

Bureau of Land Management
Northwest California Resource Advisory Council
Meeting and Field Tour
Feb. 21-22, 2013, Shelter Cove and Whitethorn, California

Summary Minutes

Feb. 21

The meeting came to order at the Inn of the Lost Coast.

Attending

Category one: Eric Lueder, Stan Leach, Dennis Possehn, Alan Abbs.

Category two: Michael Kelley, Ryan Henson, Bob Schneider, John Bernstein.

Category three: Tony Shaw. Absent: Pat Frost. Two vacancies.

There is no majority present in category three, and no quorum of the RAC

BLM Staff: Northern California District Manager Nancy Haug, Associate District Manager Richard Raione, Arcata Field Manager Lynda Roush, Redding Field Manager Jennifer Mata, Ukiah Field Manager Rich Burns, Northern California District Public Affairs Officer Jeff Fontana, King Range National Conservation Area Manager Gary Pritchard-Peterson, King Range NCA Outdoor Recreation Planner Justin Robbins.

Guests: Jacob Tyler, Jeff Hedein, Robert Godman, Summer, Ryan Frame, Dan Mainwarne.

Opening business

The RAC asked for Jeff to write a note of appreciation for Kendal, Rondal and Shirley for their years of service on the council.

The agenda was approved as mailed. The minutes from the July meeting in Geyserville were approved with a change on page six correcting the title to Berryessa-Snow Mountain National Conservation Area.

The RAC asked for an update on the draft BLM socio-economic strategy. There was no news to report.

Election of Officers: Michael Kelley was named to continue as chairman and Ryan Henson was named to continue as vice chair.

District Manager's Report

Nancy Haug highlighted issues from State Director Jim Kenna's briefing:

- The state director appreciates the time and attention focused on public lands by the RACs.
- There are 14 new members in the California congressional delegation and the state director has begun outreach to bring them up to speed on public lands issues
- Key legislation in the RAC region includes a proposal to add the Stornetta Public Lands to the California Coastal National Monument.
- The state is budgeting conservatively as national budget negotiations continue.
- Energy, renewable and non-renewable, is a major focus in the state, particularly in southern California. The issue consumes a major part of the state director's time, as it is a critical issue for the nation.

Bob Schneider expressed appreciation for the National Landscape Conservation System and Youth initiatives.

Eric Lueder said it is important that new members of Congress understand that the BLM is a revenue producer for the federal government. It is important to sustain what the BLM does, even in these tough budget times. Stan Leach agreed.

Tony Shaw offered his services to accompany any BLM Congressional tours in the Ukiah Field Office region.

District Manager's Report

Nancy's highlights:

- Updated the council and members of the public about the role of the RAC.
- Sage grouse conservation and a process to amend resource management plans to incorporate conservation measures is a major issue on the east side of the district. The Fish and Wildlife Service is considering whether to list the species. Northeast California field offices are conducting planning as part of the Nevada-California sub region. RMPs in western states with sage-grouse habitat will be amended in this process. Five alternatives are being developed for consideration, with an amendment decision expected the end of 2014. The FWS listing decision is expected in 2015. Individual RMP decisions will be issued for each field office, but a single environmental analysis process is being conducted.

- Fire rehabilitation projects are underway for the Rush, (315,000 acres in the Eagle Lake Field Office), Lost (61,000 acres, Surprise Field Office) and Likely (about 10,000 acres, Alturas Field Office) fires. The Rush and Lost fires resulted in major losses of sage-grouse habitat. These have the potential for significant negative impacts on habitat, including a stronghold population of the birds in northeast California. Rehabilitation work includes seeding, fence repairs, livestock grazing management changes and other projects designed to encourage recovery of the rangeland.
- The fires burned wild horses herd management areas, impacting the ability of the range to support existing populations. BLM's ability to gather excess horses is limited because there is very limited holding space and limited adoption demand for horses coming off the range.
- District travel budgets are greatly reduced -- 20 percent this year -- and possible additional reductions are possible. This could affect plans for a summer joint RAC meeting.
- Personnel: Richard Raione was introduced as the new associate district manager, coming to the BLM from the U. S. Nuclear Regulatory Administration. Richard will help Nancy with workload. The district is recruiting for a new fire management officer, filling behind a retirement. Temporary details are being used to keep the position filled in the interim. The Surprise Field Office manager position is vacant, with the position being filled by Alturas Field Manager Tim Burke in the interim. The Arcata fire management officer is also supporting Ukiah; Rich said the arrangement is working well.
- Wild horse populations are over appropriate management level, but the ability to gather is limited to holding space limitations and declining adoption demand.

King Range National Conservation Area

Gary Pritchard-Peterson, King Range NCA manager, updated the council on a proposal to establish a new fee system in the NCA.

Justin Robbins, outdoor recreation planner, detailed the new fee proposal:

Highlights:

- The King Range is the first NCA in the nation, contains two wilderness areas (King Range Wilderness and Rocks and Islands Wilderness), Front Country, Back Country, Recreation Sites and Trail System management focus areas in administration of the National Conservation Area.
- The fee proposals, described in a business plan, are an outgrowth of the King Range Resource Management Plan and the King Range Wilderness Plan.

- The proposal is to put into place a new overnight use fee schedule for the wilderness, replacing the back country permit program. The new fee would be \$5 per person per day for overnight use in the wilderness.
- Reservations will be made through the national website, recreation.gov, by phone, or by visiting the BLM King Range or Arcata offices.
- For the first time there will be a limit on overnight use in the wilderness area.
- The new program is designed to help manage numbers and ensure that people experience a true wilderness experience -- undisturbed open space and solitude. It follows on the 2005 resource management plan direction to determine the carrying capacity of the King Range, recognizing that the land has limits.
- The 2011 King Range Wilderness Plan calls for implementing the wilderness visitor system to align visitor use with the carrying capacity of the King Range. Visitor numbers are steadily increasing. Data shows that use is concentrated on the coastal sections.
- Humboldt State University studies in 1997 and 2003 showed that visitors are motivated by the opportunity to enjoy nature and to experience solitude. Public support for use limits controls increased between the 1997 and 2003 studies. Studies also show that King Range visitors, by more than 80 percent, are willing to pay use fees.
- The program will limit to 60 persons per day entering the wilderness during peak seasons, and 30 per day during the off seasons.

Tony expressed concern that the BLM should not market the area if there is a need to limit visitation. It could lead to frustration from visitors.

Bob noted that the fee schedule proposed is specific to the amount of time spent in the area, rather than a flat entry fee, as is common in other areas.

There was continuing discussion to clarify the BLM proposal. Highlights:

- There is a \$6.50 reservation fee charged by reservation.gov (phone) \$4.50 for online, \$2 at BLM pay station reservations such as the King Range Office or the Arcata Field Office. The processing fee applies to single transactions, not daily use fees.
- Use fees go the King Range for project and improvements; the processing fee goes to wilderness.gov.

Justin said the proposed fee was based on a fair market assessment and appears to be reasonable and fair compared to other similar sites.

Justin said the BLM intends to implement the minimal actions needed for King Range management.

- There also is a proposal to increase campground fees from \$8 to \$15 per night. The current fees have been in place since 1993. The campgrounds host about 2,500 people per year. The new fee also was based on a market comparison of facilities offering similar amenities.
- Campground fees would be used for projects including garbage service, and expanded recycling program, providing potable water deliveries, developing new water sources, replacing old or vandalized structures, improve signing and informational kiosks.

Gary summarized King Range funding amounts and sources. Base funding has been declining over the years. He summarized that the wilderness fee would generate over \$80,000 per year. Without the new fee, the King Range will not be able to fund implementation of the King Range and Wilderness plans or manage visitor use to the level required by the Wilderness Act and other federal regulations. He said the current level of service can't be maintained without additional fee revenue.

RAC Comments

Stan Leach: Fees originated when timber sales declined in the 1990s. He is concerned that the fee increase proposals will not cover King Range overhead. BLM should eliminate fees and retain leasing fees that now go to the general fund to support these recreation sites. We should be able to use public lands without fees.

Tony Shaw: Agreed with Stan. Questioned why there has been a 20-year lapse between fee increases. He suggested fees should be linked to the Consumer Price Index. The fee should be used as much as possible for sanitation and maintenance services -- basic core services of trash, sanitation and public safety. It should not be used to fund additional overhead.

Arcata Field Manager Lynda Roush noted the BLM needs input from the RAC on whether the fees are reasonable.

Ryan Henson said the fees seem to be reasonable and justified. He is dismayed that the public lands are so underfunded. He said the proposal is well thought out. In most BLM and Forest Service wilderness areas there are no fees. Philosophically, he opposed public land fees.

Dennis Possehn: Feels the fees proposed are reasonable.

Michael Kelley noted that fees discriminate against people who cannot afford them, limiting their ability to use their public lands. Michael also expressed his philosophical opposition to public land fees. He supports the King Range proposal reluctantly.

There was an audience suggestion for lower fees for those such as veterans.

Bob Schneider said he would support an annual fee, but opposes an inequitable fee for locals versus non-locals. Several members expressed agreement. Gary was not sure how an annual fee could be incorporated, but agreed to look into it.

Alan Abbs questioned whether limiting the fee to coastal areas would make a difference. Target the fee toward the users of the coastal areas. Gary said the suggestion was discussed, but would cause limitations on people's use areas.

John Bernstein suggested that a fee targeted to the coastal areas would incentivize people to use more areas.

Eric Lueder agreed it is a "sad state of affairs" that we even have to have fees at all. He feels the proposal is reasonable. An annual pass would benefit frequent users and local users.

There was also discussion about possible senior discounts, and linking fees with services provided.

The members agreed that the BLM is doing an excellent job managing the King Range and should be commended. Michael suggested a note from the RAC commending the BLM King Range staff for excellent work.

Guest Comments

Jacob Tyler said local residents generally do not support fees to use public lands where they live. Providing for a local fee waiver would encourage more local use of local public lands.

Forestry

Michael noted that the item can be moved to the next meeting agenda. The focus will be information about the Northwest Forest Plan and its relationship to BLM resource management plans. The item will be informational and on the Redding meeting agenda.

Land Use Planning

Dave Fuller, planning and environmental coordinator for the Arcata Field Office, presented a summary of the BLM land use planning process (handout). The key point is that field office resource management plans lay out the vision for how public lands are managed in accordance with regulations. They are developed with public input. The plans provide day to day direction for specific areas of land.

Plan revisions are being planned for Redding and Arcata field offices to ensure they are consistent with current laws and regulations and changes in BLM policies. He said current and relevant information in current plans is retained in the revised plans.

There was overview information about some of the specific issues that are driving the need to revise both the Arcata and Redding RMPs.

Bob Schneider suggested the RAC should be involved in issue scoping, alternative development, selecting a preferred alternative. He suggested that provisions for RAC involvement should be included in the proposals to the Washington office for the planning schedule. He said broad input is a good way to reduce the potential for future litigation.

There was discussion about the RAC's role in helping the BLM in determining wilderness characteristics.

Walker Ridge Wind Energy

Ukiah Field Manager Rich Burns summarized the proposal for wind energy development on Walker Ridge on the Colusa-Lake county line.

The field office Thursday received an internal review draft of the EIS and the plan of development (POD). The field office will complete internal review next week (last week of Feb.) via an internal webinar involving the company, environmental consultant and the BLM. The public comment period is tentatively set for April 12 through May 27. Three public meetings are scheduled during that time, to be completed by May 3, as well as a provision for RAC involvement.

The POD will present four alternatives including a no action alternative and an industry preferred alternative of 29 turbines producing 70 megawatts. The other alternatives would present different turbine arrays.

He suggested the RAC could participate via a webinar, which would enable participation without travel expenses. Michael proposed a Doodle poll to help determine a webinar date sometime after May 3 and before the close of the public comment period.

There was discussion about the end result of the webinar:

Michael would like the RAC to be able to reach a consensus on one of the alternatives presented.

Nancy suggested a pre webinar conference call to narrow down the focus for the webinar.

Bob thinks the major value will be the RAC members ideas and comments ideas presented for consideration by the BLM managers as they work toward selecting an alternative and arriving at a record of decision.

Marijuana Eradication on Public Lands

Lynda Roush provided a summary of how BLM law enforcement special agents are the lead in coordinating eradication of illegal marijuana gardens on public lands. They also lead the efforts in determining whether there will be attempts to prosecute, or just eradicate sites that are discovered. She said BLM law enforcement rangers assist as directed.

Offices are trying to focus more on cleaning up sites after grows are eradicated.

Rich Burns summarized Ukiah Field Office experiences with cleaning up growing sites and the importance of cleanup to discourage the return of growers after plants are eradicated.

He said gardens involve pesticides, herbicides and fertilizer pollution and associated camp garbage. Some areas are contaminated to the point that BLM staff has had to wear hazmat suits. Growers often divert, impound and fertilize water for use in drip systems. This impacts water availability for wildlife and other habitat needs.

In response to questions, field managers noted that the cleanup costs come from BLM funding. Offices have to compete for available funds. The Ukiah Field Office gets about \$150,000 per year.

Eric Lueder said it is important to note that the money could be better used for resource management.

Bob Schneider suggested a BLM whitepaper, available for constituents and the public about the cost of marijuana growing on public lands.

There was additional discussion about the dangers of armed growers posing a threat to public land visitors and federal rangers.

Lynda noted that removal of infrastructure during cleanup has a deterrent effect on growers' return.

Bob suggested the RAC can be most effective if members educate their elected officials. Ryan stressed that the cleanup must be stressed in addition to eradication.

Public Comments

Robert Godwin, Shelter Cove: Asked the BLM to consider providing a local area for off highway vehicle recreation. There are limited opportunities in the region for off highway vehicle use. Samoa Dunes is not sufficient. OHV users pay fees through the California Green Sticker Program and should have riding opportunities in return for their investment. The lack of riding areas leads to illegal off highway riding. There is a high level of frustration among riders. He hears the frustration from callers in to his radio program in KMUD community radio.

Jacob Tyler also noted concerns about the lack of riding opportunities for OHV users. More riding areas would provide economic benefit for Humboldt County.

Michael Kelley noted that the RAC can consider an agenda item for a future meeting, based on the comments received today.

Dennis Possehn presented comments on behalf of local resident unable to attend the meeting.

The resident is concerned with target shooting on a spur road off King Peak Road. The road is closed to vehicles causing an inconvenience to local target shooters.

RAC work planning

The topic is to determine areas for RAC work in the coming year or two. Suggested topics include Walker Ridge, RMPs, Coastal Collaborative, Knoxville planning, CCNM additions.

RAC suggestions:

Dennis: Timber/fuels management and the need to manage healthy forests to make them more fire resistant. Public lands consolidation -- blocking up scattered tracts for more efficient management.

Bob: The CAL FIRE timber management plan would have an effect on BLM public lands and should be considered.

Ryan: BLM addressing vegetation management in light of climate change.

Michael: Questioned whether the time is right for the RAC to revisit the BLM's Socio Economic Strategy.

There was a suggestion for a more complete briefing on the proposed Berryessa, Snow Mountain National Conservation Area and its addition to the BLM's National Landscape Conservation System.

There was a suggestion for a broad discussion on motorized recreation and constituent interest in expanding the program in specific areas. The discussion could include an overview of opportunities in the RAC region, a discussion about needs, and a RAC recommendation on ways to meet needs.

Collaboration: John Bernstein said it is increasingly important for agencies to work with one another. Interagency collaboration makes agencies more competitive for funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

Ryan: Suggested that the council tour a forest site. He strongly suggested the Weaverville Community Forest to talk about forest health.

There was a suggestion to learn more about the Trinity Collaborative involving the FS and BLM.

There was discussion about building meeting agendas around themes and setting aside meeting time for work planning.

Jennifer Mata suggested mineral withdrawals in the Redding field office as a potential future topic.

Michael suggested a discussion about mountain biking, including existing opportunities, community needs, and RAC recommendations for possible expansion of opportunities to meet constituent needs and demands.

Field Managers' Reports

There were questions and answers on specific issues. Written reports were distributed in advance.

Member Roundtable

Eric Lueder: Updated the RAC on Gov. Brown's appointment of Gen. Anthony Jackson (USMC, Ret.) to lead California State Parks. He is focused on improving agency transparency. He noted that the next OHV grant cycle is underway and encouraged field managers to submit requests. The available amount was reduced from previous years, to \$10 million this year, but the OHV commission is working on ways to increase available funds. Next year's budget proposes a return to previous year's funding of \$27 million.

Michael Kelley asked that the RAC consider setting the next meeting date in July rather than June.

Stan: The Redding meeting should include a tour of the Trinity Lumber Mill.

There was no further business and the meeting was adjourned.

Feb. 22

RAC members convened at the BLM's King Range Project Office in Shelter Cove for an overview of the King Range, its resource values and management. They toured projects in the Upper Mattole River watershed, where BLM and partners are working to improve year-round stream flow and water quality. Later in the day, members met with volunteers who are working with BLM to develop an interpretive site on historic dairy farm property at the King Range administrative site.

*Summary minutes compiled by
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