

The BLM Meadowood Barn

I am always amazed at how beautiful an area can be during the summer months before the heat and humidity really set in and the Meadowood property is no exception. The only concern out my office window is an aging structure in need of some assistance in order to continue its service to the public. On June 28th, 2011, 7PM, at the Laurel Hills Golf Club, the BLM will hold a public scoping meeting in order to gather ideas, suggestions, additional options, and comments from the public concerning this building. As the new site manager, I am aware of past rocky starts that have lead to misunderstandings and tension, but with everyone's constructive help, I am committed to making sure that we move forward through the approved environmental and public process, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and seeing that whatever configuration we have is safe and meets many needs.

I see three firm goals to consider when looking at this project. #1 It is absolutely necessary that if the barn remains, it functions as a safe public facility. In its current condition, this means that the structure cannot remain exactly the same; something has to be done. In that light, no matter the decision, horses will need to be removed from the barn, at the very least, temporarily. #2 The BLM must separate the administrative area from the public use areas due to safety and security considerations. This pertains more to design and layout rather than directly related to the barn structure. #3 Depending on the final decision, the BLM must use a different administrative tool, like a Concession, that releases the BLM from directly managing domesticated horses. The BLM does have a Wild Horse and Burro (WH&B) Program that serves to auction-and adopt wild horses to the care of approved owners, but the current facility does not give us the option to use it in support the WH&B program. The BLM does not have the staff or expertise to directly manage domesticated horses nor is it in the BLM mission, but this does not mean that horses cannot be a part of the recreational experience through trail riding, lessons, stabling, or physical therapy programs.

No decisions will be made during this meeting but it is very important to capture the views and ideas of the citizenry. There will be some experts on hand at "information stations" to answer specific questions pertaining to the engineering reports, safety issues, the NEPA process and what a concession or lease entails. There will also be information available about Meadowood's new trails and very active environmental education program. I hope that a variety of people who enjoy the outdoors and the area's many recreational opportunities, will consider attending and sharing their thoughts and ideas. While it is the responsibility of the BLM to make wise decisions pertaining to a safe recreational experience balanced with care for the surrounding flora and fauna, it is also important to hear and understand the value and needs of the general public.

I look forward to meeting many of Meadowood's neighbors, friends and participants on June 28th.

--E Lynn Burkett, Lower Potomac Field Station Manager

July 21, 2011

Meadowood Minute #2
Op-Ed
E.Lynn Burkett, Field Station Manager

We had a great turn-out for our public scoping meeting held on June 28, 2011 to discuss the stables at Meadowood Recreation Area. Lively conversations took place and many participants listened and took the idea of scoping and brainstorming very seriously.

It is important for folks to know that in order to truly take the time and contribute to the success of this project, we need ideas, suggestions and comments that are based on both the heart and the head. Good and responsible decisions are made by looking at all of the facts and data and balancing those with use and need. Comments, petitions, and form letters based solely on emotion and/or desire, although notably compassionate and heartfelt, are not as helpful in moving through this process; ideas, suggestions, and comments of substance are much more helpful. Also, please be aware that your ideas, suggestions and comments will be made public and become part of the public record. Any decision that the BLM makes will need to be justified through data and facts.

At the meeting I was asked by a variety of people to clarify a few things pertaining to: the barn boarding services contract; the fees collected by the boarders and how those fees are used; and deferred maintenance money.

The Meadowood barn boarding services contracts.

The former contract to provide boarding services at Meadowood ended March 2010. During 5 years, the difference between the board fees paid by private boarders and the fees that BLM paid to our former contractor was slightly over \$33,000.00. That is the total amount that BLM accrued over 5 years after payments to our former contractor. Costs to BLM not covered by board fees include utilities, fence replacement, municipal water hookup, security gates, power/lighting, repairs and upgrades, and BLM labor.

The current boarding services contract, signed by the barn manager, is for a period of one year, with four additional one-year "option" periods. The contract language specifies which portions of the facility are to be used, such as an estimated 20 acres of fenced pasture land. Payment is made to the barn manager to care for horses boarded at the stables, dispose of the waste, and provide daily maintenance of the facility. The contract contains set minimum and maximum numbers of boarders which were established during contract solicitation (advertisement and

competition); these minimums and maximums vary by year and were in the advertisement and agreed to by the contractor when the contract was issued.

During the initial or base year of the current contract, in accordance with the contract, BLM paid the contractor an additional amount per horse over the \$700 per month board fee paid by boarders. After the base year, BLM chose to renew into the first option year of the contract in order to allow enough time to work through public input under the National Environmental Policy Act process and in order not to displace boarded horses/people using the barn while the process is ongoing. According to the contract terms, during option year 1, there is a minimum of 15 boarders and a maximum of 25 boarders. The first option year also requires that, in addition to the \$700 monthly board fee paid by private boarders, the BLM pays the barn contractor an additional amount per animal per month since the board fee does not cover the contracted amount. Each option year increases the BLM payment per horse no matter how many boarders are in the barn. Each option year also retains the minimum number of boarders and decreases the maximum number.

The BLM received proposals from multiple parties who bid on the boarding services contract, as well as one protest after award of the contract. Although minor modifications to a contract can be made, "cardinal changes" substantially altering the original intent or scope of the contract, cannot legally be executed. Specific information on the current contract pricing may be requested through filing a Freedom of Information request with BLM.

Board and Other Fees. During 2008, the BLM submitted a request to the Southeast Recreation Resource Advisory Committee to increase the horse board fee in order to cover the costs of providing boarding services and some facility improvements. The BLM specified in its proposal and attached press releases, publication advertisements, and notices posted in the barn, that the cost increase would not cover the BLM's other costs for deferred maintenance (major repairs or replacement), utilities, and BLM labor. From December 2009, when the fee increase was implemented, the BLM has used board fees primarily to cover the cost of providing the services (payments to BLM contractor) and, during our former contract, to assist with the cost of utilities, maintenance, and minor repairs. Currently, the board fees collected at Meadowood do not generate excess revenue.

A relatively small amount of fees are also collected by the BLM from activities conducted at Meadowood under special recreation permits. These include non-horse related activities which charge a fee, such as high school track meets and orienteering events, as well as riding lessons for boarders and the public and the therapeutic riding program. In addition to an initial permit application fee, the BLM receives 3% of the money collected under the permits. The fees which the BLM collects under a special recreation permit stay on site and help, in part, to offset our operational costs such as the cost of water and utilities, minor maintenance and repairs, labor, and supplies. The need for special recreation permits by other groups, individuals, or businesses that make money on public lands are reviewed on a case by case basis, but, overall, anyone charging a fee for service while on public lands should have a special recreation permit.

Deferred maintenance money. When the BLM acquired Meadowood in 2001, the property contained many constructed assets (e.g., buildings, etc.) in need of repair or replacement. These

included the barn, fences, and other structures. The Meadowood barn currently needs several new interconnecting larger “systems” such as a new roof, a new electrical system, a new plumbing system, a fire suppression system, and support structures/pillars, in addition to ventilation, accessibility, and other needs. The level of the systems in need of rehabilitation is to the point of full reconstruction.

When the BLM needs to replace or repair a constructed asset, the office in need submits a project data sheet to the BLM Engineering Advisory Team for review and inclusion into the BLM 5 year plan for deferred maintenance and capital improvement. Deferred maintenance money collected for a specific project must be used for that project. The original request for deferred maintenance funding at Meadowood was granted for about \$700,000.

I hope that this information cleared up some questions and misinformation. If it did not, you are welcome to call me or come by and see me when my door is open. We will host two field trips to look at the facility and surrounding area on Thursday, August 4. One field trip will take place in the morning at 9:30 am and the other in the evening at 6:30 pm. We will meet in the parking area in front of the BLM’s main office at 10406 Gunston Road, Lorton, Virginia. We welcome your participation. Also as a reminder, during the NEPA process there will be more opportunities for the public to comment, offer suggestions and provide input. Information provided will be made public.

Please visit our website at: <http://www.es.blm.gov>. We will strive to provide frequent updates to the site.