**BLM-Idaho Resource Advisory Council (RAC) Meeting Minutes**

Held in-person at the Idaho State Office and virtually, Thursday, June 1, 2023, 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.

**ATTENDEES**

**RAC**: Participating in person: Scott Nichols (Chair.), Skip Brandt (Vice-Chair.), Kathryn Rinaldi, Steve Lentz, John Robison, Justin Mink, Chad Colter, Brenda Pierce; RAC members participating virtually Leon Smith and Skylar Jett.

**BLM**: Participating in person: Karen Kelleher, Idaho State Director, Peter Ditton, Assistant Idaho State Director, Serena Baker, Deputy State Director for Communications; MJ Byrne Idaho RAC Coordinator; Caleb Ashby, Idaho Public Affairs Officer,; June Shoemaker, Deputy State Director Resources and Sciences, Dennis Strange, Idaho Fire Management Officer, Richard White, Cottonwood Field Office (FO) Manager and Acting Lead for development of Idaho’s Recreation Strategy, Jared Blades, Branch Chief, Resources and Sciences, Aimee Betts, Branch Chief, Minerals, Land Tenure and Water Rights and Pam Murdock, (last three in Resources and Sciences Division). Rebecca L. Andres, BLM LE. Mike Courtney, Twin Falls District Manager and Heather Tiel-Nelson, Twin Falls District Public Affairs Officer, Kurt Pindel, Coeur d’Alene District Manager and Tanya Thrift Boise District Manager and Todd Kuck, Idaho Falls Acting District Manager. Participating virtually: Martha Price, Senior Engineer, Office of Engineering and Geosciences.

**Other agency representatives:** Alex Ernst, Land Access Coordinator, Recreation Bureau, Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation (IDPR).

**GENERAL BUSINESS:**

**Welcome, introductions, meeting structure, agenda review -** Idaho State DirectorKaren Kelleher andDeputy State director for CommunicationsSerena Baker. Kelleher thanked the RAC members for participating in the Field Tour on May 31, 2023, and BLM-Idaho (BLM-ID) managers and staff for their work that goes into hosting a RAC Field Tour and meetings. RAC members introduced themselves. Baker reviewed the agenda. Kelleher highlighted topics on BLM National and Idaho initiatives. Kelleher asked the RAC to identify issues they would like to have as topics for discussion at RAC meetings during the fall of 2023.

RAC Chairman Scott Nichols moved for approval of the RAC minutes from the meeting on March 17, 2023. Kathy Rinaldi seconded the motion, which was then approved unanimously by voice vote.

**Agenda Item:** **Renewable Energy** Jared Blades and Aimee Betts, Resources and Sciences Division presented **BLM Renewable Energy Tool,** which describes the process of how BLM is actively engaging with interested stakeholders during pre-National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) public meetings to review renewable energy applications using scientific analysis to provide multiple data layers including planning boundaries and exclusion areas, existing rights-of-ways (e.g., Gateway West), several types of resource data (e.g. Sage-Grouse and Big game), resource uses (e.g. livestock grazing and recreation) for the purpose of identifying conflicts and opportunities for siting renewable energy projects. One result showed a data-layered map of Idaho where no area exists without issues. Some layers, however, show exclusion areas, and others identify avoidance or minimization of impacts. New information is continually being added to these data layers, so they remain current. This tool is also being used as the districts update their Resource Management Plans (RMP’s). Information about the **BLM Proposed Renewable Energy Rule** including three upcoming virtual public information meetings in July 2023, can be found at https://www.blm.gov/renewable-energy-rule.

**Agenda Item: RAC Votes on Lava Ridge Wind Project Subcommittee Report** Kelleher and Nichols confirmed the RAC had a quorum present. After a discussion, including asking BLM to look at developing a supplemental draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and asking BLM to take a programmatic, statewide approach rather than analyzing renewable energy permit requests individually, to better identify environmental conflicts broadly on a statewide basis and tier off it with individual permit actions, saving time and funding, a motion was introduced by Brandt. There was no action on the motion as questions resulted in an amended motion.

Amended motion introduced by Brandt with a second by Steve Lentz that the full RAC send the Lava Ridge Wind Project RAC Subcommittee final report with a recommendation supporting the No Action alternative in the draft EIS to BLM was passed by a vote of nine yea’s and one nay.

Brandt moved the RAC send a letter to BLM-Idaho recommending initiation of a statewide Renewable Energy Management Plan. Rinaldi seconded the motion, which passed unanimously by voice vote.

Rinaldi said sending a letter to BLM will help keep this discussion going. Kelleher encouraged the RAC to engage the interested partners and publics they represent to become involved in development of this statewide plan.

**Agenda Item: Recreation Strategy for Idaho**

Kelleher began the discussion saying recreation is a large and multifaceted issue for both the BLM and the public. As the population in Idaho has grown, so has the significant growth of recreationists using public lands. Traditionally BLM has been mostly “hands-off, with few restrictions on public lands. However, with an increase in complaints and conflicts among users as demonstrated at Wilson Creek in the Owyhee Field Office during the RAC Field Tour on 5/31/23, BLM is being pushed to take a more proactive position, so is developing a recreation strategy. Significant numbers of recreationists using public lands in Idaho and need to manage recreation, however, this has not been aided by increased recreation budget funding. BLM is working with a $7 million budget by building partnerships and collaborating with other Federal, state and local agencies as well as public and private user groups and conservationists.

Deputy State Director, Resources and Science June Shoemaker added the BLM is one piece of the puzzle. The public is not concerned with jurisdictions. They simply want to go for a bike ride, a trail hike or ride their horses on public lands trails. Working with our partners, BLM needs to learn how to engage the public as a whole so everyone can all play together. Shoemaker asked the RAC to help develop the Idaho Recreation Strategy. Richard White, Cottonwood FO Manager and Acting Lead for development of, gave a presentation titled, “**Idaho’s Recreation Strategy** addressing funding issues and the need be proactive with management. BLM-ID is seeing recreation uses increase from 50 million to 80 million over the last three years. The strategy is in initial development phases. Public participation is going to be key to successful development. Several basic questions need to be answered including what is responsible use? How can BLM collaborate with the private, public, Tribal, non-profit and other non-governmental organizations to improve equitable access to federal lands and waterway? Need to identify sources for matching funds to apply for IDPR grants. Identify what additional staffing will be needed if additional funding is received. RAC assistance is needed to help develop a proactive approach, to help BLM-ID get feedback from the public, coalitions and user groups.

RAC members responded by citing successful examples of public involvement/education campaigns, including Ambassadors on the Landscape, Good Neighbor Authority, adopt a trail, friend’s groups, use of apps for maps, the Recreate Idaho app managed by IDPR and Q-R codes on trailhead signs to further educate the public about recreating responsibly, Pack-in-Pack out and identify what amenities are and are not on their planned trail hike. Education and greater presence of law enforcement is needed in remote areas of Idaho where rancher’s and cattle are wrongly blamed for resource damage due to cut fences and gates left unlocked. They urged BLM to increase collaborative communication and education to increase public awareness, involvement and shared stewardship. Working with other federal and state agencies, an interagency, public, educational portal is needed and the public needs to know about it. Alex Ernst, IDPR said they are hoping to engage in further discussions with BLM-ID other Federal agencies and Idaho Department of Lands about enhancing their existing educational portal to enable the public to have a one-stop portal for all public lands in Idaho.

**BLM’s Recreation Strategy, “Connecting with Communities,” Great American Outdoor Act (GAOA) Project and Deferred Maintenance Updates** were also provided to the RAC. BLM-ID is using $17.7 million in GAOA funding received over last three years to accomplish numerous repair and deferred maintenance projects at recreation sites across the state.

**Agenda Item: Lunch**

**Agenda Item: Public Comment Period** The following twelve members of the public provided comments to the RAC and BLM-ID:

David Catro, President, North Eagle Foothills Community Association

Dan Sakura, President, Sakura Conservation Strategies, member of Lava Ridge Wind Project RAC Subcommittee

Karen Steenhof

Burk Mantel

Ann Potcher, Wilson Creek Coalition member

Garret Visser, Conservation Coordinator, Idaho Wildlife Federation, member of Lava Ridge Wind Project RAC Subcommittee

Joan Mantel

Eric Shirmer

Angela Merrifield

Janet Buschert

Johnathan Seel

Commenters addressed conflicts between recreation users and safety concerns in the Eagle Foothills, concerns about conflicts at a future Eagle equestrian and sports park. The RAC was thanked for forwarding the final report of the Lava Ridge Wind Project to BLM and for recommending a statewide renewable energy programmatic EIS. Diminishing opportunities for equestrian use in Eagle foothills and areas in the Owyhee Front due to increased users and public safety concerns, need for increased information and education, use zones to identify uses and exclusions were also included in comments.

RAC members continued their discussions about the need for updated local resource management plans, land use planning, and informally asking BLM-ID to consider building target shooting sites to manage the safety aspects of this recreational pursuit.

**Agenda Item: BLM Idaho District Office Updates**

**Coeur d’Alene**: District Manager Kurt Pindel spoke with the RAC about increasing numbers of recreationists at sites in both in the Cottonwood Field Office (FO) and CDA FO.  In Cottonwood FO, the Clearwater Corridor and Lower Salmon River has an estimated1.4 million visitors per year. Pindel estimates CDA will see 250,000 recreating visitors at their campsites by 2025.  In the CDA District, there are 32 developed camp sites. The CDA District may review recreation fees at sites on the CDA and Cottonwood FOs over the next year, possibly bringing recommendations for modifications to fees to the RAC in the future. Significant recreation site improvements, repairs and upgrades were identified in both FO’s. many funded with nearly $6.7 million from GAOA. There will be hazardous fuels treatments accomplished with funds from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). The Clearwater River Management Council in the Cottonwood FO is an excellent example of BLM partnerships with a coalition of dedicated river users providing invaluable stewardship assistance to BLM’s management efforts.

**Twin Falls:** Twin Falls District Manager Mike Courtney provided an overview of recreation opportunities and planned improvements on the district, including a new boat ramp at Lud Drexler and added picnic amenities at Smokey Mountain Campground near City of Rocks in the Burley FO. Wilson Lake West is slated to receive improvements this year. In out years, Cauldron Linn and Sun Peak in Shoshone FO need upgrades to better accommodate continued increased public use. Bruneau Canyon Overlook in Jarbidge FO has seen significant improvements since 2020. BIL (Bipartisan Infrastructure Law) funding helped to support some of these improvements. Improvements include added signage and a new ADA-accessible trail to the edge of the canyon overlook, fencing around the overlook and a cattle guard. Planned upgrades in 2023 to the Jarbidge River Launch Site include a double vault restroom to include a changing room, an ADA parking pad and path to the restroom. Additionally, the TFD recently attended a tour with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game Commission where they reported about the outreach efforts to several stakeholders/partner organizations regarding developing a shooting range on public lands.  This would largely help manage indiscriminate shooting – especially during red flag days and increase safety for other recreational users. This option has been successfully implemented in Arizona.

**Idaho Falls:** Todd Kuck, Idaho Falls Acting District Manager provided an overview of recreation opportunities and planned improvements on the district. He updated the RAC on progress with continued public scoping and open house meetings in June for the Pocatello FO Upper Snake East Travel Management Plan, includes designations for nearly 850 miles of inventories routes. A coalition of BLM, City of Pocatello and others are partnering to construct a mountain bike trail for local high school teams to host competitive events. The Pioneer Ridge Mountain Bike Trail System. An activity-level recreation area management plan is under development for the 11,000 acres of open sand at Saint Anthony Sand Dunes which attracts over 250,000 visitors annually in the Upper Snake River FO. Developed recreation sites across the district are being improved and provided with added amenities including water systems, added camp sites, picnic tables and fire rings. A Multi-use, Foothills Master Trail Plan is underway in the Challis FO in partnership with the Challis Community Trails Collaborative. Challis FO received funding for design of additional camp sites to the always sold-out Mackay Reservoir Recreation Site.

**Boise:** Tanya Thrift, Boise District Manager provided an overview of improvements to dispersed and developed recreation sites, non-motorized and motorized trail systems. Recreation user conflicts are increasing with the huge increase in numerous out-door activities on nearby public lands. There are ample opportunities for dispersed camping, however the 14-day stay limit is becoming an issue for law enforcement. Recreational shooting is an accepted use on BLM- managed public lands. The number of conflicts and safety issues between users, trash dumping and trigger trash from shooting are growing. Local jurisdictions are working to develop sports parks to help manage the issue. The seven developed day use areas and campgrounds in BDO saw an estimated 290,000 campers, boaters and recreationists in the last few years. The Payette River System saw numbers triple to 100,000 guided users in last few years.

There are thousands of non-motorized trail systems throughout BDO including the Ridge-to-Rivers trails system located in the nearby Boise Foothills, 517,000 acres of public lands in the Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness area. River rafting is a hugely popular sport on the Payette River close to Boise and the more remote Owyhee Canyonlands Wild and Scenic Rivers. Even with 7,000 miles of motorized trails in Owyhee County, conflicts and safety concerns voiced by motorized recreation users of e-bikes, off-highway vehicles, motorcycles and non-motorized users including equestrian and hikers are increasing as the population and user numbers rise. Possible remedies discussed included forming collaborative coalitions of users to self-manage some of the more popular areas such as the Wilson Creek Coalition in the Owyhee Front, Volunteer Rangers in the Boise Foothills Ridge-to-Rivers’ system, trail ambassadors, good neighbor authority and BLM-built and managed target shooting sites on public lands.

**Agenda Item: Idaho State Office Updates**

**Proposed Public Lands Rule** presentation was given by June Shoemaker. There are three main components to the proposed rule: protect the most intact, healthier landscapes; restore landscapes back to health and ensure wise decision making based on science and data. Additional information can be found at <https://www.blm.gov/public-lands-rule> .

**Wildland Fire Seasonal Outlook and Preparedness:** Dennis Strange, Idaho Fire Management Officer introduced a tool/report developed by the Great Basin Coordination Center (GBCC) Predictive Services at the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) called, “2023 Seasonal Outlook.,” and ”Great Basin Seasonal Outlook, May-August 2023.” GBCC updates the report weekly. Detailed temperature and precipitation maps into spring 2023 of the Great Basin with current snowpack predicts new growth of fine fuels. Northern Idaho maps show less snowpack during winter 2023, with central Idaho at above average. Reservoirs are filling up across the west. Flooding in Idaho is not expected. A map showing a Soil Moisture Anomaly where areas of the country, including northern Idaho did not receive record amounts of moisture this winter. The 2023 Drought Monitor Outlook maps show significant improvement from 2022. However, the 20-year drought trend map for Idaho and next four months predictive forecast is for northern Idaho to join southern Idaho with higher temperatures and a higher number of larger fires if ignitions occur. Key collaborative partnerships highlighted in Idaho now include 11 Rural Fire Protection Associations, a Master Agreement with Idaho Department of Lands, other Federal agencies and numerous local agreements with municipalities, volunteer and district fire programs. RAC members were encouraged to stay current with their situational awareness of fires by using the Idaho Fire Information website at [www.idahofireinfo.com](http://www.idahofireinfo.com) and to pass this information to stakeholders they represent and the public.

**Greater Sage-Grouse Planning Update:**

**Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)** presentations were provided to the RAC members in their meeting packets and briefly discussed.

**John Robison proposed following motion:** We the BLM -Idaho RAC will write a letter to Idaho Governor Little’s office asking him to issue an executive order establishing a renewable energy taskforce and consider a renewable energy siting act to assist the BLM in their responsible siting of renewable energy projects. The motion was seconded by Skip Brandt. The motion passed unanimously. It was further agreed the Kathi Rinaldi will work with BLM-ID deputy State Director, Resources and Sciences, June Shoemaker to draft the letter by June 16. John Robison will assist with initial review. The draft letter will be circulated among RAC members for review, approval signing by RAC Chair Scott Nichols and mailing to Governor’s office.

**Agenda Item: Wrap-up and closing remarks**

Kelleher announced she received a letter from Idaho Governor Little approving all BLM-ID RAC nominations recently submitted for his review. When the nomination packages have been completed and uploaded to the national RAC SharePoint site a transmittal letter will be emailed to BLM-HQ and National RAC Coordinator Carrie Richardson to begin the vetting process for the nominations at BLM HQ with DOI and the White House Liaison for DOI.

Kelleher encouraged RAC members to help BLM recruit nominees for upcoming vacancies in RAC positions.

**FUTURE MEETING TOPICS:**

Kelleher asked the RAC for recommendations for topics for the next RAC meetings through the end of FY2023. Responses included: Interactions between BLM and the United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service; target shooting on public lands; Land Use plans; Travel Management Planning, (motorized and non-motorized); Land transfers – Lands going out of public ownership and BLM acquisition of additional private lands; update RMP’s; have tribal representatives come to the RAC meeting and address their vision of meaningful Tribal engagement; have Jen Pierce give a presentation of her research related to fire, rehabilitation and soils. Kelleher provided feedback on some of the recommendations.

Nichols moved to adjourn the RAC meeting. Brandt seconded the motion. It was passed unanimously by voice vote.

**Actions:**

1. BLM will provide RAC member John Robison with copies of Recreation Management Plan and PowerPoint, the Eagle City Recreation Concept and Eagle City Recreation Development Plans (**From Field Trip on 5/31)**; and
2. RAC member Kathi Rinaldi will work with BLM-ID deputy State Director, Resources and Sciences, June Shoemaker to draft the letter by June 16, 2023. RAC member John Robison will assist with initial review. The draft letter will be circulated among RAC members for review, approval signing by RAC Chair Scott Nichols and mailing to Governor’s office.