

Bureau of Land Management

Northern California District
Resource Advisory Council
Friday, Oct. 8, 2021, via Zoom

Summary Minutes*

Opening Business

Chairman Leonard Moty called the meeting to order at 8 a.m.

RAC members attending: Leonard Moty, Josh Cook, Dan Efseaff, Justin Robbins, Jeff Blewett.
Absent: Buck Parks, Oliver Rogers, Vint Stevenson, Thibault Hoppe-Glosser.

BLM Staff attending: District Manager Dereck Wilson, Redding Field Manager Jennifer Mata, Eagle Lake Field Manager Emily Ryan, Redding Assistant Field Manager Laura Brodhead, District Public Affairs Officer Jeff Fontana.

Guests: Ryan Henson, Linda Castro.

Northwest California Integrated Resource Management Plan

Dereck provided the RAC with a status report on the planning timeline for this resource management plan that will cover public lands managed by the Redding and Arcata field offices. He said the District plans to publish a Notice of Intent in the Federal Register on Nov. 21 of this year, formally launching the planning process and a public scoping period.

During the 60-day scoping period, members of the public will have the opportunity to comment on issues the new RMP should address. This will be a key juncture for the RAC to participate in plan development by providing a formal recommendation on the issues that the members and the constituents they represent would like to see the RMP address.

He said the District is planning on a Dec. 8 RAC meeting devoted primarily to this task.

Planning documents including the Analysis of the Management Situation are available for review on the BLM's ePlanning site: <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2012803/510>.

The staff will provide the council with meeting information as soon as the Federal Register notice announcing the meeting is published.

Surprise Complex Wild Horse Gather

Public Affairs Officer Jeff Fontana provided a slide show showing current status of the population management gather of excess wild horses currently underway on northwest Nevada public lands managed by the BLM-California Applegate Field Office.

He summarized provisions of the Wild Free Roaming Horses and Burros Act and the Northern California District herd management areas under the District's purview.

Highlights:

- The gather covers a complex of six herd management areas: Massacre Lakes, Wall Canyon, Bittner, High Rock, Nut Mountain and Fox Hog, on lands in Washoe and Humboldt counties.
- The gather plan calls for capturing 1,220 wild horses and removing 1,070 excess wild horses from the range to return the complex and its HMAs to their appropriate management level, a population affirmed in the 2008 Surprise Resource Management Plan. The plan calls for returning up to 170 horses to the range to maintain viable populations levels, if needed.
- The AML for the complex is an aggregate of 283-496 wild horses and 0 burros. Based on a two-year-old census flight and population modeling, we believe the Complex population is approximately 1,700 animals.
- Removal of excess wild horses is mandated by the federal Wild, Free Roaming Horses and Burros Act, a 1971 law that protects wild horses and burros on BLM and Forest Service managed lands, in areas where the animals existed when the Act was passed.
- The Surprise Complex is being completed under an environmental assessment that analyzed the impacts of population management over a 10-year period.
- As with all BLM gathers, members of the public have been invited to watch helicopter-assisted gathering operations from observation points selected to provide an overview from a safe and non-disruptive distance.
- So far, public observation has been light. Representatives from Wild Horse Education, a wild horse advocacy group, have been on site and posting photos to their blog site daily.

Fire and Fuels Program

Dereck summarized the District's fire suppression and fuels management programs. He said each field office conducts hazardous fuels reduction projects with the objectives of:

- Restoring and maintaining ecosystems,
- Reducing wildfire risk; and
- Improving the effectiveness and safety of wildfire suppression operations.

He said the offices carry out these projects using on-board staff, contracts and partnerships with other agencies and non-governmental organizations. Prescribed burning, including pile burning and broadcast fires, are important tools often used by BLM fire staff members.

Mechanical methods to reduce fuels including tree cutting and brush mastication are often completed under contract. The BLM also uses post fire timber salvage sales to remove damaged timber and reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire.

So far this year the District has completed fuels reduction projects on 5,927 acres of public lands. Significantly, this year the Arcata and Redding field offices have received about \$10 million in grant funding from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection's Healthy Forests Program.

- The Arcata Field Office received about \$4.4 million for fuels reduction in the King Range National Conservation Area and was a major partner in a \$4.9 million grant that will be applied to BLM-managed lands and private lands in the Northern Mendocino County Forest Health Collaborative.
- The Redding Field Office also received funds as a partner in Trinity and Butte counties, where the grant program provided \$3.9 million and \$4.8 million respectively (the Trinity County Forest Resilience Partnership and the Butte Upper Watershed Resilience Partnership).

Dereck shared photos of ongoing work.

In the Applegate and Eagle Lake field offices fuel reduction projects most often are focused on reducing juniper stands that have encroached into sagebrush steppe ecosystems negatively impacting habitat for wildlife, including greater sage-grouse. He said the BLM manages this ground dwelling bird as a "special status species." Work is focused on keeping the bird from being listed as threatened or endangered.

Dereck said that for a variety of reasons, juniper stands have been expanding out of the rocky hillsides for many years. There is now telemetry data from collared sage grouse showing that the birds return to sagebrush-steppe areas after juniper stands are reduced.

There is public interest in prescribed during projects, and smoke is an issue on some projects. Dereck said BLM crews adhere to carefully designed burn plans that specify the fuel and weather conditions and crew requirements that must be met before burns can be ignited. The plans also address smoke dispersion.

Dereck asked the council to consider how to work with the BLM on prescribed burning. Do members want to identify issues to address or work with the offices on setting project priorities? Do members have ideas that would improve the BLM's efforts at community engagement and education?

Field Office Comments:

Redding: Jennifer Mata noted that the field office works with landowners who adjoin BLM-managed lands and partners to mitigate fuels that could contribute to wildfires. Additionally, the field office partners with CAL FIRE on burn projects, including work near target shooting areas, to reduce wildfire risk.

Eagle Lake: Emily Ryan said the field office works to find a balance between focusing on sage grouse habitat improvement and fuels reduction on public lands in the wildland urban interface where communities and residential development abut BLM-managed public lands.

Dereck responded to questions from guest Linda Castro and chairman Leonard Moty regarding old growth protection and invasive plant mitigation:

- The Sagebrush Steppe Improvement environmental analysis completed in 2009 (BLM and Modoc National Forest) contains provisions for protecting old growth juniper, and the BLM adheres to these guidelines. On any juniper reduction project, we leave 10 percent of trees, including old growth, that provide wildlife habitat.
- The BLM is addressing the invasive weed issue by shifting from focusing juniper reduction on heavy juniper stands to focusing on removing “phase 1” juniper, small trees that have not had the chance to grow.
- Juniper project plans contain provisions for post treatment maintenance.
- As an example, Emily noted the Eagle Lake Field Office is now working in an old 12,000-acre treatment, removing encroaching small trees.

RAC Comments:

Justin Robbins: The BLM should continue this important work and consult the RAC where appropriate. He suggested working with members of the public who have benefitted from fuels reduction projects to communicate to the broader public the importance and success of these projects in improving public safety.

Leonard Moty: The BLM should continue this work as the risk of wildfires increases.

Redding Business Plan

Redding Field Office Outdoor Recreation Planner Jessica Tyra and Assistant Field Manager Laura Brodhead presented information on the field office plan to increase fees at some campgrounds and day use recreation areas. The business plan and RAC review and approval are required for the BLM to be able to take these actions. In a PowerPoint presentation, the BLM staff outlined the proposal and rationale.

The business plan outlines proposals to raise fees to \$20 nightly at the Douglas City and Shasta campgrounds and to \$15 nightly at the Junction City and Steel Bridge campgrounds. The plan proposes setting a new \$15 per night fee at the Steiner Flat Campground, which has been refurbished. The fee for the Reading Island Group Campground would be raised to \$90 per night and a new fee would be set at \$60 per night for the Ohl Olsen Group Campground. New \$6 daily fees would be set at the Douglas City and Steel Bridge day use areas, and a \$2 fee would be put in place for showers at the Douglas City Campground, for those not camping there. The business plan details the proposed increases and provides a market analysis showing that the new fees would be in line with those charged at comparable sites.

Jessica said fees currently cover about nine percent of the operating costs at the facilities. The BLM is hoping to increase this contribution to 50 to 75 percent of operating costs to help ensure sustainable management. This percentage of operating costs is consistent across BLM jurisdictions. She said fees help cover costs for a variety of services and maintenance, enabling the BLM to provide enjoyable camping and recreation experiences. Fee dollars are used at sites where they are collected to fund services that include toilets, fuels reduction, landscaping, minimizing natural resource damage, staff costs, education and interpretation services and more.

The fee proposal was announced via a news release, fliers, direct contacts and other means. A public comment period is open through Nov. 2

The process, in order of actions, includes release of a draft proposal, review by the BLM California state office, a public comment period, RAC review and approval, a Federal Register notice announcing the new fee structure and finally, BLM state director approval and signature.

RAC Comments:

Justin Robbins: The fee amounts appear to be a good value, considering that state park fees in northern California are \$35 nightly. They are also a good value compared to private campgrounds. He suggested that the BLM could consider removing trash pickup services in day use areas as a way to reduce costs and train users about the pack-in/pack-out ethic. He suggested the shower use fee could be even higher than what is proposed.

Leonard Moty: People seem to be willing to pay for trash collection services. While he understands Justin's sentiment, he voiced skepticism that it would be successful. The BLM could help explain the idea to the public by pointing out how long it has been since the last fee increase.

Because there was no quorum present, the RAC was not able to forward a recommendation. The topic will be discussed again at a future meeting, where the RAC can consider a recommendation to the BLM.

Public Comment:

Linda Castro: Regarding the recreation fee discussion, asked that the BLM refrain from adding services such as electrify and Wi-Fi.

Laura Leigh, Wild Horse Education: Wanted the RAC to be aware that her organization exists to assist the BLM with Wild Horse management on public lands. It can assist the agency with monitoring and fertility control, with a team in place trained to work in field settings to treat mares with fertility control using remote darting.

RAC Closing Comments

Justin thanked the BLM staff for informative presentations.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, Dec 8. It will be held at the BLM Northern California District Office, 6640 Lockheed Drive, Redding. If Covid-19 protocols dictate, the meeting will be held virtually via Zoom.

The meeting was adjourned.

*Summary minutes compiled by
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*These minutes are a summary of the proceedings. They are not a verbatim account.