

**Western Montana RAC Meeting Notes**  
**Butte Field Office**  
**2/28/2008**

**RAC Members Present:** Dan Lucas, Jack Kirkley, Sam Samson, Richard Young, Mack Long, Robin Cunningham, Steve Flynn, Michael Gibson, Nate Finch, Dennis Phillippi

**RAC Members Absent:** Francis Auld, Joyceann Thompson, Corby Anderson, David Schulz, Mitzi Rossillon

**BLM Staff Present:** Tim Bozorth, Nancy Anderson, Rick Hotaling, Marilyn Krause, Bill Hensley

**Guests:** Joni Packard (Forest Service - Regional Recreation RAC Coordinator and Fee Program Coordinator), Dave Payne (Helena National Forest), Bill Fansler (Kootenai National Forest Recreation Program Manager), Mike Waite (representing Congressman Denny Rehberg), Jack Jones (representing the Montana Shooting Sports Association).

The meeting was called to order by Dan Lucas, RAC chairperson. Administrative details were taken care of and introductions were made. Handouts were distributed, including a list of BLM employee job titles for the Western Montana Zone.

Marilyn mentioned the RAC recruitment process for 2008 – the official notice will be published in the Federal Register today and probably followed up with a press release today or tomorrow. It is open for a period of 45 days, with RAC nominations due April 14<sup>th</sup>. Along with that, Marilyn announced that earlier this week Joyce Thompson (representing the OHV community) officially resigned from the RAC. That interest slot will need to be refilled. Dick asked how much time is left on Joyceann's term and Marilyn replied that her term expires in 2010. Robin Cunningham and Dennis Phillippi's terms expire this year and neither will be eligible for reappointment. Mitzi Rossillon, David Schulz and Francis Auld are all eligible to be re-appointed. Marilyn will email applications to RAC members and the applications are also available on the BLM web site. The key thing applicants need to have is a letter of recommendation or letter of support from whomever/whatever group they would be representing. The new terms are supposed to be appointed the 3<sup>rd</sup> week in September, but it's usually been October.

Marilyn asked if the RAC members would like a summary of the Rangeland Health Assessments for Standards & Guides. Some RAC members were interested, so those will be sent out.

**Field Manager Updates:**

**Missoula Field Office Update:**

- We are wrapping up work on our watershed assessment in Rock Creek. The assessment will cover 11,700 acres of public land. We will be preparing our Environmental Assessment this spring and anticipate holding one or two open houses as part of our public review. The next area targeted for a watershed assessment is Marcum Mountain. In 2009 we will be starting our prep plan for our RMP.
- We are currently working on three stewardship projects. We will be re-advertising the Garnet Stewardship project this spring. The project will treat approximately 300 acres around the ghost towns of Garnet and Coloma.
- The Five Mile Sub-division Stewardship Project will treat 35 acres that were given a high risk rating under the Missoula County Wildfire Protection Plan. It's located approximately 5 miles up the Garnet Range Road. There is also funding available with the county for adjacent landowners to treat their private property.
- Our third project is in Bear Creek Flats. This is an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) located on the Blackfoot River. It was classified as an ACEC because of the mature Ponderosa pine, western larch, and Douglas-fir located on the site. The project will treat about 215 acres by removing some of the under-

story and ladder fuels. We held a public meeting to discuss these projects last November and received favorable comments. We are currently working through our NEPA process and are planning to have both projects ready for advertisement by July. Steve Flynn asked: is the 5-mile Sub-division really small and do those small ones work? Nancy responded this is just to treat the BLM lands by the sub-division. Steve asked if there was a reason the BLM went with a stewardship project and Nancy said there isn't much commercial there and they are doing a lot of thinning work there – there's not much volume coming off of it. As a State, we had targets for stewardship projects. Rick said the BFO has had some larger projects: the Clancy/Unionville project and another one is proposed. Sam asked when it says "treat", what is meant by that. And after thinning, what do you do with the by-products from the thinning? Nancy said it depends on the site. They have done a lot of grinding, and some under-burning. The goal is to not have a lot of slash left on the ground. Sam asked if that is contracted out and Nancy said yes. Dick asked what the difference is between stewardship and healthy forest and it was suggested that Dick ask Bill Hensley that question in the afternoon.

- We plan to offer the Flint Creek timber sale later this year. The sale is located in Granite County and the volume is approximately 2 MMBF. We are working with Philipsburg on some haul route issues, as the haul route comes through Philipsburg. BLM can dictate how the timber gets to a public road, but once you're on a public road it's up to the purchaser and they just have to follow existing laws. The town wants the BLM to use another county road that would need a lot of work done on it to make it a haul road, but the BLM can't do that under the timber sale contract. So the BLM hopes to work with the city on hauling restrictions and timing of hauls, etc. to meet their concerns. Dan Lucas asked if there was any chance of hooking into a forest service road, but Nancy said there was a problem with that. Nancy said the alternative would be to drop those units from the sale, which they wouldn't want to do.
- We just completed the 10 Mile timber sale. This was a 15 acre salvage of bug-killed timber which we offered after being approached by Stimson and adjacent landowners.
- We are preparing our burn plans for our spring prescribed fires. We will be treating about 750 acres.
- We are finishing up 12 rangeland health assessments in the Rock Creek drainage. We will be issuing those decisions later this year.
- The Department of Interior and ARCO have signed the Consent Decree for the Clark Fork superfund site. The Missoula Field Offices manages 15 tracts along the Clark Fork River which were covered by the decree. We will be receiving approximately \$300,000 as part of the settlement which will be used to treat weeds. The Consent Decree was the result of over ten years of negotiations. Hopefully we'll be working with Fish Wildlife & Parks to look at getting better public access for those sites. Right now the majority of the sites are accessible only from the river.

### **Dillon Field Office Update:**

- We plan to conduct 2,000 acres of prescribed fire this spring on the East slope of the Ruby's, in the Highlands and Upper Horse Prairie. We plan on 125 acres of mechanical treatments in the South Tobacco Roots this spring and summer. We have already completed 450 acres of mechanical treatments in the South Tobacco Roots and Upper Horse Prairie last fall; basically thinning and removing conifer encroachment.
- We were asked to submit a MT proposal highlighting a non-energy project for a national telecast on the Bureau's Healthy Lands Initiative (HLI). The Healthy Lands Initiative is an effort by the BLM & DOI to address some of the impacts from energy development. To date MT is not a part of the HLI; it is focused on states like NM, UT, CO, WY. Our South Tobacco Roots projects that are a result of the 2006 South Tobacco Roots Watershed Assessment were selected as one of three areas to participate in this telecast. As a direct result of the presentation and discussing the benefits of these projects to fisheries, Montana BLM received an additional \$50,000 in fisheries funding for FY-08 from our Washington Office. \$40,000 was for project work on Westslope Cutthroat Trout streams in the South Tobacco Roots and \$10,000 was provided to Missoula Field Office. Steve asked what the project is specifically. Tim responded that in the South Tobacco Roots it is primarily cutting junipers out of riparian areas, where they have encroached and choked out the woody vegetation.

- We are developing the EA's for the watershed assessments conducted in 2007. These were the Beaverhead West (91,000 acres and 51 grazing allotments) and Red Rocks (53,000 acres and 23 allotments).
- We are preparing for this year's watershed assessments in Rochester Basin (32,500 acres and 22 grazing allotments), East Pioneer's (27,000 acres and 16 grazing allotments), and East bench (20,000 acres and 12 grazing allotments). We are on schedule to complete all Term Grazing Permit renewals by 2009.
- Seasonal hires for this summer include: a 2 person trail crew for the Continental Divide Trail, a 2 person sign crew to complete implementation of the Dillon Field Office Travel Management Plan; getting the signs up (the new SW interagency travel map should be out this spring), 2 weed laborers for the Madison Valley and 2 weed laborers for the Tobacco Roots, a weed laborer to work out of Dillon, 4 range techs, 3 bio-techs, 1 fish tech, 3 laborers, one career seasonal laborer and 2 forestry techs, 1 Madison River Ranger, 1 Madison Park Ranger and a career seasonal park ranger to be based in Ennis. 25 seasonals total.
- We have recently had a Forester and Wildlife Biologist retire and are replacing them with Student Career Employment Program (SCEP) graduates that we recruited.
- In conjunction with FWP, USFS and Trout Unlimited we plan to complete non-native brook trout removal in four streams (Dyce Creek, Everson Creek, Dark Hollow Creek and Greenhorn Creek) including over 12 miles of stream.
- We are preparing a report summarizing the results of the last several years of sage grouse telemetry work. We captured, collared and tracked the movements of 28 sage grouse in Centennial Valley during 2007. We are planning to track birds from the Sweetwater Area this year as well. We are getting good information on the movement of those birds. They are moving a lot further than we thought they would. Some of them are going into Idaho and coming back. The concern was they would move from the leks and then nest within a couple of miles, but they are moving about 12 miles. Dick asked how the BLM is getting rid of the Brook Trout. Tim responded: Electrofishing, so they are not using poison. Dennis asked which streams are being treated. Tim responded: Dyce Creek, Everson Creek, Dark Hollow and Greenhorn. Dennis asked if the agencies or Trout Unlimited ever gets complaints about the removal of the Brook Trout. Tim responded that these particular streams are fairly small, remote, and brushy and not high recreation use areas so there haven't been complaints. Michael said there was a lot of feedback on the Specimen Creek Project, but not so much on the more isolated creeks.
- Weed control efforts will be ramped up this year in the South Tobacco Roots where a two person BLM crew will focus during the 2008 field season. Riparian areas, roads, trails, and washes will be highest priority for treatment.
- We are analyzing two new communications sites (Antelope Peak in the Centennial and Sierra east of Dillon) and replacing two existing sites (Mauer Mountain and Virginia City Hill) as part of the Interoperability Montana projects to upgrade emergency communications. The construction of these sites is funded by the Department of Homeland Security and the State of Montana. We are working with Beaverhead and Madison Counties and hope to have the Mauer Mtn. and VC Hill sites authorized this spring. Dick asked if the towers would be large ones. Tim said they are 100 ft towers, with a 12 x 26 ft. building, similar to the site in Dillon.
- We have two areas we will offer for timber sales this spring, Shale Creek near Polaris and N1 on the north side of the Centennial. Shale Creek is 230 acres and 800 MBF. N1 is 85 acres and 140 MBF. The Price Creek/Bean Creek Aspen Treatment/Salvage on 1,200 acres involving 2.5 MMBF will take place this summer.
- We have been conducting public meetings with MTFWP to discuss implementation this spring of the joint Special Recreation Permits for commercial use on the Madison River. The Madison River is the most heavily fished river in Montana and utilized by at least 150 outfitters. We've gotten good feedback as far as the details of how to go about the process; the log books, the placards for the boats and other details of the implementation. Dick asked if there had been a lot of controversy about this. Michael said he'd heard some feedback from some of the outfitters regarding the percentage of the gross. Tim clarified that it is a percentage of the gross from activity that takes place on the Madison River between the Forest Service boundary by Quake Lake and down to the confluence of the Missouri. Tim said that in a way it is a yearly

fee – you pay at the end of the year, on 3% of your gross. Michael said the feedback he is getting is that the amount of time spent on the paperwork is a concern. Mack said that when they started the SRPs on the Blackfoot, there was quite a bit of paperwork the first year or so and then once the outfitters had worked it out, the following years weren't so bad. Dick asked if there is a restriction on numbers. Tim said no. There are certain river management rules you have to follow to do allocated use. The Madison has not started that, although there will be some survey work done this summer to look at peoples' views and impressions on what their experience is. But putting people under SRP is an entirely separate process from the river management rules state process. The BLM has been required to have commercial users under permit since the 60's. It hasn't been done on the Madison because it was problematic due to ownership. The BLM has waited until the FWP had their commercial rules in place, so they could do this in conjunction with FWP. Michael asked if the BLM would have to add a staff person to administer this. Tim replied there has been a person hired to manage the SRP program on the Madison. The fees will help pay for that. There is also an additional state ranger position, and the wardens have re-prioritized and will be spending more time on the Madison. One thing that became evident throughout this process is that everyone wants more enforcement. Dennis asked if the money goes back to the BLM and the FWP. Tim said that is still being worked out, but it will stay local. Marilyn put this topic down as a potential future topic.

- Maintenance of recreational facilities on the Madison River includes:
  - At Red Mountain South we are completing road surfacing and the pavilion construction.
  - At Canady Boat Launch we are making modification to address safety concerns.
  - At Story Ditch we are graveling portions of the road and parking area and installing an outhouse.
  - Windy Point we are doing the design work to address safety concerns at the existing user created launch site.
  - At Palisades we are finalizing the design for maintenance of the campground and boat launch. Robin asked if there will be big RV sites at Palisades and Tim responded they are not huge sites. There will be new platforms, but there are only 7 sites there. Tim said they do want input on some of the design work. They will be looking at changing the flow pattern and want to look at a double ramp.
- The land exchange for lands on the Big Hole River is proceeding.
- We have received a Notice of Intent (application) to conduct Geophysical Exploration west of Lima. The project involves State, USFS, BLM and private lands. We sent you the public scoping statement this week on this project. Depending upon what is received back in the joint scoping regarding the BLM, USFS and State lands involved in this project, will determine the level of NEPA conducted. The project proposal is for utilizing a 40 lb charge in a 3" 60' hole every 220' to obtain geophysical data. Access will be via "buggy rig for slopes under 15% and heli-portable drill for slopes >15%. Cultural clearance will be conducted 10 meters around the shot holes. We will be developing conditions of approval in conjunction with MDFWP.

Dennis asked if there is a purity requirement on the existing population of Westslope Cutthroat (WCT)? Tim said the Dillon Field Office has 20 individual pure strain populations of WCT. There are three more we are awaiting genetic sampling on, that we suspect are 100% pure. In addition, we have 5-6 populations of 99% pure, 6 populations that are 98% pure, 5 populations that are 97%, 6 populations that are 95% pure and 8 populations that are 80-94% pure WCT.

- We are evaluating a project to remove mine tailings from Rochester Creek (NW of Twin Bridges); the tailings would be trucked to Golden Sunlight Mine and processed. BLM will conduct the reclamation of the site consisting of spreading topsoil and reseeded. This was a previous abandoned mine reclamation project prior a claim being filed upon the tailings.

### **Butte Field Office Update**

- **Butte Resource Management Plan (RMP):** The proposed RMP/Final EIS has been reviewed by the Montana State Office and is currently being updated to incorporate comments. The next step will be for the proposed RMP/Final EIS to be reviewed by the Washington Office. We are still on schedule for the proposed RMP/Final EIS to be published in August 2008.

- **Graymont Mine:** The life of mine expansion to the south is proposed. The expansion is proposed into an area of unexploded ordnance (UXO) near the National Guard training area. A contractor is working on the draft EIS for this proposal. A draft is planned for public release sometime in the spring of 2008.
- **Legislative EIS for the Limestone Hills National Guard Withdrawal:** The Montana Army National Guard and BLM are working on responses to the comments and preparing a recommendation to the respective Departmental Secretaries. The BLM recommendation will be from the State Director.
- **Causeway Exchange with PPL Montana:** This action would exchange landlocked BLM land with some land with a private landowner to improve public access in the Hauser Lake area. An exchange agreement has been initiated with PPL and the mineral report has been completed. We have preliminary approval to proceed with the exchange. The ID team is starting work on the EA.
- **Golden Sunlight Mine Wind Farm:** We have returned the ROW proposal from Wind Hunter to install a 50 Mw wind generated facility on the west waste rock dump for GSM. Wind Hunter has officially withdrawn their application for that wind farm. However, Barrick Gold Corporation, which owns GSM, has contacted the BLM asking what it would take to establish a wind farm there. They have not filed an official application. Dick asked why Wind Hunter had withdrawn their application. Rick responded that possibly the economics were not there. There was some question about the stability of establishing the generating facilities on reclaimed mine land. In addition, the existing mine roads would need to undergo major construction.
- **Montana Tunnels Mine:** Montana Tunnels mine near Jefferson City is proposing a life of mine expansion. A draft EIS is proposed to be released in early 2008.
- **Fish Two Heart Project:** The Fish 2 Heart stewardship project was awarded to RY Lumber of Townsend. The project is a mix of fuels reduction, riparian restoration, and timber harvest in an area southeast of Butte. The project is scheduled as a multi-year project.
- **Scratchgravel Hills Fuels Treatment Project:** A fuels reduction project in the scratchgravel hills outside of Helena. This is proposed as a stewardship project and the majority of the work would be accomplished using mechanical methods. The goal of the project is to reduce fuels loads and to utilize as much biomass as possible. The project will be implemented in the spring of 2008.
- **Tie Creek – Alder Creek Fuels Break:** During the Pattengail fire of 2007 (south of Wise River), the fire team started construction of a fuels break from Bryant creek to Alder creek. The fuels break followed existing roads where possible. The last section of the fuels break was not completed. This project would complete that last section of line on BLM land (approximately ½ mile).
- **Great Divide Pine Beetle Treatment:** A pine beetle infestation within the area of the Great Divide Ski Area is being proposed for treatment. The treatment will include the removal of select trees, either currently infested or at risk for infestation. The project is expected to be completed this year.
- **Wise River Forest Health Project:** A forest health project on BLM lands south of Dewey between Wise River and Divide. The nearly 2500 acre project area is on the south side of Highway 43 and the Big Hole River. The proposal is to treat the project area using a variety of methods including mechanical thinning, thinning using hand tools, prescribed fire, and helicopter thinning. The vegetation treatments will be designed to promote diversity and vigor within the forests. The project is also intended to reduce the hazard in the wildland urban interface and restore critical wildlife habitat. Dick asked if this is a stewardship candidate. Rick replied that part of it is. The project is currently in the planning stages. We hope to have a decision out this summer and starting implementation in FY 2009. It is a multi-year project.
- **Deep Creek Project (near Wise River):** Inland Meadows – another pine beetle infestation. We will be treating 400+ acres of public land, thinning out trees. Steve asked for the schedule on this project – Rick said it would probably be offered this spring.
- **Park County Gravel Sale:** The BLM is reviewing a request by Park County to open a gravel pit near the town of Livingston. The gravel removed from the pit would be used on roads within Park County. A public meeting is planned in Livingston on March 12, 2008.

Dennis asked about the prescribed burn project north of Whitehall – what were the results from that? Rick said he needs to get a report from Clayton Marlow. They found what they expected to find – if you remove the conifers,

you see an increase of water available in those areas. We are still looking at how it affected the wildlife habitats and the general impact on the land.

**Forest Service (FS) Recreation Fee Proposal Briefing:**

Dick Young asked Joni Packard about Baucus actively campaigning against this law – will this be a wasted effort and get thrown out? Joni said she couldn't discuss the implications of any pending legislation, but the FS will continue doing business as usual until something changes. Joni said Senator Baucus did introduce legislation to appeal REA. As part of that legislation, it would basically reinstitute the portions of the land and water conservation fund that were repealed when REA was enacted. REA would go away under that legislation, but basically we would then go back to LWCF. There would be a piece of the legislation that would be similar in format to REA, but that would apply only to the National Park Service. BLM, FS and USFWS could still charge fees if this legislation was enacted, but fees would be collected under LWCF and those fees would go to the treasury. Under LWCF, the FS could still charge for campgrounds and for rental cabins, but under a different authority. Under REA right now, the FS is able to retain the fees locally.

Joni said there is currently a back-log of fee proposals as it has been close to 20 years since some of the fees have been increased. For the next year, there will be quite a few proposals coming before the RAC for each meeting, and then in a year or two that will fall off. Joni mentioned the consumer price index model and handed out a list of the fee sites that fit within that model (sites that will be exempt from RAC review and recommendation because they fall within the level of inflation based on the consumer price index). There are about 25 sites that fit within that exemption. Most of the fee increases on the Beaverhead Deer-lodge Forest are about \$5 increments on the cabins; for the Bitterroot National Forest, the campground fee increases were typically in the \$2 range; on the Flathead National Forest there are 4 sites that fit the exemption model.

**Dave Payne (Recreation Program Manager - Helena National Forest)** presented three fee proposals:

All three sites are new sites where fees have not been charged before. Both campgrounds are in the Townsend Ranger District. Moose Creek Cabin is an old Forest Service cabin on the Helena Ranger District, located about 10 miles west of Helena. The Forest Service has put a lot of work into this cabin. The Regional Fee Board has given its approval to all three sites.

The Forest Service is planning to implement the campground fees on August 1<sup>st</sup>; implementation on the Moose Creek Cabin could be within the next month or early this spring. The fees are needed for maintaining the sites. There has been public involvement regarding implementing these fees. Articles have been published in the newspaper, senators and county commissioners have been contacted, an open house was held, and information is posted on the Forest Service web site. The only comments received regarding these three sites were positive comments. There are people who are opposed to the Forest Service implementing any new fees or increasing existing fees, but most people seem to understand the need for fees at developed sites.

<b>SITE NAME</b>	<b>2007 FEE</b>	<b>PROPOSED 2008 FEE</b>	<b>LAST FEE INCREASE</b>
Moose Creek Cabin	0	\$50	New Fee Site
Gipsy Lake Campground	0	\$10	New Fee Site
Skidway Campground	0	\$10	New Fee Site

Dan Lucas commented there are no free uses of public lands - someone has to pay the bill in one way or another. Looking at the projected revenue on these sites, the Forest Service will still be losing money on the sites. For a full cost recovery, the fees would have to be much higher. Mack commented that on developed sites, this is probably one of the best bargains you can get anywhere.

**Bill Fansler (Recreation Program Manager - Kootenai National Forest)** presented 20 fee proposals:  
 (Information on these sites can be found at: <http://www.fs.fed.us>)

The Kootenai is 2.2 million acres and the third largest recreation program for the northern region. 60% of the recreation use comes from Lincoln County. In the last two decades the timber and mining economies have bottomed out, so Lincoln County has the highest or second highest unemployment rate in the state of Montana. The Forest Service kept that in mind when looking at proposing an increase in fees. They are asking for only moderate price increases, to accommodate the Lincoln County economy. The Montanans for Multiple Use Group has an opposition to all fees. The FS invited someone from the group to attend the RAC meeting during the public comment period. The MT for Multiple Use Group sent an email to the BLM, which was presented to RAC members. The FS has contacted congressional delegates regarding these fee proposals, but did not receive any comments from them. The FS rangers met with business people, and the feedback from that group was supportive.

**Camping Fee Increases**

<b>SITE NAME</b>	<b>2007 FEE</b>	<b>PROPOSED 2008 FEE</b>	<b>LAST FEE INCREASE</b>
Bad Medicine Campground	\$8	\$10	2002
Bull River Campground	\$8	\$10	2003
North Dickey Lake Campground	\$7	\$10	1996
North Shore Campground	\$7	\$10	2004
McGillivray Campground	\$7	\$10	2004
McGregor Lake Campground (in Flathead County)	\$8	\$12	2004

**Group Site Increases**

<b>SITE NAME</b>	<b>2007 FEE</b>	<b>PROPOSED 2008 FEE</b>	<b>LAST FEE INCREASE</b>
Bull River Group	\$25 for each group of 50 people	\$30 for 1-50 people; \$60 for 51-100	2007
McGillivray Group	\$30 for each group of 50 people	\$40 for 1-50 people; \$80 for 51-100	2004
Timberlane Group	\$30 for each group of 50 people	\$40 for 1-50 people; \$80 for 51-100; \$120 for 101 - 150	2004
Overnight camping, if authorized, at these three Group Sites	\$0 -\$7, depending on the site	\$7 for each camping unit (tent, trailer, motorhome, etc.	2004

## Cabin/Lookout Rental Increases

SITE NAME	2007 FEE	PROPOSED 2008 FEE	LAST FEE INCREASE
Big Creek Baldy LO	\$30	\$40	2004
Garver Mtn LO	\$25	\$35	2003
Gem Peak LO	\$25	\$35	1989
MT Baldy Buckhorn LO	\$25	\$35	1999
Sex Peak LO	\$25	\$35	1989
Webb Mtn LO	\$25	\$35	2001
Yaak Mtn LO	\$25	\$35	2003

Steve Flynn asked what would be done with the difference between the operating costs and the increased revenue. Bill said that in most cases, the FS will still be short even with the fee increases. The increase in fees will be used for annual maintenance. The fees will not take care of deferred maintenance; deferred maintenance will be taken care of with other funds. Dan clarified that when the FS is generating revenue through the REA act, the money stays on the district and can be used for the recreation program. Bill said yes, the money will be used by the Kootenai National Forest, for the recreation program.

Dick asked Joni how many sites are in each location on the price tool list. Joni said she could look into adding that to the price tool.

### **Public Comment Period:**

Jack Jones spoke on behalf of Gary Marbut (director of the Montana Shooting Sports Association). RAC members were given a copy of an email sent by Gary Marbut and a copy of Executive Order 13443-Facilitation of Hunting Heritage and Wildlife Conservation, signed by the President August 16, 2007. Rick commented that while working on the Butte Field Office (BFO) Resource Management Plan (RMP), the BFO had to address some of the points of that Executive Order in the RMP.

- Jack Jones went over the Executive Order 13443 – Facilitation of Hunting Heritage and Wildlife Conservation. The Order directs “Federal agencies that have programs and activities that have measurable effect on public land management, outdoor recreation, and wildlife management, including the DOI and the Department of Agriculture, to facilitate the expansion and enhancement of hunting opportunities and the management of game species and their habitat”. Jack said the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep was one of the lead organizations that met with the President to draft this Order. This directive directs the BLM and the FS to review and revise current programs and plans to enhance hunting opportunities on public lands which includes public land access for that purpose. He feels that public land access is one of the most serious issues in Montana.
- Jack said the group vigorously opposes any increase in fees or additional fees to use public lands, as people are already paying with their tax dollars. He said that the Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 110-161) was signed into public law December 26, 2007, providing funding for government agencies for FY 2008. He is awaiting the BLM to respond to his FOIA on BLM wildlife and fisheries budgets in Montana and the Executive Order. In addition, he said there needs to be better fiscal responsibility and accountability by agencies on the handling of this appropriated money under the Appropriations Laws. He feels that fee proposals should include a broader spectrum of public comment.

After Jack’s presentation, Marilyn asked what the RAC group wanted to do regarding the FS fee proposals. Robin suggested that even with the lack of a quorum, those present could take a tentative vote on the fee proposals and



then have it ratified once a quorum becomes available. Marilyn said the guidance in the RAC Standard Operating Procedures is not that specific.

Dennis asked for clarification on Jack Jones' comments regarding fees. Is it out of bounds to appropriate more money when there is already a budget in place? Mack commented that the dollars and appropriations that Jack mentioned are for the general management of the BLM and the FS. The fees that are proposed here are for specific sites, for specific uses, to be used by people who want to utilize those and there are additional costs that come with that (propane, maintenance costs, toiletries, etc.). So for these fees, people are paying for an enhanced opportunity. Jack Kirkley pointed out that you can camp for free on much of the BLM and FS public lands. But if you want the amenities of a developed site, then it is reasonable to say there is a cost to maintain those sites. Jack Jones said there has been a proposal for a general recreation fee for using public lands. Tim clarified that it is prohibited by the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) which is what we are working under now. There is no general recreation fee that we're contemplating or charging currently for the use of public lands or related waters (for BLM and FS). We are prohibited from charging a fee for parking or for using public lands for hunting or fishing. Rick said that in the past there were proposals for charging fees for scenic byways for example, but that is what resulted in the legislation that we are currently operating under – that legislation made all those proposals illegal. There must be certain amenities at a campground in order for the BLM or FS to be allowed to charge fees. Jack mentioned the Anaconda Job Corps as an option for the agencies to work with. Rick said the BLM has worked with the Anaconda Job Corps, as well as with the MT Conservation Corps.

Joni said none of the fee sites being proposed by the FS are totally self sufficient. The FS has volunteers and they have partnerships with local communities – the FS uses an array of resources to keep up the facilities. In the mid-1980s the agencies were seeing an increasing use in public lands, but congress realized they couldn't keep increasing the budget of the federal agencies to take care of the increasing use and demand. So in the early 1990's the Fee Demo Program authorized four federal agencies to test the feasibility of fee retention in keeping that money locally and putting that money back into the local area. Congress encouraged the federal agencies to be very innovative, so the FS, BLM and NPS tried some things. Not all of the proposals worked. But the intent of congress at that time was that the more specialized the service that an individual was benefiting from, the philosophy was and still is that the user pay a bit more of the cost of providing that facility. For things that benefit the public as a whole, they intended the appropriations would cover. With all the demands for federal dollars, congress was trying to figure out how to stretch the dollars the best we can.

Sam motioned to go with Robin's suggestion of voting. In a show of thumbs, the RAC group voted to accept the fee proposals presented by the Forest Service, for both the Helena and the Kootenai National Forests. After lunch, Nate Finch agreed with the rest of the RAC, so there was a quorum on approving the fee proposals.

Dick asked if Joni wanted the RAC to officially sign off on the list of sites that would be exempt from voting on by the RAC. Joni said she would appreciate that. The RAC agreed to accept the exempt list.

Joni asked if there were any topics relating to the FS the RAC would want discussed at the state-wide meeting. If so, members can send suggestions to Marilyn.

Sam asked for clarification on the next RAC meetings:

May 20-21 – Billings

September 4 – Dillon

November 29 – Butte

### **Election of Chair & Vice-Chair:**

Dennis nominated **Dan Lucas** for **Chair**, and all were in favor.

Dick asked if Robin is still available for Vice-Chair – Marilyn said he's only available until September. Dennis nominated **Mack Long** for **Vice-Chair** and all were in favor.

## **Cooperative Rangeland Monitoring (Dennis Phillippi):**

As Dennis has worked with his consulting business across the west, he has encountered about four different approaches to rangeland monitoring on BLM and FS lands, which tends to be confusing to the public.

- (1) BLM does the monitoring
- (2) BLM does the monitoring with the permittee
- (3) BLM and permittee works with the extension or state government, FWP etc. to do the monitoring together
- (4) BLM and permittee with extension or state, FWP do the monitoring together along with environmental organizations

Steve Flynn asked for clarification on what is meant by rangeland monitoring. Dennis replied monitoring is getting people together to look at riparian areas, uplands, etc. to assess the rangeland health together. Dennis asked for clarification on what the current approach is for the BLM. He feels there should be a policy or a standard approach to monitoring. In central Wyoming, he ran into a situation where the BLM, FWP, permittee, and state were monitoring riparian areas jointly and they found monitoring sites that had been set up by two environmental groups who were doing their own monitoring. They had set up cages and monitoring transects right near the BLM's. The concern is over a separate data base – where will that play into the process?

Dennis would like to come up with a cooperative monitoring program process that everyone can buy into; one that represents all interested parties. The people doing the monitoring need to be credible (certified, and have an understanding of the BLM monitoring practices). Nate commented that when there are outside organizations doing their own monitoring, he has concerns about their motive. Is the motive to make progress on an allotment, to find solutions to some of the issues that may be on that particular allotment or is it to prove their point or try to remove livestock by coming up with their own set of data? He said Dennis' suggestion could be a very valuable tool. If all interested parties want to participate in the monitoring from the start, then a lot of the arguments are taken care of then rather than later and progress can be made.

Dennis said that some districts don't have a budget for monitoring, so permittees are being asked to do the monitoring. The joint cooperative monitoring is an opportunity for education. There has been good success with this in the Dillon area. He suggested this would be a good topic for the statewide meeting.

Dan Lucas commented that one of the benefits of semi-formalizing a process is shifting the focus of what drives monitoring. He feels it is usually compliance or some issue of contention that initially starts the monitoring program and that's not the way it should be. The resources are dynamic; they are always changing and it's a good idea for the permittee and the administrator to be able to exchange ideas regarding monitoring so everyone is on the same page. Sometimes the permittee is so involved in taking care of their business that they don't have the time to become involved with and become familiar with the Standards and Guides. But if they are doing some monitoring together, they can see what's going on and can have a chance to talk back and forth to find solutions to any issues that arise. The benefit to the permittee is that often times they get a heads up that a particular allotment is not headed in the right direction rather than get a letter that they are out of compliance and facing a reduction.

Dennis said that in the Wyoming situation, the BLM, permittee and everyone involved, signed off in the field as to what they all agreed to – then it becomes part of the record. Marilyn clarified that this is not done for every allotment, but only for ones where an issue has come up. She asked if there is a particular model Dennis is suggesting. Dennis said he likes the approach Dillon has taken – it's more cooperative.

Sam asked if the Elkhorn's group is similar. Rick said the Elkhorn's Working Group is similar to the RAC and they contracted (with money from the BLM and FS and Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and others) a vegetative study that came out with some recommendations. Some of those dealt with monitoring sites. The BLM is moving towards a more cooperative approach with permittees and the Elkhorn Working Group. Rick said the one issue you run into is the FACA issue. You can accept the monitoring data as a cooperative group; the BLM just can't make a decision right then and there. Dennis said that in Colorado, they decided to try this for three years. After three

years the accumulated data will lead toward a decision and any adjustments that need to be made. Nate asked if the RAC can start the ball rolling to come up with a model for doing this.

Tim talked about the process they use in Dillon. He feels the model Dennis discussed of four different types of monitoring mirrors an escalating level of concern about the issues on a particular piece of ground. What Dillon does on their watershed assessments is to send out a letter at the beginning of the year explaining to the permittee that the BLM will be looking at their allotment to assess the Standards and Guidelines and they invite the permittee along for the assessment. Permittees and other interested parties are always invited to participate in those efforts (sometimes the mailing list numbers in the hundreds). But Tim said there is almost no involvement from permittees or interested publics. It is a rare instance when a permittee wants to come along. Usually if someone wants to come along it's because there's an issue, where a solution has not been agreed upon. 90 % of the time the BLM will be doing the monitoring on whatever schedule they have and there won't be any need for anything else. The BLM looks at the riparian areas and uplands and makes a determination whether or not they meet standards. Then the BLM meets with the permittee to discuss what they found. It is a rare instance when there is disagreement. But the BLM is not out there monitoring riparian areas continuously. In Dillon there's almost a million acres, and the BLM is on a 10-year rotation of looking at things so they may not be back out to a certain piece of ground for a number of years.

Dennis said the Dillon area is doing a good job, but the same is not the case everywhere. What he is referring to is more when there is an issue that isn't being resolved. Nate said he could see this situation working where there is a lot of interest in a particular allotment. This would be an opportunity for any interested parties to participate. It would be a basis to start from. Mack commented that what is in place now seems to be working OK most of the time. But other groups are beginning to step in and show an interest and it would be best to have all groups working cooperatively.

Dick asked if what Dennis is saying is that it would be nice if there was a fixed process to deal with problem assessments, in which you had a team that would be called in at that time and you would go through meeting together - which is sort of what the BLM is doing already. Tim said it would be for when there is an allotment that isn't meeting standards and you did not agree on the approach to take, and at some point you needed some other involvement. Dennis asked if Dillon has been pretty free of litigation and Tim responded that there have been attempts, but nothing has progressed to that. Dennis said it is not like that elsewhere. Nate said it seems that if it becomes contentious it usually has something to do with endangered species. Maybe a better system could be used to prevent litigation, which wastes the time of BLM staff.

Marilyn asked what the RAC would like to do with this issue. Dan asked Dennis if he could put together a template of how this would work and then present it to the RAC and provide that as a voluntary tool for the BLM. Tim said he would like to work with Dennis on that, along with Pat, and wants to make sure Nancy and Rick are in the loop as well. Marilyn asked if they could have a draft together for the May meeting. Tim and Dennis said they could do that. Dan asked if everyone in the RAC is agreeable to Dennis and Tim working up a draft and the group agreed. Dan said as far as he is concerned, one of the trigger points would definitely be allotments that are not meeting standards. Nate said potential endangered species is another. He feels land managers and permittees will know when they need to use this process. Tim said there are different tools. In some cases, you can use a sub-group of the RAC; in other cases they have involved consultants or people from the extension or MSU or both.

### **Forest Health Presentation (Bill Hensley – MT/Dakotas BLM Forestry Lead)**

Bill presented a power point presentation on forest health in Montana (see attachment). He said there are three main definitions of forest health.

- The first one, from American Forests: “A condition of forest ecosystems that sustains their complexity while providing for human needs”.
- From the Dictionary of Forestry: “The perceived condition of a forest derived from concerns about such factors as age, structure, composition, function, vigor, presence of unusual levels of insects or disease, and resilience to disturbance.”

- From the Interagency Forest Health Committee: “The degree to which the biological and physical components of an ecosystem and their relationships are present, functioning, and capable of self-renewal.”

The key bio-physical components of forests that affect functionality and influence self-renewal:

- Soil – what type of soil and how deep
- Nutrients – how well the nutrients are able to be absorbed by the plant matter
- Precipitation
- Vegetation (plants, seeds, fungi) – what is the competing vegetation
- Animals, Insects, Disease

The key functions or processes that define a healthy forest:

- Water capture and release
- Nutrient cycling
- Carbon cycling
- Fire regime
- Succession

Bill showed a sequence of slides, from the Annual Forest Service Aerial Insect and Disease Detection Flights. Every year the FS flies specific areas/flight patterns across Montana, to try to pick up what they call red needle trees or recently dead trees. The data dates back to 1980. The red indicates red needle trees. There are also live green trees within those areas. Jack Kirkley asked if this is done by photographic records of the flight patterns or by satellite. Bill said it is done by someone in a small plane, visually looking. Jack asked if it is GPS'd from the airplane and Bill responded that it is now.

On the slides, the new attacks show up in red; the blue is the old dead tree areas. You can see some shifts taking place over the years; an ebb and flow. In 1988 there were fires in Yellowstone, so a lot of what you see there was burned. You'll notice that in the mid-90s there's not much happening with the bugs in Montana, but they are more active in Idaho. In 2000 they start showing up in Montana again.

Jack Kirkley mentioned the gap between 1994 and 2002 and asked if something happened then to make the difference (such as a cold snap) or is it just a cycle? What is the reason for such a low level of beetle kill during that time? Bill said it would be hard to tell. Normally what controls the bugs is having an extended period of cold weather which will actually kill the larvae in the trees. Some of the data for around Boulder during that timeframe indicated some 20 below zero days that lasted for 1-2 weeks and that may have contributed to it. The other part is the life cycle of the insects. There are a lot of factors to consider. We started running into the drought which could have contributed to this outbreak.

Jack asked if there is a historical look at what the beetle kills have been in the past. Is there any idea of what is “normal”? Bill said most likely you would see an ebb and flow of the bugs. What we need to look at is how many of these big cycles we're having. The forest will recover from this over time.

Steve Flynn said the current conditions of the forest exacerbate and magnify the situation. You have forests that are totally stressed, which really contributes to the success of the beetles. Bill said a lot of it is related to the age of the existing stand and the diameters within that stand. There are a lot of older stands out there that have the right diameter class which is conducive to the bugs being able to drill into and attack the trees. The components are ripe right now for insect attack.

Steve asked what the BLM has as a strategy to address this. Bill said the BLM has a **Public Domain Forestry Program Mission Statement:**

- BLM will manage the Public forests and woodlands to maintain and enhance the health, productivity and biological diversity of these ecosystems.
- A balance of natural resource benefits will be provided to present and future generations.

- The management of forest and woodland resources will be consistent with the principles of multiple use and sustained yield (sustained yield of resources).

### **MT/Dakotas Forestry Direction**

- Identify and timely implement all feasible timber or woodland salvage opportunities. Focus efforts on salvage areas still containing hazardous fuels, wildlife, watershed, soils, local community, or forest management concerns.
- Focus efforts on forest health restoration projects that improve forest resiliency to disturbances from wildfires, insects & diseases, and reduce hazardous fuel loadings. Projects in or next to wildland interface or intermix areas are highest priority.
- Provide for commercial and/or personal use opportunities to utilize vegetative products produced from forest, woodland, and fuel management treatments.
- Investigate and resolve forest and woodland vegetative trespass.

Within that, there are 13 states west of the Mississippi. Some of those have active forestry programs. We're talking about 10-12 million dollar programs entirely for the Bureau for the public domain. Within that is the split across the different states (seen on the power point slide). There is what's called the "big 4": CA, ID, MT, and Eastern Oregon. In MT/Dakotas, you're looking at about a 1.4 million dollar budget to operate on. On the slide, WO is the Washington Office; NTC is the BLM National Training Center; NOC is the National Operations Centers (one in Denver; one in Portland). The 10-12 million dollars is competed by all the states.

Steve asked who sets that number and is it possible to influence that. He feels this bug outbreak is not being addressed adequately. There is a shelf life to the trees and if not addressed, the value is lost.

Bill said that within the MT/Dakotas organization, each state has the flexibility to further define the mission statement. Within ours, part of this addresses a rapid response if possible and feasible to salvage opportunities because we do recognize there is a limited timeframe in which there is an economic value to that material. Within that caveat is the underlying focus that we want forest restoration; we want healthy forests that are resilient to insect and disease attacks and fire, that can help maintain themselves. Our methodology of getting this done is being able to make it commercially available. Within our funding capability, we have different levels of forest management activities going on in several different offices.

Jack asked what percentage of kill you need before it is economically feasible to go in and salvage. Bill said usually you have to harvest more than just the dead trees because there are green trees that are actually already dead. Currently we are in a reactionary mode. The best scenario is to be ahead of the curve and do a green tree forest restoration so the bugs don't come in there in the first place. We don't have that capability because of our funding and staffing levels and because we have a lot of different priorities within the Bureau that we need to address. Jack asked could you actually do a treatment on an unaffected forest that would make it "bugproof". Bill responded: more bug resistant; you could change the diversity of the stand, the age group structure of the stand. Jack asked if you usually have about 3 years to harvest the trees. Bill responded there are a lot of factors affecting that: checking (drying/cracking), or when blue stain comes in, making the trees less desirable. Or the wood borers can move in. Usually you have 1-2 years, but the borers move in so quick, you many only have 4 months.

Steve said he feels it is time to think outside the box. The Forest Service hires strike teams, which is a more economical way to address the issue. It's a group of foresters. They do all the field work. The agency does the NEPA and the strike team does the ground work. They get the job done quickly and the experience is there. He said the other part of the equation is the infrastructure in the state. Todd Morgan with the bureau of business and economic research tracks the forest industry. The forest industry in MT is very tenuous and it is based on supply. It is an integrated industry. Steve feels it would be instructive for the RAC to learn a bit about the forestry industry and its condition. He asked if the BLM has a good handle on how many acres of bug infested trees they have. Bill said he would have to research that, but he thinks it's about 30% total. Butte is approaching the 30% mark. Bill doesn't have the 2007 data, but the trends appear to be going up. Bill said the BLM has hired strike teams, but it is very expensive. The forestry program doesn't have a lot of funding to do that. Another whole issue in the BLM

forestry program is the aging workforce. Many of the existing forestry staff is approaching retirement age, so it takes time to fill the vacancies.

Dan asked: at the National level, has BLM or FS done an analysis of the funding that goes to fire suppression versus the funding that goes to the forestry programs that may prevent the need for fire suppression? Jack suggested it would be helpful if some of the fire suppression money could be used to do proactive urban interface work. Bill said that is occurring already. The BLM has been doing pretty well with joint funding of projects. Rick said they looked at this after the fires of 2000 – using funding for fuels reduction and fuels projects to help offset these super fires we’re fighting. It really helped out the forestry program because they are joint projects. You can’t really treat fuels unless you are also looking at forest health, so one goes in hand with the other. The one issue that came out though is that a lot of that money was put into the urban interface. A lot of the stuff we have is outside that urban interface and there is not as much money in the fuels or forestry program for those areas. But no one has done an analysis in the past few years. It’s like the bug problem. It is larger than what we can logistically or financially deal with. So we do the best we can with the money we have. Bill said there has been an upward trend with the forestry program. The budget has increased.

Nate asked what the process is to get from deciding there’s an area that needs work, to actually doing the work. Bill said the emphasis right now is to look at bigger, broader landscapes and work from a landscape level to try to address the issues and make a significant impact on the ground. Dick asked if you do identify a fairly large chunk of land, wouldn’t that be a candidate for the stewardship program? Since the BLM can’t do it, it might be more economically feasible to outsource it through a stewardship contract. Bill explained that in 2003 the BLM was given authority to do stewardship contracting. They are talking basically about wildlife habitat improvement, healthy forest, watershed improvement, recreational improvements, etc.; it’s a broad list. Within that authority, there is the ability as we restore and produce a more healthy site, if products come off of that that happen to be of commercial value, then we can retain those values of the product offset against the cost of the services. It’s not really trading goods for services; it’s doing service work and having something come off that we can use as an offset against that cost. Within that also, the contracting period was extended – our timber contract sales are a maximum of 3 years; service contracts are 5; stewardship contracts can go out to 10. It also has to be a performance based contract. So it may not be the least cost effective. We cannot go to an individual company according to our authorization because we’re supposed to compete on the open market. It’s been working well. The main thing we’re struggling with is trying to get out of the smaller ones and into the bigger ones because it takes time to get to the point where we can offer something up for bid. Dick commented – so there is a fair amount of BLM money that has to go up front before it can go out to contract. Bill said we don’t necessarily have to do stewardship projects. The BLM can do a traditional timber sale or a forest health treatment. Dick asked how the BLM decides. Bill responded it’s based on what is in the scope of the particular project as to what is the best result; it’s not just on economic grounds. There has to be collaboration with local communities.

### **Topics for the State-Wide RAC Meeting (May 20-21 in Billings):**

The following topics were suggested:

- OHV compliance (see last meeting notes)
- Standards & Guidelines for Forest Health
- Energy Development Impacts (landscape alteration)
- Cooperative Rangeland Monitoring
  - Dennis, Tim, & Pat will draft protocol/guidance for review by RAC

Jack asked how does the Forest Best Management Practices (BMPs) differ from Standards and Guidelines? Bill said that right now the BLM is following the BMPs the state set up. Tim said the BMPs would be how you achieve your standards. The guidelines are BMPs. As for the Standard part of it - the overall goal there is a mission statement. What will the forest look like on the landscape that does that? It will have a certain stocking rate depending on appropriate climate, elevation, aspect, etc. It will have what percentage of bug kill is acceptable; various things that go into what would be a healthy forest site.

Mack asked how many topics the RAC could choose for the state-wide meeting. Nate asked for clarification on the Energy Development topic. Dan felt the Eastern MT RAC would have a topic related to energy development. Marilyn suggested the group prioritize the list in case they only get one or two topics. Some in the group felt that the Eastern MT RAC will most likely raise the OHV topic. Dan suggested the S&Gs and the Cooperative Rangeland Monitoring as the two proposed topics. Mack suggested those should be topic 1 & 2 and then the OHV and energy topics should be left on the list as 3 & 4. Dick said he feels strongly about the OHV compliance as an issue.

Marilyn asked if the group wants a presentation or an opportunity for the RACs to divide into groups and work as focus groups on certain issues. Dick asked about the desired outcome of the meeting. Marilyn said she thinks they are looking for some definite issue priority setting. Mack said it would be nice to have some type of presentation/overview of whatever topics are selected, to help generate the discussion and then go into discussion groups. Jack thought it would be good to have presentations in the morning; then break-out sessions in the afternoon. Marilyn said she would suggest that as an option.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:20 p.m.

*/s/ Daniel E. Lucas*  
Dan Lucas, Chair

Date: 3/24/08