

April 19, 2018 BLM Resource Advisory Council Meeting

Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

RAC members attending in person: Mike Reggear, Almer Casile, JW Marshall, William Orr, Linda Rider, Cliff Swanson, Bob Balsler, Doug Boggan, Bill Cook, Trevor Fulton, Chris Goetz, David White.

Members attending via conference phone: Patty Perry. **Absent:** Dan Dinning

Welcome/Introductions/Orientation: Linda Rider, Current Chair & Michelle Brown, Associate District Manager (acting Designated Federal Official)

Cottonwood Field Office Updates – Michelle Brown, ADM provided updates on behalf of Field Manager Richard White.

Coeur d'Alene Field Office Updates – Kurt Pavlat, Field Manager provided updates for the Coeur d'Alene Field Office.

- Questions on the West Fork Timber project. Also discussion and encouragement regarding the Good Neighbor Authority. Encouragement for BLM to explore opportunities to use this authority for forestry projects.
- Also asked about recreation options for the West Fork project.
- Discussed the connection of the CDA Tribe to the vicinity of the planned West Fork project.
- Discussed logging methods for the Blue Creek project and haul routes.

Review of Meeting Minutes from October 19, 2017:

- **Chris Goetz motioned approval with slight correction; Mike Reggear seconded. All in favor**
- Change Payette NF on page two under Future Recreation Proposals to Bitterroot NF and strike the last sentence of that paragraph that is hanging.

Discussion about the role of the BLM RAC/Recreation RAC regarding recreation fees.

- Discussion around why the BLM Recreation RAC is responsible for reviewing and recommending recreation fees.

RAC adjourns; Recreation RAC convenes

Idaho Panhandle NF Recreation Fees – Josh Jurgensen, Jeff Ward

Jeff Ward, Regional Recreation Manager, shared an overview of the recreation fee review and proposals. Recreation fees being reviewed through this process do not include sites managed through concessionaires. Increases to existing fees if recommended by the RAC would be put in place this recreation season (2018). Any new fees recommended would be established in 2019 and would need to be published through at *Federal Register* notice.

Josh Jurgensen, Recreation Manager for the IPNF, for the purposes of convenience grouped the proposals as follows:

Campgrounds: 10 proposed fee increases ranging from 10, 12, 15, and 20/ night

Group Sites: 1 proposed fee increase and 1 new fee

Recreation Rentals: 11 proposed fee increases; 2 proposed new rentals

Day use rentals: 1 proposed increase; 1 new fee

- 1 day use boat launch (new)

- Fee increase at Emerald Ck Garnet site

RV Dump Station:

- 1 proposed fee increase; 1 new fee

Group One - Land Based Campgrounds (accessed by vehicular traffic):

8 sites proposed increases

9 new fee proposed

\$10 sites would include picnic tables, toilet, fire ring, roving forest protection officers, fee station

\$15 sites have above amenities plus water, camp hosts or roving camp hosts

\$20 fee site – Shadowy St Joe would include a boating fee w/ camp fee.

Question asked about whether sites would be on the reservation system. A portion of the campsites will be available on the reservation system to help ensure collection of fees. A portion of the campsites would still be available for first come/first serve. There is a fee charged by the reservation system (\$5 to \$10) that is added to the total fees collected for the site.

There was discussion about competition for reservation on some of the high demand sites such as lookouts and people not showing up for their reservations. This causes frustration with other users.

Discussed that some fees are used for general maintenance at the sites. FLREA establishes that fees collect are used for maintenance and improvements at the fee sites. Some seasonal labor is used and funded through the collection of fees specifically for maintenance of the sites.

Cliff pointed out that while he is not against the fees, some of them are a 230% increase and wondered how the public is going to feel about that.

Lake-based Campsites (accessed by boat)

2 sites proposed increase (Bartoo Island, Kalispell Island)

9 sites new proposed fees

\$15 sites would include picnic tables, toilet, fire ring, roving forest protection officers, fee station, water, camp hosts or roving camp hosts, bear resistant food storage, SCAT machine, boat docks.

A portion of the campsites will be on reservation basis; others will stay on first come/first serve. Discussed the unique servicing of the sites by the USFS barge and other motorcraft.

Group Two – Recreation Rentals

11 proposed increases

2 proposed new fee rentals (Beaver Creek Cabin and Spyglass Groundhouse)

6 fire lookouts

4 cabin rentals

2 new rentals

- **Lookouts proposed \$45-\$55 per night**
- **Cabins proposed \$45-\$150 per night**

Prices are based on amenities; upper is driven by propane heat/cooking. There was a suggestion to have a larger difference between close-in sites and backcountry sites.

Group Three – Group Sites

- 1 proposed increase from \$25 to \$35 at Shadowy St Joe
- 1 New fee site at Reynolds Creek (will be added to reservation site)

Group Four - RV Dump Station

- Priest Lake proposed site \$10
- Upper Landing fee increase from \$3 to \$10

Group Five – Day Use Sites

- 1 proposed new fee for day use boat launch at Shadowy St Joe (\$5 per vehicle)
- Fee increase at Emerald Creek from \$10 to \$15 (kids are free)

Recreation Budget: Josh Jurgensen provide a snapshot of the average annual recreation budget for the Idaho Panhandle and the expected increase in fee revenue for 2018 and 2019 based on approval of fee increases/establishment. The program is made up of approximately five different areas: appropriated dollars (\$175), Secure Rural Schools funding (\$120), IDPR grants (\$70k), volunteers (\$60k), and fees collected (\$150k). Proposed increases would generate another \$125-175K per year in 2018; implementing new fees would generate approximately \$50 -75K in additional revenue in 2019.

Discussion of Public Input: Open public comment period ran from Dec. 11 through January 15.

- Interactive webpage utilized
- News releases
- Brochures distributed (all FS offices and posted at retail outlets such as REI)
- Website and Forest Facebook page
- Local, state and Federal elected officials briefed
- Sites that will begin collecting fees in 2019 would be posted during the summer of 2018

Shared an overview of comments received. 73 comments from 28 individuals. Josh as program manager fielded 150 calls about the proposals in a 10 day span but only 3 individuals wanted to log a formal comment. General themes were:

- Do not support (49)
- Fee increases are too steep (4)
- Support increase (15)
- Support new fees (2)
- Generally support but suggest incremental increase (2)
- Question regarding public involvement (1)

Specific comments focused on the following:

- Avery Creek Cabin currently \$60 proposed to \$120. Has all amenities and is ADA; accessed by FHwy 9. Highest level of amenities of all cabin rentals.
- Magee Cabin – concerns about toilet/shower facilities being located in separate bld
- Lunch Peak – currently not furnished – maybe lower fees to \$35/nt
- Phasing In Concept vs One time implementation
- Funds stay at the sites to continue improvements/maintenance

RAC specific comments

- Concerns about only a \$10 differential in use fees between deluxe sites and backcountry sites and maybe there should be a lower cost for the walk-ins or long drive-ins.
- Discussed the ramifications of phasing in as well as the potential loss in the near future of Secure Rural Schools (SRS) funds that help support the IPNF recreation program.

- Conrad Flats and Spruce Tree – why is there a \$12 fee when there is not water on. The FS will reduce the \$15 normal fee to \$12 when water is not available on site. The sites are located along the St Joe River which is in the scenic recreation (river) corridor and very accessible.
- Concern about diminishing returns if fees are too high and visitors don't come.
- Question on improvements and plans.
- Josh clarified they are wanting to provide consistency in terms of fees at recreation sites.
- David White stated his supportive of all the fees but is concerned about not having a clear understanding of what future maintenance is planned. Josh clarified that they have a deferred maintenance backlog of items that are needed to be done at each location.
- Bill Orr encouraged being able to articulate the future improvements at sites to the public clearly and concisely.
- Jeff Ward stated they are developing a long-term plan (Recreation Facility Analysis) where each 5 years the sites are reviewed to determine needs and out year needs.
- FS understands and appreciated the feedback to better share what the short term and long term goals are for each site.

Magruder Ranger's House on the Bitterroot NF (located in Idaho County) The site has high level amenities and is very popular. Fees are currently \$50/night and proposed to be \$100/night. Received a total of 6 comments specific to this site; 4 in favor and 2 opposed.

Discussion and Recommendation of Recreation RAC

Motion by Cliff and seconded by Al Casile to recommend approval of all proposed increases and implementation of new fees.

- Bob expressed concern about phasing in so visitors can get used to the fee
- Doug had concern about the workload of doing that for the FS and the cost spent to
- Patty suggested going to \$75 this year for Magruder Ranger's House and then in 2019 go to \$100.
- David supported the fees and encouraged that every 5 years they are reviewed. Need to establish the base so there is something to go on for the future.
- Doug suggested amending the motion to phase in the fee for Magruder Ranger's House.
- Linda feels that all at once is the best way to implement even if there is some initial pain in the wallet. Bill Orr echoed that.
- Mike Reggear clarified that many of the cabins hold 10 or more individuals so \$100 per night is spread across a number of folks.

Doug motioned amending the original motion for \$75 for two years and then to \$100; Bob Balser seconded. 3 were in favor; the rest were against.

Vote on the original motion – all in favor of proposed increases and implementation of new fees. All were in favor.

Motion by Mike Reggear; Bob Balser seconded Recreation RAC strongly recommended to the USFS that they revisit recreation fees at minimum of every 5 years. 20 years is too long. All were in favor.

Communication to the public: Discussed marketing ideas on how to solicit feedback from the public on what improvements are needed at the recreation sites.

While the interactive website was a good idea, some RAC members found it hard to navigate and unable to make a general comment instead of having to go through each site and comment.

Communicate the broad recreation program on the Forest, the funding, and the needs as a whole instead of focusing on site specific needs.

Al encouraged all RAC members to reach out to the groups we represent to inform them about the fees and encourage them even if they support to go ahead and comment.

Public Forum - no one was present at the meeting

Recreation RAC adjourns; RAC reconvenes

3:30 p.m.

Closeout

- Nominations for expiring positions – 6 positions will expire on July 21. This will eliminate a quorum in Category One which will not allow the RAC to meet.

Chris Goetz shared with the RAC that the Type II emergency management team is now no longer active and there is only one Idaho representative on the MT/ID coordinating group. Chris is recommending adding a north Idaho Sheriff to this team to have more local representation. He asked the RAC to write a letter to the NW NWCG stating this.

Chris motioned the RAC write a letter with this recommendation and Bob Balsler seconded.

- Discussion about also adding a Fire Chief to the team as well.

David motioned amending the motion to include either a Fire Chief or someone who can represent emergency services for north Idaho as well. Bill seconded the amendment to the motion. All in favor.

A letter will be drafted for signature by the Chair and send to the Coordinating Group.

- Next Meeting Date & Location - TBD
- Fieldtrip options - TBD

4:00 p.m.

Adjourn