

# French Gulch RMZ Meeting Notes

January 24, 2015

This summary was compiled by BLM volunteer Melissa Ghergich. If we've missed anything, please let us know. If you have additional comments, questions, or suggestions you can submit them by phone at (661) 391-6186 or email at [hfriedman@blm.gov](mailto:hfriedman@blm.gov).

## **BLM Powerpoint:**

*As usual, the workshop started with a BLM powerpoint to review planning direction from the Bakersfield Resource Management Plan for French Gulch RMZ and review a few of the challenges and opportunities that the BLM perceives there. Key points:*

- The Bakersfield Field Office Resource Management Plan (RMP), which guides management of all BLM lands in the field office (including Keyesville), was finally approved on December 22, 2014. The broad, overarching management objectives and decisions made in the RMP (which included lengthy public review and comment) will serve as the framework within which more detail oriented, Keyesville specific plan/ decisions must fall.
- French Gulch RMZ includes most of Keyesville, from Keyesville road north to highway 155.
- RMP guidance:
  - Manage to provide opportunities for visitors to engage in dispersed camping and OHV recreation. The RMZ will also serve as a staging area for long-range OHV touring of both BLM and US Forest Service lands.
  - Create a versatile trail system supporting a variety of uses, skill levels and experiences through collaboration with user groups and partners.
  - Allow specialized vehicle recreation (motorcycle and mountain bicycle trials experiences) at a number of sites identified for the purpose.
  - Install information kiosks and disseminate information brochures at key locations within the RMZ
- Key issues:
  - RMZ contains over 72 miles of designated roads and trails. How should these be managed to form a trail system that is sustainable and meets user needs? Is the current spectrum of difficulty, trail types/widths adequate? Are there opportunities that users are looking for now, but not getting?
  - How should trails be maintained? Need to balance soil conservation (erosion prevention), difficulty, and multiple use.
  - How should use be managed in staging and high intensity use areas to minimize the accumulation of impacts?
  - How can we prevent inappropriate cross-country travel and closed trail use?
  - How should BLM manage camping in the foothills loop meadow area? Currently used as venue for large events. Is this how it should be managed in the long term?
  - BLM is looking not just for an enumeration of problems and complaints, but also suggested solutions.

## **Public Comments and Suggestions:**

*Questions, concerns and solutions were categorized in order to make the information easier to read and reference. Comments from both the indoor and field visit portion of the workshop are included.*

### **Trail System:**

- Keyesville Classic, Dutch Flat, Vista del Lago, Snake Pit, and a proposed downhill trail should all be maintained as singletrack.
- Backcountry horsemen conducted recent ride off of Sawmill. Additional/ new development in Sawmill area could reduce intensive use of core sites in lower Keyesville. There are existing opportunities for development in Waggy Flat, however, there is no current equestrian access along Sawmill rd. Additionally, the placement of staging areas could be problematic-- locations are limited.
- It is difficult for horses to traverse steep terrain and eroded trails which begin at current lower Keyesville and connect to trails off of Sawmill, which are excellent. Equestrian staging areas off of sawmill or alternative usable trails from lower Keyesville to the sawmill area are needed. The trails at Sawmill have a high level of difficulty. Easier/ beginner trails are currently only found towards the lower portion of the French Gulch RMZ.
- Sawmill is currently effectively a one way road. If the area is to see more use, there need to be designated areas to stage and park and likely easier/better maintained trails. Access to the area via sawmill road is limited to street legal vehicles only. Green and red sticker OHVs will not be able to use the road to access the area.
- Part of the value of Keyesville are the difficult/ expert trails near sawmill. Easier trails can already be found in lower portions of Keyesville and on the Forest Service.
- Keyesville Road, Hogeye trail, and Dutch Flat trail are currently the only ways out of lower Keyesville. There needs to be a greater variety of easy and accessible routes out of congested areas and difficult trail sections.
- It appears that clandestine routes are being turned into approved routes, which is concerning. Some of the routes on the designated route map may not exist, which is unacceptable.
- Some disagreement on whether trails should be designed to go point to point to destinations or be loops that are more about the journey and experience. Keyesville has both types of opportunity.
- The level of difficulty of specific trails should be included in design process i.e. designing satisfying loops for beginners (and intermediate and expert) in particular areas. There needs to be consistency in the level of difficulty of trails.
- There are a lot of privately owned lands that that have trails running through them or near them. Some designated motorized routes lead to small tract, plat lands, and roads in Waggy flat. Including these routes on maps would negatively impact private lands.
  - [BLM note: these routes are designated not for recreational use, but for motorized use by landowners in case of emergency without need for a

right of way or other authorization. They will not be included on recreation maps distributed to the public.]

- If a new area, specifically Sawmill, is opened up and developed it will be difficult to maintain. Why open new trail systems when we can't maintain what we currently have?
- BLM should consider using traffic calming techniques and gatekeeper obstacles-- if first part of trail is difficult, it deters users who have less experience and may have trouble with more difficult obstacles further along the trail.
- On signs and maps, BLM should show the type of trail for each route and the level of difficulty i.e. motorized/ non-motorized, beginner/ expert so that users have a better sense of what to expect.
- BLM should consider assigning numbers to intersections on trails and on maps. On map, display easy and more difficult ways to get from one intersection to another (example: Bend, OR mountain bike trail system).
- Where there are difficult sections on a trail, it would be good to offer an easier alternative route. Conversely, offer some more difficult options on beginner/ easier trails using a branching "trail tree" design. This would add greatly to the versatility/ usability of the trail system.
- Would be great if BLM created a few designated motorcycle trials practice areas for use by the general public without needing a permit.
- BLM should try to provide intriguing experiences on trails that keep users busy and entertained so they do not venture into sensitive areas, seeking adventure.
- On multiple use trails used by motorbikes, bicycles, hikers and horses, it is necessary for all parties to be aware of courtesy and etiquette (i.e. passing safely etc.)
- BLM should make sure trails are marked and noted for what uses are permitted on the route. Provide users good information on what kind of activity to expect while on the trail.
- BLM should consider using one way, directional trails to eliminate cross-traffic and increase safety by reducing the risks of collision.
- BLM should use existing industry developed standards for trail difficulty designations. See USFS greenhorn trails. Do not reinvent the wheel. Try to keep designations consistent with designations on the rest of the connected trail system on USFS in the region.
- The maintenance of routes is the most important component of sustainability. It allows routes to retain usability (keeping people on trails), quality, and avoid erosion. If routes are designed and maintained to provide the sorts of experiences that people are looking for, people are less likely to go off trail looking for other experiences.

Staging and high intensity use areas:

- Special recreation events/ competitive events need identified camping areas large enough to accommodate a high volume of people. The Meadow/ boyscout flat off of foothill loop road is a great area for such events and should continue to be used/ managed for that purpose.

- BLM should consider installing a permanent “sweet smelling toilet”/ CXT toilet in the meadow area because it is an area of heavy use.
- ‘The Meadow’ is not actually a meadow in the ecological sense of the word, but a large open flat that looks like it might have been bulldozed in the past. Vegetation loss should not be a major concern. General public should be able to park and camp in ‘the meadow’ area outside of special events. It is a good location for camping and staging.
- It’s a good idea for boundaries of camping/ staging/ high use areas to be delineated in some way (boulders, barricades, post and cable) with well defined entrance and exit points of designated trails. This makes it clear where trails are and makes it clear that user is moving from an area that looks a bit more open into an area where there’s only a single trail. This would prevent expansion of impacts.
- The area across from the bathrooms/ kiosks/ main staging and parking area sees a lot of use by families camping and letting their kids ride around in circles. This is an experience that some people are clearly looking for (even if it isn’t an experience that most advanced riders are interested in).
- It may make sense to establish a designated, specifically designed kids practice loop to cut back on impacts that are occurring in these areas.
  - It may be difficult to find a large enough area that is appropriate.
  - Adding a fence to the existing kids area at Cyrus helped protect the kids and keep them within the designated area. Could use similar approach in Keyesville.
  - Fences installed for the kids loop are likely to be vandalized if they are not monitored.
  - BLM should survey parents to get a sense of what they would like to see.
  - Caution should be used with proposed grooming of trails and changing of the value and quality of the area for kids. Cyrus canyon once had a great loop, but it was graded over.
- Any Kids Loop area would need to be placed near several different campsites, so parents have the opportunity to watch and supervise their children.

Signage, interpretation, and cultural resources:

- There is existing vandalism to cultural resources. BLM needs to direct trail authorizations away from sensitive resources. Cultural resources need to be protected and preserved.
- New trails potentially could cause harm to cultural resource areas that we know of and those that have not yet been discovered.
- Are there recreational activities that occur in areas with cultural resources? Are there signs interpreting history? People may be more sensitive if they are aware of history.
- How can protection be provided to sensitive cultural resource values when there is increased use of that area?
- There needs to be focus on the protection of Native American values and areas of importance against damage, even if sites are not advertised or signed. If more

people use the area the cultural resources will be discovered and therefore impacted.

- The placement of signs to denote areas containing cultural resources might tempt people to explore on their own and disturb artifacts.
- Effective signage also needs equal level of enforcement. Some users ignore signage.
- Accurate and easily accessible signs denoting trail routes, need to be placed at the beginning and intersections of trails.

#### Staffing, law enforcement, and safety:

- There is a need for BLM presence in the French Gulch RMZ/ Keyesville in general to ensure proposed changes meet intended goals. Having staff on site would allow problems to be addressed in real time and trail users would be able to have their questions answered. BLM should not invest in improvements/ changes if it cannot protect them.
- The level of use in certain areas is unambiguously higher than BLM can manage with current resources. BLM needs more staff to sufficiently meet the needs of the area. The high volume of trail use in more congested areas makes it difficult to monitor and enforce rules.
- The new SRMA designation allows for opportunities to seek funding and grants. These sources of income are necessary to manage future planning and management. BLM should pursue these sources aggressively.
- Keyesville and places like the Meadow area needs a defined carrying capacity-- high volumes of use present a safety hazard in case of fire/ other emergency. Can a carrying capacity not be defined by an engineer? BLM should come up with a carrying capacity/ quota and limit number of people allowed in Keyesville at a time. Consider placing occupancy limits and providing staff for holiday weekends only if staffing is not adequate to enforce quota year round.
- If BLM does define a limit, it should collaborate with the public to make sure the limit is reasonable before implementing it. [BLM note: this and any other decision would be subject to review and comment in the draft plan when it emerges].
- Keyesville once had/ should again have a defensible space area and/or safety zones for fire. These should be clearly defined and readily accessible.

#### Misc.:

- What post burn Tillie Creek burn plans for restoration/ rehab does the BLM have?
  - BLM's Chris Ryan ([cmryan@blm.gov](mailto:cmryan@blm.gov)) will be able to answer this question better than BLM staff present at the meeting. In general, BLM is likely working with the Forest Service to mitigate hazards associated with the fire.
- What are the implications of the Area of Ecological Importance designation that overlaps with Keyesville SRMA?
  - The AEI that overlaps with Keyesville is a small part of the much larger "Monache-Walker Pass National Cooperative Land and Wildlife Management Area (NCLWMA)" established by executive order. The

NCLWMA includes guidance to retain these lands in public ownership and manage them to protect their existing wildlife, recreation, and other values. The designation compliments the SRMA designation, but does not appreciably alter expected management.