

Meeting Minutes

Sierra Front-Northwestern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council

Aug. 8, 2013

Video Conference - Reno, Carson City, and Winnemucca Nevada

I. RAC Attendance and Welcome

8:00 a.m., Thursday, Aug. 8, 2013 – The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Debbie Lassiter with the following members of the RAC present:

SIERRA FRONT–NORTHWESTERN GREAT BASIN RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL

COUNCIL MEMBER	RESOURCE/EXPERTISE	8/8/2013
<i>Andy Hart</i>	Recreation	X
<i>Craig Young (Vice Chair)</i>	Archaeology	X
<i>Tim Dufurrena</i>	Livestock Permittee	X
<i>Verl Ray Hendrix</i>	Livestock Permittee	X
<i>Kyle Snyder</i>	Energy/Minerals	X
<i>Deborah Lassiter</i>	Energy/Minerals	X
<i>Mathew Gingerich</i>	Transportation/ROWs	X
<i>David Von Seggern</i>	Environmental	X
<i>William Molini</i>	Wildlife	X
<i>Mark Freese</i>	State Agency	X
<i>Charles Matton</i>	Wild Horses & Burros	X
<i>Jim Billingsley</i>	Elected Official	
<i>Ron Cerri</i>	Public-At-Large	X
<i>Douglas Hogan</i>	Academic	
<i>VACANT</i>	Native Americans	

BLM Staff Present: Gene Seidlitz, Bernadette Lovato, Mark Turney, Lisa Ross, Chris Rose

Public Present: N/A

Opening and introductions - Gene Seidlitz

Young: motions to have the last minutes approved. Molini 2nds, Motion passes.

SUB-COMMITTEE REPORTS:

NCA-Sub-Group

Young:

- Gerald Dixon leaving,
- Zach Million leaving,
- Filling Full-time Burning Man position.
- Black Rock Station is now open.
- Acquisition of 340 acres of land in the High Rock area- edge holdings East Fork High Rock Wilderness.
 - Sub-Group would ask that this land be managed as though it were wilderness.
- BLM working with Soldiers Meadow ranch on a Conservation Easement and Sub-Group believes it should be part of the grazing permit. BLM working with the Ranch on issues surrounding responsible use.
- Four properties for sale in the NCA. Could be a threat to access to NCA, the Wilderness Area and the historic Applegate Trail. Only road goes through all four parcels of private and they could close it down if they wanted.
- Spoke at length about the contributions of the Friends of Black Rock/High Rock and Friends of Nevada Wilderness.
- Spoke about the difficulty of getting representatives on the Sub-Group.
- Hydroft expansion on the south east side of the NCA near Sulpher.
 - Mitigate visual impacts to the NCA.
 - Concern of the subgroup is visual impacts on the Applegate trail.
 - Letter to Kathy Ataman discussed.

Seidlitz:

- NCA subgroup wrote a letter to the RAC. The RAC drafted a letter and sent it to the NS Director Amy Lueders and the Secretary. The letter sought approval to become active on the permit renewal process of the transfer from Kudrna to B-Taz. Subgroup could review Preliminary EA's but not be part of the actual process. Look into the deed of the landowner. With the conservation easement tied to the deed, it would be reviewed to see if it needs to be modified. This would transfer with land ownership. BLM does not get involved as this is a private issue.

Had unauthorized use in the Desert Dace areas and issues/ uses surrounding water rights and associated issues.

Grazing Subgroup:

Freese:

- Met July 10 to discuss the permit renewal process.
 - Purpose and need.
 - Recommendations as to how to streamline the process.
 - NEPA issues. What is required and what is not?
 - Proposes a NEPA topic talk for the RAC to better help understand the process.
- Extra money provided from DC to help speed up the process of permit renewal
 - Some of the money used to hire contractors to assist in gathering data and preparing reports to support the renewal process.
- NEPA process gaining a better understanding
 - Are multiple comment periods really necessary?
 - How can industry help in the process?
 - Can they hire contractors to help gather/interpret data?
 - Collection of data to ensure quality of data and work.
 - Standalone interdisciplinary teams to stand up in order to help speed things up.
 - If someone leaves the team, the process would not stop.
 - Developing a framework or model to help get everyone on the same page and through the NEPA process
 - Grouping allotments to get these NEPA actions done faster.
 - Shortening the NEPA documents. What is really needed vs. what can be removed from the documents?
 - State Team approach. FS uses an enterprise team which collects data throughout the state. This adds to the consistency of the data. The state team should be writing the NEPA document and the Districts the Allotment Management Plans.
 - Mentoring plan. With the turn-over that happens in this program a mentoring approach would help get these people on board with the program a little quicker.
 - Not sure if we should take what we have now and work with this or have another meeting to further discuss issues.
 - Seidlitz: The District developed a DRAFT permit renewal strategy and shared it with the State Office.
 - NSO backing our idea.
 - NSO engaged with the Washington Office. Washington Office making it clear to us that we must do a better job in the renewal process.
 - Strategy in Winnemucca District (WD). If you expect us to do 50-60 renewals in one year, we will never get there. This is too cumbersome, there are too many processes/protocols and reviews in the way. Washington knows there is an

issue and has given us permission to follow a different process while still meeting the intent of the IM.

- Trying to use other regs to speed things up.
- NSO has a draft strategy that they will be sending to WO.
- The creation of a standing team within the WD and possibly Nevada State Office to speed things up.
- Freese: The background is tiering or referencing other documents. If we referenced other established documents would this help shorten NEPA documents?
 - Would this be the time for a letter from the subgroup?
- Seidlitz: Yes. We support
- Freese: Perhaps we should put these recommendations into letters and send them.
- Lassiter: Draft should be sent out to group.
- Freese; **Copy of the draft strategy to be sent to the RAC.**
- Cerri motions to have a Grazing Letter drafted by Mark Freese. Seconded by Ray Hendrix. Motion passed.

Sage grouse subcommittee:

- Molini:
 - Sage grouse subcommittee update.
 - Governor set up sage grouse ecosystem council.
 - Role of the RAC for the sage grouse issue?
 - Perhaps implementation guidance.
 - Debbie has created a checklist for BLM RAC subgroups.
 - Groups' status: We will provide comments on the draft and final EIS once they are released.
 - Is the Subgroup officially recognized? Not sure if it has been.
- Sage Grouse subgroup letter to go out with comments. Craig Young motions, Chuck Matton seconds. Motion Passes.

Wild Horse and Burro Sub Group (WHB)

- Matton:
 - Last meeting we spoke about WH&B sanctuaries.
 - We put together a general idea of what should be the minimum number of horses.
 - There should be a minimum of one road and should be available to public.
 - Should be fenced or have other impediments to keep the horses on the property.
 - Sanctuaries would be maintained by contractors. They would be responsible for the care of the animals. During drought they would feed and water otherwise leave them alone.

- How many acres per animal?? No real answers. Would be site dependent.
- Wild Horses should be PZP'd through water traps.
- Chip horses? We need to look at this as a way to track them.
- Comments?
- National Academy of Science report says we should be doing something different.
- DM reports now. Take a break.

RESUMED 0935

DM Report:

- Seidlitz:
 - Drought: WD perspective on action plans for the next couple of years.
 - Within the WD. Mining exploration and projects ongoing within the WD. Mining is a big workload in our district.
 - Golden and bald eagle conservation plans. Coordination with NDOW and other services. Talked about the possible delays in permitting or authorizations based on conservation plans and Fish and Wildlife Service issues. Processes and protocols are still undefined but we are working through the issues.
 - Sage grouse issues with a Lek near the Snowstorm Exploration project.
 - Western Lithium. Hectorite clay proposal is being worked on. There are possible resource conflicts in this area because of sage grouse habitat.
 - Multiple uses can coexist.
 - Soldiers Meadows area issues: We observed some ground disturbing activities within the Desert Dace habitat area and other ACEC areas.
 - WH&B:
 - Last year and this year. Flights to see how things were on the ground. Look to see drought and permitted livestock.
 - Renewable Energy:
 - Teragen Geothermal plan approved however they cannot go forward without an Eagle Conservation Plan.
 - Lease sale package for next geothermal lease sale.
 - WD has 3 or 4 parcels for the next lease/sale.
 - San Emidio Power plant Proposal:
 - They have a plan before us which we are currently working on.
 - Burning Man SRP issued
 - 68000 cap for this year's event.
 - Working together with BRC on joint compliance teams during the event.

DM Report

- Lovato:
 - WH&B issues- No gathers planned for the Carson City District this year.
 - Held 3 public workshops on the WH&B issues. They have gotten progressively better.
 - Studying the need for supplemental watering of wild horses in specific areas.
 - Will do a horse herd helicopter flight to look at the overall health of the animals.
 - NEPA related issues:
 - We held an RMP briefing and created a matrix which was reviewed by the state office to help guide the RMP through the process.
 - Believe that we will remain on schedule with a Draft RMP being done in winter of 2014.
 - Completed a Drought EA and a FONSI.
 - American Flats issues:
 - Lots of public concern over the direction we are moving. We will continue to pursue some funding and look forward to significant steps forward in the next few years.
 - Recreational use of the land appears to be down over previous years though Walker Lake usage appears to be raising slightly.
 - Working on a process to help streamline the permit process utilizing the web.
 - Bison Fire:
 - Largest fire we had this year.
 - May turn out to be a positive for sage grouse as it burned expanding pinion habitat.

Drought Update:

- Lovato:
 - Had some permittees willing to take voluntary non-use so we haven't had to make many of the difficult choices that others have had to make.
 - We have been lucky to have people on the ground monitoring the land. If this continues we will have to find other creative ways to manage what is on the ground.
 - We have to make hard decisions within the grazing program but we have such big problems within the Wild Horse and Burro program. The horses are having huge impacts on the land.
 - Our Drought EA has taken all of these things into account but it is still a bad place to be in to have to make these decisions.
- Seidlitz: For two years we have had an internal Drought strategy from WD.
 - Our areas of concentration are:

- 2012 HMA's over AML
 - PPH & PGH for Sage grouse
 - T&E species
 - Fish
 - Wildlife
 - Plants
 - Hot season grazing
 - Riparian areas w/wo fish
- We developed a compliance schedule and a very simple form that our people are filling out in terms of available water, vegetation, pictures and GPS coordinates.
 - Shared with NDOW, permittees and others agencies
- Issued 4-6 different letters to all livestock permittees. Encouraged voluntary changes in livestock numbers.
- Requests for Temp water hauling.
- Issued a PEA on Drought. Issued final EA on drought and FONSI.
- Blue Wing Emergency Gather
 - Utilized Drought EA and drought response actions/triggers to gather 200 excess wild horses from Blue Wing.
- Voluntary Livestock Reductions signed with 2 permittees. Allows for resting of land for the remainder of this year through next year.
- Our focus is on drought still. Anything with drought monitoring data of 4 is being closely monitored. Mostly in Pershing County.
- We have had a great deal of dialogue with our permittees, congressional representatives, Nevada Cattlemen's Association and county officials through community outreach.

FIRE UPDATE:

- Shane McDonald:
 - The BIA has some serious issues this year. Their vegetation specialist retired earlier this year and they were struggling so we stepped in to help.
 - We hope to enter into a long term agreement with the BIA this year. That will help us both become more efficient.
 - Responded to about 45 fires so far this year.
- Mike Feticc:
 - 2013 YTD statistics: 30 lightning (21,533 acres), 26 Human caused (80 Acres). With our cooperators we have an additional 10 fires for a total a bit over 22,000 acres.
 - Excellent safety record this year.
 - All incidents managed here locally thus far.
 - PPH and PGH acres burned: 37 PPH 62 PGH.

- Roadside fuel breaks. Stopped 5 fires last year. Highway fuel breaks are highly effective. We have permitted them through an EA and are in the ROW for NDOT.

ES&R Update:

- Tim Roide: We had some fires that burned very hot last year. We are working to get those areas addressed first because of soil erosion and possible flooding issues onto highway 395. This will be accomplished through about 40 acres of seeding and the placement of straw walls to inhibit soil movement. We will be doing some noxious weed work and there will be some closures to both vehicles and grazing.
 - Bison fire was lightning caused. Burned 24,000 acres in total and in particular 11,000 acres of Bi-state sage grouse PPH and PGH.
 - 9 total cooperators have been involved in the planning. The plan was signed just yesterday.
- Derek Messmer: As far as last year's fires we have done 77K acres of aerial seeding. On the Holloway fire we did 66K acres there alone and drill seeded 3K acres.
 - Perennial cover fairly good.
 - This year we had around 20K acres burned. PPH and PGH roughly 100 acres burned this year.
 - Monitoring: we have preliminary data so far but there is a lot of area to cover this year.
 - Weed Treatment and inventory for all 2011 and 2012 treatments.
- Dufurrena: How long will this take to get the data back from monitoring? The permittees need to know what is going on so we can make our plans.
 - Seidlitz: We should know by September or October. We should be able to get coordination with the permittees who had fires in 2010, 2011, and 2012.
- Cerri: How does this affect closures and the number of seasons of non-use?
 - Seidlitz: The wording in past closure decisions listed two growing seasons rest. The decisions we issued to permittees in 2012 never had a growing season number listed in them. It was based off the site and the objectives as written.
- Lassiter: The RAC put together a letter on ES&R (authored by Mark Freese). What happens to it now?
- Freese: Motivations in writing the letter. It took a long time for the WO to prioritize the funding and getting it sent down to the districts. Is there any way to streamline this process of how the monies are allocated and the timeframes they are done in? Can we get this down in a timely manner to increase its effectiveness?
 - Seidlitz: The reality is that the process in place to get the Secretary of the Interior to respond needs to be worked on. Once the fire is contained and controlled we in WD have some timeframes to meet to get the process moving. Would it be advantageous to have Derek explain the process?

GEOHERMAL:

Briefings by Gene Seidlitz and Carla James.

- James: Carson City administers 176 geothermal leases.
 - Currently 6 active plants in our District.
- Seidlitz: Not as much interest in our District as in others. We do have the Blue Mountain Power Plant which has gone under new ownership. It is currently producing 40 Megawatts.
- We completed the Final EA and Decision for the New York Canyon geothermal project.
- In January we were able to work with Ormat on a hydro shearing project through a focused EA and a FONSI . This project was ultimately permitted.
- We have a utilization plan for San Emideo which we will have a kick-off meeting for here soon.

SAGE GROUSE:

- Raul Morales
 - I want to update you on our land use plan and a range of actions that are being considered on our EIS. This project was begun first in 2011. 5 Federal, 3 state agencies in Nevada, 1 in California, 9 counties (2 in CA, 7 in NV) 4 tribal gov'ts have signed the MOU to become cooperating agencies which allows them to work with BLM to craft the alternatives. It also gives those agencies the ability to see in what direction those alternatives are going and to provide feedback prior to the general public. The draft document is expected to be released to the public on September 30.
 - The draft document is currently under review in Washington DC.
 - We are trying to identify appropriate conservation measures in our Land Use Plan to conserve, enhance and restore Greater sage grouse habitat by reducing, eliminating or minimizing threats to that habitat and to make sure we identify the threats identified by the US Fish and Wildlife Services COT report.
 - There are 6 alternatives currently in our sub-regional planning efforts.
 - The comments that we have received so far were mostly editorial in nature. The most substantial comments came from the state of Nevada.
 - One important comment that we have integrated came from the Governor's Plan was the implementation of a conservation credit system. We have added that part to our sub-regional plan. We will come up with an acceptable credit system that all parties agree to.
 - If PPH were burned we will be treating the adjacent PGH as PPH until the area is restored.
 - Our current land use plan is not very adaptable and we are working to make our document more flexible so that we can revisit issues as they come up easier than is currently possible.

Subgroup on Sage Grouse.

- Molini: We have brought forward a request to form a subgroup on sage grouse. My understanding is that this has been approved and now we want to figure out the role of the subgroup and to comment on the draft EIS.
- Lassiter: We are looking for a Motion for the sage grouse sub-group to meet and produce comments that would go out to the RAC members for approval to submit.
- Motioned, seconded and approved.

WH&B:

- Raul: We have recently completed 3 gathers. (Blue Wing Complex, Seamon, and Maverick Medicine.) Two were helicopter gathers the other was a trap gather.
- There are two more gathers scheduled this summer. Both of those are water trap gathers.
- Holding facilities nationwide are full. They are all maxed out. We have been unable to get more long term facilities throughout the country but the drought conditions have made that very difficult.
- FY 14 budget allows for a few more gathers throughout the west. Some of those will be birth control and capture and release gathers. The budget right now for this program isn't looking too good.
- \$250K has been spent so far on watering wild horses.
- Lassiter:
 - When will the next meeting be:
 - Tri-RAC in February
 - Can we meet face-to-face without reimbursement?
 - Rose: I will look into this to see if we can do it.
 - TRI-RAC in February.

Member status

- Ross: We had three nomination periods.
- Rose: TRI-RAC: NEPA training??? Would this be useful?
 - YES!
- Freese: It would help us to make recommendations in our other areas that we work in.
- Seidlitz: Host a meeting here in Winnemucca this fall. Field trip this fall.
- Dufurrena: Motion to meet in September sometime. Seconded by Mark Freese
 - Passed. To host a field trip this September.
- Lassiter: Motion to adjourn: Seconded
 - Passed and closed at 3:50 p.m.