

Notes

Southeast Oregon Resource Advisory Council Meeting

Wednesday, June 22, 2022

12-4:30 p.m. PT via Zoom

Attendance:

RAC members Kat Teufel, Ken Poole, Tom O’Leary, Tim Davis, Michael O’Casey, Mary Jo Hedrick, Stan Shepardson, Tom Batty, Phil Milburn.

Agency representatives: Designated Federal Official Wayne Monger, Vale BLM; Lakeview Deputy District Manager Angela Bulla; Burns District Manager Jeff Rose; Andrews Field Manager Don Rotell. **Agency staff:** Larisa Bogardus, Vale PAO/RAC coordinator; Lisa McNee, Lakeview PAO. **Public:** Adam Bronstein, Western Watersheds; Don Hodge, Ken Kestner

Elect a chair and vice chair: Motion by Tom O’Leary, second by Michael O’Casey to elect Ken Poole vice chairman. Vote was unanimous. Motion by Michael O’Casey, second by Ken Poole to elect Stan Shepardson chairman. Vote was unanimous.

Minutes: Notes from the January 20 and April 22, 2022 were approved with one addition.

Presentation: Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA)

BLM OR & WA State Recreation Lead Dave Ballenger explained the intent of recreation fees (PowerPoint attached), how the revenue is used and the RAC’s role in the fee-setting process.

Recreation is known to benefit local economies. Fee revenue stay on the district to be used for recreation programs. Fees are intended to help fund programs, not fund them entirely.

RAC member Mary Joe Hedrick asked if the proposed fee had gone through the public process. Burns Recreation Planner Kyle Wanner explained some of the proposed fee sites stayed closed much later than usual because of the cold, late, wet spring, so full public comment has not yet taken place.

Presentation: Burns District Recreation Fee Increase Proposal

Outdoor Recreation Planner Kyle Wanner outlined the business plan (PowerPoint attached). It may seem like a significant change, but these fees have never been updated. The proposed fees are comparable to public and commercial tent sites and the increased revenue would allow for improvements and deferred maintenance.

Fees for six campgrounds would increase to \$20 per night and \$5 per additional vehicle. Each campground offers all amenities except wi-fi. All free or discounted public lands passes would still be honored. All other dispersed and less developed campsites will remain free.

Based on fee envelopes, the vast majority of campers are from out of county, primarily central Oregon/Bend and Boise. These users stay long and spend more money in the community. Visitation has increased significantly in the last 10 years and the additional revenue will help

service these sites. Recreation and travel spending is very important to Harney County and it is important to provide high quality recreation infrastructure and camping opportunities.

A 30-day outreach for public input will begin when all potentially affected campgrounds are opened. The affected campgrounds will be posted as well as postings online and in the local newspaper.

Does hunting increase visitation to the district? Yes, definitely. A lot of dispersed camping takes place between August and October.

Hunters are required to take hunter education, which includes stewardship. Is there something for general campers? Yes, recreation staff emphasize stewardship and Leave No Trace principles. People are fairly responsible, the biggest issues are closer to town.

Some places are looking at closing campgrounds because of trash, we need to find ways to correct that.

Fees are less of an issue than arriving at a campground and finding out it is full. There's also the potential that people will expect a more state park-type experience for the added cost. There is a very good communications plan to inform campers and prospective campers.

Consensus was the RAC is open to the proposal and will review public feedback at the October meeting before making a recommendation.

Designated Federal Official Report/District Updates

Vale District (attached): DFO Wayne Monger shared the district quarterly report. Some highlights included the Boardman to Hemingway outreach to Tribes and consultation; the opening of a temporary National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center exhibit at Baker Heritage Museum while the center is undergoing renovations; the Friends of the Owyhee receiving the BLM's National Volunteers Making a Difference Award; and fencing along Lytle Boulevard for traffic and cattle safety.

Is the fencing being built to wildlife specifications? Yes, standard fencing specs call for smooth wire at 18"

Burns District (attached): District Manager Jeff Rose reported the Alvord Area Management Plan was challenged. A stay was requested but denied, so the plan will go forward while the appeal is pending.

A South Steens HMA helicopter gather was approved for August. Some horses on the border between Vale and Burns will be darted with Gonacon.

Lakeview District (attached): Deputy District Manager Angela Bulla reported public scoping for closing Research Natural Areas to grazing has closed. The decision memo allowing the Prineville to Reno fiberoptic right of way was signed, pending SHPO concurrence.

A census of Beatys Butte HMA showed 270 horses, slightly above the AML of 100 to 200. Bait trapping of up to 50 horses will begin this fall.

A proposal for a 5,000-acre solar development near Ft. Rock is in the very beginning of the application process. As soon as a location is finalized, it will go through the full NEPA process.

Update: Lakeview Resource Management Plan Amendment

The draft RMPA is being reviewed at the state office prior to requesting a national level briefing, which is a requirement before the Draft is released.

Update: Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Plan Amendment

Summary to date for the RAC -- The Draft Resource Management Plan (RMP)/Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was published in 2019 with four action alternatives and the No Action (continuation of existing management) Alternative. BLM received approximately 4,000 individual comments on the Draft. Since that time, BLM has responded to substantive comments and developed an administrative review draft of the Proposed RMP Amendment/Final EIS (PRMPA/FEIS).

Once approved to proceed, a Notice of Availability in the Federal Register will be published, beginning a simultaneous 30-day Public Protest period and 60-day Oregon Governor's Consistency reviews. At that time, BLM will respond to public protests and the State of Oregon's review and develop a Record of Decision.

Will the RAC be able to comment on the Final Environmental Impact Statement? Technically, the last step is a protest period, but yes, the RAC and members have standing to submit if they wish.

Presentation: Wildland Fire Forecast for 2022

Brett Smith, a fire behavior analyst for Lakeview BLM and Fremont-Winema National Forest, used a PowerPoint (attached) to discuss seasonal expectations. Long-term, extended drought will be a big factor locally and regionally. The wet spring brought the water year up to average for most of the region, however, that means new growth and potentially more fuels come fire season.

Significant fire danger is expected to continue into September, with average to above average temperatures during the drier months of the year.

Has the federal response and ability to control fires improved with additional funding? The agency is shifting toward more permanent fire employees and more career ladders.

One challenge that remains is people don't want to come to small communities, which is a problem across the board for agencies.

Roundtable: Stan Shepardson said he is looking forward to the in-person meeting in John Day, which will allow members to get to know one another and build working relationships.

How are the sage-grouse populations this year? The ODFW population report will be released in September.

What's the status of the Steens Travel Management Plan? The contractors are doing inventories now. Will that include user-created routes? Inventories will be checked against the agency database and categorized as existing, new or different in the analysis. The Steens Mountain Advisory Council will be very involved.

How are e-vehicles and e-bikes being addressed? Can e-vehicles travel cross-country during fire restrictions, since they don't generate enough heat to ignite fuels? Recent increases in UTV to up to 40 mph also changes the landscape and experience for users, too.

Public Comment and Response: None.

Wrap-up

The next meeting will be Oct. 19-20 in John Day. Oct. 20 will be a joint meeting with the John Day-Snake RAC and include a field trip to the torrefaction plant.