



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

Central California (CenCal) Resource Advisory Council (RAC) Meeting Minutes

Held Virtually on Wednesday, November 2, 2022, 1:00 p.m.-3:30 p.m.

ATTENDEES

RAC: Mary Gorden, Shaun Crook, Warren Allsup, and Nancy Muleady-Mecham.

BLM: Chris Heppe, District Manager; Ruben Leal, Associate District Manager; David Brinsfield, District Fire Management Officer; Philip Oviatt, District Public Affairs Officer; Sarah Mathews, District Project Manager; Jeff Starosta, Assistant Bishop Field Manager; Gabe Garcia, Bakersfield Field Manager; Shekeetah Allen Genoway, Acting Central Coast Field Manager; Elizabeth Meyer-Shields, Mother Lode Field Manager; Leisyka Parrott, Acting Ukiah Field Manager; Sherri Lisius, Bishop Field Manager; Jason Titus, Biophysical Resources Staff Bishop Field Office; Sateur Ham, Planning and Environmental Coordinator Ukiah Field Office.

Public Registered: Joe Ashley, Amy Granat, Bob Schneider, Mary Boblet, Andre Sanchez, Augustine Hernandez, Michael Lueders, Andrew Silva, Reb Monaco, Matt Kingsley, and Bruce Whitcher.

GENERAL BUSINESS

Chris Heppe provided an overview of BLM Central California District with information about staffing changes and the status of the Resource Advisory Council with remarks about the expired terms of RAC members and lack of a quorum. He gave a briefing on the status of BLM California. Philip Oviatt gave an update on the status of the RAC application process. Philip conducted introductions of all attendees of the meeting. Chris Heppe gave an overview of the agenda for this meeting.

RAC BRIEFINGS

Alabama Hills Update:

Bishop Field Manager Sherri Lisius gave an overview of the Alabama Hills National Scenic Area and the Special Recreation Management Area. She highlighted the history of Alabama Hills from 1969 to present day. She presented data illustrating that vehicle counts had a steady increase from 2009 to 2019. There was a drop in 2020, which was attributed to COVID. There was a spike in 2021 that outpaced the rise prior to COVID. 2022 data is on track to resume a more normal pattern similar to 2019. The data also illustrated that Alabama Hills saw the most visitors in the months of March, April, and May.

Sherri led a discussion of the Scenic Area, highlighting the BLM's mission to conserve, protect, and enhance the nationally significant scenic, cultural, geological, educational,

biological, historical, recreational, cinematographic, scientific resources and values of the Scenic Area for the benefit, use and enjoyment of current future generations. She showed how the plan was developed with ongoing conversations with visitors and stakeholders. She discussed how the Alabama Hills Management Plan relates to both the National Scenic Area and the Special Recreation Management Area. The plan involves recreation management, including camping, rock climbing, roads and routes, education and interpretation, fire prevention, wildlife habitat improvement, protection of important historic and cultural resources, as well as administering film and special recreation permits.

Sherri highlighted camping in the Hills offering 288 sites with various amenities. Increased signage and keeping kiosks currently have helped the visitor experience at Alabama Hills. In addition, the field office has hosted two Artist in Residence programs at Alabama Hills. She also discussed how the field office was addressing fire prevention through fuel break projects aimed at protecting homes and property from fire utilizing mechanical and handwork efforts in coordination with US Forest Service treatments. Sherri thanked all the partners and volunteers who were actively working together to get all the endeavors completed at Alabama Hills.

Sherri also highlighted what was coming to Alabama Hills soon. These included monitoring, adapting, educating, and enforcing; free camping permits; restrooms that blend in with the scenery; interpretive panels at important sites, entrance sign(s) upgrades, and ongoing fire prevention efforts.

Sherri concluded her presentation by informing the group how the public could stay involved by attending Hills Happenings Events, signing up for email updates, attending volunteer events, joining the Alabama Hills Stewardship Group, and encouraging the public to spread the word to promote the caring and protection of the Alabama Hills.

Sherri then led a Q and A on the Alabama Hills and operations within the Bishop Field Office. Matt Kingsley stated that he was impressed and proud of the implementation of this plan. He was impressed with the pace of the implementation on behalf of the field office. Bob Schneider commented that he was happy that seniors only must pay \$5 to camp.

ACTION: Although no action could be taken, the RAC expressed appreciation in hearing an update on the Alabama Hills and the outlook presented.

Mammoth Geothermal Complex – Casa Diablo IV (CDIV) Presentation:

Bishop Assistant Field Manager Jeff Starosta gave an overview of the joint 2013 EIS/EIR & Federal/State Decisions between the BLM Bishop Field Office, Inyo National Forest Mammoth Ranger District, and the Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District. He illustrated the BLM's commitment to geothermal through the issuing of geothermal leases, awarding geothermal drilling permits, commercial use permits, site licenses and construction permits on public lands administered by the DOI and the Department of Agriculture. He presented a history of the Mammoth Geothermal Complex spanning from 1984 to present day. He provided an updated CD-IV powerplant timeline accounting for benchmarks met beginning in 2009 to present.

Jeff led a discussion on key monitoring strategies of the project that includes a multi-jurisdictional monitoring well network, setting a baseline monitoring period, establishing hydrologic monitoring parameters, and conducting hydraulic testing all of which are designed to meet monitoring requirements. Jeff provided an illustrated layout of the CD-IV project well system. He discussed how monitoring is and will continue to be accomplished throughout the

well system.

Jeff spoke about the coordination that the BLM has taken to ensure that cultural, wildlife, botanical, and recreation resources can effectively co-habitat together with the CD-IV project. He again stressed that compliance monitoring was key to meeting the needs of all resources.

Jeff reported that the total generation for the Mammoth Complex, owned and operated by Ormat Technologies, Inc., is 60 MW, which is enough to power 45,000 homes. He stated that the output is highly reliable, flexible, and produces no NOx emissions and virtually no CO2 emissions. He highlighted that the low visual and noise impacts from the Mammoth Complex green power plants are a model for sustainable renewable energy development. The current project has 3 new production wells, 2 new injection wells, with an allotment of up to a total of 16 new wells.

Jeff concluded his presentation with a discussion of restoration and efforts to mitigate issues. Through monitoring, the BLM is focused on human safety, road access, and wildlife corridors. The BLM is working with its partners to promote summer and winter recreation while progress on CD-IV continues.

ACTION: Although no action could be taken, the RAC and public participated in a discussion on the geothermal project. RAC member Nancy Muleady-Mecham wanted clarification that 29 MW meant Megawatts. Jason Titus confirmed that she was correct. Nancy also asked if this power is only provided to Mammoth and how much more does mammoth need. Additionally, Nancy asked if the geothermal is going to the plant, and what are the pipelines for. Jason Titus explained that the power is being supplied and sold to the grid at large. The power that is produced is sold to SoCal Edison and contributes to the power load for the entire state. The geothermal waters are produced at the production wells, the pipelines transport the geothermal resource to the Air-Cooled Binary Geothermal Power Plant itself and then pumped into the injection wells that put the geothermal water back into the geothermal reservoir. Bob Schneider asked about impacts to current hot springs and what mitigation measures are in place. Jeff responded that the current monitoring plan meets this and ensures mitigation measures are met. Bob commented that the geothermal project at the Geysers in the Ukiah area uses treated wastewater from the Clear Lake region to replenish water and pressure. Jeff responded he was aware of that project. Bob also commended staff on a nice presentation. Matt Kingsley was impressed with all the work that the BLM was able to move through despite the litigation road blocks. He commended the staff for staying with this to see it come to fruition. RAC member Warren Allsup inquired about the longevity of the geothermal project. Jeff responded that there is the ability to add more monitoring wells to monitor the life of the reservoir, but there is not an exact or estimated lifespan of this project.

BLM Central California District and Field Office Updates Presentation:

District Manager Chris Heppe gave an overview of the acreage, number of employees, counties, Congressional districts, National Conservation Land Units, and field offices encompassed by the BLM Central California District.

District Fire Management Officer David Brinsfield gave an overview of the Central California District Fire Program. He highlighted that the district was well staffed for the season. The major fire of the season, the Mosquito Fire within the Mother Lode Field Office, burned 76,788 acres. The district was able to staff: 4 Type II Engines, 3 Type VI Engines, and 2 Type II Hand Crews. David also presented on hiring events going on in Redding and Cal State Northridge. These hiring events are unique as they are doing on the

spot interviews and hiring at the events. This program is only being done in California. He also introduced a CA-BLM Engine Course that will provide training for all personnel to help them qualify for fire jobs. He concluded with an update on the ongoing fuels treatment programs happening within the district.

Bakersfield Field Manager Gabe Garcia briefed participants on the Case Mountain Forest Health Project, the MOMAC: Utilities Right of Way Consolidation, ongoing oil and gas projects/workload, and the progress on the Russell Ranch Oil Well Abandonments.

Bishop Field Manager Sherri Lisius highlighted the fuels projects, the Bi-State Sage Grouse Status and Conservation Plan, the Casa Diablo IV Geothermal Development Project, and the Alabama Hills Management Plan Implementation.

Acting Central Coast Field Manager Shekeeta Allen Genoway detailed some of his field office planning efforts, including Cotoni-Coast Dairies California Coastal National Monument and the trail and bridge work installations, Fort Ord National Monument and their noxious weeds abatement program and trails work, the San Joaquin Desert hills breeding program in coordination with the Fresno Zoo of the blunt nosed leopard lizard that will be released in the Panoche Plateau, and the Williams Hill Special Recreation Management Area seeing heavier visitation due to proximity to HWY 101 and amenities.

Mother Lode Field Manager Elizabeth Meyer-Shields gave updates on their fire season, fuels work and prescribed fire projects, recreation season updates, business plans, and leadership updates within the Mother Lode Field Office.

Acting Ukiah Field Manager Leisyka Parrott detailed the status on projects, including Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument Planning, South Cow Mountain OHV Implementation Plan, Clear Lake Fuel Break Project (2nd Phase), and the Garcia River Estuary Salmonid Habitat Enhancement project.

ACTION: Although no action could be taken, the RAC voiced appreciation for the presentation. Public participant Bob Schneider inquired about Potential Wildfire Operations Designations. David Brinsfield confirmed that the BLM is in coordination with all agencies on these designations. Public participant Andre Sanchez inquired about the River Management Plan that is open for public comment for the Forest Service. Sherri Lisius responded that she will coordinate with the Forest Service on those outcomes. RAC member Warren Allsup identified a potential horse problem in the Adobe Valley. Sherri stated that she is working with the Forest Service on this issue as the Inyo NF is the lead agency. Public participant Bruce Witcher wanted to know if any progress had been made on the East Tumbler project. Sarah Mathews advised Bruce that there were no updates to that program at this time. Bruce also wanted the BLM to know that he would like to see a presentation on what to do about Clear Creek at one of these meetings. Philip Oviatt stated he would inquire about getting this on the next agenda. Public participant Reb Monaco praised staff and stated he was impressed with all the presentations. Bob Schneider also commended staff on great presentations. Public participant Amy Granat from CORVA stated that they really appreciate the work BLM has undertaken at South Cow Mountain. She said that the BLM has shown incredible understanding of the popularity of the area and the importance to the many stakeholders. Public participant Andre Sanchez thanked the BLM for great presentations and updates.

NEXT MEETING

Chris Heppe stated that the first in- person meeting for the RAC is scheduled for February 22, 2023. The location and field trip are still to be determined. The meeting will be a blended model of in-person and virtual to accommodate participant needs.

FUTURE MEETING TOPICS

Based on comments and public input, there appears to be interest in hearing perspectives on the Clear Creek Management area, an update on Tumbler Ridge Road, the potential horse issue in Adobe Valley, and the River Management Plan in the Bishop area.

MEETING ADJOURNED

Chris Heppe gave closing remarks, thanked everyone for attending, and adjourned the meeting.