

Southeast Oregon Resource Advisory Council (SEORAC)

1301 South G Street
Lakeview, OR 97630
(541) 947-2177

Day One, Thursday, August 7, 2008

Meeting Location:

Holiday Inn Ontario
1249 Tapadera Avenue
Ontario, OR 97914

Members Present:

Group 1

Lou Davies
Tom Harris
Dick Leever

Group 2

Bill Renwick
Heather Swartz
Diane Pinney
Dave Vandenberg

Group 3

Larry Hammond
Ken Kestner

Federal Representatives: Shirley Hughbanks, Dave Henderson, Karla Bird, Mark Wilkening, Scott Stoffel and Jan Rekow.

Guests: Chris Knauf, Oregon/Washington (OR/WA) BLM

The meeting began at 8:00 a.m.

Welcome, Introductions, Housekeeping and Agenda Review:

Scott Stoffel opened the meeting at 8:00 a.m. and provided the group with the day's logistical information.

Scott reviewed the group agreements, objectives and meeting agenda.

DFO Updates:

Shirley Hughbanks, Lakeview District Manager, stated the Lakeview Resource Area (LVRA) and Beaty Butte Allotment Management Plan was heard in Eugene on April 3, 2007, by Judge Hogan. Judge Hogan ruled in favor of BLM. The Oregon Natural Desert Association (ONDA) has appealed the Resource Management Plan (RMP) case to the Ninth Circuit. As a result of the ruling on the Southeast Oregon Resource Management Plan, the LVRA is gearing up for its review.

The Backscatter Radar Site has been excessed to the Government Services Administration (GSA).

A wild horse gather at the Paisley Herd Management Area (HMA) is planned for late this fiscal year. This will bring the herd down to the established appropriate management level of 150. It is anticipated approximately 100 horses will be gathered.

There has been interest in wind development on the LVRA. Two met towers have been installed. Testing Right-of-Ways (ROW) have been issued in the Duncan area as well as Coyote Hills, Fish Creek Rim, and South Warner Rim.

The LVRA staff is spending significant time reviewing ONDA's wilderness proposals. All National Environmental Policy Act plans within these areas must include a review of wilderness characteristics. This will significantly impact range and fuels.

Dave Henderson, Vale District Manager, reported that ONDA and Western Watersheds Project (WWP) appealed and petitioned to stay the Decision Record for the North Fork Malheur Geographic Management Area (NFGMA) Rangeland Health Project Environmental Assessment (EA). In February, 2008, the Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA) affirmed the BLM's decision and denied ONDA and WWP's Petition for Stay.

In March, 2008, ONDA and WWP filed an appeal and petitioned to stay eight final grazing decisions in the NFGMA. In April, the Office of Hearings and Appeals (OHA) denied the Petition for Stay. ONDA dismissed its appeal and filed suit in Federal District Court. BLM filed a Stipulation in which BLM agreed not to move forward with or authorize construction of certain projects in exchange for ONDA not litigating a Motion for Temporary Restraining Order and/or Preliminary Injunction. On July 25, 2008, the stipulation was adopted and signed by the Court. Seven permittees filed timely appeals of their final grazing decisions. A hearing with the OHA is expected later this fall.

For the Jordan Valley Field Office, the revised Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Louse Canyon Geographic Management Area (LCGMA) was appealed through IBLA by ONDA and WWP. A stay was denied by the Administrative Law Judge. Plaintiffs withdrew their appeal, and then filed suit in the District Court. One of the major premises of the suit was BLM's failure to use the most current information on wilderness characteristics and analyze the effects of the proposed action on those wilderness characteristics. BLM was granted their motion to stay the hearing until BLM could update their wilderness characteristics inventory, and prepare an addendum to the LCGMA EA.

Karla Bird, Field Manager, Andrews Resource Area, Burns District, reported that the Burns Interagency Fire Zone has experienced a much quieter fire season to date than that experienced the last two years. The Burns District is happy to report that it is well within both average numbers of fires and total acreage burned.

The Burns District completed the majority of the emergency stabilization work for the Egley Complex, Bartlett Mountain, and Round Top fires and others. Only fencing installation remains to be completed and contracts will be let this summer. Funding was not received for any of the proposed longer term rehabilitation work. A total of \$318,000 was expended.

The Burns District also completed timber salvage sales associated with the BLM portions of the Egley Complex fires.

The Burns District has 10 wind energy projects that are in varying stages of proposal from application for meteorological tower testing rights-of-way to submission of operating plans and initiation of National Environmental Policy Act.

In FY07, the Burns District completed an emergency gather of wild horses on the Beaty Butte HMA. In FY08, the District completed gathers on the Kiger/Riddle, Jackie's Butte, and Murderer's Creek HMAs. There has been limited success on adoptions. While the special Kiger adoption event was a big success, all others conducted this year have yielded low numbers. A total of 220 horses remain in the Burns corral facility to date it is normally near empty. This results in higher than planned feeding costs. Planned gathers for this fall are at risk of being cancelled.

BLM Fire and Fuels Management Program:

Shirley Hughbanks, Lakeview District Manager

The Lakeview District has had limited wildland fire activity this season. A few lightning caused fires have occurred, all of which have been contained at one acre or less in size. Multiple lightning strikes occurred across the District last night. Fire personnel are currently scanning the area for starts.

The Lakeview District has met its annual burning target. Prescribed burning will not be initiated again until this fall.

The Lakeview District recently completed a vegetation treatment project in North Lake County. Plant and tree material was removed from the treatment area to promote the growth of native grasses. This was accomplished by two dozers pulling a large anchor chain across the site to thin juniper trees and sagebrush. Shirley indicated she has toured the site and anticipates positive results.

Action Item: Shirley Hughbanks will arrange a tour of the North Lake County chaining site for the Sagebrush Cooperative.

Dave Henderson, Vale District Manager

A total of 10 wildland fires have ignited on lands managed by the Vale District in 2008. Approximately 25,549 acres have burned to date. The number of wildland fire starts encountered this year are below average.

Significant resources are available for the 2008 fire season. Agreements are in place with neighboring state and federal agencies and local rangeland associations. Equipment and personnel have assisted with fire suppression efforts both regionally and nationally.

In fiscal year 2008, the Vale District has treated 1,914 Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) acres in the Baker Resource Area, 9,036 WUI acres and 391 non-WUI acres in the Jordan Resource Area, and 550 WUI acres in the Malheur Resource Area. Fuels treatments have

consisted of both prescribed fire and mechanical treatments. An additional 850 acres of non-WUI mechanical fuels treatments are planned this fiscal year.

Karla Bird, Burns District BLM

Four Emergency Stabilization plans and three Burned Area Rehabilitation (BAR) plans were written and approved by the BLM. The Egley, Bartlett Mountain and Coleman Creek fire had ES and BAR plans written. The Bartlett Mountain and Round Top fire ES plans were fully funded, the Egley Complex ES plan was reduced approximately \$36,000.

The Burns District has partnered with the Eastern Oregon Agricultural Research Center and the USDA Forest Service Rocky Mountain Research Station to conduct a number of research projects examining the response of native and seeded plant species to post fire conditions. Information obtained from these research projects will be used to help fine tune post-fire treatments.

Next Steps---Off-Highway Vehicle/Transportation Plan:

Shirley Hughbanks, Lakeview District Manager, indicated the Lakeview, Prineville, Vale and Burns districts have continued working with Chris Knauf of the Oregon State Office to develop eastside transportation planning guidelines. The strategy overview presented at the last SEORAC meeting was approved by the State Leadership Team and funding is being sought to begin in 2009.

The Forest Service transportation planning is moving about three to four years ahead of the Eastside BLM lands. The BLM will have to work to link management at the Forest Service boundaries as the plan is completed. The BLM programmatic EIS will take two to three years.

Transportation Planning Guidelines:

Chris Knauf, OR/WA Outdoor Recreation Planner, Travel Plan Coordinator, presented a PowerPoint on the Travel Management program. Highlights included History, I.D Team Input, Utilization of SEORAC input, Internal Scoping, and BLM direction. At this point-in-time, most inventories are complete. Extended scoping and public comment periods will be conducted in the preparation of the EIS. SEORAC recommendations and comments will be considered throughout the EIS process. The anticipated timeline is one to three years, pending funding.

BLM Wild Horse and Burro Program:

Diane Pinney reported that this fiscal year, 203 horses were adopted, 50 head were sent to long term holding, and 220 head are still in the Burns facility, which is 44% of the corral's capacity. Reproduction rates of 20% per year will continue to increase the population over time. The free delivery offer has been extended through August. With the decreasing budgets and rising energy prices, it's essential to keep the BLM's wild horse and burro program in balance. Ideas presented for offsetting appropriated dollars included, Virtual Adoption; Donations Made Easy; Tax Refund Check-Off; USPS Stamps; Dollar Round-Up; License Plates; and a Milk Carton Awareness Campaign.

Interest groups are exploring options to exercise the BLM's authority to sell older and other unadopted animals without limitation to any willing buyers, and euthanize those wild horses and burros for which no adoption demand exists.

Vale District Tour:

The tour of Kelsay Butte and Upper Pole Creek was hosted by Vale District fire and fuels employees and Field Office Managers. Subject matter experts explained the site conditions encountered, juniper treatment methods utilized, and future management actions planned.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

Day Two, Friday, August 8, 2008

Meeting Location:

Holiday Inn Ontario
1249 Tapadera Avenue
Ontario, OR 97914

Members Present:

Group 1

Lou Davies
Tom Harris
Dick Leever

Group 2

Bill Renwick
Heather Swartz
Diane Pinney
Dave Vandenberg

Group 3

Larry Hammond
Ken Kestner

Federal Representatives: Shirley Hughbanks, Dave Henderson, Mark Wilkening, Karla Bird, Scott Stoffel, and Jan Rekow

Guests: Aimee Huff, SCEP student from Vale District BLM; Pat Ryan, Field Manager for the Malheur Resource Area; and Frank Bird, Idaho-Snake Resource Advisory Council Member.

Welcome, Introductions, Housekeeping and Agenda Review: Tom Harris, Vice Chair, opened the meeting at 8:00 a.m. Scott thanked the Vale District for yesterday's tour and outlined the agenda for the day.

Sagebrush Cooperative Post-Fire Science Symposium

Heather Swartz attended a post-fire science symposium in Salem. She presented a power point from the event on recovery after fire to the SEORAC. Soils, vegetation, and climate conditions are the biggest variables. The critical factor in Sagebrush communities is vegetation types. She also discussed plant densities and plant communities. How do you determine if the site will recover? There is limited data for recovery thresholds in different plant communities. Decide which plant materials are most appropriate. Justify the rationale and your thinking. This starts with the restoration Gene Pool Concept. How do we get plants established from seed? The critical phase is the emergence for natives and the timing of seeding on establishment. Another factor is the effects of precipitation frequency and amount on establishment as well as seed placement. How do we deal with weeds? Recommendations: Revegetation is an iterative process; Soil conditions will require attention; break the fire cycle with the annual grasses; species assemblage is essential; there are new methods of seeding that may be more successful. Native species need to be able to compete with annual grasses. How do we monitor the results of seedings? Have clear objectives for the project; stratification; control plots; random sampling; data quality; statistical analysis; repeatable, objective field methods using rangeland monitoring database. What are the most important gaps in our knowledge? Site recovery basics: In the early stages. We may be

seeding more acres than necessary. Limit the spread of weeds. Need robust monitoring which can lead to scientific research.

Closing the loop on adaptive management. The USDA-ARS (Burns lab) has initiated a cooperative program among range scientists, private landowners and public land managers that coordinates data collection and monitoring across multiple revegetation projects. Heather encouraged Districts to contact them. She discussed aerial photography versus satellite imagery. We must be more strategic in decisions for seeding as budgets are being cut for rehab. This is an ongoing symposium series. This information will be provided to local communities through workshops.

Heather added a side note related to yesterday's juniper treatment tour and discussion. She indicated global woody plant expansion is theorized to be caused by climate change (especially changes in precipitation timing and frequency), historically heavy grazing, fire suppression, and atmospheric CO2 fertilization.

Steens Mountain Advisory Council Science Strategy and Oregon Explorer Project
Bill Renwick stated this was established through an act of Congress. Looking at range conditions as well as archeology, and getting information out to the public. This is a "living," adaptive document. Need to obtain a firm knowledge base for decision making. Oregon Explorer is a web-based site (oregonexplorer.info) sponsored by Oregon State University (OSU) for restoration projects, which assimilates information for each geographic location. This site is accessible to the public. There are links to scientific documents. The council will be presenting an application to the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) for funding in the near future. Bill stated that they are willing to provide free monitoring on fire rehab sites.

Roger Sheley, Academician, was contacted via conference call. A motion was made by Lou Davies that the SEORAC prepare a letter in support of the Oregon Explorer and Closed Lakes Basin portal OWEB grant application. Larry Hammond seconded, and the motion was unanimously passed.

Action Item: Bill Renwick will take the lead on drafting the support letter for the OWEB grant application. He will bring the document before the SEORAC at the November meeting for council member approval.

Vegetation Treatments Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

Dave Henderson reported that this subject has moved along substantially. Internal and external scoping has been completed. The external scoping meetings were not well attended, although it was well advertised. Main points in response were language problems. There was feedback on Landscape Health Objectives. There was universal support for using herbicides on non-native, non-invasive weeds. There was little or no comment on the use of herbicides for fuel reductions. BLM is in the process of compiling the comments, preparing a scoping report, and developing a draft EIS within a narrow timeframe. Some public feedback was brought up regarding Off Highway Vehicles (OHV) and livestock with the use of herbicides. The SEORAC needs to be

involved in submitting comments during the comment period. A suggestion was made to establish a sub-committee to advise the entire SEORAC for recommendations. A motion was made by Heather Swartz to establish a Herbicide Planning sub-committee to review and prepare comments on the vegetative proposal identifying herbicides. Ken Kestner seconded, and the motion was unanimously passed. Heather volunteered to serve on the sub-committee as well as Larry Hammond and Lou Davies. Need to have representation from each Group. Heather will serve as chair of this sub-committee. They may need to hold conference calls for gathering the recommendations.

Action Item: Scott Stoffel will e-mail Roger Sheley asking if he will also serve on this sub-committee.

Fremont-Winema National Forests' Draft EIS for Invasive Plant Treatment

Contact was made with Rick Elston, Silver Lake Ranger District, ID Team Leader via conference call. He provided background of the decision. Sent out 800 scoping letters. Region 6 prepared updated version of the EIS and examined a number of prevention practices, and completed analysis in 2006. The primary spread is from road use. There are 8,000 acres of infestation out of the 2.25 million acre FS land base. Targeted herbicide use on highest priority sites. Hope to have actual EIS out for public comment sometime this fall. Question was raised on how solid the October date for feedback was. Related it will probably be November. The earliest the subgroup could receive a draft copy for review and recommendation would be the same time it goes to the printer. The SEORAC wants to see the edited version as soon as possible. Any input the SEORAC provides will not be published in the Draft EIS (DEIS), but will be in the final. Question was raised if the invasive plant species were listed elsewhere in the DEIS, as they weren't named in the brief. Rick reported there is a fairly substantial change to be made from the recent Regional Office (RO) review. Felt too much budgetary and other factors were used in determining Alternative 3. Alternative 2 is what was initially proposed.

Action Item: Scott Stoffel will provide Heather Swartz's contact information to Rick Elston.

Energy Corridor Proposal:

Shirley Hughbanks, Lakeview District Manager

There are no active wind farms on OR/WA BLM. However, there are applications for wind testing.

The westside energy corridor was mandated by the 2005 Energy Policy Act. Upon signature of the Record of Decision (ROD), federal agencies will amend their Land Use Plans to designate the energy corridors. The DEIS was released November 16, 2007, with a 90 day comment period. Schedule for revisions is by the end of August. Hope to have in print by early October. The ROD should be final in mid December.

A concern was raised that the proposal has the same original route (20-30 years ago) with no opportunity for public comment. The SEORAC would be interested in any updates and guidelines on site specific proposals.

Action Item: The Designated Federal Official will provide a map of all energy corridor projects.

Member Roundtable/Subgroup Reports:

Diane Pinney offered to serve on the subgroup for the Vegetative Treatment EIS.

Heather Swartz had nothing further to add.

Ken Kestner asked how subcommittees will keep in contact with the entire group. The chair will coordinate the distribution of information to members via e-mail.

Bill Renwick pointed out to the SEORAC that in the Steens area, the South Steens allotment within the Cooperative Management and Protection Area (CMPA), there is an issue regarding livestock and wild horses being fenced out of Blitzen River water sources.

Dick Leever asked the status of the North Lake Recreation plan.

Action Item: Shirley Hughbanks will see that Kim McLean provides him with an update.

Dave Vandenberg commented on the wild horse and burro program. SEORAC has previously written letters, but nothing seems to change. What authority does the SEORAC actually have and how can they be more effective? Need to address creative solutions to be brought forward. It is very important that feedback be provided. Discussed what constitutes a quorum, and that all members must be in unanimous agreement before forwarding to the Secretary of Interior. Suggested process for issue-driven subcommittees come up with recommendations to bring forward to the entire SEORAC.

Walt VanDyke has submitted a verbal resignation from the SEORAC. We are in the process of names being submitted to the Secretary. Members agreed that Tom Harris will serve as acting chair until the November meeting and election. Walt's resignation was accepted.

Shirley Hughbanks asked if there were issues before the subcommittees now that need resolution?

Listed each subcommittee and members:

1. Fre-Win Travel Management (Dick Leever, Ken Kestner, Bill Renwick, & Tom Harris) **Chair: Dick Leever**
2. BLM Transportation Strategy: To be reviewed at the November meeting
3. North Lake Recreation Plan (Dick Leever, Tom Harris, Larry Hammond & Dave Vandenberg) **Chair: Tom Harris**

4. Herbicide Planning (Heather Swartz, Diane Pinney, Ken Kestner, Larry Hammond, Lou Davies, & Roger Sheley) **Chair: Heather Swartz**

Action Item: Scott Stoffel will seek clarification of the following Charter language “Unanimous agreement of all Council Members will be needed to forward a request to the Secretary...”

Action Item: Scott Stoffel will draft standard operating procedures for establishing SEORAC subcommittees and communication with the full SEORAC for review at the next meeting.

Action Item: Larry Hammond requested a summary of the history of action taken by the SEORAC related to the Wild Horse and Burro Program.

Action Item: Lou Davies asked for clarification on EIS timeframe.

Tom Harris stated he will apprise the SEORAC on any changes to the Christmas Valley Sand Dunes designation as a Wilderness Study Area.

Public Comments:

No public comments were provided.

Agenda Items for November Meeting:

New Member Orientation
Subcommittee Establishment Process
Elections
2009 Schedule and AWP
Active Subcommittee Reports
Oregon Explorer Grant Application Update
Sagebrush Habitat Treatment Update
Wild Horse and Burro Program Update

Next SEORAC Meeting:

November 13-14 in Lakeview

Meeting adjourned at 12:15 p.m.