

## **BLM-Idaho Resource Advisory Council (RAC) Meeting Minutes**

Held in person and virtually on Wednesday, March 9, 2023, 9:00 a.m.- 5:00 p.m.

### **ATTENDEES**

**RAC:** (participating in person: Scott Nichols (Chair.), Skip Brandt (Vice-Chair.), Kathryn Rinaldi, Steve Lentz, (participating virtually: John Robison, Jennifer Pierce, Skylar Jett), (RAC members participating in Lava Ridge Wind Project subcommittee in person: Leon Smith, Brenda Pace), (RAC member participating virtually in the subcommittee meeting: Chad Colter)

**BLM:** (participating in person: Karen Kelleher, Idaho State Director; Serena Baker, Deputy State Director for Communications; Rod Collins, Idaho Deputy State Director, Support Services; MJ Byrne Idaho RAC Coordinator; Caleb Ashby, Idaho Public Affairs Officer; Marty Adell, Assistant Idaho Fire Management Officer; and Mike Courtney, Twin Falls District Manager; and Beth MacLean, Associate District Manager) (participating virtually: Jared Blades, Branch Chief, Resources and Sciences, Aimee Betts, Branch Chief, Minerals, Land Tenure and Water Rights and Pam Murdock, Acting Branch Chief, Social Resources, Vegetation Management and Planning, (all three in Resources and Sciences Division); Richard White, Cottonwood FO Manager and Acting Lead for development of Idaho's Recreation Strategy; Martha Price, Senior Engineer, Office of Engineering and Geosciences; Mary D'Aversa, Idaho Falls District Manager; Tanya Thrift, Boise District Manager and Kurt Pindel, Coeur d'Alene District Manager). The RAC Subcommittee Facilitator is Nancy Haug.

**PUBLIC REGISTERED:** Need to verify whether any registered for full RAC meeting. **MJ-action**

### **GENERAL BUSINESS:**

**Welcome, introductions, meeting structure and agenda review:** Karen Kelleher and Serena Baker

Idaho State Director Karen Kelleher highlighted topics on BLM National and Idaho initiatives with information about staffing and personnel updates. Kelleher asked the RAC to identify issues for further discussion such as recreation. She agreed to expand discussion time for fire and recreation issues during the June 1'st RAC meeting. Some senior BLM managers are being moved back to Washington, D.C. to facilitate their interactions especially with Congress and other Federal agencies. Some managers and staff will remain in Grand Junction, Colorado. The Spokane, Washington and Coeur d'Alene, Idaho Districts are transitioning back to separate offices. Each will have a district manager.

### **RAC BRIEFINGS**

**State Office updates** included presentations on the Idaho's Renewable Energy Strategy, status of Solar and Herbicide Programmatic Environmental Impact Statements (PEIS) and other National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) documents, Greater Sage Grouse Planning and Amendment, Idaho's Recreation Strategy tiering off the BLM's 21'st Century Recreation

National Strategy, Idaho Fire update and predictions for 2023. National funding efforts that have resulted in significant funding for projects across Idaho were discussed, including the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA), Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). Martha Price Idaho lead engineer for the Office of Engineering and Geosciences gave a presentation about GAOA. She identified FY2022 construction projects underway and FY2023 projects with design underway, with focus on recreation. GAOA funding is limited for only deferred maintenance activities according to the Act. Various recreation amenities and repairs are being completed, with several boat ramps being replaced, some trails being improved, adding fire pits and picnic tables, all to be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. GAOA funding expires in FY2025. Marty Adell, Assistant Idaho Fire Management Officer gave a brief introduction to the State's Fire and Aviation Program, showing the RAC current precipitation and drought monitoring data. He emphasized the difficulty of predicting the outlook for fire in 2023. Idaho has 10 Rural Fire Protection Associations (RFPA's), comprised largely of local ranchers and farmers. During FY2022, they responded to 63 fires and kept their size to 10,000 acres. Without the RFPA's those fires could have been multiple times larger, according to Adell. BIL and IRA are helping to provide additional funding for added benefits to help with issues of hiring and retention of firefighters.

#### **DISTRICT UPDATES:**

**Idaho Falls District (IFD)** Manager, Mary D'Aversa gave an overview of plans for a new Rexburg Airport. Phosphate mining in Idaho accounts for 25 percent of the nation's phosphate supply. IFD manages 83 actives, permitted and in-process (permitting) phosphate mining operations; reviewed mining active sites and proposals in Challis and Pocatello Field Offices (FO); options for replacing the Challis FO that burned in 2016 were discussed. Talks with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Challis Ranger District about possibly co-locating have begun. Forestry initiatives, including, timber sales and prescribed fires in Pocatello, Upper Snake and Salmon FO's; restoration efforts were highlighted in Pocatello and Challis FO's. Planning projects include land acquisition, travel management, invasive weed treatments, and several recreation site improvements. Upper Snake East Travel Management Plan is underway with scoping to begin in spring 2023. Saint Anthony Sand Dunes Recreation Area Management Plan Record of Decision (ROD) is anticipated in the third quarter of FY2023. Energy - the Pocatello FO is analyzing a PacifiCorp pumped Storage Hydro proposal and a wind and battery storage proposal. Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) - funded projects in Pocatello FO were highlighted. Total funding received for numerous Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) projects across IDF in FY2021, through FY2023 total \$2,609 million to date. Land and Water Conservation funded projects in Upper Snake and Salmon FO's were also identified.

**Twin Falls District (TFD)** Associate District Manager Beth MacLean provided highlights on the BLM and Wood River Valley Partnership and Alliance's efforts to provide targeted closure areas to public to protect wintering wild game animals. The Lava Ridge Wind Project was discussed. Four options were identified in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) released in

January 2023. The public comment period on the DEIS was extended to April 20, 2023. A RAC Subcommittee was formed in 2021 to research and review the proposal and provide the results of their findings to the Idaho RAC at a joint, virtual meeting on March 17, 2023. An electric collar pilot project that uses E-Collars on cattle as virtual fencing was discussed. In the Burley FO, the Cedar Fields Plan Amendment ROD is expected to be published during the spring of 2023, with work progressing on proposed Salmon Falls Wind Project and on Smoky Mountain Campground improvements. BIL funding provided improvements for Bruneau Overlook in Jarbidge FO in FY2022. Upgrades to Jarbidge River boat launch site were highlighted. During FY2022 and FY2023 nearly 172,000 acres have received fuels treatments. An update was provided on the district's new fire dispatch center. In preparation for the FY2023 fire season, training was completed for 22 new members of the RFPAs in TFD. Consideration is being given to construction of publicly available shooting areas in TFD.

**Boise District Office (BDO)** Manager Tanya Thrift identified key programs including fire and fuels management, travel management planning on thousands of acres in the Owyhee and Bruneau FO's, renewable energy proposals, two gathers of Wild Horses in the Owyhee and Four Rivers FO herd management areas and development of an extensive network of fuel breaks in Owyhee and Four Rivers FO's. During 2022 and 2023, the Bruneau Owyhee Sage Grouse Habitat (BOSH) fuels treatments, a landscape scale project, is aiding sage grouse conservation efforts. Owyhee FO is also working on the Delamar Mine expansion and with Silver City managers on renewal of the National Historic Site designation. Amendments to the Four Rivers FO Resource Management Plan are scheduled for completion in fall 2024. Thrift said development of the Idaho Recreation Strategy is important for BDO with increased population and outdoor recreation activities. The district has lots of dispersed recreation, but fewer established recreation sites. Additional public input and education are needed to address unauthorized target shooting on public lands.

**Coeur d'Alene District Office (CDA)** Manager Kurt Pindel spoke with the RAC about how recreation sites in the Cottonwood and CDA FO's, have benefitted from GAOA funding, including Eagle Creek Road maintenance and improvements. Pindel identified large and small timber sales planned for both Cottonwood and CDA FO's and hazardous fuels treatments funded by BIL. The district has a large, abandoned mine lands program resulting from decades of mining throughout northern Idaho. Highlights about world famous Cooper's Ferry Archeological and Cultural Site located in the Cottonwood FO were provided. The transition from joint to separate district management of Spokane and CDA districts was addressed.

The BLM-ID RAC and Lava Ridge Wind Energy RAC Subcommittee met in joint session to hear public comments from members of the public in person and virtually at 3:00 p.m.

At 3:30 p.m. the RAC Subcommittee Chairperson Leon Smith provided an overview and chronology of the site field trip conducted in June 2022 and five subsequent meetings. Subcommittee members asked that the March 17 meeting at which they will present the conclusions to their research be optional in-person and virtual. Serena Baker said a new Federal

Register Notice (FRN) would have to be published for that to happen. There is not enough time for the Notice to be approved and published prior to the March 17 meeting. The subcommittee members and BLM agreed that their report would be emailed to the full RAC and RAC Subcommittee members on Monday March 13, 2023, by Twin Falls District Manager Mike Courtney. Recipients of the report were asked not to share it with others until it is presented to the full RAC on March 17, 2023. Baker provided an overview of the upcoming FRN about a call for RAC nominations. The call for Nominations will be shared by several states. Kelleher encouraged RAC members to help BLM recruit nominee for RAC positions.

#### **FUTURE MEETING TOPICS:**

Kelleher asked the RAC for recommendations for topics for the next RAC meetings through the end of FY2023. Responses included: Interactions between BLM and the United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service; target shooting on public lands; Land Use plans; Travel Management Planning, (motorized and non-motorized); Land transfers – Lands going out of public ownership and BLM acquisition of additional private lands; update RMP's; have tribal representatives come to the RAC meeting and address their vision of meaningful Tribal engagement; have Jen Pierce give a presentation of her research related to fire, rehabilitation and soils. Kelleher provided feedback on some of the recommendations.

#### **NEXT MEETING/FIELD TOUR:**

May 31, 2023: In-person field tour, 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. Mountain Daylight Time (MDT)

June 1, 2023: In-person and virtual, 9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. MDT

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#### **Actions:**

- 1.Recreation and Fire topics will be added to the agenda for the June RAC meeting.
- 2.Provide response to RAC question: What factors are included in drought determination?
- 3.Mike Courtney will email a copy of the RAC Subcommittee report to the full RAC and subcommittee members by Monday, March 13, 2023, for review and discussion between the full RAC and Subcommittee members during their meeting on Friday, March 17, 2023.

**Skip Brandt moved to adjourn the meeting. Scott Nichols seconded the motion. It was unanimously approved.**