



## MONTANA/DAKOTAS BLM Eastern Montana Resource Advisory Council

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### **RAC MEETING MINUTES: Billings, Montana: March 4, 2009**

**RAC Attendees:** Bernard Rose, Lance Kalfell, Shanara Spang-Gion, Chuck Hauptman, Ernest Strum, Thomas Hohn, Larry Pilster, Jerry Kaiser, Carl Siroky, Colby Branch, Howard Boggess

**Staff in Attendance:** Jim Sparks, Elaine Raper, Doug Epperly, Mary Apple, Mark Jacobsen

#### **Billings Field Office Update (Jim Sparks)**

The Meeteetse Spires acquisition has been approved. The Land and Water Conservation Fund can purchase land from willing sellers and then transfer ownership to the BLM. An offer is being made and the Conservation Fund is negotiating with the land owner. It is anticipated that the offer will be accepted.

BLM and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks own some farm acreage that has been leased in the past. Montana FWP, Pheasants Forever, Habitat Forever and the BLM have formed a partnership that will provide funding for equipment, operations and salary for a habitat technician. The habitat technician will farm these areas and complete projects as needed.

OHV management will be addressed in the RMP. A subcommittee will assist in this portion of the plan.

Members interested in serving are **Jerry Kaiser, Colby Branch, Howard Boggess and Carl Siroky**. Due to lack of a quorum, they will be ratified at the next meeting. Tasks may include; review of mapping efforts to develop GIS layers, OHV travel planning and contacting user groups.

Improved signage at Shepherd Ah-Nei, Acton and Horsethief has been completed.

Grazing permits renewed with the established Standard & Guidelines will be completed this year.

Signal Peak Energy LLC has applied to lease about 2700 acres of federal coal lands. The surface is primarily private. The Bull Mountain Coal Mine is an underground mine and will benefit Musselshell County and the Roundup area.

The BLM lease must be issued prior to the state beginning their permitting process. Due to the timeframe the company is trying to maintain, the BLM has elected to complete an Environmental Assessment instead of an EIS. The alternatives and mitigation will be specific and thorough.

The Pryor Mountain wild horse herd stands at about 190 adult horses. Gathers have been approved for FY08 and FY09; the FY08 gather wasn't accomplished and FY09 gather hasn't received funding at this time.

The total numbers to be removed would be 98 horses. This would decrease numbers to a more manageable size for this area but would still be above the established appropriate management level. The USFS and BLM continue to work on a Herd Management Plan.

Two of BiFO's priority access issues have been resolved: Land at Weatherman Draw was bought and donated to the BLM and the FWP purchased the River Ranch which provided access to a large block of public lands. The staff will determine which areas will become priority access points now.

The Lilly Pad Lake trail parking lot cost estimate is likely very high (in the 100's of thousands) and the proposal provides additional, direct access to National Forest land. The BLM lands associated already have access. The BLM is working with the county to investigate pullouts on the current road.

Bernie and Mack Cole have been working with the RMP team to identify goals and objectives. This is the next step before developing alternatives.

New committee volunteers for areas with Special Management Designation that will be included in the RMP (ACEC, Wilderness, Rivers, streams) are: **Bernie Rose, Ernest Strum**. They will be ratified at the next RAC meeting when a full quorum is present.

### **Miles City Field Office Update (Elaine Raper):**

The SEIS was signed Dec 30, 2008, amending the RMP in the Powder River Basin. To date, no lawsuits or appeals have been filed. This will follow adaptive management for O&G development. Wildlife populations, air and water quality will be monitored, if thresholds are reached, management will change. The MCFO has not received large numbers of drilling permit requests, to date.

Montana is working with three drilling companies primarily located on or near the Wyoming line.

The Cedar Creek Anticline continues to be developed; We anticipate 80 wells for Cedar Creek and 200 overall for the MCFO.

Shanny asked about the Corral Creek Pod: Montana has suspended processing the permit, BLM will continue with the application unless it's withdrawn by the company.

The management decisions from the SEIS amends the current RMPs for MCFO and BiFO so that is being incorporated in the RMP as the current management situation. It will be included as part of the "Current Management Alternative"

Professor Scott Wilson and Dr. David Naugle from the University of Montana continue to conduct sage grouse viability studies and model management actions for populations.

The second phase of the Pumpkin Creek Land Exchange didn't raise any new concerns at the public meetings. Efforts continue towards completing the exchange for the remaining acres. The federal government retains the mineral rights on the exchanged sites and obtains them on the private acres. The area will be good for riparian restoration, grazing management, hunting, recreation and outdoor classrooms. Pheasants Forever and the National Wild Turkey Federation are interested in partnerships.

The fuels management program continues to implement fuels treatment in the Ekalaka, Knowlton, North Pines (Glendive) and Wildhorse areas (Rosebud County). They are thinning trees, creating fire breaks, selling timber, completing vegetation treatments and prescribed fires.

The weeds program continues to work with counties on noxious weed issues. Cheat grass is not yet a priority for the weed or fuels programs in the MCFO area.

The Access Committee has identified possible land exchanges, travel management planning areas and easements possibilities. Inexpensive, low impact access projects being considered are; a virtual/no-impact trail at Sand Arroyo ACEC and Seven-Blackfoot; a short access road in the Wibaux-Glendive area.

The local Pheasants Forever chapter has proposed a project at the Matthews Recreation Site near Miles City. To plant and reestablish native vegetation and shrubs for game bird and other wildlife use, such as nesting cover.

Bernie asked and verified that WSA's are addressed in the RMP.

Lance questioned the status of access to the Terry Badlands; the issue of the Scenic Overlook Road status is yet to be determined by the county as they await professional legal counsel.

### **Pryor Horses (Howard Boggess)**

Howard represented himself, the Cloud Foundation, Crow Agency and the Pryor Mountain Coalition-- and gave a presentation on the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse herd.

Concerns:

1. Current herd size not able to maintain an adequate gene pool;
  2. Contraception interrupts the cycle, resulting in late born foals that can't withstand the winters;
  3. Removal of older horses limits the herd from "learning" the range for survival;
  4. Fences between USFS and BLM are problematic;
  5. Lack of water and short growing season mean inadequate graze.
- Howard's goal is to expand the range and decrease human involvement in the management of the herd.
  - He proposed reseeding the range with native grasses and installing water guzzlers.
  - Horses are a valuable asset and could be used to promote tourism.

## **Public comment period**

No public commented.

## **USFS Presentation (Doug Epperly)**

Doug discussed the agreement with the BLM to utilize the RAC for USFS issues.

- The Beartooth Ranger District Travel Management Plan is completed.
- The focus is the Pryor Mountain area; USFS will install route signs and patrol sites, some maintenance projects.
- USFS may consider fee increases in the future; but all adjustments are on hold for FY09.
- The Gallatin and Custer National Forests may share leadership positions. This will be better defined over the next year by the USFS.

## **RAC Discussion Period**

Other topics as discussed:

- Kent Williams, Chairperson, has tendered his resignation. Members discussed if there was a need to have a chair. All members in attendance were in favor of not having a chairperson. The RAC will put to a formal vote when a full quorum is available.
- **Larry Pilster** will replace Kent and join **Gerry Reichert** representing the RAC with the MCFO RMP working group.
- Colby asked if game retrieval options were being considered in the RMP.
- Bernie suggested possible seasonal closures of some roads and Howard commented that closure could be limited to when roads are muddy—in relation to Pumpkin Creek recreation area planning.
- Discussion regarding the Pryor Mountain wild horses included the possibility and cost of fencing the range, cost and benefit of genetic testing of the animals and if the range would be sole use or could be expanded.

- Chuck passed out an O&G article that was an example of media bias by the author. He asked that members take time research topics themselves, not accept all information as fact.

Members requested topics for the next meeting: Status of the MCFO RMP, game retrieval options, BLM education programs available to the public

### **Wrap-up**

- The next meeting will be May 26-27 in Billings.
- There will be a field trip to Shepherd Ah-Nei at 3 pm Wednesday the 26th. If members plan to attend the trip, please report to the Montana State Office. More details to follow as they become available.



# MONTANA/DAKOTAS BLM

## Eastern Montana Resource Advisory Council

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## **RAC MEETING MINUTES: Billings, Montana: May 27, 2009**

### **RAC Attendees:**

Bernard Rose, Ernest Strum, Lance Kalfell, Ray Trumpower, Colby Branch, Larry Pilster, Shannara Spang-Gion, Gerald Reichert, Chuck Hauptman, Tom Hohn, Howard Boggess

**Staff in Attendance:** Elaine Raper, Jim Sparks, Mark Jacobsen, Wendy Warren, Kim Prill, Joni Packard (USFS)

Members were welcomed and the meeting was brought to order, housekeeping items and ground rules for the meeting were reviewed. Minutes from previous meeting were accepted.

## **Field Manager Updates**

### **Elaine Raper, MCFO**

The RMP is being prepared and will combine and revise the Big Dry and Powder River RMPs. Sage Grouse habitat concerns are being incorporated into the alternatives. Other offices in the MT/DAK are working on RMPs and the goal is to have some consistency in the plans. Larry and Gerry are on the RMP sub-committee and will be requested to participate in July.

The Theodore Roosevelt Partnership has requested no oil and gas leasing in the Missouri Breaks area. They want to provide access for recreational use throughout the state, but the Missouri Breaks area discussion came up frequently in the discussion. Malta Field Office and Miles City will consider this for the RMP.

Lance asked why the Miles City RMPs were being combined. Originally, the two areas were separate offices, now have been combined into one. Portions of the land management plans conflicted between the two, the offices were combined and the decisions for the public land use should be consistent.

Shannara asked how much land was being considered by the TRP request. Actual acreage information wasn't available, but it includes a band along the river and the CMR.

We are wrapping up the fuels reduction project in the Pine Hills subdivision. Another project is being proposed for the Wild Horse area, located between Rosebud and Hathaway. Some public comments are not in favor of burning. Mechanical and prescribed burns may be used to reduce fuels in this area. Have been burning slash piles in the Ekalaka hills that were left from the timber sale. New this year is a cooperative project with Ft Keogh in the Terry Bench area. The goal is to stimulate native plant growth.

Eighty seasonal firefighters will report next week.

Plan to finalize the Pumpkin Creek exchange this summer. Interim work has been completed on the parking areas and some unsafe roads have been closed. The riparian areas and uplands are showing good recovery. The riparian areas are getting overgrown and neighbors are expressing fire concerns. Request the RAC to make recommendations for use of the area.

Chuck asked about FWP telling landowners to leave sagebrush intact to benefit sage grouse. Elaine wasn't familiar with that directive.

Larry mentioned that the FWP is conducting sage grouse counts; need scientific information to make decisions. He invited the RAC to visit his place to see areas of plant recovery when using spraying, grazing and no-grazing management.

Howard commented that the primary winter food source for sage grouse is the sagebrush leaves. Nesting is more successful if sagebrush is available; the birds need a good understory too.

Elaine stated that sage grouse are key factors for development in the Powder River Basin. The SEIS addresses structure placement, development, population viability and actions to be taken to maintain populations. The FWP with BLM are continuing to do more tracking. The economic situation has decreased the activity in Powder River Basin.

The Keystone Pipeline project is to be built next year. The state dept is the leading agent on the EIS, they've begun scoping meetings. The BLM will provide a 30-year right of way, the BLM fee is low compared to the private landowner easements. This fee is set nationally.

The EIS for the Bison natural gas pipeline from WY to ND has been contracted expect it to be built in 2010. The Pathfinder pipeline has been dropped.

Recreation in partnership with the MT Plant Society is working for access to the Sand Arroyo trail. Would like to open a small portion of the road and have a low impact trail for 4-6 miles.

The Glendive OHV area is similar to Shepherd Ah Nei Recreation site. We have implemented some short term mitigation management since the congressional inquiry. Concerns are riding from public to private land and trash. Increased Law Enforcement and staff presence will be at the site this summer. We've hired a seasonal that will be there to visit with users. This is an open area; 1800 acres are completely open for use. The RMP will address future management, possible fencing, restrictions etc.

MCFO has the largest outfitter and guide program in MT. We are seeing increased interest in the public land and the use of public lands; resulting in access issues.

Gerald asked if the email fire activity reports will continue for the FY09 fire season; suggested increasing the recipient list.

Fidelity has presented two plans of development for next year. Shanny noted that she is a CBM staff member for the Northern Cheyenne.

### **Jim Sparks, BiFO**

The landowner for the Meeteetse Spires Acquisition has accepted to our offer. The Conservation Fund will purchase the property and in turn BLM will purchase half this year and then purchase the remaining acreage the following year. The first purchase is blocked by BLM land so this is not a land exchange.

Travel management Fish, Wildlife and Parks has been signing public land tracts for BLM and has been signing at heavily used areas and scattered tracks off county roads. The Montana Conservation Corp will help with repairing trails and signing.

BLM will accomplish about 110 grazing permit renewals with Standard & Guideline evaluations. BiFO will not meet the goal of 100% completion because of about 20 that require work with the ranchers that the allotments are not meeting standards.

The Western Watershed Project is interested in range management actions in the Billings area.

The Signal Peak coal mine Bull Mountain coal lease application is the one of the largest construction projects in the west. Through the BLM lease application, The BLM is the gatekeeper for the company to get to more private land coal reserves. The draft EA received in March was inadequate and we should receive a new document soon. Landowners may have expressed concern over the BLM lease and could appeal the BLM permit; hope to build mitigation for the landowners concern into the EA and permit.

The Pryor Mountain Wild Horse and Burro Herd Area Management Plan management document has been finalized and went out last week. The AML have been increased to

120 horses, up from previous level of 95. Current herd level is at 195 horses. The Forest Service will rebuild the boundary fence of the herd management area. Approval has been granted to conduct a gather early this fall. Estimate 60 horses may be removed from the range. The herd will be managed for Spanish characteristics, sex ratios etc., not just numbers.

Work continues on the RMP. Public meetings for travel management are scheduled for Roundup, Billings, Bridger and Lovell.

Ernie requested an update of the Lilly Lake road status.

Jim said they'd received appeals of the last O&G lease sale for the BiFO. They've received a couple of applications to drill in the Red Lodge/Columbus area.

Requests for utilizing the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) have been submitted for approval. The BLM will receive \$300 million. The criteria and accountability requirements for these projects have been established. The projects must meet high mission goals, provide the largest number of jobs and provide lasting value for the public. The projects selected must also promote renewable energy, help youth and be used for habitat restoration or recreation improvements in treasured landscapes. BLM also received \$15 mil for hazardous fuel projects. The projects funds are to be obligated by the end of the fiscal year, but can be built later. The National Committee selected the projects from submitted proposals. The MT/DAK received \$18 mil. Funds can't be mixed; records and accounting are to follow a transparent process.

#### **Projects for BiFO:**

- New asphalt and sealing on the road at Pompey's Pillar.
- Improve heat source at Pompey's Pillar, the ground source isn't adequate to heat the building.
- Seal the new access road and reclaim the old road at the Pillar.
- Install culverts at the Crooked Creek road where it crosses Gyp Springs Creek
- Russian Olive/Salt Cedar control on Clarks Fork and Yellowstone Rivers and recreation sites

#### **Projects for MCFO:**

- Facility repairs, ware yard storage buildings, energy repairs and improve handicap accessibility
- Trail repair at Howrey and Matthews recreation sites
- Howrey Island has more concentrated management, camping, and noxious weed
- Habitat restoration to decrease encroaching conifers in the Ekalaka and Knowlton areas for turkeys and other species

The projects submitted for ARRA must have been processed through NEPA and ready to go. Projects must meet the established timeframes. MCFO was all deferred projects due to lack of funding. The request had to be for a new source of funds, not previously contracted out.

## **Wendy Warren--MCFO Engineering Projects:**

Reviewed completed projects in 2008. Lilly Lake coop to get a parking lot, handicapped accessible trail at Howrey Island and Fire stations, Pompey's Pillar, chlorinator at the Jordan fire station and gravel and fencing at Shepherd Ah-Nei. Dam verification; sites identified and status documented. Condition assessments are required every five years. Completed; 30 pits, 9 miles of pipeline, 8 miles of fence and 9 wells (average 200 ft deep) on the grazing allotments.

Projects funded or to be contracted for FY09

### **Miles City**

Helicopter Pad at the Hangar  
Pumpkin Creek Cattle guards  
Benches at Howrey Island  
Improved drainage at Glendive Short Pines area  
Backup Generators at the MCO office  
Sewer pipe repair at the Jordan fire station  
Siding of trailers at Ekalaka and Camp crook  
Shelving for storage at the hangar  
Restoration of reservoirs

### **Billings FO**

Vault toilets at Pompey's Pillar  
Drilling well  
Interpretive site on river walls  
Culvert blow out at Crooked Creek replacement  
Air conditioning for Billings Fire Station

### **Ft Howes**

ID team to select location for Fire Station

### **Range Projects**

9 pipelines  
15 reservoirs  
5 fence (1= 14 miles)  
5 wells

### **Sub-committee membership discussion**

Subcommittees must have a member from each category; the RAC may approve a non-member to be on the subcommittee (i.e. a volunteer)  
Mark provided the bylaws and SOP handout. The RAC needs to fill vacancies on the subcommittees. Next meeting will review subcommittees and members

### **Public comment period**

No public attended

## **Kim Prill--Billings RMP/Pompey's Pillar RMP and travel management**

There are two subcommittees that are involved with this; Travel Management and Special Management for the RMP. Public meetings have been scheduled for OHV sites and usage; requested the RAC subcommittee to help with criteria for route evaluations.

She would like the subcommittee to meet before June 19th to discuss the management goals of 11 routes. Carl Siroky has resigned from the RAC and submitted names of people who would be interested in serving on the committee.

Doug Kary has applied to be a new RAC member; Allan Eigen and Rob Swenson (is an appraiser) in Category 3. Colby and Larry stated the group needed to have OHV expertise and contact with user groups. The group preferred to have the committees made up of RAC members. Kim estimated the subcommittee would meet twice per month for about two hours each time, June through September. Travel for members would be reimbursed, volunteers aren't eligible for reimbursement. Phone conferences and email may be used to decrease travel requirements. The ID team will review the GIS layers, identify critical habitat and research the information available, the RAC will need to do outreach, report outside comments and opinions and work with the team to select alternatives.

### **OHV subcommittee discussion:**

Bernard nominated Lance for Category 3 and Ernest seconded; all in favor, motion carried.

Colby nominated Doug Kary and Bernie seconded; all in favor, motion carried.

### **Travel Transportation subcommittee discussion:**

RAC approved the members that were nominated at the last meeting.

Colby, Howard and Gerry; all in favor, motion carried.

RAC members chose to fill all the positions with RAC members, not volunteers.

### **Special Designation subcommittee discussion:**

This subcommittee will help make decisions regarding Wild and Scenic, Critical Concern, Wilderness designations and other special designation areas. Process meetings will be in June and update sessions will be in July and August.

Category 1 Colby nominated Chuck and Tom, Larry seconded; all in favor.

Colby nominated and Gerry seconded ratification of Bernie, Ernest and Mack; all in favor.

### **Summary:**

Billings/Pompeys Pillar RAC Special Designations Sub-Committee: Cat. 1: Thomas Hohn and Charles Hauptman; Cat. 2: Ernie Strum and Bernard Rose; Cat. 3: Mack Cole

### **MCFO RMP subcommittee:**

There will be a number of documents to look at and will help determine the preferred alternative;

Colby nominated, Shanara seconded; ratification of Gerry and Larry to fill category 1 & 2; all in favor.

Larry nominated, Ray seconded- Shanara for Category 3; all in favor.

**Summary:**

MCFO RMP subcommittee: Cat. 1: Larry Pilster Cat. 2: Gerry Reichert Cat. 3: Shanara Spang

**Shepherd Ah-Nei on-site discussion:**

Members discussed Shepherd Ah-Nei visit. Similar issues at the Glendive Short Pine OHV area near Glendive and the Pumpkin Creek Ranch Recreation Area; Miles City should use the lessons learned for management of these areas. Designated trails versus open riding, liability issues-if areas closed, pressure will move to other locations, what do we need to provide? What are the local wishes?

Communities will benefit economically from hiking, hunting and OHV areas. Small communities don't have the groups or number of citizens to work with partnerships. Communities are looking for diversity of interests to create sites to keep shops open and encourage tourism.

Howard expressed concern that the cultural aspects won't be represented when he completes his term in September.

**Joni Packard: USFS R1 Recreation Site fee program**

USFS is responsible for 1,700 sites, 400 of them are fee sites. Fees are collected for cabin rentals, camping and special recreation permits (outfitter and guide, cross country ski travel, ski rendezvous).

A regional fee schedule has been proposed. The pricing tool will incorporate private sector fees and the amount of use a site receives. There will be a range that the local line officer will select the fee from. The fees are to help cover maintenance and administrative costs. The RAC will be asked to look at the sites and determine if the fee is still appropriate for with the area economics.

**Meeting wrap-up next meeting dates:**

Next meeting will be Miles City; with August 26 being the field trip to Glendive Short Pine OHV area and customary social and the regular meeting on Thursday, the 27th.