) that

said our original Travel Plan would be in place with some additional restrictions, like, no maintenance on 26 miles of specific routes, limited maintenance on 64 miles of specific routes, 5.78 miles of obscure routes are limited to administrative use only, and provide 30 days notice to the public on BLM intent to maintain level two roads in the CMPA. We have over \$1M in Equal Access to Justice Act (EAJA) fees in litigation over this at present – moving forward in making travel management decisions, we want to remain good caretakers of taxpayer dollars. We can't just roll the dice and hope for the best.

We are still at a place where we need a final document for Travel Management in the district and are essentially going back to square one. We lacked baseline data in the TMP and that will be a big part of this new effort. Our route inventory will start completely over and will include the opportunity to gather information about historical routes. Basically, every single mile of road within the CMPA (not including roads on private property) will be reexamined and reconsidered. A contractor will complete the inventory for the 700+ miles of road (138 closed road, 18 decommissioned, 104 shown on a map, 424 open, 32 administrative use only; and 72.5 miles of trails will be inventoried, too) we can currently identify through GIS mapping, and we are hoping to start this effort in spring and summer of 2021. The route inventory will be the basis for the rest of the plan.

Fred Otley said the Steens Act says the BLM has to coordinate with private landowners in any management effort. Maps with locations of many roads were submitted from private landowners in the original travel management planning effort – that map and those roads should be included from the get go. This should shorten the process and create more thoroughness with those that are doing the inventory. Grazing permittees and landowners that know the ground and where all the historical roads are need to be involved in the process as well.

Ruthie Danielsen asked where the “maps” are that Fred referred to. Fred said the maps are in the county records somewhere and that the BLM should have copies that they worked with as well. Don said he is fairly sure the BLM has those maps and Mandy DeCroo added that those roads on those maps are part of the base inventory the contractor will be doing. Jeff Rose didn't want to assume the BLM had those maps without doing some deeper digging. Ruthie said that Stacy Davies (former SMAC member) has some of the original maps from the 1990s and she will contact him about it. Jeff said the BLM will also check with Harney County.

Ruthie asked what is the requirement or definition for baseline data? Don said we need to have more imagery, high-definition aerial photography, and generally more “proof” of roads for the public to review. Fred reminded Don that baseline data should include the roads included in the stipulated agreement with ONDA. Don agreed and said those roads would be considered and that the stipulated agreement is just for the interim. Fred reiterated the necessity to coordinate with private landowners to gather baseline data for roads within the CMPA. Don summarized the planning process: inventory roads and collect information; public scoping to gather more information; develop range of alternatives for access; create the EA to analyze the alternatives; public comment; proposed decision; final decision.

Public Comment

Dave Haugeberg, private landowner – has been involved with things on Steens Mountain for 50 years and owns property at Willow Creek. For a long time, the road to Dave's property crossed Willow Creek and this was a concern. We entered into a project with the BLM and Alvord Ranch and we moved about 1.5 miles of the access road to the north side of the creek and we don't have to cross it. I make that point to emphasize the consideration to move the road into the canyon so you don't have to cross Pike Creek.

Paul Davis, private landowner – Paul said his family has owned the ranch for 50 years and they really want to preserve the mountain [Steens] and the valley. They've never stopped the public from getting

where they want to go – they are just trying to figure out how to deal with the trash and waste. It's concerning to them to lose the mountain and desert to lack of management. We seem to have a handle on the situation at Pike Creek right now – why don't we just take the road all the way into Pike Creek Canyon all the way around to Indian Creek if we're going to open the road? Our family's main concern is preservation of that mountain. Paul's head goes up when he hears things about overuse and no protection. Paul is anxious to work with the new administration but hesitant to lose control of the beauty of that mountain.

John Helmer reflected back to his early days on the SMAC and said the SMAC made a real commitment to “get our hands dirty” and talk to landowners and work steadily on issues. Quite a bit of effort was extended on the Pike Creek situation. Everyone has worked hard on this and the stream crossing, while not ideal, seems achievable.

John Malarkey, private citizen – had a fantastic road trip to the Steens in 2015 and following along on the meeting as an appreciative person of the group that is working to help manage the Steens in all the required ways. The Steens is a really special place and a complicated area with a lot of stakeholders. He appreciates the thoroughness of everyone's role.

Terry Turner – sent some information to the SMAC group on some recent studies published about tire chemicals impacting Coho Salmon survival. He can't imagine where we would really want to have a hard crossing at a place like Pike Creek with respect to this.

Travel Management Planning – (cont.)

Ruthie Danielsen asked where to send information about roads. Don said to send it directly to him and he will share with Mandy. He is looking for what was on the landscape at the time of the Steens Act, but also any historical information about access and use in the CMPA. Ruthie also wanted clarification on whether or not to include roads that were on private land that became public land with the passage of the Steens Act. Mandy said to include roads on current public lands. Mandy and Jeff both added that just because someone says a road exists or existed in a certain place at a certain time, it doesn't mean that road will carry through in the new Travel Management Plan.

Subcommittee Member Roundtable

Ruthie Danielsen – before the last meeting, a private property owner got ahold of Ruthie and was upset that the access that goes off Cold Springs Road that he is permitted to use appeared to be so traveled by the fence contractors for the No Livestock Grazing Area that it has now become a clear two-track and is being used regularly by the public. Also, another private property owner has livestock that got out onto Ruthie's private property four separate times – it's quite a trip to get from their property to Ruthie's property, and sometimes they even get into the Fish Creek drainage which is Wild and Scenic River corridor. The issue seems to be people leaving gates open and several landowners are experiencing this problem. There is a huge financial loss to owners when their livestock get into places they can't get out of.

Ruthie also wanted to add that she talked with Paul Davis about his concerns with the Alvord Desert and the huge increase in users there.

Leon Pielstick – mentioned the spay trial for wild horses taking place in Utah that Oregon wasn't able to push through (twice). It is his understanding that Utah is willing to go to court over the issue. Tara Thissell added that the Oregon spay project proposals both involved a research study component with partners (USGS, universities). Also, with the Oregon projects happening at the federal facility, there were concerns about first amendment rights and public involvement/observation. The Utah project will take

place at a private facility.

Mandy said the North Steens Equestrian Campground is on hold until we are able to hit water in a well – we are currently at 460+ feet with no water.

John Helmer – Reminder that we need good applicants for SMAC. John has personally worked on that continuously and hopes the rest of the SMAC will do the same. At a future SMAC meeting, we should touch base on the Inholder Initiatives. We continue to have good conversations on some of those efforts, but we need to spend a little time checking in on progress.

Rod Klus – Update on the Sage grouse population status. In the Burns BLM District, it looks like a 12.7% population increase last year. Lakeview increased as well, but Vale went down. Things averaged around 2% increase overall for the state. Tara will send a link with the full report to the SMAC.

Terry Turner – Regarding the Page Springs Weir, there are some meetings planned with the Fish Passage Task Force, BLM, Fish and Wildlife Service on next steps toward removing the weir. Tara added this topic will be on the agenda for a future meeting. Terry will find the correspondence from Craig Smith about this meeting and share it with Jeff Rose.

Ruthie asked “last year sometime in the summer, we went to the Penland campground proposed site” – Mandy said it is still on the list for Comprehensive Recreation Plan list of projects for implementation. We haven’t forgotten about it! As far as the vault restroom near the “Turkey Foot” junction in the high Steens...that one IS off the table – not feasible.

Closeout

Tara closed out the meeting, noting our best bet is to attempt another virtual meeting since we know this will work until we are able to meet in person. Possible agenda items for the next session include:

- Nature’s Advocate, LLC Inholder Access EA – have Rand Campbell present on the Coole route
- Pike Creek Parking Area
- Bridge Creek Allotment Management Plan and EA
- Page Springs Weir
- Travel Management Planning
- Inholder Initiative
- Recreation stats review for 2020
- Revisit the previous exercise on “what should SMAC work on”

The SMAC felt positive about the opportunity to meet via Zoom and that we have this option for the future. Thanks to Matt Christenson from the BLM OR/WA State Office for setting up and moderating the session. The SMAC hopes we can meet in person again in the near future and get out on the ground.

Pete Runnels 03/10/2021