

BCHA Public Lands Meeting Notes FINAL

2/8/21

Attending: Rod Parks, Yvette, Randy Rasmussen, Brad Pollman, Sherry Copeland, Jerry Bentz, Jim Allen, Kathy Young

Randy Hackworth from BCH California will be the newest member to this call, joining future meetings.

-----

Randy Rasmussen reported on a call with the Forest Service.

Earlier today Sherry Copeland , Brad Pollman , Jerry Bentz , Darrell Wallace and Randy Rasmussen participated on a call with Forest Service Washington (DC) office recreation and wilderness staff about a saw demonstration project being undertaken by their National Technology and Development Program (NTDP) in Missoula MT. The purpose of the program is to come up with a mathematical model to help inform FS field decisions regarding Minimum Requirements Analysis (MRA) when tradeoffs associated with chainsaw and cross-cut saw use are to be made in Wilderness.

Recall that in 2019 BCHA adopted a resolution requesting that the Forest Service look at all options for maintaining trails in Wilderness, including use of mechanical tools (chainsaws) where there are few options to the effective clearing of trails.

The NTDP is working to develop a database or an App to be used by field personnel to help inform decisions about tradeoffs in the use of cross-cut and chainsaws in Wilderness. A pilot program has been initiated in the FS with the intention to gather data /variables and to use that data to build a mathematically driven model as a decision support to assist MRA. The Forest Service had a BETA test last spring (2020) but this program it is likely 3 field seasons away to being operational.

At this time the Forest Service wants to move the BETA model out to partners that can help with data gathering. BCHA is clearly interested in participating. This tool will help with making consistent and defensible decisions. Its use could require more paperwork, from us, but would be worth the effort.

BETA testing last year was conducted by the Deschutes NF, San Juan NF, Bitterroot NF, Flathead NF, Monongahela NF and Hoosier NF. Some of the data gathered will include input on tree diameter, crew size, downfall density, distance from trailhead, etc. BCHA assistance with this project will be similar to the work we did with the trail classification system in past years. In order for BCHA to participate and to facilitate data gathering for the FS our states will need to be working under a FS Volunteer Agreement.

The process will be very bureaucratic but the aim is to develop a tool that will provide good information to efficiently inform decisions. In the past MRA has been significantly informed by the local rangers , their personal beliefs and knowledge of their forest. This project intends to remove some of those arbitrary decisions. Data will also make decisions more legally defensible.

-----

Other updated by Randy:

Tom Vilsack, former Secretary of Agriculture 2009-2017 has been nominated to that position again. It is anticipated that he will be confirmed.

We have no information yet about Vicki Christiansen retaining her position as the FS Chief. The new administration could make a change at that level, but such changes typically take at least a year. BCHA is quite happy with Chief Christiansen and would hate to see her leave.

The new Region 3, New SW regional Forester will be Michiko Martin. This could be good for BCHA issues and trails in the Southwest. Most recently Ms. Martin has been the Director for Recreation, Heritage and Volunteer Services at the National Headquarters. She holds partnerships, including BCHA's, in high regards and appears to have served a critical role in resisting lobbyist efforts for the FS to reclassify e-bikes as a non-motorized trail use.

-----

From the National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance: There has been a change proposed in the FS Wilderness program. The FS wants to revert to fold Wilderness and Wild & Scenic rivers into Recreation, Heritage and Volunteer Services. BCHA is seeking member opinion to this possible change.

Discussion: This change could potentially mean the Wilderness Program may have less power under a new Directorate (Recreation). This decision could be a two-edged sword. In one aspect it would give an equal footing at the table, and in another it could subject Wilderness to the huge pressure for OHV recreation. Would Wilderness be better standing with its own directorship? On the budget side it could mean that Wilderness would get a better budget; or Wilderness programs would have to compete with all other recreation programs, including OHV.

We have heard that all the budgets may be lumped together, and be directed from the Region level. Brad Pollman will be meeting with Region 1, and will ask about staffing changes and budget changes. He will ask some of those questions and get back to us with insight.

NWSA may be drafting a letter to address this proposed change to the Wilderness program and seek BCHA sign-on.

-----

Rod Payer: re e-Bikes. Moab does not allow e-bikes on any trails that were built using non-motorized funds. Utah has RTP, and it has the Governor's funding, certain component is for non-motorized only.

Brad Pollman: reading legislation that is aimed to classify e-bikes. Montana is specifically giving authority to local jurisdiction or state agency to determine if e-bikes can be used.

All states are approaching the e-bike question differently. People for Bikes is working with states and parks to manage for non-motorized use and wants a uniform national policy. People for Bikes is looking at national legislation to force the agencies (FS) to treat e-bikes as a non-motorized trail use.

American Horse Council will be adding e-bike use to its list of issues, as well as considering use of horse camps by non-stock recreation.

Sherry Copeland: Reminded PLC chairs to reach out to the states to get sawyer information. She needs to hear from N. Dak, Nevada , the SE Region and Alaska.

PLC Committee Notes are meant to be shared with all states and Chapters. Pass them out.

Jerry Bentz: re the Horse camp concern. Jerry needs the names of the horse camps where there are problems and the name of the forest that they are in. To date he has received info on 83 horse camps from 11 states, and needs to turn in the completed list by Feb. 12.

BCHA Chairman Darrell Wallace has been talking with the Forest Service Washington Office [DC] on the stock camp use concerns. The following information comes from National Trail Program Manager Brenda Yankoviak, outlining the steps the FS is implementing to begin to address this issue. Jeff Mast, Asst. Natl. Trails Program Manager is the lead on this.

*“Washington Office [D.C.] Trails Program staff have taken a number of steps to carry forward the stock use sites issue. Initially staff worked to understand more about the issue and opportunities to influence change. This included meetings with Rec.gov points of contact to think through opportunities for initial and long-term improvements. Trails staff then connected with the new Developed Recreation Program Manager for the Washington Office, Surina Singh, to make her aware of the concern and develop a dialogue about the path forward. It was agreed that both Trails and Developed Recreation would connect with respective regional program managers to raise awareness more broadly, receive feedback, and get feedback on actions. We’ve done those connects, so we’re now in the process of collaborating on the following:*

- Initial messaging to speak to the purpose and intent of stock use sites that will be distributed to the regions and units, tailored for Forest websites and Rec.gov, to raise awareness and promote change.*
- We’re collecting best practices to share broadly. An example would be in Montana, where several units have developed and installed signage at horse camps specifically pertaining to this issue. After this initial push, our intent is to 1. ascertain how the regions and units are utilizing the language we provide, and 2. Work with partner organizations to understand if issues are subsiding.”*

Brad Pollman will be the next BCHA PLC Chair position, taking the chair after the BCHA National BOD meeting in April.

Next meeting of the PLC committee will be Monday March 8, 5 p.m. 605-313-6290 659516#

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Young