

DRAFT

BOISE DISTRICT RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL (RAC) MEETING

August 19, 2015 9:00 a.m.

Boise District Office

3948 Development Avenue, Boise, Idaho 83705

MEETING MINUTES

Boise District RAC Members Present:

Charles Lyons, Stacey Baczkowski, Gene Gray, Karen Steenhof, Tina Reay, Rick Raymondi, Steve Damele, Donna Bennett, Art Talsma, Nail Rimbey, Ted Howard, Joe Merrick

BLM Advisory Present:

Amanda Scott, Matt McCoy, Marsha Buchanan

BLM Staff Present:

Andy Delmas, Ben Sitz, Jon Beck, Dave Murphy, John Sullivan

Guests Present: Dan Ogle, Dave Franzen, Rob Spaul, Bill Walsh, Scott Williams

Welcome:

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

Gene opened the meeting by calling for nominations for the RAC chairperson. Neil re-nominated Gene Gray for the Chairperson position, Donna seconded the motion. Neil re-nominated Karen for the vice-chair position, Joe seconded the nomination.

The RAC accepted three set of minutes from past RAC administrative meetings held on June 5, 2014, September 24, 2014, and April 21, 2015. Tina made the motion to accept the minutes, seconded by Charlie.

Grazing Demonstration Project:

Dan Ogle and Dave Franzen spoke to the RAC about the monitoring they are completing. They are working with area ranchers Damele, Hoffman, Howard and McGrew, and in some cases they are monitoring areas never monitored before. They noted that they are noticing twice as much peppergrass compared to last year which they credit to the early deep moisture we received last winter. The plants are larger than any seen in the last four years. They noted 2012 had the same number of plants. Their transect is set up for high volume cow use to study the impacts of hoof prints and other livestock impacts. They will have a report available in October.

Karen asked about the palatability of cheatgrass and medusahead. The response was that cheatgrass will germinate in the fall and into the winter, it is prime forage (protein) when green.

During late winter and early spring as the plant turns red it is less desirable. Older plants have lower nutrient levels but do supply bulk for cattle. During winter grazing cows will eat both green and older plants, but the target is green.

When asked when is the cut-off for grazing to protect perennials, the response was late March dependent on temperatures and moisture.

Medusahead follows the same pattern, but is poor forage as it is high in silica. It adapts rapidly in dry areas. Charlie mentioned that medusahead greens in June, when it is time for cattle to leave the pasture. Charlie considers medusahead a bigger threat than cheatgrass as it develops a mat-like ground cover. There was a discussion of ways to fight medusahead, some think fire sets it back and may be one answer. Cool season grazing may be one option. Chemical control can be effective, but it is expensive and creates a loss of forage.

Rick asked if there is a no-grazing control transect. The response was that the project is a demonstration project, not a full blown research project, there are no exclosures. The project is being funded by the participating ranchers.

Oil and Gas Leasing:

Matt McCoy spoke to the RAC about oil and gas leasing. There is a four part process:

1. Land Use Planning – industry approaches BLM about leasing. BLM considers land use plans and completes and environmental assessment (EA).
2. Application for a permit to drill. This is the stage where more details are sussed out and another EA is completed.
3. Production – the actual extraction of oil and gas.
4. Reclamation.

In 2007-2008 the Willow and Hamilton fields were identified by Alta Mesa as having leasing potential. There are five parcels, including 997 acres managed by the BLM and 5,352 acres of split estate. The lease sale occurred on May 28, 2015 and the leases sold for \$3.8 million dollars. An EA has since been completed. Wildland Defense is appealing the sale.

Looking forward Land Use Plans (LUPs) will include:

- Stipulations including no surface occupancy
- Lease notices
- Withdrawal recommendations

Many RAC members asked how the local community impacts are considered in the EA process. Fracking was also a topic of discussion. Ted asked that the BLM include stipulations against fracking. There is no fracking at this point. BLM was asked about pipelines for the product, the pipeline already exists. The product is awaiting the pipeline.

RAC members asked about the extraction process:

- The condensate is extracted at the wellhead

- A condensing unit at the wellhead ‘dries’ the gas
- Product is sent to a single processing center
- Product is pressurized to 1000 psi and is sent into the pipeline system

RAC members asked about the reclamation process, reclamation is a national talking point.

Three types of bonds exist:

1. Lease bond - \$10,000 coverage per lease
2. Statewide bond - \$25,000
3. Nationwide bond - \$150,000

BLM can require bonds greater than these amounts.

Gateway West Project:

Dave Murphy thanked the Gateway West subcommittee for all of their time and effort on the route report and mitigation and enhancement portfolio. The RAC suggested route is being analyzed in detail in the draft supplemental environmental impact statement (EIS). BLM has modified part of a segment 9 route near Oreana to avoid primary sage-grouse habitat. Staff and the Idaho State Director are determining the preferred alternative. The draft supplemental EIS is scheduled to be published in October. The preferred alternative is not a final Decision. Publication of the draft supplemental EIS starts the 90 day comment period.

RAC members asked what kind of pressure BLM is receiving from environmental groups. The response was that BLM is hearing from people across the spectrum, communities, agriculture producers, and environmental groups.

Neil stated that the addition of lines and double circuiting south of the river caught him and other subcommittee members off-guard. He hopes the changes are not considered or the subcommittee may not support the BLM’s decision. He noted the feeling of lack of integrity of the process. Gene stated that this project goes beyond the topic of sage-grouse and it affects real people. BLM should quit prefacing all projects with the sage-grouse issue. Joe asked about the difference in attitude about lines crossing the NCA, the route across the top of Saylor Creek dunes (east side of NCA) is not in question but the routes across the west side of the NCA is not acceptable to some. Karen mentioned the precedent on the eastern side crossing. Dave responded that all routes for the project cross the NCA somewhere. BLM is looking at the long-term health of the NCA. BLM encourages RAC members to make comments on the draft supplemental EIS, and the RAC and subcommittee may comment as a group.

Public Comment:

Charlie Lyons is concerned that Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) teams don’t include input from local persons and permittees. Neil asked if building fuel breaks into the plan is possible. Joe urged BLM to include the Owyhee County Commissioners in the planning process, they want to assist. Gene asked if the permittees would be notified of the planning effort. Karen asked about the Inciweb website, specifically why was it not updated on at least one day during the fire, and how does the system work? Donna appreciated the updated maps that were placed in Grand View stores.

Joe commended the conduct of the Type 1 and 2 Team Commanders. In a conversation with one of the ICs Joe was told that there was so much matted cheatgrass the retardant didn't work after Friday. Steve asked if there have been grazing cuts in the Soda fire area over the last 40 years. (Steve followed up with an email with the same request on August 21.) Matt McCoy responded that the public can look on the eplanning website to gather data about seasons of use, etc. Gene expressed his frustration that the Tri-State project has been sidelined for the time being.

Road Maintenance Projects:

Daylon Dubkowski spoke about road maintenance projects occurring on the Boise District and explained that BLM has one patrol and one operator to perform road maintenance. Daylon shared a spreadsheet detailing the roads BLM maintains.

OHVs and Golden Eagle Nesting Sites:

Karen Steenhof and Rob Spaul presented information about the use of OHVs and the effects on golden eagle nesting sites.

Sage-grouse EIS Status:

Jon Beck reported that the BLM has received 20 protest letter from industry, grazers, state, and the environmental community. BLM is finalizing the protest report, Approved RMP Amendment, and the record of decision (ROD). BLM expects the ROD to be signed during September 2015.

Soda Fire Effect on Herd Management Areas (HMAs):

Chris Robbins spoke with RAC members about the effect the Soda fire had on the Boise District HMAs and the horses on the HMAs. The horses in the Sands Basin HMA and those at Jump Creek are okay for the time being, but will need to be gathered. BLM is most concerned about the Hardtrigger HMA. The population is estimated at 175 horses. 27 horses died in the fire. 145 to 150 horses remain and the range is in poor condition. Reconnaissance flights are underway to assess the range and locate horses. About one-third of the Black Mountain HMA burned in the fire. There are about 80 horses on the HMA. An emergency gather will begin next week. BLM will gather all horses from the Sands Basin and Hardtrigger HMAs. Black Mountain HMA horses will be gathered and 30 will be returned to the HMA, including mares treated with fertility control. 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. There will be limited observation opportunities at the gather sites due to lack of cover.

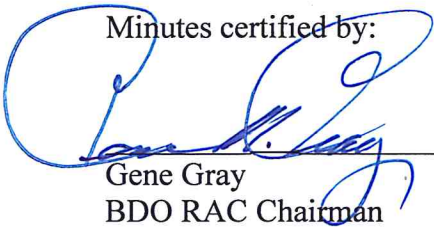
RAC members asked about the health of the herds. Chris said the horses seem mostly visibly okay, a few are 'gimpy' and BLM hopes for the best. Concerns include burns and smoke inhalation.

Soda Fire Update:

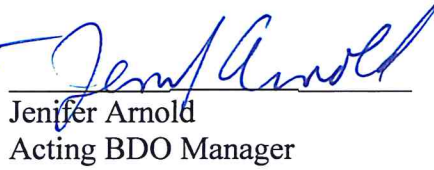
Andy Delmas and Ben Sitz spoke with RAC members about the Soda fire including size, growth rate, lessons learned and actions going forward. Andy provided a timeline of the fire activity and maps of the areas burned.

Next RAC Meeting: The next scheduled RAC meeting will be scheduled for October 2015.

Minutes certified by:


Gene Gray
BDO RAC Chairman

12-09-15
Date


Jenifer Arnold
Acting BDO Manager

12/9/15
Date