

Western Montana Resource Advisory Council
January 20, 2005
Minutes

Members Present: *Sue Marxer, Rob McCulloch, Ben Deeble, Richard Young, Dennis Phillippi, Roger Peters, Ted Coffman, Donna McDonald, Garry Williams, Joyce Thompson*

Members Absent: *Robin Cunningham, Dan Lucas, Robin Urban, Pat Flowers*

BLM: *Marty Ott, State Director, Nancy Anderson, Missoula Field Manager, Rick Hotaling Butte Field Manager, Tim Bozorth, Dillon Field Manager, Marilyn Krause, Dave Pacioretty, Terina Mullen, Traci Kunz, Butte Field Office*

Guests: *Keith Aune (MT FWP), John Schaeffer (Montana Tunnels), David Cobb (Senator Baucus' office), Pat Platenburg and Greg Hallsten (MT DEQ)*

Welcome

Rick Hotaling welcomed everyone to Butte and introductions were made. It was noted that the election of Chair and Vice Chair could not proceed because there was no quorum in Category 3. Also noted was RAC member Robin Urban cannot be contacted, and since she is no longer in the area, there would be an extended vacancy for her position until the new members were appointed.

The question was raised about changing the two day RAC meeting in Dillon scheduled for Sept. 21 to avoid confusion between old and new RAC members attending.

Recruitment for RAC members begins late March/early April and goes through May.

Sue Lenard asked how many new RAC members were anticipated to take over 09/21/05. It was determined that the following members had expiring terms:

- Roger Peters
- Robin Urban
- Dennis Phillippi
- Robin Cunningham
- Ted Coffman (served 2 consecutive terms and is not eligible for reappointment)

Notebooks were given to RAC members. They were put together by Twinkle Thompson. Her group will be conducting a random survey and may call RAC members/Chairperson.

Manager updates/handouts were provided to members.

Amendment to Oct 21, 2004 Minutes:

Ted Coffman mentioned a mistake in the minutes from the last meeting about the Big Horn sheep discussion. Bighorn sheep were near Quake Lake, not Wall Creek game range, and an amendment to the minutes was made.

State Director's Remarks:

Marty Ott commented about the changing nature and challenges of BLM. Gave brief history of how it all began with grazing and expanded over the years to include managing issues like wilderness, endangered species, OHV/recreation, camping, energy development and other interests.

Federal budget for domestic programs is diminishing; budget for defense is increasing due to current events and the deficit is growing. Management of budget means that adjustments will have to be made over the next couple of years. Positions will have to be held open, services may not be able to be provided, and participation in weed eradication will possibly be diminished.

Blackleaf EIS has been terminated. Planning is now focused in the West Highline area and \$400,000 was transferred to the new planning effort. North Headwaters should begin in 2008 or 2009 depending upon funding.

Scoping/Analysis in 3 areas projected late fall.

- Energy Development is an ongoing focus. About 6 or 8 applications for permit to drill (APDs) (400-500 wells)
- Water concerns – monitoring development is high priority for the state.
- OHV – Richard Hopkins retired – hoping to replace. Managing OHVs is a challenge. We're working with FS and others to help ensure that responsible people continue to be responsible, and irresponsible people be held accountable.

Energy development is of interest to many– especially wind-generated energy. There's a large proposal north of Glasgow (potential for 300 towers that could generate 500 megawatts), a second south of Belgrade and a third in the Judith Gap area.

Ted Coffman said there will be a Weed Control Association meeting January 25-26th in Helena. Dennis Phillippi stated that there would be a meeting about coal bed natural gas development sponsored by the local conservation district in Forsyth on February 24th for those interested. He also mentioned a hearing in Washington, DC to be held March 10, 2005 on invasive species.

Big Horn Sheep Habitat Presentation

Marilyn welcomed Keith Aune, who gave a presentation on the Bighorn Sheep Habitat Restoration program. Covered were disease transmission issues, population decline, issues with separating Bighorn and domestic sheep. On December 6, 2004 there was a meeting with focus groups for improvement to the FWP management program.

Richard Young: Is the Rocky Mountain goat making a difference, do they share habitat?

Keith: Not a big problem, but would be worth considering interfacing. If there's an overlap, it's usually with sheep and elk.

Richard Young: Concerning cycles in populations, is there pre-Lewis & Clark era data suggesting that Bighorns had huge population fluctuations?

Keith: Bighorn immune systems are different from domestic animals. They are researching Bighorn immune systems. Elk immune systems differ from cattle. Traditional veterinary vaccines don't work – they have poor effects. The introduction of novel pathogens across North America did cause problems.

Sue Lenard: What percentage of pathogens is regionally endemic?

Keith: Those are questions we are trying to answer. We have no answers now.

Rob McCulloch: With elk it seems that protein levels, drought, and/or scarce forage seem to trigger illness.

Keith: There's no doubt that the environmental factors affect the immune system and its function.

Ben Deeble: There are 49 herds around the state. How much of a contribution does the BLM make to sustain those herds?

Keith: Southwest and north central herds seem to be sustainable, larger herds. BLM makes an important contribution to their habitat.

Sue Marxer: Are you testing forage?

Keith: Next level of experiment goes to holistic questions, minerals and forage quality. Minerals are essential - too much or too little are both bad.

Sue Marxer: Do they transfer into historical sheep areas?

Keith: Yes, some of the big herds we are transferring from are the Breaks, near Thompson Falls, and the Bitterroot. Those complexes are very sustainable.

Richard Young: They don't migrate much?

Keith: We need to find ways to enhance that potential, to shape animals on the landscape to enhance distribution.

Richard Young: If there is inbreeding, that may be a cause for weak immune systems.

Keith: It could be. It seems to be a bigger immune problem than just inbreeding.

Dennis Phillippi: How much variation are you seeing in the dietary preference between domestics and bighorn sheep?

Keith: I don't know. That could be a great study. There's certainly going to be overlap, there's no doubt about that, but how that plays out on the landscape can be quite interesting. Where Bighorns might be grazing, they may be grazing on the same forage species, but in different sorts of aspects and seasonal patterns.

Ben Deeble: FWP policy is to not let domestic sheep and wild sheep co-mingle and there are maybe two different cattle diseases that have been found in Bighorns. Do you anticipate a time when you recommend against co-mingling between cattle and Bighorns, or are the issues different?

Keith: In general, I think we are going to put energy into domestic sheep transmission issues. Bovine Virus Diarrhea (BVD) not good for cows either, so we may need to work together to address the health problem from the whole "animals on the landscape" perspective. We're trying to pull away from the separation concept because it doesn't work.

Sue Marxer: Any reverse you know of, like cows or sheep reported of contracting a disease?

Keith: It's a two edged sword. You can't point fingers at one and say you're the source; what we have to do is work together with wildlife and livestock.

Rob McCulloch: In source areas, you haven't seen the die-offs?

Keith: Yes, all areas go through die-offs, and then numbers come back up.

Sue Lenard: How is herd size determined? Is there a potential to ship surplus animals out of state?

Keith: Herd size is regionally determined. Yes, ship out is possible, before we do that we have discuss it publicly, we can't just automatically grab sheep and run. We have to make sure we have public support.

Sue Marxer: Are wolves an issue?

Keith: Wolves could very likely become an issue – we're watching the herds of bighorn near Big Sky and Gardiner very closely. Added predation would become an issue for us in terms of management.

Richard Young: Why are bison leaving the park onto Forest Service land a bad idea?

Keith: Brucellosis, management issues, and not much space for bison. Property damage, population issues, tolerance issues, and distribution. They would need to be managed like wildlife.

Richard Young: Elk go outside the park – why are there regulations against bison leaving the park?

Keith: No regulation. When conflict with cattle occurs, then regulations and statutes apply. Bison have been tolerated for decades.

Sue Lenard: How many documented cases are there of brucellosis being transmitted from bison to cattle?

Keith: There are no documented cases of bison to cattle transmission in Montana since they are not allowed to co-mingle. In Wyoming, 5 cases from elk to cattle. It's possible for bison to cattle transmission.

Richard Young: Does this mean that you're going to manage elk similar to bison?

Keith: It's risk-reduction. There is a Brucellosis Management Program. The focus in Montana and Wyoming is on bison, in Idaho on elk.

Sue Marxer: At Texas A&M, brucellosis was transferred from bison to cattle.

Keith: Lots of clinical evidence in experimental conditions, natural conditions are a little different. In Wyoming there was a case that was suspect. Part of the problem is elk and bison share the same feed ground.

Sue Marxer: Brucellosis in humans is known as undulant fever.

Keith: Risk is real for transmission from other species to humans. How do we reduce the risk? Manage the disease. There is information about brucellosis on Greater Yellowstone Interagency Brucellosis Committee (GYIBC) website.

Rob McCulloch: Of the animals killed out of the park, what percentage of brucellosis infection was found?

Keith: Protocol is limited. 13-20% of all animals tested, a quarter of those harbor bacteria.

Rob McCulloch: What is the risk to hunters?

Keith: Fairly low if precautions are taken. The disease is sequestered in lymph nodes. In full blown infections it migrates to reproductive organs. Be careful during gutting, don't open reproductive organs.

Joyce Thompson: Is vaccination ineffective?

Keith: Vaccinations are problematic. There is a low success in elk – more cow-like. Bison are pathogenic. Off the shelf vaccine (RV51) – has some efficacy in bison, but is ineffective in elk.

Joyce Thompson: What is the nationwide population of Bighorn sheep now?

Keith: I don't know. I know Montana's population.

Joyce Thompson: What is the Governor's plan?

Keith: The Governor wants to review the current plan. Montana has no management authority in Yellowstone Park. Three states, regulatory agencies, and others need to work together to create an interagency bison plan.

Dennis Phillippi: Is there consideration given to altering migration routes of bison?

Keith: No, migration is defined by landscape – and dealing with private land when landowners call.

Dillon RMP Update

Tim Bozorth gave an update on the Dillon RMP. Since the draft, they have been looking at over 1700 comments to see if changes need to be made. Recommendations by State Office were received and responded to. Need final approval by mid-March to stay on schedule. Conversations are ongoing with the Washington Office. We will try to brief the director in February. Notice of availability is expected at the end of April followed by a 30 day protest period. If any protests are received they will work with the Washington Office for resolution. Publish date for the final is projected for the end of September. Joyce Thompson asked if a complete inventory of roads and trails was completed and was told that there was an extensive inventory, resulting in an increase of 700 additional miles of roads and trails to the database. Roger Peters asked about the timber trespass in Upper Horse Prairie, which started as a timber harvest on private land and ended up on BLM by mistake, because flagging was lost. Trespassers are charged double for the stumpage taken.

Proposed Montana Tunnels Expansion and Golden Sunlight Supplemental EIS briefing (John Schaeffer and Dave Williams)

Montana Tunnels is located on I-15 at the Jefferson City exit, approximately 50 miles north of Butte and 25 miles south of Helena. Montana Tunnels recently submitted an amendment to the DEQ and BLM to continue mine operations into 2011. Montana Tunnels has an Air Quality permit (DEQ), Water Rights permit (DNRC) and a discharge permit (DEQ). Environmental performance in 19 years shows good compliance, no water quality issues, 300+ acres of reclamation completed. The proposed amendment would mean the relocation of part of Clancy Creek. An ephemeral portion of Pen Yan Creek will be covered. Reclamation changes would call for an open-pit lake and the redirection of Clancy Creek. Buildings would be donated for post-mining. There are meetings every month with those concerned. BLM manages 131 acres within permit boundary. Disturbance will increase from 56 acres to 81-83 acres for waste/gravel stockpile. Wildlife in the area includes elk, golden eagles, and bluebirds. The access road is to remain open.

Dave Williams gave a status report on Golden Sunlight Mine. The draft Supplemental EIS is available. The existing alternative is a no-pit alternative. Also looked at were partial-pit backfill and an underground sump alternative. The EIS process of 97 or 98 did not evaluate the pit backfill alternative. The judge ordered the agencies to complete an analysis. An underground sump alternative was selected, primarily because of water quality issues. There will be a public meeting in Whitehall on January 31st. Public comments are due February 14th.

Pat Platenburg stated that it is a very controversial issue. The matter could end up in court if it's found to be unconstitutional. Melanin Associated Antigen (MAA) process was used to identify issues.

Marilyn reminded all that they can contact Dave Williams, Greg Hallsten or Pat Platenburg through the Butte Field Office if there are questions.

Butte RMP:

Rick Hotaling updated the RAC on the Butte RMP process. The Draft Proposed Planning Scenario is projected to be released to the public in April if the internal review is complete.

Travel Management is a major issue for the RMP. There were five travel planning meetings held - three in Helena, one in Divide and one in Boulder. The Scratchgravel area requested an additional meeting. The contractor had a facilitator, BLM gave a briefing, then the contractor took over the meetings. First the public was asked to voice their issues and concerns. Then the public was asked to provide possible solutions.

There are nine remaining travel management areas at issue. The Elkhorns, Whitetail-Pipestone, Sleeping Giant, Clancy Travel Plans are complete and will not be changed.

All areas in the Butte Field Office are planned to be categorized as "limited", which provides the greatest management flexibility. Roads need to be inventoried and identified and each road and trail rated as high, medium or low. BLM may ask RAC to form subgroups to try to work through issues.

RMP team will prioritize areas based on resources/uses. The current priority list is as follows:

- #1 – Helena
- #2 – E. Helena
- #3 – Lewis & Clark West
- #4 – Boulder (Big Hole)
- #5 – scattered areas

These priorities are not final and could be changed.

Every trail/road on BLM land was inventoried using global positioning system (GPS) units and data from different sources was gathered. Miles of roads/trails have greatly increased. Rob McCulloch asked what would be done with BLM roads with no public access. Rick said they would be identified and a decision made about what to do. Some trails/roads have no legal access, which can lead to trespassing.

Joyce Thompson commented on the FS and BLM using the process of subgroups. She felt that it is a progressive idea and she felt it would have a better success rate. Rick stated that they would have the proposed planning scenario in April and much information gathered by then. At that time, subgroups may be formed. As many as five subgroups could be formed, with the goal that the Boulder and Big Hole areas would also be included. Marysville would likely be the most difficult because of the variety of uses found there. Two public meetings are to be held, one in Helena and one in Butte. Briefings would be offered for 30 days to groups that request them. Joyce Thompson said she would be interested in being a liaison between the RAC and subgroups. Sue Marxer stated it is beneficial to have local representation on the subgroups; individuals that are familiar with the roads/trails.

Mineral Potential Map – Some roads have to remain open for access.

OHV Update

Joyce updated the RAC on proposed bill LC0299 that would allow licensing of ATVs at point of purchase. This would be the only way to identify and legalize (with plates). There's a concern with the agriculture community since they are not mandated to license and we would like them to support this bill. If ATVs are non-licensed, you will be ticketed unless you are on private land (this applies to BLM too). It is not mandatory for your ATV to be street-legal, however if not, you will be ticketed if you ride on the street. Joyce stated she thought this would help with enforcement. This bill only applies to licenses for ATVs.

Joyce stated that one-third of the money generated from taxes on OHV goes to Law Enforcement. If people take advantage, there will be more money available for Law Enforcement, etc. Ownership has gone from 7,000-28,000 in 13 years and that's probably only 1/3 or 1/4 of ATVs.

Joyce also updated the RAC on a Senate Bill 194. This would require those under 18 to wear helmets, and those under 15 would be required to attend safety education and be accompanied by a person 18 or older when riding on improved roads. There needs to be something to get kids into safety education. Safety education would be phased in. Joyce's interpretation was that currently licensed/street legal ATVs would remain unchanged and new ATVs will be required to license or they can only ride on private land.

Joyce stated that in Gallatin County there is minimal OHV abuse. The issues there are due to horseback users according to Todd Orr, a FS employee. Rob McCulloch commented that he's heard OHV operators state that fines imposed by the FS are minimal and well worth paying - that should be addressed.

Whitetail Basin Update

Dave Pacioretty updated the RAC about ongoing projects in the Whitetail Basin area (between Whitehall and Boulder). There are cooperators involved, including MSU Bozeman and the Jefferson River Watershed Council to do monitoring and evaluation of the riparian area following prescribed fire and cutting of encroachment conifers. The BLM Butte FO and MSU are sharing costs and expertise. The study started last year and will continue for a couple more years. Researchers are looking at the connection between groundwater and streams after treatment of vegetation (conifers). Changes are anticipated and the study is set up to find this out. Prescribed fire will begin in May 2005 depending on weather conditions. They are monitoring responses of groundwater, stream flow, riparian vegetation, bird populations, and game use. Dave offered to show the RAC members the project if they had an interest and said he could arrange for a tour if desired.

Other Items Discussed

The next RAC meeting will be May 4th at 10 am in Missoula.

Topics to be covered at the May meeting:

- Election of officers
- Travel Management – Butte RMP
- Western Zone fire plan
- Changing the September RAC meeting to earlier in the month

Ben Deeble asked if there was a formal process to elect RAC members and Rick told him they used parliamentary procedures.

Rick mentioned that BLM is involved in helping areas with Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP) for the Western Zone.

The meeting was adjourned.

Sue Marxer, RAC Chairperson

Western Montana RAC Meeting Notes
Butte Field Office
07/11/2005

RAC Members Present: Sue Marxer, Ben Deeble, Roger Peters, Garry Williams, Dan Lucas, Dennis Phillippi, Rob McCulloch, Pat Flowers, Robin Cunningham, Richard Young, Ted Coffman

RAC Members Absent: Joyceann Thompson, Donna Tate McDonald
Positions Vacant: Two in Category II.

BLM Members Present: Rick Hotaling, Tim Bozorth, Nancy Anderson, Marilyn Krause, Traci Scott, Terina Mullen, John Thompson

The meeting was called to order and Marilyn asked the members to decide on the date for the next RAC meeting, since it had to be rescheduled. October 13th was decided upon for the meeting, with an optional field trip October 12th at noon for those members who can attend. The field trip is planning to include Rangeland Health, watershed assessment of Sage Creek, Standards and Guidelines and abandoned mine land reclamation.

<p>NOTE: In the interest of time and travel distances, the field trip will be held in the Reservoir Creek area.</p>
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Elections for Chair/Vice Chair were held. Sue Marxer was nominated by Ted Coffman to finish the year as Chair. Dennis Phillippi seconded the motion and the vote was unanimous. Sue Marxer nominated Dan Lucas as Vice Chair, seconded by Robin Cunningham and the vote was unanimous.

Tim Bozorth presented Ted Coffman with a plaque for his service from 1999-Present on the Resource Advisory Council.

Marilyn informed the RAC members that Sue Lenard had resigned from Category 2. She thanked the remaining Category 2 members for attending so there could be a quorum. Dick Young asked about candidates for the RAC; Marilyn stated the outcome should be known the end of September.

Field Office Updates

Missoula – Nancy Anderson

A joint decision with MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks on the Blackfoot River Special Recreation Permit environmental assessment was issued April 1, 2005. One appeal was received, but was subsequently withdrawn.

A decision on the Flint Creek EA, prepared cooperatively with the Forest Service, was issued May 23, 2005. This EA addresses approximately 8,600 acres of BLM land near Philipsburg. The Ecology Center protested a proposed timber sale. The protest was denied as premature.

The Blackfoot Community Project is continuing. If the project is completed, The Nature Conservancy will acquire approximately 89,000 acres from Plum Creek Timber. \$8 million in Land and Water Conservation Funding (LWCF) will result in BLM's acquisition of 6,000-7,000 acres from The Nature Conservancy.

The Antelope Creek Salvage Timber Sale was completed. The sale treated approximately 200 acres of bug-killed timber.

The Hoodoos watershed assessment continues. This covers approximately 53,000 acres and should be completed by September.

The Garnet Ghost Town stewardship contract begins July 12, 2005 and will treat 26 acres.

Butte – Rick Hotaling

The National Guard Limestone Hills Training Area withdrawal is in progress. There were 4 alternatives developed. The Draft EIS should be out this fall and will be open to comments. The alternatives were 1) No change, 2) BLM management under FLPMA, 3) Guard management under Sykes Act, 4) Guard management similar to BLM management.

Golden Sunlight Supplemental EIS – there were 3 public meetings, the document is now out. The final Record of Decision (ROD) will be out between October and December of this year. The preferred alternative is a no pit backfill alternative, which allows the option to try a different reclamation process if technology changes.

The proposal for the Montana Tunnels expansion would enlarge the pit. Since it is non-acid generating they would let the pit fill and be a lake. Scoping is underway.

The McMasters Acquisition is complete, with the exception of French Bar (600 ac). If the BLM acquires the land, the state won't pursue the ownership issue.

Buckner Exchange, outside of Whitehall, is a swap of 400+ acres. Whitehall residents are protesting, they feel the exchange is unnecessary because of prescriptive rights. If the issue is not resolved here, it will be sent to the State Director for a decision. This process has been continuing for over 6 years.

Area north of Whitehall has not been burned because of too much moisture. A fall burn is proposed.

Construction of White Sandy campground is continuing. It should open in 2007 and will have fewer amenities. It is located on Hauser Lake by the state-owned Black Sandy campground.

Iron Mask acquisition – a 3,000 acre ranch north of the Limestone Hills. This area is important elk wintering habitat.

Rick was asked what BLM's preferred alternative for Limestone Hills was, as well as the National Guard preferred alternative and if there was any state land involved. BLM prefers to continue managing under FLPMA, National Guard prefers to manage similar to BLM. There are 2 sections of state land and 2.5 sections of private land involved.

Dillon – Tim Bozorth

Centennial Watershed Assessment is out for Public Review. The primary focus is Forest Health treatments to decrease high intensity fire & restore aspen. It will also make some changes in livestock management where standards are not being met.

Big Sheep Creek Watershed Assessment will be out for review by end of the month.

Sage Creek Watershed Assessment (80,000 acres) starts this week.

Curry Creek salvage timber sale will start any day – as soon as it is dry enough.

450 acres of prescribed fire – conifer encroachment were completed this spring. We intend to complete another 100 acres this fall

The bid for Upper Horse Prairie Stewardship Project for fuels reduction closes Friday.

Camp Creek Allotment Management Plan (AMP) revision – have a meeting to discuss alternatives this Friday. Montana Extension Service is facilitating.

The Dillon Proposed RMP and Final EIS went out in April with a 30 day protest period. RMP received 6 protests. We have developed draft responses to all but the county protest and we are working on that. We will have that done by the end of July. Then WO will review – this process will take another 4 months so the ROD & Final RMP should be issued sometime late this fall.

Protests were received from:

- SW Montana Stockgrowers
- 2 individuals
- Wilderness Society
- American Wildlands
- Madison & Beaverhead Counties – County protest to preserve standing

Working on 2 land exchanges – one in Barton Gulch near Ruby Reservoir which is a paleo site; the other is near and on the Big Hole, south of Glen. A number of other proposals are not being pursued because of reduced funding for LWCF.

Tim, Rick and Nancy discussed the federal budget cuts and their impacts.

Grazing Regulation update

Grazing Regulation updates should be published this month with updates to range improvement titles, decreases/increases of grazing use, ensuring/documenting socio-economics when doing EAs, removal of the restriction for non-use (3 yr limit – now on a yearly basis) and many others.

RMP/Travel Planning Update

Rick updated the RAC on the Travel Management/RMP processes. The Proposed Planning Scenario and Draft Analysis of the Management Situation were distributed on CD to approximately 350 interested parties/organizations. Two public meetings were held, one in Helena and one in Butte. The public comment period was to have ended July 6th, but was extended through the end of July because of briefings scheduled with county commissioners and other groups.

Alternatives should be developed by the end of August. The Draft RMP is scheduled to be out between December 2005 and January 2006.

There are 2 working groups for 3 of the 5 travel planning areas (TPA). These TPAs are in the Helena area (Scratchgravel, Marysville and North Hills). Lewis & Clark County is sponsoring the working groups. The BLM was not involved in the process of selecting the working group and only attends the meetings to answer questions and provide requested input. Tetra Tech helped facilitate the meetings. Two subgroups were formed consisting of both motorized and non-motorized users. One subgroup is evaluating both the Scratchgravel Hills and North Hills areas, the other is evaluating Marysville. The subgroup for Marysville seems to be successful, however there are problems reaching an agreement between motorized and non-motorized users of the 2nd subgroup in regards to the Scratchgravel Hills area. The subgroup is working better together on the North Hills TPA.

The RAC will be informed on what the subgroups come up with and will be asked about alternatives.

For the other travel planning areas, the ID teams will meet internally. There will not be the same level of collaboration. Public meetings will be held for comment.

The Big Hole TPA will be controversial. Part of the area is still covered under the Southwest Montana Travel Management Plan. One crossing where the road forded the Big Hole River will probably be most controversial (Sawlog). Only BLM lands are being looked at for the travel planning. It would be good if the county/subgroups can get other agencies involved.

Sue Marxer briefed the RAC on the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act. Recreational RACs will be established to provide input. The make-up of a Recreational RAC will be different than the regular RAC. The Recreational RAC will consist of 11 members, 5 Recreation users (winter, summer, motorized/non-motorized, and fishing), 3 members from interest groups (i.e. outfitter, environmental groups), 3 from State Tourism, tribes and local government. The Recreational RACs will need a quorum plus public support for their recommendations. The RACs can be established by states or regions.

CWPP Presentation

Terina Mullen gave a Power Point presentation on the Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP) and the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA). The CWPP shapes management on federal and non-federal lands. HFRA concerns wildland urban interface (WUI) designation. Communities define WUI and prioritize federal funds for community protection for high, medium and low priorities. Local government, local fire authority and state forestry agencies must agree on final plan. The CWPP helps drive fire suppression decisions. Funding can be obtained from many sources, however for federal funding a CWPP has to be done. FEMA requires pre-disaster mitigation plan.

Wrap-up

Marilyn asked for suggested topics for the October RAC meeting agenda. The travel management proposals from the working groups would be available. Richard Young brought up the Sonoran Institute Presentations on the economics of Western States. Ben Deeble suggested the Montana Challenge which is an FWP program. Pat Flowers will check on setting up a presentation. The presentation would take 45 minutes to 1 hour and uses almost all Montana information.

Sue Marxer, RAC Chairperson

RAC Meeting Notes
Butte Field Office
11/30/2005

Members Present: Sue Marxer, Joyce Thompson, Jack Kirkley, Dan Lucas, Robin Cunningham, Mitzi Rossillon, Robin McCulloch, David Schulz, Richard Young, Francis Auld, and Garry Williams.

Members Absent: Ben Deeble, Pat Flowers, Donna McDonald, and Dennis Phillippi.

BLM Staff: Marilyn Krause, Steve Hartmann, Brad Rixford and Pat Zurcher.

Marilyn welcomed the RAC members and had introductions. New notebooks were given to new and returning RAC members. Members were asked to review the contact information in the notebooks for accuracy. All were reminded that the contact information provided was an internal list only. Email was determined to be the best way to communicate with members. Discussion followed about the Charter, term limits, election of officers, composition of the RAC, what constitutes a quorum, and voting procedures. Ground rules were also reviewed and agreed upon.

Marilyn told the RAC about changes to the agenda. Pat Flowers had planned the Montana Challenge presentation, but was unable to attend the meeting. Also, Dennis Phillippi was going to share information about the White House Conservation Conference he had attended, but also was unable to be at the RAC meeting.

Field Office Overviews

Nancy Anderson and Tim Bozorth were unable to attend the RAC meeting because of winter road conditions. They both provided statements in their absences. If there were any questions, Marilyn asked members to please make note of them so they could be addressed by Nancy and Tim.

Missoula Field Office – Nancy Anderson (handout)

We are continuing work in the Hoodoos Watershed. We're doing final edits on our Watershed Assessment which covers approximately 53,000 acres. We're currently developing a scoping letter which will go out in December. We plan to hold public meetings sometime in January (tentatively in Deer Lodge and/or Helmville). The EA is scheduled for completion in April.

We issued our decision on the Flint Rock Salvage sale on November 8, 2005. The proposal is to harvest approximately 325 acres of bug killed timber (approximately 1.5 MMBF). The timber will be sold as both negotiated and advertised sales. The protest period for the negotiated sales ended November 23, 2005.

We have started logging on the Murray-Douglas timber sale. The sale was sold in September 2004. It's approximately 5 MMBF.

We are continuing our work on the Blackfoot Community Project. This project is being done in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, Plum Creek Timber, and the Blackfoot Challenge. It involves the acquisition and disposition of Plum Creek Timber lands in the Blackfoot River Watershed. To date, the BLM has acquired approximately 5,480 acres of land in the Marcum Mountain area.

We will be doing some additional restoration work as part of the Linton mine reclamation. The reclamation removed approximately 135,000 cubic yards of waste material and was completed in November 2004. The reclamation project also included the realignment and reconstruction of Cramer Creek. In the spring of 2005, high runoff flows within Cramer Creek eroded streambed substrate materials from a steep segment of the reconstructed stream channel and deposited them further downstream. The restoration work will repair the damage and stabilize the banks.

Dillon Field Office – Tim Bozorth (handout)

Congress has directed the BLM to fully process all Term Grazing Permit renewals by 2009. Fully processed means that the allotment has been assessed for land health and NEPA documentation has been completed.

The Dillon Field Office is completing this work through program integrated Watershed Land Health Assessments. Programs included in the watershed based land health assessments are range, weeds, wildlife, fisheries, fuels, forestry, soil, water, air, wilderness, recreation and cultural.

We have now completed land health assessments on 572,065 acres and have 329,161 acres remaining in the DFO. The completed acreage includes the Sage Creek Watershed, which we will be working on NEPA documentation this winter.

During 2005 we completed field assessments for Sage Creek Watershed (109,637 acres; 22 allotments). The Watershed Assessment Report is being prepared and will be sent out in mid-December.

We also completed the watershed level environmental assessments (NEPA documentation) and decisions for Centennial and Big Sheep Creek Watersheds during 2005. The decisions for both of these watersheds are now final. The Centennial Watershed included 83,102 acres and 41 allotments. The Big Sheep Creek decision included 26,938 acres and 15 allotments. Over 8,600 acres of forest treatment is included in the Centennial decision.

We are continuing to implement Watershed Plans in Upper Horse Prairie, SW Highlands and Ruby Watersheds. During 2005 we completed 765 acres of prescribed burning, 2 new fences, 4 water developments and a fish barrier in Upper Horse Prairie. In SW Highlands we completed 6 water developments, 1 fence and 2 riparian exclosures. In the Ruby's we completed 2 water developments.

For 2006, we plan to burn another 2000 acres in Upper Horse Prairie and the SW Highlands. Range improvement projects are planned in Upper Horse Prairie, SW Highlands including

several in the Camp Creek Allotment, Ruby Watershed, Big Sheep Creek and Centennial Watershed on a priority basis based on budget.

After several mediation meetings this spring and summer, we issued the Camp Creek Proposed Decision in October, 2005.

We implemented the new Reservoir Creek Decision (including the Cross Allotment) this year and completed one new interior fence and a new pipeline. We also modified existing fences within the allotments to mitigate wildlife conflicts.

DFO Noxious Weed Program report for 2005

In 2005, the Dillon Field Office was faced with a 60% budget cut in the noxious weed program from 2004. Community projects and volunteers played a big part in helping make the program a success this year, in cooperation with Beaverhead and Madison Counties, participating in 33 community spray days and treating over 7,000 acres and inventorying over 28,000 acres. To help get the most out of the budget, priority areas (areas where it was felt we could accomplish the most) were established. These included:

- 1) Centennial Valley – due to its low levels of infestation;
- 2) Bear Trap Wilderness Area – high public visibility and an already successful project;
- 3) Beaverhead and Madison rivers – high visibility and high chance of spread;
- 4) roads, washes or trails that are high use and could possibly lead to further spread of noxious weeds.

This was also the second year of a three year sheep grazing project in the south Madison in cooperation with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, the Montana Sheep Institute, the Madison Valley Ranchlands Group, Madison County Weed Board and numerous private landowners. This project is focusing on how sheep grazing affects knapweed seed production and the survivability of existing plants within an area where chemical treatment would be difficult. So far the results are promising with final data to be collected at the end of the 2006 season.

The budget picture is a little brighter for 2006 with the allocation of \$100,000 in year-end money to fund cooperative projects with Beaverhead and Madison counties. Spray days are being organized and it looks like we may exceed the 33 we had in 2005. We are also working with the counties and various private landowner groups to obtain grant funding for weed control projects in their areas.

DFO Comments – Dan Lucas wanted to congratulate the DFO for their effort in Camp Creek. He said the product addresses BLM concerns and allows grazers to do so economically. He also said that Nate (chairman of the Grazing Association) went the extra mile in the Reservoir Creek area and that management is working well.

Sue mentioned that the subgroup addressed problems and Dan was called to participate. She was curious about whether the weed program was facing the same budget cuts. The answer was yes, and the rescission (of 2-5%) could potentially take even more away from the budget.

David Schulz made the comment that they could probably get by one more year with the current budget, but after that it will get bad. The proactivity of the county working together helps and that weeds are one of the easiest things to discuss.

Butte Field Office – Steve Hartmann

Steve Hartmann mentioned that the BFO has six vacancies, four of which will not be filled. We are not in a RIF (reduction-in-force) yet, but essential positions are not being replaced.

Butte RMP is in progress with alternatives being developed and effects analysis beginning. The Draft RMP/EIS is expected to be out for public review in June 2006.

Phase I closing (2000 ac/1 Million) of the Iron Mask property west of Townsend in the Elkhorn Mountains is expected mid December. There may be two more phases (3000 ac left) depending on how much and when the remainder of the LWCF (Land & Water Conservation Fund) is approved.

The National Guard Limestone Hills Training Area Withdrawal is in progress. The effects analysis of the four alternatives is near completion and the draft Legislative EIS is scheduled to go out to the public for a 90 day comment period in April, 2006.

Phase I of the White Sandy Recreation Site on Hauser Lake is complete; Phase II will start next spring with the official opening on Memorial Day of 2007.

Preparation of the Final Supplemental EIS for the Golden Sunlight Mine is in progress, expected to out in January, 2006. At the draft stage, the preferred alternative was the underground sump alternative which did not involve back filling the pit. This alternative was believed to be the most protective of groundwater resources by both BLM and Montana DNRC technical staff.

The Montana Tunnels Expansion EIS is in progress to address pit wall stability concerns on the east side of the pit. This will add 4-5 years of life to the mine. At the conclusion of operations, Clancy Creek will flow into the pit and create a man-made lake. A portion of the creek will be diverted to maintain flows into the creek. Since acid rock drainage isn't a problem in this area, the projected water quality in the lake will be good.

The McMaster's Ranch acquisition is complete. Parking areas and signs have been implemented. The area is getting a lot of use and positive feedback.

Two meteorological towers for monitoring wind have been approved to be placed near the Golden Sunlight Mine near Whitehall. The 60 meter towers will be in place for about a year and if conditions are favorable, Wind Hunter will submit an operating plan to BLM for approval of a wind farm covering about 1400 acres.

BFO Comments

Jack Kirkley asked if the mining, grazing and recreation uses in the Limestone Hills area would continue. Steve Hartmann said that the proposed preferred alternative would be joint management between the military and the BLM so those uses could continue. Jack then asked if

the area was posted for unexploded ordnance (UXO). Steve said yes and that the BLM issued an emergency closure for the area where UXO is a possibility. Steve stated that the National Guard is responsible for the cleanup. Garry Williams asked about state land in the area. Steve said in the proposed preferred alternative that the military would acquire the state and private lands near the impact zone. Robin McCulloch asked if the lands would be exchanged or purchased and was told that either way is an option; however exchange of land was preferred. Robin McCulloch also mentioned that there is UXO from the 1950's along the access roads to Graymont Mine. Steve mentioned that the subsurface cleanup is expensive and takes a long time.

Jack Kirkley asked if a study for raptor migration was done in reference to the meteorological towers that have been approved. Steve said there was a study done a couple of years ago and that all precautionary measures would have to be followed.

Recreation RACs

Sue updated the group on the Recreation RACs. The Act was put into place last year but nothing is final yet. Public land agencies suggest using existing RACs where they can. No fees will be collected in areas where no money has been put into development. Brad Rixford mentioned that there was a moratorium on fees until Recreation RACs are in place. Dan Lucas asked if there was any indication that the Recreation RACs will have any authority on Forest Service sites because in previous projects, our RAC wasn't recognized. Sue believes that the agencies are working together. Marilyn stated that several western state legislatures passed resolutions asking to repeal the Act. Being able to keep these fees local is the only thing keeping some of these sites open. Robin Cunningham said that Montana's legislature got caught up in misinformation about the recreation fees and that a list of amenities has to be met in order for fees to be charged. Brad said the pilot program has been in place for 8 years. He said that some in some areas, frivolous fees were charged. BLM has been conservative with the fees, only charging for developed recreation sites but the Forest Service repealed fees for 435 sites (nationwide) when the Act was put into effect. He also said that people were investing in their favorite recreation sites because the monies collected goes toward maintenance costs and site upgrades. Brad Rixford stated that this law is important to all western zone offices.

Travel Planning

Pat Zurcher gave a general overview of the Travel Planning process for the BFO. The RMP began in 9/2003. Over the past 22 years there have been increased changes in activity, creating increased conflicts between users. Under national and state office direction, BFO lands are to be identified and classified as either open (unrestricted off-road motorized use permitted), closed (no motorized use permitted) or limited (motorized use restricted to existing/designated routes). In 2003, the OHV Statewide Record of Decision designated BLM land as limited.

There are approximately 302,000 acres of land under BLM management in the BFO. In the spring of 2004 we began to identify and prioritize routes. Inventory was taken using GPS, aerial photos and staff knowledge. Base maps were put together and used in-house and at scoping meetings. There were five public scoping meetings. Our proposed preferred alternative (Alt. B) was developed by collaboration from the BLM and the working groups.

Three areas were particularly important to the public, with high attendance at the meetings. These areas were Helena, East Helena and Lewis & Clark County (Marysville). Community based subgroups were recruited by Tetra Tech (contractor) under the authority of the Lewis & Clark County planning division to provide input to these travel areas. The working groups reached consensus for the Marysville and East Helena, but not for the Scratchgravel Hills. For the Scratchgravels, the majority of the group preferred non-motorized use, only one preferred motorized use. Brad Rixford added that this is like an urban park and we'd like to give it to Helena. The City of Helena has expressed an interest in acquiring the Scratchgravel Hills but no proposals will be considered until the RMP is complete. Since there was no consensus on the Scratchgravel travel plan proposal, the decision rests with BLM, based on public input and recommendations from the interdisciplinary (ID) team. This area is not typical because of its proximity to Helena.

There are thirteen travel planning areas within the Butte Field Office. Sleeping Giant, Elkhorns, Clancy and Whitetail-Pipestone areas have existing travel plans in place. Five areas were determined to be high priority areas - those with a high level of OHV use with user conflicts and resource damage. They are East Helena (North Hills), Helena (Scratchgravels), Lewis & Clark (Marysville), Upper Big Hole and Boulder/Jefferson City areas. These are being addressed in the RMP. Four other areas were found to be moderate priority and will be addressed after the RMP due to time constraints. These areas are Missouri River Foothills, Park/Gallatin, Jefferson County and Broadwater.

Travel Planning Questions/Comments

Robin McCulloch wanted to know if a closed road precluded someone from coming in and exploring (for mining). Pat explained that if a road is closed, a variance can be sought. This is the same for BLM employees. Brad Rixford said that in regards to exploration, the travel plan would have an impact. He said that variances could be issued for ground disturbance activities.

Mr. McCulloch also asked about the construction of new roads. It was explained that there is a NEPA process (EA) and if there is a long term need for a new road we'll have to look at that. Temporary roads can be put in and then taken out when no longer needed. Brad Rixford added that all new roads will conform to the travel plan and if a new road provided better accessibility then we will have some flexibility.

Steve Hartmann feels that once the Draft RMP/EIS is released, more public participation may be generated. Pat agreed and said that it is an open process until the last minute.

Pat was asked to explain to the RAC the criteria used to rate roads. Both the ID team and the working groups went through the same process. The working group asked to use our data and maps. Jack asked if the working groups were interagency groups. It was explained that the working groups were balanced community based groups. He then asked if there was coordination with the Forest Service with travel planning. Pat said some phone calls were made and he plans to take maps to the Forest Service offices in the next month or two to make sure there are no problems. Brad Rixford stated that we need some flexibility in the plan if we find that there are problems with other agencies.

Joyce commented from a motorized perspective. She stated that when there are well managed roads, people are more self-controlled. She feels there is a need to have areas available to ride close to where people live. She feels that even if roads are closed, people will do what they want. Brad Rixford stated that most of the public would like to see the Scratchgravels area closed after dark. More enforcement is needed.

Dick Young asked for a copy of the criteria used for rating the roads. Pat provided the info.

The group was asked what they thought about being more involved when it comes time to do travel planning for the other four areas, although BLM has until 2008 to initiate. They will be initiated as soon as the RMP is complete. The RAC members feel they can be instrumental in facilitating groups, but that local users need to come to the table to make recommendations.

Future Meeting Dates/Locations/Agenda

The following meeting dates were agreed upon:

Feb. 22, 2006 – Butte

May 10, 2006 – Missoula [Note: Due to a conflict, this date has changed to **May 11]**

Sept 6-7, 2006 – Dillon

Nov. 29, 2006 – Butte

Potential topics for the meeting in February are:

Montana Challenge presentation by FWP
White House Conservation Conference by Dennis Phillippi
Elections for Chair/Vice Chair
Updates on Recreation RACs (if available)
Impacts if Congress passes Mining Law

Approved by:

/s/ Sue Marxer

Sue Marxer, Chairperson