

**Bureau of Land Management
Central California Resource Advisory Council Meeting Notes
Sept. 17-18, 2010, Coalinga, CA**

Attendees:

RAC: Steve Koretoff, Carl Twisselman, Reb Monaco, Mary Gorden, Jim Haagen-Smit, Roger Mitchell, Walt Pachucki, Bill Vanherweg.

BLM: Kathy Hardy, Central California District Manager; Tim Smith, Bakersfield Field Office Manager; Rick Cooper, Hollister Field Office Manager; Bill Haigh, Mother Lode Field Office Manager; Bernadette Lovato, Bishop Field Office Manager; David Christy, Central California District Public Affairs; Erin Curtis, California State Office Public Affairs; Ryan O'Dell and Stacey Schmidt, Hollister Field Office Natural Resource Specialists; Mike Westphal, Hollister Field Office Ecologist.

Public: Jim Gorden, Jill Monaco, Cathy Haagen-Smit, Craig Fenster, Philip Martin, Ben Elgoriaga, George Armstrong, Kevin Mazzu, Marshall Havner, Amy Granat, Mike Damaso.

Rick Cooper welcomed the RAC. Reb Monaco moved and Carl Twisselman seconded motion to approve agenda. Passed.

Reb Monaco moved and Steve Koretoff seconded motion to approve notes from April 2010 meeting. Passed.

District Report: Kathy Hardy said American Recovery and Reinvestment Act projects have been a priority. The projects have been valuable to help BLM complete needed work while providing jobs through hiring and contracting.

BLM Director Bob Abbey made a series of visits to California including the King Range anniversary, Twin Peaks roundup and Sand Show.

Although it is unlikely a State Director will be named soon, Director Abbey has been satisfied with Jim Abbott as Acting State Director and plans to leave him in that capacity. Having an Acting State Director has not delayed decisions.

Roger Mitchell asked about the list of potential National Landscape Conservation System sites and whether the Interior Secretary could name a site to the system. Kathy Hardy said the list includes two sites in central California: the Bodie Hills and Blue Ridge-Berryessa area. The Interior Secretary could designate a site, but there is no indication he intends to do so. Bernadette Lovato said the Secretary has indicated designations need to be based on grass roots efforts.

State Report:

Erin Curtis gave the state report.

National/State Issues:

- **New Leadership:** Our Washington leadership is all in place and focus is now here in the field. Jim Abbott continues to serve as Acting State Director and we are transitioning the Acting Associate State Director position from Este Stifel to Patrick Gubbins from the Nevada State office this week. Gubbins will be acting through December. Stifel has been selected to serve permanently as a Senior Technical Advisor in the California State Office, and will begin in that role on December 1. Jim Scrivner, who has worked at the California State Office in various Information Resource Management roles since 1989, assumed his new position as Deputy State Director of the Minerals Division in April. Two new staff members have recently joined the External Affairs staff in the state office. Erin Curtis is the media and public affairs lead, and Martha Maciel is the congressional affairs lead.
- **Legislation:** The 111th Congress is winding to a close. There are about half a dozen legislative proposals that we are tracking, including two in Central California: Gold Hill-Wakamatsu Preservation Act which would authorize Dept. of Interior/BLM to acquire Gold Hill Ranch in Coloma to preserve it as a site of historical and cultural value; and Bridgeport Indian Colony Land Transfer Act which would transfer existing BLM land in Mono County to the Bureau of Indian Affairs to hold in trust for the benefit of the Bridgeport Tribe. Congressman Buck McKeon introduced HR 6129 in the House this week. The bill calls for the release of the Bodie Wilderness Study Area. The bill has been referred to the Natural Resources Committee but no hearing has been scheduled. The Mono County Board of Supervisors will discuss a proposed resolution supporting this bill at their meeting next week.
- **State Priorities:** Our statewide priorities for 2011 are the same as those identified in 2010 and remain in tune with the National priorities.
- **Renewables:** Statewide, we have more than 125 solar and wind applications covering more than 1.3 million acres, most of that in the Desert. Here in CenCal, we have six applications for wind projects, five in the wind testing stages and one in the development stages (AltaGas Walker Ridge met towers). The public will be involved through the planning process.
- **ARRA:** BLM-California received \$40 million to fund 115 projects under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The investments will restore landscapes and habitat, spur renewable energy development on public lands, and create jobs. Most contracts have been let at this point, all with the goal of creating or augmenting jobs by putting boots on the ground. Central California District received \$16.1 million to fund 36 projects. By year's end, 25 of the 36 projects are estimated to be completed.
- **Wild Horse & Burro Update:** The Twin Peaks Wild Horse & Burro gather is winding down in northern California near Susanville. The BLM is removing excess wild horses and burros from the 800,000-acre HMA to return the herd to its appropriate management level of 448-758 wild horses and 72-116 wild burros. BLM-California has been conducting the gather with as much public access as possible, including seven-day-a-

week public observation and use of social media to provide updates and information. As of this week, about 1500 horses and 120 burros had been gathered. The gather is expected to conclude by the end of September.

- **Director Abbey in California:** BLM Director Bob Abbey is in California this week making several stops throughout the state. Last weekend, he was at the northern end of the state celebrating the 40th anniversary of the King Range NCA. He also made stops at the Twin Peaks gather in Susanville and in Sacramento to meet with BLM staff and wild horse and burro activists. This weekend he will be in Southern California at the Sand Sports Super Show.
- **OHV Event Permitting:** Since the tragic OHV race last month in the Johnson Valley OHV area where eight spectators were killed, BLM has been reviewing how we permit such events and how we administer those permits. A report is expected soon with findings and recommendations.
- **2010 Budget:** We are closing out Fiscal Year 2010 and well into budget planning for FY 2011. The President's budget is proposes \$1.1 billion for BLM in FY 2011, an \$8 million increase over last year. It's possible that we'll be under a "Continuing Resolution" for at least the beginning of the fiscal year, as the election year adds some uncertainty to the budget process.

Alabama Hills Subgroup:

Kevin Mazzu made a presentation on progress to date. The Lone Pine Designations Subcommittee is proposing the Alabama Hills be designated a National Scenic Area and asked for a letter of support from the RAC.

Roger Mitchell asked if the subcommittee was looking at a Presidential declaration or legislation. Kevin Mazzu said they are looking at legislation and have been in contact with Senator Feinstein's staff.

Roger Mitchell asked if a designation would require an amendment to the Bishop Resource Management Plan. Bernadette Lovato said the current management as a Special Recreation Management Area would not conflict with a designation.

Carl Twisselman asked if language could be included that there would be no additional restrictions without approval of local residents. Kevin Mazzu said one of the goals of the legislation is to prevent actions on additional restrictions by outside interests.

Action: Reb Monaco moved and Carl Twisselman seconded a motion to send a letter of support for the subcommittee's proposal. The letter will reflect the intent to maintain existing uses and conditions; and commend the subcommittee. If absent members concur, the letter will be sent to the Interior Secretary. David Christy will prepare an initial draft for RAC review.

Steve Koretoff said he supports the letter, but is concerned outside interests could affect legislation designating the area after it is introduced.

OHV Subgroup: Steve Koretoff said he hopes the subgroup can meet this fall. He needs input from field managers on potential acres including lands BLM might transfer to other agencies for OHV use.

Rick Cooper said he has talked to Bruce Whitcher about potential OHV use in the Williams Hill area. Private lands adjacent to BLM land might be available for purchase and would help make an OHV area more feasible.

Next Meeting: The Mother Lode Field Office will host the next meeting in the Nevada City area in early April, with exact date to be determined. Agenda items will include the OHV Subgroup, an Alabama Hills update, land trusts and Clear Creek.

Action: Public comment periods will be held on Saturday at future meetings. The first action item will be election of officers.

Public Comment:

Marshall Havner, representing the Gem and Mineral Society and the American Lands Access Association, said rockhounds want access to Clear Creek and are willing to work with anyone in any capacity to make it happen.

Mike Damaso, who has applied for the RAC representing dispersed recreation, read a letter from Ed Tobin regarding activities at Clear Creek.

Mike Damaso said he is a hunter who has used public lands his entire life. He sees access to public lands decreasing. Wind and solar energy projects are good in some areas, but the projects restrict access for other uses. Solar panels should be installed on rooftops in the city rather than in the desert.

Public Comment Closed

Hollister Field Office Report:

Rick Cooper said, based on research by BLM Botanist Ryan O'Dell, there is a high potential to de-list the San Benito evening primrose from the threatened and endangered (T&E) species list.

Rick Cooper discussed American Recovery and Reinvestment Act projects at Clear Creek. Vault toilets were removed in the canyon and areas were restored based on the last Resource Management Plan. Roads were watered for dust control during the project. Road work was done to allow a crane in to remove vault toilets. . The toilets were relocated to dispersed camping areas outside of the ACEC.

Roger Mitchell asked if the new campground was removed. Rick Cooper said the Jade Mill campground is inside the Area of Critical Environmental Concern, but is on Franciscan soil, so BLM plans to keep it in use. The Oak Flat campground is outside the ACEC and is being improved.

Steve Koretoff asked how many campsites the campgrounds would have. Rick Cooper said Oak Flat would have seven and Jade Mill, 12. Reb Monaco asked about dispersed camping. Rick Cooper said BLM is improving dispersed camping near the Coalinga-Los Gatos Road and in the Condon, Laguna and Upper Sweetwater areas.

Amy Granat, representing California Off-Road Vehicle Association and California Four-Wheel-Drive Club, said an Inspector General's report found Department of Interior agencies, except U.S. Geological Survey, did not have policies on integrity of scientific research. There needs to be a mechanism for public recourse if the public disagrees with the scientific basis for an action.

Organizations have asked BLM to look at the Environmental Protection Agency's report on Clear Creek before issuing a Record of Decision. Agencies lose credibility if the public doesn't believe the science used is valid.

A Forest Service study found 25 percent of visitors are there for motorized recreation. Motorized recreation users feel they are treated unfairly. The Mother Lode and Hollister field offices have no areas for off-highway vehicles.

Steve Koretoff said now that the OHV subgroup has identified criteria they will look at all areas, not just BLM.

Amy Granat said OHV use doesn't always require large areas. The BLM Alturas Field Office created an 80-acre OHV park.

Carl Twisselman asked what criteria there are to evaluate science. Roger Mitchell said science is evaluated through publication in scientific journals and peer review.

Amy Granat said the work by the EPA isn't subject to peer review and OHV groups don't accept the EPA report as the sole evidence.

Steve Koretoff said surveys for San Benito evening primrose were only performed on serpentine soils in Clear Creek, leading to a habitat protection. Since then, Ryan O'Dell has found the primrose on transitional soils outside Clear Creek. The primrose was listed as a T&E species based on science that may not be accurate and that may hold true for other species.

Bill Vanherweg said the BLM Bakersfield Field Office was responsible for de-listing the T&E Hoovers Woollystar.

Steve Koretoff said historically there has been distrust among agencies and adjacent landowners. The move to look at whether species really should be listed is a new direction.

Rick Cooper said there have been questions about peer review of the EPA study. BLM received 5,000 comments on the Draft EIS, many of them technical, and is working with EPA on responses.

Reb Monaco said a challenge in peer review is replicating the study; it may be too costly. He asked about the status of the report by the state OHV Division.

Rick Cooper said BLM was supposed to receive the report earlier. He doesn't know when it will be provided. The OHV Division did activity based sampling in April.

Volunteer Programs:

Rick Cooper said Eric Morgan, Fort Ord Public Lands manager, received the Take Pride in America Award. In 2009, Fort Ord public lands benefited from 10,200 volunteer hours, valued at \$206,550, used to improve trails, conduct biological surveys, battle invasive weeds, restore sensitive habitats, and construct fuel breaks. Generous citizens have donated more than \$1,411 to date for the care and upkeep of such popular recreation facilities as the Creekside Terrace trailhead. In addition to his community of volunteers, Morgan has stewarded key partnerships with fellow Weed Warriors at California State University-Monterey Bay Watershed Institute, the Army, the Student Conservation Association, as well as Monterey County.

Bernadette Lovato said the BLM Bishop Field Office is working with the Forest Service on coordinating partnerships in the Eastern Sierras. The Alabama Hills is being used as a model. A public workshop on partnerships will be held Nov. 4 in Bishop.

Tim Smith said the volunteers at Piedras Blancas Light Station received a Making A Difference Award. Volunteers formed an association to raise funds and provide other support for the light station. The association board composition changed this summer and now is made up of volunteers. Johna Hurl, Carrizo Plain National Monument manager, is looking at ways to energize Carrizo volunteers. The Carrizo faces a challenge in that there is not a large population base nearby to draw from. The Friends of the Carrizo will hold a barbecue in November and look at ways to increase volunteer efforts.

Bill Haigh said the Cosumnes River and Pine Hill preserves have active volunteer groups. Volunteers have set up a Facebook page for the Cosumnes and Pine Hill volunteers are looking at doing the same.

Roger Mitchell asked about the status of Ferguson Slide. Bill Haigh said the slide is not on BLM. CalTrans has developed a new bridge design that would not have footings in the Merced River.

Steve Koretoff said Stewards of the Sierra National Forest have donated thousands of volunteer hours and helped acquire funding including a \$100,000 grant and \$2 million for travel management.

Mike Wubbels, Friends of Clear Creek, said motorized recreationists can work with BLM to help eliminate off-trail travel.

Mike Damaso said he started volunteering with the Forest Service while attending California Polytechnic Institute. OHV users worked with the Stanislaus National Forest, but the forest got sued and trails that had been in use for 27 years got closed. If agencies close areas they will lose volunteers.

Amy Granat agreed with Damaso. Rubicon Trail volunteers designed and implemented an “Eliminate the White Flowers” (toilet paper) campaign to pack out waste. Volunteers provided bags and bumper stickers. The campaign has been successful and may be adopted statewide.

Hollister Field Office Report (continued):

Rick Cooper said BLM Hollister had appraised seven parcels valued at \$700,000. The parcels are isolated or next to an open space conservation area. Funds derived from the sale of the parcels will be used to acquire important habitat, either in-fee purchases or conservation easements. BLM also has acquired habitat with money from the Central Valley Project Improvement Act used to mitigate habitat loss for T&E species.

BLM is working with EPA to address public comments on the Clear Creek Management Area draft EIS/RMP. Responses have been developed on technical comments and BLM is working on responses and completing analysis of the proposed action. EPA has provided risk analysis of the proposed action. BLM is waiting to receive results from the state OHV Division’s study. The goal is to provide an administrative draft to Washington for review in late October and release the document in late January, but renewable energy projects may delay the process.

There are issues at Coast Dairies with who the Trust for Public Lands might sell the property to and what it would be used for. If TPL tries to transfer ownership, there might be litigation. If the Coastal Commission gets involved, there might be conditions placed on the transfer that BLM couldn’t accept.

Congressman Sam Farr has suggested that BLM manage the property along the Carmel River that is involved in the Sam Clemente Dam decommissioning. BLM would want public access for a river parkway and would partner with local parks and the Forest Service to manage the area. Steve Koretoff asked if water users would lose their supply if the dam is decommissioned. Rick Cooper said Cal Am, the water company that owns the dam, looked at that issue and there isn’t a problem.

Rick Cooper said Hollister received ARRA funding for eight projects including \$1.7 million to replace culverts and do road/firebreak work at Fort Ord. Hollister also received \$1.4 million to do road work and improve areas for hiking and dispersed recreation in the lands west of Interstate 5. In an abandoned mine cleanup at the Archer Mine, a building and seven tons of material were removed. Roger Mitchell asked if the area had a historical review. Rick Cooper said the BLM archaeologist reviewed the project and didn’t find historical features of note. In other projects, 20 miles of watershed were improved for red-legged frog habitat, yellow star thistle was treated at Clear Creek and infrastructure was removed from Clear Creek Canyon.

Mother Lode Field Office:

Bill Haigh said BLM has been working with other agencies in the Amador-Calaveras Consensus. Agencies, Tribes and others are looking at ways to help the area economically while reducing fire fuels. BLM completed its first projects three months after they were identified using BLM employees, hotshot crews, tribal members and local contractors. A Glencoe firm is buying the trees removed in the thinning project to grind up for pet bedding.

The visitor center at Briceburg has been remodeled. A \$100,000 grant paid for materials and volunteers did the work.

The office had 11 college students at work this summer.

Mother Lode received \$2 million in ARRA funding for work on abandoned mine lands. BLM is looking at doing pilot projects on small sites with multiple owners to use as a model to address larger sites. At Davis Mill, mine tailings are being removed and the site restored. BLM has just received a draft study on how to clean and maintain a historic stamp mill at the site.

Nevada City is working on a trail along Deer Creek, but there are contamination issues. U.S. Geological Survey is looking at ways to clean the waterway.

Bill Haigh said the last segment of trail along the South Fork American River is complete and the trail runs from near Coloma to the American River Parkway that goes to Sacramento.

BLM expects to acquire the Wakamatsu property, a historic Japanese silk and tea plantation, later this year. Restoration work on buildings has started funded by an endowment and the long-term plan is to restore it as a historic site. Reb Monaco asked when there would be public access. Bill Haigh said there is no set date.

A community-based management plan is being prepared for the Kanaka Valley area in El Dorado County acquired by BLM earlier this year. The plan should be completed in about the next 18 months.

An emerging issue is the future of the Auburn State Recreation Area. It appears increasingly unlikely that Auburn Dam will be built. The area is managed by State Parks under contract to reclamation. BLM owns about 11,000 acres in the area and Reclamation owns about 14,000. Reclamation has said it will no longer give State Parks \$1.25 million annually to manage the area after the current fiscal year. There are a number of issues on where money will come from and the role of various agencies.

Jim Haagen-Smit asked about fire protection in the area, which has a high fuel load. Bill Haigh said the area has a 1,500-foot river canyon covered in brush. A fire could blow up the canyon and into nearby communities. There would need to be funding for a fuels management program and fuels would be a major focus. BLM presently has a suppression agreement with Calfire and lands in the recreation area might be included in that agreement.

Jim Haagen-Smit said the Placer County Land Trust has acquired about 2,000 acres below Highway 49 next to land managed by BLM. Walt Pachucki asked about terms when land is transferred to BLM. Bill Haigh said if the property is transferred with deed restrictions, BLM needs to get a waiver, which usually takes six to nine months.

Bishop Field Office:

Bernadette Lovato said BLM ran out of volunteer agreements at a workday at Chalfant. BLM brought about 50 agreements and 75 volunteers showed up. Recreation users and BLM have

reached an agreement to change some routes in the area where there are conflicts and build new routes. The environmental work is being done and construction may start in late October.

There are T&E issues with Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep including how to reduce the risk of disease transfer from domestic sheep. Two sheep ranchers took temporary non-use of their grazing permits to give agencies time to make a decision.

Bishop has its own population of sage grouse in the Bodie Hills and Mono Lake areas. BLM has received funds from Fish and Wildlife for habitat improvement. BLM is planning continuous habitat improvement in hopes the population can avoid being listed. Surveys with Fish and Game have found more leks in the area. BLM is working on habitat on land it manages and with private landowners to provide a link across private lands.

Carl Twisselman asked how confident she is on the science regarding grazing and bighorn sheep or sage grouse. Bernadette Lovato said the science is being peer reviewed.

Bernadette Lovato said Bishop did two habitat restoration projects in the Bodie Hills for \$133,000 and turned back \$23,000.

Roger Mitchell asked about the inclusion of Bodie Hills on a list of areas for possible special designations. Bernadette Lovato said BLM California wasn't aware of the list before news coverage.

Bakersfield Field Office:

At the last RAC meeting, Tim Smith reported BLM was looking at user fees in the San Joaquin River Gorge. BLM held public meetings and the Recreation Resource Advisory Council approved the fee proposal. Since then, a group opposing user fees has claimed BLM did not give adequate public notification of the proposed fees. Tracy Rowland, gorge manager, has spent time informing user groups and BLM issued a press release of the public meetings. The gorge is currently partially funded by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. BLM would have to reduce services if it lost that revenue, so is looking at user fees as an option. A Federal Register Notice will be published soon giving the public another opportunity to comment on the proposed fees.

This has been a record fire season for Bakersfield, with BLM doing initial attack on more than 130 fires. No BLM acres have burned in the Bodfish or Frazier Park fires, but BLM has provided resources. The Canyon Fire burned 9,700 acres, 2-3,000 on BLM.

Three students interned for the fire program this summer. They took classes, got firefighter certified and went on fires. They are doing other work following fire season.

The last oil and gas lease auction brought in \$3.6 million, bringing the total to \$4.3 million for the year.

Bakersfield started its RMP update, but put it on hold while the Carrizo RMP was completed. Work has resumed on the Bakersfield RMP, which focuses on oil and gas, travel management and land acquisition. Problems with the contractor have delayed work and the current schedule calls for releasing the draft in early 2011. The current plan is to include some OHV access on the

east side of the Temblors. If OHV users go into the Carrizo Plain National Monument, BLM will close off that access. OHV users have concurred and said they will self-police the area.

The Carrizo RMP was signed in April and was not appealed. BLM held a two-day implementation plan meeting in August and will take it to the Monument Advisory Committee in October. There were three protests on the Proposed RMP/Final EIS related to grazing.

Fencing and signage were installed to secure and restore the northern and western boundaries of the Kiavah Wilderness along Kelso Valley Road and off of California State Highway 178. The \$81,000 project was completed by BLM staff, volunteers and contracts with private businesses.

The Bakersfield Field Office received \$77,000 in ARRA funding to restore the historic Fuel Oil House and \$70,000 to demolish a former Navy Mobile Instrumentation Station. The fuel building is one of the first structures built using rebar. Students at California State Polytechnic University are designing a water tower that will hide a radio tower. The California Highway Patrol is proposing to pay for the water tower, which will be placed adjacent to the existing water tank house.

A well was drilled at Piedras, but tests haven't been completed on whether the water is potable.

A house and other structures at the Selby Ranch house were demolished and removed through \$125,000 in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds.

A crew of six to 10 workers from a firm based in San Luis Obispo County spent about three weeks grading and graveling roads, including Selby Road and Soda Lake Overlook. The \$150,000 project was funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

The Carrizo Plain National Monument provides refuge to numerous threatened and endangered plants and animals that survive in one of the last remaining ecosystems of its type in California. This project contributes to the protection of those species by restoring 500 acres of native grassland and shrubland, and by protecting nearly 20 acres of unique oak woodland. Fences also were constructed to help restore unique Alvord oak habitat. The project received \$204,000 in Recovery Act funding.

An interagency electronic kiosk with recreation information was installed at the Bakersfield Field Office. Since it became operational this summer, the kiosk has had almost a thousand visitors with more than 4,000 pages viewed. The most popular information is on fishing and hunting. There is a similar kiosk in Taft.

Walt Pachucki asked about transition planning as current employees retire.

Rick Cooper said Hollister has done a good job of recruiting and has a strong core group of younger employees.

Tim Smith said some managers are close to retirement, but others are in their 30s and 40s. Student programs have been used to give students experience with BLM. One student is getting a degree in criminal justice and is interested in working with rangers. John Skibinski, associate

field manager, teaches a class at Bakersfield City College and is on the Cal Poly board, so can advise students on possible careers with BLM.

Bill Haigh said there was a concern about five years ago that the baby boomer would retire without new employees ready to take over. There is a significant interest in BLM jobs and he doesn't see that as an issue. The Mother Lode Field Office had 11 interns working this summer. Bernadette Lovato said a number of employees left about the time she arrived and Bishop has six vacancies for permanent employees.

Bishop faces a challenge as a remote area with a high cost of housing and limited shopping. She is working with the local community college and county school districts on classes and job training. She also is working with the Paiute tribe to find young local residents for future employment.

Next Agenda:

Walt Pachucki said he would like to discuss land acquisition strategies in light of limited budgets.

Bill Haigh said Mother Lode looks at what the office can handle and says no to some proposals.

Tim Smith said Bakersfield has an active acquisition program in Carrizo where it already manages land.

Rick Cooper said Hollister is with local ranch operations to preserve large working landscapes in the eastern portion of the Hollister Field Office. These large landscapes help provide threatened and endangered species habitat and recreation opportunities.

Next meeting April 8-9, Mother Lode Field Office host.