



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

Held Virtually on Wednesday, February 22, 2023, 1:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m.

### ATTENDEES

**RAC:** Joe Ashley, Mary Gorden, Michael Lueders, Laurie Collom, Matt Kingsley, Andre Sanchez, Shaun Crook, Warren Allsup, Bob Schneider, Reb Monaco and Nancy Muleady-Mecham.

**BLM:** Chris Hepe, District Manager; Ruben Leal, Associate District Manager; Philip Oviatt, District Public Affairs Officer; Sarah Mathews, District Project Manager; Sherri Lisius Bishop Field Manager; Gabe Garcia, Bakersfield Field Manager; Zachary Ormsby, Central Coast Field Manager; Jeff Horn, Acting Mother Lode Field Manager; Nicholas Lavrov Ukiah Field Manager; Sateur Ham, Planning and Environmental Coordinator Ukiah Field Office; Gerald Martinez, Mother Lode Fire Management Officer; Noah Triplett, Mother Lode Outdoor Recreation Planner; Elizabeth Gobeski, Attorney Adviser Departmental Ethics Office; Andrew Burrows, State Outdoor Recreation Planner; Eric Morgan, Manager Fort Ord National Monument, Jeromy Caldwell, Assistant Field Manager Resources Bakersfield Field Office.

**Public Registered:** Amy Granat, Carl Twissleman, Gianna Setoudeh, Kyle Smith, John Kody, Darlene Markey, Nancy Henson, Terry Thearle, Russell Stabler, Kayla Browne, Lee Thompson.

### OPENING

#### Welcome and Introductions:

Philip Oviatt opened the meeting with a welcome to all the RAC members and the public in attendance. Chris Hepe also welcomed attendees and stated how happy he was that the RAC was now fully in place after not having a quorum for the previous meetings. Philip conducted introductions of all attendees of the meeting. Each attendee was given the opportunity to give a brief introduction of themselves. Chris Hepe gave an overview of the agenda for this meeting.

#### Ethics Training:

Liz Gobeski, Attorney Advisor for the BLM Ethics Team presented a training for all RAC members. The training explained how RACs are Advisory Committees and are subject to federal regulations. She gave an overview of the makeup of the RAC and the areas members represented. She discussed the role of a RAC member. She educated the RAC on potential conflicts of interest, conflicts due to direct financial interest, responsibilities of members listed in the RAC Charter, and the federal requirements located at 43 C.F.R Subpart 1784. She advised members of procedures that must be taken if a conflict of interest arises. Liz ended her presentation by commending the RAC on their positions and encouraged the members to perform their RAC duties the correct way and not let an ethical issue derail the good work they are doing. She asked for questions. No questions were asked.

### BUSINESS MEETING

#### Election of Chair:

Chris Heppe opened the business meeting. He again emphasized how important the work that the RAC does is to the District. The first order of business was to elect a chair for the RAC. He outlined the role and responsibilities for the position. Chris recognized Matt Kingsley as the most recent chair and commended him on a good job. Matt Kingsley spoke of his time as chair and stated that if no one else wanted to chair, he would be willing to do it again. Philip Oviatt asked if anyone else would like to nominate themselves or anyone else. Bob Schneider stated that he had run RACs before but would be fine with Matt running it again since he did not have a full RAC for most of his term as chair. Andre Sanchez asked how many RAC members had served before. Bob said he had and Matt had. Reb Monaco said he served previously, but not as chair. Philip asked again if anyone else would like to nominate. No other members were nominated. With no other nominations, Philip asked the group if anyone had any objections to Matt serving as chair. There were no responses. Philip then stated the Matt Kingsley was new chair for the CenCal RAC.

Matt thanked everyone for the opportunity to serve again. He asked Philip to conduct this meeting and then he will chair the meetings going forward.

## **RAC BRIEFINGS**

Philip Oviatt introduced BLM State Outdoor Recreation Lead Andrew Burrows to give an overview of Business Plans for the RAC.

### **Business Plan Overview:**

Andrew gave an overview of the business plan process. He stated that the BLM requires each recreation fee site or area to complete a business plan. He explained how fees are tied to the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act. He outlined how business plans assist in determining appropriate fee rates and provides a venue for the public to provide input. Andrew gave a breakdown of the elements of a business plan: Executive Summary, Introduction, Background, Fee Proposal, Public Outreach, and Appendices. He concluded his presentation with the 12 steps that must be taken for a business plan to become active. Andrew asked for questions. No questions were asked.

### **South Yuba Business Plan Presentation:**

Acting Mother Lode Field Manager Jeff Horn gave an overview of the South Yuba Campground. He then turned the presentation over to Mother Lode Outdoor Recreation Planner Noah Triplett for the presentation of the South Yuba Business Plan. Noah gave an overview of the area and illustrated its location in relation to neighboring cities (San Francisco, Sacramento, Reno). He gave specific details of the area along the South Yuba River and various amenities available at sites including the South Yuba Campground.

Noah led a discussion of the development of the South Yuba Plan under the guidelines of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act and BLM recreation fee program policy. He illustrated how fees are a way of ensuring that those who actively use recreation opportunities make a greater, but reasonable contribution toward protecting and enhancing those opportunities than those who do not utilize recreational opportunities. Noah explained how expanded amenity fees cover specialized outdoor recreation sites and services including but not limited to developed campgrounds with at least five of the following amenities: tent or trailer spaces, picnic tables, drinking water, access roads, fee collection by an employee or agent of the BLM, reasonable visitor protection, refuse containers, toilet facilities, and simple devices for containing a campfire. Noah noted that in addition to these, South Yuba also provides bear boxes.

Noah presented the campground fee proposal. He illustrated that the fee is currently set at \$5. The proposal was to raise the fee to \$15 per night. That would include parking for 2 vehicles. There

would be an additional fee of \$5 per vehicle to a maximum of four vehicles per site. He presented findings from a fair market value and cost recovery analysis that was conducted to ensure the plan was addressing local conditions. He showed how the analysis was utilized to consider what the costs were to run comparable sites to determine an appropriate rate. The analysis looked at campgrounds administered by CA State Parks, the US Forest Service, privately owned, and Army Corps of Engineers. He highlighted the fact that the \$15 fee proposal is still below all other fee campgrounds in the area.

Noah conveyed goals of the new fee proposal. Currently, recreational users currently contribute about 22% toward operating costs. He stated that the goal is for recreational fees to cover 50%-75% of operating costs. This fee modification should increase revenue to within 50%-75% range. Noah stated that the plan was to add Recreation.gov as a tool for helping to ensure sustainability by increasing internet visibility and ability to reserve campsites.

Noah illustrated how the \$15 fee would be put back into the campground. The monies would go toward waste removal, vegetation management and fuels reduction, regular maintenance of tables, grills, bear boxes, tent pads/areas, signage at kiosks, campsite posts, monitoring for resource damage, routine maintenance for septic needs, facilities and grounds. Monies would also be utilized in health and safety: fire and fuels, law enforcement, water treatment, a future campground host on-site, and recreation staff presence.

The increase in generated revenue would help offset operating costs and expenditures. In addition to those mentioned, Noah stated that increasing revenues would provide for additional vault toilets, service contracts, cost of staff in the field, trail maintenance, and the maintenance and improvements of existing environmental education and interpretive information services and signage.

Noah concluded his presentation by illustrating the steps that the Mother Lode Field Office had completed in the required 12 steps of the business plan implementation process. At the conclusion of his presentation, he asked the RAC for approval to the plan and if there were any questions.

## **DISCUSSION:**

Philip Oviatt led a Q and A on the proposed fee modification to the South Yuba Campground with RAC members.

Bob Schneider had several comments. He asked, given the analysis, if the \$15 rate was high enough. He did not like the idea of using Rec.gov due to extra fees. He liked the idea of having a camp host at the site. He asked when that might happen. He asked about the possibility of expanding the 15 sites to 20 sites. He recommended that some of the sites be set aside for first come-first-serve recreationists instead of having them all reserved. He also asked about the need to have sites that are handicap accessible. Bob also asked about the process for raising fees in the future.

Nancy Muleady-Mecham had concerns over the use of Rec.gov. She stated that there is a \$10 fee to use the service which would make the overall fee at \$25. That is concerning to her given the socioeconomic makeup of the communities utilizing the site. Nancy inquired about funding from Congress. She asked if federal funds will be reduced because of this increase. She stated that she felt that the \$15 fee was not too high and cautioned about going higher. She stressed that she would prefer to do the plan without the addition of Rec.gov.

Reb Monaco asked if the \$15 fee was high enough. He stressed that although he appreciated the discussion, we should pass this without delay.

Andre Sanchez stated that he did not feel that the \$15 fee was too high but would be ok if it went up to \$20 eventually. He asked about how much of the money generated would go to operating costs. He also asked how often price increases were likely to occur. He asked staff about the possibility of a

gradual increase to the fee increase.

Michael Lueders stressed that amenities at campsites are highly important to visitors without equipment to camp but agreed with others to keep the price as low as possible.

Laurie Collom liked all that was presented but would like to see the price increase implemented on a gradual scale instead of all at once.

Matt Kingsley stated that he was impressed with the work done on this plan. He asked if we could keep some sites set aside for first come-first serve. He also asked if we could phase in the fee increases and go for a higher top out amount. He commended staff for the goal to get to 70% of operating costs covered by fees. He stressed the importance of access for locals and disadvantaged visitors. Matt asked if the plan can be changed at this point in the process and continue forward.

Public Comment on the plan came from Nancy Hensen who stated that she lives near the campground and is in favor of the increase. She is worried about fire and hopes the extra money will be used in the area. Amy Granat stated that she was very concerned about the increase. She stated that an increase that was too high could impact locals who come out to camp because it is economical to do so.

Staff responses sought to answer all questions that were raised.

Noah Triplett addressed many of the comments. He stated that there will be sites set aside for first come-first serve. He also stated that many of the sites at the campground are handicap accessible. He addressed the topography of the campground as limiting any expansion of the campground's 16 sites.

Sherri Lisius discussed how they utilized the RAC approved range of fees (ie \$5-15) for the campgrounds within the Bishop Field Office. She spoke of having a gradual increase over time with a higher top out rate. Doing this makes it easier in the long run because no new NEPA is needed because the total rate range has already been approved. They just need to bring any rate increases back to the RAC to inform them as needed. She said that it has worked well for her field office.

Jeff Horn commented that there were also cultural concerns that limited the expansion of the site. Jeff also stated that if we were to change the plan now, he would feel obligated to have the plan come back to the RAC after the revision was made available for public comment.

Andrew Burrows stated that if the RAC wanted to change the plan, they could do so and that staff would address the change with the State Director (step 12).

Philip Oviatt asked Andrew for clarification. Can the RAC change the plan from a flat fee to a gradual fee at this point and still have it move forward to the State Director for approval. Andrew concurred that approach was allowable.

Chris Heppe stated that the provisions of the law dictate that funds be used in the area where they are generated.

**ACTION:** Bob Schneider made a motion to adopt the plan with a gradual scale instead of the \$15 fee. Laurie Collom seconded the motion. After the discussion, Bob stated that his concerns had been addressed and thus amended his motion to adopt the South Yuba Business Plan as written with the \$15 fee increase. Laurie seconded the motion. Philip asked the RAC if there were any no votes to the motion. None were given. The motion passed and the South Yuba Business Plan received the RAC's approval.

### **BLM Central California District and Field Office Updates Presentation:**

District Manager Chris Heppe provided an overview of BLM Central California District with information about fuels reduction work, programs such as the Utilities MOMAC project, the increased funding made available due to the passage of the Biden/Harris Infrastructure bill, the increase of co-stewardships with tribes within the district, vital safety updates completed through risk assessments, and stressed how partnerships are essential to District success. He concluded his update with 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.

Mother Lode Fire Management Officer Gerald Martinez gave an overview of the Central California District Fire Program. He highlighted the fire activities occurring in each field office as well as hiring and vacancies throughout the district. Gerald concluded his presentation with an overview of work being completed by the Kern Valley Interagency Hotshot Crew and the Folsom Lake Veterans Crew.

Bakersfield Field Manager Gabe Garcia briefed participants on the Case Mountain Forest Health Project, ongoing oil and gas projects/workload, and the progress on Oil Well Abandonments. He concluded with an overview of the potential flower bloom that may occur at Carrizo Plain National Monument and the preparations already underway in anticipation of increased visitation.

Bishop Field Manager Sherri Lisius highlighted the fuels projects, the Bi-State Sage Grouse Status and Conservation Plan, the Casa Diablo IV Geothermal Development Project, and the Alabama Hills Management Plan Implementation.

Central Coast Field Manager Zachary Ormsby detailed some of his field office efforts including: rehab work being completed as a result of the recent flooding, Cotoni-Coast Dairies California Coastal National Monument and the trail and bridge work installations as well as working through the IBLA process for the area, Fort Ord National Monument and their noxious weeds abatement program and trails work where they are partnering with universities and utilizing sheep to control weed spread, and the San Joaquin Desert hills breeding program in coordination with the Fresno Zoo of the blunt nosed leopard lizard that will be released in the Panoche Plateau.

Acting Mother Lode Field Manager Jeff Horn gave updates on their field work including ongoing cleanup activities caused by recent storms to areas throughout the field office. He concluded with an outlook on the next business plan being worked on for the Merced Recreation Area within the Mother Lode Field Office.

Ukiah Field Manager Nichola 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.

## **DISCUSSION:**

RAC members had comments on the District presentations.

Bob Schneider asked Gerald Martinez about the implementation of Potential Operational Delineations (PODs) within the FIRE program. Gerald responded that BLM has not adopted PODs yet. He informed that BLM does partner with Cal FIRE in all operations. He stated that their pre-planning efforts have been very successful, but situations can change depending on the scope of the fire.

Bob told Sherri that he loved the signs at Alabama Hills.

Matt Kingsley stated that Sherri Lisius and the Bishop Field Office staff did a good job at “threading the needle” to get the best plan possible for Alabama Hills. He is very happy with the changes in the area.

Nancy Muleady-Mecham asked Sherri about petroglyph damage in Bishop. Sherri told Nancy that work was being done to protect and limit the damage caused to the petroglyphs.

Bob commended Nick Lavrov and the Ukiah Field Office on the work at Berryessa Snow Mountain. He feels having a management plan for the area is very beneficial.

Michael Lueders commended Ukiah staff and stated that he appreciated the partnerships formed for

work at Cow Mountain and at Berryessa.

Public Comment came from Amy Granat regarding Alabama Hills. She stated that not everyone is happy with the changes at Alabama Hills. She felt the BLM and the Tread Lightly group was in error to have endorsed the changes to the area. She did not agree that all the improvements were beneficial. Sherri Lisius responded that the changes were implemented after much analysis and input from the public and partners. She said that education will be key to getting the word out about all the improvements implemented in the area.

**ACTION:** Although no action was required by the RAC, members voiced appreciation for the presentations.

#### **NEXT MEETING**

Philip Oviatt informed the group that the next set of meetings were being set with a new Federal Register Notice. Tentatively, meetings are being considered for May/June, September, November, and February. He stated that he would be reaching out to RAC members with more details as they become available.

#### **FUTURE MEETING TOPICS**

Based on comments from staff, the Merced Business Plan will be on the agenda for the next meeting. There also appears to be interest in hearing perspectives on implementing Potential Operational Delineations (PODs) within the FIRE program.

#### **MEETING ADJOURNED**

Chris Heppe and Philip Oviatt gave closing remarks, thanked everyone for attending, and adjourned the meeting.