

Idaho Falls District RAC Meeting – Jan. 24, 2017- Final

Attendees –

Sarah Wheeler, Chuck Stuart, Mary D’Aversa, Dave Radford, Jerald Raymond, David Anderson, Todd Kuck, William Schutte, Morris Christensen, Lance Brady, Greg Helseth, Linda Price, Jeremy Casterson, Joel Gosswiller, Matt Woodard

Housekeeping Items

Mary introduced our newest RAC member who was able to attend, Chuck Stuart representing dispersed recreation. Due to weather and the inability to have a full RAC, the group chose to postpone nominating a new chair and vice chair and approving meeting minutes.

Matt Woodard asked for any public comment, none were provided

RAC Recruitment-

RAC recruitment opportunities and suggestions were brought up by Sarah Wheeler, RAC Coordinator. For 2018 vacancies we are looking for potential federal grazing permittee, environmental groups and academia or public-at-large representation. The nomination period typically occurs beginning of March.

Administration Change-

D’Aversa discussed what the administration change might mean for the BLM. Obviously we don’t have a crystal ball to see the outcome. BLM has a senate confirmed appointee but we don’t know when the vetting process might happen. DOI Secretary likely to be confirmed soon. BLM has two Deputy Directors that help process things between DOI and BLM and once we have all these positions on board we will have a better idea of what are priorities will be, until then we are trying to operate business as usual. We expect to know what’s happening within a month.

Listening to the Zinke hearing, he has identified three areas that he wanted to focus on:

1. Re-establish Trust: The Bureau has had a rough period with sage-grouse because local decisions and agreements didn’t make it to the final plans. Probably not unique but lends itself for major improvements between local and federal agencies.
2. NPS Maintenance Backlog
3. Moving Decision Making Out of Washington D.C.: Now what does that mean? We aren’t sure. Does it mean moving people and positions from the east coast to the west? Or does it mean

delegating more authority down to the field. Currently about 75% of decision making authority resides with field managers.

How does this tie into energy production/development? We don't know yet.

Planning 2.0 has been in flux. We are kicking off a larger landscape plan within the District that would incorporate the Upper Snake, Salmon and Challis Field Offices. We are curious about legal concerns and what opposition to planning 2.0 might have on our progress. We have policy but no handbook. They might be looking at public input into the handbook but that is yet to be seen. Don't expect major changes in how we do business locally. The Idaho Falls District hired a planner who will be here in March. Once he starts we will look at hiring a contractor, who we will hopefully have onboard by the 4th quarter.

Federal Hiring Freeze- Typical under a new administration change and it takes awhile to sort through what is different and necessary. Currently we can't fill "vacant positions" but we don't know how they are defining vacant positions.

Dave Radford elevated a concern expressed by the Idaho Association of Counties that there is not enough collaboration or local input. He doesn't see that as an impediment or issue locally but wanted to know why there is so much opposition to Planning 2.0. D'Aversa said we rarely get sued for going too fast but in this case that is one of the points expressed in the lawsuit. But here are a few points expressed by the opposition:

1. Shortening of the Comment Periods- Theoretically it is easier for an NGO to comment over counties and general public because that is their full time job so they need less time to review the documents.
2. What other plans BLM needs to consider- Previously our plans had to conform to other county plans. There is some language that may change what plans we actually have to consider (i.e. they must be voted on to be viable).
3. Section 203 of the Federal Lands Policy Management Act (FLPMA) language on coordination between counties and municipalities. Worried Planning 2.0 takes away from some of the substance of that group

Jeremy Casterson said these plans take so long and planning 2.0 was supposed to provide a streamlined process and reduce the time. But they've given up on streamline because getting more input requires more time. D'Aversa said they were hoping having fewer and larger scale plans would also reduce the costs associated with planning.

Dave Radford asked how RAC's can help make the RMP's better. Casterson said the RAC's input carries a lot of weight. Because they represent community members and have the connections to provide substantive input it is easier for them to represent local viewpoints. They can also break off into subgroups to better study issues or alternatives expressed in the plans. Linda Price said the RAC diversity allows us to be very frank in having discussions and moving forward with solutions. Todd Kuck also suggested the RAC plays a critical role in disseminating information to the public.

Wilderness-

New wilderness areas have BLM-managed lands and we are working with two different forests to develop management plans. Custer County asked for an extension to review the Hemingway-Boulders and White Clouds (HB/WC) draft plan and it was granted. The Custer County Natural Resource Advisory Council (NRAC) held a public meeting to gather additional input. There were questions on why we weren't considering roads and trailheads (essentially heavily impacted access points) in the plan. They also felt that grazing was negatively portrayed and that the Plan needed to provide a positive emphasis on historic uses.

The Jim McClure-Jerry Peak (JMJP) public scoping process is scheduled to begin in February, and is likely to look significantly different than the HBWC Plan. The HB/WC has a lot of restrictions in place because it aligns with the Sawtooth National Forest (SNF) Forest Plan, the JMJP plan will not have so many restrictions. We are trying to align planning process with the FS and that makes for some confusion. The Wilderness amends the Forest Plan, while the BLM doesn't have to amend its RMP and the Wilderness Plan just operates as another plan on top of it. There was some discussion on the different planning processes.

Bill Schutte asked why we don't transfer the 450 acres of BLM-managed land to the FS. It seems like a lot of work BLM has to go through for such a small portion of land. Todd Kuck responded, wouldn't that be nice.

Dave Radford asked whether all the three wilderness areas had been managed as wilderness. Todd Kuck said essentially yes, since they were wilderness study areas prior to legislative designation. Dave also asked about search and rescue operations. Kuck explained that those were major concerns of the county and will be addressed in the plan. Bill Schutte asked if we get a lot of outfitters in these areas. Kuck said yes and they are likely to be impacted with the limits that are being set in the HB/WC but that they are highly engaged in the planning process.

Charles Stuart asked who are interested publics were. Kuck responded that it depended on location. In Challis and Stanley it was mostly local permittees and outfitters. Ketchum had a more diverse group with conservation groups, recreationalists and some permittees. Stuart asked if the public meetings restricted comment due to the timing. Kuck explained that most of the meetings happened in the evening to allow attendance and that we were also going to do a webinar. A mailing list also provides documents to interested publics.

D'Aversa said it was interested working on two plans. She will be signing both plans but the wilderness culture is very different between the Sawtooth NF and the Salmon-Challis NF. HB/WC is heavily influenced by recreation and very restrictive. Kuck explained the proposed zoning restrictions. Morris asked whether there were restrictions on group use? Kuck explained there was nothing right now, other than size restrictions, but the Plan would require monitoring and if we saw a 5% increase we would go to a reservation system. There was a little discussion on the Judge Windmill ruling against collaring elk in the wilderness and what that might mean for this plan. Kuck said the issue seemed to center on the actual use of a helicopter and not the collaring but that IDFG still had to destroy all the data they

collected. Dave Radford asked about motorized boat use. Kuck said that would not be allowed but there weren't any docks in the wilderness areas anyway so they didn't anticipate that being an issue. Kuck did say the County as seen an increase in use since the designation was in place and have data to back it up , specifically on the East Fork Road and at Little Boulder Campground. Greg Helsith asked whether drones would be allowed. Kuck said they are prohibited and you can't launch or land a drone in Wilderness, but theoretically you could fly over. Morris asked whether there was an issue with hang-gliding or paragliding? No one knew the answer but Todd said he would look into it. Kuck explained that the legislation gave certain parcels of land to county and city governments and that the BLM is working on that right now. Letters went out last week to landowners and interested parties.

Travel Management Planning

Jeremy Casterson explained there are really three steps to developing a travel management plan.

1. Inventory (picture- what's out there on the ground)
2. Evaluation (where do we have overlap and conflict, what should be a legitimate trail or route)
3. Implementation (sign and maintain the approved system)

Upper Snake Field Office is focusing on four different areas in there office and each are in varying states of the process. The Eastern/Driggs area only has a few scattered parcels, they have done inventory and public scoping and are working on evaluation. Hope to have a draft plan out this summer for people to review and then a final plan in 2018. The Sans Desert, which is east of I-15 just west of Ashton is in the inventory phase and they hope to have draft plan out in summer of 2018 with a final in 2019. The other two plans will be placed on hold until the RMP effort is complete. Bill Schutte asked how roads impacted sage-grouse habitat. Casterson said his biologists say it largely centers on habitat fragmentation and the disruption of birds during lekking and nesting seasons.

Linda said Salmon's South Half TMP is currently on her desk awaiting her signature.

Kuck stated that Challis was having difficulties with signs last in a wilderness area. They put in signs and the next day they are torn out. Challis TMP is completed but about 85,000 acres of WSA's were released and they will likely look at changing some of those route designations in the future.

Next RAC Meeting Dates

May 31 and June 1 in Pocatello, Idaho. Group is interested in touring phosphate – **This meeting was cancelled due to a DOI Administrative National RAC review.**

September 12-13 in Challis, Idaho. Group will send ideas of what they might want to see to Matt Woodard, Sarah Wheeler or Todd Kuck. **The group was able to meet Sept. 12-13 but continued with the May/June meeting location and topics.**

The Great American Eclipse-

Dr. Brian Tonks, professor of Astromomy at Brigham Young University-Idaho, addressed the group about the upcoming solar eclipse occurring August 21, 2017. The eclipse is going to be a big deal. The professors tried to get the University on board two years ago, but it wasn't until groups from the Netherlands started calling that the University started to engage. A solar eclipse occurs when the moon blocks out the sun. Annual eclipses occur regularly but the moon doesn't cover the entire sun. The path of totality will be about 60-70 miles wide. Most total eclipses occur over the ocean or places of civil unrest. This is the 1st total eclipse in the lower 48 states since 1979 and the 1st total eclipse to cross the entire country since 1918.

The greateamericaneclipse.com website has a plethora of information available. Teton County is expecting 50,000 visitors and the Greater Idaho Falls Area has predicted 500,000. To give an idea of the numbers to expect- the Melaluca Fireworks brings in just over 100,000 people. Dr. Jeff Bennett from the Univeristy of Colorado will set up at Melaleuca Field and provide some presentations for the event. BYU-Idaho will also have lectures occurring the weekend before and following the eclipse.

Professor Tonks would expect public lands to get hit hard during this event because hotels are sold out and people will be looking for camping opportunities. People will want to be mobile and able to move if places get cloudy so RV's might be an issue if people try to go to places that are meant for four wheel drive high clearance vehicles. We might want to consider setting up designated parking spots or having areas where people can sign up for space.

Make sure you have eye protection when you view the eclipse so as not to have eye damage.