

# **Western Montana Resource Advisory Council Meeting Notes**

## **June 27, 2024**

### **Missoula, MT**

Attending: (in-person) Jean Belangie-Nye, Juanita Vero, Michael O'Herron, Lois Steinbeck, Michael Albritton, Katie Stevens, David Abrams, Amanda James, Kristen Ullery, Brandy Janzen; (online via Teams) Dave Williams, Clayton Elliott, Eric Clewis, Sean Steinbach

#### **Madison River Recreation business plan subcommittee follow-up**

Subcommittee met 4 times to discuss day use fee on the Madison.

Commercial folks had concerns about how user fees already pay 3% return to agencies, and they would get charged double for the use. Commercial fees are a fair use for public lands. User fees are a cost to cover management of sites. Access fees and FLREA fees are separate, it's not a "parking fee."

Some members of the subcommittee noted that the Dillon Field Office's business plan was confusing; discussion at subcommittee meetings helped explain the outfitter guide fees, and commercial fees for shuttles.

Fishing outfitters understood the annual pass idea and how it could be beneficial. Importance of individual impacts to help protect the resources.

Revenue summary was presented as per vehicle/per person.

Lois: Public negative perception of fee, establish it to cover the cost. Make it a round number and make it enough to maintain and improve the services at the sites.

Jean: Make fees higher to prevent having to hike rates sooner in the future.

Katie: The needs are at nearly \$600k; that would require a 5/person or 8-10/vehicle with 60% compliance rate.

BLM needs to update business plan. Public notice needs a 30-day public comment period. Then we must submit a Federal Register Notice with 60 days public comment. The Dillon Field Office also has a proposal to increase campground rates on the Madison as well.

Clayton: Taking the opportunity to do public comment after business plan update and Federal Register Notice for transparency before motion.

Lois: I agree with Clayton. There needs to be public education; let them know and have transparency and make the public comfortable.

Dave: Clayton is reasonable. 10 per car is reasonable. There are questions about cash vs card payment options.

Kristen: Deschutes (Oregon) recently implemented the ROKs, also QR code, or other cashless ways to pay.

Mike (online): Use the most expeditious way to include public comment. Spell out those ways for the RAC; we won't see a motion until after public comment.

David: Moves to go forward with individual or per person.

Lois: It promotes fairness and equity; and it's easy to administer and meet the needs.

Dave: Perfection is the enemy of progress. I vote for per person to get moving,

Katie: We're interested in having to move this forward. We'll update the business plan with per person approach, summarizes the per vehicle approach and put that out to the public for transparency to make sure we can implement for next year.

Clayton: I support that and share Lois' idea to make sure we are getting to the right revenue number. If we need to get to a higher number, then we need to keep that in mind.

Katie: I propose to wait for the next meeting (September) to have a vote and then get something in Fed Register.

Clayton: Calls the question; motion carries to approve moving forward on the "per person/per vehicle" business plan changes.

Lois: moves for Campground fee increase.

Juanita: seconds.

Clayton: calls the question; motion carries to approve campground fee increase.

### **Public Lands Rule Presentation by Christine Cimiluca, BLM Montana State Office**

Katie: How will it change BLM for certain stakeholders? It formalizes and requires things that have been required in FLPMA anyways. Multiple use seems to have been misconstrued. The watershed assessments have been going on in Dillon and Butte and to some extent in Missoula, and we are making decisions based on a comprehensive inter-disciplinary assessment. Conservation and restoration leases are just a different way of doing things and may be a workload impact.

Lois: Is there a monetary amount we will receive?

Katie: The cost recovery will be authorized as ROWs and will be cost recovery, with opportunity for cost sharing/ waiver.

### **Solar Energy EIS, presentation by Adam Carr, BLM Montana State Office (via Teams)**

Adam Carr: The public comment period ended in April; we are responding to comments now and we are publishing in the end of August; we're hopeful for the ROD by the end of December. Solar energy development has mostly been in the southwest, this plan includes changing transmission needs. There's a desire from industry for more solar. Many different resource areas were considered during the EIS. There was a reasonably foreseeable development scenario: small (5,400 acres) of BLM in Montana. But most BLM lands are not suitable for development.

### **Upcoming grizzly bear food storage order public comment, discussion led by Katie Stevens**

Katie: Shared the internal working Food Storage Order. Will be published in the Federal Register. It's designed to protect humans and bears. Safe storage of food and attractants for the Western District. The order also includes portions of Havre, Billings and Lewistown. Comments must be collected and put in Federal Register for them to be enforceable for BLM law enforcement officers.

Lois: How is enforced?

Katie: LEs in early years will mostly educate the public, unless it's egregious. We encourage compliance.

Jean: Where does it apply?

Katie: This is for BLM lands; private lands can opt in and are encouraged to. There's also a bear storage check out program available at Dillon Field Office.

### **Field Manager and District Manager Updates**

MISSOULA FIELD OFFICE: Garnet Fee Increase went from \$3 to \$10. It's too early to report out for funding. Next meeting, we'll have data.

There were 50 comments on motorized pre-NEPA and early engagement on travel/transportation management. NEPA was contracted; more public meetings in the Fall.

Clark Fork Face was signed in April; there's already an appeal and request for stay. Restoration Landscape Blackfoot Clark Fork: \$17 mil, IRA and BIL obligated 60% of funding into 14 partnership agreements, plus 3 more monitoring projects.

Tribal co-stewardship with CSKT MOU: will steward resources on ceded lands. We are the first to do Good Neighbor Authority with the tribes.

We have 700 miles of roads; we're doing some road work and developing a suite of tools to do a backlog of roads projects.

DILLON FIELD OFFICE: We fall under the Restoration Landscape Missouri Headwaters. We've been working on conifer encroachment, doing a transportation inventory, bird inventory, and outcome-based grazing (radio collar fencing for livestock).

We have two proposed decisions: Grasshopper and Medicine Lodge. Should be done by mid- to late July. We're taking a good look at land health standards. Data collection for Middle Ruby is going on now. Assessment report is going on for Big Hole and Horse Prairie.

Programmatic Vegetation Management EA going on right now to cover whole field office. We're also doing mechanical and RX fire, RX livestock treatment, herbicide and seeding. Hoping for 30-day public comment period in July.

RX fire: 1,200 acres this spring, even with short staffing and WBP.

Our field office hosted DNRC, TNC MT Forest Action Council, looked at finding local contractor creatively to use the area for merchantable treatment possibilities.

Clayton: Would like to do a tour with the RAC to see different aspects of timber at play.

Lois: What is outcome-based grazing?

Amanda: When we want to meet land health standards and putting that effort on the permittees. Write into the terms in conditions that they can turn on earlier or later.

Mike Harper: I can also help answer this. We have been doing outcome-based grazing for years. We do this because we look at the land health standards and apply those terms and conditions. The collared grazing is like using the invisible line and auditory signal to animal.

BUTTE FIELD OFFICE: We have a skeleton crew; we've added a few positions. We're a Lean Mean Accomplishing Team

Recreation: Digital Fee Kiosk – ROK, at developed rec sites, day use fees, tap enabled, credit or debit card and phone enabled. Cost is \$7-10k. Can reprogram remotely. Will be hardlined in. Funds deposit directly into accounts. Education on the kiosks is important.

Improvements to the road to Ringing Rocks is going on.

We're contracting out solar at admin sites at Chain of Lakes.

We dug a well at Devil's Elbow and hit water.

Seymour Creek Acquisition: 3,600 acres. We're doing travel planning. We're doing NEPA this winter, public outreach and public comment.

We've Finalized Tie Creek Timber Sale (post Alder Creek Fire).

Dave: Is there an update on the MT Tunnels bankruptcy?

Katie: We will provide update at next meeting.

Katie: We're also about to sign the Gold Twin Decision; this is the acquisition for lands from TNC; it's gone through a couple of phases of LWCF funding.

Supplemental Rules for Missoula RMP to be published in the Federal Register to make rules enforceable.

David Abrams is retiring Aug 31 to travel in his van with wife and cats (after 16 years of service for the BLM).

We're looking at staffing according to budget which has been flat. We are looking at staffing reductions and looking at priorities and at what levels we can implement things within our means. Proud of staff with small amount of resources. If we can, we'll get an America's Public Lands Foundations representative here to talk to the RAC.

### **Public Comment Period**

No public comment.

### **Planning for Next Meeting**

September will be next meeting.

Dave: Late September or Early October is better.

Lois: Not Tuesdays.

Location should be Dillon, Helena, or Butte according to scheduling.

Meeting ADJOURNED at 4 p.m.

Minutes reviewed and signed by

---

Jean Belangie-Nye, RAC Chair

Jean Ellen Belangie-Nye