

Dakotas Resource Advisory Council
Montana State Office
Billings, Montana

Attendance

Marian Atkins	Lonny Bagley	Lyndon Bucher	Larry Dokken
Bill Bowman	Chance Davis	Jace DeCory	John Hoganson
Erick Hunt	Ron Jablonski	Stanley Kohn	Gerry Schlekeway
Andrea Stomberg	Toby Stroh		

Guest Presenter

John Hartley – BLM – RMP Administrator
Joni Packard – USFS

Public

Kinard Kunnemann, Families for Outdoor Recreation

Notes by Linda Cooksey, BLM

Wednesday, May 21, 2008

Welcome and Introductions - Bagley welcomed everyone and all members introduced themselves.

North Dakota Field Office Update - Bagley

Sage grouse – It has been proposed that BLM work with other entities that study sage grouse. We would like to see counties take a lead role with this as we are all interested in their preservation. We could set up a model where sage grouse can have harmony with oil companies, hikers, and others. We need to look at the sage we have, potential to increase numbers, and what causes those numbers to go down. Bowman County is willing to invest part of the money received from BLM in sage grouse. We can use the Healthy Lands Imitative partnerships with industry, landowners, county and state to get more involved; it will take time to implement some measures. Continental Resources has been active in helping save sage grouse. Continental spent an additional \$4,000,000 to move a well to avoid sage grouse habitat. We will try to get Continental's act publicized in Best Management Practices; and are working on a proposal to recognize them nationally.

Bill Bowman suggested building a viewing station which would not disturb the national habitat. Educational information about sage grouse habitat could be set up at the site. Lonny stated that we can work through Healthy Land Initiative to create a sage grouse viewing station.

Marian stated that there is a ¼ mile "no surface occupancy" around a lek area for Oil & Gas Exploration. It works the same for ranchers – no water tanks are allowed within ¼ mile of a lek. There is also a timing limit for drilling within a 4 mile radius around a lek where a majority of females nest. The whole 4 miles is not necessarily habitat but we are looking at it in the Resource Management Plan for both North and South Dakota. Grazing management should make sure there is enough residual height on grass so sage grouse can still hide in cover, and allow cattle in at certain times of the year. It is recommended to keep sheep out of lek area.

Lyndon is concerned that the list of Best Management Practices which should work, are not working. If he had spent \$4,000,000 and found out we had a 50% reduction in sage grouse, he would be pretty perplexed.

Bill Bowman stated that if you do nothing and they go on the endangered species list, it is too late. It is better to invest money today to save them, than wait 5 years.

John Hartley reminded people that the key place for input in BLM is in Land use Plan. The RMP is looking at Sage Grouse and there could be a subgroup in RAC with expertise to help with Sage Grouse. The RMP will be coming back to the RAC when developing alternatives.

Stanley Kohn added that there is no hunting season on Sage Grouse this year.

Coal - BLM has received a lease application for BNI around Center for 320 acres and 1 application from Dakota Westmoreland in addition to 2 exploratory permits in Mercer County.

Uranium - A Bismarck company has submitted nine uranium prospecting permits in an area south of Belfield and west of Amidon. The proposal

Phase 1 involves shovel testing and meter readings. This ; and will go through without much problem for BLM. It involves Forest Service and private surface and federal minerals. The first phase requires no permit from BLM. Phase 2 involves drilling operation – core testing; and at that phase, BLM will be involved.

BLM and the Forest Service will conduct joint NEPA and Public scoping as cooperating agencies. There is a lot of outcry in the Belfield area and lots of questions. The price of uranium is about triple of what it was several years ago making these types of adventures profitable.

Bakken Play - There is increased activity in Bakken formation. Initial Production from these wells is around 1800 barrels per day, and then dropping off to stabilized production. Ft. Berthold reservation will be another hot spot.

Lonny reported on one well operated by Encore that had a blowout during a frac job on April 16. The well is under control and a determine will be made if they can save the well. The company has invested nearly \$6,000,000 in well and if it cannot be repaired, it may have to be plugged.

South Dakota Field Office Update -

Uranium – South Dakota has some uranium claims also. There is discussion about mining claims vs. leases. The SD Dept of Environment & Natural Resources is looking at whole process.

O&G leasing - Harding County has the most of O&G leasing; Butte County has none.

Land Use Plan - There are different provisions for sage grouse habitats. We look at where leks are, and are careful with O&G leasing.

Range - Leases expired in ND & SD in 1999. National BLM recommends looking at an environmental perspective when releasing. We will be looking at leases from 2009 to the end of 2010.

Right of Way Projects - We are looking at 2 projects – Dakota Minnesota Eastern Railroad in the Southern hills to carry coal to Minnesota, where there is a lot of controversy, with 3.5 miles of track on BLM land. The other project is GCC Dakota Cement – a conveyor belt in southern hills, on which we are doing an EIS.

Cables - We don't know how to recoup the fees for old air force cables. No cultural evaluation or NEPA has been done. We would need to do a cultural review. Since we are in middle of land use plan, we will do the plan first and then deal with the cable. One rancher took ½ mile of cable off BLM land and has to reimburse BLM for that cable.

Access - We have sent forward some access priorities – getting to some tracts of land around Belle Fourche & Cheyenne Rivers. One of ranchers would like to work with BLM on it.

Global Climate Change - We will look at Global Climate Change when talking about the RMP. Marian asked for any advice on best way of how to deal on it.

Thank You - Lonny thanked Andrea for serving as RAC President.

USFS Presentation by Joni Packard - Ms. Packard presented information on setting up tools to help deal with recreation facility proposals and fee schedules.

Report from Ron Jablonski, USFS -

The Elkhorn Ranch acquisition is complete. NDSU has started phase 1 of a 3 year cultural assessment at Elkhorn. Conveyance of public lands to private is half complete. There are sales pending on 19 of 20 with a target of 5200 acres. Dave Pieper is talking about forage reserve of grass bank. They are looking at alternatives for Elkhorn Ranch.

Grazing -USFS management plans date back to 70's; they are working on updated plans. They are working on drought issues with grazing associations.

Minerals - Oil & Gas continues on Little Missouri National Grassland. A Uranium company asked USFS to approve 2 or 3 phases at once. The prudent thing to do is approve one at a time.

Recreation - National use monitoring –Recreation facilities analysis – we will see some changes. Some campgrounds have been turned into super trail heads. There will be some improvements on some facilities and changes on some others. They are starting on travel management planning. – roads and access. There will be a travel plan for the entire Little Missouri National Grassland. The Mah-De-Hey trail may see changes. Utilization is very good; and there is a lot of interest on Mah-De-Hey II. A face lift at burning coal vein will be taking place this summer.

FERC Policy - USFS is permitting procedures the same for federal or private using “Eminent Domain” – there are few problems with federal lands because we end up being cooperating agency. If there is a problem, then we would use eminent domain also. Mr. Dokken said that the 50' corridor width spacing is a concern of the industry. They may need more right-of-way. Mr. Jablonski stated that the Forest Service is having problems with companies who don't know where the lines are. Some of the problems have to do with old pipelines. A huge cleanup job is needed to clean out abandoned lines and rebuild. Mr. Dokken suggested that this is something the Forest Service, BLM, and industry should get together on. Mr. Jablonski stated that the Forest Service has an Employee in McKenzie County to do pipeline work; and maybe they can get together and work on it.

GPS monitoring systems - Mr. Dokken stated that the GPS Monitoring Systems that are being put in are great; but they can't get communication towers up on federal land. Mr. Jablonski replied that a tower

was just finished with the Park Service; and if you need a tower, let them know. Mr. Dokken stated that one place where they are unable to receive signals is in gullies.

RMP PowerPoint – John Hartley, RMP Lead - Areas covered included Progress to date, Scoping Meetings, Issues identified in Pre-Plan, SD & ND Scoping Comments, Additional Issues, SD and ND Alternatives, and emerging issues including global climate change, sage grouse, uranium for both plans and coal and oil and gas development in ND, and next steps for the SD and ND RMPs.

Seven Cooperative Agreements have been signed in SD. Marian will get the co-ops together some time in July to help work on Alternatives. RAC members are welcome to join us. Marian will notify RAC members of the date for the Alternative Workshop.

Coal discussion - Several coal companies identified areas that have interest in over the next 15 to 20 years. They want us to make studies of several big areas. We took the information that they provided us and worked with coal shop at the BLM Montana State Office to determine whether there is enough coal to be mined. We eliminated some study areas, and pared down the remaining coal areas to what will be needed within the next 15 to 20 years. We will review these areas under the RMP. Three options of ways to study the coal areas include:

1. Do all study areas – would take 2 field seasons and significant dollars.
2. Eliminate ones already done and do new areas and if a lease comes in, we would have to do a supplement amendment and the industry would have to pay for it.
3. Analyze all coal at the time of leasing (use the 1987 Coal decisions as a basis).

The Dickinson Field Office will further study all 3 options and take their findings to a meeting with MSO managers on May 30.

RAC Members Help on RMP - Marian asked the RAC members if they want to be involved in the RMP, to meet with cooperators and if they are interested in the process. “What do you want to do for our RMP?”

John Hoganson felt that it is a great idea to look at special management of paleo resources in southwest Bowman County. He suggested that the State of ND can help out with that in some kind of collaborative effort (Cooperating Agency Status). Lonny said that Dale Hanson, Wyoming BLM, is looking at paleo for North and South Dakota. John Hoganson also suggested that Bowman County and the Pioneer Trails Museum may be interested in collaboration with BLM. Although Lonny is concerned with the time involved, John Hoganson stated that they may have some information that we may not have.

It was suggested that RMP information be made available for all RAC members, as soon as it comes available. Lonny and Marian will notify RAC members of times and dates for when we are working on Alternatives and to keep the RAC up to date on what we are working on.

Travel management - Marian stated that there are different ways of approaching travel management, such as designating areas in the RMP that will be OHV routes.

Timing for the RMP - Draft to be published the spring of 2010 or sooner. Then we have a year to go out and do comments and briefings. Marian and Lonny will keep the RAC informed and will contact RAC members on specific issues and may ask members to come to a meeting.

Minutes from September 2007 meeting: - Gerald Schlekeway moved to approve the minutes of the last meeting; seconded by Stan Kohn. Motion carried unanimously.

Election of Officers - Gerald Schlekeway moved that the Chair and Vice-Chair remain the same for one more year; seconded by Stan Kohn. Motion carried unanimously.

OHV Discussion - It was agreed to have Eric Hunt draft a letter discussing OHV travel, similar to what the Eastern RAC says and state that our RAC is concerned about the issue and go along with what was said about the need for education and enforcement.

Next meeting - Nov. 5, 2008 – Nov. 7, 2008 in Spearfish, SD. Think about agenda items. Marian is working to get a vegetation management plan for Ft. Meade which involves some timber removal, thinning and wildlife work out there. If the weather is decent, we could go out there and look at what they are doing. We will start at 1:00 p.m. on Nov. 5.

Motion to adjourn – Stanley Kohn; seconded by Lyndon Bucher. Motion carried unanimously.

Meeting adjourned 4:55 p.m.