

Southeast Oregon Resource Advisory Council
June 23, 2021
Meeting held via Zoom

ATTENDANCE

SEORAC Members - Kat Teufel, Jeremy Austin, Tim Davis, Ken Kestner, Ken Poole (on phone), Don Hodge, and Stan Shepardson.

BLM - Todd Forbes (DFO), Jeff Rosa (Burns DM), Wayne Monger (Vale DM), Rebecca Carter (Presenter), Grace Haskins (Presenter), Matt Haskins (Presenter), Brent Grasty (Presenter), and Lisa McNee (Lakeview PAO)

Public - Jason Kesling

CALL TO ORDER 9:00 a.m.

Welcome, Introductions, Housekeeping, Review Agenda

Review and approve past meeting minutes:

- Vote on approving minutes: Everyone voted in favor.

Wild Horse and Burro Update: [Proposed and Ongoing Gathers FY 2021 Wild Horse and Burro Removals](#)

Designated Federal Official Report/District Updates:

Todd Forbes, DFO and Lakeview District Manager, Update:

Targeted Grazing – an above ground, small diameter (1.5 inch) polyethylene water pipeline is being installed to fill troughs in a linear fashion to facilitate livestock watering and target grazing north of Beaty’s Butte. Monitoring will continue to determine if this pilot project is effective at reducing fine fuels (cheat grass) to a stubble height capable of acting as a fuel break.

Beaty Butte Wild Horse Training Facility – We currently have a 120-day detailer in the Wild Horse and Burro position and are working on filling the position permanently as soon as possible. The training facility is fully funded through the remainder of the year with plans to institute a new agreement to continue funding the facility into the future. To date about 50 horses have been trained and adopted from the facility. Recently 7 horses were adopted from the facility into the border patrol. We expect this to be a growing need as another facility in Wyoming, while still an adoption facility, is no longer training horses.

North Warner Sagebrush Restoration Project – This is a new 10,000-acre project aimed at restoring both mule deer and sage-grouse habitat through the treatment of post-settlement juniper in the North Warner area. Treatment began this June and will continue until fire precaution levels

increase to a point that treatment must cease. Herbicide and native seeding will be ongoing follow up treatments into the future.

Clover Flat – All juniper cutting is complete across this a 19,000-acre project area near Valley Falls, Oregon. The area has been treated to restore Sage Grouse and Mule deer habitat. There are approximately 2000 acres left to be burned. Herbicide and seeding to promote the native vegetation community will continue over the next couple of years.

Litigation / Protests / Appeals

ONDA v BLM – On 9/27/2019 ONDA filed suit challenging the BLM's decision to reverse the key RNA grazing closures in the 2015 SG plan amendment. In October 2019 the District Court in Idaho enjoined BLM from implementing the 2019 amendments and ordered BLM to comply with 2015 plans. In January 2020, the BLM issued letters to the affected permittees, providing 2 years notice of the potential changes to their permit.

Jeff Rose, Burns District Manager, Update:

Bridge Creek AMP – The Bridge Creek AMP involves 4 allotments on the Steens Mountain, between Frenchglen and Diamond. The BLM advertised for available forage (1,500 to 2,500 AUMs) in April 2020 and received 4 applicants. One applicant withdrew in September. Because there were more than one applicant, the BLM followed the process for competing applications outlined in the Grazing Regulations. A Proposed Decision was posted on ePlanning on December 31, 2020. The proposed decision was signed by the Assistant Secretary for Lands and Minerals, Casey Hammond. On February 26, 2021 the Senior Advisor to the Secretary Exercising the Delegated Authority of the Assistant Secretary Land and Minerals Management rescinded the December 31st decision. The BLM was instructed to reevaluate the EA and address submitted protests. The District has completed the analysis of the protests and determined is working to determine the appropriate NEPA process to follow from this point.

Recreation – Visitor trends continues to be above the long-term average. Heavy use is in the improved campgrounds. Chickahominy and Page Springs Campgrounds are most accessible and receiving the most use. Chickahominy Campground is co-managed with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW). Currently water levels in the reservoir are low and expected to continue to decrease. Use is expected to decrease as water levels decline. Page Springs Campground on the Steens has been at capacity, or near capacity, since April. This level of use is expected to expand up the mountain as Loop Road Gates are opened. Currently the gates are open to summit from the north side, but road is still closed from the Turkey Foot to the Big Indian overlook. The road is expected to be opened by 4th of July. Visitation to the Alvord Playa continues to be high compared to historic use. There are no improved campgrounds directly adjacent to the playa, but the BLM has pit toilets located at Fields, Mann Lake and Frog Springs. The Frog Springs parking area/pit toilet is a popular access point on BLM land. The BLM and Travel Oregon have a cooperative project to place a 30 yard dumpster at the Frog Spring Site for 2021 season. This was done to address an emerging issue with trash. Prior to 2021 the public was asked to pack out their trash. The dumpster is funded partly by Travel Oregon and partly by BLM.

The BLM is also proposing to temporarily close a 1 mile section of the Pike Creek Road on the eastside of the Steens to motorized traffic. This is the section of the road that runs through private land up to a crossing at Pike Creek. Historically vehicles could cross Pike Creek to access BLM and the Steens Mountain Wilderness. However, the crossing is no longer viable and public motorized traffic was causing resource damage on private land when turning around at Pike Creek. BLM is currently working on a new crossing. Pike Creek has a population of Lahontan Cutthroat Trout and BLM is working with ODFW and USFWS to ensure the new crossing/bridge will allow for passage. The Steens Mountain Advisory Council is engaged in the issue.

Range – Most areas of the Burns District have had below average precipitation and the trend is projected to continue for at least the next 90 days. March through May precipitation was 42% of the long-term average and the projected precipitation for the next three months is expected to be 80% or less of the long-term average. Permittees are currently working the Field Office staff to adjust grazing levels and season in response to the drought conditions. The full impact will not be known until later this summer. Below average forage growth and extremely low stock water levels are the factors affecting decisions.

Wild Horse and Burro – The Burns District will be conducting a gather in the Warm Spring HMA late this summer or early fall. The specific dates will be determined by the general BLM schedule and the contractor availability. The appropriate management level (AML) is 40-80. The target is to gather 480 horse and remove 400 from the range. Approximately 20 animals will receive a fertility control treatment before being returned to the range. The BLM has also been notified that there are a number of horses outside the South Steens HMA on neighboring private lands. The district is working with the national office to schedule an additional gather to remove those animals from the private lands. South Steens and Palomino Buttes HMAs are tentatively scheduled to be gathered in 2022. The drought conditions are also impacting all the HMAs and the conditions of the horses and range are being monitored.

NEPA in PROGRESS

- Nature's Advocate Inholder Access EA: This EA responds to an inholder request for motorized access to their property within the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Area (CMPA) and Steens Mountain Wilderness. The EA has been updated and aiming for a release for public comment this calendar year.
- Alvord AMP EA: This is an EA to renew the grazing permit and develop an AMP for the Alvord Allotment. BLM is working with USFWS service to complete Endangered Species Act, Section 7 consultation for Lahontan cutthroat trout. The EA is very near being released for public comment.
- Pike Creek Parking EA: BLM is proposing to improve an access road and develop a small (1/3) acre parking area on general use public lands at the entrance to Pike Creek canyon on the east side of the Steens Mountain CMPA. BLM is working with USFWS and ODFW to develop the best method for vehicle crossing of Pike Creek to minimize impacts to Lahontan cutthroat trout. A Temporary Road Closure will be instituted to address resource damage on private lands adjacent road accessing the parking area.

Wayne Monger, Vale District Manager, Update:

Louse Canyon EIS – The State Office and Solicitor’s Office have finished their review of the Draft EIS, and the ID team is working on their comments and edits. The document informs grazing permit renewals and restoration activities.

Botany – Vale is continuing to partner with Institute for Applied Ecology and Snake River Correctional Institution (SRCI) to grow sagebrush for restoration activities in 2021. Shrubs will be planted on the Indian Creek Fire by the inmates in November.

Assistance agreements are in place to continue sensitive plant work with cooperators. Institute for Applied Ecology recently completed monitoring for the 10-year study on Mulford’s milkvetch and will provide the BLM with a final report in January 2022. Oregon Department of Agriculture is continuing to develop germination protocols for Owyhee clover and smooth mentzelia and will soon start work on seed increase and container growing for the species.

Wildlife – June Columbia Spotted frog surveys wrapped up its 21st year, capturing 594 frogs over 2 days. This reflects 431 unique frogs, which is comparable to the number of frogs that were caught last year, but an increase over 2019. For comparison, there was 439 and 221 unique frogs in 2020 and 2019, respectively. The specialists also started collecting eDNA samples to try and locate where frogs spend the winter and if these areas could be a contributing factor to population. Agencies involved in this effort include USFWS, BLM, ODFW, USGS, and USFS. This long-standing study has produced one of the best datasets for this species and will be used in several research papers.

Lakeview Resource Management Plan Amendment Update:

Draft Lakeview RMPA – The amendment contains 6 alternatives that focus on addressing provisions for a 2010 Settlement Agreement including the management of Lands with Wilderness characteristics, Off Highway Vehicle Use and Grazing permit relinquishment. At this point we are waiting for the SEORMPA to brief headquarters on their final EIS then Lakeview will request a briefing for LRMPA DRAFT.

Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Plan Amendment Update:

SEORMP Amendment – The Draft Resource Management Plan (RMP)/Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was published in 2019 with four action alternatives and the No Action Alternative. BLM received approximately 4,000 individual comments on the Draft. Since that time, BLM has responded to substantive comments and developed the Proposed RMP Amendment/Final EIS (PRMPA/FEIS). What is anticipated to be the final State Office and Solicitor's Office review of the PRMPA/FEIS is nearing completion. In July, the Vale District intends to brief the Oregon State BLM Director, Barry Bushue, requesting his review and approval to move forward. Once approved, BLM will brief the BLM Headquarters Office and the Department of Interior leadership. Publishing the PRMPA/FEIS in the Federal Register is anticipated in late Summer, 2021. Following a simultaneous 30-day Public Protest period and 60-day Oregon Governor's Consistency (with Oregon Statute and Planning) review, the BLM

will respond to public protests and develop a Record of Decision. Vale District intends to publish the ROD this winter.

Other RAC Business

- Future Topics/Topics of Discussion for Group:
 - Wilderness Study Area Updates
 - Recreation Impacts in districts with influx of visitation due to COVID/Fires
 - Outcome Based Grazing and getting more details, how does it differ to other grazing

Meeting adjourned at 11:00 a.m.