

Eastern Montana RAC Meeting Minutes
Billings, Montana
November 16, 2005

RAC Attendees: Darryl Olson, Kent Williams, Robert Lubbers, Marian Hanson, Larry Pfister, John Gibson, Colby Branch, Jack Bailey, Gerald Reichert, Chuck Hauptman, Howard Bogges, Betty Aye, Mack Cole,

Staff in Attendance: Dave McIlnay, Sandy Brooks, Jim Sparks, Mary Apple, Donna Kaseman

Not in Attendance: Neta Old Elk, Nate Hagerott

The meeting was facilitated by Mary Apple who welcomed everyone in attendance. She went over the “game rules” and restaurants available in the area for lunch.

It was announced that Marty Ott, the BLM State Director, and Jerry Meredith, the BLM Associate State Director had retired, and that Howard Lemm is now the acting State Director.

New RAC notebooks were distributed to the members.

Darryl Olson, the newest member to the RAC, introduced himself. Nate Hagerott, the other new member, was not able to attend. Betty Aye, Jack Bailey and Marian Hanson were reappointed.

Sandy Brooks explained to the members that the RAC does not have a chair person, by choice, to avoid any one person being in charge. Issues can then be worked out with a majority vote and consensus.

Miles City Field Office Update

Remodeling is in the process on the existing structure/building. The Field Office is trying to improve communication and working ability.

There is a decrease in the budget, so only the Energy Bill positions available will be filled. There are seven pilot offices, and Miles City is one of them. Interviews for the positions will begin this week.

A question arose concerning the difference between the oil and gas leases and coalbed natural gas leases– they are all treated the same. Royalties on all are paid the same, 50 percent to the state and 50 percent to the federal treasury.

Completion of the Pumpkin Creek Land Exchange would create a block of federal land located about 15 miles south of Miles City, consisting of approximately 19,580 acres for public use.

Dave McIlnay announced that Mark Jacobsen, Eastern RAC Coordinator and Miles City Public Affairs Specialist, is in Iraq at the present time.

There was discussion of what is and isn't being done right now in regard to producing wells. Dave McIlnay discussed the judge's decision to allow wells to keep operating in the Badger Hills

where there are 525 producing wells on federal and private lands. Dave McIlnay discussed water purification and a water management plan that would consist of either treating the water or holding it in ponds and what the effect would be on down-stream water.

Questions were asked regarding areas where there are sage grouse. There was discussion that students are monitoring survivability of the sage grouse, and that the sage grouse are being tracked by collars.

Questions were asked whether there is monitoring of culture sites, and it was discussed that consulting is being done by tribes and/or archeologists to protect the sites.

Billings Field Office Update

Pompeys Pillar – The construction of the Interpretive Center is completed. The exhibits will be installed in January 2006, and the center will open on Memorial Day. A national Lewis and Clark Bicentennial signature event will be held July 22-25 at the Pillar. The new walkway from the Interpretive Center to the Pillar will be constructed this spring. The new entrance road will be completed in the fall of 2006.

There was an issue regarding the fishing access at the Bundy Bridge in the Yellowstone River. BLM did a historical check, and it was decided that the BLM owns the island. BLM is working with Yellowstone County to pursue a Recreation and Public Purposes Act Lease for a boat ramp site.

Billings will begin revising the RMP in 2007. This year there is a pre-plan being written. The Custer National Forest is revising its plan in 2007.

Shepherd Ah Nei reopened in October after being closed for over a year. The Billings Motorcycle Club would like to exchange its land in the OHV area for land in the South Hills.

Fire season went well. The Billings Dispatch Center transitioned to an initial attack center last summer.

The field office has already completed 450 acres of mechanical treatment in the Horsethief area this fall.

BiFO is actively participating with counties developing county wild fire protection plans.

The Pryor Mountain Wild Horse range has 161 horses – 26 foals survived this year with a 70 percent foaling rate. Received an appeal on our fertility control EA this summer, but the stay was denied by IBLA, and 19 mares were treated.

The Forest Service, Park Service and BLM are meeting regularly to discuss management in the Pryors. We have agreed to pursue some short-term activities, including additional fertility control, possible gathers, water catchment repairs and prescribed burning. Long term, we will be addressing a herd plan in the RMP revision.

Plans are underway for the Custer National Forest Supervisor's office to co-locate with BLM, possibly in 2007.

Much of the Grove Creek area was purchased by a private party who does not plan to develop the area into a subdivision.

Miles City RMP Update

- Identifying issues
- Having collaborative meetings
- 20 cooperating agencies
- Developing alternatives
- RMP Record of Decision (ROD) is 2007.

Supplemental EIS

- Identifying issues for coalbed gas supplement
- November 23rd – preliminary draft available for RAC review
- January 2006 – going to print
- February 2006 – released for 90-day review, then 30-day protest period. If resolved, then ROD will be completed.

RAC RMP Subcommittee Report

- Subcommittee met
- Individuals picked the issues that they wanted to be involved with in a collaborative way
- RAC will identify issues they want to work on
- Need to find a range of alternatives

Issues

- Off-highway vehicle (OHV) use and access
- Air quality control
- Wildlife habitat
- Leased minerals
- Oil & gas
- Water
- Vegetation
- Grazing permits
- Public land vs. private land
- Recreational use
- Hunting
- Fire

Shepherd Ah Nei OHV Area Update

Lynn Anderson did a power point presentation on the area bringing the RAC members up-to-date on what has transpired at Shepherd Ah Nei. She explained the areas that are available for horse use, non-motorized use and the area that is now open to OHVs. The area for OHVs was reopened in October of this year. There is no charge at the present time, but there may be a fee

charged at a later date. Lynn goes out to the area at least once a week and checks to make sure the area is being used appropriately. A law enforcement ranger also goes to the area checking to make sure that the riders are using the area properly.

RAC Subcommittee Reports

- Address OHV use in the Miles City RMP
- Recreation and access of land
- RS2477 – would like agency to look into

The RAC decided that it wants to participate in the development of alternatives for the Miles City RMP by having members attend the staff meetings and meetings with cooperators.

The next meeting will be March 22, 2006, in Miles City. There will be a social gathering the evening of March 21.

Agenda/Issues for Next Meeting

- Pumpkin Creek Land Exchange update
- Weed funding

Meeting Evaluation

- Positive, informative information
- Need recommendations

Meeting on Vegetative Treatment EIS

- December 7, 2005 in the BLM Main Conference Room at 7 p.m. preceded by open house at 6 p.m.
- Will take comments on the draft EIS on vegetation treatments on BLM lands in the 17 western states.

Eastern Montana RAC Meeting Minutes
Sheridan, Wyoming
JULY 20, 2005

Members in Attendance: Dave McIlroy, Sandy Brooks, Betty Aye, Jack Bailey, Howard Boggess, Colby Branch, Mack Cole, John Gibson, Marian Hanson, Chuck Hauptman, Robert Lubbers, Larry Pilster, Gerald Reichert, Marty Ulrich, Kent Williams

Not in Attendance: Neta Old Elk, Jamie Byrne

The RAC toured the Pinnacle Gas water treatment facility on the Tongue River north of Sheridan, producing coalbed natural gas (CBNG) wells at Fidelity Gas and Exploration's CX Ranch, and a CBNG drilling operation in the Coal Creek project area on July 19.

Field Manager Updates (Billings Field Office):

Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range – The range looks great due to this year's rainfall, but improvement of range condition will take several years. We may have to do a gather in the near future. The comment period on the Fertility Control Environmental Assessment (EA) proposing fertility control on 20 older mares has closed. We have received over 100 comments. Most of the comments oppose fertility control possibly due to the high loss of foals last year by mountain lion predation. Three adult lions were removed from the Pryors by hunters last winter, and there has been a significant decline in foal loss this year. One adult lion has been spotted to date which could pose a small threat. There have been 32 foals born with 27 still surviving. Three more are expected. We hope to have the decision record out next week.

Shepherd Ah Nei –The decision to open the Shepherd Ah Nei OHV area under the Preferred Alternative was signed and released May 13, 2005. The release allowed for a 30-day appeal period, and two appeals were filed. Each appeal was filed with a request for a stay which means the decision to open the area is suspended for 45 days until the Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA) makes a ruling. Even if the IBLA rules to open the area, it probably won't happen until fall when fire danger decreases. **Update: The IBLA granted the request for a stay—Shepherd Ah Nei will remain closed until IBLA rules on the appeal.**

Pompeys Pillar - Construction on the new Pompey's Pillar Interpretive Center has been slightly delayed with a new completion date of August 15. The exhibit contractor will then have 60 days to set up the exhibits. The Pompeys Pillar Historical Association has raised over one million dollars and will help with many of the facility's expenses. We are working with the community regarding the signature event which will take place one year from now. The signature event will be an expansion of Clark Days making it a four-day event.

Weatherman Draw - The Weatherman Draw Project is ahead of schedule and additional acres within the area are now being inventoried. Looting still remains a concern.

Personnel - Eddie Bateson, Billings Assistant Field Manager, accepted a position in New Mexico. Sandy hopes to have this position filled by fall. A natural resource specialist vacancy will not be filled at this time due to budget constraints. Talks are currently taking place between the Forest Service and the BLM regarding co-location. This would mean expanding the Montana State Office to allow room for the Forest Service to move in.

Fire - In April of this year, the Billings Field Office established it's own Initial Attack Fire Zone. Irv Leach is the new fire management officer, and he spoke to the RAC about various items such as fuel moistures, the National Fire Plan, and working to get more locals red-carded.

Field Manager Updates (Miles City Field Office):

New proposed regulations mineral development –David McIlInay noted that BLM will be publishing rules and regulations for minerals cost recovery. The proposal is a \$4000 recovery fee per application for permit to drill (APD) to help with some of the costs.

Miles City's Remodel - Construction on the Miles City building has begun. The goal is to integrate the minerals office (currently a mile away) with the rest of the office and to allow for additional space.

Pumpkin Creek Land Exchange –The landowners involved in this land exchange have been trying to dispose/sell their ranch, and there are several sections of BLM land within the private land. We are working on putting together an exchange package to acquire the land. Currently, we have been very busy with public land disposals involving archaeology, timber, etc. items.

Knowlton Travel Management Plan--The Knowlton plan is being finalized at this time. We will be signing, providing maps, doing a press release, etc. Mac thanked the RAC for all of its hard work.

Grazing Regulations - The new grazing regulations have recently been published in the Federal Register and will become final mid-August or early September. Co-owned range improvements continue to be a challenge in terms of where to put gates etc. to allow for public access.

Coalbed Natural Gas Development (Shane Findlay):

Shane Findlay gave an overview of the projected plan of development for oil and gas. Once the EIS was completed, several projects were initiated. These include Badger Hills, Dry Creek, Coal Creek, and CX. The onset of these projects spurred several lawsuits. Shane distributed a handout detailing these lawsuits. The only wells that are currently active are Badger Hills and CX. The Ninth Circuit Court will rule on the others sometime in September. The earliest we will know the outcome will be Christmas and

drilling would not begin until next year. Shane also distributed a handout on coalbed natural gas development which outlines various issues involved.

Miles City Resource Management Plan Update: Mary Bloom is currently heading up the resource management plan (RMP) revision project. BLM determined a new plan to be essential. The current RMPs (Big Dry and Powder River) have several restrictions and were written in a way that does not allow BLM to conduct business in a manner proficient for today's world. Mary asked the RAC if it would be willing to take the lead on this project and offer some guidance to the BLM in terms of ideas and developing alternatives. Mary noted that she and the contractor would be available to guide them through the steps. There are several agencies/cooperators involved (17 to date), and Mary feels that developing a subcommittee for each issue will somewhat offer an organized method of developing goals and objectives and alternatives. Mary gave each RAC member a folder of information and a CD which contains the Scoping Report. The Scoping Report lists all of the issues identified through a previous process. Each RAC member can decide if there is an issue they have a particular interest in and will have the opportunity to serve on that subcommittee. The RAC members felt a unanimous sense of responsibility to assist with this project. The project needs to be completed by the year 2007. Six members volunteered to be on a subcommittee which will outline how this process will work. They will have their first meeting in August or September. The subcommittee members are as follows: Robert Lubbers, John Gibson, Marian Hanson, Chuck Hauptman, Gerald Reichert, and Kent Williams. The remaining RAC members will review the scoping document and determine if there are any issues of particular interest to them.

OHV Subcommittee Report (Marty Ulrich):

Marty has visited with owners of many bike shops and dealerships requesting their involvement with the RMP process. Colby Branch met with Families for Outdoor Recreation and they will be assisting with getting information out regarding the OHV Plan. It is felt that public education regarding this matter is of high priority.

Energy Subcommittee Report (Mack Cole):

There is very little to report at this time. However, there will be many upcoming issues in the near future.

Shooting Subcommittee Report: This subcommittee's duties have been completed. Sandy thanked them for their excellent work.

Weatherman Draw Update (Howard Boggess):

Howard reported that looting and destruction of sites is still a huge concern. The focus at this point is getting information out to the public that by removing/destroying anything on this land is against the law. Press releases will go out and Howard encourages everyone to play a part through word of mouth.

Access Subcommittee Report (John Gibson):

Custer County is in the process of declaring county roads. Many of the roads have been maintained by the county but never officially designated as county roads. John would like the RAC to have input to what happens and get involved with this process.

Budget Overview (Sandy Brooks):

The Department is facing the worst budget crunch in a long time. With the war and homeland security taking a front row seat, domestic programs are the first to be cut, and public land management is low on the list. We are expecting a 4-5% decrease in buying power with no budget increases for the four years. We are currently 30 positions above what the current budget will support. Therefore many vacancies will not be filled unless they are found to be critical positions. Currently, 50% of BLM supervisors (bureau-wide) are eligible to retire in the next five years. The future may hold shifting of positions, early outs, increased use of volunteers, and an increased use of contract and term employees.

RAC Discussion:

RAC members would like to see OHV participants get together and discuss alternatives and controversies. The closure of many Forest Service roads and trails has resulted in a loss of opportunities. Some key elements that were brought up included self-policing and public education. Sandy commended Marty Ulrich for all of his hard work with the OHV program and his dedication as a RAC member. Marty's term ends in September, but it is hoped that Marty will continue to be involved on subcommittees.

- The next RAC meeting will be held November 15, 2005 (evening social) and November 16, 2005 (meeting) in Billings, Montana.

Eastern Montana Resource
Advisory Council Meeting
Miles City MT
March 10, 2005

RAC Members Present: Betty Aye, Jack Bailey, Howard Boggess, Colby Branch, Jaime Byrne, John Gibson, Chuck Hauptman, Robert Lubbers, Larry Pilster, Gerald Reichert, Marty Ulrich, Kent Williams, Mack Cole

RAC Members Absent: Marian Hanson, Neta Old Elk

BLM Representatives: Mary Apple, Eddie Bateson, Mary Bloom, Donna Bradley, Sandy Brooks, David McIlroy, Chris Miller, Marty Ott

State Director Updates:

Marty Ott, MSO-

- The RAC has support of WO and will become more beneficial to our programs as we face declining budgets.
- Marty challenged the RAC to be part of the process to identify what we must do, (laws and regulations), need to do (political imperatives) and projects we'd like to do.
- The fire program is fully funded for FY05. We have requested severity funds, single engine tankers and strike teams.
- Last year other programs contributed additional funds to augment the base weed funding. However, those funds aren't available now. BLM will increase coordination with other agencies and work smarter and more efficiently to continue providing quality programs as the budget declines.
- We are committed to coalbed natural gas development while striving to protect the resources.
- Several power generating projects have been proposed throughout the state.
- We value the RAC members and appreciate your efforts and participation.

Field Manager Updates:

Sandy Brooks-BiFO-

- The Pompey's Pillar Interpretive Center construction is to be completed by May and exhibits will be set up through the end of July. Clark Days are July 23-24 with the Signature Event scheduled for 2006.
- We are working on the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Plan revision. We hope to develop a MOU with the National Park and Forest Service for area and herd management.
- We received hazard material funding to begin cleanup of the uranium mines in the Pryor Mountains.

- Phase I of the Horsethief Fuels Reduction plan has been completed. Phase II will be completed by June 2005. Sandy will schedule a field trip of the area this spring for RAC members.
- The Eastern Fire Zone has been split in two regions. Billings and Miles City zones will both be interagency initial attack dispatch centers. This three-tier dispatch center will improve safety through better communication and quicker response.
- Provided a Montana state map indicating the extreme drought areas.
- The road inventories for the Travel Management Plan should be completed by the end of the year.
- The Federal Register notice was printed the first of March regarding target shooting in certain areas in the field office. Sandy thanked the committee members for its accomplishments and ownership in this effort.
- Limited progress is occurring in the Grove Creek matter. An EIS is required for that area. The value of BLM parcels makes a land exchange unlikely.

Dave McIlroy-MCFO

- Nine public meetings were held to obtain comments regarding the RMP. Dave thanked the RAC members for participating in their areas.
- We continue to process APDs and have received two additional proposals for CBNG drilling sites.
- The Pumpkin Creek Land Exchange is progressing in coordination with the Conservation Fund.
- The Howrey Island Recreation site has received mechanical, fire and chemical treatment to improve the habitat area.
- Discussed the Short Pine OHV area.
- The long-term drought continues to be a grazing concern. We have contacted operators regarding management plans for this season.

Shepherd Ah-Nei OHV Plan

Eddie Bateson-BiFO

- Presented a slide show on the Shepherd Ah-Nei OHV issue.

MCFO RMP Update

Mary Bloom-MCFO

- Provided a briefing with handouts regarding the RMP/EIS revision.

Weed Program Funding

Sandy Brooks-BiFO

- Discussed the weed program funding and our plans to keep the program strong.

Public Comment Period

- Brian Biggs read a statement and answered questions on his opinion regarding the Shepherd Ah-Nei issue.
- Robert Lubbers read comments he received from Clayton McCracken (representing the Sierra Club) and his concern for the Pryor Mountain wild horses.

Overview of FLREA

Chris Miller-BiFO

- Presented a slide show of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act and the changes that will occur.

RAC Subcommittee Reports:

Public Access Committee

- John Gibson informed everyone that the Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund funding cycle is coming up the end of the month. The fund has \$400,000 available for projects that would benefit access to public lands. Proposals for access to either public land or water may be sent to him for consideration.

Shooting Access Committee

- Robert Lubbers reported on the successful completion of the plan and guidelines for target shooting at 17-Mile. He thanked all that participated.

RAC Discussion Period/Action Items:

- Weatherman Draw
- MOU with Fort Howes and the fire program
- MCFO off highway Vehicle use
- Abandoned uranium mines
- Grove Creek Area
- Motion passed for Mack Cole to write a letter from the RAC regarding increasing base funding for the weed program. This will be sent to the congressional delegation.
- Motion passed to form an OHV subcommittee. Members are Colby Branch, Chairperson, Howard Boggess and Marty Ulrich.

Meeting evaluation/wrap up, next meeting dates and agenda

- Next meeting will be July 19 and 20 in Sheridan WY.
- Will contact Fidelity to organize a CBNG tour.
- RAC will prioritize the programs for the future of BLM in Montana, based on Marty's challenge.
- RAC member nominations are being accepted through April 19. Eastern Montana RAC has five vacancies.