



MONTANA/DAKOTAS BLM

Eastern Montana Resource Advisory Council

RAC MEETING MINUTES:

Billings, Montana: March 24, 2016

BLM Miles City Field Office Conference Room

Attending RAC Members:

Category 1: Lance Kalfell, Brad Clark, Lucas Line

Category 2: Cal Cumin, Rita Harding, Art Hayes III; Steve Hanson, Ed (Ralph) Bukoskey

Category 3: Harold Guse, Tim Lehman, Doug Kary, Sharla Sackman, Jenny Olson

Attending BLM staff: Mark Jacobsen, Diane Friez, Wendy Warren, Jim Sparks, David Wood, Lori Harbaugh, Jeff Herriford, Donna Bradley

Attending Public: Ken Holmlund, MT Representative, House District #38, John A Beardsley, Rae Ellen Bird

Members were welcomed and the meeting was brought to order, housekeeping items for the meeting were reviewed. New members were welcomed and introductions were made.

Election of Co-Chairperson for 2016. Brad will move from Co-Chairperson to the Chairperson position. Cal nominated Lance for Co-Chairperson position; Rita seconded the nomination. Rita called for a motion, unanimous vote in favor.

Amendment to the agenda

Prepare a letter supporting the grant application for the Milwaukee Bridge CTAP that the Prairie County Commissioners are submitting.

Montana Indemnity Selection- (Wendy Warren and Jim Sparks)

Wendy and Jim shared a PowerPoint presentation and history of the Enabling Act of Statehood for Montana that allows the state to obtain federal lands. Montana filed an application for the lands held in seven counties and total acreage of 16,000 acres. The PowerPoint is located on the BLM website for public viewing.

Public meetings are scheduled for May in Billings, Miles City and Havre. Current operators that have BLM allotments included in the state application were notified of the proposed transfer January 2016. The presentation was followed by a question and answer time from RAC members. The completion date is targeted for July 2017.

Mark will email the link to RAC members:

http://www.blm.gov/mt/st/en/prog/lands_realty/indemnity.html

Travel Management Plan Subcommittee report (Art Hayes III)

Report was from the subcommittee March 10 meeting. BLM is completing road inventories in Carter, Rosebud, Custer and Prairie counties. When funding is available, contracts will be issued for Garfield County. The members observed the BLM process of reviewing each individual road. They commended the team on the process and detailed review they used in determining the road assignment category.

The inventory is the first step in the process; public scoping and NEPA will be completed in 14 Travel Management Areas for Miles City Field Office. There are 10,000 miles of routes that will be reviewed. The Glendive OHV inventory has been completed and the plan will be completed in the winter of 2016.

The Billings Field Office will write decisions for 11 Travel Management Areas. The Acton area will be completed in 2016 and Grove Creek, Cottonwood, Warren and the Pryor's in 2017. Areas without a specific plan will be limited to existing roads. The inventory has been completed for the office and provides baseline information for future decisions.

Art recommended that the RACs role would be a 'go-between' with the public. Lance noted that the support gives validity to the BLM process. **The subcommittee recommends that affected landowners be permitted to review the roads and alternatives, prior to the public comment period. This would allow for private management needs and support for the process.**

If members want to travel with the inventory contractor this summer, contact Wendy Warren to arrange.

Pumpkin Creek Grazing update (Reyer Rens)

Reyer informed the RAC members and the public in attendance of the regulations that permit BLM to take application for the AUMs available on Pumpkin Creek. He reviewed the application process that MCFO followed to provide public notice and accept applications. The applications were evaluated for eligibility using mandatory and regulatory requirements, as well as the objectives identified by the RAC.

Mandatory requirements

- Have commensurate base property
- Be a citizen of the United States
- Satisfactory compliance history

Regulatory consideration

- Historical use of public land
- Proper use of rangeland resources
- Needs of applicants operation
- Public ingress/egress
- Topography
- Unique management situations
- Demonstrated stewardship to maintain, improve or protect the rangeland ecosystem

BLM scored the applications most heavily on the management plans that applicants submitted and how the plans would meet the RAC objectives.

Applications were accepted through December 24, 2015; 99 applications were received. Reyer was the BLM point of contact for all applicant visits and phone calls. The Interdisciplinary team was made up of BLM employees representing the Weed, Range, Archeology, Hydrology, Recreation, and Wildlife programs. The team listed the objectives to be reviewed and developed a scoring mechanism to provide a rationale for the decision. Applications were reviewed after the applicants names were redacted from the documents.

The scoring mechanism was rated zero to three.

- 0=the objective was not mentioned in the documents
- 1=the objective was mentioned, but how it fit into the management plan was not addressed
- 2=the objective was mentioned, and identified in the plan, but not how it would be implemented and the plan matched the proposed action
- 3= the objective was addressed in the management plan, was consistent with the current knowledge of the resource and likely would meet the objective by actions described in the plan

The next step for BLM is to develop alternatives and write an EA. The EA will be signed by the Field Manager. There is a 15 day protest period of the proposed action, followed by 30 days to appeal the decision. All applicants will receive the notice of the proposed decision with instructions for the protest and appeal process. The Field Office is involved in several large projects and may have only one specialist to represent specific concerns (hydrology, soils), this workload will determine when the document is issued.

Milwaukee Bridge Tour Review (Lance and Brad)

Lance provided the history of Prairie County obtaining the Bridge. This bridge provides the only motorized access into this area. The RAC finalized a letter supporting the Prairie County Commissioner efforts in completing grant (FLAP and CTAP) applications for funds to repair the Bridge. Rita made a motion to accept the letter as amended, Art seconded the motion. All RAC members voted to approve the motion.

Public Comment Period

Public in attendance but all declined the opportunity to speak.

RAC Member Briefings

Sharla Sackman

She was pleased that members visited Prairie County for the RAC tour and could experience the Badlands. She reminded members and BLM staff that 50% of the county land is managed by BLM and that it is important to keep that in mind when making decisions because of the effects on the local economy.

Rita Harding

Visited with groups she interacts with to hear positive or negative comments. The Audubon Society requested that she thank BLM for hearing their concerns and responding to those concerns regarding the Muddy Springs Wind Farm.

Art Hayes

Art stated that he recently became aware of hunters flying into public lands in the Birney area. He suggested that it should be considered in the Travel Management plans.

Steve Hanson

Steve reported that permittees had a good experience with the Travel Management contractors, but there was confusion regarding access from county roads to the public land. Users must have permission to cross private land to reach public land.

Harold Guse

There will be extended elk hunting seasons in some areas of the state; each FWP Region will develop their own plans. Hunting areas may be limited to private land or no National Forest but may include DNRC and BLM. Eastern Montana will allow the extended hunts only on private land.

Brad Clark

Despite rumors, coal mining is not dead. Companies are declaring bankruptcy, but that is to protect the investors. Expect that coal will remain part of the energy mix; the amount will be determined by energy prices and politics. No new tracts will be eligible for lease until the Interior Department completes a review of the program. Coal lease applications have been submitted. It is important that the review process continue on applications to prevent gaps in mining operations.

Lance Kalfell

Thanked BLM for arranging the tour of the Terry Badlands. The Montana Wilderness Association and Prairie County have updated the Badlands map and it includes the scenic view location. Pleased with the Pumpkin Creek application process and encouraged that it continues to move forward.

Cal Cumin

Sits on the Board of the Montana Wilderness Association and the MWA is in support of the Milwaukee Bridge project. The MWA will also be supporting the grant process for Prairie County to receive funds for the project.

Tim Lehman

He enjoyed the Badlands tour and the historical information provided as well as the scenic view.

Doug Kary

He noted that public groups and some states are pursuing taking control of federal lands. Montana has some groups that are interested in the change, but overall; Montana is not supportive of having the management of the land.

Ed Bukoskey

Recently became a member of the Private Land, Public Wildlife committee. Primarily working with Block Management lands at this time. He will take comments forward. He sees drone use in the Missouri Breaks being an issue this year.

Eastern Montana Dakota District Manager (Diane Friez)

Informed members that Jamie Connell, BLM Montana State Director is working a detail at the Oregon State office; Aiden Siedlitz is the Acting Montana State Director during her absence.

Presented members with the State Directors response to the RAC letter regarding the Coal program review. The WO review has scheduled public scoping meeting in April; it will be a three year process to complete the programmatic EIS. Updates are expected in 2016.

The Western Environmental Law Center has filed a lawsuit against implementing the MCFO RMP. The lawsuit is available for review on line. The complaint states that the plan is not in conformance with NEPA. MCFO and BiFO are working on the administrative record response. Todd Yeager is on assignment to the WO, working on the Regional Sage Grouse implementation plan.

Members will be notified of meetings related to the implementation. Bureau and State Workshops are scheduled this spring.

Montana offices are being inspected to identify potential security risks. Facilities will be remodeled to improve employee security.

Billings Field Office Manager (Jim Sparks)

The BiFO is working to fill critical vacancies.

The Wild Horse and Burro specialist position is vacant. Fertility control will continue, but the small gathers that were planned are on hold. Also vacant is the Recreation Planner, and Biologist positions.

There are two lawsuits in federal court regarding horse gathers. Briefings were due last week.

BiFO is having an Oil and Gas lease sale in October. The Sage Grouse habitat sites are not being offered. The RMP allows leasing in Sage Grouse habitat, but no surface occupancy can occur in harvesting the minerals. MCFO has six parcels and BiFO has one. The Billings parcel is in Golden Valley county and is split estate.

BLM and several Bike groups are continuing to cooperate on work at the Acton Recreation site. Users are coming from Bozeman and Kalispell, it's a destination site.

Trails are being built at Four Dances, will be considered as bike trails.

The formal implementation for a travel plan for Action will be released soon.

The Green Mountain timber project will be completed this summer. Timber work will also be completed around Roundup to improve forest health. Another location will be Enos Mountain near McCloud.

BiFO has hired a Fire Hand Crew of Veterans that will be housed in Billings. This program received special funding to get Veterans back to work. There are 16 Veteran members that will be able to complete projects around the state, but will return for fire suppression work.

Planning 2.0 Update (David Wood)

David presented an updated PowerPoint presentation on the status of WO draft regulations and the process of Planning 2.0. Public comments are being accepted for 60 days. Planning 2.0 is a process that allows BLM to become modern, and respond to the challenges of today in overall land management.

3 Goals:

- Allow BLM to respond differently to the issues, quicker and allow for planning
- Improve more meaningful collaboration with the public, appropriate timing of input
- Improve BLM's ability to implement actions across boundaries and landscapes

The Regulations will establish what will be accomplished, the detailed process will be written in manuals.

A webinar on Planning 2.0 has been posted on www.blm.gov/planning/plan2 for the public to view.

BLM Law Enforcement (Lori Harbaugh -MCFO, Jeff Herriford-BiFO)

Presented a PowerPoint presentation overview of the Law Enforcement program. They discussed coordination efforts and Memorandum of Understanding agreements with law enforcement agencies. Federal Regulations guide the actions that BLM Law Enforcement can take. There are ten Law Enforcement Rangers in Montana. They noted their appreciation of reports from the public and permittees on violations that they are able to act on.

Acting Miles City Field Office Manager (Wendy Warren)

MCFO staff often has responsibility in all of EMDD and BiFO. Position vacancies are currently being filled or are to be announced; positions are Hydrologist, Soil Scientist, Wildlife Biologist and Petroleum Engineer.

Employees of R Montana are completing a cultural inventory at Reynolds Battlefield.

Training for Fire Resource Advisors was completed last week. They report to fire and identify resource issues during or after a fire.

Construction on the Butte Pipeline is scheduled for Aug 1-Dec 1, 2016. This will replace an existing pipeline and the line will remain in the current corridor.

Miles Community College plans to build an Equestrian center and an indoor rodeo arena on currently-held BLM land. Currently there is an outdoor arena and barns for the rodeo team. They have a Recreation and Public Purpose Act permit for the current facility; at issue is third party use of the new facility.

The Interior Secretary has issued a statement that BLM will complete a discretionary programmatic environmental impact statement regarding the Coal leasing program. There are exceptions for leases that are less than 160 acres or emergency leasing to meet contract obligations and necessary to maintain average level of production in the next three years. All new or modification applications that exceed this will not be fully processed.

Prescribed fire and mechanical treatment projects are being completed at Yarger Butte. The Knowlton fire projects were fully funded for 2016.

Funding for Sage Grouse conservations has been received. Seasonal employees will be monitoring allotments for concerns. District employees have developed a monitoring program that may be adopted for Sage Grouse monitoring. Due to the status of the work MCFO has been selected as a pilot office for utilizing tablets for field work.

Next Meeting:

July 13-14 @ Pompey's Pillar

Tour suggestions

Urban Recreation management in BiFO area

Acton

Sun Dance

17 Mile

Shepherd Ah-Nei

Pompey's Pillar

Future Agenda items:

Send requests to Brad or Lance

Coal Program review

Travel Management sub-committee updates and Presentation by Irma



BLM MONTANA/DAKOTAS

Eastern Montana

Resource Advisory Council

RAC MEETING MINUTES:

Billings, Montana: July 14, 2016 8:00 AM

Hampton Inn Lewis Conference Room

Attending RAC Members: Cal Cumin, Brad Clark, Larry Pilster, Art Hayes III, Ralph (Ed) Bukoskey, Harold Guse, Lucas Line, Doug Kary

Attending Public: None

Attending BLM staff: Mark Jacobsen, Diane Friez, Wendy Warren, Jim Sparks, Ken Schmid, Irv Leach, John Carlson, Greg Liggett, Jon Raby, Donna Bradley, MT Sage Grouse Habitat- Therese Hartman

Members were welcomed and the meeting was brought to order. Members with expiring terms were acknowledged. Harold was honored for his service and presented with a BLM blanket. His informed and timely input on public land issues was appreciated.

MT/DKs, Statewide Fire program update: Ken Schmid MSO **Fire Management Officer,**

Ken presented a slide show overview of the Fire program and included an update of the current fire season.

The initial attack agency varies depending if the fire is located in Eastern or Western Montana and North or South Dakota. The public land may be protected by the FS, FWS, BLM, DNRC or County Fire Departments depending on the agreements in place. BLM pays cooperating counties for protection. All the agencies work collaboratively to fight fires.

BLM resources are available for assignment across the state and may be moved out of state for emergency support. There are 20 fire engines, two each, exclusive –use helicopters and water tenders; one large air tanker base and 1 large cache; also three single engine air tankers and one 20 person Type 2 1A crew (Vet Focus). The Dispatch centers are inter-agency.

Ken reviewed the best management practices for fighting fire in Priority Sage Grouse Habitat. Efforts are made to extinguish the fire as quickly as possible and unburned islands where fire has moved through are left intact.

Human life is our number one priority in determining what action will be taken when fighting fires. Structures, homes, infrastructure, roads, railroads and transmission lines

are key factors to prioritize fire fighter efforts. Our top natural resource priority is Sage Grouse Habitat.

Veterans Fire Crew Program-Irv Leach, BiFO Fire Management Officer

There are three types of national hand crews made up of 18-22 people. This Veteran Crew is a Type II IA team. A Type 1 crew is made up of 'hotshot' employees that are self-sufficient and have more than one year experience; the team is managed nationally. A Type II IA crew is self-sufficient, usually made up of career and seasonal employees and has supplies and equipment to manage an initial attack fire for up to 48 hours. All first year employees make up Type II firefighter crews and receive logistical support and supervision. Funding for the program was received from the BLM National Office. BLM and Team Rubicon coordinate training for the Veteran's Crews. Team Rubicon is a volunteer veteran emergency response training program. This has been a very successful experience for BLM; expect the hiring process to improve and that BLM will have more Veteran teams. Currently, there are seven Veteran Firefighter crews across the United States.

Disturbance Cap in Sage Grouse Habitat-Therese Hartman (Montana Sage Grouse Oversight Team) , MSO-Division of Resources-John Carlson

BLM will transfer all analysis for any disturbances from any BLM projects to the Sage Grouse Habitat Disturbance Cap program. This will ensure we use a consistent methodology for decisions about habitat disturbance regardless of the land ownership; the analysis process and management direction will be the same for disturbance levels. Members viewed a slide show presented by Therese. Sage Grouse Habitat disturbance is to be limited to 5%. Private land makes up 70% of priority habitat lands and it's important that producers are conserving Sagebrush in the priority habitat areas. The Montana Sage Grouse plan mirrors the program in Wyoming which has been successful for eight years. Funding is available for improving Sage Grouse habitat; projects approved have been for conifer removal treatments and conservation easements. These improvements may result in credits to the state that can be used if impacts can't be avoided, mitigated or reclaimed. The debit/credit criteria haven't been determined at this time.

The website <https://sagegrouse.mt.gov> has current information, maps, frequently asked questions section and how to submit projects etc. All land owners should submit applications for any project that will be placed in Sage Grouse Habitat. If the project is for multiple years, the project may be granted temporary approval, to be reviewed prior to work being started because Sage Grouse aren't static.

The possible listing of Sage Grouse will be reviewed in five years. It is imperative that landowners make application to the Sage Grouse Disturbance Cap Team so data will be available to FWS to make a determination.

Public Comment Period No members of the public were in attendance

RAC Member Discussion

Harold- The Sage Grouse hunting season has been reinstated and special elk permits will be issued in a 'shoulder' season. The elk permits will start August 15 but may close during Archery season. Permits will be limited to specific lands in each Region, depending on the Commissioners preference, i.e. Region 5 will be on private land and very limited Forest Service. There will be an Initiative on the Montana ballot that would ban trapping on federal and public lands in the state.

Ed- the Black tail Wildlife Management Area in Greater Yellowstone area historically had 2000 elk. Sportsman determined that elk no longer use the area, even for winter range. The State Brucellosis committee has proposed grazing 200 cattle for a short period of time, using Crystallex supplement barrels to move the cattle through the area, breaking up the thatch.

Larry- Appreciated the speaker presentations that were on the agenda.

Doug- Recent decisions by the Federal Government regarding coal leasing, and mineral rights negatively impact Montana through the loss of jobs, industry and revenues. The repercussions will have far reaching affects across the state.

Cal- Thanked the firefighters for their response to a wildfire near his home.

Lucas- He was pleased with the cooperation between Montana and BLM in managing Sage Grouse habitat; requested an update on Pumpkin Creek Ranch grazing applications.

Art- Requested an update on the Travel Management inventories. He requested that a corridor of BLM land with river access be signed to prevent trespass on private lands.

Brad- Informed members of topics that were discussed at the April State RAC chairperson meeting.

- The time WO takes to approve RAC member replacements affects the effectiveness of the RAC committee.
- Missoula FO will utilize the BLM 2.0 Planning process as a test in their RMP process.
- The American Prairie Reserve will fund the environmental analysis for the allotments that are being considered to permit Bison grazing.

He attended the Sage Grouse focus group meeting. The policies and instructions for Sage Grouse Habitat Management written in response to the WO directives were presented to attendees. RAC chairpersons at the meeting expressed concern that the public comments and Field Office plan of action to manage Sage Grouse habitat were lost and ignored when the decision was issued at the WO level and implemented into all the Resource Management Plans.

MT/DKs Paleontology Program Update: Greg Liggett

Presented a Paleontology slideshow presentation; He reviewed the Acts and Laws that encourage scientific management and protection of paleontological resources.

This year 93 research permits have been issued, the average number is 70. Items discovered on BLM land can be preserved and viewed at the permitted entity, but ownership remains the property of BLM. Any evidence of past life is considered a fossil. This includes burrows, bones, and plants, tracks, etc. A recent BLM find is a Starfish. It will be named as a new species; the full body find is very rare. Research teams return for several years in order to clear and remove bones.

The Smithsonian is renovating its dinosaur exhibit. A temporary exhibit of Hell Creek dinosaurs is on view until the renovation is completed. It is legal to collect casual amounts of common invertebrates and plants for personal use in reasonable quantities. The Forest Service allows 25 pounds per person per day for casual use. Proposed BLM regulations may be posted in the Federal Register for comments later this year. All vertebrate finds must have a permit to remove from BLM land. All indication of past life of a vertebrate requires a permit to dig; the fossil footprints of a dinosaur must be permitted.

Montana State Office Update: Jon Raby

RAC members introduced themselves to the Associate State Director.

Jon shared his experience that led to his current position.

Jon discussed BLM topics of interest and activities that have received national focus.

- Burns Oregon
- Bison grazing on an allotment assigned to the Malta FO
 - Bison grazing has been authorized on BLM land since 1978
 - Currently 33 bison grazing permits issued across the U.S.
- Sage Grouse
 - Policies to be issued in 4/6 weeks
 - \$1.5 million has been issued for new Sage Grouse positions; staffing levels and workload will be monitored closely over the next few years to determine true workload-new versus different work
- Mineral leasing
 - Oil and Gas lease scheduled for October
 - WO Programmatic review for Coal leasing
 - Public comment meetings; none in Montana
 - MSO has responded to WO requests regarding proposed exemptions
- DNRC aircraft don't meet the Federal requirements
 - Through joint command of fires and coordination with the State of Montana, the aircraft will be utilized in 2016
- Nationally, BLM received \$40 million for Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation and Monitoring

- Anticipate similar funding for FY17 as this year, but likely a continuing resolution
- Durfee Hills fence
 - Billings and Lewistown FO have agreed on the trespass settlements

Billings Field Office Update: Jim Sparks

Acton Recreation Site

- A local bike group continues to construct trails on the area
- Level of difficulty varies from recreational loops to extreme rides

The Wild Horse gather planned for 2016 has been cancelled due to the vacancy of the WHB Specialist position.

Jim reviewed the 2011 Exxon spill in the Yellowstone River. Exxon and BLM are currently negotiating the settlement for Natural Resource and Restoration Damage. BLM may be the lead on land management issues. Funding is available for purchasing easements etc.

Jim requested RAC members' help to identify opportunities and projects that would meet the BLM objectives in restoring sites.

Travel management was completed as part of the Resource Management Plan, but decisions weren't issued to implement them. BiFO is currently working in the Acton area and the decisions will be completed this year and implemented in 2017. The Pryor Mountain site specific management will be assessed in 2017. BLM requests members provide comments they receive from constituents regarding recreation and travel management in this area.

TMP Schedule for the BiFO:

- Acton: 2016
- Cottonwood/Grove Creek/Pryor Mountains/Warren: 2017
- Gage Done: 2018
- Horse thief/Shepherd/Mill Creek: 2019
- South Hills: 2020
- Tin Can Hill: 2020
- General Area/remainder of field office areas: 2020

Miles City Field Office Update: Wendy Warren for Todd Yeager

Todd is touring Eastern Montana with WO Sage Grouse representatives. The Sage Grouse habitat in Montana varies from the Great Basin landscape. These differences are important in meeting objectives and implementing action for Sage Grouse management.

The Pumpkin Creek environmental assessment is estimated to be completed next month. Wendy and Reyer Rens will finish reviews and forward it to Todd for final edits and signature.

The FO has three Travel management inventory contracts issued. Letters requesting access across private lands have been sent to affected permittees. A second post card mailing will be sent to permittees that didn't respond. The final attempt to contact non-responders will be by phone. If permission isn't granted, aerial photography will be used to determine roads and trails on the allotment. Any roads that aren't identified will not be included in the travel plan or considered for use. September through April, the travel management team will evaluate the inventories completed this summer.

Cultural information continues to be gathered for the Indemnity allotments that the state of Montana has identified for exchange.

Fuels mastication projects are beginning in Knowlton and Mosby areas. The EA is in final review for mechanical treatments at Zook Creek. The project has been funded by the tribes and they will provide crews to complete the thinning.

WO budgeted well for the Fuels program to develop multiple use projects for improving public land through thinning projects, prescribed fires, weed control and other projects. Paul Pauley has formed ID teams to identify projects that will meet the criteria for improving land health on a multiple use scale. Five projects are planned for FY2017 and funding has been approved.

Senator Daines Representative met with FWP, BLM, Powder River County, and the Army Corp of Engineers. The county is seeking funding for the Moorhead Bridge maintenance. The county has an easement for the bridge and owns the right of way, so the federal agencies aren't able to provide funding for the project. The BLM was able to suggest options that the county can pursue.

The Short Pines OHV area had a successful cleanup day thanks to about 50 volunteers. BLM will be writing a Travel and Recreation Management plan for the area.

Prairie County is seeking funding from the Treasure State Endowment and the Federal Land Access programs for the Milwaukee Bridge maintenance project. Diane has signed off in support of the applications to these programs.

Eastern Montana/Dakotas District Update: Diane Friez

We are at the time of the fiscal year that staff is working to wrap up projects and issue contracts. The District hired about 120 seasonal employees to fight fires and support all the other programs. The facilities are being evaluated for improved security measures and upgrades will be made at the offices.

Next Meeting:

Thursday, December 15, 2016; Miles City

Future Agenda items:

Irma Nansel- Travel Management status