

Northeastern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council

Thursday, June 27, 2013

California Trail Interpretive Center, Elko, Nevada

RAC Attendance

Jeff White, Chairman	(1) Energy/Minerals
William Wolf, vice Chairman	(3) Public-At-Large
Jacob Carter	(1) Federal Grazing
Tom Connolly	(1) Federal Grazing
Kevin Lee	(1) Transportation
Jack Prier	(2) Environmental
Larry Hyslop	(2) Wildlife
Cyd McMullen	(2) Archeology
Laurie Carson	(3) Elected Official
Julie Hughes	(2) Dispersed Recreation
Jeanne Nations	(2) Wild Horse & Burro
Tanya Reynolds	(3) Native American
David Pierce	(1) Energy/Minerals

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Representatives Present:

Doug Furtado	District Manager – Battle Mountain
Rosemary Thomas	District Manager – Ely
Jill Silvey	District Manager – Elko
Mike Tietmeyer	Rangeland Management Specialist – State Office
David Overcast	Associate District Manager – Elko
Bryan Fuell	Field Manager - Wells Field Office, Elko
Lesli Ellis-Wouters	Public Affairs Officer – Elko District
Victoria Anne	Planning & Environmental Coordinator – Elko
Ruth Thompson	Wild Horse & Burro Specialist – Ely
Chris Hanefeld	Public Affairs Officer – Ely

Members of the Public Present:

None

~ 9:00 AM

Meeting called to order Jeff White

Minutes for previous meeting approved and seconded

Tour of new exhibits at California Trail Center Jill Silvey

~ 9:30 AM

Update on California Trail Center Jill Silvey

A gift, in need of funding ... Funding currently based from Elko's budget

- Receiving ~ 20,000 visitors annually
 - o Need ~50,000 visitors to support Interpretive Center

Northeastern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council

Thursday, June 27, 2013

- Considering options for additional funding
 - o Volunteer cadre
 - o Gift shop - income (less associated costs)
 - o Grant Applications
 - o Will request additional funding from Washington Office

RAC members recommended seeking assistance from state, and fund raisers.

~ 10:00 AM

NV State Objectives Regarding Drought Environmental Assessments (EA)

Mike Tietmeyer

Presentation included input and explanations from Doug Furtado and Rosemary Thomas.

The issue of managing public lands during drought is a serious challenge. BLM emphasized the importance of continuing to develop and build upon relationships with permittees.

The intentions of the State BLM Office is to ensure Drought EA's distributed from the various districts and field offices within Nevada are based on a proactive, rather than reactive, approach. Tools being created for transparency and awareness are being developed by BLM and are available to the public through the internet at the Drought Dashboard site. Check it out:

http://www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/prog/grazing/drought_report.html

Drought EA's for the different districts and associated field offices are close to being completed throughout the State. Findings of No Significant Impact (FONSI) will be issued, however decisions implementing federal actions will not be made at this time.

The goal for the drought management protocol is to avoid the need for taking emergency actions to prevent rangeland degradation, which also would affect permittees adversely.

A general process flow could be as follows:

- 1) BLM Range Program leads will keep informed about predicted drought conditions via tools such as the:
 - U. S. Drought Monitor and U. S. Seasonal Drought Outlook (www.drought.gov);
 - the Long Term Palmer Drought Severity Index (www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/analysis_monitoring/regional_monitoring/palmer.gif),
 - Great Basin Weather and Climate Dashboard (<http://gbdash.dri.edu/>); and
 - applicable Rapid Ecological Assessments pertinent to the different districts etc.;
- 2) Where drought is predicted (i.e., in the fall before livestock are turned out for the spring), rangeland specialists and permittees can work together to develop recommendations to the authorized officer for drought response, within the terms and conditions of an existing permit, to avoid the need for emergency allotment closures;

Northeastern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council

Thursday, June 27, 2013

- 3) Proactive management measures during a confirmed drought could include permittees taking voluntary reductions in AUM's, volunteering to rest an allotment, volunteering for non-use of up to three years, etc., as long as the measures fall within the terms and conditions of an existing permit;
- 4) BLM interdisciplinary teams and permittees will continue to communicate with one another throughout the confirmed drought to view and monitor specific sites after livestock are turned out to evaluate whether established rangeland health triggers (and/or indicators) are approaching or may have exceeded targeted thresholds;
- 5) Where efforts to avoid drought impacts are not successful, the BLM will be required by regulation to temporarily close allotments all or in part or change management practices. These actions would be implemented by a grazing decision.
- 6) Confirmed droughts are considered over when one growing season has passed a monthly Drought Severity Index that shows the same area/region is not in a drought.

Q&As that occurred:

- Discussion transpired between RAC members and BLM on how forage production, capacity of vegetation (such as bunch grass), could decline to a point the vegetation would not return the following season if grazing occurred without rest during drought.
- The District Managers collectively explained that using the "Regional Drought Index" or U.S. Drought Monitor to confirm "drought" was used because it is not physically, economically, logically, or geographically feasible for each BLM district or field office to annually survey acreage throughout each allotment to determine where drought was (and was not) occurring. By using the drought tools mentioned above to acknowledge or confirm drought in an area, districts can have their staff work cooperatively and in coordination with permittees in areas that are known to be most likely to suffer from rangeland degradation during a drought.

Other options for BLM with regard to proactively managing rangelands during drought include:

- Adding drought response measures to permits that come up for renewal;
- Considering realigning Herd Management Areas (HMA) and Herd Areas (HA) in new Resource Management Plans (RMP) being developed, or in amendments for existing RMPs;
- Preparing Programmatic EAs with actions tiered back to allotments; and/or
- Cooperative monitoring.

With regard to RMPs and climate change, Districts will be considering modeling and scientific information included in the REAs (mentioned above) in the RMPs to aid in analyses when presenting potential baseline conditions in the future. RMPs already completed can have amendments to account for recent issues that may not have been analyzed when decisions were made.

Northeastern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council

Thursday, June 27, 2013

~10:30AM

RAC stated their concern for ongoing personnel changes within BLM that are contributing toward communication and relationship challenges with permittees; i.e., not understanding the background of a permittee; the challenges within an allotment; the environment within an area, etc.

BLM acknowledged the succession challenges within the organization and stated that the WO and NV-SO are working on solutions.

~10:40AM

3HMA Water and Bait Trapping EA

Bryan Fuell

- The purpose and need for the 3HMA EA planned for Ely and Elko;
- The existing conditions for the areas within the EA boundary:
 - o drought conditions threatening water and forage for all animals,
 - o the area is in excess of Appropriate Management Levels of wild horses
 - o livestock grazing has not been occurring in all allotments where landscape conditions are degraded, and
 - o Elko has been hauling water into the area for several years.
- Briefly recapped the proposed action.

Q&As that occurred:

- Discussion explaining BLM does not have legal rights to access existing wells for water withdrawal;
- BLM is not authorized in Nevada to drill wells;
- Horses moved by BLM to another area with water will typically return to original water sources (even though water is no longer available);
- Vegetation has been denuded to the point where forage on the land is not expected to be adequate to support horses in the area as summer temperatures increase;
- Public observation points during gather activities will need to be far enough away that human presence and scent will not prohibit the horses from entering the fenced area.
- Horses will likely be moved to Palomino Valley;
- Discussion included debate about whether or not the number of horses over AML is correct. Responses included BLM sends helicopter flight observations to USGS and they determine, through scientifically approved modeling, the calculations for the final numbers. The statement was also made that the numbers are more than likely understated, based on NDOW calculations for wildlife observations;
- With regard to who the contractor will be for the planned activities, BLM responded that the contract has not been assigned;

Northeastern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council

Thursday, June 27, 2013

A suggestion was made to let nature take its course (allow horses to die), to which BLM stated their responsibility to maintain healthy wild horse herds in concert the multiple-use mission. It was suggested by other RAC members that Jeanne Nations work with horse advocate groups to develop and recommend alternatives to gathering, removing and long-term holding.

Jeanne Nations also shared a concern that she witnessed an area where wild horses were being removed; but that cattle were grazing in the area (snow was present). Rosemary Thomas said she will investigate the matter and get back with Jeanne.

~11:30 Public Comment

Protecting areas from storm water overflow

Kevin Lee

Kevin offered a “heads-up” that the EPA had recently fined those responsible (in an area outside of the NEGB RAC) for not keeping storm water overflow from impacting water quality where it occurred.

SB227

Jack Prier

Jack requested an answer from Noble Energy regarding SB-227.

Public Lands Managed by State

Laurie Carson

Laurie has been assigned to a Task Force where public lands would be managed by the state. She requested comments to her by September 14, 2013.

Other public comments:

Lesli Ellis-Wouters

Lesli read two public comments regarding the 3HMA Water and Bait Trapping of wild horses: 1) Laura Leigh and 2) Bonnie Kohlreiter:

Sage-Grouse EIS Status

Doug Furtado

Doug relayed message from Ray Morales that the Tri-RAC is encouraged to provide comments on the Sage-Grouse EIS being developed after the Draft EIS is made available to the public. Six alternatives are being recommended:

A = No Action (current situation being used to establish base-line conditions),

B = Following recommendations stated in NTT report,

C = Reduce multiple-use on landscape (to include livestock grazing and creating more, ACEC's (Areas of Critical Environmental Concern),

D = Sub-regional adjustments within individual BLM districts,

E = Following recommendations stated in Governor's Review,

Northeastern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council

Thursday, June 27, 2013

F = Reduce multiple-use on landscape (to include livestock grazing), but without creating more ACEC's (Areas of Critical Environmental Concern).

Thousands of comments are expected nationally and law suits are possible.

July	- review comments (IDT and Solicitors)
August-September	- National Review team will review
September 30	- Notice of Availability (NOA)
October through December	- Public comments

Doug suggested the EIS be discussed at the September RAC meeting or before, in a sub-committee format. Group elected to form a sub-committee. Members include:

Jack Prier, Bill Wolf, Larry Hyslop, Tom Connelly, Kevin Lee, Julie Hughes, Jacob Carter, David Pierce, Jeff White.

BLM representatives offered a recap for why EIS is needed and what is expected if the US Fish & Wildlife Service lists the sage-grouse as an endangered species. Battle Mountain is currently entering into MOU's with mining companies.

Eco-Sanctuary

Status of EA: Document progression is slow. More information is needed by Saving America's Mustangs before BLM is able to proceed. Several new individuals from SAM are getting up to speed on project and are working to get needed information to BLM.

Next-Meeting

Meeting may need to be held in Elko. Bill Wolf will chair meeting in Jeff White's absence.

RAC terms are cycling out. New members will be selected and aware of their terms before the Tri-RAC meeting scheduled for February 2014.

Motion made to close meeting and was seconded.