

Mojave-Southern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council

Meeting Minutes

Friday, Feb. 6, 2009

Saddle West Hotel and Casino, 1220 S. Highway 160,

Pahrump, Nevada

Resource Advisory Council members present and category represented:

Dr. John E. Hiatt, Chairperson	Wildlife	Category 2
Steven Mellington, vice-Chairperson	Public at Large	Category 3
Mauricia Baca	Environment	Category 2
Douglas "Stretch" Baker	Transportation and ROW	Category 1
Don "Skip" Canfield	State Agency Representative	Category 3
Joni Eastley	Elected Official	Category 3
Ed Higbee	Ranching/Grazing	Category 1
Elise McAllister	Dispersed Recreation	Category 2
Greg Seymour	Archeology/Historic	Category 2
Dr. Peter Starkweather	Academic/UNLV	Category 3
Claire Toomey	Permitted Recreation	Category 1
Julie Von Tobel-Gleason	Wild Horse and Burro	Category 2

Resource Advisory Council members absent and category represented:

Kenny Anderson	Native American	Category 3
Tim Carlson	Mineral Development	Category 1
Gracian Uhalde	Ranching/Grazing	Category 1

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) representatives present:

Hillierie Patton	BLM Southern Nevada Public Affairs Specialist
Mary Jo Rugwell	BLM Southern Nevada District Manager
John Ruhs, Designated Federal Official	BLM Ely District Manager
Tom Seley	BLM Tonopah Field Manager

Public

Chief Lon Fuller	Amargosa Volunteer Fire Department
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A copy of each attachment is listed in the text of or at the end of these minutes and is also on file with the official copy of the minutes in the Ely Field Office of the BLM. Persons desiring to review said minutes should contact Chris Hanefeld, public affairs specialist, at (775) 289-1842.

8 a.m. Dr. John Hiatt, Mojave-Southern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council (RAC) chairperson, called the meeting to order and conducted introductions. Hiatt thanked Wendy Seley for yesterday's Solar Energy presentation, and reminded the RAC about the Solar 101 class taking place on Wednesday, February 11th. John Ruhs thanked Hillierie Patton for coordination support for this meeting.

8:15 a.m. Public Comment, Chief Lon Fuller, Amargosa Volunteer Fire Department: Chief Lon Fuller expressed concern to the RAC about the increasing need for Emergency Support Services at Big Dune as the popularity of this recreation area has grown. The community of Amargosa has not grown at the same pace. The number of calls for emergency support has increased significantly in 2007 since signage has been placed along Route 95; this signage draws tourists unaware of the dangers of off-road travel. Dumont Dunes in California is charging fees, causing some off-road enthusiasts to look for fee-free areas such as Big Dunes. Local taxpayers and the community are bearing the cost burden for emergency calls.

Mary Jo Rugwell asked for Chief Fuller's contact information as the Southern Nevada District Office will be looking for local input as they prepare a management plan for the area. The need for increased signage was expressed. Chief Fuller provided documentation relating the increase in calls to the RAC members (Attachment 1).

8:25 a.m. The RAC reviewed the minutes from the Friday, Nov. 14, 2008, breakout session at the Tri-RAC meeting. The RAC determined to approve the minutes as written (Attachment 2).

The RAC also reviewed the Dark Sky Lighting Comments letter, and agreed to sign the document as presented (Attachment 3).

8:30 a.m. Ely Resource Management Plan Implementation, John Ruhs, BLM Ely District Manager (Attachment 4)

The final Record of Decision was signed last fall. Range staff is now working on the six worksheets (see handout). These will then be looked at as a group and see what work needs to be accomplished. Prioritized projects will be presented to the RAC for review. Afterwards, the Public Outreach Plan will be developed which will compete for funding at the national level.

Discussion on the timeline and funding of this process followed. Results of the planning process may be available to the RAC at the April meeting. Dr. Hiatt asked how unanticipated issues and costs would be accounted for from a budget and planning perspective; Ruhs stated that they were working with the industry creating a reasonable development scenario. The 2011 budget is most likely to be affected, rather than 2010; funding for planning is a challenge.

9:00 a.m. OHV Update, Mary Jo Rugwell, BLM Southern Nevada District Manager
(Agenda Change due to missing presenters)

OHV is a challenge for the Southern Nevada District Office. There is currently no Recreation Area Management Plan for Big Dune. There has been a recent change in Recreation Program supervisors due to the BLM reorganization to three-tier. Other staffing changes also have taken place.

There is still a great deal of interest by promoters for racing. People are getting bolder and less cooperative, feeling that it is their right to do as they wish. Unless areas are signed well, it is difficult to cite violators. There has been a trend towards more violence, which is becoming a safety issue. Efforts towards planning and signing continue.

Questions and comments included the effectiveness of registration of OHVs, the increase of drug and alcohol use, law enforcement issues, air quality and dust, resource sensitivity and most importantly the need for education. Brian Brown from the Amargosa Conservancy offered to assist by handing out flyers, and related the need for a map in this area. Patrick Putnam, BLM Pahrump Field Office Manager stated that all roads and trails are being GPS'd, and a map will be built from that data. The Forest Service is also working on a plan for the west side of the Spring Mountains, and plan to GPS roads and trails.

Another item in the discussion was the use of the fees collected by the BLM when issuing permits. Fees pay for ORP and LE labor before and after races. There is no reclamation bond in the BLM, and it is unsure if one can be placed on proponents as this is not an extraction activity (as in mining).

A politically-charged issue, OHV races will likely be impacted by development (e.g. airport, solar). It is difficult to withhold permits even if the event is not run well. One option is to try to reduce the footprint of races, by using the same course more than once. A member of the public mentioned that when race courses are close to private land, problems occur for landowners.

Clearly a consistent process is needed in the BLM three-district area. It was agreed that the promoter needs to shoulder the responsibility for all aspects of races, including reclamation and fans.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Standardize regulations
- Reclamation bond
- Cost recovery
- Pre- and post-race inspections (goes along with bonding)

9:30 Break

9:45 Conservation Transfer Area, Gayle Marrs-Smith, BLM Las Vegas Field Office
AFM Renewable Resources

The draft Supplemental EIS will be ready to be release next month. There are 22,000 acres which are to be added to the disposal area; sensitive resources are being quantified. The final boundary of the 5,000-acre CTA will be deferred until more research has been done in several fields including paleontology, botany and cultural resources. Pleistocene fossils have been found in the Tule Springs area, and this is where Carbon 14 dating was first performed. Botanically, there are three rare plant species in the area including bear poppies and a buckwheat. Protection of the function of the wash is an aspect, while allowing for compatible development.

Coordination with other agencies is ongoing; work has been done with the cities of Las Vegas and North Las Vegas, the Las Vegas Paiute Tribe, Clark County, NV Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration and US Fish and Wildlife Service. During public scoping meeting there were 65 responses. There is a non-profit organization involved, the Protectors of Tule Springs. Public outreach is important.

Key issues in this area include:

- Maintain the wash and alluvial fan
- Define the final boundary of the CTA
- Define allowable uses including Rights of Way
- Deciding upon the managing entity
- Disposal and future development
- Citizen groups support the CTA and passive use

The draft SEIS will be out March 10, followed by a 60-day comment period. The final SEIS will then be released at the beginning of July, followed by a 30-day appeal period. Discussion followed the presentation, including that there appears to be a difference in opinions between the cities and citizens. Gayle will update the RAC at the next meeting on this issue.

RAC members asked for a brief update of happenings in the Gold Butte area. There was a decision on route designation in August 2008, including Mormon Mesa and Coyote Springs. Protests were answered, and there were no appeals on this decision. Staff immediately started signing roads and performing restoration efforts. There are ongoing briefings taking place at town board meetings; there is good community support.

10:15

Review of Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act Round 10, Steve Tryon, BLM SNDO Assistant District Manager, SNPLMA (Attachment 5, Power Point)

Projects in Round 10 will be presented at the April RAC meeting. SNPLMA benefits areas throughout the state; Nye County projects include fuels treatment in the Spring Mountain range and capital improvements at Ash Meadows. It is up to Congress to include other possibilities for Nye County.

Round 10 nominations ended on 10-31-08. Subgroup reviews took place in January and February this year. The public comment period takes place March 23 – May 6. There is \$50,000,000 available; 84 projects requested more than \$124,000,000. Because of decreasing land sales and interest rates, revenue has been reduced.

Selection criteria has changed in that the #1 project for each agency is no longer given priority, and contingency is considered at application. Size of projects has decreased.

Though land sales are decreasing, lower prices are good for acquisitions. The costs for construction are also going down, making projects more affordable. The need for contingency funding has been reduced, and projects are providing opportunities for putting people to work. Program trends show that more land has been acquired than sold. There is \$38 million remaining to be obligated to Lake Tahoe projects.

The projected allocation in future rounds are as follows:

- Round 10 - \$50 million
- Round 11 - \$20 million
- Round 12 - \$20 million

The first substantial report went to Congress this year. There is more being done in accountability including more project scrutiny. Project accomplishments are recorded and compiled annually. There is an emphasis on closing out including inspections, etc. Overall, there is a need to have more projects closed out.

Steve shared the public BLM SNPLMA web pages; people are able to get specific information on projects, which can be sorted by location, keyword or project name.

Discussion on SNPLMA projects followed, including accomplishments in the Lake Tahoe basin (improved water quality), application procedures, and conflict of interest in the subgroups (agency reps cannot vote on their own projects).

11:00 a.m. District/Field Managers' Reports

A brief discussion took place on these reports (Attachments 6 – Tonopah Field Office, 7 – Ely District Office, and 8 – Southern Nevada District Office).

11:15 a.m. Lincoln County Archaeological Initiative Round 2 Presentation, Colleen Beck, Desert Research Institute Archaeologist (Attachment 9 – Power Point)

There were some delays within the program due to personnel changes; Carol Bass came aboard a year ago assisting with procurement. Proposals cannot be discussed until they go through the approval process. Round 2 proposals were of better quality; there were changes in procedure from Round 1. Additional changes will take place for Round 3; input will be solicited while establishing priorities. Colleen asked RAC members to convey this information to interested parties. Within the Power Point presentation is a list of priorities which will be considered for Round 3. The Nevada Archaeological Association will assist with sharing information through their newsletter.

Discussion following the presentation included dialogue on the protection of archaeological resources. Funding is a problem; sites could be prioritized so as not to stretch BLM resources too thin. Historical structures were considered.

11:45 a.m. Break for Lunch

1:00 p.m. Forest Service Update, Stephanie Phillips, Spring Mountains NRA Deputy Forest Supervisor

Judy Suing USFS Natural Resource Specialist was introduced as most of her work involves the west side of the Spring Mountain NRA. She has been working with the BLM on creating a user trail map. USFS were hoping to construct facilities such as picnic areas, campgrounds and trailheads, developing a Master Plan for this purpose. The costs of maintenance, construction and road improvement were not economical, and they were forced to step back; a market analysis was done.

The largest demand on the west side is OHV use. The Forest Service is partnering with BLM, and developed a Motorized Transportation Plan. USFS are hoping to create good motorized trails to enhance recreational experiences and prevent off-trail riding. If a better trail system is provided, perhaps enforcement will be easier to deal with. Discussion by RAC members centered on OHV use on the west side, including trail and facility development as well as community relations and education.

Phillips also gave an update on the Wildland Urban Interface project (fuels). Work on this project began in the Mountain Springs area, creating shaded fuel breaks with included a 300 – 600 foot buffer around structures, removing woody material on Forest Service lands. The intent is to slow wildfires to protect private property and firefighters. The work progressed more slowly than anticipated.

Currently the work is continuing in Trout Canyon, with Cold Springs next on the list. Kyle and Lee Canyons will be last due to the steep and difficult terrain. Lessons learned so far include the amount of woody debris left during the process. Everything has been chipped and the piles are burned when conditions allow, but there are very narrow “burning windows.” This process has proven to be very costly. Spreading chips was not considered due to endemic plants in the area.

Hiatt, who has visited the area where work was taking place, commented that duff was raked from the forest floor, which could make it easier for invasive grasses to take root. He asked about monitoring of treated areas which will be taking place for a limited time to check on endemics. Hiatt also mentioned that it appeared that no treatment was taking place on private land, which may negate these efforts. Phillips mentioned that crews are treating private lands in Trout Canyon as the Forest Service work is being done.

Another unforeseen aspect of this work has been the surveying of boundaries; this has uncovered a myriad of trespasses. As a National Recreation Area, the Spring Mountains does not have access to the same tools as other national forests, e.g. the Small Tracts Act which facilitates the exchange of small tracts of land in these cases. The Forest Service is searching for ways to resolve this issue; some have been easy to take care of such as fences and RV parking.

2:20 p.m. Hillerie Patton asked the RAC members for hotel receipts and mileage documentation.

2:25 p.m. Hiatt adjourned the meeting.

APPROVED BY:

Date: _____

John Hiatt, Chair
Mojave-Southern Great Basin
Resource Advisory Council

- Minutes provided by
Jeanne Tinsman, BLM Southern Nevada District Office -

Attachments:

1. Amargosa Volunteer Fire Department statistics
2. MOSO RAC Meeting Minutes – November 14, 2008
3. Draft MOSO RAC Dark Sky Lighting Comments
4. BLM Ely District Resource Management Plan Implementation Planning Process
5. BLM SNPLMA Round 10 Update & Program Trends (power point)
6. BLM Tonopah Field Office report
7. BLM Ely District Update report
8. BLM Southern Nevada District Manager's Report
9. Lincoln County Archaeological Initiative (power point)