

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