

Bureau of Land Management
Alaska Resource Advisory Council Meeting
Campbell Creek Science Center
Anchorage, Alaska
February 19-20, 2009

Day 1: Thursday, February 19, 2009

Council members Present: Scott Hala, Mike McDougall, Mark Hanley, Greg Beischer, Suzanne McCarthy, Teresa Imm, June McAtee, Jim Posey, Steve du Albuquerque, Phil Driver, Amalie Couvillion, Charlie Boddy (on telephone).

Council members Absent: Sandra Key, Keith Tryck, Denise Michaels

BLM Representatives Present: State Director Tom Lonnie; RAC Coordinator Sharon Wilson; Deputy Chief, Office of Communications Ruth McCoard; Anchorage Field Office Public Affairs Specialist Teresa McPherson; RAC Administrator Pam Eldridge; Fairbanks District Manager Bob Schneider; Deputy State Director for Resources Ted Murphy; Associate Manager Alaska Fire Service Kent Slaughter; Anchorage District Manager Gary Reimer.

Call to order – 1:15p.m.

Chair Greg Beischer called the meeting to order. A motion was made to approve the minutes of the August 2008 meeting in Wiseman, motion was seconded, unanimous approval at 1:20 p.m.

The Chair welcomed everyone and made opening remarks. Each RAC member and BLM employee introduced himself or herself to new RAC member Mark Hanley. Beischer briefly explained to Hanley the purpose, processes and history of the RAC. He also encouraged the RAC to make decisions and work together to stay aware of issues.

Beischer announced elections for the Chair and Vice Chair positions. Sharon Wilson explained that elections are conducted the first meeting of the calendar year. June McAtee nominated Suzanne McCarthy for Chair, Scott Hala seconded and the vote was unanimous. Jim Posey nominated Scott Hala for Vice Chair, seconded by Mike McDougall, and the vote was unanimous. Beischer excused himself as out-going Chair and BLM-Alaska State Director Tom Lonnie presented Greg with an appreciation plaque for his service as Chair. Suzanne McCarthy assumed the Chair.

BLM-Alaska State Director Tom Lonnie briefed the RAC on current events in the BLM.

- The National Public Land Foundation had presented Ramona Chinn, Deputy State Director for Alaska Lands, with an award for its Land Manger of the Year award for accelerating the numbers of land transfers toward meeting the BLM's adjudication goals.

- People who worked on the remediation of East Teshekpuk Well received an Environmental Award from the Secretary of the Interior for their superior work.
- BLM Director Caswell worked to designate the public lands managed by the BLM as the National System of Public Lands. This new designation gives BLM-managed public lands an identity similar to the Forest Service's National Forests and the National Park Service's National Parks.
- In September the BLM held a lease sale that initially generated \$31 million. Petro-Hunt later returned its leases, which reduced the amount.
- From a land use manager perspective, the new Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar is concerned with ethics, leases in Utah, off-shore drilling, and renewable resources such as wind, geothermal, hydro, and solar energy.

Comments from RAC:

Q: What is the status of the BLM's policy on subsistence use of vegetation, as brought up by Jack Reakoff at the Wiseman meeting last August?

A: At the RAC meeting Bob Schneider had discussed ANILCA authorization for the subsistence renewable resources policy. BLM-Alaska's Division of Resources drafted a policy and it was being reviewed by other offices around the state. The BLM has a free-use permit for firewood, but the residents of Wiseman want access and local preference to firewood, berries and other vegetation resources under ANILCA. They would use the ANILCA 810 process to determine adverse use.

Q: The Alaska Department of Natural Resources is redesigning guide recommendations throughout the state – does the BLM have to follow the State in establishing guide areas?

A: The BLM wants to dovetail its management with the State's management.

Q: Is there a change in the speed of land transfers?

A: We are looking at certain programs to create efficiencies in our budget so we can identify increased funding for the survey program and issue patents for land title transfers.

Fairbanks District Manager Bob Schneider presented a slide show of the August 2008 RAC field trip to Coldfoot, Wiseman and the Dalton Highway.

Teresa Imm asked about roads being built for mining access off the Dalton Highway. At the Wiseman RAC meeting, Heidi Schoppenhorst expressed concern about the possibility of highway access, and how that could affect local residents. Bob assured her that such access had to be approved in the miner's plan of operation for federal claims or by right-of-way for state claims. In either case, local people would be notified. The public notice issued by the BLM to identify 17(b) easements across land conveyed to Doyon, adjacent to the Dalton Highway corridor, was not intended to identify access for a mining project. The timing of the public notice and the discussion of mining access at the RAC meeting was coincidental and unfortunately led to some confusion until the issue was clarified.

Alaska Fire Service Associate Manager Kent Slaughter presented information about **wildfire on the North Slope**, the acres burned and lightning strikes, and commented that there had been more lightening in the tundra areas in recent years. The recent fire locations have been scattered across the Arctic and northern plain, and have represented significant change in fire regimes. The Anaktuvuk River fire burned 256,000 acres and lasted through the end of September. Late-season fires burn longer, deeper, and are more severe. The BLM is analyzing Alaska's wildland fire policy and programs and specifically North Slope fire protection, the effects of smoke, the impacts to humans and wildlife to determine if the protection policy should be changed.

Break (20 minutes – 3:15 p.m.)

Anchorage District Manager Gary Reimer presented information about the **Campbell Creek Science Center**, listing the many environmental education programs offered to children and the general public throughout the year. Rates for using the Center have been raised three years in a row to make the Center's services sustainable. The Friends of Campbell Creek Science Center had raised over \$100,000 and established scholarships for students with financial difficulties. Several local companies and private citizens have supported the Center with donations.

Science Center facilities would be open to the public during the **ceremonial start of the Iditarod Sled Dog Race** ending at Campbell Tract. The staff intended to interview Keith Tryck and his father about his grandfather, who built part of the Iditarod Trail. The staff is capturing stories for the Centennial activities. [*Editor's note: The article has been written and is on the BLM Web site at <http://www.blm.gov/ak/st/en/prog/nlcs/itarod/history/people.html>.*]

Unauthorized Use in the Glennallen Field Office area: The Alphabet Hills area will eventually be transferred to the State of Alaska under the Statehood Act, but there are numerous cases of unauthorized use (such as structures or debris) that must be cleared before transferring the title. During hunting season, many hunters found their shelter cabins in the area had been posted for removal. The GFO staff works with the state and the person who claims ownership of the unauthorized site to see if it can be authorized under state policy, but most of the time the property must be removed before title is transferred.

The BLM is working with Alaska Fish and Game concerning **bears on Campbell Tract**; satellite tracking indicates there are about 20 resident grizzlies: sows, cubs and boars. They are not transient, as previously believed. The staff has made changes to its bear safety program in response to the new information.

Reimer added a brief update on the **Bering Glacier**. The camp is on land that is now a research natural area, designated by the East Alaska Resource Management Plan and managed out of the Glennallen office. The District is trying to make the camp self-sustaining. The data collection, glacial studies, and water studies are built into the camp costs. The University of Alaska

Anchorage has signed a five-year memorandum of agreement. That will be a source of cash coming into the camp. We went to Washington, DC, with Southern University and gave a presentation attended by White House staff, along with BLM leadership. We expect commitment of cash from Southern University and if they get their NASA agreement, they might bring more. *[Editor's note: The NASA grant did not materialize and the BLM made the tough decision to not open the 2009 Bering Glacier Camp. The BLM staff is aggressively working with partners to open the camp in 2010.]* Michigan Tech is going to bring money to the table. Alaska Pacific is going to join us for the first time; Jim Posey was helpful in that engagement. We will now be running the camp on a reimbursable structure. The BLM camp was started with appropriated Challenge Cost-Share funds for two years—our seed money—and the camp is now expected to pay its own way.

Jim Posey discussed the importance of having scientific research on hydro resources (snow, rain and glacial melt) connected. Municipal Power and Light had a contract with Alaska Pacific University for research, but they were not actively working with the Bering Glacier. He said they wanted to make sure their data and the data on the southcentral ring of glaciers, including Bering Glacier, are combined for more impact. His engineers have good data, and that was why they included Alaska Pacific University in the funding support for Bering Glacier.

Fairbanks District Manager Bob Schneider handed out copies of his Manager's Update and gave a brief update on things that have happened since the RAC met last August.

- After the RAC's visit to on the Dalton Highway during the field trip, the BLM issued a permit to BP to drill at Roche Moutoneé but BP chose not to drill. They are looking at a number of alternative sites, including Trevor Creek, some existing rock quarries along the Dalton Highway, and other sources of rock not on the Dalton Highway corridor. They'll come back to us if they need to operate under the permit.
- Alaska Railroad is looking at extending the existing rail line from Fairbanks and Eielson Air Force Base south to Fort Greely. The BLM is participating with the lead agency, the Surface Transportation Board. The BLM may have 15 miles of right-of-way out of about 100 miles of track that will provide summer access options into the Tanana Flats, south of Fairbanks, for military training.
- A miner has trespassed in the Sheep Mountain area and the area must be restored. The BLM has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Alaska Department of Natural Resources. The BLM has notified the State and Steve Borrell, president of the Alaska Miners Association, of the violation. Last September the BLM used a fire crew to reclaim the site before freeze-up. We sent a letter to the individual, the claim owner and two operators, to inform them that per BLM regulations, we are taking the money the miner had put in the bonding pool to partially reimburse the cost of the work and request they pay the balance to the BLM. We notified the State we will seek additional bonding

- The scoping for the Eastern Interior plan is complete. Fairbanks District Office had eight meetings; over 100 people attended and gave comments. Recurring themes were: 17(b) easements, RS2477 routes, critical airstrips, access, and climate change and how that will affect us in the future. The D-1 withdrawals are a major issue for every land use plan, especially in the Steese and Fortymile areas.
- Access and 17(b) easements are huge issues in Eastern Interior. Doyon has submitted its land selection priorities. The BLM held meetings in Tok and Eagle about access and easement needs, then returned in December with recommendations on easements.
- Fairbanks District has been working on a fisheries monitoring plan for the NPR-A, a caribou monitoring component and also recent budget issues for the entire monitoring plan. The NSSI (North Slope Science Initiative) is now responsible for helping coordinate monitoring activities and efforts among the various federal agencies.
- Point Lonely Dew Line Site, 100 miles east of Barrow, operated from the 1950s through 1999. There is a landfill adjacent to the lagoon and south of the airstrip. The Air Force is in the process of cleaning up contaminated areas. The right-of-way permit stipulates it must be cleaned to the satisfaction of the BLM authorized officer.

RAC members discussed potential dates and locations for a summer field trip. Options were presented and a committee of Amalie Couvillon, Greg Beischer, Jim Posey, and Suzanne McCarthy volunteered to work with the district managers to decide the most effective field trip. *(Editor's note: The RAC later decided the Eagle-Fortymile trip offered the best opportunity to address issues to be covered in the Eastern Interior Resource Management Plan. August 2009 was selected, but a major flood of the Yukon River in June severely damaged the town and lodging facilities, so the field trip and public meeting were cancelled.)*

Suzanne recessed the meeting at 4:15 p.m.; RAC to reconvene at 8:30 the next morning.

Day 2: Friday February 20, 2009

RAC Members present – Scott Hala, Mike McDougall, Teresa Imm, June McAtee, Mark Hanley, Suzanne McCarthy, Jim Posey, Amalie Couvillon, Phil Driver, Greg Beischer, Sandra Key Holsten, Steve du Albuquerque, Charlie Boddy via telephone.

Council members absent: Keith Tryck, Denise Michaels.

BLM staff present –Tom Lonnie; Ramona Chinn; Bob Schneider; Shelly Jacobson, Central Yukon field manager; Gary Reimer; Sharon Wilson; Ruth McCoard; Pam Eldridge; Teresa McPherson; Ted Murphy; Beth MacLean, Anchorage District program analyst & Bering Glacier project lead; Paul Krabacher, statewide vegetation program lead.

Meeting called to order 8:35 a.m. by Chair Suzanne McCarthy.

Ramona Chinn, DSD of Alaska Lands, presented a general overview of Alaska land transfers, describing priorities, acreages, D-1 withdrawals identified in land use plans, and land transfers. Three maps were on display for viewing and a smaller size of the same maps was included as a handout.

Chinn also provided information on the **natural gas pipeline projects** proposed by Denali and TransCanada, Enstar and ANGDA (the state's Alaska Natural Gas Development Authority). ANGDA is in the scoping stage, and its short term goal is a B2F, or Beluga to Fairbanks, gasline. The Corps of Engineers is the lead agency for that environmental impact statement (EIS).

The RAC members discussed various aspects of the pipelines, including responsibilities, cost recovery, applications, and status of the proposed projects. Chinn told the group that the BLM had hired Ron Dunton as project manager; he will oversee all gas line projects.

Chinn added that for the major lines proposed by Trans Canada and Denali, FERC (Federal Energy Regulatory Commission) will be the lead for the EIS and the tribal consultation process. Alaska is unique in that legislation has set up the Office of the Federal Coordinator and the Alaska Natural Gas Pipeline Authority (ANGPA).

Jennifer Hillman, with the Alaska Wilderness League, called in to listen to the meeting on the telephone at 9:20 a.m.

Ted Murphy presented the Draft Alaska Travel Management Guide. He said comments received from RAC members had been incorporated. It would now go to other agencies for review. The document will be a comprehensive guide for land use planning and how to treat travel management aspects of a plan.

Anchorage District Manager Gary Reimer announced that the Anchorage Field Office had hired a second employee in Nome, Gary Burdeau. The field office also has one employee in Unalakleet and one in Dillingham. Reimer discussed plan implementations for the Ring of Fire and Bay RMPs. He explained that the Haines EIS is at the top of the list and he expects a lot of public participation. The next implementation plan after that will be the management plan for the Campbell Tract facility/special recreation management area.

Break through 10:30 a.m.

Fairbanks District Manager Bob Schneider discussed e-Planning, a new program the BLM has been working on for quite a while. It will allow the public to access documents on their home computers; they can select the areas they are interested in and make comments on the draft. The program automatically sorts through the comments and bundles them according to issues, which will save time for the BLM staff. The Fairbanks District, which is developing the Eastern Interior RMP, is a pilot office for the Bureau's e-Planning effort.

Q: What about people who don't have access to computers? Will the information be available in another format?

A: Yes – the BLM holds public meetings and will continue to solicit public comments through other venues.

Schneider updated the RAC on the situation with the **Fort Egbert/Eagle dump cleanup**, which has been in the wings for three years. The fort was established in 1899 and the BLM has restored five buildings that form a national historic site. For a number of years, residents have dumped trash in an area that was closed in 1989 by the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation. In 2005 the BLM worked with various entities to take materials from the dump site to the regular landfill. There was some interest from the tribal council in the old dump site. The 2005 plan wasn't funded until 2008 and we are now in renegotiation with the current council to clean it up.

During the development of the Kobuk-Seward Peninsula RMP, concerns had been raised about **conflicts between local residents in Northwest Alaska and outside (non-resident) hunters**. There was a general perception that outside hunters interfered with the fall migration pattern of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd as they passed through the Squirrel River drainage, thus impacting subsistence success in local villages. The University of Alaska-Fairbanks, as part of a Benefits-Based Recreation Study being done in preparation for the upcoming Squirrel River Recreation Management Plan, conducted surveys of non-local hunters and local residents on their perspectives. They found no consensus from local residents that there is a conflict, and few locals had direct contact with non-local hunters. Potential solutions to specific conflicts were proposed and will be considered by the BLM during the development of the Squirrel River Recreation Management Plan.

Update on the **National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska and oil and gas exploration and development**: Two projects are going on. The first is Anadarko's Wolf Creek test well, an area that hasn't been drilled in a long time in foothills area west of Umiat. Anadarko built a snow road and brought their drill rig over to the site. There is an air strip about five miles south of the drill site. Our staff will be going up there March 10 to visit the site and the snow road. The second project is Grandview West, a continuation of a ConocoPhillips drilling unit in the Greater Mooses Tooth unit. Staff will be flying over that site early in March.

Cleanup projects: The top priorities for remediation of Legacy Wells on the North Slope are based on location in terms of erosion potential (site instability with wave action), likelihood of affecting water quality and subsistence activities, the material in the wells, and the condition of the reserve pit. This year, funding for the Atiguru well cleanup has been received; the project will start in early March and be completed by the end of April. Next year, 2010, we will clean up Drew Point, west of Point Lonely.

Q: Can you explain more about the Wolf Creek test well –the situation and whether special exceptions will be granted in the future due to the climate change?

A: The contractor asked to use high-pressure vehicles for their process. Staff visited the site, examined it, and granted the request. Ice roads are expensive, so they used a compacted snow road. The soil type and type of vegetation can affect the level of freezing, so we are looking at the effect of low-pressure vehicles versus high pressure type vehicles, compacted snow road versus ice road. This summer we'll reexamine and evaluate, and decide on future protocols.

Central Yukon Field Manager Shelly Jacobson passed around a handout about invasive weeds. She explained a chart showing plant species of concern found within the Dalton Management Area.

Paul Krabacher discussed invasives in areas around the Delta River and the Iditarod National Historic Trail—many places are seeing the impacts of dog sled and straw use. There is a statewide Invasive Plant policy, and mechanisms are in place on how to effectively use inventories and integrate information into a statewide inventory. Alaska is in the position to meet the challenge of managing invasives before the invasion gets too big. The Lower 48 is spending millions of dollars. If we don't act now, we may lose the opportunity to manage effectively.

Q: How does the statewide partnership group work?

A: It has active subcommittees. Information is in a central location called the Alaska Natural Heritage Program database. Krabacher will transfer that information into the BLM database.

Q: Risk analysis seems to be an integral part of the strategy; you need to determine how much of your resources to put into stopping the spread. Do invasives have a catastrophic effect on human use of the land? To convince the public to spend money on this, you need a risk analysis.

A: It is hard to do a risk analysis in Alaska, where we have so much undeveloped land. In agricultural areas, the concerns are easy to identify. How do we convince people to protect scenic corridors or wildlife habitat that may affect subsistence harvests?

Invasive weeds may alter stream channels by growing on gravel bars, change the river's flow, reduce access to the river, increase erosion at village sites as the river passes by. There is economic evaluation in the strategic plan, but how do you place an economic value on natural

resources? Several larger rivers, such as the Susitna, are infested by white sweet clover monocultures on gravel bars. Their roots will stabilize gravel bars, so the river won't meander but they are not native and actually affect soil chemistry.

Q: What's involved in establishing a weed-free zone?

A: Using hay and other products bearing only certified weed-free seeds where an activity brings in mulch, animals, etc.

Lunch Break

RAC members discussed their workplan, volunteered for committees. Since most of the resource management plans were completed, it was decided to add the words "implementation plans" behind each one.

Greg Beischer: Coming back to resolutions, I'd like to see us all grasp issues more, engage and be more proactive in making resolutions, such as management of invasive plant species. Does Paul Krabacher have a clear directive to perform a risk analysis and develop a state wide policy and strategy for the BLM to deal with invasive plants?

Tom Lonnie: Ted Murphy is the Resources manager and can address risk analysis for invasives.

Greg Beischer: I'm not really passionate about the issue, but I think somebody else should take it up. It just seems to me that we have the opportunity to potentially nip it in the bud early, since invasives are just getting started in Alaska. Would it help to put forth a resolution from the RAC to have the BLM put more effort into assessing? Until you can really determine what the risk is, it's hard to make decisions.

Bob Schneider replied that the Bureau didn't complete its National Weed Strategy, EIS and biological assessment until last year and that is what we're now tiering from. Before the Bureauwide plan we couldn't use all the tools in the bag, and now we can. Krabacher is looking at the Dalton as a pilot program, and if it works there it could work for the rest of the state.

Mark Hanley: On the public side of this, who cares? What is the risk? If weeds go up the highway, will they interfere with caribou and moose hunting? If you're going to get public support for this you need to get the awareness level up to where people think it is a concern. You need to be able to point to a direct negative effect for people, determine what the risk is and translate that into a one-page statement. "How to do it" is the implementation stage, but first you need the public support for it.

Tom Lonnie said he considered the interagency group key to that support building, and Krabacher provides leadership in that program. Alaska has mixed land ownership patterns. We

can do all kinds of things on BLM-managed land, but then there is adjacent private land. His emphasis is on a multi-agency, multiple-surface exercise that includes private property.

Greg Beischer asked if one agency should take the lead, which one?

Tom Lonnie said the University of Alaska Cooperative Extension Service provides a centralized location for the Alaska Committee for Noxious and Invasive Plants Management (CNIPM). The BLM can provide leadership, but we can't run the show—we don't have that authority.

Amalie: Does the CNIPM group have a paid staff person? That would be the best agency to start with. [*Editor's note: CNIPM does not have a paid staff person. The group's Web site is www.uaf.edu/ces/cnipm/*]

Greg Beischer: I see the potential for invasive species to do huge damage or contribute to changes in Alaska ecosystems; if that's a big problem, then this should be a well-funded fight. But for it to be well-funded you have to demonstrate it's a threat to the ecosystems. I just see the BLM is involved in it and I've always wondered if we should be doing something more as a group to encourage and support the BLM in its efforts with invasive species.

Suzanne McCarthey: Are there any step-down or more specific plans coming up that will address invasive species, especially when planning access? I think that's where the BLM can include stipulations in their plans that may have a positive effect.

Reimer said the BLM is including invasive species in planning. Staff is also doing some field compliance on that subject on the Iditarod this year, so we'll actually have some hands and eyes on the ground looking at invasives along the Iditarod.

Suzanne asked if the members would you like to see something on the agenda at the next meeting?

Sandra suggested they could hear from CNIPM or the governor's task force. Scott asked if a representative could be invited to speak even though the BLM has only a small piece of the statewide program?

Suzanne asked if there were other comments from the RAC. There were none.

Tom Lonnie asked for time to talk about the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and the funding coming to the BLM in general. He gave an overview of the stimulus funding given the Bureau. Categories included abandoned mines and well site remediation (funding for the Drew Point Legacy Well remediation project had been identified). Other projects fall into deferred maintenance; road, bridge and trail maintenance; watershed improvement; high priority habitat

restoration; facilities construction and renovation; and wildland fire management (hazardous fuels reduction).

Tom Lonnie added that the prioritization criteria favor proposals that will create the largest number of jobs in the shortest period of time. Other criteria include energy efficiency, usable renewable energy resources, construction, green buildings and enhancing youth programs.

Chair Suzanne McCarthy gaveled the meeting closed at 2:15 p.m.

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