

**EASTERN MONTANA RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING**  
**Billings, Montana**  
**December 13, 2001**

**Attendance**

RAC: Bill Schwarzkoph, Don Allen, Becky Kallevig, Don Woerner, Bill Milton, Eldon Rice, Marty Ulrich, Robert Lubbers, Neta Old Elk, Harold Cottet, Dave Smith.  
Absent: Art Hayes, Bucky Herringer, John Ensign, Bill Kennedy

BLM: Sandy Brooks, Aden Seidlitz, Dave McIlInay, Roberta Moltzen, Marilyn Krause, David Squires, David Jaynes, Kent Undlin, Dale Tribby, Nancy Bjelland, Greg Albright, Linda Reder

**Field Manager Updates**

Sandy, BiFo – The Pompey's Pillar Interpretive Center EA protest period has closed; we have received two protests. One is mainly concerned with the building being built down by the trees. This protestor would prefer to have all building and improvements by the highway. The second protest is mainly concerned with the flexibility built into the preferred alternative. This alternative is for approximately a 5700 sq. ft. building with the ability to add on in the future should need and funding arise. The EA, therefore, analyzed impacts to a large bubble area in which the building could rest. This protestor feels a 5700 sq. ft. building is acceptable but is uncomfortable if we were to go up to an 11,000 sq. ft. building. These protests are in our Washington Office for resolution.

The other issue facing Pompey's Pillar is the grain elevator. The administrative judge that reviewed the appeals to MT DEQ's EA recommended DEQ complete an EIS. However, MT DEQ chose to update certain parts of the EA, and based on the updates have said they will issue the air quality permit. In the meantime, Pompey's Pillar Historical Association is taking this issue to District Court. They feel an elevator in that area is inappropriate and there are other possible alternative sites.

Several parties have appealed our decision allowing Anschutz Corp. to drill an exploratory well in Weatherman Draw to the Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA). Since then, the Crow and Blackfeet tribes have approached Anschutz to negotiate some other type of settlement where Anschutz could possibly trade for an oil and gas permit on other tribal land. As requested by interested parties, IBLA has agreed to postpone review of the appeal until January 15, 2002. Anschutz has also agreed to postpone any drilling until June to continue negotiations.

We have received one protest specific to the Four Dances Natural Area Land Use Plan Amendment to not allow horseback use. This protest is also in our Washington Office for resolution.

Our OHV EIS protests are also in Washington pending resolution, hopefully in January. The Forest Service has already begun implementing the OHV plan, as their appeals process differs from BLM, and has been completed.

Once the protests are resolved we print the Record of Decision (ROD) with the final decision which addresses the concerns and protests and how they were resolved. Copies of the ROD are then disseminated to the public.

We have received a proposal to mine limestone on BLM and Forest Service land (not on the horse range) in the Pryor Mountains. Dakota Coal Company will be doing soil, vegetative and wildlife studies this summer in preparation for an EIS, should they decide to move forward with the mine. Our comments so far have been related to visual resources, cultural activities and cumulative effects.

Aden, MCFO – We have been busy in our range program completing assessments, conducting Standards and Guidelines (S&Gs) and evaluations. Several allotments did fall S&Gs, and the subsequent NEPA process is out for 30 day public comment period. One of the decisions is controversial and we are working through this with the landowner and Prairie County State Grazing District.

We are a board member on the Ft. Peck Interpretive Center, though our role is minimal. We have agreed to place a back-country byway kiosk near the center when it is built. A groundbreaking ceremony was held in August and construction is underway.

BLM holds Public Lands Day annually each September. We held ours at the Matthews Recreation Site near Miles City. Local Boy and Girl Scouts and volunteers did trail maintenance and general cleanup of the site. We have put a lot of improvements into this area in the last 3-4 years and it has become a very nice recreation site for the local community.

During hunting season we typically handle six to eight hunter/landowner complaints. For whatever reason this year, we have had over 30 complaints. From the landowner side, the nature of the complaints generally involved trespass issues. From the hunter side, complaints are posted BLM land for no trespassing, hunter harassment and issues with outfitters and guides.

We had a successful fire season this year. We suppressed over 140 fires this summer, the majority of which were less than one acre in size. The only project fire we had was north of Billings in May. In our hazardous fuel reduction program, we completed three prescribed burns, mainly ponderosa pine regrowth projects of about 4000 acres in Garfield County and some grassland in Prairie County. In the Billings District, we completed several mechanical treatments, one near Shepherd to build a fire break to a subdivision and the other on the Yellowstone Ranch.

### **Sage Grouse Technical Committee**

It is known that sage grouse and other obligates have declined across the western United States. Approximately 50% of sagebrush steppe ecosystems currently exist on BLM land, and we have responsibility for long-term health of these ecosystems. A petition has been filed with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to list sage grouse as threatened or endangered in both Washington and Colorado, and we anticipate another petition for the remainder of the range at any time.

A Sage Grouse Technical Committee has been formed to draft guidance on measures to protect this habitat. Some of the things the group is working on are: a) development of a broad, mid-scale map across the west to focus on the whole ecosystem, not just sage grouse, to address conservation and restoration planning; b) coordinate habitat evaluations and mapping with range, fire, oil and gas, and LUP efforts; c) establish BLM and FS guidance on how to integrate conservation for sagebrush and sage grouse into land management planning and programmatic project planning.

Under an MOU with Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agency, Federal and State wildlife agencies have agreed to take the lead role in developing conservation strategies for sage grouse in Montana. This group has held a number of public meetings around the state and has received a lot of input from many interested parties. This is an extremely complex issue with many pieces to the puzzle including, but not limited to, predation, weather, population trends, farming practices, weed control practices, habitat, mining, etc. The committee expects to release a draft plan for review in the Spring of 2002. This plan is intended as guidance and provides recommendations on protection and improvement of sage grouse habitats, activity management, and serves as a tool for local work groups. The goal is long-term enhancement of sagebrush steppe and mixed grass prairie complex within Montana in a manner that supports sage grouse, health diversity, abundance of wildlife species, and human uses.

### **Rangeland Monitoring Proposal**

The RAC established Standards and Guidelines and set criteria on how to evaluate whether land is in good health. However, the establishment of standards is not enough to ensure long-term health. The next step is to look at the land thoughtfully enough and on a regular basis to tell us when we are making progress in achieving standards. Bill proposed to the RAC that a methodology(s) evolve to ensure 10, 20, 30 years down the road that standards are being met.

Bill will summarize the members' discussions and mail to everyone. The RAC asked BLM to give a presentation on rangeland monitoring for further discussion at the next RAC meeting.

### **Public Comment Period**

There were no comments from the public.

### **Knowlton Project Update**

We placed approximately 50 signs this fall showing road designations – open, administrative, closed and game retrieval. The feedback we received was positive and both landowners and hunters seemed generally pleased. These designations will not be legal until we complete our formal rule making process and complete countywide planning.

This effort was our first experiment in dealing with travel planning using a consensus approach of affected parties. Once the ROD for the OHV EIS is issued, we will need to implement travel planning throughout all the field offices. The question is how to go from the Knowlton Project, which took a lot of time, and accomplish travel planning over a much larger area in more practical ways.

One option under consideration is to identify areas similar to the Knowlton area on a countywide basis and complete the travel planning for these areas in the same effort. For the remainder of the county, where the BLM lands are more isolated or checkerboard, use the assessments done on individual allotments in addressing the travel issue. The group agreed that Bill Milton and Dave Squires would develop the plan of attack for finishing Custer County.

### **Oil and Gas EIS Update**

We have just completed our internal review of the Draft EIS, which exceeds 1000 pages. The document will be available to the public for comments in mid-February.

### **Recreation Funding**

Since 1994 the BLM budget has been declining; yet, as in other programs, BLM recreation needs are increasing. Demographically the west is changing, not only in the number migrating west, but also in terms of the mix and values of people. People tend to have more time and money to recreate, placing greater demands on our recreation resources. We expect this trend to continue in the foreseeable future.

### **Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Gather/Adoption/Contraception Update**

Even with the FAA air restrictions at gather time, we were able to gather 129 animals of which 46 were placed for adoption. All of these were 4 years of age and less; 29 mares and 17 studs. Due to the unique genetic pool of this herd, the adoption drew regional interest and all 46 animals were placed.

Six younger mares were given a primer dose of the immuno contraceptive vaccine. This allows for a booster shot to be given in April. The Fertility EA allowing the booster shot will be out for public comment in early 2002.

On a national level, there are approximately 8900 animals in facilities awaiting adoption. BLM plans to gather 12,000-13,000 more animals each year for the next 4 years in order to reach appropriate management levels. BLM will have to

drastically expand the adoption market in order to place these animals.

**Meeting Evaluation/Wrap-up**

The next meeting is scheduled for April 11, 2002, with an evening social planned for April 10, in Miles City.

# EASTERN MONTANA RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING

Sheridan, Wyoming

August 1, 2001

## Attendance

RAC: Bill Schwarzkoph, Don Allen, Becky Kallevig, Art Hayes, Bill Kennedy, Don Woerner, Ken Deaver, Bill Milton, Eldon Rice, Dwayne Andrews, Marty Ulrich, Larry Pilster, Robert Lubbers. Absent: Ernie Robinson, Bucky Herringer

BLM: Sandy Brooks, Aden Seidlitz, Marilyn Krause, Dave Squires, Chuck Laakso, Vicki Wood, Linda Reder

## Status of Oil and Gas EIS

The air contractor (Argonne) is working on acquiring and reviewing the ambient air quality data for the State of Montana. They have hired a subcontractor to do CALPUFF modeling. The Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology has conducted 2D groundwater modeling for the planning area and is in the process of conducting a 3D groundwater model for the Hanging Woman area. The 2D information will be in the Draft EIS and the 3D information will be provided in the Final EIS. Larry Rau, MCFO wildlife biologist, is conducting a Wildlife/Wildlife Habitat study which is partially funded by the DOE. Robert Mitchell, MCFO Soils Scientist/Hydrologist, is pursuing a Fluvial Geomorphology study with partial funding from the USGS. The DOE will also be funding a joint soils study between Montana and Wyoming BLM. Gary Smith, MSO Archaeologist, is in the process of contracting an Ethnographic study. These studies will help collect data in high development potential areas prior to development.

The BIA, EPA, and Crow Tribe have signed MOUs with the lead agencies to become cooperators in the EIS. While the Northern Cheyenne Tribe does not have an MOU with the lead agencies, we have established a working arrangement to ensure they are a part of the process.

We anticipate the Draft EIS to be out for comment in October.

A comment was addressed that an EIS is done to evaluate the impact of an action but it doesn't really establish a set of standards to be met. Monitoring will be key, but will only be useful if we know what we are monitoring for or towards. The EIS will establish Best Management Practices which are designed to tie to standards.

## Field Manager Updates

Aden - The Fire Management Plan (FMP) EA, which will amend a number of RMP's in the three state area, will be coming out in Draft in August. The Plan will be used in Fire Management Activity Plans without statewide fire management objectives, staffing and equipment needs, and anticipated costs. The purpose of the FMP is to reduce the risks and costs associated with severe wildland fires, to identify opportunities to use prescribed burns and other fuels management techniques to reduce hazardous fuels buildup, and to use prescribed burns to meet other resource management objectives. Basically this will serve as our guidance for wildland fire suppression and rehabilitation and prescribed burns and other fuels management.

Roxanne Falise of our State Office is part of the Montana Sagegrouse Technical Committee which is developing a plan to conserve sagegrouse and their habitat. They will be hosting an open house in Miles City the evening of September 4<sup>th</sup> and a working session on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>. They will also have an open house in Billings the evening of November 13<sup>th</sup> and a working session on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>. Everyone is invited to attend.

Recently we received requests from the Secretary of the Interior, through her staff, to provide information on the Otter Creek Tracts. We have not heard anything further on the decision of whether or not these tracts will be transferred to the State of Montana.

SunCorp anticipates beginning drilling this month and being done by early September. Some of the wells will be drilled for strat tests and plugged after completion of the tests. We are working with them to possibly leave one or two of these wells as monitoring wells.

Sandy - The comment period for the Pompeys Pillar Draft EA closes August 2. So far the comments have been pretty positive. We do expect one protest based on a concern the document does not contain specifics on what the building and any possible future additions will look like and how they will blend into the environment.

Pompeys Pillar was dedicated as a National Monument over Memorial Day weekend. Clark Day was held this past weekend and was again a great success.

The Pompeys Pillar association appealed the DEQ air quality permit. This appeal has since gone to hearing which ruled that the EA did require some beefing up, however, an EIS is not required. This process will not require another comment period nor will it go through another appeal period. The Association has voted to followup in District Court. It doesn't appear that alternative sites are being considered at this time.

The comment period for the Four Dances/Sundance Lodge areas management plan closed June 15. There was one protest, which was on the horse use exclusion in the Four Dances area. The protest response is currently in our WO for review. It may

be several months before this process is completed.

A number of Tribes, the Sierra Club and the National Trust for Historic Preservation filed requests for a State Director Review of the February 2001 Finding of No Significant Impact for the single exploratory well in Weatherman Draw. The State Director Review upheld the decision, but added additional constraints to further protect the area: Anschutz will be required to have a locked gate on its access road and a security guard on site.

In June, the appellants appealed the State Director's decision to the Interior Board of Land Appeals. This appeal includes a petition for stay prohibiting the oil company from doing any construction work on the access road or any drilling. Currently, Anschutz is in negotiations with the Blackfeet and Crow Tribes in regard to possibly trading their Weatherman Draw leases for leases located on the reservations.

A helicopter gather of approximately 50 Pryor Mountain Wild Horses is planned to begin on September 10. A public hearing on helicopter use is scheduled at the Bighorn National Canyon Visitors Center, August 16 at 7:00p.m. The horses will be held at the Britton Springs facilities until the September 29 adoption. We also plan to give the yearling and 2 year old mares gathered a contraceptive vaccine. This initial shot boosts the immune system and prepares them for a second shot in late fall to prevent them from reproducing next year. The second shot would be administered remotely with a dart gun. An EA will be completed, with public participation, prior to approving the second shot. This would affect 11 animals.

### **Rangeland Monitoring**

As discussed in the last RAC meeting we can't determine the effects of land management without monitoring against the standards we created. The permittee needs to play a major role in monitoring and there is certainly room for a third party to provide objective views of the situations. Monitoring needs to be long-term and useful and utilized to demonstrate achievements. Bill volunteered to draft a proposal for the RAC on how to approach rangeland monitoring. The proposal will incorporate a set of criteria, flexibility, financial practicalities, and usefulness.

### **Knowlton Travel Management**

Dave and Dwayne have been working on distribution of hunting opportunity maps and have completed maps for Custer and Powder River counties and are working on Garfield County. Essentially these maps identify four categories of the land base: 1) Commercial (outfitted); 2) Restricted (most people cannot hunt); 3) Block Management; and 4) Open. In Custer County, 69% of the land falls under categories 1 and 2 and is closed to general hunting. The purpose of this effort is to have a better understanding of hunting opportunities in allocating commercial licenses. One consideration is to limit these licenses on public lands that are accessible to the public to reduce competition. The next step is to correlate how accessible public lands sit with respect to the commercial licenses.



Currently the DNRC is working with FW&P and are developing several scenarios for leasing of the State Lands along the Yellowstone corridor and islands to the FW&P that would provide hunting opportunities to the general public.

In Carter County there is a large block of State and BLM land that has extremely limited access to public land. The ranch is leased to an outfitter and does not allow access across private land. Dave and Dwayne have identified a road through the State Land that ties into a BLM road. Part of DNRC's mission is to provide recreational opportunities on State Land. DNRC is proposing for BLM, in cooperation with FW&P, to build this road and obtain an easement from DNRC. Meetings have been held with the landowners and outfitter, both of whom are resistant to this proposal. One of their concerns is un-managed vehicle use. One consideration to mitigate this concern would be to implement a travel management plan in concert with FW&P.

The Knowlton Travel Management Plan was the pilot project for implementation of Travel Management planning. Key to this process was to have the users involved in the decisions from the beginning. Over the past year, 26 meetings were held in developing this plan. Of the designated roads, 23 miles were designated open; 14 miles administrative; 4 miles for game retrieval; .25 miles closed; and .4 miles new. The Knowlton group recommended that maps not be published until the entire county planning effort is completed to address the concern that maps will encourage a significant increase in use in a relatively small area.

The RAC accepted the subcommittee proposal and recommended the Knowlton Travel Management Proposal to the BLM, MCFO for implementation. The BLM accepted this recommendation from the RAC. Ultimately, after the OHV EIS is implemented, an LUP amendment will be required. In the interim, BLM will do signing in the Knowlton area based on the recommendations.

### **Tongue River Watershed Planning**

Several years ago the FW&P had put together a Tongue River Watershed proposal. The FW&P uses this document to provide general guidance to the Region 7 office in Miles City. The main thrust of the document is conservation easement, land exchanges for public access to the river for fishing sites, and other recreational opportunities.

There has been a lot of discussion among a lot of people concerning a watershed plan for the Tongue River and all agree that it needs to be a locally driven process. There is very little state or federal land along the river. Right now only the State of MT Department of Water Quality is looking at the watershed for TMDL, water quality and quantity, and point and non-point pollution sources, etc.

Ultimately the issue is how people manage a huge landscape to meet a variety of issues. We can see the problem we have with the various issues of CBM, fishing, subdivision, grazing, and RRs, where different groups are doing their own thing. Historically landscapes suffer in this type of segmented approach.

Currently, there are efforts going on in the state on watershed approaches where all players look at the large land area to create a supportable landscape that will last for a long time. This doesn't mean taking rights away from property owners. You can't separate public from private land in these type of land management planning efforts. The RAC agreed to table this issue for now as this needs to be a locally driven process.

### **Meeting Evaluation**

Everyone felt the CBM field trip was very informative and worthwhile. A suggestion was made to have a followup visit to the area next year to see what changes, findings, and developments have occurred.

A field trip during the Wild Horse and Burro gather was scheduled in September. The next RAC meeting will be October 11 in Billings. An evening event will be planned for October 10.

**EASTERN MONTANA RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING****Billings, Montana****April 5, 2001****Attendance**

RAC: Marty Ulrich, Bill Milton, Bucky Heringer, Eldon Rice, Bill Schwarzkopf, Robert Lubbers, Becky Kallevig, Art Hayes, Don Allen, Ken Deaver, Larry Pilster, Dwayne Andrews, Ernie Robinson

Absent: Don Woerner, Bill Kennedy

BLM: Sandy Brooks, Aden Seidlitz, Marilyn Krause, David Squires, Sharon Ross

Public: Jeri Tillet, Harmon Ranney (Montana Coalbed Natural Gas Alliance), Joe Icenogle (Pennaco), Clair Johnson (Billings Gazette), Norma Calvert (Pennaco/Marathon)

**Welcome/Introductions**

Marilyn welcomed everyone and the group reviewed the ground rules and the agenda. BLM is currently accepting RAC nominations with the new term taking effect in September. RAC members cannot serve more than two consecutive three-year terms. If you know anyone that is interested, let Marilyn know and she will send them an application.

**Mat Millenbach** - Mat welcomed the RAC members. Statewide, BLM is dealing primarily with coal-bed methane and national monuments. Pompeys Pillar is in good shape and BLM would like additional funding to expand the season. The draft for the Pillar Visitor Center should be out in June. The draft interim management policy for the Upper Missouri is out. If you are interested in a copy, contact BLM. We are working on having the final guidance in place before the Bicentennial. Mat is currently involved in the interview process for the Miles City Field Manager. He was recently called back to WO to work on the national energy plan. In the next month or two a national energy policy should be in place.

**Field Manager Updates**

**Sandy Brooks** - Sandy was recently in Washington and had the opportunity to listen to Nina Hatfield (Acting BLM Director) and she asked the new administration if the RACs would continue to operate as they had been. Nina assured Sandy that they would.

Progress on Weatherman Draw - On February 5, 2001, Sandy signed the Finding of No Significant Impact to explore one

well in the area. Application for permit to drill was approved on February 7. At that time there was a protest period and four parties protested the decision. One of the parties has asked for an oral presentation to the State Director which is set up for May 7. They will present their concerns to the State Director and he will then make a decision. If they don't like the State Director's decision, there is another 30 days to appeal to the Interior Board of Land Appeals. The decision would not go into effect until June 15. If the decision is appealed to IBLA and they ask for a stay of the decision, IBLA has 45 days to grant the stay which means that nothing would happen until IBLA proceeds with the case and comes up with a decision. If IBLA does not stay the decision, the oil company can go ahead with the exploration. If the oil company finds a dry hole or it is not economical, then they will seal it and that will be the end. If they do find producible oil, the company will cap it while BLM prepares further environmental analysis. Three main areas the parties were concerned with were: 1) They thought we should have done an EIS, 2) they thought we didn't adequately look at the alternatives, and 3) they believed we didn't comply with the National Historic Preservation Act.

Recreation Funding - BLM is trying to let the public and constituents know that we have taken on a large workload with high public expectations and we are not being funded appropriately to carry out everything the public expects. We have now added monuments to that figure.

WH&B Program - The Billings Field Office is continuing efforts on revision of the Pryor Mountain Herd Management Plan. The revision will incorporate eight years of ecological research studies on horse population genetics and ecosystem modeling. These efforts were generated through cooperative efforts with six state and federal agencies and three universities. The public was provided with this information through a press release in January 2001. Public scoping meetings were held in March of 2000 and public comments were received through April of 2000. Interagency meetings were held in late April of 2000 and invited comments were received in the fall of 2000. The comments were reviewed and summarized and are available to the public upon request.

As a result of concerns raised through the scoping process, field studies were initiated in field season 2000 to evaluate three specific issues: 1) impact of visitor activity on the horse range, 2) the potential impact of predation on the wild horse herd, and 3) to create a baseline social data for the mares. A group of interns worked last summer putting together data and research papers for us. Four interns are working for us this summer on the horse range.

Because of further studies and working with the Forest Service, a draft plan is not expected to be out prior to 2002. The Billings Field Office is continuing to monitor the herd, and if the total herd size exceeds 200 animals, the BLM will recommend a population control gather in early fall 2001. A gather plan will be prepared and distributed to the public with a 30-day comment period. Public meetings will be held on a gather plan regarding the use of helicopters and population control efforts.

Standards and Guides - The Billings Field Office's approach accomplished both permit lease renewal and assessing standard and guideline indicators. We prioritized which allotments needed to be reviewed first for not meeting standards. BLM conducted site visits and assessments to determine if changes needed to be made for the lease permit renewal. In 1999, 88 allotment assessments of both high and low priority were completed. In 2000, we assessed the remaining 25 high priority allotments from 1999. We also assessed an additional 43 allotments of lower priority, and last year we did all assessments on permits that were due to expire in 2001. This summer we should be caught up with our 1999 and 2000 assessments. By the end of 2001, we should be completely caught up with our assessment work and we will have assessed 58 percent of our total allotments. The remaining allotments are spread out through a seven year period.

We have received an additional \$51,000 to implement standards and guidelines this year; for projects specifically designed to

make progress towards meeting the uplands standard, riparian standard, and biodiversity standard.

The Billings Field Office has sent letters out to all the permittees regarding the drought situation. We will be watching the allotments and are working with the affected permittees.

A national monument designation ceremony will be held for the Pompeys Pillar National Monument on Saturday, May 26, 2001.

**Aden Seidlitz** - MCFO has been working on the Oil and Gas Coal-Bed Methane EIS, fire preparedness, and prescribed fire activities. Miles City has received funding for 100 percent MEL (most efficient level) in the fire program this year. Miles City is also doing a lot of hiring and responding to numerous data calls from the Washington Office. We are anticipating a major fire season due to the drought situation.

Aden encouraged the RAC members to find interested people to apply for the upcoming RAC nominations. He also recommended that Dwayne Andrews, a state employee with DNRC, continue to work on the Knowlton Travel Plan even though his term as a RAC member will expire in September. The Lewis and Clark Bicentennial didn't get the funding they had hoped for and they are cutting costs where they can. Miles City will continue with the community kiosk on the Big Sky Byway. A Federal Register Notice is coming out shortly to sell a section of land to Fallon County. The outfitter and guides project is progressing between BLM, DNRC, and FW&P. We are currently in the data gathering stage.

Oil and Gas EIS - The Montana Board of Oil and Gas joined DEQ and BLM as co-lead on the project and are on schedule at this point. We have encouraged the Crow Tribe and Northern Cheyenne Tribe to be cooperators on this project but an MOU has not been signed yet. There will be a coal-bed coordination meeting May 9 in Miles City.

## **OHV EIS**

**David Squires** - Everyone should have received a handout on the OHV EIS and Knowlton Project. It provided key points, differences, and comments.

The OHV EIS defined a motorized route and made the decision to stay on existing roads and trails. In the guidelines we addressed both motorized and mechanized -- the OHV EIS only addressed motorized. The national strategy only addressed motorized and deferred snowmobiles. Montana game wardens can enforce restrictions on public lands during hunting season which will supplement our BLM Law Enforcement. Our main goal is to educate people and get compliance from an educational standpoint. The guidelines suggested that we develop a plan or strategy for addressing the disabled access issue. The OHV EIS decided to address this issue on a case-by-case basis and to follow the law. The final OHV EIS does not allow game retrieval. There is an interagency effort between BLM and the Forest Service to gain consistency.

## **Knowlton Travel Management**

**Dwayne Andrews** - There have been four meetings with the Knowlton group. We are trying to determine which roads are accessible, their status, and the feelings of people using the roads. Permittees and recreation groups don't have the same issues, and we are trying to find a balance. We have a subcommittee to work on those issues. Unresolved issues will end up being an administrative decision made by BLM. Some recreationists don't want any roads closed, citing the loss of off-road game retrieval as their reason. Reaching a compromise will be a challenge and is taking a lot longer than anticipated.

State land is a big issue. State land recreational use rules say that all roads are closed. Some recreation groups want to petition to keep the roads open. It took a lot of time and effort to meet with individual landowners and go through all the side issues. There is some distrust of the government and it does modify how people think. Access was a very big issue.

The county road system is critical to the access issue on BLM ground. We will be meeting with the county commissioners. The 911 system is an emergency system, it has nothing to do with if it is a legal county road or not. We need to reach a compromise on which roads will remain open.

A map is being developed showing distribution of hunting opportunities in each county. Map will show land ownership and if it is commercially outfitted and if there is county road access. The maps will also help the public get to the ground that are accessible. The BLM, FW&P, and DNRC have been working to get these maps developed. Map may not be completely accurate by the time of printing, but it will show the trend and breakdown of access in each category.

### **Public Comment Period**

**Jeri Tillett (Lovell, WY)** - She is hearing good things in the RAC meeting. A shift is happening and ranchers are going to have to deal with urbanization. There has been more recognition of local input and greater openness to solutions.

**Harmon Raney (representative of the Montana Coalbed Natural Gas Alliance)** - He handed out a brochure explaining their mission and standards. Their group assists agencies and industry in ensuring that development complies with all state and federal regulations, that a balanced EIS is prepared before additional development occurs, and that Montana's agricultural economy, water quality, air quality, wildlife, soils, hydrologic regimes, cultural and historic resources, and local communities are protected.

### **Oil and Gas EIS Update**

**Mary Bloom** - There is a joint EIS with the State of Montana. The Bureau of Indian Affairs has signed on as a cooperator. Scoping began December 19, 2000, and after two-week extension ended January 31, 2001. There were over 300 people and verbal comments made at the scoping meetings. Our contractor is putting all the information together to identify the public's issues and any alternatives they might identify. A preliminary report of their findings have been issued to BLM and the state. The next coal-bed methane coordination group meeting will be held May 9 in Miles City at the Range Riders Museum. The contractor will present findings from the scoping process at that meeting. The BLM has five preliminary alternatives so far. An alternative won't be selected until the analysis of each alternative is complete. The Field Managers will select a preferred alternative (which can be one of the alternatives or a combination of several alternatives). The contractor will then go back and analyze that alternative. We will brief our State Director and if he doesn't have any changes, it will be ready to go out to the public. The draft EIS will go out for a 90-day review period and BLM will hold public hearings on the draft. Both the contractor and subcontractor have had a lot of experience dealing with the issues we are facing.

Air Quality Model - BLM will be doing an air quality model to analyze the impact from the coal-bed methane development and any other types of development that would impact air quality. The area they will be looking at is about two-thirds of the State of Montana and all of Wyoming.

### **Pompeys Pillar**

**Kim Prill** - BLM has been having internal discussions and reviewing issues that came up in scoping meetings a year and a half ago. It was decided to add an alternative for a scaled-back, moderate-size visitor center at Pompeys Pillar (approximately \$4 million). Trying to finish the environmental assessment and hope to have it out by June 2001.

**Dick Kodeski** - State had an appeal hearing regarding United Harvest. Both sides presented their facts, and it has now gone to review and a decision should be rendered in a couple of months. The decision can be appealed.

Pompeys Pillar will open on May 26, 2001. Since it has been designated a national monument, BLM and the Pompeys Pillar Historical Association are jointly planning a brief commemoration program on Saturday, May 26. The media and congressionals will also be invited.

Clark Day will be on July 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> this year. We are also in the process of working on a farm plan, hiring our summer seasonals, and school days will be in May with approximately 3,000 school kids going through the program. We are working to get a potable water system at the Pillar, new phone lines have been installed that will be suitable to operate the new facility, and more security has been added to the Pillar. The new visitor's center will have the capability to be open year around, but will be dictated by funds and visitor demand.

### **Four Dances**

**David Jaynes** - BLM has been working on this plan for about a year. Sundance Lodge, near Laurel, would have no off-highway vehicles, but would allow horses and bicycles. Camping would be by permit only. At this facility there is a parking area and toilet with the possibility of a boat ramp. No more development is planned at this time. Pheasants Forever have the farming lease at Sundance and they oversee the farming operation and have helped with purchasing trees and plants. There has been some prescribed burns at Sundance. Prescribed burns are being used as a management tool for habitat and vegetation improvement.

Four Dances will not allow horses, bicycles, or firearms and camping would be by permit only. At this facility there is a parking lot and one entrance road. They are considering a separate parking lot with an overlook with handicap access. There is also a possibility of a caretaker's facility with a full-time caretaker to be paid for by the Yellowstone River Parks Association.

### **Monitoring Standards and Guidelines**

**Bill Milton** - There has been increasing attention on how public lands are being managed. He suggested exploring the possibility of the permittee and agency hiring a third party to monitor and share the cost. This way the monitoring would be ongoing and there would be consistency in the data. Quality monitoring needs to occur and the knowledge needs to be shared. Accountability might become an issue. It would need to be explained as it might be viewed as an intrusion. Cost will be a

factor. Between now and next meeting, Bill would like everyone to think about this and see if they want to go forward with this issue or not.

### **Tongue River Watershed Planning**

**Bill Milton** - The Tongue has so many different and complex issues and it is such an important landscape in eastern Montana that it will take a serious commitment by affected parties discussing the management of the landscape. People need to discuss and see if they can agree on what they want the Tongue River to be 10 years down the road. We need to get discussions to occur between various parties with various interests. There seems to be a lot of disconnect between wanting information and not having the information shared. We should explore a better process of understanding what is on the line. Possibly encourage BLM to help facilitate some of the Tongue's issues and help bring the parties together. Decisions will be made on the Tongue. The question is who is going to make them, how they will be made, and what level of understanding is going to occur between the affected parties. We do need to communicate with each other, not everyone will agree, but we will create a forum and have better communication. This topic will be included in the agenda for the next RAC meeting.

### **Fire Program Update**

**Mark Bickham** - We are not expecting any relief from fire this year. We have gotten additional money from Congress this year. We have received funding at 100 percent MEL (most efficient level) so we can fill all our positions and obtain all the needed equipment. The Forest Service and Bureau of Indian Affairs also received 100 percent MEL. Unfortunately, there isn't enough qualified people (one level up) to fill all the jobs this first year. . We anticipate in the next 2-3 years we will be able to move people up the ladder. In Montana, we are anticipating hiring an additional 38 people this summer. We have also been mandated to institute an aggressive prescribed fire program this year.

Fire Assistance Program - We have received three-fourths of a million dollars, statewide in BLM, to distribute among volunteer fire departments around the state to buy equipment, service, radios, etc. The only thing they can't purchase with this money is buildings. We have talked with the Department of Natural Resources (DNRC) in Helena and have given them the authority to distribute this money. BLM will prioritize all the requests and will try to distribute as equally as possible. The money will only be distributed in \$20,000 increments per unit (per fire department, not per county). One of the other benefits of this money is that it is a 90-10 split. Ten percent is all the local units have to come up with for matching funds, and fire departments can use in-kind service for their 10 percent. The application forms are available through DNCR and the deadline to apply is May 1.

### **Endorsement of Dwayne Andrews to Continue with Travel Management Plan**

It was brought up that the RAC endorse Dwayne Andrews to continue working with the travel management plan even though his term as a RAC member expires in September. The motion was seconded and voted on to keep Dwayne working with the travel management plan.

### **Evaluation**

There was excellent participation from everyone with balanced discussions. The current room arrangement at the Hampton Inn seems to work well for everyone, and it was decided to continue with the social the evening prior to the meeting.



**Next Meeting**

Tentatively scheduled for August 1, 2001, in Sheridan or Colstrip (with a possible field trip).

**Agenda Items for Next Meeting**

- Oil and Gas EIS/Wyoming EIS
- Travel Management Plan
- Tongue River Watershed Planning
- Fire Status