

John Day Snake Resource Advisory Council Meeting, June 25, 2021

Meeting convened at 8 a.m. via Zoom

Members present: Chairman Randy Jones, Steve Lent, Shay White, Terry Drever Gee, Art Waugh, Jim Boethin, Bob Krein, Gary Gustafson, Glenn Burleigh, Greg Jackle, Jim Reiss. **Excused:** Jerry Brummer.

Agency Reps and others: Ed Guzman, Malheur National Forest; D. Wayne Monger and Joe Aragon, Vale BLM; Shanda Dekome, Deschutes National Forest; Heidi McRoberts, Umatilla National Forest; Mike Decker, Prineville BLM; Anthony Botello, Dave Plummer and Teresa Fraser, Wallowa-Whitman National Forest; and Shane Jeffries, Ochoco National Forest.

Public: Susie Koppert, Mary Fleischmann,

8:00 a.m. Matt: Zoom logistics

8:05 a.m. Introductions

8:20 a.m. Randy: Quorum confirmed by Larisa. RAC members asked about the status of pending appointments, as 8 positions will be vacant after July 6. They were advised the Washington office is aware of the situation.

Election of officers: Motion by Gary Gustafson, second by Bob Krein, to keep Randy Jones and Art Waugh as chair and vice chair until the October meeting when new RAC members will be on board. Vote was unanimous.

8:25 a.m.

Review and approve past meeting notes: Motion by Gary Gustafson, second by Art Waugh to approve the Feb. 21 regular meeting and June 9 subcommittee notes as presented. Vote was unanimous.

8:30 a.m. **Public Participation:** Susie Koppert said she was excited to hear the Department of Interior was moving forward with appointments. Chairman Jones noted for the record that this is not the first time appointments and reappointments have come down to the wire. These people volunteer their time and deserve more consideration.

8:45 a.m. **Wallowa-Whitman National Forest Recreation Fee Proposal:** Recreation Program Manager Teresa Fraser presented a PowerPoint (attached).

Based on feedback from the RAC and members of the public, the Forest decided to drop the \$5 extra vehicle charge. Single site vehicle parking will increase from \$5- \$8 to \$10, 15 for developed campsites and \$10 per night for horse campgrounds. The North Fork Catherine Creek Group Campground would be \$40 for up to 30 people. Fees would be added for recreational use of old guard stations. Day use and trailhead fees would be \$5, or \$30 for an annual pass. Fees would be eliminated for two day use sites and one campground.

Baker, Union and Wallowa counties support the proposal. Of the 29 comments received, 10 said fees should be higher, 16 opposed the fees and 3 asked questions.

Chairman Jones asked if there was a percentage change in user days in recent years. Teresa answered it was steady until 2020, when it increased significantly. For example, one site that normally averages \$9,000 a year brought in \$11,000 last year.

Why are there fees for some trailheads rather than all? Some are very popular, and the revenue is needed to provide an adequate level of services, such as cleaning toilets, removing trash and maintaining parking areas.

Most of the comments were directed at efforts to upgrade services at Pittsburgh Landing. RAC member Shay White expressed appreciation for the improvements at the boat launch.

RAC member Terry Drever Gee asked if the pass was good for year-round recreation, such as Anthony Lakes. Dave Plummer explained that the ski area is operated under a permit and the sno-park is managed by Oregon Parks. The annual pass is only good for trailheads managed by the WWNF.

What sort of objections were received? Some said it was too large an increase, doubling fees in some cases. But forests have become more fee-reliant and it's a 2 to 3 year process to raise fees. These fees will be in place for some time.

Were low-income users considered? Yes, the fees are based on what is needed to maintain operations at the sites where fees are charged. Many areas still have no fees for day use, camping, trailheads or dispersed camping. Ms. Drever Gee encouraged the forest to promote the free areas. There is a dedicated website. Many people feel taxes should pay for services, but there is not enough funding available. Even with help from grants and volunteers, there is still a need.

RAC member Glenn Burleigh said he thought the guard station fees were very reasonable. There are also structures in wilderness areas that need preservation he hopes will be considered in the future. Ms. Fraser said rustic/rugged facilities are cheaper to operate and the forest is looking at other disused guard stations.

Chairman Jones noted that there are also other federal passes available for free or at a deep discount for retirees and others on fixed incomes, such as the America the Beautiful Pass and the National Parks and Recreation Lands Pass.

RAC member Greg Jackle noted that going from free to a fee was a big step for some communities. Are other forests considering fees? It might be worthwhile to work together and offer a Blue Mountains pass similar to the Northwest Forests Pass.

Ed Guzman said the Malheur National Forest is working on a fee proposal that will be coming before the RAC, however, there are no trailhead fees, just developed recreation sites, campgrounds and rentals. A regional pass could be considered.

Dave Plummer said the WWNF specifically selected the most popular sites, and the major cost is pumping toilets. Shane Jeffries said the Ochoco National Forest is not looking at changes in the near future, although there are some high use areas and/or new facilities planned. It's important to balance the cost of collecting fees against the amount collected. That's readily apparent with firewood permits.

Chairman Jones noted that the Deschutes has also targeted high use areas. Heidi McRoberts said the Umatilla National Forest's approach is similar to the Ochoco, they have added some campgrounds on recreation.gov and others are first come, first served.

RAC member Gary Gustafson said the Northwest Forest Pass waives day use fees except at concessionaire sites. He feels the proposal is very reasonable, but fees are always an issue. It's unusual to see three counties support fee increases. Once the fees are in place and people see the improvements and services, they will see the value.

RAC member Shay White said he opposed the proposal at the subcommittee level because the people he represents are opposed to it. He added that he appreciated the removal of the additional vehicle fee.

RAC member Art Waugh said the 70-page analysis looked at every forest site, and that it should be available to the public to demonstrate the need.

Motion by Gary Gustafson, second by Jim Reiss to approve. Vote was 8 yeas to 3 nays (White, Boethin and Krein).

10 a. m. **Agency Updates** (written updates attached):

The Deschutes National Forest is moving forward with implementation of a wilderness permit system for 19 of 27 trails, which would include an advance reservation component. The forest saw a 40 percent increase in use in 2020 and is seeing similar rates of use this year. Sites are fully reserved through September. Prescribed burning is taking place on 4,470 acres at 37 locations across the forest. Cooperating agencies are allowing an additional 332 acres.

RAC member Bob Krein asked why the RAC was not advised of a Thirty-mile informational meeting held by Prineville BLM in Condon. It's important the RAC be involved and informed, because members are asked for their input. (Followup from the Central Oregon Field Office: The meeting in Condon was a public information meeting. Scoping of the Thirty-mile Travel Management plan will begin in July and virtual scoping meetings will be offered. The John Day Core Team was alerted and invited to the meeting and it was widely advertised in Condon.)

The Umatilla National Forest is moving forward on several shared stewardship projects, including the Four Corners Commercial Thinning with Oregon Department of Forestry. A total of 15 projects are planned for 2021 under the All Lands program. RAC member Glenn Burleigh gave an attaboy for the Four Corners project and thinning along roadsides. The work increases visibility and is a valuable fuel break. He'd like to see this be a standard for all projects.

Umatilla forest officials are working to reinstate the Blue Mountain Forest Plan Revision, which was withdrawn in 2019. Four Great America Outdoors Act projects are under way, focusing on a backlog of maintenance.

Chairman Jones said the RAC was very engaged in the Blue Mountain Forest Plan and asked for a report out from the Blue Mountain Environmental Council at the October meeting.

On the Ochoco National Forest, the Frog Fire roadside salvage project is going on now. The forest's wild horse plan has been signed and implementation will begin in the fall. Nationally, there is significant interest in more comprehensive management, and the BLM is better equipped than the Forest Service

to manage wild horses. For example, the Forest Service has only two facilities in the U.S. Washington is looking at developing an adoption opportunities program.

A new collaborative, the Ochoco Recreational Trails Group, is working with the forest to develop range permit recommendations for the Lemon Gulch area. The Sunflower grazing objection is expected to be a bellwether example of using the Good Neighbor Authority for third party NEPA.

RAC member Glenn Burleigh asked if the salvage sale funding comes back to the forest. Answer: It comes back to the regional trust fund. He would love to see funding designated for recovery efforts on every forest. There is a strong effort at the regional level.

The Wallowa-Whitman National Forest is working with the Umatilla National Forest under the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program on a spring burning program; and looking at 22-23 GAOA projects to address high profile uses and needs. In addition to the Pittsburgh Landing, work is being done at Kirkwood to install/replace a bridge and repair the roof of the house.

The forest is also working with the counties to resolve travel management issues associated with the Forest Plan Revision; developing a motor vehicle use map for the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area; and working with Idaho Power to reopen the Hells Canyon Visitor Center.

The WWNF is also working in partnership with NRCS and the State of Oregon on a joint chief's project for landscape restoration.

RAC member Jim Reiss asked the status of the Grande Ronde River use. A lot of watershed restoration is taking place along the Upper Grand Ronde; and no permitting is planned for the canyon. The forest is working to communicate the amount of restoration work done in the Bird Track Springs area to create a more natural stream and communicate potential hazards to users.

The Malheur National Forest conducted 7,000 acres of spring burning strategically planned to support wildfire suppression. A drought letter has been issued to permittees advising of dry, hot, windy conditions. Several vegetation projects are being implemented in Camp Lick, Ragged Ruby and Crow. The forest is also looking at a tethered logging system for potential improvements. The Slipknot EIS will be released for comment in July. Scoping for Upper Bear Lake will begin in August. Emigrant Creek Ranger District is working on a boundary project. The forest is also working with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation to find ways to incorporate First Foods concepts in the planning process. May was the largest recreation month seen in a long time. Nine GAOA infrastructure projects were approved for FY22, mainly aquatics improvements, culvert and bridge replacements.

The Blue Mountain Forest Partnership Collaborative is working on zones of agreement for how to manage upland aspen. RAC member Jim Boethin asked if local residents were allowed to comment on road closures in timber sale areas? Closures are addressed during the NEPA process, but sometimes the work takes place so long after the comment period, that people forget.

Vale BLM is working with Baker County Road Department on road maintenance and access issues, including investigating high priority trespass issues. Oregon Natural Desert Association protested the Cow Valley Grazing EA, and district staff are working with the state office on a response. The district is also drafting letters to owners of inholdings affected by flood damage along the South Fork Walla Walla River. The Castle Rock timber sale will generate 2.7 million board feet. The draft Southeast Oregon

Resource Management Plan Amendment Record of Decision is expected to be signed in late winter. About 4,000 comments were received regarding the four alternatives.

Dry, hot weather is already affecting forage and water in some Herd Management Areas (HMAs) and water may have to be hauled to them this summer. The Joseph Canyon Fire was very early due to conditions being more like August than June. The National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center is offering outdoor activities and programs while COVID conditions keep the doors closed. A retrofit will begin in spring 2021.

Round Table

Jim Reiss saw a Rogue River recreation map with campsites color coded by size. He suggested a similar product for the Deschutes River corridor. Terry Drever Gee said she's really happy to see the cross-agency and community cooperation. She asked if the WWNF could help a widow recover a mining bond. Anthony Botello said the forest is working with the woman.

RAC member Jim Boethin said he hopes to meet face to face in October and wanted to clarify that he voted against the WWNF fee proposal because it would affect older citizens in Grant County.

RAC member Greg Jackle said Oregon Game and Fish Department received 20,000 more applications for large game tags this year than in previous years. Volunteers with OGF, Oregon Hunters Association, National Wild Turkey Federation and Backcountry Hunters and Anglers teamed up to build a mile of fence on the Ochoco. OGF is seeing a lot of solar development along power line corridors around Prineville and is working with the county to address wildlife impacts. Traffic counters have been set around the Ochoco Unit to track elk movements and vehicular traffic during peak hunting seasons, as well as trail counters to monitor recreational use. Shay White asked if the sites were posted with an explanation of their purpose. Greg Jackle said he would relay that suggestion. Dave Plummer said the WWNF buries traffic counters so they are invisible. They can be programmed to sense various vehicles, from ATVs to logging trucks.

RAC member Bob Krein said he had concerns about the RAC not being advised of meetings related to the John Day River, even though the charter says they RAC should be involved in planning and management. Art Waugh agreed. He has noticed the agencies don't come to the RAC until scoping documents are in hand. It would be nice to know about things as early as possible. Chairman Jones said it is more difficult to notify members of subcommittees, but he would try harder to keep the group advised of related meetings.

Art Waugh said the Wyden Wild and Scenic River Bill is calling for wider river corridors, a half mile on each side of the high water line, and pushing a hands off approach. He would prefer to see resiliency projects where they can be done to keep fire away from streams.

Shay White applauded Chairman Jones' email to leadership regarding vacancies as an example of how outreach to elected leaders does work.

He watched the hearing on Sen. Bill 192 – the River Democracy Act – and was appalled by the issues with bordering waterways. Idaho was completely omitted as an affected area, even though it includes a proposal to extend to the Wild and Scenic designation of the Snake River Canyon from Kirkwood down

to Pittsburgh Landing. This could eliminate a number of boat trips. During the hearing it was said that 15,000 comments were received, but news releases referred to only 2,500.

He has heard from forest service staff that all management plans encompassing 4,700 miles of rivers and streams would have to be rewritten, with potential affects on recreation, logging and grazing. Terry Drever Gee said the miners are appalled as well, it could be devastating to the industry.

Art Waugh said there were changes to recreation when they instituted the Wild and Scenic Rivers legislation, but it honored the mining claims. Now, the legislation withdraws the corridors from recreational entry and if a claim lapses, it's gone forever.

Shay White said he believes very strongly in shared use, that everybody has a right to recreate responsibly. Terry Drever Gee invited Shay and Art's constituencies to join with the Eastern Oregon Mining Association's efforts. Art said the OHV organizations have not always done well interacting with horse and biking groups.

Gus Gustafson said he heard it was a record Chinook season on the Deschutes River and asked Greg Jackle to report on the spring and fall Chinook and Steelhead seasons on the John Day, Deschutes, Grande Ronde, Wallowa and Imnaha rivers at the October meeting. He also asked about the potential for warm water die off due to low water. Shay said he received an email indicating Chinook was up 55 percent from 2019 on the Snake River.

Glenn Burleigh suggested the forest service look at helping small timber operators be more competitive by assisting them with certified lumber graders. Steve Lent said he is still concerned about the status of the Cabin Lake Guard Station and the potential to preserve/restore it. Shanda Dekome said there is no activity at this time, but she will definitely notify the group if there is any movement.

Randy Jones reported the Wallowa Lake Dam project funding, which was tabled in 2020 due to COVID, has been restored and is moving forward. This is a collaborative project of the CTUIR, Nez Perce, Department of Oregon Water Resources, ODFW and Wallowa Lake Water Irrigation District to raise the water level by 4 feet. This change will be felt all the way down the Grande Ronde River, which is fed by the Wallowa River.

Meeting adjourned at 12:30 p.m.