

Steens Mountain Advisory Council

October 19-20, 2023, Meeting Summary Minutes – FINAL

Steens Mountain Advisory Council (SMAC) met October 19 and 20, 2023, at the at the Bureau of Land Management Burns District Office and via Zoom. In accordance with the provisions of Public Law 92-463, the meeting was open to the public. This document summarizes attendance, discussions that occurred, and decisions made. For the record, it is noted that to avoid any conflict of interest, Council members absent themselves from the meeting when the Council discusses matters in which a conflict of interest may occur.

SMAC members in attendance

- Terry Turner, Fish and Recreational Fishing Representative
- Jake Jakubik, No Financial Interest Representative
- Pete Runnels, Commercial Recreation Permit Holder Representative
- John F. Helmer, Dispersed Recreation Representative (via Zoom)
- Karen Withrow, State Environment Representative
- Teresa Wicks, Local Environment Representative
- Butch Goette, Mechanized and Consumptive Recreation Representative
- Mike Fox, Private Landowner Representative
- Kali Wilson, Grazing Permittee 1 Representative
- Lee Foster, State Liaison Representative

SMAC members absent

- Eric Hawley, Burns Paiute Tribe Representative

Vacant SMAC positions

- Grazing Permittee 2 Representative
- Wild Horse Management Representative

Members of the public in attendance

- Dave Haugeberg, private landowner (Thursday only)
- Cliff Volpe, incoming SMAC Dispersed Recreation Representative (Zoom)
- Rand Campbell, Nature's Advocate LLC (Zoom)
- Bill Marlett, Oregon Natural Desert Association (Zoom)
- Linda Wallace, private citizen (Zoom)
- Dawn Snell, private citizen
- Lorna Torrey Palermo, Advocates for Wild Equines (AWE)
- Teneya Jewell, private citizen
- Ruthie Danielsen, Steens Mountain landowner (Friday only)

- Dave Banks, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (Friday only)

BLM employees in attendance

- Tara Thissell, BLM, Public Affairs Specialist
- Jeff Rose, BLM, Burns District Manager and Designated Federal Official
- Don Rotell, BLM, Andrews/Steens Field Office Manager
- Kyle Wanner, BLM, Assistant Field Manager for Andrews/Steens Field Office (Recreation/Realty)
- Dean Reese, BLM, Outdoor Recreation Planner (Wilderness)
- Alec Barber, BLM, Riparian/Aquatics Specialist
- Andy Daniels, BLM, Assistant Andrews/Steens Field Manager
- Derek Yost, BLM, Realty Specialist (Thursday only)

OCTOBER 19, 2023

Tara Thissell opened the meeting with a review of the agenda, handouts for those in attendance, facility logistics, etc.

Thissell welcomed new appointee Lee Foster, State Liaison, and re-appointed Burns Paiute Tribe Representative, Eric Hawley (not in attendance). Jake Jakubik, No Financial Interest Representative will be reappointed on November 18, 2023, along with Cliff Volpe, Dispersed Recreation (new appointment). This is John Helmer's last meeting (current Dispersed Recreation Representative). The applicant for the Wild Horse Management Representative position did not pass vetting, so that position and Grazing Permittee 2 will be open for application any day now.

Designated Federal Official Update - Jeff Rose

- Federal government fiscal year ended September 30.
- Staffing update: A year ago we were around 30 percent vacancy rate for the district, and we are down to around 17 percent now. We utilized various hiring authorities and have many new, excellent folks on board.
 - o Congratulations to Kyle Wanner for moving into the Assistant Field Manager (Recreation) position and Kayce Faulkner for moving into the Corral Facility Manager position! There are several other personnel changes within – let us know if you want the full roster!
 - o Our new Law Enforcement Ranger is on board, fully trained and busy in the field. We have a zoned Law Enforcement program with Lakeview and Vale and now have more access to more rangers if needed.
 - o Still struggling to fill our Engineering positions.

- Completed a great National Public Lands Day project on the Steens with ONDA – reestablishing the Fred Riddle Trail. Did another project with employees cleaning up at Radar Hill OHV area.
- Fire season was very slow this year with less than 1,000 acres burned. We had a lot of lightning, but most storms came with moisture. Many of our firefighters were able to go off-district and support suppression efforts across the west.
- Public Lands Rule: the public comment period ended in June and the thousands of comments received are being reviewed. We expect to hear more about it after that New Year.

Andrews/Steens Resource Area, Don Rotell

- Currently onboarding another Archaeologist, Patrick O’Grady, who has been working for University of Oregon at Rimrock Draw Rockshelter for the last 10+ years. He starts November 19!
- Currently interviewing for a new Rangeland Management Specialist for the Steens area. Hoping to make a selection soon.
- Rock fall on Steens Loop Road – engineers will be on site next week to reassess and come up with a plan that will go through contracting for slope stabilization and removing the rest of the rock fall.
 - o Karen Withrow asked for current information on the rock fall to be given to the Riddle Ranch caretakers during the summer season.
- Mike Fox walked the rock fall area twice this year and didn’t think it was that bad at all. Why has it taken so long to get this seemingly minimal issue fixed? Kyle answered that it is indeed a bigger issue that it appears on the surface - the rocks are not even attached to the wall, more rocks have fallen in the last month, and geengineers made the recommendation to keep the road closed.
- Travel management planning – continuing to work with the contractor on the inventory. It has been a bit of a challenge.
- Nature’s Advocate Inholder Access – we have received all of the LiDAR data from NRCS. We are working with GIS to isolate the Nature’s Advocate area within the data and working with a LiDAR subject matter expert at our State Office to help interpret it. We are also working with the Nature’s Advocate landowner on the process but are gearing back up to move forward again.
- The Mud Creek Restoration DNA is on ePlanning right now and open for public comment. This project was developed in response to comments that were made on the original Bridge Creek Environmental Assessment.

SMAC Strategic Planning

Mike Fox asked John Helmer to open the discussion with a summary about strategic planning.

What kinds of things are of interest to the SMAC? Where do we want to go with Council work? It is important to be in control of our futures and participation in management of Steens Mountain, not just be reactive to whatever the BLM brings forward. And remember that the Council is charged with creative solution-making! Look at all the options and fill the in-between role with creativity.

- Work on the Council foundation – relationships among members, help each other understand roles, outreach to constituents, helping BLM keep SMAC positions filled, active engagement in development of agenda, formal in creation of subcommittees.
 - Developing skills and knowledge – give advice based on reality, be fully informed about laws and policies and regulations, always be learning,
 - Strategic initiatives/what are we going to work on – what are current commitments (either carry them through or shut them down), what does the Act say, what are constituents asking for/talking about, etc. The Inholder Initiative is a good example.
- Butch Goette asked about previous things that have been on agendas, or things where the SMAC has had success. Thissell stated that most meetings are full of items that the BLM is bringing TO the SMAC – not vice versa. SMAC is encouraged to bring things TO the BLM based on constituent input.
 - Mike Fox suggested that we look at the principles of the Reasonable Access for Reasonable Use document and maybe use that as a starting point. Helmer said this document isn't really a statement of SMAC policy, but a document to use when the SMAC runs into an issue of this kind.
 - Jeff Rose asked if we should bring in expertise to help the group do a full strategic plan (over a few meetings). There were a few clarification questions, and Mike Fox added that because we only meet a few times a year, it might not be the best use of time – it is a long and complicated process that takes a lot of preparation and work.
 - Mike also stated that the SMAC is also an “advisory” council with no actual power other than the power of suggestion. Because we are not in a role of true governance, we really don't need to go through the rigorous process of strategic planning. We can just come up with a list of things we want to work on and ask, “what does everyone think about this?”
 - Kali Wilson recalled a list of projects the SMAC has worked on in the past – individual things from the Comprehensive Recreation Plan – and that was a good way for the SMAC to be involved in things that are happening.
 - Terry Turner suggested that each of the representatives/constituency groups bring something to the next meeting for the BLM to consider, SMAC to discuss, etc. This would be a solid start to planning, and then we could decide what we have the desire to work on, the power to pursue, etc.

- The Steens Act states exactly what the Council should do, so we need to pay attention to that.
- Butch Goette said he is really feeling the importance of connecting with constituents and that the SMAC should talk about how to reach more people. We should look into multi-faceted ways to gather information from the people as well – an app (tell us what you think!), comment cards, how to reach SMAC members, etc.

Recreation Program Update Fiscal Year 2023, Kyle Wanner

Kyle gave a PowerPoint presentation with recreation statistics for the Steens area for fiscal year 2023 (May through September is the season of use). That presentation is available upon request.

- Visitor numbers seem around average.
- Campground revenue increased due to the increased overnight user fees that went into effect April 1 (from \$6-8/night to \$16/night).
- Had a decrease in use at Page Springs, which is unusual, but likely due to heavy mosquito infestation.
- Campground use on the north side of the Steens Loop at Fish Lake and Jackman Park increased quite a bit from 2022.
- Standard year for number of users on trails. Blitzen River trail remains the busiest by far. Saw good use on Pike Creek and Wildhorse trails as well.
- Steens Mountain Loop Road appeared a little down from previous years – could be due to rock fall closure and construction on Highway 205.
- Partners and volunteers that we work closely with: Oregon Natural Desert Association, Backcountry Horsemen, Eastern Oregon Visitors Association, Harney County Chamber of Commerce.
- In the rockfall area, there are several truck-size boulders that are essentially teetering. They are not attached to anything and big enough that they would miss the burrow and land in the road grade. Next week, engineers will determine how to deal with the issues, and the BLM will put a contract together for work next spring.
- Travel management planning – still in progress, but about 90% done with inventory. The inventory crew was conflicted about looking at routes that involved crossing or being on private property. We have some work to do there but are planning the coordination with landowners. Evaluation report expected fall 2024, then plan development, public meetings, etc.
- Penland campground update – this is a priority for SMAC, as discussed at the June 2023 meeting. There isn't anything on the ground yet, but we do have a good file of cost estimates and are looking at funding opportunities to make it happen. The project could cost \$200-400k, so potentially considering less expensive developments like a clear spot, loop entrance/exit, and dry camp only. This could

be adaptively managed in the future – adding more or not, depending on use or interest.

- Jake Jakubik asked if the North Steens Equestrian Camp was out of the picture. Kyle said not necessarily, but it isn't a priority at this time, especially because equestrian campground users are less than 1% on Steens and water/well drilling is an issue.
- Fishing at Mann Lake remains a potential for the future, if we continue to have good water years.
- This year there was a lot of interest in water sports on the Blitzen River this year – pack-rafters especially, who put in at Blitzen Crossing and raft all the way down to Page Springs! This is not for beginners and there is a lot of portaging!! If this continues to be a desire in the future, and weather conditions allow, we may consider a keyed/permitted system to provide this kind of access.
- 19 active Special Recreation Permits in FY23, which is up from 14 in FY22 (36% increase). Jake Jakubik asked for Riddle Brothers Ranch hosts to be notified of SRP users in the area. For permits, we typically have hunting guides, competitive events, Steens Mountain Running Camp, Outward Bound, birding tours, educational trips, and organized group activities.
- Trends/new uses: bike-packing, gravel biking, dual sport motorcycling, and pack-rafting.
- “Oregon Backcountry Discovery Route” was released this year by the [Backcountry Discovery Routes group](#) and they have a huge following of 500,000+. We have worked with them since the release to correct some of the route/access issues.
- Issued very few winter recreation permits for Steens in FY23 – only 8.
- Northwest Youth Corps and Idaho Conservation Corps spent 6 weeks in the Burns District – site clearing at Chickahominy and Moon reservoirs and Riddle Ranch; trail maintenance on Levi Brinkley and Little Blitzen Gorge trails.
- No Livestock Grazing Area fence maintenance and repair – this fence is a constant battle depending on weather and livestock use. We utilized a Range Rider and pack string from California to help with the work.
- Improvements in progress/planned: loop and site graveling at Fish Lake, Jackman Park and Page Springs; new portal signs at all CMPA campgrounds and dispersed areas; new campground rules and information signs and limbing at Lily Lake dispersed camp loop; new trailhead signs; additional directional markers; more trailhead kiosks and registers; continuing to reestablish the Fred Riddle Trail.
- Considering a second dock/watercraft launch and camp host site improvements at Fish Lake; adding east side trailhead; designating Big Indian Headwall route; new trails at Riddle Brothers Ranch.
- 41% of total revenue at Page Springs is through the credit card machine (Remote Off-Gride Kiosk).

- 2 Recreation Maintenance Workers on staff right now and they are swamped with campground fee collection, cleaning, etc. We are looking to hire another person to help with other projects, along with a Range Rider, and a Travel Management Planning Specialist.
- Use on the Alvord Desert continues to busy year after year. Looking to develop a Recreation Area Management Plan for the area. SMAC input would be welcome on this plan because there is so much crossover between users to the Alvord and within the CMPA.
- Estimated 600-1000 people on the Alvord for the October 14 annular eclipse. Despite this number, we didn't see any big impacts on the playa.
- Terry Turner asked if TU were to host a youth fly fishing event on the Steens, what would the permit look like? Kyle said it would be a commercial permit with 3% of gross event fees to the BLM.
- Karen suggested finding a way to accept donations at Riddle Ranch – perhaps an iron ranger? Several members of the public have offered to donate to the site.
- Teresa Wicks asked about dispersed camping and if there are any issues, how do we track it, etc. Kyle said it is difficult to quantify, but there are some areas that we know are used and monitor regularly. Pete Runnels added that it seems like people are starting to camp in the overlook parking areas and this is a concern. Kyle said we recently learned of that and plan to get information posted about day-use only.
- Jake suggested having a sign with basic “site” rules/information at Riddle Brothers Ranch, and Mike suggested more information available at places like Frenchglen Mercantile.

Inflation Reduction Act, Jeff Rose

Jeff gave a PowerPoint presentation about the Inflation Reduction Act. This presentation is available upon request.

- The IRA was passed in 2022 – it is a huge act that DOI/BLM has a very small part in. The Act serves to “strengthen the resilience of communities across the country and protect them from the effect of climate change.”
- For the BLM’s part of this effort, we are focusing on “Restoration Landscapes” – 25 of these are identified across the western states, with 2 of them in Oregon. One in southwest Oregon with Medford, Roseburg and Coos Bay Districts; the second is in southeast Oregon with Burns, Vale and Lakeview Districts. The southeast Oregon landscape has the conservation of habitat for greater sage-grouse as the priority (planting sage brush, treating invasive or encroaching vegetation, promoting growth of native vegetation, and creating fuel breaks in uplands).
- Funding that comes through IRA doesn’t have a deadline for spending.
- The SMAC could potentially have input on future Burns District IRA projects, or places where IRA funding could be used: Penland campground, NLGA fence, Steens

ethnographic study, Page Springs Weir, and coordinating with BLM fuels and BIL funding (invasive grass treatments, western juniper, sagebrush planting).

Bridge Creek Environmental Impact Statement, Don Rotell

Don gave a PowerPoint presentation about the Bridge Creek EIS. That presentation is available upon request.

- Summaries of each EIS alternative were provided:
 - o 1: Historic – issue new permits under same terms and conditions as were last issued in 2004.
 - o 2: BLM Preferred – issues grazing permits with site specific terms and conditions, range developments, and changes to allotment/pasture boundaries.
 - o 3: Granddaddy FFR– Issues grazing permits with site specific terms and conditions, range developments, changes to allotment/pasture boundaries, and maximum flexibility (significant increase in AUMs, no phasing-in grazing, non-renewable AUMs are available, etc.).
 - o 4: Reduced Grazing – reduced AUMs, season of use, utilization and thresholds; no new developments, no non-renewable AUMs authorized
 - o 5: No Action – no grazing permits issued, no non-renewable AUMS authorized, no new developments constructed, no maintenance, no supplemental feeding of hay.
- Alternatives were developed with applicant input.
- There were questions about water gaps and what it means to the landscape to remove one or more. Water gaps are areas where livestock can access a stream, but they can't move up and down/use the entire waterway. The SMAC wondered if the alternative is creating a riparian pasture or removing the gap and allowing access to the entire river? Is that the same thing? This should be clearer in the full EIS document, but Don Rotell will look into the details and share at the next SMAC meeting.
- John Helmer thanked Don for bringing the presentation to the SMAC and reminded the SMAC that they probably have constituents who know a lot about this kind of planning, all the issues analyzed, terminology, the landscape in question, etc. Make sure to reach out to your constituents to get their input on this complex issue.
- Draft EIS is around 80% complete and at the OR/WA BLM State Office for additional input and review. We hope to have the draft document out before the end of the calendar year. There will be a 45-day comment period once it is released to the public.
- The EIS Record of Decision will be finalized before the next decision is made. The next decision is selecting an applicant for the available forage.
- Each SMAC member should individually, as representing their constituents, comment on the EIS when it comes available. The SMAC can also

comment/provide a recommendation as a group, with consensus. The BLM will work on determining when SMAC can provide input on the project as it may not fall into the open public comment period.

- John Helmer stated that the group could also provide a letter of support just based on the process of the EIS.
- Jeff Rose suggested the group wait until they see the actual EIS before they make any recommendations.
- To date, the Burns District BLM has followed a legal and adequate process to develop the Bridge Creek EIS → will follow up on Friday.

Public comment:

- Bill Marlett – no comment.
- Tenaya Jewell – no comment.
- Dawn Stell – no comment.
- Lorna Torrey Palermo – came to learn and has some ideas about things we would love to support; thrilled to see so many varied people talking and working together and listening to each other.

SMAC member round robin:

- Kali Wilson – asked about the naming of the East Steens Road and why it now has a “Folly Farm Road” sign? Seemed to be a lot of traffic on the east side of the mountain last weekend – eclipse!
- Karen Withrow – sent out information to constituent groups, sharing her contact information and such; mostly just received “thank-you’s” but also some questions that Karen has brought forward.
- Mike Fox – private landowners are interested in access and preservation of Steens Mountain; most people just need and want more information.
- Lee Foster – No plans to put fish back in Mann Lake until there are more environmental assurances that it won’t dry up next year; deer season seemed slow on the Steens this year; chukar counts are up and there should be a solid season with more hunters; getting a big push to focus more on beaver issues – if you run into any beaver sign, let ODFW know!
- Terry Turner – Beavers only cause good problems for anglers! No specific input from the fish/recreational fishing groups – except that the mosquitos were the absolute worst this year. Page Springs Weir continues to come up in conversation with ODFW Fish Passage Task Force. Suggested updating signage on angling at

trailheads/fishing areas – many people do not know the rules about using flies, lures, artificials, live bait, catch/release/keep, etc.

- Pete Runnels – Pete prefers Beavers over Ducks! Another great year for the Running Camp in 2023; 2024 will be the 50th year for the event!
- Teresa Wicks – lots of conversations around Dark Sky designations; Harney County chose not to support the effort, but there is other support from business owners and residents. Working with the library to do some education sessions in 2024 about the importance of dark skies. The environmental community is also talking a lot about beavers and how to work *with* them in supporting ecosystems.
- Jake Jakubik – Riddle Brothers Ranch hosts are a great source of information from the public. They have a lot of individual contacts and could help the BLM learn more about what people are thinking.
- Butch Goette – spent a lot of time on the Steens this summer. He was amazed at the number of first timers on the mountain, and everyone LOVES it.
- John Helmer – Kyle represents a high level of ability and energy in recreation and does a very remarkable job. He represents the BLM very well and big kudos!

The BLM has visitor centers in other areas that are key in busy areas. We keep bumping up against the issue of communicating with visitors and getting information to them – this is a fundamental challenge. We could consider the Ranch as a Visitor Center and a great place to dispense information of all kinds – policy, procedure, fuel availability, access, road conditions, etc.

Keep the Steens wild!

John has become increasingly interested in issues pertaining to accessibility in nature - particularly for people with disabilities or mobility issues. Perhaps we should think about this pertaining to the Steens – it *is* one of few places you can *drive* to wilderness.

OCTOBER 20, 2023

Tara Thissell opened the session with a short recap of Thursday's session, review of the Friday's agenda and introductions.

Page Springs Weir

Alec Barber gave PowerPoint presentation about the Page Springs Weir. That presentation is available upon request.

- Overall goal of removing the weir is to increase fish passage. Rivers Designs Group is looking at weir removal options. The weir was put in in 1937.
- A site survey was completed using a combination of on the ground surveys, drone flights and existing GIS data. A sediment evaluation was completed and ranked very low with no contamination risks. There is about 160yds of cubic sediment behind the weir structure. The weir actively passes sediment during higher flows.
- Cultural inventory was also completed for the area. No sites were identified within immediate project area/near the weir. John Helmer asked why the site has been submitted for Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act evaluation when there are plans to remove it.
 - o Don Rotell said the site submission was done before the proposed removal, not in conjunction with it. For the process, if it is determined to be a historic property eligible for listing on the register of National Historic Places, we will have to enter into an agreement with State Historic Preservation Office to remove it and “mitigate the loss of the historic structure”. The weir is associated with the Civilian Conservation Corps and engineering and design techniques from that era.
- Terry Turner asked about the timeline for delivering removal design options. Alec doesn't have the exact date but will follow up. A NEPA document is in progress. There will be a full range of alternatives in the document for analysis and the SMAC will have the opportunity to comment and provide a recommendation if desired.

Steens Act – Reasonable Use, John Helmer

John Helmer reviewed Section 112, sections (d) and (e) of the Steens Act, and the SMAC's working document “Reasonable access for reasonable use: Principles of Decision Making”. These documents are available upon request.

- The practice of looking at the Steens Act at each meeting predates John's time on the SMAC but is an important part of each meeting to keep the Act on the forefront of our minds.
- The need to look closer at reasonable access for reasonable use issue came to the attention of the SMAC through the request for access to their private inholding on Steens Mountain by Nature's Advocate, LLC. The BLM began looking at ways to meet the request and the planning effort was brought to the SMAC.
- Because the group felt the 'reasonable access for reasonable use' issue would very likely come up again, the SMAC decided to take a rigorous approach to outline the SMAC's approach to looking at future access complexities. This document is not SMAC policy or a 'final decision,' but a work in progress.

- Section D states no new road for motorized access will be constructed unless for public safety or protection of the environment.
- Section E states, regarding access to non-federally owned lands – reasonable access will be provided to give the owner or interest of the land the reasonable use thereof.
- These two sections provide a number of challenges:
 - o Steens Act uses “reasonable”, but Wilderness Act uses “adequate” – what do these terms mean and which one are we following? Both? Note that the Interior Board of Land Appeals has ruled that reasonable and adequate are not the same. There is some precedence in the definition of the term “adequate,” but not so much on the term “reasonable”.
 - o When two laws seem to conflict, the SMAC concluded that you look at which law came first vs. second and which has more specific direction to the issue at hand.
 - o Sometimes in order to get laws or policies passed, there are ‘generalities’ that everyone can agree on...and those get interpreted in a number of ways.
- SMAC decided to use the dictionary to define ‘reasonable’: reasonable means not extreme or excessive, based on good sense, fair and moderate.
 - o Regarding “reasonable use,” the use of private property is not a federal matter – for the Steens, that is up to Harney County. It is still important to the SMAC to know what Harney County thinks and determines.
- Reasonable access is a thorny issue also – if someone is permitted to make reasonable use of their private property, what is reasonable access for that reasonable use? The SMAC concept is to fulfill reasonable use with the lowest impacting/minimal access that sufficiently serves the use and maintains the character and use of the lands.
 - o Note that the SMAC is looking for a compromise – there are times when access may not be ideal to fulfill wilderness values, and there are times when wilderness values may be less than they otherwise could be in order to provide access.
- We also need to make sure we look at all the tools to solve complex problems – cooperative agreements, acquiring lands, land exchanges, etc.
- Butch asked about reasonable use and the impacts/conflicts between state or county land use laws/permissions vs. “reasonable access”. The two don’t always work together and the BLM should determine the least impactful way to achieve the allowable use of private land (by way of public land).
- There is also a disagreement about whether any act or law “trumps” another. Everyone wants a definite answer, and unfortunately, that isn’t always an option. In these situations, we’re likely looking for a judge to make determinations.

- Rand Campbell thanked the council for their hard work over the years on the reasonable access/reasonable use issue.
- Mike Fox thanked John Helmer for his great explanation and written document on reasonable use/reasonable access.

SMAC Strategic Planning

The SMAC agreed to put together a “bucket list” of items/projects/things for the BLM to consider.

Had a spirited discussion ‘amongst the geezers’ (Butch, Jake, Terry and Mike – quoted verbatim from Mike!) at the north end of the dinner table last night. What are we as SMAC and what are we doing to do about the issues at hand and what is our approach going to be?

Terry said there is a section in the Act that describes the advisory council and provides suggestions on how we should work – homework assignment: everyone needs to look at that section in the Act and discuss we think our role is and how we will contribute based on that description and how that works with each of our user groups. This will be the portion of the Act we discuss at the next meeting, with Terry leading.

Butch Goette added that we need to look at what takes “precedence” – keeping the wilderness wild, accommodating the public, etc. Ying and yang. Mike Fox added from a landowner’s perspective, there is a huge importance preserving the agricultural way of life it the Steens Mountain area is a vital part of the Harney County community. Teresa said to make sure we include the conservation value of Steens Mountain also.

Next meeting, make space to talk about how all SMAC roles fit together and how preserving this suite of interests is important. John Helmer added that we should take into account the history of the SMAC formation, the Steens Act and understanding the roots of the CMPA. We could invite people who are still around to talk about it – Fred, Stacy, Bill, etc. if SMAC wants a personal perspective on what went into the planning and intention of the Act. Terry encouraged everyone to read and study the act – it is clear that a goal is to preserve the character of the area from an ecological, economic, environmental, etc. point of view. This is why there are so many different user groups represented on the Council – we need to make the best decisions possible to balance each interest.

From yesterday, John mentioned tackling these three things to get on a good strategic path:

- Work on the Council foundation – relationships among members, help each other understand roles, outreach to constituents, helping BLM keep SMAC positions filled, active engagement in development of agenda, formal in creation of subcommittees.
 - Continue having group dinners, working lunches and other social experiences, etc.
 - Field tours

- Developing skills and knowledge – give advice based on reality, be fully informed about laws and policies and regulations, always be learning,
 - Continue reviewing a section of the Steens Act at each meeting; include charter on occasion.
 - Have a presentation from originators of the Steens Act to discuss intent, purpose of SMAC. → Ask “how do you feel management, cooperation, coordination has gone in the last 23 years?”
 - Maybe a presentation on what grazing management looks like through BLM regulations.
 - Presentation on what a substantive comment looks like?
 - What’s unique about Steens environmentally and ecologically – Lee and Teresa will talk about this.

- Strategic initiatives/what are we going to work on – what are current commitments (either carry them through or shut them down), what does the Act say, what are constituents asking for/talking about, etc. The Inholder Initiative is a good example.
 - Fire management is a big issue – perhaps have someone from experiment station come in for a conversation about the latest research with regards to grazing and fire.
 - Improve how information is exchanged – find more ways to connect with the public to get/give information.
 - Continue existing commitments – Nature’s Advocate, Bridge Creek, Inholder initiative, Page Springs Weir. Need to fit these items in sooner rather than later.
 - Public access from Catlow valley and east Steens into the CMPA
 - Access for people with physical disabilities.

No matter what, SMAC must find their constituents, connect, share information, have conversations, and truly represent a population of people with varied interests.

Public Comment

- Lorna Torrey Palermo thanked the group for welcoming the public and the SMAC is an incredible group. She is very impressed with the depth and breadth of input – the group can speak, share and listen and some of the ideas and words spoken here are huge and valuable (preservation, management, solutions). The willingness of the group to work together is wonderful and this group has the capacity to do some positive things for Steens Mountain. It would be terrific to fill all the positions on the Council as well.
- Tenaya Jewell – thank you to the SMAC as well for the friendly welcome. The wild horse representative position is not filled and really needs to be.
- Dawn Snell – learned a lot and found it interesting to see representatives of so many different constituencies trying to mesh together and consider what is best for the community/the area.
- Ruthie Danielsen – thanks to the BLM for the appreciation letter and photo for the time served on the SMAC; she wondered when the rock fall would be repaired on the Steens; appreciate the conversation about reasonable use and is interested in seeing the LiDAR data for the Steens. She is happy to see the status of the Loop Road on Trip Check. Ruthie recommended that the SMAC read the ORIGINAL charter for the council, before it was generalized. Regarding institutional knowledge of the SMAC and Steens Act, that is hugely important to pass along to the next generation. Emphasized the importance of road maintenance, especially on the north Steens Loop.
- John Helmer – sometimes there is a dismissal of government, but we all know it *can* work. And the SMAC is a very carefully arranged group with detailed processes and the folks currently working are doing a great job. Also, listening to “the founders” is useful, but note that they *will* have different memories – what matters is what was actually written and passed by Congress.

Follow-up/Close-out/Next meeting planning:

Kali MOVED (as written by John): “SMAC has reviewed the Bridge Creek Area EIS work to date and engaged in discussion with the Bureau of Land Management. As a result of this review, SMAC judges that the BLM is pursuing a forthright and rigorous process that seeks maximum input from all parties. While it is too soon to judge the content of this work, SMAC thanks and congratulates the BLM on the EIS process to date.”

Motion SECONDED by Terry and PASSED unanimously.

SMAC agreed to write a letter to BLM emphasizing the importance of getting the loop road open in its entirety prior to the 2024 season of use.

Karen brought up Dark Sky recognition and wondered how the SMAC could or should be part of the discussion. Mike thinks the group should wait and see what happens with Dark Sky planning efforts. Teresa said it would be fine to step back and not engage in Dark Sky Sanctuary planning but know that other people are going to keep moving forward and the SMAC might miss the opportunity to represent. What does it mean to be a Dark Sky space? Sanctuary status has nothing to do with private lands – it's only on public land.

Jeff reminded the SMAC of their charge to focus on the CMPA and that the area doesn't have an issue with light pollution. BLM sent a letter of support from the BLM for the sanctuary recognition – the agency has guidance that directs us to adopt similar lighting plans to those from International Dark Sky Association.

John endorsed the idea of Dark Sky Designation for the Steens area. Recreation is an economic engine that is important to the economy of the area. The sources of opposition are generally about landowners concerned with additional mandates, and there are people who just don't want to do anything that attracts more people to come to certain areas. Teresa is going to track the Dark Sky Sanctuary designation conversations for our area and keep the group updated. A letter of support from the SMAC could help with a recognition for the Steens.

The meeting closed with confirmation of the next session date and details:

Next meeting: January 25-26, 2024

Location: Bend, Oregon

Potential agenda items:

- Bridge Creek EIS (potential formal recommendation for alternative(s)/decision
- Presentation about grazing management/science
- Nature's Advocate Inholder Access
- Page Springs Weir
- Steens Act Review – Purpose of SMAC, Charter review (Terry Turner)
- Presentation about Steens Act development, intent, purpose of SMAC, etc.
- Travel Management Planning (DFO Update)
- IRA Funding/project priorities (DFO Update)
- Smyth/Kiger EA (DFO Update)

- Recreation Program update
- SMAC priorities brainstorm/discussion
- Ecology of Steens Mountain

Meeting minutes approved by/on:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mike Fox', written in a cursive style.

Mike Fox, Chair
November 17, 2023