



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

Central California (CenCal) Resource Advisory Council (RAC) Meeting Minutes

Held Virtually on Wednesday, June 22, 2022, 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

ATTENDEES

RAC: Laurie Collom, Shaun Crook, Nancy Muleady-Mecham, and Jim Phelan.

BLM: Chris Heppe, District Manager; Ruben Leal, Associate District Manager; David Brinsfield, District Fire Management Officer; Will Harris, District Assistant Fire Management Officer; Philip Oviatt, Acting District Public Affairs Officer; Sarah Matthews, District Project Manager; Burns Brimhall, District Prescribed Fire and Fuels Specialist; Jodie Nelson, Acting District Public Affairs Officer; Jeff Starosta, Acting Bishop Field Manager; Gabe Garcia, Bakersfield Field Manager; Eric Morgan, Acting Central Coast Field Manager; Phil D'Amo, Acting Mother Lode Field Manager; Nick Lavrov, Ukiah Field Manager; Sherri Lisius, Bishop Assistant Field Manager; Shekeetah Allen Genoway, Central Coast Assistant Field Manager; Jeff Horn, Mother Lode Outdoor Recreation Planner; Will Harris, and Sky Murphy, Central Coast Planning and Environmental Coordinator.

Public Registered: Bernie Bensten, Kayla Browne, Amy Granat, Michael Lueders, Glen Miller, Junita Pardun, Sandra Schubert, and Bruce Witcher.

GENERAL BUSINESS

Chris Heppe provided an overview of BLM Central California District with information about staffing changes and the status of the Resource Advisory Council with remarks about the expired terms of RAC members and lack of a quorum. He gave a briefing on the status of BLM California with remarks from State Director Karen Mouritsen. Philip Oviatt conducted introductions of all attendees of the meeting. Chris Heppe gave an overview of the agenda for this meeting.

RAC BRIEFINGS

Keysville Special Recreation Management Area Planning:

Bakersfield Field Manager Gabe Garcia gave an overview of the Keysville Special Recreation Management Area. He detailed the focus areas: an overview of the BLM Field Office, a background and ongoing challenges at the Keysville Recreation Area, the state of the Keysville Special Recreation Management Plan, and steps moving forward including the possibility of the introduction of fees for river camping, trail enhancements in the area, expanding on heritage resource restorations, and continued management of mining operations in the area. Gabe concluded his presentation with a Q and A on the Keysville Plan and operations within the Bakersfield Field Office. Gabe addressed a question from RAC member Nancy Muleady-Mecham who asked about FIRE efforts regarding staffing and readiness.

ACTION: Although no action could be taken, the RAC expressed appreciation in hearing an update on the Keysville Recreation Management Area Plan and the outlook presented.

Central California District and Field Office Updates on Impacts of Increased Outdoor Recreation Presentation:

District Manager Chris Heppe gave an overview of the challenges that increases to recreation has had to BLM managed lands and efforts being taken to handle the challenges through staffing and working with field offices to help meet the increased demands throughout the field offices encompassed by the Central California District.

Bakersfield Field Manager Gabe Garcia briefed participants on the added stress on infrastructure, Natural Resource Degradation, the lack of funding and staff, and the added strain on Law Enforcement to handle the increases of use over such a large area as the Bakersfield Field Office.

Bishop Assistant Field Manager Sherri Lisius highlighted the lack of staffing, the increase in OHV Grants, the impacts of increased campground costs, the increased popularity of mountain biking, as well as challenges occurring due to increased visitation to Wild Willy's Hot Springs and Alabama Hills.

Central Coast Assistant Field Manager Shekeeta Allen Genoway detailed some of her field office challenges, including more demand putting pressure on existing facilities, more competition putting pressure on existing visitors, more diverse pool of visitors calling for additional access and opportunities, additional access creating expectations that BLM must be able to meet needs of local community, partners, and agencies, additional expectations resulting in more disputes with neighbors, and challenges related to BLM decision-making processes.

Mother Lode Outdoor Recreation Planner Jeff Horn highlighted the lack of seasonal workers making maintenance of existing facilities challenging, how increased trail usage has created overflows at parking areas as well in increased wear and tear on trail systems, and how the increase in visitation has led to an increase in user conflicts.

Ukiah Field Manager Nick Lavrov gave an update on the dramatic increase of OHV activity within the boundaries of the Ukiah Field Office and the challenges that presents as well as the challenges of post FIRE restoration projects are having on areas the public can visit.

BLM Central California District Manager Chris Heppe concluded the presentation with an overview of the BLM California Recreation Strategy. He explained BLM's vision to expand collaboration to provide equitable and sustainable recreational opportunities. Within BLM, there is a focus on increased training, development of travel management plans, promoting special recreation permits (SRPs), improve data collection, and prioritize funding for staffing and programming. Externally, BLM seeks to enhance partnerships, promote inter-agency coordination, increase communication/outreach through social media, signage, and public engagement, and expand funding areas through the development and implementation of business plans and collected fees.

ACTION: Although no action could be taken, the RAC and public participated in a discussion on the topic of recreation. RAC member Nancy Muleady-Mecham asked about efforts to recruit more seasonal workforce with the suggestion that BLM investigate enhancing housing opportunities with the use of tents and trailers. Chris Heppe

added that the BLM was looking into opportunities through Airbnb, dorm style housing, tents, and trailers to help offset housing costs facing seasonal workforce. Nancy also suggested working with partners to increase the use of volunteers to complete needed work. Chris agreed and Jeff Horn highlighted how the South Yuba partners have been very helpful in completing projects with the BLM. RAC member Jim Phelan advised the group to use caution in phrasing of travel management plans as restricting travel but instead to promote travel. Public Participant Amy Granat engaged in a discussion on the need for more recreational opportunities for larger side-by-sides. She challenged the accuracy of trail mileage numbers and would like to see them broke down more specifically to users. She inquired of Jeff Horn if his office would be willing to meet to discuss ideas to enhance increased OHV use within the Mother Lode Field Office. Jeff encouraged her to reach out to his office to schedule a meeting. Chris Heppe commented that public involvement is crucial in the development and implementation of travel management plans, and he encouraged Amy to participate in that process. Eric Morgan highlighted how the public involvement works to develop travel management plans as it did in the development of e-bike use at Fort Ord and other locations on BLM lands. Amy also discussed the need to use caution in using partners because they are not government groups and often do not work under the same rules as a government workforce. She would like to see more involvement with partners at the state level and recognized partners. Chris assured her that all partnerships were entered into through MOUs and cooperative agreements to ensure best practices are met with work being conducted on federal lands.

BLM Central California District Wildland Fire Update Presentation:

District Fire Management Officer David Brinsfield gave an overview of the Central California District Fire Program, including partnerships with Fire Safe Councils, mitigation, and education, as well as landscape and fuel break treatments. David explained the challenges and opportunities in each field office as well as completed projects in each office. He discussed the challenges of staffing and the measures the FIRES program has taken to mitigate those staffing shortages. Moving forward he seeks uniformity across the District for planning and fuels reductions, fostering partnerships that will benefit the District and community, work to increase collaboration across the District, promote more cross training of BLM staff, continue to promote, and enhance the link between fire mitigation and education specialists and fire safe councils, community assistance, project development and project implementation. He concluded that partnerships were vital to the FIRES program as many project areas are often in Wildland Urban Interface areas and work is completed in conjunction with cooperative treatment areas.

ACTION: Although no action could be taken, the RAC appreciated the presentation. RAC member Jim Phelan commended Chief Brinsfield on the clearing and thinning projects as “great news”. He would like an update on wildland fire to be included in all future meetings. RAC member Nancy Muleady-Mecham stressed that she was worried that the public was getting misinformation about fire prevention strategies being promoted in the media. Specifically, that different building materials was a better defense against fire than clearing around homes. Chief Brinsfield acknowledged the article that Nancy brought up and confirmed that clearing space around homes is still the best defense from fire. Chris Heppe said he would take the mis-information message being promoted to the State Office for possible intervention.

BLM Central California District and Field Office Updates Presentation:

District Manager Chris Heppe gave an overview of the acreage, number of employees, counties, Congressional districts, National Conservation Land Units, and field offices encompassed by the BLM Central California District.

Bakersfield Field Manager Gabe Garcia briefed participants on the Case Mountain Forest Health Project, the MOMAC: Utilities Right of Way Consolidation, the Plains Pipeline Replacement Project, ongoing oil and gas projects/workload, and the progress on the Carrizo Plain Goodwin Education Center Expansion.

Acting Bishop Field Manager Jeff Starosta highlighted the fuels projects. Specifically, he updated the RAC on the Bodie Hills Upland Vegetation Restoration Project and the Mono Lake Kutzadika Tribal Stewardship efforts. He gave a status update on the Bi-State Sage Grouse Status and Conservation Plan, the Casa Diablo IV Geothermal Development Project, and the Alabama Hills Management Plan (2021) – Implementation.

Acting Central Coast Field Manager Eric Morgan detailed some of his field office planning efforts, including Cotoni-Coast Dairies California Coastal National Monument, Fort Ord National Monument, and Williams Hill Special Recreation Management Area.

Acting Mother Lode Field Manager Phil D’Amo gave updates on Consumnes River Preserve, Pine Hill Preserve ACEC, Recreation and Resource projects, and trail work on the new Sky Ridge Trail.

Ukiah Field Manager Nick Lavrov detailed the status on projects, including Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument Planning, South Cow Mountain OHV Implementation Plan, Clear Lake Fuel Break Project (2nd Phase), and the Garcia River Estuary Salmonid Habitat Enhancement project.

ACTION: Although no action could be taken, the RAC appreciated the presentation. Public participant Juanita Pardun inquired about the impacts of homelessness on BLM lands. Chris Heppe responded that there is a 14-day camping limit that is enforced. Phil D’Amo stated that the Mother Lode Field Office relies on law enforcement to enforce the 14-day limit. Sherri Lisius stated that Bishop had implemented a 30-day permit program available in certain established facilities within the Bishop Field Office. Jeff Horn acknowledged that homelessness is a big problem, and he would like to see stakeholders get together and develop real solutions to the homeless population overstaying on BLM lands. Public participant Bruce Whitcher commended the BLM for its efforts on the South Cow trail system as a “fresh look at trail developments”. He did express concerns that BLM did not address the Clear Creek Management Area in this meeting. He also asked for BLM to address needs needed at the Tumbler Ridge Road. Bruce also felt that more needed to be done with the Keysville section 106 programmatic such as the addition of more dumpsters.

FUTURE MEETINGS

Chris Heppe asked the attending RAC members to reach out to him if they would rather wait until the RAC has a quorum to meet again or go forward with the current scheduling of RAC meetings in September, November, and February.

NEXT MEETING

Current BLM guidance recommends public meetings be held virtually for the remainder of the fiscal year. The first in- person meeting is possible for the meeting scheduled on November 17-18, it will be held in Coalinga, CA, with a field trip to Panoche and Tumey hills within the San Joaquin Desert Hills. The next meeting scheduled for September 14, 2022, will be a virtual meeting held via Zoom.

FUTURE MEETING TOPICS

Based on comments and public input, there appears to be interest in hearing perspectives on staffing and housing issues, homelessness, the Clear Creek Management area, an update on Tumbler Ridge Road and the Keysville section 106 programmatic. There also seems to be interest in BLM policies regarding partnerships and in a discussion on policy relating to OHV vehicle size and access on BLM lands.

MEETING ADJOURNED