

Notes
John Day-Snake Resource Advisory Council Meeting
Thursday, Feb. 17, 2022
8 a.m. – 2:45 p.m. via Zoom

Attendance:

RAC members Katy Nelson, Shay White, Art Waugh, Brian Sykes, Bob Krein, Randy Jones, Steve Lent, Greg Jackle, Jim Reiss.

Agency representatives Designated Federal Official Dennis Teitzel, Prineville BLM; Joe Aragon, Vale BLM; Shanda Dekome, Deschutes National Forest; Cassidy Kern, Ochoco National Forest; Josh Giles and Roy Walker, Malheur National Forest; Dave Plummer, Wallowa-Whitman National Forest; Stephaney Kerley, Umatilla National Forest; Amanda Roberts and Monica Morin, Prineville BLM Central Oregon Field Office.

Agency staff Larisa Bogardus, Vale BLM PAO/RAC coordinator; Mike Lindsay, Prineville BLM.

Public: Susie Koppert, Corbett Oregon Historical Society and Oregon Council Northwest Rock and Mineral Federation; Bill Ables, Hells Canyon Recreation Collaborative; Mary Fleischmann, Central Oregon Bitter Brush Great old Broads; Katie Rose Alexander; Cameron Alexander; and outfitters Joel Swartzmiller, Marty and Mia Sheppard, Amy John Hazel, Cory Godell,

General Business

Minutes - Motion by Steve Lent/Art Waugh to approve minutes for Oct. 21 regular meeting. It was noted that a quorum was not present to vote.

Public Comment and Response:

Cameron Alexander said it is difficult to get river permits online and he would like to know who is getting them.

Susie Koppert said she is interested in how changes to fees and permits affect outdoor recreation.

Marty Sheppard said limited entry on the John Day River will make things difficult for outfitters and guides because many guests plan their trips a year in advance and guides won't be able to guarantee launch dates. No other system makes guides compete with the public. He also said slower internet in rural areas makes it more difficult to get permits. Most rivers set aside a percentage of permits for outfitters. Oregon's statehood legislation says rivers "shall be common highways and forever free."

Amy Hazel said outfitters are stewards and ambassadors of the rivers, often voluntarily providing assistance to the public.

Mia Sheppard said a lot of stress and time is invested to get permits and asked what the BLM will do if guides are unable to get them. Last year, the John Day River ran out of water early, forcing her business to cancel two trips and reduce others from 5 days to 3. The John Day Basin Resource Management Plan calls for 300 cfs during the season. She asked the RAC to advise the BLM to maintain that flow for the full season.

Update: John Day River Permit System

Amanda Roberts used a Powerpoint presentation (attached) to update the RAC on progress. Later in the process, the District will be asking the RAC to make a recommendation in support of the plan.

The river Resource Management Plan sets the number of permits. A limited season was implemented in 2011-2012, but wasn't available online until recreation.gov was expanded to include permits as well as campground reservations.

The common pool permit system, as opposed to a commercial allocation, was reaffirmed in the 2015 RMP. The goal now is to implement permitting to address overcrowding.

In the past two years, use has skyrocketed, even with limited use, from 2,000-3,000 per year to 11,000-12,000 per year. The inability to get permits and campsites is not uncommon.

RAC member Brian Sykes asked if there administrative fixes to help? This year, the district tried rolling release dates, which may help outfitters

Another problem is that everyone wants Clarno to Cottonwood. There are other sections are available that people are not using.

Two other factors affect the system, Prineville District Manager Dennis Teitzel said, a lack of water in the reservoir, which affects the float season, and the availability of campsites along the river.

RAC Chairman Randy Jones asked why outfitters don't use the river in other seasons? Outfitter Marty Sheppard said the river is too muddy for fishing when the water is high in May.

RAC member Jim Reiss asked what has to change to allow more permits. First, the RMP would have to be opened for revision, which follows an EIS-type process in which there is public participation and analysis. At minimum, it is a two-year process and would cost \$1 million. To put it in perspective, that is 25 percent of the field office's budget for the year, and 10 percent of the district budget. It also takes away from staff's ability to do other work to protect resources in other areas.

An outfitters and guides meeting is being planned to discuss their concerns more directly, Roberts said. The RAC and public attending this meeting will be notified.

Update: Prineville BLM Thirtymile Recreation and Travel Management Plan

Roberts gave a PowerPoint presentation (attached) to update the RAC on progress.

Thirtymile is 11,000 acres acquired through the Land and Water Conservation Fund. It needs more site-specific direction and travel management to protect the resource and strike a balance between its cultural, recreation and grazing uses, among others.

The travel management environmental assessment calls for more open, motorized routes to provide for accessibility for older and disabled users, while the site-specific plan focuses on potential designations such as Wilderness Study Areas, critical habitat, special recreation area, including dispersed camping, the boat launch and toilets.

The project includes a total of 19 maps and road sections, analyzing four alternatives. It will probably go out for public review and comment in May. RAC members will be notified and have the opportunity to comment as individuals.

Later in the process, the District will be asking the RAC to make a recommendation in support of the plan.

Presentation: anadromous fish management and issues on the John Day River

Ian Tattam and Stephan Charette of Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife gave a PowerPoint presentation (attached).

The John Day Basin represents a large part of the steelhead distribution in the Pacific Northwest. It's a tremendous resource and a tremendous challenge. When steelhead were listed 20 years ago, five populations were identified. Tagging has allowed ODFW to track where juveniles originate and where they end up. They should return "home," which usually happens. The focus is on abundance for delisting. They have barged fish to help them through the hydroelectric system, but this impacts "homing." An advantage for steelhead is they can spawn multiple times. It is difficult to collect data because females expel the tags. Another method of data collection is by collecting scales.

Because they are threatened, taking is managed, and the management plan is evaluated and revised every 4 to 5 years.

Most branches are below the Minimum Abundance Threshold. For the first time, the fishery has been closed because the wild count was below 2 percent (24,000) based on the Bonneville count. Smolt survival rates averaged 5 to 10 percent in 2019 and 2020. Officials are still evaluating the 2022-23 run, but the forecast is low again.

Guides have not been happy about the closure because the decision was made after trips were booked and permits obtained. This year, they will try to make the decision earlier.

Why are barbed hooks allowed if the fish are threatened? The science shows the greatest hazard to fish is time out of water – fighting a catch, holding it for photos, etc. This is why ODFW advocates for habitat, water quality and water quantity.

Report: Central Cascades Wilderness Permit implementation

Deschutes National Forest Deputy Forest Supervisor Shanda Dekome used a PowerPoint to update the group on the program with help from forest staff Jean Nelson Dean and Lisa Machnik.

We knew we would learn a lot and we've made some changes. The goal is sustainable use of the 5 wilderness areas by implementing permits in the Mt. Jefferson, Mt. Washington and Three Sisters wilderness areas.

Use took off in 2013-2014. The environmental assessment was begun in 2017 and the decision was signed in 2019. In 2021, the permit season opened the Friday before Memorial Day and the last Friday in September, but people weren't able to access the areas due to snow. For 2022, the season will begin June 15 and end Oct. 15.

In 2021, about 40 percent of day users used the advance reservation system and 60 percent used the 7-day rolling window. For 2022, all permits will be 10 day and 2 day rolling windows. Overnight permits were simplified

In 2021, it was decided to allow hunters with an ODFW tag to access to wilderness areas without the additional wilderness permit. Trail quotas were also increased based on no-shows.

RAC Chairman Randy Jones asked if there was a corollary resource impact education. Leave No Trace partners have shared information, plus outreach has been done for tour groups and organizations. A Trailhead Ambassadors program has created a "Take Care Out There" video series.

RAC member Art Waugh asked how much of a shift there has been from paid permits to self-issue permits. Same-day use is up, as are other uses across the forest.

Agency Updates

Deschutes National Forest (attached) – Several landscape restoration projects are in the works, including a fuels project south of Bend to reduce the threat of large-scale fires. A decision is expected in January 2023.

RAC Chairman Randy Jones said there is a funding opportunity through Oregon Parks Forever to restore/rehabilitate the Cabin Lake Guard Station and add it to the rental pool.

Ochoco National Forest(attached) – Prescribed burning has begun early. The Frog Fire Restoration Environmental Assessment is complete and planting could begin this spring.

An injunction has been issued for the Walton Lake Restoration Project regarding impacts to visual scenery. The proposal would remove 35 acres of diseased and dead trees, replanting with disease-resistant strains.

The wild horse management plan has been signed and gathering will begin when it is safe to do so. The Black Mountain Vegetation Management Project is now being implemented.

This year the Forest is focused on conducting public engagement and environmental analysis for the Lemon Gulch Trail System Project, which will consider ways of mitigating concerns around the mixture of recreation trails within a grazing allotment. Ochoco Trails (formerly called the Ochoco Trails Strategy Group), a grassroots, community effort that developed a proposal for 100 miles non-motorized trail expansions, is very engaged in the process.

Malheur National Forest (attached) – Three large vegetation projects (Austin, Bark and Cliff Knox) are in the works, covering a total of 200,000 acres.

The forest and BLM have begun the environmental analysis for a Herd Management Area Plan for the jointly managed Murderers Creek Wild Horse Joint Management Area.

In conjunction with the Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests, the Malheur is in the process of having discussions with affected Tribes, Counties, States, and other interested parties regarding the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision.

Wallowa-Whitman National Forest (attached) – The forest recently conducted a trial of tether logging near Phillips Reservoir in an area with very steep slopes where aerial logging was being used and it has been very successful.

Trails and facilities along the river in Hells Canyon have been targeted for additional Great American Outdoors Act funding. The Federal Land Accessibility Program will fund several bridge projects across the forest.

The draft map of the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area travel management plan is being reviewed. RAC member Shay White asked if this was just for roads, or also rivers. It is a motor vehicle use map.

Recreation fee increases were announced last week, but will be deferred until improvements are completed.

Idaho Power's relicensing of Hells Canyon Dam is under way. One potential project would be to bring in sand and restore beaches along the river.

Bill Ables asked about Congressional funds for backcountry airstrip maintenance. That money has always been available, but is being used more directly now that Congress is encouraging more accessible transportation.

Umatilla National Forest (attached) – The forest is very engaged in several shared stewardship projects with partners including Oregon Department of Forestry, Morrow County, Washington

Department of Transportation and Mill Creek Municipal Watershed. The Ellis Integrated Vegetation Project continues to move forward and a draft Environmental Impact Statement will be released soon.

Fifteen collaborative forest projects are under way with the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest. The 2021 fire season was unprecedented on the Umatilla, with three large fires damaging 100,000 acres. Emergency treatments and long-range recovery will be taking place.

BLM Vale/Baker Field Office (attached) – Baker Field Office staff are reviewing the 1989 Resource Management Plan for adequacy and potential revision.

BLM Prineville(attached) –

Round Table

- Katy Nelson – Is the wolf policy equitable? (written comments attached). They are damaging to wildlife, indigenous populations and rural residents. The RACs have the ability to speak out on this topic and be heard.
- Susie Koppert said she is working with Corbet, Ore., and the Wasco Tribe to build a museum. They are selling rocks as a fundraiser, share stories with the tribe and build rock walls
- Jim Reiss said he sees fewer bachelor herds of mule deer than in the past. ODFW is doing surveys and updating their management plan now, but it will take multiple stakeholders to address and reverse the many impacts, including fencing, climate, drought and development. He would like an update on the Upper Deschutes. Katy Nelson asked if the the plan will address wolves. RAC member Greg Jackle, who works for ODFW, said predation is a factor, but coyotes and cougars are a bigger threat. Recreation also poses a constant disturbance for deer that affects their health and well-being, particularly nursing does. The recent restoration of wolves west of Hwy. 395 to endangered status takes management control away.
- Bob Krein said he has decided not to apply for reappointment when his term expires in May. He joined the RAC because of his interest in the John Day River and Thirtymile. He feels resources are overutilized and people take advantage of public lands to make money.
- Brian Sykes said demand is outstripping supply and we need to manage use. Permit systems need flexibility to make reasonable adjustments like the Cascade Wilderness permit system. The only way to achieve real change to BLM systems is to reopen an RMP. Furthermore, agencies are not adequately funded to manage the explosion in recreation.
- Steve Lent said he is retiring from the Bowman Museum but will stay involved with the RAC.

- Randy Jones said the Pelton-Round Butte Dam relicensing funded habitat restoration, fishery reintroduction and large wood refugia on the Metolius River. Lake Creek needs similar treatment.

There is a proposal to raise the dam on Wallowa Lake which could augment flows on the Lostine and Grande Ronde rivers. The state legislature has authorized \$14 million for fish passages.

- Art Waugh said he hopes the Thirtymile alternatives come out in May for the subcommittee to review before the June meeting. He is also concerned about water flow in the John Day system, which is freefalling and dependent on snowpack and groundwater. Water rights, including irrigation and municipal water, also impact flow and are determined by the state. Chairman Jones suggested this be a future meeting topic.
- Jim Reiss asked for a Deschutes River update and said there is potential to partner with Western Rivers Conservancy to acquire water rights.

Prineville DM Dennis Teitzel said water rights are tied to property and land in Oregon. It can't be sold and redirected. If the use is not compatible, the state will reallocate the rights. There have been stipulations put on water use for public lands. For example, when water flow drops below a certain level, irrigation must stop.

Chairman Jones asked for a report on the effect fuel reduction on water supplies. In Arizona, when Ponderosa pine densities were reduced, a significant increase in water yield was observed. The Upper Deschutes Watershed is looking for was to lease unused water rights.

Greg Jackle said water should be looked at more holistically in northeast Oregon. Protecting public lands and people will be a challenge in the next 10 to 20 years.

Wrap-up

Suggested Agenda Items

- Water management (Oregon Water Resources Department, potentially Western Rivers Conservancy)
- Presentation on Blue Mountain Forest Planning outcomes.
- Pollinators on public lands