

BLM Central California Resource Advisory Council Meeting
Lindcove, California
April 20-21, 2007

Attendees:

RAC: Bill Vanherweg, Mary Gorden, Jim Haagen-Smit, Walt Pachucki, Steve Koretoff.

BLM: Patty Gradek, Steve Larson, John Skibinski, Rick Cooper, Bill Haigh, Bill Dunkelberger, David Christy.

Public: Roger Mitchell, Lois Mitchell, Todd Ochert, Cathy Haagen-Smit.

The meeting was called to order at 8 a.m. by Chairman Vanherweg. Meeting attendees introduced themselves.

RAC members reviewed the notes of the November 2006 meeting and made no changes.

Patty Gradek, Acting Bakersfield Field Office manager, announced Time-Smith would start in June as the Bakersfield Field Office manager. State Director Mike Pool was unable to attend the meeting and she read the state report items

National/State Issues:

1. **New Acting Director Jim Hughes** – Director Kathleen Clarke resigned after five years as BLM Director. Jim will serve as Acting until new Director selected. BLM Directors, per Federal Land Policy Management Act, are appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. We have no indication when a nomination might be announced but Jim knows BLM well, is respected on the Hill, and will do a fine job as acting as long as needed.
2. **2007 Budget Enacted** – After a series of continuing resolutions, a 2007 budget was finally enacted Feb. 15 for BLM as well as most other Federal agencies in omnibus legislation. Generally, BLM is funded at the 2006 levels with some increases in our MLR (management of lands and resources) accounts and construction. 2006 levels also mean some Land and Water Conservation Funds for important acquisitions. The process of allocating all those funds to the States is currently underway and we're optimistic CA-BLM's programs will fare well, but it'll continue to be a relatively flat budget.
3. **New Congress** – The 2006 elections meant a turnover in leadership in both the House and Senate. In the committees that oversee BLM, that also meant some significant changes. Most significant to CA is Sen. Dianne Feinstein's taking over the helm of the Interior Appropriations Subcommittee. Several other Californians have leadership roles as shown on the list.
4. **Managing for Excellence** – In November, the BLM announced a long-term effort to improve our organizational efficiency and effectiveness. Called Managing for Excellence, it includes many specific proposals. Most important perhaps to you is

a proposal to reconsider our existing two-tier field office structure, meaning State Office and Field Offices. Each State has recently been instructed [or will soon be instructed] to review its structure, whether two or three tier, and come up with a plan by August 2007 on how best to strengthen and standardize our tiered organizational levels throughout the Bureau.

5. **Ongoing Litigation** – We continue to be sued on most of our significant land use decisions and plans. These range from projects such as the Medicine Lake geothermal in Siskiyou County to all of our regional plan amendments in the California Desert. Our Solicitor and Department of Justice attorneys are doing great work and we're prevailing in significant numbers of District Court rulings, but nearly all are being appealed to the Ninth Circuit where we're winning some and losing others. It's time consuming and obviously inhibiting our ability to implement decisions that have taken years of effort with full public involvement. But it just seems to be the part of the process these days.
6. **New BLM Websites** – Hopefully, if you've visited our websites recently, you've noticed a big change in terms of "look and feel" as well as overall organization. This was a national effort, but all BLM's webmasters in California were heavily involved in making our websites more uniform, but still providing CA specific information that we hope you find useful.
7. **Recreation Fee Website** – one of those new sites is the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act Approved Fee Sites with great write-ups and photos of all BLM approved fee sites.
8. **Recreation Resource Advisory Council** – or the new California inter-agency RRAC. This new joint BLM-FS Advisory Council was authorized by the Recreation Enhancement Act (REA) which also gave BLM and other Federal agencies expanded authority to charge fees under very specific circumstances. While some states decided to do local councils, CA opted to go with a Statewide council. This Council will consider and approve all Federal recreation fees under the Act.
RRAC Status: A call for nominations was issued in September and more than 40 candidates were nominated for the 11 slots specified in the REA. Those nominations are now in Washington undergoing review at both the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture. The Secretary of Agriculture will actually make the official appointments with the concurrence of the Secretary of Interior. That sounds complicated, but we actually do that in reverse for our joint BLM-FS Advisory Council so we're hopeful those appointments will move expeditiously back there and we get the Council up and running soon.

Rick Cooper, Hollister Field Office manager, said the State Management Team will meet May 23-24 to discuss three-tier organizational alternatives. The state office needs to send its proposal to Washington in August. ACTION: BLM will send

information on the meeting to RAC members. ACTION: BLM will set up a conference call with the RAC in late June to discuss the alternatives.

Patty Gradek discussed planning efforts for the Carrizo Plain National Monument. The Carrizo Plain is the largest remaining tract of the San Joaquin Valley biogeographic province with only limited evidence of human alteration. The 250,000-acre area is a diverse complex of habitats similar to those in the San Joaquin Valley that have become fragmented or destroyed. It includes the largest remaining contiguous habitats for many endangered, threatened and rare species of animals such as the San Joaquin kit fox, the blunt-nosed leopard lizard, the San Joaquin antelope squirrel and the giant kangaroo rat.

The BLM, the California Department of Fish and Game, The Nature Conservancy and other interests have been working together since the first acquisition of land within the area in 1987 to conserve the Carrizo Plain and place its lands under public ownership.

BLM is preparing a Resource Management Plan for the Carrizo and has issued the first Planning Update (posted at http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/bakersfield/Programs/planning/cpnm_rmp.html) Johna Hurl, who has been acting monument manager, has been selected as monument manager. Bob Wick, planner in BLM's Arcata Field Office, will lead the planning effort. Carl Twisselman is on the Monument Advisory Committee as the RAC representative. BLM has not seen the need so far to have a meeting facilitator. The RMP is scheduled to be completed in late 2008.

Steve Larson, Bakersfield Field Office assistant manager for resources, discussed the upcoming Caliente Resource Management Plan Update for the Bakersfield Field Office. The last plan update was done in 1990. BLM needs to update its oil and gas projections. In addition, there have been changes such as the transfer of land in east Fresno and Madera counties from the Folsom Field Office to Bakersfield and the acquisitions of Atwell Island, Piedras Blancas lighthouse, and the Buena Vista oilfield (Naval Petroleum Reserve-2). In addition, other factors such as population growth, more off-highway vehicle use and more threatened and endangered species have contributed to the need for an RMP update.

The Buena Vista oilfield was transferred to BLM from the Department of Energy because DOE lacked the legal authority to issue leases. In addition, BLM can better manage the threatened and endangered species habitat on the property.

FIELD MANAGERS' REPORTS

BISHOP – The RAC formed a subgroup at the November 2006 meeting to work with residents and other stakeholders on a community-based plan for the Alabama Hills. Bill Dunkelberger, Bishop Field Office manager, said two meetings have been held since then. The first drew 40 people including two county supervisors. Participants are developing a shared vision statement. Major issues have been identified including filming, weddings, route management, camping and shooting. Paul McFarland and

Mary Gorden represent the RAC. Walt Pachucki noted the planning effort has received positive press coverage.

Environmental Assessments for grazing permit renewals are posted on Bishop's website. There is a proposal in the Bodie Hills from individuals with grandfathered mining claims to access them through a BLM Wilderness Study Area. Mining operations may start at the Paramount Mine, a grandfathered mining claim in a Wilderness Study Area. Mining would be allowed if it does not create unnecessary and undue resource degradation..

BLM hopes to close escrow by the end of June to take ownership of Cedar Hill, 3,800 acres in the Mono Basin. The site touches seven wilderness study areas. The transfer to BLM ownership was arranged by the Wilderness Land Trust and Resources Legacy Fund.

BLM's decision to sell 40 acres to the Bridgeport Indian Colony was appealed. With assistance from a mediator, the parties have reached a preliminary settlement. BLM hopes to reach a final settlement by July. The sale would double the size of the colony's reservation.

BAKERSFIELD – Patty Gradek reported BLM has 200 oil and gas leases on federal land that bring in \$100 million per year to the treasury. BLM has issued 300 new well permits this year. Leases are issued for 10 years and inspectors monitor production. Wells are drilled in areas that are habitat for endangered species. Compensation land is purchased for mitigation and operators are educated on practices in those areas. Patty Gradek plans to retire in July and BLM is advertising to fill her position. There is high fire danger due to the drought. BLM had a 900-acre fire at 5,000 feet elevation. BLM has firefighters to staff one more engine this year and is working with other agencies.

Steve Larson discussed problems BLM has had at recreation sites on the North Fork of the Kaweah River outside Three Rivers. The area has been used for years for picnics, swimming and other dispersed recreation. In the early 1990s, BLM began seeing more crime and vandalism in the area. BLM installed signs, information kiosks and portable toilets. Law enforcement was increased in the mid 1990s in response to more gang activity and crimes. A fee program started in 2004-2005 had limited success. Crime, vandalism and trash increased in 2006 as BLM had a recreation planner vacancy and law enforcement was diverted elsewhere. In April 2006 the "iron ranger" fee box was pulled from the ground. A survey of property lines found the main recreation site is located on private land. BLM is installing a fence and gate to block access. BLM is considering closing the other two sites and will hold a public meeting to discuss the possible closure with residents.

Managers and RAC members discussed management problems in other areas. Rick Cooper said installing a dumpster at a central location reduced dumping. John Skibinski said homeowners in the Keyesville area have been dumping trash and BLM needs cooperation from the county to address the problem. Steve Larson said two of Bakersfield's three law enforcement ranger positions would soon be empty. Meeting attendees discussed OHV use in Central California. The Buena Vista area near Taft has some of the highest OHV use in the state. The Bluffs area near Bakersfield closed and OHV users moved onto BLM land. One proposal for an OHV

park in the area fell through. Some local residents have proposed a 13-square-mile OHV park that would include 2,000 acres of BLM land. There are concerns about habitat for T&E species for that proposal. Rick Cooper said at a meeting of the Biodiversity Council, a proposal was discussed that the California Department of Recreation look for potential OHV areas around the state and encourage landowners, OHV users and the state to work together. He suggested a collaborative group might be able to streamline the process of selecting and managing OHV areas. Interested parties need to look at the big picture and environmental groups need to be included. ACTION: Information from the Biodiversity Council will be sent to RAC members and managers.

Steve Koretoff said the number of OHV sites is being reduced while the number of OHV users is growing, which puts more pressure on existing areas. ACTION: BLM will provide notes from the Biodiversity Council meeting to RAC members.

Steve Larson provided information on Atwell Island, site of the afternoon tour. Atwell Island is part of the Central Valley Project Improvement Act process to retire marginal land and restore native habitat. The project has been funded to date by the U.S. Bureau of Recreation and the state.

FOLSOM: Bill Haigh, Folsom Field Office manager, said the two main issues for the office are rivers and urban growth. The foothills are expected to grow from 300,000 people in the 1990s to 2 million by 2040. The Draft RMP for the office was issued in December 2006. The public provided about 2,000 comments, most in support of wild and scenic river designations. The Final RMP is expected this summer, with the Record of Decision in the fall.

As part of the relicensing of PG&E dams on the Mokelumne River, BLM will receive \$30,000 per year. The money will allow BLM to install a raft takeout point at Highway 49.

The Cosumnes River Preserve has a new manager, Harry McQuillen. One of the challenges facing the CRP is growth in Stockton and Sacramento.

Using a \$2.5 million grant, the Sacramento Valley Conservancy is acquiring property to link lands along the Cosumnes between the preserve and the American River Conservancy acquisitions.

The ARC acquired the Cronan Ranch for BLM, an \$8 million donation. BLM recently completed a management plan for Cronan.

As part of the relicensing for SMUD/PG&E hydro on the South Fork of the American River, BLM will receive \$330,000 annually for the next 50 years, adjusted with cost-of-living increases. That will quadruple BLM's budget for the South Fork. The settlement required five years of negotiations. The river is used annually for 150,000 raft trips, a \$30 million industry.

Haigh is an ex-officio board member of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, a new agency. The conservancy will have \$50 million in grant fund available at the start of the state fiscal year in July. The conservancy will sponsor a global warming symposium in September in Murphys. ACTION: BLM will send the RAC information on the symposium.

HOLLISTER: Rick Cooper reported the Biological Opinion for the Resource Management Plan is due May 7. BLM hopes to sign the Record of Decision by the end of May.

The Clear Creek area will have its annual summer closure from May 1 to October 15. The EPA report on asbestos in the Clear Creek area is due in May and BLM expects to have a public meeting in June to start scoping for an Environmental Impact Statement and Health Risk Assessment. The EIS process is expected to take 18-24 months.

The fee program at Clear Creek will start in the fall. BLM has been able to complete work in the area and will have increased law enforcement. BLM is coordinating with the Fresno and San Benito County sheriffs.

State Parks and Recreation held a ceremony April 5 to mark its ownership of some Coast Dairies land. BLM and others are working to resolve issues so BLM can take ownership of other Coast Dairies property, hopefully in 2007.

The Army has finished an impact study on cleanup of unexploded ordnance on 7,200 acres at Fort Ord. The Army would like to do a surface cleanup for \$200 million, but BLM prefers a more comprehensive cleanup for \$495 million. If the area is not sufficiently cleared of ordnance, it can't be used for recreation and firefighting equipment.

BLM has issued an Emergency Closure Order for the Kettleman Hills due to threatened and endangered species. There have been trespass problems in the area. RAC members discussed issues related to OHV use on public lands. Bill Vanherweg moved and Mary Gorden seconded a motion to form a subgroup to evaluate opportunities for OHV areas (Members were polled by e-mail and the motion passed unanimously).

There will be a conference call June 20 for RAC members and BLM to discuss BLM's Managing for Excellence initiative, which includes moving to a three-tier system.

The next RAC meeting will be Oct. 25-27 in the Fort Ord area. OHV and Fort Ord issues will be on the agenda.

Walt Pachucki discussed the recruitment and orientation of new RAC members. He suggested BLM meet personally with RAC candidates so the candidates will understand the mission of the RAC. RAC members also should do outreach to find candidates. He also suggested BLM consider an orientation process so new members will be aware of their roles and BLM issues. BLM will plan a RAC orientation program the afternoon of October 25.

Following the morning business session, RAC members toured the Atwell Island project. Atwell is farmland retired under the central Valley Project Improvement Act to restore native habitat.

April 21

RAC members: Walt Pachucki, Bill Vanherweg, Mary Gorden, Steve Koretoff.

BLM: Bill Haigh, Rick Cooper, Patty & Gradek, Steve Larson, David Christy

Public: Todd Ochert, Harry Ambrosini, Katie Ambrosini, David Sherwood, Jim Gorden, Warren Campbell, Tom Brown, Mark Hirni, Patty Knapp, Gary Potter and family

RAC members and BLM staff discussed the previous day's tour at Atwell Island. Steve Larson said BLM is working on a plan for the project with specific goals and objectives. Rick Cooper said water rights are the nexus to bring in other parties such as Ducks Unlimited in a joint venture. Money may be available for demonstration projects. For example, Elk Grove bought vineyards, took out the grapes and put in irrigated pasture. The pasture is used by sandhill cranes and Swainson's hawks. Members of the public commented on OHV issues and issues on the North Fork of the Kaweah River.

Harry Ambrosini gave a presentation on a proposal for OHV use in the Kettleman Hills. Rick Cooper said he wanted to look at both short-term and long-term use. Walt Pachucki said the RAC had formed an OHV subgroup he could work with.

Gary Potter, a North Fork Kaweah resident, supports closing the area. There are weekend traffic problems and there has been crime including attempted murder and rape.

Mark Hearney, Three Rivers, with Central Valley Off-Road Cyclists, said there needs to be better access to the Case Mountain area for cyclists. There have been problems with crime and inadequate parking.

Dave Sherwood, Skyline Drive, said there is no designated parking and visitors park on private property. They park in dry grass, posing a fire danger, and block driveways. He has had people shooting within 150 feet of his residence and law enforcement officers haven't been patrolling the area.

Steve Larson said BLM will discuss better signage with residents and users. Patty Gradek said the area needs more law enforcement.

Warren Campbell, a North Fork resident and pastor, said his church had been left unlocked until there was vandalism in the last year. The area has problems with gangs and crime.

Todd Oechert, Lemoore, an OHV user at Clear Creek and member of the California Four-Wheelers, said \$250 grants are available for weekend work parties. He said he would like to be on the subgroup.

Steve Koretoff said many OHV users would like to volunteer and the California Four Wheelers could act as a forum to organize work.

In closing remarks, RAC members thanked members of the public for participating in the meeting. The next meeting will include an Oct. 25 afternoon orientation for new RAC members, and the regular Oct. 26-27 meeting. ACTION: A conference call will be scheduled before the meeting to discuss the agenda.