

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