

Notes
Southeast Oregon Resource Advisory Council Meeting
Wednesday, April 20, 2022
1- 5 p.m. PT via Zoom

Attendance:

RAC members Mary Jo Hedrick, Tim Davis, Stan Shepardson, Tom Batty, Michael O’Casey, Ken Kestner, Phil Milburn, Jeremy Austin.

Agency representatives: Designated Federal Official Wayne Monger, Vale BLM; Lakeview District Manager Todd Forbes, Burns District Manager Jeff Rose.

Agency staff: Larisa Bogardus, Vale PAO/RAC coordinator; Lisa McNee, Lakeview PAO.

Public: Susie Koppert; Adam Bronstein, Western Watersheds.

Ethics Training: Dan Shifrin from the DOI Ethics Office provided ethics training for new appointees. Going forward, RAC members will be asked to attest to a short disclosure statement via email prior to each meeting.

Minutes: Due to a lack of a quorum, approval of the January meeting minutes was held over to the June meeting.

Public Comment and Response: None.

Designated Federal Official Report/District Updates

Vale District (attached): Staff met with Idaho Power representatives today to discuss the limited Notice to Proceed for geotechnical surveys associated with the Boardman to Hemingway transmission line project. Staff will be working with partners to review the cultural survey data as the project moves through preconstruction phase. Implementation is expected to begin in 2023.

The Wild Horse and Burro program is preparing for continued drought; trapping some horses that have moved off the Hog Creek HMA; and preparing to dart mares with fertility inhibitors later in the season.

Recent precipitation has stimulated the growth of fine fuels, and staff expect an active fire season.

Lakeview District (attached): The Lakeview Resource Management Plan Amendment (RMPA) Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is way, way behind Vale’s (Southeastern RMPA) and is being reviewed by the s Lakeview Field Office has initiated a public scoping period for an

environmental assessment to close Research Natural Areas to grazing. Staff are monitoring Herd Management Areas for potential drought issues. Klamath Falls Field Office is planning a nuisance gather for the Pokegama Herd Management Area. An SF 299 proposal for a solar power installation on 5,000 acres in north Lake County is on hold at the applicant's request. Fire officials are working on stabilization and rehabilitation from last year's fires and expect another difficult season.

Burns District (attached): The Alvord Allotment Management Plan/Environmental Assessment is out for comment. The proposed decision calls for reinstating 1,415 suspended use AUMs for 10 years with conditions.

The Moffet Table Allotment is also nearing completion, addressing 5 permits for 1885 AUMs. Western juniper encroachment and expansion of invasive annual grasses are the major resource issues within the allotment. Treatments to reduce the influence of western juniper and invasive annual grasses are being conducted under the Otis Mountain/Moffet Table Fuels Management Project.

Three Rivers Field Office is planning salvage harvest of approximately 260 thousand-board-feet (mbf) of dead and dying trees, on approximately 47 acres as a result of the 2,643 acre Big Meadows Fire.

Route inventory has begun on Steens Mountain. This is the first step toward travel management planning for the entire district.

Presentation: Grasshopper treatment planning and implementation in southeast Oregon

Colin Park of the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) shared a PowerPoint (attached) and narrative. After a grasshopper explosion in 2020, grasshopper populations have been increasing in southeast Oregon in recent years. In 2021, parts of Harney and Klamath counties were treated. This year, treatments are planned in Lake, Harney, Baker and Malheur counties starting in late May and potentially continuing into July. Grasshoppers cycle every 10 to 15 years and an outbreak of 2 to 3 years is normal. Drought, heat and mild winters can increase the severity of outbreaks.

Presentation: Burns District Recreation Fee Increase Proposal

Outdoor Recreation Planner Kyle Wanner outlined the process for fee increases and the RAC's role in it. The business plan analysis proposes updating fees at all Burns District BLM fee campgrounds, including five campgrounds on Steens Mountain (Page Springs, Fish Lake, Jackman Park, South Steens Family, and South Steens Equestrian) as well as Chickahominy Recreation site located west of Hines. Some of these sites have charged the same amount for 30 years or more. As has increased, so has the cost of maintenance and services. Federal Golden Age passes would still be accepted. The RAC and Steens Mountain Advisory Council (SMAC) will be fully briefed in June asked to make formal recommendations.

Presentation: Understanding Designated Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas and Lands with Wilderness Characteristics

Lakeview District Manager Todd Forbes explained the difference between these terms (see attachment), which can be confusing. Designated Wilderness areas are set by Congress and governed by the legislation that created them. BLM has very little control over how they are managed. Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) are to be managed as if they were Wilderness until Congress makes a determination as to their use. Lands with wilderness characteristics (LWCs) are an inventory term for areas that may have qualities of Wilderness or WSAs but it is up to each district to determine how to manage these areas as part of their land use plan (Resource Management Plan) and whether or not to prioritize wilderness characteristics over other uses. Wilderness characteristics include size of 5,000 acres or more without roads; naturalness (undeveloped and untrampled by man; outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation; or other supplemental values.

Update: Lakeview Resource Management Plan Amendment

Lakeview is still working on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. After it is released, there will be a 90-day public comment period.

Michael O'Casey suggested a recap of the RMPA process for the new RAC members at the June meeting, which could also serve as a refresher for those who have been involved in the process.

Update: Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Plan Amendment

Vale staff have briefed the Washington Office on the Final Environmental Impact Statement and are waiting for it to be released for review by the governor's office. The Record of Decision should be issued later this year.

Does the RAC have a role in the RMPs at this point? The RAC's formal role was to make recommendations regarding the alternatives, which it has already done. Going forward, the RAC's role is to share information with the public.

After adoption, can the RMP be revised? The document being considered is an amendment, which looks at specific issues. A revision is comprehensive.

Changes can be made to an RMP if there is litigation or other factors, such as the 2015 Sage-grouse Management Plans, but generally, they are expected to last 20 years or longer. It is a lengthy and expensive process, and there are many other BLM plans waiting for review, revision and/or amendment.

Wrap-up

Michael O'Casey suggested a presentation on big horn sheep at the joint RAC meeting in October. He's heard the southeastern herd has been struggling, while the John Day herd is thriving.

Stan Shepardson noted that Bend is still in extreme drought and water sources have been overallocated. He suggested a presentation on water issues.