

CENTRAL MONTANA RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL

MEETING NOTES

Wednesday, July 15, 2015

RAC Members Absent (Day 1): Dana Darlington, Wayne Fairchild & Nick Schulz

New Members: Jeff LaVoi and Hayden Janssen

Jonathan Moor started the meeting. The Public Comment Period was first on the agenda with two individuals signed up to speak.

1. Mark Schwomeyer of Fergus County Electric & Region 4 representing bow hunters. Mark asked that the RAC keep in mind, regarding Bullwhacker, the willingness of RMEF and the Safari Club to donate money. He asked if land in an ongoing investigation can't be considered? Read proposal – look for inaccuracies in land descriptions.

Durfee Hills has a large elk herd. Land exchange proposals F14 & F15 – allows loss of historic access and is unacceptable, not in taxpayers best interest.

2. Ron Moody – previous 6 year member of RAC. There have been land arguments over Bullwhacker for the past 25 years – this one is the most complex. He beseeched the council to engage in this issue, but to sort out facts from people's opinions. Bullwhacker road access would be an important achievement. There is access by boat, air and foot. Take a thorough look at the issue and price exacted from the people of the US, looking at most cost effective.

Clive stated there were 20 minutes left of the Public Comment Period. If more public come in during this time, the meeting will be stopped to accommodate them. Introductions of members were made, for the benefit of the new members. It was noted we did not have a quorum in Category 1. If votes are taken, vote outcomes will be mailed to missing members. Motion was made to approve minutes of the last meeting. Hugo proposed that they be passed. Jim requested that a couple changes be made. Decision was made to mark changes with an * with revisions. Troy seconded the minutes with revisions.

Clive went over the agenda for the second day, asking if there were any additional topics. None were noted. On the agenda for Day 1, Mark asked to move the Roundtable before lunch.

New Member Orientation: Mark explained that the RAC is a consensus oriented group. Discussion brings options forward and that's where the value lies. There are no personal agendas – you are a representative of a broad interest. Issues wax and wane with what's going on. It's hard to make progress on some issues. We want to identify items that are important to people. Subgroups can be very beneficial and where a lot of work & deliberation occurs. We want to thank you for your time.

Stan reminded the new members that this is not a decision-making body. Recommendations are taken very seriously, from here right on up to the Secretary of Interior. He stated that he takes this very seriously and really appreciates the 15 citizen advisory group, hearing what the public want & think the correct process/progress is. Feedback is a big accomplishment. Opinions are valuable and make a lot of

difference in making decisions and how we bring things forward. Stan stated he is an advocate for the evening dinner portion of the RAC, as it helps build relationships and everyone gets to know each other. Learned success is strength of leadership and relationships make all the difference. This is a big deal and I appreciate your time.

Clive noted that there is a charter and new members were each given a copy.

Jonathan explained his position as facilitator by explaining that he does not contribute his own ideas, just moves the meeting along, remaining neutral, making suggestions, will not allow attack of individuals and will capture key comments to the flipchart. He will also assist with travel, explaining and assisting with forms, motel & mileage questions. "Do's" of the RAC meeting were given in a handout. Mark asked Jonathan to explain the rules for the Public Comment Period. During this time the public can speak to the RAC, but cannot ask questions of them, yet the RAC can ask the public questions. During the rest of the meeting, the public is not involved and may only observe.

1st and 2nd motions are used. If you desire, you can question a public. Staff may ask questions, room for interaction. Use of thumbs up - meaning you agree or can support the issue, sideways thumb – meaning you can live with it, and thumbs down – meaning you can't live with it or support it, was explained.

Mark asked about rules for Subgroups. The methodology & rules for subgroups will need to be discussed.

Jonathan asked the new members if they had any questions. None were noted.

Jim asked if anyone had come forward for the Oil & Gas Category 1 opening on the RAC. Mark said that one had come forward, but didn't meet the vetting process. However, a previous member is interested in returning, but must wait to meet timing deadlines. At this point, Clive asked if anything had been heard about the lengthy appointment process. Mark said it was heard loud and clear, but no progress.

BREAK

DISTRICT MANAGER'S UPDATE

Stan Benes

Stan stated that often times we get told what we're going to do. It's frustrating to work with the public and then get told by above what will be done. Sage grouse plan & scoping plans – didn't see any major changes. Lands with wilderness characteristics, he asked that people with concerns come and talk to him. People want to know if this will affect their ranch operations. We don't see anything at this time.

Woodhawk Litigation – as of last week, we are done with that. Reduced AUM's in the allotment, insignificantly so. We want to look out for ranchers and environment. It closes 3 miles of riparian zones along the river, but doesn't jeopardize rancher's allotment. Seems like a reasonable decision. It was appealed and repealed 3 times, so it's now over.

Heard a lot about loss of cottonwoods on the Missouri...got a few projects going. We've had wonderful help from Friends of the Missouri, planting 500 cottonwoods.

Exclosures – People enjoy time on the river, but pull up to a site to camp and can't find a spot without cow manure. Eight different places were identified for exclosures to help mitigate this issue.

Other work includes Monument RMP, road closures trail work, signs and work being done by MTCC.

Recent issues include a couple big fires in the area with great cooperation with rural and State agencies.

We've been in the middle of another hot topic with regard to a possible land exchange. Upon initial review, it appears, we will investigate further. Social media can take over an issue and not get the full/correct story.

Hayden stated that the river guys wanted bigger exclosures – have they offered help or supplies? Stan said no because it would take acres out of their allotments.

Dave asked the difference between lands with wilderness characteristics and wilderness study areas. Brian Hockett, Havre BLM, replied that WSA's are managed with higher criteria standards. Lands with wilderness characteristics require greater than 5,000 contiguous acres and can have some man-made features. (BLM Manual 6330 discusses WSA's & BLM Manual 6320 discusses Lands w/Wilderness Characteristics).

Mark Albers

Stan covered the RMP and Sage grouse. There have been lots of starts & restarts and we are looking forward to implementation. We are currently in the protest period. Travel planning was not done within the RMP – we just set up the criteria. We hope to set up subgroups for travel planning because the Hi-Line is so diverse. We've already had interest from Washington Office, motorcycle groups, etc.

Flat Creek allotment & year-round grazing - we want to discuss the science of year-round grazing. Is it a good direction to go? We want this group to wrestle with the science/social/political issues. Should this be looked at? We want to weigh the information and get ideas & input.

Access continues to be a big issue. It's an important subject from the State Director to us. The TO is being looked at to find a way to get these actions done and repurposing a position to focus on it.

Clive asked if BLM was currently working with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation? Mark responded that RMEF purchased a tract in T.25N, R17E on the Cow Island Trail, to secure public & administrative access to the public land. BLM will pursue acquisition of this property from RMEF. We are currently working on the interim MOU to make this work.

Hayden asked if RMEF is willing to donate to the land to the BLM. Marked responded that donation is not out of the question. Permanent transfer? Yes.

Dave expressed irritation that decisions discussed and plans made get changed by Washington Office folks where we have no control. Mark replied that there is more perception of that than actually exists.

Stan stated at Judith Landing there is a LWCF effort working on fee title to land adjacent to the campground. Confident we have the funds if we get through the process.

The rancher, at Coal Banks Landing, is willing to consider a place for a new boat ramp.

LUNCH BREAK * * *

ROUNDTABLE

Damien – haven't heard a whole lot. Talked to people in Zortman regarding rental of the ranger station, as to whether it would be a benefit or not. Asked for update – waiting for approval.

Dave – Same as last time....comments on sage grouse and buffalo. Quite a few comments on things coming down from the top. Lean, cutting staff...that's where the counties are.

Dan – Sage grouse and buffalo...same all the time.

Jeff – Very little BLM in Hill County. Most of what we hear is from Phillips County, so sage grouse & buffalo. After State acquisition of Aageson Ranch, we haven't heard anything.

Hayden – Sage grouse EIS folks found onerous. 6-10 pages would be nice, rather than 500+ page document. Forest Service puts out abstracts with plans. Would like to see a snapshot of the document w/plan.

Ralph – Dissatisfaction with lands with wilderness characteristics in all plans. Sage grouse dissatisfaction with setback rules.

Jim – Not much talk about sage grouse & buffalo, more talk regarding Wilks Exchange. One member of Russell County in on settlement discussion on Salmon Road. Land Board review>Judge review> if all transpires, probably a substantial increase in public use (west of state lands) near Deep Creek/Sun River. BLM land is adjacent to Forest, DNRC proposing a parking area. Wilks Exchange has been an ongoing issue for approximately 3 years. There are a lot more people interested than last year.

Hugo – Access is always an issue. Quite a bit of talk on Tenderfoot Creek. No negative comments. Durfee Hills is always an issue. Some say it isn't worth it. Wildlife specialist, Sonya Smith, getting quite a few phone calls regarding flying-in for hunting. The Wilks proposal being back on the table & reconsidering is being discussed.

Troy – Basically the same...sage grouse, buffalo, year-round grazing, RMP, Wilks Brothers & Exchange, along with local access issues.

Mary – Everything I've heard today from everyone else.

Clive – Sage grouse – State in process of replying to NSO for O&G, ROW access, access to state trust lands & avoidance. Echo the sentiment in regard to leadership and fire...great cooperation with agencies and locals. At the Fred Robinson Bridge, 90% of new cottonwoods died due to mice girdling them all. Talked with caretaker. Mailbox needs replaced.

HI-LINE RMP UPDATE – Brian Hockett, Havre Field Office

Brian presented the RAC with an update via a power point presentation. The RMP was started 9 years ago – in 2006 with a Notice of Intent and covers 2.4 million BLM surface acres and 4.2 million BLM subsurface acres. The Draft RMP/EIS came out in March 2013, Proposed RMP/Final EIS in June 2015, the Governor's Consistency review & Protest Resolution in July 2015 and Record of Decision Approved RMP due in September 2015.

Planning issues of interest include: wilderness characteristics, greater sage grouse, renewable energy resources, fluid minerals, locatable minerals and livestock grazing.

Hayden asked about areas with wilderness characteristics and what restrictions would be implemented. Brian replied that we are not closing any roads. No new roads will be made and, as with all BLM land, vehicles are limited to existing roads and trails. When work begins on the Travel Management Plan, we will be looking at status of roads.

Mary asked why the 1 mile NSO for sage grouse leks was changed to 6/10ths of a mile. Brian responded that this was the new restriction limit and made us consistent with the rest of Montana and the Dakotas. Hayden asked if this takes into account where wells can be located. Brian informed him that the 6/10ths buffer is for General Habitat with no limit to wells per section, and there is NSO for all Priority Habitat with a limit of one well per section.

In regard to discussions on the desired conditions for greater sage-grouse habitat, "Troy asked who determined that you could grow 7" of grass?" Local information, Forest Service and website information assisted in determining this range. It was asked if this 7" was before or after grazing. It was during grazing with rotation strategy worked into the standards.

Jim asked if there had been any discussion with the Fish & Wildlife Service on not listing sage grouse. Brian responded that he was not privy to any information.

UPDATE ON GREATER SAGE GROUSE – Adam Carr

Montana-wide, this is an issue. Lewistown received 6 unique protest letters.

Proposed Plan/Final EIS was released to the public on May 29th for a 30 day protest period & a 60 day Governor's Consistency Review. After completion of the consistency review, the State Director can either accept or reject the governor's recommendations; if rejected, the governor has 30 days to provide a written appeal to the BLM Director.

Records of Decision planned to be signed late summer 2015.

The main objectives for the conservation strategies are: 1) Minimize new or additional surface disturbance, 2) Improve habitat condition and 3) Reduce threat of rangeland fire to sage grouse and sage grouse habitat.

Uniqueness with Lewistown Plan is no new leasing in habitat. Habitat objectives are different than the Hi-Line Plan. Sage grouse is the #1 natural resource priority.

There are 233,000 acres of Priority Habitat Management Area, 112,000 acres of General Habitat Management Area and 53,000 acres of Sagebrush Focal Areas.

BULLWHACKER ACCESS PROPOSAL – Mike Kania, Monument Manager

Mike gave the back-story of the Bullwhacker access for the benefit of the new RAC Members. The Wilks Brothers wanted to come up with a proposal and worked on it for several months. BLM was not part of these negotiations. On July 9th we received a draft proposal that the Wilks wanted to take out to the public – Great Falls, Havre, Helena, Kalispell, Missoula. Should we make this part of the EA? We want to see what the public has to say. Mike handed out a draft copy of the "BLM - Wilks Land Exchange Proposal".

The past plan, the Wilks brought forward, was seriously protested by several large groups. We had several plans in progress, lack of staffing, etc. and we did not move forward with any exchange. The

public appears to support looking at a land exchange rather than trying to build a road into the area. So currently we are putting the information out there and asking for opinions. Are holding public meetings on this warranted? Should this proposal be added to the EA?

Hugo asked, "Does BLM plans to add this as an alternative?" Stan replied that we are considering having it added.

Hayden asked, "Who wrote the draft?" Stan answered that those who were involved and had input are listed in the document.

Jim stated that it was reviewed by groups – they feel it should go out to the public.

Hugo felt there was a general consensus that this is something that should have a serious look from the public.

Hayden asked if BLM should analyze this draft as an alternative. Majority seemed to think it should.

Mark reminded everyone that this isn't a vote. We're asking if this is a viable alternative.

Clive questioned, "Is it the document or what you take from the document?" Mike Kania replied that we need to look to see if these parcels should be exchanged and then analyze the outcome. Clive questioned whether we were considering the exact document. Mike responded that we're looking at the substance used, not the exact document with editorial comments, etc.

Jim mentioned other items, i.e. rights-of-way, block management, etc. need to be considered as well as dollar value. He also asked if Bullwhacker Road was established, what work and how much money would it take to put it back into use? Mike replied that it's a private road and very stable until past Gilmore cabin. Jim questioned, "You don't foresee more than normal maintenance cost if we acquired it?" Mike responded, "No."

Clive asked, "What do you want on this tomorrow?" regarding review of the draft.

Stan replied, "Just review."

The question to the RAC is, "Is this a good idea to take to the public?"

Hayden asked if BLM had set a precedent of looking at plans brought from outside interests. Mike replied that yes, we've had experience with this in a public forum.

Jim offered, "Public input can make a big difference."

FOLLOW UP ON BOAT RAMP & FEES – Kania/Schaefer

Recreation fees were discussed in October 2014 at the RAC, where we developed a proposal and sent in to the Washington Office. It has gone through all but one of the necessary stages and passed every one. It's currently on the Assistant Director's desk in Washington. Hopefully it will be out quickly. The next step would be six months in the Federal Register. After go-ahead, program would begin next year.

Mary asked the Fee Program costs. They are Coal Banks Landing \$10/ Judith Landing \$5 / River Fee – Day Use is \$5/boat. Overnight is a per person fee of \$4 each for 16 and older/ \$2 each for ages 6-15. These are self-registration sites. Didn't change anything discussed in October.

Mary asked if these were fees were similar at other western sites. Prices are very similar to most areas.

The local landowner contacted Mike Kania saying he'd be interested in selling some land to the BLM for a new boat launch by Virgelle Ferry. We are looking into funding and may know more by fall. It must be the landowner's decision. The government can't pay over appraised dollar amount.

LEWISTOWN RMP UPDATE – Dan Brunkhorst

The Lewistown RMP was started in February 2013 with a Prep Plan. The inventory leg covered LWWC, ACEC, visual resource inventory, lentic inventory, wilderness study reports and RFD. Analysis Management Situation (AMS) items included: current condition, decisions, management opportunities, consistency with other plans and criteria.

Public meetings were held in the planning area. There was a 60-day comment period to receive feedback. Fed through scoping process and put into Planning Issue Statements & Topics. These were used to develop alternatives. Four themes were developed from the Scoping Report for Alternatives: 1) No Action – existing current condition, 2) Blended Alternative – Management opportunities, 3) Resource Use, 4) Resource Conservation.

We've held 4 workshops with cooperating agencies.

Dan discussed the various components included in the RMP such as:

Air Resources– mitigating dust, smoke management, **Climate Change** – emphasis on this, **Soils** – designating sensitive soils, erodibility, low restoration potential, **Water Resources** – reservoirs getting to the end of life, i.e. sediment, washout, etc., **Vegetative Communities** – broke into priority veg. types, sagebrush grasslands, grasslands, badlands, ponderosa pine badlands, forests & meadows, **Invasive Plants** – how to control, monitoring, etc., **Fish & Wildlife** – designating priority species, sage-grouse conservation actions, **Wildland Fire Ecology & Management** – designating fire management units, fire response categories, **Cultural & Heritage Resources** – special designations, **Paleontology** – proposed special designation, **Visual Resources** – inventory of entire planning area for scenic quality, **LWWC** – inventoried 200,000 acres, which units to carry forward aimed at conservation, wilderness characteristics & what type management, **Cave Resources** – maintain withdrawals from mineral entry, **Special Designations** – 4 ACEC's to re-evaluate resource to see if it's still appropriate, handful of new proposals brought forward, **Outstanding Natural Areas** – 12,000 acres on the Front, designated in the 80's, definition has changed so considering forward with ONA's or ACEC's, **Back Country Byways**, **National Trails** – designate corridors & management actions, **Wild & Scenic Rivers** – id'd eligible segments, determined if they are suitable->recommend, **WSA's** – Administrative/Congressional designations, carry forward, **Treaty Rights/Tribal Interests, and Public Safety.**

Resource uses reviewed include: coal, non-energy solid leasables, fluid leasable minerals, locatables, mineral materials, livestock grazing, recreation & visitor services, travel-transportation, lands & realty, forest, woodland & special products.

The current plan covering the Western ½ of the Field Office Area is dated 1984 and the current plan covering the Eastern ½ of the Field Office Area is dated 1994. The new plan is scheduled to last 15-20 years. The timeline includes having the administrative draft completed in September 2015 and the public draft ready by January 2016.

Jim asked where the WSA's are located. Dan replied with 1) Square Butte (near Geraldine), 2) north of Sun River on the Front) and 3) south of Sun River on the Front.

Meeting was adjourned with plans to meet at Brooks Market for social time & dinner.

CENTRAL MONTANA RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL – DAY 2

THURSDAY, JULY 16TH, 2015

RAC MEMBERS ABSENT (Day 2): Dana Darlington and Wayne Fairchild

YEAR-ROUND GRAZING & POSSIBLE SUBGROUP FORMATION – Mark, Clive & BJ Rhodes

The meeting began with BJ Rhodes, Malta FO, using the Flat Creek change of use request from the American Prairie Reserve as an example. He gave the history of the allotment, stating the AMP has been in place since 1974. Nick questioned the request for changes. BJ responded that it's an unusual request so we went out for a 30-day public scoping to id issues for analysis. The 140 comments received included many misperceptions and criticisms.

History of grazing administration objectives....why we don't do it like other agencies – BLM has no regulation or policy directing it to use any particular grazing system or grazing management model. Grazing Authorization CFR 4130.6-4 Special Grazing Permits or Leases, states in a nutshell, if an animal can be privately owned, it can be permitted to graze on BLM land. (Wildlife can't be privately owned.) Because it is privately owned, it is considered livestock.

Differences between agencies:	BLM	vs.	NRCS
	Public land		Private land
	Multiple use		Focus on single use
	Resource & ecology driven		Production driven

BLM tries to tailor grazing systems to fit management style of operator and kind of animals grazing. Range management has evolved over the years.

Hayden asked, "Has using a portion or percentage of the parcel been discussed, before using the entire allotment?" BJ replied that power point presentation should answer that in upcoming slides.

Rotational/Continuous Grazing – "Although it has been speculated that desirable plants, particularly grasses, will be grazed excessively under continuous grazing, actual research does not support this speculation." – Holechek, et al., 2001. Range Management: Principles and Practices

Range science research presents a convincing argument that rotational grazing "has been found to convey few, if any, consistent benefits over continuous grazing" under proper stocking rates. – Briske, et. al., 2008

Bison/Cattle – Bison and cattle certainly behave differently and these differences should be taken into consideration for management purposes. – Kohl, et al. 2013

Bison – Personal Observations: 1) tend to graze in a herd, 2) tend to move to new areas & over large distances...often daily, 3) rarely spend time around water sources, and seem to not even prefer riparian vegetation and 4) seems to be a difference in their forage preferences.

Nick asked, “Are you making a specific management decision for buffalo?” Rangeland health and the Terms & Conditions must all still be met as with any other allotment.

Clive asked if this change of use was started by the permittee and BJ replied, yes. Clive then asked, “What does that consist of?” BJ informed him that the request consists of a piece of paper with the allotment, season of use and numbers of livestock included.

Troy questioned what protects sage-grouse in the priority areas with 12 month grazing?

Jim asked if there is a plan to do this on another ranch. Damien replied, yes. They are already using this type plan, with no fences which is basically similar to what this is and it met rangeland health. It has been in place for 1 year.

BJ summarized: 1) Rules are the same for everyone. 2) Grazing management should be tailored to fit the needs of the operator, the animal & the resource. 3) BLM is a multiple-use agency. 4) Range science has evolved to take a more ecological approach to management. 5) Continuous grazing is one of many possible grazing systems..and can be entirely appropriate under the right circumstances. 6) Bison are behaviorally different than cattle.

Mark stated that he didn't bring BJ here to defend a decision that hasn't been made. A subgroup would use a broad approach but give ideas if this option of year-round grazing should be offered, not about whether or not buffalo are allowed.

Mary stated that we'd want a beginning and end for product outcome with changing members.

Troy replied that the 30 day Federal Register Notice for subgroups complicates getting together. Mark said he will check into this. If no group is made >>>EA instead. The question is whether BLM should entertain continuous grazing.

Jim asked if BLM has any other year-long grazing allotments. BJ replied, yes.

DURFEE HILLS – Stan Benes

Stan wanted to acknowledge what's going on with this area. The Durfee Hills are reachable by aircraft.

Last hunting season Stan received calls concerning fences going in. People can build fences on their private property. People “thought” fences were on BLM. More calls and emails. The Field Manager went out to verify if this was a major concern. It “appeared” that fences could be encroaching on public land. An official, legal survey cadastral team & assessment team went out to check. The survey will first go to the Federal Register. Once it is filed there, the private land owner has/had 30 days to appeal it, if they felt it was done incorrectly. People want quantitative information. We're almost through the LE investigation damage assessment. We acknowledged that we were listening and did the review.

Letter was sent to Wilks. Not yet done, but some urgent needs were found. They did not have wildlife friendly fences and there was concern about mortality. They were asked to consider voluntarily changing the fences design and doing something about the weeds. They responded – changing fence design, removing upper strand, smooth on the bottom and spraying weeds.

Durfee Hills and Bullwhacker are TWO different discussions. Troy questioned, “You’re saying Durfee Hills is not included in the land exchange proposal.” Stan replied that, “Yes – it is within the recent proposal.” However, the trespass is a separate issue from Bullwhacker.

Hugo reiterated, “You asked Wilks to make fences wildlife friendly, it’s on their private, so it is voluntary.”

Clive and Stan said public information should be available the middle of August.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD* * * * *

8 people signed up to speak – 5 minutes allotted to each

Name: Perry Jacobs – 4th generation rancher from 50 miles south of Malta

Commenting on year-round grazing & subgroups: Wanted to comment on two things, the first being the request to create subgroups on continued grazing to see how all producers can request changes. In the Flat Creek Allotment, regarding the removal of interior fences, I’m not sure how they can manage appropriately with no fencing.

Hayden replied, “BLM has already done continued grazing. Having a subgroup could provide another outlet to get more information out there.”

There’s a need for consistency so it doesn’t appear as favoritism.

Name: Vicki Olsen – Rancher – south Phillips County

Commenting on year-round grazing: BLM has done an awesome job, but I don’t think this is a good move. Not good science. Some groups have done new stuff and it takes years to know what works and what doesn’t. We’ve come a long way with grazing management. Range/wildlife has worked for 100 years. Management ability is important. With drought/fire, you can move cattle. You need a contingency plan. There’s no control with no interior fences. One year of experience, and it’s been a good year with precip, doesn’t give a full picture. You need reserves for bad years. Wyoming tried year-round grazing with bison and it didn’t work and they are opposing it. Ted Turner’s Flying D tried it. Practical on-the-ground should be thoroughly looked at. I do not agree this will work.

Name: Elena Evans – Montana Association of Conservation Districts

Commenting on year-round grazing: Elena gave a handout of a letter from President Jeff Wivholm of the Montana Association of Conservation Districts. The Districts represent Montana’s 58 conservation districts and provides a venue for moving forward policy issues important to districts through their resolution process. Concern over changes in management, such as the proposed changes to the Flat Creek Allotment, were moved forward through the resolution process and resulted in resolution 14-1 included in the aforementioned letter, titled “Oppose Continuous Grazing on Federal Lands.”

Name: Ron Moody – Lewistown – Citizen, Sportsman

Commenting on Land Exchanges: Bullwhacker Road. Ron cautioned the RAC to proceed cautiously on endorsing aspects of land exchanges at this time. Wilks have offered a proposal. There are other stories out there. Wait to see and hear those. Ron continued, that cadastral survey & location of fencing was a relevant point as well as possibility of significant damage. Stan advised that the investigation is separate from the land exchange and confident any trespass will get resolved.

We have two parts – 1) Proposal for land exchange and 2) Process that's taken place. The process generated controversy. Events took place – people on the street not informed/included. Procedural concerns – then look at merits.

Hayden remarked that there are other sides of the story and we are tasked to put this forward.

Mr. Moody stated that people will be speaking in public. This is a public process. Don't add into alternatives until it's been handled.

Name: John Schultz – Montana Public Lands Council, Vice President

Commenting on Buffalo: The recent request by the American Prairie Reserve to change the class of livestock from cattle to bison is very liberal. By removing all interior fences and proposing year-round grazing it shows lack of compliance on the resource and should be denied. Reasons include: it will be inconsistent with the work already done on the resource by previous owners & BLM, most allotments are already fenced for rest rotation system with the added value of water already in place to benefit wildlife & cattle. It is essential to maintain and install fences that will control bison. Control is emphasized because eventually they will be imposing their unwanted presence on neighboring property.

When land is purchased by a non-profit entity, they shouldn't put BLM in a compromising position. Rationalization of this request would establish a precedence and lose credence to all agencies, as well as previous and present permittees. Very obviously there is a political trend to resource management. A productive, conservative outcome is necessary to maintain the area and resource. Resource monitoring needs to be continued.

Realizing this is a very emotionally charged issue, the groups & agencies that decide this outcome should weigh in very carefully, so not to start an alarming negative trend.

Name: Mary Friez – Member of MWA & Friends of the Missouri

Commenting on Bullwhacker Area: Public land is beneficial to this state and our communities. Regarding the land exchange proposal, I am impressed with the exchange possibilities. It's definitely worth consideration from an environmental and recreation point of view. On whether the RAC should consider a motion on this proposal, I really hope it is considered. Part of this is based on proclamation when established – people need to see this area to be advocates for public land. BLM worked to protect this area and it's a great option for all. I hope it will be considered. It's not the same as the rest of BLM land – it deserves special designation.

Name: Daryl James – N Bar

Commenting on Fencing Issue & Exchange: The fencing issue is critical to understand. The fencing contractor worked with the Forest Service and had no problem. BLM game stop and desist – concerned about weeds and calving season. We voluntarily made changes as quick as possible. Used sheep on spurge and spraying.

Exchange process is what we hope to use, that BLM has outlined in statute. Individual meetings and informal discussions were held to discuss what might work. Detractors think “collusion” and closed door meetings. Now we want to open it up – engage the public. Brought together a roundtable with various groups. Discussed what might make sense. We want to follow the process...full disclosure & public engagement. Want a fair & objective process.

CONCLUDES PUBLIC COMMENT TIME * * * * *

2015 RAC WORK PLAN

I. ACTION ITEMS

- A. Recreation Fees – Got follow through and we are close to fruition. Fees associated with boat launch & use of BLM lands within the UMRBNM will go into effect next year. We are excited about this bringing in more funds to assist with various needs.
- B. Resource Management Planning – Lewistown (Central District Office) - The RMP schedule is on time so we will hear more as it moves forward.
- C. Field Trips – Durfee Hills & Bullwhacker should be looked at.
- D. RAC Subgroups – Discussed 3 groups. 1) Year-round grazing on public lands was discussed and no subgroup will be formed. 2) It was decided that a subgroup for Bullwhacker was not necessary. 3) Hi-Line Travel Planning subgroup should be formed but is on hold until 2016. Kept as a placeholder for future work. Heads up for substantial amount of work.
- E. Bullwhacker Road – Dave said we are supposed to be representing the public. Hayden offered, more ideas are better than less. There are more ideas. Will this bring out more ideas? Will it help stimulate discussion? All agree the proposal should be considered. Is anyone opposed to considering this? Does this need a subgroup? Hugo questioned, “Should we make a motion as a body to consider the proposal?” Clive asked if there was anything a subgroup would need to do. Stan replied, no there wasn’t.

Dave made a motion to support that a land exchange proposal be considered. Hayden stated, “The “concept”, not the specific parcels... Supporting an alternative to restoring specific motorized access to Bullwhacker.” The motion was seconded by Ralph and the vote was unanimous. Clive will call Dana and Wayne to check their vote.

Discussion came back to possible year-round grazing subgroup to explore pros & cons. Clive asked, “What work would they do?” Mark replied that Flat Creek was not precedent setting... moving forward to an EA. Bigger question with year-round grazing is what to task the group with. What do we do with those plans already in place? How prescriptive can we be and still have it make sense? What could come out that would be useful?

Hugo replied that there are already some in existence so how do we choose? Some have it, some don’t. Information is addressed in the EA – let people know it’s available. Hugo & Clive suggested a presentation on some already existing year-round grazing allotments and how it’s working.

If it’s in an EA, there is a scoping process, so everything would have to be addressed.

Hayden said, “All leases are different, so what specifically would a subgroup define?”

Nick stated that he would like to see AUM’s addressed.

Mark replied that operators still need to meet the standards for rangeland health. It doesn't matter the species – everything is unique so how could you come up with prescriptive use. Not sure a subgroup could have expertise to do this.

Jeff asked who would put fences back in if there's a need to go back to separate pastures? This would need to be discussed since it would be site specific.

Hugo stated that currently it's most important to keep the RAC informed of the process.

An update will be on the next agenda. ****No subgroups formed****

Next meeting date was scheduled for October 6th & 7th in Chinook.

Update: 7/22/15 - Dana Darlington called & voted to support consideration of a land exchange as an alternative within the Bullwhacker EA. He said he would provide an email confirmation.

