



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

Northern California District Resource Advisory Council

Field Tour and Meeting

June 5-6, 2024

Arcata, CA

Summary Minutes*

Field Tour

June 5

RAC members toured sites managed by the Arcata Field Office including the Ma-le'l Dunes, Samoa Recreation Area and the Elk River Trail portion of the Headwaters Forest Reserve. At each stop, members of the Arcata Field Office staff presented information on management objectives, public access and public use. There were no members of the public participating.

Business Meeting

June 6

The meeting was held in the conference room of the Arcata Field Office and included an option for virtual participation via Zoom.

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

RAC members attending: Stacey Carman, Pat Frost, Carol Montgomery, Jim Rankin, Daniel Efseaff, Jeff Blewett, Leonard Moty, Joseph Tona, Richard Karem, David Lile, Steve Martin, Ryan Henson. There are majorities present in each membership category and therefore, a quorum is present.

BLM staff: Acting State Director Gordon Toevs (Zoom), District Manager Dereck Wilson, Deputy District Manager Phil D'Amo, Public Affairs Officer Jeff Fontana, King Range National Conservation Area Manager Paul Sever, California Coastal National Monument Manager Leisyka Parrott, Redding Field Manager Jennifer Mata, Applegate Field Manager Craig Drake, Arcata Field Manager Collin Ewing, Eagle Lake Field Manager Emily Ryan, Arcata Field Office Planner Tory Callahan, Redding Field Officer Planner Chad Endicott, Arcata Assistant Field Manager Jennifer Wheeler, Arcata Assistant Field Manager Dan Wooden.

Guests: Jora Fogg (Zoom), Conservation Lands Foundation; Camille Pon (Zoom), field representative for U. S. Sen. Laphonza Butler.

Opening Business

The meeting agenda was approved.

The minutes from the previous meeting were approved with no changes.

Overview: California Coastal National Monument

Monument Manager Leisyka Parrott summarized that the monument, established by Presidential proclamation in 2000, includes the rocks and islands off the California coast from mean high tide and out 12 nautical miles. It is often characterized as the “most viewed, but least known” BLM national monument. With an expansion in 2014, the monument “came ashore” with establishment of the Point Arena-Stornetta onshore units. In 2017, five more onshore units were added. The Arcata Field Office manages 12 acres on Trinidad Head including a still functioning lighthouse (Yurok ancestral territory), Waluplh-Lighthouse Ranch (Wiyot ancestral territory), and the Lost Coast Headlands. There is no additional funding for monument management. The BLM works closely with partners and tribes.

Ethics presentation

Liz Barry, an attorney with the U. S. Solicitor’s Office, presented information on conflicts of interest that must be avoided by RAC members; they must recuse themselves from discussion of any matter in which they have a conflict, or the appearance of a conflict. Members may not benefit financially or personally from their status as a RAC member. Barry encouraged members to call her with questions and provided contact information.

Northern California Integrated Resource Management Plan

Tory Callahan, a planning and environmental coordinator with the Arcata Field Office and Chad Endicott, her counterpart in the Redding Field Office, updated the council on the plan status and anticipated approval.

Tory, Chad and BLM managers responded to RAC questions. Highlights:

- The BLM received 533 substantive comments on the draft plan resulting in edits to the draft plan. A summary of these and the BLM responses will be included in the final plan.
- A Notice of Availability will be published in the Federal Register on June 21, advising the public that the proposed plan and final environmental impact statement are available for review and that a 30-day protest period is underway.
- Protests must be in writing to the BLM director. Protestors must have “standing,” meaning that they have participated in the planning process and have an interest that would be adversely affected by the plan.
- Protests must be specific to the plan or to law or BLM policy.
- The final plan will show a preferred alternative.
- The plan provides overall guidance and a framework for management. It does not satisfy the National Environmental Policy Act requirements for analysis of specific projects or actions. Leonard Moty characterized the plan as a “roadmap” and NEPA as project implementation analysis.
- Public comments did change some sections of the plan. For example, the draft contained language about riparian management but that was revised after consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service. The final plan will have a section detailing how public comments were addressed.

Redding Field Manager Jennifer Mata noted that there was more public scoping for this plan than most others. The process started in 2016 under planning guidance that was changed midway through the planning process. As a result, conversations with interested stakeholders started early. After a pause in planning the process was restarted and more public scoping was completed.

Collin Ewing noted that the BLM consulted with counties in the planning area, and most decided to participate as formal cooperating agencies. All relevant local agencies were invited to participate in the planning process.

Arcata Field Office Partnerships

Field manager Collin Ewing noted that with BLM staffing limitations (base funding for staffing is limited) partners are critical for management support, especially with inflation. Partners increase capacity, decrease risk, provide innovative solutions, improve communication and stewardship, and help provide better service to visitors.

The RAC heard presentations on numerous field office partnerships:

King Range National Conservation Area: NCA manager Paul Sever discussed the King Range Alliance that includes the Mattole Restoration Group and the Mattole Restoration Council, both working to improve conditions in the Mattole River at the north end of the NCA. Among their projects is a “wood is good” undertaking that places trees in the stream channel to improve fish habitat. Additionally, Nick’s Interns provides learning opportunities for young people, while Friends of the Lost Coast provides educational and informational outreach programs.

Tribal Partnerships: Assistant Field Manager Dan Wooden discussed a long-term partnership with the Hoopa Tribe in the Lacks Creek Management Area. Since 2010, the Tribe has worked under the Tribal Forest Protection Act for oak woodlands protection on lands nearly adjacent to their reservation (for acorn production and habitat values). In Arcata, the BLM will be able to utilize stewardship agreement to restore oak woodlands. The Tribe would help with the removal of the trees, some of which are large enough to go to the mill, and revenue would offset future restoration work costs. Now, the field office and Tribe are coordinating under a Good Neighbor Authority agreement, which allows access to Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding (BIL) funding.

Additional partners: Wooden said the BLM also partners with CalFire (a huge partner for fuels treatments), Mendocino County Resource Conservation District, Friends of the Dunes, Redwood Parks Conservancy and the Conservation Lands Foundation.

RAC discussion: In response to Richard Karem, Dan noted that input from fire safe councils was taken into consideration. He said that Cal Fire has provided millions of dollars in grants for fuels projects, and the BLM works with fire safe councils so they can qualify for grant funding opportunities. Responding to Jim Rankin, Dan said grants provide funding for long term maintenance of hazardous fuels reduction projects. In response to a question from David Lile, presenters noted that part of Cal Fire’s climate change initiative is to approach fuels projects on a landscape level, meaning that funds can be used for federally managed lands.

Craig Drake, the BLM Applegate field manager, noted that Cal Fire has been assisting the BLM with prescribed fire projects, a factor in the BLM’s ability to complete projects.

State Director's Report

Acting State Director Gordon Toevs addresses the council via Zoom. Highlights:

Budget

- As of late May 2024, BLM California's Operating Budget for Fiscal Year 2024 was \$349 million.
- For FY 2023, BLM California's Final Operating Budget for Fiscal Year 2023 was \$354 million

The breakdown of the BLM-CA Operating Budget year-to-date is as follows:

- \$110 million in management of lands and resources funding, while under a continuing resolution
- \$43 million in Fire funding,
- \$12 million in BIL funding,
- \$15 million in IRA funding
- \$15 million in GAOA funding, and
- \$154 million from Fee, Reimbursable, Contributed both Major and Minor Categories, and Land Acquisitions accounts (Soft Funding Accounts).

BIL/IRA Infrastructure Funding

The BLM supports a variety of infrastructure-related projects throughout California. Since June 2022, with funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, BLM California has dedicated:

- \$20.4 million for more than 50 ecosystem restoration projects, which include \$2.9 million for native plant materials needed to restore native vegetation on public lands,
- more than \$1.7 million to clean up orphaned well areas,
- more than \$8 million for forest treatments promoting ecological restoration, and received \$16.8 million for fuels reduction projects with more than 25,000 acres treated.

BIL Fuels Reduction Acres Treated:

- FY22 1,257 Acres
- FY23 24,803 Acres
- FY24 28,154 Acres planned:
 - 53% Invasive Species Removal
 - 22% Conifer Removal
 - 14% Fuel Breaks
 - 8% Other Restoration & Protection Treatments
 - 4% Terrestrial Habitat Restoration

Public Lands Rule

In mid-April, the Department of the Interior announced a final rule to help guide the balanced management of America's public lands. The final Public Lands Rule provides tools for the Bureau of Land Management to help improve the health and resilience of public lands in the face of a changing climate; conserve important wildlife habitat and intact landscapes; facilitate responsible development; and better recognize unique cultural and natural resources on public lands.

The Public Lands Rule builds on historic investments in public lands, waters and clean energy deployment provided by President Biden's Investing in America agenda, which recognizes the critical value of our public lands to all Americans.

The Public Lands Rule will help safeguard the health of our public lands for current and future generations by helping ensure we:

- protect clean water and wildlife habitat,
- restore lands and waters that need it, and
- make informed management decisions based on science, and data, and including Indigenous Knowledge

Wildfire and Fuels

The BLM Fire program protects 13.6 million acres of public, state, and private lands in California and northwest Nevada through interagency protection/fire management agreements.

The Northern California District is responsible for 3,298,398 acres in the Direct Protection Area (DPA).

For FY 23, BLM funded around 52 projects resulting in 68 treatments, 73 planning actions, 92 community assistance activities, and treating more than 14,000 acres in the Northern California District.

National Conservation Lands

In March, the BLM celebrated the 25th Anniversary of establishment of the Headwaters Forest Reserve and in late May the 10-year anniversary of the first onshore portion of the California Coastal National Monument, the Point Arena-Stornetta public lands on the Mendocino County coast.

Questions and Answers

Responding to a question from Leonard Moty, Gordon said the Wild Horse and Burro Program continues to be a major expense for the BLM. There are over 60,000 horses in long-term holding in the Midwest, consuming over half of the WHB program budget each year. He said the BLM is charged with keeping healthy herds on the range at appropriate management levels. The BLM must develop effective contraception protocols and involve partners in herd management. Dereck Wilson said the BLM is working to increase wild horse and burro adoptions of excess animals removed from the range. David Lile noted the importance of getting herds down to appropriate management level which will help slow population growth. Richard Karem said that if more members of the public knew of the impact on budgets there could be some public influence on the BLM to change management policies. Ryan Henson noted that wild horses can impact wildlife habitat.

Housekeeping Items

Jeff Fontana:

- Asked RAC members to sign a group volunteer agreement for travel in government vehicles
- Reminded members about bringing in their lodging receipts and mileage information. Stephanie Bellerman of the Arcata Field Office will support the RAC by managing their reimbursement process.
- Distributed forms for members to provide their emergency contact information.

Public Comment

Jora Fogg, Conservation Lands Foundation: Thanked the BLM for work on the Northwest California Integrated Resource Management Plan.

Land Tenure Updates

BLM staff updated the RAC on current and pending land acquisition funded by the Land and Water Conservation Fund:

- Bald Mountain: Acquisition of 700 acres on the east side of Bald Mountain will provide more access to the non-motorized trail network managed by the Eagle Lake Field Office. This will allow for construction of a new trailhead and one or two more trails for addition to the current trail network.
- Upper Smoke Creek: Purchase of the properties has been completed. It provides new public access and opportunities for managing wildlife habitat on Eagle Lake Field Office lands.
- Rush Creek: The purchase is nearing completion. These properties in the Eagle Field Office jurisdiction provide key habitat for wildlife including greater sage grouse. Springs support riparian areas and fishery habitat. There are opportunities for partnerships with the Nevada Department of Wildlife and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.
- Herlong Junction: Acquisition of the parcel along the Highway 395 corridor south of Susanville will be completed soon. The parcel managed by the Eagle Lake Field Office provides important winter habitat for mule deer.
- Sage Grouse Parcels: Closure is near on two parcels managed by the Applegate Field Office in northwest Nevada, south of Cedarville, California. They provide excellent brood rearing habitat and good water sources from springs.
- Lost Coast Redwoods: The BLM hopes to close in December 2024 on property in Mendocino County that includes five miles coastline near Rockport, south of Sinkyone Wilderness State Park. The RAC will have opportunities to provide suggestions for future management of the property that will become part of the Arcata Field Office jurisdiction.
- Elk Creek: The BLM hopes to close this fall by acquiring parcels adjacent to the Yuki Wilderness. Elk Creek is a tributary of the middle fork Eel River, a designated Wild and Scenic River. The parcel will be administered by the Arcata Field Office. It is adjacent to land managed by the Mendocino National Forest. Public access will improve but will still be difficult. Public ownership will open new

possibilities for partnership and recreation opportunities, including equestrian use. Portions of the parcel could become part of the Yuki Wilderness if a bill introduced by Rep. Jared Huffman becomes law.

- Sacramento River Bend: The Redding Field Office is working with Western Rivers, acquiring about 200 acres near Jelly's Ferry in the Sacramento River Bend Outstanding Natural Area. Acquisition will allow for more public access, restoration of the area to native riparian habitat and potential campground development. The property falls within the BLM Area of Critical Environmental Concern in the Sacramento River Bend.
- Chappie-Shasta Off Highway Vehicle Area: The Redding Field Office is working to acquire parcels that would block up public ownership into larger, easier to manage parcels.
- Swasey Recreation Area: The Redding Field Office is working to acquire a parcel that would benefit trails connections. The parcel is being donated.
- Iron Mountain Mine Site: The Redding Field Office is in the early stages of completing work on a proposed donation.

Field Managers' Reports

Arcata FO: Highlights of Collin Ewing's report:

- Lost Coast Redwoods project: A contractor is working on pre-acquisition visioning process, and consultation facilitated by the Intertribal Sinkyone Wilderness Council is underway.
- The field office is now implementing new campground fees in the King Range NCA. The RAC approved these fees presented in a business plan at a previous meeting. Funds will be retained in the King Range to support staff and projects.
- The field office has received a Cal Fire Forest health grant totaling \$3.8 million. Caltrans has provided a \$2.3 million award for work at Red Mountain.
- Work is underway on a county road rerouting project in the Lost Coast Headlands, part of the California Coastal National Monument, to provide access around an active slide area.
- The field office has been holding public events to celebrate the Headwaters Forest Reserve 25th anniversary. Recreation.gov is now accepting reservations for docent-led hikes on the Salmon Pass Trail in Headwaters.

Applegate Field Office: Craig Drake reported on the following:

- A Hog Ranch mining exploration application has been approved pending a bond posting, and a sage grouse mitigation conservation fee paid to the State of Nevada. There were few comments and no appeals on the environmental assessment and decision.
- The field office is still awaiting the start of construction on an office remodeling project in Alturas. Field office business is being conducted from the Surprise Field Station in Cedarville.
- A contract for juniper reduction on 6,000 acres is in progress; another project was awarded near Cedarville with BIL funding.

- The field office partners with the Black Rock Field Office of the Winnemucca District for management of wild horses and burros and livestock grazing in part of the Black Rock Desert-High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails National Monument.
- The field office anticipates opening a public comment period in July on an EA for a wild horse gather in the Carter Reservoir, Coppersmith and Buckhorn herd management areas.
- Staffing levels are improving. The office has hired three new rangeland management specialists. There are still some vacancies, as the BLM finds difficulties in recruiting for jobs in the remote field office location.

Redding Field Office: Jennifer Mata reported on the following topics:

- Fee increases for campgrounds in Trinity County took place in May. New campground(s) still need to be built.
- The Bureau of Reclamation received BIL money and provided support from that allocation to the BLM for Trinity River restoration work including a boat launch, campground improvements and improvements at the Steiner Flat Campground.
- The field office completed NEPA analysis on two large scale fuels reduction projects at Keswick Basin and Indian Creek.

Eagle Lake Field Office: Emily Ryan reported on the following items:

- A Twin Peaks wild horse and burro gather is planned to begin Sept. 1. The field office staff plans to remove 800 horses and 130 burros. Animals will be available for public adoption or purchase. Unadoptable animals will be moved to long term holding pastures. The goal is to achieve appropriate management level for the entire 800,000-acre herd management area, thus reducing the number of animals to be removed in future years.
- The field office building is being remodeled, and the staff is now working from smaller quarters in the Ted Overton Training Center. The project could take from six months to a year.
- The field office has had difficulty hiring seasonal help, so crews from organizations such as the Great Basin Institute, American Conservation Experience and Americorps have been dedicated to project work.
- The field office partnered with the Nevada Department of Wildlife for an aerial herbicide application project in a burned area in the Dry Valley Rim WSA. The project intends to reduce invasive grasses to benefit the return of native plants.
- Ducks Unlimited has partnered with the field office on a meadow restoration project in an area with high rodent damage. The project will help the meadow area retain water longer.
- The field office staff is working on reducing juniper encroachment on 3,000 acres, removing trees up to eight feet tall.

Future meeting topics

In discussion, the following topics were suggested for future meetings:

- Implementation of the new Northwest California Integrated Resource Management Plan,
- Fire and fuels planning and project priorities,
- Wild horse and burro management,

- Planning in the California Coastal National Monument.
- Acquisitions planning, and
- Comprehensive OHV planning for the Fort Sage, Rice Canyon and Dry Valley recreation areas managed by the Eagle Lake Field Office.

Carol Montgomery noted that the Truckee Meadows Public Lands Management Act, if passed, would have implications for management in the Applegate and Eagle Lake field office jurisdictions.

Ryan Henson suggested early communication with groups interested in management issues can be a successful strategy in planning.

Next meeting

The council will hold a field tour and meeting Sept. 25-26 in Cedarville.

The meeting was adjourned.

*Summary meeting notes compiled by
Jennifer Wheeler, assistant field manager, BLM Arcata*