

Eastern Montana Resource Advisory Council
Meeting Minutes
March 22, 2006
Miles City

RAC Members Present: Marion Hanson, Larry Pilster, Darryl Olson, Charles Hauptman, Nathaniel Hagerott, Jack Bailey, Howard Boggess, Robert Lubbers, Betty Aye, Jerry Reichert, John Gibson, Mack Cole

Howery Island Project – Brenda Witkowski

Brenda updated the RAC on the Howery Island Restoration Project which involves the removal of Russian olive and salt cedar. Two hundred acres of the area has been treated and is showing the growth of more desirable species. Future objectives include the use of prescribed fire, continued cooperation with Treasure County, and managing for native plant species. This spring BLM will be monitoring plots and treating areas that are resprouting.

The RAC members would like to tour Howery Island.

Billings Field Office Update – Sandy Brooks

Pompeys Pillar Construction

A paved ½-mile road and parking lot will be constructed this spring or fall, and the walkway will be completed this summer. The interpretive center exhibits will be installed in April, and the center dedicated on July 22, the first day of the four-day Clark on the Yellowstone National Signature Event. Sandy will be looking for volunteers to help with the event. The new interpretive center will open to the public when the Pillar opens on Memorial Day weekend.

Pryor Mountain

Billings Field Office is working on an environmental assessment to gather horses this summer by bait trapping. The horses will be lured into traps into the corrals with mineral and protein blocks and then captured. The proposal is to remove 12 stallions (4-8 years old) and 12 yearlings. This process will be much lower key than the helicopter gather and less expensive. The BLM will continue the fertility control program this year to immunoconceprcept 24 older mares. At the present time there are 135 adult horses and 24 foals.

Horsethief

BLM is continuing fuel reduction projects in the Horsethief area west of Roundup. Phase Two of the project required the removal of excess small diameter pine and juniper.

The RAC would like to tour the area.

Bundy Bridge Island

Sandy stated that after review, the solicitor concluded the island belong to the Bureau of Land Management. Yellowstone County has submitted an application to the BLM for a Recreation and Public Purposes Act lease of 20 acres on the island. It wants to construct a boat ramp, parking lot and road. The BLM will complete an environmental assessment (EA) and publish a Notice of Realty Action in the Federal Register.

There is a trespass issued on the island that has not been closed. BLM issued a trespass notice to a responsible party and requested the party provide BLM documentation showing they are not in trespass. At this time the party has not provided documentation to indicate they own or control the island. The BLM is still negotiating with the party and offered to settle the trespass if the party reseeds the area to native vegetation.

Grove Creek

The owner of the undeveloped subdivided private land in Grove Creek bought the private portion of the Meeteetse Spires with the intent of doing a land exchange with BLM. The concern is that the BLM lands are worth about 1/10 of the private lands in the Meeteetse Spires which would mean trading a large acreage to acquire the Meeteetse Spires tract.

Shepherd Ah Nei Off Highway Vehicle Area

The area is open, depending on the weather, and is monitored every weekend and many weekdays. An area of concern is the riders creating new trails on the site. There are still complaints from a private landowner about the noise in this area. In January 2007, the BLM will implement a user fee. The RAC members suggested educating the motorcyclists on the policy.

There was discussion with people camping for an extended period of time on BLM land. Lori Harbargh stated that they can camp for 14 days, but then must move a certain distance to a new location.

There was discussion on the use of ATV's for hunting. It was suggested that BLM support not using an ATV for hunting.

Miles City Update – Dave McIlroy

The employees have moved into the new building. The next phase is the remodeling of the existing main building. The contract has been let and completion is expected for next year.

In August, the President signed an energy bill which identified Miles City as an energy pilot office. Eleven additional positions were identified for the Miles City Office.

The staff is working on a prescribed fire in the Pine Hills area.

Pumpkin Creek Land Exchange

The inventory has been completed on the Pumpkin Creek Land Exchange. The BLM is working on the appraisal for the public land.

Knowlton Area

The BLM developed a travel management plan. Signs were installed last year before hunting season.

Sage Grouse Update

The Southeastern Montana Sage Grouse Working Group held a local working group meeting in Miles City in March. A variety of topics were addressed and included an overview of the Northeastern Wyoming Working Group's projects, predation, range projects and the question of where the Southeastern Montana Working Group is headed. They will be planning a field trip to look at habitat enhancement projects and other potential projects.

Hay Draw

There were trespass violations on private land that were dealt with by Fish, Wildlife & Parks. The area continues to be monitored by BLM and FWP.

Miles City RMP & SEIS Update – Bloom

SEIS Supplement

A newsletter went out to the mailing list and resulted in BLM developing another phased development alternative with less wells. There is a delay on the schedule due to BLM waiting on the air modeling. BLM and collaborators such as the RAC will be reviewing the preliminary draft from 5/1/2006 to 5/19/2006. BLM will be review the air quality section from 6/19/2006 – 6/23/2006. The public comment period on the draft will be 8/4/2006 – 11/1/2006. Public hearings and meetings will be 9/11/2006 – 9/14/2006. The final should be out in February 2006 with a 30 day protest period. The Record of Decision will be issued in June 2007.

Miles City RMP

BLM has completed Chapter 1 of the RMP and is working on Chapter 2. BLM and the collaborators will work together to form the alternatives to existing management at a meeting from April 18–20. BLM and collaborators will be reviewing Chapter 1-4 in July. The entire preliminary draft will be completed September. The Final RMP will be completed March 2008 and the ROD is scheduled to be issued in May 2008. BLM continues to work around the supplemental SEIS.

It was requested that BLM give the new RAC members a copy of the scoping document for the RMP.

There was discussion on the RMP revision combining two different RMP areas. A newsletter will be sent out this month.

New Grazing Regulations-Dave McIlnay

BLM is still working on the grazing regulations.

Discussion Items

There was discussion on monitoring the public land. It was brought up that we do not have enough law enforcement in Montana to monitor the public land. It was thought that other states have more enforcement than Montana. Lori stated that Federal regulations can only be enforced by federal law enforcement on the public land and the sheriffs' departments enforce any other actions. It was asked why BLM and the sheriffs' departments cannot work together to enforce the same laws. Lori stated that a county sheriff cannot enforce federal laws unless he attends the Federal Law Enforcement Academy.

There was concern about the retiring of an allotment in the Big Timber area permanently by a nonprofit agency for the recovery of grizzly bears and wolves. The concern was what would happen to the revenue.

The RAC discussed the funding of the Secure Rural Schools Funding Act through the selling of federal lands. The RAC passed a resolution opposing the sale of public land to reduce the federal deficit. All the RAC members present signed a letter to that effect to be sent to the Secretary of Interior.

Discussion of a big corporation buying private land for hunting, fishing and then leasing the land to outfitters for private hunting was discussed. The local hunters are being forced off of the public land and the new owners are not giving public access to the public. Outfitters should not have public access if the local hunters do not. If a road is opened to commercial use, then it should be opened to the public or the permittee should not be able to use it for recreation either. David McIlnay stated the RMP will be addressing outfitters and guides. There is an easement across state land and deeded land at Hay Draw to access public land.

The next meeting will be July 19 in Billings, Montana, starting at 7:00 a.m. There will be a social on July 18 at the Petroleum Club.

Topics: Pompey's Pillar Tour and Yellowstone River island ownership

Eastern Montana RAC Meeting Minutes
Billings, MT
August 29, 2006

Attendees: Kent Williams, Robert Lubbers, Marian Hanson, Colby Branch, Jack Bailey, Gerald Reichert, Chuck Hauptman, Howard Boggess, Betty Aye, Mack Cole, Nate Hagerott

Staff in Attendance: Cindy Staszak, Sandy Brooks, Theresa Hanley, Jim Sparks, Mary Apple, Mark Jacobsen, Donna Kaseman

Guests: Joni Packard – USFS, Joe Walks Along, Shanny Spang, David Milligan

The meeting was facilitated by Mark Jacobsen, Public Affairs Specialist, Miles City Field Office, who recently returned from Iraq.

Housekeeping

The attendees were given travel vouchers to fill out and return to Mary Apple.

Robert Lubbers welcomed Mark Jacobsen back from Iraq.

Miles City Field Office Update

Theresa Hanley introduced herself to everyone. She is the Supervisory Land Use Specialist in the Branch of Planning and Biological Resources, Montana State Office. Theresa will be Acting Field Manager, vice Dave McIlroy, for approximately 4 months. She will be commuting weekly to Miles City. Her background is in Archeology; she began her career in New Mexico, then moved to south central Idaho, and then to Montana 3 years ago. She has two children.

Fire Update – This season has been a very active time. To date, Eastern Montana fire zone had initial attack on 144 fires. The acreage that burned is over 133,000 – 25-BLM, 45-USFS, 41-Mutual Aide, 23-assisted by DNRC and 10-FWP land.

A Rehab Plan has been submitted for Black Pulaski fire to ensure there is money available to repair fencing etc. Equipment money will be available, but is not yet. Not sure of NRCS time-line - \$11 per acre available for equipment money.

Fences that BLM will provide money for, Rangeland Management Specialist's will work with Permittees to get the plan implemented.

Chuck Hauptman asked why the firefighters let the land burn and only protected structures. Sandy Brooks addressed the strategies of firefighter's safety and how Incident Commanders are the ones who direct the strategies. Marian Hanson brought up the fact that she feels ranchers should be able to do something to cooperate and help. Theresa Hanley explained how different levels of firefighters have rules to abide by. She also explained how agencies can listen and learn from post-season experiences.

Discussion was brought up on chaotic decisions and how they can be improved. Kent Williams brought up how ranchers have years of experience on firefighting but can't fight fires without a red card.

There was concern why it is easier to do prescribed burns than to cut and sell timber.

Miles City is a pilot office for the energy act. The FWS position has been filled and the DEQ and FWP positions are still in process.

Pumpkin Creek Land Exchange is continuing to move forward. The appraisals have been completed. There will be an EA completed, and the exchange will close this fall if everything goes as planned. A management plan will be written for the acquired lands.

Update on range program – Standards and guidelines have been completed. Range improvements are being implemented, and weed program folks are getting together with counties.

There is concern of funding Russian Olive trees and Salt Cedar as they are an invasive species and should be treated as a weed.

Sage Grouse – with changes of management will there be any problems? Theresa addressed the fact that change of management will not affect the schedule. BLM needs to determine how to incorporate recent study data into the SEIS and other on-going actions.

Billings Field Office Update

- Wild Horse program – a lawsuit has been filed by the Cloud Foundation. There was a hearing in Missoula, and a preliminary injunction was denied. The bait-trapping and fertility control is moving forward. Fertility control has been done on all but four horses. Linda Coates-Markle is transferring to a position in Denver where she will be a liaison for the WO and the SRM.
- Fire – 900,000 gallons of fire retardant were pumped so far this fire season. Billings Dispatch supported between 120-130 fires.
- Derby Mountain Fire - mostly USFS fire; suppression has been out of the Bozeman Dispatch Center.
- 17 Mile – Meeting scheduled Tuesday, September 5th at 7 p.m. at Hampton to discuss the target shooting area. To date, ten cattle have been shot in area. The meeting will be to:
 - Discuss shutting down the area until it is cleaned up,
 - Discuss making the area a day-use area only,
 - Discuss whether to pass a regulation on shooting at legal targets only,
 - Discuss having a citizen's watch. It was brought up that people have helped for a short period of time, but then interest died out.
 - Discuss whether or not to put in dumpsters on the property.

- Pompeys Pillar – The construction of the Interpretive Center is completed. The attendance for the Signature Event was approximately 48,000. There were 200 volunteers that helped with the event. The outdoor amphitheatre will be completed this fall.

Dale Tribby answered questions regarding sage grouse habitat in Carter County. The concern is in the coalbed methane area where the birds are leaving the area. When the development occurs, the sage grouse need to be protected. Fencing material has been provided for the area. An order has been placed for the seed. In 2-3 years, shrub species will be planted.

Jim Sparks presented update on Crooked Creek Temporary Fish Barrier in southern Carbon County.

- A temporary fish passage barrier was constructed in July 2006 to protect Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout from potential extinction.
- Brown trout are above barrier and can/will eat Cutthroats
- In September, will shock again to try to get Brown Trout out
- BLM and Custer National Forrest plan to construct a more permanent barrier in 2007 or 2008

Bundy Bridge

- BLM issued a right-of-way to Yellowstone County to construct a boat ramp
- Boat ramp will be provide ingress and egress to river
- Toilets will be built and provided in the future

Mary Bloom – Update on Miles City RMP

- Workshop was held in April
- March 2007 – draft released for a 90-day public comment period
- March 2008 – final draft released for a 30-day protest period
- May 2008 – Record of Decision will be out authorizing BLM decisions

Supplemental EIS

- Working on impact on Sage Grouse
- October 2006 – draft to be released for a 90-day comment period
- April 2007 – final draft will be out for a 30-day protest period
- June 2007 – Record of Decision expected out

Cindy Staszak and Mary Apple – Update on Recreation Fee Subcommittee

- Federal Lands Fee – passed December 2005
- Day-use Fees – Natural Conservation areas
- Expanded Amenity Fees – campgrounds, boat launches
- Forest Service and BLM are working on inter-agency agreement. Once finalized, a federal regulation will come out.

- Proposing how RAC will deal with fee issues and make recommendations on increases and decreases.
- Deadline is to have fees set up by first of the year in 2007.

Mack Cole motioned that Eastern Montana RAC make the recommendations and have control of decisions ---- unanimous.

Dick Kodeski – Pompeys Pillar Proposed Fee Increase

- New entrance road
- New parking lot
- 200,000 Amphitheatre – starts next week
- Pompeys Pillar Historical Association – local citizens that operate bookstore. Money generated is for interpretive and grant programs.
- More visitation
- More to maintain

Comparisons:

- Little Big Horn Battle Field – 450,000 visitors per year.
- Devils Tower current fees are \$10/vehicle or \$7/person.
- Yellowstone Park - \$20/vehicle.
- State parks - \$5/vehicle.
- Pompeys Pillar considering a fee of \$15/vehicle or \$8/person. Pompeys Pillar has 100,000 visitors in 4 months – ½ local, ½ out-of-state
- Casper Historic Center - \$6/adult, \$5/senior, \$4/student, \$3/six years and older, yearly pass - \$50
- Great Falls Interpretive Center - \$5/adult (16 and older)

Lynn Anderson – Shepherd Ah Nei Proposed Fee

- OHV area is 30 miles north of Billings
- Reopened October 2005
- Closed presently due to fire restrictions
- 10,000 – 12,000 visit area per year

Business Plan

- Propose fair and equitable fee of \$5/day and/or \$35/year
- Submitted Notice of Intent to Federal Register in August 2006
- If approved, establish fees in 2007
- Cost to maintain and manage site - \$38,000/year
- Comparison – BMC costs are \$200/year - per member

RAC recommendation – Kent Williams proposed that RAC supports fee proposal ---- unanimous

Housekeeping

- Summer motorized recreation
- Summer non-motorized recreation
- Hunting and fishing
- Winter motorized recreation
- Winter non-motorized recreation
- Motorized outfitters and guides
- Non-motorized outfitters and guides
- Local environmental groups
- State tourism officials
- Person who affects Indian tribes
- Local government issues

Billy McIlvain – Grazing Regulations

- Currently operating under rule established in 1995
- Monitoring fees – increases/decreases
- BLM and operators will share in range improvements
- Service charge increases

Joni Packard – Forest Service

- Thanked RAC for including Forest Service to be involved in meetings
- Routine fee increases are going to be developed
- Forest Service would like recommendations of what RAC needs
- Timing – when would RAC like information provided for meetings
- RAC proposed that Forest Service show comparisons
- Forest Service will justify fees to RAC
- RAC would like pictures of sites in question

Agenda Items

- Horse Bill
- USFS – fees
- Fire
- Sage Grouse – RMP/SEIS
- Grazing lawsuit update
- Coalbed methane update
- Pompeys Pillar presentation – update re: fees
- Weed Management
- Recreation Area Updates
- Working block of time

Next meeting dates – November 14, 2006 - social event
November 15, 2006 - meeting



MONTANA/DAKOTAS BLM

Eastern Montana
Resource Advisory Council

RAC MEETING MINUTES: Miles City, November 15, 2006

RAC Attendees

Larry Pilster, Marian Hanson, Colby Branch, Charles Hauptmann, Gerald Reichert, John Gibson, Kayhan Ostovar, Jack Bailey, Howard Boggess, Kent Williams, Daryl Olson, Betty Aye, Mack Cole, Robert Lubbers

BLM Staff

Sandy Brooks, Theresa Hanley, Mark Jacobsen, Eric Lepisto, Leanne Waterman, Irv Leach, Dick Kodeski

Guests

Doug Epperly, U.S. Forest Service

Public

Jackie Trussler

The meeting was facilitated by Mark Jacobsen, Public Affairs Specialist and RAC Coordinator, Miles City Field Office.

Housekeeping, new member introductions

The attendees were given travel vouchers to fill out and return to Mark Jacobsen.

Mark introduced the guests to the RAC members: Doug Epperly from the Custer National Forest recreation staff, Leanne Waterman (BLM) as notetaker, Eric Lepisto and Irv Leach both BLM presenters on the 2006 fire season and Dick Kodeski (BLM) a presenter on Pompey's Pillar.

Kayhan Ostovar was introduced as a new member to the RAC committee. He is a Wildlife Biologist with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and works in the Billings office. He is replacing Robert Lubbers.

Mark recognized Robert Lubbers and Betty Aye as departing members of the RAC and thanked them for their contributions.

The RAC members introduced themselves.

Ground rules were covered.

BILLINGS FIELD OFFICE UPDATE

Sandy Brooks announced that the Montana BLM has a new State Director; Gene Terland whose former position was in Utah. The Acting State Director Howard Lemm was chosen for the Associate State Director position.

Vacancies

The Billings Field Office has three key vacancies. The BiFO just hired a new archeologist and is close to making a selection on the new Wild Horse and Burro position. The announcement for the Dispatch Manager position should be out soon.

Resource Management Plan

The BiFO has been approved to revise the Billings Resource Management Plan which should get started in 2008. This is a good time to address new issues such as OHV use, etc. The current plan is approximately 24 years-old and this will be a good opportunity to incorporate current issues. The BiFO will be looking to the RAC for help during this process.

17 Mile Area

Sandy noted that this is a common area for shooting. The BiFO has been having problems with trash, dangerous shooting, etc. A public meeting was held regarding the area to get input on what should be done to help clean it up and make it safer. The area was closed for two weeks for clean up operations and currently there is a BLM ranger making frequent checks at 17-Mile to help alleviate some of the problems. This area continues to be a concern for the BiFO.

Lawsuits

The BiFO has been sued by the Cloud Foundation regarding the Wild Horse and Burro fertility control program and gather operations in the Pryor Mountains. The gather and adoptions have already occurred, but the fertility control issue is still an issue.

The BiFO is also being sued by landowner Brian Biggs on a number of issues regarding the Shepherd Ah Nei OHV Area. Biggs wants the area to be closed permanently.

Both lawsuits are ongoing.

Follow-up questions from the RAC

17-Mile Area

- Darryl asked about the 17-Mile area, concerning if it can be developed similar to Shepherd Ah Nei OHV area into a better public shooting area with targets, better roads and amenities and if more funding can be put into it. He question why similar funding could not be put into this area since it is greatly needed and one of the last open areas to shoot around Billings.
- Sandy stated if the BLM puts targets out, it increases the liability of the BiFO. She also indicated that ideal situation would be to work with an organization that would take it over and run it.
- Robert inquired about charging a fee for the use of 17-Mile.
- Sandy said she would be willing to look into that, but she thinks it will probably be a liability issue.

Grazing issues

- Robert inquired about the status of the new grazing regulations.
- Sandy stated that they are waiting for a judge to rule regarding the old regulations which address public participation, cooperative range improvement agreements, nonrenewable permits and leases. Sandy was unsure on how long this process would take.

Wild horse training program

- Mack asked about the wild horse training program
- Sandy noted that the goal is to adopt out all wild horses and burros that are collected each time. However, this year not all the animals were adopted. The remaining animals were sent to the BLM Rock Springs Corrals. The Riverton Prison takes some wild horses and provides halter training, but the Riverton staff said the remaining Pryor Horses were not good candidates for their program due to disposition and age. Sandy stated they are looking into a couple of different options, one-- sending them to a sanctuary in the Midwest to let them live out their lives, another-- would be to send them to Canyon City to another inmate training program.

Biggs lawsuit

- Betty wanted to know what the difference is with this lawsuit and the previous one that was filed. Sandy said there are several things that are being noted. The filing party is stating that the BLM is not doing what they said they would do in the Environmental Assessment.

Fee Sites

- John Gibson received a letter from a gentleman regarding Forest Service Lands that have been privatized and that are now charging fees for entrance. However, there are regulations that must be met and a budget to be worked with.
- Theresa noted that the BLM is doing an asset management plan of all of the tangible assets where the condition of the assets and the annual maintenance are rated. This is done to avoid getting into a deferred maintenance situation and will show the difference between the annual maintenance and deferred maintenance. She followed

up that if an existing site cannot be funded, options might include that the improvements might be removed or another agency might be considered to manage the site through a memorandum of understanding.

- Doug: Need to look at fee increases to help operate within the budgets.
- Howard: Stated that Fish, Wildlife and Parks gets a \$4 fee from license plates so there are not any charges for residents to get into FWP-managed parks.
- Mack: Clarified that this is an optional fee.
- Doug: Federal Lands Management Act states that you can't implement a fee for walking or driving through public lands, the fee has to be attached to some sort of amenity.
- John: Brought up that there is a stamp to access State School lands for hunting, fishing and trapping.
- The question was raised concerning why the BLM is keeping campgrounds, etc. if they can't afford to operate them, if there a mandate that there has to be so many campgrounds, and why not go back to dispersed recreation.
- Theresa: BLM is not mandated to have a set number of areas; it is based more on what the public dictates and is asked for by the public. The BLM in turn, has to show the public why it isn't feasible buget wise, if it isn't.
- John: Some areas that are used by the public have to have outhouses, etc. because of the nature and level of use.

MCFO UPDATE

Theresa Hanley stated that she is now three months into her acting assignment. She said it is nice to be back into a Field Office setting. She will be acting until the end of December. Theresa updated the RAC members on the status of David McIlroy and that he is now settled in the state office. Applications are in for his replacement and interviews are to start this week.

Energy Pilot Office

Theresa noted that several of the minerals staff are in Denver at a pilot office workshop and are exchanging information on how the offices are operating. She also noted that the BLM has been able to get partner employees on board with the MT DEQ (air quality and hydrologist) and FWP.

SEIS

Theresa noted that the Air Quality section of the draft SEIS has been sent out to stakeholders. The MCFO received a lot of comments back and held a meeting on November 2^d to resolve any outstanding issues.

MCFO staff is working on briefing the BLM Washington Office on when it will be available for public comment and hope to have it ready and published in the Federal Register notifying the public in December, but it has to get approval for the Federal Register first and then go out for a 90-day public comment period.

Colby inquired about the impact on sage grouse. Theresa noted that the BLM is already using adaptive management strategies based on monitoring and will adapt year-to-year and will use

best management practices to mitigate impacts. Kayhan inquired about what studies have been looked at. Theresa said the BLM has been using MSU's Dr. Naugle and his graduate students, as well as other research and in-house monitoring data.

Pumpkin Creek Land Exchange

All appraisals have come in but the BLM found out they didn't have equal exchange value on the lands in question (public land vs. private land). The BLM is getting a few more appraisals done and depending upon the outcome, the BLM may have to exchange more land. The next step will be to get the Environmental Assessment completed.

There was some discussion among the RAC members on how the lands were chosen. They also had some questions on what will be done with the blocks of land that the BLM will be getting.

Follow-up questions from the RAC

Fisheries Projects

- Kayhan inquired about the fisheries projects that were in the update that was handed out to the RAC members before the meeting.
- Theresa: Will have Joe Platz get with him regarding the particulars or maybe Joe can come in and do a presentation for the members.

Pumpkin Creek

- Larry: Would like to see the new Pumpkin Creek land area not used for grazing. He feels this is a great opportunity to allow OHV and possibly prairie dog shooting.
- After this discussion a need for a sub-committee was discussed to address potential future uses and planning for these newly acquired lands. A need for a field trip was determined, which will be scheduled in January. The following RAC members volunteered: Darryl, Kent, Marian, Kayhan, Colby, Larry, Howard

POMPEYS PILLAR RECREATION FEES

Dick Kodeski gave an update on the Pompey's Pillar entrance road. The road had compaction problems and crews had to add more layers of fill. The cold weather will now come into play as to whether or not crews will be able to lay asphalt. Most likely they will have to finish it up next spring.

The entrance fee collection station is in and will be staffed during the busy season, but when it is not staffed it has automated fee collection capabilities. The amphitheater is a separate project that has been started. The ground work for this has been done.

Dick also said that the new exhibits in the interpretive center had a lot of use this summer and will need some repairs this winter.

At this time the pillar is closed but the public can park at the gate and walk in. There is no charge at this time.

There was a question to whether or not the automatic fee collection system will recognize the various park passes. Dick explained that the new interagency passes that are coming out in January include all agencies and the automated teller will be able to recognize these passes.

Betty asked how Pompey's Pillar realized the money from the passes. Dick explained that whoever sells the passes realizes the money from them.

Dick then asked for feedback on the Pompey's Pillar Business Plan that was handed out to the RAC members prior to the meeting. He wanted some feedback on the recreation use fees.

Kent asked about why the fees in 2006 were so low when it was a record breaking year. Dick explained a lot of the visitors were during the four-day free Signature Event that took place.

Robert asked if special groups, such as a birding group, would be charged a fee. Dick explained that if they are using the amenities, they would be charged a fee, otherwise if it is in the off season, the BLM could let them in and they would be responsible if anything were to happen. Robert asked Dick to put that info into some sort of medium that could be handed out to special interest groups.

Dick explained that since they are already charging a fee for entrance into Pompey's Pillar, they do not have to go back through the Federal Register process if they would like to change the fee amount, but they are required to get input and ultimately get a recommendation from the RAC on what the fee should be.

Kayhan asked how many visitors were residents vs. out-of-staters. Dick said it is about half and half in-state and out-of-state attendance with about 7 percent being foreign/non-citizen visitors.

There was discussion among the RAC members on whether or not there should be a fee increase or not and if so how much. The following were some concerns mentioned:

- A \$10 fee is too much; some see the Pillar as an educational opportunity for children and a \$10 fee would be too much for families to afford.
- Residents shouldn't be charged the same as non-residents since residents are state tax payers.
- Suggestion to keep one free event each summer for those who cannot afford to pay.
- Some feel a \$10 fee might keep away the impulse visitors that are just passing through, see the sign and stop.
- Some would like to see more of an increase in commercial use fees vs. individual use fees.

Sandy explained that there was appropriated money to build the visitor center but no additional funds to maintain and operate it. Currently, the BLM is taking money away from other programs to operate this site. Sandy has asked for additional funds for operation. To date, they have not had any complaints on the fees.

Kent asked if Dick has talked to Pompeys Pillar Historical Association or other local agencies regarding the fees. Dick explained that he had, but did not get much of a response.

Mark asked the members if they were in favor of a fee increase. The majority was in favor. Mark asked how the RAC would like to come to an agreement on what the new fee amount would be. RAC members decided to vote on three amounts; \$5, \$7, and \$10.

The RAC voted on the amount: \$5 = 4 votes; \$7 = 6 votes; and \$10 = 2 votes. The RAC input was that the new fee amount would be \$7.

There was some discussion about having a longer open season but Dick explained they run into management and vandalism problems.

The RAC asked about the gift center and where the profits go and Dick explained they go back to the Pompeys Pillar Historical Association and ultimately back to the Pillar for guest speakers, etc.

TRAVEL MANAGEMENT

Brian Lynnes introduced himself and explained his role in the Travel Management Plan process and that the travel management planning process is a BLM national-level effort. Each field office has identified priority areas to work on first. The Knowlton area was completed with the RAC's help, years previously. Rattlesnake Butte/Snow Creek is the next area the MCFO wants to work on and would again like the RAC's input.

Colby expressed concern over closing roads and putting more restrictions on the public. Theresa explained that this is just a starting point to get input, this is not the final say.

Brian went on to explain the different roads and why the roads were being designated the way they were and that the major issues arise during hunting season so many of the proposed designations were to address that time of year. Fred Wambolt explained that this is just a recommendation; they strongly encourage input from the RAC to take to the public. This is one of the first steps into this process.

Sandy clarified the Travel Management Plan process up until now and that this is just a piece of the process. This area has already been identified as a high priority area.

Darryl discussed how OHV impacts hunting and that the fine/cost for breaking OHV laws is less than the cost of hiring an outfitter to get downed game for the person who shoots it. Fines need to be increased to get people to pay attention to the laws. He also supported the preliminary travel plan especially the designation of routes for game retrieval only.

Mark asked the RAC members if they would like to form a sub-committee to look into this further and give additional input. The RAC decided that they would.

John asked if there has been any coordination with the county in designating road ownership and jurisdiction. Brian said that the MCFO did look at that and incorporated it in the plan.

Betty asked if there was a major land owner that would be willing to work with the BLM in accessing some of the BLM lands. Brian notes that the RAC are the first people to actually take a look at this proposal. The MCFO has already been granted some public access easements from land owners in prior dealings, i.e.; land exchanges.

Kayhan: Would like to know how long roads have been in existence, how many miles of closures are being proposed, etc.

Colby: Feels like we are closing off public land to the public.

A Rattlesnake Butte subcommittee was established composed of: Darryl, Marian, John, Kaylan, Colby, Larry and Howard. They will schedule an on-site visit and meeting at a future date.

FIRE SEASON REPORT

Eric Lepisto gave an introduction stating that the way the BLM gauges whether or not a fire season was successful is by the safety record and number of serious injuries that occurred. The Eastern Montana Fire Zone had no safety-related incidents this fire season (2006).

Eric indicated that there was an increased number of *acres* burned in the 2006 fire season but the *number* of fires decreased. Eric gave a PowerPoint presentation illustrating the following:

- Where the fires were located
- 5-year trends
- Fire locations from 2002-2006
- Acres burned by ownership
- 2006 fires by ownership
- Equipment dispatched off district
- Overhead dispatched off district
- Top 10 fire qualifications dispatched off district
- Equipment brought into district
- Overhead brought into district.

Eric showed a map of the 2006 complex fires – south of the Yellowstone River and the Black Pulaski fire.

Irv Leach gave a handout that showed the BiFO year in review. He also handed out the “Safety Gram” which outlines all of the accidents/deaths associated with wild land fire for the 2006 calendar year.

Irv explained that they are mandated by congress to do a fire planning analysis yearly which has been completed. They have also been successful at getting all of the counties under one mutual aid agreement instead of having them all under separate agreements. They have also developed a

fire suppression agreement for the Twin Coulee area with the Lewistown Field Office; and Treasure County with the Miles City Field Office.

Irv stated that he felt there was a communication breakdown on the Derby fire. He felt like the fire system overall was broken and is looking to the RAC for some input.

Jackie Trussler stated that there is a “lightning ridge” on the Custer National Forest where there will always be fires. One of her concerns is with dispatching. It is hard to get good dispatchers and she suggested using the Ashland Ranger District and the Custer National Forest and use the range cons for assistance with knowledge of the area and dispatching. She is concerned that local landowners are not allowed to help. Irv explained what the Incident Teams are used for and they are familiar with the way things are done in eastern Montana.

There was some further discussion regarding the use of fire crews at the fires, clearing brush vs. sitting around waiting. Concerns over communication and breakdowns were also covered.

Marian noted that ranchers and the BLM used to work together for a common goal. Now permittees are not even notified when there is a fire on their allotment when livestock could have been moved. She would like to see ranchers used more. Irv explained that there are certain qualifications that need to be met in order to be on the fire line. Fire crews have to be really careful not to have private landowners hurt on a fire and the BLM held liable for personal safety incidents involving non-fire-qualified crews. Jackie Trussler noted that the fuel loads are quite different than they were years ago.

There was some discussion about getting some of the liability waived so the ranchers can help out more or maybe something in-between no certification and red card certification that would enable them to help.

Colby suggested putting fuels information into the RMP. Theresa said that all the Montana/Dakotas Resource Management Plans were amended by the Statewide Fire Plan in 2003. The RMP revisions are another opportunity to revisit these issues and decisions.

Eric noted that there had been a lot of fire information captured at various scoping meetings and the lessons-learned were being considered and incorporated.

MEETING CLOSEOUT

The next RAC meeting was scheduled by council members for **February 22, 2007** in Billings; with the social being held the evening of the 21st at the Petroleum Club. Chuck is going to organize the social.

The agenda will include reports from the RAC sub-committees. Agenda possibilities include; a look into a sage grouse update and possibly a presentation from fisheries and USGS on the study they have been involved with.

The following sub-committees were reviewed:

Energy Sub-Committee: Jack, Chuck, Mack, Colby, Howard

Rattlesnake Butte Sub-Committee: Darryl, Marian, Kayhan, Colby, Larry, Howard, John

Pumpkin Creek Sub-Committee: Darryl, Kent, Marian, Kayhan, Colby, Larry, Howard

The Pumpkin Creek Sub-committee will take a road trip to look at the area and the proposed Rattlesnake Butte area, tentatively scheduled for the 3rd week in January.