

Bureau of Land Management
Northern California District Resource Advisory Council
Business Meeting
Feb. 1, 2024,
Redding, California

Summary Minutes*

Field Tour Cancellation

A field tour scheduled for Jan. 31 as part of this meeting was cancelled due to inclement weather.

Opening Business

Chairman Leonard Moty called the meeting to order at 8 a.m. in the conference room of the BLM office. The session included a virtual component.

Attending: Category one: Jim Rankin, Jeff Blewett, Joe Tona. Two vacancies.

Category two: Bill Kuntz, Carol Montgomery. Absent: Steve Martin. Two vacancies.

Category three: Leonard Moty, Pat Frost, Dan Efseaff, Rich Karem. Absent: Stacey Carman.

There is no majority present in category two and therefore, no quorum of the council.

BLM: Acting State Director Gordon Toevs (via Zoom) District Manager Dereck Wilson, Arcata Field Manager Collin Ewing, Applegate Field Manager Craig Drake, Eagle Lake Field Manager Emily Ryan, Redding Field Manager Jennifer Mata, Public Affairs Officer Jeff Fontana, Redding Field Office Planner Chad Endicott.

Guests: Ryan Henson, CalWild; Christopher Shull, Mason, Bruce, and Girard Natural Resource Consultants. Via Zoom: Jora Fogg, Conservation Lands Foundation; Marie Milliman, Wild Horse Education.

Agenda approval: The agenda was approved with a change in the order of items.

Minutes approval: The minutes from the November meeting were approved as presented.

Northwest California Integrated Resource Management Plan

Chad Endicott, planning and environmental coordinator for the Redding Field Office, used a PowerPoint presentation to update the RAC on status of the new resource management plan under development for lands managed by the Arcata and Redding field offices. He said the planning team has been working since Dec. 29, analyzing more than 900 comments received. These included 111 unique letters and 33 form letters containing identical comments. The team deemed 570 comments as substantive.

Commenters included members of the public, tribes, non-governmental organizations, and cooperating agencies. The comments covered every BLM-managed resource and use. Chad said significant comment areas included wildfire management, special designations, visual resource management, livestock grazing, minerals, lands and realty, and collaboration.

The team aims for releasing a proposed final plan in June and a final plan in August after conclusion of a protest period and state governor's consistency review period.

Other highlights:

- Alternative D, shown as the preferred alternative in the draft plan, will not be the final preferred alternative. A new preferred alternative will reflect comments received in the public review process.
- BLM responses to comments will be included as an appendix in the final plan/EIS.
- A 30-day protest period will commence after publication of the Notice of Availability of the plan is published in the Federal Register.
- BLM headquarters will be involved in the protest review process. Protests most often related to perceived mistakes in the planning process.
- Some actions, such as special land use designations, will be implemented by the plan; other actions will require additional public involvement.
- Part of the proposed plan review involves consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service.

RAC Comments:

- Ryan Henson suggested the BLM and neighboring national forests should have collaborated more in watersheds where the agencies share management responsibilities.
- Rich Karem said the 1,000-page document was intimidating to navigate.

There was no action on this item.

BLM Law Enforcement Program

Curtis Hubanks, a BLM special agent, provided an overview of the BLM's law enforcement program. He said the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 gave the BLM authority to establish a program to "enforce law with respect to public lands and natural resources."

Curtis said the program has patrol rangers and special agents, each with specific roles and responsibilities.

The BLM also has Memoranda of Understanding in place with county sheriff's offices across the state that give the BLM authority to enforce state laws in those counties, with some limitations, such as traffic law enforcement. He said these relationships are sound.

Curtis said BLM rangers and special agencies can be involved in areas ranging from providing information to assisting with crime investigations such as illegal cannabis cultivation to homicide cases.

He presented a slide show with several case examples to illustrate this point.

Ivan Medel, of Integral Ecology Research Center in Blue Lake augmented Curtis's presentation with a talk on "Current Trends of Environmental Impacts from Illegal Cannabis Cultivation on Public Lands." He provided many examples of grow sites contaminated with dangerous and sometimes illegal pesticides that kill wildlife, pollute water, contaminate soil, and damage vegetation. Highlights:

- Investigators are finding increasing numbers of pesticides at grow sites.
- Carbofuran, a highly toxic chemical, is found at many sites.
- Illegal grow sites generate large amounts of waste, typically 1,000 pounds.
- Waste attracts almost every forest carnivore, and many animals are poisoned. Dead wild animals are found at 54 percent of sites.

Fire and Fuels Management

Rob Winkler, assistant fire management officer for the Northern California District, presented an overview of the BLM fire and fuels programs.

Fire: BLM has fire suppression responsibilities in the Eagle Lake and Applegate field offices, where nine fire engines and a helicopter are based. A BLM interagency hotshot crew is based in Susanville. In the Redding and Arcata field offices fire suppression is conducted under agreement with partner agencies, mainly CAL FIRE.

Fuels: There are 20-person fuels modules based in Alturas and Redding, and work is underway to staff a new fuels module in the Arcata Field Office. Staff in these modules conduct prescribed burning and other treatment projects, averaging about 500 acres per year for each office.

Fuel treatment objectives can include:

- Hazardous fuels reduction in the wildland/urban interface,
- Creating fuel breaks,
- Improving forest health,
- Improving wildlife habitat,
- Pre and post timber harvest,
- Restoration after wildfire,
- Restoration of natural resources, and
- Projects generated by cooperators or partners.

He said BLM natural resources staff members are integral parts of these programs, helping with design and project planning. The BLM also relies on interagency agreements, contracts, and partnerships to complete projects.

Questions and answers: In response to comments and questions, Rob noted:

- Some fire treatments such as broadcast burns can have an objective of keeping wildfires from reaching tree canopies, where they can spread rapidly.
- In juniper treatments there are plans to protect old growth trees.
- Wildland-urban interface areas are delineated in fuels project planning; they are not just “best judgement.”

Public Comments

Jora Fogg, Conservation Lands Foundation: Jora encouraged RAC members to look carefully at the mapping associated with the BLM Solar Energy Preliminary Environmental Impact Statement.

She expressed concern there may be mapping errors, citing solar development overlaying areas such as the Samoa Dunes Recreation Area and some BLM Areas of Critical Environmental Concern. She urged members to participate in upcoming virtual public comment meetings.

Marie Milliman, Wild Horse Education: Requested clarification about BLM's use of seeding after fuels treatment projects, if livestock grazing is used to reduce invasive species, if a wild horse and burro census flight was conducted after the recent Surprise Complex wild horse and burro gather, and how watersheds are evaluated after fuels treatments. Field managers responded:

- Seeding after fuels projects is used if identified in the project plan.
- Targeted grazing is a tool that can be used in specific conditions and project areas.
- Wild horse census flights were completed after the Surprise Complex gather. BLM is waiting to receive the data from the statisticians who analyze the raw data. A pre-gather flight will be conducted for the Twin Peaks HMA prior to a gather planned for late summer. This will provide good data about wild horse and burro distribution.
- Watersheds are analyzed prior to fuels treatments to determine conditions and appropriate treatments. They are monitored post treatment, with an eye on impacts such as unwanted soil movement.

Ryan Henson, CalWild: Thanked the BLM for its work in meeting with all public lands interests and for its legacy of collaboration.

State Director's Report

Acting State Director Gordon Toevs participated in the meeting via Zoom. He expressed strong support for RACs and the service they provide to the BLM and summarized his experience with the agency. His current position is associate state director for Colorado. He is acting California state director while the BLM search is underway for a permanent state director to replace Karen Mouritsen, who retired.

The state director spoke on several topics:

- Budget: The BLM is currently operating under a Continuing Resolution that holds spending to last year's levels.
- National Priorities:
 - The new Foundation for Public Lands is the first foundation for the agency and provides opportunities to reach out to donors for help with underfunded needs.
 - Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act have provided millions of dollars to the BLM for public lands improvements, including \$16 million for restoration work, \$250,000 for orphan well cleanup, \$900,000 for native plant projects among many others.
 - Public Lands Rule: Will provide helpful tools for BLM land management. The draft rule could be issued by late March and become effective 60 days later.
 - Sage Grouse: BLM California is working on the mapping that will show priority habitat to help ensure there are not conflicting uses in habitat areas. Gordon encouraged the RAC members to look closely at the draft EIS when it is released.

- National Conservation Lands: This is the 25th anniversary of the National Landscape Conservation System. 2024 is also the 25th anniversary of the Headwaters Forest Reserve, the 10th anniversary of the first onshore units of the California Coastal National Monument, and the 60th anniversary of the Wilderness Act. A key accomplishment in NorCal this year was listing of the Falk town site on the National Register of Historic Places.

Questions and answers:

Jim Rankin asked whether the BLM is shifting its focus from resource use to preservation. Gordon replied that the Federal Policy and Land Management Act continues to be the guiding legislation for the BLM. He said public land use is increasing, and the BLM must continue focusing on managing for future generations. He also noted that multiple use does not mean “everything, everywhere, all the time,” and that BLM management strives for a balance. While extractive uses are part of that balance, the BLM must pay close attention to conserving resources for future generations.

A question by Leonard Moty on BLM’s position on herbicide use led to discussion. It was noted that the BLM has a national programmatic EIS on herbicide use and local uses must adhere to that document. District Manager Dereck Wilson noted that the BLM is cautious in herbicide use, viewing it as one tool of many that can be used in vegetation management.

Rich Karem said that herbicides are the best tool in maintaining conditions after fuels treatment burns. Redding Field Manager Jennifer Mata said the BLM’s mission is not to use herbicides for stand replacement. Use can be carefully considered for fuel break maintenance techniques such as stump treatment.

Pat Frost thanked the BLM for honoring Trinity County’s 1978 resolution against herbicide use within the county. There are concerns with impacting water supplies for public use. There are consequences with herbicide use.

Jim Rankin noted that Whiskeytown Lake has herbicide pollution. Herbicide use has a downstream effect.

Gordon summarized the discussion: “Public lands management is not for the faint of heart.”

Field Managers’ Reports

Applegate: Craig Drake provided a written report covering wild horse management, fuels treatments using contract crews, a proposal for mineral exploration at the former Hog Ranch Mine site, an office remodeling project, and the recently introduced Washoe County public lands legislation that would create new wilderness areas and national conservation areas.

Arcata: Collin Ewing summarized his written report covering status of the NCIP development (discussed earlier in these summary minutes), land acquisitions, recreation management, livestock grazing, ecological restoration projects, fisheries projects, wildlife habitat projects, road maintenance, fire and fuels management, King Range National Conservation Area management and projects, and the 25th anniversary celebration of establishing the Headwaters Forest Reserve.

Eagle Lake: Emily Ryan summarized her written report that covered an upcoming wild horse and burro gather in the Twin Peaks Allotment, an upcoming office remodeling project, acquisitions, fuels projects, a Service First agreement with the Susanville Indian Rancheria and upcoming special permitted recreation events.

Redding: Jennifer Mata discussed her written report that covered the new Future of Redding Trails Committee, a Trinity County land exchange, a right of way for a Trinity County Public Utilities District corridor widening project, the Rancho Briesgau restoration project, ongoing acquisitions, prescribed fire, a new Adopt-A-Trail program, a Bend wetlands restoration project, and a Paynes Creek diversion improvement project.

Closing Business

Member comments: Members asked for information on the public lands rule, plans for a Mule Ridge project and information on forestry management.

Election of officers: Pat Frost nominated Leonard Moty to continue as chair, and Dan Efseaff as vice chair. The nominations were approved.

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.*