

Bureau of Land Management

Northern California District
Resource Advisory Council
May 25, 2023, via Zoom

Summary Minutes*

Opening Business

Chairman Leonard Moty called the meeting to order at 9 a.m.

RAC members attending: Leonard Moty, Josh Cook, Dan Efseaff, Justin Robbins, Jeff Blewett.
Absent: Buck Parks, Oliver Rogers, Vint Stevenson, Thibault Hoppe-Glosser.

BLM Staff attending: Northern California District Manager Dereck Wilson and District Public Affairs Officer Jeff Fontana.

Northwest California Integrated Resource Management Plan

Dereck provided the RAC with a status report on the planning timeline for this resource management plan that will cover public lands managed by the Redding and Arcata field offices. He said the district plans to publish a Notice of Availability in the Federal Register that will open a public comment period for a Draft Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

During the 90-day comment period, members of the public will have the opportunity to comment on the Draft RMP and EIS. This will be a key juncture for the RAC to participate in plan development by providing a formal recommendation on the issues that the members and the constituents they represent would like to see the RMP address.

When the comment period is over, BLM will review all the comments. The BLM will code the contents as substantive or non-substantive. Substantive comments include one or more of the following:

- Questions, with a reasonable basis, the accuracy of the information or analysis in the Draft NCIP
- Presents reasonable alternatives other than those presented in the Draft NCIP that meet the purpose and need of the proposed action and addresses significant issues
- Questions, with a reasonable basis, the merits of an alternative or alternatives
- Causes changes in or revisions to the proposed action
- Questions, with a reasonable basis, the adequacy of the planning process itself

Planning documents including the Analysis of the Management Situation are available for review on the BLM's ePlanning site: <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2012803/510>

Update on other plans and land tenure actions

Cascade Siskiyou National Monument

The BLM will seek public input to inform a new land use plan for the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument. The plan update would protect important biological, historic, and public resources, including the objects of scientific and historic interest identified in Presidential Proclamation 7318 and Presidential Proclamation 9564, which established and expanded the monument.

The new plan will support resilient landscapes in order to enhance resistance to large-scale disturbances and reduce fire risk to important monument objects and nearby communities. The Notice of Intent published will be published in the Federal Register in the near future.

This new resource management planning process provides an opportunity to learn from past planning efforts and ensures the 113,500 acres of public lands in the monument receive the proper protections. The upcoming comment period will provide the public with an important opportunity to help with the resource management planning process. The BLM welcomes public input to identify critical management concerns, which can help determine the scope of the environmental review, including issues for analysis and alternatives development. Future public meetings will also provide the public with an opportunity to speak with resource specialists and to submit written comments.

There will be three upcoming in person and one virtual scoping meetings during which members of the public will have an opportunity to ask and meet with specialists to learn more about the planning effort.

Greater Sage Grouse

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reopened a 60-day public comment period on the 2013 proposed rule to list the bi-state distinct population segment of greater sage-grouse as threatened with a critical habitat designation. The Service is taking this action after the United States District Court of Northern California's May 16, 2022, ruling reinstated the Service's October 28, 2013, proposed rules to list the bi-state DPS of greater sage-grouse as threatened with a 4(d) rule, and designate critical habitat. The Service will use existing and new information to conduct a species assessment, which will inform a final listing determination for bi-state sage-grouse and anticipates making a final listing determination by May 2024.

Six populations spread across 4.5 million acres of high desert sagebrush make up the bi-state distinct population segment. The species is found along the California-Nevada border near Mono Lake. Greater sage-grouse are known for the males elaborate springtime mating displays on traditional dancing grounds, known as leks. The birds use a variety of sagebrush habitats on private, state, and federal lands.

To date, federal, state, local and Tribal partners in the Bi-state Local Area Working Group have conserved, restored or enhanced more than 140,000 acres of sagebrush in the bi-state area since implementation of the Bi-state Sage-grouse Conservation Action Plan.

In 2023 the Service's Reno field office helped secure \$482,000 in Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding for collaborative projects to improve and restore sagebrush habitat in the bi-state area. This investment is part of the larger \$3 million in funding made available by the Law for projects to restore and conserve the sagebrush ecosystem in Nevada and California in 2022 and 2023.

A 60-day comment period opened April 27, 2023, and will close June 26, 2023. Information on how to submit comments can be found at www.federalregister.gov by searching under docket number FWS-R8-ES-2023-0052.

Recent acquisitions/LWCF

The BLM has acquired over 800 acres of land in five areas of northern California and northwest Nevada to improve opportunities for wildlife habitat conservation and public access for recreation. These acquisitions from willing sellers were funded by the Land and Water Conservation Fund and state grants with the goal of conserving America's lands for the benefit of all people.

In Lassen County, 680 acres along Upper Smoke Creek east of U.S. Highway 395 are now publicly owned, enhancing opportunities for the BLM and partners to maintain and improve critical habitat for greater sage-grouse, mule deer and other wildlife. This high desert land contains numerous springs that provide water year-round, along with miles of creek habitat and hundreds of acres of riparian areas and wetlands. The area northeast of Susanville is popular with hunters who pursue mule deer, antelope, and upland birds. The area is culturally significant to local Native American Tribes.

The BLM has also acquired 40 acres near the Biscar Wildlife Area on the west side of U.S. Highway 395 northeast of Susanville. The parcel includes a quarter mile of Snowstorm Creek and its associated riparian area, including a spring that flows year-round. The area is important habitat for raptors, owls, waterfowl, mule deer and greater sage grouse.

Closer to Susanville, the Reynolds parcel acquisition of 18 acres at the Rice Canyon Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Area will enhance riding and off-road driving opportunities. The addition to this off-highway vehicle area provides an important buffer between the recreation area trailhead and adjacent private property owners.

In far northwest Nevada, the BLM has expanded access for public land hunting and dispersed camping with the acquisition of a 40-acre parcel at Divine Springs in the Hays Range about 30 miles east of Cedarville, Calif. The parcel is dotted with stands of mountain mahogany and western juniper and expanses of sage and bitterbrush, all providing important wildlife habitat.

In west Redding, the BLM has acquired 40 acres within the popular Swasey Recreation Area, allowing for expanded mountain biking and hiking trails. Swasey is one of the most visited recreation areas managed by the BLM in Redding, offering more than 30 miles of trails for riders and hikers of all abilities.

Public Lands Rule Proposal

The proposed Public Lands Rule was published in the Federal Register on April 3, 2023, initiating

a 75-day public comment period open until June 20, 2023. In addition, the BLM will host five information forums to discuss the details of the rule.

The proposed Public Lands Rule provides tools for the BLM to improve the resilience of public lands in the face of a changing climate; conserve important wildlife habitat and intact landscapes; plan for development; and better recognize unique cultural and natural resources on public lands.

The proposed rule directly responds to the growing need to better manage public lands, waters, and wildlife in the face of devastating wildfires, historic droughts, and severe storms that communities are experiencing across the West, as well as to deepen BLM's collaborative work with communities, states, and Tribes to support responsible development of critical minerals, energy and other resources. The proposal is consistent with strategies used by other state and federal land management agencies to ensure the federal government has tools and direction to identify areas in need of restoration or conservation, as well as the ability to encourage investments in public lands to help balance the impacts of development. It will increase access to outdoor recreation by putting conservation on equal footing with other uses, consistent with the BLM's multiple use and sustained yield mission.

The proposed rule would build on the historic investments in public lands, waters and clean energy deployment provided by President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act by directing land managers to identify and prioritize lands and waters through the land management process that require habitat restoration work, such as removing invasive species or restoring streambanks. BLM lands are an economic driver across the West, and the proposed rule will ensure those lands and the resources they produce continue to be available for future generations.

It also proposes conservation leasing, a tool authorized by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), to facilitate restoration work on public lands in cooperation with community partners. A conservation lease is a time-limited lease of public land that allows interested organizations to conduct specific restoration or mitigation activities and would generate revenue for the American taxpayer. This tool has the potential to expand opportunities to accelerate restoration of big game migration corridors or establish carbon markets, for example, and directly responds to comments from state and industry partners on the need for a reliable path on public lands by which to pursue compensatory mitigation to facilitate development projects.

The proposed rule includes a roadmap to align the BLM with other land management agencies, such as the U.S. Forest Service, in ensuring the agency is inventorying and assessing the health of public lands, including watersheds, forests and wildlife habitat. In light of the rapidly changing climate and increasing demands on public lands, the additional information will be used to identify trends, implement adaptive management strategies, and ensure decisions are informed by the best available science and on-the-ground monitoring. It will also be utilized during the existing land management planning processes to identify public lands in need of restoration work or intact landscapes that may be best managed for their contributions to healthy, functioning ecosystems or water quality.

The proposed rule also provides a framework for land managers to apply provisions of FLPMA that direct the BLM to prioritize the identification, evaluation, and designation of Areas of Critical

Environmental Concern (ACEC) through land use planning. ACECs are the primary BLM designation for public lands where special management is required to protect important natural, historic, cultural, and scenic resources, systems or processes, or to protect life and safety from natural hazards.

Public Comment

None

Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for October 25-26, 2023. It will be held at the BLM Northern California District Office, 6640 Lockheed Drive, Redding. If Covid-19 protocols dictate, the meeting will be held virtually via Zoom.

The meeting was adjourned at noon.

*Summary minutes compiled by
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*These minutes are a summary of the proceedings. They are not a verbatim account.