

**Southeast Oregon Resource Advisory Council (SEORAC) Meeting
Final Minutes December 8-9, 2003
Hines, Oregon**

RAC Members Present: Group Number:

Tom Harris	1
Mark Ferns	1
John Bishop	2
Bob Kindschy	2
Jill Workman	2
Cecil Dick	3
Chuck Graham	3
Jane O'Keeffe	3
Walt Van Dyke	3

Federal Officials Present:

Joe Tague acting for Steve Ellis, DFO
 Dave Henderson Vale BLM
 Terry Sodorff acting for Karen Shimamoto, Fremont/Winema NF's
 Sandy Berain acting Burns BLM

 Pam Talbott, Recorder
 Lisa Swinney, Facilitator

Absent:

Chad Boyd	3
Dennis Hitt	1
Dick Leever	1
Lee Belknap	2
2 Vacant Positions	

Guests:

Tom Rasmussen	Cody Hansen
Joan Suther	Tom Seley
Bonnie Wood	Rhonda Karges
Hugh Barrett	Dave Harmon
Gary Foulkes	Melvin Dick

Lisa Swinney, Facilitator

- Meeting opened at 8:00 am with a review of the agenda.
- Rhonda and all the Burns people were thanked for all their help in setting up the meeting.

Jill Workman, RAC Chair

- The committee lacked a quorum as two members of Group 1 could not make the meeting and a third position is still vacant.
 - No final decisions could be made at this meeting.
- Jill introduced new member, Chuck Graham followed by self-introductions.
- Joe Tague was acting Designated Federal Official for Steve Ellis.
- There are two committee vacancies still outstanding.
- Chad Boyd proposed a letter to the Washington Office (WO) about the importance of timely appointments to the committee. Committee members can submit their concern as individuals and the committee will consider Chad's letter at next meeting.

Meeting Dates and Locations for 2004

- February 23-24, 2004 Hines/Burns, Oregon
- May 24-25, 2004 Lakeview, Oregon
- August 23-24, 2004 Bend, Oregon
- November 18-19, 2004 Vale/Ontario, Oregon
 - There was some discussion about conference calls. They are hard to get discussions on new items but very efficient for follow-up and votes. Group decided conference calls would be good only if needed but not for a regular meeting.

Update on National Fire Plan

Bonnie Wood, Regional Office and Oregon State Office

- National Fire Plan is a collaborative approach for reducing wildland fire risks to communities and the environment. This plan is a 10-year comprehensive strategy linked to the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003.
- Healthy Forest Restoration Act has six objectives.
 - To reduce wildfire risk to communities.
 - To authorize grant programs to improve commercial value of forest biomass.
 - To enhance efforts to protect watersheds and address threats to forests and rangeland health.
 - To promote systematic gathering of information on impact of insect and disease infestations.
 - To improve the capacity to detect infestations early.
 - To protect, restore and enhance forest ecosystem components.
- The four goals of the fire plan include the following plus accountability.
 - Improve fire prevention and suppression, become “firewise”.
 - Promote collaboration with Federal, Tribal, State and local agencies to reduce hazardous fuels.
 - Restore fire adapted ecosystems through restoration projects.
 - Promote community assistance with involvement in projects and grants.
- National Fire Plan combined interagency grants.
 - FY 2002 - \$4.1 million
 - FY 2003 - \$5.6 million
 - FY 04 – 132 Grant applications received
 - FY 04 - \$23 million in requests (not including RFA/VFA grants)
- Biomass grants are available to operators that use biomass for commercial purposes. These grants are to offset the costs incurred to purchase the biomass.
- The Fire Plan includes accountability for measuring and monitoring performance and outcomes.
- Reducing the risk from wildland and wildland-urban interface fires will reduce the risk to communities, citizens and firefighters.
- Bonnie handed out an Outline for a community fire plan.

Update on the Sage Grouse Conservation Plan

Hugh Barrett, Oregon State Office

- National Fish & Wildlife Service (USF&WS) has been ordered by a Federal judge to issue a 90 day finding on listing the sage grouse. The finding is due in January. After this, we will see if the sage grouse will go on to the 12 month study.
- Comments on the Sage Grouse Conservation Plan have gone to the WO. Several committee members made personal comments to the WO.
- WO needs to tell states what the direction will be and what the strategy is.
- State of Oregon and BLM have different plans.
- Hugh expressed concern that the strategy, conservation plan and 90 day finding may be in conflict.

Update on Sustainable Working Landscapes (SWL)

Hugh Barrett, Oregon State Office

- The proposed grazing rule of the BLM would revise existing Federal grazing regulations under three categories of action.
 - Improving working relationships with grazing permittees and lessees.

- Assessing and protecting rangelands.
- Addressing legal issues and enhancing administrative efficiency.
- The proposed rule would make no changes in rangeland health standards and guidelines that were developed by the RAC's under Rangeland Reform.
- The proposal would not establish "Reserve Common Allotments".
- RAC's will still exist to advise the BLM.
- Federal grazing fee calculation formula would not be changed.
- The draft EIS will have a 60 day comment period. The rules comment period will end when the draft EIS comment period ends.

Healthy Forest Initiative as it Relates to Eastern Oregon

Dave Harmon, Oregon State Office

- The Healthy Forest Initiative was issued by President Bush, August 2002 after the Biscuit fire. He had concerns over major fires throughout the west.
- This initiative is about forest and rangeland health concerns after 100 years of fire suppression that have caused an interruption in the 10 or more year fire cycle.
 - Fire exclusion creates dense stands with fuel ladders from ground to crown. This lead to severe crown and stand replacement fires instead of the lighter historic fires.
 - Disease and insects more prevalent now than in the past.
- Restoration activities include thinning both pre-commercial and commercial, pruning, timber salvage and reintroducing ground fire. Stands should be thinned first to reduce the risk of crown fires.
 - Aspen stands need stabilizing.
 - Protect old growth stands.
- Challenges – inventories outdated, information held by senior staff that are near retirement and not in records.
 - Funding is low for inventories.
 - Forestry staff reductions and many retiring within 5 years.
 - Streamline NEPA process and court delays.

Steens/Andrews Resource Management Plan Update

Gary Foulkes, Burns District BLM

- The Steens/Andrews Resource Management Plan is scheduled to be finished by 2004. It is a complex and large document. Reviewers should concentrate on points of interest for making comments.
- RAC would like a summary of the comments on this plan presented at the February 23-24 meeting.

Public Comment

- No public comments.

Field Trip to Burns Wild Horse Facility

Cody Hansen and Tom Seley, Burns District BLM

- Cody discussed the working of the facility and introduced Tom Seley the project manager.
- They try to only keep the horses 30-40 days in this temporary facility then move them out to adoption or long term care facilities.
- Group walked through the processing barn then out to the corrals.
 - Horses separated by age and sex in corrals.
 - Group saw a corral with Kiger yearling horses and the Paisley horses that were just gathered.

Federal Official Update

Dave Henderson, Vale District BLM

- They have a lawsuit on the Southeast Oregon Resource Plan. Hearing scheduled for February or March. No stay was issued so implementation of the plan can continue.
 - Malheur group is working on rangeland fire plan. One of the big concerns is volunteers helping with fires.
 - Similar to Nevada idea but Oregon is more stringent about having firefighting standards in place.
 - Oregon must have an incident commander (IC) on site before volunteers can be considered. It takes long time for ICs to reach fires in some circumstances.
 - BLM is working with OCA to work out details.

Sandy Berain acting District Manager, Burns District BLM.

- The District Manager job will be readvertised in January.
- Tom Seley is the new Wild Horse and Burro Program Manager.
- Oregon State Office is looking at the costs of the BLM and FS collocation into a new joint building.

Terry Sodorff for Karen Shimamoto, Fremont-Winema NF's

- Karen is at the Klamath tribe meeting on the return of tribal lands.
- Fremont-Winema is trying for salvage sales on fire areas. Doing fire rehabilitation using watershed areas and including private lands.

Joe Tague for Steve Ellis, Lakeview District BLM

- Lakeview RMP is at printers. The protest period is over.
 - Developing an implementation and business plan that ties management actions under the RMP to the budget.
- North Lake Recreation Plan funded to begin in FY04.
- Working with Sheldon Wildlife Refuge on wild horse gather. Sheldon is paying and BLM for this gather.

Council Member Roundtable

- John Bishop - no comment.
- Walt Van Dyke – no comment.
- Tom Harris – Would like an update on the Blackfoot Group. They operate as a grass roots group working on issues like wolves, grizzly, bull trout, not lawsuits and with collaborative approach. This is parallel to the RAC work.
- Cecil Dick – no comment.
- Chuck Graham – no comment.
- Bob Kindschy – would like to address the fire issue in Malheur County. The issue should be prevention of weeds such as cheat grass.
- Jane O’Keeffe – Worried about getting continual updates and not giving advice to the agencies.
 - RAC group needs an in-depth project to delve into.
- Jill Workman – Worried about the issue of not getting new members appointed timely and meeting without a quorum. RAC group needs to be more action oriented.

Rangeland Health Assessment Program - Reported by District

Hugh Barrett, Oregon State Office

- RAC was going to keep track of rangeland health issues.

- Each District has different policies for meeting the standards and guidelines.
- Establish a priority list by District, which is effected by permit renewals.
 - Allotments to assess.
 - Issues – resource priorities
 - Range health

Tom Rasmussen, Lakeview District BLM

- District is in the process of assessing their allotments for standards and guidelines and will be complete by 2008.
 - The allotments are prioritized on a watershed basis or individual basis.
 - Lakeview Resource Area is 47% complete.
 - Klamath Falls Resource Area is 40% complete.
 - Standards most commonly not met were attributed to livestock grazing problems in areas one, two and four.
 - Most commonly used corrective measure were changes in livestock management.
 - Implementation of rest or deferment in grazing system.
 - Season of use changes.
 - Development of riparian pastures.
 - Livestock exclusion.
 - Livestock use reductions.

Dave Henderson, Vale District BLM

- Progress not as good as Lakeview. Working on a watershed basis and attacking largest acreages first. Having shortage of staff and time to do field work, writing and other job requirements.
- Riparian wetlands are having the most problems.

Joan Suther, Burns District BLM

- 50% of acres have been evaluated.
- 141 Allotments have been completed with all standards met on 82% of these.
- Riparian areas and fire rehabilitation most commonly not met areas.
- Weed issue big problem with medusa head most serious followed by perennial pepperweed and knapweed species
- Livestock factors also visible.

RAC Response to 2006 Budget Priorities and Initiatives

Jill Workman

- RAC requested documents from Districts and Forest Service that did not arrive prior to the meeting. The agencies need to do better on this in the future.
- District responses.
 - Joe Tague: The Lakeview District priorities for 2006 include:
 - Continue with RMP implementation.
 - Development of the North Lake Special Recreation Plan
 - Cultural and OHV issues
 - Working on sage grouse, pygmy rabbit and Warner sucker inventories and ecology
 - Stepped up fuels treatments and prescribed burns
 - Inventory of noxious weeds
 - OHV travel management plans and road posting.

- Dave Henderson: The Vale District priorities for 2006 included:
 - Working on north end planning effort with Malheur NF.
 - Involved with National Fire Plan and fuels reduction.
 - Healthy Forest and Rangelands Health
 - Permit renewals under rangeland health
 - Reprinting recreation maps for area.
- Joan Suther: The Burns District priorities for 2006 included:
 - Implementation of the Steens/Andrews RMP
 - Amendments to the Three Rivers RMP
 - Juniper and sagebrush restoration
 - Pygmy rabbit inventories. Walt commented that grants are available on pygmy rabbit habitat.
- Hugh Barrett: Contract with OSU to develop a guide to help sage and juniper restoration efforts. It includes:
 - Five year project
 - Juniper management/rangelands fuels treatment
 - Looks at ecosystems in Oregon, Nevada, and Idaho
 - Looks at the use of fire and mechanical treatments
- **RAC Priority List** after discussion of group
 - National and local, in order of importance.
 - Noxious Weeds
 - National Fire Plan
 - Healthy Forests and Rangelands – includes restoration activities
 - Special Status Species - sage grouse, pygmy rabbits, and other species
 - Wild Horses and Burros
- RAC will concentrate on these areas and capture them as part of the work plan.

Subcommittee Reports

Jill Workman

- Since the committees were not complete with members, those present decided to meet later when everyone could be present. The subcommittees will report on their activities at the next meeting.

Noxious Weeds Program

Joan Suther for Miles Brown, Burns District BLM

- National Vegetation Treatment EIS addresses treatments and prevention mitigation for noxious weeds (as well as fuels and unwanted vegetation).
 - Primary importance is the update and analysis of existing and new herbicides.
 - Web sites available but working very well.
- Each state plans to sign a separate Record of Decision on this.
- Following the Decision, the Oregon BLM will seek relief from the 1987 Court injunction limiting BLM to 4 chemicals for treatment of noxious weeds in Oregon.
 - Many new chemicals are safer and more target specific.
- The draft EIS is scheduled for completion during the winter of 2004.
- Jill - Miles Brown suggested that each District report specific weeds in their area.
 - Add this to the agenda for each area meeting.
- Tom Harris, asked about OHV cleaning facilities and inspections.

- Jill - Contact Wyden and Smith and share concerns with helping to get this legislation passed on the National level.

Wild Horse and Burro Program Update

Tom Seley, Burns District BLM

- There are 19 Herd Management Areas (HMA) in Oregon.
 - Currently 11 are within the appropriate management levels (AML).
 - BLM needs to remove 1160 animals in FY04 and the same in FY05 to achieve midpoint of AML.
 - All Oregon wild horse herds contain quality animals that are appealing to adopters because of color, conformation and disposition.
 - Drought conditions in SE Oregon major concern for herds.
- Long term holding facilities are reaching capacity. Hoping to get two new facilities in mid-west. Pasture type facilities best but horses have long life. Overflow facilities are expensive to run.
- Funding is continual issue.
 - Need to work on plan to get capacity down for multiple-use of rangelands.
 - Wild Horse Act as amended does allow for destruction of horses excess animals but appropriation legislation always restricts to gather and holding only.
 - Horse adoption fees goes to transportation costs of the program.
- Burns facility has an adoption February 7th. Then open adoptions with the remainder going to Roseburg and two WA adoptions.
- John Bishop stated that the gathering contractor was very good at handling horses and not injuring them.

Future Meeting Topics

- Dave Henderson - Does SEO RAC want a joint meeting again? Did we really get time to interface with other groups?
 - Not enough exchange of ideas and not enough mixing.
 - Bob Kindschy suggested a joint meeting every other year..
- Cecil Dick asked why the refuges are not involved with the RAC?
 - Jill stated that they are not listed in the charter as members.
- The RAC would like a change in the boundaries of the SEO RAC to include all of Fremont-Winema NF's and Klamath Resource Area.
 - This would have to start early in the charter renewal process.
- Council would like Forest Service units to come with projects that need support and include other groups in joint projects. Read legislation and work on interpreting legislation to advantage of good projects. Find one topic and go into detail to make something work.

Next Meeting Items

- Elect new chair and vice-chair.
- 30 minute weeds report from Burns February 23-23, 2004 meeting. Other units when RAC meets at their location.
- Letter to WO about delays in RAC member appointments.
- Comment summary review on Steens/Andrews RMP.
- Charter changes.
- Solicitor from Forest Service to talk about the appeal process changes and categorical exclusions.
- Response to the proposed grazing regulations.
- Discuss new Healthy Forest legislation with speaker from Forest Service.

- Proposed Healthy Forest projects from the units that the RAC can help prioritize and support for funding.
- Subcommittee reports-one in depth report at each meeting.
 - Charter a subcommittee for the National Fire Plan
 - Grazing regulations in depth.

Other items:

- Notify Jill if you can not make a meeting.
- Next meeting will be February 23-24, 2004 at Burns District BLM Office, Hines, Oregon.
- RAC would like a contact for the Vegetative EIS.
- Meeting adjourned Tuesday December 9, 2003 at 11:00 am.