

## Resource Advisory Council Meeting Notes 9-21-23

- Introductions
  - One change to agenda, Sam Burton is filling in for Susan Grande, she is on sick leave.
  - Jon Raby- At the national level, the BLM is working to update grazing regulations and policy updates. There will be a webinar on October 11 to help with grazing policy development (pending government shutdown). Also working on public land rule, have received public comments and staff at HQ are now updating proposed rule. The next step is review at Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (IRA), expected to deliver to IRA in first part of October (pending government shutdown).
  - Minutes of last meeting approved, none opposed.
  
- Winnemucca District Manager Report- Sam Burton
  - For full details, see Winnemucca District Manager's RAC Report.
  - **Fire:** 100% initial attack success rate for federal jurisdiction fires in WMDO. 69 fires for 972 acres is 5-year average, we were well below 5 year average. Lots of water this year and veg. growth, could lead for more fuel for fires next year.
  - **Fuels:** High noxious weeds of growth this year. Still working to remediate Martin Fire scarring, planted mahogany trees this year.
  - **Renewables:** ORMAT officially withdrew Juniper Geothermal Development Project. McGee Geothermal approaching NEPA kickoff.
  - **Minerals:** Hycroft Mine not currently producing, more exploration work. Mountain View Exploration Project close to NEPA review. Thacker Pass Lithium Development Project has construction is underway and we are conducting on-site inspections and reviewing plan of work. Spring Valley Development and Wildcat approaching NEPA kickoff.
  - **Lands/Realty:** Working to remove realty trespasses, such as Guru Road ROW which had unauthorized additions. Orvada school site and fire station land exchange almost through NSO. Also, land exchange for Humboldt Shooting Range expansion.
  - **Wild Horse and Burro (WHB):** Calica WHB gather is underway as of 9/19/23, will continue to work on that through October. WHB east Persian complex starting in November.
  - **Grazing:** Conducting compliance checking on grazing allotments and notifying allotment holders as needed.
  - **Wildlife:** For Natural Resources, working with Summit Lake Paiute Tribe for LCT, meeting in Oct with tribe to coordinate on conservation efforts. Beaver dam analogs being installed in coordination with NDOW and livestock permittees. Participated in contact for upland and riparian modeling to support restoration efforts and weeds treatment, several IRA funded projects which could occur. Working with NDOW to coordinate on bighorn sheep translocation.
  - **Recreation:** Burning Man was interesting this year, further details later. NPLD event will be 9/23/23 in Water Canyon Recreation Area for HRFO and Soldier Meadows for BRFO. Will involve maintenance of campgrounds and fire rings and cabins. Eclipse event on October 14, eclipse, lots of local interest bringing in thousands for visitors. Working with county commissioners to manage influx of visitors, trash, etc.
  - **Other:** Donated 54 laptops to Lovelock school community.
  - **Hiring Efforts:** 12 new positions filled, 9 pending, 28 advertised positions at this time. 15 employees that have left this year, 2 pending to leave. Have 32 vacancies in our work plan. 62

contracts used this year. Hired two new FMs, Mandy Deforest onboarding October 10 for BRFO and Chris Matthews TBD mid-November for HRFO (pending government shutdown).

- Carson City District Manager Report- Kim Dow
  - For full details, see Carson City District Manager's RAC Report.
  - **Fire:** Few fires this year. Much of the work has been focused on fuels treatment in urban interface. Treated 11,000 acres in Washoe Co.
  - **Renewables:** 15 solar energy applications. Active include Mason and Pine Nut, Libra Project. Several geothermal projects: Dixie Meadows (new info came in during Section 7 consultation, now conducting additional NEPA), Diamond Flat (exploration with cultural and tribal concerns), Coyote Canyon in IDT stage. Geothermal Lease Sale scheduled Nov 23.
  - **Lands/Realty:** Conservation easement for agricultural use and trails/public access instead of home development. Bureau of Reclamation has lands that need to be relinquished back to BLM. BLM to convey lands to Fernley, which they plan to develop into warehousing. NDAA expanded Fallon range training complex, which will reduce allotments for 28 grazing permittees, BLM must redraw allotment boundaries. This expansion also impacts mining claims and public access. Conveying land to two tribes. BLM is lead agency for two road re-alignment for expanding bombing ranges. Acquiring 6 acres near Sand Mtn. Congress has ordered CCDO and WMDO to resolve checkerboarding in their districts. This effort is funded, Kim Dow already working with Susan Grande and Sam Burton on this.
  - **Wilderness:** Two new national conservation areas, 3 wilderness areas, and release of some wilderness study areas.
  - **WHB:** Two adoption events since last update. All animals offered were adopted (36 horses). Alpine Gather is being planned, Desert Toya Gather begins next Sunday.
  - **Grazing:** Several land health assessments should be completed by end of the calendar year.
  - **Wildlife:** Sandhill Habitat Restoration habitat to restore mule deer habitat kicking off this fall. Also, Spring Restoration for greater sage-grouse starting FY24 to improve riparian habitat.
  - **Law Enforcement:** BLM district rezoning occurred so that Carson City and Winnemucca now both have supervisory LEOs. CCDO has hired a new supervisory LEO. Also brought on a new canine ranger and reestablished canine program. Have law enforcement MOUs with 4 counties now to improve partnerships, working on 2 more MOUs. Most of LEO work on recreation and urban interface issues (target shooting and transient camping).
  - **Recreation:** New camping restrictions to create buffer to private homes bordering public land, done in partnership with county social services to help transient campers find resources they need. Three areas of high use recreation: Moon Rocks, Wilson Canyon, Sand Mtn. Moon Rocks received a grant for two new bathrooms and admin facilities to handle high traffic periods of recreations (Memorial Day weekend), partnered with country sheriffs to increase patrols in high recreation times. Sand Mtn. had an increase in recreation, could be due to cooler temps. Wilson Canyon also becoming more popular. Also, significant number of transient campers this year.
  
- Elko District Manager Report- Gerald Dixon
  - For full details, see Elko District Manager's RAC Report.
  - **Fire:** small fires, 41 fires, 256 acres, mostly from Snowstorm Fire.

- **Lands/Realty:** Wine Kept Gamble Land Exchange is a private proposal, and no one has formally approached BLM with this proposal.
  - **Renewables:** ORMAT project in Crescent Valley, geothermal, scoping has opened June of this year, NEPA open to public comment in the next year. Elko hasn't had many geothermal projects on public lands, mostly transmission lines for projects on private land. Incoming solar energy project near Valmy, proposed in area that has to go through state director in variance process before Elko can begin NEPA process.
  - **Minerals:** There is a fluid mineral proposal for mineral withdrawal in Ruby Mtns that could impact BLM and USFWS lands. Ruby Valley lease is being considered for removal so no one can propose additional leasing.
  - **Grazing:** Lots of water this year from snowmelt, unsure of loss for cattle that were out due heavy snow and washouts.
  - **Wildlife:** EKDO has an IRA-funded landscape restoration project that can benefit wildlife and migration corridors. With this funding, EKDO can hire four new positions to support this project.
  - **Law Enforcement:** Zone 2 law enforcement used to be Ely, Elko, and Battle Mtn. Now broken up that Ely and Elko are in the same Zone, Battle Mtn now in Zone 4 with Winnemucca.
  - **Recreation-** Terrible vandalism this year on almost all campground sites, especially those that are more isolated. Is an interagency issue, has been happening on other campgrounds as well. Elko is currently waiving fees for campground use due to the state of sites and due to theft of fees from fee boxes. Currently under investigation. Memorial Trails- Trail design completed in May, with a local working group for trail development. Has been unauthorized construction of trails in Elko in the past. This trail design is currently in NEPA process, but local group has good design and funding available.
  - **Hiring:** Many vacancies for Elko, made many offers but got many declines. Affordable housing was the big challenge. Elko has a local recruitment team, which has been helpful. Issue of hiring internally, leaves a vacancy in another office. Many questions about temp housing or bunk houses, Elko is discussing ways to build more housing with the county.
- Wild Horse & Burro Update- Ruth Thompson (NSO)
    - The national WHB program has approximately 77 HMAs; BLM NV manages 33. Have approximately 14 million acres of BLM, estimated WHB population as of March 23 is over 49,000 animals in NV. In 2023, BLM NV has completed 4 gathers thus far. Several gathers planned and ongoing this month. FY24 gather schedule is waiting for approval from HQ. In NV, we are approximately 3 times over our AMLs. BLM just renewed WHB plan recently, which included development of better fertility control and vaccine formulations and research for effectiveness and longevity of these methods. BLM NV has offered 400 animals through online corral, adopted out 250 throughout the U.S. Currently plan to continue offering adoptions through online corral.
  - Burning Man 2023- Bradlee Matthews (WMDO)
    - Event is held in the Black Rock NCA, it's the largest SRP in the BLM. 2023 permit authorized 87,000 population (including visitors, staff, and volunteers), with 80,000 total on playa at one time. Only reached approximately 76,000 population this year. 147 BLM staff and contractors on In December, planning will start for the 2024 event.

- NV Rangeland Monitoring Handbook- Sherm Swanson (RAC member)
  - NV Rangeland Monitoring Handbook has been developed with input from a variety of agencies. Newest edition has a focus on adaptive management to specific issues on the ground.
  
- Proposed New Lands Bill/Rules- Kathryn Dyer (NSO)
  - Came out in April 2023 and covered 3 main topics: ACEC designation and management, conservation leases, and. Received over 152,000 comment letters, over 16,000 of which were unique. HQ is working on revisions per comment letters, expecting a final draft to OMB by end of October 2023. After 120-day review period, publication of final rule and decision on CX and final preamble expected winter 2023 or 2024. Final rule is appealable. Will then work on implementation strategy for rule.
  - Grazing Rule- BLM is considering 4 points of policy to improve our grazing regulations from 1995: Outcome based grazing, drought management, rangeland information reporting, and managing unauthorized use. Timing for these policies is uncertain, maybe summer 2024 to address these 4 points. Looking also at grazing flexibilities and restoration in LCT habitat.
  - BLM received national lawsuit last week from Western Watershed Projects, specifically for range program, alleging that the BLM has not performed required NEPA review for grazing allotments, nor assessed environmental conditions and addressed resource damage caused by overgrazing. In the lawsuit, NV was used for specific examples. Unsure what will come from this lawsuit.
  
- Assessment Inventory & Monitoring Survey (AIM)- Brooks Munyer (NSO)
  - AIM is scale-able for what impacts you are trying to measure, for treatment effectiveness in a small area vs. species management areas or RMPs.
  - Standardized monitoring strategy to standardize field measurements across the BLM nationally. Here in NV, BLM has 6 districts and wants 50 points of random AIM sampling per district per year. AIM data is then made publicly available online. Also integrated with remote sensing. Each state should have a terrestrial AIM data analyst to tie results of all districts together. AIM data covers vegetation, invasive veg. species, soil, streams/rivers, soil, and wetlands per plot.
  - Most NV BLM districts try to have 10 permanent revisit AIM plots, the other 40 are random to cover more ground to be representative of the area.
  
- Fire Season Wrap-up- Donovan Walker (WMDO)
  - WMDO had 100% initial attack success this year, was 80% last year. Responded to 35 incidents, no large fire decisions needed. One fire responded in joint response area with Battle Mtn and Elko. Rate initial attack success by any fire under 300 acres ended in 48 hours. No fires on the Santa Rosa this year. Average for WMDO over last 5 years is 69 fire responses and 55,000 acres. Martin Fire in 2018 was largest one in the district, human caused at 11 pm on 4<sup>th</sup> of July with high winds the following day, never caught suspect. Fully staffed 11 engines this year, which is a robust contingent for WMDO. Hiring engine captains is difficult, nationally, can take 5-8 years' experience to qualify. High moisture this year. Burning indices were low this year, which reflects low number of fires. Should drop from high to moderate fire danger in the next week due to current conditions. Fire readiness program, fully funded for several years, have been able to donate 4-5 old fire engines to local cooperating volunteers in Lovelock, Denio, and more. Drought has ended for the area, which is good, but does means more fuel growth and fire risk

next year. A strong winter could compact standing fuels to decrease fire risk early next year; if no compaction, would be lots of dry standing fuels which would increase risk of early spring fires. WMDO Fire is keeping an eye on this possibility. Also involved in mowing, seeding, thinning, making fuel breaks in WMDO. NDOW has been a huge partner over the year to identify wildlife habitat and tailoring fuel management projects to the landscape.

- Successful Land Conveyances and Winnemucca Dunes Infrastructure Dev.- Sam Burton (WMDO)
  - Two successful land conveyances this year: Orvada School and extension of Humboldt Shooting Range (about 200 acres). School will require an expansion of water services in Orvada, which will benefit community. School designed by Lithium Nevada, is being funded by them and will act as a local community center.
  - WMDO has been working to improve infrastructure in the Dune Recreation Area, lot of recreation use and will be high traffic during the eclipse event. New picnic tables, new pit toilets, new interpretive signs.
- Public Comments:
  - No members of the public were present in person, two online that were offered opportunity to comment, both declined.
- RAC Deliberations/Dev. Of Recommendations- RAC members
  - For Next Meeting:
    - Discuss changes to mining law, organize a tour that focuses on how changes could impact utilization of minerals.
    - Presentation on BLM NV IM's new structuring and timelines for NEPA process.
    - Speaker to review tribal consultation process and any current/upcoming changes.
    - Presentation on Public Rule process, once the final is released.
  - Next Meeting Date:
    - Spring meeting- April 11 and 12, weather dependent
  - Next Meeting Location:
    - Carson City or Fallon. Could visit expanded bombing ranges in Carson City, or near them. Visit Sand Mtn or Hidden Caves.
  - Round Robin:
    - BLM road washout was serious this year and could impede fire operations next year. Could lead to more people going overland and creating new roads through repeated use. Should be a priority to address this issue. BLM could consider news releases on newspapers, radio, or social media for public updates on road conditions. BLM relies on notification from permittees for problem roads. EKDO has started an annual roads and weeds summit with cooperating agencies in March to share information and discuss priorities and what resources/overlap may be available.
    - Unknown when updated map of greater sage-grouse habitat will be available to the public.
      - There were members of the public present in the morning, but all left before the public comment period. RAC could have two public comment periods, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, both capped to 30 min each.