

RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL (RAC)
MEETING FEB. 27, 2018
IDAHO FISH & GAME
4279 COMMERCE CIRCLE
IDAHO FALLS, IDAHO 83401

PRESENT: Jon Goode, Jim Mende, Melissa Warren, Kyra Povirk, Jeremy Casterson, Jerald Raymond, Mary D Aversa, Charles Stewart, Stephen Bauchman, Chad Colter, Becky Smith, William Schutte, Dave Radford, Adam Beaupre, Matt Woodard, Ben Cisna, Ben Swaner, Blaine Newman, and Colby Tigert. Kelsey Griffee, Sarah Wheeler

WELCOME: Chairman Matt Woodard

INTRODUCTIONS

Mary D Aversa recognized the outgoing RAC members. Matt Woodard, Coby Tigert, Ken Wixom, Jerald Raymond, and Chad Colter. Mary thanked them for their service on the committee.

Matt Woodard, Chairman asked if there was any public in attendance and if there was any public comment at this time? There was none.

A motion to approve last RAC meeting board minutes was made by Dave Radford and seconded by Joh Goode. The motion carried.

Mary D' Aversa, Idaho Falls District Manager, then spoke to the committee about the BLM State of Affairs and the NEPA streamlining, and reorganization. Mary stated that the BLM has new goals and focuses for the upcoming year. They are as follows:

1. Make America great again through energy independence.
2. Maker America great through shared conservation stewardship.
3. Restore our sovereignty.
4. Getting America back to work
5. Serving the American Family by being good neighbors and supporting grazing, outdoor activities and other uses of public lands by the public.

Mary touched on the fact that there are two administration positions in the Idaho BLM chain of command that are currently held by acting administrators – our acting state director and the acting agency director . This is because the folks in Washington have not appointed permanent people to these positions. Currently Peter Ditton is the acting head of the BLM for the state if Idaho and Brian Steed is the acting director nationally. Matt asked if the acting directors were willing to stay on until a permanent person was appointed. Mary felt that they would as Washington appear to be in no hurry to fill the positions permanently. BLM officials felt that

both Brian and Peter were doing a great job and had a handle on the western issues. A committee member stated that Brian Steed had visited Idaho last summer and was very informed about the issues facing Idaho. It was mentioned that several names have floated around Washington for nominees, but that no official movement was evident. Some RAC members felt nothing was happening because the two major political parties are not getting along and nominations are not being moved on to frustrate the other party. Mary informed the committee that the states of Montana, New Mexico, Alaska, Colorado and Nevada are all under acting directors. Idaho is not alone. Because of hiring limitations at the present time many seasoned employees are being moved around to fill empty positions. Mary felt that that was a good sign that Washington is about to move forward with the recruitment announcements.

Mary also reported that the department is considering organizing by watersheds instead of state lines. Maps are circulating at this time and Idaho would be with Oregon and Washington. It is only in the conceptual stage at this time.

Mary was asked about the affect locally of no new leadership. She stated it was not too hard as there were written standards and policies that the district managers adhere to on a daily basis. The moral of some of the BLM employees has been affected. A committee member asked if the budget will be affected by the lack of permanent leadership. Mary felt that it would not as the standards and outcomes are the same throughout the agency. Some committee members questioned that the acting directors may not be in a hurry to make policies as they don't know when permanent leadership will take over and change things.

To maintain the time schedule for the meeting Kyra Povirk, Challis Assistant Field Manager was invited to make her presentation on the Wilderness Update/Open House Feedback. Mary expressed the desire to finish her presentation at the end of the meeting as she was unable to talk about the NEPA streamlining due to the strict facilitation. It was decided to talk about that just before the meeting adjourned.

Kyra reported to the committee that in August of 2015 the Hemingway-Boulders and White Cloud Wilderness areas were formed. During the comment period (Oct. 27-Nov. 27, 2017) 33 parties submitted letters. In January, the interdisciplinary team continued to review substantive comments. In March the team will meet to discuss comments and to identify modifications and edits to the plan and environmental assessment. Individuals or organizations that submitted comments during the thirty day comment period will have standing to object. The objection period is targeted for May 2018.

The Jim McClure-Jerry Peak Wilderness project comment period occurred simultaneously Oct. 27-Nov. 27, 2017. Thirty two parties submitted comment letters during the comment period. In January and February the interdisciplinary team reviewed the substantive comments received during the comment period. Edits to the plan and environmental assessment based on comment review are being completed. A line officer briefing of the plan, EA, response to comments and timeline is planned for mid-March. The objection period is anticipated for April 2018.

Requests for consistency between Plans were submitted by the public during public meetings and/or through public comment letters during the public comment period. On a topic-by-topic basis, the wilderness planning team developed recommendations for either keeping Plan text as is, or modifying Plan text so that direction between the Plans is consistent.

Kyra reported the most recent grazing relinquishment (related to the Wilderness designations) was a portion of the BLM Wild Horse Allotment - 638 AUMs, with previous relinquishments being the BLM Herd Creek Allotment – 1,000 AUMs and BLM Spud Creek Allotment – 180 AUMs.

Jon Beck, Idaho State Office Sage-grouse Lead presented information on the Sage-grouse Plan Direction and where it is going. Jon gave some background on the Greater Sage-grouse Conservation. March of 2010 warranted but precluded Endangered Species Act listing petition decision. March of 2013 Conservation Objective Team reports threats and they are: wildfire, invasive species, and conifer expansion.

Currently, there are two Programmatic EIS's (PEIS) happening. One for fuel breaks. The other is for fuels reduction and rangeland restoration. The purpose of the PEIS is as follows:

- Reduce hazardous fuels accumulation.
- Reduce pinyon-juniper encroachment.
- Reduce annual invasive species expansion.
- Protect life and property.
- Sustain multiple use opportunities.
- Protect sagebrush steppe ecosystem.

There are two distinct different PEIS's because they focus on two different areas.

Fuel Breaks PEIS:

- Protect life and property.
- Provide staging areas for fire fighters.
- Reduce rate of spread and flame lengths.

Fuels Reduction and Rangeland Restoration PEIS:

- Protect rangelands and provide for healthy ecosystems.
- Reduce potential for large scale wildfires.
- Reduce pinyon and juniper encroachment.
- Reduce spread of invasive species.

In the past the public concerns have been as follows:

- Access
- Use of non-native species
- Targeted grazing

- Maintenance of fuel breaks
- Habitat fragmentation
- Movement barriers

If you are interested in getting involved and submitting input please visit the web site: <https://go.usa.gov/xnQcG>, email: GRSG_peis@BLM.GOV, FAX: (208) 373-3805 or you can send mail to Jonathan Beck, BLM Idaho State Office, 1387 S. Vinnell Way, Boise, ID 83709. Please provide substantive comments that are specific and detailed. Comments that include knowledge, experience, evidence and suggest alternatives. Thanks!

Jeremy Casterson, Manager of the Upper Snake Field Office then presented information about the Sands Desert Wilderness Study Area. Jeremy reported that there is a movement to release the Sands Dessert Wilderness Study Area from its Wilderness designation. He stated right up front that the BLM can't weigh in on legislative issues. In 1979 there was a cursory look at the area and at this time it was not recommended for a Wilderness area. In 1981 wilderness groups appealed but it was denied. In 1985 it was made a special recreational management area. In 1991 the issue was revisited and groups asked why it was not a good candidate. Some of the reasons were difficult to manage with such large boundaries, not real scenic and natural, premiere recreation area, and negative economic impact on local economy if not used for recreation. Seasonal closures for wildlife habitat are now in place.

Jeremy revealed that the group pushing to remove the wilderness designation is a local irrigation company. They are asking because they need to release extra water into the sagebrush to recharge the Snake River Aquifer. With the movement to go to pivot irrigation the aquifers are not naturally being recharged as they would be with flood irrigation. The irrigation company went to Senator Risch and he told them to gather supporting information and people, put it in writing and he look at the proposal. Jeremy stated that the movement is gaining traction. Jeremy also stated that the BLM prefers to work with an EAU rather than a WSA because the EAU is more flexible in the management methods. There is no wiggle room in a WSA designation. He stated that if anyone wanted any more information on this topic there would be a meeting March 13, 2018 at the Spring Hill Suites in Rexburg Idaho between 8:30 a.m. to noon. The meeting will be the Henry's Fork Water Shed Meeting.

Kyra Povirk, Challis Assistant Field Manager then spoke to the committee about Outcome Based Grazing. At this stage she reported, it is a concept that is still in development; how it will be implemented is being worked on at local, state and Washington-office levels. The purpose of the Outcome Based Grazing is:

- To meet vegetation and habitat objectives through partnerships in grazing management.
- Provide demonstration projects in various geographic areas and variety of conditions.
- Transfer information and experience to policy for consistent national application.
- Use permits and leases as a framework for permit holders to demonstrate ability to achieve habitat and vegetation objectives. Also to provide flexibility to permittee to exercise knowledge, experience and stewardship.

- Consider conditions and management on adjacent allotments such as reviewing existing conditions and management of neighboring allotments to provide context. Also to develop multiple allotment NEPA where possible.
- Current policy is to evaluate land health on watershed or other geographic basis and is not restricted to allotment boundaries.
- Provide objective oriented authorizations rather than prescriptive terms and conditions.
- Include objectives addressing economic sustainability.
- Develop Voluntary Cooperative Partnerships at landscape scale.
- Describe Monitoring and Evaluation plan with both short term objectives, long term objectives and an evaluation schedule.
- Identify actions to be taken if evaluation shows objectives not met or of lack of progress toward meeting them.
- Where desired, develop management objectives and describe coordinated grazing management on associated lands. (Similar to Exchange Use Agreements or Coordinated Resource Management Plans.)

Kyra then listed the steps to initiate demonstration:

- Idaho Team to develop criteria and guidance for implementing Demonstration Project.
- Coordinate development with permit holders (NCBA/PLC) and other agencies.
- Develop training and information presentation.

Then she listed the proposed steps to implement the program

- Local offices solicit proposed projects and select initial demonstration areas with headquarters.
- Monitor achievement of goals in each of the demonstration projects.
- Analyze achievement in light of management decisions, weather and event variables.
- Develop long term policy.

Kyra then updated the committee on the Wild Horse and Burro Program. One of the biggest challenges to the BLM is that the wild horse population is constantly rising, and the adoption rates are going down which results in too many horses on too little public land. The BLM currently spends two thirds of its Wild Horse and Burro Program budget to care for animals removed from the range. That is nearly \$48,000 for one adopted horse that remains in a corral over its lifetime. Now each year the BLM only removes as many animals from the range as can be adopted. What's at stake? Declining health of public lands and animals.

New research is expected to lead to better management tools that, in time will help BLM to better care for our living legends and the rangelands on which they depend. The BLM's goal is clear: manage healthy horses on healthy rangelands. There are however divergent views on how wild horses and burros should be managed. Tough decisions are needed to put the Wild Horse and Burro Program on a sustainable path of the benefit of the animals, the land and the U.S. taxpayers. Kyra stated that they are working on an EA that will result in a comprehensive 10-

year management plan to include helicopter and bait gather, and PZP and other contraceptive treatments. The time line on the decision is October of 2018 to draft an EA. Public Comment will be taken in January 2019 and a decision signed by Feb. or March of 2019 with a gathering in the fall of 2019.

Mary then circled back to the beginning of the meeting and touched on the NEPA stream lining proposals. The following are the goals of the Natural Environmental Planning Act:

- Focus on issues that matter.
- Reduce the paperwork.
- Brief discussions on non-important issues.
- Shorter documents and page limits.

Mary reported that for a complex EIS it should only have 350 pages, for a simple one, 150 pages and should be completed in one year. Environmental Assessments that are complex should only be 50 pages long and be completed in 5 months. Simple Environmental Assessments should only be 25 pages long and be completed in 2 months. One of the main reasons the documents increased in size was because of litigation. Mary stated that often times the BLM would produce an EA and if groups took it to court then the BLM was adding information to the document so it would stand up in court. She said that striking a balance between speed and covering all variables could be tricky depending on the complexity of the action. She used the example of the Soda Springs area phosphate mines. If the BLM were to produce a bad EIS, then it would cost Soda Springs jobs.

The committee then discussed the dates of upcoming meetings. May 22nd & 23rd will be in the Upper Snake Office and September 18th & 19th will be in the Challis Office.

Meeting Adjourned.