

October 5, 2000 - Meeting - Missoula, Montana

Members Present: Hank Goetz, Sue Marxer, Ted Coffman, Doug Abelin, Chuck Swysgood, Rob McCulloch, Roger Peters, Bruce Farling, Katie Deuel, Cedron Jones, Dan Lucas, Mel Montgomery, Doug Rand, and Greg Schildwachter.

BLM: Nancy Anderson, Designated Federal Official (Missoula Field Manager); Rick Hotaling (Butte Field Manager); Rich Maggio (Acting for Scott Powers, Dillon Field Manager); Jean Nelson-Dean (facilitator).

Members Absent: Bob Zimmerman

Hank Goetz presided over the meeting which was facilitated by Jean Nelson-Dean. New members introduced themselves.

New member orientation by Hank Goetz included RAC concept, history of rangeland health, charter responsibility and dealing with policy issues of standards and guidelines and working towards better solutions, encouraging Forest Service and BLM in working together; working and advising the BLM offices. Discussion included members' comments regarding past and future accomplishments.

Jean Nelson-Dean distributed the membership list and asked members to verify names and addresses and also distributed the meeting agenda.

FIRE AFTERMATH

Nancy Anderson explained how the fires affected the Missoula Field Office; how zone closures were coordinated with other agencies; Ryan Gulch fire and the extent of hazard reduction at Garnet Ghost Town.

Rich Maggio described how the fire closures made the largest impact to the Dillon Field Office. Grazing permittees were most affected due to drought and vehicle closures restricting access to public lands.

Rick Hotaling of the Butte Field Office gave a detailed report about how the fires were started near Helena in July, acreage of burned areas, and rehab plans. Reforestation funds must be requested through

budget. Fencing and range improvements are not part of fire rehab. Private landowners may request funding. Also discussed levels of fire restrictions.

OHV UPDATE

Final should be out the end of December or January. May be delayed depending on the time table for the issuance of the BLM national policy. Comments by RAC members included remarks that significant fines were needed as a deterrent; there should be more rules to self regulate incidents of violation; there needs to be a budget for enforcement. The web site has the latest information.

FIELD MANAGERS ROUND TABLE

Dillon:

Axolotol Lakes Exchange discussion. A listing of 50 tracts of public land which will be made available for the exchange was handed out. Exchange is on a value basis; it will not be necessary to use all of the tracts. Value of lands to acquire is wildlife habitat and wilderness areas. It was suggested that when listing tracts for disposal, a better description of the lands should be included (not just the legal description).

Standards and Guides. Brief description of standards. 26 allotments equaling 81,000 acres were evaluated. 11 met the standards; 15 did not meet at least one. Have made management changes on 12 allotments. Are trying to focus on allotments with westslope cutthroat trout. Draft assessments have been completed on an additional 18 allotments containing 82,000 acres. Eleven have met the standards and 15 have met some. Drought and ability to measure hindered being able to get out to check standards. Drought letters went out to permittees.

Lower Madison Recreation Plan. 3,000 acres on both sides of the Madison is being loved to death - heavily used by Bozeman public. Continuing emergency closure. Implementation by early next spring.

Butte:

Big Belt Travel Plan on hold because of Cave Gulch fire.

Sleeping Giant on hold until Big Belt is done.

Devil's Elbow almost done

Ward Ranch acquisition - EA this spring. When acquired will involve low impact activities and no major recreation developments.

Clancy-Unionville -Travel Management Plan was protested. Will be upholding the BLM. Could be appealed. Vegetation manipulation - held up for lynx consultation

Missoula:

Preliminary assessment of Standard and Guidelines were done on 60 allotments. Have prioritized the assessments for completion over the next five years. Approximately one-half are meeting S&Gs. Range improvement projects on approximately 10 allotments which were not meeting S&Gs have been

completed. Seven allotments will be reviewed during FY2001.

Linton Mine Rehab. Old lead mine. Preparation of the EECA is scheduled for this year.

General consensus that the riparian standard is the biggest concern. May or may not be related to grazing.

RAC MEMBER COMMENTS

Trust - When we are told something is going to happen, we want to make sure there is progress on the ground. We need to develop some type of audit to make sure what we say is going to happen does happen. Discussed the formation of a sub-group to address this concern.

Discussed some of the Dillon Field Office allotments. Cottonwood Creek - making progress with the permittee. Some projects are not yet completed. Stone Creek - according to FWP, westslope cutthroat trout are thriving in Stone Creek. However, the allotment does not look good this year. Garden Creek - does not look good this year. Permit is for 2,200 aums but have only used 800 - 900 aums the past couple of years.

Canyon Ferry:

Rick Hotaling led a discussion on the current status of Canyon Ferry. BLM agreement with the Bureau of Reclamation expires 09/30/00. Operations management returns to the Bureau of Reclamation at the end of December. Further discussion on site maintenance resulted in a motion to send a letter to Congress to support continuing funding of Canyon Ferry. The motion was not approved but individual members may send their own letter. Concern by RAC members that new recreation sites are being developed (i.e. Devil's Elbow) when there isn't enough funding to manage existing sites.

Dyce Creek:

Rich Maggio reported on Dyce Creek. There has been very little progress since the tour. RAC suggestions were incorporated into the EA.

Whitetail-Pipestone:

Rick Hotaling gave an update on the project. The draft EIS was issued and two groups submitted alternatives to the BLM. Rick proposed that the RAC form a sub-group to work with the Montana Consensus Council to develop an alternative.

Centennial Travel Plan:

Rich Maggio and Rick Waldrup, Outdoor Recreation Planner in the Dillon Field Office, presented the preferred alternative for the Centennial Travel Plan. Discussion regarding the Corral Creek road, wolverines, historical snowmobile use on trail through Odell Creek Canyon, and the Agriculture Research Station. In general, the RAC agreed with the preferred alternative

DECISIONS

- The RAC agreed to form a sub-group to work with the Montana Consensus Council and outside stakeholders to develop an alternative for the Whitetail-Pipestone EIS. Hank and Doug Abelin will be

on the group for the RAC with Jim Kuipers representing Category 3 members (Category 3 proxy).

- The RAC will send a letter to the Secretary of Interior proposing adequate FWS funding to break impasse on consultation.

3. The RAC agreed to form a sub-group to develop an auditing system for on the ground progress on S&Gs. Bruce, Sue, and Dan agreed to be on the group.

4. The RAC agreed to invite congressional staff to an appropriate RAC meeting to hear concerns regarding the larger issue of building new recreation sites while closing or not maintaining existing sites.

NEXT MEETING

Next meeting will be in Butte on January 9, 2001. The topic of discussion will be possible future issues for the WMRAC such as recreation development, forest health, OHV and Dillon RMP, Whitetail/Pipestone (Feb or March), plus S&Gs subgroup presentation.

JUNE 1, 2000, MEETING - DILLON, MONTANA

Members Absent: Dan Lucas

Members Present: Tad Dale, Mel Montgomery, Steve Antonioli, Doug Rand, Bob Zimmerman, Cedron Jones, Bruce Farling, Hank Goetz, Doug Abelin, Greg Schildwachter, Ted Coffman, Charles Swysgood, Dean Welborn, and Susan Marxer.

Dillon Field Manager Scott Powers was the Designated Federal Official and facilitated the meeting because Jean Nelson-Dean accompanied the State Director and Associate State Director to Missoula. Butte Field Manager Rick Hotaling was present. No members from the Missoula Field Office were present. Rich Maggio, Bill Hensley, and Joe Casey attended for Dyce Creek discussion only). Angie Morse- Minutes.

Opening remarks by Scott Powers:

State Director Mat Millenbach and Associate State Director Roberta Moltzen are on their way to Missoula, we were lucky to have them join us. The field trip went really well. A follow up to the tour will be the first thing we will cover. Jeanette Kaiser of the Beaverhead-Deerlodge Forest Service will be coming in to answer some questions.

FIELD TRIP FOLLOW-UP

Scott asked if everyone is comfortable with what they are proposing to do. Cedron said he understands it but is not comfortable with the three proposed prescriptions.

Greg suggested that another sight may be better. Would like to see some accomplishment on the ground.

Joe explained why they chose the larger block. They tried to build in as much mitigation up front.

Scott stated, "This is basically a new game for us. We would like to learn from this, and I would like you folks to identify some areas that you are not comfortable with."

The discussion centered on the specific prescriptions. Mountain mahogany was discussed first:

Steve commented that he thinks the Mountain mahogany prescription is a waste of money. "BLM does not know why it is in bad shape. The stuff in the enclosure is in good shape." Steve doesn't see the value of that unit. Cedron seconded that. Hank suggested sticking some cages around the scrawny trees for awhile.

Doug asked if the area could be used as a pilot since it is broken up. He suggested reducing the size of the unit, putting screens on some spots, and burning some spots. He thought after five years they would find out what is going on. He thinks the scope should be broadened to cover all aspects instead of two or three.

Joe explained that the more time taken to modify what we have come up with, the longer the process will take. He hopes to finalize the EA, put it out for public comment; and finalize everything by September.

Cedron objected by stating, "You just spent a bunch of money bringing us down here, taking us on the tour, and now you aren't going to consider our comments."

Steve suggested doing some exclosures, and some other treatments, then evaluate what happens.

Greg would like to see the RACs specific recommendations in the EA.

Tad commented, "We are suppose to be a cross section of society. When the EA goes out to the public, who is going to bring out something we haven't already talked about?"

Scott and Joe were asked if they are comfortable with a formal alternative or would they take the collective comments and do some modification of the proposed 200 acres. Scott answered, "The RAC's comments would be incorporated."

Steve was concerned about spending the money. He would rather see it used to spray knapweed, because BLM doesn't know what the problem is. He was worried that they might go wipe out what is left of the mahogany. He suggested trying some prescriptions in there, to see if it helps. In a couple years we might see some improvement; and then we could use the treatment that works on the 200 acres.

Savannah:

Cedron liked these units. He would like to see something here that would encourage some management on the Big Belts. He was concerned with the effect on elk security but rather than see this area compromised, he would like to see more trees taken and leave smaller areas.

Steve was uncomfortable with the shapes of the units. He would like to see different shapes of units with more removal.

Ted suggested taking out the old growth as an experiment to see how the younger trees will do.

"If part of the idea is to recreate the savannah, there is not enough hiding cover. Do what you need to do, rather than leave a happy medium between the two (trees/wildlife)."

Douglas fir encroachment:

Cedron stated he doesn't think this is a cost effective treatment. He said, "Let natural fire take care of it. If you take care of the savannah; a natural fire wouldn't be a problem. You need to work with the forces of nature. Help set up the landscape to sustain natural events. Set it up so the natural fires can come along and do it for you. There is no huge pressure."

Mel thinks you need to get the douglas fir out of the quaking aspen; they suck a lot of water away from them.

Sue is concerned with encroachment. The concern is not only for the water table, but douglas fir will overtake all species, it will effect your water quality.

Steve wants the density of conifers per acres established. Steve stated, "You should establish a stocking at which above that you use harvest and intensive burning. Intensive burning should be used except on the sagebrush in that area. Be careful how much sagebrush you burn. On scattered trees, send someone out there with a chainsaw."

Hank suggested a managed natural burn, rather than the "let it burn theory".

Joe was asked if they addressed natural fire. Joe stated, "Resources are stretched; when Beaverhead County is on fire, get out of the way."

Doug said that the encroachment that is coming is natural. It is currently healthy, enhance it with some underbrush removal. Historically the encroachment was not a problem because of the fire.

Greg said everyone has a different idea of what is healthy and natural. He suggested managing it as a savannah. There is a reason it is doing it, let it be. If it doesn't work, you can always go back in there and manage it as an encroachment.

Joe said he has considered this for years.

Bob considers this a microsite. He thinks there is an opportunity to learn from this.

Steve asked about the road program. Joe stated that existing roads would be used and would be leveled out. Any new roads that will be built will be closed with brush over the top of them. Steve said, "I would like to see roads left about what they are now. If they are improved, you enhance hunting and have a wildlife problem."

Decision- Incorporate RAC comments into EA

WHITETAIL/PIPESTONE DISCUSSION:

Scott Introduced Jeanette Kaiser from the FS. Jeanette was asked to come and answer questions that were raised in the letter from the RAC regarding the FS position on the Tailpipe project.

Jeanette stated the RAC is not the only group asking, "why?". In regards to a projected completion date she is hoping to make it a priority to complete the project in FY 2001. They can not do it this fiscal year. When they received their final budget in April, it was 1.9 million less than what they received in FY 99. After a midyear review, they were already overspent 2 million dollars when they received their budget in April. If they end up with a deficit in the next fiscal year, it has to be paid before toilet paper can even be put in a campground.

She was asked how they could be so short on funds when the agency actually received more funding this fiscal year. She explained, "Lot of it has to do with earmarked funding, which must be spent on specific types of projects. Also, overhead costs absorb much of the funding. Bottom line is that more money is going to Washington D.C. and less money is being spent on the ground."

Mel suggested obtaining funding from a private organization. He will look into funding for the project from the motorized industry, if Jeanette will supply him with an estimate of what it will take to get the job done.

Bob said a Congressional stated how disappointed he is that he is never contacted over issues such as these. He suggested drafting a letter to our congressman stating our disappointment with the budget appropriations.

Decision: It was agreed that Hank will write a letter pointing out that this EIS has been derailed because of budget restraints; and that the RAC sees this as a priority. A courtesy copy will be sent to the FS Regional Headquarters.

Jeanette also stated that there is a glitch they need to fix with not being compliant with the road moratorium. The moratorium is in effect until they get a travel plan in place. This will also delay the FS participation in the EIS.

Rick mentioned that the BLM has the option to wait until FS gets funding, and fixes their problem with the transportation policy, to go out with a joint EIS or they could move forward with their own EIS. They anticipate a draft by the end of the summer. The agencies would still coordinate the project, but this would take the pressure off of the FS.

Decision: Everyone agreed that BLM should move forward.

BLM OHV POLICY:

Rick gave a brief update of the National OHV Strategy. BLM received a huge number of comments on the Statewide policy. An OHV strategy team was formed. Each state will have to hold their own public meetings. The Director would like the RAC to participate.

Suggestions for how the RAC can participate include:

- * The RAC sponsor the public meetings;
- * RAC participate in public meetings;
- * RAC make a recommendation back to the national strategy team.

The kicker is that the comments must be in by August 31, so meetings need to be held this summer.

Hank suggested that interested RAC members participate in nearby public meetings, as they did before.

Decision- Agreed they would participate as before.

FIELD OFFICE UPDATES

Scott Powers, Dillon Field Office:

Weeds: Scott discussed Dillon FO's fight against weeds. Beaverhead and Madison counties received about \$ 80,000 each this year for weed control. Goats have been introduced to an area on the Madison. The public is very interested in what is happening, the goat handler talked to about 50 people a day over the 3 day weekend (Memorial Day). Fungus is also being put out on knapweed in that area.

Tad inquired about opportunities for weed control on private land. He was told that citizens can lease sprayers from the counties for a minimal charge or by sharing the cost for the chemical. They don't have to be certified for certain chemicals.

Steve discussed new complications with obtaining an applicators license. The State has combined the herbicide and insecticide license. This makes it harder for people to get a license.

*Ted Coffman will follow up on this with the State Weed Board.

Recreation: The Dillon Field Office has received many new applications for outfitter and guide permits. We have basically denied all of those for now. Public comment was greatly in favor of denying them.

Mel added that by permitting new use that is not traditional, you are encouraging use that may result in a flood of new problems and over use.

Range/Grazing: The Axolotl land exchange looked like it was going to crash, the Conservation Fund is going to purchase and hold the property and sell it to the BLM.

Planning:

- Scott will be going on a 3 week detail to the state office.
- Next year, the DFO will begin a new land use plan. We will get a three year commitment in the budget to finish it. We will also be the guinea pigs for GIS analysis in Montana.
- A lawsuit has been filed against the DFO by the National Wildlife Federation and the Gallatin Wildlife Foundation. The main basis for the lawsuit is that we don't have an adequate Resource Management Plan in place. The Management Framework Plan we have in place is outdated. They want the Oil & Gas EIS stopped and incorporated in the Resource Management Plan.

Beaverhead County originally planned to join in on the lawsuit, but decided it was in their best interest to put their energy into joining in the planning for the RMP.

Rick Hotaling, Butte Field Office:

Recreation:

- The Clancy-Unionville EIS Record of Decision has been signed. The FS is writing their ROD so they can go out jointly.

- Ward Ranch Exchange. The Conservation Fund bought the land. It did not come out of the House with support for Land and Water Conservation Funds. We came out no. 9 out of the Senate just as it was on the national LWCF list. Our hope is the congressional delegation will provide support for it during the conference committee and it will get funded.

- Sleeping Giant. We don't have the staff to work on it right now. Our main concern is

Clancy and Tailpipe. Without additional staff we can't move on.

- Cedron asked if recreation user fees supplement the cost of management. It seems as if additional projects incrementally start putting the office in the hole. Current projects don't get taken care of and then additional work is added, like Pipe Organ. Rick responded that user fees are not designed to be profit generating. Reductions in staff are what is causing the delay in management.

Weeds: About the same level of control as last year.

Abandoned Mine Lands: The AML program is still on track.

PUBLIC COMMENT: None.

FOLLOW UP ITEMS:

Letter to Delegation regarding Tailpipe/budget issues- Hank Goetz

Comments and suggestions incorporated into Dyce Creek- Scott Powers

Applicator License issue with State Weed Board- Ted Coffman

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS:

Bob requested an updated e-mail list of RAC members.

Scott awarded Steve Antonioli and Tad Dale for their contributions to the RAC over the last 5 years. This was their last meeting.

MARCH 1, 2000, MEETING - BUTTE, MONTANA

Members Present: Ted Coffman, Cedron Jones, Bruce Farling, Dan Lucas, Dean Welborn, Doug Abelin, Mel Montgomery, Hank Goetz, Steve Antonioli, Doug Rand, and Greg Schildwachter.

Members Absent: Tad Dale, Bob Zimmerman, and Chuck Swysgood.

BLM: Nancy Anderson, Field Manager for the Missoula Field Office; Rick Hotaling, Field Manager for the Butte Field Office; Mark Goeden, Assistant Field Manager for the Dillon Field Office. Jean Nelson-Dean facilitated and Vickie Satterlee took notes. Steve Hartmann, Assistant Field Manager for Butte, attended part of the meeting to give updates on the Whitetail-Pipestone Travel Plan and Butte Field Office activities. Bill Dean, BLM Wildlife Biologist, attended part-time to answer questions about the possible listing of the lynx as a threatened species.

Guest: Ron Spoon, Montana Dept. of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MDFWP).

Rick Hotaling introduced himself to the council members.

Hank thanked everyone who contributed to the Martha Montgomery memorial fund at the Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch.

The 45-day nomination period started March 6 and ends April 20. The Council positions held by Steve Antonioli, Tad Dale, Mel Montgomery, Greg Schildwachter and vice-Martha Montgomery will be up for nominations this month. RAC members were asked to reach out to people they think might be interested in becoming a member.

Q: Does BLM have an EEO policy regarding RACs--to break up this all-male council?

A: The diversity of Council members might be taken into consideration when making Council selections. However, the main criteria is that a Council member is representative of their interest group and willing to work cooperatively with other members.

ELKHORNS WESTSLOPE CUTTHROAT TROUT RESTORATION PLAN

(Ron Spoon, MDFWP, and Bruce Farling)

Bruce introduced Ron Spoon to the RAC. The Westslope Cutthroat Trout (WCT) subject has come up often at RAC meetings over last 5 years during discussions on Standards and Guidelines, ATV use, timber management and mining. What is the current WCT situation in Montana? We want to talk about a specific project, a model, that will engender a cooperative approach. Ron developed the WCT plan for the Elkhorn Mountains.

Bruce passed out background information. The WCT is one of 13 subspecies of cutthroat in North America. Historically, west of the Continental Divide in Montana, WCT lived in every watershed where there was no barrier. East of the Continental Divide, WCT existed in the Missouri River and up through the Headwaters, basically everywhere where there was no barrier.

Today, we have information from many sources, steering committees from organizations and agencies, and we're looking at drafting a cooperative management plan to restore WCT in Montana. These fish are in reasonably decent shape, but are diminishing west of the Continental Divide. They appear in only 35% of the streams they used to be in. About 77% of those WCT populations have genetically changed (hybridized) with rainbows and others. WCT are very promiscuous with other species. We think about

18% are genetically pure. They are strong in the Flathead, Bitterroot, and Clark Fork.

WCT are in trouble east of the Continental Divide. Of surveyed habitat we found that WCT were present in only 8% of the streams, and not at all in private lands, lower elevations. Of that 8% only 5.8% are genetically pure, which is only 1% of historical numbers. Only 142 individual populations are present in widely scattered small stream reaches. It is hard to maintain genetic fitness. In the upper Missouri River all the pure-strain populations are at a high risk of becoming extinct. The upper Missouri is a priority. Four major objectives of a statewide plan would be:

- Protect all existing pure populations,
- Protect "intergressed" populations until management is determined,
- Ensure long-term persistence of WCT in their native range (fish zoning, upper watersheds, public lands), and
- Provide technical information and financial assistance to help preserve these fish (important for private landowners).

Trout Unlimited is really strong in cooperating with private landowners. We can protect existing populations, but over time these fish will continue to disappear east of the Continental Divide, unless we do something proactive for those populations.

Ron will explain about Cherry Creek (Ted Turner) which is very controversial because of the proposed use of fish toxicants that "kill fish to restore native fish." Trout Unlimited thinks the greater good is restoring WCT. Industry folks think anglers need to do more, but anglers are now under the catch and release regulations, which has diminished our tradition of harvesting fish. These are controversial measures--we're trying to make a sacrifice to restore these fish.

Ron Spoon described the statewide plan and handed out the Elkhorn Mountains Westslope Cutthroat Trout Restoration Plan.

Existing Conditions: There are six very small populations of WCT in the very upper ends of streams (about 7 miles of stream) in the Elkhorns. We've documented one extinction--in the upper Warm Springs since 1981. We're losing another population in Staubach Creek near Winston. We (MDFWP) made a 10-year plan with agencies and private folks to secure existing populations and then expand those populations into additional waters. At the end of 10 years we will have zoning that will make the WCT populations pretty secure in the Elkhorns. We're concentrating in the middle of the mountain range where there is not a lot of fishing. WCT in these small streams are more desirable to anglers than small brook trout. Anglers will also see benefits from this plan.

A big issue bogging us down is the use of safe chemicals--fish toxicants--to accomplish these projects. Locals in Townsend had very strong opposition to fish toxicants.

Q: Is there any science that tells how much stream is needed for the fish to be viable?

A: A minimum of 2 miles of stream reach-but there are various ideas of what is viable.

Q: Is the McClellan Creek population hybridized or pure?

A: The genetics are still in question. This is still evolving. Tepee Creek is still pure.

The Elkhorns plan is a general plan. The Environmental Analysis for Staubach Creek is in progress.

Comment: You could spend a lot of effort with a not-so-great population, so intermingling might be beneficial.

Reply: We have four barren reaches where we will try to re-establish WCT populations and gradually spread out the genetics. There won't be any fish hatcheries.

Q: Will fishing be eliminated where you restore 100% WCT?

A: No. Fishing pressure is light in most of these targeted areas. Fishing will be allowed.

Q: What are the sizes of the populations?

A: We don't have actual numbers. Staubach has less than 200. Size can be 8 -10 inches in very small streams.

Q: Do all fish migrate down to a common river, then come back up different streams, or how did they mix with other fish? What is their native range?

A: WCT are complicated; genetically, they are more varied in closer reaches than in farther locations.

Ron made a slide presentation: The WCT range in the Elkhorns is large, but populations are very small and fragmented. Tizer Basin--there is high quality habitat to work with. No new restrictions. WCT will do well. Whitehorse Creek is barren. Eureka Creek is barren with natural falls, which will prohibit other fish from intruding. Tizer Lake is full of brook trout. Crow Creek Falls is the most popular fishery from here down to Radersburg. We'll work upstream from there. Where there are no natural barriers, we'll construct barriers, such as on Muskrat Creek. Lakes in the upper end we still stalk with McBride cutthroat that originated from Yellowstone Park. We do this in areas where there is no risk of impacting WCT.

In White's Gulch there are 1.5 miles with WCT. We've been removing brook trout for the last 7 years, but they keep coming back--we can't get to zero brook trout. Even so, there are now about 1,000 WCT plus their young--an increase just from the brook trout removal. Even the size of the fish has increased.

Muskrat Creek-- it's difficult to pull brook trout with electric fishing. After 3 years we've been ineffective in getting the brook trout out. We moved 150 WCT from where they were competing with brook trout to a barren reach 3 miles upstream. Very high quality habitat. In the lower part of Muskrat Creek we'll remove brook trout with antimycin, then we'll have 6 miles of habitat for WCT after we're done. None of the WCT have moved downstream, they've survived and reproduced. When we reduce competition with brook trout, we get a quick response from WCT.

Q: What are the advantages/disadvantages of using a toxicant vs. electro fishing?

A: Electro fishing is good in the short run. A toxicant can get you to zero fish. Without getting to zero, we have a constant maintenance problem. There has been a lot of success with a 70-mile reach in Utah with toxicant removal of nonnative fish.

There is a risk when we have to pull out any WCT and hold them when treating with a toxicant. The toxicant also impacts insects, which may reduce WCT food supply. But, the food reduction is made up for by the reduction in competition. The toxicant does affect amphibians in the gill stage, but we will treat the creek early this coming September when the amphibians are in past the gill stage.

The Staubach Creek WCT sample was genetically pure. There's no access for rainbow to get into that reach.

Pretreatment involves removing 80% of the fish before applying the toxicant. Rest of the fish in the stream will be treated with toxicant. It takes about 48+ hours to kill the remaining fish. We've mostly used Rotenone mostly, not Antimycin yet. Antimycin is preferable in this situation because it is short-lived and safer but more expensive.

Cherry Creek--the first phase is planning for this year. We're in the stage of trying to see if it works.

Q: From an angler's standpoint, are brook trout larger and more desirable for fishing?

A: Just the opposite (for Montana), when we have a mixed fishery, the brook trout are smaller. Brook trout tend to stunt because they are so prolific at reproducing.

Q: Are there massive brook trout deaths below the barrier?

A: We take brook trout below and beyond the barrier by 100 yards before treatment.

Q: Will MDFWP look at temporary fishing closures on the treated reaches where angling pressure is higher?

A: In most of the Elkhorns, that won't be an issue as most reaches are pretty inaccessible. There are a few places where that might be considered. We may have to respond on a case-by-case basis. Banning angling would be an absolute last resort-we would try education first.

In Montana, antimycin has been used mostly in ponds and lakes so far.

Q: Are there any other native fish in these streams?

A: Most are very simple fish communities, brook trout and WCT.

Q: About Cherry Creek, can fishermen go in and catch as many brook trout as possible, before treatment?

A: That wouldn't be feasible due to the thick brush along the creek, but we could use help with electro fishing.

East of the Continental Divide, nonnative competition is the biggest problem, but land uses can also impact recovery. In the Elkhorns we don't need to make any land use changes, but elsewhere it may be case by case.

Risk assessment of the WCT/nonnative competition was our biggest hurdle, but the sizes of WCT reaches are very small.

Q: Are west side WCT being brought over to the east side of the Continental Divide?

A: No, we wanted to give the Elkhorn WCT populations the first crack. There could be a risk of bringing in whirling disease.

Comment: Concerning grazing, we hear different things about WCT, especially in Allotment Management Plans (AMPs).

Reply: In some areas in the Elkhorns where livestock impacts were really hard on WCT, some AMPs were redone. If there is a good riparian area, the habitat for WCT is usually good. It's important to understand that this project won't have a high impact on grazers if the stream is a good one to begin with.

Comment: Some people don't want cattle and will look for any excuse (such as WCT recovery) to keep cattle out.

STATEWIDE WEED MANAGEMENT STEERING COMMITTEE UPDATE AND DISCUSSION (Ted Coffman) (2 handouts)

In October 1998 the Governor held a Weed Summit to see what could be done to control noxious weeds. A steering committee was created to write a statewide noxious weed treatment plan. The purpose of the statewide plan is to try to get more funding. It will basically say: here's the problem, here's what we can do about it, and here's the amount of funding we need. We hope to have a draft plan by October 2000.

Q: How many entities have offered to help?

A: We had a mailing list of the 120 folks at the Weed Summit. We have groups that have offered, but they're not the only source. Groups/organizations are not contributing financially.

\$1.50 on Montana vehicle licenses goes into the State Trust Fund. Counties and cooperative landowners can sponsor a project and get 50/50 funding through a State Trust Fund grant. A big problem is that

funds are being funneled through the counties, then the counties have the obligation of identification and treatment problems. We're talking to the Legislature to try to limit the counties' liability for noxious weeds.

Q: Are any fees from hunting and fishing going into the weed fund?

A: Yes, there is no specific surcharge, but there is money from hunting/fishing going into the fund.

HB 395 mandated state agencies that administer lands have to comply with state noxious weed laws.

Q: What's DNRC's funding source?

A: State Lands has put it on the backs of the grazing permittees.

Q: In timber sales, is weed treatment a part of the appraisal process?

Mentioned: Greg Schildwachter could look into that further on state timber sales.

Comment: OHV groups have put a lot of time, money and effort into weed treatment.

Q: What's the breakdown of counties that have serious, little, or moderate impacts from weeds? How many of those counties have serious problems, have a noxious weed employee at the county level?

A: Forty of the 56 counties have a weed coordinator, either full- or part-time.

Q: Is the goal to develop an actual document?

A: Yes, one that each agency can take to their "higher ups." BLM has been stepping up to the table more than the FS, though the FS is trying more now.

Q: Once you have a statewide weed plan, will the counties and agencies sign off on it?

A: Yes, and tribal agencies, too. Tribes can share in the weed grant just as counties do.

Comments:

- Biocontrol is slow and spendy.
- Biocontrol is the only answer for dalmatian toadflax. It's difficult to get a biological agent approved.
- Bugs don't kill plants but slow their spread. Most counties in western Montana have insectories.
- Biocontrol is the only viable option on rivers and streams.

Any highway project that gets Federal funding, the counties get extra funds for 34 years to treat weeds on those disturbed sites.

Q: Helena has lots of weeds, are the cities getting involved?

A: The problem is getting chemicals licensed to use within city limits. It's a real challenge to get tools to use in those settings.

Comments:

- We need to inform the public that weeds are a problem within city limits.
- You can burn knapweed, plant something that a cow will eat, then the knapweed comes up again, you replant. Has anyone tried this process?

One proposed component of this plan is to revegetate, preferably with native species.

Comments:

- There are some plots in the Blackfoot that have been treated that way, but knapweed is such a competitor that trying to get something else to grow is hard. Sometimes fire propagates knapweed.
- One plant contains 180,000 seeds that remain viable for 10 years. That's where the challenge is.
- Along roads on our allotment, we've had success just pulling weeds.
- A motorcycle club has been helping a forest pull weeds with great success. You have to use gloves though.
- There's a group in the Blackfoot looking at spraying leafy spurge at and above the high water mark. They use several chemicals approved for direct water application. A river is another main carrier, riparian areas are hot spots. This group is looking to do an early application at the high water mark before high water then again after high water.
- There is promise in using Tordon to kill mature plants and then using sheep grazing to get rid of the 1- to 2-year-old weeds. That allows the grass to come up.

Nancy brought the RAC's attention to a comment in last meeting's minutes, on page 2, that states, "BLM channels money to private landowners." Nancy stated, "BLM has provided chemicals to people for their

treatment of weeds located on BLM lands. However, we do not channel money to private landowners."

Doug Abelin passed around handouts.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD (No public comments.)

(Lunch Break)

MONTANA/DAKOTAS OHV EIS UPDATE (Nancy Anderson)

The comment period ended last week; we received about 1700 comment letters, and there are more by now-we don't have a final count yet. Comment analysis is to be done by April 5. There has been some discussion about a joint decision with the FS, but the FS has concerns, so it is now in the Solicitor's hands. On May 4, there will be a joint meeting of BLM and FS management to make a decision on a preferred alternative.

Steve H: Jerry Majerus said there are close to 2,500 comments.

Comment: The motorized community is supporting what you're doing, with some reservations. How will BLM determine what is useable or not useable? How will you make a decision without having something specific to decide on?

Linda Elliston put together a meeting with the FS and the motorized community that was a "no issue" gathering but a chance to sit down and see where we're at.

We would like to do that with the nonmotorized community as well.

Q: Does the off-road community support the preferred alternative?

A: For the most part, we're willing to accept area restrictions if there is a sufficient road and trail system. The biggest thing I see that hasn't worked out is enforcement. How are you going to enforce it? We need to catch the few culprits and "hang them from the fence posts."

Comments:

- I want a working statewide enforcement plan.
- The BLM and FS should get together more on enforcement.

WHITETAIL-PIPESTONE EIS UPDATE (Steve Hartmann)

This project was started in 1996 with scoping: 10 public meetings, four field trips; we even had the press on-site several times. We gathered comments, and in June 1998 a preliminary draft EIS was sent to the public. The RAC was somewhat involved.

The Montana Trails Association offered an alternative: no closures, build new trails. The Southwest Lands Association came up with the most restrictive alternative. The BLM/FS proposed action would restrict about one-third of the roads and trails.

The Paiute Trail in Utah has a loop trail system in a large area. There is not a high density of trails but lots of loops and opportunities. Both the motorized and nonmotorized communities supported it. We thought Whitetail-Pipestone needed something like that, so we came up with Alternative 5, which identifies loop trails and smaller side loops. We also presented that alternative to major user groups and the county commission.

Now we're ready to put out the draft EIS; it should be ready within about 3 weeks. The FS has put this project higher on their priority list. There is a new supervisor for the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest who suggests a new analysis process, a 12-step process, that she thinks we need to use on this project. I disagreed. She is going to look into the matter further and get back to us (BLM). If we were to use that process, it may be summer before the draft goes out. I suggested putting out the draft, then doing on-the-ground assessment during the 90-day comment period. If there is no delay, you will get a copy of the draft EIS in about 3 weeks.

I suggest the RAC receive a presentation on the 5 alternatives. The RAC made a commitment to try for a

consensus recommendation on one of the alternatives or a combination. If the RAC can come up with a consensus, it would be a powerful statement.

Q: Is there anything as a RAC that we can do to urge the FS to get on with it and not go through another long study period?

A: If the new FS Supervisor decides to delay and use the new process, I think it would be helpful to have a recommendation from the RAC to keep the process as it is. We're not holding up things on our (BLM's) end by waiting to find out the Supervisor's decision.

Comments:

- For there to be meaningful community involvement, we need to eventually look at something.
- Keep us informed; we could do an interim meeting if it looks like it would help.

CENTENNIAL MOUNTAINS TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE AND DISCUSSION (Mark Goeden)

Last March we sent out the first public scoping to explain the area, and received about 60-65 responses, primarily from the environmental community. Another notice was sent last November to get responses from other groups; we received about 12 that time. Main issues from the scoping are snowmobile use, lynx habitat, what trails will be maintain/not maintained, what facilities will be maintained/built (including signing, trail heads). Limited motorized access points is another issue. Another issue is our management responsibility on the Sheep Experiment Station. We have a Memorandum of Understanding with the Agricultural Research Service that we manage recreation on the Experiment Station, but our enforcement may be limited because the ARS does not have any enforcement authority to assign to the BLM.

Rick Waldrup (Dillon BLM) plans to have a draft EIS by April 1 and a public comment period on the draft plan and EA from about April 1 to May 15. We are looking for a final decision record by July 1.

Q: Are grayling and WCT issues?

A: Yes, as they are related to the issues I've just stated. These are issues we have to address in our NEPA but were not brought up by public comments.

Comment: I thought the environmentalists sent out a draft of the Targhee plan. What Targhee decides will have an impact on what BLM may decide upon.

Reply: We will have to look at Targhee impacts. Since the entire planning area is bordered by the Targhee National Forest on the Idaho/Montana line, we will have to consider their travel plan in completing ours.

Q: Can BLM and Targhee sit down together and cooperate?

A: There have been attempts to do that. The topography on other side is very different. On our side there is very limited access, while their side has much more access.

Comments:

- There are three access points and a fourth is a gravel pit. That's reasonable access to that piece of country.
- I'm concerned about more access from the Idaho side.
- There's no parking at the O' Dell access point.
- The Sleeping Giant Management Plan--it never moves anywhere, except the date is moved forward all the time. The public gets steamed up, but nothing happens; BLM loses credibility because of this.
- Dates for use and nonuse for snowmobiles could be set, but if BLM closes it, then you're going to have more problems. If you close it you'll have illegal use; if you restrict it, at least you'll have something.
- I think the key is timing.

Mark: BLM wanted the RAC to be informed when this comes out.

MOTION:

A motion was made that "the RAC support, in principal, the use of toxicants to assist in recovering WCT populations." Discussion was held on the language of the motion.

Consensus was reached on the following language: "The WMRAC recognizes there are a variety of tools to assist in native fish restoration. These tools include fish removal, habitat alteration, harvest manipulation, and toxicants. The WMRAC supports the use of any and/or all of these tools where determined to be appropriate." The motion was passed.

SAGE GROUSE RESEARCH AND MANAGEMENT UPDATE AND DISCUSSION

(Mark Goeden)

We don't know that much about sage grouse in southwestern Montana. We've worked with MDFWP, FS and conservation groups to try to develop a study plan. We have put together a project plan for the area between Grant and Badger Pass. The idea was to put radios on sage grouse in the early spring and track them during the year to see how big of an area they use and what kind of habitat they use. The college has been doing a lot of the tracking, and the Gallatin Wildlife Association has helped.

We caught nine grouse last year from four different areas. Radio telemetry on these birds was started in early May, while they were still in the strutting grounds. We did some aerial flight tracking. Most of the birds ended up on wet meadows on private lands in the fall. Males were more wide-roaming than females. A couple of the grouse died, one was taken by a hunter and a couple by predators. The types of habitat that the birds were using was documented each time the birds were re-located. We hope to learn more about the habitat preferences of sage grouse during different times of the year through this study. We plan to continue this study.

There have been winter sightings. A site characterization is being done. We know they move back to the sagebrush areas in late fall. Four of the six males ended up in high elevations during the summer. We were surprised that the males moved so much. Still, our findings are pretty preliminary at this point. Other information we collected included how many other birds were found with the "radioed" birds.

This year we plan to follow the current radio transmitters as long as they last. We would like to get another 10 to 15 transmitters, plus the five from last year, so we can "radio" more birds this coming year. We'd also like to expand our efforts outside this study area, such as in the Medicine Lodge and Big Sheep Creek areas. We'd like to have more intensive monitoring on the strutting grounds and better harvest data. We will continue to use volunteers for monitoring.

Q: Is the BLM and MDFWP working together on sage grouse in other areas?

A: I'm not aware of any studies in other parts of Montana at this time. When we start putting the information together, we can compare the information we collected with that collected in other study areas.

Comment: There's monitoring being done at Sand Springs and Winnett, where there are 500 grouse in a group. Many are in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) where there is no sagebrush. BLM could gain time and information by talking to other areas.

Reply: Yes, but we need information for the sage grouse habitat in Western Montana.

Comments:

- I think we need less sagebrush, we could put prescribed burns on the next meeting's agenda.
- Plant succession may have a lot to do with wildlife.
- Why would the Fish and Game have an open season on something that's scarce? They even raised the bag limit.

FIELD MANAGER UPDATES

Nancy Anderson, Missoula Field Office

Personnel: We've had two critical positions open: a fisheries biologist and a hydrologist. We have a replacement for the hydrologist, and the fisheries biologist position has been announced. Our Assistant Field Manager just accepted a position in Carson City.

First year funding is available from the Clean Water Fund. We were successful in obtaining funding for the Elk Creek area and the lower Blackfoot (sedimentation reduction).

The lynx decision has been delayed; we expect one in a couple of weeks. Rumors are that the lynx will be listed. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), FS and BLM are trying to pull information together for assessment. About 50% of our jurisdictional area will be involved.

Q: Is anyone bringing together all the mapping statewide?

A: We've been doing it by unit. There are no overlapping units for us.

Mark: BLM and FS biologists have been working together on this to be consistent in the western zone on how the analysis is applied.

Steve H: We've identified our habitat in conjunction with the FS, but we don't know how much land is involved yet.

Mark: We're mostly looking at riparian stringers between forest stands.

Q: What criteria is being used?

Bill Dean: An interagency team (BLM, FS, NPS, USFWS) developed the Draft Canada Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy. In this strategy there are criteria for identifying lynx habitat.

Currently we are working on ongoing projects such as grazing permits and are in the process of identifying where potential habitats are distributed across the landscape. At this stage, we are using satellite imagery data to identify potential habitats. When we move on to a significant habitat-altering project like a timber sale, we will use our timber stand data acquired through aerial photos and ground-truthing.

Some criteria used to identify potential lynx habitat includes subalpine fir, moist Douglas fir where lodgepole pine is a major seral species, and above 5,500 feet to 9,000 feet in elevation.

There's still a lot to learn about lynx, which will change our classification of habitat and our determination of effects. For example, we have no information on how recreation affects the lynx. Regarding whether the lynx will be listed or not, I don't know and the biologists involved are hesitant to comment on their recommendations. Everyone is hesitant at this point. The impression I'm getting is that as long as our Range Program sticks with our S&Gs, we should be home free. Good range condition is probably good lynx habitat. The lynx is not listed yet, it's only proposed. We have a policy to consult with the USFWS on proposed species listing.

Q: Do you have an opinion on whether they should be listed?

A: I don't have enough information to make that call.

Steve Hartmann, Butte Field Office

Here's our project workload briefly:

Three land exchanges: Ward Ranch, Buckner, and Golden Sunlight Mine. Golden Sunlight Mine wants their exchange so they can acquire land for a buffer, plus they have big plans for the community of Whitehall. This looks like a good exchange for the public.

Three EISs are in process: Big Belts, TailPipe, and Clancy/Unionville. The Clancy/Unionville Final EIS should be out in a week; we expect a decision in May. In the South Elkhorns, we're implementing our EA (prescribed burns)

We'll be doing the Little Boulder Vegetation Treatment with the FS this spring.

The Abandoned Mine Lands Project is a zone effort. Work is progressing on the High Ore Creek, Red Wing/Waldy, Linton Mine and Rochester Basin site assessments. Cataract Creek and Basin Creek drainages are now Superfund sites; some BLM lands are involved. The Silver Creek drainage and lower Indian Creek assessments have been contracted out. We recently hired another geologist; she will be doing a lot of the assessment work.

We've obtained a road grader and operator-the Dillon FO and Butte FO will split the costs. Lots of recreation work is coming up, as well as completion of Devil's Elbow.

We have various range projects in the works: 150 acres of burning in Big Hole River area,

14 allotments for are up for renewal this fiscal year.

Q: About project time lines, can the RAC help with getting the projects moving faster? What can we do?

A: The TailPipe project is our highest priority, because of the public trust issue. I think the other projects are moving along fine time-wise.

Comment: It's been brought up several times today that project delays erode public trust. Maybe the RAC can speak on this and provide an influence.

Mark Goeden, Dillon Field Office

Our Range Program is focused on permit renewals (about 18), and we're doing NEPA reviews on those. We've have some S&Gs scheduled for this year.

Update on the Oil & Gas Use Amendment for our land use plan: we plan to get through Chapter 3 this spring. We may have funding to start a Resource Management Plan next year but we plan to continue with the O&G amendment.

Have had negotiations with LEMA, a contractor under retainer with BLM, to get our GIS up to speed.

Lands exchanges: Axolotl Lake is stalled due to a holdup on the appraisal. The Washington Office is requiring that appraisals be done before we can put out a notice-this is creating problems.

The entire Dillon Field Office has been approved as a fee demonstration area for recreation. We can put more of the fees we collect directly back into the Recreation Program.

Q: Does Dillon have any fee sites?

A: We have three on the Madison River.

We're continuing with the East Grasshopper Vegetation Management Project. Scott Powers would like to take the RAC on a tour of this area. Proposed management includes prescribed burning, road management, and grazing management. This area is also in the sage grouse study area. The scoping notice went out last fall. We're putting together the first couple of chapters and developing alternatives.

The Dillon vermiculite mine: An EA was done last year, but now, with the Libby situation, it has come to the forefront. We may have to take another look at the EA.

The experimental Stewardship Program is still active and ongoing. The East Pioneers Experimental Stewardship group will be hosting the National meeting and tour August 21-23.

Muddy Creek Allotment: We issued the final AMP decision in December. We received a request for a stay and an appeal from the Gallatin Wildlife Association. A request for a stay goes directly to the Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA). They have 45 days to make a decision on the motion for stay. The second part of this is the appeal which goes to the Office of Hearings and Appeals. IBLA wants more information from us before making a decision on the stay. There is a 3- to 4-year lag time on hearing appeals. One of the appellants has gotten his side of info out via e-mail.

Q: Would Muddy Creek be a possibility for alternative dispute resolution?

A: It would be a challenge!

Meeting adjourned.