

**WESTERN MONTANA RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL
MINUTES
OCTOBER 21, 2004
BUTTE FIELD OFFICE CONFERENCE ROOM**

RAC Members Present: Donna Tate McDonald, Ted Coffman, Ben Deeble, Dan Lucas, Garry Williams, Sue Marxer, Robin Cunningham, Robin Urban, Richard Young, and Joyceann Thompson. Robin McCulloch and Pat Flowers (afternoon session only).

RAC Members Absent: Roger Peters, Dennis Phillippi and Susan Lenard.

BLM Personnel: Nancy Anderson, Missoula Field Manager, Tim Bozorth, Dillon Field Manager, Rick Hotaling, Butte Field Manager, Marilyn Krause and Myra Roueche, Butte Field Office.

Guests: Doug Abelin, former RAC member, and Nate Finch, Bannack Grazing Association

Welcome: Rick Hotaling welcomed the RAC members to Butte. He then presented a plaque to Doug Abelin in appreciation of his tenure on the RAC. Marilyn Krause introduced Joyceann Thompson as the new RAC member.

The ground rules were reviewed. It was also noted that a quorum was present for each category.

Marilyn stated that the State Office had a Wind Energy CD available to any member that was interested in obtaining a copy. Garry Williams and Ben Deeble requested a copy.

Marilyn reviewed the agenda and the handouts (see attached). [**Note: When the minutes refer to attachments, these are handouts distributed at the meeting and not attached to this document.**] It was also stated that both Dennis Phillippi and Roger Peters had written comments regarding the Reservoir Creek Allotment Management Plan. Also available was a hand-out by Pat Fosse.

Field Manger Updates: Nancy Anderson – Missoula Field Manager
We completed a major road improvement project on the Garnet Range Road. Approximately 4 miles were paved and additional surfacing was placed on approximately 7 miles.

Our reclamation of the Linton Mine should be completed next week. Approximately 77,000 cubic yards of waste was removed from the site which was located on Cramer Creek.

We sold our Murray Douglas timber sale last month. The high bidder was Pyramid Mountain Lumber in Seeley Lake. This sale will treat approximately 900 acres.

We will be mailing an Environmental Assessment this week which addresses the salvage of bug-killed timber in Antelope Creek and Upper Rock Creek. Approximately 200 acres will be treated. We are also looking at bug-killed timber in the Ram Mountain area.

We are completing the Section 7 consultation on our RMP amendment to adopt the Canada lynx conservation strategy. We will issue the decision record after consultation is completed.

Garry Williams asked what the Murray Douglas timber sale brought. Nancy Anderson said that it was appraised at \$600,000 and was sold at 1.2 million.

Dan Lucas inquired about the status of the Copper Creek sale. The Missoula office is close to sending the draft Flint Creek Environmental Assessment (EA) to the Forest Service. The EA addresses approximately 8,000 acres around Philipsburg. Within the area, there are two timber sales and one is Copper Creek. Because of the public concern in regards to bug kill, this summer they marked the trees and will do some work if they can get into it but they still need to finish the EA and decision; therefore not sure when the sale will be offered - if not this fiscal year, then next fiscal year.

Tim Bozorth – Dillon Field Manager: We are utilizing a third party to review the BLM data and findings on the Camp Creek allotment, part of the Highland's watershed assessment. We have completed 441,000 acres of watershed assessment and have monitoring on 75 allotments comprising 334,000 acres. We met our fuels and mechanical treatment objectives this year. We are looking at a number of prescribed fire treatments and timber sales to address forest health issues in the Upper Ruby.

Dick Young inquired about the effects of drought on completing watershed assessments. Because it is long term monitoring, you can see the trend that occurs over time. Drought is factored in the watershed assessments. The monitoring conducted looks at plant species composition changes over time and not plant vigor. Sue Marxer asked if the decisions were appealable. All allotment decisions are appealable if it is determined that a change is needed due to livestock grazing.

Sue Marxer inquired about the Camp Creek Allotment and if this is something the RAC needs to be involved in. BLM is working with a third party professional range consultant to look at the data and help the permittees come up with options that will address the Standards determinations and still help them achieve their objectives. The permittee moves off private and onto the allotment in the spring and then moves to the forest later in the summer. Because of this use over time, all cool season grasses are gone causing productivity to be way down compared to adjacent areas. There is potentially a 40% reduction – this factors in both a change from spring grazing every year with some deferred fall AUM's, about 25% reduction is from spring grazing. The reduction applies to Camp Creek Allotment only. The Camp Creek Allotment is being handled as a separate decision. Since a decision has to be made before next spring, there's probably not enough time to involve the RAC.

Dan Lucas inquired if there were enough residual cool season grasses left to allow for recovery or will a more aggressive program be necessary? There are some residual grasses but it will take time and there's a potential for a more aggressive approach but it would be expensive.

Tim Bozorth said he would send a briefing paper to the RAC members regarding this allotment. (Briefing paper sent at a later date via email).

Donna Tate McDonald asked about the status of big horn sheep in the Ruby Mountains. There was a meeting last spring. Some sheep were moved and they took some out of the herd in the Greenhorns.

Dan Lucas inquired how or if domestic sheep were being used for weed management. The Madison Valley Ranchlands Group received money for it but they ran into difficulties with the project because of the proximity of big horn sheep on the Wall Creek Game Range. Sheep were considered for use in the Highlands to deal with weeds but again, because of the proximity to big horn sheep, they can not be used. Sheep are being used on private land in western Montana to control leafy spurge and spotted knapweed and it is showing real promise.

Rick Hotaling – Butte Field Manager

Ted Coffman asked for an acreage figure on the McMaster Ranch acquisition. The total for the property is just over 5,000 acres. The north piece (see map) is approximately 2,000 acres. The BLM may also acquire a piece called French Bar. The south portion of the McMaster's ranch is just about ready to be acquired also. The property just to the north along the river is private land which the BLM calls the Styles Property. There are also five one-acre sub-divided parcels with a house on one. There is no access, other than the river to this property. The deed has a clause in it that prevents the BLM granting any right-of-way across the property.

A short discussion followed concerning the “two-lot town site” within the McMaster acquisition. There is no access to the lots and it was never officially made a town site.

Butte RMP Update

Ruth Miller, Butte Field Office, presented an update on the RMP. (See attached). A discussion followed. Garry Williams asked when the interagency meetings would be held in Helena. A letter will be sent out to the agencies in early December inviting them to a meeting in late January. A question was asked as to how long the comment period would be when the Proposed Action is released. Since it is not a required step, the BLM is looking at 30 days but it can be adjusted based on the number of comments received.

Marilyn asked if the RAC would want a briefing before the proposal comes out. It was stated that the BLM will brief the RAC either at the January meeting or by a written brief depending on the schedule. The RAC members will receive a copy of the Proposed Action before it is released to the public. The Butte Field Office will present the ACEC Report to the RAC for discussion after it is complete. Since the Butte Field Office has gone through the RMP process once before, the existing ACECs will be carried forward to the RMP. We are revising the existing plan to incorporate existing decisions, like travel management into this RMP. The area of contention will probably be the three Helena area Travel Plans.

How would the RAC like to be involved and when and where? Sue Marxer asked if the Travel Management sub-group was helpful in developing Dillon's Travel Management. It was

extremely helpful. Could Butte have a sub-group made up of local people? That is one of the reasons we're holding the five collaborative meetings. From those we will gauge the level of interest and after the meetings we will see if all three plans can be completed. If the next meeting was held the end of January or February, the Butte Field Office (BFO) would know and could ask for RAC involvement. The BFO is deciding how to involve the public when the Proposed Action is issued. We are trying to gauge public interest and how they would like to participate. Mass mailings, putting it on the website, public meetings, and offering briefings to individual groups are all possibilities for public involvement. It was stated that low attendance at public meetings is disappointing so that is why a mixture of public meetings and briefings are being considered.

Dick Young asked whether the Humbug Spires were already a special management area in the BFO area. They are and they are part of a Wilderness Study Area.

Sue Marxer asked how many acres are managed by the BFO. There is just a little more than 320,000. Landownership has been updated as part of this process. She also asked that if specific briefings are done, will they be advertised. If briefings/meetings are held, BFO will send out notices to those on the mailing list, send releases to newspapers and post on the website.

Marilyn clarified the travel management proposal with Rick Hotaling. By the winter RAC meeting, all the proposed Travel Plans will be done and then BLM will brief the RAC and if they decide help is needed, a sub-group could be formed. The RAC agreed with the suggestion.

Law Enforcement Recommendations

Sue Marxer reported that an issue raised at the National RAC Meeting was lack of law enforcement especially related to OHV use. There is no way, at present, to enforce the policy. After a discussion, the RAC made the following suggestions:

- Larger /readable from a distance, stickers are needed. This needs to be legislated by the State.
- Better signage – suggest arrows or green dots showing routes that are open.
- More cooperative enforcement – saturation patrols – use in areas where problems are heavy – two weeks at a time.

It was noted this issue is much broader than just BLM. It should be worked at from the State angle and possibly a sub-group. BLM could do saturation patrols with the limited resources they now have. Signage using arrows for open routes is also a possibility as travel plans are implemented. Garry mentioned that any legislated change would need to come from both the OHV users and agricultural users. Joyceann agreed to coordinate with the Stockgrowers to get their views on the OHV problem and possible solutions and report back to the RAC at the next meeting.

Public Comment: Nate Finch, representative for the Bannack Grazing Association, was introduced. Tim Bozorth briefed the RAC on the Reservoir Creek Allotment Management Plan (AMP). The field work took place in the year 2000 prior to the watershed assessment. Last winter it was decided to complete the AMP and to prepare an EA in order to make a decision. As a result, the National Wildlife Federation expressed concerns regarding options in the EA. A

request was received by the MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MT FW&P) to form a sub-group to look at other options. The MTFW&P had a concern that if there were problems with this allotment revision, it could have an adverse affect on the Sage Grouse working group in Dillon. The BLM agreed to set up a RAC sub-group. The group met several times to review the allotment and monitoring information, and conducted a number of field trips to develop a grazing strategy designed to meet objectives. That objective was “to develop a plan to manage existing resource uses to achieve desired resource conditions”. Nate Finch provided comments on behalf of the Bannack Grazing Association. (See attached comments).

A discussion followed Nate Finch’s comments. Robin Cunningham asked what the downside of the 7” stubble residual was. Because the allotment is in a very low precipitation area, it is hard to maintain that level of residual growth. It is linked to site potential. It is being used as an objective and guideline not as a standard. It has the potential of being unachievable because of conditions.

Sue Marxer said that Roger Peters had a problem with it being an objective and with the wording calling it a guideline. (See attached). Tim Bozorth stated there are Vegetative Objectives in most of the Allotment Management Plans (AMPs) but they may not have certain utilization levels and certain stubble heights as objectives that are in some of the AMPs. We need to be clear in how the terms objectives and standards are used. Standards are the over-all statement of what the resource is and guidelines are the tools that make the objective move toward those standards. The 7” stubble height is a tool used as a measure to see if they are going in the right direction

Dan Lucas stated that range management is both an art and a science. Does stubble height give you valuable information and is it a realistic measure that can be used as a management guideline? Standards can potentially take away the ability of the local manager to make management decisions. A permittee, who has been on the allotment for a long time, understands the dynamics of the plant community but they may have a rigid standard that may or may not have anything to do with reality. What we’re trying to put together is something you can measure and gives real results and that’s difficult to do.

Rob Cunningham said you see it as a gauge; as progress toward an end. It’s a tool to measure. It isn’t a question of should they or should they not have an allotment. I hope we’re not using the 7” as a tool to push people off the ground but with 7” I feel like we’re encouraging sage grouse.

Sue Marxer read the 3rd Objective: “Maintain adequate herbaceous understory on the majority of the area within 2 miles of a lek during nesting and early brood rearing typically April through mid-June. The objective of herbaceous understory is an average of 6-7” where the site potential allows.”

Reservoir Creek Allotment Management Plan (Cont’d)

Tim Bozorth stated that they (sub-group) had spent considerable time reviewing data, viewing the resource on the ground and looking at different options. A mid-July meeting was held and a number of rotations were suggested. One was by Nate Finch, Bannack Grazing Association, one by the BLM, one by Steve Sherman, and one by MT FW&P. After much discussion they chose

a rotation the Bannack Grazing Association had recommended. It is a 4 pasture rest rotation (see attached). The MTFW&P feel this grazing strategy is best from a plant phrenology standpoint. It best meets the objectives of developing a plan to manage all the existing resources to achieve all the desired resource conditions. The group, with Ben Deeble's exceptions, (see E-mail) felt that this grazing strategy would increase range health conditions and meet that goal.

After a lengthy discussion, Ted Coffman moved that this group (RAC) support the recommendation from the sub-group.

Marilyn reviewed the decision making process. To refer an issue to the designated Federal Official, who is Tim Bozorth, requires agreement of at least 3 members from each interest group. What that means is that when the Chairperson says "Thumbs" – thumbs-up means you support it, thumbs-to-the-side means you can live with it, and thumbs-down means you oppose it.

It was then discussed whether or not Dennis Phillippi and Roger Peters should be polled since they both had submitted written comments. Ted Coffman stated there was a quorum and the members present were the ones to vote. Rick Hotaling reminded the members that the RAC Charter does not allow for voting by proxy on a recommendation to the BLM.

Ted Coffman moved to support the recommendation, Pat Flowers seconded the motion. Marilyn asked for a show of thumbs. The vote was as follows: 3 were thumbs-to-the- side, 10 were thumbs-up and the recommendation will move forward.

Dillon RMP Update

Tim Bozorth said that the draft went out last summer and they received 1600 comments. About 1400 of them were comment forms which will be treated as one comment. The responses by the specialists have been completed and are being edited. On December 14th, we will brief the State Director. A State Office review will take place the first of December through the first week of January and we will make changes if needed. The Washington Office (WO) briefing will be scheduled after the first of the year to seek approval for publication of the final due out next April. We hope to have the Record of Decision signed by July or August 2005.

Allotment Stewardship Proposal: It has been put on the back burner for now.

Sue Marxer asked about the new Grazing Regulations. Tim Bozorth replied that they were about to be published. The biggest change will be when an allotment is not meeting standards and livestock grazing is a contributing factor in not meeting standards, we have until the next grazing season to make a change that will provide for making significant progress toward achieving the standards. The new Grazing Regulations will allow BLM another year to make the changes.

Sue Marxer stated that in a meeting with State Office, regarding Allotment Stewardship, they asked for pilot project. It would be a 5 year project working with a trusted permittee to design his own grazing system and having the RAC more involved in monitoring. The idea came from a public comment asking what kind of incentive would help the rancher. The reply was some decision making rights.

Marilyn asked what the RAC wanted to do with this topic. Dick Young recalled that we were going to leave it as an option. If one of the BLM Managers recommended someone to the RAC, it might be a project that would work. Sue Marxer said that the RAC would sit down with them and say what they wanted to see in five years. The rancher would be told the results the RAC recommendations and let the rancher design the plan to get the desired results. There would be a base line established at the beginning and it would be monitored on a yearly basis. Marilyn summarized that the BLM Managers need to watch for opportunities or a situation that would be appropriate to test this program. If an opportunity presents itself to the Manager, they can than bring it back to the RAC.

Meeting Dates

The dates and locations for the 2005 RAC meetings are:

- January 20, 2005 Butte, MT
- May 4, 2005 Missoula, MT
- September 21, 2005 Dillon, MT (Field Trip)
- November 30, 2005 Butte, MT

Agenda topics for the next meeting: Butte Field Office, January 20, 2005

Big Horn Habitat Presentation
Butte RMP Update
Whitetail Basin Research Project
Dillon RMP Update

The meeting was adjourned.

Reviewed and approved by: /s/ Sue Marxer
Sue Marxer, Western Zone RAC Chairperson

Western Montana Resource Advisory Council
Minutes
June 24, 2004
Missoula Field Office Conference Room

Members Present: Pat Flowers, Robin Cunningham, Ben Deeble, Robin McCulloch, Garry Williams, Ted Coffman, Richard Young, Sue Marxer

Members Absent: Dennis Phillippi, Donna McDonald, Robin Urban, Roger Peters, Susan Lenard, Dan Lucas, (Doug Abelin recently resigned)

BLM: Tim Bozorth, Nancy Anderson, Rick Hotaling, Dick Fichtler, Renee Johnson, Rick Waldrup, Marilyn Krause, Facilitator, Lonna Sandau, Minutes

Guests: Twinkle Thompson (BLM-AZ), Chris Lorentz, Montana FWP

Welcome and Housekeeping Items:

We do not have a quorum at our meeting. A concern was raised regarding the lack of attendance and the effect it has on the group and its ability to do business. It was recognized that people may need to miss meetings. However, when they miss the discussion that goes on in a meeting, they are missing valuable information needed to make his/her vote.

Marilyn will poll RAC members prior to each meeting to make sure there will be a quorum. If not, the meeting may need to be rescheduled. At the next meeting (October 21) we will try to set the meeting dates for 2005. Reminder letters will be sent to members that have missed two or more consecutive meetings.

- It was decided that for this meeting, a vote from attendees would be taken and then Marilyn would email the absent members for their votes.

Pat Flowers had intended on having a presentation on Bighorn Sheep Habitat and Disease Management for this meeting but it didn't work out. If there is still an interest, he will set it up for a future meeting.

National RAC Meeting Update (Sue Marxer):

(See handout distributed at meeting or mailed to absent members)

Kathleen Clarke's priorities were:

- Improve health and productivity of the land
- Improve access and remove barriers for responsible multiple use
- Promote public participation

Kathleen Clarke had asked for feedback from the RACs on how to improve best management practices (such as budget management, accountability, and customer services); how to improve processes (such as how to eliminate paperwork to make thing run more efficiently); lack of law enforcement personnel to manage recreation/OHV issues.

It was asked if field employees could help in compliance. In some cases, this raises safety concerns for the employees.

The Sustaining Working Landscapes initiative is put on the back burner and will be revisited.

Over 16,000 comments were received on the Grazing Regulations. The majority were of the “form letter” type.

Primary issues raised were:

-Monitoring appeal rights for ranchers especially concerns with Endangered Species Act issues;

-Modification of weed free use forage;

-Interested party issue.

Hoping to have the EIS out in late September, final by end of October, and scheduled to go into effect at the end of December.

RS 2477 (See handout)

Wilderness (See handout)

Sue has a CD if anyone is interested in seeing how the budget process works.

Sue brought back a RAC Handbook draft edition that includes information for RAC members. It is a work in progress. It also has a CD for RAC orientations. The RAC handbook is for existing and new members and will be available in the fall.

Question was asked on BLM Law Enforcement.

Funding is a critical issue. BLM has one Law Enforcement Ranger assigned to each office. During peak periods, it is more than one officer can do. Nancy explained how Missoula Field Office deals with these times. Missoula has a cooperative agreement with Fish, Wildlife, and Parks to bring on an Intern in the summer to help with the Blackfoot Corridor. They are also entering into an agreement with Missoula County to use their officers for more of a law enforcement presence. There are concerns with using employees without a law enforcement background or training for law enforcement issues. This is an ongoing discussion.

**Blackfoot river SRP Presentation: (Robin Cunningham, Dick Fichtler, Chris Lorenz)
(See Handout)**

Robin asked the RAC members to look at this on two levels - the specifics of the recommendations and the process used to arrive at this recommendation. Robin also commented on the cooperation between the committee, the agencies, and the public as well as the dedication of the committee members. Robin talked about the key idea being a river reach definition as the basis for all ideas and thinking that led to the recommendations. Robin recommended the committee say yes, based on the sound thinking, cooperation and the idea that they are looking at river health and recreation experience as the bottom line.

Timeline is to have public participation for the EA this fall. The goal is to have implementation by January.

Question: What about limited access?

This issue had a lot of thought and discussion put into it, and is still an issue. The Blackfoot SRP working group doesn't want to see less access but recognizes that it is hard to reach certain areas along the river without a boat. They want to keep at least the present level of access. They realize that access is contingent on ownership and the owners choose who gets access. Some sites are limited by physical factors such as parking.

Question: How are we going to monitor access issues?

There will be a person out on the river dedicated to the SRP program and checking to make sure regulations are being met.

Question: Satisfaction surveys?

There will be use monitoring for groups and organizations in addition to overall monitoring. The hope is to plan and not manage by crisis. Allocation will be in the second phase of the process.

Question: Have (use limiting) "triggers" been discussed?

This will be discussed in the next phase. However, we got a sense of it with group size in this phase.

Due to the timelines, action needed to be taken for the Blackfoot River Special Recreation Permit. Richard Young moved to endorse the recommendations and Sue Marxer seconded the motion. The members were unanimous. Marilyn will poll the members not present via email.

Added note on 08/26/04: Information sent to absent RAC members on 07/01/04. No response received from absent Category II members.

Risk assessment for hazardous fuels (Rick Hotaling)

(Power Point Presentation)

These assessments were also completed for the Dillon Field Office for Nevada and Virginia City. Three factors influence wild land fire: weather, topography, and fuels (shown by the fire behavior triangle). BLM deals with the fuels part of the triangle.

Many BLM lands in Helena Valley have adjacent subdivisions, making BLM lands a buffer zone between these subdivisions and the Forest boundary.

The fire hazard index was developed out of this assessment. Looking at different factors, areas are rated as high, medium, or low risk.

These factors are: topography, fuels, probability of fire occurrence, and proximity of structures to BLM lands.

During a future RAC meeting, BLM hopes to take members to the Clancy-Unionville area where treatments have been done.

Draft Dillon RMP

A handout was distributed on issues discussed in April's meetings. (Two handouts)

Question:

(Page 75) Why aren't the provisions and mitigation the same for west-slope cutthroat trout versus grayling? No Surface Occupancy (NSO) for west-slope cutthroat trout, but for grayling it was Controlled Surface Use (CSU). Why is there a distinction, especially with the status of grayling?

See stipulation on page 48 and a reference table on page 75. On page 132 and 133 of appendix of volume 2 is information on the controlled surface use stipulation of grayling habitat.

Members may request the higher standard of NSO. They felt that there should be consistency between the west-slope cutthroat trout and grayling. It should be the same either NSO or CSU.

Renee will get further information from Dillon office on this issue.

Marilyn asked if the RAC needed to revisit the middle section (referring to green handout). The RAC voted to support the rewording changes. Marilyn will email to the absent members for a vote.

Added note on 08/26/04: Information sent to absent RAC members on 07/01/04. No response received from absent Category II members.

Refer to last two bullets on the green sheet that asked BLM to either incorporate or explain.

***Encourage 3rd party monitoring contracts (audit) (accountability). BLM should either incorporate this or explain to the RAC why not.**

BLM is currently employing several temporaries that are trained in monitoring techniques. "Quality assurance, quality control" is being done by senior staff. If there is a situation with a certain level of controversy, we bring in a 3rd party.

RAC members generally agreed this was not a plan level decision but encouraged BLM to use other tools to accomplish monitoring accountability such as exchanging personnel with other offices or using detailed employees to accomplish the work.

***Grazing practices should incorporate some type of rest to ensure long- term productivity. BLM should either incorporate this or explain to the RAC why not.**

Discussion focused on whether BLM's Standards for Rangeland Health which states "compatible seasons and duration of use, rest periods, stocking rates, structural facilities, and management activities should be designed and implemented to ensure that standards are achieved" meets the RAC suggestion to incorporate some form of vegetative rest in grazing practices. It was suggested to change the wording to something like "Periodic rest during the active growing period". BLM noted that the Best Management Practices (DNRC 1999) also address rest and are

referenced in the RMP. After lengthy discussion the RAC supported BLM's interpretation and agreed no changes were necessary with one member being able to "live with it".

It was brought up that it is hard for the RAC to come to a consensus, and when the members come to a consensus on integrating rest into grazing practices it should be given more consideration.

Each allotment in a watershed is evaluated to see if grazing leases are working with this standard and if not, then adjustments will be made. This is done for each watershed on a ten-year rotation.

The monitoring discussion prompted the RAC to agree that a statewide, multi-ownership grazing BMP review process may be beneficial. Western Montana RAC will ask the State Director to champion this request with other agencies/interests.

The members voted and are in agreement and Marilyn will email the members not in attendance for their votes.

Added note on 08/26/04: Information sent to absent RAC members on 07/01/04. No response received from absent Category II members.

***Expand discussion on invasive species, include state recognized species, clarify goal and desired future conditions for noxious weeds (page 32), identify areas without noxious weeds, and place more urgency on the issue. Susan Lenard agreed to work on language and circulate prior to the June meeting for the RAC to review and adopt.**

Tim Bozorth reviewed Susan's comments and agreed that BLM could improve the information on the number of acres infested and number of acres BLM is currently managing under integrated weed management plans. Most specifics related to weed management are explained in the weed management plan which is much more detailed than a land use plan.

BLM is already using the State protocol for mapping but cautioned that a map of weed infestations is only a snapshot in time. Due to continuous changes of infestations and treatments, it is hard to keep an updated map. Budget is also a consideration. Weed infestation was the first area that the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) talked about on a government-wide basis.

It was suggested that BLM add a measurable objective for a reduction of total infested acres. Renee will talk to the weeds staff and see if they want to draft an objective to be included in the RMP. She will email RAC members any additional objectives related to weed management.

Tim asked for suggestions on adding emphasis to the weed program. The addition of infested acres and treatment acres will help add emphasis. The goal regarding weeds in the RMP was one of the specific planning issues during the scoping process. There were specific objectives to address this issue.

In her comments, Susan felt it wasn't realistic to have a desired future condition that said weeds would not be common across the landscapes and existing large infestations are declining. She also felt the goal of reducing the introduction and spread of invasive and noxious plants is not realistic either, because of the pressure from invasive weeds coming in from other areas. She also felt an important component was the education of the public, BLM employees, and recreation people.

Tim felt he could not agree with lessening these goals. He felt striving for these goals are important and should add a strong emphasis on weeds.

It was asked if limiting travel to existing roads was a concern of noxious weeds. The weed issue was one of the components in the rationale of closing roads.

***Expand discussion on increase in future recreational use in planning area. RAC wanted BLM to look into doing this, especially in regard to increase in off road vehicle use, and bring information back in June meeting.**

This topic prompted lively discussion and no specific recommendations were made but the RAC felt BLM should anticipate increased recreation use and recognize the need for an increased enforcement presence.

Some members offered suggestions for reducing conflicts by designating areas for certain uses. There was an extensive discussion on increased recreation and recreation types, how to control fire hazards, and manage resources.

BLM managers commented that BLM will probably never have the budget and law enforcement to manage this issue completely. Some solutions given were to use the public and employees to help with this issue and looking into changing the way laws are written. However, these are solutions that can not be addressed in the RMP.

The meeting continued with discussions on law enforcement and wilderness issues - how they are designated and management of these areas.

Tim stated that making a resolution to the State Director to increase law enforcement is okay, but it's not an issue for the RMP. This would be addressed in the workforce plan.

Tim also mentioned during this discussion that BLM is concerned, especially regarding travel management, that members of the RAC subgroup are not supporting the recommendations that they made to the full RAC and that were incorporated by BLM into Alternative B. In addition, Renee reminded the RAC that BLM's intent is to look at the public comments received on the Draft and make adjustments as warranted, keeping in mind the principles established by the subgroup.

Marilyn reminded the council that they can still submit comments on this issue as individuals even though they didn't come up with a group recommendation.

It was strongly suggested from the members to make a resolution to State Director about the issues with law enforcement. This would be addressed at the next meeting since we don't have a quorum.

Miscellaneous topics - address today or leave until next meeting?

It was decided to leave Allotment Stewardship Proposal until the next meeting.

An update was given on the Reservoir Creek Subgroup: There were some concerns with the Allotment Management Plan revision. A subgroup was formed to look at these concerns. The subgroup is made up of Sue, Dan, Pat and Ben. They will look at the Reservoir Creek Allotment and provide information to RAC to help with recommendations as a whole. There have been three meetings and one field trip. The next meeting will be July 15 with a field trip on July 14. They are looking at various options; incorporating rest; changing rotation; fencing to manage herds; and a variety of options that deal with sage grouse and other wildlife species, as well as livestock.

Next meeting will be October 21, 2004, Thursday in Butte.

Scheduled another meeting for January 20, 2005(tentatively)

Future topics for the next meeting will be:

Law enforcement

Big horn sheep presentation

Allotment Stewardship Proposal

Butte RMP Update

/s/ Sue Marxer

WZRAC Chair

RAC Meeting Dedicated to Draft Dillon RMP/EIS
April 19, 2004
Dillon, Montana

RAC Members Present: Roger Peters, Robin McCulloch, Donna Tate McDonald, Sue Marxer, Susan Lenard, Ben Deeble, Ted Coffman, Pat Flowers, and Dan Lucas

RAC Members Absent: Doug Abelin, Dennis Phillippi, Richard Young, Robin Urban, Robin Cunningham and Garry Williams

BLM Personnel: Renee Johnson (RMP Project Manager), Pat Fosse (Acting Dillon Field Manager), Cheryl Atkins (Notes)

Guests: Paul Griffin, Glenn Hockett, Mel Montgomery, Frank Nelson, Dave Schulz, Jim Hagenbarth, and Orval Hadley.

Tim Bozorth was not in attendance as Field Manager due to the schedule of the BLM Management Team meeting in Billings, and Marilyn Krause was not available due to other obligations. However, the meeting had not been rescheduled as RAC members had indicated that this was the best meeting date for most if not all of them. However, it was noted that due to a number of absences, the RAC did not have a quorum, so any recommendations made at this meeting will require review/adoption at the Missoula meeting in June.

Pat Fosse welcomed the RAC as the Acting Field Manager and provided the group with suggestions from Tim to help them focus their efforts during the meeting. Suggestions were:

- To focus on areas where the RAC can develop a consensus recommendation.
- Consider issues such as vegetation, livestock grazing, sage grouse management, lands and realty issues, and fire management.
- Remember that where you cannot agree as a RAC, that you can provide your own individual comments to BLM

After her introductory remarks, Pat Fosse turned the meeting over to Renee Johnson. Renee went over the agenda, mentioned housekeeping items, and refreshed the group on the process they had proposed during their February meeting in Missoula. It was suggested that before the group identify issues in a round robin fashion that Renee go over the RAC recommendations from the April 2003 RAC work session and specify where those recommendations were incorporated into the RMP. All of the RAC members wanted to do this, so Renee got the decisions from the April 2003 meeting and reviewed them with the group.

Review of Recommendations from April 16, 2003 RAC Work Session

Noxious Weeds Recommendation: *Follow the Montana State Weed Management Plan, use all effective means of controlling noxious weeds, and educate the public and users.*

BLM incorporated the recommendation on the Montana State Weed Management Plan as management common to all alternatives. Alternative B is BLM's preferred alternative. BLM would continue the cooperative agreements with Beaverhead and Madison Counties, including education, etc. The preferred

alternative also allows for use of all tools, though there would be special considerations regarding aerial spraying.

Commercial Use Recommendation:

Allow commercial and multiple uses as long as land health standards are met.

The RMP discusses meeting the Standards for Rangeland Health in a variety of places in the document. For example, on page 16, first paragraph the document mentions the Western Montana RAC Standards for Rangeland Health. The last paragraph on the bottom right-hand column also talks about allowing for commercial and multiple uses and not eliminating entire uses.

Land Exchange Recommendation:

The RAC discussion in April 2003 had modified this recommendation several times until it finally said that *the exchange or direct purchase of land would be considered only where special public values exist or access would be improved.*

The RMP discusses this concept on page 41 and 42 of the alternative chapter, and provides acquisition criteria in the Lands and Realty appendix.

Riparian Uplands Recommendation:

Incorporate some form of vegetative rest in grazing practices to ensure the long-term productivity and health of vegetation.

Renee indicated that long-term productivity and health of vegetation is addressed by the Standards for Rangeland Health, but that the provision to incorporate rest is more specific than a land use plan decision and is determined during the watershed assessment and allotment management planning process. Pat Flowers felt the group needed to have more discussion on BLM's position not to include this recommendation.

Coordination Recommendation:

Encourage coordination and partnerships among all land management entities including FWP and private land owners

Renee indicated that coordinating with other agencies and entities and developing partnerships are fairly standard practices in everything BLM does. A lot of coordination type things are scattered throughout the document in particular resource sections. For instance, the RMP talks about coordinating with FWP on wildlife issues. Other coordination is specified in regulations, for instance in the grazing regulations. There is not one specific place in the RMP where this is identified.

3rd Party Contracting Recommendation:

Encourage 3rd Party Contracts for evaluation and monitoring and research of representing land management systems

Renee indicated that this recommendation had not been included in the Draft RMP/EIS as it is not a decision that is made at the land use plan level, but instead is administrative in nature and one of many ways to accomplish resource work. Many of the RAC members disagreed that this was the way to approach this recommendation. Renee mentioned that the distinction between land use plan decisions and implementation level decisions had been discussed in one of the RMP Update newsletters, and that there were a couple of RAC recommendations that while helpful to BLM in knowing the RAC's opinion, were not incorporated into the RMP since they went beyond land use planning level decisions. The general feeling of the RAC was that this needed to be revisited by BLM, either to figure out how to incorporate or give the RAC reasons why it was not included.

Sagebrush Recommendation:

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

The RMP addresses this concept in the Desired Future Condition for Rangelands (pages 33 and 34). The RAC was reticent last April to define “broad-scale” treatment; however BLM feels that Alternative B should meet the goal of no net loss of sagebrush habitat over the long-term.

Forest and Woodlands Recommendation:

Manage forests and woodlands for mosaic patterns and diversity of species and age classes that reflect the natural range of variability, and implement educational tools to inform the public of projects that do this.

The RMP incorporated this recommendation in the Desired Future Conditions established for Forest and Woodlands (i.e. page 90 of the alternative comparison table).

Encourage the Use of Stewardship Contracting:

This was not considered a land use plan level decision and wasn’t included in any of the plan provisions. This is something administrative in nature, there is already some direction to begin using this tool, and BLM has been exploring options.

Road Recommendations:

Build roads for forest management to minimum standards necessary for product removal and allow no permanent net increase in total road density for these projects. Restore temporary roads to original contour.

BLM tried to incorporate this concept into the RMP in the language on page 58, under management common to all alternatives for Transportation and Facilities Maintenance. However, BLM did not just limit this only to roads for forest management. There is also language on page 59 regarding “no net gain” of road mileage over the long term. There is also language in the RMP on page 280 regarding new roads needed to remove wood products, and on page 21/top of 22 regarding Coniferous Forest habitats. There was a lot of discussion on these provisions.

Sage Grouse and Westslope Cutthroat Trout Recommendations:

Comply with management direction provided in conservation strategies for sage grouse and west cutthroat trout

The RMP specifies that BLM will continue to implement the MOU and Conservation Agreement for Westslope Cutthroat Trout in Montana under management common to all alternatives, page 27.

The RMP specifies that BLM will use the Statewide sage grouse conservation strategies as a basis for evaluating sage grouse habitat when doing watershed assessments and in consideration of project level actions (page 22). In Alternative C, BLM goes a step further saying the strategies would be implemented as standards.

After review of the April 2003 recommendations, the group was then ready to identify some additional items for discussion. Pat Fosse helped capture these additional issues on flipcharts for later discussion.

ROUND ROBIN COMMENTS:

Susan Lenard

Page 32. The goal and the DFC under Invasive and Non-Native Species should be amended to identify areas without current infestations and prevent the introduction of noxious weeds to those areas. Susan

felt there needed to be more specific information about what the current conditions are, not just the broad language about preventing introductions. She also felt “not common across the landscape” needs to be clarified.

Roger Peters

Roger’s main concern is that the document does not address or plan for the future growth of recreation use in the planning area. Example - page 286; 3rd paragraph right hand side doesn’t really get at it.

Pat Flowers

Pat commented that under Special Status Species Fish, page 28, Alternative B doesn’t specify that BLM will continue to follow the habitat guidelines as it says in Alternative A. Renee clarified that BLM would, but in addition the other provisions in Alt. B would also apply.

Ben Deeble

Ben expressed concern that the document doesn’t acknowledge BLM’s National Strategy Plan for Sage Grouse Conservation. Ben wondered if it could be incorporated. He also mentioned that the National Wildlife Federation has been working productively with the Forest Service on different areas to retire allotments that have conflicts. Is there direction in the RMP that will allow BLM to retire allotments? Renee responded that the National Sage Grouse Strategy is referred to on top of page 23 in the wildlife section. She also referred Ben to the language in the Livestock Grazing section in Alternative B on page 45, second paragraph, regarding how BLM would evaluate the potential retirement of allotments that are unleased.

Dan Lucas

Dan expressed concern in the way the sage grouse provisions on page 22 are presented. He indicated he felt BLM was moving toward a “cookbook” approach and that BLM should relook at having flexibility in the ability to manage those resources.

Robin McCulloch

Rob said he wanted to see a map showing mineral potential included in the document, including locatable minerals as well as geothermal and phosphate resources. Renee directed him to the general map of mine locations in the Appendix section, but this is not the mapping Robin wants to see. He wants to see the information that he provided to Bob Gunderson included in the next document.

Donna Tate McDonald

Donna didn’t have any additional issues to what had been discussed.

Ted Coffman

Ted didn’t have any additional issues to what had been discussed.

Sue Marxer

Sue indicated one of her overall concerns is special status species and how they are handled. She feels the BLM is micromanaging the process given the provisions in the RMP, and that many of the provisions that are in both Alternative B and C fit better just in Alternative C.

At this point, all present RAC members had had an opportunity to identify an issue. They agreed they wanted to go around again before they discussed the issues as a group.

Susan Lenard

She had other concerns, but didn't think consensus would be reached on any of them, and will make additional comments on her own.

Roger Peters

Roger commented that under Alternative B on page 20, it does not mention "or strong upward trend" which is not consistent with the language for Alternative B, Riparian, on page 35, or under SSS-Fish on page 28. Roger asked if that was a mistake or was it meant to be different. Renee thought it was meant to be the same—to "achieve potential or a strong upward trend." Roger then asked about the difference in timeframes (the 15 years for fish versus the 20 years in riparian areas) and offered that BLM needs to consider a realistic timeframe. Renee told him she thought the difference would be that there would be more active management necessary to achieve the objective in 15 years than in 20.

Ben Deeble

Passed.

Dan Lucas

Dan said he felt that the overall tone of the wildlife section was for BLM to manage to maximize the maximum number and diversity of wildlife, and that maximizing a single resource causes problems. Dan wanted to see some language that speaks to managing wildlife numbers within the constraints of the base resource of vegetation, soil and water. Pat Flowers provided some feedback and referred folks to the language in management common sections that he believes does not identify a maximum management.

Ted Coffman, Donna Tate McDonald

Passed

Sue Marxer

Sue expressed concern over sagebrush habitat and bighorn sheep provisions in both Alternatives B and C, page 22. The RAC discussed both issues, and some felt the management was too specific for a land use plan and tied manager's hands. Sue Marxer thought that the restrictive provision to reduce or eliminate competing uses for bighorn sheep should not be in both Alternatives B and C. Dan Lucas felt this type of provision conflicted with the statement on page 16 that indicates BLM did not consider alternatives proposing exclusive production or protection of one resource at the expense of another. Pat Flowers indicated a concern that this statement may not be consistent with FWP bighorn sheep plans. Ben Deeble commented that one of the reasons it was not necessary for an ACEC for bighorn sheep habitat was because there were management options available to manage habitat, and an ACEC wasn't necessary. He felt the management in Alternative B was appropriate.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD at 11:30

At 11:30 a.m., the RAC discussion and round robin was suspended and members of the public were invited to address the RAC. Renee reminded the speakers that they were addressing the RAC members, not the BLM, and asked them to limit their comments to about five minutes to give everyone a chance to speak before a lunch break and to give the RAC members' time to ask questions if they wanted. Five of the seven members of the public present during the meeting addressed the group.

David Schultz (Madison County Commissioner):

Dave addressed the RAC about weed management. He talked about folks on the RAC that have been involved with development Statewide Weed Management plan (Ted Coffman and Susan Lenard) and supports the RAC desire to reference it in the RMP. He identified concerns about the ability to continue weed control efforts in the Axolotl and Blue Lake areas located south and east of Virginia City. There is knapweed on BLM lands around Blue Lake, and he is concerned that travel restrictions may limit efforts to get a handle on it. There is also an increasing amount of houndstongue. He asked that the RAC be cognizant of access needed to manage and control noxious weeds. Dave also supported that the entire allotment in the vicinity would still have tools available that could be used to manage vegetation, and did not support permanently excluding livestock. Dave also wanted the RAC to be aware that the counties are working with the State and Governor's office to expand the lists beyond noxious weeds to invasives.

Question: (Ben Deeble)

What is the scope of invasives you are talking about?

Dave:

(Dave gave some examples of invasives from other parts of the world). We need to consider invasives in order to be competitive for funding.

Question (Sue Marxer):

What do you see is the biggest obstacle to weed control.

Answer (Dave): Getting to them.

Question (Sue Marxer):

Are travel restrictions going to hurt us on weed management?

Answer (Dave):

Limitations on travel and aerial spraying in the preferred alternative could hurt.

Comment from Robin McCulloch:

Weeds were a big concern in the Wild and Scenic River subgroup meetings and the continued ability to be able to manage them.

Question (Pat Flowers):

Does the BLM have provisions in the RMP to allow for weed control?

Answer (Renee): If you look in Volume II of the appendices, there are provisions for administrative access in areas that are closed which would allow for the control of weeds.

Glen Hockett (Gallatin Wildlife Association and Western Watersheds):

Glen told the RAC he wanted to follow-up from the last meeting when he addressed the RAC at the Missoula meeting regarding bighorn sheep and wild bison management. He asked that the RAC send a letter to the State Director requesting that bighorn sheep, bison and sage grouse be added to BLM's sensitive species list. He requested the RAC ask BLM to conduct a species review and to make sure that habitat is provided for viable populations. Glen also told the RAC that the Gallatin Wildlife Association supports permanent voluntary retirements of grazing as a win-win solution to unresolvable conflicts and would support recommendations from the RAC on permanently retiring livestock grazing allotments in the RMP.

After Glen's comments, Susan Lenard asked Renee when the new species of concern list would be coming out. Renee responded that the list is approved by the BLM State Director and while she knew there had been recommendations to update the list, she did not know of any specific timeframes when that would occur.

Jim Hagenbarth (Dillon Livestock Operator):

Jim commended the RAC on the efforts they had put forth in working as a collaborative group in trying to reach agreement on certain issues, but recognized that it is unlikely that consensus can be reached on many issues given the chore. Jim talked about how folks today are removed from the resource and are unaware of where their food and other products come from. Providing open space for enjoyment by the public has become the role of the public land rancher and the rancher can't afford that if they can't run the cattle they need. He talked about the desire on the part of producers to manage for good habitat, but with the costs of time, effort and money to meet rules and regulations, the trend is when it becomes unaffordable, the resource is sold to the highest bidder. Producers will be looking not at retiring allotments to provide habitat but at selling for financial reasons. Jim sees his responsibility to take care of his family's equity, and will do what he needs to protect that. This affects all resources, especially wildlife resources, and access to BLM lands. Jim also cautioned about micromanagement of resources—which it appears is being done with sage grouse, and now, bighorn sheep. He stated that BLM has regulations in place now—no need to micromanage—but micromanaging provides weapons to environmental groups in furthering their agendas. There needs to be a way to show people how important ranchers are especially to wildlife and wildlife habitat, since much of the best is on private lands.

Mel Montgomery (Lima)

Mel thanked the RAC for their time and effort for serving on the RAC. Mel indicated he has been an outfitter in the Centennial Mountains for 18 years, and wanted to commend the RMP for the alternative to establish permitted use areas. It will prevent outfitted use from ballooning disproportionately. Under the travel management section, snowmobile use should not just be acknowledged as recreation but also as a way to get around. Mel stated he is for managed snowmobiling for recreational use, but closing county roads to snowmobiles to block people from traveling to homes or to do business is not acceptable and he would oppose this. We have to learn to accept other people with different interests.

Mel said that the BLM needs to work with Fish Wildlife and Parks on the sage grouse issue. Agencies need to work together. Mel also expressed concern that no one had talked to him about the sage grouse issue, sage grouse has hit bottom, and now are coming back. Now that they are coming back there is still a push to list them, and Mel sees that as a way to get ranchers off public land. Mel had concerns that during the same time numbers were decreasing FWP increased the bag limit.

Mel was also concerned about cultural resources, and said he didn't want to see fences around all these sites. He feels the best that can happen is not to tell anyone because if you identify them too many people will come and there will be too many signs and brochures identifying the areas. Finding something in its primitive state is the adventure of it.

Mel also commented that management and designation of the Centennial Mountains should stay the way it is now, under WSA, and not some other designation. If it gets designated as a full wilderness, it will encourage people to go there and bring in a lot of public, which will then impact the values. The Centennial is different than the Bob Marshall, it is narrow, and people can't spread out. Mel expressed support for the ranching community, and said we need to support well-managed ranching. Mel believes

that when the wrong people own private land with game it is used as a hunting club. He thinks this is the fastest growing problem in the area. Conversely, outfitters are permitted by government agencies and licensed and regulated.

Orval Hadley (retired BLM manager):

Orval introduced himself with his past history with BLM as an Associate District Manager in Butte. Orval started with first concern that the RMP doesn't have any discussion about the quantity of water, and that there should be some discussion of this, especially in regard to vegetation manipulations. Orval said there is a way to get water and the RMP doesn't address it.

Orval then moved onto his second issue on page 280 of the RMP that requires new roads necessary to remove wood products to be rehabilitated and closed after a forest project was completed. He said he was disappointed in the recommendation, and did not think perhaps that the RAC really meant to make a recommendation like that. He asked the RAC to reconsider this recommendation, or find a way to re-word it. He doesn't understand the reasoning and thinks that it ties BLM's hands.

Question (Roger Peters):

What vegetation manipulation would improve water quality?

Answer (Orval):

Need to remove forest canopy to get the snow on the ground, which will cause less (woody) vegetation and more runoff. Need to choose places that would be effective.

Sue Marxer mentioned that the RMP does talk about treating encroachment. Orval said yes, but that it doesn't provide a rationale or effect as increasing water quantity. Dan Lucas agreed that an example is in the Big Hole area.

Sue Marxer, RAC Chair, thanked the members of the public for coming to the meeting and addressing the RAC members. The public comment period ended at 12:05 PM. The RAC broke for lunch until 1 PM.

LUNCH

The RAC reconvened and started the afternoon by discussing some of the comments made to them by the public. None of the members of the public attended the afternoon session.

Discussion of Public Comments to RAC:

The RAC started the afternoon session discussing the concern brought up by Orval regarding roads. The discussion also related to the RAC's original April 2003 recommendation regarding roads. There was a lengthy discussion about whether BLM should specify that the roads that would be closed would be comparable types. There was a concern that if it gets too specific, however, then it begins micromanaging and doesn't leave much flexibility. There was also a lot of discussion about terminology and whether the recommendation is talking about status of the road (open or closed) or whether it is left in place (rehabilitated, obliterated, reclaimed, and restored). The discussion finally resulted in a recommendation on wording changes on page 59 and some tweaking to language on page 280, though the actual changes to page 280 were not suggested.

The next item discussed was the cultural resource comments brought up by Mel Montgomery. The RAC recommended that wording be changed on page 18 in Alternative B that outreach would be conducted “as appropriate” instead of “as opportunities arise.” It was also suggested that specific acres proposed for inventory be removed from Alternative B and replaced with language from Alternative D. Renee indicated that BLM has been and will be formally consulting with the State Historic Preservation Office and there could be concerns on the SHPO’s part about changing this language. The RAC asked that BLM update them on this at the next meeting.

The comment was made that the RAC did not think they should mix in bison issues, and there was no further discussion on other comments from Glenn Hockett. There was some discussion regarding Mel Montgomery’s concern on snowmobile use in the Centennials. Sue thought perhaps Mel was talking about language on page 64 in the Centennial Mountains ACEC. The RAC did not make a recommendation on any changes to this.

The RAC members then discussed Dave Schultz’s weed comments. There was additional discussion on invasive species, and the RAC agreed there needed to be some additional information in the RMP on invasives. The RAC felt that the document did not place a sense of urgency on the issue and that language in the plan minimized the importance of dealing with weeds. Susan Lenard agreed to take the lead drafting additional language in relation to invasives and placing more urgency on noxious weeds.

The group then discussed the concern identified during the round robin session on recreation. The RAC feels the RMP did not acknowledge or address recreation uses and the potential increase. Renee asked if they had information that they wanted to provide BLM, and discussed a bit some of the challenges faced by the recreation staff in projecting future uses and the lack of data regarding dispersed uses on BLM lands. Several folks gave examples from other states (Utah in particular) about tremendous increases in recreation, especially OHV use, in 10 to 20 year time frames. Renee asked even if there was additional work done on projections and put into the RMP, what the RAC would recommend regarding changes to management that would be incorporated into alternatives. No one could come up with specific suggestions, but did suggest BLM look at capacities and how much additional use could be absorbed without change, in essence setting thresholds. Others felt we just needed to acknowledge that there could be a substantial increase that could result in things like stringent road restrictions, increased law enforcement needs, etc. and those changes be made based on monitoring. Another concern was expressed that the outfitter industry is being controlled, but the plan does not have any controls for dispersed uses. Renee indicated that she would speak with BLM Recreation Staff about these concerns and would try to provide some feedback to the RAC at the next meeting.

There was some discussion on fire management. Sue suggested she’d like to see more fuels management and less fire suppression in Alternative B. Pat Fosse addressed a question about the National Fire Plan, but the RAC did not bring this forward as a consensus comment.

Ben Deeble asked if the RAC would have a chance to look at the public comments. Renee explained that comments from the public are being filed in a binder as they come in to the Dillon Field Office and are available for anyone to look at. There was some discussion about whether RAC members wanted copies of all the comments. Instead, Renee agreed to email RAC members periodically during the comment period to update them on the number of comments received, and to bring the comment binder to the June meeting in Missoula.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the above discussions, the RAC agreed on the following items:

Issues Where No Consensus Was Reached that won't be discussed further

- Too much specificity on sagebrush steppe habitat, page 22
- Too much micromanagement under Special Status Species (SSS). Some items in Alternative B would fit better in Alternative C.
- Wildlife section - numbers of wildlife managed within carrying capacity of land.
- Sagebrush steppe habitat and bighorn sheep habitat management - very specific, page 22, move to Alt. C
- Fire management. There should be more fuels management and less fire suppression.

Recommendations/Rewording that RAC Needs to Adopt at June Meeting (should need little to no discussion)

- BLM should include a map showing mineral potential in the next version of the RMP.
- p.18. Under Cultural Resources, Alternative B, second sentence: change to read “Monitoring, site stabilization, and outreach would be conducted as appropriate” instead of as opportunities arise.
- Under cultural resources, remove the acreage requirement for inventory, and use the wording in Alternative D instead.
- p. 20 Under Fish, Alternative B: add “or a strong upward trend” to the first sentence just before “within 15 years...” to make it consistent with the statement under SSS-Fish, Alternative B, page 28.
- p.59. Under Travel Management and OHV Use, Alternative B, 3rd bullet, second sentence: change to read “New roads developed for access to new activities could be left open only if equal road mileage was closed or reclaimed” (instead of just closed).
- p.280. Change sentence from “New roads needed to remove wood products associated with forest treatments would be built and used during the duration of the project, then be closed or reclaimed” (instead of closed and rehabilitated).

Issues that Need Review/Discussion at June meeting

- Expand discussion on invasive species, include state recognized species, clarify goal and desired future conditions for noxious weeds (page 32), identify areas without noxious weeds, and place more urgency on the issue. Susan Lenard agreed to work on language and circulate prior to meeting for the RAC to review and adopt at the June meeting.
- Expand discussion on increase in future recreational use in planning area. RAC wanted BLM to look into doing this, especially in regard to increases in off road vehicle use, and bring information back to the June meeting.
- Grazing practices should incorporate some type of rest to ensure long-term productivity. BLM should either incorporate this or explain to the RAC why not.
- Encourage 3rd party monitoring contacts (audit) (accountability). BLM should either incorporate this or explain to the RAC why not.

NEXT MEETING: June 24 and 25, in Missoula, Montana

MEETING ADJOURNED

Western Montana Resource Advisory Council
Minutes
February 19, 2004
Missoula Field Office, Missoula, Montana

Members Present: Sue Marxer (Chair), Ben Deeble, Robin McCulloch, Garry Williams, Dennis Phillipi, Pat Flowers, Doug Abelin, Susan Lenard, Robin Cunningham, Ted Coffman and Dick Young.

Members Absent: Roger Peters, Robin Urban, and Donna Tate McDonald.

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

Guests: Glen Hockett, Western Watersheds Council

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

Addition to Agenda: Sue Marxer will update the council on the National RAC meeting that will be held in Phoenix, Arizona from May 11th thru 13th.

Update: We haven't received an official word yet, but a call for nominations for new Resource Advisory Council members is towards the end of March. Doug Abelin's term expires and **he** will not be eligible. Susan, Ben, Garry and Pat have served one term. Let Marilyn know if you are interested in doing another term.

Election of Chair and Vice-Chair for the council (Krause): The current Chair is Sue Marxer and the current Vice-Chair is Ted Coffman. The council had a quorum.

Council made nominations for Chair and the vote was:
Sue Marxer – 6; Dennis Phillipi – 4.

Decision: Sue Marxer will continue as Chair for the council.

Council made nominations for Vice-Chair: Ted Coffman

Decision: Ted Coffman will continue as Vice-Chair for the council.

FIELD OFFICE OVERVIEWS:

Missoula Field Office (Nancy Anderson):

- **Personnel:** Linda Cardenas has been selected as the Assistant Field Manager for Renewable Resources and will report for duty in March. Shelagh Fox has been selected as the Fuels Management Specialist and we will be advertising for a Fuels Forester position.

- **Watershed Assessments:** We will be sending out a scoping letter in the next few weeks which will have the proposed action for lands contained in our Flint Creek watershed assessment (approximately 8,600 acres in the Phillipsburg area). We're doing this cooperatively with the Forest Service.
- We will be offering a small stewardship contract this fiscal year covering 20 acres near Garnet Ghost Town.
- We sent out a scoping letter addressing our RMP amendment to adopt the Canada Lynx conservation strategy. We requested comments by February 20, 2004.
- We are finishing our burn plans for approximately 300 acres in the Lower Blackfoot. Depending on snow conditions, we could burn in early March.
- This spring we'll begin a major road improvement project on the Grant Ranch Road and begin the reclamation of the Linton Mine.

Butte Field Office (Rick Hotaling):

- **MTANG Limestone Hills Withdrawal:** The scoping period for the withdrawal has closed, but we are continuing to seek input from the public. We have held additional meetings in Townsend to allow the public more opportunity to comment on the proposed withdrawal. We are currently working with the MT National Guard to develop a proposed action, which will be presented to the public this spring.
- **Butte RMP Revision:** The Notice of Intent (NOI) to revise the RMP was published in the *Federal Register* on December 19, 2003. The NOI started the 60-day scoping period. We held scoping meetings in Butte, Helena, Townsend, Bozeman, Boulder, and Divide in early January. Most of the comments from the scoping meetings were related to travel management, land tenure adjustments, and fuels treatments. Our contractor, Tetra Tech, is preparing a scoping report to summarize the comments we received during scoping. Based upon that report, we will determine where, if any, additional meetings need to be held.
- **Sleeping Giant Travel Management Plan:** We have completed our EA for this project. We hope to have a record of decision sometime in March or April. This will be our last travel management plan outside the RMP revision process. All future travel management decisions will be considered through the RMP revision. Our OHV priority areas will be established in the revision.
- **Clancy fuel treatment projects and timber sale:** We were protested on these projects. The protests were denied. The projects were appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA). The appeals were denied and the projects are now moving forward. The fuel treatment work has already been started and the timber harvest should be starting sometime this spring.
- **Helena Valley Risk Assessment:** We have completed the Helena Valley risk assessment, and we have held public meetings in Helena and Clancy. The risk assessment provides information on fuel hazards, fire frequency, and other risk factors. All of the factors were combined on a weighted scale and an overall risk assessment was developed for the project area. This assessment is only valid for BLM land; however, we are working with the tri-county fire group to overlay our assessment with the one that they developed for private land. Our assessment will help us determine where to start our fuel treatment projects.
- **Whitetail Basin Research Project:** We are working on a co-operative research project with the Jefferson River Watershed Council, MSU, and Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology. This project is a continuation of a research project conducted in the Missouri Breaks. The project will evaluate the impacts of vegetation projects, such as fuel reduction projects, on ground water quality.

Dillon Field Office (Tim Bozorth):

- **Personnel:** We are advertising for a fuels position, a forester position and a replacement for the Office Automation Assistant.
- **Watershed Assessments:** 80,000 acres were evaluated on the Highlands Watershed Assessment. We are now working on developing alternatives including hazardous fuels reduction alternatives on 8-10,000 acres.
We are looking at 5,000 acres of hazard fuels reduction projects in the Ruby Watershed Assessment. WUI, fuels reduction and forest health issues as well as actions to address areas not meeting standards and forest health objectives. We are also considering a timber sale.
- **Fuels Projects:** We are reviewing the Virginia City Hazardous Fuels Risk Assessment by Northwinds.
- The Winslow Fire Rehabilitation EA is done to address snag removal near trails, fence construction, monitoring and remediation of fire impacts from vehicle parking.
- The Curry Creek/Winslow Fire Salvage Timber Sale: 200 of the 400 acres burned, we are looking at options aimed at enhancing aspen regeneration and harvesting blackened timber while it still retains some value.
- The Sodak Mill Road EA near the Big Hole River north of Dillon, is to provide and enhance public access cut off by recent development in area.
- This summer, we will be conducting the Sheep Creek and Centennial Mountain Watershed Assessments for S&Gs.
- Upper Horse Prairie Fuels Hazard Reduction projects: 600 acres will be conducted this spring.
- We are implementing the Lower Madison Recreation Management Plan, boat ramp and campground enhancement as well as a NEPA analysis and design for South Madison Campground and boat ramp reconstruction.
- River permitting on the Madison is on hold due to reductions in recreation budget.
- The drought is a real concern south of Dillon. Drought letters have been sent to permittees. This is similar to last year. We are looking at authorizing use at the same percent of annual precipitation received by the end of March.
- It's the 40th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act and Bear Trap on the Madison. It's Montana's only BLM Wilderness Area.
- AML Project at Ermont is on hold while we negotiate with claimants. The Rochester project is on hold due to a claim on the tailings area to be remediated. Broadway Victoria, near Silver Star is on hold since the owner is planning to remine tailings.
- Vermiculite Mine, south of Dillon, is being considered for reopening. A bond will require a plan of operations and further testing. Level of NEPA depends on a plan of operations.
- We are analyzing reopening the Stock Driveway Road, east of Axolatl Lakes in the Axolatl WSA. This road provides access to the north end of the Gravelly Mountains which currently lacks access from the Virginia City area; you have to drive to Ennis and then west and south. The road was closed in 1990 via the Interagency Travel Plan due to resource damage concerns. We will look at this area this summer, have a field trip and make a decision this fall. The WSA Interim Management Plan will be followed but it doesn't preclude preexisting vehicle ways in the WSA.

Dillon RMP Update (Bozorth): The BLM Director was briefed via teleconference on February 13th. The target date for release is March 26, 2004, pending WO/DO approval.

The mailing list is finalized based on feedback requested by December 15. Thanks to those who responded. Those RAC members not responding will be sent a hard copy. Copies will be mailed by

the GPO contractor; hard copies will also be placed at locations around planning area so people who still want to look at a hard copy can find one easily. Review period is 90 days from publication of Notice of Availability by EPA in the *Federal Register*.

Planned meetings in coordination with Cooperating Agencies: (Note: Subject to change if release is delayed. These dates will be advertised, circulated once everything is finalized/approved).

All meetings will run from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. There will be a brief presentation at the beginning of meeting; comment forms available; remainder of time will be used to answer questions in an informal manner, and help people understand kinds of comments that would be most helpful.

May 3	Lima
May 4	Virginia City
May 6	Bozeman
May 11	Dillon
May 12	Butte

Two Comment Meetings:

No presentation; purpose is to provide public with another avenue to comment beyond written comment. Comments will be recorded. Both meetings will start at 7:00 p.m.

May 18	Dillon
May 25	Ennis

The Preferred Alternative contains the recommendations forwarded to us by the RAC to the extent you could come to agreement. (Subgroup work and RMP Digest public comment review).

Question: Does the RAC want to be involved in review of the Draft RMP/EIS?

There would be a distinction in commenting as a RAC versus as individuals who serve on the RAC. Would anticipate if the RAC comment as individuals, many of the members would submit comments opposite of other members, and they would be reviewed and considered just like other comments from the public. Comments from the RAC agreed by consensus would hold considerable weight in alternative/adjustments, etc. as BLM's formal advisory council.

Decision: The RAC will have a Working Meeting on April 19 at 10:00 a.m. at the Dillon Field Office to discuss issues. Tim suggested looking at ACEC's and Vegetation Management as a starting point.

Big Horn Sheep and wildlife issues may be discussed during this meeting as part of the ACEC discussion.

Proposed format for the April 19th Meeting:

- Each member will review the Draft RMP and identify issues and concerns.
 - ACEC's
 - Vegetation Management (Grazing and Fuels)
 - Others?
- Identify common concerns or prioritize as a group the issues that will be discussed. You can still comment individually.
- Break into smaller groups to tackle issues; bring recommendations/wording changes back to full RAC for concurrence (April 19th meeting, June 24th and 25th meeting).

Update on Proposed Grazing Regulations (Mike Tietmeyer): Power Point Presentation given. Comment period ends March 3rd. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was released for review on January 2, 2004.

Overview:

The proposed rule was published in the *Federal Register* on December 8, 2003. The purpose of the proposed grazing regulations is to improve and promote cooperation, protect health of rangelands and increase management efficiency and effectiveness.

Improve and Promote Cooperation:

- Address social, economic and cultural considerations in grazing decisions.
- Phase in grazing changes.
- Share title to cooperatively developed range improvements.
- Cooperate with locally established grazing boards.
- Provide review opportunity for Biological Evaluations and Biological Assessments that address grazing use.
- Retain Resource Advisory Councils

Protect Health of Rangelands:

- Expand discretion to approve nonuse.
- Require monitoring to support health assessments.
- Allow 2 years to develop and implement actions that ensure progress towards meeting health standards.
- Retain Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines.

Increased Management Efficiency/Legal Issues:

- Remove “conservation use.”
- Modify definition of grazing preference.
- Eliminate duplicative consultation requirements.
- Provide opportunity for joint livestock water rights where state law allows.
- Specify satisfactory performance.
- Establish parameters for “within the terms and conditions of a permit or lease.”
- Increase service charges.
- Link permit penalties to permitted allotments.
- Maintain grazing “status quo” while permit appeal is pending.
- Unequivocally provide that Biological Evaluations and Biological Assessments are not grazing decisions.

Alternatives:

No Action Alternative (Impacts):

- No change in working relationships
- Hastily designed actions to achieve standards – potentially less effective.
- Administrative efficiency unchanged, somewhat cumbersome, inflexible, time consuming.

Proposed Alternative (Summary of Impacts):

- Improves working relationships
- Protects health of the rangelands
- Increases administrative efficiency and effectiveness

Working Relationship Impacts:

- Time to design and adjust (example: herd size) by phasing in changes in steps over 5 years.
- Additional consideration of social, economic and cultural factors
- Improved cooperation with State and Local Grazing Boards
- Greater incentive to invest in range improvements

Rangeland Health Impacts:

- Short Term: may be reversible adverse impacts at the local level
 - 5-year phase-in of management changes
 - 2 years to develop new management strategy
 - Requirement for monitoring and assessment data for evaluations
- Long Term: slight improvement in vegetative conditions and slow improvement in overall watershed conditions.
 - Allowing more time for cooperatively developing management strategies
 - More sustainable management decisions based on monitoring data
 - Removal of restrictions on temporary non-use; greater flexibility and opportunities for resource improvements.

Administrative Efficiency Impacts:

- More focused communications with interested publics
- More timely decisions
- Improved cost recovery for processing actions
- Improved clarity of regulations

Modified Alternative (Impacts):

- Greater flexibility due to discretion allowed for 5-year phase in and use of monitoring data.
- Reduced flexibility due to 5-year limit on consecutive years of non-use.
- Reduced spread of weeds due to requirement to use certified weed free hay (prohibited actions section)

The timeline for the Final Rule/EIS is:

March 2, 2004	End of Comment Period
September, 2004	Publish Final EIS
October, 2004	Publish Final Rule
December, 2004	Grazing Rule Effective

Following the presentation there was general discussion on the proposed grazing regulations and a number of comments related to monitoring and the issue of joint ownership of water rights. It was noted that the Forest Service and the State of Montana do not currently allow for joint ownership. Other questions related to possible administrative problems such as the water right not automatically transferring with the property when it is sold. Mike clarified that this proposal would only affect new developments. RAC members will comment individually on the proposals.

Public Comment Period: Handouts were given.

Glen Hockett, Director of the Montana Watersheds Project and Volunteer President for the Gallatin Wildlife Association.

I am here today to share information with the RAC members on the Bighorn Sheep/Bison.

Bighorn Sheep:

We need to do something radical to maintain bighorn sheep on the lands. FWP released 51 sheep in the Highlands in 2000. There was one permit issued for hunting bighorn sheep in the whole state. In 1994, a bighorn sheep sold for \$310,000; in 2000 one sold for \$95,000. We have raised 2.6 million since 2000 for bighorn sheep.

Question (Doug Abelin):

If bighorn are not viable then why are we auctioning them off?

Answer:

We are making some money that can be put back into habitat and research. It is a critical part of the recovery effort.

Hunting and viewing opportunities of these animals is largely gone. If BLM had management indicators species, I would suggest that bighorn sheep be one. I suggested this to the Forest Service. As leaders in the RAC, you can serve a purpose. Our groups are very disappointed in what we have seen so far with the Resource Management Plan and the ACEC's and the failure to recognize bighorn sheep as needing special management within an ACEC. The whole issue and conflict with domestic sheep, especially, has been ignored. We would suggest voluntary buyouts.

Question:

What were the die offs from?

Answer:

Most common of the die offs were disease related. There are a number of domestic sheep diseases and the sheep appear to be healthy but they live with these diseases and yet when they come in contact with the bighorns, the bighorns cannot tolerate it.

I am also concerned about stock tanks that are in prime bighorn sheep habitats. They are a potential hazard for reservoir of diseases. They attract mites, ticks and flea's and if you have livestock and bighorn sheep using those same sites you are asking for trouble. You don't want to encourage livestock use in preferred bighorn habitat.

It will take some creative thinking and some major changes, that's why we thought the ACEC nomination is the way to designate some areas for special management for bighorns and give them a priority and we would like to work with the RAC and others.

Bison:

We think there is a wonderful opportunity to recover bison into the Taylor Fork (Gallatin NF and Hebgen Reservoir). Bison are currently allowed in Zone 2 and a small zone up in the Yellowstone. Only 100 animals are allowed at any one time and I think if there are more than 3,000 total that evens out the window. DOL and other agencies are harassing and hazing the bison into capture facilities and hauling them off.

We are suggesting the Taylor Fork area as a possible solution. We have outlined comments to the RMP and the Forest with what our vision is, which is to have elk and bison use the same migration routes. Some landowners don't oppose having bison so we think this is a real opportunity with private landowners. I am bringing this up because I don't want the BLM and hope that this RAC will not let the BLM do anything that will be adverse to bison recovery. One of the main problems we have right now is in the Taylor Fork with two Forest Service allotments; we would hope that we can get a voluntary buyout. If we can't, then the alternative is to raise yearlings. Raise an animal that will not affect our brucellosis free status. As far as the RMP goes, there may be, in 4 years, a request for a proposal to who wants bison. Our groups are interested in seeing bison back on the landscape on public land. This needs to be addressed in the RMP.

Comment (Ben Deeble): There was a very strong ACEC proposal submitted by BLM staff for the bighorns that our subgroup was not able to come to a consensus on and we passed it on to the office to do further analysis. I believed it failed to meet criteria for ACEC designation. I would argue that it was a flawed analysis. So we have had opportunities in front of the RAC to address bighorn sheep issues and haven't successfully moved it across the line yet.

Comment (Pat Flowers): We are scoping and taking comments on the bison proposal, if you want to offer your comments on it, there is about 3 weeks left on the proposal (Yellowstone).

Overview of LWCF (Land Water Conservation Fund) projects: Handouts were given to the RAC Members.

Butte Field Office:

Chain-of-Lakes Management Area-we are looking at two pieces of land, one is the McMaster's property; Phase 1 and 2. We are hoping to acquire it this year and our 2005 submission is already in to get Phase 2. In 2006, once we acquire Phase 2 there is a little corridor that runs along Forest Service land that we are potentially looking at acquiring to make a wildlife corridor. Right now the corridor has been narrowed by subdivisions on both sides and the concern is if the corridor gets closed off we are going to have a big disruption of elk running through people's back yards. We are working with different landowners to see what we can do to try and maintain a corridor.

Missoula Field Office:

Blackfoot Watershed- within the watershed there are areas that have been identified through a project The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is working on with Plum Creek. They have reached an agreement on the potential of TNC acquiring 89,000 acres of Plum Creek land within the Blackfoot. It is going to be in phases. We are in the first stage and just signed an agreement to purchase 41,000 acres and depending on how that disposition goes, it will determine whether or not TNC picks up the remaining actions. For the first stage, 2004 we received \$3 million of LWCF money and we are moving forward in the appraisal process to see exactly how many acres it's going to equate to. Over the next several years, all our efforts will be in the Blackfoot. We don't have an estimate of how many acres it will be because we are going through the appraisal process but the 41,000 acres that was purchased went for approximately \$30 million.

The Blackfoot Challenge, a non-profit organization made up of private landowners and agencies, has formed several committees and has hired Hank Goetz to work with the local communities. They've formed landowner groups that are looking at what they would like to see in terms of disposition and management of lands and are holding a series of public meetings.

For 2005, the submissions are in and we have asked for \$1M for land in this area; for 2006 our submissions are due soon. All our efforts will be in this area.

Dillon Field Office:

Since 1979, there has been only one LWCF project in our office which was the purchase of the Beaverhead River Ranch (also known as the Pipe Organ River Ranch) along the Beaverhead River about 11 miles south of Dillon. \$640,000 came from LWCF funds but most of the money for the project came from the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, which received about \$1M of additional money for approximately 2,240 acres. The purchase was completed in 2000.

We received some emergency funding since then; however, out of LWCF, \$19,000 was used to purchase another segment adjacent to the Beaverhead River Ranch for 5.45 acres and almost \$90,000 to purchase another 80 acres which is also adjacent to that tract that will consolidate our ownership in there. We closed on them in October, 2003. We are awaiting Final Title Opinion from the Solicitor.

We submitted projects in 2005 that weren't granted but we are going to pursue the same projects in 2006, they are: 110 acres on the lower Madison River below Bear Trap Wilderness Area along the segment that parallels the highway. 110 acres have been appraised for about \$425,000 but we will be submitting for the 2006 submission as well as potentially another 120 acres adjacent to the Beaverhead tract.

Weeds Overview (Field Managers): Handouts were given to the RAC Members (was not discussed). If you have questions, contact Marilyn.

Update on Blackfoot Recreation Steering Committee (Robin Cunningham): To discuss this, you have to think about three separate concepts, those being: BLM's Special Recreation Permits (SRPs) process, the existence of the RecSteerCom that exists on the Blackfoot Recreation Corridor and the newly developed statewide river management recommendations from the Statewide River Recreation Advisory Committee.

The SRP at this phase always zero's in on 3 groups (organized, competitive and commercial groups). Those are the 3 that require permits to use BLM ground and that is what the RecSteerCom is working on. The progress the RecSteerCom has made so far has been working through organized and competitive events and now is struggling with commercial activity. The RecSteerCom was originally formed in 1995 with Fish, Wildlife and Parks. In 1999, they came out with a Recreational Management Plan for the Blackfoot Recreation Corridor and in doing that they came to a consensus working with all kinds of people to come to the recommendations that are incorporated in their management plan.

How is the RecSteerCom going to work through the SRP? Current recommendations of the statewide river recreation advisory committee are being considered. The decision making process used by the RecSteerCom and their management recommendations are very similar to what evolved separately from the Statewide River RAC.

The Statewide River RAC asked: what do you want the river reaches to look like and what you want it to be like? What are the biological, physical and recreational characteristics you want to maintain? Once you have this goal, you can break it down into decision steps and then establish a goal, objective, a standard and then an action. These are familiar steps in the process which the RecSteerCom used for the SRP.

The RecSteerCom divided the recreation corridor into specific reaches. Each reach, having its own specific physical, biological, and recreational opportunity characteristics, helped develop

management plan and criteria that they used to help establish a matrix of how the river should be in these particular regions. They decided that the upper most reaches of the recreation corridor, which is the most primitive, would be inappropriate for competitive events and it may be very limited for organized groups and possibly for commercial use as well. As the corridor progresses downstream towards Bonner, it's where it's most popular and heavily used..

Recognition should be given to Nancy Anderson and Dick Fichtler for giving the RecSteerCom the opportunity to let the public decide in this circumstance.

How does the RAC fit into this process?

Once all the recommendations are worked out with the RecSteerCom and it goes through BLM they are going to land on your desk. You will have an opportunity to ask questions, discuss, and take action on the group's recommendations. Stage 1 should be done in the next couple of months.

A summary will be given to the RAC at the June meeting.

Update on Limestone Hills Legislative EIS (Rick Hotaling/Garry Williams):

Rick:

We held a town meeting in Townsend in late January to address issues and get local feedback about the Limestone Hills Withdrawal. We addressed and discussed what their specific concerns were from that meeting. The second meeting we held we got into more issues that dealt with the National Guard about what the Guard wants us to do (how management would be different?).

We are now working with the National Guard to develop a Proposed Action; then we will hold more public meetings in the Townsend area before moving forward with the EIS process. If there is a need to come to consensus on an issue, we will come to the RAC and ask that a subgroup be formed if the RAC so wishes.

Garry: There is a lot of uncertainty on what the difference would be between management under military versus BLM.

ADDITION: Update on the National RAC Meeting (Sue Marxer): The meeting will be held in Phoenix, Arizona from May 11th thru 13th.

The RAC chairs were asked to work on a committee to put an agenda together for this meeting. We had our first call about a week ago and wanted to know what kind of issues we had. Our next call is on February 23.

Some of the main issues that will be discussed at this meeting are:

- Budget Implementation
- Dillon RMP (RAC's recommendations); I will be conducting a presentation on the process that we used
- Status (update) of Grazing Regulations and SWL's

- Recreation/Travel Management/Weed Control
- Fire/Fuels Reduction (presentation)
- Stewardship Contracting
- Short presentations will be given for redeveloping books/CD's for new RAC members

Are there any issues that you would like for me to try and bring up at this meeting?

Dick mentioned designation of wilderness areas and Sue said it was not an agenda topic for this meeting. Dick would like Sue to raise the issue at the national meeting with the idea that some members of the Western RAC feel it is important.

NEXT MEETING (after April 19): June 24 and 25, 2004 at the Missoula Field Office will incorporate a field trip. (Blackfoot River or possibly Garnet?)

NEXT MEETING TOPICS:

- Risk Assessment/Hazardous Fuels Reduction (Butte committed to presenting the same information used to explain the process at recent public meetings in the Helena Valley)
- Possible Biologist to come and talk on the Big Horn Sheep
- Finish Dillon RMP Discussion
- Allotment Stewardship Project Discussion – Proposal
- National RAC Meeting Update from Sue
- Get follow-up information on proposed Grazing Advisory Board (how formed?)

MEETING ADJOURNED