

**DRAFT**  
**Bureau of Land Management (BLM)**  
**Boise District Resource Advisory Council (RAC) Meeting**  
**Dec. 9, 2015, 9:00 a.m.**  
**Boise District Office (BDO)**  
**3948 Development Avenue, Boise, Idaho 83705**

**MEETING MINUTES**

**Boise District RAC Members Present:**

Gene Gray, Neil Rimbey, Donna Bennett, Tina Reay, Joe Merrick, Steve Damele, Stacey Baczkowski and Karen Steenhof

**Boise District RAC Members Absent:** Charlie Lyons, Rick Raymondi and Ted Howard

**BLM Advisory/Staff Present:**

Jenifer Arnold, Michele McDaniel, Michelle Ryerson, Tanya Thrift, Tate Fischer, Seth Flanigan, Jeremy Bluma, Clay Stott, Lance Okeson, Justin Boeck, Cindy Fritz, MJ Byrne, Jon Beck, Justin Boeck, Dave Murphy, Jeremy Bluma, Johanna Munson

**Guests Present:** Ernie Breuer and Robyn Thompson, Owyhee County Task Force on Gateway West

**Welcome:**

Gene Gray opened the meeting at 9:00 a.m.

Gray opened the meeting by introducing the Acting BLM Boise District Manager Jenifer Arnold. Arnold welcomed the RAC members and thanked them for their countless hours of volunteer service to the BLM on behalf of the nation's taxpayers. Arnold told the RAC a new Boise District Manager had been selected, Lara Douglas. Her scheduled report date is Dec. 28.

The RAC approved the minutes as written from meeting on Aug. 19, 2015. The draft agenda was also approved by voice vote.

**Soda Fire Update – Michele McDaniel and Cindy Fritz:**

Soda Fire Team Lead Michele McDaniel provided the RAC members with a PowerPoint presentation updating details provided since the last RAC meeting on Aug. 19. A copy of the PowerPoint was provided to the RAC.

The Soda Fire started on Aug. 10, burning rapidly and intensely nearly 280,000 acres – more than 400 square miles -- of federal, state, and private lands in southwest Idaho and eastern Oregon. The fire has greatly impacted the sagebrush-steppe landscape that supports native wildlife, outdoor recreation, and other important values. Almost all of the burned area is habitat for the greater sage-grouse, with more than 50,000 acres designated by BLM as Priority Habitat

Management Area (PHMA) for the species. The fire has also had a devastating impact to ranchers who lost livestock and other property on both federal and private land. Within the burned area, 41 BLM grazing allotments were impacted, including an estimated 35,000 Animal Unit Months (AUMs). It was contained on Aug. 23, 2015. The fire impacted thousands of acres of multiple recreation uses and burned nearly all of the three wild horse herd management areas, resulting in an emergency gather of 279 wild horses. McDaniel pointed out that despite the fire's immense and lasting destruction; there were some "Silver Linings" or positive outcomes. These included community cohesiveness during fire suppression efforts, improved relationships between county, state and federal agencies due to early coordination efforts during and after suppression efforts were completed, a landscape approach to emergency stabilization and rehabilitation (ESR) efforts that was established prior to containment of the wild fire, and early involvement, integration and coordination with other agencies and affected permittees/landowners for the development of ESR treatment options.

The Soda Fire ESR Plan Implementation portion of the briefing was provided by Cindy Fritz, the District's ESR and Weeds Supervisor. Fritz referred to the Department of Interior (DOI) policy announcements that have had a significant impact on the Soda Fire's ESR efforts: the Sage-Grouse Environmental Impact Statement, an updated National Seed Strategy and Secretarial Order 3336: Rangeland Fire Prevention, Management, and Restoration.

During the Soda ESR planning process, Fritz said the national policy for ESR planning was expanded from three to five years so the Soda Fire ESR Plan ([bit.ly/SodaFireRehab](http://bit.ly/SodaFireRehab)) covers up to five years. It enables initial emergency stabilization efforts to extend into rehabilitation for added years. It also opens up the ability to utilize herbicides for invasive grass reduction and the ability to apply re-treatments to areas that were not initially successful. Fritz noted similar treatments are being conducted across the different land ownerships, calling it, "All hands all lands." An experimental treatment being applied on small acreages within the Soda Fire is *Pseudomonas fluorescens* strain D7, an experimental bio herbicide treatment derived from soil bacteria. It was applied as a seed coating and applied aurally and by drills on two 25-acre experimental plots. D7 was developed to apply the bacterium that has shown promise in invasive plant reduction. Fritz provided a list of the ESR treatments that have been completed in the fall 2015 and projects planned for the Spring/Fall of 2016.

Donna Bennett advised Fritz to be alert to army worms as an emerging insect infestation problem.

Steve Damele asked whether the ESR plan included targeted grazing as an option for managing regrowth of non-native weeds including cheatgrass. One of the barriers identified to including targeted grazing was the lack of analysis in place as required by the National Environmental Policy Act.

The issue of how to manage recreational activities was discussed. Several permitted activities have been cancelled due to the fire. Karen Steenhof commented that the use of voluntary closure of the area burned by the Soda Fire is sending mixed messages to the public. She was concerned about the potential for damage to the burned area especially when warm temperatures and lack of

snow are enabling cross country off-highway vehicle travel. Hard closure has not been approved due to the size of the fire. BLM is continuing to evaluate the impacts to the area from recreational activity and the possibility of limited closures. Steenhof recommended increased communication to the public about the potential damage to the natural resources in the Soda Fire burned area.

**Proposed Tri-State Fuels Projects Update – Lance Okeson and Justin Boeck:**

BDO Fuels Program Coordinator Lance Okeson provided an update on the status of the Tri-State Fuels Project. A copy of the PowerPoint was provided to the RAC.

A motion to create a subcommittee to study the Tri-State project and provide BLM with recommendations was presented by Jerry McAdams, seconded by Neil Rimbey and passed without objection. Gray identified the following RAC members in addition to himself who have agreed to serve on the subcommittee: Joe Merrick, Art Talsma, Jerry McAdams, Steve Damele, Rick Raymondi and Neil Rimbey. Gray will be contacting some interested third parties to be members of the subcommittee. He will provide a final membership list to Byrne before the first meeting. A date will be set after the holidays for an organizational meeting of the subcommittee.

**Public Comment Period – 11:00 a.m. to 11:10 a.m.**

There was no public comment.

**Wild Horse Emergency Gather and Adoptions – Clay Stott**

An emergency gather of wild horses from the Black Mountain, Sands Basin, and Hardtrigger Herd Management Areas (HMAs) was successfully completed in early September with a total of 279 horses gathered: 173 from the Hardtrigger HMA, 78 from Black Mountain HMA and 28 from the Sands Basin HMA. A group of horses were returned to the Black Mountain HMA, including four mares that were treated with the Porcine Zona Pellucida fertility control vaccine. Warm weather and other factors are preventing completing the gather in the Sands Basin HMA, so BLM is feeding them. Seven foals have been born at the corrals since the emergency gather. When the range improves, horses at the low Appropriate Management Level (AML) will be returned to the range. The AML for Sands Basin is 33 horses, 66 horses in Hardtrigger, and 30 in the Black Mountain HMA.

On Nov. 11, BLM successfully adopted 37 weanlings gathered from the Soda Fire. 4-H youth horse clubs from the Treasure Valley are taking 12 weanlings for 6 weeks of training prior to an adoption that will be held in conjunction with the Idaho Horse Expo in April. Additional wild horses gathered from the Soda Fire and from other HMA's will be available for the Trainer Incentive and Extreme Mustang Makeover programs in July and the Idaho State Fair in August.

Tina Reay reported on the Boise showing of "Unbranded," a documentary movie that tracks sixteen mustangs and four men achieving their dream: to ride 3,000 miles border to border, Mexico to Canada, up the spine of the American West.

Reay asked whether BLM will be able to address the fencing issues identified from the Soda Fire in the HMA where wild horses were caught and burned. She said mustang supporters are asking

her if BLM has an estimated date when the wild horses will be able to be returned out into their HMAs in Owyhee County. Stott said it would be at least two years, depending on when management objectives are met and on the success of the rehabilitation and restoration treatments. Several studs and mares have already been shipped to the BLM's largest wild horse preparation and short term holding facility at Palomino Valley, Nevada.

### **Travel and Transportation Management Planning - Tanya Thrift**

Bruneau FO Manager Tanya Thrift provided an update on the comprehensive travel and transportation management plan (TMP) and associated environmental assessment (EA) for two of five subregions of public lands in Owyhee County. A 45-day scoping period for the environmental assessment of the routes began on Dec. 1, 2015. The BLM is hosting two open houses during the scoping period for the public to provide input and identify any significant issues with the systems of routes described in each of three preliminary alternatives within the two subregions.

Thrift encouraged the RAC to attend the open houses. The first open house is scheduled for Dec. 10, 2015, in Nampa, and the second is scheduled for Dec. 11, 2015, in Grand View.

The Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 directs BLM to complete a comprehensive TMP for all public lands in Owyhee County. The Boise District BLM has grouped the public lands in Owyhee County within the Boise District into five subregions for the purposes of this TMP effort. Flanigan shared the public website and how to use the mapping tools on the site, while questions were answered on the route inventory started in 2004 and completed in 2012 with extensive public involvement and BLM validation. On BLM's ePlanning website, there are maps identifying the delineation of land ownership within the five subregions. To view the maps go to: [http://www.blm.gov/id/st/en/prog/planning/Travel\\_Management/travel\\_management.html](http://www.blm.gov/id/st/en/prog/planning/Travel_Management/travel_management.html).

The two subregions that are the focus of the present scoping effort are the Canyonlands East, which consists of 1,390 miles of routes between the Northwest Pipeline and the Bruneau River, and 292 miles of routes within the portion of the Morley Nelson Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area (NCA) in Owyhee County.

Travel management planning efforts for the other three subregions within the Boise District, Canyonlands West, Grand View, and Silver City, will follow later in 2016 through 2018.

In order to become further engaged in travel and transportation management planning, Steenhof moved that a subcommittee be created to study the TMP process and provide the BLM with recommendations. Stacey Baczkowski seconded the motion, and it passed by a voice vote. Steenhof recommended John Robison, a former RAC member and current TMP Chair for the Owyhee Initiative, be asked to join the subcommittee as a member. The Acting NCA Manager Seth Flanigan provided copies of the TMP maps to Gray for the subcommittee's use.

### **Lunch**

### **Proposed Bruneau-Owyhee Sage-Grouse Habitat (BOSH), Paradigm and Prescribed Burn**

### **projects Update – Lance Okeson and Justin Boeck**

BDO Fuels Program Coordinator Lance Okeson provided a power point briefing to the RAC on the following:

- BOSH Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) timeline
- Paradigm EA was signed and implementation will begin in the fall of 2016
- Pole Creek Prescribed Burn (Rx), South Mountain Rx, and University of Idaho Research Rx completed during the fall of 2015.

(Information for this topic is included in the PowerPoint presentation in the above agenda topic titled, “Proposed Tri-State Fuels Projects Update,”

### **Gateway West Project**

Dave Murphy, BLM-Idaho Senior Advisor for Energy and Transmission, provided an update on the status of segments 8 and 9 of the Gateway West Transmission project. Murphy recognized the tremendous amount of time and effort the Gateway West RAC subcommittee put into developing both the Route Report and the Mitigation and Enhancement Report approved by the RAC on June 5, 2014.

Significant delays in identification of the preferred alternative are due to substantive resource issues, including the record of decision for the sage-grouse land use plan amendments and recent mitigation guidance. The BLM is working with the EIS contractor, Tetra Tech, to finalize the description of impacts for each route. Alternatives will now be a set of various route combinations. According to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the agency will identify one or more preferred alternative. Murphy said the BLM is working with the Tetra Tech to revise the project schedule, but expects the Draft Supplemental EIS to be release in early 2016.

### **Sage-Grouse – Update – Brent Ralston**

The Team Lead for the Idaho and Oregon Regional Greater Sage-Grouse (GSG) Conservation efforts, Brent Ralston, provided an update to the RAC with a PowerPoint presentation. Ralston highlighted several significant actions and decisions that have been announced about sage-grouse conservation efforts. A copy of the PowerPoint was provided to the RAC members.

In January 2015, the DOI issued Secretarial Order 3336: Rangeland Fire Prevention, Management, and Restoration, relating to fire prevention and fuels management in sage-grouse habitat. On Sept. 22, 2015, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) announced that amended federal resource management plans and partnerships with states, ranchers and non-governmental organizations contributed to a decision that the greater sage-grouse was Not Warranted for Listing under the Endangered Species Act. Since Sept. 25, 2015, lawsuits have been filed challenging the decision, including one from the State of Idaho. Ralston reviewed the extensive collaboration that had occurred between BLM, the State of Idaho and the Governor’s Sage Grouse Task Force. The ongoing goal of all those efforts continues to be to increase the abundance and distribution of GSG and their habitat.

BLM has a National Implementation Coordinator and is working on a national implementation guide. At a regional level, BLM is setting up Regional Coordinators, Regional Support Teams, and interagency Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) Management Zone GRG Conservation Teams. Ralston introduced the newly appointed Great-Basin Regional GSG Conservation Implementation Plan Coordinator Johanna Munson to the RAC.

He noted that southwest Idaho has the second largest intact and important sage-grouse habitat area in the nation. A map of Idaho was divided up into four conservation areas based on similarity of habitat and used for adaptive management triggers and responses. Triggers are evaluated within a conservation area, and any adaptive management response occurs within that conservation area.

Ralston showed the RAC a map of the west divided into seven zones referred to as WAFWA Management Zone, with Idaho in zone four. Sage-grouse habitat is designated (categorized) into Priority Habitat Management Areas (PHMAs), Important Habitat Management Areas (IHMAs), and General Habitat Management Areas (GHMAs). These three habitat categories help to prioritize areas for protections while still allowing for compatible multiple uses within sage-grouse habitat. Restrictions on uses decrease moving from Priority to Important to General Habitat Management Areas, with most uses being allowed in General Habitat with some constraints and required design features.

Sagebrush Focal Areas (SFAs) are a subset of Priority Habitat Management Areas that is meant to represent the most contiguous, intact, and necessary habitat to maintain sage-grouse populations and have some additional management guidance to minimize further habitat loss – withdrawal, including no surface occupancy and project prioritization.

Idaho has 3.8 million acres identified as Sagebrush Focal Areas (SFAs) in order to preserve the habitat and populations of the GRSG. These tracts of public lands have been segregated from locatable mineral entry for two years. During this time they will be evaluated for locatable mineral withdrawal through a subsequent Mineral Withdrawal EIS. The results of the EIS will be incorporated into recommendations which will then be forwarded to Congress. As part of the Mineral Withdrawal EIS, BLM will be hosting several Open Houses to solicit public input, including two in Idaho. The first meeting will occur in Boise on Dec. 15, 2015, and the second will occur in Idaho Falls on Dec. 16, 2015.

Ralston noted that directional drilling for oil and natural gas from outside SFAs would be allowed under the new SFA regulations, but no new surface occupancy within SFAs will be allowed.

He reviewed the next steps for the RAC. Wildfire and invasive weeds were identified as primary threats to sage-grouse habitat within the Great Basin. Therefore, the primary focus of BLMs implementation is to increase the effectiveness of wildfire suppression and improve and restore sage-grouse habitat.

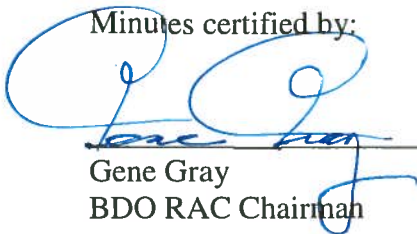
Two members of the Owyhee County Taskforce on Gateway West joined the meeting prior to Ralston's presentation. They requested a copy of Ralston's PowerPoint presentation.

**Action items** - The following action items from the meeting were identified by the RAC Chair and were shared with members:

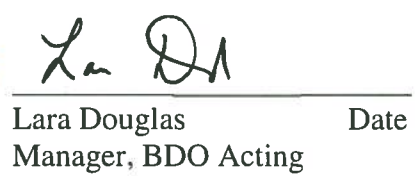
1. Purchase a name tag for Joe Merrick.
2. Michele McDaniel will provide a link to the Secretarial Order 3336 to Byrne for inclusion with the RAC's minutes.
3. McDaniel will provide a copy of the Soda Fire Update PowerPoint presentation to Byrne for inclusion with the RAC's minutes.
4. Lance Okeson will provide a copy of the PowerPoint presentation about the status of various fuels projects in BDO to Byrne for inclusion with the RAC's minutes.
5. Gray will contact RAC members and other third party individuals to be members of the RAC's Tri-State Fuels Project Subcommittee and provide the final list to Byrne. A date for the first subcommittee meeting will be set after the holidays and in coordination with Okeson and Boeck.
6. Flannigan will provide copies of TMP maps to Gray for the TMP subcommittee's use.
7. Okeson will provide the RAC with information about the BLM study refuting a study about the spread of Forage Kochia after it is planted and it becomes established.
8. Ralston will provide Byrne with a copy of the Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Efforts PowerPoint presentation to the RAC for inclusion with the RAC minutes.
9. Jon Beck will provide a response to the RAC member's questions about key habitat, provide to Aimee Betts for review and then to Byrne for distribution to the RAC.
10. Byrne will provide an electronic copy of the sage-grouse PowerPoint presentation to the two members of the Owyhee County Task Force on Gateway West.

A date for the next RAC meeting will be determined in January 2016.

Minutes certified by:

  
Gene Gray  
BDO RAC Chairman

3-16-16  
Date

  
Lara Douglas  
Manager, BDO Acting

3/16/16  
Date

