

Western Montana BLM RAC Subcommittee on Madison River Fee Proposal

May 7, 2024, meeting – Virtual (via Teams)

Attendees:

- Ingram Crosson - MT Whitewater and Madison River Tubing
- Lois Steinbeck - member of RAC, public member
- Clayton Elliot - Vice Chair of BLM RAC
- Mike Bias - Exec. Director - outfitters assoc.; Madison SRP holder
- Brian McGeehan - Owner, Montana Angler
- Dave Kumlien - RAC committee member
- Andrew Puhls - FW&P, recreation ranger Region 3
- Kim McMahon - Pinnacle Research

- David Abrams - BLM
- Amanda James - BLM
- Kristen Ulery - BLM
- Corey Meier – BLM
- Cory Manseau - BLM
- Alexandra Kind - BLM (notes)
- Katie Stevens – BLM, District Manager

- Not in attendance:
 - Will Israel - Executive Director of Montana Outfitters and Guides Association
 - Mike Garcia - expertise with noncommercial boating river recreation

Agenda:

1. Review of Questions to resolve.

- a. **Katie** – SRP holders also paying fees is the hot topic. We request your feedback on individual vs group vs vehicle permits. Important: diversity of feedback, full understanding of all factors from your perspective. Less important: agreement of options. SRP/fees are outside the scope of this group’s work. Clear – outfitters/guides don’t have to pay that fee themselves; clients should pay that fee. Outfitters pay SRP and customers pay day-use fee. Exclude – driver’s, guides, outfitters. **MIKE** – not sure that’s a correct interpretation. Our SRP 3% is based on what our clients are paying us to use those amenities.
- b. **Amanda** – A day-use fee is the use of amenities – it’s not an access fee. Depending on fee structure to exclude SRP holders from option table. Important considerations – fairness across the board between public land users. Feasibility of day use fee, consider revenue and consistency.
- c. **Clayton** – RAC member perspective: opportunity to build pros/cons. Dialog will help RAC. Limited jurisdiction RAC has related to SRPs is challenging. Specific to day use/amenity fee. **Kristen** – there are limitations as to what RAC/subcommittee can provide guidance on. How fees are charged/collected.
- d. **Lois – to Amanda:** We developed options that excluded SRPs, so fee revenue does not include assessing SRP clients? **Amanda** – revenue analysis is based off vehicle counts/visitor use data. Estimated per person count. Revenue table estimates: everyone

using those amenities is paying a fee. **KATIE** – focus different proposals. It would be easy to separate out guides/outfitters vs clients with vehicle-based fee.

- e. **Mike** –... SRP is what we pay to BLM that allows us to bring clients to the boat ramp, take them down the river and use BLM lands. How is that different than day-use fee? Us/clients covered under SRP – exempt from day use fee/permit/license since we're already paying for it. **Kristen** – whether commercial outfitter (permit holder/employee) can be/should be charged day-use fee... recreation use permit (RUP). What/where they are authorizing. SRP issued to public lands/related waters. Speaking to general BLM land – not developed infrastructure which is distinguished under RUPs – sites, facilities, services furnished at federal expense. No implemented day-use fees have left out SRP holders, per training attendees. We do have authorization to charge day use to SRP holders.
- f. **Clayton** – Mike's concerns: whether SRP holders are required to pay day-use fee and whether clients are required to pay day-use fee.
- g. **Brian** – Keeping it streamlined and consistent, we should avoid fee stacking. **Kristen** – 68.02 special considerations establishing minimum number of fees, avoiding layering Rec fees. This is related to day-use fees, not SRPs. It is RUP special consideration. We recently received clarification from BLM HQ.
- h. **Mike** – SRP allows us to use general lands as commercial users. To access lands/waters using day use amenities which would be RUP areas? **Kristen** – boat ramp, for example, yes. **Mike** –That's an important distinction regarding individual vs per vehicle. **Katie** – fee is for use of amenities. Amenities are required because of the level of use there. services of value to public. Staffing component? **Kristen** – we did not get into that detail. Conversations were heavily focused on boat ramps, multiple lanes of loading, vault toilets, picnic tables. **Kristen** – **will send standard amenities list if needed.**
- i. **Clayton** – suggest keeping a running list of topics that the RAC explore further. Good concepts that RAC would be well to understand. Program, how it works, what's the authority. Fee stacking is a concern relating to all proposals (Butte/Dillon) thinking of average user of these amenities.
- j. **CHAT COMMENT Dave:** Andrew, Does the Madison SRP agreement between BLM and MTFWP have a sunset period or provide an opportunity for evaluation? **Katie** – I don't want the fact that outfitters paying fees to FWP to be an issue either. If group comes up with recommendation that individual or vehicle are appropriate, we can figure out the agreement between BLM/FWP.
- k. **Brian** – come back to commercial, we all recognize that it can be charged a fee in different ways through different mechanisms. Let's discuss general public, come back to commercial. I don't know where commercial outfitters are charged both SRP and RUP. It is usually one or the other. **Mike** – currently commercial users are the only ones paying for anything, but you don't fix it by increasing our fees.
- l. **Clayton** – in proposal, clients vs SRP holders. Do we want to think of clients using these amenities separate from public or are they part of the commercial use? **Brian** – a client is a member of the general public that chose to hire a guide. They're a member of the general public when they are floating, we want to make sure we consider experience/charges. Person next to them floating with a buddy paying \$5 vs paying \$5 + services of a guide. In many river corridors around the country, Arkansas River in CO, not

wild/scenic, **multi-agency cooperation model to consider at a later date.** BLM/FWP/FS – work together to have a streamlined corridor cooperation.

- m. **Andrew** – move forward with fee structure (vehicle/individual) discussion then come back and visit the commercial aspect. In this commercial use discussion – third party on trips we're not discussing (guide vs SRP holder vs client). Are they subject as another user or under the SRP holder?
- n. **Mike** – following Clayton, Brian, and Andrew – your question depends on how we define the unit (vehicle/person/tube/watercraft). It is the guide, clients in one boat. If that is the unit of the fee, then those individuals are covered. If we decide it is individual, then it is clients plus guide because fee is for use of amenity. Depends on the unit you're charging.
- o. **Brian** – General user: per person/per vehicle. River rec / a river permit is generally by person. When it comes to access of sites it is by vehicle. Feasibility/enforcement: trying to charge per person will have a lot of challenges. Vehicles move to/from sites, park there all day, does every person have to have separate season pass, ticket showing they paid. Simple route would be per vehicle. Capacity of parking lot would encourage people to consolidate/carpool. Vehicle day pass and season pass. Carve it out separately – if most people don't have ATB pass. Look at Idaho model – river corridor fed pass. Allows day or seasonal. Camping would be per unit/night.
- p. **Mike** – how do campers pay. **Kristen** - They're paying for the site. It is \$5 per additional vehicle. Using Iron ranger and recreation.gov. example of RUP. Mike – would going per person confuse them. Ruby? **Kristen** – we need to keep it as simple as possible while meeting goals of business plan. **Mike** – seasonal timeframe where you collect fees **Kristen** – we do that currently for campgrounds, Model of day use fees would be same timeframe. Winter/shoulder seasons are free. Potential for changes in future. May 1st – October 15th for campsites, proposed in business plan that day use fee would align with that. **Mike** – timeframe considered in estimated fee collected? **Kristen** – yes.
- q. **Katie** – impacts are from individual users. Vehicles may be proxy, but vehicle fee may not capture all impacts by individuals and level of use.
- r. - being able to pay fee being out of cell service? **Mike** –Also, impacts to resource are because of individual people, but the only way they're getting there is by vehicle. **Kristen** –scan and pay does not require cell service. You do have to have the recreation.gov app on your phone in advance. Once you return to cell service, it processes the day-use fee. Training attendees have used scan and pay – no issues.
- s. **Mike** – two weeks ago I was in an area there was no cell service. I was gone for 4 days. How do I pay? I put checks in Iron Rangers. I am not tech savvy. **Kristen** – falls on responsibility of agency to think ahead, education, marketing, communication, etc. Goal is to cast a wide net in how to collect those fees. To work in communicating this business plan in making them aware as we are able to.

2. Subcommittee discussion / recommendations

- a. Set fee to meet revenue projections.
- b. Want to be considerate of how much we ask public to pay. The revenue amount is significantly different between vehicle vs individuals. Current expenses are \$415,390
- c. Fee to supplement operations/maintenance.

- d. **Lois** – high per vehicle fee. Promote more use of shuttle from Bozeman and helps alleviate parking. Long term: Going to the Sun Road permit because of high day use. Any way to match revenue to use of site. In favor of getting revenue to support what needs to be done there. Day use increases, no money to improve or maintain facilities. Impose fee will take a hit – impose fee that is way too little and take public hit or impose fee that is larger and take public hit? **Katie** – there is no capacity limit at these sites. Would require a capacity carrying limit study. **Lois** – if we are already experiencing over capacity, we need to address it. Optics won't be good because fee is coming but might as well get fee that is closer to what is needed.
- e. **Mike** – you impose fee to use amenities on Warm Springs and California Corner. It's per person at a higher rate. Be aware that you fee Madison, they're going to the Yellowstone. **Amanda** – What is different with Madison is it is so accessible to do a float quickly. The further away the rivers are, the less people are going to go. It's a matter of convenience.
- f. **Andrew** – impose high amenity fee at Warm Springs and California Corner, then get down to FWP sites below them. You will see a higher use to other sections of river and that will have other consequences. **Brian** – begin implementing fees does not decrease use. It brands it as a sign of quality. As a family of six (college kids) – per person allow trip leader to put on one group trip, one receipt. **Can you give one person opportunities to pay for whole group – if going through app, why can't payment feature be designed to list multiple names under group registration?**
- g. **Ingram** – general displacement – pioneered not access sites, resource degradation. Madison less dangerous than Yellowstone.
- h. **Andrew** – we can differentiate between commercial bus vs personal vehicle. Fee amount, number of people. **Lois** –account the per person capacity of vehicle.

\$X/vehicle -

Pros	Cons
Easier to enforce	
Cost is shared by all members of group. May be easier for public to swallow \$10/vehicle vs \$5/person.	Less beneficial related to revenue costs to manage – does not meet what we are currently spending on current visitation. \$10 does meet current, future growth.
Simpler.	Fairness – applying evenly to all public land users. Easiest way is to charge per person. Uniform fee doesn't address/capture users at Warm Springs, CA Corner – loaded in vans, vehicles/shuttles vs. personal vehicles. (Mike – scale it to capacity. Charge 40-person bus \$80 vs \$5 per vehicle).
Promote responsible behavior – carpooling. Note: limited parking leads to carpooling already.	
Feasibility – commercial vs noncommercial	

\$X/person

Pros	Cons
More in line with impacts to sites.	Enforcement. Vehicles move between sites, how do you check, everyone have ticket, cell signal issues.
Fairness – applying evenly to all public land users. Easiest way is to charge per person. Doesn't address users at California Corner – loaded in vans, vehicles/shuttles.	Optics – went for per person because we could make more money doing that.
	Complex. Each person essentially having their own pass. How do you do a season pass, per person? Families –

	does each kid now downloading app, need own phone? NOTE: under 16 is free.
You can generate off \$2. It brings revenue closer together. \$2/\$5 vehicle it is more in line with what our needs are. Katie – electronic fee makes lower fee easier because no change is needed.	Enforcement/compliance – when people coming in one vehicle? *Warm Springs, California Corner may be more challenging. Are they putting in/taking out at these locations? Enforcement would be to have rangers asking everyone if they purchased their day-use fee. Extremely difficult/frustrating for staff to enforce.
Raises funds commensurate with use and impact on amenity. Vast majority of passes be purchased off site. Place emphasis on education that the pass is needed not on enforcement. Education/Outreach, how you set this up is instrumental in success.	public safety concern with congestion we already have (bathroom lines into traffic), add fee kiosk line, people trying to bypass those busy sites could be a problem. Per vehicle would be simpler.
	Revenue analysis based off of 60% compliance. Per person fee probably won't be 60% compliance.
	Confusion with campsite fees with additional vehicle fee (per site vs per vehicle, etc.). within same geographical region. Have campground fee where combined sites – all inclusive to include day-use fee.

Dave – I favor individual. Raises funds commensurate with use and impact on amenity. Vast majority of passes be purchased off site/decisions made prior. I don't think there are many people going to Madison and just deciding to float. Place emphasis on education that the pass is needed not on enforcement. Put the QR code at Whitewater office and have them scan there before getting to Madison.

Education/Outreach, how you set this up is instrumental in success. Put code at sporting good stores, etc. You do not want to promote decision making process onsite. **Show people what we're doing with the revenue from passes. Make sure they understand.**

Mike – maybe it is an educational factor. First year – growing pains. Second year – people know they need their pass. **Kristen** – yes, we would absolutely focus on education. Taking a firmer stance on the 2nd and 3rd years. Majority of repeat users will choose to comply by 3rd year. **Clayton** – similar thinking to what went behind the conservation license approach with FWP. More common practice for people to plan before they get to the river. Individuals are responsible for themselves to be prepared to be on the river.

Katie – vehicle fee option because we didn't have options that made it easier to collect individual fees when that was implemented.

Kristen – America the Beautiful pass covers occupants of vehicle while it is assigned to one person (up to four individuals in one vehicle). Every Kid Outdoors covers student and up to 3 members of family. **Mike** – If my Dillon Field Office BLM pass covers up to whoever is in my vehicle, I don't have to worry about it if they have their day use fee. I'm an individual pass holder, wherever I go to use those amenities me and whoever is in my vehicle is covered. But if you have someone who just comes in for the day in his car and needs to purchase daily. **Kristen** – America the Beautiful pass can be at standard sites. Madison River Rec annual voucher would be accepted at both expanded and standard – intended to cover all Madison Corridor sites (all 13 regardless of classification).

Mike – common theme needs to be adaptive so you can change it. Implementation will give you good data on use. **Amanda** – business plan 5-year plan fee increase, based on inflation rate and reviewed other business plans. **Kristen** – business plan narrative includes fees/use can be reevaluated, carry capacity, etc.

Corey – if we came up with a target number for revenue and broke it down per person and groups of people per vehicle. Discount to those carpooling or encourage annual passes.

Katie – concern with companies with a lot of guides? All guides paying annual fee. **Mike** – This is BLM catching up with the rest of the world. The National Park Service is doing it. State of Montana is doing it.

Katie – option 6, different approaches on upper/lower Madison. **Everyone** – no.

Kim – based on vehicles used in revenue table, target 20% over \$415k – per vehicle is \$8. Repeat visitors will know they need the pass. Compliance will rise steeply over the first season.

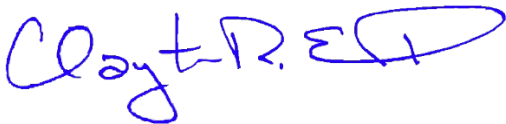
3. Review: Next steps, assignments.

- a. **Mike** - Butte for a model – Big Hole to Madison is all BLM to me. Using amenities at site or downstream. **Clayton** – East Bank is different than Divide Bridge. **Katie** – lets follow up on this.
- b. Update revenue analysis based on 5/7 discussions.

Action Items:

- Upcoming Meetings: May 23 TEAMS meeting (VIRTUAL).

Reviewed and approved by



CLAYTON ELLIOT, RAC member