

BLM Central California Resource Advisory Council (RAC) Meeting
November 17-18, 2006
Lone Pine, CA

November 17

RAC Attendees: Leigh Marymor, Bill Vanherweg (chair), Paul McFarland, Carl Twisselman, Mary Gorden, Jim Haagen-Smit, David Kilpatrick, Steve Koretoff, Walt Pachucki.

BLM attendees: Bill Dunkelberger, Rick Cooper, Bill Haigh, Ron Huntsinger, David Christy, Diana Pietrasanta, Jim Jennings.

Public attendees: Cathy Haagen-Smit, International Mountain Bicycling Association; Richard Cervantes, Inyo County Supervisor; Mike Strassman; Paul Payne, Lone Pine Chamber of Commerce; Robert Frickel; Jim Gorden.

Bill Vanherweg called the meeting to order at 9 a.m.

RAC members agreed to conduct the meeting under Roberts Rules of Order. Mary Gorden agreed to act as parliamentarian.

Minutes of the March 28, 2006, meeting were approved with the addition of clarifying language provided by Lee Stetson and the election of Bill Vanherweg as RAC Chair and Don Robinson as Vice Chair.

Hollister Field Office Manager Rick Cooper presented the proposed Clear Creek Special Recreation Management Area Business Plan for Fee Collection (file attached). The RAC agreed at a meeting in Aptos with the concept of establishing a fee program. The fee amount was established through a public process including Clear Creek users. A Federal Register Notice will be published a minimum of six months before the fee goes into effect. The plan is to start the fee program with the start of the recreation season in October 2007.

The RAC asked questions about enforcement of regulations at Clear Creek. Mr. Cooper said the first approach is education. Violators who don't pay fees or damage vegetation can be give \$100 citations. Egregious violations are subject to criminal penalties.

In response to a question from Mr. McFarland, Mr. Cooper said grant money had been identified to proceed with the plan.

Mr. Twisselman moved and Mr. Marymor seconded that the Clear Creek Special Recreation Management Area Business Plan for Fee Collection be implemented as presented at the November 17 meeting of the BLM Central California Resource Advisory Council.

The motion passed unanimously. Absent RAC members Lee Stetson and Don Robinson were polled after the meeting and voted in favor.

Mr. Twisselman moved and Mr. Kilpartick seconded that the RAC recommend the BLM State Director approve the Clear Creek Special Recreation Management Area Business Plan for Fee Collection. The RAC recommended the plan be presented to the Forest Service-BLM Recreation Advisory Council for consideration if it can be done within the October 2007 implementation schedule.

The motion passed unanimously. Mr. Stetson and Mr. Robinson were polled after the meeting and voted in favor.

BLM field managers provided updates on issues in their offices:

Bishop Field Office

Bill Dunkelberger, Bishop Field Office manager

An April 2005 BLM decision to sell 31 acres of public land to the Bridgeport Indian Colony adjacent to its existing reservation was appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals by several neighboring property owners. BLM, the appellants and the Indian Colony recent agreed to explore addressing issues through alternative dispute resolution over the next several months. The Tribe applied to purchase the land from BLM in 1999 and a series of environmental analyses evaluated the land disposal. The sale approval requires mitigations to protect rare plants, water quality and cultural sites. The Tribe desires the land for housing, a small commercial development and a community center.

Private property known as Cedar Hill in the northeast Mono Basin was purchased by the Wilderness Land Trust in March 2006. BLM is working with the Land Trust to accept donation of the 3,400-acre property, which would then become public lands. The property contains extensive sagebrush steppe and pinyon-juniper woodlands, cinder cones and lake terraces, and provides valuable wildlife habitat for sage grouse, mule deer, antelope and waterfowl.

A proposal by Clipper Wind Energy to install wind monitoring instruments to determine the viability of wind energy generation on BLM lands on Blind Springs Hill near Benton is under evaluation. A BLM environmental analysis of the proposal will be made available for public input. Any future proposal for actual wind energy development at Blind Springs would be subject to a separate, extensive environmental review and public input. The turbines would be up to 480 feet tall and could have a major visual impact. As part of the environmental review process, BLM would require additional sites in addition to Blind Springs Hill for monitoring. Clipper wants to start as soon as possible since they will need two years of study data. BLM is waiting on Clipper to meet on additional monitoring sites. BLM is preparing a map of the resource area with potential wind and solar sites.

BLM Bishop is working with the Lone Pine community, Chamber of Commerce, new film museum, Lone Pine Film festival and public to develop a collaborative management strategy for the Alabama Hills that will preserve the rich film history, future filming opportunities, traditional multiple uses in the Hills (recreation, grazing, mining) and protect and interpret the cultural and natural resources.

Mr. Dunkelberger provided the RAC with copies of a press release (file attached). The Owens Valley has limited opportunities for affordable housing. An interagency group is inventorying land and identifying land for potential disposal. Mono County is hosting the web page.

RAC members asked questions about BLM's ability to dispose of land. Mr. Dunkelberger said BLM is exploring its options under various authorities such as the Baca Bill and the Recreation and Public Purposes Act.

Bakersfield Field Office

Ron Huntsinger, Bakersfield Field Office manager

Energy, grazing and fire were major issues for the Bakersfield office. The Department of Energy had conveyed Naval Petroleum Reserve #2 land to BLM and auctioned oil and gas leases there. Some other leases in areas not previously developed were challenged. BLM has revised procedures in light of the challenges to do additional outreach and provide more upfront information.

The Hearst Corporation donated rocks at the Piedras Blancas Lighthouse to BLM. The rocks were part of the Hearst Ranch conservation easement.

In the Sprague exchange, BLM exchanged isolated parcels for parcels next to wilderness areas.

Bakersfield plans to finish grazing permit renewals by 2009. The office had a goal of 24 renewals for the 2006 fiscal year and completed 22. One of the two outstanding was lost in the mail three times and the other wasn't returned in time.

Fire crews were busy all year. Although a helicopter and crew was moved from Bakersfield, there are two Forest Service helicopters and a Kern County helicopter, so there is sufficient coverage. There were several firefighters seriously injured. Crew members suffered burns to exposed skin when a fire they were fighting near Elko, NV, burned over them. One engine was totaled when it ran off the road, but no one was injured. There were cases of Valley Fever and one firefighter on a fire east of Carrizo Plain had a lung removed. BLM is looking at options to help protect firefighters from Valley Fever.

Bakersfield is doing the pre-planning to revise its RMP and will be asking the RAC for recommendations. Bakersfield also is in the pre-planning phase for an Environmental Impact Statement for Carrizo Plain. Bakersfield also is doing planning work for four

sites: Piedras Blancas, Carrizo Plain, Atwell Island and the San Joaquin River Gorge. BLM will be releasing a plan soon with different alternatives for restoration of the Piedras Blancas Lighthouse. A recreation plan for Keyesville, a major off-highway vehicle area, will be developed this year.

Mr. Huntsinger will be moving to a new job in January as Science Advisor to the Director, working on plans to capture institutional knowledge and direct research funds.

Folsom Field Office

Bill Haigh, Folsom Field Office manager

Mr. Haigh provided a brief description of his career with BLM beginning in the 1970s and gave a summary of key issues.

A new Sierra Resource Management Plan is being developed that draws assorted plans into one document. Comments on the draft are due December 13. Issues addressed in the plan include a land tenure strategy to concentrate blocks of BLM land, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern and grazing. The South Fork of the American River is a key resource in the plan. The South Fork is a premier whitewater river that supports a \$30 million rafting industry. The plan proposes the South Fork has the outstandingly remarkable characteristics to qualify it for Wild and Scenic status. Two years ago, BLM developed a South Fork Management Plan. Since then, the Cronan Ranch has been donated and BLM is finalizing its management plan for that area. BLM is working with 14 land trusts in the foothills, the American River Conservancy being one of the most active.

BLM, the Forest Service and other agencies and organizations are involved in negotiations over renewal of operating permits for Sacramento Municipal Utility District facilities on the South Fork.

The Folsom Office will be hiring a manager for the Cosumnes River Preserve.

A BLM decision calls for offering a lease to operate a Joint Training Center for heavy equipment operators in the Yuba Goldfields. That decision has been appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals by Western Aggregates

Mr. Haigh is a non-voting member of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, a board established to work on cooperative management in the Sierras. Under Proposition 84, the conservancy will have \$54 million available for grants. **ACTION:** The conservancy status will be a standing agenda item at RAC meetings. Mr. Haagen-Smit expressed concern that BLM be cautious in its land tenure adjustments involving exchanges with upland properties BLM shouldn't shortchange upland recreation in favor of river recreation. Mr. Haigh said there is some upland property BLM will retain. BLM will evaluate each exchange on its own merits and welcomes comments. Mr. Twisselman asked if the Cronan Ranch plan allowed the option of using goats or other grazing

animals for noxious weed control. Mr. Haigh said BLM currently is focused on mechanical weed control, but is open to other alternatives.

Hollister Field Office

Rick Cooper, Hollister Field Office Manager

Mr. Cooper gave a summary of his 28-year career with BLM in Surprise Valley and Folsom, before starting the Hollister job this year.

The Record of Decision for the Clear Creek Resource Management Plan was signed in January 2006. The plan covers fencing and signs and settles litigation with the Center for Biological Diversity and the Native Plant Society.

OHV grants will allow BLM to do more work in 2006-2007.

BLM received five protests on the South Diablo Resource Management Plan; one is being handled in the Washington office. BLM needs a final Biological Opinion from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, but hopes to issue the Record of Decision in December 2006 or January 2007.

Transition plans are being finalized for the Coast Dairies land to be transferred to BLM. BLM wants some parcels excluded because they are industrial fill sites.

BLM has provided comments to the Army on its Fort Ord Feasibility Study. The Army is in the planning process for Fort Ord.

BLM expects to receive a report from the Environmental Protection Agency in December on asbestos risk at Clear Creek. BLM expects to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement analyzing the risks to employees and the public at Clear Creek. **ACTION:** BLM will provide the RAC with copies of the EPA study.

Managers and RAC members discussed timing and agenda items for the next meeting. The next meeting will be held in April or May in Visalia. **ACTION:** BLM will poll RAC members to finalize the date. The meeting will include a tour of Atwell Island and an update for the Bakersfield Field Office Resource Management Plan. **ACTION:** The next meeting will start at 8 a.m. Water source issues on the Pacific Crest Trail and in other areas will be an agenda item. Adequate time will be allocated on the agenda for questions and discussion on managers' update items.

The afternoon meeting was a tour of the Alabama Hills. RAC members were presented information on and discussed issues including the varied uses of the area, significance to Native Americans, film making and area management.

November 18

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Vanherweg at 9 a.m.

Attendees:

RAC members: Bill Vanherweg, Leigh Marymor, Paul McFarland, Carl Twisselman, Mary Gorden, Jim Haagen-Smit, David Kilpartick, Steve Koretoff.

BLM: Bill Dunkelberger, Rick Cooper, Ron Huntsinger, Bill Haigh, David Christy.

Public: Jim Gorden; Doug Thompson; Cathy Haagen-Smit, International Mountain Bicycling Association; Kathleen New, Lone Pine Chamber of Commerce; Chris Langley, Inyo County Film Commission; Robert Frickel, Eastern Sierra Advocates for Smart Growth; Mike Strassman; Anita McProud; Dick Noles, Advocates for Access to Public Lands.

Chairman Vanherweg stated he favored collaboration between the Lone Pine Community and BLM on management of the Alabama Hills. Mr. Dunkelberger said the interaction had been instructive and he would like to see a stewardship strategy come from the community. BLM could involve a broader group of stakeholders and go forward within the framework of the Bishop Resource Management Plan.

RAC members and members of the public discussed community involvement and how to proceed with developing a strategy. They also discussed uses of the Alabama Hills such as camping and how to implement decisions in a strategy.

Carl Twisselman moved and David Kilpatrick seconded a motion to form a RAC subgroup to work with the Lone Pine community, BLM and other stakeholders to develop a community stewardship strategy for the Alabama Hills. Chairman Bill Vanherweg appointed RAC members Paul McFarland and Mary Gorden as members of the subcommittee, and asked them to create a list of people who might serve on the subcommittee. Those suggestions will be given to Chairman Vanherweg, who will then appoint the other members of the subcommittee. All members in attendance voted in favor of the motion. Absent RAC members Walt Pachucki, Lee Stetson and Don Robinson were polled after the meeting and voted in favor.

Public comment period:

Dick Noles, co-chair of Advocates for Access to Public lands, presented a proposal for Congress to establish a semi-primitive roaded and roadless backcountry recreation designation on certain public lands (see file Access Advocates). The group is working to gather support by local agencies and organizations to use in developing legislation.

Mike Strassman, author of a recreational climbing handbook, discussed climbing in the Alabama Hills. BLM worked with climbers to educate them on how to behave in the Alabama Hills and he included information in the guidebook. BLM needs to develop a road inventory for the Alabama Hills using a public process, he said.

Doug Thompson, a 20-year Lone Pine resident, presented a position statement by Citizens Advocates for Land Exchange and discussed the need for regional planning (see file CAL-X) attached. In Inyo County, 98 percent of the land is in government ownership. In the land tenure concept, land that can be sold, traded or exchanged is put in one pot. The various agencies in Inyo and Mono counties need to work cooperatively. The area is living with a plan made 30 years ago and needs a plan for the next 30 years.

Robert Frickel, secretary of SRVA Eastern Sierra Advocates for Smart Growth, presented the RAC with a letter opposing the Whitney Portal Preserve subdivision location (see file SVRA).

Anita McProud, a teacher in Lone Pine, agreed there needs to be a regional planning approach and plans need to be made for housing so it is not scattered.

Mr. Twisselman said the RAC met in Lone Pine 10 years ago and the sentiment at the time was anti growth or development. Mr. Thompson said at that time, the community hadn't been consulted. Since, then, there has been a change in attitude.

In discussion following the public comments, Mr. McFarland said public agencies have finite resources and are seeing more demand. The motorized community needs to help deal with road proliferation, clean up areas damaged by vehicles and concentrate on areas that receive the most use. He and Mr. Noles engaged in a discussion about the Advocates for Access proposal and what is appropriate for a road system on public lands.

Mr. Koretoff said agencies need a road and trail inventory. There are trails at Clear Creek that aren't on the map, but are signed on the ground. He suggested use of satellite imagery for road management. Mr. Dunkelberger said the Bishop office will use funding from an OHV grant to develop a road inventory.

The meeting was adjourned by Chairman Vanherweg at noon.