

# DRAFT NOTES – WMT RAC MADISON RIVER SUBGROUP

## APRIL 11, 2024, 9:00AM – 12:00PM

1. **Focus: Fee proposal for Madison River by DFO**
2. **Purpose, roles and responsibilities, subcommittee guidelines, ground rules**
  - a. RAC - citizen committee to provide input on complex projects/work
  - b. Resource protection and accessible to all for public enjoyment
  - c. RAC subcommittee gives advice to RAC BLM present to answer questions; support work
  - d. Sensitive issues recognized - outfitters double charged, connection to state's conservation efforts
  - e. Clayton - think about how we can take lessons/conversations to other regions in the state for recreational pressures challenges of public land use and management. Not unique to the Madison River. Adaptatively consider these challenges all over.
3. **Draft Madison River Business Plan Overview and Q&A**
  - a. Amanda - overview, history, background (REVIEWED POWERPOINT)
    - i. Proposing new fee structure (increasing and new) for day use - increasing visitation and associated issues require additional funding to provide quality visitor services and experiences (overcrowding of parking, boat launches, floater/pedestrian safety, resource impacts, sanitation, maintenance cost increase now and future, provide adequate staffing for visitor support and experience)
    - ii. Corey - fee revenue - fees retained at the site; identified staffing gap: seasonal staffing increase needed (safety/maintenance), Dillon Field Office staff taken away from primary duties to assist this region, looking to fund seasonal staff at Madison.
    - iii. Lois question - appreciate conversion of traffic counts: visitors - there is no average count over 365 days of visitors. Is there a way to quantify visitors by day during peak use? That would be more helpful to understand the problem better and to discuss the proposed fees. -BLM AMANDA: we will follow up with that information; busy season July through end of August.
    - iv. Corey Meier - budget - PowerPoint slide review - annual & deferred maintenance fees.
      1. Law Enforcement - detailer from another BLM office brought in during busy months.
      2. Rely heavily on fees collected - not our intent to have recreation users shoulder all costs - expect contribute appropriately to intensively used areas.
    - v. Rec Fee Types: Free Amenities, Standard and Expanded
      1. Proposal: Raise all existing fees, Add day use fee to 13 rec sites, annual day use pass at reduced amount, incremental raise within 5 years (inflation).
        - a. MIKE B - did you look at other BLM areas when determining fee proposal? Is ID similar to guides/outfitters, but their annual is \$60 at this point. Referenced ID fees - KATIE - yes, looked at

similar sites in region, can look at suggested site - typically look at similar sites with similar amenities to determine fee.

2. Revenue Analysis - SRPs do not include the river.
  - a. Fee - per vehicle, per person, etc.? Per vehicle was what was in public comment.
  - b. MIKE B - If you go by vehicle 50K increase. How would you charge per person? AMANDA - 60% compliance rate is not realistic for the revenue scenario per person.
4. Issues/questions to resolve
  - a. Lower Madison vs Upper Madison notable issues - Business plan proposal does not address adequately
    - i. Shuttles to busiest sites for floaters? Different fee for upper vs lower, Charge per person implementation effectively, related compliance?, Concerns from SRP holders - double charged if have to pay fee., FWP issued conservation requirement for non-fisher/hunter. Timeline of implementing new fees may not be well received.
    - ii. BLM KRISTEN - comments - questioning how to enforce the day use fees and current lack of presence to gain compliance.
  - b. RAC MEMBERS - other issues, concerns, challenges?
    1. CLAYTON - enforcement on day use fee, interaction with different ownership of access sites (BLM vs FWP)
    2. MIKE - did any Madison BLM review Madison workgroup findings? -- BLM Kristen - yes, Corey worked with Chris. Is there something from the workgroup that is specific to day use fees? MIKE - we talked about the Upper and Lower are different rivers, to do one-on-one or implement similar, but different structures would be confusing/unfair.
      - a. Amanda - regular rec users / SRP permits / Commercial operators all important considerations as we move forward.
    3. LOIS - Agreed with Clayton - confusion on agencies (BLM/FWP) - can we have a combined BLM/FWP fee and permit so that end users have one fee? AMANDA - We've discussed this with FWP, challenging to get legislature approval for nonangler/hunter conservation fee; joint pass would be overwhelmingly challenging ---- LOIS: not revenue related, joint permit for access to both properties
    4. ANDREW - conservation license - new fees would require legislature approval - joint permit/fees out of scope of committee
      - a. LOIS - not a new fee, a new card. Unsure who would collect it - state vs fed cut stays separate. Not new fee. Help end user with confusion.
    5. CLAYTON - cross boundary access - day use pass and annual pass within BLM (Big Hole) - will America the Beautiful interagency pass work?
      - a. Angler in Butte - do they also have to buy day use pass for each area? Or regardless of Field Office, can they go across Field Office jurisdictions without paying two annual fees? KRISTEN - America the Beautiful falls under fed lands enhancement act - allows pass holder to access without charge certain areas with specific classifications - will apply to standard amenities site - those passes are not eligible to be used at expanded sites. They would need to purchase single/annual to access expanded sites (nationwide).
      - b. Some sites (13) will need garbage services to qualify for standard, expanded, etc.

- c. Ingram: I used America the Beautiful - first time I heard of different amenities requirements. General public is not aware. Can we make sure this information is put out there better - signage, etc.
  - i. KRISTEN: signage helps, internet: National Park Service has information to help navigate between those types of passes but recognize public facing websites are difficult to navigate for the general public.
  - ii. Communication to public for fees increase/establishment - info posted at sites, easy to correct if arrive without knowing.
  - iii. Friendly implementation approach - education first - soft opening - education with word spread/signage. Multiple notifications to public for locals/tourist - social media, press release, radio announcements, website, signage at site.

**6. Chat Comment:** The annual pass proposal reminds me of the pass used by the Flathead National Forest at certain high-use sites in the Tally Lake Ranger District managed by a concessionaire. They also do not accept the America the Beautiful pass at these sites. More info here- <https://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/flathead/recarea/?recid=67130>

5. Subcommittee discussion and recommendations

- a. Helpful to systematically to work on each potentially issue? Topic - subtopic - geography. helpful to think about all the options first and then think about feasibility next.
- b. Overview of systems:
  - i. Fee sites - traditional iron rangers - land management agencies moving away from cash collection
  - ii. Entertaining - software systems - very little infrastructure (will provide handout through David - recreation.gov scan/pay QR code) does not require cell phone service. Laminated form on site kiosk - basic/easiest for day use fees at sites.
  - iii. Second phase - kiosk - work off satellite, require digging/infrastructure (NEPA), cashless system. If primary phase works - no need to move into secondary.
  - iv. INGRAM - fees public pays for to use platform? - agency waived transaction fees: unsure did agency incur fees; rec.gov charges \$5 - need to figure this to understand how those fees will work.
  - v. ANDREW - cell phone - in the river with their bathing suit? Group of children, etc. Not everyone has a cell phone with them. 60% compliance is troublesome. Need to set up a system designed for 100% compliance.
    - 1. Vehicle pass before hand - online/ BLM office prior to going onsite.
    - 2. LOIS - goal having system allows 100% compliance, different sites different methods of collection; we need something so we don't have multiple different passes (federal that work here and not there).
  - vi. STEVIE BURTON COMMENT: What about an option to purchase for multiple individuals in a single transaction? If only one person in the group is carrying a phone, whether it's a friend, group or a family unit, a single member can complete the transaction for everyone instead of separate transactions, just adding lines for each name. Repeating the process over and over is cumbersome. If one friend paid for the whole thing, they could figure out reimbursement from their friends on their own terms whether it's cash or Venmo.

- vii. CLAYTON - tube/shuttle companies express concern the obligation of compliance that falls on them / perception is fee is part of service; \$5 BLM FEE, \$10 FWP, \$10 BUS SERVICE - impacts business
  - 1. Angry person about paying a fee to use public lands falls back on shuttle companies.
- viii. MIKE - 1 truck 3 people vehicle pass vs bus of 100 people
  - 1. Fee structure to be changed for shuttle purposes SRPs, etc.
    - a. Outfitters are bringing in a lot of trips per day - smaller vehicle, but up to 30 people / day. Should outfitters be forced to get their vehicle / pay per person.
    - b. Mike - not opposed to use fees (tag/sticker on mirror). We may put 45 people on river, but each vehicle will have to get pass. If I'm bringing in a bus with 60 people that's one vehicle. Fee needs to differentiate.
    - c. Clayton - the 60 people on the bus should be paying for the use/impact at the site, not the commercial business with the bus. \$ goes back to site.
    - d. Difference between commercial operations outfitters vs shuttle services?
  - 2. Another option is the fee amount. There could be a proposal to increase the fee per vehicle instead of a per person option.
  - 3. Ruby Horsethief has a group use camping fee based on group size. About \$20 for 1-5 people, \$50 6-15, or \$75 15-25. (Those are not right amounts, just examples)
  - 4. MIKE - Annual pass on vehicles - buses bringing in 50 people instead of 3 - \$300 annual vs \$60.
  - 5. AMANDA - Beaverhead River - minimal sites compared to Madison which is why the focus is Madison; Excluding the Henneberry Cabin, BLM Dillon Field Office doesn't have developed recreation sites on the Beaverhead River. We have one developed recreation site on the Big Hole River.
  - 6. LOIS - why can't we have different vehicle fee for larger vehicles? Add it into SRP process. A per-person fee is so much harder to enforce compliance and/or comply. **Amanda - We're are capturing the vehicle fee per size as an option.**
    - a. One permit for Beaverhead and Madison by DFO.
- ix. LINNAEA - Could you do a vehicle fee plus a per-person charge? They often do that on ferries.
- x. INGRAM - implementation needs time. MEL WEST - misinformation from FWP to commercial outfitters, difficult to get accurate information with short timeline and to communicate to clients. Commercial users were not subject to conservation license.
  - 1. Difficult - generally assume permit is enough. Comprehensive. Not giving adequate time for planning was hardest part. For one singular use vs a local - potential restrictive use. On website, in emails that they have to obtain on own. NOW do not need to obtain it. If that's not accurate - FWP needs to discuss.

2. CLAYTON - effective date at end of season to allow time to work through in winter months and implementation soft through following spring/summer. Uniform license across all state property was a good decision.
  - a. What triggers need to buy day use fee? Example: driving down road - not angler or MT resident. Use bathroom - need conservation license or stretch legs or walk dog?
  - b. Shuttle drivers on Upper Madison - quickly pulling in to drop off - how do we capture what triggers use of a site? What is considered USE? tied to use of the named amenities in FLREA - cannot charge for parking. This makes vehicle fee confusing.
  - c. KRISTEN – I'll send materials to David - authorization to charge fee to visitor is written out within FLREA --- line item: types of access in different modes of transportation. Use of facilities and services.
  - d. MIKE - licensed outfitters vs commercial user. When I go to Missouri River, I have to get commercial user \$100, but not on Madison/Beaverhead. Is Fishing Access Site commercial license required for shuttle / tuber services? Andrew - unsure. We don't permit shuttle use for our sites - no use fee for Fishing Access Sites.
    - i. Shuttle permit vs on the water fee.
    - ii. Guide licensed (outfitters) vs commercial use license (tubing) - shuttle/river use.
    - iii. MIKE - Charged disproportionately as licensed guides vs commercial site.

c. SUMMARY -

- i. Proposal FEES - how to apply vehicle or per person or per group on outfitters vs. commercial shuttle service/tubing service vs individual/family
- ii. User Friendly: How to pay? Options
- iii. Implementation: Education, communication, enforcement.
- iv. INGRAM - greater than 3% fee to cover, as long as our clients don't have to go out all over the place to get. Our clients are tourist - 5% to make it simpler.
  1. MEL WEST: Commercial doesn't have to be the same as outfitters
  2. FWP and BLM understanding - that is a different use than having a vehicle fee.  
MIKE - Outfitters strongly opposed to increasing.

Feasibility Notes (pros/cons - e.g. enforcement, how easy to pay and likelihood of compliance, perspectives, unintended consequences.

How will it work, tradeoffs, commercial user interaction, etc.

OPTIONS:

Per person - LOIS - not simple, not friendly to commercial users.

Per vehicle - outfitter, commercial vs family/local

Per group -

Extra fee from Whitewater in conjunction with SRP - outfitters strongly opposed to increasing.

Graduated vehicle Fee (whether or not drivers, outfitters and guides pay any of these would be sub-options to each of these.) vehicle size or group size?

Increased vehicle fee amount to X.

1. Next Steps

- a. make sure all approaches labeled/identified with pros/cons for future discussions.
- b. Enforcement - staffing challenges due to increase of use (activities and people management)
- c. Summarize options discussed. Send out to those who are not present today and prior to next meeting.
- d. No flexibility with meetings will someone from MT Whitewater be able to be present?  
May 7th, yes. May 23rd, unsure.

**Attendees:**

- David Abrams - BLM
- Amanda James - BLM
- Andrew Puls - FW&P, recreation ranger region 3; subcommittee member
- Katie Stevens - BLM
- Kristen Ulery - BLM
- Corey Meier - BLM
- Alexandra Kind - BLM (notes)
- Ingram Crossing - MT Whitewater and Madison River Tubing (Bozeman, MT); subcommittee member
- Lois Steinbeck - member of RAC, public member
- Linnea Schroerer - jumped to another meeting - FW&P regional rec manager
- Mark Filonczuk - Rec manager with MT FW&P; oversees eastern half of river rec program
- Clayton Elliot – Vice-Chair of Western Montana BLM RAC, and subcommittee member
- Bruce Bugbee - sitting in for Kim McMahan
- Mike Bias - Exec. Director - outfitters assoc.; Madison SRP holder; subcommittee member
- Whit Patterson - BLM
- Stevie Burton - MT FW&P - Statewide comment coordinator