

Western Montana Resource Advisory Council Minutes

September 30, 2015

Dillon Field Office

BLM Western Zone Staff Present: David Abrams, Cornie Hudson, Joe Ashor, Scott Haight, Rick Hotaling,

RAC Members Present: Nichole Brown, Dan Happel, Jim Hart, Koy Holland, Jack King, David Krueger, Paul Putz, Ron Tussing, Bob Walker, Chair, and Alan Weltzien.

RAC Members Absent: Ted Antonioli, Bob Martinka, Douglas Midgett, Mark Sweeney, and Whitney Tilt.

David Abrams, RAC Coordinator, opened the meeting with a review of safety items, travel reimbursement, agenda topics, and meeting ground rules. He said there may be a delay in travel payment due to the timing with the fiscal year. He reviewed the schedule and logistics for Thursday's field trip. He mentioned that RAC nominations packages are currently in the Washington Office for review. He thanked Cornie and her staff for hosting the meeting, field trip and treats for the meeting.

Sage Grouse Planning Strategy Update – Rick Hotaling

Congress recently decided the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) could not spend any appropriated dollars on the listing of the sage grouse but didn't preclude the USFWS from spending money on a "not warranted for listing" as an endangered species determination. Consequently, the appropriation law didn't apply.

The Secretary of Interior had invited the western governors to Denver to be present when the announcement was going to be made at a press conference. The announcement was made via press release at 8 a.m. Washington time (6 a.m. Mountain Time) so the conference was turned into a celebration event.

The decision is similar to previous briefings with the RAC. Southwest Montana is combined with the Great Basin of Idaho even though some of the stipulations only apply to Idaho and not Montana. Alan asked about the genetic similarity of Idaho's sage grouse population to Southwest Montana. Rick said it was similar and that is why Southwest Montana was combined with Idaho for management stipulations. The remainder of Montana is in a separate plan.

Rick said some of the plans did change from the draft to the final document. Some states have focus areas for primary sage grouse habitat with additional management stipulations. Montana doesn't have focus areas but we do have "importance areas." In Southwest Montana, Rick said, the BLM was pleased because it doesn't change our current management. There is a statement in the document that states when the State of Montana's Conservation Plan is finalized, BLM will look at the federal plan and try to make them more consistent. Because the Dillon Field Office has already addressed sage grouse in their RMP, there are few management changes. Any changes for Southwest Montana are in oil and gas leases, saleable minerals, and right-of-ways. BLM will look at "disturbance caps" within a geographical area (all ownerships) and when disturbance reaches a certain level (currently 3% for Federal and 5% for State or private), the percentages may need to be reconciled in the future. Also, what constitutes a "disturbance" is unclear. The disturbance cap only applies to primary habitat and not to general habitat.

Rick said the BLM is pleased that the sage grouse was not listed. The first lawsuit has already been filed in the Great Basin by a mining association. The State of Idaho is also expected to file suit. The BLM also expects appeals from the environmental side. Alan stated that his understanding is that the federal plan is more protective and that he is concerned about the BLM “migrating” to the state plan which is less protective. Rick said the federal plan is more conservative because at the time it was developed, the state had no plan. Now Montana has a conservation plan so BLM doesn’t need to be as restrictive. Bob Walker passed around a pie chart that depicts sage grouse habitat by ownership; most is private.

Montana’s focus areas are located in portions of Phillips and Valley counties north of the Missouri River. Stipulations there include mineral withdrawal and “no surface occupancy” stipulations for oil and gas operations in primary habitat. There are no focus areas in Southwest Montana.

Bob Walker said that the RAC chairs had a conference call with Jamie Connell (Montana BLM State Director) and she urged the RACs to take part in travel planning that has not been completed. Joe Ashor said the Missoula Field Office will tackle travel planning after their RMP is updated, so it’s at least five years out. The current travel plan is more than 15 years old but the Missoula Field Office has acquired additional lands that will need to be incorporated.

Jack King stated that in eastern Montana a “spacing unit” for oil and gas leases is 1,280 acres (2 sections), and if there are only 40 acres of BLM within the unit, federal restrictions apply. A well site may end up in a wheat field because of federal restrictions. Rick said that sage grouse may also affect wildland firefighting. In the past, firefighters would burn off from a road to create a fire line, but now the BLM is trying not to lose sage grouse habitat so that strategy may change in certain areas. Likewise, with controlled burning of conifer encroachment – agencies will try to burn the pines but not sage brush.

Alan commented that the big picture question is “will the plans keep the sage grouse population intact?” Only time will tell. Jack said the species is recovering but the purpose of the plan is to maintain habitat not necessarily species recovery.

Ron asked if the plan affects private land. Rick said BLM’s plan only affects BLM-managed land. If the species had been listed, then the State’s restrictions would apply. Bob said if you currently need a permit for activity on your private land, then State restrictions come into play.

Cornie said that BLM’s cooperation with private landowners is one of the reasons that the sage grouse was not listed. All grazing permits have been modified to incorporate sage grouse stipulations that have been shown to be successful through monitoring. Vegetation management changes include pasture rest/rotation, change in stocking numbers, and change in grazing dates, building exclosures, etc. Rick said those vegetation changes help other species/programs too.

Alan asked about the Phillips/Valley county cooperation. Rick previously worked in the Malta/Glasgow area and reported lots of cooperation with private landowners.

Bob said that at the RAC chair/co-chair meeting in Billings, the central and eastern Montana RAC members were very supportive of BLM’s plans.

State of Montana Indemnity “In Lieu” Selection – Rick Hotaling

Rick went over some background information which had been previously distributed to RAC members. When Montana attained statehood in 1889, the state received sections 16 and 36 for schools, etc. Western states had the option of receiving the land or opting for the federal government to pay the states for the land. Some states (Utah & Nevada) received four sections instead of two because they are so arid. Most states (including Montana) took the land but Nevada opted for the money. Montana uses state lands to generate income for state needs with a focus on school funding.

In 1889, sometimes sections 16 and 36 were already encumbered by something else (reservations, homesteads), so Montana picked other areas (Daniels County was an area of “in lieu” selection) and it was done on an acre-for-acre basis. Montana still has “in lieu selection” land coming and in the meantime, the basis for exchange is value for value instead of acre for acre. Currently, that acreage amounts to approximately 1,200 acres or an estimated \$4.1 million.

Montana DNRC came up with a list of possible BLM land but it was of higher value than what was due. Consequently, most of the western Montana parcels were dropped and DNRC is now focusing on central and eastern Montana. The BLM and Montana are both motivated to get the process complete.

Koy asked if private landowners were part of the discussion just for management ease. Rick said that Montana DNRC is looking for adjoining lands of value (grazing/mineral estate). Ron asked if Forest Service lands are affected – no, just BLM since the forest reserve was already in place.

Rick said no act of Congress will be needed to transfer title to the State. BLM will need to do NEPA on the proposed action and appraisals will be completed to balance the ledgers, but the BLM State Director wants the process completed within two years.

Preview of Thursday’s Field Trip – Cornie Hudson

Cornie gave an overview of projects the RAC could expect to see on Thursday’s field trip. She invited members to see the East Grasshopper Watershed and Baldy Mountain. The assessment was completed in 2011 with a decision in 2012. They will focus on the Baldy Mountain Allotment, comprised of 8,000 acres of BLM land, 2,400 of private and 600-plus acres of State land. Dyce Creek (7.5 miles of perennial stream) supports west slope cutthroat trout and is a focus area for the Beaverhead watershed. The allotment also provides critical big game range and a diversity of habitats. Currently the creek doesn’t meet the TMDL (total maximum daily load) as specified by the State because of sediment from some livestock grazing, roads and road crossings, and historical mining claims. Water temperature is too high. The area is also a popular recreation area.

The area has a number of resource concerns:

- 1) allotment doesn’t meet riparian, water quality, or biodiversity land health standards;
- 2) road sediment from dilapidated culverts;
- 3) juniper encroachment into aspen stands;
- 4) mountain mahogany (deer/elk forage) is dying;
- 5) declining forest health and aspen stands;
- 6) declining riparian function;
- 7) conifer encroachment into sage brush.

The tour will highlight mitigation projects and we will hear from BLM staff and our partners – FWP, DNRC and Beaverhead Watershed Committee.

Bob asked about designated OHV routes. Cornie said they have designated routes but still have a problem with illegal routes, even with good signage. Cornie said they have formed a small interagency group to increase patrols and improve signing in certain areas.

State RAC Chair/Co-chair Meeting Report – Bob Walker

Bob reported on the meeting in Billings with BLM State Director, Jamie Connell on September 15. He announced the format of the RAC will stay the same for the time being. There was a two-hour discussion on sage grouse; there are several ranchers on the RAC and they reported positive cooperation.

They also talked about RMPs and travel planning and the importance of being involved. BLM offices in Central, Eastern Montana and the Dakotas still have a ways to go in regards to travel planning. Western Montana is almost done and Missoula's will be completed following their RMP revision.

Timber Harvest Subgroup recommendations from the Western Montana RAC were well received.

The Dakotas RAC raised the issue of the coal permitting process and they have asked the BLM to simplify the application process.

Bob also mentioned the American Prairie Preserve in eastern Montana (south Phillips County). Private land has been purchased by this preserve and is funded by wealthy members of the board of directors. The issue here is primarily whether bison should be considered livestock or wildlife. Only the governor can designate bison as wildlife. They use only perimeter fences which do affect pasture rotation and grazing management. Rick said the BLM considers bison as livestock for planning purposes but the AUMs are different than for cattle. If the BLM didn't consider them livestock, then BLM lease holders would have to take non-use for a limited period of time. A wildlife designation would have them managed by FWP.

If BLM leases are included with the private land, the preserve is well over 250,000 acres. They are constructing an education center and have winterized yurts for people to stay in.

At the State Director's meeting, the Central Montana RAC reported on the Bullwhacker Coulee & Durfee Hills issue. The Wilkes family has purchased the Bullwhacker to trade for the Durfee Hills but the values are substantially different. Bullwhacker Coulee provides access and scenery on the north side of the Missouri River. It is a controversial issue in central Montana.

Weed Reports

Dillon Field Office 2015 – Cornie

- The Dillon Weed Program hired six seasonal employees this year. Two were camped out in the Madison Valley and did most of the weed control there and the other four took care of the rest of Madison and Beaverhead Counties.
- Continued cooperation with the Madison biological control project out of Ennis High School. This program employs two high school students and one teacher who collect and release biological control insects on large infestations. They have agreed to release agents on BLM lands in the Madison, when requested, and will also monitor these sites every year for effectiveness. Part of this is being paid for by a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Grant received by the Dillon Field Office.

- The weed program was funded this year by the AML, Range, Wildlife, Threatened and Endangered Species, Challenge Cost Share and Forestry programs. Total spent on BLM administered lands was \$180,000. Total acres treated: 2,245; total acres inventoried: 23,200; acres monitored for treatment effectiveness: 732. BLM participated in 39 community spray days put on by Beaverhead and Madison Counties.

Cornie mentioned that after the late July rains, knapweed emerged in areas that hadn't seen knapweed for two or three years so it was very frustrating.

Summary of Areas Treated:

Bear Trap Wilderness

- Conducted two office spray days that concentrated on the trails on the east and west side of the river. Approximately 40 people participated including weed crews from Madison and Gallatin Counties.
- 327 acres were treated including the camp and recreation sites, trails and roads. Red Mountain Campground was sprayed twice this year but still has lots of weeds.
- Noxious weeds treated included Spotted Knapweed, Leafy spurge and Hoary Alyssum.
- The area has been selected for a trial application of the fungus *Pseudomonas fluorescens* strain D7 that has shown promise in controlling cheatgrass, which is on the increase in this area after the fire. RAC members Holland and Happel volunteered to be test sites.

Madison County

- 1,000 acres were treated in Madison County with Camp Creek, the Rochester area, the south Tobacco Roots, Brown's Gulch, Alder Gulch, the Pony area and the south Madison recreation sites being among the areas sprayed this year.

Beaverhead County

- 918 acres were treated in Beaverhead County with Trapper Creek, Birch Creek, Argenta, Dyce Creek, Badger Pass, Reservoir Creek, Horse Prairie, Medicine Lodge, Big Sheep Creek and the Centennial Valley being the top areas sprayed this year.

David asked about volunteers doing the spraying. Cornie said they can use volunteers and they have a tailgate safety session, personal protective equipment and are accompanied by a certified weed applicator. Cornie said all six seasonals are now certified weed applicators.

Cornie acknowledged Mike Mooney, program lead, and all the cooperators who work hard to keep weed infestations from spreading.

Butte Field Office – Scott Haight

Scott reported \$137,000 from various program areas to fund the weed effort. \$58,000 went to fund county assistance agreements with Jefferson, Lewis & Clark, Silver Bow, Beaverhead and Park Counties. BLM sprayed more than 2,400 acres in FY 2015. BLM participated in 24 spray days with other cooperators. The largest spray days were Holter Lake and Limestone Hills (outside the National Guard training area).

At Holter Lake, 15 BLM employees attended with some spraying at Holter Lake Campground and surrounding lands. The pontoon boat was used to spray BLM lands across the river from the campground.

At Limestone Hills, 15 BLM employees attended along with a representative from Broadwater County, two Forest Service employees and five grazing permittees. Spray days are an excellent way to build relationships and get a lot of work done. BLM had two seasonals spread out over several counties.

Paul asked about wildfire and weeds. Scott said weed infestations are common after fire and they need to be treated for several years afterwards.

Missoula Field Office – Joe Ashor

Missoula Field Office hired three seasonals who treated 2,200 acres in Missoula, Powell, and Granite Counties. Sites included 243 miles of roadside spraying, 28 acres along seven stream side miles, 541 acres of broadcast applications, and 453 acres of spot applications.

Missoula focused on six areas: Lower Blackfoot Corridor in Missoula County, Chamberlain Watershed, Marcum Mountain, and the Hoodoos area all in Powell County, and Garnet and scattered areas in Granite County.

Program Highlights:

- Several new Hawkweed patches were found and treated this year. One site near Garnet Ghost Town along the Placer trail, one near Bear Creek flats and one in Washoe Gulch. Meadow Hawkweed in the upper Chamberlain watershed found in 2010 is declining in size and density. Hawkweeds are very high priority for the Missoula Field Office weeds program.
- The Missoula Field Office has recently acquired new lands in the Lower Blackfoot River corridor; much of which has a high noxious weed density. The BLM weeds crew was on the ground early in the season to start roadside treatments that totaled 28 miles or about 140 acres.
- This year's monitoring revealed Canada thistle starting to invade Chamberlain Meadows and Cottonwood Meadows. Both sites are headwater meadows and are very sensitive to disturbance and noxious weed invasion. Only a small handful of Canada thistle plants were found and treated. No other noxious weed species have been found in these meadows.
- Weed crews inventoried approximately 1,500 acres for priority noxious weeds.

Joe stated Missoula is still working with the Crown of the Continent Group. Missoula County has an employee who compiles information from other counties and agencies to make a landscape scale map of weed infestations across jurisdictional boundaries.

Bob asked if that GIS person might be willing and available to make a presentation at a future RAC meeting. Joe agreed to check into it.

Public Comment Period

At 11:25 a.m. David opened the public comment period and Cornie checked to see if any members of the public were waiting to comment. No commenters.

Field Office Updates

Butte Field Office – Scott Haight

Fires:

- Yellowstone River west of Livingston, 100 acres.
- Austin near Helena, 10 acres.
- Eustis Fire north of Three Forks, 670 acres of BLM with 3 miles of fireline.

- Whipcracker, Iron Mask, west of Townsend 10 acres.
- Holter complex, Wolf Creek, closed Holter & Log Gulch campgrounds.

Minerals:

- Golden Sunlight layoffs scheduled for November - 140 people; will continue underground operations.
- Golden Sunlight reclamation and water treatment bond recalculations in progress, five-year review.
- Pre-application discussions with GSM on possible mine expansion to the north; will be a major EIS if they make application.
- Small placer operations this year, Jefferson River and Indian Creek.

Forestry/Fuels:

- Cline Gulch, Sun Mtn, 135 acres, 2,788 tons, \$68,220 (sold 2014, implemented 2015)
- JJ 1&2; Sun Mtn, 130 acres, 1,990 tons, \$50,246 (sold 2014, implemented 2015)
- Vincent, Pender Logging, 6 acres, 220 tons, \$3,176, (sold/implemented 2015)
- Deno Creek Sale, RY Timber, 9,275 tons, \$207,481 (1.6 MMBF, 2015)
- Jimmie East, Offered, 135 acres, 1,904 tons, \$17,000 appraised (2nd offering)
- Seymour Salvage, Lorengo, 250 ac., 9,160 tons, \$190,370 (1.5 MMBF, 2015) [7000 tons sawlogs, 1500 tons post/pole, 660 tons firewood; (\$26.03/ton sawlogs, \$5/ton post-poles, \$1/ton firewood)]
- Whitetail TS, Cedar Hills logging, 650 tons sawlogs, 110 tons pulp, \$2,600.
- BLM cooperater with FS on Ten Mile project; lands west of Helena near Colorado Gulch, and south near Last Chance Gulch; about 1,000 acres BLM to be treated.
- Clancy fuels reduction continues; 3300 acres in 11,000 acre project area. 501 acres treated to date in Clancy & Jackson Creek. 4800 green tons (GT) of biomass and 6100 GT of saw logs produced. FY 16 contracted another 350 acres starting late October in Ohio Gulch.

Lands Actions:

- Backdoor Mountain condo proposal to lease three BLM acres for parking and boat dock near Holter Lake Lodge. Across bay from Holter Lake Campground where bar and grill used to be.
- Limestone Hills Mining Implementation Agreement, still pending with National Guard Dept. of Army.
- No Action on Golden Asset Mine, Road Right of Way, this year. Located in the Elkhorns.

Watershed Plans:

- Jefferson County SE completed, travel plan and grazing decisions issued. One appeal, still pending with IBLA.
- Iron Mask Plan EA issued, travel plan and vegetation management approved (5,400 acres treatment-1,000 prescribed fire). Two appeals (Native Ecosystem Council & Alliance for the Wild Rockies), dismissed for lack of standing. Iron Mask has a forage reserve allotment decision which needs to be issued. Need to decide on infrastructure needed to make that useable.
- Marysville area scoping letter issued this spring – 25,000 acres NW of Marysville. Issues will be wildlife, forestry, recreation uses.

Recreation

- Missouri River Foothills Travel Management Plan decision issued – no appeals.
- Pipestone trail maintenance partnership received an award from the trails association in Washington D.C.
- Pipestone is always popular; a competitive motorized race coming up Columbus Day weekend.
- Campgrounds were busy this year: \$233,416 in fees collected and estimated over 100,000 visitors. Fee increase did not affect visitation. Nichole asked if people who were evacuated due to fire got a refund. Scott said they are offered camping in another campground or are issued a “camp pass” to use the next time.

Appeals/Litigation Status:

- Golden Asset ROW litigation; federal district court case decided in BLM’s favor.
- McCauley Color Of Title determination; 40 acres along Boulder River to private owner because he has been paying property taxes on the property for years through no fault of his own; one appeal pending from Public Land/Water Access Assn.
- Huller Springs appeal on vegetation treatment
- Iron Mask, appeal of veg treatment decided in BLM’s favor.

On the Horizon:

- Wrap up Park, Gallatin, & Broadwater Land health assessment field work this fall.
- Iron Mask - Indian Creek Forage Reserve allotment management actions, and grazing decisions out soon.
- Park, Gallatin, and Broadwater Travel Planning to be conducted this coming winter.
- Marysville EA writing this winter; complicated project due to lynx and grizzly bear in WUI and forestry project areas.
- Iron Mask Mine reclamation under CERCLA planned for 2016. Hard rock tailings and mine waste will be hauled away or buried on site.

Other:

- Continue to receive complaints from the public over access to inholdings, grazing adjacent to private lands.

Bob explained to some of the newer RAC members about the process for raising fees at recreation sites and wondered about the difference in collections from previous years to the current rates. Scott said the information was available but it may take some time to dig it up since Brad Rixford has retired. The Field Offices said recreation use was up for the cabins and campgrounds with few or no complaints about the fee increase. Cornie said that Axolotl and Henneberry Cabins were rented continuously when available for public use.

Paul asked about in-state vs. out-of-state use. Part of the FERC relicensing process is to collect that information. There is a mix of use at all the campgrounds and this year was an early spring with people recreating earlier than other years.

LUNCH BREAK

Missoula Field Office Update – Joe Ashor

Missoula Field Office averages two fires per year; this year there were seven, all small. DNRC has suppression responsibilities for BLM.

Kennecott is exploring near Copper Hill in the Garnet Range east of the Garnet Ghost Town looking for copper. They did three test holes on BLM previously that they are rehabbing and this year had a drill site on State lands. Preliminary word is that they are not seeing much.

Philipsburg to Discovery Road – one person is doing the logging and one is building the road so it is slow going. Trying to be ready by ski season.

The Ghost Town had a very successful summer with great volunteers. Visitation was up. Garnet Preservation Association working on some interpretative materials.

LWCF (Land and Water Conservation Fund) acquisitions – made use of \$4.2 million in funds to acquire 4,587 acres in the Morrison/Chamberlain area for mostly recreation use. There is \$3.5 million left for acquisitions and they are concentrating their efforts in the lower Blackfoot Corridor. They are collaborating with the Blackfoot Challenge Group and the Nature Conservancy. Roads in the areas are “ribbons of knapweed” and need long-term treatment. They hope to complete the acquisition by the end of 2016.

The Missoula Field Office RMP is almost 30 years old and is now in the plan assessment phase which comprises two things – the analysis of the management situation which is a document for Joe by his staff to summarize what has happened in the past and what management opportunities there may be in the future. The planning process has been revised and incorporates an “envisioning process” or an exercise to determine what would the public like to see in the future on BLM lands. The envisioning exercise will take place January through April 2016 followed by traditional scoping in the fall of 2016. The planning process is expected to last three years.

Bob referenced the Blackfoot Corridor map from a few years ago and the proposed acquisitions are just to the north of where the RAC went on their field trip.

Unfortunately, LWCF expires today (9/30). The Montana congressional delegation agrees it is important but it will probably die in Congress.

Dillon Field Office – Cornie Hudson

Centennial EA and proposed decision is out for review with 8,000 acres proposed for prescribed fire and 1,500 acres of vegetation treatment. BLM proposed to open 1.3 miles of road (Corral Creek) in the Centennial Valley. This proposal received a lot of attention. Cornie made the decision not to open the road to motorized use and her rationale can be found in the proposed decision.

The Belmont EA in the Middle Ruby watershed analyzed two more alternatives along with the three original alternatives. BLM pulled out Beau Bradley’s allotment from the original EA and it is a separate decision.

Watershed Assessments for 2015: The Big Sheep and Sage Creek Assessments will be out by the end of the year. These two areas need more signage and greater law enforcement presence especially during hunting season. This is a cooperative effort among agencies and landowners.

Earlier this year the BLM received an application for a permit to drill an exploratory oil and gas well in the Big Sheep drainage. Two alternatives will be analyzed in the EA – a Forest Service alternative and a BLM alternative.

Ski chalet issue – no word has been received from Senator Daines' office on a legislative transfer.

Wild Horse Long Term Holding Facility – located on the Rice Ranch near Ennis. A small band of horses (14-15) got out after the fence wires were cut last Fall and have evaded capture for almost a year despite efforts by the Rices. May have a professional contractor collect them and transfer to another facility.

Axolotl Cabin has been closed since July 19 for a remodel. The contractor is moving slowly but has indicated they would be in to finish the job in the next month.

Dillon had a couple of fires this year. The largest was the Cabin Creek Fire (900 acres) on BLM in the Blacktail area. The BLM will be monitoring for weed infestations.

Pony Waste Dump – Cornie will be signing a determination of effects to allow hauling of another 10,000 tons through the crusher. The Forest Service just signed their categorical exclusion for Cataract Creek; all the material coming from public lands will go through the crusher.

Timber Sales – Yank Swamp (5 million bf) in the Pioneers should start mid-October. Birch Meadows Sale (60 acres) by Ennis/Norris area has been sold.

Ruby Reservoir Road is getting paved past the campground and boat launch. Ruby Reservoir dam has lots of private property with "for sale" signs. Regardless of what happens at the reservoir, BLM still has access and properties for camping. A few years ago, the toilet was inadvertently installed on private land and may need to be moved eventually.

Revenue Flats – proposed bike trail by Norris. This year BLM will just gather information on the types and amount of use in the area.

Sheep hunt in Big Sheep area to get rid of diseased sheep. There are about 30 sheep in the area and over 300 tags were sold. So far only about five have been harvested.

RAC Feedback to BLM

Jim Hart complimented BLM's work on the north shore of Ennis Lake.

Bob mentioned the EQC (Environmental Quality Council) meeting he had attended in Helena and Kerry White's bill to study federal road closures in preparation for the next legislative session. Scott said access is a big issue for BLM and Bob said we'll hear a lot more about it in the next 18 months. Scott said he felt that BLM had answered Kerry's questions about travel planning and public involvement. Bob feels that White's group wants to re-open roads that have been legitimately closed in the past.

Joe mentioned that traditional users are selling out and the newer owners are not honoring historical use. It's hard for BLM to keep up with easements and access demands.

Bob asked about Sheep Mountain Road near Clancy where BLM lost access when the road was deemed private. BLM had to pull out their trailhead.

A discussion followed on RS2477, a mechanism to petition a road as open. The Secretary of Interior determines whether the road meets the criteria. The process costs money to research and gather information, then it needs to go to court to be adjudicated with no guaranteed outcome.

Bob encouraged RAC members to go to the EQC website and read documents prepared by the Forest Service and BLM on access and road closures.

Scott asked if there is an opportunity for the RAC to have constructive involvement with this issue. Rick said the RAC travel planning subgroup involvement helped BLM develop viable alternatives. The RAC as a group cannot lobby, but can voice individual opinions. The RAC's mission is to advise BLM.

David Abrams – Action Items

- Campground fee comparison
- Weeds mapping presentation (Missoula County)
- Weed treatment summary once a year at end of FY
- Possible FS fee proposal

Jack King appreciates the on-the-ground project review. Field trips once a year are beneficial.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, January 27, 2016 in Butte.

Bob emphasized the necessity of attending meetings; today we didn't have a quorum so no business could be conducted.

Rick reported that the continuing resolution passed the Senate and should go to the House before the end of the day. If it doesn't pass, the Field trip will need to be cancelled. He also mentioned that the BLM Washington Office didn't approve any of the changes to the RAC charter that had been proposed (extending RAC term until new ones are appointed; decrease number of members to 12 from 15).

Alan asked about RAC recruitment for vacant positions; Rick encouraged RAC members to help with recruitment through their user groups and contacts.

Ron said the lag time is so great that potential members think they are not being considered and suggested a periodic contact via phone or email to let candidates know they are still being considered. Rick said it's better to get all nominations in with the first round of nominations for faster confirmation.

Ron said it would be helpful to know earlier in the process that their name is being forwarded. Rick said when more people apply than can be selected, BLM asks them to apply again.

The meeting adjourned at 2:35 p.m.

Approved by:

//SIGNED//

Date: Oct. 19, 2015

Bob Walker, RAC Chair