



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

Held Virtually on Wednesday, November 17, 2021, 1:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m.

ATTENDEES

RAC: Matt Kingsley [Elected Official], Nancy Muleady-Mecham [Academic], Carl Twisslemen [Grazing], Jim Phelan [Recreation-dispersed], Laurie Collom [Public at Large], Mary Gorden [Cultural-Tribes], Bart (Recreation-OHV), Shaun Crook [Timber]

BLM: Chris Heppe, District Manager; Ruben Leal, Associate District Manager; David Brinsfield, District Fire Management Officer; Serena Baker, District Public Affairs Officer; Steve Nelson, Bishop Field Manager; Gabe Garcia, Bakersfield Field Manager; Eric Morgan, Acting Central Coast Field Manager; Elizabeth Meyer-Shields, Mother Lode Field Manager; Nick Lavrov, Ukiah Field Manager; Sky Murphy, Central Coast Planning and Environmental Coordinator.

Public Registered: Carmel DeBartant (Media – San Benito Link, Science). Andre Sanchez (California Wilderness Coalition).

GENERAL BUSINESS

Matt Kingsley opened the meeting and reviewed the minutes from the previous meeting. Chris Heppe provided an overview of BLM Central California District including information about staffing changes. He gave a briefing on the status of BLM California with remarks from State Director Karen Mouritsen. Serena Baker conducted introductions of all attendees of the meeting. Chris Heppe gave an overview of the agenda for this meeting.

RAC BRIEFINGS

San Joaquin Desert Hills Special Recreation Management Area Activity Plan:

Central Coast Outdoor Recreation Planner Sky Murphy gave an overview of the San Joaquin Desert Hills. He detailed the focus areas: an overview of the San Joaquin Desert Hills, a background and ongoing opportunities and challenges at the area, and an overview of the Dingell Act and the BLM Planning Process. He discussed plan to engage key stakeholders, including the Shooting Sports Roundtable. He outlined steps being taken to prepare an environmental assessment to evaluate alternatives to the proposed plan. Finally, he advised that the Central Coast Field Office would publish a Federal Register Notice to foster public involvement in the rule-making process. Sky concluded his presentation with a Q and A on the San Joaquin Desert Hills Special Recreation Management Area Activity Plan within the Central Coast Field Office.

ACTION: The RAC expressed appreciation in hearing an update on the San Joaquin Desert Hills Special Recreation Management Area Activity Plan and the outlook presented. No decisions of further actions were taken.

Recreational Target Shooting:

Mother Lode Field Manager Elizabeth Meyer-Shields led a discussion regarding impacts and challenges of recreational target shooting. She gave an overview of the Mother Lode Field Office. The field office covers 230,000 acres stretching from Nevada County to Mariposa County. Three law enforcement rangers cover the entire area. She noted that although target shooting is allowed on most public lands, when under fire restrictions, limits are placed on target shooting. Elizabeth highlighted a challenge to target shooting through her discussion of the 2017 Detwiler Fire. That fire was started in Mariposa County by target shooters. The fire burned a total of 81,000 acres with 26,287 acres on BLM lands. The fire forced the evacuation of more than 5,000 residents and destroyed 131 structures. Another challenging area presented involved the BLM-managed public lands near New Hogan Reservoir. The field office has received numerous complaints from neighbors about target shooting on Hogan Dam Road in Calaveras County. A recent site visit found the main area on top of the hill was covered in trash from shooting. BLM staff found target materials, cardboard, glass bottles, canned food, pumpkins, watermelons, metal objects, propane gas tanks, exploding targets, ammunition boxes, firearms accessories, and evidence of the use of steel core rifle ammunition. Generally, areas used frequently for target shooting tend to generate a lot of trash. Clean up efforts can be particularly challenging because much of the waste is considered hazardous. Field office rangers found that many of the targets were in locations or directions where homes are in close proximity. In addition to trash and safety, resource damages are often found in areas where illegal target shooting is occurring.

The Mother Lode Field Office recognized that there are many responsible target shooters who abide by the “pack in, pack out” rule. Solutions have involved enforcement and education. The field office has been using the 3-E’s of law enforcement: Education, Engineering, and Enforcement. Elizabeth stressed that they try to tackle issues using all three components, as appropriate. The field office spends a tremendous amount of resources (time and equipment) to try to manage this area. The discussion ended with Elizabeth stating that target shooting is a recognized use of public lands, and we do have responsible target shooters in the field office. We want to be able to continue making lands available to them where appropriate.

ACTION: The RAC and public participated in a discussion on the topic of target shooting. No decisions or further actions were taken.

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 Keysville Special Recreation management Area Plan, the Plains Pipeline Replacement Project, ongoing oil and gas projects/workload, as well as an update on fire activities in the field office.

Bishop Field Manager Steve Nelson discussed the implantation of legacy projects. He briefed the council on the Alabama Hills Management Plan, the Campground Business Management Plan Implementation, the Bi-State Sage Grouse Conservation Plan, and the Casa Diablo IV Geothermal Development Project. He also highlighted emerging projects in the planning phase. Those upcoming projects included the Long Valley Recreation Management Plan, the Volcanic Tableland Recreation Management Plan, the Bodie Hills backcountry conservation area designation, and the district-wide Supplemental Rules Update/Revisions.

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.

Mother Lode Field Manager Elizabeth Meyer-Shields gave updates on the Caldor Fire Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation project, prescribed fire and mechanical thinning projects planned throughout the field office jurisdiction with a focus on partner-driven projects that fit within community or landscape strategies. She also updated the council on ongoing efforts to revise the Merced River and South Yuba Recreation Area Business Plans, exploring implementation of a reservation system through Recreation.gov for campgrounds, and on-going efforts working with El Dorado County to expand parking to accommodate increased use at the South Fork American properties.

Ukiah Field Manager Nick Lavrov detailed the status on projects, including Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument Planning and the South Cow Mountain OHV Implementation Plan.

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.

ACTION: The RAC appreciated the informative presentation. No decisions or further actions were taken.

FUTURE MEETINGS

Serena Baker advised the RAC members that the next meeting was scheduled for June 22, 2022, followed by meetings in September and November 2022.

NEXT MEETING

Serena Baker advised that 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 June 22, 2022, will be a virtual meeting held via Zoom.

FUTURE MEETING TOPICS

Matt Kingsley led the public comment period. Based on comments and public input from two attendees, there appears to be interest in scientific research related to the San Joaquin Desert Hills noted by Carmel DeBartant (Media – San Benito Link, Science); and BLM efforts to address issues related to target shooting and wildfire noted by Andre Sanchez (California Wilderness Coalition).

MEETING ADJOURNED