

Western Montana Resource Advisory Council
Minutes
October 30, 2003
Billings, Montana

Members Present: Sue Marxer (Chair), Dick Young, Susan Lenard, Doug Abelin, Ben Deeble, Dennis Phillippi, Ted Coffman, Roger Peters and Robin Urban.

Members Absent: Robin McCulloch, Donna Tate McDonald, Robin Cunningham, Garry Williams, Pat Flowers and Dan Lucas.

BLM: Rick Hotaling (Butte Field Manager), Pat Fosse (Dillon Field Office), Nancy Anderson (Missoula Field Manager), Marilyn Krause (Facilitator) and Cheryl Atkins (Notes).

Guests: **BLM:** Ruth Miller (Butte Field Office); **Members of the public:** Karen Lincoln (Contractor outreach).

The council convened at 8:00 a.m. with the facilitator covering introductions, ground rules, and agenda review.

Sustaining Working Landscapes (SWL):

(Continued from yesterday's meeting) - see attached letter for previous day decisions.

Concept 2: Reserve Common Allotments

2.5 Up to 5 percent of allotments or 10 percent of BLM acreage within a field office could be committed to RCAs.

2.6 OK as written

2.7 Dropped, already in regulations

Concept 3: Voluntary Allotment Restructuring

Do not respond to entire concept.

Decision: Six RAC members were in favor of not responding to the concept and three can "live with" not responding.

Concept 4: Conservation Easements

Susan Lenard and Bee Deeble spoke in support of Conservation Easements and indicated that any support on their part of the Sustaining Working Landscapes Initiative was contingent upon the Conservation Easement portion being reinstated in the Initiative.

Decision: 8 in favor of proposal and 1 can “live with it”.

Concept 5: Endangered Species Act Mitigation

BLM should promote or create incentives or direct financial rewards for permittees who manage their private land to provide for improved habitat for species currently listed under the Endangered Species Act or candidate species. (This program could be tied to “Candidate Conservation Agreements” for an area or allotment.)

Decision: All in favor.

Pilot Project:

In addition to the concepts of Sustaining Working Landscapes, the Western Montana RAC offers the following as a pilot project:

Allotment Stewardship Project (Pilot Project):

BLM is considering on setting up a pilot project in each Field Office in which joint resource management objectives are developed and monitored by BLM, RAC and permittee. Livestock management is developed by the permittee.

- 5-year project
- no change in AUM's without environmental review
- permittee is nominated by BLM/chosen by RAC
- annual monitoring of allotment
- if allotment is not meeting objectives, project could be terminated
- conduct baseline inventory relevant to resource objectives

RAC: All in favor. Sue will call members that were absent to get a vote.

The letter to the State Director from the RAC with decisions that were made would like to add the following into the letter:

“The Western Montana RAC appreciates the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service recognizing that fragmentation is a problem in the West and applauds their efforts to address this issue”

The letter will be sent to the State Director and Congressionals. (The RAC needs a quorum).

Limestone Hills Withdrawal (Rick Hotaling):

Welcome Karen Lincoln, who is the contractor outreach for the withdrawal.

See Handout

Sue: Do you need a subgroup?

Rick: After the first of the year we will let you know if we need one. If we do, it will probably be mining related issues.

Butte Resource Management Plan (RMP) (Ruth Miller):

See handout

FIELD OFFICE OVERVIEWS:

Dillon Field Office (Pat Fosse):

- **Watershed Assessments:**

Missoula Field Office (Nancy Anderson):

- **Personnel:** Assistant Field Manager for Renewable Resources – working through the selection process. NEPA/Panning Coordinator – working through the selection process. We will be advertising for a Forester and a Fuels Management Specialist.
- **The Blackfoot Community Project:** The Blackfoot Challenge held a press conference on October 9, 2003, to announce the agreement for the purchase of approximately 41,000 acres of Plum Creek lands by The Nature Conservancy (TNC). If the first phase of the project is successful, TNC may purchase an additional 48,000 acres. The total acquisition would occur over a five year period. The Blackfoot Challenge is working with community groups to develop a disposition and management plan to guide the ownership and management of these lands over the long term.
- We are continuing to work on our watershed assessments. We will be working collaboratively with the Forest Service on our environmental assessment addressing lands which were contained in our Flint Creek watershed assessment (approximately 8,600 acres in the Philipsburg area).
- We received nine bids for the Linton mine reclamation. The low bidder was Smith Contracting, Inc. in Butte, Montana
- We sold our two timber sales in the Lower Blackfoot Corridor. The sales involve approximately 800 MBF.
- We sent a letter jointly with FWP to the Recreation Steering Committee requesting their assistance on our Blackfoot Special Recreation Permit project. The first meeting is tentatively scheduled for the first week in November.

Butte Field Office (Rick Hotaling):

- **Limestone Hills Withdrawal:** The Notice of Intent to process the withdrawal was published on September 4, 2003. The scoping period begins with the publication of the NOI and runs for 60 days. There will be public scoping meetings in Townsend and Helena the end of September.
- **Butte RMP:** The contract has been awarded to Tetra Tech from Helena. We are planning an internal kickoff meeting for the revision on September 17 and 18. We are working on the NOI and will be holding scoping meetings in Butte, Helena, Townsend, Bozeman, Boulder, and Wise River near the end of October or the first part of November.

NEXT MEETING: Thursday, February 19, 2004.

LOCATION: Missoula Field Office, Missoula, Montana

TOPICS:

- Updates on Dillon/Butte/Limestone Hills planning processes
- Election of Chair/Vice-Chair (Chair will plan meeting dates for 2004)
- Weeds
- Pilot projects
- LWCF projects
- Out-year budget planning initiatives
- Update on grazing regulations *

Comment (Rick H.):

I appreciate the participation of the RAC. The comments that were made yesterday, if the RAC feels BLM is shutting them out, please let me know.

MEETING ADJOURNED

Western Montana Resource Advisory Council
Minutes
September 10, 2003
Search & Rescue Building, Dillon, Montana

Members Present: Sue Marxer (Chair), Dick Young, Susan Lenard, Doug Abelin, Donna Tate McDonald, Pat Flowers, Ben Deeble, Dennis Phillippi, Garry Williams, and Ted Coffman.

Members Absent: Roger Peters, Robin McCulloch, Robin Urban, Robin Cunningham and Mel Montgomery.

BLM: Rick Hotaling (Butte Field Manager), Scott Lieurance (Missoula Asst. Field Manager), Tim Bozorth (Dillon Field Manager), Marilyn Krause (Facilitator) and Cheryl Atkins (Notes).

Guests: **BLM:** Marty Ott (Montana BLM State Director), Bill McIlvain (Montana State Office), Dave Pacioretty (Butte Field Office), Pat Fosse (Dillon Field Office) and Mark Goeden (Dillon Field Office). **Members of the public:** Debbie Barrett (Montana State House Representative), Jules Marchesseault, Patti Rowland and Ray Marxer.

The council convened at 10:00 a.m. with the facilitator covering introductions, ground rules, and agenda review.

Addition to Agenda: Sage Grouse Comments.

Update: RAC appointments are still on-track. We anticipate announcements sometime next week.

FIELD OFFICE OVERVIEWS:

Dillon Field Office (Tim Bozorth):

- **Watershed Assessments:** We accomplished Watershed Assessment of the Ruby/Gravelly Watershed 29,565 acres in 10 allotments and the Highlands Watershed 78,316 acres in 12 allotments. Watershed Assessments will be complete in November and Environmental Assessments prepared for these two watersheds this winter.
- Upper Horse Prairie was final on June 12. There were no appeals, three decisions on 25 allotments including 3,400 acres of conifer encroachment that will be treated. In 2004, we will conduct watershed assessments on the Big Sheep Creek and Centennial Watersheds.
- **Fuels Projects:** We have completed the Virginia City Wildland Urban Interface risk assessment; there will be a public meeting on September 19 in Virginia City. We will complete the mitigation plan in October.
- The Winslow Fire is 85 percent contained. We are looking at salvage of timber in area outside the Wilderness Study Area.
- The Centennial Fire History Study was finished and we are working on the report.
- West Grasshopper fuels treatment is behind due to the Hidden Lake fire. East Grasshopper behind due to a logging delay over volume. We will burn next spring.

- Stock Driveway withdrawal will expire at the end of February. BLM will send out a letter to see level of concern over withdrawal expiring.
- BLM National Sage Grouse Strategy handed out and asked RAC to consider providing comments.
- Dillon OHV Priority Setting dealt with in Dillon RMP.

Missoula Field Office (Scott Lieurance):

- **Personnel:** Scott Lieurance, Assistant Field Manager for Renewable Resources, has accepted a position in Washington, D.C. His position is advertised (closes the end of the month).
- **Fuels:** Missoula was surrounded by forest fires this season. Fortunately, no BLM lands under our jurisdiction were affected. We've been under Stage II fire restrictions since July 28, 2003 and expect to remain until we get significant precipitation.
- We are continuing to work on our watershed assessments. No new information since our last July meeting.
- We had a site tour for the Linton Mine reclamation project on August 26, 2003. Seventeen potential bidders attended. If we have a successful bidder, work should start later this year.
- We are currently advertising two timber sales in the Lower Blackfoot Corridor. Sealed bids will be accepted through September 25, 2003. The sale was previously offered and went "no bid".
- We are preparing an additional timber sale in the Murray-Douglas area. This sale will be offered next fiscal year.
- With the completion of the Murray-Douglas WA and subsequent EA, we will be issuing the Grazing Decision for the 5 leases in the area shortly and reissue new 10-year leases.
- The recent ROD for OHV in Montana, doesn't affect the Missoula Field Office. OHV use in the Missoula Field Office is directed by our Travel Management Plan.
- We selected bids on 3 fuels projects. 1,500 acres of thinning/slashing; under appraised and awarded. Two chipping contracts, 250 acres; 1 slightly over and awarded and 1 significantly over and not awarded. Work will start this fall.
- The Dunnigan Prescribed burn which wasn't done this spring is scheduled for this fall (500 acres).

Butte Field Office (Rick Hotaling):

- **Limestone Hills Withdrawal:** The Notice of Intent to process the withdrawal was published on September 4, 2003. The scoping period begins with the publication of the NOI and runs for 60 days. There will be public scoping meetings in Townsend and Helena the end of September.
- **Butte RMP:** The contract has been awarded to Tetra Tech from Helena. We are planning an internal kickoff meeting for the revision on September 17 and 18. We are working on the NOI and will be holding scoping meetings in Butte, Helena, Townsend, Bozeman, Boulder, and Wise River near the end of October or the first part of November.

- **Whitetail-Pipestone Travel Management Plan:** Is being implemented. We are having good success with groups helping on improving and closing trails. So far, we have fairly good compliance with the travel restrictions.
- **Sleeping Giant Travel Management Plan:** We are proceeding with the plan and have completed a draft EA. We hope to have a final decision sometime in the fall. This will be our last travel management plan outside the RMP revision process. All future travel management decisions will be considered thru the RMP revision. Our OHV priority areas will be established in the revision.
- **Clancy fuel treatment projects and timber sale:** We published the notice of sale on August 26, 2003. The protest period ends September 10. Barring any protests, we hope to start implementation of this project this fall.
- **Helena Valley Risk Assessment:** We are nearing the completion of the Helena valley risk assessment. We are planning a public meeting in Helena and Clancy on September 15 and 16. The risk assessment will help us determine where to start our fuel treatment projects.
- **Rangeland Health Assessments:** We are in the process of completing 18 assessments on our allotments. We will have the results of those assessments available at our winter RAC meeting.
- **Whitetail Basin Research Project:** We are working on a co-operative research project with the Jefferson River Watershed Council, MSU, and Montana Bureau of Mines & Geology. This project is a continuation of a research project conducted in the Missouri Breaks. The project will evaluate the impacts of vegetation projects, such as fuel reduction projects, on ground water quality.
- **Bighole Fire History Project:** We are working with the Missoula Fire Science group on a study of fire history in the Bighole River area.
- **Elkhorns Initiative:** The Elkhorn Mountains are cooperatively managed by the USFS, BLM and MDFW&P. To assist the agencies in this cooperative effort, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation has entered into an agreement with the agencies to provide funding and support for land acquisitions, easements, and habitat projects. The RMEF is hoping to raise over \$200,000 for this project over the next several years.

Sustaining Working Landscapes (Bill McIlvain):

The following presentation was presented to the RAC:

1. SUSTAINING WORKING LANDSCAPES (SWL)

Sustainable Rangelands:

FLPMA provided for multiple-use, sustained yields and the 1995 regulations provided for Standards for Rangeland Health that applied to all uses.

Sustainable Ranching:

The Taylor Grazing Act emphasized the stabilization of the livestock industry and the current grazing regulations also contain language supporting the grazing industry.

In State Director Ott's letter to the RACs, he indicated that BLM is considering new management approaches intended to promote better partnerships with grazing permittees, advance the long term health of the public lands and provided for sustainable ranches.

2. WORKING LANDSCAPE?

Landscape is simply a View of the Land.

The scope of this RAC is a view of the lands in Dillon, Butte and Missoula Field Office boundaries. It is a inter mix of the lands, public and private, and the many uses that are dependent on each other. We have a community, farm lands, the ranch, some wildlife, some forest, some mining, some oil and gas and recreation.

Working Landscape is ability of those to co-exist with each other.

The Sustaining part is keeping the industry intact, on the land, in lieu of subdivision, or other disruptions, while ensuring the competing uses, share in the balanced use of the resource.

3. SWL PHILOSOPHY:

The Secretary and the Director are asking you to provide advice and recommendations on the four policy concepts or tools to promote new and better partnerships with public land ranchers and advance the health of the land.

Their charge is to do what we can to keep the ranches and communities a part of the landscape. If competition becomes too tough and fragmentation occurs, the landscape will change.

4. WHY ARE CHANGES SUGGESTED?

If we look back to 1957, the ranch competition was drought, fire, the market, and maybe an occasional hunter, fisherman, logger or miner.

Today, that picture is much more complicated, we have the rancher, he is still in competition with drought, fire and the market, but now his margin is affected by more recreation (hunter, fisherman, off-road vehicle, wildlife interest, T&E interest, rock hunter), mining interests as well as logging or coal, oil and gas development.

With these thoughts in mind, BLM is proposing some new tools to help management.

5. TWO-PRONGED APPROACH:

Regulations:

In March, BLM started to work on proposed changes to the current 1995 regulations. We have had scoping meetings on some of the proposed changes, teams are working on an Environmental Statement and in December or January, the proposed regulations will be rolled out and the public and RACs will be asked for their comments and recommendations. That effort has yet to come!

Policy:

Policies are opportunities or tools to encourage flexibility, new partnerships or management practices that can work.

Even if not written, BLM managers have the flexibility to adjust or do things if they are not prohibited.

A policy makes it easier. A given policy provides direction, knowledge about an action, advertisement, and it gives legitimacy to an action.

6. POLICY:

The Director is asking the RACs to consider:

Will these policy proposals work?

OR are they needed in this RAC area at this time?

OR do we need new policy initiatives which are not addressed currently.

7. SWL CONCEPTS:

Conservation Partnerships

Reserve Common Allotments

Voluntary Allotment Restructuring

Landscape Habitat Improvement

8. CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIPS:

Will provide an opportunity for permittees, on a voluntary basis, to enter contracts or agreements with BLM and/or others to achieve improved rangeland health. They would be allowed to seek grants to pay for investments or to provide increased flexibility in management.

BLM does not have a policy where we go out and formally advertise for donations or grants to do work. This concept would provide that opportunity for the permittees to openly solicit or accept such grants.

- Cooperative Agreements
Involve BLM and the permittees plus other interests
- Grants or increased flexibility could be the incentive
- NRCS cost sharing, EQUIP, Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever.
- In Montana, Undaunted Stewardship provides funding for projects associated with the Lewis and Clark celebration.

EPA has grant programs and many individual organizations have grant programs

- Voluntary performance-based contracts to provide environmental services (upland recovery, riparian/wetland restoration, etc.). Weed control, Land Health Restoration, removal of unwanted vegetation, juniper or pine encroachment.
- Grazing flexibility, numbers, season of use, or something outside of the box. Many conservation groups realize that a poorly managed ranch is better than a subdivision

Numerous consultants are now openly soliciting grants for ranchers willing to make management adjustments for special uses.

9. RESERVE COMMON ALLOTMENTS

BLM does not currently have the option to accept or set aside BLM grazing areas that could be used for specific management purposes.

Allotments managed as reserve forage areas for use by permittees engaged in rangeland restoration on their customary allotments for implementation of rangeland recovery practices that require rest from grazing.

On occasion there are situations where operators or groups want to relinquish or set aside their grazing authorization in lieu of other management arrangements.

The opportunities for RCA in Montana are really limited; however, on occasion we have been approached with similar ideas.

10. VOLUNTARY ALLOTMENT RESTRUCTURING

- Voluntarily merging two or more allotments, through maintaining authorized grazing use at proportionately lower level for conservation purposes.
- This would allow options to make management shifts that could benefit other operators or other uses.
- The options would be temporary in nature.
- Agreements would be voluntary, with specified goal and arrangements.
- Sharing of grass for conservation and range preservation purposes. We can do this now, but it involves the decision process.

11. LANDSCAPE HABITAT IMPROVEMENT (Endangered Species Act Mitigation)

- Conservation Partnership, RCAs and Voluntary Allotment Restructuring could be used for habitat improvement. If such an option was available and we can keep the sage grouse unlisted, we maintain our management flexibility.

In many allotments, listed species may require special management practices but still allow flexibility to manage livestock grazing, e.g. Nesting or breeding requirements may require reduced or removal of grazing for designated periods of time. Reserve Common Allotments or Allotment Restructuring could be used to shift grazing from one area to another during these critical times.

12. SCHEDULE:

Joint RAC Meeting – October 29, 2003

RAC recommendation due to State Director – November 1, 2003

State Director forwards recommendations to Director Clarke – November 10, 2003

Final policy preparation after regulation process completed

Public Comment Period:

Question: Debbie Barrett: Are the subjects open to public comment?

Answer: Bill McIlvain: Yes, we have gone through the scoping process where we had field input. Based on those comments they are going to put together policy concepts and the rules that are associated with those. Anything that you do on public lands is open for comment.

Debbie Barrett (State Representative and Permittee): I have a concern if the State agencies and the federal agencies don't do what they are supposed to do, manage wildlife and manage the land, I am afraid that all 4 concepts are going to doom the permittee/lessee to failure. We are going to deal with, once again, in these allotments only with the livestock. You can't have a grazing discussion any more in Montana on private lands or public lands without including everything that grazes there having an impact. Until the wildlife numbers that we currently have in Montana are brought under control, in SW Montana we have an over abundance of elk; in eastern Montana we have an over abundance on antelope. Until we address those things, the permittees will fail.

Jules Marchesseault (Rancher): I would like to reiterate what Debbie said about the wild game, it is getting to where there are so many of them. You see areas where they have eaten forage and it is not only on the public land it's on the private land areas which is happening year-round. We are not getting compensated for that at all.

Patti Rowland (Southwest Stockgrowers Association): The policies disturb me a little bit. Goal of the Sustaining Working Landscapes and the economic viability (I am glad to see there is recognition about that) but the main goal seems to be environmental health and the first question that was asked for the RAC to answer, "Are we going in the right direction in SWL initiative?" I have to suggest no, it relates to what Mrs. Barrett said and what Mrs. Marxer said earlier what we are doing with this initiative is shifting the burden that BLM has carried to permittees to make sure that the environment and rangelands are healthy.

The concept of the reserve common allotments, I feel there is concern that vacant allotments will be drawn from removing permittees from existing allotments. I think the goal and the policy should be to make sure vacant allotments aren't created by removing existing allotments. I think the voluntary programs, the policies and regulations should be very specific about them being voluntary without public pressure and private interest's pressure, it has to be entirely voluntary from a permittee's perspective. I think weeds and wildlife have to be addressed and any type of initiative that addresses rangeland health.

*I will provide the RAC members with a copy of my notes.

Ray Marxer (Matador Cattle Company): The direction that this is going is good but it's flawed in some ways. What is the incentive for the permittee? I cannot see in the proposals where, from the permittee standpoint or grazing standpoint, where there were any incentives. The only incentive I could see is the permittee would have some flexibility to either set and manage a grazing system that would reach the objectives but not be limited so much in the manner that he get it. There still needs to be some guidelines and outcomes that are realistic.

SWL provides another layer of administration and bureaucracy. Noxious weeds management would provide an opportunity for incentive-based stewardship. Not in favor of conservation easements or any reductions in grazing.

RAC Members ask the Public presenters questions:

Dick Young: How would you go about incentive stewardship, what vision do you have?

Ray Marxer: It would have to be some type of increase in decision rights.

Comments from BLM State Director (Marty Ott):

The presentation that was presented to the RAC has brought confusion. This business is Sustaining Working Landscapes. Look at all the different levels of competition that for additional grazing is dealing with today, that they didn't have to deal with a few decades ago. It is a different world fundamentally. Can the permittee remain viable over time or is this a natural process that will have the family rancher become the thing of the past? Would like to believe public land managers in cooperation and coordination with users, not just with the permittees, with all users can bring into balance.

Recommendation from RAC to add or consider for SWL "Concepts":

- Incentive-based management (including weeds), decision making
- Conservation easements to prevent fragmentation
- Land exchanges/acquisitions
- Flexibility to add other ideas
- Add language of giving managers flexibility to implement

Decision: To form a subgroup to work on the concepts and have recommendations to take to the October 29th meeting.

Sue Marxer
Pat Flowers
Dennis Phillippi
Mark Goeden (BLM Representative)

Sage Grouse Update:

Proposed: To write a letter to the State Director to send to the Director regarding the National Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy.

Decision: The RAC members agreed to send the following letter to the State Director:

“We are writing this letter to offer our support from the Western Montana Resource Advisory Council for your efforts to develop a Draft National Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Plan. The BLM manages a substantial acreage of important sage grouse habitat. For that reason, a National Conservation Strategy is a critical step to ensure the long-term conservation of sage grouse. We think it is essential that your National Strategy is consistent with Montana’s State developed conservation strategy.”

NEXT MEETING: Proposal of having the WMRAC meeting in Billings, Montana on October 29th followed by a Statewide RAC meeting on October 30, 2003.

NOTE: Since the September 10th meeting, the statewide meeting will be on October 29th, followed by a WMRAC meeting on October 30th.

Suggestions to bring up with the other RACs:

- Offer letter on Sage Grouse
- Weeds
- OHV Implementation

MEETING ADJOURNED

Western Montana Resource Advisory Council
Minutes
July 9, 2003
Butte Field Office

Members Present: Sue Marxer (Chair), Ted Coffman, Ben Deeble, Rob McCulloch, Susan Lenard, Roger Peters, Robin Urban, Dick Young, Pat Flowers and Robin Cunningham.

Members Absent: Garry Williams, Dennis Phillippi, Donna Tate McDonald, Mel Montgomery and Doug Abelin.

BLM: Rick Hotaling (Butte Field Manager), Nancy Anderson (Missoula Field Manager), Tim Bozorth (Dillon Field Manager), Marilyn Krause (Facilitator) and Cheryl Atkins (Notes).

Guests: Dick Fichtler (Missoula Field Office)

Reminder: September 10, 2003, Sustaining Working Landscapes Initiative

The council convened at 9:00 a.m. with the facilitator covering introductions, ground rules, and agenda review.

Addition to Agenda: Upper Horse Prairie Decisions

FIELD OFFICE OVERVIEWS:

Missoula Field Office (Nancy Anderson):

New Personnel:

Range Management Specialist – Mike Tietmeyer reported for duty last month.
Forestry Technician (vice – Wall) – announcement closes next week.

- We are continuing to work on our watershed assessments. We had anticipated a decision record being issued this fall for the Flint Creek environmental assessment (approximately 8,500 acres of BLM land in the Phillipsburg area) but it will probably be delayed due to coordination issues with the Forest Service. We are in the preliminary phases of work on the South Hoodoos watershed assessment (covers approximately 9,500 acres of BLM land). This field season we are continuing to implement projects from our three completed assessments (Elk Creek, Lower Blackfoot Corridor, and Murray-Douglas).
- The Linton Mine reclamation projection should go out for bid by the end of the month. We will be removing approximately 45,000 cubic yards of material to an on-site repository and 90,000 cubic yards to an off-site repository (about 5 miles north of the site). (Volumes are waste materials).
- We held three open houses to solicit public comments on Special Recreation Permit Management on the Blackfoot River. We will be discussing this issue later today.

- We should complete Phase II of our Belmont Creek restoration project today. This project is using draft horses to help place large woody debris in the creek.
- The Notice of Intent to amend our RMP to adopt the lynx conservation strategy was published. Our goal is to complete the amendment next year.

Butte Field Office (Rick Hotaling):

New Personnel:

Fire Mitigation Education Specialist – Terina Mullen

- **Limestone Hills Withdrawal:** After briefing the members of the State Legislature from that area and the Broadwater and Lewis and Clark County Commissioners, we are moving forward with that. We are hoping to have the public scoping in the next couple of months. On completion of the public scoping we will be asking the RAC Subgroup to help address issues that will arise out of that scoping. The timeframe is to start the public scoping in the next couple of months and have the EIS finished within the next 18 to 24 months.
- **Whitetail-Pipestone Travel Management Plan:** The record of decision and finding of no significant impacts was signed on March 3, 2003. We are waiting on the 30-day appeal period. Thanks to the RAC Subgroup that worked on the preferred alternative. The Forest Service has indicated their intention to start the Travel Management Process for the Whitetail-Pipestone area.
- **Butte RMP:** With the passing of the budget, we are expecting to start the plan revision. Due to the delay, we do not anticipate starting the public involvement process until later this fall.
- **Ward Ranch Exchange:** Still in progress. We anticipate completing the final phase of the exchange this fall.
- **Golden Sunlight Mine (GSM):** GSM has proposed a land exchange with BLM. GSM would exchange their land in the Doherty Mountain area near Cardwell and the Piedmont swamp area near Whitehall for BLM land within the mine boundary.

Dillon Field Office (Tim Bozorth):

- **Fuels Projects:** We are continuing work on the Virginia City risk assessment mitigation plan (64,000 acres) Once complete, we will work on our NEPA analysis and proposed treatments of that area in 2005.
- **Watershed Assessments:** We are conducting watershed assessments in the Highlands and the North Ruby's and we will do the same process as Missoula FO where we will look at and make a determination of what we need to do and go into the NEPA analysis late this fall and next winter we will look at what we will do in the future.
- We are working on the NEPA for the Barton Gulch project which consists of timber harvest and prescribed burning to reduce fuels in that drainage. The project should be complete next year with implementation starting in 2005.
- A fire history study will start later this summer in the Centennials. We are looking at fire frequencies and intervals.
- **Sage Grouse Issues:** State of Montana Sage Grouse Conservation Plan is at the printer. BLM Sage Grouse Plan is conceptual and doesn't contain specifics.

- We completed an acquisition on the Beaverhead (about 80 acres surrounding the Pipe Organ property acquired several years ago between Clark Canyon and Dillon). There were some mining claims that were contiguous to the property as well as another piece right next to FWP fishing access sites. We are waiting for the closing on that.
- The Pipe Organ tract duck ponds are completed. We are not putting water in the ponds right now because of our concerns about downstream water needs so we are going to wait until this fall.
- The fire danger was raised to HIGH this week in southwestern Montana so we are on alert to see what's next. The feasibility report on Big Hole Battlefield exchange was signed last week.
- USFWS recommendation on the westslope cutthroat trout listing will come out in August. It was petitioned for listing and was denied and sent back to USFWS because they didn't adequately consider how to address dilution of genetic purity.
- We finished the Upper Horse Prairie decision resulting from our watershed assessment on those 50,000 acres. We received some protests and we are waiting to see if the final decision is appealed. The reason is the reopening of the pasture after it has been rested for 10 years.

The Gallatin Wildlife Association requested that the RAC consider if they want to discuss this at this meeting. I spoke with Marilyn and our agenda is full but we wanted to see if the RAC wants to talk about it at the September meeting.

Question:

Who is the point of contact for input on the BLM National Sage Grouse strategy plan?

Answer:

Roxanne Falise (Montana State Office) will be the POC. She has been involved with the discussions and that group.

Update from all 3 Field Offices (Rick Hotaling):

The RAC worked hard on the OHV plan for the Montana/Dakotas. The protests have been resolved and a record of decision was issued a couple weeks ago. We will start to implement the plan that we started in 1998.

We are still moving forward with the Statewide Fire Management Plan; it should be coming out very soon.

Update on Dillon RMP (Tim Bozorth):

We are still on target with the release of the Draft RMP, March 2004. We are working on the final adjustments on alternatives and starting to work on the analysis of impacts of the alternatives. We are beginning to write Chapter 4 (Impact Analysis). There's the "No Action" Alternative which is current management direction and three other alternatives. The Statewide OHV decision will be incorporated into the "No Action" Alternative. Recommendations that the

RAC gave us from the April meeting have been reviewed and we made sure the alternatives were consistent with those recommendations. There may be some instances in some alternatives where there are some variances such as where we had no aerial spraying in some locations based on resource concerns and the recommendation was to use all effective means for weed treatments. We still think they are pretty consistent with what the recommendations were.

The RAC had questions regarding Riparian Assessments and whether or not they considered geologic or hydrologic processes and they definitely do. There was a recommendation that we use 3rd party contracting for data collection.

Madison County has a concern regarding competitive sourcing and the potential effect on rural communities and economics by contracting out work that we typically do in-house.

There will be an updated news letter on the RMP next week. It will contain the general direction of the alternatives and also the RACs recommendations from the digest that came up in April and also to define a little better the RMP decisions verses project levels and contact information.

We are doing a social assessment; Joan Trent will be contacting each of the RAC members to explain what she is doing and set up interview times. There will be 67 people interviewed and the findings will go into the social impact section of the RMP. (Not exclusive of residents of Beaverhead and Madison Counties).

Tim will check with Joan Trent to see if she can e-mail the RAC members the questions she will be asking during her interview.

How does the RAC want to be involved in the Draft RMP Review? It will be released in March of next year, possible options for the RAC are:

- 1) Homework section during the 90-day comment period which will start in March and provide comments to BLM.
- 2) Host public meetings. Listen to comments from individuals and groups, what should be recommended to BLM
- 3) RAC members could come to public meetings that BLM hosts and make comments
- 4) Hold work sessions after the public comment period to review the comments received from the public and make recommendations to BLM on what changes you would like to see in the draft.

***Whatever you want to do, you don't have to make a decision right now. (Future agenda item)**

Sue M. -There has been a lot of debated issues of getting money for monitoring studies. Is the reason BLM is not getting monitoring done is because of getting money to do so?

Nancy A. – It was mentioned recently, a request from our state office to start putting our 2004 monitoring needs in our budget planning system.

Blackfoot River Special Recreation Permit Discussion (Dick Fichtler):

- Handout, map of the Blackfoot River and slide show.

Dick went through a power point presentation with the RAC regarding Special Recreation Permits.

Summary:

The reason the BLM came out with Special Recreation Permits is because we wanted to respond to congressional inquiry's cost recovery, and we wanted to make sure there is a fair return to the taxpayer for special use of public lands. We had a bunch of new fee demo areas coming on line and needed to address how special recreation permits interfaced with fee areas. We also wanted to address group activities.

Our authority to do this comes from Federal Land Policy and Management Act and the Land of Water Conservation Fund Act. A Fee Demo Program allows all the fees to come back to the hosting office so we get money back on the land where it was generated.

We received over 400 comments (national), most did not object to the proposed rule. 10-year permits are now finalized, which the National Outfitter/Guide organization liked; the limit before were 5-year permits.

Special Recreation Permits (SRP's) are: authorizations which allow recreation uses for public lands and related waters. They are there to control visitor use, protect the resources whether it's recreational or natural resources. We wanted to insure public health and safety and we needed a mechanism for accommodating legitimate commercial use of public lands.

SRPs cover:

- Commercial Use
- Competitive Use (ex. Canoe/Kayak races)
- Vending
- Special Area Use (fees already associated)
- Organized Group Activity/Event Use (ex. Boy Scout campouts, fraternity organizations)

Permits are not needed when the use is sponsored or co-sponsored by the BLM. When a competitive event is not commercial, complies with land use plans/designations, does not award cash prizes, not publicly advertised, poses no risk for damage and requires no monitoring.

We have over 30 years of collaborative efforts in the Blackfoot. In the early 1970s the Blackfoot Recreation Corridor was identified by private landowners. Landowners had concerns about increased use and asked the agencies what they were going to do about it. They all sat down together and the Blackfoot Recreation Corridor landowner's agreement was formed.

The Blackfoot Challenge organization has been in effect for a little over 10 years. It has extended its collaborative relationship all the way up the Blackfoot River, instead of the 26 miles

of recreation corridor; it's the whole 100 miles of the drainage. They work on water quality issues and fish habitat restoration.

Starting in 1995, FWP with a lot of help from BLM, started a public process of taking a look at recreation use on the Blackfoot, see where we're at, where we've come in the last 30 years and what are our issues today. In 2000, what came out of that process is the final Blackfoot River Recreation Management Direction. It's a guidance document; it was not analyzed through the NEPA process and no formal decision was made. All the agencies and private land owners were involved in developing this document. They broke the river into 6 distinct reaches; and suggested a basic recreation experience for each reach.

It was recommended that we needed to form a citizen advisory committee (like the RAC) that the FWP hosted and the Recreation Steering Committee (RecSteerCom) was formed. They have been working on the Blackfoot issues for a couple years. In 2000, the University of Montana did a user study funded by BLM, but the fire season closed the forests so we did not get the kind of data we were hoping for. However, we did get a lot of quality data on how people felt about their experiences on the Blackfoot. FWP with some support from BLM wrapped up a study last year on recreation uses.

Some of our management challenges that we are trying to address are:

- Exploding population in the Missoula area
- Competing demands for river resources
- Fragmented ownership patterns
- Visitor Succession

We just finished our public scoping process and we identified all the landowners through the Blackfoot Challenge along the river; we also wrote to the Board of Outfitters which in return sent us a list of outfitters that had listed the Blackfoot on their plan of operations (26) and we also hosted open houses in Missoula, Ovando and Helena and issued 2 press releases.

Some of the issues that were identified were:

- Ease of Administration
- Transferability
- How will allocation system work (problems with Historical Use?)
- Will there be a portion of the river with No Commercial Use?

The next step is to develop a draft management plan for SRPs. The draft plan will become the proposed action of the Environmental Assessment. The draft plan will define the process of issuing permits; identify how the permits will be administered; define when a permit is not needed; and the possibility of defining an allocation system for implementation at some future time when the need is defined.

We need to form an Interdisciplinary team for preparation of an EA. This is where the RAC comes in. A possible role for the RAC is: 1) as a group review the draft plan in a EA, 2) review it individually without the processes of the RAC, or 3) form a subcommittee. The subcommittee can be composed entirely of the RAC, or you can take advantage of the

RecSteerCom and designate them as the RACs subcommittee. We can also take some elements of the RAC and the RecSteerCom and form a subcommittee to help the Missoula FO with this.

Question:

Is there a document already produced by the RecSteerComm?

Answer:

No, there is only the River Management direction document. Some of the RecSteerComm helped develop the document.

Proposed:

*What level of involvement is the RAC interested in?

Decision:

RAC designates RecSteerComm as a RAC Subcommittee for this issue.

Designate Robin Cunningham as a liaison on RecSteerComm as an information conduit rather than voting member of RecSteerCom. All recommendations as they apply to BLM need to be reviewed and ratified by RAC as a group.

Sustaining Working Landscapes Initiative (Dave Pacioretty):

The initiative is to implement the Secretary's 4C's within the grazing program. Consultation, Coordination and Collaboration has been and currently is in our grazing regulations. The WO has tasked other field offices to participate in public meetings this spring to look at the initiative which will involve and develop new agency policy and they want to explore that under this initiative, can the concepts be implemented under the existing authority.

What does this mean for the RAC? In the interim before September 10th, a possibility is for the RAC to form a subgroup that we can review information as it comes along so you can be kept current. If information becomes available, we are going to receive public comments and the RAC as a group can review these public comments or you can choose not to; and essentially provide recommendations to the Director or choose not to.

Sue: Received a letter from the wrap-up of the meeting she attended in WO in April and there were several issues raised. The ones we focused on were 1) species management 2) weeds/landscapes. We had expected to have the preliminary work by this meeting. WO really wants the feedback and recommendations from the RAC. It was suggested to hold a public scoping meeting related to Sustaining Working Landscapes Initiative. At the meeting in WO it was mentioned that the basic rules of the regulations still stand.

Debbie Barrett (Representative for State Legislature) has been behind the Sustained Wildlife Management. Debbie is interested in what happens with the Sustaining Working Landscapes and is hoping somehow the RAC will be working the FWP.

Comment:

If we are going through the scoping process, you need to notify the broader interested public not just the permittees.

Each FO is responsible for notifying their local constituents, like permittees. The BLM State Office is handling the state-wide interest groups.

Proposed:

*Do we want to form a subgroup now? (Concern is the time frame before the September meeting) - Review the public comments

Recommendation:

WMRAC recommends a 60-day public comment period, followed by a minimum of 45 days for RAC to review public comments and make recommendations; cc to other RAC's in MT/DAKs and Mary Apple (State Coordinator).

Proposed:

*Is there any interest from the RAC forming a subgroup once information is received?

Decision:

Hold off on the subgroup until at least the RAC sees the document and maybe form something at the September meeting and try to work through those issues at the meeting.

Question:

What is the progress of recreation planning on the Madison River in the Dillon Field Office?

Answer:

We were trying to set up a meeting in early June but it didn't work out because of people's commitments but we met with FWP and some of our SO people to try to figure out how we are going to do it. (basically the same thing as the Missoula FO is doing on the Blackfoot). There isn't the structure and history on the Madison as on the Blackfoot. The approach is very similar but we are not as far along as the Missoula FO. We are going to start on the lower river first (below the Beartrap Canyon down to Blacks Ford) and implement on that; then move to the upper river. We realize that we have to make this fit very closely with FWP and where things are going to go with the river management. We haven't had any scoping meetings yet.

We were hoping to try to get something up and running in 2004 for the lower river but I don't think that is going to happen. We talked a lot about a flat fee versus trying to simplify the fee formula like the Forest Service has and we came up with basically the same costs but it is on a per person per day basis versus trying to calculate 3% gross. We think we have concurrence on this point with our State Office.

NEXT MEETING: September 10, 2003. The meeting will be at the Dillon Search and Rescue Building, 1000 Highway 41 North, Dillon, Montana. Sustaining Working Landscapes.

NEXT MEETING TOPICS:

- How does RAC want to be involved in review of draft Dillon RMP? (decide before March 2004)
- Upper Horse Prairie Decision (Tim Bozorth)

MEETING ADJOURNED followed by field trip to High Ore Creek reclamation area and Sugarloaf Mountain reforestation project.

MINUTES FROM WESTERN MONTANA RAC MEETING

April 16, 2003

The Western Montana RAC held a working session in on April 16, 2003 at the Search and Rescue Building in Dillon. The main focus of the meeting was to review comments from the focus question workshops and determine if the RAC wanted to forward any particular recommendations to BLM for consideration as alternatives are developed for the Dillon Resource Management Plan (RMP). Twelve of the fifteen members (four from each category) were in attendance. Absent from the meeting were Roger Peters (Category 1), Sue Lenard (Category 2), and Garry Williams (Category 3). Present were:

Category 1

Sue Marxer
Doug Abelin
Donna McDonald
Rob McCulloch

Category 2

Ben Deeble
Dennis Phillipi
Dick Young
Robin Urban

Category 3

Ted Coffman
Pat Flowers
Rob Cunningham
Mel Montgomery

The meeting started at 9 a.m. Marilyn started with a few housekeeping items and requested members to fill out the contact form indicating their preference of how the public can contact them, and passed out the travel reimbursement forms. Marilyn then turned the meeting over to Pat Fosse of the Dillon Field Office who welcomed the group as the Acting Field Manager in Tim Bozorth's absence. Pat then presented a plaque to RAC member Mel Montgomery in appreciation of the eight years he has served as a member of the Western Montana RAC (since 1995). Chairperson Sue Marxer seconded the remarks made by Pat.

Sue then indicated that she had received an email message from Roger Peters, a member of the RAC and that he had asked for the email to be read to the group as he would not be attending. Sue read the email that indicated Roger had concerns that his grazing allotments would be discussed at the meeting, that his grazing allotments had been discussed with the public, and that his concerns regarding road maintenance and the proliferation of weeds was not addressed in any BLM documents.

To clarify the process used on some of Roger's grazing allotments, Pat explained the public involvement requirements as laid out in the grazing regulations, and let the RAC know the status of the environmental assessment process for the Horse Prairie allotments, some of which are leased to Roger. The question was raised by RAC members about why Roger thought his allotments were on the agenda. No one seemed to know why Roger thought his allotments were to be discussed as it was not identified as an agenda item. It was also mentioned that the concern about road maintenance has been included in the Summary Report of public comments prepared by the Counties and the MCC.

No further discussion occurred and Pat thanked the group for taking the time to come to the work

session and turned the meeting over to Marilyn. Marilyn reviewed the agenda and noted the main purpose of the meeting to be a work session to review public comments from the Dillon RMP Focus Question efforts and determine whether the RAC as a group wanted to adopt or endorse any particular recommendations to BLM for use in alternative development.

Based on suggestions from the December RAC meeting and discussions with Renee Johnson, Dillon RMP Project Coordinator, prior to the meeting, Marilyn proposed breaking into four small groups and randomly selecting the issue categories. The issue list was broken into categories, and it was suggested that the ACEC, Wild and Scenic River, and travel issues had been previously considered by the RAC, and that focus should be on the six remaining categories of Riparian/Uplands, Forest/Woodlands, Sensitive Species/Conservation Strategies, Noxious Weeds, Commercial Uses, and Other Items/Miscellaneous. Several members felt it was more important to be able to discuss things they had knowledge about rather than be assigned to issues randomly. It was also suggested the whole group meet as one, but concerns were expressed on the part of other members about being more effective in smaller groups. The RAC members then decided to break into two groups of six people comprised of two representatives from each category. Each group would address three of the six issue categories. One group reviewed the issues for Riparian and Upland, Forests and Woodlands, and Conservation Strategies/Sensitive Species. The other group reviewed the issues of Noxious Weeds, Commercial Use, and the Miscellaneous Category. The groups were formed as follows:

Members of the Weeds/Commercial Use/Other Group (Group A)

- Ted Coffman
- Rob Cunningham
- Dick Young
- Doug Abelin
- Donna McDonald
- Robin Urban

Members of the Riparian-Upland/Forests-Woodland/Conservation Strategies Group (Group B)

- Sue Marxer
- Rob McCulloch
- Dennis Phillipi
- Ben Deeble
- Pat Flowers
- Mel Montgomery

Each group spent the morning reviewing the comments from the public focus question workshops as presented in the Summary Report. After lunch, the RAC reconvened as the full group to discuss the small group recommendations. Donna McDonald presented the recommendations from Group A. Mel Montgomery presented the recommendations from Group B. Each recommendation was discussed by the entire group and decisions on whether to adopt or modify were reached on each recommendation. There was discussion that some of the recommendations are more implementation-related than items that will be addressed in the plan alternatives. Results of the RAC decisions on the small group recommendations are presented below by category. All recommendations to BLM were made by consensus of the twelve RAC members present.

Noxious Weeds

Small Group Recommendation:

Use all effective means of controlling noxious weeds, including browsing, burning, spraying, hand

pulling, mechanical, and biologicals such as bugs and pathogens. (“Effective” means demonstrative effective in the control of noxious weeds in the planning area).

RAC Decision:

Adopt as modified by adding State law reference.

Modification:

Use all effective means of controlling noxious weeds in accordance with State law, including browsing, burning, spraying, hand pulling, mechanical, and biologicals such as bugs and pathogens. (“Effective” means demonstrative effective in the control of noxious weeds in the planning area).

Small Group Recommendation:

Implementation Strategy

Educate users by using current resources and other organizations that work with BLM on weed control.

Suggestions:

- Website
- Brochures
- PSAs/news media
- Washing stations

Follow the Montana State Weed Management Plan

RAC Decision:

Adopt. (Also use a similar strategy to educate public about vegetation management).

Commercial Uses**Small Group Recommendation:**

Proper management of public land will allow commercial and multiple use as long as land health standards are met.

RAC Decision:

Adopt.

Miscellaneous/Other**Small Group Recommendation:**

BLM should obtain land, preferably by exchange.

RAC Decision:

Don't adopt as written. Combine with recommendation on direct purchase below.

Small Group Recommendation:

Direct purchase of lands should be considered in circumstances where:

- Special public values exist
- Access

RAC Decision:

Rework and adopt as modified.

Modification:

Exchange or direct purchase of lands should be considered where special public values exist or access would be improved.

Small Group Recommendation:

Easements must be acquired or reserved during exchange transactions when access to public land is improved.

RAC Decision:

Modify slightly as below

Modification:

Easements must be acquired or reserved during exchange transactions so access to public land is improved.

Riparian/Upland**Small Group Recommendation:**

Grazing practices should incorporate some form of vegetation rest that ensures the long-term productivity and health of vegetation.

RAC Decision:

This recommendation was adopted as written.

Small Group Recommendation:

Encourage coordination among all land mgmt agencies including FWP.

RAC Decision:

This recommendation was adopted as modified below.

Modification:

Encourage coordination and partnerships among all land mgmt entities including FWP and private landowners.

Small Group Recommendation:

Encourage third-party contracts (academic community or professionally credible) for evaluation, monitoring and research of land management systems. Emphasize continuity.

RAC Decision:

This recommendation was adopted as modified below.

Modification:

Encourage third-party contracts (academic community or professionally credible sources) for evaluation, monitoring and research of representative land management systems. Emphasize continuity.

Small Group Recommendation:

Manage sagebrush for a mosaic pattern and diversity of species and age classes. No broad-scale treatment, with a goal of no-net loss of sage habitat.

RAC Decision:

Adopt.

Small Group Recommendation:

In assessing proper functioning conditions for streams, consider geologic and hydrologic aspects.

RAC Decision:

Adopt.

Small Group Recommendation:

Incorporate beaver management into riparian management when appropriate and in coordination with FWP.

RAC Decision:

Adopt.

Forest/Woodlands**Small Group Recommendation:**

Forest and woodlands should be managed for mosaic and diversity of species and age classes that reflect the natural range of variability.

RAC Decision:

Adopt as modified and add language about outreach education of public on mgmt activities doing this.

Modification:

Forest and woodlands should be managed for mosaic patterns and diversity of species and age classes that reflect the natural range of variability. Implement educational tools to inform public of projects that do this.

Small Group Recommendation:

Encourage the use of stewardship contracting.

RAC Decision:

Adopt with modification/clarification.

Modification:

Encourage the use of stewardship contracting (ie. exchange of goods for service)

Small Group Recommendation:

There should be no net increase in road density for forest management with roads built to minimum standards necessary for product removal.

RAC Decision:

Adopt as modified below.

Modification:

There should be no net increase in permanent, total road density for forest management with roads built to minimum standards necessary for product removal. Restore temporary roads to original contour.

Conservation Strategies/Sensitive Species**Small Group Recommendation:**

Ask BLM to comply with management direction provide by Sage Grouse Mgmt Plan and Westslope Cutthroat Trout Mgmt Plan.

RAC Decision:

Adopt.

Before closing the meeting, the RAC spent some time identifying items that Sue Marxer as Chair should take back to the National RAC meeting in Washington D.C. next week. It was agreed Sue should discuss the BLM grazing regulations and ask why BLM didn't first seek RAC input on a major regulation change. She will find out if there's a possibility of getting a special comment extension period for the purpose of allowing RAC's to submit comments. She will also ask about weed funding and monitoring funding. There was a question about the RAC application process and what positions are open. Marilyn indicated that all people interested should be encouraged to apply as BLM is being told they should forward both a preferred selection and an alternate candidate for each vacancy.

The group then discussed the July 9 meeting agenda. Plans are for a ½ day field trip to abandoned mine land sites in the Butte Field Office. Topics for the remainder ½ day meeting are:

- National RAC Meeting Update
- Grazing regulation discussion (depends on comment extension/outcome)
- Dillon RMP Update

It was requested that minutes of all RAC meetings in the Montana/Dakotas be exchanged between RACs and that membership lists for each of the Montana/Dakotas RACs be provided at the next meeting.

The group also discussed some future agenda topics.

Future Meeting Topics

- Chase Hibbard Presentation
- Sage Creek Tour (Sue)

On a final note, Marilyn asked the group for an assessment of how they felt they were working together, and discussed the possibility of conducting a session on integrated problem solving with Steve Hartmann of the Butte Field Office. The group decided that they would leave that option open for further discussion if it looked like that might be useful when new members come on board.

The meeting adjourned about 4 p.m.

Western Montana Resource Advisory Council
Minutes
March 13, 2003
Missoula Field Office

Members Present: Sue Marxer (Chair), Ted Coffman, Donna Tate McDonald, Ben Deeble, Mel Montgomery, Doug Abelin, Rob McCulloch, Susan Lenard, Roger Peters, Robin Urban, Dennis Phillippi, Dick Young and Garry Williams.

Members Absent: Robin Cunningham and Pat Flowers.

BLM: Rick Hotaling (Butte Field Manager), Nancy Anderson (Missoula Field Manager), Tim Bozorth (Dillon Field Manager), Marilyn Krause (Facilitator) and Cheryl Dinius (Notes).

Guests: Marty Ott (BLM State Director), Dave Pacioretty (Butte Field Office), Chuck Bridgeman (Missoula Field Office)

Agenda Change: Rebecca Watson, Assistant Secretary of Lands and Minerals, WO, will not be here today at 2:45.

Reminder: Working Meeting in Dillon on April 16 at 9:00 a.m.

The council convened at 9:00 a.m. with the facilitator covering introductions, ground rules, and agenda review.

Sue M. introduced herself and clarified her role as Chairperson.

Nancy Anderson introduced Marty Ott, BLM State Director for Montana/Dakota's. Marty recognized the Council for their work on the Whitetail-Pipestone issue and for their involvement in several of the Dillon RMP subgroups. He encouraged them to work with their interest groups and nominate other interested individuals to serve on the RAC.

ELECTION OF CHAIRPERSON/VICE CHAIR:

Sue Marxer has been re-elected as Chairperson and Ted Coffman as Vice Chair.

RAC NOMINATION PERIOD:

Mel Montgomery's term will expire in September. He will not be eligible for re-nomination since he has served two three-year terms. The current RAC members that can be renominated and considered for another term are: Rob McCullough, Donna Tate McDonald, Sue Marxer and Dick Young.

All want to be considered for re-nomination in September. Marilyn will call the interest group that originally submitted the letter of recommendation, if they still support your involvement on the council, then BLM will consider the re-nomination request along with other applications received.

FIELD OFFICE OVERVIEWS:

Missoula Field Office (Nancy Anderson):

New Personnel:

Chuck Bridgeman – Assistant Field Manager for Non-Renewable Resources (vice Delon Potter) reported this week.

Brian Maiorano – Outdoor Recreation Planner.

Katie Albritton – Fuels Technician.

We are waiting for approval for the selection of our new Range Management Specialist (vice Larry Newman).

- We are continuing to work on our Flint Creek assessment. This involves approximately 8,500 acres of BLM land in the Phillipsburg area. We anticipate a decision record being issued this fall.
- We are beginning work on the South Hoodoos watershed assessment. That effort will look at approximately 9,500 acres of BLM land.
- We issued the decision on the Murray-Douglas-Yourname management projects. 4,400 acres were recommended for treatment.
- We issued the decision for the Linton mine reclamation. We will be removing approximately 45,000 cubic yards of material to an on-site repository and 90,000 cubic yards to an off-site repository (about 5 miles north of the site). (Volumes are waste materials.)
- Next month we will begin our public scoping process for Special Recreation Permit Management on the Blackfoot River. The intent is to look at commercial uses (outfitters and guides), competitive uses (downriver canoe races, etc.), and organized groups. Tentatively plan open houses in Missoula, Ovando, and Helena during the week of April 21, 2003. The goal is to issue the decision record by July 2004.

Butte Field Office (Rick Hotaling):

New Personnel:

John Thompson – New Fire Management Officer is on board.

We are almost ready to make a selection for the Fire Mitigation Education Specialist.

- **Limestone Hills Withdrawal:** We have briefed the State Legislature from that area and Broadwater and Lewis and Clark County Commissioners, we are moving forward with that. We are hoping to have the public scoping in the next couple of months. On completion of the public scoping we will be asking the RAC Subgroup to help identify issues that will arise out of that scoping. The timeframe is to start the public scoping in the next couple of months and have the EIS finished within the next 18 to 24 months.
- **Whitetail-Pipestone Travel Management Plan:** The record of decision and finding of no significant impacts was signed on March 3, 2003. We are waiting on the 30-day appeal period. Thanks to the RAC Subgroup that worked on the preferred alternative. The Forest Service has indicated their intention to start the Travel Management Process for the Whitetail-Pipestone area.
- **Butte RMP:** With the passing of the budget, we are expecting to start the plan revision. Due to the delay, we do not anticipate starting the public involvement process until later this fall.
- **Ward Ranch Exchange:** Processing forward. We anticipate completing the final phase of the exchange this fall.

- **Golden Sunlight Mine (GSM):** GSM has proposed to BLM a land exchange. GSM would exchange their land in the Doherty Mountain area near Cardwell and the Peidmont swamp area near Whitehall for BLM land within the mine boundary.

-
Dillon Field Office (Tim Bozorth):

- On February 4, 2003, we sent a drought letter to all permittees. The letter was to give advance notice that DFO BLM will authorize livestock use this year based on the percentage of long term annual precipitation received by March 31, 2003.
- 30 Bighorn Sheep were introduced on the west side of the Ruby Mountains.
- We issued a decision to rent the Axolatal Lake Cabin as part of the USFS cabin rental network. Maintenance required for this effort will be toilets at the cabin and Twin Lakes, gravel portions of the cabin access road, and water system development.
- We are working on a land acquisition of 100 acres adjacent to the Pipe Organ property BLM recently acquired along the Beaverhead River and appraisal of an adjacent property.
- We are seeking a recreation permit for management of Montana Department of Transportation parcels along the Lower Madison River between Warm Springs and Black's Ford.
- DFO is working with MDFWP on improving Black's Ford fishing access site.
- We are working with MDEQ on TMDL watershed assessment in Ruby Watershed merging in BLM S&G Watershed assessment.
- The feasibility report on Big Hole Battlefield exchange was signed last week.
- We are taking part in a Competitive Sourcing study with 2 Dillon, 2 Missoula and 5 Butte maintenance workers.
- We are working on permitting outfitter use on the lower Madison River between Warm Springs and Black's Ford.
- A timber sale will be offered in the Badger Pass area in April and had discussions on a forestry stewardship project with Beaverhead County.
- Working on allotment revisions in the Upper Horse Prairie Watershed. Three EAs will result from this effort.
- We signed the decision on the Bear Creek Ranches EA, the appeal period closes March 24, 2003.

Update on Dillon RMP (Tim Bozorth): Hand out.

The RMP Digest that we spoke of at the December RAC meeting was mailed out to over 500 people at the end of January. We distributed another 60 as a result of news releases and attendance at Focus Question Workshops. It contained information that the public could review prior to the workshops to help them make informed comments about alternative development.

Nine workshops were held in Butte, Bozeman, Missoula, Dillon, Lima, Jackson, Ennis, Twin Bridges and Harrison. Travel maps from the RAC Subgroup work were displayed and people were encouraged to make suggestions for BLM to consider as the team develops other alternatives.

Results of Workshops

-
 A summary report is being prepared by the Consensus Council and Counties. The summary is due to BLM by March 31. At the last meeting, the RAC requested this report be provided to them so they could look at the responses and have a work session to determine if the RAC wants to recommend any

of the particular approaches suggested by the public. We will send out the report to the RAC members on April 1st so they can come prepared for the April 16th work session in Dillon at the Search and Rescue building.

The Planning team will be briefed by the Consensus Council and County on April 3, and will continue to work on alternatives, considering and incorporating where possible, any new ideas resulting from the workshops. The staff is currently working on Active/Passive/Moderate approaches by program that will then be melded into entire alternative management scenarios.

Travel Planning

RAC members and the Travel subgroup members were sent information on adjustments made to the subgroup maps prior to the Focus Question Workshops. The Planning team meeting will meet the week of April 7th to look at alternative travel scenarios to the subgroup proposal.

An *RMP Update* newsletter will be released in the next few days. The mailing list for the RMP now has 550+ addresses.

Sue M. (question to Tim B.):

The WSRs are still listed the same way in the RMP Digest the subgroup worked over before the RAC gave recommendations. Why?

Tim B. (answer):

It is a procedure we have to use in the RMP for WSR's. We have to have all the rivers in one alternative or another. It is a requirement even though we had RAC recommendations which will go in the preferred alternative we still have to have all the rivers in an alternative which is why we have it in the RMP Digest.

The ACEC nominations are already taken care of, it is different requirement. The work the subgroup did will be used.

Doug Abelin ACEC subgroup member (question to Tim):

Regarding Everson Creek, it was indicated that there were 8,000 acres is that entire area subject to cultural resource use, can't figure out why it was such a broad area?

Sue M./Mel M.:

Rick W. had outlined specific areas they wanted to protect from minerals, but do not recall 8,000 acres.

Mel M.:

It was nominated but doesn't seem it was 8,000 acres. They wanted specific areas, and we felt if it was approved it would be for a much bigger area. But it seems like we could reduce that. This is why we had trouble with some of the ACEC because they were so broad of an area and overlapped other areas and if they were all approved it would be the whole state.

Tim will get it clarified for you. He will talk to Mark and give you an update at the April 16th meeting.

Sage Grouse Planning (Tim Bozorth):

The Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Sage Grouse in Montana received only 80 comments. The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MDFWP) is summarizing and working next week to review those comments and determine recommended responses and changes to the plan. Then the Sage Grouse Work Group will reconvene and go over the MDFWP recommendations and finalize the plan.

The BLM's National Sage Grouse Strategy Team met in Boise last week and a smaller group will continue to meet next week. It will include the following:

1. Guidance to acquire better information to improve our ability to evaluate management actions at multiple scales.
2. Protocols for consistent monitoring at all levels (What did we do, did it work at RMP, regional, rangewide)
3. Guidance to review Land Use Plans (RMPS) to determine the adequacy for delivering conservation and maintenance of sage grouse and sagebrush habitats.
4. Interim management guidance that can be accomplished without NEPA.
5. Funding strategies to get more money to the ground.
6. An emphasis on partnerships within communities to solve problems across boundaries.

The Sage Grouse Funding Committee is going to hire a coordinator to work with the local sage grouse work groups. BLM is looking to obtain a sage grouse coordinator.

Mel M. (question to Tim B.):

I would like to find out what your feeling is with all the talk about sage grouse and trying to keep it listed predator impact on sage grouse, rarely addressed by the agency which are doing some of these studies, if myself or some other person brings it up it is pushed aside. Would like to make sure of if you agree on the number of predators or not if it is true the predation is highly impacted stage hen then maybe we want more predators than we do sage grouse but possibly look at the number and not waste resources trying to find other reasons for it. Predator impact may be more serious than some people view.

Tim:

It is something important to keep in mind. It has been addressed in a couple ways. Talks about trying to limit perch sites near sage grouse. Now they authorize electrical overhead lines. We do not want to do that in the area that is frequented by sage grouse providing perching sites for rafters. Nesting cover for sage grouse alot of predation by animals: skunks, gophers primarily. As far as predators such as coyote's, I'm not sure if it has specifically been addressed. The workgroups need to keep that discussion open.

OHV ISSUE & letter from Central Montana RAC Chair received January 6, 2003:

The letter read as follows:

Central Montana RAC met in Lewistown on November 19 thru 21, 2002, and deliberated on several issues. The RAC requests all other Montana RACs to seek action on the OHV protests and proceed with a decision. They agreed motions should be sent to the BLM Director and the newspapers. The RAC would like your support in sending a joint letter to the BLM Director advising them to proceed with

OHV decisions in Montana. In September 1999, all Montana/Dakota RACs met in Bozeman and recommended the BLM to look at OHV use as a whole and implement OHV policy. The decision to proceed with the OHV policy plan has been held up in WO due to protests. Our intention is to recommend to the BLM Director to proceed with the decision and implement the OHV plan.

The WMRAC will write the following letter to the BLM Director and cc to other RAC's and the BLM State Director:

- The Western Montana RAC supports the MT/Dakotas OHV EIS decision currently under protest. The RAC encourages the BLM Director to resolve the protest by June 1, 2003, or separate the decision to allow Montana and South Dakota to move forward on implementing this OHV decision.

LUNCH

Fuels Reduction/President's Healthy Forest Initiative (Shelagh Fox and Margaret Heaphy): Slide show presentation. Handout.

A brief summary was presented to the RAC of the planning process used to develop environmental assessments and identify implementation projects.

The Missoula Field Office planning process involves ecological assessments at the watershed scale. These watershed assessments are interdisciplinary (involve all the resource specialists/biologists within the office) and issue driven; compare current condition to historic reference condition for the area; and assess disturbance risk for the area. The assessment of vegetation attributes and disturbance process characterization equates to forest or land health standards. These assessments provide a hierarchical link to broadscale assessments including the Interior Columbia Basin Assessment. The assessment inventory base includes field inventory, aerial photo interpretation and satellite imagery dependent on issues, ownership pattern and analysis scale.

These assessments facilitate the NEPA analysis by assisting in developing long-term restoration strategies and highlighting areas which may have ecological health concerns. The assessment process is also useful to determine the cumulative and/or indirect affects of the proposed and no action alternatives.

Implementation of watershed restoration and hazardous fuel reduction treatments can be accomplished using various silvicultural tools such as timber harvest, prescribed fire, thinning/slashing, grinding/chipping and hand or mechanical piling then burning.

NEXT MEETING: July 9, 2003. The meeting will be at the Butte Field Office. Morning - field trip; afternoon - meeting.

NEXT MEETING TOPICS:

- Update on National Meeting/Joint RAC Meeting
- Special Recreation Uses on Blackfoot
- Grazing Regulation Changes

MEETING ADJOURNED

