

**John Day Snake Resource Advisory Council Meeting
Oregon/Washington Bureau of Land Management
October 15-16, 2020**

Meeting convened at 8 a.m. Oct. 15 via Zoom

Members present: Chairman Randy Jones, Terry Drever Gee, Greg Jackle, Jim Boethin, Gary Gustafson, Steve Lent, Brian Sykes, Jim Reiss, Bob Krein, Jerry Brummer

Agency Reps and others: Don Gonzalez, Vale BLM & DFO; Tom Montoya, WWNF; Joe Aragon, Vale BLM/Baker Field Office; Joe Neer, Umatilla NF; Shanda Dekome, Deschutes NF; Shane Jeffries, Ochoco NF; Amanda Roberts, Prineville BLM/Central Oregon Field Manager; Tom Beaucage, Prineville BLM; Roxane Baca, David Dahle and Anne Marie King, BLM Ethics Office; and Jessica Keys of Sen. Jeff Merkley's office.

Public: Art Waugh, pending reappointment; Marilynne Keyser, Friends and Neighbors of the Deschutes Canyon Area; Mary Fleischmann, Great Old Broads; Susie Koppert, rockhound; Shay White, Bill Ables and Marty Gardner, and Hells Canyon Recreation Collaborative.

Ethics training for RAC members

Anne Marie King of the BLM OR/WA ethics office led the training.

Approve minutes from February 2020 business meeting and May 2020 subcommittee meeting.

February minutes corrected to reflect Gary Gustafson's absence was excused. Motion by Jerry Brummer, second by Randy Jones to approve minutes as corrected.

Agency Updates

Reports from Vale/Prineville BLM, Deschutes, Umatilla, Ochoco, Wallowa-Whitman and Malheur National Forests attached.

Joe Neer of the Umatilla National Forest (see handout) briefed the group on shared stewardship projects, including the Four Corners Commercial Thinning Project on the John Day Ranger District with Oregon Department of Forestry. This project will include precommercial thinning, logging, and fuel treatments.

Proposal by RAC member Jerry Brummer to address Prineville BLM fee proposal for Segment 1 Lower John Day River permits and resume Agency Updates afterward.

RAC member Brian Sykes recused himself. Prineville Central Oregon Field Manager Amanda Roberts presented.

During the Feb. 21-22, 2020, JDS RAC meeting, the RAC endorsed a proposal to extend the spring launch fee season from May 15-July 10 to May 1-July 15 to better align with heavy river use. No changes were made to the fees themselves. They remain \$10 per group for day use or \$20 per group for overnight.

Now the RAC is being asked to support adding the same fee structure to the fall launch permit season of Sept. 1 to Nov. 30, from Cottonwood down to Tumwater Falls. The action will make the permitting system slightly less confusing, but is primarily intended to protect the user experience.

No changes would be made to the number of permits, which is set at 6 per day under the John Day River EA. The RAC is only being asked to endorse the implementation of permit fees in addition to the \$6 transaction fee for a launch permit.

Art Waugh, who chairs the JDS RAC planning subcommittee, reported the planning subcommittee had discussed the matter twice and came to a consensus of support for the fee proposal, but had concerns regarding fish runs and potential crossover between native and hatchery fish.

RAC member Bob Krein expressed concern about improvements needed in Section 1. Roberts said the funding generated by the permits would be designated to improve the user experience and use. Currently, about \$1000 in revenue is generated along Section 1, but the fee is expected to double that amount.

Having used Section 1 since the 1960s, Krein said that section is the only one with potential for overload by the public. He hopes the BLM recognizes its recreational values are not the same as others.

Chairman Randy Jones said he had visited Cottonwood Park to experience the area for himself. The campground was full despite not being a traditional developed campground.

Marilynne Keyser expressed concern for the introduction of potential for invasive weeds and plants in the campground, with no containment.

The BLM has a cooperative agreement with Cottonwood Canyon State Park to manage the area as state land. The rest of the corridor is the BLM's responsibility. Campgrounds and launches are posted with noxious weed signs and alerts, but there is always the opportunity to do a better job.

RAC member Jim Reiss said there had been no discussion of Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's concerns regarding hatchery fish getting upstream and breeding with

wild fish. Bob Krein noted that the EA indicated the launch permits doesn't affect steelhead.

Motion by Steve Lent, second by Jerry Brummer to endorse the fee proposal. Vote was unanimous.

Agency Updates resumed

Wallowa-Whitman National Forest (see handout) Forest Supervisor Tom Montoya reported NEPA is nearly complete for fuels work on about 30,000 acres in partnership with the Northern Blues Forest Collaborative, ODF, Wallowa Resources and other partners.

Terry Drever Gee noted a new bridge was being installed across East Eagle Creek and asked if other work was planned. Montoya said the forest is working closely with miners and the mine association to complete plans of operation.

RAC member Greg Jackle commented that the planned Northwest Forest Pass fee of \$5 per day will be a big change for people living in the Blue Mountains. Perhaps other Forests could consider this concurrently. Joe Neer of the Umatilla NF said it is under consideration, but a lot of outreach will be needed to help the public understand the need and purpose.

Ochoco National Forest (see handout) Forest Supervisor Shane Jeffries reported the Forest is dealing with a root rot issue at Walton Lake recreation site that is affecting road access and the trailhead. The Dry Pine Douglas Fir restoration project was challenged by two environmental groups. Several groups have approached the forest about a non-motorized trail system across the Ochoco Mountains. The forest is seeing significant COVID impacts, with holiday-level activity every weekend.

Could the RAC get an update on eBikes? The ONF is seeing some eBike use, but the region is waiting for some direction from Washington. National forests are working to educate the public but have not enacted restrictions so far. For DOI, eBikes cannot exceed 1 horsepower pedal assist vehicles. Use will be addressed in NEPA planning process like any other mode of transportation.

Deschutes National Forest (see handout) Deputy Forest Supervisor Shanda Dekome said wildfires damaged a lot of forest-managed land this season, particularly the Lionshead Fire. One fire – Rosin Road – burned into a treatment area and dropped to the ground as intended.

Use is up on all public lands due to COVID. Nationally, outdoor recreation is up 30 percent. The forest had some issues with concessionaires and camp hosts early on, when it was unknown when recreation sites would reopen.

The Pacific Northwest met timber targets for 2020 and the Deschutes awarded the Euro timber contract as part of the 10-year West Bend project.

What is the status of the Wilderness Fee proposal? It has been put on hold for now.

Prineville BLM (see handout) Central Oregon Field Manager Amanda Roberts reported the district has done a lot of fuels work in sage-steppe country, mostly through partnerships and collaboration.

Heavy COVID recreation in permitted areas led to some complaints about enforcement, but only two users were found not to have a permit.

District personnel are working on NEPA for a travel management plan for river access, roads and trails.

Vale BLM/Baker Field Office (see handout) District Manager Don Gonzalez and Baker Field Manager Joe Aragon

Malheur National Forest (see handout) Prairie City District Ranger Ed Guzman

Farm Bill and RAC role in categorical exclusion process for mule deer and sage-grouse habitat

Teal Purrington, Planning and Environmental Coordinator for the BLM OR/WA State Office, presented (see slide show). Under the Farm Bill, there are now categorical exclusions (CX) from NEPA for activities that protect, restore, or improve habitat for sage-grouse and mule deer. One component of the CX process includes consultation with a local RAC.

When will RACs be consulted? It depends on when and where the project is. For example, Vale is looking at a project to treat invasive and noxious weeds around power line poles to prevent wildfires from sparking. The herbicide to be used has not yet been approved for use on the Vale and Burns districts, but has by other districts in Oregon/Washington.

Art Waugh noted that RAC consultation could be limited due to timeframes and meeting schedules. Don Gonzalez said there is potential to brief the RAC via email when a project is first identified. The question is, at what stage in the process does the RAC want to be engaged.

Chairman Jones said definitely during the alternative analysis and selection of a preferred alternative. RAC members can also comment as individuals at any time during the process. The Washington Office will appreciate all efforts to gather diverse input.

RAC member Greg Jackle said Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife fully support the new CX process because quick action is critical after fires and other habitat disturbances.

What outcomes will demonstrate success? It depends on the project objectives.

The powerline weed proposal will be presented during the RAC's upcoming Dec. 10 subcommittee meeting. The RAC could comment on mitigations and restrictions relative to leks, hunting and growing cycles.

RAC members Jim Boethin, Jim Reiss, Randy Jones, Art Waugh and Terry Drever Gee will lead the December power pole CX discussion, with Marilynne Keyser participated as a subject matter expert.

Fire and Fuels

During the September subcommittee call, there were numerous large wildfires across Oregon and Washington and the RAC asked to have a discussion about how to prevent the spread of wildfires.

Most of Vale BLM's work is focused on building vegetation fuel breaks into recovery plans, especially around roads, as well as removing juniper to reduce fuels and improve habitat. Vale has also supported the Wallowa-Whitman NF's work in the wildland urban interface around Baker City. A large project is being implemented around Castle Rock, which has a large amount of timber killed by beetles. And the Mormon Basin fuels plan is a 10-year project, with more components implemented every year.

Prineville BLM was not greatly affected by fire this year in comparison to 2018, which had a record 200,000 acres affected by wildfire. Treatment planning is done about 5 years out and an emphasis is placed on aligning with habitat priorities.

The Wallowa-Whitman NF is averaging 20,000 acres of treatments per year and will need 8 to 10 years to finish the work it has planned.

Peter Brewster, Air Quality Attainment and Wildfire Smoke Response Coordinator for Oregon Dept. of Environmental Quality, spoke about the many factors involved in allowing prescribed burn activities (see attached smoke management rules document), particularly during COVID, when many people are already at higher risk.

"Smoking out" communities is a common source of complaints, and good communications regarding the need and purpose for the burning being done are very important, including communicating when, where and how long residents can expect smoke.

Joe Neer commented that until two years ago, agencies were prohibited from conducting any treatment fires that put smoke into communities, which made it almost impossible to burn. Agencies have much more freedom now, provided they have a smoke communication plan. He also shared the airnow.gov website that is linked to DEQ air quality monitors, allowing the public to see conditions in real time.

Break for PUBLIC COMMENT at 3 p.m.

Susie Koppert and Shay White commended everyone for the high quality of RAC meetings, which are very informative. Marty Gardner said the Hells Canyon Recreation Collaborative worked with the Wallowa-Whitman NF on the development of user fees and the use of \$500,000 to improve facilities in the canyon area. They are also looking for ways to leverage fee money or avoid fees by engaging the public and sharing information.

Resume Fire and Fuels discussion

Ed Guzman of the Malheur NF said fire starts were higher this year, but initial attack was very successful due to heavier aviation use. The forest is planning several large vegetation projects, including a lot of timber stock (see handout). Prescribed burn days are a challenge. The Cow Fire, which was 9500 acres, achieved a lot of treatment objectives. After working a number of years, the forest is starting to see the benefit of reducing stock. A new torrefaction plan will utilize small wood material and other markets may be attracted, such as pole mills.

Do stewardship projects include fuel reduction requirements? Yes. Will biomass fuel become viable? Yes, it has a chance, but the goal will have to be not for profit, but to create a new market for material.

Ochoco National Forest Wild Horse Herd Program

Shane Jeffries introduced Wild Horse and Burro program lead Beth Peer. The forest is developing an update to the Big Summit Wild Horse Territory and Herd Management Plan, which encompasses 25,000 acres. The original plan was adopted in 1975, with an appropriate management level of 55-65 horses. At present, the population is 135-140. The revised plan will include new management tools available to agencies. The most limiting factor of the Big Summit Territory is forage on winter range. This could lower the AML to 57 horses. Another goal is to improve the genetic health of the herd through gathers and fertility inhibitors. Her team is working through 125 comment letters and the draft decision notice will be available to the public in November for a 45-day objection period.

To what degree do the horses affect mule deer? That wasn't assessed as part of the analysis, but the team did look at competition for forage with big game.

Is the decision economically driven? RAC member Jim Reiss said he's heard it can cost \$50,000 to care for a horse. The plan is to address conditions and ensure the herd is sustained.

What is the BLM doing for manageable populations? Gathers, adoptions and darting programs, which are different from bringing mares in and injecting them. BLM Utah is testing field spaying, which looks promising.

Competition for winter range is a major concern to ODFW, RAC member Greg Jackle said.

Meeting convened at 8 a.m. Oct. 16 via Zoom

Members present: Greg Jackle, Randy Jones, Jim Boethin, Gary Gustafson, Jerry Brummer, Bob Krein, Terry Drever Gee, Steve Lent, Jim Reiss and Brian Sykes.

Agency reps and others: Don Gonzalez, Tara McLain of the Oregon/Washington BLM Realty Division, Matt Krumenauer of U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Special Projects, Joe Neer, John Rademacher of Vale BLM's Baker Field Office, Ed Guzman, Jessica Keys

Public: Mike Billman, Shay White, Marilynne Keyser

Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)

Land Tenure Lead Tara McLain presented (see PowerPoint attached). LWCF funds have been used to purchase land and water and rights for federal agency and even communities for parks and ballfields, all to benefit all American people.

Last year, The LWCF awarded \$30 million to the BLM and this year is preparing a budget for \$87 million to the BLM. These funds are generated by recreation, including hunting, boating, and biking, among other activities. Recreation is responsible for 7.6 million jobs. LWCF dollars have been used to purchase several well-known sites within BLM Oregon/Washington, including the South Fork Walla Walla on the Vale District and the John Day River on the Prineville District. Recreation access projects are selected by the agency as part of an application process.

Amanda Roberts asked about public access needs. Broad community support is key. If people identify parcels they would like to be acquired with LWCF money, it helps to talk to the county commission beforehand and get their support.

Grazing permit renewals

John Rademacher presented. Over the past 13 years, Baker Field Office has worked on seven permit renewals through the Environmental Assessment (EA) process. Two are in the process now – Cow Valley and Widman Water Development.

A 1950s study of land productivity showed overgrazing, which resulted in a 24% reduction in Animal Unit Months. This allowed allotments to stay within production ranges during minor droughts. In the 80s and 90s, BLM employees started seeing changes in the season of use. In the 200s, it was thought NEPA was not required for minor changes, but a solicitor ruled differently. BFO is now working to build flexibility into on/off dates to accommodate these changes. Over time, the field manager has focused on community involvement, particularly engaging environmental groups. To date, 5 EAs have been completed, representing 52 allotments – 40 percent of the total allotments on Baker Resource Area. Now a Determination of NEPA Adequacy is being conducted on 227 allotments ranging from 40 to 300 acres in size. In the Pritchard Creek allotment, many of the AUMs that were cut have been restored by focusing on rangeland health objectives.

Energy & Timber

Ed Guzman and Matt Krumenauer presented on Restoration Fuels torrefaction plant in John Day, Ore. Krumenauer explained the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Special Projects focuses on markets that give value to working forests and is funded by a softwood lumber agreement between the U.S. and Canada. Funds are leveraged with federal partners and private entities. Staff work on different initiatives, ranging from large corporations to niche manufacturers. Some efforts have been spectacular failures, like biomass heating systems. Torrefaction is the transformation of biomass to a denser, coal-like material that is lighter weight and more transportable. The endowment has worked with Pacific Gas & Electric and Boardman Power Plant on the viability of the product. In 2018, Restoration Fuels LLC was created as a subsidiary of the U.S. Endowment. Construction of the plant began in 2019, on the site of Malheur Lumber Co. The facility is producing 20-30,000 tons per year now, with the potential for generating 100,000 tons in the future. In 2021, it plans to distribute the material for use by the power industry. The goal is to show a stable, consistent market for low value softwood residuals and wood scraps from logging and forest health treatments.

Guzman said he has learned a lot through the process. The forest met its 75 million board feet target this year, in part due to accelerated landscape restoration. Timber is a by-product of the work, which also addresses conifer and aspen encroachment due to wildfire suppression. The plant offers an alternative method of disposing of hundreds of acres of stacked slash, rather than waiting for burn windows to open. Upcoming projects

encompass 40-70,000 acres, and many areas lack merchantable timber, but have vegetative matter that needs to be removed.

RAC member Jerry Brummer asked about tests showing the product generated 20% more BTUs than traditional coal, but raised concerns about particulate matter. Krumenauer said a test at the Boardman plant using 100% torrefied biomass showed the material was more thoroughly consumed and did not emit mercury or sulfur particles like coal does, and the particulates can be managed with existing pollution controls.

One challenge is transporting the material. John Day lacks a rail line, so the product must be hauled to the Prineville rail depot for shipment. This also allows the collection of new material from producers around Prineville to deliver to John Day for processing.

Are there other domestic markets for the product? There are promising opportunities in the U.S. over the next 5 to 10 years, but policies and regulations will need to change.

What about the effect on communities? At full production, the plant should employ 24 people, which is significant in a community of fewer than 2000 people. Currently, 4 employees earn \$70,000 a year and 8 employees earn \$18-28 an hour, plus benefits including health care and retirement. At least 8 more people will be hired soon. Malheur Lumber was close to closing, which would have been devastating to Grant County and force people to seek work elsewhere. Alternative markets like this offer hope and opportunities.

Could torrefaction save the Boardman plant from being decommissioned? It's possible, and officials are talking to PG&E about it. The facility has a lot of useful life left in it.

In coming decades, as a more natural regime is achieved, the availability of raw materials will decline. What is the plan for that? The plant is a non-profit and if the need for it becomes obsolete, it would be considered a huge success. The goal is to find better solutions to return good fire to the landscape and reduce the need for mechanical thinning.

How much backhauling are we talking about? Probably 21-50,000 green tons from the Ochoco, Malheur and Umatilla NFs. It's not economically viable to transport material very far. Other opportunities are being explored, too, such as biochar (charcoal) production.

What species shows the most potential for output? Ponderosa pine, fir and juniper are all being tested. It might also be more challenging to process some materials.

Chairman Jones suggested a biofuels subcommittee. This would help meet the new RAC charter's directive to look for innovative solutions to aggressively address the impacts of wildfire.

Appoint Standing Subcommittees

Blue Mountain Forest Plan Subcommittee -- RAC members: Jim Boethin, Terry Drever Gee, Randy Jones, Jim Reiss, Art Waugh.

Fire/fuelscape/biomass/Farm Bill CX Subcommittee -- RAC members: Jim Boethin, Jerry Brummer, Terry Drever Gee, Randy Jones, Steve Lent. (Jim Boethin, Jim Reiss, Randy Jones, Art Waugh and Terry Drever Gee will lead the December power pole CX discussion, with Marilynne Keyser participating as a subject matter expert) Chairman Jones suggested the fire/biomass subcommittee look at the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and communities, including water and watersheds as part of their mission.

Hells Canyon Fee Proposal Subcommittee -- RAC members: Glenn Burleigh, Randy Jones, Steve Lent, Brian Sykes, Art Waugh, Jean Waugh, Shay White. Non-Members: Bill Ables

John Day River Recreation Subcommittee (Includes Thirtymile Plan, campground fee proposals) -- RAC members: Steve Lent (Thirtymile only), Bob Krein, Greg Jackle, Jim Reiss, Brian Sykes, Art Waugh.

Lower Deschutes Business Plan and Fee Proposal Subcommittee -- RAC members: Gary Gustafson, Greg Jackle, Jim Reiss, Brian Sykes, Art Waugh. Non-members: Marilynne, possibly Tim Underwigner, Travel Oregon, other externals

Mineral Resources Subcommittee -- RAC members: Terry Drever Gee, Randy Jones, others depending on location.

Outdoor Recreation Subcommittee (Includes Recreation rental fee proposal for WWNF; Recreation rental fee proposal for Malheur NF; and eBikes) -- RAC members: Jim Boethin, Gary Gustafson, Randy Jones, Art Waugh. Non-members: Marilynne Keyser, Jean W. Olney.

RAC Roundtable

Chairman Jones reported the Wallowa Dam project has been tabled because it was funded with lottery revenue, which has dropped significantly due to COVID. This is a very important regional project because it supports recreation, irrigation, fisheries, and tribal interests. It has the potential to serve Umatilla and Morrow counties, and could also impact the Grand Ronde and Wallowa river flows.

Jim Reiss commented on the severity of the drought northeast of Sisters, where some reservoirs are at 1%. Chairman Jones concurred, noting the Wickiup Reservoir was drawing sediment, which was discoloring the river below.

Brian Sykes reported it was a wild year for outfitters. COVID pushed many people outdoors, but outfitters had to establish COVID protocols that limited group capacities to half. Large wildfires late in the season further impacted outfitters. He expects 2021 to be another big season for outfitters and they are working to get prepared for it.

Terry Drever Gee said she was encouraged by how agencies and entities are sharing experiences, resources, and people. Eastern Oregon Mining Association is working with the Wallowa-Whitman NF on plans of operation. Unlike central Oregon, Baker County had a good water year.

Steve Lent said various groups have expressed concerns about the fate of Civilian Conservation Corps-era structures, primarily on Forest Service lands.

Greg Jackle reported that COVID restrictions resulted in hunting being closed to non-residents this year. There will likely be a lot of spring bear and turkey tags. ODFW sold 30% more archery elk tags this year. People with bow tags who were directly impacted by wildfires, such as homeowners and first responders, were offered a rifle tag as a substitute.

Chairman Jones suggested the fire/biomass subcommittee look at the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and communities, including water and watersheds, as part of their mission. The RAC works with major Oregon river watersheds that communities rely on.

Meeting effectiveness

It was hard to get to know people via Zoom. In-person meetings are preferable whenever possible.

This was the first time the RAC had a quorum this year, and important business was done. This shows the value of pre-work by the subcommittees.

Meeting Adjourned: 12:30 p.m.