

Southeast Oregon Resource Advisory Council
A Federal Advisory Committee

Committee Members

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1784 (010)

October 22, 1999

Steve Ellis
District Manager
Lakeview District BLM
HC 10 Box 337
Lakeview, Oregon 97630

Dear Steve:

The Southeast Oregon Resource Advisory Council (RAC) has completed work on what the majority of its members consider to be the first stage in the development of a Steens Mountain Cooperative Management Program. The attached report is our recommendation to the Secretary of the Interior.

The initial work on this report was undertaken by a Subcommittee of the RAC. The professionalism and dedication of the group cannot be overemphasized. The subcommittee made one fact-finding trip to the mountain and several individual trips. They conducted three public meetings; in Frenchglen, Bend, and at the October 14th RAC meeting in Lakeview. In addition they received and reviewed approximately 60 pieces of written testimony.

The issue of how the Steens Mountain should be managed is complex and controversial. Depending on placement of the boundary, there are as many as 278 landowners. Much of the private land is located in the most scenic areas and often includes major portions of the mountain and riparian areas.

The subcommittee witnessed essentially two conflicting points of view during its public hearings and in the end, as individual RAC members tried to represent the views of their constituencies, we reflected these differences in our own deliberations. We recognize that our decisions will not please everyone, but feel very strongly that we took our charge very seriously. Our report represents the result of countless individual hours of research, discussion and soul searching. The RAC has always worked as a team and strived for consensus. Until this issue we were able to reach consensus or the matter did not go forward. In the case of this report, many individual votes had to be taken to reach a majority decision.

Designated Federal Official

Steve Ellis

c/o Lakeview District
Bureau of Land Management
HC 10 Box 337
Lakeview, Oregon 97630

Use of the mountain for many forms of recreation draws people from throughout Oregon and the western United States. In public testimony and written comments the subcommittee found the desires of the local people do not necessarily always agree with those living outside Harney County. Most people and groups testifying from Harney County and eastern Oregon, and especially the local landowners and County Commissioners quite strongly opposed any designation for Steens Mountain. Most organizations and individuals from Western Oregon and some from central Oregon primarily advocated a National Recreation Area or National Monument, or favored a large scale wilderness designation.

As we reviewed testimony and written comments several key issues emerged.

FINDINGS

The short time frame we were given to formulate our report was extremely difficult to accommodate. Given more time, the team could have expanded and perhaps come to agreement on more of the issues. This fires our desire to continue to be a key player in the further management of Steens Mountain.

- Secretary Babbitt himself, in visiting with us, said that management on Steens Mountain was very effective and the partnerships and programs were working better here than any place in the west.
- The huge amount of private land within the proposed boundary makes this place different from any other site proposed for some type of federal designation.
- Grazing and wilderness are sensitive issues that need much more deliberation.
- A majority of the testimony indicated users did not want more people drawn to the mountain because of the potential for ecosystem damage and the management problems that could be created. They were divided however on how to resolve this issue.
- A major issue was the proposal of some federal designation for the mountain, either National Park, National Monument or National Conservation Area.

The RAC's recommendations are as follows:

- Current management programs are working and there should be no designation of a National Park or National Monument. We could not agree to support legislative designation as a National Conservaton Area. We left open however the option of some other form of legislation based on the management framework that we are forwarding.
- The future management program should be called: "The Steens Mountain Cooperative Management Program."
- Our intent is that this report be a starting point for the formation of a cooperative management program for Steens Mountain. We encourage the formation of a broad based management team of users and landowners that will take the concepts that the RAC has developed and use them in conjunction with the current programs and partnerships to move forward in a dynamic management program.

- The mountain should stay under BLM management.

The RAC very much appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the management of Steens Mountain. It is our desire to have a role in, and support any management team or program that is formulated as a result of this or any other action.

In closing, it is important to note that I am extremely proud of the RAC members. They have participated in a contentious and potentially divisive atmosphere, had wide differences of opinions, did not always get what they wanted, but always maintained the respect and professionalism that has been a hallmark of this group.

Sincerely,



Mike Golden, Chair
Southeast Oregon
Resource Advisory Council

Enclosure (as stated)

PRIVATE LAND

We must recognize the value of private lands to the Steens Mountain. There are over 200,000 acres in the Steens area of consideration with 239 individual ownerships being an integral part of the landscape. Primary use of private land is grazing, ranching, and recreational uses, including hunting and fishing. Most of the private land is zoned “Exclusive Farm” use except for a few small parcels.

The Southeast Oregon RAC recommends:

- Recognition of existing land ownership and uses.
- Recognition that private lands are the key to landscape management.
- Land acquisitions and exchanges should be designed to minimize the adverse impact on local economies
- Allow for “willing seller” acquisition and land exchanges
- No federal condemnation authority
- Avoiding creation of situations requiring private land disposal by landowners
- The continued use of partnerships for the successful management of the mosaic of public and private lands
Examples: Open access, fewer fences, riparian improvements

GRAZING

Livestock grazing is administered on 42 allotments in the Steens Mountain area. There are 37 grazing permits all managed under Section 3 of the Taylor Grazing Act. Approximately 92,400 AUM's of grazing are authorized.

Management of this activity should continue with the following consensus points:

- There are areas and times when grazing should not be allowed
- Grazing should be maintained as a habitat management tool for fish and wildlife benefit
- Recognize that changing conditions occur
- Recognize grazing is a historic and viable component of Steens Mountain where appropriate

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

Vegetation is the product or result of soils, climate, topography, organisms, and time. Vegetation kinds and amounts may be and often are strongly influenced by the kind of land uses, and past as well as present management, for those uses. Plants need the opportunity to grow and reproduce in order to compete successfully. Management of existing vegetation communities are necessary to meet a range in desired future conditions. Healthy, well-functioning watersheds result when a desirable mix of plants exist on each ecological site. Vegetation management is key to proper fish and wildlife habitat management.

The Southeast Oregon RAC recommends:

- Aggressively treat, control, and otherwise manage noxious weeds, invasive, and undesirable vegetation that impact the well-functioning watershed capability of each site
- Recognizing healthy riparian conditions as key indicators of proper management
- Maintaining management tools and options, including but not limited to prescribed fire, mechanical, biological, and chemical control
- Maintaining and enhance healthy stands of aspen and other native vegetation types in an array of seral stages.
- Recognizing the critical importance of vegetation management on a landscape scale, i.e. undesirability of land fragmentation
- Paying special attention to aesthetics
- Recognizing the importance of monitoring with good science and achievable goals
- Managing western juniper to maintain or enhance watershed function while recognizing that juniper is an important wildlife habitat component

PARTNERSHIPS

Currently over 36 partnership activities and relationships exist and are ongoing regarding management on Steens Mountain. Such relationships are a product both of need and willingness of people in private ownership and many public agencies, universities, various interest groups, and individuals to cooperate in achieving some common important result, product, or outcome.

The Southeast Oregon RAC recommends:

- Partnerships as vital to management on a landscape level and continuing private/public land connections
- Encouraging and sustaining maintenance of existing partnerships, and building upon them for future management partnerships
- Encouraging a diversity of partnership opportunities
- Providing for an effective “climate” or “environment” for involvement
- Partnerships should continue to be an integral part of future planning
- Encouraging government participation in partnerships
- Aggressively cultivating a volunteer base for partnerships in management projects

FISH AND WILDLIFE

The private and public lands of Steens Mountain provide habitats for a wide range of fish and wildlife species. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife has primary responsibility for managing fish and wildlife populations, and works in a cooperative manner with private and public land managers to provide long-term, suitable habitats for species. Future management of the fish and wildlife resources and their habitats on Steens Mountain.

The Southeast Oregon RAC recommends:

- Continuing to provide hunting/fishing/viewing opportunities consistent with the laws of the State of Oregon
- Maintaining access to provide for dispersed recreation with road management where appropriate
- Minimizing conflicts between wildlife and livestock
- Allowing the State of Oregon to continue to monitor and manage wildlife population levels and the reintroduction of extirpated native fish and wildlife
- Managing for potential threatened and endangered species
- Management emphasis for native wildlife (habitat manipulation, private/public ownership)
- Maintaining partnerships vital to providing for fish and wildlife resources
- Continuing to recognize private land contributions to fish and wildlife habitat and populations and associated recreational opportunities
- Continuing fish stocking when it does not conflict with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODF&W) wild fish policy
- Seeking opportunities to maintain integrity of large private ownerships, i.e. conservation easements to maintain habitat integrity
- Emphasizing conservation agreements
- Emphasizing landscape scale management
- Minimizing conflicts between wildlife and recreational uses

RECREATION

There is a potential for significant resource impacts with repetitive or increased use. Direction should be established to provide adequate opportunities, but limit recreation-oriented facilities on Steens Mountain. Current recreational activities include driving for pleasure, camping, picnicking, hiking, biking, photography, hunting, fishing, nature study, rockhounding, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, equestrian, and OHV use. Monitoring and limits of acceptable change must be established.

The Southeast Oregon RAC recommends:

- Providing for adequate levels of family-oriented outings
- Expanding existing facilities within the region to meet the demand, but minimizing new recreational facilities on the mountain proper
- Monitoring of recreational use to minimize adverse effects on resources
- Pro-actively addressing increases in demand and new forms of recreation
- Continuing to periodically assess the mix and use of recreation levels to limit conflict
- Providing educational material that will encourage ethical behavior and tolerance
- Recognizing private property contributions to recreation and involve land owners in recreational decisions when private land is involved
- Recognizing the impact of over use

TRANSPORTATION AND ACCESS

Provide adequate and reasonable access to Steens Mountain for both recreational and administrative needs.

The Southeast Oregon RAC recommends:

- Recognizing roads as open unless posted closed
- Recognizing private property access and partnerships are essential to maintaining adequate access
- Road conditions - current standard
- Retaining primitive nature of road systems
- Developing a comprehensive transportation plan

WILDERNESS

After extensive discussion and review, the Southeast Oregon RAC reached consensus only on one phase of this issue.

- Wilderness has a place on Steens Mountain

Exact extent and location was not agreed upon, and is deferred to the RAC subgroup for further research, study, discussion, and agreement.

WILD HORSE MANAGEMENT

To ensure continued existence and viability of existing wild horse herd management areas as follows:

Kiger HMA - Featuring Spanish Mustang characteristics

Riddle Mountain HMA - Featuring Spanish Mustang characteristics

South Steens HMA - Featuring Paints and Pintos

The Southeast Oregon RAC recommends:

- Maintaining and managing wild horse herds in established Herd Management Areas at Appropriate Management Levels
- Protecting and preserving special genetic characteristics

MINING & MINERALS MANAGEMENT

The Southeast Oregon RAC recommends:

- That the current temporary withdrawal for locateable minerals should become permanent and be extended to leaseable minerals on Steens Mountain proper. Saleable mineral activities should be grandfathered only below the 6000 foot elevation. No new sales would be permitted above 6000 feet.
- Rockhounding activities should be allowed to continue.

BOUNDARY

To accept green line perimeter as current but temporary boundary for area of consideration.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

The Southeast Oregon RAC recommends:

- Recognition of all identified cultural and historical sites
- Providing protection for fish and wildlife resources
- Protecting archaeological sites - don't disclose locations
- Protecting historical homestead sites on the mountain

RESOURCES TO MANAGE

The Southeast Oregon RAC recommends:

- Adequate funding
 - visitor facilities
 - monitoring for grazing impacts, recreational impacts, and visitor use
- Adequate staffing
- Utilizing best science