

HOOD/WILLAMETTE RESOURCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

P.L. 106-393: SECURE RURAL SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY SELF-DETERMINATION ACT OF 2000

July 1, 2019, 12:30pm

Meeting Minutes

Keizer Community Center, Claggett Room, 930 Chemawa Road NE, Keizer, OR 97303

RAC Member Attendees: Jon Tullis (A2), Hayden Price (A4), Patrick Davis (A5), Ron Adams (B2), Neila Whitney (B3), Jeff Jaqua (B4), Kevin Cameron (C2), Will Tucker (C2), Steve Wilent (C4)

FS Attendees: Jennifer Sorensen, Omero Torres, Lorelei Haukness, Rachel LaMedica, Matt Peterson, Holly Jewkes

Public: Jeff Parker (RAC Nominee, B2), Rick Ragan (RAC nominee, A5)

Acronyms:

RAC: Resource Advisory Council

SRS: Secure Rural Schools

FS: Forest Service

FY: Fiscal Year

DFO: Deciding Federal Official

REA: Recreation Enhancement Act

NEPA: National Environmental Policy Act

NHPA: National Historic Preservation Act

CRGNSA: Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area

WNF: Willamette National Forest

Discussion on Status of National SRS Charter and Title II Program

- SRS/RAC Overview:

- Legislation we work under is the Secure Rural Schools (SRS). This was reauthorized with Omnibus Spending Bill in 2018. Counties (under SRS legislation) opt to put SRS allocations into one of 3 buckets (1,2,3). Title 2 funds are the ones this Hood/Willamette RAC recommends how to spend (see handout for amounts by FY).
 - Counties would prefer to receive more money overall from SRS, however this is out of their hands.
- Typical Title 2 project proposal process: FS opens a project solicitation period, proposals come in and are reviewed jointly by FS and RAC at a RAC meeting. RAC takes proposals back to committees, constituents, groups etc. they represent for feedback. RAC meets again to make funding recommendations to DFO (currently Tracy Beck from the Willamette National Forest).
- All meetings are open to the public.
- Hood Willamette RAC jurisdiction: Wasco, Hood River, Multnomah, Clackamas Counties, Marion, Linn, Lane and Douglas Counties

- RAC membership represents a wide swath of community and interests. The more diverse the better. Usually 12 members. Chairperson elected annually by RAC.
- Ethics- real or perceived ethical conflict with a project member needs to recuse themselves from voting on that project.
- SRS Charter allows RAC to make recommendations on REA efforts.
- National Updates and Implications to Hood-Willamette RAC:
 - National charter for all Secure Rural Schools RACs expired in June 2018, was reauthorized in December 2018. June 2019 executive order to cut overall number of RACs nationally- may not impact SRS RACs because legislatively mandated, but no guarantee.
 - Hood-Willamette RAC still has 6 vacancies. Last year outreached for new RAC members and submitted a nomination package to the Secretary of Agriculture, Sonny Perdue, in September 2018. There has been no movement on the nomination package (or others across country). That said we do have a quorum (albeit barely). Three past RAC members expressed interest in reappointment and have been submitted as nominees for open seats. Until this nomination package is considered and new nominees are appointed, only currently appointed RAC members can vote and make recommendations.
 - Discussion on concerns around lack of action at agency level:
 - There is Title 2 funding in the pipeline from FY18 and 19, but if we lose any more RAC members we'll be unable to move forward. While we have a quorum, is very difficult to pull together a meeting because we have no flexibility in attendance.
 - Deadlines for these funds are 2020 (recommendations) and 2021 (obligation) but no movement to extend these deadlines despite delay on nomination package.
 - RAC members represent many communities and organizations who rely on Title 2 funds, not being able to get these dollars to the ground would be impactful.
 - Interest among RAC members to discuss these concerns with their elected officials and USDA directly.
 - What causing the shift? What are the politics?
 - Unknown, overall concern about efficiency, bureaucracy.
 - DOI was successful in reappointing RAC members, why issues with USDA?
 - Title II projects are initiated by boots on the ground staff- very important
 - FY17 funds are in the process of being obligated- in lieu of having a full RAC/new project period, previously approved projects received additional funding (see FY17 spreadsheets).
 - For FY18 and 19 funds- agreement to open a new project solicitation period ASAP, despite thin membership. Best to move forward while we can in case there continues to be no action.

- See handout for FY17 and 18 funding breakdown. FY19 funding amounts are TBD, but project solicitation should cover both FY18 and 19 funds.
- Agreement on the following rough schedule:
 - Open project solicitation period ASAP. Project proposals due 9/1/19 (approx.).
 - Oct 2019- hold RAC meeting to review proposals and hear from project proponents. RAC members have 6 weeks to bring proposals home for consideration with constituents, communities, etc.
 - Nov 2019- hold RAC meeting to hold vote and make formal funding recommendations to DFO.
 - Winter/spring 2020- FS staff work to obligate funds in time for 2020 field season.

Elect New Chairperson

- Role of the chairperson: communicate with RAC coordinator, help wrangle attendance to achieve quorum for meetings, co-host RAC meetings and facilitate discussions between members, signs/approves final RAC project recommendations with DFO
- Nominations for K. Cameron, H. Price. Vote and unanimous approval for H. Price as RAC Chairman.

REA overview:

- Recreation fees are governed closely- only specific types of fees are allowable, there are rules that govern each type.
- Public involvement process is a requirement and includes the need for a RAC recommendation.
- In absence of a Regional Recreation RAC, this group has agreed to take this on.
- 95% of funding generated from fees come back to the forest where fee is located and intent is to reinvest into the site. Remaining 5% goes to regional office for managing fee program.
 - How is money allocated once back to the forest? Comes back in general pot for all recreation fee sites, not site specific. Fee dollars can only be spent on fee sites, though it may not be the specific site where it was generated.
 - The group had lots of dialogue on REA at last meeting- see June 2018 minutes.
 - RAC can recommend a lower fee, but not higher. Some amounts are set.
- The proposed fees are only for FS operated sites; concessionaire fees are under a different legal authority and don't require public participation or notice. Concessionaires work with the National Forest on any proposed changes.

Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area New Fee Proposal

- Review highlights of proposal (originally shared at June 2018 meeting). See handout.
- Discussion:
 - Significant public outreach completed. Most are supportive of the change.
 - Vehicles who do not fit within the designated parking lot are not charged a fee.

- Possible to use adjacent protected area for parking? Unknown.
- There are issues with homeless camps on site, but less on NFS lands than other jurisdictions.
- What makes this site unique? It's highly developed, includes 200 car parking lot. The costs to manage dogs are high. Represents opportunity to engage urban public.
- This proposal is not setting precedent. Unique site geographically, nothing able to be used in similar ways within close proximity.
- Concerns raised around diversity, equity and inclusion and potential impacts to underrepresented communities. Recognition that we may be adding and additional barrier to access. The FS is doing a lot of other work on access for underrepresented groups throughout the region. Anecdotally, FS staff felt this area had other more pressing barriers (ex: transportation) which would be more of a barrier than this fee.
- Vote: Move to **recommend new fee** as proposed for the CRGNSA **Sandy River Delta**.
 - Vote was in favor (unanimous).

Willamette National Forest New Fee Proposals

- Review highlights of proposal (originally shared at June 2018 meeting). See handout.
- Discussion:
 - Most recent fee increases at these sites were 9-15 years ago.
 - How do these relate to other jurisdictions fees? Within close proximity, often lower than neighboring fees.
 - No prohibition to using these dollars for planning (NEPA, NHPA), but haven't been used this way in the past.
 - Fee dollars are more likely to be used for project work that appropriated dollars don't cover.
 - Extra vehicle fees do not include trailers (ex- a truck and attached trailer are considered one vehicle). Campground fees include one vehicle.
 - Group campground fee increases seem very reasonable, perhaps too low? Reasonable is relative.
 - Reiterate concerns about access for underrepresented populations. Price point is very important. Do these fees take into consideration the impact of lag in fee increases? Perhaps this is too much too late? FS should do a better job of keeping up with more regular, but smaller, fee increases. Agency is working in other ways to address this Diversity Equity and Inclusion issue. There are other barriers to these underserved populations that would also hinder their use.
 - Are there free sites on the forest? Currently WNF has one campground with amenities that remains free. The greater forest is always open for camping at non developed sites. Fees are only charged when sites are in operating season (staffed, etc.). Some sites are still open outside that just not staffed. Call for more open gates during off season.
 - Must strike a balance between providing access to public lands and caring for them.

- Are there long term sustainability plans for these structures? Yes for lookouts. That's why many are in the fee program; it supports a long term intent to maintain them.
- Government goal is to break even, not make profit. In almost all cases, the government does not even break even with the existing or the proposed fees.
- Are any of these campgrounds also impacted by proposed wilderness permit system? Big Meadow Horse Camp is the only one in proximity to wilderness. Matt did not have the wilderness information available at the meeting and could not remember whether day use limited entry permits are going to be required at trailheads adjacent to Big Meadows. Group support for one fee only (see voting information below).
 - NOTE: Matt reviewed the wilderness permit decision and the Big Meadows Trailhead does not require limited entry day use permits.
- Hackleman- Suggestion of bilingual interpretive sites. This site provides opportunity for agency to provide educational experience and therefore less support for fees here.
- Regarding the three fee proposals affecting day use sites- these are effectively toilet sites on the Hwy. Other toilets on the highway are free- but how do you know which ones when you're passing through?
- If not funded through fees, interpretive signs at any site may not be maintained.
- If approved, how would fees be collected? To be determined and would depend on the site. Two options- iron ranger or need to arrive already having paid. Iron rangers are becoming less popular due to theft issues.
- Voting:
 - Fee increase proposals:
 - Move to **recommend fee increases** as proposed for WNF **group campgrounds**
 - Includes: Fox Creek, Horse Creek, Roaring River group campgrounds
 - Vote was in favor (unanimous).
 - Move to **recommend fee increases** as proposed for WNF **Cabin/Lookout sites**
 - includes: Gold Butte, Indian Ridge, Box Canyon, Fish Lake Hall House, Fish Lake Commissary, Timber Butte, Timpanogas, Warner Mtn. cabins/lookouts
 - Vote was in favor (unanimous).
 - Move to **recommend fee increases** as proposed for WNF **campgrounds EXCEPT for Big Meadow Horse Camp**
 - Includes: Elk Lake, Marion Fork, Piety Island, Shady Cove, Trail Bridge, Lost Lake, Blair Lake, Kaihanie, Sacandaga, Timpanogas campgrounds
 - Vote was in favor (unanimous).

- Move to **recommend fee increase** as proposed for WNF **Big Meadow Horse Campground**
 - Votes in favor: Tullis, Price, Davis, Adams, Jaqua, Cameron, Tucker, Wilent
 - Vote against: Whitney
 - Motion carries.
- New Fee Proposals:
 - Move to **recommend new fees** as proposed for WNF **campgrounds**
 - Includes: Indigo Springs, Alder Springs campgrounds
 - Vote was in favor (unanimous).
 - Move to **recommend new fees** as proposed for WNF **Day Use Areas EXCEPT Hackleman Old Growth Grove**
 - Includes: Hardesty Trailhead and McCredie Picnic Area
 - Vote was in favor (unanimous).
 - Move to **NOT recommend new fee** as proposed for WNF **Hackleman Old Growth Grove Day Use Area**
 - Vote was in favor to not recommend fee (unanimous).
- Recommendation for Wilderness permit planning team (via Matt Peterson) to consider implication of fee proposals at sites that would also be impacted by proposed permit system.
 - Vote was in favor (unanimous).

Meeting Adjourned at 4:15.