

Western Montana Resource Advisory Council Minutes

February 20, 2013

Butte Field Office

BLM Western Zone Staff Present: David Abrams, Cornelia (“Cornie”) Hudson, Tanya Thrift, Tim LaMarr, Rick Waldrup, Brad Colin, and Rick Hotaling.

RAC Members Present: Ted Antonioli, Jack King, David Krueger, Paul Putz, Whitney Tilt, Mike Connors, Steve Flynn, Michael Gibson, Koy Holland, Dave Kirsch, Katherine Looney, Mark Sweeney, Bob Walker, and Alan Weltzien

RAC Members Absent: Sam Samson

David Abrams, RAC coordinator, opened the meeting at 9:00 a.m. with a review of safety items, travel reimbursement, agenda topics, and meeting ground rules.

New (incoming) RAC members were welcomed and all members briefly introduced themselves and explained why they were interested in serving on the RAC.

Henneberry House Fee Presentation:

Rick Waldrup, Recreation Planner with the Dillon Field Office, made a presentation on the historic Henneberry House 15 miles south of Dillon on the Beaverhead River. The BLM has been working on the property for the past 18 months in an effort to restore it as a recreational rental for the benefit of public use. According to the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA), any time we intend to implement a new fee, we need approval from the RAC. Rick also thought this would be a good time to reconsider existing recreation fees—primarily at sites along the Madison River. The fees haven’t been changed since 2004. We hope the RAC will be able to come back with a recommendation at its next meeting and, if all goes well, we can start implementing the fees next Fiscal Year.

Alan asked if the RAC would be making a decision at the meeting today; Rick Waldrup said no, there is still time for the RAC to consider the proposed fees. Cornie mentioned that her office had not received many public comments, even after a news release had gone out.

Bob mentioned that the RAC had studied the Butte Field Office recreation fees last year and came back with a recommendation. He expected the same with the Dillon Field Office.

Rick W. gave a PowerPoint presentation of photos showing the restoration work done to the Henneberry House to make it usable. There is an outdoor toilet and a solar panel to generate electricity for lights. The refrigerator will run on propane.

Alan spoke on behalf of the Henneberry House and said the Montana Preservation Alliance had toured the site during its last conference. It’s a beautiful spot on the Beaverhead River between Dillon and Clark Canyon Reservoir. There’s a lot of eagerness and interest in this place.

Motorized access will be limited only to guests so it doesn’t become a fishing access site. Mark asked if there are plans to stabilize the outbuildings; Rick W. said, yes, they’re working on that.

Ted asked how it came to belong to BLM. Rick said the land belonged to Tom Rice and the BLM acquired it around 2003 through a partnership with Trout Unlimited and a couple of other partners. The cabin was restored using contract labor.

Alan said the Henneberry House is unique from other recreation rentals like Axolotl Lakes and Forest Service sites due to its riparian habitat. Rick W. agreed, saying this would probably be a year-round rental, unlike Axolotl Lakes.

Whitney asked if information about the Henneberry House would be available on recreation.gov. Rick said he wasn't sure, but it would be on the BLM's recreation webpage. Whitney encouraged putting the site on recreation.gov to increase visibility and make it easier for the public to rent.

Kathy asked how the Rice family feels about the Henneberry House. Cornie said she's spoken with Tom Rice and he's on board with the project and has offered to donate historic photos of the site.

Paul asked what the fee would be. Rick said the BLM is proposing \$75 a day, based on comparison with surrounding campsites and other recreation sites. Koy said the fee should be \$60-65, which is more comfortable and more user-friendly to the public. Koy also strongly encouraged the BLM to not allow use by outfitters. Rick Hotaling said if outfitters wanted to use BLM recreation sites on a for-profit basis, they have to apply for a permit.

There was discussion on the pros and cons of using phone messages to reserve the cabins. Cornie would like to try it for a year and see how it goes.

Alan said he thought the Henneberry site is worth \$75 and doesn't think it will keep people away.

Bob commented on the overall Dillon Field Office recreation fee plan. He said it was inconsistent with the Butte Field Office's recreation fee schedule, both in its timeline and in the amount of fees charged. He also had questions on the operations and maintenance figures in the plan. Bob said this issue needs to be considered by a subgroup, just as one was formed to study the Butte Field Office recreation fees.

Alan moved that the recreation fee subgroup be re-established and provide input to the RAC at its next meeting. Dave Kirsch seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The members who volunteered to be on the **Recreation Fee Subgroup** were **Michael Gibson, Whitney Tilt,** and **Koy Holland**. They will review all fee proposals for both agencies (BLM and Forest Service).

Bob said he would prefer the recreation fee subgroup not be just for the Dillon Field Office but to examine other future fee proposals from the other BLM field offices as well. Rick Hotaling said there was nothing in the RAC charter which prevented it from creating a standing fee proposal subgroup. Rick H. reminded the group that the Forest Service also submits numerous fee proposals throughout the year.

Western Montana District Update

Rick Hotaling explained some of the recent leadership changes: Sally Jewell has just been nominated by President Obama to be the next Secretary of the Interior. Neil Kornze is now the acting director for BLM

and our State Director, Jamie Connell, is now serving a four-month detail as deputy director of the BLM. In Jamie's absence, Kate Kitchell will be acting State Director.

Rick discussed the Sage-Grouse Planning Strategy. The BLM is a little behind schedule to complete the EIS by September 2014. To be a legally-defensible document, BLM will be analyzing a no-grazing alternative in the EIS—this is a change from what we previously told the RAC. Koy asked how much impact BLM permittees can expect from this. Rick said we're simply analyzing the impacts right now; we're not going to ask permittees to give us potential impacts. Here in southwestern Montana, we're ahead of most other BLM offices in the work we're doing on the EIS. Dillon already did a good job of addressing the Sage Grouse in its RMP. The BLM manages about 80 percent of Sage-Grouse habitat in the western United States. Koy asked if there will also be a predator impact study. Rick clarified that the BLM only manages the land/habitat and not the wildlife; we don't actually manage the Sage Grouse themselves. Bob W. asked David A. to provide the new RAC members with background information on the Sage Grouse planning process from the last meeting.

Rick then talked about the Mountain States Transmission Intertie (MSTI) project. Northwestern Energy asked us to put the project on a hold status (not withdrawing it). We agreed to put it on hold status on a quarterly basis, for at least two quarters. It won't go beyond one year "on hold." Rick said the BLM hasn't finished the analysis or finalized the draft EIS. Right now everyone in BLM who was working on MSTI is no longer working on it.

Alan said the RAC subgroup studying MSTI felt that the project was not viable. Ted said that was not the conclusion of the subgroup—there was no vote taken. There was no enthusiasm for the project, but there was no conclusion reached by the subgroup. Alan: "I stand corrected."

Bob said the MSTI subgroup (Alan Weltzien, Dave Kirsch and Ted Antonioli) is still in effect. Rick said that until MSTI comes back on line, the subgroup should probably be on hold as well. Dave Kirsch said that Jefferson County was opposed to the MSTI project because of realtor concerns.

Rick also discussed the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan—the plan is not yet out for public review. They're anticipating it will be out sometime in the next couple of weeks. Koy Holland brought up the fact that the RAC has a Grizzly Bear Subcommittee and that one of the members, Martin Balukas, is no longer on the RAC (Koy and Michael Connors are the other members). Rick said they'll need to pick another member from Category 3 for the subcommittee.

Legislative Update: David Abrams gave an update on the current session of the Montana State Legislature, which is starting to wind down. As of yesterday afternoon, 554 bills had been introduced in the House and 365 bills had been introduced in the Senate. David then briefly discussed several bills which the BLM is tracking closely: Senate Bill 88 (water compact bill for the Upper Missouri), Senate Bill 201 (allows the State to enter into "Good Neighbor Agreements" with BLM and FS and allows the Attorney General to intervene in litigation); House Joint Resolution 7 (initiating legal action for damages to State waters); House Bill 169 (allows city/county growth policy to be used for coordination); and Senate Joint Resolution 15 (establishes interim committee to study public land management).

An informal discussion followed with RAC members asking questions and speculating on the intent and meaning on various bills. Some members felt that counties have sometimes been frustrated and feel like they've been left out of the planning process. Some of the legislation reflects that frustration and their inability to influence timber harvest and other resource management.

Public Comment Period at 11:30:

Doug Midgett, a St. Regis resident, has worked with the Central Montana BLM RAC and said some of the issues surrounding the land-management discussion in the State Legislature revolve around the differences in the internal structure of the BLM and the Forest Service. The Forest Service is much more “top-down” management.

Legislative Update (cont.):

Bob Walker then discussed some of his impressions of the legislative bills his organization has been tracking during this session, primarily parks, recreation, rivers and historic sites issues. During the legislative session, Bob is a volunteer for “Our Montana” a private, non-profit organization based in Billings. HB 24 would establish a Parks & Recreation Board within MT FWP. It was recommended by Environmental Quality Council (EQC) and received strong support on the House side. Parks in Montana are traditionally underfunded. HB 257 would clean up MT bicycle code and would include a 5 ft. passing margin, which is in the driver’s manual but not in MT law. That bill died on the floor. HB 398 deals with OHV safety education and would require drivers younger than 16 to pass a safety and ethics education course. That bill was tabled in committee.

Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan Subgroup:

Mark Sweeney volunteered to be on the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan Subgroup.

Lunch Break**Doherty Mountain Trail Proposal:**

Brad Colin, Outdoor Recreation Planner in the Butte Field Office, gave a presentation on the proposed Doherty Mountain Trail. A couple of years ago, Brad was contacted by the Montana Mountain Bike Alliance who said they had ideas for trail systems, but didn’t know how to go about getting them approved. Doherty Mountain happened to be one of those proposed trail systems. The BLM received the proposal to analyze the trail system (25 miles total) while doing its assessment of the Jefferson County Southeast Planning Area near Whitehall. The group is looking for off-season (less snow, warmer) riding opportunities and would like to see the area developed for non-motorized use. Doherty Mountain is about 13 miles away from Pipestone, which does have active motorized recreation. This area was designated as semi-primitive, non-motorized use in our Resource Management Plan. The Candlestick Ranch is just west of Doherty Mountain. It’s owned by Golden Sunlight Mine and is open for waterfowl hunting, hiking and equestrian use. Originally, the mine was supportive of the proposal, but we recently received a letter saying they are no longer in support of it, after talking with several people in the Whitehall area who were opposed to it. The Jefferson County Sportsmen Assoc. is also opposed due to the possibility of big horn sheep introduction. Equestrian users were concerned about safety and line-of-sight issues. We in the BLM certainly see the need for non-motorized use in the area. We’re still in the initial stages of analyzing this proposal; we’ve just done scoping for it. The overwhelming majority of scoping comments were in favor of the project. We are hoping to have it analyzed by this spring.

Alan asked if the economic impact would be analyzed in the report. Yes, per Brad, there is an economist in the State Office. A member asked if grazing permittees would be impacted through reduced AUMs. Tanya said no, BLM has grazing in the Pipestone area which receives much higher impact use.

Kathy asked about the big horn sheep reintroduction and how realistic that was. The sportsman association thinks it is a possibility, others are not in favor. Bob asked if the trails were there in some form, but Brad said no, just game trails. Dave Kirsch asked about the impact to Whitehall, since most use may come from the Bozeman area and Three Forks would see more benefit than Whitehall. Estimated cost for 10-15 miles of BLM trails is around \$100-150K with lots of volunteer labor.

Field Office Updates:

BUTTE – Tanya Thrift

- Jefferson County Southeast assessment is underway which includes the mountain bike proposal that Brad just talked about, grazing permit renewals, range projects, and vegetation manipulation projects. The EA should be out this spring for review and comments.
- Iron Mask planning area includes permit renewals and the forage reserve allotment. All projects are in coordination with the Elkhorn Cooperative Management Area which seeks to improve wildlife habitat in the area. That EA will also be out this spring for a 30 day comment period.
- Upper Big Hole East planning area is completed with the decision issued last August. Still under appeal and BLM is waiting for IBLA to make a decision on whether to dismiss the appeal. Appellants are the Alliance for the Wild Rockies and Native Ecosystem Council. They appealed the WUI fuels treatments in Beaverhead and Silver Bow Counties and in the Wise River area and grazing permit renewals and travel plan decisions.
- This summer BLM will start the Marysville planning area west of Helena (15,000 acres) and the Missouri River Foothills area near Townsend in Broadwater County (4000 acres).
- “Walk-in” projects are incorporated into the larger planning projects where possible to make the most efficient use of staff time.

Dave Kirsch asked about the reroute of Pipestone Creek, a multi-agency proposal. Tanya said the last update she had was that BLM was working closely with the Jefferson Watershed Council. They have applied for grants to conduct monitoring on TMDL reports on Pipestone Creek. Dave said Pipestone Creek carries debris that is deposited in the Jefferson Slough which in turn sends the aquatic nuisance species down river all the way to Fort Peck Dam. Estimated cost is 4.7 million to remediate.

Mark asked about shooting restrictions in the McMaster Hills area near Helena. Brad said that all of BLM trailheads and developed sites say no shooting for safety reasons but the area is still open for hunting. In the McMaster Hills, there is also a shooting restriction around the buildings.

DILLON – Cornie Hudson

- Hagenbarth land exchange ribbon cutting ceremony will be held this spring on site and all the RAC members are invited. Cornie will let RAC members know the specifics.
- Madison River Citizens Advisory Group update – the group is working hard and they are struggling to define thresholds and trigger points for future river management. Hoping to go before the FWP Commission in April.
- Medicine Lodge and East Grasshopper watershed decisions were issued last fall. BLM didn’t receive any appeals or protests so implementation is underway. Range staff has met with permittees to implement changes in grazing practices.
- Working on Upper Horse Prairie Watershed Assessment – that EA should be completed in May. This year Dillon staff will be starting on the Southwest Highlands and Ruby Watershed Assessments.

- Medicine Lodge area landowner was previously in block management but withdrew last year and the public lost access to a large block of public land. With the Medicine Lodge WA decision, BLM will build four access points to regain access to the public land. The County is helping with one, BLM is building two, and one is being contracted out.
- Timber sales – Price of Beans is completed. Shell Creek salvage sale up the Grasshopper has about 65 acres to yet to cut. Black Mountain Timber sale contracted by Sun Mountain Lumber is making good progress and should be done within a week or two. South Tobacco Roots is over 900 acres (five drainages) adjacent to a State sale. Yank's Swamp TS (150 ac.) is located in the west Big Hole.
- 200 acres were treated in the Pine Creek area under an IDIQ contract. 300 more acres are slated to be treated along with three miles of stream restoration up Bean Creek.
- BLM treated 200 acres as part of the Sun West project and had a tour for interested people. Some RAC members expressed an interest in seeing the site.
- White pine cone collection in Upper Horse Prairie and Madison Lodge area for planting in the burned area near Pony.
- Crews will be working in the Bear Trap burn area this year spraying weeds and reseeding.
- DFO has potential land acquisitions that are in the very early stages of investigation – one is the Walsh property on the Madison River near the Wall Game Range. The other property is in the Centennial Valley in Odell Creek that belongs to Thresh that would provide public access.
- Ennis long term holding facility for wild horses – the IBLA did not rule on the stay and BLM can implement the decision. The first load of horses is due on February 27, with other loads following soon after for a total of 650 horses. BLM crews will be on hand to make sure the fencing meets specifications. The facility is located SW of Ennis on the Rice's Spanish Q Ranch. The facility is managed under a contract.

Koy asked about BLM selling custodial allotments to adjacent landowners. Rick said BLM used to be able to sell scattered parcels and the funds would be held in an account to purchase other property of higher public value. That is not currently authorized and BLM's options are to exchange or do a direct acquisition.

MISSOULA – Tim LaMarr

- MFO is working on the Chamberlain Watershed Assessment in the Blackfoot drainage. Issues include lynx, grizzly bears, and bull trout and west slope cutthroat trout. Analysis is wrapping up and the office is developing the proposed actions for a broad range of activities including vegetation treatment, timber sales, fuels projects, and wildlife habitat improvements. The analysis area is about 20K acres of BLM and some State owned lands. Other proposed actions will improve fish habitat with culvert replacement, fish passage and road work. There is no grazing in this watershed.
- Two timber sales are currently active – North Hoodoos TS (10 million BF), hauling is winding down and should be finished soon. Bear Creek Flats stewardship sale (200 acre project) is being completed by a subcontractor – 330K BF.
- Depending on budget, MFO is scheduled to complete 270 acres of mechanical treatment with a masticator this field season. 200 acres are slated to be burned when conditions allow, 160 acres of tree planting in the Markam area, and 500 acres of precommercial thinning.
- Grazing lease renewal also in the Markam area will include some fisheries habitat improvement for bull trout.
- Two small fisheries restoration projects are in the works for west slope cutthroat trout habitat.

- Mannix Park land exchange in the Hoodoos is a proposal that would improve public access by blocking up public land. Ted asked about minerals ownership; Tim said the proposal would be for the minerals to accompany the surface acres. An EA is expected to be completed this spring.
- Discovery Ski Area ROW is on the back burner until BLM receives the EA from the proponent. BLM doesn't expect anything until ski season is over. Ted asked about feedback on the proposal and Tim said the comments were mixed. There are wildlife and safety concerns and there is also a positive economic impact for Philipsburg. The EA will be put out for public comment and then the public will have something specific to comment on. Kathy asked if the safety concerns on the road could be mitigated. Tim said BLM only has 160 acres (1 mile) along the proposed ROW; most of the road is through private. This proposal has been in the works for several years.

RAC Feedback to BLM:

Mark asked how many acres were associated with the potential acquisition along the Madison River and Cornie thought it was around 2500 and said to remember that BLM was just at the very preliminary stages. Some of the buildings are historic ranch structures.

A question was asked about when the Medicine Lodge accesses would be constructed and Cornie said this year.

Bob reviewed the makeup of the various subgroups including MSTI (Alan, Dave, Ted) which is now on hold; the recreation fee subgroup (Michael, Whitney, Koy) which is currently still active; the Grizzly Bear subgroup (Koy, Michael, Mark) which is also still active. The timber subgroup has completed their work and is no longer in existence.

Bob said he and Kathleen had received an invitation to attend a meeting with Jamie Connell, BLM State Director next month in Billings. Bob will send out a series of seven questions to the RAC members and he would like feedback to take to the meeting.

Ted suggested that Cornie take a geologist along when they visit the Medicine Lodge area to see if an interpretive sign might be warranted. The area "near the top" is the only place Ted is aware of in a 10 state area when you can see "shatter cones" where an ancient meteorite impact resulted in this unique geologic feature.

Kathleen asked about fires last year and if BLM had crews on hand to deal with run off and flooding. Tanya said right after it was safe to go in after the fires, BLM and FS had crews that went in and assessed the damage and determined what mitigation could be done to protect the landscape. They looked at what needed to be done immediately for stabilization and more long term for burned area recovery. Alan said there was a good presentation on what stabilization was done. Cornie said it's always on their radar and that the agencies work with county commissioners also. Tim said they completed their stabilization in Missoula and that all offices will follow up with weed treatments.

David A. asked about potential topics for the next meeting: Doherty Mountain update, Grizzly Bear Conservation Strategy, MSTI topic – still on hold; recreation fee update, weed control update (especially Jefferson County). Rick asked Dave Kirsch if he would like an update from each FO on what the plans are for this fiscal year including funding, staffing, and maps. Alan was interested in FO budgets in light of sequestration and what that means for projects on the ground – potential impacts.

Next meeting: April 10 in Butte, with a possible June meeting in Dillon with field trip.

Meeting was adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

Minutes approved by:

Bob Walker, RAC Chairperson

Date