

Notes:

Western Montana Resource Advisory Council

March 14, 2012 – Butte Field Office

106 N. Parkmont, MT

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Welcome/Housekeeping Items

- David Abrams welcomed members and the public
- GOV Trip review for RAC members
- Information Packet
- Socio Economic Program
 - provides data analysis and training for internal and external sources
 - for information, but not mandatory

Agenda Review

- Abrams reviewed the schedule
- He noted that the RAC nomination period closed Monday. He also announced that the BLM Washington Office is going to extend the nomination period another 30 days in order to get more nominees

Introduction of new RAC members

Nate Finch

- Represents grazing interest on RAC
- Got involved through dealing with RAC subgroup
- Has two more meetings and is then done with his service on the RAC

Steve Flynn

- Sun Mountain Lumber
- Represents Timber interests
- Almost done serving with the RAC

Dave Kirsch

- Jefferson Co. Commissioner
- Instrumental in a lot of Forest Service purposes

Sam Samson

- From Boulder, former county commissioner
- Previously on RAC road subcommittee
- Taught Science, German and Russian in area high schools

Paul Putz

- Retired
- Historical resources interests

Rich Torquemada

- Missoula Field Office manager

Tim Bozorth

- Dillon Field Office manager
- Former Hydrologist for BLM

Scott Haight

- Butte Field Office Manager
- From Central Montana
- Former geologist for BLM

Sherri Lionberger

- Asst. Field Manager non-renewables
- Former log engineer and forester

Martin Balukas

- Natural Resource interests

Michael Gibson**Bob Walker**

- Retired
- Former FW&P state trails coordinator

Koy Holland

- From Dillon
- Animal range scientist

Katherine Looney

- Pony
- Madison Co. Planning Board, former president of the board
- Public land access interest

Mark Sweeney

- Fisheries interest
- Represents elected officials of Deer Lodge and Powell Co.

Election of new RAC chair

- Abrams opened up the floor for the election of the chair and vice chair
- Abrams gave a description of positions, including duties and responsibilities

Chair Nomination

Bob Walker was nominated for the chair by Nate Finch

The nomination was seconded by Mark Sweeney

Katherine Looney moved to close nominations

Mark Sweeney seconded closing the nomination

Sweeney reviewed voting protocol of thumbs up or down, no name vote.

Bob Walker was nominated and approved with a unanimous vote

Vice Chair Nomination

Sweeney nominated Looney for vice chair

Sam Samson seconded the nomination

There were no other nominations

Sweeney moved to close

Kirsch seconded to move to close nomination

Looney was unanimously approved as the vice chair

RAC subgroup report (Recreation Fees)

Bob Walker addressed the group about the fee increase:

- Spoke about the background of fees.
 - fees have not changed for eight years
 - spoke about cost recovery needs, and sustainability of rec sites
 - review of other camping fees
 - ❖ KOA- \$25
 - ❖ MT FWP - \$15
- Public comment Period
 - received 5 responses
 - 4 opposed, 1 in favor
 - 3 from Helena, 1 from Circle, 1 from East Helena
 - Noted that everyone's position matters, shocked that they only received five comments

Paul Putz asked if all responses were from individuals; Walker noted that they were all from individuals

Walker talked about operation and maintenance costs per site

- Project fee revenues would bring in \$276,000 and still wouldn't match op & maintenance costs
- Brad Rixford confirmed that these costs have gone up around 5%

A news release about the proposed increased fees were sent to Helena, Butte, and Missoula newspapers.

Walker revisited the need to increase fees:

- \$10 to \$15 on high impact campsites

- \$6 to \$10 on other campsites

- \$2 to \$5 on day-use fees based on vehicles

- Talked about various sites with fish-cleaning facilities (White Sandy)

- did not recommend increase on six of the river sites

- recommended fees at previously uncharged sites

The length of the charge season was discussed

- Sherri Lionberger informed Samson of the charging schedule

- Walker discussed impact of increasing fees at rec sites

- Dave Kirsch asked what the difference between Black and White Sandy was

- Flynn asked about difference of facilities

- Gibson discussed the difference between various sites

- Flynn asked about the difference between Log Gulch and Dickey Bridge

- Lionberger responded by explaining the number of amenities between the two sites
- Sweeney discussed the developed sites, and was appreciative of the benefit of the sites to the public.
- Putz asked Walker of the possibility of an annual camping pass
- Walker responded that he was not sure of the possibility of an annual pass
- Brad Rixford discussed the annual pass restriction and conflicts
- Finch asked if the day use pass was national or just local
- Gibson discussed the vehicle fee
- Steve Flynn asked how the money was collected to these fees
- Lionberger responded that most were collected by the honor system; she also added that boat-in sites were also charged for day-use at sites with boat launches
- Crystal Park (Forest Service) was also discussed
- Walker asked if there were other comments about the subgroup's proposal
- Balukas asked if there were no- or low-cost sites with less amenities
- Flynn asked if there is lower costs for seniors
- Lionberger confirmed there was
- Sweeney brought up primitive access is as an option
- Rixford mentioned that the popularity of destination is often tied to amenities and price
- Nate Finch noted that the projected revenues are still below the maintenance costs
- Looney asked about the requirements and schedule to address fees
- Lionberger responded that the office needs to address a business cost every five years
- Finch asked what we can do to address the costs associated with the sites
- Rixford responded with BLM's role in addressing costs
- Finch asked how the budgeting was addressed
- Rixford responded that with the lack of flexibility the office has, it receives a budget upfront
- Haight added that the sites will never pay for themselves in order to pay for critical maintenance
- Walker also noted the various grants that the bureau has applied for... and how this is comparable with various state parks.
- Jerry Walker (FWP representative in the audience) said revenue from state parks is usually below cost of maintenance, but the state is trying to move toward closing that gap
- Rixford added that the Bureau tries to find partners for financing recreation sites. He cited PPL-Montana as an example of this, but added that partnerships are not popular.
- Rixford then expanded on that source of funding
- Kirsch asked about if all staff are voluntary.
- Rixford spoke about how there are career seasonal employees who are hired to maintain certain recreation sites
- Kirsch asked about any shrinkage associated with the sites
- Lionberger responded that the park ranger has the only access to the money that is collected in what is called an "iron ranger."

Walker asked if there were any other questions

A vote was then called whether the RAC members favored the subcommittee recommendations
The RAC unanimously voted in favor of the subcommittee recommendations

Haight reviewed what actions will be placed next. The BLM will come up with a proposal to adjust fees and members will vote on the fees in the next meeting

Lionberger added comments about fees at certain sites, noting that certain amenities needed to be in place in order to charge at certain sites

Forest Service Rec Fee Proposal: Earthquake Lake Visitor Center (fee elimination)

Overview of Visitor Center and Fee adjustments

Margaret Gorski (Forest Service)

- Administers fee program, fairly new to her job due to cost-cutting efforts
- Forest Service overview of fees
 - Fees are important part of the program
 - Should put a lot of thought into what is charged
 - Implementation of fees has often been met with resistance
 - Not much resistance in this area, since only high impact areas were charged fees
 - Noted that this is only her (Gorski's) interpretation
 - Not much activity from the Forest Service, the decisions at the local level have backed up until national issues are ironed out with raising fees.
 - Forest service has ultimately moved to slowly phase in fees to areas that might be new or have been invested in and/or renovated
 - Very tightly reviewed process with Washington office
 - The intent is to have national standardization of analysis for fees
 - Interested in discussing fees or process of increasing fees

-Steve Flynn noted that the committee thought that the RAC had worked through many of these issues with fees and the Forest Service in the past.

-concerning fee increases

-Gorski noted that the Forest Service was seeking a set schedule for increasing fees, where they left off before the process was frozen by the Washington office

-Flynn asked why the BLM is involved with raising fees at Forest Service sites.

-Gorski noted that it's the law in order to go to RACs in order to raise fees. The decision to use the BLM RACs were to utilize previously formed groups for efficiency purposes.

-Sweeney remembered this process

-Gorski noted the choice to utilize the BLM RACs.

-Sam Samson noted that when he was on the subcommittee for roads, might have been where all this started. This might be part of the affiliation.

-Gorski noted that it's a much more efficient route to use a fee schedule, based upon the development level of the site.

-Finch noted that the committee had gone through this process about three years ago.

-Gorski responded in that this was mostly just an update since she is new.

-Finch said that they had already formed a streamlined process (the RAC and Forest Service), and didn't want it thrown out.

-Sam Samson noted that this was discussed 11/28/2007 with Joanie.

Gorski responded that her role is to come before the committee for the Quake Lake Visitor Center.

Quake Lake Visitor Center History

- One of three "Major" Visitor Centers
- Built due to the earthquake of 1959
- Most of the deaths occurred in campgrounds and surrounding facilities
- Created massive rockpile
- Rockpile was leveled off and a visitor center was built and opened in 1962
- Center is a memorial site to those who died during the earthquake
- Most visitors are those who stop off on the way to Yellowstone
- \$3 fee for walking into the center
 - Center includes
 - Bookstore
 - Seismograph
 - Viewing platform
 - Area also includes tour route around the lake

Quake Lake Visitor Center Proposal

- Eliminate Fee
- Current Fee: \$3 individuals, \$15 per bus
- No fee for educational groups
- Average income of \$30,000
- Current Income at \$8,000
- Motive for removing fee
 - Loss of visitation
 - Provides flexibility to not have two staff people
 - Partnerships would be more desirable
 - No affect anticipated on next nearest similar enterprise (not in competition with any other similar sites)
- Expect to remodel building so that it can be minimally heated during the winter months
- Wants Yellowstone Association to staff the building as part of a partnership

Questions Concerning the Elimination of the Quake Lake Rec Fee:

Ted Antonioli is part of group that makes this facility a destination. He expects that the income drop is the result of a lack of new material at the site, therefore repeat visitors don't return with the fee in place. He supports the dropping of the fee.

-Walker asked what the Chamber of Commerce thinks about the proposal.

-Sam Samson is a member of the Yellowstone Association. He noted that volunteers at other locations may bring attention to those who might stop at the visitor's site.
-Gorski noted that the Yellowstone Association has been part of the process. Says that it's all lining up and is dependent on the association and sales.
-Finch asked if the Yellowstone Association pays any fees to sell books at the site.
-Gorski says there is no charge
-Paul Putz asked if parking plays any roles in generating fees
-Gorski responded that they try to avoid overnight situations
-Holland asked if Gorski is asking for support to raise fee
-Sam Samson moved to support the elimination of fees at Earthquake Lake Visitor Center
-The RAC voted unanimously in favor of eliminating the fees at the center.
The RAC meeting was then recessed for five minutes
Abrams reconvened the meeting at 11:10 a.m.
Abrams reminded the committee that it must open to public comment at 11:30 a.m.

MSTI Update

Tim Bozorth reviewed the MSTI project

- Initiated in 2007, BLM has a neutral position on the program
- Needs to be consistent with land-use plans
- Number of other federal agencies in the process
- Montana DEQ is co-lead in the process
 - Performing joint EIS
 - Working with various Indian tribes
- It's been a complicated process and project for the past four years
- Showed older map of Montana's involvement in project
- Has tweaked alternatives of project since drawing up map
- Highlighted a number of alternative routes for the project

Increased protection measures for sage grouse along the project

- Current policy tells BLM that sage grouse be not impacted by project.
- Trying to come up with appropriate mitigation plan for Sage Grouse
- Has held various meeting with Montana and Idaho counties
- Is pretty set on the range of alternatives as far as environmental impacts of project
- Will meet with the DEQ for the final picture as far as simplifying the local routing options

MSTI Status

- Hopes for draft EIS by early Fall.
- Followed by a three-month comment period
- Comment analysis will follow before a final decision is made
- Hopes to decide on an agency's preferred alternative
- MSTI has a RAC subgroup

-A representative is needed from category three for the RAC's MSTI subgroup

-Eventually the subgroup will review the draft EIS and make suggestion

-Putz asked what the MSTI will look like

-Bozorth responded:

- Tower heights of 140 feet
- Less cable and weight than Colstrip lines
- Will be second largest power line in Montana
- Distance between towers will range between 1500 and 2000 feet
- There's been discussion of adding smaller lines on towers and noted that will probably not work

-Kirsch volunteered to be on the subgroup

-Looney asked about Future West's involvement with the project

-Bozorth responded that Future West and various other groups got together to access information about the project, in order to make some informed decision applicable to the project.

-Future West is looking at the priorities for the commissioners as far as private property, agriculture, recreation and various other interests.

-Have expanded efforts down into Idaho with various results

-Provides a quantified analysis that is different from NEPA's approach.

-Said the models are not very detailed in the respect that they show color-coated gradient for economic impacts of the line.

Public Comment Period

Public comment was open from 11:30 a.m. to 12 p.m.

No public comment was made

MSTI (cont.)

-In returning to MSTI discussion, Kirsch noted the diverse group of Future West and the value of the group in addressing the potential problems

-Looney asked if the previously-discussed gradient maps were open to the public.

-Bozorth noted that there has been great effort to keep the two groups separate to dissuade any influence of one over the other.

-Holland asked if BLM has thought about creating its own energy corridor

-Bozorth noted that there are segments along the corridor that have been dedicated to the line. These are only segments, but a specific corridor has not been designated. A separate corridor called the Chinook was developed and subsequently dropped in a different area.

-Holland raised the point of making a separate corridor to avoid subsequent Environmental Impact Statements.

-Finch noted that this could be applied for natural gas transmission

-Balukas asked if eminent domain power was reserved by MSTI

-Bozorth confirmed that regardless of the project there are eminent domain rights associated with any project. He added that eminent domain is not an issue when it comes to public land. Balukas expanded on MSTI's impact on private land

-Kirsch noted that he thinks the project should go on public land as much as possible

-Bozorth responded that there is a presumption in trying to place it on public land where practical.

-Walker asked if this was the end of the discussion on MSTI and asked that the gradient maps be brought to the next meeting.

Walker asked if the committee could start with the Field Office Reports before adjourning for lunch

Top Items of Interest

Missoula Field Office

Rich Torquemada discussed issues from the Missoula Field Office

Access to Discovery Ski Area

- RAC made a previous request for this information
- Previous issues with the access included: increased traffic, fish impact
- A firm date has not been made on the EIS for the right-of-way permit

-Sam Samson asked about how the comments for expansion panned out

-Walker noted that the FWP submitted issues with big game winter ranging

Manix Park Land Swap

- Proposal phase of obtaining blocks of properties in the Hoodoos area
- Also reviewing blocks of BLM land
- Exchange with two current landowners around Manix Park
- Several other landowners may be part of the exchange.

Ram Mountain

- EA was submitted about 2 months ago.

Northern Continental Ecosystem for Bear delisting

- Strategy for protection for Grizzlies in order to delist them
- A final conservation strategy ready by December
- Involvement through the public process
- It impacts the Butte, Missoula and Lewistown BLM field offices

Grazing lease renewal

- EA probably by June

America's Great Outdoors

- Presidential initiative started in 2010
- Addresses interests in participating in the great outdoors
- Crown of the Continent: Missoula is located on the southern border of the crown
- Support has been noted for the land and conservation easements, as well as acquisitions of land beneficial to outdoor recreation
- Personally will be looking to pool more resources for weed issues

Resource Management Plan for Missoula

- Prepped plan in late 2010
- Addresses key issues of change
- Torquemada said that funding for Missoula is a close number two for next year

-Looney asked the other office in contention

-Torquemada responded that Lewistown is favored due to oil and gas issues, as well as sage grouse in the surrounding area.

-Walker asked Torquemada about the conservation strategy draft conservation strategy

-Torquemada was hesitant to say when the strategy will be released but it looks like June at the earliest

- Walker asked about RAC's involvement
- Torquemada responded that there will probably no formal presentations to the committee
- Antonioli asked about the parcels in the land swap and if they were reviewed for their resource rights
- Samson asked if mineral rights are transferred if not withdrawn on deed.
- Looney asked where the funding came from on the land swap from the facilitator
- Torquemada was unsure
- Haight guessed that there are several groups out there that are usually involved with those issues
- Torquemada said that land swap facilitator is a group they have used in the past and that a competitive bid is not usually required.

The meeting was adjourned for lunch until 1 p.m.
The meeting was reconvened at 1:15 a.m.

Top Items of Interest (cont.)

Butte Field Office

Sherri Lionberger addressed the RAC

Wilderness Study Area North of Helena

- Sleeping Giant fits as a jewel
- BLM does not own all the mineral rights in the area
- A title search has been pursued for the area
- Low potential of having many minerals
- Hoping to get mineral report back March
- Looney asked if both sides were involved
 - Owners included railroad, state and private
 - Initial interest (30 years ago) was extended by the state and railroad
- BLM has ownership of what Lionberger called the Mickey Mouse Ears
- Lionberger said that the ownership of the Oxbow Ranch has land in the area and is so far not interested in sale of the land or a swap.
- Looney asked if that is the only WSA area brought up for Montana
- Lionberger confirmed it was the only area in the Montana/Dakotas

Upper Big Hole East Planning Area

- Has been ongoing for a while
- EA for public due out in 4-6 weeks
- Try to look at area as a landscape
 - May have grazing leases renewed
 - Removal of conifers in the area
 - Try to consolidate analysis into one document
- Issues include pine bark beetle
- Travel planning implemented in 2010
- Fall of 2010, hunters voiced concerns
- No opportunity to do best inventory, therefore inventory was revisited

Iron Mask

- Iron Mask lands not analyzed as part of RMP

- EA on line
- rest of data collected this year
- CERCLA process going on in tandem with EA
- Not a lot of commercial vegetation in the area
- Some activities will be done to manipulate vegetation, but not for commercial allotment or lease
- Part of Elkhorn management area

Jefferson County Southeast

- Collecting field data this season
 - Going forward with specifics next winter
- Samson asked a question about location of a planning area near Bull Mountain
 -Lionberger responded that she can get him a map with sections on it

Dillon Field Office

East Grasshopper Watershed Assessment

- brought up, but only discussed shortly

Medicine Lodge Watershed Assessment

- assessed last summer
- EA submitted next fall

Upper Horse Prairie Watershed Assessment

- second assessment of that area
- expects just some minor tweaks
- look at standards, roads, recreation, fire, ...
- EA will be performed a year from now

Possible Environmental Assessment for Mining along Beaverhead River

- State office denied permit of that area and sent back due to appeals
- Haven't heard if company will be willing to pay approximately \$65,000 for EA

Sage Grouse Sub-regional Assessment

- May do a separate EIS from other states involved

MSTI

- topic was previously during meeting

Rocket Timber Sale in Big Hole

- done this past winter
- done by Sun Mountain

Beartrap Fire

- Occurred this past weekend
- 100 acre fire
- Burned downstream down to the banks of the river
- In Wilderness Area portion of Beartrap

Travel Management Issues

- Trying to open up more public access
- Will be physically closing some public roads in if public access is not granted in some areas
- Will also be constructing roads around these areas

Nay Ranch Cabin

- Restoration work being completed
- Historic property
- Working to keep property in period it was built

-Looney asked if the property will be open to the public

-Bozorth responded that opening the cabin to the public is what they are working toward

Hiring

- about 25 summer seasonal employees
- ranging from labor to forestry and fire

Big Hole Watershed Environmental Assessment

- assessment has been approved

Hagenbarth Land Exchange

- back in Washington for final approval
- hoping to see light at the end of the tunnel
- about 90 acres on the Big Hole
- Land kept out of exchange several years ago.
- says it's not a great area for a home site
- hopes to consummate by end of the calendar year

Madison site downstream from Palisades

- 880 acre access
- across from Wall game management area
- one of top three access areas in the state
- application in 2011 was just below funding line
- complicated project

-Flynn wanted to commend Bozorth and his staff on a previous land deal with Sun Mountain. He said that the deal was done in about two-and-a-half months and was a very successful project.

RAC Feedback to BLM

-Flynn wished to address the mountain pine beetle infestation on BLM lands. Says 26,000 acres of lodgepole pine in the Garnet area will essentially be dead. Flynn said that the watershed analysis is the only way to address these issues. Flynn hopes to find a more flexible way to address the issue outside of the watershed assessments. Says there is a tremendous potential for the area. He hates to see timber to go to waste.

-Haight responded that the watershed and NEPA analysis are both ways to address the problem. He said there's been some success for Bozorth and his district.

-Bozorth agreed and said that a little NEPA was involved with his recent success. He said that they can identify more but it isn't going to get it out of the door any faster.

-Torquemada agreed with Bozorth's assessment that his office is also at capacity

-Looney asked Flynn about the subcommittee he formed to address the bark beetle problem.

-Flynn said the committee tried to come up with a process to promote the harvesting of the lumber.

-Samson asked Flynn about the current price of lumber

-Flynn responded by saying it's all about the economics. It depends on how much you can pull out

-Kirsch asked about how dead the tree can be in order to get anything worth out of the lumber

-Flynn said that the tree is still of value in terms of byproducts but reduces with the amount of rot.

-Walker asked Abrams about a report from the previous meeting to come up with an access plan to address the mountain pine beetle

-Abrams said that that has not happened but would have to get with Hotaling about the plan

-Sweeney asked what could be done to speed the process along

-Bozorth said that it's all tied to funding, and that he doesn't see getting more funding. If anything, he says he will most likely see less funding.

-Haight added that it would have to happen at a higher level

-Walker asked that if it was still worth for the subcommittee to meet with the BLM staff

-Bozorth said that it is still of some value for the subcommittee.

-Sweeney added that the resources aren't reaching those who want them due to the political side.

-Antonioli asked if BLM could approve a green timber sale. He added the bug-killed timber could also be moved.

-Bozorth added that some legislation would most likely be needed

-Torquemada said that some expansion has been done in the past when it comes to timber sales

-Antonioli added that the green slip program should be revised.

-Haight said that it could take a national concerted effort

-Samson added to the discussion asking about "thinning" and salvage efforts. He said that years ago he bid on so many acres in the name of bidding. He then added that the principal of thinning has changed given the dead trees.

Kirsch added that part of the appraisal should include how much it costs if fire occurs.

-Balukas asked if there are contracts not being bid on

-Sweeney asked if there is anything the RAC can do as a group

-Walker said that it could be worth visiting alternatives as well as flexibility for Flynn's subgroup

-Looney brought up an issue of grants for people who are recreating, in order to map the location of weeds. She asked if BLM has any similar efforts.

-Bozorth said that they are getting money from the rural schools and other sources for the wood that is not getting cut. He added that BLM does not have a grant program like that.

-Bozorth said there were efforts with those floating the rivers and counties

-Looney said there is a problem with hounds-tongue in the Pony area. She says that she knows where these areas are and it could be helpful with more efforts.

Holland spoke about range improvement efforts in certain areas. He suggested planting grass to help with weeds and sagebrush. He also mentioned using fire in a mosaic pattern to help with the weeds. He added that this would be a win-win all the way around.

-Lionberger said that this is something they have done in the past with the watershed analysis

-Samson added that it has worked well up in Boulder

-Bozorth said that burning sagebrush for increased forage productions is something that is not likely to happen. He added: "For us to say that we have the answer and burn so many acres of sagebrush... it isn't going to happen."

-Finch said that he thinks that it *is* going to happen. What he is seeing is that the sagebrush canopy is continuing to close in.

North Hills Shooting Restriction

-Sherry Lionberger discussed

- North Helena Area
- Has long been a popular recreation area
- Most likely due to better roads
- In 2004, people in the area wanted their safety addressed due to shooting in the area
- A working group was subsequently established due to outcry
- RAC came up with proposal in 2007
- BLM held additional meetings in 2008 and 2009 and came up with shooting restriction proposal
- Addressed area of concern for the North Hills
- The EA was completed in 2009
- No decision was made on the area
- A wait-and-see approach was taken with new employees coming to BLM
- Have received some comments since then
- A fire started in the North Hills in the summer of 2011
- A temporary closure was made and shooting restrictions were put in place until the end of fire season
- A serious incident report was filed at the beginning of March
 - Three men were shooting at sleeping back tied around tree
 - One of the men had a warrant for his arrest and was taken away
- The BLM is trying to move the shooting area to a location up the road that is further away from homes

-Haight added that there has previously been a lot of politics involved with this issue concerning 2nd amendment rights. This has gone forward on a case-by-case basis.

-Samson added that as a former county commissioner, he doesn't see any infringement on rights when it comes to safety

-Looney asked the distance to the alternate trailhead for shooting.

-Rixford said about two miles

-Balukas noted that FWP routinely has re-designation done due to shooting

-Lionberger added that BLM isn't re-designating areas for shooting. Instead, BLM wants to close this area.

-Samson added that he thinks the committee had already voted on this

-Putz added that this has become more of a park

-Walker suggested that the RAC make a motion to reiterate the 2007 motion
Samson made a motion to support the previous motion from 2007
Kirsch seconded Samson's motion to support the previous motion from 2007
The motion passed unanimously

Limestone Hills Withdrawal Legislative EIS

- Lionberger spoke of the Limestone Hills area near Helena
 - o A 30-year right-of-way grant was made in 1984
 - o Coming up on the end of the right of way
 - o Limestone mining and shooting operations are currently happening in the area
 - o A closure of 8,000 acres was closed due to unexploded ordnances
 - o The Montana Army Natl. Guard contracted an EIS in 2008 for withdrawal
 - o EIS was not released
 - o BLM will review findings and submit
 - o Active mining activity was concerned about unreleased EIS
 - o EIS was finally released last Sept. 30
 - o Mining organization received the EIS
 - o One comment was received by a federal register watcher as well as the Graymont mining organization
 - o Prompted BLM to make revisions to its findings
 - o BLM struggled with language for the 8,000 acres of permanently closed area
 - o A monetary value was assigned to the area
 - o BLM revised some of the language it used on the environmental agreement
 - o Legislation now has two tracks to get to Congress
 - Senator introduces legislation for area
 - NDAA route, which has less hang-ups with appropriations
 - ❖ In order to get it in there, it must be submitted by April
- Haight added information the two parties went over in a meeting at the BLM district office.
- Antonioli added that he thought the meeting went well. He said he is happy to see how things are being added.
- Lionberger said there have been a few minor communication glitches
- Kirsch asked what Dolomite was
- Antonioli gave an explanation of what he thought it was
- Looney asked if Flynn was missing any members on his committee
- Sweeney volunteered to be the third member

Closing remarks

Abrams went over a list of action items for the meeting
-Haight asked if the resolutions were typed up and sent out

Review of action items

- o Action items from the meeting were reviewed Abrams

Next Meeting Date and Agenda

- o Possibility of a field trip for next meeting

- It was noted that there may be just two more meetings before the end of the calendar year

Topics of Discussion for the next meeting

- Rec Fee Proposal
- MSTI gradient maps provided by Bozorth
- Review of need for continuation of fee subgroup
- Timber Subgroup Report

-Finch brought up that somebody might be able to come in and give presentation on BLM sage grouse strategy. He also mentioned that it might be worth hearing about the Grizzly strategy.

-Sage Grouse Strategy

-Garnet Field Trip (most likely June 6-7)

-Walker discussed the lengthening of the RAC Feedback period

-Meeting was adjourned

Approved by:

Bob Walker, RAC Chairperson

Date _____

Western Montana Resource Advisory Council Minutes
June 12, 2012
Missoula Field Office

BLM Western Zone Staff Present: David Abrams, Pat Fosse, Scott Haight, Sherri Lionberger, Rich Torquemada

RAC Members Present: Ted Antonioli, Martin Balukas, Mike Connors, Steve Flynn, Michael Gibson, Koy Holland, Dave Kirsch, Katherine Looney, Paul Putz, Sam Samson, Whitney Tilt, Bob Walker, and Alan Weltzien

RAC Members Absent: Mark Sweeney, Nate Finch

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. Logistics for the June 13 field trip were discussed. Rich suggested meeting at the Hampton Inn in the morning and sorting out vehicles then.

Scott Haight suggested introductions since there are new members on board. It was announced that Tim Bozorth of the Dillon Field Office and Sherri Lionberger of the Butte Field Office would be retiring within the next month.

Rich welcomed the RAC members to the Missoula FO and apologized for the parking situation. The office is short of space due to seasonal employees and the Lolo Hotshot fire crew currently based at MFO.

David reviewed the action items from the previous meeting.

- BLM will bring its recreation fee proposal back to the RAC for discussion which will happen today.
- David had sent an information paper and memorandum of understanding (MOU) to the RAC members after the last meeting concerning Forest Service recreation fee proposals. The letter from the RAC to the Forest Service supporting Quake Lake fee elimination was also sent.
- A letter was also sent reiterating the RAC support of a shooting restriction in the North Hills near Helena. Also a letter supporting the recreation fee proposal.
- Timber subgroup convened and a report by Steve Flynn will be presented today.

Recreation Fee Proposal – Sherri Lionberger

1. The proposal reflects the subgroup recommendations for the most part which includes increasing camping fees on BLM's major sites on Holter and Hauser Lakes near Helena from \$10 per night to \$15. On BLM's river sites (Holter Dam, Divide), the proposal is for an increase from \$6 to \$10.

2. The subgroup also recommended increasing the day-use fee on Holter and Hauser from \$2 to \$5 except for White Sandy day-use which would increase to \$5 from no fee. BLM may need to review that in the future since the “no fee” was agreed to with MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks some time ago in order not to compete with the State’s Black Sandy site. Sherri commented that both sites are full to capacity in the summer and the fee probably won’t make any difference. If the fee does create a management impact at Black Sandy, then BLM will consider a fee adjustment as necessary.
3. The subgroup recommended not establishing day-use fees at any of the river sites due to remoteness of sites, high level of volunteer assistance, and lower levels of amenities provided. This proposal differs from the RAC’s in that no day-use fee would be charged at Holter Dam which is also a river site. BLM considers it to be a “launch and leave” site with few amenities.
4. New camping fees would be established at East Bank, Dickie Bridge, and Bryant Creek on the Upper Big Hole River pending the completion of improvements at Bryant Creek and amenities provided at all three sites. Fees at these three proximity sites will allow BLM to offset the costs of providing a management presence. An appropriate fee for these sites will be proposed to the RAC pending site improvements at Bryant Creek, which may be a year or two down the road.
5. No camping fees are proposed at Galena Gulch and Crow Creek. BLM does not believe that a camping fee would be cost effective over the next five years giving the infrastructural needs, campground host costs and relatively low use rates. This proposal differs from the RAC recommendation to establish a camping fee at these two sites.
6. Increase the BLM seasonal day-use pass from \$25 to \$40/season at the reservoir fee sites. This proposal is consistent with the RAC recommendation.

Sam mentioned that he felt Galena Gulch gets a lot of use due to 4-wheeling opportunities and the proximity of a shooting range.

Whitney asked about federal lands passes and camping fees. Pass holders (such as Golden Age) still pay 50% of established fees.

Bob Walker was pleased with assistance from BLM and is happy with the overall proposal. Michael Gibson also concurred.

Sherri said BLM will go forward with proposal for implementation for the 2013 season, pending affirmation by the RAC. Alan moved and Sam seconded that the RAC accepts the final recreation fee proposal. It passed unanimously.

Timber Subgroup – Steve Flynn

Steve gave a handout to the RAC and explained that the subgroup had met in Missoula in an effort to understand the current management approach to mountain pine beetle infested timber stands. Steve drew a diagram on the flip chart to depict landscape analysis that includes all uses (timber, recreation, fisheries, wildlife, range, etc.) on a particular geographic area over a 10 year period. The plans developed need to be defensible in court but Steve said he felt the plans don't take into account an unusual occurrence such as beetle-killed timber.

The timber subgroup is asking BLM to look at the planning process and reprioritize resources to address the timber dying due to beetle infestation. Infested timber has a shelf life and will quickly lose value. Steve recognizes the lack of funding and understands that any priority change will need to be accomplished with existing staff. This means that other projects may need to be delayed while the timber issue is addressed. He said it may not be popular with the public since it is a single issue approach, at least over the short-term.

Rich Torquemada said that all watersheds in the Missoula FO have beetle mortality to some extent and that the MFO is starting to look at the next 10 year cycle. BLM has some flexibility to change the order of watersheds analyzed. From a management standpoint, it would be better if BLM could continue with the process and BLM doesn't hold up the other programs.

Pat Fosse explained that once the DFO's watershed are assessed, it's easier for foresters or whichever specialists to do a simpler NEPA process such as a categorical exclusion (CX) or a Documentation of NEPA Adequacy (DNA) and tier back to the watershed analysis to accomplish project work. The fact that BLM has done the baseline analysis can really expedite the process.

Scott Haight mentioned that the RAC may benefit from hearing the planning process presentation prior to discussion of the timber subgroup proposal.

Dave Kirsch asked if all areas would be logged. Steve said no, there are many factors and restrictions to consider. Alan asked Steve to summarize the proposal. Steve said the subgroup would ask the council to compose a letter based on the subgroup's proposal and send it to BLM's State and Washington D.C.'s organization.

The decision was made to rearrange the agenda and start the Western Montana BLM Planning Areas now and bump the Top Items of Interest topic to the afternoon.

Western MT Planning Areas

Dillon FO, Pat Fosse presenter:

Pat explained the 17 watershed analysis areas for the Dillon FO established in 2001. In 2002 they started with the Horse Prairie watershed and in 2012 they will review that geographical area again. To start the process the interdisciplinary team (IDT) collects data for all program areas and all resources. It is a three-year process – the first year, data is collected; the second year, field assessments are completed; and then the IDT puts out a "Watershed Assessment Report" mailed to the public and posted on the BLM website. It is used as a scoping document for the environmental analysis. BLM also meets with permittees, recreationists, and other land

agencies. At any given time, there are several watershed assessments in different stages of development. All environmental assessments include three driving issues: riparian areas, upland health, and forest health and fuels. Pat summarized the findings of the watershed analysis related to those issues. Resource concerns include: special status species, wildland urban interface (WUI), noxious and invasive species, socio-economics, recreation use, travel management and public access.

So what does BLM do with this information? The plans make recommendations to repair or improve the condition of the land and make management more consistent. The plans recommend projects such as water developments, spring enclosures, fence removals, livestock permit modifications, wildlife habitat improvement projects, fish barriers, prescribed burns, timber harvest, aspen improvement projects, and other mechanical treatments.

DFO's plans have been appealed four times and BLM has won all four times. All the plans include monitoring plans that help measure any improvement in land health. It allows Dillon to take advantage of unplanned funding since they have a number of projects sitting on the shelf ready to be implemented.

Alan asked about Upper Horse Prairie and what BLM is expecting to find. Pat said objectives were written in 2002, with management changes taking place in 2003. BLM can measure change over 10 years with data collection. Her goal is to have an upward trending watershed over all program areas.

Whitney asked about projects such as fence removal or culverts installed and wondered what percent of needs that represented. Pat said some watersheds (through 2008) are fully implemented. Assessments from 2009-2010 are not completed yet. For prescribed fire, 60-65% of that is completed.

Rich said that projects are prioritized and staged over time, but BLM tries to get to everything identified in the watershed assessments. Whitney was surprised that BLM was as far along in the process as they are.

Paul Putz asked about cultural resources. Pat said that the BLM archaeologist is incorporated into the planning process along with other specialists. He also asked about enhancement vs. protection. Pat said most of the projects are protection-related but some enhancement and interpretive projects have been accomplished. One historic cabin is being refurbished and will be part of the cabin rental program in the near future.

Bob Walker asked about volunteer projects. Pat said certain projects lend themselves to volunteer labor (i.e. lek monitoring, fence removal). Martin Balukas mentioned the wikipups on Big Sheep Creek – it is a great site.

Bob asked about travel planning and compliance. Pat said it's not bad until hunting season. A question was asked about insect infestation – it is a huge issue but there are many other issues including weeds, white bark pine, and sage grouse that need attention.

Missoula FO – Tim LaMarr, presenter

Missoula's process is similar to what Dillon does but there are differences. MFO manages 156,000 acres (mostly forested) but the management is complex and includes endangered species such as grizzly bear, bull trout, and Canada lynx.

MFO does a lot of vegetation management including burning and mechanical methods. Missoula does comprehensive landscape planning that is interdisciplinary and issue driven. The watershed analysis includes an assessment of disturbance risk. Recommendations from the assessments are rolled into an environmental analysis (EA) document that specifies planned projects.

Tim said MFO looks at all the resources but he is going to focus mostly on vegetation management which includes planting, prescribed fire, commercial thinning and timber sales. Missoula has acquired about 11,000 acres that were previously managed by Plum Creek.

Tim used the Murray-Douglas assessment as an example to explain the planning process. The first step is to compare current conditions to historic conditions through use of old aerial photos and other field information. Steve asked about level of inventory in the MFO; Tim said 85-90% of field office area is inventoried.

Based on information gathered, the specialists recommend projects for improving land health. The same specialists implement the planned projects. These are long-term plans, multiple treatments over multiple decades.

Steve asked about beetle-infested trees and how that affects planning. If areas scheduled for commercial sale are infested, can response be accelerated while the value is still there? Rich said that in the first decade there are treatment priorities, but it doesn't keep BLM from going back and doing a smaller NEPA effort to capture more of the volume through salvage sales. Steve asked if an area was scheduled for a commercial sale in the future and became infested, can the process be accelerated while the timber still had value. Rich said the highest priority areas had already been harvested. Tim said that with the current workforce, there is only so much that can be done, keeping in mind other resources such as wildlife. He cautioned that it is not as straightforward as it might seem; it is a complex issue.

Steve is looking for a reprioritization and more aggressive planning for the timber industry. How can beetle-infested stands be addressed in a more timely manner?

Martin asked if all watershed assessments are done – not the Butte FO. He suggested a reordering of watershed assessments to address the heavily-infested areas.

Koy asked about the “red areas” (from Tim LaMarr’s map) – how does fire play into the lynx model? Rich said he wanted to address a misperception – everywhere that plans are being done, the beetle-infested trees are a high priority for treatment. Chamberlain is currently under assessment; Marcum and Hoodoos have been done. The problem is determining what is the highest of the high priorities.

Pat said the issue is not planning but staffing. Priority is in the eye of the beholder for public land users depending on who you ask.

Sam asked about staffing mix – how is that decided. Scott said it was a long and involved process.

Dave Kirsch mentioned that trees were breaking off about halfway up and he heard that loggers don’t want ponderosa pine. Steve said ponderosa pine doesn’t make good studs so the market is limited. However, other mills can use ponderosa pine for boards. Dead ponderosa pine is of no value.

Tim continued his PowerPoint presentation with slides of prescribed burns recently implemented. He said it takes many years to implement a suite of projects in any one area. Tim said this is the first planning cycle and he expects the second cycle of planning to go faster since they have baseline data.

Butte Field Office – Sherri Lionberger

Sherri said that Butte manages 350,000 acres over several counties. Maps were passed out to RAC members. Butte recently gained the north half of Lewis & Clark County from the Lewistown FO. Butte will figure out how to incorporate it into Butte’s planning process.

Prior to 2011, only grazing allotments were assessed for land health standards. They were mostly looked at for range-related issues and were not all-encompassing. As leases expired, allotments were analyzed.

Butte’s current process started in 2009/2010 for holistic planning. The scattered ownership doesn’t lend itself to watershed divisions. Butte staff has divided their field office into 19 planning areas. Sherri explained how areas were prioritized, including the four areas that still need travel planning. Butte tries to accomplish two areas per year with a process similar to MFO and DFO.

BLM has the ability to flex priorities but it still takes a few years to gather data and go through the planning process. Butte is focusing on a forestry/fuels project in the Clancy area based on need (planning area 11,000 acres/treatment area 3,300 acres).

The Upper Big Hole East is the BFO’s current large planning effort. The EA is out to the public for comment. The plan calls for many forestry/fuels projects, noxious weeds treatments and travel planning. BLM has public meetings scheduled and hopes to have a decision this summer.

Sam asked about weeds and biological control and said BLM might consider creating an insectary. Sherri said that BLM uses bio-control where it's appropriate. Scott said some small projects related to beetle issues are outside the planning cycle, i.e. Clancy and Rogers Pass Timber Sale.

Paul asked about coordination with the Forest Service. Sherri said they share data with the Forest Service and said the FS has a longer planning process and has more of a problem with litigation. BLM's projects are generally smaller and easier to implement.

Bob asked Steve to look at the timber subgroup proposal over lunch and bring back the proposal with any modifications for discussion in the afternoon.

MSTI Project

David introduced Paul Callahan president of CPCI an environmental consulting firm and manager for Mountain States Transmission Intertie project (MSTI). Alan also reminded the group that the RAC has had a MSTI subgroup for two years.

Paul said that CPCI is a contractor for BLM and MT DEQ, the two co-lead agencies. His task is to develop an environmental document with help from subcontractors, Northwestern Energy, and cooperating agencies. The process started in 2008. So far there have been two administrative drafts completed – the first one generated 2,700 comments from agency staff and the second had 200 comments. Jefferson County had filed a lawsuit in 2009 but that is now settled. The third administrative draft is due out in September with a draft for public review by the end of the year. The sage grouse issues may necessitate some local routing changes, especially in Idaho. In MT the project tried to avoid major sage grouse areas.

Montana's permitting process is different than Idaho's due to the Major Facility Siting Act which is why the MT DEQ is a co-lead. Paul distributed a handout of the type of structures that are proposed to be used if and when the line is constructed.

Alan said the MSTI subgroup will make a recommendation to the RAC at large and stated the project is not a "done deal"; the organizations Alan represents are generally not in favor of the MSTI project.

Paul said the EIS document that CPCI is developing is his own "juggernaut." It analyzes various routes and fully discloses the impacts of each of the alternatives. Paul stated that the EIS will be a decision document and Scott asked about the schedule and milestones. Paul said the deadlines were reshuffled due to the sage grouse issues, but they expect a public draft early in 2013 followed by a 90-day comment period with a minimum of six public meetings. Notices will be posted in the Federal Register and area newspapers. At the end of the comment period, the comments are processed and the agency decision-makers review the information, revise the document if needed, and decide which alternative (or combination of alternatives) to choose.

At that point, the draft is made into a final EIS with a Record of Decision that is posted in the Federal Register and newspapers.

Ted asked about the socio-economic portion of the EIS – who will pay for transmission line – which rate payers? It is of great concern to individual rate payers and industrial users. Paul said the issue is front and center in the EIS; the Siting Act calls for a rate impact study. Energy Strategies in Salt Lake City specialize in this issue and their information is Appendix A of the EIS. Paul said he felt the right people were looking at the issue but the bad news is that the information is not definitive because there are deficiencies in the policy arena. The study will be available in the draft document.

David announced the public comment period at 11:30 but there were no members of the public present who wished to address the RAC.

Sam asked about the source of the power, where it's going, and the level of demand. Also, what is the Public Service Commission (PSC) involvement? Paul responded that Northwestern Energy may have the answers to Sam's questions but his understanding is that the PSC has no involvement with the EIS but does have a role in any rate increase proposals. The power source is a big question – who wants to ship electrons over this line? Uncertain answer because not a lot of entities have signed up to ship power using this line. DEQ needs to make a determination on whether this project is needed or not. Level of demand is also uncertain.

Originally the line was presented by Northwestern as a way to connect California (which needs renewable energy) to Montana that has renewable energy and make the grid more reliable. Paul said he is not an expert on California energy policy.

California is a big market but the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) has a need to get power to southeast Idaho under contract with other business's lines. The line-use contracts expire in 2016 and are not being renewed. BPA is looking at all their options including MSTI to serve those customers.

Alan said there are many unanswered questions with no clear economic benefits from MSTI. The project is not supported in Beaverhead County. Paul said the cost/benefit economic studies will be spelled out in the draft EIS.

Dave Kirsch of Jefferson County said the county sued DEQ over the level of coordination with the counties. Jefferson Co. won the first round but lost after review by the Supreme Court. Jefferson Co. and Madison Co. established a paid (by Northwestern Energy) working group to meet with agencies and interested public to hear comments and try and get answers to questions. Dave said the line was proposed to carry "green" energy (wind farms) but realistically most energy would come from Colstrip power plants. As a county commissioner, Dave prefers "black energy" as opposed to green, because the counties are paid at a higher taxation rate (2% vs. 12%).

Ultimately, DEQ will determine the route. Jefferson Co. prefers the route that goes to the north and follows the power corridor that comes from Townsend and goes to Butte, then Mill Creek, and south. The “preferred” route in the draft administrative document was the southern route. The MSTI “review group” was started by the counties and funded primarily by Northwestern Energy.

Martin asked how the RAC subgroup fits into the MSTI EIS and how concerns are addressed. Alan said the RAC subgroup would make a recommendation to the RAC at large and the RAC would make a recommendation to BLM. Bob suggested a MSTI subgroup presentation at the next meeting to bring everyone up to date since there are a lot of new members. Alan said that may be difficult without Tim Bozorth present.

Scott said that Tim Bozorth (soon to be retired) may have a supporting role on the MSTI project for BLM. The Western Zone District Manager (Rick Hotaling) will be the authorized federal official for the MSTI project for the time being. Current RAC subgroup members are: RAC members Alan Weltzien, Ted Antonioli, Dave Kirsch (replaced Dave Schultz), and Rob Thomas, Doug Mood, and Leonard Wortman from outside the RAC but representing the three categories of interest. David Abrams will check to see if a chair has been designated.

Scott asked what type of recommendations the BLM would want from the subgroup – review and comments on the draft EIS and preferred alternative. Bob asked about the appropriate time for a historical review of MSTI project by the subgroup; Ted suggested after the draft EIS is out early in 2013.

The council broke for lunch at noon and reconvened at 1:05 p.m.

Field Office Updates

- Missoula – Rich Torquemada started with a short video on the Missoula Field Office and continued with the following items of interest:
 - Chamberlain Watershed Assessment is wrapping up; followed by an EA.
 - Working on three grazing lease renewals; draft EAs by the end of June.
 - Riparian improvement fencing project at Ram Mountain is underway along with others in the MFO area.
 - Discovery Basin right-of-way project is waiting for the Draft EA from a private firm hired by Discovery Basin. The proposal is to tie into Rumsey Road so Discovery can expand area and open another day-use facility.
 - Mannix Park Exchange in South Hoodoos is a possible opportunity to consolidate land holdings – a feasibility study is underway.
 - Vegetation management projects in the Marcum area – thinning, burning, weeds, fencing, and timber sale administration. Logging is wrapping up in the Hoodoos.
 - Trying to capture some beetle-killed salvage in the Willow Creek area by tying to an existing environmental document.

- America's Great Outdoors – This is the current administration's initiative to address a number of issues by trying to get adults and children into the outdoors with more opportunities for recreation. Rich pointed out a few areas on the map that were submitted for national funding. One proposal for next year's budget is a land exchange for land currently held by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) called Morrison Peak along the Highway 200 corridor and another segment in the Chamberlain area. The area is important wildlife habitat. Proposals originally submitted for Land and Water Conservation Fund – never fully funded so it is a national competition to see what gets funded.
- Missoula FO has partnered with the Forest Service, National Park Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service, MT Department of Natural Resources and several counties to develop a weed map for the "Crown of the Continent". It will provide a universal data base for weed management decisions.
- Grizzly Bear Conservation Strategy - area with active grizzly bears has expanded. Land management agencies are developing a grizzly conservation strategy with a public comment draft out by the end of the summer. It will involve road density, food storage guidelines for the back country, and management prescriptions. Would like the RAC comments on the strategy and discussion at future meetings.

Butte FO – Sherri Lionberger

- Implementation continues on vegetation-management projects from the Whitetail-Pipestone EA and the Wise River EA.
- Rogers Pass Timber Sale has a volume of 1.5 million board feet with a site tour on June 14.
- Clancy EA allows different vegetation management activities to reduce fuel load and has a 4 to 5 year implementation schedule depending on budget.
- BLM expects a late June decision on the Upper Big Hole East EA which has a number of projects ready for implementation.
- 20 summer volunteers are engaged at various recreation sites in the Butte Field Office – mostly on Holter and Hauser Lakes. Involves significant training.
- White Sandy, Devil's Elbow, and Clark's Bay recreation sites were built without being part of a public water system. MT DEQ has notified BLM that the sites need to be part of a public system to be in compliance. BLM has put notices in the campgrounds to tell users that the systems are not in compliance but there has never been a bad water test.
- BLM is proposing shooting restrictions in the North Hills outside of Helena. Two recent wildland fires are believed to have been caused by tracer bullets.
- A cooperative spray day for weeds in the Elkhorns is scheduled for June 14. A 2012 grant was used to provide spray.

Dillon – Pat Fosse

- Tim Bozorth's last day is June 29. Pat will do a 90-day detail as acting Field Manager followed by Vinita Shea for 90 days or until the position is filled.

- The Medicine Lodge EA is posted on the website. Private land in the Medicine Lodge area is no longer in block management which closed access to the public land. BLM is looking at building three short roads across BLM to provide public access.
- East Grasshopper EA (80K acres, 16 allotments) is due out by the end of June; proposed projects include forest health treatments and prescribed fire due to conifer encroachment.
- Upper Horse Prairie Watershed Assessment (32 allotments, 54K acres) is scheduled for this summer.
- Madison River Recreation Plan Citizen's Advisory Committee is working to determine carrying capacity for anglers. It will involve several meetings.
- Continue to work with Idaho on the sub-regional EIS to amend land use plans for sage grouse conservation efforts. The Dillon RMP is very close to what the technical team came up with for conservation measures. May need some revision in the area of oil and gas leasing for no surface occupancy in core habitat.
- Land exchanges – proposed exchange along Madison River that will provide public access into the river from the Highway. Hagenbarth Land exchange on Big Hole River is almost complete – it is in the Washington Office for final review.
- Restoration of historic Nay Ranch House is almost complete; will be part of the cabin rental program in 2013.
- Timber Sale Program – Shale Creek and Price of Beans Timber Sales are in progress and a sale at Black Mountain is advertised. Sun West stewardship project in the Madison Valley has limited access. South Tobacco Roots Phase 1 Timber Sale will be advertised later this summer.
- Completed all planned prescribed burning this spring (1200 acres); left enough funding for 110 acres of aspen restoration near Lima. Will also complete 300 acres of service contracts around the Price Creek Timber Sale of non-merchantable trees (aspen and Douglas-fir savannah restoration) in the Centennial Valley.
- Virginia Kelly of the Greater Yellowstone Conservation Committee attended a staff meeting in Dillon to welcome them to the partnership. Other BLM offices involved include Butte and Billings (a total of 1.6 million BLM acres).
- Recently BLM staff and 20 volunteers from the Madison River Foundation did willow planting along the Madison River to restore a riparian area that had been fenced in with private land and grazed every spring.
- White bark pine work continues with treating trees with verbanone to protect them from mountain pine beetle. Cones are collected and tested for blister rust resistance.
- Working with Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest to revise the Southwest Montana Interagency Visitor Map.

RAC Feedback to BLM

Bob asked Steve for clarification of the timber subgroup proposal. Steve said the proposal is the same as the draft document and they would like some feedback from BLM on how areas are prioritized and a timeframe for addressing them (over the next 18 months).

Steve made a motion to make a proposal in the form of a letter to BLM Western District to ask the BLM to focus on areas with current environmental planning documents and to address the mountain pine beetle infested timber stands in these areas, and, to get feedback from BLM on how the infested areas are prioritized and what the timeframe would be. Scott clarified the motion to two parts – first asking for a priority change and the second is an information request. Ted seconded the motion.

Michael Gibson asked if it was a realistic request considering staffing and budget. Steve acknowledged that BLM staff is doing all it can do, but he is asking for a reprioritization and using current staff to focus on infested areas.

Scott said that BLM could respond to the request, keeping in mind it may fall short of expectations. Whitney asked if the committee had a clear idea of how the District can respond given it has landscape plans in place and adequate NEPA to infestations to answer the questions? If not, he would be uncomfortable making it a priority. Scott added that BLM's timber and fuels budget may be cut by as much as 37%, so any additional workload will be a challenge.

Alan asked about total acres infested by FO – Rich said 20-30K acres in the Missoula Office. Pat said specialists have a good sense of infested areas and plans. They try to move quickly and prioritize to deal with forest health issues. Sherri said BFO is limited for timber sale opportunities and are mostly paying for fuel to be removed. There are two commercial sale possibilities in the Wise River area.

Martin asked how realistic a change of planning is, since it is a legislated planning process. Rich responded that the biggest challenge may be the timber budget if that gets cut by more than 30%. Missoula is also waiting to start their RMP process.

Scott said by the next meeting BLM should be able to tell the committee what BLM can do but whether that will change the priorities, with potential budget cuts, remains to be seen. Bob called for a vote on the motion which passed. Steve will write the letter of proposal.

Sam Samson mentioned an old stamp mill on BLM land near Marysville and the Great Divide Ski Area. Another individual wondered if the committee could recommend that the site be set aside as a historical site. Paul said it was probably the "Rattlesnake Mill" which is a nice example of a 5-stamp mill in decent condition. Another example is in the Elkhorns which is a 10-stamp mill with adit.

Sherri said the Butte archaeologist would not like to see the mill moved and interpretation is a possibility. More development at the site could encourage vandalism. Scott said ownership needs to be verified and access (and type) would need to be determined.

Whitney asked about how the RAC gets involved with an eroding budget. Bob responded by reading a paragraph from the charter which states that except for long-range planning and priority setting, the council will not advise on expenditure of federal funds or personnel actions.

Scott explained the federal budget process and stated that RAC endorsed requests carry more weight than BLM requests alone.

Dave Kirsch gave an example of firewood cutting differences between the Forest Service and BLM related to cutting distances from an established road. You can travel 300' feet off the road on BLM land and a pickup length on Forest Service.

A discussion followed on the frustration of the budget process and how best to express that to Congress and the Administration. Any RAC recommendation to the Secretary goes on BLM letterhead; and it is better for the RAC not to do it directly.

Some members expressed concern over the wildfire possibility and the large amount of beetle-killed trees. It is a complex issue and not easily solved.

Scott mentioned the State Leadership Team will be spending time at Devil's Elbow in July and they will see the challenge of forest health issues in the Helena area. Koy asked how there was no money for management but there is always money available to fight fires.

Katherine asked about a proposed wind farm at Golden Sunlight Mine near Whitehall. Scott said that the private initiative is continuing but the federal portion has been dropped; BLM is no longer involved.

Bob asked how travel management compliance is going. Butte FO has two park rangers (funded through a state grant) that work in the Pipestone area. The law-enforcement officer helps with education. Hunting season sees the most infractions. Routes are being inventoried in the four remaining travel management areas.

Pat said part of the problem is that GPS software shows all the roads but not whether a road is open or closed. Montana State Office is working on a website where people can download or print a certain area. Discussion followed on volunteer efforts related to trails in the Pipestone and Boulder areas.

Scott challenged the group to think of a project that the RAC could problem solve and offer solutions to the BLM similar to the recreation fee effort. . Katherine asked about volunteer efforts to help with signing and trail maintenance and suggested advertising events. Sherri said some projects lend themselves to volunteer efforts and others don't. Sherri mentioned the Clancy area would be a good candidate for a focused effort.

Alan talked about partnering (state, federal, and local) along with volunteer groups could come together and make things happen on the ground and used the Continental Divide Trail Alliance as an example. Bob mentioned a Bi-state Recreation Parks & Trails Conference in Missoula, September 26-29, Holiday Inn Parkside. Bob is on the steering committee.

Action Items:

- Determine who is chair of the MSTI subgroup (David)

- Provide the RAC with a list of timber priorities and how it fits into the planning cycle (Field Managers)
- Check on history of ownership and legality of access to Rattlesnake Stamp Mill near Great Divide (Sherri Lionberger)

Closing Items:

- Dinner tonight at the Montana Club at 6 p.m. for RAC members.
- Friday Field Trip – reviewed agenda and stops; meet in Hampton Inn lobby @ 8:15
- Next RAC meeting: September 12 in Dillon

Agenda topics:

- BLM response to timber subgroup
- Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy
- Rattlesnake Stamp Mill (ownership/access)
- What is BLM doing to recruit volunteers? How do DOI and BLM use volunteers? MSO Coordinator as speaker.
- Grizzly Bear Conservation Strategy Update – contingent on timing and public comment.
- The “Gap” Analysis (see explanation below)

Paul Putz suggested making a report about what is not being done on public lands due to lack of funding and resources – an “inventory of needs” document. Suggested the RAC could work on something similar without getting into lobbying trouble. Western RAC Report on unfunded needs. Would that information be identified in the Watershed Analysis Plans? Possibly so.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

Approved by:

Bob Walker, RAC Chairperson

Date _____