



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

**Northern California District
Resource Advisory Council**
Field Tour and Meeting
Sept. 25-26, 2024 Cedarville, California

Summary Minutes

Sept. 25 Field Tour

Advisory council members toured sites managed by the Applegate Field Office/Surprise Field Station in northeast California and Northwest Nevada. Stops included a site used by wild horses from the Carter Reservoir Herd Management Area, and stops at the Divine Springs, Boulder Reservoir and Wall Canyon areas. RAC members heard presentations on projects to improve and conserve natural and cultural resources and to meeting growing expectations for public land recreation.

Sept. 26 Meeting

The council met in the Four Seasons Building on the Modoc District Fairgrounds. Chairman Leonard Moty called the meeting to order at 8:10 a.m.

RAC members attending: Joe Tona, David Lile, Jim Rankin, Bill Kuntz, Rich Karem, Dan Efsaeff, Leonard Moty, Carol Montgomery, Casey Bokavich, Jeff Blewett, Ryan Henson. There are majorities present in each membership category, and therefore a quorum of the RAC is present.

BLM staff attending: California State Director Joe Stout, State RAC Coordinator Sarah Denos, District Manager Dereck Wilson, Deputy District Manager Phil D'Amo, Applegate Field Manager Craig Drake, Eagle Lake Field Manager Emily Ryan, Redding Field Manager Jennifer Mata, Applegate Field Office Assistant Manager Kevin Kunkel, California State Office Resource Advisor Julie Hartley, Northern California District Public Affairs Officer Jeff Fontana.

Opening Business

The committee approved the minutes from the June meeting and the agenda for today's meeting.

State Director Comments

Joe Stout commended the RAC members for their service and advice. He provided a summary of his history in federal service, including working two years as the BLM California associate state director and work at the field, regional and national levels of the BLM. He also served as supervisor of the Eldorado National Forest before returning to the BLM as state director.

The state director discussed projected budget reductions for the agency and said the BLM will continue to look for funding opportunities to offset losses. Grants, the Land and Water Conservation Fund and other sources are all part of this approach. Stout said the BLM will be looking to the RAC for advice in Public Lands Rule implementation, land use planning, resource conservation projects. He also reported that a third round of land

use plan amendments is underway now. These will amend current BLM resource management plans to incorporate conservation measures for sage grouse habitat.

RAC Comments to state director

Rich Karem expressed concerns that the BLM has too many restrictions regarding herbicide use. He said herbicides are an important tool for fuel break maintenance. He also said small numbers of people are driving the narrative on wild horse and burro management. He said more people need to understand the cost associated with the program.

Leonard Moty suggested that national level review and approval processes for RAC meeting notification in the Federal Register should be streamlined.

Northern California Integrated Resource Management Plan

District Manager Dereck Wilson updated the council on approval of the resource management plan that applies to public lands managed by the Arcata and Redding field offices. He said the protest period ended. Headquarters staff reviewed and settled 11 protests; no changes to the RMP are anticipated. A protest report will be available to the public. The field offices will now turn their attention to implementing the plan. Plans for managing transportation routes, wild and scenic rivers, areas of critical environmental concern, fire management and recreation are all upcoming.

Wild Horse and Burro Management

Dereck Wilson presented an overview of the Wild Free Roaming Horses and Burros Act that requires the BLM and Forest Service to protect the animals and control their populations on areas where they roamed at the passage of the act in 1971. Phil D'Amo provided an overview of the act's history and Craig Drake presented information on managing horses as part of a thriving, natural ecological balance on the range, as required by the act. He discussed management challenges resulting from horse and burro overpopulation, noting that herds do not self-regulate. Emily Ryan presented information on how the BLM places horses off range after excess numbers have been gathered. The BLM moves them to private care in adoption and sale programs. Horses not adopted are placed in long term pastures where they live out their lives while retaining their protection under the act.

Dereck noted that the BLM is working to increase numbers of horses and burros adopted and suggested the RAC might have ideas about how the BLM could improve adoption numbers. Suggestions from members included:

- The BLM should increase program visibility through more appearances at events such as county fairs.
- The agency should explore opportunities to produce videos highlight successful adoptions.
- Wild horses and burros should be viewed and marketed the way a company would market a product.
- The BLM should share information more broadly in ways that are easily understood.
- The BLM should partner with Modoc County by providing wild horses for the Colt Challenge Program that highlights 4H and FFA youth and their successes training young wild horses.

Public Comment

There were no members of the public present to comment.

Public Lands Rule

Julie Hartley, a resource advisor from the California State Office presented an overview of the Public Lands Rule that was adopted in June. Highlights:

- The rule is consistent with the BLM's mission to sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the public lands.
- It is needed because of increased demands on the public lands.
- It places conservation on an equal footing with other uses of the public lands.
- The rule intends to protect the most intact landscapes, restore impacted areas and ensure that public land management decisions are based on science and data.
- The rule contains provisions for restoration and mitigation leasing while recognizing valid existing uses and rights
- The rule will apply the BLM Standards for Rangeland Health, developed by the RACs in the mid 1990s to all BLM-managed lands, not just rangelands. It will require development of restoration plans that would have to be reviewed and amended every five years.
- The rule will provide a structured flow of information to aid in decision-making across all BLM-managed lands. and programs.
- An important provision is incorporating indigenous knowledge into the BLM decision making processes, putting it on an equal footing with other information.
- The rule does not foundationally change the BLM. The agency will continue its tradition of close cooperation and collaboration with public land stakeholders.

RAC comments

Dan Efsaeff: A pilot or demonstration project would be a good tool to help communicate information about the rule with the public.

Bill Kuntz: Would be interested in seeing offices identifying problem areas for restoration

Jeff Blewett: Expressed concern with more rules being imposed, and questioned how the Public Lands Rule will improve what the BLM is already doing. The BLM should provide examples of how the rule will be put into practice.

Ryan Henson: The rule needs to clarify definitions such as indigenous knowledge to identify whose knowledge is being referenced.

There was broad consensus that examples of the Public Land Rule in use would help build public understanding.

Field Manager Reports

Applegate Field Office: Craig Drake provided the following:

Field Office Overview

The Applegate Field Office (AGFO) is responsible for approximately 1.8M acres in northwest NV and northeast CA. In addition, the AGFO manages livestock and wild horses on 200K acres of land within the Black Rock High Rock National Conservation Area. The boundaries of the Field Office encompass a wide variety of ecosystems ranging from Douglas Fir and Ponderosa Pine forests in our western regions and arid Basin and Range landscapes to our east. Likewise, the ownership pattern shows a similar pattern of diversity with scattered, isolated tracts to our west and large contiguous tracts of land to the east.

While the full range of BLM programs occur within the AGFO, the major workloads are associated with range management (194 allotments and 146,000 AUMs), wild horse management (11 Herd Management Areas), wildlife and cultural resource management. The AGFO is also home to fire suppression staff with two permanent fire stations and an active fuels management program.

Hot Topics/Accomplishments:

- Completed Carter Reservoir, et al Preliminary Wild Horse Gather, ready for public participation.
- Completed the Rowland Spring Enhancement Project providing spring source protection from wild horses and livestock. Improving 18 acres of wet meadow for sage grouse habitat and protection of cultural resources.
- Continued restoration on Fitzhugh Cr. and meadow in partnership with Cal DWR, Cal DFW, and Cal Trout as part of a larger Sierra Conservancy grant.
- Completed Planning efforts for the Wall Canyon Recreation site.
- Completed the initial phase of Threat Based Conservation Planning for northwest Nevada in coordination with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Nevada Department of Wildlife, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Nevada BLM, Oregon State University and the Nature Conservancy
- Completed an MOU with the Alturas Rotary Club for a new trail network west of Alturas and completed new trail mapping.
- Continued progress on 5,901 acres of juniper reduction currently under contract.

Fall 2024 Focus Areas:

- Completion of the Carter Reservoir, et al Wild Horse Gather EA
- Continued mentorship of 7 new Field Office Employees and hiring of up to 3 more.
- Continued progress on riparian restoration (Sage Hen spring, Bregar Spring, Chester Lyons Spring, Pinto Spring road improvement)

Arcata Field Office: Field Manager Collin Ewing provided the following report:

The Arcata Field Office (ARFO) has a staff of about 40 employees and manages a public land base of about 250,000 acres in Humboldt, Del Norte, Trinity, and Mendocino counties. The field office jurisdiction includes the King Range National Conservation Area, the Headwaters Forest Reserve, parts of the California Coastal National Monument, seven Wilderness areas, and the designated Wild and Scenic Eel River. Major priorities include recreation, tribal engagement, lands/realty, and restoration of forest, grassland, coastal dune, and aquatic habitats.

Northwest California Integrated Resource Management Plan (NCIP RMP) The Arcata and

Redding Field Offices are nearing completion of the collaborative revision of their respective long-term management Plans through this singular NCIP RMP planning effort. The NCIP RMP includes most of the lands for both field offices in its “decision area” except designated National Conservation Land units that have existing RMPs. At the time you are reading this document, we hope that the Approved RMP and Record of Decision has already been signed!

Headwaters Forest Reserve

The Bureau of Land Management and its partners continue to celebrate 25 years since the establishment of the Headwaters Forest Reserve on California’s North Coast and the many collaborative conservation achievements since the 7,400-acre Reserve came into public ownership on March 1, 1999. The BLM hosted a scheduled series of hikes in the Reserve as well as guest lectures and interpretive events at the Headwaters Education Center. We have posted regular features on our social media platforms to share interesting facts about the Reserve and its importance and produced commemorative posters and stickers that are available at the Arcata Field Office.

King Range National Conservation Area

The King Range National Conservation Area (NCA) is a spectacular meeting of land and sea as mountains thrust straight out of the surf with King Peak (4,088 feet) only 3-miles from the ocean. The King Range NCA encompasses 68,000 acres along 35 miles of California’s north coast. It is the Nation's first NCA, designated by Congress in 1970.

King Range Business Plan Update

King Range NCA briefed the RAC on October 26, 2023 regarding a draft business plan that proposes to raise the campground fees for the four King Range NCA campgrounds from \$8 a site per night to \$15 a site per night and implement a \$12 per person per trip fee for the King Range Wilderness permit (Individual Special Recreation Permit) for those 17 and older. The business plan has been signed by the State Director and a notice of the wilderness permit fee has been published in the Federal Register (May 9th, 2024). The new campground fees were implemented on May 5th, 2024, and the new wilderness permit fee will be implemented for permits starting on March 1st, 2025.

Other King Range updates

A bike race is planned for October 19th, 2024 on the Paradise Royale trail system with a maximum of 150 participants. The Special Recreation Permit is in progress.

Lands and Realty - Current Acquisition projects

The Arcata Field Office has an active land tenure program, providing new access to the public through donation or purchase of lands from willing sellers with funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

- Elk Creek Property - 3,400 acres adjacent to the Yuki Wilderness and Middle Fork Eel River in Mendocino County.
 - Completed September 2024
- Guthrie Creek Expansion - 142 acres located west of Ferndale, adjacent to the Guthrie Creek Trail and Lost Coast Headlands onshore unit of the California Coastal National Monument. Completed August 2024
- Westfall property - 71 acres adjacent to the Headwaters Forest Reserve. Owned by

Save the Redwoods League.

- o Target close by December 2024 with LWCF funds.

- Lost Coast Redwoods properties - 4,300 acres with 5 miles of coastline north of Ft. Bragg and south of Sinkyone Wilderness State Park. Owned by Save the Redwoods League.

- o Target close by December 2024 with LWCF funds.

- (New) Folsom Ranch – 7,000 acres in Mendocino County near Willits accessed by county road and adjacent to the Eel River and the Brushy Mountain/English Ridge BLM managed lands with Wilderness characteristics.

- o Under contract to pre-purchase by The Conservation Fund.

- o BLM would own approximately 4,000 acres, seeking LWCF and WCB funding for BLM portion

- o Tribes would own approximately 3,000 acres, funding provided by a Tribal Nature Based Solutions grant from the state of California.

There are several other potential acquisitions at varying stages

Recreation

Lost Coast Headlands unit of the California Coastal National Monument (CCNM)

As a result of the 2023/24 winter storms and earthquake series, a large section of the Fleener Creek Trail slid into the ocean. Humboldt County Public Works has finished work to re-route the County road around the slide. However, the Fleener Creek Trail is permanently closed and the BLM is considering long-term options for alternate trails, such as a trail expansion with the recent acquisition of the Guthrie Creek Expansion property (see above).

Future Opportunities for Recreation

With the pending Elk Creek Property and Lost Coast Redwoods acquisitions in calendar year 2024, the BLM is looking forward to activity-level recreation use planning in 2025 that tiers to its new 2024 NCIP RMP.

Ecological Restoration

CalFire Grants

ARFO Forestry and Fuels staff continue implementing a \$4.9 million Cal Fire Grant in the KRNCA. Highlights of work accomplished in 2024 include thinning and fuels reduction along Shelter Cove Road, a primary access / egress route for the community. The fuels reduction and forest health thinning has also opened coastal views in several locations along the road. This project is anticipated to be completed in 2025.

In April of 2024 Cal Fire awarded an additional \$3.8 million for forest health work in the Larabee Valley. This money will be used to mitigate hazardous fuels and thin overly dense stands over a three-year period in both Butte Creek and Larabee Valley south of Highway 36 in Humboldt County.

Lacks Creek Restoration

ARFO Foresters are working to finalize a Stewardship contract in 2024 that will enable the Hoopa Valley Tribe to implement restoration timber sales in Lacks Creek. The new contract will utilize the Tribal Forest Protection Act (TFPA) authority, building on an existing Good Neighbor

Agreement with the Tribe. Almost 500 acres have currently been identified that contain small diameter Douglas fir that needs to be thinned to accelerate late successional reserve forest characteristics. This material will be sold to a local timber mill to offset other restoration costs in Lacks Creek.

Headwaters Restoration

South Fork Elk River (Headwaters Forest Reserve) – In 2022 and 2023, over 200 trees have been dropped directly into the stream, with an addition 200 trees staged for placement into a 1.5-mile stream reach. This reach is visible to the public and serves as an excellent interpretive opportunity for habitat restoration. The instream wood was moved around in the flooding of winter 2023/2024. ARFO staff is evaluating opportunities to do additional thinning and in stream wood projects further up in the watershed in 2025.

Fisheries

Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL Funding) has been added to the existing Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) with the Wiyot Tribe to continue to implement restoration actions and manage aquatic invasive species across the ARFO. Projects to restore fish habitat through beaver damn analogues continue in Baker and Ancestor Creek, and fish dives are beginning to monitor and eradicate invasive pike minnow.

Wildlife

Barred owl eradication research study continues in the Headwaters Forest Reserve and Lacks Creek Management area to protect the Northern Spotted Owl. USFWS recently issued a Record of Decision (ROD) for a barred owl eradication program throughout the range of the Northern spotted owl. BLM California is considering issuing its own ROD which would authorize implementation of the eradication program.

Botany and Invasive Plant Management

Several large BIL projects have been awarded to the ARFO and our Tribal partners in 2023 and 2024 to manage invasive plants and develop native plants for ARFO lands. Agreements are in place with the Wiyot Tribe, Blue Lake Rancheria, Cahto Tribe, and Bear River Band of Rohnerville Rancheria to establish native plant nurseries, remove weeds, and protect and enhance culturally significant plant species.

Cahto Peak Oak Woodland Restoration

The ARFO is building on an existing interagency agreement with the Cahto tribe that has been being used for Oak Woodland Restoration in and adjacent to the Cahto Peak Wilderness. A new agreement, using TFPA authority, will allow for BIL funding to be used for thinning under a stewardship agreement in the Wilderness to restore oak woodlands. This is in addition to another project for development of native plant materials through the Botany program.

Road Maintenance

ARFO maintains over 153 miles of road that provide access to a variety of public and private users. Intense winter storms, persistently wet conditions, aging infrastructure and limited maintenance funds present constant challenges.

In August of 2024, ARFO and KR project office operations staff replaced a degraded culvert on Cahto Peak Road, a road vital to critical infrastructure, the Cahto Peak communication site

facility. ARFO needs a grader. The BLM has requested internal funding, as well as submitted a proposal to the Foundation for America's Public Lands seeking grading equipment to help provide better public access to coastal landscapes through improvement road maintenance. In the meantime, ARFO is working within the NorCal District and greater agency community to leverage road grading resources as able.

The Arcata field office recently received a \$938k grant from CalTrans, through the Water Board, to implement road upgrades on the Red Mountain Road in Mendocino County. A grant agreement is currently being finalized that will result in significant road upgrades and reduce sediment discharge by replacing and upgrading culverts and improving drainage on the road.

Fire and Fuels Management

The Arcata Field Office recently hired a new Fire Mitigation/Education (Prevention) specialist duty stationed at the King Range Office. We have recently signed a burn plan to burn piles throughout the Field Office and are looking forward to implementation.

Eagle Lake Field Office: Emily Ryan presented the following:

- Twin Peaks Wild Horse and Burro Gather: Preliminary injunction was filed on our 2024 gather decision. Court has ordered us to only gather within the Skedaddle and North Observation Home Ranges and not to remove any burros. The contract was awarded last week, and the gather operations will begin on Oct 1st. The public is welcome to observe the gather, they do need to call ahead of time to reserve a spot, since space is limited. Phone number to make gather observation reservations: 530-252-5332
- Office Building Remodel: Project has come in way over budget. Delays in GSA negotiating costs with the building owner.
- Staffing Updates
 - New Administrative Officer has started
 - New Heavy Equipment Operator starting Oct 6th
 - Four Arch Seasonals
 - Vacancies within Fire Organization and challenges filling positions
- New Partnerships
 - Backcountry Hunters and Anglers – Juniper removal work
 - Honey Lake Valley Resource Conservation District - New restoration Good Neighbor Authority agreement to complete a variety of work. Will be completing some spring restoration work this fall.
 - Mule Deer Foundation – Completed guzzler maintenance this summer, have contributed funding for spring restoration projects and are planning to complete juniper removal work
 - Eagle Lake Road Project - the BLM, U.S. Forest Service and Lassen County applied for a grant through the Federal Highway Administration to improve Eagle Lake Road. This is a multi-year project. We are in the process of reviewing the 30% design plan.

Redding Field Office: Jennifer Mata presented the following:

- Trinity County PUD/ USFS Land Exchange: Continue work on the Trinity Public Utility District / USFS legislated land exchange. Hopefully that project will be completed in 2024. Waiting on corrected legal descriptions from USFS for the easements they are requesting on the USFS land that will be transferred to TPUD.
- Trinity PUD ROW Widening Project (WRAP): BLM is working with the USFS and WAPA on the proposal from Trinity PUD to widen their powerline ROWs in Trinity County from 30 feet to 150 feet. This EIS (being led by WAPA) is expected to be released for public comment in Nov 2024.
- Rancho Brisgeau Restoration: Restoration work continues, the fields have been disced and floated with irrigation installed. BLM and River Partners are hosting a planting event October 11-12 for partners and the public.
- Land Acquisition: Field Office and District Staff continue to work on several acquisition projects along the trinity river, in Shasta County, within Chappie Shasta OHV area as well as along the Sacramento River in the Sacramento Bend ACEC. BLM did get emergency LWCF funds to acquire a parcel along the Sacramento River and hopes to close in early 2025.
- BOR Funded BIL Money Trinity River: Bureau of Reclamation requested and received 600,000 dollars for BLM to fund recreation improvements within campgrounds and provide other maintenance needs within our facilities.
- Fuels: BLM Redding completed NEPA on two large scale fuels reduction projects Keswick Basin and Reading Indian Creek. Fuels work at Indian Creek should start this summer and Keswick Basin this fall. Total for 2024 the Redding Fuels Program in 2024, Hand cut and Pile Acres completed 527 and Pile Burning 469 acres.
- Forestry Program: Oregon Mountain Timber Sale (Weaverville Community Forest) was completed this summer. This project was completed under agreement with the Trinity County RCD. The first phase is a timber harvest that will be followed up with fuels work in the area. Fuels work will start in the area this fall. Also working on layout for another timber sale in the Jennings Ridge area of Trinity County.
- Trinity River Restoration Work: Upper Conner Creek and Sawmill restoration NEPA was signed in July 2024. Phase 1 of the project near Junction City started in August and will continue with Phase 2 next summer.
- Emergency Stabilization Work. Work began in September on the Rock Creek Culvert Restoration Project. This project is a Bureau of Reclamation Right of Way on BLM lands that was impacted by flows after the Carr Fire. The project is being funded by Infrastructure Bill money. We are also working on ESR plans for the both the Park Fire in Tehama and Butte County and Lower Fires in Shasta County
- Hog Lake Allotment Grazing Permit Renewal and Boundary Adjustment: This allotment is in Tehama County and was due for its 10-year renewal. Consultation with USFWS and compliance

with the 1993 RMP required that grazing not be allowed with the riparian areas along the Sacramento River. BLM partnered with the permittee to design and finish implementation of fence construction to allow grazing to continue while meeting the terms and conditions of the Biological Opinion. The fence construction was started also in partnership with the Pit River Tribe

- Personnel Updates: We were able to hire a second forester, Jason Schlaufman who started in August. We also recently hired two realty specialists, one to replace Lindsey Moyer who went to the district and another to focus on PGE related workload. Lastly, we have hired a third Law Enforcement Ranger (one of ours left to the NPS) who is still pending background with BLM, he comes from the USFS in Colorado.

There was no additional business, and the meeting was adjourned at 1:30 p.m.

*Summary minutes compiled by
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