

Western Montana BLM RAC Subcommittee on Madison River Fee Proposal May 23, 2024 meeting – Virtual (via Teams)

Attendees:

- Clayton Elliot - Vice Chair of BLM RAC
- Brian McGeehan - Owner, Montana Angler
- Dave Kumlien - RAC member
- Andrew Puhls - FW&P, recreation ranger Region 3
- Mike Bias - Exec. Director - outfitters assoc.; Madison SRP holder
- Kim McMahan –
- Lois Steinbeck - member of RAC, public member
- Katie Stevens – BLM, District Manager
- David Abrams - BLM
- Amanda James - BLM
- Kristen Ulery - BLM
- Corey Meier – BLM
- Whit Patterson - BLM
- Alexandra Kind - BLM (notes)
- Stevie Burton - MT FW&P - Statewide comment coordinator
- Linnaea Schroeer

- Not in attendance:
- Ingram Crosson - MT Whitewater and Madison River Tubing
- Will Israel - Executive Director of Montana Outfitters and Guides Association
- Mike Garcia - expertise with noncommercial boating river recreation
- Bruce Bugbee - sitting in for Kim McMahan

Agenda:

1. Review of Questions to resolve.

a. Did we miss any pros/cons based on your review?

- i. **Kim** – calculations may not be unique users. May have been overstated. Traffic numbers are not unique units each time they enter the site. **Kristin** – they’ve been adjusted by .53 in recommendation from Northwestern Energy to account for shuttle vehicle and an average of 2.5 people per vehicle.
- ii. **Katie** - \$8 – does the above change amount we need to consider? Vehicle side \$10 gets above where we want to be. Per person side \$5 gets above where we want to be. These numbers have been adjusted for the shuttle point Kim brought up. **Kristin** – correct. **Amanda** – it is an estimate, but yes. **Corey** – assumption of 60% compliance.

b. Did we miss any options we should have considered?

- i. No discussion.
- c. **Which option do you think best meets everyone's concerns?**
- i. **Katie** - \$5/person or less, \$10/vehicle or less seem to meet needs best. **Kim** – don’t start too low and have to increase in the future. If \$10 is a little above the goal, it would be best to leave for five years. \$10 is a great cash payment amount. **Amanda** – intentions of increasing 5 years from now.
- ii. **Brian** – seasonal pass option for vehicle pass? Amanda – yes, it is in the business plan. **Kristen** – ATB pass would be accepted at standard amenity sites; ATB is not accepted at expanded. Interagency pass can cover day use at standard, not expanded. BLM Madison river corridor pass is \$40 for 12 months, incrementally increasing (5 years) eligible at both standard and expanded within corridor.

- iii. **Clayton** – Big Hole comparison. Option for annual pass for locals/frequent users.
- iv. **CHAT COMMENT – Katie** - Based on the per-person and per-vehicle amts we're looking at, a person would make 8 trips to justify an annual pass (at \$5/individual) and 4 trips if we go with \$10/vehicle.
- v. **Mike** – going from \$5/vehicle to \$12/vehicle. What is the rationale? **Katie** – looking at \$10/vehicle so from \$10 to \$12/vehicle. **Amanda** – inflation, operation costs. **Kristen** – inflation is one factor. Additional factor is what other agencies, multi-entities are charging both in this region and throughout agencies. Interesting Note: majority of SRP training attendees noted the proposed fees are low in comparison to other federal/state fees. May shed light on the 5-year increase plan. Upper CO sites charge \$5 for last 7-10 years. Goal – maintain some sort of similarity but does not have to mirror.
- vi. **Kim** - \$10/vehicle 628000, \$12/vehicle 753000, \$5/person 758000, \$8/person 1.2mil. assuming these took into account 60% compliance.
- vii. **Amanda** – currently estimated O&E costs, can vary over the years with different maintenance costs. **Kristen** – day to day operations without inclusion of deferred maintenance and emergency projects.
- viii. **Amanada - most** drive people there and shuttle is mostly getting back to vehicle. Still paying per vehicle fee. Concern for per person vs per vehicle is dissipating.
- ix. **Katie**- I don't think we accounted for children at all in the numbers. **Corey** – used conversion factor of 2.5 per vehicle and that is how we came up with the per person number.
- x. **Kim** – based on most recent survey roughly 20% of participants in Madison corridor are considered children under 16yo. **Amanda** – reduce revenue percentage by that amount. **Kim** - \$5/adult person 600k in revenue. **Katie** – would only be relevant in per person. Vehicle numbers are flat numbers. **Kim** – will make more money on per person. Could take up all revenue you will make because of enforcement challenges.
- xi. **Dave** – 60% is a universal number (compliance)? It seems low. **Katie** – scientific estimate based on experience. **Dave** – I think per person is commensurate with use. Vehicle isn't as much. Education first. **Katie** – this will need to be a gradual progression to enforcement. Need to have an option for people who have not paid to do so onsite.
- xii. **Katie** – rock machines don't print anything out. Overstating enforcement. Individual/vehicle? Are we overstating feasibility differences between those options? **Kristen** – the machines do print documentation of purchase for whatever type of fee purchased. What doesn't produce receipt is the scan/pay QR code. Looking at ecommerce options, early on implementation using QR code, no receipt. Purpose of QR code initially is due to cost of rock/ven tech machines. Once revenue compounded, ability to purchase machines and print documentation. Potential apply grant funding for electronic fee machines earlier on.
- xiii. **Katie** – any other amounts other than \$5/person, \$10/vehicle. **Kim** – they generate same amount of revenue. **Mike** – and the annual pass amount is the same regardless of person/vehicle? If you have a pass, is it a vehicle pass to cover everyone in your vehicle? **Amanda** – individual purchases and intention everyone in vehicle is covered in pass.
- xiv. **Brian** – typically most site access is by vehicle (access), permitting (float) is by person. I think you have to be careful if you go per person to think all logistics – it may get messy/complex. **Kristen** – we have consulted with other FO and recreation sites. It has been suggested to not charge per person. Simplicity – per vehicle.
- xv. **Clayton** –I feel strongly around per person. **Dave** – I don't think you can come up with one recommendation. This all is going to be in front of the RAC. I think individual. The RAC will want to hear options anyway.

xvi. **Dave** – is the annual pass figured into these numbers? **Kim** – not in the numbers that I provided. Levels of use based on columns in front of you and reduced people by 20% (youth).

| Options | Per Vehicle | Per Person |
|------------------|----------------------|---|
| 1 vs 2 (\$5 fee) | 1. \$502,420 (\$8pp) | 2. \$607,029 (\$5pp - considering ~20% vis. = under 16) |
| | | 3. \$1,214,059 (\$8pp w/ kids) |
| | | 4. \$971,000 (\$8pp - no kids) |

xvii. **Clayton** – transition period with some iron rangers? If there is, if there is it makes sense to start with \$5.

Katie – one season of transition with iron ranger. Move as quick as we can because it doesn't work very well. **Amanda** – recommended to just go with digital kiosk. Still working those options out. Won't obtain full revenue amounts 1-2 years anyway as people are still learning.

xviii. **Mike** – we don't know the actual numbers. As development/implementation we will learn numbers and compliance.

xix. **Lois** – imposing fee is a big change, PR issues no matter what fee is. Generate revenue we need quickly as can so we can keep up facilities.

xx. **Kristen** – scan & pay is linked to recreation.gov. confirmed through multiple BLM FO and ACE does work for day use fees in service and out of service. Need app prior to losing service to utilize QR code. Goes back to education/marketing prior to implementation. Rec.gov fee associated with all fees. Note:

The transaction costs are per reservation (e.g. for overnight camping, customers pay a single transaction cost regardless of the number of nights)

| Ticket | Timed Entry Ticket | Camping | Day Use Shelter | Permit | Activity Pass | Site Pass |
|--------|--------------------|---------------|-----------------|--------|---|---|
| Quota | Quota | Quota | Quota | Quota | No Quota | No Quota |
| \$1.00 | \$2.00 | \$8.00/\$9.00 | \$8.00/\$9.00 | \$6.00 | \$0.01-\$7.99 = \$.50 \$8.00-\$15.99 = \$1.00 \$16.00-\$29.99 = \$2.00 \$30.00-\$45.99 = \$3.50 | \$0.01-\$7.99 = \$.50 \$8.00-\$15.99 = \$1.00 \$16.00-\$29.99 = \$2.00 \$30.00-\$45.99 = \$3.50 |

app admin fees are .50 cents for day use fee

xxi. **Amanda & Kristen** – **critical to have printed receipt.**

xxii. **Kim** – going back to annual pass question – survey data 2021 60% repeat visitors. ½ had visited 10 or more times in the pass and have been visited in past 10 years. **Annual pass will likely have significant impact on total revenue.** **Kristen** – strive to make purchase of annual pass available in multiple areas, have hangtag mailed to them so they don't have to drive from Bozeman to DFO.

xxiii. **Dave** – **I think most people would have the pass done before they even get to the site.** Look more into Rec.gov. most don't want to download another app to get to scan/pay. Just pay before you get to the river is simpler. Need to have 10 kiosks at Warm Springs when it is busy, or you'll have zero compliance.

Amanda – I think we can offer both options for payment. **Katie** - They can use the rec.gov website (I think) if they do it on the computer before they go. Without the app I think.

xxiv. **Mike** – receipts or phones. I think that depends on per person or per vehicle. Vehicle it goes on dashboard; per person needs to be on them.

- xxv. **Lois** – will annual pass need to be \$50/\$60 to start?
- xxvi. **Kim** – Charge for use of the facility. When fees are implemented / public it needs to tie back to those guidelines – what and why? What is the public benefiting from? **Kristen** – clarity provided to public linking fee back to law and benefits to public.
- xxvii. **Lois** – we don't have to use rec.gov? How much congestion if you have to have an app. Just scan & pay would be ideal. **Katie** – no, the advantage is the website. They could pay their fee and print out receipt prior to leaving. Easy for user/BLM. Onsite congestion with kiosk. Need to offer for folks who are completely unaware when they get onsite. Could be QR code with app or the remote operated kiosk. **Corey** – rec.gov preferable for annual pass purchasers.
- xxviii. **Corey** – 60% and used 10 trips/ per person would reduce revenue from 620k to 402k. accounting for annual pass. To make that back up to 620k, roughly \$15/vehicle fee. **Kim** – used 40% repeat users, also 10 trips per person, total at 10/vehicle is 477k. data provides insight, not actual numbers. **CHAT COMMENT Katie** – If we assume there are 7-10 weekends in the highest use period of late-July-August it seems like 10 repeat trips is pretty high.
- xxix. **Mike** – don't have to make up shortfall for annual pass users by raising per/car fee. Raise annual pass fee \$10 or \$15. **Lois** – put in best guess of reduction and consider more than a \$40/annual pass vehicle.
- xxx. **Brian** – is it possible to just state fees will increase in 5 years potentially to account for actual costs, inflation, etc.? Keep it flexible to adjust rates. **Kim** – I agree. Build into plan not specific amount, but a timeline and process for evaluating start of program and economic factors. **Katie** – RACs are difficult to keep going. Have it approved up front, so we don't have to come back to discuss. **Amanda** – will explore with policy procedures to create adaptive fee increase (reevaluate 3 years out where revenue / fee process); do we have something that would not require RAC approval? **Whit** – go back to RAC. If not set in stone, easier to go back to RAC and give yearly update. In 3-5 years implement new fee.
- xxxi. **Dave** – I would like to see this evaluated every year. **Kim** – yes, annual review. **Amanda** – final concurrence from RAC, then federal register notice. This wouldn't be in place until 2025, start with education. First year will be just a startup. Looking at 2026 before we get good numbers. **Would be 2027 before evaluating implementation. CHAT COMMENT Katie** – I think the point is taken though, that there is good support in this subcommittee for making adjustments based on the degree of accuracy of our assumptions.
- xxxii. **Clayton** – I like adaptive management plan. Changes in RACs in future may be an issue. **Kim** – no decisions on year one results, good to track change over time. Find measurable outcomes to evaluate overtime. Less subjectivity. Compare data to goals.
- d. How do we handle shuttle buses in the “per vehicle” option?**
- i. **Brian** – They are paying fees under SRPs just like guides do. They don't do much of bringing whole group from Bozeman out, they mostly shuttle people who already paid for a pass. Have length limit or has capacity for 12+ people higher annual pass, commercial user covered under SRP. **Amanda** – Currently MT Whitewater only shuttle once a day Thursday - Sunday. **Mike** – are we doing per person or vehicle. If vehicle – some large capacity fee. If per person, then it is covered. **Katie** – do a group fee... option that works better for shuttle bus passenger. **Mike** – group leader, who's in your group, etc. leads to chaos. Still think individual or vehicle. Annual pass covers your vehicle passengers.
- ii. **Clayton**: A per person shuttle bus is covered. Individual is responsible for own fees. 50 people are each responsible for own pass. Per vehicle – carve out shuttle buses and deal with them separately in fee schedule. Suburban full of family and friends treated differently than bus of 45 people. **Kim** – most groups are being shuttled one direction. Already paying fee for vehicle. Would it make sense to charge shuttle group \$120/annual and they can recoup from their shuttle groups. Not talking about majority of users at the site. Higher annual pass and call it a wash with take-out vehicle. **Vehicle capacity over 8**

people fee, commercial use covered in SRP, annual person pass covers vehicle passengers and \$10/vehicle pass.

- iii. **Amanda** – multiple runs per day, more days of the week with busload of 40 people--that would be different. CHAT Comment **Katie** - If American Whitewater brings 1 bus/day from Bozeman, at full capacity 40 people/day for 3 weekend days = 120 people at max over a weekend at current rates
- iv. **Brian** – confused why SRP 3% commercial doesn't cover their use. If you don't use a shuttle, then you double number of vehicles needed to float the river. Less impact for shuttles, less parking space, etc. **Kristen** – revisiting: fees cover different types of use. 3% vs day use. Commercial fees returned to public for commercial use of the lands and to administer the commercial permit system vs day use for extra services/amenities.
- v. **Katie** – big shuttle different commercial fee schedule that would be additional. Shuttle company would absorb responsibility to pay to agency. **Amanda** – fair in how we treat all users including com. Operators or SRP holders. Apply consistently across the board. Vehicle more than 6 passengers you pay a higher fee. **Katie** – challenge with large cap vehicles include different groups. There's no easy way for individual groups to pay that fee. Commercial operators pay individual user fees.
- vi. **Kim** – most of shuttled groups are parking at one end or the other. Shuttle buses drop off large number of people at California Corner. They do operate every day of the summer. Thousands of people. Reports don't specify person takeout to put in or bus from Bozeman.
- vii. **Andrew** – fees going to FW&P, not compensating for use of BLM sites/amenities. **Kim** – promote responsible behavior (shuttling) and individual use. Separate fee – any vehicle that has large cap pays higher fee, anything 8 people and under daily fee/annual pass.
- viii. **Dave** – discussion about the buses. Not concerned about people on bus if they have amenities permit. Leave buses alone. More than willing as an outfitter that my guests have a permit before they go to the river.
- ix. **Katie** – shuttle passenger group fee. Publicize/educate at that location. \$10 fee for group of up to 5 who are riding a shuttle bus. In lieu of vehicle permit.
- x. **Brian** – recommend the vehicle fee. Keep it simple charge the 9-capacity vehicles higher fee whether it is a bus/passenger van. **Katie** – is it more profitable to you to absorb fee? **Brian** – we have to log each person we take down the river. We just bill them for that and at the end of the season we send in the fee based on those logs. If we go vehicle route – guide can get season pass and charge higher annual pass for bus/passenger vans. **Mike** – guides work for outfitter. Clients in guides car are covered under guides pass. 40-person shuttle bus gets 40 annual passes, and all passengers are covered. Not fair. **Katie** – how does payment work and how to ensure fairness. **Kim** – with lack of detail about exactly how many trips/people. I would be more comfortable with a nominal fee \$120 or so. **Adaptative management plan will allow us to make informed decisions in the future.** **Lower** fee to start is better for this group to promote responsible behavior.
- xi. **CHAT Comment** **Maybe we need to give Montana Whitewater some options and have them give the RAC some feedback on what would be most feasible since they' haven't been able to be with us and it's really their specific operation that's the challenge for this.**
- xii. **Amanda** – Bozeman shuttle/back. Less than \$10k revenue for 7-8 weeks of use. Would like it more straightforward with per person or per vehicle with it.
- xiii. **Kristen** – fee collection of per person at Warm Springs/California Corner--no way to gain compliance. Visitors preparing in advance with day use fee, and all sorted out prior to arrival with education/marketing and large vehicle fee. More comfortable with pp option, most viable.
- xiv. **Dave** – guides, tubal rentals, etc. encourage users to get their passes before going to the river. Per person option makes the most sense.

- xv. Kim – under per person, does annual pass cover everyone in vehicle? Would like to see adaptive management strategy.
 - xvi. Brian – per person – do they have paper with them in the water? Where does per person pass go? How to keep dry, not lose it, etc.
 - xvii. Kim - whether the fee program is meeting the intended goals, and whether we are getting the compliance we hope for.
 - e. **Feasibility: What are rec.gov fees? How would scan-and-pay work?**
 - i. See notes above in section c.
 - 2. **Review: Next steps**
 - a. Review: Finalize report/recommendation to RAC
 - b. Prepare something so RAC can look at adaptive management plan. Goals and perspectives. Would like a draft prior to RAC final decision.
- Action Items:**
- **RAC Meeting in Missoula June 27th (Virtual Option)**
 - **Public meeting. David will provide invite to subcommittee members.**