

**MOJAVE-SOUTHERN GREAT BASIN AREA
RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES
January 21, 2000**

Resource Advisory Council (**RAC**) Members Present and Category Represented:

Steve Mellington	Las Vegas Public at Large
Susan Selby	Environment
Dr. Colleen Beck	Archaeology
Jerry Helton	Transportation, Rights-of-Way
Duane Whiting	Chairman, Mining
Mike Wickersham	State Agency Representative
Alan Levinson	Permitted Recreation
John Hiatt	Wildlife
Dr. Stan Smith	Academic
Robert Maichle	Recreation
Barbara Callihan (new)	Dispersed Recreation
Gary Hollis (new)	Elected Official

(Maurice Frank-Churchill and Marta Agee were not present)

Bureau of Land Management (**BLM**) Representatives Present:

Phillip Guererro	RAC Coordinator, Las Vegas
Mark Morse	Field Manager, Las Vegas
Craig MacKinnon	Field Station Manager, Tonopah
Valerie Metscher	Tonopah
Bill Fisher	Tonopah
Eric Luse	Associate Field Manager, Ely
Jo Simpson	Chief, Communications, Nevada State Office
Mark Chatterton	
Jack Norman	
Jeff Steinmetz	

Public Attendees:

Mr. Eric Watkins	Nellis Air Force Base
Mr. Danny Rakestraw	SAIC Environmental Scientist
Ms. Christine Brehm	National Wild Horse Association
Ms. Elaine Ezra	Terra Spectra
Ms. Billie Young	NWHA
Ms. Susan Barrow	Nellis Air Force Base
Mr. Mark Farman	Nevada Div. of State Lands

Ms. Julie Gleason
Ms. Mary Blake
Mr. Keith Rogers
Mr. Hank Astuego
Mr. Tom Kuekes

Nevada Commission for Wild Horses
Interested Member of the Public
Las Vegas Review Journal
Las Vegas Sun
Forest Service District Ranger, Spring Mountains

A copy of each attachment listed in the text of, or at the end of these minutes is on file with the official copy of the minutes in the Las Vegas Field Office of the BLM. Persons desiring to view attachments should contact Phillip Guerrero, (702) 647-5046.

General

Meeting was called to order and introductions were made by Chairman Duane Whiting. Whiting welcomed the newest member to the RAC, Gary Hollis from Pahrump. He is the chairman of the town board and plans on running for county commissioner. Hollis worked as a driller on the Nevada Test Site and has good knowledge of flood control on the test site. Barbara Callihan is also new, and was introduced. She is a horse trainer and is involved in multiple use and equestrian trails in Las Vegas. She wants to maintain equestrian trails in Las Vegas. New Field Manager for BLM, Las Vegas Field Office Mark Morse was also introduced. He arrived six weeks' ago. Morse commented that the RAC brings a new perspective to the BLM. Morse will be the new designated federal official for the RAC. Phil Guerrero said the letter from State Director Abbey should be reviewed. The goal of the notes in the letter are to make the meeting run more efficiently. Whiting read and discussed the State Director's letter. Whiting also wants the Field Managers to prepare handouts for the meeting during their presentations.

Review of 1999 RAC Activities

The RAC submitted comments concerning the tortoise restrictions on ranching and other uses as proposed by the Caliente land use plan.

Wild horse and burro Standards and Guidelines were developed and submitted to the State Director. This RAC was the first to finish these Standards and Guidelines. Other RACs are using these as an example. The RAC supported Senator Reid's plan on the NAS study for proposed revision to the 3809 Regulations.

With help from the BLM Field office, issues were evaluated where a top 10 list of issues for the RAC to address in fiscal year 2000 was developed.

Military Base Issues (see attached table listing the various issues the MSGBRAC worked on during the year.) The RAC was appalled with the degradation caused by wild horses and burros.

Range Condition Survey and Appropriate Management Level of Wild Horses on the

Nevada Wild Horse Range

Erik Watkins from Nellis Air Force Base spoke. There are severe problems on the base including overgrazing. The large horse population was resolved with gathers. The Nellis Air Force Base (NAFB) hired Scientific Applications International Corporation (SAIC) to study the vegetation and horse population.

Kevin Bloomquest of SAIC gave a report on the study which had two objectives. The first was to determine range conditions. The second was to calculate the appropriate number of horses to maintain a healthy herd and rangeland. SAIC worked with the Ely and Las Vegas field offices in this effort.

SAIC used the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) range site descriptions in their study. Since no soils information was available due to a lack of a soil survey, they used satellite imagery to delineate soil polygons. This was done first in the office and then field checked and adjusted. The majority of the color reflected on satellite photos is soil color not vegetation color. SAIC then identified the range sites in the polygon and gave percentages of each range site in the polygon. Next, range condition was determined by comparing the current vegetation with the climax vegetation expected to be there, using the NRCS Range Site Descriptions for Major Land Resource Area 29. Data collected is listed in pounds of production per acre, air dry weight and percent composition of plant species. The condition is put in one of four classes: (1) Potential Natural Community (PNC); (2) late seral; (3) mid seral; and (4) early seral. Plant communities in the PNC have mainly climax species present. Plant communities in early seral have few or no climax species present.

SAIC sampled 27 of 47 sites evaluated using a double sampling method (BLM and NRCS). The BLM also did ocular estimates on the remaining 13 sites.

The next step was to calculate Appropriate Management Levels (AMLs) of the horse herd. SAIC couldn't find any methods for calculating AMLs in literature, so they made the following assumptions:

- Mountainous areas were not used in the calculations because they are infrequently used by horses.
- One horse equaled one Animal Unit (AU).
- BLM wanted 55% use on perennial grasses, so SAIC used 50% use for horses and 5% use for wildlife. They assumed that horses used 50% of the grass in the areas up to 4 miles from water, that horses used 25% of the grass from 4 to 8 miles from water and that use did not occur more than 8 miles from water.

- The study year (1999) was a year with above normal precipitation and 15 of the sites produced above the favorable production levels listed in the range site descriptions. The AMLs were not calculated based on production in a favorable or normal year but on production in an unfavorable year. Production for an unfavorable year was used to calculate AMLs.
- Horses consume 9,500 pounds of forage per AU per year.

Vegetation Conditions on the Nevada Wild Horse Range are as follows:

PNC	0%
Late Seral	13%
Late & Mid Seral line	15%
Mid Seral	60%
Early Seral	6%

SAIC found that 23,438,121 pounds of grass was produced per year on the horse range and that 10,523,433 pounds of grass would be produced in an unfavorable year. However, only 2,158,027 pounds of feed were found to be available which calculates to 227 horses on the horse range. They were conservative on their estimates to avoid overstocking the range.

The question was asked, what is considered mountainous? Answer: Areas with pinon and juniper vegetation. Playas were obviously excluded. All sampling was done at least one mile from water. Danny Rakestraw, SAIC environmental scientist, said they relied on the expertise of professionals in the field when they developed assumptions. The goal of the project was to allow for improvement of range condition. Trend data was collected for the first time, and will continue to be collected. Early seral areas were found mainly in the valley bottoms and were dominated by *Halogeton glomerata*. Watkins said they had to back track because there was no soil survey and they had difficulty defining some of the polygons and mountain areas. He hopes an official soils survey will be done in the near future.

In 1998, a census done on the horse range found 820 horses, but SAIC believes there are possibly 1,200 horses. The horses don't seem to stay in the horse range. Use was found to be above allowable use levels.

There were no burros on the horse range. Burros are on the west side near the Tonopah Field Station.

John Hiatt, RAC member, suggested that we have had frequent dry years and wanted extremely dry years factored into the study assumptions.

Rakestraw said the report has been written. The final decisions will be made by BLM and

NAFB. SAIC recommend not exceeding 227 horses on the horse range since they did not consider forage outside of the horse area.

The BLM indicated that in 1998 there were 820 horses on Nellis, and now it may be 1,200 or more. They also said that the horses don't stay in the HMA and that use is above allowable use levels.

SAIC will continue to study the horse management area as authorized by NAFB. Currently they are doing a more detailed vegetation mapping study.

RAC member Stan Smith along with the other RAC members encouraged continued data collection and passed the following motion:

“The Mojave-Southern Great Basin RAC encourages the collection of validation data in 2000 and 2001 (if applicable) growing seasons for SAIC’s ‘adjusted range production in a poor year’ estimates.”

Also, the following motion proposed by Chairman Whiting was accepted:

“To have Nellis develop a plan to continue monitoring in concert with the BLM with follow up information provided to the RAC.”

Horses Found Shot on Forest Service Land

Tom Kuekes, U.S. Forest Service (FS), presented information on the deaths of the horses. The FS checked out a tip and found four horses and two burros shot and killed. A later tip lead them to three more dead horses. The dead horses were found near the BLM's Red Rock Canyon. Las Vegas police flew and checked out the area. The Secret Witness Program is involved, Charlie Vaughn is their contact. The National Wild Horse Commission received \$18,000 in pledges for the reward money. There have been a number of tips from the public that the FS is still checking on. The animals had been dead for several weeks before they were found. A veterinarian checked the animals for cause of death. The animals may have been shot at several different times and some of them may have taken several days to die.

Red Rock General Management Plan

The draft plan comment period was extended to the end of October 2000. All comments have been reviewed and summarized into categories. The BLM is now organizing the comments and editing the plan, after which the final plan will go to the BLM Nevada State Office for review. The Las Vegas Field Office will finalize the plan after edits are reviewed.

Proposed Federal 3809 Mining Regulation Revisions

The mining industry is supporting much of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) study on the new regulations. **The RAC supports the NAS study findings. Chairman Whiting wants RAC members to contact him by email/fax/cell with their decisions by February 15 so that the comments could be submitted to BLM by the February 23 deadline.** The study results are on the web, and the reasons for revising the regulations are in the *Federal Register*.

Archaeology Subcommittee Status

The subcommittee will meet during lunch today. They have four sites to work on. There is a tour of Grapevine Canyon in February but Chairman Beck doesn't have the dates. **The RAC will provide input on rock art management on BLM land.** Barbara Callihan, new RAC member, joined the committee. Chairman Beck is putting together background material and they will have a meeting in February. The committee was asked to report on their activities at the next RAC meeting in March.

BLM Managers Update

Battle Mountain Field Office. Craig MacKinnon, Tonopah Field Station Manager, had a handout that will be included with the minutes.

As to recreation issues, there is a lot of interest in competitive events. Unfortunately, during the Las Vegas to Reno race a race monitor's 11-year old daughter fell into a mine shaft and died. However, the permit was not violated, since the shaft was 300 feet from the race course. Only dangers up to 100 feet from the course are flagged. The Tonopah office is getting so many demands for competitive races that they hope they don't have to go to a lottery.

Gary Hollis, new RAC member, said people with mining claims often have fencing around claims stolen. Whiting said every active mine now pays \$30 an acre for disturbed lands. This money goes for closing and fencing abandoned mines. Clark County is injecting foam in openings after surveying for bats. Bat gates are put in if colonies are found.

In May 2000, the new prototype Mars Rover is to be tested in Lunar Crater near Ely.

The Rhyolite railroad depot near Beatty is being transferred to the BLM by Barrick Resources. MacKinnon asked for ideas from the RAC on how to manage the depot. There will be a foundation set up for Rhyolite. The BLM will not be the keeper of the project, the foundation will. The RAC wants a field trip to Rhyolite to review the conditions there before making any recommendations.

There has been no precipitation for five months and we may have problems with wild horses and burros on public land. Tonopah is working with Ely on a drought plan. No gathers are planned.

There are nine burros near Beatty sneaking into town to eat fountain grass at the senior center. The BLM will round up and move these burros.

Tonopah is still working on the Reveille Allotment evaluation. The proposed evaluation was sent out in September. MacKinnon met with the Fallinis' and made progress on one issue. No agreement has been made on the remaining three issues. The BLM will issue the final decision. The grazing allocation will drop, and the cattle will be off every third year in the spring. There are tremendous problems on the ground. Twin Springs Slough is tui chub habitat. The Fallinis' think the slough is a ditch, the BLM says it is a creek.

Senator Inouye has draft legislation ready to go to give the Timbisha Indians a homeland. The BLM will provide a draft report and contractor to do the EIS. Water rights are not going to the Timbisha.

Anderson wants to exchange Chatovitch Creek for land around Laughlin.

Ely Field Office. Eric Luse, Associate Field Manager briefed RAC members on the following:

Range - planning 11 allotment evaluations including two Horse Management Areas. They want to set AMLs on some HMAs. Permit lease renewals with NEPA is a big challenge, lots of work. Ely has 20 to renew. Range improvement projects will be put on web site.

As to noxious weeds, leafy spurge, and dalmatian toadflax are found in Lincoln County. BLM is trying to establish a weed district. BLM treated salt cedar by the cut stump method.

Caliente Field Station is getting a new office complex.

The public didn't like the plan to use "spike" to kill pinion and juniper to reduce the fire hazard due to its chemical composition. The project is on hold now. Ely is doing a lot of fire rehabilitation work.

Lincoln County land exchange has been slowed down because of the tortoise issue at Mesquite.

Pioche's school has been condemned, and the BLM is looking for land for Lincoln County to build a new one on.

Las Vegas Field Office. Mark Morse, Field Manager talked about issues which were all based on the growth in Las Vegas.

Angie Lara has been hired to be the new Associate Field Manager.

Las Vegas manages the horses on the Nellis Air Force Base.

Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act—A public auction will be held on June 8 and 9 in Las Vegas. Eighty-five percent of the money will come back to the four agencies to use for land acquisitions.

Red Rock has 1.1 million visitors a year. Red Rock may have an interactive web site. Callihan says Zion is working on a plan to schedule use. Red Rock should consider a similar approach.

The BLM, Las Vegas Field Office is getting a new building where the Forest Service, the Fish & Wildlife Service and the BLM will all be together.

The Multiple Species Habitat Plan will protect the desert tortoise and allow the County, Fish and Wildlife Service and BLM to work together. The plan has not been finalized yet.

Nevada Power land sale will occur to fix an existing trespass situation.

The Las Vegas Field Office will have a mineral material sale in the south Jean Lake area. The sale is for approximately 10 million tons of sand. This action will not interfere with public access or off-highway vehicle (OHV) events in the area as access will be routed around the sale area. It is anticipated that the maximum depth of the sale area will be 20 feet. Slopes will be reclaimed to provide for public safety at the conclusion of the contract.

An issue as to the ownership of methane gas has developed with the closer of the Sunrise Landfill. Methane is a leasable mineral under the Mineral Leasing act of 1920. However, questions have arisen because the gas is being generated as a result of man's intervention in the area by placing household waste products in the Sunrise Landfill. The BLM is asking the Solicitor's Office of the Secretary of Interior for an opinion as to the ownership of the methane gas. It is generally BLM's position that the methane gas is a product of the landfill and not subject to the Mineral Leasing act of 1920.

*** (While it was not known at the time of this meeting the planned sale for 10 million tons of sand was canceled for lack of qualified bidders.)*

Nevada State Office

Jo Simpson, Chief, Communications, reported that State Director Bob Abbey couldn't make it to this meeting. She had handouts for the RAC which included information on OHV races, interim rules for monuments, Federal Partners Program proposal, and a letter from State Director Abbey on how to improve the RACs.

Nearly 200 horses and burros are ready to be adopted by the satellite downlink

Re-seeding the burned areas in the state is ongoing but very expensive, especially with the native seed being so scarce.

Project Planning for 2000

RAC member Robert Maichle suggested **the following projects be added to the list for 2000: OHV, 3809, Standards and Guidelines for Wild Horse and Burros.**

Jerry Helton, RAC member, believes noxious weeds are not the RAC's responsibility, nothing they can do about it. The Ely Field Office has weed standards maybe the RAC could get the counties to adopt. Weeds will be listed as a future topic, however, due to the potentially high impacts to native populations and the increase in populations.

*****Field Office Priorities*****

1. Battle Mountain/Tonopah
 - a. Multiple Use Decisions on five allotments
 - b. Suitability evaluations of HMAs since horses were removed in 1996
 - c. Rhyolite land exchange

2. Ely
 - a. Allotment evaluations, including two HMAs to set AML
 - b. Finalize tortoise amendment
 - c. Land disposal and exchanges
 - d. Wilderness and recreation
 - e. Noxious weeds, possible regulations and policies, lack of control on private land

3. Las Vegas
 - a. Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act - acquisition priorities and section criteria
 - b. Red Rock General Management Plan, second recreation facilities plan
 - c. Nevada Wild Horse Range (Nellis) alternatives
 - d. RMP implementation

There was a discussion by the BLM Field Offices and the RAC on what should be top priority for the RAC this year. Las Vegas Field Office wants the SNPLMA as top priority along with public meetings to determine where the SNPLMA money will be spent. Whiting wanted to know how the RAC would function in this role. Hollis is worried that the SNPLMA will remove private land from rural areas causing a loss of a tax base. Gary said new legislation will allow land sales in other parts of the state also. Hollis said that Pahrump has no BLM representation and wants the district lines changed. He wants Pahrump in the Tonopah Field Station. Las Vegas has lots of problems in Clark County and cannot deal with Pahrump. Gary said he would talk to Bob Abbey about changing the district boundaries. Whiting said that the SNPLMA appears to be the RAC's top priority.

Maichle wants the Nellis Range Plan evaluation as a new project and suggested Red Rock as the second priority.

Luse said Ely's number one priority was OHV issues in Duck Creek; wilderness is also important. Jo Simpson wants to know what the RAC can do to help. Eric doesn't know. Council member Mike Wickersham wanted to know exactly what the BLM wants the RAC to do. He doesn't feel the RAC should host a public meeting for the BLM as Mark Morse wants. Wickersham also wanted to know if the RAC has responsibility to see that the Standards and Guidelines are implemented and working.

Maichle said Ely used the Standards and Guidelines in their allotment evaluations. He wants it to be a **priority to see if the Standards and Guidelines work**. MacKinnon said Tonopah used them in their evaluations. He said (talking about Nellis's determination of horse carrying capacity based on poor growing season) the BLM cannot use a poor growing season to stock range, they must use a normal year.

Whiting wants the BLM to give a noxious weed presentation to the RAC so they can become focused on the weed problem. He wants each manager to get together and make a presentation of what the RAC needs to know.

Beck didn't want the priority list numbered.

The following list is the RAC's priority for projects in 2000.

These five are the top priorities:

- 1. SNPLMA - review and recommend criteria to be developed by the BLM**
- 2. Red Rock Recreation Area issues**
- 3. Standards and Guidelines for noxious weeds (included in grazing/Wild Horse and Burro Standards and Guidelines).**
- 4. Nellis AFB Alternatives**
- 5. Cultural Resources Control/Awareness/Presentation**
- 6. Land Disposal in Ely and Tonopah**
- 7. Multiple Use Decisions on five grazing allotments in Tonopah**
- 8. Wilderness/Recreation areas - management criteria**
- 9. Wildlife Standards and Guidelines**
- 10. OHV use**

Public comments

Mark Farman, said Nevada State Public Land Symposium is coming in May to Reno. He said the state is updating their public land policies.

Billy Young, NWA, thanked the RAC for their work on the Red Rock issues including wild horses and burros. However, they are still concerned about two wild horse issues. They have 30 years experience in wild horse issues and are willing to help on any issue and recognize the range comes first in order to have healthy horses. Whiting asked her what the RAC can do to help them. She said the Red Rock tour opened communication and she would like this to continue. She doesn't want parking at the underpass, this blocks wild horses and burros from trailing.

Beck explained that she had seen backhoe activity in early January at the Peace Camp location across from the Nevada Test Site. She believes the Peace Camp is eligible to be placed on the National Register and is concerned that there are plans to bulldoze the area.

Closing Business

Minutes from the last meeting were corrected and the motion to accept was tentatively approved with some additional editing being required.

Next meeting is March 23-24, starting at noon in the Las Vegas Field Office. The May 18-19 meeting is to be held in Beatty to look at Rhyolite. The August 10-11 meeting will be in Pahrump. The October tr- RAC meeting is expected to be in Reno.

Meeting was adjourned at 4:30 p.m.

DATE:

August 11, 2000

APPROVED BY:

/s/ Duane Whiting
Chairman
Mojave/Southern Great Basin
Resource Advisory Council