

Steens Mountain Advisory Council

Meeting Minutes

August 15 and 16, 2002

Members Present:

Jerry Sutherland, Vice Chair, Environmental Representative – Statewide,
Portland, Oregon.
Tom Harris, Chair, Mechanized or Consumptive Recreation, Keno, Oregon
Stacy Davies, Grazing Permittee, Frenchglen, Oregon
Wanda Johnson, Burns Paiute Tribe, Burns, Oregon
Cynthia Witzel, Recreation Permit Holder, Frenchglen, Oregon
Steve Purchase, State Liaison, Salem, Oregon
Alice Elshoff, Environmental Representative – Local, Frenchglen, Oregon (not an
official member - no reappointment made by the Secretary of the Interior)
Hoyt Wilson, Grazing Permittee, Princeton, Oregon (not an official member - no
reappointment made by the Secretary of the Interior)

Members Absent:

Jason Miner, Fish and Recreational Fishing, Portland, Oregon
E. Ron Harding, Wild Horse Management, Burns, Oregon
Harland Yriarte, Private Landowner, Eugene, Oregon

Designated Federal Official (DFO):

Tom Dyer, Burns District Manager, Bureau of Land Management (BLM),
Hines, Oregon

Designated Federal Official Assistants:

Rhonda Karges, Management Support Specialist, BLM, Hines, Oregon
Liz Appelman, Budget Analyst, BLM, Hines, Oregon
Tara Wilson, Public Affairs Specialist, BLM, Hines, Oregon

Presenters:

Joan Suther, Three Rivers Resource Area Field Manager, BLM, Hines, Oregon
Jim Buchanan, Range Management Specialist, BLM, Hines, Oregon
Jon Collins, Supervisory Natural Resource Specialist, BLM, Hines, Oregon
Carolyn Freeborn, Acting Steens Project Manager and Andrews Resource Area
Field Manager, BLM, Hines, Oregon
Doug Linn, Botanist, BLM, Hines, Oregon
Jeff Rose, Fire Ecologist, BLM, Hines, Oregon
Jill Benefield, Park Ranger, BLM, Hines, Oregon

Facilitator:

Dale White

Commenting Public:

Susan Hammond, Hammond Ranches, Inc.

Steve Hammond, Hammond Ranches, Inc.

Josh Warburton, Steens Mountain Resort

Don Renie, Schauff Ranch

Barbara Cannady, Capitol Press Freelance Writer,

Others Present:

Mark Sherbourne, Natural Resource Specialist, BLM, Hines, Oregon

Darren Brumback, Fish Biologist, BLM, Hines, Oregon

Charlie Otley, rancher

Ed Davis, rancher

John Holt, interested public

Harold Belisle, BLM, OR/WA State Office, Portland, Oregon

Tara Gunter, ONDA

Matt Obradovich, Wildlife Biologist, BLM, Hines, Oregon

Paul Davis, Alvord Ranch

Welcome, Introductions, Housekeeping, Agenda Review:

Tom Harris called the meeting to order. People introduced themselves and minor adjustments were made to the agenda.

Chairman Update:

DFO Tom Dyer had not received confirmation of the pending SMAC appointments, so the Council did not have a quorum. He also stated any press releases or notifications to be published must first be cleared through BLM's Washington Office.

Yank Springs EA:

Joan Suther, Three Rivers Resource Area Field Manager, gave some background on Yank Springs and updated the Council regarding the on-the-ground tour with E. Ron, Jim King, Stacy, Joan Suther and Dan Barnhart, which identified some concerns with impacts to the viewshed as well as water availability. A new alternative was developed as a result of the concerns expressed. Joan described the new alternative and stated the revised EA will be sent out next Wednesday for a 15-day comment period.

Alternatives for material to be used in the construction were discussed, with some concern as to utility, maintenance costs, and aesthetics.

Stonehouse EA:

Jim Buchanan, Range Management Specialist, updated the Council on yesterday's tour, and some of the discussions leading to an early morning session today. This morning, the group came up with a 3-pasture proposal believed to be within the framework of the EA. Jim stated since the alternative had just been formulated this morning, the ID team had not yet had a chance to review it completely, which would be scheduled shortly.

Consensus Decision: It was moved and seconded to allow the ID team members in attendance, Alvord Ranch Representatives, Tara Gunter (ONDA) and anyone who was on the tour yesterday to participate in this discussion.

The process to be used for the new alternative will be Jim Buchanan will write it, the ID team and Jim will discuss it, and then make recommendations to the manager. At this point, it will be issued to the SMAC members as well so they can review it and make recommendations. After reviewing the recommendations, the manager will make the decision as to whether or not the impacts were analyzed adequately within the original EA. If it is decided all the appropriate analysis has been done within the existing EA, it would not be necessary to issue a new one.

Action Item Followup: Send SMAC members write up of new proposal.

The group discussed various aspects of monitoring, vegetation, wildlife, objectives and goals, riparian areas, fence maintenance, and location of fence.

Due to time constraints, the group agreed to return to the discussion after lunch.

Public Comment Period:

Susan Hammond: Hammond Ranches, Inc., informed the Council of the processes she believed were a waste of time. She thought the CMPA was to be an improvement over the existing agency domination. Ecologically with no development this process is not going to survive. Management use and economic stability and sustainability of the people in the area have to be allowed or the management is going to be a catastrophic fire. She believes this will occur in the cow free wilderness area.

Steve Hammond, Hammond Ranches, Inc., expressed concern with the Council's ability to deal with its own structure. He welcomed the group to Frenchglen, describing it as the home of the people who are ultimately responsible for making the Steens so desirable that so many organizations want it. He wished some more credibility were given to their opinions when this designation was created. He thanked the group for their dedication of time, unequalled to his knowledge. Steve had the opportunity to visit the Steens Mountain Running Camp for the first time this year, and felt sad this Camp's existence is threatened under the new designation. Steve noted the lack of management through fire has been easy to

see through the Westside and what has happened there, while noting those in the industry had seen it coming for years. He also expressed concern about how this group could be structured for ranchers and managers to come voluntarily with ideas and proposals and feel they would be acted upon.

Joshua Warburton, Steen Mountain Resort, introduced himself as a retired BLM employee who now owns a campground in the area. He felt the group has a hard task to address, on one hand he wanted to commend them for the efforts to keep focused on what the Council is and to elevate the perspective, but he expressed concern the Council should stay out of the details because their responsibility is much broader. Josh stated he found deficiencies in the Yank Springs EA, and would be submitting comments. He believes the number one issue needing to be addressed post legislation is public access since legislation closed a lot of public access roads to motorized vehicles by virtue of land exchanges and wilderness. Much of the south part of the Mountain is closed or inaccessible to public, creating a shift of general public use from south to north on the Mountain. This shift is of concern to the private landowners on the north part of the Mountain, since it is moving people on to their private lands. A growing concern is roads being closed that were not closed 2 years ago. He does not want BLM to take the initiative or respond to special interests to further restrict public access through seasonal closures or additional road closures. The ecologically most critical places have been closed and he believes using road closures should be used only when significant resource conflicts exist. Josh stated the lower gates on the Loop Road no longer have a sound management reason to be there. They were originally established to protect the dirt road when it got wet, but since it has been upgraded to a gravel road standard this is no longer applicable. He urged the Council to look at the validity of those gates being closed.

Tom Harris read a letter from Marlene Gleisen, Boring, Oregon. Ms Gleisen spent a few great days at a wildflower class sponsored by Fields Station. When they were on the mountain, she stated Cindy Witzel stopped by in a large truck pulling a trailer to say what a hazard their vans were. Ms. Gleisen had been coming here since 1991 and would be extremely upset that botanists are no longer welcome.

Cindy explained the vans were stopped on a blind corner and should have been moved forward about 150 yards and would not have created such a safety hazard. She also stated the class was not currently under permit from the BLM and if there had been stipulations this kind of thing could have been included.

Stonehouse EA (continued):

It was proposed BLM will write the proposal with some comparisons to the original EA (the difference in Pueblo Mountains and this area).

Action Followup Item: Write up the proposed alternative with background information and send it to SMAC members.

Wilderness Access/Cooperative Management Agreements – Private landowners Perspective:

Several meetings back the issue arose about 2920 regulations, NEPA and timelines. Jason worked with the environmental communities to see what was most important and with the solicitor to see what could or couldn't happen. At the last meeting, SMAC members felt NEPA was a necessity, time limits on permits were not an issue, and decided the main concern focused on access not impacting wilderness values. Stacy and Harland were to meet with the landowners to get their perspective, but this has not occurred.

Jerry said he made it very clear at that meeting there needed to be a timeline, and he expressed his concern that none of this happened, since he went along with the delay in that process.

Cindy informed the Council with her present workload she was unable to meet with the landowner group to discuss these issues, and it was up to BLM to do what they needed to get the NEPA process completed. She also expressed concern an application denotes something new and this access is not new.

The Council discussed asking the BLM to send a letter to property owners identifying the two approaches (2920 and CMA) with the CMA as an alternative to the 2920 regulations. The letter would identify their opportunity to participate in this endeavor and if they chose not to, it would also let them know the 2920 regulations would then be the requirement. They would have to initiate that process themselves. It was suggested the letter be sent registered to ensure proof each person was contacted. Some SMAC members felt it was important to identify the use being referred to as historical use and not something new.

Tom Dyer appointed Rhonda to be Stacy's contact to help write the letter and if additional staff is needed a Realty Specialist would be available. He stated the BLM will select a date for response to ensure the information is back by the next meeting, but people also need to realize some people might not get the letters due to unforeseen circumstances.

Action Item Followup: Letter to landowners. Stacy, Hoyt, Rhonda

Transportation (Access and Maintenance Categories):

Tom Harris reviewed the Council's decision to identify routes, uses and possible tenure. The process also calls for contacting those people with particular knowledge of the areas involved, including landowners, permittees, recreationalists, Burns Paiute Tribe members, and environmentalists. Tom felt the group also needed to look at how to accommodate the parking areas, camping areas, etc., people have traditionally used. Another aspect critical to this process is the identifying of maintenance criteria.

The transportation subgroup that was going to meet to start working on these issues and draw preliminary designations on maps had not done so. Tom Dyer reiterated for the group what he believed the decision thus far had been: The small group was to go through and categorize roads, visiting only those where there is a big debate or discussion. The group will then come back to the SMAC who will make the recommendations to carry forward to BLM's Resource Management Plan. In the meantime BLM will proceed with the Transportation Plan using guidance from the state transportation plan and notes from the last SMAC meeting regarding categories of access and maintenance.

Recreation (Wilderness Settings):

Jon Collins, the new Supervisory Natural Resource Specialist in charge of the District Recreation Program, provided the Council a brief description of his background. He has been on District only a short time and in his trips to the Mountain has been very impressed with it and its resources, and impressed with recreation facilities and maintenance.

The Council discussed the merits and concerns of using the zoning proposal and where it currently stands as well as the Limits of Acceptable Change matrix. They also discussed the possibility of doing a recreation plan similar to the regular land use planning process.

The group brainstormed ideas concerning the recreation issues.

Action Item Followup: Tom Dyer, DFO, agreed to take the LAC information and bring it back in October with recommendations on which way to proceed.

The Council discussed the handout "Entities Known to use Steens Mountain". They were informed everyone on the list has been contacted requesting them to get in touch with the BLM prior to using the mountain this year. There have been a lot more permits issued with the Bureau in the implementation stage and probably starting next summer, the monitoring stage will kick in. Cindy reiterated she felt the self-issue permit at the gate is the only real means of knowing who is on the Mountain and what use is being made. The Council discussed the need to tighten up on the people who should have permits using the Mountain without them.

Frenchglen Community Club Update:

Carolyn and Rhonda attended the Frenchglen Community Club meeting to invite them to speak at the August SMAC meeting. They declined since they didn't have a full compliment of members and felt they could possibly misrepresent the interests of some of the members. A discussion about a kiosk, rest area, and parking area in Frenchglen took place. They asked that the Community Club and School board be added to the RMP mailing list.

Wild Horse Program:

Stacy asked Tom Dyer to describe to the Council the issues surrounding the Wild Horse Program.

Tom told the Council the National Wild Horse Program is currently running way over budget due enlarge part to the emergency gathers as a result of drought and fire. The Burns District completed most of our gathers before the deadline. Because of the large number of horses gathered, adoptions will be difficult. In Oregon unless there is an emergency such as fire or drought, most likely we will not be gathering our projected numbers. Two areas that were supposed be gathered but is now unlikely to occur are the South Steens HMA and the Kiger HMA.

Prescribed Fire:

Stacy raised the issue the prescribed fire program is really important to a lot of the landowners and permittees. He noted there are some prescribed fires planned for this year, and wanted to know if they would go forward. Tom Dyer felt it was important to continue the program as much as possible, which includes completing the NEPA requirements. However, in a severe fire situation it is difficult to prescribe burn not only because of weather conditions but because resources are committed elsewhere on wildfires. Stacy asked if the District needed any type of assistance in this program to please contact the SMAC.

The Council discussed whether or not chainsaws could be used in WSAs, and Jerry will check further.

August 16, 2002

Introductions & Questions from Monday:

Tom Harris called the meeting to order, with people introducing themselves.

Chainsaws in WSAs: Jerry reported from what he read in the IMP it looked to him like chainsaws could be used, if needed.

Tom Dyer stated that in WSAs, protection of life and property along with safety are number the # priority. If these are not involved, then natural breaks are used.

Yesterday's Brainstorming Recreation Session: Jerry felt BLM needs to assess what the bottom line is of what has to be done and what is the discretionary part. BLM has to set the limits of what is acceptable change, what it is now and where it needs to go.

Cindy questioned if any particular way had been endorsed. Tom Dyer said no, parts of several different processes can be used, rather than just one.

Review and Approve June Minutes:

Motion made and seconded.

Discussion: Council made minor changes to the draft minutes.

Consensus Decision: Approve the minutes as corrected. (Jerry moved, Stacy seconded)

The Council discussed what to do for members who were leaving.

Motion made and seconded:

Consensus Decision: To send a plaque to those who depart. (Jerry moved, Alice seconded). BLM will work on the wording.

Planning Update:

Carolyn reported the District is still on track with the timeline for the RMP, and apparently the only one that is currently conducting an RMP still on schedule. The goals and objectives have been issued, and the management actions will be completed Monday. The contractor will begin developing the outline for the document. Carolyn explained the due dates and timelines in the Council's packets.

Action followup Item: Email Management Actions to Council members.

Tom Dyer reiterated the law is driving the schedule for the RMP and it is on the fast track so it is vital SMAC members stay closely involved in each step.

Wild Horse Program:

Stacy raised the issue of the Wild Horse Program again, stating that Oregon's Wild Horse Program is well managed and it really does concern him the Bureau is taking a well-managed program and letting it go downhill. He asked the members present if they could support a letter to the State Director emphasizing the importance of continuing to manage the horses well, which includes gathers this fall. Stacy explained the impacts of not gathering would have by pushing the horse numbers outside the Appropriate Management Levels in the next couple of years, which would, in turn, heavily impact the habitat. This would then put Oregon's program into crisis management.

Motion made and seconded. No objection heard.

Consensus Decision: A letter will be sent to the State Director regarding wild horses. (Stacy moved, Tom Harris seconded)

Action Followup: Tom Harris to write Wild Horse and Burro letter.

Quorum:

Cindy raised the concern about not having a quorum present both from people being absent and the appointments not being confirmed. She would like to cancel the next meeting if the appointments are not made by that time. It was noted that this would not be possible given the time required to file a Federal Register notice to notify the public of such a cancellation.

Motion made and seconded.

Consensus Decision: Send a letter to the Congressional and Secretary, detailing the concerns of the SMAC about the lack of appointments. It was determined that the June 2 motion takes precedence.

Action Followup Item: Cindy and Jason will write the letter.

Draft Letter for Tribal Concerns:

The Council reviewed the draft letter with some discussion. It was determined any reference to the contact between the legislators and the Burns Paiute Tribe should come from the Tribe itself. The letter should state the Council heard the concerns listed in the letter and according to the Act, and are asking the BLM to ensure they consider them. Alice will work on the letter and send it out again for review.

Action Followup Item: Complete letter to the BLM on Burns Paiute Tribal concerns.

Tour:

The group toured the Wildland Juniper Management Area with a presentation made by Jeff Rose and Doug Linn. Jill Benefield discussed possible kiosk locations and described the cooperative nature of the Steens Mountain portal sign.

Public Comments:

Susie Hammond, Hammond Ranches, Inc., stated they had just completed a field trip on the mountain and she emphasized again and again cooperative management is important for the people who own property or own permits to be contacted. She stated neither the permittee nor the landowner been contacted and the initial contact is the only way you have cooperative management.

Don Renie voiced a concern he felt the transportation plan needed to address which was on the Cold Springs Road. There is a locked gate and once reaching the gate there is no room to turn around. He believes the road was left open legislatively and many people expect to be able to use it. He has a concern that once they encounter the locked gate there will be some very unhappy publics.

Cindy raised the issue perhaps Riddle Ranch closure should be revisited since it is impossible for a lot of the older visitors to hike all the way down to the Ranch and back, perhaps there is a better way to handle this.

Tara Gunter, ONDA, introduced herself giving a brief personal history.

Barbara Cannady, stated she had offered her services to Capital Press with two missions in mind: first to present a positive image of Harney County to the rest of the state and to get word out of the precedent setting things going on in Harney County. She offered the same services to the Council. She also requested if there were any particular ideas for articles to please contact her.

Steve Hammond, Hammond Ranches, Inc., said he didn't mean to put Stacy on the spot, and was referring to it more in a team aspect than what it came across. Steve talked of a means to measure how various representatives were fulfilling their obligations to their constituents. This would also be a means for anyone appointed next to a position to know a bit of history on what had been happening. He also felt it might be a good idea to put the Federal agency under scrutiny to see how they are performing because he believes normally they aren't. He also requested that alternatives for feed would help in making people more willing to be cooperative managers. He thanked the Council for their time and dedication.

The SMAC voted to add to the agenda concerns raised during the public comment period.

Community Communications:

Stacy raised the issue concerning the fact during this meeting the Council had heard it several different times concerned individuals had not been notified timely of events they would have wished to participate in. The Council believes it is vital to ensure this communication takes place and determined the process by which it would occur. Part of it should occur through the representatives on this Council. Stacy suggested at the end of the meeting during the critique and development of the agenda, the contacts be added at that point, as well as when the final agenda is developed, those involved be sensitive to who needs to be contacted.

Cold Springs:

Tom Dyer stated he would find out what existing plans are in effect on this area, and would get back to Don Renie and the Council within 2 weeks with all the information as to what plan covers it, why it is closed, and if it doesn't have to be closed, then we will address it as an option.

Tom Harris stated he too is an advocate for that road to be open, he has long pushed for it to be open by permit because there is a resource to be protected and this would provide accountability.

Stacy encouraged in the short term the agency ensure the warning sign is in place at the top of the hill and to possibly look at moving the location of the locked gate to a safer spot. In the long term it is Congressionally mandated to be open. He also urged the agency to ensure any maps issued to the public correctly depict the state of the road.

Jerry wanted to clarify that nowhere in the legislation does it talk about Cold Springs Road or any others inside the Steens Wilderness area being open. Neither are there any references to these being open roads on the official maps. The only reason these roads are open is they are colored the same as the Wilderness boundary. All of them can be closed as part of the Transportation Plan.

Action Followup Item: Tom Dyer will review the existing plans for the area and determine what is applicable and get back to Don and the Council within 2 weeks.

DFO Update:

SRP and Access EAs: Carolyn Freeborn reviewed the proposed schedule for the SRP EAs and Access EAs, which is to have them completed and out for public comment by the end of the year.

Cindy raised the concern that trails are either not depicted correctly or not depicted at all in the EAs. Trail maintenance is of concern since it has to be accomplished for safety reasons and BLM staff is not usually available for it. She felt there should be some sort of basic criteria, which would allow emergency trail maintenance to address safety issues.

Positions: Carolyn reported that a 120-detail vacancy has been issued for the Andrews Resource Area Field Manager position to fill in while the permanent position is advertised and hired. The wilderness position (vice-Emerick) should be out next week. Tara Wilson received notification her appointment is approved. She will be officially the Public Affairs Officer for the Steens on August 25.

Steens Loop Road: Carolyn stated next spring, about May, the approach aprons to the four bridges on the Loop Road would be paved, because of a structural safety issue. It was to be done this fall, but due to visitation and temperature requirements, it has been postponed until the spring. Jerry asked if it was covered under an EA for the Loop Road. He also asked about the proposal to pave the road from Frenchglen to Page Springs brought up at the last meeting. Carolyn clarified that the road is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the bridges are managed by BLM (Page Springs section).

The Council discussed means of performing Loop Road maintenance more efficiently, including working with the county, timing of maintenance, and type of maintenance.

Cold Springs Road: Carolyn informed the Council there is a short section on this road that has a public safety issue with an erosion rut and the BLM will be maintaining that section.

Public Affairs: Carolyn reported Kathleen Clark, Bureau Director, is tentatively scheduled to visit Burns on August 27. Council members will be kept informed as the details are confirmed.

Brochure: Work is going forward on the brochure, with a few changes. It will be a winter project for the BLM staff. SMAC members will be given a chance to review the brochure prior to it being issued.

Prescribed Fire: When it becomes possible to perform prescribed burning, the BLM's first priority is to complete those started last year in Stonehouse. The next in priority will be Chimney Tackman.

Some of the delays last year were due to hunters who refused to move out of the area. Council members discussed ways to alleviate this problem including contact between Council members and their constituents, billing those who won't leave for the extra costs, closing the area for public health and safety, include a write up in the hunting regulations (will be included next year), notify SMAC members of those individuals who refused to move last year, and landowners could accompany BLM on their visits to the camps to let people know the impacts that the landowner would receive.

Project Implementation EA: Carolyn reported all the implementation projects are on schedule, and the BLM has begun looking at next year's projects. Carolyn stated it might be necessary to modify one of the projects slightly. Jerry expressed concern with any modification to the original EA since it was a negotiated agreement. It is possible a modified decision will be issued.

A discussion ensued on whether or not helicopter use was covered in the EA for Strawhat Pass Fence.

Action Followup Item: Tom Dyer will check the EA.

Cindy asked that when the fences are designed, if recreation considerations could also be incorporated.

Eusabio Fence: Carolyn explained the original position of this fence as well as the proposed positions and the reasons for them, which included maintenance issues, livestock impacts, drainage considerations, ecological enhancement, and land additions and subtractions. Jerry suggested it is possible to modify the maps according to these changes because this isn't changing wilderness boundary or wilderness just adjusting fenceline. The Council agreed the fence should follow the line as it was GPS'd rather than the original, which would leave the waterhole

on public land on the private side of the fence and hook into the rim. Neither Alice nor Jerry believed their constituencies would object to this.

Consensus Decision: All Council members present today agree the fence should be built as it was GPS'd leaving the waterhole outside the cow free boundary fence.

Action Followup Item: BLM is to look into all the boundary adjustments and pursue getting them on maps and ensure that is appropriate rather than having to go through new legislation.

Tom Dyer talked of the need for Council members to maintain the trust among themselves. If something should happen where that trust is a problem, he needs to know about it, and needs to know how to get it back.

Meeting Critique:

Most members felt positive about the meeting as a whole, the "how do we solve it" approach the group is taking, and the comments from the public help the group to focus better. An item of concern is the lack of a quorum. Jerry thanked Rhonda and others for all the hard work of putting the meeting together away from the office.

Tom Dyer asked the Council members to help him maintain the level of involvement they would like.

Agenda Items for October Meeting: Update on recreation and law enforcement; transportation plan (categories and maintenance of roads); cooperative management agreements for inholder motorized access; brochure; charter review; redband trout presentation; set meeting schedules; and wildlife.

Meeting adjourned.

Submitted by Liz Appelman.

The SMAC approved the meeting minutes as amended on October 22, 2002.

Certified by:

Tom Harris, SMAC Chair

October 22, 2002
Date