

Northwest Resource Advisory Council's Subgroup for the White River Field Office's Travel Management Planning 2/18/15

Background

The Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) White River Field Office (WRFO) is preparing to conduct comprehensive travel and transportation management planning across the 1.5 million acres of BLM-managed surface within the WRFO. In 2014 the WRFO completed an on-the-ground inventory of transportation features (routes) for the eastern portion of the resource area; with the remaining portions of the field office scheduled to be inventoried in 2015.

On December 4, 2014, the WRFO asked the Northwest Resource Advisory Council (NW RAC) to consider forming a Subgroup comprised of members with local expertise to assist with travel management planning, particularly with land use planning associated with amending the 1997 Resource Management Plan's (RMP) travel management decisions. The BLM's land use planning regulations state that the "BLM will inform [the advisory council], seek its views, and consider them throughout the planning process" (43 CFR 1610.3-1g).

What is the relationship between the Subgroup and the NW RAC?

Only the NW RAC can provide recommendations to the BLM. However, the Subgroup can play a vital role in informing the NW RAC about the issues being considered and make recommendations to the NW RAC. The Subgroup can provide general advice to the NW RAC and recommendations for consideration by gathering information, conducting research, analyzing relevant issues and facts, and drafting proposed position papers.

The Subgroup will have an opportunity to participate in a 2-day BLM-led travel and transportation management training and so will be educated on the BLM's travel management planning process. They will also be able to study the amendment and associated planning documents at a level of detail that is likely not possible for the members of the NW RAC. Through the NW RAC, the Subgroup can provide valuable feedback to the BLM on planning issues that may not have been identified by the Cooperating Agencies since the Subgroup would be composed of a diverse group of public land users that may represent points-of-view not expressed by the Cooperating Agencies due to their agencies' focused missions.

No travel compensation is authorized for members of the Subgroup.

What tasks does the BLM envision asking the Subgroup to work on?

The primary purpose of the Subgroup is to facilitate the NW RAC's involvement in the BLM's travel management RMP amendment (RMPA). The BLM envisions that the travel management RMPA will be evaluated through an environmental assessment (EA) rather than an environmental impact statement (EIS). The Subgroup would be asked to provide feedback to the NW RAC on whether or not the BLM has developed an adequate range of alternatives with respect to OHV area designations, designation criteria, and exception criteria. A diverse subgroup representing various interests with local knowledge of the lands managed by the White River Field Office would best be able to answer that question.

The BLM is planning for route-by-route implementation level planning to begin in 2016. Prior to beginning implementation level planning, the BLM and NW RAC will evaluate how useful the Subgroup has been during land use planning and determine whether or not to continue use of the Subgroup during implementation level planning.

Composition of the Subgroup:

The composition of the Subgroup will be similar to that of the NW RAC. The Subgroup will consist of 10 to 15 members who represent a broad range of interests in three general categories with up to 5 members assigned to each category. Category 1 members represent commercial interests or users such as livestock grazing, timber, mining, oil and gas, realty and rights-of-ways, off-highway vehicle groups, and guides and outfitters. Category 2 members represent environmental organizations, archaeology/historical interests,

wildlife organizations, wild horse and burros, and dispersed/general recreation. Category 3 members represent state or other governmental agencies, Tribes, academic institutions, and the public-at-large.

What are the roles and responsibilities of the Subgroup?

- The Subgroup should be active and participatory rather than just being there to observe or "watch".
- Their role is advisory, serving as a sounding board on specific topics, such as making sure the BLM has an adequate range of alternatives. The Subgroup is not tasked with developing or identifying the preferred alternative; the BLM is responsible for choosing the preferred alternative.
- The Subgroup will be asked not to discuss or distribute information outside of meetings if information has not yet been made publically available by the BLM. The BLM employees working with the Subgroup will inform them regarding the public/nonpublic nature of the information they are given.
- The Subgroup will elect a Chairperson who will be responsible for coordinating meetings (and agendas) with the BLM and for reporting to the NW RAC via the Liaison.
- The Chairperson will report to the NW RAC, via the Liaison, on tasks that the Subgroup has been assigned by the BLM. The Chairperson will identify topics/issues on which the Subgroup has reached a consensus recommendation and which areas they have not reached a consensus recommendation. For topics that the Subgroup has not reached a consensus recommendation, the Chairperson will provide the NW RAC with a summary of the group's differing opinions.
- A consensus recommendation must include all members of the Subgroup. If certain members of the Subgroup are not attending meetings or being active participants, the Chairperson will coordinate with the NW RAC Liaison to facilitate more active participation (e.g., alternate meeting times, venues, conference calls, or replacement of the Subgroup member with someone who has more time to participate).

What are the roles and responsibilities of the NW RAC Liaison?

- The NW RAC will appoint at least one of its members to serve as the Liaison to the Subgroup.
- The Liaison will assist with facilitation of the Subgroup's meeting and ensure that the Subgroup remains focused on the assigned task.
- The Liaison will not be an active participant in discussions during Subgroup meetings to avoid influencing the Subgroup or dominating the conversation.
- The Liaison will coordinate with the Chairperson regarding distributing information to the NW RAC and necessary timeframes and formats for their review.
- The Liaison will serve as the point of contact for any conflicts or process issues that arise between the BLM and the Subgroup.

What are the roles and responsibilities of the BLM?

- The BLM will provide Subgroup members an opportunity to participate in a 2-day travel management training on March 18 and 19, 2014 in Meeker, CO.
- The BLM will ensure that Subgroup meeting notices are posted online at least two weeks prior to a meeting and that there is an opportunity for public comment and questions at each meeting.
- The BLM and NW RAC liaison will develop a suggested meeting agenda to make sure that the Subgroup is clear on the specific tasks and feedback requested from the NW RAC. Final meeting agendas will be developed/approved by the Chairperson.
- The BLM will provide meeting space at the WRFO in Meeker, CO.
- During Subgroup meetings, the BLM will provide staff to answer questions from the Subgroup about the travel management planning process or the BLM's rationale for specific proposals. The BLM will also provide the technology needed to use GIS and Google Earth to assist the Subgroup in evaluating proposals across the landscape.
- The BLM will coordinate with the Chairperson and Liaison to be sure that the NW RAC is aware of the BLM's planning schedule and critical timelines for input to be fully considered.
- The BLM will engage the Subgroup at similar timeframes during the planning process as it engages the Cooperating Agencies (i.e., typically prior to public comment and review periods).

What records must be kept?

Detailed records must be kept for each Subgroup meeting (43 CFR 1784.5-3) and the Chairperson shall certify the accuracy of meeting records. Records shall include at a minimum:

- Time and place of the meeting;
- Copies of the Federal Register and other public notices announcing the meeting;
- A list of advisors and Department or Bureau employees present;
- A list of members of the public present and who each represented;
- The meeting agenda;
- A complete and accurate summary description of matters discussed and conclusions reached;
- A list of recommendations made by the group;
- Copies of all reports received, issues, or approved by the subgroup; and
- A description of the nature of public participation.

Federal Advisory Committee Act Considerations:

- The Subgroup is not a stand-alone FACA-chartered group, but reports to the NW RAC, which is.
- The NW RAC is a FACA-chartered group. The Subgroup will operate under the same procedural requirements as the NW RAC.
- All meetings are open to the public and news media and will need to provide a comment/question period at the end for the public (43 CFR 1784.4-3).
- All meetings will be announced by posting a notice on the WRFO's travel and transportation management website at least two weeks in advance.
- Subgroup participants are "officially" recognized under FACA and participants cannot tag-team as representatives. Others can attend, listen, and comment or ask questions during the comment/question period for the public. However, only Subgroup members can formally participate in the discussion or vote.